

Work crews furiously try to restore power

By Jomay Steen
Rapid City Journal

RAPID CITY, S.D. — The 1,400 people of Wanblee, Longvalley, Norris and Parmalee woke up in the dark again Nov. 12, as local electrical crews and 80 additional personnel from seven South Dakota counties and two different states helped Lacreek Electric of Martin replace downed power poles and transmission lines. South Dakota National Guard sent an 11-man team to help open roads for the electrical work crews.

Yet, they may have another 10 days before power will flow into their communities.

"Things are going, but they're going slow," said General Manager Wayne Sterkel of Lacreek Electric of Martin.

On Monday, Tribal President John Yellow Bird Steel sent out a news release declaring the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation to be in a State of Emergency, initiating all federal, state and county services be used to restore travel, power and emergency services to the residents of the reservation.

While the 600 power poles lost to the storm isn't anything to sneeze at, it is the more than 70 cross arms down on the transmission line that has slowed progress in restoring power. The transmission line is like an interstate highway that feeds the electricity coming into the system that is fed into local substations. Lose that system and there isn't any power to be gained by restoring power poles, he said.

"We're trying to get our transmission up and running. We do have crews setting up poles," Sterkel said.

Moreau Grand Electric Cooperative has an estimated 500 poles down, but uncooperative weather has moisture building up on the power lines and freezing causing new problems.

"We're starting to see repeat outages," said general manager Melissa Maher.

Maher has been impressed with the stamina of their electrical crews as well as their vendors.

"We have material coming in here around the clock," she said of the Timber Lake shop.

This morning 100 to 200 people will wake up to cold and darkness, but each day brings them closer to energizing the entire grid system.

"This is day five and some of our members haven't seen any power for all that time," Maher said. "We keep working away at it. We're making progress."

Monday night crews were expected to have the last 50 Vale customers' power restored, according to Mutch (pronounced Much) Usera, director of external affairs at Black Hills Power.

Last Wednesday, 7,000 Black Hills Power customers had lost services. Crews immediately began working to restore services, working long hours throughout the remaining week and weekend. Everyone worked safely and no injuries were reported, Usera said.

"This is the last day hopefully," he said.

He said that while power lines are now routinely buried with infrastructure and other utilities in subdivisions in Rapid City, there are several reasons why they are strung on power poles rather than buried.

"The cost," Usera said. The type of cable used to be buried would need heavier insulation along with different types of equipment to trench in the lines. Electrical companies would also need to gain right-of-way to move lines through roads, bridges and when crossing lakes.

"The way the line is designed would be changed, too," he said.

"The difficulty of terrain also plays a factor. In some parts of the Black Hills, it's very difficult to bury a line," he said.

Granted, rewiring power poles and setting them up is no picnic, yet, it is proven to be the simplest way to replace them.

"It is easier to get to the power lines when you can see them than when they're buried underground," Usera said.

Battle spotlights rights of American Indians

By Staci Hupp
Des Moines Register

DES MOINES, Iowa — James Ironshell has lived with his wife and daughters on the Meskwaki settlement for more than a decade. Now he's fighting tribal authorities who want to ban him from his home because he's from another tribe.

Authorities say Ironshell has violated a tribal ordinance that prohibits Meskwaki women from sharing a settlement home with men who are not Meskwaki.

Ironshell is a Rosebud Sioux. His wife, Eloise, is Meskwaki. Both say the ban amounts to racial discrimination.

"Not only is it saddening, it's really confusing," said James Ironshell, 49, a U.S. Army veteran. "This is 2008."

The dispute raises a legal question with implications that reach far beyond the settlement: Does the U.S. Constitution provide equal protection rights to American Indians as it does other U.S. citizens?

Ironshell's attorney says yes. Tribal officials say no. State officials are staying out of the dispute.

Legal experts say the case is rare because inter-tribal marriages are common nationwide.

But Ironshell's chances of getting relief from state or federal courts are slim because of tribal sovereignty, said Raymond Cross, a University of Montana law professor who studies American Indian rights.

