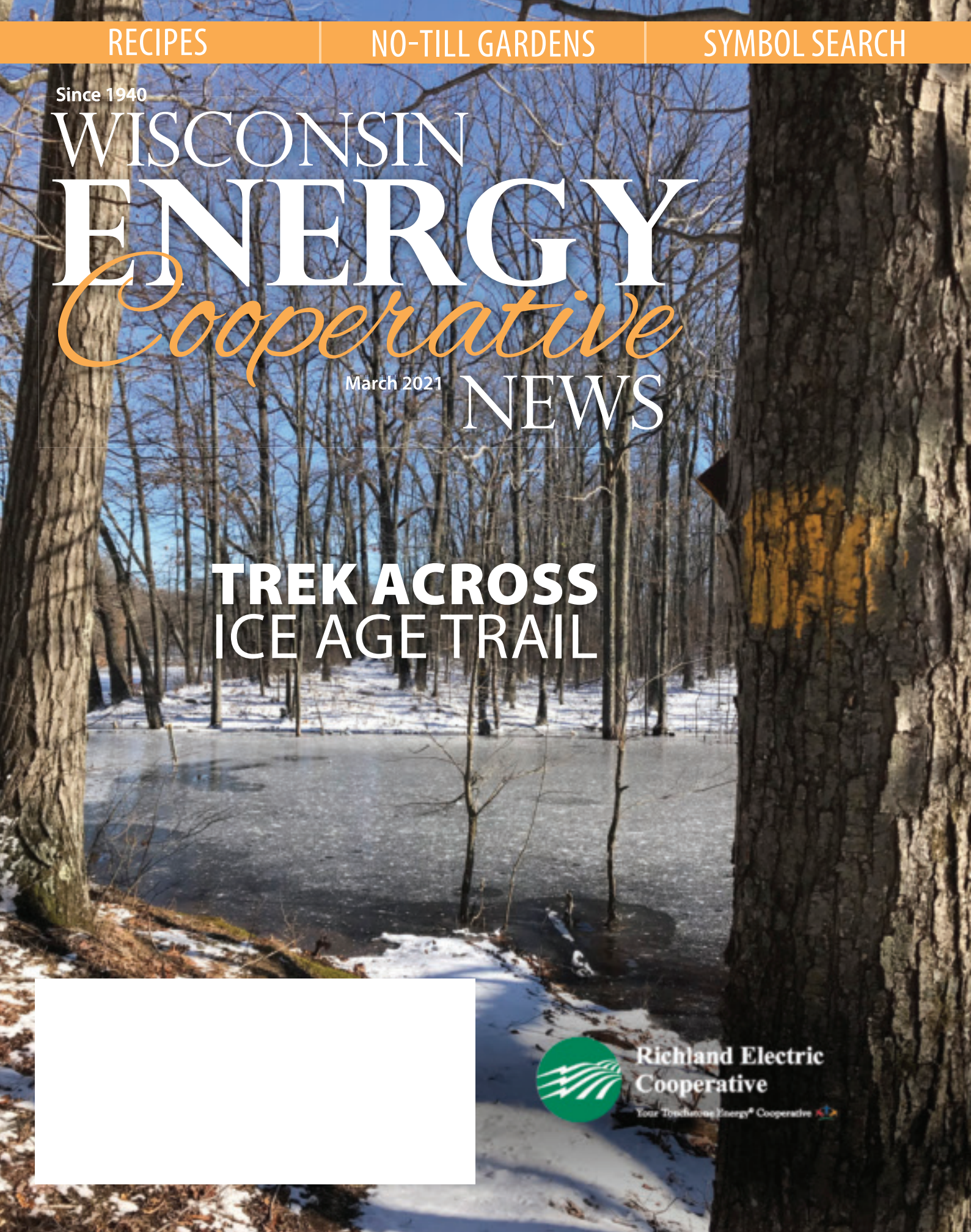
RECIPES | NO-TILL GARDENS | SYMBOL SEARCH

Since 1940

WISCONSIN ENERGY Cooperative NEWS

March 2021

TREK ACROSS ICE AGE TRAIL



COMMITTED TO A CO-OP CULTURE FOR ALL

Richland Electric Cooperative
Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

Over the years, you've heard me expound on why and how Richland Electric Cooperative (REC) is different—because we're a cooperative. Our business model sets us apart from other utilities because we adhere to seven guiding cooperative principles that reflect core values of honesty, transparency, equity, inclusiveness, and service to the greater good of the community.

Electric cooperatives, including REC, have a unique and storied place in our country's history. We democratized the American dream by bringing electricity to rural areas when for-profit electric companies determined the effort too costly. Back then, cities were electrified, and rural areas were not, creating the original rural-urban divide. Newly established electric lines helped power economic opportunity in rural areas. Today, that spirit of equity and inclusion is a vital part of our co-op DNA.

Equal Access for All

When our electric co-op was founded, each member contributed an equal share in order to gain access to electricity that benefited individual families as well as the larger local community. Each member had an equal vote in co-op matters. That sense of equity and inclusion is still how we operate today. REC was built by and belongs to the diverse communities and consumer-members we serve. Membership is open to everyone in our service territory, regardless of race, religion, age, disability, gender identity, language, political perspective, or socioeconomic status.

By virtue of paying your electric bill each month, you're a member of the co-op, and every member has an equal voice and vote when it comes to co-op governance. This ties back to our guiding principles of equitable economic participation and democratic control of the co-op.

We encourage all members to vote in REC's director elections every year, and we invite all members to participate in co-op meetings to weigh in on discussions that set co-op policies and priorities, such as high-speed internet, community solar, and electric vehicle programs.

