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Why Electric Bills Are Rising in 2026 — But Not WEC Members' Bills

Good Planning Helps Insulate WEC Bills from Sector-Wide Rising Costs

By Brian Callnan

2026 has been an active year for utilities requesting rate increases. Through September, nine of Vermont's 17 distribution utilities have implemented rate increases. But WEC has kept your rates flat since January of 2025, when an increase of 2.9% was implemented. We've been able to do this even though WEC's service territory is so challenging.

There are lots of reasons customers of neighbor utilities are seeing their electric bills rise, but increasing profit is not one of them. All but one of Vermont's utilities are either not-for-profit cooperatives or nonprofit municipalities. Green Mountain Power (GMP), Vermont's only investor-owned utility, has formulaic rates that are adjusted every year by the Public Utility Commission. In October 2026, GMP was granted a Return on Equity (ROE), or profit to shareholders, of 9.05% versus 9.97% in Fiscal Year 2026. This means the rate of "profit" for GMP was actually reduced about 1%.

Lower Member Density, Higher Rate Pressure

WEC's distribution system is in some of the most beautiful parts of the state, but those beautiful parts are on back roads, open fields, and sugarbushes. Our rural character makes maintaining our distribution lines difficult. Our miles of line could stretch from here to Georgia, but we have less than 10 members per mile to help support that infrastructure — the lowest service density in the state.

There's a saying we have that if you're driving around Central Vermont on a dirt road, then the electric line you see is probably a WEC line. If you're on pavement, it's probably another utility's. This makes sense because back in the 1930s, for-profit utilities decided that bringing power to WEC's rural farms wasn't worth the investment, so WEC's founders formed our rural electric cooperative to meet their needs. This reality means that relative to other utilities, WEC will continue to have fewer members covering increasing costs to maintain our lines — which puts constant pressure on our rates.

Why Are Other Utility Bills Rising?

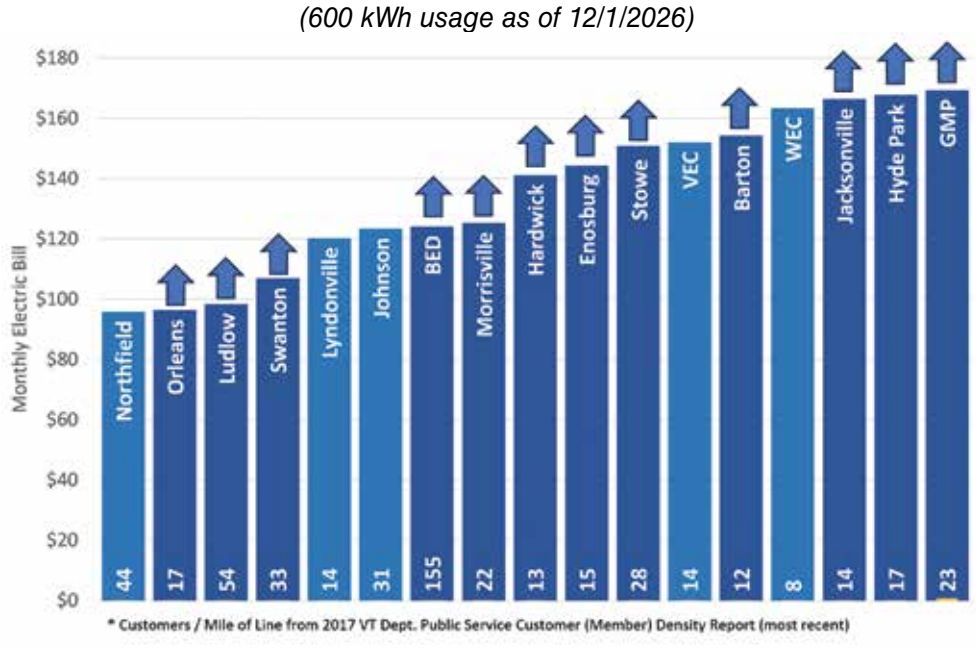
So, what's driving other utilities' rate increases? To find the answer, we took a look at some of their rate increase requests to the Public Utility Commission.

In GMP's case, their filing cites increasing transmission costs, investment in their Zero Outage Initiative (ZOI), investment in energy storage systems for their customers, taxes, depreciation, and yes, more profit. Even though their ROE was

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Vermont Residential Electric Bill Comparison by Utility

(600 kWh usage as of 12/1/2026)



This chart shows the bill at every Vermont utility, estimated for December 1, 2026, for an electric consumer who uses 600 kWh per month. The arrows indicate whether a utility's bill has increased, and the numbers at the base of each bar show that utility's service density — or in WEC terms, how many members per mile of line.

