



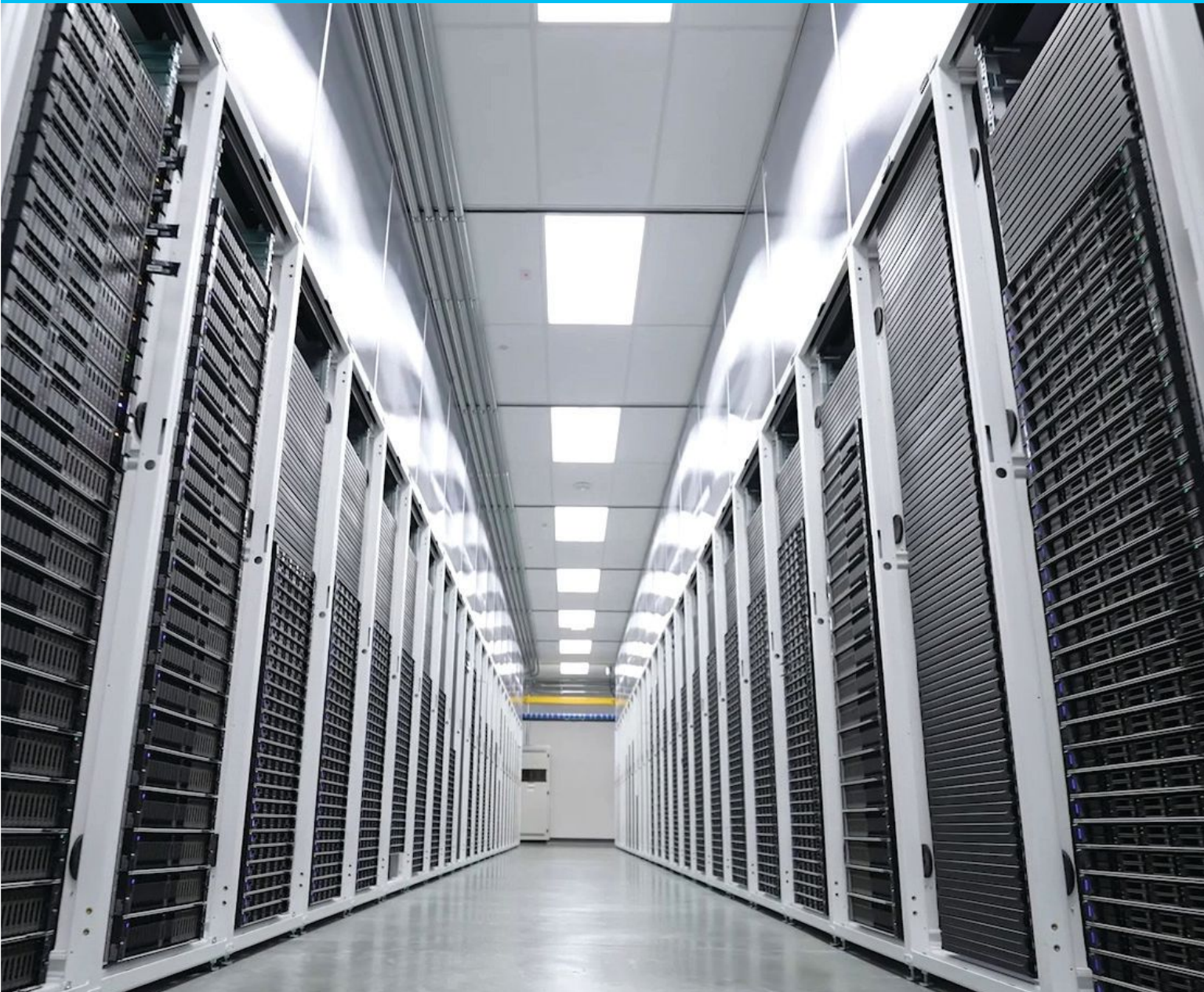
Rural Montana

Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association Magazine | JULY 2026

DECIPHERING Data Centers

a five-part
SERIES

WHAT IS A DATA CENTER?



FEATURES



2

Data Centers

In the first part of a series, learn what data centers are



12

Legislative Conference

Co-op leaders visit Washington, D.C.

ASK A MANAGER

10

Community Minded

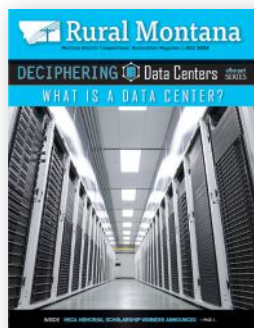
Co-op managers discuss role in community



4

Scholarship Winners

MECA announces Memorial Scholarship winners



COVER

About our cover:
Stacks of servers work in a data center near Quincy, Washington.

Rural Montana

July 2026

Vol. 72 | No. 7

(ISSN0199-6401)

DEPARTMENTS

1 | Viewpoint

9 | Dateline D.C.

14 | Recipes

15 | Events Calendar

16 | Young Montanans

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MANAGING EDITOR | Mark Lambrecht

COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR,

EDITOR | Ryan G. Hall

GRAPHIC DESIGN | Nick Daniels

OFFICES | 501 Bay Drive, Great Falls, MT 59404

TELEPHONE | (406) 761-8333

FAX | (460) 761-8339

WEBSITE | www.mtco-ops.com

E-MAIL | rural@mtco-ops.com

CHANGE OF ADDRESS | Mail change of address to your local rural electric cooperative, or if the code ME is above your name, the Rural Montana office, P.O. Box 3469, Great Falls, MT 59403. Please include the mailing label from a recent issue of Rural Montana.

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CEO | Viewpoint



The truth about data centers

MARK LAMBRECHT, CEO of Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association



DATA centers have become one of the most widely discussed topics in recent years. Across the country, communities have debated their potential benefits and drawbacks at public meetings, while news reports and social media have raised concerns about electricity demand, utility rates, water use, noise and the role data centers play in global technological competition.

As a member of Governor Greg Gianforte's Energy Task Force, I have spent considerable time learning about data centers and their energy requirements. One of the most important lessons I've learned is that misinformation about data centers is widespread. To help our readers better understand the facts, I asked *Rural Montana* editor Ryan Hall to research what data centers are, how they operate and what impacts they may have on the communities where they are located.

Over the past several months, Ryan has conducted extensive research on existing and proposed data centers of varying sizes and capacities. He attended

a national conference focused on the role of data centers in the economy and national security, where experts discussed electricity and water use as well as economic, environmental and community impacts. Ryan has also toured a data center in Quincy, Washington, and will soon visit additional facilities, including a proposed project in Montana.

