Grand Marais balances interests by keeping customers first

by Steve Downer

If local control is the bedrock of municipal power, then it is up to the local utility to give its customers what they want.

That isn’t easy today, with competing interests and ideas on how best to provide electric utility service, but the Grand Marais Public Utility is doing its best.

The utility serves approximately 1,350 electric and water customers in what has become one of the state’s premier vacation spots. Located on the north shore of Lake Superior, the main draws are cool air and plenty of cold, clean water.

Preserving those natural resources while keeping the lights on and water flowing is a real balancing act.

The Grand Marais utility is literally at the end of the line, in this case a Great River Energy transmission line. Interruptions of that precarious supply are a very real concern, and an occasional reality over the years.

Grand Marais: see page 8 please

Municipal utilities join effort to create more butterfly habitat

Among those taking part in the habitat planting at Princeton Public Utilities were, from left to right: utility staff Iorey Zahn, Cindy Lakeberg, Jon Brooks, General Manager Connie Wangen, Kenny Elton, Scott Daniels and Duaine Anderson.

Minnesota’s Next Generation Energy Act dealt another blow by appeals court

BISMARCK, N.D. – A Minnesota law that would have restricted some deliveries of electricity from North Dakota into Minnesota was dealt another blow June 15 as the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld an earlier ruling by a federal judge that ruled the law unconstitutional.

The State of North Dakota first sued the State of Minnesota in 2011, alleging that Minnesota’s Next Generation Energy Act (NGEA) violated the Commerce Clause of the U.S. Constitution by restricting transmission of electricity generated in North Dakota and consumed in Minnesota unless the generation of that electricity met Minnesota’s carbon dioxide emission requirements.

MMUA affiliate member Missouri River Energy Services (MRES), Basin Electric Power Cooperative, and Minnotta Power Cooperative, Inc., along with others, joined North Dakota in the lawsuit.

MRES CEO Tom Heller said that MRES joined the lawsuit because “NGEA would have restricted MRES from considering all options when choosing the least-cost resources for meeting the needs of our 24 municipal electric utility members in Minnesota as well as our 36 other members in the states of Iowa, North Dakota, and South Dakota.”

In April 2014, U.S. District Court Judge Susan Richard Nelson of St. Paul agreed with North Dakota and ruled the NGEA unconstitutional. In her ruling, she said the law was “a classic example of extraterritorial regulation.” Minnesota appealed the decision to the Eighth Circuit and oral arguments were held in October 2015.

“I am extremely pleased to announce that North Dakota has once again prevailed in its lawsuit against Minnesota’s overreaching regulations,” said North Dakota Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem.

Heller noted that while much of the discussion regarding this case centered on how NGEA would restrict the building of new power plants, it also would have restricted agreements between Minnesota utilities and other critical pollinators,” said Chris Schoenherr, Director of Agency and Government Relations at SMMPA. “We’ve come to understand that lots of small actions, right here in our communities will be the best way to save this important species.”

Butterflies: see page 6 please

MMUA Develops Leadership Training page 6

ROCHESTER, MN – Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency (SMMPA) June 10 announced an effort to create habitat for monarch butterflies and other pollinators in its 18 member communities. Loss of habitat has resulted in an estimated 90 percent reduction in the eastern U.S. population of the iconic butterfly.

“Leveraging the power of community is what makes public power so effective, and we felt we could use this same approach in helping address the loss of habitat for monarch and other critical pollinators,” said Chris Schoenherr, Director of Agency and Government Relations at SMMPA. “We’ve come to understand that lots of small actions, right here in our communities will be the best way to save this important species.”

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State to Examine Co-op Tariffs page 2

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Butterflies: see page 6 please

Inside Stories

State to Examine Co-op Tariffs page 2
MPUC opens docket to examine fees in cooperatives’ distributed generation tariffs

by Bill Black

During its weekly open agenda meeting on Thurs-

day, June 9, the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission
(PUC) held its first discus-
sion regarding an objection
filed by Fresh Energy and the Environmen-
tal Law & Policy Center against the
PUC’s possible approval of
revised distributed genera-
tion tariffs filed by 14 electric
cooperatives. The objection’s main argument was that new
monthly fees included in the
tariffs for these utilities’ fixed
costs were inappropriate-
ate, or unlawful. The co-ops
based their fees on a 2015 law
change explicitly allowing co-
operative and municipal utili-
ties to charge such fees to cus-
tomers who have distributed
generation facilities under 40
kilowatts (kw) so long as the
fees are “reasonable and ap-
propriate for that class of cus-
tomer based on the most re-
cent cost of service study,” as
the new provisions in Minn.
Stat. 216B.164, subd. 3 (a)
require.

