

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



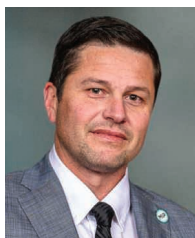
Building Communities

REED Fund Helps
Support Local Growth
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DERs and the
Electrical Grid
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Dave Eide, right, presents a check to Jason Foster, left, fire chief of Garden City Fire Department. Through the REED fund, the department secured a loan to renovate the fire hall.

What Lies Ahead: Introducing Your New CEO



Robert Raker
CEO/GM

I want to take a moment to introduce myself to you, our member-owners. My name is Robert Raker, and I am honored to have been hired by the West River Electric Association, Inc. Board of Directors as your Chief Executive Officer.

I was born in a small town in eastern South Dakota and attended Western Dakota Tech, Chadron State College, and Mitchell Hamline School of Law. My wife, Billi Jo, and I are proud parents of two daughters: Charlee Jo, 14, and Andee Jo, 2.

I began my career with West River Electric in 2008 and have had the privilege of being involved in many aspects of our cooperative, including marketing, strategic planning, communications, and legislative affairs. Like many of you, I've worn many hats over the years. Through those experiences, in addition to having the pleasure of working closely with outgoing CEO Dick Johnson, I've gained invaluable insight into how we can better serve you, our members. I am incredibly excited to lead this exceptional team and to work alongside our Board of Directors to continue improving our service to you. I look forward to meeting many of you in the future!

Now, let's talk about what's ahead for your cooperative.

In our evolving industry, I am hitting the ground running. One of the immediate challenges we face is a 7% power cost increase in 2025 from our power providers, Basin Electric and Western Area Power Administration (WAPA). After a thorough review, we explored every possible way to absorb this increase. For example, we have decided not to rehire for my previous position, instead redistributing those duties across the organization to operate even more efficiently.

However, there are areas we cannot compromise on—specifically, safety and reliability. After carefully analyzing our 2025 budget, the Board, staff, and I determined that we must implement a Power Cost Adjustment (PCA) line item on your bill starting in March, reflecting your February usage. This adjustment will be slightly over half a cent (\$0.0057) per kilowatt-hour to recover the increased power costs. To learn more about the PCA, see Amanda's

Detail Of Charges				
Base Charge				\$34.00
KWH Revenue	3,127 KWH	x 0.1195		\$373.68
Power Cost Adjustment	0	x \$0.0057		\$0.00
SD State Tax 4.2%				\$19.29
Total This Meter				\$423.97

	Days Srvd	KWH/Day	Cost/Day	Avg High	Avg Low
This Month	30	104	\$13.49	44	23
Last Month	31	70	\$9.36	61	37
Last Year	30	80	\$10.17	51	27

article further in the connections.

Additionally, we continue to face higher local operating costs. Although inflation has slowed, mild weather in 2024 impacted our sales, which fell short of expectations. In fact, I am writing this column over Christmas, and I have our windows open because it is so warm out, and because I spilled something that is smoking from the oven. So, to address these localized increased cost challenges, we will also be increasing the base charge by \$3.00 per month.

In total, the average residential member (937 kWh per month) will see an increase of approximately \$8.34 on their monthly bill starting in March. Please know that we did not take this decision lightly.

As a not-for-profit, member-owned cooperative, any additional margins we generate are returned to you. In fact, the last time we used the PCA, it was in 2021 and a negative number because we were returning money to members. However, the current environment has brought unprecedented challenges, and we are working to ensure we continue to serve you effectively.

The staff and I are here to serve you, our member-owners. Your feedback is vital to us, so if you have suggestions for improving our service, please don't hesitate to share them.

On behalf of my family and myself, thank you for the opportunity to lead this incredible team. Together, we will work to serve your best interests and continue building a stronger future for our cooperative.

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

Board of Directors

- Stan Anders – Vice President
- Jamie Lewis – Secretary
- Chuck Sloan – Treasurer
- Larry Eisenbraun
- Peter Blake
- Marcia Arneson
- Steven Edoff
- Sue Peters

CEO and General Manager:

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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.

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.

SCHOLARSHIPS

for the 2025-2026 school year NOW OPEN!



Scan Here for more information!

Deadline: January 29, 2025



More Information

605-393-1500
www.westriver.coop



"Powering You For A Brighter Future"

Statement of Non-discrimination

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ad-3027.pdf> and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

- (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
- (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or
- (3) email: Program.Intake@usda.gov

At West River Electric Association, the individual responsible for non-discrimination compliance is Liliya Stone, 605-279-2135 or hr@westriver.coop WREA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.



SOUP

Sensation

BROCCOLI CHEESE SOUP

Ingredients:

- 1 large pkg. frozen broccoli
- 1/4 cup water
- 3 tbsps. margarine
- 10 oz. package corn
- 1/4 cup chopped carrots
- 1/4 cup chopped onion
- 1/4 tsp. pepper

Cook the above and add
 3 cans cream of potato soup
 3 cups milk
 2 cups shredded Cheddar cheese
 1/2 cup shredded Monterey Jack cheese
 Stir until melted

LaVonne Schmidt
 Sioux Falls, S.D.

