

# COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



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

Photo by Jacob Boyko

## Co-ops at the Capitol

**Every Voice Counts**  
Pages 8-9

**Easements Bring Safety  
and Reliability**  
Pages 12-13



**HAPPY  
New  
YEAR!**

Wishing you all a  
year filled with  
happiness, success,  
and unforgettable  
moments.

**WE WILL BE  
CLOSED  
THURSDAY,  
JANUARY 1**

Call to report outages:  
605-345-3379 or  
1-800-657-5869



## *January Billing*



**Bills arrive later than  
usual this month.**



**Payments will be due  
January 20th.**



**ACH payments will come  
out January 20th.**

## **WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS!**

Diane and Anthony St. Sauver

Justin and Liz Slaight Docter

Paul White and Maria Gotay

Chayse Shoemaker

Christopher and Pamela Soine

Hans Haase

Faith and Wyatt Ewing

Aaron Bjerke

Jerry and Donna Plank

Bryan Vig

Emily and Mark Hrabik

Anna and Joe Meissner

Christopher Burke



## COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

### LAKE REGION ELECTRIC RIPPLES

(USPS 018-904)

#### Board of Directors

Kermit Pearson, President  
Rodney Tobin, Vice President  
Thomas Steiner, Secretary  
Andrea Kilker, Treasurer

Amy Kuecker

Cody Paszek

Mark Wismer

Danny Smeins, LREA Attorney

#### General Manager

Jeremy Lindemann

#### Staff

Donna Sattler, Director of  
Finance/Office Services Manager

Dan Williams,  
Interim Manager of Operations

Brett Kwasniewski,  
Manager of Member Services

Tim Gaikowski,  
Manager of Technology Services



Lake Region Electric Association, Inc. is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

#### Like us on Facebook:

Lake Region Electric Association Inc.

LAKE REGION RIPPLES COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS is the monthly publication for the members of Lake Region Electric Association, Inc., PO Box 341, 1212 N Main St., Webster, SD 57274. Lake Region Electric Cooperative Connections' purpose is to provide reliable, helpful information to members on electric cooperative matters and better living.

Subscription information: As part of their membership, Lake Region Electric members devote 50 cents from their monthly electric payments for a subscription. Nonmember subscriptions are available for \$12 annually. (USPS 018-904) Periodicals Postage Paid at Webster, SD 57274 and at additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Lake Region Ripples Cooperative Connections, PO Box 341, Webster, SD 57274. Telephone 605-345-3379; Toll Free 1-800-657-5869; Fax 605-345-4442  
E-mail: lakeregion@lakeregion.coop

