



# HEAVY WET SNOW, HIGH WINDS, AND FALLING TREES (OH MY!)

**T**hese are the Lions, Tigers, and Bears of the utility world, and there is nothing you can do to stop them even from a church pew! By the time you read this, hopefully these storms that came through starting on the 10th of December will just be a bad memory. As I write this, just a bit sleep-deprived and with all the sore muscles you can imagine for a fat guy going up and down into the bucket to pull up lines, the individual outages themselves all sort of blur together.

I took this photo from up in the bucket on Hemlock Road as I was getting ready to pull lines back up. Board member Jim Jorgenson had stopped to help out for a while and was walking to ensure that no cars came around the corner as I pulled up the lines. This was early in what became a 17-hour day for Mike and a 21-hour day for me, not to mention a 17-hour day for Lee Engstrom, who manned the phones (that incidentally weren't working right either) at the office. Unfortunately, Don was out due to COVID isolation (all is well now) and Mary was out of town during this storm.

All around the Island this is the sort of thing we were up against (inset) and in this particular case the repair was simply to remove the tree and tighten the lines. Most of the time, the lines were on the ground. The culprit was the wet heavy snow. This broke off trees from well in the woods away from the lines, bent tall balsams over nearly to the ground, and broke off branches that were then blown into the lines. There was not a single area that was not affected by this storm, and in many cases, we restored power only to have another branch or tree give up under the

Contrary to popular opinion, this is not a pretty picture. Nor is the one at right.





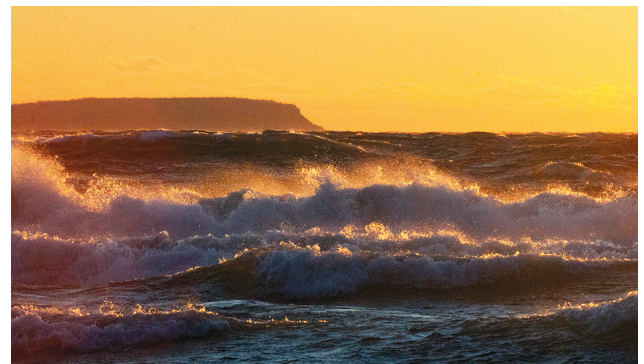


### UNTIL THURSDAY, THAT IS!

With all weather reports predicting gale-force winds starting Wednesday night and persisting into Thursday and possibly Friday, we knew we were in for it again and prepped the trucks as best we could. With Don back to work and Mary back, at least we would be at full strength for this one. All scheduled ferry trips were canceled for Thursday in anticipation. At least the warm weather had melted most of the snow we received during the Saturday storm.

Our first outages came on Wednesday at about 9 p.m. and were due to toppling trees. We had power restored to both Green Bay Road and Swenson Road by 11:30 p.m. We all went home to get what sleep we could, although with the wind howling, I don't think any of us really slept. We lost power from the mainland at approximately 4:10 a.m. and came in and started engines, bringing the entire Island back on-line for at the most maybe an hour. Then outages caused the load to go unbalanced and the engines shut down. We were able to run out the lines and then start engines and get the south end of the Island back up except for Lee Engstrom and the Ferry Line's shop on Old West Harbor Road. The north end of the Island was another matter completely. By the time we were able to run out the lines and make the necessary repairs, we knew the load was going to be high. Every pump, water heater, regular heater, refrigerator that had been out for several hours were all going to attempt to come on at once and even though it was not particularly cold out yet, the wind was still blowing hard.

We attempted to close in the north end and the load was very high and incredibly unbalanced. In an attempt to



Nope. Not pretty either. (Steve Waldron Photo)

Left: Definitely not pretty! (Lee Engstrom Photo) Right: Sunday after a couple of hours of sleep and some coffee (just a small inkling of pretty).

weight of the snow and put the lights out again.

The wet heavy snow was also very slippery. Both of our bucket trucks are 4-wheel drive, but the thing about having a big 4-wheel drive truck is that you can get stuck big as well. We knew the day was not going to be fun when early on, as I was closing in breakers running to the south, Mike was closing in breakers running to the north. I could hear Mike's wheels spinning over to the side of Kenny Koyen's driveway and as I headed back to my own truck, he called to tell me to bring a chain. I drove over, hooked up and no sooner put my foot on the accelerator than I slid down off the road and was stuck too. Luckily, John Mann was going by with the town's road grader and saw us and pulled both trucks out at once.

During the course of the storm, and the long hours, we had people who helped out. Jim Jorgenson spent a bit of time with me on Hemlock Road, Hoyt Purinton helped out on Old West Harbor Road, Tom Jordan spent many hours with us moving snow so we could get to poles, and Brian Jordan helped him watch for downed wires as he plowed a path beneath them with his rubber-tired loader. In addition to the town crew and Gary and Tyler spotting problems, we appreciate all the patience shown during this FIRST storm! Not everyone is patient or has an understanding of what is involved in restoring power under these circumstances, but in a small town, we all know who those people are and we work hard for everyone, even the impatient ones.

