

A Day With the Linemen (continued from page 10)

It's a lot of poles and a lot of wire. And a lot of trees.

Here is just one example of what it means to be part of a rural power system: the Mist substation supplies power all the way through Jewel, out Highway 26, through Elsie, all the way to Camp 18. About 50 miles all told. If one tree comes down along that stretch, every one of those customers along the whole line could lose power. And some lineman crew has to go out and find that break and fix it.

One possible solution to avoiding the trees in the region and the problems they present is putting lines underground. It has been used successfully, but also has some drawbacks. Like the underground break a crew was dispatched to in Chapman the day of my ride along. Finding the break becomes a challenge-- you can't just visually locate it when you reach the area. New radar equipment has helped make finding underground breaks easier, but the job we were on provided another issue. The line was buried under an addition to the home which had been constructed by a previous owner. It couldn't be reached without moving part of the house-- or digging a tunnel. So the line had to be temporarily run above ground through conduit, and will have to be retrenched and buried, later. This job took most of the day for three crew members, three trucks, a back hoe-- and it's still not finished. All that for one repair.

The rural, curving roads throughout the system provide another challenge. Repair work on a back road may require flaggers, meaning a three or four man job might turn into a five or six man job, or most of the entire WOEC crew. Again, all for one repair.

There have been suggestions from some Coop members that WOEC should sell their assets to a larger power company, or maybe a company that doesn't seem to have so many problems keeping the power on. A company that could manage itself better. The problem is-- no one wants it. WOEC has looked at selling off some of the furthest areas to companies that are closer to those service areas. They aren't interested. WOEC has looked at selling the whole system. No takers. Managers of other utilities know exactly what we are dealing with here in WOEC country, and they don't want anything to do with it. The terrain is difficult, the size and expanse of the territory is restrictive, and the number of trees is crushing. No one wants this area. We're stuck with it.

Farmer has one idea on how to improve the situation and service for his WOEC members-- widen the rights-of-way around the lines. "We have a forty-foot right-of-way, with 100 foot trees on either side. When those trees come down, they can



Downed trees at Fishhawk Lake caused lots of problems

Many of the lines are slowly being moved closer to the roads, making them easier to maintain, and repair. WOEC is actively training apprentices, to be able to rebuild their manpower. Older poles are slowly being replaced.

Each time we have severe winter weather, it slows progress and the Coop incurs more expenses. The last three years have taken their toll. But the folks at WOEC keep working hard, providing the best service they can, given the circumstances. And the linemen keep heading out to the middle of nowhere-- making repairs and doing whatever it takes to get the lights back on-- at all hours of the day and night.

take out our lines. That's a big part of our problem," he said. "We can trim the trees, but it really doesn't do anything." In fact, Farmer has added a second trimming crew, which has helped create fewer outages, but if members want to see a real difference, more trees need to be removed. This will take state legislative action, which takes citizen pressure.

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Heath says he has seen a lot of improvements in the system since he arrived seven years ago.

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...Details to be Announced soon

For more information contact
the Vernonia Police Department

Congratulations Burdette & Larinda Robb!



Burdette & Larinda were married on December 27th 2008, at the home of Larinda's parents Michael and Marie Botchie in Rainier, Oregon after a brief engagement and years of friendship.

The ceremony was conducted by their friend and "Civil War" Captain Bob Olin. Despite the snow, the evening wedding turned out to be as beautiful as the couple hoped it would be. The parents of the Groom, Burdette Robb and Cathy Robb, along with several close family and friends attended the private wedding and reception.

After a brief honeymoon at the beach, Burdette returned to his military training at Fort Sam Houston where he is currently training to be a Combat Medic, after having already successfully completed his Basic Training at Fort Benning, GA. Larinda is continuing her education at PCC where she has already completed her EMT Basic training and plans to pursue a Paramedic Degree. She is currently a volunteer for Metro West Ambulance in Vernonia, and a volunteer Firefighter/EMT for Columbia River Fire and Rescue. The couple is anxiously waiting on orders to learn where the Army will take them.

For the Hero in both of you, we are all very proud!