24 hour Dispatching/Outage Line  
1-800-657-5869

## New Lake Region Electric Rates

Effective January 1, 2026

Rate Class	Old 2025 Rate	NEW 2026 Rate
<b>Residential</b>		
Base Charge	\$65	\$65
First 1,400 kWh	11.29¢ per	12.98 ¢ per
<b>Electric Heat Meter</b>		
Base Charge	\$5	\$5
Electric Heat kWh (Controlled)	5.76 ¢ per	6.09 ¢ per
Electric Heat kWh (Non-controlled)		
October – April	5.76 ¢ per	6.09 ¢ per
May - September	9.39 ¢ per	10.80 ¢ per
<b>400 Amp</b>		
Base Charge	\$75	\$75
First 1,400 kWh	11.29 ¢ per	12.98 ¢ per
All Additional kWh	10.69 ¢ per	12.29 ¢ per
<b>600 Amp</b>		
Base Charge	\$85	\$85
First 1,400 kWh	10.09 ¢ per	11.60 ¢ per
All Additional kWh	9.49 ¢ per	10.91 ¢ per
Demand Charge per Billing kW	\$3.50	\$5.00
<b>800 Amp</b>		
Base Charge	\$95	\$95
First 1,400 kWh	10.09 ¢ per	11.60 ¢ per
All Additional kWh	9.49 ¢ per	10.91 ¢ per
Demand Charge per Billing kW	\$3.50	\$5.00
<b>Small Three Phase</b>		
Base Charge	\$80	\$80
First 1,400 kWh	10.33 ¢ per	11.88 ¢ per
All Additional kWh	9.73 ¢ per	10.91 ¢ per
<b>Demand Charge per Billing kW</b>		
First 20 kW	\$2.50	\$5.00
Next 30 kW	\$2.50	\$5.00
All Additional kW	\$17.25	\$18.25
<b>Grain Dryer</b>		
Base Charge	\$65	\$65
First 1,400 kWh	10.09 ¢ per	11.60 ¢ per
All Additional kWh	9.49 ¢ per	10.91 ¢ per
Demand Charge per Billing kW	\$3.50	\$5.00
<b>Large Three Phase (Controlled)</b>		
Base Charge	\$120	\$120
First 100 kWh per Billing kW	7.06 ¢ per	8.12 ¢ per
Additional kWh per Billing kW	4.76 ¢ per	5.47 ¢ per
Demand Charge per Billing kW	\$6.75	\$7.75
<b>Large Three Phase (Non-Controlled)</b>		
Base Charge	\$120	\$120
First 100 kWh per Billing kW	7.06 ¢ per	8.12 ¢ per
All Additional kWh per Billing kW	4.76 ¢ per	5.47 ¢ per
Demand Charge per Billing kW	\$17.25	\$18.25
<b>Irrigation (Controlled)</b>		
Base Charge	\$90	\$90
All kWh Charge	6.39 ¢ per	7.35 ¢ per
Demand Charge per Billing kW	\$6.75	\$7.75
<b>Irrigation (Non-Controlled)</b>		
Base Charge	\$90	\$90
All kWh Charge	6.39 ¢ per	7.35 ¢ per
Demand Charge per Billing kW	\$17.25	\$18.25



# Tree Trimming Safety

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

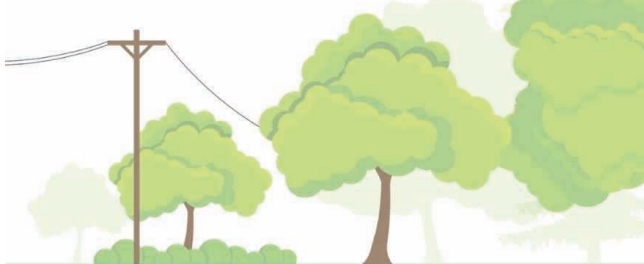
Keeping power lines clear of overgrown vegetation improves service reliability. After all, we've seen the whims of Mother Nature during severe weather events with fallen tree limbs taking down power lines and utility poles. While many factors can impact power disruptions, about half of all outages nationally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

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

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

## BENEFITS OF TREE TRIMMING

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



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

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

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

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



### "Watch for overhead power lines."

Jacob Ymker, Age 10

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

Kids, send your drawing with an electrical safety tip to your local electric cooperative (address found on Page 3). If your poster is published, you'll receive a prize. All entries must include your name, age, mailing address and the names of your parents. Colored drawings are encouraged.



# Heart-Warming DESSERTS

## APPLE BREAD

### Ingredients:

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

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

*Mix together in a bowl and add:*  
1 1/2 cups flour  
1 tsp. baking powder  
1/2 tsp. baking soda  
2 cups chopped apples

### Method

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

Bake at 350° for 45-60 minutes.

**Grace Klein**  
Sioux Valley Energy

## PUMPKIN CHEESECAKE DESSERT

### Ingredients:

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

### Method

Beat 1 cup heavy whipped cream and set aside.

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

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

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

(Optional) add chopped pecans or walnuts.

