

F E R R I G U S

FEATURES

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

Fishing with a Flare

Brett Nienhuis creates one-of-a-kind custom drift boats

Story and photos by

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Contributing Writer

“Where did you get that boat?” That’s the question Brett Nienhuis is often asked when out fishing.

And it’s his favorite question to answer.

“I made it,” he says.

Owner and operator of Big Fish Boatworks, Nienhuis has spent the last 12 years building custom drift boats for anyone and everyone interested.

“Whatever you want in a boat, just let me know,” he said. “You draw it on a bar napkin and I can figure out how to build it.”

Nienhuis and his two-man crew mean it. Whether interior, paint, custom covers, ready-to-fish or basic model and trailer, they’ve got you covered.

‘The fifth dimension’

Creating drift boats is an art form for Nienhuis, and it’s something that comes quite naturally after almost 30 years of experience with aluminum fabrication.

“Aluminum is my specialty,” he said. “Everything Big Fish Boatworks makes is 100-percent welded. I offer a lifetime guarantee on the welds, as long as they haven’t been abused or damaged by Mother Nature.”

Nienhuis goes beyond just any aluminum drift boat: He gets creative.

“I like to think outside the box,” he



Big Fish Boatworks owner Brett Nienhuis is seen with his pink “Casting for a Cure” drift boat he built to raise awareness for breast cancer.

said. “I like to say I try and think in the fifth dimension.”

Stirring it up

Considering Nienhuis has more than 30 years of Steelhead and Salmon fishing experience, it’s safe to say he knows boats.

“I’ve seen a lot of boats,” he said. “I’ve been fishing since I was 4, and I’ve been rowing since I was 12. My dad and grandpa would take me out a lot growing up in Washington. Actually, my dad guided when I was younger. After a while, I was approached by an outfitter in Idaho — The Guide Shop — and I still guide for them.”

Through the years, Nienhuis said he’s “rode pretty much every brand of drift boat manufactured.”

Instead of always riding the same ones, he decided he could try to make a

more comfortable boat for fishermen.

“Big Fish” drift boats are built for the convenience of those on board. Bigger than the average drift boat, they range from 15- to 21-foot long.

“The extra length gives the fisherman more room and more stability,” he said. “Our boats draft less water fully loaded with gear and people than any boat of comparable size.”

“Big Fish” boats also have a 72-inch bottom. As far as Nienhuis knows, they are the only company that makes bottoms that size.

“All other drift boats have a continuous radius on their bottom. Ours have a straight line on each side, which allows for a flatter bottom, giving us less draft,” he said. “This means we have less boat in the water, making it easier to row.”





MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Scott Sweeney

Lineman Appreciation

April 9 is NRECA Lineman Appreciation Day. On behalf of the board and staff members, I want to extend our sincere appreciation and thanks to all our lineworkers for their continued hard work and dedication!

Recommended addition to cooperative bylaws

To help clear up delinquent accounts and reduce the amount of time staff spends attempting to collect past-due balances, the board of directors, staff and I are proposing an addition to Section 7.2 of Article VII of the co-op's bylaws, which the members will be asked to vote on at our annual meeting on June 7, 2018.

The suggested addition permits the board of directors to adopt a policy allowing Fergus Electric Cooperative to offset or recoup a member's unpaid power bill with accrued capital credits, and permits the board to discount the capital credits used for this purpose to the net present value, at the time of offset or recoupment.

Board of directors position open

Last month in my *Manager's Message*, I reported that the board of directors will be interviewing interested candidates for District 2 in the

March/April timeframe. Although several members inquired about the available position, due to snowstorms and bad roads during March, the board has not begun the interview process.

Members interested in running for the board, whose principal residence is in District 2, should contact the office at 406-538-3465 or email ferguselectric@ferguselectric.coop or contact any of the current board members listed on Page 6 of the *Rural Montana* magazine.

District 2 includes the Glengarry, Kolin and Straw substation areas, as well as the Nihill West area, which includes members west of Highway 191 and north of Highway 12 in Wheatland and Meagher counties.

