

Claverack Rural Electric Cooperative

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives
serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

Claverack REC

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Jeff Fetzer, Local Pages Editor

From the President & CEO



Maintaining a culture of safety

By Steve Allabaugh

“SAFETY” is a universal word that is mentioned often and used loosely. Companies large and small, across all industries, express their commitment to safety.

At Claverack, we do more than just talk about our commitment to safety; we operate in a culture of safety by making the safety of our employees and the community our top priority.

At its essence, Claverack’s mission is to provide safe, affordable and reliable electricity to its members. At the end of the day, we strive to deliver a steady flow of power to our members, but equally important, we want to return our workers home safely to their loved ones. To do this requires ongoing focus, dedication and vigilance.

Claverack has a safety team that focuses on keeping employees and the community safe around electricity. We also have the benefit of a full-time safety professional who guides us in establishing and following protocols based on leading national safety practices for the utility industry.

Our safety team has regular meetings in which they discuss upcoming projects from a safety perspective. They monitor and track near-misses of accidents in order to understand them, share “lessons learned,” and improve in the future.


We require our lineworkers to wear specialized equipment when working next to or with power lines and to take part in regular safety training. Our line crews conduct safety tailboards before

beginning each job to review work procedures, personal protective equipment requirements, and specific precautions associated with the project at hand.

As importantly, we encourage all of our crews to speak up and hold each other accountable for safety. We also hold our entire organization accountable by voluntarily participating in the Rural Electric Safety Achievement Program, a comprehensive national program that utilizes an inspection/certification process with a goal of improving safety performance and culture.

Claverack’s safety efforts extend beyond our employees. We strive to keep our members and our communities safe. That’s why the cooperative has a long history of providing safety talks and electrical safety demonstrations, free of charge, at community events and to schools, youth groups, first responders and other organizations. And that’s why we’re using this space in *Penn Lines* to focus on electrical safety in May, which has been designated as National Electrical Safety Month.

There is much you can do to keep yourself and your community safe around electricity. Report downed power lines. Teach your children about the dangers of electricity. Don’t attempt electrical DIY projects or overload your outlets. Contact Claverack or visit our website, claverack.com, for additional electrical safety tips.

Be mindful when it comes to electrical safety. Pause and take the extra time to plug into safety. 

Claverack expanding ash removal efforts

By Jeff Fetzer

CLAVERRACK beefed up its battle to blunt the impact of ash tree die-off this spring with the addition of an independent tree-cutting crew focused exclusively on dropping danger trees growing along co-op rights of way.

The vast majority of danger trees — those with a strong likelihood of falling onto the co-op’s power lines — are ash trees that are dying en masse across the region as a result of an invasive forest pest called the emerald ash borer.

With an abundance of unhealthy ash trees lining long stretches of the co-op’s 3,000 miles of electric lines, the ash die-off has contributed to a significant increase in tree-related power outages over the past five years and has been especially problematic in the early months of 2021 as ice and wind storms have battered the region with regularity.

“Our approach now is to get as many of these hazard trees on the ground as quickly as possible,” says Joshua Baublitz, right-of-way program manager for Claverack. “There are two ways this



ASH SLASH: Claverack’s right-of-way program manager, Joshua Baublitz, displays a stretch of co-op right of way along Buck Road in Rome Township, Bradford County, where crews cut down approximately 50 dead ash trees this winter. A January ice storm caused a number of dead ash trees to topple onto the line section, resulting in downed wires and broken poles. Co-op crews replaced the poles and rebuilt the line section after a contract tree crew spent a week felling ash danger trees growing along the right of way.

ends: we either cut the tree or it falls. And cutting the trees is much better for our membership.”

The cooperative’s historical approach to vegetation management entailed utilizing tree service crews to maintain rights of way along pre-planned circuits, typically in two to four substation service areas of the co-op’s territory each year. The co-op typically maintains about 390 miles of rights of way annually.

“With normal maintenance, all we’re typically doing is trimming and making sure vegetation isn’t coming up in the right of way and that the right of way is accessible,” says Baublitz.

Prior to the emerald ash borer infestation, a vegetation management crew was likely to encounter a handful of hazard trees growing along each mile of circuit being cleared, Baublitz notes. Those trees would be worked into the routine right-of-way work without slowing down the process.

“Ash trees have exacerbated that situation, and we’ve gone from where you might have a two or three hazard trees every couple of miles, and it was

intermittent to deal with, to now, where you might have 100 of them in a mile,” Baublitz says.

The sheer volume of dead and dying ash threatening co-op facilities prompted the utility forester to seek approval to bring on an additional work crew focused solely on removing danger trees. The co-op board has opted to fund the dedicated danger tree removal crew for two years, and a two-man crew with Asplundh Tree Service began work toward that end in the Herrick Substation area in mid-March.

