



# Rural Montana

Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association Magazine | MARCH 2026



## STATEWIDE ESSAY WINNER

**AMELIA GILCHRIST**

READ HER FULL  
ESSAY INSIDE

- PAGE 2



FEATURES



2



Youth Tour

Read the statewide Youth Tour winner's essay

ASK A MANAGER

12

Ask A Manager

A brand new panel tells readers what they need to know about electric co-ops



10

Red Cross

Learn what a Red Cross disaster volunteer does and how to be one



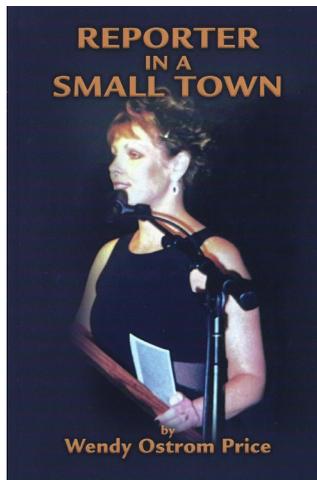
COVER

About our cover: Youth Tour statewide essay winner Amelia Gilchrist of Glasgow/NorVal Electric Cooperative poses in front of the Fort Peck Dam powerhouses. | PHOTO BY RYAN HALL

4

Co-op Author

Former reporter, co-op employee pens book



Rural Montana

March 2026

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DEPARTMENTS

- 1 | Viewpoint
- 9 | Dateline D.C.
- 14 | Recipes
- 15 | Events Calendar
- 16 | Young Montanans

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# NRECA Youth Tour: Helping secure our future

**MARK LAMBRECHT**, CEO of Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association



**O**NE of the highlights of my time with the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association (MECA) was working with Youth Tour, the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) program that brings high school students from all over the country to the nation's capital to learn about government and to experience Washington, D.C.



Montana's delegations were incredibly diverse, with different ethnicities, rural and urban backgrounds, athletes and artists, and contrasting political viewpoints.

The program traces its roots back to 1957, when Lyndon B. Johnson, then a U.S. Senator from Texas, addressed the NRECA Annual Meeting in Chicago, and suggested the organization initiate a program for rural teens to have the opportunity to experience Washington, D.C., and see their government in action. Since then, NRECA has welcomed tens of thousands of students to D.C. every summer. Montana's electric cooperatives and MECA have sent more than 800 youth delegates over the years. This summer MECA will send Glasgow High School's Amelia Gilchrist, whose winning statewide essay contest entry is featured in this issue, along with more than two dozen students sponsored by their electric cooperatives.

In the February issue of *Rural Montana*, I wrote about my hope that by getting to know each other better, we can come together. Youth Tour proves that concept every year. I've witnessed Montana's students start each trip in small groups of those who knew each other from 4-H or athletics, while others didn't know anyone else. Yet after spending a week together learning about American history and seeing how our government works, experiencing fun team-building exercises and just talking on the bus, they all understood each other better and developed enduring friendships.

I had the privilege to chaperone two Montana Youth Tour delegations to Washington, D.C. They each included a couple dozen youth from across the state, featuring students from large and small high schools, as well as home schools.

Youth Tour alumni have become leaders in their schools and communities, and in state and national organizations. In fact, Apple CEO Tim Cook participated in Youth Tour in 1977 as a member of Alabama's delegation. There's no doubt in my mind that as they become leaders in government, business, education and other fields critical to our union, Montana's Youth Tour delegates will show the rest of us the way to come together to move our nation forward. 

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## STATEWIDE ESSAY WINNER



**E**ACH year the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association (MECA) holds an essay contest to select one student to be sponsored by MECA on the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) Youth Tour.

The winner this year is Amelia Gilchrist, a junior at Glasgow High School, whose parents

are members of NorVal Electric Cooperative.

This year's essay topic was: *All cooperatives share a concern for their communities. Write about how your local cooperative supports your community or detail new ways they could get involved.*

Below is Amelia's winning essay with minor edits to match RM style.

## NorVal Electric:

### Leading our community toward a brighter future

ESSAY BY **AMELIA GILCHRIST** | MECA STATEWIDE YOUTH TOUR WINNER

**N**ORVAL Electric Cooperative is a company that is fully invested in the surrounding communities. From Scobey to Wolf Point, and Opheim to Glasgow, this co-op not only keeps the lights on but also helps those in need all across eastern Montana.

This support is especially important in our rural and underserved community. NorVal contributes over \$3.5 million annually to the local economy. This helps fund the numerous philanthropic and community projects that enhance our small town and the surrounding areas.

NorVal Electric is a business that supports our rural population through numerous activities, such as donations to nonprofits, offering scholarship opportunities to local high school students, and encouraging its employees to volunteer as coaches and mentors in the surrounding area. Our community wouldn't be the same without NorVal Electric Cooperative.

Recently, NorVal has both donated to and participated in our local Festival of Trees, which is where different groups, businesses or people in our community decorate Christmas trees to be auctioned to the highest bidder.

*Editor's Note - Citations and the reference section of the following essay were removed due to space availability. A cited copy of the essay, with references, is available upon request to [ryanh@mtco-ops.com](mailto:ryanh@mtco-ops.com).*

This money is donated to the Valley County non-profit HOPE (Help Others Pay Expenses) Project, which supports citizens of Valley County who are struggling with medical bills. According to the Centers for Disease Control, the average hospital stay in 2019 was over \$14,000, while according to *CensusReporter.org*, the annual per capita income in Glasgow is only \$34,439, with 13 percent of individuals being below the poverty line. Considering these two facts, medical bills could easily result in crushing debt or even bankruptcy.

One community member has said, "Your thoughtfulness means so much more than words can say. Thank you seems so inadequate for all the help you have given us. Thank you so much," concerning how the HOPE proj-

ect affected their life. This assistance wouldn't be possible without support from individuals and organizations such as NorVal Electric.

When the government shutdown threatened the most vulnerable people in our community with the loss of SNAP benefits, NorVal answered the call for assistance. NorVal collected food donations for the Valley Community Emergency Food Bank, offering credits to those who donated canned food. This generosity is nothing new as NorVal has a long history of supporting the local food bank, helping to provide nourishment to those who need it most.

NorVal keeps an eye toward the future. Every year, the humble co-op offers several scholarships for local member high school graduates. These scholarships are especially important as the cost of attending college or a technical/vocational school is only increasing. According to *US News*, the average college sticker price in 2025 rose over the past year by 3.3 percent for private institutions and in-state public college students, and by 3.7 percent for out-of-state public college students. The average four-year degree costs \$19,068 annually, which is a lot



*NorVal's dedicated employees are involved in the community just as much as the co-op itself... These people have had a great impact on our community.*

Amelia Gilchrist from Glasgow is the NRECA Youth Tour Statewide Essay winner. She will go with students from around the state to Washington, D.C., this summer, all expenses paid by the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association. | PHOTO BY RYAN HALL

to ask, especially for students below the poverty line in Valley County. Without the help of scholarships like these, many students in our community wouldn't be able to attend these programs.

NorVal's dedicated employees are involved in the community just as much as the co-op itself. Employees such as Eric Feit, Cody Odom, Jayson Nelson, Kyle Barras and Tracy Henry coach athletic activities and mentor students. These people have had a great impact on our community. NorVal's workforce is committed to volunteering and influencing our youth in positive ways, while educating them on the importance of teamwork and

sportsmanship, and assisting them in building their skills.

