

January 2024

# HALIFAX NEWS

## EXTREME PRECIPITATION & GRID RELIABILITY

- Laurel Copeland

Mike Burke (top right in photo) and Tiana Smith of Green Mountain Power (GMP) visited the Halifax Café on Thursday, Dec. 14<sup>th</sup>. Tiana Smith manages electrification—helping consumers cut carbon and costs by switching from fossil fuels to clean electricity for driving and heating—and works in customer outreach and communication during storms (<https://greenmountainpower.com/about/tiana-smith-bio/>). Mike Burke is VP of Field Operations (<https://greenmountainpower.com/about/mike-burke-bio/>). They came to talk with us about the

power grid, that network of energy suppliers and interconnections delivering electricity to our homes and businesses. Most of the power grid that we see consists of overhead wires, poles, and padmounted transformers (for those with buried cable). Overhead wires traverse southern Vermont through woods and shady roads. Severe weather and trees outside right of ways can bring down these lines, cutting power. Thus, grid reliability—the ability of the power grid to remain on and connected regardless of external factors—is of critical importance to GMP and to all of us.

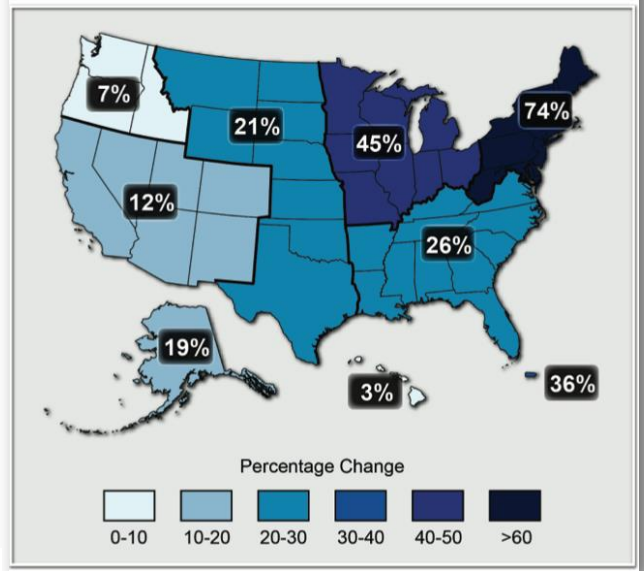


Mike, who also sits on the Governor’s Emergency Preparedness Advisory Council, explained that the changing climate threatens our power grid. We are dealing with more frequent heavy wet snow, stronger winds, and more numerous severe thunderstorms—overall more extreme precipitation events. Trees are growing faster. Heavy wet snow pulls down trees and wires; wind knocks down trees onto wires.

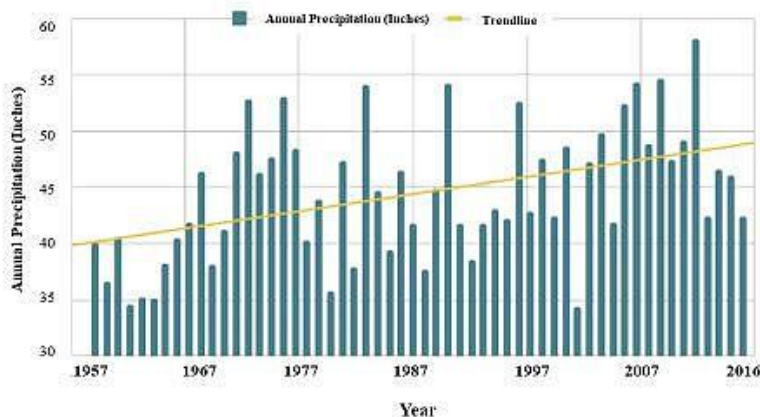
Historically Vermont has enjoyed a lot of dry snow. Dry snow falls when the temperatures are well below the 32-degree freezing mark, in the mid high 20’s and below. At 30 to 33°F and above, heavy, sticky snow and ice can weigh down power lines.

The last dry snow we had was in November 2022, more than a year ago. So far 2023 has given us wet snow, most

