Rural Montana

Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association Magazine | **NOVEMBER 2026**

DECIPHERING Data Centers

a five-part SERIES

part 5

PROSPECTS OF DATA CENTERS IN MONTANA

– PAGE 2



INSIDE ENERGY SHARE: GIVING AID TO THOSE WHO NEED HELP KEEPING THE HEAT ON – PAGE 10

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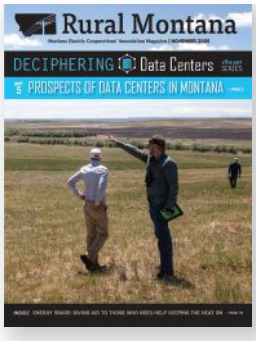
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Ask A Manager

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About our cover: A crew from Quantica Infrastructure surveys the site of a proposed data center. **Photo by Ryan Hall.**

Rural Montana

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(ISSN0199-6401)

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RURAL MONTANA (ISSN0199-6401)
Mission Statement: To be the premier source of trustworthy information related to Montana's electric cooperatives — highlighting their members, the vital role co-ops have in their communities, and their commitment to delivering safe, reliable and affordable electricity.
Vol. 72 | No. 11
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SUBSCRIPTIONS | $10 per year.
POSTMASTER | Published monthly by Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association, 501 Bay Drive, Great Falls, Montana. Periodicals postage paid at Great Falls, Montana, and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster send address corrections to P.O. Box 3469, Great Falls, MT 59403.
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Data centers in Montana: Must ask the right questions

MARK LAMBRECHT, *CEO of Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association*



MONTANA'S electric cooperatives have earned the trust of their members through decades of service. With that trust comes an obligation to provide the unvarnished truth about issues that affect members as electricity consumers. Few issues in recent decades have generated as much attention as the development of hyperscale data centers. Across the nation, these facilities have sparked discussions about America's global competitiveness in computing power and their potential impacts on communities, energy resources and the environment.

This issue brings us to the conclusion of *Rural Montana's* five-part series on data centers. When we began this series, our goal was to look beyond the headlines and social media narrative to pull back the curtain on data centers: what they are, how they are or could be powered, their potential benefits and drawbacks and, ultimately, what their prospects look like in Montana.

Whether a data center is developed in your community depends on several factors, including access to affordable electricity, proximity to transmission infrastructure and the availability of water resources. Montana law establishes an obligation to serve for electric utilities, including cooperatives. This means they must provide reasonably sufficient, adequate and efficient electric service to customers within their service territories. That obligation extends to potential residential, commercial and industrial customers alike.

As a member-owner of your electric cooperative, you now have the information and tools to ask informed questions if a data center is proposed for your community. Is sufficient electricity available, or will the facility generate its own power behind the meter? What are the potential implications for electric reliability and rates, and will other consumers benefit? Will the developer be required to pay the full cost of the infrastructure needed to serve the facility? How many permanent local jobs will be created? What contributions will the data center make to the community, including support for local schools? What safeguards are in place to protect water resources and air quality, mitigate noise and prevent conflicts with neighboring land uses?

I encourage you to participate in public discussions about data center proposals in your area. Talk with your electric cooperative and its elected board of trustees. Make sure they understand your perspective and the questions you believe deserve answers as they evaluate any proposed development. These decisions can have long-term consequences for our communities, our natural resources and our electric system.

Montana's electric cooperatives have a responsibility to serve their members, and members have an important role in shaping the future of their communities. Informed questions, open discussion and thoughtful consideration of the costs and benefits will help ensure decisions about data centers reflect the best interests of the people who call Montana home.

Deciphering data centers

WILL A DATA CENTER LOCATE IN CO-OP TERRITORY?

STORY AND PHOTOS BY **RYAN HALL** | *RURAL MONTANA EDITOR*

DECIPHERING Data Centers

A FIVE-PART SERIES | PART 5: DATA CENTERS COMING TO MONTANA

This is the last in a five-part series on data centers. The previous four issues looked at what a data center is, the community benefits, potential power options and concerns. To see previous stories in the series, visit www.mtco-ops.com/rural-montana/data-centers.

OVER the last four months, *Rural Montana* has looked at multiple aspects of data centers, from what they are, to how to power them to potential benefits they bring to communities and their drawbacks.

The question remains, will there be large-scale data centers in Montana, particularly in an electric co-op's service area?

"Yes," said Jason Brothen, manager of Lower Yellowstone Rural Electric, Mid-Yellowstone Electric and Goldenwest Electric cooperatives, when asked if he expected such a data center to be located in a co-op's service area within the next five years.

Electric cooperatives were founded because large utilities didn't want to serve areas with sparse populations that were not profitable. Rural communities banded together under the Rural Electrification Act, part of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, to ensure rural America had access to power.

Electric cooperatives don't pick and choose their members, if you live in their service area and meet the requirements of membership, the cooperative has an obligation to serve. It is in cooperative bylaws, and it's the law in Montana.

"Rules and regulations do not allow you to discriminate services," Brothen said. "We can't say, 'No, we're not serving you.' As long as they meet our requirements and any permitting that pertains to us, and pay for the necessary infrastructure, we can't say no. We don't have a choice."

He noted that other concerns such as road traffic and water usage that do not pertain to electric service cannot be considered by the co-op as a reason to deny service.

> "If we have data centers in Montana, they pay their own costs."
>
> **– GREG GIANFORTE,** MONTANA GOVERNOR

Montana is ready

In a phone interview, Gov. Greg Gianforte said, "Montana is open for business," when it comes to data centers, or other large industrial businesses, but only if Montanans are protected from the associated risks.

"Being open for business doesn't mean we are going to give anybody a blank check," Gianforte said. "We can't pass on their infrastructure and energy costs to hard-working Montanans."

He noted that the Governor's Energy Task Force, of which the state's electric cooperatives were a member, worked hard over the last year to come up with recommendations to help shape what energy will look like in the state.

"The task force was a bipartisan effort to really map out Montana's energy future," Gianforte said. "I was very pleased with the results."

He said the task force came up with 20 recommendations, ranging from ones that can be done with executive orders to some that will need to be passed by the Legislature to be implemented.