On May 12, the commis-
sion published a Notice of
Comment Period requesting
public comments about how the commis-
ion intended to pro-
cceed. MMUA filed comments
sustaining that the scope of
the proceedings should be
limited to fees that have ac-
tually been established and
not include those that might be
filed later, particularly any
established by municipal utili-
ties. The governing bodies
of municipal utilities are au-
thorized to rule on such fees
so long as they have officially
adopted rules consistent with
the PUC’s.

During the meeting, com-
misioners asked questions of
the Minnesota Rural Electric
Association’s representative
who spoke on behalf of the 14
co-ops. The discussion among
the five commissioners and
MREA focused on what au-
thority the PUC should exert
over the fees within the co-
op tariffs. Should the com-
dmission determine whether
each fee complies with the
state law and either approve
it or remand it to the co-op
board? Should the commis-
sion calculate exactly what
each fee should be? Should
the commission determine
whether just the methodology
that all these particular
coops used to calculate their
tariffs complies with the stat-
ute? Are “fees” synonymous
with “rates,” and, if so, who
determines whether they are
“reasonable and appropriate,”
the PUC or local rate-making
co-op boards? How far should
the PUC look into a utility’s
cost of service study to deter-
mine whether fees are truly
related to fixed costs?

On June 27, the commis-
sion published an order and
findings from the June 9
hearing. It found that it has
jurisdiction to investigate the
coops’ fees and that the co-
generation and small power
production tariffs containing
these fees must be filed with
–and reviewed and approved
by–the Commission, before
becoming effective.

It also opened a new, gener-
orthand investigation docket (#16-
512) to “(a) investigate the
appropriate methodology or
methodologies for establish-
ing electric cooperatives’ fees
under Minn. Stat. §216B.164,
subd. 3; and (b) to review and
determine whether the specif-
ic fees charged or filed by elec-
tric cooperatives associations
under Minn. Stat. §216B.164.”

It is possible for a customer of
a municipal utility to pe-
tition the PUC to resolve a
dispute with his utility over
its distributed generation
tariff as did customers of
the 14 co-ops above. Resolu-
tion of any such hypotheti-
cal dispute would potentially
involve findings made by the
PUC during the proceedings
to come in the present co-op
docket. Therefore MMUA will
remain vigilantly involved in
those proceedings and ap-
prise members of the MMUA
Government Relations Com-
mitee and Distributed Gen-
eration Task Force of signifi-
cant developments.

Electric sales expected to rise slowly in the future

Electricity sales in the United States are expected to
rise slowly between now and
2040. The Energy Information
Administration said June 15 in its Today in Energy publi-
cation. Residential energy in-
tensity “is expected to decline,
with the average purchased
electricity per household fall-
ing 11.3 percent from 2015 to
2040. Federal efficiency stan-
dards for most major end uses,
including lighting, space cool-
ing and heating, and water
heating, as well as state and
local building energy codes,
are the main reasons for the
projected electricity intensity
decline.

The U.S. Energy Informa-
tion Administration (EIA) re-
cently reported that most new
capacity in 2013 was from
natural gas, with average construction costs of $965 per
kW of installed nameplate
capacity. Solar construction
costs averaged $3,705 per kW,
and wind averaged $1,895 per
kW. The report also includes
information on other genera-
tion types, and notes that fuel
costs can be substantial.
The regional meetings were held by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) across the country in April and May, and the public power community has a unique opportunity to weigh in on a number of key energy policy matters of importance to public power. More than 10 public power executives took full advantage of that opportunity to, among other things, detail how public power is proactively working to address the growth of distributed energy resources and rapidly changing customer expectations in a digital age.

At the same time, public power executives questioned the effectiveness of wholesale mandatory capacity markets, while emphasizing the need for self-supply, and highlighted the need to improve the effectiveness of wholesale power. Public Power Association President Sue Kelly said at the Feb. 4 meeting that regional transmission organization-operated markets “are increasingly showing that they are unable to support the development and maintenance of a lower carbon resource portfolio at a reasonable price.”

The Washington, D.C., meeting was followed by two regional meetings in Boston, Mass., and Salt Lake City, Utah, in April, and four regional meetings in May in Des Moines, Iowa, Austin, Texas, Los Angeles, Calif., and Atlanta, Ga. Public power was represented at all of the meetings.

Challenges and opportunities related to distributed energy resources was a topic addressed at the meetings.

