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PHOTO COURTESY BASIN ELECTRIC POWER COOPERATIVE

*Basin Electric Power Cooperative's Pioneer Generation Station uses natural gas to generate power in northwestern North Dakota. The cooperative broke ground in September 2023 on another natural gas generation power plant near the Pioneer Station.*

## Striving for reliability

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

Maintaining and upgrading McLean Electric Cooperative's (MEC) system helps the co-op provide reliable electricity to its member-owners. That includes everything from tree trimming to reduce potential outages to converting overhead line to underground cable.

For example, plans call for burying 2 miles of overhead line in the Washburn area in 2024, part of a larger project totaling 6 miles of new line.

In the coming years, upgrading to underground cable is scheduled for the Butte and Coleharbor areas, along with improvements to an older single-phase line in the Roseglen area.

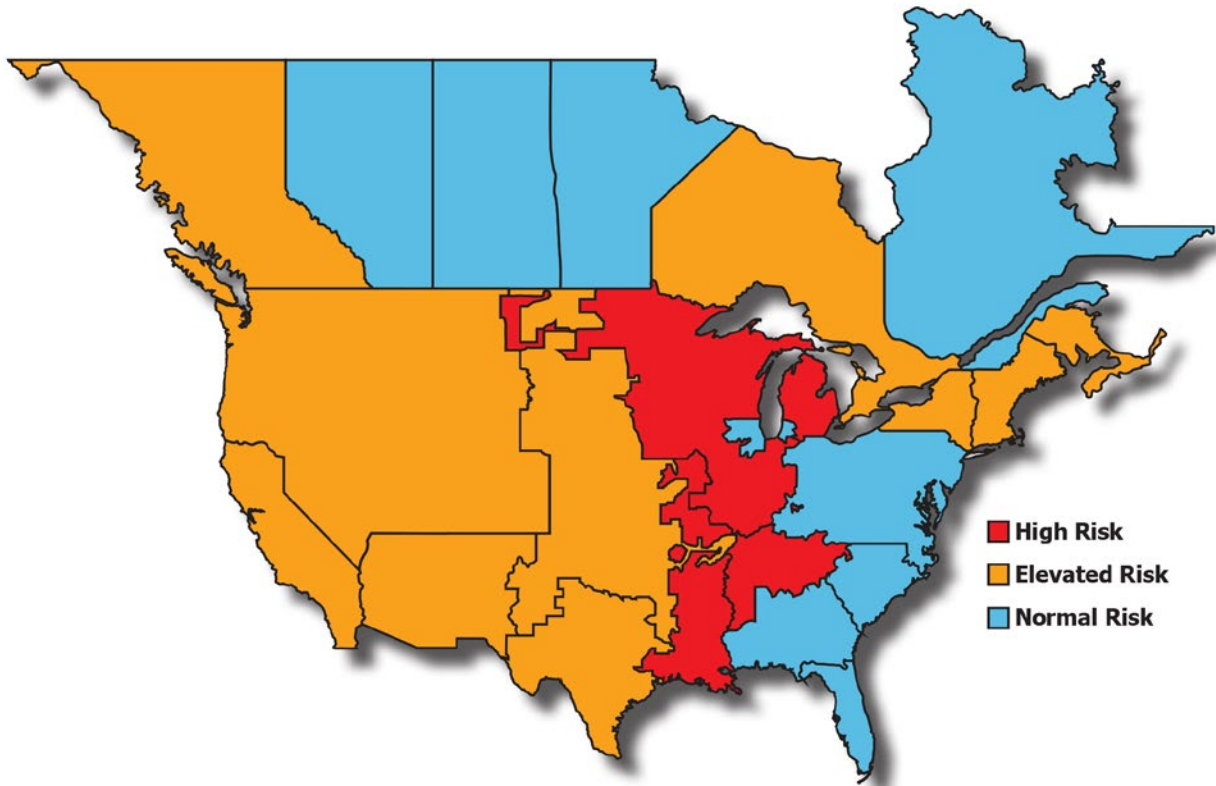
However, maintaining reliable and affordable electric

service extends beyond local upgrade projects. Its roots are tethered to generation and transmission cooperatives providing and transmitting electricity throughout the country.

