A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

BLACK HILLS ELECTRIC
JANUARY 2026 VOL. 26 NO. 9

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

(left to right) Rosebud Electric Directors Dennis Purvis and Boyt Young and Butte Electric CEO Matt Sleep serve a homemade meal to legislators, state employees and Capitol visitors in South Dakota State Capitol.

Photo by Jacob Boyko

Co-ops at the Capitol

Every Voice Counts
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Easements Bring Safety and Reliability
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Projects and Priorities

Jesse Sorenson
System Coordinator
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Black Hills Electric Cooperative employees and contractors completed several large projects in 2025 and have several scheduled for completion in 2026. Many of the projects involve converting old single-phase overhead lines to new three-phase lines. Where it is economical, these lines are replaced with new underground lines; where terrain and ground conditions do not allow for underground installation, overhead lines are installed. The majority of these lines were originally installed in the early 1950s and are due for updates and upgrades. The main reasons for these improvements are the age of the infrastructure and growth in our system.

As we look ahead to 2026, the Operations and Engineering team is focused on safety, efficiency, and keeping our system reliable for all members. Our goals include addressing day-to-day needs and emergencies promptly, maintaining new service construction backlog at no more than two weeks, keeping up with line patrols and right-of-way clearing, engineering new services and projects, and continuing work on CWP (Construction Work Plan) initiatives. Safety continues to be our top priority in all operations across the cooperative.

To meet these goals, we plan to make the best use of our workforce and resources. This includes regular safety and training sessions, ongoing line patrols and maintenance, engineering of larger projects, and purchasing approved capital equipment during the "off" season so that our construction season runs efficiently. We will also continue to utilize outside services, including consulting engineers and contractors, as needed.

Major Projects Scheduled for 2026

- **Indian Canyon Road Rebuild:** Converting the overhead line to underground three-phase to improve reliability during weather events and enhance voltage balance.
- **Moon Meadows Exit Feeders:** Upgrading undersized feeders to meet projected load growth.
- **Spring Creek Road Three-Phase Rebuild:** Replacing 5.7 miles of overhead line with higher-capacity underground line to provide flexibility for shifting load between substations during maintenance or outages.
- **Rockerville East Circuit Three-Phase Rebuild:** Replacing a four-mile tie line with larger underground cables to support forecasted growth. Grant funding is being pursued to help offset costs with this project.
- **Angostura Control House Replacement:** Installing a new substation control house to accommodate updated controls and emerging technologies.

Looking Back: 2025 Project Highlights

Several large projects were completed in 2025, including the South Slate Creek and Sunny Brook three-phase rebuilds, the Lower Spring Creek addition of two phases, and the Moon Meadows control house replacement. Approximately 200 work orders were also completed, including 130 new services, 30 upgrades, and 55 other projects such as line moves, regulator installations, and retirements. We expect similar work volumes in 2026.

Fire mitigation remains a key focus. Aggressive line patrols and right-of-way clearing will continue ahead of fire season. Pole inspections, regulator maintenance, and substation transformer testing ensure system reliability and early detection of potential issues.

Rushmore Engineering will continue supporting mapping, technical guidance, and inspections, while contractors such as Kainz Power Lines, Brink Electric, May Construction and others will assist with larger projects. Independent services will handle specialized maintenance, including regulator and OCR (Oil Circuit Recloser) testing, and radio maintenance.

From all of us at Black Hills Electric Cooperative, we wish you a safe and joyful holiday season and a bright start to 2026. By focusing on safety, efficiency, and proactive planning, we remain committed to providing a reliable and well-maintained electrical system for all our members.

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

BLACK HILLS ELECTRIC

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CAPITAL CREDIT RETIREMENT ON DECEMBER BILL

Black Hills Electric Cooperative belongs to you and other members/owners who receive electric service from the cooperative.

At Black Hills Electric, the cost of services and energy is based on actual expenses and is kept as low as possible while providing safe and reliable electric service. Because we are owned by the members we serve and operate as a not-for-profit, any profits, known as margins in the co-op world, are returned to members in the form of capital credits.

When you pay your monthly electric bill, you are contributing the capital necessary for the cooperative to cover its operating expenses. Each year, any remaining margins are allocated to members based on the amount they paid for electricity that year. Active members receive a notice in their May billing statement detailing the capital credits they have accumulated. Each November, the board of directors reviews the cooperative's financial health to determine what portion of capital credits can be returned to members. This year, the board approved the retirement of $2.3 million in capital credits, and your share appeared in the upper right corner of your December bill.

EXAMPLE

Account Number XXXXXXX	
BILLING SUMMARY AS OF	
Previous Balance	$$$.$$
No Payment Received	$$$.$$
Balance	$$$.$$
Current Charges	$$$.$$
Capital Credit Retirement	$$$.$$
Past Due on 01/05/2026	$$$.$$

To continue receiving capital credit retirements, please ensure that you keep the cooperative updated with any address changes. One of the unique benefits of being a Black Hills Electric Cooperative member is that you are not just a customer, you are an owner.

If you have questions about capital credits or need to update your contact information, please reach out to us.

Tree Trimming Safety

Trees are majestic, beautiful and good for the soul. But we also know that our members depend on us to deliver reliable power to their homes and businesses. South Dakota's electric cooperatives strive to balance maintaining the beautiful surroundings we all cherish with ensuring reliable electricity. You might not realize it, but there are several benefits to regular tree trimming.

