

# COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



## **Antler Shed Hunting**

**Shed Hunter Kelly  
O'Bryan**

Pages 8-9

**Artificial Intelligence**

Pages 12-13

*Photo submitted by  
Kelly O'Bryan*

# Youth Excursion 2025

What does it take to keep the lights on? Sixteen students representing 10 electric cooperatives from across South Dakota embarked on a three-day trip to Bismarck, N.D., in July to go behind the scenes and learn about electricity generation. Sponsored by their local electric cooperatives, students toured the energy infrastructure that generates and transmits electricity into residential homes and commercial buildings, learning firsthand from industry experts.

The group kicked off the tour by visiting the Coteau Properties Co. Freedom Mine, where they watched large equipment in action and coal being mined in real time. The group followed the coal to Antelope Valley Station, a coal-fired power plant, where the coal is burned to create energy. In addition to generation, the group learned about coal byproducts, touring the one-of-a-kind Great Plains Synfuels Plant where natural gas, liquid carbon dioxide, fertilizers and fuels are produced from coal. Lastly, the group concluded their tour at Basin Electric Headquarters where most of the energy generation is facilitated and managed.

Owen Sperry, who lives within Northern Electric's service territory, said the trip provided a new perspective on how power is generated. Sperry, a sophomore at Groton Area High School, expressed interest in becoming a lineman someday.

"My uncle used to be a lineman, so I've always had a passion for it," Sperry said. "And getting to go through the shop of the Freedom Coal Mine was my favorite part of the trip. The scale of everything was just incredible."

The trip is organized by the statewide South Dakota Rural Electric Association in Pierre,



S.D., and paid for by the students' electric cooperatives as part of the industry's ongoing support of the fifth cooperative principle: education, training, and information.

As cooperatives, we value our communities and our youth. If you are interested in learning more about youth activities and opportunities, reach out to your local cooperative to learn more.

# Unclaimed Capital Credit Refunds

Listed below are names of former members who have unclaimed capital credit refunds from Codington-Clark Electric Cooperative, Inc. 3520 Ninth Avenue SW, PO Box 880, Watertown, SD 57201. If anyone has information regarding these individuals, please contact the Cooperative at (605) 886-5848 or 800-463-8938 or e-mail: [info@ccelectric.coop](mailto:info@ccelectric.coop).

Anderson, Joel	Hilderbrandt, Lynn	Pieschke, Gary W
Anderson, Richard	Holmes, George M	Powell, Sherri
Bohlmann, Jeff	Humphrey, David	Pulvermacher, Carl
Brown, Kara	Ihlen, Harvey	Raml, Jerod
Burchell, Deanna M	Jackson, Cody	Randolph Angelina D
Carlson, Guy	King, Arne	Schmitt, Stanley
Dagel, Harold W	Kurtenbach, Marsha M	Schorg, Evelyn
Darrington, Dennis H	Lane, David	Snow, Keith
Denzer, Virgil	Larsen, Jesse A	Sowards, Raymond
Dewar, Robert S	Matson, Aaron	Steen, Kimberly
Erlacher, Vic	Meyer, Thomas W	Stroupe, Ron
Florey, Todd	Mickey, Thomas A	Sutton, Terry J
Germantown Township Hall	Miller, T D	Traustman, Cristina
Glosimodt, Jim	Mundhenke, William B	Vander Linden, Chris
Grimsrud, Jacob	Nikolaisen, Thomas A JR	Walker, Patricia
Gueffroy, Linda M	Oddson, Charles A	Ward, John R JR
Hardie, Pamela	Olson, Larry	Whisman, Julie
Haugan, Peter	Pekkala, Rose A	Wilson, Tamara M

## COOPERATIVE

CONNECTIONS

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(USPS 019-073)

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- Step into South Dakota's Touchstone Energy interactive tent at the State Fair and experience fun and learning for all ages!
- Soar above the crowd with thrilling bucket truck rides or watch as skilled linemen demonstrate pole climbing techniques.
- Explore a variety of electric vehicles and tools!
- Kids will love Safety Town! Dig for treasures at the 811 booth and test your luck at our Plinko game for a chance to win prizes and an exclusive East River Electric Cooperative cookbook.
- Dive into the world of renewable energy with hands-on STEM activities like paper circuits, pedal power bikes, and static electricity experiments.

## Emergency Preparedness: Are You Ready for a Disaster?

Source: National Safety Council

National Preparedness Month, sponsored by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and held annually in September, is a good reminder that natural and man-made disasters can strike at any time. It's important to have a planned response when you're at work, on vacation or on the road.

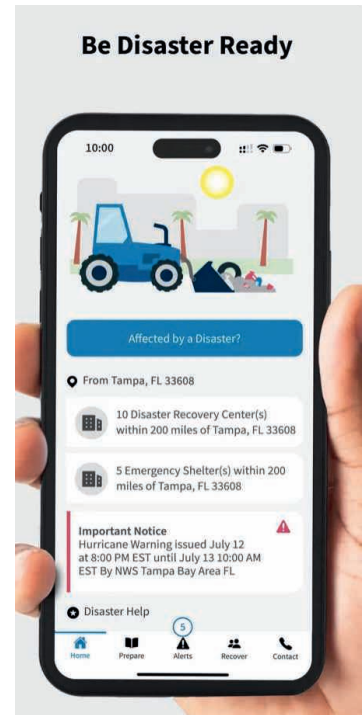
In 2022, 69,473 weather-related events resulted in 813 deaths and 1,718 injuries. Winter weather, heat, floods and hurricanes resulted in the most deaths that year, according to Injury Facts.