As MEC's wholesale power provider, Basin Electric Power Cooperative (BEPC) is the nation's largest generation and transmission provider based on megawatt-hours, sales and geographical territory. Central Power Electric Cooperative (CPEC) is MEC's power and transmission provider.

Like MEC, both cooperatives – BEPC headquartered in Bismarck and CPEC in Minot – continuously strive to maintain and upgrade their systems, focusing on reliability and affordability.

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COURTESY NERC

The North American Electric Reliability Corporation is a nonprofit regulatory authority tasked with protecting the electric transmission grid throughout the United States and parts of North America. Its 2023 reliability risk priorities report cited "energy policy" as the No. 1 threat to reliability. In addition, its 2023 long-term reliability assessment infographic indicates the entire United States west of the Mississippi River is at elevated risk to the bulk power system. Midwestern states are in the high risk category.

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For example, CPEC built a new substation to better serve increasing growth in the Garrison and surrounding Lake Sakakawea areas. It also upgraded transmission lines for the new substation and elsewhere in the MEC system.

With increasing load demand throughout its service area in western North Dakota, BEPC broke ground in September 2023 on a 580-megawatt (MW) dispatchable electric generation facility using natural gas. It's expected to go online in 2026, said BEPC Vice President of Strategic Planning and Communications Andy Buntrock.

BEPC currently has seven natural gas generation units, which in 2022 accounted for 1,253 MW or 17% of its generation, Buntrock said.

The cooperative announced in January it's also exploring another potential natural gas generation facility in North Dakota, as BEPC continues striving to meet increasing regional load demand. The size and type of BEPC's potential new generating facility is yet to be determined, Buntrock explained.

## RELIABILITY VERSUS REGULATIONS

MEC's mission statement sums up the cooperative's management strategy. It's been in place since its 1947 founding: "It shall be the aim of McLean Electric Cooperative Inc. to make electric energy available to its members at the lowest cost consistent with sound economy and good management."

Many in the electric cooperative industry throughout the United States share those values. And many are concerned about their ability to meet their mission, as they face increasing reliability challenges, especially given the country's national energy policies.

The electric industry, including the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) representing cooperatives across the United States, has expressed concern that policies and pending Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) carbon dioxide emission regulations don't factor in that scientific technology isn't available on an affordable commercial scale to meet pending regulation deadlines set for final approval



in April.

U.S. national energy policy is accelerating non-dispatchable energy as the primary source of electrical generation. Examples include wind and solar generation, which don't produce electricity 24/7 and rely on weather-dependent fuel sources.

Non-dispatchable generation requires backup dispatchable sources, such as coal, natural gas or oil, to be readily available when the wind doesn't blow, sun doesn't shine, snow blankets solar panels and adverse weather conditions shut down wind tower generation.

The issue is dispatchable electric energy generated from a source available 24/7 is largely produced from fossil fuels – coal or natural gas generation. Nuclear power is another form of dispatchable electric energy.

Pending EPA regulations would require elimination of carbon dioxide emissions from the electric energy industry by 2035. Fossil fuel generating facilities would have two options – eliminate carbon dioxide emissions by implementing carbon capture and sequestration or implement clean hydrogen co-firing technology.

Or shut down.

NRECA has expressed concerns that proposed regulations fail to consider existing technology doesn't allow for feasible implementation of hydrogen co-firing. The science isn't proven in today's world. Research indicates it likely won't be available in the coming decades.

In addition, concerns exist over the economic viability of carbon capture for coal-based and natural gas

generating facilities to meet the proposed deadlines.