WEC Adds Digital Voting Before 2027 Annual Meeting

Ballots Will Arrive By Mail; Members Can Vote Digitally, By Mail, and In Person

For the first time in the Co-op's nearly 86 years, WEC members will be able to vote digitally for Board of Directors candidates. Members will receive ballots in the mail from Survey and Ballot Systems, or SBS, the Minnesota-based firm providing voting services to the Co-op. These ballots will arrive separately from the Annual Meeting issue of *Co-op Currents*. Members will then have the option, to vote digitally following a secure link; to return their ballots by mail, or to vote in person at Annual Meeting. "The Board and staff at Washington Electric feel like we should do whatever we can, at reasonable cost, to make sure all members have the opportunity to vote," said General Manager Louis Porter.

If you vote electronically, it saves time, and the ballot is sure to reach us.
– Dawn Johnson

Why Add Digital Voting

The goal is to make voting more accessible and secure, said Dawn Johnson, WEC's Administrative Assistant and the manager of Annual

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East Montpelier, VT 05651

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President and General Manager's Message

Member-Focused Planning and Investment Protected Members from Rising Rates

Advocating for Policies That Align With Cooperative Values, Addressing Potential Impacts of AI, Preparing for an El Niño Winter

WEC Bills Compared to Other Vermont Utilities

Steve: Co-op Month may be October, but the point of this column, and of *Co-op Currents*, is to inform and invite dialogue with WEC's member-owners year-round. Our Board, elected from and among our members, is guided by the Cooperative Principles in all our decision-making (see page 5). This commitment is examined in this issue particularly in terms of our cooperative investment in Coventry, and the long-term benefit of that decision to members, which is on full display now that our bills have been protected from rising rates in an energy environment that has been challenging for utilities and ratepayers.

Louis: Washington Electric bills for residential members, which have long been near or at the top for Vermont utilities, have dropped to fourth as of October 1. We're not celebrating other utility customers' bills going up. The important thing is acknowledging that Washington Electric has made a lot of decisions over a long period of time to stabilize its expenses, while simultaneously making much of the 100% renewable power we produce for our members through our own plant in Coventry. These decisions are proving to be beneficial not only environmentally, but financially, for the Co-op and the members who own it.

Even though we have a rural, highly residential, very expensive territory to serve, good work over many years from the managers and directors of the Co-op have insulated our members from changes in the regional cost of electricity. That's what put us in this position. A member who uses 500-600 kWh per month, which is about average, pays less in our territory than they do in Green Mountain Power or Hyde Park's territory. We've seen many neighbor utilities request necessary rate increases. Washington Electric has been able to avoid large rate cases over the last few years, so other utilities' electric bills have come closer to ours.

Steve: Washington Electric and several other utilities invested preemptively in purchasing or generating renewable power for members. It's generally true that over the past several decades, renewable electricity has proven more expensive per kwh than other fossil fuel sources. Our early investment to become certified 100% renewable by Vermont's Department of Public Service had some cost increases associated with that.

But the cost of most fossil fuels has zoomed lately and Vermont now mandates all utilities to use more renewable energy, so other utilities are having to purchase additional renewable power. That's one factor in other utilities' costs and hence bills increasing perhaps just a tad faster than WEC's.

Louis: Steve's point here is right. We have been largely insulated from the market due to long-term power markets and especially the Coventry plant, so what is the most expensive territory to serve is no longer the most expensive per customers' bills.

Now, I can hear members saying, "Yeah but it's still expensive!" It's fair for members to push back on rates. But WEC still has the least industrial load and the most penetration of net metering of any utility in Vermont. All those things add to costs.

Steve: Those who regularly read this column will recall Louis and me discussing the pros and cons of Vermont's net metering program for a cooperative utility. This is a program mandated by the state and WEC follows the law scrupulously. We and others have pointed out that while it's useful that rooftop solar can often supply energy that the utility doesn't have to buy, the effective cost of that power is typically more expensive to the utility — and by extension, the members or ratepayers of that utility — than other types of renewable electricity, including utility-scale solar. This has been found to be generally true around the country. Rates could be cheaper if regulators could evolve Vermont's net metering program to benefit both the residential solar generator and the other members of the utility.

Louis: It's fair to say net metering provides us with benefits. It's worth more than power on the open New England market because it's local, which offsets load and transmission costs to get it here. Our point is that although net metered power is valuable, there's an imbalance between what members pay and what it is worth.

