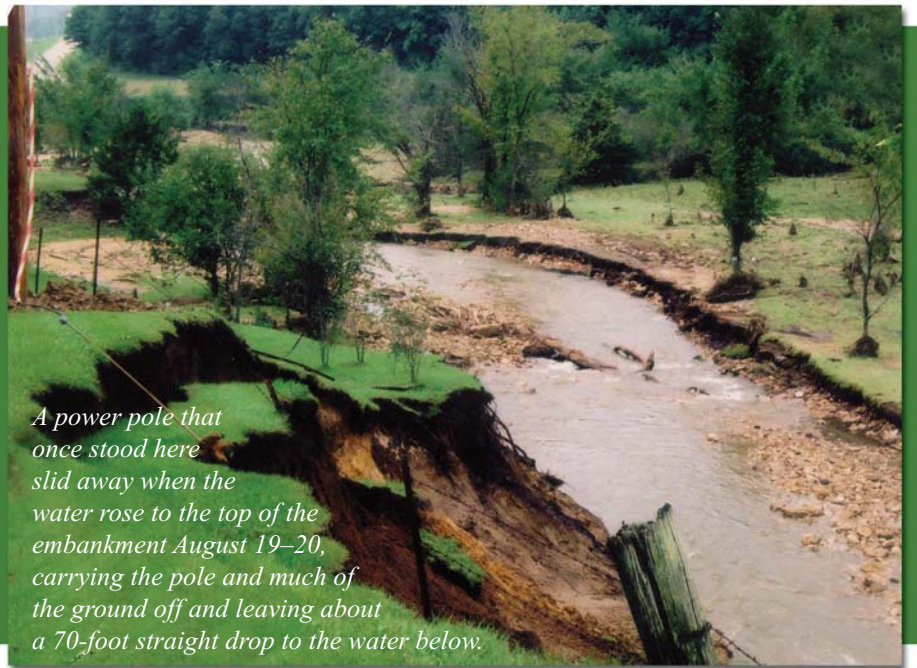


AFTER THE FLOOD

August Storms Present Unique Challenges for SREC Lineworkers



A power pole that once stood here slid away when the water rose to the top of the embankment August 19–20, carrying the pole and much of the ground off and leaving about a 70-foot straight drop to the water below.

As lineworkers, guys like Joe Grimsled, Earl Windsor, Bob Olson, Jerry Becwar, Troy Dahl, and apprentice lineman Justin Sprosty are used to working on challenging problems in adverse weather conditions. Based out of Scenic Rivers Energy Cooperative’s Gays Mills office in Crawford County, these lineworkers know what it’s like to face nature’s challenges. After all, Crawford County sits in the heart of Wisconsin’s driftless region, with rugged hills and deep valleys that present unique problems when it comes to providing reliable electric service.

Joe, district supervisor for the Gays Mills area, has been on the job here since 1978. Throughout his almost 30-year career, he’d pretty much seen it all — ice storms, lightning, high winds, and flooding. Joe’s first day on the

job, in fact, was right before the great flood of July 4, 1978, which left great chunks of Crawford County under several feet of water. One of Joe’s first tasks as a co-op lineworker was to help clean up after that flood.

However, even that experience wasn’t enough to fully prepare Joe for what he saw the weekend of August 18–19, when 12 inches of rain fell on already saturated ground, turning the village of Gays Mills into a muddy body of water about 4 feet deep.

“This was much worse,” Joe said of the August flood. “We had time to prepare for that flood (in 1978), but this one hit Sunday about 4 a.m. and the entire town was overtaken in about an hour. I’ve never seen anything like it.”

Office Underwater

Like all the other businesses on Main Street in Gays Mills, the SREC office was filled with several inches of flood water, ruining the carpeting, much of the furniture, a computer, and other items inside. “We’ve never had water in the office before in the 29 years I’ve been working here,” Joe said. “This is the highest it’s ever been.”

Even more damaging was the water in the garage behind the office, which sits about 4 feet lower than the office itself. The garage doors caved in and flood water lapped over the hoods of five SREC trucks housed in that garage; all were total losses.

