

# McLean County's winter wonderland



**Ryan Trautman**, Garrison, rides a fat tire bike at Fort Stevenson State Park. The park has several rental fat tire bikes available for using on their packed winter biking trails.

PHOTO BY CHAD TRAUTMAN



Part of Fort Stevenson State Park's cross-country trails trek the same Vita Fitness Course used by hikers in the summer. The park offers several miles of packed and groomed cross-country ski trails, as well as packed trails for hiking, fat tire biking and snowshoeing.

PHOTO BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

## Over the snow we go: *McLean County's winter wonderland*

by Patricia Stockdill

**W**inter and outdoor recreation in McLean County often means walleye and ice fishing on Lake Audubon, especially in early winter months like December and January.

Or it's Lake Sakakawea's back bay pike activity.

However, McLean County also offers two winter recreation getaways guaranteed to be tranquil while providing a healthy workout at the same time: Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery (NFH) and Fort Stevenson State Park's trail systems.

The trails are open for winter hiking in years when Mother Nature refuses to cooperate with enough snow. Garrison Dam NFH Complex Project Leader Rob Holm grooms the hatchery's five-mile trail located downstream of Garrison Dam for cross-country skiing when Mother Nature offers enough snow for good skiing conditions.

Fort Stevenson State Park Manager Chad Trautman and his crew also pack and groom the park's hiking trails for cross-country skiing. In addition, Fort Stevenson, located three miles south of Garrison, has a separate trail system packed for hiking, fat tire biking and snowshoeing.

In the summer, the park and hatchery are busy places each in their own way. The park, which is

served by McLean Electric Cooperative, hosts a variety of campers and outdoor recreationists. It leads the way in visitation among all of the state parks in the N.D. Parks and Recreation Department.

Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery is busily rearing a variety of sportfish species for stocking throughout North Dakota and neighboring states and plays a key role in endangered fish species efforts.

In the winter, a different world emerges. Yes, staff at both locations are still busy with an array of duties. But outside on the trails, a peaceful tranquility emerges: Users of the hatchery's trails are entertained by geese wintering on the Missouri River. Overhead, it's likely a bald eagle circles eyeing its next dinner options.

Wildlife of the furry type finds shelter in each location's woodlands, along with wintering songbirds and perhaps a glitzy pheasant.

The hatchery's trail journeys along a wetland and creek adjacent to the Missouri River, which remain open in the winter, heated by water from the hatchery's fish rearing operations. Like the river, they also provide areas for wintering waterfowl and a wildlife viewing blind is available. Informational kiosks and resting benches dot the trail.

The original Wetlands Trail was built in 1997, Holm described. The trailhead is near the hatchery's parking lot, which is where skiers and snowshoers can park even when the hatchery isn't open.

The trail expanded south to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Downstream Campground in 2004 with the advent of the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial. The groomed cross-country ski trail is a total of 5.2 miles long, Holm described.

Fort Stevenson State Park fat tire bike trails feature two loops packed for a smooth surface for hiking, fat tire bike riding and snowshoeing. The Flicker Loop is 1.06 miles long and connects to the Northern Pine Loop, which is a total of 2.22 miles.

Three packed and groomed cross-country ski trails are available: The Trooper Challenge takes skiers along the park's summer Vita Fitness Course and is 0.7 miles long. It connects with the 0.9-mile-long Whitetail Loop. The longest trail, de Trobriand, is 1.7 miles long.

While all three trailheads are located in a parking area just east of the Fort Stevenson Guardhouse Interpretive Center, parking is available at the Visitor Center and easily connects skiers to the de Trobriand Loop as well as the other two loops.

The fat tire bike, hiking and

snowshoeing trailhead is also at the Visitor Center.

All of the trails are well-marked and packed or packed and groomed weekly, weather and snow conditions permitting. Trails are designed for users of all skill levels.

Another trail, the North Loop, is also available for fat tire biking, hiking and snowshoeing, although it's not listed on the park's current map brochure detailing the trails.

Dogs are welcome on the fat tire and snowshoeing trails, Trautman described. Users are asked to keep dogs off the cross-country ski trails, though, only because the trails are groomed with tracks for skiing.

The Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery and Fort Stevenson State Park trails share some special features for those who cherish winter's beauty: "It's an excellent wildlife viewing opportunity. You can get closer to wildlife. ...It's very tranquil out here in the wintertime," Trautman described.

The same holds true for the hatchery's trails as they meander through the Missouri River bottomland timber.

