

Testimony In Support of 2025 Senate Bill No. 2339

Capital Electric Cooperative

Paul Fitterer General Manager

Good morning. My name is Paul Fitterer, and I am the General Manager of Capital Electric Cooperative (Capital Electric) based out of Bismarck, ND and Wing, ND. Capital Electric provides retail electrical distribution to nearly 22,000 services for member-consumers in Burleigh, Sheridan, Emmons, Kidder, and McLean counties and owns and operates approximately 2,800 miles of medium and low voltage distribution lines, including stepdown transformers and associated service entry equipment. To date, approximately 1,500 miles of line, or 54% of our total line is overhead, and 1,300 miles, or 46% is underground. The vast majority of new conductor we place is underground. Wildfires are a risk for many areas of the country, and Capital Electric is not immune to the potential for wildfires within our service territory. We have and maintain a wildfire mitigation plan. This plan captures the steps Capital Electric takes to minimize the probability of starting a wildfire due to actions of employees and/or equipment.

Today, I'd like to share with you some of the on-going mitigation efforts that Capital Electric is proactively taking to mitigate fire risk.

a. Routine line patrol

Capital Electric performs visual patrol of distribution assets daily, whenever driving to/from jobsites as well as while working at a given location.

Maintenance items that are noted by personnel are converted to electronic service orders, which tracks the scope of work, date the work is completed, and

any notes specific to the resolution. Notifications of potential concerns are also communicated from our member consumers, upon which a line crew is dispatched to assess and evaluate any necessary actions.

b. Annual line inspection

We perform a focused visual inspection for half of the overhead distribution system annually. Electronic inspection records dictate the areas to be inspected, requiring line crews to note deficiencies and maintenance items, which then follow the same service order process as previously noted for tracking and completion.

c. Vegetation management

Annual vegetation management is performed by line crews and contractors to address the potential for tree contacts and any danger trees that are at risk of falling into distribution lines. Routine and annual line patrol notes are sources of data to develop a given year's tree trimming plan, ensuring that identified potential contacts are addressed when needed, not solely on a periodic X-year cycle.

d. Pole testing

We hire a third-party inspection company to annually test 1/10th of our system's poles, or approximately 2,000 poles, and thereafter continuing tests with the intent of a documented test result within 10-years of today's date for every pole and then starting again in year 11. These tests include visual, sound, partial

excavation, and/or bore testing. Poles that fail inspection are marked as reject, and after receiving the report Capital Electric or its contractors begins to change out rejected poles with new ones.

e. Rural rebuilding

We have been committed for many years to rebuild approximately 25 miles of overhead distribution line each year. This includes new poles, hardware, and conductor, mostly applied to single-phase rural lines. The rebuilt line is improved to current construction standards, utilizing Aluminum Conductor Steel Reinforced (ACSR), shortening spans between poles, and using neutral offset brackets. Having committed to rebuilding rural overhead line for almost 20 years, Capital Electric has rebuilt 1/3 of what was our oldest and most rural overhead line.

f. Sectionalizing equipment

We also use many types of protective devices to isolate and clear system faults. Substations with electronic controls have remote control capabilities, including non-reclose and hot line tag modes. Underground circuits have interrupters to clear what are typically permanent fault conditions. Overhead lines use electronic reclosers with the ability to try one or more operations to open and close, typically clearing temporary faults; these can also be locally set to non-reclose mode. Fuses are also used on underground and overhead taps, although more commonly applied to overhead lines. Capital Electric no longer

has oil-filled reclosers on distribution lines. In all cases, Capital Electric analyzes the need for, and the appropriate type of sectionalizing device to apply, to balance the needs for reliability and security.

g. Conversion to URD

Capital Electric also converts existing overhead line to underground as part of standard construction activities; a portion of the annual work plan projects are typically dedicated to these conversions. Often these projects are selected to avoid future maintenance costs such as right of way clearing. Conversion of overhead lines eliminates the potential for tree contact or the impacts of high winds and ice.

h. Coordination with emergency response

Capital Electric coordinates emergency response activities in multiple ways. Internally, mobile radios are used between line crews to ensure communication of activities and locations; automatic vehicle locating GPS tools also monitor locations of crew vehicles and refresh positions on electronic system maps, including on tablets using cellular data. After normal business hours, we use dispatch services to receive outage messages and relay details to on-call crews. For large outage events after hours, operations staff returns to headquarters to provide additional management of the restoration activities. Capital Electric communicates with local transmission system operators (ex. WAPA, Otter Tail, and MDU) for larger system events. In the event of accidents and natural

disasters, we coordinate with local county officials via Burleigh County Central Communications, responding to requests to disconnect power.

g. Power Restoration Procedure

In times of elevated fire risk, line crews visually inspect all lines downstream of an open protective device (breaker or fuse) before re-energizing a line. This may require crews to use ATV's, walking or other means to be able to visually inspect line before energizing.

h. Additional efforts during high-risk conditions

- Carry large spray water cans on trucks
- Patrol every span before attempting reclose
- Fire watch during and after work
- Trim grass before driving or parking vehicle
- Only leave roadway by vehicle for outage response
- Avoid work on Red Flag days unless lack of action poses more risk than completing work.
- Require contractors to abide by the same standards as Capital electric employees.
- Revised recloser settings

Capital Electric feels this is an important bill that will strongly encourage ND utilities to annually evaluate the evolving risks of wildfires as it relates to the potential impacts from

utility operations. Likewise, the qualified utilities in turn, would reduce some risk by avoiding the standard of strict liability.

Capital Electric supports this bill.

Thank You.