

Co-ops protect members and mammals

Associated Electric Cooperative Inc.

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Power supply facts

Working together, Associated Electric Cooperative and the Association of Missouri Electric Cooperatives developed an agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that protects habitat for endangered species, like the Indiana bat, and ensures reliable transmission for members.

The innovative agreement was noted by the Conservation Federation of Missouri, which presented the association with its esteemed Conservation Organization of the Year award.

Member cooperatives also received recognition with the Outstanding Achievement Award in environmental stewardship from the Missouri Waste Control Coalition for cooperatives' environmental work, including the habitat preservation agreement.

Associated Electric and its member systems have a history of balancing members' needs for affordable, reliable electricity with environmental stewardship.

The integrated high-voltage transmission system owned by Associated Electric Cooperative and its six owner generation and transmission cooperatives is vital to providing reliable power to member cooperatives.

But, like many other aspects of the utility industry, the planning, construction and maintenance of that transmission system faces increasing challenges.

When a G&T's planned transmission line met a roadblock, the one-quarter ounce Indiana bat, cooperatives went to bat for members and the mammal.

Co-ops go to bat for members and mammals

Summer is a sensitive phase in the migrating Indiana bat's life cycle. In the past the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service prohibited any brush or tree clearing from April 1 to Oct. 31, when bats could be present.

Associated and the G&Ts abided by this requirement, but when one of its G&T owners proposed to clear for a



Indiana bat

While much of the news on environmental issues centers on air quality, Associated and its six owner G&Ts also face environmental challenges when it comes to transmission line construction and maintenance.

Matters for members

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transmission line in winter on land where no bats had been located, it was told the rules had changed. Clearing would not be allowed unless mitigation, in the form of a monetary payment, was provided.

The potential impact of the new requirement on costs and reliability prompted Associated, AMEC and the six G&Ts to contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and propose an agreement that would keep power reliable and affordable for members and protect the Indiana bat.

In essence, the agreement proposes Associated and its member systems continue to implement voluntary measures to avoid and minimize impacts to the bat and its habitat. Instead of cooperatives' paying into a fund, cooperatives will continue

The Indiana bat is getting more attention due to growth in the wind power industry, deaths of bats from white nose syndrome disease and the species' continuing decline.

The Indiana bat was added to the endangered species list in 1973. It lives in the Midwest to eastern U.S., as well as parts of southeastern Canada. In Missouri, it hibernates in caves in the Ozarks and southeastern part of the state.

In summer, pregnant bats migrate north to have their pups under the bark of exfoliating trees, often returning to the same area each year.

Transmission rights of way also may provide beneficial habitat for the bats, including better sun exposure to suitable roost trees, new "edge" habitat beneficial for foraging and open flight paths that are connected to forests.

to provide many benefits to the bat through conservation measures, including following historic, recommended tree clearing guidelines, restoring habitat to natural conditions and conducting educational activities about preserving bats and their habitat.

The agreement has been submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; meanwhile, the transmission project was allowed to proceed.



This bat mansion is located on property in the Thomas Hill mine area. Below, a university student, holds a bat "rocket house."

Bats and Robbins



Associated Electric Cooperative also is working with Missouri State University professor Lynn Robbins to develop artificial habitat for the Indiana bat.

Robbins has placed 10 structures, including four utility poles (wrapped with artificial bark) provided and installed by Northeast Missouri Electric Power Cooperative, at Thomas Hill Energy Center. An initial habitat assessment of the Thomas Hill area showed it has the necessary characteristics for the Indiana bat to be present.

The project started in early spring 2012, when bats were migrating north in search of summer roosts under the bark of trees. Studies have shown man-made structures have been used by the Indiana bat, although it's not common.

The structures are located at Bee Veer and Prairie Hill mines, and researchers are evaluating evidence of their use.