

Connections

April 2024

For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 28, Issue 4

Brown County REA's directors advised state legislators on co-op energy issues



Representatives from electric cooperatives, including Brown County REA directors, visited with Senator Gary Dahms March 19.

Brown County REA's Board of Directors visited with our state legislators on issues of concern for electric cooperatives and our member-owners to ensure affordable, reliable power. It was a part of the Minnesota Rural Electric Association's Legislative Day March 19.

The six directors who participated were: Tom Hayes, Bill Berg, Greg Mages, Brad Sprenger, David Wendinger and Landon Sletta.

Topics discussed included:

1. Clarifying a 1939 tax exemption

law in rural areas that distribution lines, including street lights, meters and load control receivers, are tax exempt.

2. Transmission line permitting reform.

3. Streamlining energy-efficiency reform allowing fuel switching due to the beneficial electrification push by the state.

4. Reconsider the nuclear moratorium to ensure carbon-free power for a reliable electric grid.

Electric co-ops also support:

1. Retaining local cooperative control

by member-elected directors and not state mandates on co-op operations.

2. Avoiding mandates for battery storage technology. Let the market decide what makes sense.

3. Avoid increasing the subsidies for wind and solar net metering since the state has already approved 100 percent carbon-free electricity by 2040.

"These face-to-face visits provide an opportunity to advocate for electric cooperatives and our legislative agenda," said BCREA Board President Tom Hayes. ☺

At A Glance



Tip of the hard hat for our co-op line crews in April

We value our lineworkers every day and celebrate them in April for National Lineworker Appreciation Day. Lineworkers are ranked as one of the 10 most dangerous jobs in the U.S. The lineworkers at BCREA work rain or shine, to ensure you have reliable electricity. See Page 5. ☺

Co-ops promote heat pumps for more than 20 years — still tops for energy efficiency

Many companies and homeowners are placing an increased emphasis on reducing their use of fossil fuels by looking for new ways to use electricity to help them achieve their goals.

This strategy of replacing direct fossil fuel use with electricity in a way that reduces overall emissions and energy costs is called "beneficial electrification." It's made possible as utilities, including your electric cooperative, continue incorporating more carbon-free sources of energy into their power supply portfolios. For more than 20 years your electric cooperative has been rebating heat pumps!

Many opportunities exist for beneficial electrification across the residential and commercial sectors, including making the switch to an electric vehicle or an electric heating system — as long as the end-user and environment both benefit from the change.

One home appliance that provides the opportunity to reduce fossil fuel use and replace it with electricity is the heating system. Heat pumps have become increasingly popular as the technology advances to support heating in colder climates. Plus, over the last three decades the efficiency keeps improving for heat pumps.

Like an air conditioner, a heat pump can cool your home. What makes them unique is that they can also provide

Magical! Ductless air source heat pumps provide energy-efficient heat and cooling without the need for duct work! Perfect for a room addition or older home. Plus, your co-op's rebate makes it even more affordable!



heat. Unlike other electric heating options, air source heat pumps (ASHPs) do not use electricity to create heat, but instead use it to move heat from outdoor air and transfer it indoors. With today's ASHP technology this process of moving heat is extremely energy efficient, even when it's cold outside.

According to Rewiring America, a nonprofit advocacy group, heat pumps can achieve more than 300 percent efficiency, while even the most efficient gas-powered furnaces fall short of 100 percent efficiency. It is common for homeowners who install an ASHP to save hundreds of dollars per year.

Your local electric cooperative provides rebates for ASHPs. Three types of heat pumps with co-op rebates


can fit your home's needs.

1. Building a new home? Go with an ground source heat pump for 400 percent efficient heating system.

2. Want to upgrade your old central air and furnace? Upgrade to an air source heat pump and furnace with a variable speed fan for the highest efficiency — up to 300 percent.

3. Have an addition or home with no ductwork, but would like summer cooling or winter heating? Install a ductless air source heat pump. Near the top of the ceiling the cooling unit goes through the wall with the compressor outside. One outside unit can serve a couple of rooms if it has open room design.