Those recommendations protect Montana resources such as water, ensure an "all-of-the-above" strategy for Montana's energy future — meaning traditional fossil fuels, renewables and new technologies will all be part of the mix — and that electric ratepayers aren't subsidizing new large loads, including data centers.

Gianforte added that he also has signed the Ratepayer Protection Pledge.

"That guarantees that if we have data centers in Montana, they pay their own costs (for energy development and use)," Gianforte said.



A team of engineers from Quantica Infrastructure survey the future site of a data center near Broadview. | **RYAN HALL PHOTO**

Co-ops protecting members

While Brothen predicts there will be a large-scale data center in an electric cooperative's territory in the near future, he also said members shouldn't be concerned because while co-ops have an obligation to serve, they also have an obligation to protect their members, who are owners at the co-op. Brothen also noted that if a large data center located in co-op country, it would have the same single vote as a residential account.

"We are going to have one," Brothen said of data centers locating in an electric cooperative's service area in Montana. "But we are going to have one in the right way."

He said the power supplier for his cooperatives, Basin Electric Power Cooperative, has a large load commercial program that ensures any large load, including data centers, pay up front for any generation or transmission construction or improvements. It also ensures that the members are protected from stranded electric infrastructure costs if a data center were to fail, and ensures long-term reliability of power.

Brothen added that while a hyperscale AI data center has not been completed in Montana, that doesn't mean there aren't data centers in the state.

"They're already here," he said, noting that a couple crypto-mining players on Lower Yellowstone Rural Electric's system have already converted half of their system to data centers, with the loads around 10 megawatts (MW). That is a significant load size for many electric cooperatives around the state, but pales in comparison to the 1,100 MW data center under development near Broadview.

Though 10MW sounds small in the scheme of data centers, Jason said that a load that size is more power coming through one meter, at its peak, than the entire Mid-Yellowstone Electric Cooperative system uses in nine months.

"That's the impact these things can have," Brothen said.

Stabilizing rates

Brothen likened data centers to the oil industry served by two of his cooperatives in the Bakken region, as well as across North Dakota. He said that large loads such as oil pumping stations can help stabilize a co-op's rate when they pay their fair share.

"We stabilized for 27 years because of growth," Brothen said. "Any time you get a chance to upgrade your transmission and distribution system through new loads coming on and paying for that, guess who isn't having to replace that old system — the member who has been there for 50 years.

"Someone else is paying for that transmission system, that distribution system and that new substation," Brothen said. "That stabilizes rates for a long time."

Montana must be protected

Like Brothen, Gianforte stressed that a key to data centers benefitting co-op members, and Montanans in general, is that they pay their own way.

"They must build, bring or buy the power they need, and cover the full cost of infrastructure," Gianforte said. "They also need to make long-term commitments (to ensure ratepayers don't pay for infrastructure if a data center doesn't last)."

He added that they also must be good stewards of the land, and Montana has regulations in place to ensure that.

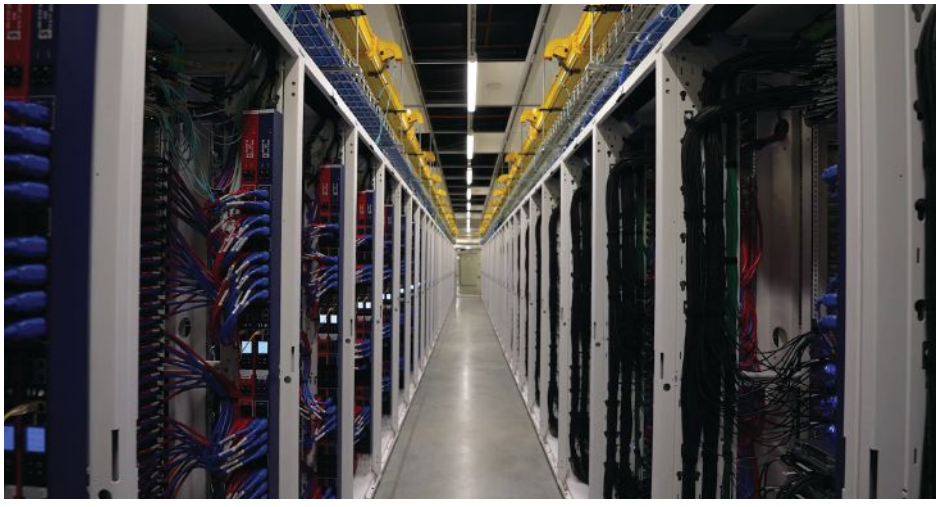
Gianforte said the Department of Environmental Quality reviews all applicable water quality and consumption requirements, while the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation oversees water rights.

"It's really a property-right issue," Gianforte said, adding that the closed-

See DATA CENTERS, next page

DATA CENTERS

Continued from previous page



loop cooling system used by modern data centers uses significantly less water than the evaporative system that was used in the past. "We have to make sure water is available, but that it doesn't take from homeowners and agricultural use. We have an existing framework to ensure that does not occur."

He said that just because Montana is open for business for data centers, doesn't mean they should be everywhere. Gianforte said any data center developer needs to work with the local community to build support for the project within that community in order to be successful.

"We can support economic growth while also protecting the Montana way of life," he said. "They shouldn't be in everybody's backyard. Montana has a lot of open space, that doesn't mean that every spot is the right spot for a data center."

Prospects in Montana

Several large-scale data centers have already been proposed in Montana, though nearly all were eventually scrapped. Missoula County has enacted a one-year moratorium on new data centers, and Butte-Silver Bow County has instructed its attorney to draft a proposed moratorium.

The state does have the Right to Compute Act, which was passed in 2025, and states that, "Government actions that restrict the ability to privately own or make use of computational resources for lawful purposes, which infringes on citizens' fundamental rights to property and free expression, must be limited to those demonstrably necessary and narrowly tailored to fulfill a compelling government interest."

The exact scope of that law is currently being questioned by the Yellowstone County Commission.

Proposed data center projects in Great Falls, near Butte, and in Bonner have all been shelved after local opposition.

