



Rural Montana

Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association Magazine | OCTOBER 2026

DECIPHERING



Data Centers

a five-part
SERIES

part
4

ADDRESSING THE CONCERNS

BROADVIEW RESIDENT RAISES CONCERNS, DATA CENTERS RESPOND

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Broadview resident
Kassi Solberg stands
by a sign on her
property opposing a
data center. **Photo
by Ryan Hall.**



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October 2026

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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

Data centers in Montana: Understanding potential drawbacks

MARK LAMBRECHT, CEO of Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association



One of *Rural Montana's* primary goals is to provide electric cooperative members with accurate, factual and unbiased information about issues that affect them. We launched the five-part series on data centers because of their significant potential to affect Montana's electric grid, its communities and ratepayers.

Previously, we provided a fundamental understanding of what data centers are, examined their resource needs and explored how they could benefit the communities in which they're located. We promised an honest, balanced look at the potential drawbacks. This issue delivers on that commitment by examining one Montanan's concerns about the potential impacts of a proposed data center, including its effects on water, electricity, eminent domain, noise and land use.

Beyond individual community concerns, broader questions are being raised about who should pay for the infrastructure needed to support large new electric loads such as data centers.

The Energy and Technology Interim Committee (ETIC) of the Montana Legislature recently voted to advance legislation aimed at preventing regulated utilities, such as NorthWestern Energy, from having ratepayers subsidize development of the generation and transmission infrastructure demanded by data centers and other large loads. The draft legislation

would also require financial guarantees from large loads to protect consumers from having to pay for electricity infrastructure built for large customers should they cease operations.

The legislation would not apply to electric cooperatives, which are not regulated by the Montana Public Service Commission, but are instead governed by their individual boards of directors. Co-ops don't need legislation to protect their members from paying for data center development. They're committed to ensuring data centers pay for all generation and transmission connection infrastructure up front, and that they build additional reserve capacity to help prevent service interruptions to co-op members during periods of peak demand.

The Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association expects the ETIC legislation, along with other proposals related to data centers, to be a major focus of the 2027 Montana Legislative Session. We will be thoroughly engaged in every bill, hearing and vote that has the potential to affect the interests of electric cooperative members.

Our commitment is straightforward: to advocate for affordable, reliable electricity while protecting the long-term interests and well-being of Montana's electric cooperative communities. 

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Concerns about data centers

OPPONENTS WORRY ABOUT LAND DEVALUATION, AND THE USE OF WATER AND POWER



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

LEWISTOWN native Kassi Solberg and her husband moved to just outside Broadview in November 2025, looking to find their Montana paradise and establish a property that could be handed down for generations.

On Jan. 3, 44 days later, she learned Quantica Infrastructure and Big Sky Development Infrastructure (BDSI) were planning to build a large 1,100 Megawatt (MW) generative AI data center in phases just four miles away. She soon found out that neighbors had leased the companies up to 45,000 acres of additional land for potential wind turbines, solar panels and a likely baseload power source such as a natural gas plant.

Quantica noted that it initially announced the Big Sky Campus in a press release in August 2025, sharing that the 5,000-acre campus located outside of Billings would be a 1 gigawatt energy and digital infrastructure campus.

"This is the worst mistake I ever made moving here. Worst choice. Ever," Solberg said. "I would have never bought near wind turbines or solar. They brought my property value down before I even walked in the door."

She added that selling and leaving is not an option.

"We poured our entire life savings into this place. We will be lucky to get what we paid for it out of it – if it's not completely destroyed," Solberg said, adding her adult children have no interest in joining her in Montana or inheriting the home now. "What's going to be left for them? This was

DECIPHERING Data Centers

A FIVE-PART SERIES

PART 4: ADDRESSING THE CONCERNS

This is the fourth in a five-part series on data centers. The previous three issues looked at what a data center is, the community benefits and potential power options. Next month will examine the prospects of data centers coming to Montana, particularly in co-op country. To see previous stories in the series, visit www.mtco-ops.com/rural-montana/data-centers.

next month: PROSPECTS OF DATA CENTERS IN MONTANA

supposed to be not only our little nest, but it was supposed to be for (future) generations."

Raising concerns

Solberg is not alone, national polls show 70 percent of Americans oppose data centers being built near them, and a recent Montana Free Press/Rutgers Eagleton poll showed nearly 75 percent of Montanans oppose a data center being built near by. While there are many reasons people oppose data centers, the most common are residential power rate increases, power availability, water use, noise pollution and land use.

A quick recap

This series has already shown how some communities have embraced data centers, and the benefits that can come from them, such as a substantial increase in property taxes leading to newer schools and city buildings. But Washington, where those data centers are located, offers no property tax incentives for those centers. Montana

offers an attractive .9 percent property tax rate for data centers, meaning any influx would likely be less tax revenue than in Washington. This series has also discussed power, noting in some areas such as Georgia and Virginia, residential rates have increased greatly, while in Washington, a Grant County Public Utility District (PUD) official said the data centers pay more than the cost to serve themselves, while residents pay significantly less than the cost to serve their homes.

In Montana, Quantica has said it wants to cover the costs of serving the data center.

"As a developer we want to pay our own way, we do not want ratepayers to have increased costs in power rates," said Charlie Baker, accounting officer for Quantica.

