

WEC CO-OP CURRENTS

Cycle Billing Conversion Complete

A Thank You and an Apology

by Susan Golden, Member Services Director, and Avram Patt, General Manager

The Member Services Department would like to thank you for your patience and understanding during our recent conversion to cycle billing. In order to make the change, it was necessary for the bills sent in February to cover two months' past usage. Many members contacted us about this, and in some cases made arrangements to pay this larger bill over time. Now that the change is complete, you will again be receiving your bills at regular monthly intervals.

A number of members have asked why the Co-op made the change in February, which can be a difficult time of year, and especially this year due to increased fuel expenses. We do regret the inconvenience the conversion has caused for some of our members, but a number of factors caused us to perform the conversion at this time rather than in the summer.

We discussed the conversion at length with another electric cooperative that had made a similar conversion, and it was their strong recommendation that we do it in the winter months when we disconnect very few delinquent accounts, in accordance with state regulations. Members who do have a problem paying the one-time "double bill" may also be eligible for assistance

programs at this time of year, or may be receiving tax refunds, which would not be the case later in the year.

As we explained in previous articles and in inserts included with bills mailed in January and February, there were two main reasons for the change:

Performing Necessary Billing Functions

The conversion was necessary so that our small Member Services staff can continue to operate efficiently as our membership continues to grow. By billing all 10,000-plus members on the same day, we were experiencing periods of the month during which we had difficulty completing what needed to be done. A major area of concern has been collections, as it is important that we work to resolve delinquent accounts, first and foremost so that we can avoid disconnections, and also to avoid passing these costs on to the members as a whole. It was becoming virtually impossible to accomplish what needed to be done in the timeframe available to us in order to be effective in our collection efforts, and to meet state consumer-protection requirements. The number of delinquent accounts has also increased, just over the last several months (most likely in response to the economy), and we need to be able to respond to that increase effectively. Breaking out the

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Fourteen Washington Electric Cooperative vehicles, of various shapes and sizes, are now running on cleaner-burning biodiesel fuel, including these nine. Co-op leaders say this is just 'a start.'

WEC Goes Biodiesel

The Latest In Co-op's Fleet Improvements

Washington Electric Cooperative has switched to a biodiesel fuel blend to run most of its trucks, as well as the off-road heavy equipment powered by diesel engines. WEC took its first delivery of biodiesel in February. Biodiesel is cleaner-burning than straight diesel fuel, so it will reduce emissions and may also improve mileage and prove beneficial for vehicle maintenance.

Diesel engines don't have to be modified for biodiesel, so the

changeover caused no disruption for the Co-op. Precautions must be taken in the first weeks or months because there is a natural cleansing

A common misconception is that there is no difference among biofuels – that ethanol, for example, is basically the same thing as biodiesel – when in fact they are unrelated.

action to this fuel that can loosen residue and sludge in the underground storage tank and within the trucks' fueling systems (tanks, fuel lines, and engines). WEC has installed a pre-filter on its storage-tank fuel pump, and Brad Nutbrown, the Co-op's mechanic, has been keeping an eye on the trucks'

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Inside

Biodiesel is not ethanol, but that doesn't mean its production is always environmentally harmless. In Vermont, though, proponents have ideas for sustainable, agriculturally friendly production. Page 7.

A river and a wellness clinic were two worthy beneficiaries of assistance from WEC's Community Fund in 2007. See the annual wrap-up of the fund's activities on page 5.

Hard truths, and the leaders who avoid them. WEC President Barry Bernstein argues that the time is running out for soft-peddling state and global energy dilemmas. Page 3.

Vermont DPS reports on its "Public Engagement Process." Page 8.



WEC's 2008 Annual Meeting is approaching in May, and four Co-op members are running for the Board of Directors. They introduce themselves in this issue, on page 4.

Washington Electric Cooperative
East Montpelier, VT 05651

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.

Moretown Landfill A Missed Opportunity

Editor, *Co-op Currents*:

On the front page of the Friday, March 21, *Times Argus*, the caption read, "Moretown landfill will generate power."

The article went on to say that the state's second landfill will begin converting its waste into electricity. That's very good to hear, but what I'm unhappy about is that PPL Renewable Energy will be selling to power to Green Mountain Power rather than to WEC customers. Reportedly, up to 2,500 homes will benefit. If the WEC directors had been paying attention to what was happening right "under their noses," so to speak, we would be reaping the benefits.

Four years ago, at the WEC annual meeting at the Elks Club in Montpelier, I asked this very question and was told that the Moretown landfill wasn't big enough. A neighbor told me that she, too, asked this question at another time and was given the same answer.

I believe that if the directors were as interested in power from methane as they are in peppering our ridgelines with windmills, the

power would be going to WEC. I also believe that when our elected officials aren't working for our best interests, they should be replaced whenever possible. I understand that this year there are [four] candidates applying for [three] positions. This was a wasted opportunity and should not be overlooked by the membership when the voting takes place in May.

Betty C. Crowell
Middlesex

General Manager Replies:

When the Co-op first began seriously looking into landfill gas generation in 2001-2002, smaller landfills such as Moretown were not considered economically viable because of the large capital investment needed in order to produce a small amount of (expensive) power. That is why we turned our attention to Vermont's largest landfill in Coventry and in 2003 announced plans to build that project. At that time, it was also not known whether the Moretown landfill would receive approvals for an expansion, whereas the Coventry landfill was expected to receive approval for an expansion that would keep it in operation for another 25 years or more. Since then, the Moretown landfill has

received approval to expand, but that expansion is very limited compared to Coventry, due to space constraints there.

