

# COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



## Antler Shed Hunting

**Shed Hunter Kelly  
O'Bryan**

Pages 8-9

**Artificial Intelligence**

Pages 12-13

*Photo submitted by  
Kelly O'Bryan*



FEM staff meet with the board of directors at the July board meeting.

## July Board Report

A regular meeting of the Board of Directors of FEM Electric was held in Ipswich, South Dakota at 8:30 a.m. on July 15, 2025, pursuant to due call and notice. It being determined that a quorum was present, President Gary Bachman called the meeting to order. Secretary Eric Odenbach kept the minutes of the meeting. The following directors were declared present by roll call: Gary Bachman, Paula Petersen, Eric Odenbach, Tom Thorpe, Kelly Melius. Operations Manager Sean Christiansen, Electrical Manager Ryan Holien, Director of Finance and Benefits Rhonda Tuscherer, and CEO Scott Moore.

**Guest Employee:** Gregg Zwart

**Changes to the agenda:** none

**Changes/Additions to Minutes from June 19, 2025, meeting:** None

**Next Meeting Date:** After a review of the calendars, directors agreed that the next regular meeting of the board would be on Friday, August 15, 2025, at 8:30 a.m. to be held at FEM Electric Board Room in Ipswich, South Dakota.

Motion by Kelly Melius, seconded by Paula Petersen and carried to approve administrative business.

Motion by Tom Thorpe, seconded by Kelly Melius and carried to approve minutes from June 24, 2025, Board Reorganization meeting.

Motion by Eric Odenbach seconded by Kelly Melius and carried to acknowledge the manager, and staff reports along with East River Electric load management report.

June 2025 Cyber Security Report was acknowledged.

### Resolutions and Contracts:

Motion by Paula Petersen seconded by Tom Thorpe and carried to appoint Barb Schaefer/Dan Feldhaus/Cody Scarrott/Ryan Holien/Gregg Zwart as 2026 wellness committee.

Staff explained changes to East River Voting Delegate at the request of East River Electric.

Moore reported that SDREA Cooperative day at the South Dakota State Fair will be August 28, 2025.

### Membership Business:

Board acknowledged membership business.

### New Memberships, Member Cancellations and Contracts:

**Disconnects:** Bob & Diane Allbee, Aberdeen, SD, Active Farm; Allen Hadrick,

Faulkton, SD, Active Farm; Irene & Walter Kalt, Mina, SD, Active Farm

**Reconnects:** Ross & Samantha Tarbox, Roscoe, SD, Active Farm; Allen & Pam Hadrick, Faulkton, SD, Active Farm; Daryl Kalt, Mina, SD, Active Farm

**Contracts:** Century Swine RE, LLC, Brandon, SD, Hog Barn

**Retired Locations:** Eugene Nolz, Ventura, ND, Pasture Pump

Motion by Kelly Melius seconded by Eric Odenbach and carried to approve one line construction contracts with Century Swine RE, LLC.

### Capital Credits:

Estates – July 2025: Three = \$2,774.16  
73 & Older – July 2025: none

Motion by Eric Odenbach seconded by Paula Petersen and carried to set date for 2026 FEM Electric annual meeting to be June 23, 2026.

Board acknowledged receipt of following financial business.

**Financial Business:** The board acknowledged reviewing the following financial information:

The check register for the month of June 2025 contained information on checks #35397 through #35494 and all automatic payments/withdrawals for June 2025 totaling \$1,012,590.91.

The June 2025 financials were reviewed.

Director of Finance and Benefits Rhonda Tuscherer reviewed Quarterly Loan Update, Quarterly Budget Projection Update with Current TIER, and Renewable Energy Credits (REC's).

Motion by Eric Odenbach seconded by Paula Petersen and carried to approve

**Continued on page 6**



## COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

### FEM ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION

(USPS 189-720)

#### Board of Directors

Gary Bachman, President  
Tom Thorpe, Vice President  
Eric Odenbach, Secretary  
Paula Petersen, Treasurer  
Kelly Melius, Asst. Secretary/  
Treasurer  
Vaughn Beck, Attorney

#### CEO/General Manager

Scott Moore  
info@femelectric.coop

#### Management Staff

Sean Christiansen  
*Operations Manager*  
Ryan Holien  
*Electrical Manager*  
Rhonda Tuscherer  
*Director of Finance and  
Benefits*

#### Editor's e-mail:

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FEM ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS is the monthly publication for the members of FEM Electric Association, Inc., 800 5th Ave., Ipswich, SD 57451. FEM Electric Cooperative Connections' purpose is to provide reliable, helpful information to members on electric cooperative matters and better living.

