

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



(left to right) Rosebud Electric Directors Dennis Purvis and Boyt Young and Butte Electric CEO Matt Sleep serve a homemade meal to legislators, state employees and Capitol visitors in South Dakota State Capitol.

Photo by Jacob Boyko

Co-ops at the Capitol

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A Very Merry Christmas & a Bright New Year at West River Electric



Robert Raker
CEO/GM

As 2025 wraps up and that family photograph session is behind everyone, I want to take a moment to look back—with gratitude—and ahead—with purpose.

We are deep into setting up next year's budget, and if you've ever tried to gift wrap a basketball, you understand the process. A lot of tape, a few deep breaths, and eventually something presentable emerges. Humor aside, this year's budget is serious business: it positions us to maintain safe crews, high reliability, and rates with stability at a time when the entire energy industry is facing higher material costs, supply-chain delays, and shifting/raising power markets.

Our board and staff have been laser-focused on building a budget that protects the long game—your cooperative's future—while managing the near-term pressures every utility is feeling. We're tightening where it makes sense, investing where it matters, and making sure we're not passing short-term problems on to long-term members.

Looking Back

Even with all the changes sweeping the power industry, our foundation remains the same: we are here to serve our members' best interest. This last year we invested in our crews to maintain a safety culture, and our system to provide you with safe, reliable, affordable electricity. But make no mistake, there are also things beyond our control, and it's important our members understand that.

That was highlighted to many on November 13th where most of Rapid City was without power. However, West River Electric stayed on—as much as I wish I could say it was because of a strategic investment we made locally—it was because we sit on the Eastern Interconnection, while that outage occurred on the Western Interconnection.

Most people don't realize the U.S. essentially has two giant electric grids: East and West. The dividing line—or “seam”—is roughly along Campbell Street in Rapid City. In other words, the two grids operate completely independently, and there are only a handful of locations in the entire country that allows power to move from one grid to the other. Now, are there things we can do to avoid this? Trust that whether we can have much

impact or not we still debrief the issue and see what we can control.

I share this because it highlights a simple truth:

No matter how much we invest locally, some events on the national grid are out of our hands, and that situation highlighted that. Regardless, I feel more comfortable with the direction shift we saw in 2025 regarding our national energy policy. Moreover, I feel more comfortable when we can make local decisions—amid all the noise around power supply, renewables, rising costs, and policy debates—the Co-op model remains our strength. Your board lives here. Your employees live here. And we remain committed to our communities, you and your neighbors. 12376600

That's a gift that lasts much longer than anything under the tree.

Looking Toward 2026

This coming year, we'll be taking on several major efforts that shape the long-term direction of your cooperative.

First, we begin one of the largest and most important projects any cooperative undertakes: **submitting our next 4-year Work Plan to the Rural Utilities Service (RUS)**. This plan is our blueprint for meeting the needs of a growing service area and ensuring our system is built for the future—not just the present.

Our last Work Plan, submitted in 2023, totaled roughly \$45 million in system improvements. Growth hasn't slowed since then, and material prices certainly haven't either. It's fair to expect that this next Work Plan will come close to, and likely exceed, that investment.

The Work Plan will outline:

- **Future substations, line rebuilds, and system upgrades** in Rapid City, Box Elder, and our rural communities.
- **Grid-hardening measures** to address wildfire risk, extreme weather, and evolving reliability standards.
- The un-glamorous but essential backbone of the system—**poles, wire, transformers, and undergrounding**—that keeps your lights on 24/7/365.

Our area continues to experience strong

residential and commercial growth, and this Work Plan helps ensure we stay ahead of that growth—not chasing it. 12182900

Second, we will undertake another **strategic planning session**. This gives us the opportunity to reassess our goals, refine our priorities, and set a clear roadmap for where we want to be in the coming years. Strategic planning is how we make sure day-to-day decisions are aligned with a long-term vision.

Third, we will conduct a **Cost of Service Study**. This work helps us evaluate how much it truly costs to serve each rate class and ensures that, over the long term, the cost causers are the cost payers. It's a critical step in maintaining fairness, transparency, and rate stability for all members.

Gratitude for a Year of Progress

To our employees: thank you for the long hours, the early mornings, the storm calls, and the professionalism you bring to our members every single day.

To our board: thank you for your leadership, your trust, and your commitment to doing what's right—not what's easy.

