**FREE GENERATOR SAFETY CHECK**

For the safety of our crews, please call the office 406-446-2310 and let us know that you have installed a back-up generator. We will note this with your member information and our crews will come out and conduct a complimentary safety check.

Portable generators, widely used when power lines are down, can prove fatal to our line workers and your neighbors when used improperly.

---

**FEATURE STORY: GENERATOR SAFETY: LIVES ARE AT STAKE!**

The safety of Beartooth Electric line worker employees is a top priority of the Cooperative, every day and even more so during extreme weather events. Beartooth employees recently celebrated seven years without a lost-time accident!

When extreme weather events hit our service area, we rush to your aid as soon as weather conditions allow our line workers to travel and make repairs safely.

Our line crews take precautions before they work on downed power lines. First, they verify a circuit has been de-energized and switches are opened and tagged to isolate the circuit from the electric system.

We also place heavy copper ground conductors on the circuit—on both sides of workers—to make sure the line cannot be inadvertently energized while work is being done. But even after these measures, our workers’ lives remain in your hands.

Beartooth Electric is proud of our outstanding safety record, but sometimes, no matter how many steps we take to keep everyone safe, the very people we are there to help unknowingly put lives—and their own—in danger.

Commercial and residential generators, widely used when long-term outages occur, can prove fatal to line workers and your neighbors when used improperly. Of course, no one would ever intentionally cause the death of a line worker. Nevertheless, a generator connected to a home’s wiring or plugged into a regular household outlet can cause back-feeding from your home wiring back on to Beartooth’s circuit and electrocute anyone who comes in contact with our lines—even if the line appears to be dead. Yes, the 120 volts at your household outlet can transform itself into 7200 volts by the time it enters Beartooth’s electric circuits.

Beartooth Electric employees are not the only ones in danger when a generator is used improperly. Generator owners themselves may be at risk of electrocution, fire injury, property damage, or carbon monoxide poisoning if they do not follow the necessary safety rules.

---

continued on page 6.
Greetings Members! We’re off to a great start this year with a new set of projects and priorities. We started off January getting the Request for Proposal (RFP) out to vendors for a response prior to the January 30, 2018 board meeting. A new folder has been established on the Beartooth Electric website for the Digital Meter Project. Members are able to review the RFP on the website location if they so choose (or pick up a copy at the Red Lodge office).

We will be stepping up communication with members regarding this project over the next two years. Where, Why and When will be very important to all of you. BEC utilizes multiple communication channels to reach members, watch closely and feel free to ask questions of Staff or Board members when they arise.

The Digital Meter Project, which is prompted by the obsolescence of our current analog meter system, is a large capital investment for the Cooperative that will help us operate more efficiently and bring new information to members.

Upon receipt of qualified RFP responses, Staff will present a recommendation to the Board for approval at the January 30 Board Meeting. Once contracts are signed with the preferred vendor, work will commence this Spring to upgrade our 6,126 meters. The first of five substation upgrades in 2018, will be Belfry, with the installation of new metering equipment at each member location. In the Spring of 2019, the remaining five substations will be upgraded and the remaining meters installed.

We will increase communication to members as the project moves forward to broadcast more specific information about the numerous benefits of moving our metering function into the digital age. [497800]

On a side note, thank you for all of the nice compliments the Board and Staff have received at Beartooth regarding the Christmas LED lighting of the Carnegie Library spruce tree. Staff fully embraced the opportunity to make such a huge contribution to the Red Lodge community. It was a very moving experience to witness the initial illumination of the tree that brings a smile to my face every evening I happen to be driving through town. Apparently a lot of you feel the same way.

As always, please feel free to give me a call or stop me on the street if you have a question.

Budget and planning go hand-in-hand, a best practice for BEC. For nearly all businesses, budgeting is an annual planning process. At BEC we add a risk management financial forecast model and seven-year plan as tools for examining impacts resulting from different assumptions and scenarios. Side by side with the annual budget the plan provides a hands-on reference for management and a broad picture with longer-term context for the Board’s evaluation and oversight. Now that the budget is approved, its numbers will be incorporated into the forecast plan, effectively adding a year to the reference timeframe and increasing the accuracy of future projections. The 2018 budget and all the related information is available for members to examine. You can pick up budget and planning information at the co-op or access it on the BEC website.

There are several areas of primary focus that are driving the 2018 Budget. Here are the highlights:

- **NO CHANGE IN RATES!** If you do not read anything else in the 2018 Budget—know your rates will remain the same throughout 2018.

- **Deployment of BEC’s digital meter replacement project.** Based upon long delivery schedules for digital meters, 50% of the meters will be delivered in August 2018, with the balance in March 2019. The first digital meter is scheduled to be installed in Belfry, September 2018. Digital meter related work on five substations will be completed during the spring and summer of 2018. The remaining five substations will be completed in 2019. Budget $751,000.

- **Initiate a Vegetation Management Program that provides a 5 year rotation throughout BEC’s service territory.** The initial two years are funded at $220K with year 3 and beyond funded at $150K. Current tree trimming practices target areas of greatest need and customer outages from year to year. The Vegetation Management Plan will divide the service territory into 5 geographic areas and trim trees within the rights of way of one geographic area per year. After the 5th year, natural tree growth in the first area will require trimming again and the cycle repeats. Members can expect fewer outages and reduced operating costs from less overtime call-outs from tree related outages. Budget $220,000.
BEC BOARD APPROVES 2018 BUDGET—HEADLINER: NO CHANGE IN RATES!  continued from page 4.