At least one large data center is under development in Montana. Quantica Infrastructure and Big Sky Digital Infrastructure are developing the previously mentioned 1,100 MW AI data center outside of Broadview, near Billings, on about 5,100 acres of land. Tens of thousands of additional acres are being leased for renewable generation and a proposed natural gas power plant to power the data center. That data center would be served by NorthWestern Energy, not an electric cooperative, and plans to bring its own generation.

"The climate is good for Montana data center development," said Charlie Baker, chief accounting officer for Quantica Infrastructure. Quantica handles site selection and preparation, power and network for data center development but does not build the actual facility. "Responsible data center development has the potential to bring huge economic development to the state."

Though it is early in the process and the timeline may change, he said the hope is to have the Big Sky Campus near Broadview energized in 2030.

Sabey, which owns data centers in the Quincy, Washington area, among others, was the developer of the proposed data center in Butte. The company is still interested in locating in Montana, though there are no plans to pursue another location near Butte, officials said earlier this year.

"We are actively working with other communities," said Ryan Beebout, vice president of Sabey Data Centers-West. "We want to be in Montana."

He added that while the first proposal was in NorthWestern Energy's territory, they are open to working with electric cooperatives. The Quincy facility is served by a public utility.

Beebout also said the company has a 20-year history of contributing to the local community and paying more than its fair share of power and infrastructure costs. A Grant County Public Utility District official previously said data centers near Quincy, including Sabey, pay 150 percent of the cost to serve those facilities. As a result, residents currently pay about 60 percent of the cost to serve their households.

"We are committed to paying our share, and to pay a rate that doesn't impact other customers," Beebout said.

Quantica has made similar statements.

"As a developer, we want to pay our own way. We do not want ratepayers to have increased costs in power rates," Baker said.

He said the company is continuing to look for opportunities across the country, including in areas served by an electric cooperative.

"I don't think there's anything that would prevent it from being in co-op territory," Baker said. RM

LYREC
Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

NOVEMBER 2026

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Apply for Electric Cooperative Youth Tour

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to walk through the halls of Congress, visit the Washington Monument or meet like-minded students from all over the nation? The Electric Cooperative Youth Tour gives high school students the opportunity to do all of that and more.

For more than 60 years, electric cooperatives have been sending students to Washington, D.C., for a week of learning, leadership and unforgettable experiences. Each year, Lower Yellowstone Rural Electric Cooperative (LYREC) sponsors one local student to represent our cooperative on the trip.

The adventure begins June 17, 2027, with orientation in Great Falls, where delegates and their parents will meet the other Montana Youth Tour participants. The next day, students will fly to Washington, D.C., and spend five days exploring our nation's capital.

During the trip, students will tour museums, visit monuments and memorials, meet with Montana's Congressional delegation, and learn more about leadership, government and the cooperative difference. They will also meet new friends and create memories to last a lifetime.

Best of all, LYREC covers all the expenses, including airfare, lodging, meals and program costs. The program is coordinated by the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association and the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

Words from 2026 Youth Tour delegate

Danica Denowh shares some words about her experience on the 2026 Youth Tour:

The Youth Tour is truly a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and one I will never regret taking. I loved every aspect of the trip and got to meet so many new people, including friends I still talk to every day.

The Youth Tour helped me see so much of our country's capital, including historical memorials and educational museums. Outside of Washington, D.C., we also went on tours, such as the Gettysburg battlefield, which was a surreal experience as we got to stand where history took place. Additionally, we got the chance to visit with Sen. Steve Daines to ask him questions and learn about his role in Congress.

One of my favorite parts of the trip was getting to



learn about how rural cooperatives work and seeing how impactful they are to our communities. This trip taught me about advocacy and how I can make a difference, even from Sidney.

Not only did I get to connect with Montana kids, but also with kids from across the nation through activities like going to a baseball game with kids from other states and the nights when we listened to speakers and got to dance.

Youth Tour is something I cannot recommend enough. It was an unforgettable experience for which I will forever be grateful. If you are thinking about applying for the trip, just do it. You will not regret it!

Apply today

Applications for the 2027 Youth Tour are due Nov. 24 at 5 p.m.

If you know a high school sophomore or junior looking for a unique opportunity or if you know a student who would be a great fit, encourage them to apply.

For more information or to download an application, visit lyrec.coop. ■

Stay Safe on Winter Roads





Winter months can bring snow, ice and windy conditions, creating hazards for drivers. It is important to be prepared in case there is an accident.

Safe Electricity.org®

Before a winter storm

Perform seasonal maintenance on your car to ensure:

- Batteries are charged.
- Tires have sufficient tread.
- Spare tire is inflated.
- Jumper cables are in good condition.
- A winterized car emergency kit.
- Windshield wipers work.
- Headlights, brake lights and turn signals work.
- At least a half-full tank of gas.

Prevent frostbite and hypothermia

If you are stranded in your car after an accident, observe the following precautions:

- Do not stay in one position for too long.
- Stay awake.
- Do not overexert yourself to avoid strain on your heart.
- Watch for signs such as a change in skin color, numbness, shivering, slurred speech, loss of coordination or confusion.

Winter storms and power lines

Always treat sagging and downed power lines as energized and dangerous. Keep at least 50 feet away from the area.



- If your vehicle hits a power pole, stay inside.
- Contact 9-1-1 and wait for the power to be shut off by utility workers.
- If your vehicle is on fire, jump clear with feet together, avoiding contact with both the vehicle and ground simultaneously.
- Shuffle or "bunny hop" away from the vehicle, keeping feet together to prevent different electric currents through your body.
- Never drive over a downed power line, which can cause additional hazards.

What happens when the power goes out?

When the lights go out, you should first check to see if your neighbors are also without power. If your home is the only one affected, you may have tripped a breaker or have another related issue. If your neighbors are without power, too, report the outage to Lower Yellowstone Rural Electric Cooperative (LYREC) as soon as possible.

Be ready to report an outage

When you call, dispatch will ask for your meter number or service description. Many members have multiple meters, and knowing exactly which service is out helps crews get to the right location faster.

A service description can be something simple, such as "home" "shop" or "north well." If you would like to add a service description to your account, call the office at 406-488-1602.

Finding the problem

LYREC uses several tools to help locate outages, including smart meters, our outage management system, and supervisory control and data acquisition technology. These systems help pinpoint where a problem may be located, but member outage reports are still an important part of the process.

