

# HI-LINES

A newsletter for members of JCE Co-op

MARCH 2025

Elizabeth, IL

800-858-5522

jcecoop.com



**CEO'S REPORT**  
by Mike Casper

## Be ready for storm season

### CALENDAR OF EVENTS

#### MARCH 4

Senior Planet–Savanna Museum and Cultural Center 10:00–11:00 a.m.

#### MARCH 6

Senior Planet–Mount Carroll District Library 1:00–2:00 p.m.

#### MARCH 11

Senior Planet–Schmaling Memorial Public Library Fulton 11:00 a.m.–Noon

#### MARCH 13

Senior Planet–Apple Canyon Lake Clubhouse 1:00–2:00 p.m.

#### MARCH 27

Senior Planet–Geneseo Public Library 10:00–11:00 a.m.

#### APRIL

JCE Co-op Tree Giveaway—follow us on Facebook to learn more

#### APRIL 18

Closed for Good Friday

### SPECIAL FEATURE

#### 18D

Substation projects underway for 2025



Spring is on our doorstep and like many of you, I'm looking forward to more opportunities to be outdoors and enjoy warmer weather. Unfortunately, spring and summer can create the perfect conditions for severe storms.

JCE Co-op crews are always prepared and standing by to respond should outages and emergencies occur in our area. When severe storms cause disruptions, our line crews take all necessary precautions before they get to work.

Remember, if you see a downed line, always assume it's energized, never approach it and report it. If flooding occurs, never walk through areas where power lines could be submerged.

I encourage you to also practice preparedness to protect your family during storms and outages. Advance planning for severe storms or other emergencies can reduce stress and anxiety caused by the event and lessen the impact of the storm's effects.

Organize emergency supplies so they are easily accessible in one location. The Federal Emergency Management Agency recommends the following as a starting point for storm and disaster preparedness:

- Stock your pantry with a three-day supply of non-perishable food, including canned goods, energy bars, peanut butter, powdered milk, instant coffee, water and other essentials like diapers and toiletries.
- Confirm that you have adequate sanitation and hygiene supplies including towelettes, soap and hand sanitizer.
- Ensure your First Aid kit is stocked with pain relievers, bandages and medical essentials; be sure your prescriptions are current.

- Set aside basic items you will need, including flashlights, batteries, manual can opener and portable, battery-powered radio or TV.

In the event of a prolonged power outage, turn off major appliances, TVs, computers and other sensitive electronics. This is to help avert damage from potential power surges and prevent overloading circuits during power restoration. Do leave one light on so you will know when power is restored.

If you plan to use a portable generator, make sure it's rated to handle the amount of power you need. Always review the manufacturer's instructions to operate it safely. Check the safety section of our website for information on using a generator safely to avoid hurting yourself and others – including line crews working to restore power.

Listen to local news or a NOAA Weather Radio for storm and emergency information and sign up for NOAA emergency alerts and warnings.

Follow us on Facebook for the latest power restoration updates. If you do experience an outage, please don't report it on Facebook. Call 800-858-5522 to report your outage or natural gas emergency – this is the fastest way to let us know if your power is out.

You also can check for outages by visiting the outage map linked on our website home page. If you're away from home and want to check outage status, enter the phone number associated with your account and your house or business street number to see a message if your address is in an outage.

## Rate increase effective in March: What you need to know

The 2025 rate increase goes into effect on March energy use and will be reflected on April bills. This adjustment, averaging 6% across all rate classes, was approved as part of the 2025 budget to address challenges of inflation and rising costs.

From 2021 to 2024, the co-op saw the cost of materials and hardware to keep the grid functioning surge by a staggering 51%. Co-op staff has reviewed budgets line by line to make cuts and reprioritize items in operating and maintenance, without impacting safety or reliability.

For those who may have missed the February issue of Hi-Lines, we encourage you to visit [jcecoop.com](http://jcecoop.com) to read the full article explaining why the rate increase was necessary and the steps we're taking to stabilize future rates.

We continue to encourage members to reach out to us if they are concerned about being able to pay their energy bills. We work with members on a case-by-case basis regarding options and assistance that may be available to them.