The National Safety Council offers safety tips specific on preparing for earthquakes, floods, hurricanes and tornadoes, and how to minimize fire risks.

Federal agencies, like Ready.gov and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration also are valuable resources for emergency preparedness. When you face a natural or man-made emergency, try to stay informed through radio, TV or the Internet. In some cases, however, cable, electric and cell phone service will be disabled, making communication nearly impossible. The National Safety Council recommends the following general precautions that apply to many disaster situations:

- Make sure at least one family member knows first aid and CPR.
- Download the FEMA app for resources, weather alerts and safety tips.
- Have a family communication plan in place; all members of the family should review and practice the plan.
- Have all family members' and other important phone numbers written down or memorized.
- Have an emergency kit in your car and at least three days of food and water at home.
- Be sure to store all important documents – birth certificates, insurance policies, etc. – in a fire-proof safe or safety deposit box.
- Know how to shut off utilities.

The official FEMA mobile app offers critical resources and real-time alerts to help you prepare for emergencies, stay safe during disasters, and navigate recovery afterward. With features like customizable emergency checklists, shelter locations, disaster recovery centers, and direct access to emergency alerts, the app is a comprehensive tool for personal and family safety planning.



**"Don't drive tractors into power lines."**

### Darcy Welsh, Age 9

Darcy cautions readers while driving tractors near power lines. Great picture, Darcy! Darcy's parents are Ryan and Rachel Welsh from Oral, S.D.

Kids, send your drawing with an electrical safety tip to your local electric cooperative (address found on Page 3). If your poster is published, you'll receive a prize. All entries must include your name, age, mailing address and the names of your parents. Colored drawings are encouraged.

# Fruit SPECIALS

## FROZEN FRUIT FIESTA

### Ingredients:

- 1 6-oz. frozen orange juice concentrate
- 2 10-oz. frozen strawberries
- 2 cans pineapple with juice (1 tidbits, 1 crushed)
- 3-4 bananas, sliced
- 1/4 cup lemon juice
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 1/2 cup cold water

### Method

Mix all together in a large bowl. Freeze in individual cups. Set out at room temperature for 1-2 hours before serving.

Optional: pour sour or 7-Up on top before serving.

**Ginny Jensen**  
Sioux Valley Energy

## PEACH RHUBARB CRISP

### Filling:

- 3/4 cup sugar
- 3 tbsps. flour
- 1/2 tsp. nutmeg
- 1/8 tsp. salt
- 3 cups rhubarb (sliced, fresh or frozen)
- 2 1/2 cups chopped fresh or frozen unsweetened peaches

### Topping:

- 1/2 cup flour
- 1/2 cup oatmeal
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 3/4 tsp. cinnamon
- 1/8 tsp. salt
- 5 tbsps. butter (cold)

### Method

Combine the filling ingredients and fruit. Transfer to a greased 11"x7" baking dish. In a small bowl, combine the topping ingredients; cut in butter until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Sprinkle over fruit. Bake at 375°F for 30 to 35 minutes until bubbly and browned.

\*Recipe can be cut in half and bake in 8" x 8" pan.

**Sally Florey**  
Charles Mix Electric

## CHERRY ICE CREAM DESSERT

### Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 cup Rice Krispies, crushed
- 1/4 cup brown sugar
- 1/4 cup melted butter
- 1 cup grated coconut
- 1/4 cup chopped nuts
- 1-quart vanilla ice cream
- 1 cup cherry pie mix

### Method

1. Melt butter in frying pan. Add coconut and toast, stirring constantly as it burns easily. Cool
2. Add nuts, brown sugar and crushed rice Krispies. Mix together.
3. Press 2/3 of crumb mixture into a buttered 9x9 inch pan.
4. Soften ice cream and spread over crumb mixture then top remaining crumbs.
5. Freeze well. Cut in squares and top with cherry pie mix.
6. Can be served with any other toppings. Serves 6-8.

**Rowena A. Wipf**  
Northern Electric

Please send your favorite recipes to your local electric cooperative (address found on Page 3). Each recipe printed will be entered into a drawing for a prize in December 2025. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

# Find Hidden Energy Users at Home



**Miranda Boutelle**  
Efficiency Services  
Group

Out of sight, out of mind. It is easy to overlook the hidden energy users in our homes. Yet, every plugged-in device and ready-to-use appliance can lead to higher electric bills.

Let's see if we can find some hidden energy savings for you.