**Susan Forma**  
Union County Electric

## CHERRY COCONUT BARS

### Ingredients:

#### Crust

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

#### Mixture

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

### Method

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

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

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

**Barbara Anderson**  
Lake Region Electric

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



# LEGISLATIVE FORUM

Laura London

Lake Region Electric Association joined four other cooperatives from northeast South Dakota to discuss current issues and pending legislation with lawmakers from our districts. Jeremy Lindemann, CEO/GM of Lake Region Electric, was MC for the evening. He welcomed a total of 42 attendees including 5 legislators, staff and directors from Lake Region, Northern, CamWal, Traverse and FEM Electric. SDREA General Manager Steve Barnett presented information about South Dakota's electric cooperatives. East River's Chief Member & Public Relations Officer Chris Studer presented information on issues affecting our cooperatives including electric reliability and load growth in Basin and East River territories. Andy Buntrock, Vice President of Strategic Planning and Communications at Basin Electric was also in attendance to help answer questions regarding Basin Electric.

The main topic of discussion for the evening was load growth and what steps Basin Electric is taking in order to meet the increasing needs of their members. There was good discussion on data centers and how Basin has developed a program that would help meet the needs of large scale data centers coming to the area while protecting the legacy members. Plans for growing our cooperatives while protecting traditional members include requiring large energy users to go through an onboarding process with Basin Electric, including disclosure of financial information and pay for a large percentage of the generation and transmission resources in order to protect Legacy consumers from risk.

The SD Electric Cooperative Legislative Affairs Team is preparing for the 2026 legislative session. One area of interest this session is wildfire mitigation legislation. This legislation is a collaborative effort of several utility groups. Legislation is needed in order to protect co-op members from excessive lawsuits and jury awards and to retain affordable insurance coverage. It is the co-ops stance that they have plans in place to help mitigate wildfires, "Ultimately, we want to hold ourselves accountable and protect our members."

Another area of focus this legislative session will be a data center bill sponsored by Rep. Kent Roe: An Act to provide a sales and use tax exemption for goods and services related to data center operations. SDREA's input provided for this bill is that it should ensure "traditional" co-op members are

protected, data centers cover appropriate costs (cost causation) and that it provides utilities flexibility.

Legislators in attendance at the forum were: Rep. Brandei Schaeffbauer, District 3; Sen. Carl Perry District 3; Rep. Lana Greenfield, District 22; Sen. Brandon Wipf, District 22; Rep. Scott Moore, District 22. Lake Region feels it is important to continually educate ourselves and others. We invite discussion on upcoming legislation with our representatives who were unable to attend the forum to help broaden understanding of the impact of legislation on our electric cooperative and our members.

### Legislators in Lake Region Electric Territory

**District: 01 Counties: Brown, Day, Marshall, Roberts**

- **Representative Logan Manhart:** Aberdeen  
Logan.Manhart@sdlegislature.gov
- **Representative Nick Fosness:** Britton  
Nick.Fosness@sdlegislature.gov
- **Senator Michael Rohl:** Aberdeen  
Michael.Rohl@sdlegislature.gov



Basin Electric's Andy Buntrock answered questions about electric reliability and load growth during the forum.



# Looking Back at Lake Region's 2025



The year started with a rate increase, the second in 8 months. Prior to that, members of our cooperative had not seen an increase in their rates in ten years.



The board of directors elected to return over \$590,000 in patronage to the member owners through Capital Credits.



Member bills got a new look. This re-design offers more information and helps maintain compliance.



Around 300 people attended the Annual Meeting in Webster.



"Sometimes you need to look back at the road you've traveled to appreciate how far you've come." – David Reynolds.

## Lake Region's Mission Statement Updated:

*To provide the highest quality services and products to its members while maintaining reliability and affordability.*



Crews focused on upgrading our infrastructure; burying approximately 85 miles of cable, which equaled out to around 50 miles of line converted from overhead to underground.



Tevin Abeln earned his Journeyman Lineman Certification



Lake Region worked with Basin Electric to donate \$20,000 to the new child care facility in Webster.