We also offer several programs and resources to help you manage your energy costs. From free home energy assessments to energy efficiency tools like Kill-A-Watt meters and personalized advice from our energy advisor, we're here to support you. Visit our website for more details or give us a call—we're always happy to help. Our member care representatives can be reached at 815-858-5522 between 7:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

## Prioritizing safety

### JCE Co-op recognized for outstanding workplace practices

Safety is paramount in the electric industry. To advance safety education and practices, lineworkers, supervisors and warehouse personnel from electric cooperatives across Illinois gathered in Springfield for the annual Safety and Energy Conference held Jan. 29-30. The event was hosted by the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives (AIEC).

The conference emphasized the importance of safety and leadership in the energy industry, providing participants with training and resources to ensure their well-being on the job. Sessions included discussions on active leadership, staying focused and safe practices in the workplace.

During the conference, safety awards were presented to honor both individual and cooperative-wide commitments to fostering a safe work environment. Brandon Sebena, director of utility operations at JCE Co-op, received a 2024 Safety Leadership Award for his exemplary efforts.

The Safety Leadership Award acknowledges individuals who excel in promoting a culture of safety and demonstrate leadership beyond typical safety performance standards. Recipients are nominated by their peers, with nominations detailing the nominee's impact on safety practices.

JCE Co-op was also recognized for its outstanding safety performance over the past year, receiving a 2024 award for Best Incident Rate. This

award underscores a cooperative's dedication to maintaining a safe working environment, exceeding industry safety expectations, and cultivating a proactive safety culture.

The Best Incident Rate Award recognizes the cooperatives with the lowest overall number of recordable workplace incidents, including minor injuries. It highlights a commitment to maintaining a consistently safe work environment for all employees.

As the electric industry continues to evolve, safety remains a top priority. It ensures that the workforce can continue to serve communities efficiently and without harm. The AIEC celebrates the electric cooperatives and individuals that prioritize safety, consistently demonstrate leadership in safe practices, and foster a strong safety culture.



Pictured from left to right: Payton LuGrain, broadband construction crew; Jason Broshous, broadband operations foreman; Alex Peebles, manager of safety and loss control; Brad Travis, line foreman.



## Substation projects underway for 2025

Upgrades to JCE Co-op substations that will enhance reliability and increase capacity are underway in 2025.

In Mount Carroll, the existing Clay Substation will be replaced with the co-op's new Railroad Substation located on a five-acre spot near the old substation. This project is part of the 34 KV to 69 KV conversions at the co-op's substation following the sale of transmission assets to ITC in 2017.

Ground was broken on the project in the fall of 2024 and the new substation is scheduled to be energized in the fall of 2025, according to Brad Edler, director of engineering. Underground work has been completed, and foundations are being installed along with fencing.

Edler noted the project will enhance reliability because the substation will be on 69 KV network lines as well as increase capacity for further load growth in the area. The new location also improves access both to the substation and the four lines into and out of the substation. The project will significantly improve reliability in Mount Carroll and surrounding areas.

The main contractor for the project is Eilertson Inc. of Fond du lac, WI. Fencing is being done by area contractor Hulscher Fencing, Inc.

Near Savanna, progress continues on the upgrades to the Metform Substation where crews are working to upgrade the transformer and associated breakers. The transformer is being upgraded from a 10/14 MVA to a 15/28 MVA transformer and was expected to arrive the first week in February.

This upgrade increases capacity to large industrial members and enhances reliability. The substation also will be able to back up the Thomson area. Work on the project is expected to be completed by the end of April 2025.

In a recently completed project, fencing at the West Galena Substation was upgraded. "The fence was starting to show age and allow erosion of soil and rock in the substation", Edler said. Work included construction of an approximate eight-foot rock wall for proper drainage, prevent erosion and enhance safety. Edler noted JCE Co-op appreciated the cooperation of the neighboring co-op member.

The automated metering infrastructure (AMI) upgrade is in high gear, with meter changeouts beginning in April of this year. The co-op will be utilizing contractor UMS for the meter change out! Currently the co-op is completing work on the natural gas meters, which is about two-thirds complete, and installing 34 base stations to collect all the metering data in the co-op territory.

