A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

H-D ELECTRIC
SEPTEMBER 2025 VOL. 26 NO. 5

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

Antler Shed Hunting

Photo submitted by Kelly O'Bryan

Saving Energy During Peak Times Benefits All

Matt Hotzler
Manager

Conserving electricity during peak energy use times not only lowers your monthly bill – it benefits our entire community.

"**Peak times**" refer to periods of the day when electricity demand is highest. Think of early mornings (6 a.m. to 10 a.m.), when people get ready for work or school, and evenings (4 p.m. to 9 p.m.), when families return home, cook dinner, and relax with electronics. When everyone uses energy simultaneously, it adds pressure to the electric grid.

Weather and seasons also influence peak electricity usage times. In **summer**, extreme heat often pushes peak usage into the evening. In **winter**, both mornings and evenings can reach peak demand during cold spells.

H-D Electric Cooperative works around the clock to ensure reliable electricity to your home whenever you need it. Behind the scenes, an enormous and intricate system – one of the most complex machines in the world – is at work: the U.S. power grid. The grid is comprised of three major interconnections spanning the country, each managed by regional authorities to balance supply and demand, ensuring the economy operates smoothly.

Electricity comes from a diverse mix of sources, including hydropower, natural gas, coal, solar, wind, and more. Some power plants can quickly adjust to spikes in demand, while others are less flexible. Once generated, energy travels through high-voltage transmission lines to local utilities, such as H-D Electric Cooperative, which then delivers it to your home or business through distribution power lines.

When electricity demand surges during peak times, it becomes more expensive to generate or purchase power. If supply can't keep up, the risk of outages increases. That's why reducing energy use during peak hours is so important. It not only eases strain on the grid – it also saves money. Because H-D Cooperative operates on a cost-based rate structure, any increase in the price we pay for electricity will ultimately be passed on to you, our members.

How to "Beat the Peak"

There are simple ways to reduce your energy use during peak hours:

- Adjust your thermostat a few degrees. A smart thermostat can automate this.
- Delay using high-energy appliances like ovens, dishwashers, and laundry machines until later in the evening.
- Charge electric vehicles overnight instead of right when you get home.
- **Enroll your water heater in our load control program**, one of the most effective tools for reducing peak demand.

Small actions by many can lead to big results. When we all work together to reduce energy use during peak times, we help control costs, protect the power grid, and ensure reliable electricity for our communities.

TIPS TO AVOID
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

COOPERATIVE
CONNECTIONS

H-D ELECTRIC

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Design assistance by SDREA.

H-D Electric Monthly Poster Contest Winner

Marah Kinnunen, daughter of Reuben and Sarine Kinnunen from Hayti, S.D., won an art set for being the poster contest winner in July. Congratulations, Marah!

Operating Statistics

	June 2024	June 2025
Customers	3,845	3,891
Amount Collected	$1,030,995	$1,265,723
Average Bill	$268.14	$325.30
Average Kilowatt-Hour	2,366	2,794
Kilowatt-Hours Purchased	9,569,303	11,550,535
Kilowatt-Hours Sold	9,096,697	10,870,623

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.

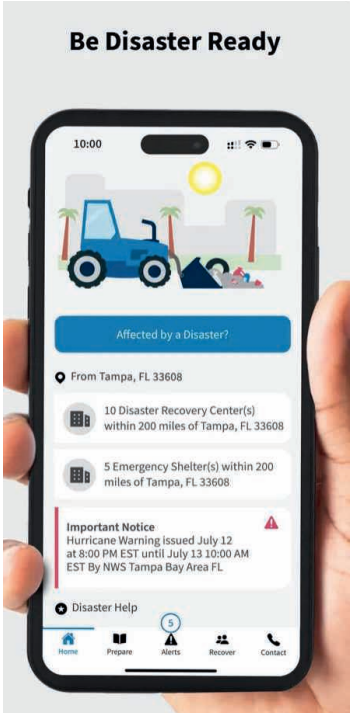
In 2022, 69,473 weather-related events resulted in 813 deaths and 1,718 injuries. Winter weather, heat, floods and hurricanes resulted in the most deaths that year, according to Injury Facts.

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.

Find Hidden Energy Users at Home

Miranda Boutelle
Efficiency Services Group

Out of sight, out of mind. It is easy to overlook the hidden energy users in our homes. Yet, every plugged-in device and ready-to-use appliance can lead to higher electric bills.

Let's see if we can find some hidden energy savings for you.