Washington Report

Arlen Orchard, CEO and general manager at California’s Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD), noted at a May 10 QER meeting in Los Angeles that SMUD is engaged in a comprehensive examination of distributed energy technologies, among other things, energy efficiency opportunities, support for electric vehicles and consideration of a variety of storage options.

Orchard said that SMUD is interested in distributed storage “as an important solution not only to integrating variable resources like rooftop solar, but also to meet new challenges associated with electric vehicles.” Orchard also detailed how SMUD has worked over several years to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

At San Antonio, Texas-based CPS Energy, the utility has seen “a very large demand for distributed generation resources— rooftop solar, community solar—and there’s clearly a strong, strong demand for that type of product and service,” noted Ces Eupuster, group executive vice president and chief generation and strategy officer at CPS.

“For us, the penetration level is still low—it’s very manageable from a grid perspective, but we do need to think carefully in how we integrate those resources within our distribution system, what kind of technologies we need to deploy there,” Eupuster said at the May 9 QER meeting in Austin, Texas.

Orchard pointed out that over the past few years, SMUD has made a significant investment in smart grid technology that is paying dividends in many ways.

Smart grid technology can also pay off in areas of transmission, noted Gil Quiniones, president and CEO of the New York Power Authority (NYPA), at an April 15 QER meeting.

Along with investing more than $730 million in life extension and modernization of the grid, NYPA has also been in the process of installing smart grid technology on a 345-kV NYPA transmission line. “By not changing the line at all—just applying smart grid technology—we are going to increase the transfer capability by 440 megawatts and bring more power from upstate to downstate,” Quiniones noted.

Ongoing concerns about market and capacity markets in organized electricity markets were voiced.

Municipal Electric Author- ity of Georgia’s James Fuller said municipal electric authorities such as MUA have already partnered with Veracity Connect—makes it easy for members to update information. Updates can be made anytime, from any device. MUA asks its members to watch for an email from Veracity Connect to follow the instructions in the email to activate your account. Your account information will only be used by MUA for a mutual aid event. After your initial account activation, we ask that you periodically log in and review/update the information to ensure it is accurate.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Mike Willetts, director of training and safety, at 763-746-0705. We thank you for helping us help you respond effectively to mutual aid situations if, and when, they occur.
position of electric distribution supervisor, effective May 2016. Bumgarner began his Austin Utilities’ career in January 1995 as a janitor at the NE Plant. He later transferred to the gas and water construction department before beginning his line worker career in 1998.

Director of Public Service Roger Avelegard left Breck- enridge Public Utilities on June 22, for Montezuma, Iowa. The Montezuma municipal utility provides water, natural gas, electricity and recycling services. He has been replaced by Brian Wika, who formerly served as electric line crew foreman.

Hutchinson Utilities and the city of Brownston gas utility are engaged in an un- usual, if not unique, partnership. Hutchinson is reading Brownston’s gas meters across its automated metering infrastructure. Data is exported to Brownston, which imports it into its billing system. Hutch, which helped Brownston get its municipal gas utility off the ground in 2013, continues to do some gas system operations and maintenance for its smaller neighbor, located 12 miles to the south.

Population growth coupled with Destination Medical Center plans lead to a projected 1.7 percent growth in downtown Rochester power needs in a few years. Rochester Public Utilities recently received a report with options on meeting that growth. One option involves upgrading the five substations that power Mayo Clinic and the rest of downtown. Other options include a new power station and a transmission system. Cost options range from $15 million to $20 million, not including land costs or the cost of placing lines underground.

A Mountain Lake business was ordered by state regulators to treat its waste-water rather than releasing it into a county tile. That required the business to install equipment, which increased its electric load, which demanded more power from the Mountain Lake Municipal Utilities, which has it looking into building a second substation to meet the demand. Plans call for the $1.75 million substation to be built on the east side of the city near the industrial park.

Two of the five generating sets in the municipal power plant are compliant with federal emissions standards. The increased electrical load has also led the utility to invest in emissions upgrades for its three remaining generators.

The city of Shakopee is considering franchise fees on utility services. The city is served electricity primarily by Shakopee Public Utilities, but two other providers also serve in the city. Natural gas is provided by two different companies.

Fosston Municipal Utili- ties electric rates in June increased an average of three percent across all rate classes. The residential meter charge increased $1, to $24 per month. The increased rate reflects increased wholesale power costs.