The information Ryan gathers through his research and site visits will be featured in a five-part *Rural Montana* series. The first installment, which appears in this issue, introduces the fundamentals of data centers. Future articles will examine key topics such as power and water consumption, effects on electric grids and utility rates, and the potential benefits and challenges data centers bring to local communities.

I encourage you to follow this series with an open mind and use the information it provides to participate in informed discussions about data centers. 

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Deciphering data centers

WHAT IS A DATA CENTER?



STORY AND PHOTOS BY **RYAN HALL** | RURAL MONTANA EDITOR

DATA center is a buzzword that appears seemingly everywhere, but it's a broad term that is often used too narrowly, according to one data center manager.

Ryan Beebout, vice president of Sabey Data Centers – West, said that much like electric cooperatives, data centers come in different sizes and serve different needs. Not all data centers focus on generative AI (artificial intelligence), a common belief.

Sitting in the conference room of Sabey's 123 MW facility outside of Quincy, Washington, Beebout explains that while some of the clients who rent space in the facility use AI, there's little to no actual AI computing done on site.

"It's not a focus of ours," Beebout said, noting that a lot of AI technology is not investment grade, and Sabey is "somewhat risk averse" when it comes to AI.

He said the belief that if people stopped using AI for ChatGPT or tools such as Canva and Photoshop, the need for data centers would disappear, is wrong.

Data centers are a fast, secure, efficient way to do the computing that is needed to power today's society and economy.

"If there's no data centers, your phone is a brick, it's on airplane mode permanently," Beebout said. Enterprise customers renting space in Sabey's co-location data center perform photo cloud, health record, phone app, online banking, e-commerce and travel reservation-related computing functions.

"We have all of these things on site," he said. "We rely on all of this stuff."

DECIPHERING Data Centers

A FIVE-PART SERIES

this month: WHAT IS A DATA CENTER?

This is the first in a five-part series on data centers. In the coming months, we will examine options to power data centers, the community benefits of data centers, the concerns surrounding data centers and the prospects of data centers coming to electric cooperatives' service areas in Montana.

next month: THE CHALLENGE OF POWERING DATA CENTERS



Ryan Beebout, vice president of Sabey Data Centers – West, poses in the halls of a data center in Quincy. | PHOTO BY RYAN HALL

Beebout added that any app opened on a phone or tablet, "is a window into a data center."

He said there's so many functions people don't think of that go through data centers. Almost every massive telescope, such as the ones producing space images shared across the world, run through a data center. If your job involves using a phone, computer or even GPS, you utilize a data center. Even farms utilize data centers through the GPS in equipment and various

programs that track soil nutrients, pesticides and moisture content.

"The whole economy relies on data centers," he said. "If AI crashed tomorrow, we're still operating tomorrow."

In fact, data centers would still grow, Beebout said, just at a different pace.

Data centers are not new

Due to the rapid growth in the AI space, data centers have become a mainstream media topic over the last few years. But, they have been around

long before that. Microsoft recently celebrated 20 years in the Quincy area by donating 20 \$10,000 checks to area organizations. Sabey has been in town for nearly that long, and was founded before that, in 2000.

Beebout said before modern-day data centers there were mainframe rooms in the '80s and early '90s, and then basement server rooms. Centralized computing, and the need for cloud storage, has come a long ways since then.

Anatomy of a data center

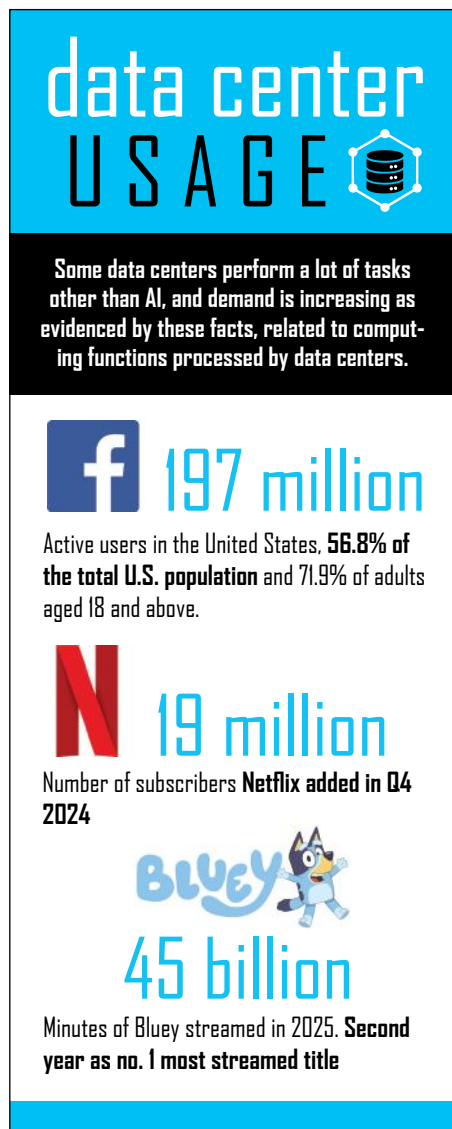
Beebout and Amber Daniels, assistant general manager for the Sabey plant, walked through the data center hallways, which are wide, with large placards boasting company mottos and Sabey branding on the walls. Beebout explained that the doors in the facility are all double-secure due to the private nature of the information being processed. He has to badge in, and then either do a fingerprint or face scan to open a door.

He walked to a gray door, explaining that this is one of the three operational data halls in the center, with five more planned. As a colocation center, Sabey rents space to other entities for computing, so they don't have to construct a full data center themselves. It is similar in many ways to a shopping mall, in that Sabey provides the large building but instead of store fronts, other companies rent as much space as they need inside the data halls.

Not all data centers are colocation facilities — one of the many potential differences of the types of centers grouped together under one term.

Beebout explains that each data hall can have multiple tenants. Sabey provides the secure space, with access to power, cooling capability, and a clean and sterile environment. Once completed, with a planned expansion, Sabey's plant will use 123 megawatts. It currently runs around 57 megawatts, and does that consistently.

"It's pretty flat, we run at about a 90-percent load factor," Beebout



said. "We find the PUDs (public utility districts) like that."

Load factor is the ratio of actual energy used to the maximum possible energy used during a specific period, or simply how efficient and consistent something uses the power allocated to it. A high load factor benefits the utility for reasons that will be discussed later in this series.

