



Keep those weeds at bay



Photos: Doug Moore

Last fall, nearly 500 customers in the Animas Valley/Dalton Ranch area abruptly lost power. The weather was fine and there'd been no human or animal interaction with LPEA's poles or equipment. The ultimate culprit, however, ended up to be weeds – happily growing not just around, but into LPEA's equipment.

“The vegetation had grown tall enough to make contact with equipment inside our switch cabinet,” says Justin Talbot, manager of operations. “The moisture in the vegetation caused the circuits to lock open and stop the flow of electricity as a precaution to prevent fire or further damage.”

The lack of snow this winter is coaxing early foliage growth, and members are reminded to keep vegetation away from all electrical equipment. In rural areas, LPEA equipment, like the switch cabinet in question [pictured above] may be located in areas not regularly observed.

“It's always good for members to walk their properties and see what might be growing close to equipment and clear the brush,” says Curt Marlatt, line superintendent. “If trees or vegetation are discovered to be too close to lines or equipment, we ask our members to call us, 970.247.5786, to have it removed safely. With the Dalton Ranch outage, our linemen needed to get inside the switch cabinet and trim back the vegetation.”

Lack of snow might also get outdoor construction

going a little earlier this season, notes Talbot, who reminds anyone planning an outdoor project to dial 8-1-1 before digging to arrange a free “line locate.” No job is too small.

Utility lines can be buried only a few feet underground, making them easy to strike even during shallow digging projects. More than 256,000 underground utility lines are struck each year in the U.S., resulting in injuries, property damage and electrical outages, and 35 percent of all those damages result from not calling before digging.

Within two days of dialing 8-1-1, LPEA will send a professional line locator who will mark the paths of any underground cables. Line locate arrangements can also be made online via the Utility Notification Center of Colorado, <http://colorado811.org> or click on the link on LPEA's web site www.lpea.coop.

“We want our members to be safe and we want to keep those lights on,” says Talbot. “Help us help you as you get out into your yards this spring.”



Leadership Camp student selected

Rebecca “Becca” Schaldach has been selected to attend the 2015 Cooperative Youth Leadership Camp, an all-expense paid educational/ leadership camp set for July 12-17, 2015 at Glen Eden Resort outside of Steamboat Springs, Colo. Schaldach is a junior at Animas High School, Durango.



Each summer, the Cooperative Youth Leadership Camp brings together approximately 100 high school students selected by electric cooperatives in Colorado, Kansas and Wyoming to learn about the organization and operation of a cooperative, as well as build leadership skills designed to assist students in meeting future challenges.

A member of the Mayor’s Youth Advisory Commission and active in soccer, cross country and skiing, Schaldach is a National Honor Society student who intends to study biomedical engineering in college.

Applicants are required to pen an essay on leadership, and in her winning essay Schaldach observed, “Leadership should not be about who can get the job done first, or the quantity of successes one acquires. Leadership should be a passion so strong that it overflows and spreads, engaging those around us. Leadership should be the guiding light for others, as well as oneself. Opportunity is endless when leadership becomes not merely a role, but a lifestyle.”

To learn more about the opportunity to participate in the Cooperative Youth Leadership Camp, contact Jeannie Bennett, jbennett@lpea.coop or 970.382.3505, or visit www.lpea.coop.

Packets for Board elections available on Mar. 17

Electric cooperatives, such as LPEA, are private, independent electric utilities owned by and operated for the benefit of the members they serve. Everyone who pays their electric bill to LPEA is eligible to be a member of the cooperative, and as such has the right to both vote for the directors who represent them on the board, and run for a seat on that board.

Pursuant to LPEA bylaws, one-third of the director’s seats are up for election annually, one in each of LPEA’s four districts. Incumbent directors are Bob Formwalt (District 1 – Archuleta County), Jerry McCaw (District 2 – south and west La Plata County), Britt Bassett (District 3 – Durango proper) and Heather Erb (District 4 – north and east La Plata County).

Election packets will be posted on LPEA’s web site on Mar. 17, 2014, plus hard copies will be available at LPEA offices in Durango and Pagosa Springs. The packet includes Board Policy information pertaining to the election, as well as a petition that must be signed by 15 LPEA members within a candidate’s district and returned to LPEA with the completed candidate’s information form, biography, candidate’s statement and digital color photo (headshot), 300dpi or larger, by 1 p.m. on April 1, 2015.

