

# Connections

July 2024

For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 28, Issue 7

## Power grid outlook for peak season

The Midwest grid operator, known as MISO, anticipates a stable summer for the region's electric grid, projecting peak demand of around 123 gigawatts (GW) and total available generation capacity of approximately 143 GW. While MISO expects sufficient capacity for normal summer conditions, it has cautioned emergency measures may be needed if there are periods of extreme conditions.

Similarly, the North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC) recently reported that MISO is expected to have sufficient resources for normal summer peak demand, but has elevated risk for reliability events during periods of extreme demand with high generation outages.

Brown County REA's wholesale power supplier, Great River Energy (GRE), is well positioned to meet the electricity demands of its member-owners this summer.

"Summer typically has the highest load days for our system, but we and our member-owners are prepared to meet demands during peak conditions," said GRE Vice President and Chief Power Supply Officer Jon Brekke.

### How co-ops handle the heat

Power plants capable of rapid electricity production, called "peaking plants," are critical during periods of high demand. GRE also works with its member-owner cooperatives, including Brown County REA, to reduce electricity usage through voluntary demand management programs, such as interruptible irrigation and air conditioning. These initiatives not only provide relief to the electric grid, but also offer financial savings to members.

### Long-term plans in place

With preparations for this summer in place, long-term reliability is a concern for NERC, MISO and electricity providers like GRE.

"New resources will be needed to meet growing demands," Brekke said.

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission earlier this year approved Great River Energy's long-range integrated resource plan to reliably meet the energy needs of member-owners in a cost-effective and environmentally responsible




manner. GRE and several regional partners are developing multiple projects to bolster long-term reliability.

Among these is the Northland Reliability Project, a new 180-mile, 345-kilovolt transmission line designed to ensure continued reliability in northern and central Minnesota, while delivering wind power from North Dakota.

GRE also began deploying Heimdall Neurons on several of its transmission lines. These sensors sit on power lines and deliver real-time data about the status of the transmission system, allowing operators to maximize grid capacity, alleviate congestion and increase reliability.


Over the next two years, GRE will enhance the Cambridge Peaking Station with dual fuel capability to improve winter reliability. At the same site construction will soon begin on the first multi-day battery energy storage system in the country. A long-term battery would be capable of delivering electricity for several days, which would be valuable during a heat wave or polar vortex.

"Electric cooperatives are hard at work in planning for more electricity demands in the future," Brekke added. 

### At A Glance



**Planning to get away on a vacation?**

Take a few easy steps before you leave to reduce energy use at home in your absence. Learn more on Page 2. 

# Set your home to vacay mode

Just like you, the equipment in your home is hard at work going through the daily grind. While you are off enjoying a new adventure or time away, give your home's equipment a vacation, too. Doing so can reduce unnecessary energy waste and unneeded wear and tear on your heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) system, appliances and more. Here's how to set your home to vacay mode.

Your HVAC system keeps you comfortable. If you aren't there, it doesn't need to be quite so comfortable in your home. Setting the thermostat closer to the outdoor temperature can save you energy and money. Don't turn off the system completely, however. In extreme weather your heating and cooling system also helps protect your home from freezing pipes or damage from excessive heat.

Installing a smart thermostat gives you the ability to control your settings remotely from your smart phone. This allows you to adjust the temperature after you leave home and right before you return.

Closing the curtains can provide two benefits. It keeps heat from the sun at bay. This reduces the load on your

heating and cooling system, which saves energy. It also has the benefit of blocking visibility into your home when you're away.

For security some people use timers or leave on exterior lights. Make sure any lights left on are LEDs, instead of incandescent or compact fluorescent bulbs. LEDs use less energy and have less impact on your electric use when left on all night. You can also consider adding smart LEDs to your home. Smart LEDs can be controlled remotely through an app on your phone.

Did you know there are devices in your home that continue to draw power from your electrical outlets even when turned off or on standby? Before you leave, walk through your home and unplug devices and small appliances. Make sure gaming consoles and computers are fully powered down. Unplugging any devices that have lights, clocks or use standby mode can also reduce wasted energy.

