

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



Antler Shed Hunting

**Shed Hunter Kelly
O'Bryan**

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Artificial Intelligence

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*Photo submitted by
Kelly O'Bryan*

Safety Thrown Aside: Out-of-State Trucking Company Puts Lives and Lines at Risk



Jeff Birkeland
CEO

Dear Members,

I want to give you a clear view of a serious safety issue that recently occurred in our service territory – an incident that put our electric lines, our linemen and potentially our members at risk.

Earlier this month, an out-of-state company contacted West Central Electric (WCE) about escorting six oversized loads through our area. These loads were exceptionally tall, requiring careful coordination to lift electric lines safely and legally as they passed through. The plan was for WCE to escort each group of two loads – three groups in total – through our system to ensure proper line clearance and, most importantly, public safety.

What Was Planned

On Friday, July 11, 2025, our WCE linemen safely escorted the first load from the White River to Fort Pierre. We raised two of our electric lines to allow clearance, delivering the load safely to a designated stop at the Holiday Inn Express in Fort Pierre. The plan was to resume the escort Monday morning, handing it off to Moreau Grand Electric once the load reached their territory. We were going to escort two more loads through our system Monday morning from the White River (southern edge of our territory) to the Cheyenne River (northern edge of our territory).

What Actually Happened

What happened next should alarm every cooperative member.

Saturday morning, we received a disturbing report: the first load had illegally continued on its own and was already near Bison, S.D. Based on its height – 19 feet 4.5 inches – it would have had to raise at least one of our lines. And they did this without notifying us, without permission, and without safety-certified linemen. This is a direct violation of safety protocols

and state regulations.

Worse still, a second load was actively moving through our system – again without WCE involvement – and would have had to raise our power lines to get under them. This is not only illegal; it's outright reckless. Lifting high-voltage electric lines without the proper training or authorization can kill someone in an instant.

We immediately mobilized. Our linemen and operations staff tracked down the unauthorized load and stopped it inside Fort Pierre city limits. Law enforcement was notified, and Motor Carrier Officers responded to handle the situation. Here's the kicker: since nobody saw them raise our lines, nothing could be done to this company. No traffic citations, no penalties!

A Pattern of Disregard

This was not an isolated mistake. The third set of loads also moved on the weekend without proper coordination. Though we were told they'd wait in Hermosa until Monday, they made it as far as White River by Sunday night. Again, it's unclear whether they coordinated with other electric cooperatives whose systems they crossed – but what is clear is that they ignored the safety yet again.

Even more troubling was a conversation I had with one of their employees. He plainly said, "If we get a ticket, it's only \$189." The fine is just the cost of doing business compared to \$600 to \$800 per day per pilot car or bucket truck, plus other expenses including payroll and hotel expenses. In other words, they're knowingly breaking the law because it's cheaper than following it.

And when I asked if they'd raised any of our lines, they flat-out lied. West Central linemen had just raised two of those lines the day before for the same-sized load. If they truly hadn't lifted any lines, why were their bucket truck employees wearing safety harnesses and had uncovered their buckets?

The Risks Are Real – and Unacceptable

Let me be clear: these are not just procedural violations – they are life-threatening actions. This company had no permission to touch our lines. We don't know if their equipment is safe

Continued on page 3

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

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Design assistance by SDREA

for use near high-voltage lines. We don't know if their operators are trained, qualified, or even aware of the dangers they're creating. What we do know is this: it is illegal and unsafe to touch our lines.

WCE linemen are the only people authorized to work on our system. We are trained, certified, and committed to protecting the lives and property of our members. Out-of-state companies should not be allowed to cut corners and gamble with our safety just to save a few bucks.

A Call for Action

We've seen this type of behavior before – and it's time it stops. West Central Electric is calling on the State of South Dakota, our fellow Cooperatives, and law enforcement to step up enforcement and increase penalties for companies that put lives at risk.

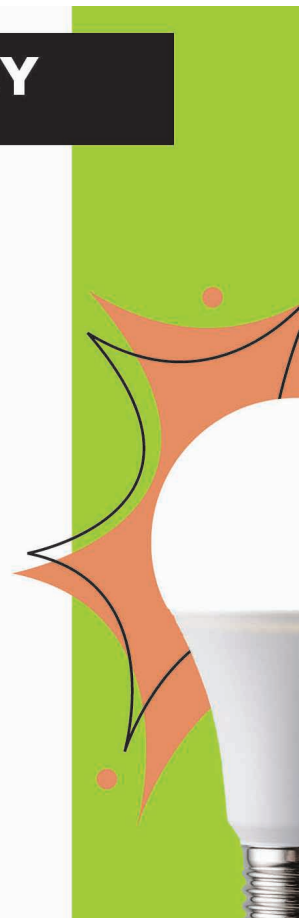
Our job is to serve you reliably and safely. That duty doesn't change just because it's the weekend or because a company wants to save money. We will continue to protect our system and our members – but we also need accountability.

No one should lose their life because a trucking company decided the rules didn't apply to them.

