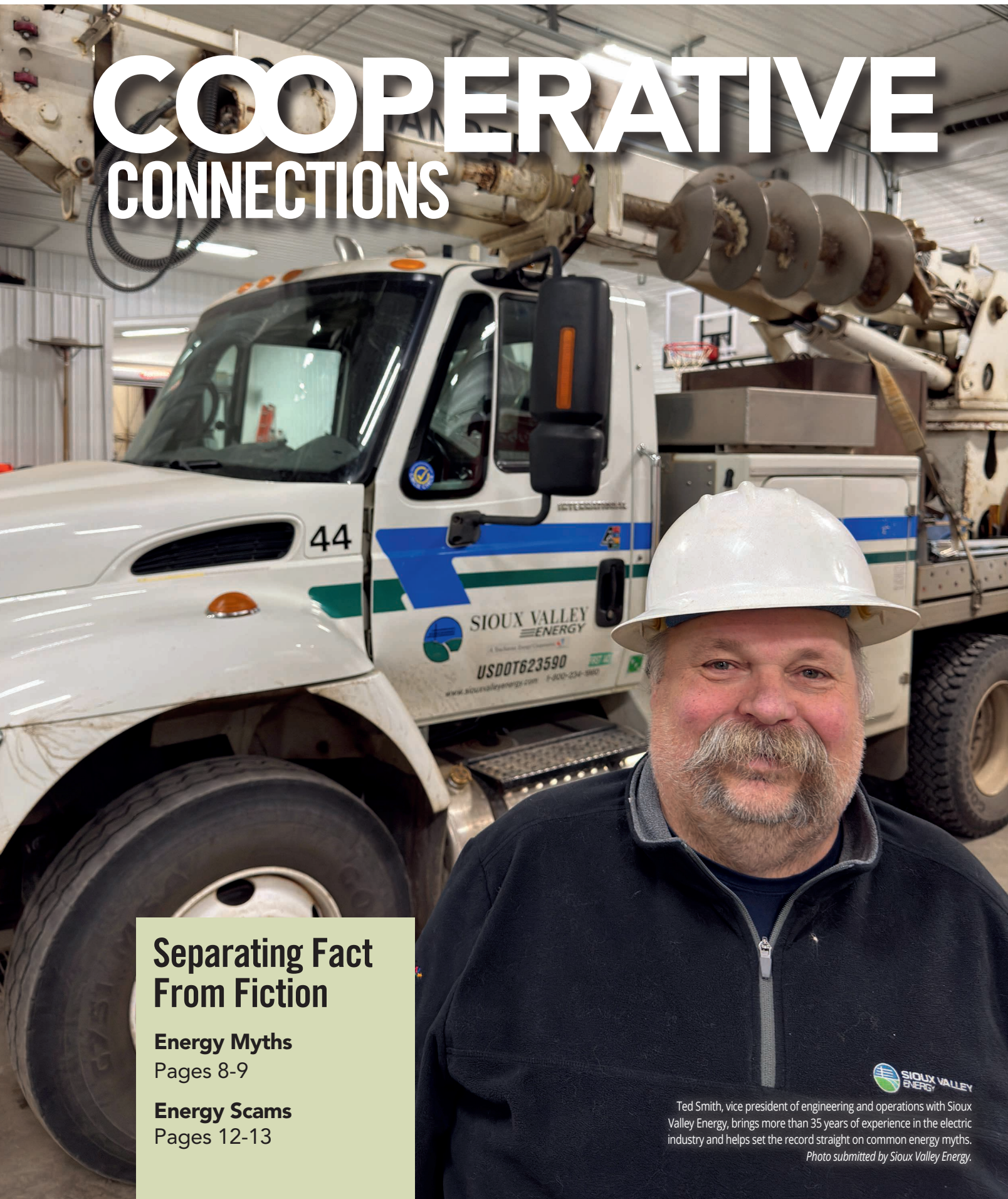


COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



Separating Fact From Fiction

Energy Myths

Pages 8-9

Energy Scams

Pages 12-13



Ted Smith, vice president of engineering and operations with Sioux Valley Energy, brings more than 35 years of experience in the electric industry and helps set the record straight on common energy myths.

Photo submitted by Sioux Valley Energy.

Growth is Coming...Maybe



Robert Raker
CEO/GM

If you follow developments across western South Dakota, you've likely heard the word "growth" more than once. New housing. Commercial expansion. Activity around Box Elder and Ellsworth. Optimism about what may lie ahead.

The question that keeps me up at night is: Is it really coming?

The honest answer is this — growth is coming... maybe.

In 2024, West River Electric connected just over 900 new services. In 2025, we connected approximately 658, making it our second-highest year on record. Those are meaningful numbers. Many cooperatives across the country would welcome that kind of momentum, particularly as some rural areas are experiencing flat or even declining membership.