Steve: Around the country, new ways are emerging to install residential rooftop solar without subsidization by other ratepayers.

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Co-op Currents

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WEC is part of the alliance working to advance and support the principles of cooperatives in Vermont.

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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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Louis: Paring solar with battery storage is probably the best example. Spreading out when the power is generated and when it is used is highly beneficial.

Steve: I hope to see rooftop solar evolve as a more mature technology in our territory to be a more controlled and balanced resource for utility ratepayers. It's time for regulators and legislators to catch up with an acceptable plan to get the maximum benefit out of this approach without penalizing ratepayers who have already invested in renewable energy through their utility's power portfolio.



I hope to see rooftop solar evolve as a more mature technology in our territory to be a more controlled and balanced resource for utility ratepayers. It's time for regulators and legislators to catch up with an acceptable plan to get the maximum benefit out of this approach without penalizing ratepayers who have already invested in renewable energy through their utility's power portfolio.
– Stephen Knowlton

AI and Cybersecurity

Louis: There are a couple of ways AI interacts with utility business. One is that these data centers that support AI are huge power users and that has impacted utilities, and the customers of those utilities, around the country. From Vermont's rural nature to regulatory complexity to regional power costs, I think it's very unlikely anyone will site a data center in Vermont, much less WEC territory. If more were sited in Quebec, that could have a downstream effect on Vermont. Our state gets much of its power from Hydro-Québec, including WEC.

The use of AI tools is different. You can imagine that AI's ability to predict and analyze data could be very useful for a utility as it's planning infrastructure buildout or responding to outages. Readers probably know a lot of the software they use everyday has AI integrated into it; the software tools utilities use for billing and operation are very likely to have AI integrated going forward; we won't have the choice of opting out. Those are the two broad ways it affects us.

Steve: I think you've hit on the major items. AI as an operational tool for WEC and other utilities is here to stay I think, because of its implications for improving reliability and potentially lowering costs.

One of the reasons these data centers are so large is they're basically training AI programs how to think. Some are huge, and maybe some are cryptocurrency centers. But for the most part, a suite of AI applications utilities might use should require considerably fewer resources.

Nonetheless, it's legitimate to be concerned about the information data centers extract and the costs they drive with their electrical and water use, and to be concerned about AI's impact on our well-being — how it will be intrusive on a much more rapid scale than we can imagine now in our daily lives. It's imperative that WEC takes care to mitigate cybersecurity threats that are enhanced by baddies using AI. There are lots of things to be concerned about, but to echo Louis's basic comment: like any complex enterprise, utilities will use AI, and our task is to make sure that utilities have agency over that resource and that its usage is cybersecure.

Louis: WEC is far from alone in this space. Grid security and cybersecurity in the vanguard of AI is a top issue across this industry, and beyond this industry. Here at home, WEC keeps up with what NRECA [National Rural Electric Cooperative Association] is discussing: we band together with hundreds of cooperatives around the country, pooling our resources and influence. And WEC has a wonderful IT expert in Scott Dane.

Winter Forecast

Louis: Washington Electric recently had three experienced line crew members and right-of-way coordinator leave for other opportunities. They all had good reasons for making those changes: a shorter commute, advancing in their career, or working closer to their families. For a small line crew like ours, to have a few very good and experienced people leave is always a challenge, particularly going into winter.

And this will be a challenging winter for our line crew and Washington Electric. It's an El Niño year, which typically brings more storms, warmer temperatures, and heavy wet snow that results in treefall. Fortunately, we have very good relationships with regional utilities, especially public power utilities — municipals and co-ops. We also have strong relationships with contractors who will help us out, and we belong to a network of utilities that pitch in and help out when needed.



Washington Electric has made a lot of decisions over a long period of time to stabilize its expenses, while simultaneously making much of the 100% renewable power we produce for our members through our own plant in Coventry. These decisions are proving to be beneficial not only environmentally, but financially, for the Co-op and the members who own it.
– Louis Porter

Steve: I often hear members say they recognize the challenges our crews work under and appreciate the work they do under difficult conditions, and in difficult territory. There's a lot of gratitude for the work they do. You probably need some of the best line crews around to work in our territory.

Louis: That's absolutely the case, because they have to be experienced in all conditions and environments, from bucket trucks in the roadway to underground to offroad and barely accessible. It's a very challenging territory both physically and electrically, given the variety of work they do.

Steve: This territory requires the best. I greatly appreciate the service our employees provide, in the office and out in the field.

