

One-two punch

City of Tyler endures rolling electric grid outages and natural gas price spikes

by Steve Downer

Talk about a one-two punch. No Minnesota city has been hurt more by recent electrical outages and natural gas price spikes than Tyler. The city of approximately 1,100 in far southwestern Minnesota operates both electric and natural gas utilities.

With little warning, calm winds and a temperature of 20 below zero the morning of Feb. 16, the city's power supply was disrupted.

The financial shoe fell weeks later, when the natural gas bill arrived.

Tyler is on the electrical grid operated by the Southwest Power Pool (SPP). With electric generation from north Texas to the Dakotas not sufficient to meet the demand the morning of Feb. 16, SPP began rolling blackouts to reduce demand.



Tyler is one of 33 Minnesota cities that provide both electric and natural gas distribution service. The city was uniquely hit by electrical grid power outages and natural gas price spikes. This photo was taken in 2018.

Tyler city administrator Stephanie LaBrune's phone rang at 7:50 a.m. Judd Guida, who oversees the city electrical system, was calling. He had just been informed of the disruption to electric service.

East River Electric, a genera-

tion and transmission cooperative headquartered in Madison, South Dakota, operates the transmission system over a 40,000 square mile area, including all or part of 22 counties in western Minnesota.

Following an initial outage

that affected the entire municipal service area from approximately 7:30 to 9 a.m., East River was able to restore partial service to Tyler. The city was divided into four quadrants, and

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City of Henning marshalls local people to do a lot with a little

by Steve Downer

The City of Henning, like most municipal utilities, does a lot with a little.

It seems to come naturally when you work for people you know, in a place you care about.

Henning isn't the biggest city, with a population estimated at just over 800. It is the newest municipal electric utility in Minnesota, however, having been formed in 1969.

Approximately 25 years ago the city also built a natural gas system, which extends outside of city limits to serve adjacent rural and lakes-area customers. Henning also provides water and wastewater service (with water service extended 10 miles to the City of Ottertail, on the northwest bank of Otter Tail Lake).

Keeping current on the required training certifications for each utility is a task in itself.

The homegrown four-person utilities/public works crew is responsible for maintaining the four utilities, city park, festival grounds, ballfields, airport, sidewalks, streets and senior living facility.



MMUA file photos

City of Henning staff includes, from left to right: Clerk/Treasurer Kim Schroeder, Police Chief Mike Helle, Utilities Supt. Brenden Markuson, Utilities/Public Works staff Jake Williams, Travis Arnd and James Nelson and Utility Billing/Deputy Clerk Jessica Strege.

Taking care of things can quickly use up a workday, but long-term planning is vital.

The city is working on a \$2.9 million electric distribution voltage conversion project, from 2400 Delta to 4160 Wye. As part

of the project's Phase I, the four municipal linemen are switching out padmount transformers and installing new underground

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MISO: Renewable integration complexity increases sharply beyond 30 percent

A mid-February cold snap revealed weakness in regional electric grids from Texas to the Dakotas and western Minnesota.

How reliable is our region's grid?

The Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO) in February released an updated Renewable Integration Impact Assessment (RIIA). The document is part of MISO's ongoing four-year initiative to understand the impacts of increasing renewables on the grid.

The RIAA's key conclusion is that planning and operating the grid becomes more difficult beyond 30 percent of the electric

load being served by wind and solar. With proper planning, the report said the region could achieve 50 percent or higher renewable penetration.

MISO is currently operating 25,000 megawatts (MW) of wind energy generation which, in MISO's most recent 12-month history, generated 12 percent of the electricity mix (with solar contributing less than 1 percent). MISO is preparing for an additional 15,000 MW of renewables (10,000 MW of solar and 5,000 MW of wind) on the system in the next few years.

Emergencies have been increasingly declared by MISO since the summer of 2016.

These are not a direct indicator of a reliability issue, said MISO. However, calling emergencies more often and in unforeseen hours are evidence of a "changing risk profile."

The region is changing in big ways.

Looking at the marginal cost of energy produced, said MISO, wind and solar are lower cost than coal, nuclear, or natural gas generation.

These renewable resources are replacing the region's conventional baseload resources, which for decades constituted the

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PAST DUE

Walleye Wind, Hayward Solar proposals advance before state regulators

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MPUC) March 4 issued a draft site permit and requested a full administrative law judge report in the application of Walleye Wind, LLC for a site permit for a 111.5 Megawatt Large Wind Energy Conversion System in Rock County.

Walleye Wind is a subsidiary of NextEra Energy Resources, LLC. The project would connect to an existing 345-kilovolt high-voltage transmission line that is owned and operated by Xcel Energy at its Rock County substation. The project would include no more than 40 wind turbines. Walleye Wind, according to regulatory documents, has entered into a power purchase agreement

with Minnesota Municipal Power Agency for purchase of the entire output of the facility under a 30-year term.

Associated facilities would include 34.5 kV collection lines, a collector substation, an operations and maintenance facility, a construction laydown yard, crane paths, gravel access roads, a meteorological tower, and a 500-foot 161-kV generation tie line connecting to Xcel Energy's Rock County Substation.

The amended application also included an increase of two miles of 34.5 kilovolt (kV) trenched underground collector lines.

A draft site permit does not authorize construction of the project but instead it provides interested persons with

a sample of the conditions being considered at this stage of the review process. If the Commission decides to issue a preliminary draft site permit, the public will have the opportunity to provide further input during the public hearing on the project prior to the Commission making its final decision on the site permit application.

Hayward Solar

The MPUC March 18 approved exemption requests with modifications for Hayward Solar, LLC in its application for a Certificate of Need for the up to 150 MW Hayward Solar Project in Freeborn County.

Hayward Solar is an In-

dependent Power Producer proposing to construct and operate an up to 150-megawatt (MW) photovoltaic solar energy generating system on approximately 1,640 acres within Hayward Township.

The project proposal includes interconnection to a new Minnesota Municipal Power Agency 161 kilovolt (kV) switching station in Freeborn County. Electricity generated will be offered for sale to wholesale customers, including in-state and out-of-state utilities and cooperatives. Hayward indicated an in-service date in 2023.

Hayward Solar requested partial exemptions for those data requirements seeking information on alternatives to

the project that would not satisfy the Minnesota Solar Energy Standard or other clean energy standards or sustainability goals. The requested exemptions involve several certificate of need application content requirements.

Hayward stated that the project would produce renewable energy to be sold to electric utilities or other entities to satisfy renewable energy standards, policies, or goals and cited several instances in which the Commission granted exemption requests to Independent Power Producers.

Hayward may be required to provide relevant information upon request during the certificate of need review process.

Detroit Lakes, Rochester territory transfers approved; Minnesota Power proposal tabled

The MPUC March 15 approved two permanent electric service territory transfer petitions and tabled another. Two of the petitions involved municipal electric utilities: Detroit Lakes Public Utilities

(DLP) and Rochester Public Utilities (RPU).

Both of the petitions involving municipal utilities were made pursuant to Minn. Stat. § 216B.44, and were approved as routine matters.

The DLP-Otter Tail Power (OTP) request included approximately 1.2 acres on north Hwy. 59 with two residential customers currently being served by OTP; and a second area on the northwest

corner of Becker County Rd. 131 and North Tower Road of approximately 36.55 acres with no customers.

The parties agreed that OTP will continue to provide electric service to the two residential customers in the first area until they mutually agree on a date to transfer electric service. The parties shared with the MPUC a proposed notice to the affected customers, regarding DLP providing electric service to those previously served by OTP.

