

May 2014

HIGHLIGHTS

From Big Horn Rural Electric Company

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



Manager's Message

Thanks to all the members and guests who attended and those who executed their proxy at the March 15, 2014 annual meeting. As a member/owner of Big Horn REA, a member's right to participate and vote on matters affecting Big Horn REA is a value in receiving power from your local electric cooperative.

In the past several weeks, the weather has changed several times over. Whatever your projects are for the spring and summer, Big Horn wants everyone to make safety a part of their job planning and activities. If you are planning a new service or change in your electrical needs, please contact Big Horn so that we can meet and discuss your service requirements and schedule the project. The project process will generally require such things as an electrical permit, easement, line locate, estimate of cost, etc. Everything takes time to complete in a proper manner, so please contact Big Horn early in your planning.

On a different subject, there have been inquiries regarding deposit requirements. In order to minimize past due amounts and possible write-offs of bad debt, Big Horn does normally require a deposit. Big Horn's general objective test for good credit is when a mem-

ber has had twelve consecutive months of service and bills have been paid by the payment due date. Big Horn requires a deposit under the following conditions: 1) A new member that has not had electric service with Big Horn, and 2) An existing member who has not paid all of their previous 12 months' electric bills by the due date (25th of the current month). Big Horn's required deposit amount will be the average estimated ninety days' bill of the electric service requirements. Big Horn's deposit requirements are in compliance with and approved by Wyoming Public Service Commission.

It is important in more ways than one to make sure to pay your bills on time. If you would like to schedule your bill to be paid automatically and on time every month, please contact the office. Deposit amounts are refunded or applied to a member's bill when they have paid their bill on time for twelve consecutive months. Deposit amounts are also used to be applied to a member's final bill and/or against a member's account that has been disconnected. This process has helped Big Horn reduce write-offs of past due amounts.

Thanks for your patronage and be safe.

Inside...

- Learn Before You Burn** 2-3
- Big Horn's Line Superintendent** 3
- Trees and Power Lines** 4

Learn Before You Burn This Spring

By Chris Jones of the National Weather Service meteorologist and Cody Beers, Wyoming Department of Transportation District Five Public Relations Specialist – Reprinted with permission from Wyoming Livestock Roundup

Despite reports to the contrary, it does look like this winter will come to an end – someday! Inevitably, as temperatures begin to warm and the winter snows melt, many ranchers and farmers will head outside to begin their annual agricultural burns.

Each year, as the spring burning season gets into full swing, at least a few of these burns get out of control. So, what can you do ensure you and your neighbors stay safe this spring? Learn before you burn!

It doesn't take long once the snow begins to melt for fire danger to rapidly increase, even after a cool and wet winter. The persistent spring wind only serves to further dry vegetation and literally provides more fuel for the fire. A wind-whipped fire in quick-burning dormant vegetation can cause a burn to easily become uncontrollable.

Wind impacts

It is common for calm morning wind to give way to gusty wind around the midday hours during the spring months. A weather forecast of how and when the wind speed and direction may change during the day can mean the difference between a successful burn and having an animated discussion with your local fire warden.

Federal and state land management agencies routinely obtain weather forecasts from the National Weather Service. So should you! In fact, landowners, conservation districts – even local fire officials – should get the most up-to-date forecast possible before lighting a controlled burn.

Your local National Weather Service office can be contacted 24 hours a day by phone. The two NWS offices located in Wyoming are in Cheyenne, at 800-269-6220, and Riverton, at 800-211-1448, and are staffed 24 hours a day. Area-specific forecasts are also available online at weather.gov/cheyenne and weather.gov/riverton or on your SmartPhone

at mobile.weather.gov.

Burning tips

Remember, your fire is your responsibility. Try to conduct your burn as safely as possible by following these tips.

First, call the local National Weather Service for a local weather forecast. Then, call local fire authorities to ensure your burn is legal and inform them of your plans. Talk to neighbors about your plans, as a matter of safety and courtesy.

Also, it is important to have water, shovels and rakes nearby for all those assisting the burn.

Begin your burn where it might be easiest for the fire to get out of control, and try to burn into the wind. This slows the rate of spread and is easier to control.

Lastly, control the fire. Keep piles small, stay with the fire, call 911 if the fire gets out of hand.

Consequences of damage

What if your agricultural burn becomes out-of-control and causes property damage? You can imagine damage costs and firefighting costs can quickly escalate when homes are lost, outbuildings torched and fences damaged. This past year, the U.S. Forest Service billed a Jackson man \$6.3 million for the costs of fighting a wildfire he is accused of starting when he burned twigs and paper in a barrel. Yikes! It might have been cheaper to take it to the dump!