Future projects include:

- Upgrade of the Geneseo Substation. Increasing the transformer size is currently under design. Expected to begin in the spring of this year, the project will enhance reliability and increase capacity.
- Upgrade of the Chadwick Substation to the higher 69 KV transmission voltage in the spring of 2026. This project is currently in the design phase. The project will enhance reliability and increase capacity.
- In East Dubuque, the Frentress Lake and Pioneer substations will see upgrades to allow them to be connected. This project will provide better reliability to the area, allowing backup to each other and the Menominee area. Because the two substations are at different distribution voltages, 13.8 kV at Frentress Lake and 12.47 kV at Pioneer, they will connect with a transformer and voltage regulators to maintain proper voltage. Frentress Lake will be expanded to become the main feed for Pioneer.

Watch for more information in the April issue of *Hi-Lines*.

## ROW tree trimming

Electric lines coming into contact with trees can create a dangerous situation. Contact can cause power outages, fires and other safety hazards. The risk increases when severe weather brings lightning, ice or high winds.

JCE Co-op trims trees along our right-of-way year-round for reliability and compliance with the National Electric Safety Code. We prune or cut down trees that threaten electric service. We determine a schedule each year for areas that require trimming and re-evaluate those plans as needs change throughout the year. We trim to get adequate separation between trees and power lines.

Our approach to tree trimming is guided by some key factors:

1. Maintenance Records: We track all trimming activities to identify areas that have gone the longest without attention.
2. Field Observations: Our servicemen frequently report trees that pose risks to power lines or areas needing immediate care, especially after severe weather events like snow, ice or storms.

We strive to keep landowners informed before any work begins. Notifications are posted on our website and social media pages. We will also send postcard and email notifications.

Currently, our contractor, Zielies, has four crews trimming trees across our service area. Stay updated by visiting our website at [jcecoop.com/tree-trimming](http://jcecoop.com/tree-trimming).

For yard trees, our right-of-way coordinator or contractor will make every effort to meet with you in person. If direct contact isn't possible, we'll leave a door card with instructions to reach us if you have any questions or concerns.

If you notice a tree limb near the lines or plan to trim a tree that could fall on power lines, please call us at 800-858-5522. We'll send someone to assess the situation and ensure it's handled safely.

Your cooperation helps us maintain a safe and reliable electric system for all members. Thank you for your continued support!



## JCE Co-op tree giveaway

### With a social media twist

JCE Co-op is excited to announce its annual tree giveaway for members with a fresh approach this year. The co-op is giving away a limited number of tree seedlings to interested members on a first-come, first-served basis. To stay informed about the program, members are encouraged to follow JCE Co-op on Facebook and Instagram where updates and details will be shared.

This year, JCE Co-op is partnering with the Arbor Day Foundation to provide trees to members. Once spring ordering becomes available, the co-op will order a selection of trees through the foundation. The Arbor Day Foundation will then supply the trees with an estimated 10-day shipping window, expected sometime after April.

Specific pick-up dates and times will be announced on the co-op's social media channels as soon as they are confirmed. Trees will be distributed on a first-come, first-served basis and can be picked up at any of JCE Co-op's offices.

Members are encouraged to follow JCE Co-op on Facebook and Instagram for the latest updates and announcements about the tree giveaway. Don't miss this opportunity to beautify your property and contribute to a greener future! One tree per member household please while supplies last.



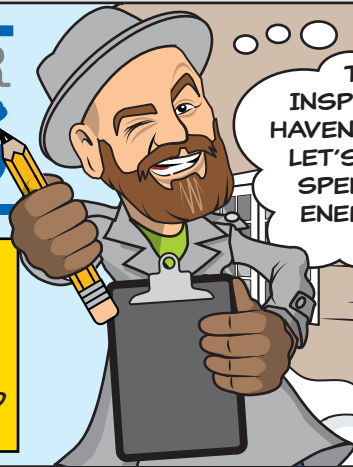
## Energy savings fun!

