



TREE TRIMMING IMPROVES SERVICE FOR ALL

One of the things I love best about our community is the natural beauty that surrounds us. We are fortunate to have so many trees that offer beauty, shade, and a habitat for all sorts of birds and other wildlife. We know that you appreciate our community for many of the same reasons.

At Richland Electric Cooperative (REC), we strive to balance maintaining beautiful surroundings and ensuring a reliable power supply by keeping power lines clear in rights-of-way (ROW).

While we recognize and appreciate the beauty of trees, there are three main benefits to tree trimming in ROW areas. However, before touching on the main reasons, let me explain what a “right-of-way” is and how it may impact you. A right-of-way is the land we use to construct, maintain, replace, or repair underground and overhead power lines. Rights-of-way enable the co-op to provide clearance from trees and other obstructions that could hinder the power line installation, maintenance, or operation. REC must be able to maintain the power lines above and below the ROW. The overall goal of our vegetation management program is to provide reliable power to our members while maintaining the beauty of our community. Proactive vegetation management benefits co-op members in three tangible ways.

Safety

First and foremost, we care about our members and put their safety and that of our lineworkers above all else. Overgrown vegetation and trees pose a risk to power lines. For example, if trees are touching power lines in our members’ yards, they can pose grave danger to families. If children can access those trees, they can potentially climb into a danger zone. Electricity can arc, or jump, from a power line to a nearby conductor like a tree. A proactive approach also diminishes the chances of fallen branches or trees during

severe weather events that make it more complicated and dangerous for lineworkers to restore power.

Reliability

Of course, one of the biggest benefits of a smart vegetation management program is reliability. Strategic tree trimming reduces the frequency of downed lines causing power outages. Generally speaking, healthy trees don’t fall on power lines, and clear lines don’t cause problems. Proactive trimming and pruning keep lines clear to promote reliability.

We also use data and the technology to maximize the efficiency of our operation. This includes our vegetation management plan. Arborist Mark Mercer said, “Each year, REC and I sit down to review the plans for the upcoming year. The REC system is trimmed on a rotational basis, meaning this year we will focus on the Forest and Ash Ridge substation areas, whereas last year our focus was in the Rockbridge substation area.”

Affordability

As you know, REC is a not-for-profit cooperative, and that means we strive to keep our costs in check in order to keep our rates affordable. This extends to our approach to vegetation management. If trees grow too close to power lines, the potential for expensive repairs also increases. Effective tree trimming and other vegetation management efforts keep costs down for everyone.

Our community is a special place. We appreciate the beauty trees afford, but we also know our community depends on us to provide reliable energy. Through vegetation management, we are better able to keep the power lines clear, prepare for future weather events, and secure the reliability of the grid.

OUR HEROES IN HARD HATS

On the job and in the community, REC lineworkers create culture of safety

There was once a time in the not-so-distant past when a lineworker was listed as one of the most dangerous occupations. Today, depending on which list you're looking at, it falls anywhere from 10-15. Sitting in the top five most dangerous jobs are loggers, commercial fishing, airline pilots, roofers, and construction workers.

You may be asking yourself what unit of measure is used to determine how dangerous an occupation is.

Unfortunately, the unit of measure is based on the number of deaths per 100,000 workers. We do not have a good source to determine the number of deaths of lineworkers in 2022; however, we have been fortunate not to have anyone be one of those statistics, and that is a testament to our safety program.

When you hear us say safety is our number one priority, it is not a message we take for granted or state to make ourselves sound better. It is a message

we instill throughout the cooperative and the membership. There is a reason the lineworker occupation has dropped on the list of the most dangerous, and the majority of its decline is due to the dedication to safety. Safety goes beyond the equipment lineworkers use, such as their gloves, hard hats, and hot sticks, but it is the culture as well. Our crew will perform a safety tailgate before each job to assess the hazards and to ensure each person understands the risks and



Richland Electric Cooperative teach safety to youth. At left, Dave Darling talks to students at an Electrical Safety Demonstration. Right, Larry Hallett (now retired) shows children a lineworker equipment at a Member Appreciation Day event.

Dave Darling



Grant Worthington



Jim Kaderavek





how to do the job safely and efficiently. Monthly safety meetings are held at the office and often include the entire staff. Constant communication occurs between the crews and office staff, with updates and job site locations.

