

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



South Dakota Snowmobiling

Seasonal Fun in the
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Gaining Dual Credits

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Looking Ahead



Dick Johnson
General Manager

I hope you all had a wonderful Christmas and New Year. As I wrote this right before Christmas, it was 60 degrees out. Now when I edit this, we have a blizzard. As I have told several people, we are at least one day closer to spring this way.

Jumping into what is happening at your electric cooperative, today I will discuss some big news that came out of our recent board meeting. Your board recently approved our 2024 budget. Dawn, our CFO, and the staff put many hours looking at what we need to maintain system reliability, stay up with current technologies, and keep ahead of growth while still maintaining affordable rates. We have budgeted \$24.3 million in capital projects for 2024 which is down from \$27.9 last year. We had several larger substation and transmission projects last year that we have closed out in 2023. We have a large transmission line rebuild on Eglin Street/Cheyenne Boulevard to the Rapid City substation. That will push \$1.0 million alone for that short stretch. We are working on the Ashland substation north of the Flying J Truckstop along with purchasing another transformer and material for additional substations and transmission. We have two projects in the Enning area that we will be starting on, or completing, in 2024 that add up to \$2.0 million. We have budgeted for just under 1,000 new services totaling \$2.5 million. Our budget shows replacements needed of two bucket trucks. Five years ago, we budgeted one for \$165,000; now they are \$250,000 each, if we can even get them. Right now, if you order one, you can expect to wait three to four years. Along with that, our cost of material in most cases has doubled, yes doubled, in five years.

Our total revenue is budgeted at \$47.3 million with a final margin of \$3.0 million. We are assuming a 4% increase in new members. Our total payroll is \$6.3 million, which is \$6.3 million in wages that go right back into the communities we serve. Our lenders have specific equity requirements and the good news is our equity will see a needed uptick in 2024.

Next, our technology budget is heavier this year as we have several end-of-life servers that need to be replaced. We continue to see large amounts of data being stored and needed in our world today. We have budgeted for upgrades to a work management solution and new staking program. 1769800

Earlier I stated, “while still maintaining affordable rates.” It is no secret that we have had financial pressures for the last few years. We have been able to keep our rates the same since 2016 while absorbing many of these cost increases through our financial prudence, growth, and putting extra margins away into a revenue deferral plan; a savings account if you will. However, we are preparing for a rate adjustment, in April of 2024. Your board has reviewed three different options over the last two months and asked us to provide a couple of other options. We will have final approval at the January board meeting. Our forecasts show that we can hold these rates for at least the next two years.

Everyone is affected by increased costs including your cooperative. However, remember your board is local and they pay the same rates you do. The member-elected Board is a real benefit, as we have seen through this year’s process. They came back and asked for more, and different solutions to our various scenarios in order to further minimize impacts. Stay tuned for more information on the rate adjustment as move forward.

I hope you have a wonderful and prosperous 2024.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Dick Johnson".

**COOPERATIVE
CONNECTIONS**

**WEST RIVER
ELECTRIC**

(USPS No. 675-840)

Our Mission:

We are safety conscious, community oriented, and the trusted energy expert for our member owners.

Our Vision:

We will achieve an ACSI score of 90 by 2024.

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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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.

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Rate Adjustment in 2024: We're All Feeling the Squeeze

At your cooperative, we take pride in serving our community and delivering reliable electricity to your homes and businesses. Over the past seven years, we have worked diligently to keep our electric rates stable, prioritizing affordability for our members. However, we find it necessary to communicate a rate adjustment, the first since 2016.

As a cooperative, we believe in the principle that when we win, you win. In 2021, your cooperative's board of directors granted a three-month rate reduction, demonstrating an unwavering commitment to your financial well-being.

Why Now? We understand that rate adjustments may raise concerns, but we want to be transparent about the reasons behind this decision. Essential materials costs, which are vital to maintaining and upgrading our electrical infrastructure, have increased significantly. For instance, the prices of transformers have surged by 95%, wire by 64%, and poles by 91%, driving up our expenses.

Your cooperative is dedicated to ensuring the high-quality reliability that you deserve. This rate adjustment will allow us to continue investing in the maintenance and modernization of our infrastructure, which ultimately translates into fewer power outages and improved service.

We understand that any increase in costs can be concerning, therefore, we want to empower you to take control of your energy consumption and costs. We encourage you to make use of the following energy-saving tools and programs:

- **SmartHub:** Access detailed usage insights and manage your account online efficiently.
- **Energy-Efficient Heat Pumps:** Explore rebates and incentives for energy-efficient heat pump installations.
- **Energy Audits:** Take advantage of our energy audit options to identify and implement strategies to reduce your electricity bill.

