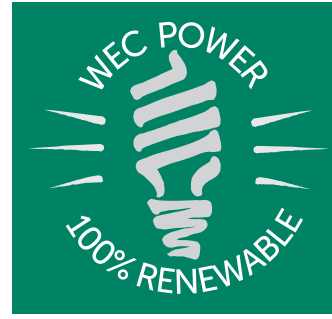




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CO-OP CURRENTS



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

June-July 2026

Another Close Election at WEC's 87th Annual Meeting

Paul Zabriskie Confirmed to First Term After Recount; Don Douglas and Jean Hamilton Re-Elected

"It's an interesting election," said President Stephen Knowlton, before announcing the vote results for 2026 Board of Directors candidates. "You may remember two years ago we had an election that demanded a recount. Well, here we are again." Incumbents Don Douglas and Jean Hamilton were both re-elected by a decisive margin. However, only a handful of votes separated the third and fifth candidates.

Election Results	
Vote totals for the Board of Directors election as determined in May 12 recount:	
* Don Douglas	532
* Jean Hamilton	494
* Paul Zabriskie	381
Ian Buchanan	379
Steven Farnham	369
* elected to the Board of Directors	
Total valid ballots cast: 758	

and several distinguished guests enjoyed each others' company in the brick hall under warm string lights.

The evening began with a classic Safety Moment from David Young, who advised members on the key points of power line safety, including how to exit a car when the ground below could be energized. See this issue's Safety Minute on page 8 for more.

Official Business
After comments from US Senator Peter Welch and a presentation by ecologist Shelby Perry, members visited over a buffet dinner, Knowlton called the meeting to order, introducing the Board of Directors, candidates, and special guests. A number of Vermont political figures were present, including US Senator Peter Welch, Lieutenant Governor John Rodgers, State Senator Andrew Perchlik, State Representative Candice White, as well as partners and colleagues from throughout Vermont's electric sector.

Ballot Committee Co-Chair Cort Richardson confirmed the quorum with more than 750, or about 7%,

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US Senator Peter Welch, an unannounced special guest at the Annual Meeting on May 7, congratulated Co-op members for WEC's long history of self-reliance and democratic governance. At a time when federal energy policy is "truly upside-down," he said, cooperative principles are inspiring. See page 4.

Repairing Tornado Damage in Williamstown

By Louis Porter, General Manager

The outage on April 16 and 17 was caused by an unusual event. After all, tornados don't touch down in Vermont that often, and this was the only one to do so in April over at least the 75 years that solid records have been kept.

This meant the outage itself was somewhat unusual as well. Within just a few minutes, the storm, and the tornado it brought, cut a path across a part of WEC territory, with most damage occurring on either side of Route

After a few hours of work the new pole replaced the broken one, and the job was done—and the number of WEC members out of service dropped by one household.

14 in Williamstown and extending to Jackson Corner, fortunately barely missing our substation there. Winds up to 90 miles an hour blasted trees, ripped a roof off a barn sending it into the branches of a maple tree, and sending WEC's outage numbers from zero to nearly 1,400 in just a few minutes. While that night and the following day saw a handful of outages in other parts of our territory, it was the path of the tornado that

caused the largest number of problems and loss of service.

In other ways, it was an outage *continued on page 8*

Washington Electric Cooperative
East Montpelier, VT 05651

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Inside

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System Maintenance Technician Mike Gray was honored for 15 years of service at the Co-op. See P. 8 for more staff recognition.



President's and General Manager's Message

WEC Avoids Rate Case, Defers 2025 Revenue to 2026

Thanks to Financial Cushion and Grants, WEC Invests in Right-of-Way Clearing, Infrastructure, and Resources

WEC's Financial Picture

Steve: People are concerned about the affordability of everything these days, including their electric power. I take that concern to heart while I serve on the Board. It's always an issue for many members, and it's coming to a head across the country because we live in a two-tier economic society where perhaps 20% of the people have around 80% of the assets. This inequality leads to hardship felt only by some. What can our Co-op do about it? We must be mindful of what our members' concerns are.

Louis: It's one reason our 2025

finances are such good news for members. For several reasons, especially because we had no major outages and very good production from Coventry in 2025, Washington Electric was able to defer revenue from 2025 into 2026. The biggest impact to members is that we did not go in for a rate case. Most other utilities in Vermont needed to request significant rate increases.

Instead, we are looking at ways to shore up and make some improvements to our operations. A good example is increasing the right-of-way budget, which I hope will improve our cycle of trimming rights-

of-way. We've been able to update our fleet of trucks and other equipment. For several years before last we have had major storm expenses, and we're using our healthy position from 2025 to put us in a more secure position going forward.

We've been spending about a million dollars a year in right-of-way clearing, which is less than most utilities with our miles and landscape spend. We've increased that to about \$1.5 million in 2026. I'm hopeful to keep that higher number going forward to get in a better cycle of clearing lines long-term. It takes a long time to have an impact, because we have so many miles of line and hiring crews to cut trees in a safe way around electric lines is not cheap.

