

# WATT'S UP

## Closer to a Solar Garden

BY MARK SCHWANTES | MANAGER OF CORPORATE SERVICES | MSCHWANTES@LPEA.COOP

LPEA members may soon have another option for the source of their electric power.

After many years of research, analysis and discussion, LPEA's Board of Directors, working with community members and staff, are wrapping up development of a Community Solar Garden Program. During the August board meeting, the directors discussed a new policy "To support and encourage the further development of local renewable energy projects by offering a Community Solar Garden (CSG) program."

Currently, many LPEA members have chosen to take advantage of a few available alternatives to better "control" the resources utilized to produce the electricity for their needs. These include participation in LPEA's Green Power Program, purchasing Renewable Energy Credits to offset their electric use from a third party provider, and, at an increasing rate, producing electricity with a renewable, net metered, grid tied generation system, such as solar photovoltaic.

Solar photovoltaic (PV) energy installations are currently generating electricity at approximately 500 locations throughout LPEA's service territory. The interest and activity related to net metered installations at local businesses and homes is expected to remain strong in the foreseeable future (please check out this link to the 4CORE website for information on the residential Solarize La Plata program: <http://www.fourcore.org/Residential/Solarize.aspx>). It is estimated, however, that a PV system is not viable for up to 75 percent of households. Therein lies the benefit of the community solar garden.

LPEA's CSG program will be of interest to those members who, for a wide variety of reasons, are not able to install a PV array at their location. Some

reasons include: lack of roof space; inadequate solar insolation on the panels (shading, orientation of panels); they rent their house; or, a concern regarding financing.

To elaborate, CSGs consist of a solar PV array that is connected to the utility grid. Individuals, or subscribers from the community, own an interest in the array. Each month the electricity that is generated by the CSG is measured and allocated to each subscriber based on their specific investment in the system. This allocated electric energy is then credited to the subscriber's electric bill.

Local, distributed CSGs are a prime component of LPEA's Long-term Alternative Energy Plan (AEP), which is being developed by the Board of Directors to promote and support the construction and operation of additional renewable energy facilities in LPEA's service territory. [Read more on Page 3.]

LPEA has a proven track record of supporting community-based programs and distributed renewable generation. It's always been our focus as a rural electric cooperative to bring power to the remote areas of our service territory. I look forward to working with LPEA's board members to continue our successful effort. With the anticipated current costs for installing a solar garden, I expect the interest and participation in CSGs to be extraordinary.

Look for more information in the coming months. ☀



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### Next Board Meeting:

9 a.m. | Wednesday, September 18, 2013  
LPEA Headquarters, Durango

### Mission Statement:

La Plata Electric Association provides its members safe, reliable electricity at the lowest reasonable cost while being environmentally responsible.

### Board of Directors:

Davin Montoya, President - District 2  
Heather Erb, Vice President - District 4  
Ken Fox, Secretary - District 1  
Joe Wheeling, Treasurer - District 4  
Britt Bassett - District 3  
Jeff Berman - District 3  
Tom Compton - District 2

### Bob Formwalt - District 1

Mark Garcia - District 1  
Jerry McCaw - District 2  
Michael Rendon - District 3  
Jack D. Turner - District 4

### Chief Executive Officer:

Greg W. Munro

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# Protecting our feathered friends

Raptors, those birds of prey such as eagles and hawks, hunt from above. They often can be spied at the tops of Ponderosa pines, surveying in search of supper.

In the absence of such natural perches, however, these raptors find manmade structures – such as LPEA's utility poles – highly attractive. The cross arms also appear as secure nest locations. Unfortunately, what they may perceive to be a great perch to help sustain or birth new life, can also mean immediate death by electrocution.

Federal laws protect the birds, nests, eggs and parts (such as a raptor's talon), but to take compliance a step further, LPEA has in place an Avian Protection Plan to ensure that line crews know exactly what needs to be done to protect our feathered friends. LPEA initiated its avian protection in 1995, then developed a formal Avian Protection Plan in 2002, working with EDM International, which consults with the electric utility, construction and forestry industries on wildlife and environmental protection. EDM recently completed an update of the plan.

"An avian protection plan has several primary components," says Jake Wills, staff engineer who worked with EDM. "We are sometimes necessarily reactive, responding to incidents and problem nests on existing poles. With any new construction, we put avian protection automatically in place, and we are proactive, retrofitting our system with the latest in avian protection."

The comprehensive document also addresses specific avian protection issues and strategies, the laws, suggested regulatory compliance procedures and training programs.

