

# 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

October 4, 2016

## Beartooth Electric members explore merger proposal at meeting

Beartooth Electric Cooperative's study of whether to merge with Lower Valley Energy of Jackson, WY, occupied a considerable amount of time at Beartooth's annual meeting Saturday, Sept. 24 as the board, co-op attorney and general manager sought to answer all questions members had about the proposal.

Also during the meeting, General Manager **Jim Webb** updated the membership on the co-op's solid financial condition, noting healthy revenues had made it possible for the co-op to reduce rates three times, including a rate decrease earlier this year. The co-op's rates are now about equal to the average electric co-op rate in Montana, it was reported.

Trustees told the membership the board will, after gathering all the data and projections of the pros and cons of merger vs. remaining independent, take a vote on whether to recommend a merger. If the recommendation is to merge, then the merger will need to be approved by 2/3 of Montana members voting. In Wyoming, it must be approved by a majority of all Beartooth Electric's members in that state.

In trustee elections, **Bill Pascoe** was elected unopposed. He had been appointed to fill the remainder of the term of **Laurie Beers** who resigned for personal health reasons. **Roxie Melton** was reelected in a two-way race and **Arleen Boyd** was reelected unopposed.

## Co-op employees, trustees win top MECA awards

A co-op manager, two directors and a retired manager of finance and administration were the top award winners at this year's MECA Awards Breakfast on Sept. 29.

**Brandon Wittman**, general manager of Yellowstone Valley Electric Co-op, won the MECA Hog Tied Award for his stellar efforts to serve as a point man for the co-ops on various issues.

In particular, MECA President **Brent McRae** applauded Mr. Wittman's superb response in dispelling false information broadcast earlier this year about so-called "smart meters." Despite sustaining personal verbal attacks for presenting the facts on advanced metering, Mr. Wittman stood his ground in a professional manner, President McRae noted. Other past assistance by Mr. Wittman in representing the co-ops in a variety of other venues was also highlighted.

**Lon Waid**, a trustee at Hill County Electric Cooperative and chairman of MECA's Communications Committee, was the recipient of MECA's Hard Ridin' Award. Despite breaking his pelvis on June 18 when he was bucked off by a horse, Mr. Waid continued to keep up with his duties as the co-op board's secretary treasurer and has been able to attend co-op board meetings.

MECA's cooperative spirit awards were garnered this year by two Glacier Electric members. **Brian Elliott**, a trustee at Glacier, was presented the trustee cooperative spirit award. Mr. Elliott has been on the co-op board for 24 years and remains active in local community activities. He also serves on key committees at MECA and on the board at Western Montana G & T Cooperative. **Betty McCormick**, recently retired manager of finance and administration at Glacier Electric, was the recipient of this year's employee cooperative spirit award. Ms. McCormick, who worked for Glacier Electric for 32 years, was recognized for her exemplary dedication to the co-op as well as her mentoring of countless Glacier Electric employees.

A special honor was also given this year to **Gerhard Helm**, a former trustee at Tongue River Electric Cooperative, and his wife, **Pat**. Mr. Helm retired earlier this year after 48 years of dedication to the cooperative family. His first 20 years were spent at McCone Electric Cooperative, beginning in 1960. He later moved into the Tongue River service area and came onto the Tongue River board in 1988.

***Line personnel presented Lifesaver awards***

Lifesaving awards went to line personnel from Sun River Electric and Ravalli County Electric.

**Scott Steyee** and **Trey Caffyn** were honored for their timely arrival on the scene of an automobile accident west of Fairfield involving two teenagers. The vehicle rolled several times before hitting a NorthWestern Energy power pole. The pole and lines fell down on the car. One person had been thrown from the vehicle during the crash, but one remained trapped inside. The linemen were able to safely remove the power lines from the vehicle, allowing the trapped teen to be rescued.

Journeyman lineman **Rick Twardoski** and apprentice **Alex Keith** of Ravalli County Electric Cooperative won lifesaving awards for performing first aid and helping rescue a woman trapped in a car in a remote location of the co-op's service area.

**Goldenwest Electric leads  
MECA safety awards  
with 60 years no lost time**

Following are the no-lost time awards presented to co-ops at Thursday's MECA awards breakfast:

60 years, Goldenwest Electric; 28 years, Lincoln Electric; 18 years, Tongue River Electric; 14 years, Sun River Electric; 13 years, Southeast Electric; 10 years, Marias River Electric; 9 years, Ravalli County Electric; 6 years, Beartooth Electric; 3 years, Big Flat Electric, Fergus Electric and McCone Electric; 1 year, Big Horn County Electric and Fall River Rural Electric.