Winter Preparation

Louis: I'm sure members are tired of hearing me say this, but services in our territory are different from in urban and suburban places. People here rely on themselves and their friends, relatives, and neighbors for things they'd rely on service providers to do in other places. That includes passability of roads, emergency services, and electrical service. Members who live in rural service territories like ours need to be prepared and able to manage what they need during an outage. People who live here know their road may not be in the same condition as in a suburban area after a storm, and the same is true for electric service.

WEC is supporting battery backup, improving and rebuilding lines, and strengthening infrastructure. We're doing what we can in the face of increasing storm damage. But we're going to have outages. Our members do a terrific job of looking in on and helping their neighbors and relatives.

Steve: Do you have specific advice for members with medical needs and their caretakers, as far as options in an outage or extended outage? This is particularly important for some of our members.

Louis: We maintain notes in our member files as to who has serious medical needs and requires lifesaving medical equipment. I urge members who have those needs, or who no longer have those needs, to let us know. Some members have the mistaken idea that if we have those notes we can restore power to those locations quickly. The reality is, if you're at the end of a long feeder line, we have to repair the line upstream from you before we can repair your power, and that can take a long time.

Members with medical needs need a plan. If you're concerned about that, you can call us. I also ask members to be honest and practical about what is a medical device that is necessary versus what is lifesaving medical equipment. A CPAP machine is important and you should plan for backup, but it may not be necessary to save your life.

Steve: It's important for all readers of *Co-op Currents* to ask, "Do I have a neighbor who has such needs, and what can I do to help my neighbor in an extended outage?" We can forward requests to Vermont Emergency Management but I find that friends and neighbors can provide best and most immediate support. Please take stock of which of your neighbors are likely to need help. Most people do this already, but it helps to say in print once in a while: neighbors helping neighbors is the best kind of support during an emergency.

Don's Chronicles

Country wisdom from
Don Douglas, Editorial Committee Chair



I always remind folks not to stack wood or park their camper in the right-of-way. But 100 years ago, nobody told that apple tree not to grow where the Co-op would eventually install your power line. Don't worry. Standard practice for utilities is to leave apple trees alone. All utilities trim trees in the right-of-way to prevent outages, but a healthy apple tree should be safe. Better yet, those apples are organic, because WEC doesn't use herbicides in the right-of-way.

Innovation Projects that Save Members Money

Updates on Several Grant-Funded Projects Designed to Lower Members' Bills

WEC's first mandate is to provide electric power safely and reliably — and as affordably as possible. Affordability has always been a challenge in a forested, mountainous region with an average of only eight customers per mile of line — so much so that almost 90 years ago, when electric lines were getting connected across the Northeast, corporate power companies looked at the return on investment for powering central Vermont's farms and decided to pass. But electricity is a necessity, and that's why community members worked together to form their own rural electric cooperative, Washington Electric Co-op, that they could govern according to their own values to serve their own power needs.

Today, WEC has an innovation team focused on projects to make electricity more affordable for all members, which is consistent with cooperative values. This includes projects that make technology available to members who may not be able to take on the capital costs.

It's a different approach from offering incentives, which lower a product's purchase or installation price. Instead, projects like ReWire and the Energy Storage Access Program use grant funding, and sometimes collaboration across multiple utilities, to make electricity more affordable for income-eligible members by directly providing useful products. A cash incentive can make a product cost less, but with high costs of food, fuel, and everything else, a household on a tight budget may still not prioritize buying that product. Meanwhile, higher-earning households that don't necessarily need an incentive are the ones that access them.

"Incentives are good for boosting initial widespread adoption of a product. Our goal, however, is rooted in cooperative values. When we're looking at using public or grant funding to make electricity affordable for our members, that means reaching members who would not otherwise have access to these products. This makes these households more resilient," said JJ Vandette, Director of Special Projects and Innovation. That resilience shows up in multiple ways, depending on the program. "Their electric bills are more affordable, fossil fuel use and cost go down, outages are less of a crisis because there's backup," he listed.

These measures support the whole cooperative by pairing projects with other metrics: batteries mitigate peak costs, and providing grant-funded resources before a problem occurs prevents spending more expensive resources afterward. Plus, reducing members' stressors is healthier for the community. This is what it means to embed cooperative values into business decisions.

Five Years of Bill Credits With Community Solar

Program name: ACRE
Funding source: Federal
Partners: VEC
Number of members served: 200+
Impact: $45/month bill credit over five years

WEC has enrolled more than 200 members in the federally funded ACRE program (Affordable Community Renewable Energy Program). In partnership with Vermont Electric Cooperative (VEC), this program directly benefits qualifying members with a monthly bill credit over five years. At $45 per month over 60 months, Vandette said, "This puts a pretty big dent in members' electric bills."