We are fortunate to have six linemen who buy into the safety of not only themselves but also their crew and the membership. We currently have three journeyman lineworkers, Dave Darling, Grant Worthington, and Jim Kaderavek. Hopefully, once you read this article, we will have two more journeyman lineworkers as current apprentices Grant Butcher and Jadon Olson will have taken their test to earn journeyman status. And lastly, we have Nathan Roesch, who will begin his apprenticeship this fall.

We often say people do not think about their electric cooperative until they receive their bill or when the power goes out. We understand how appreciative you are when you know our line crew is en route to restore power. Most of the time, when the power goes out, it can be in some of the worst conditions, but other times it can be because of a darn squirrel. Nevertheless, our crew is ready to roll at a moment's notice.

On April 10, we celebrate Lineworker Appreciation Day, but we can all agree this is one of those days that should be celebrated every day. It takes a special person to work in some of the conditions they do for the service of others, not to



Left to right: Grant Worthington, Dave Darling, Nathan Roesch, Jim Kaderavek, and Grant Butcher after a working through a December storm. Not pictured: Jadon Olson.

mention the sacrifices they make, such as leaving their families in the middle of the night or having to leave in the middle of their children's concerts or sporting events. This day could also be dedicated to the families of lineworkers as well. In April 2019, we published an article in this very magazine from the spouse's point of view. The article is currently in our archives on our website, and we encourage you to read it.

In closing, Dave, Grant, Jim, Grant, Jadon, and Nathan, thank you for your constant dedication to the cooperative and its membership. Thank you for your commitment to safety and to each other. Thank you for the work you do outside of the co-op and with tasks not associated with your job description. From Richland Electric Cooperative Board of Directors, staff and membership, thank you.

Grant Butcher



Jadon Olson



Nathan Roesch





SNOWBOUND BIRDS AND NEIGHBORS

It was as if a portal to another dimension opened up, and bits of stardust settled into my world. I was around 12 years old. Our pastured grass and woodlands were poor habitats for those delightful birds, and I didn't know they existed. A merciless October snowstorm had overtaken some that had been among the late to migrate. They were in trouble.

They moved into the vicinity of our farm buildings and were attracted to the narrow bands of bare ground near the foundations of the house and barn. Dad, seeing that they were very approachable and struggling, grabbed one. It was near the barn's foundation, and he intended to put it in the barn so it could roost out of the storm for the night. Many birds, when pursued by a predator, relax the muscles holding their otherwise stable tail feathers, so they pull out easily to avoid capture. Dad ended up with a little bird's tail feathers between his thumb and fingers.

Though those little bits of stardust lost their glow as the cold night settled in, in my mind, they lit the pathway for a journey. I wanted to see them again in the light and warmth of a future day. They were all warbler species and probably mostly Common Yellowthroats.

However, that event was just an early beginning to one winter. The most memorable winter season occurred in 1959. It started out cold but with very little snow. Without snow cover, frost went deep and the buried water pipe from the pump to the barn froze. Dad put a water tank in the pasture next to the pump. Every day, the cows were let out and made their 250-yard journey to that tank. The change started on January 17. That was the date of the first heavy snowfall. As winter progressed, the cows were always able to make it to water through the increasingly deep snow accumulation.

Us boys got to stay home for an accumulating number

of snow days. The downside of those fun days was that we ended up going to school on a glorious spring Saturday to help make up for lost school days.

The snowplow remained busy heaping snow higher and higher along the roads. Chores, from shoveling snow to fetching firewood from the outdoor cords, became more difficult.

One day, the snowplow couldn't make it up the hill to our neighbors on the ridge. Though those neighbors had roads from three directions converging at their place, they were snowbound. From our place and the other side of the hill, the snowplow couldn't make it up the hill. The other access came across the ridge where extreme drifting had plugged the road.

The county sent their cat to open the road. Their road cat had tracks without cleats so it would not damage the roads. We watched it crawling past pushing aside snow. In an hour, it came back down the road, and we soon learned that it had not made it up the hill roads. After it left, we got another 10-inch snowfall that day.

That neighbor had to dump his milk for a while. Eventually, he was able to establish a sled trail down the other side of the hill to where the plow had gotten. Then they could get income from the milk they hauled out on a sled and could get needed supplies.

March was relentless, adding more heavy snowfalls early in the month. On or about the 24th of March, the county sent their Oshkosh truck with a large v-plow. It went up the hill followed by their cat. That combination broke through, and the neighbors were no longer snowbound.


For us boys, it had just been a lot of happy snow days followed by that infamous Saturday in May spent in the classroom.

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