



A WHOLE NEW MEANING OF WINTER WONDERLAND

Snowstorm Blankets Area, Causing Power Outages

After hearing weather reports of an approaching snowstorm, there is anticipation for weather-related power outages. The phone rings around 1 a.m. when you are dispatched into work. The reported snowstorm has hit much of the region, and you have minutes to crawl out from under your warm covers, quickly grab the clothes you will need, leave your family behind not knowing how long you'll be out, and head out the door into the darkness. Your drive to work is okay, but your teammate wasn't so lucky when a tree fell into the roadway. With no time to react on an unplowed road, he smashes his truck into the downed tree. When you arrive to headquarters, there are already 1,500 power outages reported, and it's getting progressively worse.

This is just the beginning. You and the crews review the extent of the damage on the outage map, and the line superintendent assigns crews to designated areas to begin power restoration efforts. You head out without hesitation because you know what needs to be accomplished. You don't do it for the recognition. This is your call to duty, what you signed up for. This is the commitment and sacrifice you knew you'd have to make. This is the life of a lineman.

Early Morning December 15, 2022: The Beginning



Line Superintendent Eric Steien

"We've had summer outages that lasted several days, but this is the first time in my 33 years here that we've had an outage of this extent in the winter," says Jackson Electric Line Superintendent Eric Steien.

Just one year after the historic December 15-16, 2021, storm, Jackson Electric's lineworkers and staff were faced with a new round of outages in the early morning hours of December 15. This time it wasn't

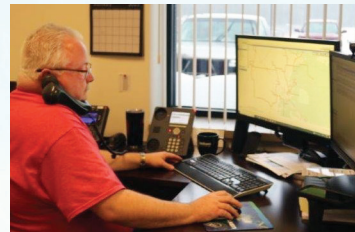
because of unseasonably warm temperatures and strong winds causing tornado-like conditions, but because of the heavy, wet snow that hit much of western Wisconsin.

It's no secret that this area is undoubtedly beautiful, from the fall when the foliage shows off its colors, to winter when the fresh snowfall glistens on the trees. Yet, Mother Nature certainly reminded us with this storm that something beautiful can also be unpredictable and wreak a lot of havoc. "Trees out of the rights-of-way were the primary cause of the 12,106 total combined outages," says Eric. "This number includes those locations that experienced repeated outages."



Looks can be deceiving. While the snow sure looks beautiful in this photo, it gave a whole new meaning to winter wonderland when it wreaked havoc on distribution equipment.

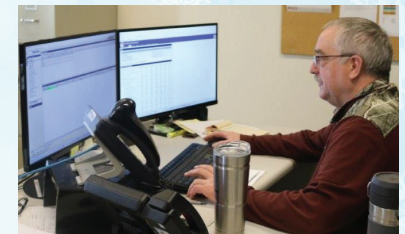
Outage Restoration Everyone at Jackson Electric has a role in power restoration efforts, which starts with dispatch coordinating the outages. "Most of the meters self-report that there's an outage, but you have to verify that they reported correctly," explains Operations Accountant (dispatch) Jerel Gunning.



Operations Accountant Jerel Gunning

"Once you do that, the goal is to assign the crews to areas that are going to restore power to as many members as possible."

Power restoration begins at the distribution substation, moves to three-phase and main feeder lines, then ends with tap lines to residences and businesses. While it may seem like "you are being saved for last," it isn't intentional. "We have to turn on the main feeders, then the primary and secondary lines; the taps are last," says former GIS/Mapping Technician Steve Bucholz, who got to work this storm just days before his retirement. "You start at the source [the substation] and work out to the end [the taps]. If the feeder isn't energized, we could work at the end of the line all day, and nothing would happen."



GIS/Mapping Technician Steve Bucholz

The second greatest challenge our crews faced in the early morning was physically getting to the lines to be restored, as some roads weren't yet plowed and fallen trees were completely blocking roadways; the first challenge was trees and limbs on the lines. The crews spent the early morning hours working on main feeders until daylight, such as a feeder out of the Merrillan Substation, which serves the Hatfield area. Correcting a problem on this line, or what turned out to be many problems (trees), could restore power to 997 people alone. Unfortunately, this was easier said than done. "The trees were so saturated from the heavy snow that they kept falling over," says Eric.