Another benefit, which is more opaque but still important, is we will meet our lenders' financial metrics, which keeps us able to access low-interest loans from the Rural Utility Service. That saves members money in the short- and long-term in lower interest payments.

Infrastructure Updates

Louis: We're still considering the future of the Wrightsville hydro plant and all possible options. We had a sale lined up, but regulators did not allow us to complete it. We're still working to figure out what action will best serve Washington Electric Co-op members. Either we continue to operate it, and that comes with significant upgrades and work to be done; or we continue to work on selling it. The universe of small hydro operators isn't large, but we are talking with people who may have interest in buying it.

I anticipate having a contract for the Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) vendor and installer before the Board of Directors by the end of spring. We intended to have the Board vote on it at our last meeting, but there's a provision called "Build America, Buy America" which requires equipment like this to be made in the US if it's going to be used with federally funded projects. We're working through what that means for this project. It could mean that some of the components are a little more expensive; it could mean we have to

seek a waiver; it could mean slightly different components. So much of this project is covered by state and federal grant money that any financial impact to members will be very small.

Steve: It's important to recognize that WEC staff have successfully locked in \$4.75 million in grant funding for the AMI project we would have otherwise had to take out loans to cover. It's too bad dealing with the attached strings is delaying the project, but members should be relieved it'll be worth it.

Louis: At Coventry, we're working toward installation of new chiller equipment. The plant will be out for about a week. We're aiming to complete the work in May and not in June, when transmission costs are higher.

The Jackson Corners substation rebuild is through the first round of state approvals, and we're now going out to RFP [request for proposals] to bid for the engineering work to rebuild that project. We'll do the engineering first and then we can seek federal loans to do the actual work. It's still probably two years from completion, between the need to do a federal environmental review, state environmental review and permitting, engineering, and building.

We're partway through the Greensboro feeder rehabilitation project rebuild. One of the towns up there asked us to delay the work until the end of mud season. We're at the tail end of that now, and we hope once we complete that feeder that will improve service to our Greensboro/Walden area. We're just getting approval now to work on the Jones Brook feeder. That's largely right-of-way clearing that will be paid

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Co-op Currents

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Editorial Committee

Betsy Allen, *Puzzle Editor* Dawn Johnson Donald Douglas Jean Hamilton Louis Porter Katie Titterton

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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for by Grid Resilience Utility and Industry grants, a federal program administered by the state.

DPS Recommends Pause on Increasing Net Metering Rates

Louis: Every two years the PUC [Public Utility Commission] evaluates and adjusts the compensation for net metering systems. Because the payment for excess generation of net metering is based on the average statewide residential rate, without any intervention the payment would increase as part of this biennial review. The DPS [Department of Public Service] made a recommendation that for a year the PUC should suspend its own rules and not increase that compensation for extra power produced, because of the increase in residential electric rates that's happened across the state—although not at WEC—and to give regulators time for a more comprehensive review of net metering rates.

Not surprisingly, those with net metering systems, and those whose business it is to promote and install those systems, don't like the idea of the pause on the increase in net metering rates. The PUC has not yet issued their biennial review. Washington Electric has, along with Vermont Electric Co-op [VEC], submitted comments supporting the Department's position that there should be a pause in the increase of net metering excess generation rates and compensation.

AI and Security

Louis: I fully expect artificial intelligence to become a larger share of the software we use to run Washington Electric Co-op. Part of our system for identifying outage locations is predictive software that helps us figure out where outages are occurring. You can imagine AI making that system a lot more accurate and efficient. There are dozens of examples where artificial intelligence could help us. I think most of the work will happen at the levels of the vendors who provide us with various services and software and other equipment. Another way we're using AI is through satellite imagery to plan for and implement right-of-way cutting.

There's no artificial intelligence for climbing a utility pole. Having seen the work of the line crew in the field, it would be a challenge for a robot to do it, given the combination of physical and intellectual work that goes into



We live in a two-tier economic society where perhaps 20% of the people have around 80% of the assets. This inequality leads to hardship felt only by some.

What can our Co-op do about it? We must be mindful of what our members' concerns are.

— Stephen Knowlton

repairing a power line.

There's a big concern that the data centers that back up AI will increase electric prices in the United States, and I think that will happen. They are massive users of power and generally have to operate 24/7, so it's hard to manage a data center in a way that can be beneficial from a peak transmission cost management situation, though people are working on that in different ways. The likelihood of a data center being located in Vermont is small, but I think it's quite possible there will be some in Quebec, which could impact Hydro-Québec's interest and ability to sell us power.

Steve: Regarding the rapid build-out of data centers, we expect it to create higher costs for WEC even though it's unlikely a data center would be built in our service territory. The soaring demand for grid infrastructure equipment required by the nationwide expansion of data centers drives up the costs for all utilities needing to maintain and upgrade their own grids. Although it might be undesirable for other reasons, the electric usage of a local data center, like that of any large industrial customer, could eventually result in lower bills for residential ratepayers. I'll add that like other utilities, we are likely to explore private AI applications for making our operations more efficient. But we're wary of routinely incorporating large language modules like ChatGPT or Claude in member-facing applications where security is paramount. We're conscious about shielding our members' personal data.

