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Power in unity: MMUA provides national mutual aid planning in DC

Minnesota Municipal Utilities Association (MMUA) Director of Training and Safety Mike Willetts traveled to Washington, DC, representing Minnesota at the American Public Power Association (APPA) 2025 Spring Mutual Aid Committee (MAC) meeting in May.

Mike Willetts speaks to a Minnesota mutual aid crew deployment to Florida in 2024.

As vice-chair of APPA's Mutual Aid Committee and the backup for the APPA national coordinator, Willetts participated in a national tabletop exercise called "FrostWire Fury," simulating national mutual aid best practices during a week-long storm.

MAC emerges from big storm

After 2012's devastating Hurricane Sandy that ravaged the Northeast, public power leaders decided to act. Hurricane Sandy had destroyed thousands of homes, caused some $19 billion in damage, and resulted in the deaths of at least 48 people in the New York vicinity. Residents were without clothes, food, and—most importantly—power.

At the time, the Long Island Power Authority (LIPA) was criticized for its slow response

Continued on page 6

MMUA gas field restoration reignites training and community

Joe Bellomy, Owatonna Public Utilities, blowing out the gas line to remove water buildup caused by inactivity.

At MMUA's Marshall Training Center, four utilities assisted in updating gas lines to prepare for the upcoming Gas School.

For more than 15 years, the MMUA Training Center's gas lines have sat untouched. During the initial installation of the gas fields at the Training Center in the early 2000s, the MMUA gas circuit rider (GCR) and members of the Gas School Committee created a steel distribution system along with medium density plastic piping to mimic a natural gas distribution system.

At Gas Schools during this era, the Training Center curriculum included directional boring, commercial meter installation, working with Mercury instruments, locating, steel main and service installation, anode installation, cathodic protection troubleshooting, and working

Continued on page 8

2025 Legislature needs overtime to complete its job

Three vacancies in office.

Three special elections plus a courtroom battle over the timing of one of them. Two senators charged with felonies: one resigns, one waits for her trial. One election recount that uncovered missing ballots. A temporary tie in the Senate followed by a one-seat DFL majority. A temporary one-seat Republican majority in the House followed by a tie. A court battle over what constitutes a quorum of the House. A lengthy DFL boycott of the House. These are just some of the factors that made the 2025 regular session of the Minnesota legislature stand out as one of the strangest and most challenging in the state's history. They are also the reasons why, when mandatory adjournment came on May 19, only a small fraction of the state's budget had been resolved, despite a constitutional mandate that a balanced budget for FY 2026 and FY 2027 had to be adopted.

Another factor that had an impact on getting things done on time was the general assumption that a special session was going to be needed. Most legislators accepted that inevitability early on, and thus reasoned there was no need to push hard for anything during the regular session.

That is not to say absolutely nothing got done between January 14, when the legislature first convened, and May 19, when they adjourned. In fact, the House saw 3,347 bills introduced, and the Senate saw 3,546. Of these bills, however, only 39 were delivered to Governor Walz and signed into law. Of that list, only three affect municipal utilities. (See the bill log on page 10 of this issue for details.)

After the regular session fizzled out, members of what had been the conference committees trying to resolve the differences between the House and Senate versions of bills were renamed as "unofficial working groups." The groups were charged with resolving at least the budget portion of each bill. For almost a month, the working groups met

Continued on page 9

Inside Stories

MMUA

To unify, support and serve as a common voice for municipal utilities

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Hortman, Hoffman impact on Minnesota's municipal utilities is significant

In the aftermath of the tragic and senseless murders in June of Minnesota Representative Melissa Hortman, her husband Mark, and their dog Gilbert, and the serious wounding of Senator John Hoffman and his wife Yvette, advocates for utilities and energy were taking stock of the impact these two legislators have had on the policies that influence municipal utilities.

Melissa Hortman, DFL–Brooklyn Park, Speaker Emerita of the Minnesota House of Representatives

John Hoffman, DFL–Champlin, Minnesota State Senator

Both have been significant influencers in the space. As Governor Walz prepares to call a special election to fill Representative Hortman's seat, and everyone remains hopeful that Senator Hoffman will be able to return, it is worth noting how much impact two people can have.

Representative Hortman served as the Chair of the Energy Policy Committee in 2013 and 2014, and she was chief author of energy policy bills both years. These bills required investor-owned utilities to obtain 1.5 percent of their retail energy sales from solar by 2030, developed a specific rate to be paid to solar generators, established community solar in Minnesota, and addressed interconnection issues.

As House Speaker between 2019 and 2025, Hortman drove a clean energy agenda. In 2023, she spearheaded a wave of energy and environmental policy including passage of the 100 percent carbon free by 2040 bill, major clean energy investments and programs, expanded community solar provisions, and encouraged the construction of infrastructure to support electric vehicle adoption, energy efficiency, and clean buildings.

MMUA and Representative Hortman did not always see eye-to-eye on the issues. However, our government relations team worked closely with her both before and after her time as Speaker of the House, and our team enjoyed getting to know her as a person at assorted events. This relationship was valuable, and Representative Hortman was both respectful of municipal utilities concerns and willing to consider alternatives.

Senator Hoffman has been a member of the Senate Energy, Utilities, Environment, and Climate Committee since 2017. He also serves on the Environment, Climate, and Legacy Committee and Chairs the Human Services Committee. With these interrelated assignments, his fingerprints can be found everywhere as he helps shepherd legislation and prevents questionable ideas from progressing. The benefits of having a willing ear on both sides of the aisle cannot be overstated.

Senator Hoffman has long been a strong supporter of municipal utilities, and we hope he will return to his seat in the Senate and continue being a forceful—and fun—advocate for hometown power.

Hibbing Public Utilities joins MISO

On June 12, the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO) Board of Directors voted to accept the non-transmission owner application of the Hibbing Public Utilities (HPU) Commission for MISO membership.

HPU now joins other Minnesota municipal utilities and joint action agencies as a member of the regional transmission organization that oversees the electrical power grid covering 15 states and Manitoba.

HPU General Manager Luke Peterson says both customers and the utility will benefit from MISO membership, noting, "It gives us access to affordable power, and that is very important to [address the surging] electric demand." With rolling blackouts becoming increasingly frequent, Peterson expressed concern about potential capacity shortages and blackouts in northern Minnesota. He stressed it is vital for Hibbing to have the reliability assured by MISO to safeguard its customers from such issues.

As a MISO member, HPU is able to participate in MISO committees and advisory groups to advance both regional planning and HPU's interests for the future. HPU is currently working toward transmission ownership and, in collaboration with Minnesota Power and Great River Energy, is assessing new transmission routes and interconnection opportunities. Membership in MISO is a necessary step to attaining that goal and to receiving cost recovery (revenue) benefits for HPU's transmission investment. HPU leaders believe MISO membership and an ownership stake in transmission could lead to expanding service to more industrial and commercial users, including manufacturing facilities, data centers, and other energy-intensive businesses.

James Bayliss, chair of the HPU Commission, addressed the MISO board, and thanked them on behalf of the residents of Hibbing for their consideration and acceptance. He noted that joining MISO "is a big step for HPU as we begin our long-term planning for our transmission to connect us to a broader grid for the community, with a strong local perspective, based in reliability and economic development, and obviously, Hibbing's gusto."

HPU operates a wood-fired boiler system generating an average of 15 MW of excess electricity. After reactivating the system in 2021, HPU faced the challenge of managing surplus generation without a guaranteed market. As a MISO member, HPU can sell this excess power into the regional grid using MISO's broader transmission and market capacity.

Good governance: It's not glamorous but it beats a bologna sandwich

From My Desk to Yours

Karleen Kos
MMUA CEO

A column focused on the topic of municipal utility governance is about as exciting as a lunch box containing processed meat on white bread, celery sticks, and a broken cookie. I mean, it'll do, but nobody is clamoring for it.

So, it is with a certain amount of trepidation that I tap this one out on my trusty keyboard. Governance is one of those topics that almost never gets anyone's motor running, yet it underpins everything we do. When governance is strong, utility systems hum, our communities benefit, and public trust thrives. When governance falters, we risk inefficiencies, reputational damage to the utility, and, worst of all, diminished service to ratepayers—our neighbors, friends, and families.

What is meant by the term "governance" anyway? Governance is a unique function, carried out by a group of people acting as one, whose job is to ensure an organization is both relevant and sustainable. It is about stewardship and meeting the needs of stakeholders over time in a legal and ethical way. Board guru John Carver says governance is, "ensuring that an organization achieves what it should and avoids what is unacceptable."

It is important to remember that governance is distinct from leadership, which is about discerning and doing the right things. It is also distinct from operations, which are focused on doing things the right way. Governance focuses on vision, oversight, and accountability to those who depend on the organization and make it possible.

When it comes to hometown utilities, governance is usually carried out by an independent commission operating according to Minnesota Statute Sections 412.321–412.391. This text covers the formation, operation, and abolition or transfer of a public utility. It's brief and to the point regarding the *what* of governance. It doesn't give us much to go on as to how, and across Minnesota, I see that municipal utility commissions vary in their approach. There are as many ways to do the *how* as there are utilities. Some work better than others. Yet, there are some things about governance that really do matter, and it's important to get them right.

I was a tender 25 years old when I first worked for a governing body. At the time, I thought it was cool not to have a single boss, and I liked being accountable to a group with different views and different spheres of influence. I learned a lot from those folks, and their varied perspectives were invaluable.

Over the next 15 years, I got a lot of experience with governing bodies, some of it highly rewarding, and some of it fairly nerve-wracking. Until you have spent months checking the morning paper to see whether you and your board are again being covered in an unflattering way due to a misunderstanding you had nothing to do with but are charged with fixing, you cannot truly appreciate the nuances of good governance. Or the importance of cherry-flavored Mylanta.

In the nightmarish case I lived through, I learned about the importance of boards speaking with one voice. Our nonprofit was in some pretty hot water because two people—talking as though they were representing the entire entity—had said some regrettable things that hurt the mission, alienated donors, caused staff turnover, and generally created mayhem. The two didn't mean to create chaos, and an over-zealous reporter made things worse, but the damage was done because basic governance guidelines were not in place or understood. Lesson learned.

Luckily, that lamentable episode turned out to be very useful. My next job was working with the national office of a large charity, where I traveled the country consulting with dozens of our local chapters' governing bodies. I got to see some of the most functional and dysfunctional groups you can imagine. Whether they were located in Nebraska (where a board president challenged me to do strategic planning without a flip chart) or Louisiana (where I got to explain why they could not serve beer at 8:00 am on Sunday morning using the association's brand), every board member served because they cared and wanted to help—even though some of their methods were rather, um, unorthodox.

Since that time, I've worked for, served on, and advised many more boards and commissions. I have been blessed to see how very important commitment and heartfelt good intentions are to success. I've learned that everyone does not have to do things the same way. Yet, there are best practices and ways of doing things that are usually most successful—both because they get more accomplished and because they avoid unnecessary risk and drama.