If this article upsets you, please contact your local state legislators and ask them to put some teeth into the law to prevent this from happening again. Feel free to forward this article and have your local legislators contact me for more information. I will be more than happy to offer my assistance.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP OF THE MONTH

Take advantage of “shoulder months,” which refer to the transitional periods between peak heating and cooling seasons. During the fall, these milder weeks typically occur between September and November. Shoulder months offer a great opportunity to reduce home energy consumption as the need for extensive heating or cooling is reduced. Look for simple ways to boost indoor comfort without running your heating and cooling system. Use ceiling fans and open windows on breezy days to ventilate your home. On cooler days, add a layer of clothing and avoid running the heat.



Emergency Preparedness: Are You Ready for a Disaster?

Source: National Safety Council

National Preparedness Month, sponsored by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and held annually in September, is a good reminder that natural and man-made disasters can strike at any time. It's important to have a planned response when you're at work, on vacation or on the road.

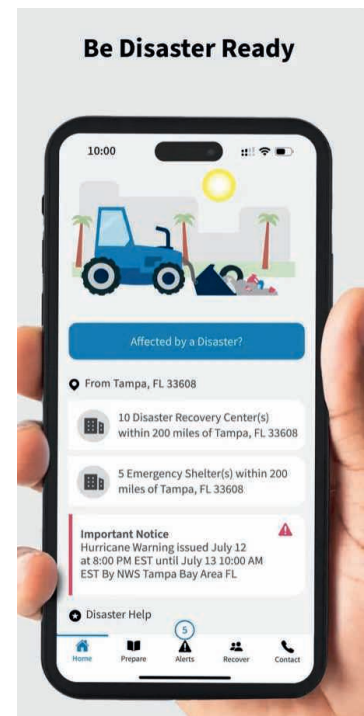
In 2022, 69,473 weather-related events resulted in 813 deaths and 1,718 injuries. Winter weather, heat, floods and hurricanes resulted in the most deaths that year, according to Injury Facts.

The National Safety Council offers safety tips specific on preparing for earthquakes, floods, hurricanes and tornadoes, and how to minimize fire risks.

Federal agencies, like Ready.gov and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration also are valuable resources for emergency preparedness. When you face a natural or man-made emergency, try to stay informed through radio, TV or the Internet. In some cases, however, cable, electric and cell phone service will be disabled, making communication nearly impossible. The National Safety Council recommends the following general precautions that apply to many disaster situations:

- Make sure at least one family member knows first aid and CPR.
- Download the FEMA app for resources, weather alerts and safety tips.
- Have a family communication plan in place; all members of the family should review and practice the plan.
- Have all family members' and other important phone numbers written down or memorized.
- Have an emergency kit in your car and at least three days of food and water at home.
- Be sure to store all important documents – birth certificates, insurance policies, etc. – in a fire-proof safe or safety deposit box.
- Know how to shut off utilities.

The official FEMA mobile app offers critical resources and real-time alerts to help you prepare for emergencies, stay safe during disasters, and navigate recovery afterward. With features like customizable emergency checklists, shelter locations, disaster recovery centers, and direct access to emergency alerts, the app is a comprehensive tool for personal and family safety planning.



"Don't drive tractors into power lines."

Darcy Welsh, Age 9

Darcy cautions readers while driving tractors near power lines. Great picture, Darcy! Darcy's parents are Ryan and Rachel Welsh from Oral, 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.

Fruit SPECIALS

FROZEN FRUIT FIESTA

Ingredients:

1 6-oz. frozen orange juice concentrate
2 10-oz. frozen strawberries
2 cans pineapple with juice (1 tidbits, 1 crushed)
3-4 bananas, sliced
1/4 cup lemon juice
1 cup sugar
1 1/2 cup cold water

Method

Mix all together in a large bowl. Freeze in individual cups. Set out at room temperature for 1-2 hours before serving.

Optional: pour sour or 7-Up on top before serving.

Ginny Jensen
Sioux Valley Energy

PEACH RHUBARB CRISP

Filling:

3/4 cup sugar
3 tbsps. flour
1/2 tsp. nutmeg
1/8 tsp. salt
3 cups rhubarb (sliced, fresh or frozen)
2 1/2 cups chopped fresh or frozen unsweetened peaches

Topping:

1/2 cup flour
1/2 cup oatmeal
1/2 cup brown sugar
3/4 tsp. cinnamon
1/8 tsp. salt
5 tbsps. butter (cold)

Method

Combine the filling ingredients and fruit. Transfer to a greased 11"x7" baking dish. In a small bowl, combine the topping ingredients; cut in butter until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Sprinkle over fruit. Bake at 375°F for 30 to 35 minutes until bubbly and browned.

*Recipe can be cut in half and bake in 8" x 8" pan.

Sally Florey
Charles Mix Electric

CHERRY ICE CREAM DESSERT

Ingredients:

1 1/2 cup Rice Krispies, crushed
1/4 cup brown sugar
1/4 cup melted butter
1 cup grated coconut
1/4 cup chopped nuts
1-quart vanilla ice cream
1 cup cherry pie mix

Method

1. Melt butter in frying pan. Add coconut and toast, stirring constantly as it burns easily. Cool
2. Add nuts, brown sugar and crushed rice Krispies. Mix together.
3. Press 2/3 of crumb mixture into a buttered 9x9 inch pan.
4. Soften ice cream and spread over crumb mixture then top remaining crumbs.
5. Freeze well. Cut in squares and top with cherry pie mix.
6. Can be served with any other toppings. Serves 6-8.