> *This puts a pretty big dent in members' electric bills.*
>
> – JJ Vandette, on the ACRE program's bill credit of $45/month for 60 months for participating members

The grant supports the bill credits, which frees up utilities to invest in renewable generation plants. But with an already 100% renewable portfolio provided by long-term power contracts and so much net metered solar already on the lines, WEC had little need reason to install its own solar generation plant within its territory to meet the state's renewable goals. However, partnership between sister cooperatives, and VEC's willingness to attach its already-built solar site to the project, helped Vermont's two electric co-ops leverage their resources, win grant funding, and lower the bills of more than 200 WEC members.

Shoring Up Home Electric Systems

Program name: ReWire
Funding source: VLITE
Partners: Capstone
Number of members served: 12
Impact: Upgraded electric systems, weatherization

In 2022, WEC worked with Capstone to launch a project to prepare income-eligible members' homes for electric upgrades. Members who received fuel assistance and whose homes had already been weatherized were invited to join the project. The project was developed by current WEC Board members Bill Powell and Paul Zabriskie, who were elected to the Board after retiring from Washington Electric and Capstone, respectively.

With funding from VLITE, the Vermont Low Income Trust for Electricity, the project upgraded eligible members' home electric panels to make it easier to replace old fossil fuel devices with less expensive, more energy-efficient options. For example, a home heated with fuel oil can only switch over to heat pumps if it has the electric capacity for them. If the electric system isn't ready when the boiler breaks, it takes more time and money to transition to the cheaper, more efficient option, no matter how many incentives are in place. Preparing households in advance to be ready for these upgrades is what Powell and Zabriskie called "future-proofing."

Midway through the ReWire project, the national electrical code was updated. The outcome of the update, Vandette said, is that many electrical panels that previously would have been flagged for upgrading are now considered to have enough capacity. This means that going forward, panel upgrades may be a less urgent need. And because that means cost savings, Vandette added, that's a good thing.

The project is set to conclude by the end of November. In total, 12 member households had their electrical panel capacity expanded to support future electrification projects, and were able to take advantage of some additional weatherization opportunities that came up during the work.

Home Battery Backup for Income-Eligible Members

Program name: ESAP
Funding source: State
Partners: Burlington Electric Department, Vermont Public Power Supply Authority
Number of members served: 30+
Impact: Grid-tied battery backup

WEC is one of several utilities participating in Vermont's state-funded Energy Storage Access Program, which provides home battery systems to income-eligible member households at no cost. About 30 eligible WEC member households will receive backup power infrastructure; installations are currently underway. "The mechanics and cost benefit to the utility are similar to PowerShift," WEC's program that incentivizes members to charge electric vehicles at off-peak hours, Vandette explained. Batteries charge when electricity is least expensive, and utilities can draw from the grid-tied batteries when market power is more expensive. He clarified that utilities do not draw from members' home batteries when there are storms forecast or when there is a peak event happening.

Three-quarters of the way through the project, the forecast is good. A small outage recently impacted three households with newly installed batteries. Vandette reported that when he checked in with their member-owners, the batteries had kicked on so smoothly they hadn't even realized the power was out.

LED Lighting Throughout WEC Territory

Program name: LED Security Lighting
Funding source: Efficiency Vermont
Partners: N/A
Number of members served: 125+
Impact: Reduced load throughout service area

For many years, WEC has offered a security light to members as an opt-in tariff. That means that the light use is not metered: it's billed as a flat fee, which includes both the fixture and the energy use. The light turns on after sunset and turns off at sunrise. And until recently, those lights were high pressure sodium bulbs. Thanks to a grant from Efficiency Vermont, WEC swapped out all those bulbs with highly efficient LED bulbs. "That reduces the total load, which saves money for everybody," said Vandette.

To Learn More About These Projects:

- Visit washingtonelectric.coop and click the yellow "Utility Assistance Programs and Resources" box
- Call 802-223-5245 or toll-free 800-932-5245 during work hours to speak with a Member Services Representative
- Read past *Co-op Currents* stories on ReWire (July 2022) and ACRE (September 2024)

Have Your Finances Taken a Hit?

Don't let your WEC bill go past due, or grow beyond what you can manage. ***Help is available:*** A Member Services Representative will help you put together a budget that works for you. Plus, there are state programs that may help pay down your bill.

