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# WISCONSIN ENERGY *Cooperative* NEWS

July 2026



**Richland Electric  
Cooperative**

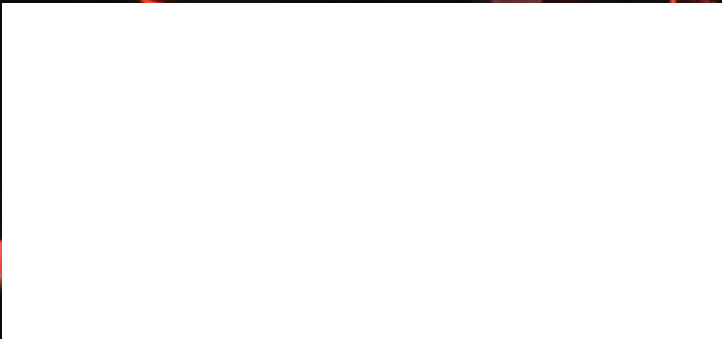
Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

## **FOREFRONT OF FUSION**

**HOW TO HELP  
DURING PEAK DEMAND**

**READER RECIPE CONTEST**

**KIDS AND CRITTERS**





# WHY VEGETATION MANAGEMENT MATTERS

**T**here's something timeless about trees. They ground us. They remind us of where we've been, and they stretch toward what's ahead. Here in our community, we take pride in the natural beauty that surrounds us—the shade on a summer afternoon, the colors that mark the changing seasons, the quiet strength of something that grows slowly but endures.

At the same time, we share another responsibility—one that's just as essential to our daily lives. The responsibility to keep the lights on, to power our homes and businesses, to make sure that when you flip a switch, the energy you depend on is there. That's why Richland Electric Cooperative works every day to strike a careful balance between preserving the beauty we cherish and delivering the reliable electricity you expect.

One of the most important ways we do that is through regular tree trimming. Now, it may not always be obvious, but keeping lines clear of overgrown vegetation plays a major role in preventing power outages. We've all seen what can happen when severe weather rolls in—strong winds, heavy ice or sudden storms can bring down branches and, with them, power lines and poles. In fact, nearly half of all power outages can be traced back to trees and vegetation coming into contact with electrical infrastructure. Scheduled trimming helps remove dead or weakened limbs and keeps fast-growing trees from becoming hazards. It's about staying one step ahead, especially as we prepare for the increasing frequency and intensity of severe weather events.

*Electric utilities across the country are obligated to manage vegetation near power lines.*

To ensure long-term grid resilience, rather than just meeting minimum standards, REC began a comprehensive five-year plan in 2025 to implement a strict right-of-way clearing rotation across all areas in our membership. This systematic approach is designed to stay ahead of nature, ensuring that overgrown limbs and invasive brush are cleared before they can disrupt your service.

As we move forward, the conversation often turns to the possibility of burying power lines. However, cooperative leadership has emphasized that “undergrounding” everything is not a universal solution. Moving the overhead system underground would lead to significant rate increases for our members. Beyond the financial impact, our local

geography presents physical barriers; the prevalence of shallow bedrock and sensitive wetlands makes digging nearly impossible in many areas. By focusing on a disciplined five-year clearing cycle, we are choosing the most effective and fiscally responsible path forward. This proactive maintenance plan helps ensure our grid remains resilient against the elements while keeping costs manageable, securing a more dependable and affordable energy future for every member we serve.

That's why you may notice crews from Zielies, our trusted contractors, working in areas near you throughout the year. Our crews are highly trained and certified, following the latest industry standards to ensure the job is done safely and effectively. Their work might seem routine, but it's anything but—it's a proactive step that helps prevent problems before they start.

You can help, too. When planting new trees, consider their mature height and distance from nearby power lines. Trees that grow up to 40 feet should be planted at least 25 feet away from overhead lines. Larger trees—those that exceed 40 feet—should be planted at least 50 feet away. If you're landscaping near pad-mounted transformers, keep shrubs at least 10 feet from the front and 4 feet from the sides to allow safe access.

If your home does have underground lines, don't forget to call 811 before digging. It's a simple step that can prevent serious accidents.

Ultimately, we all want the same thing: a community that's safe, resilient and beautiful. At Richland Electric Cooperative, we're proud to be part of that effort. Our roots run deep here, just like the trees we work to care for.



# 90 YEARS STRONG: ANNUAL MEETING 2026

Members gathered Saturday, April 18, for the cooperative's 90th annual meeting at our headquarters in Richland Center, marking a meaningful milestone. REC was the first electric cooperative organized in Wisconsin and, on May 7, 1937, the first to energize co-op power lines in the state.

