



COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



Antler Shed Hunting

Shed Hunter Kelly
O'Bryan

Pages 8-9

Artificial Intelligence

Pages 12-13

*Photo submitted by
Kelly O'Bryan*

REED Fund Continues Its Success



Jordan Lamb
CEO

Oahe Electric Cooperative partnered with twenty-seven non-profit electric cooperatives in South Dakota and Minnesota to address a common goal – provide lower interest rate loans to businesses and

communities in rural areas to support growth.

Rural Electric Economic Development (REED) provides loans alongside banks to ensure our rural needs are met. Oahe Electric Cooperative offers REED loans to both members and non-members in our rural area. Whether it be community affordable housing projects, new businesses or business expansions, and in this case – daycare providers.

Garrett and Victoria Peterson recently closed a low interest loan through our offered REED program to open a daycare facility in Pierre, South Dakota. As parents themselves, Garrett and Tori have both recognized a need in our area! They plan to open the daycare soon, with the potential to add a preschool the following school year. Enrollment is currently open.

We are fortunate to have their business in our area and look forward to their success! For any questions regarding Lil Gov's



Above: Oahe Electric CEO Jordan Lamb with Victoria and Garrett Peterson after closing on the loan

Below: Garrett and Victoria worked with Oahe Electric and the REED Fund to secure the loan.



Bright Beginnings, please visit their website:
www.lilgovsbrightbeginnings.com

Congratulations to the Peterson's on their new adventure, and if you are interested expanding a business, building a new

business, renovating existing properties for housing, or anything else, please reach out to Oahe Electric Cooperative so we can meet your growing needs through our REED program!

"As we near our closing date on the daycare, I just want to send a quick thank you to Oahe Electric for supporting our new project and adventure through the REED Program. We can't express how grateful we are for your support! Thanks Again!"

— The Petersons (Lil' Govs Bright Beginnings)"



COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

OAHE ELECTRIC

(USPS No. 019-042)

Board of Directors:

James Feller – Assistant Secretary
605.962.6207
Brandon Haag – President
605.215.6758
Ryan Noyes – Treasurer
605.280.3500
Ross Sperry – Secretary
605.280.7770
Kirk Yackley – Vice President
605.258.2412

Employees:

Tyler Arbach – Journeyman Lineman
Austin Bergeson – Journeyman Lineman
Mark Bruning – Line Foreman
Matt Eldridge – Chief Operations Officer
Trudie Feldman – Custodian
Brady Gaer – Journeyman Lineman
Sidney Geigle – Journeyman Lineman
Austin Hammer – Business Procurement
& Development Specialist
Sam Irvine – Executive Services Specialist
Megan Jaeger – Membership Director
Les Job – Journeyman Lineman
Jordan Lamb – Chief Executive Officer
Dan Lettau – Journeyman Lineman
Steve Long – Power Supply Specialist
Valerie Marso – Chief Financial Officer
Tory Smith – Journeyman Lineman

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Our Mission

Oahe Electric delivers high quality, low-cost electric service to our local member-owners. As a Touchstone Energy® Cooperative, we are committed to meeting the highest standards of customer satisfaction. We do business with accountability, integrity, innovation and commitment to community. As an electric co-op, we are part of America's most trusted network of high quality energy

What It's Like to Manage Your Electricity Bill — From the Other Side

An Employee's Perspective On Rates



Valerie Marso
CFO

Every month, just like our members, we open our electric bills — and we notice when there are changes too. But along with being part of this community, we're also the team responsible for managing the co-op's finances. That means we see both sides: the impact on households and the behind-the-scenes work that goes into keeping the lights on.

And it's not always easy.

Power isn't a luxury — it's a necessity. It keeps homes comfortable, food fresh, devices connected, and families safe. It powers schools, businesses, and healthcare. In today's world, life simply doesn't function without it.

While many essential goods and services have seen steep increases over the past 20 years, electricity has not risen at the same pace. That's not by accident. It's the result of careful planning, long-term investment, and a commitment to doing what's right for our members.

Still, keeping electricity reliable, safe, and affordable requires constant work. When

storms damage equipment, when supply costs rise, or when infrastructure ages, those expenses have to be addressed. But as a not-for-profit cooperative, we answer only to our members — not shareholders. Every decision we make is about serving this community, not generating a return.

Sometimes that means postponing projects until the timing makes sense. Other times, it means making tough calls — like adjusting rates — to avoid bigger problems down the line. These are choices we approach with care and transparency, knowing their impact.

We live here, too. We drive the same roads, shop in the same stores, and understand what it means to stretch a paycheck. That shared experience keeps us grounded — in every budget meeting, every planning session, and every conversation around the board table.

At the end of the day, we want you to know this: we're doing everything we can to manage costs wisely, maintain reliable service, and protect the trust you've placed in us. Every dollar matters — because it's your dollar.

And if you ever have questions, just ask. This cooperative belongs to all of us — and we're proud to power it together.

Attend Your Annual Meeting

Official Notice for Oahe Electric Annual Meeting on Sept. 13, 2025

The annual meeting of the members of Oahe Electric Cooperative, Inc. will be held at the **Larkspur Landing Events Center in Pierre, SD, at 7:00 pm on September 13, 2025**, to take action on the following matters:

1. Review of the minutes of the previous meeting.
2. Presentation and consideration of reports, officers, directors and committees.

3. Election of directors.

In conjunction with the election of directors, for two terms of three years, the following members have been nominated for director by petition, pursuant to the bylaws:

For term of three years:

- William Colson, Pierre, SD
- James Feller, Blunt, SD

4. All other business that may properly come before the meeting.

Emergency Preparedness: Are You Ready for a Disaster?