Once an outage is reported, crews use this information along with line patrols to find and repair the issue as quickly and safely as possible.

Restoration priorities

During major outages, crews focus first on repairs that will restore power to the greatest number of members. Critical facilities, such as hospitals, schools and emergency services, may also receive priority.

Members who rely on electricity for medical equipment should always have a backup plan in place in case of extended outages.

How members can help

Technology has greatly improved outage response, but we still depend on our members. Reporting outages promptly, keeping contact information current and adding service descriptions to your account all help crews respond more efficiently.

A few minutes spent updating your account today could save valuable time the next time the power goes out. ■



Use generator safely

Portable or permanently installed standby generators can come in handy during a long-term power outage. However, if you do not know how to use them properly, they can be dangerous.

If you are installing a permanent generator, it must have a transfer switch. The transfer switch prevents energy from leaving your generator and going back onto the utility's electrical equipment, where it could be dangerous to a lineworker working on downed power lines. This process is known as "backfeed." A qualified electrician should install your generator and transfer switch.

Follow these tips to use portable generators safely:

- Operate it outdoors in an area with plenty of ventilation. Never operate a generator in a home or garage. Generators give off deadly carbon monoxide.
- Do not plug a generator into the wall to avoid backfeed. Use heavy-duty extension cords to connect appliances to the outlets on the generator.
- Turn the generator on before plugging appliances to it. Once the generator is running, turn your appliances and lights on one at a time to avoid overloading the unit. Remember, generators are for temporary usage; prioritize your needs.
- Generators pose electrical risks, especially when operated in wet conditions. Use a generator only when necessary if the weather creates wet or moist conditions. Protect the generator from water and rain by operating it under an open, canopy-like structure on a dry surface where water cannot form puddles or drain under it. Always ensure your hands are dry before touching the generator.
- Be sure the generator is turned off and cool before fueling it.
- Keep children and pets away from portable generators. Many generator components are hot enough to burn you during operation. ■



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Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

MONTANA U.S. SENATORS

In order to allow ample space for responses, Rural Montana alternates asking Montana's senators and representatives the Dateline D.C. question each month. This month features the senators. Next month, we will ask a question of the state's two representatives.

THIS MONTH'S QUESTION: *"Do you believe Congress should regulate AI, if so, how? If not, why not?"*

THE SAME QUESTION WILL BE ASKED TO MONTANA'S TWO U.S. REPRESENTATIVES IN *NEXT MONTH'S* EDITION



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Washington, D.C. 20510
www.sheehy.senate.gov
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Senator Tim Sheehy

ARTIFICIAL intelligence has the potential to drive unprecedented innovation, opportunity and prosperity in the 21st-century economy. Recent AI model developments have only underscored the reality that it is essential for our national security and position on the world stage that America maintains its competitive edge and leads the global AI race. That leadership requires commonsense guardrails, similar to what we have pursued with cryptocurrency, to ensure that we not only develop the world's most advanced models, but also establish the most effective governance framework.

As we continue working to unlock that potential, we must put in place reasonable safeguards and regulations to protect hardworking Americans and ensure AI is not exploited as a tool for fraud. That's why earlier this year I introduced the AI Fraud Accountability Act. This legislation modernizes federal law so we can crack down on AI fraudsters targeting American families, seniors and businesses, while protecting technological innovation and First Amendment rights. Specifically, the bill creates a new offense under the Communications Act to ban falsely posing as a real or imaginary person by means of highly realistic digital impersonation with the intent to defraud someone.

As a former technology entrepreneur and member of the Senate Commerce, Science and Technology Committee, I will continue working to implement practical regulations that protect from AI abuse while promoting a commonsense framework that allows America to lead and win the AI race. RM



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Ph: **(202) 224-2651**

Senator Steve Daines

ARTIFICIAL intelligence is already becoming a driving force behind our economy, scientific research and energy demand. It is critical that America remains a leader in AI, quantum computing and semiconductor manufacturing, and we do not cede that leadership to China. As Congress looks at new laws related to AI, we must ensure that we are thoughtful and focused on protecting our rights enshrined in the Constitution.

Montana, in particular, is a growing hub for science and technology, and has one of the nation's highest per capita concentrations of quantum and photonics companies. These companies help create the parts needed for all kinds of tech — from night-vision goggles to semiconductors. This is critical not just for America's tech leadership, but for our national security. The next generation of computing, including AI, will bolster our national defense and better train and equip our service members, as well as help breakthrough disease research and patient health resources.

In Congress, we have already taken steps to ensure we protect electric ratepayers by ensuring any large load customer, such as a data center, does not raise the cost for Montana customers. We also passed the TAKE IT DOWN Act to crack down on nonconsensual online publication of explicit content, including AI-generated deepfakes.

We can continue to promote a world-class jobs, research and technology economy while also promoting individual freedoms and protecting Montanan electric customers. RM

A winter safety net

Energy Share helps thousands of Montana families every year

For Rural Montana

ENERGY Share of Montana is a statewide nonprofit that, simply put, helps Montanans stay warm. With the help of individuals, small businesses, electric cooperatives, other utility companies and large electric users, Energy Share helps keep people safe and warm across the state.

One example of the assistance Energy Share provides is found in the story of "Sherri" and "Dan" (their names have been changed to protect their privacy), a young couple with a small child. This co-op family spent every penny they had getting into their own apartment, but got behind on several bills in the process. Dan works while Sherri, who has some health issues, stays home with their child. Energy Share helped them get caught up on their home energy bill so they could keep their power on.

While many of Energy Share's program participants have lower incomes, Energy Share's assistance is situationally-based, meaning it considers applications on a case-by-case basis, regardless of income. For example, if the applicant was working but had major medical expenses that resulted in falling behind, they could still get help from Energy Share if they were about to be without heat or lights. The determining factor as to whether Energy Share can help them is if they are facing a home energy emergency and have no resources with which to keep their heat or lights on. Reasons for needing a little extra help are varied.