We know members of our community have different needs and perspectives, and we welcome diverse views on all issues under consideration by the co-op. The more viewpoints we hear, the better we are able to reflect the needs of all corners of our community.

Inclusion

While our top priority is providing safe, reliable, and affordable energy, we also want to be a catalyst for good in our community. Because we are your local electric cooperative, co-op revenues stay right here in our community. In turn, we invest in our diverse community base through scholarship programs, charitable giving, educational programs, and more. We strive to make long-term decisions that improve and enrich the communities we serve.

While today's world is radically different than it was when REC was founded, our cooperative values have stood the test of time and remain just as relevant today. We recognize that today's co-op members expect more, and my pledge to you—the members we proudly serve—is to promote a cooperative culture of inclusion, diversity, and equity for all.

ENSURING RELIABILITY AS POWER SUPPLY TIGHTENS

The key to meeting the energy needs so essential to your quality of life is balancing electricity supply with demand.

You expect reliable and affordable electricity from your electric cooperative, so how does your co-op deliver on that promise?

A complex network of electricity generators and tens of thousands of miles of electrical lines 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 this network.

The key to meeting the energy needs so essential to your quality of life 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. Think of them as energy traffic managers on an interstate highway system, regulating the number of cars—in this case, electricity—and their destination.

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 simply 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 and nuclear energy facilities—must continue to operate in many regions. In some, they remain the most cost-effective options for producing electricity.

NEED HELP PAYING FOR YOUR EDUCATION?

Scholarships available from REC

Richland Electric Cooperative offers scholarships to any graduating high school senior who is a member of REC and is enrolling in a postsecondary degree program or vocational program. Applications are available at the Richland Electric Cooperative office and from area high school guidance counselors. Completed applications should be returned to the office of Richland Electric Cooperative by March 15. To learn more, visit ww.rec.coop/scholarships.

We announced last month that renowned local author Jerry Apps has decided to take his well-earned retirement from penning his monthly columns for us about rural life. We hope to continue the tradition he established for us by offering this space to other writers in our service territory, starting with this piece written by REC member Al Cornell. We know there are a lot of talented people out there, with great stories to tell. Please consider sharing your work with your fellow members by submitting a story to Richland Electric Cooperative. Please send your submission to Trevor Clark via email, tclark@rec.coop, or mail it to the REC office, 1027 N. Jefferson St., Richland Center, WI 53581. We look forward to hearing from you!

COMING ON BOARD WITH ELECTRICITY

In September 1952, the Richland Cooperative Electric Association strung wirers up the hollow to the Cornell residence. Since there was no local kindergarten, I was still free at 5 years old. With my older brother in second grade and the two younger ones having not yet arrived, I bonded with the dogs and cats and regularly checked the cookie jar. But the coming of electricity injected a few days of excitement.

Well, someone had to wire the house and barn, and I got to be helper. The electrician was the West Lima postmaster, Henry Hawkinson. He did most of the wiring, but since he was a bit large for getting through the hole into the attic, he sent his teenage son up there to do that part. Henry gave instructions, and the upstairs lights still work.

A highlight for me was getting those round steel punchouts from the electrical boxes. They were about the size of a quarter and transitioned into a currency system in the toybox of like treasures.

Though I remember getting that currency from the pump electrical box, I'm sure Dad treasured more highly the concept of being able to flip a switch to water the cattle. The gas engine on the pump, though a huge improvement over hand pumping, presented a perpetual cold weather problem. Seldom does anything work like it should in cold weather.

Then came the big day of added excitement up the seldom-used gravel road. Orange trucks and a crew arrived to set posts and run wires. At 50 yards from the house, trucks were lined up along the road, and the crew was busy. They set a pole just up the slope from the road, attached a transformer and insulators, and stretched the wires that extended from the neighbors down the valley. A post just across the ditch in front of the house received a meter.

The ongoing process hung enduring pictures in the chambers of my young brain. From near the house, Mom and I could hear some of the conversation. Someone said, "There's a rooster up the road." Thinking he had seen a pheasant, he uncased a gun from a truck and walked in that direction. Nobody objected to legally apprehending supper along a rural roadway in Richland County in 1952.

Yet, I felt a little tension in Mom's under-her-breath voice, "That's one of my roosters." I looked for the rooster and watched every step the guy took. He slowly walked up the road. Then he stopped and turned back. He declared, "It's a domestic fowl." I wrinkled my nose and looked at Mom. She said, "That means it's our chicken." All was well. Mom returned to her thoughts of electrical lighting, and I enjoyed a memorable day of stay-at-home education.

Soon other electricity-dependent items were added. Getting milking machines was a major labor saver. The cows, in their stations, turned their heads to the side and gave a wide-eyed look at that bucket setting on the floor beside them with a pulsator beating out its monotonous sound as the cold teat cups sucked the milk from their udders.

The addition of a refrigerator took a twist related to the times. Mr. Reidle from Yuba stopped by and explained to Mom that she needed a refrigerator. She responded, "We can't afford it now." He replied, "I'll bring you a refrigerator, you pay for it when you can." So, sight unseen and with that sense of trust, a refrigerator arrived. And then, the four-foot-deep hole in the backyard could be filled with dirt. A string had been attached to the top of a jug of milk, and it had been lowered into the hole so it would be cool. But now even cooler was right in the kitchen.—*Al Cornell*

Shannon Clark, Manager/CEO
1027 N. Jefferson St., P.O. Box 439, Richland Center, WI 53581
608-647-3173
www.rec.coop
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