A Minnesota Department of Employment and Eco- nomic Development (DEED) grant that supported the position of a liaison between the Nashwauk Public Utilities Commission and Essar Steel Minnesota expired June 30. The grant allowed the local commission to employ former Elk River Municipal Utilities general manager Bryan Adams as its project manager. Adams worked with Nashwauk on the Essar project for the last seven years.

Lake Crystal Utilities is aggressively promoting its load management system, in an effort to reduce its peak usage and subsequent wholesale demand charges. Reducing the peak will help save everybody money, notes the utility.

As part of that promotion, the utility is sponsoring the ‘Beat the Peak’ competition. Participants are asked to reduce energy use during Beat the Peak events, from 4:30 to 9:30 p.m., and will receive points by promoting the program and win cash prizes or get credits on bills.

A local health care pro- vider May 31 broke ground on a new $26 million hospital in Melrose. Major donors included the city of Melrose and Melrose Public Utilities Commission.

After almost 33 years at Chaska, Steve Wilker retired May 31. Wilker served for many years as electrical director.

After more than 27 years of service, Wesley Hompe retired from the Willmar Municipal Utilities on July 15. Hompe began his career with WMU as a staff electrical engineer on May 8, 1989. Through the years, he has held various titles until being named general manager in September 2012.

Granite Falls City Manager Bill Lavin retires Aug. 1 after 40 years of public service. He also worked in Madison and Wells. The city council has offered the administration’s position to Crystal Johnson, the Dawson administrator. Superintendent Dave Recheel retires Aug. 5 after 40 years with Granite Falls Municipal Utilities.

Austin Utilities an- nounced June 30 the retire- ment of Joe Kroc, electric dis- tribution supervisor with 34 years of service. Kroc began his Austin Utilities career in October 1982 as a meter reader. In 1989 he moved to gas and water construction before beginning his line worker career in 1991. In April 2011 he advanced to supervisor of the department.

Bill Bumgarner, line worker, advanced to the

Waseca extends power contract with SMMPA

The city of Waseca ensured its electrical needs would be met through 2050 when its city council unanimously extended its power sales contract with the Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency (SMMPA). The contract was extended until April 1, 2050.

The original power sales contract that Waseca and the other 17 county utilities signed was a 50-year contract that expires April 1, 2030. In 2009 SMMPA offered agency members the opportunity to extend their power sales con- tracts 20 years, from 2030 to 2050. At that time, Waseca opted not to extend the term of the contract.

At its June 8 meeting, the SMMPA board unanimously approved Waseca’s Power Sales Contract extension through 2050. SMMPA provides electricity and related services to 18 Minnesota municipal utilities. Waseca Utilities provides electricity to over 4,000 customers.

**Around the State**

Exterior view of the Mountain Lake municipal power plant.
Solar
in the News

Solar is poised to climb into the top 10 states for annual solar installations, up from 25th in 2015, according to the Minnesota Department of Commerce.

The Department expects the state’s solar capacity to increase by more than 500 megawatts this year. That would be a 15-fold increase in Minnesota’s total installed solar energy capacity.

A 2013 state law requires investor-owned utilities to obtain 1.5 percent of their electric energy from solar by 2020, with a goal of 10 percent by 2030. Solar development in Minnesota also benefits from several other programs and the five-year extension of the federal solar tax credit.

The Mankato city council has agreed to invest in a solar energy development that it expects to save the city $1.2 million over the next 25 years. The city will invest in 5-megawatts of solar development in “community solar gardens” in and around the city. The deal with Geronimo Energy requires no city investment up front and guarantees a 1 cent per kilowatt-hour discount on the amount of power purchased from Xcel Energy for the next 25 years.

The city of Foley in May discussed a similar proposal from Geronimo Energy.

The city of Wabasha, Wabasha County and Wabasha-Kellogg School District are Nesting eagles idle three Xcel wind turbines

Editor’s note. The following is a shortened version of an article that appeared May 11 in the Lamberton News.

The eagle has landed in rural Mower County, shutting down three turbines at the Pleasant Valley Wind farm near Annandale. This site is part of the $290 million, 102-megawatt, 16-site Aurora Project.

According to local press reports, “The project has raised the ire of area city and township officials because there has been no local control over the project locations, and because of changes in the project plans.”

One township was told to expect a 2.5 megawatt project, which turned into a 6-MW development. Annandale city officials worry that a 70-acre site will intrude on future city growth and transport plans. The city appealed to the courts but eventually reached a settlement.

On May 3, the Wright County Board sent a letter to Enel listing growing concerns over a Buffalo Township solar plant, citing “several discrepancies between the residents’ understanding of the project and the actions taken in the development of this site,” including “unexpected modifications.”

