

April 2023

# Connections

For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 27, Issue 4

## BCREA is responding to the demand and efficiency needs of the grid

Our homes are outfitted with more devices that require electricity more than ever before. As the demand for electricity rises, Brown County REA must continue providing the same affordable, around-the-clock service to its members — regardless of market conditions or in Minnesota's case — weather conditions.

Demand for electricity regularly fluctuates as people move throughout their homes and businesses on a day-to-day basis. However, on extreme weather days when everyone is either trying to keep cool or stay warm, the electric grid experiences periods of high stress, while attempting to meet members' comfort needs.

These times are when Great River Energy (GRE), Brown County REA's wholesale power provider, deploys its demand response (DR) strategy to relieve the electric system of this strain. This ability to respond to the needs of the electric system is made possible by members like you.

Brown County REA members have the option to participate in demand response programs that allow GRE to "control" or "cycle" their air conditioner, water heater, heat pump or other electric devices for a period of hours on high demand days. Large commercial members utilize back-up generators or load reduction to help BCREA and in turn, GRE, reduce capacity and energy requirements during peak load conditions throughout the year. Irrigation loads may be controlled over peak times in the summer and early fall. Members are given a reduced rate or price reduction in the case of water heaters for participation in DR programs.

When the time comes for these appliances to be used for DR — typically on hot summer days or during a polar vortex when energy prices increase — GRE flips a switch to alleviate demand. This strategy not only reduces sometimes hundreds of megawatts of electricity demand system-wide, but it also helps the cooperative avoid making expensive

purchases from the energy market, ultimately saving you, the members, money.

In late 2022, GRE used its DR strategy as Winter Storm Elliott brought blizzard conditions and subzero temperatures to the Midwest in the days leading up to Christmas. The region's grid operator issued an emergency alert December 23, which triggered utilities to deploy DR resources.

It takes a collective effort from the cooperative and its membership to maintain a healthy, reliable electric grid. BCREA appreciates all who participate in DR programs. If you are interested in learning more, call or stop by. ☎

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### At A Glance



#### 'Tis the season for home improvement

As the weather gets nicer, it's a great time to make energy-efficiency improvements in and around the home. Some of these improvements may even qualify for BCREA rebates, IRA funds and tax credits. See Page 5 to learn more. ☎

# Heat pump technology makes them effective and efficient in cold climates

Cut your heating and cooling costs by going with a heat pump.

Heat pumps function as both an air conditioner and heater and use 72 percent less electricity doing it. A heat pump moves heat instead of generating it like a furnace. In the winter heat is extracted from outside air, which is transferred into your home. Even when it's really cold out, heat energy exists in the air. Since heat pumps transfer heat rather than generate it, they are one of the most efficient means of cooling and heating available.

Heat pumps are common in warmer climates, but many people think they will not work in places where temperatures drop below freezing. That used to be true, but heat pump technology has evolved to handle colder climates.

Cold-climate air-source heat pumps (ccASHPs) work in even colder climates than regular heat pumps. The key feature in a ccASHP is a variable-speed compressor. The variable-speed system holds a steadier temperature than a traditional single-speed heating or air-conditioning system.

Plus, heat pumps come in different options to fit your needs. Building a new home? Go with a ground source heat pump for 400 percent efficiency. Want to replace your decades-old central air conditioner and furnace? Install a cold climate air source heat pump. Live in an old farmhouse with no ductwork or an open cabin with no central air? Go with a ductless heat pump (pictured above.)

Some heat pumps require a backup system to provide heat when cold



**Ductless air-source heat pumps have become more popular in recent years. They are great for homes without ductwork. It consists of an outside unit and an inside unit to reduce your heating and cooling bills dramatically.** — Photo by Marcela Gara

outdoor air temperatures limit the heat pump capacity. Ducted systems typically use a propane/natural gas furnace as a backup. Otherwise, heat pumps may possess electric resistance heat for the few weeks of arctic winter air. Installing properly sized HVAC equipment is essential to getting the best performance and comfort. A system that is either too large or too small for its intended space will struggle to meet your comfort needs.

