April 2026

THE WHEAT BELT CONNECTION

Maintaining Reliability:

Why We Test Our Wooden Utility Poles

By: Kurt Cleveland, *Staking Technician*

Across Wheat Belt PPD's electric system, thousands of wooden utility poles support the power lines that deliver electricity to homes, farms, and businesses throughout our service territory. While these poles are built to last decades, they are exposed to weather, soil conditions, insects, and natural aging. Because of this, regular inspection and testing is essential to ensure the reliability and safety of the electric system.

Each year we test approximately 5,500 wooden poles, representing roughly 10% of the poles in our distribution system. By testing a portion of the system annually, we maintain a continuous inspection cycle that helps identify potential issues early and allows us to proactively maintain our infrastructure.

Why Pole Testing Is Important

Wooden utility poles are strong and durable, often lasting 50–70 years when properly maintained. However, deterioration can occur over time due to moisture, fungi, or insect activity. In fact, much of the decay that weakens a pole occurs at or below ground level, where moisture and oxygen promote rot.

Because these changes happen inside the pole and underground, they are often not visible from the outside. Routine testing helps determine whether a pole remains structurally sound or if it should be treated, reinforced, or replaced before it becomes a safety risk.

Regular inspection programs also help utilities make better long-term investment decisions. Inspecting and maintaining a pole is far less expensive than replacing one prematurely, and identifying issues early helps prevent outages and maintain reliable electric service.

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Editor - Kelli Chaon

LUCKY DRAWING

Wheat Belt Public Power District is pleased to announce Galen Wittrock as our February Lucky Draw winner. Galen has been a resident of Cheyenne County for more than 30 years. He serves as the General Manager of the South Platte NRD and also farms on the side.

In his spare time, Galen enjoys improving wildlife habitat on his farm, experimenting with hybrid oak trees, and spending time outdoors hunting and fishing.

Galen received a $50 credit on his account for his prompt payment. If you would like to be included in our next drawing, and avoid a $5 delinquent fee, please send your payment before the 16th of the month.

For your convenience, we offer several payment options. Please give us a call at 308-254-5871, or visit wheatbelt.com, and select the Customer Engagement page for more information.

Maintaining Reliability cont'd from 3-A

Using Advanced Technology to Evaluate Pole Condition

To complete this work efficiently and accurately, we have recently partnered with a contractor that utilizes advanced inspection technology called Polux 5. This technology allows technicians to analyze the structural condition of wooden poles and identify internal deterioration that cannot be seen from the outside.

The inspection process typically includes:

- GPS verification of the pole location
- Photographic documentation of the pole and equipment
- Non-destructive testing of the wood structure
- Digital data collection for long-term asset management

These modern tools measure how wood resists a small test probe or sensor, which provides information about wood density and potential decay inside the pole. These measurements allow inspectors to detect cracks, cavities, or rot within the pole and estimate its remaining structural strength.

All inspection data is digitally recorded and analyzed to help our engineering and operations teams determine the best course of action.

Data-Driven Decisions for a Stronger Electric System

The data collected through our annual pole inspection program provides valuable insight into the condition of our distribution system. By reviewing inspection results each year, our team has the ability to identify poles that require replacement, and apply preventative treatments to extend pole life.

This data-driven approach helps us maintain a safe and reliable electric system while making responsible use of public power resources. In 2025 our team completed testing around the Lake McConaughy area as well as north of Lewellen and Oshkosh. 91 poles total were designated as "rotten" or needing to be replaced. This failure rate is well below the industry average of 4.6%. Our crews are actively replacing each of these poles and any other hardware that may need to be replaced. For the 2026 year we are slated to test much of the area in Deuel county north of Chappell and east of Lodgepole.

Investing in Reliability

Maintaining thousands of miles of electric infrastructure requires continuous planning and investment. Our annual pole testing program is one of the many ways we work behind the scenes to ensure the lights stay on for our communities.

