

Connections

July 2025

For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 29, Issue 7

Great River Energy is investing in the future by increasing pollinator habitat at substations

In November of 2024, Great River Energy (GRE) was approved as a member of the monarch Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA), which is a voluntary program to create and protect monarch butterfly habitats. Along with GRE's land management practices, under this program they are required to monitor the number of milkweeds present at randomly selected spots annually. Due to the nature of the land used by electric utilities, GRE can make an impact on the success of monarchs.

GRE has its own initiative, Pollinator Strong, that aims to increase the acreage of pollinator habitats. With this initiative, GRE has developed over 300 acres of habitat for pollinators. By 2029, GRE hopes to have a total of 600 developed acres of pollinator habitat.

GRE's restored sites include:

Lakefield Junction Station: 91 acres
Pleasant Valley Station: 87 acres
Becker Ash Landfill: 33 acres
Elk River campus: 12.4 acres
Riverview Substation: 7.6 acres
Cambridge Station: 7 acres



Butterfly beauty! Pollinators benefit from the land around Great River Energy substations that are planted with these insects in mind.

St. Bonifacius Station: 3.6 acres
McHenry Substation: 2.5 acres
New Prague Service Center: 2.5 acres
Lake Marion Substation: 2 acres
Bunker Lake Substation: 1.8 acres
Maple Grove office: 1.5 acres
St. James Service Center: 1.5 acres

"We pursued this opportunity because our vegetation management approach already aligns with the terms of the agreement," Heinen said. "We are excited to be part of this program and look forward to continuing to improve the ecosystem for pollinating insects."

At A Glance



**Operation
Round Up
deadline nears**

The next Brown County Rural Electric Trust Board meeting is set for August 11. Organizations wishing to be considered for funding can submit the application by August 8, which is found on our website www.browncountyrea.coop.

Energy Wise

Which heat pump option fits my home?

If you do not already have a heat pump, we recommend considering an upgrade. The technology of a heat pump has improved a lot over the past 10-20 years and is likely to be at least 20 percent more efficient than what you have now. Heat pumps can also cool your home during summer months, which is an added value!

Newer models of heat pumps can operate effectively in sub-zero weather, but sometimes they do so by switching to electric resistance mode, which is much less efficient. In a colder climate, it may be worth investing in a dual fuel system where propane or another fuel provides supplemental heat on extremely cold days.

Here are a few situations where you might use the different types of heat pumps:

1. Ducted heat pump

If your home has a forced air furnace, a centralized air-source heat pump works well. A compressor outside your home, which looks like a central air unit, is connected to your home's existing duct system. Like your furnace, the temperature is controlled through one main thermostat. This is a solid solution if your system has quality ductwork that heats and cools every room evenly, which is rare.

Ductwork in most homes is not designed to heat or cool every room evenly. Long supply runs provide little air to some rooms, and it's typical for some rooms to lack return air registers. Ductwork may be leaky, which creates comfort issues. If leaky ducts are leaking into unheated areas such as crawl spaces or attics, it increases your heating and cooling costs. Poor



Heat pumps come in many shapes and sizes to fit different budgets and needs to improve your home's efficiency.

ductwork will render any kind of central heating or cooling system much less effective. Some HVAC contractors can repair ductwork problems if the ductwork is accessible.

Heat pumps vary in efficiency, and this is measured in two ways. The Heating Seasonal Performance Factor (HSPF) rating measures heating efficiency and the Seasonal Energy Efficiency Ratio (SEER) rating measures cooling efficiency. The minimum ratings for a new heat pump are HSPF 8.2 and SEER 14. Heat pumps with the Energy Star-rating are significantly more efficient than the minimum standard. The quality of the installation also matters; some contractors will have more experience and training than others.

2. Mini-split heat pump

If your home does not have ductwork or the ductwork is poorly designed or leaky, a ductless mini-split heat pump might be your best bet. With a mini-split heat pump, tubes connected to the outside compressor carry refrigerant to one or more air handlers, which are


mounted high on a wall to distribute air. Thermostats regulate each air handler, providing control of different zones in the home.