That landfill will never produce more than a fraction of Coventry's output. Four years ago, Moretown was still, at best, a marginal site due to its size. What has happened since then is that wholesale energy prices have risen. Even though the cost to produce power at Moretown will still be much higher than at the Co-op's Coventry plant, it started to look better compared to "market." But because of Coventry, WEC at this point has little exposure to market energy costs, compared to other utilities.

WEC members should know that your Co-op's board and management were in fact paying attention to the Moretown landfill for some time, since the rise in wholesale prices now was now attracting developers who would not have been interested before. Before PPL Renewable Energy came on the scene, we were close to coming to terms with another developer that had plans for the site. When the landfill owners decided instead to work with PPL, we began serious discussions with them as well. The landfill actually straddles the territory border between WEC and Green Mountain Power, so we assumed that GMP might be interested in purchasing the output, too. (GMP also has an existing transmission line running through the landfill, while WEC just has a single-phase distribution line.)

We gave PPL Renewable Energy a respectable price proposal late last year, met on site at the landfill, and continued discussions with them in 2008. In February, we were informed that they had chosen to sell the output

to GMP. I do not at this point know the details of GMP's power supply agreement, but I do know what the Co-op's last offer to PPL was. I think that the power generated at Moretown will cost about twice what WEC's Coventry power costs us.

It is good that the gas at the landfill will now be used to produce energy rather than just being flared, and will supply power locally in Vermont. WEC's price proposal was what we were willing to pay based on our own power-supply needs. GMP's proposal was apparently more attractive to the developer, but your Co-op was certainly not asleep at the wheel.

We have devoted a lot of space to wind energy in past issues of Co-op Currents. I will just briefly note that UPC's wind project in Sheffield, which is quite small by comparison to wind farms operating or being built in Maine, New York, Pennsylvania, Quebec and elsewhere, will alone generate more kilowatt-hours per year than both landfills combined, the kWh equivalent to what all the homes in Orleans County use. Existing landfills should be tapped for their energy potential. But with major changes expected in how we deal with solid waste coming our way in the future, it is less likely that landfills will be much of an energy source to Vermonters in a generation or two. Wind on the other hand, has far greater potential, both in terms of the amount of electricity it can generate, as well as the permanent nature of the natural resource.

Avram Patt
WEC General Manager

Co-op Currents

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WEC is part of the alliance working to advance and support the principles of cooperatives in Vermont.
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Editorial Committee

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The Board of Directors' 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, or to receive a copy of the minutes of past meetings, contact Administrative Assistant Deborah Brown, 802-223-5245.

Cycle Billing

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billing into three separate cycles allows us to do so. We simply did not have the luxury of waiting until June or July.

Better and timelier usage information for members

Additionally, it will benefit members to be billed a week after their meters have been read, rather than up to six weeks later. This will help all members understand and manage their electric usage better. For example, we have had a number of members who have used portable heaters this winter, not realizing the major impact this would have on their kWh usage. Since they weren't billed for that usage until up to six weeks later, they used the heaters for six weeks (or more) longer than they might have, had they known the impact this would have on their bill. We are also beginning a new Pledge program to encourage members to practice energy efficiency, and this change will allow you to see the results of your efficiency efforts more quickly. In order to shorten the period between the meter reading and billing, it was necessary to have the "transition" bill

cover two periods of usage.

If you have a problem paying your bill

There is never a good time for a double bill, but we are confident that the benefits to the members and WEC will ultimately be well worth the difficulty experienced during this one-time transition. We appreciate the patience and understanding of all our members, and apologize to those for whom the change has caused inconvenience or hardship.

Members having difficulty paying their bill should always contact us, as we want to help you avoid further problems and disconnection. We especially ask members who are experiencing a problem caused by the cycle billing transition to call us. We have already made payment arrangements with a number of members. If you are having a difficult time paying this larger bill and have not yet contacted us, please call the Member Service Department at 802-223-5245 or 1-800-932-5245 between 7:30 a.m. and 4 p.m., Monday through Friday. We will be happy to work with you to make acceptable payment arrangements.

President's Report

What's Needed: Straight Talk And Courageous Leadership

By Barry Bernstein

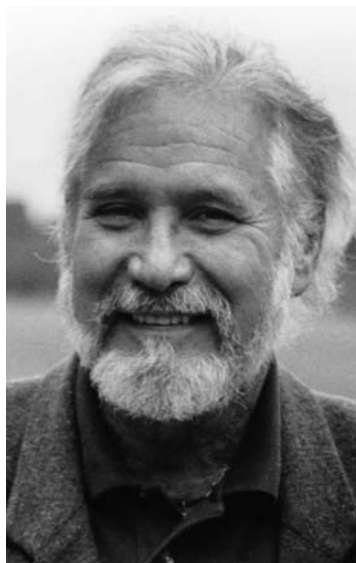
I write this as the price of crude oil has reached an all-time high of \$111/barrel, while gasoline is more than \$3.27/gallon at the pumps and is projected to reach \$4/gallon by this summer. We are all, of course, more focused now on the impact that these and other chaotic changes are having on our pocketbooks and our lives.

As President of the WEC Board, and as someone with a business that is also focused in the energy field (selling and servicing automated heating plants fueled by wood chips to commercial and industrial customers), I pay particular attention to energy issues that will affect our Co-op and my business.

Energy issues have lately risen to the surface, and are being discussed and debated with some urgency both nationally and locally.

- In Congress, it's climate change and global warming; it's a carbon tax vs. cap-and-trade policies for carbon emissions; it's ethanol and biodiesel as alternatives to fossil fuels vs. the effects such a transition could have on farm commodities and food prices – and even potential food shortages.
- In the Vermont Legislature, it's the question of the most prudent course the state should take concerning Vermont Yankee, and other energy-planning and -policy issues.
- At WEC, for the Board and staff, its power planning and energy efficiency; the schedule for adding a fifth engine for electric generation at our Coventry facility; the addition of wind power from the UPC project in Sheffield as well as power from other renewable resources; and the introduction of the WEC's "Pledge" pilot program aimed to help accelerate efficiency investments in our members' homes and businesses.