In this data hall, there are two tenants, each having their computing infrastructure within a secure cage. There is also ample space between the two, but that's already been reserved by one of the current tenants, who plans to expand. With data center demand always increasing, many clients rent

more space than they plan to use, so they can expand and keep their servers at the same facility, and within the same data hall, Beebout said.

"It's built by Sabey, but they own everything inside the cage," Beebout said. "They provide their own servers, and design their network architecture."

Walking through the cool, empty space between the two cages, where someday the concrete floor will be filled with racks, Beebout explained that "real estate" is different in the data center world. The commodity is not floor space, it's the power to compute. So Sabey's tenants don't rent by the square foot, they rent by the kilowatt.

"It costs a lot more for us to deliver power and cooling than it does to deliver square footage," Beebout said. "We can strand space, we cannot strand capacity."

Looking inside the cage, every server has two plugs, a blue and a red, that go to separate breakers. The servers are housed in racks, and the racks are in rows, similar to books in a library.

"We can't have any single source of failure," Beebout said.

The server room is kept at between 65 and 81 degrees Fahrenheit, and at about 50 percent relative humidity. Above each server pod is a sealed containment structure, which captures the hot air.

All of the air circulated through the data halls is kept in a closed loop, so that no dust or smoke particles from outside get inside.

"Servers don't like dust or smoke," Beebout said.

As he speaks, an employee of a tenant walks through her company's server stacks. Beebout said that between Sabey and its tenants, about 250 people work on the campus.

"Those are permanent jobs," he said, noting that's about five full-time employees per megawatt. "Not every site will have that many."

"Our people, we live here, we go to school here, we buy houses here, we are part of the community," Beebout said. RM



Kaitlyn Noyes, Vigilante Electric



Elaina Dorr, Flathead Electric



Sydney Patterson, Yellowstone Valley Electric



Evie Karren, Lower Yellowstone Rural Electric

2026 MECA Scholarship winners announced

For Rural Montana

A panel of judges has selected the winners of the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association (MECA) Memorial Scholarships. They are: **Southwest District**, Kaitlyn Noyes of Vigilante Electric Cooperative; **Northwest District**, Elaina Dorr of Flathead Electric Cooperative; **Southeast**

District, Sydney Patterson of Yellowstone Valley Electric Cooperative; and **Northeast District**, Evie Karren of Lower Yellowstone Rural Electric Cooperative.

MECA also would like to say thank you to our panel of judges, Kaaren Robbins of Beartooth Electric, Jami Propp of Lower Yellowstone Electric, Mitch Johnson of Sun River Electric and Houston Bradbury of Yellowstone Valley Electric. 

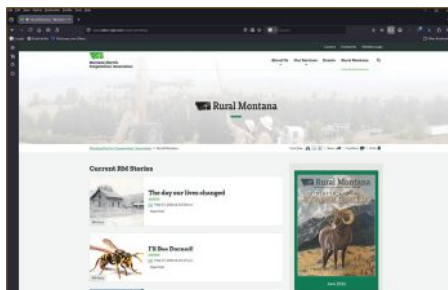
Searchable archive comes to *RM* online

By **RYAN HALL** | *RM* Editor

SINCE long before I joined Rural Montana in 2012, the only way to find old stories and articles was to call the office and ask, and then we'd look it up for you, or at least try.

It isn't uncommon to get a call for that "great sweet potato recipe that ran a couple years ago," only to find out it actually ran in 2008. Or for someone to ask "for a copy of that story on my neighbor Ray, can't remember his last name, that ran sometime in the last three years, I think there may have been a picture of a dog somewhere in that magazine."

While we are always happy to help, we are also excited to announce a



new feature for those readers who have access to the Internet. We now have a searchable digital archive. It currently covers 2024-2026, but we will be adding to that each year, so by this time next year, 2022-2027 will be fully searchable.

To use this new feature, go to www.mtco-ops.com/rural-montana and click

on ANY copy of the magazine (on the right side, sorted by year), from 2024-2026. It doesn't matter which edition you open.

From there click, the three green dots in the lower corner and click "search". A new panel will come up. By default, it will search only that issue. At the top of the panel will be two gray circles, with a green logo inside. Click the one on the right. You can now search all of the issues from 2024 to the current one by typing a keyword in the box in that panel.

If you aren't Internet savvy, or don't have Internet access at home, don't worry. You can still call and ask us to find the sweet potato recipe that got lost. We are happy to help. 



David



Nygaard



Reed



Paul

Meet the newest members of LYREC crew

Lower Yellowstone Rural Electric Cooperative (LYREC) welcomes four new team members. Luke David and Morgan Nygaard have joined as seasonal lineworkers, while Craig Reed and Jon Paul have joined as facilities construction coordinators.

David, originally from Cando, graduated from Bismarck State College (BSC) in 2019 and has worked for BT Mills since then. His interest in the electric industry began at an early age, inspired by his father's work at Northern Plains Electric Cooperative. Outside of work, David enjoys woodworking and hiking.

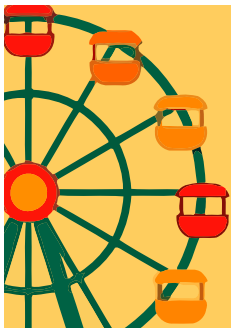
Nygaard was born and raised in Minot and graduated from the lineworker program at BSC in May. Before attending lineworker school, he worked for Main Electric Construction. Line work runs in the family, as his grandfather was a lineworker and electrician for BNSF Railway, and his older brother is currently a lineworker in Minot. In his free time, Nygaard enjoys hunting, fishing and spending time outdoors whenever the weather cooperates.

Reed and Paul both previously worked with Besler Inc., one of LYREC's longtime contractors. Following the owner's decision to retire, the two joined LYREC's team as facilities construction coordinators.

Reed is originally from north of Rapid City, S.D., but has been living in Sidney while working in the area for several years. He spent the last 22 years with Besler Inc. His wife and children currently remain in the Rapid City area. Reed enjoys hunting, fishing, target shooting and camping.

Paul, who is from the Sturgis, S.D., area, worked for Besler Inc. for the past two-and-a-half years before joining LYREC. His wife still resides in the Sturgis area, with his grown children nearby. In his free time, Paul enjoys fishing.

LYREC is excited to welcome these individuals to the cooperative and looks forward to the experience and dedication they bring to the team. ■



Join us for Co-op Day at Fair

Lower Yellowstone Rural Electric Cooperative, along with several other area cooperatives, will serve treats to keep you cool during the Richland County Fair Thursday, July 30.

