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Gearing up for construction

Lineworker **Brian O'Shea** works on an overhead line from the Turtle Lake outpost's bucket truck.



GEARING UP FOR CONSTRUCTION: **2026 and beyond**

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL



Lineworker **Loren Desjardins** replaces an OCR on a pole north of Garrison.

North Dakotans may eagerly be thinking about getting outside when spring officially arrives March 20, especially after the state's brisk January temperatures.

But spring has been on the minds of McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) Engineering Manager Lucas Schaaf and others for several months.

Spring means construction season can begin, but the task of planning for construction during the state's short window of opportunity is an ongoing effort. Every year, Schaaf, MEC General Manager Mark Doyle, Operations Supervisor Keith Thelen and MEC staff develop annual work plans for line construction.

MEC often works with the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Utilities Service (RUS) to obtain low-interest loan funding for projects. One requirement to obtain RUS funding is that cooperatives develop four-

year work plans to submit to the agency for review and funding approval. Once a four-year plan is complete, efforts get underway to strategize needs for the following four-year plan.

It's all part of the process of staying abreast and projecting future electrical needs of MEC's member-owners, Schaaf explained. At the same time, the cooperative has a longstanding policy to try to accommodate those more immediate projects member-owners may have, such as an agricultural producer adding a new grain bin and needing an electrical service upgrade or a new property owner constructing a rural home of their dreams.

New rural residential subdivision developments remain in demand and developers are eager to be able offer utility services to potential buyers. For example, Schaaf added, a new residential lake development with at least eight lots is planned along Lake Sakakawea west of Garrison in 2026, with MEC bringing in electric service.

Another aspect of short-term projects may involve input from MEC member-owners if they identify a need to improve safety or reliability, such as trees in overhead power lines.

"Feel free to reach out," Schaaf suggested.

Several projects are planned once crews can get into the field, Schaaf said. The cooperative's lead contracting firm, Underwood's Coal Creek Construction, is booked with work for MEC into late summer this year, he continued.

Projects are planned based on benefits they provide for MEC member-owners, including maintaining and improving reliability and capacity, public and landowner safety, and accessibility for maintenance.

While MEC member-owners are the direct beneficiaries of the cooperative's construction projects, others also benefit. For example, replacing an 8-mile stretch of overhead MEC distribution line in the Max area with underground electrical cable is being done in conjunction with Basin Electric Power Cooperative's (BEPC) transmission line upgrade in the area.

Basin Electric is a multi-state generation and transmission cooperative and provides wholesale electricity for MEC's member-owners, along with Central Power Electric Cooperative.

"It's going to be one of our biggest projects (in 2026)," Schaaf described, and is being done to bury the overhead lines that would be beneath the upgraded transmission lines.

The project derives a multitude of benefits.

“The main benefit is safety by eliminating transmission lines crossing overhead distribution lines,” Schaaf explained.

It also improves reliability and accessibility, because the new buried cable will be realigned with Highway 83 and more accessible in the event of any necessary maintenance. In addition, underground distribution cable isn’t exposed to weather elements, which helps improve reliability.

Two projects, less than 2 miles each, in the Underwood and Coleharbor-Turtle Lake area also tie with Basin Electric transmission upgrades.

MEC is also working on four projects in the Crooked Lake and Turtle Lake areas in conjunction with Central Power’s transmission system upgrades.

Part of the planning process for construction projects includes working with landowners to obtain easements, a process that begins months in advance of construction. Granting easements for underground work benefits landowners by reducing liability and safety concerns of having overhead power lines near their property, Schaaf described. In most cases, line construction is done along a right of way, he added.

Projects involving RUS funding also involve environmental and archeological assessments, Schaaf described.

MEC’s next four-year work plan transitions 10 projects into the new plan. It will be sent to RUS for its review and approval and finalized by Dec. 1, Schaaf added.

The priority in all of MEC’s projects is for the cooperative to have the ability to meet those short-term needs that come up at any given time throughout the year, while still meeting long-term system stability, Schaaf described.

