

# PEA LINE CLEARANCE AND FORESTRY COMMITTEE

by Peter E. Spangler

**Abstract.** The Line Clearance and Forestry Committee of the Pennsylvania Electric Association was formed in September 1984 to discuss, study, and review vegetation management research and practices for line clearance to improve electric reliability, operating economy and safety through the application of professional, arboricultural practices including tree pruning, herbicide use and other related activities. The committee consists of representatives from each of the major investor-owned electric utility companies operating and maintaining facilities within Pennsylvania. The objectives of the committee are to: 1) conduct informational activities to increase public understanding of vegetation management within electric line rights-of-way; 2) give the electric utility industry within Pennsylvania a single voice on matters of vegetation management; and 3) promote continual exchange of useful information between electric utilities within Pennsylvania.

The purpose of this paper is to introduce you to the Line Clearance and Forestry Committee (LC&FC) of the Pennsylvania Electric Association (PEA), its function and objectives, history and other information. You may find some of the information helpful if you wish to establish a communication network among electric utilities within your state. In order to understand the LC&FC, it is necessary to understand that this committee is one of 28 standing committees within the PEA. An explanation of the PEA will help clarify how each committee interacts within the PEA.

## PEA Organization

The PEA had its inception when the founder, Mr. L.H. Conklin, the President of West Penn Power invited all power and light companies to discuss the development of a statewide organization. Ten companies sent representatives to Harrisburg on January 15, 1908. A year later, twenty more companies joined the association.

Today all 11 investor-owned electric utilities in Pennsylvania are members of the PEA (Table 1). Each member of the Association is a regulated public utility corporation engaged in transmitting or distributing electric energy for light, heat, and power within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

These companies supply 98 percent of the state's electric power and serve more than 4.7 million customers.

The PEA is governed and policy is set by an Executive Committee having full supervision and control of its affairs. The Executive Committee consists of one representative from each member company from which a chairman is elected to serve a one-year term. The association and staff officers are elected at the PEA annual meeting in September during which the new chairman formally assumes his position as presiding officer of the association. Management of the day-to-day affairs is the responsibility of the President, the association's principal staff officer and a member of the Executive Committee.

The PEA staff is headquartered in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania within one block of the state Capitol. The staff's purpose is to carry out the objectives of the association, provide service to member companies, and provide liaison between member companies and many Commonwealth of Pennsylvania departments of agencies.

The headquarters staff tracks legislation and regulations introduced in Pennsylvania and provides an analysis of pending legislation. Positions on the legislation are coordinated with member companies through each member company's legislative liaison person. When a common single position can be taken by all member companies, the PEA often provides testimony and other information to the Pennsylvania Assembly and state agencies on the proposed legislation and regulations.

A regular liaison is maintained by the PEA headquarters staff with the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission resulting in reports on meetings and significant developments that may affect the industry. The Department of Environmental Resources and the Pennsylvania Energy Office are also monitored.

**PEA Objectives**

The PEA Objectives may be summarized as follows:

- To promote common interests of member companies in more efficient generation, transmission and distribution of electricity, and in more harmonious relations with customers, government, and regulatory bodies by the continual exchange of information as well as inter-company cooperation and communication.
- To conduct informational activities designed to increase public understanding of the investor-owned electric utility industry.
- To give the electric utility industry in Pennsylvania a single voice on all matters that affect the industry as a whole.
- To act as a central informational resource for member companies and state government.

One of the primary purposes of the PEA is to provide a means for the exchange of information between member companies. This is accomplished primarily through the committee organization. There are now 28 standing committees involving over 300 member company representatives. These committees are grouped into four sections: Accounting, Consumer and Energy Services, Engineering, General, and also three special committees: Environment, Energy Education, and Communications. (See Figure 1.)

To enable better communication and liaison within the association, each section has a member of the Executive Committee serving as its advisor. Each section has a chairman and vice-chairman, one of which attends the committee meetings.