The Board also approved sending a letter to the MPUC, Gov. Dayton and its legislative representatives in regards to its concerns about the project. The letter will note several discrepancies from what residents were reportedly led to believe would take place and what has actually happened.

On May 16, the Wright County Board unanimously voted to extend a countywide moratorium on solar energy developments for six months.

Construction has begun on a large Aurora Solar development near Paynesville, which will cover approximately 108 acres with solar panels. In all, 282 acres are under control of Xcel Energy’s Denver operation. The project will remove about 98 acres of farmland from agricultural use, noted a local report.

The Paynesville city council recently approved subscribing to a community project that Geronimo Energy plans to develop near the Aurora development.

Great River Energy has reported on its third year of solar generation. On average, annual output is slightly lower than the expected 15 percent. Frequent, rapid power swings, due to more cloudy days than sunny, is another takeaway.

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MMUA developing Leadership Training Program aimed at typical member

Minnesota Municipal Utilities Association (MMUA) has determined that a new affordable and local high-level Executive Leadership Training Program is needed. To meet that need, MMUA is developing a program that will be focused on meeting the specific leadership needs of our members.

The MMUA Board of Directors recognizes the need for this program, which will prepare talented employees in our organizations to be able to step up and provide the leadership needed for the future of their communities and our industry. The program will also provide an opportunity for current leaders to expand their skills and provide stronger leadership to their organizations.

In an effort to meet this need, MMUA is seeking a provider to utilize the latest leadership development practices to create a two-year Executive Leadership program based on MMUA competencies determined to best meet our member needs.

MMUA developed these competencies by inviting experienced and successful leaders, including recently retired leaders, to regional focus groups. These group sessions identified the most important skills that our next generation of leadership will need to succeed.

The following curriculum and criteria was developed by our focus group sessions and will be included in the course offerings:

**Year One**
- Communications: Speaking/presenting, persuading, ability to sell/influence, working a crowd.
- Politics: Governance, relationships to build, city/community involvement, best practices.
- Strategic Planning/Execution: Technical aspects of strategic planning with a key focus on achievement of results.

**Year Two**
- Human Resources: Developing networking program for participants to use.
- Finances: Financial reserves, best practices. Also to be developed: a networking program for participants to use.
- Team Building/Employee Engagement: Creating employee ownership and organizational loyalty.
- Administrative: Best practices—Develop networking program for participants to use.
- Behavior competencies will be built into all eight of the above programs.

The two-year program is envisioned to include eight two-day courses. Each two-day course would last six hours per day, a total of 12 hours. The program will be held at the MMUA office in Plymouth. In addition to the six hours of classroom time, the first night of each two-day course will include dinner/networking and focused discussions. Class size will be limited to 20-25 people.

The program’s focus will be on meeting the needs of small to medium sized utilities that have 1-150 employees, politically sensitive, very independent and proud.

The program will include the development of a network for human relations and financial people. This network of individual leaders may be available for up to a five-minute consultation to requesting utilities, with additional time to be negotiated.

The first session is scheduled for the first quarter of 2017.

MMUA Executive Director Jack Kegel was extensively involved in program development and extends his thanks to RPU Board Member Jerry Adam, General Manager Mark Fritsch and MMUA President and Elk River Municipal Utilities General Manager Troy Adams for their work in developing the program.

Butterfly

continued from front page

SMMPA will initially help its member municipal utilities establish 29 habitat sites in 14 different communities in late spring. The sites are generally in the 200-400 square foot range and will consist of milkweed plants, a variety of flowering nectar plants and educational signage. Milkweed is the main food source for monarch caterpillars, and nectar plants, such as flowers, provide nourishment for the adult butterflies. Local community groups, utility employees and school groups will help prepare, plant and maintain the sites. SMMPA expects to add additional sites this fall and in the spring and fall of 2017.

SMMPA partnered with Sand County Foundation in developing the program. Sand County Foundation has made addressing the loss of the monarch population a priority issue. In cooperation with Sand County Foundation, Syngenta, a leading agriculture company, is helping fund the SMMPA effort.

SMMPA will acquire the necessary seeds and plants from Prairie Restorations of Princeton. The Prairie Restorations “Sowing it Back Together” program uses native Minnesota plant species to help create habitat for pollinators like the monarch.

Pollinators, like bees and butterflies, are an essential component of 30-40 percent of the food supply. Loss of habitat is the major factor in the decline of pollinator populations. The dramatic decrease could replace the monarch on the endangered species list.