Louis: Right. Certainly there are people here who use ChatGPT to edit a document, but not ones with member information. Like all utilities, we're under strict rules to protect private data. Our systems have controls and protections in place to keep private data private. We band together with hundreds of other co-ops around the country to jointly fund and support the private AI system in the software we use.

PowerShift and Load Management Programs

Louis: There are several programs available that may interest our members. We're getting our new EV PowerShift program up and running. [Learn more about PowerShift in the April-May 2026 issue of *Co-op Currents* and on wec.coop/incentives]

We're still developing grants that match batteries to demand management, so we'll have more to say on that soon. And we still have some slots open in our ACRE [Affordable Community Renewable Energy] program. That's a monthly bill credit of \$45 for five years for income-qualified members. Washington Electric offers this in partnership with the state and with Vermont Electric Co-op, and we have just over 200 spots to offer our members. We're well over half full but we still have some spots.

We've had a really strong response to our update of PowerShift, and a lot of EV owners signing up for it. The program gives members a bill credit for setting their EVs to charge at off-peak times. There are still some tweaks and changes with how we administer it and run the software behind it—it's been a lot of work for Kevin [Crawford, Energy Innovator Fellow] and JJ [Vandette, Director of Special Projects and Innovation] to develop that program. We won't have time-of-use rates until we have advanced meters built out, but this bill credit design helps incentivize off-peak charging in the meantime. It's intended to be beneficial for both EV operators and members at large.

Steve: Yes, PowerShift is not a program simply to benefit EV owners. If EV owners can be flexible about when they charge, the program incentivizes them to do so when it's less expensive for WEC to purchase the power they use. It's a good incentive for a cooperative to use because everyone benefits; it can be a win-win for all members, we believe. And while federal tax incentives for EVs are gone for now, the volatility of gasoline prices continues to make a good case for an EV if charging solutions are convenient for you since they are cheaper to drive.

Louis: It's recognizing the changing nature of the utility world, where the time of energy use is just as important as the amount of energy used. I view it as a continuation of Washington Electric's commitment to educating members about efficient use and using energy efficiently. Time of use is another form of energy efficiency. Using electricity at the best time is beneficial to the rest of the membership as well as to your own electric bill.

Steve: As a small utility we often learn from other utilities' experiments and pilot programs and try to determine what seems to be working



Time of use is another form of energy efficiency. Using electricity at the best time is beneficial to the rest of the membership as well as to your own electric bill.

— Louis Porter

well at the present time. Since we are a cooperative that invests its members' capital in projects while using grants in the few cases they're available, we may exhibit a lower tolerance for risk than an investor-driven company might do. Nonetheless, evolution is essential, and WEC can and should adapt at a pace appropriate to its financial responsibility to its members.

Louis: Absolutely. This is us benefiting from VEC's work and experience. For several years they've been doing electric vehicle programs, and we're adopting a lot of what they've done into

our program. We've really benefited from their knowledge, experience, and generosity. We're not on the vanguard of this—we're catching up—but that also has a benefit, because we can learn from what others have already tried and save ourselves the money and time of experimentation.


Steve: We're collaborating with other utilities, which is a good thing to do. Is WEC's early pioneering 100% renewable energy part of it, Louis?

Louis: No question. Without WEC and the other two 100% renewable utilities, Vermont would not have set the standard for all utilities to become 100% renewable.

It also probably has to do with cooperative principles. In part because we don't compete with each other, there's a great deal of sharing and exchange of info among the co-ops, especially among WEC and VEC, and we've benefited tremendously from that across the board.

Steve: There's a lot of change in the utility world. Not all of it is doom and gloom. The utility business is changing and it's an exciting time to be in it. We're looking forward to providing you a running commentary along the way and fielding your questions and concerns as they come up.

Learn More

- For more information about Power-Shift, visit <https://www.washingtonelectric.coop/flexible-load/>
- For more information about ACRE, visit <https://www.washingtonelectric.coop/affordable-community-renewable-energy-program-acre/>.
- You can also learn about either program by calling WEC at 802-223-5245 or toll-free at 800-932-5245. 

A Slime Mold Epiphany

Shelby Perry, Wildlands Ecology Director for Northeast Wilderness Trust, Introduces Co-op Members to their Lesser-Known Neighbors

Shelby Perry, Wildlands Ecology Director for the Northeast Wilderness Trust, endeared a room full of people to springtails and liverworts. She started by describing her slime mold epiphany. Perry's job is to make management decisions about wild places, which are home to millions of known and unknown species. But she realized that she had trained herself to see human shaping of landscapes—for example, seeing fields where forests had grown in—when she discovered a cluster of little yellow ovals in the woods and had no idea what it was, or how it fit into the ecosystem. “I started to feel the limitations of the human lens,” she explained. “How was I supposed to make management decisions about something I didn't understand?”

