

Connections

January 2025

For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 29, Issue 1

Understanding utility equipment ownership: for the utility & member's responsibilities

When it comes to electric service, understanding who owns which parts can help prevent confusion and clarify responsibilities for maintenance and repair. Let's review what the electric utility typically owns and what the member owns and maintains.

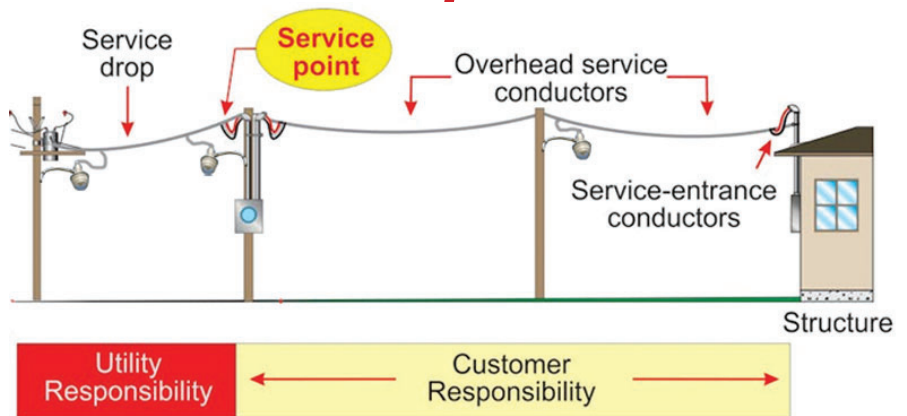
What the electric utility owns

The cooperative owns the poles, wires, and transformers that distribute electricity to neighborhoods and farms. These are often seen as the power lines along roads. The service drop, which includes the overhead or underground wires from the transformer pole (or transformer) to the service point, is typically owned by the co-op. (See drawing.) The meter that records electricity usage is owned and maintained by the co-op.

Cooperative-owned security lights are installed after the meter. The co-op maintains only the light, while the member is responsible for their own wiring. Members pay a monthly fee and the co-op retains ownership and maintenance responsibility for the light, excluding member-owned wiring.

What the member owns

For overhead connections the member owns the service mast or riser, which involves the wires and conduit that support and protect the wires leading to the meter. If the service drop wire is to be attached to a house or other building, the member is responsible for supplying a point of attachment on the building for the wires. The meter socket that holds the co-op's meter may be owned by the property owner, though the co-op retains ownership of the meter itself. The main breaker or disconnect, along with the circuit panel that distributes electricity throughout the home or building, is the responsibility of the property owner. All wiring, outlets, switches, lights and appliances beyond the



The above drawing represents a typical overhead service. As shown, everything connected left of the service point is the cooperative's responsibility. Everything to the right of the service point is the member's responsibility.

service point are the member's responsibility, including yard lights. For underground electric service the co-op typically owns the underground line up to the service point, such as the transformer or meter socket. However, the member owns the wiring and equipment from this connection point to the house or buildings.

Tree trimming near powerlines

The cooperative is generally responsible for maintaining vegetation around overhead lines they own. Call the utility to notify them of trees growing into these lines. However, members are responsible for trimming trees or vegetation on lines beyond the service point. Contact your local tree trimmer or Carr's Tree Service at 888-470-3355 for a quote.

Locating underground utilities

When locating underground lines are required, the member is responsible for contacting Gopher State One Call to ensure all utilities with underground equipment are notified; call 811, 800-252-1166 or go to www.gopherstateonecall.org. The cooperative will locate the underground wires up

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At A Glance

BROWN COUNTY REA

Recycle your holiday lights by January 20

BCREA is working with Sleepy Eye YES! Team to collect old holiday light strings for recycling. Drop off old lights in the box found our REA office entry during regular business hours 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. The collection occurs until mid-January. This is NOT for CFL bulbs, rope lights, battery packs or cord adapters.

Audit your home to uncover energy savings

A home energy audit may sound daunting, but it can be as easy as creating a checklist of improvements based on what you see around your home.

Find opportunities to save energy and money; tools needed: a flashlight, dust mask, tape measure, cooking thermometer and a notebook.

