

Condenser

Weekly News & Updates in the Electric Utility Industry



November 18, 2022

WECA Hosts 2022 Annual Meeting in Stevens Point

WECA's annual meeting took place in Stevens Point this week, with what was potentially the largest attendance in history. According to WECA Director of Education and Events Wendy Fassbind, 164 co-op leaders representing all of Wisconsin's electric cooperatives gathered for two days of presentations and discussion about the issues impacting the industry on November 15–16, 2022. "This is the largest meeting ever that I can remember, and that goes back 20 years," Fassbind said.



The conference kicked off with a candid and unfiltered presentation by environmentalist and investigative journalist Michael Shellenberger, who is also a best-selling author and *Time Magazine*'s "Hero of the Environment." Shellenberger, whose books include [San Fransicko: Why Progressives Ruin Cities](#) and [Apocalypse Never: Why Environmental Alarmism Hurts Us All](#), presented comprehensive data that debunks widespread messaging about catastrophic global warming.

"You'll never find this out if you read the mainstream news media, but global carbon emissions were actually slightly declined over the last decade," Shellenberger said. "Mostly that was a transition from coal to natural gas, which produces half the carbon emissions as coal... The number of people who died from natural disasters has been going down for over 100 years, even as the population has quadrupled. There's been no increase in the frequency of hurricanes globally, and in fact, there's been a slight decline in hurricanes that have hit land in the United States."

Shellenberger touted the clean benefits of nuclear energy and joined in a greater discussion on the issue with NuScale Director of Supply Chain Development Michael Brasel, Dairyland Power Cooperative CEO Brent Ridge, 2022 Miss Wisconsin Grace Stanke, an engineering student at UW-Madison who is working to promote clean energy including nuclear, and UW-Madison Grainger Professor of Nuclear Engineering and Department Chair of Engineering Physics Paul Wilson. The discussion was moderated by Dairyland Executive VP and COO Ben Porath.



L to R: Michael Brasel, Michael Shellenberger, Grace Stanke, Paul Wilson, Brent Ridge, and Ben Porath



*Keith Johnson, account executive,
Federated Rural Insurance Exchange*

Shellenberger pushed back on the idea that nuclear should support other renewables, such as wind and solar. “You should not have your most reliable source of energy supporting your least reliable source of energy,” he said.

The annual meeting also included a presentation by Federated Rural Insurance Exchange Account Executive Keith Johnson on the status of the insurance claims and funds, and a presentation by RESCO President and CEO Matt Brandrup, who gave an update on supply-chain challenges.



*Tim Clay, vice president of
operations, WECA*

According to Brandrup, RESCO has been able to temper the extreme price increases on equipment such as transformers, so Wisconsin electric cooperatives are not taking as big of a hit as other utilities. Still, he said the number of price increases from their supplier in 2021 and 2022 has been “unheard of,” with six increases last year and four this year. The good news, Brandrup said, is they have much greater allotments expected from ERMCO for 2023, which should relieve some of the supply-chain pressure.

WECA Vice President of Operations Tim Clay presented the manager’s report, including a review of how the organization is taking on major challenges including third-party ownership of solar installations, and he thanked the WECA staff for stepping up in the absence of WECA President and CEO Steve Freese, who has been on medical leave since his cancer diagnosis in June. Board Chair David Hischke echoed that sentiment and presented the chairman’s report saying, “What a year this has been.”



David Hischke, WECA board chair, director, Oconto Electric Cooperative

Hischke talked about the plan to purchase a building in Middleton to house the WECA headquarters, and the expected savings it will bring. WECA board Secretary-Treasurer Roger Wiff presented on the financial stability of the organization.



Directors from Jump River Electric Cooperative deep in discussion.



Jennifer Beaudette, WECA resolutions committee chair, director of member services, Barron Electric Cooperative

Freese made an appearance at the meeting to accept a special ACE award (see below) and recorded this message for attendees: <https://vimeo.com/769649644/19739c716e>

Chair of WECA's Resolutions Committee Jennifer Beaudette presented two new resolutions and one amendment to a resolution, related to beneficial electrification (amendment), rural broadband, and closure of generation plants. There was also a new proposed amendment relating to the development of hydroelectric power. All proposals were passed.

