

MCLEOD COOPERATIVE POWER

NEWS

DECEMBER 2023

A LINE WORKER'S TIMELINE: RESTORING A POWER OUTAGE FEATURING BRAD HUNDT



"How long is it going to take?" Those are familiar words to all who work in the electric industry. It's a phrase line workers at McLeod Co-op Power have been asked thousands of times. It's the first thing people think when the lights go out. It doesn't take long sitting in the dark to realize how dependent we are on electricity.

But what does it take to get those lights back on? Why does it sometimes take so long? Most people will never get to experience or witness the work that goes into ending outages. So we interviewed Brad Hundt, a McLeod Co-op Lineman for over 15 years, to share some of the story from his perspective behind the scenes.

THE OUTAGE CALL: A line worker may find themselves receiving a call from dispatch at the most inconvenient times—whether it's moments after getting home or in the dead of night—prompting a swift response.

When the dispatcher calls, they pass along the power outage location, number of members who are impacted, and any additional information about the outage or safety concerns. "The first thing I do is take a few minutes to look at our mapping system from the app on our phones," shared Brad. "This helps me answer a few questions like, where is the power source? Is it overhead or underground? Will we need any specific equipment? At this point, I also take the time to read the comments that have been called in to our dispatch to help identify a possible cause for the outage. I'm hopeful to find information that can pinpoint the location of an issue."

With 30 minutes or less to report to the headquarters line workers move quickly. After taking some notes from dispatch and a quick assessment, they grab any personal items they

need and hit the road. "On the drive to the shop I'm getting mentally prepared for the job running through what is ahead and what I need to do."

Tips from our members that can be helpful are reporting things like hearing a loud bang and where they heard it, if there is a tree branch on their power line, an accident (car vs pole/farm equipment), and so forth.

TRAVEL TIME: When line workers arrive at the McLeod Co-op Power Headquarters it typically takes only 15 minutes for the responding team of two to prepare the trucks, run a safety check, load up and hit the road. "Before pulling out of the shop, we double check the outage location and any additional details that may have come in about the outage. As we drive, we make sure as a team we are on the same page and talk through our plans for arriving on scene. A lot of problem solving happens on the road."

Location and weather are significant factors in an outage response time. McLeod Co-op's service territory spans approximately 965 square miles. Outages can be anywhere from 5 minutes to an hour away and bad weather can make travel times even longer.

ARRIVAL: Once line workers arrive at the scene of the power outage, the first order of business is always to assess the situation and locate the cause of the outage, which could be anything from a blown fuse to a massive storm event or a car accident.

"That initial assessment includes a visual assessment of the environment and the conditions to addressing hazards, bystanders, and in some

Continued on page 3.

LEAVING FOR WARMER WEATHER?

SNOWBIRDS ARE ENCOURAGED TO NOTIFY THE COOPERATIVE

McLeod Co-op Power members saying goodbye to the cold and the snow this winter for sunny skies are encouraged to notify the Co-op before leaving. While your meter will continue to be automatically read each month, it is helpful to discuss and decide on your preferred payment arrangement during your absence.



OPTIONS INCLUDE:

- Advance payment
- Forwarding your mail
- Automatic payments from a checking or savings account
- SmartHub/Online Payment Options
- Phone payments through automated system
- Bill pay through your financial institution

Be sure to call the Co-op during business hours at (800) 494-6272 to make your billing arrangements.

A LINE WORKERS
TIMELINE CONTINUED

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SAFEGUARD YOUR HOME
THIS WINTER

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Happy Holidays!

The McLeod Co-op Power office will be closed on Monday, December 25, and Tuesday, December 26, 2023, in observance of Christmas and Monday, January 1, 2024, in observance of the new year. Please call (800) 927-5685 in the event of an outage or emergency.

Calendars Available

McLeod Cooperative Power 2024 calendars are now available featuring scenic landscape photos from our service territory! Stop by the office to pick up a copy today. Calendars are available on a first-come, first-serve basis while supplies last.



CEO MESSAGE

In this month's newsletter, you will find a feature with Brad, one of our talented linemen. He goes into how they manage outages and some of the other aspects of what it takes to keep the lights on. We tend to share the lineman story a lot, after all the work they do is rather unique and provide interesting stories. Not too many people find themselves working up in the air either using a bucket truck or climbing a pole in the middle of the night.