One idea that NorVal could consider implementing in our rural community would be a mentorship program for those looking to enter the trades, specifically a lineman training program. This program would aim to mentor high school students interested in the trades on what linemen do and how they could pursue these career opportunities. In addition to teaching about the trade itself, this project could include safety demonstrations, trade school application seminars and what it's like to work for NorVal. This program would potentially influence students to attend trade school, then

return to work for the co-op.

From supporting non-profit organizations to providing scholarships and mentors to the local populace, NorVal Electric Cooperative is truly a business that loves its community. By helping the local area, NorVal has become a pillar of our region that we would collapse without.

The continued presence of our local co-op serves as an important indication of just how essential community bonds are to the welfare of rural areas. As Northeastern Montana faces the future, we can be confident that NorVal Electric Cooperative will continue to stand by our side and aid our community through whatever comes our way. RM

*NorVal Electric is a business that supports our rural population through numerous activities, such as donations to nonprofits, offering scholarship opportunities to local high school students, and encouraging its employees to volunteer as coaches and mentors in the surrounding area. Our community wouldn't be the same without NorVal Electric Cooperative.*

# Retired co-op employee authors book of her career as a reporter

*Reporter in a Small Town* available now

BY RYAN HALL | RURAL MONTANA EDITOR

**W**ENDY Ostrom Price, a retired Flathead Electric Cooperative communications employee, never set out to write a book. With *Reporter in a Small Town*, she has done just that, chronicling her life as a radio station reporter in Kalispell prior to joining the co-op.

When her father, famed local journalist G. George Ostrom, passed away on New Year's Day 2025, Ostrom Price began reminiscing about life and her career in journalism.

"My husband said, 'Stop talking and start writing,'" Ostrom Price said. "So I began journaling."

She said that when she finished, she shared her writings with friends and family, who encouraged her to publish the stories as a book.

"So I did," Ostrom Price said.

The book is an easy-to-read chronicle of her career, with most stories only taking up a page or two. There's humor, compassion and a story about the day the world changed on Sept. 11, 2001.

"Because it was journaling, I spilled my guts about a lot of things. I scaled that way back when I decided to publish. I didn't want to hurt anyone or bring up bad memories," Ostrom Price said.

"That was the hard part, was deciding

what to leave out," she added.

Ostrom Price said the stories she picked, and the brevity of each one, were very intentional choices.

"I wanted my book to be as if I was on the radio, short and succinct," she said.

The book chronicles Ostrom Price's career and interviews as she parachutes, meets Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf and other interesting tidbits.

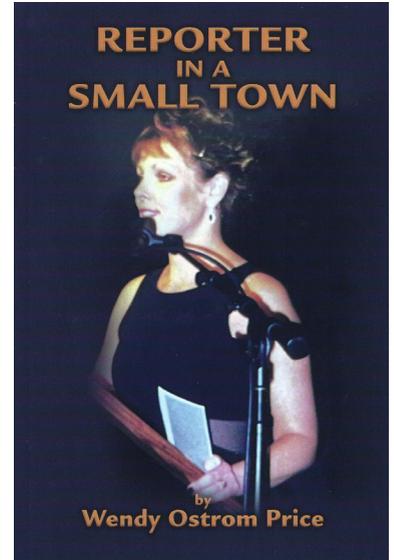
"There's nothing I said yes to that I wish I would have said no to. Even the things that were out of my comfort zone, I learned from them," Ostrom Price said.

Though the pages are dotted with experiences and celebrity interviews, the focus is on local people and their stories.

"My favorite interviews were with those people right here in the community," Ostrom Price said. "The focus was as a reporter in a small town. So that's the period of my life I covered, and attributed to my father."

She said her book not only pays homage to an era of journalism before social media and smartphones, but it honors her community and those in it.

"I hope that people in my area, in my community, who were with me along this ride will just take a little nostalgia from it," Ostrom Price said.



## HOW TO BUY

*Reporter in a Small Town* is available in softcover at various Montana retailers, as well as online and from Farcountry Press at (800) 821-3874, [farcountrypress.com](http://farcountrypress.com).

REMINDER

## Send us your Reader Issue content

Photo and story submissions are due by April 1

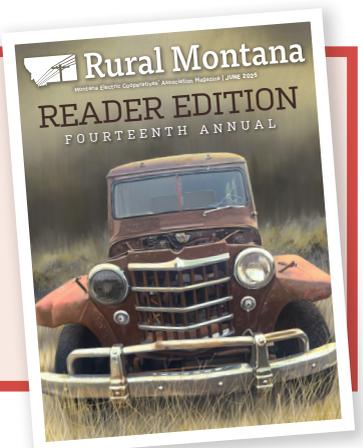
If you have any questions, call Editor Ryan Hall at 406-761-8333.

Send stand-alone photos to: [rural@mtco-ops.com](mailto:rural@mtco-ops.com).

Send stories (and related photos) to: [ryanh@mtco-ops.com](mailto:ryanh@mtco-ops.com),

or mail any item for submission to Rural Montana, PO Box 3469, Great Falls MT 59403.

**\*You must include your address and phone number to be considered for publication**



# Power players of the grid

By **ANTHONY BUCKLEY** | NRECA

**E**VERY time you flip a switch, you're connecting to one of the most complex systems ever built, also known as the North American electric grid. Often called the largest interconnected machine in the world, this network spans the United States, Canada and parts of Mexico. It includes thousands of generators, hundreds of thousands of miles of transmission lines and millions of miles of distribution powerlines all working together to keep the lights on day and night.

But how does electricity actually get from a power plant to your home? And where do electric cooperatives fit in? Let's break it down.

The U.S. electric grid has three major components: generators, transmission and distribution. Each plays a critical role in delivering electricity where and when it is needed.

## Generators: Making the Power

In the U.S., most power plants produce electricity by burning fossil fuels or by harnessing renewable resources such as solar, wind and water. To ensure that enough electricity is generated to keep the lights on at an affordable price, two main structures exist.

The first is a "vertically integrated" model, where in some regions, a single utility owns everything from power plants to powerlines, and delivers electricity directly to consumers.

In other areas, a second model is used. Instead of one company making and delivering power, many companies sell electricity in a competitive market. Utilities buy electricity from these generators and deliver it to consumers like you. In this model, a group called a regional transmission operator (RTO) or independent system operator (ISO) helps keep everything running smoothly. They make sure enough power is available every second of the day. This system is called a wholesale market, and it lets utilities buy extra power when they need it.

Most electric cooperatives don't own large power plants. Instead, they purchase power through long-term contracts, wholesale markets or from their generation and transmission cooperative (G&T), a member-owned utility that serves multiple co-ops in a designated region. G&T cooperatives are owned by distribution co-ops like yours. There are 64 G&T cooperatives across the U.S., and they often own power plants and transmission lines. G&Ts also plan for the future by investing in new generation sources, building infrastructure and integrating renewables, all while staying true to the cooperative model: member-focused, not profit-driven.

