

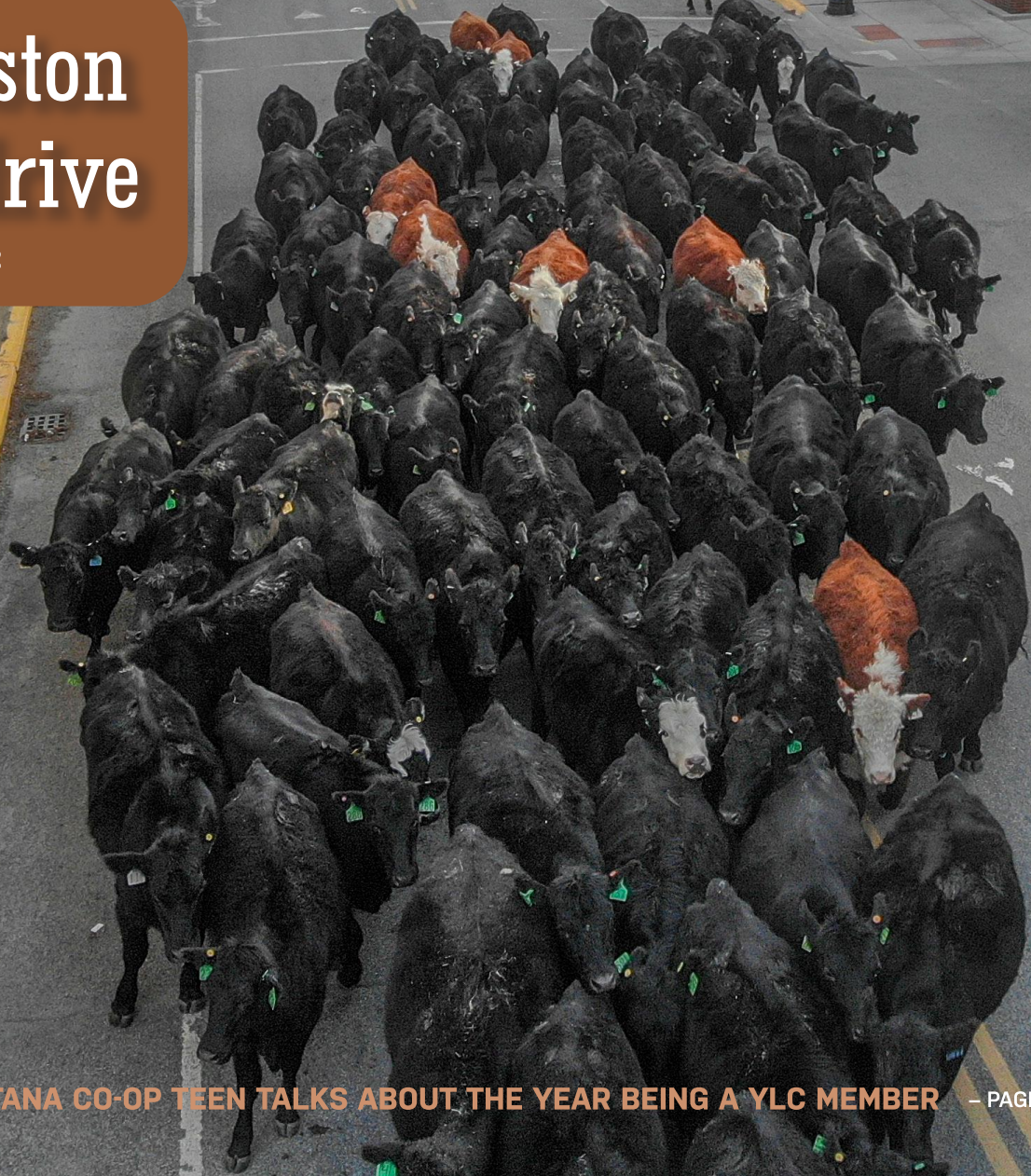


# Rural Montana

Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association Magazine | APRIL 2026

## Livingston cattle drive

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Cattle Drive

Co-op rancher takes cows through Livingston

Rural Montana

April 2026

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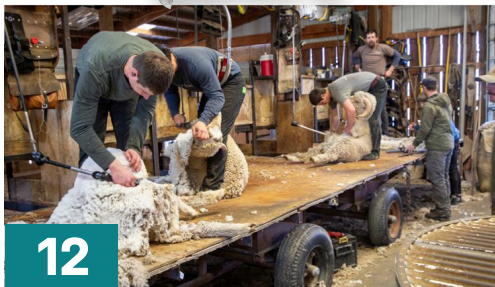
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Made in the USA

Co-op members take wool from sheep to shirt



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Look Up

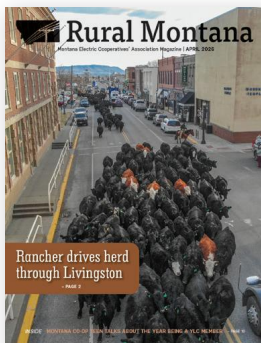
A reminder to watch for powerlines while in the field



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Year as YLC

Youth leader recalls experiences in D.C., Nashville



Rancher drives herd through Livingston

COVER

About our cover: Jesson Rock N Ranch cattle make their way down Park Street in Livingston. | PHOTO BY RYAN HALL



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# THE CO-OP RESOLUTIONS PROCESS: Make your voice count

MARK LAMBRECHT, CEO of Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association



ONE of the great things about being a member of an electric cooperative is that you have a voice in how the state and national co-op organizations operate. One way that happens is through the cooperative resolutions process.

Last month, representatives from your co-op and the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association (MECA) traveled to Nashville for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) annual meeting. At that meeting, co-op leaders from across the country reviewed and adopted dozens of resolutions submitted by electric cooperatives.

These resolutions help guide the work of MECA and NRECA. They provide direction on important issues such as legislative and regulatory advocacy, cooperative operations and community support. For example, some resolutions encourage federal agencies to maintain preference for co-ops for power purchases and transmission access. Others seek to protect availability of hydropower, support tax policies that benefit cooperative financing organizations, and promote youth programs and scholarships.