It comes at a time when electrical energy demands continue increasing, not just in McLean County on the local level, but throughout the nation. But MEC technology plays a large role in that capability through the additional, detailed usage data now available on today’s MEC metering system, Schaaf continued.

As that technology becomes even more accurate, it allows electric industry providers at the distribution level of cooperatives to gain even more precise usage data. That means electric energy providers can better identify load demand and be more prepared to meet the increasing needs.

“We can nail it (energy usage) down tighter and tighter. ... It allows us to be more efficient,” Schaaf explained. ■



*Turtle Lake-based lineworker **Trevor Thomas** works on a line in the Crooked Lake area.*

HOW TO READ YOUR BILLING STATEMENT

- A** Informational and account level messaging can be found here. Examples include the message listed in this bill sample, annual meeting dates, disconnection notices and other important information.
- B** The total account balance bubble features the total due. The ring around the bubble will be blue for current total due, green if a credit and red if past due.
- C** The billing summary contains the billing date, previous balance, a payment when received, capital credit retirement (when board approved), a late payment fee (if applicable), any balance forward, the current charges due for this billing period, and the total due, along with the due date.
- D** This table details specific meter information, including the meter number, which rate class the meter is in, the meter description, the reading dates, the previous kWh reading, days of usage, multiplier, kWh and kW usage for the billing period.
- E** kWh Usage on the electric bill indicates either the noncoincident (NCP) or coincident (CP) peak demand. NCP is the highest demand occurring in any 30-minute interval of the billing period. CP is the 30-minute average demand that coincides with Central Power Electric Cooperative's coincident peak.

Member Name: JOHN DOE
Account #: 123456789
Billing Date: 12/10/2025

Total Due: \$378.00
AutoPay On: 01/02/2026

Meter No.	Rate	Description	Reading Dates From	Reading Dates To	Previous	Readings Present	Days	Multi	kWh Usage	kW Usage
22222222	105	MAIN METER	11/01/2025	12/01/2025	64029	65155	30	1	1,386	13.760

Current Service Detail

Monthly Base Charge	\$56.00
kWh Charges	1,386 kWh @ 0.11489
Total Meter #12247307	\$159.24
Monthly Base Charge	\$3.00
kWh Charges	2,740 kWh @ 0.0581
Total Meter #97394207	\$162.19
Operation Round Up	\$9.57
Total Current Charges	\$378.00

Energy Usage Comparison

Category	This Month	Last Month	This Month Last Year
kWh Usage (30 days)	4,126 kWh	1,370 kWh	6,094 kWh
Avg Daily Use	138 kWh		
Avg Daily Cost	\$12.58		
Avg Daily High	32°F		

Account Number: 123456789
AutoPay on 01/02/2026: \$378.00

McLean Electric Cooperative, Inc.
PO BOX 399
Garrison, ND 58540-0399

36037012345678900037800000038366121020254

The above example bill is subject to minor changes.

- F** This chart details the past 13 months of usage and the monthly average temperature throughout those months. Usage is represented with the gold and blue bars, and the average temperature is shown as a red line.
- G** Here, you'll discover information about your current service, including a breakdown of charges.
- H** A new key feature of the bill is the energy usage comparison, which details kWh usage and the number of days calculated for this month. In the next bubble, members can quickly compare their usage with how much kWh they used last month and then compare it with this month last year.
- I** If you're paying by check, tear off this section and send it in so a customer service representative knows which account to credit.

More billing information and details can be found in your SmartHub account

Directors achieve credentials



James Odermann



Darcy Klain

James Odermann (Parshall), president, and Darcy Klain (Ruso), vice president, recently received the Director Gold Credential certificate from the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

The Director Gold Credential recognizes directors who have already earned their Credentialed Cooperative Director and Board Leadership Certificates (BLC), plus three additional credits from the BLC courses. Maintaining the Director Gold status includes a continuing education requirement: directors must earn three credits of approved coursework and/or conferences every two years.

