



THE POWER OF CHANGE

Bringing Back the Bees

Bees have stung Jim Ashcraft more times than he cares to talk about. As the point man of an apiary at the Izaak Walton League's Fredericksburg-Rappahannock campus, he understands the hazards he faces when he steps inside the fenced-in area that houses the bee boxes.

What many don't realize, however, is the thousands of bees buzzing among those boxes face their own hazards. Most recently, Ashcraft noted, mites infested many of the bees with fatal diseases. Other bees have been coaxed out to pollinate in unseasonably warm winter weather — only to freeze once the cold roars back into town.

As a result, the Spotsylvania County apiary has lost thousands of bees in recent years. Through the generosity of Rappahannock Electric Cooperative's (REC) members donating to The Power of Change, funding was awarded to purchase additional bees, to add more bee boxes and for maintenance of the apiary.

Each year, nearly 17,000 REC members voluntarily donate to The Power of Change. About 100 local non-profit organizations have received funding from the program since its inception in 2005. This funding has made a significant impact on improving community services, economic development, education, and emergency response in REC's service territory.

Last year the Izaak Walton League was able to bottle more than 250 pounds of honey. The conservation-focused group uses funding such as The Power of Change to sustain its operation.

"All the money goes back into the bees," said Tim McArtor of the league.

Sterling Schoonover, manager of member services at REC, said giving back to the community has always been important to the Cooperative. "Caring is one of our core values," he said. "Over the years, we've been able to support some outstanding organizations to make a positive change in their communities." ■