First, check the heating and cooling equipment. Determine the age and efficiency of the equipment by looking up the model number on the nameplate. The average lifespan of HVAC equipment is 10 to 30 years, depending on the type of equipment and how well it's maintained. If your equipment is older, it may be time to budget for an upgrade. If so, consider a heat pump for higher heating/cooling efficiency and take advantage of the co-op's heat pump rebates, as listed on the website. Check the furnace filter too and replace it if needed.

Now check the envelope of your home, which separates the heated or cooled areas from the exterior, for drafts and air leakage. Feel around windows and trim for any drafts. Pay special attention to spots where different building materials come together. Check under sinks for gaps around pipes. Seal with weatherstripping, caulk or expanding foam as needed.

Replace incandescent or compact fluorescent bulbs with LEDs. LEDs use significantly less energy and last longer than traditional incandescent bulbs.

Check for leaking faucets and make sure aerators and showerheads are high-efficiency models in good condition. The gallons-per-minute (GPM) ratings should be etched onto them. To reduce wasted energy from using more hot water than needed, aerators should be 0.5 to 1.5 GPM, and showerheads should be no more than 2 GPM.

Next, look in the attic, while wearing a dust mask, to make sure it's insulated. You may see enough from the access area using a cellphone with the flash on to take pictures. Use the tape measure to check the depth of the insulation. It should be a minimum of 12 inches deep. This can vary depending on the type of insulation used and your geography.

Insulation can become compacted over time. It should be evenly distributed throughout the attic. Loose fill or blown-in insulation should be fluffy and evenly dispersed. Rolled batt insulation should fit tightly together without gaps.


Plus, exterior walls should be insulated. If your home is



older than the 1960s, the walls are probably not insulated. Homes from the 1960s or 1970s likely need more insulation. Sometimes you can see wall insulation by removing an outlet cover or switch plate and using a flashlight to look for insulation inside the wall cavity. Turn off the power at the electrical panel to avoid the risk of electric shock. Wall insulation can be blown in from the inside or the outside of the home. This is a job for a professional.

If you have a basement or crawlspace, head there next. Unfinished basements should have insulation on the rim joists, at minimum. This is the area between the top of the foundation and the underside of the home's first-story floor. Use closed-cell spray foam or a combination of rigid foam and spray foam to insulate rim joists. Crawl spaces should have insulation on the underside of the floor between the floor joists. Insulation should be properly supported in contact with the floor with no air gaps. Water pipes and ductwork should also be insulated.

Lastly, check the temperature of your water by running it for three minutes at the faucet closest to your water heater. Then fill a cup and measure with a cooking thermometer. Hot water should be between 120 and 140 degrees. You can reduce the temperature on your water heater to reduce energy waste and prevent scalding. Your co-op recommends 120° for the setting.

Once your home energy audit is finished, review your findings and start prioritizing home energy-efficiency projects. For step-by-step instructions visit www.energy.gov/save. 

Amp up car's ice removal with ice scraper


Scraping ice and frost off the car windshield is a "frost"-strating experience.

Amp up your snow clearing with the lebdua ice scraper that uses your existing 20-volt DeWalt rechargeable battery. The 1,300 revolutions per minute chomps down your ice removal time. The quicker you clear the ice, the sooner you can go inside away from frigid wind chills.

The ergonomic, sturdy and slip-resistant long handle helps you reach the center of the car's windshield. It weighs slightly more than 2.5 pounds. The tool's head flexes from zero to 45 degrees for ice removal from different angles with a protective guard. The blade is five inches wide. Just keep scarves, long hair and hands a safe distance away from the spinning head; it would be wise to wear eye and face protection. A scratch-free base plate protects the car's windows from damage.



Tackle icy windshields with a power tool! This lebdua electric ice scraper uses your existing 20-volt DeWalt battery. Power through ice and frost removal on your car's windshield in record time!

Buy this tool from Amazon or other retailers for \$60 and use the DeWalt battery already in your tool collection. 

Safety

Quick guide to sizing a generator for your home

While your electric cooperative provides reliable power 99 percent of the time, sometimes Mother Nature throws a whopper of a storm causing a multi-day outage.

This guide helps walk you through buying a generator, which provides great convenience during a power outage.

