

Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

# Valley News

January | February 2014

Volume 71 | Issue 1



**Right-of-way  
maintenance  
effort includes  
beaver patrol**

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[www.valleyrec.com](http://www.valleyrec.com)

DEAR MEMBERS,

# Nominating meetings are your chance to be involved

This February's nominating meetings are for members in Districts 1, 3 and 5. If you are a member in one of these districts, you should have received an invitation in the mail to your meeting.

Are you planning to attend? Have you ever considered how vital member turnout is to these meetings?

Nominating meetings are an opportunity for co-op members to exercise the cooperative principle of democratic member control. Here's how it works:

Valley REC's service territory is comprised of nine director districts. A member from each district serves on the co-op board of directors for a three-year term. Nominating meetings provide members of a district the opportunity to nominate someone for election to the board at the annual meeting, held in April.

Nominees are elected by the membership at large – those folks attending the annual meeting. This is to demonstrate that the elected board member serves the co-op as a whole, not just his or her district.

But the process begins with you. Please consider returning your invitation to let us know you plan to participate.

If you'd like more information about Valley REC's director districts, go online to [valleyrec.com](http://valleyrec.com), click on "Member Info" and then "Directors and Districts" or contact the Member Services Department.



**Doug Roles**  
Director of Member Services

Cooperatively yours,

Doug Roles  
Director of Member Services



Valley REC employees participated in the 2013 Toys For Tots campaign, contributing puzzle books, toys and even a stuffed Teddy bear. Organizers of the co-op's Huntingdon Christmas Parade float donated the entry's \$200 first prize to the children's charity. Toys For Tots coordinators Dana Yakimczyk (left) and Mindy Shoemaker visited the Valley REC corporate office Dec. 18 to pick up the donations from employees Alicia Stoner and Terri Cohenour. (Photo by Doug Roles)

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**Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.**

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

## On the cover ...



What happens when Valley REC's well-planned right-of-way maintenance work meets a beaver's teeth? Members lose power and, hopefully, gain a new respect for these industrious creatures. See story on Page 4.

# Energy specialist, southern Blair County seniors discuss home electrical efficiency at new center



Left: Valley REC's energy specialist, Travis Kuhstos, (left) speaks with Orville Lingenfelter of Claysburg, a Valley REC member since 1966. Above: Seniors gathered at the new Southern Blair County Senior Center Wednesday, Nov. 20 to learn about home energy efficiency. Below: The center, located in East Freedom, replaced three older facilities. (Photos by Doug Roles)

## By Doug Roles

*Director of Member Services*

Senior citizens in Blair County learned some low cost/no cost ways to save energy at home just in time for this winter's heating season. Valley Rural Electric Cooperative Energy Specialist Travis Kuhstos visited the new Southern Blair County Senior Center Nov. 20 as the center's lunchtime guest speaker.

Kuhstos spoke to more than 40 seniors about the importance of sealing a home against the elements. He told the group the key to energy efficiency is weighing the cost of an upgrade against how long it will take to pay for itself.

"Energy efficiency is important for everyone but especially for those on a fixed income, like many senior citizens," Kuhstos said. "Given the economic times we're in, everybody should become an energy specialist to some level."

"Who couldn't benefit from having more money in their pock-

ets by having less of an electric bill?"

Seniors were provided a copy of Touchstone Energy's pamphlet *101 Easy Ways to Save Energy and Money*. The booklet offers tips such as insulating electric wall plugs and switches with foam pads and making sure south-facing drapes and curtains are open in the winter so homes catch free solar heat.

The visit to the center gave Kuhstos and Doug Roles, Valley REC director of member services, an opportunity to tour the new facility along Dunning's Highway in East Freedom.

"We actually opened Sept. 2, the day after Labor Day. Then we had our grand opening in October," says Sandra Stacey, senior center coordinator.

"We combined three facilities, Duncansville, Claysburg and the Cove," she adds. "Distance-wise, this location is pretty central. The transition went very well."

Combining the facilities gave seniors a chance to meet residents from the other centers. The new center provides more space to users. It features a kitchen and dining room, a computer room and a large fitness room. The center offers Zumba classes, games, crafts and other activities, as well as a hot lunch. The new center also boasts a large parking lot and easy access to the highway.

Sandra has worked with the Blair Senior Service for three years and has 15 years total experience working with seniors

"Every month we try to have a different program on a different topic," Sandra says.

Prior to the start of the energy efficiency presentation, the seniors were given a brief overview of the cooperative business model and Valley REC's service area.



# Beaver-felled tree cuts power to 900 co-op members

By Doug Roles

Director of Member Services

Valley Rural Electric Cooperative consumers who lost power in northern Fulton County the Saturday before Thanksgiving may be surprised to learn that the cause of the outage was not one of the usual culprits. The service disruption was not storm-related nor was it caused by a motor vehicle accident. Instead, this event falls squarely on the shoulders, or teeth, of a beaver with some big building plans.

Crews responding to the scene found that a beaver had toppled a large ash tree onto the dual circuit line that feeds the Harrisonville substation. The beaver's handiwork cut power to 991 consumers for just over two hours.

"It was a Saturday evening. We got there before dark and got the tree off the line," Mark Booher, Shade Gap district supervisor, recalls. "Every couple of years a beaver will cut down a tree that falls into our lines. Prior to this the last one was near Richvale (Huntingdon County)."