“This is simply the right thing to do, but there is also a sound business case for SMMPA and its members to join this effort,” said Schoenheer. “Agriculture and food processing are key industries in our member communities, so addressing the pollinator issue is important from an economic perspective. In addition, as utilities, we need access to rights-of-way for our infrastructure, and having the monarch on the endangered species list would make acquiring and maintaining that right-of-way much more expensive and complicated. Being part of the solution makes sense environmentally and economically.”

Also beginning this summer, SMMPA member utilities will distribute pollinator seed packages, which will help individuals within the community join the effort.
Minnesota Municipal Utilities Association and our partners, Minnesota Rural Electric Association and American Public Power Association, are pleased to announce the 2016 Overhead Lineworker School. The class lineup offers something for all levels of lineworker.

General Session Topics

Cyber Security
Presenter: Robb Stiffler, FRSecure LLC

"Cyber" attacks are an ominous new threat faced by utilities. Learn what the industry is doing and how you can help prevent disruption of your utility’s service with common-sense practices. Operational security is everyone’s responsibility.

The Buried Truth Uncovered—Video/Discussion
This video describes the experiences of a man buried alive while working in 6’ deep trench. Co-workers made split-second decisions to save his life. The accident changed everything, including relationships with co-workers and family. This moving story is a first-hand reminder of the importance of having an attitude of safety—in everything we do. Discussion/review of lessons learned following video.

Hands-On Training Classes

Class 1: Trouble Shooting & Pole Replacement
Instructor: Todd Keach, Rochester Public Utilities

The apprentice and first-step journeyman lineworker will be challenged to trouble shoot a damaged 0-phase pole, which has an underground riser. The class will replace the damaged pole by setting a new pole in the same hole—all while the overhead line is energized.

Class 2: Overhead Maintenance
Instructors: Roger Moltzan, Detroit Lakes Public Utility; Darren Weber, Elk River Municipal Utilities

This class will challenge the apprentice lineworker up to first-step journeyman. Participants will have the opportunity to practice several different trouble-shooting techniques including testing, grounding and proper rubber cover up.

Class 3: Advanced Rubber Gloving
Instructors: Russ Nelson, Austin Utilities; Miles Heide and Wade Williams, Fairmont Public Utilities

This class is designed to challenge the 3rd to 4th year apprentice and journeyman lineworkers looking to improve or enhance rubber-gloving skills. This advanced class will focus its efforts on "Working it Hot." Class participants will develop a safe strategy to installing a new pole within an energized three phase line. This hands-on class includes digger derrick operations.

Class 4: Rigging For Lineworkers – How to Safely Lift Equipment Using Ropes, Knots, Splices, Blocks and Slings
Instructor: Al Czeczok, MMUA

This class is designed to challenge all levels of lineworkers. The class will start with the basics and work into the more complicated and technical knots and rigging useful for today’s lineworker.

Class 5: Moving Up The Leadership Ladder – Smoothing Out The (Often) Awkward Transition
Instructors: Steve Johnson, Electric Operations Manager, Marshall Utilities; Joyce Hottinger, Assistant Human Resources Director, League of Minnesota Cities; Mike Willets, Director of Training and Safety, MMUA

This class is intended for the emerging new leader: The lineman with advanced responsibilities, journeyman lineman, crew leaders, forearm or others in the field seeking leadership training.

Registration deadline Aug. 31.

Questions? Please contact Theresa Neddermeyer at 763-551-1230, email tneddermeyer@mmua.org or see the ‘Events’ calendar at www.mmua.org

Overhead Lineworker School
September 13-16, MMUA Training Center, Marshall

Apple subsidiary asks to sell electricity at market-based rates

Apple Inc., has formed a subsidiary which in early June asked for authorization to sell energy and ancillary services energy—produced at Apple’s solar and other generating plants—at market-based rates over broad areas of the United States. Apple Energy seeks permission to sell excess renewable on the wholesale power market at market-based rates in the electricity markets overseen by the California Independent System Operator, the New York ISO, Midcontinent ISO, ISO New England, PJM Interconnection and the Southwest Power Pool.

If the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) grants Apple’s request, the company could begin selling electricity and related services in August.

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If the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) grants Apple’s request, the company could begin selling electricity and related services in August.

Class 3: Advanced Rubber Gloving
Instructors: Russ Nelson, Austin Utilities; Miles Heide and Wade Williams, Fairmont Public Utilities

This class is designed to challenge the 3rd to 4th year apprentice and journeyman lineworkers looking to improve or enhance rubber-gloving skills. This advanced class will focus its efforts on “Working it Hot.” Class participants will develop a safe strategy to installing a new pole within an energized three phase line. This hands-on class includes digger derrick operations.