Get ready to power up your imagination with Inspector Watts and his trusty sidekick, Scout—an energy-detecting duo like no other! Whether they're tracking down rogue energy sources or saving the day, there's never a dull moment with this electrifying team!

**Keep your eyes peeled for more thrilling stories, exciting activities for kids and high-voltage fun coming soon from Inspector Watts and Scout!**

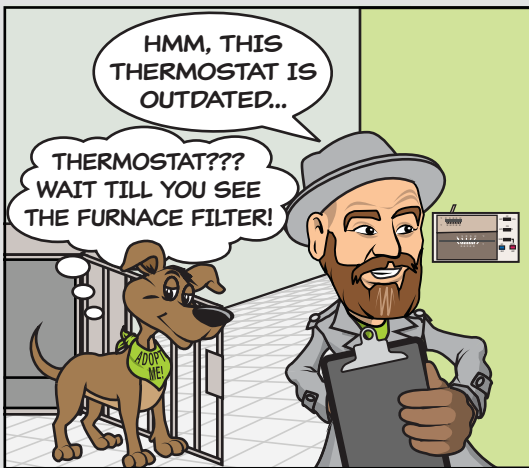
# INSPECTOR WATTS

MEET INSPECTOR WATTS, ENERGY ADVISOR EXTRAORDINAIRE FOR JCE CO-OP. HE'S ON A MISSION TO HELP MEMBERS UNCOVER ENERGY INEFFICIENCIES AND SAVE MONEY.



TIME FOR MY INSPECTION OF SAFE HAVEN ANIMAL SHELTER. LET'S SEE IF THEY'RE SPENDING MORE ON ENERGY THAN THEY SHOULD.

SAFE HAVEN HUMANE SOCIETY



HMM, THIS THERMOSTAT IS OUTDATED...

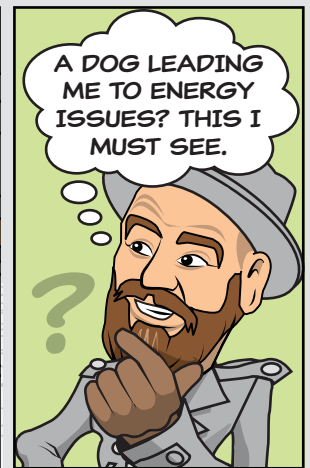
THERMOSTAT??? WAIT TILL YOU SEE THE FURNACE FILTER!



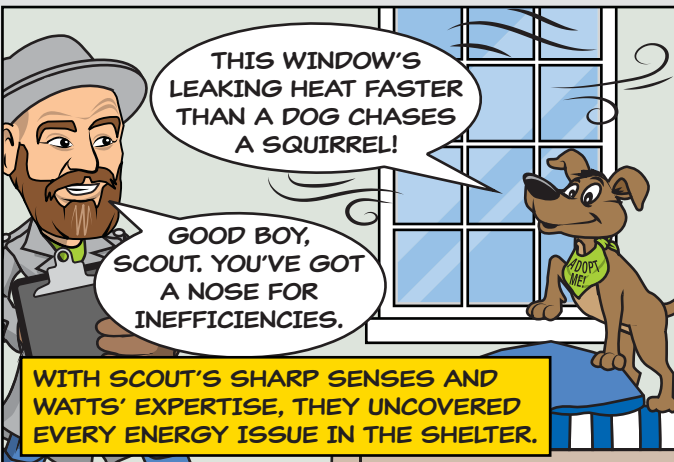
BARK!

WELL, HELLO THERE. WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

ENERGY INEFFICIENCIES ARE MY STORY. FOLLOW ME.