This is a great opportunity for us to connect with the community and visit with members and fairgoers throughout the day. Stop by our booth, say hello and grab a free treat while you enjoy the fair festivities. ■



Co-op shares during Career Exploration Day



Lower Yellowstone Rural Electric Cooperative (LYREC) lineworkers Preston Long and Trey Schepens spent the afternoon at West Side Elementary School for Career Exploration Day. Students had the opportunity to learn about the lineworker profession, explore the tools and safety gear used on the job and ask plenty of great questions.

Thank you to West Side Elementary School for inviting LYREC to be part of such a fun and educational day with an outstanding group of students. ■

Discounts offered for Medora vacation

Lower Yellowstone Rural Electric Cooperative is able to offer its members discounts in Medora by being a Touchstone Energy® member. Simply call 800-MEDORA-1 and give the discount code of "TOUCH2026" for a 15% discount on all of the following during any night of the season.

THINGS TO DO:

- Medora Musical
- Pitchfork steak fondue
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- Elkhorn Quarters
- Badlands Motel
- Rough Riders Hotel
- Hotel 1883

The code is good for reservations over the phone, website or in person. A greens fee discount will be applied at check-in at the golf course.





SURGE PROTECTION

Keeping your Electronics and Home Safe

The National Electrical Manufacturers Association estimates that **60-80%** of surges originate from **internal sources** (within a home or business). Keep your valuable electronics **safe** by protecting them from the surges that can **damage or destroy them**.

What is a power surge? A power surge is a sudden and unwanted **increase in voltage** that can damage, degrade or destroy electronic equipment. Surges can occur when large appliances, such as air conditioners, turn on and off. Surges can also originate from electric utilities or lightning.

LEVELS OF PROTECTION

GOOD

Point-of-Use Surge Protection

Easy to use
- just plug in.

Only protects electronics **plugged into the device**.

Must be **replaced** over time or after a major surge event.

BEST

Whole Home Surge Protection

Must be installed by a **qualified electrician**.

Provides protection for your **entire electrical system** at home including large appliances, outlets, and light switches.

Protects against **larger surges** and provides **longer lasting** surge protection than point-of-use devices.

No surge protection can handle a **direct lightning strike**. **Disconnect** sensitive electronics if you suspect a surge is coming.

Power strips and surge protectors are **not the same**. Not all power strips offer surge protection.



Stay safe in your backyard

Summer means more time spent outdoors, making backyard electrical safety especially important. Hidden electrical hazards can pose serious risks, but a few simple precautions can help keep your family safe.

Always stay alert around overhead and underground power lines. Teach children never to climb trees near power lines or fly kites, drones, balloons or remote-controlled toys in those areas. If you ever see a downed power line, stay far away and contact your electric cooperative immediately.

If you're installing a trampoline, swing set or other tall play equipment, make sure it is located safely away from overhead power lines. Before digging for landscaping or an in-ground trampoline, always call 811 to have underground utilities marked. Digging into buried electric or gas lines can cause serious injuries and costly damage.

Water and electricity are a dangerous combination, so extra caution should be taken around pools, hot tubs and sprinklers. Outdoor outlets, pool pumps and lighting should have ground-fault circuit interrupter protection. Avoid using plugged-in devices such as

radios, speakers or chargers near water, and teach children not to handle electrical devices with wet hands.

Outdoor sports and play areas should also be checked for safety. Keep tall equipment away from power lines and make sure outdoor lighting and extension cords are in good condition. If a ball or toy lands inside a substation fence, children should never try to retrieve it. Instead, contact your electric cooperative for assistance.

Children are naturally curious, so remind them to stay away from transformers, utility boxes and other electrical equipment. If you use a backup generator, keep it in a well-ventilated area children cannot access and never plug it directly into your home's electrical system.

Finally, leave major electrical projects, such as installing outdoor lighting or outlets, to licensed electricians. Proper installation helps protect your family from shocks, fires and other electrical dangers.

By staying aware of potential hazards, you can create a backyard that is both fun and safe all summer long. ■



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MONTANA U.S. SENATORS

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 senators. Next month, we will ask a question of the state's two representatives.

THIS MONTH'S QUESTION:

With several forecasts calling for an increased wildfire risk this summer, what can Congress do to help mitigate that risk and help protect electric cooperative members, and all Montanans?

THE SAME QUESTION WILL BE ASKED TO MONTANA'S TWO U.S. REPRESENTATIVES IN NEXT MONTH'S EDITION

**Senator Daines**

320 Hart, Senate Office Building,
Washington, D.C. 20510
www.daines.senate.gov
Ph: (202) 224-2651

Senator Steve Daines

YEAR after year, Montanans deal with the catastrophic consequences of wildfire season. Wildfires have a devastating impact on Montana's electric cooperatives in particular, destroying infrastructure and causing service disruptions and liability risks.

That's why it's critical we take steps to mitigate the risks of wildfires and protect our communities. One way to do that is through responsible forest management. In 2025, I was glad to see the U.S. Forest Service withdraw the harmful Old Growth amendment, which would have added a bureaucratic layer to forest management work and halted much-needed projects. I'm also proud that the Working Families Tax Cut bill, which President Trump signed into law last summer, included my provision to increase timber sales. The new law requires the Forest Service to nearly double annual timber sales by 2034, putting Montana at about 250

million board feet annually. By promoting timber sales, we support Montana's logging industry, communities and our economy, while also ensuring our forests are healthy, which reduces the risk of wildfires.

But there's still more work to be done. In Montana alone, there are 367 million board feet of timber projects tied up in litigation. We need to reverse the disastrous 9th Circuit Cottonwood decision and stop allowing fringe groups in the courts to block commonsense forest management projects. We also need to pass my bill, the "Fire-Safe Electrical Corridors Act," which would approve the removal of trees and other vegetation near powerlines on federal forest lands.

By passing commonsense forest management reforms, we can stop the spread of wildfires and protect Montana's electric co-ops. 

**Senator Sheehy**

Dirksen Senate Office Building, SD-G55
Washington, D.C. 20510
www.sheehy.senate.gov
Ph: (202) 224-2644

Senator Tim Sheehy

IT'S no secret to Montanans that we are looking down the barrel at a particularly dangerous wildfire season. Already, we've seen 31,511 fires burn almost 2.5 million acres across the country, devastating families and communities. Wildfires are not just a western issue anymore — they're a national issue. We need a more effective, aggressive approach to quickly identify, suppress and contain these wildfires.

Congress has been hard at work to implement commonsense reforms that reduce bureaucracy and streamline interagency coordination by overturning onerous regulations and championing legislation like the bipartisan Fix Our Forests Act, which simplifies National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review processes, supports wildland firefighters, targets firehedges, and promotes collaboration between federal agencies and state, local and tribal partners.

