

Red River Valley Cooperative Power Association

# SPARKS

November 2021

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



**Cooperatives on call**

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# SPARKS

Red River Valley Co-op Power is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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Halstad, Minnesota (USPS 509-300)

## OFFICERS & DIRECTORS

- Roger Krostue ..... Fisher  
*Chairman*
- Marvis Thompson ..... Perley  
*Vice Chairman*
- Trevor Sorby ..... Glyndon  
*Secretary-Treasurer*
- Bob Kinkade ..... Ada
- Paul Baukol ..... Hendrum

Rich Whitcomb  
*Chief Executive Officer*

### Scheduled Board Meeting

Board meetings are held in Halstad at the cooperative office starting at 8:30 a.m. on the next-to-last Monday of each month.

### Outages:

**800-788-7784**

**Our offices will be closed Thursday, Nov. 25. If you experience an outage or power quality concern, please call dispatch at 800-788-7784.**

On the cover: Justin Nord, apprentice lineman



## THE CEO'S REPORT Small facility charge increase likely

by Rich Whitcomb, CEO

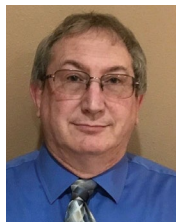
Line crews continue to work hard wrapping up field projects before the frost goes too deep into the ground and puts a halt to what has been a productive construction season for Red River Valley Co-op Power.

Tentatively, operations finished about 130 projects this year comprising a mixture of new services, service upgrades and maintenance projects. They will now transition to winter maintenance activities, including line patrol, hardware inspections, pole replacements, brushing and continuing to update digital mapping of the whole system.

Despite less than anticipated kilowatt-hour sales, your cooperative has so far met its financial and operational requirement. The good news for 2022 is that a wholesale rate increase from Minnkota Power Cooperative appears unlikely (barring anything unforeseen). The flip side is supply-side delays and material cost increases are presenting challenges. Directors will be presented with the formal 2022 budget later this month for consideration.

The budget request includes two small component changes – a \$1 per month facility charge increase to Rate 1 (homes, general single-phase service) and a 75 cent per month facility charge increase to members who have off-peak electric heat. If approved, this would be the first change to any rate component in five years.

More will be communicated to the membership in December as well.



### Stubstad named District 3 director

At its October board meeting, your directors appointed Curtis Stubstad of Sabin to the vacant

District 3 director position after an interview selection process. Mr. Stubstad

is a business owner, farmer and member of the Clay County Planning Commission. He will be seated at the upcoming November board meeting.

### Zastrow and Zurn hired

Becky Zastrow and Nathan Zurn have been hired full-time stationed out of the Halstad office. Zastrow is a customer service representative who started in October. Zurn started in June and is an apprentice lineworker.



Becky Zastrow



Nathan Zurn

### Building update

Final drawings and specifications are now complete regarding the Halstad main office/warehouse renovation and rebuild project. Bids should be opened around the first of the year, and if accepted, a construction timeline will be drawn up for the spring. Hopefully, the long process of study and planning is coming to an end.



South Exterior

This process has been communicated for some time now in this periodical. For an overall summary of why the project is necessary, please go to [rrvcoop.com](http://rrvcoop.com), 2021 Sparks, and you will find the facilities review sheet.

# Value during volatility

## Your co-op expects active off-peak season spurred by volatile energy markets

Last winter, a polar vortex event sent energy market prices soaring. Fewer resources across the country were able to generate electricity in the historic cold, and demand was high for the few resources that were generating enough to sell into the electric grid.

Utilities are experiencing higher market prices again – but it’s not because of a single major weather event this time. It’s the climbing cost of natural gas.

“Natural gas is one of those resources that typically help manage the variability in electricity generation, and we’re seeing prices that are significantly higher than what we’ve seen in the past 10-15 years,” explained Todd Sailer, senior manager of power supply & resource planning for Minnkota Power Cooperative (Red River Valley Co-op Power’s wholesale power provider). “We’re seeing prices double and triple what they were last year, or even over the last couple of years.”