And to you, our members: thank you for being the reason we exist. Your support for your cooperative—whether during outages, construction, or rate discussions—drives everything we do.

Finally, from my family to yours, I wish you a very Merry Christmas, a safe holiday season, and a New Year filled with health, joy, and hope.

Robert Raker | CEO



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
- Taran Eisenbraun
- Peter Blake
- Jason Habrock
- Steven Edoff
- Sue Peters

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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.

Tree Trimming Safety

Trees are majestic, beautiful and good for the soul. But we also know that our members depend on us to deliver reliable power to their homes and businesses. South Dakota's electric cooperatives strive to balance maintaining the beautiful surroundings we all cherish with ensuring reliable electricity. You might not realize it, but there are several benefits to regular tree trimming.

Keeping power lines clear of overgrown vegetation improves service reliability. After all, we've seen the whims of Mother Nature during severe weather events with fallen tree limbs taking down power lines and utility poles. While many factors can impact power disruptions, about half of all outages nationally can be attributed to overgrown vegetation.

Overgrown vegetation and trees also pose a risk to power lines. For example, if trees are touching power lines in our members' yards, they can pose grave danger to families. If children can access those trees, they can potentially climb into a danger zone. Electricity can arc, or jump, from a power line to a nearby conductor like a tree. A proactive approach also diminishes the chances of fallen branches or trees during severe weather events that make it more complicated and dangerous for line workers to restore power.

If trees and other vegetation are left unchecked, they can be-

come overgrown and expensive to correct. A strategic vegetation management program helps keep costs down for everyone.

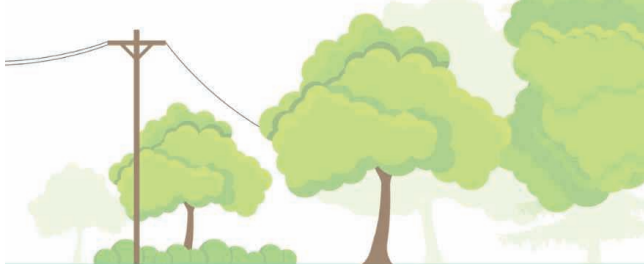
When it comes to vegetation management, there are ways you can help too. When planting new trees, make sure they're planted a safe distance from overhead power lines. Medium-height trees (40 ft. or smaller) should be planted at least 25 ft. from power lines. Taller trees (over 40 ft.) should be planted at least 50 ft. from power lines. You can also practice safe planting near pad-mounted transformers. Plant shrubs at least 10 ft. from the transformer door and 4 ft. from the sides. If your neighborhood has underground lines, remember to contact 811 before you begin any project that requires digging.

Additionally, if you spot an overgrown tree or branch that's dangerously close to overhead lines, please contact your local electric cooperative.

We have deep roots in our community, and we love our beautiful surroundings. It takes a balanced approach, and our vegetation management program is a crucial tool in ensuring service reliability.

BENEFITS OF TREE TRIMMING

- ✓ Improves service reliability
- ✓ Speeds up restoration time
- ✓ Keeps crews & communities safe



"Watch for overhead power lines."

Jacob Ymker, Age 10

Jacob reminds readers to watch out for overhead power lines. Great job, Jacob! Jacob's parents are Mark and Marion Ymker from Armour, 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.

Heart-Warming DESSERTS

Picture by Elena Veselova from Shutterstock

APPLE BREAD

Ingredients:

1/2 cup brown sugar
1 1/2 tsps. cinnamon
Mix in small dish & set aside.

2 eggs (room temperature)
1/2 cup sugar
1 tsp. vanilla
1/2 cup melted butter or margarine

Mix together in a bowl and add:

1 1/2 cups flour
1 tsp. baking powder
1/2 tsp. baking soda
2 cups chopped apples

Method

Pour 1/2 of the batter into a greased and floured bread pan. Sprinkle 1/2 of the cinnamon and sugar mixture over it. Add remaining batter and top with remaining cinnamon sugar mixture.

Bake at 350° for 45-60 minutes.

Grace Klein
Sioux Valley Energy

PUMPKIN CHEESECAKE DESSERT

Ingredients:

1 cup heavy whipped cream
8 oz. cream cheese, whipped
1/3 cup sugar
1/2 cup brown sugar
1 can pumpkin puree
1 tbsp. pumpkin pie spice
1 tsp. vanilla
1 pkg. cheesecake pudding mix

Method

Beat 1 cup heavy whipped cream and set aside.

