

**MINUTES**  
**GENERAL BOARD MEETING, SEPTEMBER 25, 2025**  
**FERGUS ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC.**

1. **GENERAL MEETING CALLED TO ORDER.** The Fergus Electric Cooperative, Inc. Board of Trustees met in general session September 25, 2025, with PRESIDENT TERRY FROST calling the meeting to order at 10:04 a.m. JANINE RIFE DIDIER was scrivener. The Board Members in attendance were BRAD ARNTZEN, PAUL BRADY, BOB EVANS, CATHY KOMBOL, BRETT MAXWELL, and JASON SWANZ. Other attendees included GENERAL MANAGER CARSON SWEENEY, OFFICE MANAGER SALLY HORACEK, LINE SUPERINTENDENT BRET OPHUS, and CORPORATE COUNSEL KRIS BIRDWELL. The attendees recited the Pledge of Allegiance.
2. **APPROVAL OF AGENDA.** After reviewing the September 25, 2025, meeting agenda, BRETT MAXWELL moved to approve it. BRAD ARNTZEN seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.
3. **MINUTES APPROVAL.** After reviewing the general board meeting minutes of August 21, 2025, and discussing them, VICE PRESIDENT JASON SWANZ, moved to approve them. PAUL BRADY seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.
4. **PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD.** No one from the public appeared.
5. **PLANNING.**
  - i. **2026-2031 WORK PLAN REVIEW.** GENERAL MANAGER CARSON SWEENEY reviewed the six-year capital budget-work plan and provided details regarding each of the items presented on the list.
  - ii. **2026 EXPENSE BUDGET REVIEW.** GENERAL MANAGER CARSON SWEENEY provided an overview of the accounts that make up the expense budget and stated that due to the increased focus on right-of-way maintenance to reduce the risk of igniting wildfire, 2025 and 2026 general ledger account allocations for vegetation management have been increased.
  - iii. **2026 RATES.** GENERAL MANAGER CARSON SWEENEY presented the tentative rate increases that Fergus Electric's power supplier, Basin Electric Power Cooperative, intends to pass through to Fergus Electric effective January 1, 2026. SWEENEY then thoroughly reviewed the proposed 2026 industrial rate schedule, missile rate schedule, and the general service rate schedule, which, with board approval, would become effective for the co-op's membership on January 1, 2026. SWEENEY added that his preference would be to receive board approval of the 2026 rates today to allow staff time to communicate the forthcoming rate changes to the membership in the Fergus Features section of the November Rural Montana magazine. After a period of discussion, BOB EVANS moved to approve the rate increases as discussed for the general service rate, missile rate, and industrial rate for 2026. BRAD ARNTZEN seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.
  - iv. **CAPITAL CREDIT RETIREMENT PLAN.** OFFICE MANAGER SALLY HORACEK reviewed the capital credit retirement plan for coming years. HORACEK suggested that the co-op pay out the remainder of 2006, one hundred percent of 2007; and ten percent of 2008 to stay within the Board's goal of an annual one-million-dollar general retirement payout. The Board thanked Sally for her clear, well-defined report. After a brief discussion, VICE PRESIDENT JASON SWANZ moved to approve the proposed general retirement of capital credits payout for the remainder of 2006, entire balance of 2007; and ten percent of 2008, totaling approximately \$1,027,399.36. BRETT MAXWELL seconded the motion, which carried unanimously. HORACEK plans to issue general retirement checks October 23, 2025.

- v. **WILDFIRE MITIGATION PLAN PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD.** MANAGER SWEENEY reminded the Board and staff that the dates planned for the Wildfire Mitigation Plan 45-day public review and comment period to run are from September 15, 2025, through October 30, 2025. The notice will be posted in draft mode online and will be published in the Saturday, Wednesday, and Saturday newspapers.
- vi. **MECA ANNUAL MEETING – PAC AUCTION.** OFFICE MANAGER SALLY HORACEK presented the items that the Board and management will donate to the PAC auction held during the MECA annual meeting. The items include two Fergus Electric logoed Yeti cups and a Charlie Russell Chew Choo Train tickets package, which in addition to tickets to ride the Chew Choo, also includes two Polar Express Train tickets and a night at the Calvert Hotel in Lewistown, (including the “Suite” if it is available at the time of booking).

**6. FINANCIAL AND OTHER MONTHLY REPORTS.** Staff presented financial and other monthly reports to the Board for discussion.

