



WRECA
Washington's Electric Cooperatives

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Your Touchstone Energy® Partner

Improve Federal Land Management Policies to Strengthen Grid Reliability

Issue: Electric cooperative efforts to maintain reliability and ensure public safety include keeping power line rights-of-way clear of hazardous trees and vegetation, even along lines that cross federal lands to provide affordable electricity to rural Washingtonians. Proactive rights-of-way upkeep that includes vegetation management to ensure reliable delivery of electricity is a uniform utility industry practice adopted by electric cooperatives in Washington.

However, outdated and inconsistent federal land management policies make it more difficult and costly for electric cooperatives to get approval for rights-of-way management to prevent power outages, protect human life and limit impacts to natural resources on or near federal property. Federal reforms are needed to cut red tape and make it easier for electric cooperatives to manage vegetation to limit downed power lines, prevent catastrophic fires and respond to emergencies.

Background: To meet federal and state reliability standards, electric cooperatives perform rights-of-way maintenance, including vegetation management, on their lines. All electric utilities must comply with reliability, security and safety standards, even for the distribution and transmission lines on federal forest land.

Because many electric cooperatives extend service to the “last mile” for people in the most remote and rugged areas, cooperatives lines often cross federal lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Therefore, Forest Service and BLM reviews are often required for cooperatives to do routine power line maintenance and vegetation management – including removing a fallen tree, as well as system upgrades to improve reliability. Delays in application reviews and renewals can keep cooperative projects on hold for several months to over a year and add tens of thousands of dollars in costs.

Such delays also create unnecessary liability risks for electric cooperatives, which can be held responsible for damages if a hazardous tree or other vegetation comes into contact with a power line and causes a fire before the Forest Service or BLM give the cooperative approval to address the problem. Forest Service and BLM efforts to address the lack of uniformity in their standards, review processes and decisions led to some improvements. However, these issues remain unresolved without a legislative remedy.

The Electricity Reliability and Forest Protection Act, introduced by Rep. Doug LaMalfa (R-CA) and Rep. Kurt Schrader (D-OR), includes reforms to streamline rights-of-way reviews and time limits for federal decision-makers to provide consistency, flexibility and accountability. It would also ensure utilities cannot be held liable for damages if the government fails to allow them to manage vegetation on a right-of-way or immediately adjacent area.

WRECA Position

Washington's electric cooperatives urge Congress to pass legislation to reform federal land management practices in order to better ensure reliability and reduce the risk of fires and fire hazards

on utility rights-of-way across federal lands. Streamlining federal government management practices on these federal lands will make it easier for electric cooperatives to maintain safety and reliability by performing needed vegetation management to prevent threats to power lines and respond to emergencies.

Please cosponsor and pass the Electricity Reliability and Forest Protection Act to ensure grid reliability and consistent access to power line rights-of-way on federally-owned lands.

About the Washington Rural Electric Cooperative Association –Established in 1942, WRECA provides its members with a variety of services. Its main function is to serve as a single, cohesive voice for its members. Its mission is to proactively influence the regulatory environment in the best interest of the consumer-owned electric utilities in the state of Washington. Furthermore, WRECA identifies and monitors issues potentially affecting the membership and serves as a resource center for issues concerning its membership. For more information, see www.wreca.coop.