In a separate bowl, mix and beat the cream cheese, sugar, brown sugar, pumpkin puree, pumpkin pie spice, vanilla, and cheesecake pudding mix.

Fold the whip cream into this mixture and spread in a graham cracker crust

Refrigerate two hours before serving plus add a spray of whip cream and sprinkle cinnamon on top.

(Optional) add chopped pecans or walnuts.

Susan Forma
Union County Electric

CHERRY COCONUT BARS

Ingredients:

Crust

1 cup flour, sifted
1/2 cup butter
3 tbsps. powdered sugar

Mixture

2 eggs, slightly beaten
1 cup sugar
1/2 tsp. baking powder
1/4 cup flour
1/4 tsp. salt
1 tsp. vanilla
3/4 cup chopped nuts
1/2 cup coconut
1/2 cup red maraschino cherries, quartered

Method

Mix together flour, butter and powdered sugar. Spread in 8" square pan. Bake at 350° for 20-25 minutes or until it is a delicate brown.

In a bowl, mix in the remaining ingredients in the order given: eggs, sugar, baking powder, flour, salt, vanilla, chopped nuts, coconut, maraschino cherries.

Spread this mixture over the crust and bake again for 25-30 minutes. cool and cut into squares.

Barbara Anderson
Lake Region Electric

Please send your favorite recipes to your local electric cooperative (address found on Page 3). Each recipe printed will be entered into a drawing for a prize in December 2025. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

Working Together to Lower Demand



Amanda Haugen
Communications
Specialist

When outdoor temperatures drop, electricity use naturally rises. Colder weather drives us indoors, where we rely more heavily on home heating systems, more lighting and household

appliances. Heating systems run longer and more frequently to maintain comfortable indoor temperatures. Combine that with the fact that most people use electricity at the same times—typically in the mornings and early evenings—and the result is significant pressure on our electric grid.

West River Electric works closely with Rushmore Power Cooperative, our local generation and transmission (G&T) cooperative, to plan for these seasonal weather patterns and changes and ensure you have reliable power every day of the year. This partnership involves detailed resource and infrastructure planning to make certain electricity is available whenever you need it. However, it's important to remember that our local system is part of a much larger regional and national electric grid.

During the winter months, when homes and businesses across the country are using more electricity simultaneously, overall demand can approach—or occasionally exceed—available supply. This is especially true during severe weather events, such as ice storms, sudden temperature drops or equipment malfunctions that reduce generation capacity. In rare cases when demand threatens to outpace supply, the regional grid operator may call for temporary, controlled outages—often referred to as rolling blackouts—to prevent broader system failures. If such a situation arises,

West River Electric will provide timely updates and information to members.

To prepare for these scenarios and minimize risks, WREA and Rushmore will take proactive measures to strengthen reliability year-round. These include routine system maintenance, investments in grid modernization, and comprehensive disaster response planning. These proactive steps are designed to ensure our portion of the grid remains resilient even under extreme conditions. Yet, maintaining a reliable electric system requires a collective effort—and every member plays an important role in lowering demand when the grid is under stress. 12108000

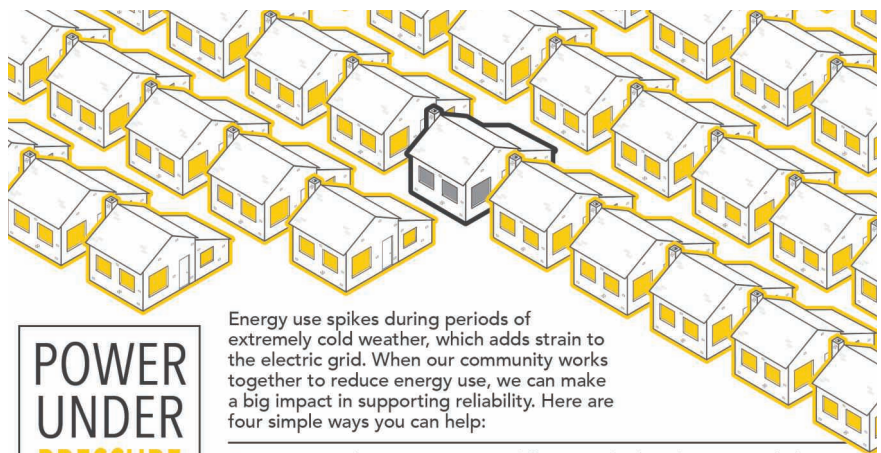
You can help by taking simple actions during periods of high electricity use, especially on the coldest days of winter:

1. Lower your thermostat slightly. Even reducing the temperature by a few degrees can help.
2. Delay using large appliances during peak hours, which are 5am – 9am and 5pm - 9pm. Run dishwashers, washing

machines and dryers during off-peak hours—typically midday or late evening.

3. Adjust your water heater. Setting it to 120 degrees F and spacing out showers helps conserve both energy and hot water.
4. Unplug unnecessary devices. Power used for lighting and electronics adds up and accounts for a significant portion of home energy use. Disconnect unused items to reduce energy waste.

Understanding how winter weather impacts electricity demand is key to maintaining system reliability. By practicing simple energy conservation habits at home, you not only save money on your monthly bill—you also help strengthen the resilience of the grid that powers our community. Together, through small actions and shared awareness, we can ensure that our homes remain warm, our lights stay on and our local grid continues to serve us reliably throughout the season.



POWER UNDER PRESSURE
Four Ways to Ease Grid Strain This Winter

Energy use spikes during periods of extremely cold weather, which adds strain to the electric grid. When our community works together to reduce energy use, we can make a big impact in supporting reliability. Here are four simple ways you can help:

1. Lower your thermostat. Even a difference of a few degrees can help.
2. Delay using large appliances. Run them in the evenings or midday when demand is lower.
3. Lower your water heater to 120 degrees and avoid back-to-back showers.
4. Unplug unnecessary devices. Electronics and lighting add up. Unplug any unused items.

Understanding Your Electric Rates: A Look Behind the Scenes



Amanda Haugen
Communications
Specialist

At West River Electric, we know rate increases are never easy. We don't like them any more than you do, and we take every decision seriously when we face rising cost pressures. As prices continue to shift nationwide, we want to provide clarity, transparency, and a look behind the scenes at what's driving these changes—and how your cooperative is working to keep your power reliable and affordable.

To help explain the factors influencing your electric bill, it's helpful to understand the three key stages of how electricity is produced and delivered. You experience only the final stage when power reaches your home or business, but the process begins long before it gets to your meter.

Tier 3: Generation

This is where electricity is created—whether from coal, wind, natural gas, solar, or hydropower. West River Electric receives power from Basin Electric Power Cooperative and the Western Area Power Administration (WAPA), which generates hydropower from dams along the Missouri River. As national

demand grows and infrastructure ages, the cost of building, operating, and maintaining generation resources continues to rise. These increasing wholesale power costs account for a significant portion of the rate pressures we're seeing today.

Tier 2: Transmission

Once electricity is generated, it travels long distances through high-voltage transmission lines to substations where the voltage is then reduced. These lines are what you would see crossing the fields and greater landscape. This system is designed with redundancy so power can be rerouted when needed, improving reliability for everyone. Transmission infrastructure requires constant investment to keep pace with demand and reliability expectations, and these costs also contribute to upward pressure on power supply rates.

Tier 1: Distribution

This is where West River Electric steps in. After electricity reaches the substation, it flows through our distribution lines—the poles and wires you see along roads. Before arriving at your home, business, or school, electricity passes through a transformer, typically the green box you may see in your yard, where voltage is lowered one final time.

Both transmission and generation make up about half of your electric bill. Our nation needs more of both of these, which contributes to one factor that is driving up power supply costs and putting pressure on your electric rates.

The remaining portion of your bill is divided among several essential areas that keep your cooperative operating safely and reliably. As we mentioned above, about 52 cents of every dollar you pay goes toward power supply costs. Another 22 cents covers costs we cannot control, such as taxes, interest, and depreciation. The final 26 cents funds the work we can directly manage—maintenance, infrastructure upgrades, system improvements, and reliability planning. Unlike investor-owned utilities, every dollar we receive is reinvested back into the co-op—not passed on to shareholders.

