

# WEC CO-OP CURRENTS

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March 2001

## \* Into It \*

### Forecaster Roger Hill Digs The Weather From His Worcester Home

Montana is Big Sky country. Driving beneath that endless, airy spread of blue and white, with the terrain rolling away into boundless abandon, gives a traveler a sense of the majesty of the earth and its elements. It's as beautiful as Vermont, but there's a difference. In Vermont the mountains are never far away; you have a sense of being cradled by the land. Montana offers no such solace. In Montana there is an invigorating sense of vulnerability to everything natural and real.

Montana turned a young Roger Hill, merely eight years old at the time, into a meteorologist – one of Vermont's best-known meteorologists these days, and in his humble way one of the local celebrities on Washington Electric Co-op's power lines. Roger has been a WEC member since 1999, when he moved to Worcester from Marshfield with his wife Michele, and Dylan, Jocelyn and Garth (Garth being a lumbering retriever with arthritis in his hips). The move put Hill closer to Burlington, where he was working for the National Weather Service until he resigned in July 2000 to return to his first love – calling the shots for people who need to know specifically what

nature has in store for us in central Vermont.

"It's great to be a member of WEC," says Hill. "It's a breath of fresh air. The Co-op is using new thinking and applying conservation techniques that pertain to our planet. They're working with nature rather than against it. We need that approach in the world more and more."

The morning, evening and storm-related weather forecasts you hear over the stations of Radio Vermont come directly from Roger's home, nearly a mile down Mackenzie Road, a private road that in winter seems to be less than one lane wide. There are few houses there, which is good because in 1999, when Tropical Storm Floyd battered Co-op Country, Mackenzie Road was one of the last places to get its power restored. The Hills and their neighbors went five days without electricity. Fortunately, Roger was with the National Weather Service at the time and not dependent on his home computer for his livelihood.

But even if the same thing happened today, Hill would not be at a loss for words for his radio audience. This is

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*With his cylinder for measuring precipitation, forecaster Roger Hill stands in his Worcester back yard.*

## Bylaw Proposals Hold Key To Co-op's Future

A year ago the Vermont Legislature passed a new statute that permits Washington Electric Cooperative to provide potentially valuable energy and energy-related services to the 9,000 members of this co-op and their homes, farms, businesses and families. Previously, such services were off-limits to rural electric co-ops, but not to the urban and suburban customers of investor-owned utilities.

Under the new co-op statute, Washington Electric could, for example, pursue opportunities in "green" energy sources, fossil fuels, telecommunications, cable TV, and developing technologies in the rapidly evolving energy field. Such services as WEC and its membership decided to pursue would be offered, perhaps for the first time in Vermont, with the many advantages of cooperative

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### Inside

#### **Bernstein, Hayden, Morton and Payne.**

Get acquainted with this year's candidates for the Board of Trustees on page 4.

**From California to East Montpelier,** energy supply is a hot topic these days. See Avram Patt's 'Manager's Report' on page 3.

**Automated bill payments coming to the Co-op.** Interested in signing up? See page 6.

**USDA program offers grants,** low-interest loans, to qualified rural residents. Page 2.



**Out with the old,**



**In with the new. New logo gives Co-op a modern look.**

#### **Washington Electric Cooperative**

East Montpelier, VT 05651

# USDA Program Provides Money For Rural Home Repairs

Rural Vermonters who need financial assistance in order to make needed repairs to their homes are urged to call the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in Montpelier and inquire about a loan and grant program for people with low income.

The program can be used for single-family dwellings, including mobile homes as long as they are on permanent foundations, and "prefab" housing as well as conventional homes. The Agriculture Department's goal is to remove the financial obstacles that prevent people from living in safe, healthy and comfortable housing.

"We want to see the money used toward the needs that we know are out there," said Anita Rios of the USDA.

People have to qualify for the program under income guidelines that vary slightly from county to county and depending on the number of people living in the household. The program applies only to owner-occupied housing – that is, no rental units or vacant buildings – and there are a few other restrictions as well. But the only way to know if you can obtain this

assistance is to call the USDA and ask about the application process.

"For a grant," Rios explained, "people need to be age 62 or older, and not have repayment ability for a 1-percent loan. Mostly, the grants are used to remove health and safety hazards, or to provide

**"We want to see the money used toward the needs that we know are out there."**

— Anita Rios, USDA

access, or modifications within the home – for example in the bathroom – for people with disabilities."

The program does not require that houses be brought up fully to code. But if the department concludes that the desired repairs will not substantially remove health and safety hazards, an application will be rejected so the money can be used more effectively somewhere else.

"We see a lot of roofing fixed or replaced in this program," said Rios, "and improvements made to people's wells

and water supplies. The grants are what we call a 'lifetime grant' of up to \$7,500. That means that if people qualify for assistance and the project does not require the entire \$7,500, they are entitled to come back for more money, up to the maximum, to make further repairs."

The USDA will not ask for repayment of a grant as long as the owners occupy the home for at least three years after the grant was approved.

The other component of the program, besides grants, is a low-interest (1-percent) loan. The maximum repayment period for loans is 20 years, but the department will require a quicker repayment if the applicant is considered to be able to afford it.

"We'll loan people up to \$20,000," said Rios.

But actually, more money is available once people qualify for assistance. The outstanding balance on a loan can never exceed \$20,000, but as Rios said, "If

people can pay down their debt below that amount they can go back to the well (the loan program) for more."

Certain restrictions on both loans and grants are designed to ensure that the money is used to upgrade existing, primarily rural, housing. It is not for new construction, or site-preparation work for a new dwelling or mobile home. It cannot be used to refinance a person's existing debt, nor to purchase personal property like stoves and refrigerators.

And the agency will not approve assistance when homes are in such poor condition that the renovations will leave them still unsafe and inadequate.

WEC members who believe they would qualify for a grant or low-interest loan, or know someone who might (you don't have to be a Co-op member to participate) are invited to call the USDA for more information. The number in Montpelier is 828-6010.