Additionally, earlier this year, I introduced the Carbon Resource Innovation Act to encourage responsible forest management and reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires. This bipartisan legislation expands the Section 45Q carbon-capture tax credit to cover innovative, private-sector technology

that processes forest residues into carbon-storing products — ensuring we have the best tools at our disposal.

The recent creation of the U.S. Wildland Fire Service (USWFS) also goes a long way to improve agency coordination. By unifying all firefighting operations under the Department of the Interior and cutting red tape that has bogged down wildfire management, the USWFS will streamline response and recovery efforts across public lands, prioritizing aggressive initial attack to better protect our communities.

President Trump and the 119th Congress have given clear and bipartisan direction that our national wildland firefighting apparatus be more aggressive, unified and effective. We expect all federal agencies to embody that direction.

All these approaches on the federal level will make it easier to fight fires quickly and effectively. As a former aerial firefighter and your U.S. senator, I will keep fighting to ensure our wildfire prevention, response and recovery efforts are constantly improving to better protect Montanans and all Americans. 

THE ASK A MANAGER PANEL



MATT
HAGGERTY
PARK ELECTRIC
COOPERATIVE



TREVOR
PARKE
VIGILANTE ELECTRIC
COOPERATIVE



BRAD
BAUMAN
SUN RIVER ELECTRIC
COOPERATIVE

SEND US YOUR QUESTIONS

If you want to ask a question for a future edition of *Ask a Manager*, email your question to ryanh@mtco-ops.com, or call the editor at 406-761-8333.

ASK A MANAGER:

What community program(s) are you proud of?

Every other month we ask our electric co-op manager panel a question, many of which are provided by our readers.

Our panel for 2026 is Matt Haggerty, manager of Park Electric Cooperative in Livingston; Trevor Parke, manager of Vigilante Electric Cooperative in Dillon; and Brad Bauman, manager of Sun River Electric Cooperative in Fairfield.

This month's question is:

Q: *"One of the guiding Cooperative Principles is Concern for Community. What is something your co-op recently has done/is doing for the community or in the community that you are particularly proud of?"*



MATT HAGGERTY PARK ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

AT Park Electric, we support a wide range of community initiatives, including active involvement in local schools and their libraries, the county fairgrounds, the Youth Tour and our scholarship programs. If I had to highlight one particular effort, it would be the electrical hazard training we provide to first responders and students across our service area.

We host training sessions for local police and fire departments, as well as age-appropriate programs for students at our local schools. These trainings emphasize a critical message: downed powerlines are often still energized. We encourage everyone to stay back, keep others away and contact the local utility immediately. Our crews are available 24/7 to respond, assess the situation and ensure lines are properly tested, grounded and made safe.

With the version we teach our first responders, we use a large demonstration trailer equipped to simulate real-world

voltages found on our powerlines. Our linemen demonstrate how energized and de-energized lines appear identical and walk through scenarios responders may face, reinforcing that only trained utility crews can safely confirm and secure a line.

For our school youth trainings, we provide a scaled-down demonstration using lower voltages, led by one of our knowledgeable office employees. This interactive table illustrates our lines out in the field. We demonstrate potential hazards such as arc flashes caused by vehicles, farm equipment, downed lines, irrigation pipes, excavation accidents or even kites contacting powerlines. Students learn how these situations can lead to serious or fatal injuries if proper precautions aren't taken.

By dedicating time and resources to these trainings, our goal is simple: to help keep our community informed and safe. 

TREVOR PARKE VIGILANTE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

ONE of the defining principles of electric cooperatives is “Concern for Community.” It is more than a slogan — it is a commitment to improving the quality of life for the members and communities we serve. Electric cooperatives were built by local people to meet local needs, and that mission continues today through investments in safety, reliability and member support programs.

In recent years, wildfire mitigation has become an increasingly important focus for electric cooperatives across the West. Longer fire seasons, dry conditions and extreme weather have increased the risk of devastating wildfires that threaten homes, businesses and critical infrastructure. Electric cooperatives are responding proactively by strengthening their systems and implementing aggressive mitigation strategies designed to protect both people and property.

These efforts include vegetation management around powerlines, replacing aging infrastructure, installing more resilient equipment and increasing system inspections in high-risk areas. Many cooperatives are also utilizing advanced technology to monitor system performance and weather conditions in real time. While these investments require significant resources, they are necessary to reduce wildfire risk and maintain reliable electric service for rural communities.

Concern for community also means helping members through difficult times. Rising costs for housing, groceries and energy continue to put pressure on many families. Electric cooperatives understand these challenges because the people making decisions live and work in the same communities as the members they serve. They experience the same economic realities and understand firsthand the importance of affordable, reliable electricity.

Unlike investor-owned utilities, electric cooperatives are guided by local member-owners, not outside shareholders. That means decisions are made with the best interests of the community in mind. Cooperative leaders work hard to keep costs as low as possible while still providing safe, reliable service and investing in the future of the electric system.

Many cooperatives also offer energy assistance programs, flexible payment options, and energy-efficiency resources to help members manage their monthly bills. During times of financial hardship, these programs can provide support and help families stay connected to essential electric service.

At their core, electric cooperatives are about people, not profits. Whether through wildfire-prevention efforts or energy-assistance programs, cooperatives continue to demonstrate their commitment to serving the long-term needs of their communities — safely, responsibly and with compassion. 

BRAD BAUMAN SUN RIVER ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

COMMUNITY involvement for Sun River Electric Cooperative (SREC) has been constant for years. Like most other electric cooperatives, SREC gives scholarships to young people pursuing further education, gives rebates for energy-efficient appliances, offers energy conservation rebates and supports most all community fundraising projects.

One project that is front and center is the renovation of the Fairfield Community Hall. This community project will create a facility that will host events such as annual meetings, wedding receptions, educational seminars, holiday bazaars and anything else that needs a large area for hosting community members.

The new heat and ventilating system will be an upgrade that will allow participants to enjoy their event more comfortably. The handicap-accessible restrooms as well as entrance door openers will encourage all community members to come and enjoy events. The new entrance and upgraded windows will aid the food bank in providing its important services to our community. Upgrades to the kitchen equipment will allow for easier food preparation. And the new portable stage will allow for a selection of room

setup options. All of these improvements will make for an awesome community facility.

