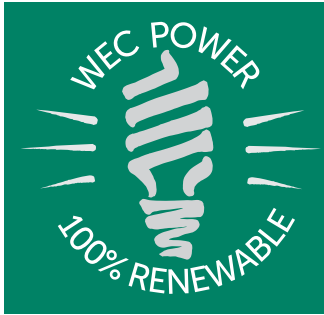




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CO-OP CURRENTS



Vol. 86, No. 6

The newsletter of Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc., East Montpelier, Vermont.

October-November 2025

Building Resilience on Bliss Road

FEMA Mitigation Grant Supports Line Improvement Using New Tree-Resistant Cable

In December 2022, Winter Storm Elliott left Washington Electric Cooperative with some of the worst storm damage of any cooperative in the country, including 41 broken poles and thousands of members without power. In East Montpelier, Bliss Road heads north, crosses Center Road, and continues as Barnes Road. Along this roadway, the storm left more than 160 member households without power for nearly three days.

"When we looked back after that storm," said General Manager Louis Porter, "we identified several places we needed to strengthen, rebuild, and make more resilient to that kind of storm damage. That's what this project is about: making this line less subject to damage from storms, more accessible to repair, and reducing the severity of outages."

This year WEC won a FEMA hazard mitigation grant to upgrade the lines on Bliss and Barnes Roads. The project runs roughly 50 poles' worth of line, starting at Green Road and continuing out to County Road, including the portion that crosses Center Road. The FEMA grant covers \$588,000 of the \$784,000 total project cost, with the Co-op borrowing the remaining \$196,000 through the Rural Utilities Service (RUS).

This grant is different from disaster recovery grants in that it is intended to prevent damage from future storms. WEC is not usually competitive in

The goal is fewer outages on that section of line. Even if a tree lays on the wires, power should stay on.

— Dave Kresock

winning this type of grant, Porter noted, because FEMA tends to privilege projects in high population density areas or that power critical infrastructure, like hospitals. That doesn't describe WEC's service area. "We're lucky to

qualify for this money and to do this project with nearly \$600,000 that does not fall on our members," said Porter.

The reason WEC was successful was because of the line's importance—and vulnerability—within WEC's grid, said Dave Kresock, Director of Engineering and Operations. "This particular line has 601 members on it from the substation out," said Kresock. In addition to being a feeder line from the East Montpelier substation to smaller distribution lines, it connects a lot of sections of WEC's grid. That means the Co-op also depends on it for backup: if a line fed by the nearby Maple Corner substation is out, Kresock's Operations team can energize, or "backfeed," it from the Bliss Road line. "So when it goes down, it affects a lot of people," Kresock said. "FEMA looked at the cost-benefit and this was the project that rose to the top."

Hendrix Spacer Cable

Instead of traditional open-wire crossarm construction, the rebuilt line uses Hendrix Spacer Cable. Three insulated conductors are supported by a high-strength messenger wire that also serves as the neutral.

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Line crew workers from WEC and contractor Riggs Distler work to pull messenger wire for the rebuilt lines along Bliss Road near Green Road in East Montpelier. The line is being rebuilt using Hendrix Spacer Cable system and other techniques to make it less susceptible to outages caused by storms and trees and is being funded in large part through federal grant dollars.

CO-OP MONTH ESSAY Investing In Our Cooperative

By Susan Alexander

Cooperatives exist in many forms: from food stores to credit unions to electric utilities—and my personal experience over the years as a member of multiple co-ops has been almost entirely positive. I attribute this to the general principles of a cooperative being hard to argue with: democracy, equity, mutual benefits, community.

And while there are many commonalities in cooperative structure, there are also unique circumstances that

differentiate how they operate and how members can participate. For example, many cooperatives, in addition to having a minimal investment in the form of a membership fee, offer a reduction in cost of goods and services in exchange for an additional contribution in the form of time or effort. My local food co-op provides a discount on products sold in the store in exchange for some elbow grease cleaning the storeroom or stocking shelves. When we sent our toddlers to the Woodbury Playschool cooperative, we received credit towards their tuition in exchange for lighting the wood furnace on those nippy winter mornings.

That said, it is not always possible

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Washington Electric Cooperative

East Montpelier, VT 05651

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Winter is coming. Be prepared for storms and outages: clip out WEC's annual checklist on page 6.

President's and General Manager's Message

Reliability Investments in Changing Times

WEC Buys a Ford F150 Lightning, Surpasses 1,000 Net Metering Members

WEC's Fleet Adds an EV

Louis: Washington Electric has purchased an all-electric Ford F150 Lightning. We need a vehicle for use both in the field and for staff travel, so its primary use will be offsetting staff mileage and field work. We started talking about whether we should do that with an EV before the expiration of federal tax credits. Even though WEC is a not-for-profit we're eligible to use the federal incentive without the tax liability to offset it. The incentives brought the cost to just under \$60,000. It made sense to us, given the rural nature of our territory, to get an electric vehicle that had high clearance and room for tools in the back. We settled on the F150 Lightning because we

can use it in the field as well. It has a 300 mile range between charges, and we plan to have a charger at both the warehouse and the office.

Purchasing an EV makes sense for us, given we're in the electrical distribution business and given WEC's environmental mission. It's our judgment that the tech for bigger models of all-electric trucks, like the bucket truck, is not a great fit for our territory, given the long distances crews travel and occasionally, unfortunately, the long duration of our outages. Our territory ranges from Wheelock to Tunbridge, which is more than 70 miles, and that's pretty long if you're going from one end to the other several times during an outage.

Steve: As an EV driver myself, I find that a work vehicle that can be used in a relatively local range is ideal. The WEC Board felt that the F150 Lightning fits the bill, and we agreed the Co-op was wise to not go with a bucket truck at this time for the reasons Louis mentioned.