Keeping power lines clear of overgrown vegetation improves service reliability. After all, we've seen the whims of Mother Nature during severe weather events with fallen tree limbs taking down power lines and utility poles. While many factors can impact power disruptions, about half of all outages nationally can be attributed to overgrown vegetation.

Overgrown vegetation and trees also pose a risk to power lines. For example, if trees are touching power lines in our members' yards, they can pose grave danger to families. If children can access those trees, they can potentially climb into a danger zone. Electricity can arc, or jump, from a power line to a nearby conductor like a tree. A proactive approach also diminishes the chances of fallen branches or trees during severe weather events that make it more complicated and dangerous for line workers to restore power.

If trees and other vegetation are left unchecked, they can become overgrown and expensive to correct. A strategic vegetation management program helps keep costs down for everyone.

When it comes to vegetation management, there are ways you can help too. When planting new trees, make sure they're planted a safe distance from overhead power lines. Medium-height trees (40 ft. or smaller) should be planted at least 25 ft. from power lines. Taller trees (over 40 ft.) should be planted at least 50 ft. from power lines. You can also practice safe planting near pad-mounted transformers. Plant shrubs at least 10 ft. from the transformer door and 4 ft. from the sides. If your neighborhood has underground lines, remember to contact 811 before you begin any project that requires digging.

Additionally, if you spot an overgrown tree or branch that's dangerously close to overhead lines, please contact your local electric cooperative.

We have deep roots in our community, and we love our beautiful surroundings. It takes a balanced approach, and our vegetation management program is a crucial tool in ensuring service reliability.

"Watch for overhead power lines."

Jacob Ymker, Age 10

Jacob reminds readers to watch out for overhead power lines. Great job, Jacob! Jacob's parents are Mark and Marion Ymker from Armour, 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.

Heart-Warming DESSERTS

Picture by Elena Veselova from Shutterstock

APPLE BREAD

Ingredients:

1/2 cup brown sugar
1 1/2 tsps. cinnamon
Mix in small dish & set aside.
2 eggs (room temperature)
1/2 cup sugar
1 tsp. vanilla
1/2 cup melted butter or margarine
Mix together in a bowl and add:
1 1/2 cups flour
1 tsp. baking powder
1/2 tsp. baking soda
2 cups chopped apples

Method

Pour 1/2 of the batter into a greased and floured bread pan. Sprinkle 1/2 of the cinnamon and sugar mixture over it. Add remaining batter and top with remaining cinnamon sugar mixture.

Bake at 350˚ for 45-60 minutes.

Grace Klein
Sioux Valley Energy

PUMPKIN CHEESECAKE DESSERT

Ingredients:

1 cup heavy whipped cream
8 oz. cream cheese, whipped
1/3 cup sugar
1/2 cup brown sugar
1 can pumpkin puree
1 tbsp. pumpkin pie spice
1 tsp. vanilla
1 pkg. cheesecake pudding mix

Method

Beat 1 cup heavy whipped cream and set aside.

In a separate bowl, mix and beat the cream cheese, sugar, brown sugar, pumpkin puree, pumpkin pie spice, vanilla, and cheesecake pudding mix.

Fold the whip cream into this mixture and spread in a graham cracker crust

Refrigerate two hours before serving plus add a spray of whip cream and sprinkle cinnamon on top.

(Optional) add chopped pecans or walnuts.

Susan Forma
Union County Electric

CHERRY COCONUT BARS

Ingredients:

Crust

1 cup flour, sifted
1/2 cup butter
3 tbsps. powdered sugar

Mixture

2 eggs, slightly beaten
1 cup sugar
1/2 tsp. baking powder
1/4 cup flour
1/4 tsp. salt
1 tsp. vanilla
3/4 cup chopped nuts
1/2 cup coconut
1/2 cup red maraschino cherries, quartered

Method

Mix together flour, butter and powdered sugar. Spread in 8" square pan. Bake at 350˚ for 20-25 minutes or until it is a delicate brown.

In a bowl, mix in the remaining ingredients in the order given: eggs, sugar, baking powder, flour, salt, vanilla, chopped nuts, coconut, maraschino cherries.

Spread this mixture over the crust and bake again for 25-30 minutes. cool and cut into squares.

Barbara Anderson
Lake Region 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.

SCHOLARSHIP & YOUTH TOUR

Black Hills Electric Cooperative is now accepting applications for scholarships sponsored by Basin Electric Cooperative & Rushmore Electric Power Cooperative. The recipients will be selected based on a combination of criteria, including SAT or ACT scores, overall GPA, a personal statement of career goals, a one-page essay, and an adult appraisal. All applications are confidential and will only be reviewed by the BHEC-appointed selection committee.

Application forms are available on our website at www.bhec.coop/scholarship-program. Please send all supporting documents to BHEC, Attn: Michelle Fischer, PO Box 792, Custer, SD 57730, no later than Friday, February 6th. For more information, you can reach Ms. Fischer at 800-742-0085 or via email at michellef@bhec.coop.

