

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



Antler Shed Hunting

**Shed Hunter Kelly
O'Bryan**

Pages 8-9

Artificial Intelligence

Pages 12-13

*Photo submitted by
Kelly O'Bryan*

COOPERATIVES PARTNERS IN PROGRESS



Duane Wolbrink
Board President



Ken Schlimgen
General Manager

We invite you to attend your cooperative's annual meeting on Tuesday, Sept. 9, 2025, at the World's Only Corn Palace in Mitchell. Doors open at 5:30 for registration and a three-meat buffet with beef, chicken and pork chops. The business meeting will begin at 6:45 p.m.

This year's annual meeting theme is "Partners in Progress" and we are celebrating 25 years since Tri-County Electric and Intercounty Electric came together to form Central Electric Cooperative. Each registered member will receive a \$25 credit on their electric bill in honor of Central Electric's 25-year anniversary. Watch for more details on the official notice postcard.

Looking back, 2024 was a successful year, although it came with some challenges. Below is a brief recap.

ANNUAL HIGHLIGHTS & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Electric Rates

- The average residential cost per kilowatt hour for farm and residential accounts was 13 cents, well below the national average of 16.88 cents in 2024.
- Rates were adjusted to help cover the rising cost to purchase and provide reliable energy.

Financials & Capital Credits

- Total cost of electric service increased by \$1,874,693.
- Capital credits of \$1,248,412 returned to member-owners and \$174,849 in estate retirements.
- Refer to page 6 for a detailed financial report.

Operations Department

- Infrastructure improvements included 77 miles of new underground line and 6.8 miles of new single-phase overhead line.
- Installed 74 new electric services and upgraded 133 existing electric services.
- Equipment costs continue to rise on everything from vehicles to poles and transformers.

Service Department

- 1,500 service requests performed for heating and cooling, electrical wiring, security lights and appliances.
- Collected more than \$2,000,000 in gross revenue.

Marketing & Member Services

- Issued \$36,850 in rebates to member-owners.
- Assisted key accounts and members considering distributed energy projects such as wind and solar.

Load Management

- Central Electric embarked on a project to replace all load management receivers on our system.
- Efforts continue to increase participation in the load management program for the benefit of all members.

Operation Round-Up

- Awarded \$31,600 in grants to community projects.
- Approximately \$225,000 in grants awarded since 2016.
- Members in all eight counties have contributed to and benefited from the program.

Like all cooperatives, Central Electric is in the business to serve our members as reliably and cost effectively as possible. This takes trust from our membership and it means our directors, and employees must continually seek ways to become more efficient while still being able to meet the challenges of constant change. We rely on our cooperative values of innovation, safety, integrity, commitment to community and accountability to help guide us.

Be assured that your cooperative remains committed to delivering reliable and reasonably priced electricity to you, the member owners, now and in the future. The 2024 annual report contains highlights of the year, as well as a financial report.

Please attend your cooperative's annual meeting on Tuesday, Sept. 9. You will hear a review of 2024 and a preview of what's ahead and the challenges facing the electric industry. Our employees, board of directors and management always look forward to visiting with the members we serve. Until next month, stay safe.

CENTRAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

(USPS 018-963)

Board of Directors

Aurora County - Duane Wolbrink, President
Brule County - Bradee Pazour
Buffalo County - Donita Loudner
Davison County - Jeff Gustafson
Hanson County - Mark Hofer, Secretary
Jerauld County - Mark Reindl, Treasurer
Miner County - Robert Banks
Sanborn County - Todd VanWalleghen, Vice President
Director-At-Large - Merl Bechen

CENTRAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS is the monthly publication for the members of Central Electric Cooperative, PO Box 850, Mitchell, SD 57301. Families subscribe to Cooperative Connections as part of their electric cooperative membership. Central Electric Cooperative Connections' purpose is to provide reliable, helpful information to cooperative members on matters pertaining to their cooperative and living better with electricity. Also available at www.centralelec.coop.