Once electricity is generated, it doesn't stay at the power plant. It begins a long journey to reach homes, farms and businesses. Power must travel across regions to where it's



The complex electric grid includes thousands of generators, hundreds of thousands of miles of transmission lines and millions of miles of distribution powerlines all working together to keep the lights on day and night. | **PHOTO CREDIT: NRECA**

needed most, and that's where the transmission system comes in. These high-voltage lines act like energy superhighways, moving electricity efficiently over hundreds of miles before it's stepped down for local distribution and, ultimately, for the devices you use every day.

## Transmission: The Energy Superhighway

Transmission lines move enormous amounts of electricity efficiently across regions. Most distribution co-ops don't own these transmission lines, but they rely on their G&T to handle this part of the journey. G&Ts make sure power gets from the plant to your local co-op.

The electricity carried by transmission lines cannot be used as is because the voltage levels are too high. That's the job of the distribution network, which is the final step that brings power to your lights, appliances and devices.

## Distribution: The Last Mile

The distribution network is the "last mile" segment of the electric grid. It delivers generated energy from the transmission network to consumers. The high-voltage power from transmission lines is converted to lower voltages that home appliances, electric vehicles and personal devices can use. This is where your electric cooperative comes in to keep local lines maintained and power flowing to members 24/7/365.

Understanding how power moves from generation to your home helps explain why reliability and affordability depend on teamwork and collaboration between your local co-op, its G&T partners and the broader grid. Together, co-ops are preparing for tomorrow's challenges, so you can count on safe, reliable power for years to come. **RM**



Keith King is the Camp Ranger and year-round caretaker at K-M Scout Ranch. | PHOTO BY CATHY MOSER

# K-M Scout Ranch a world-class camp

Ranch serves all scouts in the heart of central Montana

STORY BY CATHY MOSER | FOR FERGUS ELECTRIC

**U**PON its founding in 1910, the Boy Scouts of America adopted a 12-point Scout Law. To better reflect an ongoing commitment of welcoming all youth to experience the benefits of Scouting, the organization changed its name to Scouting America in 2025, yet, the original 12 points of the Scout Law endure.

Along the graveled K-M Road leading to the K-M Scout Ranch, 12 small metal signs each announce one point of Scout Law. Every day a Scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverent.

I arrive at K-M Scout Ranch, pronounced K-bar-M, in the North Moccasin Mountains near Hilger. Camp Ranger Keith King greets me.

“Have you been to the camp before?” he asked. I had, in August of 2023, as a member of the Lewistown Birding Bunch. In a single afternoon, the Scouts, we birders and former Camp Ranger Nick Williams built 30 nest boxes for bluebirds. The Scouts earned merit badges for their work, and we birders had a new supply of nest boxes.

Scouts were everywhere that day. Today, no Scouts are present. The surroundings on this chilly November morning are quiet and still.

“Just turkeys and deer,” King said of the year-round residents, other than himself, on the camp’s nearly 1,000 acres of forest, lake and meadow. King has been a Scout since the third grade, starting as a Cub Scout and reaching the highest rank of Eagle Scout before

serving as a volunteer Scout leader. He relocated from Great Falls in early 2025 to become the K-M Scout Ranch camp ranger, a paid position.

Of course, when the calendar flips to July, the camp will revert to what I remember from three summers ago, boys and girls scampering from one activity or adventure to the next. King tells me the camp exists to “support Scouting programs by delivering outdoor experiences for youth.” K-M Scout Ranch primarily serves the Cub Scouting, Scouts BSA and Venturing programs, but King said it’s a camp for all Scouts. Last summer, the camp hosted more than 1,100 Scouts and leaders, of which 700 were “youth participants,” meaning they ranged in age from 5 to 20 years old. Camp



The Scouts partnered with the Lewistown Birding Bunch and Town & Country grocery for a community project of bluebird box building. | PHOTO BY CATHY MOSER

sessions run for one week.

Of the outdoor activities and adventures offered, the most popular is hands-on All-Terrain Vehicle training.

"It's for Scouts 14 years old and older," King said. "They learn to drive an ATV safely. The camp has five miles of ATV trails, which the Scouts ride after they've completed training."

Scouts who enroll for aquatics learn how to swim, canoe and kayak at Taylor Lake. The camp recently revitalized the small lake, including installation of three underwater cameras to monitor aquatic activity. The Scouts can view trout spawning and other underwater action on camera monitors in the Nature Cabin. Camp offerings integrate science, technology, engineering and math, or STEM. According to the Scouting America website, STEM-based activities help to "expand a sense of wonder in Scouts." STEM also teaches some of Scouting's core values, including leadership, teamwork, creativity and problem solving. The construction of a new building for STEM activities is one of the camp's future projects.

Another popular program is Range and Target Activities. Scouts learn to shoot an arrow from a bow and how to fire a .22 rifle and a shotgun. Adventure awaits at the climbing tower, where Scouts learn how to rappel safely.

"It's rewarding to see youth having fun and wanting to come back to camp next year," King said.

## CONTACT:

- Learn more about the opportunities in Scouting that await your kids by visiting [scoutingmontana.org](http://scoutingmontana.org).
- If you would like to host your event at K-M Scout Ranch, contact the Scouting America Montana Council in Great Falls at 406-761-6000.

## DONATE:

K-M Scout Ranch is in need of donations for the purchase of picnic tables to be placed throughout the camp. If you would like to contribute, enclose a check with a note stating the donation is for K-M picnic tables. Send to: Scouting America, Montana Council, 820 17th Ave. S., Great Falls, MT 59405

These contemporary outdoor programs adopted by Scouting America complement original programs such as Scout craft, first aid, orienteering and wilderness survival — all instituted in 1910. Coincidentally that year, K-M Scout Ranch's most novel feature, the Kendall townsite, enjoyed its most productive year of its brief existence. At the Barnes-King gold mine in the North Moccasin Mountains, production peaked and the population in the town supporting the mine and miners, Kendall, swelled to a zenith of 1,500

residents. Kendall flourished in the first decade of the 20th Century as Montana's richest gold-mining town. The mining industry around Kendall eventually waned, with the Barnes-King Mine closing completely in 1921. As residents moved away, Kendall became a ghost town.

In 1968, Kendall Mining Company gifted the land to the Boy Scouts of America, including the townsite with its few sandstone ruins. That year, the site found new life as the home of the Camp Kendall Scout camp. In 1973, the camp moved to a new location, about two miles from the ghost town. Taking the K from Kendall, and the letter common to each of the four land donors, M, the Scouts of America Council had a name for their new camp, K-M Scout Ranch. The camp still touts its claim of the "only Scout camp in the world owning a ghost town."

A new state-of-the-art lodge, completed in 2019, beautifully complements the camp's forest setting and is equipped with a spacious dining hall and kitchen, offices, conference rooms, medical center and Scout store. Scout leaders use the Scoutmaster Lounge for reprieve, work and study. The lodge, with its 300-person capacity, was designed with the intent of hosting groups outside of Scouting and, according to King, "We are ready to welcome organizations, private events and businesspeople, and become a bigger part of the central Montana community." All of the many donations that funded the construction of the lodge were made anonymously.

As King and I stand on the lodge deck with the forest around us and a view of the Central Montana plains ahead of us, he said he has his dream job.

"I always wanted to be a Camp ranger and work outdoors," King said.

He likes the solitude, and watching the turkeys and deer as they wander through the property.