Rowena A. Wipf
Northern 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.

Find Hidden Energy Users at Home



Miranda Boutelle
Efficiency Services
Group

Out of sight, out of mind. It is easy to overlook the hidden energy users in our homes. Yet, every plugged-in device and ready-to-use appliance can lead to higher electric bills.

Let's see if we can find some hidden energy savings for you.

Your water heater could be using more energy than necessary. Storage water heaters heat water to a preset temperature. When hot water is used, cold water enters the tank, lowering the temperature, and the water is reheated to that preset level. If the water heater is set higher than needed, it wastes energy. Most water heaters are set to 140 degrees at the factory. The U.S. Department of Energy recommends setting the temperature to 120 degrees. This will save energy and reduce the risk of scalding. Do not set it lower than 120 degrees to prevent bacteria development in the tank.

Exterior security lights, porch lights and barn lights can use more energy than needed. If they are on every night, all year long, that adds up to 4,380 hours, or half the hours in a year. If those lights use outdated, inefficient technology, they waste energy. With that many hours, even a slight increase in efficiency can yield big energy savings. Switch to energy efficient LED bulbs. If lights need to stay on, consider upgrading to motion sensor lights so you aren't drawing energy all night.

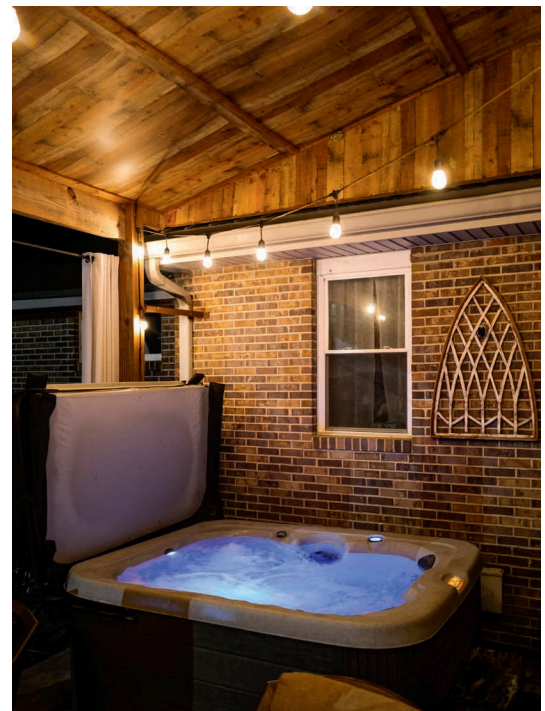
Pools and hot tubs can also be big energy users. Since you don't see the pumps or heaters by design, it's difficult to know when they are operating and consuming energy. Pumps filter water to keep it clean and safe for swimming. Energy Star®-certified pumps run at lower speeds and can be programmed to match your pool's filtering needs, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. They can pay for themselves in two years, are quieter and can prolong the life of your pool's filtering system. Schedule your hot tub to a lower temperature when you're not using it to reduce

energy use. If your electric utility offers time-of-use rates, consider scheduling accordingly.

Plug load is anything in your home that is plugged into an outlet. As we use more and more appliances and technology in our homes, plug load energy use increases. Find what is plugged in around your home. If you aren't using it, unplug it. For computer stations and entertainment centers, consider using smart power strips. These devices sense when energy is being used and turn peripheral devices on or off as needed.

Gaming consoles are another hidden energy user. Gamers often put them in rest mode when not in use. This allows them to complete updates and reduces start-up time for the next session. It also means they are still consuming energy even when not actively used. Powering off between gaming sessions can save energy. Ask the gamers in your life to power off. It may require a bit more time for updates, but every kilowatt-hour counts when it comes to saving energy.

It's easy to make a habit of powering down and unplugging once you identify everything drawing power in your home. For upgrades, reach out to your electric utility about available rebates to help cover costs.





SOUTH DAKOTA SUNFLOWERS

Photo by Mary Howell

Wild Dutchman Seeds a Nationwide Snack

Jacob Boyko

jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop

If you're driving across central South Dakota in the summertime and you pass by a field of tall, bright sunflowers swaying in the breeze, there's a good chance you're a witness to the first step in those seeds' journey to being roasted, seasoned and packed into a bag of Wild Dutchman sunflower seeds.

One sunflower seed grower is Dakota Energy member Greg Bich, who's involved in just about every step from the farm-to-bag process for the iconic South Dakota brand.

Greg is a part owner of Southern Sun, the Huron-based company that processes, roasts and markets Wild Dutchman sunflower seeds for a nationwide audience of sweet-and-salty snackers.

Years ago, as a favor to his friend, local farmer and sunflower processor Danny Dale, Greg hauled loads of sunflower seeds up to Mound City for an up-and-coming operation known as "Wild Dutchman."

During these visits, Greg got to know the company's founders: father and son

duo Wayne and Toby Vanderlaan.

"If you ever talk to the older farmers in this area, a lot of them have nicknames, and that's kind of what they went by," Greg explained. "Wayne Vanderlaan's neighbor was called 'The Crazy Norwegian', while the neighbor called him 'The Wild Dutchman.'"