Before buying a generator determine your backup power needs to select the right size. Make a list of essential appliances and devices that you will want to

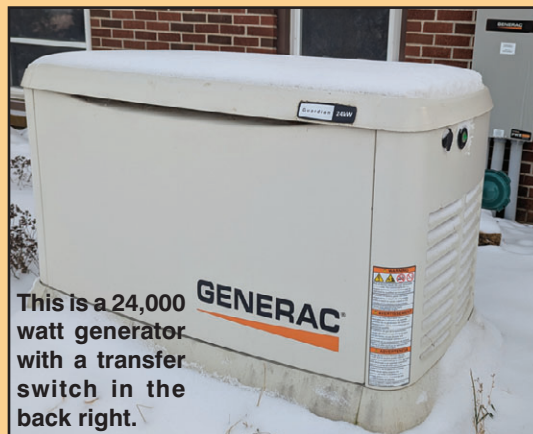
power during an outage. This determines the required wattage size of a generator.

Work with your local electrician. A permanent standby generator requires a transfer switch. This prevents your generator power from flowing back onto the electrical powerlines where co-op line crews could be working. The transfer switch keeps our line crews safe.

1. If you rarely lose power...

Recreational inverter: Up to 2,000 watts

- Lightweight, about 60 pounds
- Quiet, easy to store
- Power: fridge and a few smaller items (lamp, phone charger, crockpot)



This is a 24,000 watt generator with a transfer switch in the back right.

- Before using, disconnect the normal source of power coming into the home.

Mid-sized inverter: Up to 3,500 watts

- Weighs up to 150 pounds
- Power: Fridge, laptop, five to 10 lights, phone charger, and a 10K BTU air conditioner
- Before using, disconnect the normal source of power coming into the home.


2. If you occasionally lose power...

Portable generators or large inverters: up to 7,500 watts

- Weighs about 300 pounds
- Power: fridge, gas furnace, 10K BTU air conditioner, dishwasher, multiple lights, TV, laptop and more.
- Ability to connect to home's transfer switch.

3. If you frequently lose power...

Home standby generator: up to 20,000 watts

- Must be permanently installed; starts automatically during outage. Requires a transfer switch.
- Power: nearly all home appliances and electronics simultaneously
- Can run indefinitely on natural gas or propane. 

Brown County Briefs

Efficiency tip

Taking steps to help your home heating system run more efficiently can reduce energy use and lower your winter bills. Check to see if any air vents around your home are blocked by furniture, curtains or other items. Obstructed vents force your heating system to work harder than necessary and can increase pressure in the ductwork, causing cracks and leaks to form. If necessary, consider purchasing a vent extender, which can be placed over a vent to redirect air flow from underneath furniture or other obstructions. Source: energy.gov



Members can stop by the REA office during business hours to pick up a 2025 large, farm pocket calendar or small pocket-size calendars. One per member please.

Member Advisory Council Jan. 6

The final meeting of the current Member Advisory Council will be held January 6, 2025 at the REA auditorium. Details were mailed out.

Operation Round Up meeting February 18



The first quarterly Brown County Rural Electric Trust Board meeting for 2025 is set for February 18. Organizations wishing to be considered for funding can submit the application, found on the REA website www.browncountyrea.coop, before that date. ☎

Annual line patrol is underway

Brown County REA crews are starting line patrol and will be coming onto yards and property throughout the service area. Line patrol will begin at the far southwest portion of the service territory and will continue to work to the east and north. Work will continue until early spring.

The cooperative patrols its lines each year in the winter months checking the cooperative's overhead and underground lines and equipment. Linemen will be looking for maintenance issues that need attention, such as loose or missing guy wires and guards, damaged wires and proper line clearance. They will perform maintenance on OCRs and overhead and underground lines.

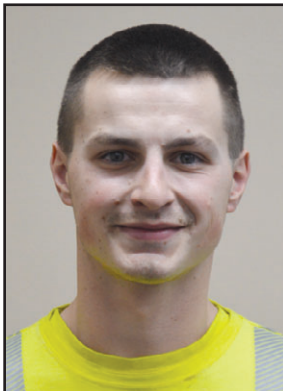
Line patrol is just one more way your co-op strives to meet its mission to deliver safe and reliable electric service to its members. ☎



Santa's helpers make Christmas merry!

Brown County REA CFO Jennifer Rose is pictured with New Ulm Sertoma Club members Sam Jacobs and Scott Waldner as they picked up the five bags of gifts donated for distribution to area children through the Santa's Closet program. BCREA office employees also purchased gifts using their accumulated Jean Fridays donations. Thank you to all who contributed this year!