"I'm supporting the Scout program in such a beautiful place," he said. "If I am successful as caretaker, then the camp is successful." RM



## MONTANA U.S. SENATORS

In order to allow ample space for responses, Rural Montana alternates asking Montana's senators and representatives the Dateline D.C. question each month. This month features the senators. Next month, we will ask a question of the state's two representatives.

## THIS MONTH'S QUESTION:

"Cyber threats to electricity infrastructure such as substations and even the power grid itself are a growing concern for utilities. What can Congress do to develop a more comprehensive cybersecurity strategy to protect critical infrastructure like electricity?"

THE SAME QUESTION WILL BE ASKED TO MONTANA'S TWO U.S. REPRESENTATIVES IN NEXT MONTH'S EDITION



## Senator Daines

320 Hart, Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510  
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Ph: (202) 224-2651

## Senator Steve Daines

**U**NLEASHING made-in-America energy has been a hallmark priority of mine for years. It bolsters our economy, supports millions of jobs, decreases our reliance on foreign nations, strengthens our electric grid and protects our national security. The demand for U.S. energy is expected to grow at least 50 percent over the next 25 years. It's critical that we do everything we can to support more Made-In-America energy and strengthen our electric grid so we are prepared for this growth in demand and maintain our energy dominance in an increasingly competitive global market.

To meet the increase in demand for electricity, we must support an all-of-the-above energy portfolio that increases American energy on all fronts—from coal and natural gas to hydro, wind and solar. That's why I fought so hard to reverse Joe Biden's anti-energy rules that would have put Montana's Colstrip Power Plant out of business. Thanks to the

leadership of President Trump, the power plant will remain operational. I also fought to protect funding for the Calumet Refinery in Great Falls, which provides good-paying Montana jobs and is critical to our energy dominance.

As technology evolves, it's essential that we strengthen our energy independence and cybersecurity to defend our electric grid from any threats. Back in 2020, President Trump signed my bill into law that requires cybersecurity standards for Internet-connected devices bought by the U.S. government, which puts the proper protections in place to keep our national security safe from cyber threats. We also need to ensure proper funding for research and development in technology, so that America remains at the forefront of cutting-edge tech and can counter any malign influences.

I will always fight to protect Montana's energy security and work toward a secure, safe future. RM



## Senator Sheehy

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## Senator Tim Sheehy

**E**NERGY security is national security. Threats to our electricity infrastructure — from substations to the broader power grid — are a serious national security concern. We must thwart these threats to keep the lights on for Montana families, small businesses and rural communities, and to fuel America's 21st-century economy without disruption.

Emerging technologies, from AI to data centers, quantum computing, crypto and more, will drive exponential demand for baseload electricity over the next 20 years. These generational technological advances will create jobs, economic growth and prosperity, but only if we can securely meet that demand.

Our mission is clear and twofold. First, increase energy supply to keep pace with rising demand. Second, harden our grid against threats so electricity continues to flow reliably and safely.

Montanans voted to unleash Montana's resource economy, protect Montana jobs and make energy affordable, accessible and reliable again. From pass-

ing pro-energy provisions in the Working Families Tax Cuts Act to putting an end to radical Biden-era regulations that put our resource economy on life support, Montana's delegation is delivering on this commonsense agenda. And we're just getting started.

As a member of the Armed Services and Commerce, Science and Transportation committees, I'm positioned to ensure that Congress works alongside appropriate federal, state and local partners, and invests in the research, resources and technology needed to safeguard critical infrastructure. Delivering commonsense solutions to secure America's future remains my top priority in the U.S. Senate, including policies that defend our grid and electricity infrastructure.

Thank you for serving Montanans each day. Your work is essential to our state's future, and it is the honor of my life to represent you. Please do not hesitate to reach out to my office for assistance and support. RM

# Montana Red Cross in need of volunteers

Co-op couple among those donating their time

STORY BY RYAN HALL | RURAL MONTANA EDITOR

**M**ANY Montanans donate blood through the Red Cross, but did you know the nonprofit organization is looking for volunteers to do everything from dispatch to disaster response?

“Ninety percent of our workforce is volunteer,” said Matt Ochsner, communications director for Red Cross of Montana, Idaho and Eastern Oregon. “The more volunteers we have, the more folks we can serve.”

He noted that more than 400 volunteers statewide put in upwards of 36,000 hours last year.

“Home fires are our number-one disaster,” Ochsner said. “We respond to home fires from Libby to Plentywood.”

One co-op couple who has responded to house fires and other disasters is Mike and Barbara Gumbert of Kalispell, who are Flathead Electric Cooperative members.

Barbara, 77, was an operating room nurse for 35 years, who wanted to continue to help others, which she felt was the Lord’s calling for her, even after retirement.

“When I retired, I felt that I still had time and the experience to help other people,” she said. “So when I retired, I went to volunteer with the Red Cross.”

While Barbara is able to use her years of medical experience by responding to disasters and providing healthcare, Ochsner noted there are myriads of volunteer jobs available — with no training or medical experience necessary.

“We provide services, but one of the biggest things we provide is a hug,” he said.

Ochsner added that people can



March is Red Cross Month

**To volunteer:** call (800) REDCROSS or go online to [www.redcross.org/montana](http://www.redcross.org/montana)

volunteer for a few hours a month up to several hours a week. They can be available as needed or take a six-hour shift as a duty officer, which basically acts as a dispatcher for Red Cross volunteers and services.

“Red Cross will provide free training,” for any position, he said.

Volunteer opportunities include duty

Flathead Electric Cooperative members Mike and Barbara Gumbert of Kalispell volunteer for the Red Cross at shelters and by driving donated blood where it is needed, among other duties.

officers, helping at temporary shelters during floods and wildfires, and responding to disasters such as house fires.

Another opportunity is transporting blood, which Mike Gumbert does frequently, driving much-needed donated blood from Kalispell to Great Falls more than 200 times to date.

## Helping Others

The Gumberts have volunteered for Red Cross in Washington, Ohio and Montana, and find it rewarding.

“I enjoy the fact that I can assist and help people. I know the Lord is with me and helping me get done what I need to get done,” Barbara said.



# MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

THE MONTANA CHAPTER OF THE RED CROSS IN FY2025

“I don’t think we’ve run into a single client that hasn’t been grateful for the Red Cross assistance,” Mike said. “The sheer outpouring of gratitude is so gratifying and amazing... Just the sheer gratitude for yourself, the gratitude and personal satisfaction from being able to help, that the Red Cross gives you the tools and the training you need to be able to go out and face the client and be able to help them in a desperate time of need.”

In addition to transporting blood or helping with health needs, the Gumberts are among those volunteers who set up shelters and perform intake functions for the Red Cross.

“Whenever they have a disaster, they have us help them out immediately. We always do intake, open shelters, just whatever we can do,” Barbara said.

She also has helped children who have breathing issues get their breathing equipment replaced following a house fire. Barbara said medications, glasses and hearing aids are other items that often need replaced.

Ochsner said the Red Cross has also provided money to displaced families to get a place to stay, as well as replaced work boots, cellphones or clothes. Anything they need to get back on their feet quickly, Ochsner said.

## A Growing Need

Ochsner said volunteers are needed across the Treasure State, particularly

in rural areas — and especially in eastern Montana. While volunteers statewide and from neighboring states will respond to a major disaster such as the flooding in Libby earlier this year, local volunteers are needed when a house fire happens.

