

Electric load drops during coronavirus response

by Steve Downer

While percentages varied significantly, electric utilities across Minnesota reported decreased sales (and revenues) during the coronavirus pandemic and response.

The reduction in electric demand was among the topics covered April 24 during a 'virtual' Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO) quarterly update meeting, convened by the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MPUC).

Numerous Minnesota utilities and transmission providers participated in the meeting.

Durgesh Manjure of MISO, noted a "rapid and dramatic change" in electric load since the imposition of unprecedented steps to combat coronavirus spread, but noted the drop in demand has not impacted reliability. Electric demand 'actual to forecast' under weather-normalized circumstances showed an overall 6 percent decline in the MISO North Region, he said. Individual utility results varied.

With the onset of 'stay-at-home' orders, load was challenging to forecast, Manjure reported. March stay-at-home orders resulted in a lower and flatter load profile. The load shape changed, with a longer morning peak, lasting until



Demand for electricity dropped significantly during the coronavirus pandemic. These transmission lines are located east of the Sherco and Monticello electric generating stations.

noon. Evening energy use was lower. Evening and morning peaks were lower than normal.

Mid-April electric demand was 10 percent less demand than expected. By late April, energy use and demand remained consistent, with small week-over-week reductions. Peak forecast errors did not impact reliability. A reduction in load, as a whole, flattened the load curve.

The resource mix didn't change, with more or less the same fuel mix. The stay-at-home orders coincided with peak wind time: there was 18,000 MW 'peak wind' on the regional system.

Great River Energy (GRE) reported no pandemic impact on load data, with any March

difference due to weather. With the March 27 stay-at-home issued, April might be impacted, with load shifting. The GRE board reportedly allocated relief to distribution cooperatives, forgiving late fees, etc.

ITC, a transmission company, reported a load decrease larger than what MISO reported. Weather normalized, Michigan load was down 20 percent, while Iowa-Minnesota was down 10 to 15 percent.

Minnesota Power reported an April 16 daily peak down 20 percent, with 300 megawatts (MW) due to large customers idling or down for maintenance. The daily load profile flattened in the days

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Winners selected in scholarship contest

The MMUA Tom Bovitz Memorial Scholarship Contest winners were selected Monday, April 28. The top four essays in the 20th annual contest are:

- First Place: Cady Rancourt, Hibbing
- Second Place: Ella Madson, Delano
- Third Place: Jordan Mernaugh, Marshall
- Fourth Place: Hailey Eggerbraaten, Alexandria

The winning essay was "well written, had a great understanding of the scope and impact of public utilities, and a personality that put it over the top for me," said one judge. Several others agreed, as Rancourt's submission garnered four first place votes.

Also capturing a first-place vote was Madson's entry. This essay "was very authentic," said one judge. "She related utilities' importance to herself and current events, appreciating the role they play in the COVID-19 pandemic. She also took the theme and expanded on it in the closing."

After those two essays, the scoring tightened, with the Marshall and Alexandria essays capturing enough points to put them into the top four.

The first-place scholarship carries an award of \$2,000, second place \$1,500, third place \$1,000 and fourth place \$500.

Scholarship: see page 8 please

Glencoe forgives energy portion of customers' March electric bills

by Steve Downer

The Glencoe Light and Power Commission at its March 23 meeting forgave its customers' energy charges for the March meter reading. The municipal electric utility charged its usual monthly service charge. Bills were mailed from April 10-12.

The municipal electric utility billed for the fixed monthly charge because those fixed, non-energy costs—including line maintenance and business office functions—were still incurred, said General Manager Dave Meyer. Accurately identifying and collecting fixed costs is something the utility has been stressing. The utility also handles billing for the city, so there was a need to bill all the regularly occurring water, sewer and other monthly charges.

Backdrop for the unusual energy charge forgiveness was the coronavirus pandemic, state-issued stay-at-home orders and business closures.

"It's a pretty tough time right now," Commission President John Schrupp told the *McLeod County Chronicle*. "We wanted to help people out. We wish everybody well."



MMUA file photo

The Glencoe Light and Power Commission headquarters houses business offices, shop, garage and the 41-megawatt municipal power plant.

Response from customers has been overwhelmingly positive.

Funds to pay for the customer energy charges came from a catastrophic reserve

fund, established in 1988. The fund was established to deal with the aftermath of tornado or ice storms. While not weather-related,

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Customer protections in place, MMUA corresponds with Gov. Walz on financial strain

MMUA Executive Director Jack Kegel on April 14 sent a letter, following up earlier correspondence, in regards to provision of utility service during the COVID-19 pandemic response. The text of the letter is as follows:

Dear Governor Walz:

Thank you for your recognition of Minnesota utilities' efforts to voluntarily suspend disconnections for non-payment during the pandemic health emergency. I want to assure you that Minnesota's 124 municipal electric and 33 municipal gas utilities are extending their winter season protections to keep energy

flowing. In addition, virtually all of our members operate water utilities and they too plan to defer any service disconnects. Municipal utilities also remain willing to offer flexible payment plans for customer whose accounts fall into arrears. Municipal utilities are locally governed and sensitive to local needs.

In response to a joint request of the Department of Commerce and the MPUC, many of our municipal utilities have e-filed their extension of the Cold Weather Rule, including a continued period of no disconnects. Others have provided notice via email rather than using the eDocket system, and those submissions may not yet appear among the docket's postings. MMUA continues to follow up with our members to answer their questions

about this filing request and to encourage their compliance with it.

We understand that there has been some discussion in your administration of issuing a broad executive order banning shutoffs. In view of the voluntary commitment of the states' utilities to refrain from disconnecting customers, a gubernatorial decree would be both unnecessary and counterproductive. An executive order would be viewed by some customers as a guarantee of free service for the duration of the pandemic. While our municipal utilities are willing to work with customers who can't pay, it is vital that they continue to receive revenue from those who can pay. And the longer a customer goes without paying for service, the more difficult it becomes to work out a

payment plan to make up the arrearage.

We are now relatively early in what is likely to be a lengthy health emergency. Your recent extension of the stay at home order to May 4 was issued in the hope that it can delay the COVID-19 peak in Minnesota until July. We don't dispute the wisdom or necessity of your latest order. We do invite you to begin a conversation about the potential consequences of a lengthy moratorium on disconnections.

The average municipal electric utility has just over 3,000 customers. The median system has about 1,250 customers. Median household incomes are typically below the state average. Rates are set to cover costs and provide a modest payment in lieu of taxes to the city.

Financial reserves are limited, in keeping with the overall size of the utility.

We anticipate that municipal utility revenues will erode substantially in the next few months, and the return to pre-pandemic revenue levels may be slower than we all would hope. A lengthy period of providing uncompensated service to a substantial percentage of a utility's customers could place a severe strain on the utility's finances.

We know that there are no easy answers to the issues raised here, Kegel concluded. As with so many aspects of this pandemic emergency, we're entering uncharted waters. We appreciate your efforts in trying to chart the best choice for our state, and we will work with you to keep the lightson.

We've moved!

Our former offices demolished to make way for re-development, MMUA has moved across the street to 3131 Fernbrook Lane N., Suite 200, Plymouth, MN 55447-5337. All of our other contact info remains the same.

MMUA orders, to distribute thousands of KN95 masks in pandemic response effort

With municipal utilities preparing return-to-work plans and health organization guidance on the wear-

ing of respiratory masks in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, MMUA Executive Director Jack Kegel identified

a source of KN95 face masks, then surveyed members regarding their interest in a bulk purchase

Initially hoping to reach the 10,000 needed to make a purchase, members responded with interest in a total of more than 40,000. With that, MMUA placed the order. The first shipment has made its way to Japan. As of this writing (May 6), MMUA hopes to receive its first shipment in mid-May.

The bulk of the orders will be delivered by MMUA Regional Safety Coordinators.

These masks are a Chinese design and are manufactured in China. In a technical bulletin issued in January 2020, 3M stated that it is reasonable to consider the KN95 mask as equivalent to the N95 Mask. The U.S. FDA has issued an emergency use authorization for KN95 masks. The C.D.C. lists KN95 masks as a suitable alternative when N95s are not available.

Once MMUA receives the shipment, we will get each member's mask order delivered as soon as possible.



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Local paper lauds Glencoe Light and Power for coronavirus relief action

From the McLeod County Chronicle

Imagine sitting at a meeting contemplating spending nearly \$429,000 to help out the community and worrying it won't be enough. That's a dilemma the members of the Glencoe Light and Power Commission pondered last month when they considered a proposal to waive the fee for electricity used during March.