Twelve Lake Region members joined Northern and FEM for a VIP Tour of Basin Electric generation facilities.



Norah Jean Zubke received \$1,000 from the Lake Region Electric/Duane Snaza Memorial Scholarship.



Sidney Johnson received \$1,000 from the Lake Region/Basin Electric Power Cooperative Scholarship.



Abby Vanderlinden represented Lake Region Electric on the Rural Electric Youth Tour to Washington D.C.





# CO-OPS AT THE CAPITOL

## EVERY VOICE COUNTS

**Frank Turner**

[frank.turner@sdrea.coop](mailto:frank.turner@sdrea.coop)

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

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

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

In addition to SDREA’s internal

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

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

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

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

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

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

The association has also been working



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

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

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

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

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

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



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

*Photo by Jocelyn Johnson*

## STAYING INVOLVED

### Co-op Day at the Capitol

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

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

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

### Legislative Banquets

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

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



# Happy New Year, Lake Region Members!



**Jeremy Lindemann**  
CEO/GM

As the old saying goes, would you like the good news first? Or the bad news?

Well, here is the good news: 2026 is here and we are expecting a big year for LREA as we continue to invest in reliability of our system. Last year we buried nearly 80 miles of line. The crew worked extremely hard to get this work completed before the frost set in.

Additional good news is that LREA was awarded five small FEMA mitigation grants. These grants will help fund some projects to convert overhead lines to underground in historical storm damaged areas. Burying these lines will increase reliability by reducing outages for many of our members and will help save the cooperative money from having to rebuild these lines due to storm damage. These projects along with our 2026 construction workplan will keep the crew extremely busy and bring added reliability to you, our member owners!

Now for the bads news: We have talked about this over the past few months and there is no way around it, a rate increase for your power cost will take effect January first. There are a few reasons why we are seeing an increase in our cost of power. Reason number one: load growth. Basin Electric, our power supplier, has seen a 100 percent increase in traditional load growth since 2010. This load growth is leading to Basin Electric and East River having to construct new power generation and new transmission lines. Basin Electric will invest 11 billion dollars in capital expenditure projects over the next 10 years.

In the news you see speculation that this is all because of data centers. This is not very accurate where we are concerned. The load growth affecting your rates does not include the data centers. Data Centers as part of Basins large load rate will pay the majority of their generation and transmission needs up front, avoiding putting that cost on to the legacy members of the cooperative and avoiding the risk of stranded assets.

Here at Lake Region, we are seeing natural load growth from our members. The fact is that each of us uses more electricity every day than we did just a few years ago. We are also seeing growth as new homes and

services are being built, and people expand their farms and businesses.

The second biggest reason for the increase is reliability. To reliably serve all of its members and accommodate load growth, Basin Electric has started construction of the Bison Generation Station. This natural gas power plant will provide almost 1,500 megawatts of power. The city of Aberdeen is about 60 megawatts on the coldest day in January. This power plant will be able to power approximately 25 cities the size of Aberdeen. Personally, I think this new generation station should have been named the Jack Rabbit or the Coyote Station, but that is another story! This new generation station is needed to serve the load growth coming in the future and to provide reliable power in those cold winter months.

In addition to growth, Southwest Power Pool regulations will require Basin Electric to have higher capacity reserves. This is a technical way of saying that Basin needs to have the ability to produce more power than is typically necessary "just in case" of an extreme event.

A few other factors that contributed to the increased power cost are higher interest rates and the inflation of construction materials like copper and steel, all the things that go into building power lines.

Considering all these factors, Lake Region will have a slight increase in the kWh price. Your kWh rate will be a little over a penny higher per kilowatt hour.

I want to assure you we are doing everything we can here to keep our rates affordable. We have a conservative, well-informed Board of Directors and knowledgeable dedicated staff here at LREA. This cooperative is not for profit, and we pay patronage back to the members if we have excess margins. This increase is directly related to the cost of power so it hits the bottom line, and we must collect more revenue.