The Gumberts said they can see relief on the faces of victims when they are given a Red Cross Comfort Kit, which may include bottles of water, blankets and toys for kids in the family.

It’s the first step to getting back to what life was like before the fire, and it’s a sign that someone cares and will be with them as they start that journey.

“Oftentimes we get back more than we give. We run into those people a month or two later,” and they are doing well, Mike said. “It’s rewarding. The Lord is taking care of them as well.”

In co-op country, Ochsner said areas near Sidney, Medicine Lake, Glasgow, Circle and Jordan are all hurting for volunteers. But, any area would welcome new help.

If you don’t have the time or interest in volunteering, you can still help your neighbors. Nationwide, more than 500 blood drives were canceled between Jan. 1 and Feb. 6, meaning approximately 20,000 units of blood that are typically collected were not.

“Raise your hand, roll up your sleeve and donate blood,” Ochsner said. RM



**408 volunteers** made up 90 percent of the workforce and contributed **36,614 hours**.



Gave **667 people** food, shelter and other support following **187 disasters**.



Collected **51,489 units** of lifesaving blood at **2,176 blood drives**.



The Service to the Armed Forces team supported **7,987 military families**.



With Red Cross partners, installed **364 free smoke alarms** and made **143 homes** safer.



Taught **8,876 people** lifesaving skills, including CPR and first aid.

## THE ASK A MANAGER PANEL



MATT HAGGERTY  
PARK ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE



TREVOR PARKE  
VIGILANTE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE



BRAD BAUMAN  
SUN RIVER ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

### SEND US YOUR QUESTIONS

If you want to ask a question for a future edition of *Ask a Manager*, email your question to [ryanh@mtco-ops.com](mailto:ryanh@mtco-ops.com), or call the editor at 406-761-8333.

# ASK A MANAGER:

## What is one thing I need to know about co-ops

Every other month we ask our electric co-op manager panel a question, many of which are provided by our readers.

This month we introduce our new panel for 2026: Matt Haggerty, manager of Park Electric Cooperative in Livingston; Trevor Parke, manager of Vigilante Electric Coop-

erative in Dillon; and Brad Bauman, manager of Sun River Electric Cooperative in Fairfield.

This month's question is:  
**Q:** "What is one thing I need to know about electric cooperatives?"



### BRAD BAUMAN SUN RIVER ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

**I**n my mind the most important aspect of a cooperative that needs to be understood is the fact that the organization is owned by the people who receive the service from the business. Having that direct relationship with the cooperative and the member/owner is unique and healthy.

Other business models lend themselves to creating margins or profits for investors. Electric cooperatives generate margins to pay for the operations of the organization, and any margins leftover from paying the operating costs are allocated back to the members in the form of capital credits that will be paid back to the member/owner. What a wonderful concept!

As a member/owner, being able to talk directly to the management and personnel creates a healthier environment for exchanging ideas and creating trust in the operation and the purpose of the organization. The answers that the member/owner receives from the conversations may not always be in line with how the member feels or believes, but at least they have the

opportunity to hear the position of the cooperative and the "why."

The representation that the member/owner gets through the election of the board of trustees that represent them in monthly board meetings, state, regional and national organizations, and strategic planning sessions opens the door for additional member opportunities. Knowing that the member has a seat at the table should give the member/owners a healthier outlook on the purpose and means of operation of the organization.

Cementing the member/owner concept is paramount in having the cooperative model function as it has always been meant to. The continued education and promotion of these ideas should be a part of every electric cooperative's member/owner communication. It is what makes us special and unique. It is who we are. It is what makes us stronger and successful.

Thank you, member/owners, we are proud and honored to serve you. BM

## MATT HAGGERTY PARK ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

**T**HIS is a fantastic question, and one that more people should ask. While there are definitely many aspects that I would want cooperative members to know, I will highlight a few key points that truly set electric cooperatives apart.

First, electric cooperatives are not-for-profit, member-owned organizations. Unlike for-profit utilities, cooperatives do not exist to generate profits for their shareholders. Instead, they charge just slightly above their operating cost. Any excess funds remaining at the end of the year are allocated as capital credits, which are returned to our members.

These credits are generally retired on a 15- to 30-year cycle, depending on the cooperative's financial condition. In addition to our standard retirement schedule, Park Electric members also have the option to receive a portion of their capital credits early through a discounted capital-credit program. In general, most cooperatives retire outstanding capital credits as long as their board of trustees deems the cooperative financially stable. This structure ensures members pay only the cooperative's operating costs without any added profit margins.

The reason for the 15- to 30-year cycle is that coopera-

tives use these margins as a way to help fund infrastructure projects on the electrical system as a zero-interest loan from their membership. It then repays that money back to its members at the end of the term.

Another essential principle I feel everyone should understand is democratic member control. Cooperatives are founded on the ideals of democracy. Every member has an equal voice in decisions that affect the organization, including electing the board of trustees, approving policies and shaping the cooperative's future. Every member receives one vote, regardless of how much electricity they use.

This democratic structure ensures fairness, encourages member participation and holds elected leaders accountable. When members know their voices matter, they are more engaged and invested in the success of their cooperative. If concerns arise, members have the power to address them collectively, ensuring decisions are made in the best interest of the entire membership.

Understanding the cooperative difference helps members see how unique this model truly is. Electric cooperatives are built on fairness, accountability and local control, ensuring the focus remains on service, not profit. RM

## TREVOR PARKE VIGILANTE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

**E**LECTRIC cooperatives are built on trust, community and member ownership. Every electric consumer is also a member/owner, giving them a voice in setting policies and making key decisions. Unlike investor owned utilities (IOUs), which are for-profit companies focused on maximizing returns for shareholders, cooperatives operate on a not-for-profit model dedicated to serving local communities, often in rural areas where access to affordable power was once limited and not profitable for IOUs.

Cooperatives are governed by a board of trustees elected by the membership. These trustees are fellow member/owners who live in the same communities they represent. Their role is to guide the cooperative responsibly, ensuring decisions reflect local priorities. Because cooperatives are not driven by profit, revenues are used to maintain and improve the system, cover operating costs and invest in infrastructure. Any excess is returned to members as capital credits.

Employees and trustees share a deep commitment to their communities. Many live within or near the service areas, and therefore understand firsthand the importance of safe, reliable and affordable electricity.

It's common to find cooperative trustees and employees volunteering, serving other local organizations or supporting community initiatives. They see their work as part of strengthening the places they call home.

Support for local communities is a core cooperative principle. Many cooperatives regularly contribute to schools, fire departments, student programs, scholarships, community events and local charities. They also help fund energy-assistance programs and provide aid to individuals and families facing hardship. In many cases, a portion of each power bill directly supports these community-focused efforts.

