

F E R G U S

FEATURES

Member Newsletter ♦ Fergus Electric Cooperative, Inc., Lewistown, MT ♦ www.ferguselectric.coop



MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Carson Sweeney

EACH fall we present detailed budgets to our Board of Directors for the coming year. During these presentations, I review specifics of infrastructure investment projects and substation upgrades that our engineering team has spent several years preparing. Larger projects typically require several years of advanced planning to work through the necessary permits, engineering design and long material procurement lead times.

Our operations team is regularly discussing projects several years into the future, thus triggering the need for a long-term financial plan. Now that we have completed our review of the 2025 budgets, we are already developing financial forecasts and project lists for 2026 and beyond.

Each December our team comes together to review our strategic plan, our succession plan and financial goals. Last year our planning session was focused on operations and future infrastructure projects.

This December, the Fergus Electric Board of Directors and leadership team will be meeting off site for two days to discuss our long-term financial strategy. We will attend a financial training seminar and engage with financial advisors on the state of the economy. Our discussions will include the costs of infrastructure investments, equipment

Fergus Electric team is reviewing future financial plans, budgets

upgrades focused on future load growth and the associated rate impacts to our membership.

Our team is working to reduce wildfire liability and improve system reliability while being sensitive to the financial burden to our members. As communicated previously, I am supportive of regular infrastructure investments, which correlate well with annual rate increases. Our team is diligently developing future investments within a structured financial plan. I share this information to provide insight into our long-term planning, and to highlight our goals of consistent financials.

An upcoming employee retirement in our leadership team along with a promotion within has triggered us to advertise for an assistant line superintendent position in Lewistown. This position is responsible for supervising 15 employees and managing the daily construction schedule of our Lewistown crews.

Applications will be accepted until the end of business on Thursday, December 12. Please check our website or Facebook page for more information.

I hope you enjoy the winter season and upcoming holidays. From all of us at Fergus Electric Cooperative, Merry Christmas. RM

Announcing the Co-op Month Drawing winners

ON October 31, employees Erika Mattaliano, Denise Jennings and Louie Hould were each given the honor of drawing a member's entry form from the 68 forms submitted in the "October is Co-op Month" drawing. The drawing was part of a "Help Celebrate Co-op Month" promotion.

Congratulations to our three winners: Paul D. and Sarah J. Walter, Lewistown – co-op members since 2021; Sally McBurney, Hilger – co-op member since 1998; and Jamie and Trent Hess, Lewistown – co-op members since 2017. Each will

receive an electric credit of \$50, which will appear on the next billing statement! Thank you to all the co-op members who participated in this year's drawing.

Your name wasn't drawn? Be sure to check the Identify Account Number section of your monthly *Rural Montana* magazine for a chance to win a \$32.50 credit on your account. Multiple account numbers are listed in every issue. Yours might be one of them. RM

A look back at 2024

HIGHLIGHTS from Fergus Features inserts January through November 2024.

January

In January, General Manager Carson Sweeney reported that the completion of our new office/shop for our team in Roundup was just weeks away. He said that the office team was busy working through the details of our new rate structure change, which would go into effect January 1.

The new transmission line being built in the Hilger-Winifred area was ahead of schedule and expected to be completed by the end of April. The new transmission line will serve our members for 60-plus years.

February

Sweeney began his Manager's Message reporting that the forecast was expected to dip to -36 °F at night for the next 48 hours. He reported that the co-op's decision to become a whole-sale provider of Generac Generators has been very popular.

Construction at the new office/shop facility in Roundup is wrapping up. Sweeney thanked the entire membership for supporting this project over the years saying, "We were able to construct a beautiful facility to meet the needs of our growing membership while staying under budget."

He said that February is the first month in which our members will receive an electric bill under the new rate structure, and reminded members to refer to the *Fergus Features* sections of their September 2023-January 2024 *Rural Montana* magazines to read his articles on the new rate structure.

March

In March the co-op reported that Rural Development Rural Cooperative Services selected Central Montana

Medical Center's (CMMC) application for a USDA Rural Economic Development Loan in the amount of \$2 million to finance the purchase and installation of a linear accelerator for CMMC's new cancer center. Sweeney said Fergus Electric was honored to partner with CMMC to facilitate federal rural economic development funding to provide state-of-the-art cancer treatment in Central Montana.

We put the spotlight on our three groundman linemen, Jason Deffinbaugh, Dylan Rickman and Travis Sura. Assistant Line Superintendent Bret Ophus said that he has no doubt that all three of our new groundmen will turn out to be great linemen. "Fergus Electric is fortunate to have them on board, and we are looking for many great things from them throughout their years of service," he said.