Many large corporations, businesses of various sizes, states, cities and small communities, and individuals around the country are stepping up to the massive challenges that confront us. They are



When people know the truth they are more likely to embrace the changes that are necessary.

taking action on their own to try to moderate the pace and impacts of climate change, and to find alternatives to the aggressive competition for shrinking natural resources now coming from newly developing economies.

Yet in the face of these very real challenges we see too many in leadership positions who appear unwilling or afraid to level with their constituencies about the inevitable changes ahead of us. You can see this at all levels of governance and leadership. I continue to read in national publications such as

RE Magazine (the monthly publication from the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association) and other utility-focused newsletters, that co-ops should be enlisting their members' support to slow down legislative proposals to combat global warming, as they might cost too much money and raise our members' rates.

We can attempt to conduct business more or less as usual, but it is my strong belief that such actions will not prepare us well for the future we will face. If we don't do anything about the energy-related challenges that confront us, the consequences are going to be far greater than our electric rates going up.

I strongly support the need to be careful in our decision making as we move forward. However, it is also important that we be extremely frank, and fully acknowledge that we have entered into an era of higher energy and electric rates, and that the time for being timid in responding to the global effects of climate change and the wasteful use of fossil fuel and other natural resources is running out.

To some extent, we who are members of Washington Electric Co-op have not felt those pressures as directly as others, because our Coventry generation plant and some of the other decisions the Co-op has made have kept our rates steady in recent years, and will at least for the next few years. But we are not insulated from the rest of the world. Yes, it is a fact that electric rates and fuel and grain costs are going up significantly; so are the costs of steel, cable, transformers, and other materials and equipment that are part of doing business for electric utilities. We need to

be honest about that. At the same time, I strongly support continued oversight of the industry by regulatory agencies, to prevent manipulation of energy markets that can cause prices to rise due to speculation, greed, and outright theft.

What we don't need from our leaders in the national cooperative movement, nor from public power or investor-owned utility leaders – nor from regulators who oversee the electric-utility industry – is a repeat of past history in which those leaders demonstrated an unwillingness or inability to level with the people at the end of the power lines, to tell them the truth about choices, costs and consequences in the energy field. When people know the truth they are more likely to embrace the changes that are necessary.


As someone who has watched and been involved in energy issues since the early 1970s, what comes to mind for me are these major events:

- Our leadership's inability in the mid-1970s to step up to the energy crisis with a full embrace of energy conservation and efficiency;

- Foisting a nuclear industry and nuclear plants on the public, with the promise of electricity "too cheap to meter"; this, with a head-in-the-sand attitude and little regard for the possibly unsolvable problems of waste disposal and nuclear proliferation.

- And in the 1990s, the restructuring of the electric industry, again with promises of cheaper power and lower electric rates. What we have reaped instead, with deregulation, has been significantly higher wholesale and retail electric prices, the Enron scandal, and the loss of thousands of jobs and people's pensions.

Now we have entered the 21st century. We can choose a different path – one that honestly confronts and discusses the realities we face, and makes informed decisions regarding the use and sources of energy, even if those choices entail sacrifice.

Whether we do so, or continue down blind pathways toward the collapse of our energy systems, is up to us. 

Right-Of Way Reclearing Projects Scheduled

Affected Members with 'Special Trees' Should Call the Co-op

The Co-op will continue working to improve service reliability by reclearing power-line rights of way in the areas described below. Right-of-way reclearing normally involves removing trees and pruning vegetation for 15 feet on either side of a single-phase distribution line, and for 25 feet on either side of a three-phase main distribution line. Except where noted, all of these projects involve single-phase lines, those carried by poles without cross-bars. Reclearing projects often involve a tap. That's where a single-phase line takes power from another line.

Throughout the year, post cards are mailed to members notifying them that right-of-way maintenance is to take place. Also, WEC's automated message-delivery system will place a phone call (if a phone number is on file) to all households affected by such maintenance projects, up to two or three weeks before work on the property is to begin. Calls will be placed in the evening, when most members are likely to be home. If no one answers, Co-op staff will attempt to reach that member during the day.

Because the evening calls are automated, they cannot hold the line if, for example, a child answers. If you believe you may have received a call from WEC, please call during office hours to check. If you are notified that a portion of your property is to be recleared and you especially hope to save any particular trees that are within the right-of-way, call the Co-op.

The Co-op's Right-of-way Management Coordinator Mike Myers, also a forester, will be happy to talk with you about any problems.

Right of Way Reclearing Projects Spring and Summer 2008

Barre	Jalbert, Lyman, Taplin and Cobble Hill Road
Cabot	Cabot Plains, Dubray and Danville Hill Road
Calais	Old West Church, Lightning Ridge, and George Street
Corinth	Limlaw, Pike Hill, Richardson and Brook Road
East Montpelier	North Street
East Montpelier	Haggett Road
East Montpelier	3 phase along County Road from Templeton Road south for approximately one half mile
Fayston	Rankin Road
Fayston	3 phase along North Fayston Road near Smith Road towards Route 100
Groton	Powder Spring, Quarry and Minard Hill Road
Groton	3 phase line from Topsham/Groton town lines along Route 302 to Goodfellow and Branch Brook Roads
Williamstown	McCarthy Road

A leaky toilet can squander 200 gallons of water a day.

2008 Annual Meeting Set to Return to Barre Elks Club

Four Candidates for WEC's Board of Directors

Four member/owners of Washington Electric Cooperative have come forward as candidates for the Co-op's Board of Directors in 2008. Those elected will serve for three years, their terms ending in 2011.