People's Energy Cooperative and RPU also jointly filed a petition, requesting transfer of four areas totaling approximately 104.73 acres and two traffic signals. RPU is currently serving the two traffic

signals and will continue to serve them. RPU will provide interim service to the areas, subject to certain conditions.

Under Minnesota Statutes, Section 216B.44(a), the Affected Areas lie within the city limits; a municipal utility expands its assigned electric service territory, upon reaching agreement with the neighboring utility as to compensation.

The MPUC took no action on a request from East Central Electric and Minnesota Power. The request was one of 45 service-area-related agreements filed by MP in September 2020. One of the adjustments involved a Service Territory Agreement

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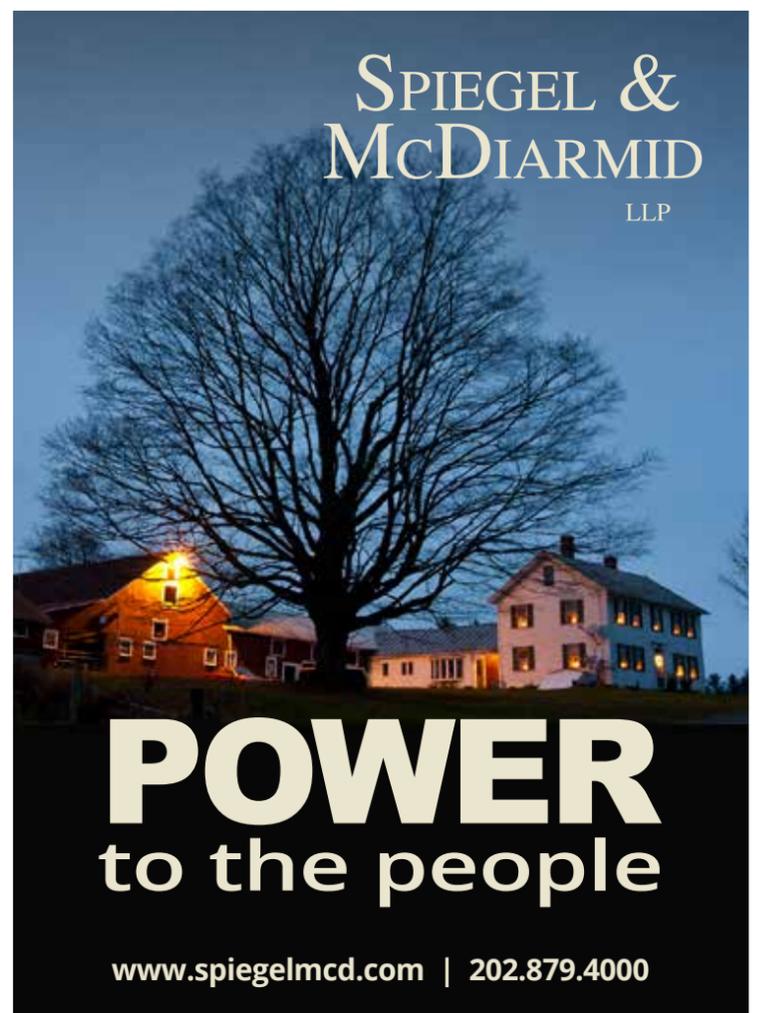
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New Ulm Public Utilities conveys gas price spike message to its customers

March 12, 2021

by **Kris Manderfeld**

*Utilities Director,
New Ulm Public Utilities*

Natural gas is an integral part of our daily life. It is used to fuel our furnaces, cook our food, and heat our water for bathing and cleaning, as well as support our district energy (steam heating) system.

We don't really think about the necessity of having it; we just rely on it. Recently, during the polar vortex that the Midwest experienced, the need for reliable natural gas came to the forefront. With extreme cold temperatures in the South, the availability of natural gas across the Midwest was threatened. Gas wells, power plants and wind turbines experienced freeze outs.

With the constraint in sup-

ply and the increase in demand, the price for natural gas skyrocketed. New Ulm Public Utilities (NUPU) saw the price increase from \$2.60/mcf at the beginning of February to over \$188.00/mcf by mid-month. This price increase was not unique to New Ulm but was felt across the greater Midwest. This put a financial burden on our utility and ultimately on our customers.

Fortunately, a portion of the natural gas needed was hedged, meaning it was bought in the past for the future at a fixed price. This helped absorb some of the impact of the high price.

The cost of natural gas purchased to supply our customers' needs is a direct pass-through from our supplier to our customers through the

purchased gas adjustment. There is no markup on the cost of natural gas.

At a special New Ulm Public Utilities Commission meeting on Friday, March 5, the Commission authorized the use of \$2.6 million of reserves to buy down the rate to be passed on to our customers. The Commission recognized the hardship this price spike would have on our customers and felt the use of reserves was appropriate to soften the impact.

Even with the buydown, there will be an impact to customers' bills. To help mitigate this impact, the Commission authorized to provide customers the opportunity to set up a contract to spread the payment of the March gas/steam bill over the next five months. The monthly amount owed

under the contract will be the natural gas or steam portion of the bill divided by five months. To set up a contract, customers should call the Billing office . . . or send an email to . . . This contract is available to all customers and requires no qualification.

We are asking customers who have their utility bill automatically paid each month via their bank account (ACH payment) and those customers who are under the Budget Billing program to pay special attention to their utility bill they will receive in March (for February usage).

Under the ACH policy, the entire amount of the bill will be withdrawn from the bank account on the due date. If customers would like to take part in the five-month repayment contract, they will need

to contact the Billing office prior to the due date to have the ACH amount changed. Budget Billing customers will pay their normal budget billing amount due but should monitor their budget excess or shortfall before paying their March bill. Budget Billing customers also have the option of the five-month contract or to make an extra payment toward their budget balance.

Our customers are important to us. We hope that the \$2.6 million buydown and the contract option will help absorb some of the impact the natural gas crisis has on our customers. We are here for you, our community, to provide reliable, safe and competitive utilities today and tomorrow.

MISO's Reliability Imperative addresses big issues in time of profound industry change

The following is a message by Midcontinent Independent System Operator CEO John Bear, from MISO's 'Response to the Reliability Imperative.'

The electric industry is changing in profound ways.

The industry's longtime reliance on conventional base-load power plants is declining sharply, driven by economic factors and consumer preferences for clean energy, among other things.

Meanwhile, the grid is becoming increasingly reliant on wind and solar resources that are available only when the wind is blowing, or the sun is shining.

The changes we are seeing . . . pose a host of complex and urgent challenges to electric system reliability in the MISO region.

Utilities, states, and MISO all have roles to play to address these challenges. MISO calls this shared responsibility the Reliability Imperative. The word "imperative" is appropriate for several reasons.

First, the work we are doing is not optional—to maintain system reliability, we must

respond to the unprecedented change we and our members face. Second, this work cannot be put off for months or years—much of it has long lead times, so we need to act

now. And third, our stakeholders are counting on us—regulatory agencies, utilities and other entities are looking to MISO to identify problems and find solutions.

The Reliability Imperative report describes the many interconnected efforts that MISO is pursuing in the realms of markets, opera-

tions, and planning to meet that charge. The report is also designed to be regularly updated and expanded.

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made by the utilities in 2015, that had never before been submitted to the Commission for approval.

There was no customer notice since the parties noted no customers will experience a change in service provider as a result of the agreement. However, the MPUC tabled the matter as the areas appeared to be trust lands of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, and nobody appeared to have discussed the matter with the tribe.