Louis: A number of other utilities have EVs: VEC, BED, GMP [Vermont Electric Co-op, Burlington Electric, Green Mountain Power] — so this is our foray into that. And the climate change benefit is a big part of it. We offer incentives to members for using EVs, so it makes sense for us to invest in EVs for our own work as well.

Steve: It's long been WEC's culture to be environmentally conscious and this is reflected in WEC's mission statement. Ever since I've been on the Board there's been discussion from staff and Board members about not only selling renewable power but being conscious of our environmental footprint of our operations. For example, WEC has not used herbicides in clearing its rights-of-way for several decades. The Board agreed this EV is a good operational choice for WEC.

Louis: It's more expensive versus a new Toyota Tacoma, but after the federal rebate, not that much more expensive. You're talking about \$10-15,000, which of course we expect to make back in lower costs of operation, maintenance, and fuel.

Regulators Convene Utilities To Discuss Resilience

Louis: This summer the DPS and PUC [Department of Public Service and Public Utility Commission] started an extensive process of meetings and workgroups about what resilience means for every Vermont electric utility and their members or customers. They're aiming to wrap up this process by the time the Legislature reconvenes. It's been quite extensive and has involved a lot of regulators and experts from outside the state, including academic experts and climate and weather experts.

I think that the core question is a valid one: which is, roughly, what is the expectation of electrical customers

and members for what their utilities are going to spend to address resilience and reliability? Is each utility around the state spending enough, too much, and is it on the right projects, and how do we improve service with increasingly damaging and difficult storms? However, I and other utility leaders have been somewhat frustrated by the broad scope of the conversation, and we've asked for more focus on what regulators see as actual problems. Regulators agree this will be different in every utility territory.

One outstanding question none of us have an answer to yet is what FEMA reimbursement for disasters will look like going forward, and how that changes investments in reliability and resilience. For public power utilities like ours, it's a very different calculus to figure out what investments in reliability pay off versus responding to outages, compared to a utility like GMP that is ineligible for federal reimbursement after disasters. If we continue to receive FEMA reimbursement, what makes sense to spend on reliability investments is very different than if that funding does not exist.

Why it matters to members is that I think we're seeing an increasing divergence in the opinions of Washington Electric's membership. Spend more to increase reliability, which is reflected in electric rates. Spend less, and rates don't rise as rapidly, but reliability is likely impacted. I think the difference of opinion is exacerbated by net metering. For net metering members, who don't pay for the full amount of electric service they receive, there's a disincentive to advocate for paying less. In other words, it's easier to advocate for a more robust electric grid if you're not paying as much as your neighbor for grid investments that you all benefit from.

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Co-op Currents

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The Board of Directors' regularly scheduled meetings are on the last Wednesday of each month, in the evening. Members are welcome to attend. Members who wish to discuss a matter with the Board should contact the president through WEC's office. Meeting dates and times are subject to change. For information about times and/or agenda, or to receive a copy of the minutes of past meetings, contact us, at 224-2332, or visit wec.coop/board.

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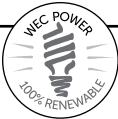
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Steve: Louis's focus with the Board's support is to improve outage management in the face of what appears to be increasing storms and damaging weather. In addition, an increasing number of members are using electricity for charging EVs and powering cold climate heat pumps and hot water heat pumps for their primary heat and hot water. So there's a group of members who are depending more on electricity for more purposes, and that presumably sparks an interest in having electricity be reliable, because more of your well-being depends on having electricity whenever you need it.

Louis: And more of our members are home more of the time, working and going to school from home, and we have an aging population. More people are reliant on electricity for more hours of the day.

Steve: Anecdotally, I've found some members who've been on WEC lines for some years assume outages will come and go, and hunker down, maybe with a generator, until the power comes back on as it inevitably will. For the reasons above, some others are more concerned about any outage, whether short or long-term, because it affects their lives to a greater degree. I'm pretty sure I haven't met any member who doesn't mind an outage. It is clear to me that members are affected differently by outages both because of where they live and how much they depend on electricity. So we've come to realize that our members have a range of concerns during an outage that we must address.

Louis: And readers can tell even from what Steve and I are discussing the directions this type of conver-



An increasing number of members are using electricity for charging EVs and powering cold climate heat pumps and hot water heat pumps for their primary heat and hot water. So there's a group of members who are depending more on electricity for more purposes, and that presumably sparks an interest in having electricity be reliable, because more of your well-being depends on having electricity whenever you need it.

— Stephen Knowlton

sation can go. It goes from what type of robust infrastructure makes sense, to what the appropriate level of spending on it is, and how you fairly distribute that across your territory—when a lot of utilities have a wide variety of members who suffer different impacts from outages. If you're a Washington Electric member at the end of a 15 mile line from the substation, you'll see more outages than if you're three miles from the substation. How do we spend our members' money in a way that's fair, when some live farther out on the lines than others?

Steve: Of course, following general standards for resilience and reliability are of importance to our regulators to ensure all utilities are up to scratch in restoring service to their customers.

Louis: Utilities have a complex relationship with regulators. Regulators advocate for utility members and

customers, provide guidance and help, and sometimes facilitate grants for utilities, but at their core they're regulators, and that often means improving—and increasing—regulation. There will likely be increased regulatory requirements of some kind that come out the other end of this. It's our aim to make these reasonable and appropriate, and that improve the level of service members get without unduly increasing the cost they face.