By inspecting approximately 10% of our system each year, we maintain a proactive maintenance cycle that helps extend the life of our infrastructure, improve safety for our crews, and deliver reliable service to our customers.

For our customers, these inspections may simply look like a contractor walking from pole to pole along a road or field. But the information collected during those inspections plays a critical role in protecting the electric system that powers our communities every day.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY
TIP OF THE MONTH

As we prepare for the seasonal shift, remember to set your ceiling fan rotation accordingly. In winter months (or whenever your home heating system is running), fan blades should rotate clockwise, which produces an updraft that pushes warm air down. In summer months (or whenever your home cooling system is running), blades should rotate counterclockwise, which produces a downdraft or windchill effect that makes you feel cooler. When used correctly, ceiling fans can boost comfort and allow you to adjust the thermostat a few degrees for energy savings.

Source: energy.gov

Improving Reliability Near Lisco

By: Rollie Waite, *Manager of Operations*

Wheat Belt Public Power District recently completed a project replacing approximately three miles of insulators on a power line north of Lisco.

In the early to mid-1980s, several of Wheat Belt's lines were constructed using Knox brand insulators. At the time, Knox was a widely used manufacturer; however, it was later discovered that some of these insulators had a tendency for the porcelain to crack near the top. Over time, these cracks can worsen and eventually cause the top portion of the insulator to break off, which can lead to outages.

Unfortunately, several thousand of these insulators were installed before this issue became known. In recent years, Wheat Belt crews have been working to identify locations where Knox insulators exist and replace them in a systematic manner.

Some power lines were built entirely with Knox insulators, while others contain a mixture of manufacturers, which can make the replacement process more complex and time-consuming. Despite these challenges, Wheat Belt continues to proactively replace these aging components as they are identified.

We understand that outages can be frustrating for our customers, and projects like this are part of our ongoing effort to improve system reliability and reduce the likelihood of future service interruptions.

Wheat Belt Linemen....Ready When It Matters Most!

Top to bottom L to R
Rollie Waite, Manager of Operations; Chase Armstrong, Journeyman Lineman; Levi Berndt, Line Equipment Technician; Xander Burns, Apprentice Lineman; Wesley Christensen, Apprentice Lineman; Kevin Coss, Foreman; Austin Dormann, Apprentice Lineman; Patrick Hansen, Apprentice Lineman; Greg Jenkins, Foreman; Cory Lundgren, Journeyman Lineman; Ethan Mientka, Apprentice Lineman; Jordan Peters, Journeyman Lineman; Travis Secrest, Foreman; Dan Westman, Foreman and Anthony Savala, Apprentice/Intern.

Kevin Coss Graduates from NREA Leader Essentials Program

Wheat Belt Public Power District is proud to announce that Kevin Coss, Oshkosh Area Foreman, has successfully graduated from the Nebraska Rural Electric Association (NREA) Leader Essentials Program, instructed by LDR.

The LDR Leadership Essentials Program is designed as a transformative journey for individuals stepping into or strengthening their leadership roles. The curriculum combines self-awareness, critical thinking, and practical leadership skills across 15 four-hour learning blocks. Core areas of focus include emotional intelligence, decision-making, team dynamics, performance coaching, and leading with positive influence.

Throughout the program, participants engage in immersive sessions featuring real-world case studies, interactive discussions, and hands-on activities. The course equips leaders with the tools necessary to apply leadership principles effectively within their organizations while maintaining a strong commitment to safety and performance excellence.

Kevin's completion of this program reflects his dedication to professional growth and to serving Wheat Belt's employees and customers with strong, forward-thinking leadership. His expanded skills and knowledge will continue to strengthen the Oshkosh area operations and support Wheat Belt's mission of delivering reliable service with safety and integrity at the forefront.

Wheat Belt congratulates Kevin on this significant accomplishment and looks forward to the positive impact of his continued leadership.

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Our Mission

Deliver electricity safely, reliably and efficiently.