April

In April, we introduced our membership to three new employees, Jason (Slim) Mills, mechanic; Bill Stanton, journeyman lineman; and Lake Mellott, journeyman lineman. The three new employees were hired over a period from November 2023 to February 2024. Bret Ophus said, "We have had a lot of interest in all our recent job postings, and have been fortunate enough to get people who fit into our proverbial puzzle." We have a fine group of employees. Bret added, "We all want to welcome Slim, Bill and Lake. We are excited that they have joined our team!"

Sweeney reported that the new general service rate structure effective January 1, 2024, was communicated to the membership as a revenue-neutral rate change, meaning that the monthly revenue under the old rates would closely align with the monthly revenue under the new rates. Sweeney said, "With only two months of billing under our belt, I have confidence that the team

at Fergus Electric hit the nail on the head in terms of implementing a universal demand billing component across the membership in a revenue-neutral manner."

Our April 2024 issue included a big thank you to our linemen in recognition of National Lineman Appreciation Day on April 8, 2024.

May

Sweeney reported that he recently joined board Director Brad Arntzen in Washington, D.C. to meet with the Montana delegation on federal and state issues impacting electric cooperatives. Sweeney reported that the priority of Montana electric cooperatives is to provide reliable and affordable power. We are fortunate to have a strong and influential Montana delegation that supports Montana electric cooperatives.

The May *Fergus Features* included the board candidates selected by the nominating committees to run for election at the annual meeting of the membership. The board candidates were Bob Evans, District 7; Terry Frost, District 5; Brad Arntzen, District 3; and Thaddeus Daniel Moseman, District 3.

June

The headline for the Manager's Message read, "Destructive May 7 storm downs 96 Fergus Electric poles." Sweeney wrote, on May 7, Fergus Electric experienced our most destructive storm to date. The combination of heavy moisture, freezing temperatures and sustained high winds caused widespread damage throughout our service territory. "Our membership was supportive and patient with us as we worked long days in tough conditions to restore power to every meter." He thanked the members who brought out tractors and equipment to help us access poles and patrol lines, or

retrieve stuck vehicles. Sweeney also thanked McCone Electric Cooperative, Beartooth Electric Cooperative and Red Rock Power for responding with linemen and equipment, saying, "Storm restoration has been and will always be a part of the electric utility business. We can only hope that a storm of this magnitude isn't repeated."

Thanks for sticking it out with us." President Paul Descheemaeker provided his President's report, telling the membership that our rates have remained stable over the last 13 years. He said that Fergus Electric continues to attract top-notch employees, many of whom have local roots. "Our employee-retention rate is exceptional, as well, with many employees celebrating more than 20 years of service."

Descheemaeker reported that the co-op was able to establish a heat rate for members with qualified heat sources, saying that owners of our cooperative solar panels get a credit on their electric bill. The program provides a direct pass-through savings from Basin Electric Power Cooperative to participating members, without affecting the rest of the membership.

July

Carson's headline for his Manager's Message read, "Fergus Electric's 86th annual meeting was a beautiful success." He thanked everyone who attended, noting that we could not have asked for a nicer day. Sweeney said that service awards were given to Terry Frost, vice president, 15 years; Ryan d'Autremont, serviceman, 25 years; Tyson Ruff, foreman, 20 years; and three employees received service awards for five years: Scott Olson, staking engineer; and linemen Danyon Rice and Brock Pyrah.

Sweeney reported that, "We have officially moved into our new building in Roundup, and our team is enjoying the new facility." He told the members that contractors finished the new transmission line to Winifred in early June.

He reported that 33 students in attendance at our annual meeting each received a \$1,000 scholarship. He added that, "This is always a favorite part of the annual meeting." He wrote that the membership re-elected incumbent Brad Arntzen, district 3; incumbent Terry Frost, district 5; and incumbent Bob Evans, district 7.

August

The Manager's Message was "A look back at the 1st year with the Tesla Model Y electric car." Sweeney provided a good, informative article on the co-op's experience covering driving in all of the four seasons, and traveling in various distances. Fergus Electric hosted the MECA summer meeting in Lewistown. About 90 people attended the meetings, and more than 130 people took a ride on the Charlie Russell Chew-Choo as part of the two-day event.

September

The feature story highlighted each of the 33 students who received a \$1,000 scholarship at our 2024 Annual Meeting. The piece gave each student the opportunity to tell where they would be attending school and their future goals.

Sweeney reported that the cost of electricity from our power supplier will be increasing in January 2025. He said that the team at Fergus Electric will be analyzing our financials and developing several options for our Board of Directors to review. He said that he

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HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

FROM OUR FAMILY AT FERGUS
ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE TO YOURS

CLOSURE

Fergus Electric offices will close Tuesday, December 24 and Wednesday, December 25 for Christmas and Tuesday December 31, and Wednesday, January 1 for the New Year's holiday.