Be sure to check with your cooperative to explore your options and to ask any additional questions. Visit the cooperative's website for details on the heat pump rebate forms or call the co-op to request the form. If you have questions, call your co-op and visit with our energy expert or talk to your local heating/cooling contractor.


As a reminder, air source heat pumps, ground source heat pumps and ductless mini split air source heat pumps all qualify for a 30 percent federal tax incentive on your 2024 taxes up to \$2,000. It's Form 5695. That's another way that heat pumps are good for the environment and your wallet! 

Rest the wrists! Go with electric pruners

If pruning branches one day means a chiropractor visit the next day for your shoulders, hands and wrists, go electric! Upgrade your tree branch trimming with an electric pruning shears to save time and cut your aches and pains.

The DeWalt 20-volt MAX pruning shears gardening tool uses the same battery as your other DeWalt power tools. It costs about \$120 for the tool only (battery not included). This tool weighs about three pounds without the battery. According to DeWalt, it can do up to 1,000 cuts on a charged rechargeable battery.

Cut branches up to an 1½ inches thick on the first try. Branches thicker than that may take a second powerful snip. Enlighten your cut with the unit's LED light. Blades can even be changed out with a change tool. This brand comes with a three-year limited warranty to make pruning safer and faster than your old, rusty manual lopping shears and hand pruner.

If your battery tools are powered by another brand, explore if they have a battery-powered pruning shears so you can work smarter and not harder. The DeWalt model is available from Home Depot, Amazon and Ace Hardware. 



Cut the time it takes for pruning with an electric pruning shears this spring. You'll also cut your aches and pains, thanks to this rechargeable electric power tool. — Photo courtesy of DeWalt

Safety

Ditch burning near poles requires caution

If Smokey the Bear warns about forest fire dangers, then Festus the Pheasant warns about burning ditches.


Only you can prevent your electric poles from catching fire, stated Festus the Pheasant. It's tempting to burn off the weeds in the ditches. Yet, you are burning off the pheasant habitat and also endangering the electric poles in the ditches that provide your electric service.

A pole typically has a life of 50 years to provide you reliable electric service. However, if the pole catches fire during ditch burning, you have just shortened that pole's lifespan and the reliability for electric service. Sometimes the pole ends up smoldering and looks fine on the ditch side, but has burned away on the other side. Now weakened by fire, the pole



could snap under an ice storm's added weight on the lines and heavy winds.

A pole damaged by fire will be billed to the landowner. Replacing a single-phase pole costs about \$1,500 with labor, truck, the pole and hardware. Meanwhile, a three-phase pole costs about \$2,500. Burning off a whole ditch and the several poles per mile could really add up.

Never leave a ditch fire unattended. Festus the Pheasant, along with your electric cooperative, thank you for being cautious in the ditches. If a fire does get away from you and may have damaged a pole, please let us know. 

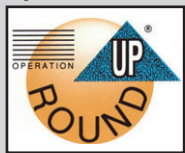
Don't get burned! Fire reduces the lifespan of an electric pole. You don't want a fire-weakened pole to snap when you need electricity the most, like during a blizzard.

Brown County Briefs

No Community Health Day in Spring 2024

No Community Health Day occurs in Sleepy Eye this spring. Organizers are hopeful the event can be offered again in the future.

Round Up Trust board meets April 9



The Brown County Rural Electric Trust Board will meet to review applications and select recipients of the 2024 Operation Round Up scholarships on the evening of April 9. Organizations wishing to apply for funding should submit requests before this date.

Member Advisory Council

The first meeting of the new Member Advisory Council will be Monday, April 22. Details will be mailed out to members.

Energy-efficiency tip

A well-designed landscape can add beauty to your home and reduce home heating and cooling costs. Plant deciduous trees with high, spreading crowns to the south of your home to block sunlight in the summer and reduce the need for air conditioning. Deciduous trees lose their leaves in the winter, allowing sunlight to warm your home. Plant evergreen trees and shrubs with low crowns to block winter winds. Dense evergreen trees and shrubs planted to the north and northwest are the most common type of windbreak and can help lower energy used for home heating.

Light program change

Effective April 1, 2024, the monthly charge for all yard lights on Brown County REA's program will increase to a minimum of \$6. ☎

Jensen selected as BCREA Youth Tour delegate to D.C.