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Transmission grid development mantle passes to Grid North Partners

from Grid North Partners

Following the development and construction of more than 800 miles of new high-voltage transmission infrastructure in the Upper Midwest, the 10 CapX2020 utilities have renamed their organization Grid North Partners. The new name reflects the partners' strategy to identify collaborative solutions to meet the region's evolving energy needs.

The Grid North Partners include Central Municipal Power Agency/Services, Dairyland Power Coopera-

tive, Great River Energy, Minnesota Power, Missouri River Energy Services, Otter Tail Power Company, Rochester Public Utilities, Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency, WPPI Energy and Xcel Energy.

"The CapX2020 projects are serving customers well, bringing power to where it is needed, while also building a solid transmission grid that will ensure our region continues to enjoy the reliable electric service that powers our communities and our economy," said Mark Mitch-

ell, Chief Operating Officer, Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency and Chairman of the Grid North Partners Vision Team. "As we look toward 2050, it's imperative that our teams identify long-term transmission options to meet the changing needs of our partners and their customers."

The companies published a 2050 Vision Report in 2020 that identified the need for new transmission infrastructure as the region's energy mix shifts. The group continues to work with policymakers and stakeholders to explain the study's findings and to advocate for policies that will ensure the continued delivery of reliable and affordable electricity to customers.

As energy needs evolve, so

must the transmission grid that serves the nearly three million customers of the Grid North Partners in the Upper Midwest. Utility planners, including the Grid North Partners, have prompted these conversations among regulators and policymakers for nearly two decades, and will continue to use their experience and expertise to ensure that as the energy system evolves, the transmission system is there to serve their customers and support shared policy goals.

The evolution of the CapX2020 organization reflects the changing nature of our electric system, and the new name reflects the priorities of the group.

"As our companies evaluate and meet the energy chal-

lenges we face in the coming decades, we'll continue to depend on the partnership we've developed while expanding our transmission capacity, and use our collective knowledge, experience and relationships to ensure the electric grid in the northern United States reliably delivers for our customers," said Mitchell.

Grid North Partners plans to host an industry conference in the spring of 2021 to highlight the industry's opportunities and challenges and how the organization can develop solutions to meet the needs of customers in the Upper Midwest. Additional information will be released in the coming weeks.

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MISO requests delay on energy storage tariff, again

The Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO) March 4 requested a deferral, from June 2022 to March 2025, for revisions to MISO's Tariff on Energy Storage Resources (ESR). This is MISO's second deferral request to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) on the issue.

The ESR tariff is developed in compliance with FERC Order No. 841. That order requires each Regional Transmission Organization (RTO) and Independent System Operator (ISO) to revise

its tariff to establish a participation model consisting of market rules that recognize the physical and operation characteristics of ESRs and facilitates their participation in the RTO/ISO markets.

According to trade industry reports, MISO said the deferral would allow it to accelerate completion of market system enhancement (MSE) software planned to replace an existing platform in 2025, to address reliability challenges from the growth of renewable resources.

Among its reasons for needing to accelerate MSE implementation ahead of Order 841 compliance, MISO noted findings from its Renewable Integration Impact Assessment (RIAA) that penetration

of wind and solar resources in the region may reach or exceed a critical threshold of 30 percent of MISO's load as early as 2026.

ESR issues listed on the MISO website include definition of qualification criteria (which should not include a uniform accrediting process to determine the capacity of an ESR); ESR testing procedures; and ESR capacity, de-rating, and minimum run times.

In November 2019 FERC accepted a MISO request for tariff filing extension to June 6, 2022.

Several renewable and other industry groups have challenged MISO's deferral request.

Renewables hit new penetration record in Southwest Power Pool

The Southwest Power Pool (SPP) reportedly set a new renewable penetration record of 81.39 percent on March 14, breaking a record set less than a week earlier and causing wholesale power prices to dive to minus \$10.82/MWh for March 15 at SPP's North Hub, while South Hub off-peak real-time dropped to minus \$6.18/MWh.

Off-peak real-time has averaged minus 39 cents/MWh from early- to mid-March.

The majority of SPP's renewable generation comes from wind power, which averaged 64.6 percent of the total fuel mix on March 14, the highest daily average on record, according to SPP data.

Less than a month earlier, electric generation in the region was not sufficient to meet the demand. SPP Feb. 16 began rolling blackouts to reduce demand. The rolling outages included 14 states, largely in middle America, including western parts of Minnesota.

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Fuel oil helped Minnesota utilities weather polar vortex, price spikes

by Steve Downer

While Minnesota's electric utilities reported little or no cold-weather operational or financial difficulties this winter, one reason for their resilience may have surprised many—the availability of oil-fueled peaking generation units.

That information emerged during the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission's (MPUC) quarterly meeting with the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO) Friday, March 5. This was the MPUC's first such regularly-scheduled meeting since a mid-February energy disruption afflicted middle America.

While wind-generated electricity met or exceeded expectations during the cold snap, little was expected.

With cold forecast, Xcel forecast near zero wind generation. Since the temperature was warmer than forecast, its wind outperformed. Like most of the utilities, "cold weather packages" allow Xcel turbines to operate until temperatures dip to minus-22 Fahrenheit. The utility said it could retrofit wind turbines to operate at lower temperatures, but only after a cost-benefit analysis.

Xcel said it encountered gas supply issues, but had pipeline capacity, underground storage, and fuel oil resources. To mitigate start-up risks, the company started all of its coal and combined-cycle units (fueled by either natural gas or fuel oil) before the cold snap. This generation ran reliably throughout the event.

Xcel said it relied heavily



While not covered in the March 5 report to the MPUC, municipal generation charged into service during the midst of the mid-February electrical emergency. The Glencoe Light & Power plant was among those called into service during that time period. It is similar to many municipal power plants.

on oil and those units were "extremely valuable" during the time of constrained supply and high market prices.

Xcel said it was "a net seller" to the market during the cold snap.

Great River Energy

GRE said it was either a buyer or seller to the market depending on the performance of its wind portfolio and peaking plants.

Most of GRE's 1,400 megawatts of peaking generation has dual fuel (natural gas or fuel oil) capability. With high gas prices, GRE switched the peaking plants to fuel oil.

The plants were "very valuable," said GRE.

GRE said there was an outage at Lakefield Junction, a dual-fuel, 495-megawatt combustion turbine plant, when the plant couldn't run on fuel oil due to potential to exceed Minnesota emissions limits.

Smaller peaking plants

were dispatched for ancillary services. GRE said one of its peaking plants received 14 start/stop calls from MISO in one day.

GRE noted "unprecedented" negative Locational Marginal Prices (LMP) with wind, which led to "material economic impact."

GRE said all its wind turbines have cold weather packages rated to -22. In response to a question about fortifying its wind turbines to operate at even lower temperatures, GRE noted that cold weather packages use more electricity. A 100 MW wind project requires two MW of electricity, it said, and that load continues below -22.

GRE said it has 650 MW of wind and output ranged from 10 MW to 320 MW over five days of most extreme cold. GRE said it is talking to wind developers to develop better dispatch information.

GRE said it expected only a modest economic impact.

Otter Tail Power and Minnesota Power

Minnesota's two northern IOUs—Otter Tail and Minnesota Power—ran into issues but successfully negotiated an even longer stretch of cold.

MP said very cold weather impacted its system beginning Feb. 1, with very high load. Its large customers responded to calls and shifted 35-40 MW of load to other times. MP said its power supply was still 34 percent renewable, though wind was less than expected, with only 25 percent available.

The bulk of its fleet was online and generally performed well, including baseload coal units. The Laskin Energy Center, a 116-MW plant which re-powered from coal to gas in 2015, had a Northern Natural pipeline gas procurement issue, and went offline.

