



Big Skylights

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

A report from your Chief Executive Officer Dave Wheelihan

March 31, 2016

Recording available of METSPool webinar

METSPool last week conducted an approximately 90-minute webinar to explain its services and available co-op-specific loss information, and offer other guidance on filing claims.

A recording of the webinar, which includes audio as well as the slides used in the presentations, was sent out to all participants in the webinar. Anyone wanting to receive a copy of the webinar recording should contact **Beckie Frediani** of our staff. Her email address is beckie@mtco-ops.com. The phone number is (406) 761-8333.

Need for fairness of co-op rate structure explained at Flathead Electric

Approximately 600 people attended the 79th annual meeting in Kalispell on March 19. General Manager **Mark Johnson's** presentation included slides with facts about the co-op and the region that members would find interesting, of which they were likely unaware. Of primary focus was addressing whether the current residential rates structure — in use since the inception of cooperatives — is fair and equitable for members, because today's members consume electricity differently than they did 10 or 20 years ago. Mr. Johnson also discussed how the co-op is being proactive in dealing with issues of member protection as they pertain to cyber and physical security.

Attendees heard from candidates for the board of trustees, all of whom were unopposed. Running for re-election were incumbents **Bruce Measure** and **Doug Grob**, and unopposed candidate **Stacey Schnebel** filed for her first term. Ms. Schnebel replaced **Chris Byrd**, who did not seek re-election. Bylaw changes to be voted on by members were discussed. One would require nominating petitions for candidates to be submitted 12 business days prior to the annual meeting, instead of just five days as it stands now. The other concerns capital credits and a clarification as to how they are retired for a business as opposed to a "natural person," should that business cease to exist.

Flathead Electric presented a video titled: "Co-op on the Cutting Edge." The co-op also provided four \$500 scholarships to graduating high school seniors (who had to be present to win), along with the grand prize of a \$500 electric bill credit. Leftover breakfast treats were donated to the Samaritan House to help the Flathead Valley's homeless population.

Ravalli Electric members hear reports on net metering & solar projects

Ravalli County Electric General Manager **Mark Grotbo** reported on the co-op's community solar development project in a report to his membership at the co-op's annual meeting March 19 in Corvallis.

He said the board decided to proceed with the project based on receiving enough favorable responses from members. Phase 2 of the project is now under construction.

Touching on the subject of net metering, Mr. Grotbo talked about the board's decision to place a demand-charge line item on member's power bills, although a demand charge will not yet be made. He told members the co-op wants to be fair to all of its members, saying that members receiving benefits from the co-op will be billed. Conversely, members who provide benefits to the co-op will be rewarded, he said. The MECA net-metering video was shown at the meeting.

In trustee elections, members elected **Brein Weber** to a vacant seat on the co-op board. Re-elected to the board was **Dennis Schneider**.

**Sun River Electric
manager explains new
kW demand charge**

Sun River Electric Cooperative General Manager **Scott Odegard** explained to members at their annual meeting March 25 the co-op's rationale for adding a new \$1 per kW demand charge to residential members' bills.

He said the new charge will make it possible for the co-op to more fairly charge members based on their usage patterns. However, he said the co-op's longstanding kWh charge will be lowered somewhat to help ensure that the total bill for most residential members is revenue neutral. He also explained that the installation of new meters has made the demand charge technologically feasible.

To help members get a better understanding of the need for the new demand charge, Mr. Odegard likened the co-op's old rate structure to that of a car rental business that rents cars by the mile but includes gas with the rented cars. Under the old rate structure, everyone's charged the same — the same rate— but some cars come back with the tank empty, others are half full. "Clearly," said Mr. Odegard, "the costs are different depending on usage of the car, but the slow drivers are subsidizing the fast drivers." Carrying the rental-car business analogy a little further, he told members that under the new rate structure, the "mileage rate" is unbundled and the gas is charged separately. "We just fine-tuned who paid how much for what," said Mr. Odegard, in reference to the new kW demand charge.

Also at the co-op's annual meeting, MECA appreciated being able to provide a legislative update, including presentation of MECA's short video explaining co-ops' concerns about the state's mandate for net metering, which results in a cost shift in the co-op's operating costs from members who own home-based renewable energy generators to those who do not.

In trustee elections, trustees **Leonard Sivumaki** was re-elected and **Russell Bloom**, who had been appointed, was elected to fill the remaining term of **Richard Artz**, who passed away last December after a lengthy battle against cancer. Members also elected **Mitchell Johnson** to replace **Darell Stott**, who had decided not to seek re-election. Mr. Stott, who served on the board for 24 years, was given a standing ovation for his years of service to the co-op.

**Growth and small-scale
solar project highlight
reports at co-op meeting**

Yellowstone Valley Electric Cooperative members received an update on the growth of their cooperative and a recently installed small-scale solar project at the co-op headquarters during their 78th Annual Meeting on March 23 in Billings.