Despite this needed adjustment, electricity remains a good value and hopefully the following will provide some perspective. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, \$100 in 1939 has the purchasing power of about \$2,278.36 today, an increase of \$2,178.36 over 85 years. In contrast, the cost of electricity has only gone up 2.6 times, from \$0.045 per kWh to \$0.12 per kWh. This demonstrates that, even with this adjustment, electricity remains an excellent value in comparison. 1690900

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this rate adjustment, please do not hesitate to contact us. We are here to assist you and provide any necessary information.

Cooking Safety

Watch What You Heat: Cooking is the Number One Cause of Home Fires

Plan A: Primary Prevention

- The best time to cook is when you are wide awake, and not drowsy from medications or alcohol.
- Always wipe clean the stove, oven, exhaust fan to prevent grease buildup.
- Wear short or close-fitting sleeves when cooking.
- Keep a pan lid and dry potholders or oven mitts near you EVERY time you cook.
- Turn pot or pan handles toward the back of the stove.
- When heating food in the microwave, use microwave- safe cookware that allows steam to escape.
- Allow food to rest before removing from the microwave.
- When frying, use a pan lid or splash guard to prevent grease splatter.
- Stay in the kitchen while you are frying, grilling, or broiling food. If you leave, turn off the stove.
- If you are simmering, baking, roasting, or boiling food, check it regularly. Remain in the home while food is cooking, and use a timer to remind you to check on your cooking.
- After cooking, check the kitchen to make sure all burners and other appliances are turned off.

Plan B: Secondary Prevention

If your food does catch on fire...

1. Cover the pan with its lid. A cookie sheet works too. Leave covered until the pan is cool. NEVER move the pot or carry it outside - the pot is too hot to handle and the contents may splash, causing a severe burn.
2. Turn the heat off. With the lid on and the heat off, the fire should quickly put itself out. NEVER use water to put out a kitchen fire. Water will cause the

oil to splatter and spread the fire, or scald you as it vaporizes.

3. If the fire is inside the oven or microwave, keep the door shut and turn it off. Keep closed until the oven is cool.
4. If the fire gets out of control- get out, stay out and call 9-1-1. Don't return inside for any reason.

STATS

- 47% of all home fires are caused by cooking
- Preventing a burn injury is always better than the pain and trauma of medical treatment afterward.

National Burn Awareness Week (Feb. 4-10, 2024) is a window of opportunity for organizations to mobilize burn, fire, and life safety educators to unite in sharing a common burn awareness and prevention message in our communities.

Source: American Burn Association



Call 811 Before You Dig

Lillee Pannell, Age 10

Lillee Pannell instructs readers to call 811 before digging. Lillee is the daughter of Scott and Kim Pannell from Sioux Falls, S.D., members of Southeastern Electric Cooperative.

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.

BRUNCH SPECIALS

FRENCH TOAST SUPREME

Ingredients:

1/2 cup butter
2 tbsps. white corn syrup
1 cup brown sugar
5 eggs
1 cup Carnation milk
1 tsp. vanilla
1/4 tsp. salt

Method

Boil together butter, corn syrup, and brown sugar for one minute. Grease a 9x13 pan and put the caramel mix in bottom. Slice French bread about one inch thick or use Texas toast. Put slices close together on top of the caramel sauce. Beat together eggs, milk, vanilla, and salt. Pour on top of bread. Cover and refrigerate overnight. Bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes. When ready to serve, turn the pieces over and caramel will be on top. Best served warm.

Brigitta Hofer
Bridgewater, S.D.

MINI FRITTATAS

Ingredients:

8 eggs
1/4 cup milk
1 1/2 tps. Italian seasoning
1/4 tsp. salt
1/8 tsp. ground black pepper
1 cup crumbled cooked bacon
1 med. onion, finely chopped
1 med. zucchini, finely chopped
1 cup shredded Cheddar cheese, divided

Method

Preheat oven to 350°F. Beat eggs, milk, Italian seasoning, salt and pepper in medium bowl until well blended. Add bacon, onion, zucchini and 1/2 cup of the cheese; mix well. Spray one (12-cup) muffin tin generously with no stick cooking spray. Spoon about 1/4 cup egg mixture into each cup. Sprinkle with remaining 1/2 cup cheese. Bake 20 to 22 minutes or just until eggs are set. Run small knife or spatula around each cup to loosen mini frittatas. Let stand five minutes before serving.

McCormick.com

CINNAMON PANCAKES

Ingredients:

2 cups pancake mix
1 tsp. cinnamon
2 eggs, beaten
1 cup milk
2 tbsps. vegetable oil
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract

Method

Stir pancake mix and cinnamon in large bowl until well blended. Stir in eggs, milk, oil, and vanilla just until blended.