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

Digital Voting

continued from page 1

Meeting logistics. "If you vote electronically, it saves time, and the ballot is sure to reach us," she said. Ideally, a digital option will prompt more members to participate, broadening the pool of voters, and ensuring their votes count. SBS manages elections for cooperatives and other groups around the country, including hybrid elections, like WEC's, that offer multiple ways to cast a vote. WEC's priority is security, Johnson said, so it was important to select a vendor that guarantees election integrity.

WEC's Ballot Committee is an independent member committee that does not include elected directors or candidates, co-chaired by Nancy Fuller of Bradford and Cort Richardson of East Montpelier. Slower postal service in recent years is a factor, Fuller confirmed. "Voting by mail when the mail service is poor equals lost votes, especially for those voting close to the Annual Meeting," she said. When elections are decided by only a few votes, delays in the mail can change the outcome.

In addition to speed, precision matters. Occasionally, paper ballots are filled out incorrectly: this is called a spoiled ballot and can't be counted. The Ballot Committee has always counted ballots by hand, and the team has an impeccable record: in the past five years, two elections were close enough to require a recount according to the Co-op's bylaws. Neither recount changed the outcome of the election. However, an attraction of digital voting is that it is designed to support accuracy in recording voter intent and in tabulation.

What to Look For

In the past, the Annual Meeting issue of *Co-op Currents* was packaged with a ballot and return envelope and mailed to each member household. The newsletter and the ballot will now arrive separately. Ballots will be sent directly from SBS during the first week of April. "SBS does all the printing, all the mailing, and all the tallying of ballot packet material," said Johnson.

WEC members who prefer to vote by mail will have to return their ballots quickly. That's because mail-in ballots must travel back to the Minnesota offices of SBS in time to be counted.

WEC Democracy in Action in 2027

- Three ways to vote: digitally, by mail, in person at Annual Meeting
- Ballots will not be mailed with *Co-op Currents*. They will be mailed separately from SBS
- Ballots will include a QR code for digital voting
- Mail-in ballots must be mailed to SBS in Minnesota
- Ballots may be submitted in person at Annual Meeting

Johnson and Fuller both remarked that it's important to keep a mail option available — but that they hope most members will respond to the speed and security of digital voting.

The mailed ballots will have instructions for how to vote virtually, including a QR code members can scan immediately. "I'm hoping most members will open the ballot in the mail, scan it, vote, and be done," Johnson said.

Managing Change

Fuller has supported WEC's elections for 30 years, since she was a "homeschooling, single mom of four, and it was a great little gig to add to a busy schedule without a steady commitment," she remembered. Over the years, she said, WEC elections have come to signal the start of her summer. The role of the co-chairs has been to collect and transport securely stored mailed ballots, set up the counting space, and manage in-person voting at Annual Meeting. They're joined by Ballot Committee volunteers to count ballots for several hours on the day of Annual Meeting and the day prior, fueled by lunch and snacks provided by the Co-op.

Going forward, the Ballot Committee will disband, Fuller confirmed, as SBS will tabulate all digital and mailed ballots. However, per the Board of Directors' decision, she and Richardson will stay on to manage in-person voting at Annual Meeting. The ballot box will remain, and they will add in-person votes to the count provided by SBS. Election results will be announced at Annual Meeting.

Fuller predicted that the small number of members who vote in-person will remain the same for a while. She's hopeful that members who are used to mailing in their ballots will continue to participate, and that many of them will switch to digital. "I'm sure there will be more new voters" who are prompted to start voting in WEC elections, she said, because of the speed, familiarity, and practicality of the online platform.

Co-op Currents will continue to provide voting information to members as the new hybrid voting system rolls out in spring of 2027.



WEC Ballot Committee co-chairs Cort Richardson and Nancy Fuller. A full ballot committee will no longer be necessary as a ballot services firm will tally digital and mailed votes ahead of Annual Meeting. Fuller and Richardson will continue to manage the ballot box at Annual Meeting for members who vote in person.

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.

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 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 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.

Community Resilience Resource

Being prepared is for communities as well as households. Use the Community Resilience Hub Toolkit to make a resilience plan with your neighbors. This toolkit brings the lessons learned from Vermont's 2023-2024 floods to communities everywhere.

Access the toolkit at resiliencetoolkit.org

Electric Bills

continued from page 1

reduced to 9.05%, it was multiplied by a significant amount of equity investment in their ZOI resulting in higher expected profit for 2027 than in 2025.