Manager **Brandon Wittman** told the members that Yellowstone Valley Electric has been growing at a pace well above the state and national averages — adding more than 1,700 meters in the past five years. He also talked about how the technology, equipment and quality of employees at the cooperative has allowed the co-op to keep its consumers per employee number relatively high, which helps keep the cooperative financially stable.

Mr. Wittman also highlighted the cooperative's new small-scale solar system that was recently installed at the co-op building in Huntley. He said the purpose of the installation is to show what a typical home solar system will realistically produce in the area. The co-op's website will have a live stream of the output of the system so members can check in and see how it is performing.

In elections, incumbents **William Keller**, **Larry Kaufman** and **Richard Weldon** were re-elected without opposition.

**Restructuring rates
under consideration,
manager tells members**

Examining the rate structure will be a high priority for Lincoln Electric Cooperative in 2016, Manager **Ray Ellis** told members during the cooperative's 67th Annual Meeting on March 19 at Lincoln County High School.

Mr. Ellis told the members that no rate increases are proposed for 2016, but the cooperative does need to rearrange how it bills customers. He explained what elements make up the co-op's bill and a member's bill, and what constitutes fixed costs in both cases. Mr. Ellis informed members that staff members and trustees will be hosting community gatherings throughout the co-op's service territory this summer to further talk about rate structure.

Also during the meeting, Engineering Manager **Jamie Stark** did a live demonstration of the Smart Hub app.

In elections, incumbent Trustees **Tom Klyver**, **Tina Taurman** and **Terry Utter** were re-elected without opposition.

**Numerous projects cited
at Missoula Electric event**

Phase 2 development of a second 50-kW solar array, an upgrade in automated meter reading equipment, completion of 2,700 square feet of new office space and the addition of about \$1.4 million in utility plant was among the news provided at Missoula Electric Cooperative's annual meeting March 19 in Missoula.

General Manager **Mark Hayden** also reported on "external issues" with potential to impact Missoula Electric Cooperative. Among the issues he cited were the federal Environmental Protection Agency's Clean Power Plan, renegotiation of the Columbia River Treaty and net metering. He commended MECA for its efforts in trying to help electric co-ops retain local control on net metering with a recent vote by the Legislature's Energy and Telecommunications Interim Committee.

In addition, Mr. Hayden told members that despite a 6.87 percent increase in its wholesale power rates charged by Bonneville Power Administration that took effect late last year, the board is not planning to increase its retail rates this year.

Also at the annual meeting, members re-elected **Charles Drinville**, **Tom Alsaker** and **Dena Hooker**.

Condolences

We were saddened to hear of the death recently of **Linda Lewis**, a former long-time employee of CFC whose service territory as regional vice president included Montana.

Ms. Lewis, who grew up in Pennsylvania, worked in the electric cooperative program for nearly 45 years. She died at home in Colorado after a long battle against Churg-Staruss Autoimmune Syndrome. She was 67.

She also was once a field representative for the federal Rural Utilities Service. She retired after 30 years with RUS and joined CFC in 1997 as a regional vice president, serving members in Montana, Alaska, Nebraska and Wyoming. Ms. Lewis retired in 2010.

Memorial donations in Ms. Lewis' honor may be made to the Immaculate Heart of Mary Center, 2300 Adams Ave., Scranton, PA 18509.

Job Market

Journeyman Lineman

Big Horn County Electric Cooperative (BHCEC), based in Hardin, Mont., has an opening for a journeyman lineman.

Applicants must have completed a recognized apprenticeship program, be a team player, be on an "on-call" Rotation, and have or be able to obtain and maintain a Montana CDL. Other requirements are: have a positive, safety-minded attitude and an ability to operate equipment associated with the trade, be physically able to perform all of the duties involved with being a journeyman lineman, and pass a pre-employment drug screen.

BHCEC is located in southeast Montana, in the heart of an outdoor enthusiast's dream. If you enjoy hunting, fishing, water sports, winter activities and much more, this is a great place to be. The co-op offers a

competitive salary and benefit package. For more information or to obtain an application, call the office at (406) 665-2830. Email resumes to mrussell@bhcec.com.

CALENDAR

April

4	957.1 Director's Course	Great Falls, MT
5-6	MECA Spring Board and Committees Meetings	Great Falls, MT
7	Upper Missouri Power Cooperative Annual Meeting	Sidney, MT
8	Marias River Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Shelby, MT
19-20	MECA-Sponsored Retirement Seminar	Great Falls, MT
26-27	Disaster Response Plans & Working With FEMA	Great Falls, MT
30	Glacier Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Cut Bank, MT

May

1-3	NRECA Legislative Conference	Washington, D.C.
7	Northern Lights, Inc. Annual Meeting	Sagle, ID
10-11	MECA Line Superintendents' Group Spring Meeting	Lewistown, MT