

# FERGUS

## FEATURES

Member Newsletter ♦ Fergus Electric Cooperative, Inc., Lewistown, MT ♦ [www.ferguselectric.coop](http://www.ferguselectric.coop)



## MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Carson Sweeney

**A**s we embark on a new year, I wanted to highlight several of the infrastructure projects we have planned for 2026.

Members will see our crews replacing circuit protection equipment and installing fuses in the Ruby Gulch, Hilger, Harlowton, Spion Kop, Nihil and Musselshell areas. We will also be changing out distribution poles in the areas of Grass Range, Winnett, Hilger and Straw. In the spring and summer, we will begin replacing 8.5 miles of vintage underground cable along South Fork in the Little Belt Mountains and Christina West Road.

We continue to see member growth throughout the Roundup service territory. To accommodate existing and future load growth, we have ordered a new 5 megavolt-amperes (MVA) substation transformer for our North Roundup Substation. The lead time on this equipment is approximately 40 weeks. We expect to take delivery and install the equipment in the fall of 2026. Our Roundup crew will also be rerouting an existing overhead line near the Musselshell river in an area prone to flooding and riverbank erosion. We will be relocating the powerline to a more suitable location with improved access.

Our engineering team will also be working through the design details of future projects. In 2026 we will begin planning a route to replace the exist-

## Infrastructure and maintenance projects are planned for 2026



Apprentice Lineman Jason Deffinbaugh is tying a phase on a new three-phase line. A number of infrastructure projects are planned for 2026.

ing 50 kilovolt (kV) transmission line from Hilger to Roy. This line segment is our most problematic line, and the replacement will significantly reduce the frequency and duration of outages for members in the area. The construction for this project is planned for 2027 and 2028. We will also be designing a steel substation to replace our existing wood substation at Winnett Junction. We intend to reuse a retired electric cooperative substation near Sidney and relocate it for service in our territory.

As always, we will continue with our consistent maintenance and tree-trimming efforts to improve system reliability. Our increased investment in tree removal is paying dividends during storm and wind events. Our capital investments for 2026 are similar to previous years, and continue the progression of our strategic plan and consistent financials year after year.

We look forward to 2026 and wish a Happy New Year to all members of Fergus Electric Cooperative!

RM

# It was a productive, busy year at the co-op

MANY of us were not ready for the blast of winter that greeted us in January 2025. During that month, Manager Carson Sweeney elected to close the office twice due to the severely cold temperatures and the heavy blizzard that ripped through our area. Heavy, drifting snow caused extreme road conditions and road closures. The Department of Transportation asked drivers not to attempt to drive. Many employees' driveways and streets were drifted shut. Closing was the safest, most practical decision given the circumstances.

The weather settled a bit and line crews were busy making repairs to members' service wires from heavy snow and member tear downs. In addition to making repairs, throughout the remainder of January, many hours were spent moving snow in the yard and making access to substations as the snow was relentless.

From February 13-18, 2025, Darek Dygert and Dan Rice, two of our journeyman linemen, were able to escape the cold weather of Montana and join 13 other linemen from 11 other Montana co-ops and travel to Guatemala as part of the Cocalitos electrification project. It was an amazing experience for them, one they will never forget, and one for which they were happy to have volunteered. Ryan Hall, Communications Director/*Rural Montana* Editor, documented the events in Guatemala and wrote a story that was featured in the April 2025, *Rural Montana* magazine.

Back home in central Montana, the heavy, deep snow of January was replaced with muddy and flooding conditions. Nonetheless, Roundup's line crew had a goal of testing 1,500 poles in the Lavina area in 2025, so the job of pole testing began.

After 21 years as Line Superintendent, Dale Rikala prepared to retire. On February 26, Tyson Ruff was promoted to assistant line superintendent. Newly promoted Line Superintendent Bret Ophus was busy transitioning into his new role, while training Ruff for his. Ruff's previous foreman position was filled by Mark Schwomeyer, who had held the co-op's transformer repairman position for several years. It was a busy time of learning and training.

Perhaps spurred by the volatile weather we experienced in January, or maybe it was driven by the reasonable cost of the devices, whichever, the Generac Generators that the co-op offers began selling quickly. All 39 of our 22 kilowatt (KW) generators sold, plus 11 more of a different size, for a total of 50 sold so far in 2025, and it was only March.



Journeyman Lineman Dakota Wahl is getting ready to deadend wires during a pole replacement procedure.

By the end of the first quarter, Lewistown had received about 30 requests for new services, and Roundup had seven requests for line extensions. The Lewistown crews were changing poles and cutting trees in the Winnett area. They finished six highway projects between Lewistown and Grass Range. Roundup had tested about 1,000 poles north of Lavina, completed five new services, cleared rights-of-way, and were doing P2 maintenance tickets in the Ryegate area.

When May arrived, line crews had been testing poles in the Geyser area. They had been doing a lot of underground work, replacing overhead lines and adding new line extensions. Clearing rights-of-ways was going well. ROW Groundman Jake deRosier and Tyson Ruff met with the

Forest Service to review tree trimming on their properties. In June, deRosier and Journeyman Lineman Dan Rice began clearing the ROW on Indian Hill up South Fork of the Judith. This was no small feat. The men had to hike in, carrying all their gear, as there was no way to drive to the areas they were working. By July, the two-man team had cleared 9.5 acres of heavily wooded sidehill, cutting just over 1,000 trees. Their part of the work was done, and they were elated to be off that mountain and onto flat ground.

July's weather brought very strong lightning, rain and wind. One storm took down 20 poles on the line going to Rattlesnake Oil Field.

On August 18, we welcomed Luke Wood, who joined our team as a full-time journeyman lineman. Wood hit the ground running as there hadn't been any slowdown in new line extension activity yet. Usually there is a lull in mid-to-late summer, followed by a rush to get the work done before winter. This year the engineers continued to receive plenty of requests for line extensions across our system. The engineers were also preparing for more 2025 projects – conductor replacement, pole replacement, sectionalizing and the rebuilding of the Carters Substation, to name a few.

Line crews were doing more pole testing in the Spion Kop area. The drone pilots flew the lines out of the South Roundup and Ruby Gulch Substations, and crews chased plenty of outages. Strong lightning and wind gave our system a true test.

September 19, we welcomed our new Right-of-Way Groundman Travis McAlpin. He would team up with ROW Specialist Jake deRosier, and work to continue implementing our Wildfire Mitigation Plan.

Our engineers continued working with contractors to complete pole replacements and upgrades in the Buffalo area, near the Utica Substation, and the Winnett area.

By September 2025, Lewistown had completed 51 new line extensions and



Montana linemen, including Fergus Electric's Darek Dygert and Dan Rice, along with linemen from the local cooperative pose for a picture on the road to Cocalitos, a village in Guatemala.



Apprentice Lineman Jason Deffinbaugh works on storm repair.

Roundup 25, we added 206 and retired 262 poles year-to-date, and had tested approximately 2,800 poles, completed P2 maintenance tickets, trimmed trees and worked on outages. There was still plenty of work ahead in all those categories, which would keep crews busy for the remainder of the year.

Line Superintendent Bret Ophus said, "I have good faith we will be able to meet our yearly goals, and that all this work will pay off in good dividends."

On November 3, Bryce Alexander began work for the co-op as a ground-

man lineman. We were pleased to have Bryce join our team.

Line extensions finally began to slow down. Engineers compiled work to be completed by the end of 2025. Pole testing concluded for the year in Lewistown. In November, Roundup had about 500 poles left to test in the Lavina area, which they would finish in early December. Roundup was also working on 5.5 miles of underground wire change out of the Musselshell area.

By early December, the maintenance tickets from drone patrol were all but done. There were a few system-wide issues yet to clean up. The crew in Lewistown would be working on sectionalizing in the Straw, Ruby Gulch and Hilger areas. A team of six employees spent several days working to revamp and reorganize all the inventory and shelving in the warehouse. The update also included barcoding, which provides better ways to track, order and keep our inventory supply in order. The upgrade provides us with a much more efficient and cost-effective system. The project had been a work in progress for a couple of years. It took a lot of coordination between our material suppliers, our software provider and our employees to get to this point. Staking Engineer Melanie Foran, PE was instrumental in spearheading the project.