Subscription information: Central Electric Cooperative members devote 50 cents of each monthly electric payments for a subscription. Non-member subscriptions are available for \$12 annually. Periodicals Postage Paid at Central Electric Cooperative, PO Box 850, Mitchell, SD 57301, and additional mailing offices.

Postmaster: Please send address changes to Central Electric Cooperative, PO Box 850, Mitchell, SD 57301. Address all other correspondence to: Cooperative Connections, PO Box 850, Mitchell, SD 57301 Telephone: (605)996-7516; Fax: (605) 996-0869; e-mail: cec@centralelec.coop; website: www.centralelec.coop.

Contact Us

Office Hours: Monday - Friday 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Phone: 800-477-2892 or 605-996-7516
Website: www.centralelec.coop

Our Mission

Provide reliable energy and services with a commitment to safety and member satisfaction.

Non-Discrimination Statement:

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the State or local Agency that administers the program or contact USDA through the Telecommunications Relay Service at 711 (voice and TTY). Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English. To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at www.usda.gov/oascr/how-to-file-a-program-discrimination-complaint and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Mail Stop 9410, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov. USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender. Central Electric Cooperative, Inc. is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.



Board Meeting Summary

The board of directors met June 16, 2025, at Central Electric Cooperative's headquarters for the regular board meeting. They reviewed reports by management including details on operations, member services, communications, service department and financials.

Board Report

General Manager Schlimgen reported on East River Electric Managers' Advisory Committee, Basin Electric updates, Rural Electric Economic Development (REED) activities, Rural Utilities Service, FEMA mitigation grant program, new service inquiries, district meetings, Howard Service Center construction, and other management activities.

The board discussed the ongoing district meetings and reviewed attendance history from 2015 to 2025.

Manager of Finance and Administration Uher provided an update on the RUS loan application progress. The 10-year long-range financial forecast results and forecast assumptions were reviewed.

Director Wolbrink updated the board on the East River Electric board meeting and activities.

The board reviewed monthly director expenses.

Board Action

The board considered or acted upon the following:

- A motion was made and seconded to award a \$25 electric bill credit to each registered member at the annual meeting this year for Central Electric's 25-year anniversary. The motion carried.
- A motion was made and seconded to donate \$1,000 to NRECA International. The motion carried.

The next regular board meeting was scheduled for July 21. There being no further business, President Wolbrink adjourned the meeting.

| FINANCIAL REPORT | YEAR TO DATE JUNE 2025 | YEAR TO DATE JUNE 2024 |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Kilowatt Hour (kWh) Sales | 168,168,024 kWh | 172,730,478 kWh |
| Electric Revenues | \$ 19,789,911 | \$ 18,459,765 |
| Total Cost of Service | \$ 19,239,664 | \$ 18,425,655 |
| Operating Margins | \$ 550,246 | \$ 34,109 |

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.

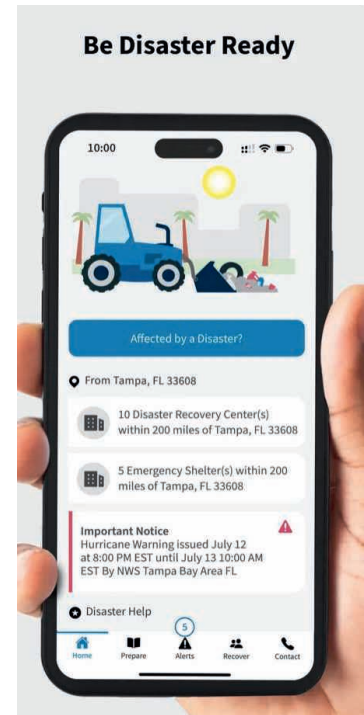
In 2022, 69,473 weather-related events resulted in 813 deaths and 1,718 injuries. Winter weather, heat, floods and hurricanes resulted in the most deaths that year, according to Injury Facts.

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.

