

# WILDFIRE PLANNING AT YVEA

BY STEVE JOHNSON GENERAL MANAGER

Colorado's electric cooperatives provide electric service to over 70% of the landmass of our state. Electric cooperative service territories include vast tracts of public and private land that are full of overgrown vegetation and dead or dying trees. Many of these areas are susceptible to a potential wildfire due to the amount of kindling present. In the past several years, there have been a few large fires that caused significant environmental impacts in areas served by cooperatives and impacted the operations of cooperative electric facilities.

For example: In 2017 the Pine Tree Fire burned 4,700 acres in Routt and Moffat counties damaging over 2 miles of overhead transmission line, 33 utility poles and 13,200 feet of conductor cable in Yampa Valley Electric Association's territory. This caused over \$215,000 in damages and months of cleanup work to return this infrastructure to normal operating condition.

Population growth poses additional wildfire risk. As Colorado's population continues to boom, electric cooperatives must service these new consumer-members throughout the state. The wildland-urban interface (WUI) where many cooperatives operate is being stressed by new infrastructure requests and increased population. The Colorado State Forest Service defines the WUI as an area or areas where human improvements are built close to, or within, natural and flammable vegetation areas.

This year, fingers crossed, we have not had a wildfire that has affected our infrastructure. However, our crews assisted our neighboring co-op, White River Electric Association, to restore power to its consumer-members after the Streeter Fire destroyed power lines running through its territory.

With Colorado's dry conditions and several large fires burning this year, including the Middle Fork Fire in north Routt County, wildfire mitigation is at the forefront of planning at YVEA. During an enterprise risk assessment performed during their annual retreat, our board of directors identified wildfires as one of the top risks to our cooperative. Due to these concerns, YVEA is enhancing its wildfire mitigation activity, as well as developing a comprehensive wildfire mitigation plan. We want to share what we are currently doing to mitigate wildfire risk with you, our members.

## VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

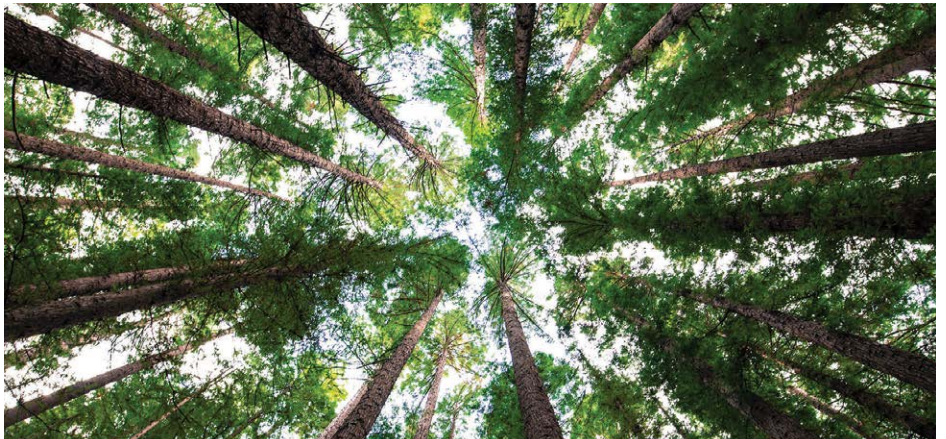
For many years now, YVEA has used vegetation management strategies to mitigate the risks of wildfires. Not only are tree limbs and branches the most common causes of power outages and flickers, they also pose a risk of starting a fire when they contact our lines. Our board recognizes the importance of clearing our rights-of-way (ROW) of vegetation and continues to increase funding for this each year. One challenge co-ops face is that we operate in a variety of different jurisdictions including private, local, state and federal lands. Each of these



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jurisdictions has different rules and regulations for clearing ROWs by trimming or cutting down trees that pose a threat to utility infrastructure. We are working to standardize and widen all ROWs in our territory, through a variety of methods.

YVEA utilizes professional service providers and these tree-trimming contractors follow guidelines set by the Utility Arborist Association, Tree Care Industry Association and the National Electrical Safety Code. All of these contracted crews are professionally trained to recognize hazardous situations and use proper pruning techniques to correct those situations. They use directional pruning, which removes entire branches and limbs from the main tree trunk or large lateral branches. This technique directs future growth away from power lines, reduces regrowth and protects the tree from decay while preserving as much beauty as possible. We avoid tree topping because topped trees can quickly regain their original height and the



▲ Trees are beautiful, but they can also become a danger if they are near power lines and not maintained well.

large number of fast-growing sprouts are susceptible to breakage and storm damage.

We trim trees based on facility type: primary lines, service and secondary lines and underground electricity service. Underground electricity service maintenance involves inspecting pad-mounted transformers and making sure there are no trees, shrubs or plants or other obstructions within 10 feet of the front of the transformer and within 5 feet of the other three sides.

**OPERATIONAL RESPONSE**

At YVEA our primary concern is always the safety and protection of our community and environment. To address the threat of wildfires and extreme weather, we're expanding our maintenance programs to improve the safety and resiliency of our electric grid.