"The U.S. Constitution does not apply to tribal governments," Cross said. "The reason for that is a practical one. Tribal governments were not part of the plan of union that formed the U.S. in 1787."

As a result, nearly all tribes have their own rule-making authority independent of federal, state and local laws.

The Meskwaki Nation's laws don't ban marrying outside the tribe, but a Meskwaki woman can't share a settlement home with a man who isn't a member of the tribe.

The conflict is rooted in settlement housing, said Roger Sanders, who runs the Meskwaki Nation's police department. Homes are owned and assigned by the tribe, not individual members.

"There's a limited number of houses available, and I think they want to maximize

their ability to assign houses to tribal members first," said Sanders, who is not a member of the tribe.

Sanders couldn't verify the Ironshells' claim that a Meskwaki man can live with a woman who doesn't belong to the tribe. Tribal leaders did not return telephone calls this week.

"All these white women who live here have more rights than I do," said Eloise Ironshell, a blackjack dealer at the Meskwaki Casino.

While some of the Meskwaki Nation's laws appear discriminatory to outsiders, Sanders said, they're no less binding.

"Because of their cultural values, the courts have said that discrimination is not illegal," Sanders said.

James Ironshell said the discrimination started 13 years ago, when he and his wife were newlyweds. The Ironshells have two daughters, Aileena, 12, and Abigail, 7.

James Ironshell has been arrested for trespassing twice, ticketed six times and thrown out of a tribal powwow. A sign once posted on the settlement said, "J. Ironshell: Go Home."

The trespassing charges were directed to the Tama

County attorney's office because the tribe lacked law enforcement at the time, said James Ironshell's attorney, Darrell Meyer.

Tama County officials dropped the charges because tribal witnesses never showed in court to testify against Ironshell, Meyer said. "They didn't want to set a precedent that if they showed up under subpoena, they didn't want to affect their claim of sovereignty," he said.

Since then, the tribe has created a police department and courts system.

Sanders said the new layer of law enforcement probably gave tribal leaders the confidence to issue an exclusionary order, for the first time, to Ironshell last week.

Meyer asked a district court judge to stop the order, which he said could enable tribal leaders to haul Ironshell to a U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs holding facility in Nebraska.

Attorneys on both sides were in private negotiations this week.

Meyer said Wednesday that he will drop the district court petition and work through the tribal court system if Meskwaki leaders agree to delay the

ban until the case is closed.

Ironshell will sue in federal court if he loses the tribal case, Meyer said.

He acknowledged that federal courts have dodged similar cases in the past because they lacked jurisdiction, but "I think that issue is going to have to be revisited," he said.

Cross, the law professor, said the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled before on a tribe's exclusion of a non-member who lived on a settlement with his family.

In that case, the man was accused of assaulting both a tribal officer and a federal peace officer, Cross said. The justices rejected the man's double jeopardy claim because he was convicted in both tribal and federal courts.

Ironshell has no criminal history other than the failed trespassing charges.

He said he won't leave the settlement. He's taking community college classes full time, has a long court battle ahead of him - and he has a family.

"The girls would be torn apart," said Eloise Ironshell, her voice breaking. "They live through stress every day wondering if their dad is going to be home."

Oil jackpot



Associated Press

A new oil well operates on the outskirts of Parshall, N.D., Sept. 24. The drilling frenzy in North Dakota's oil patch has transformed this once-dying town on the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation. Now, a company is eyeing another well that will aim directly beneath the city, and many residents are hopeful they are atop a jackpot.

Green named new director of Native American programs

By Patricia Ecker
Mt. Pleasant Morning Sun

MT. PLEASANT, Mich. — Since August 2007, a member of the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians has been serving as interim director of Native American Programs for Central Michigan University, and now her position has been made permanent.

On Oct. 21, 34-year-old Colleen Green of Remus was appointed to continue her working with the 198 self-identified Native American students who attend CMU, and she has been coordinating this month's Native American Heritage month activities.