Your water heater could be using more energy than necessary. Storage water heaters heat water to a preset temperature. When hot water is used, cold water enters the tank, lowering the temperature, and the water is reheated to that preset level. If the water heater is set higher than needed, it wastes energy. Most water heaters are set to 140 degrees at the factory. The U.S. Department of Energy recommends setting the temperature to 120 degrees. This will save energy and reduce the risk of scalding. Do not set it lower than 120 degrees to prevent bacteria development in the tank.

Exterior security lights, porch lights and barn lights can use more energy than needed. If they are on every night, all year long, that adds up to 4,380 hours, or half the hours in a year. If those lights use outdated, inefficient technology, they waste energy. With that many hours, even a slight increase in efficiency can yield big energy savings. Switch to energy efficient LED bulbs. If lights need to stay on, consider upgrading to motion sensor lights so you aren't drawing energy all night.

Pools and hot tubs can also be big energy users. Since you don't see the pumps or heaters by design, it's difficult to know when they are operating and consuming energy. Pumps filter water to keep it clean and safe for swimming. Energy Star®-certified pumps run at lower speeds and can be programmed to match your pool's filtering needs, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. They can pay for themselves in two years, are quieter and can prolong the life of your pool's filtering system. Schedule your hot tub to a lower temperature when you're not using it to reduce

energy use. If your electric utility offers time-of-use rates, consider scheduling accordingly.

Plug load is anything in your home that is plugged into an outlet. As we use more and more appliances and technology in our homes, plug load energy use increases. Find what is plugged in around your home. If you aren't using it, unplug it. For computer stations and entertainment centers, consider using smart power strips. These devices sense when energy is being used and turn peripheral devices on or off as needed.

Gaming consoles are another hidden energy user. Gamers often put them in rest mode when not in use. This allows them to complete updates and reduces start-up time for the next session. It also means they are still consuming energy even when not actively used. Powering off between gaming sessions can save energy. Ask the gamers in your life to power off. It may require a bit more time for updates, but every kilowatt-hour counts when it comes to saving energy.

It's easy to make a habit of powering down and unplugging once you identify everything drawing power in your home. For upgrades, reach out to your electric utility about available rebates to help cover costs.

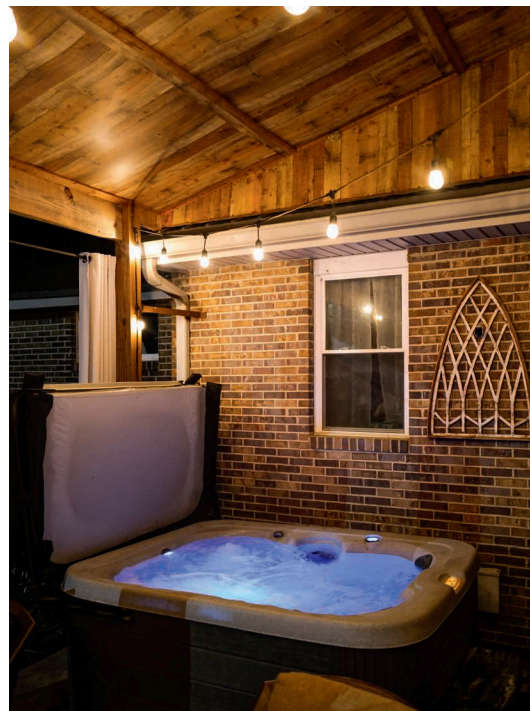




Photo by Mary Howell

# SOUTH DAKOTA SUNFLOWERS

## Wild Dutchman Seeds a Nationwide Snack

**Jacob Boyko**

[jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop](mailto:jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop)

If you're driving across central South Dakota in the summertime and you pass by a field of tall, bright sunflowers swaying in the breeze, there's a good chance you're a witness to the first step in those seeds' journey to being roasted, seasoned and packed into a bag of Wild Dutchman sunflower seeds.

One sunflower seed grower is Dakota Energy member Greg Bich, who's involved in just about every step from the farm-to-bag process for the iconic South Dakota brand.

Greg is a part owner of Southern Sun, the Huron-based company that processes, roasts and markets Wild Dutchman sunflower seeds for a nationwide audience of sweet-and-salty snackers.

Years ago, as a favor to his friend, local farmer and sunflower processor Danny Dale, Greg hauled loads of sunflower seeds up to Mound City for an up-and-coming operation known as "Wild Dutchman."

During these visits, Greg got to know the company's founders: father and son

duo Wayne and Toby Vanderlaan.

"If you ever talk to the older farmers in this area, a lot of them have nicknames, and that's kind of what they went by," Greg explained. "Wayne Vanderlaan's neighbor was called 'The Crazy Norwegian', while the neighbor called him 'The Wild Dutchman.'"

What started as a part-time snack-making hobby for the Wild Dutchman and Toby had boomed into substantial business – one that was quickly outgrowing their batch-by-batch roasting set-up.

"They had all of these distributors calling them, and they couldn't really get production done, and he just really wanted some help," Greg explained. "I came back, and I talked to my sunflower seed processing plant partner, Danny Dale, and I told him I'd like to invest in this company, and we felt a need for an additional roasting plant and built it."