Our team attends wildfire mitigation stakeholder meetings at the state and local level to make sure we are all working together to protect our communities. In partnership with these entities, we have identified areas within our service territory that are rated by the Colorado State Forest Service as extreme or elevated fire-threat areas. In these areas, we are conducting enhanced safety inspections of electric infrastructure with the use of aerial patrols and will clear additional vegetation around equipment and structures.

When the National Weather Service issues a red flag warning anywhere in our service territory, we will modify the operations of the electric system to reduce the chance of an electrical fire in that part of our territory. A red flag warning means that low humidity, high temperatures and strong winds combine to create an increased risk of fire danger. When a red flag warning occurs, our operations and engineering teams will adjust system configurations to increase the sensitivity of protection devices located throughout the system. Once the red flag warning has expired, the system will return to normal operation. Members should expect that this increase in fire protection also increases the possibility of more short duration electric service outages.

**POLICY ADVOCACY**

On a policy level, YVEA, in partnership with other Colorado cooperatives, is working with our state policymakers to support clearer and more equitable guidance for vegetation and wildfire mitigation. YVEA will never be able to completely avoid the risk of wildfires, but we can advocate for establishing consistent and realistic ROW corridors to further limit the risk of vegetation hitting our lines. Historically we have been restricted to 50-foot ROWs, which are not wide enough to account for large trees

falling on or through our power lines. We are working with state legislators to advocate for funding support to expand clearing and widening these ROWs in the interest of safety and wildfire mitigation.

**HOW CAN YOU HELP?**

YVEA consumer-members can take proactive steps to prepare themselves, their families and their homes, to reduce the risk of wildfire. Things like trimming shrubbery, clearing tree limbs that are close to a home, cleaning gutters, and keeping lawns mowed and watered are good first steps.

Members should remove anything within a 15-foot radius around a power pole if possible and maintain unobstructed access to all YVEA equipment — overhead and on the ground. Visit our vegetation management page for frequently asked questions or if you have any concerns about trees near your power lines: [www.yvea.com/vegetation-management](http://www.yvea.com/vegetation-management).

**For more information on YVEA's Wildfire Mitigation Plan, visit [www.yvea.com/wildfire-mitigation](http://www.yvea.com/wildfire-mitigation).**

**Attention Nonprofits:**

**Grant Application Deadline is October 15**

Nonprofit organizations within the YVEA territory that continue to provide much needed programs and projects that are important to our communities are encouraged to apply for Operation Round Up funds. Applications are accepted two times per year: May 15 and October 15. **For application and more information, visit [www.yvea.com/operation-roundup](http://www.yvea.com/operation-roundup).**

**Unclaimed Capital Credits**

Yampa Valley Electric Association posted on September 25, 2020, in local newspapers a list of people from 2017 who have patronage capital refund checks that were either returned by the postal service as undeliverable or have remained uncashed for more than three years.

These refunds must be claimed within 30 days after the published notice. You may claim your refund by calling Yampa Valley Electric Association at 970-879-1160 or toll free at 888-873-9832, or by emailing [capitalcredits@yvea.com](mailto:capitalcredits@yvea.com). You will be asked to identify yourself, provide your current mailing address and telephone number, and verify the years and/or location of your service with YVEA.

We strongly encourage you to contact us and update your information so that future funds may be distributed without delay. **You may also visit [www.yvea.com/what-are-capital-credits](http://www.yvea.com/what-are-capital-credits) for a complete listing of unclaimed capital credits.**

# YVEA Director Larry Ellgen Retires from YVEA Board

After serving as YVEA director for District 2 for 9 years, Larry Ellgen elected to step down from the board of directors.

Ellgen is a native of Craig, with strong ancestral ties to northwest Colorado. His grandfather homesteaded near the Yampa River southwest of Craig in 1909. Larry's family continues to operate a ranch on the original homestead. Mr. Ellgen graduated from Moffat County High School and attended Brigham Young University, where he earned a bachelor's degree in Accounting.

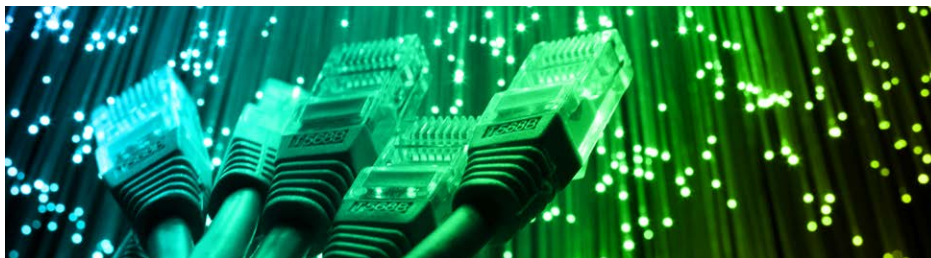


Following college graduation, he returned to Craig and began a career in the coal mining industry, accumulating 24 years of experience. In 2012 he left the mining industry and started a trucking company, Lazy E Transport, LLC that serves Western Colorado and the Western states region, primarily hauling crude oil, condensate, and other commodities.