With the focus on the line workers this month, I want to make sure we realize they are part of a diverse team of talented people to make it all happen. Being a team is something we emphasize and I'm proud of all our employees.

The finance department has been busy working with the other department managers on preparing the 2024 budget. They started by looking at how the past year went when it comes to expenses, culling out any of the irregular expenses; like from a major outage. They then work on projecting what can happen in 2024.

The largest expense we have every year is purchasing power from Great River Energy (GRE) and Western Area Power Administration (WAPA). As we look at the past year's purchase power expense, we must consider mainly how the weather was. Did we see a colder winter than normal, or perhaps a hotter summer? Weather patterns really can affect this expense. Additionally, we also need to look to GRE and their projections. They too look at weather patterns on a regional scale in addition to the expected growth or lack of sales while also considering investments that are required to serve us all. Today, they continue to see increasing investments, which ultimately



CEO RON MEIER

translates into their need to raise their rates for us.

Moving into 2024, our rates have had to increase across all our members. This has not happened since 2017. When we looked at the needed requirement for more revenue to offset our increasing expenses to serve you all, we spent a lot of time deciding how much of an increase balanced against having to have another rate increase in the near or further out in the future. We decided to only adjust the rates to cover our expected needs for 2024 and not further beyond. Our financial model today is projecting the need to increase rates again for 2025, but that decision will be considered later in 2024. Again, it was decided to make a smaller increase to our rates today rather than a larger one to cover revenue gaps over multiple years.

Coming back to all the people here at the cooperative, we really have a talented team. Of the 26 employees, only 9 climb poles but everyone is essential. Whether it is keeping the computers up and running, generating the bills, or installing a standby generator, it takes everyone here to make sure the lights stay on.

Cooperatively, R1PL

NOVEMBER 2023 BOARD MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

The Regular Meeting of the Board of Directors of McLeod Cooperative Power Association was held on November 28, 2023, at McLeod Co-op headquarters. Eight board members, the attorney, CEO Ron Meier, and department managers participated in the meeting.

Highlights of the meeting included:

- The outage report for the month of October 2023 with a total of 69 outages, affecting 166 consumers.
- A motion was carried to approve Policy 4-5 Member Deposits.
- A motion was carried to approve another 3-year term (2024-2026) for Operation Round-Up Board Members Cheryl Bielke and Curt Burns.
- Manager of Finance Jakel reviewed the October financials and the preliminary budget summary for 2024.
- A motion was carried to approve Resolution 2023-11-02 WAPA Exhibits B&C.
- A motion was carried to approve Resolution 2023-11-01 Vote in Connection with GRE Special Member Meeting.
- A motion was carried to approve Susan Anderson as the voting delegate and Allan Duesterhoeft as the first alternate for all 2024 MREA Membership Meetings.

CONNECT WITH YOUR CO-OP ONLINE

FACEBOOK

Efficiency tips, photos from the field, outage information, and more updated regularly.

CO-OP WEBSITE

All the Co-op's information, news, and resources at your finger tips 24-7.

SMARTHUB

Easy account access online. Pay your bill, check your usage, report outages and more.

BY THE NUMBERS | Q3 2023

McLeod Co-op Power's leadership spends substantial time managing and providing oversight of the Co-op's operations, including ensuring that the organization remains in a strong and stable financial condition. Below is an overview of our Third Quarter Unaudited Financial Report.

2023

\$16,407,417

2022

\$17,060,655

OPERATING REVENUE

	2023	2022
Cost of Purchased Power	\$10,163,591	\$11,175,568
Other Operating Expenses	\$6,456,917	\$6,179,795
Total Cost of Electric Service	\$16,620,508	\$17,355,363

kWh's SOLD

127,218,147

2022 Comparison: 134,145,270

TOTAL MARGINS

\$624,006

2022 Comparison: \$(77,745)

	2023	2022
Operating Margins	\$(213,091)	\$(294,708)
Non-Operating Margins	\$837,097	\$216,963

6,975

MEMBER SERVICES BILLED

2022 Comparison: 6,946

AVERAGE kWh's used by residential members

1,387

PER MONTH

2022 Comparison: 1,404

THE VALUE OF ELECTRICITY

1 CUP FROM THE COFFEE SHOP

38 HOURS OF HOLIDAY LED LIGHTS

Based on 13 cents per kWh, a \$5 cup of coffee and 1,000 LED lights using an average of 34.1kWh per month.