Your water heater could be using more energy than necessary. Storage water heaters heat water to a preset temperature. When hot water is used, cold water enters the tank, lowering the temperature, and the water is reheated to that preset level. If the water heater is set higher than needed, it wastes energy. Most water heaters are set to 140 degrees at the factory. The U.S. Department of Energy recommends setting the temperature to 120 degrees. This will save energy and reduce the risk of scalding. Do not set it lower than 120 degrees to prevent bacteria development in the tank.

Exterior security lights, porch lights and barn lights can use more energy than needed. If they are on every night, all year long, that adds up to 4,380 hours, or half the hours in a year. If those lights use outdated, inefficient technology, they waste energy. With that many hours, even a slight increase in efficiency can yield big energy savings. Switch to energy efficient LED bulbs. If lights need to stay on, consider upgrading to motion sensor lights so you aren't drawing energy all night.

Pools and hot tubs can also be big energy users. Since you don't see the pumps or heaters by design, it's difficult to know when they are operating and consuming energy. Pumps filter water to keep it clean and safe for swimming. Energy Star®-certified pumps run at lower speeds and can be programmed to match your pool's filtering needs, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. They can pay for themselves in two years, are quieter and can prolong the life of your pool's filtering system. Schedule your hot tub to a lower temperature when you're not using it to reduce energy use. If your electric utility offers time-of-use rates, consider scheduling accordingly.

Plug load is anything in your home that is plugged into an outlet. As we use more and more appliances and technology in our homes, plug load energy use increases. Find what is plugged in around your home. If you aren't using it, unplug it. For computer stations and entertainment centers, consider using smart power strips. These devices sense when energy is being used and turn peripheral devices on or off as needed.

Gaming consoles are another hidden energy user. Gamers often put them in rest mode when not in use. This allows them to complete updates and reduces start-up time for the next session. It also means they are still consuming energy even when not actively used. Powering off between gaming sessions can save energy. Ask the gamers in your life to power off. It may require a bit more time for updates, but every kilowatt-hour counts when it comes to saving energy.

It's easy to make a habit of powering down and unplugging once you identify everything drawing power in your home. For upgrades, reach out to your electric utility about available rebates to help cover costs.

Photo by Mary Howell

SOUTH DAKOTA SUNFLOWERS

Wild Dutchman Seeds a Nationwide Snack

Jacob Boyko
jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop

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."

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

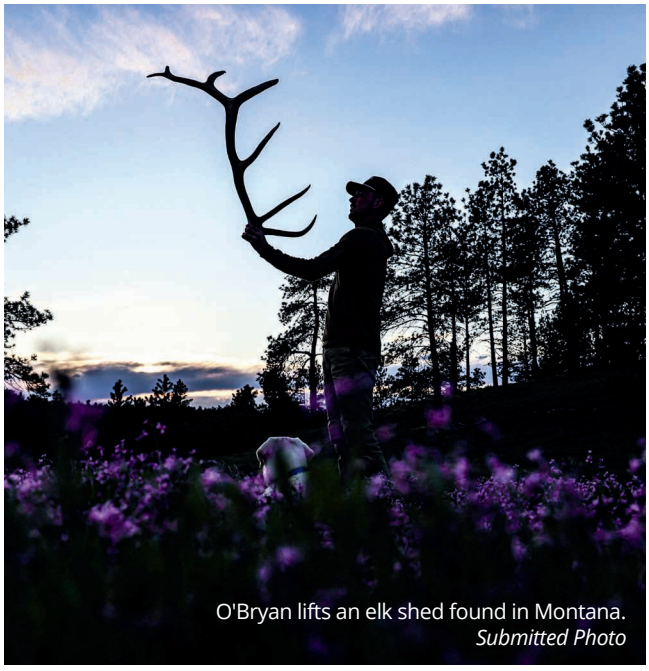
Prairie Miles and Antler Piles

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*

Farmer and Rancher Safety

We don't have to remind those who work the land and raise livestock that they have a potentially dangerous occupation. However, due to the nature of the job, and because of long days and tiring work, here are some reminders about electrical dangers on the farm or ranch.

Overhead power lines

If you make contact with a power line, don't get out!

If you make contact with a power line, guy wire, power pole, electrical box or any other electrical equipment, do not get out of your cab or truck. Stay put and call 9-1-1 to dispatch the local utility to de-energize the power. If you must get out due to smoke or fire, make a solid jump out without touching any part of the tractor or vehicle, and hop away as far as you can, keeping both feet together as you hop. Another option (after you make a clean exit) is to shuffle or waddle away while keeping your feet together and on the ground.

Once you are out, never try to re-enter the cab or truck.

