

# Newsline

September 2011



## Storm damages vital transmission line



Three transmission line towers were damaged east of Lowry after severe weather swept through REA's service territory the morning of August 1st. Above, workers survey the damage from the Canadian Pacific Railroad tracks.

After severe weather swept through west central Minnesota on Aug. 1, one of Great River Energy's most important assets was left out of commission. The storm damaged three transmission line towers and cut off Great River Energy's largest power plant from providing electricity to cooperative members in Minnesota.

The +/- 400-kilovolt direct current transmission line spans more than 1,600 towers and 435 miles from Great River Energy's Coal Creek Station power plant near Underwood, N.D., to the Dickinson Converter Station, located near Buffalo, MN.

The line delivers 1,100 megawatts of electricity from Great River Energy's largest power plant and has operated reliably since it was energized in 1978. The line was built to withstand extreme conditions. This is only the second tower failure in 33 years.

Continued on page 3...

## DC Transmission Line Tower Tidbits

**Energized** - 1978

**Owned by** - Great River Energy, REA's wholesale power provider.

**Distance of Line** - 435 miles from Coal Creek Station power plant near Underwood, N.D., to the Dickinson Converter Station, located near Buffalo, MN.

**Number of Towers** - 1,600

**Height** - Approximately 185' above ground in the area of the failure near Lowry.

**Weight** - 75,000 to 80,000 lbs.

**Conductors** - Hang on the towers and weigh 11,870 lbs. (5,935 lbs per side)

**Concrete** - Each leg has about 4.75 cubic yards of concrete or about 8,000 lbs.

**Tower design** - designed to withstand 120 mph winds.

**Why direct current?** - Nearly all transmission lines transport alternating current, or AC power, which is the same type of electricity that consumers use in their homes. When Coal Creek Station was designed, engineers determined that electricity could be transmitted more efficiently with a direct current, or DC, line.

DC lines are able to transport electricity more effectively over long distances, however the current must be converted to AC before it can be distributed to homes and businesses.



## Board Meeting Highlights

The regular meeting of the Board of Directors of Runestone Electric Association was held on July 28, 2011.

- Manager of Operations and Engineering Al Haman reviewed the outage restoration process following the July 10, 2011 storm in which 3,500 members were without power.
- In addition to the regular board meeting, a joint board meeting was held with the Stearns Electric Board of Directors. This meeting represents our continuing efforts to look for ways the two cooperatives can work together.
- Amy Fredregill, V.P Minnesota division, Cooperative Network discussed the benefits of being a member of the Cooperative Network and the importance of cooperatives working together to raise awareness and give support to fellow cooperative businesses.
- Guy Adams, General Manager of Heartland Security reviewed the history and future of subsidiary business owned by 14 electric co-ops (including REA and Stearns) and presented each board with a \$20,000 dividend check, the third such dividend over the past year.
- Dave Saggau, CEO of Great River Energy gave an outlook on the future of GRE including member sales, MISO pricing and environmental regulations.

The regular September Board Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, September, 27.

### August Cooling Degree Days

2011	141
2010	201
2009	83
2008	145

### July 2011 Statistics

#### Kilowatt-hours Sold

2011	18,450,218
2010	17,529,360

#### Cost of Purchased Power

2011	\$1,477,689
2010	\$1,209,840

#### Cost per Kilowatt-hour Purchased

2011	\$.073
2010	\$.063

#### Number of Accounts

2011	13,650
2010	13,585

## Quiet after the storm(s)

by CEO Rick Banke

I thought I'd touch on a couple different subjects this month, but first I'd like to extend a thank you to many of our members that have been patient during the summer storms that plowed through our area in July and then again in August. I don't remember a stormy summer like this where we endured two major storms in six weeks.



**Despite an aggressive right-of-way clearing program, trees bringing down power lines caused most of the damage during the August 1st storm.**

First was the July 10th storm. That was a "big deal" for REA and our members. Then, on the morning of August 1, our definition of a "big deal" was redefined.