Source: National Safety Council

National Preparedness Month, sponsored by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and held annually in September, is a good reminder that natural and man-made disasters can strike at any time. It's important to have a planned response when you're at work, on vacation or on the road.

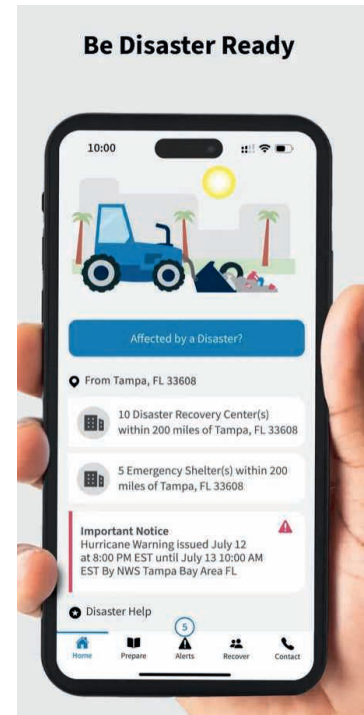
In 2022, 69,473 weather-related events resulted in 813 deaths and 1,718 injuries. Winter weather, heat, floods and hurricanes resulted in the most deaths that year, according to Injury Facts.

The National Safety Council offers safety tips specific on preparing for earthquakes, floods, hurricanes and tornadoes, and how to minimize fire risks.

Federal agencies, like Ready.gov and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration also are valuable resources for emergency preparedness. When you face a natural or man-made emergency, try to stay informed through radio, TV or the Internet. In some cases, however, cable, electric and cell phone service will be disabled, making communication nearly impossible. The National Safety Council recommends the following general precautions that apply to many disaster situations:

- Make sure at least one family member knows first aid and CPR.
- Download the FEMA app for resources, weather alerts and safety tips.
- Have a family communication plan in place; all members of the family should review and practice the plan.
- Have all family members' and other important phone numbers written down or memorized.
- Have an emergency kit in your car and at least three days of food and water at home.
- Be sure to store all important documents – birth certificates, insurance policies, etc. – in a fire-proof safe or safety deposit box.
- Know how to shut off utilities.

The official FEMA mobile app offers critical resources and real-time alerts to help you prepare for emergencies, stay safe during disasters, and navigate recovery afterward. With features like customizable emergency checklists, shelter locations, disaster recovery centers, and direct access to emergency alerts, the app is a comprehensive tool for personal and family safety planning.



"Don't drive tractors into power lines."

Darcy Welsh, Age 9

Darcy cautions readers while driving tractors near power lines. Great picture, Darcy! Darcy's parents are Ryan and Rachel Welsh from Oral, S.D.

Kids, send your drawing with an electrical safety tip to your local electric cooperative (address found on Page 3). If your poster is published, you'll receive a prize. All entries must include your name, age, mailing address and the names of your parents. Colored drawings are encouraged.

Fruit SPECIALS

FROZEN FRUIT FIESTA

Ingredients:

1 6-oz. frozen orange juice concentrate
2 10-oz. frozen strawberries
2 cans pineapple with juice (1 tidbits, 1 crushed)
3-4 bananas, sliced
1/4 cup lemon juice
1 cup sugar
1 1/2 cup cold water

Method

Mix all together in a large bowl. Freeze in individual cups. Set out at room temperature for 1-2 hours before serving.

Optional: pour sour or 7-Up on top before serving.

Ginny Jensen
Sioux Valley Energy

PEACH RHUBARB CRISP

Filling:

3/4 cup sugar
3 tbsps. flour
1/2 tsp. nutmeg
1/8 tsp. salt
3 cups rhubarb (sliced, fresh or frozen)
2 1/2 cups chopped fresh or frozen unsweetened peaches

Topping:

1/2 cup flour
1/2 cup oatmeal
1/2 cup brown sugar
3/4 tsp. cinnamon
1/8 tsp. salt
5 tbsps. butter (cold)

Method

Combine the filling ingredients and fruit. Transfer to a greased 11"x7" baking dish. In a small bowl, combine the topping ingredients; cut in butter until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Sprinkle over fruit. Bake at 375°F for 30 to 35 minutes until bubbly and browned.

*Recipe can be cut in half and bake in 8" x 8" pan.

Sally Florey
Charles Mix Electric

CHERRY ICE CREAM DESSERT

Ingredients:

1 1/2 cup Rice Krispies, crushed
1/4 cup brown sugar
1/4 cup melted butter
1 cup grated coconut
1/4 cup chopped nuts
1-quart vanilla ice cream
1 cup cherry pie mix

Method

1. Melt butter in frying pan. Add coconut and toast, stirring constantly as it burns easily. Cool
2. Add nuts, brown sugar and crushed rice Krispies. Mix together.
3. Press 2/3 of crumb mixture into a buttered 9x9 inch pan.
4. Soften ice cream and spread over crumb mixture then top remaining crumbs.
5. Freeze well. Cut in squares and top with cherry pie mix.
6. Can be served with any other toppings. Serves 6-8.

Rowena A. Wipf
Northern Electric

Please send your favorite recipes to your local electric cooperative (address found on Page 3). Each recipe printed will be entered into a drawing for a prize in December 2025. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

Meet Your Directors

Get to Know Candidates Filling Open Board Seats

Oahe Electric Cooperative is governed by members — just like you — who step up to serve their neighbors and communities. This year, two board seats were open for election, and we're pleased to announce that two candidates filed valid petitions to serve in these positions.

Because only one candidate filed in each zone, an election will not be held, in accordance with cooperative bylaws. However, we want to take this opportunity to introduce the two individuals who will be representing you on the board. Their experience, values, and dedication to the cooperative model are what keep Oahe Electric strong.