SCHOLARSHIP DEADLINE: FEBRUARY 6, 2026 **WINNER WILL BE ANNOUNCED IN APRIL**

One lucky dependent of a Black Hills Electric Cooperative member has the chance to win a FREE trip to Washington, D.C. from June 14–20 as part of the NRECA Youth Tour! This exciting opportunity allows students to explore our nation's capital, develop leadership skills, and gain a deeper appreciation for the role of electric cooperatives.

How to Apply:

- Submit a one-page form summarizing your volunteer activities, leadership roles, and goals for the future.
- Applicants must be a dependent of a Black Hills Electric Cooperative member.
- Applicants must be at least 16 years old at the time of the tour.
- Complete page 2 of the Youth Tour Application, available on our website at www.bhec.coop/youth-tour.

Entries can be emailed to michellef@bhec.coop or mailed to BHEC, Attn: Michelle Fischer, PO Box 792, Custer, SD 57730, no later than **Tuesday, December 30th, 2025.**

AREA MEETINGS SCHEDULED FOR 2026

Meal will be served from 5:30 - 6:30 p.m. at all meetings.

AREA MEETING	DATE	LOCATION	CO-SPONSOR
Oelrichs	February 12th	Oelrichs Community Hall	Oelrichs Rodeo Association
Hermosa	February 13th	Hermosa Elementary School	Battle Creek Fire District
Whispering Pines	February 16th	Whispering Pines VFD	Whispering Pines VFD
Rockerville	February 20th	Rockerville Community Hall	Rockerville Community Club
Johnson Siding	February 26th	Rimrock Community Center	Rimrock Community Club
Rochford	April 10th	Rochford Community Hall	Rochford Community Club

KINGBIRD COFFEE
Your Local Coffee Shop

Jocelyn Johnson
jocelyn.johnson@sdrea.coop

Tucked away in the heart of Brandon, S.D., sits Kingbird Coffee – a cozy, vibrant coffee shop built on the foundation of generosity and community spirit. Kingbird Coffee has blossomed from a simple act of love into a cherished gathering place that embodies hometown values and creative flair. It all began as a surprise.

"Technically, my wife, Jessica, owns it," said Michael Gross, who purchased the coffee shop as a gift to his wife. "It was an impulse buy," recalled Michael with a chuckle.

At the time, Michael felt his hometown lacked a proper coffee shop – a local hangout where neighbors could linger over coffee, connect and find a sense of belonging.

"Our inspiration is to be able to give back to the community," Michael said.

True to that inspiration, Kingbird Coffee radiates generosity from its very core. Since opening, every cent of profit has gone directly back into the community – nurturing local events, student activities and charitable causes.

"My wife and I have never taken any money from the coffee shop," Michael explained. "Everything we have made over the years has gone back into the community to support events or kids."

Their commitment to fostering community shines through ongoing innovation and engagement. Now, the team is preparing to launch new extended hours, accompanied by themed nightly events – each designed to cultivate connections and celebrate local interests.

"We're planning on having a different event every night," Michael said. "Like Monday might be advanced board games. Tuesday might be about meeting a local pastor. Wednesday could be kids' crafts night."

This effort signifies Kingbird Coffee's continual quest to be more than just a coffee shop: it is a place where everyone can find something to enjoy, every night of the week.

The eclectic atmosphere of the coffee shop invites you to stay awhile. Couches and nooks make for perfect reading corners, board games beckon to the playful, and even a whimsical swing under the stairs welcomes imaginative children.

"It's just a fun little quiet vibe," Michael described. "We have little hidden nook areas underneath the steps and a little swing where kids can go and hang out… there's 'take a book, leave a book,' and board games. It's just a fun place."

Here, creativity isn't just encouraged – it's essential. While the owners handle behind-the-scenes work, they credit the employees and a dedicated events manager for shaping the everyday magic that keeps patrons returning.

Photo by Kingbird Coffee

Kingbird Coffee's devotion to local flavor extends to every product sold. Beans are sourced from Parable Coffee Roasting Co., a local roaster in Tea, S.D. But the commitment to homegrown doesn't stop with coffee. Local honey, jewelry, bison jerky, pizza, even handmade stockings from coffee bags, and flowers from a local florist – each item tells a story of community partnership. Artists hang their work for free, keeping a portion of sales and donating proceeds to local art initiatives. On weekends, the shop welcomes pop-up boutiques, allowing small business owners an affordable, supportive venue.

Signature drinks bring history to the present. The beloved "Billy King" remains on the menu in honor of Billy, the shop's founder and namesake.

"We kept everything the same as if he's still at it. Billy created it, and he's a good friend of mine," says Michael.

Such continuity gives regulars – and new customers – a sense of belonging and nostalgia.

Cultivating connections goes well beyond commerce. Employees past and present share a special bond, growing from high school baristas into college students and, often, friends for life.

"People don't quit. They just...love it because they have the freedom to experiment and to make drinks," he said, noting the murals and memories that fill the walls.

When asked to describe the shop's personality, Michael laughs, "A crazy, wild teenager...you never know what's gonna happen." The unpredictable, energetic spirit is exactly what makes Kingbird Coffee so beloved – a hub that welcomes everyone, surprises often and gives back always.

For Kingbird Coffee, community isn't a slogan – it's a way of life, brewed fresh daily for everyone who walks through the door.

