

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



Get Out & Vote!

It's Your Civic Duty

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Get involved! Go vote! Election Day is June 2; Go Vote! Democracy Needs You!



Robert Raker

CEO/GM

Looking back just a handful of decades here in the rural Midwest, if you needed light after the sun went down, your options were a bulky kerosene lamp... or to wait until morning.

Electric cooperatives were only organized because enough people got together to solve a problem in their community. In just a few short years, those first co-op members brought power to the prairie. Without their determination and commitment to build a better future, co-ops never would have been formed. Perhaps, some of us today would still rely on kerosene lamps.

At West River Electric, one of our core principles is Commitment to Community and we believe in order to build strong communities, people need to get involved. And one of the best ways to do that is by exercising your right to vote.

The pursuit of a better tomorrow – the same spirit that sparked electric cooperatives during their founding – is just as impactful today. Unfortunately, in many cases, people are sitting on the sidelines. 3946001

Recent national voting statistics paint a grim picture. You may be surprised to hear that turnout in the 2024 general election was just 64%. For midterm elections, it's even worse – just 46% of voters nationwide turned out for the 2022 midterm elections.

In this issue of Cooperative Connections, you'll read different perspectives from across the state, including one from your West River Electric board member, Chuck Sloan, on the importance of voting. From co-op leaders with military service history, to others who serve in local government, they make the case for why it's your duty to go vote.

When you vote, you have a say in the decisions that affect your everyday life. As we celebrate the United States' 250th Anniversary, we also stop and remember the fallen heroes who gave their lives for this cause; a land where people elect their own leaders and control their own government.

That's something that sets our country apart. According to Freedom House, only about 43% of countries hold meaningful elections. We've fought for this privilege of self determination, yet half of the people stay home during elections.

Here's our challenge for you: make a plan to vote June 2. Bring a friend, spouse, parent, son or daughter; it's their privilege too! Get out and vote!

I hope to see you at the poles and until next time, stay safe.

Robert Raker
CEO & General Manager

Did you know?

During the 2024 primary election,
16% of voters made decisions
for **84%** of South Dakota



Youth Excursion 2026 to Bismarck, ND



Amanda Haugen
Communications Specialist

Calling all high school freshmen, sophomores, and juniors! Is your parent or guardian an active member-owner of West River Electric? If so, you're eligible to apply for an unforgettable summer experience: Youth Excursion 2026! 4388401

If chosen, you will receive an all-expenses-paid trip to Bismarck, N.D., for a youth event unlike any other. From July 20-22, participants will stay on-campus at Bismarck State College. During this time, they will have the opportunity to sightsee, make friends from all across the state and gain a new understanding of where their electrical power comes from.

Once participants arrive on the campus, they can look forward to building friendships, taking in the sights of North Dakota's capital and learning "The Story Behind the Light Switch." During their stay,

students will get to hear from power industry experts and participate in hands-on activities. Students will be given the opportunity to tour the Great Plains Synfuel Plant, Freedom Coal Mine and Antelope Valley Station Power Plant to see where South Dakota's power is generated.

There will also be plenty of time built in for recreation and socializing – students will play games, visit local attractions and much more. Participants can look forward to connecting with students from all across South Dakota, building strong friendships and learning from their peers.

To be eligible for Youth Excursion, students must be in high school and their parent or guardian must be an active member-owner of West River Electric. 4648401

Fill out the application below to participate!

Scan to apply for Youth Excursion Online



Application Form

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

2026 Youth Excursion Application

Name: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone#: _____ Email: _____

School: _____ 2026-2027 Class/Year: _____

Gender: _____ T-shirt Size: _____

Return this information by June 15, 2026 to:

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

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.

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

CEO and General Manager:

Robert Raker – robert.raker@westriver.coop

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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.

ELECTRICAL SAFETY MONTH: TIPS FOR PRIORITIZING SAFETY

At your local cooperative, Electrical Safety Month is recognized every May, but the importance of practicing safety year-round is always emphasized. From co-op crews to the consumer-members served, everyone has a part to play in prioritizing safety.

According to the Electrical Safety Foundation International, thousands of people in the U.S. are critically injured or electrocuted as a result of electrical fires and accidents in their own homes. Many of these accidents are preventable. Electricity is a necessity that powers daily life, but it can also be dangerous — something your local cooperative understands firsthand from working with it 365 days a year.

Safety is more than a catchphrase. Cooperative leadership recognizes the responsibility to keep employees safe while also helping protect members and the broader community. That's why your local cooperative hosts safety demonstrations at community events and in schools throughout the year, highlighting the dangers of electricity. These demonstrations often include emergency scenarios, such as what to do in a car accident involving a utility pole and downed power lines, along with discussions about the dangers of pad-mounted transformers and overloading circuits with too many electronic devices.

