

FERGUS

FEATURES

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



MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Carson Sweeney

AS communicated in prior articles, our costs for wholesale electricity are increasing for 2026.

Development and load growth throughout our nation requires new generation and transmission assets, which come with staggering construction costs. To maintain a reliable grid that can meet the growing demand for electricity, utilities must construct dispatchable generating assets and increase the capacity of high-voltage transmission lines.

Electricity is generated and consumed at the speed of light, requiring a flexible grid with adequate resource reserves to meet the changes in our electric consumption throughout any given day.

The Fergus Electric Board of Directors recently approved the 2026 rate schedule at our September board meeting. A graphic of the 2026 rates is shown to the right. We are expecting an average rate increase of approximately 11.32 percent across our membership. Similar to prior years, if you would like to understand how the increase will impact your specific meter(s), please contact our office. Utilizing historic electric consumption data, we can provide a 2026 monthly cost estimate for every meter on our system.

As fall comes to an end, our crews are busy working through a full construction schedule. Contract crews are rebuilding the Carters Pond Substation as well as replacing poles and conductor in the Straw/Utica/Hobson areas. Pole replacements will start soon in the Winnett area, and our

2026 rate increase approved by Fergus Electric directors

2026 GENERAL SERVICE RATE SCHEDULE

RATE PER MONTH - BASED ON MONTHLY PEAK DEMAND

0 kW ≤ 30 kW:

- Base Charge: \$35.00
- Energy Charge: \$0.106/kWh
- Peak Demand Charge: \$5.50/kW

> 30 kW ≤ 60 kW:

- Base Charge: \$48.00
- Energy Charge: \$0.102/kWh
- Peak Demand Charge: \$9.50/kW

> 60 kW ≤ 90 kW:

- Base Charge: \$61.00
- Energy Charge: \$0.091/kWh
- Peak Demand Charge: \$13.50/kW

> 90 kW ≤ 1,000 kW:

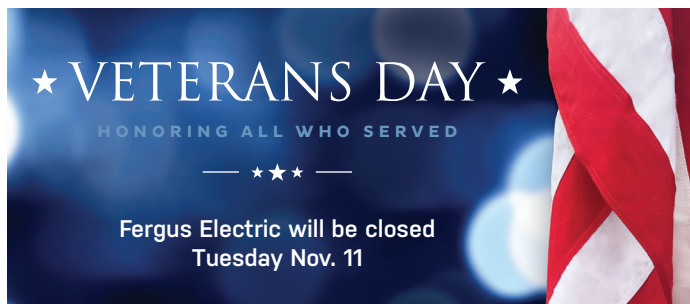
- Base Charge: \$74.00
- Energy Charge: \$0.077/kWh
- Peak Demand Charge: \$17.50/kW

PEAK DEMAND (kW) BILLING WINDOWS:

- October 1 - May 31: 6 a.m. to 9 a.m. and 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.
- June 1 - September 30: 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.

crews are testing poles throughout Glengarry. If Mother Nature is kind to us, we might just meet our aggressive construction plan.

I hope you and your families have a warm and enjoyable Thanksgiving. 



HOT CERTIFIED

Fourth-step apprentices achieve a major milestone on their path to becoming journeyman linemen

IN March 2024, we included a story here in our *Fergus Features* insert section titled *Finding the Perfect Fit*, *Groundman linemen enjoying their work*, which featured Jason Deffinbaugh, Dylan Rickman and Travis Sura, whom the co-op had hired to fill the groundman lineman positions. Since their *Fergus Features* story appeared, much has happened in the work lives of our three apprentices.

Dylan, Jason and Travis are stepping their way through completing the seven-step apprenticeship program on their way to each becoming a certified journeyman lineman. The apprentices traded their groundman lineman titles for their current job classification of apprentice lineman.

A huge goal of each apprentice lineman is to earn their “hot certification.” This achievement is a turning point for an apprentice as being hot certified means they are trained and certified to work on energized (live) electrical lines and equipment. To a lineman, becoming hot certified increases an apprentice’s capabilities. We are super excited to announce that Fergus Electric’s three apprentices recently achieved the “hot certification” milestone when they each passed their test with flying colors. Since, they have wasted no time putting their new skills to work in the field, safely and confidently.

It’s a strong possibility that you would never hear of this accomplishment if you talked to any of these three humble employees. Yet, this achievement is no small feat. Being hot certified is not just a personal accomplishment, it adds value to the co-op since now they can do work that was



Dylan Rickman safely covers an energized conductor in preparation to hang a sectionalizing device, part of our six-year systemwide effort to upgrade circuit coordination and install new protection equipment. Rickman recently completed his hot certification. | **FEC PHOTO**

previously off limits to them.

