

Connections

June 2020



For the member-owners of Brown County REA

Volume 24, Issue 6

Great River Energy will close Coal Creek Power Plant & add more wind

Great River Energy (GRE) announced plans May 7 to transform its portfolio of power supply resources in the coming years. The electric cooperative plans to phase out remaining coal resources, add significant renewable energy and explore critical grid-scale battery technology.

GRE is a wholesale power supplier to your electric cooperative. GRE plans to take the following actions:

- Retire the 1,151-megawatt (MW) Coal Creek Station in the second half of 2022.
- Add 1,100 MW of wind energy purchases by the end of 2023.
- Modify the 99-MW, coal and natural gas-based Spiritwood Station power plant to be fueled by natural gas.
- Install a 1-MW long-duration battery demonstration system.
- Support the repowering of the Blue Flint ethanol plant with natural gas.

"We are building a power supply portfolio that will serve our member-owner cooperatives for decades," GRE President and Chief Executive Officer David Saggau said. "We are taking advantage of cost-competitive renewables and reliable access to market energy, while fostering innovation, as the technology of our industry evolves."

This announcement follows several changes GRE made in recent years



Great River Energy announced plans to close the Coal Creek power plant in 2022. Wind, natural gas and battery storage will replace this source of power for Minnesota electric cooperative members.

to seek economic efficiencies in its power supply portfolio. Past analysis led to decisions to exit a contract for half the output of a Wisconsin coal plant in 2015, retire the coal-based Stanton Station power plant in 2017, close the waste-to-energy Elk River Resource Recovery Project in 2019 and purchase the output of several wind energy projects.

The portfolio changes will significantly reduce GRE's member-owner power supply costs. In addition, the

cooperative's power supply resources will be more than 95 percent carbon dioxide-free, virtually eliminating carbon risk.

"Our power supply plans deliver on our member-owners' three highest priorities: affordability, reliability and environmental stewardship," Saggau said. "Electric cooperatives have a bright future in Minnesota."

GRE plans to purchase more than 1,100 MW from new wind energy
— **Continued on Page 6**

At A Glance



Brown County
Rural Electrical
Association

BCREA reconvened Annual Meeting set for June 25

Members are encouraged to attend BCREA's Annual Meeting to learn about the state of your electric cooperative and to vote on directors for Districts 2, 3 and 8. More details on the Annual Meeting can be found on Page 4.

This publication focuses on cooperative savings, programs and events. As this is the official member publication, member's story ideas, letters-to-the-editor and comments are welcomed.

Andrea Christoffer, CCC, Editor
 "Owned by those it serves"

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Get educated on smart thermostat options

According to the U.S. Department of energy, heating and cooling costs account for around half of a user's energy bill. That smarts!

However, when it comes to cutting home energy costs, the right thermostat settings can yield savings of 8 to 15 percent! A new smart thermostat can help you maximize those savings.

Wi-Fi smart thermostats can be controlled through a tablet, smartphone or voice control. Some models monitor temperatures in multiple parts of the home for more balanced heating or cooling. Others track user temperature preferences to optimize heating and cooling schedules. Finally, some smart thermostats are designed for multi-stage systems: heating, cooling, dehumidifier and ventilation.

To narrow down your choices factor in smart features, price and extras that matter most to you. Plus, make sure the product supports your system.

The Nest Third Generation Learning Thermostat and Ecobee4 are two of the most popular devices available. Both thermostats cost about \$250, but consumers can easily recoup their money in energy savings. Your electric co-op also offers a \$25 rebate to give you a head start! Find this rebate form on the co-op's website.

Both thermostats can be adjusted via computer, tablet, smartphone, Google Assistant or Amazon Alexa device (the Ecobee4 even has a built-in Alexa-enabled speaker). Both thermostats offer geofencing—using your phone's GPS to determine if you're home, then automatically adjusting the temperature. Nest's geofencing works with multiple phones. Ecobee supports only one phone, but it makes up for this with more sophisticated sensors.