Electricity is an integral part of modern life. Given the widespread use of electrical devices, tools and appliances, here are a few practical electrical safety tips:

Watch for frayed wires. Power cords can become damaged from age, heavy use or excessive current flow. If cords become frayed or cut, replace them to avoid shock hazards.

Avoid overloading circuits. Circuits can only handle a limited amount of electricity. Running too many devices on one circuit can lead to overheating and potential fire risk.

Label circuit breakers. Understanding your home's electrical system can help prevent overloads. If your home is more than 40 years old and you plan to install large appliances, contact a qualified electrician.

Use extension cords properly. Never plug one extension cord into another. "Daisy chaining" can cause overheating and fire hazards. Do not exceed the cord's wattage, and avoid using extension cords as permanent solutions. If additional outlets are needed, consult a licensed electrician.

Parents and caregivers are encouraged to talk with children

about playing it safe and smart around electricity, including staying aware of overhead power lines near outdoor play areas.

Providing a reliable energy supply 24/7, 365 days a year is a top priority. Equally important is keeping the community safe around electricity.

Contact your local cooperative for additional electrical safety tips or to request a safety demonstration at a school or upcoming community event.



"Do not fly kites by power lines!"

Casen Yuker

Casen cautions readers not to fly kites around power lines. Thank you for sharing your picture, Casen! Casen's parents are Lance and Tarah Yuker from Aberdeen 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.

Delicious DESSERTS

RHUBARB CAKE DESSERT

Ingredients:

1 pkg. yellow cake mix
1 cup sugar
4 cups rhubarb, diced
2 cups half and half

Method

Prepare cake mix as directed on package and pour into a greased 9x13 pan. Mix sugar and rhubarb together. Spoon evenly over cake batter. Pour half and half over top of rhubarb mixture. Bake at 350° for 40-45 minutes. This is like an upside-down cake with custard on the bottom of the cake.

Marla Gilbert
Southeastern Electric

FUZZY NAVEL CAKE

Ingredients:

1 pkg. yellow cake mix
1 instant vanilla pudding (large, 5.1 oz. size)
3/4 cup peach schnapps
1/2 cup vegetable oil
1/2 cup orange juice
4 eggs

Glaze

1 cup powdered sugar
4 tbsps. orange juice
2 tbsps. peach schnapps

Method

Spray a 12-cup fluted baking pan with cooking spray, dust with flour. Mix all cake ingredients together until well blended, spread evenly in pan. Bake at 350° for 45-50 minutes until golden brown and cake springs back when lightly touched. Cool cake for 20 minutes. Run a long, sharp knife around the edges to loosen, and invert onto platter. Whisk glaze ingredients together until smooth. With wooden skewer, poke holes on top and around sides of cake. Spoon glaze over the warm cake, allowing to seep in holes, and drizzle down the sides and center. Cool completely before slicing.

Sally Florey
Charles Mix Electric

HAWAIIAN PINEAPPLE CAKE

Ingredients:

2 cups flour
2 cups sugar
2 eggs
1 tsp. baking soda
1 tsp. vanilla
Pinch salt
1 20 oz. can crushed pineapple, undrained (in natural juice, not heavy syrup)

Frosting

1/2 cup butter, softened
1 8 oz. cream cheese softened
1 tsp. vanilla
1 1/2 cups powdered sugar

Method

Mix all cake ingredients together until well blended. Bake in greased 9x13 pan at 350° for 35-40 minutes or until top is golden brown.

Combine cream cheese, butter and vanilla. Beat until smooth and creamy. Gradually add powdered sugar. Spread frosting on cake while still warm. Garnish with some toasted coconut if desired.

Sally Florey
Charles Mix 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 2026. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

Picture submitted by William Berry via Shutterstock.

Spring Into Energy Savings



Amanda Haugen
Communications
Specialist

Spring is a season of renewal—and a great time to refresh your energy habits, too! As temperatures begin to warm and daily routines shift, a few small changes around your home can add up to

meaningful energy savings.

West River Electric is committed to helping our members use energy wisely while keeping homes comfortable year-round. 4842900

Spring is the perfect time to schedule maintenance for your heating and cooling system. Spring and fall checkups conducted by a licensed professional can help ensure your system is running efficiently, safely and reliably before the peak seasons begin. A well-maintained unit uses less energy, lasts longer and helps prevent costly breakdowns when you need it most.

If you're looking for a simple place to start saving, look no further than ceiling fans. Fans don't actually cool or heat the air, but they help you feel more comfortable by moving it. During warmer months, make sure your ceiling fan blades are set to rotate counterclockwise. This creates a downward breeze that makes you feel cooler, allowing you to raise your thermostat a few degrees without sacrificing comfort. In cooler months,



reverse the direction of fan blades clockwise to help push warm air down from the ceiling, improving efficiency when your heating system is running.