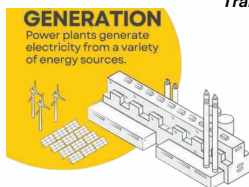
We expect to receive final 2026 wholesale cost information from Basin Electric soon, which will help us determine next year's rates. As always, we will remain transparent and continue to communicate updates as they become available. 11715400

Thank you for your trust, your understanding, and for taking the time to learn about your cooperative. Together, we will continue powering our communities forward.

Tier 3

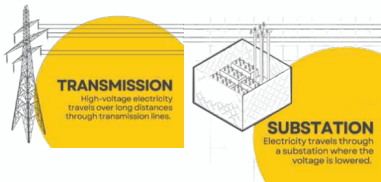
Generation of Power

- Coal
- Wind
- Natural Gas
- Solar



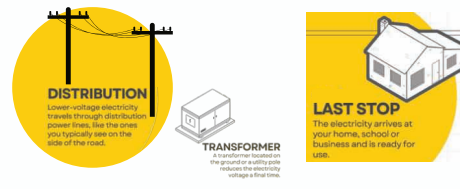
Tier 2

Transmission



Tier 1

Distribution





The South Dakota State Capitol
in Pierre, S.D.
Photo by Frank Turner

CO-OPS AT THE CAPITOL EVERY VOICE COUNTS

Frank Turner

frank.turner@sdrea.coop

Electric cooperatives carry a wide range of responsibilities to the members they serve. Beyond keeping the lights on, co-ops represent their communities, focus on member needs and help strengthen the places they call home. But behind the scenes, cooperatives also stay actively involved in legislative discussions to stay engaged in the decisions that shape how they serve their members.

According to Steve Barnett, general manager of the South Dakota Rural Electric Association, legislative efforts help protect reliable electricity, keep costs manageable and support rural communities across South Dakota.

“While it’s important that we stay involved in the topics that are relevant to our industry, it’s really about sharing our values and telling our story,” Barnett said. “Being involved means being engaged and aware of the challenges and issues coming up in the 2026 Legislative Session,”

In addition to SDREA’s internal

leadership, legislative efforts are supported by the association’s lobbying team in Pierre, led by Darla Pollman Rogers of Riter Rogers LLP. Rogers and her colleague, Ellie Bailey, have been involved with SDREA’s legislative work for more than two decades.

“A key component of this work involves relationship building with legislators to establish trust and credibility,” Rogers said.

Rogers noted that member engagement strengthens the cooperative voice during session and throughout the year. “The grassroots approach is huge for co-ops,” she said. “Hearing from members across the state and from different cooperatives helps strengthen our overall impact.” Rogers added that one of the best ways members can get involved is by getting to know their local legislators or attending Co-op Day at the Capitol to observe the process firsthand.

With the next session approaching, several topics are already drawing the attention of not only electric cooperatives but utilities across the

state. One of the proposals SDREA is following closely is Rep. Kent Roe’s data center bill, identified as Draft HB 31.

“We’re seeing an increase in interest from large data center developers looking to site facilities in cooperative service territory,” said Chris Studer, chief member and public relations officer at East River Electric Power Cooperative, a wholesale power supply cooperative which serves distribution co-ops in eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota. “We have been providing input on the data center bill to make sure the law would fit within our process and require data centers to invest in generation and transmission infrastructure to serve them, so we can protect our current cooperative consumers from the risk of building generation to serve these large consumers. At the end of the day, we’re not going to put our member-owners at risk, and engaging with lawmakers working on that issue is very important to our cooperative network.”

The association has also been working

with investor-owned utilities on wildfire mitigation legislation, which stands out as another priority for South Dakota cooperatives.

“Wildfire risk is a growing concern, and this proposal gives utilities a clear, consistent way to plan ahead. At its core, this legislation is about preparedness – making sure utilities have a plan and have reviewed it with their governing authority. By strengthening infrastructure, improving vegetation management, and coordinating closely with communities, the framework helps protect public safety while supporting the reliable service South Dakotans depend on,” Black Hills Electric General Manager Walker Witt said.

Cooperative members also have an important role in legislative advocacy. Their engagement helps ensure that rural needs and perspectives reach decision makers. Barnett encouraged members to stay active by reaching out to local lawmakers in their districts and attending local legislative forums and cracker barrels. These are formal town hall style gatherings where legislators answer questions and update the community.