Commission members ultimately made the decision to waive the fee. They decided to take money from a catastrophe fund Glencoe Light and Power created back in 1988. The commission has been squirreling away money into the fund, little by little, over the years in the event of, as the name suggests, a catastrophe.

First of all, who could imagine the wisdom, foresight and courage to create such a catastrophe fund and actually put money away just in case, for example, a tornado roared through

Glencoe. No doubt some people today perhaps wondered if commission members had taken leave of their senses. The fund provided commission members the opportunity to provide customers a break at a time when it is hopefully appreciated.

Finding ways to help customers isn't entirely new territory for the commission. Glencoe Light and Power works to keep its rates as affordable as possible. The utility typically looks for ways to buy down rates during the year.

The catastrophe fund contained about \$2 million before the commission dipped into it last month in the name of helping residential and commercial customers. Under most circumstances, \$2 million is a lot of money, but when a transformer at a substation costs \$700,000 or a mile of transmission line checks in at \$1 mil-

lion, that puts \$2 million into a different perspective.

Commission members were concerned how customers would perceive the decision. Fortunately, we hope, most customers have the sense to appreciate the gesture.

Commissioners worried people would not understand or appreciate the catastrophe fund or its big-picture purpose. They also fretted over the expectation the commission would make dipping into the catastrophe fund a more common occurrence. When possible, the commission routinely uses excess funds to buy-down rates.

If the commission made a mistake, it might have been to pull the trigger on the waiver so quickly. Clearly, the challenges created by the pandemic aren't going away immediately. Folks are hurting and the opportunity to help presented itself.

If that's a faux pas, commissioners deserve a pass for trying to help when they saw a need.

It should also be noted, based on the reaction posted on social media, not every utility has the luxury of helping its customers out in the same way. As Glencoe Light and Power GM Dave Meyer said, every utility is facing different challenges, just like every household or business faces different circumstances most of us don't know about.

We applaud the commission and its members for the unanimous decision to tap its catastrophe fund to waive the charge for electricity used last month.

Thanks so much for thinking of your neighbors and friends at a time when they need a helping hand.
— John Mueller

APPA focusing on funding for members to weather COVID-19 financial crunch

by Paul Ciampoli

News Director, American Public Power Association

As lawmakers on Capitol Hill craft a fourth bill that will address the COVID-19 pandemic, the American Public Power Association is voicing concerns that the longer the pandemic goes on and customers can't pay their electricity bills, along with declining load, there could be negative effects on cash flows for utilities, said Desmarie Waterhouse, APPA's Vice President, Government Relations & Counsel.

APPA will gather information that would be helpful to make the case for some sort of additional funding that would be available to public power utilities.

The additional funding would help public power utilities weather the financial crunch that is anticipated from a combination of non-payments by customers, as well as the loss of load.

APPA will be reaching out to member utilities asking for related information. Among the things that APPA would like to hear from members about is whether they are seeing declines in load and at what point in their billing cycle they are noticing an uptick in the number of customers who can't pay their bills.

APPA expects COVID-19 legislation in the House of Representatives to include language that would tie receipt of any money in the bill to the suspension of power shutoffs, "whether the utility gets that money directly or the local government that the public power utility is tied to, if that were the case, then that would be in effect," she said. If a state receives

funding, "it would also have to mandate the suspension of power shutoffs."

The power shutoff language would be included as part of a broader legislative contribution from the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

A large number of public power utilities have already proactively suspended customer disconnects in the wake of the pandemic in recognition of the financial hardships faced by many customers.

LIHEAP

APPA is also discussing the need to provide further assistance to individuals and small businesses through the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and Small Business Administration, respectively, to help them pay their utility bills.

In an April 9 letter to leaders in the House and Senate, Joy Ditto, President and CEO of APPA, said that Congress should increase funding for LIHEAP, as well as the Coronavirus Relief Fund to states. The CARES Act includes \$900 million for LIHEAP to help low-income households pay their utility bills during the crisis.

Along with the increase in

Washington Report



funding for the Coronavirus Relief Fund to states and LIHEAP, APPA would also like to see completed implementation of CARES Act section 4003(c)(3)(E) requiring the Treasury Department to work to establish a Federal Reserve program or facility that provides liquidity to the financial system that supports lending to states and municipalities. (The Federal Reserve on April 9 announced that it would help state and local governments manage cash flow stresses caused by the coronavirus pandemic by establishing a Municipal Liquidity Facility that will offer up to \$500 billion in lending to states and municipalities.)

Pandemic creating a "double-edged challenge"

The COVID-19 pandemic "is creating a double-edged challenge for these critical providers: increased costs and reduced revenues," Ditto said. "Increased costs as we take extraordinary measures to ensure that 'the lights stay

on,' but decreased revenues as commercial, industrial, and institutional use declines and delinquency in payments increase. The full extent of this may not be seen for weeks—or even months—and financial concerns may seem secondary when life safety is on the line, but we must pay our workers, we must pay for fuel that drives our power plants, and we must pay for equipment when repairs are needed."

APPA cancels Annual Meeting

The American Public Power Association (APPA) on April 28 made the decision to cancel its National Conference and Expo—scheduled for June 5-10, in Long Beach, California.

"This was not an easy decision to make, but it is the right decision," said APPA CEO Joy Ditto. "I made a commitment at the beginning of this crisis to make decisions keeping the health and safety of the APPA staff, our members and the public at large at the forefront. After careful consideration of all factors, it was our only choice."

Instead, APPA is offering an alternative virtual meet-

ing: the Public Power Connect Virtual Summit & Business Meeting, which will take place June 8-10. The online conference is designed to capture key conference elements, including board and business meetings, keynote and breakout sessions. It is also said to "provide an opportunity for public power utilities to come together, share and make connections in these unique times."

According to its archives, this is the first time since APPA started annual national conferences after World War II that it has not held the meeting in-person. It is also APPA's 80th anniversary.

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Glencoe power plant, transmission investments strengthen local, regional electric grid

Along with business of-fice and electric distribution functions, the Glencoe Light and Power Commission owns and operates a 41-megawatt electrical generating plant. Though no longer supplying the utility's power on a round-the-clock basis, the plant remains a valuable asset.

Permitted by the state of Minnesota, Glencoe operates the plant under certain circumstances.

Generators in the plant include:

Engine No. 5: Fairbanks-Morse 1,360 kilowatts (kW)

Engine No. 7: Enterprise 4,100 kW

Engine No. 8: Cooper-Bes-mer 5,600 kW

Engine No. 9: Enterprise 7,150 kW

Engine No. 10: Enterprise 7,060 kW

Engine No. 11: Caterpillar 4,840 kW

Engine No. 12: Caterpillar 4,840 kW

Engine No. 14: Caterpillar 4,840 kW.

Air permit stipulations vary, depending on the engine and fuel, either diesel or

natural gas. By permit, four dual-fueled generators can be used to supply power as part of a financial arrangement with another entity, if all of the following conditions are met:

The engine is dispatched by the local balancing authority or local transmission and distribution system operator; The dispatch is intended to mitigate local transmission and/or distribution limitations so as to avert potential voltage collapse or line overloads that could lead to the interruption of power supply in a local area or region; The dispatch follows reliability, emergency operation or similar protocols that follow specific National Electric Reliability Corporation, regional, state, public utility commission or local standards or guidelines.

As can be glimpsed by the dry language of the permit, Glencoe has made significant investments, including generation and transmission, strengthening the electrical grid in its region of Minnesota.



The Glencoe municipal power plant has proven its worth many times over the years, and remains a model municipally-owned internal combustion power plant.

Pres. Trump issues executive order on electric infrastructure

President Donald Trump on May 1 signed an executive order (EO) that authorizes U.S. Secretary of Energy Dan Brouillette to work with the Cabinet and energy industry

to secure the country's bulk-power system (BPS).

The EO, which the American Public Power Association is currently reviewing, prohibits federal agencies and

U.S. persons from acquiring, transferring, or installing BPS equipment in which any foreign country or foreign national has any interest and the transaction poses an unacceptable risk to national security or the security and safety of American citizens.

