



# POWER CONNECTION

FEBRUARY  
2022

member driven.  
community focused.  
energy smart.

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(800) 962-0655  
[WWW.STEARNSELECTRIC.ORG](http://WWW.STEARNSELECTRIC.ORG)

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## ENERGY EDUCATION CONTINUES VIRTUALLY IN 2022

*Every year as part of Stearns Electric Association's commitment to safety and community, we present an energy efficiency and electrical safety demonstration to local fourth grade classrooms throughout our service territory.*

Due to the ongoing pandemic, Stearns Electric presenters used Zoom or Google Meet technology to connect with classrooms and present Energy Education virtually this year. One of the Cooperative's conference rooms was turned into the Energy Education 'studio' with the same display we typically bring into the classroom.

"Our Energy Education program is a highlight for many students every year, and we didn't want this year's students to miss out," Stearns Electric's Energy Education Coordinator Katie Anderson said. "Being in person is more fun for everyone, but the virtual option is a great alternative to be able to still share this important safety message to students across our service territory."

In 2022, we presented to over 1,550 students at 30 schools throughout Central Minnesota.

All classrooms received a pre-recorded video, which educated students about the basics of electricity, including the seven types of generation fuels, conductors and insulators, our nation's power grid and Stearns Electric's local distribution system. We asked the teachers to show this video to their classrooms ahead of the live safety demonstration.

Wayne Sens and Levi Jessen, Stearns Electric line workers, then took turns facilitating the virtual, live safety demonstration. The display features an electric home and farm model where students see first-hand what can happen when people, vehicles or equipment come into contact with electricity.

Continued on page 2.

# ENERGY EDUCATION CONTINUED...



"The interaction with the students and answering their questions is my favorite part of our presentations, despite being virtual," Jessen said. "It's fun when we get recognized by students out in the field and they tell us what they learned."

"It's important for the students to learn the dangers of electricity and how to be safe around it," Senst added. "Our goal is that they are able to go home and share what they learned with their family so everyone can stay safe around electricity."

The most important safety takeaway from the presentation is teaching the students what to do if a vehicle hits a power pole or other electrical equipment.

"The biggest lesson that I hope the students remember from the demonstration is what to do if the vehicle they are in hits any sort of electrical equipment," Senst said. "Hopefully our presentation reminds them to always stay in their vehicle unless it were to start on fire."

Although the virtual program went well again this year, we are looking forward to being back in the classrooms as soon as we can.



"The virtual presentations are not ideal, but we've continued to find ways to make them the best they can be and still be interactive for the students," Jessen said. "I really enjoy being able to share my knowledge with the students."

"While the arcs and sparks are still fun for the students to see, the impact of students seeing them in person makes a big difference. We're excited for the chance to hopefully be back in the classrooms next year," Senst added.

Stearns Electric values community involvement and public safety. Our Energy Education presentations reinforce these important messages with the hope that local students will bring their new electrical efficiency and safety knowledge home to their families.

For more information on our annual Energy Education programming, please visit [www.stearnselectric.org](http://www.stearnselectric.org). You can also visit the Stearns Electric Facebook page to see more photos at [www.facebook.com/stearnselectric](https://www.facebook.com/stearnselectric).



*Our Energy Education presentations were previously done in area schools by the wives of the Board of Director members. Over the past 30 years, multiple different Co-op departments and employees have been involved.*

POWER THAT PERSISTS

## YOU'RE INVITED!

**85<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL MEETING**  
Tuesday, April 5, 2022  
Melrose Area High  
School Auditorium

**Doors Open: 6:30 p.m.**  
**Business Meeting: 7:00 p.m.**

As a member-consumer of Stearns Electric Association, you are also an owner of the Co-op. As an owner, you have a voice in the operation of our organization. Through attendance at the Annual Meeting and the election of your Board of Directors, you help set the future direction of our Cooperative.

