

Weasel nearly zaps Christmas Stroll

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At around 2:30 p.m. on Friday, Dec. 8, Big Sky went dark just as businesses in Town Center prepared for the annual Christmas Stroll, scheduled to start only three hours later at 5:30 p.m. Staff at NorthWestern Energy's headquarters in Butte noticed right away that there was a problem at Big Sky's Meadow Village electrical substation, so it dispatched a crew. Then the phones started lighting up with calls from several of the 2,375 business and residential customers left without power.

When NorthWestern crews arrived at the Meadow Village substation, they inspected it for damage or any signs of tampering. Then to their surprise, they discovered the culprit: a weasel.

Butch Larcombe, spokesperson for NorthWestern Energy, said, "I've heard of outages caused by raptors and other birds. But this is the first time for a weasel—first weasel

outage."

Larcombe said the number one cause of outages is the weather—high winds, broken tree branches.

"After that," said Larcombe, "it comes down to animals. Squirrels are a big one. There have been beaver-caused outages where a beaver chews through a tree and it falls on a power line."

NorthWestern dispatched a local crew and reinforcements from Bozeman in the rush to get the power back on before the start of the Christmas Stroll. When asked if the crews took any pictures of the electrocuted weasel, Larcombe said, "What they found of the weasel... There probably wasn't too much left."

After removing the weasel's remains, the NorthWestern crews went to work and delivered what felt like a Christmas miracle to some when it restored power around 15 minutes before the start of the holiday stroll.

During its monthly meeting on Dec. 12, Big Sky Chamber of Commerce Board members



praised NorthWestern for its nick-of-time response. But at the time, the Chamber and others in the community were still in the dark about the exact cause of the outage.

There were rumors that the cause was a fire in the Firelight Meadows Condominiums or a car crash that took out a

The scene of a weasel's untimely death, which according to NorthWestern Energy, caused the untimely pre-Christmas Stroll power outage.

transformer on Ousel Falls Road.

"This situation just highlights the need for a new substation," said Larcombe, explaining that a second substation would have allowed NorthWestern to reroute power and restore service in even less time.

Larcombe recalled the series of meetings held in Big Sky earlier this year to discuss potential locations for the new substation.

"We're looking for possibilities for the location," said Larcombe. "And we hope to make a decision in the first half of 2018."

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