Under the executive order, the Secretary of Energy is authorized to do the following:

- Establish and publish criteria for recognizing particular equipment and vendors as "pre-qualified" (pre-qualified vendor list);

- Identify any now-prohibited equipment already in use, allowing the government to develop strategies and work with asset owners to identify, isolate, monitor, and replace this equipment as appropriate;

- Work closely with the Departments of Commerce, Defense, Homeland Security, Interior; the Director of National Intelligence; and other appropriate federal agencies to carry out the authorities and responsibilities outlined in the executive order.

In addition, a task force led by Brouillette will develop energy infrastructure procurement policies to ensure national security considerations are fully integrated into government energy security and cybersecurity policymaking, DOE noted.

The task force will consult with the energy industry through the Electricity and Natural Gas Subsector Coordinating Councils to further its efforts on securing the BPS.



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ed, the Commission reasoned that, for many of its customers, the pandemic and resulting economic downturn has qualified as a catastrophe.

With the sudden shuttering of businesses and people furloughed or laid off, the five-member Commission discussed various ways of helping customers through a difficult time. Legal and audit professionals were consulted. The Commission was advised that forgiving a bill was a better way to aid its customers than a refund, which might create a legal/audit problem.

Out of a total monthly billing of \$470,000, the Glencoe commission forgave \$429,000 in energy charges. The internally-designated reserve fund totaled \$2.1 million. The utility contributes a fixed, budgeted amount to the fund annually. Both Meyer and Schrupp pointed out that while \$2.1 million is gener-

ally considered a lot of money, it can be quickly spent in the capital-intensive electric utility industry.

With the uncertainty of the length of the pandemic emergency, one of the ideas discussed was dividing the benefit between two billing cycles. Meyer acknowledged there is a lot of future economic uncertainty, but noted that answers to those questions may not be apparent for a few months.

The Commission settled on forgiving one month's energy charge, at the onset of the emergency, to give its customers a financial break the first month. That would give people a month to adjust, and make plans.

"Customers are really appreciative," Meyer said.

A utility foregoing revenue will make news, but Meyer was quick to point out unusual circumstances helped Glencoe.

Along with the catastrophe fund, the utility had recently

received deferred revenues from its municipal joint action agency—Central Minnesota Power Agency Services (CMPAS).

Normally, if the Commission finds itself in an advantageous financial position, it puts that money into infrastructure or uses it to forestall future rate increases. It was also concerned about how the forgiveness would be perceived, both by customers and others. Just like circumstances for a business or household, each utility is different, Meyer pointed out.

"The stars aligned correctly for us," he said.

Along with its supply from CMPAS, the utility buys a significant amount of locally-generated renewable power from the Spruce Ridge Landfill. Combined with various renewable resources from CMPAS, Glencoe currently supplies 34 percent renewable energy.

Glencoe is a charter city. The local commission is au-

tonomous, with its members appointed by the mayor and city council. Schrupp, the board chair, also serves as a city councilmember.

Along with monthly payments, thank-you cards have been filling the utility's bill-pay drop boxes.

This sentence from one card summed it up: "Your simple act of kindness is truly a blessing during this troubled time. Thank you."

Glencoe Light and Power was created in 1938. The utility has 2,750 electric customers.

CenturyLink fined for locating failures; ordered to improve response

CenturyLink will pay the Minnesota Office of Pipeline Safety (MNOPS) \$2.25 million for repeatedly violating a state law last year which requires utilities to expeditiously mark the location of

underground utility lines.

The consent order also requires the company to develop a damage prevention program, evaluate its quality assurance measures and provide monthly status reports

to MNOPS regarding its on-time response performance.

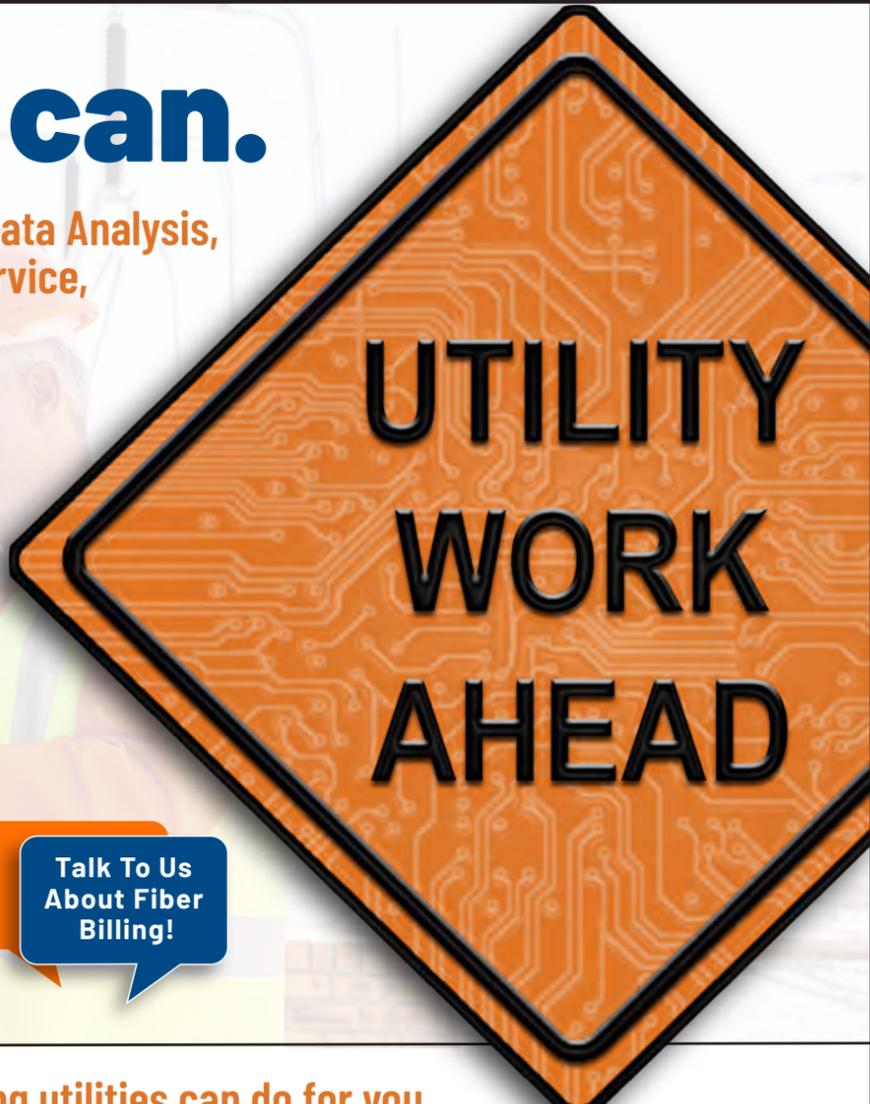
One agreement stipulation is that CenturyLink must respond to 90 percent of utility-locate requests on time over the next two years.

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leading up to the meeting. Lasting impacts were difficult to predict, said the company.

Otter Tail Power reported its largest customer was a petroleum pipeline pumping station. That customer had been hard hit. (Federal Energy Information Administration petroleum Weekly Status Report for the week ended April 24 noted "Total products supplied over the last four-week period . . . down by 28.0% from the same period last year. Over the past four weeks, motor gasoline product supplied . . . down by 43.7% from the same period last year.")

Otter Tail reported commercial/industrial use was

down generally, although one bright spot was increased use at a cheese processing plant.

Xcel reported load down 4-5 percent the first couple weeks of the stay-at-home order, then 11 percent in the afternoon and 16 percent down in the morning, in mid-April. That reduction had stabilized and appeared to have "hit the bottom," said a company representative.

Xcel reported over 2 gigawatts of generation outages delayed, due to parts delays from China or social distancing requirements. Lack of virus testing supplies was an issue.

In response to a question on the ability to provide 'mutual aid' during the pandemic from Commissioner Matt Schuerger, who chaired the meeting, GRE noted that



Electric demand has dropped in varying amounts for various utilities, but the fuel mix has remained fairly constant, according to MISO. Pictured here is the Sherco generating station in Becker. The plume is from Unit No. 2.

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the Electricity Subsector Coordinating Council (ESCC) resource guide and recent experience with storms in Tennessee showed mutual aid worked well under new guidelines. (The ESCC guidance is linked at the MMUA Covid-19 library, behind the login on our website.)

Planned transmission and generation outages are either being re-scheduled or delayed. Many generation outages have been shifted to the

fall.

MISO non-control room personnel are working from home until July 1. That policy is under review, with a phased return-to-office option studied. No travel is allowed. Access to facilities is restricted. Operations personnel are separated into teams. Temperatures are checked at start of shift. Cleaning has been stepped up. Full isolation was deemed unnecessary.