James Feller – Zone 1

Member Since:

"We've been members of Oahe Electric since purchasing our ranch in 1991," Jim shared. "But I remember attending the annual meeting in Onida back in the 1970s — it's been a long-standing part of our lives."

Occupational Background:

Jim wears many hats. Along with farming and ranching, he and his family run a pheasant hunting operation. He also works full-time in animal health sales, serving veterinarians across the region. He's a proud graduate of South Dakota State University with a Bachelor of Science degree.

Family Life:

Family plays a central role in Jim's life. He and his wife Nancy have been married for 34 years. Their family includes:

- Daughter Tiera and her husband Jalen, parents to Layla (6), Vance (3), and one-year-old twin boys Boden and Watson.
- Daughter Dakota and her husband Sal.
- Son Reed and his wife Kynlynne, with their son Bridger (1).
- Son Clay.

Community Involvement:

A strong advocate for local causes, Jim is active on the Sully Buttes Track and Field Committee, serves on the Hughes County Conservation District Board and is a long-time member of the Oahe Electric Board.

Board Experience:

Jim has accumulated an impressive 29 years of experience on the Oahe Electric Board. Additionally, he has served on the South Dakota Veterinary Medical Examining Board for nine years.

Focus Areas:

He believes the board's priority should be delivering "reliable,

low-cost electricity," especially as demand increases and traditional power generation methods face more regulation.

Why He Serves:

"Even as a kid attending annual meetings, I saw how essential electricity was to our ranch," he recalled. "My parents respected how Oahe Electric treated its members — and that hasn't changed."



Willie Colson – Zone 2

Member Since:

"I've lived in Oahe Electric's service territory for all 31 years of my life," Willie says. "You could say I've been a lifetime member."

Occupational Background:

With a strong foundation in agriculture, Willie grew up working on the family farm and now manages his own and rented acres. He also jokes that he's a "professional kid chauffeur," responsible for safely transporting his kids to school, sports, and daycare.

Family Life:

He and his wife Lahnee have been married nearly three years. Their children—Maddie, Clay, and Kirby—keep them busy and entertained.

Community Involvement:

Willie is actively involved in the local community. He supports youth and high school sports and rodeos, and volunteers his time as a referee during youth basketball tournaments.

Board Experience:

While this is his first board position, he brings a fresh perspective, enthusiasm, and a strong willingness to learn. "I plan to be active and engaged while supporting the cooperative's goals."

Focus Areas:

He's committed to helping the cooperative continue delivering "quality, dependable, and affordable service in a rapidly growing and changing electrical world."

Local Concerns:

He sees a need to support rural communities facing population decline. "We have fewer young people in our area. We need to get the ones we do have more involved and invested in our future."

Why He Serves:

"I want to help keep Oahe Electric the strong, reliable, member-focused cooperative it's always been," he says. He also credits his mother's career in the utility industry for sparking his interest in cooperative service.

Thank You for Supporting Your Cooperative!

Even though this year's board positions were uncontested, we encourage all members to stay engaged with their cooperative, attend annual meetings, and reach out to board members with questions or ideas. Together, we power a stronger community.



SOUTH DAKOTA SUNFLOWERS

Photo by Mary Howell

Wild Dutchman Seeds a Nationwide Snack

Jacob Boyko

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If you're driving across central South Dakota in the summertime and you pass by a field of tall, bright sunflowers swaying in the breeze, there's a good chance you're a witness to the first step in those seeds' journey to being roasted, seasoned and packed into a bag of Wild Dutchman sunflower seeds.

One sunflower seed grower is Dakota Energy member Greg Bich, who's involved in just about every step from the farm-to-bag process for the iconic South Dakota brand.

Greg is a part owner of Southern Sun, the Huron-based company that processes, roasts and markets Wild Dutchman sunflower seeds for a nationwide audience of sweet-and-salty snackers.

Years ago, as a favor to his friend, local farmer and sunflower processor Danny Dale, Greg hauled loads of sunflower seeds up to Mound City for an up-and-coming operation known as "Wild Dutchman."

During these visits, Greg got to know the company's founders: father and son

duo Wayne and Toby Vanderlaan.

"If you ever talk to the older farmers in this area, a lot of them have nicknames, and that's kind of what they went by," Greg explained. "Wayne Vanderlaan's neighbor was called 'The Crazy Norwegian', while the neighbor called him 'The Wild Dutchman.'"

What started as a part-time snack-making hobby for the Wild Dutchman and Toby had boomed into substantial business — one that was quickly outgrowing their batch-by-batch roasting set-up.

"They had all of these distributors calling them, and they couldn't really get production done, and he just really wanted some help," Greg explained. "I came back, and I talked to my sunflower seed processing plant partner, Danny Dale, and I told him I'd like to invest in this company, and we felt a need for an additional roasting plant and built it."

The rest is history; Greg and Danny took over some of the roasting and helped out Toby and his daughter, Shelby, with new packaging designs, highlighting the Vanderlanns' Dutch heritage with the iconic orange packaging.

With the additional processing capacity, the company continued to expand its growing footprint throughout the Midwest and beyond.

"It's hard for a little two-family-owned company to be competitive in the market, but since we have the seeds from start to finish, it kind of gives us an advantage over everyone else," Greg said.

Starting in December 2024, Greg and Danny took over full production of Wild Dutchman seeds in Huron.

"From that first load that we hauled up there to Mound City to the time we built the roasting plant was probably three years of building a friendship," Greg said. "Small town South Dakota is very different, and we honestly went into wild Dutchman with no contractual agreement besides a shake of a hand and a 'hey, we're in this together.'"

Today, as the Wild Dutchman brand continues its remarkable streak of success, Greg is elated seeing how a little small-town friendship, hard work, and faith can achieve so much.