Growth, when managed properly, allows us to spread fixed system costs across more members — an important advantage at a time when costs across the industry continue to rise. At the same time, we remain focused on operational efficiency. West River Electric continues to rank among the top in the state in employee-to-member ratio, reflecting a disciplined management of resources.

In addition to our recent growth, it was recently stated during a Northrop Grumman earnings call that production of the B-21 Raider will be accelerated, with delivery targeted by 2027. Ellsworth Air Force Base has historically been a catalyst for regional growth, and early indicators suggest that trend may continue, particularly in the Box Elder area.

At the same time, when you look at how much we've grown in the past, you see on consistent trend, growth is rarely linear. It accelerates, pauses, and shifts. Responsible planning requires acknowledging both momentum and uncertainty. In other words, we need planning with discipline.

Electric infrastructure cannot be built overnight. Substations, feeders, transformers, and system upgrades require significant capital — and in today's environment, some equipment carries lead times measured in years. Increased demand nationwide (and worldwide for some equipment), from large industrial and data center projects, has added additional pressure to supply chains. Simple supply and demand means we're seeing long lead times and increased costs. 12313500

Our responsibility is to prepare for growth before it fully materializes — but not so aggressively that we create unnecessary financial risk.

That balance defines the area that we operate in.

We model multiple scenarios. We stress-test our work plans. We align capital investments with realistic projections rather than headlines — all with one purpose: protecting the membership.

Growth, when managed correctly, can strengthen a system. It can improve load factor, which is simply a measure of how efficiently our system is being used. A higher load factor is like steady highway driving — smooth, efficient, and predictable. A low load factor is more like stop-and-go city traffic — harder on equipment and more expensive to operate.

When usage is steady and predictable, fixed system costs can be spread more effectively across the membership. That supports long-term financial stability and helps keep rates as steady as possible.

However, growth must also have skin in the game. In other words, they have to pay their fair share. Despite all those benefits I just listed above, we also need to avoid new services placing undue burden on existing members. That requires careful evaluation of construction contributions, infrastructure sizing, and cost allocation. It requires discipline and steady governance. In some cases, it's relatively easy to find the solution, like with data centers. Your board has been very upfront that these large loads need to pay 100% aid to construction up front because this is such a new technology that it comes with some uncertainty whether they will be here long into the future.

Your Board of Directors has been clear: preparation is necessary, but protection of current members remains paramount. 11914000

Western South Dakota is still receiving attention. We see opportunity. We also recognize the variables outside our control with things like the current political environment. So, whether growth accelerates or moderates, West River Electric will continue planning with discipline because that is how we serve our members' best interests.

One last thing before I go, as I'm writing this, I see there is a substantial amount of turmoil in the Middle East, and bombs have started flying. So, please keep our men and women in uniform in your prayers.

Stay Safe,

Robert Raker
CEO & General Manager



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PowerUP⁺ Youth Leadership

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DEADLINE TO APPLY:
SEPT. 14, 2026

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- Hear from industry leaders and community leaders
- Learn about cooperative principles

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

WEST RIVER ELECTRIC

(USPS No. 675-840)

Our Mission:

To serve our members' best interest.

Our Vision:

We will be a high performing co-op.

Our Values:

1. Safety
2. Accountability
3. Integrity
4. Innovation
5. Commitment to Community

This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Board President: Andy Moon

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- Stan Anders – Vice President
- Jamie Lewis – Secretary
- Chuck Sloan – Treasurer
- Taran Eisenbraun
- Peter Blake
- Jason Habrock
- Steven Edoff
- Sue Peters

CEO and General Manager:

Robert Raker – robert.raker@westriver.coop

Editor

Amanda Haugen – amanda.haugen@westriver.coop

WEST RIVER ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS is the monthly publication for the members of West River Electric Association. Members subscribe to *Cooperative Connections* as part of their electric cooperative membership for \$6 a year. West River Electric Cooperative Connections purpose is to provide reliable, helpful information to electric cooperative members on matters pertaining to rural electrification and better living. Nonmember subscriptions are available for \$12 per year. Periodicals Postage paid at Wall, S.D., and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to West River Electric Cooperative Connections, PO Box 412, Wall, SD 57790-0412.

Other correspondence to: West River Electric Cooperative Connections, 3250 E Hwy 44, Rapid City, SD 57703; telephone (605)393-1500, Exts. 6564, 6531 or 6522; fax (605)393- 0275; e-mail amanda.haugen@westriver.coop.

STAYING FOCUSED BEHIND THE WHEEL: A SIMPLE GUIDE TO SAFER ROADS

Distractions behind the wheel aren't just inconvenient – they're deadly. Each moment you allocate to anything other than driving increases the risk for you and everyone sharing the road. According to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, distracted driving claimed 3,522 lives in the United States in 2021, underscoring how costly a split-second lapse can be. The good news is that small, deliberate habits behind the wheel can make a big difference. Here are three practical ways to stay focused.