Pour 1/4 cup of batter per pancake onto preheated lightly greased griddle or skillet. Cook one to two minutes per side or until golden brown, turning when pancakes begin to bubble. Serve pancakes with Spiced Syrup, if desired.

Kitchen Tip: To make flavorful Spiced syrup, mix one cup pancake syrup, one teaspoon pure vanilla extract and 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon in a small microwave-safe bowl and microwave on HIGH for one minute or until warm, stirring once.

McCormick.com

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 2023. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

Attention High School Juniors and Seniors

Win a Trip to Washington, D.C.

West River Electric will once again sponsor two high school juniors and seniors on an all-expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C. Each June, more than 1,800 high school juniors and seniors travel to Washington, D.C., to participate in the Rural Electric Youth Tour. During the week, they learn about Washington, D.C., government, cooperative philosophy, and rural electrification. The students are selected and sponsored by their local rural electric cooperatives. The South Dakota Rural Electric Association (SDREA) coordinates arrangements for the South Dakota students.

Some of the sites that toured are the Lincoln Memorial, National Cathedral, The White House,

Air and Space Museum, Washington Monument, U.S. Capitol, Ford's Theatre, The Kennedy Center, the Metro, Arlington National Cemetery, Mount Vernon, Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, The Smithsonian, Iwo Jima Statue, National Archives, U.S. Supreme Court, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Students will participate in a breakfast briefing with the South Dakota Congressional Delegation.

Who is Eligible? All area high school juniors and seniors whose parents are members of West River Electric.

What Does It Cost? West River Electric, along with the other local electric cooperatives that participate in the weeklong event, funds the tour. The funding for the tour provides for each participant's transportation, room and board, entertainment, and sightseeing events. Students are required to provide their spending money (snacks and souvenirs).

When is it Held? The weeklong trip will be held on **June 15-21, 2024.**

Participants will meet for an orientation meeting on Saturday, June 15 in Sioux Falls. Then, the group will fly to Washington, D.C. on Sunday, June 16, and return to South Dakota on Friday, June 21. A commercial bus will be used for transportation while in Washington, D.C.

How do I Qualify? Each Entrant must submit an application by going to www.westriver.coop and write a 250-word essay on the following topic: "What does the Electric Cooperative mean to me?"

Questions? Please call 605-393-1500 or email info@westriver.coop. 1103501

NOW ACCEPTING SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS!

High School Seniors and Current College Students

7, \$500 scholarships up for grabs!

Deadline to apply: Feb. 5th, 2024



NRECA Youth Tour 2024



SCAN TO APPLY FOR YOUTH TOUR!

deadline: March 18, 2024

1-week in WASHINGTON, D.C.

June 15-21, 2024

COST

QUESTIONS?

605-393-1500 | info@westriver.coop

A week-long trip to the nation's capital for High School Juniors or Seniors

- historic landmarks
- leadership experience
- great entertainment
- long-lasting friendships
- opportunity

FREE!! West River Electric will fund the week-long event

*students parents must be a member of WREA



West River Electric Association, Inc.

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

"Powering You For A Brighter Future"



SOUTH DAKOTA'S SNOWMOBILE CLUBS

A group of Black Hills Snowmobile Club members enjoy a ride through the snow covered pines.

Snow Lovers Create Trails and Lifelong Friendships Through Club Membership

Shannon Marvel

shannon.marvel@sdrea.coop

Being a member of one of South Dakota's many snowmobiling clubs is more like being a member of a big, adrenaline-loving family.

Being a part of a snowmobile club provides the opportunity to meet likeminded individuals that can easily turn into some of your best friends. That's the case for Mike Boock, of Rapid City, who is a longtime member of the Black Hills Snowmobile Club (BHSC).

"Most of the friendships that I have today are because of the snowmobile club. Many of us even camp together during the summer at the lake," Boock said.

Boock said the club boasts up to 70 members in all. While he primarily rides the mountains of Colorado and Wyoming, Boock loves riding in Black Hills when the area receives enough snow.

There are a total of 416 miles of groomed snowmobile trails

in the Black Hills National Forest, making it a pristine spot for snowmobiling.

The snowmobile clubs in the Black Hills have it a little easier than those out east as they don't have to mark, install, groom or repair trails.

"The state takes care of that," Boock said. "This allows clubs like the BHSC to become more of an educational and community support organization."

This allows club members more free time to volunteer or participate in community events, such as the Festival of Lights Parade and Storybook Island Christmas Nights of Light.

Kelly Weaver is the President of the South Dakota Snowmobile Association and a member of the Aberdeen Drift Busters Snowmobile Club.