“By freeing up the maintenance crews, they are able to focus on their job, which is trimming and making sure the rights of way are accessible,” Baublitz says, “and the ash tree crew doesn’t need to worry about maintenance. They can just focus on tackling this issue that we have because of the emerald ash borer.”

The ash borer, a small metallic green beetle native to Asia, was first discovered in Michigan in 2002. It has slowly migrated east, decimating ash tree populations along the way.

The beetle entered western Pennsylvania in 2007, and, a few years later,



EXPOSED: A dead ash tree with bark stripped away reveals the serpentine tunnels created in the sap wood by feeding emerald ash borer larvae. Over a period of one to three years of infestation, the larvae kill the tree by girdling it and stopping the flow of water and nutrients.

tell-tale signs of its arrival in north-eastern Pennsylvania could be found on local ash trees: thinning crowns, browning leaves, a “blonding” of the bark, and prodigious production of seed, a signal of tree stress.

The ash borer targets only ash trees, laying its eggs on the rough bark of the trees. The ash borer larvae bore into the tree, tunneling and feeding just under the bark in the cambium layer, the part of the tree through which water and nutrients are transported. After several years of infestation, the larvae tunnels effectively girdle the trunk of the tree, killing it.

Claverack began encountering problems stemming from the ash borer infestation around 2016. To address what was expected to be a serious, long-term issue with significant potential to impact service reliability, the co-op contracted with a national utility forestry company, ACRT, for expert guidance in 2017.

Baublitz, a forestry professional with ACRT at the time, came on board as the consultant tasked with creating a program to mitigate the ash issue on Claverack’s behalf. The following year, the cooperative hired Baublitz as its first full-time right-of-way program manager.

In addition to planning out the annual vegetation management cycle each year and overseeing contract tree crews working across the system, Baublitz serves as the co-op’s point of contact for members calling with concerns about potential hazard trees, particularly ash, growing near the electric lines at their properties.

“We get calls from members all the time to look at trees, and then I have to go out and evaluate them,” he says. “Right now, I have 28 different people who I need to visit to take a look at their trees.”

After assessing and prioritizing each tree based on its potential to come into contact with co-op lines, Baublitz works them into the removal schedule, based on the availability and proximity of the contract tree-service crews. With a large number of individual hazard trees scattered across a service territory

that touches eight counties, Baublitz says scheduling that work has been a challenging task.

With the dedicated danger tree crew now in place, Baublitz anticipates a more streamlined and effective approach to handling individual member concerns about danger trees.

“The new program will still have a systematic approach to it 90% of the time,” Baublitz explains. “I will have work pre-planned for the ash tree crew in a given area that they will focus on, but probably once each quarter, they will spend a week or two doing random go-rounds to address the individual tree concerns members have called us about.”

The crew will initially work on the western side of the co-op’s service territory, where Baublitz says all of the ash trees have either died or are in the process. He says a sizeable area of healthy ash trees remains in the northeastern corner of Claverack’s territory, but adds it’s a only matter of time until the emerald ash borer reaches that area, too.

“You cannot stop this beetle,” he says, noting the co-op has felled about 1,500 ash trees annually since 2017. “We are absolutely making headway, and this crew we added is really going to make a big difference. It’s only going to get better.”

Even so, Baublitz projects the co-op will be dealing with the ash tree issue for another five years or so.

“We’re about at the mid-way point,” he says. “We’ll either cut all the ash trees down or they will have fallen by then. Once that happens, that will be the end of the story. I’m hoping in about five years that I will not receive another ticket about ash trees again.”

Baublitz cautions that another invasive forest pest, the spotted lanternfly, has been detected in Lackawanna and Luzerne counties within the past year, so another threat to the region’s trees looms. The spotted lanternfly feeds on the sap of about 70 different plant species and has a strong preference for tree of heaven, as well as economically important plants such as grapevines, fruit trees, maple, black walnut, birch



DISTRESS SIGNAL: One of the first, easily noticeable signs that emerald ash borers have infested an ash tree is “blonding” of the bark. It is caused by woodpeckers, which flake off the dark outer layers of bark while searching for meals of ash borer larvae.

and willow.

“I expect we’ll see the spotted lanternfly across our system within five years,” the utility forester says. “I haven’t seen data yet for mortality in commercial saw timber trees like those that would be growing along our rights of way. So far, what I’ve seen is information on how it would affect the overall quality of hardwoods that are harvested and loss of dollars in quality.”

That leads him to suspect that while the spotted lanternfly may impact tree health and stunt tree growth, it may not ultimately kill the trees it feeds upon.

“Am I concerned about spotted lanternfly? Yes, because it has the potential to impact a lot of people’s lives and livelihoods,” he says. “In terms of the utility, though, I haven’t seen the data to show it’s going to be the next emerald ash borer. I’m cautiously optimistic that won’t be the case.”