This humility and curiosity led her to want to learn more about the “least known neighbors” in our wild areas, she explained. There are species many of us know, like blueberries. There are also a lot of species we “kinda know”—we might identify something as a fly, but there are thousands of




species that match our understanding of what a fly is—and the vast majority of species are unknown to us, not even named.

With charm and humor, Perry

described the behaviors of slime molds—the fruiting bodies of which were those yellow ovals that caused her epiphany. “They fruit like fungi and move like animals, so they defy

Annual Meeting speaker Shelby Perry, Wildlands Ecology Director for Northeast Wilderness Trust, shows members that of the millions of species that exist on Earth, those we know and have names for make up only the tiny top of the pyramid.

the categories we have,” she said. Springtails, also known as snow fleas, contain either 3,600 species or 36,000 species, “depending who you ask,” she said. Their flea-like, flicking movements are caused by building up pressure in their abdomens and then using a rear-end tripod to balance: “They fling by their belly and stick by their butts, so I propose a new name of ‘springbelly sticky butts,’” she offered, to chuckles from the audience.


Perry captivated members with more facts and vivid slides—such as the existence of a fungi in Northeast woodlands that glows in the dark, and the differences between dry and hydrated sphagnum moss, which can contain up to 26 times its dry weight in water. 

Special Guest: Sen. Peter Welch

United States Senator Peter Welch took the podium to greet WEC members and praise the Co-op for its social and environmental values. It's inspiring, he said, that when corporate power wouldn't serve rural Vermont because it wasn't profitable, WEC members had the self-confidence in 1939 to say “Hey, we're going to take care of ourselves.” Putting people and values first in energy policy is important, but it's as great a challenge now, he pointed out, as federal decisions end renewable power projects and invest in fossil fuels. “Energy policy in Washington is truly upside-down,” he said: hindering renewable power, energy efficiency, and beneficial electrification. Worse, he said, this is happening while the administration started a war that closed the oil-critical Strait of Hormuz, which rapidly raised the price of fossil fuel. China is the exact opposite, he added: improving its grid and investing in wind and solar.

“So, we've got a problem in DC,” he concluded. “We've gone from a values-based approach to one that's all transactional. You're a sucker if you don't step on someone in your way. That's the poison in our political system now.” In contrast, Welch said, he appreciates cooperative principles, where the metric for action is how a decision benefits all members.

Senator Welch pointed to some projects that could impact WEC members. He's seeing bipartisan support for investing in grid improvements, which could avoid \$180 billion in costs over time, he said: “My job is to advocate for policies that make your jobs a little bit easier.”

The Senator also delivered a shout-out to longtime former WEC President Barry Bernstein, recalling when Bernstein would visit him in Montpelier to discuss energy policy. Later, Bernstein confirmed that WEC's late Vice President, Mary Just Skinner, who passed away in January, was a mentor to Welch in the Statehouse. Skinner was elected to Vermont's State Senate the biennium before Welch, and both served as Democrats at a time when Vermont's General Assembly first began to shift to that party's majority. 

Special Guests

WEC was honored to welcome these special guests to the 2026 Annual Meeting:

Elected Officials and Staff

US Senator Peter Welch
Lieutenant Governor John Rodgers
Senator Andrew Perchlik
Representative Candice White
Rebecca Ellis - State Director for Sen. Welch

Vermont Electric Co-op

Andrea Cohen
Paul Lambert
Charlie Van Winkle
Jeff Wilson

VELCO

Tom Dunn

Featured Speaker

Shelby Perry

VLITE

Gabriella Malina

Capstone

Alison Calderara

Annual Meeting Vendors and Sponsors

WEC appreciates local businesses and vendors who supported the Annual Meeting with their services and donated door prizes:

Department of Public Service

Jim Porter
Louise Porter
Kerrick Johnson

Efficiency Vermont

Paul Lambert

Energy Action Network

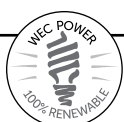
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Cabot Creamery
Efficiency Vermont
Farnham Farm Sugaring
Green Mountain Rentals
Hunger Mountain Co-op
Minuteman Press
The New School of Montpelier
Sugarsnap Catering

**Go Green. Go Electric.
Go WEC!**



Annual Meeting

continued from page 1

of Co-op members voting. Board Secretary Betsy Allen confirmed the meeting had been duly announced.

Staff recognition included Mike Gray, System Maintenance Technician, who was honored for 15 years of service. 2021 was a big hiring year for the Co-op, with five staff honored for five years of service. These included First Class Lineman Justin Lemieux, and Dylan Gagnon and Ryan Martel, both Apprentice Linemen who had just been promoted to First Class Linemen. Director of Engineering and Operations Dave Kresock and General Manager Louis Porter were also recognized. Knowlton commented on Porter's accomplishments hiring and retaining talented staff that strengthen WEC. Porter, for his part, praised his team, and members applauded the many WEC staff present.

