



# Delivering reliability during a rough winter

To say winter was challenging this year is an understatement. From record cold temperatures to consistent snow fall, our service area experienced, and continues to experience extreme weather conditions.

On Thursday afternoon, March 14, the list of South Dakota towns experiencing an outage was longer than any of us ever want to hear: Wagner, Yankton, Mitchell, Springfield, Avon, Letcher, Virgil, Wessington, Hitchcock, Miller, Redfield, Kransburg, Goodwin, Bemis, Mellette, Warner and St. Lawrence.

Across the service territories in South Dakota and Nebraska, severe weather from what meteorologists were calling a “bomb cyclone” wreaked havoc on our lines. As blizzard conditions moved into parts of South Dakota and Nebraska, with blowing snow packing roadways and making travel treacherous, heavy rain caused flooding in eastern parts of both states.

“We did preparedness work in advance across the state,” said Brad Wenande, operations manager for the South Division in South Dakota.

The teams made sure trucks were stocked and ready, and employees were in communication with local authorities and contractors who could help get around the service territory should the snow and/or flood water create the need, he said.

“We deployed linemen to Chamberlain in anticipation of what was then forecasted to be an extended ice event,”

Brad said. “Those guys spent a few nights away from home to be ready to respond for our customers there. Fortunately, the icing event didn’t materialize as predicted but they still responded to customer needs while there.”

The Yankton crew was hit hard by flooding.

“I’ve been in town for 30 years, and I’ve never seen the mall flooded like that,” said Yankton journeyman lineman Mark Walter. The roads were all closed, so the crews were unable to get customers back in power right away. The mall was out for about eight hours.

“We spent quite a lot of time trying to get to fuses,” said Mark. They had to wait for water to subside so they could safely get to outages.

In one area, near Marne Creek, which was flooding, Walnut Village Independent and Assisted Living was evacuated as water was coming into their building. They asked to have their power disconnected, so a couple of supervisors went out to make sure everyone got out safely first.

“I just wanted to make sure no one was stuck in an elevator when the power was disconnected,” Mark said.

Marne Creek is one of the main drainage ways through Yankton, running from northwest to southeast, eventually emptying into the Missouri River. There was also water

across all four lanes of Highway 81, which is the main North-South thoroughfare through town.

There were transformers completely submerged, leaving residential customers out of power until a crew was able to connect a new transformer that sits higher off the ground.

In addition, flood water completely overran our gas border station at Parker, SD. NorthWestern pulled in employees who are natural gas experts from South Dakota and Montana as well as equipment vendors and others to assess the situation. The group discussed and analyzed what the best course of action would be.

“In the end, the decision was made to allow the system to run normally, but to closely monitor it around the clock to be sure we didn’t encounter any issues,” Brad said. “We had gasmen deployed in shifts at that location until the water receded. We were fortunate that the system continued to operate throughout the event thus avoiding a

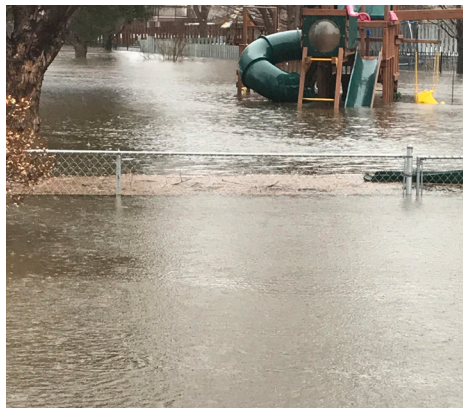
shut down and relight process.”

Despite power outages and difficult travel conditions, we have worked together to ensure everyone’s safety and to restore power to our towns. We would like to sincerely thank our customers for bearing the storm with us. As we continue clean-up efforts, please watch out for and stay away from downed power lines. If you see a downed line, call us. As ice melts, be sure your vents and meters remain clear. Make sure you follow manufacturer directions and have CO detectors properly installed.

As spring arrives, we are closely monitoring water levels, said Dennis Placke, manager of district operations in Nebraska.

“Flood season doesn’t usually start until May,” he said.

The next time weather strikes, know that everyone at NorthWestern Energy stands ready to do it all over again.



## » Payment help

With every dramatic drop in the temperature outside, customers’ heaters were working in overdrive to keep up. And unfortunately, that will be reflected in higher-than-normal energy bills. We know accruing this extra cost will be difficult for many of us. If you’re worried about paying your winter utility bills, call NorthWestern Energy at 800-245-6977 right away.

### **BUDGET BILLING**

NorthWestern Energy offers a Budget Billing program in which your monthly utility bill will be nearly the same each month as we average your yearly energy costs into more affordable monthly payments.

### **BILL ASSISTANCE**

We’re happy to support the Federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program. Qualified households can receive financial assistance, applications available at local assistance centers.

### **HELP YOUR NEIGHBOR**

If you choose, you could pay it forward and purchase a NorthWestern Energy gift certificate as a way to help a family member, friend or neighbor who may be struggling to pay their energy bill.

Learn more about these options under the Account Services tab at [NorthWesternEnergy.com](http://NorthWesternEnergy.com).