The rest is history; Greg and Danny took over some of the roasting and helped out Toby and his daughter, Shelby, with new packaging designs, highlighting the Vanderlanns' Dutch heritage with the iconic orange packaging.

With the additional processing capacity, the company continued to expand its growing footprint throughout the Midwest and beyond.

"It's hard for a little two-family-owned company to be competitive in the market, but since we have the seeds from start to finish, it kind of gives us an advantage over everyone else," Greg said.

Starting in December 2024, Greg and Danny took over full production of Wild Dutchman seeds in Huron.

"From that first load that we hauled up there to Mound City to the time we built the roasting plant was probably three years of building a friendship," Greg said. "Small town South Dakota is very different, and we honestly went into wild Dutchman with no contractual agreement besides a shake of a hand and a 'hey, we're in this together.'"

Today, as the Wild Dutchman brand continues its remarkable streak of success, Greg is elated seeing how a little small-town friendship, hard work, and faith can achieve so much.

"One of the greatest feelings I've had is being in a faraway place and seeing an empty bag of Wild Dutchman seeds blowing across the baseball field," Greg laughed. "It's those little things that are more satisfying than having a positive balance sheet or a huge profit."



Kelly O'Bryan of Winner shows off his impressive collection of deer and elk sheds alongside his shed-hunting Labrador, Skye. Photos submitted by Kelly O'Bryan

# SHED HUNTING

## Prairie Miles and Antler Piles

**Frank Turner**  
frank.turner@sdrea.coop

Rosebud Electric member Kelly O'Bryan of Winner regularly hikes mile after mile of open prairie in search of the perfect shed. But he isn't looking for a place to store his garden tools or lawnmower – instead, he's after antlers. Each spring, deer and elk naturally shed their antlers, leaving behind prized treasures for shed hunters like O'Bryan to find.

O'Bryan jumped into the shed hunting hobby in 2020, during the social distancing months of the pandemic, after a friend invited him on a shed hunt in Montana. When O'Bryan found his first deer shed, he uncovered more than just a pair of antlers – he discovered a new passion.

"It was during the time when you couldn't go out and do anything, so you just had to make your own fun and find stuff to do," he laughed. "I just fell in love with covering as many miles as I possibly could each season, trying to pinpoint sheds. It's just like an Easter egg hunt."



O'Bryan lifts an elk shed found in Montana. Submitted Photo

Shortly after, O'Bryan fully committed to the hobby and added the ultimate scavenger to his team: a white lab named Skye. According to O'Bryan, it didn't take long for the dog to become an invaluable shed-hunting partner.

"I got Skye as a puppy, and I knew as soon as I got her, I

would train her to be a shed dog,” he said. “I taught her to sit and stay while I hid sheds all around the house. When she found one, I would give her lots of positive reinforcement. She figured it out just like that.”

Since then, O’Bryan and Skye have become seasoned shed hunters. In 2024 alone, the pair found 152 whitetail sheds, 25 mule deer sheds, nine elk sheds and 16 complete skulls – called “dead heads” – which resemble an English-style mount. Many of their best finds come from long days spent in remote country, often covering 10 to 15 miles in a single outing.

O’Bryan’s collection of sheds has grown into an impressive heap of bone and tines that continues to grow each season. Like many in the shed hunting community, he has found creative ways to showcase his finds with his most festive being an antler-adorned Christmas tree.

Others in the shed hunting community use their collection for art projects, crafting everything from knife handles to chandeliers. Some even trade or sell antlers to crafters, collectors, or pet product makers, giving shed hunting both recreational and economic appeal. Although O’Bryan does not sell his finds, he does cut up broken and damaged antlers for dog chews, gifting them to friends, family and his own favorite shed-hunting friend.

O’Bryan also has a few tips for beginners, drawn from miles of experience.

He says spring is the best time to search – antlers are freshly shed, and the grass is still short enough to give hunters a clear view. A good pair of binoculars is another must-have, helping spot antlers from a distance when the terrain allows for a higher vantage point.

And once you’ve found one shed, don’t assume the hunt is over. Whitetail deer are often in groups and antlers are often dropped in pairs so it’s worth taking the time to thoroughly scan the surroundings.

“You aren’t going to be finding many sheds unless you are willing to put on the miles,” he said. “The more you hike, the more you are likely to find sheds.”

More photos of O’Bryan’s collection and other hunting trophies can be found on his Instagram page: [@db\\_huntin](#).



(Above) O’Bryan praises Skye for a lifetime of discovering antlers. (Below) O’Bryan and Skye show their white tail antler finds from a winter shed hunt. *Submitted Photo*

# Line Worker Training

Line personnel from Codington-Clark Electric received training at a recent safety meeting on pole top and aerial truck rescue from Joe Denison, Loss Control Professional for the South Dakota Rural Electric Association.

This is an annual training requirement for all line workers. During the safety meeting Joe inspected the crew's personal equipment, reviewed safety practices in regard to an aerial or pole top rescue and talked about any close calls or near misses.

