

Big Skylights



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

A report from your Chief Executive Officer Dave Wheelihan

October 25, 2007

MECA board sets quarterly meeting & banquet

MECA's board of directors will hold its winter quarterly meeting and annual Holiday banquet Nov. 28 in Great Falls. MECA committee and subcommittee meetings will also be held in conjunction with the board meeting on the same day. All meetings will be held at the statewide association building, 501 Bay Drive.

Following is the schedule of meetings: 7 a.m., Audit Committee; 8 a.m., Tribal-Cooperative Issues Committee; 9 a.m., USBP Legislative Subcommittee; 10 a.m., Climate Change Legislative Subcommittee; 11 a.m., Renewables & PURPA Legislative Subcommittee; 12 Noon, Legislative Committee and lunch; 1:30 p.m., MECA board meeting.

The annual Holiday reception and banquet will be held at the Meadowlark Country Club, starting with the reception at 6 p.m. and the banquet at 7 p.m. RSVP cards and meetings information were mailed to co-op managers and MECA board members on Monday. RSVPs are due by Nov. 21.

Montana electric co-ops share in carbon demo project

Montana electric co-ops that are members of Basin Electric Power Cooperative are among the beneficiaries of a \$67 million federal carbon sequestration demonstration grant recently awarded to Basin Electric and other members of the Plains CO₂ Reduction Partnership.

The grant is one of three large-scale carbon sequestration projects awarded grants by the federal Department of Energy that are designed to further President Bush's Initiatives to Advance Clean Energy Technologies to Confront Climate Change.

The grant awarded to the Plains CO₂ Reduction Partnership that includes Basin Electric Power Cooperative will be led by the Energy & Environmental Research Center at the University of North Dakota. The partnership will conduct geologic CO₂ storage projects in the Alberta and Williston Basins. The Williston Basin project in North Dakota will couple enhanced oil recovery and CO₂ storage in a deep carbonate formation that is also a major saline formation. The CO₂ for this project will come from a post-combustion capture facility located at a coal-fired power plant in the region. A second test will be conducted in northwestern Alberta, Canada, and will demonstrate the co-sequestration of CO₂ and hydrogen sulfide from a large gas-processing plant into a deep saline formation. This will provide data about how hydrogen sulfide affects the sequestration process. The Plains partnership includes North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, Montana, Wyoming, Nebraska, Iowa, Missouri, and Wisconsin, along with the Canadian provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. Total cost of the project is estimated at \$135.6 million with the non-federal remainder of the project expenses being paid by private sources, including Basin Electric, either through direct or in-kind contributions.

Sheridan Electric avoids retail rate increase

Helped by strong margins and solid overall financial strength, Sheridan Electric Cooperative members will avoid a retail rate increase in 2008 despite continuing increases in wholesale power costs, general manager **Bill Schell** told the membership at their 60th annual meeting Oct. 20 in Medicine Lake.

Mr. Schell said the co-op's wholesale power bill will take a 14 percent jump in January and the co-op utility faces rising fuel and infrastructure costs. But oil and gas development helped produce 19 percent co-op margins in 2006 and load growth is expected to continue. Mr. Schell noted three major developments expected in the coming months, including development of a \$100 million natural-gas fired peaking generator near Culbertson equal to about six times Sheridan Electric's current load. The plant, construction of which is expected to start next year, will be built by Basin Electric Power Cooperative. Mr. Schell also reported that Basin Electric is planning to install an additional 5 megawatt heat recovery generator in that same area. And he said the co-op will benefit further from the development of a new \$8 to \$12 million grain terminal in co-op's northeast service territory in the town of Westby. A new substation will have to be built to accommodate the new grain terminal, Mr. Schell said.

In other news at Sheridan Electric's annual meeting, the co-op re-elected three trustees without opposition. Re-elected were **Warren Overgaard**, **Roger Bertelsen** and **Robert Rust**. In a board reorganization meeting after the annual meeting, the board elected Mr. Rust as secretary after Mr. Bertelsen decided to step down from that seat. No other changes were made in board officers.

