

Big Skylights



An internal newsletter of the STATEWIDE ASSOCIATION OF MONTANA RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES

A report from your Chief Executive Officer Dave Wheelihan

June 9, 2005

Communications director takes reins at MECA

MECA has hired **James “Jim” Smith, Jr.** as its new communications director and editor of *Rural Montana* magazine following the recent retirement of **Mack McConnell**. Mr. Smith, who grew up in Shelby and most recently served as editor of the *Shelby Promoter* weekly community newspaper, began his duties on June 1. A retired military officer, he has a master’s degree in journalism from the University of Kansas and a bachelor’s degree in public administration from the University of South Carolina. His father, the late **James Smith, Sr.**, retired as an employee of Marias River Electric Cooperative in Shelby. An experienced writer, editor and journalism instructor, Mr. Smith is a former reporter and feature writer for the *Dallas Morning News* in Dallas, Texas, and the *Indianapolis News* in Indianapolis, Ind. He also has written two writer reference books for *Writer’s Digest* as well as a corporate writing handbook. Mr. Smith was the Journalism Department director the Department of Defense Information School and served as a workshop speaker on corporate writing.

Co-op trustee retires after 37 years on board

Long-time Southeast Electric Cooperative trustee and MECA board member **Merle Hayden** was honored at the co-op’s annual meeting Friday, June 10, for 37 years of service as a trustee. Mr. Hayden, who decided to retire from the board, was replaced in trustee elections by his son, **Dave Hayden**. In other trustee elections, **Francis Hayes** and **Leroy Jardee** were re-elected without opposition. Also at the annual meeting, Mid-West Electric Cooperative Executive Director **Tom Graves** updated the membership on regional public power issues and I appreciated the opportunity to report on MECA legislative activities affecting electric cooperatives at the state level.

MECA board sets meeting plans for July

MECA Board of Directors has set its schedule of events in conjunction with the board’s July summer board meeting in Missoula. The July 6-9 events will be held at the Holiday Inn Parkside Hotel.

The schedule kicks off on Wednesday, July 6, at 9 a.m. with a meeting of the MECA Power Supply Committee. Morning meetings will continue at 10 a.m. with a meeting of the Legislative Tax Subcommittee followed by the Legislative USBP Subcommittee meeting at 11 a.m. A MECA-sponsored lunch will be served at 12 noon. Afternoon meetings will begin at 1:30 p.m. with a meeting of the Legislative Net Metering Subcommittee. The Legislative Territorial Integrity Subcommittee will meet at 2:30 p.m., followed by the full Legislative Committee meeting at 4 p.m.

On the social side of activities, a spouse tour of the Missoula Smokejumper Base will begin at around 3 p.m. or 4 p.m. on Wednesday. Signs will be posted in the hotel to confirm the departure time of the tour bus. Also Wednesday, beginning at 5:30 p.m., Missoula Electric Cooperative will serve as co-host for a barbecue at the Big Sky Brewery on Missoula's west side. Shuttle buses to and from the brewery will be provided.

On Thursday, July 7, the MECA Resolutions Committee will meet from 8 a.m. to 12 noon, and the Communications Committee will meet from 10 a.m. to 12 noon. The MECA Audit Committee will meet from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. A MECA-sponsored lunch will be served beginning at 11:30 a.m. An executive session of the MECA board will begin at 12:45 p.m. The regular board meeting will begin at 1:30 p.m.

Thursday evening, MECA will be host for a reception from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. in the hotel atrium. On Friday, July 8, MECA will hold an orientation session for new directors and co-op staff, featuring directors and co-op staff from across the state. The session will run from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. with lunch served at noon.

Resolutions process begins in July at MECA

The 2005 MECA membership resolutions process gets underway with the first meeting of the MECA Resolutions Committee this year on Thursday, July 7, at the Missoula Holiday Inn Parkside Hotel. The meeting will begin at 8 a.m. Resolutions Committee members are urged to attend and bring with them any new resolutions or proposed changes in existing resolutions. If at all possible, it would be helpful to have proposed new resolutions mailed to MECA a week or so before the meeting. This will give committee members sufficient time to review proposals. Current MECA resolutions as well as copies of NRECA resolutions will be mailed to committee members in advance of the meeting.