Ellgen states, "It has been a pleasure to serve on the YVEA board the last 9 years. It has been a challenging and rewarding

opportunity. I would like to thank the past and present board members, as well as the great YVEA staff, for their dedication to our association. The last 9 years have seen great changes for our co-op, both internally and externally. It has been a wonderful opportunity to be a part of shaping YVEA for the future. I look forward to watching YVEA continue to thrive."

On behalf of the YVEA Board of Directors and staff we thank Larry for his years of service and wish him the best.



## YVEA Pursues Grants to Serve Our Communities

We are pleased to announce that over the last year our co-op has been successful in securing multiple grants toward electrical and broadband infrastructure. Here are a few of the highlights:

- \$247,929 in grant funding was awarded from the state of Wyoming Office of Homeland Security and the Federal Emergency Management Agency for assistance with hazard mitigation in Wyoming. Persistent wind damage had caused the electrical feeder serving Baggs, Wyoming, to deteriorate. With this funding we began work early this year to replace existing copper line with an upgraded wind-resistant line. The project is nearly complete. Thank you to our members in Baggs for your patience while we complete this important project dedicated to reliability.
- \$18,000 was awarded toward two electric vehicle charging stations. In partnership with the Colorado Energy Office Charge Ahead Colorado Grant, we installed public electric vehicle charging stations at our Steamboat Springs and Craig campuses.
- \$2,313,382 in two separate awards from the state of Colorado's Broadband Fund will be used to deploy Luminata Broadband's gigabit service to the communities of northern Routt County.



**ENERGY HERO**

Fight Energy Waste:  
**SPACE HEATERS**

### New Space Heater Video on YVEA Website

Have you ever wondered how to use a space heater properly or how much a space heater costs you to use per month? Energy Hero has a new space heater video on [yvea.com](http://yvea.com) to answer those questions. **Learn more at [https://youtu.be/GhJ2rlg\\_NrY](https://youtu.be/GhJ2rlg_NrY).**

**Be an Energy Hero and fight energy waste.**



## 2020 Annual Meeting Director Election Results

Yampa Valley Electric Association held its 2020 Annual Meeting Tuesday, September 22, at the Valley Community Center in Baggs, Wyoming. **Board members elected include the following:**

### District 2



**Debbie Cook**  
Craig, CO

### District 3



**Jean Stetson**  
Craig, CO

### District 6



**Tom Fox**  
Steamboat Springs, CO

## The Luminate Difference

Say “goodbye” to slow telephone DSL and cable company internet. Luminate is rapidly growing, delivering voice and broadband services over fiber optics.



Fiber optic-based broadband service isn't just a catchy phrase. It is fundamentally superior to other networks including old legacy copper (telephone company DSL) and clunky coaxial (cable company) networks, which are outdated, overutilized, lack appropriate maintenance and are inferior to the short- and long-term capability of fiber.

While fiber is the term we hear most often, the measurable differences are speed, capability, reliability, sustainability and overall performance — characteristics that set us apart. Our pricing is arguably better than any other area provider while providing impeccable service and increased overall bandwidth. We are local, we care and our network is ready for your data. Ditch overpriced cable television, stream your service of choice, game without guilt and work without worry with Luminate. If Luminate isn't in your area yet, know the team is working hard to get it there.

**Check us out today at [luminat broadband.com](http://luminat broadband.com) and register your interest so we know where to build next. Luminate: Internet the way it should be.**

## October Construction Update

**YVEA works year-round to keep your power flowing.** As part of its 2020 construction work plan, YVEA will have several contractors working in the service territory.

- Intermountain Electric Service, Inc. completed the work in Baggs and Dixon, Wyoming.
- Work in the Craig area around Pizza Hut, McDonalds and Centennial Mall is almost complete.
- Work in Steamboat Springs in the areas of Meadow Lane, Delta Queen, Highland Way, Natches Way, Robert E. Lee Lane, Anglers Drive, Apres Ski Way, Alpenglow Way, Melrose Lane, Val D'Isere, Anthony's Circle and Laurel Lane will continue through October.
- Work on Glacier Ridge will be held off until late summer.

If you have any questions, please visit our website or contact Dan Trevithick at YVEA at 970-871-2253.

The contractor crews will be wearing yellow safety vests and hats emblazoned with “Yampa Valley Electric Association Contractor” on them. For the public's safety and the safety of its crews, YVEA asks that you use caution near contractors' worksites. YVEA wants you and its contractors' crews to get home safely.

**For more information, please visit [www.yvea.com/current-construction](http://www.yvea.com/current-construction) or follow YVEA on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.**



## NEW Residential Level 2 Electric Vehicle Charger Rebate

YVEA has a new rebate offering for residential level 2 EV chargers. **Visit YVEA's website at [www.yvea.com/rebates](http://www.yvea.com/rebates) for more information.**

**YVEA OFFICES WILL BE CLOSED NOVEMBER 26 AND 27 FOR THANKSGIVING.**