Cindy Jensen of rural Comfrey will represent Brown County REA at the 2024 Rural Electric Youth Tour to Washington, D. C., June 18-23.

Cindy will travel with approximately 40 students representing other Minnesota electric cooperatives on the all-expense-paid trip to the nation's capital. While there, she will participate in leadership training, engage in one-on-one conversations with elected officials, plus tour museums, monuments and memorials in Washington, D.C.

The Minnesota delegation will join youth representing electric cooperatives from across the United States during the 58th anniversary Youth Tour.

Participants gain a first-hand understanding of the legislative process, learn about advocating on behalf of their community and make connections with others that will last a lifetime.

Cindy is a junior at Comfrey High School. She is the daughter of David and Kelli Jensen.

Fellow Comfrey High School junior, Joe Nachreiner, was awarded second place and a \$150 check. Adam Mages, a sophomore at New Ulm Public School received the third-place prize of \$100. ☎

BCREA posts annual 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. ☎

Whatever it takes: Powering life, from a lineworker's perspective

My name is Adam Fischer. I'm one of seven lineworkers at BCREA who work every day in all weather conditions to make sure our co-op members have the power for their lives. For the most part we love our jobs. It's hard work, but it's very rewarding. We hope this will give you a better look into what we face and more importantly, why we do it.

The Danger

A lot of people know linework is dangerous because we work near high-voltage electricity. Move just the wrong way or lose focus for a split second, and it could be deadly. You must be aware of your surroundings and the safety of the person next to you. We often work on energized power lines and you can't always tell if they are energized by just looking at them. You're working with an element of danger that requires concentration and there is no margin for error. The environment compounds the pressure, because when you need power most is usually when the weather is worst. We often work in storms with rain, wind, extreme heat and cold, in the dark, or on the side of the road next to fast-moving traffic. Yes, it's dangerous, but we're trained.

Many may not realize it, but we undergo years of training before we can officially be called a lineworker. After one or two years of schooling at a community and technical college, we typically start as an apprentice, which typically spans four years. After an apprenticeship, with more than 7,000 hours of training under our belts and successfully completing a series of tests, we transition to journeyman lineworker status — that's when we're considered officially trained.

Yet, the education is ongoing. Lineworkers continuously receive training to stay mindful of safety requirements and up to date on the latest equipment and procedures.

The Physical Demand

The daily expectations of a lineworker are physically demanding, but you won't hear us complain about that. We know what we signed up for — loading heavy materials, climbing poles and in and out of buckets, but that's the job. Most of us are just glad to be outside.

The Sacrifices

There are some sacrifices to being a lineworker. There are times we are first on the scene of an emergency, seeing things that are devastating, like car accidents, structure fires and damage from severe storms. You don't know

what type of situation you're going to face or when you're going to face it. We get calls at all hours of the day and night; we've missed kids' activities and family dinners. We make sure there is nothing standing in the way of helping our friends and neighbors get back to normal life.

It's Worth It

One thing that makes this job worthwhile is the camaraderie. Our co-op is my second family; the line crews are a brotherhood. We depend on the person beside you in life-or-death circumstances. It's a culture of trust, teamwork and service. It's all about keeping the teammate beside you safe and the lights on for everybody else.

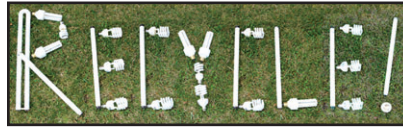
We take a lot of pride in our work. Even when it's cold and wet, we know we're working to keep people warm. There's a lot of satisfaction in hearing someone yell "Thank you" from the window after the lights come back on or seeing people flipping the light switches on their porches after an outage is restored. No matter how tired we are or how long we've been working, that feeling always makes it worth it.

BCREA and its employees are members of this community. We live in the same neighborhoods. We shop at the same stores. Our kids go to the same schools. If your lights are off, ours are likely off too. Trust that we are doing our best to get the lights back on as quickly and safely as possible — so you can get back to normal life. ☺



Recycle fluorescent bulbs as part of your spring cleaning

State law requires the recycling of fluorescents and compact fluorescent bulbs due to the mercury. Check out these recycling options this spring.