## Co-op Currents

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*The Board of Trustees' regularly scheduled meetings are on the last Wednesday of each month, in the evening. Members are welcome to attend. Members who wish to discuss a matter with the Board should contact the President through WEC's office. Meeting dates and times are subject to change. For information about times and/or agenda, contact Management and Programs Administrator Denise Jacques, 802-223-5245.*

## Members Write

*Co-op Currents* welcomes letters to the editor that address any aspect of the Co-op's policies and operations, or any matters related to electricity. Readers can write to *Co-op Currents*, P.O. Box 8, East Montpelier, VT 05651. Letters to the editor will not be published in the Annual Meeting (April) issue.

## Grateful For WARMTH Support

To The Editor:

I wish to extend thanks to Washington Electric Cooperative for your support of CVCAC's Warmth Program. We appreciate the time and effort your organization expends coordinating donations made by your members to this much-needed service.

Support of our work makes an important difference in the lives of the families who are in need of our services. Without the help from our friends and neighbors in central Vermont, it would be impossible for us to fulfill our mission.

Last year CVCAC was able to help more than 6,000 people access the resources they need to begin to move out of poverty. At the same time, we were able to considerably expand and strengthen our family services and our economic-development programs.

We will continue to work collaboratively with community groups as we face the challenges of the next few years, and we look forward to your continued support for this work.

Sincerely,

Hal Cohen, Executive Director  
Central Vermont Community Action  
Council Inc.



**Tunnel Vision**  
*A considerate Co-op member in Walden made our meter-reader's work a little easier.*

## Manager's Report

# Energy Supply Very Much At Issue These Days

By Avram Patt

One of the areas we at Washington Electric Co-op try to keep you informed about is power supply. WEC has some significant power-supply choices to make in the near future, so in this report I will update you on our strategies. I will also offer some comments about the recent energy supply problems that have surfaced across the nation.



WEC does not intend to keep any significant portion of our future supply uncommitted and subject to the price fluctuations of the spot markets. We have actually benefited financially over the past few years from buying a small part of our supply through spot purchases, because those prices have generally been lower than the average cost of our longer-term

contracts. However, the spot markets have tightened and there is concern about where wholesale prices may go in the future, as well as volatility and the risk of severe price spikes. We intend to replace expiring contracts with new longer term-commitments.

With the help of our power-supply consultant, La Capra Associates of Boston, the WEC Board of Trustees recently adopted some general preferences and strategies for our future power supply. Besides making longer-term supply commitments to replace Vermont Yankee in 2003, another strategy is to do our best to meet our future needs through renewable generation sources such as wind, landfill

gas and small-scale hydro.

When we began our in-depth analysis last year, we knew that a great many WEC members would like to get more of their electricity from renewable sources. At the same time, renewable sources

were expected to be more expensive than other sources, and we were sensitive to how "green" we could get without causing unacceptable rate impact. What our preliminary analysis is showing is that by being willing to make long-term commitments to new renewable generation projects, we may be able to bring those costs down into the same range as our other, non-renewable, supply options.

If that proves to be the case, there may be some contract or investment decisions down the road that will require membership approval. Replacing our Vermont Yankee contract is the biggest power-supply decision the Co-op has had to make in many years. We will keep you informed as things develop.

### What's with California?

Over the past year, energy supply has certainly been in the news. There have been blackouts and threats of blackouts in California, and the whole western part of the country is having major problems.

New York and New England have experienced wholesale price spikes, and prices in general are higher than had been predicted even a year ago. Is there an energy shortage?

As might be expected, the answer is not a simple one. I can, however, tell you with some certainty that our energy supply is being

manipulated to create enormous profits at the expense of consumers. Why are prices high and supply in such short demand?

The faith that deregulating the electricity industry would inevitably lower prices is proving to be unfounded. This is not the case in California, nor in any of the other states that deregulated. And they are now beginning to go up.

No one was planning. It is true that in some places like California new generating plants were not built to meet rising

demand. Part of the blame goes right back to those who promoted deregulation in the first place. The market did not provide new power to meet the demand, either because the risk was too high to build plants or because supply was withheld to raise wholesale prices.

There has been a lot of plain old greed and market manipulation. It is now clear that in California obscene profits have been made during the "crisis." Fuel and natural gas costs have risen. There actually is a tight supply of natural gas, in part because most of the new electric generating plants being built burn it.

Because natural gas has been the cheapest fossil fuel, the demand did grow faster than the supply. On the other hand, your oil, propane and gas costs have gone up for more complicated reasons, greed being

### Where does your electricity come from?

WEC purchases the electricity we deliver to you from several sources. The accompanying graph shows our sources for 2001, as well as the changes we expect over the next few years.

