

Connections

March 2021

For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 25, Issue 3

Rolling blackouts & outages occur down south, while MISO grid provided reliable power last month

Rolling blackouts occur in the ERCOT and SPP zones...

These words were not part of our normal vocabulary until February's record-low temperatures.

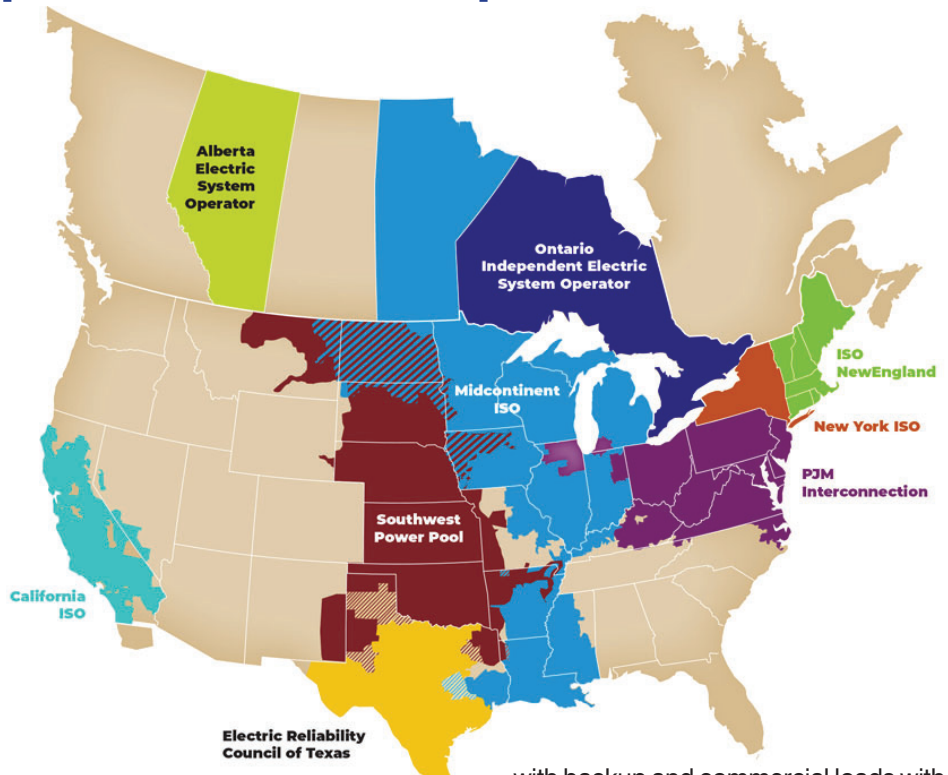
Texas residents lost power for days. Rolling blackouts occurred as close to us as South Dakota, Iowa and at Minnesota co-ops and municipal utilities on the west side of the state. Local co-op members wondered if they'd be next.

"Our local co-op members appreciated their reliable power even more after watching the news," said Mike Heidemann, Brown County REA CEO.

BCREA and most of Minnesota is part of the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO) grid. Texas has its own power grid called Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT). States to the south and west of us are in the Southwest Power Pool (SPP) Grid. MISO consists of a northern area that includes most of Minnesota and a southern area. SPP and ERCOT had rolling blackouts. MISO South had issues too.

At no point during the polar vortex were rolling blackouts even considered in the MISO North region, according to sources at BCREA's wholesale power supplier Great River Energy (GRE). MISO is designed to provide reliable power even in extremely cold weather.

GRE's power supply resources, including Coal Creek Station and Spiritwood Station, operated throughout



the cold weather with no issues. GRE's peaking stations operated as designed, injecting electricity onto the grid quickly and dependably when needed.

GRE also deployed demand response programs to reduce electricity demand during events such as a polar vortex. Cooperative members across its 28 member co-ops collectively reduced hundreds of megawatts of electricity demand over a few days with load control on water heaters, electric heat

with backup and commercial loads with and without backup generators. This alleviated stress on the electric grid and allowed GRE to avoid expensive purchases from the energy market during both morning and evening peak periods.

