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Central Power Electric Cooperative's Garrison substation, which serves many McLean Electric Cooperative members in the Garrison area, will be relocated in 2021. Currently located immediately adjacent to McLean Electric's Garrison headquarters, it will be moved 2 miles north. The relocation will help provide more reliable service, with the substation served off a larger, more reliable and resilient transmission line.



PHOTOS BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

Two major upgrades on tap for 2021

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

Two McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) construction projects in 2021 will upgrade service and improve reliability for Garrison area members.

Three miles of overhead three-phase line currently serving 177 members from Garrison south toward Fort Stevenson State Park will be converted to three-phase underground cable.

Rural residential growth continues along Lake Sakakawea and Lake Audubon. For example, at least five new accounts are already slated for hookup in 2021 in the Garrison area where the line upgrade will take place. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and travel concerns, more people are migrating to the lake area, McLean Electric General Manager/CEO Mark Doyle added.

The line will also be upgraded to larger electric cable providing more capacity when it goes underground, MEC Engineering Manager Lucas Schaaf described.

The upgrade would be akin to converting from a typical garden hose to 1.5-inch pipe, Schaaf explained. But instead of water, the new underground has greater electric capacity to serve members in the area.

Many rural residential lots are now designed for year-round living, MEC Operations Manager Keith Thelen described, and electrical load demand continues to increase. New rural residential hookups often install 50-KVA or even 75-KVA (kilovolt-ampere) transformers for each lot, depending on the consumer's usage.

The larger underground capacity not only meets existing needs, but helps plan for future projected area growth. It also improves reliability by removing overhead lines exposed to wind, storm and tree damage. The upgrades reduce outage time, benefiting lineworkers and members alike, Thelen continued. Routine line inspection and maintenance by MEC's line crews help identify the need for projects such as the one south of Garrison, Thelen added.

Converting the three-phase overhead line to larger-capacity three-phase underground is part of MEC's responsibility as a cooperative, Doyle added, which includes providing safe and reliable electricity to its members.

In recent years, MEC has worked with cabin owners in other lake developments in its service area to convert overhead lines to underground cable, with the goal of identifying similar potential projects in the future, Schaaf said.

Work on the line south of Garrison is expected to

be completed by the fall of 2021 but in the meantime, another large project will take place immediately adjacent to MEC's Garrison headquarters. One of MEC's transmission providers, Central Power Electric Cooperative (CPEC) is working with MEC to relocate CPEC's Garrison substation east of McLean Electric along N.D. Highway 37.

The entire substation will be moved two miles north to an area near the Garrison landfill.

In following with the goal of providing reliable electric service, the new substation will be served from Western Area Power Administration's major 115-kV (kilovolt) transmission line, which provides greater reliability and resiliency, Schaaf explained.

The move allows the substation to be fed off a larger transmission source than is currently available. CPEC would also have the ability to switch over to other transmission lines in the event of an outage. That reduces outage time and the potential number of members out of power in an outage event.

"Some of the Garrison substation users should see fewer blinks and outages," Schaaf added

The existing substation will continue serving members in the Garrison area until the new substation is complete, inspected and the line is ready to be switched to the new facility.

Most of the substation work will be done by CPEC with MEC installing two new underground circuits to tie with existing infrastructure and converting tie-ins to services along the route to the new substation. Overhead lines along the route will also be converted to underground – a total of 4 miles of new underground line.

The new Garrison substation is a joint effort of CPEC and MEC, Doyle added, as part of both cooperatives' efforts to better serve their members. ■



County lakes offer winter getaway opportunities

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL



PHOTO BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

While several McLean County lakes offer winter perch fishing opportunities, it's a treat to catch a nice keeper.

Lake Sakakawea may be one of the most popular summer fishing lakes in North Dakota – and the region. But in the winter, its “little sister” lake to the east, Lake Audubon, garners most people’s attention.

“It’s the most popular ice fishing lake in my district,” N.D. Game and Fish Department North Central District Fisheries Supervisor Jason Lee offered. And that district extends north to include Lake Metigoshe and south to Nelson Lake with its year-round open water.

