

Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.
10700 Fairgrounds Road
P.O. Box 477
Huntingdon, PA 16652-0477
814/643-2650
1-800-432-0680
www.valleyrec.com

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GUEST COLUMN

Latest bill includes capital credits



by Doug Roles
Manager of Member Services

IF YOU haven't noticed it yet, there's something a little bit different about your latest electric bill. It includes your capital credits return. Valley Rural Electric Cooperative will be returning more than \$632,000 in capital credits this year to eligible members and former members. Active members receive a bill credit while former

members will receive a check.

Many members are probably familiar with the capital credits return. They may even look forward to their December bill to see how much of the co-op's margins is coming back to them. If you're new to the co-op or have never taken time to read previous information in *Penn Lines* about capital credits, here's how they work.

Remember, the co-op's mission is not to make a profit; it's to provide safe, reliable electric service at the lowest possible cost. Those who receive their electric service from Valley REC are members (not "customers") and they are part-owners of the business. When the financial health of the co-op permits, a percentage of margins (revenue in excess of expenses) is returned to the owners of the business. Including this disbursement, Valley REC has returned nearly \$22 million to co-op members over the years.

Unless your job entails calculating these returns, the math behind the process is probably of little interest. But you should know that the co-op uses a combination of two methods to retire capital credits. The first-in/first-out approach enables the co-op to return money to members who have invested in the co-op for the longest time. The


percentage method is used to ensure that present-day members, who are paying for current costs, are still rewarded for their patronage. Additionally, a portion of the return is distributed to the estates of deceased members, allowing those co-op accounts to be retired.

So, beyond the obvious benefit of a reduced bill, how much should this capital credits issue matter to you? In the U.S., the vast majority of people receive their electricity from one of three types of utilities: investor-owned, municipal-owned or cooperative.

Investor-owned utilities or private power companies tend to be very large corporations and are owned by a great number of stockholders. They serve large cities, suburban areas and some rural areas, too. In most cases, they have few employees in the communities where they operate.

In municipal systems, the city runs the utility. Government-owned municipal electric systems can serve large cities or smaller areas. About 16 percent of the market is served by municipal utilities.

Rural electric cooperatives serve the smallest number of consumers, about 12 percent of the market (42 million people), but our electric lines cover more than 75 percent of the U.S. landmass. This is because we provide power where others once refused to go because of the low population density. And our employees live and work in the communities served by the co-op.

In addition to Valley REC, there are more than 800 other electric co-ops in 47 states. Electric co-ops rank highest in member satisfaction among the three types of utilities. We believe this is because we serve owner-members, not customers. Receipt of your capital credits return is proof of our commitment to our members. 

Balancing act

Trough Creek State Park attraction gets some TLC from Rotary volunteers

BY DOUG ROLES
Manager of Member Services

In the middle of the beautiful Trough Creek gorge, perched high up on the side of a slope, the “Balanced Rock” sits precariously at the edge of a cliff — a boulder that, from below, appears to be suspended in mid-fall from the other rock formations of Terrace Mountain. The rock is arguably the crown jewel of the 541-acre Trough Creek State Park. It’s also a graffiti magnet for visitors.

The park is a popular attraction and logged 86,214 visitors in 2014 alone. The imposing boulder should be one more part of Trough Creek’s pristine public forest. But some visitors see the boulder, and other flat surfaces in the park, as the place to profess love to sweethearts in spray paint or jot down



ABOVE: Valley REC member Sandi Wright applies a camouflaging paint to Balanced Rock during the Huntingdon Rotary Club’s recent cleanup effort. Sandi operates Heritage Cove Resort on Valley lines near Saxton.

AT RIGHT: It’s a long way down ... Visitors to Balanced Rock can peer into the Great Trough Creek gorge below.





AT LEFT: Trough Creek State Park Manager Andy St. John speaks with Huntingdon Rotary Club members before they begin a cleanup effort at Balanced Rock. Club member John Eastman (at right) spearheaded the club's service project.

BELOW: A graffiti-free viewing area awaits hikers at the end of Balanced Rock Trail.

the date of their visit with a permanent marker.

After a while, all that "artwork" really detracts from nature's handiwork. Park Manager Andy St. John says this tourist season's worth of graffiti vandalism was worse than ever. Fortunately, the rock face got cleaned up in October by eight volunteers from the Huntingdon Rotary Club.

