

Claverack Rural Electric Cooperative

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

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Guest Column



The power of data

By Steve Allabaugh, *Director of Engineering*

NOW more than ever, we are bombarded by information. With a simple mouse click or touch of your phone screen, you are presented with endless streams of information about any topic.

Try typing “Is global warming real?” into Google, and you’ll see my point — 52 million websites with wads of data to support whatever position you want to believe. All of this data can lead to “paralysis by analysis.” We can’t take action or make the decisions because we are overwhelmed by the information. But within this sea of information, smart corporations are capitalizing on the power of data.

Companies like Tesla are successfully using data from sensors to build self-driving cars. Rolls Royce takes the scads of data generated by its intelligent jet engines to guide maintenance and improve efficiency. Major health care providers are consolidating patient data into databases so doctors can make the best decision based on all the available information about a patient.

Electric utilities are conservative by nature and have sometimes been slow to adopt new technology. In the last decade or so that has changed.

Since I started at Claverack in 2005, we’ve taken big steps to use data and information technology to improve. In 2005, we were beginning deployment of our Automatic Metering Infrastructure (AMI) system. AMI replaced the old disc meters with digital meters.

AMI provides detailed information about electrical use and service information such as voltage levels, outages and

blinks. It gives us data that we can use to help members better understand their electrical use and diagnose high bills.

Once we finished deploying our AMI system, we targeted our paper electrical system maps.

Today, we utilize a digital Geographic Information System that houses data about every pole, transformer and line on our system. This information is available to our crews in the field on computer tablets.

One of our more recent projects is the implementation of a Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) system. SCADA provides real-time data from the many pieces of equipment located in our substations back to our headquarters.

With this system in place, we can monitor the health of our equipment in real time and respond to alarms when they happen. The system even generates text messages to supervisors and crews, alerting them when a circuit breaker trips or our substation is affected by a loss of power.

Next, we plan to expand this system to equipment out on our distribution lines. We’ve got some great new projects underway as well, including a new digital mobile radio system that will enable Automatic Vehicle Locating technology. This system will map crew locations on the system in real time, enabling us to respond more efficiently in emergencies and storms.

While we will never have the name recognition of Tesla or Rolls Royce, rest assured we are doing our very best to leverage the power of data. 

Co-op crew helps get the lights back on in Georgia

By Jeff Fetzer

FOUR Claverack linemen traveled to Georgia in September to assist with power restoration efforts in an area battered by Hurricane Irma.

The four linemen — Greg Wilcox, Aaron Signore, John Farrell and Shawn Robinson — joined more than 50 lineworkers from Pennsylvania and New Jersey cooperatives who assisted Jackson Electric Membership Corp. (EMC) in restoring electricity to members who were left in the dark by the storm.

Jackson EMC, the second largest co-op in the nation, serves more than 220,000 members in a 10-county area near Atlanta. While the co-op escaped flooding from Irma, high winds that accompanied the storm, coupled with saturated ground conditions, resulted in widespread damage to the co-op system. Scores of trees toppled onto the co-op's electric lines, downing miles of electric wire and breaking about 180 utility poles.

At the height of the outage, at about 6 p.m. Monday, Sept. 11, more than 123,000 members of the cooperative were without power.

The Claverack crew set out on the long drive to Georgia the morning of Tuesday, Sept. 12. They reported for



STORM CREW: Claverack linemen, from left, Shawn Robinson, John Farrell, Greg Wilcox and Aaron Signore, traveled to rural northeast Georgia to help Jackson Electric Membership Corp. restore power following Hurricane Irma in September. The hurricane knocked out power to more than 123,000 members of the cooperative. Linemen from 31 electric co-ops and contractors from across the nation assisted Jackson in power restoration efforts following the storm.

duty at Jackson EMC early Wednesday morning, and worked three 16-hour days in a rural area of the co-op's service territory.

The four local linemen worked together, aided by a Jackson EMC employee who served as a "bird dog" by patrolling line and helping them navigate to various job sites in unfamiliar territory.

Most of the damage the local crew encountered was caused by trees that had fallen onto the electric lines.