Having peace of mind that your home is powered down and secure can help you enjoy your vacation. After all, we all need an occasional break. ☺

*Heartland Security is a subsidiary of Brown County Rural Electrical Association. It offers a variety of security applications, protecting against intrusion, fire, water damage and more. Surveillance is also available. Contact Heartland for more information.*

## Rate adjustment, effective September 1, 2024

Service Description	Current Service Charge	New Service Charge	Current Energy Charge	New Energy Charge
Residential	\$42	\$52	\$.095/kWh	\$.1020*/kWh
Three-Phase	\$65	\$75	\$.095/kWh	\$.1020/kWh
Large Power	\$70	\$80	\$.077/kWh	\$.0804/kWh
Large Power Demand			\$7.20/kW	\$7.75/kW

\* Former Alliant Energy members current rates will be merged to this rate. All seasonal and step rates will be eliminated. ☺

# Power up your salt and pepper grinders


If you are a fan of ground pepper and salt, give your wrists a break and buy rechargeable salt and pepper grinders. They are perfect to go with the grill or on the dinner table.

These electric salt and pepper grinders have a built-in rechargeable battery. This eliminates the need to spend money on batteries like other battery-operated salt and pepper grinders.

These rechargeable salt and pepper grinders can hold up to 75 grams of seasoning at a time. This large capacity keeps you from having to refill the grinder frequently.

These rechargeable grinders also have adjustable ceramic grinders. Just turn the top of the devices to grind your desired spice from coarse to fine. Then press the button with one hand and receive freshly-ground spices.

The grinders also have an LED light that gives you the illumination to make sure you add just the right amount of salt and pepper to your dishes.

The rechargeable salt and pepper grinder is available online and in stores for approximately \$50. Secure your set today and power up your seasoning! 



## Safety

# Generic chargers can cause unsafe conditions

People are always losing their phone chargers.

As a solution, many people reach for low-cost, generic plug-in USB chargers and charging cables found in the sea of impulse items that flank check-out lines. It can save money and it's so convenient, most people rationalize when making a purchase. Without much more thought, in the virtual cart or on the counter it goes.

Knockoffs can be great, but not when replacing your original phone charger and for a variety of reasons.

"Although it is tempting to pick up an inexpensive phone charger to save money, buying and using cheap chargers is one place you might not want to cut corners," according to Erin Hollinshead, Executive Director of the Energy Education Council/Safe Electricity program. "Using an authentic replacement charger made by your



mobile phone's manufacturer is always a better choice."

Along with a potential burn and fire hazard, using cheaply made charging components and devices can also cause shock and electrocution. Serious potential dangers aside, they may cost you more in the long run since they can cause damage to your phone, tablet or other electronic devices.

When using charging gear, Safe Electricity recommends the following:


- Don't leave charging items unattended.
- Always keep charging items away from flammable objects, especially bedding, and do not take them to

bed with you. Tell kids and teens to NEVER place any charging device under their pillow. The heat generated gets trapped, which could cause the pillow or bed to catch fire.

- Do not touch charging electronic devices with wet hands or while standing in water.

- Make sure charging components are certified by a reputable third-party testing laboratory.

- Only buy product-approved chargers and cables (those made or certified by the manufacturer). Using cheaper devices can cause damage to the USB charge chip, which can have a lasting impact on how quickly and effectively your device charges in the future.

Be on the lookout for fakes claiming to be brand approved. If the price is too good to be true, it likely is. 

— Information courtesy [safeelectricity.org](http://safeelectricity.org)



# Brown County Briefs

## Energy-efficiency tip

Electricity used to operate major appliances accounts for a significant portion of your home energy use. Here's an easy way to lighten the load on your clothes dryer. Before you dry a load of damp clothing, toss in a clean, dry towel. The towel will absorb excess water, shortening the drying time. If your dryer does not include an auto-sense feature to determine drying time, remember to reduce the timer to about half of what you normally would. Remove the towel about 15 minutes after the cycle begins. Shorter drying times will extend the life of your dryer and save energy.

## Advisory Council September 9

The second meeting of the current Member Advisory Council is set for Monday, September 9, beginning with a light meal at 6 p.m. The evening will include a trip to one of BCREA's substations. Members will receive more details by mail.

## Tune up to stay cool

Keep your home's cooling system in peak condition with a tune-up and cash in on Brown County REA's rebate. Members can receive a \$25 cooling tune-up credit every two years. Have your HVAC contractor complete the tune-up portion of the Heating & Cooling rebate form on our website and submit along with a dated copy of the contractor's bill to Brown County REA to receive your bill credit.

## Meeting date change

Due to scheduling conflicts, the Brown County REA Board of Directors has moved its monthly meeting to July 18. ☹️

## Twins Youth Clinic August 11 in Sleepy Eye



The Minnesota Twins free youth clinic is returning to Sleepy Eye's Prairieview Field on Sunday, August 11 from 10 a.m. to noon.