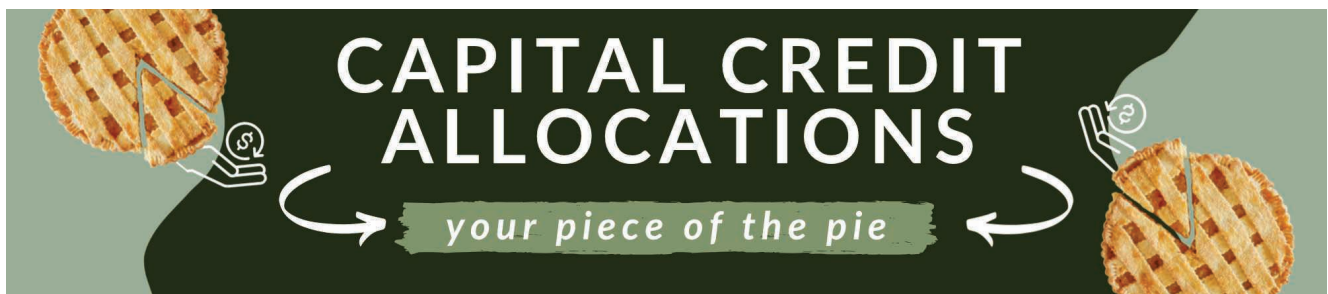
Speaking of thermostats, adjusting the temperature just a few degrees can make a noticeable difference on your energy bill. As spring arrives, try setting your thermostat slightly higher when cooling or slightly lower when heating. Even a two- or three-degree adjustment can reduce energy use while still keeping your home comfortable—especially when combined with ceiling fans or open windows on mild, pleasant days.

Hot water use is another area where simple habits matter. Taking shorter showers can help reduce the amount of energy used to heat water, which makes

up a significant portion of most energy bills. Cutting just a few minutes off each shower not only saves energy but also conserves water.

Finally, the time of day you use energy can also play a part in savings. When you run major appliances during off-peak hours (when energy demand is lower), you can help reduce pressure on the electric grid—now that's a win!

West River Electric is here to help every season, every step of the way. We offer energy-saving resources designed to help you lower energy use for your home or business and manage costs. If you have questions or want to learn more about energy efficiency, give our office a call at 605-393-1500.



CO-OP FAMILY LEGACY

Mother & Daughter Duo Find Careers in Co-ops

Jacob Boyko

jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop

Ask any longtime electric cooperative employee what makes the co-op network special, and the answers often sound the same: It feels like family.

For Sharla and Amanda Haugen, that's more than a figure of speech. Working for electric cooperatives on opposite ends of South Dakota, the mother and daughter pair share a commitment to service and community.

Sharla is the manager of dispatch at Sioux Valley Energy in Colman, overseeing 24-hour radio dispatch for line crews from Sioux Valley Energy, Kingsbury Electric Cooperative, Codington-Clark Electric Cooperative, Union County Electric Cooperative, Nobles Cooperative Electric and the City of Brookings.

Sharla has worked at Sioux Valley Energy for 35 years, starting as a dispatcher nearly a decade before Amanda was born. Amanda understood at a young age that whenever there was a severe snow, wind or ice storm, her mom would be out the door and off to work to help get the lights back on.

"Seeing how my mom dropped everything to serve the members and go above and beyond, and my dad supporting her role, it really opened my eyes to what a co-op does for a community," Amanda said.

Growing up in rural Moody County on Sioux Valley Energy lines, Amanda was very involved in the co-op. In high school, she helped serve the meals at district meetings, attended annual meetings, and even traveled to North Dakota on Youth Excursion – a co-op event promoting youth education in energy careers and production. On the trip, Amanda toured the Antelope Valley coal-fired power plant and other facilities, getting a behind-the-scenes look at how electricity is generated and transported to co-op members. She also participated in Sioux Valley Energy's youth leadership programs, which prepped students with professional skills for future careers.

"The Empower Youth Leadership program went over different leadership skills and how to find strengths and weaknesses," Amanda recalled. "That involvement is really how I got ingrained with the co-op."

Years later, as Amanda worked to finish her marketing degree at Lake Area Technical College, she was on the hunt for internship openings to help kick off her career.

"I gave it to God and put it in his hands," Amanda said.

One Thursday afternoon, during class, Amanda's phone started



Now living at opposite ends of the state, Sharla and Amanda enjoy time together in the Black Hills during visits. When in each other's company, other family members suggest there's perhaps too much talk about electric cooperatives. Photo submitted by Sharla Haugen.

buzzing over and over again. When she glanced down, she saw multiple missed calls and texts from her mom. West River Electric Association had an opening for a member services representative at their Rapid City office, and applications were due the next day.