Electricity is an essential service and cooperatives take reliability seriously. Crews are available 24/7/365 to restore power as quickly and safely as possible during outages. Cooperatives also support one another during storms and emergencies, sending crews wherever needed. This spirit of cooperation extends beyond local boundaries. Cooperatives work together regionally, nationally and even internationally to improve service quality, strengthen local economies and address broader community needs. RM

Photo submitted by  
Martha Notess

**1st**  
PLACE

## Lamb and Mint Hand Pies

Martha Notess | KALISPELL

### INGREDIENTS

**DOUGH:**  
2 cups plus 1 T flour,  
divided  
1 tsp. salt, divided  
10 T cold butter, cut into  
small pieces  
7-8 T ice water

**FILLING:**  
1 lb. ground lamb  
1 carrot, finely chopped

1 small onion, finely  
chopped  
½ cup beef broth  
1 tsp. Dijon or deli  
mustard  
¼ tsp. black pepper  
½ cup (2 oz.) shredded  
Irish cheddar cheese  
1 T chopped fresh mint  
1 egg, lightly beaten

### DIRECTIONS

#### FOR DOUGH:

Combine 2 cups flour and ½ tsp salt in medium bowl. Cut in butter. Add water, 1 T at a time, stirring with fork until loose dough forms. Knead dough until it comes together.

Divide dough into four pieces; press each into a 5-inch disc. Wrap dough with plastic and freeze for 15 minutes.

#### PREPARE FILLING:

Cook lamb in skillet over medium-high heat, 7-8 minutes, stirring. Drain well, remove to bowl.

Add onion and carrot to skillet; cook 2-3 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Add in lamb and 1 T flour; cook and stir 1 minute.

Add broth, mustard, ½ tsp salt and pepper; cook over medium heat until thick-

ened, about 2 minutes. Remove from heat; stir in mint. Cool 10 minutes. Stir in cheese.

#### TO BAKE:

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Line baking sheet with parchment.

Roll out dough on lightly floured surface. Cut out 4 circles (per disc) with 5-inch round cookie cutter.

Place half of the dough circles on prepared baking sheet. Top each with lamb filling, leaving 1/2-inch border around edge.

Top with remaining dough circles, pressing edges to seal. Press edges again with fork tines. Brush tops with beaten egg; cut 1-inch slit in top.

Bake 28-30 minutes, until golden brown; serve hot or at room temp.



## SEND IN YOUR RECIPES

Recipes for *RM* magazine are submitted by cooperative members across the state. First, second and third place monthly winners are awarded \$30, \$20 and \$10 prizes, respectively. Send your recipes to *RM* Recipes, Box 3469, Great Falls, MT 59403, or email rural@mtco-ops.com. **Please include your name, hometown and an address. If you do not include this information, your submission will not be accepted.** For April send your favorite recipe that uses cream cheese by March 16. Please send in May recipes anytime: You favorite dish that is saucy/gravy. Try to limit the ingredients and length of directions for space. Please include a photo, if possible.

**2nd**  
PLACE

## Stuffed Cabbage Rolls

Nicole Watkins | LAUREL

### INGREDIENTS

1 large head of cabbage,  
cored  
1 T butter  
2 medium onions,  
chopped  
3/4 lb. ground beef  
1/2 lb. ground pork  
sausage

1 cup rice, cooked  
1/2 tsp. allspice  
1 can (28 oz.) tomatoes  
1 can (8 oz.) tomato sauce  
1 can (6 oz.) tomato paste  
1 tsp. salt  
1/2 tsp. garlic salt  
1 tsp. thyme

### DIRECTIONS

In a large pot, steam cabbage until the leaves are softened enough to peel away, 10 min. Separate leaves, shake off water.

Melt butter in a skillet and saute onions.

Add half the onions to a bowl, combine with beef, sausage, rice and allspice, gently with your hands.

To the remaining onions in

the skillet, add the tomatoes, tomato sauce, paste, salt and seasonings. Simmer for 15 minutes.

Roll a small amount of meat mixture in each cabbage leaf. Place rolls, in a buttered baking dish.

Cover with tomato mixture and bake uncovered for 1 hour in a 350 degree oven.

Serve with sour cream.

**3rd**  
PLACE

## Irish Soda Bread

Teresa Gaylord | KALISPELL

### INGREDIENTS

3 cups all-  
purpose flour  
1 T baking powder  
1/3 cup sugar  
1 tsp. salt  
1 tsp. baking  
soda  
1 egg, lightly  
beaten  
2 cups buttermilk  
1/2 cup butter,  
melted

### DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 325 degrees.

Combine dry ingredients in a large bowl. In another bowl, blend egg and buttermilk. Add to flour mixture. Mix until moistened. Add butter.

Pour into greased 9x5-inch loaf pan.

Bake 65-70 minutes, or until toothpick inserted comes out clean.

Cool on a wire rack. Remove from pan and wrap in foil for several hours, or overnight for best flavor.

## NORTHWEST

### March 1

**John White Series presents Marty Boehm on the early days of ALERT** — Northwest Montana History Museum, 2 p.m., 756-8381 | **KALISPELL**

### March 14-15

**NWMT Rock & Gem Show** — Kalispell Fairgrounds, Sat: 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., Sun: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., 250-1936 | **KALISPELL**

### March 16

**Westerners Int'l presents "Shelby: Jack Dempsey's Biggest Bout" by Tim Christenson** — Northwest Montana History Museum, 6:30 to 8 p.m., 309-0958 | **KALISPELL**

### March 18

**Flathead Valley Community Band "Celebrating America's 250th - Thru the Ages" Concert** — Flathead High School Auditorium, 7:30 p.m., 270-1696 | **KALISPELL**

### March 18

**Columbia Falls Women's Connection Luncheon** — Guest speaker is Connie Lamb, 827 9th St. West, 11:30 a.m., call 892-3621 for reservations | **COLUMBIA FALLS**

### March 21-22

**Kalispell Weekend Market** — Flathead County Fairgrounds Expo Building, Sat: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sun: 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. | **KALISPELL**

### April 2

**Spring into Health and Safety Fair** — All ages, Bigfork Senior Center, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., free CPR/AED class on site from 9 to 10 a.m., | **KALISPELL**

### April 9-12

**Pondera Players presents Fiddler on the Roof** — Orpheum Theatre, Thurs-Sat: 7 p.m., Sun: 2 p.m. | **CONRAD**

### April 10-12

**60th Annual Creston Auction & County Fair** — Hwy. 35, Fri (consignment day): 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Sat (general auction): begins 9 a.m., Sun (vehicle, equipment and marine): begins 11 a.m., 250-7396. | **CRESTON**

### April 18

**Teakettle Quilt Guild 2026 Quilt Show** — Glacier Gateway Elementary School, 9 a.m. to 3:45 p.m., 249-7216 | **COLUMBIA FALLS**

### April 11

**Ben Larson: "Off the Beaten Path: The Lost History of Montana"** — O'Fallon Historical Museum, 6 to 8 p.m., 778-3265 | **BAKER**

### April 18

**PEAKS Style Show & Luncheon** — Benefits cancer patients. Raffles, door prizes, art auction, St. Bernard Catholic Church, prior ticket purchase or RSVP required, 697-1098 | **BILLINGS**

### May 2

**High Tea at the Museum with Fallon County Community Theater** — O'Fallon Historical Museum, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., 778-3265 | **BAKER**

## SOUTHEAST

### February 25-March 1

**Billings RV & Boat Show** — MetraPark Expo Center, 256-2400 | **BILLINGS**

### March 12

**Transportation & Industry City College Expo** — For high school students, register online at [www.msubitillings.edu/future/springexpos.htm](http://www.msubitillings.edu/future/springexpos.htm) | **BILLINGS**