**LC&FC History**

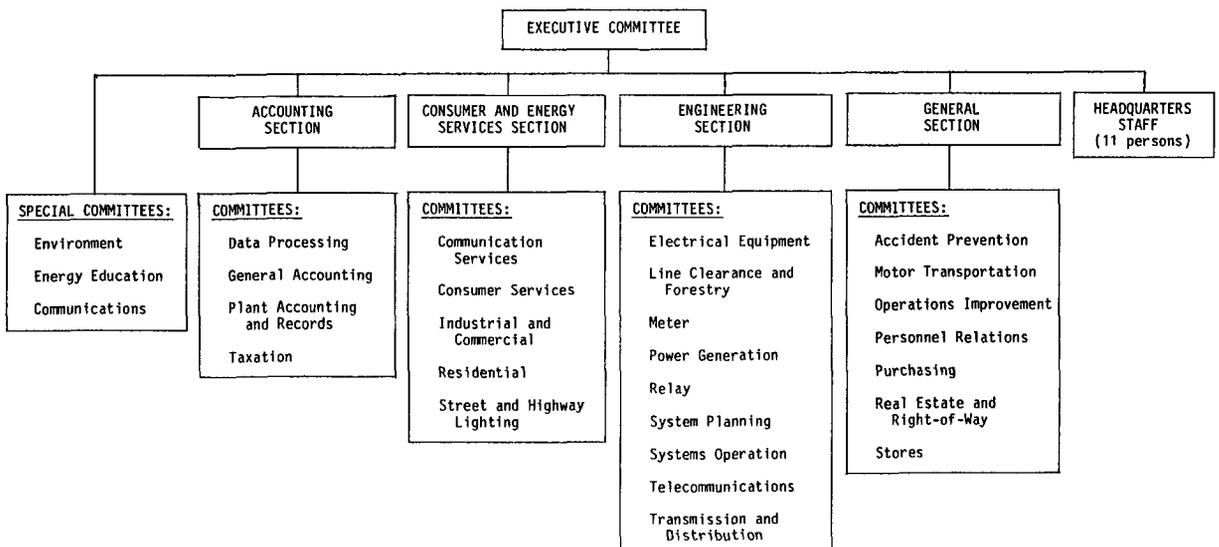
Since the early 1970's many of the Pennsylvania utility foresters have seen a need for a special committee within the PEA which would offer the opportunity to exchange ideas and transfer information concerning right-of-way vegetation management. The PEA Executive Committee did not recognize the need to establish the Line Clearance and Forestry Committee (LC&FC) until

**Table 1. Pennsylvania Electric Association Member Companies**

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Citizens Electric Company
Duquesne Light Company
Metropolitan Edison Company
Pennsylvania Electric Company
Pennsylvania Power & Light Company
Pennsylvania Power Company
Philadelphia Electric Company
Pike County Light & Power Company
UGI Corporation
Wellsboro Electric Company
West Penn Power Company

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**Figure 1. Pennsylvania Electric Association Organization**

after the Consumer Advocate of the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission challenged West Penn Power's right to use aerial application of herbicides on rights-of-way in response to objections filed by two landowners.

In 1982 West Penn Power exercised the rights contained in its right-of-way agreement and made helicopter application of herbicides to an inaccessible right-of-way over the objection of the property owner. As a result, the press and TV coverage gave the Consumer Advocate an opportunity to present an image of helping the rate payer/property owner. This resulted in the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (PUC) holding hearings before an administrative law judge which were highly publicized in newspapers, TV, and radio. One of the Consumer Advocate's tactics used during the hearings was to subpoena Penelec and Met Ed foresters to testify for the Consumer Advocate since these Pennsylvania utilities elected not to use helicopter application methods. That governmental body used the divide and conquer approach to reach its objective. A statewide association keeps the lines of communication open between its members and permits understanding of each company's programs so that governmental rules, regulations, and legislation can be discussed, reviewed and acted upon by affected parties in order to obtain a fair and workable solution for all utilities.

The PUC hearings on the right-of-way spray issue brought together the investor-owned electric utility companies (11), the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association Cooperatives (14), utility contractors, and manufacturers of herbicides used to control right-of-way vegetation into a dedicated coalition to prevent a herbicide application method from being legislated out of existence. In June 1983, through the efforts of Walt Betsch of Dow Chemical and others a field trip was conducted on a right-of-way vegetation control test area located near Port Matilda, PA. Drs. W.C. Bramble and W.R. Byrnes explained the test area (established and studied since 1953) noting the ecological benefits of using herbicides and various application methods. A representative from each utility was assigned a station at which he explained and demonstrated one of the current herbicide application techniques ranging from stump spray to

helicopter application. This field trip was organized to 'show and tell' legislators, the Pennsylvania PUC, the Consumer Advocate, other state regulators, outdoor writers, the press, conservation organizations, and utility upper management what was being done to manage right-of-way vegetation. Through the efforts of Pennsylvania electric utilities, the Pennsylvania Electric Association, Pennsylvania Rural Electric Cooperatives, the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association, and chemical manufacturer representatives, some 90 people were briefed and shown what was being done on rights-of-way to ensure that a safe, reliable source of electrical energy is available to the public.

The controversy involving herbicide application and the successful field trip convinced the PEA Executive Committee that a need for a special committee on rights-of-way vegetation management did exist. On September 19 and 20, 1984, the LC&FC had its first meeting.

### **LC&FC Purpose and Objectives**

The Line Clearance and Forestry Committee's purpose is to discuss, study and review vegetation management research and practices for line clearance to improve electric reliability, operating economy and safety through the application of professional, arboricultural practices including tree pruning, herbicide use and other related activities.

In addition to the above mentioned purpose, the LC&FC objectives may be summarized as follows:

- To conduct informational activities designed to increase public understanding of vegetation management along and within electric line rights-of-way.
- To give the electric utility industry within Pennsylvania a single voice on matters of vegetation management.
- To promote continual exchange of useful information between electric utilities within Pennsylvania.
- To maintain one representative on the LC&FC from each electric utility company maintaining electric facilities within Pennsylvania.