Left: The power lines were hanging low from the weight of the snow. Middle: Surprisingly, Jackson Electric wasn't challenged with many broken poles during the storm. This pole on County Road E wasn't so lucky. Line crews have already replaced this pole. Right: This tree came close to taking out this power line on County Road E.

"We'd clear trees from a line and get it restored, and another tree would fall on it later," adds Brian Schultz, line foreman.

Eric and Brian explain Jackson Electric has an aggressive rights-of-way (ROW) maintenance plan. Easements allow our tree trimming contractor to trim trees up to 15 feet on each side of the center of the power line. Vegetation maintenance, using an environmentally friendly herbicide, helps prevent regrowth. Anything beyond this 15-foot easement is considered a member's tree out of the ROW. "Some of these substations had just been trimmed," shares Brian.



Line Foreman
Brian Schultz

While trees presented many challenges to the crew, Jerel explains the greatest challenge of working in dispatch is coordinating the number of meters out and receiving information from the crews. For safety, crews call in through the radio to let dispatch know that they are going to try energizing a line because they need to ensure that everyone is clear of that line or safely away from the line. "They call and ask if it's okay. This is where the AVL (Automatic Vehicle Locating) system is helpful in knowing where everyone is," says Jerel. "They will also let me know if the fuse held. If not, there could still be a tree on the line. If it clears, I tell them where to move next."

ROPE is Implemented As the outages got progressively worse, Eric called for Restoral of Power in an Emergency (ROPE) assistance the morning of the storm. However, because the storm also affected our neighboring cooperatives, there were not any crews readily available to assist because they were responding to their own outages. "Jackson Electric received ROPE assistance as soon as crews were released from their co-ops," shares Member Relations Manager Carol Blaken, who oversaw the hospitality arrangements for these crews during their time in Jackson County.

Meanwhile, Jackson Electric's tree trimming contractor, New Age, was already working on a job in the service territory. Because trees had fallen on power lines during the storm, Eric requested assistance from New Age, pulling them from their current job to clear trees and limbs from lines, working in conjunction with the linemen. New Age's

employees have the proper training and equipment to work safely around power lines. "This made a world of difference," shares Eric. "Our linemen could then focus on restoring power instead of having to clear trees first."

The first two crews from Scenic Rivers Energy Cooperative, headquartered in Lancaster, arrived Thursday afternoon to assist. The next morning two crews from Mi-Energy Cooperative, Rushford, Minn., and one from Vernon Electric Cooperative, Westby, arrived to continue helping with restoration efforts. A crew from Adams-Columbia Electric Cooperative, based in Friendship, arrived Saturday morning. Mi-Energy also brought a tracked vehicle to assist with efforts in areas that couldn't be reached with trucks. "You only have so many resources," says Eric. "You need to have equipment, proper training, and the line workers must have rest time. We worked 16-to-17-hour days."

Since ROPE crews aren't familiar with the service territory, they were paired with a leader from Jackson's crew and provided with iPads with a carry map to familiarize themselves with the system. "The map is helpful, but a big part of what helped us is our crew's physical knowledge of the system," says Jerel. "We were able to send the tracked vehicles where they were needed in rights-of-ways non-accessible from the road."

Restoring power isn't just a simple fix, especially when a line isn't anywhere near accessible from the road, requiring crew members to walk through deep snow and then climb snow-covered poles. In one instance, a lineman was wading through water and ducking under logs to reclaim a line that was torn down. "We couldn't go off-road with the bucket trucks. We physically walked through snow and climbed," says Brian. "It takes longer to climb than it does to set a bucket truck to reach the top of the pole."

Adding additional crews through ROPE essentially doubled Jackson Electric's crew, providing the necessary resources to restore power more quickly. For example, in some of the snowy offroad rights-of-ways, there were lines down. "Instead of one lineman having to climb up and down three different poles, we were able to have three guys climb at the same time to bring a line back up," says Eric.

When the crews weren't physically climbing poles, they were walking out the lines to locate the issues to be addressed. This process is also called birdwatching, where someone drives, and in some cases walks, ahead of the crews, letting

them know of areas along that line with possible issues, such as limbs on the line or a line completely torn down. In some cases, this can take some time as our feeder line from the Shamrock Substation to Millston is 25 miles long. “This helps save time because the crews have a better idea of what to expect and where the problem is,” says Eric.