Percentage Change in Very Heavy Precipitation

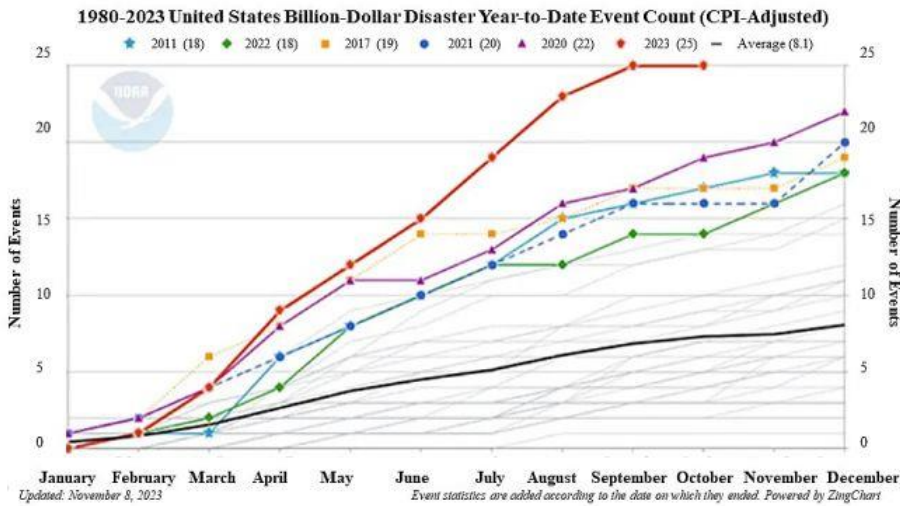


Vermont’s Annual Precipitation



memorably the nor’easter of March 13-14. Wet snow is like concrete on power lines and trees, and it takes four times as long to deal with, as all equipment and teams must slog through the heavy wet stuff. Part of our problem is that the amount of water brought by individual weather event has been increasing since 1960. The frequency of extreme weather events has also increased. Here in the Northeast, we have experienced a 74% increase in extreme precipitation events since 1960 (see map).

The storms that fueled flooding in north-central Vermont July 9-11, 2023, brought more inches of rain in some locations in VT than Tropical Storm Irene did in 2011. Usually, Vermont has 1 or 2 major storms per year; in the past 12 months we've had 6 major storms that affected the grid—windstorms, torrential rain with flooding, and snowstorms. One metric GMP mentioned was the billion-dollar event: a \$1B event is an event that costs a state and its communities more than \$1B in damage, not just to the grid but overall. These \$1B events have been ticking up for several years in the United States, as we've seen on the news (and in the figure at left). A National Oceanic and Atmospheric Report noted 25 \$1B+ FEMA events in the United States already in 2023.



To address increased risk to the grid and to customers, GMP has developed

the **Zero Outages by 2030 Initiative**. GMP will accomplish this goal through three proven strategies. They will storm-harden above-ground lines and poles, go underground when that is optimal, and increase backup storage in homes. Storm-hardened above-ground wires are protected by being clipped into a diamond shape where the top wire is a solid steel cable and the wires carrying electricity are below that. This is called a spacer cable system (see pic). In more rural areas, GMP will put wires underground, eliminating most tree threats altogether.



The third part of the initiative is expanding energy storage for customers. Battery backup increases resiliency and also helps transition customers away from fossil fuel backup, primarily propane generators. GMP has been offering battery storage for lease for many years but capped at 500 units/year. Right now there are about 4,000 energy storage devices in customer homes. GMP received permission to remove that cap this summer and is accelerating placement of batteries in homes.

Going underground will also utilize a very efficient machine: the rocksaw trencher. Normally GMP uses multiple pieces of equipment to dig a trench, lay in the conduit, fill in the trench, and tamp down the earth, but this machine can do it all at once. GMP plans to have one of these machines (pictured) in Halifax in the spring.



The trencher features a 10-foot diameter rock saw that digs a trench up to 51" deep. It carries a spool of utility cable with it, unspooling cable into the new trench, and pushes earth back over the newly laid cable. A skid-steer follows behind to tamp and smooth the earth. For houses at the end of the line and far from neighbors, GMP will sometimes find it more cost-effective to provide free battery storage than put the wires underground, so that is another part of the plan, if approved by regulators. Over the next 2.5 years, GMP will

demonstrate their ability to storm-harden hundreds of miles of line toward their 2030 goal.

While no grid is completely disaster-proof, GMP is working to improve grid resilience in the face of our changing weather. Let's hope for the best.



## TALK WITH THE SHERIFF (AND SENATOR!)



Rep./Selectboard Member Tristan Roberts, Sheriff Mark Anderson, and Senator Nader Hashim talk with Halifax residents and area neighbors in the Community Hall on Dec. 16, 2023.

Tristan Roberts, our representative to the Vermont General Assembly and a member of the Halifax Select Board, arranged for Sheriff Mark Anderson to come speak with us at the Halifax Café in mid-December. He brought with him a surprise guest, Senator Nader Hashim. Sen. Hashim had a career with the Vermont State Police (2011-2018) before serving in our state government (House of Representatives, 2019-2020; Senate 2023-ongoing). He focuses on public safety as a member of the Judiciary Committee.

Sheriff Anderson serves in the Air National Guard and has worked in Vermont law enforcement since 2004, in Newfane, Vernon, and Brattleboro. The sheriff is law enforcement at the county level, so we have the Windham County Sheriff. There are 14 counties in Vermont but only 13 sheriff departments because Essex, our least populous county, has none. Sheriffs are elected by the voters for 4-year terms. Anderson explained that the duties of the sheriff include transport (e.g., of jailed persons to and from court), extradition, mental health, children at risk, patrol, escorts (e.g., of over-size loads on the highway, such as huge bridge beams), serving civil papers, and enforcing evictions and Relief from Abuse orders. The office of the Sheriff is not funded by the state, so all work is by contract. The Windham Sheriff's office currently has contracts with 13 towns including Halifax. Halifax currently contracts for \$10,000 worth of services. Sheriff Anderson pointed out that a single burglary investigation could cost \$2500; Halifax services focus on speeders. For towns without contracts, response to 911 calls is by Vermont State Police (VSP). The nearest VSP barracks is in Westminster, an hour away. Unfortunately, VSP has a 25% staff shortage, further hindering their ability to respond to problems in southern Vermont. A town constable can respond to some issues and can take someone into custody within their town. They have to use their own vehicle—which can incur liability for them or the town—and they have no supervision (a constable does not answer to the Select Board).