- **Replace Staking/Mapping software.** The driving force behind the need for replacing our existing staking/mapping software is the age of the staking program, lack of support and vulnerability to loss of 17 years of data. The utility industry has made significant progress in this area over the years to fully integrate Mapping, Staking and GIS systems. BEC’s existing staking and mapping software is 17 years old and no longer supported and contains none of the integration requirements of GIS, Mapping and Staking functions. Budget: $56,824

- **POLES: Change-outs, testing & inspections.**
  1. 100 poles will be changed out in 2018 due to age and condition. BUDGET: $115,000.
  2. Pole testing and inspection will include 4 summer interns to expedite this process. The goal is to complete testing and inspection of all poles within the next four to five years.

- **Community Solar Research.** Initiate market research and member interest in a Community Solar Project with possible construction in 2019 based upon member financial commitment.

- **Alternative Rate Design.** Initiate discussion on possible alternative rate designs that offer fair and equitable cost recovery among members within and across all rate classes. The electric industry is being driven by new technology, distributed generation and customer choice. The BEC Board has chosen to deploy new digital meter reading technology and support customer choice without jeopardizing the Cooperative’s financial stability, system safety and reliability. Rate designs that support customer choice and meet the Cooperative’s objectives will be explored with member input in late 2018 and early 2019. Implementation targeted for late 2019 following a full scale Cost of Service Study.

Next month, join us as we begin in-depth coverage of the Digital Meter Replacement Project.

---

KATIE JACOBSEN NAMED BEC’S 2018 WASHINGTON D.C. YOUTH TOUR WINNER

The BEC Board of Trustees selected Red Lodge high school junior, Katie Jacobsen of Belfry, MT for this year’s representative to the Electric Cooperative Youth Tour in Washington, D.C. in June.

Ms. Jacobsen is a member of the Green team at Red Lodge High School. This organization focuses on how to be as Eco-friendly to the environment as possible. Her team has won, “Smart Schools in Montana,” for three years. The green team has successfully installed solar panels on top of the school, saving electric costs. Last year the Team did quite a bit of research on a wind turbine in hopes of acquiring one for the school. This year they are working on a project called “Pedal Power,” A bike share program within the Red Lodge community.

Katie is the vice president of the FFA organization for the Red Lodge High School chapter (she designed the logo for the HS FFA t-shirts) and also serves and the junior Student Council secretary. She is a leader on a youth committee that is trying to get a voice on city council committee meetings in order to improve communication through the high school, youth and the city.

Katie is an all-state athlete and captain of the XC team. She placed 5th in the state competition in pole vault and has lettered in both cross country and track.

Ms. Jacobsen is very involved with classical violin. She was awarded for two years in a row- Northwest College Showalter Best Performance Musicianship Award. She has also played in the Billings Youth Orchestra.

Katie is also very involved in serving in her church and community. Katie serves as a Youth Committee Representative. She has and continues to represent her local congregation on a committee of youth leaders from the different congregations in the area. Here she helps plan activities for the youth that will take place during the year. She reaches out to girls that need a friend and tries to involve them in helping others. She shares her art talent by sending hand-drawn cards to people that are sick or struggling emotionally. She has shared her musical talent with residents in rest homes and church congregations.

Ms. Jacobsen will join over 1,500 students from across the United States for a one-week all expenses paid trip to Washington, D.C. While on the Youth Tour, Katie will learn about electric cooperatives, American history and the United States government. Youth Tour participants will also visit the historic sites of the nation’s capital and spend time with their congressional leaders. The trip will be from June 9-15, 2018, with an orientation in Great Falls on June 8.

Congratulations Katie! BEC is proud to have you represent us in this year’s Washington D.C. Youth Tour.
Generators can be very helpful to consumers during outages. Beartooth Electric urges you to follow these safety guidelines when using one:

- Have a licensed electrician install the necessary equipment to safely connect generators to your home or business. Connecting the generator to your home’s circuits must be done by a qualified, licensed electrician who will install a transfer switch to prevent back-feeding into Beartooth’s circuits.

- Never connect a generator directly to your home’s wiring unless your home has been wired for generator use. This can cause back feeding along power lines and electrocute anyone coming in contact with them, including line workers making repairs.

- Always plug appliances directly into generator.

- Use heavy-duty, outdoor-rated extension cords. Make sure extension cords are free of cuts or tears and the plug has three prongs. Overloaded cords can cause fires or equipment damage.

- Ensure your generator is properly grounded.

- Never overload a generator. A portable generator should only be used when necessary to power essential equipment or appliances.

- Turn off all equipment powered by the generator before shutting it down.

- Keep the generator dry. Operate it on a dry surface under an open structure.

- Always have a fully charged fire extinguisher nearby.

- Never fuel a generator while it is operating.

- Read and adhere to the manufacturer’s instructions for safe operation. Never cut corners when it comes to safety.

Beartooth Electric encourages you to protect the well-being and safety of your family during outages, and safeguard those who come to your aid during emergency situations. When we work together for safety and the good of our communities, we all benefit. [541802]