Ballots will be mailed to all members in mid-April, and election results announced at the LPEA Annual Meeting, Saturday, May 16, 2015 at Pagosa Springs High School. For further information visit www.lpea.coop.



The LPEA Board of Directors in session

CO-OP MEMBERS

Ask...

Q: I’m unclear – does LPEA still have a time-of-use program?

A: We do, but the program isn’t as robust as it had been in the past, due to a change in Tri-State Generation and Transmission’s rate structure. Tri-State, LPEA’s primary power supplier, is re-examining its rate structure for 2016, so we may be able to give our members who previously enjoyed the benefits of shifting their heavy electricity usage to off-peak hours some good news, but it’s too soon to speculate.

However, our members in rural areas may still find the current TOU program more cost effective than propane. We encourage those who may be investing in propane [or planning to build] to call Suzy Bynum [Durango], 970.382.3506 or Debbie Bass [Pagosa Springs], 970.382.7722.

Manage your LPEA payments with the “Pre-Pay” program

Ever wish you didn't have to “think” about paying your electric bill each month? LPEA has a bill payment option to make your life a little easier: the “Pre-Pay” program.

To get started, LPEA's customer service representatives can provide members with average daily usages as a guideline to calculate how much to contribute to “Pre-Pay” on a regular basis. If members have a deposit on account with LPEA, that sum can be put toward the “Pre-Pay.”

“If you sign up for Pre-Pay, you don't have to worry about late fees, interest or disconnect fees,” says Dennis Svanes, CFO. “When your account gets low, we will notify you through email, text or an automated phone call.”

Members can add funds to their Pre-Pay account 24 hours a day, every day of the year with check or debit/credit card by phone, via SmartHub on LPEA's web site, www.lpea.coop, with the SmartHub App, or by using LPEA's automated kiosks. To add cash to an account, members must visit the kiosk or LPEA's offices in person. The SmartHub web portal, App and kiosks also enable members to monitor their Pre-Pay balance.

“We truly want to help our members ‘keep the lights on’ and provide a variety of options for managing their account balance,” says Betsy Lovelace, customer service manager. “And if you DO have a deposit on account with us, why not put that money to good use with the Pre-Pay program?”

The Pre-Pay program is not available in all areas in La Plata and Archuleta counties. Contact LPEA, 970.247.5786 for availability.

LPEA offers a variety of billing and payment options in addition to Pre-Pay. Visit www.lpea.coop to discover other ways to make bill paying more convenient.

LPEA CEO/Board to host open meeting in Pagosa Springs

CEO Mike Dreyspring wants to meet you, LPEA's members in Archuleta County and Pagosa Springs.

Tuesday, Mar. 24, Dreyspring and representatives from LPEA's Board of Directors will host a special open meeting in the south conference room of the Ross Aragon Community Center, 451 Hot Springs Blvd., Pagosa Springs, beginning at 6 p.m.

“We would love to meet with you and just hear what's on your mind,” says Dreyspring, who took the helm at LPEA in September 2014. “How is LPEA doing in serving you? What concerns you most about your energy needs? How can LPEA improve its service to our members in Archuleta County?”

The meeting is casual, free and open to all members with any questions, comments or concerns.

“Thank you for allowing me, and LPEA, to serve you,” says Dreyspring. “I look forward to seeing you March 24.”

The LPEA Board of Directors meets regularly on the third Wednesday of each month at LPEA's headquarters in Durango. Review the Calendar of Events at www.lpea.coop.



LIVE WIRES

Board meeting **Mar. 18, 9 a.m.**

The next meeting of the LPEA Board of Directors is set for Wednesday, Mar. 18, 2015, 9 a.m. at LPEA headquarters in Durango. The agenda will be posted 10 days in advance of the meeting at www.lpea.coop. All members are reminded that public comment is heard at the beginning of the meeting.

Communicate with LPEA electronically

LPEA is working to expand communications with its members by providing information of value, including notice of the e-version of *Colorado Country Life*, electronically. Does LPEA have your email address? Call 970.247.5786 to update your information, or visit www.lpea.coop and click on “Contact Us” to sign up for convenient Constant Contact alerts.