As the wholesale power future becomes increasingly served by intermittent resources like wind and solar, maintaining power grid reliability in this region will continue to be a MISO, GRE and BCREA priority. ☺

At A Glance



**Brown County
Rural Electrical
Association**

Vote for your electric co-op directors

Co-ops are democratically-controlled. Co-op members have a say in who represents them on the Board of Directors. Review the director candidates up for election on Page 5 and vote for them at the upcoming Annual Meeting. ☺

A heat pump that is built to handle Minnesota winters and summers

Air source heat pumps (ASHPs) have been used for many years in nearly all parts of the United States. Until recently they were not common in areas with extended periods of subfreezing temperatures. However, cold-climate ASHP (ccASHP) technology has advanced in recent years so that it now offers a legitimate heating alternative in colder regions.

A ccASHP provides both efficient heating and cooling for your home. When properly installed, it can deliver up to three times more heat energy to a home than the electrical energy it consumes. This is possible because a heat pump moves heat, rather than converting it from a fuel, like combustion heating systems.

A project recently conducted by the Center for Energy and Environment found that the efficiency of the newest generation of ccASHPs can operate down to minus 13 degrees Fahrenheit. The efficiency of these technologies in moderate climates is also two to three times more efficient than standard electric heating systems.

Since heat pumps provide heating in the winter and cooling in the summer, you should be aware of at least two heat pump energy-efficiency ratings.



The 1999 air source heat pump was replaced with a cold-climate air source heat pump at a co-op employee/member's house in 2019. If you need a new central air unit, go with a cold climate heat pump for added efficiency and savings!

The Seasonal Energy Efficiency Ratio (SEER) measures cooling efficiency over the cooling season, while the Heating Seasonal Performance Factor (HSPF) measures heating efficiency over the heating season. Given that it's still winter, let's further explore the heating aspect.

HSPF is a standardized rating used to compare energy efficiencies. HSPF is used by all heat pump manufacturers to indicate efficiency ratings. Like miles per gallon for your car, the higher the HSPF number, the more efficient the system.

Heat pumps, when properly installed, provide members with advantages. When sized appropriately, today's ccASHPs can provide 100 percent of a

home's heating needs down to temperatures as low as zero degrees, which is roughly 90 percent of all heating hours in Minnesota. If properly set an ASHP can serve as your primary source for a good part of Minnesota winters.

The balance point of your heat pump is the outdoor temperature where your home HVAC system switches over to its backup heating system, likely set by your installer. If your heat pump can keep your home warm

down to 10 F, but your balance point is set to switch over to backup heat at that same temperature, then anytime it's in the 10 to 15-degree Fahrenheit range, you'll be paying more than you should for heat.

Aren't sure of your ASHP's balance point? Take note of the temperature where your backup heating source kicks in. If it's above 10 F, your balance point may be set too high. If you have already installed an ASHP, ask your installation contractor to ensure your balance point is where you want it.

Your local electric co-op provides a variety of rebates and a discounted Dual Heat rate for heat pump technologies. Contact your co-op's energy expert or visit the co-op's website.

Ego Power+ has 'snow' problem clearing driveways

Blowing snow is not a job many enjoy. It is usually cold out. One usually has to do it early in the morning so they get going on their day. For many the worst part is getting the snowblower started.

Some may have to pull and pull to start their snowblower. Others may use an electric start, but the combination of a cold engine and cold weather is not always the best combination when it comes to getting snowblowers running.

Imagine simply pushing a button and the snowblower is on immediately. That's possible with an electric snowblower. The Ego Power+ snowblower is a cordless two-stage snowblower that delivers the power and performance of gas without the noise and fuss.

The Ego Power+ combines the power of two 56V ARC Lithium batteries to tackle the toughest snow conditions.




The Ego Power+ two-stage snowblower brings easy to use electric products to winter. It's quieter and easier to operate than combustion snowblowers; the Ego Power+ clears an 18-foot driveway on a single charge.

This electric snowblower gets the job done quickly with a 24-inch clearing width and 20-inch intake height to handle deep snow. It can clear an 18-foot driveway with eight inches of snow on a single charge. It takes approximately 20 minutes to charge.

