



Rural Montana

Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association Magazine | MAY 2026



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to 'Landman'

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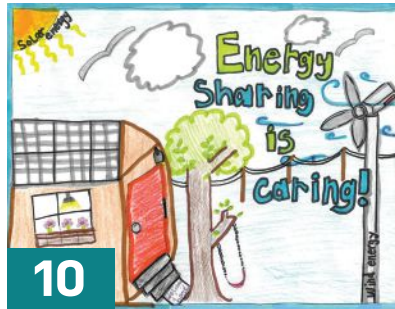


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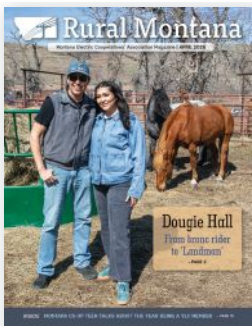
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Powering through the storm And preparing for the next

MARK LAMBRECHT, CEO of Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association



THE most important expectation members have of their electric cooperative is delivery of safe, affordable and reliable power. Co-ops overcome a variety of challenges to meet this expectation, such as ever-increasing costs for power supply, equipment, labor and insurance. They also face regulatory hurdles and destructive natural disasters.

Communities served by Montana co-ops have been hit hard in the past couple of years with windstorms and floods that knocked down powerlines, washed out roads and bridges, and severely damaged homes and businesses. Some co-op members were without power for an extended period of time and even had to vacate their homes while emergency responders and line workers worked around the clock to reconnect power.

May is National Wildfire Awareness Month — reminding us our communities are one lightning strike or careless action away from additional devastation requiring emergency response and restoration of homes, livelihoods and landscapes. Every Montana electric co-op is working to reduce the risk of utility-involved wildfire through mitigation plans required by the law they helped pass in 2025.

Despite all of our efforts to prevent and prepare for them, disasters will continue to happen. Rebuilding communities after them is time challenging and resource-intensive. Recent windstorms required electric co-ops across the state to clear downed trees and debris, replace power poles and powerlines, and repair other infrastructure. This work required thousands of co-op man-hours, contractors, equipment rentals and other resources.

If not for the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association (MECA), Montana Disaster and Emergency Services (MTDES) and Governor Greg Gianforte working together to convince the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to provide signifi-


cant technical assistance and funding to Montana communities impacted by recent disasters, costs for rebuilding roads, bridges, powerlines and other infrastructure would have been the responsibility of their citizens and co-op members.

FEMA has been under a great deal of scrutiny lately because of delayed response to floods, hurricanes and tornadoes throughout the country. Staffing shortages, budget constraints, stricter approval requirements and plain old bureaucracy are among the reasons critics of the agency have called for it to be reformed — or in some cases — dismantled.

MECA prefers FEMA be reformed through legislation in Congress to:

- Expedite the timeline for reimbursement of emergency work;
- Streamline the process for approving and executing work to repair, restore and reconstruct damaged infrastructure;
- Improve access to resiliency funding to prevent future disasters; and
- Allow FEMA funds to be used to reimburse communities for loans taken out to respond to disasters.

The agency's Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program is of particular importance to co-ops. Funds from this program help communities guard against disasters by providing a 75 percent federal cost share for projects such as hazardous fuels management in forests and burying powerlines.

I encourage you to contact Montana's congressional delegation and ask them to support the FEMA Act (H.R. 4669) to bring about necessary agency reforms — and do your part for National Wildfire Awareness Month by helping prevent wildfires: Practice campfire safety, avoid parking on dry grass, create defensible space around your home and report any unattended smoke or flames by calling 911. 

Dougie Hall

Turning tragedy into motivation

STORY AND PHOTOS BY RYAN HALL | RURAL MONTANA EDITOR

GLACIER Electric Cooperative Member “Dancin’” Dougie Hall of Babb, and formerly of Browning, never expected to be a viral sensation on the Internet or land a recurring role on the popular series *Landman* on Paramount+.

The acting career, motivational speaking engagements and large online following weren’t goals, but Hall is happy to have had a variety of opportunities.

“I just want to keep moving with good intention, and whatever that brings will be pretty damn cool,” he said.

Bronc Riding

Hall grew up around horses, traveling with his father and uncle on the Indian Relay circuit every summer.

“Pretty much every weekend as a little guy was a fair,” Hall said. “That’s where I fell in love with horses. An old saddle horse – that was my babysitter.”

At age 5, Hall found his true passion: saddle bronc riding.

“That’s when I started paying attention to rodeo,” he said.

He qualified for the national collegiate finals as a bronc rider for the University of Montana-Western and found success as a pro on the PRCA circuit, finishing in the money often, and taking home one event win.

“I wouldn’t say I was the greatest, but I did better than a lot of people

thought I was going to,” Hall said.

Rider to Stockman

Hall hasn’t ridden broncs in a few years, but his company Good Medicine Bucking Horses – founded about eight years ago – has continued his rodeo legacy. The company was founded with help from Will Shirley of Conrad, as well as partners Mark and Lynette McMillen, Aces Wild, Warren and Susan Johns and Hells A Roarin’ Outfitters. Hall and his wife Kay also received help along the way from Benny and Hope Powell, and Bill and Nicki Powell.

Among their stable of 52 bucking horses are three favorites for riders looking to score big – Brings Plenty, Stacy and Ice Cap.

“It was a pretty good transition (from rider to stock contractor), to see it through the eyes of a rider,” Hall said, adding that his goal is to make it as easy as possible for both the cowboy and the horse to perform well.

“As crazy as it sounds, it’s easier to ride a horse that bucks than one who doesn’t. A horse that doesn’t buck will get you hurt, it will get you crippled,” Hall said. “I want to be the guy that when I pull up to the rodeo with the trailer, the cowboys are all like, ‘hell yeah.’”

Hall said he loves everything about raising horses, from pairing mares with studs, to working with colts and teach-

ing them to remain calm in the chute.

“They ain’t no different than humans,” Hall said. “They just need to know everything is going to be OK. ... They just need the chance to simmer down and breathe.”

Sharing his story

Five or six years ago, Hall was going through a tough time when he saw a bronc-riding training opportunity in California.

“I needed to get back to the basics,” Hall said.

He went to the training, held by George Veeder, a bronc rider in his 60s – “He rode broncs and he rode them good,” Hall said.

While there he met Meng Lee of Make Line Productions.

“He told me, ‘Dougie, you’ve got a gift but you don’t use it,’” Hall recalled. Lee told him that he had a compelling story, and when he talked, people listened and connected with him. Lee suggested that Hall start sharing his story and uplifting people on social media.