Lake Sakakawea isn’t neglected in the winter, although the midsection and upper end get more ice fishing attention because it ices over sooner. Anglers still check out “big lake” back bays, including Douglas, Steinke, Centennial and Garrison bays, as well as Wolf Creek on its east end.

But Lake Audubon enjoys the most winter activity, including anglers living beyond McLean County’s border, in part because it offers opportunities to catch large pike in the winter.

“Not a lot, but we see some,” Lee added. Plus, it has nice walleye numbers with a mix of small perch.

Game and Fish Department fisheries biologists conduct summer netting in late June and early July, which helps understand fish populations and growth rates. This summer’s walleye catch rate was comparable to Audubon’s long-term average of 20 fish per net night.

There are several reasons for Audubon’s popularity, Lee suggested: It is apt to have clear water and good water quality (even though it’s closed to darkhouse spearing) and it’s somewhat predictable. Look for best success from about one-half hour before and after sunrise and sunset, he hinted.

It’s also predictable that Audubon’s best walleye success is often shortly after ice-over and again in late winter as weather inches closer to spring and walleye are in a pre-spawn feeding mode.

Nelson Bay is also predictably the most popular early ice-over fishing location because it usually enjoys first ice. Look for activity at the east end by Velva Point, access points from Audubon National Wildlife Refuge, Totten Trail boat ramp, and the east cabin site.

Access and snow are North Dakota’s limiting factor in the amount of ice fishing activity and opportunities. However, Lake Audubon tends to have people willing to try to keep some of the most popular access points open.

Totten Trail Resort owner Tim Aman is one of those people. He tries to maintain access off the boat ramp on Lake Audubon’s west side near the U.S. Highway 83 embankment. It’s a win-win for his customers and the nearby restaurant, bar and bait shop, he explained, because it is a place to eat and relax, coming off the ice or taking a break from fishing.

McLean Electric Cooperative serves the Totten Trail, as well as an adjacent cabin site and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers recreation area where Aman keeps the ramp open.

Lee manages other popular McLean County ice fishing lakes and offers insight based on 2020 summer netting:

- **Walleye:** Lake Audubon isn’t the only lake for winter walleye. Others worth checking out include Brush, Strawberry, Brekken-Holmes and East or West Park lakes.



PHOTO BY N.D. GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

Scooby Lake southwest of Benedict had partial winter kill two years ago that depleted some of its walleye and perch populations, Lee described. A relatively new lake, it was first stocked in 2014. It's still worth fishing after the winter kill, however, and was stocked with walleye fingerlings in 2019 and 2020.

The Game and Fish Department also stocked Coal Lake south of Underwood in 2014 after the lake became part of

the Coal Lake Wildlife Management Area. A natural lake tucked among steep, woody coulees and draws, it suffered complete winter kill two years ago.

"It seems like the snow keeps piling up in years of fish kills," Lee described, given the lake's surrounding topography.

The Game and Fish Department also stocked Coal Lake in 2019 and 2020. "When we netted this summer, the walleye stocked in 2019 were 13 to 14 inches, which is typical of a complete kill," Lee described. Fish take advantage of the lack of competition for the abundant forage.

Walleye fingerlings stocked this year had already grown to 6 and 7 inches in length. All of the netted fish were plump and healthy, which Lee attributed to Coal Lake's abundant natural forage.

However, all of that natural forage could make it tough to entice a walleye – even a young one – to bite a hook with a minnow or wax worm on it, he hinted.

- **Northern pike:** Check out Crooked, Long, Brush, Lake Gertie, Strawberry, and, yes, Lake Audubon for pike, Lee suggested. Brush Lake even has a few

Darkhouse spearing opportunities

Two McLean County lakes ranked among North Dakota's top 10 for northern pike darkhouse spearing harvest during the 2019-2020 winter – Crooked and Long lakes.

However, as popular as Lake Audubon is for traditional hook-and-line winter anglers, the lake is closed to darkhouse spearing. That's because it contains muskie, which closely resemble northern pike, N.D. Game and Fish Department North Central District Fisheries Supervisor Jason Lee explained.

Instead, the back bays of Lake Sakakawea draw attention for darkhouse pike spearing.

Water clarity greatly influences darkhouse spearing success, with clear water necessary to see fish, Lee described. Several factors enter into water clarity, which varies from year-to-year: runoff or lack of runoff, lake elevation, lake productivity, and the amount of suspended materials, whether it's plant or substrate, for example.