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Design assistance by SDREA

**FEM Electric is an equal  
opportunity provider and  
employer.**



**Scott Moore**  
**General Manager/CEO**

At FEM Electric's 2025 annual meeting board president Gary Bachman told the crowd he predicted "the cost of power would be increasing," and he was right. In mid-July, FEM Electric received an email stating that there will be an increased cost to our power purchases. A week later Basin Electric held a meeting with all Basin members including Class C members (distribution cooperatives) and Class A members (transmission cooperatives) and gathered for a conversation mostly on the increased rates. Basin members are looking at double digit rate increase but until the group gets through some suggested additional scenarios in the coming weeks where Basin is looking to spread the increase over time, FEM Electric will plan for the increase for January 1, 2026.

This isn't a new bridge to cross for Basin members. In the 1980's cooperatives saw double digit increases mostly due to the increased cost of coal fired generation needed for growth, and at that time Basin's balance sheet doubled. From

2005 through 2010 electric cooperatives saw large increases mostly due to, once again, large capital investments. Today Basin is looking at \$11 to \$13 billion dollars over ten years in capital investments both for new generation and transmission lines. As for the latest estimates for capital investments, the large or mega loads for data centers **are not** part of Basin's current load projections.

Electric generation has been hampered for decades by federal regulation and permitting. Most gas fired peaking plants are being operated like base load generators causing reduced lifespan and increased maintenance cost. Basin Electric built one of the last coal fired generation plants in America, only getting completed after years of court rooms and environmental protest. The options left were renewables and natural gas. We live in an energy hungry society, but these roads of increased energy cost have been traveled before. It will be towards the end of 2025 before the

*Continued on page 6*

#### FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

@FEMElectric on

@fem\_electric on

@FEMelectric on

We'll post outage updates, safety tips, news and more to keep our members informed on all the latest from FEM Electric.

## Statement Mailing Dates

September 30, 2025 for September's energy  
October 28, 2025 for October's energy

Regardless of the statement mail out date, payments are due in the office by the 9th of the following month.

# 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.

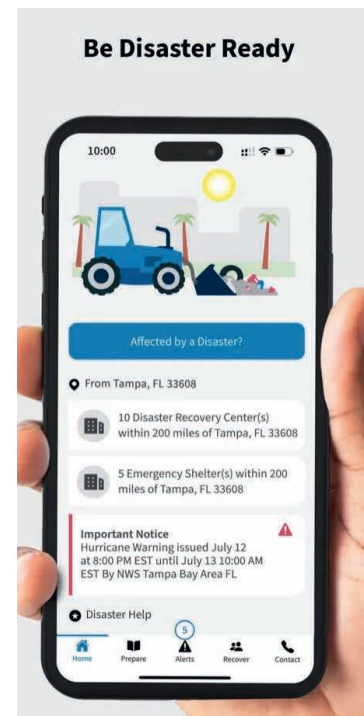
In 2022, 69,473 weather-related events resulted in 813 deaths and 1,718 injuries. Winter weather, heat, floods and hurricanes resulted in the most deaths that year, according to Injury Facts.

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.

## **Board Report Continued from page 2**

board expense reports and attorney fees.

**Legal Update:** Moore reported that attorney Vaughn Beck had no report.

### **Meeting Report:**

East River monthly board report was given by Gary Bachman. There was no video report. Moore reported that once he received the report, he would forward it to board members.

Tom Thorpe reported on SDREA June 26-27 board meeting.

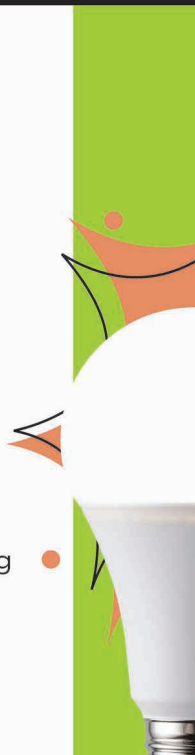
The safety meeting minutes from June 26, 2025, were acknowledged.