"We are on schedule to complete retrofitting our system by early next year," says John Stephenson, regulatory compliance & operations superintendent. "Many of our protection measures aren't necessarily visible from the ground, but you might see what look like triangles on top of cross arms. Those are an example of how we keep the birds away from the electrified lines."

Nesting on utility poles is an issue for raptors, as they run the risk of coming in contact with different phase

lines. On a three-phase pole the raptors [that can have a wing span of more than 54 inches] risk hitting two different phases of electric current.

They become a conductor between the phases, and just like lightning can zip through a human body, so will electric current in a bird. Death comes

quickly. In addition, all LPEA customers on that three-phase line will be out of power. LPEA thus follows the plan and uses 60-inch spacing between phases and phase-to-ground lines to accommodate large female eagles.

"Although the implementation of an avian protection plan is voluntary, our regulatory compliance is enhanced and the risk to birds is reduced by following the plan's suggested approaches," says Stephenson. "We work very closely with federal and state agencies to minimize avian mortality and injury. They recognize that we're doing the best we can do to meet the letter of the law and protect our region's regal raptors." ⚙️



*Cross arms of LPEA's poles feature the avian protection.*

## LIVE WIRES

### **LPEA Annual Meeting set**

The 2014 LPEA Annual Meeting has been set for Thursday, May 22 at the Community Concert Hall at Fort Lewis College. To celebrate the cooperative's 75th anniversary, the event will be held late afternoon/early evening (time TBA). Election packets for those interested in running for the Board of Directors will be available in March 2014. To be included on the email list to receive timely notification of all election and Annual Meeting activities, visit [www.lpea.coop](http://www.lpea.coop) and click on "email notices."

### **No Time-of-Use hours change**

LPEA members participating in the Time-of-Use [TOU] program are reminded that, unlike in previous years, off-peak hours will not change on Sept. 15. With Tri-State's new rate structure, initiated Jan. 1, 2013, TOU hours remain the same throughout the year.

### **Labor Day Observance**

LPEA offices in Durango and Pagosa Springs will be closed Monday, Sept. 2 in observance of Labor Day. ⚙️

## Refunds made

LPEA members who have paid electric bills since at least 2011, received capital credits refunds totaling \$2.5 million during the August billing cycle.

“Capital credits represent our member’s investment in La Plata Electric,” says Greg Munro, CEO, noting that LPEA is a not-for-profit corporation with a 501 (c)(12) tax designation. “That tax designation, which establishes us as a cooperative, requires us to refund capital credits to our members as we can afford to do so. We give the money back to our members instead of stockholders, as is done in investor-owned utilities.”

Capital credits are the margins or revenues remaining after all expenses have been paid. The electricity payments made by members in excess of the cost to provide their electric service is placed into a patronage capital account in each member’s name. This capital, along with borrowed funds, is used to finance needed improvements.

“In other words, LPEA invests the margins back into our system,” says Dennis Svanes, CFO. “It helps build members’ equity and reduces the amount of money LPEA has to borrow – so it reduces interest charges we’d have to otherwise pay. The margins allow LPEA to maintain system reliability at its highest level.”

Each year, should the patronage capital account reach a level in excess of the amount LPEA needs, the LPEA board of directors “retires” a percentage. Since incorporation in 1939, LPEA has refunded more than \$35 million.

LPEA endeavors to find those members who have moved, as they are still eligible to receive retired capital credits from previous years. Members are asked to change or report new addresses to ensure receipt of future capital credits refunds. ⚡

## So long Dennis

After nearly 23 years with LPEA, Engineering Clerk Dennis Baxter has decided time had come to spend more time with the grandkids and relax at his home in Vallecito. He bid adieu to the cooperative in August.

Baxter, deciding to make a career change mid-life, started at LPEA as Meter Reader, then after 13 years, moved to the warehouse for a year until the Engineering Clerk position opened up nearly eight years ago. As an Engineering Clerk in LPEA’s Durango office, he has typically been the first point of contact for members seeking electricity for their new construction.

He’s known for his signature black cowboy hat, but also for his dedication to the Bayfield Lions Club, with which he has been involved for more than 25 years. He was responsible for creating the Lions’ Santa Claus project, and for 15 years he organized the team of volunteer “Santas” who visit the homes of all the pre-school and elementary students in Bayfield on Christmas Eve. He also recently was instrumental in helping the Lions secure a permanent club house.

