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MANAGER'S MOMENT:
Rates approved for 2026

BY MARK DOYLE, GENERAL MANAGER



Mark Doyle

I would appreciate a moment of your time...

Happy New Year, everyone! I hope this message finds you all happy and healthy!

A new year brings optimism and an opportunity to evaluate the past and make changes as we head into the future.

Here at McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC), we're doing

the same. We look back at 2025 and review all the accomplishments we have made, along with the initiatives we intend to put into play in 2026 and beyond.

One of the accomplishments of 2025 was restructuring our rates. This process began several years ago with discussions on what is fair and equitable for our members. We always want to make sure all members pay their fair share. This is the cooperative model. No member is more important or less important than another.

You should have received significant information, either sent to you or available on our website. As a co-op, we want to ensure transparency.

In addition to the rate design change, we are also facing an 11% increase in wholesale power costs for 2026. The board of directors approved the 2026 rates, effective Jan. 1, knowing we are not recouping all the wholesale power cost increase.

Our margins are usually tight, but will be a little tighter in 2026. We felt it was important to make sure the rate design change is effective and is more of a transition than a complete restructure. If you have any questions, feel free to call the office and we would be happy to walk you through the changes.

In other news, 2025 was another incredibly busy year. We realized growth in almost all classes of membership. We anticipate 2026 to be the same. Under the cooperative business model, the more the co-op grows, the better it is for each member.

If you have any projects that need electric service, I strongly suggest you contact our staff now to discuss the project and get in the queue for the 2026 construction season.

We appreciate the cooperation and patience members have shown in completing projects.

As for cooperation, easements are always an issue, and we ask the landowners for continued support in getting our infrastructure in place to enhance our reliability. As for patience, we will have contractors working with the MEC crew to complete this infrastructure, and we thank you for understanding we cannot get everything done in a day, even though we try.

Again, I wish you all a happy, healthy and prosperous new year!

As always, feel free to reach out to me with any questions or comments. My door is always open. ■

OPERATION ROUND UP
GIVE A LITTLE, HELP A LOT

Even the smallest gifts can make a big difference



McLean Electric Cooperative's Operation Round Up program gives members a chance to round up their bill to the nearest dollar and turn pennies into powerful support for their community and local nonprofits. Join your neighbors in giving back, because when we come together, our change truly changes lives.

mcleanelectric.com/operation-roundup-program



Riding the rollercoaster

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

The beginning of a new year tends to lend itself to a time for reflection. In January, people also focus on a fresh start as perennial optimists. January is a time to look back and look forward.

As McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) looks toward 2026 and reflects on past years, the world is now approaching six years since the pandemic.

The human impact of COVID-19 remains with many in McLean County and beyond, General Manager/CEO Mark Doyle says.

But time passes and people adjust. So does the electric industry.

Yet both continue dealing with those impacts more than five years later.

As the pandemic's direct impact waned, people realized they weren't going down, Doyle explains. Businesses reassessed business plans, implementing clever, intuitive revisions, and the outlook became more positive. People traveled again.

"It was an uptick in the economy," he adds.

A major component of how businesses readjusted

during COVID-19 also had a significant impact on the electric industry. MEC, like multiple businesses, closed its doors to the public during the height of COVID-19 concerns. Rather than have employees physically come into an empty workspace, businesses adjusted, ensured internet and computer security, and allowed employees to work from home.

Looking back, Doyle reflected on how COVID-19 directly impacted MEC.

"When we came out of it, we came out fine," he says.

With the growth of rural residential homes prior to COVID-19, one major direct impact to MEC was people employed in outlying communities, such as Minot and Bismarck, had an opportunity to continue employment by working from their homes.

With the pandemic moving into spring and summer, residents had the option of enjoying a lake home throughout the week, rather than just during weekends, vacations or holidays, and the cooperative experienced an increase in electric usage.

That didn't end when COVID-19 ended.

"People moved to MEC's service area during and post-COVID because of the ability to have home offices," Doyle says. MEC member-owners who could only be at their lake property had reliable communications and electric services.