“Members can contact legislators in their respective districts via email or by telephone,” Barnett said. “Attending cracker barrels is also a good way to stay engaged. These opportunities give members a chance to hear updates, ask questions, and share how policy decisions affect their communities.”

Barnett also noted the importance of staying alert during the legislative process, particularly when a bill is significantly amended. He explained that when a bill gets “hog housed,” it means it has been changed so much that the original version is no longer recognizable. “A hog housed bill is changed or amended significantly, to the point where a person may change their position on the bill,” he said. “Tracking these changes is essential to understanding the real impact a proposal may have if it becomes law.”

Barnett said SDREA will continue to represent the interests of both cooperatives and rural communities across the state. At the end of the day, it’s all about providing dependable electricity and keeping the lights on.



Gov. Larry Rhoden takes a picture with members of the electric cooperative network at Co-op Day at the Capitol last February.

Photo by Jocelyn Johnson

STAYING INVOLVED

Co-op Day at the Capitol

Electric cooperatives’ efforts to engage local legislators extend far beyond traditional lobbying. Every February, cooperatives from across the state gather for a light-hearted dinner at the South Dakota State Capitol to break bread with lawmakers, provide attendees industry updates and sit in on legislative committee meetings.

Last year, South Dakota cooperatives continued their time-honored tradition of serving pulled pork sandwiches and cowboy beans prepared by Ken Gillaspie, who formerly served as a director for East River Electric and as board president for Oahe Electric, and Roger Crom, a former loss control manager at SDREA.

The next Co-op Day at the Capitol is scheduled for Feb. 17, 2026.

Legislative Banquets

In addition to Co-op Day at the Capitol, select electric cooperatives across the state host legislative banquets as a means of communicating the latest legislative environment with both their members and local lawmakers. Many times, these events provide a free meal to attendees and include updates on both the successes and challenges for the co-op.

Reach out to your local cooperative to learn more about local Legislative Banquets, Co-op Day at the Capitol or the latest legislative news affecting cooperatives. The co-op network is more than happy to engage.

Are Portable Space Heaters Efficient for My Home?



Jared Stalley
Marketing Rep

Small space heaters are meant to do exactly as their name says: heat a small space. But unfortunately, many people use portable space heaters to heat their entire home,

which can really take a toll on your energy bills. The truth is, whether you should use space heaters really depends on your home's efficiency and energy needs.

If you're using a space heater to compensate for problems in your home, like inadequate insulation, drafty windows and exterior doors, or an inefficient heating system, space heaters are not a practical solution. Your best bet is to improve the overall efficiency of your home. If you're on a tight budget, caulking and weather stripping around windows and exterior doors is a low-cost, easy way to save energy. Depending on the size of your home, adding insulation can be a great next step. Taking these proactive energy-saving measures rather than relying on space heaters for supplemental warmth can reduce your heating and cooling bills for years to come.

Perhaps your home is energy efficient but you're cold-natured and want a specific room to be cozier than the rest. In this case, a space heater may work for your needs. A good comparison is ceiling fans; we use ceiling fans in the summer to cool people, not rooms. A space heater can be used in a similar way during winter months. Only use a space heater in small spaces that you're occupying



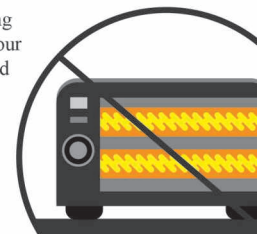
and, if possible, try to shut off other rooms to contain the warmth provided by the space heater. If you decide to use a space heater to heat a small area in your home, make sure the heater is properly sized for the space; most heaters include a general sizing table.

A word about safety: the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates more than 25,000 residential fires are associated with the use of space heaters every year, resulting in more than 300 deaths. If you must use a space heater, purchase a newer model that includes the most current safety features and make sure it carries the Underwriter's Laboratory (UL) label. Choose a thermostatically controlled heater to avoid energy waste and overheating and place the heater on a level surface away from foot traffic when in use. Always keep children and pets away from space heaters.

TIPS TO DITCH THE SPACE HEATER

Space heaters are energy hogs, and older models can be extremely dangerous. This winter, ditch the space heater and try these alternative solutions to stay cozy.

- Use an electric blanket to keep warm during the night.
- Caulk and weatherstrip around all windows and doors to prevent heat loss.
- Consider adding insulation to your attic and around duct work.