"Friday morning, I worked on a revamped resume and cover letter and sent it off," Amanda said. West River Electric Association reached out shortly after for an interview, and less than two weeks later, Amanda was offered the job.

"It's like the stars aligned," Amanda said. "When I told my mom, she was ecstatic – I'm pretty sure she started crying."

For Sharla, it was a joyful moment, knowing Amanda was part of the co-op family that had treated her so well over her decades at Sioux Valley Energy.

"If Amanda got out there and she had car trouble, I knew the co-op people would take care of her," Sharla said. "It was just a sense of relief for me to know if something were to happen, there'd be people there to help her."

Amanda, now five years into the job at West River Electric, works on the co-op's Cooperative Connections magazine, communications and public relations, and youth initiatives similar to the ones at Sioux Valley Energy that lead to her co-op career. Much like her mom, Amanda said her co-op now feels like family.

"Coming to work every day, you kind of have this second family that always has your back," Amanda said. "They are there for you and will help you whenever you need it."

That's exactly what Sharla wanted for her daughter.

"Co-ops are big on employee growth, so I knew Amanda would always be learning and improving. I knew she wouldn't be stagnant in a career at a cooperative because they're always investing in their employees. It was just such a proud moment when she joined the co-op world."

ONE VOTE MAKES A DIFFERENCE



Chuck Sloan • Piedmont, S.D.

Board Treasurer, West River Electric Association

U.S. Air Force 1983-2003

Chuck Sloan has spent much of his life serving his nation.

Sloan enlisted in the U.S. Air Force in 1983 and served 21 years on active duty before retiring as a master sergeant in 2004. In that time, he was stationed at bases all around the world, including Oman, South Korea, Turkey, and the Pacific. Since 2004, Sloan has worked as a civilian at Ellsworth Air Force Base, where today he is Chief of Operations Compliance.

Serving in the military, Sloan observed firsthand how seriously service members took absentee voting and civic participation, despite being thousands of miles from American soil. Their passion helped ignite Sloan's own admiration for America's democratic system of government.

"If I found somebody a little laissez-faire about voting, saying, 'my vote probably won't count,' I would give them a spiel," Sloan explained. "Yes, your vote does count, and you'll want to be able to say that you made that vote."

He continued, "If you don't choose to exercise that responsibility, then later on if you're displeased, you really can't

complain about it because you didn't make a choice – If anything, vote and give yourself the opportunity to legitimately complain!"

Sloan said people should never underestimate the importance of showing up and making their voices heard, because in close races, one vote can tip the scale.

"There are many instances when one vote may have been a determining factor," Sloan said. "It may not be a general election, but how about in a state or local election where one vote can be the deciding factor? That happens more often than one would think. Your vote matters, no matter what you do."

Sloan brought that civic-mindedness along with him to West River Electric Association, where he serves on the Board of Directors and helps make decisions in the interest of his neighbors and communities he represents.

Sloan said it all just comes back to civic responsibility and staying involved.

"From the time I turned 18, I've never missed a vote," Sloan said. "It's second nature. It's too important to not do."



VOTING STRENGTHENS COMMUNITIES



Evan Buckmiller • De Smet, S.D.

General Manager, Kingsbury Electric Cooperative

De Smet School District Board

For Kingsbury Electric Cooperative General Manager Evan Buckmiller, his call to public service came after a mid-term resignation on the De Smet School District

Board left a vacancy that needed to be filled.

"The board had to appoint someone to fill the seat," Buckmiller said. "Initially when I was asked, I didn't know if I wanted to do it, but I also knew that my wife and I have two young kids in the school system, so I agreed to fill the spot until the next election."

Buckmiller wasn't expecting to develop a passion for civic-service, but six years and two election cycles later, he's still representing the De Smet community on the school board.

"It's for my kids, to make sure they have the best education opportunities possible to prepare them for their future," Buckmiller added.

He said that while serving on the school board has been a

rewarding endeavor, there are also moments that are discouraging; some people will sit out elections, but are also vocal about board decisions they disagree with.

"I receive phone calls about how we are doing everything wrong, but they don't want to step up to be a part of change," Buckmiller explained.

His advice is simple: show up.

"Public participation at the monthly school board meetings is always encouraged," Buckmiller said. "When a community is engaged, there is more diverse input and you get to see the needs of everyone. The needs for one person might not be the same as another, and when you are sitting on a board you want to hear the needs of everyone so you can make the best decision possible for everyone."

Buckmiller said when more people get involved and exercise their civic duties, the communities like his are better for it.

"Being active in the community makes the community stronger and allows different opinions to be heard," Buckmiller said.