Employee meeting minutes from June 24, 2025, were acknowledged.

**Adjourn:** President Gary Bachman declared the meeting adjourned.

## **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.



## **Manager's Article Continued from page 3**

electricity rates are set. All options must be vetted before decisions can be made to keep electricity affordable.

Safety and reliability are big concerns also. It is your local electric cooperative's duty to deliver safe power and keep electricity reliable 24/7. To keep it simple excess power is getting consumed and demand continues to increase. Capital improvement needs to be built and paid for if we want to live in a safe environment and to keep our economy growing.

This isn't just a Basin Electric problem but a national issue for all levels of electric consumers. Planning and making improvements to the electric grid has never stopped, but it is getting outpaced by demand throughout the nation both in urban and rural areas. An increase to your power bill is coming; how we implement the increase is the question.

By the time this article floats through your mailbox schools will be starting or will have started. Please be safe on all roads. The crops are tall, and we have many blind intersections.

Fall is about here so if you have electrical projects to complete this fall, or planning projects for 2026, please call Ryan Holien or Sean Christiansen 605 426 6891. This would also be a good time to inspect your electrical equipment at your grain handling facilities to be prepared for a good harvest.





# YOUTH TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

FEM Electric sent three students to represent our area on the 2025 Youth Tour trip to Washington D.C. Charli Rawden, Ella Batie, and Jana Dignan made the trip in June where they toured the Lincoln Memorial, the Washington Monument, the US Capitol, Ford's Theatre, the Arlington National Cemetery, Mount Vernon, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier as well as numerous other locations. They also met with their state's Congressional Delegation.

Charli Rawden was able to share her favorite experiences at the 2025 Annual meeting on June 24th. She stated that she loves history, and this trip was a dream come true for her.

If you have a student who will be a high school junior or senior during the 2025-2026 school year, be on the lookout for sign-up information for the 2026 Youth Tour in upcoming editions of our newsletter!



Kaylee (a student from another electric cooperative), Charli, Jana and Ella pose for a picture on the 2025 Youth Tour.

# YOUTH EXCURSION



Treyton and Natalie pose for a picture outside of Antelope Valley Station during the 2025 Youth Excursion.

Two high school students, Natalie Hadrack and Treyton Severson, represented FEM on the 2025 Youth Excursion to Bismarck, ND. A bus of 18 students from all over the state of South Dakota made the trip on July 21st, and returned on the 23rd.

Students spent two days touring Basin Electric Power Cooperative facilities to learn where their power comes from. Tours included the Freedom Mine, Antelope Valley Station, the Synfuels plant and Basin Electric Headquarters.

During their stay, students also heard from power industry experts, and participated in hands-on activities. As an added bonus on their all expenses paid trip, they visited the Dakota Zoo.

If your high school student is interested in attending, look out for information about the 2026 Youth Excursion in future editions of the Cooperative Connections, on FEM's social media pages, or have students visit with their school counselors.





# 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**

frank.turner@sdrea.coop

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*

# FARM SAFETY FOR KIDS

### FARM AND RANCH SAFETY: TOP TIPS TO PROTECT KIDS

Farms and ranches give kids unique opportunities to gain responsibility, independence and strong work ethics. Growing up on a farm helps children develop problem-solving skills, build close family bonds, gain respect for the food cycle and cultivate a deep passion for the land.

However, agriculture is also one of the most dangerous industries for youth in the U.S. More young people die working in agriculture than in all other industries combined, with a child lost to an agriculture-related incident approximately every three days. Many of these tragedies occur when kids take on tasks that aren't suited to their age or abilities.

The impact of a farm injury or fatality extends beyond the individual, affecting families and entire communities. The emotional and mental toll can last a lifetime, underscoring the importance of making safety a priority for everyone.

By implementing safety strategies, farmers, ranchers, families and employees can reap the benefits of farm and ranch life while minimizing risks.

#### WHY ARE KIDS AT GREATER RISK?

Injuries often occur when children are doing something beyond their mental, physical or emotional abilities. They are susceptible to certain types of accidents and injuries:

- Children often work on farms at young ages and in hazardous jobs.
- Their bodies and brains are still developing, affecting coordination, decision-making and impulse control.
- Kids tire easily, are more likely to get distracted (think cell phones and social media) and may take risks to prove themselves.
- Many lack experience and may be reluctant to ask questions or admit uncertainty.