“I’ve really enjoyed working with all the people at La Plata Electric,” says Baxter. “But now I’m looking forward to just kicking back and enjoying the beauty of Vallecito.” ⚡



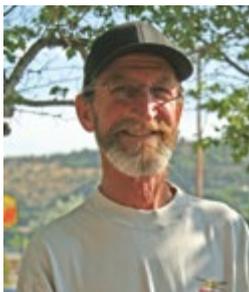
## INPUT SOUGHT FOR ALTERNATIVE ENERGY PLAN

Over the past decade, LPEA has been studying and adopting (when appropriate and of benefit to members) renewable energy programs and policies. In recent years, the Board of Directors determined the need to look at the “big picture” and be more proactive in exploring and adopting alternative energy options. Thus in 2012, the board asked LPEA staff to begin the process of researching and developing a long-term Alternative Energy Plan [AEP].

The central goal of the AEP is to chart a course, and monitor the progress, to achieve 20 percent of LPEA’s electric energy purchases generated locally by alternative means by 2020. The LPEA board seeks input on this AEP.

An overview synopsis of the proposed AEP will soon be posted at [www.lpea.coop](http://www.lpea.coop). Public meetings are also planned, but at deadline, dates had not been set. To receive email announcements of upcoming meetings, sign up on LPEA’s web site. Click on “Contact Us.” ⚡

## Journeyman Linemen join Operations team



Holtsford

Veteran Journeyman Linemen Bill Holtsford and Gregg Smith have joined the Operations team at LPEA. In the electric utility industry, linemen are responsible for constructing and maintaining electric power transmission and distribution lines and facilities.

Based out of Durango, Holtsford has been in La Plata County for the past 15 years working for a variety of electric contractors. Most recently he served as a lineman with WESODI, LPEA's wholly-owned line construction subsidiary.

"I've been in the business doing the same kind of work going on 36 years, in 20 different states," said Holtsford who is originally from North Carolina, where he did his lineman apprenticeship. "Having been with WESODI, I know almost everybody here at LPEA. It's an easy transition."

Smith, who hails from the Midwest, is based out of LPEA's Pagosa office. He earned a diploma in Electrical Power and Distribution from Manhattan Area Technical School, Manhattan, Kan., in 1989 and his Journeyman Lineman in 1993. He comes to LPEA from Norris Public Power District in Nebraska.

"We were in Silverton 2006-2008, and we've always been connected to the area," says Smith, employed by San Miguel Power Association during that time. "LPEA is a good company, great camaraderie. It's like a family."

"It's important that we have skilled and experienced linemen in place," says Steve Gregg, manager of operations. "Our linemen are the ones who are out there literally on the front lines getting the power back on in all types of conditions. It's great to have Bill and Gregg on the team." ☀



Smith

## Three named to LPEA Apprentice Lineman program

Riley Christensen, Michael Messier and Ty Mortensen have been named to LPEA's Apprentice Lineman program, working toward earning their Journeyman Lineman.

All three apprentices are Colorado natives and graduates of Mesa Hotline School in Grand Junction, Colo. Christensen and Mortensen graduated in May 2013, while Messier completed the program in 2009.

Working out of LPEA's Pagosa office, Christensen is from Monte Vista, Colo. He comes from a long heritage of linemen, and once earning his Journeyman will be the fourth generation to continue the family tradition.

"I have always wanted to be a lineman," says Christensen, who enjoys hunting and fishing. "I'm very happy to be here at LPEA. I like it and I'm learning a lot."

The grandson of the family who owned Lori's Family Dining locations in Durango, Mortensen was born and raised in Alamosa, Colo. An avid athlete, Mortensen is also an Eagle Scout - experience that has served him well in the lineman training.

"I have an uncle who's a lineman in Alamosa for Xcel Energy and we have the same mentality and personality," says Mortensen, based in Durango. "He loves the job and I thought it would be great for me."

Born and raised in Del Norte, Colo., and now based in Durango, Messier has most recently served with San Luis Valley Rural Electric as a meter reader, awaiting the opportunity to enter an apprentice lineman program. He also worked as a contractor in Craig, Colo., which afforded him experience in line construction.

"One of my cousins went to Hotline School and told me I should try it, as he thought I'd like it," says Messier, who studied at Fort Lewis College and is also an avid outdoorsman. "I like to work with my hands. In the program we go out and work with the equipment, and then come back and read about it."

LPEA's program is sanctioned by the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers as well as the Department of Labor. The four-year apprentice program includes working on-the-job with mentor linemen in the field, as well as simultaneous scholastic study in the evenings, and written examinations. ☀



Christensen



Mortensen



Messier