The Aberdeen Drift Busters maintain what's called the Dakota Midland trail system, which connects Aberdeen, Mina Lake, Richmond Lake, Westport, Frederick and Columbia.

"This provides about 75 miles of riding in a safe, marked, and groomed corridor," Weaver said.

There are rules governing the trail system. While there are no posted speed limits on the trail, when the trail is located in a road right-of-way, the speed limit of the road applies.

There are also laws governing the type of vehicle that can be ridden on a snowmobile trail. Machines must meet the state definition of a snowmobile. ATV's and other motorized vehicles do not typically meet that definition.

Aberdeen Drift Busters has held the title of being the largest snowmobile club in the state for several years. It was established in 1969, the same year the South Dakota Snowmobile

Association was established.

“Currently, our membership is right around 100 families,” Weaver said. “The club has been as large as 225 members but membership has slowed over the past decade due to the lack of snow and the growing number of activities that families have an opportunity to participate in.”

Anyone can join a snowmobile club and snowmobile ownership is not a requirement.

“You are connected with very experienced snowmobilers who can provide information about machines, riding ventures and how organized snowmobiling operates,” Weaver said. “It is a way to connect with people who have a shared passion for the sport.”

Weaver had her first taste of snowmobiling as a young child with her father and neighbors.

“When I was young, I only rode as a passenger, which I found was not to my liking. When I met my future husband, he also had a snowmobile and I had to ride as a passenger once again,” Weaver said.

Weaver and her husband decided to join the Aberdeen Drift Busters while taking a break from riding for a bite to eat years ago.

“In 1986, my fiancé – now husband – and I were on a snowmobile ride and stopped to eat at a trailside business. Another snowmobiler, who we did not know, approached us and told us we needed to join the club. We did and have been actively involved ever since. That snowmobiling ‘stranger’ became a lifelong friend who we’ve shared many snowmobile memories with,” Weaver said. “Like most things we are drawn to, it is the ability to connect with others who share a common interest that keeps us involved. We have met so many people across the state and the nation through our involvement and have experienced some awesome and fun-filled trips over the years. There are so many ways to be involved that even members who are not avid riders can benefit from and enjoy

being part of the club.”

Once married, Weaver decided she’d need her own sled if she were to continue with snowmobiling. When her husband acquired a new Polaris, she was granted a used Arctic Cat Jag that she described as a “trusty starter sled.”

“Early on in our riding, we were able to make trips to the Black Hills, Big Horn Mountains and West Yellowstone. These venues are even more breathtaking in the winter,” Weaver said.

A long day on the trail in a large riding area might last six to eight hours. There needs to be a minimum of six inches of snow on the ground, depending on the terrain.

It may take several layers of snow to create a base for the trail, which can then be groomed and maintained throughout the season.

With adequate snow and a trail in place, an ideal riding day for Weaver would be sunny skies with a little wind, and temperatures between 0 and 30 degrees.

Over in the southeastern corner of

the state, Duane Duerr, President of the Siouxland Sno Trackers, finds great enjoyment in riding his Ski Doo 900 Ave Four Cycle snowmobile.

The Siouxland Sno Trackers is one of the original snowmobile clubs in South Dakota and has around 78 miles of groomed trails for its 80 members.

Duerr grew up in Minnesota and joined the club in 2006 when he moved to South Dakota. Joining the club helped him to learn the trails and rules, and provided him with many friendships.

“I think snowmobiling has become more popular, but involvement in all organizations is down,” Duerr said. “Many do not realize that snowmobile clubs are why we have a trail system and that they put it in and take it out. Without the clubs, we will no longer have trails in South Dakota. Member support is what makes a difference and too many take that involvement for granted.”

More information on the state’s snowmobile clubs can be found at the SDSA’s website at snowmobilesd.com.



Watertown’s South Dakota Snowmobile Club members take a break during an outing.



PROVIDING YOU WITH RELIABLE ELECTRICITY!

The Rural Electric Cooperative's Number One Goal Since the Beginning.



Kory Hammerbeck
Rushmore Electric Power Cooperative
CEO/GM

On New Year's Day 2021, had you asked me the odds of a winter blackout rolling through these parts, I would have told you a million to one. A longshot. Don't worry about it. Then February 16 happened. A polar vortex took a nasty turn, causing rolling blackouts for over 5,500 rural South Dakotans west of the Missouri. Now, on the 3-year anniversary of that storm (Uri), it looks like the odds of a repeat are increasing.