Remote sensors (sold separately)



The Nest thermostat, powered by a rechargeable battery, automatically learns your schedule.



The Ecobee model is Wi-Fi connected and can be controlled through your smartphone, tablet or voice.

enable both the Nest and Ecobee thermostats to take readings from any room in your home and adjust the temperature accordingly. This can be an advantage if your thermostat is located near a draft or in direct sunlight.

Ecobee sensors go one step further with occupancy sensing. This feature overrides geofencing, if the primary phone user leaves the home and someone is still there.

Meanwhile, the Nest is a learning thermostat. As you adjust the temperature up or down, the Nest records it, and after a week, learns your schedule. From then on it continues to learn and respond to your adjustments.

The Nest also records 10 days of energy use data that shows you a visual of the times your system turned on and off during those 10 days. Nest also sends a monthly email report that includes a summary of your energy use compared to previous months and other Nest users.

The Ecobee must be hardwired, uses a touchscreen and can analyze HVAC data for 18 months. All temperature and motion data from the

thermostat and sensors is recorded; it can be accessed online by the owner to help them monitor total energy use, how the weather influences their use, and how their home efficiency compares to other users in the area.

Both thermostats can also connect with various energy devices in your home. Ecobee recognizes dehumidifiers and ventilators. Meanwhile, the Nest thermostat recognizes heat pumps and auxiliary heat.

For those looking for a smart thermostat with fewer bells and whistles, the Honeywell Lyric T5+ is one of the market's most popular, priced around \$135. While it can't sense your presence or learn your schedule, it offers the geofencing feature and can interact with other smart-home devices, such as turning on lights when you arrive or leave home.

Whichever fits your lifestyle and preferences, a smart thermostat is a good investment that can help you save energy and money in a more convenient way than ever. They are a smart decision to make! ☺

Ride the current with an electric jet ski

Electricity and water don't mix safety-wise, but electricity and water recreation are becoming more common. First, electric boats entered the marketplace. Now electric jet skis are becoming viable options for water sport enthusiasts.

Taiga Motors, a Canadian company that introduced an electric snowmobile last year, now has an electric jet ski available for pre-order.

The Taiga Orca uses a 23-kWh battery to give riders two hours of fun before they need to head to shore for a charge. No more trips to the gas station, no more hauling fuel down to the dock or spills into the lake and no more engine maintenance.

Features include:

- The Orca can generate over 180 horsepower for incredible acceleration and a top speed of 65 miles per hour.
- Three levels of charging: 100 percent charge overnight with a household 120-volt outlet; level two charging in two hours with 240-volt outlet found at marinas; and level three charging to 80 percent in 20 minutes with DC fast charge.
- The Orca also features a digital display more comparable to automobiles than jet skis. Its digital display is powered by a computer offering intelligent connectivity via built-in GPS mapping, LTE, Wi-Fi and Bluetooth. Users can choose from a variety of integrated sensors: water temperature, cameras and sonar to explore their environment.
- Connected Orca users will also benefit from continuous updates to their jet ski, as the latest advancements are made available via remote updates.
- No winterization is required for the Orca. Plus, the



The Tiaga Orca is an electric jet ski that offers a top speed of 65 miles per hour and a two-hour runtime on a single charge.

vehicle can be left unplugged up to five years, while still periodically waking itself to check on systems. Users will no longer have to disconnect their 12V batteries for fear of draining them. The Orca will also be backed by an industry leading five-year, no-maintenance power-train warranty and remote diagnostics anywhere they are sold.

The Orca will cost \$24,000 for the base model. Tiaga's plan, according to the electric transportation news outlet *Electrek*, is to use sales of the limited edition Orcas to finance the development of mass market jet skis that will sell for around \$14,000. Visit <https://taigamotors.ca/watercraft/> for more information. ☺

Safety



Electrical safety tips for boat operators

Reduce the risk of electric shock drowning and common boating electrical hazards with these safety tips:

- Don't allow yourself or anyone else to swim near the dock. Avoid entering the water when launching or loading your boat. Docks or boats can leak electricity into the water causing water electrification.
- Be aware of your surroundings and potential electrical hazards by checking the location of nearby power lines before boating, fishing or swimming. Always maintain a distance of at least 10 feet between your boat and nearby power lines.
- If you feel a tingle while swimming, the water may be electrified. Get out of the water as soon as possible avoiding the use of metal objects, such as ladders.
- Have Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters (GFCI) installed on your boat and insist that your marina/dock owners

have GFCIs installed on the dock too. Test them once a month.