When Hall said he didn’t know what to talk about, Lee simply told him, “Talk from the heart and the mind.”

Hall started shooting videos and posting them on social media. He shared his story of being in the car his mother was driving when they were struck by a drunk driver, and watching her die from her injuries when he

“ Hey everybody, it's your favorite Indian Dougie Hall. If you like what I say please use it, if you don't, don't worry about it. ”

– INTRO USED BY DOUGIE HALL ON SOCIAL MEDIA



Glacier Electric Cooperative Member Dougie Hall, a social media influencer, bucking horse breeder, motivational speaker and actor, feeds horses on his property near Babb. | PHOTO BY RYAN HALL

was only 14. He talks about overcoming tragedy and being positive in his videos, and his motivational/inspirational speeches, which go more into detail about his story.

"I feel like people are kind of like these bucking horses when they watch these videos," Hall said. "If they are upset or stressed, when they watch my videos, it lets them breathe, lets them know they will be OK."

"It lets them know they are not alone," Kay added.

Tik Tok to TV

Hall became a stunt rider in movies and soon befriended fellow stunt rider Steven Yellowtail.

"He and I hit it off. Both Indian cowboys," Hall said.

On a movie set one day, Hall heard Yellowtail on the phone and walked in. That led to him meeting the man on the phone, country singer Ian Munsick, who invited Hall to be part of the documentary "White Buffalo." Then Hall met Mo Brings Plenty, who played Mo in *Yellowstone*. After Hall served as a stunt rider for the series finale of that

show, Brings Plenty asked him if he could act.

"I was camera broke from doing those videos," Hall said. "That's probably what got me the job."

That job was the role of Two Spears, who appeared in three or four episodes of *1923*.

"That was a hell of an experience," Hall said, adding that after it wrapped up he, "told Kay that if they call again, that's awesome, if not, it was a fun experience."

The phone did ring, leading to a recurring role as Russ "King" Fisher in the hit series *Landman*.

"(Co-creator/producer) Taylor Sheridan's a hell of a guy, and he's been really good to us," Hall said.

Notes of Positivity

Whether on TikTok or the stage, Hall is known for his positive outlook in the face of any situation, and for his unique way of looking at life.

"Positivity is a lot like bathing. Just because you do it once doesn't mean it will stay on," Hall said. "I think human beings forget sometime how capable

we are, and how much we matter."

He said that prior to his mom's death, she always picked herself up no matter what happened.

"Some days she was crawling, some days she was flying, and every damn thing in between," Hall said.

"The best way to honor those people who came before us is to live our lives to the best of our ability," Hall said. "Creator woke me up this morning, so He must not be done with me yet."

Hall said he tells his followers that it's OK to get knocked down, but they can't lose sight of how strong they are and what they are capable of.

"If you got to lay there and bleed, then lay there and bleed. But you better be thinking of how to get back up again," Hall said. "Everyone has survived 100 percent of our bad days, and we ain't tipped over yet."

As for what's next, Hall isn't sure. He just controls what he can, and trusts that the opportunities will continue to come.

"As long as we're fed and our bucking horses are fed, that's all I can ask for," he said. RM

2026 READER ISSUE PREVIEW

A lifetime journey to my own yellow dog

EDITOR'S NOTE: Next month is our annual Reader Issue. With so many great submissions coming in, we decided to include one in this month as well. We hope you enjoy it.

By **TERRY CROOKS**
Flathead Electric Cooperative

WHEN I was a second-grade boy sitting in a small classroom, our teacher read *Old Yeller* to us. Like many kids, I was captivated by the story of the brave yellow dog that protected his family and stood loyal in the face of danger. To a 7-year-old boy, *Old Yeller* seemed like the perfect dog — fearless, faithful and willing to give everything for the people he loved.

Anyone who has read the book knows that the story ends in tragedy. The ending hit me hard. Even as a child, I felt deeply connected to that yellow dog. Something about the loyalty and courage of that animal stayed with me long after the book was finished.

I didn't know it then, but that story would quietly follow me for the rest of my life.

Years passed, and my life eventually became deeply connected to search and rescue work. Over time, I had the privilege of training and working with six personal search and rescue dogs in multiple disciplines — water recovery, avalanche search, trailing, tracking, live-find work and cadaver detection. Those dogs and the missions we worked together were some of the most meaningful experiences of my life.

Search dogs are remarkable partners — they are teammates, companions and heroes in the quiet moments when a person is found, or answers are



brought to a grieving family. Every dog I worked with taught me something about dedication, patience and trust.

Through all those years, there remained a small piece of that childhood memory — the boy who once dreamed about having a yellow dog like *Old Yeller*.

Sometimes life has a way of bringing things full circle when you least expect it, and one day my circle closed in an unexpected way.

A yellow dog appeared on my doorstep — abandoned, alone and looking for a place to belong. There was no grand plan, no careful search. Just a dog that found its way to the right place.

We named him Bodacious Yellow Dog.

From the beginning, there was something special about him. He had the heart, the drive and the willingness that good search dogs need. With time, patience and training, Bodacious became certified with the National

Search Dog Alliance.

Living and working in rural Montana has a way of shaping a person's sense of responsibility to neighbors and community. In small towns and mountain valleys, people still depend on one another when things go wrong. When someone goes missing in the woods, on the river or in deep winter snow, it is often volunteer search-and-rescue teams, and their dogs, that answer the call.

The terrain can be unforgiving and the distances vast, but a trained search dog can cover ground that would take humans hours or even days to search.

Much like electric cooperatives keep the lights on across the countryside, search-and-rescue teams are built on neighbors helping neighbors.

Looking back now, I realize that the story of a yellow dog that moved a young boy's heart never left me. It simply waited.

In the end, that childhood inspiration came full circle — not in a storybook, but on my own doorstep in rural Montana, in the form of a search dog named Bodacious Yellow Dog. RM

LINCOLN ELECTRIC: EMPOWERING OUR COMMUNITIES WITH FINANCIAL SOLUTIONS

Glacier Peak Holistics

DEB Gwynn is the CEO and founder of Glacier Peak Holistics, which provides a holistic approach to pet health. She is a certified herbalist and herbal remedy formulator, and has been designing herbal remedies for dogs, cats and horses since 1996. Deb is also a pet food nutrition specialist.