Wisconsin Department of Transportation Secretary Craig Thompson addressed attendees about state efforts to build out EV charging infrastructure. Public Service Commission of Wisconsin Director of the Office of Energy Information Joe Pater talked mostly about the wealth of funding opportunities coming from the federal government to support a clean energy transition.

Wisconsin Realtors Association Director of Political and Governmental Affairs Joe Murray broke down the recent midterm election with a discussion about why the expected "red wave" did not happen and how Wisconsin's political landscape is shaping up.



Craig Thompson, secretary, Wisconsin Department of Transportation



Joe Murray, director of Political and governmental affairs, Wisconsin Realtors Association (left) and Joe Pater, director of the Office of Energy Information, Wisconsin Public Service Commission (right)



WECA's Director of Government Relations Rob Richard talked about the importance of ACRE and how the committee determines which political candidates to support.

Attendees also watched videos recapping the Year in Review: <https://vimeo.com/769727648/9a4b5dc71d>

And the 2022 Youth Leadership Congress: <https://vimeo.com/769814388/f59e7c3be7>



Karen Newbury, director, Price Electric, Dairyland Electric Cooperative, and WECA Vice Chair, and Jeff Monson, director, Richland Electric Cooperative and Dairyland Electric Cooperative

New WECA Board Seated at Annual Meeting



L to R: Mike Wade, Dan Smrekar, David Hischke, Cynthia Thorman, Craig Buros, Steve Johnson, Jerry Sorenson, Barbara Miller, Dan Hillberry, Roger Wiff, and Karen Newbury

The board members are:

- Chair David Hischke, District 4: Oconto Electric Cooperative
- Vice Chair Karen Newbury, District 4: Price Electric Cooperative
- Secretary/Treasurer Roger Wiff, District 2: Pierce Pepin Cooperative Services
- Dan Smrekar, District 2: Jackson Electric Cooperative
- Jerry Sorenson, District 2: Riverland Energy Cooperative
- Steve Johnson, District 3: Chippewa Valley Electric Cooperative
- Craig Buros, District 1: Vernon Electric Cooperative
- Justin Jahnz, District 3: East Central Energy
- Mike Wade, District 4: Central Wisconsin Electric Cooperative
- Cynthia Thorman, District 3: Polk-Burnett Electric Cooperative
- Dan Hillberry, District 1: Richland Electric Cooperative
- Barbara Miller, District 1: Rock Energy Cooperative
- Chuck Simmons, invited observer, Scenic Rivers Energy Cooperative and NRECA Director



2023 WECA Executive Committee

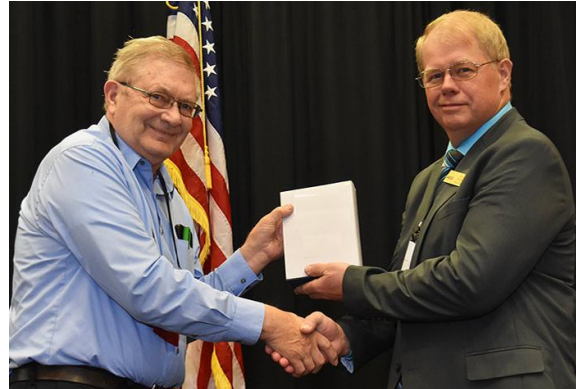
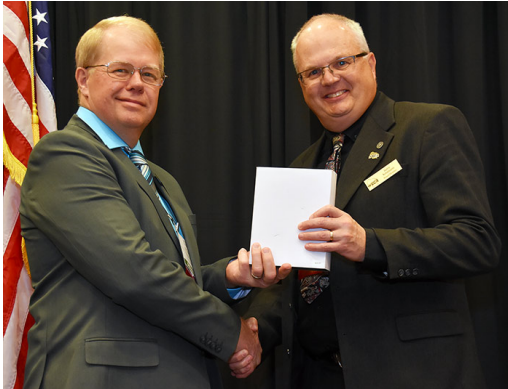
WECA Executive Committee

- David Hischke
- Karen Newbury
- Roger Wiff Craig
- Buros Mike Wade

WECA Finance Committee

- Roger Wiff, Chair
- Steve Johnson
- Dan Hillberry
- Barbara Miller

At the annual meeting, WECA honored Jerry Sorenson, whose term is up in 2023 and does not plan to run again, and Joe Metro, who also did not run for another term, for their service on the board.



