



Getting CVEA'S Right-of-Way Plan Right

Reprioritizing ROW Management at Copper Valley Electric

There are hundreds of thousands of trees along CVEA's 500 miles of distribution lines and 105 miles of transmission line, and no shortage of high winds and heavy, wet snowfall annually, forcing trees into power lines and causing power outages for Cooperative members. For CVEA line crews, restoring power in these conditions is a top priority—no matter the day or time.

The response begins immediately. Crews patrol, looking for the cause—sometimes along the highway, but often in remote or hard-to-reach areas. In winter, locating a single tree on a line can be difficult. While some outages are resolved quickly, others involve downed lines or damaged equipment that require time-consuming repairs, extending the time it takes to get the lights back on.

Reducing the negative impact of trees on the system is critical for maintaining and improving system reliability, a strategic priority of CVEA. For this reason, right-of-way (ROW) management is ongoing, and a significant amount of time and

money are spent on this effort each year. ROW management includes planning and scheduling to keep power lines clear of trees and debris to help prevent outages and maintain safe access for the line crew to perform required maintenance.

In the last several years, CVEA has invested heavily in ROW clearing, increasing spending since 2017 from roughly \$80k to \$800k annually. In 2024, the Co-op cleared:

- 12 miles of transmission line
- 18 miles of distribution line in the Copper Basin
- 9 miles of distribution line in Valdez

This is in addition to 8.5 miles of trimming work throughout the districts performed by CVEA line crews.

ROW clearing is one of CVEA's top priorities because it contributes significantly to system reliability. In 2024, 18 percent of outages were caused by trees. The majority of tree-related outages are caused by trees outside of the right of way. In 2024, less than five outages were caused by trees inside the right of way,



demonstrating that CVEA's right-of-way management efforts in the areas we can control are helping.

In 2025, the Cooperative updated its Right-of-Way Management Plan to improve efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and long-term reliability. The goal of the plan is to clear the entire system on a 10-year cycle, ensuring no area is missed and reducing the need for reactive maintenance in trouble areas. In the updated plan, contractors will provide regular, scheduled clearing on a 10-year cycle, while the CVEA line crew will trim trouble areas that have a high number of outages and respond to emergency and danger trees.

Schedules and clarifications on clearing standards and specifications have been updated to reflect this new goal. Other updates to the plan include clear definitions and standards for danger tree removal and cleanup efforts, maps of the scheduled areas by year and updated photos showing ROW clearance guidelines.

Additionally, changes to the plan included a new competitive bidding process that allowed the Cooperative to better evaluate contractors' prices and capabilities, saving the Co-op funds that

What is a Right of Way?

A right of way (ROW) is the use of private or government owned property covered by an agreement that allows utilities to construct and maintain their facilities in order to ensure reliability. Cooperative power lines are constructed within the ROWs. CVEA needs access on the ROW for the following reasons:

- Reclear brush and trees that could contact power lines
- Make emergency repairs
- Maintain existing lines and structures
- Add or replace transformers and other equipment when a new customer connects

Typical right-of-way clearing maintenance standards for CVEA are 100 feet for transmission lines, 20-30 feet for overhead distribution lines, and 30 feet for underground.



can be used to increase the number of miles cleared during the season.

Finally, as part of the updated plan, CVEA is committed to providing timely right-of-way updates to members. Notifications of the schedule and locations where clearing and trimming take place will occur.

A well-maintained ROW improves response times during outages and reduces their frequency. It allows crews to access damaged areas faster, clear trees more efficiently, and restore power to members more quickly. This gets the lights back on sooner and the line crew home more quickly and safely.

Improvements made to the Right-of-Way Management Plan in 2025 are already showing results, and CVEA is confident that continued commitment to ROW management will further improve system reliability

If you have questions regarding CVEA's Right-of-Way Management Plan, contact CVEA Operations Manager, Dirk Williams, at dwilliams@cvea.org.

Photos opposite and bottom left, courtesy of Top Notch