“A couple of the guys — Earl and Bob — live nearby and tried to get to the trucks to save them, but they were overwhelmed by the water,” Joe said.



Washed-out bridges and flooded crossways like this divided SREC’s Crawford County service territory and presented accessibility problems for days after the water receded.

Of course, immediately after the water rose, the linemen had more pressing matters. Earl is also a volunteer with the local fire department, which worked through the early-morning hours evacuating Gays Mills residents and moving them to safety in the North Crawford School. Both Earl and Bob jumped in to help evacuate residents.

Once people were moved out of harm's way, the crew began the long and tiring task of restoring power.

Unique Challenges

Joe explained that because most of SREC members live on higher ground away from the downtown areas in Gays Mills and Soldiers Grove, which was also heavily flooded, there was no need for the co-op to shut off power for safety reasons the way Alliant had to. However, many SREC members were still out of power thanks to poles that had simply been washed away or otherwise damaged, including one of Dairyland's transmission poles that fed power to distribution lines serving 600 to 700 people. Restoring power to these people would have been a daunting task under normal storm conditions, but circumstances created by the flood made the job even harder.



Typical pole damage caused by flooding included ground washed away around the base of the pole (pictured at left) and debris carried by floodwater left pushing up against a pole (right).

“The biggest problem we had was losing the building and losing the trucks,” Joe said. “Our radio system was based in this building, so we had no communication system Sunday. We tried to use cell phones and do what we could.”

Fortunately, SREC has a building a mile outside of Gays Mills, on higher ground, where a truck and some equipment were stored. The crew set up a makeshift office at this property, with Dairyland, SREC's wholesale power supplier, setting up a new radio system there. By Monday, joined by eight lineworkers and much-needed trucks from SREC's Lancaster office, the crew had a working home base.

This was especially necessary since it would have been difficult working from the downtown office even if

it had miraculously been spared flood damage. By Monday morning, Gays Mills had taken on the feel of a refugee camp; some residents were allowed back in briefly to retrieve belongings, but even they had to check into a command center and leave immediately, following a strict 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. curfew.

“We were fortunate that we had the other property close by,” Joe said.

So close, and yet so far. The temporary office was in place within 24 hours, but it took three or four days before the lineworkers could access it easily.

Joe explained that the Kickapoo River divides Crawford County, and it took that long for the water to

recede enough to be crossed at its regular points. The lineworkers had to instead take circuitous routes through Prairie du Chien, Readstown, and Wauzeka to reach the makeshift office, sometimes turning what would have been a few minutes' drive into an hourlong trek.

Back in Power

Despite these obstacles, crews had power restored to all members by the Monday after the flood about 9 p.m. Joe said the lineworkers know the back-

roads well and could get where they needed to restore power despite the closed highways and washed-over bridges in the days immediately following the flood.

However, there would be no immediate rest for the crews once power was initially restored. Adding to their difficulties was that the weather didn't let up as the water went down. The lightning and high winds that hit during the week following the flood created even more outages. Between August 19 and 23, there were 1,763 outages in the SREC area, with some members out of power several times during this timeframe. Each time, power was restored to all members within 24 hours.

As for damage, Joe said three SREC distribution

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SREC Joins Change a Light, Change the World Campaign

Scenic Rivers Energy Cooperative has joined the ENERGY STAR® Change a Light, Change the World campaign. “We have joined a growing community of corporations, utilities, manufacturers, individuals, and countless others who have made a firm commitment to change the world, one light—one energy-saving step—at a time,” said Megan Graney, SREC director of communications.

As part of this national movement, SREC has volunteered to encourage 100 individuals to pledge to replace at least one incandescent bulb or fixture at home with one that has earned the government’s ENERGY STAR label as a first step to preserve our energy resources and environment. One hundred pledges could save up to \$3,000 over the lifetime of the bulbs and prevent 450,000 pounds of greenhouse gas emissions.