Four LED lights make it easy for use during dark mornings or evenings. Plus, the variable speed auger and 200 degree chute direction give you complete control to throw snow where you need it — up to 50 feet away.

The Ego Power+ has a weather-resistant heavy-duty steel and composite construction to handle the challenging conditions of Minnesota winters. It comes with a metal auger and five-year warranty.

The Ego Power+ is available through places like ACE Hardware for approximately \$1,300, which includes batteries and charger. 

Safety

Winter storms pile on electrical safety hazards

March Madness can also refer to winter snow or ice storms. Are you prepared for Mother Nature's worst?

Keep these tips in mind.

- When cleaning out your yard, don't pile the snow near the power lines. Children might want to play on these large snow piles and would be too close to the wires. Keep your equipment at least 10 feet away from power lines too.

- If snow or icy conditions bring down power lines, stay away from them. Just like a summer storm, downed lines can still be energized.

- When the power goes out, it may come back in spikes. This can damage electronics. Keep your electronics safe by unplugging them when the power goes out. Leave one lamp or switch on as a signal

Watch for the green underground power line cabinet. This one lost the battle to snow removal, which caused an outage.




for when your power returns.

- In the case you do lose power and heat, watch your pipes to prevent freezing. Keep faucets turned on slightly, so water drips from the tap to

prevent frozen pipes. Know how to shut off water valves in case a pipe bursts.

- If you have underground power line cabinets (the green boxes) in your yard, know where they are located so you don't damage one when moving snow. Instead, carefully clear the snow around underground cabinets with a shovel. This also helps the electric co-op crews find it if they have to service the equipment inside it.

- If you use a portable generator, use it safely. The Consumer Product Safety Commission reports that 50 percent of all portable generator-related carbon monoxide deaths occur during the winter months. Never use a generator inside of a house or garage; make sure to have working carbon monoxide detectors present. 

Brown County Briefs

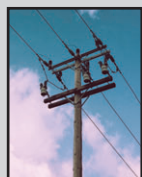
Office closed

Our office remains temporarily closed to the public. If you need to conduct business that can't be done remotely, please call 800-658-2368 to make an appointment. Please continue to pay your electric bill using the drop box, online bill pay through our website (www.browncountyrea.coop), mobile app or automatic payment from your bank account, credit or debit card.

No Health Day in 2021

The Community Health Day, a joint effort of Brown County REA, Brown County Public Health, Sleepy Eye Medical Center and Sleepy Eye Community Education, will not be held in 2021.

Pole inspections



Brown County REA has again contracted with Southwood 2000 to perform pole inspections. Weather conditions permitting, they will begin in the southeastern portion of the service territory in April.

Vegetation control planned

BCREA will be using Central Applicators, Inc. to control vegetation along rights-of-way in the co-op's service area. Work is expected to begin at the end of April/early May. Central Applicators will use an EPA-approved herbicide to treat only the unwanted brush, weeds and volunteer trees that may interfere with power lines.

2020 Annual Report on the way!

A copy of the co-op's 2020 Annual Report will be mailed in mid-March. It includes your Annual Meeting registration so please save and bring to the meeting. ☎

Never miss a payment and enter a drawing for bill credits; Auto Pay is win-win for all!



Pay your electric bill each month without giving it a thought through recurring Auto Pay from your checking or savings account. Enroll before March 31 and you'll be entered in a drawing. Members already enrolled in the program are automatically entered in the drawing for one \$100, two \$50 or 12 \$25 bill credits.

Your monthly bill payment is automatically deducted from your bank account on the 20th of each month. You still receive a statement, but no longer have to write a check, look for a stamp or make a trip to the mailbox or our drop box. Sign up today by calling the office or using the ACH Authorization Form under the *Forms* tab on our website at www.browncountyrea.coop. ☎

Scholarships offered through Round Up



High school seniors planning to attend college after graduation whose parents/guardians are members and live in Brown County REA's service area are encouraged to apply for one of six \$250 scholarships to be awarded through Operation Round Up.