The electric cooperative industry – electric cooperatives and NRECA – aren't the only ones expressing concerns about reliability and affordability.

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 tasked with protecting the electric transmission grid throughout the United States and parts of North America.

Its 2023 reliability risk priorities report cited "energy policy" as the No. 1 threat to reliability, followed by NERC's 2023-24 winter reliability assessment, which stated, "A large portion of the North American bulk power system is at risk of insufficient electricity supply during peak winter conditions." And, its 2023 long-term reliability assessment indicates the entire country west of the Mississippi River is at elevated risk to the bulk power system, with Midwestern states in the high-risk category.

As proposed, the pending EPA regulations wouldn't affect existing simple-cycle natural gas facilities, Buntrock said, but they're less efficient than combined cycle facilities.

Existing combined cycle facilities operating more than 50% of the time would be impacted if regulations are adopted as proposed, he added.

"This would be like buying a new car to get to work, but being told you can only drive it part of the time," he described.

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## Have a voice

Sometimes, it just might be important to speak up when something in the "big picture" hits close to home.

When it comes to having electricity when it's needed 24/7 throughout the year, many electric cooperatives across the United States, along with the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), are increasingly informing their member-owners electric reliability is at risk.

And, in the big picture, it's not because of Mother Nature's wrath and bad weather.

NRECA is on record opposing proposed Environmental Protection Agency carbon dioxide emission regulations, which the organization feels oversteps the agency's regulatory authority and hampers electric cooperatives' abilities to provide reliable, affordable electricity.

Local North Dakota electric cooperative member-owners can play a role in voicing their concerns by contacting the state's congressional delegation.

However, there is another avenue that reaches far beyond North Dakota, by becoming a member of America's Electric Cooperatives Political Action Committee.

Founded in 1966, it advocates for government officials who speak for and work to protect that nation's electric cooperative industry, helping ensure safe, affordable and reliable electric energy remains available in America.

More than 35,000 individuals are members. Any McLean Electric Cooperative member-owner and immediate family members of eligible member-owners can participate. Contact McLean Electric Cooperative at 701-463-6700 or 800-263-4922 for more information. ■

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It’s unknown how EPA proposals would impact a potential new facility, because they aren’t final, Buntrock explained.

BEPC applies an “all-of-the-above” philosophy in its electric generation portfolio: A mix of non-dispatchable – mostly wind – and dispatchable sources, such as coal and natural gas, when non-dispatchable generation isn’t available.

BEPC is a member of two of the nation’s regional transmission organizations, Southwest Power Pool (SPP) and Midcontinent Independent System Operator.

Both have added vast amounts of non-dispatchable generation when those sources are available, Buntrock described.

“As we know, the wind doesn’t always blow and the sun doesn’t always shine, so it is critical that our cooperatives invest in an all-of-the-above energy strategy,” he added. “This portfolio contains coal, natural gas, oil, hydropower, wind, recovered energy, market purchases and solar.”

It’s like farming, Buntrock said. Farmers diversify their crops and so must electric generation providers.

But as electric generation cooperatives like BEPC increasingly invest in new technologies and facilities to meet growing load demands, concerns still exist across the industry that the ability to maintain reliable and affordable power could be increasingly difficult with current national energy policies.

It’s become normal for MEC and many electric cooperatives across the country to receive “resource alerts” from SPP, MEC General Manager/CEO Mark Doyle said.

Alerts notify all members within SPP’s 14-state area that electric energy demand is nearing generation capacity. They can occur throughout the year as electric demand shifts.

It’s likely any new regulations prohibiting that ability would be challenged, Buntrock explained.

“As the EPA regulation is currently written, the ability for cooperatives to maintain this delicate balance between affordability and reliability would not be possible,” he said.

The United States doesn’t have much excess electric capacity, Doyle added, with concerns that pending regulations could even further challenge the ability to meet demand.