What started as a part-time snack-making hobby for the Wild Dutchman and Toby had boomed into substantial business — one that was quickly outgrowing their batch-by-batch roasting set-up.

"They had all of these distributors calling them, and they couldn't really get production done, and he just really wanted some help," Greg explained. "I came back, and I talked to my sunflower seed processing plant partner, Danny Dale, and I told him I'd like to invest in this company, and we felt a need for an additional roasting plant and built it."

The rest is history; Greg and Danny took over some of the roasting and helped out Toby and his daughter, Shelby, with new packaging designs, highlighting the Vanderlanns' Dutch heritage with the iconic orange packaging.

With the additional processing capacity, the company continued to expand its growing footprint throughout the Midwest and beyond.

"It's hard for a little two-family-owned company to be competitive in the market, but since we have the seeds from start to finish, it kind of gives us an advantage over everyone else," Greg said.

Starting in December 2024, Greg and Danny took over full production of Wild Dutchman seeds in Huron.

"From that first load that we hauled up there to Mound City to the time we built the roasting plant was probably three years of building a friendship," Greg said. "Small town South Dakota is very different, and we honestly went into wild Dutchman with no contractual agreement besides a shake of a hand and a 'hey, we're in this together.'"

Today, as the Wild Dutchman brand continues its remarkable streak of success, Greg is elated seeing how a little small-town friendship, hard work, and faith can achieve so much.

"One of the greatest feelings I've had is being in a faraway place and seeing an empty bag of Wild Dutchman seeds blowing across the baseball field," Greg laughed. "It's those little things that are more satisfying than having a positive balance sheet or a huge profit."



SHED

Kelly O'Bryan of Winner shows off his impressive collection of deer and elk sheds alongside his shed-hunting Labrador, Skye. Photos submitted by Kelly O'Bryan

HUNTING

Prairie Miles and Antler Piles

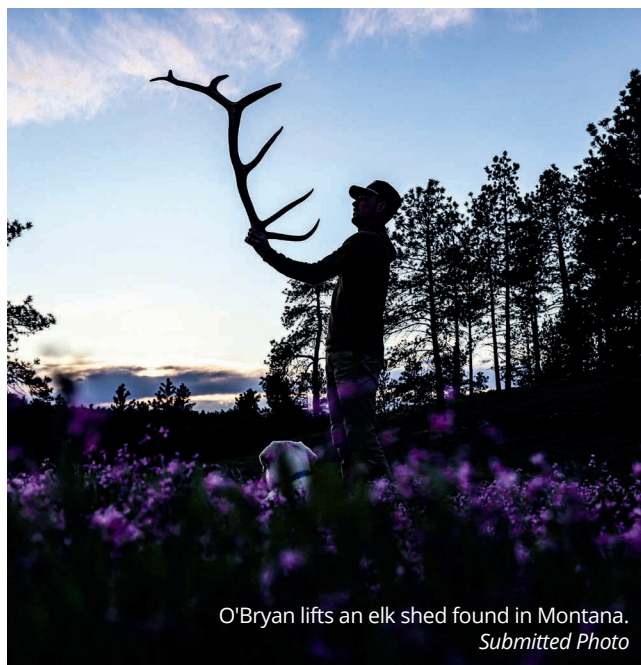
Frank Turner

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Rosebud Electric member Kelly O'Bryan of Winner regularly hikes mile after mile of open prairie in search of the perfect shed. But he isn't looking for a place to store his garden tools or lawnmower – instead, he's after antlers. Each spring, deer and elk naturally shed their antlers, leaving behind prized treasures for shed hunters like O'Bryan to find.

O'Bryan jumped into the shed hunting hobby in 2020, during the social distancing months of the pandemic, after a friend invited him on a shed hunt in Montana. When O'Bryan found his first deer shed, he uncovered more than just a pair of antlers – he discovered a new passion.

"It was during the time when you couldn't go out and do anything, so you just had to make your own fun and find stuff to do," he laughed. "I just fell in love with covering as many miles as I possibly could each season, trying to pinpoint sheds. It's just like an Easter egg hunt."



O'Bryan lifts an elk shed found in Montana. Submitted Photo

Shortly after, O'Bryan fully committed to the hobby and added the ultimate scavenger to his team: a white lab named Skye. According to O'Bryan, it didn't take long for the dog to become an invaluable shed-hunting partner.

"I got Skye as a puppy, and I knew as soon as I got her, I

would train her to be a shed dog,” he said. “I taught her to sit and stay while I hid sheds all around the house. When she found one, I would give her lots of positive reinforcement. She figured it out just like that.”

Since then, O’Bryan and Skye have become seasoned shed hunters. In 2024 alone, the pair found 152 whitetail sheds, 25 mule deer sheds, nine elk sheds and 16 complete skulls – called “dead heads” – which resemble an English-style mount. Many of their best finds come from long days spent in remote country, often covering 10 to 15 miles in a single outing.

O’Bryan’s collection of sheds has grown into an impressive heap of bone and tines that continues to grow each season. Like many in the shed hunting community, he has found creative ways to showcase his finds with his most festive being an antler-adorned Christmas tree.

Others in the shed hunting community use their collection for art projects, crafting everything from knife handles to chandeliers. Some even trade or sell antlers to crafters, collectors, or pet product makers, giving shed hunting both recreational and economic appeal. Although O’Bryan does not sell his finds, he does cut up broken and damaged antlers for dog chews, gifting them to friends, family and his own favorite shed-hunting friend.