First, minimize phone use. Store your device out of sight before starting the engine. Texting or scrolling through apps draws your eyes from the road, your hands from the wheel and your mind from the task at hand. If you must communicate, pull over safely or use hands-free features only if absolutely necessary and legal in your area. Remember, many places have laws prohibiting texting while driving, with penalties that reflect the risk. Consider enabling “do not disturb” modes that silence notifications while you drive, and set your status to indicate you're driving. This simple barrier can prevent impulsive checks and help you maintain steady attention.

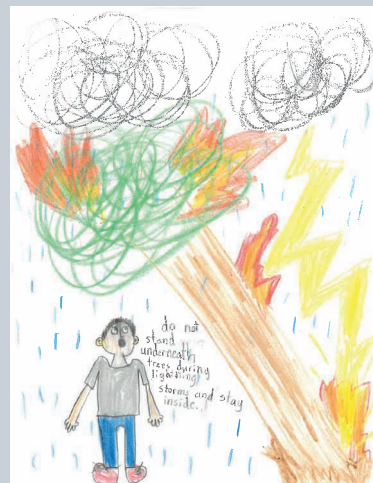
Second, plan your route before you depart. Entering a destination while driving is a dangerous distraction. Take a few minutes to review the route, check traffic conditions, and set your navigation system in advance. With your route loaded, you can keep your attention on driving rather than on-screen instructions during the journey. If possible, choose routes with fewer turns or fewer heavy-traffic segments, and be ready to adjust if conditions change. Having a mental map of the journey can also reduce the need to peek at the screen for updates.

Third, ensure you are well rested. Fatigue can dull reaction times, reduce concentration, and cause your eyes or your vehicle to drift. Prioritize a good night's sleep before long trips, and consider stopping for short breaks on extended drives to refresh your focus. Even brief pauses for stretching and deep breathing can reset your alertness and help you respond more quickly to changing road situations.

Beyond these tips, practice general safe-driving habits: obey speed limits, maintain a safe following distance and stay alert for pedestrians, cyclists, and other motorists. If you feel distracted or fatigued, it's wiser to pause and reassess rather than press on. Safe driving is about consistent, proactive choices that protect everyone on the road.



"Do not stand underneath trees during lightning storms and stay inside."



**Ramsey Faini,
Age 8**

Ramsey warns readers about the dangers of lightning storms. Thank you for sharing your picture, Ramsey! Ramsey's mom is Katie Faini from Rapid City, 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.

MAIN DISHES

HOMEMADE MAC & CHEESE

Ingredients:

16 oz. box elbow macaroni noodles
Oil
1 pkg. bacon
3 cups whole milk
1/2 cup butter (melted)
5 oz. can (about 2/3 cup) evaporated milk
16 oz. block Velveeta cheese (cut into cubes)
1 tsp. salt
Guda cheese
Parsley (to taste)
1 tsp. garlic powder
1/2 tsp. black pepper

Method

Cook noodles as directed. Drain noodles and pour a small amount of oil on them while in the strainer. Cook bacon and cut into small pieces. Add all of the ingredients into a Crock-Pot and mix. Cover and cook on low for 1.5 hours, stirring once or twice while cooking. Serve and enjoy.

Cindi Foster
Codington-Clark Electric

CHEDDAR POTATO SOUP

Ingredients:

1 medium onion, chopped
3/4 cup celery, chopped
1/4 cup butter
5 cups peeled potatoes, cubed
3 cups water
3 cups milk, divided
4 tps. chicken bouillon granules
1/2 tsp. salt
1/2 tsp. pepper
1/4 cup flour
4 cups (16 oz.) cheddar cheese, shredded

Method

In large Dutch oven or kettle, saute onion and celery in butter for 5 minutes. Add potatoes and water, bring to a boil. Reduce heat, cover and simmer for 15 minutes or until potatoes are tender. Stir in 2 cups milk, bouillon, salt and pepper. Combine flour and remaining milk until smooth, gradually stir into soup. Bring to a boil, cook and stir for 2 minutes or until thickened. Reduce heat, add cheese and stir until cheese is melted.

Sally Florey
Charles Mix Electric

CARAMELIZED HAM & SWISS SLIDERS

Ingredients:

12 Hawaiian dinner rolls, split
1/4 cup horseradish sauce (optional)
12 slices deli ham (or 24 if it's thinly sliced)
6 slices Swiss cheese, cut in fourths (so you will have 24 squares of cheese)
Sauce
1/2 cup butter
1/4 tsp. onion powder
2 tbsps. brown sugar
1 tbsp. Dijon mustard
2 tps. poppy seeds
1 1/2 tps. Worcestershire sauce
1/4 tsp. garlic powder

Method

Spray a 9x9 or 9x13 glass dish with non-stick cooking spray. Set aside. Preheat oven to 325°. Spread roll bottoms with horseradish sauce (if using). Fold up pieces of ham to fit the rolls and place them on the bottom halves of the roll. Next, place 2 squares of cheese. Replace tops and place in a single layer in the prepared pan.

