

Big Skylights



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

A report from your Chief Executive Officer Dave Wheelihan

November 8, 2017

Governor picks members of new dig law council

Congratulations to **Doug Hardy**, general manager of Central Montana Electric Power Cooperative, on being appointed by Gov. **Steve Bullock** to the newly created Underground Facility Protection Advisory Council (UFPAC). Mr. Hardy, who will represent MECA on the council, was involved extensively both with development and passage of the legislation that created the council, House Bill 365.

HB 365, which was passed by the 2017 Montana Legislature, greatly improved Montana's Call Before You Dig or 8-1-1 law. As part of improving enforcement of the law, the legislation created UFPAC. The council is allocated to the state Department of Labor (DOL) to help administer the dig law. UFPAC's duties are to advise DOL in the collection of civil penalties for damages to underground facilities, assist DOL in the mediation and resolution of disputed civil penalties, provide recommendations to DOL in determining grants awarded for safety training and education related to underground facilities, and advise DOL on other significant matters concerning the administration and enforcement of the law, including rulemaking. The council must meet at least once a year.

Other members of UFPAC are **Aaron Arthur**, Miles City. Qualification: Member representing a telecommunications provider with less than 50,000 subscriber lines in Montana. Mr. Arthur is the vice president of field operations for Mid-Rivers Communications; **Doug Hansen**, Billings. Qualification: Member representing a public utility that owns an underground facility that is an electric distribution or transmission line in Montana. Mr. Hansen is the Rocky Mountain Region manager for Montana-Dakota Utilities; **Jason Moothart**, Billings. Qualification: Member representing a telecommunications provider with

more than 50,000 subscriber lines in Montana. Mr. Moothart is the manager of region operations for CenturyLink; **Mandi Nay**, Circle. Qualification: Member representing a regional water, wastewater or both authority. Ms. Nay is the coordinator for Dry-Redwater Regional Water and Wastewater Authority; **Theron Pavlik**, Bozeman. Qualification: Member representing excavators. Mr. Pavlik is the superintendent for SIME Construction; **Nich Pericich**, Bozeman. Qualification: Member representing a municipal sewer or water system, or a municipal water supply system. Mr. Pericich is the assistant superintendent for the city of Bozeman's Water and Sewer Division; **Dale Schultz**, Butte. Qualification: Member representing a public utility that owns an underground facility that is a jurisdictional pipeline in Montana. Mr. Schultz is the Manager of System Integrity and Technical Services for NorthWestern Energy; **Michelle Snyder**, Laurel. Qualification: Member representing owners or operators of an underground facility that is a jurisdictional pipeline in Montana that is not a public utility. Ms. Snyder is the Department of Transportation Compliance Manager, Pipelines and terminals for CHS/Cenex Pipelines.

Park Electric members hear good news on rates

Park Electric Cooperative members received an update on several aspects of the co-op and heard from a local cowboy poet during their annual meeting Oct. 27 in Livingston.

Board President **Mike Warren** introduced his fellow board members and announced there would be no rate increase this year. He also explained the importance of attending the co-op's annual meeting.

Manager **Tim Stephens** updated members on several issues and improvements during his report. He gave the current status of the Clean Power Plan, noting that the administration's plans to repeal the regulation is a good thing for Park Electric. Mr. Stephens also addressed solar energy. He said the cooperative has a demonstration solar project, and based on the first 15 months' production, it is expected to cost \$600 more than it will save over 25 years.

Mr. Stephens also addressed recent system upgrades, as well as the co-op's new webpage and Facebook page.

The guest speaker was cowboy poet **Gwen Peterson**.

In trustee elections, incumbents **Alan Johnstone**, **Bert Otis** and **Melanie Roe** were elected without opposition.

Congressman Gianforte creates business council

MECA's **Gary Wiens** has been named to a Business Advisory Committee for Montana Congressman **Greg Gianforte**. The 20-member committee will hold mostly quarterly teleconferences. It will discuss federal legislative or regulatory issues of concern to various business or industry groups represented on the committee.