Having completed the pole top rescue, the crews then performed the required annual electrical dielectric test of Codington-Clark Electric's bucket and digger trucks. Dielectric testing verifies the electrical insulation strength of the truck. To complete the dielectric test, a testing instrument is connected to the basket of the truck. When ready, the basket is placed against an energized high voltage power line and the testing equipment measures how much current is passing through

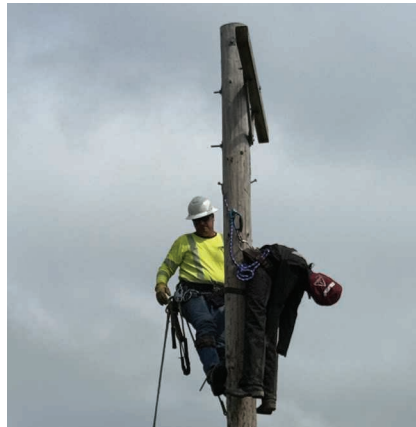
the fiberglass basket and arm of the aerial trucks.

The line workers then performed live line maintenance as a part of the rubber gloving refresher training. This training allows crews to maintain lines without disconnecting power to the consumers.

Reviewing these procedures and testing of the trucks are for the safety of the crews and public.



Crew Leaders James Hatton (above) and Josh Mikkelson (left) perform pole top rescue with a 120 lb. dummy.



Joe Denison, Loss Control Professional with SDREA discusses pole top rescue with the line crew. From left to right, James Hatton, Joe Denison, Rhyan Koch, Jacob Stromseth, Josh Mikkelson, Kobe Kettwig, Systems Operation Mgr. Jared Terhark and Cole Jurgens.

# Make Time for Safety This Harvest

Harvest season often means putting in long hours, which can make it difficult to stay alert and on the lookout for potential hazards.

Be prepared for potential emergencies before the rush of harvest season begins. Be sure that you can see well in work areas. Consider adding extra lighting around grain bins and augers.

Take the time to look up and look out for electrical lines. Always be aware of where they are in relation to your equipment. Keep a minimum of 10 feet away from all electrical equipment, and lower extensions before moving equipment. If you see a power line that is sagging or low, contact the co-op. Also keep an eye out for guy wires. While these wires are not energized, they can bring down live lines.

In equipment with auto-guidance systems, less focus is needed on steering, which may lead some drivers to think that they do not need to be as aware of navigation issues. Yet, even while using a GPS with auto-steering, farm workers need to keep safety in mind and stay focused on their surroundings. Recognize when you need to take breaks so that you can be active and engaged in the farm work.

Additional electrical safety tips include:

- Use a spotter when operating large machinery near lines.
- Inspect the height of farm equipment to determine clearance.
- Look up and use care when moving any equipment such as extending augers or raising the bed of grain trucks around power lines.
- Always set extensions to the lowest setting when moving loads to prevent contact with overhead lines. Grain augers should always be positioned horizontally before being moved.



- Never attempt to move a power line out of the way or raise it for clearance.

If the machinery you are operating does make contact with a power line, stay on the equipment. Immediately call 911, warn others to stay away, and wait for the utility crew to cut the power.

Only on the rare occasion that the machinery catches fire should you leave the vehicle after contact is made. If this is the case, jump off the equipment with your feet together and without touching the ground and machinery at the same time. Then, still keeping your feet together, hop to safety as you leave the area. Never touch anything that is in contact with a power line.

## Holiday Closing

Your Co-op's business office will be closed Monday, September 1 to allow employees to spend holiday time with family and friends.

As always, call after-hours dispatch at 844-968-1976 if you should experience electric service problems.



# HARNESSING AI

## Electric Cooperatives Explore What's Next for AI

**Frank Turner**

frank.turner@sdea.coop

Artificial intelligence (AI) is becoming an increasingly popular tool for many industries and even in our daily lives. It has the potential to bring many opportunities, and a few challenges, to electric cooperatives. But machine learning takes time, and cooperatives are still in the process of determining how AI can be effectively used.

Like any new technology, AI brings with it a mix of potential and uncertainty. It's a hot topic — sometimes exciting, sometimes a little intimidating. But for electric cooperatives, the focus isn't on the buzz. It's on the basics: What problems can it solve? What efficiencies can it create? And how do cooperatives make sure they are using it safely?

That measured, practical approach is what's guiding East River Electric Power

Cooperative, a wholesale power supply cooperative which serves 25-member distribution systems in eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota, as it explores how AI might support the operations of its member cooperatives now and into the future.

Right now, most electric cooperatives in South Dakota have not yet integrated artificial intelligence into their operations or systems. But that doesn't mean the technology is being ignored. Across the state, many co-ops are watching AI developments closely, asking questions, and exploring how these tools might be used in the future. The focus remains on learning first — before implementing anything that could affect system reliability or member service.

At East River Electric Power Cooperative, that learning process is already well underway. According to Jeff May, chief information officer with East River Elec-

tric, the co-op has spent the past several years researching what AI has to offer. Their approach has been to identify practical, secure applications that could help improve efficiency, support employees in their day-to-day work, and ultimately benefit members.

“With the explosion of AI applications and models for both personal and professional uses, we've been exploring ways that East River Electric and our members can harness the power of AI while making sure that our data is secure from a cybersecurity perspective,” said May.

