

Might as Well Jump: Frogs awaken, New England braces for electric cars and know-a-guy politics reigns

Wood Frogs Thaw Out Then Get Busy

In southern New England, wood frogs are among the first species to emerge from winter hibernation, typically in mid to late March.

Wood frogs produce a natural antifreeze that allows them to freeze almost completely solid in winter. Unique among frogs in the Northeast, the wood frog's antifreeze is a chemical reaction between stored urine and glucose, which protects a frog's cells and organs from freezing while allowing the rest of its body to freeze.

Once spring comes, the frogs thaw out and their hearts start beating again. As soon as they awaken, they hop to their breeding pools to seek a mate on the first night it rains.

Wood frogs are often joined by spring peepers and spotted salamanders in migrating to their breeding pools during rainy nights in March, but it's the frogs that often experience the highest mortality rate as they are hit by cars while they cross roadways to get to breeding pools.

Road mortality for these amphibians can be as high as 100% in some areas when traffic is high during the one night of the season that most migration takes place.

Grid Braces for More Electric Cars

There's little doubt that electric vehicles (EVs) will soon be running the roads. Automakers such as Ford, General Motors and Volvo have committed to larger electric fleets. States are adopting sales targets for zero-emission vehicles and introducing bills that follow California's ban on new gas-powered cars in 2035.

The shift will increase demand for electricity just as the grid will be changing from centralized power to distributed smaller sources of renewable energy such as solar farms, offshore wind and even hydropower from Canada.

But is our local grid ready for all those EVs to plug in to power up?

For now, ISO New England, the manager of the regional power grid, projects there will be adequate capacity and reliability until 2030, as the electricity needed for EV growth is offset by energy-efficiency advancements and more solar power. But after 2030, when electrification must ramp up, is the gray area.

National Grid is installing 278 fast-charging ports across Rhode Island. The multinational utility is also conducting a three-year study, called SmartCharge Rhode Island, of hundreds of current EV owners to understand charging habits and determine if incentives can prompt EV owners to help manage the grid

by charging during off-peak hours.

This strategy includes the use of battery storage and getting drivers to establish new habits such as charging at home when demand for power is low. So far, the pilot programs in Rhode Island and other states have shown that pricing incentives for charging during off-peak hours are working.

National Grid and the Rhode Island Department of Transportation are also testing the concept of battery storage to supplant power from the grid during peak hours with a charging station plus battery-storage systems at park-and-ride lots in Warwick and Hopkinton.

Progressives Say PUC Appointment Smacks of Know-a-Guy Politics

Former senator John C. Revens Jr. will be joining the Rhode Island Public Utilities Commission (PUC), but his approval came with a reminder of the State House's ugly history of patronage and insider politics.

Vocal support for Revens' nomination came from long-tenured members of the Senate who severed with the Warwick democrat who left office in 2008.

Nine progressive senators, however, opposed Revens during a March 9 vote by the full Senate. Twenty-nine senators confirmed Revens to a six-year term on the PUC.

Freshman Sen. Kendra Anderson, D-Warwick, noted that serving on the PUC requires a knowledge of utilities policy and an appreciation for the urgency of addressing the energy transformation the state is facing in the next six years.

"Here's the problem: Senator Revens has no experience in energy science, environmental economics or environmental justice," Anderson said.

Revens has been a private-practice attorney for the past 20 years. He previously owned a liquor store and was a real-estate developer.

Revens' nomination was opposed by Pawtucket-based George Wiley Center and the Poor People's Campaign, among others.

According to the PUC, no date has been announced for Revens' first day on the job. The position comes with a \$139,000 annual salary. He was nominated to the three-member commission by then-Governor Gina Raimondo.

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