And that brings me again to the governance of municipal utilities in Minnesota. As I mentioned earlier, Minnesota Statutes Section 412.341 lists some details about utility governing bodies, including:

- the number of commissioners
- limitations on the number that may serve on the city council simultaneously
- residence requirements
- specific powers reserved to utility commissioners

These powers are spelled out in the law and include:

- full and exclusive control of the utility systems
- power to operate, extend, or expand the utility but not sell it
- purchase of insurance
- separation of funds
- rate setting and collection of fees
- hiring of staff and payment of pensions

The enumeration of the commission's powers is in the law because the legislature meant to keep a very clear line between the city council and the operation of the utility. As a later court decision on the topic observed:

"The purpose was to create a ... commission ... and to clothe it with exclusive authority, acting by itself, and independently of the city council, or mayor, to operate, control and manage a city water and light plant. This authority is expressed in clear and unambiguous language and effectually creates a department of village or city government responsible only to the people." *State ex rel. Briggs v McIllraith*

Although the law and its intentions can seem straightforward, sometimes things get lost in translation. When that happens, good intentions and good governance can part company rather quickly.

Consider this: the court decision I quoted above tells us the powers listed in Minnesota's law are there to make sure everyone understands where the lines are between a city council and the utility commission. The powers were never intended as a "to do" list for commissioners. Yet, some commissions interpret the list of powers as exactly that.

Take the matter of staffing the utility. Some commissions see the power of "hiring of staff" to mean the commission should be involved in every hiring decision. Most commissions simply hire a general manager, set a budget and compensation philosophy, and provide policies that must be followed. Then they empower the general manager to do the hiring. The latter is more in keeping with the role of a governing body, while the former is not.

You could argue that either approach is fine—or that "we've always done it this way and it works for us"—but that would be missing the point. When a commission gets in the weeds and starts being involved in the hiring of every employee, they are no longer governing; they are into operations. That creates role confusion, disempowers the general manager, and invites everything from end runs to lawsuits. Just because you can do something, doesn't mean you should do that thing.

The American Public Power Association (APPA) has two excellent resources on the topic of governance you might find useful. Both *Policymakers Handbook: A Nuts and Bolts Guide to Governance in Public Power* and *Governing for Excellence: Raising the Bar on Public Power Governance* are available for purchase on APPA's website. They list the following requirements of effective governance for utility boards and commissions:

- Complying with legal and fiduciary responsibilities. This includes responsibility for understanding the relevant laws and regulations as well as assuring the commission and organization adhere to them.
- Assuring an effective staff leader. This means recruiting, hiring, compensating, delegating authority, supporting, evaluating, and correcting (if necessary) the general manager.

Continued on page 4

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UMN partnership opportunity for Minnesota's municipal utilities

Gabe Chan, Humphrey School of Public Affairs

The University of Minnesota announces free technical assistance for a limited time.

Need help with a research-to-action project? The Center for Science, Technology, and Environmental Policy (CSTEP) offers technical assistance resources and expertise to support planning, research, and applying for funds for energy projects. CSTEP is building out partnerships with MMUA members as well as consumer-owned utilities and tribal government members for a limited time at no cost.

CSTEP was established in 1996 at the University of Minnesota Humphrey School of Public Affairs to foster interdisciplinary and community-engaged research on sustainability, environmental justice, and the clean energy transition. We build capacity for communities to engage in environmental decision-making and provide tailored and accessible assistance that allows utilities and others to secure funding and resources that materially improve outcomes.

MMUA members are well aware of their needs. Yet, due to capacity constraints, some municipal utilities can lack the time required to evaluate and understand options, plot a course forward, and develop the best implementation plan that would help achieve those goals. CSTEP can bring techno-economic modeling tools, systems impact analysis, industry landscape assessments, and community engagement planning capacity to help communities advance their goals. Our team coordinates with community partners, maximizes collaboration with experts, and offers tailored and timely grant-writing support.

We continue to work on a wide variety of projects, depending on local needs. Example projects include:

Distributed energy resource innovation – Evaluating growth opportunities for distributed energy resource opportunities (demand response, distributed generation, storage, and more) and collaboratively designing new programs.

Local energy action plans—Working with communities and municipal utilities to support their future energy goals and ambitions through the development of an actionable plan, including funding opportunities.

Community solar benchmarking—Analyzing aggregate quantity of community solar demanded at various rates and conducted program evaluation.

Community benefit plans—Developing thoughtful, clean energy project design to support the places and people where they are located.

Developing the next generation—Introducing students to consumer-owned utility models through field trips.

We welcome the opportunity to work with you and assist in developing your unique energy goals. Connect with us today!

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TVA applies to build a small nuclear reactor

The nation's largest public power company, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), announced in late May it submitted a construction permit application to the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) for a small, modular nuclear reactor.

The TVA wants to develop advanced nuclear reactor technologies designed to improve upon the safety, efficiency, sustainability, and cost-effectiveness of current nuclear power systems.

The TVA is a federally owned electricity utility operating nearly 34,000 megawatts (MWs) of electricity-generating capacity. It serves most of Tennessee and parts of six surrounding states.

Benefits of small modular reactors

Small modular reactors (SMRs) are currently getting a lot of attention as the nation seeks feasible ways of replacing carbon-based dispatchable power. They offer several key benefits, positioning them as a promising solution for energy needs. Their compact design allows for flexible deployment, making them suitable for a variety of locations, including remote and underserved areas. SMRs enhance safety through advanced technology, minimizing the risk of accidents and simplifying emergency responses. They contribute to decarbonization efforts by providing a reliable source of carbon-free energy, helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In addition, their scalability enables rapid construction and integration into existing energy systems, making them a more cost-effective option for meeting growing energy demands.

TVA as the small reactor pioneer

TVA President and CEO Don Mule told the Associated Press nuclear power is reliable, resilient, and carbon-free. "It is, what I would consider, one of the highest quality generating sources we have. And so, starting a path forward not only helps others in America follow, but it

Continued on page 13

Good governance

Continued from page 3

- Setting strategic direction and priorities. This area is the one that most often suffers when governing commissions get in the weeds. It is the unique responsibility of the commission to require, participate in, and approve the development of a longer-term strategic plan. The plan should anticipate and address the needs of the community, and the commission should ensure the utility has the resources it needs to fulfill the plan.

- Monitoring organizational performance. At the governance level, this typically means working with the general manager to identify key performance indicators and other metrics that will be reported, discussed, and used to evaluate and communicate the utility's success. Ideally, the monitoring should be largely objective, rather than subjective.

- Evaluating and improving governance performance. This means the commission is willing to take a look at its own work and ways of behaving. It should self-evaluate each year and, if necessary, make improvements to strengthen how it serves the utility and the community.

After more than 35 years in working with boards, councils, and commissions, I can tell you from experience that this stuff is both really easy and really hard. Most municipal utility commissioners are not in it for the big money or glamor, and they want to do good things. More times than I can count, I have heard someone lamenting, "I wish I'd know [this thing about good governance] when I started. I could have done a better job." So I urge commissions and general managers to adopt a comprehensive orientation program for new commissioners. Helping them get off on the right foot will pay off in spades.

MMUA is doing its part to help. In January 2026 we will be introducing *Governance in Action: The View from the Commissioner's Chair.* It's a new daylong program to help Minnesota's commissioners feel comfortable and knowledgeable in their governance roles. It is mostly aimed at commissioners, but council members and general managers are welcome to attend as well. Our goal is to take a dry topic and make it interesting, with case studies, guest speakers, and interactive exercises that will help attendees do a great job at governing their hometown utility. Think of it as replacing the bologna with a hot beef sandwich and the broken cookie with pie and ice cream.

Watch for more information coming soon.

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Slayton move to municipalize headed to contested case hearing

Bill Black, MMUA Government Relations Attorney

On May 15, the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MPUC, Commission) took its first procedural step in the municipalization of Xcel Energy's electric facilities serving the City of Slayton, calling upon a statute that has not been applied since its 1976 enactment in addressing the parties' request for a contested case hearing.

In its action, the MPUC approved Slayton's request for the referral of a major issue in the municipalization—compensation to Xcel—to the Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH). Typically, when a municipal utility annexes service territory and it cannot come to agreement with the adjacent utility on compensation for acquired facilities or loss of revenue, the parties seek adjudication by the MPUC. The usual next step is the MPUC's referral to the OAH. There, an administrative law judge (ALJ) takes written and oral testimony from both utilities and develops a factual record for the Commission to use in determining a final compensation amount and other matters related to the service area transfer. This happens under Minnesota Statutes §216B.44—the municipal service territory extension statute.

However, Slayton does not currently have a municipal electric utility, so a different but similar statute governs this transaction. The municipal purchase statute (§216B.45) directs the MPUC, when evaluating compensation to the non-municipal utility, to consider the original cost of acquired property less depreciation, loss of revenue to the utility, expenses resulting from integration of facilities, and other appropriate factors. These same four factors are in the service territory extension statute and have guided the OAH and MPUC in past transfer proceedings. However, the municipal purchase statute has never been used before, because no other city in Minnesota has municipalized electric service between enactment of the statutes in 1976 and the present time.

Commission staff and Xcel suggested to the MPUC that its referral order could direct the ALJ to look at territory transfer cases under 216B.44 as precedent for Slayton's purchase of the Xcel facilities. The City's

representatives said Slayton did not object. However, they went on to persuade the commissioners that leaving the order open regarding the referential statute would lead the ALJ to the Commission's precedents if appropriate, but also preserve the possibility of reaching a settlement agreement between the parties that goes beyond the scope of the statute.

Commissioner John Tuma, who did nearly all the speaking on behalf of the Commission, liked the City's suggestion that a deal might be worked out. He noted the Commission would then be responsible for analyzing the agreement to determine whether it would be prudent for Xcel's ratepayers and, thus, whether the MPUC would allow Xcel to enter into it. He also said that such deliberation could call for somewhat different considerations in the event the Commission is asked to approve or modify the ALJ's eventual recommendation if the parties don't reach an agreement. Xcel agreed settlement was a possibility.

During the hearing, Commissioner Hwikwon Ham observed that any agreement between the parties might have to account for whether Slayton's new municipal utility would purchase power from Xcel using Xcel's existing transmission line to the City, or whether the line would be a stranded asset. He theorized that the issue could be explored during the upcoming contested case proceeding or later by the Commission, if necessary.

The Commission approved the City's petition 5–0 and will eventually post an order formalizing the decision.

Power in unity

Continued from page 1

time. News outlets and customers called out LIPA's failure to plan for extreme weather, including proactive tree-trimming, perhaps the most basic step in preparing for storms. In addition, resources arrived too late, power outage maps were inaccurate, and communication from LIPA was lax.