David Hischke presenting a WECA board service award to Jerry Sorenson, WECA director, and general manager of Riverland Electric Cooperative (left photo), and to Joe Metro, board director of WECA and Polk-Burnett Electric Cooperative (right photo)

Freese, Trescher, Maxwell, Bella, Honored at Annual Meeting



ACE Award

The projection screen read, "And though she be but little, she is fierce," as Rock Energy CEO Shane Larson presented Marian Trescher with the 2022 Ally of Cooperative Electrification (ACE) award, and it could not have been more fitting. Trescher is a lifelong public servant whose commitment to community has had an exceptional impact on the electric cooperative world and beyond.

"I am so honored to be only the second woman to receive this award," Trescher said to a round of applause from the audience, which included four granddaughters.

Trescher, ran for the Rock Energy Cooperative board seat held by her husband Howard in 2004, after he passed away. During his 43 years as a director, Marian was always by his side, supporting the cooperative. In 2011, she was elected board secretary and has received many certifications and served on the Federated Youth Board and WECA Education Committee. In her remarks, Trescher recalled launching Rock's "cooperative queen" program, and traveling the country when their representative won the state and national titles.





Special ACE Award

Many members were happy to see Steve Freese, president & CEO of the Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association (WECA), attend in person to accept the special Ally of Cooperative Electrification (ACE) Award. Freese thanked the WECA staff and all members for their continued support. "Your calls, messages, cards, and emails mean more than you know," he said. "And your prayers and the medicine are working." Freese hopes to be back in the office in January.

Freese has also demonstrated a lifelong commitment to community serving in local and state government, he is also credited with securing the financial stability of Circus World Museum in Baraboo when he took over as leader there in 2007.

Freese also served as chief administrative officer of the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation Cooperative before joining Cooperative Network as vice president in 2015, where WECA was then a division. Freese was tasked with the daunting challenge of re-establishing the statewide as a stand-alone organization after being part of Cooperative Network for 20 years.

David Paudler, Riverland Energy Cooperative board president and then WECA chairman, said, "Even in times when Steve placed his future at risk, he always advocated for our best interests. His dedication and hard work resulted in the momentum that became WECA's renewal and this will always be part of his legacy."



Leifer Award

Dave Maxwell, director of member services, accepted the 2022 N.F. Leifer Memorial Journalism Award on behalf of Vernon Electric Cooperative. Maxwell serves as local editor of Vernon Electric's pages and Leah Call contributes, writing feature stories.

This is the fifth Leifer Award Vernon Electric has won since this publication first began offering awards for excellence in 1966, and the third such honor to be earned on Maxwell's watch. In addition, the co-op has won multiple category awards, particularly in the area of human interest.



Potthast Award

Ben Bella, safety & loss control manager, accepted the 2022 Potthast Award for his commitment and dedication to safety in the electric cooperative field. Bella has served in this role for more than 12 years, graduating from NRECA's Management Internship Program in 2017 and earning NRECA's Loss Control Certificate in 2012.

RESAP Certifications

The following co-ops were honored with RESAP Certifications for safety efforts: Adams-Columbia Electric Cooperative, Chippewa Valley Electric Cooperative, Clark Electric Cooperative, Jackson Electric Cooperative, Richland Electric Cooperative, St. Croix Electric Cooperative, and Vernon Electric Cooperative.