As the August 1st storm passed through, our phones began to ring. They continued to ring for the next few days. At one point we were challenged with over 100 separate outages affecting more than 3,700 members. It was clear that this storm had done far more damage than the July storm.

Despite an aggressive right-of-way clearing program, trees bringing down power lines was our biggest foe in this battle. We also had around 50 poles that were broke or needed to be replaced. Needless to say, the month of August was spent cleaning up from the storm.

Thankfully we made it through both storms without a single injury or vehicle accident despite driving hundreds of miles in less than perfect conditions. I mentioned it last month and I need to mention it again that you can be proud of

your service-driven and safety-conscious co-op employees. They are dedicated to serving you, our member-owners.



### Ebill coming very soon

Many of you have asked for electronic billing and I am pleased to announce it will be available very soon. If all goes according to plan, I'll be filling you in on all the details next month.

Our ebill program will allow you to view your bill online; see your consumption history on a daily, monthly and yearly basis; and if you choose, you will even be able to pay your bill online with a credit card. You will also be able to pay your bill in our office with a credit card.

We hope this new service will benefit our members that have been waiting for electronic options.

### Pancake Feed = harvest is underway

Our 17th Annual Member Appreciation Pancake Feed was held on August 20. The beautiful day brought in almost 2,400 members and their families to enjoy a great meal and a chance to visit with friends and neighbors. I always enjoy the opportunity to visit with so many of our members and to personally thank you for your support of the cooperative.

The Pancake Feed reminds me that summer is almost over and fall is just around the corner. The wheat harvest is mostly done and beans and corn will soon follow.

Long hours, powerful equipment and the rush to get the crop out of the field all add to the risk of an accident. Most accidents can be prevented with a few simple safety steps listed on page 3.

I hope you will share these safety rules with everyone in your family and those that work on your farm. Here's to a safe and profitable harvest.



## Plan ahead for increased power requirements

Will you be adding irrigators, grain bins or other equipment? Please contact REA's Operations Department at (320) 762-1121 or (800) 473-1722 as soon as you identify your needs.

## Look up and live during harvest season

Electricity does great things for us every day. It makes our lives better and easier.

However, when farm equipment comes in contact with power lines, the result can be life-threatening if basic safety rules are not followed.

First, make sure that you, your family and your farm workers know the location of overhead power lines, and map out ways to avoid them when moving equipment. Make sure everyone understands that any contact with these lines creates a path to the ground for electricity and carries the potential for a serious, even fatal, accident.

Everyone should know the height of all your farm equipment and how high power lines are to prevent accidental contact. A good rule of thumb is to stay at least 10 feet away from power lines.

Be extra careful when moving grain augers. Many electrical accidents on farms occur when augers are accidentally raised into power lines. The combination can be deadly.

Avoid moving large equipment alone. Have someone watch out for you as you drive equipment to ensure that you stay clear of the power lines.

These rules also apply to guy wires, which support power line poles. Damaging guy wires can weaken the poles and even cause them to topple, bringing live power lines



down onto the ground and creating an extremely hazardous situation.

If your farm machinery or any other vehicle hits a power pole or comes in contact with electrical wires follow these rules to stay alive:

**Always assume a power line is hot!** Do not let others get close to the farm equipment or vehicle until electric company personnel have arrived and cleared the vehicle.

**Do not attempt to move a downed line** with anything.

**Do not get out of the vehicle** unless it is on fire. The safest place is to stay in the vehicle and call for help or wave to someone passing by. If your vehicle is on fire, jump out and away from the vehicle so that no part of your body touches the vehicle and the ground at the same time. Continue jumping away from the vehicle for quite some distance. Be sure to visually check for any wires on the ground or in your path before jumping.

### Damaged transmission line continued from page 1...

"The line is essentially an extension cord between our members in Minnesota and Coal Creek Station," said Great River Energy Transmission Vice President Will Kaul. "It's an absolutely vital resource for us to provide reliable and affordable power."

A portion of Coal Creek Station's output was redirected to the North Dakota electric grid while the line was down.