April is budget billing annual enrollment month

April is budget billing enrollment month. To qualify for our budget billing program, your account must be billed under a residential rate class, the account must have been active at that location for the past 12 months and the account must be paid in full before converting to budget billing.

In addition to April being the only month for enrollment, it is also the "true-up" month for members already enrolled in budget billing. This means

whether you have a credit or a balance due; your electric billing account will be adjusted accordingly. Call the office at 406-538-3465 if you are interested in enrolling in budget billing or learning more about the program.

SmartHub

Use the SmartHub app on your iPad or phone, or if you prefer, use SmartHub Web, which is available on Fergus Electric Cooperative's website, to set up your payment method. In addition to paying your monthly power bill, you can check and monitor your monthly usage, and view your current or previous monthly billing statement.

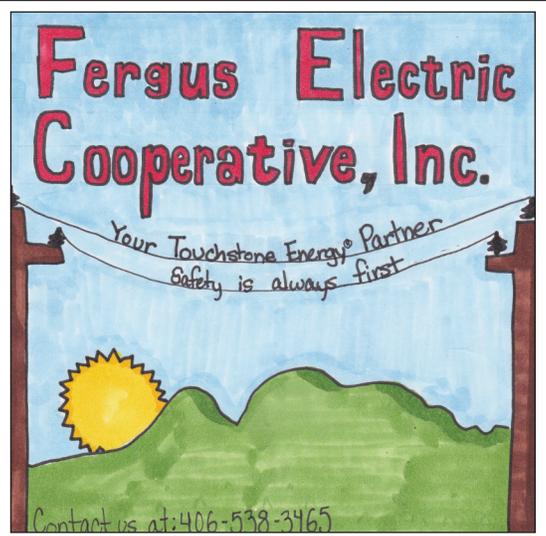
Annual meeting bylaw amendment

The recommended addition to Section 7.2 of article VII of the bylaws is as follows:

Notwithstanding any other provision of these Bylaws, the Board in its discretion is hereby authorized to adopt a policy allowing the Cooperative to offset, set off, or recoup a member's unpaid power bill with accrued capital credits. Further, the Board policy may permit the Cooperative to discount the capital credits used for this purpose to the net present value, at the time of offset, set off, or recoupment.

Newspapers, Business and Education — An Amazing Partnership

Newspapers in Education is designed to introduce newspapers into the classroom, and to get students thinking about the newspaper industry. Students were encouraged to visit the business whose ad they would compose. Under the supervision of Krystal Ferguson, art teacher at Lewistown Junior High School, Jaden Swan chose to create an advertisement for Fergus Electric Cooperative. Jaden received a third-place award for her efforts.



Fishing *Continued from page 3*



From left: Brett Nienhuis welds aluminum. All “Big Fish” drift boats are 100-percent welded; Nienhuis demonstrates his handicap-accessible boat; “The Patriot” is his favorite custom drift boat. Boat photos courtesy of Brett Nienhuis.

Nienhuis makes boats this way to make life easier for the fisherman, and he’s happy to cater to any special needs, especially when it comes to interior options, which include rod holders, coolers, heaters, side trays, rod lockers, cup holders, tackle storage, seating capacity, moveable seats and more.

“The boat can be as basic or as elaborate as you want,” he said.

Clever customs

Although often consistent with size, Nienhuis is crafty when it comes to design. In 2016, he made a theme boat to raise awareness for breast cancer called “Casting For a Cure (Tough Enough To Row a Pink Boat).”

“That boat gets a lot of attention on the river,” he said. “I appreciate that. It means it’s doing its job.”

Last year, Nienhuis made a red, white and blue boat with all military insignias on it called “The Patriot,” which he dedicated to his father, a Vietnam veteran.

“When I’m guiding, I often have veterans request the boat,” he said. “That’s pretty special.”

