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MANAGER'S MOMENT **Changes on horizon**

BY MARK DOYLE, GENERAL MANAGER



Mark Doyle

I would appreciate a moment of your time... Reliable, affordable delivery of electricity is our mission. We are constantly making sure our system is up to the task of being reliable by doing system upgrades and maintenance. The other part of our mission is to make it affordable.

We are fortunate to have a stable energy provider, Central Power Electric Cooperative, that is projecting relatively stable rates for the foreseeable future. On our

end, we are always reviewing our rate structure to make sure we are allocating our costs to you in a fair and equitable way.

With the evolution of the electric industry, it is anticipated we will need to make some adjustments to our rate structure. In the near future, you will hear terms like coincidental and non-coincidental, grid access and base/customer charge.

Please keep in mind as these changes are proposed, we are making sure they are fair and equitable for the membership.

As always, feel free to reach out to me with any questions or comments. My door is always open. ■



**STAY BACK.
STAY SAFE.**

Always assume a downed power line is energized. Downed lines can energize the ground to 35 feet away.





Rows of wire line an area in McLean Electric Cooperative's materials yard, with a stack of 35-foot poles ready for installation.

THE 'TO-DO' LIST: four-year construction work plan

Striving to ensure electric reliability now and in the future

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

Some people keep a daily “to-do” planning list, whether it’s a checklist of personal or work tasks one seeks to accomplish.

And then there are the long-range plans – funding a college education, retirement or working toward a goal of home ownership or business growth.

Regardless of the end goal, planning for the future saves time, money and helps reduce potential problems.

One way McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) fulfills its responsibility within its mission to “make electric energy available to its members at the lowest cost consistent with sound economy and good management” is to plan for growth, while maintaining reliability, through development of construction work plans (CWP).

Annual construction work plans are done for each coming year, and four-year work plans provide a more long-range vision for construction needs.

MEC recently received a U.S. Department of

Agriculture Rural Utilities Service (RUS) low-interest \$15 million loan for its latest four-year CWP from 2022 through 2025, described MEC General Manager/CEO Mark Doyle.

A multiyear plan’s main priority is identifying what the system needs to maintain service reliability, he described.

“It’s basically a summary of an engineering analysis of the system. It’s an engineering estimate of what needs to happen over the next four years. ... It’s a guiding document. It’s very fluid,” he continued.

It’s important for MEC to remain proactive in addressing load capacity demands, especially in rapid growth areas, such as rural residential development, and continue to maintain its system to reduce outages and ensure service reliability as the number of consumer-members increases, MEC Engineering Manager Lucas Schaaf added.

The most recent CWP is similar to others completed



Several underground cabinets and enclosures in McLean Electric Cooperative's materials yard in preparation for 2022 construction.

in recent years in terms of cost and project scope, Doyle explained, factoring in current inflationary trends.

For example, it looks at projects, such as tying one substation with another. That would provide MEC with the ability to switch service from one to another in the event of an outage – whether it's because of planned system maintenance or an unexpected weather-related event – so power can be returned more quickly.

The latest CWP also identifies areas where overhead lines could be converted to underground to improve service reliability. It also looks at transformer upgrades in areas to meet increasing load demands.

The core of the latest CWP addresses MEC's current 5% annual growth rate trend, includes several site-specific projects to address reliability issues and will address the need to replace aging infrastructure, Doyle continued. The cooperative's long-range plan also helps guide MEC as it develops annual work plans.

Part of the infrastructure upgrades include replacing old poles and lines that may have weakened over the years.

In addition, this CWP includes a meter upgrade

throughout much of MEC's system. The cooperative has two types of meters, radio frequency (RF) and power line carriers (PLC), Doyle explained.

PLC meters comprise about 80% of the cooperative's meters and were installed more than a decade ago. Many have "aged-out," Schaaf added, and are the priority for replacement over the next several years.

The new technology in the upcoming upgraded meters is designed to provide better capability to monitor usage and trends, Schaaf continued, which helps MEC ensure it has the capacity to meet load demand.

"It's a more comprehensive look at what's going on (for electric demand)," he explained.

A four-year work plan is required to qualify for RUS funding, Doyle said, but the need for a multiyear work plan is also imperative to have as the cooperative prepares for anticipated growth. It also helps develop a long-term financial funding strategy, which is critical to MEC's financial stability.