2024 YEAR END FINANCIALS

| BALANCE SHEET | 2024 | 2023 |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| ASSETS - What we have | | |
| Lines, Office Bldg and Operational Equipment | \$ 113,099,743 | \$ 106,130,028 |
| Less Depreciation | 29,498,976 | 27,592,692 |
| Total Electric Plant Less Depreciation | 83,600,767 | 78,537,336 |
| Cash and Investments: | | |
| Cash and Cash Equivalents | 3,999,911 | 4,071,373 |
| Investment (Associated Organizations) | 25,731,721 | 24,900,536 |
| Investments (Other) | 133,757 | 148,872 |
| Total Cash Investments | 29,865,389 | 29,120,781 |
| Accounts Receivable | 3,589,370 | 3,361,898 |
| Materials and Supplies | 7,324,695 | 6,265,419 |
| Prepaid Insurance | 201,295 | 190,832 |
| Other Current and Accrued Assets | 6,600 | 6,600 |
| Deferred Debits | 1,581,185 | 1,439,070 |
| TOTAL ASSETS | \$ 126,169,300 | \$ 118,921,936 |
| LIABILITIES - What we owe | | |
| Loans Payable to RUS & CFC | \$ 70,069,788 | \$ 63,359,498 |
| Accounts Payable | 2,472,224 | 3,165,504 |
| Other Current and Accrued Liabilities | 1,443,444 | 1,336,664 |
| Deferred Credits and Regulatory Liabilities | 214,140 | 1,251,225 |
| Consumer Deposits | 204,061 | 190,804 |
| TOTAL AMOUNT OWED | \$ 74,403,657 | \$ 69,303,695 |
| MEMBER EQUITY - What's left after liabilities | | |
| Patronage Capital and Other Equities | \$ 51,765,643 | \$ 49,618,241 |
| TOTAL EQUITIES | \$ 51,765,643 | \$ 49,618,241 |
| TOTAL LIABILITIES AND EQUITY | \$ 126,169,300 | \$ 118,921,936 |

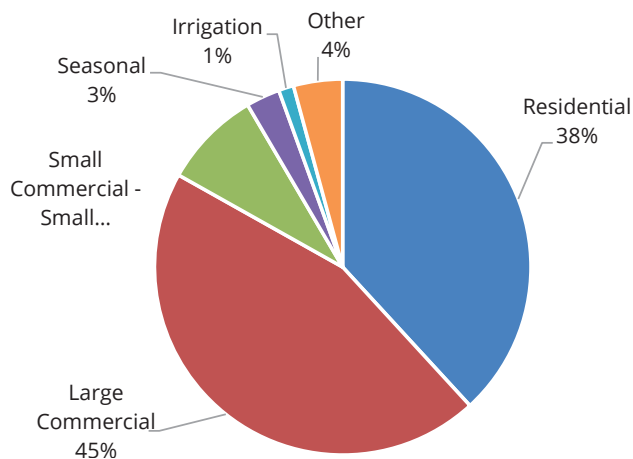
| OPERATING STATEMENT | 2024 | 2023 |
|--|----------------------|----------------------|
| REVENUES - What the cooperative takes in | | |
| Revenue from the Sales of Electricity, Wheeling/Fees | \$ 38,069,932 | \$ 35,385,449 |
| TOTAL REVENUE | \$ 38,069,932 | \$ 35,385,449 |

| | | |
|---|----------------------|----------------------|
| EXPENSES - What the cooperative spends | | |
| Cost of Purchased Power | \$ 24,291,527 | \$ 23,260,671 |
| Distribution-Operations Expense | 1,282,872 | 1,391,341 |
| Distribution-Maintenance Expense | 2,161,640 | 2,002,607 |
| Consumer Accounting and Collecting Expense | 465,130 | 392,569 |
| Consumer Service and Information Expense | 517,310 | 501,526 |
| Sales Expense | 88,370 | 119,604 |
| Administrative and General Expense | 2,076,670 | 1,964,050 |
| Depreciation Expense | 2,891,134 | 2,670,338 |
| Tax Expense | 557,054 | 551,048 |
| Interest Expense | 2,099,673 | 1,696,287 |
| Other Deductions | 27,381 | 34,026 |
| TOTAL EXPENSE | \$ 36,458,761 | \$ 34,584,067 |

