

Connections

June 2025

For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 29, Issue 5

Critter control! Co-op tries to prevent birds & animals from causing dreaded power outages

Squirrels, raccoons, birds, snakes and other animals can inadvertently contact power lines, causing short circuits and outages. Last year animals caused 10 percent of Brown County REA's power outages. According to Cooperaive.com, studies show that animals cause between 7 and 20 percent of all U.S. power outages annually and are likely the second-most-common cause of interruptions after the weather.

BCREA has 780 miles of overhead lines and 16 substations. Even the 750 miles of underground cable can be susceptible to digging and gnawing critters. Your electric co-op installs certain safeguards to keep the critters out of harm's way that cause the occasional outage.

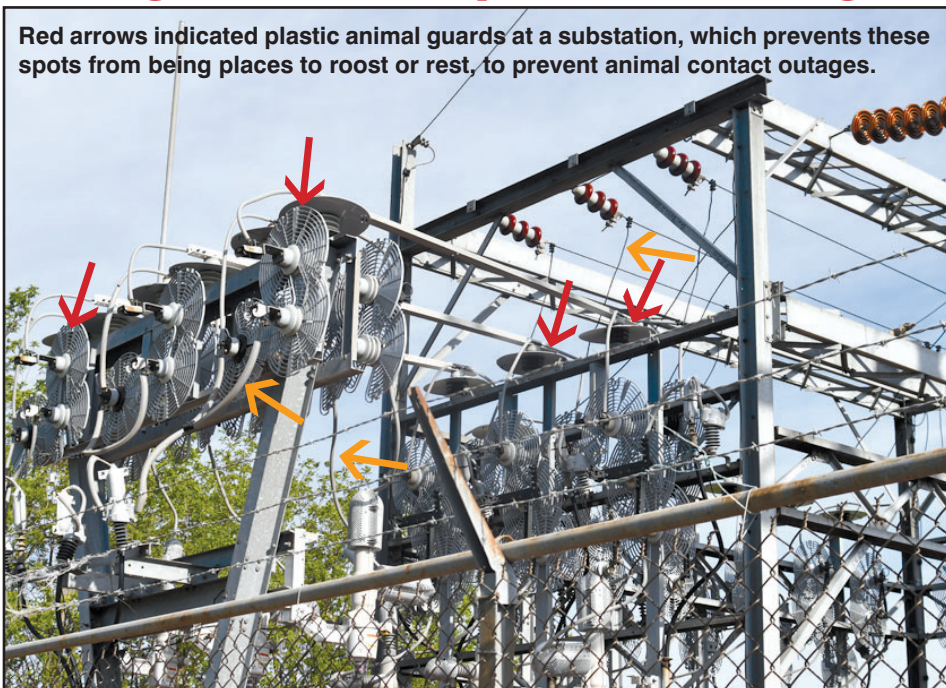
- **Pole guards** — This pole wrap is installed on poles that have fuses, transformers or equipment that animals may touch. The slippery guard doesn't allow the squirrel, cat or raccoon to climb above the wrap.

- **Animal guards** — These plastic covers are designed to prevent animals or birds from coming in contact with energized parts of the equipment.

- **Cover up** — Rubber cover up slides onto wires within a few feet of anywhere an animal or bird may be able to touch, while standing on a grounded piece of equipment.

- **Fencing** — Fences keep humans

Red arrows indicated plastic animal guards at a substation, which prevents these spots from being places to roost or rest, to prevent animal contact outages.



The orange arrows indicate gray tubing that covers up energized wires.

and critters out of substations and safe. However, since critters cannot read our fencing caution signs, they sometimes dig under the fencing looking for a good place to play. (C)



Substation fencing tries to prevent animal outages.



The red arrow indicates pole wrap. This slippery cover doesn't allow squirrels, cats or raccoons to climb above the wrapped area to prevent outages and avoid contacting energized equipment.