An attendee commented that it was hard to find out about crimes in Halifax, citing a school break-in as an example. Sen. Hashim said that press releases are required for crimes and are posted on a website. I found the VSP News Release site (it is searchable): <https://vtstatepolice.blogspot.com/>; VTDigger has a Public Safety site that lists their reports of crimes and related actions: <https://vtdigger.org/public-safety/>.

Sheriff Anderson opined that Vermont has a bad rural policing system, because the funding and interoperations of the various law enforcement entities are not consistent or coordinated. He posed two questions that need answers: How do we govern Vermont sheriff departments, and how do we fund them?

Sen. Hashim commented that he hopes to see standards implemented across the state for evidentiary holds/releases, which are inconsistent across districts. This means that a person who is seen as a threat (and arrested) in one district might not be viewed that way in an adjacent district (and would be let go). He is also working to reduce the backlog of court cases, and working to create a new court docket that focuses on drug offenses. Adding a Drug Docket would let the state hire an additional judge, thus reducing backlogged cases. We currently have three dockets: Criminal, Civil, and Environmental).

This gathering attracted 27 visitors to our little café, including 9 newcomers from Halifax, Whitingham, and Wilmington. All of us are much wiser for the experience.





**JOAN'S SIGHTINGS.** I am happy to say I still have two pairs of Cardinals, several Sparrows, a Red-Bellied Woodpecker, a Downy and a Hairy Woodpecker, Mourning Doves, Chickadees, Tufted Titmice, a White-Breasted Nuthatch, Juncos, Blue Jays, a few Goldfinches, and I hear Crows but seldom see them. I smile each time I walk past a neighbor's house and see a 'Flamingo' (plastic) with a Santa suit on!!!

**ELSEWHERE AROUND TOWN.** Up on Hanson Road we see grey foxes, chipmunks, mice, deer, ravens, crows, a broad-winged hawk, barred owl (photo), blue jays, chickadees, golden-crowned kinglets, and juncos. We also enjoyed the moon next to Jupiter at our winter solstice bonfire on the longest night of the year. In Halifax Center, Jesse spotted a snowshoe hare, still very brown with a white tail, munching away on grass by the woodshed in the pre-dawn semidarkness.

**FIRE DEPARTMENT.**

On December 5 nine men and one truck responded to Dover for a mutual aid call.

Five men went to the scene, and four stayed back to make sure there were still men available in case there was another call.

On December 16 five men and one truck responded to Colrain, MA, to cover their station.

On December 17 five men and one truck responded to Green River Road for a motor vehicle accident.

On December 17 four men responded to Old County Road, a medical call.

On December 18 five men responded to Rte. 112 to assist with pumping water out of a residential basement. They pumped for two hours.

As of the last week in December, Halifax Fire Company has had 96 calls!

**Burn Permits are Required – call before you burn. Dennis (802) 368-7809 or Malcolm (802) 368-2484**

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[JWCinVt@gmail.com](mailto:JWCinVt@gmail.com)

(PO Box 27, 05358).



# Halifax News

JANUARY 2024

## CALENDAR

**Dec. 17, 2023, through Jan. 5, 2024: Café closed** for the holidays.

**Jan. 6, 2024** (Saturday): **COVID Vaccination Clinic** at the Café, 10:00 am – 2:00 pm

**Jan. 6, 2024** (Saturday): Halifax Café reopens, open 10:00 am – 1:00 pm

**Jan. 11, 2024** (Thursday): Halifax Café open 10:00 am – 1:00 pm

**Jan. 13, 2024** (Saturday): Halifax Café open 10:00 am – 1:00 pm

**Jan. 18, 2024** (Thursday): Halifax Café open 10:00 am – 1:00 pm

**Jan. 19, 2024** (Friday): Senior Meal serving at 12:00 Noon

**Jan. 20, 2024** (Saturday): Halifax Café open 10:00 am – 1:00 pm

**Jan. 25, 2024** (Thursday): Halifax Café open 10:00 am – 1:00 pm

**Jan. 27, 2024** (Saturday): **Soup for Boots!** At the Café, 10:00 am – 1:30 pm

**Jan. 27, 2024** (Saturday): Halifax Café open 10:00 am – 1:00 pm

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Archives: <https://czresearch.com/newsletter>



**Heavy equipment working at the corner of Hatch School and Butterfield on a beautiful day**