Remember: *If your machinery or vehicle comes in contact with a power line or other utility equipment, do not get out of the cab. Stray power could energize your equipment and the ground. Call 9-1-1 and wait for us to arrive and cut the power so that you can safely exit your tractor or vehicle.*

Determine Proper Clearance

Contact us to measure power line heights; do NOT do this yourself. Once you know the heights, you can determine appropriate equipment, implement and extension clearances. Always maintain at least 10 feet between the power line and the tallest height of the equipment that will be transported. Keep in mind that due to wear, age and even weather conditions, power lines can change height. Please contact us with any concerns. It's good to know power line clearance, but always have a spotter.

Call Us Before Moving or Adding a Grain Bin

The National Electrical Safety Code addresses grain bins and their proximity to power lines with very specific requirements. The requirements are in place to help keep farmers safe: to decrease the chances of farming equipment and machinery coming in contact with power lines. If you are planning on building a new grain bin or remodeling around an area that already has one, contact **H-D Electric Cooperative** at **605-884-2171**. We can help with specific code requirements. The taller a grain bin, the farther it must be placed from a power line.

Always Dig Safely

Whether you are installing new fence posts or using large tillage tools, call 811 before you dig to have underground utilities marked. Even if you think you know where buried gas, power and other lines are, don't rely on your memory. Get all utilities marked so that you know for sure. Utility locators dispatched by 811 do not mark private lines.

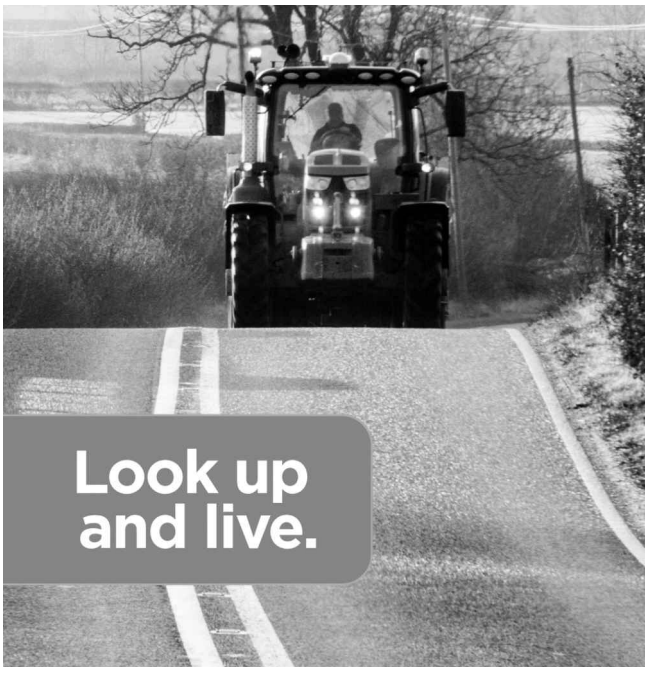
Use Standby Generators With Care

If you have a standby generator to provide essential power during an outage, be sure to correctly use the transfer switch. Once you properly engage the switch, it stops your farm's generated power from entering utility lines, aka backfeeding, which can electrocute lineworkers who are working to restore power.

For more information about electrical safety, visit safeelectricity.org.

General Safety

- Check and maintain equipment, especially electric cables and hydraulic hoses that have cracks or show other signs of wear.
- Always have someone nearby when entering grain bins or other high-risk areas.
- Check all buildings and grounds for fire hazards and hazardous materials.
- Assess how any chemicals are stored and make sure children and animals can't access them.
- Make a list of chemicals for firefighters in case a fire breaks out on your farm or ranch.
- Establish a safety boundary around gas and fuel tanks.
- Don't skimp on safety: wear eye and ear protection, gloves, and face masks and respirators when appropriate.
- Shield all PTO-powered machinery and keep others away.
- Outfit tractors and trucks with fire extinguishers.
- Never exit a tractor or truck without placing it in park or engaging the emergency brakes.
- Discuss safety concerns with children and explain safe operating procedures. You can never start too young, and they watch what you do.



H-D Electric Yard Light Program

Installing yard lights has been and continues to be an important service to our members. We repair yard lights at the cost of the parts and also install new yard lights.

We sell 40-watt LED lights for new yard light installations as well as for any existing yard lights that cannot be repaired. The cost of an LED light is $287 (plus tax). For new installations, there may be additional costs for a pole and wire if required.

The warranty of the light is 10 years and has a savings of approximately $12.50 a year.

Give us a call if you have any questions or are interested in purchasing a new LED yard light or replacing an existing yard light.