If you are having trouble paying your electric bill, please give us a call. We have energy experts on staff that can help recommend more efficient ways to save electricity and we are always happy to help. We are just a phone call away, or you can check our website for energy saving tips.

Thank you for supporting your cooperative I hope you have a safe and happy new year!

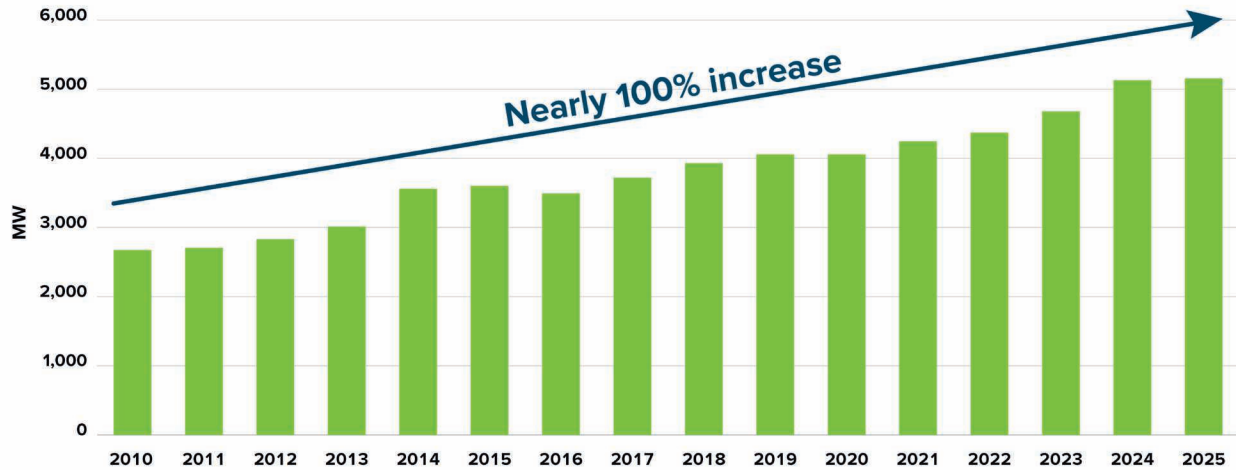
Until next time we will keep the lights on for you,  
Jeremy Lindemann  
CEO/GM