- Consider having Equipment Leakage Circuit Interrupters (ELCI) installed on boats to protect nearby swimmers from potential electricity leakage into water surrounding your boat.
- Only use shore or marine power cords, plugs, receptacles and extension cords that have been tested by Underwriters Laboratories (UL). They are specifically designed to keep you safe when using them near water. Never use cords that are frayed, damaged or had the prongs removed or altered. Damaged cords exposed to water could result in electrical shock or electrocution.
- Never stand or swim in water when turning off electrical devices or switches to prevent shock or electrocution. ☺

— *Information courtesy of esfi.org*

Brown County Briefs

BCREA lobby remains closed

Our office remains closed to the public. Members who need to conduct business that cannot be done remotely may call to make an appointment. This does not include payment of electric bills, which will continue to be done via the drop box, online and other payment options.

Twins Play Ball! Clinic



The Twins Play Ball! Youth Clinic scheduled for June 19 in Sleepy Eye was cancelled.

Member Advisory Council

The new Member Advisory Council meeting has not been set. New members are still being sought. Contact us if interested.

Operation Round Up

The next meeting of the Round Up Trust Board is August 18. ☎

Rural mental health resources available

Farmers, you are the backbone of our local community and region. The stress of being a farmer can be a lot to manage on your own. COVID-19 has added many new challenges to an already challenging occupation. It is important for you, your families and your employees to know that there are resources available to serve the agricultural community.

If you need someone to talk to, the Minnesota Farm and Rural Health Helpline is available 24/7 at 833-600-2670. Ted Matthews (320-266-2390) and Monica McConkey (218-280-7785) are rural mental health counselors who work with farmers throughout Minnesota at

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Brown County REA Notice of Annual Meeting

All Brown County REA members are invited and encouraged to attend the reconvened 83rd Annual Meeting



Instructions:

- Enter through the south driveway only; other entrances will be blocked.
- Stop at registration point, available for those with Annual Report (photo at left) to scan and for manual registration.
- Register, pick up ballot for election of directors in District 2, 3 & 8, and attendance gift. Complete and return the ballot and depart, beginning at 4 p.m.

Those who wish to stay for the 6 p.m. business meeting should keep the ballot and will be directed to park in the lot south of the auditorium. Attendees are to remain in their vehicles and listen to the radio broadcast of the meeting on FM 89.1.

- No meal will be served. However, each attending member account will receive a Sleepy Eye Chamber gift certificate to use toward a meal or other purchase at participating business. No prize drawings will be held.
- Please remember to bring along the 2019 Annual Report, which was mailed to you in March, to scan your registration. Members who don't have their Annual Report will be able to register manually. ☎

Details:

- Annual Meeting Date: June 25
- Location: South Parking Lot, BCREA Headquarters 24386 State Hwy 4, Sleepy Eye
- Voting from 4-6 p.m. with Meeting at 6 p.m.

Donation made to area food shelf



Brown County REA CEO Mike Heidemann presented a \$370 check to Sleepy Eye Food Shelf Treasurer Lori Sellner. The funds were collected from office employees who made a donation in exchange for the opportunity to wear jeans on Fridays. ☎

We'll help you keep your cool this summer

Let Brown County REA help you stay cool and offer some cold cash with higher air source heat pump rebates and cooling system tune-ups.

Brown County REA encourages members to have their central air conditioner or air source heat pump unit tuned up regularly by a licensed, professional HVAC contractor. We are again offering a \$25 electric bill credit to members who have their home cooling system tuned up.