Shortly after these events, Willetts and other public power leaders from around the nation took a big step forward by forming the Mutual Aid Committee to better prepare utilities for disaster response. When power is affected, locally or nationally, residents often look to their government officials for assistance. However, political leaders will not know how to restore power. Willetts says, "The politics side to storms is as important as getting the lights back on. When things go sideways and [customers] don't have power, they go to the governor, who doesn't understand it like power workers."

MAC's goal is to continuously strengthen planning, organization, and coordination efforts with federal government agencies to streamline mutual aid. MAC has been instrumental in developing protocols to maximize public power utilities' response efficiency. The Committee also works to raise awareness about public power utility effectiveness at supporting communities during times of crisis.

Patrick Hart, Senior Director of Resilience Programs at APPA, on his knee, discussing the exercise.

Giacomo Wray Operations Services Manager at APPA, standing at the podium.

Bringing people together to plan

The May tabletop exercise, "FrostWire Fury," provided a hands-on walk-through scenario simulating a week-long bomb cyclone impacting multiple states, causing extended and widespread outages. Participants from utilities and government agencies gained a deeper understanding of a utility's role in recovery following a natural disaster.

At the meeting, Willetts sat at a table with the Department of Energy and the rest of the MAC executive committee. In the bomb-cyclone scenario, the national coordinator for APPA was unable to perform their duties. Willetts and the MAC chair practiced stepping into that role, acting as the backup for the national coordinator. This includes informing the national membership that the chair and vice-chair are in charge and organizing multiple daily meetings with state coordinators and parts of the federal government.

During exercise, the participants, including public power representatives for each state, referred to the *Mutual Aid Playbook* (MAP). The MAP is a thorough resource developed by the MAC to guide them through managing an event response, including the determination of whether the disaster should be reported as a national event. Willetts commented that hurricanes are the most common type of national event requiring national mutual aid due to the storms' large-scale impact.

The MAP also provides the process for coordinating activities, information, and resources across a three-tiered national network without infringing on mutual aid agreements between utilities. It offers guidance on ranking the incident's severity, from level one (isolated), to level four (national) and outlines how the state, regional, and national coordinators should respond at each level. Willetts and the MAC executive board assisted in writing the playbook.

Willetts emphasized that mutual aid is not solely about sending crews to areas in crisis, but it is also about having a systematic and practiced approach to disaster response, ensuring public power utilities are recognized and effective. Willetts believes understanding mutual aid is as essential as preparation for national events.

Effective mutual aid about preparation and communication

It is important for all stakeholders to communicate and plan when a local or national weather event takes place. In the event of a disaster, Willetts says, "We [The MAC executive board] would be operating all those systems and running those meetings, keeping notes, making sure that everybody knows on a nationwide basis what's going on. Then we communicate those things back to the Department of Energy, to make sure information gets to the President." Willetts went on to say, "There are briefings to the President, and that's our time to talk about public power and what public power is doing for the country,"

In addition to dealing effectively with crises as they come along, MAC conducts many events throughout the year to help public power utilities develop and strengthen their response and restoration strategies. It is important for key utility personnel to attend these meetings so when utilities are called into action, all personnel are well-versed on their expectations and roles. Willetts says, "When you get hit by a tornado, that's not the time to learn what to do, right?"

MMUA's impact

For more than 30 years, Willetts has been involved with APPA on behalf of MMUA and Minnesota's municipal utilities. He has served as chair of many committees, was one of the founders of the national lineworkers rodeo, and he helped to create the MAC. Willetts has been involved in this committee's work since its creation in 2014, and he was recently elected to serve another three years as vice-chair. Willetts' extensive history in utility work provides the necessary experience to serving in these vital roles.

Along with being the vice-chair of the MAC, Willetts is the primary representative, or state coordinator, for Minnesota, South Dakota, and North Dakota. As the state coordinator, he communicates with APPA about any event requiring mutual aid in the area. "If there's a tornado anywhere in Minnesota, South Dakota, or North Dakota, I would report that we have got a local storm going on, and this is what we're doing to put everything back together."

Willetts and MMUA have been at the forefront with other utilities and APPA in encouraging utilities to have a mutual aid agreement in place. When an event occurs, utilities can tap into the mutual aid network for assistance. Willetts has

Continued on page 7

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Power in unity

Continued from page 6

also developed useful tools and resources for members, such as the MMUA Damage Assessment Template, the APPA Safety Manual, and the APPA MAP.

MMUA members benefit greatly from Willetts' national involvement

Along with his role as vice-chair of the MAC, Willetts serves on many APPA committees, ensuring that Minnesota public power utilities are well represented. He is the voice for the membership, saying, "We want to make sure national rules influence public power in a positive way and that Minnesota is not just a flyover state."

The first time MMUA was called for mutual aid was on a local level during the 1997 Red River flood. New to his role at MMUA, Willetts lined up crews and coordinated deployment for 10 days. Since then, MMUA has helped coordinate assistance both in-state and out of state dozens of times. Most recently, in October 2024, MMUA led a contingent of 36 lineworkers and two mechanics from 14 Minnesota utilities to Florida, assisting the Kissimmee Utility Authority and Orlando Utilities Commission following Hurricane Milton. These deployments provide vital assistance to our public power cohorts, strengthening them and the municipal model. All of that is good for the folks back home, who rely on MMUA to be visible, active, and influential in ensuring our voice is heard.

Mike Willetts' leadership at the APPA MAC meeting underscores the critical role preparation, communication, and experience play in disaster response. His decades of dedication to public power and mutual aid have elevated Minnesota's national profile and strengthened the country's ability to respond when disaster strikes.

As storms grow more intense and widespread, the work of MAC and leaders like Willetts ensures public power utilities are prepared when needed.

Impact of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act on Minnesota's municipal utilities

There has been a lot of commentary on the tax reform bill known officially as the One Big Beautiful Bill (OBBB).

The bill barely survived a vote in the Senate, with Vice-President Vance having to cast the deciding vote after the body tied 50–50 on final passage of the bill. The House then called members back from their summer breaks to re-pass the bill as amended by the Senate. The OBBB was delivered to President Trump in time for him to sign it into law by his self-imposed July 4, 2025, deadline.

There are those who think the tax savings offered in the bill will be a huge economic stimulus, while the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office predicts the law will add an estimated $4.1 trillion to the federal deficit. The two are not mutually exclusive. MMUA's primary interests in the bill centered around three issues: (1) retaining the tax-exempt status of municipal bonds; (2) retaining the ability to use direct pay (also known as elective pay); and (3) retaining the tax-exempt status of otherwise qualified nonprofit organizations. A preliminary review of summaries of the bill (which came in at more than 850 pages) indicates that, for the most part, MMUA got its wishes on these three issues. Other provisions of the bill may take some of the luster off the wins.

On the upside, municipal bonds appear to have been held harmless in the final draft of the OBBB. This is good news that will help keep the financing of municipal projects more competitive and thus reduce the long-term costs of projects funded, at least in part, by the issuance of municipal bonds. However, it does not appear that the cap under which a bond issuer can be treated as a small issuer was increased as we had urged. This is not surprising since lobbying efforts for the increase took a back seat to other priorities, such as protecting the tax-exempt status of the bonds.

As for direct-pay, the authority to use it remains intact, but changes to the underlying tax incentives to which direct pay would be applied may prove to have greatly weakened the value of this carryover from the Biden era. For example, an accelerated phase-out of tax incentives for solar, wind, and electric vehicles means that there may not be anything available for which to seek direct pay after 2026.

In a win for utility workforce development efforts, the OBBB expands the use of 529 savings plans to cover postsecondary training and credentialing, such as licenses and non-governmental certifications common in the trades. The new law effectively transforms college savings plans into career savings plans and creates more viable pathways to career success.

Finally, the tax-exempt status of qualified nonprofits like MMUA was also retained. For charitable nonprofits, changes were made to the maximum donation amount corporations and others can make to such entities and still claim a deduction on their income taxes. Efforts to add new taxes on nonprofits were removed during the legislative process.

MMUA will be conducting further analysis of the new law in the coming weeks. Watch for details in future issues of *The Resource*.

MMUA gas field restoration

Continued from page 1

with new gas-related technology. Many of these schools were involved in the original development and installation of the Training Center's gas infrastructure.

Then, the Training Center's gas field entered a period of non-activity as changing regulations required multiple programs for operators and participation at the training center's annual Gas School declined.

The time has come

After COVID-19 shelved gatherings such as the Minnesota Office of Pipeline Safety (MNOPS) safety conference, the Minnesota natural gas industry felt a loss of community. The annual MNOPS Conference had been a gathering place for gas workers to collaborate on issues, share expertise, and connect with like-minded individuals over multiple days.

Sensing an unmet need, MMUA personnel began exploring the possibility of reinstating hands-on natural gas training and using the gas field at the MMUA Training Center. The idea was to rebuild that sense of community while offering a valuable learning experience. Early in 2025, the Gas Committee was reorganized, the gas field was inspected, and some important repairs were carried out to assess what percentage of the natural gas infrastructure could be used in the future at the Training Center.

Now, a large portion of the natural gas field is once again ready to help provide that training resource for natural gas operators, and the first Gas School in 15 years will run from October 7–9. The Gas School curriculum will include locating and leak field investigation, and it will educate attendees on the ever-changing natural gas technology and laws. Ideally, we will offer an environment where operators can come together, swap experiences, and help each other determine the best procedures for a safer natural gas community across Minnesota.

A group effort brings the gas field back to life

MMUA never "goes it alone." The new Gas School is the product of ideas and participation from many members and experts. In late May 2025, Owatonna Public Utilities, Hutchinson Utilities Commission, Circle Pines Public Works/Centennial Utilities, and New Ulm Public Utilities sent their elite gas operators to check, test, and refurbish the underground gas lines in the Training Center's fields. The utilities also donated materials for the Gas School and contributed their views on how to make the most of the three-day session.

Justin Rusch (operating the backhoe) from HUC joins Austen Enrooth (right) and Brandon Rousseau (left) from City Circle Pines/Centennial Utilities, as they excavate to locate a gas pipe.

Hutchinson Utilities Commission (HUC) team members Bryce Rusch (far back), Jeremy Carter (backhoe operator), and Will Valdez HUC (standing outside of trench), are joined by Joe Bellomy (standing in the trench) from Owatonna Public Utilities in refurbishing the gas field at the MMUA Training Center.

First, though, there was just hard work to accomplish. To refurbish the field, a Marshall Municipal Utilities expert located all spots where the detector lost signal and painted an "X" on the ground. The gas field was littered with "Xs" by the time he was done. At each "X," the gas operator team dug to search for damage, missing hookups, and to test the pipes' pressure. One section of the pipe was completely excavated and opened up to clear out almost 200 gallons of water using high-pressure air.

