

Operation Round Up supports students

BY BRITTNEE WILSON

In December, 145 elementary students at Minnewaukan Public School had the opportunity to explore hands-on learning that sparked curiosity, creativity and problem-solving through a STEM-focused outreach program.

The experience was made possible through North Dakota's Gateway to Science (NDGTS) On the Go, a statewide outreach program that delivers dynamic, hands-on STEM experiences to pre-K-12 students in communities across North Dakota. NDGTS STEM educators bring standards-aligned learning festivals and workshops directly to schools, making science, technology, engineering and math both accessible and engaging.

A team from NDGTS traveled from Bismarck to Minnewaukan to present 10 age-appropriate, hands-on activity stations known as STEMzones. Designed in a carnival-style format, the STEMzones allowed students to actively explore STEM concepts through interactive learning experiences.

One teacher shared enthusiasm about the impact on students.

"Right when the sessions began, kids were fully engaged, asking questions, experimenting and genuinely excited to explore the world of STEM. The hands-on

activities are especially great for learners who often struggle to find excitement in the classroom," the teacher said.

Bringing the program to Minnewaukan was made possible in part through a grant from Northern Plains Electric Cooperative's Operation Round Up program.

"Your investment in our mission is helping us create meaningful hands-on learning experiences, build confidence and inspire the next generation of innovators," said Jessica Dunbar, NDGTS STEM educator and community relations coordinator. "We truly value your commitment to education." ■

FEBRUARY 2026

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Understanding recent rate increase

BY SETH SYVERSON, GENERAL MANAGER



Seth Syverson
General Manager

We all notice when our monthly electric bill changes, so Northern Plains Electric Cooperative (NPEC) wants to be upfront about what's happening and why. Our goal has always been to provide safe, reliable and affordable electricity for the members we serve.

Like many in the electric industry, we're facing rising costs and ongoing pressures, from changes in the power market to higher prices for the

equipment and materials needed to keep our system operating smoothly.

To meet these challenges and make sure we continue providing reliable service, a 10.9% rate increase went into effect Jan. 1. We know any rate change can be concerning, so we want to explain why this adjustment was necessary and how it helps keep your cooperative strong for years to come.

The largest factor behind this increase comes from higher wholesale power costs. Our power supplier, Basin Electric Power Cooperative, implemented a 10% increase to the cost of the electricity we purchase. These higher costs reflect investments being made in new generation and transmission facilities to meet growing demand and maintain long-term reliability, including investments of over \$11 billion over the next 10 years. While much of our cooperative's current power supply comes from older, lower-cost resources, new facilities cost significantly more to build and maintain. These investments are essential to ensure your cooperative has reliable power today and well into the future.

Electric rates are also affected by ongoing volatility in the power markets. The cost of electricity can change based on weather conditions, fuel prices and overall demand. Even renewable energy resources – an important part of today's energy mix – can be unpredictable, because they depend on weather and availability. These fluctuations impact the cost of the power we purchase and, in turn, the rates paid by local distribution cooperatives like ours.

At the local level, your cooperative is also facing higher costs to maintain and improve the system. Essential materials, such as underground cable, transformers and rubber goods, have increased significantly in price. These

rising costs mean higher budgets are needed to continue making critical system improvements.

Those improvements play an important role in keeping the lights on. They help strengthen the system against severe weather, add capacity to serve growing energy needs and replace aging infrastructure that has reliably served our members for many years. Investments in upgraded lines, modern equipment and underground facilities help reduce outages, improve safety and increase reliability.

Please know this decision was not made lightly. The NPEC board of directors, who are local members living and working in the communities we serve, carefully reviewed all options before approving the rate adjustment. Every effort is made to manage expenses responsibly, while continuing to provide reliable, affordable service.

This is where the cooperative difference truly matters. Every dollar you pay for electricity is reinvested back into the system to maintain lines, upgrade equipment and strengthen the grid or returned to members as capital credits.

NPEC also proudly supports local schools, nonprofits and community programs, helping make our communities stronger.

Most importantly, decisions are made locally by people who understand the needs and values of our members.