Sauce

In a small skillet, heat butter over medium-high heat. Stir in remaining ingredients. Pour over rolls. Cover with foil and bake covered for 20 minutes. Remove foil and bake 5 more minutes. These can also be made ahead of time. Just cover with foil and refrigerate for several hours or overnight. Bake as instructed.

Jerald & Virginia Jensen
Sioux Valley Energy

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 2026. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.



Capital Credit Allocations Mailed in April



Jenny Patterson
Manager of Office Services

Each member who was on service in 2025 will receive a capital credit allocation notice (see example on right) in the mail during April. West River Electric is a not-for-profit organization owned by you, its member-owners. The revenue that covers day-to-day operating costs of the cooperative comes directly from members paying their monthly electric bills. Member rates provide:

- A sufficient amount of revenue to cover all operating costs,
- Funds for capital requirements, such as trucks, equipment and other items not funded by the RUS loans,
- Sufficient income to meet our financial needs set by our lenders,
- Revenue for additional capital items to keep pace with growth.

Revenue over the amount needed to keep the co-op operating is called a “margin.” These margins are allocated in the spring of each year based on the amount of electricity you have used for the previous year, (your patronage), and are called “capital credits.” The allocation notice you receive will state your balance before the 2025 allocation. In the middle, it shows the amount that

has been credited to your capital credit amount for the year 2025 for each service location you have on service. In the end, it will show your total capital credits allocated to date. These capital credits provide equity for the co-op and you. As a reminder, this allocation notice cannot be cashed, nor can it be used as a credit on your energy account.

On the notice, you will notice line items listed as “COOP” & “G&T.” The “COOP” line is for the margins derived strictly from West River Electric. The “G&T” line is for the margins that have been allocated by our power suppliers, Rushmore Electric Power Cooperative and Basin Electric Power Cooperative, (BEPC) of which we, West River Electric, are members. 2440001

Each year, the Board of Directors review the financial condition of West River Electric to determine if a capital credit, “retirement,” (payment of capital credits) will be possible for the year. If one is approved, you will find this information in the October edition of the Cooperative Connections. If you have further questions, please contact our offices at, Wall: 605.279.2135, or Rapid: 605.393.1500, or by email at info@westriver.coop. 787500

0000114291 // .



West River Electric Association, Inc.

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 
 PO Box 412
 Wall, SD 57790-0412

Wall Office
 1200 W. Fourth Ave.
 PO Box 412
 Wall, SD 57790-0412
 (605) 279-2135
 Visit us at:
www.westriver.coop
 24-Hour Automated Attendant:

Rapid City Office
 3250 E Hwy 44
 Rapid City, SD 57709
 (605) 393-1500

 (605)791-6555

2242 1 AV 0.471 5 2242
 Jane Doe C-4
 John Doe
 1234 Capital Credit St.
 RAPID CITY SD 57703-7081

Explanation of numbers key

1. Member's account number.
2. Total previous years amount.
3. Explanation of what it means to be a member of the cooperative and how capital credits work.
4. Current year allocation break down:
 - a. Location: the number we assigned to your home location.
 - b. Patronage: total of all electric bills paid in 2025.
 - c. COOP & G&T: type of allocation.
 - d. Capital Credit: amount of each allocation.
5. Total credits accrued for 2025.
6. The new balance of your totals after this year's allocation.

1

RE: Capital Credit # 123456

Page 1 of 1

2

Capital Credit Allocation Notice

THIS IS NOT A REQUEST FOR PAYMENT

Prior Years Balance: COOP 107.88
 G&T 28.88
 \$ 136.76

4

CAPITAL CREDIT STATEMENT Calendar Year 2025			
Location	Patronage	Type	Capital Credits
1234	1,510.69	COOP	30.43
	1,510.69	G&T	90.35
Totals allocated for Jan. 1, 2025 - Dec. 31, 2025:			120.78

3

You are part owner of West River Electric Association, Inc. and one way your ownership is reflected is through capital credits -- your share of what's left over after the co-op pays all its expenses.

Every month, you pay your bill for electric service, and the co-op pays the expenses incurred in providing that service. Any funds left over at the end of the year -- margins -- provide equity for the co-op and you, the member. These funds are allocated each year based on the amount of electricity you have used for the previous year (patronage) and are called "capital credits." Allocated capital credits are considered "unretired" until the Board of Directors "retire" a portion of the capital credits, which normally happens annually in September.

We retain the unretired capital credits for two reasons: (1) as working capital to keep the co-op financially sound and to allow for emergencies, such as storm damage that might require replacement of poles and power lines; and (2) to retire debts and build equity in the co-op.