Your local heating/cooling contractor can provide recommendations based on your home, insulation and existing system. Installing properly sized HVAC equipment is essential to getting the best performance and comfort. A system that is either too large or too small for its intended space will struggle to meet your comfort needs.

Rebates from your local electric cooperative, as well as tax incentives, are available if you are thinking about upgrading your heating/cooling system this summer. Visit your cooperative's website to find rebates on the three types of heat pumps currently available. A federal tax credit exists for 30 percent of the cost for purchase up to \$2,000 (between January 1, 2023, and December 31, 2023). Visit [energystar.gov](http://energystar.gov) for eligible products and credit details. Later this year the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) may offer a new point-of-sale rebate for people earning up to 150 percent of area median income for heat pumps. The rebate has a \$14,000 cap. Go to [www.energystar.gov](http://www.energystar.gov) and click on tax credits.



# Electric bikes boost rider ability

Perhaps you like riding bike, but it isn't as easy as it used to be. Maybe you would like to do more offroading, but don't have the strength to get up some of the steeper hills or across rougher ground.

Electric bikes help riders by letting them use pedal power, a combination of pedal power supplemented by an electric motor or an electric motor alone. The Nakto EBIke gives bike enthusiasts a variety of options with its German-designed configuration.

The Nakto electric bicycle has a 250-watt brushless, high-speed, waterproof motor. Its top speed is 25 miles per hour. The electric bike will travel up to 20-30 miles per charge and up to 30-40 miles with pedal




**Respark your enjoyment of bike riding with the Nakto EBIke. An electric motor makes riding easier.**

assist. Once the battery is drained, the bike can travel on pedal power alone. An LED display gives riders a continual idea of where their charge level sits.

To assist in helping you travel as efficiently as possible, the Nakto EBIke has six gears. The electric bike also has front and rear disc brakes and shock absorbent front fork to make your ride as comfortable as possible.

A headlight and taillight ensure that you can see where you are going at night and be seen easily by cars.

The Nakto EBIke is available online and is one of the more affordable electric ebikes available. Many electric bikes cost \$1,000 to \$2,000 or more. The Nakto EBIke retails for approximately \$700 online. 

## Safety

# Sow safety first for spring planting season

Farmers reap what they sow. We often think of this when planting corn and soybeans in the spring.

Add "electrical safety" to the phrase, "you reap what you sow!" Plant safely and you reap going home to your family at the end of each day's hard work.

As you approach the field look up at the power lines. Do you have enough clearance to drive underneath safely with no equipment touching the overhead lines or guy wires? Is this a new tractor that's taller than what you used before? Did winter ice or a tree cause this overhead line to sag lower? If in doubt, call the electric cooperative.

Once you have entered the field, look to the sides for power lines, green transformer or cabinet boxes and guy wires, as you do spring




tillage with the large equipment or unfold the planter. Slow down while doing the end rows.

If your equipment comes into contact

with power lines, stay in the cab and call your electric cooperative for help. If the power line is energized and you step outside, your body becomes the path to the ground for the electricity. Warn others who may be nearby to stay away and wait until the electric utility arrives.

If leaving the cab is necessary, as in the case of fire, the proper action is to jump — not step — with both feet together, hitting the ground at the same time. Do not allow any part of your body to touch the equipment and the ground at the same time. Hop to safety, keeping both feet together as you leave the area.

Farmers may want to consider moving or burying power lines around buildings or busy pathways for better safety clearance. Work with your electrician and electric co-op. 

# Brown County Briefs

## Energy-efficiency tips



This spring, include energy efficiency in landscaping plans. Adding shade trees around your home can reduce surrounding air temperatures by as much as six degrees. To block heat from the sun plant deciduous trees around the south side of your home. Deciduous trees provide excellent shade during the summer and lose their leaves in the fall and winter months, allowing sunlight to warm your home.

## Member Advisory Council to meet April 17

The first meeting of the new Member Advisory Council will be held April 17. Details will be mailed out to members.

## Round Up scholarships

High school seniors whose parents/guardians are Brown County REA members or adult REA members pursuing a degree are reminded of the April 10 deadline for applications to be considered for one of six \$250 scholarships offered through the Brown County Rural Electric Trust.