"One of the greatest feelings I've had is being in a faraway place and seeing an empty bag of Wild Dutchman seeds blowing across the baseball field," Greg laughed. "It's those little things that are more satisfying than having a positive balance sheet or a huge profit."



SHED

Kelly O'Bryan of Winner shows off his impressive collection of deer and elk sheds alongside his shed-hunting Labrador, Skye. Photos submitted by Kelly O'Bryan

HUNTING

Prairie Miles and Antler Piles

Frank Turner

frank.turner@sdrea.coop

Rosebud Electric member Kelly O'Bryan of Winner regularly hikes mile after mile of open prairie in search of the perfect shed. But he isn't looking for a place to store his garden tools or lawnmower – instead, he's after antlers. Each spring, deer and elk naturally shed their antlers, leaving behind prized treasures for shed hunters like O'Bryan to find.

O'Bryan jumped into the shed hunting hobby in 2020, during the social distancing months of the pandemic, after a friend invited him on a shed hunt in Montana. When O'Bryan found his first deer shed, he uncovered more than just a pair of antlers – he discovered a new passion.

"It was during the time when you couldn't go out and do anything, so you just had to make your own fun and find stuff to do," he laughed. "I just fell in love with covering as many miles as I possibly could each season, trying to pinpoint sheds. It's just like an Easter egg hunt."



O'Bryan lifts an elk shed found in Montana. Submitted Photo

Shortly after, O'Bryan fully committed to the hobby and added the ultimate scavenger to his team: a white lab named Skye. According to O'Bryan, it didn't take long for the dog to become an invaluable shed-hunting partner.

"I got Skye as a puppy, and I knew as soon as I got her, I

would train her to be a shed dog,” he said. “I taught her to sit and stay while I hid sheds all around the house. When she found one, I would give her lots of positive reinforcement. She figured it out just like that.”

Since then, O’Bryan and Skye have become seasoned shed hunters. In 2024 alone, the pair found 152 whitetail sheds, 25 mule deer sheds, nine elk sheds and 16 complete skulls – called “dead heads” – which resemble an English-style mount. Many of their best finds come from long days spent in remote country, often covering 10 to 15 miles in a single outing.

O’Bryan’s collection of sheds has grown into an impressive heap of bone and tines that continues to grow each season. Like many in the shed hunting community, he has found creative ways to showcase his finds with his most festive being an antler-adorned Christmas tree.

Others in the shed hunting community use their collection for art projects, crafting everything from knife handles to chandeliers. Some even trade or sell antlers to crafters, collectors, or pet product makers, giving shed hunting both recreational and economic appeal. Although O’Bryan does not sell his finds, he does cut up broken and damaged antlers for dog chews, gifting them to friends, family and his own favorite shed-hunting friend.

O’Bryan also has a few tips for beginners, drawn from miles of experience.

He says spring is the best time to search – antlers are freshly shed, and the grass is still short enough to give hunters a clear view. A good pair of binoculars is another must-have, helping spot antlers from a distance when the terrain allows for a higher vantage point.

And once you’ve found one shed, don’t assume the hunt is over. Whitetail deer are often in groups and antlers are often dropped in pairs so it’s worth taking the time to thoroughly scan the surroundings.

“You aren’t going to be finding many sheds unless you are willing to put on the miles,” he said. “The more you hike, the more you are likely to find sheds.”

More photos of O’Bryan’s collection and other hunting trophies can be found on his Instagram page: @db_huntin.



(Above) O’Bryan praises Skye for a lifetime of discovering antlers.
(Below) O’Bryan and Skye show their white tail antler finds from a winter shed hunt. *Submitted Photo*



Youth Excursion

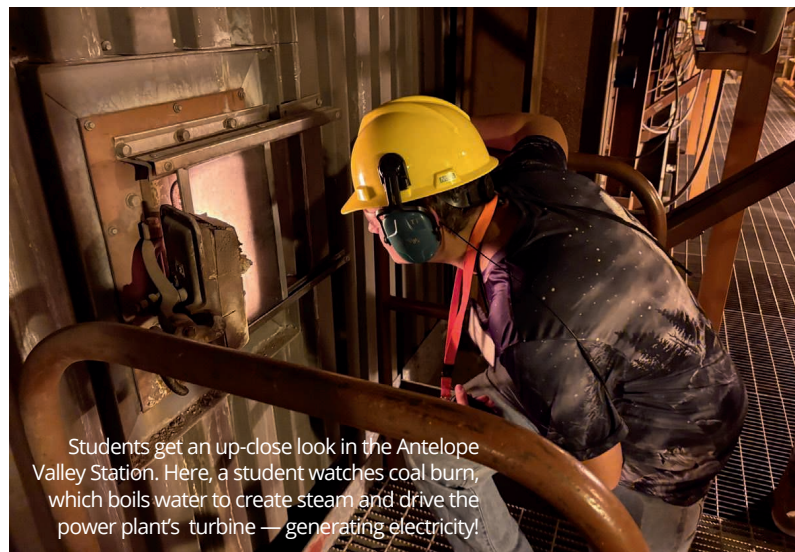
Area Students Learn How the Light Stay On

What does it take to keep the lights on? Sixteen students representing 10 electric cooperatives from across South Dakota embarked on a three-day trip to Bismarck, N.D., in July to go behind the scenes and learn about electricity generation. Sponsored by their local electric cooperatives, students toured the energy infrastructure that generates and transmits electricity into residential homes and commercial buildings, learning firsthand from industry experts.