The LC&FC functions within the PEA organization as previously mentioned. The LC&FC currently consists of nine members (Table 2). From the

nine committee members, a chairman and vice-chairman are selected for two-year terms. The vice-chairman normally progresses to chairman upon completion of the two-year term. Members of the committee consist of engineers and foresters and therefore, an effort is made to balance the leadership with at least one forester. Leadership is rotated among each of the member company representatives.

### LC&FC Meetings

Generally two meetings are held during the year—one in April or May and the second in September in conjunction with the PEA annual meeting. All committees meet either before or after the PEA annual meeting which offers the opportunity to attend the annual meeting and also have joint meetings with other committees having similar interests. A recent LC&FC meeting with the Real Estate Committee resulted in discussion on right-of-way agreement language, methods used to exercise agreement rights, right-of-way widths, danger trees, etc.

Committee meetings are unique in that the meetings or parts thereof may be open (anyone can attend) or closed (attendance limited to committee members only). The closed session offers an opportunity to discuss and debate subjects among committee members which would only interest or impact electric utilities in Pennsylvania. Recent examples are the revision of Pennsylvania Erosion Control Law (land clearing) and proposed rules and regulations being drafted by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (rights-of-way category).

Open meetings are held periodically when the committee feels there is new material or information that should be made available to the 130 people on the LC&FC mailing list. Subjects for open meetings have included maintenance of standing wood poles, chemicals in the right-of-way environment, tree replacement as an alternative to tree trimming for line clearance, two line clearance seminars (covering wildlife benefits, tree growth regulators, herbicide effects on plants and animals and tree trimming safety), an educational symposium on right-of-way vegetation management (featuring Drs. Bramble and Byrnes research area), and most recently a briefing on a municipal

tree restoration program. In general one committee member is assigned as program chairman for each meeting on a rotating basis. He develops the program theme with concurrence of the committee leadership.

### LC&FC Benefits

The establishment of an organization such as the LC&FC is beneficial in that topics of current concern can be addressed in a timely manner through the meeting process or through letters to committee members and to the entire mailing list as the need dictates.

The year 1988 has seen an exceptional amount of activity on the legislative scene as well as rules and regulations. The chairman has requested that members make their voices heard by writing comments concerning:

1. Pennsylvania issues
  - A. Erosion control measures that are more restrictive as a result of changing definition from earth-moving activities to "earth disturbance"—PA Dept. of Environmental Resources.
  - B. New rules & regulations being drafted in response to new pesticide legislation—PA Dept. of Agriculture.
  - C. Proposed HB 2213 requiring prescribed advance notification procedures for pesticide application in Pennsylvania.
2. National issues
  - A. Groundwater protection program—EPA
  - B. Endangered species protection program—EPA

**Table 2. Line Clearance and Forestry Committee (1988-1989)**

<i>Member</i>	<i>Company</i>
P.E. Spangler, Chairman	West Penn Power Company
M.E. Bablerchak, Vice-Chairman	UGI Corporation
R.H. Mider	New York State Electric & Gas Corp.
J.P. Mikulecky	Pennsylvania Power & Light Company
C.J. Olenik	Pennsylvania Electric Company
R.J. Sikora	Duquesne Electric Company
D.E. Thomas	Pennsylvania Power Company
E.S. Ulrich	Metropolitan Edison Company
R.H. Wells	Philadelphia Electric Company

- C. Local political body control of pesticide regulation—U.S. Senator Chafee (S-1524)

### Summary

The Line Clearance and Forestry Committee of the Pennsylvania Electric Association offers its members opportunities to exchange ideas, programs and research involving various activities associated with vegetation management methods, materials and equipment in order to improve electric reliability, operating economy and safety of electric distribution and transmission facilities. The committee strives to increase public understanding of vegetation management within electric line rights-of-way, attempts to speak with a single voice on matters of vegetation management, and promotes continual exchange of information between electric utilities within Pennsylvania.

This discussion of the LC&FC suggests one of many ways to establish a network of key persons having responsibilities for electric line right-of-way vegetation management within state boundaries.

Utilities in other states have used organizations such as the International Society of Arboriculture to accomplish similar results. Having such an organization in place, along with good working relationships, results in quick attention to problems and the establishment of a prompt course of action. Expedient, organized, and thorough action of the membership can be very effective in obtaining a fair and equitable resolution of issues affecting electric utility line clearance programs.

### Literature Cited

1. Anonymous, August 1987. An Introduction to the Pennsylvania Electric Association. Pennsylvania Electric Association, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

*Chairman, Line Clearance and Forestry Committee  
Pennsylvania Electric Association  
West Penn Power Company  
800 Cabin Hill Drive  
Greensburg, PA 15601*

### Abstract

HIGGANBOTHAM, J.S. 1987. **New woody plants offer fresh landscape options.** Am. Nurseryman 165(9): 88-92, 94, 96, 98.

Each nursery, arboretum or university introducing new plants hopes to capture a niche in a competitive market. It is difficult to predict what will catch the fancy of the public. The offerings discussed in this article are about to enter the arena. They come from arboreta and nurseries and they are in various stages of the introduction process. Some are searching for commercial producers. A check of North American universities known for plant introductions disclosed a good deal of breeding and testing activity. However, none of the university horticulturists was ready to announce the results nationally.