Lake Region Electric Association

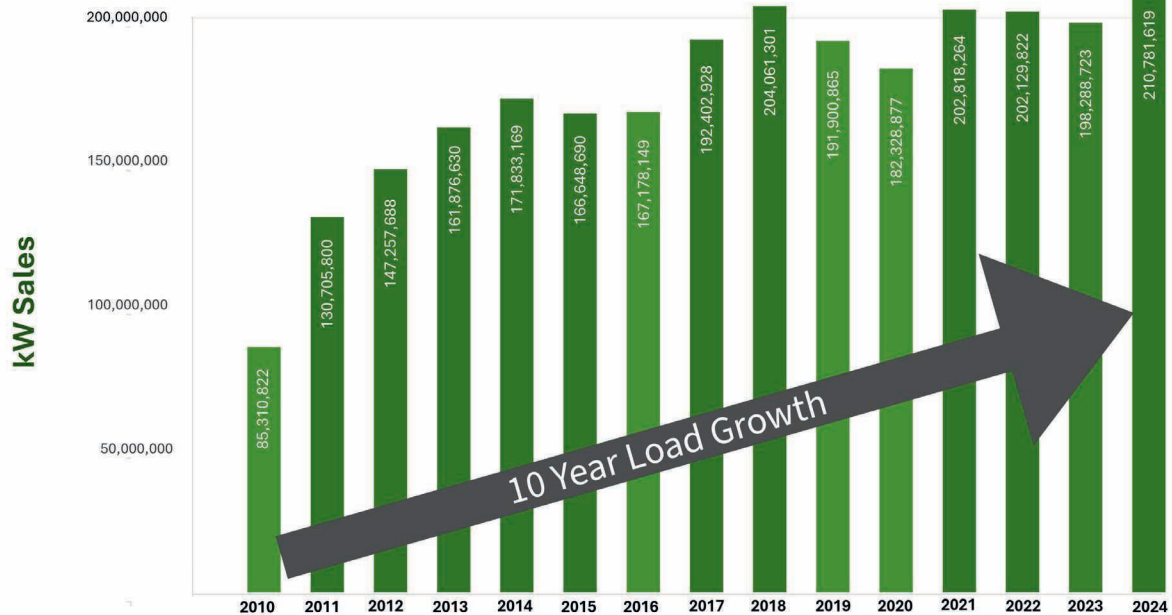




## Basin Electric Load Growth Winter Season



## LAKE REGION ELECTRIC Member Power Usage







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

*Photo by Jacob Boyko*

# EASEMENTS BRING SAFETY, RELIABILITY

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

**Jacob Boyko**

[jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop](mailto:jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

That willingness helps keep cooperative power moving across the countryside.



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

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

*Photo submitted by East River Electric.*



# SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE THROUGH LAKE REGION ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION

**The Basin Electric Power Cooperative (BEPC) / Lake Region Scholarships** are funded by LREA's energy partner, Basin Electric. The top applicant will receive **\$1,500** and the runner-up will receive **\$1,000**! These scholarships will be awarded to the dependent children, including adopted or stepchildren, of member-owners of Lake Region Electric Association. Applicants must be a U.S. citizen and must be a student who is enrolled, or is planning to enroll, in a full-time undergraduate course of study at an accredited, two-year or four-year college, university or vocational/technical school.

Recipients of these scholarships are selected based on their completed application including a short essay or

video, academic record, potential to succeed, leadership and participation in school and community activities, honors, work experience, a statement of education and career goals, and an outside appraisal.

**The Duane Snaza Memorial Scholarship** was created by Lake Region Electric Association's Board of Directors to honor a former employee.

This **\$1,000** scholarship will be awarded to one student who is the dependent child, including adopted or stepchild, of member-owners of Lake Region Electric Association. The applicant must be a U.S. citizen and must be a student who is enrolled, or is planning to enroll, in a full-time undergraduate course of study at an accredited, two-year or four-year

college, university or vocational/technical school.

This scholarship is awarded based on the following criteria: completed application including a short essay or video, participation in school and community activities, grade-point average, work experience, SAT/ACT scores, statement by student explaining his/her educational and career goals, and a written recommendation by a third party.

To apply for these scholarship opportunities, students must complete the required criteria and the scholarship application, which can be obtained from your high school counselor, by visiting our website [www.lakeregion.coop](http://www.lakeregion.coop), or from the Lake Region Electric Association Office. Applicants must provide all of the required information and complete the scholarship application. **Submissions MUST BE POSTMARKED OR RETURNED BY FEB. 14, 2026**, to Lake Region Electric Association, PO Box 341, Webster, SD 57274.

For more information, contact Laura London at Lake Region Electric Association by email: [llondon@lakeregion.coop](mailto:llondon@lakeregion.coop) or by telephone: 605-345-3379 or 1-800-657-5869.



## SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE



**LREA/Basin  
\$1,500**



**LREA Duane Snaza  
Memorial  
\$1,000**



**LREA/Basin  
\$1,000**

**To apply** for these scholarship opportunities, students must complete the required criteria and the scholarship application, which can be obtained from your high school counselor, by visiting our website [www.lakeregion.coop](http://www.lakeregion.coop), or from the Lake Region Electric Association Office. Applicants must provide all of the required information and complete the scholarship application. Submissions **MUST BE POSTMARKED OR RETURNED BY FEB. 14, 2026**, to Lake Region Electric Association, PO Box 341, Webster, SD 57274.