The company reported min-

imal exposure to LMP spikes.

While testing its new Astoria Station, a 245-MW simple cycle combustion turbine in South Dakota, Otter Tail took the unit off-line due to gas prices on Northern Border Pipeline.

Astoria is part of the company's plan to retire, this year, the 140-MW coal-fired Hoot Lake Plant in Fergus Falls. Hoot Lake was pressed into service and ran reliably.

Due to high gas prices, OTP's 44-megawatt simple-cycle combustion turbine plant in Solway transitioned from natural gas to fuel oil.

OTP reported some cold weather shutdowns of its wind turbines at negative 22, with "moderate output" from Feb. 12 to 20.

Otter Tail noted temperatures in its service territory were below zero for 10 days straight before Monday Feb. 15. On Feb. 16, during the Southwest Power Pool (SPP) outage, an "erroneous load shed" affected 12 of its communities from one minute to 37 minutes. OTP said it was working on this issue with

WAPA and SPP.

OTP saw "huge jumps" in LMPs and said the extreme pricing was driven by the gas market. However, it said the company weathered the event well, both operationally and financially.

MISO presentation opened meeting

Commissioner Matthew Schuenger, in introductory comments, said "reliability and resilience are central" to the MPUC's work and noted the "relatively good performance" of Minnesota utilities' winter operations.

In an opening presentation, MISO noted that during a mild December and January, wind was 40 percent of MISO's fuel mix. With an additional 10 percent nuclear, carbon-free resources provided half of the region's energy. A new wind peak of 20,337 megawatts (MW) was set on Feb. 5.

In mid-February, however, MISO noted that extreme cold led to wind and natural gas "fuel supply issues."

Wind is not usually blowing during extreme cold, said MISO. And that was the case Feb. 15-17.

Widespread outages and runaway natural gas prices hit the Electric Reliability Council of Texas at this time. The Southwest Power Pool called for rotating outages, which reached into western Minnesota.

With widespread extreme cold, MISO was importing "unprecedented" electricity from the PJM region. With electricity needed in its own region, MISO cut exports to SPP. SPP the morning of Feb. 16 called for rotating outages.

Prices were volatile across the MISO footprint Feb. 15-17.

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Events provide fodder aplenty for MMUA Emergency Preparedness Conference

MMUA held its second Emergency Preparedness & Restoration Conference March 16-17 at the River's Edge Convention Center in St. Cloud.

The event was prompted by a series of national and local disasters and the 'mutual aid' response of cities and municipal utilities. MMUA and its members have played prominent roles in numerous responses. While local and association-involved responses have been deemed successful,

it appears there will always be more to learn.

One attendee recommended MMUA hold the conference annually, to stay on top of developments.

"So much to go through," he said. "Good talk. Thank you."

This year's program contained a smorgasbord of topics, from COVID-19 protocols to one municipal utility's response to a severing of its life-line to the electric transmission grid.

Much of the meeting was



Moose Lake Water & Light Superintendent Harold Schmeling discussed lessons learned from his utility's experience of being cut off from the electrical grid during severe sub-zero weather. While Moose Lake's local generation carried the utility through the crisis, there were plenty of lessons learned along the way.

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devoted to a 'Tabletop' Emergency Preparedness Exercise. An introduction to the topic completed Tuesday's program and much of Wednesday morning was devoted to working through, in small groups, a response to an eerily-real simulated disaster. MMUA's Marc Machacek led the group through this work.

Moose Lake Water & Light Superintendent Harold Schmeling discussed his utility's response to a substation outage that plunged his city into darkness in the midst of February's polar vortex. While Moose Lake was fortunate to have local generation to fall back on, it faced numerous issues while keeping the power flowing through the multi-week emergency. MMUA thanks Schmeling for traveling to St. Cloud and sharing the lessons learned from this experience.

Of course, you can't do much of anything now without considering COVID-19. Mutual Aid protocols in light of the pandemic were covered in the Conference opening. This session, led by MMUA's Mike Willetts, took a deep

dive into the Electricity Sub-sector Coordinating Council's COVID-19 Resource Guide (You can find the guide in MMUA website's COVID-19 resource library.)

Communications are a key to any mutual aid response. Representatives from AT&T presented on their company's Public Safety Solutions to end the program.

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Minnesota utilities earn Reliable Public Power Provider status, and national safety awards

One hundred eight of the nation's more than 2,000 public power utilities, including a strong contingent of 15 from Minnesota, earned the Reliable Public Power Provider (RP3) designation from the American Public Power Association (APPA) for providing reliable and safe electric service.

The designation, which lasts for three years, recognizes public power utilities that demonstrate proficiency in four key disciplines: reliability, safety, workforce development and system improvement.

Criteria include sound business practices and a utility-wide commitment to safe and reliable delivery of electricity.

With 108 utilities earning the designation this year a total of 270 of the more than 2,000 public power utilities nation-wide hold the RP3 designation.

"Over the last year or so, we've seen the vital importance of running a reliable and safe utility," says Aaron Haderle, Chair of APPA's RP3 Review Panel and Manager of Transmission and Distribution Operations at Kissimmee Utility Authority, Florida. "The utilities receiving the

RP3 designation have proven that they are committed to running a top-notch public power utility by implementing industry best practices," he said.

This is the 16th year that RP3 recognition has been offered.

Minnesota utilities earning the award include:

Diamond Level

Austin Utilities, (2019)
Blue Earth Light and Water, (2019)
Marshall Municipal Utilities, (2020)
Owatonna Public Utilities, (2019)
Rochester Public Utilities, (2019)
Shakopee Public Utilities Commission, (2021)
Willmar Municipal Utilities, (2020)

Platinum Level

ALP Utilities, (2020)
Detroit Lakes Public Utilities, (2020)
Elk River Municipal Utilities, (2020)
Hutchinson Utilities Commission, (2020)
Moorhead Public Service, (2019)
New Prague Municipal Utilities, (2021)

Gold Level

Brainerd Public Utilities (2021)
City of Saint Peter, (2019)

Safety Award winners

One hundred twenty-nine utilities have earned the APPA Safety Award of Excellence for safe operating practices in 2020.

Entrants were placed in categories according to their number of worker-hours and ranked based on the most incident-free records during 2020.

Utilities' incidence rate, used to judge entries, is based on the number of work-related reportable injuries or illnesses and the number of worker-hours during 2020, as defined by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

2020 First Place Honorees:

Group A (less than 15,000 worker-hours of exposure)
Saint Peter Municipal Utilities
Sleepy Eye Public Utilities

Group B (15,000 to 29,999 worker-hours of exposure)
Austin Utilities

New Prague Municipal Utilities
Worthington Public Utilities

Group C (30,000 to 59,999 worker-hours of exposure)
Owatonna Public Utilities

Group D (60,000 to 109,999 worker-hours of exposure)
Elk River Municipal Utilities.

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Tyler:

continued from front page

rolling outages were instituted.

The city hall phone was “ringing off the hook,” LaBrune said. City staff explained the situation to everybody who called and local media, which helped inform the public. The first rolling outage affected the business district, which helped mitigate the impact on residences.

Following the initial outage, customers were out of power for no longer than an hour at a time. The service disruption lasted until noon.

In an area accustomed to bad weather and an occasional blizzard- or tornado-related power outage, people coped. With service soon restored, people were generally thankful.

Life went on.

Within days, however, unsettling news emerged about natural gas price spikes. It soon became clear that a natural gas spike would affect Tyler. How much of an affect, however, remained uncertain.



