



National Rural Electric
Cooperative Association
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Fast Facts



Improve Federal Land Management Policies to Strengthen Grid Reliability

Issue: Public Power Districts (PPDs) and Electric cooperative (co-ops) efforts to maintain grid reliability and ensure public safety include keeping power line rights-of-way clear of hazardous trees and vegetation, even along lines that cross federal lands. Proactively clearing rights-of-way is a uniform utility industry practice that helps prevent power outages, protects human life and limits impacts to natural resources on or near federal property.

Outdated and inconsistent federal land management policies, however, make it more difficult and costly for electric co-ops and PPDs to get approval for rights-of-way management. Federal reforms are needed to cut red tape and make it easier to manage vegetation, limit downed power lines, prevent catastrophic fires, and respond to emergencies.

Background: To meet federal and state reliability standards, electric co-ops and PPD's perform rights-of-way maintenance, including vegetation management, on their 2.5 million miles of lines, spanning 75 percent of our nation's land mass. All electric utilities must comply with reliability, security and safety standards, even for the nearly 100,000 miles of distribution and transmission lines on federal forest land.

Because many electric co-ops and PPDs extend service to the "last mile" for people in the most remote and rugged areas, electric lines often cross federal lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Therefore, Forest Service and BLM reviews are often required to do routine power line maintenance and vegetation management – including removing a fallen tree, as well as system upgrades to improve reliability. Delays in application reviews and renewals can keep projects on hold for several months to over a year and add tens of thousands of dollars in costs.

Such delays also create unnecessary liability risks for electric co-ops and PPDs, which can be held responsible for damages if a hazardous tree or other vegetation causes a fire before the Forest Service or BLM give the approval to address the problem. Forest Service and BLM efforts to address the lack of uniformity in their standards, review processes, and decisions led to some improvements. Without a legislative remedy, however, these issues remain unresolved.

H.R. 2358, the Electricity Reliability and Protection Act, introduced by Rep. Ryan Zinke (R-MT) and Rep. Kurt Schrader (D-OR), includes reforms to streamline rights-of-way reviews and time limits for federal decision-makers to provide consistency, flexibility, and accountability. It would also ensure utilities cannot be held liable for damages if the government fails to allow them to manage vegetation on a right-of-way or adjacent area.

The House Natural Resources Committee approved H.R. 2358 in October 2015, and much of this language was adopted by amendment into a larger energy bill (H.R. 8) that was passed by the House of Representatives and awaits consideration in the Senate.

NRECA Position: Electric co-ops and PPDs urge Congress to pass legislation to reform federal land management practices in order to better ensure reliability and reduce the risk of fires and fire hazards on utility rights-of-way across federal lands. Streamlining federal government management practices on these federal lands will make it easier to maintain safety and reliability by performing the needed vegetation management to prevent threats to power lines and making it easier to respond to emergencies. **Urge your Senators and Members of Congress to pass H.R. 2358 as either a stand-alone measure or as part of broader energy legislation if a final compromise bill is developed by a Conference Committee.**

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