The how-to power question is an important one, but opponents also note data centers could lead to loss of access to power for residents – and it's already happened.

Earlier this year, NV Energy announced that it will end its power

supply agreement with Liberty Utilities in 2027, leaving approximately 49,000 residents as well as local ski resorts without a power provider. Liberty, which serves the Lake Tahoe area in California and Nevada, currently gets 75 percent of its power from NV Energy. The reason for the change is to send the freed-up energy to new industrial data centers near Reno, Nevada, where major tech companies such as Google, Apple and Microsoft are building large facilities to run AI systems, according to an article in *Fortune*.

In that case, some groups blame the utility for not planning for the abundance of new data centers, while others blame the data centers themselves, according to the article.

In Montana, electric cooperatives have long maintained that their long-term preferential power agreement with Bonneville Power Administration and the long-term contract many eastern Montana cooperatives have with the Western Area Power Administration and/or Basin Electric Power Cooperative would protect members if data centers were to come to electric co-op country. They also have said any data center would be responsible to either bring its own generation or pay for the generation and transmission upgrades and construction needed to serve any large new load, without impacting members.

Solberg is not an electric co-op member. Her utility, NorthWestern Energy, has filed a large load tariff with the Public Service Commission that it says protects consumers from high rates. The PSC has not issued a final ruling on that filing.

"I don't believe a thing they say," Solberg said of her utility. "I believe they will prioritize data centers over people."

Water

One issue raised by Solberg, and people across the country, is how much water data centers use for cooling.

Ryan Beebout, vice president of Sabey Data Centers – West, said that



This is the chilling portion of a closed-loop colling system for a data center. The blue air conditioners cool a pipe containing water, which is then used to cool the air coming off the servers at the Sabey data center in Quincy, Washington. | RYAN HALL PHOTO

HOW MUCH WATER IS 20,000 GALLONS?

= { 5 kids swimming pools (15' diam. x 42" deep) **or**
Average daily useage of 66.6 Montana homes **or**
Daily irrigation of 3.33 acres of Montana cropland

Other usages

Montana Golf Course: 50,000,000+ gallons a year (136,989 daily average)

Lumber Mill: 45,000 gallons a day

Irrigated acre of Montana cropland: 6,000 gallons a day

Avg. Montana House: 300 gallons a day

there are many different kinds of data centers, and the type and size of data center, and especially the type of cooling system used, determines their water use. At Sabey's facility in Quincy, Washington, some buildings use virtually no water because they use a closed-loop cooling system. Others use older evaporative technology, which requires more water.

Beebout said cooling is basically a tradeoff between power and water usage, air-conditioners that chill the pipe containing water in a closed-loop system consume more power, while evaporative coolers use much less power, but are heavy water users.

Walking through the 57-mega-watt Quincy facility earlier this year, Beebout explained how the closed-loop cooling system works. The server rooms in this non-AI data center must be kept at a temperature of 65 to 81 degrees Fahrenheit, and a relative humidity of about 50 percent.

He explained how each set of servers is grouped in a pod, and how the heat from that pod rises into a containment area, keeping the hot and cold air separated. The exhausted air is about 20 degrees warmer than room temperature. The server room has a 14-foot ceiling, with 8-10 feet above the ceiling for the hot air. The hot air is brought through an air handler, where cold water is circulated through pipes to cool down the air, which is then recirculated into the room. It's essentially a large radiator. This helps keep outside dust and smoke from coming into the server rooms. The water in the pipe is warmed during the air-cooling process. It then travels outside, where a series of air conditioners cools the pipe, and thus the water, before the water is recirculated to begin the process again.

"This building, we are not consuming any water at all," Beebout said, adding

See DATA CENTERS, next page

DATA CENTERS

Continued from previous page

that the water never leaves the pipe. “We don’t ever have to replenish it.”

He noted that in the summer the system uses more energy, while in the winter there are days when the coolers don’t even have to run, as the ambient air cools the water.

In Montana, BSDI is planning for a closed-loop cooling system at the Big Sky Campus, meaning minimal water will be used for cooling. Closed-loop systems are initially charged during commissioning and do not require routine water replenishment during normal operations, the company said in an email.

“When the Big Sky Campus is fully operational, it’s estimated that the campus will use 20,000 gallons (of water) per day, primarily for domestic use,” Baker said.

“My research showed it’s not a fully closed loop, that it must be discharged somewhere, that the water is so mineralized they would need to add chemicals,” Solberg said. “Which chemicals, we don’t know. The company is not telling us. Where will these be stored?”

In the September news release, the company said it planned to tap into the deeper Madison Aquifer, at a depth of at least 4,000 feet, not the Eagle Aquifer used by local residents.

According to the online water rights database maintained by DNRC, BSDI currently owns two wells and has five surface water rights that came with the property it purchased. None of those rights would satisfy the company’s stated plans.

The existing wells on the property are about 100-feet deep and would only produce about 3,000 gallons a day even if they had enough water to meet the limit of the right. The surface water rights, which are listed under the stock category, are measured by an estimated 30 gallons of water a cow could drink a day, multiplied by the carrying capacity of the land.