Consider alternative ways to stay warm like extra layers of clothing or UL-approved electric blankets. If you have hardwood or tile floors, lay down area rugs to provide additional insulation (and appeal!) and maintain warmth.

We know it's cold out there, but remember in addition to safety concerns, space heaters can greatly increase your energy bills if used improperly. 11182500

If you're looking for alternative ways to save energy and increase comfort in your home, contact our office at 605-279-2135 or 605-393-1500. We're here to help you manage your energy use.



West River Electric Association, Inc.

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

"Powering You For A Brighter Future"

SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE

DEADLINE: JAN. 30, 2026

- 7, \$500 scholarships available
- High school Seniors or Current College students* eligible to apply

*Students parent or students themselves must be members of West River Electric.



Scan HERE to submit an application!

605-393-1500

www.westriver.coop

Happy Holidays

Your Co-op. Your Power. Your Holidays.



West River Electric Association, Inc.

Your Touchstone Energy Cooperative

OFFICES WILL BE CLOSED THE FOLLOWING DATES:

Wednesday Dec. 24th | All day

Thursday Dec. 25th | All day

Wednesday Dec. 31st | 11am-5pm

Thursday Jan. 1st | All day



South Dakota law allows electric cooperatives to place poles along public rights-of-way without needing an easement. Shown here, East River Electric's transmission lines north of Pierre are built within the right-of-way. In cases where the rights-of-way are crowded, have obstacles, or are otherwise not suitable for poles or line work, a co-op may seek an easement outside of the right-of-way.
Photo by Jacob Boyko

EASEMENTS BRING SAFETY, RELIABILITY

Why More Room Makes Sense for Co-ops, Line Crews & Members

Jacob Boyko
jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop

Serving rural members means maintaining thousands of miles of power line – and finding the space to safely build and access it. At your local electric cooperative, building, maintaining and repairing thousands of miles of infrastructure is a logistical challenge, but each and every piece of the system has its role in a functioning and reliable electric grid.

That's why easements, or agreements to use and access private land, are essential for co-ops and their members. At East River Electric Power

Cooperative, the generation and transmission co-op serving 25 member distribution systems in South Dakota and Minnesota, Engineering and Planning Services Manager Jon Aus works directly with co-op members to get easements for power lines.

In 2025, most cooperatives prioritize building lines along the public right of way – the area between the road and fence lines along roadways – instead of along quarter lines like they have historically, back when rights-of-way were cluttered with telephone and other overhead lines.

“That’s where we like it from an access and maintenance perspective,”

Aus said of rights-of-way. “Nowadays, when we develop a route for a line, we pick the roads we want to zigzag down to get from Point A to Point B.”

Placing infrastructure along roads improves accessibility for crews and speeds up outage response time, especially when mud or snow are a factor, Aus added. But the trade offs are a workspace limited to the shoulder and ditch and overall limited access to the infrastructure.

That’s where easements make all the difference. When a co-op member allows an easement, the co-op will set poles back just several more feet away from the road right-of-way onto private land, and crews can cross behind the fence when they need to access the poles. The impact on private land is minimal, but it’s a massive benefit for the line crews.

“Having an easement allows crews to work on the backside of the structures,” Aus said. “If you don’t get an easement and you don’t have any access rights, they’re stuck working everything from the ditch and the roadside.”

Engineers are meticulous when mapping routes for new lines, Aus added, noting the lengthy process for engineers as they consider pole placement, obstacles, hazards and community impact.

“At the onset of any project, we’re evaluating the impact of our routing,” Aus continued. “Public impact is right up there on our priorities along with reliability and maintenance. We don’t go down routes we foresee to have challenges with public impact.”

Distribution cooperatives see similar challenges on the ground. In southwest South Dakota, Black Hills Electric Cooperative System Coordinator Jesse Sorensen aims to manage a system that’s not only reliable and affordable, but also built on cooperation with members.

“Very rarely do we have someone reject giving an easement,” he said. “We’ve had very good luck sitting down with members and explaining everything to them that there are hundreds – if not thousands – of landowners that allowed easements so we could get electricity to this property.”

He continued, “The biggest concerns from landowners are about losing their trees or the aesthetic value of their property, and we’ll work with landowners by rerouting lines to prevent cutting prize trees or installing lines in prime views.”

