



KEEPING THE LIGHTS ON



THE COST OF ENERGY POLICY

We have been talking about wholesale power costs, economic interruptions, and generation shortfalls due to energy policy not only recently, but for many years.

We ended the month of June with a total of 85 hours of economic interruption, which translated to a \$15,331.65 adder to the wholesale bill that month.

In addition, the regular formula rate, where we did not hit the economic trigger, was higher due to fuel costs and that part of the bill was higher than it has ever been during the summer months at nearly \$80,000. As of this writing, July is at 20 hours...and counting. I guess a higher wholesale bill is better than a rolling blackout, where we generate at \$3 per kWh, but it all could have been avoided.

We don't need to rehash what we have spoken about time and time again, but we do need to make you aware of the real cost.

The day-to-day work continues here with an inordinate number of new line extensions (at least in recent years). We continue our work trimming lines and some may see that we have been a bit more aggressive in this effort, although still not to the extent of other utilities.

This work is necessary not only to help reduce outages, but also to try and prevent fires and the potential of injury should electricity be transmitted to a person on the ground through contact with a tree. As we have noted, with limited crews, some of this additional work has been facilitated by new equipment, which makes the job easier and safer and improves reliability for everyone. It also helps prevent what could be very bad situations.



Left: Mike Jorgenson prepares to cut an oak that was threatening three-phase lines running south while John Mann pushes with the loader Right: A dead birch branch that came in contact with the lines and then dropped to the ground started the above fire. Luckily the ground was wet enough that the fire was contained and did not spread.

In addition to this trimming, which reduces outages, we have been plagued by a number of small animal suicides. In some cases, these cause an outage. In some cases, these cause a "blink." The blinks you see might be due to a local cause or even one on the mainland down the county. In some cases the first blink leads to more blinks.

In one such case, a squirrel electrocuted itself in a transformer's lightning arrester gap and the corpse ended up on top of the transformer. As decomposition took place, flies were attracted and some of them flew through the small gap on the transformer, causing an ark. While certainly an effective "bug zapper," this caused a variety of minor blinks for the homeowner and also some larger blinks experienced by everyone on that primary circuit. The cause was difficult to find because the dead squirrel was nearly invisible from the ground.



We are not sharing the name of the squirrel until next of kin have been notified of his/her demise.

ANNUAL MEETING AND OTHER COMMUNITY UPDATES

The cooperative has tentatively scheduled our annual meeting for September 17. This year we will move back to the more traditional meeting held at the community center gym after three years of outdoor meetings at the cooperative. More information is coming, but there will be an election this year as well as a couple bylaw changes on the docket. We are working on the logistics of ballots being included in this publication, which can be removed and then returned by the member prior to the annual meeting date, but barring that, watch your mail. Relevant meeting information will be published in this magazine as in previous years, but as this is the first year with an election since we started distribution of the magazine, you may have to bear with us a bit as we learn. There is a significant cost savings for the cooperative to not mail out the ballots, but as we work through the process, we will do what we need to do in order to ensure the best participation.

Community Billboard

As you have likely seen, the cooperative maintains a “billboard” of sorts that we allow community organizations to use for hanging banners announcing events. This is done as a service to the community and is not for advertising specific commercial businesses, etc. It works as a nice community bulletin board for announcements and reminders of events.

Its location right on Main Road makes it an ideal spot, and we have room on both sides as well as room to hang large banners above the board. It has been well utilized throughout the years, but recently we have had some conflicting banners for the same dates that were brought in. Luckily, we were able to accommodate and manipulate hanging them so that they would get equal time and space, but we really need those who

would like a banner displayed to schedule it with us in the office so we can get it on the calendar.

As a reminder, it is up to you to provide the banner and we do not charge for its display.

Little League Scoreboard

We mentioned in the last magazine the Lion’s club found a “new” scoreboard to replace the no-longer-functioning scoreboard at the Little League field.



Some of you will remember that lighting the field, installing the scoreboard and all the ancillary infrastructure was a group effort on the part of the Lion’s Club, the cooperative, several individuals, and several of our vendors and was done in memory of Irwing “Henry” Nelson. Henry was the manager of the cooperative for 40 years and a member of the Lion’s Club for more years than that.

Joel Gunnlaugsson and the Lion’s Club obtained the replacement scoreboard, and we tested and rewired it in the cooperative shop and then got it hung although only in time for the last home game. At some point in the future, we will be looking for volunteers to help us re-aim the lights on the field, which is a bit of a process and obviously is best done in the dark!





FIBER UPDATE

DELAYS, DELAYS, AND MORE DELAYS

We were hoping our Broadband Project would help with slow internet...now it seems like the project itself is getting slower!

We had thought we were on track to get light to the cooperative and then on to the first few members during the month of July; however, scheduling delays in contractors is pushing that part of the project out a bit and we do not currently have a “best estimate” for when they will get here. This is for the colocation part of the project that we have with Nsight involving their feed to the cooperative and then to the cell tower as well as our backbone on the same route.

On the positive side, IPV4 addresses have finally been obtained (for the entire project, not just the grant funded portion), which was an ordeal that we never could have predicted.

So, in spite of the delays, we still move forward. Unfortunately, we will not make the predicted July first hookups as reported in a recent edition of the *Washington Island Observer*. The information we gave them was based on what we expected and what was predicted, and this delay was not expected or predicted!

BROADBAND FUNDING AND THE IMPORTANCE OF SPEED TESTS

As noted in previous publications, we have been successful in major grant funding for the fiber project and have also been rejected for grant funding. We continue to move forward regardless of grant funding, but that does not mean we will not continue to pursue every dollar that is available.