RUS loans are structured so the agency reimburses MEC for its work plan project expenditures. Other

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McLean Electric Cooperative has a full stack of 40-foot poles in 2022 in preparation for a busy construction season.

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financial sources offering low-interest loans to cooperatives across the United States are also available, Doyle continued, with more flexibility and upfront funding.

However, the RUS interest rate was lower and finalized prior to the recent trend of increasing interest rates, which MEC's board of directors felt would be more beneficial to the cooperative and its member-owners.

Developing the final 2022-25 CWP took about eight months, Schaaf described. Environmental reviews are done for every project, which includes consulting with a litany of state and federal agencies – the N.D. State Historic Preservation Office and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, for example – addressing historical features, wetlands and wetland protection, water resources, environmental contamination, land use and tribal interests.

While the latest four-year work plan is for 2022 through 2025, actual construction will likely extend into 2026 and possibly 2027, Doyle suggested, which is another reason the document is fluid and evolves. After all, things change. Plans change. Weather changes plans, as well.

Something that could change this new construction work plan that wasn't an issue in past years is ongoing supply chain concerns and high inflation rates.

Normally, projects have a startup timeline and material orders were usually made less than a year in advance,

Doyle described, so materials are available, yet don't arrive too early so money is not spent on inventory for a lengthy time until the project can begin.

However, like so many other industries, businesses and consumers dealing with the inability to obtain products, Doyle said MEC is trying to order materials well in advance in hopes of getting what is needed in time for upcoming construction plans in the coming years.

Work will likely begin on the next four-year work plan when MEC is in the third year of this latest plan, Doyle added. But the engineering analysis of MEC's existing system's current and future needs is always ongoing, he concluded.

Because it's a good idea to have a plan, especially one that is flexible and visionary with long-term goals. ■



Large reels of underground wire in McLean Electric Cooperative's materials yard.

Stay safe on the farm

Overhead power lines are necessary to deliver electricity to hardworking farmers and ranchers, but those same power lines can also be deadly if not treated with respect. Fall can be a busy time for farmers, but safety, especially around electrical hazards, should always be a priority. McLean Electric Cooperative urges you to also watch for electrical hazards around the farm or ranch.

Follow these other tips:

- Look over work areas carefully for overhead power lines and utility poles. Make sure you, your family and employees know the location of overhead power lines, and use routes to avoid the lines when moving equipment. Do this every year, as equipment sizes and soil conditions may change.
- Be aware of increased heights of equipment, especially new equipment with higher antennas.
- Avoid moving large equipment alone. Have someone watch as you move equipment to ensure you are clear of power lines.
- Be extra careful when working around trees and brush; they often make it difficult to see power lines.

Be aware

Farmers and their equipment should always be 10 feet away from power lines on all sides. Field cultivators and sprayers can often reach as high as 12 feet in the air. Practice extreme caution and use a spotter to make sure you stay far away from power lines when you use tall equipment.

If you have purchased new equipment, be aware of antennas or other attachments that may pose new hazards. A newer, bigger piece of equipment may no longer clear a line. In addition, shifting soil may also affect whether or not machinery avoids power lines from year-to-year.

Power lines also may sag over the years. If power lines on your property are sagging, contact your electric cooperative to repair the lines. Never move a power line out of the way or raise it for clearance.

Overhead power lines are not the only electric hazard on the farm. Pole guy wires, used to stabilize utility poles, are grounded. However, when one of the guy wires is broken, it can become charged with electricity. If you break a guy wire, call the cooperative to fix it. Don't do it yourself.

What if you contact a power line?

- First, DON'T climb out. If your equipment does contact a power line, stay in the cab and call 911 for help. Warn others to stay away and wait until the electric cooperative arrives.
- If you must leave the combine or tractor due to immediate danger, such as a fire, jump as far away as you can, making sure that no part of your body touches the combine or tractor and the ground at the same time. Land with both feet together and hop or shuffle your feet a few inches at a time, making sure to never break contact with the ground or cause separation between your feet.
- Once you're off the combine or tractor, do not go back until your local electric cooperative disconnects the power line.