“Our mission is to provide electricity and McLean Electric needs the ability to meet that demand. When

McLean Electric has sustainable growth, its member-owners grow,” he added.

## TRANSMISSION CHALLENGES

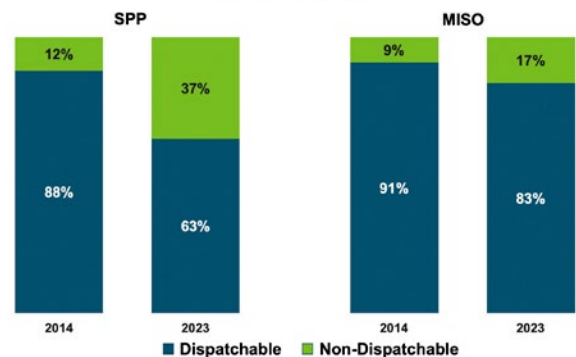
Grid transmission was second on the list of NERC’s risk profile in its 2023 reliability risk priorities report.

Its opening statement in assessing risk No. 2 states: “Transformation of the grid continues to accelerate toward generation and load resources that are increasingly non-synchronous, diverse, digital and dynamic, while dependence on uninterrupted electric energy increases. ... As is further emphasized in the new Energy Policy section of this report, the regulatory and socioeconomic policies driving grid transformation continue to grow in impact.”

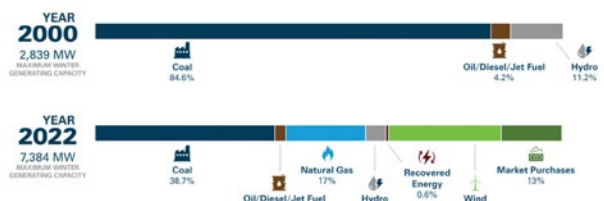
MEC doesn’t want to be in the position to have to tell an existing member-owner or potential new member-owner it doesn’t have the electric capacity to meet their needs, Doyle concluded.

“Safe, reliable, affordable electricity is our mission. Public policy is skewing all of that,” he said. ■

## Generation Energy Mix Change 2014-2023



## Basin Electric Power Cooperative Diverse Generation Portfolio





## Operation Round Up is seeking nonprofit organization applications

# Help wanted: Operation Round Up seeking applicants

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

Spread the word: Operation Round Up is seeking area nonprofit organizations that provide great local community-minded programs, projects and services.

The Operation Round Up May grant application deadline is April 30.

Operation Round Up grants up to \$2,500 each are available for nonprofit organizations and individuals or families in financial need following major emergencies.

Funds are available through Operation Round Up for an array of community-minded programs. Need ideas? Here are some examples of past recipients:

- An array of children's programs, such as Turtle Lake's Bike Fest, area school Character Counts programs or children's community Halloween activities and festivities.
- Local food pantry support for communities throughout McLean Electric Cooperative's (MEC) service area.
- Community-based facility upgrades and safety improvements, such as a hospital elevator, library, 4-H educational facility improvements or helping a community-based day care facility meet its building needs to provide child care for working families.
- Organizations providing services to aid senior citizens and people with disabilities in the region.
- Individuals and families have also been gifted a glimmer of hope after major financial situations developed through sponsorship by local nonprofit organizations or churches, such as serious fires, accidents or major illnesses.

Applying for grants is easy:

- Applicants simply need to have 501(c)(3) federal nonprofit tax exemptions and provide their verification letter with the application.
- Applicants can apply for a maximum of \$2,500 annually and can submit more than one grant each year if they haven't met that amount in a calendar year.
- Unlike most government agency-based grants, Operation Round Up grants don't require matching funds.

MEC proudly supports Operation Round Up, with its board of directors nominating MEC member-owners to serve on the Operation Round Up volunteer board of directors and its role in administering the trust fund account.

But it's MEC member-owners who make the program a reality by rounding up their monthly electric bills to the nearest dollar. Those pennies, dime, nickels and quarters add up to mean big things to those receiving grants. Operation Round Up is eager to support organizations and individuals and families in need throughout its service area in the May grant round.