Heat Season is Just Around the Corner

Is your Heat Meter Breaker On

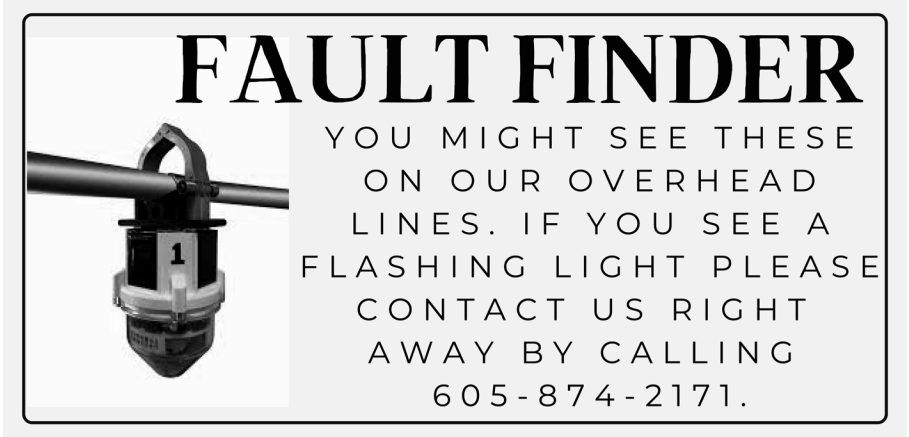
The heating season will be here soon, and H-D wants to make sure that the breaker for your heat meter is turned on. To receive credit for any electric heat running through the heat meter the breaker must be on.

If you have electric heat but do not have a heat meter, give us a call at 874-2171 to find out how you can save money with one.

Electric Heat Rates

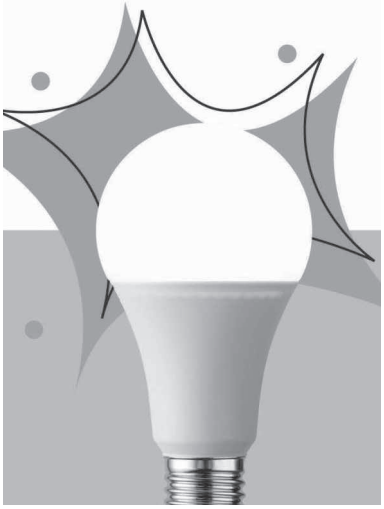
Separately metered electric heat qualifies for a 3.5 cent kWh deduction on your electric bill. A heat meter will be installed by H-D Electric at your request at a cost of approximately $160.

Contact H-D Electric to discuss if your electric heat qualifies.



ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP OF THE MONTH

Take advantage of "shoulder months," which refer to the transitional periods between peak heating and cooling seasons. During the fall, these milder weeks typically occur between September and November. Shoulder months offer a great opportunity to reduce home energy consumption as the need for extensive heating or cooling is reduced. Look for simple ways to boost indoor comfort without running your heating and cooling system. Use ceiling fans and open windows on breezy days to ventilate your home. On cooler days, add a layer of clothing and avoid running the heat.



HARNESSING AI

Electric Cooperatives Explore What's Next for AI

Frank Turner
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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 Electric, 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.

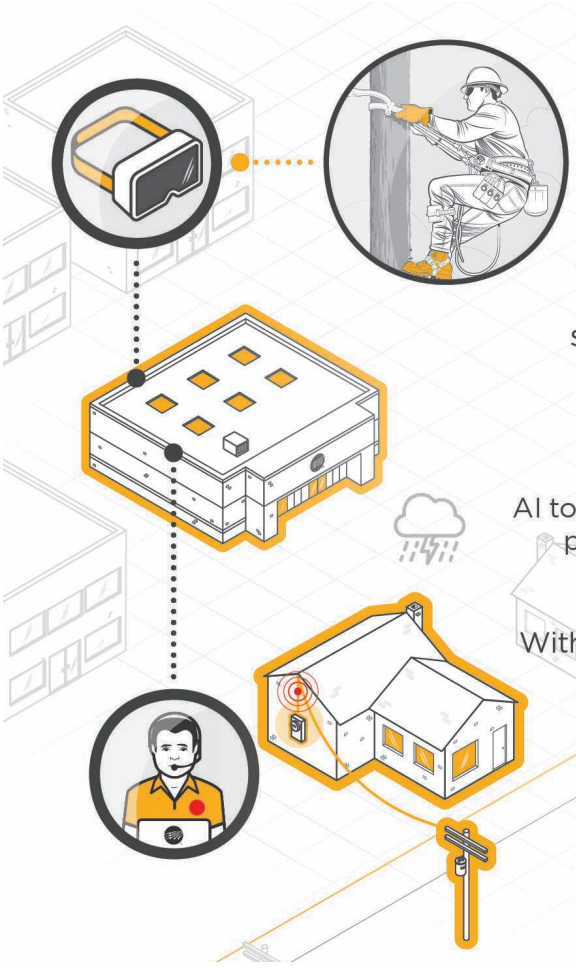
With safety in mind, May said East River Electric is actively partnering with Dakota State University graduate students to see how AI can be safely utilized by electric cooperatives. Together, East River Electric is working with the school to build an AI model that can predict electricity usage based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