Funds for the scholarships come from members who choose to round up their electric bill to the nearest dollar each month. The difference is placed in a trust, which is administered by a nine-member board.

The group meets four times each year to distribute funds to charitable causes, individuals and families in crisis and scholarships.

Scholarship guidelines and applications are available from area high school counselors. They can also be found on the BCREA website at www.browncountyrea.coop.

Applications and supporting materials must be submitted by April 1. Winners will be announced at the Brown County REA Annual Meeting April 8. A copy of the student's high school transcript and one letter of recommendation are required. Scholarship funds will be awarded after successful completion of the first semester of college. ☎

Operation Round Up distributes \$2,350



The Brown County Rural Electric Round Up Trust Board kicked off its 2021 giving at its first quarterly meeting February 9. The Trust Board welcomed new members Lisa Schmitz and Jessie Beranek, representing Districts 7 and 8, respectively.

Trust Board Officers elected at the meeting are President: Lee Johnson, Vice President: Michelle Oswald, Secretary: Vickie Kral and Treasurer: Kari Helget. Other current Trust Board Members are Pat Roiger, Lynnae Pelzel, Lisa Schmitz and Jessie Beranek.

Funds totaling \$2,350 were contributed to five applicants and five area food shelves. Sleepy Eye Safety Pup, Junior Achievement of New Ulm Area, Brickstone Manor, New Ulm Figure Skating Club and Comfrey After Prom were awarded donations. The Trust Board also donated funds to Sleepy Eye Area Food Shelf, Springfield Area Food Shelf, New Ulm Emergency Food Shelf, We Care Food Shelf and Sibley County Food Share.

The Round Up Trust Board will meet again on Tuesday, April 6. ☎

Introducing BCREA director candidates

District 3



Landon Sletta has lived his entire life in the Hanska area. He is a graduate of New Ulm High School and attended Mankato State University where he studied Business.

Since 1991 Sletta has been engaged in farming in rural Hanska, where he lives with his wife, Jodi, and four children: Andy, Alden, Abby and Blake.

Landon is a 21-year member of the Hanska Fire Department and serves as a supervisor on the Lake Hanska Township Board. He also represented his district on the BCREA Trust Board until being elected to fill the vacancy on the Brown County REA Board of Directors in January.

"We are fortunate to have affordable and reliable electrical service like we do," Sletta said. "I want to work together in order to keep it that way." (U)

District 6



Joel Christensen and his wife, Monica, live on the farm Joel grew up on in Eden Township, Brown County. They have four grown children: Dayna, Jon (Kindra), Tyler (Lydia) and Jake. They are also blessed with seven grandchildren.

Joel has a cow-calf operation with his son, Jake, and raises corn, alfalfa and soybeans. He graduated from Morgan High School and attended the University of Minnesota-Waseca for two years before going into farming. He has been involved with the Redwood Area Cattlemen's Association and is a past church board member.

Joel is completing his third term as a BCREA Director for District 6. He says his goal for the cooperative is to continue to provide excellent service and affordable power.

"I welcome the opportunity to continue to serve as a director on the Brown County REA Board," Joel added. (U)



Mary Portner and her husband, Tom, have operated the family's Brown Swiss dairy operation in rural Sleepy Eye since 1992. They have five daughters Boston, Sabrina, Isabella, Crystal and Sophia.

Mary grew up in the Comfrey area and graduated from Springfield High School. She is a graduate of the Animal Science/Business program at South Dakota State University.

Mary has been club leader and very active with Brown County 4-H over the years. She has served on the Sleepy Eye St. Mary's Board of Education and is a member of the church's administrative council.

Being an active member of the Dairy Farmers of America, Mary understands how a cooperative works. "I have a curiosity about energy and how we can support and produce it efficiently for generations to come," she said. (U)

District 7



Greg Mages is life-long resident of Brown and Nicollet counties, Greg raises corn, soybeans and hogs together with his parents, Dan and Arlene, and brother, Tim Mages, in a family farm corporation.