One of Porter's additions to the recognition portion of Annual Meeting is to single out one staff member for an annual award. The recipient of the 2026 Manager's Award was Donnie Singleton, First Class Lineman. Porter noted Singleton's commitment to his work, and told members that it is likely him they've seen out their windows in the worst weather, restoring their power.

Treasurer's Report

Treasurer Don Douglas jumped right into the good news. 2025 started with a 2.9% rate increase, he said, but it also started with an 11% rise in kilowatt per hour (kWh) sales. Record generation at WEC's Coventry landfill gas-to-energy plant meant WEC was able to sell more than \$2 million in renewable energy credits, or RECs. All this meant that WEC was able to defer \$1.2 million into 2026, providing an ample buffer for major storm repair costs or other expenses. "Meanwhile, every other utility in Vermont is asking



Lieutenant Governor John Rodgers, left, catches up with General Manager Louis Porter at the 2026 Annual Meeting.

for a rate increase. We're using that money to not have a rate increase," Douglas declared.

Douglas also made an impassioned pitch for support for NRECA International, which has taken up fundraising since the federal government cut aid to build out the electric grid in rural Africa. For more information or to donate, visit NRECAInternational.coop.

President's Report

Knowlton began his remarks with a tribute to Vice President Mary Just Skinner, who died suddenly in January. "Mary brought her legal and legislative experience, and extensive mental Rolodex" to her role, he commented, remembering her intelligence, tenacity, helpful legal opinions, and preferred seating at Board meetings. "Woe to the hapless Director," Knowlton joked dryly, who took Skinner's favorite seat before she arrived to claim it.

Affordability is the term of the moment, and Knowlton is focused on members' bills. But as costs increase, so does the wealth gap, and "I don't think the pain of rising costs is being shared evenly among us," he pointed out. The job of a cooperative is to serve its members equitably, Knowlton reiterated, and that value will continue

to drive WEC's policy decisions.

Knowlton also extended his appreciation to all 2026 Board of Directors candidates for their willingness to volunteer in service of their fellow members, and to engage in a healthy competition of policy platforms. Without contested elections, "I don't think a democratic organization like WEC can operate at its full potential," Knowlton said. With that, he announced Douglas and Hamilton's re-election, and confirmed a recount to determine the third Director.

Q&A

What followed was perhaps the briefest question-and-answer period at any recent Annual Meeting. Former President Barry Bernstein congratulated the Co-op on a good financial year and commented that, with utilities around Vermont raising rates, the coming year would mark "the first time in 87 years our members' bills will be less than Green Mountain Power's" customers' bills, to lots of applause. He then asked what 2025 production had been like at Wrightsville, the hydro plant the Co-op is considering selling.

General Manager Porter said Wrightsville produced just 51 kWh in 2025. In 2024, he added, Wrightsville produced 1.5 million kWh, about

a million kWh short of the mark. It seems counterintuitive to want to sell an owned asset, he added, but the numbers favor it. "The biggest challenge is we spend about as much staff time on Wrightsville as we do on Coventry," he explained, when the hydro plant generates almost nothing compared to the landfill gas plant, which produces about three-quarters of WEC's power.

Steven Farnham of Plainfield asked if the Morrisville Power and Light hydro case had implications for Wrightsville. Porter explained that Morrisville's utility hadn't exactly won its case, but had received a pledge to review ponding rules after the next three years, and that the outcome was still unknown. Ponding, or building up a great deal of water and then releasing it, like a form of hydro battery storage, is very effective for generating electricity but has a deleterious impact on water quality and organisms, he added. The degree of ponding is regulated by state agencies.

Carl Quesnel of West Brookfield asked two timeline questions: when smart metering infrastructure will roll out, and when net metering will be permitted again for residents whose power travels through the Jackson Corners substation. Porter announced that WEC is about to sign the contract with a contractor to roll out advanced metering infrastructure (AMI), and anticipates it will take 12-18 months. The delay, he added, is mainly due to compliance with the federal grants that are paying the bulk of the upgrade: the extra time is worth it if it means the cost doesn't fall to the membership. As far as Jackson Corners, it's an old, wooden substation that needs a full rebuild. That will take closer to two full years, and the substation won't be able to support new net metering projects until it's complete.

Finally, Bud Haas asked the Co-op to consider redesigning its bills. Porter replied that bills are complicated, especially with net metering calculations factored in, and invited members to call the office with questions about their bills.

With that, the meeting adjourned, door prizes were distributed, and members headed home. 🐾

Volunteer Appreciation

WEC members volunteer to ensure their Cooperative's democratic elections run smoothly and accurately.