Because AI technology has the potential to interact with both internal systems and external networks, cybersecurity is a top priority. As South Dakota rural electric cooperatives look to adopt tools powered by AI and other tech, they will ensure their systems are safe from potential cyber threats. Strong digital defenses are essential for the safe use of any new technology.

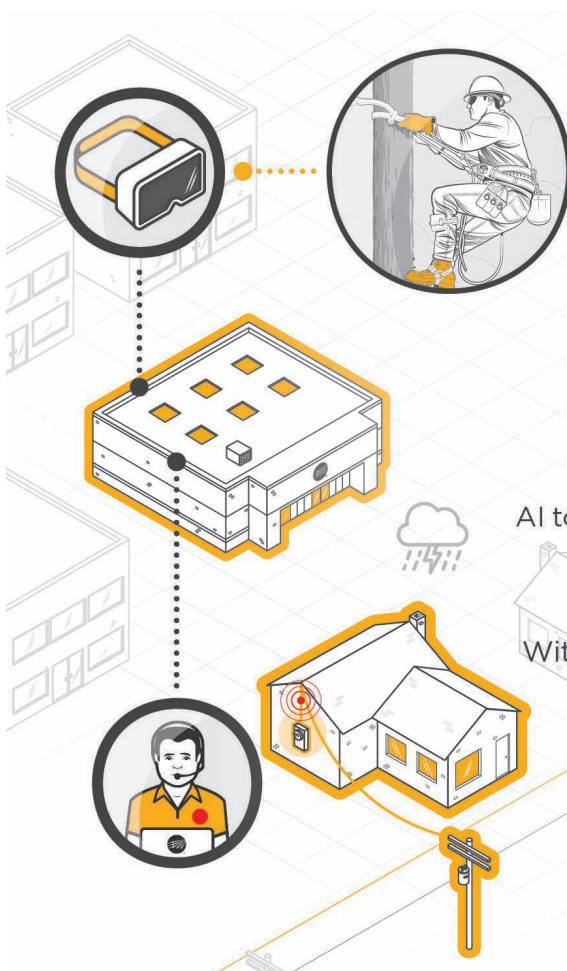
With safety in mind, May said East River Electric is actively partnering with Dakota State University graduate students to see how AI can be safely utilized by electric cooperatives. Together, East River Electric is working with the school to build an AI model that can predict electricity usage based on weather conditions and other factors to support the cooperative's load forecasting and rate forecasting capabilities. Although the technology is still in its infancy, May said he expects that someday AI will play a significant role in an electric cooperative's daily operations, including load forecasting, outage response and maintenance planning.

"It's difficult to predict how AI can be used for different types of jobs, but it will certainly become common throughout the organization as we learn all of the things AI can do," he said. "If it can be used to make our employees more productive and have a positive impact on the organization and our members, we will consider it. In some areas it could become commonplace within the next year, but throughout the cooperative it could take 3 to 5 years or more to be fully integrated in a safe and secure way."

Beyond grid operations, East River Electric is also trying out Microsoft CoPilot, an AI-powered assistant built into programs like Word, Excel, Outlook and Teams. A few employees are currently testing it to see how it might improve productivity and workflow, especially in communications and marketing departments.

Ultimately, if AI can streamline a process, predict an issue or improve service for electric cooperative members, May said it's worth considering. AI can be another tool in the cooperative tool belt that can make energy more reliable, services faster and operations more efficient.

"Over the next 5 to 10 years, AI's role in electric cooperatives is poised to grow significantly, driven by the need for efficiency, grid reliability and sustainability amid rising energy demands and technological advancements," said May. "Just the advancements that have been made in the last three years have been astounding to watch, and as more and more data centers and large language models are built in the coming years, it will become something that cooperatives likely use on a daily basis."



## AI PUT INTO ACTION

Electric cooperatives are already using artificial intelligence (AI) and augmented reality (AR) for key tasks and activities. Looking ahead, co-ops see great potential for AI and AR as helpful tools for improving grid reliability and the services they provide to consumer-members.

### SERVICES FOR MEMBERS

AI tools like chatbots can enhance member interactions and provide a tailored experience based on energy use data.

### WEATHER FORECASTING

With the help of AI, weather forecasts will become more accurate, pinpointing areas to station utility crews.

### EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Through augmented reality, or AR, lineworkers can experience interactive, lifelike trainings, rather than watching a video or webinar.



Photo by Jessie Tucker

# ELECTRIC VEHICLES

## Is an EV Right for Your Needs?

**Jacob Boyko**

[jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop](mailto:jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop)

As electric vehicle infrastructure improves in South Dakota, you may be wondering: is it finally time to jump on board the EV bandwagon?

EVs offer many lucrative benefits to their owners. They mark an end to the tedious oil changes, and you're likely to take on fewer expenses to maintain the vehicle — and that's all while you're getting the combustion engine-equivalent of 100 miles to the gallon.

It's a deal lucrative enough that EV registration has surged in the U.S. to more than four million vehicles on the road in 2024, with that number expected to grow exponentially over the next decade. Florida, Texas and Washington each already have more than 100,000 EVs registered, and California reports more than one million.

