IREA typically receives over 50% of its energy from Comanche Unit 3, the 750-megawatt super-critical, pulverized coal power plant near Pueblo. IREA owns 25.3% of Unit 3. Holy Cross Energy owns 8%. Xcel Energy owns the rest and operates the plant.

A turbine blade failure in January 2020 took the plant out of service for nearly five months. The turbine and generator were damaged in June when Xcel attempted to bring the unit back into service. The extensive damage has taken another six months to repair.

Due to these incidents, Unit 3 has produced almost no energy during 2020 and IREA has had to purchase replacement energy at more than twice the cost of Unit 3 production.

We have been able to defer much of this additional cost until 2021 and 2022 and will seek to recover that cost from responsible parties, but cannot avoid the need for additional revenue to cover our expenses. IREA management is evaluating and discussing with the Board of Directors potential rate changes needed to cover our additional power and other increasing costs.

IREA has not increased rates generally since 2013, but anticipates that additional costs will have to be passed on to customers this year. More information will be forthcoming next month.

IREA currently purchases all of the output of the 12.8-megawatt Victory Solar project north of Bennett, Colorado. In 2019 we agreed to purchase the output of an 80 MW solar project planned to be built northeast of Bennett known as the Pioneer Solar project.

Pioneer Solar has been under construction for several months and has begun producing energy, though it is not yet complete. Racks are up, interconnection facilities are complete and have been energized, and panels are being installed. Test energy is being delivered and full production is scheduled for February.

Work also has begun on interconnection facilities for the 75 MW Hunter Solar project south of Bennett. IREA has agreed to purchase 45 MW of the output of that project, which should be producing this summer. IREA has a fourth solar project under contract, a 55 MW project to be built in Adams County. All told, IREA is well on the way to having nearly 200 MW of solar generation under contract, most of which will be producing this year.
Mooney announces retirement

IREA Chief Executive Officer Patrick Mooney plans to retire in 2021.

Mooney has served as CEO since 2011. Formerly a practicing attorney, he began representing IREA in litigation, labor relations and employment matters in 1988, and was named its General Counsel in 1999. In 2010 he became an IREA employee as General Counsel and Deputy General Manager, and became General Manager/CEO in 2011.

In Mooney’s decade as CEO, IREA has significantly improved its transmission and distribution system, introduced better customer service options and invested in renewable energy sources. Under his guidance, the association implemented an outage management system, developed a wildfire mitigation plan and installed Advanced Metering Infrastructure. The association also has refunded customers more than $100 million in capital credits under Mooney’s leadership.

Mooney’s last official day as Chief Executive Officer will be April 1.

IREA’s board of directors will select Mooney’s successor. Once the selection is made, an announcement will appear in Watts & Volts, on our website (www.IREA.coop) and on our social media channels (@IREAColorado on Twitter and IntermountainREA on both Facebook and Instagram).

Strength in diversity: A core value of IREA

IREA is committed to establishing and promoting a diverse, inclusive work environment for all employees. We recently created a diversity statement that reflects that commitment:

IREA is dedicated to building a culture that values the unique attributes of each person. To foster and maintain an engaged and highly efficient workforce, we all must feel included and valued.

IREA recognizes the voices of our employees and is dedicated to developing a diverse and inclusive work environment for ALL employees based on respect and professionalism.

IREA is committed to empowering employees to share their differences, experiences and ideas, and to establishing initiatives designed to integrate diversity and inclusion within IREA’s culture and business practices.

The association also created a diversity action plan that will help us realize that commitment. It includes:

• The development and addition of a diversity and inclusion section to IREA’s equal opportunity and non-discrimination policy.
• Annual training for all staff on diversity and inclusion-related topics.
• The expansion of recruitment efforts aimed at promoting IREA job opportunities among diverse candidates.
• The development of a diversity and inclusion focus group to aid in identifying opportunities that support our diversity statement.
IREA is collecting and recycling customers’ unwanted string lights through Jan. 29. We will recycle them and donate the proceeds to Energy Outreach Colorado.