Nearly every spring, prescribed burning impacts state-owned property across the state but especially in Big Horn, Hot Springs, Fremont, Park and Washakie counties in northwest Wyoming.

Citizens conducting prescribed burning are criminally and civilly liable for damages to state property, including right-of-way fencing and other state property, inside the state rights-of-way.

DOT perspective

“From the Wyoming Department of Transportation’s (WYDOT) perspective, the safety of the traveling public, workers and volunteers in the rights-of-way is first and foremost in decisions made regarding activity on or along the state highway system,” said WYDOT District Engineer Shelby Carlson of Basin. “The situation of burning highway rights-of-way generates safety concerns for the traveling public by the potential of limited visibility caused by low hanging smoke and damage to fences, signs, sign posts, guardrail and permitted utilities. Damage to any of these items may increase the potential for a crash or otherwise jeopardize the safety of the highway user.”

Carlson said fences are impacted by prescribed burning near the rights-of-way.

“The use of metal posts minimizes damage to fence posts from fire, but fire destroys the galvanization of steel posts and the integrity of the wire and may either destroy or severely damage the brace and end panels which are constructed of wooden posts,” she said. “Wire that has been damaged by fire cannot be stretched for fence repair, and it must be replaced because the tensile strength is destroyed. This lengthens WYDOT’s response time to repair a fence breach, and it increases maintenance costs.”

Some of the state highway rights-of-way in question are held by WYDOT through permanent easements. But although the title to the land belongs to the grantor of the easement, a highway easement brings with it all of the laws, rules, policies and authority that go along with the control of highways.

Chapter 12 of the WYDOT Rules and Regulations states in part that “any use of the right-of-way which interferes with construction or maintenance of the highway, or safe use of the traveling public, shall be considered an unlawful encroachment.”

Wyoming law makes these unlawful encroachments misdemeanor offenses on state-owned or controlled lands.

Myths and facts

To many people, burning grass is a tradition, and almost a rite, of spring. Upon closer examination, however, the reasons for spring grass burning are largely unfounded and rather than being beneficial, grass burning is destructive and dangerous.

Myths say, "It's safe to burn grass as long as there is still some snow on the ground."

However, within hours of snow melting, dead grass becomes flammable, especially if there have been drying winds. Grass fires burn hot and fast and spread quickly around, and even over, patches of snow.

It's a common myth that spring grass burning controls weeds.

In reality, the weeds deposited seeds into the surrounding soil last fall. Burning creates an ideal bare soil bed for the seeds to germinate.

Another common myth is that

spring burning improves the new grass crop.

Burning actually reduces grass yield 50 to 70 percent.

Some say that burning makes the new grass come in greener.

To the contrary, the new grass will be the same color whether burning took place or not. It just appears greener due to the contrast against the bare, blackened ground.

It is often said, "I don't see much wildlife around here, so I can burn grass without threatening any animals."

However, burning destroys the habitat of species you don't normally see such as mice and voles, as well as the nests and eggs of certain birds. If the fire gets out of control, larger animals can be caught by the flames, and many species will lose habitat.

Another common myth is that lost habitat will grow back in a few months, and the wildlife will return.

Rather, it may take several years to replace what was lost. Vegetation is often multilayered with higher growth protecting undergrowth. Different

species depend on different layers for food or shelter. Loss of the lower layer and its residents will impact species that prey upon those lost species.

Additional myths say, "Spring burning is the easiest way to get rid of last year's vegetation."

While this method may be easy, it is not good for the soil. Burning results in most of the old plants' nutrients going up in smoke or remaining in ash that is washed away. Burning also releases CO2 into the atmosphere. Plowing old plants under, or allowing them to decompose, allows carbon and fertilizing elements to go back into the soil.

Finally, it's common to hear, "It's pretty safe to burn grass here. There's a fire hall just down the road."

Producers should keep in mind, if you light a fire, you are responsible for it. If your fire gets out of control, you may be liable for the cost of fighting the fire, the destruction of others' property and face criminal penalties for violating burning regulations.

Big Horn's Line Superintendent Retires

The date December 31, 2013 marked the end of a 22-year career with Big Horn REA for Line Superintendent Jeff Stocklin.