Since I have been manager, my number one fear (other than the obvious safety considerations that are always number one) was the cable failing. It did and we

got through it. My number two fear was downed lines across Arni's Swamp. You have heard me write about that before. This number two fear became number one as the lines did indeed go down across Arni's Swamp. The easiest thing would have been to pull them back up and splice them together, IF we could have gotten to them. An attempt to get to the second pole in the swamp failed and since the lines were down in two spans, it was apparent that we were not going to be able to get out to them to pull them back up. As I have noted in the past, the poles on this route, while not ready to fall over, have not passed inspection and climbing them is not a safe option.

Luckily, the underground project on Lobdell Point Road was initiated for this very reason, with the fiber project coming along for the ride. Unfortunately, we were not quite ready to eliminate the swamp run yet, but with a bit of creative connecting we were able to get Green Bay Road back on-line again around midnight. Had the underground not been available as an option, it is quite likely that restoring power to Green Bay Road would have taken much longer, and by longer, we mean days. We will need to make a permanent repair and will require an outage to transition from our temporary connection to the permanent one, but we think that beats the alternative of days without power.

With the exception of a few services that we were able to get cleaned up over about five hours on Sunday, we had everyone back on by 4 a.m. Sunday.



lower the load and improve the balance, we then went out and opened several downstream reclosers and after three attempts, we were still unable to get the engines to hold. Before doing anything more drastic than opening reclosers, we made a call to Wisconsin Public Service System Operating for an update (and no, we are not one of those impatient customers). We were informed at this time that they were working on the problem affecting most of Liberty Grove (at one point WPS had over 50,000 people out in its territory—with over 3,000 still without power on Saturday afternoon) and they should have us back on shortly. Power was restored to the Island around 12:30 p.m. and we began closing reclosers and chasing down problems that had occurred while the power was out. We had everything wrapped up, including the broken pole at Lee Engstrom's, by around 4:30 p.m. Joel Gunnlaugsson

came in and helped so we could have two full crews working on what was left.

All in all, we were actually pretty lucky considering the widespread damage that was done through out the state. As part of the Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association, we do participate in the mutual aid group called ROPE (Restoration Of Power in an Emergency); however, it would be a rare circumstance that the "ROPE" would be long enough to reach to Washington Island and most times during these circumstances, boats are not running to deliver help anyway.

Lee Engstrom wrote up a description of the specific event that happened at his home and it is included below. With the exception of the broken pole, it is a pretty typical tale during events like this. Lee, your board secretary, is often directly involved in the restoration of power because he is always there to help and usually in the truck with me.



Believe me when I tell you that this is not our idea of a fun day at the beach, but we were lucky the ground was firm enough that we could get the truck to this pole to make repairs.

## POWER OUTAGE 12/16/2021 ON OLD WEST HARBOR ROAD

At 4 a.m. on 12/16/21 the power went off at my house and everywhere else on the island. I waited about an hour then finally got up. The REA was already outside my house on the road so I thought I would go out and investigate the situation. Mike was on the ground and Donny was in the bucket on the truck. Mike informed me a big beach had come down and broke the electrical pole off and it needed to be reset with a new pole. It sounded like it was going to be awhile before I was going to have any electricity at my house and also for my neighbor. Mike and Don temporarily repaired the lines so that the rest of the folks on the road would have power.

When it finally got light enough, I went out to look at the damage more closely. A big beach tree had broken off at the base and was hung up in another dead beach tree, but it had taken down the electric pole and it was broken off at the base also, which means a new pole as Mike told me. It was quite a mess.

The REA left but said they would return to fix the down pole and down wires, but with down wires and outages all over the island, I knew it would not be right away. Janet and I just settled down with no internet, TV, or radio—just my Kindle and a cup of instant coffee and Janet with her tea, a book, and her new kitty.

Around 11:15 a.m. the little REA truck, with Mike driving, pulled up with a new transformer and a bunch of wire and right behind Mike was Donny with the big REA bucket truck. The

bucket truck pulled off into the ditch and got ready to install the new transformer. A lot of preparation went into this whole process. First, we decided where the wire was to go because when this tree took down the pole it also took down my triplex and my neighbor's triplex also. The REA decided not to install a new pole but to relocate the transformer onto an existing pole that was only about 30 feet away. That did save a lot of time and extra work. Donny was in the bucket doing a lot of tree trimming for where the wire would be going and Mike was splicing the triplex for the extra length that was needed to reach the new transformer location