While the energy markets soared for only 7-10 days in February 2021’s polar vortex, Sailer says this volatility could last throughout the winter season, or longer. That’s good insight for cooperative members on the demand response – or off-peak – program, which allows the co-op to temporarily interrupt service to a participant’s off-peak loads (electric heating, large-capacity water heaters, electric vehicle chargers, etc.) in exchange for a lower electric rate.

Minnkota’s energy marketers are preparing for 200 hours of off-peak load control this winter, but Sailer says that could rise if natural gas prices continue to climb. He also notes that load control could be spread out over more days and not always coincide with major weather events.

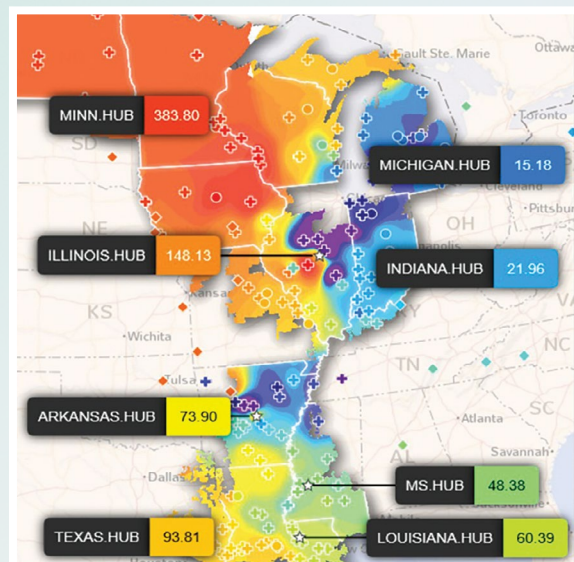
Ultimately, the cooperative will deploy off-peak load control when it needs to protect itself from buying high-price energy from the market. This system was established years ago to avoid building more generation facilities for peak need that only arises a few days out

of the year. That, in turn, keeps rates low for members.

***“By being a part of the off-peak load control program, members can also take advantage of an even lower electric rate without any disruption in comfort.”***

As we enter the winter, Sailer urges those who are a part of the off-peak program to make sure they have adequate backup fuel supply now. When the cooperative runs its load control tests before the peak of the cold season, confirm that all parts of your heating system are running smoothly.

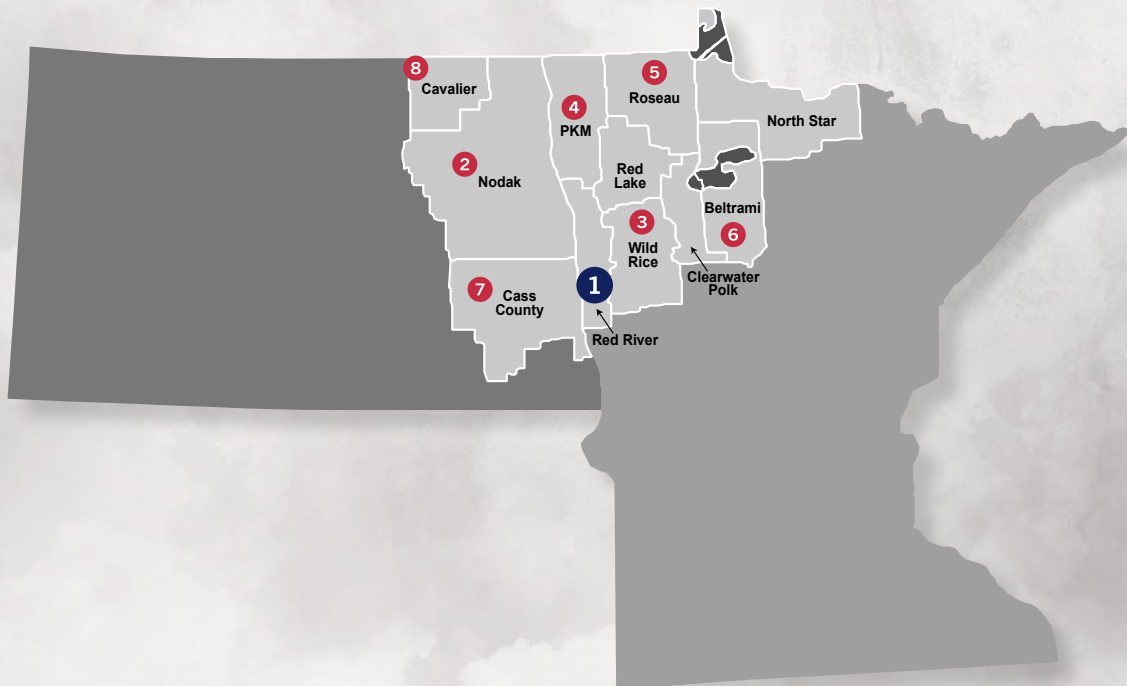
“It’s not just natural gas – it’s propane, it’s all fuel sources that have seen an increase in cost. Which leads to people reliant on their off-peak system,” Sailer said. “Members should be making sure their system works.”