In 1991, Stocklin was hired as an apprentice lineman in Basin. Shortly thereafter, he moved to the Ten Sleep shop to work under Line Foreman Morris Mullis. Jeff received his Journeyman Lineman certificate in June of 1994. Following Mullis' retirement, Stocklin was named Line Foreman for the Ten Sleep area in 1995. His journey at Big Horn REA culminated in his being appointed Line Superintendent in February, 2010.

Along the way, Stocklin was instrumental in the Cody Line School, serving on the organizing committee and as a highly regarded instructor. Stocklin was recognized by the Big Horn REA board of directors at their board meeting in September, 2009 for his dedication and involvement in the Cody Hot Line School. Jeff was an

instructor at the training facility that is held every year to teach utility line workers about things such as - line equipment installation and maintenance, proper methods of working on energized lines, and overall safety and work habits.

Jeff stated that after 22 years of coming to work, knowing you have a schedule to complete and enjoying your job, it is nice to be able to go and do things when they come up. When asked what he'll miss, Jeff stated, "I miss the line work. I miss the members....but a lot of them I still get to see! I've been doing a little of this and a little of that, helping out a rancher, spending time with my kids. It's good!"

Jeff and his wife Georgia, who works in the Ten Sleep schools, will remain living in Ten Sleep. The Stocklin's have three children, Megan, Clay and Halli, as well as two grandsons and a son-in-law and a daughter-in-law they

are looking forward to spending more time with.

Board President Delaney noted that "Jeff Stocklin has been an



outstanding employee for Big Horn REA for 22 years! As a lineman serving in the Ten Sleep area, Jeff always went the "extra mile" to serve the member/owners and was very much appreciated by the people in that area. After being promoted to Line Superintendent, Jeff served all Big Horn members in the same way and was highly respected by all Big Horn employees. Big Horn will miss Jeff Stocklin and his contributions to our member/owners."

Trees and Power Lines

Big Horn REA would like to thank our members who have allowed us to cut trees that have grown into our lines. Big Horn is committed to providing safe and reliable power. By cutting the trees we are able to remove such hazards as a tree falling into a line creating a fire and a child climbing a tree near an energized line. Further, trees in the lines create outages and voltage problems.

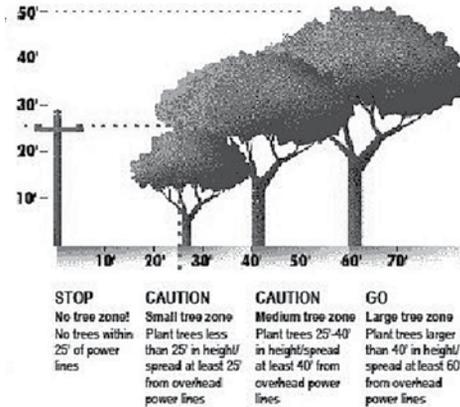
Big Horn wants to remind our members that planting of trees under or near overhead lines should not be done. Big Horn must maintain proper line clearance distance between our lines and trees. The costs associated with tree removal or trimming could be charged to the property owner.

Just as important, trees planted near underground lines could also create hazards. Before you plant, make sure that you are aware of the location of the underground utilities. To be certain that you do not dig into any lines and risk serious injury or costly service interruption, call Wyoming One Call for a line locate at 1-800-849-2476, or simply dial 811.

Big Horn REA wants to remind everyone proper selection and placement of trees away from either overhead or underground power lines can eliminate potential public safety hazards, reduce expenses related to tree removal and provide more reliable power.

Maybe your trees near the power lines do not seem too bad, but if they are in or near the power line they will create a hazard. Please give us a call and we will arrange to meet with you to analyze and discuss the best course of action.

Big Horn has contracted with a tree removal company to clear right of ways and problem trees. The costs to remove the tree will generally be a part of our operating costs, whereas later-on the homeowner may be required to pay for the costs associated for damage to lines from trees and for tree removal.



HIGHLIGHTS

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Call the office number: **ANYTIME**
(307) 568-2419 or 1-800-564-2419
After 5 p.m., weekends and holidays
all calls will be answered by our pro-
fessional answering service, who will
contact the appropriate person(s).



Energy Efficiency

Tip of the Month

A well-designed landscape provides both energy efficiency and curb appeal for your home. The type of vegetation you choose is as important as where they are planted. Sunlight streaming through windows and bearing down on the roof can drive up air conditioner use. Using shade trees and shrubs in your landscaping plan can help reduce cooling costs. In the winter, deciduous trees lose their leaves and let in warmth.

Source: Energy.gov