The event is free and open to youth ages 6-12. Fundamentals of hitting, throwing, fielding and defense will be taught in a fun and encouraging atmosphere. Equipment will be provided, but participants are asked to bring their own gloves.

A partnership between Brown County REA's wholesale power supplier GRE, the Minnesota Twins and the Twins Community Fund, this year's Sleepy

Eye event is being hosted by Sleepy Eye Baseball Association. Register at [www.playballmn.com](http://www.playballmn.com). ☹️

## Help children in need to succeed by donating school supplies

Brown County REA is a drop-off site for the United Way of the Brown County Area's *Stuff the Backpacks* school supply drive & we need your help.

Please consider donating any of the following items :



- \*4 oz. Elmer's Glue
- \*24 -count Crayola crayons
- \*Broad tip markers
- \*Facial tissues
- \*12-pk. colored pencils
- \*Glue sticks
- \*#2 Pencils
- \*Large pink erasers
- \*Pencil top erasers
- \*Pencil bags & boxes
- \*Fine tip Sharpie markers
- \*Dry erase markers
- \*Spiral notebooks
- \*Highlighters
- \*Kids scissors
- \*2-pocket folders
- \*Hand sanitizer
- \*Composition notebooks
- \*Scotch tape rolls
- \*1" 3-ring binders
- \*Post-it notes

Please drop off donations before July 28th.

Collected donations will be distributed to children in Brown County. Thank you!

## COMMON CAUSES OF POWER OUTAGES

There is never a good time for the power to go out, but if it happens on a sunny day, you might be left wondering why. Here are the most common causes of a power outage.

### WEATHER

High winds, snow and ice can cause tree limbs to fall on power lines. Other weather effects, like wildfires and lightning strikes can cause major damage to equipment.

### CRITTERS

Squirrels, birds, snakes and other animals can inadvertently contact power lines, causing short circuits and disruptions to electrical supply.

### Scheduled MAINTENANCE

Occasionally, we plan outages to perform upgrades or repairs to parts of the local grid.

### ACCIDENTS

Vehicles can crash into utility poles, bringing down power lines. Construction and excavation work can also result in disruptions to underground lines.

# Beyond the plug: the local grid

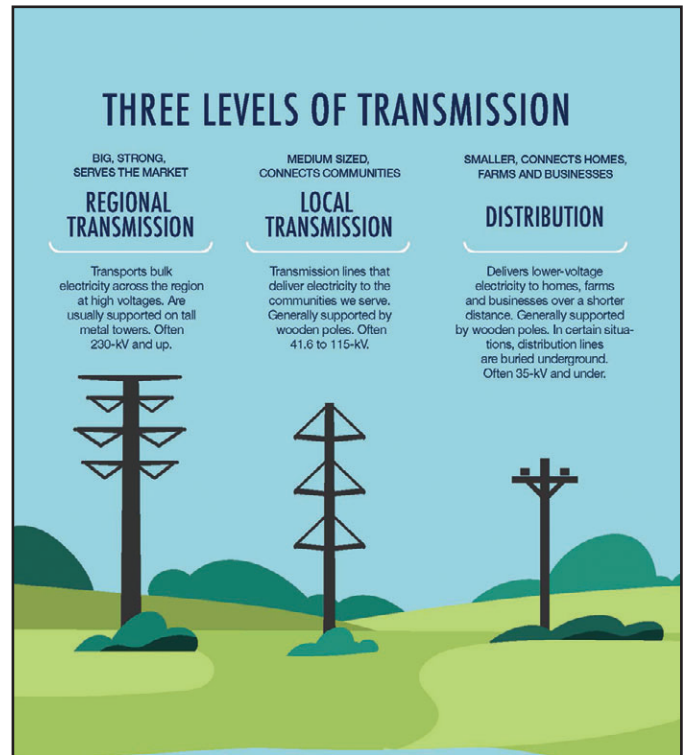
We live in an increasingly power-dependent world. Every day we rely on electricity in a variety of ways to help us run our lives. It gives us light, keeps our refrigerator running and charges our mobile devices.

At a basic level the electric grid is a system of interconnected wires connecting the places where energy is produced to where it is used. Great River Energy, the wholesale power supplier to Brown County REA, generates electricity and uses the grid to move it and ensure reliable electric service, as well as quick response times when there is an issue on the electric system.

The local grid delivers electricity from distribution substations, like those owned by Brown County REA, to members at the end of the line for you. At substations higher voltages are “stepped down” to lower, more usable levels. Then it is sent along smaller distribution lines to be delivered safely to neighborhoods and farms.