#### GRAIN BIN DANGERS

Grain bins are especially hazardous. Grain can act like quicksand, trapping and suffocating anyone who enters. Most youth grain entrapments are fatal. Kids should never enter grain bins or "walk down" grain, and all grain storage areas

should be off-limits and secured.

In 2010 in Mt. Carroll, Illinois, four young farm workers aged 14-20 were sent to loosen clumped grain from inside a grain bin. Three of the youth became entrapped in the grain. Two were engulfed and suffocated and the third was rescued following a six-hour mission. A settlement of \$16 million was awarded to the affected families. This case led to the formation of the Grain Handling Safety Council, [www.GrainSafety.org](http://www.GrainSafety.org).



#### FIVE ESSENTIAL FARM SAFETY TIPS FOR KIDS:

1. Keep kids off tractors. Tractors are involved in more than 40% of fatal farm accidents involving children under 15. Most kids are not tall or strong enough to operate them safely. Only let youth operate one if they meet safety guidelines for age, size and maturity.
2. Supervise and restrict access. Young children should never be in work areas unsupervised. Fence off or lock hazardous areas like grain bins, animal pens and equipment storage.
3. Assign age-appropriate tasks. Match chores to the child's abilities and maturity. Teens are more likely to



take risks, so clear guidelines and supervision are essential.

4. Create a safe environment.

Remove hazards such as slippery or uneven surfaces, keep equipment keys out of reach and avoid repetitive motion. Provide protective gear like gloves, non-slip shoes and hearing protection.

5. Train and model safe behavior.

Teach kids how to do tasks safely, practice together until they are proficient and always demonstrate safe habits yourself. Kids learn by watching adults.

### FARM SAFETY STARTS WITH OPEN COMMUNICATION

Talk regularly with your kids about farm safety. Clearly explain which areas are off-limits, how to spot hazards and why following rules is important. Frequent, open conversations help build safe habits and encourage kids to think before they act.

Conduct safety audits of your farm, ranch and home together. Identifying and fixing hazards not only protects your children but also helps them learn how to prevent injuries.

Supervision is key. Always keep an eye on children, especially around potential dangers. Remember, learning safe habits takes time and patience — be prepared to repeat instructions to encourage smart, lasting and safe work habits.

For more tips on assigning safe farm tasks to kids, check out the Agricultural Youth Work Guidelines at [CultivateSafety.org/AYWG](https://www.cultivate-safety.org/AYWG).

Farming is more than a job; it's a way of life. By making safety a family priority, we can help ensure that future generations enjoy the rewards of farm life with fewer risks.

# KNOW THE SIGNS



## Farm and Ranch Stress is REAL

Farming and ranching are stressful occupations that are associated with increased levels of anxiety and depression. Left untreated, stressors may lead to mental health issues, increased substance use or death by suicide.

### IN THE U.S.:

- ✗ One person dies by suicide every 10.9 minutes.
- ✗ In 2021, suicide ranked as the 11th most frequent cause of death.
- ✗ The national suicide average is 14.1 per 100,000 people.

### For farmers, rangers and agricultural managers:

- The suicide rate is 43.7 deaths per 100,000 people.
- The suicide rate is the 6th highest among occupational groups.

### SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- ⚠ Changes in routine or social activities.
- ⚠ Decreased interest in activities or events.
- ⚠ Decline in care for crops, animals and the farm.
- ⚠ More frequent illnesses or chronic conditions.
- ⚠ Increase in accidents on the farm or ranch.
- ⚠ Less care about personal appearance.
- ⚠ Decreased interest in activities or events.
- ⚠ Signs of stress in family members.

### FIVE ACTION STEPS for helping someone in emotional pain:

1. ASK if they have suicidal thoughts.
2. KEEP them safe.
3. BE THERE by listening carefully.
4. HELP them connect.
5. STAY connected.

**NATIONAL SUICIDE AND CRISIS LIFELINE NUMBER:**



**988**  
CALL OR TEXT

Safe Electricity.org<sup>®</sup> Learn more at:

Sources: Penn State Extension, NIMH, Nat'l Farm Bur.



# HARNESSING AI

## Electric Cooperatives Explore What's Next for AI

**Frank Turner**

[frank.turner@sdrea.coop](mailto:frank.turner@sdrea.coop)

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.