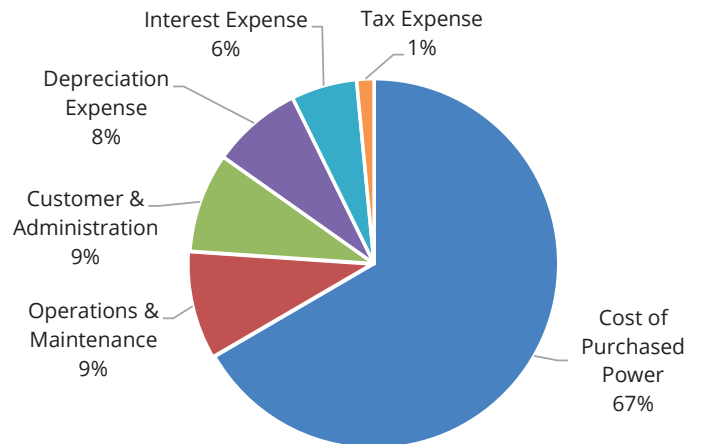
| | | |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|
| MARGINS - What's left after expenses | | |
| Patronage Capital and Operating Margins | * \$ 1,611,171 | \$ 801,382 |
| Non-Operating Margins | 198,213 | 153,934 |
| Generation and Transmission and Other Capital Credits | 1,670,972 | 2,062,474 |
| PATRONAGE CAPITAL OR MARGINS | \$ 3,480,356 | \$ 3,017,790 |

*Operating Margins included \$1,000,000 in deferred revenue in 2024.

2024 REVENUE



2024 EXPENSES





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

SHED 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*

COOPERATIVES

PARTNERS IN PROGRESS

EAST RIVER ELECTRIC UPDATE



Bob Sahr

General Manager
East River Electric

For 74 years, East River Electric and our member cooperatives have been partners in progress, providing safe, affordable, and reliable power to South Dakota and southwest Minnesota. Together we've accomplished a lot over the years through the steadfast commitment of East River and its members to keep our systems reliable and deliver the energy you need to power your life. The relationship between East River and our members is a great example of how through collaboration, we achieve more than we would alone.

The past year we spent a lot of time planning for the future as co-ops are faced with unprecedented growth. Advances in technology and artificial intelligence have significantly impacted our industry, creating both opportunities and challenges. While we've strengthened our protocols to safeguard our infrastructure from cybersecurity threats, we have also leveraged advances in information gathering and analytics. We've implemented innovative programs to improve our data-driven decision-making, streamlined our processes, improved forecasting, and enhanced our ability to manage electric load effectively. We continue to prepare our transmission system for the rise of cryptocurrency and data centers and the large amounts of electricity they need to ensure our infrastructure will support these emerging technologies while making sure we're able to continue to deliver electricity to the homes, farms and businesses that rely on us.

East River recently faced the challenge of managing rate increases from our power providers. Like all businesses, Basin Electric, our generation and transmission cooperative, is dealing with inflation, power market volatility, and expenses related to much-needed investments in load growth and reliability to ensure dependable electricity to cooperative members. Basin Electric and the Western Area Power Administration, or WAPA, that markets hydropower from the federal dams both recently implemented rate increases.

Due to these changes, East River implemented an increase to our average base rate in January. As a not-for-profit, member-owned cooperative, we work diligently to keep costs down while delivering the reliable, high-quality service you depend on. Any revenue earned is reinvested into the electric system or returned to our member cooperatives as capital credits. While rate increases are never easy, our commitment remains the same – to provide safe, reliable electricity at the most affordable rate possible.

East River and our power supply partners are dedicated to ensuring a balanced mix of energy resources to provide our members with reliable and affordable electricity. We employ a diversified all-of-the-above-generation strategy, and our cooperative network is at the forefront of efforts to ensure sustainable and dependable energy for years to come.

