

# A Message from the WOEC Manager

By Billi Kohler  
WOEC General Manager

I would like to take this opportunity to invite all members of the West Oregon Electric Cooperative to attend our Annual Meeting on Saturday, August 20, starting at 11:00 am at the Vernonia Schools Commons.

At that meeting members will be electing Directors for Districts 2 and 5. In District 2, Director Paul Seamons is running unopposed. In District 5, Director and current Board Chair Erika Paleck is running for re-election against nominee Ray Taber. Ballots will go out in the mail at the end of July. Members will have the option to vote online, by mail, or in person at the Annual Meeting.

As you may recall, the West Oregon Electric Cooperative Board of Directors approved a two-step plan to increase rates in 2022, with a partial increase in January and the remainder in July.

There will be a \$3.50 increase to the base charge and a half cent increase to the kilowatt-hour charge for your July use. The new rate will be reflected on your August bill.

I often am asked why our rates are so high. Several

key factors go into setting our rates both from a historical perspective and looking ahead.

WOEC was formed more than 75 years ago to serve a small group of people who did not have access to power. There was not enough return on the investment needed to motivate investor-owned utilities to run the lines out to all of the sparsely scattered accounts in our territory.

The cost factors were – and remain – significant because the areas we serve cover parts of five heavily forested counties. Our service areas are so spread apart that the long distances we travel make service work, outages, and maintenance extremely costly and time consuming.

Another question I am asked is, “Why not sell or merge with another utility since rates are forecasted to rise?” This is a fair question, and one I would like to address.

In 2018, our Board directed management to explore the possibility of WOEC selling the system to another utility. Any such arrangement would have to satisfy the Board’s fundamental principles: WOEC members’ rates would be substantially reduced by the sale to another utility; and WOEC members would be treated the same as the ac-

quiring utility’s existing customers both in terms of service and rates.

Under Oregon law and WOEC’s bylaws, any sale of the system would have to be approved by two-thirds of WOEC’s members.

One utility expressed interest in buying our system. WOEC and the potential purchaser began a long and thorough analysis of the economics, logistics, and legal requirements for a sale proposal. Unfortunately, after four years of thorough examination, the realities of WOEC’s service territory – along with current cost drivers – made it clear the sale would not result in meaningful rate reductions, if any. Given that information, the Board decided to terminate the discussions.

We are a not-for-profit cooperative with a strong internal focus on controlling costs and operating efficiently. We understand the economic challenges our members face. We will continue to work hard to contain costs while providing safe and reliable service to our communities.

*Portions of this message were previously published in the July 2022 issue of Ruralite magazine.*

# Wauna Credit Union Attains Juntos Avanzamos Designation

Wauna Credit Union (WCU) has been granted the Juntos Avanzamos designation this month, a designation for credit unions who have committed to serving Hispanic consumers.

The designation is led by Inclusiv; the Network of Latino Credit Unions and Professionals (NLCIP); Coopera, Iowa-based consultants to the credit union industry on the Hispanic market; Cornerstone Credit Union League; and a growing number of state leagues and associations across the country.

“If the Credit Union is failing to serve any individual for any reason, we need to correct that immediately,” said WCU President and CEO Robert Blumberg. “As long as we are consistently living our mission and discovering new ways to help people, then we are on the right path,” he said.

WCU joins 121 Juntos Avanzamos designated credit unions in 27 different states throughout the county. The program

is specifically designed to better support the Hispanic community, offering information on credit unions who have demonstrated specialized abilities including, bi-lingual staffing, translation services, non-citizen lending, and more.

WCU is known for providing financial education, investment services, lending products, and more for the Hispanic community, and is involved with a number of local Hispanic-support organizations, including Adelante Mujeres and Consejo Hispano.

“WCU has been serving the Hispanic community for years and one day it just made sense to reach out to Inclusiv about securing this designation,” said Michael Murdoch, Marketing Manager at WCU. “We’ve looked up to many pioneers in these initiatives amongst credit unions in the Portland area – it’s time for us to better feature these invaluable services for our Hispanic communities in and around our footprint,” he said.

You can learn more about Juntos Avanzamos and Inclusiv by visiting [juntosavanzamos.org](http://juntosavanzamos.org).

*Wauna Credit Union is a not-for-profit member-owned financial cooperative. Founded in 1967, WCU delivers all annual profits back to its members via strong savings and loan rates, investment in technology,*

*and highly-rated personal service. Anyone who resides, is employed, attends school, or worships in Clatsop, Columbia & Western Washington Counties in Oregon, or Pacific County in Washington is eligible for membership.*

VERNONIA'S  
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reflecting the spirit of our community

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