We appreciate your understanding and continued trust. Your electric cooperative remains committed to serving you today, while building a strong, reliable electric system for the future. ■

What this means for you

Beginning Jan. 1, electric rates increased by 10.9%. The increase impacts residential energy rates, electric heat rates and the monthly service charges. For most residential members, this will be an approximate increase of \$11 to \$16 per month, depending on usage, weather conditions and energy needs.

We encourage members to take advantage of energy-saving tips and off-peak programs offered by the cooperative to help manage electricity use and control costs.

If you have questions about your bill or would like help understanding ways to save energy, we are always available to assist you. ■

Interested in running for the board of directors?

Director petitions due by April 10

The nine board members who serve on the Northern Plains Electric Cooperative (NPEC) board of directors set policies and make decisions that guide the cooperative into the future. With the annual meeting just a few short months away, now is the time for members to start thinking about whether they have the time and desire to serve their electric cooperative.

The board meets on the fourth Monday of each month to make decisions regarding budget, policy, rates and other co-op business. Meetings alternate between the Carrington and Cando offices and typically last a good share of the day. In addition to monthly meetings, we offer specialized training opportunities through our statewide association to help board members make informed decisions. Directors are compensated for their time.

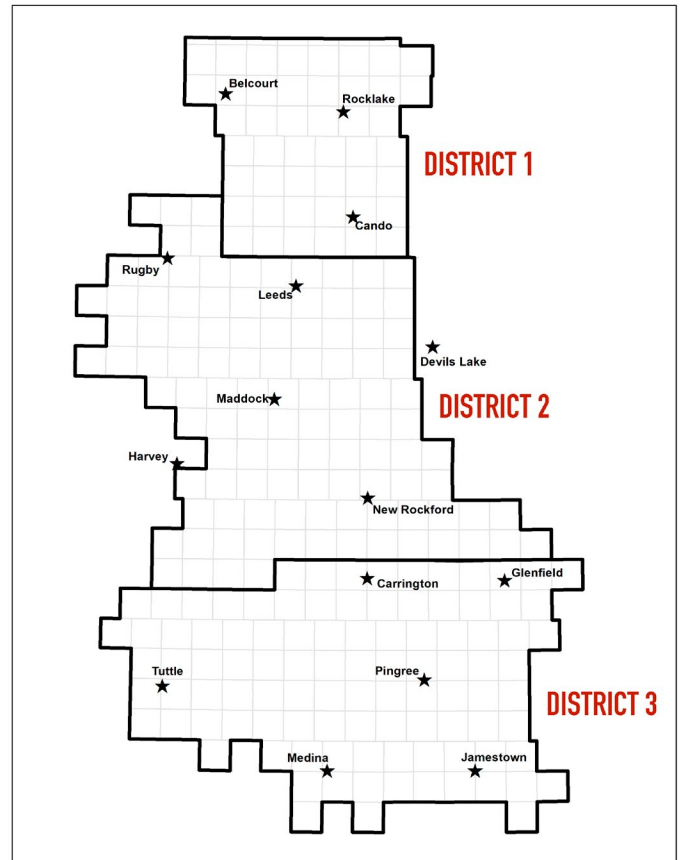
While you don't need to be an expert in electricity or business, you do need to have a passion for the community and a willingness to actively serve and learn.

Incumbent directors Bruce Olsen (District 1), Curtis Wiesz (District 2) and Lori Carlson (District 3) are eligible to run again.

To run for director, members must:

- 1) Receive NPEC electric service at your primary residential abode, and you may only run in the district in which you reside.
- 2) Obtain a petition from our offices in either Carrington or Cando or call for one to be mailed.
- 3) Obtain at least 15 signatures from NPEC members of the district in which the director resides. For a joint

Northern Plains Electric Cooperative service territory



membership, either the husband or wife may sign a petition, but not both.

4) Petitions must be filed to our office by the close of business (4 p.m.) Friday, April 10.

5) Attend the annual meeting on June 11 in Maddock.

For more information, call 800-882-2500 or email justask@nplains.com.

Play to Win

Congratulations to Kathie Lindsay of Jamestown.

Lindsay is our latest winner of a \$25 bill credit for playing the December bill insert crossword puzzle contest. Members can regularly check bill inserts for future contests.