Among other topics cov-

ered were: actions taken by Minnesota utilities to assure reliable electric service; challenges have Minnesota utilities encountered or anticipate that they may encounter (during the pandemic); observations with respect to changes in peak demand, energy consumption and load profile; experiences that could help or improve the management of the risk associated with the pandemic.

Federal, state governments react to pandemic threat

President Trump on April 24 signed into law a \$484 billion coronavirus response bill, passed by the House of Representatives on April 23.

The legislation provides additional funding for business loans and grants, and \$100 billion in funding for hospitals and COVID-19 testing. As part of the latter, the bill would provide \$11 billion for states, localities, territories, and tribes to develop, purchase, administer, process, and analyze COVID-19 tests, scale-up laboratory capacity, trace contacts, and support employer testing.

Pres. Trump has said he will work with Congress to draft another bill including direct aid to states and infrastructure investment incentives.

In late March, Pres. Trump signed into law the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The measure will provide \$2 trillion in financial assistance.

Among other things, the CARES Act provides \$900 million for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), which comes in addition to the \$3.74 billion

already appropriated for the account for fiscal year 2020.

As Congress moves to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, additional funding for LIHEAP has been a key priority for the American Public Power Association.

Minnesota actions

Minnesota's budget forecast went from a projected \$1.5 billion surplus to a \$2.43 billion deficit, it was announced May 5. The state

Threat: see facing page please

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Pandemic response leads to closures; some municipal electric loads plummet

Local coronavirus cases became national news when food processing plants closed in the Midwest, including in several MMUA-member cities.

Those closures mirrored others across the nation, imperiling the nation's food supply.

That development led Pres. Donald Trump April 28 to invoke the Defense Production Act, which deemed the meat processing plants essential infrastructure which must remain open. The federal government was to provide per-

sonal protective equipment and guidance.

The development which drew the most attention was the closing of the JBS USA plant in Worthington. The company announced the temporary closing April 20. The plant employs more than 2,000 people and typically slaughters 20,000 hogs per day.

That same day, the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) announced that Nobles County had 76 coronavirus cases. MDH investigators interviewed confirmed pa-

tients in Nobles County and said 33 JBS employees and six family members of employees had tested positive, as of April 18. The plant partially reopened May 6.

JBS comprised 39 percent of Worthington Public Utilities total retail kilowatt-hour sales, said General Manager Scott Hain. The drop in electric sales would also affect the utility's supplemental wholesale electric supplier, Missouri River Energy Services.

Financial hardship imposed on employees and business suppliers were also ex-

pected to affect the utility.

"It impacts a lot of folks," Hain said.

The decision to close the Worthington plant came less than two weeks after Smithfield Foods shut down its meat production plant in Sioux Falls, S.D. Widespread plant closures also led to a collapse of hog prices, an impending disaster for area farmers.

Jennie-O closed its Willmar turkey processing plants on Friday, April 24, after 14 employees tested positive for COVID-19. A limited number of employees remained to clean and disinfect the plants.

According to the company website, the Jennie-O Turkey Store operation includes 12 lay farms, three hatcheries, more than 100 commercial growing farms, eight feed

mills and seven processing plants in Minnesota and Wisconsin, which employ more than 7,000 people. Two processing plants are located in Willmar, with another in Melrose.

According to news reports, Jennie-O is Kandiyohi County's largest employer with 1,650 employees.

Comfrey Farm Prime Pork Windom reportedly employs 660 people, and closed for two days after discovery of a coronavirus case. After two days of sanitizing and review of work procedures the plant reopened.

Meanwhile, White House economic advisors warned of Great Depression-level unemployment this summer, with a jobless rate that could spike to 20 percent by June.

Threat:

continued from facing page

does have a \$2.4 billion 'rainy day' fund.

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz April 23 issued Executive Order 20-40, which provides "a limited first step in the process of returning to work," beginning with workers at non-Critical Sector industrial, manufacturing and office-based businesses that are "non-customer facing."

There were 2.6 million Minnesotans working, as of April 23, said the Department of

Employment and Economic Development. Executive Order 20-40 was expected to allow around 20,000 businesses and roughly 80,000 to 100,000 workers to go back to work beginning on Monday, April 27.

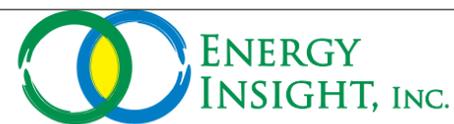
Before reopening, businesses were required to develop plans to monitor and protect their employees' health, including sanitation and cleaning procedures.

During a news conference announcing the plan, however, Gov. Walz announced Minnesota schools will re-

main closed through the end of the academic year.

Previously, on April 8, Gov. Walz extended the stay-at-home order until May 4, with some few exceptions.

The state Health Department reported May 4 that deaths tied to COVID-19 rose to 428, as current hospitalizations (396) and intensive care cases (166) also hit new highs. Confirmed cases jumped as the state's program to test for the disease accelerated, with 7,234 Minnesotans tested positive since the pandemic began.



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Good for all of us: Municipal benefits flow from close community relationships

The following is the first place essay in the 2020 MMUA Tom Bovitz Memorial Scholarship Award contest.
by **Cady E. Rancourt**

Like nearly everyone else, the very first thing that I do in the morning is check my phone.

It's been charging all night and is ready for another day of incessant use. Then, I turn on my bedroom light. I'll head into the kitchen and open the fridge as my dad turns on the TV in the living room. My way of life is governed by every flip of a lightswitch, by every plug put into an outlet—the power, whether being delivered to my house or not, decides what I do and when I do it. Beyoncé may claim that girls run the world, but I maintain the notion that the men and women employed in public power hold true sovereignty. My local municipal utilities, Hibbing Public Utilities (HPU), certainly runs my world; this concept is often forgotten and goes unappreciated by many until

Municipal utilities like HPU are incredibly crucial to the lovely machination of our communities—they provide the everyday power that turns the metaphorical gears of a town: schools, stores, restaurants, and homes.

the power ceases via rogue squirrel or robust storm. Municipal utilities like HPU are incredibly crucial to the lovely machination of our communities—they provide the everyday power that turns the metaphorical gears of a town: schools, stores, restaurants, and homes.

Behind the scenes, however, municipal utilities do much more and offer several other benefits to customers that often go unrecognized.

Firstly, municipal utilities—in comparison to larger, investor-owned, profit-driven

power providers—keep operations local. They're frequently headed by commissions appointed by city councils; this allows citizens of a particular area to have some say in who's in charge of providing such essential services to them and their neighbors. Municipal utilities are then consequently run by people who best know how to suit the individual needs of their community while still being held subject to all of Minnesota's regulatory laws. Minnesota Municipal Utilities Association (MMUA) says it best: "No other utility invites as much public input or operates in such an open, democratic manner."

The aforementioned closeness between municipal utilities and their respective towns is particularly evident between HPU and Hibbing proper. This internalized, focused nature of municipal utilities fosters customized care to communities that might otherwise be overlooked by other utility organizations. For example, in 1991 HPU donated \$200,000

towards the renovation of the Hibbing Memorial Building, a building incredibly rooted in Hibbing's past, present, and future. Annually, countless community events take place there. The Memorial building offers a place for our hockey games, curling bonspiels, weddings, graduation parties, fundraisers, and much more. By contributing to the betterment of the Memorial Building, HPU was preserving the livelihood and long-held traditions of the Iron Range. Had Hibbing been a customer of a larger utility provider, the Memorial Building might not even be standing today.

Another advantage of the localization of municipal utilities lies in problem resolution. In the case a problem arises for a customer, response time and restoration come faster and with more efficacy. Utility workers are better able to understand the intricacies and unique circumstances of their city, and are thus equipped with the ability to produce the necessary solutions within a short-

er time frame as compared to a utilities organization that operates over several cities. HPU has demonstrated this time and time again through individual customer issues and city-wide outages; they are always quick in informing their customers on situations by way of social media platforms and the easily accessible HPU website. Among other things, municipal utilities also tend to keep costs lower for customers, offer free or discounted assistance to other city departments, and lend funds, materials, and equipment to local projects.

Whether customers realize it or not, everyone reaps the benefits of their local municipal utilities. Their operations have an impact on nearly every facet of daily life.