At A Glance

BROWN COUNTY
REA

Member
Advisory
Council met

The first meeting of BCREA's Member Advisory Council was on April 22 followed by a tour of the Sleepy Eye headquarters. Council members help us think critically about member priorities during big changes and decisions within the cooperative. We encourage all members to consider serving on the Member Advisory Council someday! (C)

Beyond the weather forecast, key factors help determine, is today a load control day?

Members enrolled in one of your electric cooperative's load management programs know that when extremely hot temperatures are in the forecast, it's likely that your water heater or cooling system may be controlled. In the winter your Dual Heat system may see control under extreme cold. A small group of members enroll their business /farm generators or irrigation in the interruptible rate class too.

Temperature is the primary factor for load control dispatch, as extreme weather events will drive energy demand due to heating or cooling needs.

Your electric cooperative and its wholesale power providers use load management as a strategy to reduce demand for electricity during high demand periods. These programs encourage members to invest in a larger water heater that stores less expensive off-peak energy or heating/cooling equipment that can be temporarily controlled to reduce energy consumption during times when electricity costs more than usual.

However, some days control occurs when factors beyond temperature come into play determining when to initiate a load control.

- **Market position:** Wholesale power suppliers forecast the demand needs of its member-owner cooperatives on a daily basis and make purchases from the regional energy market to serve them. Similarly, generation is bid into the market daily, including wind energy. When high demand is expected, load management programs can reduce the cooperative's overall market exposure.

- **High prices:** These can be driven



The gray radio control on the side of your house "talks" to your water heater, cooling system or electric heat, if enrolled in one of the co-op's money-saving programs. A green light means it has power. A red light means control is occurring.

by natural gas prices, which are often price setters in the energy market.

- **Localized outages:** Either generation or transmission outages can affect pricing.


- **Reliability concerns:** While not a frequent driver, instances occur where load control helps mitigate reliability concerns. During these events, load is reduced so that transmission congestion is brought below a system operating limit.

- **Monthly events:** Your co-op's power supplier(s) often initiate a load control event one time per month for

contractual reasons; this ensures that member-owners receive the value from load management over the billing peak (i.e., the highest demand that is experienced on the system each month).

Using load management as a strategy saves members money by helping electric cooperatives mitigate high-cost market purchases that would otherwise need to be paid by its member-owners, which are passed along using the power cost adjustment (PCA) on your electric bill. Additionally, capacity benefits accrue, allowing the cooperative to better position its resources and reduce costs needed to acquire or build more generation.

Great River Energy (GRE), which includes co-ops statewide, manages more than 300,000 devices — from water heaters to air conditioners to irrigation and space heating systems; radio controls operate different load management programs that can be dispatched when needed by system operators. Members who participate in these programs receive a reduced electric rate, credit or discounted new water heater purchase price.

Contact your electric cooperative for more information on load management programs and how you can enroll. Visit the co-op's website and click on the home page button to see if GRE is calling for load control. In addition, look for lights on your gray radio control box. A green light means the radio control has power and is working. A red light means control is occurring. Thank you co-op member-owners for doing your part to help the co-op keep your electric rates affordable. 

Portable air conditioner chills small space

Look beyond a typical window air conditioner (AC) to help you chill out this summer! Go with a portable air conditioner for that bedroom, apartment or garage without any ductwork.

Determine the size of the room you want to cool. Portable AC units are listed by square footage or British Thermal Units (BTU) for how much heat can be removed from a room.

Look for cool features:

- Besides adjusting the temperatures settings from on and off, look for multi-speed fan settings with some models providing a remote control, a timer or Wi-Fi connections. Does it offer the modes of cool, fan and dehumidification?


- Quiet mode run with less noise for better sleep.

- Rather than lifting a heavy window AC unit and trying to install it in a window,

it's much easier to install the flexible tube with the sealing kit; the hot air is exhausted through the tubing. Before buying, make sure the expanding hose will reach to your window.

