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May 2026



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KIDS AND CRITTERS





WEATHERING STORMS TOGETHER

by Craig Buross, CEO & General Manager

If you've lived in Wisconsin long enough, you know one thing to be true; Mother Nature doesn't always follow the rules. We've all heard the sayings, "in like a lion, out like a lamb," associated with March, and "April showers bring May flowers," but this year April decided torrential down pours and freezing temperatures were more appropriate. Instead of a gentle transition into spring, we were met with heavy rain, ice, and even flooding. It felt like winter refused to loosen its grip just as we were ready for longer days and warmer weather.

The early April ice storm was a strong reminder of how unpredictable and impactful weather can be. While ice may look beautiful, it creates tremendous weight on trees and branches. As that weight builds, limbs snap, and entire trees can fall.

When trees fall, they often take power lines and poles down with them. The result can be widespread outages and dangerous conditions. Even with preparation and experience, storms like this can challenge any utility due to their size and severity.

In moments like these, one of the greatest strengths of electric cooperatives becomes clear: Cooperation Among Cooperatives. This

principle is more than just an idea—it's a commitment to ensuring no cooperative stands alone during times of need.

When large-scale outages occur, electric cooperatives rely on a mutual aid system known as R.O.P.E., or Restoration of Power in an Emergency. Through this, crews, equipment, and resources are quickly sent to the areas with the most need. Lineworkers may travel from neighboring cooperatives—or even across state lines—to help restore power safely and efficiently.

This level of teamwork makes a meaningful difference in restoration times. It also reflects the cooperative

spirit that defines organizations like Vernon Electric. Just as we can call on others for help, we stand ready to assist when other cooperatives face challenges of their own.

Whether responding locally or supporting another community, the goal remains the same—restoring power and serving people. It's a system built on trust, partnership, and a shared understanding of how essential reliable electricity is to everyday life.

As we move further into spring, it is also an important time to recognize Electrical Safety Month. The recent storm highlights just how critical electrical safety is for both our crew and our members.

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A late-season ice storm coated lines and equipment in early April.

KEEPING VERNON COUNTY CLEAN



By Leah Call

It's easy to forget about something once it is thrown away. Yet every clean roadside, well-kept park, and healthy community depends on what happens next. In Vernon County, that responsibility falls to the Vernon County Solid Waste and Recycling Center. This Vernon Electric Cooperative member works effectively behind the scenes every day—keeping disposal accessible and affordable while safeguarding the region's natural beauty.

“Vernon County is very fortunate to have this facility,” said Solid Waste Service Director Stacie Sanborn, who has worked at the facility for 11 years. “I regularly hear from people moving into the area how much they appreciate the level of service we provide here in Vernon County.”

Recycle, Repurpose, Reuse

The Vernon County recycling facility serves the cities of Westby and La Farge and every township in the county except Liberty. Each year it processes approximately 1,500 tons of recyclables annually through a source-separated program. Residents dropping

off recyclable material at the facility on County Road LF near Viroqua are asked to separate items before arrival.

“We keep everything separated throughout the process,” explained Sanborn. “Then we bale materials and ship them to specialized recycling facilities.”

Cardboard and paper materials are sent to Wisconsin Rapids; plastics to

a sorting facility in Quincy, Illinois; tin and aluminum to a processor in Waupun; and glass to Hilltopper Refuse and Recycling Service in Onalaska.

Most household recyclables are accepted free of charge, while items such as appliances, electronics, mattresses, lightbulbs, and tires can be disposed of for a small fee.

Recycling not only keeps waste



VCSWR staff accept a Recycling Excellence Award. From left: Mike Paulsrud, Dan Martin, Stacie Sanborn, Brian Schott, and Nate Klinge.

out of the landfill, it gives discarded materials new life. Used tires, for example, are sent to Liberty Tire in Auburndale, Wisconsin, where they are processed into playground and landscaping products. Remaining tire shreds are used to produce tire-derived fuel, which has a high BTU value capable of generating electricity.

“We have worked hard over the last few years to organize our drop-off areas,” said Sanborn. “The goal is to make the process more efficient and customer-friendly.”

The facility does not accept hazardous waste, such as oil-based paints, cleaning chemicals, or agricultural and lawn chemicals. However, residents can take advantage of the annual hazardous waste collection event, scheduled May 30, from 8 a.m. to noon. “We also receive DNR grant funding for electronics recycling events,” added Sanborn. Those events – held in partnership with Dynamic Lifecycle and Wisconsin DNR – will take place on June 27 and August 22, from 8 a.m. to noon.