In residential areas pad-mounted transformers — the big green boxes sitting on the ground in the corner of some properties — make the power safe to use. That energy then runs along lines to power homes, schools, farms and businesses.

The local grid is one important key to helping deliver the power we rely on every day. (U)



## Youth Tour winner



**Cindy Jensen, rural Comfrey, enjoyed the trip of a lifetime as Brown County REA's representative on the 2024 Rural Electric Youth Tour to Washington, D.C. Look for the full story and more photos in the August Connections.** (U)

## BCREA summer help



**Jack Windschitl is assisting BCREA line crews as summer help this year. He lives in Sleepy Eye and will be a junior at St. Mary's High School in the fall.** (U)

## Just make the call before digging



Call Gopher State One Call before doing any digging more than 12" deep — 48 hours before digging for foundations, trees and tiling (1-800-252-1166). Register at [www.gopherstate-onecall.org](http://www.gopherstate-onecall.org) or call 811. Call a licensed electrician to locate the underground lines on your side of the meter. (U)



# State legislative session avoids new mandates



Jenny Glumack

The 2024 legislative session adjourned in complete chaos at midnight May 19. Democrats, who control the House, Senate and Governor's

office, rushed to pass their legislative agenda before the constitutional deadline over Republican objections.

For cooperative member-owners, the session was mostly a success with no new costly mandates, the passage of a bipartisan permitting reform bill and an expansion of scholarship eligibility for students interested in an energy career. Nonetheless, the inability of the legislature to agree on a tax bill that includes common-sense property tax relief for cooperative member-owners remains a disappointment.

## Energy infrastructure permitting

The Minnesota Energy Infrastructure Permitting Act was a bipartisan clean energy permitting-reform package that incorporated various ideas with widespread support from energy stakeholders. The package makes the electric sector permitting faster and more cost-effective. This bill was a high priority for many stakeholders, especially clean-energy advocates, who consider permitting reform critical to building the wind and solar generation and transmission infrastructure needed to achieve carbon-free by 2040. The legislation should help save member-owners money, while accelerating the construction of necessary infrastructure to improve reliability during the transition to cleaner energy.

## No new mandates

One of the top priorities of the Minnesota Rural Electric Association (MREA), the statewide association representing electric cooperative member-owners, was ensuring no new mandates were imposed on electric co-

ops this session. Several bills, including distributed generation mandates, interconnection mandates and a cooperative governance mandate, were introduced or carried over from last year. However, none of these bills moved forward or passed thanks in part to MREA's work and the work of member-owners advocating for their cooperatives. Cooperatives are governed by the members they serve, and heavy-handed government mandates only work to raise costs, undermine local democracy and add layers of unhelpful bureaucracy. We are grateful to legislators in both parties who stood up and said "no" to additional mandates.

## Development scholarships

MREA's proposal to add "energy" to the list of industries eligible for workforce development scholarships at Minnesota state colleges and universities passed as part of the final Higher Education bill and could mean more aid to students looking to join our industry.

The Workforce Development Scholarship Program provides aid of \$2,500 per academic year (\$1,250 per semester) for students enrolled in programs in nine select industries and is now available to those in lineworker education. This program is available at all Minnesota state schools, but is geared toward full-time, two-year associate degree programs. It is especially valuable to students because it has more expansive uses than other forms of financial aid, is provided in addition to other scholarship and grant opportunities and does not have an income limit. Because other types of state aid go only to low-income students and max out before paying for the full cost of attendance, this scholarship can often close the gap between a student's full cost and other aid.

Cooperatives can now work with their local Minnesota state schools to set up a matching scholarship for students who choose to study an energy-related field. The law sets

aside 10 percent of the funding for this program every year to increase awards at colleges that successfully develop local business partnerships and receive matching scholarship dollars from those businesses. This program is a great opportunity to develop our future workforce, while helping local students afford college.

## Property tax relief

MREA's bipartisan property tax clarification bill did not pass, as no final tax bill was agreed upon before the closing moments of the session when a monster omnibus bill was pieced together. The provision was a priority in Governor Walz's supplemental budget, as well as the House and Senate Omnibus Tax bills and faced no opposition.

The bill would have provided property tax relief to cooperatives by clarifying existing property tax law. The bill remains a priority for cooperatives across the state and will hopefully pass next session. In the meantime, the MREA is working with the Minnesota Department of Revenue to help alleviate the problem until a permanent solution is signed into law.