Carter Tauer joins BCREA's line crew



Brown County REA welcomed Carter Tauer as a new apprentice lineman in July.

A Sleepy Eye native, Carter graduated from Sleepy Eye High School in 2018 then completed Lineman Training at Minnesota State Community College in Baudette. He worked with Brown County REA's line crews as a summer helper and temporary employee in 2019. Carter worked as an electrician for Sleepy Eye Electric until starting with Brown County REA.

Outside of work, Carter said he spends his time hunting and fishing, and with his girlfriend, Alexa, who is an elementary teacher at Sleepy Eye St. Mary's School. Welcome Carter to Brown County REA! ☎

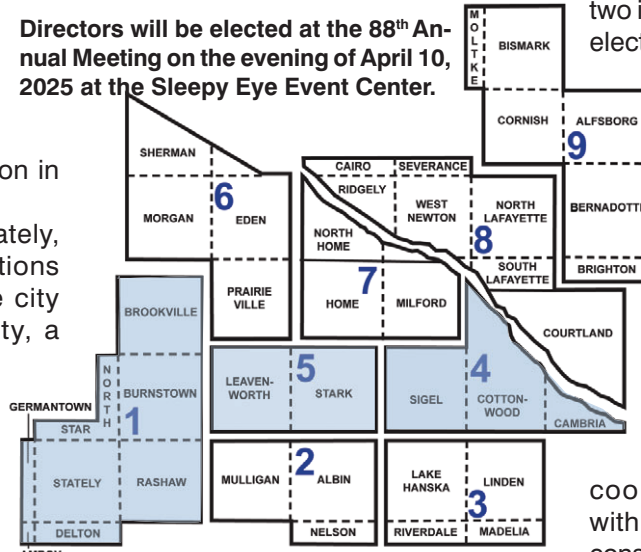
2025 director candidates needed

Interested or know of someone who may be interested in running for a position as Director for your electric cooperative? Nominations are being sought for candidates to run for election in BCREA's Districts 1, 4, and 5.

District 1 is made up of Stately, Bashaw, Burnstown and portions of North Star townships, the city of Comfrey in Brown County, a portion of Brookville Township in Redwood County and part of Delton Township in Cottonwood County. District 4 covers Sigel and Cottonwood townships in Brown County and part of Cambria Township in Blue Earth County. District 5 consists of Stark and Leavenworth townships in Brown County.

Nominating committees are made up of at least two members from each

Directors will be elected at the 88th Annual Meeting on the evening of April 10, 2025 at the Sleepy Eye Event Center.



of the districts up for election. Per the cooperative's by-laws, the nominating committee shall at least 30 days before the Annual Meeting, diligently and in good faith attempt to nominate at least

two individuals to run for a scheduled election.

In addition, a minimum of 10 members may nominate through petition for a director position in their district. Nominations from the floor and write-in candidates are not permitted at the annual meeting.

Members who reside in District 1, 4 or 5 and interested in being a director candidate, please complete and return the Director Candidate Application found at www.browncountyrea.coop.

Your name will be shared with the nomination committee for consideration as a candidate. You may also contact the REA office.

Directors will be elected at the 88th Annual Meeting set for the evening of April 10, 2025 at the Sleepy Eye Event Center. ☎️



What do 1,500 high school students, our nation's capital and electric cooperatives have in common? The Rural Electric Youth Tour, of course!

Brown County REA is looking for one exceptional student to represent the cooperative on an all-expense paid trip Washington, D.C. June 16-21, 2025. The Youth Tour group will explore D.C., spend a day on Capitol Hill, meet congressional leaders. It is a fast-paced leadership opportunity to see our government in action. Students will explore the cooperative business model, visit several museums and memorials, plus gain a new appreciation of our nation's history. In the process many new friendships are created as they spend the week with young people from electric cooperatives throughout Minnesota.

The application and selection procedures are available from high school counselors and on the REA website www.browncountyrea.coop. Apply by February 28, 2025. ☎️

High school seniors apply now for Operation Round Up scholarships



Brown County REA, through its Operation Round Up program, is offering scholarships to high school seniors planning to attend college after graduation.

Eight \$250 scholarships will be awarded to students

whose parents/guardians are members and live in Brown County REA's service area. 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, which 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. The application materials also be found on the REA website at www.browncountyrea.coop.