Power truly is the blood that runs through a city's streets, keeping it alive and keeping us all connected to each other and to the outside world. Without it, we would be lost. As such, education regarding the services that municipal utilities provide is absolutely necessary for the long-term success of these organizations. Citizens must strive to protect, advocate for, and acknowledge their local utility provider and the earnest efforts of its employees.

Scholarship:

continued from front page

The contest was created as a public relations tool to increase the awareness of public power and create goodwill in the community for the local municipally-owned utility. Essay theme was "Municipal Utilities: Good for All of Us."

The essays were initially submitted to the governing body of the local utility. Winners of the local contests were then entered in the statewide contest. Judges included five MMUA member utility representatives and one MMUA staff member. Judges ranked their top four essays, point values were assigned and winners selected.

The award is named in honor of the late Tom Bovitz, a firm believer in the value of education, who was a former general manager of Hibbing Public Utilities and MMUA president. MMUA, headquartered in Plymouth, represents the interests of the state's 124 municipally-owned electric and 33 municipally-owned gas utilities.

MMUA thanks all its members who forwarded contest materials to their local schools and all contest entrants.

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The 299-foot chimney on Silver Lake Plant's Unit 4, operated by **Rochester Public Utilities (RPU)**, will be demolished early this summer. The Rochester landmark was built in 1968 and was in use until it was shut down on September 24, 2013. The chimney was sound for decades as hot flue gas kept the chimney warm and prevented the penetration of moisture into its cracks and crevices. As the unit was cycled on and off more often at the end of its life, rain, snow, and ice ate away at its integrity, accelerating the rate of deterioration.

Although it is in no immediate danger of collapsing, the attached structures (ladder, shelter, lighting platforms) could eventually produce a safety hazard.

Meanwhile, when fire engulfed a garage and threatened other buildings in northeast Rochester late on April 19, among those quickly responding was a crew from RPU. The utility cut power in the immediate area, allowing fire crews to safely extinguish the fire.

The **City of Virginia**, according to the *Mesabi Daily News*, expected to furlough 28 percent of its employees due to budget shortfalls caused by pandemic issues. The city was projecting a budget shortfall of approximately \$950,000. Twenty-eight of 100 employees would be impacted, mostly in the library and parks departments.

Like city offices throughout Minnesota, **New Ulm** municipal facilities were closed throughout April until at least May 4. This included city hall, public library, street department, recreation center, civic center and community center.

The **Lakefield City Council** May 4 passed a resolution declaring the city a "constitutional and business-friendly community." The city pledged to not direct any city resources to enforcing stay-at-home orders or restaurant and bar closures. The vote was 3-2.

The **Alexandria City Council** awarded bids approximating \$208,000 for materials to replace a section of ALP Utilities electric lines. In a separate action, the council also approved a \$580,000 construction bid. The project is part of an ongoing effort to place the municipal electric lines underground. Total project cost was estimated at \$1.8

Around the State



million, which was included in the ALP Utilities Board budget.

With much business and industry closed, a hopeful note came from **Lake City** in April, as the city-owned marina replaced a 300-foot dock destroyed by last fall's tornado, and boats began entering the water by late in the month.

The marina is the largest between St. Paul and St. Louis and accommodates 635 boats.

The UPM Blandin paper mill in **Grand Rapids** announced April 20 that it would close temporarily due to economic consequences of the coronavirus. The closure affected 240 employees.

The **Grand Rapids Economic Development Authority** in April approved eight loans for area businesses affected by shutdowns related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The \$15,000 loans are interest free and are payable over five years. More loans were expected.

On March 25—the day that Governor Tim Walz issued his "stay home" order—most lodging establishments in the state closed their doors—and the **Grand Marais Public Utilities Commission** saw a 10 percent decrease in electric sales.

Grand Marais is among the Minnesota cities that

operate campgrounds. Like others around the state, the opening date at the campground has been left purposefully vague, as the city awaits more news from the governor regarding campgrounds.

A fire broke out at a downtown **Grand Marais** restaurant early afternoon April 13. Grand Marias Public Utilities Commission was dispatched to cut power to area, and the city also deployed a backhoe to help firefighters. Three area fire departments responded to a call for mutual aid. Three buildings were destroyed. No one was hurt. The cause was unknown but under investigation.

The City of Grand Marais asked customers to reduce water use in an effort to maintain adequate supply.

Cook County, population: 5,400, in mid-April was one of just a handful of Minnesota counties without any confirmed coronavirus cases. But Cook was hit hard by in another way: jobs. The tourism-dependent county, since mid-March, has seen unemployment applications roughly equivalent to 29 percent of the size of its 2019 workforce, according to data from the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development—a higher share than any other county in the state.

Three mines—**Hibbing Taconite, Keewatin Taconite and Northshore Mining** laid off workers and planned to idle into the summer, as the demand for steel

tumbled during the coronavirus pandemic. The three mines provide approximately 1,500 jobs.

As of April 22, the *Star Tribune* reported that four Minnesota ethanol plants are idled and many more have throttled back production as pandemic response sapped gasoline demand. U.S. ethanol production has hit an all-time low. Nearly 30 percent of the nation's 204 biofuel plants have been idled since March 1, while many have slashed production.

Corn Plus in Winnebago, Guardian Energy Management in Janesville; and Chippewa Valley, Benson shifted to making hand sanitizer. Ethanol makers consumed 36 percent of Minnesota's corn crop in 2019, according to the Minnesota Bio-Fuels Association.

The **Fairmont City Council** April 13 selected five finalists to invite for in-person interviews for the city administrator position. Interviews would be held in May.

The post has been open since Nov. 15. Mark Sievert, former city administrator in St. James and Lake City, has been serving as interim administrator. He is scheduled to leave Fairmont May 28.

Following pandemic response protocols, the meeting was held in a "video chat" with the city's executive search firm.

Thea Boesch is the new **Truman** city clerk. Boesch is a native of the area with a

business and banking background.

Merton Auger, a former MMUA board member, has retired after 43 years with the **City of Buffalo**.

Lauren Bodin has replaced Auger as city administrator.

Mark Lorenz stepped down from the **Breckenridge Public Utilities Commission** in March, after 27 years of service. He has been replaced on the board by Nate Summerville. Summerville is an electrical contractor and the city's fire chief.

Approximately a foot of snow fell in northwest Minnesota on April 11, which renewed flooding concerns. The Sorlie Bridge over the Red River between Grand Forks, N.D. and **East Grand Forks** was closed temporarily on April 2.

The Red River at East Grand Forks April 13 was at major flood stage. Waters began to recede later that week.

Broadband issues continue to plague rural parts of northeastern Minnesota, especially with increased demand on the system with stay-at-home orders and school closures.

Internet service went down at least three times in **Ely**, including for a 12-hour stint on Sunday, March 29. Outages impacting schools and work were also reported in the city of Aurora and Biwabik Township.



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State regulators accept Minnkota/NMPA integrated resource plan filing

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MPUC) on Feb. 27 accepted the Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) of Minnkota Power Cooperative, Inc. (Minnkota) which provides wholesale electric service to 11 retail distribution cooperatives and is also associated with the Northern Municipal Power Agency (NMPA), a municipal power agency serving 12 municipals, including 10 in Minnesota.

The primary function of an IRP is to demonstrate how a utility plans to meet the electrical needs of its end-use consumers over the next 15

years. Minnkota and NMPA together submitted the IRP to fulfill regulatory requirements of the MPUC and the federal Western Area Power Administration (WAPA).

Minnkota and NMPA form a Joint System, through operating agreements and joint ownership of transmission facilities. Additionally, Minnkota's generation, NMPA's generation, Minnkota's WAPA allocation, and the NMPA WAPA allocations collectively serve the Joint System capacity and energy requirements, consistent with applicable tax law relative to NMPA's tax-

exempt financing.

The Minnkota-NMPA Joint System energy requirements are forecasted to increase 1.0 percent per year. Minnkota is a market participant in the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO) energy market but purchases little from the market. Minnkota anticipates no need for additional generation additions in the 2019-2033 time-frame.

NMPA owns a 30 percent share of the Coyote generating plant, a 427-megawatt (MW) facility located near Beulah, N.D. NMPA also owns an undivided interest in Minnkota's transmission system based on a ratio of NMPA's load to the Joint System load.

The Joint System purchases from renewable energy resources are significantly greater than its requirements. The Joint System has met the Minnesota energy efficiency and conservation requirements and is anticipated to continue to meet the requirements in the future.

The Joint System has developed an effective demand

response program. Minnkota controls 400 MW of interruptible winter load in 2020; 100 MW summer.