Landfill Services

Vernon County residents dropping off non-recyclable waste should scale themselves in and out, remembering to stop by the office before unloading. A minimum charge of \$20 applies for loads up to 400 lbs. All loads must be covered with a tarp during transport.



Once on site, the waste is unloaded and compacted in the landfill.

“Weather is one of our biggest challenges on the solid waste side of things,” Sanborn said. “Any moisture in or on the waste must be managed and treated. We transport that out for proper wastewater treatment.”

Better for Everyone

Sanborn asks that facility users “know what is in their load” before arriving. “If you are bringing a mixed load, make sure you have the recyclables separated from items for the landfill,” she added.

The three full-time and four part-

time employees at the Solid Waste and Recycling facility all work to maintain a system that runs smoothly and benefits the entire county.

Beyond daily operations, the team supports local initiatives, including school tours, the Kickapoo Valley Reserve cleanup, Friends of Pool Nine cleanup, and other spring and fall cleanup events throughout the county.

All of these efforts make Vernon County a clean, healthy, and welcoming place to visit and live.

Check out the Vernon County Solid Waste and Recycling website for a full list of accepted materials and upcoming events.



YOUTH LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

UW-Stout | July 14-16, 2026



Looking for something fun, fresh, and truly worth your time this summer? The WECA Youth Leadership Conference might be exactly what you didn't know you were missing.

Held each July at the University of Wisconsin–Stout, this three-day experience brings together high school students from across the state for a mix of leadership, teamwork, and just plain fun. Sponsored by your local electric cooperative, it's a chance for students to step outside their normal routine and try something new—without having to travel far from home.

From the moment students arrive, the experience feels different. They stay in the dorms, eat in the dining halls, and get a real taste of college life. For many students, it's their first time staying on a campus, and it offers a sense of independence while still being part of a supportive group.

But this isn't just a camp—it's an experience designed to build confidence in a way that doesn't feel like school. They'll take part in team-building activities, group challenges, and interactive sessions that help grow their communication and leadership skills. Whether they're outgoing or a little more reserved, there are plenty of chances to step outside their comfort zone.

Students learn and explore how electric cooperatives work—how they serve their members and what sets them apart. They will get a behind-the-scenes look at something that powers their everyday lives, presented in a way that's engaging and easy to understand. Throughout the conference, they'll meet students from across Wisconsin, and by the end of the three days, they'll likely leave with new friendships and connections that last well beyond the summer.

One of the highlights of the conference is the opportunity to run for the Youth Board. Students can campaign, give a short speech, and be elected by their peers. It's a fun and supportive way to build confidence and practice leadership. But it doesn't stop there—being selected for the Youth Board can open the door to even bigger opportunities.

In fact, elected students earn the opportunity to attend the National Youth Leadership Conference in Washington, D.C., where they join students from across the country to explore leadership on a national level, visit historic landmarks, and experience the nation's capital in a way few students get to.

At its core, the WECA Youth Leadership Conference is about trying something new, meeting new people, and discovering what they're capable of. It's fun, fast-paced, and an experience that stands out from the typical summer options.

If your high school student is looking for something unique this July, this could be the opportunity they've been waiting for. Reach out to your local electric cooperative to learn how you can be part of it.



Spring Storms

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- **Stay far away from downed power lines.** Always assume they are energized and report them immediately.
- **Call Before you Dig.** If you're starting outdoor projects, call 811 before digging to have underground utilities marked.
- **Use generators safely.** Operate them outdoors, away from enclosed spaces. Ensure you have a proper disconnect in place to prevent backfeeding electricity onto the power lines.
- **Watch for overhead lines.** When operating large equipment, always be aware of overhead power lines. As equipment size increases and work activities intensify, maintaining safe distances is more important than ever.

While we hope the worst of winter weather is behind us, Wisconsin has a way of keeping us on our toes. Conditions can change quickly, and storms can happen when we least expect them.

No matter the season, Vernon Electric Cooperative is prepared. Our crews are trained, equipped, and ready to respond when outages occur. And through strong partnerships with other cooperatives, we can expand that response when needed.

At the end of the day, our focus remains on safety and reliability. Storms may come and go, but through cooperation and a shared commitment to safety, we are always ready for whatever comes next.

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