Then, a special cleaning process called "pigging" was used to remove any remaining debris. When the system was tested, it initially failed to hold pressure, indicating leaks. In the process, the volunteers determined that sections of the field were damaged, causing small portions to be eliminated. Half the system was working after a full day of troubleshooting and repairs. By day two, all leaks were repaired, and the system passed the final test.

Member insights

Bryce Rusch from the Hutchinson Utilities Commission (HUC) played a key role in supporting this project. Since joining HUC more than six years ago, Rusch has been seeking high-level gas field education. Larger investor-owned utilities (IOUs) have set up training centers for new employees, focusing on qualifications and industry expertise. However, many municipal utilities don't have the resources to offer similar training. MMUA is unique in the municipal space, having pooled resources from multiple utilities to establish the gas training field, something Rusch appreciates.

Rusch emphasizes the importance of collaboration at the Training Center and learning from other utility experts. He said, "The exposure that you get from working with others was the real benefit and neat part of it."

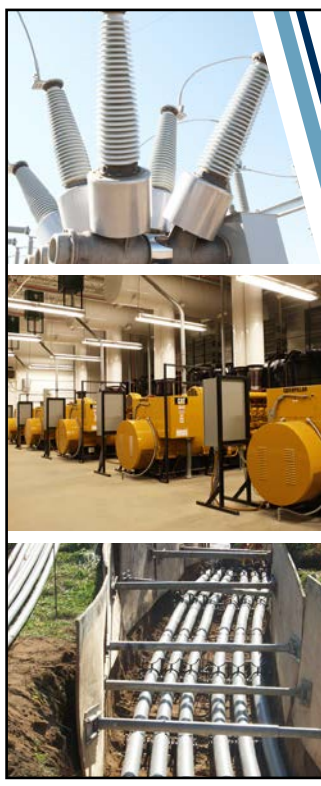
Rusch expects the new gas field to be as successful as the electric training field in Marshall. He notes that the electric training plays a significant role in the success of Minnesota municipal utilities and hopes the gas field training will have the same positive impact.

What's next?

MMUA's Gas Committee will be meeting again this summer to discuss the next steps and finalize plans for the Gas School.

Jay Reading, assistant director of technical services at MMUA, oversaw the collaboration between these utilities. He noted, "It was wonderful seeing this group get together. We did not know each other, but we worked amazingly well together to complete the job."

The MMUA Gas School has enormous potential. With the help of the four utilities and their supplies, the gas field is once again a valuable training ground. This revival improves technical education and strengthens the bonds within Minnesota's natural gas community, laying the groundwork for a safer, more connected future.



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2025 Legislature needs overtime

Continued from page 1

in differing frequency, almost always without notice, and not in a public setting.

When it was clear the working groups had attained agreement on the budget provisions for each major area of concern, Governor Walz set June 9 as the day for the First Special Session of 2025. Pursuant to a written agreement between the governor and legislative leaders, even though additional bills were introduced in the special session (19 were introduced in the House and 27 in the Senate), only the 12 budget bills, a tax bill, and two bonding-related bills were heard and passed during the one-day special session. Most policy language had been stripped from the bills, and it was clear that leadership had finalized budget negotiations. The House passed its last bill just before 11:00 pm and adjourned. The Senate needed a few more hours but finally adjourned at about 2:00 am. You can review summaries of all the bills relevant to municipal utilities in the bill log published on page 10 of this issue of *The Resource*.

Perhaps of equal importance, however, are the bills that didn't pass. For example, MMUA joined a coalition of more than 30 associations and organizations seeking to repeal what is commonly referred to as the nuclear moratorium. Despite the efforts of this coalition, the initiative stalled due to the lack of support from key House DFLers and the Senate energy chair stating that he would move the bill only if the Prairie Island Indian Community either supported or was neutral on the bill. This did not happen.

Net-Metering reform faired a little better but still failed to reach the finish line. Again, key House DFL members opposed the bill, but it had strong bipartisan support in the Senate and was amended into the Senate's Omnibus Energy Bill. Unfortunately, the provision had to be dropped to get a budget bill done.

A troublesome provision of a bill that would have granted the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) authority to require air dispersion modelling before granting virtually any approval of a new or renewed air permit proved to be difficult to kill as it kept coming back in the Senate. The House Republican co-chair of the Environment Committee made it clear his caucus would not accept the measure and even read from MMUA's testimony in opposition to it. Meanwhile, in the Senate, its provisions were buried in a broader effort to reform the permitting process, a matter that had broad bipartisan support. The MPCA glossed over the modeling provision so MMUA, joined by the Chamber of Commerce, had to flag it and kill it in both bill and amendment form.

Expanding what sources of energy will count towards the carbon-free by 2040 standard had some support in the Senate, where woody biomass and large-hydro were both briefly carried in the Senate Omnibus Energy Bill. As with other policy matters, the language supporting these measures was dropped from the final budget bills.

Finally, a bill that would have removed a municipal utility's Right of First Refual (ROFR) in constructing transmission, did not move in the Senate after an MMUA member talked to the bill's chief author and explained why MMUA opposed the bill. This turnaround by a local legislator illustrates the need for MMUA members to participate in our government relations efforts and to be familiar with the issues.

MMUA expects to once again push some of the issues discussed above in the coming year. We also expect to continue playing defense on others.

Setting the 2026 legislative agenda will begin later in the fall. Any MMUA member is welcome to offer suggestions. Joint Action Agencies will also be consulted, as will the Government Relations Advisory Group (GRAG), before the MMUA Board of Directors makes the final decisions on issues and priorities at its December meeting.

The Minnesota Legislature is currently adjourned until February 17, 2026. There is some chance a second special session could be called to respond to the impact Federal cuts in Medicare/Medicaid funding will have on the state budget. However, since many of these cuts won't take effect until after the 2026 mid-year elections, there is probably enough time to wait and deal with the impact as part of the 2026 regular session. Disasters such as what hit Beltrami County could also trigger the need for another special session, but that need cannot be forecasted.

The MMUA Government Relations team recently completed four regional meetings focused on the impacts of the 2025 regular and first special sessions. An additional update will occur at the Annual Conference in Rochester in August. We will be exploring options for providing additional guides, best management practices, and other tools to help member utilities comply with the new laws. Members are welcome to call or email either Kent or Bill at the MMUA offices.

2025 Minnesota Legislature summary of laws pertaining to, impacting, or of interest to municipal utilities

Regular Session Laws

Ch. 23 (SF 908) Modification of 2024 Telecommunications Installer Certification Law

Entire bill
Makes January 1, 2026, the uniform deadline to have trained installers. Recognizes some past training and training other than by the Department of Labor and Industry. Changes requirement for two trained installers at each underground installation to only one. Effective date: May 20, 2025.

Ch. 34 (HF 2446) Agriculture and Broadband Development Policy and Finance bill

Article 1, section 2, subdivision 4 (k); Article 2, section 2
Appropriates $50,000 in FY 26 for a study by a nonprofit organization examining market and workforce factors that may contribute to incorrect markings. Report due June 1, 2027. Appropriates $1,001,000 (not a typo) in both FY 26 and FY 27 to the Office of Broadband Development. Effective date: July 1, 2025.

Ch. 39 (SF 3045) State and Local Government Elections Policy and Finance bill

Article 6, sections 1–2 and 11–13
Modifies the open meeting law by eliminating the limitations imposed on a member of an entity subject to the law who is participating by interactive technology. Notice of a regular meeting at which a member may participate by interactive technology must state that a member may be participating by means of interactive technology, but the notice no longer must identify the location from where that member is participating. Effective date: August 1, 2025.

Establishes authority for a new local utilities commission to be established with three, five, or seven members. Sets forth a process to modify the size of existing commissions. ***MMUA lobbied successfully for a change to require a referendum before a city council can downsize a commission.*** Effective date: May 24, 2025.

Increases the threshold for a mandated audit when the offices of clerk and treasurer are combined from $150,000 to $1 million, including enterprise funds. Effective date: August 1, 2025, and applies to audits performed for 2026 and thereafter.

First Special Session laws

Chapter 4 (HF 4) Commerce and Consumer Protection bill

Article 7, section 14–15, 23
Preserves service territory integrity when third-party charges for EV charging. ***MMUA secured this provision to codify that only third parties with express statutory authority may sell electricity at retail in Minnesota.*** Imposes $100 per port inspection fee with inspections of electric vehicle supply equipment required annually if budgetary and staff limitations allow; otherwise as often as possible. Effective date: July 1, 2025.

Chapter 6 (SF 17) Workforce and Labor bill

Article 4, section 27; Article 5, sections 10–13
Reduces maximum payroll tax for Paid Family Medical Leave (PFML) from 1.2 percent to 1.1 percent of taxable wages paid to each employee (currently rate is set at .88 percent of taxable wages).

Modifies Earned Sick and Safe Time (ESST) to allow an employer to require reasonable notice of need to use ESST. Employer can require reasonable documentation of need after two consecutive days of use of ESST (down from three); employee can voluntarily find a replacement worker from within and trade hours instead of being absent. Allows employers to advance ESST to employee expected to vest after 80 hours but who have not yet worked enough hours to vest in ESST program. Effective date: July 1, 2025, except section 13 pertaining to PFML which takes effect January 1, 2026. ***MMUA members lobbied for reform of both PFML and ESST during the 2025 MMUA Legislative Conference.***

Chapter 7 (SF 2) Energy bill

Articles 2–4
Imposes no direct impact on municipal utilities. Very limited Regional Development Authority funds expenditure (Article 2). Large energy facility definition increased from 100,000 to one million gallons of liquified natural gas (LNG) storage at a single site (Article 3, section 7). Securitization authority granted to investor-owned gas utilities (Article 4). Effective date: assorted; mostly June 15 and July 1, 2025. ***MMUA testified against provisions in the House bill that were ultimately dropped from the legislation.***

Chapter 8 (HF 14) Transportation bill

Article 2, sections 67–78
Requires that on and after July 1, 2027, operators of public charging stations must be licensed. Public charging stations are defined to be any facility at which a person conducts for-profit business selling electricity to charge EVs. Also, on and after July 1, 2027, charging station operators must collect and remit a five cents per kWh tax. Given the definition of public charging stations, these new licensing and tax mandates do not apply to any operator who does not charge a fee to use their charging station. Public charging stations that begin operation on or after July 1, 2027, must be capable of imposing the cost of electricity sold on a per-kWh basis.

Legacy chargers (public charging stations operating before October 1, 2023, that do not use vehicle supply equipment capable of measuring electricity delivered as vehicle fuel to an EV) will be exempt from the new 5 percent tax until December 31, 2031. On and after January 1, 2032, sales from a legacy charger shall be subject to the tax so the public charger must be capable of imposing the cost of electricity sold on a kWh basis. Public charging stations with a charging capacity less than 50 kilowatts are exempt from the new tax. Effective date: July 1, 2025.

