



# MEA Vegetation Management Plan

UPDATED JULY 2019

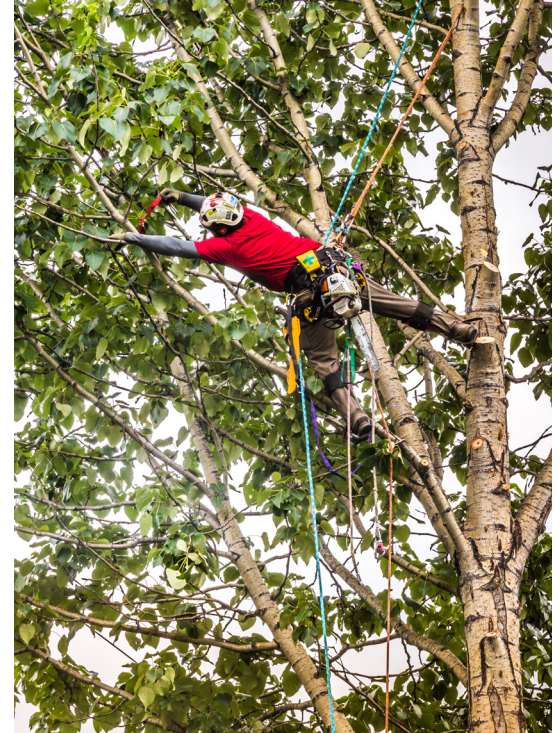




# INTRODUCTION

The mission of Matanuska Electric Association (MEA) is to provide safe and reliable power for its members. Vegetation management is an essential component of this process and includes maintaining our power lines, equipment, and electrical systems. An initial plan to effectively clear and maintain our 4,500 miles of power lines was implemented in 2014 and has since been updated to incorporate best practices and changes to the communities we serve. The vegetation management plan includes:

- Objectives for clearing
- What is cleared
- How MEA clears
- Notifying members of clearing activities
- Guidelines for planting and landscaping away from power lines and electrical equipment
- Frequently Asked Questions



## Reducing Outages

Since the implementation of a Vegetation Management Plan, MEA has been able to greatly reduce the amount of outages caused by trees and vegetation within its easements, also called right-of-ways. Prior to implementing MEA's seven-year cycle Clearing Plan, thousands of members were being impacted by outages from trees within MEA's easements annually. As a result of taking a more proactive and systematic approach when it comes to clearing, MEA has been able to significantly reduce outages caused by trees and vegetation within our easements and provide safer and reliable power for our members. The data below shows the amount of tree caused outages within MEA's easements prior to and after implementation of the vegetation management plan.

## Number of Members Impacted by Tree-caused Outages from Trees Inside Easements

### Before MEA Clearing Cycles Began

2013 – 12,815 members, 119 outages

2014 – 28,542 members, 41 outages

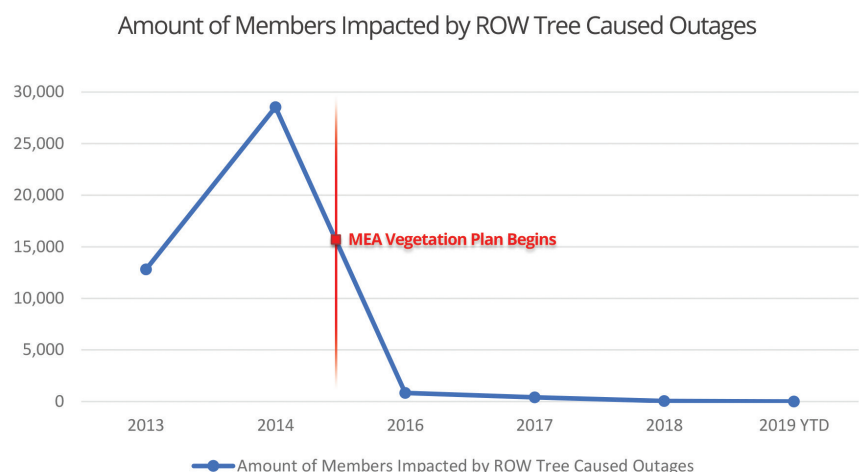
### After 7-Year MEA Clearing Cycle

2016 – 829 members, 15 outages

2017 – 412 members, 17 outages

2018 – 52 members, 8 outages

2019 YTD – 0 Members, 0 outages



## OBJECTIVES FOR CLEARING

Clearing provides safe and reliable power not only for our members, but also for our employees. A clear right-of-way allows for our line crews to quickly and safely access power lines, identify outage causes and make repairs. Properly maintaining MEA's right-of-ways is also required by the National Electric Safety Code. When it comes to clearing utility easements, MEA utilizes best practices in vegetation management and has been a Tree Line USA utility more than 20 years.

### The MEA Vegetation Management Plan aims to:

- Ensure safe, reliable and feasible electric service.
- Consider associated costs for clearing and maintenance and the impact on MEA members.
- Maintain trees and vegetation within power line right-of-ways.
- Support arboricultural practices to provide healthy trees.
- Effectively communicate with members on vegetation management and provide resolution to member concerns.
- Balance the rights and responsibilities of property owners and MEA, ensuring all members are treated equitably.
- Respond to member concerns and disputes in a timely manner in regards to vegetation management.
- Provide safe working conditions for MEA employees.