The South Dakota State Capitol in Pierre, S.D.
Photo by Frank Turner

CO-OPS AT THE CAPITOL
EVERY VOICE COUNTS

Frank Turner
frank.turner@sdrea.coop

Electric cooperatives carry a wide range of responsibilities to the members they serve. Beyond keeping the lights on, co-ops represent their communities, focus on member needs and help strengthen the places they call home. But behind the scenes, cooperatives also stay actively involved in legislative discussions to stay engaged in the decisions that shape how they serve their members.

According to Steve Barnett, general manager of the South Dakota Rural Electric Association, legislative efforts help protect reliable electricity, keep costs manageable and support rural communities across South Dakota.

"While it's important that we stay involved in the topics that are relevant to our industry, it's really about sharing our values and telling our story," Barnett said. "Being involved means being engaged and aware of the challenges and issues coming up in the 2026 Legislative Session,"

In addition to SDREA's internal leadership, legislative efforts are supported by the association's lobbying team in Pierre, led by Darla Pollman Rogers of Riter Rogers LLP. Rogers and her colleague, Ellie Bailey, have been involved with SDREA's legislative work for more than two decades.

"A key component of this work involves relationship building with legislators to establish trust and credibility," Rogers said.

Rogers noted that member engagement strengthens the cooperative voice during session and throughout the year. "The grassroots approach is huge for co-ops," she said. "Hearing from members across the state and from different cooperatives helps strengthen our overall impact." Rogers added that one of the best ways members can get involved is by getting to know their local legislators or attending Co-op Day at the Capitol to observe the process firsthand.

With the next session approaching, several topics are already drawing the attention of not only electric cooperatives but utilities across the state. One of the proposals SDREA is following closely is Rep. Kent Roe's data center bill, identified as Draft HB 31.

"We're seeing an increase in interest from large data center developers looking to site facilities in cooperative service territory," said Chris Studer, chief member and public relations officer at East River Electric Power Cooperative, a wholesale power supply cooperative which serves distribution co-ops in eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota. "We have been providing input on the data center bill to make sure the law would fit within our process and require data centers to invest in generation and transmission infrastructure to serve them, so we can protect our current cooperative consumers from the risk of building generation to serve these large consumers. At the end of the day, we're not going to put our member-owners at risk, and engaging with lawmakers working on that issue is very important to our cooperative network."

The association has also been working

with investor-owned utilities on wildfire mitigation legislation, which stands out as another priority for South Dakota cooperatives.

"Wildfire risk is a growing concern, and this proposal gives utilities a clear, consistent way to plan ahead. At its core, this legislation is about preparedness – making sure utilities have a plan and have reviewed it with their governing authority. By strengthening infrastructure, improving vegetation management, and coordinating closely with communities, the framework helps protect public safety while supporting the reliable service South Dakotans depend on," Black Hills Electric General Manager Walker Witt said.

Cooperative members also have an important role in legislative advocacy. Their engagement helps ensure that rural needs and perspectives reach decision makers. Barnett encouraged members to stay active by reaching out to local lawmakers in their districts and attending local legislative forums and cracker barrels. These are formal town hall style gatherings where legislators answer questions and update the community.

"Members can contact legislators in their respective districts via email or by telephone," Barnett said. "Attending cracker barrels is also a good way to stay engaged. These opportunities give members a chance to hear updates, ask questions, and share how policy decisions affect their communities."

Barnett also noted the importance of staying alert during the legislative process, particularly when a bill is significantly amended. He explained that when a bill gets "hog housed," it means it has been changed so much that the original version is no longer recognizable. "A hog housed bill is changed or amended significantly, to the point where a person may change their position on the bill," he said. "Tracking these changes is essential to understanding the real impact a proposal may have if it becomes law."

Barnett said SDREA will continue to represent the interests of both cooperatives and rural communities across the state. At the end of the day, it's all about providing dependable electricity and keeping the lights on.

Gov. Larry Rhoden takes a picture with members of the electric cooperative network at Co-op Day at the Capitol last February.
Photo by Jocelyn Johnson

STAYING INVOLVED

Co-op Day at the Capitol

Electric cooperatives' efforts to engage local legislators extend far beyond traditional lobbying. Every February, cooperatives from across the state gather for a light-hearted dinner at the South Dakota State Capitol to break bread with lawmakers, provide attendees industry updates and sit in on legislative committee meetings.

Last year, South Dakota cooperatives continued their time-honored tradition of serving pulled pork sandwiches and cowboy beans prepared by Ken Gillaspie, who formerly served as a director for East River Electric and as board president for Oahe Electric, and Roger Crom, a former loss control manager at SDREA.

The next Co-op Day at the Capitol is scheduled for Feb. 17, 2026.

Legislative Banquets

In addition to Co-op Day at the Capitol, select electric cooperatives across the state host legislative banquets as a means of communicating the latest legislative environment with both their members and local lawmakers. Many times, these events provide a free meal to attendees and include updates on both the successes and challenges for the co-op.

Reach out to your local cooperative to learn more about local Legislative Banquets, Co-op Day at the Capitol or the latest legislative news affecting cooperatives. The co-op network is more than happy to engage.

Merry Christmas & Happy New Year!