Donny was getting the pole ready for the new transformer and at 12:30 p.m. the new transformer was installed. Now the wire had to be pulled up to the transformer to be wired into the transformer. This process took 55 minutes to finish. After a final inspection to make sure all was correctly installed and all equipment was picked up and put away and the switch turned on, at 1:40 p.m. the lights were on again at the house. At 4 a.m. when the lights went on it was 43 degrees outside and 72 degrees inside, and at 1:40 p.m. it was 33 degrees outside and 67 degrees inside. The wind was blowing pretty hard still with some really high gusts, so this was the cause of the problem to start with. I would like to thank the REA for the hard work they do in ADVERSE conditions, because power outages seem to happen only when the wind blows hard, or it's snowing hard or raining hard or at night (sometimes all night!).—Lee Engstrom





## TRIM/WIDEN YOUR DARNED DRIVEWAYS!

Over the last several years, there has been a concerted effort by the fire department to make people aware of the problems inherent in driveways that are too narrow or are not maintained. You may remember the fire truck strategically placed throughout the Island with a sign asking something to the effect of “Do you think this can make it down your driveway in an emergency?”

Your electric cooperative has been a firm supporter of this effort. Did you know that there is even a town ordinance regarding driveway width?

During the middle of the outages on Saturday, in the heavy wet snow, sometime around 11 p.m., yours truly was attempting to get down one of the driveways that is the subject of these previous efforts. Because of the size of the truck this is a fun task even under the best of conditions. You have to swerve to the right to avoid hitting the driver’s side mirror on a tree and then immediately



swerve to the left to avoid hitting the passenger side mirror on a tree. Typically, we replace two to three mirrors a year because of branches intruding into driveways or trees that should come down to widen the driveway. This time we lost more than a mirror. The mirror hooked the tree, bent the corner of the door out, and the passenger window shattered. I was driving the truck and

the air was quite blue at the time this occurred, and not due to the cold weather. It was also not a whole lot of fun to work from 11 p.m. until 4 a.m. with no window in the truck.

Repairing this damage means replacing the door. Luckily, we have a source for a used one.

The responsibility for this damage is mine, as I was driving the truck. After working 15 hours, I probably had an excuse for ziggling when I should have zagged. However, had the driveway been in compliance this would not have occurred. It is just one more thing that we have contend with when trying to get the lights back on. Had this been a fire, would one of the fire trucks made it down the driveway? Unlikely. Please, bring your driveways up to snuff so that those who need to do a job can do it. We do not want to make a choice between taking a tap off and leaving you without power or damaging the truck in order to restore it.

In addition, parking your boat, unused vehicle, piling brush, or worse, planting trees in the utility right-of-way only makes a difficult job that much more difficult. Please leave rights-of-way clear so we can maintain the lines and restore power in an emergency. If we can’t get to it, we can’t fix it.



## NOW THIS IS OUR IDEA OF A PRETTY PICTURE!

You may not know that the cooperative takes on the responsibility of hanging banners (the welcome banners too) and lights/trees for the Christmas season. It takes a bit of doing, but we think it brightens the downtown area and we hope you enjoy them as much as we do.

## WORK WITH QUANTUM AND NRTC CONTINUES

As mentioned in the December issue, we are not letting the grass grow under our toes while we wait for resolution with WPS on mainland pole contacts. Quantum crews have been at the cooperative helping us build out the headend for internet distribution and have been working on internal wiring in Island anchor institutions. This work will continue, likely throughout the winter months. We are hopeful to, weather permitting, begin hanging hardware on poles and running and terminating drops to homes. We hope to provide you with mugshots of the Quantum crew so you can put a name to the face as we move forward. In the meantime, you can see some of their work not only here, but in the county on the Quantum PC social media pages. We are very happy to have them on board and look forward to them having a long presence here on the Island serving the Island’s tech needs.

In addition, you have likely seen NRTC personnel and vehicles. They were wrapping up prior to Christmas and had been on the move so unfortunately,

I don’t have photos. We expect to get the final engineering and bill of materials information that results from this “rapid design” effort by the end of January.

Maybe, just maybe (although not likely), we will have heard about the NTIA grant by the time you’re reading this. Keep those fingers crossed. In the meantime, we are working under the grants we’ve already received and will accomplish all we can.



Above: Clinton Tripplett works on the headend room. Not pictured are Zak Hirn, Joel Asher, and Chris Wilson. Joel and Zak are heading up the project here and Chris has been wiring the anchor institutions. Right: Pat Keehan (a former Frontier lineman) tests the fiber splitter cabinets. Much like testing the fiber on the reels, it is very important to test these cabinets PRIOR to installation.



## RATE INCREASE

By the time you read this you will have received a notice in the mail regarding a rate increase effective with the January billing. We have discussed the increase and the reasons for it in the mailing and in previous issues. After review, monthly main meter base charges are increasing by \$3.50 per month (less than the predicted \$4.50) and the energy rate is increasing by \$0.01 across the board. As our cost of purchased power increases, even with controlling and attempting to reduce the fixed costs, we unfortunately are unable to stave this off. As noted, this is the first non-cable related increase since 2015.

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