### Clearing Challenges

There are many important factors in providing safe and effective clearing within our service territory. Some important safety considerations include:

- **Access issues** – Sometimes placement of fences, structures and other vegetation can make it difficult for our crews to access our right-of-ways or easements. Members should learn and mark the utility easements on their property prior to conducting any construction or landscaping that may impede or block access to MEA's right-of-ways and/or equipment.
- **Weather** – Conditions in Southcentral Alaska can make it challenging from high winds to wet ground conditions, and snow and ice build. Our clearing crews try to optimize the best times for clearing to provide for safe operations.
- **Vegetation health and growth** – Our short summers with long daylight provide rapid growth for much of the vegetation. This is an important consideration when developing our clearing cycles and knowing when we will need to revisit an area for clearing. There are also other vegetation health issues such as the Spruce Bark Beetle which has infested spruce trees all over the Mat-Su Borough within the last several years. MEA's clearing crews have prioritized clearing spruce bark beetle kill danger trees that pose a threat to our power lines and electrical equipment.





# WHAT MEA CLEARS

MEA currently operates over 4,500 miles of power lines and clears on a seven-year cycle in order to effectively maintain and provide reliable service. To stay on track with this seven-year clearing cycle, MEA must clear over 340 miles of overhead line annually.

## # of miles of MEA Powerlines





Overhead Lines	Underground Lines	Transmission Lines
2,333 miles	2,067 miles	122 miles

### What Trees and Vegetation are removed?

- Trees located in the immediate easement
- Trees blocking access to overhead or underground right of way
- Trees that have contact with lines
- Trees and vegetation that could come in contact with lines (both overhead and underground) and electrical equipment.

Before clearing operations begin, MEA clearing crews conduct an inspection of the area and mark trees, vegetation and easement boundaries. Also called “flagging”, crews use different colored tape markings (biodegradable) to indicate future actions within the easement.




### Flagging Tape Indicators

- Pink tape  indicates the edge of MEA’s right of ways.
- Orange tape  indicates further discussion and input with MEA and the member impacted before clearing.
- Blue tape  indicates the tree or vegetation will not be cut.
- Red tape  indicates the tree or vegetation will be cut.

Following flagging procedures, additional communication methods are used to notify members about clearing in right-of-ways in their area.

### How are members notified about clearing that may impact them?

MEA provides notification to members/property owners who may be directly impacted by clearing operations by sending:

-  **Postcard notification**  
(minimum 2 weeks in advance)
-  **Auto-Call**  
(minimum 1 week in advance)
-  **Doorhangers**  
(minimum 96 hours before clearing starts)

To learn more about MEA’s current clearing projects, visit [www.mea.coop](http://www.mea.coop)





## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**Q: I have a tree on my property that I am worried about falling into the power line or on electrical equipment. What should I do?**

A: MEA refers to these as “Danger Trees.” Our definition of a danger tree is a structurally unsound tree, located on or off the right-of-way, that could come into contact with our power lines, equipment or facilities by growing, falling or swaying into energized lines. We ask that you fill out a danger tree report on our website at [www.mea.coop](http://www.mea.coop). If you need assistance filling out a danger tree report, please call our clearing department at 907-761-9269. MEA removes hundreds of reported danger trees annually and appreciates the due diligence of our members to ensure we all have safe and reliable power.

**Q: Am I charged by MEA for removal of a danger tree?**

A: No, we do not charge members for removal of danger trees and greatly appreciate the assistance of our members to help us identify trees and vegetation that may pose a threat to the safety and reliability of our electric system.

**Q: Who do I contact about a flagged tree that I don't want to be removed?**

A: To share your concerns and discuss a flagged tree, please contact our clearing department at 907-761-9269. Objectives of this vegetation management plan include ensuring effective communication with our members regarding our vegetation management and ensuring all members are treated equitably.

**Q: Can I prune and cut my own trees to keep them from interfering with MEA's power lines?**

A: In the past MEA has tried to implement member maintenance agreements, which has overall failed as part of our vegetation management plan. To

be consistent and equitable to all members, MEA no longer provides member maintenance agreements and must reclaim all of its existing right-of-ways and remove vegetation and trees that pose a threat to our power lines and equipment.

**Q: Can MEA just top my tree off (also known as crown reduction) to keep it from interfering with power lines?**

A: Over the years MEA has learned through best practices that topping trees or providing crown reduction is not the most effective, feasible or safest way to manage vegetation that can come into contact with our powerlines or electrical equipment. Topping the tree or reducing the crown can also negatively impact the tree's health. For ornamental or special trees that have to be removed, MEA provides a replacement tree voucher. To learn more about the MEA replacement tree program, please call our clearing department at 907-761-9269.





# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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**Q: I want to plant trees and/or landscape in my yard. What can I plant and where can I plant it without interfering with utility easements?**

A: MEA follows Right Tree, Right Place guidelines which outline various tree species and shrubs that can be planted based on their potential maximum growth. A majority of MEA's easements are between 20' to 40' and right-of-way boundaries will be marked prior to clearing. It is also important to consider vegetation planting, ensuring shrubs and smaller trees are not planted near electrical equipment such as transformer boxes and underground lines. If you plan to dig on your property, please call 811 at least two days in advance so your utility lines can be marked. Please refer to the graph below for general guidelines about planting the right tree in the right place:

