

# Big Skylights



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

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A report from your Chief Executive Officer Dave Wheelihan

July 13, 2017

## Ten candidates seek seats on board at Fall River

Ten candidates vied for three open seats on the Fall River Rural Electric Cooperative Board of Directors at the co-op's annual meeting Saturday, June 24 in Ashton, Idaho.

In election results announced near the close of the meeting, incumbents **Jay Hanson** and **Ralph Burton** retained their seats and newcomer **Georg Behrens** was elected to a vacancy on the board created with the retirement of trustee **Boyd Bowles**, who stepped down after 15 years of service.

During the meeting, members heard an excellent report on the key drivers of changes occurring in the Pacific Northwest power industry from **Beth Looney**, CEO of Pacific Northwest Generating Cooperative.

Using graphs and charts to illustrate her points, Ms. Looney attributed depressed energy prices in the region, in part, to an oversupply of renewable energy, created largely by state government mandates for renewable energy purchases. This includes a 50-percent renewable portfolio standard in California that is affecting wholesale power rates in the Northwest.

Ms. Looney also cited the significant impact of natural gas fracking since its use became widespread in the 2008-2009 time period. Fracking has resulted in a massive supply of natural gas, with prices for natural gas now closely correlating to the wholesale cost of electricity, she said.

Another factor affecting wholesale power rates, said Ms. Looney, is the Columbia River Treaty with Canada. Ms. Looney said the treaty forces an overpayment to Canada of about \$1 million every two to three days, or about \$150 million a year. And fish and wildlife mitigation for the region's hydropower system are costing Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) ratepayers \$622 million a year, comprising about one third of wholesale power costs, which includes the cost to ratepayers of court-ordered spilling of water, she said, adding that those costs will rise further as a result of a recent court ruling on salmon protection. The ruling requires greater reductions in the amount of water retained for power generation. This will force BPA to buy even more power on the market, with fish costs estimated at about \$40 million more a year to BPA ratepayers. Ms. Looney said ratepayers are also being impacted by constraints on the BPA system due to a lack of capacity to handle increased power supply.

Speaking to members near the end of the meeting, General Manager **Bryan Case** told members the changing situation at BPA may result in an eight-percent wholesale power rate increase. The Fall River Rural Electric board will likely decide in August or September whether this will necessitate an increase in retail rates, he said.

## RESAP team visits co-ops

Observations of three electric cooperatives participating in the Rural Electric Safety Achievement Program (RESAP) have been held thus far this year. The most recent observation was held June 27 at Ravalli County Electric Cooperative. RESAP observations were held at Flathead Electric Co-op and Missoula Electric Co-op in May. RESAP has been considerably streamlined in recent years from the original version, which many co-ops deemed to be too cumbersome and containing unnecessary paperwork.

## Upcoming workshop focuses on co-op basics

MECA will hold a one-day Co-op 101 workshop on Aug. 9 in Havre and Aug. 11 in Dillon.

The Havre workshop will be held at the Best Western Plus Havre Inn and Suites, 1425 US Hwy 2 NW and the Dillon workshop on Aug. 11 will be held at the University of Montana-Western, 710 S. Atlantic St.

This workshop was designed specifically by **Adam Swartz**. Mr. Swartz, who will conduct the workshop, is a former NRECA employee and the founder and principal of “The Cooperative Way,” a consulting firm dedicated to improving the operations of cooperatives by using the Seven Cooperative Principles, and to solving cooperatives’ needs for capital.

This course will provide strategic guidance to cooperatives seeking to utilize cooperative principles and values as a primary force in serving their members.

Topics of interest include: “Understanding the definition of a cooperative organizational culture,” “Why cooperative culture is important to the future success of the cooperative,” “How to implement and sustain a cooperative culture,” “The seven steps to build or restore a cooperative culture within your organization,” “The role your co-op can play in rebuilding your local economy,” “Becoming an active leader in creating cross-sector cooperative collaboration for business, policy and social impacts,” “How to grow your business through strategic alliances,” and “Partnering to grow capital resources for co-ops.”