- Washable filters save money.

Look for these portable AC units from your local hardware store, home improvement store or online. Prices range from \$250-\$600, depending on the size and features.

A more permanent option for a larger area home with no duct work would be a ductless air source heat pump providing heating and cooling. Take advantage of the co-op's ductless air source heat pump rebate; find the form on our website. 

Keep your chill factor going with a portable air conditioning unit with expandable tubing and window sealing kit.



Safety

Be weather aware and storm prepared!

Are you ready for the severe summer storms?

Be prepared

- Create an emergency kit with power outage essentials: batteries, power banks, flashlights, non-perishable foods, water, medical supplies and prescriptions.

- Develop an emergency family plan with meeting points, communications methods and evacuation routes. Share your plan with all family members.

- Monitor the weather for important updates that could impact your emergency plan.

- Download a weather notification app on your Smart Phone to receive weather updates. No smart phone? Buy a NOAA weather radio.

Stay safe


- Ensure a safe shelter. Stay away from the windows and doors. With tornadoes move to a basement or



interior room without windows. Talk with your children. Do they know where to go as well?

- Use portable generators safely. Operate outdoors in well-ventilated areas. Place on a flat dry surface. Do not overload it and always read the operating manual before use.

- Severe storms can bring down tree limbs and power lines. If you encounter a downed line, stay back at least 20 feet. Always assume a downed line is live and dangerous. Call your electric cooperative to let us know if tree branches downed the line, the pole snapped or what you see from a safe distance. Downed tree branches can hide downed lines; just stay inside versus going outside to see the damage.

- See downed wires on the road? Do not drive over them. Stay away and let the cooperative know so repairs may occur quickly. 

Brown County Briefs

Efficiency tip

Take advantage of the warmer weather to reduce home energy use. Avoid using your oven and use a grill instead. Not only will cooking outdoors eliminate the electricity used to power the stove, but it will also avoid raising the temperature inside your home, reducing the need for additional air conditioning. You can also avoid using the oven with tasty no-bake recipes. Get creative in the kitchen and explore new ways to save energy! Source: energy.gov.

Tune up your AC to stay cool

Keep your home's cooling system running smoothly and efficiently by having it tuned up by a licensed, professional HVAC contractor; cash in on Brown County REA's rebate. Members are eligible for a \$25 electric bill credit for the home cooling system tune-up every two years. Submit the checklist below, along with a dated copy of the contractor's bill to Brown County REA to receive your bill credit. You can also use the tune-up portion of the Heating and Cooling rebate form on our website.

Name _____
Address _____
Town/zip _____
Account _____
Cooling equip. brand _____
Model # _____
Serial # _____
Age of unit _____
Size in tons _____
HpSF2/SEER2 rating _____

I certify this work was completed:
___ clean condenser coil; check belt
___ check coolant level & lube motor
___ test all controls & blow out drain
___ check indoor furnace filter
___ check coolant pressure (🔧)

Member Advisory Council held first meeting April 22



Members enjoyed a building tour after learning about the history of the cooperative. They toured our office spaces, warehouse, and OCR room. Board of Directors facilitated the tour with detail about our maps, operations, and even the Ford Lightning! CEO Mike Heidemann presented the OCR room to groups as they went through the space.



The first of three impactful meetings took place on April 22 at the Brown County REA headquarters. Representatives of the membership were nominated by the Board of Directors to attend these three meetings. At each meeting it is our goal to educate the council on each aspect of the cooperative and present changes to them for input. Time exists for questions to be answered about the cooperative and this is when the input on our changes occur. Whether good or bad, it is important for us to hear what our members are thinking about the changes happening within the cooperative. From financial decisions to building maintenance, the Member Advisory Council has been a great resource for the cooperative to gain insight into member priorities. (🔧)

Add to calendar: BCREA Annual Meeting set for April 9, 2026

Follow five tips to reduce wildfire risks

Wildfires are no longer confined to the western United States. Traditionally associated with dry, fire-prone regions like California, wildfires are now affecting areas in the Midwest and even parts of the Southeast.