5 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT OFF-PEAK HEATING

You often hear McLeod Co-op Power mention the off-peak heating program. That's because we get really excited about programs that offer benefits to everyone involved. Integrating off-peak heating into your home or business benefits you (the member), the cooperative and the entire regional electric grid. Here's why we think the off-peak heating program is top-notch.

DIVERSE HEATING SOLUTIONS: The program offers an array of heating options, from air-source heat pumps, mini-split heat pumps and plenum heaters to thermal storage heating, in-floor heating and beyond. Our experts can guide you toward selecting an off-peak-qualified heating system that aligns with your home and budget.

AFFORDABILITY: Members who participate in the Off-Peak Heating Program, help the Co-op out by reducing energy demand during peak times by avoiding the need to purchase additional energy when market prices are at their highest. In return, the Co-op passes the savings back to the member through a low Off-Peak Rate.

GRID RELIABILITY: As winter blankets the nation, it brings with it additional demand for energy which has potential to cause strain on our electric grid. Participants in the Off-Peak Heating Program become vital contributors to grid reliability by temporarily scaling back energy consumption, ensuring a robust and energized grid even during the coldest months.

SAVINGS: Members enrolling in the program receive an electric heating rate nearly 50% lower than the standard rate. You could save hundreds on your electric bill over the course of the heating season!

REBATES FOR THOUGHTFUL CHOICES: Thinking of upgrading to new off-peak heating equipment? Consult with our co-op energy pros and explore the benefits. You could even be eligible for substantial rebates, putting money back into your budget and making your energy-efficient choices even more rewarding.



ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Get smart with a better way to heat and cool your home! Smart thermostats are Wi-Fi enabled and automatically adjust heating and cooling temperature settings in your home for optimal performance. Smart thermostats learn your temperature preferences and establish a schedule that adjusts to energy-saving settings when you're asleep or away.

LINEWORKER CONTINUED...



case coordinating with emergency services and dealing with public relations personnel. There are a lot of variables that have to be considered when a crew arrives," Line Superintendent Emerson Brady added. "If members feel they have information that will help us, it's best to call our dispatch line. They will relay anything important, which allows us to stay focused on the work in front of us and restore power faster."

PATROLLING: Patrolling is what comes next. Patrolling is the act of visually inspecting everything down the line from the source of the outage. The last thing we would want to do is re-energize a power line that has been compromised and possibly endanger the public or cause a larger outage.

"In a rural setting, most of our patrolling is done from the truck. In a residential area, we may be on foot, walking through backyards," noted Brad. "This can often be confusing for members as they might see us come and go. It's important to understand that there is a process at work."

ADDRESSING THE CAUSE: With time and effort, line workers find the cause of the outage and establish a plan to restore power. At this time additional crews are called in for support if needed.

"If it is a smaller issue, we often can take care of it on the spot with one of our extendable fiberglass sticks to remove a branch, animal, or a piece of broken equipment. If it's a larger issue like a broken pole or wires on the ground, we then must install a "ground set." A ground set is a series of wires that we install on the power line that will short the circuit to the ground, making the power lines safe for us to proceed with our work. With larger issues, we will often cut the power lines apart so we can re-energize as many members as possible by isolating the issue further down the line."

FACING THE ELEMENTS: Conditions have a significant impact in how long it takes to restore power. While most outages are routine, responding during a rainstorm or blizzard involves facing challenging conditions.

During a storm, visibility is usually the biggest concern. "The elements can create a very harsh working environment. Many times the lines are swaying in the wind, there are flashes of lightning all around us, and rain is pelting us in the face. The interplay of your vision, the darkness, and the reflections lights in the rain can be disorienting," Brad detailed. "You get this incredibly eerie feeling sometimes when the atmosphere is charged with the buzzing of static in the air."

Line workers will often comment about how responding to an outage in a storm evokes a sense of adrenaline, making them feel alive, but it's incredibly important that they follow protocol set by the Co-op and rely on their instincts to determine when it's safe to work.

"When we have those long-extended outages, one safety procedure we have is that we are never allowed to work more than 16 hours straight. And when that timeframe is closing in, it's really tempting to squeeze in just one more outage. But you just never know what you're going to get into, and I have to remind myself that I can only restore one outage at a time."