Committee on Candidates:

Robin Arnell
Susan Davis
Bud Haas
Steve Hatch
Carla Payne
Jamie Shanley
Yvette Tomlinson
Charlie Wanzer

Ballot Committee:

Nancy Fuller, *Co-Chair*
Cort Richardson, *Co-Chair*
Barbara Bendix
Barry Bernstein
Ann E Dolan
Richard Dolan
Gail Falk
Roy Folsom
Cathy Frey
Scott Frey



From left to right, Dina DuBois, Roberta Kaplow, featured speaker Shelby Perry, and Charo Douglas at WEC's 2026 Annual Meeting at the New School in Montpelier.

Getting to Know WEC Director Paul Zabriskie

Co-op Currents invites new WEC Directors to talk about the values and experience they bring to the role, how they'll balance vision and fiscal responsibility, and what drives them to serve fellow members. Profiles do not necessarily represent the values and policy decisions set by WEC's Board as a whole, but rather the individual perspectives of Board members. In 2026, Paul Zabriskie was elected to his first term.

Paul Zabriskie of Middlesex works through things. He spoke to *Co-op Currents* from downeast Maine, taking a break from rebuilding a set of stairs while seabirds screamed behind him. On the drive east he saw three cars pulled over because they'd run out of gas. "It's been a long time since I've seen people run out of gas, but folks are trying to stretch their budgets as far as they can, and another \$10 in the gas tank is dinner," he observed.

Zabriskie recently retired from Capstone, the Barre-based community action agency, where he was director of weatherization and climate impact. He spent a lot of time in state and national policymaking circles. "I can rap about the challenge of the energy bill versus the food bill," he said. That's a simpler conversation when it comes

to rising gas prices, but a trickier one when it comes to net metered solar power. There's tension in conversations around net metering, Zabriskie said. Sensitive to jargon and other triggers that cause people to stop listening to each other, he thinks he can help find common ground for dialogue and evolving policy.

Evolution is necessary because the world is turning away from fossil fuels, infrastructure is changing, and the future requires investment. Not everyone is in a position to make personal investments in panels and batteries. How does a cooperative utility invest in the future in a way that's fair for its members, and within overlapping regulatory, political, and legal contexts? Zabriskie would like to see decision-makers make investments "with an understanding we need to be really cognizant of the pain



Paul Zabriskie of Middlesex at the 2026 Annual Meeting. Zabriskie was elected to WEC's Board of Directors in 2026 as a first-time candidate. Because the vote was close, his election was formally announced only after the required recount.


that policies can inflict if we're not sensitive to people's reality." Regarding current net metering policy, that reality is "we basically have a cost-shift going on that's hurting people, and one of the things we saw in community action is that it hits kids and elders first."

In his weatherization role, Zabriskie enjoyed the challenge of working on farmhouses. There's the common metaphor of the Vermont farmhouse—with generations of additions to the original frame—to describe something no longer quite coherent. For Zabriskie this wasn't a metaphor, but real drafty houses with hands-on challenges, which made fixing them to be comfortable and energy efficient into a puzzle.

He understands how energy policy impacts people's lives, and brings that to tackling the puzzle of investing in the future. Take the next big

development: behind-the-meter battery storage. Batteries have the collective potential to lower WEC's peak power costs, with a member experience like the relaunched PowerShift program for EVs. How does WEC incentivize those with the capital to purchase batteries and harness those investments in a way that fairly benefits both the owner and the full membership?

Zabriskie acknowledges that the Board's first job is fiduciary responsibility, but shouldn't avoid taking risks because of that. Not evolving is a risk itself; striving to be better is the goal. "To the extent that you can achieve change incrementally and not strand investment as you create something new, you can avoid volatility. Not biting off the whole thing at once. That's something I really lean into," he said.

Achieving change responsibly requires good communication. "I would like members to know that we all learn from stories. Board members need to hear the stories of how Washington Electric impacts the lives of our members," he said. "I'm eager to hear and engage with people around what they need from the Co-op, and what they want from the Co-op—which aren't always in alignment," he said. "I'm eager to learn." 

Puzzle

O I D Y Z W C W A Q W O T M Z
 K L D H V F Y O G T O C P G L
 F E J R T F C I Y O T W T T I
 K K L E R E S T O R E I X J N
 E C D C L U O A O N I L K V E
 Q G O C R E E C U A R L N U W
 A N X O Q P C Z L D Z I T R O
 B E X R P S P T X O W A A G R
 S P A E J E W N R H N M P P K
 I O R P R H R I G I K S R O E
 R W H A U S Q A D B C T I L R
 E E H I R H L E T O X O L E Q
 U R C R A O Y G G I T W B X N
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 W X O U T A G E I H W E F H U

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|--------------|---------|-------------|
| Tornado | Outage | Lineworker |
| Williamstown | Restore | Rural |
| April | Pole | Electric |
| Power | Repair | Cooperative |



John Lazenby

First Class Lineman Donnie Singleton was honored with WEC's Manager's Award in 2026 for his reliability and commitment to restoring members' power. Photographer John Lazenby captured Singleton hard at work in the aftermath of Winter Storm Elliott, which caused extensive outages in December 2022.