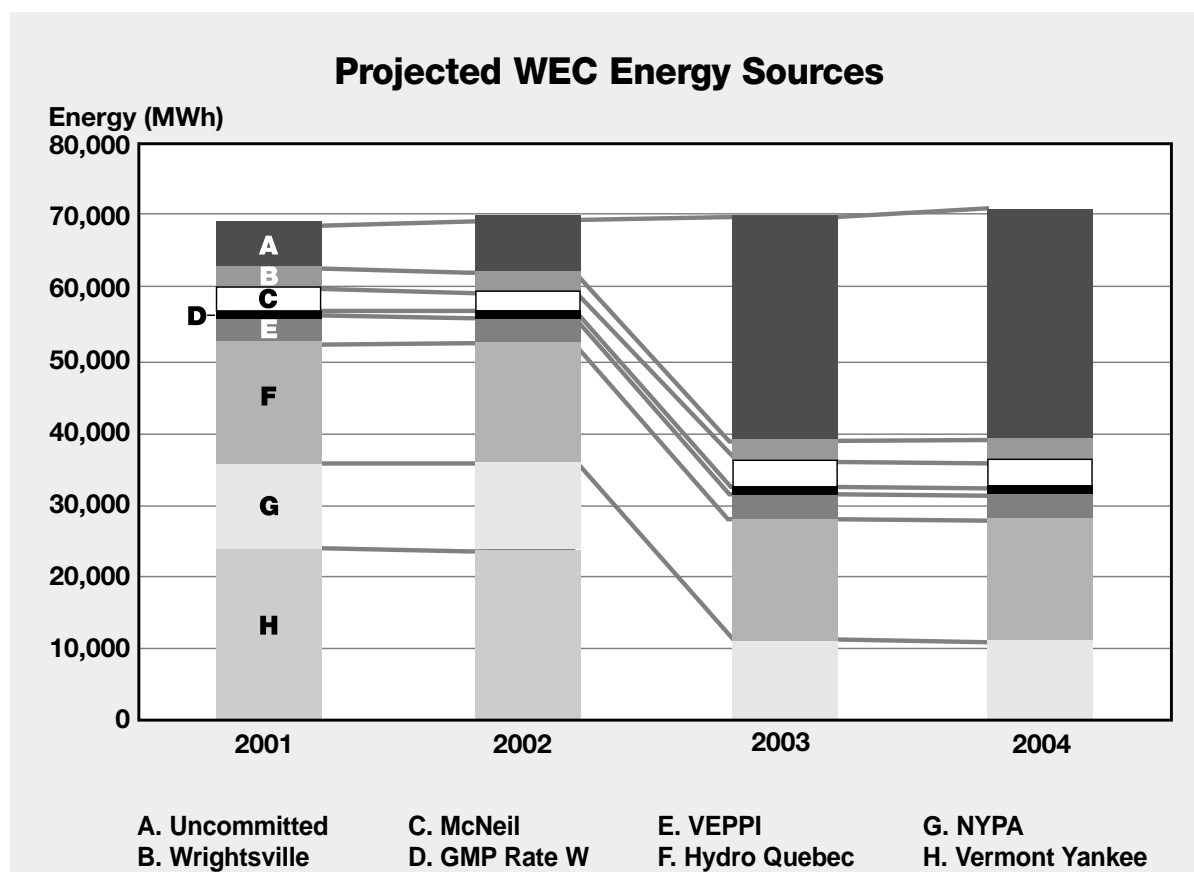
Our two largest sources have been the Vermont Yankee nuclear plant, and the Hydro Quebec contract we entered into with a number of other Vermont utilities. We also purchase power from a number of in-state renewable hydro and woodchip generators (VEPPI and McNeil) and we own and operate the Wrightsville hydro plant.

Our lowest-cost source is our share of Vermont's block from the New York Power Authority.

We are also about 8-percent "uncommitted," securing this amount of our needs through short-term and spot-market purchases.

### Where will our electricity come from in the future?

WEC's obligation to buy power from Vermont Yankee ends in November 2002. At the same time, it's becoming increasingly uncertain whether Vermont will continue to receive its low-cost NYPA power two or three years from now. Our demand is expected to continue to rise as our membership grows slowly but steadily. As the graph shows, beginning in 2003, a large portion of our supply needs is "uncommitted."



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# Four Candidates Vie For Seats On WEC's Board

Four member/owners of Washington Electric Cooperative have come forward as candidates for the Co-op's Board of Trustees in 2001. The three candidates who are elected will serve for three years, their terms ending in 2004.

Every year three seats on WEC's nine-member Board expire, providing the membership an opportunity to elect one-third of the body that makes leadership decisions for the consumer-owned cooperative and works closely with its general manager. This year the terms of Trustees **Barry Bernstein** of East Calais, **Monique Hayden** of Williamstown, and **Carla Payne** of Cabot are ending. All three are offering their services for

another three-year term.

Also, this year a fourth candidate has come forward: **Raymond Morton** of Peacham. Candidates for the Board are elected at large and do not represent a specific district or area. Therefore, the three candidates who receive the most votes will win the election and serve on the Board. Contested elections give WEC's members more of a choice than in years when only three candidates step forward, and offer an opportunity for divergent viewpoints and personalities to be considered. Voters are encouraged to become familiar with each candidate's credentials and interests. Electing the people who serve as leaders of your utility is a benefit of cooperative ownership –

one that most electricity consumers, served by investor-owned utilities (IOUs), do not have.

Each of the four official candidates submitted his or her petition before the established deadline, and each petition had the signatures of the requisite number of Co-op members. Washington Electric's Committee on Candidates examined each petition and also ascertained that the four members were qualified to run for the Board by the criteria stated in our bylaws. However, voters can write in the names of other Co-op members who are not official candidates, if they choose.

The election of Trustees is performed by ballots sent to each Washington Electric Cooperative member by mail in the weeks prior to the organization's Annual Meeting. Check your ballots to determine when the deadline is for posting your votes by mail. Members may also vote at the Annual Meeting, instead of by mail. The meeting, which includes dinner, will be held at the Montpelier Elks Club on Tuesday evening, May 8 and is

open to all. (A schedule of events for the Annual Meeting, and a coupon for the dinner, will appear in the April issue of *Co-op Currents*.)

Printed below are brief biographical sketches submitted by the candidates, which contain information on each person's background and involvement with the Cooperative or other avenues of community service. Candidate Morton may be less familiar to some WEC members than the other three candidates because he hasn't served on the Board before. He has therefore provided more detailed information about his background.

Voters will have another chance to hear from the four official candidates before casting their ballots. The April "Annual Meeting" issue of *Co-op Currents* will feature their responses to a series of questions about issues related to Board service. It will provide readers a better sense of the interests and viewpoints of the four Trustee candidates.

## Report of the 2001 Committee On Candidates

The 2001 Committee on Candidates convened a teleconference on Tuesday, March 13, at 7 p.m. to review the petitions and qualifications of those members who have submitted their names as candidates for the Board of Trustees. This year, four (4) members of the Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc., submitted their names as candidates for the three (3) Board positions to be filled.

The Committee on Candidates hereby

affirms:

- that each candidate submitted a valid petition in accordance with Article III, Section 3A, of the Bylaws;
- that each has signed a statement of affirmation indicating that he or she:
  1. has been a member of the Co-op in good standing for at least six months;
  2. does not have a conflict of interest as defined in Article III, Section 2,

of the Bylaws; and

3. has received and understands the responsibilities and time commitments required of a trustee.

