

# WATTS & VOLTS

The Official Publication of **IREA**

July 2019

## DIRECTOR NEWSLETTER

Greetings! I hope this summer finds you well. I have several updates I'd like to share with you regarding your electric cooperative.

### Proposed changes to Rates & Regulations

You may have seen in the June Watts & Volts notice of proposed changes to IREA's Rates & Regulations. This was done primarily to accommodate people who may want to opt out of receiving an upgraded meter for our Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI). Also proposed are a few housekeeping modifications. We do not propose to increase electricity rates, but will increase charges for some customer-requested service calls and slightly increase the monthly service charges for residential demand rates to match service charges for other residential rates, while reducing energy charges to make the changes revenue-neutral. We also propose to increase the service charge for time-of-use rates while eliminating a monthly charge and reducing the energy charge for those rates, which will reduce overall time-of-use costs.

The proposed changes also will allow customers who meet specific eligibility requirements to opt out of our AMI. To opt out a customer would sign an AMI opt-out agreement and pay an \$80 setup fee and a \$20-per-month meter-reading fee. Those fees are to recover some, but not all, of our costs to install different meters, set up alternative billing and read meters manually. If a customer opts out after an AMI meter has been installed, there also would be a one-time charge to swap out the AMI meter with a non-AMI meter. That fee is \$20 if the meter change occurs during business hours, and \$65 if it occurs outside of normal business hours.

Those who do not opt out of having their meter upgraded will enjoy many benefits provided by the improved meters, which already serve nearly half of U.S. homes. The AMI system will provide convenient access to energy usage data, improved custom



BRUFF SHEA  
District 5



billing periods (within limits) and quicker service restoration following outages. We also are exploring the possibility of additional cost-saving programs and pre-payment plans. The AMI system will allow customers to log into accounts and see current electric usage and charges, enabling better energy use choices.

We already have installed more than 10,000 upgraded meters and expect installation to ramp up through the rest of the year. Most meters will be upgraded in 2020. Members will receive notification postcards before installation of new meters. This postcard will provide

details about the installation process, and contact information if you have questions. You can visit [www.IREA.coop/ami](http://www.IREA.coop/ami) to read more about AMI. There is no charge for the new meter or its installation, and IREA will fix at no charge problems with the meter socket discovered during installation.

### Outage mitigation

In mid-March, IREA's 5,000-square-mile service territory was hit by a record-setting "bomb cyclone" that was later declared the strongest storm in Colorado's recorded history. Hundreds of thousands of Coloradans experienced loss of power and other essential services. At their peak, these outages affected nearly 5,500 IREA customers, some of them for extended periods of time. Several of our neighboring utilities lost service to much larger numbers of customers. Two months later we experienced a late spring snowstorm that also wreaked havoc with unseasonable ice and fallen trees. The number of affected IREA customers was kept to a minimum. We believe the performance of our system during these storms shows our outage mitigation efforts are working.

Our linemen and other field personnel deserve credit for working around the clock during and after the storms to make sure power was restored

Continued on other side

Continued from front

to every affected customer. They were aided by the improvements we continually make to our system, as well as our aggressive maintenance and vegetation management programs. We understand the frustration and worry our customers experience during outages and will always work to reduce the number and length of service interruptions.

### Free and upgraded payment options

We are working to improve your customer experience. To that end, we recently eliminated all fees associated with electronic payments. We previously passed some of these fees on to customers, but have negotiated with our payment processor to reduce costs and create more options for customers. Payments made via credit card, debit card and ACH are now free for residential accounts; commercial accounts now have free ACH payments.

In conjunction with the elimination of those fees, we have implemented an improved version of Speedpay, our electronic payment system. It offers quicker, more convenient payment via desktop, laptop and mobile devices and allows you to save multiple payment types to a digital wallet and access a searchable payment history. Speedpay can be accessed via the My Account feature on [www.IREA.coop](http://www.IREA.coop), but is also available through our automated voice service at (800) 332-9540.

### Summer safety

Many of our members are well into summer landscaping and other outdoor projects. We encourage everyone to make use of the free 811 utility locate service for any projects that require digging. Hitting an underground utility line can have severe consequences such as bodily injury and even death. Legal liability for fines and damages also can be imposed for damage to underground utility facilities if a locate is not requested. It is worth the minimal amount of time it takes to simply dial 811 before you dig. Please make the call at least three business days before you break ground on any size project.

Please maintain that mindfulness when it comes to above-ground activity, too. Be especially careful when working or playing near overhead lines, transformers and other equipment, and consult our vegetation guidelines, available at [www.IREA.coop/irea-your-property](http://www.IREA.coop/irea-your-property), before placing any plants, trees, shrubs or other vegetation. If you

spot any existing hazards related to our system, don't hesitate to call us at (800) 332-9540.

### Energy efficiency

Higher energy bills during summer months sometimes catch customers off-guard. If you haven't already seen and followed the energy efficiency tips we've shared in previous editions of Watts & Volts, please visit [www.IREA.coop/energy-efficiency-is-a-breeze](http://www.IREA.coop/energy-efficiency-is-a-breeze). If you have taken action using those tips but still see a spike in your monthly bill, consider scheduling a free energy audit. Our energy efficiency specialist will visit your home, identify possible efficiency issues and provide you recommendations for how to fix them. You can schedule your audit online via [www.IREA.coop/energy-audits](http://www.IREA.coop/energy-audits), where you also can find our recently updated energy use chart, which makes it easy to calculate how much energy your household appliances and other devices use each month.

### Education grants

I would like to close this letter by congratulating the recipients of this year's IREA education grants. The names of three graduating high school seniors from District 5 were drawn randomly at last month's Board of Directors meeting:



**Nicholas Ball**  
Elizabeth High School  
Colorado Northwest C.C.



**Cooper Rockwell**  
Grandview High School  
Colorado School of Mines



**Joshua Stowe**  
CO Early Colleges Parker  
University of Wyoming

Nicholas, Cooper and Joshua will each receive a \$2,000 grant to be used for higher education expenses. Next year's graduating seniors can expect the education grant application process to reopen in early 2020. Look to Watts & Volts and our social media channels – @IREAColorado on Twitter and IntermountainREA on Facebook – for updates on when applications will be available.

It is my pleasure to continue serving as your representative on the IREA Board of Directors. I hope the remainder of your summer is safe and enjoyable!