With more than 30 years of expertise in herbs and nutritional supplements, Deb formulates exceptional natural solutions designed to promote pet well-being and ease discomfort from injury, aging or illness. Each product is carefully handcrafted at their facility in Eureka. Glacier Peak Holistics takes pride in using 100 percent organic, naturally sourced herbs — most of which are grown in the Pacific Northwest.

Before starting Glacier Peak Holistics, Deb owned a health food store specializing in herbs.

“I started with herbal formulas to help people. I made teas and tinctures for ailments,” she said, reflecting on her time operating Heaven’s Peak Health. “The store was located on Main Street, and it was growing. People were looking for plant-based and herbal health supplements, and being an herbal formulator, I was staying busy. I was enjoying it and doing well, but my true passion was helping animals through a holistic approach. So, I sold the health food store and started Glacier Peak Holistics in 2009.”

Deb was doing what she loved, and business was growing. Soon, it was time to expand. That’s when a friend told her about Lincoln Electric Cooperative’s Revolving Loan Fund.

“It was just me. I was grinding herbs, filling capsules, packaging, shipping — everything. I needed help, and I needed more space. The loan from Lincoln Electric allowed me to set up the larger space I needed. I was able to use the



Deb Gwynn is the CEO and founder of Glacier Peak Holistics. Lincoln Electric’s Revolving Loan Fund helped her grow and expand her business. | **LINCOLN ELECTRIC PHOTO**

funds to remodel an old warehouse, hire more people and make it exactly how we needed it.”

With the new warehouse and headquarters in place, Deb has continued to grow and help animals across the country and around the world.

“We currently supply approximately 500 wholesale stores with our products, as well as approximately 300 veterinarians nationwide. The funds allowed me to expand so we could focus on inventory and hiring help, so we could get products made and out to people who need them for their pets.”

Glacier Peak Holistics has built a strong reputation nationwide, with customers providing first-hand testimonials about how the products have helped improve their pets’ health and quality of life.

“I’m a lifelong animal lover. My company works with pet owners and veterinarians to help animals live their best lives. We run a Pet Wellness Sensi-


tivity Test using biofeedback machines. That way we have a starting place to know what the pets need, or need to avoid, in their diet and environment.”

The loan from Lincoln Electric helped purchase the biofeedback machines, which Deb describes as the backbone of the operation.

“Once we know what the animals are sensitive to, we can provide specific remedies to get them healthy and keep them healthy,” she said.

In addition to serving pets worldwide, Glacier Peak Holistics employs 17 team members locally and remotely.

“Another great thing the LEC loan allowed me to do was expand to a point where I can support the local economy of Eureka. We work with many different contractors, and I’m able to hire locally and give back to the community,” Deb said.

Glacier Peak Holistics pet products can be purchased online at www.glacierpeakholistics.com. 

Keeper of the game

Central Montana rancher and referee,
passionate about basketball

STORY BY **CATHY MOSER** | FOR FERGUS ELECTRIC

REFEREEES sprinting up and down a basketball court and watching every player, every ball toss and every dribble can net two miles of running in a single game. They must tune out the cheering, fist pumps, groans and other reactions from parents, hecklers and coaches. Yet, neither athleticism on the court nor focus on the play is the greatest challenge referees must manage. It's the mental demands of making instantaneous decisions such as foul/not a foul. That's according to referee Jared Foran.

This past February, I met with Jared who, in addition to refereeing, ranches on the Foran family ranch near Christina.

Working school basketball courts as a referee since 2012 and officiating tournaments since 2017, Jared told me about his enthusiasm for basketball, how basketball enthusiasts in Montana become referees, and what the highlights and lowlights of the job are. His passion for the sport came early, passed to him by his father, Jim Foran, who refereed school basketball games and tournaments across Montana for 32 years.

Jim's first season as a referee was in 1989, and Jared remembered, "Since I could crawl, I traveled with him to the games." In this way, Jim exposed his son to the excitement and fun of hometown basketball.

According to Jared and the *Hi-Line Today* website, Jim's refereeing career began in college at Montana State University-Northern, where he officiated university intramural basketball.



Jared Foran refereed the 2026 Southern C Divisional Tournament hosting both boys' and girls' tournament action. | **FORAN FAMILY PHOTO.**

After college, he coached grade school and middle school basketball, as well as junior varsity at Winifred High School.

Jim retired from officiating in 2022. His dedication as a referee earned him an induction into the Montana Officials Association Hall of Fame, Class of 2023. Jim has since stayed busy with the

Foran ranch.

Jared started playing basketball as a fifth-grader at the Winifred school in 2000, and continued through high school.

His favorite professional basketball player was Michael Jordan, "just like every other kid my age," Jared said.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you would like information about becoming a referee, contact regional director George Maruska at (406) 366-0034.

Entry into the referee profession wasn't a calculated decision.

Coming home from Montana State University as a student in 2012, Jared rode with his father's friend Mark Heggem. Like Jim, Mark refereed central Montana basketball. Just outside of Lewistown, Mark made his announcement, "I'm going to a referee meeting and so are you." It so happened that Jim was riding in the car but not saying a word as Mark drove the three of them to the meeting.

Come fall, Jared wore the black and white stripes of a referee as he officiated central Montana junior high and high school basketball. Jim and Mark also officiated that season. In fact, they would referee together for 32 years.

Every state has its own pathway and requirements for referee certification. In Montana, the Montana Officials Association administers the process. A series of tests, training and two-year apprenticeships advance referees from apprentice to certified to master classification.

Jared is at master official, which makes him eligible to officiate junior high and high school games, as well as tournaments. It's the highest classification before college officiating, which entails college-specific training. Collegiate conferences and national associations oversee the advancement of college-level referees.

Jared is content to stay where he is. Montana colleges are a long way from Christina, and officiating at the college level would require a lot more travel and time away from his wife, Melanie, and their three boys, ages 7, 4 and 1.

Given central Montana's relative



Officiating at Montana schools is already a multigenerational accomplishment in the Foran family, and little James Foran might be the family's next referee. Pictured from left to right is Jared, James and Jim. | **FORAN FAMILY PHOTO.**

isolation, recruitment of new referees and maintaining a pool of them isn't easy. Recruitment is mainly by word of mouth, Jared said, mentioning Tuff Berg of Stanford, the 15-year-old high school sophomore newly recruited into the officiating pool.

"When he's not playing the game, he's helping us referee the junior high school games," Jared said. "He's really into it, and he'll be a good ref."

I asked, "What makes a good ref?" Jared responded, "Thick-skinned, short of memory, passion for the game and an understanding of the rules."