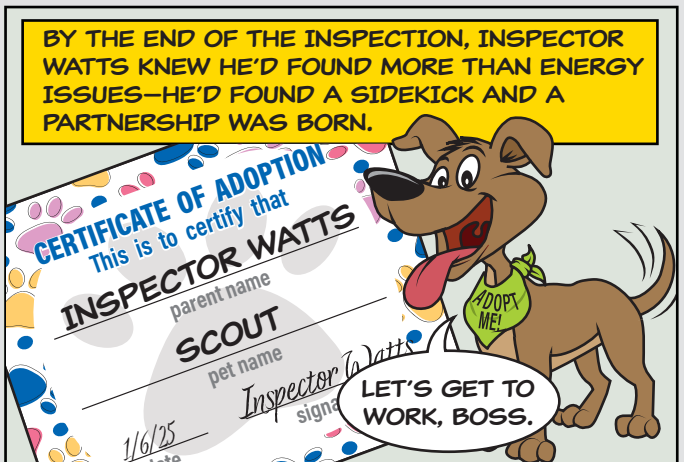
A DOG LEADING ME TO ENERGY ISSUES? THIS I MUST SEE.



THIS WINDOW'S LEAKING HEAT FASTER THAN A DOG CHASES A SQUIRREL!

GOOD BOY, SCOUT. YOU'VE GOT A NOSE FOR INEFFICIENCIES.

WITH SCOUT'S SHARP SENSES AND WATTS' EXPERTISE, THEY UNCOVERED EVERY ENERGY ISSUE IN THE SHELTER.



BY THE END OF THE INSPECTION, INSPECTOR WATTS KNEW HE'D FOUND MORE THAN ENERGY ISSUES—HE'D FOUND A SIDEKICK AND A PARTNERSHIP WAS BORN.

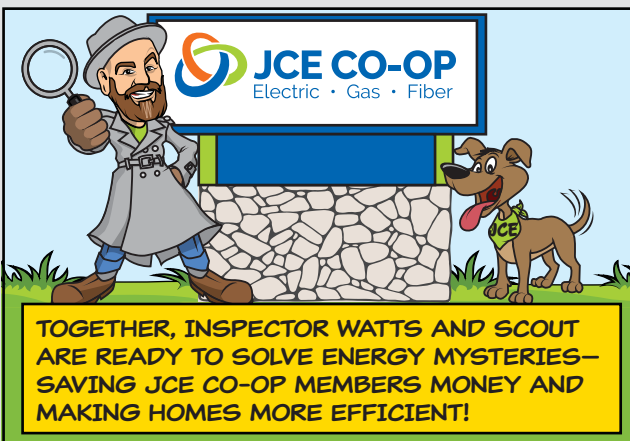
CERTIFICATE OF ADOPTION  
This is to certify that  
**INSPECTOR WATTS**

parent name  
**SCOUT**  
pet name

Inspector Watts  
signature

1/6/25  
date

LET'S GET TO WORK, BOSS.



**JCE CO-OP**  
Electric • Gas • Fiber

TOGETHER, INSPECTOR WATTS AND SCOUT ARE READY TO SOLVE ENERGY MYSTERIES—SAVING JCE CO-OP MEMBERS MONEY AND MAKING HOMES MORE EFFICIENT!



LET'S GO SCOUT!!!

## What is Lifeline?

In the 21st century, having access to fast, reliable internet is now just as essential to every household in America as telephone service was in the 20th century. But your neighbors at JCE Co-op also understand that many families struggle to pay household bills, especially with rising prices associated with global turmoil and economic uncertainty.

Fortunately, there are programs that help families with their telephone and internet service bills, including one prominent program you may not know about: Lifeline. Daniel Ugorcak

### The basics of the Lifeline cost-savings program

Let's begin with a few basics about the Lifeline program. At its core, Lifeline is a government program that assists qualifying low-income households by providing them a credit on their monthly telephone and/or internet bill.

Originally designed to help consumers with the costs of their landline telephone service, most states have expanded its benefits to broadband internet and even cell phone lines as well. The monthly credit amounts vary depending on the service, and we will discuss those differences below.

### Qualifying for Lifeline's benefits

Participation in the Lifeline program depends on one of two different factors: 1) certain low-income level thresholds, or 2) whether an individual already utilizes certain other government assistance programs.

Specifically, to meet the income-based qualification, a customer's income must be at or below 135 percent of the federal poverty guidelines. The guidelines' dollar amount usually changes every year, but you can check the federal Department of Health and Human Service's Poverty Guidelines webpage for the latest information.