Changing the existing stock rights to industrial or domestic use would require approval of the DNRC, pending the determination that the change would not affect older water rights. The oldest water right the company owns is dated 1936; the newest is 1992.

Other Concerns

Water, power availability and power rates are the chief concerns with any data center project, particularly AI generative data centers such as the one proposed in Broadview.

Other concerns also exist. Locally, Solberg is concerned about the construction phase’s impact on traffic. She said that if access to Highway 3 is closed off or delayed during the approximately three-year construction phase, it will severely impact residents’ ability to go to Billings.

“That’s how you get anywhere from here,” she said.

In an email, BSDI said that construction will generate temporary truck traffic, and it is currently working on designating construction routes to minimize impacts on local roads, traffic management plans to reduce congestion during peak hours and communication with neighbors about construction schedules.

Noise is also a concern at some plants, depending on the abatement measures installed. The Sabey center in Quincy was quieter than most industrial sites. A conversation could be held inside the server rooms at normal volume, and it was even quieter outside.

In Broadview, both noise and light concerns will be partially mitigated by the location of the site, which is set back from the main road, said Taylor McCarthy, director of communications for Quantica. There are also plans for additional noise and light mitigation measures.

Eminent Domain

Another concern of opponents is the use of eminent domain in order to build the infrastructure needed for data

centers.

A recent example of this involves our much-cited example of Quincy, Washington, where Grant County PUD filed a lawsuit in 2025 to condemn parts of customer’s properties that sits in the path of a planned transmission line to Quincy.

A judge ruled in August that the utility has the legal right to take private property to build electrical lines, according to the *Seattle Times*. The issue of compensation was left for a jury to decide, unless the parties come to an agreement or waive the right to a jury.

The transmission line would roughly double the amount of power that can be delivered to Quincy. The *Times* said approximately 37 percent of Grant County’s power was consumed by data centers in 2025.

The line would impact 34 homes, cutting across some of their front yards.

In Montana, utilities have access to eminent domain, but it is believed that no electric cooperative has ever exercised it. A NorthWestern Energy spokesperson said that utility has not used eminent domain in Montana. The spokesperson said the company could not comment on whether its predecessor, Montana Power, which NorthWestern purchased in 2002, had used eminent domain.

Sabey’s Beebout noted that across the country, most data centers try to be good neighbors and support their communities, but he said there are a few that don’t operate that way, and it gives the industry a black eye.

“There’s a right way and a wrong way to do it,” Beebout said. “There’s certainly examples of bad ones. But most do it well.”

Done well or not, Solberg doesn’t think AI data centers belong in Big Sky Country.

“We have been in a drought for six years, why would anyone even think AI Hyperscale data centers are a good idea in Montana?” she asked. 

The walls of Lower Yellowstone Rural Electric Cooperative's new 200-by-250-foot warehouse came together quickly, with the prefabricated concrete panels set in place over a two-week period.



New warehouse taking shape

Lower Yellowstone Rural Electric Cooperative (LYREC) is making progress on a new warehouse that will help meet the cooperative's growing needs for years to come.

The headquarters was built in 1986, and LYREC has required more space over the years. In 2016, LYREC purchased the former Sunrise Equipment property, which has provided much needed storage, office space and work areas. That property has served us well for 10 years, but it became clear additional space was needed as the cooperative continues to grow.

After careful planning and discussion, the LYREC board of trustees approved construction of a new warehouse in the lower yard. Currently, material is stored in three different locations. The new 200-by-250-foot building will bring everything under one roof, making it easier for crews to access materials and equipment. The building will also provide space for larger equipment, additional offices and a meeting room.

The warehouse is being built using prefabricated concrete panels manufactured by Basin Precast Inc. The concrete panels are extremely durable, require little maintenance and hold up well against fire, wind and other harsh conditions. The panels also provide

good insulation and allow the building to be built much faster than traditional construction.

From start to finish, the walls are expected to take approximately two weeks to be erected. Some of the largest panels weigh nearly 28,000 pounds. Each panel takes about 10 hours to cure because of the high-quality concrete mix being used, according to Mike Wolff, Basin Precast vice president of operations.

Wolff knows this type of construction well. Before joining Basin Precast, he spent years working with similar concrete buildings in the Chicago and Milwaukee areas and other parts of the Midwest. He's seen firsthand how durable and long-lasting these structures can be.

As construction continues, some members may wonder whether a new building like this will affect electric rates. The answer is no. The primary factor impacting rates is the cost of wholesale power. Buildings, vehicles and equipment make up only a small portion of the cooperative's overall expenses.

The new warehouse is an investment in LYREC's future. It will provide LYREC with the space it needs to safely store materials and equipment, work more efficiently and continue delivering reliable service to our members for many years to come. ■



Serving up smiles at the Richland County Fair, Lower Yellowstone Rural Electric Cooperative and six other local cooperatives hosted Co-op Day at the Fair on July 30. We served more than 900 root beer floats and 300 popsicles. Thanks to everyone who stopped by to enjoy a treat and visit with us at the fair!



In its continued support of 4-H youth, Lower Yellowstone Rural Electric Cooperative purchased a market lamb from Cruz Lammers and a market hog from Beau Becker at the Richland County 4-H sale. A sheep was also purchased from Lachlan Holbrook at the Roosevelt County 4-H sale (not pictured).