November's outage was located along Sideling Hill Creek, near Route 655. It appears the beaver took a liking to the stretch of creek and its proximity to a nearby farm pond. The beaver (or beavers) cleared saplings from a small area along the creek and cut a number of larger trees. The impacted area is on private property.

Booher returned to the area Dec. 11 to check for other signs of gnawing and to see if any more trees were threatening the lines. Sure enough, another tree, chewed about one-third of the way through, was leaning toward the dual circuit. A B&L Tree Service crew was in the area and was able to quickly bring down the tree without contacting power lines.

"I saw this one other time, near a line in Bedford County," said Rod Bisbing, B&L owner, who cut the tree with worker Chad Nicodemus of Claysburg.

Valley REC's outage management system includes a code for outages caused by wildlife. Most often the animal involved is a squirrel or a bird but opossums, raccoons, foxes and snakes can also trigger outages. The National Rural Electric Associ-



Photo by Mark Booher

Above: A large ash tree, felled by a beaver, rests on Valley REC lines near Harrisonville, Fulton County. The contact caused more than 900 co-op members to lose service. Below: Rod Bisbing (left), owner of B&L Tree Service, and B&L employee Chad Nicodemus prepare to cut a beaver-gnawed tree leaning toward a Valley REC line. The downed tree next to it was felled by a beaver and, fortunately, was not tall enough to reach a nearby tap line.

ation (NRECA) reports that nationally 11 percent of power outages are caused by animals. Restoration and cleanup costs utilities \$15-18 million a year.

The involved animal normally is killed when it contacts an energized wire and provides a ground for the electricity. Co-ops, including Valley REC, use a variety of devices to try to discourage animals from accessing lines.

"We put animal guards on our transformers, protecting bushings and high voltage leads so squirrels can't physically contact them," says Terry Hutchinson, Valley REC manager of engineering and technical services. "We put that on all new construction and on existing equipment where we visit properties."

"Animal-caused outages used to be a large percentage of our outages," he adds. "A beaver caused outage is not unique to us but we don't know how we would protect against that."

Terry recalls a beaver caused an outage a few years ago in the Alan Seeger forest, in Huntingdon County. While the beaver is the ground threat, woodpeckers can be quite a problem for the co-op at some sites. They sometimes want to nest in a pole and can hollow out a fairly large cavity to do so. In his experience as a lineman, Terry has seen all types of animal-related events. Once a cow that had taken to rubbing against a guy wire vibrated the pole enough to get the ground wire and phase (energized wire) slapping together, causing a fault.

"There are some interesting things that happen with critters," Terry says.

Since this beaver appears to be set on more tree trimming, Valley crews will occasionally stop by to check on his ac-



Photo by Doug Roles

tivities.

“We’ll have to keep tabs on this area. They can really cause some damage,” says Kevin Detwiler, Valley REC’s forester who is responsible for planning right-of-way maintenance.

Barry Leonard, information and education supervisor for the Pennsylvania Game Commission’s Southcentral Region, says beavers can have both a positive and a negative interaction with humans.

“It depends on whether that wetlands they’re creating is in your pasture or your back yard or if they’re eating your ornamentals,” he says. “It’s all relative to where they are and what they’re doing.”

Beaver-created wetlands can be a positive occurrence for waterfowl hunters or muskrat trappers. Barry reminds residents that they must have a Pennsylvania furtaker license to trap beaver.

“The beaver population is quite healthy,” he says. “They were traditionally here and they were gone for a while. They’re back now because the habitat is better for them.”

The commission doesn’t track the actual population of the animal but does record incidents reported by residents. Barry says landowners who are having a problem with the animals



Photo by Doug Roles



Photo courtesy Pa. Game Commission

Above: Mark Booher, Shade Gap district supervisor, pauses near the stump of the ash tree a beaver cut into a Valley REC line. Left: A Pennsylvania beaver carries a small twig into its dam.

can contact the commission to have them live trapped and re-located.

So, why does this Fulton County beaver cut such large trees?

“What they’re after is the tender shoots at the top of the tree for food. Then they’ll use the log for their dam or their hutch,” Barry reports.

Beavers, North America’s largest rodent, can reach four feet in length and weigh 60 pounds. Sign of their presence, in addition to gnawed tree trunks and pointed stumps, includes slides into ponds or streams and tracks in snow or mud that include a mark off to the side of a tree branch being dragged to the water. Beavers are known for building lodges but also live in burrows in riverbanks.

The Game Commission reports uncontrolled trapping had eliminated beaver from Pennsylvania by the end of the nineteenth century. They have since rebounded and are now found throughout the commonwealth.

## One in a million

Valley REC member Andrew Mishock, of College Township, Centre County, is a 2013 *Penn Lines* Rural Reflections photo contest winner. Andy, who has a cabin on Valley REC lines near Seven Points Marina, Huntingdon County, snapped the winning photo in the “Best Animal” category. The photo appears in the January 2013 edition of the magazine.

To get the shot, Andy stalked a birdfeeder at his home, sneaking up on a raiding gray squirrel. He captured the animal as it leapt away, over some evergreen boughs.

Andy was using a Nikon DX40 on manual focus. He had a narrow depth of field as he approached the feeder.

“I moved two steps closer and my focus was behind the feeder. The squirrel jumped into the focus,” Andy says. “It was one in a million. It’s one of those photos you couldn’t duplicate.”

Andy, a retired technical writer who also served in the Air Force as a Morse code operator, enjoys wildlife photography as well as photographing the area’s churches and barns. Congratulations, Andy, on your winning shot!

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## WANTED

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