

Powerlines, Trees, and other Burning Questions

Trees are our number one cause of outages. Vegetation that grows too close to lines can cause outages, start fires, or create hazardous conditions. The PUD and trimming crews work hard to maintain a safe and reliable electrical grid.

What happens when a branch falls on power lines?

When a wind-blown branch lands on power lines and becomes energized it creates a path for thousands of volts to travel through. Both the branch and line begin to burn and melt. Pieces of branch can fall to the ground or, as many witness, can arc brilliantly in a flash, sending sparks in all directions.

The melted power line falls to the ground, draping across any object below (typically underbrush) often with the appearance of being de-energized. Current can easily flow directly into any object it touches. Vegetation can provide a path to ground with areas on the energized plant smoldering or smoking. This tree-line contact results in a localized outage, but also presents a major fire hazard.

Net Meter Bank Resets in Early-April

Net meters are bi-directional meters allowing customers to both use power from the grid and send power back to the grid. There are currently 624 net meters in Jefferson County. Net meters measure how much power comes in and how much goes out. When the PUD reads the meter, the customer is charged the difference between the two readings. If the customer generates more than they use they will receive a credit. Credits are "banked" and applied to future bills. Banked credits expire and reset yearly in April.

Why does the PUD cut back trees so severely?

Trimming branches and removing trees within the protective zone (shown on back page) is essential for service reliability. The tree species can determine trimming requirements. At minimum the zone is 10' either side of lines and 15' above lines. Trimming and removal extends to ground level to reduce fire potential and for line crew access to poles.

How does the weather affect our utility?

According to NOAA, 2023 was the hottest year on record since 1850. Warmer average temps combined with below-average snowpack (51% of average) and springtime rain means explosive early season vegetation growth followed by dry conditions.

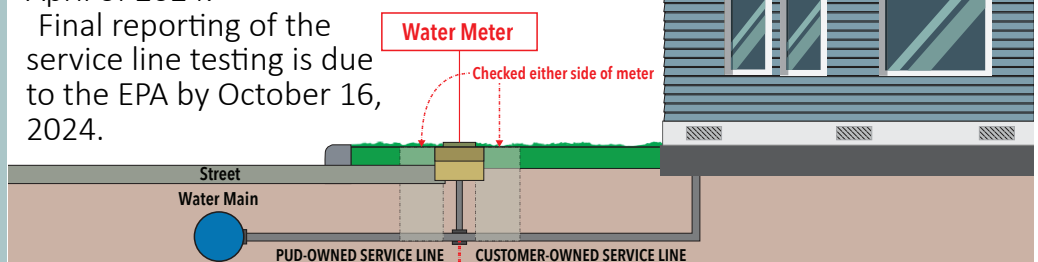
Extremely dry conditions greatly increase wildfire risk. With nearly 400 miles of overhead power lines throughout the county, the PUD must aggressively trim and remove hazard trees to ensure the utility right of ways remain clear.

Lead Service Line Study Underway

In an effort to significantly lower the risk of exposure to lead and copper in our nation's drinking water, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is requiring all water utilities to perform a Lead Service Line Inventory and provide the results.

JPUD has never used lead in our service lines from the main to the meter, however, homes built before 1986 could potentially have lead in the customer-owned section of line between the water meter and the home. The PUD will oversee randomized spot checks of service lines beginning in April of 2024.

Final reporting of the service line testing is due to the EPA by October 16, 2024.



Does the PUD have a trimming cycle?

Yes. We work on a 7-year cycle with the goal of trimming approx 50 miles of right of way each year. This cycle helps minimize line contacts before crews return.

Why cut trees that are not touching lines?

Branches present a hazard even when not touching a line. During windy weather, branches can contact lines, create arcing that may lead to a fire. Branches within and outside the protected zone can break and land on lines. This creates an outage and potentially melts through lines due to overcurrent.

Do crews remove trees as well?

Yes. We hire certified contractors trained to naturally prune or remove trees. When pruning will not work, or if a tree is directly beneath lines and more than 4.5' tall or deemed a 'hazard tree', the tree will be removed. Hazard trees can extend well beyond the PUD right of way. PUD staff work to identify standing dead trees within utility easements and beyond. We also work with property owners on hazard tree removal. Nearly 300 hazard trees are planned for removal in 2024.



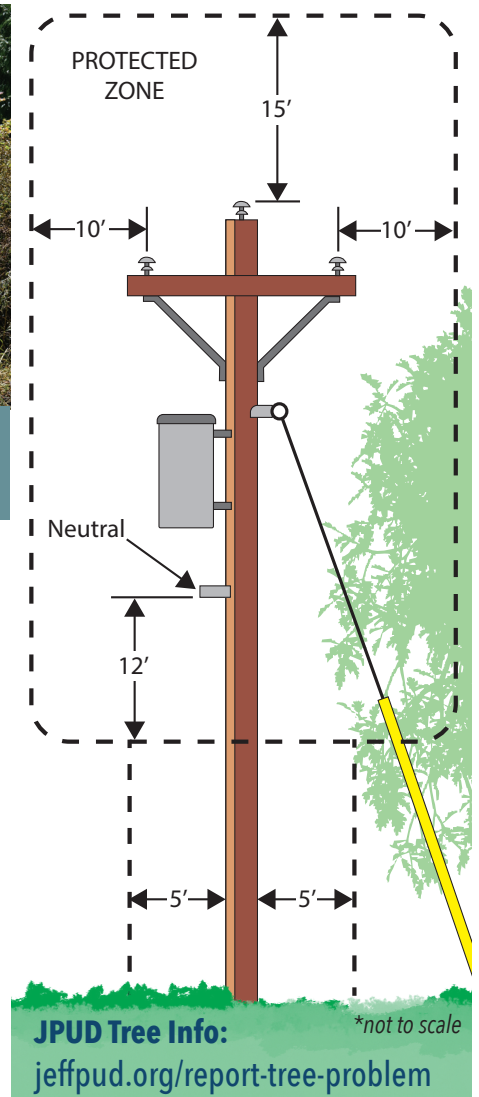
Line crew run new wire after a hazard tree beyond the utility right-of-way severed a line, igniting a brush fire.

Does the PUD have a fire plan?

The PUD is building its Wildfire Mitigation Plan (WMP) to work in-step with its tree trimming policy. Official plans will be submitted to the state by Oct. 31, 2024.

What happens with trimmed trees?

Planned trimmings will be chipped and removed. Trees larger than 8" in diameter will be cut into manageable pieces and will remain on site for local use. When trees cause an outage and are removed from lines, debris will be left for disposal by the property owner.



JPUD Tree Info: jeffpud.org/report-tree-problem

ACP Begins Program Winddown

The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) provided discounts for internet service to income-qualified homes. If you receive benefits from the ACP, please be aware that the funds are ending soon. The final fully funded month is April 2024.

Learn more on the Federal Communications Commission's ACP website: fcc.gov/acp

Feasibility Study Funding Awarded

The PUD has been awarded \$172,000 toward a feasibility study to explore in-line hydro power generation. The concept looks at adding three 1-megawatt turbines to water pipelines supplying PT. Generated power would supply a proposed battery backup system for use critical infrastructure such as hospitals and county EOC.



PLANNING A HOME UPGRADE? Rebates are available!

The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) provides rebate incentives to encourage energy savings for homes and businesses. Reduced demand through energy saving helps offset the need for constructing costly new generation facilities. JPUD receives funding from BPA every two years to help customers afford energy saving improvements. Visit our rebates page under the Sustainability tab on jeffpud.org to learn more and see if you qualify today!

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