Winners will be announced at the Brown County REA Annual Meeting April 13. Scholarship funds will be awarded after successful completion of the first semester of college. Find application materials at [www.browncountyrea.coop](http://www.browncountyrea.coop).

## AC tune up

Get a jump on the rush to tune up your cooling system by scheduling now. BCREA members may be eligible for a \$25 rebate on tune-ups on cooling systems at least three years old. Check out our website for details and the rebate form. ☎

## Round Up Trust organizes first 2023 meeting



The Brown County Rural Electric Trust Board met for its first 2023 meeting February 28. Trust Board Officers elected at the meeting include President Lynnae Pelzel, Vice President Kim Hensch, Secretary Pat Roiger and Treasurer Jessie Beranek.

Contributions totaling \$1,750 were made to eight area organizations and five food shelves in BCREA's service area. Sleepy Eye Police Department youth safety education, Lake Hanska Lutheran Quilters and after-prom activities for Comfrey, Gibbon-Fairfax-Winthrop, Minnesota Valley Lutheran, Sleepy Eye Public, Sleepy Eye St. Mary's and Springfield high schools were recipients of funds this quarter. In addition, donations for March Foodshare Month were made to Sleepy Eye Area, Springfield Area and New Ulm Emergency food shelves, We Care in Morgan and Sibley County Foodshare.

Thanks to the REA members who participate in Operation Round Up, since 1995, \$237,625 has assisted organizations and individuals in the service area and provided scholarships to graduating high school seniors. Collectively, your change can make a difference!

If you are willing to contribute less than \$12 per year by rounding up your bill to the nearest dollar to help Operation Round Up support local causes, please complete and return the enrollment form in the *Forms* section of our website at [www.browncountyrea.coop](http://www.browncountyrea.coop) or call Brown County REA at 1-800-658-2368 or 794-3331. The Round Up Trusts Board will meet again April 11 to review 2023 scholarships and other applications. ☎

## Grace Mages to represent BCREA at Youth Tour



Grace Mages will represent BCREA at the Electric Cooperative Youth Tour to Washington, D. C., June 13-18.

Grace will be among 40 students from Minnesota rural electric cooperatives who will have the opportunity to participate in leadership training, engage in one-on-one conversations with elected officials, jumpstart their national peer network and tour Washington, D.C.

The Minnesota delegation will join youth representing electric cooperatives from across the United States during the 57<sup>th</sup> anniversary Youth Tour. Participants gain a first-hand understanding of the legislative process, learn about advocating on behalf of their community and make connections with others that will last a lifetime.

Grace is a junior at Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School. She is the daughter of Greg and Mary Kay Mages, rural Sleepy Eye.

Comfrey High School sophomores, Cindy Jensen and Joe Nachreiner, were awarded second and third place respectively. Courtney Brey, New Ulm Public High School junior, received fourth place. ☎

## BCREA notice of cogeneration

In compliance with Brown County Rural Electrical Association (REA)'s adopted rules relating to cogeneration and small power production, Brown County REA is obligated to interconnect with and purchase electricity from cogeneration and small power producers, whom satisfy the conditions as a qualifying facility. Brown County REA is obligated to provide information free of charge to all interested members, upon request, regarding rates and interconnection requirements. All interconnections require an application and approval to become a qualifying facility. Any dispute over interconnections, sales and purchases are subject to resolution by the Brown County REA Board of Directors. Interested members should contact Brown County REA, 24386 State Highway 4, PO Box 529, Sleepy Eye, MN 56085 or call 800-658-2368. ☎



# Efficiency upgrades help you save

Spring and summer are opportune times for home upgrades and DIY projects. If you're planning to make improvements to your home, consider upgrades that promote better efficiency.

Here are a few projects that can help you save energy and money—and increase the comfort of your home.

Installing a smart thermostat is one of the simplest ways to manage home energy use and keep summer bills in check. Smart thermostats are easy to install and allow you to control your heating and cooling system from your phone. You can purchase an ENERGY STAR®-certified smart thermostat, which can save you 8% on annual heating and cooling costs, about \$50 per year. Brown County REA offers a \$25 rebate on an Energy Star certified smart thermostat. This upgrade will quickly pay for itself, and you'll gain insight into better ways to heat and cool your home.