Units that are more than three years old and have not had a tune-up in the last two years are eligible for a rebate, if serviced by a qualified contractor who performs the tasks on the coupon's checklist. This checklist can also be found on the Heating & Cooling Rebate Form on our website. Submit a copy of the coupon's checklist or have the contractor complete the tune-up portion of the HVAC rebate form, along with a dated copy of the contractor's bill to Brown County REA, PO Box 529, Sleepy Eye, MN 56085, or place it in the dropbox outside the office. Even if members have the tune-up done annually, a rebate will only be credited if it has been two years since the last tune-up.

Replace your old AC unit with a heat pump

If it's time to replace your cooling system, consider an Air Source Heat Pump (ASHP) for your home. Efficiently enjoy the best of both worlds as a heat pump provides home cooling and supplemental heating with 72 percent less electricity than conventional air conditioners and furnaces.

Switch between cooling and heating directly from the thermostat, putting you in complete control. Residential rebates are available when the new heat pump is placed on the co-op's load control program with a non-electric backup.

A new load-controlled ASHP with a Heating Seasonal Performance Factor (HSPF) of 8.2 and higher qualifies for a \$1,000 rebate. A heat pump with an HSPF of 9.0 and higher qualifies for a \$2,000 when placed on load control.

Brown County REA adopting new interconnection technical standards



In compliance with Minnesota Statute 216B.1611, Brown County Rural Electrical Association (REA) is updating the technical requirements for Distributed Energy Resources (DER) interconnections. The existing technical requirement document will be replaced with the Technical Interconnection and Interoperability Requirements (TIIR) and

Technical Specification Manual (TSM). These new documents can be found after June 1, on the cooperative website at www.browncountyrea.coop. These requirements become effective July 1 and all new DER systems and DER system additions applying for interconnection after July 1 will be required to meet these updated standards. ☎

No ductwork in your home? Cool your home with a Ductless Mini Split Heat Pump. During the months of June, July and August, Brown County REA is offering bonus rebates on Energy Star residential Ductless Air Source Heat Pumps. Receive a \$750 bonus rebate if electricity is your home's primary heat source and \$450 rebate if you heat your home with fossil fuel. Contact the office to learn more. ☎

Cooling system tune-up check points

Member name _____

Address _____

Technician Checklist:

Clean condenser coil; Check coolant level;
 Check coolant pressure; Check indoor filter;
 Check belt and lube motor, if needed; Test all controls;
 Blow out drain lines; Perform a visual inspection of the entire cooling system; Educate member on proper system operation and maintenance

List cooling unit's brand, model and serial number:

Age of unit _____

ER rating and BTU rating _____

Technician's signature _____



Notice of Cogeneration

In compliance with Brown County Rural Electrical Association (REA)'s adopted rules relating to cogeneration and small power production, Brown County REA is obligated to interconnect with and purchase electricity from cogeneration and small power producers, whom satisfy the conditions as a qualifying facility. Brown County REA is obligated to provide information free of charge to all interested members, upon request, regarding rates and interconnection requirements. All interconnections require an application and approval to become a qualifying facility. Any dispute over interconnections, sales and purchases are subject to resolution by the Brown County REA Board of Directors. Interested members should contact Brown County REA, 24386 State Highway 4, PO Box 529, Sleepy Eye, MN 56085 or call 800-658-2368. ☎

Coal-fired power replaced by natural gas & long-duration batteries too

—Continued on Page 6

projects. This amounts to a more than \$1.2 billion investment in the Midwest's abundant clean energy resources. GRE's renewable capacity is projected to grow from approximately 660 MW in 2020 to more than 1,760 MW by the end of 2023. The GRE Board of Directors approved 600 MW of wind energy projects May 7, most of which will be located in Minnesota.

GRE plans to add energy and capacity as needed through upgrades at its fleet of modern, natural gas peaking plants and purchases from the MISO energy market.

Coal Creek Station has been a critical part of GRE's power supply portfolio for decades, but it has lost value compared to other alternatives in recent years. GRE plans to shut down both units of Coal Creek Station during the second half of 2022, although the cooperative is willing to consider opportunities to sell the plant. Coal Creek Station began operations in 1979 in Underwood, North Dakota, and employs 260 people.