You have likely heard on the news that the Department of Commerce is in the process of distributing funds to each state in order to fund their “digital equity” programs, which are targeting getting service to those who do not have it. Currently, the State of Wisconsin is estimating that they will receive somewhere between \$800 million and \$1 billion as part of this program, to be distributed in 2023. Local eligibility and priority for grant funding will depend on the level of service available in each area.

As you may or may not be aware, FCC and state broadband maps have, in the past, been determined by attainable speeds reported by providers in various areas.

This has been a little more than problematic because, to be blunt, providers lied about the speeds they were capable of providing. This created map inaccuracy, which then led to some ineligibility for some federal programs. For instance, all of Door County was ineligible for the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) because of inaccurate self-reporting by incumbent internet service providers...those of us in the real world call “inaccurate self-reporting” a lie. We will leave it to you to guess who did the lying.

In order to avoid this problem and also to help move those federal dollars closer to \$1 billion, the Public Service Commission (which will be administering the new grant program, much the same as it has administered the previous ones) is embarking on a “Wisconsin Internet Self Report” Survey (WISER) of end users and using actual speeds received as the measure for funding eligibility. Without getting into the details of Underserved versus Unserved status, suffice it to say that the Island, and really most of rural Door County, is Unserved. We would like our members to participate in this survey and report your actual speeds. Yes, we are working towards connecting everyone and some will be connected sooner than the additional money is available; however, we want maximum survey participation now because it will help us in those upcoming grant applications to offset the cost of the balance of the project.

The link for this survey is: <https://maps.psc.wi.gov/apps/WISER/index.html> You can also take the survey by calling: 608-267-3595.

The web application will link you to an actual speed test that you run that will provide information for mapping based on the address that you provide. If you are one of our seasonal members and are taking the survey from somewhere other than here, don’t run the speed test because it would not be accurate.

Having actual real data will be very important in helping with eligibility for funding. We have brought in nearly \$2 million in grant and outside funding for the project to date (\$4.5 million if you include cable funding) and would greatly like to bring in more. Real data showing how poor things actually are not only help with the scoring of a grant application, but as mentioned before, can help determine how much the state has to distribute.

Door County as a whole will be participating in this effort and it is possible that you might see an additional survey come to you from the county. We want you to

We want maximum survey participation now because it will help us in those upcoming grant applications to offset the cost of the balance of the project.

participate in that as well, but it is very important to have good participation in the WISER survey at the link provided. We want to attempt to bring as much outside money as we can to the project, and while any grant is a crap-shoot, odds get better when the data is there.

In addition, we are currently looking at pursuing another NTIA grant opportunity for their “Middle Mile” program, which may or may not involve some additional submarine cable work. By the time you read this we should know if we are going to participate in this opportunity or not.

One thing we have to consider with the federal vs. state opportunities is the

politics involved in the federal programs. As you know, our previous NTIA grant was denied funding. We actually had our debrief with the staff involved in the program, and it was an incredibly frustrating experience. We were hoping to find out specific areas where our application fell short of the requirements but instead were told that we had a very strong application (top tier was the comment) and that we checked off all the requirements, plus told a compelling story with many outside benefits beyond the service itself. As it turns out, our shortcoming was something that was beyond our control—our population. It did not matter that we were serving

100% of our population; what mattered was the number of services. In other words (and these are my words), our 1,100 meters would not make a good enough photo opportunity for handing over a big check.

To be honest, I would have rather had shortfalls in the actual application be pointed out. For this reason, we will have to determine if the scale of a “middle mile” project would be sufficient to overcome this.

In any case, we just want to reiterate how important it will be for decisions to be made based on real data and hope that you will participate in the WISER survey and the Door County survey as well.



On page 10 of this magazine there is an article discussing fraud. We have all sorts of it going on all over the country. We hear about scams involving calls claiming to be from the utility trying to collect money. We hear scams about loved ones needing bail money. We all get calls on our phone wanting to talk about our car’s warranty.

We can assure you that if the cooperative is trying to collect, you will know it is us! We will not hire some service to contact you; it will be either myself or Mary who contacts you. That is one advantage you have since we are small. If someone is asking you to “Pay your bill, dammit!” you can be

assured it is likely me! And, it is not very often that we have to make such contact.

This does not mean that someone won’t try! This means that if you get such a call, you should hang up and then call us to check before you do anything else. This applies not only to utility scams, but to all sorts of scams out there.

In today’s internet age, it is much easier for the scum...er, we mean scammers...to gain access and to attempt to get your money. This happens even close to home and it is important for the story to be told such that we might be able to head it off for someone else.

Right here on the Island, one of our members was working on their computer when the screen froze and they were instructed viruses had been found and they should call a number. They called the number and all seemed very professional right up to an employee name and number. Once the member spoke with this person, they were told that they would need to pay to have the viruses removed and this would cost \$2,500. They were then instructed that payment could be made using various gift cards and unfortunately, they obtained the gift cards and are now out the money.

The moral of the story is that fraud can hit anywhere, including Washington Island. You need to be vigilant and question such situations. Fraudsters can be very convincing. In a case such as this, turn off the computer and find someone you trust to ask questions.

We expect that we will be sponsoring and encouraging some cybersecurity presentations as we move forward with the project.

Robert Cornell, Manager

1157 Main Road, Washington Island, WI 54246

920-847-2541

info@wiecoop.com

Hours: Monday–Friday, 9 a.m.–5 p.m.