Chapter 12 (HF 16) Data Centers bill

Entire bill
Defines "data center" to mean a facility designed to have a load of 100 megawatts or more and whose primary purpose is the storage, management, and processing of digital data. Establishes water permit conditions. Investor-owned utilities (IOUs) must create tariffs for very large customers to protect other customers and ensure ongoing compliance with energy standards. IOUs must offer clean energy to data centers. Any utility may exclude sales of electricity to a qualified large-scale data center from their gross annual sales. Qualified large-scale data centers that pay to the state an annual fee ranging from $1 million to $5 million are exempt from the Energy Conservation and Optimization (ECO) requirements. Utilities are prohibited from spending for or investing in ECO improvements that directly benefit a large energy facility including qualified large-scale data centers. The state may invest funds anywhere in Minnesota for low-income ECO and weatherization programs. Information technology equipment (computers) and software purchases by qualified data centers, qualified refurbished data centers, or qualified large-scale data centers, are exempted from sales tax so long as the data center is registered before July 1, 2042. Effective dates: assorted, but primarily June 15. 2025 (day following enactment) for sales and purchases made pursuant to the timeframes provided in the bill. ***MMUA analyzed multiple proposals collected by the House energy committee chair, discussed them with members, and conveyed to the chair concerns with issues that she ultimately dropped from the legislation.***

Chapter 13 (HF 9) Tax bill

Article 3, section 4
Deletes the sales tax exemption on electricity sales to qualified data centers now taxed. Since non-qualified data centers never had the exemption, the result appears to be that all electricity sales to any data center are now subject to sales tax. Effective date: sales and purchases made after June 30, 2025.

Chapter 14 (HF 17) Capital Investment (Cash) bill

None
Appropriates various amounts from the general fund for various state and local projects. No municipal utility-related provisions, but Chapter 14 is needed to pass Chapter 15.

Chapter 15 (HF 18) Capital Investment (Bonding) bill

Entire bill
Authorizes approximately $700 million total infrastructure funding using General Obligation bonds, trunk highway bonds, and cash. Investments of particular interest include: $44 million to the Department of Natural Resources; $12 million to the Pollution Control Agency, including $6 million for the new Statewide Drinking Water Contamination Mitigation Program; $176 million to the Public Facilities Authority, including $87 million for the Water Infrastructure Funding Program, $32 million for the Point Source Implementation Grants Program, and $18 million for the Emerging Contaminants Grant Program. The bill's primary effective date is the day following enactment, which is June 15, but bonds are issued at different times. ***MMUA members lobbied their legislators to support state bonding focused on these programs during the MMUA Legislative Conference.***

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This is a great option for members who prefer digital tools and want to stay connected on the go. We hope you enjoy using ***MMUA Connect.***

***Note:** *While contact information is included, clickable links for emails and phone numbers are not currently supported. We're working with our vendor to enable this feature in a future update.*

Minnesota's natural gas industry is at a crossroads

Minnesota's natural gas industry stands at a pivotal juncture in 2025, traversing the challenges of rising energy demands, climate goals, and infrastructure expansion.

The current state of natural gas in the state

Natural gas is a significant component of Minnesota's energy mix. In 2023, natural gas-fired power generation hit a record high, eclipsing coal-fired generation for the first time. Renewable resources—wind, solar, biomass, and hydropower—generated the largest share of Minnesota's electricity, accounting for one-third of the total in-state electricity net generation, while natural gas contributed 24 percent, coal 22 percent, and nuclear power 21 percent.

Expanding the infrastructure

To meet rapidly growing energy needs in the industrial and residential sectors, Minnesota is undertaking substantial infrastructure projects. For example, the Northern Lights 2025 Expansion Project is designed to enhance natural gas transportation capacity across Minnesota and Wisconsin, accommodating the growing energy demand. These developments come with financial implications for customers. Greater Minnesota Gas has proposed a 7.7 percent rate increase for residents and businesses, which would amount to an additional $1.4 million in revenue annually. The proposal has incited discussions about energy affordability and the equitable distribution of infrastructure costs.

Protecting the environment

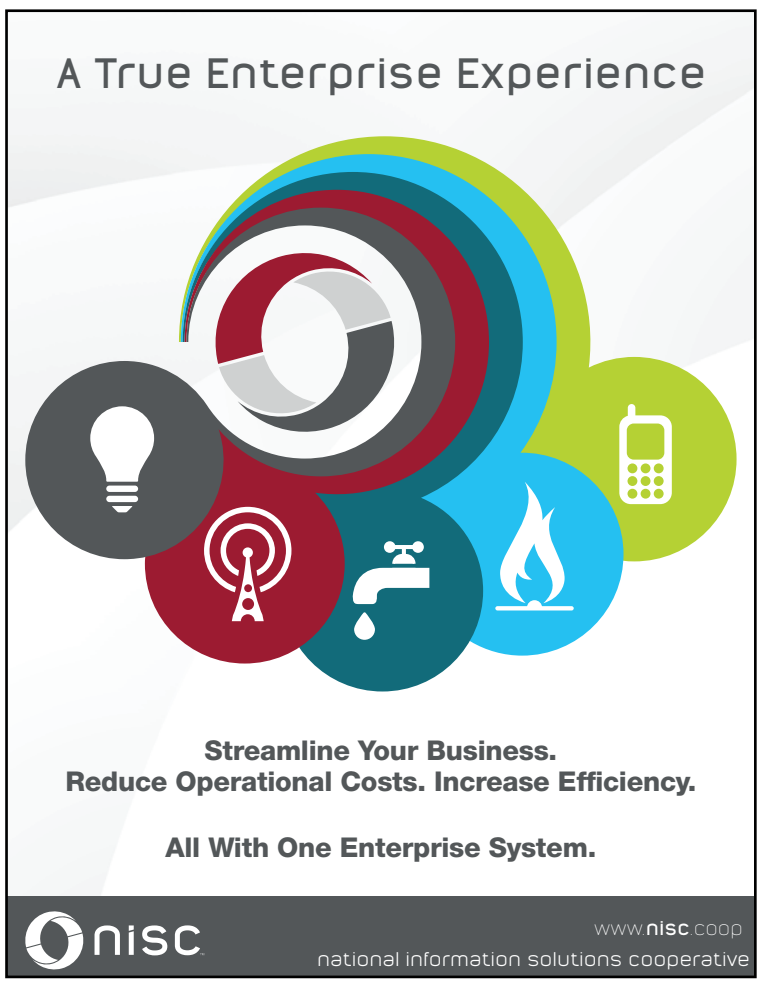
Environmental considerations also play a critical role in shaping the future of natural gas in Minnesota. The state has committed to a 100 percent clean energy standard by 2040, aligning with broader climate change mitigation efforts. This commitment requires reevaluating the reliance on fossil fuels, including natural gas, and encourages renewable energy investments.

The future of line extension allowances

In addition, the practice of subsidizing natural gas line extensions to new customers is now being dissected. Utilities have offered "line extension allowances," covering the costs of extending service for new developments. Critics believe this unfairly burdens existing customers and may not align with the state's environmental goals.

Attaining the 2040 clean energy target

The relationship between infrastructure expansion, consumer costs, and environmental goals highlights the complexity of Minnesota's energy landscape. As the state progresses toward its 2040 clean energy target, stakeholders must navigate this complex minefield to ensure a sustainable and equitable energy future.



Iowa's innovative nuclear gamble stalls

Iowa's ambitious energy legislation, aimed at expanding nuclear power and granting existing utilities the right of first refusal (ROFR) for new transmission projects, failed to advance as the 2025 legislative session concluded.

In Des Moines, lawmakers had been weighing a sweeping energy proposal championed by Gov. Kim Reynolds that could have reshaped the state's power landscape. The five-division, 53-page bill sought to spur nuclear generation, modernize grid infrastructure, and hand electric transmission companies a controversial ROFR to build new lines. But while some hailed the plan as a visionary move toward energy security, others warned it would restrict competition and ultimately increase costs.

Reynolds unveiled her proposals in January during her annual Condition of the State address, stressing Iowa must embrace an "all-of-the-above" energy strategy to meet rising electricity demands fueled by data centers, artificial intelligence, and industrial growth. "Invest in Iowa, and you won't regret it," she told lawmakers, emphasizing low costs and a reliable grid as key selling points for businesses.

At the heart of Reynolds' plan was a bold endorsement of nuclear energy development. The bill conveyed legislative intent to grow nuclear generation and attract energy storage projects. While Iowa is already a leader in renewables, particularly wind, Reynolds argued nuclear is essential for ensuring stable, dispatchable electricity.

However, the momentum behind the bill stalled. Despite early committee victories, House File 834 and Senate File 585 languished in their budget committees. Disagreement over the ROFR provision, particularly after a warning from the Trump administration's Department of Justice (DOJ), had complicated the path forward.

The debate intensifies

The ROFR provision would grant incumbent utilities the first opportunity to build new transmission projects — a move critics argued eliminates fair bidding and suppresses competition. A March letter from a Trump-appointed DOJ official warned Iowa legislators the ROFR approach could raise costs and lower service quality.

Advocacy groups such as Americans for Prosperity (AFP), a longtime supporter of Reynolds on many issues, broke ranks to oppose the measure. "Competition produces better outcomes for consumers," said Tyler Ragor, AFP's Iowa director. "When you're outright eliminating competition, you're setting up Iowans to pay more."

Conversely, utilities such as ITC Midwest insisted competition had not delivered the savings proponents claim. Dusky Terry, ITC Midwest's president, said after a 2011 federal rule limited ROFR nationally, promised cost reductions failed to materialize. Terry argued incumbents are best positioned to build infrastructure quickly and responsibly.

The debate drew heavily on competing studies. Opponents cited a 2019 Brattle Group report estimating 20 to 30 percent savings through competitive bidding. Supporters countered with 2022 and 2024 studies from Concentric Energy Advisors suggesting competitive processes delay projects by 14 to 18 months on average.

Mason Mauro, a spokesman for Reynolds, said ROFR would prevent project slowdowns that could hamper economic growth. "ROFR ensures that companies who care about Iowans are maintaining the grid and restoring power after storms," he said.

Resource planning sparked concern

Another controversial element was the bill's requirement for five-year energy supply and demand reports from utilities. Unlike in most states, Iowa currently does not mandate formal integrated resource planning overseen by regulators.

Josh Mandelbaum, a senior attorney with the Environmental Law and Policy Center, criticized the proposal's hands-off approach. "Best practices include transparent planning with input from ratepayer advocates," he said. "Instead, this bill sets up a utility-run process that lacks accountability."

Mandelbaum warned without contested case hearings and regulatory oversight, utilities could pursue projects prioritizing profits over affordability or sustainability. "This was a missed opportunity to create a fairer, more transparent system," he said.

Environmental groups saw the lack of robust resource planning as a red flag, especially given the bill's push toward nuclear development, a sector known for long lead times and high upfront costs.