Don's Chronicles

Country wisdom from
 Don Douglas, Editorial Committee Chair

The blackflies are out, and they're hungry. Feed them. I recommend yard work as a way to ensure they get their daily meal. Just be sure you're stacking your woodpile anywhere but underneath your power lines.



2025 System Reliability Index

The big story for 2025: WEC saw a significant drop in the number of outages and outage hours. Compared to 2024 the number of outages decreased 20%, and the time members went without power dropped by 35%.

Ongoing grid improvements help, but a year of relatively mild weather is the main factor behind these encouraging statistics. There were no major storms in 2025—that is, no weather events that met the specific criteria for the category of major storm.

There were still plenty of severe weather events, including heavy icing, high winds, and intense summer thunderstorms. These were damaging, but tended not to be widespread. Dave Kresock, WEC’s Director of Operations and Engineering, reported, “Even

though the number of severe weather events in 2025 remained high, the decrease in outages can be attributed to how many of them were very localized to various parts of Vermont; sometimes affecting WEC’s territory and other times not.”

The industry metrics that measure system interruption frequency and customer interruption duration are averages. They exclude major storm data, which can skew the assessment of how reliable the utility is under normal conditions. From a member perspective, the absence of major storms makes 2025 a good year to establish WEC’s baseline. WEC’s performance target for interruption frequency is 3.8, and the average customer experienced 3.9 outages over the year: just .1 over the target.

Average outage time beat the target of 2.7 hours: the average outage lasted 2.3 hours, about 20 minutes shorter than the target.

Two thirds of 2025 outages were caused by trees. That’s no surprise in WEC’s rural, forested service area. What’s interesting is that the total number of tree-related outages is down (at 475 outages, a 4.2% decrease from 2024), although the percentage of tree-related outages is up (66% of outages, an 11% increase from 2024). That’s because outages caused specifically by weather are down 74.8% in 2025, so trees take up a bigger piece of the pie.

Tree and weather-related outages were down, but outages caused by equipment failure, company initiation, and power supplier—the transmission

company that delivers power to our substations, which is either VELCO or Green Mountain Power—were all slightly up. Outages caused by accidents were also up, although outages caused by accidents were short in duration: in fact, the duration of accident-caused outages was at its lowest since 2017.

Kresock noted that his team is building on WEC’s existing Construction Work Plan with additional grid-hardening projects: for example, this fall on Bliss Road in East Montpelier, WEC replaced 46 poles, relocated off-road lines, and replaced unprotected conductors with the stronger Hendrix Cable Spacer System. In December, a second project began to upgrade the Greensboro feeder line from the Walden substation to a more resilient three-phase line, also using the Hendrix Cable Spacer System. To learn more about this system, see the October-November 2025 issue of *Co-op Currents*.

324
Distribution transformers installed or replaced in 2025

11,655
Average number of WEC member households in 2025, up 76 from 2024

1,250
Miles of line in WEC service territory (or about 100 miles per lineworker)

724
Separate outages on WEC’s system in 2025 (for comparison: 906 in 2024, 776 is 10 year rolling average)

103,821
Number of WEC consumer hours out in 2025 (for comparison: 159,960 in 2024, 102,300 is 10 year rolling average)

0
Weather events that met major storm criteria in 2025

65.6%
Percentage of 2025 outages caused by trees (for comparison: 55% in 2024)

2.3
Average duration in hours for outages caused by trees

475
Number of 2025 outages caused by trees (for comparison: 496 in 2024)

14
Number of line rehabilitation projects added to WEC’s existing construction work plan

For updates about maintenance clearing, click *Right-of-Way and Field Work Notices* on wec.coop.

2026 Rebates for Your Home

If you’re planning on **improving the efficiency of your home** this year, take a look at Efficiency Vermont’s offers, including:



Air Sealing and Insulation

- Up to \$9,500 off weatherization projects with an Efficiency Excellence Network contractor (depending on household income)
- DIY weatherization: \$100 back on a qualifying do-it-yourself project



Heating, Cooling, and Water Heating

- Air-to-water heat pumps: up to \$6,500 rebate + \$500 income bonus
- Ducted / ductless heat pumps: \$375-\$2,200 discount + \$200 income bonus
- Ground source heat pump: up to \$2,100/ton rebate + \$500 income bonus
- Integrated controls for ductless heat pumps: \$600 rebate
- Smart thermostats: \$100 rebate for select ENERGY STAR models
- Water heaters: \$600 for select heat pump water heaters + \$400 income bonus
- Window air conditioners: \$150 rebate for select ENERGY STAR models
- Wood pellet furnaces & boilers: \$6,000 rebate
- Wood and pellet stoves: \$400 discount at select retailers



Electric Vehicles

- \$500-\$3,200 electric utility incentives



ENERGY STAR® Appliances

- \$25-\$90 rebate for dehumidifiers
- \$200-\$400 rebate on heat pump clothes dryers
- \$400 rebate for heat pump dryer/washer combination units



Lighting and Electrical

- \$500-\$3,200 utility incentives
- \$100 rebate for qualifying LED fixtures for indoor growing



Income-based Assistance

- Free lighting, appliances, energy consultations, weatherization, and more — visit efficiencyvermont.com/free-products to see if you are eligible

Additional rebates may also be available from your electric or gas utility.