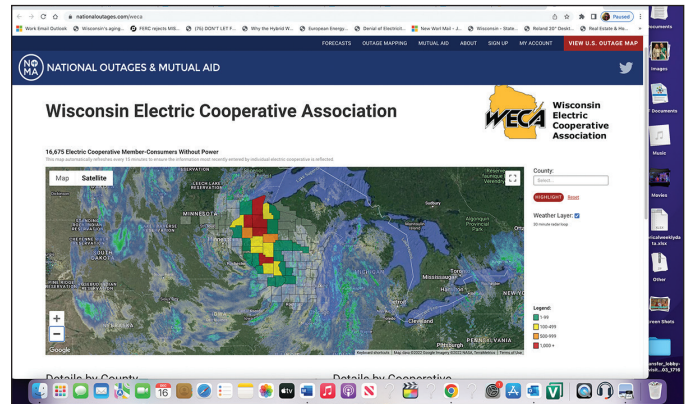
“In some cases, there were lines with every breaker or fuse off,” adds Brian.

Member Communications When there is an outage of an extensive nature, it’s an all-hands-on-deck effort to restore service, perform daily business functions, and keep members informed. This is where the Member Relations Department steps in. The first day of the outage, the office opened to conduct business as usual, and the phones began ringing at 7:30 a.m. For the next 2 ½ hours, the front office staff, which included Deanna Oliver and Brandi Shramek, fielded countless calls that were coming in, some of which were callers reporting their outage for a second time. “When callers report their outage, we enter any extra information they report, such as tree limbs or full trees on a line, or hearing a loud noise,” says Brandi. “If the call was related to downed, low hanging lines, or an emergency, these concerns were immediately given to dispatch.”

With an outage of this extent, it’s nearly impossible to predict how long you will be out of power and be accurate, and it’s also impossible for our limited number of office staff to field every outage call. When the volume of calls became more than what two office staff could reasonably handle, the calls were transferred to Jackson’s outage reporting center, Cooperative Resource Center (CRC). CRC has offices located in Austin, Minn., Dunlap, Tenn., and Abilene, Texas. Other electric cooperatives across the United States also utilize CRC, so they were handling several outage calls which may have caused a bottleneck or delay in answering.

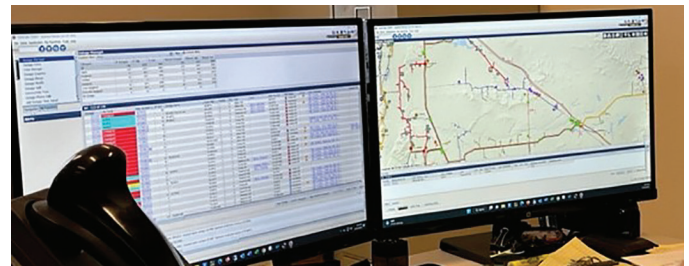
Brandi and Deanna spent the remainder of Thursday and much of Friday covering the front desk, where members were coming in to ask questions, receive updates, and conduct regular business, such as making a payment on their account, turning in a rebate application, or applying for new membership. “Most of the walk-ins were members wanting an update,

Left: The weight of the snow caused tree limbs to hang over the roadways. In some instances, line crews had to wait for downed trees to be cleared from the roadways. Middle: Jackson Electric maintains its right-of-way corridor. Trees outside of the right-of-way fell onto the power line. Our tree trimming contractor, New Age, would go ahead of the line crews to clear those trees from the lines. Right: Trees leaning into the power lines was the scene on many rural roads in Jackson County.



Above: Just before 2 p.m. on Friday, December 16, there were still 16,675 electric cooperative member-consumers without power, most in the west-central and northwest portions of the state.

Below: Jackson Electric’s dispatch crew coordinates the outages through the OMS (Outage Management System).



which wasn’t always possible to provide,” says Deanna.

“We did have members who were not part of the outage who needed their water heater repaired, or new members needing to set up an account,” adds Brandi.

Member Relations Manager Carol Blaken was scheduled to be out of the office both Thursday and Friday. However, she canceled her plans and came in mid-day Thursday to assist with communications and provide updates from the field. “It’s my responsibility to provide the most up-to-date information to our members and to assist where I can,” says Carol. “I don’t mind giving reports from the field because I learn so much about what the crew is doing, I see what elements the crew is challenged with, and I can relay that to our members and our office staff. I also get to talk with members on the side of

the roadways. Sometimes our members want that reassurance knowing that they're not forgotten, and power will be restored."