The group kicked off the tour by visiting the Coteau Properties Co. Freedom Mine, where they watched large equipment in action and coal being mined in real time. The group followed the coal to Antelope Valley Station, a coal-fired power plant, where the coal is burned to generate energy. In addition to generation, the group learned about coal byproducts, touring the one-of-a-kind Great Plains Synfuels Plant where natural gas, liquid carbon dioxide, fertilizers and fuels are produced from coal. Lastly, the group concluded their tour at Basin Electric Headquarters where most of the energy generation is facilitated and managed.

Owen Sperry, who lives within Northern Electric's service territory, said the trip provided a new perspective on how power is generated. Sperry, a sophomore at Groton Area High School, expressed interest in becoming a lineman someday.

"My uncle used to be a lineman, so I've always had a passion for it," Sperry said. "And getting to go through the shop of the



Students get an up-close look in the Antelope Valley Station. Here, a student watches coal burn, which boils water to create steam and drive the power plant's turbine — generating electricity!

Freedom Coal Mine was my favorite part of the trip. The scale of everything was just incredible."

The trip is organized by the statewide South Dakota Rural Electric Association in Pierre, S.D., and paid for by the students' electric cooperatives as part of the industry's ongoing support of the fifth cooperative principle: education, training, and information.

As cooperatives, we value our communities and our youth. If you are interested in learning more about youth activities and opportunities, reach out to your local cooperative to learn more.

ENERGY SCAMS



Solar energy is rising in popularity — and so are solar scams. If a salesperson knocks on your door promising free solar panels at zero cost or that you'll never have to pay your energy bill again, it's likely a scam. If you're interested in solar panels for your home, do your research, get multiple quotes from licensed providers who are reputable, and most importantly, take your time to ensure a smooth process.

Source: Federal Trade Commission

2024 Annual Meeting Minutes

MINUTES OF THE SEVENTY-THIRD ANNUAL MEETING OF THE MEMBERSHIP OF OAHE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC., SEPT. 21, 2024.

The seventy-third Annual Meeting of the members of the Oahe Electric Cooperative, Inc. (hereinafter called the Cooperative) was held at the Sully Buttes High School in Onida (Sully County South Dakota) on the 21st day of September, 2024, pursuant to provisions of the bylaws and upon notice having been given by the secretary to all of the Members of the Cooperative.

A drive-thru format was offered in Blunt (Hughes County South Dakota), Onida (Sully County South Dakota), and Pierre (Hughes County South Dakota) in addition to the in-person meeting. Registration was declared open at 3 p.m. Members received printed cooperative reports and ballots to cast their vote for the proposed bylaw amendment as they registered at all drive-thru locations and the in-person meeting. Polls closed promptly at 5 p.m.

The business meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m. by President Brandon Haag, who presided.

President Haag declared a quorum with 444 members registered.

The invocation was performed by Pastor John Fette.

On behalf of the cooperative, Vice President Kirk Yackley presented Years of Service awards to the following individuals: Les Job, Journeyman Lineman, 5 years; and Sam Irvine, Executive Services Specialist, 15 years.

Secretary Ross Sperry presented the Proof of Mailing and the Count of Membership (2,168) on the date of the annual meeting.

President Haag called for approval, without reading, of the minutes of the annual meeting of September 16, 2023, as printed in the annual meeting programs. A motion was duly made and seconded that the reading of the minutes be waived and that the minutes be approved. Motion carried.

In video presentations, Chief Financial Officer Marso reported on the benefits of cooperative membership, as well as the financial condition of the cooperative.

Chief Operations Officer Eldridge reported on the projects the operations department worked on in the last year.

Chief Executive Officer Jordan Lamb reported on the cooperative, including possible new large loads in our service territory as well as possible rate increases in the future.

President Haag called for new business, of which there was none, after which he called for unfinished business, of which there was none.

There were two candidates for the two offices of Director for three-year terms, Brandon Haag of Pierre, South Dakota, and Ross Sperry of Blunt, South Dakota. Attorney Hegge announced both directors were elected by acclamation.

Attorney Hegge also explained the proposed bylaw amendment and announced the results of the vote – the proposed bylaw amendment passed with a vote of 338 – YES / 89 – NO. The Certificate of Election is attached and made part of these minutes.

There being no further business to come before the meeting, upon a motion duly made and seconded, the meeting was adjourned.

Your Co-op's Thank-You Notes

I would also like to take this time to share our thoughts on how well the guys responded to the damage caused by the storm.

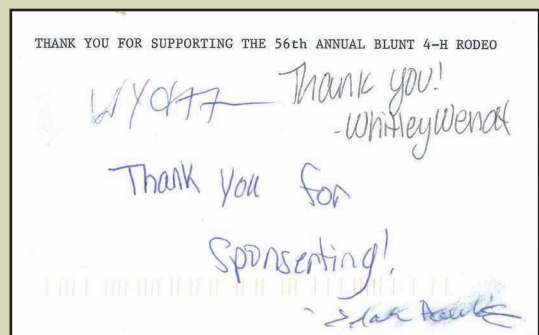
I was on the phone reporting that the power to our house was out. The operator asked about the store as he could see we have several meters under my phone number. I drove down and saw the broken power pole with lines strung across our parking lot. That was at 8:15pm. By 12:03am the replacement pole was in the ground with lines attached.

Power to the house was back on within the hour; it took until 3pm the next day to get power to the store because the underground feed had been too damaged to repair that night. Tyler, Austin, and the rest of the guys did a tremendous job of getting everything back to normal, starting with working on the lines to get power back to our house in 30+ mph winds. We cannot say enough about how communicative and quick the guys were. Our heartfelt thanks!

As an added bonus, with up to 4 bucket trucks in our parking lot with their flashing lights on, our store cat Bear had plenty of things to watch that night.

Our sincere thanks for the outstanding job the linemen did.