There is a lot of training required for an apprentice to prepare for this qualification. The apprenticeship requires at least 7,000 hours of training, which takes about three and a half years. There are classes and course workbooks, and lots of studying. The apprentices take part in hands-on pole

yard training, where they develop skills and are trained to work safely.

By the time they were ready to test to become hot certified, Jason, Dylan and Travis had learned how to use specialized tools to perform tasks from a safe distance without having to de-energize the powerline. They had undergone extensive classroom



ABOVE: Jason Deffinbaugh repairs a broken conductor strand discovered during one of our drone-assisted line patrols. Deffinbaugh recently was promoted to apprentice lineman.
BELOW: Travis Sura is pictured changing out an A1 as part of our pole testing and replacement program. Sura finished the fourth step of seven (hot certification), to becoming a journeyman lineman. | **FEC PHOTO**



and hands-on training under the supervision of experienced, certified journeyman linemen. They had passed written exams and had shown they could perform the work meticulously, meeting rigorous safety standards, and had demonstrated their skills through performance tests. The hot certification allows an apprentice to assist with repairs and maintenance, and permits them to respond to an outage call; however, until they are a certified journeyman lineman themselves, they must work with and under the direct supervision of a certified journeyman lineman. Being hot certified is a big deal and a major accomplishment for an apprentice lineman.

Dylan Rickman, a fourth-step apprentice working in Roundup, Montana, is part of a four-man crew there, and proudly continues a family tradition as his grandfather, Don Criswell, worked for Fergus Electric for many years. When he's not at work, Dylan enjoys spending time boating and smoking up tasty barbecue on his Traeger.

Travis Sura, a fourth-step apprentice based in Lewistown, is a young, single man and homeowner who enjoys hunting, fishing and all things outdoors when he's not on the job.

Jason Deffinbaugh, also a fourth-step apprentice, ranches full-time with his wife Becky and twin sons, Finn and Zane. Jason previously served as Fergus Electric's mechanic before taking the next step toward becoming a lineman.

Together, Dylan, Travis and Jason represent the next generation of Fergus Electric linemen — hardworking, safety-minded and committed to keeping the lights on across central Montana. Their accomplishment marks not only a proud step forward in their own careers but also a bright sign for the future of our cooperative.

The next big goal for the apprentices is to complete the seven steps then take the test required to obtain their journeyman lineman certification. They are about halfway through the apprenticeship program. Well done, gentlemen. Congratulations! RM



■ REMINDER:

Don't miss out on a chance to win a free trip to D.C.

Youth Tour Essay Contest applications due Dec. 5

YOU'LL have a fun, fabulous trip, you will visit all the famous monuments and memorials, and the Smithsonian museums, make friendships with 1,500 students from across America, be part of a group that has more than 50,000 alumni, and the fantastic part is that Fergus Electric covers the cost of your trip, so it's free!

Don't miss the December 5th deadline to apply!

Our 2025 Youth Tour Winner, Ashlen Arntzen, had an amazing time on her trip to Washington, D.C. She continues to enjoy friendships with several of the students she met. She said that she felt safe the entire time and really enjoyed being part of the group.

The students did many fun things, and there was no time to be bored. There was so much to see and do, each day was filled with sights, activities,



Ashlen Arntzen

food and fun! She highly recommends that students apply for a chance to go on the Youth Tour! Opportunities like this do not come along often.

The student must be a current sophomore or junior in high school.

The student must author an essay on the topic: *All cooperatives share a concern for their communities. Write about how your local cooperative supports your community, or detail new ways it could get involved.*

Essays and applications are due to Fergus Electric by December 5.

Flip to page 8 of the October *Fergus Features'* section in the *Rural Montana* magazine for full details or check out *Fergus Features* website at www.ferguselectric.coop/youth-washington-essay-contest Don't miss out! Apply today!

Mail essays and applications to: Youth Tour Essay Contest, Fergus Electric Cooperative, Inc., 84423 U.S. Highway 87, Lewistown, MT 59457. RM

IDENTIFY ACCOUNT NUMBER*

WIN A \$34 CREDIT

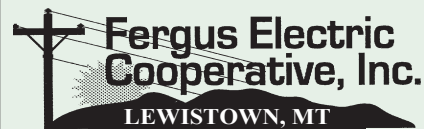
If one of the following account numbers is yours, call Fergus Electric (406-538-3465) and identify yourself and your account number, and you will receive a \$34.00 credit on next month's statement.

**Account 178701, Account 248850
Account 196900, Account 195417
Account 194710, Account 397931**

CONGRATULATIONS!

Gregory Baker of Ryegate and **Gwen Gustafson** of Musselshell were last month's winners!

*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:

| | |
|-------------------------------|--------------|
| Tyson Ruff | 406-366-9830 |
| Bret Ophus | 406-366-7523 |
| Bret Nellermoe (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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Fergus Electric is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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Fergus Features is an award-winning newsletter.