This shift is driven by rising temperatures, prolonged droughts and changing weather patterns, which are creating conditions ripe for fires in regions that historically saw fewer of them. As a result, more communities are now facing growing threats from wildfires, prompting a need for broader awareness and preparedness nationwide.

Brown County REA is working to reduce the risk of wildfires throughout our service territory. Through regular vegetation management and grid maintenance and hardening practices, we are proactively working to reduce risks and improve the reliability of our local system.



Do your part to help protect the BCREA distribution system from wildfires.

As a member of Brown County REA, there are steps you can take to prevent wildfires.

1. Properly extinguish campfires. Always douse your campfire with water, stir the ashes and ensure everything is


cool to the touch before leaving the area.

2. Don't burn on windy days. Avoid outdoor burning when it's windy or dry, as embers can easily spread and ignite surrounding areas.

3. Clear vegetation and debris. Maintain a defensible space around your home by removing dry leaves, dead branches and other flammable materials.

4. Use equipment safely. Tools like lawnmowers or chainsaws can spark fires. Use them during cooler times of the day and keep them in good working condition.

5. Follow local fire regulations. Always check for burn bans or restrictions in your area before burning anything or using open flames outdoors.

For more information on wildfire prevention and preparedness, visit www.redcross.org. 

Be prepared for the worst of the summer storms

The Electrical Safety Foundation International (ESFI) encourages consumers to practice caution and safety during summer storms, which at times can be severe. Beware of flooded areas cause by heavy rains — water and electricity do not mix! Below is safety advice to use following a summer storm:

Flooded areas — Be careful when attempting to walk in flooded areas and remember that submerged outlets or electrical cords could energize the water.

Wet electrical equipment — Do not use electrical appliances that have been wet. Water can damage the motors in electrical appliances, such as furnaces, freezers, refrigerators, washing machines and dryers. Electrical parts can pose a shock hazard or overheat and cause a fire.

A qualified service repair dealer should recondition electrical equipment that has been wet. Certain equipment will require complete replacement, while a trained professional can recondition



How long has it been since you ran your portable generator? Maybe take a look at it; start it to see that the gas is still good so you are ready at a moment's notice.


other devices.

Portable generators — Take special care with portable electric generators, which can provide a good source of power, but if improperly installed or operated, can become deadly. Do not connect

generators directly to household wiring. Power from generators can back-feed along power lines and electrocute anyone coming in contact with them, including line workers making repairs. A qualified, licensed electrician should install your generator to ensure that it meets local electrical codes.

Other tips include:

- Make sure your generator is properly grounded.
- Keep the generator dry.
- Ensure extension cords used on generators are rated for the load, are free of cuts, worn insulation and have three-pronged plugs.
- Do not overload the generator.
- Do not operate the generator in enclosed or partially enclosed spaces. Generators can produce high levels of carbon monoxide very quickly, which can be deadly.

- Use a ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) to prevent electrocutions and electrical shock injuries. Portable GFCIs require no tools to install and are available from \$12 to \$30. 

Many ways to pay...enroll today!

Let me count the ways to pay!

Co-op members have more ways to pay their electric bill. Take advantage of these technologies to avoid paying for the increasing cost of stamps and save time as post office changes mean slower delivery.

Automatic payments from your checking or savings account

Sign up once and have your electric bill paid automatically on the due date (20th of each month or the next business day). You decide whether you want it paid from your checking or savings account. Find the enrollment form on the co-op's website under billing.

Online pay

If you prefer to manually make the monthly payment, use the online pay app. Federated members: download the Federated Rural Electric app. Brown County REA members: download the Brown County REA app. Otherwise, you can pay through the co-op's website too.