Class 4: Rigging For Lineworkers – How to Safely Lift Equipment Using Ropes, Knots, Splices, Blocks and Slings
Instructor: Al Czeczok, MMUA

This class is designed to challenge all levels of lineworkers. The class will start with the basics and work into the more complicated and technical knots and rigging useful for today’s lineworker.

Class 5: Moving Up The Leadership Ladder – Smoothing Out The (Often) Awkward Transition
Instructors: Steve Johnson, Electric Operations Manager, Marshall Utilities; Joyce Hottinger, Assistant Human Resources Director, League of Minnesota Cities; Mike Willets, Director of Training and Safety, MMUA

This class is intended for the emerging new leader: The lineman with advanced responsibilities, journeyman lineman, crew leaders, forearm or others in the field seeking leadership training.

Registration deadline Aug. 31.

Questions? Please contact Theresa Neddermeyer at 763-551-1230, email tneddermeyer@mmua.org or see the ‘Events’ calendar at www.mmua.org

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Grand Marais continued from front page

The utility several years ago demolished its old diesel power plant by the lake, and in 2005 built a new electric generating plant on the ridge rising to the north. The plant burns diesel fuel; there is no natural gas service in the area.

Grand Marais’ wholesale power supplier—the Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency—pays the utility $18,000 a month to keep the plant ready to run. The local utility recently spent $300,000 to ensure compliance with the most recent federal air emissions standards. The plant has a six megawatt (MW) generating capacity. Load on a nice summer day is three MW; winter peak is 5.

Electricity and propane remain the heating fuels of choice. Studies were conducted in regards to construction of a biomass-fueled district heating system, but the economics precluded construction.

There are two solar panels interconnected to the municipal electric system, including one on the bed and breakfast owned by Mayor Jay Arrowsmith Decoux. The municipal campground and North House Folk School have solar hot water panels. The city owns a large solar panel at the municipal golf course (which is on an electric cooperative’s lines). City staff is actively considering other solar installations.

“The numbers aren’t quite there yet,” said City Administrator Mike Roth.

But there is significant local support for solar. The Grand Marais Public Utilities Commission is one of 12 U.S. municipalities (and by far the smallest) to have approved official resolutions or municipal endorsements in support of a “carbon fee and dividend.” These local governments, working through the Citizens Climate Lobby (CCL), are calling on Congress to address climate change.

While the commissioners approved the resolution, the city council demurred. Staff, meanwhile, has plenty of work to do.

The city shop, also located adjacent to the lake and the municipal campground, is slated to be replaced. The city has bought land south on Hwy. 61, away from the lake, and will remove an abandoned resort as part of the project.

The utility has installed light emitting diode (LED) lights on Hwy. 61. The lights consume half the electricity as the lights they replaced and will pay off in a couple years. An automated meter reading system is under consideration.

Mike Taylor is the electric superintendent. He came to the utility as a lineman, 22 years ago. Along with the power plant, substation and electric distribution system, Taylor supervises two line-workers—Matt Bronikowski and Jeff Eliasen.

The men have roots in the area. When Taylor first started, the utility would hire people out of line school. In a couple years, they would leave. “We could never get anything done,” he said. Now, he can leave town for a few days and “feel pretty good about what we did.”

It takes quite a few people to provide good service, Taylor said.

The electrical system is in good shape now. Notable improvements include the power plant, a distribution system voltage upgrade to 13.8kV, and moving a distribution line that runs out of town to the north away from the lake, giving residents an unobstructed view.

Clearing space for the new line was “pretty much a logging operation,” Taylor said. He also used to read meters. He fondly remembers two customers, both elderly women, on the north shore west of town. Those two customers would routinely invite him in for coffee and cookies. He would politely accept. Everybody enjoyed the company.

“It took an hour to get through those two places,” Taylor said.

He didn’t mind—they were customers. More than that, they were people. Taylor considers it his job to take care of them.

Maybe that’s why people in so many places have appreciated their municipal utility over the years—no matter where the electrons come from.

Building a Better World for All of Us*

Among the people keeping the lights on in Grand Marais are, from left to right: Mike Taylor, Matt Bronikowski and Jeff Eliasen.

* Does your community shine? Outdoor lighting is one of the best ways to impart community character and appeal.

