

NOVEMBER 2024

VIGILANTE ELECTRIC  
COOPERATIVE

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LOWER SNAKE RIVER DAMS

# NRECA against dam breaching

**T**HE National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) is fighting the Biden Administration's latest action to move toward breaching the lower Snake River dams that provide clean, carbon-free hydro-power to 55 electric cooperatives in eight Western states.

On Sept. 20, the Department of Energy announced that it would launch a study to explore how to "replace the power and services provided by the four lower Snake River dams" in southeast Washington.

"It's difficult to imagine why anyone would want to breach the four dams on the Lower Snake River — 3,000 megawatts of always-available, carbon-free capacity," NRECA CEO Jim Matheson told co-op CEOs and directors last month at NRECA's Regions 7 and 9 Meeting, where the dams were a big topic of discussion.

Matheson vowed that "NRECA will be very aggressive in advocating for the dams."

Louis Finkel, NRECA's senior vice president of government relations, said the association has already met with the transition teams of Vice President Kamala Harris and former President Donald Trump.

NRECA wants to ensure that the next president — regardless of who wins — will

come to office understanding how important the dams are to reliable, affordable power in the West, Finkel said.

"Our passion is a reflection of your passion about this issue," Finkel told co-op leaders at the regional meeting.

The DOE study comes in the wake of a settlement agreement reached in late 2023 among the Biden administration, environmental groups, and tribal and state governments over the federal government's operation of the dams, which plaintiffs said are threatening the survival of endangered salmon. The settlement supports breaching the dams and replacing them with other types of renewable energy.

In January, Matheson testified before the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Energy, Climate and Grid Security, warning that efforts to breach the dams threaten the region's power supply, and would hurt farmers and economically disadvantaged rural communities.

Although it would take an act of Congress to breach the dams, the settlement agreement and DOE study show that the administration's actions are "all geared to putting

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# Wharton receives Life Saver Award

**T**HE Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association's (MECA) Life Saver Awards are presented to any employee or board member of a cooperative whose actions saved or potentially saved another person's life. At this year's MECA annual meeting, Charles Wharton, who is an area foreman in our Dillon shop, was one of the recipients.

Charles was paddleboarding at Clark Canyon Dam, when he heard a man on shore shouting. The man's 3-year old daughter had drifted quite a ways from

shore on an innertube and was not wearing a lifejacket. Charles paddled over and was able to get the little girl on his paddleboard, and take her back to her dad.

The award reads, "For citizenship, exemplary of our rural cooperative family, in saving the life of another individual." His alert, responsive and selfless action serves as a model for us all.

Vigilante Electric Cooperative would like to congratulate Charles on this well-deserved award. RM



# Gary Ferris recognized for 25 years of service at VEC



**T**HE Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association (MECA) hosts its annual meeting in Great Falls each year. As part of the awards program, MECA honors cooperative trustees and employees for their years of dedicated service. This year, Gary Ferris was recognized for his 25 years of service to our

organization.

Gary came to work at Vigilante Electric Cooperative in October 1998 and is an integral part of our engineering/operations team. On behalf of Vigilante Electric, we would like to congratulate and thank Gary for his service and dedication to our organization. RM

# Co-op Principle #6: When Help is Needed

**C**OOPERATIVE principles are guidelines that help cooperatives put their values into practice. These principles ensure that cooperatives operate in a way that is democratic, equitable, and beneficial to their members and communities. While we have repeatedly written about principle #7, "Concern for Community," this summer has provided us with several shining examples of principle #6, "Cooperation Among Cooperatives."

This principle emphasizes that cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the cooperative movement by working together through local, regional, national and international structures. While this principle has been fundamental in the evolution of the cooperative movement, it takes on a special meaning when disaster strikes.

At the time of this article, the East Coast is dealing with

*See HELP, next page*



Pictured is storm damage sustained in Missoula Electric Cooperative's service territory. This was one of two storms this past summer in which Vigilante Electric linemen assisted in power restoration efforts.

**| MISSOULA ELECTRIC PHOTO**

# SCHOLARSHIPS

FOUR \$500 SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE, APPLY BY JAN. 24

**I**f you are a high school senior planning to attend college or are a student continuing an undergraduate education, you could win a scholarship from the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association (MECA). Four \$500 scholarships (one from each of the four districts in MECA) will be awarded to qualified students.

To qualify for the scholarships, the applicant must:

- Be a member (parent, guardian or self) of Vigilante Electric Cooperative (VEC);
- Be a graduating high school senior with plans to attend a university or vocational technical school, or be an undergraduate college student;
- Attach a copy of their school transcripts, grades and ACT/SAT scores;
- List all activities in school and community, awards and/or honors received and a description of any extracurricular activities and volunteer service in a resumé-style format;
- List all high school and/or college employment, including employer, position and hours worked weekly during the school year and/or the summer;
- Include a personal statement – write about how your

school/community/work activities will influence your goals and career choice. This statement should be no more than two, double-spaced typed pages. Please do not use AI to write your personal statement. Statements may be run through an AI checker;

- Attach one letter of recommendation;
- Submit entries to Vigilante Electric no later than Jan. 24, 2025.