"There were a lot of uprooted trees,

and it was widespread," Robinson says.

The linemen all note that the Jackson co-op employees, as well as residents in the areas where they were working, were extremely appreciative of their efforts to help restore power.

"I'd go back there any time," Signore says. "It was an awesome experience, and we were lucky to be able to help."

Despite the 16-hour drive, being away from his young family for four nights, working long days in the Georgia heat and humidity, and enduring numerous fire ant bites, Farrell says he thoroughly enjoyed his first out-of-state storm work experience.

"It was great to see other places and meet new people," Farrell says, "but, most importantly, we were helping those who needed help."

By the time the crew left Georgia to return home on Saturday morning, Sept. 16, Jackson EMC had fewer than 1,200 members without power. By the time the local linemen rolled across the Pennsylvania line Saturday night, Jackson had fully restored power to all of its members.

Jackson EMC received assistance from 31 cooperatives and contractors from across the United States. In all, the co-op had more than 800 people focused on restoring power for its members. 

Co-op gift certificates make great stocking stuffers

Looking for holiday gift ideas? Gift certificates from your electric co-op make an ideal holiday stocking stuffer.

Give the gift of electricity to that hard-to-buy-for relative or to the family down the road struggling to make ends meet. A Claverack gift certificate could brighten the holidays for someone in your life.

Simply fill out this form and return it to Claverack with your check for the amount of the gift.

Recipient's Name: _____
 Address: _____
 City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
 Claverack Account Number: _____
 Amount of Gift: _____
 From: _____
 Address: _____
 City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
 Phone Number: _____
 Mail the certificate to: _____

Claverack assists with chestnut restoration project

By Jeff Fetzer

AN EFFORT to restore the American chestnut tree to Pennsylvania forests took root in Bradford County this fall.

On a sunny September day, Claverack lineman Leonard Fowler worked from a bucket truck to collect chestnuts from a rare mature American chestnut tree growing along a back road near Stevensville.

Of several hundred chestnut burrs pulled from that tree, about 40 contained viable nuts that are being planted this fall as part of an effort by the Bradford County Conservation District to return the American chestnut to Penn's Woods.

Once the most dominant and important tree of the early American landscape, the native chestnut tree was virtually wiped out by chestnut blight in the first half of the 20th century.

Straight-grained, light-weight and rot-resistant, lumber from the American chestnut, which once accounted for about a quarter of all trees growing in the Appalachian Mountain Range, was the wood of choice for barn and home construction and ideal for making everything from fence posts to furniture. The nuts found inside the prickly burrs of the tree were cherished for eating and roasting, and also relied upon as a cheap, abundant food source for swine.

"This tree was probably the most important plant on the continent, and it's no longer here," says Daniel Rhodes, education coordinator for the Bradford County Conservation District. "It seemed like it would be worth devoting time to try to do something to bring it back."

Rhodes is on a mission to do just that. His interest began after noticing a chestnut tree during a walk in the woods. Even though finding mature chestnut trees is rare, chestnut saplings can be commonly found



THE POLLINATOR: Daniel Rhodes, left, education coordinator for the Bradford County Cooperative Extension, uses pollen-laden male flowers, known as catkins (inset), removed from an American chestnut tree growing in Lycoming County, to hand-pollinate a chestnut tree growing in the Stevensville area of Bradford County in July. Operating the bucket truck for the project is Claverack lineman Leonard Fowler.

throughout Pennsylvania's hardwood forests. The saplings, which sprout from the roots and stumps of long-dead chestnut trees, typically succumb to chestnut blight long before reaching the nut-producing state at about age 10.

"I started to read about the different approaches out there that different agencies and organizations were employing to try to bring this tree back," he says.

The American Chestnut Foundation, which has a chapter in every state of the former range of the chestnut tree, has been working for decades to cross-breed American chestnut trees with blight-resistant Chinese chestnut trees.

Although the foundation has raised a good number of highly resistant hybrid chestnut trees with this approach, genetic complications that arise as a result of crossing two different sub-species of chestnut trees have, up to this point, made large scale re-introductions of resistant, self-pollinating trees difficult

within natural forest environments.