In climates that don't experience extreme cold, a ductless heat pump could supply all the heating and cooling in a small home. They are often used in combination with a central heating and cooling system. Ductless mini-splits are an excellent option if you don't have central air ducts, your ducts are leaking, or you only want the new ductless heat pump to heat or cool part of the home.

3. Geothermal (or ground-source) heat pump

Several feet underground, the temperature remains constant year-round, typically between 45 degrees and 75 degrees F, depending on latitude. Heat is transferred into or out of the ground by pipes buried in a loop 10 feet underground or drilled up to 400 feet into the earth. The pipes carry water to a compressor, which uses a refrigerant to transfer the heat to or from your home's ducts.


A geothermal heat pump system is extremely energy efficient since the earth's temperature is warmer than the outside air in the winter and cooler than the outside air in the summer. This efficiency comes with a high price tag, which is the initial cost to install the pipe loop or drill the hole for a vertical pipe.

Check with BCREA for additional information, guidance and find the heat pump rebates forms on our website or at the office. If interested, find an energy audit handout on the BCREA website under Resources and Touchstone Energy. Then you'll be ready to reach out to contractors and request a few quotes. 

Battery-powered cultivator chews up weeds

Take your summer weed battle to new depths with this Craftsman V20 cordless tiller/cultivator.

Use the battery from your V20 power tools. This attachment tills up 8 inches wide and 6.5 inches deep. The battery provides about 50 minutes of garden tilling on low speed. Enjoy the lightweight — weighing about 15 pounds (without the battery or charger). It's the perfect size to get into the tight spots of the garden where plants have grown, in raised beds or smaller flower gardens. It can also be used to mix compost. This tiller attachment comes with a three-year warranty. It features an integrated Versatrack hook so it can be hung up.

You can find this attachment at Ace, Lowes or online for \$139 (tool only — no battery), making it well worth the time and sweat saved on a hot, humid gardening day. If you do not have Craftsman battery power tools, check and see if your brand of batter-powered tools offers this same type of attachment. 

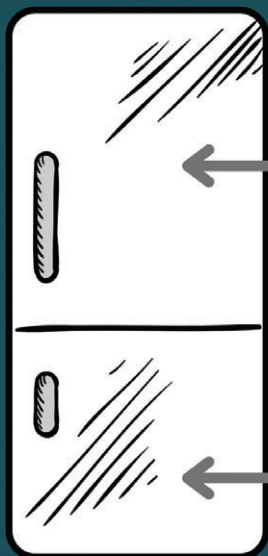
Win the weed battle this summer with a battery-powered tiller. This Craftsman model uses the same V20 battery as many of your existing tools.



Safety

Keep Food Safe During and After a Power Outage

Refrigerated or frozen foods may not be safe to eat after a power outage. Use these tips to minimize food loss and reduce risk of illness.



4

Refrigerated food will last four hours. After four hours, place refrigerated foods in a cooler with ice.

24 OR 48

Food in a **half-full** freezer will last 24 hours. Food in a **full** freezer will last 48 hours.

Food Safety Tips

1. Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible.
2. Throw out any food with an unusual odor, color or texture.
3. Throw out perishable food in your refrigerator after four hours without power or a cold source (like a cooler with ice).

When in doubt, throw it out!



Brown County Briefs

Efficiency tip

During summer months, use large appliances that emit heat such as clothes dryers and dishwashers during the evening when the outdoor temperature is lower. Running heat-emitting appliances in the evening will reduce indoor heat gain during the day when outdoor temperatures are highest and ultimately keep your air conditioner from working harder than necessary.