"When you show up to meetings and vote, you are giving the board direction so they can make decisions that are in the best interest of everyone."

STICK UP FOR YOURSELF & VOTE



Don Schurdevin • Elk Point, S.D.
Board President, Union County Electric Cooperative
U.S. Navy 1962-1968

Serving on the Union County Electric Cooperative board for more than 25 years, Don Schurdevin has built a reputation for steady leadership and a strong commitment

to the cooperative and its members. But before serving his neighbors and community on the co-op board, Schurdevin first served in a different way. He served not just his Union County neighbors, but his entire country in the U.S. Navy. Schurdevin enrolled during his junior year of high school in 1962, serving active duty in Vietnam from 1963 to 1965, some of that time aboard the USS Midway. The experience helped shape his views on patriotism, civic duty and personal responsibility.

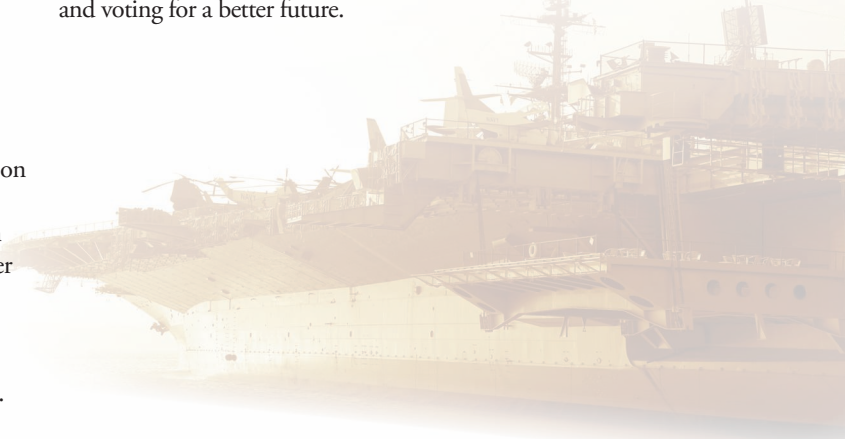
“In the navy, you learn to get along with people, but you learn to also stick up for yourself, because nobody else – is so you better take care of your own business,” he said.

That’s the attitude that Schurdevin brings to his civic participation. He said serving in the military gave him a deeper appreciation for the freedoms Americans enjoy, including voting.

Schurdevin believes participating in elections is one of the most important ways citizens can stay involved in their communities and help shape the future of their community, state and country.

“I think I voted in every election since I could,” Schurdevin recalled. “School board election, county, state – if I was able to vote I was voting.”

That sense of duty carried into his years of cooperative service. As a director, Schurdevin remains focused on serving members and ensuring the co-op continues to meet local needs. Schurdevin encourages others to “stick up for yourself” by staying informed and voting for a better future.



LEADERS DEPEND ON YOU SPEAKING UP



Chris Rahn • Mission, S.D.
Member Services Manager, Cherry-Todd Electric Cooperative
Todd County School District Board, Rosebud Sioux Tribe

Chris Rahn was not always interested in his local government. In fact, up until just several years ago, he sat many elections out.

But through his work at Cherry-Todd Electric Cooperative and the commitment to community that came with it, Rahn gained a new perspective on civic participation, realizing that change only happens when peoples’ voices are heard.

“I believe everybody who has an opinion should come out and vote,” Rahn said. “One vote matters. One vote can change an entire election.”

Rahn’s indifference to voting began to change as he was asked to take on more responsibilities with the co-op. Cherry-Todd Electric General Manager Tim Grablander nominated Rahn to the Rushmore Electric Federal Credit Union Board of Directors, where Rahn now serves as president.

Shortly after, he was encouraged by local community leaders to apply for a board seat with the Rosebud Sioux Tribe. The tribal

council voted to seat Rahn on the judiciary committee, leading to his first real experience with public service. Like flipping a switch, Rahn’s enthusiasm led to his appointment to other tribal boards, including the Tribal Utilities Commission, Tribal Tax Commission, and the Rosebud Energy Services Company.

Rahn said serving in tribal government opened his mind to the impact he can have on his community. That realization inspired Rahn to run for his first publicly-elected position as a school board member for the Todd County School District.

“I wanted to be more involved in my daughter’s education and just listen to the community’s input,” Rahn said, restating the importance of community members actively engaging with elected officials and sharing feedback.

He continued: “I feel like I’ve been able to bridge the gap between the people I represent and the administration and other public leaders.”

As Rahn looks ahead to years of future public service to work for a better community, he encourages others to step up as well — and all it takes is a vote.

“If you speak up, your voice is heard,” he continued. “When everyone’s voice is heard, we can make better decisions for the community as a whole.”