Energy Share gives assistance to lower-income families who need help keeping up with their utility bills in the winter. Contact Energy Share at 1-888-779-7589, online at *www.energysharemt.com,* or through your local HRDC. | **FILE PHOTO**

energyshare of Montana

Last year, Energy Share helped 3,328 families statewide. Of those, 670 were electric co-op members who received an average of $436 each in Energy Share assistance.

Energy Share was formed as a nonprofit in 1983, when electric cooperatives, investor-owned utility companies and human service organizations recognized there were Montanans "falling through the cracks" of government-funded programs. Many of our neighbors make just enough money to scrape by, so if they have an event in their lives that costs extra money, they can get to where they are unable to keep up with all their bills. Having one's heat or lights disconnected is often just one step away from homelessness.

Energy Share applications are

processed at the 10 Human Resource Development Councils (HRDCs) across the state, each one having its own service area. The county you live in determines which HRDC would take your application. Energy Share payment is made directly to the energy provider. Energy Share is fortunate to be able to work with almost all the major players in Montana's energy community.

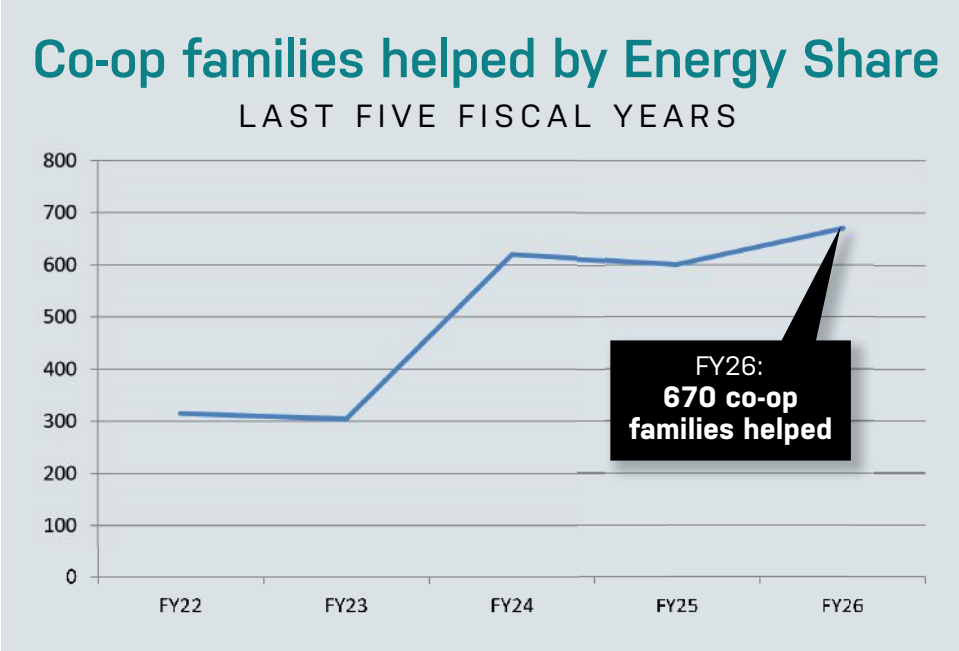
Energy Share also helps with utility deposits. Not only do people find themselves in situations where they need help keeping their heat or lights on, but also getting into housing. In some cases, utility deposits can be a barrier to this. Energy Share has helped with deposits in situations of domestic abuse, homelessness, extended illnesses and many others.

In an effort to help low-income Montanans reduce their energy costs and stay safe, Energy Share has expanded its appliance replacement program. Funds are available to help income-qualified people who have unsafe or inefficient furnaces and other home appliances by repairing or replacing them.

Since 1983, Energy Share has helped 80,346 Montana families stay warm. If you can, please use the envelope included in this edition of *Rural Montana* to donate to Energy Share. Your individual donation is crucial and very much appreciated!

Likewise, if you or someone you know is in a situation where you need help with your home energy bill, contact Energy Share at 1-888-779-7589, online at *www.energysharemt.com*, or through your local HRDC. Sometimes it is hard to ask for help, so even going with a neighbor or friend when they apply provides the support they need.

Energy Share exists because of the support we receive across the great state of Montana. It truly is all about neighbors helping neighbors. RM



Energy Share of Montana Fourth Grade Art Contest

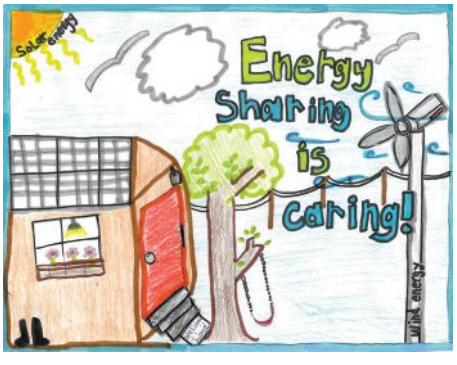
Get your drawings in by Nov. 20

For Rural Montana

Since 1997, Energy Share has sponsored a fourth-grade art contest across Montana. Through this activity, fourth graders become more aware of the value of community and doing what Montanans always do — help each other during tough times.

November 20 is the deadline for submitting entries this year. This is a great opportunity for fourth graders and their teachers. Energy Share uses the winning drawing on the front of thank-you cards sent to donors statewide, and helps get the winners interviewed by local media.

The prizes for the statewide first-, second- and third-place artists are $75, $50 and $25 respectively. The teachers of the first-, second- and third-place statewide winners receive a gift card of $500, $400 and $300, respectively, for classroom supplies.



The winning drawing also is displayed on a billboard or banner in or near the winner's community.

To learn more, visit our website at *www.energysharemt.com/art-contest*. Here you can see this year's guidelines and past winning drawings. You can also call 1-888-779-7589 ext. 3 for more information. Fourth graders in public schools, private schools and home schools are welcome to participate. RM

THE ASK A MANAGER PANEL



MATT HAGGERTY
PARK ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE



TREVOR PARKE
VIGILANTE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE



BRAD BAUMAN
SUN RIVER ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

SEND US YOUR QUESTIONS

If you want to ask a question for a future edition of *Ask a Manager*, email your question to *ryanh@mtco-ops.com*, or call the editor at 406-761-8333.

ASK A MANAGER:

What is the biggest challenge you have faced?