WALKER WITT
CEO/GENERAL MANAGER
27 YEARS

DEAN WHITNEY
FOREMAN
37 YEARS

BILL BRISK
MANAGER OF OPERATIONS
35 YEARS

SAMMI LANGENDORF
CFO
33 YEARS

STEPHANIE ZACHER
MEMBER SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE
31 YEARS

LONNIE SCHRYVERS
STAKING TECHNICIAN
30 YEARS

JENNIFER KAINZ
MEMBER SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE
27 YEARS

KENT SCHNEIDER
PURCHASING AGENT/WO CLERK
27 YEARS

MARK SVOBODA
JOURNEYMAN LINEMAN
25 YEARS

TRAVIS CARLIN
JOURNEYMAN LINEMAN
25 YEARS

RORY HALVERSON
STAKING TECHNICIAN
23 YEARS

JESSE SORENSON
SYSTEM COORDINATOR
22 YEARS

COREY SCOTT
JOURNEYMAN LINEMAN
20 YEARS

BEAU BRADEEN
FOREMAN
18 YEARS

CASEY ELLERTON
JOURNEYMAN LINEMAN
18 YEARS

MICHELLE FISCHER
COMMUNICATIONS & MEMBER SERVICES
18 YEARS

KENNY PARKER
JOURNEYMAN LINEMAN
18 YEARS

NATHAN SCHERER
ACCOUNTING CLERK
18 YEARS

TERRI HERMAN
ADMINISTRATIVE ASST./MSR
14 YEARS

JEFF BARNES
IT SPECIALIST
12 YEARS

DANNY DOOLEY
JOURNEYMAN LINEMAN
9 YEARS

JEREMIAH KELLER
METER TECHNICIAN
7 YEARS

SCOTT SCHRAMM
RIGHT-OF-WAY TECHNICIAN
7 YEARS

CARLOS RODRIGUEZ
JOURNEYMAN LINEMAN
6 YEARS

SHANNAN STEELE
MEMBER SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE
5 YEARS

DOMINICK SCHOOLER
JOURNEYMAN LINEMAN
3 YEARS

TAITON SKAARE
APPRENTICE LINEMAN
2 YEARS

PARKER NOEM
APPRENTICE LINEMAN
6 MONTHS

TRACY KELLEY
ATTORNEY
11 YEARS

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:
BACK ROW L-R: GARY KLUTHE 31 YEARS, ALAN BISHOP 14 YEARS, THAD WASSON 5 YEARS, AND DENNIS QUIVEY 11 YEARS

FRONT ROW L-R: DAVE LINDBLOM 15 YEARS, JIM PRESTON 17 YEARS, AND DON ANDERSEN 7 YEARS.

South Dakota law allows electric cooperatives to place poles along public rights-of-way without needing an easement. Shown here, East River Electric's transmission lines north of Pierre are built within the right-of-way. In cases where the rights-of-way are crowded, have obstacles, or are otherwise not suitable for poles or line work, a co-op may seek an easement outside of the right-of-way. *Photo by Jacob Boyko*

EASEMENTS BRING SAFETY, RELIABILITY

Why More Room Makes Sense for Co-ops, Line Crews & Members

Jacob Boyko
jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop

Serving rural members means maintaining thousands of miles of power line – and finding the space to safely build and access it. At your local electric cooperative, building, maintaining and repairing thousands of miles of infrastructure is a logistical challenge, but each and every piece of the system has its role in a functioning and reliable electric grid.

That's why easements, or agreements to use and access private land, are essential for co-ops and their members. At East River Electric Power Cooperative, the generation and transmission co-op serving 25 member distribution systems in South Dakota and Minnesota, Engineering and Planning Services Manager Jon Aus works directly with co-op members to get easements for power lines.

In 2025, most cooperatives prioritize building lines along the public right of way – the area between the road and fence lines along roadways – instead of along quarter lines like they have historically, back when rights-of-way were cluttered with telephone and other overhead lines.

"That's where we like it from an access and maintenance perspective," Aus said of rights-of-way. "Nowadays, when we develop a route for a line, we pick the roads we want to zigzag down to get from Point A to Point B."

Placing infrastructure along roads improves accessibility for crews and speeds up outage response time, especially when mud or snow are a factor, Aus added. But the trade offs are a workspace limited to the shoulder and ditch and overall limited access to the infrastructure.

That's where easements make all the difference. When a co-op member allows an easement, the co-op will set poles back just several more feet away from the road right-of-way onto private land, and crews can cross behind the fence when they need to access the poles. The impact on private land is minimal, but it's a massive benefit for the line crews.

"Having an easement allows crews to work on the backside of the structures," Aus said. "If you don't get an easement and you don't have any access rights, they're stuck working everything from the ditch and the roadside."

Engineers are meticulous when mapping routes for new lines, Aus added, noting the lengthy process for engineers as they consider pole placement, obstacles, hazards and community impact.

"At the onset of any project, we're evaluating the impact of our routing," Aus continued. "Public impact is right up there on our priorities along with reliability and maintenance. We don't go down routes we foresee to have challenges with public impact."

Distribution cooperatives see similar challenges on the ground. In southwest South Dakota, Black Hills Electric Cooperative System Coordinator Jesse Sorensen aims to manage a system that's not only reliable and affordable, but also built on cooperation with members.