Photos by Shutterstock

2026 Policy Priorities for Electric Cooperatives

American families and businesses count on reliable electricity at a price they can afford. But with the demand for power continuing to climb and the supply of always-available power sources at risk, smart energy policies are more important than ever.

At West River Electric, our job goes beyond keeping the lights on day to day. We are responsible for advocating on behalf of our members in Washington, D.C., to make sure decisions being made at the federal level protect reliable, affordable power in our local communities.

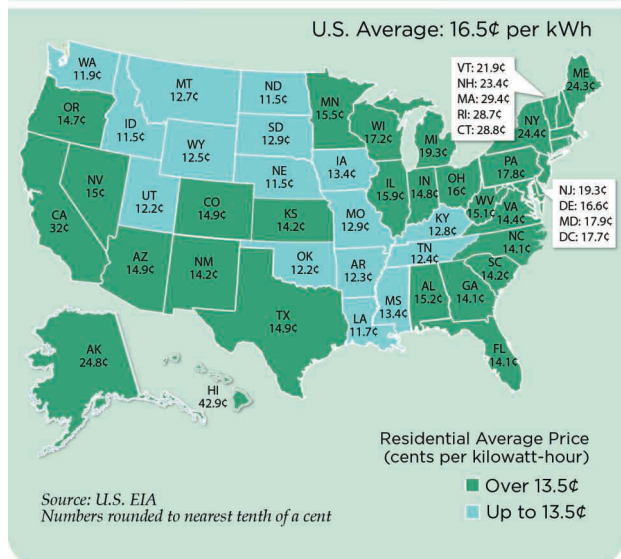
As we head into 2026, America's electric cooperatives are focused on a few key issues that directly impact our members:

- **Faster Disaster Recovery:** We support the bi-partisan FEMA Act of 2025. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is a critical partner in helping electric co-ops restore power and rebuild their systems in the wake of natural disasters, but it could be more effective and responsive to the needs of rural America. If the FEMA Act passes, it will help utilities restore power more quickly after storms and disasters—while keeping costs lower for rural families and businesses.
- **Cutting Through Red Tape:** Outdated and overly complex permitting rules slow down essential upgrades to power lines and substations. Streamlining these processes helps us keep up with growing demand and improve reliability. We're



In April, electric cooperative leaders will gather in our nation's capital to advocate for co-op members.

Average Prices for Residential Electricity 2024 figures, in cents per kWh



urging Congress to pass comprehensive permitting reforms, including the SPEED Act and PERMIT Act, both of which cleared the House in December.

- **Keeping Reliable Power Plants Online:** We're advocating for realistic energy regulations that don't force dependable power plants to shut down before reliable replacements are ready. Mandating emissions limits based on unavailable technology would force critical power plants off the grid and restrict the operation of new natural gas plants.
- **Protecting Critical Hydropower:** Hydroelectric dams in the Pacific Northwest play a key role in keeping electricity reliable and affordable across multiple states. Removing them would raise costs and threaten reliability, which is why we support preserving the Lower Snake River Dams.
- **Smarter Land Management Policies:** We're advocating for smarter land-management policies like the Fix Our Forests Act that would allow electric cooperatives to better maintain power lines on public lands and mitigate wildfire risk.
- **Maintaining Funding for Grid Innovation and Investments:** Federal loan and grant programs help co-ops strengthen the grid, prepare for extreme weather, improve cybersecurity and explore new energy technologies—without shifting costs to members.

While you may not consider it on a daily basis, electricity is essential and underpins nearly every aspect of modern life. Understanding today's evolving energy landscape is important as it shapes how electricity is produced, delivered and consumed. Advocating on behalf of West River Electric's members is a critical part of our commitment to you. These policy priorities all come back to the same goal: making sure our members have safe, reliable and affordable power—now and in the future.

Wired for Growth: Balancing Data Center Demand and Reliability



Matt Schmahl
Business
Development
Manager

Data centers may feel like a big-city phenomenon, but more and more of them are showing up in rural communities like ours—and there’s good reason for that. Rural areas offer what data centers need most: affordable land, room to grow and access to transmission lines that can move large amounts of power.

What makes data centers different from other large businesses is their appetite for electricity. These facilities run 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Servers must stay online constantly, which means power has to be reliable every minute of every day.

For electric cooperatives like West River Electric, powering data centers creates both opportunities and challenges.

On the plus side, data centers

have the potential to bring steady, long-term load growth that helps support investments in the local grid. With proper planning and policy support, those upgrades—including new substations, stronger lines and smarter technology—could benefit all West River Electric members and help keep electricity rates steady.

But providing power to data centers presents challenges, too. These large facilities can be constructed and operating in as little as one year, but ensuring the necessary infrastructure, equipment and electricity requires longer lead times and significant financial investment. Strategic planning and partnerships, as well as long-term power supply strategies are essential to the process.