Winter can be a special time in North Dakota's great outdoors. Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery and Fort Stevenson State Park provides unique ways to enjoy it. ■



David Trautman is all smiles riding a fat tire bike on Fort Stevenson State Park's biking and snowshoeing trails. The park, located three miles south of Garrison, rents fat tire bikes for winter and summer riding.

PHOTO BY CHAD TRAUTMAN

## To learn more

More information about Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery and winter use on its trail system is available by calling 701-654-7451 or on the website, <https://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/fisheries/garrisonDam.php>. The hatchery updates trail conditions – snow conditions permitting – on its Facebook page, as well.

More information about Fort Stevenson State Park and its winter recreation trails is available by calling 701-337-5576 or on its website, <http://www.parkrec.nd.gov/parks/fssp/fssp.html>.

The park also offers fat tire bike rental and bikes can be reserved for weekend riding by calling the park before 5 p.m. on Fridays.

Park Manager Chad Trautman said the trails are packed and groomed on Fridays, weather and snow permitting, and trail conditions are also posted on the park's Facebook page.

The park's annual Full Snow Moon Candlelight Hike takes place Feb. 3 from 5 p.m. to 7:30 p.m., weather-permitting. Park staff provide candle luminaries to light the trails and trees along the trail. "We make a hot chocolate bar in the Visitor Center," Trautman continued, "and there is an outdoor fire pit with s'mores."

Something seems almost magical about the park and its trails at night, Trautman suggested, especially when lit with luminaries for the two events, which typically attract 75 people and more each.



# 2017 Youth Tour Winner Ryeleigh Laib

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

If Ryeleigh Laib could use one word to describe the opportunity to tour Washington, D.C., it would probably be “amazing.”

Laib, a junior at Turtle Lake-Mercer High School, represented McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) as the winner of the 2017 National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) Youth Tour.

The daughter of Sheldon and Anita Laib, Mercer, Ryeleigh joined other North Dakota high school juniors and seniors as part of the annual event. Each year, students from throughout the United States visit the nation’s capital, touring museums and monuments, meeting the state’s Congressional delegation, and learning about history, government and the role of rural electric cooperatives.

Each year, students write an essay on a specific topic. “I had it in the back of my mind to enter,” Ryeleigh explained, but it was encouragement from her grandparents and friends who previously won the contest that prompted her to submit her winning entry last year.

Ryeleigh still keeps in touch with her newfound friends she met from not only North Dakota, but other states, as well,

*Ryeleigh Laib, Mercer, won McLean Electric Cooperative’s essay contest, earning her a trip to Washington, D.C. The contest is sponsored by rural electric cooperatives across the United States.*



through group chats. Meeting new friends ranks high on her list as one of the most enjoyable aspects of the trip.

In addition, seeing some of the many museums and memorials is something she treasured. Her favorite, the Marine Corps Museum had so many fascinating and amazing artifacts, she described. The North Dakota delegation also got to see first-hand the work senators and representatives do when they visited with Rep. Kevin Cramer, (R-N.D.)

While writing essays

for something other than homework assignments might not sound like much fun, Ryeleigh encouraged other students to take the time to think about the 2018 Youth Tour essay topic. “It’s an amazing opportunity,” she explained. Plus, the topics are perhaps in their own way, equally amazing and could help generate ideas for school writing assignments. As an added bonus, “it makes it easier to write school essays,” Ryeleigh offered.

A trip to Washington, D.C., to tour the nation’s most time-honored historic sites, an opportunity to meet new friends from throughout the country are a little extra inspiration for those not-always-so-fun school writing and essay assignments.

A reason for entering the NRECA Youth Tour Essay Contest just might not get any better than that. ■



PHOTOS BY NDAREC

## RULES:

- Entrants must be a sophomore or junior in the 2017-2018 school calendar year.
- Student and guardian or parents must be McLean Electric Cooperative consumer-members.
- Entry deadline is Jan. 31, 2018.
- Entrants must write an essay not exceeding two standard pages, double-spaced, on the topic, “There are approximately 20 million military veterans in the United States today. How shall fellow U.S. citizens honor and look after these veterans, who have served and sacrificed on our behalf? Describe any special connection you may have to a veteran or active-duty

member of the military.”

- Entries should include a cover page with entrant’s name, birth date, high school name and grade in school, and parent or guardian’s name, address and telephone number.

- Submit emailed entries (or questions) to [sonjadm@mcleanelectric.com](mailto:sonjadm@mcleanelectric.com) or hard copies to Youth Tour Essay Contest, McLean Electric Cooperative, 4031 Hwy. 37 Bypass, Box 399, Garrison, ND 58540-0399.

