

An Expectation of Reliable Service - Vegetation Management (An Aggressive Approach)

Trees are an important part of our ecosystem, and provide much needed benefits to our members and the environment. They are also the leading cause of outages for Southside Electric Cooperative, with trees alone accounting for over 22 % of outages. Trees also contribute significantly to outages and equipment damage during weather events such as high winds, storms, snow, and ice.

Southside Electric Cooperative established a Reliability Improvement Plan in May 2010. Part of that plan is focused on developing a vegetation management program that will reduce these tree related outages and improve reliability. With nearly 6,800 miles of overhead transmission and distribution lines spread over 18 counties, six towns, and one city, we have one of the largest rural territories in the state.

To further enhance the Reliability Plan, in March of 2010, the Cooperative began an intensive survey of all of its right of way. This work was conducted by Environmental Consultants, Inc.

The focus of this survey was to identify improvements to our maintenance cycle, provide vegetation management data, and insights into the vegetation management program. The data gathered from this study was presented to SEC in early

September and it stated that we have 174 trees per mile of line, which is almost two times more than the industry average. The



Figure 1 - Tree growing around service wires.

survey also identified 2,200 hazard trees, which consist of damaged, diseased, or dead trees that have



Figure 2 - Mechanical Side-Trimmer

the potential to cause outages. All of these trees were removed before the end of 2010.

This information allows SEC to better utilize our contractors, who perform services such as brush clearing, side trimming, herbicide application, hazard tree removal, and yard tree maintenance.

Yard trees (trees typically found in maintained yards planted inside the right of way) present their own set of problems for the Cooperative. Because of their proximity to the lines, they often cannot be trimmed as extensively as other trees along the right of way. This means that they require additional pruning (more often) to ensure clearance. These trees hinder power restoration and add additional cost to the Cooperative due to their rapid growth. A new Yard Tree identification and removal program was started in 2011 and will continue to focus on these issues. In addition, a new hazard tree identification and removal program was started in 2011 and has removed approximately 8,000 trees in 2011 and 2012.

Vegetation Management is the largest maintenance budget item for the Cooperative, with almost \$3.8 million spent annually. We know these funds have a great impact on reliability and developing an aggressive approach to managing the program, instead of just maintaining it, will yield positive results for our members.

On occasion, we get calls concerning a member's tree. That information is gathered and, if it is deemed the tree needs attention, the Cooperative will forward that information to our tree contractors who will take care of it when they are in the area. If the tree is an immediate threat to the Cooperative's lines, an SEC representative will evaluate the situation and take the appropriate action.

As a member, you can assist us by not planting trees in the right of way. If you must plant trees for screening purposes, please keep in mind the type of tree that you are planting and how tall it will be at maturity. A small sapling planted today can be a huge problem for the Cooperative 3-4 years down the road.

If you have any questions related to our Vegetation Management Program or if you have tree related questions, email us at trees@sec.coop.



Figure 3 - Planting recommendations for tree species