The Joint System has diverse energy resources. Existing resources consist of base-load, diesel and hydro. The Young 1, Young 2, and Coyote generating units are all base-load generation. Minnkota also has power purchase agreements for wind-derived energy.

Minnkota's transmission facilities are directly interconnected with seven area utilities: Manitoba Hydro, Montana-Dakota Utilities Company, Minnesota Power, Otter Tail Power Company, Xcel Energy, Great River Energy, and WAPA.

Minnkota's extensive transmission system and large number of interconnections with other utilities enhances reliability and permits the sale or purchase of energy with neighboring companies.

The Minnkota system is winter peaking.

The Minnkota member systems' service areas, which encompass 34,500 square miles,

are located in northwestern Minnesota and the eastern third of North Dakota and serve approximately 137,000 customers. The 12 municipal utilities serve the electrical requirements of approximately 15,300 customers. (For comparison, Minnesota Power serves 146,741 retail customers; Otter Tail 131,170 across three states and Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency 118,000.)

Purchases

- Minnkota has a Firm Power Allocation from WAPA. This allocation provides firm capacity and energy to the Joint System of 72.632 MW and 358,303 MWh per year.

- Eight of the 12 NMPA municipals have a WAPA Firm Power Allocation. These allocations provide firm capacity and energy to the Joint System of 40.6 winter / 36.2 summer and 174,311 MWh per year.

- Minnkota purchases the electrical output from the Fargo, ND, landfill gas facility, which has a capacity of 0.925 MW.

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Minnkota's 'Project Tundra' studies carbon capture

Minnkota Power Cooperative is engineering Project Tundra, a proposed carbon capture system at the Milton R. Young Station near Center, N.D.

Minnkota last fall received \$9.8 million from the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), which then provided access to \$15 million from the state of North Dakota's Lignite Research Fund.

The grant is assisting Minnkota in completing advanced research and engineering design on the project—one of the final steps before deciding whether to move forward and begin construction.

The vision for Project Tundra is to equip Unit 2 at the coal-based Milton R. Young

Station with technologies that will capture more than 90 percent of the CO2 emissions. The CO2 would then be permanently stored in a deep geologic formation more than a mile underground.

In addition to research on the CO2 capture system, Minnkota is also conducting significant research on deep geologic storage of CO2 near the Young Station. A geophysical survey has gathered information about rock layers in the deep subsurface. Minnkota engaged with landowners, local leaders and received state permits prior to beginning this research.

Project Tundra is estimated to cost approximately \$1 billion. The project is current-

ly seeking financial partners to help utilize existing 45Q federal tax credits, which are currently \$50 per ton of CO2 that is captured and stored in a geologic formation deep underground.

Project Tundra is pursuing financing opportunities and preparing to begin the permitting work. The process of capturing, injecting and storing CO2 underground is being carefully studied and will need to be approved in a rigorous regulatory process overseen by the state of North Dakota and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. A project timeline calls for construction to commence in 2022-2023.

Minnesota municipals join ranks of reliability leaders

The American Public Power Association recently honored more than one hundred public power utilities with a "certificate of excellence" for reliable performance in 2019, as shown by comparing their outage records against nationwide data gathered by the Energy Information Administration (EIA).

The utilities that were recognized by the Association have been keeping track of their reliability data via the Association's web-based subscription service, called eReliability Tracker, which lets utilities collect, categorize

and summarize their outage information.

At the end of the year, the Association benchmarks their data against national statistics from EIA, which is a branch of the Department of Energy.

Utilities that placed in the top quartile of reliability nationwide, as measured against the EIA's data on System Average Interruption Duration Index (SAIDI) received the certificate of excellence. The EIA information comes from the agency's annual surveys of electric power utilities via EIA Form 861.

Minnesota utilities that earned recognition include:

- ALP Utilities (Alexandria)
- Austin Utilities
- Chaska Public Utilities
- City of Benson Light & Water Dept.
- City of Luverne
- City of Ortonville
- Detroit Lakes Public Utilities
- Elk River Municipal Utilities
- Fairmont Public Utilities Commission
- Hutchinson Utilities Commission
- Jackson Municipal Utilities
- New Ulm Public Utilities

Reliability: see facing page

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Thief River Falls moves forward; repairs hydroelectric turbine

The Thief River Falls municipal power plant, located adjacent to a Red Lake River, contains hydroelectric turbines that have been benefiting the city since their original installation in 1927. The plant also contains four internal combustion units.

Hydro turbine No. 2 last year suffered a catastrophic failure. The process is underway to repair the turbine and return it to service. It may cost up to \$2 million to repair turbine No. 2, depending on the final bids. Insurance is expected to cover most of the cost.

Turbine No. 1 continues to run and generate electricity.

Each turbine has been serviced and re-wound over the years. They offset wholesale electric purchases, often saving a minimum of \$180,000 to \$250,000 annually. The turbines produce electricity around the clock, as long as there are good head waters coming into the dam.

Initial plant repair work had begun but was halted with the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. Early estimates for project completion

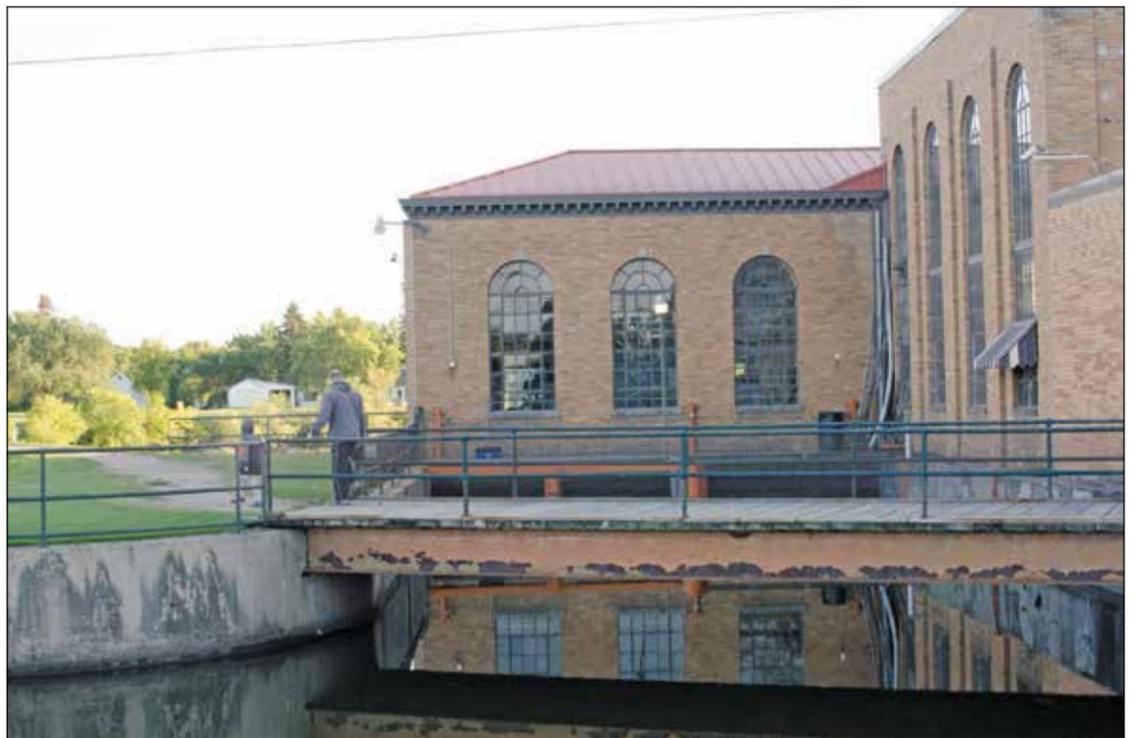
date of late this year now appear overly optimistic.

The project will involve updated relays and breakers going into the main electrical panel.

The dam was built in 1892 and was originally the site for a crush mill. In 1892, the city commissioned General Electric to design a hydroelectric plant to power their “white way” lights, some of which still exist at the local Pioneer Village. The hydroelectric plant was built in 1905.

The power plant also contains four reciprocating internal combustion engines. While generation has been updated over the years, the plant does contain two diesel engines purchased from decommissioned submarines after World War II.

The plant regularly churning out a good amount of hydropower on a daily basis. The engines were most recently pressed into service in earnest during the ice storm of 1997, when transmission feeds to the city were interrupted. The local generating capacity remains a valuable asset.