The Stone Hall and Lutheran ‘Cross Church,’ in Tyler’s Danebod historical district. The buildings are two of several in the area listed on the National Register of Historic places.

Tyler purchases its gas from New Ulm Public Utilities. LaBrune credited New Ulm with doing everything it could to keep Tyler informed and help lessen the shock. Tyler had been told to expect costs five to six times higher than normal. Tyler received its wholesale bill a week before it had to bill its customers. The bill came in only four times higher.

Still, looking at the num-

ber was “kind of a shock,” LaBrune said.

One difficult aspect of the situation is that Tyler’s bills immediately reflected the price spike, while gas customers in nearby communities served by investor-owned utilities won’t see the affect until sometime after the

state’s “true up” period in September.

Some municipal customers are “pretty upset,” LaBrune said. “We’re doing everything we can.”

Tyler’s population includes a high percentage of elderly residents and a median in-

come well below the state average. A number of customers were already struggling through the COVID pandemic and related economic disruption.

Payment arrangements are being set, or re-set, with a goal of getting everybody paid up by October. The city is thankful for many customers who paid in full.

LaBrune has been with the city for a year and a half. February’s events have called into question an initial goal to reduce the level of unpaid utility bills.

The city will carefully follow investigations into price gouging. While any sort of relief is uncertain, Tyler certainly doesn’t want to re-live the events of February.

Many expect the combination of power outages and price spikes to be a once-in-a-lifetime event.

The people of Tyler certainly hope so.

“Those events really make an impact,” LaBrune said.

FERC sets conference on weather, reliability

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) March 5 announced it will convene a technical conference to discuss “issues surrounding the threat to electric system reliability posed by climate change and extreme weather events.” The conference will be held June 1-2.

In announcing the conference, FERC said reliable electric service is vital to the nation’s economy, national security, and public health and safety, and prolonged power outages can have significant humanitarian consequenc-

es, as the nation recently witnessed in Texas and the south-central United States. The conference “will address concerns that because extreme weather events are increasing in frequency, intensity, geographic expanse, and duration, the number and severity of weather-induced events in the electric power industry may also increase.”

This conference will also address challenges posed to electric system reliability by climate change and extreme weather, which may vary by region.

Through this proceeding, the Commission seeks to understand the near, medium and long-term challenges facing the regions of the country; how decisionmakers in the regions are evaluating and addressing those challenges; and whether further action from the Commission is needed to help achieve an electric system that can withstand, respond to, and recover from extreme weather events.

CenterPoint proposes 2-year recovery for February gas cost spike

CenterPoint Energy has proposed to spread the cost of the February natural gas price spike over two years to help cushion the blow to Minnesota consumers and the company itself.

The company said the high-priced gas would cost each household an average of \$354.

The company reported a \$500 million commodity gas cost in Minnesota over a 10-day period in February. That is 56 percent more than it spent the previous 12 months.

The company will borrow money to pay its suppliers until such time as its rates are adjusted.

Xcel Energy and Minnesota Energy Resources Corp. estimated last month that their average residential customers’ bills would rise respectively by \$250 to \$300 and \$225 to \$250.

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Henning:

continued from front page

feeders and switches. Portions of the overhead system are being re-wired.

The voltage conversion is planned for May 1, when a brief, system-wide outage is planned.

The city purchased land next to its existing substation, which will be upgraded with work beginning this spring. Phase II bids were opened March 23. This phase will include more underground work and materials.

A contractor will do underground boring and pull wire. The local crew will do the rest of the work, including secondary services.

The avalanche of work started last year. Locating alone chewed up large chunks of time.

“We could have used 10-12 guys,” said Superintendent Brenden Markuson.

The busy pace won't slow anytime soon.

In 2022, a \$2 million water/sewer project will coincide with a rebuild of Otter Tail County Road 108, which doubles as Douglas Ave., the city's main throughfare. The project includes replacement of water, natural gas and wastewater mains, and is expected to reduce stormwater inflow and infiltration of the city's wastewater system.



A new 'welcome' sign and Dollar General welcome visitors to Henning along Otter Tail County Road 108. The road will be rebuilt next year. While MnDOT is at it, the city will replace water, wastewater and natural gas mains located under the roadway.

As part of these utility improvements, a lift station will be rebuilt in 2024.

MMUA helps hometown staff

Overseeing the work is Markuson, a Henning native who previously worked as a journeyman electrician in the Hawley area. When the opportunity came to get back home in 2011, he went to work for Henning. He earned his journeyman lineman license working through MMUA and the Northwest Lineman College, as did co-worker James Nelson, a Battle Lake native who previously worked for an electric contractor. Henning natives Jake Williams and Travis Arnd complete the public works/utilities crew.

Clerk/Treasurer Kim Schroeder, Utility Deputy Clerk/Billing Clerk Jessica Strege and Administrative Assistant Paige Stewart handle the office duties. Rounding out the city staff is Mike Helle, who is police chief and chief of the volunteer fire department (which also includes many city employees).

Always intent to learn, and to do so economically, Henning combines its MMUA Job Training and Safety meetings with the Staples and Wade municipal utilities. The crews rotate through each city, working with MMUA's Cody Raveling. Markuson said Henning is also pleased to have a monthly visit from MMUA Regional Safety Coordinator Keith Byklum, who



Henning city hall serves a variety of purposes in the Otter Tail County city of approximately 800 people.

brings a variety of municipal utility experience.

The city is also growing. Two sets of townhomes were built last year, and four new single-family homes, the first residences built in Henning since 1995. There has also been some business growth, and growth on the gas system along the lakes.

Municipal utilities provide

much of the natural gas service in this part of the state.

In 1996, the Perham gas service area was extended south around Otter Tail Lake and the City of Ottertail, and north around Little Pine and Big Pine Lakes. Henning connects with a Perham gas line. This same connection provides service to the Battle Lake municipal system.

Nestled in lakes country, Henning is a 'good place to live'

Nestled in the heart of Otter Tail County's 1,048 lakes, Henning bills itself as “a good place to live.” Residents enjoy the small-town rural life surrounded by rolling farmland, dairy farms and hardwood forests.

Henning is located 35 miles north of Alexandria and 34 miles east of Fergus Falls. The high-water mark for population was 1,004 in 1950. Af-

ter dropping it has increased from the 1990 and 2000 census counts, to 802 at the 2010 census.

The city employees are in-

involved in various ways in the community and its organizations, including the volunteer fire department and first responders.



Henning's Brenden Markuson with the city's inventory of available 2400 Delta transformers.

Henning has 2400 Delta transformers for sale

As part of its voltage conversion project, the City of Henning has for sale a variety of 2400 Delta transformers, in a range of sizes. See the 'For Sale' section of the MMUA website Classified Ads page. Henning is also looking for a smaller bucket truck.

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Around the State

Joe Steffel is retiring as **City of Buffalo** utilities director as of May 31.

Steffel started his career in the utility industry with Northern States Power, shoveling coal at the Riverside Power Plant.

"They took bets on how long I would last," he recalled.

He worked a variety of power generation jobs before leaving for the City of Chaska in 1978.

He started as a laborer with the city, working his way up to journeyman lineman, general foreman and eventually assistant utilities director.

He initially turned down the Buffalo opening, in November 1998. Before he left town, then-mayor Fred Naaktgeboren prevailed on Steffel to come over to his house for dinner. Fred's wife Jan had prepared a delicious pork chop dinner. After a good dinner and conversation, Steffel accepted the job.