Greg holds a Farm Management degree from South Central Technical College. He values people and is always eager to learn from new acquaintances. He is a member of New Ulm's Farm-City Hub Club.

Greg lives with his wife, Mary Kay, in Home Township, Brown County, where they raise their four children: Grace (15), Adam (13), Anna (10) and Martin (8).

Greg was first elected to fill the remainder of a term on the BCREA Board of Directors in 2014 and is completing his second full term. He is interested in continuing to serve as a BCREA director because he values affordable and reliable electricity. (U)

District 9



Tom Hayes, and his wife, Patti, live on their Century Farm, east of Lafayette. Tom and Patti have four grown children: Anna, Daniel, Father John Hayes and David, along with his wife, Micaela. They also have a grand baby, Sophia.

"With the experience of being on the REA board, I am more appreciative of the things that Brown County REA is involved in and stands for," Tom said. "We work to address issues and maintain a reliable system."

In 2014 Tom was elected to serve on the board of directors of the National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation. He served as BCREA board president from 2004-2014, and 2020 and is a past director for Cooperative Network. Tom is a member of the Farm-City Hub Club, a director of the New Ulm Area Foundation and is currently the president of the Lafayette Lions. (U)



Emilee Stehr attended University of Wisconsin-River Falls graduating with an Ag Business degree. She worked as an analyst for Farm Credit and CHS Capital and was drawn back to Winthrop to continue the family-farming legacy. She

now works for Rabo AgriFinance in Mankato.

In August 2020 Emilee and her husband, Tyler, welcomed a daughter, Jolee.

Emilee is involved in her church, St. Francis de Sales, as a lector, usher and Eucharistic Minister. "When I was younger, I was very involved in the community being in 4-H, FFA, Miss Winthrop First Princess and Miss Sibley County, It is time to continue that involvement," said Emilee, adding she believes her work knowledge and experience would be valuable contribution to the board. (U)

New transmission line's wire better withstands winds & ice storms for improved reliability

April ice storms in 2013 and 2019 beat up a transmission line so it's the perfect place to test a different technology against ice. Great River Energy (GRE) is piloting such a project in Federated Rural Electric's service territory.

The southwest part of Minnesota, where Federated is located, is the area on GRE's transmission system that sees the most "galloping." Galloping occurs when ice forms on overhead lines and their wires jump like a rope and sometimes contact each other, which can cause momentary outages. Sometimes galloping is so widespread that system operators will de-energize a line until the wind and ice have subsided.

The pilot project involves rebuilding the FE-RH line, a 69-kilovolt, 23-mile line between Heron Lake and Round Lake Substations, with larger wood pole structures, steel switch structures and what is called a "twisted pair" conductor, which is resistant to icing.

"This line needed to be rebuilt based on the age and condition of the line, but we also are taking the opportunity to use innovative conductor technology," said Mark Peterson, manager of system operations at GRE. "Our goal is to improve reliability in this area where we are at high-risk for severe ice storms."


These additional resiliency design features are expected to result in a hardened, more reliable system to withstand these types of ice storms and wind.

Peterson said transmission lines, especially those located south of the Interstate 94 corridor, have historically had damaging events related to freezing rain and ice.

"When a typical round conductor is subjected to freezing rain, ice forms around the conductor in the shape of a wing," Peterson said. "As the wind blows across the conductor, it causes it to lift and the lines can start galloping, causing faults and may cause damage to line equipment, such as insulators and poles. The twisted pair conductor minimizes the galloping effects because it sheds ice due to its asymmetric shape, which causes the conductor to continuously rotate."

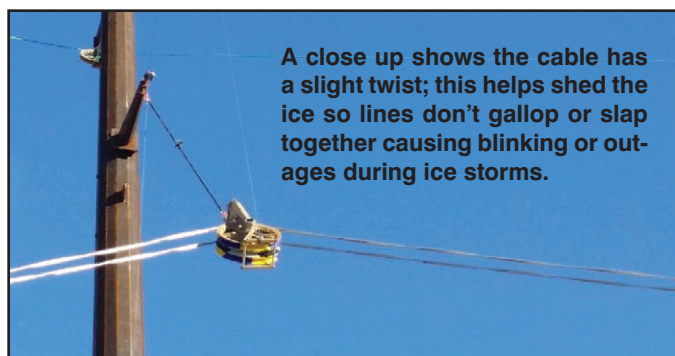
Peterson said the pilot project will help GRE understand if the benefits of the conductor will outweigh the extra effort needed to install and maintain it.