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Nyhus joins RPU management team

ROCHESTER, MN–Rochester Public Utilities (RPU) recently announced the hiring of Steven Nyhus as the new Director of Compliance and Public Affairs.

Nyhus comes to RPU with over 15 years of experience assisting local governments and industries with water quality and energy compliance matters. He has represented large and small communities and corporate entities with environmental permitting matters for wastewater and stormwater, environmental review, and related topics, and served as Minnesota regulatory counsel for a municipal power agency. He is also a familiar face around the Minnesota Legislature and state environmental and energy regulatory agencies.

Prior to joining RPU, Nyhus has held positions with the Minnesota House of Representatives, the Flaherty & Hool law firm in St. Paul, and most recently with the University of St. Thomas School of Law in Minneapolis.

A Minnesota native, Nyhus has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from Minnesota State University – Moorhead, and a Juris Doctorate from the University of Minnesota Law School. He was admitted to practice law in Minnesota in 1999 and is treasurer of the Minnesota State Bar Association’s Environment, Natural Resources and Energy Law Section.

Municipal reps attend Energy Bar fundraiser in D.C.

The Charitable Foundation of the Energy Bar Association (CFEBA) June 7 recognized the electric lineworkers of America at a gala in Washington, D.C. Among those representing the public power segment of the industry were Todd Keach of Rochester Public Utilities and MMUA Director of Training and Safety Mike Willetts.

The CFEBA Fundraising Gala, ‘Light Up the Village!’ was an effort to raise funds for the electrification of several communities in the north-east region of Bolivia. The project will create a profound change for many people who have never had electricity in their homes. In 2016, a team of 14 linemen will construct 21 miles of power lines to connect a total of 461 families. The people of these communities will have better healthcare, improved education, safer streets and a chance at a better life.

During the gala, CFEBA honored linemen as a profession to recognize their skills, courage and dedication.

“It was exciting to see CFEBA recognize the power lineworker of the country and it was very much an honor for us to represent public power,” Willetts said.

Following the event, CFEBA took the funds raised and made a sizable donation to Light Up the Village!

New TVA nuclear power plant comes on-line

The Tennessee Valley Authority’s 1,150 megawatt Watts Bar Unit 2 nuclear generator put electricity onto its power grid for the first time on June 3.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission on Oct. 22, 2015, issued the operating license, marking the first U.S. reactor that the NRC had authorized to operate since 1996, when the agency issued a license for Watts Bar Unit 1.
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Geronimo Energy is a utility-scale renewable energy development company headquartered in Minneapolis, with satellite offices located in southwest Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Illinois and Michigan. Geronimo Energy provides customer renewable energy development solutions for utilities and corporations looking to harness renewable energy for business growth. Geronimo Energy has developed several operating wind farms and solar projects throughout the United States: over 1,500 megawatts of renewable energy projects that are either operational or are currently under construction. Geronimo Energy has a multi-gigawatt development pipeline of wind and solar
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Energy Act: Gov. Dayton announces Minnesota will appeal Eighth Circuit decision

continued from front page

and others regarding the term of such agreements and the amount of power Minnesota utilities could purchase from out-of-state coal-fired facilities. “The success of this case means we can consider purchase power agreements of longer than five years and for more than 30 megawatts of power from existing plants,” Heller said. “In many cases, we have found that buying power from these existing plants can be the least-cost option for our members.”

In its decision, the Eighth Circuit’s three-judge panel unanimously agreed that the law illegally sought to regulate activities taking place wholly in North Dakota, well beyond Minnesota’s borders. If left in place, the law would have prevented North Dakota utilities from selling power into the Midcontinent Independent Transmission System Operator market—hurting businesses and customers in both Minnesota and North Dakota.

Minnesota also will be required to pay attorney fees for the State of North Dakota and the other plaintiffs, now estimated at over $1 million.

Minnesota to appeal Governor Mark Dayton June 22 announced his decision to appeal the June 15 ruling of the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals. In a prepared statement, Dayton said, “After consultation with the Attorney General, I have decided to appeal the recent decision from the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals, which struck down an essential part of Minnesota’s Next Generation Energy Act.”

“The State Statute does not require to pay attorney fees for the State of North Dakota. In a prepared statement, Dayton said, “After consultation with the Attorney General, I have decided to appeal the recent decision from the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals, which struck down an essential part of Minnesota’s Next Generation Energy Act.”

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The Minnesota Attorney General will pursue reimbursement of any attorney fees the state is required to pay. “I will continue to do everything in my power to defend the State of Minnesota’s right to protect the quality of the air our citizens breathe.”