Doyle credited McLean County's two rural telecommunications cooperatives, West River Telecommunications (WRT) and RTC Networks, with their longstanding commitment to providing state-of-the-art broadband capabilities for making the opportunity a reality.

For several MEC member-owners, it meant they could move to "the lake" as full-time residents.

MEC continues experiencing increased growth and revenue as the number of full-time rural residents continues to increase in the five years past COVID, Doyle adds.

That's the silver lining to the horrifically dark cloud of COVID.

Yet, it's impossible to ignore the extremely negative impact of COVID on industry as a whole.

Making adjustments

Almost six years later, it's still with everyone. Labor issues arose in all aspects of manufacturing. People lost jobs. Those still employed had to adjust to a smaller workforce.

Supply chain issues arose. Fewer manufacturing workers meant fewer goods and transportation issues. Fewer truckers meant the goods available were more difficult to deliver.

While a vast majority of material in the electric energy sector is sourced in the United States, it was still difficult to have enough materials available in the event of major weather events, Doyle says.

After all, Mother Nature doesn't care what's happening on Planet Earth.

Inflation escalated to double-digit levels and continues six years later.

"Inflation is inevitable; it's just to what extent," Doyle describes. "The inflationary pressure, that supply and demand, was substantial (in the electric energy industry)."

Because of that, MEC was forced to acquire as much material when and if it was available, ordering as much as possible to plan for the future.

The negative impact of having to build a significant inventory put MEC into the immediacy of a tight cash flow. However, a positive comes from a negative.

"As of today's markets, prices are stable, and supply and demand are manageable," Doyle describes. The cooperative is reducing its inventory.

"In 2026, we feel we will be more in what we consider normal for our inventory," he adds.

Inflation was a major residual impact of the pandemic, he says, but the trend appears to have plateaued and

becoming more like a "new normal."

Shift in demand

The electric energy industry as a whole experienced a shift in how it provided electricity simultaneously to COVID-19's onslaught. That shift continues playing a major role throughout the industry as it pushed toward expansion of non-dispatchable energy sources (renewables such as wind and solar), moving away from dispatchable sources.

Unlike dispatchable energy sources dependent on temperature or climate, dispatchable sources (coal, natural gas and nuclear, for example) can operate 24/7 by design.

The problem with such a shift is the nation's electric transmission capabilities don't exist to meet current electric usage without available dispatchable electric energy sources. Nor was it possible to meet future increased load and transmission demand projections.

Non-dispatchable electric energy issues center around their lack of efficiency and environmental impact. For example, a 400-megawatt gas plant with capabilities of operating 24/7 equate to the efficiency rating of a 1,200- to 1,600-megawatt solar or wind power plant. In addition, it needs to be able to tie into transmission lines.

"You would need three to four times as much transmission," Doyle describes.

The electric cooperative industry began expressing concerns about reliability and affordability.

A federal regulatory authority joined to voice concerns based on research.

The job of ensuring electric generation supply and transmission capabilities meet U.S. demands now and in the future is in the hands of the North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC). It's a not-for-profit regulatory authority with the task of protecting the electric transmission grid throughout the United States and parts of North America.

Its 2023 Reliability Risk Priorities Report, approved by its board of trustees in August 2023, cited "energy policy" as the No. 1 threat to reliability.

It followed with its 2023-24 Winter Reliability Assessment by stating, "A large portion of the North American bulk power system is at risk of insufficient electricity supply during peak winter conditions."

Fast-forward into 2026, Doyle explains the study prompted state and federal agencies, the industry and some congressional members to try to address issues to ensure the nation's current and future electric energy needs, because electricity moves everyone, including the nation and world's economy.

"Today, we're in an environment where reliability is the focus," Doyle says.

Shifts in electric usage, supply and demand ebb and flow with the economy, politics and changing times.

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The energy crisis of the 1970s and high electricity costs gave way to adequate and even abundant electricity capabilities when the electric energy industry constructed several dispatchable energy power plants, including in North Dakota, Doyle says.

Looking ahead and projecting future electric energy needs, the industry's generation and transmission providers, including MEC's providers, Basin Electric Power Cooperative and Central Power Electric Cooperative, are constructing additional dispatchable generation capacity and transmission lines.

