

Claverack Rural Electric Cooperative

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives
serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

Claverack REC

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Office Hours

Monday through Friday

7:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Jeff Fetzer, CCC, Local Pages Editor

Guest Column



Seeing the forest for the trees

by Doug Nichols, *Director of Operations*

ONE OF my responsibilities as the co-op's director of operations involves overseeing our vegetation management program.

Maintaining rights of way in a nearly 2,250-square-mile service territory with 2,700 miles of primary electric line running through seven heavily forested counties can be challenging to say the least. With tree contact being our top cause of power outages, there is a lot of planning behind the scenes to improve the reliability of our system through vegetation management.

Over the years, we've continually looked for ways to improve our right-of-way maintenance program. Last year, we made a significant change when we opted to contract with a forestry consulting firm, ACRT, to provide us with a full-time, year-round forestry professional to oversee our right-of-way program.

With the support and recommendations of our forestry consultant, we are looking at several different approaches to maintaining our rights of way.

One of the biggest right-of-way challenges we have ever faced stems from destruction of ash trees by a forest pest called the emerald ash borer.

The emerald ash borer is a bright green beetle, the larvae of which feed just under the bark of ash trees, ultimately girdling and killing infected trees three to five years after infestation. Since it first was discovered in Michigan in the summer of 2002, the

emerald ash borer has killed 40 million ash trees in the United States.

We first began seeing evidence of emerald ash borer destruction in Bradford County in 2012. Since then, the insect has spread to all of the counties served by Claverack, and we've been trying to deal with the thousands of resulting dead and dying ash trees along our rights of way.

To put the scope of this problem into perspective, this past year we selected one circuit out of our Plank Road Substation in Bradford County for reclaiming/reclearing of existing right of way. As part of our plan to complete the circuit, ACRT and our right-of-way contractor were asked to identify dead or danger trees along our rights of way to target for removal. Our contractors removed over 760 ash trees from this 54-mile section of line.

So with 2,700 miles of primary line to maintain, we know the emerald ash borer will be a significant challenge for us for many years to come.

We are in the process of developing clear specifications regarding ash tree removal. Obviously, we can't cut down every ash tree growing along our rights of way, so we will target those trees most likely to contact our lines.

We appreciate members' awareness of the problem. If you have a dead or dying tree on your property in close proximity to electric lines, please contact us so we can evaluate it for removal. 

Claverack brings forester on board

By Jeff Fetzer

MAINTAINING 2,700 miles of co-op right of way across the tree-clad hill-sides and valleys of Northeastern Pennsylvania has never been a small feat.

But the task grew significantly more difficult in recent years after an exotic metallic green beetle arrived in Claverack's service territory and began killing the region's ash trees.

The dead and dying ash trees have prompted an uptick in tree-related outages for the co-op, as well as a surge of calls from members wishing to report dead trees on their properties, in close proximity to Claverack's electric lines.

With the ash problem consuming an increasing amount of staff attention and planning, the co-op management team opted to bring in a professional forester to provide guidance in dealing with the ash issue and to take the lead role in overseeing the co-op's vegetation management program.

"About 65 percent of our outages are tree-related," says Director of Operations Doug Nichols. "As we focus more and more on reliability and right of way, we felt we needed the expertise of a trained forester. Right-of-way maintenance is one of our biggest budget items, and we felt it was important to have a forestry expert manage the program, especially in light of the ash tree problem."

In early 2017, Claverack contracted with ACRT, an employee-owned utility vegetation management consulting firm based in Akron, Ohio, to provide a forester to steer the co-op's right-of-way maintenance efforts.

Tasked with those duties is Colby Marshall, a Vermont native with a bachelor's degree in forestry from Paul Smith's College in Paul Smiths, N.Y.

Since August, Marshall has been serving as the co-op's full-time forester, a job that entails working with co-op members who have concerns about trees growing near or dying along power lines, overseeing vegetation man-



CO-OP WELCOMES FORESTER: Colby Marshall, a forester with ACRT, an Ohio-based utility vegetation management consulting company, began providing full-time forestry services to Claverack in August 2017. Marshall's role involves coordinating and inspecting vegetation management work performed by contract tree service crews, and meeting with members on right-of-way issues and concerns.

agement activities being conducted on co-op rights of way by contractors, and meeting with members to address concerns they may have about right-of-way work being done on their properties.

In past years, those activities would have fallen to Claverack's three district operations supervisors.

"Our operations supervisors were spending 60 percent of their time on tree issues," Nichols says. "With a consulting forester on board, now they are back to working with their crews and scheduling reliability projects instead of chasing tree problems all day."

The addition of a forestry professional to the co-op team also provides direct benefits to members, according to Nichols.

"A forester provides an element of expertise, someone who can talk clearly to our members about danger trees outside the right of way," he says.

"They offer us a better way of managing our program that potentially will allow us to cut more right of way for the same amount of money."

Marshall says he has been enjoying his role as the liaison between the co-op and its members when it comes to tree-related issues.

"It's fun. It's interesting. It's something different every day," he says.

The forester says he typically begins and ends the workday at Claverack's office in Wysox, but spends most of his time in the field. Some of his work involves visiting and inspecting right-of-way projects where the co-op's tree service contractor, Asplundh, is working.

"I also meet with members who call the co-op and express concerns about right-of-way work that has been done or have concerns about trees that are close to their wires," he says. "I will

go to the member's property, look at the trees and make a recommendation about whether something needs to be done."

