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those customers not directly affected by the break.

Union County is home to three different water providers: Notla Water Authority, Blairsville City Water and Coosa Water Authority.

“Because of this, there was confusion of who was involved in the Boil Water Advisory,” said Danny Young, Notla Water Authority System Manager. “Our customer-based metered accounts are

around 5,500, and it involved around 4,500 of those metered accounts.”

Added Young: “We lost almost 3 million gallons of water in less than three hours.”

While the break constituted a significant water loss, extensive testing determined that water quality remained unaffected, and problems with water pressure to metered accounts fed by the main line were resolved by the end of the day on Wednesday.

Notla Water Authority employees worked diligently from the early morning hours until late in the afternoon to secure the break, repair the line and work toward replenishing reservoir levels.

“Where the break happened was in a very bad spot on a hill, and was 10 feet below the surface,” said Jennifer Maier, Chief Water Operator at Notla’s Surface Water Treatment Facility. “There was rock everywhere and it was actually kind of a precarious situation. The guys dug a trench below the pipe, so whenever they cut the pipe to replace it, all the water went downhill and nothing went into the pipe.”

“They isolated valves on either side, so nothing went past that point anyway. Whenever they got it fixed, they flushed everything out at full pressure.”

Although many county residents were alarmed by the BWA, Maier said that the main reason for its issuance was to ensure the safety and quality of the water.

“Basically, if there is a drop in the pressure in our system through a break in the main line, we are required by EPD (Georgia Environmental Protection Division) to send out a Boil Water Advisory,” said Maier. “It is a precautionary measure just in case there was any type of contamination that may have occurred during the break.”

“Since we never really lost pressure in our water system, it’s extremely unlikely that would have occurred. However, just to be safe, we wanted to make sure that everyone went ahead and boiled their water.”

“We’ve taken several water samples throughout the system and taken it to our certified lab to get it analyzed for any bacteria. It’s a 24-hour test, which is why it has taken so long.” Under a BWA, residents are asked to bring all drinking water to a rolling boil for one minute before consuming. All other water uses are not affected during a BWA unless otherwise noted, such as showering or washing dishes.

Typically, a BWA only affects the surrounding areas of the broken pipe. However, Notla employees extended the advisory for preventative measures and to reduce confusion.

The Boil Water Advisory went into effect last Wednesday and lasted until 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, Feb. 2.

Even though the main break has been repaired and the BWA has been lifted, Notla Water Authority still urges customers to conserve water through the coming week to ensure a swift refilling of the reservoirs. There is no limit to water usage, but abstaining from leaving water running if not in use is advised.

Since this break, Young said that Notla Water Authority is working toward setting up



It took Notla Water employees a few hours to fix the break, after which the water was tested for contaminants. None were detected.

an alert system like Union County’s Wireless Emergency Notification System for future situations such as last week.

Young met with Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley on Thursday morning to further discuss the issue.

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EMC.

“Right now, the biggest thing we’re working on is the development of our strategic plan to help myself, my board, and all of our employees to all have a clearer understanding of the direction we’re going to be going in the short-term as well as the long-term,” said Nelms.

Continued Nelms: “What are our particular items of focus, how do we show that we’re meeting our goals, what are our measurements, what’s the measuring stick we’re using to ensure that we’re meeting what we think we want to meet? We’ve got to have the recipe – if we follow this recipe, we’ll have a nice cake at the end. That’s the plan.”

As for the two newest board members elected in last year’s annual meeting, Cory Payne of Clay County, North Carolina, and Gene Mason of Union County, both Nelms and Cummings agree that they have become integral parts of a board that “clicks.”

“Both of them have contributed a lot, and they’re fitting in well with the board, helping us make decisions that affect the future of the EMC,” said Cummings.

A hot button issue for Nelms is the planned annual rate hikes proposed by the Tennessee Valley Authority, which by the time they are through being implemented will result in a greater than 10 percent increase in electric bills by 2023.

One of these proposed increases, about 1.5 percent on the retail side of electric costs, occurred in October of 2016, and there will be similar yearly increases through 2023.

“For every dollar we take in, 65 cents of that goes to TVA,” said Nelms. “From my perspective, I feel like it’s something that I have to take on my shoulders – I have to go to Chattanooga, and go to Knoxville, and go to Nashville, and fight for the members here in this five-county territory.”

“TVA is expected to do similar rate increases until the year 2023. And the way I see it, I’m asking for cost justification. I’m asking for, what is your justification to not just the 50,000 members that Blue Ridge Mountain EMC serves, but all nine million customers that the local power companies serve that buy their power from TVA.”

And with President Donald Trump in the White House, Nelms foresees potential changes down the road for the more than 150 power companies that rely on TVA for electricity.

“With the new administration, there will be some vacancies on the TVA board, and those are all political appointees,” said Nelms. “We’ll see how that shakes out. Only time will really tell with how President Trump will view TVA and TVA’s board.”

“But I’m beating the drum on behalf of Blue Ridge Mountain EMC, and getting the audience with TVA. Not to say I have a great deal of influence, but if nothing else, they’re at least going to hear



Nelms at the 2016 annual meeting of the membership

me – they’re going to know who Blue Ridge Mountain EMC is, because I’ve got to make sure I’m doing what I can for this membership here.

“Passing 1.25 percent or 1.5 percent rate increases every year is going the opposite direction from where I would like to go.”

Building on last year’s successful town hall meetings and the overall goal of transparency with the membership, Nelms, Cummings and the rest of the

EMC board of directors will be holding another round of town hall meetings soon in Union and Towns counties.

For members with questions for the EMC leadership, the Union County meeting will be held at North Georgia Technical College on March 23 at 6 p.m.

The Towns County town hall will be held at the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center on April 13 at 6 p.m.