

F E R G U S

FEATURES

Member Newsletter ♦ Fergus Electric Cooperative, Inc., Lewistown, MT ♦ www.ferguselectric.coop

Sharptail Lodge — a premier bird-hunting retreat

Story and photos by

Charlie Denison
Contributing Writer

Twenty years ago, Pro Outfitters owner and outfitter Brandon Boedecker met his best friend.

“He was a handsome orange and white setter with a kind heart and an energetic tail,” Brandon said. “I named him Mac and loaded him in the cab of my pickup.”

Brandon is an avid bird hunter, but it was Mac who taught him how to really hunt.

“Mac would run big, and if birds were around he would find them,” Brandon said. “We explored as a team from Cascade to Canada.”

Brandon often refers to Mac as a “bird-finding machine.”

“There were more points and retrieves over our partnership than I will ever remember,” he said.

Mac is no longer with Brandon, but he’s far from forgotten. The dog has a yurt named after him at Sharptail Lodge, a premier bird-hunting retreat and Pro Outfitters’ base of operation, located approximately 60 miles west of Lewistown, near Geyser.

A Butte native and former fishing guide, Brandon has owned Pro Outfitters since 2001. Walking around the lodge with him last month, getting a tour of the yurts and a feel for the experience, Brandon would sometimes smile and shake his head, still in disbelief that the place is his.

“It’s always been my dream to own my own bird-hunting lodge,” he said.

The hunting at this Orvis-endorsed operation isn’t easy, but Brandon likes it that way, as do his clients.



Owner Brandon Boedecker poses with Nancy, the friendly “lodge dog.”

“Our business isn’t based on the volume of birds you shoot,” he said. “It’s more about the experience and following the dogs. Clients come to see the country, it’s cool country — undeveloped. We lease over 100,000 acres, and we take our clients all over: Stanford, Utica, Geraldine, Highwood, Cascade. Sometimes we’ll drive an hour before we hunt.”

When hopping around the state with the hunters, Brandon said he brings them into town.

“We go to the local restaurants and

grocery stores,” he said. “We try to support the local economy as much as we can.”

Hunters who come out to the lodge focus on sharp-tailed grouse and Hungarian partridges. Like dogs, the guests are loyal, Brandon said, as 90 percent of them return.

“They come from all over,” he said.

Most of the guests bring dogs with them, and Brandon likes it that way. As far as he’s concerned, hunting is hardly worth it without a favorite hunting dog.

“If you can’t follow a dog, I don’t think it’s worth going,” he said.

Why yurts?

When Brandon started looking to set up guest cabins, he stumbled upon a website, www.livingintheround.org, all about the benefits of yurts.

“I was looking for something offbeat I could do for a bird lodge,” he said. “I called people who’d had them up, and I was checking on their longevity. I liked what I saw.”

Brandon also was impressed with a yurt’s ability to withstand damage from high gusts.

“Typically the wind is on and off awful out here, and yurts are supposed to be pretty wind-resistant,” he said.

The clients also enjoy the yurts’ atmosphere. Each yurt has a rustic, Western theme, with two queen beds, a bathroom and a plaque honoring the life of a bird dog.

“Guides I’ve been working with for 20-plus years picked their favorite dog

Continued on page 5



MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Scott Sweeney



Credit and debit card compliance

If you have recently been to or called Fergus Electric Cooperative to make a payment using your credit or debit card, you were likely told that Fergus Electric staff can no longer process credit or debit card transactions in the way you are accustomed.

The reason for the change is to provide its customers with protections against credit-card fraud, theft and data breach, our software provider, National Information Solutions Cooperative (NISC), has adopted the security standards required by the Payment Cardholder Industry (PCI).

You may hear office staff refer to Fergus Electric being "PCI compliant." To Fergus Electric, that means, we must take a "hands-off" approach when members want to use their debit or credit card to pay a bill. Members can now dial 1-844-425-4302 to reach Fergus Electric Co-op's pay-by-phone system. Please be sure to have a copy of your bill, along with your credit card or checking/savings account information, ready when you call. I think you will find this new method of making your payment by using a credit or debit card straight forward. If you have questions, please call 406-538-3465 and speak to someone in the billing department. They will be happy to help you!

Making payments by ACH

That said, there is another option that many members use, including myself, that works well. I have my electric billing account set up to be paid automatically out of my checking account through a monthly ACH process, which is possibly the easiest method available. Each month, I am assured that my bill is paid on time, whether I am at home or out of town.