- More information is available by calling Sonja Moe at 701-463-6700, toll-free at 800-263-4922 during business hours, or at the above email address.

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- If you have a question, contact Sonja Moe, McLean Electric, at the address listed below, or call 701-463-6700 during regular business hours.
- The deadline is **Jan. 31, 2018**. Emailed entries should be directed to [sonjadm@mcleanelectric.com](mailto:sonjadm@mcleanelectric.com), and hard-copy entries mailed to: Youth Tour Essay Contest, McLean Electric Cooperative, 4031 Hwy. 37 Bypass NW, PO Box 399, Garrison, ND 58540-0399.

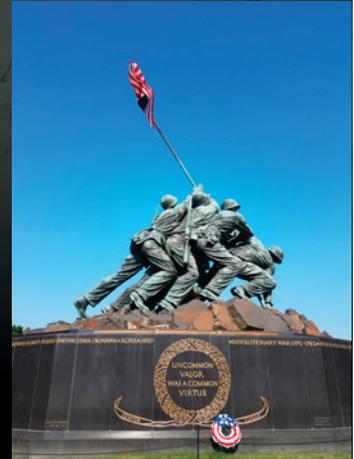
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*There are approximately 20 million military veterans in the United States today. How shall fellow U.S. citizens honor and look after these veterans, who have served and sacrificed on our behalf? Describe any special connection you may have to a veteran or active-duty member of the military.*



CHECK OUT THE ESSAY-CONTEST GUIDELINES AT  
[www.ndyouthtour.com](http://www.ndyouthtour.com)



## Conserving energy through technology

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

**M**cLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) members probably don't think of their electric cooperative as a tightrope walker. But in its own way, that's exactly what the cooperative does.

Even though rural electric cooperatives like McLean Electric are not-for-profit

entities, they still need to sell electricity to pay their bills for expenses like wholesale power costs, equipment, employees and plant infrastructure, such as power lines, poles and underground cable.

Yet the electric energy industry also promotes electric energy conservation – the very thing it sells.

Cooperatives do so because it's wise and responsible to save energy, consumers' money and resources for future generations.

However, McLean Electric General Manager/CEO Marty Dahl described the practice of encouraging energy conservation while in the energy industry as a "balancing act." The cooperative walks that tightrope of encouraging energy conservation, yet doing so can also mean decreased revenue.

In addition, because cooperatives are not-for-profit, they operate on a narrow cushion of reserve funding. Too much revenue loss means a potential rate increase to cover McLean Electric's costs. "It's a double-edged sword," Dahl admitted.

That is where lowering demand (customer usage) during times of the day when people use a lot of electricity (peak usage) could help balance less electricity sales with the need to make enough revenue to pay cooperative costs. That way, less electric usage doesn't adversely impact sales.

"The trick is trying to control it during that peak time," Dahl described.

## Operating remotely

For many homeowners, automatic thermostats that adjust themselves up or down in temperatures at preset times are increasingly becoming in norm.

Nowadays, though, Zigbee technology takes that several steps forward, allowing homeowners to control everything from televisions, home security, and, yes, even their home's temperatures or the ambiance of their light fixtures remotely via computer, tablet or smartphone.

The advantage, described McLean Electric Cooperative Member Services Communicator Sonja Moe, is that homeowners have remote-controlled capability from literally anywhere. It can also save money by turning off lights

remotely or lowering wintertime room temperatures, for example.

Forgot to shut off lights? Zigbee systems can do that even from several thousand miles away.

Want to turn up the heat so it's toasty warm after being gone for a few days? Yes, Zigbee can do that, as well.

However, the systems require Internet or Wi-Fi wireless connections and their initial upfront cost is higher.

For more information about the array of possibilities with remote-controlled energy and lighting systems, go to the Zigbee Alliance website, [www.zigbee.org](http://www.zigbee.org).



Just as thermostats changed over the years, meters used to record kilowatt usage have also changed as technology evolves and improves. These meters were used over the course of various years on McLean Electric Cooperative's system.

The reason for reducing the amount of electricity used during peak demand periods boils down to the fact that McLean Electric – and all cooperatives – pay for their peak usage.

“If, for example, McLean Electric can reduce its peak by 1,000 kilowatts (KW), we save nearly \$20,000. This is what we (McLean Electric) would pay to our wholesale electric generation and transmission (G&T) providers, Basin Electric Power Electric Cooperative and Central Power Electric Cooperative, during a cooperative's time of peak

usage,” Dahl explained.