He says most of the member calls he responds to involve ash trees.

"It's a big issue for members," he says. "There are just so many of them out there that are dying."

In addition to responding to ash tree calls from members, Marshall says the co-op has been removing ash trees growing along the edge of co-op right of way on individual line circuits targeted for contract tree service work.

"We have been cutting ash, dead or alive, if we feel it has the potential to come in contact with the electric lines," he says.

Marshall noted that while working on the Plank Road Substation circuit, a project that began in November and was completed in January, crews felled more than 760 ash trees growing along the 54 miles of right of way targeted for routine maintenance.

He says this year, Asplundh has been awarded a bid to maintain about 200 miles of right of way on circuits served by the Lime Hill and Franklin Forks substations.

Circuit maintenance, which is ideally performed on a five-year cycle, involves mowing and cutting brush in the right of way, trimming branches and limbs hanging out over the right of way and cutting standing dead trees or leaning trees along rights of way that have the potential to topple onto electric lines.

Marshall says he or an Asplundh employee spend a lot of time meeting with property owners about planned work, and seeking permission to access rights of way or to remove trees growing outside the right of way.

"The members have been really good to work with and are generally very understanding," he says. "We try to educate them about what is going on with the ash trees and why we are cutting them. Most people understand that if the power goes out because of a tree coming down, it's going to take a lot longer to get back



ASH PROBLEMS: Chris Cilino, a foreman with Asplundh Tree Experts, works to remove a dying ash tree on the Plank Road Substation circuit in Bradford County while forester Colby Marshall looks on. Because ash trees become very brittle as they die, the trees are taken down limb by limb, starting at the top of the tree, to ensure the safety of tree workers.

on than if we take down the tree while we are doing routine maintenance on the circuit."

Members with concerns about trees

growing on or along rights of way on their properties are asked to contact the Claverack office at 1-800-326-9799. ☀

SmartHub: Manage your account from anywhere

SmartHub, Claverack's online bill payment and account management program, lets you manage all aspects of your account online or with your mobile device

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Signing up for SmartHub is easy. Visit our website, www.claverack.com, click on the "Pay Bill" button on the left side of your screen and follow the registration instructions. The SmartHub mobile app is available for download through your app store.



Claverack Board of Directors Chairman James Luce presents Guthrie President & CEO Dr. Joseph Scopelliti with a \$1,000 contribution to Guthrie's Forward Together capital campaign. The contribution, part of the cooperative's \$11,000 pledge to the campaign, will be used to support new facilities and investment in the latest medical technologies for patient care. Pictured are, from left: Tricia Huston, Guthrie director of resource management; Scopelliti; Luce; Claverack President & CEO Bobbi Kilmer; and Patty Dawsey, major gift officer of resource development for Guthrie.

Claverack REC commits to Guthrie's Forward Together campaign

CLAVERACK has committed \$11,000 to Guthrie's Forward Together comprehensive campaign, an initiative designed to ensure Guthrie continues to thrive during a time of rapidly changing health care delivery.

In addition to a \$1,000 check Claverack representatives presented to health system officials at Guthrie Robert Packer Hospital in Sayre recently, the cooperative has pledged to invest an additional \$10,000 in the Forward Together campaign over the next five years.

Funds raised through the capital campaign will be used to expand and renovate Guthrie's emergency department and cardiovascular center, invest in state-of-the art medical technologies and expand the regional health care provider's residency and fellowship programs for physicians in an effort to attract new clinicians to the Twin Tiers.

"We know how important Guthrie is to the health care needs of the people

in our region, and we are very pleased to be able to support the health system's campaign to expand and enhance its services and facilities," said Bobbi Kilmer, Claverack president & chief executive officer.

Claverack is able to provide financial support to beneficial community projects like the Forward Together campaign by utilizing funds from unclaimed property, primarily the capital credits of inactive members the co-op is unable to locate.

Guthrie is a non-profit integrated health system serving patients from 11 counties in north-central Pennsylvania and upstate New York. A member of the Mayo Clinic Care Network, Guthrie is comprised of a research institute, home care/hospice, hospitals in Sayre, Pa., Towanda, Pa., Troy, Pa., and Corning, N.Y., and a regional network of 45 subspecialty and primary care clinics in 21 communities throughout the Twin Tiers. 

Keep in touch with us on Facebook

Looking to keep up with the latest news involving your local electric cooperative? Join us on Facebook.

By "liking" Claverack REC on Facebook, you will receive updates about major power outages, current events and activities involving the cooperative, as well as information about system projects, photos and other items of interest.

To find us on Facebook, simply click on the Facebook icon on our home page at www.claverack.com. You can also view all of our Facebook posts by checking out the Facebook feed on the right side of our home page.

Even out your payments with Levelized Billing

You can avoid large fluctuations in your electric bill from month to month by participating in Claverack's Levelized Billing plan.

The program allows you to level out your monthly payments throughout the year.

Levelized billing is available to members with at least one year of electric use, provided they have fewer than two late payments in the prior 12 months.

This plan is particularly helpful to members with electric heating or central air conditioning systems, since their electric bills tend to increase significantly during the heating and cooling seasons. It's also convenient for those on fixed incomes.

If you are interested in a levelized billing plan, please call the member services department at 1-800-326-9799.

OFFICE CLOSING
All Claverack offices
will be closed
Friday, March 30,
in observance of
Good Friday.