Brown County

The dates are set for May 1-2. A fee applies for recycling bulbs. Recycling occurs at:

- Springfield Market, 101 W. Central St., Springfield, May 1 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.
- Brown County Fairgrounds in New Ulm, May 2 from 2 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.
- Sleepy Eye Hardware, 1200 Main St. E., Sleepy Eye, accepts fluorescent bulbs for recycling year-round and will dispose for a fee. Call 507-794-3611 or stop by the store for pricing. The store also recycles high-pressure-sodium, mercury-vapor and metal-halide lamps for a fee.

• River View Sanitation will sponsor an *Electronics & Appliance Recycling Day*, which will include fluorescent bulb recycling, May 15, from noon to 6 p.m. at the Sleepy Eye Hockey Arena parking lot. Fluorescent lamps 8' and under: \$1, ballast — PCB: \$7.50/lb. and PCB capacitors: \$7.50/lb. Most household appliances, including water heaters, refrigerators and freezers, computer CPUs, phones, keyboards, etc. and car batteries are free. Battery backups, printers, DVD/VCRs, copiers/scanners

and stereos: \$10. Computer monitors and TVs: \$25. RV appliances: \$75.


Jackson County

Residents of Jackson County can recycle their fluorescent bulbs at the Lakefield

Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) Facility (605 S Hwy 86), which is typically open June through October. A fee applies for bulbs (50 cents each) and ballast recycling (\$3.50 each).

Other electronics are not accepted at the HHW. An E-Waste Collection for residents and businesses will be held September 13-14 at the Jackson County Fairgrounds. You can find more information about the HHW Facility and E-Waste Collection advertised in the Livewire; on the Land Management website: www.co.jackson.mn.us/land; or you may call the Land Management Office at 507-662-6682, extension 4.

Martin County

Recycle fluorescent bulbs Thursday, May 2, at the Tractor Supply (1215 N State St., Fairmont) parking lot from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. The other date is Thursday, October 3, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Fairmont's Tractor Supply lot. Bulbs are accepted from the homes and businesses in the county. A fee applies for recycling bulbs. Call the Fairmont Area Chamber of Commerce at 507-235-5547. 

3 Ways to Help Limit Tree Trimming

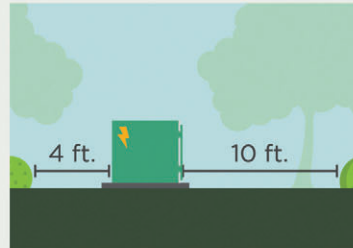
Did you know electric utilities are required to trim trees and other types of vegetation that grow too close to overhead power lines? We know you love your trees, and we will do everything we can to avoid trimming them.

Here's how you can help:

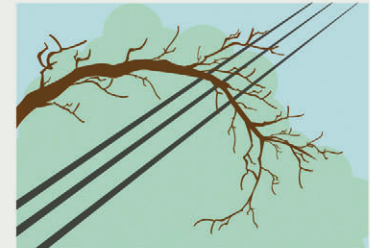
1. Plant trees in the right place. Trees that will be <40 ft. should be planted at least 25 ft. away from power lines (>40ft. should be at least 50 ft. away).



2. Don't block pad-mounted transformers. Plant shrubs at least 10 ft. away from transformer doors and 4 ft. from transformer sides.



3. Report dangerous branches. If you spot a tree or branch that is dangerously close to power lines, please let us know.



Trimming improves safety for all.

Let's work together to enjoy the beauty of trees and reliable electricity.

‘Lettuce’ see your family’s favorite salad recipes! Scoop up & share!

Savor the flavor of salads! Share your favorite salad recipes with us, whether it’s for lettuce, taco, fruit or veggie salads. Have a favorite homemade salad dressing? Share that recipe too! Send your favorite salad recipes to Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by April 26. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! 📧

Water heaters from your co-op proudly provide the HOT when needed

Turn to us for your next American-made, insulated water heater



Oven Baked Caramel Corn
by Barbara Sellner, New Ulm

- 2 c. brown sugar
- 1½ sticks butter
- 1½ c. white corn syrup
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- ½ tsp. salt

Boil these ingredients together for five minutes. Remove from heat. Add ½ tsp. baking soda. Stir and pour over 8 quarts of popped popcorn. Mix and put in a large roaster. Bake at 250° for one hour. Stir every 15 minutes.