O’Bryan also has a few tips for beginners, drawn from miles of experience.

He says spring is the best time to search – antlers are freshly shed, and the grass is still short enough to give hunters a clear view. A good pair of binoculars is another must-have, helping spot antlers from a distance when the terrain allows for a higher vantage point.

And once you’ve found one shed, don’t assume the hunt is over. Whitetail deer are often in groups and antlers are often dropped in pairs so it’s worth taking the time to thoroughly scan the surroundings.

“You aren’t going to be finding many sheds unless you are willing to put on the miles,” he said. “The more you hike, the more you are likely to find sheds.”

More photos of O’Bryan’s collection and other hunting trophies can be found on his Instagram page: @db_huntin.



(Above) O’Bryan praises Skye for a lifetime of discovering antlers.
(Below) O’Bryan and Skye show their white tail antler finds from a winter shed hunt. *Submitted Photo*



LARGE LOAD MOVES



Kit Talich
Operations

Over the last ten years, the cooperative has seen a marked increase in large load moves. Every year, there seem to be more moves, and they keep getting larger! We use “large load move” to describe anything over 18 feet tall while loaded for transport. This would include things such as buildings, bins, and large equipment. Some have been absolutely massive. We have moved loads that were close to 40 feet tall. Some are well over 100 feet in length and weigh over 100 tons! Most moves involve items built for North Dakota and Canada’s oil and gas industry. However, we also see several loads coming from the east due to our geographic location. Those are mainly new houses destined for locations west of the river.

Several factors are involved in these moves. The main issues we must juggle involve OSHA, the NESC (National Electric Safety Code), South Dakota Codified Law (SDCL), coordination between our crews and the movers, and billing.

OSHA and NESC have rules on the approach distances, meaning how close people and things can get to energized power lines. If a load is going to be within a certain distance of a line, the line has to be lifted to create a safe clearance while the load passes underneath. Of course, the lines can only be lifted so far. If we have a very tall load, we may have to turn off the line, apply grounds, cut it, and let it down completely

so the load can safely pass. This is a very time-consuming process.

South Dakota Codified Law sets rules for the notice the mover must provide (48 hours), who can lift the lines (only the owners of the line), the amount a utility can charge, and the size of loads that require a permit. If a permit is required, the state may also dictate its route. We are allowed to collect a deposit from the mover for the move, but we are only allowed to bill for the direct costs associated. If a move only takes six hours of the day, we can only bill for six hours, even though the move delays the whole day’s work. We try to fill the rest of the day with something productive as best we can, but this can easily kill a day where we could have gotten something else done.

In 2024, we completed 25 moves in eight months. Each move required at least four guys and two trucks. In other words, four guys and two bucket trucks lost more than a month’s worth of productivity moving these loads through the system. We are on pace to smash that number in 2025 and recently had four moves scheduled in one week.

Our location in the state is also a significant factor in why we see so many moves. As you are probably aware, Highway 83 runs from Texas to Canada. Much of the equipment we see going north uses this route, as it is coming from the port in Houston and going to Canada. The effect

Large Load Moves, Continued

can be exacerbated by Nebraska making the loads move at night, so they all start at the South Dakota border in the morning. Most can only make it to Fort Pierre because if they start going west and north from there, they cannot reach the next spot they can “sit down” at before dark. Therefore, a lot of those moves turn into two half-day moves. The other major factor we have is the Oahe Dam. Due to the types of bridges and other dams on the river, it is the only place where these large loads can cross the Missouri River in South Dakota. This means every move to cross the river must come through our territory.

For all these reasons, we have started an aggressive project to bury all the overhead crossings west of Fort Pierre along Highway 34 out to the end of the territory near Bridger and the crossings from Four Corners (Highway 34 and 63 Junction) north to the Cheyenne River. That will consist of approximately 50 crossings and eliminate 99% of load moves in the future!

In the meantime, sometimes getting these moves through causes challenging traffic situations. We want to remind everyone to stay safe around these moves and give plenty of space to the crews while they are out there.



TIPS TO AVOID ENERGY SCAMS

Solar energy is rising in popularity, and so are solar scams. If a salesperson knocks on your door promising free solar panels at zero cost or that you'll never have to pay your energy bill again, it's likely a scam. If you're interested in solar panels for your home, do your research, get multiple quotes from licensed providers who are reputable, and most importantly, take your time to ensure a smooth process.

Source: Federal Trade Commission





HARNESSING AI

Electric Cooperatives Explore What's Next for AI

Frank Turner

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Artificial intelligence (AI) is becoming an increasingly popular tool for many industries and even in our daily lives. It has the potential to bring many opportunities, and a few challenges, to electric cooperatives. But machine learning takes time, and cooperatives are still in the process of determining how AI can be effectively used.

Like any new technology, AI brings with it a mix of potential and uncertainty. It's a hot topic — sometimes exciting, sometimes a little intimidating. But for electric cooperatives, the focus isn't on the buzz. It's on the basics: What problems can it solve? What efficiencies can it create? And how do cooperatives make sure they are using it safely?