RESCUE THE RESCUE

How a community saved Turtle Mountain Animal Rescue

Within a year of moving to Rolette County, Keith Benning turned his entire home into a makeshift animal shelter. Whether his intention or not, an animal rescue was born.

Benning arrived in North Dakota to work as a deputy for Rolette County and quickly became aware of a heartbreaking need. As winter tightened its grip, 911 calls began coming in, not just for people, but for dogs. Many were malnourished, suffering from severe mange, roaming for food or freezing in deadly conditions. With no animal shelters within a 100-mile radius, Benning began to adopt the animals in need.

In 2015, Benning made a life-changing decision to step down to part-time deputy work and founded Turtle Mountain Animal Rescue (TMAR), a nonprofit, primarily volunteer-based organization near Rolla. Its mission is to save animals that otherwise had no chance and put in place the necessary services to decrease animal overpopulation.

Three years later, TMAR retrofitted a rented 40x60-foot building served by Northern Plains Electric Cooperative west of St. John into a functioning animal rescue, complete with living quarters. TMAR made an agreement with the out-of-state property owner, but knew the arrangement was temporary and the property could be sold at any time.

The community and TMAR worked hand in hand to save thousands of animals each year, covering more than 2,000 square miles of rural North Dakota and rescuing between 50 and 80 animals every month. While employing nine people, TMAR relies heavily on volunteers to foster the rescued animals.

What sets TMAR apart is not only the scale of its work, but its transparency. With nearly 600,000 followers

on Facebook from all over the United States and in 56 countries, the rescue regularly shares live videos of animal intakes. Raw, unfiltered footage shows the harsh reality many homeless dogs and cats face. Benning often leads these videos himself, introducing animals moments after rescue, hoping someone watching might open their heart and home. On average, the rescue facilitates about 50 adoptions each month. Over the years TMAR has been in operation, it has saved over 8,000 animals in North Dakota.



Founded by **Keith Benning**, Turtle Mountain Animal Rescue saves 50 to 80 animals each month.

The new animal shelter and sanctuary building will give Turtle Mountain Animal Rescue more adequate room and proper ventilation to continue its mission in Rolette County. Construction and lack of funding have halted a move-in date for the rescue.



The youth center building, located on the property of the new animal shelter and sanctuary, will host a program to help educate youth in animal care. The building is equipped with a solar system obtained by grants.



TMAR's mission goes beyond rescue. Understanding prevention is key, the organization hosts four free spay and neuter clinics and six free vaccination clinics each year. These services are only possible through donations and the dedication of volunteers, but they play a crucial role in reducing overpopulation and future suffering.

As the rescue grew, TMAR knew the rented property was a temporary solution and invested in a 23-acre plot of land east of Dunseith. Plans were drawn for a permanent 60x200-foot animal shelter and sanctuary, paired with a youth center. It was an ambitious vision that would be the first of its kind in North Dakota. However, the dream would have to take the long road, as construction delays, planning and fundraising slowed progress, but the vision remains alive.

"We have the shells of the buildings, but are at a standstill due to lack of useable water and lack of funding," Benning said.

Then, in December 2024, the uncertainty TMAR had long feared became reality. The owners of the property where the rescue operated announced it was being sold. While they graciously offered TMAR the first opportunity to purchase, the price was daunting for a small nonprofit that solely operates on donations. Faced with the possibility of shutting down entirely, Benning turned to the community the rescue had built, making a heartfelt plea on social media. If supporters had the means to help, he asked them to do so. If not, he simply asked them to share the message. The campaign became known as "Rescue the Rescue."

What happened next was nothing short of remarkable. Through the power of social media and collective compassion, enough money was raised in three weeks for TMAR to purchase the property outright. The rescue was saved by the people it had inspired.

Today, TMAR continues its work with renewed stability and hope. While the dream of a new, purpose-built facility and youth center remains on the horizon, TMAR stands strong, rooted in resilience, transparency and community support.