### GIFTS AND DOOR PRIZES:

The first 300 members will receive 1lb of cheese and 1lb of butter quarters as a gift. We will also provide an 85<sup>th</sup> Anniversary commemorative gift to everyone present. Attendees have a chance to win one of 10 - \$100 gift card door prizes as well. You must be present at the meeting to win.

Watch for more details in the March Power Connection or visit [www.stearnselectric.org](http://www.stearnselectric.org).

# CEO MESSAGE

## POWER SUPPLY UPDATES AT GREAT RIVER ENERGY

*In August, I shared news of the pending sale of Great River Energy's (GRE) Coal Creek Station to Rainbow Energy Center and Nexus Line. Though the sale is not finalized just yet, a few key factors were announced and approved over the last month. We anticipate the sale to be finalized sometime after May 2022, pending a few final approvals.*

In January, two key approvals advanced the sale of GRE's Coal Creek Station and high-voltage direct-current (HVDC) transmission system. Additionally, GRE announced in January a new, 400-megawatt (MW) wind energy project near the existing Coal Creek Station.

On January 6, the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission approved the transfer of the construction permit for the Minnesota portion of the HVDC transmission system from GRE to Nexus Line. This portion of the HVDC system spans from central North Dakota to the Twin Cities. It is used to bring electricity from the generation and transmission facilities in North Dakota to us here in Central Minnesota and beyond.

Likewise, on December 30, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission issued an order effective January 1 approving an amended generator interconnection agreement between GRE and the region's grid operator. This order was also needed to advance the sale of the Coal Creek Station power plant and its facilities. At the final closing of the sale, this amended interconnection agreement will be transferred from GRE to Rainbow Energy Center.

Since negotiations began regarding the sale of Coal Creek Station and the HVDC system, GRE has always had an arrangement with Rainbow Energy Center and Nexus Line to provide GRE with access to interconnect new wind-energy projects to the HVDC system.

On January 18, GRE announced the Discovery Wind project, in partnership with developer Apex Clean Energy. The 400 MW wind energy project will begin operating in 2025 in McLean County, North Dakota, very close to the existing Coal Creek Station. It will be the single largest wind project in North Dakota and deliver renewable energy to Central Minnesota along the 436-mile HVDC system.

GRE will not own the wind project, but will enter into a 20-year power purchase agreement with Apex Clean Energy to provide the wind energy to GRE member-consumers. Additionally, per the agreement with Rainbow Energy Center and Nexus Line, electricity produced by the wind project will take priority along the HVDC line over electricity generated at Coal Creek Station.

These changes are projected to help reduce GRE's carbon emissions by over 80% by 2027.



Sincerely,



Robin C. Doege  
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

# BOARD MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

The regular meeting of the Board of Directors of Stearns Electric Association was called to order on December 30, 2021 at 1:00 p.m. at the Melrose office of Stearns Electric Association.

Highlights of the meeting include:

- The Cooperative's 2022 proposed budget and department initiatives were approved.
- The Board approved a Great River Energy (GRE) proposed amendment to NextEra Energy Resources, LLC Buffalo Ridge Wind Purchase Agreement.
- CEO Robin Doege provided an overview of ongoing bargaining unit negotiations.
- All 2021 Conservation Improvement Fund (CIP) funds were utilized, including \$50,000 more dollars that were secured at the end of the year. The bulk of 2021 Commercial, Industrial and Agricultural grants were used for commercial lighting retrofits, electric forklifts and dairy farm improvements.
- The Cooperative achieved 1.5 million miles without an accident, which was the best in recent years.
- Board members approved the Cooperative's new Corporate Scorecard, which measures how well the Cooperative is completing identified operational and strategic goals.

## NEXT BOARD MEETING

March 24, 2022



**85** years  
**POWER**  
**THAT PERSISTS**



## POWER TO DELIVER

FOUNDED IN 1937 TO BRING POWER TO THE PEOPLE, THE NEWLY FORMED COOPERATIVE, STEARNS ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION, INTENDED TO BRING ELECTRICITY TO FARMS IN RURAL CENTRAL MINNESOTA. MUCH HAS CHANGED IN OUR 85-YEAR HISTORY, BUT DELIVERING ELECTRICITY TO OUR MEMBER-CONSUMERS REMAINS A TOP PRIORITY FOR THE COOPERATIVE.