Back to the drawing board?

Although Reynolds prioritized energy in her agenda, lawmakers were hesitant to advance the bill in its current form. House Speaker Pat Grassley acknowledged concerns but reiterated the need for a clear energy strategy. "We want to see Iowa have a more certain future in our energy policy," he said.

House Democratic Leader Jennifer Konfrst said the bill's backers failed to demonstrate how the proposals would lower utility bills. "The question should be: Will rates go down?" she said. "Instead, it seems more about moving things around for big companies behind the scenes."

In addition to ROFR concerns raised by critics of the measure, a letter from the DOJ warned the ROFR provision could raise prices and reduce service quality.

Environmental and consumer advocacy groups also expressed concerns about the bill's approach to resource planning and its potential impact on ratepayers. The Environmental Law and Policy Center highlighted the proposed legislation's lack of transparent planning and regulatory oversight.

Despite early committee approvals, HF 834 and SF 585 stalled in their respective budget committees and did not receive floor votes before the session's end.

The failure of the bill leaves Iowa's energy policy at a crossroads. While the state continues to lead in renewable energy, particularly wind power, the challenge of meeting growing electricity demands remains. The debate over the role of nuclear energy and the structure of utility competition is expected to continue in future legislative sessions.

Black bear rescue is a utility's "day in the life"

Continued from page 4

On May 29 at 4:00 am in Thief River Falls, a black bear was spotted strolling down Main Street, eventually making its way up a tree.

Local veterinarians, law enforcement, and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) were on site trying unsuccessfully to coax the bear down. Then Thief River Falls Municipal Utilities saved the day with a bucket, a zip-tied extendo stick, and a dirt blanket.

When the bear was spotted, the police and firefighters responded to the initial call. The DNR could only advise law enforcement, who called a local veterinarian to sedate the bear.

After spending more than five hours in the tree, the bear was not letting go of the 30-foot climber, despite having been tranquilized eight times during the timespan. Then, Thief River Falls Municipal Utilities (TRF) arrived with their bucket and got up close and personal with the bear. Matt Nelson, TRF electrical lineman, said, "They were under the assumption that he was dozing off. We went up there with two of the cops, and we got eye level with a bear that was very much awake and very unhappy."

The TRF team's goal was to poke the bear out of the tree. After 10 more tranquilizer shots, the bear was loopy enough to misplace his foot on the tree. Nelson and his crew then used tape, zip ties, and an extendo stick to create a pole long enough to make the bear fall onto a landing pad placed below the tree. Nelson added, "After he fell, he got up again, so they stuck him on the ground. Then he just wandered down the street for the next 10 to 15 minutes. They had to tranquilize him one more time because he just was not giving in."

TRF Line Foreman John Kinsman estimated the bear weighed over 400 pounds. A team of eight people rolled the bear onto a dirt blanket from TRF's digger derrick. Using a winch to secure the bear, the safe rescue was complete.

For the town of Thief River Falls, a bear strolling their streets is a rare occurrence. Many residents watched the event as the utility crew and law enforcement handled the situation. Nelson added that it was, "Definitely one of the more exciting days on the job. We were hanging flowerpots throughout the city that morning, and then we get called to come and do some bear wrangling."

A black bear is stuck in a tree on Main Street in Thief River Falls. Photo by Matt Nelson from Thief River Falls Municipal Utilities.

What started as a quiet morning in Thief River Falls quickly turned into an unforgettable wildlife rescue mission. The bear would not be safe without the help of the TRF team, who turned an unbearable situation into a heroic adventure. Just another day in small-town Minnesota.

can also help America lead the world in the new technology."

Mule added he hopes TVA's development of an SMR will lead the charge for other utilities across the nation.

TVA's service regions are growing rapidly and will need up to 26 GW of power by 2035 to serve its region and power approximately 15 million homes. This nuclear power source and other electric alternatives would help reach that number and replace retiring power plants in the area.

Other US electric utilities have been reluctant to invest in nuclear energy and construction because of the large investments needed. The US currently does not have a next-generation reactor, a safer and more efficient version of current reactors, operating commercially. Other next generation reactor applications are being reviewed by the NRC to begin providing nuclear power by 2030. Previous projects have faltered due to increasing costs and insufficient support from local power providers.

The TVA project may become the trend-setter in the US. Ontario Power Generation (OPG), an electric utility company in Ontario, Canada, began building the first of four small nuclear reactors in May 2025, which are similar to the reactor the TVA is proposing.

The Canadian project is estimated to cost $6.1 billion Canadian dollars ($4.4 billion USD), along with an equipment cost of $1.6 billion Canadian dollars ($1.1 billion USD). "Once the first reactor clears regulatory approval and the initial learning curve is overcome, the cost of building each subsequent reactor is expected to decline due to increased efficiency and experience." The TVA estimates similar costs to construct their SMR.

The nonprofit Environmental Working Group argues there are safer, cheaper, and cleaner sources of renewable power than SMRs. Solar rooftops, battery storage, and wind power are faster deployed and highly scalable compared with small nuclear reactors.

However, these small nuclear reactors have support from the U.S. government. The Biden administration invested $900 million in the reactors last year. The Trump administration has also supported investments in flexible and reliable energy sources, particularly small nuclear reactors, which is especially important now as power demand reaches record highs.

The TVA is asking for $800 million in federal funding, which they say will help speed up the process. The NRC has stated that the Clinch River site is suitable for four new reactors. If approved, TVA's SMR could be up and running around 2032, servicing 175,000 homes throughout their network.

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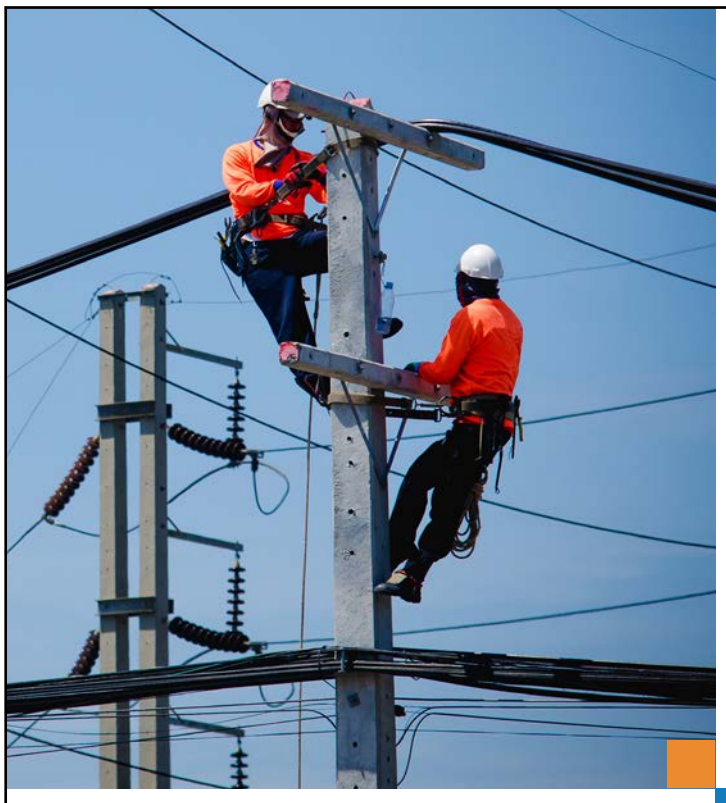

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Water utilities—the unsung heroes of grid stability

In an era marked by escalating energy demands and climate-induced stresses on power grids, water utilities are emerging as pivotal players in enhancing grid resilience.

By leveraging demand response programs, these utilities ensure the continuous supply of clean water, and they contribute significantly to the stability of the electric grid.

Harnessing demand response for grid support

Demand response (DR) programs incentivize consumers to reduce or shift their electricity usage during peak periods to help balance supply and demand on the grid. Water utilities, with their substantial and flexible energy consumption patterns, are uniquely positioned to participate in these programs.

The Orange County Water District (OCWD) in California exemplifies this approach. Managing the Groundwater Replenishment System (GWRS), the world's largest water purification system for indirect potable reuse, OCWD produces up to 130 million gallons of purified water daily. Recognizing the energy-intensive nature of this operation, OCWD enrolled in Southern California Edison's (SCE) Base Interruptible Program (BIP), a DR initiative compensating participants for reducing electricity consumption during grid stress events. By strategically lowering water production rates during DR events, OCWD can shed approximately 10–11 megawatts of load, contributing to grid stability without compromising water quality or supply.

Financial and environmental benefits

Participation in DR programs offers water utilities substantial financial incentives. OCWD, for instance, has earned approximately $12.5 million since 2014 through its involvement in such programs. These funds can offset operational costs and support infrastructure improvements.

Beyond financial gains, DR participation aligns with environmental stewardship goals. By reducing electricity consumption during peak demand periods, utilities decrease reliance on fossil-fuel-based plants, thereby reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This synergy between operational efficiency and environmental responsibility accentuates the multifaceted benefits of DR engagement.

Expanding the role of water utilities

The potential of water utilities in supporting grid stability extends beyond DR programs. Innovations such as microgrids and advanced energy management systems can further enhance their role. Microgrids, which integrate renewable energy sources like solar power, enable utilities to operate independently during grid outages, ensuring uninterrupted water services.

Moreover, the integration of smart technologies allows for real-time monitoring and optimization of energy usage. By adopting such solutions, water utilities proactively manage their energy consumption, respond swiftly to grid conditions, and contribute to overall grid resilience.

Challenges to consider

While the benefits are clear, water utilities must navigate potential obstacles in implementing these strategies. Participation in DR programs must not compromise water quality or availability. Utilities must also invest in infrastructure upgrades and staff training to effectively manage energy reduction strategies.

Regulatory frameworks and utility-specific constraints can influence the feasibility and extent of DR participation. Collaborative efforts among utilities, regulators, and stakeholders are essential to address these challenges and unlock the full potential of water utilities in grid support.

Municipal utilities matter

While large agencies like OCWD make headlines, thousands of smaller municipal water utilities, including dozens in Minnesota, hold untapped potential to support grid health. According to the Minnesota Department of Commerce, public water systems in the state account for nearly 30 percent of municipal electricity use. Pumping and treating water are energy-intensive tasks, and most facilities operate under tight budget constraints.

Some municipalities are already acting. In Hutchinson, a city-owned water utility integrated variable frequency drives (VFDs) and remote controls into its water system to shift energy use away from peak times. Through coordination with Xcel Energy, the city has reduced its peak load and its energy bills. Similar opportunities exist across the state, especially for water plants in municipal power service territories.

Leveraging technology and flexibility

Demand response is just the start. Water utilities, especially those in snow-prone states like Minnesota, can also integrate on-site solar, backup generators, and even battery storage to reduce dependence on the electric grid during emergencies. Microgrid systems are being explored in northern towns with funding from the US Department of Energy.

