



# FAST FACTS

## Improve Federal Land Management Policies to Strengthen Grid Reliability

**Issue:** Electric cooperative 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 to provide affordable electricity to rural Americans. Proactive rights-of-way upkeep that includes vegetation management to ensure reliable delivery of electricity is a uniform utility industry practice adopted by electric co-ops across the country.

However, outdated and inconsistent federal land management policies make it more difficult and costly for electric co-ops to get approval for rights-of-way management to prevent power outages, protect human life and limit impacts to natural resources on or near federal property. Federal reforms are needed to cut red tape and make it easier for electric co-ops to manage vegetation to limit downed power lines, prevent catastrophic fires and respond to emergencies.

**Background:** To meet federal and state reliability standards, electric co-ops 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 extend service to the "last mile" for people in the most remote and rugged areas, co-op 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 for co-ops 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 co-op 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, which can be held responsible for damages if a hazardous tree or other vegetation comes into contact with a power line and causes a fire before the Forest Service or BLM give the co-op 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. However, these issues remain unresolved without a legislative remedy.

The Electricity Reliability and Forest Protection Act, introduced by Rep. Doug LaMalfa (R-CA) 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 immediately adjacent area.

**NRECA Position:** Electric co-ops 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 for electric co-ops to maintain safety and reliability by performing needed vegetation management to prevent threats to power lines and respond to emergencies. **Urge your Members of Congress to cosponsor and pass the Electricity Reliability and Forest Protection Act to ensure grid reliability and consistent access to power line rights-of-way on federally-owned lands.**

**For more information:**

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