Rhodes prefers the approach of the American Chestnut Cooperators Foundation, based at Virginia Tech, which focuses on maintaining genetically pure American chestnuts. One of the problems with that approach is that American chestnuts do not self-pollinate. And while it is very rare for an American chestnut to mature to the fruit-bearing stage, it is rarer still for two or more mature chestnuts to be found in close proximity with one another. A matchmaker is needed for successful pollination.

To learn how to hand-pollinate chestnut trees, Rhodes attended a workshop hosted by the Chestnut Cooperators Foundation. Armed with this knowledge as well as the location of several mature chestnut trees growing in Bradford County, Rhodes contacted Claverack in the spring to gauge the co-op's interest in partnering on a pollination/harvest project. Specifically, he was looking for access to a bucket truck that could hoist him

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Chestnut restoration

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into the crown of mature trees for pollination and harvest purposes.

“The management and directors of the co-op were very excited to be able to help with efforts to bring back the American chestnut tree, and we volunteered a bucket truck and crew for the project,” says Brian Zeidner, Claverack’s director of member services. “These types of projects provide us with a great opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to community, one of the guiding principles of the cooperative program.”

Rhodes had originally planned to collect the pollen-producing male flowers, known as catkins, from several 80-foot-tall chestnuts growing on State Game Lands within the county. Once collected, he planned to use the catkins to pollinate a tree growing near Stevensville, which, while mature, showed signs of blight.

“Most of the time when a chestnut gets any kind of blight, it’s dead within a month,” he says. “So this tree, even though it has the blight, has been able to fight it off.”

Wet-weather conditions, however, prevented access to the game lands trees during the prime pollination period.

Fortunately, Rhodes learned of a mature chestnut tree growing in Loyalsock State Forest in Lycoming County that he could access to collect catkins.

With assistance from a Sullivan



THE COLLECTOR: Claverack lineman Leonard Fowler collects chestnuts from a mature American chestnut tree growing near Stevensville in September as part of a Bradford County Conservation District project aimed at restoring the American chestnut to Pennsylvania forests. Once one of the most dominant trees of the Appalachian Mountain range, the American chestnut was decimated by a disease known as chestnut blight in the early part of the 20th century. Very few mature American chestnut trees remain in Pennsylvania.

County Rural Electric Cooperative bucket truck, Rhodes was able to clip a bunch of catkins from the tree in Loyalsock State Forest one morning in early July. He then transported the catkins to the site of the Stevensville chestnut tree, where he was met by Claverack linemen Leonard Fowler and Jeremiah Lund.

For several hours that afternoon, Fowler guided the co-op’s two-man bucket through the branches of the chestnut tree, while Rhodes hand-pollinated the tree’s female flowers.

Rhodes and the Claverack crew reunited at the Stevensville site in September to harvest chestnuts from the tree.

The 40 viable nuts collected that day will be planted in several areas of the county.

“This was our first attempt, and it’s an experiment,” Rhodes says. “We hope there is enough genetic resistance that we can eventually make restoration of the American chestnut a reality.”

Rhodes says his hope is that one day the American chestnut will once again

become a dominant tree species in Bradford County.

“We’re starting with small steps,” he says. “If we get a pocket of blight-resistant trees that live to be 100 years old, they could produce thousands of nuts over the course of their lifetime. You are trying to set it up so the best possible stock you can get will survive the longest and breed between each other, and in the process, increase the odds of getting more resistant stock to be the dominant next generation of trees.”

Rhodes asks that Claverack members learn how to identify chestnut tree and be on the lookout for them. If anyone comes across mature chestnut survivors, please contact Rhodes by email at Daniel.Rhodes@pa.nacdn.net or by calling him at 570-265-5539, ext. 3125.

“We are looking for the few old survivors that have the potential to rekindle the population as a whole,” he says. “There are so few genetically superior trees left, and they are so far apart, that we want to connect those trees that wouldn’t naturally connect on their own.”