Every year three seats on WEC's nine-member board expire, providing the membership an opportunity to elect one-third of the board that makes leadership decisions for the member-owned cooperative, and oversees management and staff. This year the directors whose terms will expire at the time of the Annual Membership Meeting (they remain board members

until that event) are **Wendell Cilley** of **West Topsham**, **Donald Douglas** of **East Orange**, and **Timothy Guiles** of **Williamstown**. All three of these incumbents are seeking re-election. In addition, **David Magida**, a Co-op member from **Middlesex**, has also declared his candidacy and been approved to run by the 2008 Committee on Candidates.

The election of directors is performed by ballots sent to each Washington Electric Cooperative member by mail in the weeks prior to the Annual Meeting. **When your ballot arrives, check the accompanying materials to determine**

when the deadline is for posting your votes by mail. Members who attend the Annual Meeting can vote there if they wish, rather than by mail. The meeting, which includes dinner, will be held at the Barre Elks Club, the same location as last year. The date is Wednesday evening, May 28. (A schedule of events for the Annual Meeting, and a coupon for the dinner, will be printed in the next issue of *Co-op Currents*.)

Voters can also write in the names of other Co-op members who are not official candidates on their ballot, if they choose. Candidates run at-large because Washington Electric

Cooperative is not divided into districts. The three candidates who receive the most votes are the winners.

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. The April/May "Annual Meeting" issue of *Co-op Currents* will feature their responses to questions about issues related to Board service. It will provide readers a better sense of the interests, viewpoints and experience of the three candidates.

Report of the 2008 Committee On Candidates

The 2008 Committee on Candidates convened a teleconference on Thursday, April 3, at 7:00 p.m. to review the petitions and qualifications of those members who have submitted their names as candidates for the Board of Directors. 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 they:
 1. have been a member of the Co-op in good standing for at least six months;
 2. are residents of Vermont;
 3. are not employees of the Cooperative;
 4. do not have a conflict of interest as defined in Article III, Section 2 of the Bylaws; and
 5. have received and understand the responsibilities and time commitments required of a director.

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

Electric Cooperative 2008 election of Directors:

**Wendell Cilley
Donald Douglas
Timothy Guiles
David Magida**

2008 Committee on Candidates:

<i>Dale Bartlett</i>	<i>Cort Richardson</i>
<i>Michael Conlogue</i>	<i>Polly Stryker</i>
<i>Carl Demrow</i>	<i>Caro Thompson*</i>
<i>Brian Howes*</i>	<i>Carolyn Wells</i>

* Did not participate in the teleconference.

Wendell Cilley

Residence: I have lived in West Topsham for the past 26 years. I was born at the former Barre City Hospital and grew up in Orange, Corinth, and Topsham, attending schools in Cookeville and Barre. My mailing address is 468 VT Rte 25, West Topsham, VT 05086, and I can be reached by phone at 439-6138.



Director because I believe that there is still work to do to provide economical and reliable services while continuing to actively address the growing climate-change issues.

Don Douglas

Residence: I live in East Orange at 21 Douglas Road. We have been here since 1980 when we bought our house. I have been a Co-op member since 1978. I can be reached at home at 439-5364 or by e-mail at dondouglas@gmail.com (please note that my e-mail address is missing the s from my last name).



Education/Profession: I graduated from high school in Kokomo, Indiana, and went to college in St Louis, Missouri, and then graduate school at the University of Texas at Austin. I traveled extensively in South America before moving to Vermont from Cochabamba, Bolivia. I have been delivering the mail as a rural carrier since 1979. My 90 mile route serves mostly co-op members, which gives me many opportunities to answer questions.

Community Service/WEC: I have been an active member of my community since moving here in 1981. I was a volunteer fireman for 14 years. I was the vice-president of the Orange County Court Diversion Board. I have been a high school soccer referee, and I worked with Central Vermont Refugee Assistance to provide transportation and temporary housing. I have been a member of Washington Electric Cooperative's Board of Directors since 1999 and have served as the Treasurer of the Board since 2000. I am seeking another term because I enjoy the challenge of helping to chart our best course of action through the difficult energy future that I see ahead. I have the time, interest and the energy to devote to serving on the board.

Tim Guiles

Residence: I live off Baptist Street in Williamstown in a partly solar-powered home. My son, Zachary, heads off to Oberlin Music Conservatory in the fall for his first year at college. I moved to Vermont in 1992. I can be reached by phone at 279-2168, and by e-mail at timothyguiles@gmail.com.



Education/Profession: After receiving two engineering degrees from Dartmouth College in 1981, I worked as an R&D software engineer for eight years, then entered the environmental engineering Ph.D. program at Johns Hopkins University to study sustainability issues. I currently make my living as a music teacher/math tutor and piano accompanist. I play for Barre Town Elementary School, many regional festivals, and for singing groups like the Randolph Singers, the Mad River Chorale, and the Vermont Symphony Chorus.

Community Service/WEC: I have been a Hospice volunteer for the last 18 years. I also volunteer as an EMT-B on the Williamstown Ambulance Service. I have been on the WEC Board for the last three years and have been involved with the new rate design which will encourage more energy efficiency and conservation.

David Magida

Residence: I have lived on the Center Road in Middlesex, and been an owner-member of WEC, since July 1986. Members are welcome to contact me at 223-8672 or by e-mail at vtmagida@aol.com



Education/Profession: I graduated from Middlebury College in 1979 with a degree in environmental economics. Since that time, my professional life has focused on the management of large operations in higher education. I have been the Chief Administrative Officer at Norwich

University for the last 15 years. My responsibilities include the management of most support services and all construction projects. Among my duties at Norwich is a focus on energy management, conservation, transmission, and procurement. The Norwich team has helped to make

the Norwich campus one of the more energy-efficient campuses in the country. Our efforts include the installation of two electricity co-generation units.

