

Thursday, February 4, 2010

Co-op Offers \$5,000 Reward

By John Severance

SOCORRO – The Socorro Electric Cooperative along with Tri-State Generation and Transmission Co-op are offering a \$5,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the person or persons responsible for stealing copper from power poles in the Tierra Grande area in Socorro and Valencia Counties. Co-op general manager Polo Pineda said close to 200 poles have been vandalized in northern Socorro County. Somebody had cut the ground wire and removed the copper wire in the pole, which has a street value of \$600, according to Pineda. In all, the loss to the co-op has spent \$50,000 to replace the poles that had been vandalized. Pineda said the copper will be replaced by copper clad, a metal that is coated with copper, which has no street value.

“We had a couple of leads. Somebody said they saw a blue mini-van with no plates and the other saw a maroon mini van. All the authorities have been contacted.”

Richard Lopez, the engineering and operations manager at the co-op, said pole grounding is a vital part of the electric service grid. Those who are stealing the wire are putting themselves at great risk of getting electrocuted.”

“We need to have a detective run this down,” trustee Jack Bruton said.

New Mexico State Police are currently investigating the theft. If you have any information, contact New Mexico State Police or Lopez at the Socorro Electric Coop – 1-800-351-7575.

At the Jan, 27 meeting, trustee Donald Wolberg, once again, brought up conflict of interest issues in regards to co-op attorney Dennis Francish, who also represents the Continental Divide co-op.

“There are rules of professional conduct that guide us that specifically deal with conflict of interest,” Francish said.

Wolberg, though, insisted the co-op get some kind of agreement from an independent entity in regards to the attorney.

“My concern centers on potential conflicts involving both cooperatives directly or indirectly via possible projects, postures requiring the co-ops involved to be on different sides of any legal or regulatory issue; contracts with vendors or any entity which may require legal action or liabilities, and any of those legal or regulatory issues that I do not understand or know about but which may arise,” Wolberg said in an email Thursday night. “In such instances it may be required for the attorney involved to not take either side and recuse himself/herself. In this instance we would be required to contract another attorney. I am also concerned that an attorney representing more than one cooperative may/will be privy to confidential or proprietary information. “I am making no statement regarding capabilities, qualifications, reputation, etc., but I am simply expressing concern for possible conflicts of interest that might impact the SEC. For example, my concern in this matter vanishes if the attorney decides to represent only the SEC, and decides to not represent the other cooperative. My concern also lessens if there is an available formal opinion from an external source defining the issue of conflict of interest within the context of an entity such as the SEC.”

Francish was hired last year, but Wagner pointed out the SEC did not go through its usual vetting process.

“When Joanna Aguilar was hired, there were advertisements and we looked at resumes,” Wagner said. “In this case, we didn’t do this. The decision was made by Co-op president Mr. (Paul) Bustamante.”

Wolberg also discussed the possibility of an informational meeting for members, tentatively scheduled for March 27 at the Finley Gym, pending board approval. The meeting would allow members to ask questions of the trustees as a preview for the general meeting, which will be scheduled in April.

The agenda for the informational meeting was discussed during a committee meeting Monday, consisting of Wolberg, Leo Cordova and Milton Ulibarri. The agenda will be set, pending board approval.

Wolberg also set up an email address for members to discuss issues with the co-op trustees. The email address is sectellme@ gmail.com and Wolberg said he would answer every email.

In other business, the board:

- Unanimously passed a resolution that would sponsor Richard Lopez’s trip to Haiti to help build a substation in earthquake-devastated Haiti. Lopez was asked by the NRECA International and the trip would take two weeks. Originally Pineda told the board that Lopez was going to do this on his vacation time but Wolberg suggested

that Lopez should go on co-op time.

“There are still many variables on this effort so I do not have a lot of the details, “ Lopez said last week.

“Logistics will not be the best and the work will be hard. There are a lot of relief efforts going on and electricity as you know has grown to be a necessity for logistics itself. I have not been to Haiti, but I have helped build a substation with their neighbors in the Dominican Republic. I am really excited to go.”

- Passed a resolution that would let the co-op proceed with the four-year plan that was presented by Lopez last month.
- The co-op moved its next meeting to Feb. 9 instead of Feb. 10 because the new trustees have to travel to Atlanta for training.