Therefore, the Committee determines all of the candidates to be qualified for the position of Trustee in accordance with the Cooperative's Bylaws, and hereby presents the following official listing of

candidates for the Washington Electric Cooperative 2001 election of Trustees:

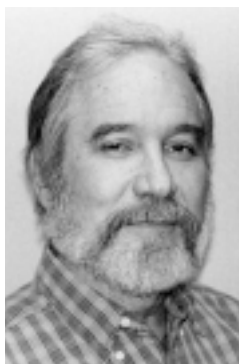
*Barry Bernstein  
Monique Hayden  
Raymond Morton  
Carla Payne*

Respectfully submitted by the 2001 Committee on Candidates:

*John Bellefeuille      Judith Sargent  
Betty Crowell          Scott Skinner  
Ben Huffman            Yvette Tomlinson  
Gene Parent*

### Barry Bernstein

**Residence:** I live on Bliss Road in East Calais and have owned a home there since 1976. I have been on the Co-op lines and an owner/member since 1971. If anyone has any questions they would like to discuss with me regarding the Co-op or my candidacy, I can be reached at 802-456-8843, or by mail at 1237 Bliss Road, Marshfield, VT 05658. My email address is bbeartv@aol.com .



**Occupation:** I am self-employed as a partner in Better World Energy, Inc., East Calais, in the design, manufacture, sales and technical support of Messersmith Automated Wood Chip Heating Systems for schools and businesses (Barre Town

Elementary, Calais Elementary and U-32 High Schools). I have been involved in management and management consulting, with both for-profit and non-profit organizations, for 35 years. I have also been active on an individual and a professional basis as a consumer advocate on issues regarding energy, disability rights, elderly, and people with low incomes.

#### **Personal/Professional**

**Background:** I graduated from the University of Southern California with a B.S. in Government and a minor in Business Administration. I also attended Northwestern University, Graduate School of Business.

I have been involved in community organizations and cooperatives for 30 years in Vermont. I currently serve on the boards of Washington Electric Cooperative, Woodbury College (in Montpelier) and Independent Living Resources (of Shutsbury, Mass.), which is a disability-rights organization with a leading role in training, technical assis-

tance and materials development.

I am on the editorial board of the Independent, a statewide newspaper serving Vermont's elder and disability communities.

I have served as treasurer and board member of the Hunger Mountain Co-op (1986-1989) and Buffalo Mountain Co-op (1996-1998). I was a cofounder of the Vermont Center for Independent Living and its first executive director (1979-1982 and 1992-1993), and a cofounder, treasurer and board member (1979-1985) of the Central Vermont Transportation Association (CVTA).

**WEC:** I have been on the WEC Board for four years. I am currently serving as president of the Board and have held this position for 2 1/2 years. Prior to that, I was vice president for 1 1/2 years. As president, I serve on the Board's four standing committees: Finance, Power & Operations, Members & Markets, and Policy.

### Monique Hayden

**Residence:** I live in Williamstown and I'm seeking re-election to the Board of Trustees.

#### **Personal/Professional**

**Background:** My educational background is in accounting and data processing. My employment history has, until most recently, been in the computer technology field. I have recently decided to move my career in a different direction focusing more on community outreach and fund raising for non-profits.

I am currently employed part-time by Central Vermont Crime Stoppers and the Vermont Center for Independent Living.



## Candidates

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My interests are quite varied and many people describe me as a "joiner." In addition to my service to Washington Electric Cooperative members, I have served on the board of the town library and volunteered at the local recycling center. I have served as town auditor, chaired the Friends of the Library, and organized a book-discussion group. As you can probably tell, I believe in getting involved.

**WEC:** Over the past three years, I have learned a great deal about electric utilities in general and Washington Electric Cooperative specifically. There is still a lot more to learn in this environment of change and I look forward to the challenge.

## Raymond Morton

### Personal/Professional

**Background:** I was born in Columbus, Ohio, and grew up in rural north-central Ohio about 30-35 miles from Columbus. I graduated from Westerville High School in 1957 and went to college at the Ohio State University, where I majored in and received my B.S. in Music Education in 1962.

After graduation I accepted a teaching position in southwestern Ohio as a band director and choral director. I stayed in that area until I retired and we moved to Vermont in 1992.

While teaching, I continued my education at University of Dayton, Wilmington College, University of Cincinnati and Miami University (Ohio). I received my Masters of Education in personnel supervision, curriculum and high school administration from Miami University in 1981.

I am married to Dottie Jo and we have two boys who finished their high school education at St. Johnsbury Academy. Andrew, 23, did a three-year tour in the U.S. Army as a jazz piano player with the 389th Army Band stationed at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Aberdeen, MD. He is currently in college and serving in the same capacity with the 40th Army Band (VNG) in Colchester, VT. Aaron, 19, is currently working, has completed Level One Volunteer Fire Fighter training and is attending first-responder classes. My oldest boy, Matthew, a captain in the Army, is a West Point graduate, and upon completion of his Ph.D. in May will be returning to West Point this summer as a member of the Military History Department.

In 1967, with the help of tireless volunteers, I started a rural water system in our county to serve the needs of people

in six or seven townships (towns). Unlike Vermont, which seems to have endless ground water supplies, our area did not. Almost everyone had cisterns for their water supply. These are fine for cows, but for human consumption it left lots to be desired. This was a FmHA (Farmer's Home Administration) rural water project, only the third such project in Ohio at that time. Like WEC, we served areas that no others wanted to serve — too rural and too sparsely populated.

I served on the board for 25 years in a variety of positions: office manager, president, vice president, board member, etc. Had we not left the area, I would still be active. Some of my original board members are still at it.

**Residence:** We moved to Peacham in 1992, where my wife, sons, and I built our current home and I have taken the time to relax and do lots of things I want-

ed to do before, but for which there was never enough time.

It is now time to become active again, meet new people, expand my horizons and be again a giver instead of a taker.

## Carla Payne

**Residence:** I have lived in Vermont since 1968, for 32 of those years at my present home in Cabot.

### Personal/Professional

**Background:** My educational background is in philosophy and German, and I have been on the faculty at Norwich University since 1981.

I have a strong commitment to community service and have participated in a variety of ways, including the school board in Cabot from 1988 to 1994, and on our town's municipal loan fund and scholarship committees.

**WEC:** I have been a Trustee of Washington Electric Co-op since December 1996, and have served on the Board's Members & Markets Committee for the past three years, and have found this work very challenging.

I bring to the Board a concern for the equitable treatment of all members and for careful consideration of the role of utilities in economic growth. My experience in critical decision-making and analysis has been helpful in sorting out the very complex issues surrounding restructuring and deregulation as they may affect the Co-op.



