Eklutna Generation Station (EGS) serves the Railbelt grid, which extends from the city of Fairbanks to the city of Anchorage and on to the Kenai Peninsula. This region consumes approximately 80% of Alaska’s electricity. Being the second largest power plant on the grid, EGS is integral in maintaining grid voltage and frequency stability. “We’ve got 60,000 people relying on our power. Wärtsilä Online Services have sped up the parts procurement process tremendously. This helps us to keep the plant operational 24/7,” says Bob O’Neill, Maintenance Supervisor at Matanuska Electric Association’s Eklutna Generation Station.

Matanuska Electric Association Inc. (MEA), was formed in 1941. It is Alaska’s oldest existing and second-largest electric cooperative. It is owned and operated by its nearly 60,000 members. MEA’s service area covers almost 7,000 kilometres of power lines in Southcentral Alaska. Recently MEA decided to build its own power plant: the Eklutna Generation Station (EGS), which is a 171-megawatt natural-gas-powered power plant in Eklutna, Alaska. The plant, which officially became a self-generating utility in 2015, is powered by ten Wärtsilä 18V50DF low-emission engines.
MAIN SOURCE OF ELECTRICITY
With Wärtsilä Online Services you always have access to information about your installations and equipment and can manage them. The CORE level includes features such as Technical Knowledge, Parts Online, TechRequest and Warranty Online. With the Wärtsilä Online Services customer portal, you have access to installation and equipment-specific technical information such as bulletins and interactive manuals. Among other features, you can also create spare part quotations or orders and ask technical questions directly from the correct team.

- Wärtsilä offered us the online services during the warranty period and we worked together for a number of months to get the functions to satisfy everybody’s needs. The people involved worked very diligently. A number of things didn’t work the way we wanted at first, but then they remade it. They were very customer friendly, says Bob O’Neill.

EGS provides electricity to some 60,000 people. It is vital that the power plant meets the load demands of the customers, since especially during the winter period the availability of replacement power is very limited and unreliable. The weather conditions can get quite extreme and the plant is designed for temperatures even below -30°C.

- When it gets colder, people turn up every electrical heating device they own and our load increases extremely fast and stays that way. So far, our engines have shown a very high reliability, says O’Neill.

SPEEDING UP THE PROCESS
According to Mr O’Neill, there were some technical issues initially during the installation and testing process. Wärtsilä, however, presented a model and plan and they were very trustworthy from the very start of the customer relationship.

- They were very upfront and telling us that this does not work as we want it to and gave us a scope of what they were working on. They really did their best to make the system work as we wanted. Issues were rapidly identified and fixed.

EGS has now had the full functionality in use for approximately one and a half years with six active users. Among other things, Wärtsilä Online Services have sped up the parts procurement process for the EGS procurement manager. Previously the procurement manager had to contact several different persons to obtain quotes for different parts. Since the quotes are now centralised in the Wärtsilä Online Services customer portal, the workload has been reduced tremendously.

- Requesting parts and obtaining quotes mostly happen within 24 hours, instead of days. Once the Wärtsilä Online Services were ready to use they were extremely user friendly, fast and really reliable. We have had nothing but positive feedback from our users.

A NECESSARY TOOL
For MEA, Wärtsilä Online Services also have an impact on the company’s business and goals. This is because the Wärtsilä Online Services allow the company to do their work in a more expeditious manner. Wasting a lot of time is history, since phone calls and tracking things are now done in one place.

Bob O’Neill sees the freeing-up of time and cutting down on redundancy as clear benefits. This concerns both parts procurement and technical requests, for which Wärtsilä Online Services are a huge time saver.

- I would surely recommend Wärtsilä Online Services. It’s a necessary tool for everyone having Wärtsilä equipment. I enjoy what Wärtsilä has done for us and I’m looking forward to more improvements as time goes by. Wärtsilä Online Services are going through a continuous improvement process. Every time there is a new feature, it just gets better, concludes Bob O’Neill.