Tune up your AC to stay cool

Keep your home's cooling system running smoothly and efficiently by having it tuned up by a licensed, professional HVAC contractor; cash in on Brown County REA's rebate. Members are eligible for a \$25 electric bill credit for the home cooling system tune-up every two years. Submit the checklist below, along with a dated copy of the contractor's bill to Brown County REA to receive your bill credit. You can also use the tune-up portion of the Heating and Cooling rebate form on our website.

Name _____
 Address _____
 Town/zip _____
 Account _____
 Cooling equip. brand _____
 Model # _____
 Serial # _____
 Age of unit _____
 Size in tons _____
 HpSF2/SEER2 rating _____

I certify this work was completed:
 _____ clean condenser coil; check belt
 _____ check coolant level & lube motor
 _____ test all controls & blow out drain
 _____ check indoor furnace filter
 _____ check coolant pressure (P)

Beyond the plug — the local grid



We live in an increasingly power-dependent world. Every day, we rely on electricity in a variety of ways to help us run our lives. It gives us light, keeps our refrigerator running and charges our mobile devices.

At a basic level the electric grid is a system of interconnected wires connecting the places where energy is produced to where it is used. Great River Energy, the wholesale power supplier to Brown County REA, generates electricity and uses the grid to move it to ensure reliable electric service, as well as quick response times when there is an issue on the electric system. (See graphic on Page 5.)

The local grid delivers electricity from distribution substations, like those owned by Brown County REA, to members at the end of the line like you. At substations higher voltages are "stepped down" to lower, more usable levels. Then it is sent along smaller distribution lines to be delivered safely to neighborhoods and farms.

In residential areas pad-mounted transformers — the big green boxes sitting on the ground in the corner of some properties — make the power safe to use. That energy then runs along lines to power homes, schools, farms and businesses.

The local grid is one important key to helping deliver the power we rely on every day. (P)

MINNESOTA

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BROWN
COUNTY

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Brown County REA Farmfest 2025
Drawing at the Touchstone Energy
Cooperatives' Booth #2301

Name _____
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MISO grid: ready for the summer heat

The Midwest grid operator, known as MISO, aims for a stable summer for the region's electric grid, projecting peak demand of around 123 gigawatts (GW) and total available generation capacity of approximately 138 GW. While MISO expects sufficient capacity for normal summer conditions, the generation capacity has been reduced slightly from last year. With decreasing capacity they caution that emergency measures may be needed if there are periods of extreme conditions.

Similarly, the North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC) reported that MISO expects to have sufficient resources for normal summer peak, but has elevated risk for reliability events during periods of extreme demand with high generation outages.

"Part of our value proposition is maximizing existing resources to maintain reliability across a large, diverse region," said Jessica Lucas, MISO's executive director. "At some point we find ourselves in need of every available resource to keep the power flowing across our footprint almost every summer. The continued reduction in accredited capacity makes it more challenging, especially during heat waves, hurricanes or other extreme weather."

Despite the decline in overall capacity, Brown County REA's wholesale power supplier Great River Energy (GRE) is ready to meet the electricity demands of its member-owners this summer.

How co-ops handle the heat

Power plants capable of rapid electricity production, called "peaking plants," are critical during periods of high demand. GRE also works with its member-owner cooperatives, including Brown County REA, to reduce electricity usage through voluntary demand management programs, such as interruptible irrigation, water heaters and air conditioning. These initiatives not only provide relief to the electric grid but also offer financial savings to members.

Brown County REA members have the option to participate in demand response (DR) programs which allow Great River Energy (GRE), Brown County REA's wholesale power provider, to "control" or "cycle" their air conditioner, water heater, heat pump or other electric devices for a period of hours on high demand days. Large commercial members use back-up generators or load reduction to help BCREA and in turn, GRE, reduce capacity and energy requirements during peak load conditions throughout the year. Irrigation loads may be controlled