LYREC

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JOHN REDMAN MEMORIAL

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www.lyrec.coop

All submitted essays must be the original work of the applicant. Essays found to be generated by AI tools may be disqualified.



➤ JUNE 17-24, 2027 ◀

MONTANA ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE YOUTH TOUR

Essay topic: If you could build a monument in Washington, D.C., who would you honor and why?

YOUTH TOUR RULES

- ✓ Must be a sophomore or junior
- ✓ Parent/guardian must be a LYREC member
- ✓ Submit application and essay
- ✓ Deadline is Nov. 24, 2026

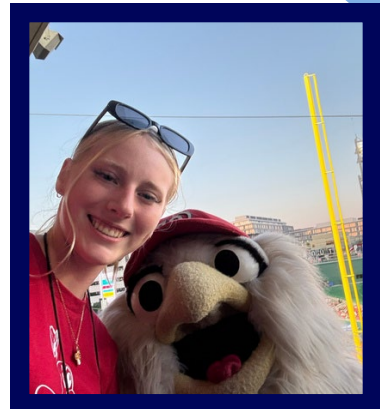
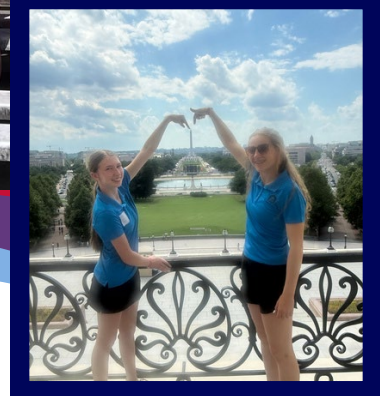
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Go to lyrec.coop for more info



Don't fall for utility scams

As fall arrives and we prepare our homes for colder weather, it's also a good time to think about protecting yourself from scams.

Lower Yellowstone Rural Electric Cooperative (LYREC) works hard to keep our systems and member information safe. Unfortunately, scammers are finding new ways to trick people, and advances in artificial intelligence are making scam emails, text messages, websites and phone calls more convincing than ever.

One common scam is when someone pretends to be from a company. Scammers may pose as LYREC and claim your account is past due, your power will be disconnected or an immediate payment is required. These messages can sound convincing and may even use LYREC's name or logo.

If you get a call, text or email like this, don't panic. Don't click on links or call the phone number in the message. Instead, contact LYREC directly using the phone number or contact information you know is correct.

You can also protect yourself by using strong passwords and using security features, such as multifactor authentication, when available.

Most importantly, take a few moments to make sure you're dealing with the right person before sharing information or making a payment. LYREC will not ask for your payment information over the phone.

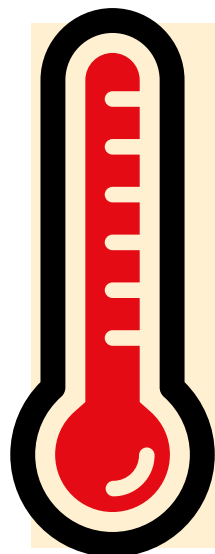
By staying alert and being cautious, you can help protect your personal information and avoid being a victim of a scam. ■



Need heating assistance?

If you are having difficulty paying your heating bill, there is help. The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program is accepting applications. This program helps with heating during the winter months.

Eligibility is based on household income and resources. If you reside in Montana, contact Energy Share at 800-227-0703. If you live in North Dakota, contact Community Action at 701-572-8191. You may also download an application at lyrec.coop or call Lower Yellowstone Rural Electric Cooperative for more information. ■



3200 W. Holly - Sidney, MT 59270

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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:

"What can Congress do to help mitigate wildfire risk and help protect electric cooperative members, and all Montanans?"

A SIMILAR QUESTION WAS ASKED TO MONTANA'S TWO U.S. SENATORS IN RM'S JULY EDITION

**Rep. Downing**

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

Representative Troy Downing

CONGRESS can help mitigate wildfire risk by making it easier to manage our forests before fires start.

That is why I strongly support the Fix Our Forests Act, and introduced the Accelerating Forest Management Act. My bill would streamline environmental reviews for routine timber salvage projects on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands, and help remove dead and hazardous timber before it becomes fuel for catastrophic wildfire.

It would also reauthorize the Forest Ecosystem Health and Recovery Fund so BLM has the resources to respond to fires and carry out proactive forest health work.

For electric cooperatives, this matters directly. Wildfires threaten powerlines, substations, access roads and the rural communities co-ops serve. Congress should give land managers and local

partners more flexibility to reduce hazardous fuels around critical infrastructure and rights-of-way.

We also need to make sure federal agencies can move quickly after a fire. Dead timber loses value fast, and delays make recovery more difficult. Streamlined salvage work can reduce future fuel loads while supporting local mills and rural jobs.

Montana has seen firsthand what happens when forest management is delayed for years. We should not wait until smoke is in the air to start addressing risk.

The goal is simple: manage forests earlier, reduce fuel loads, protect critical infrastructure and give local communities more tools to prevent catastrophic fires before they start. That is better for public safety, rural economies and the reliability of Montana's electric grid. 