Additional devices like smart LED bulbs also offer convenient control and help boost energy savings at home. With smart lighting, you can set a schedule for when and how your

**Insulation is one of the most common ways to improve heating/cooling efficiency.**



lights should be turned on or off. And the next time you head out to run errands and realize you left the lights on, all you have to do is turn them off through your phone. Smart lights come in a variety of shapes, colors and brightness levels—and you can purchase bulbs for indoor or outdoor use. Schedule outdoor smart lights to illuminate your home at night and when you're out of town for better security.

While it's not as trendy as incorporating smart technologies, sealing air leaks around your home is a simple, effective way to save energy and lower your bills. Applying new (or replacing old) weather stripping around doors and windows can instantly make your home more comfortable

and reduce energy waste. Applying caulk to fill gaps can also improve the seal of your home. Caulk can be applied to a variety of areas, including windows and doors.

If your home feels too warm during summer (and too chilly during winter) even after you've sealed with weather stripping and caulk, your home may need additional insulation. Insulation is considered a

more expensive efficiency upgrade; however, if your home is under-insulated, additional insulation can make a big impact on reducing energy use and costs. The cost of new insulation depends on a variety of factors like materials, size of the home and whether you use a contractor. Typically, the project costs can be recouped in a few years and your home will feel more comfortable.

Additional efficiency upgrades like replacing old appliances with ENERGY-STAR® models or replacing old, leaky windows with new, energy efficient windows can make a big impact on energy use. These upgrades can be a bit pricey, however. Some may be eligible for tax incentives or funds through the Inflation Reduction Act. ☺

## Electric vehicle visits St. Mary's



Sleepy Eye St. Mary's 9<sup>th</sup> graders got a close look at Brown County REA's Ford F-150 Lightning EV pickup after an energy and electric safety presentation from Meter Foreman Adam Fischer and Member Services Manager Marcia Solie.

## Join us for the Brown County REA 86<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting

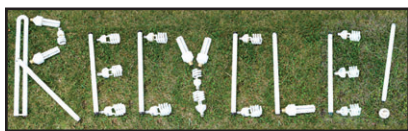
**All Brown County REA members are invited and encouraged to attend the 86<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting**

**When:** April 13  
**Location:** Sleepy Eye Event Center  
110 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue N.E.  
Sleepy Eye, MN  
**Register:** 4:30 p.m.  
**Meal:** 5:30 p.m.  
Meeting to follow



**Agenda includes 2022 review, financial report and election of directors in Districts 2, 3 & 8**

## Recycle fluorescent bulbs as part of your spring cleaning



State law requires the recycling of fluorescents and compact fluorescent bulbs due to

the mercury. Check out these recycling options this spring.

### Brown County

The dates are set for May 3-4. A fee applies for recycling bulbs. Recycling occurs at:

- Springfield Market, 101 W. Central St., Springfield, May 3 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.
- Brown County Fairgrounds in New Ulm, May 4 from 2 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.
- Sleepy Eye Hardware, 1200 Main St. E., Sleepy Eye, accepts fluorescent bulbs for recycling year-round and will dispose for a fee. Call 507-794-3611 or stop by the store for pricing. The store also recycles high-pressure-sodium, mercury-vapor and metal-halide lamps for a fee.

- River View Sanitation will sponsor an *Electronics & Appliance Recycling Day*, which will include fluorescent bulb recycling, May 17, from noon to 6 p.m. at the new location — Sleepy Eye Hockey Arena parking lot. Fluorescent lamps 8' and under: \$1, ballast — PCB: \$7.50/lb. and PCB capacitors: \$7.50/lb. Most household appliances, including water heaters, refrigerators and freezers, computer CPUs, phones, keyboards, etc. and car batteries are free. Battery backups, printers, DVD/VCRs, copiers/scanners and stereos: \$10. Computer monitors and TVs: \$25. RV appliances: \$75.

### Jackson County

Residents of Jackson County can recycle their fluorescent bulbs at the Lakefield Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) Facility (605 S Hwy 86), which is typically open June through October. A fee applies for bulb and ballast recycling.