NRECA assigns hotels for annual meeting

Montana has been assigned the headquarters hotel, the Westin Hotel, for attendees to the 2018 NRECA Annual Meeting & Expo, Feb. 22-28 in Nashville, Tenn.

Open registration for the annual meeting, including hotel reservations, will begin in about two weeks, NRECA has informed us.

Anyone with questions about registering or hotel reservations may contact **Beckie Frediani** of our staff. The phone number is (406) 761-8333. Her email address is beckie@mtco-ops.com.

Electric co-op consumers give high marks to RM

The results from the *Rural Montana* readers survey are in. We received 3,285 responses, and every co-op that receives the magazine was represented. The response represents about 2.67 percent of RM's circulation of approximately 123,000 magazines. According to CheckMarket.com, a marketing website, any number above 2,355 responses, or 1.9 percent, is considered statistically significant.

According to the survey, the average reader would be a female age 56-75 who reads more than 11 issues. She would be very satisfied with the magazine, and would have voted in both the presidential and special U.S. House elections. The average reader would also often agree with the opinions expressed in the magazine, and would most enjoy the feature stories.

Breaking down the numbers a bit, 59.7 percent of readers are age 56-75, 18.7 percent are 76 or older and 17.9 percent are age 36-55. Readers read an average of 11.25 issues annually, and score the magazine an average of 8.87 out 10. The survey shows that readers are voters (93.4 percent voted in the presidential election while 86.6 voted in the special U.S. House election), and largely agree with MECA's opinions and positions (80.2 percent often or always agree). The most popular sections are feature stories, reader photos, and energy efficiency articles.

About 4 percent of readers said they wanted the magazine in some electronic form, as opposed to print (96 percent want print).

If you would like to see the full survey results, or have the results from your cooperative's readers presented at a future board meeting, please contact **Ryan Hall** of our staff at 406-761-8333 or by email at ryanh@mtco-ops.com

Job Market

Lineman

Sun River Electric Cooperative, headquartered in Fairfield, MT, is accepting applications for the position of lineman in the Highwood service area. The position requires the ability to perform all responsibilities required of a journeyman lineman, including rubber gloving, and construction and maintenance of electrical transmission, substation, and distribution systems. To be considered for the position, applicants must have a valid Montana CDL and First Aid/CPR card, and must have the ability to climb poles and operate bucket

trucks, digger derricks, backhoes, and other equipment commonly used in the utility business. They also must pass a pre-employment physical and drug and alcohol test. The person in this position will be required to live within 30 minutes response time to the Highwood shop. Applicants not meeting journeyman criteria may be considered for hire as an apprentice based on experience and training. Applications are available online at www.sunriverelectric.coop. Send applications to **Robert Anderson**, Operations Manager, Sun River Electric, PO Box 309, Fairfield MT 59436-0309; email: randerson@sunriverelectric.coop; Phone: (406) 467-2526. This position will remain open until filled.

CALENDAR

November

14	Convening of Special Session of Montana Legislature	Helena, MT
28-29	MECA Winter Meetings	Great Falls, MT

December

1-6	2017 Winter Directors School	Nashville, TN
4-5	Meeting of Legislature's Revenue and Transportation Interim Committee	Helena, MT
12-14	Midwest Electric Consumers Association Annual Meeting	Denver, CO

January

7-10	CEO Close-up Conference	Palm Desert, CA
16	Meeting of Legislature's Energy & Telecommunications Interim Committee	Helena, MT
17-18	Meeting of Legislature's Environmental Quality Council	Helena, MT
23	Co-op Campaign Academy	Missoula, MT
24	Co-op Campaign Academy	Great Falls, MT
25	Co-op Campaign Academy	Billings, MT

February

6-8	Lineman Basics Training	Great Falls, MT
22-28	NRECA Annual Meeting & Expo	Nashville, TN