### March 13-14

**Glendive Agri-Trade Expo** — Eastern Plains Event Center, Fri: 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., Sat: 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. | **GLENDIVE**

### March 27

**MSU Billings Preview Day** — Come check out MSUB during Preview Day, explore campus, programs and student life all in one visit. Register online at [msubitillings.edu/future/previewday](http://msubitillings.edu/future/previewday) | **BILLINGS**

## SUBMIT YOUR EVENTS

To list an event, send it to: RM Events, PO Box 3469, Great Falls, MT 59403 or email us at: [rural@mtco-ops.com](mailto:rural@mtco-ops.com) — Submit items by March 16 for April events. Include date, time, site, city and contact number with your event. **Events without such info will not be used.**

## SOUTHWEST

### March 6

**Hot Springs Adult Soak & Fun Night** — Cultivating Connections MT at Sleeping Child Hot Springs, 5:30 to 10:30 p.m. [CultivatingConnectionsMT.org](http://CultivatingConnectionsMT.org) | **HAMILTON**

### March 7

**Women's Wellness Retreat** — CCMT at Sleeping Child Hot Springs, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. [CultivatingConnectionsMT.org](http://CultivatingConnectionsMT.org) | **HAMILTON**

### March 8

**Sunday Family Swim Day** — CCMT at Sleeping Child Hot Springs, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. or 3 to 7 p.m., [CultivatingConnectionsMT.org](http://CultivatingConnectionsMT.org) | **HAMILTON**

### March 14

**Easter Market** — Craft Market, Ravalli County Fairgrounds, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., 360-6743 | **HAMILTON**

### March 18-22

**Western Heritage Art Show** — Holiday Inn Convention Center, Wed: preview night: 6 to 9 p.m., Thurs-Sat: 10 a.m. to 9 p.m., Sun: 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., 590-2377 | **GREAT FALLS**

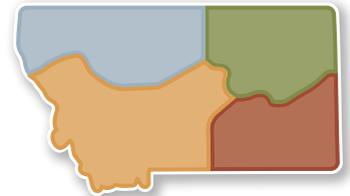
## NORTHEAST

### March 21

**Slam the Dam 10** — Non-competitive Fun Run/Walk across Fort Peck Dam, Registration is at 9 a.m., run/walk begins at 10 a.m., 480-9057 | **FORT PECK**

### March 27

**Schmeckfest** — German festival of tasting followed by entertainment and silent and live auction, Lustre Christian High School, 5 to 7 p.m., 392-5735 | **LUSTRE**



### March 21-22

**Hellgate Mineral Society presents Treasures of the Northwest** — 31st annual gem, mineral, fossil, bead and lapidary show and sale, Hilton Garden Inn, Sat: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sun: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. | **MISSOULA**

### March 27-28

**Naomi Spring Bazaar** — Victor School Cafeteria, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., 544-6383 | **VICTOR**

### April 4

**American Legion Post and Auxiliary Annual Easter Egg Hunt** — Lewis and Clark Park, 10 a.m. sharp, 369-8843 | **STEVENSVILLE**

### April 18

**Spring Market** — Craft Market, Ravalli County Fairgrounds, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., 360-6743 | **HAMILTON**

### April 18

**Rummage Sale** — Puzzles, games, craft supplies, Three Mile Community Center, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., 360-3385 | **STEVENSVILLE**

### March 28

**MonDak Spring Soiree** — Music by The McDades, hors d'oeuvres, beer & wine, a specialty mocktail, desserts, silent auction, gemstone raffle, wine pull & more, MonDak Heritage Center, 7 p.m., tickets: \$50, 433-3500 | **SIDNEY**

# YOUNG MONTANANS

RM invites youngsters to send in original art and poems. If we use it, we'll pay you \$10. **Mail to:** Young Montanans, P.O. Box 3469, Great Falls, MT 59403.

**Email:** rural@mtco-ops.com. **Include:** Your name, age, address and your cooperative. *If you do not include this information, your submission will not be accepted.*

**SEND YOUR SPRING DRAWINGS  
AND POEMS**



Silas Shofner, 10, Eureka | LINCOLN ELECTRIC

Audrianna Bernard, 12 | VIGILANTE ELECTRIC



HAPPY ST. PATRICK'S  
Day!



Sophia Myers, 7, Billings | YELLOWSTONE VALLEY ELECTRIC

Damian Soss, 15, Somers | FLATHEAD ELECTRIC



# READER PHOTOS

SEND US YOUR FAVORITE PHOTOS/ARTWORK

**Please include:** the photographer's/artist's name, address and hometown in the entry. *If you do not include this information, your submission will not be accepted.* If we use your entry we'll pay you \$25-\$100 (depending on size and location).

**Send entries to:** [rural@mtco-ops.com](mailto:rural@mtco-ops.com). No more than 20 MB at a time. No prints please.



▲  
***Snowy Perch***

A bird's feathers fluff out in the wind as snow falls.  
**Photo by Gloria Allwin of Boyd.**

***Winter Watchman***

An eagle sits in a snow-covered tree.  
**Photo by Kelly Williams of Kalispell.**

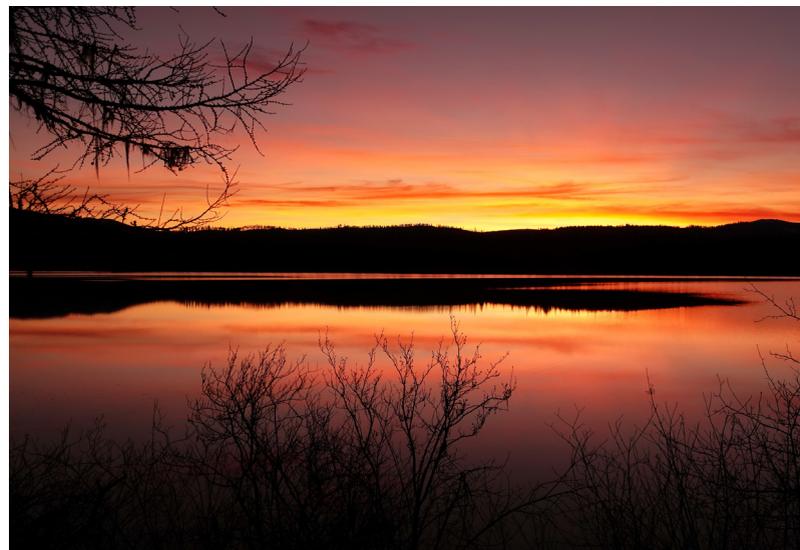


▲  
***Moon 'Light'***

A power pole is in silhouette against the moon.  
**Photo by Adam Bowser of Lewistown.**

***Sunset Over Seeley***

The sun sets at Seeley Lake.  
**Photo by Katie Hickman of Seeley Lake.**





The Magazine of the  
Montana Electric Cooperatives'  
Association

Visit us online: [www.mtco-ops.com](http://www.mtco-ops.com)

Email: [rural@mtco-ops.com](mailto:rural@mtco-ops.com)



BASIN ELECTRIC



AFFORDABILITY

## INVESTING IN POWER

Whether you're turning the lights on in your home or keeping your livestock warm, electricity is vital to our way of life. It powers our communities and keeps us safe. We use many different fuel sources to keep electricity affordable for the cooperative family because investing in you is why we exist!