"The twisted pair conductor is installed differently," Peterson stated. "It can be more labor intensive. Our crews will need to gain experience maintaining the line once it's constructed. Ultimately, the benefits should outweigh those issues. This investment in the part of the state where we see reliability issues due to icing will help ensure we can continue to keep the lights on for end-use electric cooperative members."

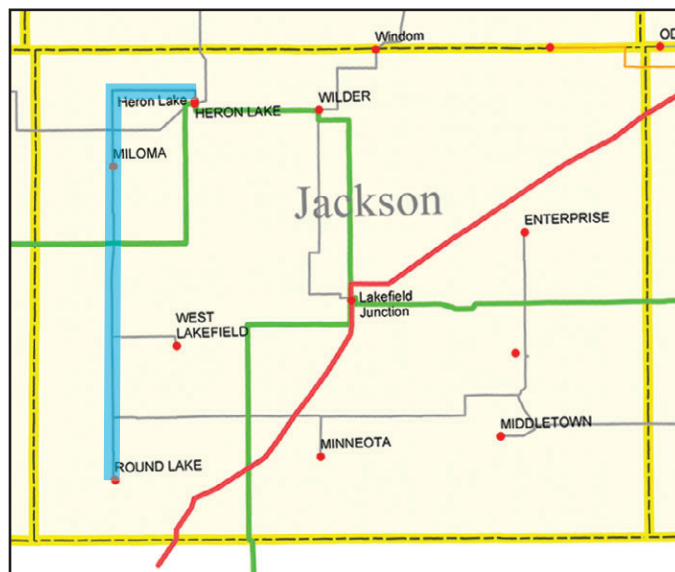
This transmission line project is expected to be completed by spring 2022. 



This new transmission line doesn't use cross arms, which reduces its weight during ice storms.



A close up shows the cable has a slight twist; this helps shed the ice so lines don't gallop or slap together causing blinking or outages during ice storms.



The light blue line indicates the stretch of transmission line that will be replaced with this different design.

'Dough' as we say and share your favorite bread recipes with us

As winter and the pandemic lingers, homemade bread becomes a great comfort food. Send us your favorite bread recipes, whether for a bread machine, yeast bread, quick bread or rolls. Mail to Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by March 25. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! 📧

Tater Tot Taco Casserole by Doreen Schmitt, New Ulm

1 pound ground beef 1 oz. packet taco seasoning mix
1 small onion, diced 16 oz. pkg. frozen tater tots (Crispy Crowns)
16 oz. bag frozen Mexican-style corn (or 1 can corn, drained)
1 bag frozen chopped broccoli (or other vegetable)
12 oz. bag shredded Mexican cheese blend 2 oz. can enchilada sauce
sour cream, optional

Preheat oven to 375°. Prepare a 9x13" baking dish with cooking spray.

Cook the ground beef in a skillet over medium heat until completely browned. Add the onion. Combine the ground beef mixture, corn, vegetables and taco seasoning in a large bowl with about three-fourths of the Mexican cheese; blend and add the tater tots. Stir to combine.