The cooperative has not only made a nice contribution on the financial side of the project, but also contributed to the administration of the project. Shelley Batson, office manager, has been the secretary/treasurer of the Fairfield Community Hall Board for more than 40 years. The additional work that comes with a \$1.2 million project such as this one creates a large additional workload outside of her days at Sun River Electric.

The Fairfield Lions Club, which has four SREC employee members, took the role of fundraising leaders. SREC member Mark Lacher and I volunteered to be the point people for the Lions Club in this endeavor. Many presentations, phone calls and sidewalk conversations led to the successful funding and completion of the community project.

This project will serve the Fairfield community for years to come, and being a part of it shows the cooperative's unwavering commitment to supporting our communities within our service territory. 

2026 NRECA Legislative Conference

Co-ops discuss key federal issue with lawmakers

EACH year, electric co-op leaders from across the country, including Montana, descend on Washington, D.C., to talk to their state's congressional delegations about issues impacting electric cooperatives and their members.

It's part of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) annual Legislative Conference, and it's vital to protecting clean, safe, reliable, affordable electricity.

"Sending a strong contingent of Montana electric cooperative managers and directors to Washington, D.C., for the NRECA Legislative Conference is important because it demonstrates the strength and geographic distribution of co-ops across the country, as these leaders advocate for their members with members of Congress and federal agency officials. Their conversations help shape federal policy and secure funding beneficial to consumer-owned utilities," said Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association (MECA) CEO Mark Lambrecht.

The Montana contingent consisted of 20 people, including managers, board members and representatives from MECA.

"Montana's electric cooperatives have consistently maintained close working relationships and communications with the state's congressional delegation, so it came as no surprise that we were in alignment on almost every aspect of the issues we discussed. The real value of these conversations was for the members to hear directly from co-op managers and directors how these federal issues impacted their co-ops and for us to learn more about the legislative and administrative processes for them and how we can be most impactful," said Joe Kolman, MECA government relations director.

There were six issues that were brought up during meetings with federal agencies, the delegation and their staff:

Wildfire Mitigation and Grid Resilience

Wildfires are a growing threat to electric infrastructure, so managing vegetation near powerlines is essential to defending against wildfire threats. For this reason, the Montana delegation asked lawmakers to pass the Fix Our Forests Act to facilitate removal of hazard trees near powerlines, streamline federal approvals for vegetation management and eliminate timber sale requirements.

"Although all the issues we discussed are extremely important to co-ops and their members, passage of the Fix



Congressman Bruce Westerman, R-Arkansas, chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee, speaks at the NRECA Legislative Conference. | **PHOTO BY MARK LAMBRECHT**

Our Forests Act was the most timely, given it has already passed the House and would likely pass the Senate, were it not for a Senator from Utah holding up the process for leverage on another issue," Lambrecht said.

Montana electric co-op leaders also asked the delegation to pass legislation to make the strict liability limits in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, which are set to expire in 2028, permanent; and require that federal land management agencies follow claim procedures and provide evidence if they seek damages above the strict liability limit.

Columbia River System Operations

Montana's electric cooperatives told the delegation and agency representatives that the state's co-ops oppose litigation requiring operational changes to hydroelectric dams on the Columbia River system to increase flow and reduce electricity generation.

They respectfully requested that Congress assert its authority over any federal decisions to change operations or breach federal dams on the Columbia River system. The co-op leaders also requested that Congress not authorize any appropriations supporting operational changes at the dams.

Modernize FEMA Disaster Programs

Montana's electric co-ops have suffered extensive damage to infrastructure from severe wind storms the past couple of years. Assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) helped relieve significant pressure on



The Montana electric cooperative delegation poses on the roof of the U.S. Department of the Interior. | MECA PHOTO

members to pay for repairs. Montana's electric cooperatives asked the delegation to pass the FEMA Act of 2025, which would expedite disaster reimbursements and reimbursement for recovery loan interest, expand resiliency programs and better account for damage in rural areas.

Federal Permitting

Long federal environmental reviews and litigation often delay projects, raise costs and increase risk for electric transmission and generation projects, grid maintenance and reliability work, and wildfire mitigation and vegetation management.

The co-ops told the delegation that Congress should pass the SPEED and PERMIT acts.

These two pieces of legislation would expedite the federal environmental permitting processes and implement judicial reforms to limit costly lawsuits.

Sage Grouse

The state's electric cooperatives support including a rider in the fiscal year 2027 appropriations bill prohibiting the use of federal funds to list sage grouse in the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Rural electric cooperatives have opposed listing the sage grouse because of the additional expense of burying powerlines and other required construction and engineering expenses, and undue hardship on rural community economies.

Montana has a successful sage grouse habitat conservation program in place, making federal intervention unnecessary.

Bridger Pipeline Expansion Project

The Bridger Pipeline Expansion Project, a proposed 647-mile pipeline to carry crude oil from the Canadian border along Phillips County to Guernsey, Wyoming, would significantly benefit six electric cooperatives in eastern Montana. These co-ops would supply electricity to pump stations along the pipeline route, greatly increasing their electric loads and helping offset distribution costs to other members. This increase would be several times the co-ops' current load in some cases.

Looking Ahead

The co-ops told lawmakers that they'd greatly appreciate any measures Congress and the administration can take to facilitate prompt federal approval of this project.

"We had outstanding meetings with key officials of the Trump Administration, including the acting director of the Bureau of Land Management and senior director of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, where we shared our priorities on energy infrastructure development and federal permitting. Our meetings with Senators Steve Daines and Tim Sheehy were productive, with robust conversations about forest management, FEMA and operation of the Columbia River dams," Lambrecht said.

Kolman added that the successful meetings are the start of the work, not the finish line.

"After the legislative conference, those managers and directors who attended share information about the trip with their boards and members. MECA's and NRECA's government relations professionals and many managers and directors continue to have conversations with federal lawmakers and agency officials throughout the year," he said. RM

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 August send your favorite recipes that use garden vegetables (you don't have to have grown them) by July 16. Please send in September recipes anytime: Your favorite snack (or after-school snack) recipe. Try to limit the ingredients and length of directions for space. Please include a photo, if possible.

**1st
PLACE**

Mr. Lou's Key Lime Pie

Mary Swier Bolhuis | BIGFORK

INGREDIENTS

CRUST:

- 1-½ cups graham cracker crumbs
- ½ cup white sugar
- ½ stick of melted butter

FILLING:

- 2 cans (14 oz.) sweetened condensed milk
- 1 cup freshly squeezed key lime or regular lime juice (bottled is fine)
- 2 large eggs

WHIPPED CREAM TOPPING:

- 2 cups whipping cream
- ¼ cup sugar
- ½ tsp. vanilla

DIRECTIONS

Combine graham cracker crumbs, sugar and butter. Press mixture into bottom and up sides of a large 10-inch pie plate. Bake 15 minutes at 375 degrees. Remove and allow to cool completely before filling.