Director Gold demonstrates to co-op member-owners and other stakeholders the directors' ongoing commitment to advancing their knowledge and performing their fiduciary duty to the best of their ability. ■

Statement of nondiscrimination

McLean Electric Cooperative Inc. is a recipient of federal financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). In accordance with federal civil rights law and USDA civil rights regulations/policies, USDA, its agencies, offices and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity/expression, sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal/retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA; not all bases apply to all programs; remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language) should contact the

responsible agency or USDA TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at 800-877-8339. Program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Discrimination Complaint Form (AD-3027) found online at http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call 866-632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: 1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Ave. S.W., Washington, DC 20250-9410; 2) fax: 202-690-7742; or 3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



Your change... ...creates change!

Help support your community by donating to Operation Round Up.



YOU HAVE THE POWER TO SAVE

Flip a switch. Change the air filter. Unplug electronics. As a McLean Electric Cooperative member, you have the power to save every day. Start by avoiding these six wintertime energy-wasting mistakes that could be costing you.

1. Failing to replace the furnace filter

Furnace filters should be replaced once each month during the heating season.

2. Neglecting your thermostat

Lowering your thermostat when you're asleep or away from home is the simplest and most cost-effective way to save on winter energy bills, but it's widely ignored. Smart thermostats make it easy. They automatically adjust temperatures to save energy and maintain comfort based on your schedule.

3. Ignoring cold drafts

If some rooms or areas feel colder than others, don't just crank up the thermostat or break out the space heater. Check for gaps that may be letting cold air inside. Start with windows and exterior doors. Other common culprits include exterior plumbing, wiring or exhaust vents in your basement or attic. Seal any gaps you find with weatherstripping, caulk or expandable foam insulation.

4. Letting warm air escape up the chimney

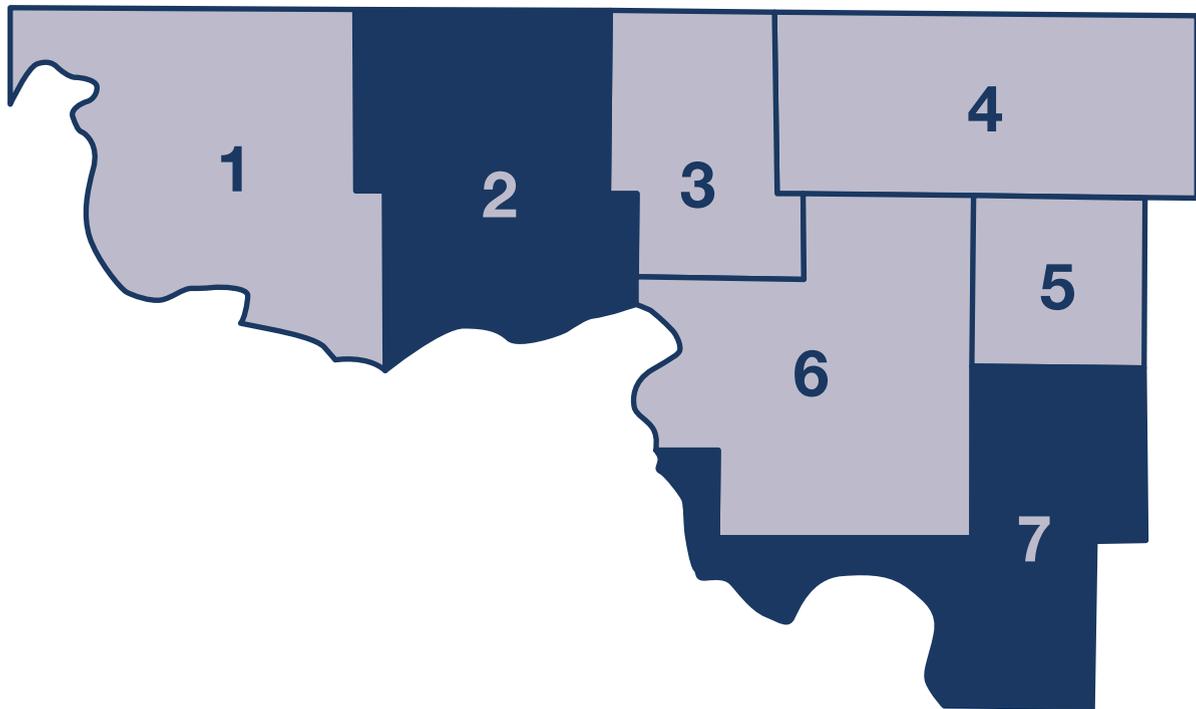
Your chimney is an outlet for the warm air your heating system generates. If your fireplace is not in use, keep the damper closed to prevent any warm air from going up the chimney. Check the seal on the flue damper and make sure it is as snug as possible. Consider installing tempered glass doors and a heat exchange system that blows warm air back inside.