1,000 WEC Net Meterers

Steve: The thousandth net metering array just came online. It's a milestone. A thousand net meterers is roughly 10% of our members. It signifies that solar power, for all its benefits and weaknesses, is a significant source of electricity on WEC's grid. At this time, all solar electricity on WEC's grid is

net metered, and at this 10% level of penetration, exerts upward pressure on electric rates for other WEC members.

Louis: There are a few factors that are impacting the business of net metering and has left some solar developers struggling or even facing bankruptcy. Tariffs have an impact when most of the components are made overseas, and the end of some federal programs will also have an effect.

I don't think those factors will have as dramatic an impact in Vermont as you might expect, because Vermont's system is weighted heavily toward the net meterer and installer's benefit. There may be some short term supply change hiccups due to tariffs, but the financial benefits of net metering to members and developers in Vermont are very strong, and we'll continue to see systems deployed in our territory and Vermont overall.

Second, the reductions in rates from the Public Utility Commission are pretty small for new system owners.

Owners of existing systems in some cases got higher rates. And keep in mind, that's against a backdrop of massive decline in the cost of panels over years. A main change in the recent bill changing the Renewable Energy Standard was to curb what are essentially merchant generator projects from continuing to take advantage of rates intended for homeowners with solar on their roof or in their backyards.

A lot of Washington Electric's territory is negative load, or close to negative, when solar is producing well. Why that matters is we have power contracts and generation plants we own that produce electricity, and we're 100% renewable, which effectively means that solar power is not displacing fossil fuel power to be used by WEC members. It results in



I would rather answer to and return money to my community members than multinational corporate investors. I would not say it's any less work to be organized as a co-op than to be a publicly traded entity. There's a lot of work and compliance and I think it's worth it, but it is also worth recognizing there are a lot of people at Washington Electric who do a tremendous amount of work to make it work as a co-op.

— Louis Porter

an excess of renewable power we sell on the market. It's possible that power is replacing fossil fuel generated power in other parts of New England, but it's not really replacing fossil fuel power used by WEC members.

WEC estimates a million dollar per year cost shift from net metering members to non-net metering members for the price the Co-op is required to pay for net metered power. In other words, net meterers collectively receive a million dollars in benefits from other non-net metering members once the benefit of that net metered power is taken into account, like offset load and no transmission costs.

Steve: In a nutshell, it's an outdated incentive and there are environmentally beneficial incentives that could be a lot more effective and equitable these days. The introduction of solar to the grid has changed the grid itself, and while solar is a good thing, it requires attention to address its intermittent nature now that we are coming to

depend on it.

Member Survey

Louis: Every five years, Washington Electric does a survey of its members. This year we're doing the survey all online, rather than online and telephone. The reason is because it's difficult to get people of all demographics to answer surveys on telephones, because there's so much spam and robocalling out there. The other reason is surveying members online allows us to ask more questions, and we're asking members what kinds of questions: like what balance in reliability and cost they would like to see, and what kinds of beneficial electrification incentives they're looking for. Finally, by doing it online we're able to open it to all

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Don's Chronicles

Co-op Currents highlights from
Don Douglas, Editorial Committee Chair

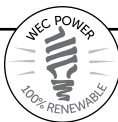
"Even though I'm only 39, I've been a Co-op member for more than 40 years. Every winter, we get storms, and we have outages. It's the nature of living in the woods. WEC has dedicated time, money, and effort to preventing outages through right-of-way clearing. Read about our new tool on page 4, and get prepared for Vermont winter using the checklist on page 6."



Capital Credits Returned in November

If you were a WEC member in 2000 or 2013, look for a credit on your November electric bill. As a cooperatively owned utility, WEC returns money to its members over time. In 2025, WEC surpassed \$10 million total returned to members.

Members may also donate their capital credit refunds to WEC's Community Fund, which supports small, local non-profits active in the Co-op's service area.



Patrick Davis Uses Tech and Observation to Manage Rights-of-Way

WEC's Right-of-Way Coordinator Describes how AI Supports Plans to Trim Trees and Reduce Outages

In WEC's heavily forested territory, falling trees are the most frequent cause of outages. And in member surveys, WEC members consistently say reliability is what they value the most.

But as long as there are trees, there will be outages. From the Co-op's founding up through the 1970s, the Rural Utilities Service (RUS)—WEC's federal lender—would not lend money to route lines along roadways. Lender requirements stipulated lines could be set only along the shortest distances, which meant across open pastures, explained longtime WEC Treasurer Don Douglas. "Lines were set through fields. Those fields are now forests," said Douglas.

Maintaining 1,200 miles of rights-of-way has been a challenge from the beginning, especially as fields reverted to forests. Eventually RUS changed policies to lend for relocating lines to roads, but WEC still has hundreds of

miles of heavily forested line. Right-of-way tree trimming has always been a focus for WEC, especially given the value members place on reliability, said Douglas. "The greatest balance the Board and staff have to come up with is, do you spend \$1 million or \$10 million on rights-of-way? Because you could spend either," he said. "And no matter what, you'll have outages, because trees fall from outside the right-of-way. No matter how much you spend on rights-of-way, there will always be outages."

Member alerts about overgrowth have always been an important part of WEC's tree cutting plans, as has information from line crews who work daily on the system. Now WEC may have a new tool in its belt. Recently, WEC opted to try out new software

The work of reducing outages proactively in a forested utility territory is ongoing—never finished.

coupled with satellite data, called AiDash, to see if it improves the Co-op's ability to manage tree trimming in its rights-of-way and reduce outages. AiDash, which describes its program for electric utilities as "satellite based vegetation management," claims its clients see a 10% improvement in reliability, as well as reduced costs and faster storm recovery.

Meet Patrick Davis

A co-op like WEC is as informed by its history, geography, and relationships as it is by data. In March, WEC hired Right-of-Way Coordinator Patrick Davis, a seasoned forester who brings to his work both the ability to use and understand software like AiDash, plus an appreciation for the information that comes from walking along the lines and talking to members.