*This image of the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO) energy markets on Feb. 13, 2021, shows a swath of red, where market prices in our region climbed to about 25 times higher than recent averages. With natural gas prices high, any dip in intermittent resource generation – like wind – can send costs soaring.*

# Cooperatives on call

Red River Valley Co-op Power and other affiliated local cooperatives are chock-full of employees who have stepped up to serve their local fire departments and as first responders. The following is a sampling of the community volunteers spread throughout the region – and thank you to the many more we were unable to list!



1



## RED RIVER VALLEY CO-OP POWER

**Justin Nord, Apprentice Lineworker**  
Halstad Volunteer Fire Department

*"I grew up in the small community of Halstad. I enjoy helping people within the community that helped me grow up and become the person I am today."*

2



## NODAK ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

**Max Stromsodt, Apprentice Lineworker**  
Finley Volunteer Fire Department

*"Finley is a small town, and any help around the community is nice. I enjoy going out on fire calls and being part of parades and community events."*

3



## WILD RICE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

**Nathan Pazdernik, Power Quality Coordinator**  
Mahnomon Volunteer Fire Department – Secretary

*"My dad had a fire a long time ago and, at the drop of a hat, all of those guys came out to try to help us save our shed. When they all did that and didn't think twice about it, right then I said, I have to do that."*

4



## PKM ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

**Scott Slusar, Line Crew Foreman**  
Hallock Volunteer Fire Department – Assistant Fire Chief

*"The most enjoyable thing is seeing the relief on people's faces when we show up. Very similar to being at work during a storm, everybody's happy to see you. A close second is the crew – it really is a brotherhood, again very similar to being a co-op lineman."*

5



### ROSEAU ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

**Neal Vatnsdal, Lineworker**  
Roseau Volunteer Fire Department – First Lieutenant

*“Our community is so supportive of our fire department – it’s unbelievable how much support we get. It’s a nice way to give back and help with different things around the community. It’s not just fires and accidents – there are many other functions we’re involved with.”*

6



### BELTRAMI ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

**Kasey Kampfer, Journeyman Lineworker**  
Lakeport Fire Department (Laporte, Minn.)

*“I joined the military when I was 17 – I was in the National Guard for nine years. It was just a lifelong path of doing things like that. When I got out of the military, I wanted something else to do, so I joined the fire department.”*

7



### CASS COUNTY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

**Joey Strauss, Journeyman Lineworker**  
Arthur Volunteer Fire Department

*“I’m originally from Arthur – I was born there and never left. I just wanted to help out the community and do my part.”*

8



### CAVALIER RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

**Marty Tetrault, Operations Manager**  
Langdon Fire Department – Fire Chief

*“The thing I enjoy the most about volunteering is being around people who want to make our community a better place, and being able to help people in general is very rewarding.”*

# Veterans Day

★ HONORING ALL WHO SERVED ★



*Red River Valley Co-op Power would like to thank all men and women who serve and have served in the U.S. Armed Forces. Their efforts and sacrifices are truly appreciated.*



Your cooperative would like to recognize current employees who have served. They are: Jon Kuehn, foreman, U.S. Air Force; Nate Zurn, apprentice lineman, U.S. Air Force; and Jim Berg, engineering technician, U.S. Navy.

# Electrical Safety Checklist

Nearly half of all home fires occur during winter months. Take a few minutes to identify and correct any potential electrical hazards to ensure the safety of your home.

