The Benefits of Tree Trimming

GREETINGS, FROM YOUR COOPERATIVE FORESTER. As 2022 disappears behind us, we're looking forward to the challenges of the upcoming year. Valley Rural Electric Cooperative (REC), through its vegetation management program, has scheduled 463 miles of overhead right of way for maintenance in 2023. So, once again, we're asking members for their continued cooperation and support as our contractor crews complete their work along these corridors.

The importance of consistent vegetation maintenance cannot be overstated. In 2010, prior to my tenure at the cooperative, there were approximately 270 tree-related outages. Thanks to the long-term commitment of our board of directors, management and contractors, we have been able to steadily reduce that number to 63 tree-related outages in 2022. While these numbers exclude tree-related outages resulting from storm events, this is still a major accomplishment for our program over the last 12 years. Of the 63 outages recorded in 2022, only four of them affected a main three-phase feeder, which is the backbone of our distribution system. Vegetation management is just one of the many tools that help us maintain a safe and reliable electric utility system while continuing to keep electricity costs as low as possible for our members.

Sometimes, Valley REC is faced with unforeseen circumstances that require us to adjust our focus and think outside the normal scope of scheduled work. This was the case from 2016 to 2019, when the cooperative worked diligently to combat the large-scale threat from dead and dying ash trees as a result of the emerald ash borer. The widespread damage from this invasive insect wreaked havoc across our entire operating system. We quickly formulated a plan to mitigate damage to our facilities and minimize outages resulting from dead trees. While completing our scheduled maintenance work, our contractor crews also removed approximately 3,380 trees of various sizes within a three-year timeframe as part of our targeted ash-tree mitigation plan. This was a significant undertaking both financially and from a labor standpoint. Nevertheless, the cooperative was able to successfully mitigate the emerald ash borer threat with few to no outages.

I wish all Valley REC members a blessed 2023, and please know the cooperative's employees and contractors are working hard to keep your lights on.

KEVIN DETWILER
COOPERATIVE FORESTER

Updated Bill Design and Integration

BEN GORMAN, VP TECHNICAL SERVICES & ADMINISTRATION

WHEN YOU RECEIVE YOUR BILL this month, you will notice the design has changed. Our billing and records vendor, NISC (National Information Systems Cooperative), has been working with us to to make the upgrade possible. This will allow us to keep pace with NISC's programming progression, while giving the bill a new look and additional features.

Ben Gorman

Bill design

Your bill now is a little more streamlined and colorful (see example on next page). The account information and current billing period are in the upper right corner with the Message Center below. The Message Center will feature consistent information monthly, but will also include other messages, depending on the bill status or the need for urgent notifications.

The service description briefly details the service location and includes information about your meter readings. The billing period information outlines the dates of the billing cycle. You'll also see previous and current payment activity along with a graph of the average temperatures over the last 13 months.

Most of the remaining layout of the bill is consistent with the previous design. The payment slip is at the bottom of the bill, and the reverse side of the bill provides definitions and a form for contact information updates and changes.
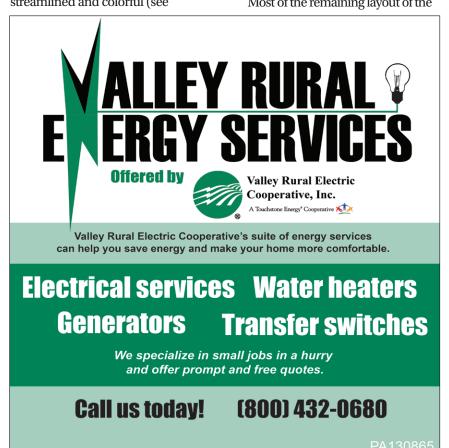
I would also like to point out three additional components on the reverse side of the bill. The graphic in the upper right corner of the reverse side of the bill and the additional information below the graphic can be updated monthly instead of including separate inserts with the bill. This gives us room to provide information as frequently as necessary at no extra cost.

We're also providing barcodes that will link you to SmartHub, our account management app. You can scan the barcodes with your hand-held devices to download the app for IOS or Android and then easily view and manage your account.

These updates also enhance the options we have for grouping bills for members with multiple accounts. In addition, with this updated billing system, adjustments and corrections will now be reflected in your account immediately.