Be sure to keep the Cooperative informed of your correct address so that you continue to receive your notices and future refunds. If you move, we recommend that you update your current address with us every five years.

5

Total Unretired Capital Credits: COOP 138.31
 G&T 119.23
 \$ 257.54

Unretired capital credits cannot be applied to your past due or current energy bill or payment for any other services provided by your cooperative.

If you previously had a DCG Allocation, it has been combined into the G&T amount. If have any questions please feel free to contact us.

West River Electric exists for the purpose of providing its members with electric service on a non-profit basis. All excess margins are allocated back to its members.

KEEP THIS STATEMENT FOR YOUR RECORDS





From left, in the Sioux Valley Energy shop: Ted Smith, vice president of engineering and operations; Chad Williams, manager of operations; journey lineworker Jager Rus; and journey lineworker Paul Schamber. Photo submitted by Sioux Valley Energy

BUSTING ENERGY MYTHS

with Ted Smith of Sioux Valley Energy

Frank Turner

frank.turner@sdrea.coop

Electricity powers nearly every part of daily life, yet most people only think about it when the lights flicker or a bill arrives. Because the system works quietly in the background, assumptions about how it operates tend to fill the gaps.

To sort through several common misconceptions, Cooperative Connections spoke with Ted Smith, vice president of engineering and operations at Sioux Valley Energy, the cooperative serving South Dakota counties of Brookings, Lake, Moody, Kingsbury, and Minnehaha and Minnesota counties of Rock and Pipestone. Smith has worked in the electric industry for 35 years, including 20 years at Sioux Valley, where he

oversees engineering, line crews and dispatch.

Here are several claims he regularly hears from members and how he responds.

Myth: If the lights go out, it must be a local problem.
Smith: That's definitely a myth.

An outage can begin anywhere from inside your home all the way back to a generating station two states away. The electric grid is highly interconnected. A disruption in one area can ripple outward across transmission lines that serve multiple utilities.

There have been large historical outages, especially in the eastern United States, where a single event such as a tree contacting a transmission line triggered a cascading failure across multiple states. Entire cities lost power

because one initiating fault spread across the network.

Closer to home, severe weather in one region can affect transmission lines feeding a much broader footprint. If a major transmission line trips offline, and another line is already out for maintenance, service interruptions can extend far beyond the original storm area.

“Just because your lights go out doesn't mean the problem started down the road, close to home” Smith said. “It could be much farther upstream.”

Myth: The grid can be powered entirely by renewable energy.
Smith: At times, yes. Around the clock, no.

Smith pointed to hydroelectric dams along the Missouri River as renewable generation that run continuously, but other renewable resources, such as wind and solar, simply aren't reliable sources of energy and only contribute

significantly when conditions allow.

“Although sometimes it seems like it, the wind doesn’t always blow in South Dakota,” Smith said. “And solar only produces during daylight hours.”

Although battery storage has improved in recent years, Smith says storing enough energy to power the grid around the clock is prohibitively expensive at this point in time.

For now, maintaining reliability requires a mix of generation resources so supply remains available regardless of weather or time of day.

Myth: If my neighbor has power and I do not after a storm, the cooperative skipped me.

Smith: That’s not how it works.

In some cases, the cooperative may not yet know a member is without service. Reporting outages remains important.

Another possibility is that the issue is on the member side of the meter. Crews may restore cooperative equipment and determine that the damage is within the member’s own service.

“When crews see it’s a problem on the member side of the meter, they will call dispatch and have them contact the member,” Smith said.

He also emphasized the importance of keeping current phone numbers on file. Fewer households rely on landlines today, which makes updated cell phone numbers critical during storm response.

Myth: Burying all power lines would eliminate outages.

Smith: No.

Underground lines are not exposed to wind and ice, but they are not immune to failure. Over time, underground conductors deteriorate. Rodents such as gophers can damage them. Excavation damage is also common when individuals dig without confirming where utilities are buried.

Before digging, members should always contact 811, the national call-before-you-dig number. That service

notifies utility providers so buried lines can be located and marked before excavation begins. Failing to call 811 can be dangerous and increase the risk of damaging underground infrastructure, causing outages.

And even when damage occurs naturally, locating the fault underground can take time.

“With overhead lines, crews can usually see the damage,” Smith said. “Underground, it takes troubleshooting to figure out exactly where the fault is, sometimes leading to longer outage durations.”

He recalled one outage that proved especially difficult to diagnose.

“One time we had an outage that we just could not narrow down,” he said. “When we finally found the damage, we saw that a gopher had chewed the bottom of the wire. You could not see it from the top. We had to dig up about 20 feet of cable and turn it over before we could see the damage.”

Underground systems can reduce certain types of outages, but they do not eliminate them, and repairs often require more time and labor.

Myth: Wind and solar power are free once installed.

Smith: The fuel is free, but that’s the only thing that’s free.