Referees are comrades in arms as they play their positions of lead, trail and center.

"We trust each other and we have each other's back," Jared said. "We make calls in our primaries (the assigned section of the court a referee monitors) and help out when a ref can't see his area because his vision is blocked."

A referee seamlessly blends in with the action on court until blowing his whistle. A ref's call can significantly impact the outcome of a game, and situations arise where he must explain his

call to coaches, and even act as a mediator or peacekeeper during disputes.

"You want to call a fair game," Jared said. "But you still get criticized. Make a questionable call, you have to forget about it. Half of the fans will think it's wrong, and the other half will think it's right."

Exemplary referees, according to Jared, must be flexible, patient, even-tempered, smart and have an understanding wife — like Melanie. She and Jared used to travel to games together. Nowadays while he's on a basketball court officiating, she's at home with the boys.

Referees in the central Montana pool earn \$80 for officiating varsity games and \$60 for junior varsity. Mileage is reimbursed.

Jared likes the camaraderie he shares with his fellow referees. He's developed long-time friendships with some of them. Another benefit of being a referee is the opportunity to support rural communities.

As Jared put it, "I ref for the kids, schools and local coaches, and I spend part of each paycheck at a local business." RAM



SOLAR ENERGY POP QUIZ

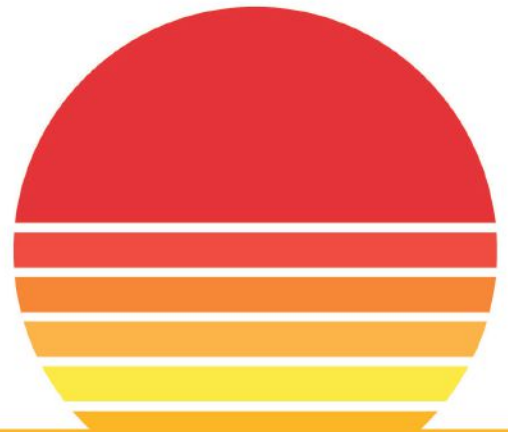
Solar energy is amazing because it allows us to use electricity generated from natural sunlight. Complete the quiz below by matching the solar energy terms in the word bank to the correct description.



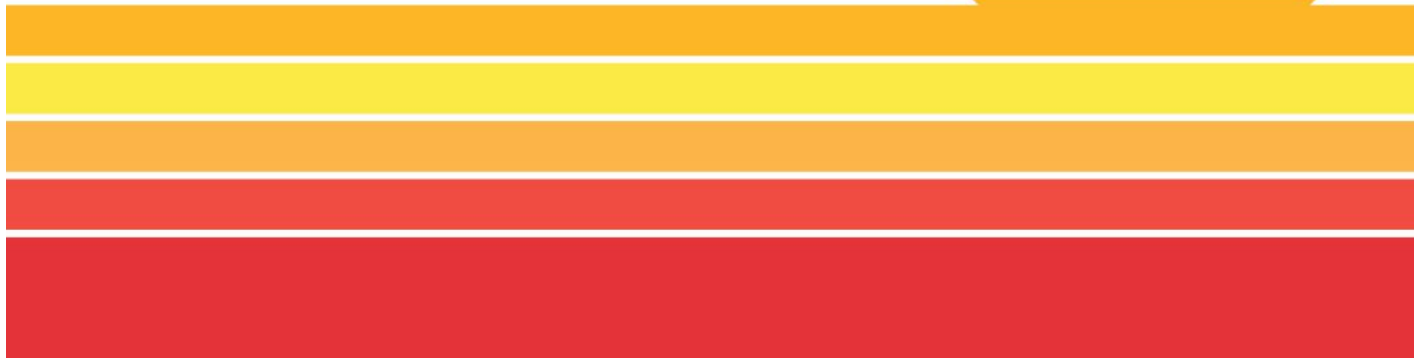
1. _____ A star at the center of our solar system that provides light and heat.
2. _____ Flat devices often placed on rooftops that collect energy from the Sun and help power homes and businesses.
3. _____ Tiny particles of energy that travel through space and reach Earth in about eight minutes.
4. _____ The basic building block inside rooftop equipment that converts sunlight into usable power.
5. _____ The type of energy that runs appliances, lights and electronics in your home.

Word Bank

- A. Solar Cell
- B. Electricity
- C. Solar Panels
- D. Sun
- E. Photons



Answer Key: 1) D 2) C 3) E 4) A 5) B



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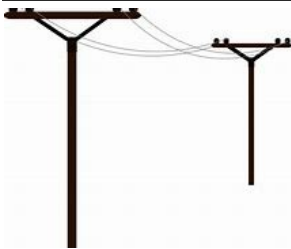
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ALONG THESE LINES . . .



MYEC HOLDS ANNUAL MEETING OF THE MEMBERS

Mid-Yellowstone Electric held it's 87th Annual Meeting on Wednesday, March 25th at the Rosebud-Treasure County Exhibit Hall in Forsyth at 6:00 p.m.

During the meeting, members heard reports from their President, Tim Fulton, and CEO, Jason Brothen.

Joe Kolman, from Montana Electric Cooperative Association, spoke about legislative issues and the importance of having electric cooperatives. Lana Maychrzak—GWEC Director, Greg Rauschendorfer—LYREC Director, and Steve Nile—MYEC Director each spoke to the members about the advantages of having shared services amongst the three cooperatives.

After faithfully serving on the MYEC Board for seven years as a Director for District #3, Richard Pinkerton decided to step down. President Fulton acknowledged Pinkerton for his dedication and presented him with a certificate of appreciation. CEO Brothen thanked the Nominating Committee for selecting the candidates for the three director positions for District 1, District 3 and District 6. Since there was only one nominee chosen for each district, no election was necessary. Re-elected to District #1 was Reese Stahl; re-elected to District #6 was Tim Fulton; and elected to District #3 was David Rickett.

Abigail Fay gave a slide presentation and spoke about her Washington D.C. Youth Tour trip she attended in June of 2025, which was sponsored by MYEC.

Scholarship winners were announced. Winners of the MYEC Scholarships, chosen from the MECA applications, were: \$1,000 Danica Gamble from Hysham and \$500 Bryan Bidwell from Forsyth. Danica's application was sent on to MECA to be considered at the state level. Basin Electric Power Cooperative \$1,500 scholarship winner was Elizabeth Moke, and \$1,000 was Danica Gamble, both from Hysham. Danica Gamble and Bryan Bidwell were the recipients of the two \$1,000 Luck of the Draw Scholarships given at the annual meeting. Reagan Fink won the essay contest and will attend the 2026 Washington D.C. Youth Tour in June.