Basin Electric recently announced plans to build its largest generation project to date: the Bison Generation Station. The natural gas-fueled power plant to be built near Epping, North Dakota, will have a capacity of 1,470 megawatts. Construction is expected to begin at the end of this year with the

project expected to come on line in the early 2030s.

We continue to see an increase in renewables within our generation mix adding to the significant amount of power supply we already receive from wind and hydropower. Solar has now become part of our energy mix. It's a small fraction of our total power supply. Still, it will continue to increase with generation being added through our power supplier Basin Electric and new utility-scale solar projects like the 128-MW Wild Springs Solar recently built in western South Dakota.

Our ongoing Transmission System Upgrade Plan and Construction Work Plan continue to produce significant enhancements and updates to our infrastructure while ensuring we can meet demand, sustain reliability, and prepare for future capacity growth. Through it all, we've overcome challenges like supply chain disruptions, extended wait times for essential components, inflation and rising supply costs.

We continue a proactive approach to participating in the legislative and regulatory process to ensure that we stay ahead of policy impacting our industry and have a hand in shaping a path that aligns with our mission. We continue to advocate for an all-of-the-above generation strategy, and policies that align with that priority – making sure we're able to generate power from all sources so you have the power you need, when you need it.

Beyond providing electricity to our members, powering communities, education, and economic development remain high priorities — enhancing the quality of life of our members. The Rural Electric Economic Development Fund, our member cooperatives' economic development arm, continues to reach impressive milestones and has invested over \$135 million dollars in over 400 loans supporting rural development since 1996. It remains committed to providing financing and leveraging investment to make a difference across the region. We also continue to partner with our member systems to live out the cooperative principle of commitment to the community by giving back to those we serve through charitable giving, events, youth outreach programs, education, and scholarships.

While our industry is evolving and new challenges arise, it also brings exciting opportunities. These will enable East River to continue to uphold the Touchstone Energy Cooperative values of accountability, integrity, innovation, and commitment to community as well as continue our mission of enhancing the value we provide to our member systems.



THE NEXT GENERATION OF LOAD MANAGEMENT

East River Electric and Central Electric Cooperative are stepping into the next generation of energy management, also known as load management.

The current devices that manage energy usage on participating members' water heaters, air conditioners and irrigation systems have become outdated and will be incompatible due to technology changes. That means we must update the equipment at your home or business to continue managing energy use and expenses.

This implementation project brings numerous benefits to member-owners across the cooperative by ensuring we are efficiently utilizing our resources during times of peak electricity usage when energy costs more. By managing energy wisely, we are able to reduce wholesale power purchases, saving money and resources for all.

Since installations began in 2024, roughly 800 of our membership's 4,600 receivers have been replaced with the new devices.

If you are a participating member, Central Electric's technicians will eventually need to visit your location to install the new device. We understand that this may cause some inconvenience, but we will communicate with members to set up a time that works best for them. We may reach out with postcards and emails to schedule your load management installation.

We appreciate your cooperation as we move toward greater energy efficiency and cost savings.



HARNESSING AI

Electric Cooperatives Explore What's Next for AI

Frank Turner

frank.turner@sdea.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.