5. Not letting the sun shine

On sunny days, opening shades and curtains on south-facing windows can let natural light in, which also brings welcome heat, reducing the strain on your heating system. Closing window treatments at night not only ensures privacy, but also helps keep warm air inside.

6. Overusing the space heater

Space heaters are great for providing short-term warmth in cold areas, such as your basement or a workroom in the garage. However, using them long-term around your home can get really costly. If there are rooms or spaces in your home where you need extra heat, check for and seal exterior gaps and contact a qualified contractor to ensure your home is properly insulated. ■



Do you want to become a director?

Have you ever thought of running for a seat on the board of directors? It is quite simple. Pick up a petition at the McLean Electric Cooperative headquarters in Garrison and secure 15 signatures of members from within your district. You can start circulating the petition right away, but it must be filed at least 60 days prior to the date of the annual meeting.

Petitions for the 2026 director elections must be filed with McLean Electric Cooperative by Monday, April 13.

Director duties

Directors have a fiduciary responsibility to the cooperative. They exercise care, time and responsibility in reviewing cooperative matters. Directors treat cooperative business as if it were their own.

Directors devote a certain amount of time to the cooperative. At a minimum, a director attends each monthly board meeting.

Directors learn about the industry as a whole by reading other materials and by attending state and national meetings. An understanding of the issues facing the industry is vital.

To help directors with their responsibilities, training is offered through the electric cooperative's statewide organization. Courses cover director duties and liabilities, understanding the electric business,

board roles and relationships, strategic planning and financial decision-making.

According to the bylaws, any member of McLean Electric Cooperative who is a member of this cooperative as a bona fide resident of the district he/she represents, and is in no way employed by or financially interested in a competing enterprise, can become a candidate for the board of directors. Directors shall be elected by the members at large.

This year, the districts up for election are:

- District 2, which is a three-year term, includes the townships of Douglas, Blue Hill, Gate, Roseglen, 149-86, 149-85, Saint Mary, 148-86, Blackwater, 147-88, 147-87 and 147-86. District 2 is currently served by Clarence Behles.
- District 7, which is a three-year term, includes the townships of Mercer, 146-80, 145-80, 145-84, 145-79, 144-80, 144-81, 144-82, 144-83, 144-84, 143-81 and 143-80. District 7 is currently served by Larry Gessele. ■

McLean County community calendar: Events and activities to see and do

McLean County area food pantry March distribution and donation thrift store dates, times and locations:

- **Garrison – Garrison Area Resource Center & Food Pantry:** Noon-2 p.m. and 5-7 p.m. March 26.
- **Makoti, Parshall, Plaza, Roseglen, Ryder, White Shield and others in need – Community Food Pantry:** 10 a.m.-1 p.m. March 28, 181 Ellsworth St., Makoti. Community Thrift Store: 3-6 p.m. Tuesday, 4-7 p.m. Thursday and 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturday, except holidays, 181 Ellsworth St., Makoti.
- **Max – Our Savior Lord’s Food Pantry:** Noon-3 p.m. and 5-7 p.m. March 16, Max City Hall, 215 Main St.
- **Turtle Lake – The Lord’s Pantry:** 2-4 p.m. March 12 and 10 a.m.-noon March 28, Trinity Lutheran Church, 515 Kundert St.
- **Turtle Lake – Free Community Clothing Share & Exchange Store:** Noon-6 p.m. every Thursday, 221 Main St.
- **Underwood – Community Cupboard of Underwood food distribution:** 10 a.m.-noon March 7 and 4-6 p.m. March 26 (Easter ham basket), 208 Lincoln Ave. Like us on Facebook (Community Cupboard of Underwood), for distribution dates and thrift store updates.
- **Washburn – McLean Family Resource Center:** McLean County residents can contact the center, 701-462-8643, for an appointment to pick up baskets along with more information or assistance through the center’s services, 205 Seventh St.
- **Washburn – McLean Family Resource Center Clothing Outlet:** 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, 205 Seventh St.
- **Wilton – Wilton Food Pantry mini distributions:** 11:30 a.m. until gone every Friday. Full food distribution 4-6 p.m. March 19, Wilton Senior Citizens Center, 42 Dakota Ave.
- **Wilton – The (free) Clothes Closet:** 3-5 p.m. March 19, First Presbyterian Church, 401 Dakota Ave.

Area food pantries often experience high needs for the following items: baked beans, pork and beans, canned fruit, tuna, chicken, vegetables, cereal, oatmeal, granola and breakfast bars, juice, macaroni and cheese, hamburger and tuna helper, pancake mix, syrup,

pasta, spaghetti, Alfredo and pasta sauce, peanut butter, jelly, rice side dishes, soups and chili, and household items, such as body wash and soap, dish soap, laundry detergent, shampoo and conditioner, toilet paper, toothpaste and toothbrushes. Contact local food pantries for drop-off locations, information or a list of additional needs in your community.

- **Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Free Monthly Victim Support Group meetings:** 11 a.m.-noon March 5, McLean Family Resource Center, 205 Seventh St., Washburn, and 5:30-6:30 p.m. March 11, Northland Health Center, 55 First Ave. E., Turtle Lake.

March and early April events:

- **March 11-15:** Crafting Retreat at Camp of the Cross Ministries, Garrison. Visit campofthecross.com/retreats for details and registration.
- **March 15:** Benedictine Living Community Annual St. Patrick’s Day Event, Garrison City Auditorium.
- **March 17:** Leprechaun’s Gold Geocache, Fort Stevenson State Park, Garrison. Geocachers can search off the beaten path for the annual Leprechaun’s “Gold.” Coordinates will be posted on Facebook and the geocache community’s website at geocaching.com.
- **March 18:** White Shield Pop-Up Food Pantry west of the 1804 C-Store, 11 a.m.-1 p.m., White Shield.
- **March 28:** Midwest Murder Podcast, 7 p.m. Garrison, sponsored by the McLean Family Resource Center.
- **April 4:** Annual Easter Egg Hunt (free), Poolside Park, weather permitting, or the Underwood School Gym, 10:30 a.m., Underwood.
- **April 4:** Movie with the Easter Bunny, Kota Theater, Garrison.
- **April 30:** Operation Round Up application deadline. Visit McLean Electric Cooperative’s website, mcleanelectric.com, click “Grants & Scholarships” on the homepage or contact MEC Communications Manager Sonja Moe, 701-463-6700 or 800-263-4922, for details.

Nonprofit organizations and communities throughout McLean County can contact Patricia Stockdill at stockdill.patricia@gmail.com or 701-337-5462 to submit community events. ■

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

James Odermann, president
701-743-4415
District 1, Parshall

Darcy Klain, vice president
701-448-2408
District 4, Ruso

Rod Stockdill, secretary-treasurer
701-337-5462
District 3, Garrison

Clarence Behles,
asst. secretary-treasurer
701-337-5362
District 2, Garrison

Troy Presser, director
701-447-2855
District 5, Turtle Lake

Karen Hanson, director
701-448-2636
District 6, Washburn

Larry Gessele, director
701-447-2461
District 7, Mercer

STAFF:

Mark Doyle, General Manager/CEO
Keith Thelen, Operations Manager
Lucas Schaaf, Engineering Manager
Wendy Kinn, Business Manager

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