Combine milk, juice and eggs in large bowl. Whisk until well blended; pour into cooled pie shell. Bake for 15 minutes in a 325-degree oven; allow to chill in refrigerator for at least 2 hours.

Whip cream with icy beaters. Gradually add sugar and vanilla, whipping until soft peaks form. Spread over lime layer. Refrigerate.

**2nd
PLACE**

Glazed Lemon Drop Cookies

Serena Skierka, 13 | CUT BANK

INGREDIENTS

- 2-½ cups flour
- 2 tsp. baking powder
- ¼ tsp. salt
- ½ cup butter
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 egg
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- 2 T lemon zest
- 1 T lemon juice

DIRECTIONS

Whisk together dry ingredients, set aside.

Combine butter and sugar in a mixing bowl; beat until smooth. Add the egg, vanilla, lemon zest and lemon juice.

Add dry ingredients. Roll into balls, place on greased cookie sheet.

Bake for 10 minutes at 350 degrees until cookies are set but not brown. Let cool completely before frosting.

Frosting:

- 2 cups powder sugar
- 3-4 T lemon juice

Mix with electric mixer, should be slightly runny.

**3rd
PLACE**

Orange Rolls

Nicole Watkins | LAUREL

INGREDIENTS

ROLLS:

- 1-¾ cups warm water
- 2 T dry yeast
- 1/3 cup granulated sugar
- 2 large eggs
- ½ cup butter, melted
- 1 tsp. salt
- 5 cups all-purpose flour

FILLING:

- ½ cup butter, softened
- 1/3 cup granulated sugar
- Zest of 2 large oranges
- ORANGE GLAZE:**
- 2 cups powdered sugar
- ½ teaspoon orange zest
- 2 T orange juice

DIRECTIONS

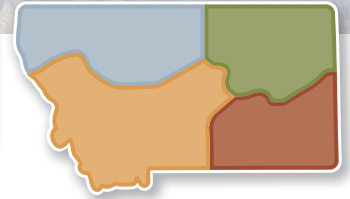
Dough: In a small bowl, add water, yeast and sugar. Let rest for 5 minutes, until foamy on top. In a large mixing bowl fitted with a dough hook, add eggs, butter, salt, flour and yeast mixture. Knead the dough with your mixer on medium speed for 3 minutes. Cover bowl with a towel and rest dough for 10 minutes. Knead for 3 minutes and rest for 10 minutes, two more times. Divide the dough into three balls. Roll each dough ball out into a 15x8-inch rectangle.

Filling: Combine ingredients. Spread the mixture evenly over the three rectangles of dough. Roll-up each rectangle lengthwise into a long tube. Use a sharp serrated knife to cut the dough into 1-½ inch sections. Put each dough round into a greased muffin tin. Cover dough lightly with a greased piece of plastic wrap and rest for 30 minutes. Bake at 400 degrees for about 10-12 minutes. Remove from oven and drizzle with glaze.

Glaze: Whisk ingredients until smooth.

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 June 15 for July events. Include date, time, site, city and contact number with your event. **Events without such info will not be used.** Some items may be cut for space concerns.



NORTHWEST

July 4

Flathead Valley Community Band — Depot Park, 10:30 a.m., 270-1696 | **KALISPELL**

July 10-11

Ferndale Sewing Circle Rummage Sale — S. Ferndale Dr. 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., 890-4368 | **BIGFORK**

July 11

Community Garage Sale — Bigfork Senior Center, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. | **BIGFORK**

July 11

Ferndale Fire Annual Bison BBQ and Community Appreciation Day — Ferndale Fire Dept., 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., 420-2189 | **BIGFORK**

July 11

Sunburst Arts and Education Presents Rails to Trails — Entrance to Rails to Trails, 9 a.m. to noon, 297-0197 | **EUREKA**

July 11

Fine Arts Ice Cream Social — Heritage Museum, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., 293-7521 | **LIBBY**

July 12

Sunburst Arts and Education Presents: Andrew Brozak — Free outdoor concert, Indian Springs Ranch, 5 p.m., 297-0197 | **EUREKA**

July 12

Antique Outdoor Flea Market — 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., 800-426-2926 | **VIRGELLE**

July 15

Shakespeare in the Parks presents Much Ado About Nothing — Historical Village, 5 p.m., Dinner starts at 4 p.m. | **EUREKA**

SOUTHEAST

July 2

Montana Shakespeare in the Parks — Roger Schmidt Amphitheater, 5:30 to 8 p.m., 778-3265 | **BAKER**

July 3-4

Roundup's 4th of July Celebration — City Park Stage, Fri: Cooper Allen in concert, 7 p.m., Sat: Tanya Tucker in concert, 7 p.m., fireworks, 323-7779 | **ROUNDUP**

July 10-12

Fallon County Community Theater presents The Sound of Music — Longfellow Gymnasium, 6 to 8 p.m., 891-0099 | **BAKER**

July 18

Alberton Railroad Days — 607 Railroad Avenue, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., 722-3404 | **SUPERIOR**

July 18

Backwoods Accordion Festival — Trego Pub, 2 to 9 p.m., 882-4359 | **TREGO**

July 20

Westerners Int'l present Shootout: Saga of Clyde Rector and Mike Ren — NW Montana History Museum, 6:30 to 8 p.m., 309-0958 | **KALISPELL**

July 22-26

Cut Bank First Friday Dumpster Paint — Town Park, 6 a.m. to noon, 224-8898 | **CUT BANK**

July 23

Flathead Valley Community Band — Marentette Park, 7 p.m., 270-1696 | **COLUMBIA FALLS**

July 26

Women of Rollins Annual Pig Roast/Silent Auction — Rollins Schoolhouse/Community Center, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., | **CUT BANK**

July 28

Movie Night at the Museum — NW Montana History Museum, 7 p.m., 756-8381 | **KALISPELL**

July 29

Glacier Park in 3-D presentation — Northwest Montana History Museum, 6 p.m., 756-8381 | **KALISPELL**

July 31-August 1

Cabin Fever Quilters 25th Annual Quilt Show — Superior High School, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., 591-5753 | **SUPERIOR**

SOUTHWEST

July 4-5

Wrangler Team Roping Championship — Three Forks Rodeo Arena, 95691 MT Hwy 2, 272-3716 | **THREE FORKS**