This app requires you to set up your account so you will need to have your electric bill in front of you. Once you do so, paying the monthly bill is simple using this app.

The Online Pay app has many other great features at your fingertips:

1. Account summary
2. Statement history
3. Usage history
4. Payment history
5. My accounts
6. Change your password



Sign up for a “greener” way to pay your electric bill, from your bank account or online. For the ultimate level of efficiency sign up for paperless bills; it’s like saving a tree!

7. Messages — Sign up for reminders to pay and confirmation e-mails that it was paid.

8. Sign up for paperless bills. Your bill amount is emailed to you; you log in to see the full bill. This saves your cooperative printing and postage, which

helps us keep our electric rates to you as low as possible.

Paper check payment

Many co-op members still pay by mailing a check, but members are seeing slower mail delivery times.

Drop box

If you're coming to town, drive by and use the drop box in front of our office.

Front counter payment

If you prefer to pay in person during business hours, you can pay with cash, check or credit card.

Automatic payment with credit card

Residential accounts can enroll their credit card (VISA, Mastercard or Discover) for payment on the due date. Again, find the form on the co-op's website under billing. Your co-op encourages you to use your bank account method if possible, as the co-op pays processing fees with credit card payments.

Telephone payment

Members use this option to avoid late fees or disconnection. Call the co-op during business hours. Be careful with this option and use only the co-op's published landline listed on your electric bill and not some scam phone number on a fake website.

If you have any questions about any of these payment options, reach out to the co-op's billing department during business hours. ☎

No e-mail on your account? It's hard to stay in the know



E-mail your electric co-operative your e-mail address. We need a current e-mail address for you with these billing options mentioned

above. Plus, we sometimes use it for communications when members do not answer their phones or check voice mail. Thanks for helping us serve you, our member-owners, better! ☎



This summer it's time to upgrade your dehumidifier

Save energy on your electric bill each month with an Energy Star model. Plus, save with the co-op's \$25 Energy Star rebate. Find the form on the cooperative's website.

A dehumidifier can add \$14 to \$40 to your electric bill each month, depending on it's size, efficiency and moisture level. A new Energy Star model will use about 13 percent less electricity. Ⓢ

Share cilantro recipes to spice up your summer gatherings!

Summery cilantro recipes summon you! Share your favorite cilantro recipes with us, whether it's for salsa, salads, marinades, chicken or pesto. Send your favorite cilantro recipes to Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by June 24. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! 📧

Raspberry Pretzel Dessert by Holly Benson, Granada

Crust: 2 c. pretzels crushed (about 8 oz.) $\frac{3}{4}$ c. butter, melted 3 T. sugar
Preheat the oven to 350°. In a medium bowl add the crushed pretzels, butter and sugar. Toss well to combine. Press into an ungreased 9x13" pan. Bake 10 minutes. Remove from oven and cool to room temperature.

Filling: 8 oz. cream cheese, softened 2 c. boiling water
1 c. powdered sugar 32 oz. frozen raspberries
8 oz. Cool Whip, thawed whipped topping for garnish
2 3 oz. pkgs. raspberry gelatin uncrushed pretzels for garnish
In a medium bowl beat the cream cheese and powdered sugar until smooth. Stir in the whipped topping until combined. Spread over pretzel crust and refrigerate until chilled at least 30 minutes. In a large bowl dissolve the gelatin in boiling water. Stir in frozen raspberries and chill until partially set about 15 to 20 minutes. Carefully pour or spoon over cream cheese filling. Chill until firm about four to six hours. Garnish with additional whipped topping and pretzels, if desired. 📧



Look for Energy Star to save on fridges & freezers

When buying your kitchen's next refrigerator or home's freezer, look for the Energy Star logo. It indicates energy efficiency and your electric co-op offers rebates. Find the form on our website. 📧



The co-op is
closed July 4th —
celebrate safely!

Crews will be on
call in case of
outages.