The other way to qualify for Lifeline is through participation in other federal assistance programs. Qualifying programs include Federal Public Housing Assistance, Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Supplemental Security Income and the

Veterans and Survivors Pension Benefit. Additionally, there are several Tribal programs that qualify families for Lifeline. If you already receive benefits under any of these programs, you are eligible for Lifeline.

To speed up the qualification process, the government offers a helpful tool to determine consumers' eligibility through a website called [Lifelinesupport.org](http://Lifelinesupport.org). From there, simply navigate to the "Apply Now" button, which takes you to another page to verify if you meet the requirements for Lifeline's benefits. Just follow the instructions and steps and you are on your way!

### Lifeline's monthly benefits

If you're deemed eligible for Lifeline, the program provides a credit that will appear every month on your bill, lowering your monthly costs. The credit can apply either to "voice" services (i.e., your landline telephone service) or to internet service. However, Lifeline's monthly credit cannot apply to both voice and internet service. Thus, members must choose to apply their Lifeline monthly credit to one service or the other—not both.

The Lifeline credit for voice services (landline) is \$5.25 per month. For internet service, Lifeline's benefits are a bit more generous. Indeed, a Lifeline credit can save up to \$9.25 a month off the cost of internet service (or bundled services, like landline and internet). That's a savings of \$111 per year, which many families will most certainly appreciate.

The Lifeline program can help many lower-income members keep up with the internet age. Please reach out to JCE Co-op should you have any questions about Lifeline and its benefits or if we can assist you with your home internet service in any way.

Check out our website [jcecoop.com/lifeline](http://jcecoop.com/lifeline) to learn more!





## Changes to net metering, avoided cost policy

Amendments to JCE Co-op's distributed energy resources policy on net metering and avoided cost will sunset new net metering interconnections after March 31, 2025. Members with new distributed generation (DG) interconnection applications after March 31, 2025 will be eligible for avoided cost rates.

At its Jan. 31 meeting, the co-op's board of directors approved changes to Policy 411 Net Metering and Avoided Cost Policy. Net metering will apply only to members with DG systems connected prior to March 31, 2025 or those who have submitted DG interconnection applications by end of business on March 31, 2025; completed construction; and submitted all Certificate of Completion documents by end of business on May 30, 2025.

New DG interconnection applications received prior to March 31 but not completed construction with all Certificate of Completion documents submitted by end of business on May 30, 2025, will only be eligible for avoided cost rates.

Avoided cost pays members the value of their kWh return to the cooperative based on the market prices of energy.

Read more at [jcecoop.com](http://jcecoop.com).



### Reader prize!

Each month we print the name of a JCE Co-op member who is eligible to win a monthly \$25 readership prize. If your name is printed in this month's edition, and not a part of any article, contact JCE Co-op.

## Reminder: 2025 Director nominations deadline approaching

Deadline for 2025 board of director nominations is approaching. Any member, including the incumbent directors, whose primary residence is in one of the districts up for elections may petition for nomination in their district by Friday, March 28. Potential candidates must collect at least 25 signatures from members residing in their district.

Petitions are available to download on the co-op's website at [jcecoop.com/elections](http://jcecoop.com/elections) or be picked up at a co-op office. Petitions must be filed at JCE Co-op headquarters in Elizabeth no later than March 28.

Details on director qualifications and nomination procedures can be found in the cooperative's bylaws posted at [jcecoop.com](http://jcecoop.com).

If two or more candidates file in a district, ballots and voting instructions are made available electronically and by mail to members in that district. A member votes for one candidate either by mail or online through a special election website.

If only one candidate files in a district, no election materials are mailed. Election is by vote of acclamation at the annual meeting of members. The winner is announced during the annual meeting.

Candidate profiles are included with election materials when there is a contested election and also appear in Hi-Lines. All eligible candidates will be listed on [jcecoop.com](http://jcecoop.com) and in Hi-Lines.

The 2025 Annual Meeting of Members is scheduled for May 28 at East Dubuque High School.

