

## Power of the People

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### I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas

Okay, so maybe it was a bit whiter than we expected. It was beautiful in a visual sense, but created lots of problems for West Oregon Electric Cooperative and most of our members. In what has been called an "Arctic Blast" and claimed to be the biggest snowstorm in 40 years, once again the month of December found us at the mercy of Mother Nature. The winds of 2006, the winds and flood of 2007, and the snows of

2008 all took their toll on our power system. The weight of the snows, freezing rain, more snow, and then the rain soaking the snow took down trees and tree limbs into our lines. As we've pointed out before, trees and power lines do not mix.

At its peak we lost power to four of our five substations and roughly 80 percent of our members were without power. Even our power providers BPA and PGE had tree problems and lost power to our Substations during the storm. Our crews worked literally around the clock and we first brought in crews from Clatskanie PUD, Columbia River PUD and Forest Grove to help put up lines. When the lines kept coming down as fast or faster than we could put them up during the first week-and-a-half of the storm, additional crews from Wasco Electric Co-op, Blachly Lane Electric Co-op, ILB, Michels Power, Pacific Power, PTI, and Wilson Power were called in, along with additional tree crews from Asplund and Trees Inc. At one point we had 20 crews working alongside our two Tree Crews and Line Crews.

In addition to the crews, we called in specialized equipment to work in the deep snows. Snow ranged from two feet to drifts of five feet deep in areas where the crews were working. We brought in snow machines, snow cats and big track vehicles, with a bucket truck on one and a digger derrick on the other, to go where we couldn't drive or hike-in due to deep snow and downed trees. They were able to clear and put up broken lines and replace broken poles and cross arms in these areas for us. Without them it would have taken days, and maybe weeks to wait for snows to melt or for us to cut our way into some of these areas. There are some that it would be almost impossible for our trucks to get to, our crews would have had to hike-in or use the ATV for access, but these big track rigs were able to reach them easily. Just traveling throughout our system was difficult and dangerous for all of the crews that worked on our system. Roads and falling trees were serious safety issues, along with being tired from the long hours without rest.

This was the most tiring and frustrating experience our crews can remember. Working around the clock for over two weeks and trudging through cold, wet snow two to four feet deep was exhausting work. The real frustration came when all of the time, efforts, energy and sacrifice to put lines up – only to have them come right back down behind you was demoralizing. I recall, on the night of the 20th, we made a big push to get the Mist Feeder Lines from the Mist Substation through Birkenfeld to Jewell and on to Camp 18, then the Fishhawk Lake area, and the Feeder Line to Pittsburg up in hopes of resting on Sunday the 21st. At 12:35 a.m. we had them

## ODFW to hold fly tying workshop

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Bugger, Elk Hair Caddis, Gold Ribbed Hare's Ear and other basic trout fishing flies. Experienced instructors will also cover tools and equipment, materials, terminology, how and what trout eat and aquatic insect life stages, and the fly patterns that represent them.

Space is limited to 15 participants, 18 years of age or older, and pre-registration is required. The \$30 registration fee covers instruction, program materials, use of equipment and lunch. It's an all day workshop beginning at 8:30 a.m. and ending around 4:00 p.m.

Workshops are held year-round at locations throughout

the state. Additional events scheduled for 2009 include a small game clinic, two pheasant hunts, two fly fishing workshops, Dutch oven cooking, clamming, crabbing, use of inflatable watercraft, shotgun clinics and a multi-course family outdoor day.

To register for the fly tying workshops or to get information about the Outdoor Skills Program and other workshops scheduled, check out the Education and Training page of ODFW's web page at [http://www.dfw.state.or.us/outdoor\\_skills/workshops.asp](http://www.dfw.state.or.us/outdoor_skills/workshops.asp) or call ODFW either in Salem at 503-947-6025 or your local ODFW office.

up and were working on another area when at 3:35 a.m. more trees and limbs took the lines down again. I think that was one of the low points, along with then losing power to all of the substations. We never gave up though and the Inside Staff and Line Crews all worked tremendous hours, gave up Christmas and New Year's to keep working on getting power restored to all of our members. The storm damage started for us on the 13th and we replaced the last broken pole on January 6th up on Pumpkin Ridge, again using the digger derrick on tracks as we couldn't reach it with our trucks because of the snow.

To do all of this didn't come cheap though. We are assessing the costs now and hoping some of the counties will be declared disaster areas so we can get some financial help. I can't even venture a guess yet, but it will be substantial. During this time we twice had to spend time moving equipment, files and documents, and as many other important items up or out of the building in anticipation of impending flood events. With a major weather event in the month of December during the past three years, we are beginning to wonder just what normal is anymore.

Several of our members have asked what they or we could do differently with these kinds of events occurring so frequently. There are two things that come to mind immediately. The first is to help us help you and that is with tree removal. Trees and power lines do not mix. We need to remove trees farther back from our lines. A forty-foot right-of-way with trees over 100 feet on both sides is a losing proposition for us every time. Undergrounding is four times more expensive and takes more time, but we are looking at increasing the amount of undergrounding on our system, where and when we can.

The second is to realize that when you chose to live among the beautiful trees, we are going to experience power outages. It is best to be prepared, which should include the purchase of a generator. Having some gas on hand for longer outages is important, especially in times when getting to the gas station is difficult in snow or flooding events. Having flashlights or lanterns, candles or oil lamps for light, a generator for heat, cooking, refrigeration and other essentials, and extra water are also good preparations. We cannot and do not guarantee continuous, uninterrupted power in the service area we serve, especially in times of severe winter storms that Mother Nature has hit us with in the past three years. We strive to do the best we can to provide power to all of our members. We added an additional tree crew two years ago and have added a pole inspection and replacement program to increase our reliability, and it has been showing excellent results until we get hit with a major destructive storm.

The final item I would like to note to those members who have questions regarding how we prioritize our repairs and power restoration. We always start with our transmission lines, which bring the power to us and through our system. The Substations are the second priority, as they provide service to thousands of members. Next are the Feeder lines and Distribution Lines which take the power from the Substations to the members, and then the smaller Tap lines to the individual members. We try to restore power to as many as we can as fast as we can, and then work our way down to the individual problems. We want you to know we want to restore power to you as quickly as possible and do everything within our control to do so. We appreciate your patience, support, and understanding of the difficult challenges we faced.

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