2025 was indeed another busy, productive year at the co-op. We wish everyone a healthy, happy and prosperous New Year as we welcome 2026!

# SCHOLARSHIPS



## MECA, Fergus offer scholarships

**T**o qualified students whose parents are cooperative members: If you are a high school senior planning to attend college or are a student continuing an undergraduate education, you could win a \$1,000 scholarship from Fergus Electric Cooperative and have a chance to win a \$500 scholarship from the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association (MECA).

Scholarship applicants must: 1) Be a member of Fergus Electric Cooperative, 2) Be a graduating high school senior with plans to attend a university or vocational /technical school, or be an undergraduate college student, 3) Submit a completed application to Fergus Electric that includes school transcripts, ACT/SAT scores, a personal statement and one letter of recommendation, and: 4) Submit entries to Fergus Electric postmarked no later than March 6, 2026 to MECA/Fergus Scholarship Committee, Fergus Electric Cooperative 84423 U.S. Highway 87, Lewistown, MT 59457.

Criteria for scholarship judging includes 20 percent academic strength (as demonstrated by coursework, GPA and national testing scores); 20 percent activities in school and community, awards and honors; 20 percent employment, volunteerism and community service and 40 percent personal statement.

Fergus Electric will select one application to be forwarded to MECA in Great Falls for further judging. A MECA committee will choose the scholarship recipients from the pool of finalists. Fergus Electric will also award one scholarship from the applications.

For more information, contact Debby at 406-538-3465. Please click on both links to open the Application Information and the MECA Application. The MECA website also carries the application and information about the scholarship. In addition, the December issue of the *Fergus Features* newsletter in *Rural Montana* will cover the scholarship. RM

## Basin scholarship is due Feb. 24

**F**ERGUS Electric's power supplier, Basin Electric Power Cooperative, is offering a \$2,500 scholarship to the dependent of a member/consumer.

The applicant must be a student who is enrolled or planning to enroll in a full-time graduate or undergraduate course of study at an accredited, two-year or four-year college, university or vocational/technical school.

Scholarship recipients are selected based on academic record, potential to succeed, leadership and participation in school and community activities, honors, work experience, a statement of education and career goals, and an

outside appraisal. The essay topic for the 2025 Essay Scholarship is: "How does the electricity provided by your electric cooperative improve the quality of life in your community?"

A scholarship application and essay topic are available below. Contact Debby at 406-538-3465 for more information or to request a copy of the application.

Mail completed applications to Basin Scholarship, Fergus Electric Cooperative, 84423 U.S. Highway 87, Lewistown, MT 59457 postmarked no later than February 24, 2026. RM

## IDENTIFY ACCOUNT NUMBER\*

### WIN A \$34 CREDIT

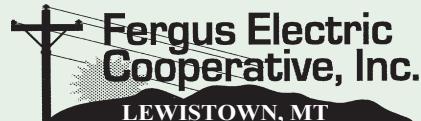
If one of the following account numbers is yours, call Fergus Electric (406-538-3465) and identify yourself and your account number, and you will receive a \$34.00 credit on next month's statement.

**Account 37910, Account 396251  
Account 397558, Account 345635  
Account 395167, Account 395120**

### CONGRATULATIONS!

**Loyd Bantz** of Grass Range, **Lynn Lipps** of Roundup, and **Thomas Wichman** of Moore were last month's winners.

\* NUMBERS ARE DRAWN MONTHLY



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:

Tyson Ruff .....	406-366-9830
Bret Ophus .....	406-366-7523
Bret Nellermoe (Roundup) .....	406-939-0636
Carson Sweeney .....	406-366-0971
Melanie Foran .....	406-462-5650
Scott Olson .....	406-366-5822
Dan Balster .....	406-366-0975

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**Bret Ophus** .....Line Superintendent

**Sally Horacek** .....Office Manager

**Janine Rife Didier** .....Editor

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