LOOK BACK

Continued from page 7

would provide regular and transparent updates to the membership.

October

October's Manager's Message covered discussion about pending rate increases. Sweeney said, "The new rates will be presented to the Board of Directors in October, and, upon approval, I will share them with our membership in next month's *Rural Montana* magazine.


We wrote about Tyler Icard for being awarded the 2024 MECA/Fergus Scholarship. We celebrated "October is National Cooperative Month" and included a form for members to complete and return to the co-op to be entered into a drawing for an electric credit of \$50. Three winners would be contacted in November.

We dedicated a full page to promote the Youth Tour Essay Contest and tell current high school sophomores and juniors whose parent or guardian is served by Fergus Electric Cooperative about the free trip to Washington, D.C. that they could win.

November

Carson's Manager's Message covered the projects the co-op is completing in 2024 and discussed the projects being planned for 2025. Sweeney let members know that they are likely to see drones in their area as they are used to capture high-definition video footage of our powerlines for our annual line patrol program.

He reported that in October, our Board of Directors reviewed the 2025 expense budget and approved a 5.5 percent rate increase due to the rising cost of wholesale power. As communicated previously, the two entities that provide power to Fergus Electric are increasing rates beginning January 1. The last time Fergus Electric members experienced a rate increase was July 2011. The rate increase includes a monthly base charge increase, an energy charge decrease, and a demand charge increase.


Fergus Features included an article reminding high school seniors to get their applications in by January 24, 2025, to have a chance to win a \$1,000 scholarship from Fergus Electric Cooperative and a \$500 scholarship from the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association (MECA). 

Capital Credits checks

OUR Board of Directors is pleased to report that based on the financial condition of the cooperative, it authorized the retirement of \$932,417.22 in capital credits (also known as patronage capital), which included the balance of the year 2005, and ninety percent of 2006.

Office Manager Sally Horacek said that Fergus Electric issued 2,863 capital credit checks in late October, paying \$721,743.10 in capital credits to current members, and \$210,674.12 to former co-op members who had active accounts during the years being retired.

Current address and phone

Every year hundreds of capital credit checks are returned to Fergus Electric Co-op due to an invalid address or the death of a former member of the co-op. We spend a fair amount of time trying to get an updated address or searching for heirs of deceased, former members. If your phone number changes or if you have plans to move out of the co-op's service area, please contact our billing department, and provide them with your new mailing address, so in the future, your capital credit check will not be among those returned to us as undeliverable or address unknown. 

IDENTIFY ACCOUNT NUMBER*

WIN A \$32.50 CREDIT

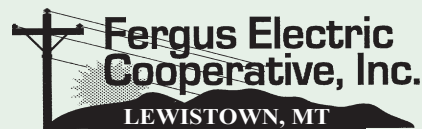
If one of the following account numbers is yours, call Fergus Electric (406-538-3465) and identify yourself and your account number, and you will receive a \$32.50 credit on next month's statement.

**Account 392745, Account 397789
Account 396413, Account 398465
Account 396682, Account 396441**

CONGRATULATIONS!

Blanche Plovanic of Lewistown, was last month's winner!

*NUMBERS ARE DRAWN MONTHLY



Your Touchstone Energy® Partner

FOR OUTAGES

First: Check the fuses or breakers in the building in which the electricity is off.

Second: Check the breaker below the meter.

Third: If electricity is still out, call a neighbor to see if they have electricity.

Fourth: Call 406-538-3465 day or night or:

Dale Rikala	406-366-3374
Bret Ophus	406-366-7523
Bret Nellermeoe (Roundup).....	406-939-0636
Carson Sweeney	406-366-0971
Melanie Foran.....	406-462-5650
Scott Olson	406-366-5822
Dan Balster.....	406-366-0975

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Carson Sweeney.....General Manager
Dale Rikala.....Line Superintendent
Sally HoracekOffice Manager
Janine Rife Didier.....Editor
Fergus Electric is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

District 1:	Paul Descheemaeker, President, Lewistown, 428-2417
District 2:	Brett Maxwell, Lewistown, 538-9002
District 3:	Brad Arntzen, Hilger, 462-5555
District 4:	Cathy Kombol, Roundup, 428-2202
District 5:	Terry Frost, Vice President, Roundup, 323-3415
District 6:	Jason Swanz, Sec./Treas., Judith Gap, 473-2462
District 7:	Bob Evans, Jr., Geyser, 735-4476

Fergus Features is an award-winning newsletter.