The resolutions process starts with co-op members. If you have an idea for a resolution, you can share it with your local co-op board. If the board supports the idea, it can be brought forward to the MECA Resolutions Committee, which reviews proposals at its annual

fall meeting before they're approved by the members present at the meeting.

There's a similar path for national resolutions. Ideas from members move from local co-op boards to MECA and then on to NRECA, where they are first reviewed at regional meetings. From there, they may be considered by national committees that focus on legislative issues, regulatory matters, and cooperative management and community programs. Ultimately, proposals approved by the national committees go to the NRECA annual business meeting, where delegates from co-ops across the country vote on which resolutions become official policy.

Montana's cooperatives have a leadership role in this process. Chris Christensen, a director at NorVal Electric Cooperative, serves on the NRECA Board of Directors, and I serve on the NRECA Legislative Committee.

I encourage co-op members to stay engaged in this important process. If you'd like to review the MECA or NRECA resolutions books, please email [meca@mtco-ops.com](mailto:meca@mtco-ops.com). And if you have an idea for a new resolution — or a change to an existing one — please share it with your co-op board's district representative. Your voice helps shape the future of the cooperative network. RM

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# On the mooove

## Rancher drives cattle through downtown Livingston

STORY AND PHOTOS BY RYAN HALL | RURAL MONTANA EDITOR

**O**N Valentine's Day, early morning visitors to Livingston experienced a Montana "traffic jam," as 400 head of cattle were walked down Park Street on their way from grazing ground to the Jesson Rock N Ranch just west of town.

Police cleared the main drive, and friends and family blocked the side streets as the cows made the short trek through town on their 5-mile journey. From there, they went under I-90 and headed home.

"It went really good," said Matt Jesson, a Park Electric Cooperative board trustee and owner of the ranch. "We were done and eating breakfast back home by 10 a.m."

He said this was the fifth year the cows have been run through town. Prior to that, the Jessons hauled their cattle. However, years of corrals in the flats being drifted over with snow, workers being stepped on and poles being snapped by plows was enough to convince the Jessons to do an old-fashioned cattle drive. Jesson said it's faster, typically goes smoothly and all the crew members get home earlier without their feet being smashed by cows.

"That many cows, it'd probably take two days to haul them all," he said, noting that about half of the cows this year were a neighbor's heifers.

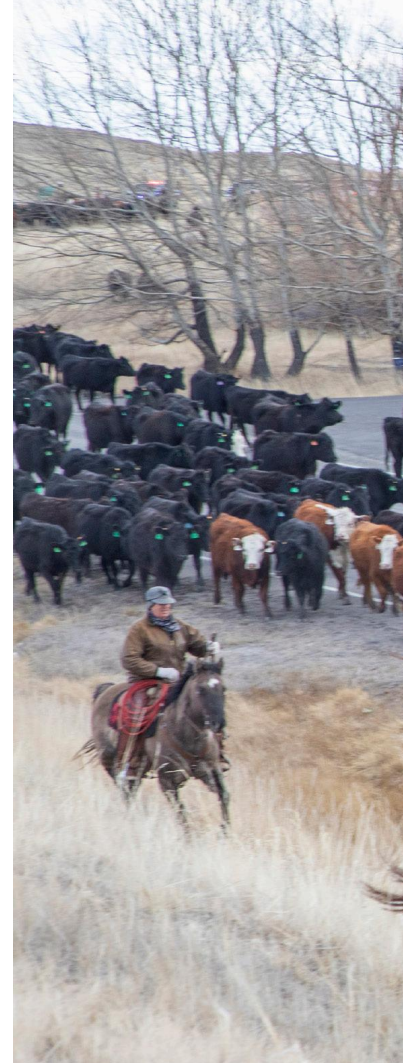
The clear, although chilly, morning was perfect for the cattle drive, Jesson added.

"(The weather) has been unreal," he said.

The streets were also mostly clear, as the

Jessons did their best to keep the date and time of the drive quiet. Jesson said the less people on the street, the smoother the drive goes, though most people in town are understanding and try to stay out of the way while watching.

"It's no big deal in Wilsall or Clyde Park, they do it all the time. For some reason, it turned into a big deal here," he said with a laugh. RM



**RIGHT:** Cows from the Jesson Rock N Ranch move down Highway 10 after walking through Livingston on their way back to the ranch.



**ABOVE:** A ranch worker monitors the cows as they pass the "Entering Livingston" sign on their way to the ranch outside of town.

**LEFT:** A Montana traffic jam at the on-ramps to I-90 occurred for a few minutes as the cows moseyed through the intersection on their way home.



Rural Montana file graphic

SPRAYER **BOOM WIDTH: 90'-130'**

Sprayers have a turning radius ranging from 29'-32', and the booms when raised are approximately 8' off the ground when they turn.

# FARMING DANGER

## KEEP LARGE FARM EQUIPMENT AWAY FROM POWERLINES

**COOPERATIVES** across the state are seeing an increase in powerlines being struck by farm machinery. One co-op reported the increase in powerline hits in its area is due to newer machinery being taller and having additional features.

The standard powerline over farmland is 15.5 feet high. Some new combines, grain carts and augers easily eclipse that height. Additionally, the travel height of air seeders and the height of booms on sprayers when raised to take corners also puts them in danger of impacting powerlines. Some

new sprayers automatically raise the booms when cornering, which already has caused powerline hits at one electric co-op.

Please take the time to look at the information on this page, and if you think your equipment may be taller than the powerlines on your property, call your cooperative BEFORE you accidentally get too close. Remember, a single-phase line that runs over your property can carry a dangerous 7,200 volts of electricity. RM

## A FEW COMMONLY USED OVERSIZED MACHINES

**REMEMBER: TYPICAL ROAD AND FIELD ELECTRICAL POWERLINE HEIGHT IS 15'6"**



### LOADER

**APPROXIMATE OPERATING HEIGHT: 15'6"** (bucket raised)

Add another 6' to 7' if the bucket has a grapple fork.