That's because G&T cooperatives must be able to have enough electricity available to serve the peak for all of their own customers throughout their broad service region.

The demand rate is how much electric generation in kilowatts is needed to serve McLean Electric's highest coincident usage. “We pay more on the wholesale end,” Dahl continued.

McLean Electric's wholesale cost for its demand rate is approximately the same as the retail cost to its three-phase

members, which include large demand loads such as irrigation systems or Blue Flint ethanol plant.

“If you (McLean Electric) hit that demand (peak usage) once, you pay that for the entire month,” he added. “We don't always hit those time frames (of our highest peak usage), because we are able to lower our peak with our load control programs. That's why it's important for McLean Electric to be able to control usage, such as water heaters, during peak demand.”

Typically, most electric consumers in this region of

## Tips to save

Some winter energy saving tips from your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative:

- Open window treatments during the day – especially on sunny winter days – to allow the warmth of the sun to filter into the home. Close them at night, though.
- Cover drafty windows with clear, heavy-duty plastic sheeting around the frame, which reduces air filtration. Insulated window treatments also help. Or better yet, replace poor windows with energy-efficient windows if possible.
- Lower thermostats to a temperature that is still comfortable but cooler. Turning it down approximately 10 to 15 degrees when leaving for an extended time period also reduces energy costs. However, don't turn it down so low that water lines could freeze and damage.
- Caulk or weather strip air leaks such as

utility or plumbing penetrations, recessed lighting in insulated ceilings, leaky doors and windows, and even electric outlets and switches on outside walls.

- Keep a regular maintenance schedule for the home heating system.
- If using wood or pellet-burning stoves, clear the flue vent regularly, as well as the chimney. Close fireplace dampers unless in use.
- Keep water heaters at 120 degrees.
- Release 1 or 2 gallons of water from the bottom of a water heater periodically to help reduce sediment build-up.
- Use Energy Star or LED light bulbs and for holiday decorating.

More information and energy saving tips are available at the Touchstone Energy website, <https://www.touchstoneenergy.com/together-we-save/overview/>, and McLean Electric Cooperative's website, [www.mcleanelectric.com](http://www.mcleanelectric.com), clicking “My Energy.”

the country tend to use more electricity in the summer between 4:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. when people return home from work to turn up air conditioning, cook supper and do other chores.

Winter peak demands typically occur between 7 a.m. and 9 a.m. when people are getting up and getting ready for work and school, Dahl described. However, McLean Electric pays its demand rate whenever its demand peaks with its power provider, regardless of the time of day. Demand readings are taken about every 15 minutes, Dahl continued, “and you take the highest one during the peak and that is what you are billed for.” One way electric usage can be reduced during those peak times is through programs such as McLean Electric’s electric water heater rebate program, called demand response or demand reduction.

Rebates are available to members if the water heater meets or exceeds these requirements:

- Meets or exceeds 0.94 percent energy factor.
- MEC member must have water heater invoice or proof of purchase.

The rebate is \$250 for an 80- to 85-gallon water heater; and \$275 for a 100- to 175-gallon water heater. In addition, the member receives a \$7 per month bill credit.

In return, the member must agree to install a load-control system (LCR) and to participate in the cooperative’s “off-peak program.”

The LCR allows McLean Electric to automatically shut off a water heater when demand usage peaks. However, given the large storage capacity of most water heaters, most people don’t even realize their water heater was off for a few minutes.

One way to think of demand usage and peak electric loads is today’s use of computers and the Internet. There are times when people notice their Internet is slow to upload a website, for example, and it’s often because there is so much data. Even with wireless connections, Internet data is transmitted over broadband and there is only so much capacity.

While electricity doesn’t slow down and remains available during high demand periods, it requires more electricity to be available instantaneously – and that’s when it costs McLean Electric more to meet the demand.

Another way McLean Electric members can conserve energy and ultimately save money is try to do things outside of what are typically those periods of high demand in both the summer and winter.

Yet another way is with automatic thermostats or



*Typically, electric boiler heating systems were, for years, thermostatically controlled by the turn of a knob. Nowadays, smart technology enables home and business owners to control room temperatures remotely.*

“smart” thermostats that can be set to automatically lower a few degrees at night in the winter during normal sleeping hours or increase in the summer. Even turning heat down 2 or 3 degrees in the winter during peak usage lowers demand and can save McLean Electric – and its members – money.

So, yes, electric distribution cooperatives such as McLean Electric encourage their members to save money. And by participating in programs such the water heater load control and installing “smart” thermostats, everyone can save ■.

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