The line was re-energized the evening of Aug. 5 using 18 temporary wooden structures to replace the metal structures that were damaged.

Tremendous teamwork made it possible to reach this goal. At times, up to 50 people were working at the construction site. Local residents were very accommodating to repair crews. Two nearby landowners allowed Great River Energy crews to use their farmyard to stage materials and equipment, and a restaurant out of Lowry, Minn., catered most of the meals to the job site.

Engineering for a permanent repair plan has begun. Great River Energy has three spare towers in inventory that can be used to replace the damaged structures. The foundations of the towers were also damaged and will have to be replaced.

Great River Energy and Runestone Electric want to thank their members for doing their part in conserving energy during this critical time. Your efforts were much appreciated.

**(Below) Officials secure Hwy 55 east of Lowry after the DC line tumbled across the roadway during the August 1st storm.**



Please note: REA's phone number was listed incorrectly in the white pages of the Yellowbook®. Our toll-free number is 1-800-473-1722. We apologize for any inconvenience this error has created.



## Make safety a priority with fall projects that require digging

Accidentally cutting a power line can leave many folks without power and cost you your life! It is YOUR responsibility to call Gopher State One Call (GSOC) at least 48 hours before you dig. GSOC will notify utilities in your area. Utilities will then locate their facilities.

**REA will locate power lines up to your meter. If you will be digging between the main meter and your home or other buildings, you will need to hire a private locator.** Most electricians will locate these private power lines, and GSOC also has a list of locators on their website: [www.gopherstateonecall.org](http://www.gopherstateonecall.org)

You can also request and view the status of your locate on-line. Call GSOC at **1-800-252-1166** or visit the website at least 48 hours before you dig. **It's the law!**

## Help us update our Critical Load List

Electricity is a lifeline for members with medical equipment and farmers with confined animals. It is good to notify REA if you have confined animals or if you use medical equipment, such as:

- respirators
- oxygen concentrators
- home dialysis
- bi-pac/c-pap machines
- other human life-threatening medical conditions


REA maintains this list so that we may attempt to notify members prior to a planned outage.

Having your name on REA's Critical Load List does not necessarily mean we will restore power to your location first. During an outage, we restore power to the largest block of members first. This strategy provides the highest probability that Critical Load members are restored quickly.

When possible, Critical Load members will receive advance notice of planned power outages. The notification allows members to make alternate arrangements during the outage, if necessary. We encourage members to be prepared with back-up plans in case of an outage.

**If you haven't notified REA,** please complete this coupon and return it to us with your next bill payment, give us a call or email us at [rea@runestoneelectric.com](mailto:rea@runestoneelectric.com).

In addition, please notify REA if the person with the medical condition moves off the REA system, no longer needs life support or has passed away, so that we can keep our list current.

  
**REA Critical Load List**

**Yes, medical equipment in use**

Type of medical equipment or medical condition \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Battery backup? Yes  No

If yes, how long will the batteries last? \_\_\_\_\_

**Yes, confined animals - type:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Is there a **generator** on-site for backup electricity? Yes  No

**Acct #** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address** \_\_\_\_\_

**City/state/zip** \_\_\_\_\_

**Home Phone #** \_\_\_\_\_

**Cell Phone #** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please return to:**  
**Runestone Electric Association**  
**PO Box 9**  
**Alexandria, MN 56308**

**Official monthly publication of Runestone Electric Association**

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**Office Hours**  
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### In case of a power outage

- Make sure the problem is not on your side (Members may be billed for service calls if the problem is caused by their own equipment).
- Check your own fuses and circuit breakers in your home and by the meter pole (Call us for help if you are unsure of the location of your breakers).
- Check your neighbors to see if their power is off and if they have reported the outage.
- If the trouble is not on your wiring, please call (800) 473-1722 for 24-hour service. Please report any tree branches in lines, twisted wires, broken poles and if your neighbors are also out of power.
- Be sure to have one corded phone in the house, because cordless phones won't work when the power is out.
- Program the number above into your cell phone for easy access.