**BASIN ELECTRIC  
POWER COOPERATIVE**

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

# GOLDENWEST ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE HI-LINES

WIBAUX, MONT. | 406-796-2423

MARCH 2026

## Director Maychrzak earns director certificate



Goldenwest Electric Cooperative proudly recognizes Director Lana Maychrzak for earning her Credentialed Cooperative Director (CCD) Certificate. This achievement demonstrates her dedication to advancing her knowledge, strengthening her leadership skills and upholding the highest standards of cooperative governance.

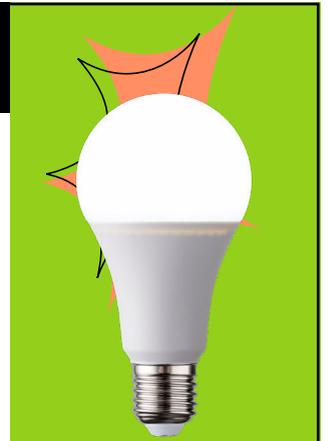
The CCD program, offered through the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), provides directors with essential training in cooperative principles, financial oversight, strategic planning and boardroom decision making. By completing this certification, Maychrzak has shown a strong commitment to performing her fiduciary duties with excellence and integrity.

Goldenwest Electric extends sincere appreciation to Maychrzak for her continued service and leadership. Her dedication to professional growth and cooperative values helps ensure the co-op remains focused on providing reliable, member-driven service.

Congratulations on this well-deserved accomplishment. ■

## ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP OF THE MONTH

As spring arrives, take advantage of milder temperatures to save energy at home. Open windows on pleasant days to bring in fresh air instead of running your HVAC system. It's also a great time to replace dirty air filters, which helps your system run more efficiently and improves indoor air quality. As daylight increases, turn off unnecessary lights and rely on natural sunlight when possible. Small seasonal adjustments like these can reduce energy use, lower monthly bills and help keep your home comfortable as winter transitions into spring.



## ELECTRICAL SAFETY: **What your teen should know**

**P**arents of teens can relate. Sharing important information often feels like walking a tightrope between concern and another dreaded “lecture.” Cue the eye rolls and hashtags:

#IDoNotNeedYourUnendingWisdom  
#HereComesAnotherLecture

But some conversations are too important to skip. Electrical safety is one of them. The right knowledge can prevent serious injuries or even save a life. When the moment feels right, share these essential safety tips with your teen.

### **At home**

- **Keep phones away from water.** Never use a cellphone near the bathtub, sink or with wet hands while it's plugged in and charging. Avoid using an extension cord to bring a charger closer to the tub. Teens have lost their lives after a charging phone fell into bathwater.
- **Don't sleep with a charging phone.** Charging a phone under a pillow or in bed can cause overheating, fires or burns. A short in the charging cord can also cause electrical shock, especially with generic or incompatible chargers. Always use brand-name or matching charging equipment.
- **Charge devices on hard surfaces.** Avoid placing charging phones, tablets or other electronics on soft surfaces, such as blankets, pillows or bedding, which can trap heat and increase fire risk.

### **On the road**

- **Stay in the car after an accident involving power lines.** If a vehicle hits a power pole, pad-mounted transformer or other electrical equipment, do not get out. Call 911 and wait for help. Only exit if there is smoke or fire. If you must leave, jump clear of the vehicle without touching it and hop away with both feet together. Never walk, since electricity can travel through the ground.
- **Keep your distance from downed lines.** If you come upon an accident involving a downed

power line, do not approach or attempt to help. Call 911 immediately and warn others to stay back.

### **Outside**

- **Avoid electricity near water.** Never use plugged-in devices, such as a charging phone, near pools, hot tubs or damp areas.
- **Be alert while swimming.** If tingling or zapping sensations occur while swimming in a lake, move away from docks or boats. There could be stray electrical current in the water. The same applies to pools and hot tubs; if something feels off, get out immediately. Electrical safety may not be the most exciting topic, but it's one that matters. Taking a few minutes to share these tips could prevent tragedy and protect the people who matter most. For more information about electrical safety, visit [safeelectricity.org](http://safeelectricity.org). ■





## Facility charge explained

**M**embers of Goldenwest Electric Cooperative (GWEC) may notice a separate line item on their monthly statement labeled as a facility charge. This charge represents a fixed monthly fee that supports the cooperative's ability to deliver safe, reliable electricity to every member, regardless of how much energy is used.

GWEC serves a diverse membership base, including households, farms and businesses that operate year-round, as well as seasonal members who only require electricity for part of the year. While energy consumption may vary from one member to another, the cost of maintaining the infrastructure that delivers power remains constant. The facility charge ensures these essential costs are shared equitably among all members.

This fee helps cover the cooperative's ongoing expenses related to system maintenance,

equipment and personnel. It supports critical components, such as substations, transformers, power lines, and meters, which are assets that must be available and operational at all times to ensure uninterrupted service. In this way, the facility charge functions much like the base service fees found in other utilities, such as telecommunications or cable services, which fund the infrastructure necessary to provide consistent access.

By contributing to the facility charge, members help sustain the cooperative's long-term reliability and financial stability. This investment ensures electricity is always available, whether powering a home, running a well pump or operating irrigation equipment. Through this shared commitment, GWEC continues to uphold its mission of delivering dependable, affordable energy to all members of the cooperative. ■

# Building your financial safety net

**E**ach spring, millions of Americans look forward to their tax refunds. While it can be tempting to view this extra cash as an opportunity for a shopping spree or a vacation, a more strategic approach can turn that refund into a powerful tool for long-term financial stability.

## Strengthening the foundation

The first step in smart tax refund planning is to evaluate emergency savings. Financial experts often recommend setting aside three to six months worth of essential living expenses. This safety net can provide peace of mind and financial security when life throws unexpected challenges your way, such as a car repair, medical bill or job loss.

If an emergency fund isn't yet in place, consider using your refund to start one. Opening a dedicated savings account that's easily accessible, but separate from everyday spending, can help ensure the money is available when it's truly needed.

## Building toward future goals

Once an emergency fund reaches a comfortable level, a tax refund can be redirected toward other meaningful goals. Contributing to retirement savings, paying down high-interest debt or tackling necessary home or vehicle repairs are all smart ways to put that money to work. Each



of these choices strengthens financial health and reduces future stress.

## A mindset shift

The key to effective tax refund planning lies in intentionality. Rather than viewing the refund as a short-term bonus, think of it as a gift to the future. Every dollar directed toward savings, debt reduction or investment helps build a stronger financial foundation.

By making thoughtful decisions today, it's possible to transform a once-a-year windfall into lasting financial security. Treating a tax refund as a strategic opportunity - rather than a spending spree - can be one of the most rewarding financial moves of the year. ■



A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

### GOLDENWEST ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE INC.

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OFFICE HOURS:

Mon. through Thurs. 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

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 Bob Makelky ..... Secretary-Treasurer  
 David Franz ..... Director  
 Lana Maychrzak ..... Director

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 Tori Wyman ..... CFO  
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 Jessica Welch ..... Centerpage Editor

### Reporting outages

Trouble calls may be placed to the office 24 hours a day. After normal working hours, the phone will be forwarded to one of our lineworkers who are on call. Please check with your neighbors to see if they have power, along with resetting your breakers below the meter prior to calling Goldenwest.