People are using electricity more than ever before. According to a Deloitte survey, the average household in the United States has 25 connected devices. Add those devices to our everyday household needs - such as ovens and microwaves, heating and air conditioning units, hot water heaters, washing machines and clothes dryers, refrigerators and more - the need for consistent, reliable electricity is greater than ever before.

At Stearns Electric, we have a dedicated team of employees who are equipped to make sure electricity is delivered to our members when they want it. Our linemen spend their days maintaining our electrical distribution system and restoring outages. The engineering team ensures our distribution system is built to meet the electricity demand from our members both now and into the future.

And our operations department makes certain all Cooperative employees have the tools, equipment and resources they need to get their jobs done both efficiently and safely.

### SAFETY

Throughout the last 85 years, the challenges of being a line worker have not changed much. But the safety gear and equipment definitely have.

In 1937, people had been working on power lines for several years already, so it wasn't an entirely new practice to bring electricity to rural Central Minnesota. Line worker gear included belts and climbers for the linemen to shimmy up the power poles. Line workers wore hats to protect themselves from the elements and had access to manual equipment to make digging holes for power pole placement a little easier.

It wasn't until after the 1950s that bucket trucks and rubber gloves became commonplace for line workers. And after the 70s, line workers donned hard hats and rubber sleeves.



*Stearns Electric line workers set a power pole in the 1970s.*

"Today, Stearns Electric line workers and substation crews are required to wear special fire-resistant clothing every day, along with the appropriate gear needed to work with high voltage electricity," Manager of Operations Glenn Blommel explained. "This includes hard hats, rubber gloves, rubber sleeves, safety glasses, safety-toed boots and safety harnesses."

These items are examined and tested daily by employees. "One pin hole in a rubber glove can cause severe injury or worse," Blommel continued. "We take safety training, and the safety of our employees and equipment, seriously at the Co-op."



*A rubber glove is tested to identify any damage that presents a safety hazard.*

"Stearns Electric's line workers participate in monthly safety training covering topics like working on overhead lines and equipment operations," Safety and Loss Control Coordinator Deb Goebel said. "They also practice power pole-top rescues annually and are certified in CPR and First Aid."

In order to deliver reliable electricity to our members, it is crucial to keep our field employees safe.

### TECHNOLOGY

Over the last 85 years, significant improvements in technology have helped the Cooperative respond to outages more quickly and deliver electricity more reliably to our members.

Before today's technology was available, Cooperative employees answered phone calls for outages and hand wrote tickets for each outage. Member information was organized in printed binders and sorted by name, address, member

number and service location. Office employees would radio the outage location to line crews, who would in turn find the location in their printed map books and then respond to each individual outage.

"Today, with the SmartHub mobile app, members can easily log into their account 24/7 and report their outage within seconds. Each of our linemen are equipped with an iPad in the field which includes detailed maps of our entire distribution system, so they are able to immediately access this information, allowing for quicker response times and outage restoration," Engineering and Operations Support Supervisor Melissa Welle said.

"Through our outage management system (OMS) we have the ability to ping meters to determine the extent of an outage and identify other services on the same line without power. Assisting line crews so they don't have to patrol entire line sections when there is an outage saves time for everyone – crews can respond and discover power outage causes faster, and essentially restore power to our members in a shorter period of time," Welle continued.

In the last few years, you might have driven past one of our line crews working in the field and wondered what everyone was doing, looking down at their tablets. Our linemen, substation techs, Energy Service field personnel, arborist and staking engineers carry iPads, tablets or laptops with them to every job site. These iPads have apps and resources available so each crew can complete daily safety checks, document job briefing discussions and perform their daily work as quickly and efficiently as possible.