The deadline for submission is April 7, 2025; the winners will be announced at the Brown County REA Annual Meeting on April 10. 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. ☎️

2025 state legislative session preview: requires cooperation to ensure a reliable, affordable and sustainable energy future

Minnesota's legislature enters 2025 facing new challenges and opportunities. The results of November's elections mark the end of two years of single-party control, making bipartisan cooperation essential. Meanwhile, the state's latest budget forecast predicts a \$616 million surplus for the next two years, but projects a \$5 billion deficit by 2027. These fiscal constraints highlight the importance of practical, cost-conscious policymaking.

Electric cooperatives across Minnesota, led by the Minnesota Rural Electric Association (MREA), are focused on ensuring the electric grid remains reliable, affordable and sustainable. To achieve this MREA is advocating for the following priorities.

Keeping energy costs fair: net metering reform

As energy technology evolves, the rules governing it must adapt. Net metering compensates members who generate their own electricity with rooftop solar or wind for the power they send back to the grid. However, under the current system, some costs — such as maintaining power lines — are unfairly shifted onto co-op members who don't generate their own power. MREA supports updating net metering policies to distribute costs fairly, while encouraging renewable energy use.

Exploring a carbon-free future: lifting the nuclear moratorium

Minnesota's 25-year-old moratorium on new nuclear power plants is under scrutiny, as energy demands grow and the need for reliable, carbon-free energy increases. Nuclear power could play a critical role in diversifying Minnesota's energy mix and stabilizing



The 2025 Minnesota legislative session kicks off and requires cooperation.

the grid for decades to come. MREA is urging lawmakers to lift the moratorium, as part of a balanced and future-ready energy strategy. It's time Minnesota allowed this very important conversation to happen on the heels of recent innovations in nuclear technology, such as small modular reactors.

Supporting rural communities: property tax relief

Electric cooperatives continue to face rising costs due to misguided property tax laws. In 2024 a bipartisan bill aimed at addressing this issue gained significant support, but failed to pass in the final hours of the session. MREA is renewing its push for property tax reform in 2025, emphasizing the lower costs this would bring to cooperative members and rural

communities across Minnesota. The bill has near unanimous support, but still needs to get across the finish line.

A session built on teamwork

Cooperation this legislative session is not just encouraged — it's required. MREA is committed to working with lawmakers from both parties to advocate for responsible energy policy and bipartisan solutions that prioritize affordability and reliability for Minnesota's electric cooperative members.

As we head into the 2025 legislative session, MREA is dedicated to ensuring the energy policies passed will serve our members and communities for years to come. Together, we can build a brighter, more sustainable energy future. ⁽¹⁾



From mud to suds...

Turn to your electric cooperative for your new water heater in 2025!

Butter us up with favorite biscuit recipes for warm winter meal

Whip up a batch of biscuits! Share your favorite biscuit recipes with us, whether it's from scratch, with gravy, as a breakfast sandwich or even dressing up the refrigerator biscuits for hot dish, pizza or breakfast. Send your favorite biscuit recipes to Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by January 28. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! ☺

Who owns what for your electric service equipment

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to the service point or meter. The member is responsible for having any wires beyond the service point located; contact your local electrician for this service.

Why ownership matters

Understanding ownership is crucial because it determines who is responsible for maintenance, repair and costs.

- If your cooperative-owned security light stops working, the co-op will repair or replace it at no cost.
- If a member-owned yard light stops working, the member must hire an electrician to fix it.
- If the service mast or meter base is damaged, the consumer must hire an electrician to fix it.

Being aware of these distinctions helps members plan for routine maintenance and avoid unexpected expenses. If you're ever unsure about what you own versus what the co-op owns, contact your electric cooperative for clarification.

Why the utility can't work on member-owned equipment...

Electric utilities are responsible for delivering reliable power to customers, but our jurisdiction ends where consumer ownership begins. Utilities generally cannot work on consumer-owned equipment for several key reasons related to liability, safety, legal compliance and operational boundaries.