The flexibility of water operations lends itself well to grid collaboration. Unlike hospitals or data centers, water utilities often have some operational slack. Pumping schedules can be adjusted; storage tanks provide a buffer. With advanced metering and remote control, utilities can time their energy use with precision.

Continued on page 15

Water utilities

Continued from page 14

The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that water and wastewater utilities nationwide could save 15–30 percent of their energy costs through energy efficiency and load management strategies. For small communities with limited tax bases, those savings are meaningful.

The power of local partnerships

In a warming world, electricity and water are increasingly interdependent. Grid outages can cripple water supplies, while water shortages can disrupt cooling for power plants. That interdependence makes coordination essential.

"Climate extremes are testing both systems," said Sarah Brewster, a senior policy analyst at Fresh Energy, a Minnesota-based clean energy nonprofit. "Collaborative planning between electric and water utilities builds resilience for both."

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission encourages utilities to consider water-energy linkages in their Integrated Resource Plans. Meanwhile, in the past few years both MMUA and Great River Energy have hosted educational sessions to help local utility managers understand demand response and distributed energy solutions.

A worthwhile investment

As Minnesota and the nation brace for tighter power markets and more frequent grid emergencies, water utilities, especially municipal systems, represent a scalable and cost-effective solution. Whether it's OCWD curbing demand in California or a rural Minnesota town shifting pump schedules, water utilities have a powerful role to play in our energy future.

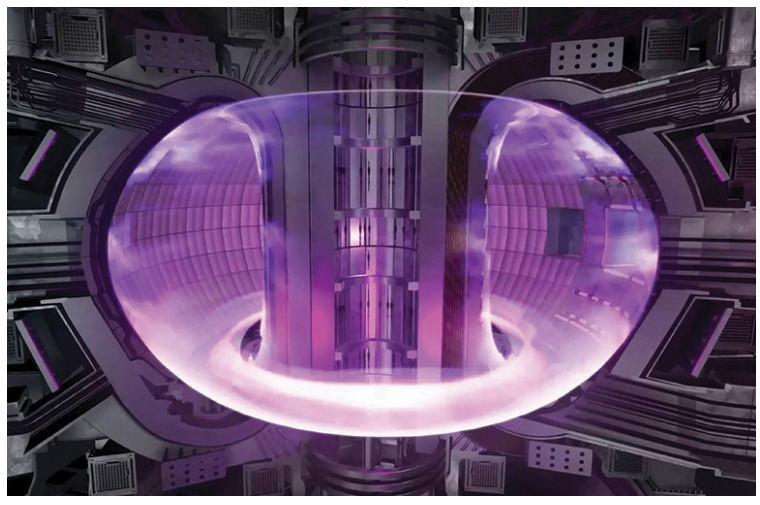
"Water and power don't operate in isolation," Brewster said. "It's time we stop planning like they do."

In closing...

As the energy landscape evolves, water utilities stand at the forefront of innovative solutions to bolster grid stability. Through strategic participation in demand response programs and the adoption of advanced technologies, these utilities demonstrate the path to a resilient and sustainable energy future is intrinsically linked to the effective management of our water resources.

Wisconsin Legislature approves nuclear power expansion

Governor Tony Evers signed two bipartisan bills aimed at making Wisconsin a leader in nuclear energy development on July 2.



The measures, authored by Sen. Julian Bradley (R–New Berlin), Rep. David Steffen (R–Howard), and Rep. Shae Sortwell (R–Two Rivers), call for a study to identify neighborhoods interested in supporting nuclear power generation, plan a nuclear power summit, and declare formal support for nuclear development. The Wisconsin Senate approved the nuclear summit bill on June 24 and the location study legislation in May.

One of the new laws calls for a nuclear summit to take place in Wisconsin in 2028. Bill author Rep. Shae Sortwell stated, "The nuclear renaissance is here in Wisconsin and in the United States, and it's time for everybody else to get on board."

The bills focus on nuclear fusion, which differs from nuclear fission, the reaction that powers current reactors and nuclear weapons. Nuclear fusion is the same energy source driving the sun and stars. Unlike other nuclear plants, nuclear fusion does not produce waste. It relies on heated plasma and is a carbon-free process.

Wisconsin is prioritizing nuclear fusion technology, driven by three local startups. Two of these are Type One Energy, a Wisconsin-based fusion company, and Shine Technologies, which focuses on advanced nuclear technologies and is also headquartered in Wisconsin. The third startup is Realta Fusion, which worked with lawmakers to develop the state's nuclear legislation.

The bill's co-author, Sen. Julian Bradley, said in a statement, "Wisconsin must act now to embrace nuclear energy as a clean, reliable solution to our growing power needs." He added, "The bill lays the groundwork so that our state is ready to embrace innovative nuclear technologies that will power our economy for decades to come."

As energy demands increase due to AI and data centers, the need for clean, reliable energy also rises. These Wisconsin bills could influence other states to strengthen their nuclear policies.

Passage of Wisconsin's nearby nuclear legislation would likely positively influence Minnesota's nuclear energy plans. Currently, Minnesota aims to achieve carbon-free energy by 2040, but has a nuclear moratorium in place. Some lawmakers are pushing to lift it. Perhaps this Wisconsin situation will shape Minnesota's legislative decisions in the future.

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Oregon's clean energy goals are at the mercy of BPA

In February 2025 Oregon Governor Tina Kotek promised "climate action will continue in Oregon regardless of what's happening in Washington, DC."

In Donald Trump's presidential campaign, he promised to sign orders tabling renewable energy efforts. His first week in the office, he followed through, signing orders aimed at halting new sources of wind power and freezing Biden-era renewable energy funding.

Across the country from the Oval Office, the state of Oregon has set ambitious sustainable energy goals, similar to those of Minnesota's "Carbon Free by 2040" law. Oregon's objective is easy access to clean energy for the residents of Oregon and—like Minnesota—to "achieve clean electricity by 2040." Gov. Kotek says a community effort is needed to reach these goals and not retreat despite the political obstacles.

Obstacles Oregon must overcome

Considering these bold objectives, Oregon lags in clean, renewable energy adoption, even compared with Republican-led states. South Dakota, for example, is currently leading the way in clean energy generation, with 92 percent of its retail electricity coming from wind, solar, or geothermal sources. Texas, California, Iowa, and Oklahoma trail just behind South Dakota.

Oregon currently sits at 21 percent renewable energy adoption, largely due to several obstacles. For example, the state was set to work with the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) to arrange necessary power grid upgrades. This is a significant need since some areas in this grid are up to a century old. Getting it done is not a simple thing.

BPA owns most of the power lines needed to carry its wind and green energy to the highly populated areas of the state. However, Bonneville Power has no state or local representation, so it operates as a self-funded business by statute. Without state or local representation, regional renewable energy goals—like state-level clean energy mandates—may not be fully reflected in BPA's planning and investments. Integration of renewables is slowed down in turn.

Efforts to bypass BPA started in earnest this year. Oregon and the state of Washington introduced bills aimed at creating their own state bonding authorities for upgrading the region's high-voltage network, but both bills ultimately failed.

BPA decides how quickly these projects get done, and due to BPA's schedule, Oregon has been left in the dust. Oregon state Rep. Mark Gamba said the state is faced with not hitting its climate goals when it comes to energy production. This would cause rolling blackouts and energy costs jumping to new heights for the state.

The bigger picture

Bonneville is in high demand in the Northwest, but project approvals are typically slow (illustrated by the case above, for example). One proposed wind farm has been waiting for the green light for 16 years. The suspension of all new federal wind permits puts most of the region's energy plans in jeopardy. In addition, the Trump administration has added BPA to the list of agencies for federal job cuts, potentially adding another hurdle for project approvals. One Portland energy developer, David Brown, plans to develop a solar farm on a piece of southern Oregon high desert land the size of 3,000 football fields. It could power up to 110,000 homes. Like all power plants, it must be wired into the electrical grid. Brown's project requires access to the BPA transmission lines. He requested permission in 2020 and does not expect approval until at least 2028.

Hundreds of projects like this one in the Northwest are waiting for BPA's approval—projects that could power the Northwest 10 times over. The Portland General Electric wind farm project is the only one to successfully complete the grueling approval process in the last decade. The wind farm plan made it through the approval gauntlet largely because theirs did not require any BPA grid repairs.

BPA also struggles to hire and keep people on the job because it tends to pay less than the private sector. In February, it lost hundreds of employees to nationwide reduction-in-force measures put in place by the Trump administration, only to seek to rehire many of them a month or so later.

Even with BPA's ability to borrow money at low interest rates, they are hesitant to use this power. The agency fears going into debt to upgrade infrastructure that may not be used in the future. As a result of these factors, much of the Northwest faces ongoing barriers to clean energy adaptation.

Oregon's commitment to clean energy is clear, but its path is obstructed by outdated infrastructure, federal rollbacks, and a sluggish approval process dominated by the BPA. Despite bold goals and strong leadership, the state's renewable energy future remains uncertain without structural reforms and greater local control.

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Around the State

At Xcel Energy's Sherco Solar Project, four-legged team members are helping to prevent greenery from affecting the wires and panels. Xcel Energy employs sheep to manage vegetation at its Sherco Solar Project in **Becker**, Minnesota, offering a sustainable and cost-effective alternative to traditional landscaping methods. The sheep graze between solar panel rows, controlling grasses and weeds that could obstruct operations and pose fire risks. This environmentally friendly approach reduces reliance on fossil fuels and herbicides, promotes native prairie plants, and supports pollinator habitats. Xcel says that as the solar project expands, the number of sheep will increase.

Seven miles of streetlights in **Minneapolis** and **St. Paul** need repairs after thieves broke in and stole copper wire. "This is absolutely a core function of city government to be able to provide lighting," City Operations Officer for Minneapolis Margaret Anderson Kelliher remarked. Some 450 out of 22,000 lights are affected, costing the city $40,000 per mile to repair. Mayor Jacob Frey issued a warning to the thieves: there's probably no copper to steal, but if you get caught trying, there will be consequences. A new state law took effect this year requiring a license to sell scrap metal, so city officials anticipate this law will short-circuit the copper thieves.

In the Iron Range town of **McKinley**, Minnesota, a city councilor faces three felony charges after allegedly cutting a tension wire attached to a power pole in May. Joseph Christopher Vaida has been accused of the crimes, which caused outages in Gilbert, Biwabik, and McKinley. A week before cutting the wire, Vaida had demanded Minnesota Power remove a support wire he claimed was on his property.

He gave the company a week to relocate the wire. Minnesota Power responded, saying it would take longer than one week for the utility to resolve the issue. Vaida faces a potential 10-year prison sentence and/or fines for allegedly cutting a guywire from the power pole. A guy-wire is a tensioned cable used to stabilize a power pole.