Steffel served on the



Joe Steffel outside of the Buffalo Municipal Utilities headquarters, in a 2017 photo. Steffel, Buffalo's Utilities Director, started his utility career shoveling coal for NSP.

MMUA board of directors from 2008-2013 and also on the Minnesota Municipal Power Agency board, where he currently serves as treasurer.

For more on the Buffalo job opening, and a variety of others around the state and region, see the News > Classifieds section of the MMUA website.

The **Shakopee** City Council, Public Utilities Commission and Scott County, citing the possible construction of more than 1,000 new homes in the area, have agreed to an Alternative Urban Area-wide Review (AUAR) with a master plan for approximate-

ly 500 acres of land.

The AUAR would plan for storm water, sewer, water, utility corridors and natural resources in the area, instead of approving development parcel by parcel.

The cost for the plan is not to exceed \$250,000 and is expected within eight months. It will be paid for through building permit revenues and a previously-approved AUAR fee.

Wet, heavy snow up to a foot deep blanketed a wide area of northern Minnesota March 10-11.

Media reports noted 9,400 customers without power in the Crosby and Pequot Lakes area. Wind was also an issue. Trees falling into lines caused two outages in **Brainerd**, where municipal crews quickly responded and restored power to 13 customers.

Transmission service to the city 'blinked' a few times but service remained intact.

The mid-February spike in natural gas prices hit a number of municipal utilities hard, including **New Ulm Public Utilities**. The spike led the local Public Utilities Commission to use \$2.6 million in reserves to buy down the costs that are passed through to customers.

To help mitigate the remaining impact, the PUC is offering a five-month contract to pay amounts owed by gas or steam customers.

In **Two Harbors**, the city saw gas prices jump from January to February. The city is waiving its overhead charges for the month and will also allow for 12 months with no penalty for payment of the natural gas portion of the February bill. It is also working with customers to establish or amend payment plans.

According to a report from the *Ely Echo*, the **Ely City Council** is likely to pass along a seven percent increase in wholesale electric rates to its customers. The

recommendation for the increase came after study from the Ely Utilities Commission (EUC).

The EUC has had a series of small rate increases over the last decade, to maintain fund balances, support capital projects and reduce the need for major increases in a single year.

A public hearing was scheduled for March 15. The new rate could be instituted later this spring. Minnesota Power is the city's wholesale power supplier.

The **City of Breckenridge** is planning to put four

blocks of overhead electric line underground this construction season. The work will be part of an ongoing flood mitigation project, which also involves street and storm drain work. The city will hire a contractor to do directional drilling work but the city crew will do the line work.

Lyon County has approached **Marshall Municipal Utilities** for permission to mount security cameras on utility poles to monitor people throwing trash in com-

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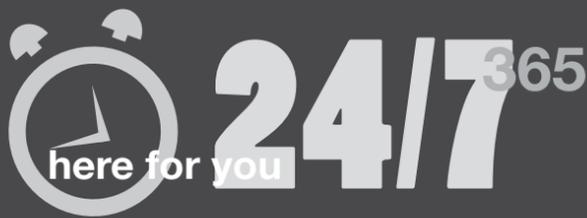
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Ray Wahle retiring May 31 after 42 years of MRES power supply planning

Ray Wahle, senior vice president of power supply and operations at Missouri River Energy Services (MRES), has announced his retirement effective May 28, 2021. He joined the organization in 1979 after earning his bachelor's degree in electrical engineering.

Since 1986, Wahle has managed the power supply and operations department under various titles and increasing areas of responsibility, which include generation, transmission, power purchases and sales, engineering, forecasting, distribution maintenance, and information technology.



Ray Wahle

Wahle was instrumental in the construction and acquisition of all power supply resources that serve MRES members, including Lara-

mie River Station, Exira Station, Watertown Power Plant, and Missouri River's newest resource, Red Rock Hydroelectric Project. During his tenure he oversaw Missouri River's interests in major transmission projects, such as the CapX2020 project and Alexandria substation. He has been involved in representing member interests in the Midwest Independent System Operator (MISO) and Southwest Power Pool (SPP)

regional energy markets. And, he led MRES efforts on cybersecurity and members' electric distribution system operation and maintenance.

"It has been an honor and privilege to serve such a great organization and work with so many talented and wonderful people," Wahle said. "While it is with mixed emotions that I made the decision to retire, I am very much looking forward to passing the torch and watching MRES and its mem-

bers continue to flourish."

"Ray's leadership and dedication to MRES is unsurpassed," said Tom Heller, MRES president and CEO. "His understanding of technical issues and the electric industry, and his vision for the future have helped guide the direction of MRES for these many years. It is with tremendous appreciation that we wish Ray a happy and rewarding retirement."

Heartland wins national energy efficiency award

Heartland Consumers Power District and the City of Tallahassee, Florida have earned the 2021 Award of Continued Excellence (ACE) from the American Public Power Association's Demonstration of Energy & Efficiency Developments (DEED) program.

The award recognizes continued commitment to the DEED program and its ideals, including support of research, development and demonstration, improving efficiency, renewable resources, and support of public power.

South Dakota-based Heartland has been a DEED member since 1987 and extends its DEED membership to all its utility members.

Heartland has benefited from sponsoring four interns with scholarships, which included projects that ranged from performing customer research to evaluating the effect of economic development incentives to creating a renew-

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munity recycling bins. Also, county staff will be moving the bins to the former county fair site, where they will be more easily monitored.

The **Fergus Falls City Council** approved an ordinance amending city code relating to solar energy systems. The action was taken to advance the Hoot Lake Solar Farm project.

Otter Tail Power is proposing to build a 49.9-megawatt farm near its Hoot Lake power plant, which it plans to retire this year. Building the solar farm near the existing plant will allow the Fergus Falls-based company to use facilities already in place.

The Hoot Lake project took one step forward when the council passed a resolution approving a joint resolution with a neighboring township for the immediate annexation of land. The solar plant will cover 450 acres.

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Nominations sought for MMUA Awards and three board members seek re-election

MMUA's Nominations and Awards Committee is accepting nominations for MMUA awards. The deadline to submit a nomination is June 30. This is a great way to recog-

nize a municipal utility colleague, a public official, or a municipal utility system for showing leadership and innovation and providing an example for others to follow.

Nomination forms can be downloaded from MMUA.org at the Awards and Recognition page on the 'About' menu. All nominations will be considered by MMUA's Nomination and Awards Committee and the awards will be presented at the MMUA Summer Conference in August.

Here is a brief summary of the awards for which we are accepting nominations. Please consider recognizing the accomplishments of a member of our community by submitting a nomination.

- **System Innovation Award.** This award is given to a utility that has demonstrated leadership and innovation in customer service, energy efficiency or renewables, technology, or other areas.

- **Public Service Award.** This award is given to a state, or federal elected or appointed official who has been a strong supporter of MMUA and its members.

- **Distinguished Service Award.** This award is given to individuals who perform outstanding service in support of the association and its goals.

- **Community Service Award.** This award is given to an individual who has performed long and well in support of a municipal utility at the local level.

dividual who has performed long and well in support of a municipal utility at the local level.

- **Rising Star Award.** This award recognizes a future leader who has demonstrated a dedication to the goals and principles of municipal utilities through problem solving, creativity, and job knowledge.

- **Honorary Lifetime Membership Award.** This prestigious award symbolizes a long professional life dedicated not only to the advancement of municipal utilities locally, but also for the betterment of our industry on a statewide basis.