Every other month we ask our electric co-op manager panel a question, many of which are provided by our readers.

Our panel for 2026 is Matt Haggerty, manager of Park Electric Cooperative in Livingston; Trevor Parke, manager of Vigilante Electric Cooperative in Dillon; and Brad Bauman, manager of Sun River Electric Cooperative in Fairfield

This month's question is:

Q: *"What is the biggest challenge you have faced in your career at your cooperative?"*



BRAD BAUMAN SUN RIVER ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

IN the utility business, the phrase "send our employees home in as good or better shape than when they came to work" is used often because of the danger of the profession. On August 9, 2024, that was not the case for Lucas Fowler. Lucas lost his life in a tragic accident when a power pole fell over with him on it.

Navigating this event as the general manager was the most challenging event of my career. Supporting the Fowler family, our employee group and the communities affected by the tragedy was a lift. During a time like this you do what your instincts tell you is the right thing, not worrying about how others may be seeing or judging your actions. One leans on their faith and leadership skills, hoping that the answers and actions help offer a level of compassion and calm that allows each to move forward at their own pace.

In most instances we hope to learn from our experiences. This is one event that I would like to not have to experience again, nor get better at how we would respond. One time — was one too many. We trust that Lucas is home and watches over us each day. RM

MATT HAGGERTY PARK ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

My biggest challenge has been keeping rates as affordable as possible while nearly all of our operating costs continue to increase. Several factors drive these higher costs.

Wholesale Power: Our largest expense is wholesale power, which has increased every year for the past four years. Initially, we absorbed these increases to protect our members from higher rates. As costs continued to rise, we eventually had to pass a portion of those increases along.

As a not-for-profit electric cooperative, we strive to charge rates that cover the cost of providing service. We ultimately return any margins to our members through capital credits.

Much of the increase in wholesale power costs is related to our power supplier investing in new generation and transmission infrastructure to meet growing demand. The cost of constructing transmission lines has increased from approximately $500,000 per mile to as much as $2 million per mile over the past decade. These higher costs ultimately impact electricity users. It's important to note that these investments are not driven by data or AI centers; our power provider requires those customers to pay their associated generation and transmission costs.

Materials: The cost of materials to maintain our system has increased by 30 percent to 200 percent. Transformer costs have increased approximately 100 percent to 200 percent, depending on size, while wire, poles and crossarms have also increased.

Equipment: Equipment used by our line crews has increased approximately 30 percent to 50 percent over the past five years.

Property Taxes: Utilities are among the largest taxpayers in many areas of Montana because of the extensive infrastructure required to provide electric service. Higher taxes on substations, poles, wires and other equipment increase operating costs.

Despite these challenges, electricity has remained relatively affordable compared with many other necessities. From 1940 to 2025, the cost of bacon increased approximately 3,210 percent, and gasoline increased 1,622 percent, while electricity increased by approximately 140 percent.

We cannot control many of these costs, but we can control how responsibly we manage them. Our commitment is to operate efficiently and provide safe, reliable electricity at the lowest reasonable cost, while maintaining the financial strength needed to serve our members today and in the future. RM

TREVOR PARKE VIGILANTE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

I have been the general manager at Vigilante Electric for a little over 2½ years. For me, the biggest challenge I have faced has been navigating significant changes while continuing to serve our members, support our employees and remain true to our cooperative values.

The world around us is constantly changing. Keeping up with those changes while making meaningful decisions is both challenging and rewarding. Change is never easy, particularly in a cooperative where relationships matter. Our members trust us to provide reliable service and create value for the communities we serve.

One of the most difficult parts of leadership is recognizing that what worked yesterday may not be what we need tomorrow. Our industry continues to evolve, costs increase, technology changes, regulations shift and member expectations grow. At the same time, we must make decisions that protect the long-term strength of the cooperative rather than focusing only on the immediate future. The challenge is finding that balance.

As a general manager, I have learned that communication is critical when navigating change. Everyone impacted by a decision deserves to understand why the change is necessary. The challenges we face rarely belong to one person. The strength of a cooperative comes from its people. When we face difficult circumstances, I have seen employees step up, managers find solutions and trustees offer valuable perspectives. Some of the best ideas have come from simply listening to the people closest to the issue.

Vigilante Electric faced unique challenges long before I became general manager. One ongoing priority has been improving our operations by becoming more efficient and less exposed to the risks we face. Asking questions, seeking input and listening to our employees and members helps us better understand how each decision will affect the people we serve. That does not mean every decision will be perfect. It means we must be willing to learn, adapt and keep moving forward.

Ultimately, the biggest challenge has been learning how to lead when there is uncertainty. Challenges will continue, but by communicating openly, supporting one another and keeping our members at the center of our decisions, we can meet them together. RM



SEND IN YOUR RECIPES

Recipes for *RM magazine* are submitted by cooperative members across the state. First, second and third place monthly winners are awarded $30, $20 and $10 prizes, respectively. Send your recipes to *RM* Recipes, Box 3469, Great Falls, MT 59403, or email rural@mtco-ops.com. **Please include your name, hometown and an address.** ***If you do not include this information, your submission will not be accepted.*** **For December send your favorite Frosted or Glazed recipes by November 12.** ***Please send in January recipes anytime: Favorite recipes that include any kind of mushroom.*** *Try to limit the ingredients and length of directions for space. Please include a photo, if possible.*

1st PLACE

Roasted Vegetable Soup

Mel Hayes | **LIBBY**

INGREDIENTS

- **End of garden veggies, such as: Carrots, celery, potatoes, squash (any kind), tomatoes**
- **4 T butter**
- **½ cup half-and-half**

DIRECTIONS

Roughly cut up the vegetables and place on a large sheet pan. Drizzle olive oil, salt and pepper over vegetables.

Roast veggies in 400-degree oven for about 30 minutes, until tender.

Put vegetables in a blender or food processor, add butter and half-and-half, blend until desired consistency. Serve Hot.

OPTIONS: You can freeze the soup or it can be used as a sauce for pasta.