Deposit your unwanted lights between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Friday – excluding Christmas and New Year’s days – in the collection bin in front of each of our four offices:
- Bennett, 1092 Cedar St., 80102
- Conifer, 13404 Old U.S. Highway 285, 80470
- Sedalia, 5496 N. U.S. Highway 85, 80135
- Woodland Park, 800 N. Highway 67, 80863

Lights must be free from all packaging to be accepted. They cannot be boxed or bagged.

The first session of Colorado’s 73rd General Assembly is scheduled to convene Wednesday, Jan. 13. With the continued uncertainty regarding COVID-19, however, the session may be delayed.

IREA is working closely with State Senator Chris Hansen and other key energy legislators to move forward on energy market legislation this upcoming session.

The General Assembly convened in early December for a special session to allocate funding to help businesses and individuals struggling during the pandemic. One critical piece of legislation was Senate Bill 20B-003, Money for Energy Utility Bill Payment Assistance, by State Sens. Rhonda Fields and Larry Crowder and Representatives Monica Duran and Lois Landgraf, which transfers $5 million from the state’s general fund to the Colorado Energy Office to provide direct energy bill payment assistance to low-income households via Energy Outreach Colorado. Energy Outreach Colorado is required to expend this money prior to June 30, 2021.

IREA’s government affairs team works with elected officials to implement policies that lead to reliable service and support lower electric rates. If you would like additional updates on these efforts, please sign up for our legislative alerts. Visit the Contact Us page at IREA.coop, then submit an inquiry using the contact form and subject “Legislative Alert Sign Up.”

IREA customers donated nearly 600 coats for the most recent Coats for Colorado drive, the fourth in which IREA has participated.

Over the four years, IREA customers have donated more than 2,000 winter coats to the cause. The Coats for Colorado organization works with 120 non-profit health and human services agencies to provide Coloradans warmth during winter months.

IREA thanks its customers for their generosity.
Graduating high school seniors can apply for one of IREA’s education grants.
We will award 35 graduating high school seniors grants of $2,000 each to help with higher education expenses. The names of five students from each of the seven IREA director districts will be randomly drawn to receive the grants. Recipients’ names will be drawn at random during the June Board of Directors meeting.
The applicant – or applicant’s parent or guardian – must be an IREA customer to be eligible.
The applicant must also:
• Be a graduating high school senior in 2021;
• Submit an acceptance letter from a college, university or vocational/trade school; and
• Return a completed entry form by 5 p.m. Friday, June 11, to any IREA office or online at www.IREA.coop/education-grants.

IREA recently established an employee volunteer program, IREA Cares, which allows association employees to spend a workday volunteering at a nonprofit or charity organization within our service territory.
IREA employees have volunteered for the Mountain Resource Center in Conifer, the Coalition for the Upper South Platte along the Highway 285 corridor, and the Help & Hope Center in Castle Rock.
“More than ever, our community nonprofits need volunteers,” said Public Affairs Director Josh Liss. “Our employees want to help make a difference during these difficult times, while also taking necessary precautions.”
IREA welcomes eligible volunteer opportunities with local nonprofit organizations within our service area. For-profit organizations and activities, causes for specific individuals, and solely religious or political organizations and causes will not be considered.
If your organization, program or activity is eligible and interested in recruiting volunteers, email IREA Community Affairs Administrator Becky Wilson at bwilson@irea.coop.

IREA is converting an aging section of overhead distribution line to underground to improve system reliability in the Bennett area. The line originates at our Bennett Substation and extends north across Interstate 70 and into the area near King Soopers. Construction of the electric facilities was completed in November. Additional cleanup work will be done this spring.
In 2021, we will also begin rebuilding the 115-kilovolt transmission line between our Bayou and Elizabeth substations. The larger conductor will increase capacity in the area, which includes neighborhoods in and around Elizabeth, Franktown and western Douglas and eastern Elbert counties. Construction is planned to begin this spring and be completed by the end of the year.
Visit www.IREA.coop > About IREA > System Improvements for information about IREA’s current and planned system improvement projects.