Davis moved to Calais from Durham, North Carolina. He and his wife both have family in the Northeast, and they're pleased to be closer to them. Davis, originally from the Finger Lakes region of New York, earned degrees in forestry resource management from the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse, and worked both as a consulting arborist—traveling up and down the east coast looking at trees in public spaces—and later as a planning forester for the city of Raleigh. "I've had jobs where I'm looking at specific trees, and where I'm looking at the whole system," he explained.

Davis observed that trees grow differently in northern New England than in southern regions. For one thing, in heavily forested Vermont, trees grow much more readily than in more urban areas. "When we have to remove a tree, it can be sad, if it's a notable tree. But the truth is, there's going to be a tree growing right back in its place," he explained. "It's not like that in other places where there is severe canopy loss and a lot of impervious surfaces," like concrete and paved roads. And

while managing fast-growing vegetation is a challenge to maintain and creates obstacles for lineworkers, he said, "for forest health, it's great." This is a happy balance for a forester: Davis said his job is to limit the impacts of vegetation to utility infrastructure, to make rights-of-way safe for line crews to work, and ultimately to improve power reliability. Basically, the work of reducing outages proactively in a forested utility territory is ongoing—never finished.

The new software, Davis commented, is already improving efficiency, because it includes work-planning software. This helps him assign sections of line to subcontracted tree crews. "You can get mileage and cost estimates for tree crews. Previously, this was all done manually," he observed.

In terms of vegetation, the software helps WEC understand its system better and prioritize decisions. It includes a mapping interface, like any digital map with a satellite view, and tables with data analysis. From a big picture perspective, the software identifies areas most in need of trimming. What the AiDash demo showed is a portrait of WEC lines that may be familiar to many members: yes, there is a lot of vegetation growth; but that overgrowth is not universal, said Davis. Instead, it's interspersed with many well-trimmed sections of line. "The more you analyze, the more nuanced the data," Davis said.

There are no easy fixes when it comes to managing WEC's rights-of-way. Davis still needs to prioritize the highest risk sections and work within his right-of-way budget. Right now he's setting up bids for cycle trimming, or trimming an entire section of line at a time. It's more cost-efficient, he said, and as a result it's the industry standard for right-of-way clearing. But it takes planning and labor, and in the meantime, some sections of line that aren't in a particular year's cycle may be so high-risk they require trimming too. This off-cycle trimming, called "hot-spotting" in industry language, is also supported through AiDash. "It

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Puzzle by Betsy Allen

WEC is a Co-op!

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| partnership | member owned | collective |
| community | mutualism | caring |
| equity | cooperative | democracy |
| voting | unity | local |
| fair | | |

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Call us today, and we'll help you put together a plan: 802-223-5245 or toll free at 1-800-WEC-5245.



Bliss Road

continued from page 1

This construction holds the system compactly: a smaller strike zone, as Kresock put it. The system shrinks what used to be a ten-foot-wide strike zone down to a space about two feet across, significantly reducing the chance of direct hits from falling trees. And because the conductors are insulated, even a tree resting on the line often won't cause an outage. "If a tree falls on it, in most cases the tree just stays there. The support messenger has an 11,000-pound breaking strength. It can take a beating," Kresock observed.

Porter added, "We see so many more breaks in electrical wire than in communications wire because power lines are on top. With this, we're putting something else up there to take the brunt of trees."

"The goal is fewer outages on that section of line," said Kresock. "Even if a tree lays on the wires, power should stay on. That means less time spent repairing, and when we do have to clear a tree, it's often just a matter of cutting it off."

Project Timing and Details

Because FEMA approval came late in the year, WEC had a narrow window to complete the work before the November deadline. "That

urgency meant we didn't have as much time to communicate with members in advance as we would have liked," Porter acknowledged. "We've had some inquiries, and some members suggested we should have been in touch earlier. But between the federal timelines and approvals, there wasn't much time."

At the same time, Porter noted, "We heard from a lot of these members after the 2022 storm. They were upset about the length of outages. This project is exactly meant to reduce those kinds of outages and how long they last."

For WEC, the Bliss Road project is something of a pilot. "We've never used Hendrix before on our system," said Kresock. "Other utilities like GMP [Green Mountain Power] and Stowe have used it widely. It costs more than traditional construction, but it appears to be a worthwhile investment."

The Co-op also plans to use Hendrix Spacer Cable on a 2.5-mile rebuild of a main feeder line in Greensboro. But Kresock emphasized the technology won't be used on all lines, and that WEC's mountainous topography



means line upgrade decisions have to be made on a case-by-case basis. "It's not something we'll jump into whole hog. In some areas, underground might be better; in others, traditional construction. But in places like Bliss Road—off-road, hard to access—this design makes a lot of sense," he said.

In addition to new cable technology, WEC is also replacing aging poles. Thinner, shorter poles installed in the 1970s are being replaced with stronger class 2 poles, which are designed to withstand heavier loads and last longer. This area of East Montpelier has a lot of ledge, so

pole-setting requires subcontracting for special equipment to dig holes into the rock. Still, Kresock pointed out, digging holes is less expensive than digging a trench to underground wires.

One of the hardest parts about line upgrades for members, said Porter and Kresock, is that it often involves cutting trees. "Nobody likes having trees cut," Porter said. "But it's impossible to improve reliability without cutting trees. I hope members understand that in order to maintain the system, we have to

cut trees and be on their property in rights-of-way. At the same time, we're working to improve resilience in a way that impacts their rates as little as possible. This project is a good example: members are only on the hook for a relatively small portion of the cost."