2nd PLACE

Pork Roast with hoisin and plum sauce

Mel Hayes | **LIBBY**

INGREDIENTS

- **6-8 pound pork roast (such as a pork shoulder, bone in)**
- **6 cloves of garlic**
- **1 cup hoisin sauce**
- **1 cup plum sauce**

DIRECTIONS

Cut slits in several places around the roast. Stuff a garlic clove in each cut.

Place roast in a roasting pan and pour both sauces over the top.

Roast at 350 degrees until cooked through. Approximately 2 to 3 hours.

Can also be done in a Crockpot.



3rd PLACE

Montana Prairie Land Pot Roast

Bev Mix | **MISSOULA**

INGREDIENTS

- **1 boneless beef chuck roast (2 pounds)**
- **½ tsp. salt**
- **¼ tsp. black pepper**
- **¼ tsp. garlic powder**
- **1 bottle (8-oz) Kraft Catalina salad dressing, divided**
- **2 large onions, sliced**
- **2 pounds potatoes, peeled and cut into 1-inch pieces**
- **1 pound carrots, peeled and cut into 1-inch pieces**
- **2 T chopped parsley**

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

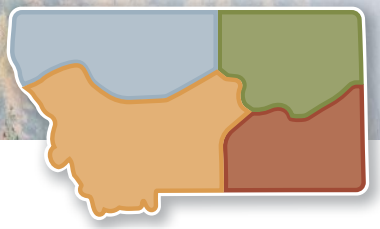
Season both sides of roast with salt, pepper and garlic powder.

Brown meat in Dutch oven on high heat in 1/4 cup of the Catalina salad dressing, turning to brown both sides. Add onions; stir to brown.

Add remaining salad dressing, potatoes, carrots and 1-1/2 cups water. Bring to boil, cover and bake in oven for 2-3 hours, or until meat and vegetables are tender.

Remove meat from oven. Let rest tented with foil for 10 minutes. Slice meat against the grain. Serve meat and vegetables with pan gravy. Sprinkle with parsley just before serving. Makes 8 servings.

Events Calendar



NORTHWEST

November 1
Lutefisk Dinner — *Trinity Lutheran Church, 12:30 to 3 p.m., 590-1379* | **CHOTEAU**

November 1
Holiday Craft and Bake Sale — *St. Richard Church - Pearce Center, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., 892-5142* | **COLUMBIA FALLS**

November 4
History Book Club — *NW Montana History Museum, 2 p.m., 756-8381* | **KALISPELL**

November 7
Annual Bazaar — *Lunch (11 a.m. to 1 p.m.), crafts, handmade items and bake sale, Epworth United Methodist Church, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., 257-6849*

November 7
Sons of Norway Annual Lutefisk Dinner — *Bethlehem Lutheran Church, 1 to 3 p.m., reservation required, 309-0958* | **KALISPELL**

November 9
Northwest Montana Photographers Meeting — *1025 7th Ave. West, 7 p.m., 206-0086* | **COLUMBIA FALLS**

November 16
Westerners Int'l present Chuck Cushman on *Pioneer Preachers of the Flathead, 1886-1901* — *NW Montana History Museum, 6:30 to 8 p.m., 309-0958* | **KALISPELL**

November 18
Columbia Falls Women's Connection Luncheon — *Guest speaker is Robbin Bouslog, 827 9th St. West, 11:30 a.m., call 892-3621 for reservations* | **COLUMBIA FALLS**

November 27
Movie Night at the Museum — *NW Montana History Museum, 7 p.m., 756-8381* | **KALISPELL**

December 5
Glaciereens Children's Christmas Store — *Children ages 5-12, Anna Jeffries Elementary, 10 a.m. to noon, 873-2693* | **CUT BANK**

December 5
Stillwater Christmas Shoppe — *Vendor booths, Stillwater Lutheran Church, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., 257-4614* | **KALISPELL**

December 6
Annual Christmas Carol Sing — *Soup and supper to follow, First Presbyterian Church, 4 p.m.* | **CUT BANK**

December 19-20
Seize the Day Flathead presents Craft and Vendor Event — *Flathead County Fairgrounds Expo Building, Sat: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sun: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.* | **KALISPELL**

NORTHEAST

November 21
All-Handcrafted Holiday Bazaar — *Vendors, lunch, Schermer pecans, Glasgow Civic Center, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., 263-5200* | **GLASGOW**

STATEWIDE

All year
Blood Drives — *Various locations, see website for full schedule, redcrossblood.org.*

Blood Drives — *See website for full details, vitalant.org.*

SOUTHEAST

November 5
Dinosaur Dimensions — *Longfellow Gymnasium, 6 to 7:30 p.m., 778-3265* | **BAKER**

November 21-22
Billings Big Sky Optimist Vendor Market & Craft Fair — *505 Orchard Lane, Sat: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Sun: 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., 259-1306* | **BILLINGS**

December 5
Wibaux Winter Gift Show — *Christmas gift shopping, local vendors and crafts, lunch, Wibaux Fairgrounds Exhibit Hall, 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., 891-0543* | **WIBAUX**

SUBMIT YOUR EVENTS

To list an event, send it to: RM Events, PO Box 3469, Great Falls, MT 59403 or email us at: rural@mtco-ops.com — Submit items by November 12 for December events. Include date, time, site, city and contact number with your event. Events without such info will not be used. Some items may be cut for space concerns.

SOUTHWEST

November 3, 11, 17, 24
Ladles of Love - Making Soups for Donation — *Cultivating Connections MT at Homestead Organics Farm campus, Nov. 3: 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., Nov. 11: 5:30 to 8:30 p.m., Nov. 17: 5:30 to 8:30 p.m., Nov. 24: 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., CultivatingConnectionsMT.org* | **HAMILTON**

November 6-8
Artists Along the Bitterroot Studio Tour and Sale — *10 a.m. to 5 p.m., artistsalongthebitterroot.com, 605-212-3979* | **LOLO TO HAMILTON**

November 7
Fall Women's Wellness Retreat — *Cultivating Connections MT at Sleeping Child Hot Springs, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., CultivatingConnectionsMT.org* | **HAMILTON**

November 7-8
Hilger Christmas Bazaar — *Hilger School House Community Hall, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., 350-1022* | **HILGER**

November 8
Lutefisk Dinner — *Shields River Lutheran Church, noon to 3 p.m., 223-9014* | **WILSALL**