Other electronics are not accepted at the HHW. An E-Waste Collection for residents and businesses will be held in September at the Jackson County Fairgrounds. Due to the volatility of the market, e-waste collection fees will be established closer to the collection date. You can find more information about the HHW Facility and E-Waste Collection advertised in the *Livewire*; on the Land Management website: [www.co.jackson.mn.us/land](http://www.co.jackson.mn.us/land); or you may call the Land Management Office at 507-662-6682, extension 4.

### Martin County

Recycle fluorescent bulbs Thursday, May 4, at the Tractor Supply (1215 N State St., Fairmont) parking lot from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. The other date is Thursday, October 5, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Fairmont's Tractor Supply lot. Bulbs are accepted from the homes and businesses in the county. A fee applies for recycling bulbs. Call the Fairmont Area Chamber of Commerce at 507-235-5547. (C)

## Safe digging takes 5 steps

Working on an outdoor project requiring digging more than 12" deep? Careless digging poses a threat to people and underground infrastructure, like power lines. Always call 8-1-1 or Gopher State One Call first. Remember these five easy steps for safe digging.



### 1. NOTIFY

Call 8-1-1 or make a request online two to three days before your work begins. The operator will notify the utilities affected by your project.

### 2. WAIT

Wait two to three days for affected utilities to respond to your request. They will send a locator to mark any underground utility lines.

2-3

### 3. CONFIRM

Confirm that all affected utilities have responded to your request by comparing the marks to the list of utilities the 8-1-1 call center notified.

WARNING

### 4. RESPECT

Respect the markers provided by the affected utilities. The markers are your guide for the duration of your project.



### 5. DIG CAREFULLY

If you can't avoid digging near the markers (within 18-24 inches on all sides, depending on state laws), consider moving your project location.




**GSOC**  
GOPHER STATE ONE CALL

Call 8-1-1 or  
Gopher State  
One Call at  
1-800-252-1166



## Let's roll! Spice up meal time with your favorite tortilla recipes!

How do you roll up your tortillas for a meal? Enchiladas, burritos, quesadillas, breakfast, desserts or even as a lasagna or hotdish? Share your tortilla recipes with us. Mail your favorite tortilla recipes to Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to [christoffer@federatedrea.coop](mailto:christoffer@federatedrea.coop) by April 26. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! 

## Hot April showers powered by a water heater from your local electric cooperative

- Features lifetime warranty against leaks for the original owner.
- Features insulated stainless steel tank.
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### Craving Raisins

by Connie Richison, Winnebago

½ c. rice, uncooked

3 c. water


pinch of salt

Add rice to the boiling water and salt. Cook over low heat and stir until there is no water left. Drain. Return to low heat and add the remaining ingredients.

1 can sweetened condensed milk

¼ c. butter

1 tsp. vanilla

Cook and stir until thick. This pudding is good served hot or cold. 

### Heavenly Bars

by Lola Schultze, Ceylon

2 c. raisins    ½ c. brown sugar

1 T. flour (mix with brown sugar)

1½ c. water

Put in a kettle and cook over medium heat until thick, stirring periodically. Once thickened, add 1 tsp. vanilla.


Crust: 1 c. flour

1 c. brown sugar

2 c. quick oatmeal

1 tsp. soda

¾ c. butter, melted

Mix crumbly dough; divide into two parts. Pat half in bottom of greased 9x13" cake pan. Spread the raisin filling and top with the remaining crumbs. Bake in 350° oven about 30 minutes. 

### Raisin Fork Cookies

by Barbara Sellner, Sleepy Eye

1 c. brown sugar & 1 c. white sugar

1 c. shortening


3 eggs

4 c. flour

1 tsp. baking soda in ½ c. warm water

1 c. oatmeal

1½ c. raisins                      1½ c. coconut

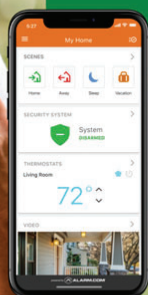
Mix in order given. Roll into balls and press with a fork. Bake at 350° until done. 

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**Brandon Havemeier**  
**Operations Manager**

## Staff Notes

### BCREA gearing up for summer construction and maintenance

The 2023 construction season for Brown County REA is shaping up to be a busy one. As the temperatures rise and ground conditions improve, our line crews and contractors are preparing for construction and maintenance projects.