NORWEGIAN FRUIT SOUP

Ingredients:

- Bring 1/2 gallon water to a slow boil.
- Add 1 pkg. of sweetened dried cherries, banana chips, apricots, prunes, 2 apples (all cut into pieces)
(Optional to use any dried fruit you wish)
- 1/2 cup golden raisins
- 1/2 cup regular raisins
- 2 whole cloves
- 2 cinnamon sticks
- 1 cup sugar (you can use Splenda)

Method

Boil slowly for one hour add 3 tbsps. tapioca and a large pkg. of cherry jello.
 Refrigerate and serve with whip cream.

Kari Reder
 Warner, S.D.

CABBAGE SOUP

Ingredients:

- 1-2 tbsps. vegetable oil
- 1 pkg. (14 oz.) smoked sausage, sliced 1/4 in. thick
- 1 large yellow onion, chopped
- 1 tbsps. tomato paste
- 1 small green cabbage, cored and shredded (about 8 cups)
- 1 medium carrot, finely chopped
- 1 can (14 1/2 oz.) petite diced tomatoes
- 1 1/2 tsps. salt
- 1/2 tsp. garlic powder
- 1/2 tsp. ground black pepper
- 1/4 tsp. onion powder
- 1/8 tsp. crushed red pepper
- 4 cups chicken stock or broth
- 1 can (15 1/2 oz.) white beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 tbsps. white wine vinegar

Method

Heat oil and cook sausage, until browned. Remove from skillet. Add onion and tomato paste; cook and stir until onions are slightly softened and tomato paste has darkened. Add cabbage and carrots to stockpot. Cook, stirring frequently, about 30 minutes or until cabbage has softened and begins to caramelize. Stir in tomatoes, salt and spices. Cook 10 minutes longer or until cabbage is very soft. Return sausage to pot. Stir in stock and beans. Bring to boil. Reduce heat and simmer 10 minutes. Stir in vinegar. Serve hot, sprinkled with freshly grated Parmesan cheese, if desired.

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 2025. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

The Electric Grid and West River Electric



Amanda Haugen
Communications Specialist

The electric grid is a made up of three main parts: generation, transmission and distribution. Consider generation as the factory where electricity is made using various energy sources, like natural

gas, wind, solar and coal. 3559401

Once the electricity is generated, we need a transportation system to get the power from power plants to you. High-voltage transmission lines act as the highways for electricity, transporting power over long distances. These lines are supported by massive towers and travel long distances, connecting power plants to electric substations.

Substations are like pit stops along the highway, where the voltage of electricity is adjusted. They play a crucial role in managing power flow and ensuring that electricity is safe for use in homes and businesses.

Once the electricity is reduced to the proper voltage, it travels through distribution power lines, like the ones you typically see on the side of the road. Distribution lines carry electricity from substations to homes, schools and businesses. Distribution transformers, which look like metal buckets on the tops of power poles or large green boxes on the ground, further reduce the voltage to levels suitable for appliances and electronic devices. 3562200

After traveling through transformers, electricity reaches you—to power everyday life. From the time it’s created to the time it’s used, electricity travels great distances to be available at the flip of a switch. The costs of generating, transmitting, and distributing electricity, including fuel, equipment, and maintenance, directly impact electricity pricing and ensure reliable service. These factors are reflected in the Power Cost Adjustment (PCA).

What is the PCA?

West River Electric is a not-for-profit electric utility. We’re committed to delivering reliable, cost-effective power to our members. We purchase electricity each month from our power suppliers, Basin Electric and Western Area Power Association, at a wholesale cost to meet the needs of our members. The cost of wholesale power is a significant factor in providing electric service to the homes and businesses we serve.

The Power Cost Adjustment (PCA) helps balance changes in the cost of electricity. If the actual cost per kilowatt-hour that West River Electric pays to purchase power from our supplier is lower than the current cost set in your rates, the PCA will appear as a credit on your bill. If the cost per kilowatt-hour is higher than the current cost, the PCA will appear as an additional charge to cover the difference.

As Robert mentioned in his article, starting March 1, 2025, you will notice two changes on your monthly bill: 1) a \$3.00 base charge increase, and 2) a Power Cost

Adjustment (PCA) line item of \$0.0057 (a little over 1/2 a cent). The PCA provides a monthly adjustment dependent on any differences in the base cost of wholesale power from our power supplier. The \$3.00 increase to the base charge will help cover West River Electric’s rising localized costs, ensuring reliable service and ongoing maintenance for our members.

What impacts the PCA?

Changes in the price of goods and services needed for power generation and delivery, such as equipment, labor, and infrastructure maintenance, can drive fluctuations in wholesale power costs. Additionally, fuel expenses and operational costs can rise due to market conditions, further impacting power prices. Seasonal demand also plays a role, with higher electricity usage during extreme weather months, like summer and winter, often requiring the purchase of additional power from more expensive sources. To ensure reliability and meet these changing demands, our power supplier will also need to invest in new generation resources.

What is West River Electric doing to help?

We know times are tough as the cost of gasoline, groceries and other essential needs are rising. West River Electric is doing everything possible to keep internal costs down, but we can’t control rising fuel costs that are impacting the country.