By electing to make payments via ACH, funds are pulled directly from the account you have elected to set up. You can set up your account to have payments made via ACH on a recurring or one-time-only basis. Use the Smart Hub

App on your iPad or phone, or if you prefer, use Smart Hub Web, which is available on Fergus Electric Cooperative's website, to set up your payment method.

Checks and cash

Security is of the utmost importance to all businesses and individuals these days. Fergus Electric is no exception. We take your privacy very seriously, which is why we are taking these measures to protect your information. If electronic or telephonic payments are not for you, we accept checks or cash payments.

General retirement of capital credits

The board of directors approved a general retirement of capital credits for members who received power from Fergus Electric Co-op during 1984 and 1985. The total allocation of capital credits for those two years was a little greater than \$900,000. Given that the co-op's margins are strong this year, the board agreed that the 2017 distribution of capital credits will be for the balance of 1984 and 1985.

This is a significant retirement of capital credits, and we are pleased to return the margins earned by Fergus Electric Co-op to our members! We plan to mail capital credit general retirement checks in November.

Thanksgiving

On Thursday, November 23, we will celebrate Thanksgiving. There is much to be thankful for on any given day, but after a hot, dry summer, we are especially thankful for the recent moisture that gave the earth a much-needed drink and quenched the flames of the fires burning in areas of our state.

Fergus Electric Co-op is thankful and grateful for its hard-working employees who show their dedication and dependability to the co-op day after day, year after year!

We are very thankful and appreciative for all of our members! In turn, many of our members go out of their way to

thank our line crews and show appreciation for their hard work. We have members whose support of the co-op extends to potential future members. In 2017, the co-op was the recipient of our members' bigheartedness when the executors of the Leroy Strand Ranch generously paid it forward by donating \$30,890.58 in estate capital credits to provide scholarships to children of Fergus Electric Co-op's members.

We thank the members who said they were interested in and supportive of the co-op offering solar energy to its members, and have demonstrated their support by purchasing solar panels.

Our board of directors is made up of fellow members whom you elected to represent the entire membership. They give generously of their time to act on your behalf. We are thankful for their directorship; they serve the co-op well!

Fergus Electric Co-op's mission is to provide reliable, safe and affordable energy services to the communities we serve. We are thankful for the privilege of continuing to fulfill our mission! Happy Thanksgiving!

Identify Account Number*

Win a \$32.50 credit

If one of the following account numbers is yours, call Fergus Electric (406-538-3465) and identify yourself and your account number.

Account 394875

Account 318147

Account 260701

Account 134030

Account 379166

You will receive a \$32.50 credit on next month's statement.

**Numbers are drawn monthly.*

Last month's winner was Donald Cates of rural Lewistown.

Sharptail Lodge

Continued from page 3



Accommodations at the retreat are Western-themed yurts, each with two queen beds, a bathroom and a plaque honoring the life of a bird dog.

and wrote the dog's story," Brandon said.

Brandon's favorite yurt is of course the Mac yurt, but he's also a fan of the master yurt, which has a lounge room with a large flat-screen TV, a deck and a kitchen, which is often occupied by Sharptail Lodge Chef Michael Carlucci.

Fortunate chef

For the past 18 years, New Jersey native Michael has worked with Pro Outfitters in Montana, the state where he now feels most at home.

"I came out here around 2000. I thought I was going to hang out for a little bit, and I never left," he said.

A restaurant consultant who worked in some top-of-the-line restaurants in New York City and elsewhere, Michael said Montana is a blessing, and he

couldn't imagine living anywhere else.

An affinity for the Treasure State is something Michael, Brandon, the guides and the regular clients all share, and they enjoy having the opportunity to experience the Central Montana outdoors together.

"We're glad Michael fell in love with Montana," Brandon said. "And we can't blame him. It's happened to all of us."

Mac's memory lives on

The only thing that would make it better, Brandon said, is if Mac were still around.

He recalls fondly Mac's final hunt.

"Mac was diagnosed with cancer and started going downhill quickly," Brandon said. "He was limping and I'd pulled over to let another dog out on the long shelter belt. Mac jumped out, ran

down the shelter belt and pointed a bunch of birds. It was like he wasn't sick at all."

Mac died the next day.