Art Smith & Mary Eckstrom



Oahe Electric Staff,

Thank you for the \$50. It will come in handy when I attend Dakota Wesleyan University.

Colton Brady

Oahe Electric,

Thank you for the money and the card, it is very greatly appreciated

*Sincerely,
Weston Northrup*



HARNESSING AI

Electric Cooperatives Explore What's Next for AI

Frank Turner

frank.turner@sdrea.coop

Artificial intelligence (AI) is becoming an increasingly popular tool for many industries and even in our daily lives. It has the potential to bring many opportunities, and a few challenges, to electric cooperatives. But machine learning takes time, and cooperatives are still in the process of determining how AI can be effectively used.

Like any new technology, AI brings with it a mix of potential and uncertainty. It's a hot topic — sometimes exciting, sometimes a little intimidating. But for electric cooperatives, the focus isn't on the buzz. It's on the basics: What problems can it solve? What efficiencies can it create? And how do cooperatives make sure they are using it safely?

That measured, practical approach is what's guiding East River Electric Power

Cooperative, a wholesale power supply cooperative which serves 25-member distribution systems in eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota, as it explores how AI might support the operations of its member cooperatives now and into the future.

Right now, most electric cooperatives in South Dakota have not yet integrated artificial intelligence into their operations or systems. But that doesn't mean the technology is being ignored. Across the state, many co-ops are watching AI developments closely, asking questions, and exploring how these tools might be used in the future. The focus remains on learning first — before implementing anything that could affect system reliability or member service.

At East River Electric Power Cooperative, that learning process is already well underway. According to Jeff May, chief information officer with East River Elec-

tric, the co-op has spent the past several years researching what AI has to offer. Their approach has been to identify practical, secure applications that could help improve efficiency, support employees in their day-to-day work, and ultimately benefit members.

"With the explosion of AI applications and models for both personal and professional uses, we've been exploring ways that East River Electric and our members can harness the power of AI while making sure that our data is secure from a cybersecurity perspective," said May.

Because AI technology has the potential to interact with both internal systems and external networks, cybersecurity is a top priority. As South Dakota rural electric cooperatives look to adopt tools powered by AI and other tech, they will ensure their systems are safe from potential cyber threats. Strong digital defenses are essential for the safe use of any new technology.

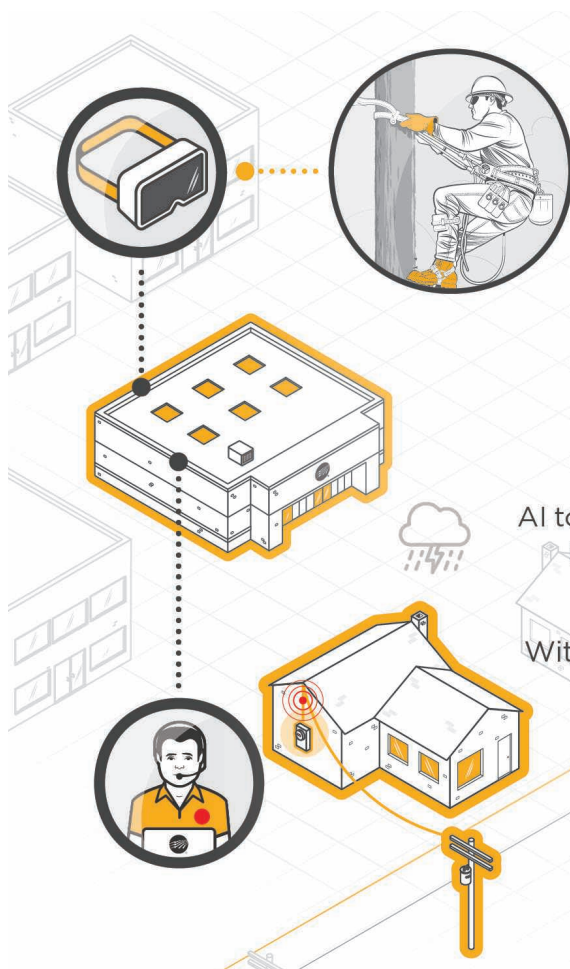
With safety in mind, May said East River Electric is actively partnering with Dakota State University graduate students to see how AI can be safely utilized by electric cooperatives. Together, East River Electric is working with the school to build an AI model that can predict electricity usage based on weather conditions and other factors to support the cooperative's load forecasting and rate forecasting capabilities. Although the technology is still in its infancy, May said he expects that someday AI will play a significant role in an electric cooperative's daily operations, including load forecasting, outage response and maintenance planning.

"It's difficult to predict how AI can be used for different types of jobs, but it will certainly become common throughout the organization as we learn all of the things AI can do," he said. "If it can be used to make our employees more productive and have a positive impact on the organization and our members, we will consider it. In some areas it could become commonplace within the next year, but throughout the cooperative it could take 3 to 5 years or more to be fully integrated in a safe and secure way."

Beyond grid operations, East River Electric is also trying out Microsoft CoPilot, an AI-powered assistant built into programs like Word, Excel, Outlook and Teams. A few employees are currently testing it to see how it might improve productivity and workflow, especially in communications and marketing departments.

Ultimately, if AI can streamline a process, predict an issue or improve service for electric cooperative members, May said it's worth considering. AI can be another tool in the cooperative tool belt that can make energy more reliable, services faster and operations more efficient.

"Over the next 5 to 10 years, AI's role in electric cooperatives is poised to grow significantly, driven by the need for efficiency, grid reliability and sustainability amid rising energy demands and technological advancements," said May. "Just the advancements that have been made in the last three years have been astounding to watch, and as more and more data centers and large language models are built in the coming years, it will become something that cooperatives likely use on a daily basis."