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**MYEC
ANNUAL
MEETING
2026**



MONTANA U.S. SENATORS

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 senators. Next month, we will ask a question of the state's two representatives.

THIS MONTH'S QUESTION:

Many Montana communities are counting on the Federal Emergency Management Agency to help them recover from recent floods and windstorms. Should they expect the federal government to continue its disaster relief role in the long term?

THE SAME QUESTION WILL BE ASKED TO MONTANA'S TWO U.S. REPRESENTATIVES IN NEXT MONTH'S EDITION



Senator Daines

320 Hart, Senate Office Building,
Washington, D.C. 20510
www.daines.senate.gov
Ph: (202) 224-2651

Senator Steve Daines

MONTANANS have long dealt with natural disasters in our state, from catastrophic wildfires to major windstorms and flooding. Montana's state and local governments are well-equipped to provide on-the-ground assistance in the aftermath of natural disasters, but federal assistance from FEMA and other government agencies is critical as well.

Right now, my main priority is ending the Democrats' Department of Homeland Security shutdown that directly affects FEMA and its ability to assist disaster victims. In December, in the aftermath of a major flooding event which caused the failure of the Lower Flower Creek Dam and several roads and bridges, I worked with President Trump, Governor Gianforte and relevant agencies, including FEMA, to secure emergency funding to help northwest Montana recover. However, because of the Democrats' dysfunction, FEMA employees did not get paid for nearly two months, and if this government

shutdown continues it will impact FEMA's ability to provide future disaster relief to Montana.

I have also worked to improve FEMA's effectiveness. Last May I introduced the "Floodplain Enhancement and Recovery Act" that reduces burdensome regulations and red tape by reining in FEMA's "No Rise" rule. This will allow important conservation and ecosystem restoration work to move forward without unnecessary costs and delay, while keeping our communities safe from flooding. I'm also working with my colleagues in the Senate to streamline our approach to wildfire response to allow for better coordination between the federal government, state governments and community partners.

As Congress considers the most effective way to provide disaster relief to states, I will continue to work closely with our federal partners to ensure Montana's needs are always met. ^{RM}



Senator Sheehy

Dirksen Senate Office Building, SD-G55
Washington, D.C. 20510
www.sheehy.senate.gov
Ph: (202) 224-2644

Senator Tim Sheehy

MONTANANS understand that when disaster strikes, recovery begins at the local level. It's volunteer firefighters, county road crews, ranchers helping neighbors and local officials who are first on the scene after floods or damaging windstorms. That spirit of self-reliance is what defines our communities.

The federal government also has a role to play when disasters overwhelm state and local resources. Agencies like FEMA should exist to provide emergency support and partnership as communities rebuild and get back on their feet, because Washington works best when it supports local leadership rather than replacing it with layers of bureaucracy.

Too often, rural states like Montana face delays and complicated requirements that make it harder to access disaster aid. Federal rules are

frequently written with large urban areas in mind, leaving small towns and agricultural communities in Montana struggling to navigate a system that doesn't reflect rural realities. Disaster relief should move faster, trust local decision-makers and respect the unique needs of Montana communities.

Looking ahead, we also need to focus more on prevention. Better forest management, maintaining rural infrastructure, community hardening and reducing unnecessary federal regulations can help lessen the impact of future disasters. Preparing ahead of time protects families, saves taxpayer dollars and strengthens our communities.

Montanans expect accountability in how their tax dollars are spent. Disaster assistance must remain transparent, efficient and focused on serving communities — not bloated bureaucracy. ^{RM}

ENERGY SHARE ART CONTEST

Co-op student wins

Second, third-place winners also from co-op country

STORY BY RYAN HALL | RURAL MONTANA EDITOR

THREE children from electric cooperative service areas took the top three spots in the 2026 Montana Energy Share Art Contest for fourth graders.

Kaisa Benson, a home-schooled student from Kalispell earned first place, Tillie Dempewolf of Glendive finished in second place, and Luna Sonsalla of Baker submitted the third-place drawing.

Benson's parents are members of Flathead Electric Cooperative. Glendive's schools have students from Goldenwest Electric Cooperative, and Southeast Electric Cooperative serves the families of many Baker students.

Using the medium of art, the contest teaches fourth-grade students across the state about their Montana neigh-



bors, who sometimes need additional help keeping warm in the winter. Per Energy Share's contest guidelines, the drawings depict what Energy Share means to them.

The art contest is part of Energy Share's overall efforts to educate the public on the energy needs of people across the state. Donations from indi-

viduals and small businesses across Montana make it possible for Energy Share to help Montanans who face emergency, no-heat situations when they encounter temporary financial difficulties. Investor-owned utilities, large electric users, the propane industry, Montana's electric cooperatives and individuals across the state come together to support Energy Share.

Kaisa received \$75, Tillie \$50 and Luna \$25 for their winning drawings. Luna and Tillie's teachers also received a gift card for teaching supplies, and their classes each received a pizza party. Energy Share also provided pizza for Kaisa and her family.

In a phone interview, Kaisa said she was shocked to win. She originally



First place Energy Share Art Contest winner Kaisa Benson, from Kalispell, shows off her winning drawing and \$75 prize check with her parents.



Tillie Dempewolf from Glendive took second place in the Energy Share Art Contest. She won \$50 for her artistic efforts.



thought she won fourth place, until her mother clarified that she took first.

"I was very excited," Kaisa said.

She said that the inspiration for her winning drawing was the theme of "sharing and caring", something she believes strongly in, and tries to do

often.