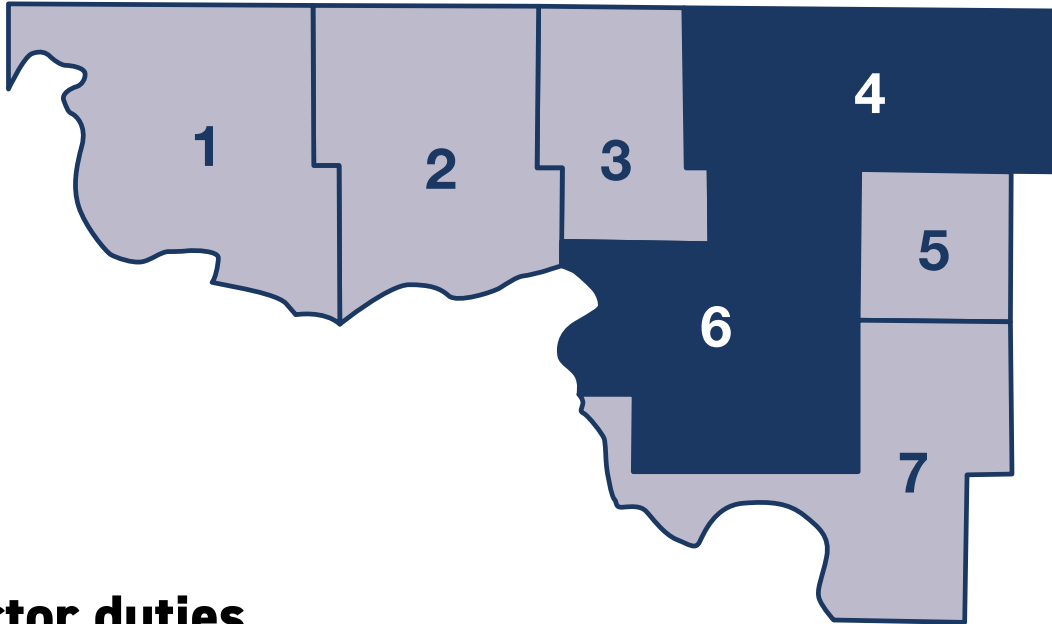
More information about the program and an application is available on MEC's website at [www.mcleanelectric.com](http://www.mcleanelectric.com), clicking "Grants & Scholarships" on the homepage and then "Operation Round Up Program," as well as the co-op's Facebook page. ■

# Do you want to become a director?

**H**ave 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 2024 director elections must be filed with the co-op by Tuesday, April 16, 2024.

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. Directors currently serving the cooperative find the duty extremely rewarding.



## Director duties



**Darcy Klain**



**Karen Hanson**

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 statewide organization. Courses cover director duties and liabilities, understanding the electric business, board roles and relationships, strategic planning and financial decision-making.

Directors currently serving the cooperative find the duty extremely rewarding.

This year, the districts up for election are:

- District 4, which is a three-year term, includes the townships of Dogden, Butte, Otis, Andrews, 150-82, 149-82, Greatstone, Horseshoe Valley, Aurena and Byersville. District 4 is currently served by Darcy Klain.
- District 6, which is a three-year term, includes the townships of 148-81, Malcolm, 147-84, Victoria, 147-82, Turtle Lake, 146-81, 146-82, Longfellow, 146-84, 145-83, Buffalo Lake, 145-81. District 6 is currently served by Karen Hanson.