### Director nomination deadline

**Friday  
March 28**

### Districts up for elections

**1, 2, 4**



**YOUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**David Senn**  
Chairman  
District 7

**Jerry Meyer**  
Vice Chairman  
District 1

**Robert Kuhns**  
Treasurer  
District 10

**Dan Tindell**  
Secretary  
District 4

**Joseph Mattingley**  
District 2

**Allen Hendren**  
District 3

**Patricia Smith**  
District 5

**Thomas Lundy**  
District 6

**Ted James**  
District 8

**Larry Carroll**  
District 9

**Office Hours:**  
Monday-Friday

**Elizabeth**  
793 U.S. Route 20 West  
7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

**Savanna**  
103 Chicago Ave.  
7:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
1:30 to 4 p.m.

**Geneseo**  
1004 S. Chicago St.  
7:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
1:30 to 4 p.m.

**Services and billing questions:**  
(800) 858-5522  
jcecoop.com

**For emergencies and outages call:**  
(800) 858-5522

# Resume of Minutes

**December 17, 2024**

## Board Meeting Minutes Summary

The board meeting of Jo-Carroll Energy, Inc. (NFP) was held on Tuesday, December 17, 2024.

**Presentation** – Director and GM of Broadband Operations, Jesse Shekleton and Sara Bielema, Publications and Communications Coordinator, provided a demonstration on the use of Virtual Reality (VR) Goggles. Jesse demonstrated how goggles can be used to teach workforce development by creating a simulated environment where students and employees can practice real-world skills in a safe and controlled way.

**Safety Moment** – Director Tindell provided a safety moment regarding icy conditions and tips that could be used to help keep you safe.

**Approval of Agenda** – A motion was made, seconded and carried unanimously to approve the meeting agenda.

**Consent Agenda** – A motion was made, seconded and carried unanimously to approve the Consent Agenda items, including the November 26, 2024, Board Meeting Minutes/ Summary, Discounted Estate Retirements, and the board expense summary.

## Board Issues and Action Items

**Select Attendees for BLC 988/The Board’s Role in Safety** – Attendees were selected to attend BLC Course 988.

**Select Attendees for CCD 2610/ Understanding the Electric Business** – Attendees were selected to attend CCD Course 2610.

**Rate Policy 801/Fiber Service Rate Standard Packages** – A motion was made, seconded and carried unanimously to approve Rate Policy 801.

**Rate Policy 803/Wireless Service Rate Standard** – A motion was made, seconded and carried unanimously to approve Rate Policy 803.

**November Financial Operating Report** – Chuck Woods, Chief Financial Officer, provided a summary of the November financial operating report. Revenue year-to-date (YTD) is approximately \$62.2 million. Total operations and maintenance

expenses are approximately \$50.4 million, which is (\$460,691) under the budget of approximately \$50.8 million. Margins are approximately \$1.4 million. By general consent, the board moved to file the financial operating report with the auditor.

**2025 Proposed Budget** – The 2025 proposed budget was presented to the JCE Co-op Board of Directors by Senior Staff members of the cooperative. After discussion and a thorough understanding of the budget, a motion was made, seconded and carried unanimously to approve the 2025 budget.

Wholesale electric power and natural gas costs, which make up the largest portion of the budget, are projected at approximately \$32 million, similar to last year.

Approximately \$21.5 million of capital expenditures were approved, compared to the \$16 million in 2024. In addition, \$25.5 million in operation and maintenance (O&M) expenses were approved. Both increased over last year due to growth and inflation.

Other expenses of approximately \$13.8 million include depreciation and long-term debt interest expenses. Depreciation expenses have increased and are driven by the continued investment in the system. While long-term debt interest expense is impacted by the investment in the system coupled with the rising cost of borrowing. Overall, a projected increase over 2024 by approximately \$800,000.

**Executive Session** – A motion was made, seconded and carried unanimously to go into Executive Session at 11:51 A.M.

**Out of Executive Session** – A motion was made, seconded and carried unanimously to come out of Executive Session at 12:49 P.M.

**Action Resulting from Executive Session** – None.

**Other Business** – None.

**Adjournment** – A motion was made, seconded and carried unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 12:50 P.M.