Financing options available starting at 0% interest



Not sure where to start?

Sign up for a **FREE** Virtual Home Energy Visit! Call **888-921-5990** to learn more (Translation services are available)

All rebates are subject to availability and eligibility. For the most up-to-date information, visit: www.efficiencyvermont.com/rebates



Safety Minute: Do the Bunny Hop

By David Young

Most of electrical safety is around preventing dangerous situations from happening. But accidents happen, and it's important to know how to get out of a dangerous situation safely.

At this year's Annual Meeting, I talked about how to be safe when there are electrical hazards around a car. Electricity always seeks the shortest path to the ground, and the ground can be electrified. A tree leaning on a line can be electrified, and if you touch the tree, you can become the shortest path to the ground. But the same is true of the ground itself. Birds sitting on a wire don't get electrocuted because the circuit remains open. If they had one



David Young, Safety and Environmental Compliance Specialist

foot on the wire and one foot on the ground—two points of contact—they'd be chicken dinner.

The voltage difference between two points of contact and the energized surface is called step potential. When the ground is energized, the voltage is highest where the electricity flows into the ground, and reduces in concentric circles radiating outward, like pond ripples. So with that in mind,

imagine what happens when a car hits a tree or utility pole, and the tree or dangling lines electrify the ground.

In this case, the safest place to be is the car. Wait inside until help arrives. The tires don't protect you from the high voltage carried through the ground: the protection is from being

part of a larger conductive object, like the wire the bird is sitting on. I have been to accident sites where the tires have burned off the vehicle and it had to be towed away. The occupants remained in the vehicle and were unharmed.

But what if the car is on fire? In that case, the occupants need to do everything they can to avoid closing the circuit. Jump from the vehicle. It doesn't have to be far. To avoid closing the circuit you need to either be touching the car or touching the ground—never both at the same time. To move to safety, bunny hop or shuffle 50 feet from the vehicle and wires if you see them, with both feet on the ground at the same time.

In the event of a car-pole or car-tree-wire accident, here's what you need to know:

- Stay in the car. Call 911 if you have a phone. Tell bystanders to stay at

least 50 feet away.

- If the car is on fire and you must exit, hop away from the car, landing on both feet. Maintain only one point of contact with the ground.
- Hop or shuffle, until you are at least 50 feet from the car and wires.
- Call WEC at 1-802-223-5245 or 1-800-932-5245.

I hope this is something none of you ever have to experience, but when accidents happen, a little knowledge can make all the difference. Stay safe out there and keep your wits about you.

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.

Tornado Damage

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like many others the Co-op has experienced over the years. Despite a long night and day, line crew members were working with their usual dedication and attention to safety when I got the chance to get out and see some of their efforts first-hand. I know WEC members appreciate the care and the friendliness with which line workers go about the difficult and sometimes, it must be said, dangerous work of cutting trees, repairing lines and replacing poles, because I hear messages of thanks from members regularly, as do others who work here. But I am not sure that members always know how many hours those crews have been out, and with what precise care they need to do their work, no

matter how long they have been afield.

And one trouble spot struck me as a classic Co-op section of line. Along a stream-carved gulch, the line runs along a steep and wooded hillside, with several spans of wire to serve a single member's house. The storm had brought a large pine down, knocking down not only the power line but snapping the pole off at about 8 feet. Because of the location, no truck could reach that pole, so the crew brought down one of WEC's tracked vehicles, which looks a bit like a snow cat which can carry a pole, dig a hole where necessary, and lift a new pole in place in spots that would seem inaccessible to any normal piece of equipment.

Replacing such a pole safely is a significant undertaking. The three-man WEC crew did it with efficiency and, most importantly, following

the procedures in place to protect themselves, their colleagues, and the public. After a few hours of work the new pole replaced the broken one, and the job was done—at least until the next storm—and the number of WEC members out of service dropped by one household.

Although the cause of the largest chunk of outages was a rare event, looking at the history of the outage a few days later, it did not look all that different than others WEC and other rural electric providers experience. Some additional outages came in over the next few hours, but the entire event was less than 24 hours long. By then, line crews were heading into the weekend tired but happy to have another storm, although an unusual one, behind them.



Line crew members replace a pole in Williamstown after an April tornado caused a surprise outage.

Employee Celebrations

WEC staff celebrating milestone employment anniversaries in 2026:

5 Years

Dylan Gagnon, First Class Lineman
 Dave Kresock, Director of Engineering & Operations
 Justin Lemieux, First Class Lineman
 Ryan Martel, First Class Lineman
 Louis Porter, General Manager

15 Years

Mike Gray, System Maintenance Technician

Manager's Award:

Donnie Singleton

Thank you for your service!

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.