For generations, adults and children have walked past the Thief River Falls Municipal Utilities power plant to fish below the dam on the Red Lake River.

Reliability:

continued from facing page

- Olivia Municipal Utilities
- Owatonna Public Utilities
- Shakopee Public Utilities Commission
- Wadena Light & Water Dept.
- Willmar Municipal Utilities.

A closer look at one utility reveals just how reliable these utilities are. Like many

municipal utilities, ALP conducts annual reviews of its system to identify areas that may need improvement and performs ongoing maintenance to prevent service interruptions. According to the numbers for 2019, ALP’s average outage time was only 28.62 minutes, compared to the industry average of 143 minutes. This means that measured out over approxi-

mately 10,000 electric meters, a customer’s total outage time was 114 minutes shorter than the national average.

If your municipal utility meets the standards for recognition but tracked reliability using a different method, please contact Steve Downer at MMUA for inclusion in the reliability honor roll.

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Nomination window opens for MMUA board of directors, full slate of awards

MMUA's Nominations and Awards Committee is accepting nominations for MMUA awards. The deadline to submit a nomination is June 19. This is a great way to recognize 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 con-

sidered by MMUA's Nominations 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 effi-

ciency 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.

- 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 Mem-

bership 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.

Nominations sought for five board seats

Serving on MMUA's Board of Directors is an honor, as well as a great opportunity for professional growth. Five positions on the MMUA Board will be up for election at this year's Summer Conference. Vernell Roberts of Detroit Lakes, John Crooks of Shakopee and Chris Olson of Alexandria will have completed their second three-year term in August and will be leaving the board.

Mark Nibaur of Austin and Carol Laumer of Willmar will have completed their first

three-year term and are up for re-election this year.

Please return completed nomination forms, by June 19 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 Executive Director 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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Elk River's Adams, MMUA leader, heads to Wisconsin

Troy Adams, Elk River Municipal Utilities (ERMU) general manager, has accepted the position of general manager with the Manitowoc Public Utilities (MPU), in Manitowoc, Wisc.

Adams is chair of the MMUA government relations committee and served as MMUA president in 2015-16.

MPU general manager Nilash Kothari reached out to Adams personally. Adams eventually agreed to visit the utility, which is located on the Manitowoc River and Lake Michigan, 45 minutes south of Green Bay. The opportunity at MPU proved to be too good to pass up. With the support of his family, Adams accepted the offer.

The MPU general manager also acts as manager of Great Lakes Utility, a municipal power agency that includes Manitowoc and 10 other municipal utilities in Wisconsin and Michigan.

Adams, a Wisconsin native, has been ERMU general manager since 2009. He started at ERMU 2006 as Engineering Manager.

In ERMU he leaves a reliable, robust, and fiscally sound utility. ERMU reduced electric rates 5 percent in 2019 and held that rate steady for 2020. ERMU has 12,244 electric meters.

Adams "met challenges head-on to the point where ERMU is now looked at as one of the top municipals in the state," Elk River Mayor John Dietz said in a statement to the Elk River *Star News*.

Dietz, who doubles as the ERMU chair, lauded Adams' team approach to manage-

ment and concluded, "All ERMU customers and Elk River citizens owe Troy a debt of gratitude for everything he has done to make this a better place . . . I wish Troy all the best in the future and thank him for his tremendous effort on our behalf."

MPU is a municipally-owned electric and water utility serving approximately 17,800 accounts. It is Wisconsin's largest municipal electric utility.

Adams last summer received the MMUA President's Award, the association's highest individual achievement award. Previously, he had also received the MMUA Distinguished Service Award.

Adams completed Public Power Manager Certification through APPA and was elected to the APPA board in 2019.

He was instrumental in developing the curriculum for the MMUA Leadership Academy, and is formerly chair of the Midwest Municipal Transmission Group.

Adams has also been a frequent presenter in legislative meetings and at numerous MMUA and APPA conferences.

MMUA thanks Adams for his contributions to the advancement of Public Power in Minnesota, and wishes him the best as he continues his career in Wisconsin.

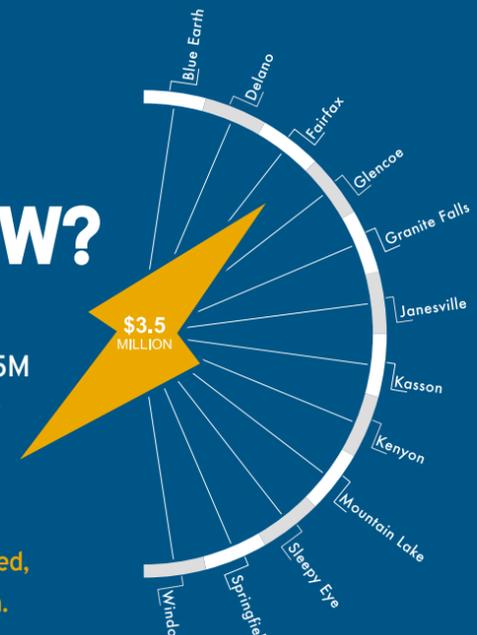


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MMUA mourns the loss of Shane St. Clair, trainer and regional safety coordinator, 55

Shane Shannon St. Clair, 55, MMUA regional safety coordinator/job training and safety instructor, died in a motorcycle accident the afternoon of April 18 near Viborg, South Dakota.

St. Clair, 55, of Sioux Falls, joined MMUA in June 2015.

St. Clair was born April 7, 1965 to Charles and Annette St. Clair (Fodness) in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. His family moved to Chester, South Dakota in his early childhood. He graduated from Chester High School in 1983 where he had lifelong friendships and fond memories of football, wrestling, and antics from his youth.

Shane was married to JoLynn McClain from 1986 to 1999. They had two boys, Jordan and Andrew



Shane St. Clair

St. Clair. Shane graduated from Mitchell Technical Institute Lineman College in 1988.

From 1989-2015 he worked for Otter Tail Power as a Lineman and Service Representative. In 2015, he

was hired by MMUA where he worked as a Regional Safety Coordinator and JT&S Instructor. He continued serving many communities in South Dakota, Minnesota, North Dakota, and Wisconsin. He loved being a lineman and his continued work with linemen.

In 1985, Shane joined the South Dakota Air National Guard where he served in the 114th Fighter Wing, Civil Engineer Squadron.

Using his professional lineman training he worked on many assignments in-country and around the world setting up hospitals, base camps, and stabilizing infrastructure. He was also deployed to Afghanistan in 2001 as part of Operation

Enduring Freedom, and to Iraq in 2003 as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom. He was honorably discharged in 2006 as a First Sergeant.

Shane's military experience formed his approach of service, support, community, and crisis response. He made special connections that helped shape his view on life and deepen his love of God and country. Shane was a patriot and proud to have served his country in the Air National Guard.

Those blessed to remember Shane's life include his mother and sister, sons Jordan St. Clair (Steffanie) of Luverne and Andrew of Lennox, S.D., as well as three grandsons, a stepson

and niece. He also leaves behind uncles and aunts, along with numerous other family members and dear friends.

Shane was a trusted co-worker and friend. He will be missed by his co-workers and the people and organizations he served as an MMUA employee.

A Celebration of Life will be scheduled at a later date when family and friends may safely gather to remember Shane. Details regarding the service date and time will be updated as they become available.

Tributary donations to the VFW may be made in honor of Shane St. Clair at vfw.org/foundation/foundation-donate.



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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

Minnesota municipals recognized with national safety awards

One hundred twenty-five utilities have earned the American Public Power Association's Safety Award of Excellence for safe operating practices in 2019.

More than 335 utilities entered the annual safety awards program.

Entrants were placed in categories according to their number of worker-hours and ranked based on the most incident-free records during 2019.

The 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 2019, as defined by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

The safety awards have been held annually for the last 60 years.

Minnesota winners include:

- Detroit Lakes Public Utilities
- Hutchinson Utilities Commission
- New Prague Utilities Commission

- Sleepy Eye Public Utilities
- Willmar Municipal Utilities
- Worthington Public Utilities

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The Energy Information Administration reported in April that coal-fired generation in February was down to its lowest level since 2011, and down over 40 percent from a five-year average.

A ruling in a Keystone Pipeline case from the United States District Court, District of Montana has utilities concerned.

The court ruled that a 'blanket' permit for water crossings was illegal because, when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers re-authorized the permit in 2017, it did not adequately consider potential harm to imperiled wildlife species. Among the concerns: that construction could stir up sediment and bury the food source of the endangered pallid sturgeon.