That measured, practical approach is what's guiding East River Electric Power

Cooperative, a wholesale power supply cooperative which serves 25-member distribution systems in eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota, as it explores how AI might support the operations of its member cooperatives now and into the future.

Right now, most electric cooperatives in South Dakota have not yet integrated artificial intelligence into their operations or systems. But that doesn't mean the technology is being ignored. Across the state, many co-ops are watching AI developments closely, asking questions, and exploring how these tools might be used in the future. The focus remains on learning first — before implementing anything that could affect system reliability or member service.

At East River Electric Power Cooperative, that learning process is already well underway. According to Jeff May, chief information officer with East River Elec-

tric, the co-op has spent the past several years researching what AI has to offer. Their approach has been to identify practical, secure applications that could help improve efficiency, support employees in their day-to-day work, and ultimately benefit members.

"With the explosion of AI applications and models for both personal and professional uses, we've been exploring ways that East River Electric and our members can harness the power of AI while making sure that our data is secure from a cybersecurity perspective," said May.

Because AI technology has the potential to interact with both internal systems and external networks, cybersecurity is a top priority. As South Dakota rural electric cooperatives look to adopt tools powered by AI and other tech, they will ensure their systems are safe from potential cyber threats. Strong digital defenses are essential for the safe use of any new technology.

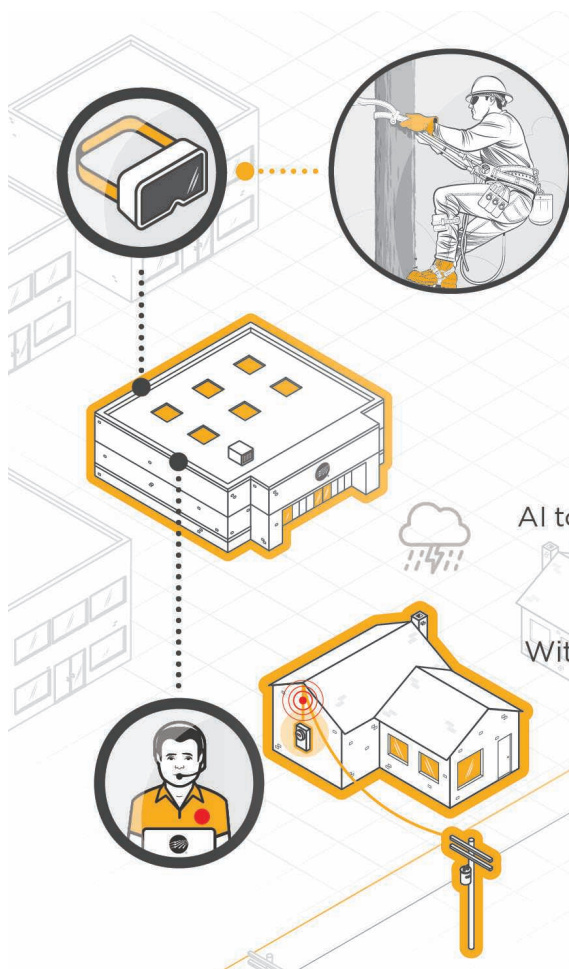
With safety in mind, May said East River Electric is actively partnering with Dakota State University graduate students to see how AI can be safely utilized by electric cooperatives. Together, East River Electric is working with the school to build an AI model that can predict electricity usage based on weather conditions and other factors to support the cooperative's load forecasting and rate forecasting capabilities. Although the technology is still in its infancy, May said he expects that someday AI will play a significant role in an electric cooperative's daily operations, including load forecasting, outage response and maintenance planning.

"It's difficult to predict how AI can be used for different types of jobs, but it will certainly become common throughout the organization as we learn all of the things AI can do," he said. "If it can be used to make our employees more productive and have a positive impact on the organization and our members, we will consider it. In some areas it could become commonplace within the next year, but throughout the cooperative it could take 3 to 5 years or more to be fully integrated in a safe and secure way."

Beyond grid operations, East River Electric is also trying out Microsoft CoPilot, an AI-powered assistant built into programs like Word, Excel, Outlook and Teams. A few employees are currently testing it to see how it might improve productivity and workflow, especially in communications and marketing departments.

Ultimately, if AI can streamline a process, predict an issue or improve service for electric cooperative members, May said it's worth considering. AI can be another tool in the cooperative tool belt that can make energy more reliable, services faster and operations more efficient.

"Over the next 5 to 10 years, AI's role in electric cooperatives is poised to grow significantly, driven by the need for efficiency, grid reliability and sustainability amid rising energy demands and technological advancements," said May. "Just the advancements that have been made in the last three years have been astounding to watch, and as more and more data centers and large language models are built in the coming years, it will become something that cooperatives likely use on a daily basis."



AI PUT INTO ACTION

Electric cooperatives are already using artificial intelligence (AI) and augmented reality (AR) for key tasks and activities. Looking ahead, co-ops see great potential for AI and AR as helpful tools for improving grid reliability and the services they provide to consumer-members.

SERVICES FOR MEMBERS

AI tools like chatbots can enhance member interactions and provide a tailored experience based on energy use data.

WEATHER FORECASTING

With the help of AI, weather forecasts will become more accurate, pinpointing areas to station utility crews.