It's not because your local co-op has neglected grid maintenance. Quite the opposite: Over the past 3 years, West River Electric Cooperative (WREA) invested nearly \$14.5 million in system hardening (upgrading poles, wires, transformers, substations, vegetation clearing, etc.). In 2022, WREA's average outage time per consumer was 47 minutes. 2023 numbers, soon to be verified,

look similar. For perspective, the national average outage time per consumer is 5 hours a year. WREA, at 99.99% reliability, easily beats that – a remarkable feat considering the extreme cold, snow and ice storms, hail and high winds that distinguish our climate. I tip my hat to the line crews. Their craft is one of the most dangerous in the country. Often, they maintain energized power lines so your heat and light are not interrupted. So your Wi-Fi router doesn't reboot. So your microwave clock doesn't blink. So you don't experience any inconvenience at all.

To grasp what happened during Uri, you must first understand the grid's complexity. In southern states, natural gas lines feeding power plants froze. Iced-up regional wind turbines went offline. To counterbalance the shortfall, so a larger geographic area didn't blackout, the Southwest Power Pool (SPP, our region's transmission operator) directed electric suppliers to reduce the amount of power they delivered to the grid. This marked the first time in SPP's 83-year history that it initiated such a call. The result: outages from the Midwest to Mexico. But the grid did not crash. 785700

Since that storm, our region's reliability has not been severely tested.

Here at Rapid City-based Rushmore Electric Power Cooperative, we sell the electricity delivered to your co-op. We purchase it from two places: (1) Generating stations (primarily fueled by coal, natural gas and wind) owned by Bismarck, ND-based Basin Electric Power Cooperative (BEPC); and (2) hydroelectric power from the Western Area Power Administration (WAPA, a federally managed agency). Both have a half-a-century-plus track record of reliability. Drought conditions can reduce the amount of WAPA's hydropower, but it's dependable. BEPC employs an all-of-the-above generation strategy, using coal,

natural gas, wind, hydro, oil and solar to generate power. And recently, to bolster regional reliability, it committed more than \$1 billion for new transmission and generation.

Even so, what happens in 14 states impacts our reliability. That's 756 generating plants, 61,000 miles of transmission and 4,800 substations delivering power to 18 million people across 546,000 square miles. Have utility post-Uri upgrades made our region's network bulletproof? Perhaps only another prolonged Arctic blast will tell.

At the federal level, reliability concerns now grow. In December, the North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC), our nation's grid monitoring watchdog, warned that over the next decade, our region is at elevated risk: likely to experience an increased number of shortages when extreme and prolonged weather conditions strike. NERC attributes this to:

- Electric generating plants not designed or prepared for extreme cold or heat
- Fuel production and transportation disruptions limiting fuel availability
- Weather-dependent renewable generation
- Increased electric demand

In its recent 2023 Long-Term Reliability Assessment, NERC acknowledges that electric use in North America is increasing more rapidly than at any time in the past three decades. This certainly factors into future reliability concerns.

I can add some color to this.

It's not just electric vehicles, heat pumps and air conditioners. It's crypto mining and large data processing centers. It's siting and permitting delays for needed transmission lines. It's sensitive wind and solar inverters tripping unexpectedly. It's heightening concerns that existing generation is at risk of retirement before reliable alternatives are in place. And that proposed Clean Air Act Section 111(d) EPA regulations addressing carbon emissions will accelerate fossil-fuel generator retirements. As you can see, it's intricate.

Rest assured, reliability tops our region's present and future priority list.

WHAT YOUR CO-OP IS DOING TO ADDRESS FUTURE RELIABILITY

Locally

We regularly conduct face-to-face meetings with local, state and federal delegates. We educate and inform them about this issue, stressing the need for legislative support.

In South Dakota

Through the South Dakota Rural Electric Association (our state's lobbying organization), we advocate initiatives in Pierre that promote reliable, affordable electric service.

At the regional level

Representing co-ops in western South Dakota, Murdo's Mike McQuiston, a board member of West Central Electric and

Rushmore Electric, sits on the BEPC Board of Directors. There, at monthly meetings, he provides local input. Additionally, on peak-electric-use days – when it's really hot or cold – we cycle voluntarily connected loads (turning the power on for a while, off for a while), including irrigation units, water heaters, AC units, etc. This prevents us from pushing the grid to its limits and reduces regional power costs.

