

Georgia Co-ops Join for BPL Study, Pilots

Reprint from BPL Today

Habersham Electric Membership Corporation is leading 28 Georgia coops seriously looking into BPL, more than half the state's coops with 1.5 million members.

Habersham is probably the state's most advanced coop in terms of broadband with about 100 miles of fiber, and plans to double that soon and owns its own ISP (www.hemc.net). That may be a reason the BPL group picked Habersham CEO Todd Pealock as its chair.

He picked Habersham's information director, Rodney Pugh, to look at the opportunities and to report to the group by the end of the year. Pugh bought expensive reports on BPL geared mostly to municipals and IOUs and realized the coops needed one with a "by coops, for coops" perspective to see how BPL fits their unique world, he told us.

The average municipal utility has about 44 customers/mile versus 34 customers/mile for IOUs and seven/mile for coops, noted Pugh. Georgia has 41 or 42 coops serving maybe 4 million members and at least a few of those coops not yet in the BPL group are thinking of joining soon, Pugh reported. A Florida coop that hasn't found much interest among its peers is leaning towards joining, Pugh added. Smaller coops sometimes have a hard time getting a call back from BPL hardware makers, he added.

Banding together to create strength in numbers is nothing new for these folks. The Georgia group charges a small fee for membership and is using some of that money to send Pugh around the country to talk to vendors and others to research BPL. He expects his report, with six other coop managers, to be done by the end of the year or soon after, he reported.

Pugh hired The Shpigler Group to put together a business model for each of the coops in the group plus one for the group as a whole. After the report, one or more pilots are expected and Pugh expects Habersham to be asked to do one of the first ones due to the utility's experience with broadband.

Over time he expects a significant number of coops to install BPL solely for the internal applications without offering broadband to customers. Those that want to serve broadband will probably want their logo on the service because they are a part of the community, he predicted, unlike a Georgia Power (Southern Co) that Pugh expects to play a purely background role leasing the lines to others. Coop members comprise about half the power customers in the state, noted Pugh.

His group meets again this month in Atlanta (<http://www.habershamemc.com/>).