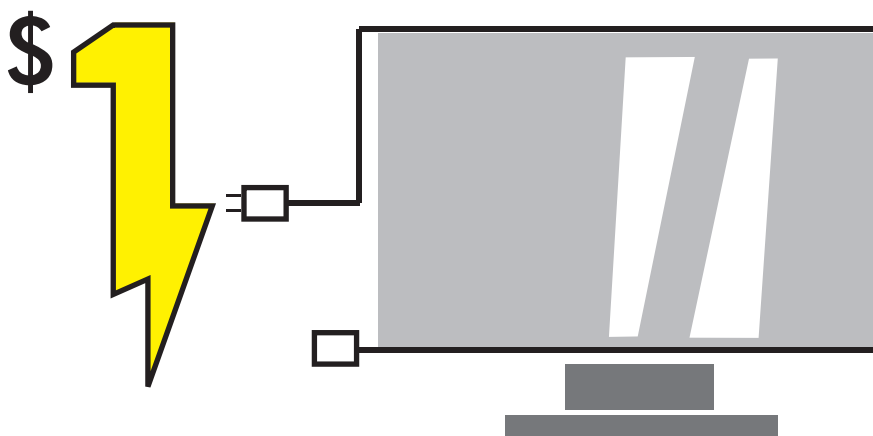
Pour about one-third of the enchilada sauce into the bottom of the prepared baking dish and spread evenly. Add the tater tot mixture to the baking dish; lightly pat the mixture down into a solid, even layer. Pour the remaining enchilada sauce over the tater tot layer. Bake in the preheated oven for 40 minutes. Sprinkle the remaining Mexican cheese over the casserole and return to the oven until the cheese is melted and bubbly, about 5 minutes more. Serve with sour cream on the side. 📧

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BCREA Annual Meeting

All Brown County REA members are invited and encouraged to attend the 84th Annual Meeting

When: April 8
Location: Sleepy Eye Event Center
110 12th Avenue N.E.
Sleepy Eye, MN
Time: 6 p.m.



Agenda includes 2020 review, financial report and election of directors in Districts 3, 6, 7 & 9

— James Hanson, Secretary

Important notice

The bylaws of Brown County REA require the Annual Meeting of Members to convene in February, March or April of each year and that a quorum of at least 50 members be present. The bylaws, however, also allow the meeting to be adjourned to a later date if a quorum is not present.

Due to continued concerns regarding COVID-19 and the need to keep our members and employees safe from potential exposure and spread of the virus, Brown County REA will not have a gathering of members at the Annual Meeting scheduled for April 8, 2021. The Board of Directors has decided to convene the Annual Meeting on April 8, with only the CEO present, establish that a quorum is not present and immediately adjourn the meeting to a later date. No members should attend. No business will be conducted, no reports given and no election held. No meal will be served and no gifts or door prizes will be distributed.

The 84th Annual Meeting will reconvene Thursday, June 24 in the south parking lot of the Brown County REA headquarters, 24386 State Highway 4, Sleepy Eye. Voting for directors in Districts 3, 6, 7 and 9 will take place between 4 and 6 p.m. with the business meeting to begin at 6 p.m.

Watch for further details in upcoming issues of *Connections*, on our website at www.browncountyrea.coop and on our Facebook page.



**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

Thomas Hayes, President — 228-8954
William Berg, Vice President — 766-1497
James D. Hanson, Sec.-Treasurer — 829-6756
Brad Sprenger — 317-5576
David Wendinger — 276-3166
Greg Mages — 794-3540
Joel Christensen — 828-4550
James Mickelson — 794-6298
Landon Sletta — 439-6559
The Board of Directors meets the last Thursday of each month.

Board meeting highlights

The BCREA Board of Directors held its monthly meeting February 25 in the REA headquarters auditorium. Discussion and/or action were taken on the following items:

- Reviewed and approved the January 2021 board meeting minutes, new membership applications, member cancellations, payments to estates and assignment transfers.
- Reviewed and approved January 2021 payroll and financial statement.
- Received presentation on Interconnection Contracts and Agreements, C-MIP documents and approved the 2020 Cogeneration Report.
- Discussed plans for the 84th Annual Meeting. Due to indoor gathering limits, the April 8 meeting will be reconvened June 24 in the REA headquarters parking lot.
- Authorized CEO Mike Heidemann, Office Manager Jennifer Rose and Board President Tom Hayes to sign USDA Rural Utilities Service loan documents, and for Heidemann and Rose to certify and submit data for the USDA Rural Development Utilities Program.
- Updated on operations and maintenance activities and results of the co-op's trucks and trailers DOT inspections.

The next meeting is set for March 25 at the BCREA office in Sleepy Eye.