"Like all of GRE's decisions, these changes are made in the best interests of our member-owner cooperatives," Saggau said. "Coal Creek Station is



David Saggau
Great River Energy
President & CEO

this transition."

To assist local communities during the upcoming transition GRE plans to make voluntary annual payments of the local government share of the plant's taxes for five years after the plant's closure.

GRE plans to negotiate an agreement to terminate its steam and water supply contract with Blue Flint, an ethanol plant fueled by process steam from Coal Creek Station. Blue Flint's owner, Midwest AgEnergy, is considering using the contract termination payment from GRE to reinvest in an economical alternate source for its process heat. This benefits North Dakota farmers by continuing to support the local market for corn.

Located near Jamestown, North

operated efficiently, safely and with pride by a dedicated and talented staff. We will make every effort to minimize impacts on our employees and the communities through

Dakota, Spiritwood Station is a combined heat and power plant fueled by a combination of DryFine™ lignite coal and natural gas. GRE plans to modify the plant to be fueled with natural gas. The plant generates electricity for the regional electric grid and supplies steam to a nearby ethanol plant.

GRE is working with Form Energy, a battery storage technology developer based in Somerville, Massachusetts, on a first-of-its-kind demonstration of Form's unique long-duration storage technology. The battery project will be a 1-MW grid-connected storage system capable of delivering its rated power continuously for 150 hours; this operates far longer than the four-hour usage period common among lithium-ion batteries. Long-duration storage will help maintain grid reliability in the future during extreme conditions, such as a heat wave or polar vortex. The battery system will be located in Cambridge, Minnesota, and completed in late 2023.

The projects will create hundreds of high-quality construction jobs. "We look forward to partnering with local labor and industry on our projects," Saggau said. ☺

CTV channel changes for you!

Good news! A few channel changes recently occurred on the CTV towers at Jackson, Frost and Godahl. Do a rescan to pick up these new UHF channels:

- Find Channel 45 on CTV channels 5.2 and 5.5. KSTP added one as a backup.

- Find 11.8 Circle (Country Music channel).
- On 17.1 Fuse replaced You Too America.
- Vibrant was replaced with Telemundo (Spanish language channel) for Godahl and Jackson tower on channel 25.1. Find these on Jackson and Godahl towers:

25.2	SonLife	Christian TV channel
25-3	COZI TV	Pop culture favorites
25-4	LX	Lifestyle & entertainment
25-5	ShopHQ	Shopping
25-6	GetTV.	Classic movies & TV ☺

**Your electric cooperative
will be closed July 3**

**Crews will be on call
in case of outages**

Be safe!

Don't be chicken to share your favorite poultry recipes with us

Cock-a-doodle-do! Rise and shine and share your favorite chicken, turkey or duck recipes with us. Whether it's fried, grilled, baked, in a salad or a chicken wing secret sauce, share your favorite recipes using poultry by sending to: Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by June 27. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! ☺

Southern Cream Cookies by Rose Freking, Heron Lake

1 c. butter	5 c. white flour
2 c. white sugar	3 tsp. baking powder
3 eggs, beaten	1 tsp. salt
1 tsp. vanilla	½ tsp. baking soda
1 c. sour cream	1½ c. broken walnuts

Cream the butter and sugar; add the eggs, vanilla and sour cream. Mix well. Sift together the flour, baking powder, salt and baking soda. Add to the creamed mixture. Add the coarsely chopped walnuts. Drop from a teaspoon onto a greased cookie sheet. Then sprinkle the top of the cookies with this cinnamon and sugar mixture:

3 T. sugar 1 tsp. cinnamon

Bake at 350° for about 15 minutes. Makes about six dozen cookies. ☺

Cucumber Slices

by Yvonne Wolff, Windom

2 T. sugar	1½ tsp. salt
1 c. sour cream	
3 tsp. grated onion	2T. of vinegar
3 cucumbers, thinly sliced ☺	



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for foundations, trees, tiling and more. You can also register at www.gopherstateonecall.org or call 811. Call a licensed electrician to locate the underground lines on your side of the meter. ☺

The Power to Protect Your Favorite Chill Spot

To do our part during these challenging times, we're offering **3 months free monitoring** with the purchase of a new security system. Protect your home or business from intruders, fire, carbon monoxide, and other threats for less than you'd think.