Lobby kiosks now available

Members visiting LPEA's offices can update their payment information, and if there's a line at the counter, also pay their bills by check, debit or credit card, at the new lobby kiosks. The kiosks have been installed as an added convenience to members, as well as ensure that LPEA is PCI compliant.

Follow LPEA on Twitter

Sign up to follow LPEA on Twitter at www.lpea.coop and click on the blue Twitter bird icon.



Operations Update Keeping the lights on - safely

BY JUSTIN TALBOT | MANAGER OF OPERATIONS | JTALBOT@LPEA.COOP

Flip the switch. Push the button. The lights, computer, machine and electronic devices turn on. Seems simple, doesn't it? We here at LPEA, your electric co-op, have a different perspective of all that goes into powering up those things that make our life more comfortable and convenient.

Electricity is often taken for granted, and what our members don't see is all the planning, maintenance, training, education and system upgrades. Your dedicated employees here at LPEA are trained and accustomed to managing the electrical system to ensure its safety and reliability, so you don't have to worry about it.

Most members notice when our linemen are out there in bad weather attending to sporadic outages, as well as serving customers' needs on a daily basis. The Operations team also inspects the electrical system thoroughly

each year, checking clearances on buildings, implementing proper tree and radius trimming, and testing the system's poles (changing out the ones that have failed). We also have rigorous safety training for our employees to keep them on top of the latest safety trends in our industry.

To become a lineman and call yourself a lineman is one thing, but to assist the public and provide you with reliable electricity AND go home safely every day, is another. It takes a team effort. We can have all the tools and equipment to perform the job in a safe manner, but to incorporate safety as part of one's everyday life requires on-going training. I am proud to say LPEA is proactive in keeping employees and the public safe. LPEA's operations group not only attends monthly safety meetings, each crew sits down and has thorough job briefings before the start of every workday - or at the beginning of a different task throughout the day. Communication is the key to success.

LPEA holds many other training sessions throughout the year to keep employees on top of their game: pole top rescue, bucket truck rescue, first aid and CPR, traffic control, defensive driving and accident awareness, automatic

recloser and voltage regulator training, apprenticeship training, and relay training, to name a few.

Monthly safety meetings are also a great way to foster communication among employees, as they express their concerns and share experiences. All information shared is just another tool that allows our employees to go home safely to their families.

Our safety committee, made up of representatives from different departments, continually strives to keep all our employees safe - beyond the linemen. They review/update our safety manual, standard operation procedures and emergency response plan. We also are part of the Colorado Rural Electric Association's job training and safety program, which allows us to interact and network with other co-ops throughout the state. CREA brings a lot of ideas and experience to the table and is one group that is definitely on the forefront of safety.

Keeping the lights on is a priority, but guaranteed, safety is our FIRST priority here at LPEA. Proper training and dedication is what keeps everyone sharp and alert to ever-changing conditions on the electrical system, enabling LPEA to respond efficiently in a safe and timely manner to serve you, our members.

Mailing Address:

PO Box 2750 Durango, CO 81302-2750

Street Address:

45 Stewart St. Durango, CO 81303
603 S. 8th St. Pagosa Springs, CO 81147

970.247.5786 | www.lpea.coop

Mission Statement:

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

Board of Directors:

- Michael Rendon, President - [District 3]
- Heather Erb, Vice President - [District 4]
- Mark Garcia, Treasurer - [District 1]
- Jeff Berman, Secretary - [District 3]
- Britt Bassett [District 3]
- Tom Compton [District 2]
- Bob Formwalt [District 1]
- Bob Lynch [District 1]
- Jerry McCaw [District 2]
- Davin Montoya [District 2]
- Jack Turner [District 4]
- Joe Wheeling [District 4]

Chief Executive Officer:
Michael A. Dreyspring

Statement of Non-discrimination

LPEA is an equal opportunity provider and employer M/F/ Disability/Veteran. If you wish to file a Civil Rights program complaint of discrimination, complete the USDA Discrimination Complaint Form, found online at http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html, or at any USDA office, or call (866) 632-9992 to request the form. You may also write a letter containing all of the information requested in the form. Send your completed complaint form or letter to us by mail at U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, by fax (202) 690-7442 or email at program.intake@usda.gov.