West River Electric uses a diverse mix of fuel sources for electricity, which helps reduce costs. The 2024 portfolio is not out yet, but in 2023, our electricity was generated from coal (35.2%), natural gas (15.6%), hydro (3.9%) and wind (26%). This balanced fuel mix helps reduce dramatic fluctuations in generation costs.

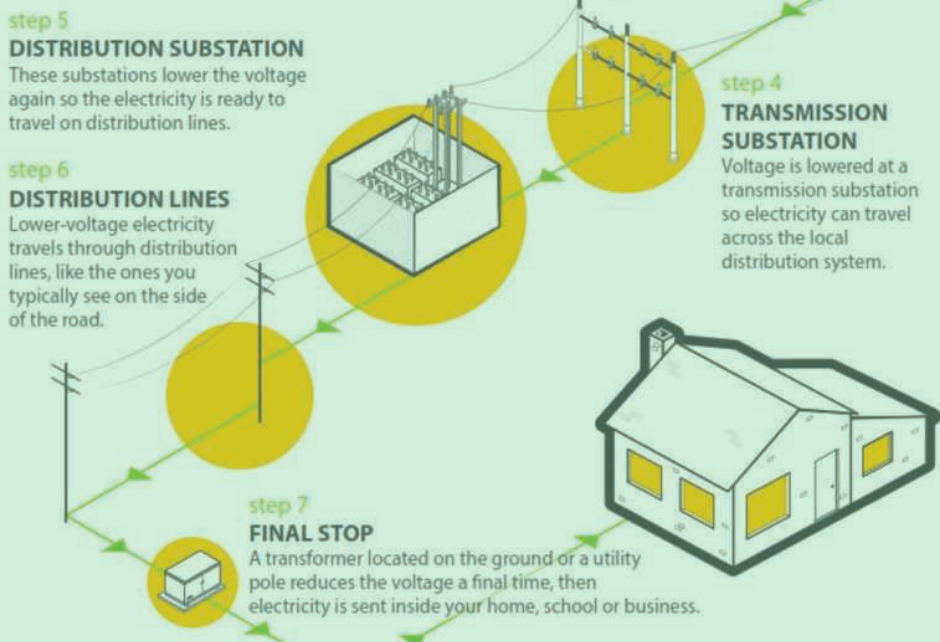
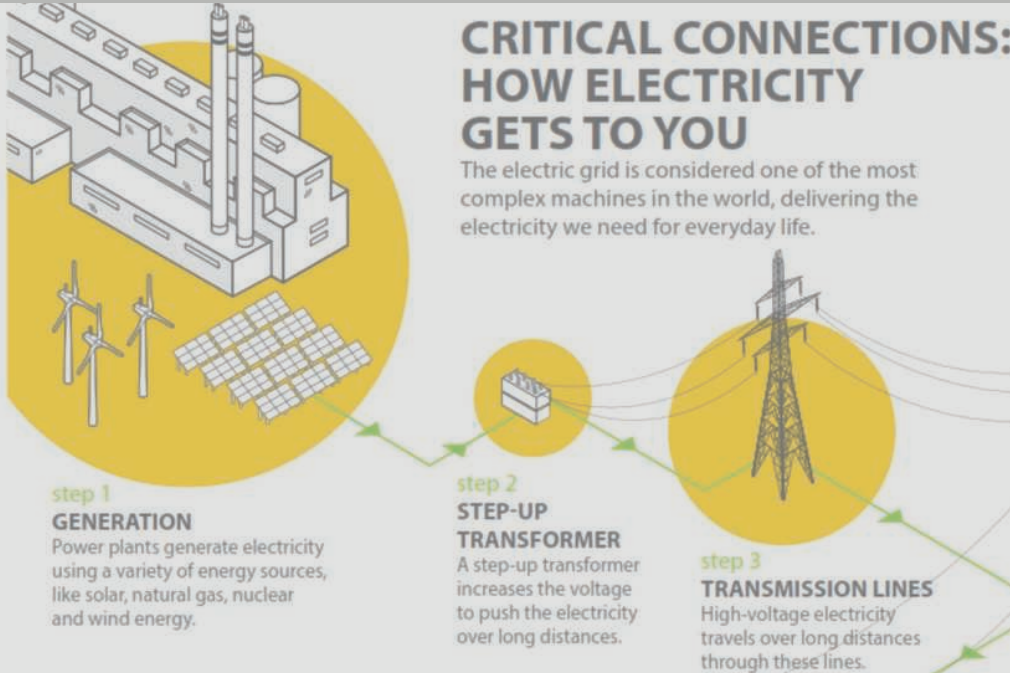
We also offer a variety of rebates and services to help members save on their energy bills. 3562600

We’re here to help. Contact us at 605-279-2135 or 605-393-1500 if you have questions about your bill or ways to save energy.



\$0.0057 PCA = WAPA & Basin

Basin's building more generation (primarily natural gas) and WAPA has to put money into the their aging infrastructure driving up costs.



\$3.00 Base Charge = WREA's Cost

We continue seeing our localized costs increasing. Things such as transformers, poles, wire, ect. To recover these costs we have to increase our base charge to continue investing into our system to ensure reliability.



Pulse of Life Kids Center in Vermillion, S.D.