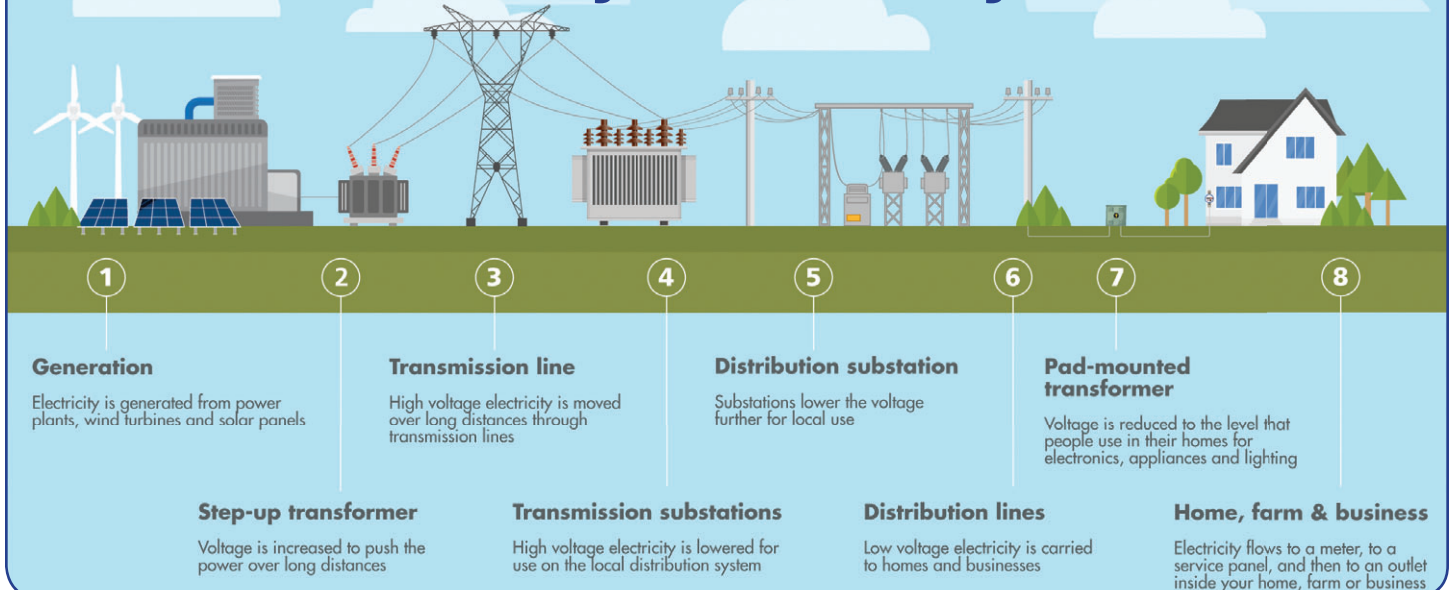
over peak times in the summer and early fall. Members are given a reduced rate or price reduction in the case of water heaters for participation in DR programs.

When the time comes for these appliances to be used for demand response — typically on hot

summer days or during a polar vortex when energy prices increase — GRE flips a switch to alleviate demand. This strategy not only reduces sometimes hundreds of megawatts of electricity demand system-wide, but it also helps the cooperative avoid making expensive purchases from the energy market, ultimately saving you, the members, money.

It takes a collective effort from the cooperative and its membership to maintain a healthy, reliable electric grid. Brown County REA appreciates all who participate in these money-saving programs. If you are interested in hearing more about your options, call or stop by the office. ☎

How electricity reaches your home



Caulk up savings this summer

The greatest sources of heating and cooling losses in your home are often invisible — air leaks. As a result, controlling air leaks provides the best way to extend the life of your home, conserve energy, save money, and increase comfort.

Bottom line? If you don't tighten up your home first, money spent on insulation may be wasted.

Fortunately, you can seal a lot of leaks around your home's exterior with less than \$100 worth of caulk. It's generally possible to seal openings up to one-quarter inch between window frames and siding or around door frames. For larger gaps add a backing material before caulking or use a spray foam sealant instead.