Community Service: My involvement in the community includes serving as

a trustee for the Vermont Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, serving as an elected auditor for U-32 for three terms, chairing the building committee for the Rumney Memorial School expansion/renovation project, and coaching more than a dozen youth sports teams.

2007 WEC Community Fund Report

Contributing To The Health And Wellness of The Land And Its People

When the People's Health & Wellness Clinic first opened its doors in Barre 14 years ago it was a time when lots of Vermonters didn't have health insurance – and because of that they lacked access to preventive care, so the first time they consulted a doctor about a problem was often in the hospital emergency room. By then they were sicker than they needed to be, and more expensive to treat. Those hospital costs showed up sooner or later in the form of higher insurance premiums for those who were insured – certainly a wasteful, inefficient system, and one in which people suffered more than necessary.

That was in March 1994. But as we know, the same conditions exist today.

Except in one respect: Now, there's The People's Health & Wellness Clinic, a well-established link in the health-care chain in central Vermont. It provides access to care for hundreds of people who otherwise would not receive it unless or until they showed up at the emergency room.

Contributing to an asset so important to central Vermont is a no-brainer for Washington Electric Cooperative's Community Fund. The Fund has supported the Clinic ever since WEC began it in 2003. Last year (2007) again, the Clinic received a donation on the high end of the Community Fund's scale.

"This is the reason the Co-op's board created the Community Fund," said Avram Patt, WEC's general manager. "It is a means by which Co-op members can make conditions better and help our neighbors in central Vermont. Even though the Clinic is located in Barre City, where we don't provide electric service, it serves people from all over Washington County and beyond, so we're certain we have members who use it. It's a great and necessary resource, and I'm sure they can continue to count on our help."

Washington Electric's Community Fund is capitalized by WEC members who voluntarily choose to donate their annual capital credit refunds instead of taking those amounts as deductions on their November electricity bills. Typically, capital credit refunds are in the \$10-to-\$40 range (some can be higher), but those modest contributions add up. In 2007 the Community Fund donated a total of \$26,214.03, spread among 49 recipients. Contributions usually range from \$250 or so to \$1,000 (occasionally slightly more).

In his annual report on the

Washington Electric Cooperative's Community Fund is capitalized by WEC members who voluntarily choose to donate their annual capital credit refunds instead of taking those amounts as deductions on their November electricity bills. The capital credit refund program will be starting again soon. Please consider donating your return to the Community Fund. You can do it just for this year or in perpetuity. It's a way for us all to make small contributions that do so much for our neighbors and ourselves in central Vermont.

Community Fund to Washington Electric's Board of Directors, Patt provided this breakdown of the year's contributions:

- Social services and assistance: 36 percent
- Community projects, libraries, recre-

- ation and miscellaneous: 27 percent
- Environmental/conservation: 24 percent
- Arts events and activities: 13 percent

A committee of board members makes decisions about donations,

guided by Patt's recommendations, since it is Patt who fields inquiries from groups seeking assistance. The Committee attempts to distribute donations to all parts of WEC's service territory, and that has turned out to be easy because so many organizations have become aware of the fund and are not shy about applying for assistance.

Patt and the committee are eager to hear from community-focused organizations who have not previously applied, as well as those who have. To qualify, organizations must meet certain criteria. For example, they must be financially viable (so the money is not wasted) and have broad support in the communities they serve. The Community Fund does not contribute to religious or political organizations.

Dedicated to preventive care

Services at the People's Health & Wellness Clinic are free. Clinic Director Peter Youngbaer (a WEC member from Plainfield) said patients are asked to contribute what they can.

"Our annual cash budget is about \$225,000, and we get about a quarter of that through a grant from the Vermont Department of Health. The rest," said Youngbaer, "we have to get through fundraising every year."

The clinic's request for support is on the annual ballot in 23 towns – every town in Washington County, plus Williamstown, Orange, and Washington in Orange County. Those contributions have been routinely approved by the voters, a fact the clinic can cite in fundraising from other sources.

However, the patients come from a wider geographical spread.

"Last year we had patients from 61 towns, in Caledonia, Lamoille, and Orange counties as well as Washington," said Youngbaer. In all, 600 individuals were seen at the clinic, compiling 1,442 visits.

"Washington Electric Co-op covers a lot of the same territory as the clinic does," said Youngbaer, "and the odds are that a high percentage of the folks we see here are Co-op members. So there's a nice and direct connection. The Co-op has been very generous to us for many years, which has helped us continue the work we are doing."

The clinic has a small paid staff, Director Youngbaer being the only full-time employee. The medical, mental health, and healing-arts professionals who work there donate their time.

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2007 Contribution Summary, WEC Community Fund