BUILDING COMMUNITIES

REED Fund Helps Support Local Growth

Jacob Boyko

jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop

Small towns and rural communities are the backbone of electric cooperatives, with many co-op members relying on their small towns for shopping, childcare, entertainment and other basic needs and services.

That’s why co-ops are working to help keep – and expand – services and job opportunities in small towns using the co-ops’ Rural Electric Economic Development Fund, or REED.

REED is a non-profit organization launched by the electric cooperatives in 1996 to finance community-focused projects across small towns in South Dakota and Western Minnesota where affordable financing can be harder to secure.

REED has multiple sources of funding, but one of the main sources of funding over the years has been the United States Department of Agriculture. REED has utilized both the Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant Program (REDLG) and the Intermediary Relending Program (IRP), which together have amounted to more than \$30 million.

Through the REDLG program, REED

can fund eligible projects at a 0% interest rate. Through the IRP program, REED applies for low-interest loans and then re-lends the money at a rate slightly higher than the USDA rate – but still less than traditional lending sources. This adds money to the fund and perpetuates it for future projects.

Since the fund’s inception, it’s been used to support more than 400 community-focused projects.

East River Electric Business Development Director Mike Jaspers says it’s in co-ops’ best interests to make rural living just as feasible as living in a larger city.

“It comes back to our principle of commitment to community,” Jaspers explained. “REED ensures our membership has their vital needs met, and they can enjoy the amenities of life in a rural setting when they’d otherwise have to go to a larger city to access some of those services.”

Eric Fosheim, East River Electric’s economic development director in charge of the REED fund, said the \$130 million lent by REED has impacted more than 10,000 jobs and amounted to over \$1 billion of economic impact throughout

South Dakota and Western Minnesota.

“Our \$1 million investments help spur \$10 million projects, which means for every \$1 REED invests into a project, it roughly has a \$9 or \$10 impact,” he explained.

As a supplemental lender, REED won’t finance a project alone; organizations still must secure funding from other sources. However, REED’s low interest rates and community focus can be just what a project needs to catalyze it over the finish line.

As members of the REED fund, co-ops can impact economic development projects while letting REED take on the financial risk.

“The co-ops aren’t on the hook and aren’t guaranteeing the loans here,” Fosheim explained. “REED is doing that.”

Pulse of Life Kids Center – Vermillion, S.D.

Pastors Glenn and Angela Pulse had a vision and a calling. Pulse of Life Foursquare Church, which they hoped to start on Vermillion’s Main Street inside an old medical clinic, had the ability to serve a greater need in the community, where the wait lists for childcare sometimes exceeded three months. They had the faith — they just needed some resources.

The church council worked with First Bank & Trust to secure a loan to create the Pulse of Life Kids Center, but the bank couldn’t lend them the entire amount they needed.

“New daycare centers have a high rate

of failure, so we couldn't qualify for all of the money that we needed through bank loans," Angela explained. "Instead of saying no, the bank manager suggested we go about it in a different way. That's how the conversation about the REED fund came up."

Clay-Union Electric Manager Chris Larson said supporting the Pulses, who are members of the co-op, made sense for Vermillion, where challenges from workforce shortages and the lack of childcare options are prevalent.

"It fills a need in our community," Larson said.

Fosheim agrees.

"Workforce challenges have really been an issue in recent years and one way we try to help with that is by investing in daycares," he said. "Daycares don't always look that good on paper from a financial standpoint, so a lot of these organizations have a hard time getting adequate financing."

With the REED fund's \$245,000 loan, the Pulses' vision finally took shape and the Kids Center opened in 2023. Today, the center offers faith-based daycare with a capacity for 43 of the community's children.

"It's encouraging because it puts more options on the table to make these new things possible," Angela said. "There's no way we could have done this without the REED fund."

Fire Station – Garden City, S.D.

In Garden City, a small community northwest of Watertown, a dilapidated fire hall sat rotting into its own footprint.

"It was just in a state of disrepair," said Scott Campbell, treasurer at the Garden City Fire Department. "The walls were pushing out and we had to put plastic over the doors. It was cramped and old. The truck was parked over a basement area, and being heavy and full of water it caused some concern."

Options were narrowing; Garden City would have to act fast or lose their fire station and rely on surrounding communities during an emergency.

Codington-Clark Electric Director



Nursing home expansion in Philip, S.D.

Russel Foster, who also volunteers for the fire hall, approached his co-op's manager, Dave Eide, in 2022 about using REED to breathe new life into Garden City's fire hall.

Eide agreed and helped with the application process, championing the fire hall as a vital need for Garden City, the co-op and co-op members.

"Everybody needs fire protection," Eide explained.

Through REED, the fire hall secured a \$230,000 loan. The new hall features a community room, which Scott said filled a desperate need.

"We had no place to vote, no place for birthday parties," Campbell said. "Township meetings were in houses at kitchen tables."

For Eide, the REED fund is just another example of what co-ops are supposed to do – serve communities.

"It's an extension of what co-ops are in the first place," he said. "We sell power to members and that's one way we help and serve our communities. The REED fund is just another extension of that."

Elder Care – Philip, S.D.

In rural Philip, limited options for elder care had some long-time locals facing tough decisions.

"Our nursing home for a lot of years was not big enough," said Cindy Pfeifle, business manager at Philip Health Services. "Members of our community were having to leave the area when they needed nursing home care."

