



Upgrade in line improves West Yellowstone area power service

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Bonneville Power Administration

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Idaho Falls, Idaho – A Bonneville Power Administration crew is removing a troubling section of wire that will temporarily correct the problems the area has experienced with occasional power outages and flickering lights.

An eight-man BPA transmission repair crew began fighting snow and ice Feb. 10 to remove two static lines from 3-1/2 miles of transmission structures that cross the continental divide between Idaho and Montana. Work continues this week. Although not needed for moving electricity, a static line sits atop transmission towers and diverts lightning away from transmission lines to ground, ensuring reliable service even during periods of heavy lightning.

“The exceptional weather caused a build-up of as much as four inches of ice on the static lines,” explained Lynn Kerzman, BPA manager of regional operations and maintenance in Idaho Falls. “That amount of ice caused the lines to sag into the conductor, resulting in the interruptions of service that Fall River Cooperative customers have experienced.”

Kerzman added that the outages occurred when a combination of heavy icing and high winds blew the sagging lines into the conductors, or the wires that carry electricity. He said the icing was worse this year because fog and slightly higher temperatures produced a thicker build-up of ice. Since the weather wasn't predicted to change, BPA decided to remove the static wires and come back in late spring to replace them with a heavier wire that will be less prone to sagging.

According to Fall Electric Cooperative general manager Dee Reynolds, the Cooperative's 1,700 customers in Montana had experienced short outages and blinking lights caused by the sagging line since late December, while its remaining 8,500 customers experienced just the blinking lights.

“We began to work with Bonneville in December to isolate the problem and get it corrected,” said Reynolds. “I appreciate their willingness to correct the problem as soon as possible, especially considering the effort required to get through the snow just to get near the site.”

The eight-man crew began work Wednesday, arriving at the site 12 to 13 miles from the nearest cleared road on snowcats and snow mobiles.

“With a snow depth of eight to 10 feet, there was no other way to get to the transmission structures,”

said Kerzman. "And because we couldn't get our normal line and bucket trucks in, our linemen had to do it the old fashioned way and climb the poles using hooks and belts."

The crew first had to clear ice from the wires by pounding on them with large hammers at the structures and relying on the vibration to break the ice away, a hair-raising exercise, Kerzman said. Then the crew cut the 30,000 ft. to 35,000 ft. of wire in 600 ft. to 800 ft. sections and pulled it to the side of the site.

The crew will return in May or June to replace the static lines, Kerzman said. In the mean time, the transmission line continues to be protected from lightning strikes. Before they left, the crew installed lightning arresters on each pole.

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