## SWITCHES AND OUTLETS

- **Are any switches or outlets warm to the touch?** YES NO  
Warm switches or outlets indicate an unsafe wiring condition.
- **Are any outlets or switches discolored?** YES NO  
Discoloration indicates dangerous heat buildup at these connections.
- **Do plugs fit snugly into outlets?** YES NO  
Loose-fitting plugs can cause overheating and fires.

## CORDS

- **Are any cords cracked, frayed or damaged?** YES NO  
Damaged cords can expose wires, causing shock or fire hazard.
- **Are any cords pinched by furniture or windows, or attached to anything with staples or nails?** YES NO  
Pinching and/or stapling cords can damage the insulation, causing shock or fire hazard.
- **Do you use extension cords on a permanent basis?** YES NO  
Extension cords should only be used temporarily.

## ELECTRIC PANEL

- **Do you have recurring tripped circuit breakers or blown fuses?** YES NO  
If yes, this could indicate you're exceeding a safe level of electrical current.
- **Do you have arc fault circuit interrupters (AFCIs)?** YES NO  
AFCIs provide greater fire protection.  
Check your circuit breakers for the AFCI label.

*Please note this is not a comprehensive safety checklist.  
Visit [ESFI.org](http://ESFI.org) for more information.  
Source: ESFI*



## Rebate notice

Red River Valley Co-op Power members planning to take advantage of energy-efficiency rebates this year should keep in mind that rebates for this year must be in the office by Dec. 21. Getting your rebates in by that date is very important for business members wishing for a lighting rebate because rebates for those items have been eliminated for 2022.

Your cooperative does plan robust energy rebates in 2022 for heat pumps, off-peak electric heat and electric vehicle chargers on off-peak. The new list of rebates and amounts for 2022 will be released in early January 2022. If you have any questions, please call 218-456-2139 or email at [info@rrvcoop.com](mailto:info@rrvcoop.com). The current rebate form is available online at [rrvcoop.com](http://rrvcoop.com).

## Inside off-peak meter changeout notice

**Attention members:** If you have an older-looking off-peak meter inside your garage or basement (looks like hard glass), please contact Member Services so we can see if it needs to be replaced with newer technology.

Members who have not had their off-peak meter exchanged will no longer be able to obtain the off-peak electric heating rate because the technology/software used to collect those readings is now obsolete per the manufacturer. That means we will no longer be able to obtain readings electronically and the potential kWh will be rolled into the main meter at the higher rate. There are about 75 off-peak meters like this yet to be changed out.

If you have a meter inside your home or garage that appears under hard rounded glass, please call the cooperative.

# Energy assistance funding available



*to help local homeowners and renters pay their electric bills*

Winter is right around the corner. Members who meet income guidelines and have trouble paying their electric bills are encouraged to apply for the Energy Assistance Program by contacting their local energy assistance service provider. If you aren't sure where to begin, you can contact Red River Valley Co-op Power for additional guidance on how to get started.

Household income must be at 60% or lower than the state median income to qualify. Grants up to \$1,600 to help homeowners or renters pay their electrical bills plus assistance for past due energy bills are available. The eligibility is based on the past three months of income.

## How to apply for the Energy Assistance Program

Funding is limited and administered on a first-come, first-served basis. Households apply at their local Energy Assistance Program service provider.

Household Size	Past 3 Months Income
1	\$ 8,809
2	\$11,520
3	\$14,230
4	\$16,941
5	\$19,651
6	\$22,362

- Clay County – Contact West Central Minnesota Communities Action at 1-800-492-4805 or go online to <https://www.wcmca.org/programs/energy-assistance-program/>.
- Norman and Polk counties – Contact Tri-Valley Opportunity Council at 218-281-9080 or go online to [tvoc.org](http://tvoc.org).

If you have questions or need help contacting these agencies, please call Red River Valley Co-op Power at 218-456-2139.

Is your off-peak heating system

# Ready for winter?

It's hard to believe winter will soon be here. Since weather conditions and future wholesale power market prices make the amount of load control hours hard to predict, all our off-peak members are encouraged to have a reliable, automatic dual heating system in place and ready to use.