After applying for a REED loan in 2022 through West Central Electric and securing funding from other community sources, Philip Health Systems renovated and expanded the nursing home, increasing occupancy from 30 beds to 42 beds.

West Central Electric CEO Jeff Birkeland said access to the REED fund is essential for rural areas without much population growth.

"We need to keep our people from moving away and keep our businesses local," Birkeland said. "The best way to do that is by giving them access to very low-interest financing. Saving hundreds of thousands of dollars in interest costs makes projects much more feasible."

Pfeifle says the community support was essential to initiate the project and applauds REED for helping bring opportunities back to small towns.

"It sends a message of support and cooperation and that they understand how important it is to keep services in rural areas for people who live here," Pfeifle said.

The nursing home project was the first in West Central Electric's territory to use the REED fund, but Birkeland hopes many more projects are to come.

"We are a cooperative, so job number one is to take care of our members and do everything we can to help our communities," Birkeland continued. "If somebody comes to you or you see a need in our communities, we're all in."

Understanding Factors That Impact Your Energy Bills



Adam Daigle
Manager of
Marketing and
Communication

February brings some of the coldest weather of the year, and as our home heating systems work harder and longer to keep us warm, we typically see higher energy bills.

There are a few key factors that affect electricity prices, as well as a few ways you

can make a meaningful impact on home energy savings.

When you receive your monthly bill from West River Electric, you're provided with a summary of how much electricity you used during the billing cycle. You can even see how electricity use may have spiked on days when you used more electricity, such as a particularly chilly day or when relatives were staying with you in smart hub.

But you might be surprised to learn that beyond your monthly energy consumption, there are external factors that can impact the cost of electricity.

Power Supply Cost Factors

West River Electric purchases electricity from our power generation partners, Basin Electric and Western Area Power Association, at a wholesale cost, which we then deliver to our local communities. The cost of generating and transmitting electricity from our generation partner accounts for 52% of the cost to provide electric service to local homes and businesses. The prices of materials and services required for power generation and distribution, such as equipment, labor, infrastructure maintenance, and fuel sources like natural gas and coal, can fluctuate based on market conditions, supply chain factors, and demand. While these variations can influence the overall cost of electricity, we work closely with Rushmore Electric Power Cooperative to plan strategically and help stabilize electricity prices for our members.

Extreme Weather

While we can't control the weather, we can review weather patterns and forecasts to prepare for times of extreme cold or heat, when we know the demand for electricity will increase. But when temperatures become extremely cold and the demand for electricity spikes, the price of electricity can also increase. 3879500

West River Electric Infrastructure and Equipment

To cover the costs associated with providing electricity to your home or business, West River Electric members pay a monthly service charge. This flat monthly fee ensures the cost of equipment, materials, labor and daily operations are covered for all members in West River Electric's service territory. To ensure the reliable service you expect and deserve, we must maintain the local grid, including power lines, substations and other essential equipment.

Energy Policy and Regulations

Federal energy policies and regulations can have a profound impact on electricity costs. As energy generation shifts to the use of more renewable sources and stricter regulations for traditional, always-available fuel sources, such as natural gas and coal plants, costly upgrades and technologies must be constructed and deployed. These additional costs are ultimately passed to members.

U.S. power consumption is expected to double by 2050. Across the country, electric cooperatives are working with members of Congress to advocate for smart energy policies that reliably power our local communities.

You Have Control

While many of these external factors that impact electricity costs are out of our control, we all have the power to manage our energy use at home. The most effective way to lower use is thermostat management. Since heating and cooling account for 30% of home energy use, adjusting the thermostat to the lowest comfortable setting can help you save energy

and money. Remember to service your heating and cooling system annually and replace dirty filters monthly.

You can also help reduce energy use by participating in our demand response program. Allowing West River Electric to manage energy load by controlling your water heater and air conditioner during peak times, we can shift usage to off-peak hours, helping lower overall energy costs. Additionally, sealing air leaks around windows, doors, and other potential gaps can reduce energy waste, making your heating and cooling systems work more efficiently while improving the overall comfort of your home. 38791100

West River Electric is your local energy partner, and we're here to help. Visit www.westriver.coop to learn about our efficiency programs designed to help you save. As always, we will continue working diligently to provide you with reliable power at an affordable cost.

EFFECTIVE WAYS To Lower Home Energy Use

Outside factors, such as fuel and equipment costs and extreme weather, can impact electricity prices. But you have the power to control home energy consumption by taking proactive steps to reduce energy use.



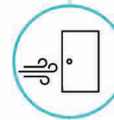
Thermostat Management

The thermostat is one of the best places to lower your energy use because heating and cooling account for a significant portion of home energy consumption. During winter months, adjust your thermostat to the lowest comfortable setting to reduce energy use. The Dept. of Energy recommends 68 degrees or lower.



Utilize Off-Peak Energy Times

Plan energy-intensive chores and tasks, such as running the dishwasher or washing clothing, during off-peak energy hours, when the demand for electricity is lower. Off-peak times are early in the morning or late evenings. By scheduling these activities during off-peak periods, you can help keep rates lower, reduce demand and relieve pressure on the grid.