- a. **FINANCIAL REPORTS.** OFFICE MANAGER SALLY HORACEK reviewed the August 31, 2025, Form 7 operating report. JANINE RIFE DIDIER reviewed the August 31, 2025, ratios report.
- b. **OPERATIONS AND SAFETY REPORT.** LINE SUPERINTENDENT BRET OPHUS reported that at the September 17 safety meeting NRECA REPRESENTATIVE LORI SLABODA gave a benefits update. SLABODA covered insurance, retirement, and investments, and reviewed changes to the insurance vision plan. OPHUS said that MANAGER SWEENEY reviewed the Wildfire Mitigation Plan with the line crews, and the line crews read aloud Chapters 4 and 5 from the MECA Safety Manual and went over close calls. During the next safety meeting, scheduled for October 15, Safety Data Sheets will be reviewed. OPHUS announced that the first day of work for TRAVIS McALPIN, the co-op’s new RIGHT OF WAY GROUNDMAN, will be Monday, September 29. OPHUS said that the Roundup staking engineer position is still open. The hiring committee is sorting through approximately ninety applications of individuals interested in the two groundman linemen positions. The interviewing process will begin soon. OPHUS said that the engineers have been working with contractors, Red Rock Power Company, to complete pole replacements and wire upgrades. Contractors Rocky Mountain Power will be doing a complete rebuilding of the Carters Pond Substation, using old substation steel that Fergus obtained from Lower Yellowstone Co-op. Later Rocky Mountain Power will return to the Taber Substation to perform additional work on the substation. OPHUS reported that the service bucket truck remount from Terex arrived. It needs radios installed. It should be a good option compared to buying a new truck. A JJ Kane Auctions representative will come to take photos and get details of the old truck that was under that boom. They will also be looking at the co-op’s oldest digger truck, No. 8, a 2007 International. OPHUS said that having MECHANIC JASON MILLS travel to Roundup on a scheduled basis to keep up on preventative maintenance and needed repairs has proven to be good practice. OPHUS reported that year to date, Lewistown crews have completed 51-line extensions and Roundup 25. Crews have been busy changing poles, completing P2 maintenance tickets, trimming trees and working on outages.
- c. **INVENTORY OF WORK ORDERS.** After reviewing Inventory of Work Orders No. 642-642X for \$667,139.76 dated August 31, 2025, BRAD ARNTZEN moved to affirm them. CATHY KOMBOL seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.
- d. **POWER OUTAGE REPORT.** LINE SUPERINTENDENT BRET OPHUS reviewed the August 2025 Outage Report prepared by STAKING ENGINEER MELANIE FORAN, PE.

**7. POLICIES.**

- a. **Review:**
  - i. **205 – RETIREMENT.** The Board reviewed Board Policy 205.
  - ii. **206 – BOARD MEMBER NOTIFICATION, DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH.** The Board reviewed Board Policy 206.
  - iii. **207 – MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEES/MEMBERSHIP ASSISTANCE.** The Board reviewed Board Policy 207.

**8. REPORT OF CORPORATE COUNSEL.** CORPORATE COUNSEL KRIS BIRDWELL has completed the process of purchasing 0.66 acres of land from CHS for one hundred dollars. BIRDWELL said CHS representatives were good to work with.

**9. MANAGER'S REPORT.** GENERAL MANAGER CARSON SWEENEY covered items included in his written report. SWEENEY reported that the Wildfire Mitigation Plan public comment period is currently open. SWEENEY said that a printed copy is available for review at the front desk, and an electronic copy is available on our website. SWEENEY said that he is meeting with employees individually to ask them how things are going and whether they have any specific concerns to discuss. SWEENEY said that the General Manager at McCone Electric Cooperative asked if SWEENEY would present Fergus Electric's process for implementing a demand charge during their October Board Meeting. SWEENEY and STAKING ENGINEER MELANIE FORAN, PE plan to team up to cover the member monthly bill improvements, the importance of consistency in meter programming, wholesale power bill/demand billing window, and the co-op's rate structure.

**10. MEETING REPORTS.**

a. **MEMBERS 1<sup>ST</sup> MEETING: SEPTEMBER 15, SHERIDAN, WY - JASON.** VICE PRESIDENT JASON SWANZ and GENERAL MANAGER CARSON SWEENEY reviewed the meeting they attended.

**11. EXECUTIVE SESSION.**

a. **ANNUAL REVIEW – GENERAL MANAGER.** At 1:45 p.m., JASON SWANZ moved to go into executive session. BRETT MAXWELL seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

b. **RETURN TO GENERAL SESSION.** At 3:08 p.m., BRETT MAXWELL moved to resume general session. JASON SWANZ seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

c. **RATIFY DISCUSSION DURING EXECUTIVE SESSION.** BRAD ARNTZEN moved to approve the salary offered to GENERAL MANAGER CARSON SWEENEY for the forthcoming year. CATHY KOMBOL seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

d. **ESTATE CAPITAL CREDITS.** The Board reviewed the list of estate capital credits for September 2025 totaling \$6,676.80, which were prepared by SENIOR BILLING CLERK ERIKA MATTALIANO. BRETT MAXWELL moved to affirm the retirement and JASON SWANZ seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

e. **DELINQUENT STATUS, NEW MEMBERS.** The Board reviewed the delinquent accounts showing accounts paid in full and accounts still owing.

**12. OTHER BUSINESS.** The December 19, Board Meeting will start at 1:00 p.m., not 10:00 a.m. as previously scheduled.

**13. NEWS FROM THE DISTRICTS.**

**14. FUTURE MEETINGS.**

a. Safety Meeting; October 15, 2025

b. FEC Board Meetings 2025:

i. October 30 – 10:00 a.m.

ii. November 25 – 10:00 a.m.

iii. December 19 – 1:00 p.m.

c. MECA Annual Meeting: Great Falls, MT; September 30 – October 1

d. NRECA Region 7/9 Meeting: Bellevue, WA; October 6-8

e. MECA Winter Meeting: Great Falls, MT; December 2-3

f. MidWest Electric Consumers Association Annual Meeting: December 9-11; Denver, CO

g. Members 1<sup>st</sup> Board Meeting: December 15, Sheridan WY

h. Fergus Electric Cooperative Christmas Party, December 19, Yogo Inn, Lewistown, MT

15. NEWS FROM THE DISTRICTS.

ADJOURNMENT. PRESIDENT TERRY FROST adjourned the meeting at 3:35 p.m.

SECRETARY Braden Amstutz ATTEST: PRESIDENT Terry Frost