### GRAIN CART

**APPROXIMATE OPERATING HEIGHTS: 16'6" TO 17'9"**

Maximum auger height measured to the bottom of the downspout.



### COMBINE

**APPROXIMATE OPERATING HEIGHT: 16'6"**

A typical operating width of a combine harvester is 17'8".



## Lineworkers ready when it matters most

by Jason Brothen, CEO



Brothen

**A**s CEO of Lower Yellowstone Rural Electric Cooperative (LYREC), I get to see what it really takes to keep the lights on for our members. Every April, we take a little extra time to recognize the lineworkers who make that happen day in and day out.

When a storm hits and the power goes out, most people see it as an inconvenience.

Our lineworkers see it as “go time.” They have to leave whatever they are doing, often heading out in tough weather to get power restored safely and as quickly as they can. That kind of dedication doesn’t just happen. It comes from many hours of training, experience and a strong commitment to the people we serve.

What makes it even more meaningful is they’re not just restoring power to members. They’re restoring power to their own friends, family, neighbors and communities. They live here. Their kids go to school here. They know electricity isn’t just a convenience.

It keeps our farms running, businesses open, schools operating and emergency services ready. Powering the places we call home is personal.

Electric cooperatives like LYREC were built by neighbors helping neighbors, and our lineworkers live that out every day. They’re often the first ones out and the last ones back, putting in long hours. And when needed, they travel to other cooperatives to offer mutual aid. That teamwork makes the whole cooperative family stronger.

We know it’s frustrating when the lights go out, and we truly appreciate your patience and support when it happens. Linework is tough, physical and can be dangerous work. Our crews take safety seriously and rely on each other every step of the way. They take pride in doing the job right and getting power restored.

On April 13, we will celebrate Lineworker Appreciation Day, but they deserve more than just one day.

To our lineworkers: Thank you for showing up, for being ready and for caring so much about the communities we serve. We’re proud of you and grateful for all you do. ■



## Policy priorities for electric cooperatives

**A**merican families and businesses count on reliable electricity at a price they can afford. But with the demand for power continuing to climb and the supply of always-available power sources at risk, smart energy policies are more important than ever.

At Lower Yellowstone Rural Electric Cooperative (LYREC), our job goes beyond keeping the lights on day to day. We are responsible for advocating on behalf of our members in Washington, D.C., to make sure decisions being made at the federal level protect reliable, affordable power in our local communities.

As we head into 2026, America's electric cooperatives are focused on a few key issues that directly impact our members:

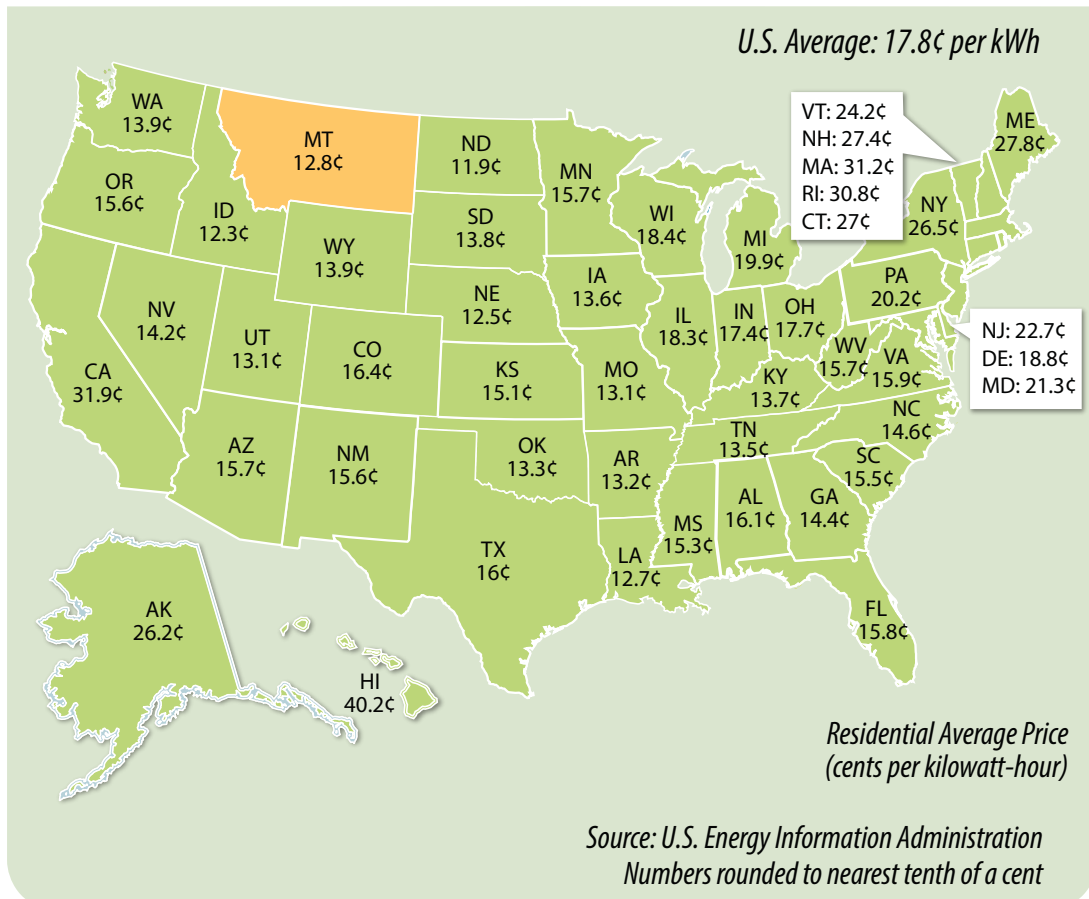
- **Faster disaster recovery:** We support the bipartisan FEMA Act of 2025. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is a critical partner in helping electric co-ops restore power and rebuild their systems in the wake of natural disasters, but it could be more effective and responsive to the needs of rural America. If the FEMA Act passes, it will help utilities restore power more quickly after storms and disasters, while keeping costs lower for rural families and businesses.
- **Cutting through red tape:** Outdated and overly complex permitting rules slow down essential upgrades to power lines and substations. Streamlining these processes helps us keep up with growing demand and improve reliability. We're urging Congress to pass comprehensive permitting reforms, including the SPEED Act and PERMIT Act, both of which cleared the U.S. House in December 2025.