Contribution Recipient	Notes
North Branch Nature Center	winter naturalist talk series
U-32 Project Graduation 07	substance free graduation celebration
Central VT Community Land Trust	affordable housing
Feed Montpelier Concert	foodshelf benefit concert
Central VT Adult Basic Education	adult literacy
Barre Homecoming Celebration	community event
Our House of Central VT	child abuse services
VT Center for Independent Living	disability advocacy & services
The VT River Conservancy	preservation of North Branch land
Kid's Fest	childrens' art event
Central VT Home Health & Hospice	
Town of Groton	youth fishing derby
S.H.S. Boosters	Spaulding H.S. Project graduation
Prevent Child Abuse VT-Walk for Children	sponsor of fundraising event
VT Historical Society	Vermont History Expo, Tunbridge
Studio Arts Place	downtown arts center
Assoc. of VT Recyclers	youth summit
Elmhill, Inc.	special needs school & community agriculture
Battle of White Plains Theater	Middlesex historical film
Groton Recreation Committee	childrens playground
VT Arts Council	support of local erts events
Tunbridge Public Library	community library
VT Bicycle & Pedestrian Coalition	local promotion of non-vehicle transportation
Jaquith Public Library- Marshfield	summer concert series
The Governor's Institutes of VT	scholarships for summer programs for HS students
Plainfield Historical Society	calendar ad
Food Works @ Two Rivers Center	sustainable agriculture programs
VT Campus Compact	college student environmental conference
Vt Granite Museum	Barre museum & programs
VT Youth Conservation Corp.	local conservation & trail projects
Hardwick Area Playground For You	recreation improvements
Roxbury Free Library Campaign	capital improvement campaign
Kellogg-Hubbard Library	library serving five WEC towns
MDCA - First Night	New Years arts event
Bradford Conservation Commission	relocation of composting facility
Town of Marshfield/VT Land Trust	preservation of large land parcel
U-32 Tennis Court Committee	community recreation facility
People's Health & Wellness Clinic	health care for uninsured & underinsured
Barre Youth Sports Assoc.	youth hockey scholarships
Jeudevine Memorial Library	library serving several WEC towns
CVCOA Blizzard Bags	emergency kits for housebound seniors
Family Center of Washington Cnty	capital campaign for family services agency
Sugar Maple Preschool	early childhood program & childcare center
Green Mountain Film Festival	Montpelier arts event
Stuff A Truck	employee shopping trip for Barre foodshelf
Chelsea Public Library	community library
Mad River Valley Community Fund	local assistance fund for people in need
Central Vt Community Action Council	emergency & other services for low income people
Topsam Historical Society	

2008 Community Fund

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“We have a core of about 66 different practitioners,” said Youngbaer. “They have busy practices, but these are people who are committed to care. They are dedicated to our mission and understand the importance of people getting preventive care. Eighty-three percent of the people who come in have delayed seeking care because they have no insurance or are underinsured, so they’re coming in sicker.”

The clinic not only provides them treatment – which can include taking blood samples for analysis at the hospital, and giving prescription medicines received from the National Association of Free Clinics as well as from pharmaceutical companies – but it also tries to get people into the mainstream health-care system. Clinic workers screen patients for their eligibility for VHAP, Medicare, Catamount Health, and other medical assistance programs. If they qualify the clinic works to find them doctors of their own.

Besides standard medicine, services include counseling from licensed dietitians and nutritionists, alternative healing such as naturopathy, massage therapy, and mental health services.

The People’s Health & Wellness Clinic is located at 553 North Main Street in Barre. It is open Mondays through Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., with evening clinics Mondays and Thursdays from 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Patients are seen by appointment only.

Saving ‘a gem’

Another of Washington Electric’s larger Community Fund gifts in 2007 was to the Vermont River Conservancy, to assist in the purchase and protection of 70 acres of some of the wildest, most untouched land in the region. The property lies in Elmore near that town’s border with Worcester, and spreads from Route 12 up to the Putnam State Forest. It drains into the North Branch of the Winooski River.



The People’s Health & Wellness Clinic in Barre provides primary health care and wellness education to hundreds of uninsured and underinsured people in central Vermont. Pictured are (from left) nurse practitioner and case manager June Benoit, administrative assistant Jodie Murray, and director Peter Youngbaer.

“This land is of huge wildlife significance,” said River Conservancy board member Stephan Syz. “Wildlife – deer, moose, and bear – cross from the Worcester Range over to an area to the east that’s a very wild, forested area. It’s a gem, that corridor, in terms of what Vermont used to be.”

But the property was for sale by the timber and real estate-development company that owned it. The company was advertising it as an off-the-grid home site, but the River

Conservancy saw that as a step that would lead to greater development. Syz said a glance at an aerial photo

that shows both the 70-acre parcel and the nearby Stowe valley provided ample reason to worry. The North Branch corridor is rich, undeveloped, natural habitat, a resource for fishing, hunting, hiking and similar outdoor recreation; while the Stowe valley,

seen from above, is checkerboarded with private property plots and cross-hatched with roads and driveways.

“Our mission,” Syz explained, “is to conserve water-related land and public access to public waters.”

The Vermont River Conservancy garnered significant financial support from the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and the Fields Ponds Foundation, augmented by contributions from 120 other sources, including WEC’s Community Fund. It closed the deal last April 30.

“We owned it for a few minutes,” said Syz, “and then conveyed ownership to the (Vermont) Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation, with a conservation agreement with the VHCB. We appreciated the participation and support of Washington Electric Co-op in helping make it happen.”

WEC’s Avram Patt noted that the project had, perhaps, particular

importance to the Co-op.

“The North Branch generates five percent of our power, at our hydro station at the Wrightsville Dam,” Patt said. “Helping protect the river and the watershed was a good thing to do anyway, but even more so because there’s a direct connection to the Co-op.”

For more information on the North Branch River transaction and other activities of the Vermont River Conservancy, go to vermontriverconservancy.org.

And when WEC begins its annual capital credit refund program this summer, remember that contributing your refund to the Community Fund will allow it to be pooled with the contributions from your fellow WEC members – and will make a positive contribution to central Vermont and central Vermonters.



In 2007 the Community Fund donated a total of \$26,214.03 to area organizations and causes, spread among 49 recipients. Contributions usually range from \$250 or so to \$1,000.



This section of the Winooski River’s North Branch lies within a 70-acre parcel of undisturbed wildlife habitat in Elmore, preserved and protected in 2007 by the Vermont River Conservancy.