At the federal level

Through the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, we advocate initiatives that promote reliability and affordability throughout the region. 724700

WHAT YOU CAN DO

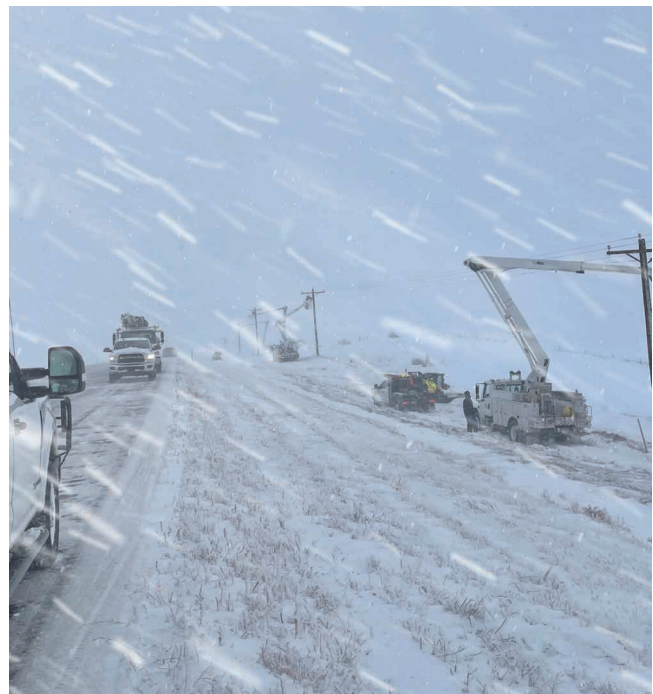
Sign up for our load management program (if you haven't already)

When critical, a few hours a month (for those who sign up), we remotely cycle water heaters, irrigation, and other electric loads to improve reliability during peak-use times. Our goal is to do this without causing you inconvenience while reducing the risk of outages and high wholesale power costs.

Start the conversation locally

Tell us what you think. Tell your co-op board member, your general manager and member services representative. Your voice is important to them. And don't forget to email/write a letter to your state and federal representatives.

Kory Hammerbeck is the CEO/General Manager of Rushmore Electric Power Cooperative in Rapid City, South Dakota. Hammerbeck has worked in the electric industry for 23 years.





Jocelyn Cihak takes a dual-credit calculus class offered by Northern State University. *Photo courtesy of Northern State University*

DUAL-CREDIT

High Schoolers are Gaining College Credits

Scott Waltman

Some graduates of South Dakota high schools are showing up on college campuses with a semester's worth of credits.

Sometimes even more.

The dual-credit program has proven to be both beneficial and popular since it was introduced by Gov. Dennis Daugaard in 2014.

It's easy to understand why. Here's how the program works. High school juniors and seniors at any South Dakota high school can take classes for which they get both high school and college credits. There are scores of

classes to choose from, and the cost to take them is steeply discounted.

For instance, once a student enrolls at any of the state's six public schools or universities, they pay between \$253.85 and \$260.55 per credit hour. That cost for a high school student taking a college-level class through the dual-credit program? It's a mere \$48.33 per credit hour.

That's why education officials in South Dakota love the program.

Nathan Lukkes, executive director and chief executive officer for the South Dakota Board of Regents, said providing an affordable education has been a priority for the regents in

recent years. Tuition freezes and an increased number of scholarships are part of that work. But so are dual-credit classes, he said.

Most of the dual-credit courses are general education classes – or generals, as college students often call them – he said. Through the program, students can have some of those courses out of the way before they even get their high school degrees.

The work done by the regents and the universities resulted in Forbes naming South Dakota the most affordable state in which to get a high school education, Lukkes said.

All six South Dakota public universities offer dual-credit classes, and the number of high school students taking advantage has been going up in recent years.

The number of students taking dual-credit classes changes throughout

the year, but there were 1,223 taking classes at Northern State University in Aberdeen in fall 2023 compared to 1,141 the year before. And at South Dakota State University in Brookings, the number jumped from 903 to 1,031 in fall 2023, according to statistics from the board of regents.

Here's how the systemwide numbers are trending based on the number of students taking dual-credit classes, according to the 2023 South Dakota Board of Regents Fact Book, which was issued during summer at the end of the most recent fiscal year.

2021-2022: 4,300

2020-2021: 3,919

2019-2020: 3,781

2018-2019: 3,168

The 10 most popular classes all had more than 150 students.

College algebra: 990

Fundamentals of speech: 905

Composition I (English 101): 830

General psychology: 513

U.S. history I: 379

American government: 317

Music appreciation (Music 101): 280

Introduction to sociology: 241

Biology survey I (Biology 101): 157

Biology survey lab: 156

In 2021, there were 9,523 dual-credit courses taken by South Dakota high school students, according to information from the regents. That number includes summer courses and students who took more than one course.

At Northwestern High School in Mellette, Superintendent Rob Lewis said about 25% of the juniors and seniors are taking advantage of dual-credit courses. One student has taken a full semester's worth, he said.

Do the math over the course of a semester, and that's a savings of north of \$2,300. And that doesn't take on-campus housing and food into account.

That's just a great deal for high school kids, Lewis said.

Chris Ulrich, the middle school and high school principal at Northwestern, agrees.

