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Co-op updates members at 2025 Annual Meeting

Wildfire Preparedness and Artificial Intelligence top reports

GRANTS, N.M. – Wildfire preparedness was a hot topic at Saturday’s annual Continental Divide membership meeting.

During his presentation, the co-op’s Chief Executive Officer, Robert E. Castillo, shared a slide showing high-fire-risk areas in Cibola and McKinley counties identified by the Forestry Division of the state’s Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department.

“The recent devastating fires in Los Angeles have reinforced the reality that wildfires can occur anywhere – rural or urban,” Castillo said.

His comment echoed true on Sunday when several homes in Grants were destroyed by fire. “I want to assure you our Cooperative is committed to advancing protection policies and practices that safeguard the communities we serve,” Castillo said.

He mentioned the Wildfire Prepared Act, signed into law earlier this month by Gov. Michelle Grisham. This act establishes a fund to support state entities that offer technical assistance, training, and grant funding to property owners to help them increase their resiliency to wildfires.

Castillo also described a pilot program the co-op is pursuing that uses satellite mapping, historical data, and AI modeling to improve and cost-effectively manage vegetation around power lines.

“The end objective of our Intelligent Vegetation Management System is a resilient grid where infrastructure design, maintenance practices and operational protocols work together to prevent catastrophic wildfires while ensuring reliable power delivery, he said.

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AI, or “artificial intelligence,” is the science of making machines capable of learning to perform tasks that have traditionally required human intelligence. It is expected to play a pivotal role in how power is generated, distributed and consumed in the future, leading to increased efficiency, sustainability and resilience.

With the help of AI, Continental Divide will someday be able to analyze historical data and perform real-time monitoring to predict equipment failures and other issues to address potential problems, reducing downtime and maintenance costs proactively. AI will also improve load balancing and enhance demand response, leading to greater efficiency and reliability,” Castillo said.

Continental Divide Board President Keith Gottlieb also addressed AI in his report, stating that federal and state officials need to focus now – more than ever – on smart energy policies that expedite new generation, transmission and distribution systems and include new supply options like small modular nuclear reactors, advanced geothermal and storage to satisfy the power needs of the AI data centers going up across the country.

“Our board and management continue participating in state, regional and national meetings to monitor developments that could affect our ability to provide cost-effective power and sound service to our members,” Gottlieb said.

He added that inflation continues to drive up energy costs across the country. During his presentation, Gottlieb shared a slide that showed how inflation has increased the cost of equipment used to build and maintain the electrical grid. “In some cases, prices for equipment like transformers, underground wire and wooden poles have doubled in the past four years. And supply chain pressures remain for some equipment,” he said.

Gottlieb called Saturday’s annual meeting to order inside the new gym at Grants High School. At that time, registration for members and the annual Cibola General Hospital Health Fair began immediately.

Continental Divide did not take any official business actions during the business meeting. The co-op registered 426 members and needed 539 to establish a quorum.

Incumbent board members ran unopposed and retained their trustee seats. They included Mike Chambers of District 1; Claudio Romero of District 3 and Lloyd Ortega of District 4.

There were no bylaw amendments on the ballot.

Toward the end of the business meeting, Gottlieb announced that the co-op's governing board held a special meeting in February and voted unanimously to inform the co-op's membership of its intention to "redistrict," or redraw the geographical boundaries of its service territory.

"The bylaws that govern our co-op require this board to review and reconstitute the districts periodically to ensure that members maintain fair and equal representation. Growth in portions of our service territory necessitates these changes. In addition, we have tried unsuccessfully to fill the vacant board seat in District 8 since the passing of its previous representative, Mr. Lyle Adair, in December 2020," Gottlieb said.

Nathan Paden, a partner in auditor Bolinger, Segars, Gilbert & Moss, LLP, reported a clean bill of financial health for Continental Divide with a total revenue of \$67.9 million in 2024, compared to \$68.7 million in 2023. Total expenses last year were \$68.3 million, compared to \$65.8 million in 2023.

The winner of the grand prize drawing for \$1,500 was Larry Alires.

The report can be accessed online at cdec.coop. It will also be published in the July edition of *enchantment* magazine, which is mailed to the co-op's nearly 18,000 members.

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