## Manager's Report

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one of them.

We are wasting energy. Americans have been through a period of relatively stable energy prices and prosperity. At the same time, the utility industry and most state regulators retreated from commitments they had made to energy efficiency. We are driving bigger gas guzzlers, the average new American home is 600 square feet larger than 10 years ago, and our homes are full of electronics that use electricity even when they're "off." The progress we had made in using energy efficiency is eroding.

### What is the solution?

Demand for energy is growing as our population grows. However, we are

also being manipulated, economically and politically, toward solutions that are profitable for some but bad for ordinary consumers and for the environment.

We are being told that vast tracts of public land and the Alaska Wildlife Refuge need to be opened up for drilling. This exploitation will yield only a small, and temporary, increase in energy supply, though it will profit influential companies if we are led to believe there is an supply crisis.

We are being told by the nuclear power industry that they have the answer—"clean" energy that creates no air pollution or global warming. This rehashed public-relations campaign is so disingenuous and dishonest that I have trouble believing anyone listens, but some politicians do. Yes, nuclear plants don't emit air pollution. They do "emit" waste that remains lethal for 10,000 years. That "problem" was supposed to have been solved by around 1980. There

is still no solution and there is none on the horizon. We should not extend the licenses of nuclear plants, or build new ones.

Last year, it was encouraging that the major presidential candidates were committed to reducing the environmental impacts of generating electricity. Unfortunately, President Bush has reversed a campaign pledge to regulate utility emissions of carbon dioxide, a key contributor to global warming. He did so despite his own Environmental Protection Administrator's support of such regulation as well as that of his Treasury secretary

(the former CEO of Alcoa Aluminum, a major source of air emissions and a huge consumer of electricity).

The president gave two reasons. First, he said it hasn't been

proven that carbon dioxide contributes to global warming. After years of research and debate the evidence is incontrovertible, and the President apparently thought so until recently. His other justification was the energy crisis in California. President Bush's reversal will not create additional electricity for Californians or anyone else. It will create additional profits for some. Considering which lobbyists pressured the administration, what is really behind this regrettable reversal should be apparent to Co-op members.

There is no serious widespread effort to use energy more efficiently. The majority of WEC members have participated in our efficiency programs and have average monthly consumption below the state and national averages, without any loss in convenience or standard of living.

Most utilities abandoned their efficiency programs as deregulation appeared on the horizon. Most consumers get no help from industry or government in using other fuels more efficiently, for heating their homes or transportation.

In Vermont, our energy efficiency efforts, coupled with some new renewable energy generation, basically took care of our state's growth in demand for the last 15 years. That is a lesson that has been lost in the current energy hysteria.

### Back at your Co-op...

At Washington Electric Co-op, we have a responsibility for meeting the power needs of our members. As we look ahead, we will try to use some old-fashioned common sense. We will make our power decisions based on:

- A long-range view that looks beyond next month's needs and the irrational fluctuations of the spot market;
- A continued commitment to helping our members use energy as efficiently as possible;
- A desire to meet future supply needs from renewable and cleaner generation resources (including new home-based generating technologies).

This is not a new direction for WEC. But as I follow the news these days, it sometimes feels as if we are a tiny island of common sense and sanity. I usually

finish my reports by encouraging you to contact me or your elected board members to ask questions or discuss your concerns. I'll close this similarly, but also suggest

that your elected representatives, at the state and national levels, need to hear from you.

**President Bush's reversal will not create additional electricity for Californians or anyone else. It will create additional profits for some.**

**Energy supply is being manipulated to create enormous profits at the expense of consumers.**

# WEC To Offer Automated Bill Payments

**B**y the time summer rolls around, Washington Electric Cooperative plans to offer its members a convenient new way to pay their electric bills. Rather than writing out a check each month, putting it in an envelope and mailing it to the Co-op – or delivering their payments to the office in person, as many people do – members will be able to choose to have their payments automatically deducted from their bank accounts.

“As most people know, this is a fairly standard method for paying bills these days for companies that are equipped to receive payments electronically,” said WEC General Manager Avram Patt. “Within a couple of months we will make forms available for our members, and by signing up for the program they will authorize us to automatically debit their accounts. If they don’t sign up for it they will continue to pay their electric bills in the customary way.

“People have started asking if they can have their bills paid automatically,” said Patt, “and we’re happy to say that soon they will be able to.”

Of course, some of the bills that people pay by automatic withdrawal, such as loans and car payments, are for the same amount each month, so they know how much money will be withdrawn. By contrast, electric bills vary from month to month.

Therefore, WEC members who join the ACH (Automated Clearinghouse) program will receive a notice in the mail, much as they receive their electric bills now. The notice will inform them what their costs for electricity were for the billable month, and make it clear specifically

when the money will be deducted from their account. That way they can keep their ledgers up to date, and have plenty of advance warning to make sure there is sufficient money in the bank to cover the withdrawal.

Participants can designate any bank account they wish for the program, whether savings or checking or some special account.

“We’ve had a lot of interest in this idea from people, and it’s kind of exciting to be able to offer it to our members,” said Linda Nelson, senior accountant in the Co-op’s finance department.

“I pay some of my bills at home this way. It’s very convenient.”

The convenience isn’t all on the bill-payer’s side, either. For your Co-op, the new system will reduce paperwork (processing and depositing the checks that arrive in the mail), and ensure prompt payment of their bills from those members who sign up. Nearly everyone inadvertently forgets to pay a bill now and then, or misses a payment when they’re traveling. The ACH program will ensure that WEC gets its payment on time and avoids unnecessary collections efforts and costs.

“We’ve lined up a few guinea pigs for a trial run of the program,” said Nelson, who spearheaded the Co-op’s negotiations with companies vying for the opportunity to run the program on a contract basis. “Some of our employees who are Co-op members, and one of the Trustees, are going to have their bills paid this way in April so we can make sure everything works right.

“Then, we’d like to start offering the

service to the membership in May. Just when it becomes operational will depend on how many people sign up and what we have to do to get everyone on board. But we want to have it running by the summer.”

While ACH is a step forward for the Co-op in customer service, General Manager Patt said it will not answer everyone’s wishes.