“Like many organizations, we want to do our part to create a better environment,” said Graney. “Participating in this national campaign is both easy and effective. We are proud to spread the word about the simple steps individuals in our communities can take to make a difference.”

SREC will take an active role in encouraging individuals to make a simple, yet meaningful commitment by taking the ENERGY STAR Change a Light Pledge. With lighting accounting for about 20 percent of the typical home’s electricity use, switching to energy-efficient options is a significant way to reduce greenhouse gases, save energy, and protect the environment. To be part of SREC’s efforts, take the pledge online at www.energystar.gov.

“Committing to change the world takes less time and energy than you might think. In fact, it can start with simply changing a light,” said Wendy Reed of the Environmental Protection Agency. “Organizations like Scenic Rivers Energy Cooperative are an important part of the ENERGY STAR Change a Light community who have committed their time to help us spread the word about the ENERGY STAR Change a Light Pledge, and we are proud to work with them and with the thousands of Americans who’ve already taken the pledge to make a difference for this generation and those to come.”

The ENERGY STAR Change a Light Pledge is already having a dramatic impact. Individuals who

pledged to change a light in 2006 alone have the potential to save more than \$2 million in energy costs and prevent more than 33 million pounds of greenhouse gas emissions!

The ENERGY STAR Change a Light, Change the World campaign is a national challenge sponsored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy to encourage Americans to consider the energy they use and to switch to light bulbs and fixtures that have earned the government’s ENERGY STAR for energy efficiency.

About ENERGY STAR®

ENERGY STAR was introduced by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 1992 as a voluntary, market-based partnership to reduce air pollution through increased energy efficiency. Today, with assistance from the U.S. Department of Energy, the ENERGY STAR program offers businesses and consumers energy-efficient solutions to save energy and money and help protect our environment for future generations. More than 8,000 organizations have become ENERGY STAR partners and are committed to improving the energy efficiency of products, homes, and businesses. For more information about ENERGY STAR, visit www.energystar.gov.

CFL Fast Facts

Why use ENERGY STAR Qualified CFLs?

- They last up to 10 times longer than standard incandescent bulbs.
- They use a third of the energy of ordinary bulbs.
- They save an average of \$30 each or more in energy costs over their lifetime; change five bulbs to ENERGY STAR and save more than \$150!
- They fit in almost any fixture, indoors and outdoors.
- They’re convenient in hard-to-reach and high-use fixtures because of their long life.
- They generate 70 percent less heat than standard lighting, cutting home cooling costs.
- They provide the same amount of light as standard incandescent bulbs, but use fewer watts of energy.
- They prevent more than 450 pounds of greenhouse gas emissions each over their life. ■



Scenic Rivers Energy Cooperative's Member Appreciation Day

October 18

Lancaster Office, 4 to 7 p.m.

Celebrate October Co-op Month by joining your friends and neighbors at Scenic Rivers Energy Cooperative October 18 for an old-fashioned cookout! The menu includes hamburgers, hot dogs, pork sandwiches, potato salad, relish tray, fruit salad, chips, apple crisp, and ice cream.

Representatives from Focus on Energy and Wisconsin Health Cooperative will be on hand to answer your questions. Browse the informational booths and learn more about SREC's budget billing program and electric heating and cooling options.

*Hope to see
you there!*

After the Flood

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poles were lost to the flood completely, and about 20 others slid away or were left threatened by unstable ground. These poles were temporarily relocated to more stable grounds. Other poles were pushed aside by debris carried in the flood. The cooperative also lost tens of thousands of dollars' worth of material and office content and faced clean-up and repair costs of about \$18,000. That doesn't even include the costs of storm outage labor, which reached \$35,000.

In the weeks that followed the flood, SREC staff took time to evaluate the co-op's emergency plan and response, determining what went right and what could have gone better. It's a necessary step, but Joe, undoubtedly like everyone else, hopes the planning won't be put to use again any time soon.

"I hope not," Joe said. "Not in my time."—*Mary Erickson (photos by Megan Graney)* ■



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