Seal Your Home

According to ENERGY STAR®, about 20% of heated or cooled air that moves through a home is lost due to lack of proper insulation and air leaks. Ensure your home has sufficient insulation levels and seal air leaks around windows and doors with caulk and weatherstripping. This is a simple, effective way to lower energy use and improve indoor comfort.



Maintain Equipment

The health of your heating and cooling system is essential for comfort and can greatly impact energy bills. Maintain your system by regularly replacing dirty filters and scheduling annual inspections for maintenance and necessary repairs.

Wrapped in Savings



Jared Stalley
Marketing Rep

Ensuring your home is properly insulated can improve energy efficiency and make your home more comfortable. Insulation acts like a cozy coat that reduces heat loss

during winter months and a protective layer that reduces heat gain during summer months.

Many older homes have less insulation than newer homes, but even newer homes can benefit from additional insulation. While it's not the least expensive efficiency improvement, adding insulation and air sealing your home can provide energy savings and overall comfort.

The most common areas to insulate are attics, ceilings, crawlspaces or unconditioned basements, exterior and interior walls and floors.

Websites like The Department of Energy or Home Depot provide easy-to-follow recommendations. Visit energy.gov/insulation to learn about recommended R-values for specific areas of the home based on climate zones.

It's important to understand how insulation effectiveness is measured. Insulation is rated in R-value, which measures the material's resistance to conductive heat flow. The higher the R-value, the greater the insulating effectiveness. The R-value you'll need depends on factors like climate, type of heating and cooling system and which area of the home you plan to insulate.

Insulation is offered in a wide



range of materials from bulky fiberglass rolls to cellulose materials made from recycled paper products. If you're considering installing additional insulation, talk to an expert who can offer guidance on the right materials

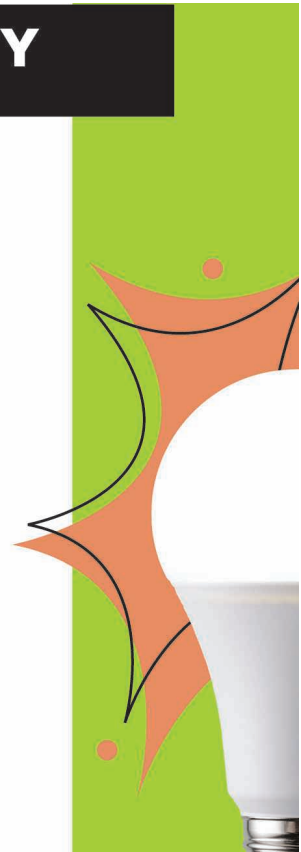
for your budget, climate and comfort needs.

Investing in proper insulation for your home not only enhances comfort but also reduces energy consumption.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP OF THE MONTH

If you have a home office, look for opportunities to save energy in your workspace. Use ENERGY STAR®-rated equipment, which consumes up to 50% less energy than standard models. Set equipment like printers and scanners to automatically switch to sleep or energy-saver mode when not in use. In addition to saving energy, the equipment will stay cooler, which will help extend its life. Another way to save energy in your home office is to use efficient lamps for task lighting. Replace any older bulbs with energy-saving LEDs.

Source: energy.gov





The Waxdahl's solar array and hog farm, east of Flandreau. *Submitted Photo*

DISTRIBUTED ENERGY

Understanding the Impact of DERs to the Electrical Grid

Frank Turner

frank.turner@sdrea.coop

Farming has always been a way of life for fourth-generation producers Matt Waxdahl and his brother, Ben. Growing up just outside of Flandreau, the brothers spent their childhood lending a hand on their grandfather's and father's farms.

Over time, Matt and Ben started their own operation. As the market evolved, so did the brothers. In 2009, they expanded into hog farming, building their first barn. Their success led to the addition of two more barns, the most recent constructed in 2022.

According to Matt, raising hogs comes with one major benefit: temperature-controlled barns.

"It's all under one roof, and it doesn't matter if it's 100 degrees outside or -20, it's always T-shirt weather," said Matt.

However, keeping their hogs on a permanent tropical vacation requires a significant amount of energy. During the summers, industrial fans and a stout ventilation system keep the barn cool, while powerful heaters maintain a comfortable environment in the biting South Dakota winters.

Two years ago, the brothers tackled this energy-intensive challenge by installing a 30-kW solar array. With guidance from Sioux Valley Energy, their local electric cooperative, they determined the project would financially benefit their operation due to availability of tax credits and grant funding.

"We saw that the majority of our power usage was always during the day," Matt explained. "We did some number crunching, and it penciled out."

Distributed Energy Resources

The Waxdahl brothers' decision to invest in a solar array reflects how farmers and ranchers across the state are utilizing Distributed Energy Resources (DERs) like solar panels and on-site wind turbines. While some producers use solar panels to power remote water pumps, others invest in larger systems like solar arrays to offset the energy demands of their farms.

According to Ben Pierson, energy services manager at East River Electric, DERs are not common across the state. However, Pierson noted there are situations where DERs make sense: in remote areas where connecting to the electrical grid is too costly, for businesses or individuals looking to leverage tax credits and grant funds, and

for individuals who want to produce their own energy as a personal or environmental choice.