By knowing these distinctions, both the cooperative and member can work together to ensure the reliability and safety of their electric service. ☺

Monte Cristo Sliders by Ginger Heiderscheidt, Sleepy Eye

- 12 Sweet Hawaiian buns
- 12 slices ham 12 slices turkey
- 12 slices Swiss cheese
- 1/3 c. butter, melted
- 1 large egg 1/2 tsp. pepper
- 1 T. powdered sugar
- raspberry jam for serving

Preheat oven to 350°. Spray a 9x13" pan with cooking spray. Take rolls out of the package and slice in half all the way through without separating each one. Place the bottom half of the rolls in the pan. Place half of the cheese on the rolls. Layer with ham, turkey and the other half of the cheese slices. Place the tops on the rolls. In a small bowl whisk together the melted butter, egg and pepper. Brush all over the tops and sides of the sliders. Bake for 25 minutes or until the cheese is melted and the buns are toasted. Sprinkle the top of the buns with powdered sugar. Serve with raspberry jam on the side for dipping. ☺



Stay independent

with a mobile medical alert from **Heartland Security**

888.264.6380
heartlandss.com



A subsidiary of your local electric co-op

Always call first:
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 til-

ing. Register at www.gopherstateonecall.org or call 811. Call a licensed electrician to locate the underground lines on your side of the meter. ☺



**Marcia Solie,
Member
Services Manager**

Staff Notes

Dual Fuel offers benefits to members, co-op and the grid

A program offered by Brown County REA provides home heating at a good value by pairing electric heat with a dependable, automatic non-electric backup.

If you are a member enrolled in the Dual Fuel program, knowing the “why” behind the moments your Dual Fuel heating is temporarily switched is likely important to you — especially during the

long, cold months of winter.

Great River Energy, our wholesale power provider, makes the decision of when to shift participating members to their backup heat source for a variety of reasons, but affordability and reliability are the ultimate drivers.

The program is a win-win for all involved. Enrolled members benefit from a reduced electric rate, Brown County REA is able to manage local electricity demand and avoid expensive market purchases, and the entire regional grid benefits from reduced demand for electricity. On a cold winter day, when demand and market prices are high, our Dual Fuel program helps us, our members and the grid as a whole by lowering demand on the system to avoid high market prices.

Dual Fuel heating is one example of a demand response program designed to reduce electricity demand to keep energy reliable and affordable. The demand response system is launched by Great River Energy’s control center. Power system operators use computers to send tens of thousands of electronic signals through the power delivery system and into distribution power lines.

Load control receivers plugged into standard electrical current at member homes and businesses can read the signals and, when the appropriate message is sent, those receivers interrupt the electric power flowing to the heating system. When control is no longer needed, a signal is sent to turn the system back on.

Based on weather and market conditions, Great River Energy’s system operators and energy marketers know when a peak- load period is approaching. Depending on how much load Great River Energy needs to reduce from the peak, operators choose various groups of controlled load and turn them off using the demand response system. BCREA members have electric baseboard systems, electric furnaces, ceiling cable, electric boilers, air source and ground source heat pumps — all with an automatic non-electric or storage backup heat source enrolled in the Dual Fuel program.

BCREA is grateful for the members who participate in the co-op’s Dual Fuel and other load management programs. Contact the co-op if you have questions regarding these programs or if you’re a new member and wondering if your home is part of a load management program. ☎

BROWN COUNTY REA

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 — 507-228-8954
William Berg, Vice President — 507-766-1497
James D. Hanson, Sec.-Treasurer — 507-829-6756
Brad Sprenger — 507-317-5576
David Wendinger — 507-276-3166
Greg Mages — 507-794-3540
Joel Christensen — 507-828-4550
James Mickelson — 507-794-6298
Landon Sletta — 507-276-1899
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 November 26, 2024. Discussion and/or action were taken on the following agenda items:

- Reviewed and approved the October 2024 board meeting minutes, new membership applications, member cancellations, payments to estates and assignment transfers.
- Reviewed and approved October 2024 payroll and October financial statement.
- Approved appointment of Jared & Stacy Green, Nick Rients, Mitch Anderson, Bill Hoffmann, Ryan Hoffmann, Jonathon Kral, Brad Sellner, Justin Steffl and Keith Hoffmann to the nominating committees for the 2025 director elections.
- Discussed and approved a change to the cooperative’s irrigation rate to take effect January 1, 2025.
- Reviewed and approved Policy 218 Charge for Idle Services – Temporary Reconnection, as updated.
- Updated on operations activities, including transformer failure and replacement at Schilling Substation.

The next meeting is December 19, 2024, at the Brown County REA office. ☎