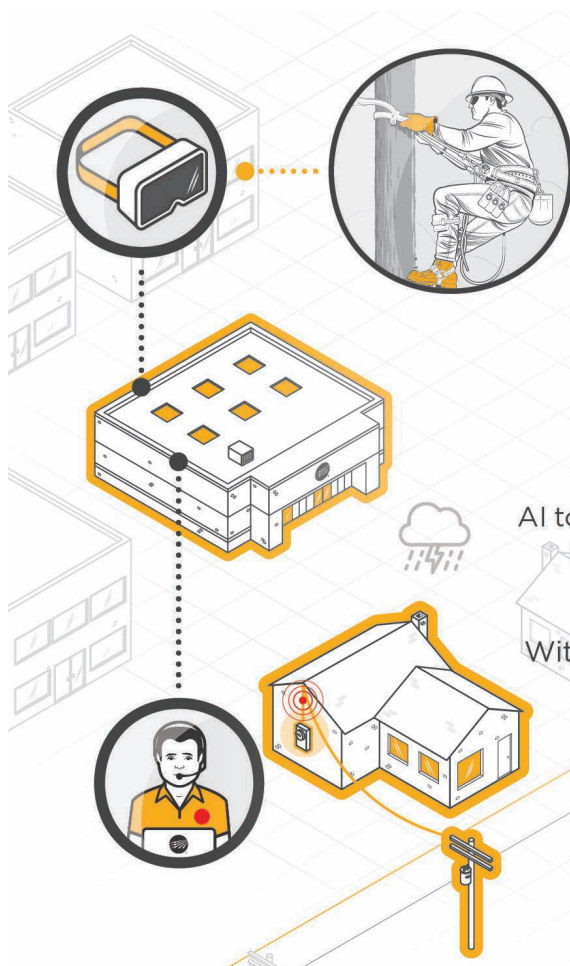
With safety in mind, May said East River Electric is actively partnering with Dakota State University graduate students to see how AI can be safely utilized by electric cooperatives. Together, East River Electric is working with the school to build an AI model that can predict electricity usage based 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.





# TRAINING AND REFRESHERS

## ANNUAL SAFETY TRAINING HELD JULY 8TH AND 9TH

Over a 2 day period in early July, the FEM Operations Department held a safety visit with Joe Denison from SDREA. The goal of the visit was to reinforce safety practices in all aspects of line work.

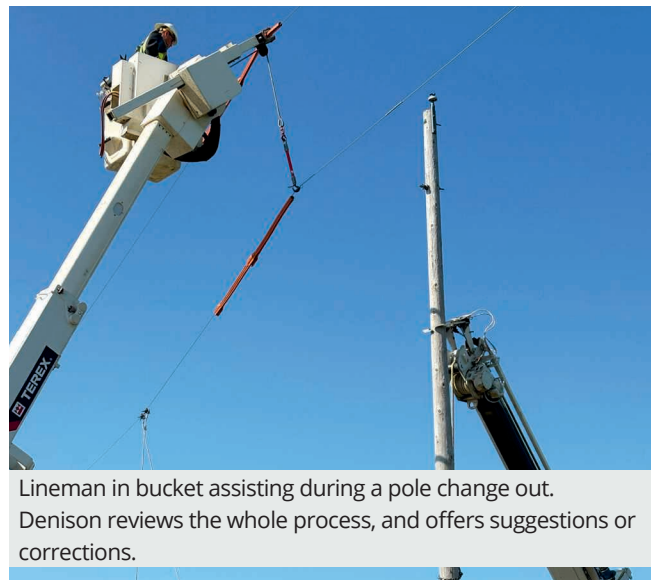
A safety meeting was held and trucks and tools were inspected before the crew jumped into hands on safety training like pole top and bucket truck rescue, and climber certification. Safety gear like belts and lanyards were inspected, and dielectric testing was done.

Pole top and bucket rescue trainings are designed to train line workers on what to do if their fellow line worker is ever in need of aid while up a pole or up in the bucket. Continuing to practice these rescues year after year means that it will become



Journeyman Linemen Perry Ptacek practices pole top rescue as Joe Denison looks on.

second nature to line workers, and they will less likely freeze in an emergency situation. They'll be able to assess the situation safely, and report the incident to dispatch before taking any action to help their crew mate.