“The most successful applications of DERs that I’ve seen have been for agricultural operations like hog and dairy farms, where the producer has been able to secure both grant funding and tax incentives,” said Pierson. “It makes sense economically because they are using most their energy during the day when solar is producing.”

Even in the best-case scenarios, DERs still face challenges. Without existing tax breaks and grant funds, the energy savings from Waxdahls’ solar array would not have justified the expense. “It wouldn’t be economically efficient at all without the tax credits and grant funding,” Matt said.

The array has also not been as efficient as the Waxdahls had hoped. While the panel installers projected a return on investment within seven to 10 years, the reality after two years of operation suggests it may take closer to 12 to 15 years for the panels to pay for themselves.

Despite the challenges, Matt considers his solar array a successful addition to his hog operation. “If I had another barn the same size, I would make the same decision to add a solar array,” he said.

The Electrical Grid

While DERs offer renewable energy options at the local level, South Dakota’s electrical grid already incorporates significant contributions from renewable energy sources at a wholesale price.

In fact, Basin Electric Power Cooperative, a generation and transmission cooperative serving South Dakota’s electric cooperatives, began purchasing energy from the Wild Springs Solar Project in 2024. Located near New Underwood, the 128-megawatt facility is the largest solar farm in the state. Basin Electric is set to purchase 114 megawatts of the project’s output, marking its first step into utility-scale solar generation.

The benefits of this project are already underway, said Pierson.

“Building a large-scale solar array is much more economically feasible than

a smaller-scale solar array,” said Pierson. “It lets us implement renewable energy into the portfolio in a cost-effective way.”

According to Pierson, power providers are continually working to implement renewable energy where it makes sense while providing reliable energy at an affordable price.

Connecting to the Grid

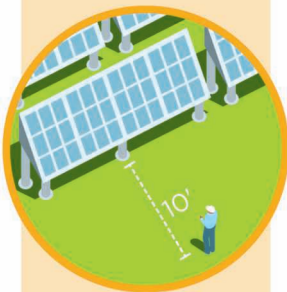
When considering the addition of DERs such as solar panels or an on-site wind turbine, Pierson encouraged members to contact their local electric cooperative to ensure the system is properly sized and safely connected.

When implementing a DER, there are often safety requirements in place to protect both the DER owner and the grid operators.

“Especially if you are talking to a third-party vendor, please reach out to your local utility to discuss the pros and cons – and realities – of implementing DERs,” said Pierson. “Utilities can offer unbiased information regarding the expected output and proper sizing of a DER.”

SAFETY NEAR SOLAR

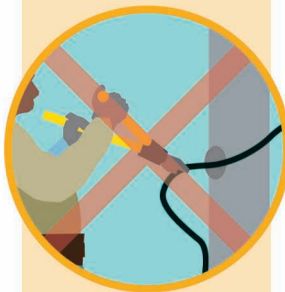
Like any other source of electricity, solar panels can pose potential hazards. Keep these safety tips in mind when you’re near solar panels.



Stay at least 10 feet away from the installation.



Never walk on solar panels.



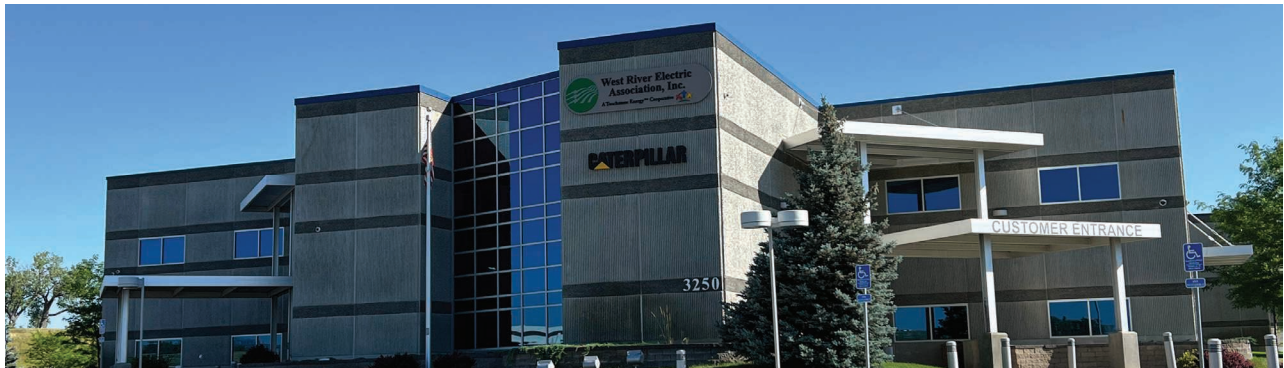
Never cut any wiring to the solar panels.



Never touch broken or damaged solar panels.

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

SHINING THE LIGHT ON WEST RIVER ELECTRICS DEDICATED EMPLOYEES



CAMERON PRICE
JOURNEYMAN
LINEMAN

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN WORKING WITH WEST RIVER ELECTRIC?

I have been with West River Electric for 5.5 years.

WHAT DOES YOUR JOB ENTAIL?

My job as a journeyman lineman is to keep the lights on for our members at the end of the line. I help build, maintain and repair the powerlines.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT WEST RIVER ELECTRIC?

