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Alger-Delta upgrade project moving forward

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MARQUETTE - A nearly \$8 million electrical system upgrade project along Marquette County Road 550 by the Alger-Delta Cooperative Electric Association is on schedule.

The improvements are taking place along the roadway from just north of Marquette north to Big Bay. Likely the most visible work to motorists and residents is the installation of new power poles and lines along the road.

That work is currently about 60 percent complete. The project began a year ago and also included removing tree branches and other vegetation away from power lines.

"We're looking at energizing the line some time in July," said Alger-Delta Manager Tom Harrell.

A new substation, which can handle four times the power of the previous unit, is finished except for signs and metering. The substation is just north of Marquette, off CR550.

Having the new lines and substation in place will result in fewer power outages and less costly maintenance - meaning member savings and greatly improved service, Harrell said.

"We'll have a more robust system," he said. "For us, it's a pretty significant construction project."

Another segment of the project, which involves bringing electricity to the site of the proposed Kennecott Eagle Project on the Yellow Dog Plains, has just been started.

Harrell said only preliminary engineering and permitting issues have been worked on for extending electricity over 13.5 miles along County Road 510 and County Road AAA to the Kennecott site.

"We only have done about five percent of that," Harrell said. "We are kind of taking a wait-and-see attitude."

Kennecott is currently working through permitting issues and legal challenges to its project, with parent company Rio Tinto deferring work on the project indefinitely pending improvements to the market economy.

To this point, the deferment of the mining project has not hurt the electrical upgrade project work, Harrell said.

Kennecott is funding the \$7.9 million project. Upgrades to the Big Bay system were necessary in order to carry the increased load needed to provide future power to the mine site, said Harrell.

In the deal to build the new line for Kennecott, the cooperative has built in several escape clauses in case the mine project is ultimately not approved.

Alger Delta has submitted a bill to Kennecott for 40 percent of the total cost up front. If Kennecott backs out, the mining company will not be refunded any money that Alger-Delta has spent on the project, only money that has not been spent.

If Kennecott backs out, then the upgrades will not be done.

The underground cable that would power the proposed mine would be removed once mining ceases.

Article Photos



Power poles are lying alongside Marquette County Road 550, ready to be installed as part of an electric system upgrade project currently ongoing by the Alger-Delta Cooperative Electric Association. The new lines are expected to be energized in July. (Journal photo by John Pepin)

Alger Delta has roughly 1,000 cooperative members who live along County Road 550.

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