While West River Electric

does not currently serve any data centers, co-ops nationwide are fielding requests and inquiries from tech companies, and we anticipate similar requests in the not-too-distant future.

As a member-owned cooperative, our responsibility is twofold: to listen to the communities we serve and to provide reliable, affordable electric service to all West River Electric members. Balancing those responsibilities is not always simple, especially as new types of large-scale energy users, like data centers, become part of the local landscape.

No matter what the future holds, our priority will be supporting growth with fairness—that means ensuring large-scale energy users pay their fair share so residential bills don’t spike and our local communities feel invested in.

The energy landscape is changing, and with it comes both opportunities and challenges. Our commitment, and the commitment of West River Electric’s board and employees, is to continue listening, communicating and working with our members and community partners to ensure all decisions reflect the best interests of the people we serve.

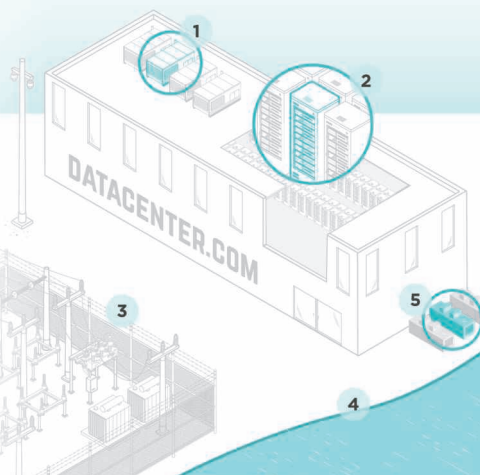
If you have questions or concerns regarding data centers, your energy bills or any other co-op matters, we encourage you to stay engaged and reach out.

Your voice matters at West River Electric.

Big Data, Bigger Demands

Many companies are choosing rural areas for their data centers because of cheaper land, available power and potential tax breaks. Data centers require huge amounts of electricity to operate, which presents new opportunities and challenges for electric co-ops.

- 1 **HVAC:** Constant cooling is needed to ensure the servers function properly.
- 2 **Servers:** Servers run applications and process data 24/7. One server rack can consume enough electricity to power a small home. A large data center can house thousands of server racks.
- 3 **Infrastructure:** Data centers often require new electrical infrastructure to meet their power needs.
- 4 **Water Source:** Many large data centers are deploying evaporative cooling, which is more efficient than compressor-based systems.
- 5 **Backup Power:** On-site generators keep data centers running during power outages and can also be used to help lower demand when electricity use spikes.



BUILDING FOR WHAT COMES NEXT

Basin Electric's Pioneer Generation Station, located near Williston, N.D.
Photo Submitted by Basin Electric

Basin Electric Expands Generation Capacity to Meet Growing Demand

Frank Turner

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Although the flick of a switch can seem close at hand, the electricity that powers our world is often generated many miles away.

For rural cooperative members, electricity often comes from North Dakota, where Basin Electric Power Cooperative operates a fleet of power plants to serve rural communities across nine states. As demand continues to build across that system, the infrastructure behind it is growing right alongside it.

This steady growth has shaped the work now underway across Basin Electric's service territory. In response, the cooperative has kept up with demand by expanding existing generation facilities, building a new power plant and supporting the system with additional transmission projects in just a few short years.

"We're seeing load growth across our system, and it's coming from a combination of residential, agricultural, commercial and energy development," said Gavin McCollam, Basin Electric's senior vice president and chief operating officer. "When you step back and look at it as a whole, it becomes clear that we need to continue building to keep pace with that growth."



New transmission lines in western North Dakota support Basin Electric's newest generation assets.
Photo Submitted by Basin Electric

Pioneer Generation Station

To maintain reliability and keep the lights on for their members, Basin Electric recently expanded its generation capacity through new development to Pioneer Generation Station near Williston, N.D.

Originally developed in the early 2010s, the facility grew in phases over time. Those additions turned Pioneer Generation Station into one of Basin Electric's most important generation assets, but within a decade, the pace of that growth had begun to change.

"Coming out of COVID, not just us but everybody

was seeing rapid increases in loads,” McCollam said. “At that point, we were asking what we could do the quickest to add capacity.”

To meet the need, Basin Electric moved forward with Pioneer Generation Station Phase IV. The cooperative completed the project in 2025, adding about 580 megawatts of generation and bringing the site’s total capacity to 822 megawatts, enough to power roughly 400,000 homes.

The expansion moved quickly in part because Basin Electric built on what it already had.

“We had the site and the people that worked there, so we could add onto it a lot quicker than we could analyze and research new sites,” McCollam said.