A major theme of the meeting was our long-standing connection to the communities we serve. Among those commitments was the opportunity for high school students to attend the Youth Leadership Conference, and 15 post-secondary education scholarships were awarded by Richland Electric for 2026. Additionally, REC, in partnership with Dairyland Power Cooperative, awarded an inaugural scholarship to Landen L. from Kickapoo High School. The \$1,000 Cooperative Scholarship is specifically designed to support an applicant enrolling in an accredited Electrical Power Distribution (Lineworker) program, aiding them in building a career within the energy industry. Special guest Rob Richard, WECA President and CEO, surprised one of our REC scholarship winners with an additional scholarship. Rob presented Christian W., homeschooled, with the 2026 Charles Van Sickle Scholarship. The \$5,000 scholarship is awarded to a pre-law or law student who has an interest in cooperative law. The scholarship is made possible by an endowment established in 2013 to honor Wisconsin's renowned electric cooperative lobbyist and attorney, the late Charles Van Sickle. A huge thank you goes out to Rob for his attendance at our annual meeting as well as Tim Clay, WECA's Vice President of Operations, for attending and taking photos, allowing us to prioritize our members and the annual meeting.

Amy Martin, General Manager & CEO, introduced our cooperative staff with special recognition to Curt Brockway for his 35 years of service with the cooperative, and Mark Mercer, the cooperative's arborist, who is retiring this year after 10 years with REC. Former director Don Huffman was also recognized for his 33 years of service on the board of directors. In Amy's CEO report, she noted that long-term debt was reduced slightly in 2025. Additionally, she said the number of kilowatts sold increased in 2025, the wholesale cost represents 44% of the co-op's total expenses.

Amy noted that while we had been fortunate to not experience significant weather events this year, other co-ops were not so lucky. Recognizing the importance of vegetation management and the correlation to outages, in 2025, the cooperative began a five-year plan to implement a 5-year right-of-way clearing rotation for its circuits. She acknowledged that trimming trees can be unpopular but emphasized that it is cost prohibitive to bury all co-op overhead lines and that would be nearly

impossible due to shallow bedrock and wetlands in many areas.

With much of the co-op's energy system built decades ago, continuous re-investment is necessary to maintain system reliability. Amy stated, "The reality is things cost much more than they did just a few years ago, let alone when poles, wire, and transformers being replaced were purchased." Amy added that the co-op is implementing a residential demand charge that would align the residential rate structure more equitably and with how the co-op is charged for the power it purchases.





Amy also said that in 2025, the cooperative paid out \$275,000 in capital credits, and in total, more than \$7 million in capital credits have been returned to its members.

Special guest Ben Porath, Executive Vice President and COO with Dairyland Power Cooperative discussed Dairyland’s current portfolio of energy resources and its plans to move away from coal, most of which is largely being driven by federal energy policy. Dairyland’s strategic plan includes a significant addition of renewable resources and additional natural gas generation assets including the co-op’s recent natural gas turbine plant purchases in Illinois. Of importance, he mentioned that adding additional renewable energy resources will come with the need to build additional transmission lines to improve the reliability of these intermittent renewable energy resources and to move energy from where it is produced to where there is growing demand.

Porath said that many of the new sources of renewable energy would be built west of the Mississippi River and are in areas that currently lack sufficient transmission lines to move the power to the west where the Mid-Continent Independent System Operator (MISO) forecasts growing demand. He told the co-op members that MISO is responsible for planning new transmission projects and companies like Dairyland compete for building and maintaining projects approved by MISO.

In recent years, MISO has approved two rounds of several transmission construction projects in the Upper Midwest. Most recently, MISO approved the MariBell Transmission Project, a 765 kV line running a total of 145 miles. He said that Dairyland Power and its partner were successful in obtaining the rights to construct the segment of line between Marion, MN and Bell Center, WI. Porath mentioned that the right to build the segment of the 765 kV line running through Richland Electric Cooperative’s service territory was given to Transource Energy and that this company would be responsible for outreach to the individual landowners and communities that the line would traverse.

Board directors Dan Hillberry, Judy Murphy, and Calvin Sebranek were elected to new terms on the board, with Murphy defeating her challenger and with Sebranek and Hillberry running unopposed.

During new business, a member-advisory resolution focused on concerns with the MISO Transmission Project was introduced and passed unanimously. The resolution seeks greater engagement with the project manager, Transource Energy, for co-op members to learn about the project and to communicate their concerns.

The meeting concluded with two grand prize drawings. Members Steve and Barbara B. won a red maple tree and Jason D. won a \$200 gift card to the Richland Meat Locker.



# REC MEMBER SUMMER READING



## CHALLENGE

July 1-31, 2026

"The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go." — Dr. Seuss



### INSTRUCTIONS

For each book read, color in a heart, and list the title and total number of pages on the book log to the right.

To claim your prize, please bring your entry to the REC office at 30 E. Robb Rd, Richland Center, between August 3 and August 14, 2026, during normal office hours.

### REQUIREMENTS

- K - 2<sup>nd</sup> : 8 short books  
15 minutes daily
- 3<sup>rd</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> : 2-3 short chapter books  
25 minutes daily
- 6<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> : 1-2 novels  
30 minutes daily
- 9<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> : 1 piece of American literature



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By turning this in, I confirm that I finished the reading and am now eligible for a prize.

**REC ACCOUNT NUMBER**

**PHONE NUMBER**

**PARENT NAME**

**STUDENT NAME/GRADE**

**Amy Martin, Manager/CEO**

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**Trina Duffy-Brauer, Editor**



**Richland Electric Cooperative**

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