JUNE SPECIAL!
Buy one glass break or motion sensor,
get one FREE!
with purchase of a new system and three-year monitoring agreement

Heartland Security A subsidiary of your local
electric co-op

888.264.6380 heartlandss.com

Always call first:
1-800-252-1166



Contact Gopher State One Call before doing any digging more than 12" deep — 48 hours before digging for foundations, trees and tiling.

Register at www.gopherstateonecall.org or call 811. Call a licensed electrician to locate the underground lines on your side of the meter. 📧



Laura Fischer
Member Services
Manager

Allow me to introduce myself

After working as a manager for three years in the food service industry, I saw a brighter future when Mike Heidemann offered me the job as Member Services Manager for BCREA in March, 2025. As a new resident in the county, I have been learning a lot about the community and its members, while learning this role. It has been a pleasure to see the instant impact of assisting members with water heaters and rebates. Another aspect of this position that I enjoy is facilitating the Operation Round Up Trust meetings and donation/scholarship disbursements, as it is beautiful to see

the community support each other. Within my first month I helped with the 88th Annual Meeting. Each experience has taught me something. I am excited to continue learning how to be a great Member Services Manager to all of you. Along with the other passionate managers, I will be creating some beneficial changes within the cooperative. Our goal is to serve you, our members, and to keep your needs at the forefront of our minds when we work.

Summer heat means cool co-op rebates on heat pumps to stay cool

With summer at our doorstep I would like to bring your attention to our HVAC rebates! Enjoy the best of both worlds with an air source heat pump (ASHP) which provides home cooling and heating with 72 percent less electricity than conventional air conditioners and furnaces. The largest rebates are available to members who install an ASHP or hybrid system, placed on load control with a non-electric or storage backup. Heat pump rebates are based on Heat Seasonal Performance Factor (HSPF) 8.2/7.0 HSPF 2 and higher. Rebates range from \$1,000 to \$2,000 on a load-controlled heat pump with whole house dual fuel or storage backup. A rebate of \$500 to \$1,000 is available to members who choose to install a qualifying ASHP not placed on load control or with electric as the backup.

Install a new geothermal heat pump for a \$2,000 rebate. Place it on load control with whole house storage or non-electric backup heat to receive an additional \$500 rebate. A replacement geothermal unit earns a \$1,000 rebate.

No ductwork in your home? No problem. Energy Star Ductless Mini Split Heat Pumps efficiently heats and cools your home and qualifies for a \$500 rebate if electricity is your home's primary heat source. Pair with a delivered fuel heating system to earn a \$300 rebate. Members who install or upgrade existing heating and cooling systems with an electronically commutated motor (ECM) can receive a \$25 rebate. Upgrade to an Energy Star WiFi/Smart thermostat for your heating and cooling equipment and receive a \$25 rebate. Find these rebate forms on our website or call the office to request one. ☎️



**BROWN
COUNTY
REA**

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Sleepy Eye MN 56085

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Website: www.browncountyrea.coop

Phone: 507-794-3331 or 800-658-2368

Payment Line (PSN): 833-250-4481

Office hours: 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday-Friday

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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 April 24, 2025. Discussion and/or action were taken on the following agenda items:

- Reviewed and approved the March 2025 board meeting minutes, new membership applications, member cancellations, payments to estates and assignment transfers.

- Reviewed and approved March 2025 payroll and financial statements.

- Reviewed the 2025 Annual Meeting and set Thursday, April 9, as the 2026 meeting date.

- Updated on operations activities, including the completion of underground patrol and maintenance, Altec boom test and new quad track plow.

- Reviewed and approved whistle-blower policy 307.

- REviewed and approved Jeff Pelzel's three-year term on the CTV Board.

- Reviewed staff meeting reports, director meeting reports and individual director reports.

The next meeting is set for July 31, 2026, at the Brown County REA office in Sleepy Eye. ☎️