Three directors up for re-election

Serving on MMUA's Board of Directors is an honor, as well as a great opportunity for professional growth. No seats on the Board are coming open this year. Up for re-election, having completed their first three-year term are Jenny Palmer (Winthrop), Scott Grabe (Staples) and Dave Meyer (Glencoe).

Nominating forms can be found on the MMUA website at www.mmua.org/about/



Grabe



Meyer



Palmer

awards-and-recognition

Please return completed nomination forms, by June 30 to Theresa Neddermeyer via email (tneddermeyer@mmua.org), fax (763.551.0459) or mail to 3131 Fernbrook Lane N., Suite 200, Plymouth, MN 55447.

During the state's order to stay-at-home, MMUA employees are working remotely so faxes and regular

mail will be held until we return.

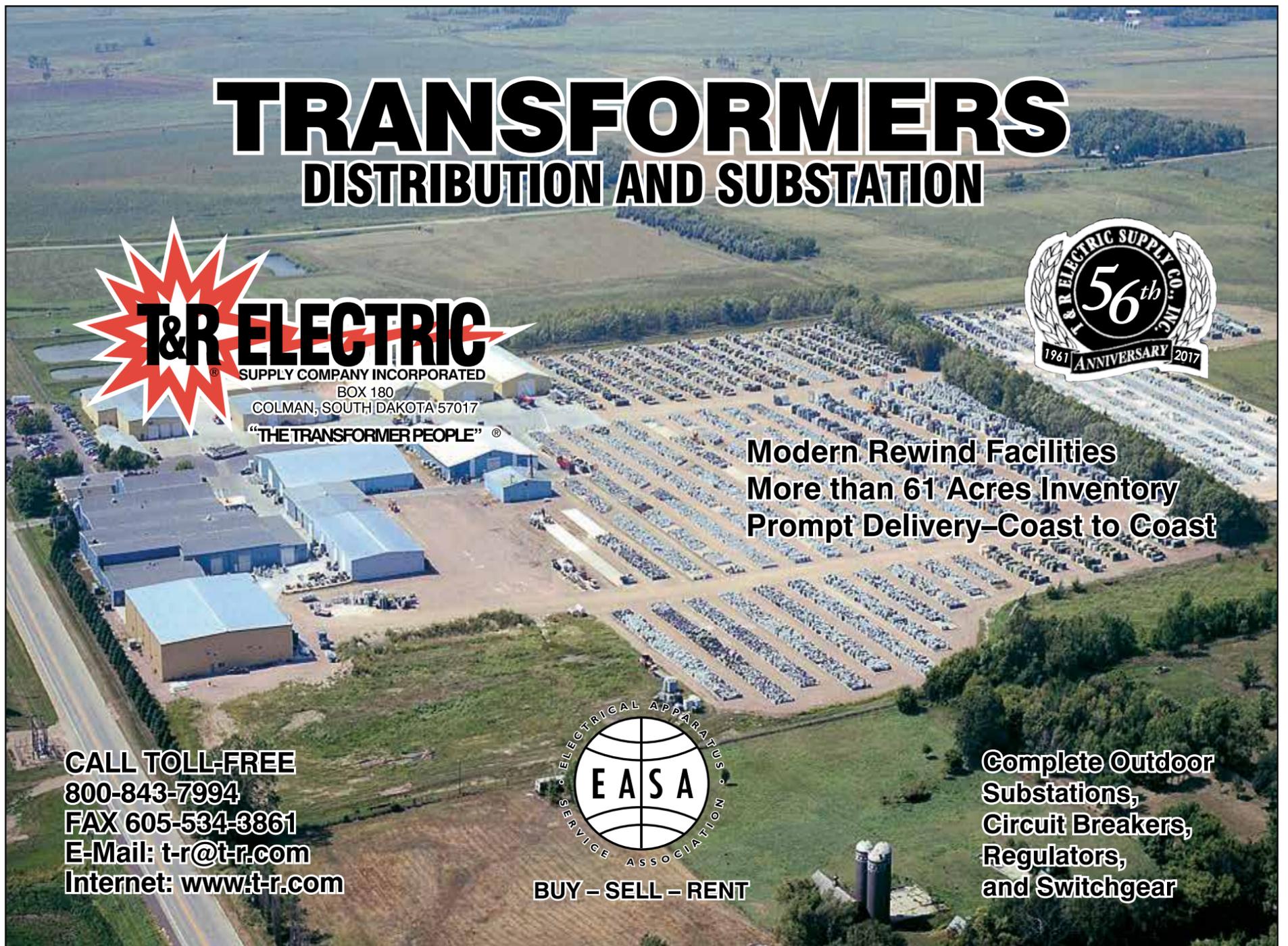
If you have any questions about the nominations process or what service on the board involves, please contact MMUA Chief Executive Officer Jack Kegel. He will be happy to fill you in on the role of the board member and the time commitment involved. You can email jkegel@mmua.org or call 763.746.0701.



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COVID-related utility debt repayment plan for Xcel customers approved

For utilities, few questions during Minnesota's ongoing pandemic-related emergency have had quite as much consideration as how to handle customers that have gone delinquent on their accounts.

Plans for the state's largest utility came into clearer focus March 11, as the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MPUC) approved Xcel Energy's Payment Plan Credit Program. The program is intended to help prevent service disconnections when the Minnesota Cold Weather Rule protections expire on April 15, 2021, by establishing an economic recovery incentive for residential electric customers who enter and complete a payment plan arrangement, while also helping them to keep up-to-date on their current bill.

The Plan offers relief to residential electric customers who, particularly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, have been accumulating delinquent balances.

The Payment Plan Credit Program of \$17.5 million would aid in bill payment to any residential customer with a past due or overdue balance between \$1,000 to \$4,000

and with a payment arrangement in place. Eligible customers will receive 75 percent of their balance in bill credits issued as a partial up-front credit and later a monthly bill credit for up to 11 months, so long as the customer adheres to the established payment plan arrangement.

Xcel notes that with this plan a customer's total credit will be between \$750 and \$3,000 (that is 75 percent of the \$1,000 and \$4,000 threshold).

Xcel will allow arrearage customers on a payment plan arrangement who miss up to two consecutive payments to remain in the program.

Xcel reported it had 11,600 residential electric customers with arrearages.

Xcel was allowed to commit any remaining amount of this \$17.5 million program fund not used to pay qualifying past due bills to be used to fund similar programs at the Commission's direction.

Xcel emphasized that the Program was not designed to specifically benefit low-income customers under federal income assistance—it is intended to bring relief to customers who are above the fed-

eral poverty level and do not qualify for other assistance, and who are struggling financially because they have lost their jobs, were furloughed, or otherwise experienced lost or reduced income as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Further, Xcel said that it carefully considered the program budget to provide maximum impact to the customers most in need without a significant rate increase for other customers. It will recover the \$17.5 million through an increase of \$0.51 to the existing Low-Income Energy Discount surcharge, for two years.

Xcel noted that its rates are based on cost of service. When customers default on their payment obligations, other customers cover the costs of service. Xcel said it is not seeking to recover more than its cost of service from customers, only to temporarily recover them from those customers who can afford to carry such costs (and who, said the company, will ultimately benefit through lower bad debt expense).

The MPUC on Feb. 4 directed all state-regulated utilities submit transition plan comments that address

the arrearage forgiveness plans and other transition issues. On March 11, it deemed Xcel's Energy Payment Plan

Credit program a responsive measure to COVID-19 issues contemplated in a variety of other related proceedings.

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The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) March 18 for the first time assessed the significance of a proposed natural gas pipeline project's greenhouse gas emissions and their contribution to climate change.