What I enjoy most about West River Electric is the comradery between all the employees.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE MEMORY SINCE STARTING WORK AT WEST RIVER ELECTRIC? There are so many to choose from that every day ends up

being a new favorite for me.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE WEST RIVER ELECTRIC IN THREE WORDS?

Power, delivery, cooperative.

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

Working with great people and being able to support my family.



CHRISTINE RITTER
MARKETING
REPRESENTATIVE

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN WORKING WITH WEST RIVER ELECTRIC?

I have been with West River Electric for 16 years.

WHAT DOES YOUR JOB ENTAIL?

I get to do so many things! In the office I help with regular Marketing duties such as billing calls, water heaters, heat meters & rebates. I also help coordinate with outside groups using the Community Room for meetings. I work on the event side of things such as Member Appreciation Day, Tailgating, Mixers & gatherings. We are also able to host various meetings & trainings in our office so I help make arrangements and work to make everything as seamless and easy as possible. I help with Operation Round Up, scholarships, donations & sponsorships. I am the gal receiving the applications & helping to distribute funds.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT WEST RIVER ELECTRIC?

I love the family feel here. When you are part of a co-op, it's pretty special. Many of us are also members- so we really do understand serving our members and work hard to go above & beyond to meet needs. I also love getting out and getting to meet with our members. Whether we are serving burgers, helping with a cleanup, or at a booth—it gives us a chance to really get know our membership and find ways to help connect in our community.

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

I don't have a specific one, as mine comes during our big events. When we are in the heart of the busy events like the Annual Meeting or Member Appreciation Day, I like to step back for a minute & watch all my co-workers. Those days have a lot going on and everyone comes together and make it work. I know that I ask a lot from everyone, and they just get it done. Getting 3 offices together doesn't happen often, but when it does, it sure is fun!

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE WEST RIVER ELECTRIC IN THREE WORDS?

Hardworking, Community Oriented

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

My team! I have the best group that I get to work with everyday.



Operation Roundup is a voluntary program that does just what the name implies. Each month we "round up" the electric bills of participating consumers to the next highest dollar. For example, a consumer's monthly bill of \$37.75 would automatically be rounded up to \$38.00, with the additional 25 cents going to the Operation Roundup fund. Donations are tax deductible, and consumers are sent a summary of yearly contributions each January.

Where Does the Money Go?

All Operation Roundup donations are placed in a trust that is administered by an independent Board of Directors. This Board of Directors is made up of community leaders who serve on the Board on a voluntary basis. They are responsible in receiving the funds, evaluate all requests for funds, and decide how to distribute the funds.

How is the Money Used?

The funds will be available to help any charitable projects for organizations, groups, families, or individuals within the service territory of West River Electric. No funds shall in any way be used to support any candidate for political office or for any political purpose.



Applications are open! Scan the QR code to submit an application.



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.

REGISTER TO WIN!

Bring this coupon and mailing label to the Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives booth at Black Hills Stock Show & Rodeo to win a Blackstone electric grill!

Your Phone Number: _____

Your E-mail Address: _____



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

FEB. 1
James River Gobblers Wild Turkey Banquet
5 p.m.
Highland Conference Center
Mitchell, SD
605-999-3208

FEB. 8
Polar Bear Chili Cook-Off
11 a.m.-2 p.m.
Main Street
Hill City, SD

FEB. 8
ALL Ability Skate Day
Disability Awareness & Accessibility Committee
1-3 p.m.
Main Street Square
Rapid City, SD
605-390-4434

FEB. 14-17
11th Annual Frost Fest
9 a.m.-3 p.m.
Brookings, SD
605-692-7444

FEB. 15
Sioux Empire On Tap
Sioux Falls Convention Center
Tickets available online
www.siouxempireontap.com

FEB. 21-22
Women in Blue Jeans Conference
Highland Conference Center
Mitchell, SD
www.womeninbluejeans.org

FEB. 22
Knights of Columbus Ice Fishing Derby
Waubay Lake
Registration 9-10 a.m.
605-881-5075

FEB. 22
Bellator Titans Charter Casino Night Fundraiser
6-11 p.m.
316 2nd St.
Aberdeen, SD

FEB. 28-MARCH 1
Mardi Gras Weekend
8 p.m. Fri.-10 p.m. Sat.
Main Street
Deadwood, SD
605-578-1876

MARCH 8-9
Philip Area Gun Show
Sat. 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
Sun. 9 a.m.-3 p.m.
American Legion Hall
Philip, SD
605-859-2135

MARCH 14-15
Badlands Quilter Weekend
Fri. 5 p.m.
Sat. 8 a.m.
Community Center
Wall, SD
605-685-5718

MARCH 21
East Dakota Chapter National Wild Turkey Federation 32nd Banquet
Ramkota Grand Rushmore Room
Sioux Falls, SD
605-940-0702

APRIL 4-5
Annual Schmeckfest
German Heritage Celebration
748 S Main St
Freeman, SD
605-925-4237

APRIL 11-12
Junkin' Market Days Spring Market
Fri. 4-7 p.m.
Sat. 9 a.m.-4 p.m.
\$5 Admission
W.H. Lyon Fairgrounds
Sioux Falls, SD
www.junkinmarketdays.com

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