

Big Skylights

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



A report from your Chief Executive Officer Dave Wheelihan

May 12, 2006

New staffer at MECA

We're pleased to welcome on our staff **Lea Upshaw** as a new program coordinator for MECA. Ms. Upshaw, whose name is pronounced *Lee*, replaces **Niki Schultz** who resigned to move to Idaho. A native of Chinook, she has a bachelor's degree in organizational communication studies from the School of Business at the University of Montana. She is the former director of catering at Holiday Inn Parkside in Missoula. Most recently she served as director of marketing at the Great Harvest Bread Company in Great Falls.

Ms. Upshaw will be in charge of organizing MECA safety/loss control program events and activities as well as Montana ACRE, the annual Operations Conference, the statewide wellness program and numerous other duties.

Northern Lights re-elects Montana board member

Judith Simonson was re-elected to represent Montana on the Northern Lights cooperative's board of directors at the Idaho-based co-op's annual meeting May 6 in Sagle, Idaho. Also re-elected was **Orin LaRitchie**, board president.

The value of statewide lobbying services by MECA and the Idaho Cooperative Utilities Association were a focus of Mr. LaRitchie's president's address to the membership at the meeting. Mr. LaRitchie asked Ms. Simonson to talk about MECA's lobbying services. Ms. Simonson reported on MECA's work in Helena and its reliance upon co-op members' grassroots lobbying to achieve success on co-op issues before the Montana Legislature. She also praised co-op lobbying efforts in Washington, D.C.

Manager **Jon Shelby** reported to the membership that the co-op is in sound financial condition, having increased member equity in 2005 by 11 percent and increased sales by 16 percent compared to the previous year. It was noted during the meeting that the co-op's Montana district is the fastest growing of the seven districts.

Western meeting zeroes in on three primary concerns

The future of power supply with Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), fish preservation costs and strategies for dealing with administration budget threats to BPA were key topics of discussion at Western Montana Electric G & T Co-op's annual meeting Wednesday in Missoula. Also during the meeting, **Joe Kilminster** was re-elected to serve as Missoula Electric's representative on Western G & T's board of directors. **Terry Hoke** of Missoula Electric was re-elected as the alternate. **Norm Tebay** of Vigilante Electric was also re-elected to the Western G & T board with **Jim Peterson** re-elected as Vigilante Electric's alternate. **Earl Reynolds Jr.**, Ravalli County Electric's representative on the Western G&T board, was honored for his years of service. He has resigned because he is moving to Ekalaka to join his son in cattle ranching in southeast Montana.

BPA's **Mark Gendron** talked about the pending release of BPA's proposal on long-term power supply. He said the proposal was expected to be released anytime now, with Missoula tentatively selected to be the location of the first public meeting on the proposal. That meeting is set for June 8. He said the proposal was expected to allow for 20-year contracts, with the contracts to be signed in November 2007, and power service beginning October 2011. Contracts will be effective for 20 years from the signing date, resulting in 16 years of firm power service. Four key features of the contracts will be: 1) Take-or-pay purchase commitments; 2) Each customer to receive a defined right to buy from the existing federal system at a "Tier 1" rate. The amount of Tier 1 power available will be set at what BPA calls "high water marks." This level will define the maximum amount of power a customer can buy at the Tier 1 rate. High water marks will be based on historical averages and will allow for some co-op growth, according to Gendron. 3) Beyond high-water marks, customers could either develop their own resources or buy power from BPA at a higher Tier 2 rate; 4) BPA would reset the Tier 1 and Tier 2 rates every two or three years to ensure that rates recover costs.

Jim Litchfield, one of the region's leading experts on fish protection efforts, talked about the challenges of dealing with the issue. He predicted increasing pressure on BPA to spend more money on fish protection. Currently, about \$750 million a year is being spent for fish. With BPA projected to have financial reserves this year of around \$1 billion, the push is already on, he said, to see more money spent on fish. The hydropower dams remain the perpetual scapegoat for fish reproductive problems. But, said Mr. Litchfield, there's a good reason for that. "They must blame BPA otherwise their financial funding source will collapse," he said. He urged utilities to remain vigilant in scrutinizing spending on fish protection.