“People have also been asking whether we can accept automatic credit card payments in the same way,” said Patt. “People like using their credit cards for various reasons, including getting frequent flyer mileage.

“We’ve looked into it, but we are not offering credit card payments at the pre-

sent time. The credit card companies charge a percentage of the billing amount for each transaction they perform, rather than a flat fee that’s comparable to our internal costs for our traditional billing program. We don’t want to pass those fees on to the membership. As a co-op, everyone ends up paying for the expenses we incur.

“We’re going to continue looking into credit card payments in case something works out,” said Patt., “But for right now we’re limiting automated billing withdrawals to people’s bank accounts.”

Keep your eye out for an invitation to sign up for automatic payments. WEC will send the forms in an upcoming electric bill.

## CO-OP MEMBER SKI TICKET DISCOUNT!

Washington Electric Cooperative (WEC) is proud to offer a member discount at the nation’s only cooperatively-owned ski area, Mad River Glen in Waitsfield, Vermont. This discount is valid for WEC members through the end of the 2001 ski season (or April 2001). This discount is valid only when the WEC member provides sufficient photo ID (driver’s license, etc).



To apply for discount when purchasing Mad River Glen tickets, WEC members must complete the form on the reverse, including all household member names for whom discounts would be applicable.



**MAD RIVER GLEN’S 2000 – 2001  
SPECIAL TICKET PRICING:**

**Weekday Co-op Member price: \$20  
Weekend Co-op Member price: \$35  
Holiday Co-op Member price: \$35**

For more information, contact Mad River Glen Co-op at 802.496.3551 or visit: [madriverglen.com](http://madriverglen.com)

## CHECK FOR NEW PRODUCTS!

### Save on Lights That Last









Ask for WEC’s brochure for expanded lighting options!

WEC offers members the opportunity to purchase state-of-the-art compact fluorescent light bulbs and attractive fixtures at discount prices.

Discounts will be honored for members who return this form to The Energy Federation with a check, VISA or MasterCard number.

For more information call WEC at 1-800-WEC-5245, or EFI at 1-800-456-5983.

Please send me the bulbs specified below:

Code	Product Description	WEC Member Price	Quantity Ordered	TOTAL
BB	15w Triple 	\$8.00		
CC	20w Triple 	\$8.00		
DD	23w Triple 	\$8.00		
GG	25w SLS 	\$8.00		
FF	30w Circline 	\$8.00		
HH	20w Tube 	\$7.50		
JJ	28w Tube 	\$8.00		
II	25wGlobe 	\$8.00		

### Order Form

Member’s Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_  
 State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
 Acct. or map # \_\_\_\_\_

Order subtotal: \_\_\_\_\_  
 5% Vt. sales tax: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Shipping: **\$3.50**  
 Total: \_\_\_\_\_

To order by mail, fill out form and return with check or Visa/Mastercard number to:  
 Energy Federation, Inc.,  
 40 Washington St., Suite 3000, Westborough, MA 01581-1013.

## Roger Hill

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because he intuits the weather almost as much as he relies on the computer models studied endlessly in his basement office. A glass door slides open to a small back yard with a view of the Worcester Range. It is in that sunny yard that he positions his metal collection tube for measuring precipitation, and when he wants to feel the weather, taking a break from those arcane video images, all he has to do is step outside.

"Forecasting for me is an art that uses scientific methodology," Hill said recently. "The computer models are available to everyone on the Internet, but what I bring to it is knowledge of the local history and climatology. I'm focused on this neck of the woods, north-central Vermont. I know how the weather patterns in the Worcester Range differ from Northfield, or Marshfield or wherever. I'm putting my experience to work for people who make their decisions based on what they hear from me. I live on my reputation."

It's not just radio listeners who depend on Hill's forecasts. The Worcester weather guru (and he looks like a guru, too, with his chuffy silhouette, his jeans and flannel shirts, and his dark beard) also supplies forecasts to the City of Montpelier, and to District 6 of the Vermont Agency of Transportation, which covers an area roughly from Morrisville to Granville and from Brookfield to West Danville. He provides localized forecasts for free to his hometown, Worcester, which help the highway foreman budget for salt and sand and allocate manpower.

Washington Electric receives forecasts from Hill via email. "His updates to the weather situation are what's most valuable," says Dan Weston, WEC's director of engineering and operations. "They are very localized and up to the minute, whereas the national forecasts only give us the most general information. Roger's messages really help us work our way through storm-related outages."

In the summer months, arts organizations and events promoters come calling.

"I give site-specific forecasts for Stowe Performing Arts and for the Mozart Festival," said Hill. "I've done both (Vermont) Grateful Dead concerts, and I did Lollapalooza [a rock concert in Pownal]."

No, Hill can't change the weather for these events. But if bad weather threatens it helps the presenters to know how long a storm might last, whether it will be local or widespread, what the temperature will be on their patch of earth, how they should prepare the stage, and whether they should set up portable heaters for the orchestra.

"People make a lot of decisions based on the weather," he said. "Timing these things out is critical to their decisions, and that's what I do best."

## 'Awesome power'

It's a long way from the Worcester Range to the Montana plains, but there's plenty of weather in both. It was in Montana, on a family trip from southern California, that young Roger got his appetite for meteorology. Suddenly there came up a "humungous" hail storm, and the boy in the back seat was struck by "the awesome power of Mother Nature. It was almost breaking our windshield."

"Plus," Hill added, "weather is part of the outdoors and I've always been an outdoors type." The red canoe hanging in his garage and the cross country skis standing by the door attest to that.

He was a surfer, too. In fact, surfing and meteorology got him through the U.S. Army after high school. The Army provided his first formal training in meteorology, and when they stationed him in Oahu – the "big island" in Hawaii – Hill pursued his passions for waves and weather simultaneously.

He planned to use the GI Bill to attend college after the Army, but the National Weather Service (NWS) interfered, giving him employment at a string of interesting and not-so-interesting posts and substituting on-the-job training for a formal degree. Hill, now 46, worked for the NWS in Kansas City, Missouri; Great Falls, Montana; Ely, Nevada; and Bishop, California (on the eastern side of the Sierra Nevadas) – and in that most intriguing seaside weather cauldron, Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, "the Graveyard of the Atlantic," where storms smashed Blackbeard's pirate ship and scores of others to smithereens against the rocky coast in the 19th century.