"It's a nice opportunity for kids

to get not only college credits, but also experience what college is like," he said.

And they get to do it within the comfort of their high school, Ulrich said. The program is a great transitional step leading from high school to college, he said.

AP, or Advanced Placement classes, were great, but dual-credit classes are even better, Lewis said.

AP classes are college-level courses taught by high school teachers. But they don't always equate to college credit. Dual-credit courses are taught by college instructors and professors and always result in college credit, if a student passes.

In South Dakota, dual-credit courses can be taken on any of the six public university campuses, in Sioux Falls, Rapid City, Huron, Pierre, Watertown and online.

And there's another benefit, Lukkes said. Dual-credit classes create a tie between South Dakota high school students and the regental schools. Any chance a high school student has a chance to engage with a state school creates a bond that could help keep that kid in South Dakota, he said.

Perhaps a Spearfish High School student takes a dual-credit class at Black Hills State University and it's a good experience. Maybe that high school graduate stays in town and enrolls at BHSU.

Lewis, too, said the program is a great way to keep students in South Dakota for college and perhaps beyond.

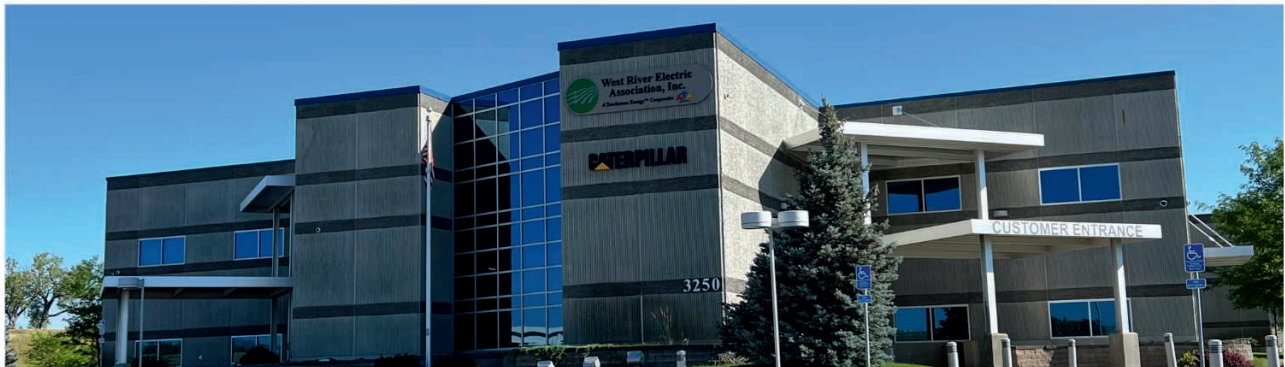
That's also a focus for the Aberdeen Development Corp., which is starting a program aimed at keeping more Northern graduates in town to start their professional careers.



Rhianna Troske, a student at Northwestern High School in Mellette, takes a dual-credit class while at school. *Photo by Scott Waltman*

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

SHINING THE LIGHT ON WEST RIVER ELECTRICS DEDICATED EMPLOYEES



JENNY PATTERSON
MANAGER OF
OFFICE SERVICES

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN WORKING WITH WEST RIVER ELECTRIC?

I have been with WREA for 16 years.

WHAT DOES YOUR JOB ENTAIL?

I oversee the front office in Wall, which includes the accounting, billing and human resources. I also handle the capital credits.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT WEST RIVER ELECTRIC?

It's the first place I have worked that cares deeply for the people, our members, and the employees. They want everyone to be safe and have a huge heart in wanting to help everyone.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE MEMORY SINCE STARTING WORK AT WEST RIVER ELECTRIC?

There have been so many good memories. Storm Atlas was a turning point for me. It showed me the true cooperative mentality. All the employees, other cooperatives, and contractors worked tirelessly to get every last person's power back on. You could see the grit and determination of all and at the end exhaustion, but never giving up.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE WEST RIVER ELECTRIC IN THREE WORDS?

Family, Giving, Always doing the right thing.

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO GET UP AND GO TO WORK EVERY DAY?

Everyone I work with and knowing what I do makes a difference.



BONNIE ALMEIDA
MEMBER SERVICE
REPRESENTATIVE

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN WORKING WITH WEST RIVER ELECTRIC?

I have been with WREA for almost 13 years.

WHAT DOES YOUR JOB ENTAIL?

My # 1 job is answering the phone, filling in at the counter to help members, and process cycle 1 billing.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT WEST RIVER ELECTRIC?

Talking to our members.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE MEMORY SINCE STARTING WORK AT WEST RIVER ELECTRIC?

There are so many to choose from but if I had to pick, it would be our employee trip to Basin, ND.


HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE WEST RIVER ELECTRIC IN THREE WORDS?

Bright, Exciting, Positive.

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO GET UP AND GO TO WORK EVERY DAY?

I enjoy speaking to our members and answering their questions.


Operation Round-up Application deadline April 1, 2024 by 5pm



Do you have a non-profit organization that you would like to see apply for Operation Round-up funds? You can visit westriver.coop to submit an application online or download and drop it off at either office.

Office hours: Mon-Fri | 7am-5pm

Rapid City Office
3250 E Hwy 44
Rapid City, SD 57703

 **West River Electric Association, Inc.**
Your Sustainable Energy Cooperative
"Powering You For A Brighter Future"

Wall Office
1200 W Fourth Ave
PO Box 412
Wall, SD 57790

LOCATE YOUR ACCOUNT NUMBER

If you locate your account number anywhere in this issue of West River Electric's *Cooperative Connections*, you will be a winner. There will be five account numbers placed randomly throughout the publication. If you spot your account number and notify our office before the 10th of the next month, you will receive a \$10 credit on your next bill.

WEST RIVER ELECTRIC OFFICE HOURS

RAPID CITY OFFICE

3250 E Hwy 44, Rapid City, SD
Monday-Friday 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.
605-393-1500

WALL OFFICE

1200 W 4th Ave, Wall, SD
Monday-Friday 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.
605-279-2135

A night depository is available at both offices for your convenience.

SERVICE AND BILLING QUESTIONS?

Contact 605-279-2135 or 605-393-1500 during office hours. E-mail us at info@westriver.coop for questions on your account.

OUTAGE OR EMERGENCY?

Contact 605-279-2135 or 605-393-1500 in the event of an outage or other emergency. Our calls are answered 24/7.



FEB. 24, 2024
Nemo 500 Outhouse Races & Chili Cookoff
 10 a.m.
 Nemo Guest Ranch
 Nemo, SD

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.

FEB. 3
Lake Hendricks Fishing Derby
 11 a.m.
 City Boat Landing
 Hendricks, MN

FEB. 9-10
Mardi Gras Weekend
 Historic Downtown Deadwood
 Deadwood, SD

FEB. 10
Polar Bear Chili Cook-Off
 11 a.m.
 Main Street
 Hill City, SD

FEB. 11
Beadle County Humane Society Bingo, Silent Auction & Bake Sale Benefit
 2 p.m.
 Huron Community Center
 Huron, SD

FEB. 18-20
MASC presents Disaster! the Musical
 Vesta Community Center
 Vesta, MN

FEB. 22
The Starlets: Pop Female Trio
Aberdeen Community Concert Association
 7 p.m.
 Johnson Fine Arts Center NSU
 Aberdeen, SD

FEB. 23-24
Women in Blue Jeans Conference
 Highland Conference Center
 Mitchell, SD

MARCH 1-3
National Pheasant Fest & Quail Classic
 Denny Sanford Premier Center
 Sioux Falls, SD

MARCH 2
Live on Stage
 High Country Guest Ranch
 Hill City, SD

MARCH 7
Elevate Rapid City Economic Summit
 8 a.m.
 The Monument
 Rapid City, SD

MARCH 9
French Toast/Pancake Feed & Health Fair
 8:30 a.m.
 Tea Community Building
 Tea, SD

MARCH 9
SunCatcher Therapeutic Riding Academy & 3rd Annual Shamrock Gala and Benefit Auction
 5 p.m.
 Alex Johnson Ballroom
 Rapid City, SD

MARCH 11-15
Black Hills Institute's 50th Anniversary Celebration
 Hill City, SD

MARCH 15
East Dakota Chapter NWFT 31st Annual Banquet
 Ramkota Exhibit Hall
 Sioux Falls, SD

MARCH 16
Live On Stage
 High Country Guest Ranch
 Hill City, SD

MARCH 16-17
Hill City Antiques, Railroad & Collectibles Show & Sale
 Hill City Center
 Hill City, SD

MARCH 17
St. Patrick's Day Green Pancakes and Sausage
 8:30 a.m.
 RVUMC
 Rapid City, SD

MARCH 20-23
Hill City Restaurant Week
 Hill City, SD

MARCH 23
Tyndall VFW Vegas Night
 7:30 p.m.
 Tyndall Community Center
 Tyndall, SD

MARCH 23
Hill City Children's Easter Egg Hunt
 Visitor Info Center
 Hill City, SD

MARCH 24
Ham Dinner & Silent Auction
 11:45 a.m.
 RVUMC
 Rapid City, SD

MARCH 24
Run for the Rangers
 Hill City, SD

Note: Please make sure to call ahead to verify the event is still being held.