Meanwhile in South Dakota, it's still fairly irregular that you'll see an electric vehicle (with in-state plates) driving around your community. In fact, the South Dakota Department of Transportation records only about 1,400 fully-electric vehicles on the road, even as charging infrastructure increases.

"You do have range anxiety — that is something that happens," said Matt Hotzler, manager of H-D Electric Cooperative in Clear Lake, who regularly takes the co-op's Tesla Model 3 on business trips across the state.

South Dakota's weather makes planning a trip in an electric vehicle a little more hands-on. Temperature, wind speeds, climate control and headlights all affect how frequently you have to stop to add some joules.

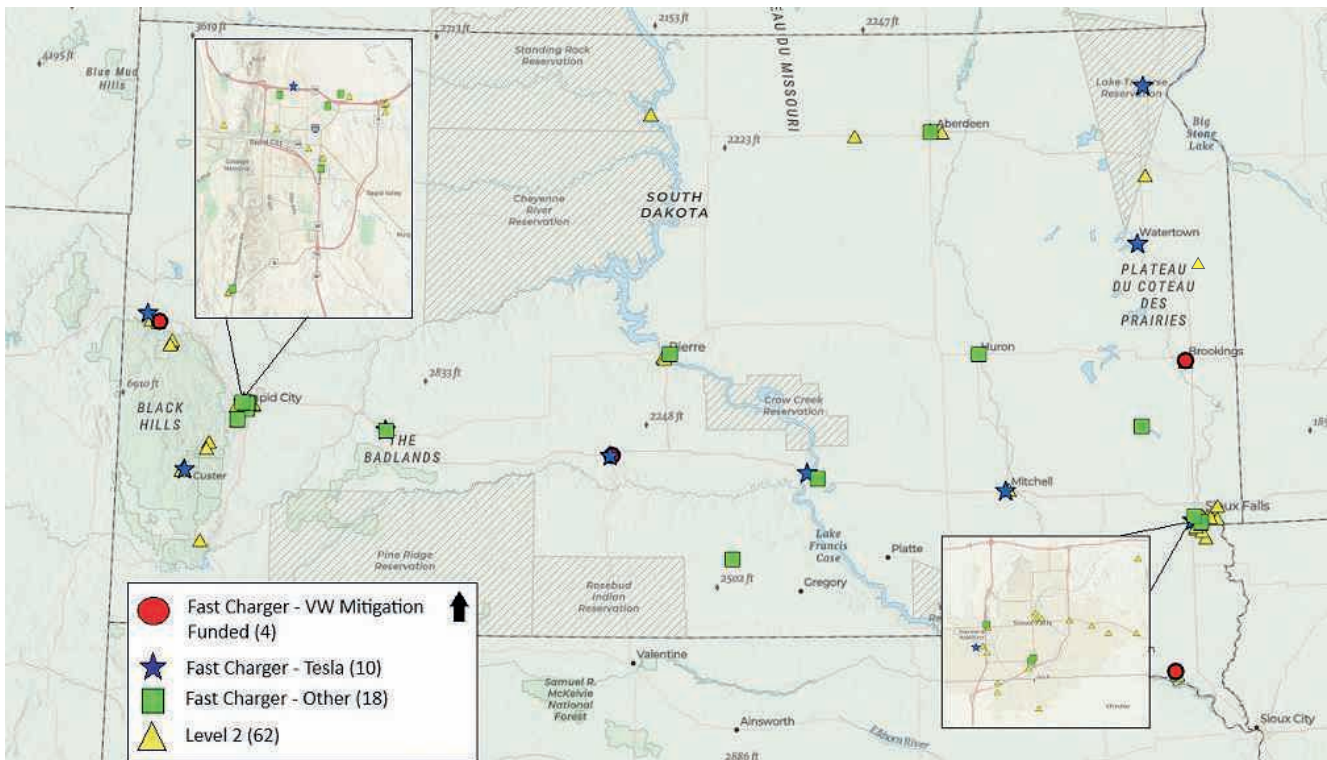
Luckily, the stops aren't usually long, Hotzler said, with his Tesla planning several

stops along a route to do partial charges — about ten minutes at a time — before hitting the road again.

While the public charging stations are convenient for out-of-town travels, it's where one giant plus to owning an EV — low operating costs — begins to erode.

Jessie Tucker, manager of member services at West Central Electric Cooperative in Murdo, recalls his surprise on a trip last winter to Rapid City when he stopped to charge the co-op's Ford F-150 Lightning and discovered his charging rate was nearly 68¢ per kWh — more than five times what it would cost to charge at home. Driving 80 mph in the winter weather and averaging about 1.3 miles per kWh, Tucker calculated the combustion engine-equivalent would be about \$9.41 per gallon.

"It would be tough for me to own one (personally) at this point," Tucker said. "If you're a daily commuter and you're getting home every night, then owning an EV does make sense. If you can charge overnight at your own house, it is still approximately half the cost of \$2.85 fuel."