November 13
3rd Annual Potomac Sip-n-Shop — *Have a beverage and shop with local vendors, Potomac Community Center, Fri: 5 to 9 p.m., Sat: 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., 529-8472* | **POTOMAC**

November 13-14
Bazaar — *Lunch, bake sale and handmade items and crafts, Florence/Carlton Community Church, Fri: 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., Sat: 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.* | **FLORENCE**

November 15
Cold Press Soap-Making Workshop — *Cultivating Connections MT at Homestead Organics Farm campus, 1 to 4 p.m., CultivatingConnectionsMT.org* | **HAMILTON**

November 22
Missoula Rising Stars Talent Showcase — *A premier youth talent showcase, Hellgate High School auditorium, 3 p.m.* | **MISSOULA**

November 28
Nine Mile Holiday Fair — *Nine Mile Community Center, 12:30 to 3 p.m., 240-2597* | **HUSON**

November 29
Farmstand Open House — *Cultivating Connections MT at Homestead Organics Farm campus, 5:30 to 8:30 p.m., CultivatingConnectionsMT.org* | **HAMILTON**

December 5
Holiday Cookie Bake & Swap — *Cultivating Connections MT at Homestead Organics Farm campus, 1 to 4 p.m., CultivatingConnectionsMT.org* | **HAMILTON**

December 5
Stevensville Garden Club presents A Holiday Flower Show — *"Here We Come A-Caroling," Kootenai Creek Village Clubhouse, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., 381-5157* | **STEVENSVILLE**

December 5
St. Philip Benizi Christmas Market — *Crafts, bake sale, raffle and lunch, Darby Clubhouse, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., 925-405-2811* | **DARBY**

December 19
Wreaths Across America — *Placing wreaths on veterans' graves, Sunset Hills Cemetery and Veterans Memorial Wall, 9:30 a.m., 586-8976* | **BOZEMAN**

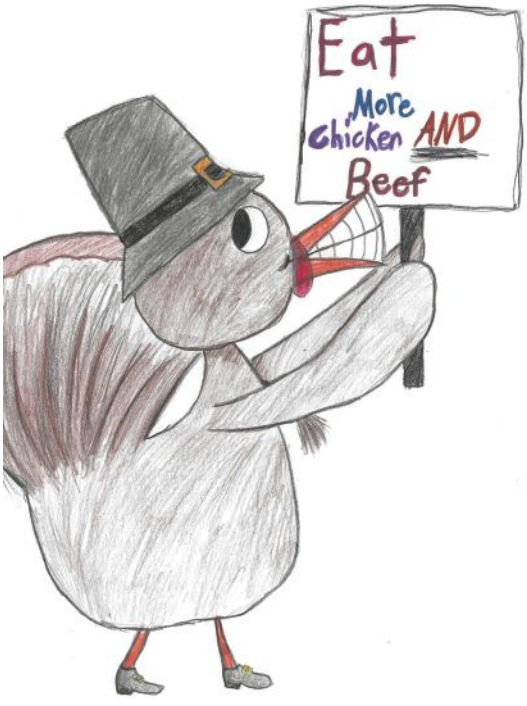
YOUNG MONTANANS

RM invites youngsters to send in original art and poems. If we use it, we'll pay you $10. **Mail to:** Young Montanans, P.O. Box 3469, Great Falls, MT 59403. **Email:** *rural@mtco-ops.com.* **Include:** Your name, age, address and your cooperative. ***If you do not include this information, your submission will not be accepted.***

SEND US YOUR WINTER DRAWINGS AND POEMS



Aislin Mott, 13, Stevensville | **RAVALLI ELECTRIC**

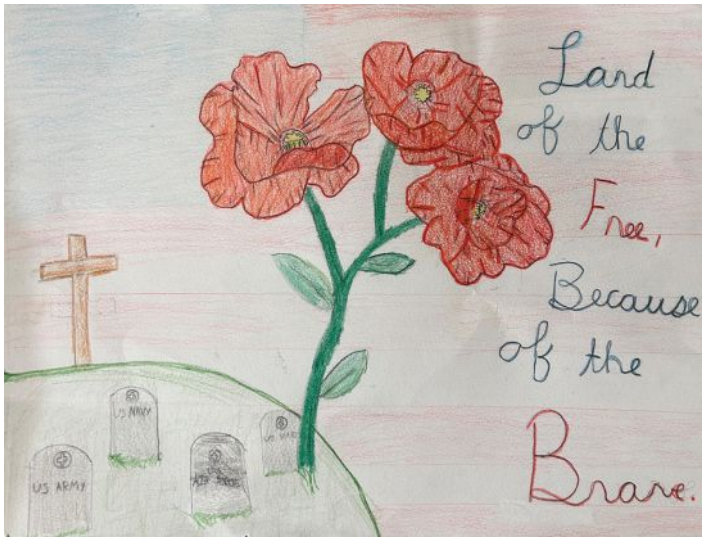


Jeremiah Spencer, 14, Billings | **YELLOWSTONE VALLEY ELECTRIC**

Salvatore Antieri, 9, Clark, WY | **BEARTOOTH ELECTRIC**



Reagan Grace Boman, 10, Broadus | **TONGUE RIVER ELECTRIC**



READER PHOTOS

SEND US YOUR FAVORITE PHOTOS/ARTWORK

Please include: the photographer's/artist's name, address and hometown in the entry. ***If you do not include this information, your submission will not be accepted.*** If we use your entry we'll pay you $25-$100 (depending on size and location).
Send entries to: *rural@mtco-ops.com.* No more than 20 MB at a time. No prints please.



Eagle Eye

A bald eagle keeps a watchful eye. **Photo by Pete Sabin of Whitefish.**



Water Web

A spider's web glistens with dew.
Photo by Krystal Loring of Cut Bank.

Moose Drool

A moose takes a drink in Glacier National Park.
Photo by Carol Fowler of Seeley Lake.



Furry Folliage

A bunny sits among falling leaves.
Photo by Willow Henke of Kalispell.



RM
The Magazine of the
Montana Electric Cooperatives'
Association

Visit us online: www.mtco-ops.com
Email: rural@mtco-ops.com