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Through augmented reality, or AR, lineworkers can experience interactive, lifelike trainings, rather than watching a video or webinar.



Photo by Jessie Tucker

ELECTRIC VEHICLES

Is an EV Right for Your Needs?

Jacob Boyko

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As electric vehicle infrastructure improves in South Dakota, you may be wondering: is it finally time to jump on board the EV bandwagon?

EVs offer many lucrative benefits to their owners. They mark an end to the tedious oil changes, and you're likely to take on fewer expenses to maintain the vehicle — and that's all while you're getting the combustion engine-equivalent of 100 miles to the gallon.

It's a deal lucrative enough that EV registration has surged in the U.S. to more than four million vehicles on the road in 2024, with that number expected to grow exponentially over the next decade. Florida, Texas and Washington each already have more than 100,000 EVs registered, and California reports more than one million.

Meanwhile in South Dakota, it's still fairly irregular that you'll see an electric vehicle (with in-state plates) driving around your community. In fact, the South Dakota Department of Transportation records only about 1,400 fully-electric vehicles on the road, even as charging infrastructure increases.

"You do have range anxiety — that is something that happens," said Matt Hotzler, manager of H-D Electric Cooperative in Clear Lake, who regularly takes the co-op's Tesla Model 3 on business trips across the state.

South Dakota's weather makes planning a trip in an electric vehicle a little more hands-on. Temperature, wind speeds, climate control and headlights all affect how frequently you have to stop to add some joules.

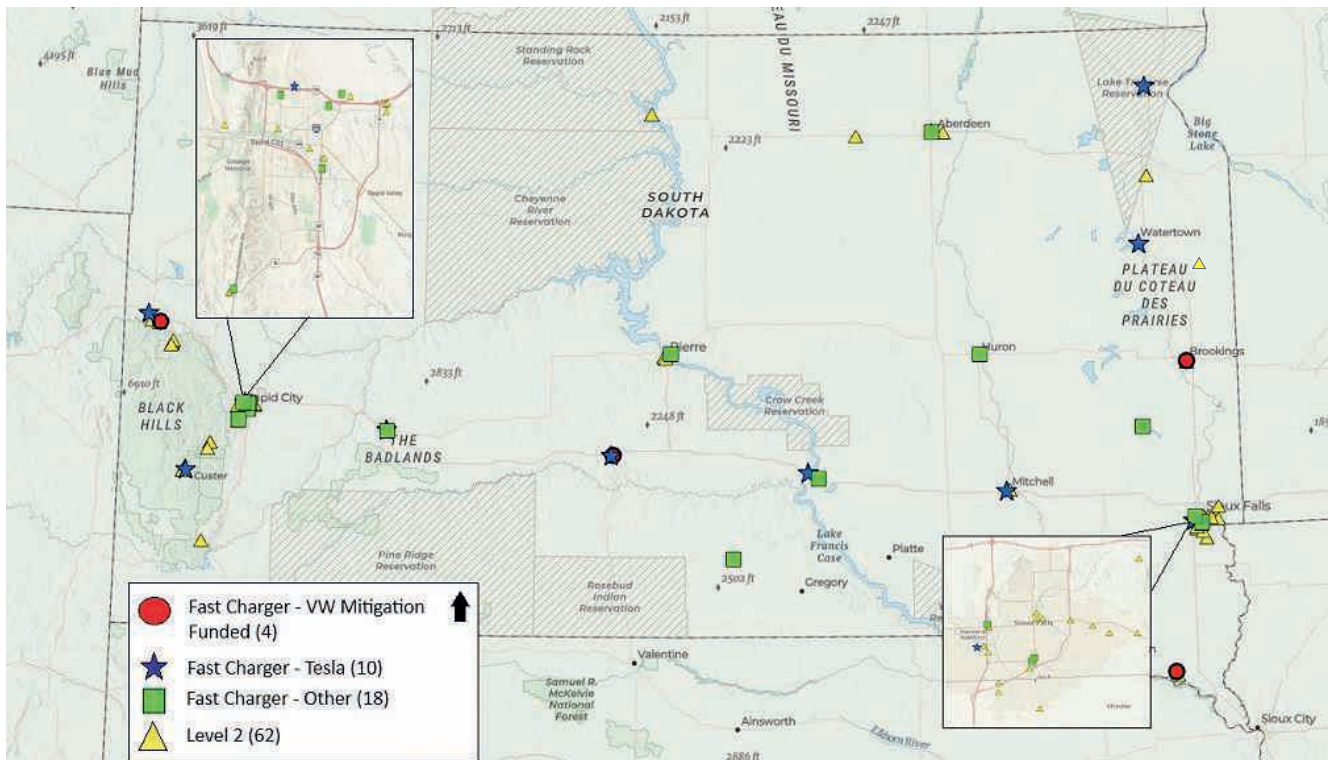
Luckily, the stops aren't usually long, Hotzler said, with his Tesla planning several

stops along a route to do partial charges — about ten minutes at a time — before hitting the road again.

While the public charging stations are convenient for out-of-town travels, it's where one giant plus to owning an EV — low operating costs — begins to erode.