SmartHub

Speaking of SmartHub, I'd like to make sure everyone is aware of what this service is. SmartHub is an online resource provided by our payment software vendor, NISC. We use SmartHub to digitally interface with the membership. You can make payments online, set up payment options, manage notifications, report outages, and look up historical billing records. For more information about this option, visit valleyrec.com. (Go to "Billing Info" and then click on "SmartHub Overview.")
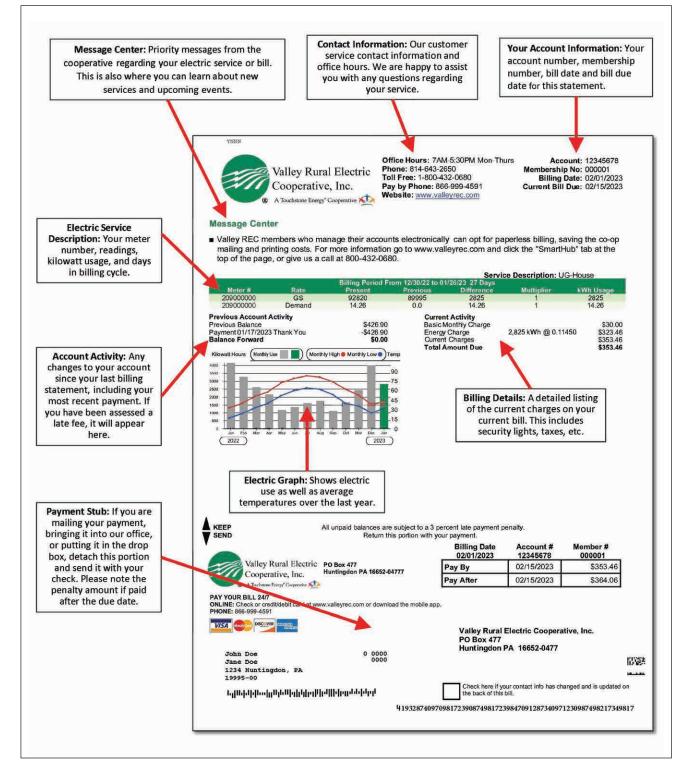
Moving forward

The cooperative's former bill design was antiquated and limited. This new update was built from a common template and then customized, which will simplify changes in the future. It also helps that we are now on the same page as NISC in regards to the billing software. Once we get everything established, we will begin looking at more ways to improve our billing system, both on the back end and the bill itself. This project took a lot of time and effort to design and review the results. Thanks goes out to our billing department for the time and energy it took to put this together and provide a result that is more mainstream and presentable. ⚡

(Above) Example of graphic area that will appear in the upper right on the back of the bill.

Message Center: Priority messages from the cooperative regarding your electric service or bill. This is also where you can learn about new services and upcoming events.

Contact Information: Our customer service contact information and office hours. We are happy to assist you with any questions regarding your service.

Your Account Information: Your account number, membership number, bill date and bill due date for this statement.

Electric Service Description: Your meter number, readings, kilowatt usage, and days in billing cycle.

Account Activity: Any changes to your account since your last billing statement, including your most recent payment. If you have been assessed a late fee, it will appear here.

Billing Details: A detailed listing of the current charges on your current bill. This includes security lights, taxes, etc.

Electric Graph: Shows electric use as well as average temperatures over the last year.

Payment Stub: If you are mailing your payment, bringing it into our office, or putting it in the drop box, detach this portion and send it with your check. Please note the penalty amount if paid after the due date.

DRIVE-THRU ANNUAL MEETING

Huntingdon County Fairgrounds
4-7 p.m. Friday, April 14
Elections: Districts 1, 3 & 5

Valley REC's 2023 Annual Meeting will again follow a drive-thru format. Members can arrive at the fairgrounds any time between 4-7 p.m. Participants will receive a ballot, an annual report, a $25 bill credit AND A DOOR PRIZE!

$25 off your electric bill!

PHOTO BY DOUG ROLES

Members line up to register at Valley REC's 2022 drive-thru annual meeting at the Huntingdon County Fairgrounds.

HOW ELECTRICITY REACHES YOU

Generation
Electricity is produced at a generation facility either by renewable or non-renewable energy sources.

Transmission Lines and Substations
After the electricity is generated, it travels through high-voltage transmission power lines to electric substations, where the voltage is lowered.

Distribution Lines
Once the voltage is lowered, the electricity travels over distribution power lines, which ultimately deliver the electricity to our homes and businesses.

Distributed Generation
Distributed generation systems like rooftop solar panels produce electricity when their energy source is available, such as when the sun shines. When the energy source is unavailable, the home or business receives electricity from the grid. If the system produces more electricity than needed, the excess power is sent back to the grid.