Most types of outdoor caulk are sold in tubes that fit a caulking gun. In addition, some caulks come in aerosol cans; they're a good choice for filling gaps up to one-half inch around pipes and wires.

When shopping for caulk, many choices exist. Prices range from a couple of dollars to several dollars per tube; be sure to read the labels and choose a product that will adhere best to the materials you're sealing.

If your budget allows, spend a little more to get a higher-quality caulk. Inexpensive caulks may last only a few years, while premium-priced caulks are rated for 20 years or more.

Caulk like a pro

- As a rule of thumb so you know how many tubes of caulk to buy, you will probably use half a cartridge per window or door and up to six cartridges for foundation work.

- Most caulks pose no known health hazards after they're fully cured. However, some high-performance caulking compounds contain irritating or potentially toxic ingredients; carefully read the manufacturer's instructions and take the appropriate precautions.

- The best time to apply caulk is during dry weather when outdoor temperatures are above 45 degrees. Low humidity is important during application to prevent cracks from swelling with moisture.

- If the gap you're sealing is too



Now is great time to go after those cracks and air leaks that cause you to loose heat in the winter and add to cooling costs in the summer. Load up a caulk gun or pick up a can of spray foam insulation. These tips will help walk you through those hidden energy issues so you can reap the rewards of energy savings each and every month!

wide, use a special filler made for that purpose. You'll find fillers in the caulking department of your local hardware store or home center. However, note that fillers are not designed for exposure to the elements; caulk or seal over it.

- Before applying new caulk, remove the old caulk or paint residue with a putty knife, stiff brush or special solvent.

- Make sure your work area is dry, so you won't seal in moisture.

- Hold the caulking gun at a consistent angle; 45 degrees is best.

- Caulk in a straight, continuous stream, avoiding stops and starts; make sure the caulk sticks to both sides of the crack or seam.

- Send caulk to the bottom of an opening to avoid bubbles.

- Release the trigger on the caulking gun before pulling it away from the crack to prevent applying too much caulk. A caulking gun with an automatic release makes this much easier. A battery-powered caulk gun dispenses it consistently and smooth, plus reduces hand fatigue.

- Don't skimp. If the caulk shrinks, reapply it to form a smooth bead that completely seals the crack.

- If caulk oozes out of a crack, use a putty knife to push it back in.

- Once you've applied caulk, it takes time for it to dry or cure. Curing time is


described in two ways. The tack-free time tells you how quickly the fresh caulk's outer surface will dry or skin over. The total cure time indicates the time required for the caulk to become completely stable — or reach the point where no further drying or shrinking will occur.

- Don't allow pets and small children to contact fresh caulk.

Use expanding foam for large gaps

- Be sure to use the correct type of spray foam for the job. Polyurethane expandable spray foam works well around pipes and gaps around the foundation. However, this type of caulk expands with so much force that it can cause damage to window frames and door frames. In those spots use a water-based spray foam specifically designed for the job.

- Expanding foam is ideal for filling cracks that caulks can't handle. It comes in aerosol cans and takes a short time to cure. The foam is very sticky and attaches itself quickly, so be prepared to pick up any messes fast.

- To seal gaps too wide for foam, use foil-faced bubble wrap. For really large holes cut sections of rigid foam insulation to fit and then glue into place with expanding foam before covering the area with wood or another appropriate building material. 

Red or green peppers? Spice up the summer recipes you share

Waiting for the first garden peppers! Share your favorite red or green pepper recipes with us, whether it's for pizza, hot dish, salads, stuffed peppers or main dishes. Send your favorite red or green pepper recipes to Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by July 25. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! 📧

Lemon Bars by Holly Benson, Granada

Shortbread crust: 1 c. unsalted butter, melted ½ c. white sugar
2 tsp. pure vanilla extract ½ tsp. salt 2 c. + 2 T. all-purpose flour

Preheat the oven to 325°F. Line the bottom and sides of a 9x13" glass baking pan (do not use metal) with parchment paper, leaving an overhang on the sides to lift the finished bars out (makes cutting easier). Set aside.