Also during the annual meeting, MECA's **Gary Wiens** reported on the current status of climate change legislation both in Congress and at the state level and outlined the co-ops' position and concerns about the issue.

Big Flat members gain ground on equity position

At 63 percent, Big Flat Electric Cooperative members' equity ownership of their cooperative is now at least one of the highest in Montana and bodes well for the co-op's continued ability to avoid going deeper into debt to maintain its utility infrastructure, **Gerald Keller**, co-op board president, told the membership at its 61st annual meeting Saturday, Oct. 13.

Manager **Jeanne Barnard** told the members the biggest challenge facing Big Flat Electric is in powering the co-op's future. She noted the drought is putting an increasing strain on the federal government's hydropower supply and she said a variety of economic pressures will force the co-op's wholesale power rate to increase by 25 percent on Jan. 1. Ms. Barnard said the board hasn't yet made a decision on retail rates but she told members the rate increase will be less than a penny per kilowatt hour.

Despite damages from two wildfires, including damage to a substation, as well as costs of replacing aging poles, the co-op was nonetheless able to issue capital credits to members this year. Checks were handed out at the annual meeting.

In trustee elections, Mr. Keller, **Betty Campbell** and **Patty Quisno** were all re-elected without opposition. Central Montana Electric Power Cooperative Manager **Tom Huntley** updated the members on wholesale power issues. MECA Assistant General Manager **Gary Wiens** addressed the issue of climate change, saying that the co-ops will be launching a national effort to talk about the costs of action on climate change as well as the need for a balanced approach.

Growth pressure on Beartooth Electric Cooperative

Beartooth Electric Cooperative members heard at their annual meeting recently that 153 new services for 2006 was a continuation of a trend that will have the co-op nearly doubling in size over the past 10 years. The influx of new members and the requirement for new large irrigation pivots is behind a new four-year work plan totaling more than \$8 million, according to co-op general manager **Bob Walker**. The growth, in combination of devastating fires over the last two years, has prompted upgrading significant parts of the system, Walker said.

Beartooth members approved a resolution to exempt the co-op from rate regulation by the Wyoming Public Service Commission, thus allowing projected rate increases, estimated to be in the 5 to 6 percent range, to be passed along to that state's consumers of the cooperative's power. Trustees **Mike Plymale** and **Ronnie Wright** were re-elected, and in the subsequent reorganization of the board, president **John Prinkki**, vice president **Fred Weiler** and secretary/treasurer **Mary Lou Flanagan** remained in their positions.

**New
pre-apprentice line
school opens
in Butte**

Grand opening of the Pre- Apprenticeship Line Program at the College of Technology in Butte will be held Nov. 13. Development of the program was accomplished in part through MECA and NorthWestern Energy. MECA's representatives on the project steering committee are **Ric Brown**, general manager of Ravalli County Electric Cooperative, and **Brandon Wittman**, assistant manager of Yellowstone Valley Electric Cooperative.

**Non-engineer
course date
reset for January**

A two-day MECA-sponsored workshop providing electric co-op employees with a comprehensive understanding of electrical system operations, including generation, transmission and distribution set for mid-November has been cancelled and will instead be held Jan. 8-9, 2008. Titled "Electric Systems Operations for the Non-Engineer," the workshop will be conducted by the Northwest Public Power Association. Contact **Sharon McDonald** at the MECA office for more information.

**MECA kicks off
first in series
on foreman
leadership skills**

The first in a series of courses leading to a certificate in foreman leadership skills is being sponsored by MECA and will be presented Nov. 5-6 at the Best Western Heritage Inn, in Great Falls, in conjunction with the 2007 Operations Conference. Northwest Public Power Association is conducting the course titled "Foreman Leadership Skills Program, Part 1." Three additional courses that are part of the foreman leadership program will be offered by MECA in a multiple day training session in February, 2008. Participants must complete all four courses in order to receive the certificate. However, individual courses may be attended without receiving the certificate.