Baublitz continues to encourage members who have concerns about dead or dying trees near the co-op’s electric lines to contact the Claverack office so those trees can be added into the danger tree tracking system and targeted for removal, if deemed necessary. 🌳

All Claverack offices will be closed on Monday, May 31, in observance of Memorial Day.

Keep in touch with us on Facebook

Looking to keep up with the latest news involving your local electric cooperative? Join us on Facebook.

By "liking" Claverack REC on Facebook, you will receive updates about major power outages, current events and activities involving the cooperative, as well as information about system projects, photos and other items of interest.

To find us on Facebook, simply click on the Facebook icon on our homepage at claverack.com. You can also view our most recent Facebook posts by checking out the Facebook feed as you scroll down our homepage.

Even out your payments with Levelized Billing

You can avoid large fluctuations in your electric bill from month to month by participating in Claverack's Levelized Billing plan.

The program allows you to level out your monthly payments throughout the year.

Levelized Billing is available to members with at least one year of electric use, provided they have fewer than two late payments in the prior 12 months.

This plan is particularly helpful to members with electric heating or central air conditioning systems, since their electric bills tend to increase significantly during the heating and cooling seasons. It's also convenient for those on fixed incomes.

If you are interested in a Levelized Billing plan, please call the member services department at 1-800-326-9799.

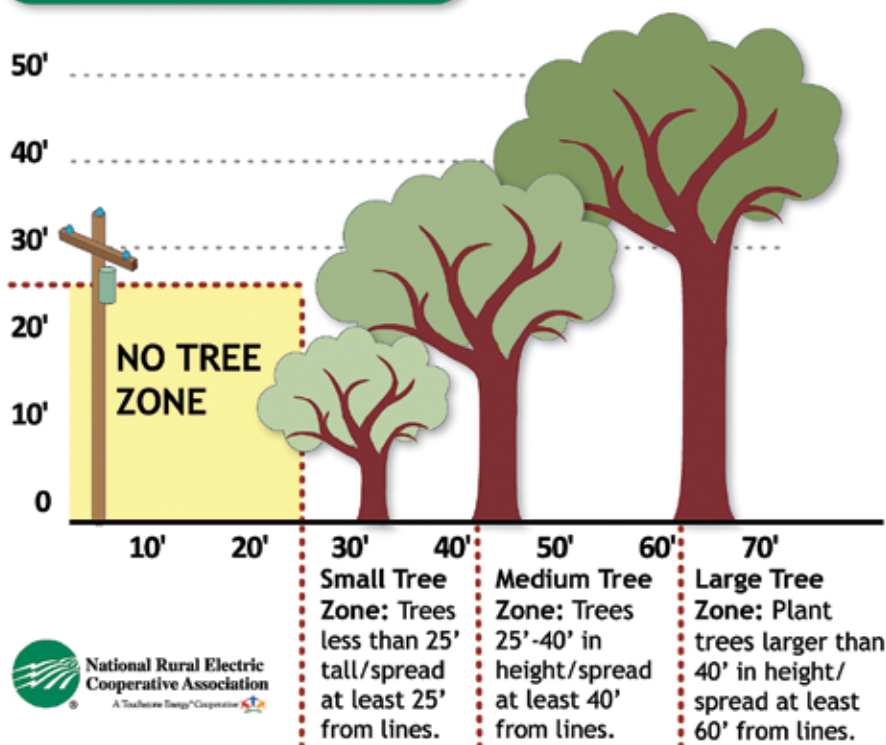
Plant the right tree in the right place

Trees beautify the landscape around our homes and, when planted in the right spot, can even help lower energy bills. But the wrong tree in the wrong place can be a hazard to electric lines.

Claverack discourages members from planting trees of any kind under our electric lines. Low growth trees such as magnolia, lilac, crabapple and fruit-bearing trees with maximum height and spread of 25 feet should be planted at least 25 feet from our lines.

Members with concerns about trees growing on or along rights of way on their properties are asked to contact the Claverack office at 1-800-326-9799.

Tree Planting Guide



Co-op offers scholarship to MU students

Applications are being accepted for a \$1,000 scholarship that is available for the 2021-2022 academic year to a Mansfield University student who is a Claverack member or dependent.

To be eligible for consideration, students must:

- ▶ be enrolled full time at Mansfield University
- ▶ demonstrate financial need
- ▶ be a member or dependent of a member of Claverack Rural Electric Cooperative
- ▶ demonstrate the highest traits of leadership, citizenship and character

Students can also apply online by visiting our homepage, claverack.com, and clicking on Scholarships under the "Your Community" drop-down menu at the top of the screen.

Claverack endowed the scholarship fund at Mansfield University in 2000, with a goal of providing financial assistance to any Claverack member or dependent pursuing a degree at the university.

A member of the State System of Higher Education, Mansfield University attracts many students from throughout the cooperative's service territory.