- **Keeping reliable power plants online:** We're advocating for realistic energy regulations that don't force dependable power plants to shut down before reliable replacements are ready. Mandating emissions limits based on unavailable technology would force critical power plants off the grid and restrict the operation of new natural gas plants.
- **Protecting critical hydropower:** Hydroelectric dams in the Pacific Northwest play a key role in keeping electricity reliable and affordable across multiple states. Removing them would raise costs and threaten reliability, which is why we support preserving the Lower Snake River Dams.
- **Smarter land management policies:** We're advocating for smarter land-management policies like the Fix Our Forests Act that would allow electric cooperatives to better maintain power lines on public lands and mitigate wildfire risk.
- **Maintaining funding for grid innovation and investments:** Federal loan and grant programs help co-ops strengthen the grid, prepare for extreme weather, improve cybersecurity and explore new energy technologies without shifting costs to members.

While you may not consider it on a daily basis, electricity is essential and underpins nearly every aspect of modern life. Understanding today's evolving energy landscape is important as it shapes how electricity is produced, delivered and consumed. Advocating on behalf of LYREC's members is a critical part of our commitment to you. These policy priorities all come back to the same goal: making sure our members have safe, reliable and affordable power now and in the future. ■

## Average Prices for Residential Electricity

November 2025 figures, in cents per kWh



### ELECTRIC RATES:

## How does Montana compare?

**A**cross the United States, thousands of people work every minute of every day to keep the power flowing 24/7/365. From the coal miner to the lineworker and everyone in-between, it takes an immense amount of people, resources, coordination and planning to ensure you can charge your cellphone, heat your home, dry your grain or turn on your lights.

The cost of that electricity is determined by several factors, from the price of poles and wires to the expense of generating and delivering power.

In Montana, electric cooperative rate making is a function of local electric co-op boards of directors, which are democratically elected from the membership by the co-op members. Electric co-op boards weigh

many factors when determining rates and balancing reliability, safety and affordability.

When an electric cooperative board of directors votes to increase rates, directors are also raising their own electric rates, because they, too, are members of the cooperative. This is one of the hallmark advantages of the cooperative model.

And, those democratically elected directors have done a good job, if you consider the price of retail electricity. Montanans enjoy one of the lowest electricity rates in the country, averaging 12.8 cents per kilowatt-hour. Here at Lower Yellowstone Rural Electric Cooperative, our rate is even lower at just 7.4 cents per kilowatt-hour! ■



## Spring into energy savings

**S**pring is a perfect time to refresh your energy habits and find simple ways to save. As temperatures warm, a few small adjustments can help lower your energy bills, while keeping your home comfortable. Lower Yellowstone Rural Electric Cooperative (LYREC) is here to help members use energy wisely all year long.

Start by scheduling a spring tune-up for your heating and cooling system, and clear dirt and debris from around your outdoor air-conditioning unit to maintain proper airflow. Regular maintenance keeps your system running efficiently, extends its lifespan and helps prevent costly breakdowns during peak heating and cooling seasons.

Ceiling fans are another easy way to save. In warmer months, set blades to rotate counterclockwise to create a cooling breeze so you can raise the thermostat a few degrees. When it's cooler, switch them clockwise to help circulate warm air. Even adjusting the thermostat by two or three degrees can make a noticeable difference.

Spring is also a good time to clean your refrigerator's condenser coils. When the coils are clean, the unit runs more efficiently, using less energy. Shortening showers can reduce both energy and water use.

Finally, remember electric usage continues to climb. Unplug chargers and small appliances when not in use to cut down on "phantom" energy use.

Small changes this spring can add up to meaningful savings, and LYREC is here with tips to help you manage your electric bills. ■



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## MONTANA U.S. REPRESENTATIVES

In order to allow ample space for responses, Rural Montana alternates asking Montana's senators and representatives the Dateline D.C. question each month. This month features the representatives. Next month, we will ask a question of the state's two senators.

## THIS MONTH'S QUESTION:

"Cyber threats to electricity infrastructure such as substations and even the power grid itself are a growing concern for utilities. What can Congress do to develop a more comprehensive cybersecurity strategy to protect critical infrastructure like electricity?"

THE SAME QUESTION WAS ASKED TO MONTANA'S TWO U.S. SENATORS IN RM'S LAST MONTH'S EDITION

**Rep. Downing**

1037 Longworth, House  
Office Building,  
Washington, D.C. 20515  
<https://downing.house.gov>  
Ph: (202) 225-3211?

## Representative Troy Downing


**G**RID security is national security. Now more than ever, it is critical that America works to future-proof our grid to address cyber threats and increasing transmission demands.

One immediate step Congress can take to protect our grid from cyber threats is to fully fund the Department of Homeland Security. At present, DHS is shut down, leaving the fate of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency and its employees mired in uncertainty. You'll be pleased to know that I have now voted twice to fund the agency, and stand ready to do so again.

Another piece of legislation making its way

through the House is the Cyber PIVOTT Act. This bill would establish a scholarship program for students pursuing careers in cybersecurity.

Looking forward, I welcome input from Montana's electric co-ops as Congress works to strengthen grid security and reliability. If you have a question, require assistance or would like to learn more about arranging a meeting with me or my staff, please give us a call or stop by any one of our offices in Helena, Billings or Washington.

Every day, I am humbled to serve you. It is truly the honor of a lifetime. 