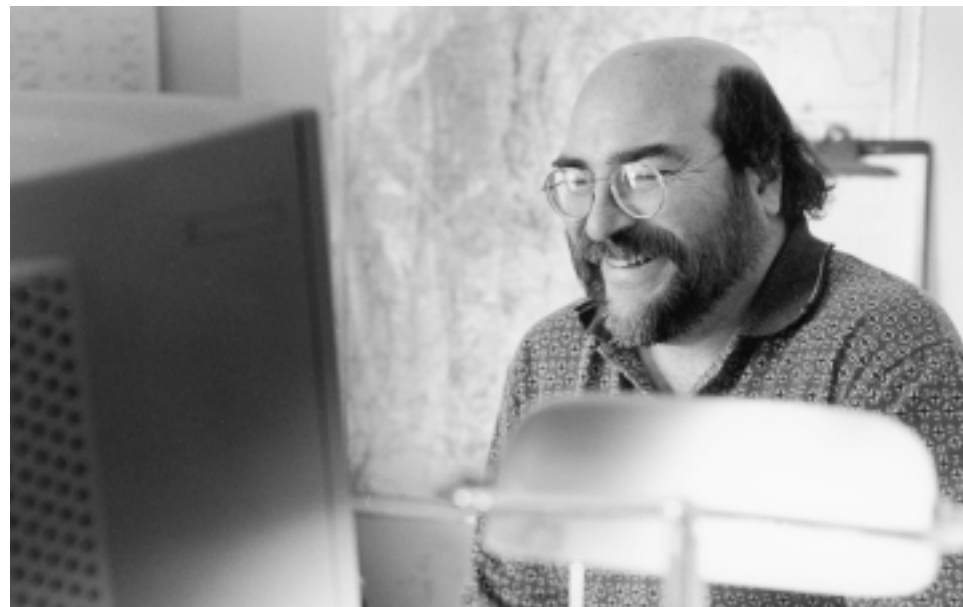
He was stationed in Albany, N.Y., when he met Michele, a Montpelier native. That was his first connection to the state he would call home. He went into private, site-specific meteorology after arriving in Marshfield in 1986 and built up a roster of clients including *The Times Argus* and *The World*. In 1998 he returned to the National Weather Service for another two-year stint before resuming private meteorology from the family's Mackenzie Road hideout in Worcester.

On the whole, with 15 years of NWS service under his belt, he'd rather work for himself.

"Working for the government is very restrictive," said Hill. "Large organizations have to have a set of rules and procedures, and it's hard for them to respond to changes [in the weather models]. Whereas I can be more flexible. Weather systems are very fluid. They change constantly."

## The winter from hell

Hill revels in those changes. Preparing for his next phoned-in broadcast over WDEV, he flipped from a 120-hour computerized forecast showing blue, green and red swirls ("The blue is snow, the green is rain, the red is freezing rain," he explained), to a screen that revealed what was happening atmospherically



**Loves his work.** Hill's fascination with weather comes through to his radio audience.

moment-by-moment.

"Those blue isobars there," he said, pointing to squiggles on the map, "are lines of equal pressure."

Keeping an eye on the isobars and dozens of other factors, Hill compared the reality unfolding on his screen to the predictions the national services were making. His forecasts are his personal interpretations of all that data, plus intimate knowledge of his own meteorological stomping grounds. (Although Hill is basically a homer, weather systems everywhere fascinate him. "Oh yeah," he said, with his hand guiding the computer mouse. "There's a freezing rain episode over Cleveland. Excellent!").

And he loves the artistic effect Vermont's weather systems have on the sky. "Altostratus Standing Lenticulars are really cool," he said enthusiastically. "Those are the clouds that look like flying saucers. They form near mountain ranges. You can learn to read the terrain from cloud formations."

This winter, with its parade of storms, has been, in Hill's words, "the winter from hell" (and many WEC linemen would agree). "It's the hardest I've worked since I came to Vermont. I've spent nights and weekends in front of this computer. I've had maybe four weekends off all winter."

But from a meteorological standpoint, it's been fascinating – especially the convergence of events that have led to the usually mild Champlain Valley becoming Storm Central repeatedly this year.

## And now, the forecast

So what does Roger Hill see in Vermont's future? Short-term, it's obvious. "We're going to have floods [when the snow pack melts]. It's a no-brainer."

The nation's weather forecasters (everyone works off the models developed by the National Center for Environmental Prediction, in the World Weather Building in Washington, D.C.) have studied the rhythms of El Nino and La Nina – phenomena caused by current and wind patterns off the coast of

Ecuador, which influence the weather globally. They have concluded that the winter of 2001-2002 will be mild.

"How accurate is this? I wouldn't bet your house on it," he said, "but the prediction is based on sound methodology."

Hill's biggest meteorological concern, however, is the one he has the most trouble getting people to pay attention to: global warming, attributable to the accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere that are produced by our consumption of fossil fuels

Hill has little patience with the vested interests that dismiss global warming as a false alarm. He agrees that a gradual temperature increase is a natural phenomenon – "How else could we have emerged from the Ice Age?" – but the pace has accelerated dramatically. To demonstrate, he called up computerized historical graphs from the National Climate Data Center; they chart average-temperature increases per decade in Vermont amid erratic lines representing high and low temperatures. The graphs pertain only to December, January and February ("Winter is when global warming shows up, and its measurable effect is on the average low temperature, interestingly").

The first graph covers the span from 1896 to 2000, and shows a warming trend during the winter months of three-tenths of a degree per decade over those 104 years. Then he calls up another graph: 1991 to 2000. Over the course of that recent decade, the average winter temperature increased by 3.7 degrees.

"That's right here in Vermont," said Hill. "At that rate, there won't be any maple sugaring in these valleys. You'll see snowlines in the winter halfway up the mountains."

It's an ill wind the weatherman sees in the world's future if nothing is changed, and Vermont will not be spared. But it does not quell Roger Hill's enthusiasm as he cobbles together those site-specific forecasts that tell his many listeners and clients just what the thunder is going to happen next.

## Bylaws

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ownership.

