

The INDEPENDENT

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"Voice of the Upper Nehalem River Valley"

December 21, 2006

'Tis the Season



An old adage says "If you have a lemon, make lemonade!" This isn't a lemon tree, but a Banks homeowner shares the idea by moving Christmas decorations to the butt of a tree knocked down by last week's wind storm.

Spruce Run closed by major storm damage

The Oregon Department of Forestry has announced that Clatsop State Forest's Henry Rierson Spruce Run Campground along the Nehalem River will be closed until March 1 to make storm-related repairs.

The popular campground about five miles off Highway 26 at Elsie suffered significant wind-storm damage.

For more information, contact Larry Sprouse at the ODF Astoria District Office 503-325-5451.

Holiday closure for Transfer Station

The Vernonia Transfer Station will be closed on December 23 for the Christmas Holiday. Regular dates and hours will resume in January.



Dozens of Vernonia youth volunteered their services after the windstorm-caused power outages created a community-wide emergency. Pictured above are students unloading cots to be used in the Red Cross emergency shelter. Among the many tasks they helped with, students also went door-to-door with over 1,700 information flyers for residents who were impacted by the storm.

Windstorm does major damage to WOEC lines, substations

By W. Marc Farmer, General Manager, West Oregon Electric Cooperative

Top Three Ranking Storm

The December 14, 2006, storm will go down in history as one of the three worst wind storms in West Oregon Electric Cooperative history. The damage, widespread and severe, hit hard in all five of the counties we serve. Poles, line, and trees all came down during the wind and rains that continuously pounded our service territory for over 12 hours. While we had our trucks stocked and fueled, crews ready to go, and staff prepared, Mother Nature reminded us who is in control.

It literally did start with a bang at 2:07 p.m. on Hwy 202, as the first tree came through the line and blew the fuses on the transformer. Necanicum Substation went down next, as trees took out the line feeding power to our substation from PP&L. From there it went downhill in a hurry. Mist and Chapman areas were next, with the Mist Substation going out at 3:35 p.m. and the Chapman Substation going out at 3:45 p.m.

The world faded to black at 4:45 p.m., when the transmission line from BPA, feeding our main substation in Timber, was lost. This also took out power feeding the Vernonia Substation at the same time as Vernonia is fed power from the Timber Substation. Metering points where we receive power from PGE starting going dark, as well, as they experienced the full wrath of the storm.

At its peak, West Oregon EC had 100 percent of our members without power and it was reported that everything from 185th to the coast and the entire coast north of Tillamook

was dark.

At 10:30 p.m. we had to call in our crews as their very lives were in danger from falling trees and debris. Two of our Linemen were hit, one in the shoulder, another in the neck and shoulder as they were cutting trees out of the way. Clatskanie PUD had two trucks smashed by a tree and a snapped power pole. The driver of one of the trucks required 22 stitches when the tree fell into his side of the truck.

Trees were falling into the roads faster than my crew could cut them. They literally had to cut their way back to the office in Vernonia. Four of my Linemen couldn't make it back as the trees caused roads to be closed and they had to spend the night in the trucks. All through the night the Engineering and Operations Manager and I were contacting other utilities to see how they were fairing. The devastation was everywhere. The entire coast was under siege and it spread inland and down the Columbia Gorge. When morning came, we had 99 percent of our members without power and a severely damaged service area.

As our crews went through normal procedures for restoring power – first to transmission lines, then to substations, followed by the major feeder lines, then to tap lines, and finally to individual services – we encountered our first major problem. With all of our neighboring utilities having been hit by the storm just as hard or harder than us, we realized that getting the transmission lines repaired on our side of the substations didn't get us started, as power was not available from the other side.

Please see Power of the People, Page 12