**Rep. Zinke**

512 Cannon House
Office Building,
Washington, D.C. 20515
<https://zinke.house.gov>
Ph: (202) 225-5628

Representative Ryan Zinke

MONTANANS understand wildfire better than most. Every summer, our electric cooperatives face the challenge of keeping the lights on while protecting communities from fire. Congress has a responsibility to give our co-ops and land managers the tools they need to reduce that risk before smoke is in the air.

That starts with better management of our forests. For too long, federal red tape and litigation have delayed projects that reduce hazardous fuels and improve forest health. I have consistently supported active management because healthy forests are more resilient to catastrophic wildfire. This year, the House passed a permanent fix to the disastrous Cottonwood decision as part of the Farm Bill. That change would remove a major legal roadblock that has tied up important forest management projects across Montana.

Congress also needs to make it easier for electric cooperatives to protect their infrastructure. Many co-op powerlines cross or border federal lands, but routine work to clear vegetation and remove

dangerous trees can get bogged down in federal permitting. That makes no sense. The bipartisan Fix Our Forests Act, which I co-sponsored, would help streamline vegetation management around electric lines on federal lands, giving utilities greater authority to address risks before they become emergencies.

At the same time, Congress should support locally driven efforts to make Montana's electric grid more resilient. Cooperatives know their systems and communities better than Washington bureaucrats do. Federal policy should give them the flexibility to strengthen vulnerable infrastructure without saddling rural communities with unnecessary mandates or higher costs.

The best time to fight a wildfire is before it starts. That means doing the work on the ground to reduce the risk and making sure our electric cooperatives can protect the infrastructure Montanans depend on. Congress can help by cutting through federal red tape and putting commonsense back into how we manage our lands. 

BBER projects data center impact on MT economy

STORY BY RYAN HALL | RURAL MONTANA EDITOR

DATA centers and their potential impact on the Montana economy was the topic of this year's Economic Outlook Seminar held annually by the Bureau of Business and Economic Research (BBER), which is housed at the University of Montana.

The statewide tour focuses on one topic each year, and its impact on the economy. Last year, energy was the focus.

BBER Director Jeff Michael showed slides discussing what impact a data center would have on Montana's economy, with four phasing scenarios of 500 megawatts each, up to a total of 2,000 MW. The hypothetical model was set in rural Yellowstone County, "based on a true story," Michael added.

"The biggest issue is risk," he said in an interview. "What if it's a bubble situation?"

He said that the data center would have no impact on electricity rates. While data centers increase demand, driving rates up, they also lower prices through economies of scale and by spreading out fixed costs by adding additional use during times that typically are low use.

Michael said the model showed a \$20 billion capital investment, not counting any on-site power generation, and took two years to build. He added two years of construction for each additional 500 MW phase, up to eight years for a 2,000 MW data center.

Michael said the model showed that about \$2 billion of the investment would be for materials or labor from Montana.

As for employment impact, Michael said a 500 MW data center would



TECH SURVEY

Results of a survey of Montana tech employers, provided by Christina Henderson, executive director of the Montana Business Alliance.

- **68 percent** of new hires come from within Montana
- **53 percent** work remotely part of the time, 30 percent are fully remote
- **87 percent** of the companies use AI daily
- **76 percent** say AI is strategic to future growth
- Tech jobs in Montana pay **2.4 times** the average annual wage in the state.

create about 168 permanent jobs, while a 2,000 MW data center would create about 373 permanent jobs. Accounting for indirect jobs, a 500 MW data center would create 390 long-term jobs, and about 2,000 total jobs.

Michael also described other economic impacts, including \$40 million in income during operations of a 500 MW facility, or \$60 million during the operation of a 1,000 MW facility.

Finally, he looked at property tax impacts, noting that a 500 MW data center, at Montana's favorable tax rate

for those facilities, would pay \$33.2 million annually, of which \$13.8 million would fund property tax reductions for others, and \$19.4 million would represent new revenue to state and local governments.

Michael also gave attendees a briefing on the state of Montana's economy as of July, including:

- Jobs are flat
- Wages are rising
- Big investments are coming into the state (Quantica in Broadview, Janicki in Great Falls)

Michael said there are also limiting factors for Montana, such as consumers in the state spend 27 percent more on gasoline than the national average, so the high prices this year have impacted the state more than other places. He noted there are some positives from that trend as well, such as oil-drilling permits in the state being at their highest level since 2014.

He said the rest of 2026 hinges on a few things, with oil prices at the top of the list as Montanans and tourists drive a lot. Population growth and migration into the state are stabilizing. Additionally, home prices have flattened out and inventory is increasing, and while incomes are rising faster than home prices and property tax cuts were instituted, buyers are getting no help from mortgage rates. It is also unknown how the new second-home tax will impact the market.

The other question is with at least three large data center proposals being withdrawn in the last year, will a data center project break ground and, if so, how many and when? **RM**

Hosted by **Montana Council of Cooperatives**Co-hosted with **Montana's Credit Unions**

2026 MONTANA CO-OP ACADEMY

Building Montana's next generation of cooperative
leaders and community builders

**OCTOBER 19-21, 2026****BOZEMAN, MONTANA**

Monday afternoon

• Tuesday full day

• Wednesday morning

Co-op Academy is a training and connection event for Montana's cooperative leaders, rising leaders, outreach staff, community partners, and people supporting cooperative development work across the state.