Brown County
Rural Electrical
Association

Brown County Rural Electrical Assn.
24386 State Hwy 4, PO Box 529
Sleepy Eye MN 56085

E-mail address: bcrea@bcrea.coop
Website: www.browncountyrea.coop
Phone: 507-794-3331 or 800-658-2368
Office hours: 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday

Mike Heidemann, Chief Executive Officer

Board of Directors

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William Berg, Vice President — 766-1497
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Brad Sprenger — 317-5576
Allen Hanson — 276-0691
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Reuben Kokesch — 359-2112
Greg Mages — 794-3540
Joel Christensen — 828-4550

The Board of Directors meets the last Thursday of each month.



David Saggau
GRE President & CEO

Guest columnist

Power supply transition delivers what members want

When you work for a cooperative, you have one goal: provide what the membership wants.

Of course, not all members want the same things. Some members want service at the lowest possible cost. Others want energy with minimal environmental impact. Certain members value reliability above everything else.

Great River Energy (GRE) focuses on keeping electricity reliable and affordable, while being responsible stewards of the environment. We recently announced plans to change our power supply portfolio that deliver on all three of those objectives. See story on Page 1.

GRE plans to phase out remaining coal resources, add significant renewable energy in Minnesota and explore critical grid-scale battery technology. The portfolio changes will significantly reduce GRE's costs, which will save money for BCREA's membership over the long term.

When the power supply plans are in place in 2023, GRE's power supply resources will be more than 95 percent carbon dioxide-free.

Our power supply plans included the difficult decision to shut down our largest power plant, Coal Creek Station. Coal Creek Station has been a critical part of GRE's power supply portfolio for decades. This "flagship" GRE power plant began operations in 1979 in Underwood, North Dakota, and employs 260 people.

Thousands of members have visited the facility and met the men and women who operate and maintain the plant. It has attracted families and businesses to central North Dakota and served as the hub of a thriving community.

Coal Creek Station is operated efficiently, safely and with pride by a dedicated and talented staff. We will make every effort to minimize impacts on our employees and the communities through this transition.

To assist local communities during the upcoming transition, GRE plans to make voluntary annual payments of the local government share of the plant's taxes for five years after the plant's closure. Plus, we will treat the employees with the dignity and respect they deserve.

As GRE transforms its power supply portfolio, our mission remains the same: provide member-owners with affordable, reliable energy in harmony with a sustainable environment. ☐

Counseling available for area farm workers

— *Continued from Page 4*

no cost and with no paperwork. For additional resources to support emotional health, as well as to help with your business or financial situation with legal matters, visit www.mda.state.mn.us/about/mnfarmerstress or call your Brown County Public Health office at 507-233-6820 to inquire about specific local resources. ☐

Board meeting highlights

The BCREA Board of Directors held its monthly meeting via phone conference May 28. Discussion and/or action was taken on the following agenda items:

- Reviewed and approved the April 2020 board meeting minutes, member cancellations, assignment of transfers and payments to estates.
- Reviewed and approved resolutions outlining responsibilities of the CEO and Office Manager in applying for a new Rural Utilities Service (RUS) loan.
- Updated on plans for the reconvened 83rd Annual Meeting, June 25, in the REA headquarters south parking lot. Voting is open from 4 to 6 p.m.
- Informed that the cooperative will begin using updated interconnection technical standards and its customized Technical Specification Manual for new and additions to existing Distributed Energy Resources on July 1.
- Discussed recent substation outages caused by animals.
- Updated on construction activities, underground rebuilds and pole replacements.

The next Board meeting is set for June 25 at the BCREA headquarters, Sleepy Eye. ☐