"It was almost like his swan song," Brandon said.

Although there are many other dogs who point birds at Sharptail Lodge, Mac remains central to the operation, and he always will.

"He was a true and loyal friend that will forever be a part of my life," Brandon said. "He's buried just over the ridge behind the lodge. This allows him to look out over the vast prairie and see the sunset on the Highwoods, as we once did together."

For more information on Sharptail Lodge, go to www.prooutfitters.com.



Awards for all

Manager Scott Sweeney presents Vangie McConnell with a first-place award for her monthly member newsletter, *Fergus Features*, at the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association's annual meeting in Great Falls. Fergus Electric Cooperative was also recognized for a four-year accident-free record.

Don Criswell, Kerby Durbin, Bret Ophus, Dale Rikala and Tom Simons were honored for 25 years of outstanding service to Montana's rural electric cooperatives and to the national rural electric program.

Guy Johnson was recognized for his 30 years of dedicated service to the Montana and national cooperative community.



Give Thanks with a Grateful Heart

Dear Fergus Electric Linemen,

Thank you for working so hard to keep our electricity on.
Gladys Walling, Winifred

Fergus Electric Cooperative, Inc.,

Thank you for your added purse donation for the 2017 Roy Rodeo.
Roy Rodeo Club

Dear Fergus Electric Co-op,

Thank you so much for choosing me to go on a trip that I will never forget (Youth to Washington Tour). When my dad told me I had won the trip I was shocked. I loved it.
Alyssa Thomas, Hobson

Dear Fergus Electric Cooperative,

Our family is so appreciative of your Shrine Circus sponsorship! We had such a wonderful time taking our 1- and 3-year-old boys to the circus.
Cameron, Angie, Jake & Ian Berger, Moore

Dear Fergus Electric,

Thank you for the "luck of the draw" scholarship! I'm looking forward to attending Rocky Mountain College to study aviation. I will also run track for the Battlin' Bears.
Haiden Collins, Lewistown

Dear Fergus Electric Cooperative:

Your generous donation made it possible for Anna Slivka and Lorianne Stulc to attend the National Business Professionals of America Leadership Conference in Orlando.
Sincerely, Cheryl Udelhoven, Advisor, Winifred

Fergus Electric,

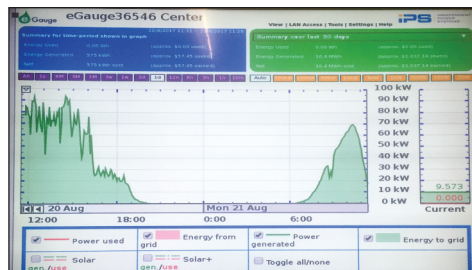
Thank you for donating your time to present at Farm Safety Day! The high-voltage safety demonstration with the "sparks" was a favorite.
Fergus/Petroleum 4-H Ambassadors: Jada Hartman, Morgan Ward, Berkley Stroh & Tova Gerer

Fergus Electric Crews,

Thank you to the crews from those affected by the Winnett fire at the end of August. They did a fine job.
Janet Kiehl, Winnett

Thanks so much,

I would like to express my gratitude for the quick response of Fergus Electric to our fire in Grass Range. Bret and Brian did an awesome job! It is so nice to know that you guys are always available.
Becky Cushing, Grass Range Rural Fire Department



SOLAR ARRAY PROJECT. Photos clockwise: Line Supt. Dale Rikala and project manager Dan Perata of Independent Power Systems; Janine Rife Didier, Mike Vlastelic and Melanie Foran were instrumental in moving the project along; solar array monitoring system; part of group that turned out in the rain for the ribbon cutting ceremony. For additional information see page 10.

Fergus Electric Cooperative, Inc.
 LEWISTOWN, MT
 Your Touchstone Energy® Partner

- FOR OUTAGES**
- First:** Check the fuses or breakers in the building in which the electricity is off.
 - Second:** Check the breaker below the meter.
 - Third:** If electricity is still out, call a neighbor to see if they have electricity.
 - Fourth:** Call 406-538-3465 day or night or:
- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------|
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| Scott Sweeney | 406-538-7218 |
| Don Criswell (Roundup) | 406-366-3465 |
| Monte Obert | 406-425-1288 |
| Melanie Foran | 406-462-5650 |

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Fergus Electric is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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- Fergus Features is an award-winning newsletter.