Wind turbines require ongoing maintenance, including mechanical components that need to be regularly serviced. Solar power relies on inverters and other equipment that must be maintained and eventually replaced.

There are construction costs, financing costs and transmission costs involved in delivering electricity from generation sites to homes and businesses. Those transmission and maintenance assets are accounted for over time and included in the overall cost of electricity.

Free fuel lowers one portion of cost. It does not remove the need to build, maintain and replace infrastructure.

Myth: Electric cooperatives raise rates to increase profits.

Smith: No. Cooperatives are not-for-profit.

Electric cooperatives are member owned, not investor owned. That means there are no outside shareholders expecting earnings. Instead, cooperatives operate on margins, collecting enough revenue to pay expenses, maintain infrastructure and meet financial obligations.

“The only place we get money is from the people at the end of the line,” Smith said. “We don’t have a printing press in the basement.”

In fact, if revenue exceeds expenses in a given year, a portion of those margins are allocated back to members as capital credits when the board determines it’s financially appropriate. Capital credits represent a member’s share of the cooperative’s financial performance during the years they received service.

However, in recent years, equipment costs have risen significantly. Smith cited bucket trucks that once cost around \$220,000 have since more than doubled in price, and major system components have seen similar increases. Usually, the cost of wholesale power from the cooperative’s power suppliers makes up the largest share of the budget and those costs have been increasing as well.

Rate adjustments reflect those rising operational costs and the need to maintain reliable service, not profit distribution.

Electricity may seem simple at the flip of a switch, but as Smith makes clear, the system behind it involves infrastructure, coordination and constant evaluation. Understanding how it works helps members separate assumption from reality and better appreciate the network that serves them every day.



L to R: Zach H., Tyson S., Turner D., Trevor S., Matt K., Brandon A., Aarin A.

L to R: Ty C., Ty G., Keenan C., Clint S., Brandon B., Camden S., Tucker O.

L to R: Eric E., Cameron P., Brendan N., Sanden S., Tyson G., Lance S., Justin W.

L to R: Mike O., Lane B., Lucas S., Trent M., Derek H., Tucker H., Riley R.

Linemen are Ready When it Matters Most



Amanda Haugen
Communications Specialist

Being a Communications Specialist, I am constantly working with other departments on ways to communicate updates, happenings and other topics to you, the membership. With that,

I have the unique privilege of seeing firsthand what it truly takes to keep the lights on for our members. In April, we take time to pause and recognize the brave men who make that possible every single day—our linemen. 9577500

When storms impact our communities and outages occur, many people experience the inconvenience, but our linemen see a call to action. Our crews are always ready when it matters most—leaving family dinners, working through the night and heading into challenging conditions to restore power as safely and quickly as possible. That readiness is not accidental. It comes from rigorous

training, deep experience and a shared commitment to serving others.

What makes linemen especially remarkable is that they aren't just restoring power to a system—they're restoring power to their own communities. They live here. They raise their families here. They understand that electricity is more than a convenience; it's essential to daily life, to local businesses, to schools, farms, and emergency services. Powering the places we call home is personal to linemen.

Electric cooperatives like West River Electric were built on the principle of neighbors helping neighbors, and our linemen embody that spirit every day. They are the first to respond and the last to leave, often working long hours behind the scenes. At times, serving our neighbors means going beyond our own service territory through a process known as mutual aid. During major outage events, WREA crews stand ready to assist neighboring co-ops—sometimes close to home, and sometimes across state lines—to help restore power.

This spirit of mutual aid strengthens all cooperatives and ultimately benefits the members we serve.

We understand any time the lights go out can be frustrating, bringing everyday life to a halt. We are incredibly grateful to our members for your patience and encouragement during these times. Linework is demanding, physical, and at times, it can be dangerous. Our crews approach each job with a focus on safety and teamwork. They take pride in their craft and in the trust our members place in them.

On April 13, 2026, we will celebrate Linemen Appreciation Day, but one day is hardly enough. Every day, we thank our linemen for their service and dedication, which are the backbone of our cooperative.

To our linemen: thank you for your hard work, your readiness and your unwavering commitment to the communities we serve. We are proud to stand behind you and grateful for all that you do.

People • Power • Purpose



South Dakota Rural Electric – – – – – YOUTH EXCURSION – – – – – July 20-22, 2026

Application Form

To apply for 2026 Youth Excursion, complete the form below and return it to West River Electric. The deadline to apply is June 15, 2026. If you have any questions, please call 605-393-1500.

