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WESTERN COOPERATIVE ELECTRIC NEWS

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FROM THE MANAGER

Ensuring Electric Supply Reliability



Tom Ruth

During February's Winter Storm Uri, the unprecedented sustained freezing temperatures in Texas and Oklahoma affected gas pipeline infrastructure and limited the

supply of natural gas across much of the Midwest. Many electric power generation units are dependent on natural gas supply even though there were extraordinary spikes in the market costs. Many of these generation units are required to run in order to maintain the reliability of the electric grid, no matter the market cost of natural gas. The unusually high natural gas prices incurred during the storm event will be passed onto families and businesses across the Midcontinent, including Western Co-op consumer-members.

Over the past two decades, energy policy has shifted away from more traditional fuels toward renewables. Renewable energy is an important asset but it also changes the dynamics of an electrical system. It is intermittent. It is not available under some conditions so there must be redundancy of generation sources to allow for electricity to be available on demand. Those baseload units are traditionally

coal- and gas-fired units. The natural gas fired units are dependent on the gas supply being available.

To provide reliable and affordable electricity, Western plays an important part in the distribution of electricity. We are integrated with Sunflower Electric Power Corporation, our generation and transmission provider, which is connected to a complex network of electricity generators and tens of thousands of miles of electrical lines within the Southwest Power Pool (SPP). These entities must work together to ensure that enough electricity is available on the coldest winter morning and during the dog days of summer.

What happens when the demand for power overwhelms the ability to provide it? That's a particularly vexing question given the transition taking place in how electricity is produced and shared across the electric grid.

The key to meeting the energy needs is balancing electricity supply with demand. While that may sound simple, there is a complex web of facilities and organizations that work together to make it happen each day.

Regional transmission organizations coordinate, control and monitor the electric grid across several states in a region. For Kansas, that entity is the SPP. The SPP doesn't own or operate

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Sharing Success Grant Applications Open April 1

In 2021, Western is increasing our Sharing Success program funding to \$7,500, and with CoBank's match that raises the total to \$15,000 for community grants.

Also this year, Western is partnering with the Heartland Community Foundation, which will be serving as a funds manager.

By partnering with the Heartland Community Foundation, Western will now accept grant applications throughout the full year or until all funds are exhausted.

"We are pleased to have such great partners in CoBank and the Heartland

Community Foundation," said Member Services Manager Nolan Numrich. "Having the flexibility to accept grant applications throughout the year will give us the ability to distribute funds in a timely manner."

Another change for 2021, Western will have no limits on the number of grants distributed, only until the funds are expended.

"Our Sharing Success Program exists to make a positive difference in the communities Western Cooperative serves. Charitable, educational and non-profit organizations can apply for Sharing Success grants," said Numrich.

In 2020, Western Cooperative awarded five grants. Those recipients were Bunker Hill Historical Society, Grainfield Community Development Committee, City of Otis, Grainfield American Legion and Natoma American Legion. Each beneficiary demonstrated how the grant would benefit their community.

Since 2013, the Sharing Success program has donated \$66,000 to local organizations bettering the communities we serve. Western Sharing Success program will accept applications beginning April 1, 2021. For more information or to apply, visit www.westerncoop.com/sharing-success.



The Grainfield American Legion replaced their front doors, which hadn't been sealing.



The Grainfield Community Development Committee was able to add a bathroom to the city park that is ADA-compliant.



The City of Otis established a new city park.



The Natoma American Legion used the funds for their building restoration project, which included new insulation, an energy efficient furnace and siding.



The Bunker Hill Historical society replaced a non-functioning bathroom with an ADA-compliant bathroom facility for their museum.

Western Begins Conversion to New Billing Software

Members can look forward to a more consumer-friendly experience

During last September's board meeting, Western's Manager of Accounting and Assistant General Manager Stacey Malsam presented the business case to replace Western's current billing software with software developed by the National Information Solutions Cooperative (NISC).

The software committee's analysis demonstrated significant cost savings over time and increased efficiencies and improvements in Western's membership services. Following the presentation, the board of trustees approved the motion to begin the conversion.

"As we put together the business case, it became clear NISC's software was going to create efficiencies to several of our processes," said Malsam. "With NISC's software, members will have a more consumer-friendly experience. They will be able to easily pay bills and have access to detailed information on their electric usage through the SmartHub app."



Receptionist Colleen Klien recently participated in software training to be ready for the July go-live date.

Software conversions are not as simple as they may sound. The NISC software upgrade will take several months, and all employees have been developing and learning new procedures.

Over the past several months, Western's Manager of Information Technology Craig Cramer has been converting data to the new system in preparation to go-live in July. With all of the advanced metering infrastructure (AMI) information, this is no small task.

"There are millions of records that must be captured and converted into a proper format so the new software can make sense of the information," Cramer said. "It has been a meticulous process that will be vital to the success of the conversion."

Up to this point, much of the work has been done behind the scenes. In the coming month's Western will begin to release more information to the members about some of the benefits they can expect before the July go-live date.

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Coming in July, SmartHub will give Western members a consumer-friendly experience from their computer or smartphone.

Ensuring Electric Supply Reliability

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the electricity generating assets, nor does it own or operate the transmission line, but it does, like an air traffic controller, oversee, manage and balance the dispatch of the energy.

Even so, on some days there is an imbalance in that system that leads to rolling power interruptions or blackouts — so-called “max-gen” events. In those cases, supply can’t keep up. In the Midcontinent region comprised of 15 states, there were six max-gen events from 2006-2016. Since 2016, there have been 15, including three last July and August alone.

Simply, that’s because power plants that generate electricity are being closed faster than new producers come online. In most cases, traditional large-scale power suppliers such as coal and nuclear plants are being closed and replaced by alternatives on a much smaller scale. And this gap is closing more quickly despite the development of new natural gas-fueled power plants.

As more electric utilities pursue zero- or low-carbon initiatives by 2035 and beyond, this challenge will grow more complex. So, what’s the answer?

Electric cooperatives and others in the energy sector will continue to develop renewable options and pursue new technologies. But absent new large-scale alternatives and advances in energy storage, the stalwarts of today’s energy fleet — coal, natural gas, and nuclear energy facilities — must continue to operate in many regions. In many cases, they remain the most cost-effective and reliable options for producing electricity.

Thank a Lineworker on April 12.

“Lineworker” is listed as one of the top 10 most dangerous jobs in the United States. This is understandable as they perform detailed tasks near high-voltage power lines. Regardless of the time of day, lineworkers must brave stormy weather and other challenging conditions to get the job done.

Being a lineworker is not a glamorous or easy profession. It takes years of specialized training, ongoing education, dedication, and a sense of service and commitment. How else can you explain the willingness to leave your home’s comfort to tackle a difficult job under challenging conditions? This dedication and sense of service to the community is truly what sets them apart. That’s why we set aside the second Monday in April to celebrate and recognize the men and women who work around the clock to keep the lights on.

On April 12, and any time you see a lineworker, join Western Cooperative in thanking them for their exceptional service.

“We are fortunate to have a dedicated group of lineworkers representing Western Co-op, they deserve all the appreciation and accolades that come their way on Lineworker Appreciation Day,” said General Manager Tom Ruth.

Leave a message for our linemen on one of Western’s social media pages or use #ThankALineworker on April 12 to show support for all lineworkers.



Line Foreman Aaron Frieb climbs a pole during annual safety training.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY Tip of the Month

Some manufacturers set water heater thermostats at 140 degrees, but most households usually only require them to be set at 120 degrees. Consider lowering your water heater’s temperature to save energy and slow mineral buildup in the heater and pipes.

SOURCE: ENERGY.GOV