Green earned her Bachelors of Science in Education in 2007, and she is currently in the Educational Leadership Masters Program at CMU.

"It is really challenging for students when they are one of very few students of their own race in a classroom, knowing that they are expected to be the spokesperson for their whole group," Green said. "I still get that today, as the only person of color in my classes."

Green said the pressure to be the spokesperson for your entire race is very challenging, and that she has learned handle situations by beginning with the phrase, "this is my perspective" when discussing issues dealing with Native Americans.

"We have two Native student organizations now," Green said. "The one is brand new this fall, the American Indian Society and Engineering Society (and the North American Indian Student Organization)."

"They are very outgoing organiza-

tions."

Green said the month of Nov. is a time to celebrate the intertribal cultures and to educate the public through programs and classroom presentations.

"This month, there are many opportunities to learn about the heritage, history, art, and traditions of American Indian people," Green said. "We recognize this month for the sole purpose to educate and to give a small glimpse into our culture."

Green said the Native student organizations will be helping the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe with their Angel Tree project that sponsors families in need from the Oglala Sioux Tribe in Pine Ridge, South Dakota who are arguably the poorest Native American community in North America.

"We look forward to helping the Tribe every year," Green said.

Casino guest's winnings can help local charities

By Patricia Ecker
Mt. Pleasant Morning Sun

MT. PLEASANT, Mich. — For the next three Saturdays in November, guests of the Soaring Eagle Casino and Resort will have an opportunity to give what they get.

The "Thanks and Giving" promotion offers the chance to win cash from a "jumbo scratch card" if they're name is drawn for the possibility of winning up to \$3,000.

"It's a way for guests to give to a charity, and to give to those in need," Advertising and Public Relations Manager for the casino Mike Dini said. "The kickoff was Nov. 1 with drawings happening hourly from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m."

Dini said that guests earn points by playing, and their names are added to the weekly drawing for the opportunity to donate to one of eight Tribal Council selected local charities.

"We thought it was a nice way to give back," Dini said. "It feels good any time when you give back to your community."

"And we want to do this for our guests."

The casino will match the value of the guests scratch card winnings, and the guest can make a selection to give to one of the following charities: Isabella County American Red Cross, Woodland Hospice, the Special Olympics Michigan, the Isabella County Soup Kitchen, the Isabella County and Clare County Toys for Tots programs, the Tribe's Angel Tree project which supports needy families of the Oglala Sioux Tribe in Pine Ridge, South Dakota, the Anishinabe Athletic Youth Association which supports and encourages Tribal youth in school sports, and the United Tribes for Christ.

"This is the first time we are doing this," Tribal spokesman Joe Sowmick said. "In this case, we're looking at an effort to give back some dollars, and for people to participate in giving back to the community."

WinStar Casino offering gas incentives to employees

KTEN

OKLAHOMA — As you know, gas prices plummeted over the past couple of weeks, staying under \$2 in our area -- for the moment. But, even with that relief, one local employer is taking it a step further by footing your gas bill. KTEN's Jhen Kordela has more.

Prices at the pump have gone from

maddening to manageable recently, but what if you didn't have to pay anything at all? Even though we're looking at gas prices now from a different perspective, it still cost money to get to work. Well, maybe not for some employees at WinStar casino in Thackerville, OK.

"WinStar is a rather remote location," Mark Reasoner, marketing man-

ager at WinStar, "and for any of the employees making under \$50,000, it starts at \$25 per paycheck after taxes, and it goes up, depending on how far away you live. It goes all the way up to 50, 75 from there."

Right now, the casino is expanding and officials there are sharing the wealth with North Texas and Southern Oklahoma. Officials at WinStar say

they came up with the idea for gas vouchers even before fuel reached \$4s a gallon, hoping to recruit the right people and willing to reach further to get them. They're even offering part-time employees full benefits.

The company's already hired 350 employees in the past couple of months, and it's looking to bring in 350 more.