**Rep. Zinke**


512 Cannon House  
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## Representative Ryan Zinke

**C**YBER threats to our energy infrastructure are growing more sophisticated by the day. Our electric grid, substations and control systems are prime targets for adversaries like China, Russia and Iran that are actively probing American networks for vulnerabilities. These systems power hospitals, military bases, businesses and homes across the country. A successful cyberattack on the grid would not just shut off the lights, it would disrupt our economy, threaten public safety and weaken national security. Protecting critical infrastructure like our power system must be treated as a top priority.

Right now, one of the biggest gaps in that defense is the Democrats shutdown of the Department of Homeland Security. DHS and its cybersecurity arm were built to coordinate with utilities, share threat intelligence and help defend critical infrastructure from digi-

tal attacks. When that capability goes offline, so does one of the federal government's most important early warning systems. Reopening DHS and restoring its full cybersecurity mission is an essential first step in building a serious national strategy to protect the grid and other critical infrastructure.

Congress should move quickly to reopen DHS and ensure it has the tools to work hand-in-hand with the private sector operators who run our energy systems. Utilities need timely threat information, clear coordination with federal agencies and the resources to secure industrial control systems that were never designed for today's cyber battlefield. Cyber warfare is the next frontier of conflict, and keeping DHS fully operational ensures we are not fighting that battle with one hand tied behind our back. 



Savannah Nelson, a junior at Beaverhead County High School in Dillon, was chosen as Montana's Youth Leadership Council (YLC) representative in 2025. She participated in virtual meetings with the other YLCs and most recently attended the NRECA PowerXchange annual meeting in March, in Nashville.

# Year as YLC

Co-op student recalls lessons from leadership program

STORY BY RYAN HALL | RURAL MONTANA EDITOR

**L**EADERSHIP skills and life lessons were among the things Savannah Nelson learned in her year as Montana's Youth Leadership Council (YLC) representative.

Savannah, a junior at Beaverhead County High School in Dillon, was sponsored by Vigilante Electric on the annual National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) Youth Tour. While on that trip, she filled out an application and gave a speech, hoping to become the state's YLC. She did just that.

Each state's Youth Tour delegation and/or chaperones elect one YLC, who participates in virtual meetings with the other YLCs, travels to Washington,

D.C. with them, and then joins them at the NRECA PowerXchange annual meeting in March to learn leadership skills and work at the event. This year's PowerXchange was held in Nashville.

"I feel like this trip and experience has given me more hands-on leadership experience," Savannah said during a break between sessions in Nashville.

## Becoming YLC

Savannah said Jackie Sutton of Lima, a role model and mentor to her, pushed her to apply for the Youth Tour, and eventually YLC. However, Sutton told Savannah the competition was usually tough and not to get her hopes up.

"That actually motivated me to get

it," Savannah said.

She worked hard to memorize her speech, and was the only YLC candidate to recite the speech completely from memory.

## A tale of two trips

Savannah said that though the Youth Tour and YLC trips both occurred in D.C., they were very different. The Youth Tour trip focused on experiences and learning about the country and cooperatives. YLC was more training oriented.

"It was more like the (Youth Tour) group went to see the Capitol and learn stories of how the nation came to be," she said. "YLC was less tours. We

learned from other leaders and learned how to build our own leadership skills.”

She said that through various trainings on her return trip to D.C. and in Nashville she learned a lot about herself. For instance, Savannah said she likes to always be busy, and stopping or sitting down feels like a waste of time. Others need rest, or time to think, before taking action.

The YLC trip focused on each student finding their own leadership style and learning how to make that work best with other leadership styles to form a strong team. She also learned that leadership strengths can become weaknesses, for instance if someone takes control in a group setting and doesn't let others use their strengths to shine and help the team.

“(The program) helped me regulate how I am in a (team) project, and hold back my strengths sometimes, and recognize who can do what,” Savannah said.

### Forming bonds

Along the way, the YLC reps from across the country tried out new experiences together, learned about their similarities and differences, and became close friends. Through mastering leadership tactics and public speaking, tackling team-building exercises like an elevated ropes course, and even learning dinner etiquette, the group came together and formed friendships.

“Everybody cares so much for each other, it's almost like a family,” Savannah said.

She said she learned to talk about herself and her feelings, something she has struggled with in the past.

“I definitely feel like when I'm in school, I feel like I'm different. I feel awkward with people,” Savannah said.

The YLC program has helped her feel more comfortable having one-on-one conversations, especially with those she doesn't know well, and to be more open.

“It's been a really good experience,” Savannah said. “I think I've gotten more confident in myself.”



“

It's been a really good experience. I think I've gotten more confident in myself.

– Savannah Nelson,

Montana's Youth Leadership Council representative

”

Through the YLC program, Savannah has also become a much more confident public speaker. Her YLC candidate speech last year at Youth Tour orientation was only her second speech. When she delivered a speech at the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association Annual Meeting in October, that was her first time on stage.

Last month, she stood on stage in Nashville in front of thousands of co-op leaders, first to carry the American flag during the opening ceremonies of the first general session, and later to introduce herself as Montana's YLC.

She also learned to network, and was exposed to different cultures in Nashville. She said that every adult

co-op leader she met in Nashville was supportive, and seemed genuinely interested in what she had to say.

“It's really nice to come here and have so many adults want to help you with your future career,” Savannah said.

Prior to the Youth Tour and YLC, Savannah never saw herself working for an electric cooperative. And while she is still undecided on her future career, she no longer excludes co-ops from the possibilities.

“I am all for the cooperative business model,” she said, noting the way electric cooperatives support rural communities really appeals to her.

### Looking to the future

Savannah said she hopes that any Montana students who are eligible consider the Youth Tour, and that anyone who goes on the trip takes the opportunity to apply for YLC, even if it means stepping outside their comfort zone.

“I don't think we can improve society if we don't give our young people the opportunity to step outside their bubble,” she said.

And while she doesn't yet know what career she wants to pursue, Savannah said that through the Youth Tour and YLC programs, she has learned that it will likely be connected in some way to electricity.