In approving Northern Natural Gas Company's request to build and operate 87.3 miles of replacement natural gas pipeline from South Sioux City, Neb., to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, the Commission found, based on the record, that the project's greenhouse gas emissions would not be significant.

However, "Going forward, we are committed to treating greenhouse gas emissions and their contribution to climate change the same as all other environmental impacts we consider," FERC Chairman Rich Glick said in a statement.

Coal-fired generation has fallen 61 percent since 2008, according to information released March 18 by the federal Energy Information Administration. Coal-fired generation dipped below both natural gas and nuclear in 2020.

Low natural gas prices led to a lessening of coal generation, EIA said, but noted coal is expected to rebound as gas prices are expected to rise in 2021.

Valero Energy Corporation and BlackRock Global Energy & Power Infrastructure Fund III announced March 16 that they are partnering with Navigator Energy Services to develop an industrial scale carbon capture pipeline system (CCS). The initial phase is expected to span more than 1,200 miles of new carbon dioxide gathering and transportation pipelines across five Midwest states with the capability of permanently storing up to 5 million metric tons of carbon dioxide per year.

The CCS project seeks to provide biorefineries and other industrial participants a long-term, economic path to materially reduce their carbon footprint while maximizing the value of their end-product in a cost-effective manner that is safe for the environment.

Navigator will work with each counterparty to install or connect the applicable

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carbon capture equipment to the pipeline at various receipt points in Nebraska, Iowa, South Dakota, Minnesota, and Illinois. The proposed system plans to transport liquefied carbon dioxide through the pipeline for delivery into a central sequestration facility contemplated to be in south-central Illinois.

NextEra Energy announced plans to build a \$700 million solar farm at the site of the mothballed Duane Arnold nuclear power plant in Iowa. The solar farm is planned across 3,500 acres and is expected to produce up to 690 megawatts of energy.

Midwest *Energy News* reported March 10 that more than 100 cities, counties and states across the U.S. have enacted ordinances restricting renewable energy projects, which could impede 100 percent clean energy targets, according to a Columbia Law School analysis.

Democrats in the U.S. House of Representatives have introduced the CLEAN Future Act, which proposes to slash economy-wide greenhouse gas emissions to net-zero by 2050, and cut emissions 50 percent below 2005 levels by 2030 or sooner.

The City of Burbank, Calif., March 12 disconnected electricity to Tin Horn Flats, a commercial customer which had not been observing government-ordered COVID-19 restrictions.

After the restaurant remained open using its own generator, the court authorized the city to lock the establishment's doors.

Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly on March 3 signed a bill to protect Kansas cities from potential price surges in electricity bills caused by extremely cold temperatures in February.

Senate Bill 88 establishes a \$100 million low-interest loan program for municipal utilities facing high utility bills after last month's frigid temperatures.

The loan program will be administered by the Kansas State Treasurer's Office using Pooled Money Investment Board (PMIB) funds.

The legislation went from a hearing on the morning of March 3 to passage on emergency action by both the full House and Senate later that day, with Gov. Kelly signing the measure that evening. The State Treasurer

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was accepting applications 24 hours after the measure was enacted.

Two years after announcing a plan to transition its entire fleet to electric buses,

Metro Transit decided to buy 143 biodiesel-fueled buses. The Twin Cities-area transit operator said the biodiesel buses work better for certain routes which require longer range.

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1 www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes499051.htm | 2 www.bls.gov/oes/2017/may/oes499052.htm
3 www.bls.gov/oes/2017/may/oes472152.htm

MISO:

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region's electric system backbone.

While MISO is policy-neutral on these trends, it has observed significant challenges for the region's electric system. MISO is responsible to maintain reliability, which it does by addressing energy, capacity, resource adequacy and flexibility.

Each resource type provides a different mix of these capabilities:

- Wind and solar resources are not always available to provide energy during times of need.

- Conventional baseload resources that remain in service can be more prone to outages given their changed usage patterns and maintenance cycles, rendering them potentially unavailable when they are needed most.

- Generation fleet change and extreme weather are increasing risk across the entire year (not just in the summer).

MISO organizes its Reliability Imperative work into four main categories: Market Redefinition; Long Range Transmission Planning; Operations of the Future; and Market System Enhancements.

Market Redefinition

Since the early 2000s, the generation fleet has moved to more renewable resources

that are variable and outage risk has expanded beyond the summer months. MISO's mechanisms must be updated to reflect the changing risk. MISO said it is "in the process of improving emergency and scarcity prices to more accurately convey system conditions and ensure reliability."

Long Range Transmission Planning

"If you love renewables you'd better love transmission," the report quoted MISO Chief Executive Officer John Bear as saying.

Additional transmission is crucial to support the continued growth of large-scale wind and solar, since those resources are often located in rural areas, far from load centers.

Retirement of conventional generation as intermittent renewables continue to grow, said MISO, poses significant challenges to the reliability of the transmission system in the MISO region.

The business case, said MISO, should reflect the need for transmission to ensure reliability of the system. MISO and stakeholders will adjust existing or develop new cost-allocation methods. The Organization of MISO States (OMS), which represents state regulatory agencies in the MISO footprint, is working on this.



MMUA file photo, by Steve Downer

If you love renewables, you had better love transmission, said MISO CEO John Bear. These lines, including CapX 2020 lines carrying windpower from the west, converge at an NSP substation near St. Cloud.

Operations of the Future

The shift to more weather-dependent, intermittent renewables and distributed resources means that system peaks and operating risks are becoming less obvious and more difficult to manage in day-to-day operations.

To effectively manage both wholesale and retail connected resources, MISO envisions the development and use of artificial intelligence, machine learning and advanced analytics.

Market Enhancements

A new flexible architecture and analysis is needed to support an evolving resource mix and future market processes.

Conclusion

As an independent, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission-approved system operator, MISO asserted that it is responsible for the reliability of the Bulk Electric System and has the authority to act.

But the responsibility for reliability is shared. Utilities, electric cooperatives, and

municipal utilities serve customers and own the region's transmission lines, generating units, and other infrastructure. State regulatory agencies often oversee how load-serving entities carry out their responsibilities.

Not every proposal and initiative in the RIIA report will be supported by every one of MISO's stakeholders, said MISO. But the Reliability Imperative warrants an immediate response.

The time to act, concluded MISO, is now.

Upcoming Events

There is hope for an increasingly 'normal' year in 2021, with more known about COVID-19 and the rollout of vaccines. We do not know the impact of the pandemic and state-imposed restrictions going forward, but we are moving ahead with our meeting planning. Many of our meeting and training events, most people agree, are better held in person. The deeper into the year we look, the more positive we are that these get-togethers will occur as scheduled.

Underground School

May 11-14, MMUA Training Center, Marshall

Minnesota Municipal Utilities Association and our partners—Minnesota Rural Electric Association and American Public Power Association—are pleased to offer the 2021 Underground School.



The Underground School offers a hands-on training track with a variety of training sessions and an advanced technical course.

Multi-session courses include: Troubleshooting Primary Outages & Implementing Switching Procedures; Directional Drill Operations; Troubleshooting Secondary; and 600-Amp Terminations. The Advanced Course will focus on Key Considerations When Choosing an AMI Metering System.

Register by April 9 for best rate. Deadline to register is April 19.

Minnesota Public Power Walleye Tournament

June 6, Rush Lake



See the Events calendar on the MMUA website for more information.

Annual Summer Conference

August 16-18, Cragun's Resort

Planning is underway for MMUA's annual summer get-together. We are keeping our fingers crossed for this one. Watch your email inbox or MMUA's various communications vehicles for more information!