## Judging criteria

The criteria for scholarship judging includes: **20 percent** – academic strength (as demonstrated by course, 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.

VEC will select one application to be forwarded to MECA for further judging. A MECA committee will choose the four scholarship recipients from the pool of finalists.

For an application or for more information, contact VEC or go to our website, or go online to [www.mtco-ops.com](http://www.mtco-ops.com). RM

## SNAKE RIVER

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forward a trajectory toward breaching the dams,” Finkel said.

The DOE’s action comes as the Bonneville Power Administration, which provides power to co-ops from the dams, warned in its latest Pacific Northwest Loads and Resources Study that the region will experience rapidly escalating energy deficits in just three years, as demand for electricity grows.

In addition to advocacy efforts by NRECA and co-op leaders, NRECA has activated its grassroots network – Voices for Cooperative Power – to oppose breaching the dams, said Kelly Cushman, NRECA’s vice president of political programs.

Last December, about 20,000 co-op consumer-members and employees who belong to VCP signed a petition calling on President Joe Biden to abandon any plans to breach the dams. The signatures were collected over a seven-day period and delivered to the White House. RM

## HELP

*Continued from previous page*

the aftermath of Hurricanes Helene and Milton. Their destructive force left millions of people without power and when the call for help went out, American electric cooperatives stepped up and sent line crews to help.

A little closer to home, destructive wind wreaked havoc in the service territories of Missoula Electric Cooperative (MEC) and Ravalli Electric Cooperative. MEC alone lost over 100 poles between the two storms. As part of a mutual aid agreement, Vigilante Electric sent crews to help MEC restore power to its members.

While we are proud of the resiliency of our distribution system, we too can experience situations like this, and we know that when we call for help, help will come. Cooperation among cooperatives is a tried-and-true principle that we are proud to honor. It is who we are and it is part of the cooperative spirit. RM



# When the lights go out

## Tips to prepare for and deal with power outages

**A**T Vigilante Electric Cooperative, our mission is to provide reliable electricity at the lowest possible cost. While we take pride in our daily efforts to stay true to this mission, outages do and will happen, and we want you to be prepared.

Outages can occur for several reasons: severe weather, equipment failure, planned maintenance, animals and human error. The duration of an outage can be as variable as the cause. In our service territory, the trouble spot plays a significant role in how long it will take us to restore power.

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### When your power goes out, we recommend you do the following:

1. Check your meter to see if the display is on;
  2. Check your breaker, which is typically located under the meter. If the breaker is tripped, you can reset it by firmly pushing it to the off position and then back on;
  3. Look around your neighborhood for lights. This helps determine how widespread the outage is; and finally
  4. Call our office: 406-683-2327 or 800-221-8271.
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We understand that outages are inconvenient and frustrating, but they will happen. The more prepared you are before an outage, the better. Ensure you have bottled water, first-aid supplies and necessary medications, non-perishable food, flashlights and batteries.

Outages in the winter could affect a home's ability to create and/or distribute heat. If you have a wood stove or fireplace, use it; if not, keep extra blankets handy. Also, avoid repeatedly going in and out of the house. You want to avoid introducing cold air into the home when the power goes out.

We often get questions about food storage. Without electricity, the refrigerator can keep food safe for several hours, and the freezer even longer. The key is keeping the doors shut.

For a person on oxygen, you must use your portable system until power is restored. Ensure your portable respirator is working properly and your spare tanks are full. Also, contact us regarding your situation. In the event of a planned outage, we will call you so you can plan ahead.

If you are working from home, an outage becomes problematic. Electricity is part of the gateway to the cyber universe because your computer, modems and wireless routers all need electricity to function.

Short of malware and viruses, nothing is worse for the reliability of your computer than power outages. To minimize the potential damage from power fluctuations, have all of your office electronics plugged directly into power strips rated for surge protection.

We also recommend that if you are using a desktop computer in your home business, consider using an uninterruptible power supply (UPS). A UPS is a battery backup that allows you time to save your work and shut down your computer correctly. A UPS can also provide integrated surge protection.

At the time of this article, the East Coast was dealing with the destruction left behind by hurricanes Helene and Milton. In Montana, a neighboring cooperative dealt with devastating windstorms that left members without power for days. While limited in scope, the Deep Creek Fire gave our organization a sample of dealing with a catastrophic event. Our focus remains on keeping our system in the best condition possible. For you, the focus should be on preparing for what could happen. RM