McCone Electric changes officers

I enjoyed being able to attend McCone Electric Cooperative's annual meeting in Circle on Friday, June 10 and update the membership on MECA legislative activities. In trustee elections, **Ruth Hinnaland**, who had been appointed last year to fill a vacancy on the board, was elected unopposed. In other trustee elections, **Donald Bogar** and **Dean McCabe** were re-elected without opposition. Other speakers at the annual meeting included **Tom Barnett**, manager of Upper Missouri G & T; **Tom Huntley**, manager of Central Montana Electric Power Cooperative; and Mr. McCabe, who is a Basin Electric Power Cooperative board member. In officer elections after the annual meeting, trustees elected **Arne Sutton** as its new board president. **Ken Buechler** was elected vice president, **Patti Murphy** was elected secretary and **Rod Weeding** was elected treasurer.

Co-op enjoys rate stability, growth

Financial stability, strategic planning and the importance of each cooperative “doing its share” in state, regional and national organizations, was emphasized by Lower Yellowstone REA President **Allen Thiessen** at the co-op’s 67th annual meeting June 8 in Sidney. Mr. Thiessen noted Lower Yellowstone REA had an “excellent year” and Manager **Don Prevost** echoed that assessment, stating the co-op had ended 2004 with strong margins and its 13th straight year without a rate increase. Mr. Prevost noted that continued oil and gas development and other commercial ventures have helped boost the co-op’s sales in recent months.

Also at the annual meeting, the cooperative re-elected three trustees without opposition. Along with Mr. Thiessen, other trustees winning re-election were **Lester Larson** and **Greg Rauschendorfer**. MECA’s **Gary Wiens** reported on MECA’s success in the 2005 session of the Montana Legislature.

Sign-ups needed for orientation program

Sign-ups are needed for a MECA orientation program for new directors and employees. A minimum 15 registrants are needed in order to justify holding the session. The program is to be held in conjunction with MECA’s Summer Board Meeting in July in Missoula. Key topics will include co-op history, cooperative principles, governance, the co-op manager’s job, an overall view of Montana’s electric utilities, cooperative financing and legislative issues. The orientation program will be held on Friday, July 8, at the Holiday Inn Parkside Hotel in Missoula. The course will begin at 9 a.m. and end at 3:30 p.m. The fee for the program is \$35 per person. To sign up for the course or to have any questions answered, contact MECA’s **Sharon McDonald** at 406-761-8333. Or, you can reach her by electronic mail: sharonm@sofast.net.

Job Market

East River Electric Power Cooperative, a wholesale power supply cooperative based in Madison, S.D., is accepting applications for a land agent. The primary responsibility of the land agent will be to provide a full range of land and right-of-way support functions for the operation of the cooperative’s electric and telecommunications facilities. The duties of this position require considerable public contact and the use of discretion and independent judgment. Professional related experience is preferred, or any equivalent combination of education, experience, and training that provides the knowledge, skills and abilities needed for this challenging position. Completed course work in real estate or public records would be a plus. To review the complete advertisement, job description and to obtain application information, interested persons should visit the web site, www.eastriver.coop. Click on “About East River.” The position closes June 30, 2005.

2005 CALENDAR

June

11	Ravalli County Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Corvallis, MT
18	Fall River Rural Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Ashton, ID
18 – 23	NRECA Youth Tour	Washington, D.C.
20 – 22	Manager's Group Meeting	East Glacier, MT
22	Northern Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Opheim, MT

July

7	MECA Summer Board Meeting	Missoula, MT
8	New Employee & Director Training	Missoula, MT
16	Tongue River Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Ashland, MT

August

8 – 10	Office Managers Conference	Dillon, MT
29 – Sept 1	Operations Conference	Missoula, MT