“I feel like electricity goes hand-in-hand with everything,” she said. RM

# Shear Madness

Dillon-area family brings local wool to U.S. made clothing

STORY AND PHOTOS BY RYAN HALL | RURAL MONTANA EDITOR

**T**HERE is only one made-in-the-USA wool brand from sheep to clothing in the United States, and it's based just outside Dillon.

Duckworth clothing is co-owned by Vigilante Electric Cooperative member John Helle, whose family shears nearly 10,000 sheep each year to provide about 80,000 pounds of wool for the clothing brand. They also buy another 180,000-plus pounds of U.S. wool. The wool is spun, dyed and stitched in factories across the U.S., said Evan Helle, John's son. He noted that Duckworth products are produced in more than 30 factories across 17 states, with many of the factories specializing in one part of the process or one garment. Products include everything from socks and base-layer garments to performance wear and coats.

"We've taken the itchiness out of it and developed wool for next to your skin, which is the best place to put it," John said.

The Helles raise Rambouillet-Merino sheep, which produce a very fine wool. Generations of refining genetics have made the Duckworth wool finer, softer and less itchy than most other wool produced in the U.S. That itchy blanket many people remember from their youth is not among the many Duckworth products.

"Not on this ranch," John said with a laugh.

## In the beginning

John's grandfather started the ranch in the late 1920s or early 1930s, adding adjoining land as he could.

"Land was cheap if you wanted to work hard," John said.

He noted that between the ranch-



**ABOVE:** Duckworth clothing owner John Helle checks wool after it was removed from a sheep. **LEFT:** The crimps in this wool gives it an elastic property when it is made into yarn. | PHOTOS BY RYAN HALL

land and leases, their sheep now have access to about 100,000 acres of grazing land, including federal mountain land leases.

"One thing people don't realize is that the mountains are actively managed by agriculture. The national

forest summer grazing allotments allow us to have the ranch. If we didn't have the allotments, we would be a quarter of the size we are," Evan said, adding the ranch appreciates being able to team with the U.S. Forest Service to manage the land.

"That what makes what we do so sustainable," he said.

In 2014, John Helle, John Edwards, Graham Stewart and Rob Bernthal formed Duckworth clothing to vertically integrate the wool business,



**ABOVE:** Part of the Helle family's flock waits to be sheared. **LEFT:** A shearer works on a young ram. | **PHOTOS BY RYAN HALL**

“(The Montana Wool Lab) has just been instrumental in helping us apply the technology,” John said.

### A new age of wool

The Helles note that Duckworth is a different kind of wool clothing company than most people would expect. Longjohn base-layers, athletic moisture-wicking clothing, sweatshirts that stay tight at the waist and cuffs without elastic, various coats and high-performance wool socks are all in the product line.

John said that while many people think of wool socks as bulky and tending to fall down, that isn't the case anymore. Modern wool socks hold their shape, are lightweight and more comfortable.

“The wool sock business in America has been really good,” John said. “The socks are the gateway drug to wool (products). People try the wool socks then move to base-wear.”

Evan said that Duckworth clothing is pricier than some options because of its quality and durability. As he spoke, the Helles worked on the line moving wool back and forth, all wearing Duckworth shirts, coats or sweatshirts that had stood up to the elements and various hazards of working with sheep and machinery day after day.

“American factories have a style of overbuilding (the products they produce), so our products are made to last,” Evan said. RM

## Duckworth

See the full line of Duckworth clothing online at [www.duckworthco.com](http://www.duckworthco.com)

set of young rams. Each time a shearer grabs a ram, one of the Helles uses a wand to read the ear tag on the sheep. A label is printed and paired with the wool once it is sheared. The wool is then laid out on a round table with slats in it. Crew members shake any dirt off the wool and pick out any bad pieces. From there, it is taken to a station to be checked for quality.

John's brother Tom takes a small sample of the wool and gives it to Liz Maxwell of the Montana Wool Lab at Montana State University (MSU) – one of only two such labs in the country. Maxwell scans the label and puts the sample in a machine, which scans it and records the length, thickness, curvature, crimp (elasticity), comfort factor (averaging 100 percent this day) and other data. A larger sample will be tested at the lab later for strength. That data can then be used by the Helles to refine the genetics of the herd to continue producing the best wool.

making a truly Made-In-America product.

The mission statement is simple: *To revitalize the American wool industry through American manufacturing.*

“We pretty much are the only ones in the U.S. doing what we do,” Evan said.

The company started with a retail store model until the pandemic hit in 2020, and many stores closed their doors for months.

“We had to pivot our whole company around to online direct,” John said. “It was the perfect model.”

The ranch and Duckworth are family businesses with John, Evan, Evan's brother Weston and John's brother Tom all working on different phases of the operation. Evan has a business management degree, John has an animal science background, Tom is the tech manager and Weston has a range-science degree.

### More than just shearing

Wool production is a science at the ranch. Everything is done with the goal of producing the best wool for each product, and ensuring that future generations of sheep are even better at it than today's generation.

On this day, there are four shearers, all from Montana, working through a



**1st**  
PLACE

## Maple Cookie Bars

Gaye Lynn Genereux | BIG SANDY

### INGREDIENTS

- |                                       |                                     |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>4 cups AP flour</b>                | <b>FROSTING:</b>                    |
| <b>2 tsp. baking soda</b>             | <b>1/3 cup butter</b>               |
| <b>1/2 tsp. salt</b>                  | <b>1/2 cup brown sugar</b>          |
| <b>1/2 cup butter, softened</b>       | <b>1/3 cup heavy cream</b>          |
| <b>1/2 cup cream cheese, softened</b> | <b>2 T real maple syrup</b>         |
| <b>1 cup brown sugar</b>              | <b>2 tsp. maple extract</b>         |
| <b>1 egg</b>                          | <b>3 cups powdered sugar</b>        |
| <b>1 cup maple syrup</b>              | <b>4 oz. cream cheese, softened</b> |
| <b>1 tsp. vanilla extract</b>         |                                     |
| <b>1/2 tsp. maple extract</b>         |                                     |

### DIRECTIONS

#### FOR BARS:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees and grease jellyroll pan.

Sift first three ingredients and mix well.