At East River Electric, Aus’ team fields similar questions from landowners, usually concerning specific pole placement and whether poles will interfere with field access, an approach or operation of large machinery. He says it’s usually something the engineers can accommodate because ultimately, co-ops want to leave members’ land as good or better than they found it.

“We’ll even work with landowners to pay to replace any trees we have to remove if we obtain an easement from them,” Aus said.

As the co-op steadily grows and expands its transmission system, East River Electric General Counsel Danny Brown stresses that the co-op relies on voluntary easements, and in its 75-year history has never used eminent domain to obtain an easement.

“Eminent domain is not something we ever want to use,” Brown explained. “We try to educate and work with the property owners the best we can. At the end of the day, an easement is voluntary, and if we can’t make it work from the right of way, we have to start thinking about changing our route.”

But opting for alternate, less-efficient routes is a concession that can severely impact system reliability and leads to a higher price tag for co-op members to pay. Fortunately, Aus and Sorensen said most landowners understand the value of working with their cooperative for themselves and their community.

“There have been several times when landowners have said, ‘Absolutely, bring that line through here,’” Aus recalled. “They want to improve their reliability, or they know that they just need more electricity in that area for whatever they might be doing on their property. Most of the time we’re welcomed with open arms.”

That willingness helps keep cooperative power moving across the countryside.



When a co-op obtains an easement to build a line along a road right-of-way border, the line is placed several feet away from the right-of-way border. In this photo, the right of way border is about at the fence line, with the poles placed several feet behind the fence.

On this route, East River Electric has an easement for 30 feet behind the fence line for when line crews need to maintain or repair the line, giving crews more room to work and better access to the structures.

Photo submitted by East River Electric.

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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

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

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UNTIL JAN. 6

Garden Glow

5-9 p.m. (Closed Dec. 24-25, Jan. 1)

SDSU McCrory Gardens

Brookings, SD

www.sdstate.edu/mccrory-gardens

Photo Courtesy of Travel South Dakota

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.

DEC. 24

Candlelight Christmas Eve Service

4 p.m.

Rapid Valley United Methodist
Rapid City, SD

UNTIL DEC. 26

Christmas at the Capitol

8 a.m.-10 p.m. (Holidays Included)

South Dakota State Capitol

Pierre, SD

605-773-3178

christmasatthecapitol.sd.gov

DEC. 20-21, 23-24, 27-28

1880 Train Holiday Express

Hot Chocolate, Santa

Hill City, SD

www.1880train.com

605-574-2222

DEC. 31

New Year's Eve Bash

Doors Open at 5:30 p.m.

American Legion

Sioux Falls, SD

Tickets: 605-336-3470

JAN. 10

**Knights of Columbus Coats
for Kids Bowling Tournament**

1 p.m.

Meadowood Lanes

3809 Sturgis Rd.

Rapid City, SD

JAN. 16

Annual Soup Supper

4:30-7 p.m.

Rapid Valley United Methodist

Rapid City, SD

JAN. 20

Prohibition & the Pig

Lake Cty. Museum Fundraiser;

Prohibition-Era Bootlegging

6 p.m.-7:30 p.m.

\$60 per ticket

The Office Bar & Grill

Madison, SD

JAN. 23-24

Pro Snocross Races

Deadwood, SD

605-578-1876

JAN. 30

Box Elder Ball

6 p.m.-8 p.m.

Box Elder Events Center

Box Elder, SD

605-390-9341

JAN. 30-FEB. 7

Annual Black Hills Stock Show

Central States Fairgrounds

Rapid City, SD

www.centralstatesfairinc.com

605-355-3861

FEB. 1

**The Great Lake County
Hotdish Competition**

11:30-1:30 p.m.

St. Thomas School Gym

Madison, SD

605-256-5308

FEB. 7-8

**The Black Market/Formerly
Benson's Flea Market**

Sioux Falls, SD

605-332-6004

FEB. 13-16

12th Annual Frost Fest

Brookings, SD

605-692-7444

FEB. 20-22

Winterfest

Fireworks, Parade of Lights,

Bonfire, Snowshoeing

Lead, SD

www.leadmethere.com/winterfest

605-584-1100

FEB. 21

Bellator Titans

Casino Night Fundraiser

6-11 p.m.

City Lights Bar & Event Center

Aberdeen, 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.