Regarding administration budget threats on BPA, **Marty Kanner**, of Kanner and Associates consulting firm in Washington, D.C., said he was optimistic about the chances of defeating the administration proposal to accelerate BPA's debt repayments. The proposal would raise rates by 10 percent in the region. Mr. Kanner noted that Sen. **Conrad Burns** of Montana and others had lead efforts to include language in an emergency supplemental spending bill that bars the administration from spending money to implement the proposal in the coming fiscal year. He said these threats can be expected year after year but said he was confident that because of the unity of the Pacific Northwest delegation, they could be defeated.

Managers group to gather in Lewistown

The MECA Managers Group will hold its summer meeting June 26-28 at the Yogo Inn in Lewistown. Fergus Electric will host the meeting. The event will begin with an open scramble golf tournament on Monday, June 26, at the Pine Meadows Golf Course southeast of Lewistown. Cash and other prizes provided by co-op vendors will be presented. The golf tournament will be followed by a barbecue at the nearby Harry's On the Hill restaurant. The meeting will begin Tuesday morning. Featured speakers will include **Jay Morrison**, NRECA's general counsel, speaking about the new federal PURPA energy standards and how they affect co-ops. Mr. Morrison will speak via teleconference and a live Internet hook-up of a PowerPoint presentation. Also speaking will be **Mary Van Buskirk**, one of the state's leading legal experts on employment, labor and personnel laws. She will talk about the 10 most common mistakes of employers and how to avoid them as well as current trends in labor, employment and human resource laws. The meeting will conclude on Wednesday at 12 noon. Managers and other invitees should be receiving registration information and other information about the summer meeting in the next week or so.

MECA summer meetings set for Miles City

MECA will hold its summer committee and board meetings July 11-12 at the Eagles Club in Miles City. Committee meetings, which have yet to be set, will be held July 11, continuing through the morning of July 12. The MECA Board meeting will be held the afternoon of July 12. The evening of July 11, **Gerhard Helm**, a trustee at Tongue River Electric Cooperative, and his wife, **Pat**, will host a barbecue dinner at the Helm Ranch 17 miles from Miles City. The MECA group dinner will be held the evening of July 12 at the Range Rider Museum in Miles City. RSVP cards and details of all meetings will be mailed in the near future.

Room reservations may be made now. Room blocks have been reserved at the Historic Olive Hotel, the Holiday Inn Express and at the Comfort Inn in Miles City. To reserve a room at the Historic Olive Hotel, call (406) 234-2450. Ask for the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association room block. Room block rates are \$30 for one person in a room and \$36 for two persons. This room block is open indefinitely. To reserve a room at the Holiday Inn Express, call (406) 234-1000. Ask for the MECA room block. Room block rates are \$75 per room. To reserve a room at the Comfort Inn, call (406) 234-3141. Ask for the Montana Electric Co-ops room block. Room block rates are \$74 per room. Room blocks for both the Holiday Inn Express and the Comfort Inn are open until June 20.

Condolences

Our thoughts and prayers are with the family and friends of **Wade Keith Sukut** of Circle who died May 4 in a work-related accident at McCone Electric Cooperative. He was 50 years old. The accident occurred while Mr. Sukut was testing oil circuit reclosers at the co-op testing facility. He died of electrocution, according to an autopsy. Mr. Sukut had worked as a lineman at McCone Electric for the past 18 years. He is survived by his wife, **Dianne**, of Circle; a daughter, **Nicole Keysor**, of Sidney and a son, **Brent**, of Circle.

Job Market**General Manager**

The Missoula Electric Cooperative Board of Trustees is conducting a search for interested, qualified general manager candidates. The current general manager plans to retire in August 2006, and the co-op plans to have the selected successor available by early August to provide a smooth transition. The co-op is looking for candidates with high integrity and credibility, a four-year college degree, five or more years of upper level electric utility management experience, excellent people skills, proven leadership and management capability and broad experience in engineering, operations and financial/accounting principles. Additional consideration will be given to individuals with multiple or advanced degrees, electric cooperative experience and demonstrated strong commitment to customer service. Missoula Electric Cooperative currently has 42 employees servicing 13,000 meters in seven counties of western Montana. Electric utility growth has averaged 4 percent over the last few years and is expected to continue. A subsidiary partnership provides propane to 11,000 customers. The general manager position offers an excellent benefits package and salary commensurate with experience and qualifications.