Once again this summer, BCREA crews will work along Highway 14 to accommodate the four-lane highway expansion project between New Ulm and Nicollet. Along with that project, crews will also replace overhead line with underground cable in multiple areas, including one and a half miles in Courtland West Township. The crews will also replace more than six miles of line with three-phase in Eden Township. Weather permitting, the work is expected to begin in mid-April.

In addition to the work plan projects planned for the summer, we will replace overhead services and upgrade services as necessary throughout the year. We will focus on areas where we have had recent tree issues via tree trimming or replacing the overhead line with underground cable. This month Brown County REA began inspection of all underground locations and equipment in Cornish, Alfsborg and Bismarck townships.

Brown County REA has contracted with Central Applicators, Inc. to maintain and control vegetation at all of our substations and rights-of-way this year. Work is expected to begin in early June, depending on weather conditions. Central Applicators uses an EPA-approved herbicide to treat unwanted brush and noxious weeds.

Southwood 2000, a subsidiary of Redwood Electric Cooperative in Clements, will continue to locate our underground cable throughout the year. In addition to locating, Southwood 2000 will inspect poles in Milford, Prairieville and Eden townships. Pole inspection involves visually inspecting the pole, checking for cracks, equipment damage and burn marks from ditch fires. If the pole passes that part of the inspection, they dig 18 inches to inspect the base of the pole. To check for internal decay, they drill into the core of the pole. The base of the pole is also visually checked for decay. If the pole does not pass inspection, it is rejected and will be replaced. We test the poles regularly to meet requirements of the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) and to improve service reliability.

Carr's Tree Service will be back in the service area in July trimming trees system-wide. Much of the planned work will require crews and contractors to enter members' property to access and inspect equipment.

And as always, we ask you to be aware of Brown County REA equipment as you are working in your fields and yards. Be aware of transformers and other equipment while out mowing, riding an ATV or working in the fields. Know the location of poles and overhead lines when planting, spraying and moving equipment. Remember to call Gopher State One Call at 800-252-1166 or 811 or enter ticket information online at [www.gopherstateonecall.org](http://www.gopherstateonecall.org) before starting any digging more than 12 inches deep.

All of us at Brown County REA wish you a safe spring and summer. ☺



Brown County Rural Electrical Assn.  
24386 State Hwy 4, PO Box 529  
Sleepy Eye MN 56085

E-mail address: [bcrea@bcrea.coop](mailto:bcrea@bcrea.coop)  
Website: [www.browncountyrea.coop](http://www.browncountyrea.coop)  
Phone: 507-794-3331 or 800-658-2368  
Office hours: 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday-Friday

Mike Heidemann, Chief Executive Officer

### Board of Directors

Thomas Hayes, President — 228-8954  
William Berg, Vice President — 766-1497  
James D. Hanson, Sec.-Treasurer — 829-6756  
Brad Sprenger — 317-5576  
David Wendinger — 276-3166  
Greg Mages — 794-3540  
Joel Christensen — 828-4550  
James Mickelson — 794-6298  
Landon Sletta — 439-6559  
The Board of Directors meets the last Thursday of each month.

## Board meeting highlights

The BCREA Board of Directors held its monthly board meeting March 30. Discussion and/or action were taken on the following agenda items:

- Reviewed and approved the February 2023 board meeting minutes, new membership applications, member cancellations, payments to estates and assignment transfers.
- Approved appointment of election judges for the 2023 Annual Meeting: District 2 Ronald Windschitl, Robert Sprenger; District 3 Richard Smith, David C. Olson; District 8 Gregory Hillesheim, Reuben Kokesch.
- Approved appointments of members, with additions, to the Member Advisory Council. First meeting is set for April 17.
- Reviewed and approved the 2022 Rural Development Utility Services (RUS) Form 7 Financial and Operation Report.
- Updated on plans for the 86<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting to be held April 13 at the Sleepy Eye Event Center.
- Approved the 2022 financial audit as presented by Nick Crank of Eide Bailly, LLP.
- Updated on ongoing maintenance projects and scope of the 2023 work plan.

The next meeting is set for April 27 at the BCREA office, Sleepy Eye. ☺