Bison Generation Station

Still, Basin Electric continued building for traditional member load growth, beyond Pioneer Generation Station Phase IV, turning to a new project: Bison Generation Station.

Located near Epping, N.D., the natural gas-fueled generation project is being built from the ground up as a large-scale, natural gas facility designed to meet future demand. Once completed, the combined-cycle power plant will produce approximately 1,490

megawatts of electricity, making it the largest power plant solely owned by Basin Electric – almost double the capacity of Pioneer Generation Station. The plant is expected to come online in two phases, with the first unit operating in 2029 and the second in 2030.

Unlike Pioneer Generation Station, which expanded over time, Bison Generation Station is being built as a single, large project.

“We had a history of building small units, piecemealing them in as quickly as we could. That worked for a long time, but eventually we reached a point where we needed to think about building differently,” McCollam said. “There was a point where we recognized that continuing to add smaller pieces wasn’t going to be the most effective approach. We needed to build something at a scale that would allow us to stay ahead of that growth.”

Serendipitously, the transition from Pioneer Generation Station to Bison Generation Station happened on the same day. Basin Electric finished construction at Pioneer and turned the facility over to operations, then received the permits to begin construction on Bison.

“I’m kind of a nerd,” McCollam

said, laughing. “I’m nerdy enough to think this wasn’t a coincidence, and the power plant gods were smiling on us.”

Once complete, it will become a central part of Basin Electric’s generation portfolio.

“It’s going to be the flagship of our gas fleet,” McCollam said. “It’s being designed with the understanding that the system we’re serving today is going to continue to grow.”

Looking Ahead

According to McCollam, these new generation assets are a response to the organic growth Basin Electric is seeing across its traditional membership, including residential demand, agriculture, commercial activity and energy production.

“We support that growth where it happens, and we make sure the system can deliver power where it’s needed,” he said.

For Basin Electric, the work underway now is part of a longer process to ensure reliability in a time of growing energy demand.

“The entire purpose of Basin Electric is to provide reliable service to our membership,” McCollam said. “As that system grows, we have to continue building to keep up with it.”





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MAY 18
Voter Registration
Deadline for Primary
Election
5 p.m.
(South Dakota)

JUNE 1
Last Day to Request
Absentee Ballot.
5 p.m.
(South Dakota)

JUNE 2
Primary Election
7 a.m.-7 p.m.
(South Dakota)

Photo by Shutterstock

MAY 2
Consignment Auction
7 a.m. Gates Open
10 a.m. Auction
Prairie Village
Madison, SD

MAY 2
Cinco de Mayo Fiesta
2-8 p.m.
Milbank, SD
605-432-6656

MAY 6-7
Energize! Exploring Innovative
Rural Communities Conference
Hosted by SDSU Extension
Community Vitality
Community Center
Wall, SD
extension.sdstate.edu/energize

MAY 9
1880 Train Opens
Hill City, SD

MAY 10
Senior Breakfast
8 a.m.-12 p.m.
Hill City Senior Center
Hill City, SD

MAY 15-17
Open House Weekend
Free Entrance
Custer State Park
Custer, SD

MAY 16
2nd Annual Bird Bash
8 a.m.-1 p.m.
Bear Butte State Park
Sturgis, SD
605-390-2901
valleyhummingbird@yahoo.com

MAY 22
Hill City Community
Birthday Party
5-7 p.m.
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD

MAY 23
Free Christian Men's Event
8 a.m.-2 p.m.
The Barn at Aspen Acres
Spearfish, SD
Register: RiseUpMen.com

MAY 23-24
Hill City Birthday &
Lumberjack-Logging
Celebration
Downtown Hill City
Hill City, SD

MAY 30
Cleaning Up the Box
City Hall, Other Locations TBD
Box Elder, SD
605-390-9341
mikki.gubka@boxelder.us

MAY 30
Car, Pickup & Motorcycle Show
12-4 p.m.
Johnson Siding
Rapid City, SD
605-348-2343

MAY 30
Frühlingsfest
Spring Street Market
1-5 p.m.
Main Street Square
Rapid City, SD
605-718-8484

JUNE 4-6
Black Hills Quilt Show
Thurs. 5-8 p.m.
Fri. 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
Sat. 9 a.m.-4 p.m.
Rushmore Hall
at the Monument
Rapid City, SD

JUNE 13
Luce Pioneer Day
10 a.m.-3 p.m.
Rope & Candle Making, Butter
Churning, Dutch Oven Cooking
Lake Herman State Park
Madison, SD
605-880-5077

JUNE 19-20
77th Annual Czech Days
Tabor, SD
www.taborczechdays.com

JUNE 24-27
Crystal Springs Rodeo
Clear Lake, SD
605-874-2996

JUNE 26-27
Buckhorn Rodeo
Britton, SD
605-880-5077

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