"We are nothing without our community; we are nothing without our volunteers," Benning said. ■

Giving Hearts Day

TMAR is eligible to participate in Giving Hearts Day on Feb. 12. Founded in 2008, Giving Hearts Day is a 24-hour charitable giving event benefiting nonprofits across North Dakota and northwest Minnesota. Each year, it connects charities with an ever-growing community of donors dedicated to making a difference. More information can be found at givingheartsdays.org.

To find out more ways to give or how to adopt, visit turtlemountainanimalrescue.org.



Annual poster contest announced

Attention kids! Grab your art supplies, as Northern Plains Electric Cooperative (NPEC) sponsors a safety poster contest for children in kindergarten to sixth grade.

The purpose of the safety poster contest is to help make children aware of the dangers of electricity. At NPEC, safety always comes first, and we are dedicated to doing our part to teach children how to be safe around electricity.

Winners will be announced on our Facebook page and featured in the NPEC local pages of *North Dakota Living*.

RULES

- Posters must be on white, 8.5x11-inch paper.
- Posters must depict the theme, "How to stay safe around electricity."
- Print the child's name, school grade, address and parents' names on the back of the poster.
- Dependents of current NPEC members are eligible for this contest.
- **Deadline is March 15.**

ENTRY CATEGORIES

- Kindergarten to first grade
- Second to third grade
- Fourth to sixth grade

PRIZES IN EACH CATEGORY

- First: \$20
- Second: \$15
- Third: \$10

**Submit entries to an NPEC office
(Cando or Carrington) or mail to:**

Northern Plains Electric Cooperative
Attn: Poster Contest
P.O. Box 608
Cando, ND 58324

FEELING THE HEAT

Hot water is one of those comforts we often take for granted. But water heating can amount to 12% of your monthly energy use. You can save with some simple tips. That leaky faucet, for example, can lead to gallons of wasted water and create a "drain" on your monthly bill. Here are some tips from your local electric cooperative:

- **Lower the temperature.** For most households, a 120-degree setting on your water heater may work fine.
- **Insulate the tank.** Install water heater wrap, also known as water heater blanket, per manufacturer's instructions.
- **Maintain.** Drain 1 to 2 gallons from the bottom of your water heater each year to reduce sediment buildup.
- **Insulate exposed hot water lines.** In addition to insulating the tank itself, consider adding insulation to the first 6 feet of both the hot and cold water pipes connected to the unit.
- **Fix dripping faucets.** You can significantly reduce hot water use by simply repairing leaks in fixtures, such as faucets and shower heads. A leak of one drip per second wastes 1,661 gallons of water and can cost up to \$35 per year.
- **Use either cold or warm water for most laundry loads.** Cold water is always sufficient for rinsing.
- **Fill the dishwasher before starting it and use a shorter cycle.**
- **Install non-aerating, low-flow faucets and showerheads.** Purchase quality low-flow fixtures for around \$10 to \$20 a piece and achieve a water savings of 25% to 60%. ■

Thanks to members, donation total hits \$1 million

At the December 2025 meeting, the Northern Plains Electric Cooperative (NPEC) Operation Round Up board of directors approved grants totaling \$10,700 to help support worthy causes. In 2025, grants totaled \$39,125.

These charitable grants are made possible through the generosity of NPEC members who voluntarily elect to have their electric bills rounded up to the next dollar. The donated amount averages about 50 cents a month for each participating member and raises approximately \$37,000 each year.

Since the program's beginning in October 1998, grants totaling \$1,012,187 have been awarded to 1,392 local charitable causes.

Grants approved in December include:

- Cando Volunteer Fire Department, battery-powered ventilation fans
- Maddock Community Center, stage replacement project
- Hospice of the Red River Valley, Jamestown, Community Grief and Bereavement Program
- Jamestown Area Grief Support Team, widows retreat program
- Joni Pulst, Cando, medical expenses
- Elizabeth L. Sorenson, Chaseley, medical expenses
- Benson, Eddy, Foster, Griggs, Kidder, Pierce, Rolette,

Stutsman, Towner, Wells, Ramsey counties, food bank programs

If you would like additional information about this worthy program, please contact NPEC by calling 800-882-2500 or you may obtain guidelines or download applications at nplains.com. The board will meet again in March to review applications. The application deadline is Feb. 20. ■



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