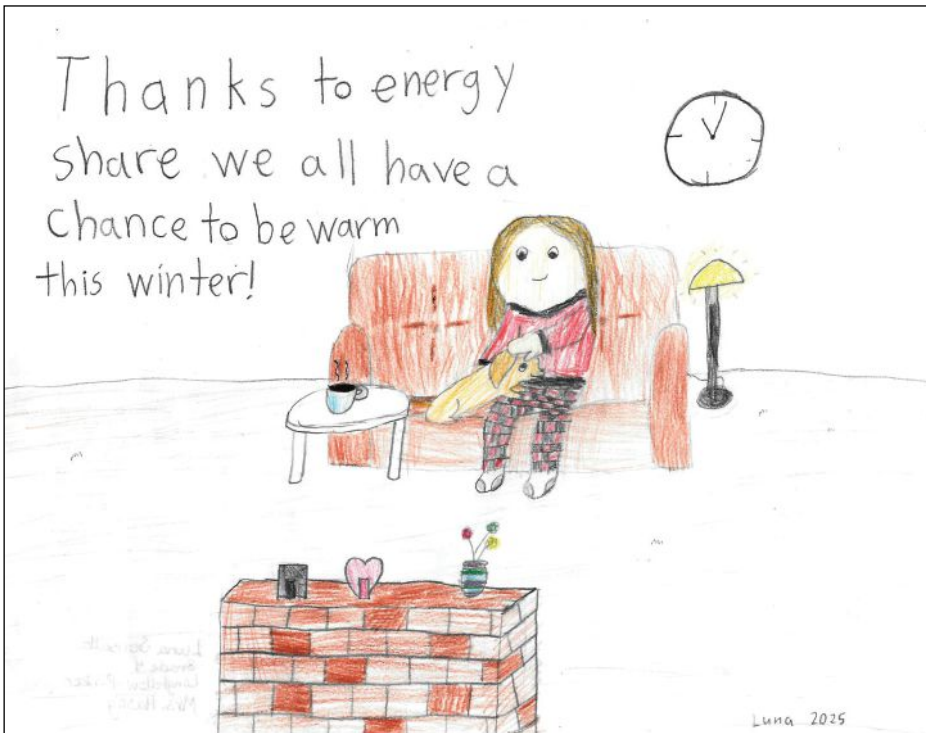
Kaisa said that once she learned about Energy Share, she felt it was something she wanted to support.

"I think it's really important," she said.

In describing her drawing, Kaisa said

she wanted to show energy in a variety of ways.

"In the house, the light is like Energy Share," she said. "The solar panels and the windmill when it spins and stuff, is all energy. The swing moves when (there is) more wind." RM



Luna Sonsalla of Baker poses with her Energy Share drawing and her teacher Mrs. Hastig. She took third place and won \$25.

THE ASK A MANAGER PANEL



MATT HAGGERTY
PARK ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE



TREVOR PARKE
VIGILANTE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE



BRAD BAUMAN
SUN RIVER ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

SEND US YOUR QUESTIONS

If you want to ask a question for a future edition of *Ask a Manager*, email your question to ryanh@mtco-ops.com, or call the editor at 406-761-8333.

ASK A MANAGER:

What is the best thing about your job as manager?

EVERY other month we ask our electric co-op manager panel a question, many of which are provided by our readers.

Our panel for 2026 is: Matt Haggerty, manager of Park Electric Cooperative in Livingston; Trevor Parke, manager of Vigilante Electric Cooperative in Dillon;

and Brad Bauman, manager of Sun River Electric Cooperative in Fairfield.

This month's question is:

Q: What is the most rewarding part of your job as an electric cooperative manager/CEO?



MATT HAGGERTY PARK ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

THE most rewarding part of my job is collaborating with our staff and fellow cooperatives to serve our members. I have many examples of this, but today I will share one.

Park Electric was facing a 20 percent power cost increase from one of our wholesale power providers in 2026. I traveled nearly 8 hours to meet with the provider and managers representing 139 different electric cooperatives and municipalities. Over two days, we discussed cost drivers, equity rates, capital projects and other factors affecting rates. Through these conversations, we gained a clearer understanding of the reasons behind the proposed increase, and I came to see the need for it.

We asked our provider to consider spreading

the increase over two years to ease the immediate impact on rates in 2026. Together, we explored ideas and other options that could reduce the burden on the members in the short term. Some trade-offs would have to happen to lower near-term rate effects on our members. In the months that followed, and based on our feedback and collaboration, the provider reduced the 2026 increase to just under 10 percent, with the remainder anticipated in 2027.

Working alongside other managers to help deliver the lowest possible power costs to our members is incredibly rewarding. These collective efforts helped reduce rate impacts in 2026 for more than 3 million members across nine states. RM

TREVOR PARKE VIGILANTE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

THE most rewarding part of serving as the CEO of an electric cooperative is the opportunity to invest in people. That investment extends to the employees we work alongside, the members we serve and the communities that depend on us every day.

Electricity is an essential service that powers nearly every aspect of modern life, yet it is often taken for granted. Behind that reliability is a dedicated team working daily to ensure the lights stay on safely and affordably.

Working for an electric cooperative brings a unique sense of fulfillment because the impact is both visible and meaningful. As a not-for-profit organization, we serve our member-owners rather than shareholders focused on maximizing profits. This distinction guides our decision-making and keeps our mission centered on service, affordability and long-term community benefit.

At the heart of this role is trust. Members rely on their cooperative to deliver safe, reliable and affordable

electricity. Earning and maintaining that trust is both a responsibility and a reward. Whether evaluating future risks, investing in critical infrastructure or guiding the organization through change, the CEO plays a central role in ensuring members' needs always come first.

Equally rewarding is the opportunity to support and develop employees. Electric cooperatives are often among the most stable employers in rural areas, and fostering a strong team culture while watching individuals grow in their careers is deeply meaningful. Cooperatives also strengthen communities by supporting local initiatives and enabling economic growth through dependable power.

Ultimately, success in a cooperative is shared. Every improvement, every challenge overcome and every long-term decision directly benefits the people we serve. The opportunity to work closely with people and make decisions that affect their daily lives creates a strong sense of purpose that is rare in many other industries. RM

BRAD BAUMAN SUN RIVER ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

I could go a variety of directions as to the most rewarding aspect, but in the end they all lead back to the **people**.

The relationship with the various **people** connected to the cooperative family makes this job seem more like a fellowship versus a job. Let me share.

The first level of interactions is with the employees. These are the **people** who deliver the services to our members and are the frontline communicators with our members/owners. I am blessed to have an amazing group of employees to provide the service of safe, reliable and affordable electricity to the membership. The professionalism, commitment and enthusiasm that they bring to work every day is contagious in our culture and makes coming to work rewarding.

Our board of trustees is another group of **people** that make my life rewarding in that they understand their roles and execute them well. The guidance and support that is rendered by them makes the duties of managing the organization a pleasure. The knowledge that they bring to help me and the senior staff in making decisions is substantial.

The many individuals who are a part of the cooperative network through our statewide affiliate Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association, are another group of **people** that I have developed friendships and relationships with that lead to rewarding interactions. The individuals who represent other cooperatives are such genuinely good **people**. They are all truly committed to the mission of serving Montanans with good service.