TWO TRACKS



TRACK 1: COOPERATIVE LEADERSHIP

For co-op leaders and rising leaders, including managers, department heads, directors, senior staff, and people preparing for greater responsibility.



TRACK 2: COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

For outreach staff, community partners, Extension, economic development professionals, and others helping communities explore shared needs and cooperative solutions.



WHO SHOULD ATTEND

- Current and rising co-op leaders
- Managers, directors, and department heads
- Outreach and member engagement staff
- Community and economic development partners
- People supporting cooperative development across Montana

WHAT YOU'LL GAIN



Practical leadership and communication tools



Cross-sector cooperative learning



Real-world community engagement ideas



Stronger understanding of co-op culture and development



Connections with peers and partners across Montana

montanacouncil.coopadmin@montanacouncil.coop

406-727-1517

With support from the Cooperative Development Foundation
and the Montana Department of Commerce.

More than a safety inspection

REC joins electric cooperatives across the state to strengthen workplace safety

By **KEVIN KNOTTS** | Ravalli Electric Line Superintendent

AT Ravalli Electric Cooperative, safety is not simply a policy, a meeting topic or a box to be checked. It is a commitment we make to one another every day to speak up, continue learning and make sure everyone goes home safely.

That commitment is at the heart of REC's participation in the Rural Electric Safety Achievement Program, better known as RESAP.

Every three years, employees from electric cooperatives across Montana visit REC to conduct a comprehensive safety assessment. The team reviews our facilities, equipment, vehicles, documentation, safety procedures and day-to-day work practices. They walk through our headquarters, warehouse, shops, storage areas and substations, looking at our operation through a fresh set of experienced eyes.

"RESAP isn't about finding fault," said Ravalli Electric Cooperative Chief Operating Officer Kyle Kearns. "It's about identifying opportunities to improve and helping one another work safer."

The people performing the assessment understand the realities of electric utility work because they are surrounded by it every day. They are lineworkers, safety professionals, operations employees, managers and other cooperative employees who face many of the same challenges we do.

That shared experience creates honest conversations. It allows cooperatives to discuss what is working, where improvements can be made and what lessons have been learned without losing sight of the people behind the work.

RESAP isn't just a one-way process. REC employees also serve on assessment teams at other Montana electric cooperatives. Those visits give our employees an opportunity to step outside their normal routines, see how other cooperatives approach similar challenges, and bring valuable ideas and best practices back home.

"Every cooperative has something to teach, and every cooperative has something to learn," Kearns said. "That exchange of knowledge is what makes RESAP so valuable."

No two electric systems are exactly alike. Each cooperative has different terrain, equipment, facilities and operating challenges. However, the responsibility remains the same: protect our employees, serve our members safely and continue improving.

RESAP reflects the cooperative spirit at its best. Rather



Montana electric cooperative staff complete safety evaluations at Ravalli Electric during a recent RESAP inspection. | **REC PHOTO**

than working in isolation, Montana's electric cooperatives open their doors to one another, share their experiences and work together to strengthen safety across the entire state.

The greatest value of RESAP isn't found in a checklist or final report. It is found in the conversations that continue after the assessment team leaves. The improvements made, the ideas brought home and the renewed awareness employees carry into their work.

Safety is never finished. It requires humility, honest feedback and a willingness to learn from others. Sometimes the most valuable lesson comes from seeing a familiar task through someone else's eyes.

At its heart, RESAP is about people.

It is about looking out for the person working beside you. It is about sharing what we've learned so another cooperative doesn't have to learn it the hard way.

And it is about making sure every employee returns home safely to the people who matter most.

At REC, we are proud to take part in a program that strengthens not only our own safety culture, but the safety of electric cooperatives throughout Montana. Because when cooperatives learn together, we all work safer. **RM**

MECA launches new podcast

THE Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association, publisher of *Rural Montana*, has launched a new podcast, *Beyond the Meter*.

The new podcast, which can be found on your favorite streaming service, including Spotify, will feature people with connections to electric cooperatives, and who have appeared in the pages of this magazine.

Episodes already include interviews with candidates for U.S. House and Senate in Montana, as well as Brandon Wittman, manager of Yellowstone Valley Electric Cooperative/chairman of the board for CoBank, a cooperative finance company. Andrew Don, CEO of another finance company CFC, has also appeared, as has Braxten Nielsen, a man who was paralyzed in a rodeo accident.

Future episodes include Youth Tour participants, the Montana Youth Leadership Council representative, motivational speaker Dougie Hall and a bareknuckle fighting champion from Montana, among others.



Brandon Wittman, CEO of Yellowstone Valley Electric Cooperative and chairman of the board for CoBank, talks with MECA Communications Director and Rural Montana Editor Ryan Hall during the *Beyond the Meter* podcast.

The podcasts, which average about 30 minutes long, with a few exceptions, feature *Rural Montana* Editor Ryan Hall sitting down with guests and having a conversation. The goal is to let listeners “eavesdrop” on that conversation.

New episodes will drop by the first of the month, each month.