Andy says help from volunteers is greatly appreciated because it multiplies the efforts of park staff and demonstrates public concern for the facility, served by Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, in southwestern Huntingdon County.

"Any time that a group approaches us about volunteering, it shows a connection between the park and the community," Andy says. "That's critical to the success of the park."

"Since the Rotary Club's visit was covered in the local paper (*The Daily News*), we've seen an uptick in people calling to volunteer at the park," he adds, noting that one group of volunteers recently spent a day helping to mark trails.

The club's Oct. 20 cleanup effort was initiated by club member John Eastman, a local businessman who had hiked to the rock this summer after not having been to the park in years. He was appalled by the amount of graffiti and asked his fellow Rotarians to lend a hand.

After trekking to the site over a

swinging bridge and climbing stone steps placed on the trail by Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps crews, the volunteers used a tan-colored paint specially selected by the park to cover the latest graffiti. Previous restoration efforts have included sandblasting and chemical removal of paint. The park removes or covers the vandalism twice a year, unless something offensive is painted that has to be removed immediately. Due to the remote location, supplies and tools, such as ladders, must be hand carried to the rock.

Valley REC member Sandi Wright wanted to help restore the rock to a more natural appearance because she appreciates the beauty of the area. She encourages visitors to her campground near Saxton (Heritage Cove Resort, served by Valley) to make a trip to Trough Creek part of their stay while in the Raystown Lake area.

"The park is conveniently located with easy access for Heritage Cove guests, and I recommend it to guests because it has so much to offer," Sandi says. "I consider it to be one of the most beautiful parks in our area of Pennsylvania because of the rock formations and the vegetation. I want visitors from other areas to enjoy the natural beauty of the park as I did when I first visited it."

Park officials are planning to erect a large dry erase board near the rock so

that visitors can leave messages and take photos there. It's hoped that providing this alternative outlet will decrease the amount of spray paint and marker activity on the stone.

Andy points out that the illicit scribbling is premeditated and carried out by visitors who tote in markers and paint. Catching a vandal in the act is unlikely and following up on an incident to press charges can be difficult, even in situations where the "artist" leaves his or her name, since the author can simply say that someone else put the writing there.

A ranger has been visiting Balanced Rock every week since the October cleanup to check for new graffiti.

"There's been nothing so far," Andy says. "It's been great." 🌞





AT LEFT: Martinsburg District Crew Leader Greg Dilling installs an in-line insulator in piping at the Frankstown Substation. The pipe is part of a new switch assembly installed during an improvement project.

Valley crews complete Frankstown Substation improvement work

BY DOUG ROLES
Manager of Member Services

Valley REC crews from the Martinsburg District planned their work and then worked their plan to complete necessary improvements to the Frankstown Substation in one day without interrupting service to members.

The Martinsburg lineworkers were joined by a crew from the Huntingdon District for the daylong job on Oct. 20 at the substation located in Frankstown Township, Blair County.

“We’re replacing some of the switching equipment on the high (voltage) side of the sub,” Martinsburg District Manager Mike Shawley explains. “It’s original

equipment to when the sub was built, in the late 1950s or early 1960s.”

The work had been planned for some time. Valley staff coordinated with Penelec to shut off power to the substation. Then crews removed the existing air break, a manual switch operated from the ground that opens and closes transformer connections located at the top of the side of the substation where Penelec’s 46-kilovolt line enters.

“The switch was very difficult to open and close,” Mike says. “We’ve been noticing over the years that it was getting really difficult to operate.”

The new air break consists of the handle at ground level, piping and

brackets to the top of the high side structure and the switch arm itself. The new piping includes an in-line insulator that further protects linemen operating the switch. New wiring was also installed on the secondary (lower-voltage) side of the station.

Load normally handled by this substation was routed through the Sinking Valley and Williamsburg substations to eliminate a service disruption.

“We’re able to backfeed everybody,” Mike says as crews wrapped up the job. “No one even notices we’re down here.” ☀



AT LEFT: Journeyman Lineman Bill Bogel, from the Martinsburg District, completes installation of new expulsion fuses at the Frankstown Substation as part of a day-long improvement project. The substation is located along Scotch Valley Road, right.