Hyde Park's increases were different from GMP's. They requested two different rate increases during the year to catch up to costs from previous years. Some of the reasons cited were past investment in a solar project that's large compared to their electric needs, not historically raising rates enough to cover operating losses, and significantly increased transmission costs. Jacksonville also reported that a rate increase was needed to cover past operating losses. Most of the other utilities cited increased power supply costs and transmission costs as main components of the need for rate increases.

Good Planning Keeps WEC's Rates Stable

How has WEC managed to avoid a rate increase in 2026? One of the reasons we've been able to keep our rates stable for the better part of two years is our Coventry landfill gas-to-electricity plant. We use this plant to reduce the amount of power we need to purchase. This helps us avoid many of the increasing costs that the rest of Vermont's utilities have cited as the reason for rate increases. In 2025, the Coventry plant provided almost 60% of the power we used. We get another 10% of load reduction from member net metering installations (See my article "The Duck Curve", August-September 2026, for how solar net metering has shifted peak energy times). That leaves us with roughly 30% that we need to purchase elsewhere. The remaining 30% is also met with renewable resources, as WEC is a 100% renewable utility. Because WEC and our members self-generate around 70% of our energy, we are insulated from many of those increasing costs we see in the market.

How We're Planning For The Future

WEC has and will continue to benefit from its decision to enter into long-term contracts to meet its members' needs for energy. Some of those contracts will start to expire in five years. We'll be looking into either extending them or replacing them with something similar so we can continue to minimize our exposure to increasing market costs. We're also looking to use battery storage technology at the member and the utility level. These flexible resources can help WEC reduce increasing capacity and transmission costs. More to come on that front in a future *Co-op Currents*.

Brian Callnan is WEC's Director of Power Supply and Regulatory Affairs

An Appreciation for WEC Staff

By Louis Porter;
photos by David Young

Washington Electric Cooperative is small: about 40 people working together to provide renewable electricity to 12,000 members. But despite our size and the mission we share, it's all too rare that we work together in the same place. Member service representatives and others who work in the office talk to those who work in the field by telephone, radio, or through email much more often than we see each other in person.

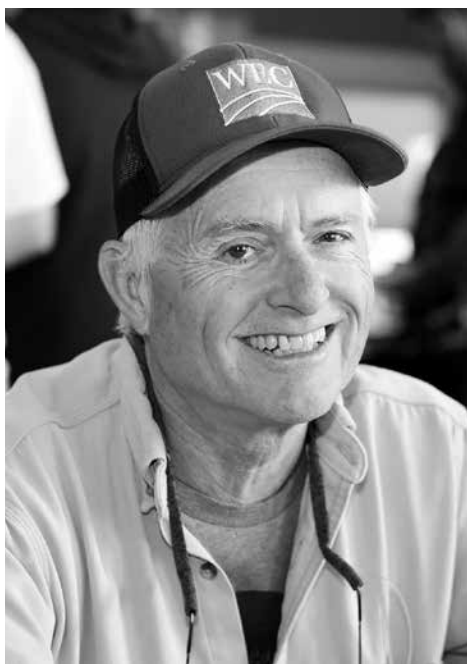
But every year those who work at WEC get together at the warehouse where we store our equipment, trucks, and materials, and out of which many field folks work, for a cookout and to spend some time together.

As I talked with my colleagues this year, I realized that each of us has a unique set of reasons why we are at the Co-op. For some, it's the chance to work for and with people who are our neighbors. Others are passionate believers in public power and the right of those who pay the bills to determine how their money is spent. The desire to support other WEC employees who they have worked with for years, or even decades, is what makes others continue what is often difficult — and sometimes dangerous — work. For most, I expect, it is a combination of these reasons and more I haven't listed.

You read about the work of these people in this and other issues of *Co-op Currents*. You already know the dedicated, and often downright heroic, work done by line crews during outages. But the people at WEC bring that same commitment to members in their day-to-day work as well, whether it be in building and refurbishing lines, by developing battery and flexible load programs, getting and implementing grants which lower costs for members, or supporting those in the field with dispatching, design, accounting, and other help.

From its rural nature to its snowstorms, floods, and (who knew) tornadoes, WEC has a financially and physically challenging territory to serve. Fortunately, we have the right people on the job and they do it for the right reasons. Thanks for supporting them, and for being a Co-op member.









Top row: The staff of Washington Electric Co-op. Second row, left to right: Mike Myers, Utility Field Technician; Richard Pateta, First Class Lineman; Dylan Gagnon, First Class Lineman; and Tucker Bullard, Second Class Lineman. Third row: First Class Lineman Kyle Sands and Plant Accountant Janet Ohland compete in a team cup stacking game while their colleagues cheer them on.