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Promise Seen For Vermont Ag In Biodiesel

Despite Unforeseen Consequences Worldwide

The "Age of Innocence" for biofuels was over almost before it began.

There was a time – and it seems not long ago (because it wasn't) – that replacing fossil fuels with fuels derived from natural, renewable resources appeared to have no downside. We would reduce tailpipe pollution, avoid catastrophic oil spills, and turn our back on OPEC. Instead of enslavement to the fossil-fuel industry we could power our civilization on products nurtured from the soil and raised in the sunshine, with birds singing.

That rosy vision overlooked a critical factor – human response to market pressures. The evidence is a 100-year oil orgy that has brought us land, sea and air pollution, led to climate change caused significantly by the atmospheric accumulation of greenhouse gases, and the diminution and eventual depletion

of the petroleum resource. These problems have spurred a worldwide interest in biofuels, including biodiesel – and the threat that similarly harmful poor planning and overproduction could result.

The European Union (EU) has adopted a mandate to move its member states toward a goal of achieving 5.75 percent of fuel consumption with biodiesel by 2010. Though well-intentioned, the mandate has begun to have negative consequences.

"It was assumed that the rapeseed growers who had dominated the market would continue to be the major producers," explained Netaka White, biofuels coordinator at Renewable Energy Vermont (REV). White was executive director of the Vermont Biofuels Association (VBA) before that organization's merger with REV. The

VBA was formed in 2004 to help develop a market for biofuels in Vermont, and to assist in the development of sustainable local production of fuels to respond to that market.

As it turned out, the increase in demand brought on by the EU mandate left European rapeseed growers unable to satisfy the growing market. (Other nations, too, are adopting biodiesel targets, including South Korea.)

"So Indonesian growers saw an opportunity and planted palm kernel [another source for biodiesel] wherever they could find room," White said, "and when they ran out of room they started burning down the rainforest to open up more land."

An Indonesian official stated in November 2007 that the country expected to produce some 17 million tons of crude palm oil that year,

increasing to 20 million tons by 2010.

"Biodiesel went from a fuel with low net-CO2 emissions to a scenario where the rainforest – the lungs of the earth – were getting burned, emitting tremendous amounts of carbon into the atmosphere and reducing the [forests' ability to act as a] biosink for carbon," White explained. "By destroying the rain forest to produce oil palms, we're actually creating more CO2 than we are from reduced tailpipe emissions. This is industrial agriculture at its worst, and we need to send a signal to stop it."

A Vermont scenario

These destructive production practices have been a response to market forces. So it makes sense that the "stop signal" must also come from the market – in other words, consumers

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WEC Goes Biodiesel

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filters and hoses, which he says can wear a little differently when biodiesel is introduced.

Changing to biodiesel is the latest step in a campaign the Co-op undertook about 10 years ago to create a fleet of vehicles that would run more efficiently, last longer before trade-in, reduce overall operating and maintenance expenses, and cut back on emissions. In itself, the change to biodiesel is a fairly modest step. The blend WEC is using is known as B-5; it is 95 percent petroleum-based diesel fuel and 5 percent biologically derived diesel. The other common blend is B-20 (20 percent biodiesel). However, the consensus is that B-20 is problematic in Vermont because the fuel thickens at low temperatures.

"We can't take a chance on a truck going out in eight-degree weather, gelling up and not working," said Dan Weston, WEC's director of operations. "You hear different reports from people about different blends, but we're starting off conservatively with the B-5 blend."

That decision is supported by Netaka White, biofuels coordinator for Renewable Energy Vermont (REV).

"B-5 is preferable when you're running a fleet in Vermont between October and May," said White. "While B-20 is known to work in almost all conditions, it's that 'almost' that can mess you up if you're a utility or an ambulance service."

WEC purchases its biodiesel from a Vermont fuel dealer, but it is produced in Montreal by a company that "hot mixes" the fuels to ensure a thorough blend. The biological component of biodiesel can come from a number of sources, including reclaimed vegetable oil, soy, canola, rapeseed, and palm kernel oil. While White wasn't sure which Canadian company was blending the product WEC is now buying, he said Montreal producers primarily use tallow – animal fat left over from meat processing – to make the fuel.

"Biofuel" is a broad category, of which biodiesel is only one segment. A common misconception is that there is no difference among these fuels – that ethanol, for example, is basically the same thing as biodiesel – when in fact they are unrelated. One reason the distinction is important is that it's

inaccurate simply to transfer the ethical, agricultural, and environmental questions now arising about corn-based ethanol and apply them to biodiesel – although biodiesel production raises its own set of economic and environmental concerns (see "Promise Seen For Vermont Agriculture in Biodiesel," page 7).

At this stage, however, biodiesel and biofuels in general are still considered developing technologies, which is why WEC General Manager Avram Patt was quick to put Washington Electric's move to a low-percentage biodiesel blend in perspective. "The biodiesel we're using now is a beginning," he said, "it's not the end of the line for us. There could be other ideas in the wings."

For example, Adams Electric Cooperative in southeastern Pennsylvania is the first electric utility in the nation to use a PHEV (Plug-In Hybrid Electric Vehicle) bucket truck. It provides the fuel-efficiency and emissions-reduction benefits typical of hybrid vehicles; plus, when the truck is at a job site the batteries can power the hydraulic boom and other functions as well as heating or cooling the cab, which means the engine can be turned off during those working hours. The Pennsylvania co-op recharges the truck's batteries at night during off-peak hours when electricity is less expensive.

"That's a pretty interesting new development," said Patt, who saw the PHEV utility truck displayed at a national meeting in Anaheim, California. "The point is, we drive a fleet of trucks here at the Co-op, and we're looking for ways to run a cleaner fleet and make it more fuel-efficient. Right now we've taken a step toward biodiesel. There are organizations working very hard to develop sustainably produced biofuels in Vermont. We'll be watching and hopefully supporting what they do, because it could benefit the Co-op and the entire state. But I would call what we've done so far a baby step toward where we eventually hope to be."

