

Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives
serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

SOMERSET REC

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Director of Finances

Emily Baer

Director of Marketing and Member Services

Phil Stern

Manager of Metering Services

Jessi Ditzler

Executive Assistant

OFFICE HOURS

Monday through Friday
7:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.

EMERGENCY OUTAGE NUMBERS

814-445-4106
800-443-4255

You can make the difference



JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT THE last-minute preparations for the holidays were behind you, I have one more urgent request. In the last few weeks, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) rolled out a process to create and fund broadband access and expansion in the years to come. The first step is for the FCC to review broadband coverage maps. These maps are a critical piece in determining if an area has sufficient broadband access.

Your input will improve the existing coverage maps, which we know are incorrect. These flawed maps were a major factor when our attempts to explore broadband were deemed to be not financially viable several years ago. Improving the maps will align the funding for broadband expansion with the areas that truly need the access.

How can you help?

You know better than anyone the quality of broadband service at your house, farm or business. If you log onto broadbandmap.fcc.gov, you can type in your address to see if the map aligns with your experience. If the map indicates the area is covered (a green circle) and you know it is not, you can click on the "Availability Challenge" link and report the inaccuracy.

Unfortunately, the window to provide this feedback closes on Jan. 13, 2023.

How can your co-op help?

We understand some members who are reading this do not have internet access, so they cannot visit the website. If you need help viewing this website, the co-op will have computers available and staff to help you review and submit any challenges. You simply need to stop by our office any weekday between 7:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. before Jan. 13, and we will help you with this process.

When will broadband be available?

The steps outlined above only fix the starting point for any broadband expansion that may occur. Building this infrastructure will take a lot of time and money, so I do not foresee fiber-optic solutions becoming available in the next year or two in our remote areas.

With that being said, rules are still being developed about when funds may be available, when service needs to be available and what companies may be eligible for funding. Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative will be reviewing all of these details as they become available, and your voice in the process is important.

How the cooperative gets involved with any broadband expansion will depend on how the rules develop, the financial viability of any projects and what other companies plan to provide internet services. Despite all of the changes that have occurred in recent years, the cooperative has remained involved in this discussion and will work through all the available options as we know more.

Hopefully this effort will improve the process and put all the last-minute preparations behind you as you enter 2023. If you have any questions about this process, please stop by or call the office. Happy New Year. 🍷

RUSTON OGBURN
GENERAL MANAGER

Indian Lake Line Conversion and System Rehabilitation

EMILY BAER, DIRECTOR OF MARKETING & MEMBER SERVICES

A LITTLE HISTORY: WITH A vision that started in 1960 and originally known as Allegheny Mountain Lakes, Inc., Indian Lake Borough consists of more than 2,000 developed acres of recreational land. Indian Lake is a 5-mile horseshoe-shaped lake that covers 750 acres with 20 miles of shoreline. The lake's name came about because one of the developer's sons was reading "The Big Book of Indians." The original park system needed a name, and the tribe names aligned with the 21 original communities within the Indian Lake. Tree species and past presidents were also considered.

In the final stages of plot planning, an important topic of discussion was the cost estimate for clearing and building the roads. Douglas Smith, the manager of Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) at the time, came forward while the lake project was still on paper and offered to cut and clear all the roadways, construct all the electric lines, and supply the service free of charge. In return, the cooperative received a blanket right-of-way agreement for the Borough of Indian Lake.

As our name implies, Somerset REC primarily serves rural America. The cooperative only serves a handful of boroughs throughout our service area. According to 2022 statistics, on average, Somerset REC serves approximately 7.5 members per mile of line. In comparison, within Indian Lake Borough, that average jumps to approximately 16.7 members per mile of line. This makes Indian Lake Borough the second-most densely populated service area within our territory. This density is only surpassed by the Seven Springs Borough area.

In early 2014, the cooperative



EASY ACCESS: Somerset REC Lineman Carter Engleka uses a track machine to access lines in hard-to-reach areas in the right of way at Indian Lake Borough, where the cooperative is undertaking system upgrades.

noticed the electrical load in the Indian Lake area had increased, and the time had come to begin upgrading those facilities. Members were converting to on-demand water heaters and electric heating systems,

causing their neighbors to experience dimming lights. More homes are also being used year-round than when the system was originally built and many homes were summer cabins. In early 2015, the first



DE-ENERGIZING: Somerset REC Lineman Alex Mazanowski uses a "hot stick" to de-energize the line so other crew members can start their work safely on the next pole.

upgrades and voltage conversions were initiated.