## McLean County community calendar:

# Events and activities to see and do

### McLean County area food pantry March distribution dates, times and locations:

- **Community Cupboard of Underwood food distribution:** 4-6 p.m. March 7, with Easter food basket distribution 10 a.m.-noon March 23. Call 701-595-0320 to preregister for the Easter basket distribution, 208 Lincoln Ave. Like us on Facebook, Community Cupboard of Underwood, for food pantry distributions, thrift store and other information.
- **Community Food Pantry serving the communities of Ryder, Makoti, Roseglen, Plaza, White Shield, Parshall and those in need:** 10 a.m.-1 p.m. March 23, 181 Ellsworth, Makoti.
- **Community Thrift Store serving the communities of Ryder, Makoti, Roseglen, Plaza, White Shield, Parshall and the region, 181 Ellsworth, Makoti. Store hours:** 3-6 p.m. Tuesday, 4-7 p.m. Thursday and 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturday, except holidays.
- **Free Community Clothing Share & Exchange Store:** Noon-6 p.m. every Thursday, 221 Main St., Turtle Lake.
- **Garrison Area Resource Center & Food Pantry:** Noon-2 p.m. and 5-7 p.m. March 28.
- **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, Wednesday and Friday, and 10 a.m.-1 p.m. first Saturday of every month, 205 Seventh St., Washburn.
- **Our Savior Lord's Food Pantry, Max:** Noon-3 p.m. and 5-7 p.m. March 18, Max City Hall, 215 Main St.
- **The Lord's Pantry:** 2-4 p.m. March 14 and 10 a.m.-noon March 23, Trinity Lutheran Church, 515 Kundert St., Turtle Lake
- **Wilton Food Pantry:** "Mini" distributions every Friday, 11:30 a.m. until gone; full food distribution, 4-6 p.m. March 21, Wilton Senior Citizens Center, 42 Dakota Ave., Wilton.

Area food pantries often experience high needs for the following items: baked beans, pork and beans, canned fruit, tuna, chicken and 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, 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.

The McLean Family Resource Center is sponsoring Greater Access for Groceries throughout March, providing free gas cards to help pay travel expenses to pick up food baskets during the month. Contact the center at 701-462-8643 for more Greater Access for Groceries information and to schedule an appointment to get the food basket.

### March activities:

- **March 17:** Benedictine Living Center St. Patrick's Day Breakfast and Auction, 11 a.m.-1 p.m., Garrison City Auditorium.
- **March 17:** Leprechaun's Geocache, Fort Stevenson State Park, Garrison. Contact the park at 701-337-5576 for details and GPS coordinates.
- **March 25:** Taste of Turtle Lake, 5 p.m. until gone, Turtle Lake Legion Hall.
- **March 30:** Easter Egg Hunt, 10:30 a.m., Underwood school, sponsored by the Underwood Civic Club.
- **March 30:** Lunch with the Easter Bunny, 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m., Cubby Hole, Main St., Garrison.
- **April 30:** Operation Round Up May grant application deadline. More information about the program and application is available on McLean Electric Cooperative's website at [www.mcleanelectric.com](http://www.mcleanelectric.com), clicking "Grants & Scholarships" on the homepage and then "Operation Round Up Program," as well as the co-op's Facebook page.

Nonprofit organizations and communities throughout McLean County are encouraged to contact Patricia Stockdill, [stockdill.patricia@gmail.com](mailto:stockdill.patricia@gmail.com), or telephone 701-337-5462, to submit community events. ■



# SAVE THE DATE

## MEC Annual Meeting

### June 18, 2024



## STATEMENT OF NONDISCRIMINATION

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**Darcy Klain**, vice president  
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District 4, Ruso

**Rod Stockdill**, secretary-treasurer  
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District 3, Garrison

**Clarence Behles**, asst. secretary-treasurer  
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District 2, Garrison

**Troy Presser**, director  
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District 5, Turtle Lake

**Karen Hanson**, director  
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District 6, Washburn

**James Odermann**, director  
701-743-4415  
District 1, Parshall

### STAFF:

**Mark Doyle**, General Manager/CEO  
**Keith Thelen**, Operations Manager  
**Lucas Schaaf**, Engineering Manager  
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