*Line workers can view maps, member information and project plans actively in the field with iPads.*

*Before today's technology was available, Cooperative employees answered phone calls for outages and hand wrote tickets for each outage.*



Each iPad includes detailed maps of the entire distribution system. Every piece of equipment in the field is documented and accounted for.

"This technology has given our field personnel a wealth of information at their fingertips to safely and quickly respond to outages, perform line work and communicate across departments," Blommel explained. "Our system map can easily be viewed in great detail, along with details of our 33 substations and other special line equipment. This has been a real game changer for the Co-op and a tool that keeps getting better and better."

The power to deliver reliable energy to our members has improved significantly since our early days. Advancements in equipment, safety gear and technology allow Cooperative employees to spend adequate time every year patrolling power lines looking for safety hazards and potential outage causes, cutting trees out of the right-of-way, and using infrared technology to assess our substations and underground power lines throughout our distribution system. All of this plays a significant role in our ability to deliver our members the electricity they need when they want it.

We pride ourselves on safely delivering reliable electricity to our member-consumers. It's our mission today, just as it was 85 years ago.



# THE IMPORTANCE OF LOAD MANAGEMENT: MAXIMIZING BENEFITS, MINIMIZING INCONVENIENCE

*Electricity cannot be effectively stored in bulk at this time; it must be generated, distributed and consumed immediately. When the need for electricity (demand) requires maximum generating capacity, network operators must either find additional supplies of energy or find ways to reduce the electrical load.*

One way to help reduce the demand for electricity is through load management, or demand response. When demand and cost for electricity are at the highest, typically the hottest and coldest days of the year, Stearns Electric can use its load management programs to help stabilize electricity rates and consumption in its service territory.

In coordination with our wholesale power provider, Great River Energy (GRE), the Cooperative offers EnergyWise load management programs to help curb electricity demand. Members enrolled on these programs help the Cooperative manage overall energy costs for the entire Stearns Electric service territory, benefitting all members. In return, participating members receive a lower electricity rate or a credit on their monthly electric bill. Rebates for necessary equipment might also be available.

In 2021 alone, Stearns Electric added an additional 297 load management programs, increasing our controllable load by 2,320 kilowatts.

EnergyWise programs help delay the need for additional generation resources. Without demand response, GRE and other utilities would need additional generation and transmission infrastructure to meet the region's increasing electrical demand. Load management programs also help avoid building high-cost peaking plants or purchasing expensive energy in the wholesale market.

## ENERGYWISE PROGRAMS:

- Dual Fuel
- Cycled Air Conditioning
- Stored Water Heating
- Peak Shave Water Heating
- ChargeWise (Electric Vehicle Charging)

More information on our EnergyWise programs, load control notifications and hours of control can be found on our website, [www.stearnselectric.org](http://www.stearnselectric.org). Our Energy Services team is also available to assist you and answer your questions during regular business hours at (800) 962-0655.



*Our Energy Services team is here to help you find right the solution.*



## ELECTRIC SAFETY

### USE YOUR SPACE HEATER SAFELY

While they keep you warm, space heaters don't come without risks. Stay safe by keeping your heater on a flat surface, plugged directly into a wall outlet, and at a safe distance (at least 3 feet) from flammable items.

## MEMBER NEWS

### FINANCIALLY STRUGGLING TO PAY YOUR ELECTRIC BILL?

You may be able to qualify for energy assistance through a local assistance agency. Contact Stearns Electric at (800) 962-0655 during normal business hours with any questions.

### TOP REASONS TO LIKE US ON FACEBOOK

1. Outage Information – get the most recent outage updates when major outages occur.
2. Photos from the Field - see what our linemen are up to in the field every other week.
3. Member Giveaways – who doesn't enjoy winning prizes? Interact with our content for the chance to win prizes and giveaways.



**LIKE US ON FACEBOOK**

[www.facebook.com/stearnselectric](https://www.facebook.com/stearnselectric)

# NOTICE: CO-GENERATION AND SMALL POWER PRODUCTION

In compliance with Cooperative Rules implementing Minnesota Statute section 216B.164 Co-generation and Small Power Production Notice, Stearns Electric Association is required to interconnect with, and purchase electricity from, co-generation and small power production facilities that satisfy the conditions of a Qualifying Facility.