In a large bowl, cream the remaining ingredients, beating well after each addition. Add in the flour mixture and stir until well blended.

Spread the dough evenly in the jellyroll pan and bake for 24-26 minutes.

Cool and frost with maple-brown sugar frosting (see right).

#### FOR FROSTING:

Heat the butter and sugar in a small sauce pan, add the cream and maple syrup, and continue heating and stirring often until the mixture comes to a boil.

Remove from the heat and pour into a mixing bowl. Add the maple extract and the powdered sugar a cup at a time, beating with a mixer until smooth each time.

Add the cream cheese to the frosting and beat until smooth.



Photo submitted by Teresa Gaylord

**2nd**  
PLACE

## Creamy Chicken Enchiladas

Teresa Gaylord | KALISPELL

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 can (10 oz.) red enchilada sauce**
- 2-1/2 cups shredded chicken**
- 2 cups cheddar cheese, shredded**
- 2 cups Monterey Jack cheese, shredded**
- 8 oz. cream cheese, cut into 1/2-inch cubes**
- 1 can cream of chicken soup**
- 1 (1 oz.) pkg. fajita seasoning**
- 10 flour tortillas (6 inch)**

### DIRECTIONS

Heat oven to 375 degrees. Grease 13x9-inch baking dish. Spread 1/4 cup of the enchilada sauce in bottom of baking dish.

Combine chicken, 1 cup cheddar cheese, 1 cup Monterey Jack cheese, cream cheese, soup and seasoning.

Spoon slightly less than 1/2 cup filling onto each tortilla. Roll up tightly; place seam-side down in baking dish.

Drizzle with remaining Enchilada sauce. Cover and bake 15 minutes.

Sprinkle with remaining cheese. Bake uncovered 15 minutes, or until bubbly and lightly browned.



## SEND IN YOUR RECIPES

Recipes for *RM* magazine are submitted by cooperative members across the state. First, second and third place monthly winners are awarded \$30, \$20 and \$10 prizes, respectively. Send your recipes to *RM* Recipes, Box 3469, Great Falls, MT 59403, or email rural@mtco-ops.com. **Please include your name, hometown and an address. If you do not include this information, your submission will not be accepted.** For May send recipes for your favorite dishes that are saucy or use a gravy by April 16. Please send in June recipes anytime: *Your best specialty diet recipes (vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free)*. Try to limit the ingredients and length of directions for space. Please include a photo, if possible.

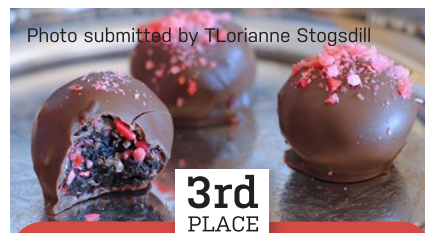


Photo submitted by TLorianne Stogsdill

**3rd**  
PLACE

## Exploding Oreo Bon-Bons

Lorianne Stogsdill | WHITEFISH

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 package (14 oz.) Oreos**
- 8 oz. cream cheese, softened**
- 12 oz. chocolate chips**
- Butter for melting chocolate**
- 6 pkgs. Pop Rocks, optional**

### DIRECTIONS

Crush (or process) Oreos into small pieces.

Transfer crumbs to a mixing bowl and add softened cream cheese. Mix until combined. Shape mixture into small balls, about 1 T each.

Roll each ball in Pop Rocks and place on a baking tray, and freeze for 10 minutes.

Melt chocolate chips with a little butter in the microwave or a double boiler. Dip the cold Oreo balls in the melted chocolate. Sprinkle extra Pop Rocks on top.

Store in the refrigerator or freezer. Makes about 2 dozen.



## SUBMIT YOUR EVENTS

To list an event, send it to: RM Events, PO Box 3469, Great Falls, MT 59403 or email us at: rural@mtco-ops.com — Submit items by April 16 for May events. Include date, time, site, city and contact number with your event. Events without such info will not be used.

### NORTHWEST

#### April 2

**Spring into Health and Safety Fair** — All ages, Bigfork Senior Center, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., free CPR/AED class on site from 9 to 10 a.m., | **KALISPELL**

#### April 9-12

**Pondera Players presents Fiddler on the Roof** — Orpheum Theatre, Thurs-Sat: 7 p.m., Sun: 2 p.m. | **CONRAD**

#### April 10-12

**60th Annual Creston Auction & County Fair** — Hwy. 35, Fri (consignment day): 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Sat (general auction): begins 9 a.m., Sun (vehicle, equipment and marine): begins 11 a.m., 250-7396. | **CRESTON**

#### April 14

**Northwest Montana Photographers meeting** — Columbia Falls Fellowship Church, 7 p.m. | **COLUMBIA FALLS**

#### April 18

**Teakettle Quilt Guild 2026 Quilt Show** — Glacier Gateway Elementary School, 9 a.m. to 3:45 p.m., 249-7216 | **COLUMBIA FALLS**

#### April 18

**South Fork Roundup of Cowboy Poetry and Music sponsored by the Augusta Area Historical Society** — Roundup Barn, 2 miles east of Augusta on Highway 21, 11 a.m., 403-9608 | **AUGUSTA**

#### April 18

**Flathead Valley Earth Day Expo 2026: Powering Our Future** — Flathead Valley Community College, Arts & Technology Building, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. | **KALISPELL**

#### April 20

**Westerners Int'l presents North Fork Homestead by Zach Block** — NW Montana History Museum, 6:30 to 8 p.m., 309-0958 | **KALISPELL**

#### April 21

**KalisPELL Women's Connection Luncheon** — Guest speaker is Karen Spalding, 1830 Hwy. 35, 11:30 a.m., call 261-9894 for reservations or information | **KALISPELL**