Carol applauds the dedication from Jackson Electric's employees to our membership. "Two crew members were out sick the first day of outages, but they insisted on coming in on Friday to assist, and another employee who was scheduled to be on vacation also came in to assist," shares Carol. "That says something about your employees."

Many Jackson Electric employees are also members who were without power for several hours and days, and many crew members left their families to restore power to members. "However, you never hear any of them complain about not being able to help their spouse with the kids during an outage, plow their driveway, or take a hot shower after a long day of power restoration efforts," says Carol. "I always say I'm biased, but I believe Jackson Electric members have one of the best teams working for them."

December 18, 2022: Power is Restored Just before 8 p.m. on Sunday, December 18, power was restored to Jackson Electric's members, but the weeks to follow would involve clean-up work and the fear of more outages because of the cold, windy weather conditions and weight still lingering on the trees. While this certainly isn't what members want to hear, it is a real concern. "There is still a lot of winter left," says Eric.

As Eric mentioned, this is the first time he has been involved in a winter outage of this extent. We hope it's the last, but we can't make that guarantee. As we heard from many members, this storm was a reality check of how much we depend on electricity to meet our daily needs. "After experiencing this storm, members need to evaluate their needs and decide if a generator would be a good investment for them," says Eric.

"If you're reliant on electricity for any medical reason, you need to have a battery backup or a plan in place," adds Brian.

Eric concludes by reminding members to please be patient during an outage. "We're not going to leave a single member off," he says. "We will keep on until everyone is restored." —*Brandi Shramek, Member Relations Advisor*

Glossary of Terms

Feeder: The main three-phase distribution line that transmits power from the substation to distribution points. This line is the backbone for the rest of its circuit.

Tap: A shorter section of line that provides power to a smaller number of consumers.

Breakers and Fuses: Both are protective devices and safety mechanisms that operate if there is a fault on a line. These devices are coordinated together to isolate a section of line, which minimizes the number of outages on our system. If a fault occurs, the isolated section of line will go out, but the power will stay on upstream where there is not an issue. An example may be a tree branch that doesn't clear the line.

RULES OF THE ANNUAL MEETING

These rules are set in accordance with Jackson Electric Cooperative Bylaws, Article II, Section 7. Jackson Electric Cooperative's annual meeting will be held on **Monday, April 24, 2023**, at the Lunda Theatre in Black River Falls.


Annual Meeting Rules

1. The meeting will be conducted in accordance with Roberts Rules of Order Newly Revised edition.
2. Any speaker must be recognized by the Chair before speaking.
3. Only members and duly registered guests will be recognized by the Chair; each person so recognized must give his or her name.
4. Unless otherwise approved by the Chair, those recognized are to limit their questions and comments to three minutes, with any rebuttal limited to two minutes.
5. Questions and comments from members and duly registered guests will be in order during old and new business sessions, and at the conclusion of the officer reports, if invited.
6. No resolution affecting Jackson Electric Cooperative may be submitted by any member, unless written copies have been received by Jackson Electric Cooperative by February 3, 2023. This will permit time for review by the Jackson Electric Cooperative Board of Directors to make its recommendation to the meeting as to approval or rejection.
7. No signs or handouts will be permitted within the building of the place of the meeting, except such handouts as required for the official conduct of the Annual Meeting. No handouts made available outside of the building will use the name of the Cooperative, its letterhead or logo to imply that the Cooperative supports or opposes any resolution.
8. No demonstrations shall be held within the building of the place of the meeting.

Annual Meeting Voting Procedures

Voting may be by voice vote (one vote per membership)



Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

Customer Service 715.284.5385
800.370.4607
Outage Reporting 855.222.DARK (3275)
Diggers Hotline 800.242.8511
Card Payments 844.759.3984
www.jackelec.com   

Mailing Address: N6868 County Road F
Black River Falls, WI 54615
Office Hours: Monday – Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Board of Directors: Gary Woods, President
Chris Curran, Vice President
David Peasley, Secretary-Treasurer
Jerry Huber, Dairyland Power Representative
Daniel Smrekar, Kristi Hanson, Brian Huber,
Troy Torkelson, Les Dokkestul
Kevin Babcock, General Manager/CEO

Jackson Electric Cooperative is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Your Touchstone Energy® Partner 