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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

## **Washington Electric Co-op General Manager Patty Richards to Depart January 2022**

*East Montpelier, Vt:* Patty Richards, who has led Washington Electric Cooperative (WEC) as its general manager since 2013, has announced she will step down January 14, 2022.

“It has been a wonderful experience leading this innovative and 100 percent renewable electric cooperative over the past eight years. It has been a privilege and honor to serve WEC’s members. I am proud of all that we have accomplished as a small yet mighty co-operative utility,” said Richards. “It has been a special honor to work alongside WEC’s dedicated staff, who are tireless in their efforts to keep the power on in this rugged and rural terrain.”

Richards’ departure date will give her time to lead WEC through the initial stages of the rural electric cooperative’s role in a project to bring high speed internet fiber to underserved parts of its service area, as well as to wrap up other initiatives this year.

Most recently, as an essential service provider operating during the COVID-19 pandemic, Richards led her staff through an unprecedented health hazard, implementing safety protocols that have so far prevented any outbreaks at WEC.

Financially, WEC saw increased electricity sales in 2020, and also saw a steep rise in members struggling to pay for electric service. Under Richards’ compassionate and fiscally sound leadership, WEC staged a campaign to proactively connect with members experiencing pandemic-related financial hardship. Staff offset financial loss to the utility by helping members create individual budgets and apply for the state’s arrearage program. As a result, WEC was able to recoup \$214,000 in unpaid bills.

Other key achievements over Richards’ tenure include:

- Receiving the 2020 Distinguished Service Award from the Northeast Public Power Association (NEPPA), where Richards served as a board member and Vice Chair
- Transforming WEC members’ power outage experience with timely, responsive, and proactive communications and resources during outages
- Collaborating with members to implement a new rate structure that lowers the cost

per kilowatt hour to incentivize using electricity; a structure other Vermont utility may consider as a possible model to reduce emissions and use of fossil fuels

- Initiating action and adoption of a Climate Change policy by WEC's board of directors; the first policy statement of its kind from a Vermont electric utility
- More than doubling contributions to WEC's member-supported Community Fund, which supports small nonprofits working in WEC's service area
- Working with a team to build and operate a siloxane removal system at WEC's generation plant at Coventry Landfill, improving efficiency and production at the plant and lowering costs for members

"On behalf of WEC's board of directors and membership, I thank Patty for the energy and skills she has contributed to our Co-op over nearly a decade of service," said Barry Bernstein, president of WEC's board of directors. "Patty has the special ability to work with everybody, and she is widely respected by our lenders, state regulators, policymakers, utility industry associates and of course our membership. We appreciate and have greatly benefited from her years of leadership and vision."

"I am committed to give wings to the projects I promised members, including rolling out broadband, improving reliability and communication and finding innovative ways to reduce the capital costs to replace fossil fuel-powered devices with electric ones," pledged Richards. "I am excited to see what the future holds for WEC."

After her departure, Richards looks forward to more deeply exploring some of her interests, including traveling in a post-COVID world, training sled dogs and enjoying time with family and friends.

#### **About Washington Electric Cooperative:**

Washington Electric Cooperative (WEC) is a member-owned, not-for-profit electric utility founded in 1939. WEC serves approximately 10,800 member-owners in 41 towns throughout Washington, Orange, Caledonia and Orleans counties with power generated from 100 percent renewable sources. WEC is an equal opportunity provider and employer. For more information, please visit [washingtonelectric.coop](http://washingtonelectric.coop) or call 802-223-5245.

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