Kresock noted that outages have been relatively quiet so far this year. "But we can't forget what 2022 was like," he said. "We had a lot of storms, a lot of outages, and people were upset. You can't have fewer outages without making these investments. That's why we're doing this." 🐿️

President's and General Manager's Message

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members to get as wide a spectrum of input and responses we can.

We also have an option for those without internet access to call the office and get a written survey.

Steve: We are all eager to perform this survey, and we review the results quite carefully to see what our membership prioritizes, and how we're doing in specific areas. Also of interest to us is what priorities may have changed since the previous survey and what consistently remains the same.

Louis: It also allows us to compare what WEC has done in the past, because we ask similar questions in these surveys, and how we're doing compared to other cooperatives around the country, especially our neighboring co-op VEC. So we can get a pretty good picture of areas we need to work on and where we're doing well. Everybody would like to have greater reliability, more services, and lower rates. Those have to be balanced against each other.

Steve: Distilled, it gets down to what do you want the Co-op to invest your money in for the services you prefer? As a cooperative; we use the rates you pay to make it better, so we want to have the best information we can about what's important to members.

October is Co-op Month

Louis: I've been a member of this Co-op and other cooperatives for most of my life, and I never anticipated before coming to work here how much additional effort and work goes into having an organization be a cooperative. Whether a business is family-owned, or privately held, or publicly traded, there is work with all those structures. But there's a lot of effort that goes into the organization of an entity as a co-op and its continued existence as a co-op, whether that's arranging for an annual meeting, for member surveys, arranging for votes, for capital credits—that's probably the largest—and Rural Utilities Service compliance, construction work plans, construction work loans—there's a lot that goes into being organized as a co-op.

That goes into the benefits of a co-op: being democratically run, transparently run, returning margins to members. I would rather answer to and return money to my community members than multinational corporate investors. I would not say it's any less work to be organized as a co-op than to be a publicly traded entity. There's a lot of work and compliance and I think it's worth it, but it is also worth recognizing there are a lot of people at Washington Electric who do a tremendous amount of work to make it work as a co-op.

Steve: As another comment on cooperatives, I'll point out that regulation of utilities is generally

necessary to prevent predatory pricing and unnecessary costs imposed by for-profit utilities on their ratepayers. But the board of a member-owned co-op is going to act in the best long-term financial interest of the members who elect them in these positions of leadership, so regulation of cooperatives is not as necessary. Of course, cooperatives, like all utilities, must and should adhere to performance, reliability, and environmental standards set by regulators. But for financial management, co-ops aren't regulated by their

respective legislatures and public utility commissions in many states to the extent investor-owned utilities are. While that is not true in Vermont's case, the cooperative model generally affords member-owned organizations more leeway in guiding their future for the benefit of their members.

That's simply what it boils down to for me: under any regulatory framework a cooperative should strive to do what's best for members and as many members as possible as long as it's in existence. 🐿️

Emergency Resources

Financial and energy coaching

Contact your local Community Action Agency: Capstone at capstonevt.org or Northeast Kingdom Community Action at nekcavt.org.

Fuel

Running out of fuel? No matter where in Vermont you live, if you are in danger of running out of fuel this winter, call the toll-free Emergency Fuel Assistance number: 1-800-479-6151

Mental health: call 988

If you are in distress or crisis, call 988. If you prefer to text, text VT to 741741 to reach a crisis counselor quickly.

For peer support, call/text 833-888-2557 More resources are at mentalhealth.vermont.gov

Food

Vermont Foodbank: 800-585-2265
Capstone Community Action: capstonevt.org
Northeast Kingdom Community Action: nekcavt.org
3SquaresVT: 855-855-6181, vermontfoodhelp.com

211

Call 211 to find any emergency resource you need: food, mental health, fuel, shelter, and anything else.



Be Prepared for Winter Storms

Being prepared is taking responsibility for the safety and comfort of yourself and those around you. That means staying informed, having the supplies you need, and making wise choices. As winter storm season approaches, the Co-op asks all members to please prepare for the possibility of outages. During major storms, outages can last several days. This annual checklist is published in *Co-op Currents* to help you get ready. You may not have or need every item on this list, but scan it before big storms to make sure you do have what you need to ride out a multi-day outage.



Annual Winter Storm Checklist

Be aware:

- Pay attention to local weather reports
- Sign up for school closings, road alerts, and weather alerts on electronic devices
- Follow travel precautions
- Contact 511 for road closures
- Contact 211 for local assistance, like emergency food and shelter
- Charge phones, tablets, computers, and other devices
- Address potential storm hazards on your property, like a chimney that needs cleaning or a dead tree limb hanging over the driveway

Check your supplies:

Food and dining

- 3-5 days of nonperishable food for each family member, including pets
- Hand-crank can opener,
- Large cooler or ice chest, frozen ice packs
- Disposable plates, cups, and eating utensils

Water

- Fill containers with water for drinking and buckets or bathtubs for household use. If you're on a well, you won't have water when the power goes out.

- Flush toilets sparingly with a bucket of water
- Have a way to boil or otherwise purify water

Health and comfort

- Extra medication, oxygen, or other health essentials
- First Aid kit
- Sleeping bags or blankets
- Warm, dry clothing
- Personal hygiene supplies
- Extra baby supplies, if relevant

Lighting

- Flashlights and headlamps
- Spare batteries
- Candles and matches

Devices, safety, and entertainment

- Charged phones, laptops, and tablets
- Charged EV or full tank in gas car
- Shovels and/or tuned up snowblower
- A fire extinguisher
- Wind up or battery alarm clock
- Portable radio
- Books and games

Have a plan:

- Do you have backup heat that does not rely on electricity?
- If you have special health needs, do you have ice packs to keep medication cold, backup oxygen, or

a generator?