Lineman in bucket assisting during a pole change out. Denison reviews the whole process, and offers suggestions or corrections.

The crew also went into the field where Denison observed job site practices, and went over a rubber glove refresher. Denison offered suggestions and corrections for line workers as needed. Every summer this visit and training is held to help reinforce and keep safety in the forefront of line worker's minds.



# WAIT! DON'T EAT THAT

## Make sure food is **SAFE TO EAT** after an outage

If there is a power outage for more than an hour or two, the food in your refrigerator or freezer may not be safe to eat.

Unlike mold that visually warns you not to eat old bread or cheese, many foods do not scream *don't eat me, I'll make you sick*. They can look harmless, but bacteria growing in them can bring on a slew of symptoms like nausea, chills, cramps, vomiting, and other unwanted visitors.

### During and after an outage, keep these food safety tips in mind:

- ❏ Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed to keep in the cold air.
- ❏ Time the outage. Foods in an unopened fridge up to 4 hours should be safe to eat.\*
- ❏ Know the numbers:
  - A freezer that is half full (and is kept closed) can keep foods frozen for 24 hours.\*
  - A freezer that is full (and kept closed) can keep foods frozen for 48 hours.\*
- ❏ Never taste food to determine if it is safe to eat: **WHEN IN DOUBT, throw it out.**
- ❏ Throw out perishable food in your refrigerator after 4 hours without power or a cold source like dry ice.
- ❏ Perishable foods include meat, fish, cut fruits and vegetables, eggs, meats and leftovers.
- ❏ Throw out any foods with unusual color, odor, or texture.

Remember, when in **DOUBT**, throw it **OUT**.

Learn more at:  **Safe Electricity.org**<sup>®</sup>



## REGISTER TO WIN!

Bring this coupon and mailing label to the Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives booth at Dakotafest or the South Dakota State Fair to win a prize!

Your Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Your E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_



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.

**SEPT. 4-6**  
**DKG Used Book Sale**  
Wylie Park Pavilion  
Aberdeen, SD

**SEPT. 5-7**  
**James Valley Threshing Show & Tractor Club**  
Threshermen's Park  
Andover, SD  
[www.jamesvalleythreshers.com](http://www.jamesvalleythreshers.com)

**SEPT. 5-7**  
**EurekaFest**  
Eureka, SD  
209-728-5744

**WEEKENDS SEPT. 6-OCT. 26**  
**The Back Forty Corn Maze**  
42242 134 St.  
Pierpoint, SD  
[www.backfortybeef.com/commaze](http://www.backfortybeef.com/commaze)

**SEPT. 6**  
**Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale**  
8 a.m.-3 p.m.  
Groton, SD

**SEPT. 7**  
**Farmer Tractor Parade**  
1 p.m.  
Tractors, Cars & Food  
Farmer, SD

**SEPT. 8**  
**Sip & Shop**  
5-8 p.m.  
Redfield, SD  
605-472-0965

**SEPT. 13-14**  
**Prairie Pickers Harvest Fest**  
10 a.m.-3 p.m.  
Tulure, SD  
605-450-0263

**SEPT. 13-14**  
**Harvest & Kuchen Festival**  
Delmont, SD  
[www.twinriversoldiron.org](http://www.twinriversoldiron.org)

**SEPT. 13-14**  
**South Dakota Senior Softball Tournament**  
Huron, SD  
605-295-2039  
[www.southdakotaseniorgames.org](http://www.southdakotaseniorgames.org)

**SEPT. 19**  
**Veterans Stand Down**  
SD Military Alliance  
8:30-11:30 a.m.  
Sioux Falls, SD

**SEPT. 19**  
**Homecoming Parade**  
2 p.m.-3 p.m.  
Groton, SD

**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  
[yourraceaberdeensd@gmail.com](mailto:yourraceaberdeensd@gmail.com)

**SEPT. 27**  
**Wheelin' To Wall**  
Wall, SD  
[www.wheelintowall.com](http://www.wheelintowall.com)

**SEPT. 27**  
**Harvest Pumpkin Fest**  
3-7 p.m.  
Eureka City Park  
Eureka, SD  
605-230-1777

**OCT. 4**  
**Harvest Fest**  
11 a.m.-4 p.m.  
Redfield, SD  
605-472-0965

**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.**