Stearns Electric has available and will provide free information to all interested members regarding rates and interconnection requirements. An application for interconnection is required for a Qualifying Facility to interconnect and operate in parallel with the Cooperative's distribution system and is subject to approval by the Cooperative. For more information, please contact Stearns Electric Association during business hours at (800) 962-0655.



## DID YOU KNOW?

**Did you know one distribution line recloser on the Stearns Electric distribution system costs \$3,000 and one electronically controlled substation recloser costs \$22,000?**

Stearns Electric has 680 line and substation reclosers on our distribution system.

*Reclosers are devices that protect electric lines by momentarily interrupting service when a fault occurs, then restoring power automatically if the fault clears. This keeps outages from occurring when temporary problems arise, such as tree branches touching a line.*

## COOKING CORNER MAPLE BOURBON BAKED SALMON

*Submitted by: Julie Haugen*

### INGREDIENTS

- |                            |                       |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 ½ lb salmon fillet       | ½ tsp salt            |
| 2 Tbsp pure maple syrup    | 2 Tbsp bourbon        |
| 1 Tbsp olive oil           | orange or lemon juice |
| ¼ tsp sweet smoked paprika |                       |

### DIRECTIONS

In a bowl about the size of the salmon fillet, combine remaining ingredients. Place salmon in the marinade skin side up, then turn skin side down. Cover tightly and marinate for 8-10 hours. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Line a baking dish with foil and lay salmon in pan skin side down. Pour marinade over and bake about 15 minutes, until fish is opaque when flaked with a fork. Makes 6 warm or cold servings. Enjoy!



### SUBMIT YOUR FAVORITE RECIPE FOR A CHANCE TO WIN A \$10 BILL CREDIT

Members may submit one recipe per month by email at [communications@stearnslectric.org](mailto:communications@stearnslectric.org) or mail to: Stearns Electric Cooking Corner, PO BOX 816, St. Joseph, MN 56374. The recipe selected each month for publication will receive a \$10 credit on their electric bill. Recipes not selected will be saved for consideration in future publications.





## STEARNS ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION

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## SMARTER SOLUTIONS START HERE

### 2022 RESIDENTIAL REBATES ARE AVAILABLE NOW

#### ENERGYWISE® REBATES

*In order to receive the EnergyWise® rebates, members must enroll in the associated program, if applicable.*

**Quality Install Air Source Heat Pump**

SEER 14.5	\$550
SEER 15	\$650
SEER 16	\$700

**Pool Heating**

Pool ASHP	\$400
Pool Pump VSD	\$200

**Ground Source Heat Pump**

\$150 / ton (10-ton max.)

**New Dual Fuel Rebate**

\$200 (9 kW min.)

**Thermal Storage Space Heating**

\$50 per kW (5 kW min.)

**ECM Motor**

\$50

**New Marathon Water Heater**

(Purchased from Stearns Electric Association)  
\$300 80+ gallon on Stored Water or  
Peak Shave programs  
\$100 50+ gallon on Peak Shave Program

**Electric Water Heater**

(Contractor/Member Supplied)  
\$100 50+ gallon on Stored Water or  
Peak Shave programs  
**Heat Pump Water Heater**  
\$300

**Electric Vehicle Charger**

\$500

**Wifi Thermostat**

\$25

**Engine Block Heater Timer**

\$5

#### ENERGYSTAR® REBATES

**Ductless ASHP** \$300

**Refrigerator** (with recycling of old unit) \$50

**Freezer** (with recycling of old unit) \$50

**Dehumidifier** \$25

**Clothes Dryer** \$25

**LED Yard Light** \$30

For complete details on these rebates contact Stearns Electric at (800) 962-0655 or visit [www.stearnslectric.org](http://www.stearnslectric.org).