Scan this QR Code to listen to the podcast

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1st
PLACE

Cabbage Rolls

Madison Broadbent | BALLANTINE

INGREDIENTS

2 packages yeast
½ cups sugar
1-½ tablespoons salt
3-½ cups warm water
½ cup oil
1 T vinegar
8 cups flour
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 whole onion, chopped
1 pound ground beef
1 whole cabbage, shredded
Salt and pepper, to taste

DIRECTIONS

Mix the yeast, sugar, salt, warm water, oil, vinegar and flour together. Let rise 1 hour. Punch down. Let rise 45 minutes. Roll out to about 1/16-inch thick.

Saute garlic and onions; add ground beef and fry until browned. Add cabbage and fry until tender and browned. Salt and pepper to taste.

Cut the dough into 5x5" squares and put a generous portion of the beef mixture on the middle of each square. Gather all 4 corners together and pinch shut each diagonal seam toward the center. Turn upside down on a baking sheet.

Bake for 20 minutes at 400 degrees. Brush with butter when they come out of the oven.



2nd
PLACE

Marzipan Kirschkuchen

Mary Notess | KALISPELL

INGREDIENTS

1 kg. sweet cherries, washed, dried and pitted	250 g butter
100 g almond paste	250 g sugar
50 g heavy whipping cream	6 large eggs
	450 g flour
	2 T baking powder
	125 ml milk

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Cut almond paste into small pieces and mix well with whipping cream. Add butter and sugar, and beat until fluffy. Mix in the eggs.

Combine flour and baking powder, then gradually mix into wet ingredients. Add enough milk so that the dough falls heavily from the spoon.

Pour into greased 10.5-by-15.5 inch jelly roll pan (9-by-13 will work in a pinch). Gently lay cherries on top and bake 45-55 minutes. Enjoy with powdered sugar sprinkled on top.



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 November send your favorite Roast or Oven-Roasted recipes by October 15. Please send in December recipes anytime: Frosted or Glazed. Try to limit the ingredients and length of directions for space. Please include a photo, if possible.

PHOTO BY MADISON BROADBENT

3rd
PLACE

Sauerkraut and kielbasa Casserole

Mel Hayes | LIBBY

INGREDIENTS

3 T butter
2 cups kielbasa, sliced
1 medium onion, sliced thinly
28 oz. sauerkraut, drained
2 lbs. potatoes, cooked and sliced
2 large eggs
4 T milk
2 cups cheese, grated
Salt and pepper to taste

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

In butter, fry onions and kielbasa. Add sauerkraut.

In a 9-by-13 inch casserole dish add half the potatoes and half of the sauerkraut mixture on top. Layer again.

Mix eggs and milk, salt and pepper, and pour over the top of the casserole. Top with cheese.

Bake 30 minutes.



Events Calendar

NORTHWEST

October 3

Trego Heritage Day — Blarney Ranch, 191 Ant Flat Road, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., www.thehalltfs.com/heritageways, 307-699-5026 | **LIBBY**

October 3-4, 18-19

Hunter Sight-In — Whitefish Rifle & Pistol Club, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., 314-8149 | **WHITEFISH**

October 9-10

Teakettle Quilt Guild Harvest Quilt and Craft Sale — Hillside Church Quonset Hut, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., | **WHITEFISH**

October 10

Stayin' Alive Celebration — A disco fundraiser to celebrate 50 years of Abbie Shelter services in Flathead County, Wachholz College Center on the FVCC campus, 5 to 9 p.m., abbieshelter.org, 752-4735 | **KALISPELL**

October 10

PEO Chapter CB Annual Makers' Market — Gathering Place, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., 609-6320 | **LAKESIDE**

October 16, 17, 23, 24

Conrad Mansion Ghost Tours — Conrad Mansion Museum, 7 to 9:15 p.m. every 15 minutes, 755-2166 | **KALISPELL**

October 17-18

Seize the Day Flathead presents Craft and Vendor Event — Flathead County Fairgrounds Expo Building, Sat: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sun: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. | **KALISPELL**

October 17-18

The Women of Rollins Fall Holiday Bazaar and Bake Sale — Shop for Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas and more, along with baked goods, Old Rollins School House, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. | **ROLLINS**

October 18

Westerners Int'l presents Scott Tanner on History of West Glacier and Belton, Entrance to Glacier National Park — NW Montana History Museum, 6:30 to 8 p.m., 309-0958 | **KALISPELL**

October 20

Kalispell Women's Connection Live Auction/Fundraiser — Guest speaker is Deanna Doying, 1830 Hwy. 35, 11:30 a.m., call 261-9894 for reservations or information | **KALISPELL**

October 20

Kalispell Square Dance Lessons — Smith Valley Grange, 2902 Hwy 2 West, 7 to 9 p.m., 871-0173 | **KALISPELL**

October 20

Soup for Supper Fundraiser for Replacement Station 251 — Choose from 10 different soups, roll and dessert, drive through or pickup only, Lake Blaine Fire Station, 3:30 to 7 p.m., 250-7396 | **CRESTON**

October 21

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

October 22-24

NRA Finals Rodeo — Majestic Valley Arena, 7 p.m., 252-1122 | **KALISPELL**

October 24

Senior Resource Fair — 17 vendors, Kalispell Senior Center, 1 to 4 p.m., 609-5351 | **KALISPELL**