However, wind is one of the biggest influencers of water clarity, especially in the fall right before ice-over. Strong winds create wave action, which contributes to suspended materials becoming churned up beneath the surface.



PHOTO BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

Drilling several holes and pulling the ice chunk out with ice tongs is all part of the darkhouse spearing experience.

So, while it's possible Crooked and Long lakes could once again garner lots of darkhouse spearing activity and success in during the 2020-2021 ice fishing season, like so many other things when it comes to North Dakota's great outdoors, Mother Nature and her seemingly ever-present wind will play a large factor on what lakes offer adequate water clarity. ■

large pike, he added. Lake Gertie south of Benedict is down a little in elevation, but should still offer some pike. And Lake Audubon, like Brush Lake, could kick out some larger pike.

- **Perch:** Several McLean County lakes have perch; it's just that they're not large perch. More often than not, perch end up as forage for larger predator fish like walleye and pike, Lee explained.

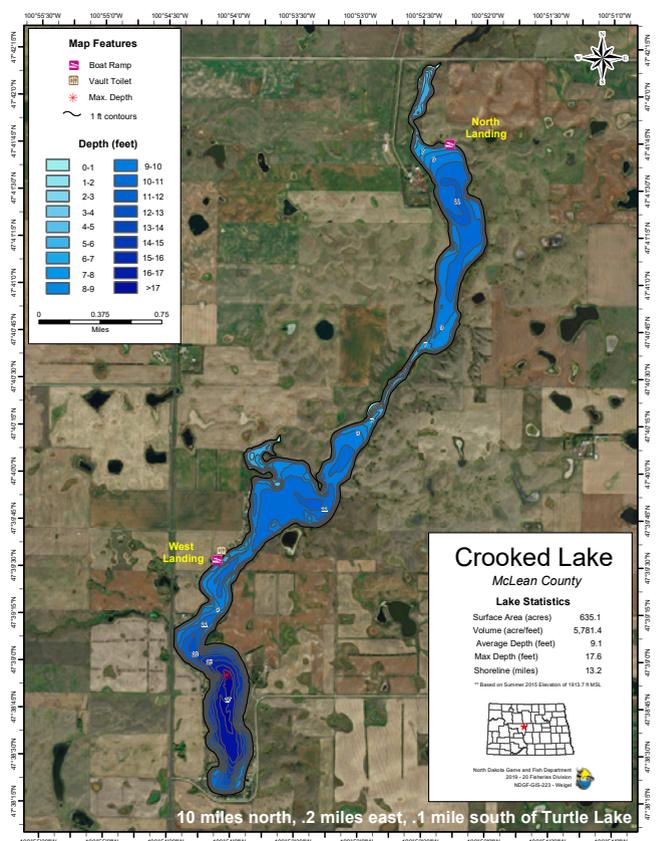
The list of winter fishing lakes in the county has a notable absence of lakes north of Lake Sakakawea. "When you go north of the lake, there just isn't as much that is big enough or deep enough to support a fishery," Lee explained.

Typically, a North Dakota lake, whether manmade or natural, should have at least a 12-foot depth to support a viable fishery. In addition, public access needs to be available, Lee added.

Even without small lakes in western McLean County, anglers can still head to Lake Sakakawea's back bays in the winter for walleye and pike and a litany of smaller lakes.

The Game and Fish Department has most of McLean County's lakes topographically mapped and available for download on its website, www.gf.nd.gov, clicking "Resources" and then "Maps" to get to an index of lakes. Anglers can also look up fish stocking information.

McLean County may be better known as a summer fishing destination, but its winter opportunities provide an excellent reason for residents and visitors to get outside. ■



The N.D. Game and Fish Department has contour maps available for download from its website, www.gf.nd.gov, for most lakes across North Dakota and McLean County. Crooked Lake and Long Lake ranked in the top 10 for darkhouse pike spearing in the 2019-2020 ice-fishing season.