## Conclusion

Despite the challenges and last-minute chaos, the 2024 legislative session brought several positive outcomes for Minnesota's electric cooperative member-owners. The passage of crucial permitting reforms, the prevention of new costly mandates and the expansion of workforce development scholarships are significant wins. However, the lack of progress on property tax relief remains a key issue that we will continue to address in future sessions. MREA, alongside member cooperatives like Brown County REA, remains committed to advocating for policies that support the affordability, reliability and sustainability of our energy infrastructure. As we move forward, we keep working tirelessly to ensure that the voices of cooperative members are heard and their needs met. (E)

— Courtesy of MREA

## Spice up this summer with fresh or canned salsa favorite recipes

Summer calls for salsa! Share your favorite salsa recipes with us, whether it's a garden-fresh recipe, frozen/canned salsa or even a fruit salsa recipe. Send your favorite salsa 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 July 26. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! 📧

## MINNESOTA FARMFEST®

August 6-8 • Gilfillan Estate

Visit the Touchstone Energy  
Cooperatives' booth



Bring this coupon to our Farmfest booth. Fill it out and use it to enter the grand prize drawing for battery-powered electric tools.

### Brown County REA 2024 Farmfest Drawing at the Touchstone Energy Cooperatives' Booth #2201

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Town/state/zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

**Clip this coupon & put it in your wallet now!**

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To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at [http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint\\_filing\\_cust.html](http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html) (link is external) and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

- (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
- (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or
- (3) email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov)

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**Marcia Solie,  
Member  
Services Manager**

# Staff Notes

## Putting some numbers to the rate changes

As Brown County REA has been sharing information about the upcoming rate adjustments, we've talked in the *Connections* newsletters previously about inflationary pressures. At a recent conference a representative from one of Brown County REA's main suppliers, Rural Electric Supply Cooperative also known as RESCO, shared some real numbers to go with the phrase.

The information that probably stood out the most to me is that in their business, the supplier has seen inflation increase 43 percent since 2020. While it has slowed some, inflation has put tremendous pressure on co-ops like BCREA to get jobs done for you, our member-owners.

Some drivers of these increases include manufacturing labor shortages resulting in the need to increase wages to draw workers. Raw material and freight costs have gone up, and factor in supply chain imbalances. It is not uncommon to see material order lead times, which have gone from a few weeks to more than one year, on orders of materials commonly used by your co-op. The fact that the growing number of renewable energy projects, electric vehicles, and rural broadband are using many of the same materials needed by your distribution cooperative affects both the cost and the lead times.

On a smaller scale the costs of electric water heaters sold to REA members and placed on our load management programs have risen an average of 37 percent over the past four to five years. Office supplies and materials used in the day-to-day operations of your cooperative have trended upward. Insurance and labor costs inch up each year as well.

Combining these factors with the pressures on providers of wholesale power to build out transmission systems to handle the vast amounts of renewable energy coming online and wholesale power costs, your co-op's largest expense gets bigger.

Your co-op's Board of Directors reviewed the Cost-of-Services Study and determined it necessary to adjust rates for all members. This is being done through a \$10 increase in the monthly base charge, a slight energy charge increase and, where applicable, demand charge adjustment. The rates billed to former Alliant Energy territory members will be merged to match those of similar legacy rate classes. See the chart on Page 2. ☺

## Coffee with the co-op

Join us at one of the events below to learn more about the rate adjustment, rebates, cooperative programs and to visit with co-op directors/employees.



July 23: 9-10 a.m., Comfrey Bar & Grill, Comfrey

July 30: 8-9 a.m., Sweet Sisters Bakery, Hanska

August 14: 9-10 a.m., Carl's Corner, Essig

August 15: 8-9 a.m., D's Pit Stop, Gibbon



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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 Brown County REA Board of Directors held its monthly board meeting on May 30, 2024. Discussion and/or action were taken on the following agenda items:

- Reviewed and approved the April 2024 board meeting minutes, new membership applications, member cancellations, payments to estates and assignment transfers.

- Reviewed and approved April 2024 payroll and April financial statement.

- Reviewed results of annual substation inspections.

- Updated on recent work with member-owned Distributed Energy Resources.

- Reviewed a meeting on the discussion of yard light rates and approved rate consolidation and adjusting unmetered rate classes up \$2 per month.

- Reviewed the first meeting of the new Member Advisory Council.

- Reviewed recent safety trainings including all-employee emergency actions, mayday review and line workers' pole top and bucket truck rescue.

- Updated on operations activities including start of three-phase project in Eden Township.

The next meeting is set for June 28, 2024, at the BCREA's office in Sleepy Eye. ☺