AI PUT INTO ACTION

Electric cooperatives are already using artificial intelligence (AI) and augmented reality (AR) for key tasks and activities. Looking ahead, co-ops see great potential for AI and AR as helpful tools for improving grid reliability and the services they provide to consumer-members.

SERVICES FOR MEMBERS

AI tools like chatbots can enhance member interactions and provide a tailored experience based on energy use data.

WEATHER FORECASTING

With the help of AI, weather forecasts will become more accurate, pinpointing areas to station utility crews.

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Through augmented reality, or AR, lineworkers can experience interactive, lifelike trainings, rather than watching a video or webinar.



Photo by Jessie Tucker

ELECTRIC VEHICLES

Is an EV Right for Your Needs?

Jacob Boyko

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As electric vehicle infrastructure improves in South Dakota, you may be wondering: is it finally time to jump on board the EV bandwagon?

EVs offer many lucrative benefits to their owners. They mark an end to the tedious oil changes, and you're likely to take on fewer expenses to maintain the vehicle — and that's all while you're getting the combustion engine-equivalent of 100 miles to the gallon.

It's a deal lucrative enough that EV registration has surged in the U.S. to more than four million vehicles on the road in 2024, with that number expected to grow exponentially over the next decade. Florida, Texas and Washington each already have more than 100,000 EVs registered, and California reports more than one million.

Meanwhile in South Dakota, it's still fairly irregular that you'll see an electric vehicle (with in-state plates) driving around your community. In fact, the South Dakota Department of Transportation records only about 1,400 fully-electric vehicles on the road, even as charging infrastructure increases.

"You do have range anxiety — that is something that happens," said Matt Hotzler, manager of H-D Electric Cooperative in Clear Lake, who regularly takes the co-op's Tesla Model 3 on business trips across the state.

South Dakota's weather makes planning a trip in an electric vehicle a little more hands-on. Temperature, wind speeds, climate control and headlights all affect how frequently you have to stop to add some joules.

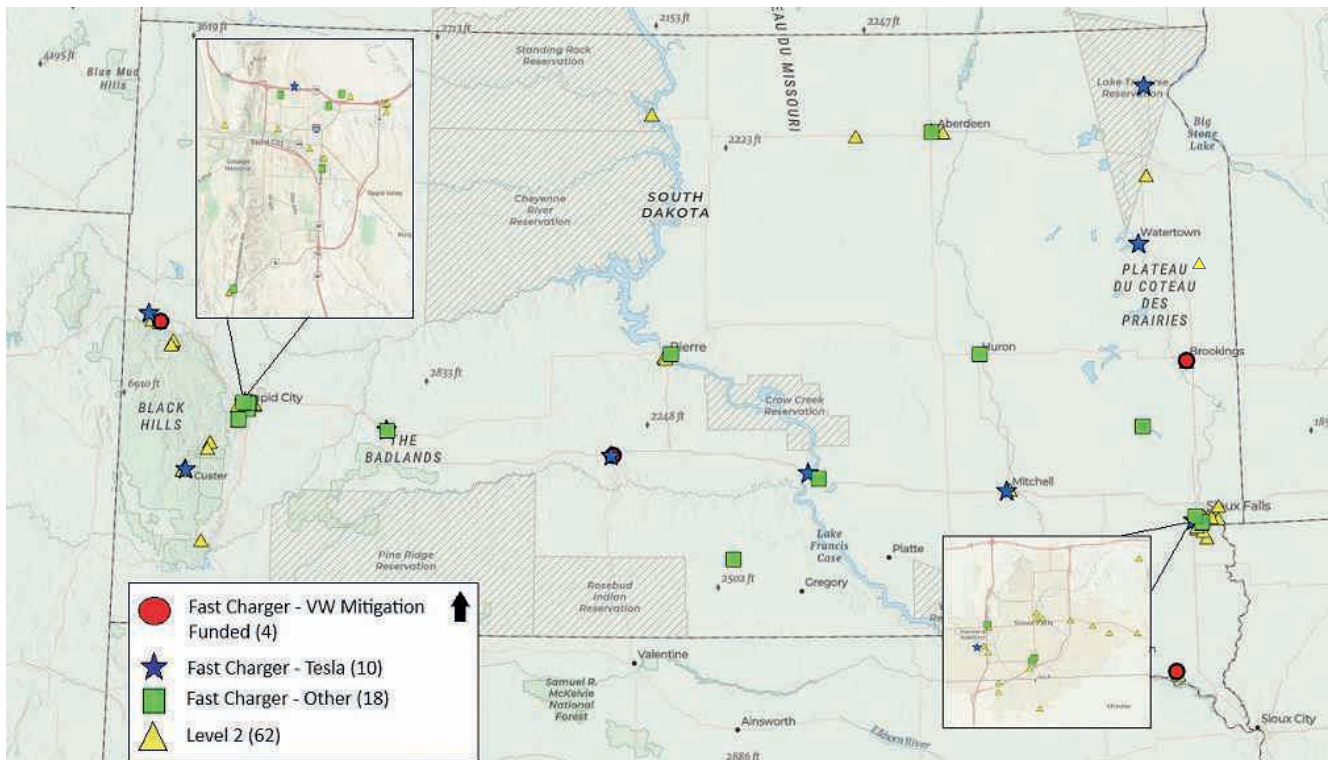
Luckily, the stops aren't usually long, Hotzler said, with his Tesla planning several

stops along a route to do partial charges — about ten minutes at a time — before hitting the road again.

While the public charging stations are convenient for out-of-town travels, it's where one giant plus to owning an EV — low operating costs — begins to erode.