The revised co-op statute provides WEC with new financial opportunities, as well. Under previous law, Vermont's electric co-ops were essentially permitted to borrow money only from two sources – the federal Rural Utilities Service (RUS) and the Cooperative Finance Corporation (CFC). In 2000 the Legislature relaxed those restrictions. Under the new law, WEC can move more quickly and cost-effectively in today's business climate. Vermont's co-ops (presently there are two: WEC and Vermont Electric Co-op, based in Johnson) can now borrow from commercial lending institutions just like other businesses do.

That could mean quicker access to capital in any number of scenarios, and transactions that could benefit the Co-op and its consumer/owners.

These changes in the law are good ones for your Co-op. That's why WEC and VEC worked hard last year to encourage the Legislature to adopt them.

### And yet...

And yet, in many respects the Co-op's hands are still tied. The bylaws that govern our cooperative were written in an earlier era, under an older regulatory regime, and they make it difficult – in some cases even impossible – for WEC to do the things the Legislature now says it can do.

That's why the Co-op's Board of Trustees is coming to the membership this year with a set of proposed bylaw revisions (in the form of amendments), and encouraging Co-op members to approve them in the upcoming annual election.

"I think [the rewritten co-op statute] is going to be a huge economic-development tool for many of the small towns and rural areas [WEC] serves," said Vermont Gov. Howard Dean at a bill-signing ceremony for the new legislation last June. "[I]t will allow . . . the co-ops to get into different areas that they haven't been into before: different kinds of energy other than electricity; telecommunications, including the Internet, and even the cable business. I think it also could be potentially a huge service to rural Vermont, [which is] lagging behind in telecommunications infrastructure," he said.

But only if co-ops can take advantage of it. That's why the leadership at Washington Electric Cooperative has drafted the proposed amendments, and asks for your support when ballots are

mailed out in April.

### Tidying up

There are other reasons, too, that the Trustees have brought amendment proposals to the voters. One reason is that WEC's bylaws in some areas are simply out of compliance with the new state law. The statute, for example, requires that co-op members reside in Vermont to qualify to serve on the utility's board. WEC's bylaws make no such provision.

Some of the board's other efforts to bring the bylaws into compliance deal with minor differences, but the Trustees believe it would be advisable to conform. The statute now refers to the elected leaders of an electric cooperative as

"directors"; WEC's bylaws still call them "trustees." The statute uses the word "secretary" to designate the Board officer responsible for a co-op's records and official paperwork; our bylaws use the outdated term "clerk." These word changes are included in this year's bylaw amend-

ment proposals.

A third reason for the proposed changes might be called matters of "housekeeping." The bylaws are nearly half a century old, and some of the language is redundant and out of date. The Trustees propose making this official document gender-neutral, just as the Vermont Statutes are gradually being modified for the same reason. "He" would be replaced by "he or she," "his" by "his or her," etc.

Similarly, the bylaws contain references to the Rural Electrification Administration – the federal agency originally formed during the Roosevelt Administration to bring electric power to rural America. The REA has been superseded by the RUS (Rural Utilities Service) – except in WEC's bylaws, that is. That means our bylaws authorize us to borrow money from an entity that no longer exists. Changing that wording, as the 2001 amendments propose, seems simple enough.

### The heart of the matter

The wording changes noted above are important from a standpoint of accuracy, modernization and statute compliance. But there is one change proposed by your Trustees that goes more directly to the heart of the matter: serious barriers that our bylaws currently present to the Co-op's ability to do business effectively in the modern era.

To begin with, the bylaws confine WEC to borrowing money for operations or any other purpose from the RUS and the CFC, even though that is no longer a statutory provision in state or federal law.

But a more important consideration is



More of the same. Another snowstorm in March. So what else is new?

this: When businesses borrow capital – as WEC would probably need to do to launch new services – lending institutions commonly secure their loans with a mortgage on the business' property. Unfortunately, Washington Electric's current bylaws make it virtually impossible for the Co-op's leadership to offer a mortgage position to a potential lender other than the RUS or CFC. To do so, the Co-op would need a vote in favor of the plan by fully two-thirds of the entire membership – some 6,000 people. That's three or four times the number of members who vote in our annual elections, even on the issues that attract the most attention.

The reason the mortgage provision is so stringent is that the same section of the bylaws (Article IX, Section 1) that deals with mortgages also deals with a potential sale of the Co-op. That section was purposely designed to protect the interests of the members by making it extremely hard to sell our Co-op. But the fact that the mortgage provision and the sale provision are joined at the hip in the bylaws is unfortunate.

Making the situation even harder is that the bylaws present the same onerous barrier – a two-thirds vote of the entire membership – to changing Article IX. No other article anywhere in the bylaws is so difficult to update. (Amending other bylaws requires only that the majority of those who are actually voting support the change.)

The amendments proposed by the Board this year take a roundabout course to changing the status quo – perhaps the only course possible. That is to remove the special restriction (found in Article II, Section 8) that sets a more onerous standard for amending the mortgage-and-sale bylaw than for amending any other bylaws. Such a change would enable Washington Electric subsequently to

separate the mortgage provisions from the sale provisions, continue to set the same high threshold in case anyone ever proposes to sell us off, but establish a reasonable threshold for merely borrowing money on the mortgage.

(It's important also to note one final thing: The sale provision, as it stands, applies not only to selling the Co-op itself, but to selling significant assets that at some point could become attractive commodities and net Washington Electric welcome revenue.)

Taken in their entirety, these changes can only be accomplished step-by-step, in at least two separate voting stages: First, ask the members to remove the restriction on amending the mortgage-and-sale bylaw; second, ask the members to change that bylaw by separating the mortgage provision from the sale provision.

The Trustees propose taking the first step this year.

### Details in April

The 9,000 members of Washington Electric Cooperative own a business together. We govern it democratically, so the vote and the involvement of every member is important. The Trustees encourage you to consider the matters set forth in this article, and be a part of the decision-making process by voting on the proposed amendments in your mailed ballots in April, or when you attend the Annual Meeting on May 8.

The April issue of *Co-op Currents* will contain the actual bylaw-amendment proposals as they will appear on the ballot. An accompanying article will address, in a question-and-answer format, the important issues at stake. Members are also invited to call their Trustees or General Manager Avram Patt to discuss the proposed amendments in person.