#### April 22

**Columbia Falls Women's Connection Luncheon** — Guest speaker is Karen Spalding, 827 9th St. West, 11:30 a.m., call 892-3621 for reservations | **COLUMBIA FALLS**

#### May 6

**Flathead Valley Community Band and Columbia Falls Community Choir Concert** — Flathead High School Auditorium, 7:30 p.m., 270-1696 | **KALISPELL**

#### May 16

**KalisPELL Senior Center Annual Tea Party Fundraiser** — 40 11th St. West, 11:30 a.m., 609-5351 | **KALISPELL**

#### May 18

**Westerners Int'l presents Battle of the Little Big Horn: 150 Years Later by Tim Christenson** — NW Montana History Museum, 6:30 to 8 p.m., 309-0958 | **KALISPELL**

### SOUTHWEST

#### April 2

**Cyber Safety Clinic** — University of Western Montana STC Great Room, 2 to 4:30 p.m., 663-5511 | **DILLON**

#### April 4

**American Legion Post and Auxillary Annual Easter Egg Hunt** — Lewis and Clark Park, 10 a.m., 369-8843 | **STEVENSVILLE**

#### April 7

**Wildlife Prevention Open House** — Nine Mile Community Center, 5 to 7 p.m., 626-4294 | **HUSON**

#### April 10

**Chamber After Hours** — Badger Archery, 5 to 7 p.m., 988-0035 | **DILLON**

#### April 18

**Spring Market** — Craft Market, Ravalli County Fairgrounds, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., 360-6743 | **HAMILTON**

#### April 18

**Rummage Sale** — Puzzles, games, craft supplies, Three Mile Community Center, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., 360-3385 | **STEVENSVILLE**

#### April 18

**Montana Rockies Bluegrass Association's Spring Festival & Fundraiser** — 19 bands playing from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m., The Neely Center, 821-3777, mtbluegrass.com | **VICTOR**

#### April 25

**Black, White & Read All Over - A boot-stomping shindig to benefit the North Valley Public Library** — The Barn on Pine Hollow, 5 to 8 p.m., 777-5061 | **STEVENSVILLE**

#### April 25-26

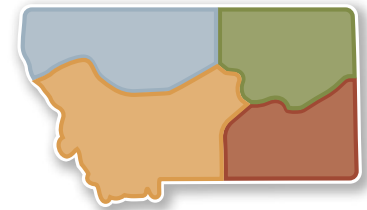
**Missoula Quilters' Guild Spread Your Wings Quilt Show** — Vendor market, auction, raffles, Western Montana Fairgrounds, Fri: 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., Sat: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., 531-2156 | **MISSOULA**

#### May 9

**Mother's Day Market** — Craft Market, Ravalli County Fairgrounds, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., 360-6743 | **HAMILTON**

#### May 22-25

**44th Annual Wildhorse Rendezvous** — 531-0244 | **CYR**



### SOUTHEAST

#### April 10-11

**Montana State University Billings Powwow** — MSU Billings, Fri: Grand Entry 7 p.m., Sat: Grand entry noon and 6 p.m., MSUBillings.edu/powwow | **BILLINGS**

#### April 11

**Ben Larson: "Off the Beaten Path: The Lost History of Montana"** — O'Fallon Historical Museum, 6 to 8 p.m., 778-3265 | **BAKER**

#### April 18

**PEAKS Style Show & Luncheon** — Benefits cancer patients. Raffles, door prizes, art auction, St. Bernard Catholic Church, prior ticket purchase or RSVP required, 697-1098 | **BILLINGS**

#### April 25-26

**Big Sky Optimist Club Fundraiser Vendor Market** — Boys and Girls Club, 55 Orchard Ave., doors open at 10 a.m. 855-2416 | **BILLINGS**

#### May 2

**High Tea at the Museum with Fallon County Community Theater** — O'Fallon Historical Museum, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., 778-3265 | **BAKER**

#### May 2

**Pub Station Presents Three Dog Night** — Alberta Bair Theater, 7:30 p.m., 256-6052 | **BILLINGS**

#### May 22

**Keith Alessi: Tomatoes Tried to Kill Me, but Banjos Saved My Life** — O'Fallon Historical Museum, 3 to 5 p.m., 778-3265 | **BAKER**

# YOUNG MONTANANS

RM invites youngsters to send in original art and poems. If we use it, we'll pay you \$10. **Mail to:** Young Montanans, P.O. Box 3469, Great Falls, MT 59403. **Email:** [rural@mtco-ops.com](mailto:rural@mtco-ops.com). **Include:** Your name, age, address and your cooperative. **If you do not include this information, your submission will not be accepted.**

SEND US YOUR SPRING AND SUMMER DRAWINGS AND POEMS



Mischa Schmidt, 12 | FLATHEAD ELECTRIC



Alexia Lee, 10, Kaitispell | FLATHEAD ELECTRIC



Annabelle Whitmoyer, 8, Corvallis | RAVALLI ELECTRIC

Selena Jessop, 12, Pinesdale | RAVALLI ELECTRIC



# RURAL MONTANA READER PHOTOS

SEND US YOUR PHOTOS OR ARTWORK

**Please include:** the photographer's/artist's name, address and hometown in the entry. ***If you do not include this information, your submission will not be accepted.*** If we use your photo we'll pay you \$25-\$100 (depending on size and location). **Send entries to:** [rural@mtco-ops.com](mailto:rural@mtco-ops.com). No more than 20 MB at a time. No prints please.



## 'Abandoned in Eastern Montana'

A painting by Gina Tiernan of Corvallis.

## Pretty Posie

A springtime flower. **Photo by Lilly Coats, 13, of Worden**

## Saddle Stand

A young lady stands on a well-trained horse's back. **Photo by Amber Rasmussen of Missoula**

## Hooo...is watching me?

A curious short-eared owl checks out a visitor. **Photo by Austin Berard of Missoula**





The Magazine of the  
Montana Electric Cooperatives'  
Association

Visit us online: [www.mtco-ops.com](http://www.mtco-ops.com)

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