A powerful storm swept through the **Bemidji** area on June 21, leaving thousands without power and causing significant damage to local infrastructure. Beltrami Electric Cooperative (BEC) and Otter Tail Power Company reported widespread outages, with restoration efforts underway shortly after the storm subsided. It took nearly a week for all power to be restored in the area, with BEC indicating 100 percent of its 19,000 customers were back online on June 27. BEC officials indicated the storm damage included around 80 broken poles, damage to transformers and other essential equipment, and downed lines in what they described as "one of the most challenging and grueling restoration efforts in recent memory."

The **Brainerd** council has paused its search for a new public utilities director. In a 4–2 vote on June 2, the council decided to cease searching for an interim leader and continue working "toward the best circumstances for public utilities in the city of Brainerd." The position has been open since Christopher Evans resigned on April 4.

Fire broke out at a **Rochester** substation containing a gas-powered turbine late on June 1. Fire fighters responded around 11:00 pm to the Cascade Creek Substation, arriving to find heavy smoke coming from the structure and flames visible through exterior vents. The contents of the structure suffered significant damage, and the structure itself sustained minor to moderate damage. There were no injuries. The cause of the fire is under investigation.

Environmental assessments are underway for a **North Branch** battery storage site at the North Star solar array. The project is expected to cover some 900 acres on the south end of North Branch, north of the Xcel substation and contained within the original footprint of the solar production project initiated by North Star in 2015. The project is sponsored by DESRI, which owns and operates the Chisago County solar array, along with sites in 23 other states. A permit from the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission is required because the storage system capacity will exceed 10 megawatts. The permitting process is expected to take about a year, and construction will take another year once the permit is issued. The developers say the project is being installed at the request of MISO, and it is designed to meet its specifications.

Construction of the new police station in **New Prague** ran into a snag when council members realized it had not held a legally-required public hearing on the project before greenlighting the work. The council approved the $10 million building in March, and a construction bid was awarded. In May, councilors saw their error, but not before hearing concerns from residents upset about transparency issues and the perceived lack of transparency about the project, which estimates suggest could raise taxes by $156 per year on a $300,000 home. According to the StarTribune, the city has spent $575,000 on design work, and the mayor has resigned amidst the controversy. New Prague ultimately held the public hearing on June 2 and voted again to move forward with the work.

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Bits & pieces

The Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (PUC) is closely examining how utilities respond after major storms. In April 2025, Pittsburgh was hit by deadly storms that caused extensive outages in the area. The damage affected electrical systems, roads, communication networks, and other infrastructure. PUC chairman Steve DeFrank said the Commission needs to understand what worked, what did not, and what improvements are needed. Officials will analyze outage causes, assess the effectiveness of utility emergency response plans, and aim to develop enhanced storm cleanup strategies for utility workers going forward.

The Illinois Municipal Electric Agency (IMEA) has ramped up its solar investment by obtaining 25 MWs of energy and capacity from Big River Solar Illinois. IMEA is a wholesale electric supplier to 32 municipally owned utilities. IMEA will receive 25 MW of the total 149 MW production for a term of 10 years. Though IMEA will receive the energy and capacity, the deal does not include receipt of the renewable energy credits associated with the project. Big River is just one of IMEA's solar power purchase agreements. Through a prior power purchase agreement, Bee Hollow Solar will produce 150 MW for IMEA beginning in late 2026. IMEA will receive all energy, capacity, and renewable energy credits (RECs)s from that project upon completion.

The Texas Senate passed a bill in May requiring renewable energy projects to purchase backup power matching their output at night. The Texas Association of Business (TAB) has expressed concern about the legislation, noting it would do more harm than good and cost the state an extra $5.2 billion annually, with consumers paying an additional $225 each year. The TAB also stressed the bill would create a high risk of blackouts during hot summer months or ice storms.

New York Governor Kathy Hochul has proposed the state's first nuclear power plant in decades. The New York Power Authority would operate the new facility, which would increase the state's nuclear energy capacity to 4.3 megawatts (MWs) and help the state achieve energy independence. Currently, there are three operational Empire State nuclear

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plants, all located upstate in Oswego and Wayne counties. No location has been determined for the proposed plant, but upstate communities seem receptive. The project would create an estimated 1,600 construction jobs and 1,200 permanent positions. Gov. Hochul assures safety is a high priority for the new plants, with automatic safety systems to enhance containment and strict environmental standards.

Beware of snakes! A Kennett, Missouri, city-wide power outage occurred recently when a snake tripped a breaker at a local substation. According to the Kennett Board of Public Works Facebook page, the SPA substation supplies power to the city whenever snakes are not meddling with the system.

Talen Energy in Pennsylvania has entered a 1,920 MW power purchase agreement with Amazon Web Services (AWS) to supply clean nuclear energy from its Susquehanna power plant to AWS data centers in Pennsylvania. This new agreement transitions their existing 300-MW co-location setup to a "front of the meter" model so the electricity will now flow through the public grid rather than be delivered directly on-site. The change, which does not require federal regulatory approval, is expected to take effect next spring following transmission system upgrades.

Chicago-area start-up Sun Metalon is revolutionizing metal recycling by transforming steel and aluminum waste into valuable materials. The company's innovative technology cleans contaminated metal slivers and sludge, reducing emissions linked to metal production. With $9.1 million in new funding, Sun Metalon uses modular ovens to heat waste and extract recyclable "pucks," which are reused in steelmaking. By turning what was once considered trash into a resource, Sun Metalon expects to enhance sustainability in the metal industry and cut carbon emissions.

Sunnova Energy filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection on June 9, 2025, citing significant debt and dwindling residential solar demand. The company reported liabilities between $10 billion and $50 billion, with total debt reaching $10.67 billion. Sunnova plans to lay off 55 percent of its workforce to reduce expenses. The bankruptcy filing follows mounting industry challenges, including rising interest rates and the threat of government subsidy reductions.

Wind resistance: 17 states challenge Trump's halt on renewable energy projects

Attorneys general from 17 Democratic-led states and the District of Columbia filed a lawsuit on May 5, 2025, against the Trump administration, seeking to overturn an executive order halting federal approvals for wind energy projects.

The legal action, initiated in the US District Court for the District of Massachusetts, contends the order unlawfully impedes the development of both onshore and offshore wind energy initiatives.

President Donald Trump's executive order, signed on January 20, 2025, cites concerns over navigational safety, national security, and potential impacts on marine life as reasons for suspending federal leasing and permitting of wind projects. The order also calls for a comprehensive review of federal wind leasing and permitting practices.

The coalition argues the halt on wind energy development threatens their investments in renewable energy infrastructure and workforce development, which collectively amount to billions of dollars. They assert the executive order violates several federal statutes, including the Administrative Procedure Act, the Clean Air Act, and the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act, by disrupting established permitting processes without adequate justification.

New York Attorney General Letitia James, leading the coalition, emphasized the economic and environmental stakes, stating the administration's actions jeopardize a critical sector contributing significantly to job creation and emission reductions.

The Trump administration defends the executive order as a necessary measure to reassess the implications of wind energy projects on various national interests. Officials argue the pause allows for a thorough evaluation to ensure such projects do not adversely affect navigation, security, or marine ecosystems.

The legal challenge underscores the ongoing tension between federal energy policies and state-level initiatives to expand renewable energy sources. The outcome of this lawsuit could have significant implications for the future of wind energy development in the US.

Electric vehicle charging glows up

The electric vehicle (EV) industry is now experiencing a charging station makeover, enhancing these fuel stops with more amenities, safety, and reliability features that are enhancing brand loyalty.

Since 2019, automakers have spent more than $130 billion to electrify their models and convert their products into EV or hybrids.

Electric vehicles (EVs) require charging, but finding a station has been one of the most common objections to EV ownership. Charging stations are often inconvenient, spread apart, and unreliable. Now, important players in the industry are attempting to remedy this situation.

According to Harvard research on the state of EV charging, many "refueling" stations have broken chargers and inconsistent pricing. In some states, entire counties lack public chargers. Some drivers report gas powered vehicles taking EV charging spaces, hindering EV owners even more.

Money already spent on EV adoption could go to waste if EV buyers don't have a positive charging experience. For these automotive companies, it is in their interest to improve charging spots.

Ionna, a consortium of eight large automobile manufacturers, plans to build 30,000 public EV fast chargers across the US by 2030. Another joint venture, Chargescape, is focused on in-home chargers. Their goal is to put money back into the pockets of EV owners.

How will they do this?

Chargescape works with companies like DTE energy, Xcel Energy, and Duke Energy, implementing strategies to make EV charging easier on the consumer and the grid.

Retail companies like Walmart and Canada's ON the RUN convenience store chain are working to add charging spaces to their stores. Walmart plans to install thousands of charging stations, outdoing Tesla's Supercharger network. ON the RUN wants to use its customer loyalty program in unison with new charging stations at retail locations.

This new "Charging 2.0" strategy is a more thoughtful and data-driven approach. The major EV companies are aiming to make EV charging more reliable, especially in areas where these vehicles are more popular. With the Biden-era federal highway charging program now paused, there is more focus on urban areas where electric vehicle adoption is growing.

Upcoming events

Minnesota Lineworker's Rodeo

September 9
MMUA Training Center
Marshall, MN

The Minnesota Lineworker's Rodeo is your opportunity to step out of your comfort zone as you challenge yourself to complete in three events safely, accurately, and proficiently:

- Hurtman rescue
- Obstacle course
- Arrester change out

Rodeo events are individual, and any apprentice or journeyman lineworker can participate. Plaques will be awarded to the top three apprentices and top three journeymen in each event. Plus, the top three overall winners in the apprentice and journeyman categories will be awarded a trophy. Participants will receive a commemorative t-shirt and are invited to join us for the awards reception in the evening. Advanced registration is required; the deadline is August 14. Visit mmua.org/events for more information or to register.

Overhead School

September 9–12
MMUA Training Center
Marshall, MN

One of our most popular programs, Overhead School offers valuable technical training on topics specific to overhead electrical, taught by expert instructors. There's often more than one way to complete a task or solve a problem. Small group instruction fosters collaboration and camaraderie among lineworkers, creating a valuable space for exchanging ideas and learning from one another.

Participants will rotate through four hands-on training sessions:

- House services
- Wire stringing
- Reaming a double circuit
- Capacitor bank and maintenance

Overhead School takes place following the Lineworker's Rodeo. Advance registration ends August 14. Visit mmua.org/events for more information or to register.

Gas School

October 7–9
MMUA Training Center
Marshall, MN

MMUA's Gas School is a new annual opportunity to learn about current trends and best practices for natural gas utilities. Having the best distribution system doesn't matter if your locating maps or leak investigation procedures are inadequate. This school offers instruction on important topics that can benefit anyone working in or on gas utilities. Visit mmua.org/events for more information or to register.

For more information, see the Events Calendar at www.mmua.org or call MMUA at 763-551-1230.