July 6, 20, Aug. 3, 17

Shields Valley Farmers Market — Veterans Park, 4:30 to 7 p.m. | **WILSALL**

July 8, 22, 29, Aug. 5, 12, 19, 26

Frontier Rodeo Company Outlaw Stampede — Three Forks Rodeo Arena, 95691 MT Hwy 2, 7 p.m., 272-3716 | **THREE FORKS**

July 9

Dinner and live music by Austin English — Jaycee Park, dinner at 5 p.m., music at 6 p.m. | **DILLON**

July 11

Nye Goes Nuts — Nye Volunteer Fire Department, 4 to 8 p.m., 780-0170 | **NYE**

July 11

Philipsburg Skatepark Shred the Ribbon — Zane's Park, special guest Jeff Ament, noon to 3 p.m. | **PHILIPSBURG**

July 11

Anything With Wheels Tractor/Car Show/Swap Meet — Big Hole River Retreat, 10 to 4 p.m., 660-2389 | **GLEN**

July 13, 27, Aug. 10

Shields Valley Farmers Market — Holliday Park, 4:30 to 7 p.m. | **CLYDE PARK**

July 16

Dinner and live music by Paper Flowers, remembering Fleetwood Mac — Jaycee Park, dinner at 5 p.m., music at 6 p.m. | **DILLON**

NORTHEAST

July 8-11

Wolf Point Wild Horse Ranch Rodeo & Stampede — Wed: Ranch Rodeo, 6 p.m., Thurs-Sat: PRCA Rodeo, 7 p.m., Marvin Brookman Stadium, 653-2012 | **WOLF POINT**

July 4

50th Annual Celebration and fundraiser for the Zortman Volunteer Fire Department — Parade, games, food, fireworks, 11 a.m., 673-3737 | **ZORTMAN**

July 17-18

Three Forks Northern Rodeo Association Rodeo — Three Forks Rodeo Arena, 95691 MT Hwy 2, 7 p.m., Visit www.threeforksrodeo.com, 272-3716 | **THREE FORKS**

July 23

Dinner and live music by High Ore Road — Jaycee Park, dinner at 5 p.m., music at 6 p.m. | **DILLON**

July 24-26

The Last Hardtimes Bluegrass Festival — 10 miles south of Hamilton, 424 Forest Hill Rd., 821-3777 | **HAMILTON**

July 25

Third Eye Blind at the State Fair — Montana ExpoPark, 7:30 p.m. | **GREAT FALLS**

July 25

Blackfoot River Cleanup — Johnsrud Park, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., 244-6156 | **POTOMAC**

July 25

The Bray's Brickyard Bash — The Archie Bray Foundation, 6 p.m., 443-3502 | **HELENA**

July 26

Kansas at the State Fair — Montana ExpoPark, 7:30 p.m. | **GREAT FALLS**

July 27

Ian Munsick at the State Fair — Montana ExpoPark, 7:30 p.m. | **GREAT FALLS**

July 28

John Crist at the State Fair — Montana ExpoPark, 7:30 p.m. | **GREAT FALLS**

July 30

Dinner and live music by JST Us — Jaycee Park, dinner at 5 p.m., music at 6 p.m. | **DILLON**

July 8

MonDak Synchronized Reading of the Declaration of Independence — MonDak Heritage Center, 4 p.m., 433-3500 | **SIDNEY**

July 18

Brockway Dair Day Rodeo — Kids rodeo at 10 a.m., main rodeo at 1 p.m., Brockway Rodeo Grounds, Free outdoor concert to follow with The Red Clark Band | **BROCKWAY**

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. **Include:** Your name, age, address and your cooperative. *If you do not include this information, your submission will not be accepted.*

**SEND US YOUR FALL
DRAWINGS AND POEMS**



Jack Best, 13, Rexford | **LINCOLN ELECTRIC**



Della Tefre, 11, Plentywood | **SHERIDAN ELECTRIC**

Tristan Clavin, 7 | **FLATHEAD ELECTRIC**



Aislin G. Mott, 11, Stevensville | **RAVALLI ELECTRIC**



READER PHOTOS

SEND US YOUR FAVORITE PHOTOS/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 entry we'll pay you \$25-\$100 (depending on size and location).

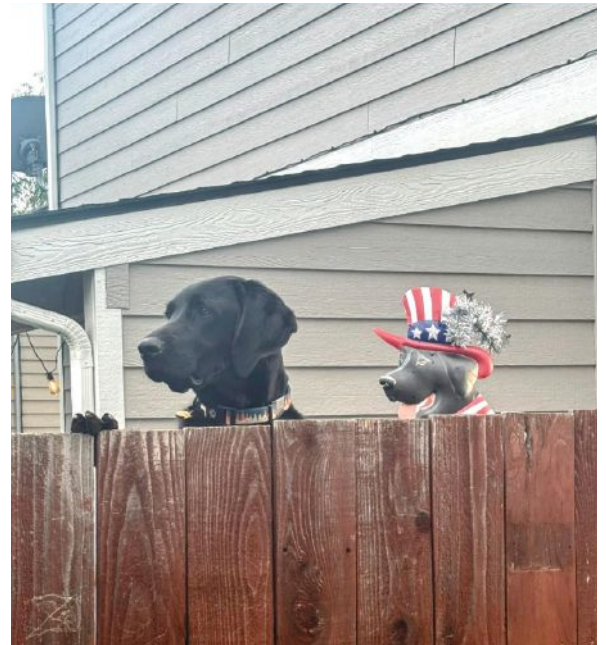
Send entries to: rural@mtco-ops.com. No more than 20 MB at a time. No prints please.



Rodeo Takedown

A cowboy looks for a quick time during the Belt Rodeo.

Photo by Diane Halvorsen of Belt.



Twinning

A lab and his festive twin strike similar poses.

Photo by Kay Love of Missoula.

'Out to Pasture'

This oil painting by **Alanna Ober of Kalispell** depicts an International Harvester in a field near Rudyard.



'Becuase of Ravalli Electric'

Anita Bozich of Stevensville shows the power of electricity in this artistic photo.





The Magazine of the
Montana Electric Cooperatives'
Association

Visit us online: www.mtco-ops.com

Email: rural@mtco-ops.com

BASIN ELECTRIC



RELIABILITY

POWER YOU CAN DEPEND ON

No matter the season or storm our members face, Basin Electric provides reliable and affordable electricity for our members' homes, schools, and businesses. We'll do everything we can to keep fans running, the lights on, and the coffee brewing.



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