- Do you have someone you can call if you need assistance?
- Do you have neighbors who may need special assistance? If you can assume responsibility to check on them, do their family members have your contact info?
- Does your town have an emergency action plan?
- Do you have a place you can go if you need to leave town for a few days?
- Have you updated WEC if someone in your household has, or no longer has, medical needs that require wellness checks during an extended outage?

In case of longer outages:

If your power is going to be off

- for hours or days, here are some additional precautions you and your family can take:
- Turn off and unplug electrical equipment. Leave on one light inside so you can tell when power is turned back on.
 - Turn on an outside light that is visible from the road so that Co-op crews can see that your power has been restored.
 - Close external doors, windows, curtains, and doors between rooms. This will help your home retain heat in cold weather.
 - Keep the refrigerator and freezer closed tightly. If you're not sure food is safe to eat, don't eat it.
 - Know how to override your electric garage door opener.
 - Conserve tap water. Water will keep hot in your water heater's tank for up to three days.
 - Keep warm in layers of clothing and blankets.
 - Keep active.
 - Use the fireplace wisely and safely. Do not leave the damper open when not in use.
 - Pets like tropical fish and birds are very sensitive to temperature changes and will require special care.
 - If you have a landline, it will probably work—the telephone company uses a separate, low voltage power supply. Use it to keep in touch and stay informed. 

New EV or Heat Pump? Fill Out WEC's Load Sheet

Did you buy an EV or new electric device with recently-ended federal incentives? Make sure you don't overload your transformer! Have your electrician fill out WEC's Load Sheet at washingtonelectric.coop/loadsheet. WEC is now upgrading transformers at no cost for members increasing their electric load through beneficial electrification. But you have to contact the Co-op first! Don't risk causing an outage by plugging in your new EV to an overloaded transformer. Send in the Load Sheet today.

Don't Miss This!

Major or time-sensitive incentive picks from JJ Vandette,
Director of Special Projects and Innovation

\$500 Public EV Charger Incentives

Members, there are incentives available for installing a Level 2 or Level 3 EV charger at your workplace, multi-family housing, or public location. WEC is offering an incentive of \$500 per charger.

If you live in Orange, Caledonia, or Orleans county, you can stack WEC's incentive on ChargeVermont incentives: this Green Mountain Power-administered program covers up to 90% of the cost to install EV chargers.

Washington County members—your county is fully subscribed to ChargeVermont, but you can still use WEC's incentive.

Visit ChargeVermont.com, and find WEC's incentive form on WashingtonElectric.coop or direct link: wec.coop/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/2025-WEC-Public-EV-Charger-Form.pdf.



Share Your Story: Seeking Members' Experiences with EVs and New Electric Appliances

When making a big decision, many of us seek advice from friends and neighbors who have already been through the same process. *Co-op Currents* invites members to write in with their honest experiences buying and installing hot water heat pumps, cold climate heat pumps, electric vehicles, and other new electric tech. Your tips and advice are valuable to fellow members considering similar purchases.

Submit your stories to currents@wec.coop. Stories will be published as time and space allow. *Co-op Currents* will contact you to confirm before publication. Please keep stories to 500 words or less. If you have a longer story you'd like to share, please email first to inquire.



Investing In Our Co-op
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to receive discounted pricing or reduction in fees by contributing your time and energy. That is the case for WEC. Certain cooperatives, like credit unions and electric utilities, being highly specialized in their functions, do not present similar opportunities to reduce your bill by working off a few hours each month. While you are certainly welcome to volunteer your services for special events (e.g. the annual meeting dinner) this will not get you a reduction on your monthly bill...sorry! But you'll get a mention and warm thanks from your fellow members.

So how can members of an electric co-op realize a reduction in cost of service or keep their utility bills as low as possible? Well, there are many ways to look at this question; some very obvious, and some less so.

First and most obvious is to reduce your use. We have been schooled on efficiency for decades, like choosing LED lights, weatherizing our homes, turning down the thermostat, stringing clothes lines instead of clothes dryers, and trading in older appliances for those with better energy ratings. This works exceptionally well on the individual scale, where residents have complete control over the physical plant of their home.

The irony of this simple and effective approach is that as we reduce our overall electric consumption measured as kilowatt hours (kWh), we lower our own bills, but inadvertently increase the Co-op's cost per kWh. Since the only direct revenue source for WEC to provide service comes from sale of energy to members, efficiency measures—which work great for the individual—have a deleterious effect on WEC's rates. That is because WEC's expenses do not go down relative to the amount of energy use reduced through efficiency measures. Many operational costs remain the same regardless of the number of kWh sold to members.

If you enjoy math, here's why:
(Operational Expense \$) / (kWh

income \$) = \$ / kWh. If we decrease the denominator (kWh), we increase the result of the equation (\$).

So, as individual members reduce their kWh use through efficiency, the system cost per kWh goes up. It may leave you feeling a bit cynical to learn that the efficiency you work so hard to achieve, when applied across the entire membership, can place upward pressure on rates.

And yet! There are many other ways in which a cooperative, working together, can mitigate some of the losses of revenue realized through efficiency. That brings us to electrical beneficiation: that is, replacing some or all of our fossil fuel-burning appliances and tools with electrically operated ones.

"Whoa, you just said reduce the number of kWh I use, and now you are asking me to increase use of kWh by converting my gas dryer to an electric one, or my diesel car to an electric one? This seems crazy and counterintuitive." Yup, that's what I am saying.

Here are two good reasons: 1. Your gas bill will go down, and 2. Our air will be cleaner since most of WEC's energy comes from lower carbon sources.