2026 Youth Excursion Application

Name: _____
Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
Phone#: _____ Email: _____
School: _____ 2026-2027 Class/Year: _____
Gender: _____ T-shirt Size: _____

Return this information by June 15, 2026 to:

West River Electric Cooperative
Attn: Amanda Haugen
3250 E Hwy 44
Rapid City, SD 57703

Scan to apply for Youth Excursion Online



ON THE LOOKOUT FOR ENERGY SCAMS

Photo by Frank Turner

Frank Turner

frank.turner@sdrea.coop

It's no April Fools' joke. Consumers with an electricity connection have long been targets for scams. In today's digital world, those schemes have evolved. As more daily business is conducted online, scammers have shifted their tactics to match. They now use phone calls, texts and emails to create urgency, confusion and fear, hoping consumers will act before taking time to verify the claim.

For victims, these scams can lead to financial loss and identity theft, but understanding how the most common schemes work and what they typically look like is one of the best defenses to staying safe.

The "Past Due" Disconnection Threat

One of the most common tactics that scammers use is the disconnection threat. They use a fake message claiming a bill is past due and that service will be disconnected immediately unless payment is made on the spot.

The call may sound official. The message may include account numbers

or appear to come from your local cooperative's phone number due to caller ID spoofing. The scammer's goal is simple: create panic so you pay first and question later.

In reality, cooperatives follow clear procedures and provide advance notice before any disconnection. A demand for instant payment, especially with threats attached, is a major red flag.

The "You Overpaid" Refund Scam

Who would not want a refund? Scammers take advantage of that instinct.

In this scheme, a text, call or email claims a member overpaid an electric bill and is owed money. The message often includes instructions to click a link or provide banking information so the refund can be "processed."

The message can sound especially convincing to cooperative members because electric cooperatives do return margins to members in the form of capital credits. Capital credits represent a member's share of the cooperative's annual margins and are returned over time.

However, capital credits are distributed through established,

official processes. They are not issued through unsolicited texts, surprise phone calls or links requesting personal banking information. When your local cooperative retires capital credits, members are notified through official channels such as billing statements, newsletters, verified mailings or even through Cooperative Connections.

An unexpected refund message that asks for sensitive information is a red flag. When in doubt, pause and contact your local cooperative directly using trusted contact information.

Gift Card and Cryptocurrency Demands

Scammers often insist on unusual payment methods such as gift cards, prepaid debit cards or cryptocurrency. They may provide detailed instructions on how to purchase gift cards and read the numbers over the phone.

This is a clear warning sign. Legitimate cooperatives do not request payment in gift cards or cryptocurrency. These forms of payment are nearly impossible to trace or recover, which makes them attractive to criminals.

Spotting a Scam

Regardless of the method, every scam has similar warning signs that members can watch for:

- High-pressure tactics that demand immediate payment
- Requests for payment through gift cards, prepaid debit cards or cryptocurrency
- Emails or text messages with poor grammar, spelling errors or unfamiliar web addresses

Scammers rely on urgency. Taking a few extra minutes to verify a message can prevent lasting financial consequences.

What Your Local Cooperative Will and Will Not Do

Your local cooperative will not demand immediate payment without prior notice. Cooperatives follow

established procedures and provide advance communication before any service interruption.

Your local cooperative will not ask for Social Security numbers, banking details or other sensitive information through unsolicited phone calls, emails or text messages.

Members have secure payment options available through official cooperative channels, including the cooperative's verified website and approved payment systems. When in doubt, independently locate the cooperative's official contact information rather than using links or phone numbers included in a message.

Text alerts are only sent to members who have enrolled in official notification programs, such as outage updates.

Avoiding Energy Scams

If you receive a suspicious call, text or email claiming to be from your local cooperative, do not use the contact information provided in that message. Instead, use the phone number printed on your billing statement or listed on the cooperative's verified website.

Also, reporting suspected scams helps protect fellow members. By alerting your local cooperative to fraudulent activity, members help strengthen the community's defense against energy scams and ensure the cooperative network remains secure for everyone.

Have a question about whether something is real or not? Reach out to your local cooperative. Electric cooperatives are owned by the members they serve and powered by the communities around them.

SIGNS OF AN

ENERGY SCAM

High-Pressure Tactics

Scammers will pressure you, creating a sense of urgency. Claims that your power will be disconnected without immediate payment are common with utility scams.

Sketchy Payment Methods

Scammers may ask for unusual payment methods like gift cards or cryptocurrency. In these cases, it's likely a scam.

Dodgy Communication

Whether an email, text message or letter, utility scams typically include poor grammar, spelling errors or unusual email addresses. These are common warning signs of a scam.





WORK ZONE AWARENESS WEEK

APRIL 20-24

KEEP ROADSIDE CREWS SAFE






- Merge early and be courteous of other drivers.
- Go slow and be patient. Traffic delays sometimes are unavoidable.
- Keep a safe distance between your vehicle and traffic barriers, trucks, equipment and workers.
- Obey all signs and road crew flag instructions.
- Minimize all distractions. Avoid texting, operating the radio, eating, or digging the backseat for something.