Multimillion- and multibillion-dollar generation and transmission investments such as those are projected to impact consumer costs across the United States, Doyle says, as electric energy usage continues to

escalate in everyone's daily life.

Today's rollercoaster cycle is similar to what was experienced decades ago in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, which included high costs during the 1970s energy crisis, and abundant energy and even reduced electric costs in the 1980s and 1990s.

Now the pendulum swings again with inflationary and economic trends.

The one given in all of those years is MEC, its board of directors and staff always strived to operate with its mission statement in the forefront: "It shall be the aim of McLean Electric Cooperative to make electric energy available to its members at the lowest cost consistent with sound economy and good management." ■

Welcome new employees



Angie Carr - CSR/billing coordinator

Angie Carr started working at McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) on April 1 as a customer service representative and billing coordinator.

She will be one of the friendly voices helping you when you call MEC. She was raised in Underwood and earned a degree in accounting and business management in 2008. Missing the area, she moved back in 2012. Angie and her husband, Jesse, have two young, energetic boys who keep them busy. In her free time, she volunteers for the Underwood Fire Department, enjoys canning and freeze drying food, traveling to new places and helping others.



Michelle Luther - Office associate

Michelle Luther started working at MEC on Oct. 1 as an office associate. She will be one of the friendly voices on the phone and at the front desk to help you.

Michelle is excited to meet and work with our members. She and her husband, Charles, moved to Garrison nearly four years ago from Cody, Wyo., where they lived for over 25 years and raised four children. They also have four wonderful grandchildren.

Michelle served as the finance manager at Fremont Motor Cody for nearly 20 years. She enjoys crafting, fishing and spending time with her grandchildren. She looks forward to working with all our members. ■

ENTER YOUR YOUTH TOUR ERA



JUNE 14-20, 2026

1,800 students.
7 days.
1 unforgettable trip.

Join us on the adventure of a lifetime. On the Electric Cooperative Youth Tour, you'll do it all. You'll explore monuments and museums, meet with members of Congress and get an up-close look at where our country's laws are crafted. You'll stand on the Gettysburg Battlefield, walk the halls of George Washington's iconic 18th-century mansion and witness ceremonies honoring the men and women who fought in uniform for this great nation. For one jam-packed week, you'll be immersed in the cooperative spirit that built and sustains our great nation. And **all expenses are paid** by your local electric cooperative! *Yeah, Youth Tour hits different.*

Learn more at ndyouthtour.com.

To enter the essay-writing contest:

- You must be a sophomore or junior in high school.
- You and your parents or guardian must be served by McLean Electric Cooperative.

Essay question:

As member-owned organizations, electric cooperatives are always seeking new ways to engage their members. What are some ways electric cooperatives can better communicate and connect, especially with students and young adults?

The application deadline is Jan. 16, 2026.

Questions? Please contact Sonja Moe, McLean Electric Cooperative, at 701-463-6700 during regular business hours.

Email entries to Sonja Moe at sonjadm@mcleanelectric.com or mail a hard copy to: Youth Tour Essay Contest, 4031 Hwy. 37 Bypass, P.O. Box 399, Garrison, ND, 58540.



SAFETY SNOWBALLS

When the weather turns cold, the snow piles high and we snuggle inside, McLean Electric Cooperative wants you to remain safe this winter!

Practicing these winter safety tips will have a snowball effect on your safety throughout the entire winter!

Be aware of where electrical equipment is located. Avoid plowing into pad-mounted transformers, cabinets, poles and guy wires while moving snow. Mark electrical equipment near driveways and sidewalks with flags or posts to avoid hitting the equipment with a plow when the snow gets deep.

Always follow the manufacturer's recommendations on how to use your electric generator. Most important is the transfer switch that disconnects the farm or home from the power line and connects it to the generator. It must be a double-throw transfer switch, which prevents the generator from feeding electricity back onto the power line. This protects the lineworkers who may be working to restore your service.

Have a working smoke alarm and test its batteries regularly.

Pile cleared snow a good distance away from power lines to avoid contact with a power line.