The bottom line is there is no way to get around paying for the energy you choose to use on a monthly basis (setting solar aside for another discussion), but by transferring your gas dollars into WEC electric dollars, you will mitigate the impacts of efficiency.

The benefit of switching out gas to buying 100% renewable electricity from WEC is that instead of spending your dollars purchasing fossil fuels from for-profit sources, you will instead be directing those dollars towards your electric cooperative and keeping

So, what's really in it for me if I transfer my gas dollars into electric dollars? Aside from the benefits to our air quality, the real reason is that as a member of a co-op, and helping to make that co-op financially strong, we can all benefit from an increase in the number of kWh sold.

— Susan Alexander

rates lower for every member in the cooperative.

So, what's really in it for me if I transfer my gas dollars into electric dollars? Aside from the benefits to our air quality, the real reason is that as a member of a co-op, and helping to make that co-op financially strong, we can all benefit from an increase in the number of kWh sold.

The difference for you personally in what you will pay for electricity versus what you currently pay for fossil fuel is well above the scope of this piece and is truly a case by case calculation best left to the experts (call Efficiency Vermont). However, if you transfer your dollars to electricity and away from gas or oil you are investing in your cooperative keeping the overall cost per kWh hour lower.

WEC is a very small co-op. It's not only the number of customers, but because our membership is primarily residential, our kWh sales are low relative to other co-ops our size. Despite size and sales numbers, our rates are only about 10% higher than other Vermont utilities. And as those utilities work to attain 100% renewability as WEC already has, their rates will likely climb at a steeper rate in the years ahead.

The investment you make in beneficial electrification increases your equity in the Co-op. One thing you will only see from your cooperative—and not investor-owned utilities—is a return on your investment in the form of what is called capital credits. Watch your bill year over year: in November you will usually receive a credit on your bill relative to your investment (the amount of kWh you used in the time period being credited). Use more and receive more. That is the cooperative principle of equity I fully appreciate as a member.

Some fun facts about cooperative electric utilities from National Rural Electric Cooperatives Association (NRECA):

- Co-ops serve **42 million** people, including **92%** of persistent poverty counties.
- Co-ops power over **22 million** businesses, homes, schools, and farms in 48 states.
- Co-ops return more than **\$1 billion** to their consumer-members annually as not-for-profit organizations.
- **830 distribution cooperatives** are the foundation of the electric cooperative network. They were built by and serve co-op members in the community by delivering electricity and other services.
- **64 generation and transmission cooperatives** provide wholesale power to distribution co-ops through their own electric generation facilities or by purchasing power on behalf of the distribution members.

Visit NRECA at electric.coop to learn more about the electric co-op community across the country. 

Susan Alexander is a WEC Director from Cabot.

Scavenger Hunt Answers

Indoors:

3. Small fire. Water puts out fire, but water conducts electricity, so it is not safe to use in an electrical fire. Fire extinguishers don't use water. They can put out small fires or help people escape from a big fire.
4. 911!
8. They both switch off if it's dangerous.

Outdoors:

1. The sun!
2. It should be on or near the home exterior
5. Kites, drones, trees, construction equipment, etc.
6. No! Why? Shovels could cut the wires.
7. Never!
8. Stay far away and tell an adult who can contact the utility for help.

Co-op Principles



1. Voluntary and Open Membership —

Cooperatives are voluntary organizations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.

2. Democratic Member Control —

Cooperatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary cooperatives, members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote) and cooperatives at other levels are organized in a democratic manner.

3. Member Economic Participation —

Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their cooperative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the cooperative. They usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing the cooperative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the cooperative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.

4. Autonomy and Independence —

Cooperatives are autonomous, self-help organizations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organizations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their cooperative autonomy.

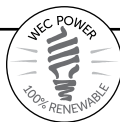
5. Education, Training and Information —

Cooperatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their cooperatives. They inform the general public — particularly young people and opinion leaders — about the nature and benefits of cooperation.

6. Cooperation among Cooperatives —

Cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the cooperative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.

7. Concern for Community — While focusing on member needs, cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies accepted by their members.



Safety Minute: Electrical Scavenger Hunt

By David Young

While the adults in your household are going through the winter storm preparation checklist in this issue, I thought it would be fun to include a scavenger hunt for young people. This is a great activity to include with fall chores, to get kids moving, or to start conversations about electrical safety.

Because we're looking at electrical equipment here, this scavenger hunt should be completed with an adult, and only an adult should touch electrical devices or equipment. The answer to some of these scavenger hunt questions will depend on your home or setting. Other answers are true for everyone. Find these answers on page 7.



David Young, Safety and Environmental Compliance Specialist

Indoors:

1. Count the number of fire/smoke detectors in your home. If you have multiple floors, make sure to check each one!
2. How many fire extinguishers are in your home? Where are they located?
3. Look at the size of your fire extinguisher. Do you think it is for putting out a big fire or a small fire?
4. Do you know what number to call in case of a fire or other emergency?
5. How many GFCI outlets can you count in your home? GFCI outlets have little buttons in the middle that say TEST/RESET. These are safer than non-GFCI outlets because they are designed to switch off if it's dangerous, like if they get wet.
6. How many non-GFCI outlets can you count? These have a smooth panel with only the two outlet heads. They should be located only in bedrooms, living rooms, or other rooms that won't get damp.
7. Where is the circuit breaker panel? A circuit breaker is a safety device.

It stops the flow of electricity if it's dangerous: for example, if there are too many devices turned on and using power in one part of your home at the same time.