Ice safety tips

N.D. Game and Fish Department basic ice safety tips:

- Test ice depth by drilling along the way when going out onto a lake to a destination.
- Shoreline edges firm up sooner than areas farther from shore, which is why it's important to test all of the way to one's fishing destination.
- Ice thickness can vary greatly, even within a short distance. Freezing and thawing weather conditions can create varying ice depths. Ice near culverts and bridges with flowing water can be thinner.
- Avoid cracks, areas around vegetation, pressure ridges – which can form suddenly – submerged trees and brush, and along embankments.
- Ice can be thinner in areas with slushy conditions or where ice is dark and cloudy.
- Snow is an insulator, which could inhibit ice formation and hide cracks, weak areas, or

open water.

- Carry a cellphone, tell someone your fishing destination and wear a lifejacket.
- Carry screwdrivers or ice picks to help pull yourself back onto the ice should you break through.
- Immediately call 911 if someone breaks through the ice. Rescue attempts should only be done by using a long rope, board, blanket or something that allows the rescuer to avoid going to the edge of the open water.
- When assisting a person who fell in the water, replace their wet clothing with dry clothing, wrap in a blanket, and get to the nearest hospital.
- Always test ice conditions with an ice chisel when moving around on ice. ■



Capital credits and the cooperative philosophy

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

Capital credits are one of seven cooperative core value principles: Member economic participation. They are also core to the cooperative business model: Capital credits are essentially revenue over and above a cooperative's cost of doing business, adequate enough to maintain financial reserves.

It's a financial margin, a financial cushion.

When fiscal conditions allow, cooperatives – including rural electric cooperatives such as McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) – return capital credits to qualifying member-owners through a fund retirement.

Investor-owned, for-profit businesses pay dividends to investors when they make profits. MEC members, instead, receive capital credits because it is an Internal Revenue Service 501 (c)(12) not-for-profit cooperative.

Capital credits are an opportunity to return an investment to those contributing to the cooperative through their purchase of electricity – its member-owners, MEC General Manager/CEO Mark Doyle explained. They're also an indication a cooperative is fiscally sound.

The amount paid to qualifying members is based on the total amount of money available in the pool of funds in capital credit allocations, Doyle added. Typically, MEC pays 1/20th of the total amount in the pool.

It's been a long-standing MEC board of director policy to pay capital credits when margins – that financial

Did You Know?

Electric cooperatives have retired \$17 billion to members since 1988 – \$1.2 billion in 2018 alone. Because electric co-ops operate at cost, any excess revenues (called margins) are allocated and retired to members in the form of capital credits.

Source: National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation



cushion – are adequate to protect resources in the event of emergencies.

While some cooperatives opt to borrow money to pay capital credits, MEC instead either decreases the amount retired or declines to retire capital credits until margins are adequate to support the distribution of funds, Doyle continued.

All MEC member-owners receive allocations, but not all receive capital credit distributions each year. Capital credits are based on the amount of electric usage a member-owner had for the calendar year being retired. A current consumer-member doesn't receive a distribution if he or she wasn't a member in the years being retired.

For example, if someone has been a MEC member-owner since 2010 and capital credits are retired for 2008, he or she wouldn't receive a capital credit check allocation because the member didn't contribute to 2008 revenue. If capital credits are retired for 2012, members would receive a capital credit check based on the amount of their electric usage in 2012.

MEC hasn't retired capital credits every year, but they have been allocated to members annually since 1975 with three exceptions: Major storms in 1981, 1989 and 1999 depleted what the board of directors at that time felt was adequate operating margins.

MEC's board has authorized capital credit allocations since 2000. In addition, capital credit retirements have been paid the past 11 consecutive years.

Some MEC consumer-members will receive a capital credit check from the cooperative in mid December for the years 1988, 2001, 2002 and 2003.

Check amounts were determined based on a member's electric usage for the entire calendar years that were retired, MEC Finance Manager Wendy Kinn explained.

Checks were mailed in mid December.

Just as rural electric cooperatives across the United States – including MEC – pay capital credits to its consumer-members, MEC's cooperative wholesale electric providers pay capital credits to their member cooperatives when it fits within their operating margins.

That, in turn, is passed onto MEC's own consumer-members. Its generation and transmission provider Basin Electric Power Cooperative (BEPC) and transmission provider Central Power Electric Cooperative (CPEP) both retired some of their capital credits in 2020.