"Very rarely do we have someone reject giving an easement," he said. "We've had very good luck sitting down with members and explaining everything to them that there are hundreds – if not thousands – of landowners that allowed easements so we could get electricity to this property."

He continued, "The biggest concerns from landowners are about losing their trees or the aesthetic value of their property, and we'll work with landowners by rerouting lines to prevent cutting prize trees or installing lines in prime views."

At East River Electric, Aus' team fields similar questions from landowners, usually concerning specific pole placement and whether poles will interfere with field access, an approach or operation of large machinery. He says it's usually something the engineers can accommodate because ultimately, co-ops want to leave members' land as good or better than they found it.

"We'll even work with landowners to pay to replace any trees we have to remove if we obtain an easement from them," Aus said.

As the co-op steadily grows and expands its transmission system, East River Electric General Counsel Danny Brown stresses that the co-op relies on voluntary easements, and in its 75-year history has never used eminent domain to obtain an easement.

"Eminent domain is not something we ever want to use," Brown explained. "We try to educate and work with the property owners the best we can. At the end of the day, an easement is voluntary, and if we can't make it work from the right of way, we have to start thinking about changing our route."

But opting for alternate, less-efficient routes is a concession that can severely impact system reliability and leads to a higher price tag for co-op members to pay. Fortunately, Aus and Sorensen said most landowners understand the value of working with their cooperative for themselves and their community.

"There have been several times when landowners have said, 'Absolutely, bring that line through here,'" Aus recalled. "They want to improve their reliability, or they know that they just need more electricity in that area for whatever they might be doing on their property. Most of the time we're welcomed with open arms."

That willingness helps keep cooperative power moving across the countryside.

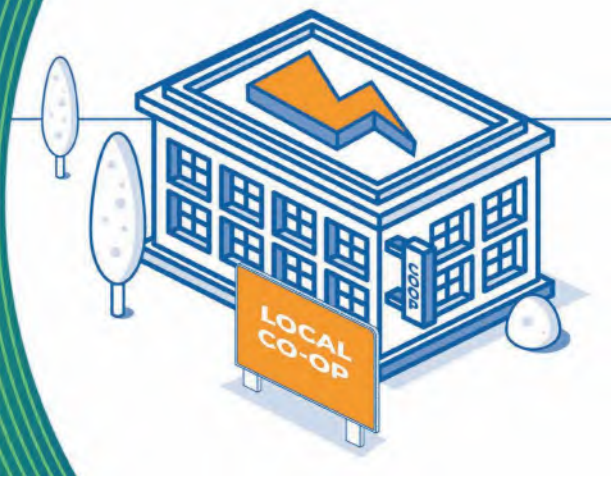
When a co-op obtains an easement to build a line along a road right-of-way, the line is placed several feet away from the right-of-way border. In this photo, the right of way border is about at the fence line, with the poles placed several feet behind the fence.

On this route, East River Electric has an easement for 30 feet behind the fence line for when line crews need to maintain or repair the line, giving crews more room to work and better access to the structures.

Photo submitted by East River Electric.

POWERING COOPERATION

WORKING TOGETHER IS POWERFUL



Understanding the Three-Tier Co-op Structure

Jacob Boyko
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What Is an Electric Cooperative? (Tier 1: Distribution Co-ops)

An electric cooperative is a non-profit, member-owned utility governed by a member-elected board of directors. Co-ops are different from a typical utility because they don't report to shareholders; a co-op's responsibility is solely to the people it serves.

Member-ownership keeps the co-op focused on serving the interests of the community and maintaining low costs to members. Co-ops employ democratic principles; each member has one vote, which keeps control local and shields the co-op and members from outside interests.

Your local electric cooperative owns and maintains distribution power lines to serve members throughout its territory. While electric cooperatives' territories cover almost all of South Dakota, most of the state's population lives in cities and small towns and purchase electricity from a city-owned municipal power system or a for-profit investor-owned utility.

Most of the electric distribution cooperatives in South Dakota were organized by members beginning in the 1930s and 1940s to serve the rural areas that investor-owned utilities determined would not be profitable enough to be worth serving.

Rural residents formed co-ops, going door-to-door collecting $5 sign-on fees – a lot of money at the time – from their neighbors to kickstart the fledgling co-ops. They applied for loans from the Rural Electrification Administration to begin construction, and by the early 1950s, most rural South Dakotans were enjoying amenities made possible by electricity.

Who Supplies My Co-op's Power? (Tier 2: Regional G&Ts)

East River Electric Power Cooperative in Madison and Rushmore Electric Power Cooperative in Rapid City are generation and transmission (G&T) cooperatives that sell electricity to a total of 27 distribution systems in South Dakota.

East River sells electricity to 19 member systems located in eastern South Dakota and six member systems in western Minnesota, while Rushmore sells electricity to eight member systems: seven located in western South Dakota and Cam Wal Electric Cooperative serving Campbell and Walworth counties in eastern South Dakota.

Both East River and Rushmore are governed by a board of directors comprised of directors from the distribution co-ops. Therefore, each distribution co-op receives one vote on its respective G&T's board.

Beyond selling electricity, East River and Rushmore assist their member systems in other areas; East River builds and maintains transmission systems to serve its member systems and offers support for information technology, marketing, public relations and economic development. Rushmore also offers marketing, PR and IT support, along with engineering services.