**For more information**, contact Laura London at Lake Region Electric Association by email: [llondon@lakeregion.coop](mailto:llondon@lakeregion.coop) or by telephone: 605-345-3379 or 1-800-657-5869.

**Applications and Information:**  
[www.lakeregion.coop](http://www.lakeregion.coop)



**Applications due  
February 14, 2026**



# ATTENTION Trade Students

## Do you want free money for school?

### Apply now for the Charles Johnson Education & Training Trust Scholarship

Scholarships through the Charles Johnson Trust are awarded to persons who intend to further their education in order to return to the area with the knowledge and skills necessary to flourish in the trades industries.

### Criteria for Award

- **Qualifying Course of Study** Examples, not limited to: Precision Machining, Welding, Electronics, Robotics, Energy Technology, Engineering, Construction Management, etc.
- **Positive Character Qualities - Future Goals & Plans Align With Scholarship**
- **Reference from educator or employer**

### For information and applications:

- Visit: [www.lakeregion.coop](http://www.lakeregion.coop)
- Contact Laura at Lake Region Electric or Contact Your High School Counselor

**Applications  
Due April 1st**





## REGISTER TO WIN!

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

Your Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Your E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_



### UNTIL JAN. 6

#### Garden Glow

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

SDSU McCrory Gardens

Brookings, SD

[www.sdstate.edu/mccrory-gardens](http://www.sdstate.edu/mccrory-gardens)

*Photo Courtesy of Travel South Dakota*

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

### UNTIL DEC. 26

#### Christmas at the Capitol

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

South Dakota State Capitol

Pierre, SD

605-773-3178

[christmasatthecapitol.sd.gov](http://christmasatthecapitol.sd.gov)

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

#### 1880 Train Holiday Express

Hot Chocolate, Santa

Hill City, SD

[www.1880train.com](http://www.1880train.com)

605-574-2222

### DEC. 31

#### New Year's Eve Bash

Doors Open at 5:30 p.m.

American Legion

Sioux Falls, SD

Tickets: 605-336-3470

### JAN. 10

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

1 p.m.

Meadowood Lanes

3809 Sturgis Rd.

Rapid City, SD

### JAN. 20

#### Prohibition & the Pig

Lake Cty. Museum Fundraiser;

Prohibition-Era Bootlegging

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

\$60 per ticket

The Office Bar & Grill

Madison, SD

605-256-5308

### JAN. 22

#### Gentleman's Quartet: Instrumental

7 p.m.

Johnson Fine Arts Center

Aberdeen, SD

### JAN. 23-24

#### Pro Snocross Races

Deadwood, SD

605-578-1876

### JAN. 30

#### Box Elder Ball

6 p.m.-8 p.m.

Box Elder Events Center

Box Elder, SD

605-390-9341

### JAN. 30-FEB. 7

#### Annual Black Hills Stock Show

Central States Fairgrounds

Rapid City, SD

[www.centralstatesfairinc.com](http://www.centralstatesfairinc.com)

605-355-3861

### FEB. 1

#### The Great Lake County Hotdish Competition

11:30-1:30 p.m.

St. Thomas School Gym

Madison, SD

605-256-5308

### FEB. 7-8

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

Sioux Falls, SD

605-332-6004

### FEB. 13-16

#### 12th Annual Frost Fest

Brookings, SD

605-692-7444

### FEB. 20-22

#### Winterfest

Fireworks, Parade of Lights,

Bonfire, Snowshoeing

Lead, SD

[www.leadmethere.com/winterfest](http://www.leadmethere.com/winterfest)

605-584-1100

### FEB. 21

#### Bellator Titans

#### Casino Night Fundraiser

6-11 p.m.

City Lights Bar & Event Center

Aberdeen, SD

### FEB. 22

#### C Street Brass

4 p.m.

Johnson Fine Arts Center

Aberdeen, SD

**Note: We publish contact information as provided. If no phone number is given, none will be listed. Please call ahead to verify the event is still being held.**