I put the popped popcorn in a large roaster and mix it all in the same roaster that I use to bake it. 📧

Save a tree!

Sign up for paperless bills!



Just make the call before digging:

1-800-252-1166



Call Gopher State One Call before doing any digging more than 12" deep — 48 hours before digging for

foundations, trees and tiling. Register at www.gopherstate-onecall.org or call 811. Call a licensed electrician to locate the underground lines on your side of the meter. 📧

Heartland Security

This month get:
THREE MONTHS FREE SERVICE PLAN
with three year agreement

888.264.6380 | heartlandss.com

A subsidiary of your local electric co-op

Staff Notes



Brandon Havemeier
Operations Manager

BCREA gears up for summer construction and maintenance

The 2024 construction season for Brown County REA is shaping up to be a busy one. With a warmer than usual winter and ground conditions improving, our line crews and contractors are preparing for construction and maintenance projects throughout the service area.

This summer, the BCREA crews will be completing their work in Eden Township replacing the single-phase line with three-phase URD. In addition to the work plan projects planned for the summer, we will be replacing overhead services and upgrading services as necessary throughout

the year. We will also focus on areas where we had recent tree issues via tree trimming or replacing the overhead line with underground cable. In April, Brown County REA began inspection of all underground locations and equipment in Milford, West Newton, North Home, and Ridgely townships.

Brown County REA contracted with Central Applicators, Inc. to maintain and control vegetation at all of our substations this year. Work is expected to begin in early June, depending on weather conditions. Central Applicators uses an EPA-approved herbicide to treat unwanted brush and noxious weeds.

Southwood 2000, a subsidiary of Redwood Electric Cooperative in Clements, will continue to locate our underground cable throughout the year. In addition to locating, Southwood 2000 will be inspecting poles in Home, Ridgely and West Newton townships. Pole inspection involves visually inspecting the pole, checking for cracks, equipment damage and burn marks from ditch fires. If the pole passes that part of the inspection, then they dig down 18 inches to inspect the base of the pole. To check for internal decay they drill into the core of the pole. The base of the pole is also visually checked for decay. If the pole does not pass inspection, it is rejected and will be replaced. We test the poles regularly to meet requirements of the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) and to improve service reliability.

Carr's Tree Service will be back in the service area in July trimming trees system-wide. Much of the planned work will require crews and contractors to enter members' property to access and inspect equipment.

As always, we ask you to be aware of Brown County REA equipment as you are working in your fields and yards. Be aware of transformers and other equipment while out mowing, riding an ATV or working in the fields; know the location of poles and overhead lines when planting, spraying and moving equipment. Remember to call Gopher State One Call at 800-252-1166 or 811 or enter ticket information online at www.gopherstateonecall.org 48 hours before starting any digging more than 12 inches deep.

All of us at Brown County REA wish you a safe spring and summer. ☺



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: 7:30 a.m. to 4 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 Brown County REA Board of Directors held its monthly board meeting on February 29, 2024.

Discussion and/or action were taken on the following agenda items:

- Reviewed and approved the January 2024 board meeting minutes, new membership applications, member cancellations, payments to estates and assignment transfers.
- Kristi Robinson of Star Energy Services LLC presented proposed rate changes based on the cooperative's Cost of Services Study recently completed by Star Energy.
- Reviewed and approved adjusted rates and merging of former Alliant Energy territory rates to take effect September 1, 2024.
- Reviewed the February meeting of the Brown County Rural Electric Trust Board.
- Updated on the financial audit field work conducted the week of February 12.
- Discussed plans for the 2024 Annual Meeting set for April 11 and progress with the annual report mailing.
- Updated on operations activities, including line patrol. Pole inspections to start in March.

The next meeting is March 28, 2024, at the Brown County REA office in Sleepy Eye. ☺