A resume, a minimum of four professional references and salary expectations should be submitted as soon as possible, but no later than June 1, 2006 to: Missoula Electric Cooperative, Inc.; Board of Trustees Search Committee; 1700 West Broadway; Missoula, MT 59808

Apprentice linemen

McCone Electric Cooperative is currently seeking two qualified applicants for apprentice lineman positions. The co-op prefers applicants with some line work experience or graduates of a certified line school. The successful applicant must possess a valid Montana CDL Class A license (or be able to obtain one within 90 days of the hiring date) and join the local I.B.E.W. Successful candidates must pass a pre-employment drug test and physical. The successful applicants must also be able to deal with co-workers and consumers in a courteous and professional manner. These openings are part of McCone Electric's "succession planning" program and does mean one of the successful applicants must be willing to re-locate to an outpost after completion of two years of apprentice training out of the Circle, Mont. office. The other apprentice will be located in Circle. McCone Electric has an excellent benefits program. A McCone Electric Co-op., Inc. job application is required and may be obtained from McCone Electric at PO Box 368, Circle, MT 59215. The application deadline is Friday, May 19, 2006 at 5:00 p.m. Call for applications at (406) 485-3430 or e-mail **Larry Schmidt** (lschmidt@mcconelectric.coop).

Journeyman station wireman

Flathead Electric Co-op, Kalispell, Montana has a full-time union position with a wage of \$30.82 per hour and excellent benefit package. Duties: Responsible for the construction/installation, operation, testing, and maintenance of electrical equipment and apparatus within substations and on the transmission and distribution system. Prerequisite Skills and Experience: Must have completed a recognized, qualified apprenticeship and be recognized by I.B.E.W. as a Journeyman Station Wireman. Live in the beautiful Flathead Valley close to Glacier National Park, Flathead Lake, two major ski areas, and lots of outdoor activities. The complete job description may be viewed and vacancy announcement at www.flatheadelectric.com or call **Debbie Biggar**, (406) 751-4425 for an application. For more information, contact **John Eisinger**, (406) 751-4493 or **Brian Plunkett**, (406)751-4496. Application and resume must be submitted before June 1, 2006.

Journeyman and/or apprentice lineman

Lower Yellowstone REA, Inc., located in Sidney, has positions open for a journeyman and/or apprentice lineman. Applicants must possess the ability to perform skilled work in construction, operation and maintenance of an REA electrical system including transmission, substation and distribution for both overhead and underground line. Candidates must have a high school diploma or GED equivalent, possess a current driver's license, plus possession of or ability to immediately obtain a Montana commercial driver's license. A drug test will also be required. To apply for this position, mail a resume and cover letter to **Donald Prevost**, General Manager, Lower Yellowstone REA Inc., PO Box 1047, Sidney, MT 59270, or you may call 406-488-1602 to speak to Mr. Prevost or **Ed Savelkoul**, manager of operations. A complete job description and job application is available at Lower Yellowstone's office. Jobs will be open until filled.

CALENDAR**June 2006**

1	Lower Yellowstone REA Annual Meeting	Sidney, MT
2	McCone Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Circle, MT
2	Southeast Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Ekalaka, MT
3	Hill County Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Havre, MT
8	Fergus Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Lewistown, MT
10	Ravalli County Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Corvallis, MT
10 -16	NRECA Youth Tour	Washington, DC
17	Fall River Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Ashton, ID
21	Northern Electric Annual Meeting	Lustre, MT
26-28	MECA Managers Group Summer Meeting	Lewistown, MT

July 2006

11-12	MECA Committees and Board Meetings	Miles City, MT
11	MECA Barbecue at the Helm Ranch	Miles City, MT
12	MECA Dinner at Ranger Rider Museum	Miles City, MT
15	Tongue River Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Ashland, MT