Electric Vehicle charging stations in South Dakota.  
Graphic courtesy of South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

In western South Dakota, West River Electric Association offers members an EV charging incentive — with some stipulations.

“It’s like the old cell phone plans where they would have unlimited nights and weekends,” joked Adam Daigle, manager of communications and public relations at West River Electric in Wall.

“Members with an electric vehicle can pay \$33 per month for unlimited charging on nights (9 p.m.- 7 a.m.) and on weekends. So in a sense, you can drive all month for \$33.”

The incentive is designed to encourage charging during off-peak times when there is less strain on the electric grid while also helping members interested in electric vehicles make the switch.

“I think EVs are great cars for commuting,” Daigle said. “If you stay within range of that battery, where you don’t have to hit a level three charger, they’re fantastic.”

Another factor to consider if you’re thinking about an electric vehicle: you’ll need somewhere indoors to charge it.

The lithium-ion batteries found in EVs will not charge as quickly in cold weather.

Though many EVs have systems to warm the battery before charging, a heated garage is still the most convenient and efficient way to charge, and can prevent cold-weather charging degradation on your battery.

“When I drive my Tesla to work and it sits out in the really cold weather for a big part of the day – 8 to 10 hours – I do see some battery used during that time to keep things warm,” H-D Electric’s Hotzler added. “You have to be careful of the batteries getting so cold.”

Another necessity: a 240-volt plug for level 2 charging. While you can charge an electric vehicle with a standard 120-volt outlet, it could take more than a day to reach a full charge.

After five years of driving the Tesla Model 3, Hotzler is a fan of the technology, and recommends it as a daily driver.

“I’d recommend an EV for a household using it for a back and forth commute – just not any extremely long trips,” Hotzler said. “For an everyday driver, it works really well. They drive fast, they’re zippy, there’s hardly any maintenance. I’ve just had a really positive experience.”

## EV Charging Explained

**Level 1 charging** uses a standard 120-volt outlet. Level 1 charging is the slowest charging speed, adding about 3-5 miles of range per hour. This is not recommended, and is typically used in residential settings.

**Level 2 charging** uses a 240-volt outlet – the same as your stove or dryer. This is the more practical solution, adding about 12-30 miles of range per hour and is enough to charge many EVs overnight. This is recommended for residential settings. Many public charging stations also feature level 2 chargers.

**Level 3 charging**, or DC fast chargers, are the quickest way to charge, taking just a half hour to charge the battery to 80%. Using these chargers can cost as much or more than a tank of gas. Speeds range from 50 kW to 350 kW. These stations are placed along major highways, including I-29 and I-90.

Source: driveelectricsd.com, How-To Geek

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### UNTIL OCT. 31

**Wallace Dow, Prairie Architect Traveling Exhibit**  
Lake County Museum  
Madison, SD  
605-256-5308

### SEPT. 2, OCT. 4

**Davis Indoor/Outdoor Flea Market & Vendor Fair**  
9 a.m.-3 p.m.  
Davis American Legion  
Davis, SD  
605-351-3074

### SEPT. 5-7

**James Valley Threshing Show & Tractor Club**  
Threshermen's Park  
Andover, SD  
www.jamesvalleythreshers.com

### SEPT. 7

**Farmer Tractor Parade**  
1 p.m.  
Tractors, Cars & Food  
Farmer, SD

### SEPT. 7

**Homesteader Day Celebration**  
Pioneer Demonstrations  
1-4 p.m.  
Beaver Creek Nature Area  
Valley Springs, SD

### SEPT. 13-14

**Harvest & Kuchen Festival**  
Delmont, SD  
www.twinriversoldiron.org

### SEPT. 13-14

**South Dakota Senior Softball Tournament**  
Huron, SD  
605-295-2039  
www.southdakotaseniorgames.org

### SEPT. 19

**Veterans Stand Down**  
SD Military Alliance  
8:30-11:30 a.m.  
1600 W. Russell St.  
Sioux Falls, SD

### SEPT. 19-20

**Holiday Arts Fall Craft Show**  
Davison Cty Fairgrounds  
Mitchell, SD  
605-770-8136

### SEPT. 19-20

**SiouxperCon Annual Convention**  
Benefits Make-A-Wish, REACH Literacy, JY6 Foundation  
Sioux Falls Convention Center  
Sioux Falls, SD

### SEPT. 26-28

**Coal Springs Threshing Bee Featuring Horse-Drawn Equipment**  
Meadow, SD  
605-788-2229

### SEPT. 27

**Your Race, Your Pace**  
9:30 a.m.  
Wylie Park  
Aberdeen, SD

### SEPT. 27

**Wheelin' To Wall Cycling Event**  
Wall, SD  
www.wheelintowall.com

### SEPT. 27

**Ag Day**  
Roundup Arena  
Belle Fourche, SD

### OCT. 3

**DSU Architecture Walking Tour**  
3-4 p.m.  
Lake County Museum  
Madison, SD

### OCT. 4

**Pumpkin Train, Vendor Showcase**  
Prairie Village  
Madison, SD

**Note: We publish contact information as provided. If no phone number is given, none will be listed. Please call ahead to verify the event is still being held.**