Add to this list the many interactions with **people** who represent other organizations and cooperatives across the country similar to how I explained the Montana cooperative family, and you have an amazing group of **people**, serving the **people** that receive our services.

And last, but even more important, is our members. The **people** for whom we are providing service. I am blessed to have a membership that appreciates our efforts to serve them. The support of the members brings this relationship full circle into how we all rely on each other. The cooperative story is a great one, and I hope our membership feels we do our part well for the **people**. RM

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 June send your best specialty-diet recipes (vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free) by May 14. Please send in July recipes any-time: Your favorite recipe that uses any kind of citrus. Try to limit the ingredients and length of directions for space. Please include a photo, if possible.

**1st
PLACE**

Garlic Chicken Spaghetti

Judith Crawford | BIGFORK

INGREDIENTS

- 1 lb. pkg. spaghetti
- 1/2 cup sun-dried tomatoes (not packed in oil)
- 1 cup boiling water
- 1 cup flour
- 1 lb. boneless skinless chicken breast, cut into 1-inch cubes
- Garlic salt
- 1/4 cup olive oil, divided
- 2-3/4 cup fresh mushrooms, sliced
- 5-10 garlic cloves, minced
- 1-2 cups reduced-sodium chicken broth
- 1 cup white wine
- 1/4 cup minced fresh parsley
- 1/2 tsp. dried basil
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- 1/4 tsp. pepper
- 1/8 tsp. crushed red pepper flakes
- 1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese

DIRECTIONS

Cook spaghetti. Place tomatoes in a small bowl and add boiling water. Cover and let stand for 5 minutes, then drain, chop and set aside. Heavily season chicken with garlic salt. Put the flour in a large resealable plastic bag, add chicken a few pieces at a time and shake to coat. In a large skillet, saute chicken in 2 T oil until no longer pink. Remove and keep warm. In the same skillet saute mushrooms and garlic in additional oil until tender. Add the broth, wine, parsley, basil, salt, pepper and pepper flakes. Stir in chicken and tomatoes and heat through. (The sauce will thicken). Drain spaghetti and toss with chicken, sauce and Parmesan, and serve.



**2nd
PLACE**

Fresh Mushroom Gravy

Deb Hogan | ROBERTS

INGREDIENTS

- 4 T butter (or margarine)
- 1/4 cup chopped onion
- 1 cup fresh mushrooms, chopped
- 1 tsp. garlic, minced
- 3 T flour
- 1/2 cup evaporated milk or half and half
- 1-1/2 cups beef broth
- Pinch of cayenne pepper
- Salt and pepper, to taste

DIRECTIONS

Melt butter in skillet over medium heat. Add onion, garlic and mushrooms, and saute for 2 minutes while stirring. Stir in flour and cook until lightly browned. Stir in milk and broth, stirring constantly. Turn heat to high until boiling, then turn down to medium-low and allow to thicken until it coats a spoon, stirring regularly. Season with salt and pepper. Yields about 2 cups of gravy.



**3rd
PLACE**

Mushroom-Onion Alfredo Sauce with Meat

Gaye Lynn Genereux | BIG SANDY

INGREDIENTS

- 1 T butter and 1 T olive oil
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 2 cups fresh (or canned) mushrooms, sliced
- 1 or 2 gloves garlic, minced
- 2 T flour
- 2 cups heavy cream
- 1 cup Parmesan cheese grated
- 1/4 cup fresh or dried parsley
- Cooked meat (shrimp, cubed chicken, turkey, pork or ham in desired amount)

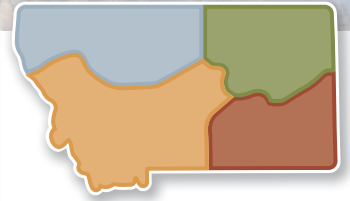
DIRECTIONS

Melt butter in large skillet with oil. Add and saute onion, mushrooms and garlic. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Gradually add cream while stirring with a whisk. Add meat and parsley. Cook for 8 minutes or until thickened and bubbly, stirring constantly. Add Parmesan over mixture, stirring until melted. Serve over pasta or spaghetti squash. Garnish with more Parmesan, parsley and pepper as desired.



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 May 14 for June events. Include date, time, site, city and contact number with your event. **Events without such info will not be used.**



NORTHWEST

May 2
Teton Antique Steam & Gas Threshing Association de Mayo Dinner — Club Showgrounds, 4 to 7 p.m., 289-0128 | **CHOTEAU**

May 2
Old-fashioned Spring Pie Social — Music by Swan Range Jammers, Historic Mountain Brook Community Center & Library, 4 to 7 p.m., 314-8232 | **KALISPELL**

May 5
Artist talk — Glacier Bank Community Room, 7 p.m., 297-0197 | **EUREKA**

May 6
Flathead Valley Community Band and Columbia Falls Community Choir Concert — Flathead High School Auditorium, 7:30 p.m., 270-1696 | **KALISPELL**

May 9
Family Forestry Expo — Trumbull Creek Educational Forest, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., 758-5280 | **COLUMBIA FALLS**

May 9
Community Garage Sale — Bigfork Senior Center, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. | **BIGFORK**

May 9, 10
Northwest Ballet Company presents Act II of Coppelia and excerpts from Phantom of the Opera — Bigfork Center for the Performing Arts, Sat: 2 and 7:30 p.m., Sun: 4 p.m., 755-0760 | **BIGFORK**

May 10
Mother's Day Afternoon Tea — Tour the Museum, free tea, Heritage Museum, 1 to 4 p.m., 293-7521 | **LIBBY**

May 12
Northwest Montana Photographers meeting — Columbia Falls Fellowship Church, 7 p.m. | **COLUMBIA FALLS**

May 16
Kalispell Senior Center Annual Tea Party Fundraiser — 40 11th St. West, 11:30 a.m., 609-5351 | **KALISPELL**

May 16
Dupuyer Community Garage Sale — Stop at 316 S. Montana Street for map of participants, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., 808-3038 | **DUPUYER**

May 19
Kalispell Women's Connection Luncheon — Guest speaker is Cindy Reagan, 1830 Hwy. 35, 11:30 a.m., call 261-9894 for reservations or information | **KALISPELL**

May 19
Tomatoes Tried To Kill Me but Banjos Saved MY Life — Fundraiser at Tobacco Valley Senior Center, 5:30 p.m., 297-0197 | **EUREKA**