RESTORATION: Restoring power involves a coordinated effort. Once the cause is identified and addressed, crews work diligently to repair or replace damaged components. This often includes repairing downed power lines, fixing transformers, or replacing faulty equipment. The restoration process prioritizes critical infrastructure and densely populated areas. As repairs progress, power is gradually restored to affected members, bringing relief in the wake of disruption.

RETURN TO THE SHOP: After successfully restoring power, line workers return to the shop to restock and prepare for the next call. Documentation and reporting are crucial, and debriefing sessions are typically held the following morning to share insights and takeaways as a team.

SACRIFICES AND REWARDS: Line workers and their families often make significant sacrifices for their responsibilities during outages. They miss all kinds of things from birthday parties and Christmas celebrations to deer hunting and family game nights. "It's really a family commitment. I've got a wonderful wife and three kids that give up a lot when I'm on call. I've missed baseball games and all kinds of family activities," shared Brad. "It takes a toll, many times my wife will be at home lying awake with worry until I come home safe."

Despite the unpredictable schedule and the sacrifice, line workers find reward in restoring power, serving their communities, and taking pride in their work. The understanding and support of community members make the commitment worthwhile.

In the world of linework, the timeline of a power outage is a carefully orchestrated process, demanding dedication, skill, and a commitment to service. Line workers like Brad continue to navigate these challenges, ensuring that when the lights go out, they are there to bring them back on.

"I got started in this career because I knew I would enjoy working outdoors, get to drive around in a cool truck and make a good living. But after you get into the field it becomes more than that," shared Brad. "Responding to outages is exciting and challenging. There are so many unknowns, you have to think on your feet, and its empowering. Being able to turn the power back on for families and businesses brings me great satisfaction and a strong sense of purpose. I'm proud of the work I do to serve the people in my community."

FIVE WAYS TO SAFEGUARD YOUR HOME THIS WINTER

As the temperatures drop and the days grow shorter, there's a natural inclination to create a warm and cozy haven at home. Unfortunately, as we see increased use of heating equipment, candles and electrical items, the number of home fires tends to increase during winter months. Here are five ways you can safeguard your home for the winter season.



TEST YOUR HOME SAFETY ALARMS

Ensure carbon monoxide and smoke detectors are working properly. If your detectors are battery-operated, replace the batteries annually. Test the detectors once a month and give them a good dusting to ensure the sensors are clear of dirt and debris.



USE SPACE HEATERS SAFELY

If you use portable space heaters, remember to keep them at least 3 feet away from flammable items. Use models that include an auto shut-off feature and overheat protection. Space heaters can take a toll on your energy bills. Use them efficiently (to heat smaller spaces) and safely. Never plug a space heater into a power strip.



DON'T OVERLOAD OUTLETS

Avoid overloading electrical outlets and power strips. When overloaded with electrical items, outlets and power strips can overheat and catch fire. If you use power strips for multiple devices, make sure the strip can handle the electrical load. For a safer bet, look for power strips that include surge protection.



CLEAN YOUR FIREPLACE

Clean the fireplace to improve safety and efficiency. There's nothing better than a warm fire on a chilly night, but it's important to maintain your fireplace for safety. The chimney should be cleaned at least once a year to reduce fire risks. Regular cleaning also improves air flow and limits the amount of carbon monoxide that seeps indoors.



PRACTICE SAFETY IN THE KITCHEN

As we spend more time in the kitchen during the holiday season, be mindful of potential fire hazards. Never leave food that's cooking on the stovetop unattended. Clean and remove spilled foods from cooking surfaces and be mindful of where you place flammable items like dish towels.

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PERIODICALS
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HUTCHINSON, MN



IS ELECTRICITY YOUR PRIMARY HEATING SOURCE?

If you use electricity to heat your home, you may qualify for a Minnesota sales tax exemption. Members with electric heat as their primary heating system are exempt from sales tax, or only pay partial sales tax, from November through April.

The exemption only applies to electricity used as your primary fuel for residential heating. Please note that space heaters and other temporary heating sources do not qualify. Additionally, electricity from lights, appliances, etc. is not tax-exempt, only the portion of electricity used to heat your home.

Members must complete an exemption form. To request the form, contact the Co-op at (320) 864-3148 or (800) 494-6272. **If you completed this form in the past, you do NOT need to send it in again.**



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