8. Extra credit: How is a GFCI outlet like a circuit breaker?

Outdoors:

1. Where does solar energy come from?
2. Where is the meter located? Sometimes the meter looks like a clock, or like a thermostat.
3. Where is the transformer? It's usually in a can shape on a power line, or in a green box on the ground called a padmount. The transformer is a device that connects electricity flowing on power lines to the power line that attaches to your home. Electricity in power lines is very high-voltage, or super strong. It's too powerful for the devices in our home. The transformer makes it so the electricity going to your home is a safe voltage for your devices.
4. Now that you've found your

transformer, can you tell if the wire connecting to your house is overhead or underground? A pole-mounted transformer is likely to lead to an overhead wire; a padmount transformer should have an underground wire.

5. If your wires are overhead, what are some things you should keep away from them?
6. If your wires are underground, do you think it's safe to dig in that area?
7. Is it ever safe to touch power lines with hands, tools, ladders, or anything else?
8. What should you do if you ever see a power line dangling or down on the ground?

Want David Young to lead a scavenger hunt for your group? Members can recommend Safety Minute topics and request safety presentations from David Young for their school, organization, or community group. Contact him at 802-224-2340 or david.young@wec.coop.

Patrick Davis
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will help identify areas both in need of trimming now and areas that will provide the most outage-reducing potential," said Davis.

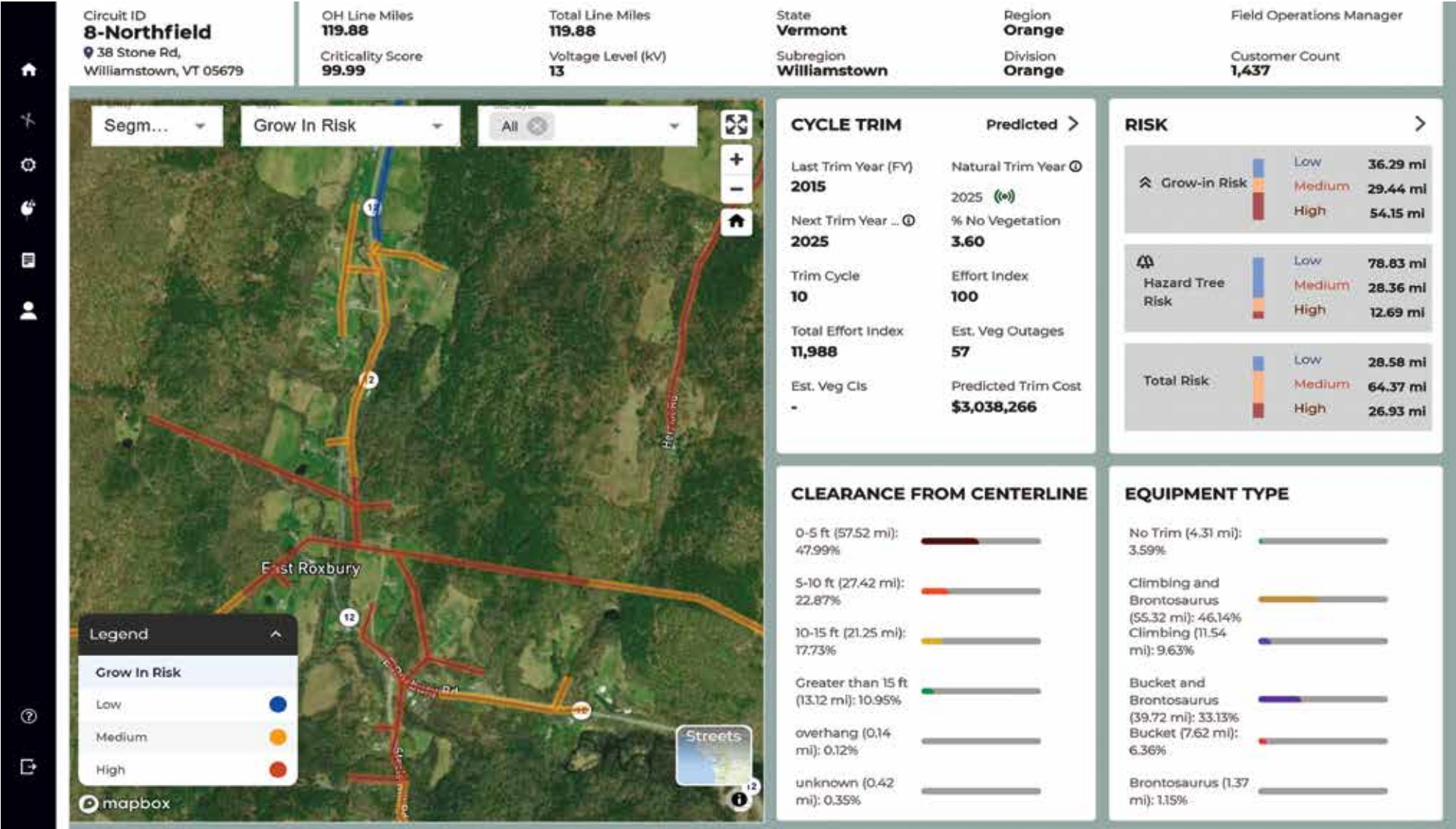
It's helpful to have software that works in parallel with word-of-mouth reporting, he said: when someone reports a section of right-of-way that's badly overgrown, "I'm always going to go look," he pledged. And he's already observed a lot of overlap between

what's informally reported and what's shown through data analysis.

Davis enjoys the connection between data and observation, and requested that if members are concerned about vegetation growth in their rights-of-way, give him a call.

"I'm pretty responsive to member calls and emails," he said, "and I'm really enjoying getting to know our members."

Reach ROW Coordinator Patrick Davis at Patrick.Davis@wec.coop or call the WEC office 802-244-2339.



Above, a screenshot of a WEC circuit as seen on the AiDash platform.