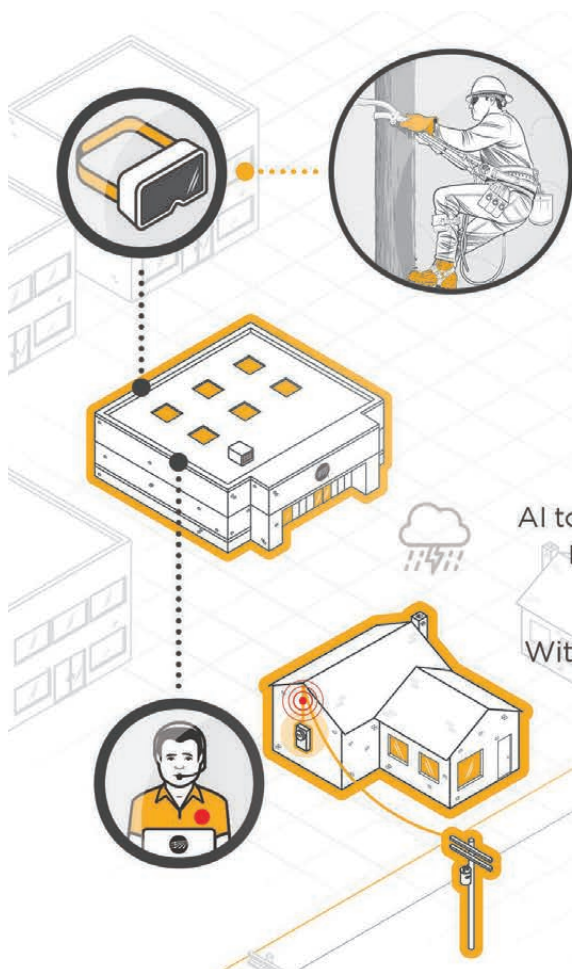
With safety in mind, May said East River Electric is actively partnering with Dakota State University graduate students to see how AI can be safely utilized by electric cooperatives. Together, East River Electric is working with the school to build an AI model that can predict electricity usage based 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.

COOPERATIVES

PARTNERS IN PROGRESS

2024 ANNUAL MEETING UNAPPROVED MINUTES

The Annual Meeting of Central Electric Cooperative Inc. members was held on Tuesday, September 10, 2024, at the Corn Palace, Mitchell, South Dakota. Duane Wolbrink, the President, called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. President Wolbrink thanked Central Catering of Hawarden, Iowa, for providing the meal. Attorney Don Petersen was appointed acting secretary. President Wolbrink announced that registration for the annual meeting had closed. President Wolbrink announced that there was a quorum of 337 registered members present at the time the meeting began.

President Wolbrink called upon Father Bob Krantz of Saint Mary of Mercy Catholic Church of Alexandria to give the invocation.

President Wolbrink recognized past and present U.S. Military service members in the audience. Attendees were asked to stand as special guest Vayda Hofer sang the National Anthem, followed by attendees reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

President Wolbrink introduced IT Manager Ryan Mueller and Manager of Communications Tara Miller who then conducted drawings for a scholarship and youth door prizes.

President Wolbrink stated that members received a postcard providing proof of due notice in accordance with the bylaws. The reading of the notice was dispensed with no objection and the order of business was approved.

The minutes of the 2023 Annual Meeting were mailed to each member as part of the Central Electric Cooperative Connections Annual Report. President Wolbrink asked if there were any objections to dispensing with the reading of the minutes. There being no objections, the minutes were approved.

President Wolbrink noted that director elections are held every three years for each director seat. Hanson County Director Mark Hofer, Davison County Director Jeff Gustafson, and Director-At-Large Merl Bechen were deemed re-elected as no other nominating petitions were turned in by the membership.

Director-At-Large Bechen delivered remarks and thanked the membership for allowing him to serve another term.

President Wolbrink introduced the board of directors and attorney to annual meeting attendees: Vice President Todd VanWalleghen representing Sanborn County; Secretary Mark Hofer representing Hanson County; Treasurer Mark Reindl representing Jerauld County; SDREA Director Donita Loudner representing Buffalo County; Bradee Pazour representing Brule County; Jeff Gustafson representing Davison County; Bob Banks representing Miner County; and Director-At-Large

Merl Bechen representing all eight counties served by Central Electric; and Don Petersen, serving as the cooperative's legal counsel since 1990.

President Wolbrink recognized Attorney Don Petersen for being inducted into the SD Cooperative Hall of Fame in August.

President Wolbrink delivered the president's report, which included details on 2023 financials and capital credit retirements. President Wolbrink reviewed the growth in demand for electricity, rural electric economic development (REED) fund, and Central Electric's commitment to safety, reliability, and member satisfaction. National conversations promoting green energy, push to eliminate coal generation, and the expected growth in the demand for electricity in future years, will require Basin Electric to increase investment in new generation. He concluded the report with a personal thank you to Central Electric employees and their families.