October 24

Sunburst Arts and Education Presents: Singer-Songwriter Mike Murray — LCHS Auditorium, 7 p.m., 297-0197 | **EUREKA**

October 24

Columbia Falls Women's Connection Make it, Bake It, Sew It, Grow It fundraiser — Vendors and lunch with a donation, 827 9th St. West, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., 892-3621 | **COLUMBIA FALLS**

November 1

Lutefisk Dinner — Trinity Lutheran Church, 12:30 to 3 p.m., 590-1379 | **CHOTEAU**

STATEWIDE

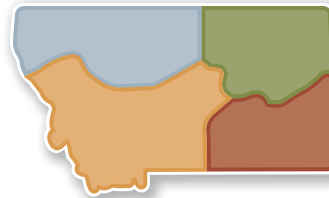
All year

Blood Drives — Various locations, see website for full schedule, redcrossblood.org.

Blood Drives — See website for full details, vitalant.org.

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 October 15 for November 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.



NORTHEAST

November 21

All-Handcrafted Holiday Bazaar — Vendors, lunch, Schermer pecans, Glasgow Civic Center, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., 263-5200 | **GLASGOW**

SOUTHEAST

October 24

Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd Annual Bazaar — Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., 672-3723 | **BILLINGS**

October 25

Night at the Museum — O'Fallon Historical Museum, 4 to 9 p.m., 778-3265 | **BAKER**

November 5

Dinosaur Dimensions — Longfellow Gymnasium, 6 to 7:30 p.m., 778-3265 | **BAKER**

November 21-22

Billings Big Sky Optimist Vendor Market & Craft Fair — 505 Orchard Lane, Sat: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Sun: 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., 259-1306 | **BILLINGS**

SOUTHWEST

October 2-3

Stevensville Scarecrow Festival — Family event, Main Street, Fri: 3 to 9 p.m., Sat: noon to 9 p.m., stevensvillescarecrowfestival.org 224-4880 | **STEVENSVILLE**

October 2-4

Townsend Rotary Fall Festival — Live music, food and craft vendors, car show, Heritage Park, Fri: 4 to 9 p.m., Sat: 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., Sun: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., www.TownsendFallFest.com, 918-914-2055 | **TOWNSEND**

October 3

Mountain Valley UMC Annual Harvest Sale — 2470 East River Rd., lunch at noon, auction at 1 p.m., 222-4897 | **LIVINGSTON**

October 9-11

Lewistown Gun Show — Trade Center at the Fergus County Fairgrounds, Fri: 3 to 7 p.m., Sat: 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., Sun: 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., 366-1459 | **LEWISTOWN**

October 24

Flea Market — Vendors, chili, soup, pie, Shields Valley Senior Center, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., 578-2270 | **WILLSALL**

October 24

Bitter Root Humane Association The Howling — A night of wickedly good fun to benefit the animals, Ravalli County Fairgrounds Events Center, 5 p.m., see bitterroothumane.org for ticket info, 363-5311

October 24, 31

Family Fright & Fun Days at the Farm — Cultivating Connections MT at Homestead Organics Farm campus, noon to 4 p.m., CultivatingConnectionsMT.org | **HAMILTON**

November 13-14

Bazaar — Lunch, bake sale and handmade items and crafts, Florence/Carlton Community Church, Fri: 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., Sat: 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. | **FLORENCE**

November 8

Lutefisk Dinner — Shields River Lutheran Church, noon to 3 p.m., 223-9014 | **WILLSALL**

November 28

Nine Mile Holiday Fair — Nine Mile Community Center, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., 240-2597 | **HUSON**

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 WINTER
DRAWINGS AND POEMS**



Elaina Cole, 13, Darby | **RAVALLI ELECTRIC**

Madison Rae Browe, 5, Corvallis | **RAVALLI ELECTRIC**



Alexia Lee, 11, Kalispell | **FLATHEAD ELECTRIC**

Jeremiah Spencer, 14, Billings | **YELLOWSTONE VALLEY 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.



Look Here

A young girl reads to a horse during a photoshoot.
Photo by Sandie Green of Billings.

Bear Necessity

A cub checks out a nearby visitor.
Photo by Mike Sweigart of Columbia Falls.



Eagle Eye

An eagle sits atop a tree with the moon behind it in Logan State Park. **Photo by Steven Barta of Columbia Falls.**

Fourth Fireworks

Fireworks explode over Seeley Lake on the Fourth of July.
Photo by Carol Fowler of Seeley Lake.





The Magazine of the
Montana Electric Cooperatives'
Association

Visit us online: www.mtco-ops.com

Email: rural@mtco-ops.com

BASIN ELECTRIC  COMMUNITY

CREATED FOR COMMUNITIES

Community support is more than a nice idea – it's Basin Electric's culture. Giving back is important to us because charitable programs and non-profit organizations help our communities thrive.

Our communities have supported us throughout the years by providing a strong workforce, and without them, we couldn't provide reliable, affordable electricity across rural America. Now more than ever, community matters.

 **BASIN ELECTRIC
POWER COOPERATIVE**
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