Following the ruling, the Corps of Engineers, which has broad jurisdiction over U.S. waterways, has suspended issuing blanket permits. The action reportedly puts on hold about 360 pending notifications to entities approved to use the permit, a Corps spokesperson was quoted as saying.

The effects could be widespread, according to various industry sources cited by the Associated Press. Among those expressing concern: developers of power lines from wind turbines and generating stations in many parts of the U.S.

Since the blanket Nationwide Permit 12 was renewed in March 2017, it has been used more than 37,000 times, said a Corps of Engineers spokesperson. Projects that cause the loss of no more than a half-acre of water or wetlands are eligible for the permit.

If Great River Energy (GRE) closes its Coal Creek Station power plant in North Dakota, it might install 800 megawatts of wind energy in the area, according to a recent article in the *Bismarck Tribune*. The subject came up in a recent letter from GRE to McLean County commissioners, who were considering changes to a local zoning code.

Frontier Communications has filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy. Minnesota's second-largest landline phone-service provider reported losses in each of the last five years, including \$5.9 billion

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last year. The company has approximately 100,000 Minnesota customers, mostly in northeastern and southern parts of the state.

A 400-mile fiber network built to provide broadband internet access to 14 mountain communities across northwest Colorado recently went online.

The Northwest Colorado Council of Governments has spearheaded the work, dubbed Project Thor. The loop starts in Denver and runs west, using Colorado Department of Transportation fiber along Interstate 70.

The network is owned by the council and operated by Wyoming-based Mammoth Networks. The project's partners include three counties, four towns, the Yampa Valley Electric Association, Northwest Colorado Broadband, a nonprofit in Steamboat Springs, and Middle Park Health.

Xcel Energy announced April 6 it will sell the Mankato Energy Center, a natural gas-fired power plant, to Denver-based Southwest Generation for \$680 million.

Xcel Energy purchased the plant in early 2020 through a non-regulated affiliate company. The proceeds from the sale will primarily be used to reduce Xcel Energy's overall financing needs and improve the company's credit metrics, said the company, with the net gain from the sale to fund its corporate giving and COVID-19 relief efforts. Xcel Energy will continue buying power from the facility.

Southwest Generation is a Denver-based independent power producer that owns and operates approximately 1.7 gigawatts of generation capacity across the western United States.

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency announced April 3 it will delay publishing official notice of its intent to adopt California vehicle emission standards, which it calls "Clean Cars Minnesota."

The delay was blamed on the outbreak of a coronavirus and 'stay-at-home' orders.

In a related development, the U.S. Department of Environmental Protection had previously announced it would remove the Obama-era federal mandate for car manufacturers to improve fuel efficiency and emissions by 5 percent each year, with a rule requiring 1.5 percent annual improvement.

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mately 14 miles of 115KV transmission lines subject to NERC compliance. Ideal candidate has BSEE degree and two years of electric utility experience. The person hired in this position is a direct report to the General Manager and will be responsible for supervision of the distribution and generation departments along with the SCADA, electrical/system controls and associated equipment. The best candidates will have a strong understanding of power systems engineering concepts along with a general knowledge of SCADA and Distribution Modeling. Experience with complex projects in distribution design (Ex: High

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voltage switchgear, distribution automation projects) is also ideal. Candidates must be able to develop and implement necessary work activities, maintain confidentiality and communicate effectively both orally and in writing, and provide essential leadership skills and personnel management experience. Light and Power Commission offers comprehensive wage and benefits package and is an EOE. A post-job offer physical, including drug/alcohol test is required. Application forms are available at www.glencoelightandpower.com or by contacting the GLP office. Review of applications will begin May 26, 2020 and

will continue until position is filled. Submit resume along with completed application form to: Light and Power Commission, 305 11th Street E., Glencoe, MN 55336, 320-864-5184 or by email to dave@glencoelightandpower.com.

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Sleepy Eye electric utility, EDA offer pandemic relief programs

The City of Sleepy Eye is offering two programs to provide small businesses relief during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Commercial businesses in Sleepy Eye are eligible to apply for a \$2,500 emergency relief grant. In order to receive the grant, the business must be directly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, among other qualifications. Grants are awarded on a first-come,

first-serve basis.

Sleepy Eye Public Utilities Commission (PUC) has also established a utility relief program under the same guidelines as the business relief grant. The PUC Utility Relief Program is designed to help those businesses in Sleepy Eye that are closed due to the Governor's Executive Orders. This program will allow the affected business to defer utility payments, without



Sleepy Eye city hall is located on U.S. Hwy. 14. The building also provides offices for the local Economic Development Authority.

Upcoming Events

MMUA has been forced to cancel or postpone several events this year, but as of early May we were still planning to hold these events.

Generation School Rescheduled to July 14-16



Generation School offers networking plus hands-on instruction on three different engine sets: Enterprise, Cooper and Fairbanks Morse. We'll tour one of Hutchinson Utilities' generation plants and 3M's manufacturing plant in Hutchinson.

Register by June 8 for best rate. Deadline to register is June 18.

Substation School Rescheduled to August 4-6 Anoka

MMUA partners with Minnesota Rural Electric Association (MREA) on the Substation School.

In addition to classroom instruction on a variety of substation-related topics, participants will also go behind the scenes and tour two of Anoka Municipal Utilities' substations, plus we will tour Federal Cartridge.

Register by July 3 for best rate. Deadline to register is July 13.

Annual Summer Conference August 24-26 Cragun's Resort, Brainerd

Yes, we know it's early, but check your calendars. This conference has been moved back one week from its original date! Our Trade Show and Reception takes place August 25. Hotel reservations being accepted.

Underground School Rescheduled to Oct. 6-9 MMUA Training Center, Marshall

The Underground School offers a hands-on training track with a variety of training sessions and an advanced technical course. We offer this school with our partners MREA and APPA.

For up-to-date information, see the 'Events' calendar at www.mmua.org
Cancelled: Minnesota Public Power Walleye Tournament.

penalty or interest, for up to two months beyond the date they are allowed to re-open for business. The amount deferred can either be paid in full or in part after the deferral period or can be spread over the next 12 months.

Eligibility guidelines are the same for either program. They include:

- Applicant must be the business owner
- Business must be located within the city limits (for the PUC Relief Program, business must be served by Sleepy Eye Public Utilities.
- Applicant's business must be at a commercial address. Home-based businesses are not eligible.
- Businesses as described in Executive Order 20-04, and/or clarification in EO 20-08, may apply.

Any small business not specifically mentioned on application form may still apply and be considered by the EDA for possible grant award at the EDA Board discretion.

W-9 form must be provided. Funding is not transferable and other restrictions apply.

Funds for this program are limited, and applications will be processed first-come, first-served.

Non-profits are not eligible. As of April 22, Public Works Director Mike Hardin said the utility had received four applications for the utility relief program. He expected more as time went on.

EDA Director Kurk Kramer said he anticipated that

more than 30 local businesses would qualify for the business relief grant. He had received 17 applications by April 22. He anticipated several more. He said the EDA has also offered to suspend EDA loan payments temporarily. Of 19 active EDA loans, three had submitted written applications to suspend payments.

Kramer patterned the local program after the new federal Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) Loan. Entities available for this program include: A small business with fewer than 500 employees that was in business on or before Feb. 15, 2020. This can be an S Corp., C Corp., LLC, sole proprietorship or independent contractor. It also includes certain nonprofits, tribal groups and veteran groups.

The loan forgiveness provision is for the amounts spent over the next eight weeks after receiving the loan, on certain qualifying expenses. The qualifying expenses of the business over the eight-week period includes payroll costs, rent, interest on mortgage debt and utilities.

When obtaining the PPP loan, a business needs to certify that it has been economically affected or that economic uncertainty make the loan necessary. These are Small Business Loans through local banks.

In addition, Sleepy Eye Public Utilities, like utilities throughout the state, temporarily waived late fees for residential utility bills.

Apprentice Lineworker Training On-site/On-demand Four-Year Career Development Program

This MMUA course allows the municipal utility employee who wants to learn more about the lineworker's trade to receive professional training from experienced instructors, right at the utility site.

Students enjoy cutting-edge academics, extensive hands-on training, along with tuition-free attendance to four MMUA schools.



For information on this program, please call Mike Willetts at 612-802-8474.



The Sleepy Eye train depot serves as an area museum. Built in 1902, the building is on the National Register of Historic Places.