President Wolbrink introduced Manager Ken Schlimgen. Manager Schlimgen welcomed members to the Annual Meeting and delivered the manager's report.

General Manager Schlimgen reviewed 2023 financial performance, operating results, completion of the meter upgrade project, progress on accelerated line replacement, High Plains Processing soybean plant construction, and plans to construct a new outpost building in Howard. He provided a brief update on 2024 financial results through July, increased power costs, and the need for future rate adjustments.

Manager Schlimgen also recognized long-time employees Tim Neises and Al Spader who both plan to retire in late 2024 or early 2025.

Manager Schlimgen closed his report by thanking board members and employees for their dedication to the cooperative and Central Electric members for their cooperation and support.

President Wolbrink called for old business. There was none. He called for any new business. There was none.

President Wolbrink introduced Brian Bultje, Manager of Operations, and Lincoln Feistner, Sales and Project Manager, who drew names for prizes.

President Wolbrink asked for and received a motion and a second to adjourn the 2024 Central Electric Annual Meeting. There being no further discussion from members the meeting was adjourned.

COOPERATIVES

PARTNERS IN PROGRESS

BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Duane Wolbrink
President
District 1 Director
Aurora County



Bradee Pazour
District 2 Director
Brule County



Donita Loudner
District 3 Director
Buffalo County



Jeff Gustafson
District 4 Director
Davison County



Mark Hofer
Secretary
District 5 Director
Hanson County



Mark Reindl
Treasurer
District 6 Director
Jerauld County



Bob Banks
District 7 Director
Miner County



Todd Van Walleghen
Vice President
District 8 Director
Sanborn County



Merl Bechen
Director-At-Large

Central Electric Cooperative's directors are elected by local members to represent each county within the service area.

Board members invest a tremendous amount of time in the co-op throughout the year. They meet monthly to review operations of the co-op, and they attend outside meetings to stay informed and capable of making sound decisions. It is their duty to ensure governing decisions are in the best interest of the cooperative and its member-owners.

Todd Van Walleghen of Letcher decided not to seek reelection after 15 years of service to the cooperative. We sincerely appreciate the energy and expertise he brought to the table during his tenure from 2010 to 2025. Jeremy White of Letcher was elected to represent Sanborn County at the district meeting in May and will assume the role after the annual meeting.

We thank these directors for the time they invest upholding the mission of Central Electric Cooperative, which is to provide reliable energy and services with a commitment to safety and member satisfaction.

REGISTER TO WIN!

Bring this coupon and mailing label to the Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives booth at Dakotafest or the South Dakota State Fair to win a prize!

Your Phone Number: _____

Your E-mail Address: _____



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. 6

Annual Pink Ladies Ribfest Cancer Fundraiser
4-7 p.m.
Vendors & Youth Activities
Main Street
Emery, SD
605-449-4290

SEPT. 7

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

SEPT. 9

Central Electric Annual Meeting
World's Only Corn Palace
Mitchell, SD

SEPT. 13-14

Harvest & Kuchen Festival
Delmont, SD
www.twinriversoldiron.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

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

OCT. 10-11

Holman Acres Pumpkin Fest & Vendor Show
Sat. 12-6 p.m., Sun. 10 a.m.-6 p.m.
Philip, SD
605-441-1060

OCT. 11

Howard Fall Festival
10 a.m.-4 p.m.
Miner County 4-H Grounds
Howard, SD

OCT. 18

Buffalo County Fall Ball Fire Dept. Fundraiser
6 p.m.
Food, Music, Raffles
Fire Hall
Gann Valley, SD

OCT. 18-19

Heartland Quilting Stars Show
Highland Conference Center
Mitchell, SD
605-770-1551

OCT. 24

Humor for Heroes Comedy Night Fundraiser
Comedians, Silent Auction
Tickets \$15, two for \$25
1600 W. Russell St.
Sioux Falls, SD
605-336-3470

NOV. 21-22

Holiday Arts Christmas Craft Show
Davison County Fairgrounds
Mitchell, SD
605-770-8136

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.