Two co-op systems in South Dakota are affiliated with neither East River nor Rushmore. Rosebud Electric Cooperative, based in Gregory, and Grand Electric, based in Bison, are part of District 9 – a collection of other distribution cooperative systems in Minnesota and North Dakota that purchase their energy from multiple sources rather than from a single supplier.

Who generates my electricity? (Tier 3: Basin Electric)

Rushmore Electric, East River Electric, and District 9 systems including Rosebud Electric and Grand Electric purchase energy from Basin Electric Power Cooperative, a G&T cooperative based in Bismarck, North Dakota.

Just like the regional G&Ts it serves, Basin is governed by a board of directors representing its member systems. There are 11 directors on Basin's board, and they know the energy industry inside and out – after all, to serve on the Basin board, the directors must also serve on their local co-op's board as well as the regional G&T's board, and are elected by their colleagues to represent the co-op, board, and its members.

Currently, Mike McQuistion of the Fort Pierre area represents his local co-op, West Central Electric Cooperative, on Rushmore's board, and represents Rushmore on Basin's board.

Kermit Pearson of the Lake City area represents his local co-op, Lake Region Electric Association, on East River's board, and represents East River on Basin's board.

The cooperative systems that comprise District 9 also elect a director from

a District 9-affiliated co-op to represent them on Basin's board. Wayne Peltier from Minnesota Valley Electric Cooperative in Montevideo, Minn., represents Rosebud, Grand and the other District 9 co-ops on Basin's board.

Basin Electric was formed in 1961 by electric co-ops in the upper Midwest to generate and transmit electricity exclusively for cooperative systems to purchase. The system has grown to serve North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Minnesota, Iowa, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, and New Mexico.

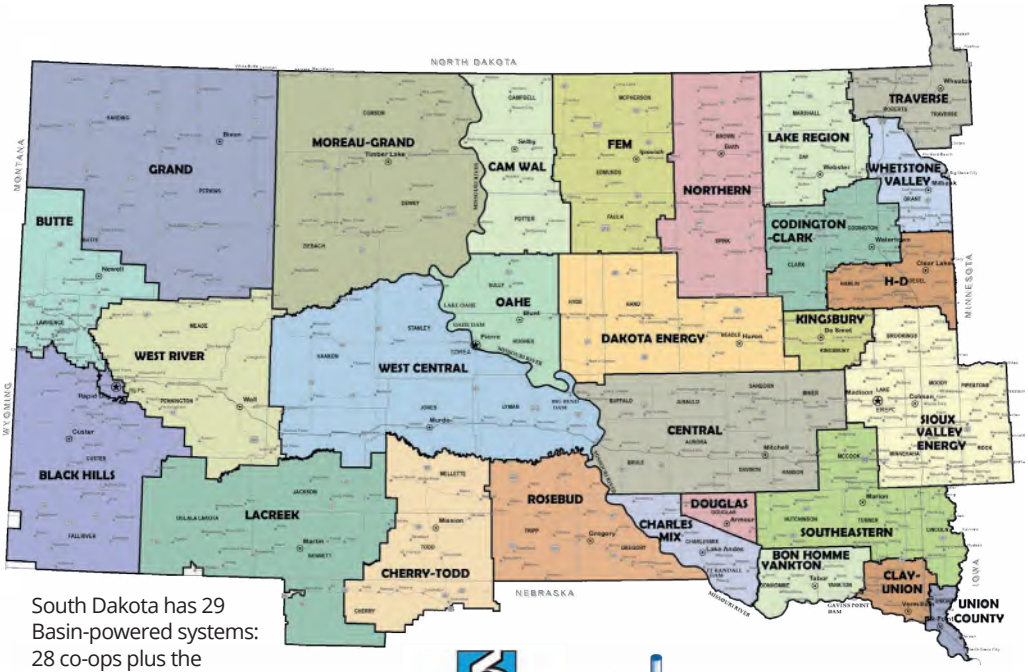
Basin Electric generates electricity using its owned and leased generation assets, which include coal, natural gas, solar, wind, oil and waste heat, with a maximum generating capacity of about 8,500 megawatts.