APRIL IS SAFE DIGGING MONTH

- 48 hours before beginning any project, call 811 or go to call811.com and submit a ticket request.
- Have the project description, where you plan to dig, and your location handy.
- After all utilities have been marked, carefully hand dig at least 18 inches around the marked areas before going in with your big equipment.

UNIFORM COLOR CODE

	WHITE: Proposed Excavation		PINK: Temporary Survey Markings		BLUE: Water, irrigation		PURPLE: Reclaimed water, irrigation		GREEN: Sewers and drain lines
	RED: Electric power lines, cables, conduit or lighting cables		YELLOW: Gas, oil, steam, petroleum		ORANGE: Communications, cable TV				



Know what's below.
Call before you dig.



West River Electric Association, Inc.

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

"Powering You For A Brighter Future"

Small donations every month from you, our members, adds up to BIG support for local communities.

Consider donating today to Operation RoundUP. You'll not only help non-profits, you'll help our local communities complete projects that benefit all.

Scan the QR code to contribute to the fun and to fill out a Project Application!

Project Applications open January 2, 2026!
The application window closes April 1, 2026.

LOCATE YOUR ACCOUNT NUMBER

There are five (5) account numbers placed randomly throughout the publication. If you locate your account number anywhere in this issue of the Cooperative Connections, you will be credited \$10.00, towards your next bill. You must notify our office by the 10th of the following month to receive your credit.

WEST RIVER ELECTRIC OFFICE HOURS

RAPID CITY OFFICE

3250 E Hwy 44
Rapid City, SD 57703
Monday – Friday: 7 a.m. – 5 p.m.
605-393-1500
Info@westriver.coop

WALL OFFICE

1200 W 4th Ave
PO Box 412
Wall, SD 57790
Monday – Friday: 7 a.m. – 5 p.m.
605-279-2135
Info@westriver.coop

*This email is not monitored on nights or weekends and it is not for reporting outages. To report an outage please follow the instructions below.

OUTAGE OR EMERGENCY?

Our calls are answered 24/7. In the event on an outage, please report it via the SmartHub app, texting OUT to 855-939-3719, or by calling our office at 605-279-2135 or 605-393-1500.



APRIL 9-11
Annual Schmeckfest
 German Festival of
 Tasting
 Freeman, SD
 605-925-4237
 www.schmeckfest.com

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.

MARCH 27-29
Special Olympics State Basketball Tournament
 DWU Avera Sports Complex
 Mitchell, SD

MARCH 29
Run for the Rangers
 Registration: 11:45 a.m.-12:45 p.m.
 Granite Sports
 Hill City, SD

MARCH 29
Palm Sunday Ham Dinner & Silent Auction
 11:45 a.m.-1:30 p.m.
 Granite Sports
 Hill City, SD

APRIL 3
Bachelors of Broadway: Gentlemen of the Theatre
 7 p.m.
 Johnson Fine Arts Center
 Aberdeen, SD

APRIL 4
Hop With a Cop - Free But Ticketed
 10 a.m.-12 p.m.
 Sensory-Friendly Hunt 12:30-1 p.m.
 Box Elder Events Center
 Box Elder, SD
 605-390-9341

APRIL 5
Easter Sunrise Service
 7 a.m.
 Mount Rushmore
 605-391-9156

APRIL 9-11
Annual Schmeckfest
 German Heritage Celebration
 Freeman, SD
 605-925-4237
 www.schmeckfest.com

APRIL 10-11
Forks Corks & Kegs Food & Wine Festival
 Deadwood, SD

APRIL 10
Hill City Arts Council Bingo
 6-8 p.m.
 Hill City Prairie Dog Taproom
 Hill City, SD

APRIL 11
Women VetsConnect Retreat
 A Wellness Retreat for Women Veterans and Military Spouses
 9 a.m.-2 p.m.
 Our Savior's Lutheran Church
 909 W. 33rd St.
 Sioux Falls, SD

APRIL 15
Hill City High School Annual Job Fair
 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
 Hill City High School Gym
 Hill City, SD

APRIL 18
Brookings Quilt Show XII
 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
 Admission: \$10
 Dakota Bank Center
 Brookings, SD
 605-690-3246

APRIL 18
Tri-Valley Chorus 75th Annual Show
 4 p.m.
 Centerville, SD
 605-201-9398

APRIL 19
Natl. Park Service Fee-Free Day
 6-8 p.m.

APRIL 20
The Bronx Wanderers
 7 p.m.
 Johnson Fine Arts Center
 Aberdeen, SD

APRIL 22
Hill City Garden Club Meeting
 Great Plains Bumblebee Atlas
 1 p.m.
 Super 8 Conference Room
 Hill City, SD

APRIL 22
Hill City Garden Club Meeting
 Great Plains Bumblebee Atlas
 1 p.m.
 Super 8 Conference Room
 Hill City, SD

APRIL 22
Vinyl Record Club
 5:30-6:30 p.m.
 Custer County Library
 Custer, 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.