This year's MECA Fitness Challenge was won by Lincoln Electric Cooperative. The co-op's six employee participants logged more than 4.2 million steps or just over 2,108 miles. They also drank 147 gallons of water.

**Job Market**

**Journeyman Lineman**

Vigilante Electric Cooperative, headquartered in Dillon, Mont., has an immediate opening for an IBEW journeyman lineman located at the co-op's Townsend outpost office. This is a three-person outpost primarily serving the Townsend area but also areas north and south of Helena. Excellent pay and benefits are provided in this position. The co-op may accept applications from a fourth step and above, "hot", apprentice lineman. The position requires residing within a 20-minute response time of the Townsend office. Please contact **Justin Bair**, line superintendent, at (406) 683-2327 or, via email, [Justin@vec.coop](mailto:Justin@vec.coop), for an application package and details/requirements related to the position. This position will remain open until filled.

**Journeyman Lineman**

Big Horn County Electric Cooperative of Hardin has an opening for a journeyman lineman. Applicants must have or be able to obtain a Montana CDL, have completed a recognized four-year apprenticeship program; be proficient in operating digger derricks, bucket trucks, trenchers, and underground locating and fault-finding equipment; be in physical condition to carry out the work associated with overhead and underground power lines; be willing to work in extreme conditions such as heat, cold, wind, rain, snow, at all hours and be on a rotating "on call" list; have experience in rubber gloving, the operation of OCRs and regulators, and underground and overhead distribution lines. Having a positive safety minded attitude and being a "team player" is a must.

The successful applicant will be required to live within 15 minutes driving time of work, take a pre-employment physical and drug test, and be on a six-month probationary period.

Big Horn Electric is located in a farming/ranching community serving rural residents, including three-phase irrigation and pumping loads, an oilfield, and some small and large commercial loads in Big Horn County, Montana, and a small part of north central Wyoming.

The co-op offers a competitive salary and an excellent benefits program. Send resumes to: Monte Russell, District Supervisor, Big Horn County Electric Cooperative, Inc., PO Box 410, Hardin, MT 59034 or [mrussell@bhcec.com](mailto:mrussell@bhcec.com). Ph: (406)665-2830. A company employment application with references will be required along with work history dating back five years. This position will be open until filled.

### **Maintenance Engineer and Planning Engineer**

East River Electric Power Cooperative, based in Madison, S.D., has two position openings. These positions will remain open until filled.

**Maintenance Engineer** - Primary responsibilities include development and implementation of maintenance programs. Also to perform electric system design for new and modifications to current transmission lines, distribution and transmission substations.

**Minimum qualifications:** Bachelor's degree in engineering, registration as a professional engineer or the ability to obtain such license within 4 years of hire. Experience with personal computers, AutoCAD, PLS-CADD, ESRI software, and Microsoft Office products is required.

**Planning Engineer** - Primary responsibilities include transmission analysis, planning and related activities to support transmission development, improve reliability, accommodate load growth and provide interconnections.

**Minimum qualifications:** Bachelor's degree in electrical engineering. Five years of experience in electric system planning is preferred. Registration as a professional engineer or the ability to obtain such license within 4 years of hire is also required. Experience with personal computers, and Microsoft Office products is required. Experience with Siemens PSS®E software is preferred.

East River is a power supply cooperative that delivers wholesale power through a 2,800-mile transmission system to 25 member electric distribution systems throughout eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota. The co-op offers an excellent compensation package, which includes health insurance, a pension plan and 401K contribution, and a 9/80 work schedule.

To apply for this position, visit [www.eastriver.coop/careers](http://www.eastriver.coop/careers) and complete your electronic profile. You will be able to upload additional applicant documents (i.e. resume, cover letter) and submit your electronic application. Questions can be directed to [hr@eastriver.coop](mailto:hr@eastriver.coop) or (605) 256-4536.

## **CALENDAR**

### **October**

5-6	NRECA Region IX Meeting	Reno, NV
5-6	Performance Management 2	Great Falls, MT
8	Big Flat Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Malta, MT
8	Sheridan Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Medicine Lake, MT
12-14	CCD Fast Track	Billings, MT
26	NorVal Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Glasgow, MT
28	Park Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Livingston, MT