For more information on this course and the series please contact MECA's **Lea Upshaw** or Sharon McDonald at 406-761-8333 or via electronic mail at meca@mtco-ops.com.

Job Market

Office manager

Marias River Electric Cooperative, Inc. is conducting a search for the position of office manager. This position reports directly to the CEO/general manager.

Candidates should have a strong knowledge of accounting, finance and at least 5 years progressive experience in accounting or a related field. A CPA designation is preferred. This position has responsibility for the overall finances and human resources of the cooperative. This includes oversight of all accounting activities, cash management, and the development of financial forecasts, and budgets. The office manager is responsible for oversight of reconciling general ledger accounts, preparing journal entries, calculating accruals, and conducting financial analysis. Additional duties include administration of the benefits and human resources programs. Managerial duties include direction and oversight of all administrative personnel and functions.

Qualifications include a bachelor's degree in finance or accounting or related experience. Qualified applicants must possess excellent oral and written communication skills, time management and organizational skills, and be a team player. Qualified applicants must be proficient in Excel. The successful applicant must pass pre-employment physical, drug screen, pass checks of references, credit, criminal and driving histories.

Marias River Electric Cooperative (MRE) is an electric distribution cooperative which provides serves to approximately 3,700 electric meters in north central Montana. Additionally, Marias River Electric Cooperative provides management and administrative services to Shelby Gas Association, (SGA) a not-for-profit natural gas distributor. SGA provides natural gas to approximately 1,100 accounts in the Shelby area.

Applicants should send a confidential resume, cover letter, recent salary history and three professional references by November 26, 2007 to: Mark Grotbo, Marias River Electric Cooperative, Inc. P.O. Box 729, Shelby, MT 59474. mgr@mariasriverec.com.

General manager position

Burke-Divide Electric Cooperative of Columbus, N.D. is seeking a new general manager to replace the retiring manager.

The board of directors seeks candidates with backgrounds that are broad enough in scope to include experience in utility operations, financial management and member relations. The board also seeks an individual with an appreciation for the cooperative business model, communications and people skills. The cooperative serves more than 2,300 meters and maintains 2,104 miles of line in five counties.

The company offers an excellent NRECA benefits package, including a competitive salary commensurate with qualifications. Please send resume, a minimum of three professional references and salary expectations by Jan. 15, 2008, to Don Negaard, Pringle & Herigstad, P.C., 2525 Elk Drive, P.O. Box 1000, Minot, ND 58702-1000. The information can also be e-mailed to Mr. Negaard. donn@srt.com

Communications manager

East River Electric Power Cooperative, located in Madison, S.D., is accepting applications for the position of cooperative communications manager. This is an opportunity for an individual with experience in media relations, writing and communications planning. The person selected for the position will be responsible for working with the East River Electric management team in developing and implementing a long-range communications plan that will assist East River's members in communicating important issues facing electric cooperatives and will include representing the cooperative at regional and national meetings. Applicants must have a bachelor's degree in journalism or related field and a minimum of 3 years of experience in communications and media relations. To request an East River application, contact East River Electric Power Cooperative, Inc.; PO Box 227, Madison, SD 57042; Phone: 605-256-4536 or via e-mail, hr@eastriver.coop. Or, download information from East River's website, www.eastriver.coop. Applications must be received by Nov. 13, 2007.

CALENDAR**October**

26	Park Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Livingston, MT
29-Nov. 1	MECA-Sponsored NRECA Director Fast-Track Course Series	Great Falls, MT

November

5-6	MECA Course: "Foreman Leadership Skills Program, Part 1"	Great Falls, MT
6-8	MECA Operations Conference	Great Falls, MT
7-8	Basin Electric Power Cooperative Annual Meeting	Bismarck, ND
28	MECA Board, Committee Meetings & Holiday Banquet	Great Falls, MT