Mix the melted butter, sugar, vanilla extract and salt together in a medium bowl. Add the flour and stir to completely combine. The crust dough will be thick. Press firmly into prepared pan, making sure the layer of crust is nice and even. Bake for 20-22 minutes or until the edges are lightly browned. Remove from the oven.

Lemon filling: 2 c. white sugar 6 T. all-purpose flour
6 large eggs 1 c. lemon juice (about 4 lemons)

optional: powdered sugar for dusting

Sift the sugar and flour together in a large bowl for the filling. Whisk in the eggs, then the lemon juice until completely combined. Pour the filling over the warm crust. Bake the bars for 22-26 minutes or until the center is relatively set and no longer jiggles. (Give the pan a light tap with an oven mitt to test.) Remove bars from the oven and cool completely at room temperature. I usually cool them for about 2 hours at room temperature, then stick in the refrigerator for 1-2 more hours until pretty chilled. I recommend serving chilled.

Once cool, lift the parchment paper out of the pan using the overhang on the sides. Dust with powdered sugar and cut into squares before serving. For neat squares wipe the knife clean between each cut. Cover and store leftover lemon bars in the refrigerator for up to one week.

Freezing Instructions: Lemon bars can be frozen up to three to four months. Cut the cooled bars (without confectioners' sugar topping) into squares, then place onto a baking sheet. Freeze for 1 hour. Individually wrap each bar in aluminum foil or plastic wrap and place into a large bag or freezer container to freeze. Thaw in the refrigerator and then dust with powdered sugar before serving. 📧

Looking to upgrade your water heater?

Heat Pump Water Heaters
are up to 500% more efficient than your electric water heater.

Upgrading rebates \$500
with Brown County REA if ENERGY STAR certified.

With Federal Government,
qualifying purchases of a HPWH could credit up to \$3,200.

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Contact Gopher State One Call before doing any digging more than 12" deep — 48 hours before digging for foundations, trees and tiling.

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



Brandon Havemeier
Operations Manager

Poletop rescue is part of our crew's training

It has been a busy year, and we are already half-way through! We've had multiple safety meetings, a successful annual meeting, and completed line patrol, along with regularly combating and preventing outages. Our goal, as always, is to do our job the way we were trained while keeping ourselves safe.

We do various training throughout the year to keep ourselves safe on the job. A lot of our work is also keeping members and their neighbors safe while they live amongst our power lines and equipment.

One big risk of climbing a pole or interacting with equipment is electrical shock, which can be fatal if action isn't taken. This is where our experience and training with pole top rescue and CPR comes in handy. By doing this training, we can achieve our goal of having your homes and businesses electrified, while keeping everyone safe. Ⓢ



To complete the pole top rescue training crews start by communicating the crisis to our team. Then, they safely climb the pole, strategically remove the victim, descend the pole and perform CPR.



MREA provided an experienced trainer who guided the linemen through each component of training, including Mayday procedures and tying knots.



BROWN COUNTY
REA

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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 May 29, 2025. Discussion and/or action were taken on the following agenda items:

- Reviewed and approved the April 2025 board meeting minutes, new membership applications, member cancellations, payments to estates and assignment transfers.
- Reviewed and approved April 2025 payroll and April financial statement.
- Met with guest, Ben, from Resco to receive report on dividends and capital credit check.
- Reviewed contractors that are working on the co-op's system.
- Updated on recent work with member-owned Distributed Energy Resources.
- Reviewed the first meeting of the new Member Advisory Council. Set date for second meeting as September 15.
- Reviewed individual director reports, including CTV updates and safety meeting topics.
- Reviewed staff meeting reports, director meeting reports and individual director reports.

The next meeting is July 31, 2025, at the Brown County REA office in Sleepy Eye. Ⓢ