May 20
Columbia Falls Women's Connection Luncheon — Guest speaker is Cindy Reagan, 827 9th St. West, 11:30 a.m., call 892-3621 for reservations | **COLUMBIA FALLS**

May 20
Westerners Int'l presents Battle of the Little Big Horn: 150 Years Later — NW Montana History Museum, 6:30 to 8 p.m., 309-0958 | **KALISPELL**

May 23
6th Annual Plant Sale — Grown and donated by local gardeners, Historic Mountain Brook Community Center & Library, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., 314-8232 | **KALISPELL**

SOUTHWEST

May 3
Missoula Family of Choirs presents The Stars Touch the Earth — The Dennison Theatre, 3 p.m. | **MISSOULA**

May 7-10
Faith - Family - Freedom Conference — Hilton Garden Inn, For more information go to iba777.org/, 531-8297 | **MISSOULA**

May 9
Mother's Day Market — Craft Market, Ravalli County Fairgrounds, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., 360-6743 | **HAMILTON**

May 9
Gem, Mineral and Fossil Show — Vendors, raffle, displays, kids games and more, Gallatin County Fairground Buildings 1 and 2, Sat: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Sun: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., 580-3419 | **BOZEMAN**

May 10
Mother's Day Celebration: Honoring Corn Mother (Make, Taste, Plant) — Cultivating Connections MT at Homestead Organics Farm, 1 to 4 p.m., CultivatingConnectionsMT.org | **HAMILTON**

May 10
Three Forks Rodeo Mother's Day Barrel Racing — Three Forks Rodeo Arena, 95691 MT Hwy 2, events begin at 10 a.m., 240-344-5462. | **THREE FORKS**

May 22-25
44th Annual Wildhorse Rendezvous — 531-0244 | **CYR**

May 22-25
55th Annual Montana State Square & Round Dance — Helena Valley Community Center, for full schedule go to helenalastchancesquares.com 461-7536 | **HELENA**

May 23
Doll Show — Bitterroot River Inn, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., 360-7214 | **HAMILTON**

May 23-24
Lozeau Flea Market — Buy, sell, trade, Exit 55 on I-90, Sat: 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Sun: 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., 509-361-3343 | **SUPERIOR**

May 25
69th Annual Memorial Day Dinner — Florence-Carlton Community Church Fellowship Hall, 11 a.m. flag raising, 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. service | **FLORENCE/CARLTON**

SOUTHEAST

May 2
High Tea at the Museum with Fallon County Community Theater — O'Fallon Historical Museum, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., 778-3265 | **BAKER**

May 2
Pub Station Presents Three Dog Night — Alberta Bair Theater, 7:30 p.m., 256-6052 | **BILLINGS**

May 22
Keith Alessi: Tomatoes Tried to Kill Me, but Banjos Saved My Life — O'Fallon Historical Museum, 3 to 5 p.m., 778-3265 | **BAKER**

STATEWIDE

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

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

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 FALL
DRAWINGS AND POEMS**



Jessica Nisley, 13, Stevensville | **RAVALLI COUNTY ELECTRIC**

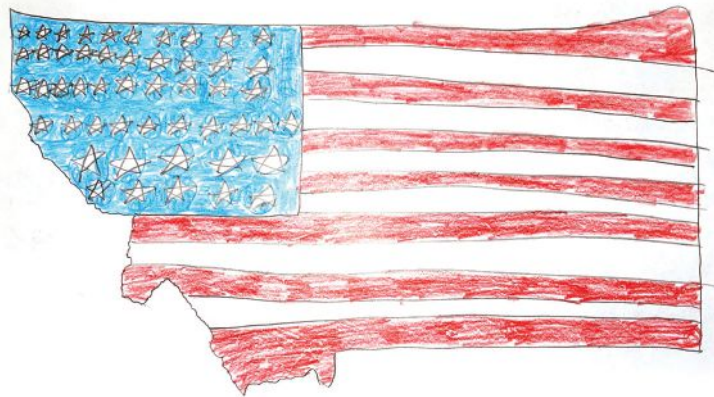
Syrena Crane, 14, Dillon | **VIGILANTE ELECTRIC**



Syenna Crane, 8, Dillon | **VIGILANTE ELECTRIC**

Diana Hatch, 9, Kalispell | **FLATHEAD ELECTRIC**

Rural Montana.



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.

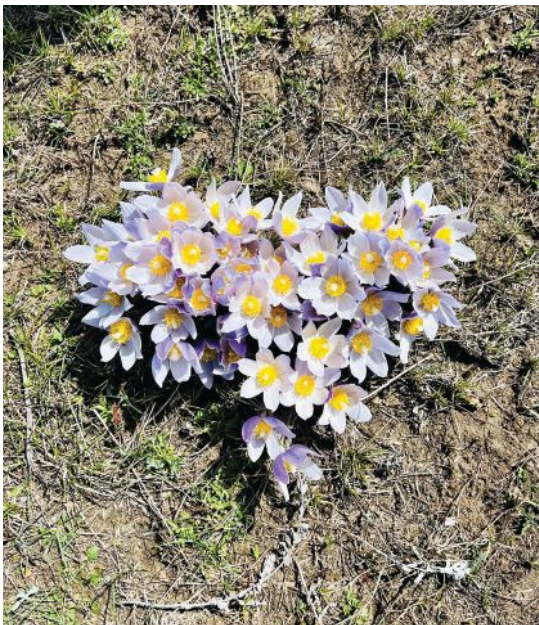


Electric Sky

The Northern Lights make a beautiful backdrop for a Fergus Electric Cooperative power pole. **Photo by Sarah Thomas of Shawmut.**

Dynamic Duo

Two bald eagles sit in a tree above the Flathead Landfill. **Photo by Carol Lynne Fowler of Seeley Lake.**



Fledgling Falcon

A kestrel sits on deck rail. **Photo by Jeff Turek of Seeley Lake.**

May Flowers

A group of crocuses that naturally formed a heart-like shape grow in a pasture. **Photo by Kyla Traeger of Bainville.**





The Magazine of the
Montana Electric Cooperatives'
Association

Visit us online: www.mtco-ops.com

Email: rural@mtco-ops.com



BASIN ELECTRIC



AFFORDABILITY

INVESTING IN POWER

Whether you're turning the lights on or brewing your morning coffee, electricity is vital to our way of life. It powers our communities and keeps us safe. That's why we're investing in infrastructure that strengthens reliability, ensuring power today and for generations to come.



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