To ensure your total comfort this winter, consider the following questions about your backup heating system:

- 1. Is the system sized to heat your entire home or business?**
- 2. Does it maintain an adequate comfort level?**
- 3. Is it reliable?**
- 4. Is it fully automatic?**

Check current fuel prices and be sure to fill your propane or fuel oil tank at the beginning of the season. Also, make sure your tank is large enough to hold an adequate supply. Remember, prices typically rise as demand increases during the heating season.

Our member services department is glad to answer any off-peak questions you may have. A loan program is also available to assist you in replacing your old, inadequate off-peak heating system.

## You have the power to

- View daily and monthly energy use.
- View and pay your bills online.
- Go paperless and receive an email notice when your bill is ready to view.
- Compare energy use to changes in temperature.

Sign up for SmartHub @ [rrvcoop.com](http://rrvcoop.com)



For assistance, call us during regular business hours at 218-456-2139 or send an email to [info@rrvcoop.com](mailto:info@rrvcoop.com).



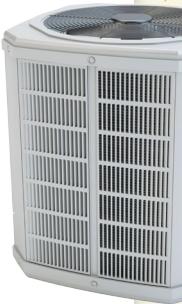
# Give thanks for the off-peak program



This time of year, we often express gratitude for the good things in our lives. Your electric cooperative is grateful for members who participate in the off-peak program. In true cooperative fashion, the program helps us all work together to use energy wisely, improve reliability of electric service and save money.

The off-peak program is voluntary for members who agree to let Minnkota Power Cooperative, our wholesale power provider, temporarily interrupt power to certain electric loads – like heating systems, water heaters or vehicle chargers – when demand for electricity is high.

The off-peak program has been a success story since 1977 because it provides a true win-win-win for you, your cooperative and the electric grid.



**Members** – Members like you receive a discounted electric rate (about half the retail rate) for participating in the off-peak electric heating, water heating or vehicle charging programs. In exchange for these savings, members voluntarily allow these electric systems to be temporarily turned off or switched to a backup fuel source primarily during periods of high demand for electricity. In addition to the lower electric rate, your cooperative offers numerous rebate and incentive programs to help offset the cost of purchasing new equipment.

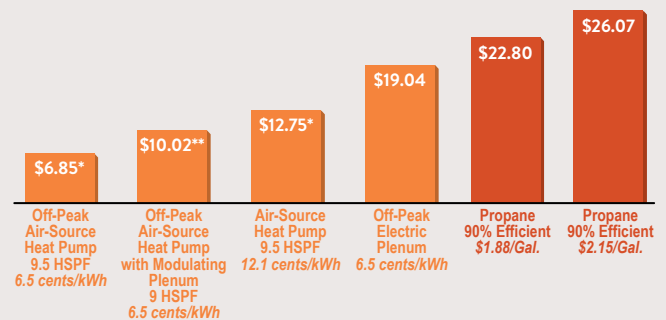
**Your cooperative** – The cost of electricity is not only based on how much is used, but also when it is used. Your cooperative saves on its wholesale power costs through the off-peak program by reducing its demand for electricity during peak events. These savings are passed back to you through the lower off-peak rate.

**The grid** – By utilizing off-peak, Minnkota and Red River Valley Co-op Power can more effectively manage their existing power resources and avoid purchasing high-priced energy from the energy market. It also prevents the need to acquire or build costly new electric generating resources.

The off-peak program proved extraordinarily valuable during the electric grid challenges experienced in February 2021, when widespread power outages and high market prices impacted other areas of the country. Minnkota and Red River Valley Co-op Power were able to strategically use the program to shield you from price volatility and other system issues.

**Contact your cooperative at 218-456-2139 or visit [rrvcoop.com](http://rrvcoop.com) to learn about the great rebate programs available to help you join the off-peak program.**

## PRICE DIFFERENCE IN HEATING FUELS PER MILLION BTUS OF HEAT (November 2021)



\* Outside temperatures fluctuate, affecting the heat pump's efficiency. Efficiency and price per million Btus is estimated at 47 degrees F. Need additional heat like plenum heater in winter.

\*\* Heat pump with modulating plenum assumes a coefficient of performance of 1.9 at 10 degrees F using information provided and reviewed by Electro Industries, Monticello, Minn.