Special requests

Nienhuis and his crew don’t back down from a good challenge. Just recently, they were asked to make a

handicap-accessible boat. Taking a risk, the crew cut a chunk out of an aluminum drift boat, creating a 27-inch door so an individual wheelchair can wheel right in.

“I was a little nervous to take a chunk out of a perfectly good brand new boat, but you don’t know if you don’t try,” Nienhuis said. “Thomas Edison failed 1,000 times before he got the light bulb to work.”

Fortunately, Nienhuis didn’t have to cut up 1,000 boats; he got it right on the first attempt.

“I even bought a wheelchair to try it out,” he said. “I’m glad it worked out. We wanted to take accessibility to the next level.”

Nienhuis debuted the boat at a “Hunting With Heroes” event in Wyoming last spring that celebrates U.S. veterans.

Anything goes

Nienhuis is just getting started, as he has many other one-of-a-kind drift boats on the way.

“I’m working on a low-sided one now,” he said. “It’s going to be something like no one has ever seen in an aluminum boat.”

Nienhuis will keep thinking outside the box, and he encourages potential

customers to do the same. But whether the boat requires him to go to the fifth dimension or not, Nienhuis is happy to be doing what he’s doing.

“I truly love building boats for people,” Nienhuis said, “I also love doing repairs. If you need something done in a hurry, I’ll try to squeeze you in. I don’t want anybody to miss a day of fishing.”

For more information on Big Fish Boatworks, go to www.bigfishboatworks.com or find it on Facebook. You can also call Nienhuis at (406) 366-2044.

Unclaimed Capital Credits

Fergus Electric Cooperative is attempting to locate former members who received electric service from the co-op during 1984, 1985 and 1986 to deliver a capital credit check to them or their heirs. A list of unclaimed capital credit recipients is posted on the website www.ferguselectric.coop and a link to the list is on Facebook at www.facebook.com/ferguselectric. If you recognize any of the names and have current contact information, please call Fergus Electric Cooperative at 406-538-3465.

Anna Slivka and Kallie Zinne write winning essays

Each November central Montana sophomores and juniors vie for a trip to Washington, D.C., by writing an essay on an assigned topic. This year's topic was: "Electric cooperatives offer various opportunities to young people such as scholarships, job shadowing, electrical safety programs and sponsorships. What are some innovative ways your electric cooperative can connect with young people, especially with children and teens?"

A Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association committee selected one state winner, and other co-op submittals were declared cooperative winners. This year, the Fergus Electric Cooperative board of directors voted to send two students to Washington, D.C. Anna Slivka of Winifred and Kallie Zinne of Ryegate will represent the co-op in the nation's capital this summer.

Parents are Fergus Electric members Shane and Erin Slivka of Winifred and Todd and Lea Ann Zinne of Ryegate.

Top to bottom: Anna Slivka and Kallie Zinne



Identify Account Number*

Win a \$32 credit

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

Accounts 396052 • 394971
Accounts 378889 • 242650
Accounts 321185 • 210151
Accounts 298300 • 93400

You will receive a \$32 credit on next month's statement.

*Numbers are drawn randomly.

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:

Dale Rikala	406-366-3374
Guy Johnson	406-366-9170
Scott Sweeney	406-538-7218
Don Criswell (Roundup)	406-366-3465
David Dover	406-366-1975
Melanie Foran	406-462-5650

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Fergus Features is an award-winning newsletter.

Are you safe?

When temperatures drop, children need extra attention to stay warm, safe and healthy. Young children are less likely to recognize when they are cold, and are more likely to lose body heat quickly due to their smaller size. One important tip to protect children when the thermometer dips is to put several layers of clothing on your child and make sure their head, neck and hands are covered. Dress babies and very young children in one more layer than an adult would wear. If you see a child who is consistently underdressed and not protected, it is a good time to contact local authorities.

Prevent Home Fires

- Install smoke alarms and carbon-monoxide alarms; change the batteries at least once a year in these devices.
- Plan — and practice — an escape route, and agree on a meeting place outside of your home.
- Know two ways out of every room in the house.
- Learn how to use your fire extinguisher.