Jessie Tucker, manager of member services at West Central Electric Cooperative in Murdo, recalls his surprise on a trip last winter to Rapid City when he stopped to charge the co-op's Ford F-150 Lightning and discovered his charging rate was nearly 68¢ per kWh — more than five times what it would cost to charge at home. Driving 80 mph in the winter weather and averaging about 1.3 miles per kWh, Tucker calculated the combustion engine-equivalent would be about \$9.41 per gallon.

"It would be tough for me to own one (personally) at this point," Tucker said. "If you're a daily commuter and you're getting home every night, then owning an EV does make sense. If you can charge overnight at your own house, it is still approximately half the cost of \$2.85 fuel."



Electric Vehicle charging stations in South Dakota.
Graphic courtesy of South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

In western South Dakota, West River Electric Association offers members an EV charging incentive — with some stipulations.

“It’s like the old cell phone plans where they would have unlimited nights and weekends,” joked Adam Daigle, manager of communications and public relations at West River Electric in Wall.

“Members with an electric vehicle can pay \$33 per month for unlimited charging on nights (9 p.m.- 7 a.m.) and on weekends. So in a sense, you can drive all month for \$33.”

The incentive is designed to encourage charging during off-peak times when there is less strain on the electric grid while also helping members interested in electric vehicles make the switch.

“I think EVs are great cars for commuting,” Daigle said. “If you stay within range of that battery, where you don’t have to hit a level three charger, they’re fantastic.”

Another factor to consider if you’re thinking about an electric vehicle: you’ll need somewhere indoors to charge it.

The lithium-ion batteries found in EVs will not charge as quickly in cold weather.

Though many EVs have systems to warm the battery before charging, a heated garage is still the most convenient and efficient way to charge, and can prevent cold-weather charging degradation on your battery.

“When I drive my Tesla to work and it sits out in the really cold weather for a big part of the day – 8 to 10 hours – I do see some battery used during that time to keep things warm,” H-D Electric’s Hotzler added. “You have to be careful of the batteries getting so cold.”

Another necessity: a 240-volt plug for level 2 charging. While you can charge an electric vehicle with a standard 120-volt outlet, it could take more than a day to reach a full charge.

After five years of driving the Tesla Model 3, Hotzler is a fan of the technology, and recommends it as a daily driver.

“I’d recommend an EV for a household using it for a back and forth commute – just not any extremely long trips,” Hotzler said. “For an everyday driver, it works really well. They drive fast, they’re zippy, there’s hardly any maintenance. I’ve just had a really positive experience.”

EV Charging Explained

Level 1 charging uses a standard 120-volt outlet. Level 1 charging is the slowest charging speed, adding about 3-5 miles of range per hour. This is not recommended, and is typically used in residential settings.

Level 2 charging uses a 240-volt outlet – the same as your stove or dryer. This is the more practical solution, adding about 12-30 miles of range per hour and is enough to charge many EVs overnight. This is recommended for residential settings. Many public charging stations also feature level 2 chargers.

Level 3 charging, or DC fast chargers, are the quickest way to charge, taking just a half hour to charge the battery to 80%. Using these chargers can cost as much or more than a tank of gas. Speeds range from 50 KW to 350 KW. These stations are placed along major highways, including I-29 and I-90.

Source: driveelectricsd.com, How-To Geek

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To have your event listed on this page, send complete information, including date, event, place and contact to your local electric cooperative. Include your name, address and daytime telephone number. Information must be submitted at least eight weeks prior to your event. Please call ahead to confirm date, time and location of event.

UNTIL OCT. 31

Wallace Dow, Prairie Architect Traveling Exhibit
Lake County Museum
Madison, SD
605-256-5308

SEPT. 2, OCT. 4

Davis Indoor/Outdoor Flea Market & Vendor Fair
9 a.m.-3 p.m.
Davis American Legion
Davis, SD
605-351-3074

SEPT. 5-7

James Valley Threshing Show & Tractor Club
Threshermen's Park
Andover, SD
www.jamesvalleythreshers.com

SEPT. 7

Farmer Tractor Parade
1 p.m.
Tractors, Cars & Food
Farmer, SD

SEPT. 7

Homesteader Day Celebration
Pioneer Demonstrations
1-4 p.m.
Beaver Creek Nature Area
Valley Springs, SD

SEPT. 13-14

Harvest & Kuchen Festival
Delmont, SD
www.twinriversoldiron.org

SEPT. 13-14

South Dakota Senior Softball Tournament
Huron, SD
605-295-2039
www.southdakotaseniorgames.org

SEPT. 19

Veterans Stand Down
SD Military Alliance
8:30-11:30 a.m.
1600 W. Russell St.
Sioux Falls, SD

SEPT. 19-20

Holiday Arts Fall Craft Show
Davison Cty Fairgrounds
Mitchell, SD
605-770-8136

SEPT. 19-20

SiouxperCon Annual Convention
Benefits Make-A-Wish, REACH Literacy, JY6 Foundation
Sioux Falls Convention Center
Sioux Falls, SD

SEPT. 26-28

Coal Springs Threshing Bee Featuring Horse-Drawn Equipment
Meadow, SD
605-788-2229

SEPT. 27

Your Race, Your Pace
9:30 a.m.
Wylie Park
Aberdeen, SD

SEPT. 27

Wheelin' To Wall Cycling Event
Wall, SD
www.wheelintowall.com

SEPT. 27

Ag Day
Roundup Arena
Belle Fourche, SD

OCT. 3

DSU Architecture Walking Tour
3-4 p.m.
Lake County Museum
Madison, SD

OCT. 4

Pumpkin Train, Vendor Showcase
Prairie Village
Madison, SD

Note: We publish contact information as provided. If no phone number is given, none will be listed. Please call ahead to verify the event is still being held.