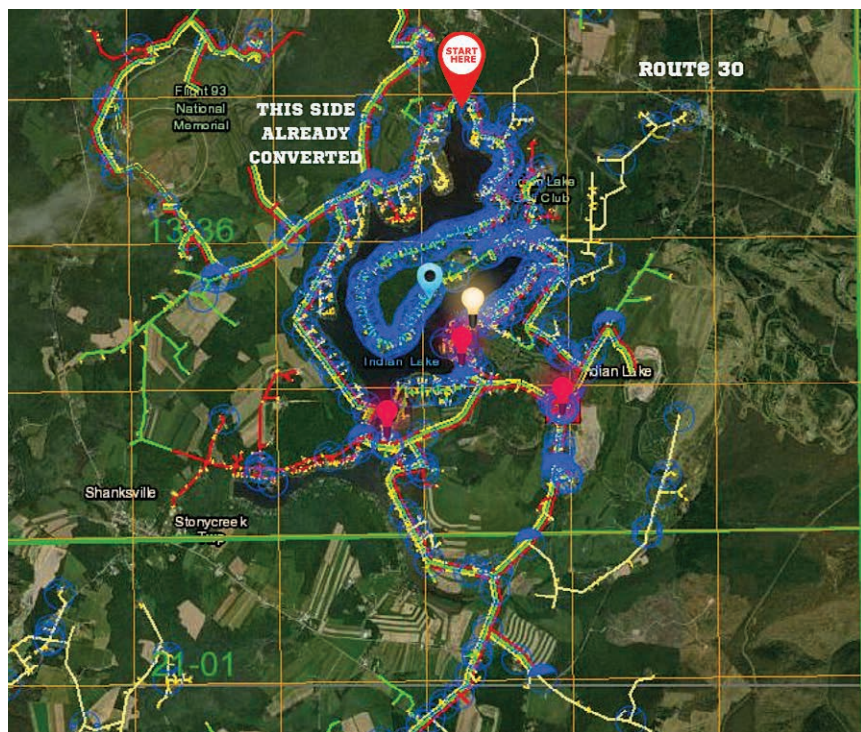
Since that time, more than 25 miles of line have been upgraded, which serves 374 members. Along with those upgrades, which included replacing poles, transformers, and wire, the primary operating voltage was increased from 7,200 volts to 14,400 volts. This voltage increase allows the cooperative to serve almost double the amount of electrical load. This voltage increase allows the cooperative to provide almost double the amount of electrical load.

With respect to pole replacement, when the original system was built, communication companies, such as Comcast and Verizon, did not exist. As those utilities began providing services to lake residents by attaching to Somerset REC facilities, it soon created crowded poles, where proper clearances were not being met. Because of this, 35-foot poles are being

replaced with 45-foot poles for more clearance between the power and communication lines.

Plans are to complete the first phase of this conversion before the end of 2022. The second and final phase of this project will conclude with rebuilding about 10.5 miles of line that serves around 245 members. That project is underway with tentative plans of a 2023 completion date.

As always, we thank you for your patience while we improve our infrastructure to deliver the most cost-effective, safe and reliable electric service to our members. If you plan to increase your electric load at your home or business, please notify the cooperative, and an engineer will be happy to meet with you to discuss an upgrade to your service. 📞



CONVERSION: Here is an overview of the cooperative's electric system at Indian Lake. Beginning at START HERE and snaking around the horseshoe to the lightbulb, is an outline of the recent conversion/upgrade work done by the cooperative. The red lightbulbs and surrounding areas are starting and ending points used to indicate the remaining conversions planned for 2023.

ATTENTION HIGH SCHOOL JUNIORS!

YOUTH TOUR APPLICATIONS NOW AVAILABLE

High school juniors can apply now for a fun-filled, all-inclusive leadership and networking opportunity in *Washington D.C.*, sponsored by Somerset REC **June 18-23, 2023.**

Network with youth from co-ops all over the country while exploring our nation's capital. Applications are available on our website at somersetrec.com and due **January 23, 2023.**

Please contact Emily at ebaer@somersetrec.com or call 814-445-4106 for more information regarding this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity! This leadership opportunity also looks great on college applications and job resumes.





PLENTIFUL DONATIONS: Somerset REC right-of-way crew member Drew Boyer, left, and Ben Tawney, director of the Somerset County Mobile Food Bank, hold food donated during Member Appreciation Day, which was held at the cooperative office Friday, Oct. 7. Attendees received a gift and enjoyed kielbasa, hot dogs, chips, cookies, and ice cream sandwiches. Members were also encouraged to bring non-perishable food donations to stock the shelves of the local food pantry. Donating members signed up for a chance to win a \$50 bill credit, and 10 were chosen to receive the prize. Donation sites are rotated each year so the donated food touches all corners of the cooperative's service territory.

DIRECTOR ELECTIONS

The 84th annual meeting of members of Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative (REC), Inc., will be held Thursday, May 25, 2023.

Somerset REC is proud to have a board of committed and knowledgeable directors who play a vital role in the decision-making process at the cooperative.

Listed below are the three director positions open for election in 2023 at the annual meeting. Directors elected are required to serve a three-year term. The districts up for election are:

- ▶ District 2: Allegheny, Juniata, Quemahoning and Stonycreek townships
- ▶ District 3: Donegal, Jefferson, Jenner and Lincoln townships
- ▶ District 7: Fairhope, Greenville, Larimer, Northampton and Southampton townships

If you are interested in running for one of these positions, your primary residence must be in one of these areas and you must be a member in good standing. Please submit your specific district request to the cooperative, in writing, no later than Feb. 1, 2023.

Communications receive recognition

EMILY BAER of Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) and other co-op communicators were recognized during the 2022 Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association (PREA) Communications Awards Ceremony, held Oct. 5 at the Omni Bedford Springs Resort in Bedford. The program, sponsored by the statewide organization representing 13 electric cooperatives in Pennsylvania and one in New Jersey, is designed to recognize the work of cooperative communicators.

Entries in the competition included articles and photos from local cooperative pages of *Penn Lines*, cooperative newsletters, and special cooperative projects. Awards were presented by Steve Brame, president & CEO of PREA and Allegheny Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Somerset REC received an Award of Excellence for Best Website and honorable mentions for Best Photo, Best Wildcard and Best Use of Cooperative Principle.

The awards program was held in conjunction with the 2022 PREA Communications Institute. The two-and-a-half-day institute focused on effective storytelling techniques and tools. Communicators also participated in a roundtable, featuring reports from Pennsylvania and New Jersey electric cooperatives.

Ten representatives from eight Pennsylvania and New Jersey cooperatives participated in the institute. 📺



COMMUNICATIONS AWARDS: Emily Baer, Somerset REC director of marketing and member services, is shown with Jim Meiers, left, regional vice president at the National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation, and Steve Brame, president & CEO of PREA and Allegheny Electric Cooperative, Inc.