Jessie Tucker, manager of member services at West Central Electric Cooperative in Murdo, recalls his surprise on a trip last winter to Rapid City when he stopped to charge the co-op's Ford F-150 Lightning and discovered his charging rate was nearly 68¢ per kWh — more than five times what it would cost to charge at home. Driving 80 mph in the winter weather and averaging about 1.3 miles per kWh, Tucker calculated the combustion engine-equivalent would be about \$9.41 per gallon.

"It would be tough for me to own one (personally) at this point," Tucker said. "If you're a daily commuter and you're getting home every night, then owning an EV does make sense. If you can charge overnight at your own house, it is still approximately half the cost of \$2.85 fuel."



Electric Vehicle charging stations in South Dakota.
Graphic courtesy of South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

In western South Dakota, West River Electric Association offers members an EV charging incentive — with some stipulations.

“It’s like the old cell phone plans where they would have unlimited nights and weekends,” joked Adam Daigle, manager of communications and public relations at West River Electric in Wall.

“Members with an electric vehicle can pay \$33 per month for unlimited charging on nights (9 p.m.- 7 a.m.) and on weekends. So in a sense, you can drive all month for \$33.”

The incentive is designed to encourage charging during off-peak times when there is less strain on the electric grid while also helping members interested in electric vehicles make the switch.

“I think EVs are great cars for commuting,” Daigle said. “If you stay within range of that battery, where you don’t have to hit a level three charger, they’re fantastic.”

Another factor to consider if you’re thinking about an electric vehicle: you’ll need somewhere indoors to charge it.

The lithium-ion batteries found in EVs will not charge as quickly in cold weather.

Though many EVs have systems to warm the battery before charging, a heated garage is still the most convenient and efficient way to charge, and can prevent cold-weather charging degradation on your battery.

“When I drive my Tesla to work and it sits out in the really cold weather for a big part of the day – 8 to 10 hours – I do see some battery used during that time to keep things warm,” H-D Electric’s Hotzler added. “You have to be careful of the batteries getting so cold.”

Another necessity: a 240-volt plug for level 2 charging. While you can charge an electric vehicle with a standard 120-volt outlet, it could take more than a day to reach a full charge.

After five years of driving the Tesla Model 3, Hotzler is a fan of the technology, and recommends it as a daily driver.

“I’d recommend an EV for a household using it for a back and forth commute – just not any extremely long trips,” Hotzler said. “For an everyday driver, it works really well. They drive fast, they’re zippy, there’s hardly any maintenance. I’ve just had a really positive experience.”

EV Charging Explained

Level 1 charging uses a standard 120-volt outlet. Level 1 charging is the slowest charging speed, adding about 3-5 miles of range per hour. This is not recommended, and is typically used in residential settings.

Level 2 charging uses a 240-volt outlet – the same as your stove or dryer. This is the more practical solution, adding about 12-30 miles of range per hour and is enough to charge many EVs overnight. This is recommended for residential settings. Many public charging stations also feature level 2 chargers.

Level 3 charging, or DC fast chargers, are the quickest way to charge, taking just a half hour to charge the battery to 80%. Using these chargers can cost as much or more than a tank of gas. Speeds range from 50 KW to 350 KW. These stations are placed along major highways, including I-29 and I-90.

Source: driveelectricsd.com, How-To Geek

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UNTIL OCT. 31

Wallace Dow, Prairie Architect Traveling Exhibit
Lake County Museum
Madison, SD
605-256-5308

SEPT. 2, OCT. 4

Davis Indoor/Outdoor Flea Market & Vendor Fair
9 a.m.-3 p.m.
Davis American Legion
Davis, SD
605-351-3074

SEPT. 5-7

James Valley Threshing Show & Tractor Club
Threshermen's Park
Andover, SD
www.jamesvalleythreshers.com

SEPT. 7

Farmer Tractor Parade
1 p.m.
Tractors, Cars & Food
Farmer, SD

SEPT. 7

Homesteader Day Celebration
Pioneer Demonstrations
1-4 p.m.
Beaver Creek Nature Area
Valley Springs, SD

SEPT. 13-14

Harvest & Kuchen Festival
Delmont, SD
www.twinriversoldiron.org

SEPT. 13-14

South Dakota Senior Softball Tournament
Huron, SD
605-295-2039
www.southdakotaseniorgames.org

SEPT. 19

Veterans Stand Down
SD Military Alliance
8:30-11:30 a.m.
1600 W. Russell St.
Sioux Falls, SD

SEPT. 19-20

Holiday Arts Fall Craft Show
Davison Cty Fairgrounds
Mitchell, SD
605-770-8136

SEPT. 19-20

SiouxperCon Annual Convention
Benefits Make-A-Wish, REACH Literacy, JY6 Foundation
Sioux Falls Convention Center
Sioux Falls, SD

SEPT. 26-28

Coal Springs Threshing Bee Featuring Horse-Drawn Equipment
Meadow, SD
605-788-2229

SEPT. 27

Your Race, Your Pace
9:30 a.m.
Wylie Park
Aberdeen, SD

SEPT. 27

Wheelin' To Wall Cycling Event
Wall, SD
www.wheelintowall.com

SEPT. 27

Ag Day
Roundup Arena
Belle Fourche, SD

OCT. 10-11

Holman Acres Pumpkin Fest & Vendor Show
Sat. 12-6 p.m., Sun. 10 a.m.-6 p.m.
Philip, SD
605-441-1060

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.