Low Turnout for Sierra Club's Nemadji Trail Protest



Members of the media nearly outnumbered the number of protestors at the Sierra Club's planned protest of the Nemadji Trail Energy Center project this week. The peaceful protest took place on public property outside of Dairyland Power Cooperative's headquarters in La Crosse Wednesday.

The Sierra Club is opposing the Nemadji Trail Energy Center (NTEC), a state-of-the-art, combined cycle natural gas plant proposed to be built in Superior. Dairyland is 50% owner of the project and is partnering with Minnesota Power and Basin Electric. According to Dairyland, the Nemadji Trail plant is "renewable enabling" in that it allows the co-op to ensure reliability during the clean energy transition. When wind and solar cannot provide enough generation, Nemadji Trail would be able to ramp up quickly to backfill for the needed demand. Dairyland shuttered its Genoa #3 coal plant last year, in line with its goal to transition to a diverse, lower carbon portfolio.

In opposing the plant, Sierra Club chapter of Wisconsin Campaign Coordinator Jadine Sonoda ignored the data and said, "In the economic and physical climate that we're in, there's no reason for us not to be transitioning and we're hoping Dairyland will hear that and make the transition as well.

Dairyland pre-empted the event with education and transparency, providing interviews and information with WXOW TV-19 and WKBT News 8, both of which also covered the small protest which included a half-dozen members of the Sierra Club's Coulee Region.

In his interview, Dairyland Power Cooperative President Brent Ridge said Nemadji Trail will reduce emissions equivalent to removing 190,000 cars from the road each year and reminded reporters of the risk of potential blackouts in Wisconsin. This past spring, the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO), the grid operator that directs the flow of electricity among 15 states including Wisconsin and parts of Canada, warned of the chance of rolling blackouts due to the transition to wind and solar, without enough reliable baseload power, which is generally natural gas, nuclear, and coal.



"I think they want to be zero carbon or net-zero and we want to have much less carbon, but we also want to maintain a strong economy through reliable and cost-effective electricity," Ridge told News 8.

The Sierra Club has filed legal challenges against the project in Minnesota and Wisconsin and lost. The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission and the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin both approved the project after extensive reviews, granting a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (CPCN) in 2020. Also, the federal Rural Utility Service (RUS), which provides funding to co-ops for major generation projects, released a finding of "no significant impact" (FONSI) on the environment in 2021. The Sierra Club also challenged that finding and RUS revoked the FONSI and ordered additional environment reviews, which have been completed. The agency, under the Biden Administration, has yet to reissue the FONSI, so the \$700 million project is currently stalled.

According to Dairyland, completion of Nemadji Trail will reduce CO2 emissions by an average of 964,000 tons per year, the equivalent of removing more than 190,000 cars from the road each year. Dairyland hopes to receive final permits and begin construction in spring of 2023.

See the December Wisconsin Energy Cooperative News magazine for more information about the stalled Nemadji Trail project.

JOB MARKET

MASTER ELECTRICIAN

Chippewa Valley Electric Cooperative (CVEC), Cornell, Wisc. is seeking to hire a Master Electrician. CVEC is a non-profit, member-owned electric cooperative serving approximately 7,600 consumers in North Central Wisconsin

based in Cornell. We are an employer of choice offering competitive compensation and benefits, newer well-maintained vehicles, equipment, and up-to-date technology for a modern and mobile workforce. Our culture is focused on a commitment to safety, teamwork, service to our members, and the communities we serve.

The Master Electrician will be responsible for providing electrician services for the cooperative and for cooperative members. This position will review distributed generation applications, assist with the automated metering system, troubleshoot and repair load management receivers, install electric vehicle chargers, and provide service to members as needed. The complete job description is available upon request.



[Click here for details](#)

STATEWIDE SUPPORTERS

The Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association would like to recognize all of our sponsors and associate members for supporting our efforts on behalf of the state's electric cooperatives, so they may continue to supply safe, reliable, and affordable electricity to members. Please join us in supporting these partners of the electric cooperative community.

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Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association
222 W. Washington Ave., Suite 680, Madison, WI 53703-2719