A room block has been set up in Havre at the Best Western Plus at a group rate of \$105/night. Please ask for the group “MT Co-op” when making your reservation. A block of rooms has also been set aside at the Comfort Inn in Dillon at a group rate of \$104/night. Please reference group, “MT Electric Co-ops Association” when making your reservation.

To register, please contact **Beckie Frediani** at the statewide office. She can be reached via email at [beckie@mtco-ops.com](mailto:beckie@mtco-ops.com) or via phone at (406) 761-8333.

### **MECA sponsors winter survival training course**

MECA will hold a one-day Winter Survival Training course at the Yogo Inn in Lewistown, Mont., on Tuesday, Aug. 8. The course instructor will be **Art Seely**, a renowned authority in safety and survival training and the sole founder of Safety One Training International. He is one of the first certified rescue paramedics in the United States.

Training will focus on Case Histories — simple lessons to avoid disaster; Survival Attitude — how to get it, how to keep it; Winter Survival — secrets that make a difference; Hypothermia — why it kills so many, recognition and what you need to do; Frostbite — simple secrets to keep your fingers; and Survival Priorities — surviving the unexpected.

Registration deadline for this training is July 28.

For additional information, please contact **Lea Potoczny** of our office. She can be reached at (406) 761-8333 or via email, [meca@mtco-ops.com](mailto:meca@mtco-ops.com).

### **OCR training schools set for Kalispell and Huntley**

Two Oil Circuit Recloser schools will be offered by MECA next month. The first course will be held Aug. 22-23 at Flathead Electric Cooperative in Kalispell. The second course will be held Aug. 29-30 at Yellowstone Valley Electric Cooperative in Huntley. The course instructor will again be **Mike Dean**.

The course is limited to the first 30 registered participants, so those interested in attending are urged to register as soon as possible, but no later than July 31.

For additional information, please contact **Lea Potoczny** of our office. She can be reached at (406) 761-8333 or via email, [meca@mtco-ops.com](mailto:meca@mtco-ops.com).

### **Job Market**

#### **Work Order Supervisor**

A South Dakota electric cooperative, Southeastern Electric Cooperative, has an opening for a work order supervisor in the co-op’s rural Sioux Falls office, located at exit 68 on I-29.

This position requires a self-motivated individual to check staking sheets with related material charge-outs, verify direct charges to work orders, close work orders, and prepare inventories of completed work orders and

summaries of special equipment purchases on a monthly basis. Prior experience with an electric cooperative is preferred, along with a strong background in related software applications, such as those provided by National Information Solutions Cooperative.

This is a full-time, regular position with excellent benefit plan and salary commensurate with experience and qualifications. A bachelor's degree from a four-year college or university or one to two years related experience and/or training, or equivalent combination of education and experience, is required.

For an application and job description, visit [www.southeasternelectric.com](http://www.southeasternelectric.com) or contact **John McDonald** at (800) 333-2859 or [john@southeastern.coop](mailto:john@southeastern.coop). Application deadline is July 31, 2017.

## CALENDAR

### July

13	Goldenwest Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Wibaux, MT
19	MECA Webinar on Online Reporting of Bird Mortalities, Injuries	
22	Tongue River Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Broadus, MT
31	Legislature's Energy & Telecommunication Interim Committee	Helena, MT

### August

5-8	Statewide Editors Association Institute	Whitefish, MT
8	Winter Survival Training	Lewistown, MT
9	Co-op 101 Class	Havre, MT
11	Co-op 101 Class	Dillon, MT
17-18	MECA Office Managers & Accountants Summer Meeting	Fairmont Hot Springs, MT
22-23	OCR School	Kalispell, MT
29-30	OCR School	Huntley, MT

### September

7	2630 Certified Credentialed Director's Course	Lewistown, MT
11-14	Annual MECA Operations Conference	Helena, MT
19	"General Differences" Training Course	Great Falls, MT