Ten years in the making

WEC has taken lots of steps over



Netaka White

the past decade to make its vehicles more fuel-efficient, more cost-efficient, and longer lasting. This started with a gradual conversion from overly heavy, gasoline-fueled trucks to aluminum-bodied trucks run on diesel.

"We at one time had twenty-some vehicles and all but three of them were gas," said Weston. "We would have a gas

one-ton truck and a steel

body on it, which was not only heavy but it rusts out. We were getting only five years out of them. Eventually we decided, 'Let's go to diesel, and get out of steel bodies and go to aluminum. They're half the weight and give you better fuel economy.' So now we've got diesel trucks, and the typical rotation is seven years."

The diesel fleet – 14 vehicles in all – consists of eight one-ton trucks, three fully equipped utility trucks in excess of 26,000 pounds and a fourth truck used to pull equipment, the off-road track-digger (somewhat like a snow cat, and used for setting poles in remote and rugged locations), and a backhoe. Weston lamented that the Co-op's seven quarter-ton trucks still use gasoline, but said diesel-burning trucks that size are not available in the U.S. (although they are in Canada and Europe).

In researching biodiesel fuel before committing to it, Weston learned about a recent controversy that, in the end, provided further incentive for the Co-op to change. In 2001 the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) adopted rules to gradually move the diesel-fuel industry toward Ultra


Low-Sulfur Diesel (ULSD), limiting sulfur content in fuel for highway and off-road vehicles to 15 parts per million (a more lenient standard remains for other diesel applications). This was met with protest from transport companies, who claimed that removing most of the sulfur content was destroying the engine-lubricating qualities of the fuel.

That turned out to be inaccurate. As Weston learned, "It's not the sulfur in the diesel that was providing the lubrication. It was the process whereby the fuel company removed the sulfur, which also removed most of the lubricating properties."

Interestingly, one characteristic of biodiesel is its naturally occurring lubricity. Said REV's Netaka White, "Since it has this quality, it prolongs engine life by reducing wear on moving parts. That reduces the maintenance that's required, so maintenance intervals can be extended."

Reportedly, some vehicles also get slightly better mileage using biodiesel – perhaps a mile or two more per gallon for trucks like WEC's. And as for emissions? WEC mechanic Brad Nutbrown can tell the difference in the mornings when the linemen come in and fire up the trucks in the Co-op's garage. He's noticed that the air is clearer and there's less diesel stench.

Taken as a whole, the benefits of using biodiesel counteract the fuel's somewhat higher price compared to straight diesel. White said the difference is usually around 1 penny per percent of biodiesel in the blend. Since WEC is using B-5, the cost per gallon generally will be about five cents more than regular diesel.

That difference is not insignificant. But neither are the many considerations that persuaded WEC to convert its fleet to biodiesel – at least for now. 

Vermont Ag and Biodiesel

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refusing to purchase biodiesel produced from palm oil. In Vermont, we could do that by supporting local production from soybeans, sunflowers, and possibly canola. REV's Biofuels Working Group believes that growers here could produce enough biodiesel, not to meet the total demand, but to satisfy a significant segment of it. The limitation, said White, is available farmland.

"Research we have recently finished shows there's only about six million gallons of biodiesel that can be sustainably produced on Vermont farmland, in rotation with other grains. That's 3 percent of the total amount of diesel fuel used for engine fuel and heating in Vermont per year.

"But," White added, "it's 100 percent of the diesel and heating fuel that's used on our farms."


REV's provisional conclusion is that Vermont could dedicate 16 percent of its available farmland to producing oilseed crops, and from that derive two valuable products: enough biofuel

to power Vermont agriculture, with its tractors, trucks, and equipment, and high-protein meal (which is left over after oil extraction) for livestock.

"All farm animals, whether they're for meat or eggs or milk, consume this protein meal, which we import at a high cost," said White. "In fact, that product is even more valuable than the oil."

According to White, the UVM Extension Service and the state Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets are involved in agricultural biodiesel production studies, along with REV's Biofuels Working Group. And the market definitely is growing, as is local production. "There are now four oil seed crushers in Vermont," said White. "Two years ago there were none."

"We can't pull up to the pump and buy Vermont-made biodiesel today," he continued, "but if people show support for that product, one day Vermont farmers could be fully in production."

By running most of its fleet on B-5, Washington Electric Co-op is helping to send the message that there's a market for Vermont-produced biodiesel, however it may be used. 

DPS Publishes Vermonters' Opinions on 'Vermont's Energy Future'

In October 2007 the Vermont Department of Public Service undertook a "Public Engagement Process" that was designed both to inform citizens about the energy-related challenges and choices facing the state, and to discover citizens' opinions and values concerning these issues. The DPS has now published the results of the Public Engagement Process and it makes for interesting reading. Some examples: 94 percent believed that Vermont should obtain the majority of its electricity from renewable sources; efficiency, wind, and hydroelectric were identified as the most desirable resources for energy, while coal, oil, and nuclear power were the least desirable.

"The public engagement process had several components to it," said WEC General Manager Avram Patt, "and together I think they really do give a sense of where Vermonters are at about energy issues. I was on a panel at the two-day 'deliberative polling' event. Participants became educated on these issues, and their opinions at the end were informed ones, involving trade-offs and weighing the pros and cons of the energy choices we face."

For more, visit the DPS website and the link to "Vermont's Energy Future."

Got a conservation tip? Share it with your fellow WEC members in Co-op Currents. Simply e-mail the editor (see page two).