Use your space heater safely. Read and follow the manufacturer's operating instructions, never leave a space heater unattended and keep the heater at least 3 feet from flammable items.

While snowmobiling in a roadside ditch, remember power lines and poles are located along those same roadside ditches. Often, poles are reinforced with guy wires which extend some distance from the poles. They may not be easy to see from a speeding snowmobile, especially on a dark, winter night or when they are buried under snow. Always ride at a speed at which you can stop quickly. Ease up on the throttle, especially when near any objects. Know your riding area, too.

As you move snow, hay or equipment, keep watching for those overhead power lines. Look up, look around and always remain at least 10 feet away from any power line.



Beat the winter peak

Did you know electricity costs more during peak hours of usage?

When it comes to electric demand, electric utilities and grid operators watch two variables closely: winter peaks and summer peaks. These are the times of the year when electric demand is highest – and electricity is most expensive – and they vary depending on where you are in the country.

That's why we encourage members to use less electricity during peak demand hours. Usage peaks often occur in the morning when people wake up and again in the evening as temperatures drop and people return home.

If you can lower your use of electricity during these peak hours, you can help McLean Electric Cooperative keep rates stable.

WINTER PEAKING

Cold regions of the country, including the Upper Midwest, are winter peaking, because of the demand for electric heat during the winter months. Summer-peaking regions experience high electric demand during hot months, as air conditioners are on overdrive. Dual-peaking regions have both a winter and summer peak.

Factors such as below-normal temperatures push the wintertime peak higher. Severe cold snaps, like

that experienced in 2021, can lead to record-setting demand for electricity and put the electric grid under significant stress.

During the winter months, the electric grid must meet the higher demand for electricity to prevent power outages and maintain a stable supply.

In January 2025, Basin Electric Power Cooperative, the region's power supplier, experienced a new all-time high member billing peak.

Basin Electric typically peaks during the winter months because of winter storms and extreme cold temperatures.

HELP BEAT THE PEAK!

To avoid usage during peak hours:

- Do laundry during the day or later at night.
- Avoid using the dishwasher or other major appliances during these hours.
- Turn down the thermostat by 2 to 5 degrees.

Contact McLean Electric Cooperative to learn if there are ways you could help reduce your on-peak demand. Demand response programs help you manage your energy use by voluntarily reducing power consumption during peak hours to help stabilize the power grid. ■

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

McLean County area food pantry January 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. Jan. 22
- **Makoti, Parshall, Plaza, Roseglen, Ryder, White Shield and others in need – Community Food Pantry:** 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Jan. 24, 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. Jan. 19, Max City Hall, 215 Main St.
- **Turtle Lake – The Lord’s Pantry:** 2-4 p.m. Jan. 8 and 10 a.m.-noon Jan. 24, 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 Jan. 10 and Jan. 22, 208 Lincoln Ave. Like us on Facebook (Community Cupboard of Underwood) for distribution dates and thrift store updates.
- **Underwood – Community Cupboard of Underwood Thrift Store:** 1-5 p.m. every Tuesday.
- **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. Jan. 15, Wilton Senior Citizens Center, 42 Dakota Ave.
- **Wilton – The (free) Clothes Closet:** 3-5 p.m. Jan. 15, 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.

January and early February events:

- McLean Electric Cooperative will announce its photo contest winners in the February issue of *North Dakota Living*.
- **Jan. 16:** Deadline for Youth Tour essay contest (sophomores and juniors). Go to McLean Electric’s website at mcleanelectric.com, clicking “Grants and Scholarships/ Youth Tour.”
- **Jan. 24:** Bottoms Up Delta Waterfowl dinner and fundraiser, doors open at 5 p.m., Wilton Memorial Hall, 105 Dakota Ave.
- **Feb. 1:** Application deadline for three scholarships from Basin Electric Power Cooperative and McLean Electric for students enrolling in technical, two-year, four-year or advanced educational programs. Go to mcleanelectric.com, clicking “Grants and Scholarships” on the homepage or contact MEC Communications Director Sonja Moe, 701-463-6700 or 800-263-4922, for more information.

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:

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District 4, Ruso

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