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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.

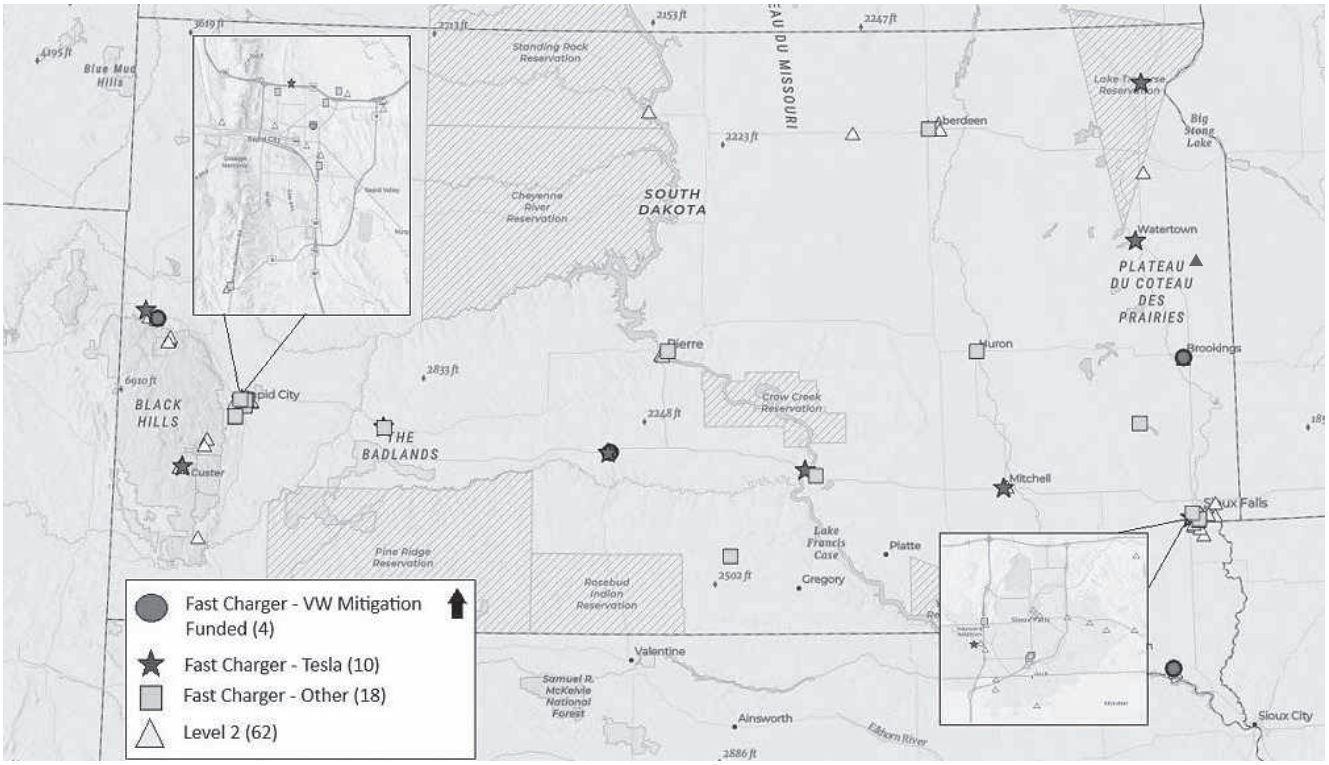
South Dakota's weather makes planning a trip in an electric vehicle a little more hands-on. Temperature, wind speeds, climate control and headlights all affect how frequently you have to stop to add some joules.

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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Wallace Dow, Prairie Architect Traveling Exhibit
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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
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SEPT. 13-14
South Dakota Senior Softball Tournament
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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
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SEPT. 19-20
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Sioux Falls Convention Center
Sioux Falls, SD

SEPT. 26-28
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Meadow, SD
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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.