Where's WEC?

Right-of-way maintenance, field work, and pole inspections are necessary to keep your power safe and reliable. Washington Electric Co-op or its designee is working on trimming the right-of-way around power lines in these areas:

- North Fayston Road in Moretown
- West Shore Road in West Danville
- VT-12 in Northfield
- McCullough Hill Road in Middlesex
- Hampshire Hill Road in Worcester
- White Hill Road in Topsham

If you have any questions, please call 802-224-2339.

Visit wec.coop/right-of-way for the most recent notices.

Safety Minute: Avoiding Hazardous Plants and Insects

By David Young



David Young, Safety and Environmental Compliance Specialist

WEC members know that when there's an outage, our line crews endure long hours and nasty weather while they work to repair lines and restore power. But they endure all kinds of other hazards doing routine linework, too. Some natural hazards, like poisonous plants and disease-transmitting insects, can impact anyone doing yardwork or enjoying fall recreation — and they don't impact everyone the same way.

The oils on poison ivy and poison parsnip can cause painful reactions that require medical attention. You probably know if you have these in your yard, but if you are out hunting or hiking, pay special attention. Recently three of our crew members were cutting brush on a hot day, and poison ivy was hidden within the brush. Each crew member was affected differently: one developed large painful blisters all over his arms. One developed a less severe dot rash on his arm. The third had dots all over his torso and his hands. The crew member with blisters required a prescription of antihistamine steroids, and all have fully recovered.



Leoleobobeo via Pixabay

Poison ivy changes with the seasons just like any leaf — and its oils remain hazardous. Use caution when walking in unfamiliar terrain.

Even if you're wearing long sleeves and protective equipment, think about how you move outside: tying bootlaces, wiping off sweat with your sleeve, shifting your gear. That moves the oils around. You can do your best to avoid poisonous plants by knowing what they look like, and not touching unknown vegetation. Even if the vegetation is no longer green, the oils are still there. The best thing to do is be careful about washing up: wear gloves, wash your hands, and wash your outdoor clothes right when you come inside. And never burn poisonous plants, because inhaling smoke carrying these oils can burn your throat and lungs.

What to do if you touch a poisonous plant:

- Immediately wash your body with regular soap and water.
- Wash your clothes, boots and bootlaces, sheets, and anything else you may have touched with soap or detergent.
- If you have a reaction to a plant, seek medical attention.

Ticks are the bane of hunters, hikers, and kids who love jumping in leaf piles. They increase their activity in the fall. At the Co-op, we don't use standard bug spray, because it's flammable. Instead, our crews wear clothes treated with permethrin. Never apply permethrin to your skin, but if you apply it to dedicated outdoor clothes and boots and let it dry, it will remain effective for several washings.

You probably know to wear long pants, stay on the trail, and conduct tick checks. When checking, ticks like to go in body creases where it's warmer and they're less likely to get brushed off, like armpits, under the collar, behind the ears, and in undergarments and socks.

The best tool I've found for removing a biting tick is a two-pronged plastic forked product, sold under a couple of different brand names, like Tick Twister or Tick Tornado. You want to avoid crushing the tick or leaving the biting part under your skin. Dispose of ticks by dropping them in rubbing alcohol or wrapping them tightly in tape and throwing them away.

What to do to avoid tick bites:

- Cover up, stay on the trail, and conduct tick checks — especially for leaf pile jumpers.
- Remove ticks safely and dispose of them.
- If you have a reaction to a tick bite, seek medical attention.

This is a beautiful time of year. Enjoy it outdoors — just be tick and plant safe!

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.

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.

Successful Upgrade at Coventry

A necessary infrastructure upgrade at the Co-op's landfill-gas-to-electricity plant in Coventry was completed successfully. Operators were able to keep the plant running at a reduced output for much of the time needed to replace the chiller. Avoiding a pause in operations reduced the financial impact to WEC, and Co-op members will benefit from increased plant efficiency.

Safety Minute Fall Chores

Your top-three fall chore checklist to keep safe this winter season:

- Check, charge, or change batteries in smoke and CO detectors and flashlights
- Sweep dryer and stove vents

Puzzle

Co-op Month

A V G V N K B Y U W C L W Z S T I X M C
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G M A O R C I I B G K Q N F A P L W C O
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community solar
battery backup
led lighting
staff
assistance
coop values
lineworkers
acre
powershift
innovation
neighbors
resiliency
coventry
members
grants
checklist
upgrades
savings