Capital credit allocations remain in a member's name even though the funds are part of McLean Electric's margin. When a MEC member passes away, capital credits are paid to the estate based on MEC's retirement policy.

Capital credits aren't paid in full to protect a

cooperative's equity. Cooperative lenders, such as CoBank, Cooperative Finance Corporation (CFC), or U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Utilities Service (RUS), all require specific equity levels for cooperatives to qualify for loans, Doyle added.

While McLean Electric member-owners don't receive annual dividend checks, they receive a financial benefit to being a rural electric cooperative consumer-member when capital credits are retired.

"To me, it's the iconic thing about being a cooperative member. ... It's what sets the co-op model apart," Doyle concluded. ■



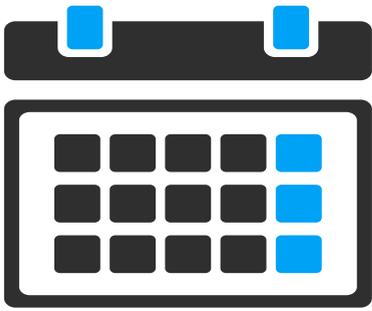
Basin Electric & McLean Electric offer scholarships

Deadline Feb. 24

Thinking about going to college and wondering how you will pay for everything?

Basin Electric Power Cooperative will be offering two scholarships in the amount of \$500 each. McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) will offer one, \$500 scholarship. Applicants must be members of MEC or children of members of the cooperative. The applicant must be a student who is enrolled or planning to enroll in a full-time graduate or undergraduate course of study at an accredited, two-year or four-year college, university or vocational/technical school.

Information packets are available at area schools. Contact your school counselor. You can also obtain information by calling MEC at 701-463-6700 or 800-263-4922 or at www.mcleanelectric.com All applications must be received in our office by Feb. 24. The scholarships will be presented to the recipients at McLean Electric's 76th annual meeting on June 15. ■



McLean County community calendar:

Events and activities to see and do

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

McLean Electric Cooperative's 75th anniversary of incorporation was in 2020. However, the COVID-19 pandemic prompted the cooperative to move its celebration to 2021. Please follow our website, Facebook page and your *North Dakota Living* local pages for details and the date so we can celebrate together.

McLean County

food pantry distributions:

- **Community Cupboard of Underwood:** 4-6 p.m. Jan. 7, 10 a.m.-noon Jan. 16 and 4-6 p.m. Feb. 4, 208 Lincoln Ave.
- **Garrison Area Resource Center & Food Pantry, Garrison:** Jan. 28, noon-2 p.m., 5-7 p.m., former Lazy J's building back door.
- **Our Saviors Lord's Food Pantry, Max:** Jan. 18, noon-3 p.m. and 5-7 p.m., Max City Hall, 215 Main St.
- **The Lord's Pantry, Turtle Lake:** 2-4 p.m. Jan. 14, 10 a.m.-noon Jan. 23, Trinity Lutheran Church, 515 Kundert St.
- **Wilton Food Pantry, Wilton:** "Mini" distributions every Friday, 11:30 a.m. until gone; full distribution, 4-6 p.m. Jan. 21, Wilton Senior Citizens Center, 42 Dakota Ave.

PLEASE NOTE THAT SCHEDULED EVENTS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE PENDING COVID-19 PRECAUTIONS. PLEASE FOLLOW HEALTH GUIDELINES AND RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONTACT EVENT SPONSORS FOR DETAILS AND UPDATES.

Tentative January events:

- **Jan. 23:** Bottoms Up Delta Waterfowl fundraising banquet and auction beginning with 5 p.m. social, Wilton Memorial Hall.
- **Jan. 23:** "Flakes of Fury" fat tire bicycle race, Fort Stevenson State Park, 3 miles south of Garrison. Registration begins at 10 a.m. with racing at 1 p.m. Contact the park, 701-337-5576, for more information.

Tentative early February events:

- **Feb. 3:** McLean County Ag Show, Garrison High School, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. ■

McLean County organizations and communities can contact Patricia Stockdill, (stockdill.patricia@gmail.com) or telephone, 701-337-5462, to submit community events. February and early March listings for the February local pages are due Jan. 20.

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