Other Generation: Western Area Power Administration

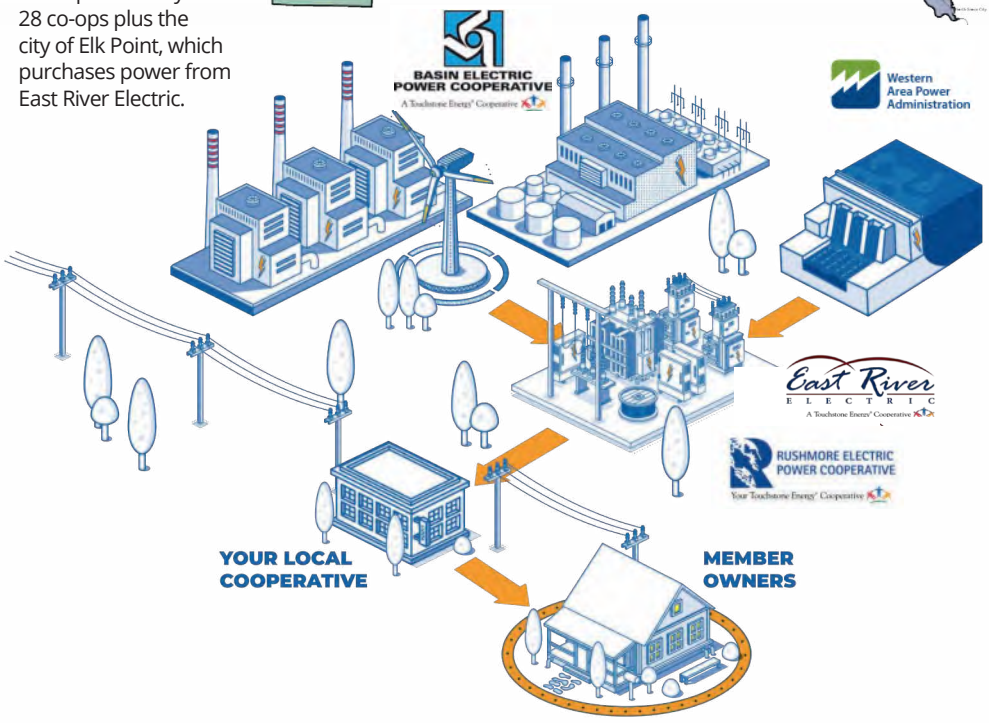
East River, Rushmore and the District 9 systems also purchase an allocated amount of electricity from the Western Area Power Administration. WAPA is the power marketing administration under the U.S. Department of Energy that markets and transmits power from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers-operated Missouri River dams and other generators in the western U.S.

WAPA purchases make up about 18% of East River Electric and 12% of Rushmore Electric's purchases, respectively. District 9 systems also purchase some of their electricity directly from WAPA.

Each year, WAPA transmits about 25,000 gigawatt hours of electricity across its 17,000-circuit mile transmission system. WAPA serves a 15-state region that includes North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa, Wyoming, Montana, Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado, Utah, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada and California.



South Dakota has 29 Basin-powered systems: 28 co-ops plus the city of Elk Point, which purchases power from East River Electric.



Basin Electric Directors Representing South Dakota

Kermit Pearson
East River, Lake Region
Submitted Photo

Wayne Peltier
District 9, Minnesota Valley
Submitted Photo

Mike McQuistion
Rushmore, West Central
Submitted Photo

REGISTER TO WIN!
Bring this coupon and mailing label to the Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives booth at the Black Hills Stock Show & Rodeo to win a prize!

Your Phone Number:_____

Your E-mail Address:_____

UNTIL JAN. 6
Garden Glow
5-9 p.m. (Closed Dec. 24-25, Jan. 1)
SDSU McCrory Gardens
Brookings, SD
www.sdstate.edu/mccrory-gardens

Photo Courtesy of Travel South Dakota

To have your event listed on this page, send complete information, including date, event, place and contact to your local electric cooperative. Include your name, address and daytime telephone number. Information must be submitted at least eight weeks prior to your event. Please call ahead to confirm date, time and location of event.

DEC. 24
Candlelight Christmas Eve Service
4 p.m.
Rapid Valley United Methodist
Rapid City, SD

UNTIL DEC. 26
Christmas at the Capitol
8 a.m.-10 p.m. (Holidays Included)
South Dakota State Capitol
Pierre, SD
605-773-3178
christmasatthecapitol.sd.gov

DEC. 20-21, 23-24, 27-28
1880 Train Holiday Express
Hot Chocolate, Santa
Hill City, SD
www.1880train.com
605-574-2222

DEC. 31
New Year's Eve Bash
Doors Open at 5:30 p.m.
American Legion
Sioux Falls, SD
Tickets: 605-336-3470

JAN. 10
Knights of Columbus Coats for Kids Bowling Tournament
1 p.m.
Meadowood Lanes
3809 Sturgis Rd.
Rapid City, SD

JAN. 17
Focus on Fall River Historical Conference
9 a.m.-3:30 p.m.
Mueller Center
801 S. 6th St.
Hot Springs, SD

JAN. 23-24
Pro Snocross Races
Deadwood, SD
605-578-1876

JAN. 30
Box Elder Ball
6 p.m.-8 p.m.
Box Elder Events Center
Box Elder, SD
605-390-9341

JAN. 30-FEB. 7
Annual Black Hills Stock Show
Central States Fairgrounds
Rapid City, SD
www.centralstatesfairinc.com
605-355-3861

FEB. 12
Oelrichs Area Meeting
5:30-6:30 p.m.
Oelrichs Community Hall
Oelrichs, SD

FEB. 13
Hermosa Area Meeting
5:30-6:30 p.m.
Hermosa Elementary School
Hermosa, SD

FEB. 16
Whispering Pine Area Meeting
5:30-6:30 p.m.
Whispering Pine VFD
Whispering Pines, SD

FEB. 20
Rockerville Area Meeting
5:30-6:30 p.m.
Rockerville Community Center
Rapid City, SD

FEB. 20-22
Winterfest
Fireworks, Parade of Lights, Bonfire, Snowshoeing
Lead, SD
www.leadmethere.com/winterfest
605-584-1100

FEB. 26
Johnson Siding Area Meeting
5:30-6:30 p.m.
Rimrock Community Center
Rapid City, SD

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.