TAKE THE BRR OUT OF WINTER

DON'T SHIVER THROUGH ANOTHER WINTER. PREPARE YOUR HOME NOW BEFORE THE WINTER WINDS START BLOWING.

BUNDLE UP YOUR HOME

Weatherstripping and caulking are probably the least expensive, most effective ways to save energy in the winter. Take these steps:

- **Check around doors and windows for leaks and drafts.** Add weatherstripping and caulk any holes you see that allow heat to escape. Make sure doors seal properly.
- **If your windows leak badly, consider replacing them with newer, more efficient ones.** Keep in mind, however, that replacing windows can be expensive – it could take you quite awhile to recover your costs from the energy savings alone.
- **Every duct, wire or pipe that penetrates the wall, ceiling or floor has the potential to waste energy.** Seal them all with caulking or weatherstripping.
- **Electric wall plugs and switches can allow cold air to enter.** Purchase simple-to-install foam gaskets that fit behind the switch plate and effectively prevent leaks.
- **Don't forget to close the damper on your fireplace when the fireplace is not in use.** If the damper is open when you're not using the fireplace, your chimney functions as a large open window that draws warm air out of the room and creates a draft.
- **Reverse your fan.** In the summertime, a fan is a wonderful way to keep cool, but your fan can also help circulate warm air in the winter. When you reverse the direction of your fan (there's a little switch on the motor housing), the fan will push warm air downward and recirculate it through the room. To ensure your fan is spinning in the correct direction, set it so the blades are spinning clockwise when you look up.

TUNE UP YOUR FURNACE THIS FALL

Save energy this fall and winter by having your furnace tuned up. Furnaces can go approximately three to five years between service calls and longer, if you change the filters regularly.

Changing filters regularly is one of the key maintenance tasks to keep any type of furnace running efficiently. Make sure you know where your furnace's filter is located and what size it is. Inspect it periodically, and replace it when it is dirty. How frequently you need to change the filter depends on the amount of dirt in the house and around the furnace and also how much time the furnace operates.

Call before you dig!

Planting a tree? Planning construction work? Remember to contact North Dakota One Call first! The first step to any project is safety, and damaging an underground facility while you dig can cause injury or even death.

Numerous utility lines may be buried on your property, ranging from electric and telephone lines to water and sewer lines, but North Dakota One Call will help you locate these lines before your project begins.

Contact North Dakota One Call and utility line owners will locate and mark their lines. These locates do not include any lines you may have installed to your private facilities, such as detached garages, wells or yard lights.

Go online at www.ndonecall.com or call **800-795-0555** or **811**.

It's free, it's simple and it's the law.

The 811 process:

1. NOTIFY

Notify the North Dakota One Call center by calling 811 or making an online request at least two full business days before work begins, excluding weekends and holidays. You'll give the operator information about how to contact you, where you are planning to dig and what type of work you will be doing, or go online to www.ndonecall.com to enter this information. Utility companies who have potential facilities in the area of your dig site will be notified about your intent to dig.

2. WAIT

Wait the required amount of time for affected utility operators to respond to your request.

3. CONFIRM

Confirm that all affected utility operators have responded to your request and marked underground utilities. Compare the marks to the list of utilities the One Call center notified. You can also view your ticket online and see each utility's response for your dig site.

4. RESPECT

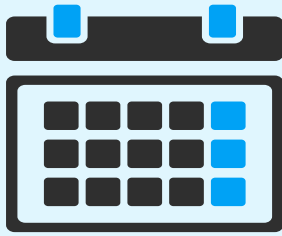
Respect the marks. The marks provided by the affected utilities are your guide for the duration of the project. The marks are valid for 21 calendar days.

If you are unable to maintain the marks during your project, or the project will continue past your request's expiration date, please call 811 or go online to file a RESPOT request.

5. DIG CAREFULLY

Dig carefully around the marks. No mechanical excavating can take place within 24 inches on either side of the marked location of the underground facility. If you plan on digging within that 4-foot-wide area, hand digging is allowed, but please dig carefully and cautiously.





McLean County community calendar:

Events and activities to see and do

McLean County community food pantry August distributions:

- **Community Cupboard of Underwood:** 4-6 p.m. Aug. 4 and 10 a.m.-noon Aug. 20, 208 Lincoln Ave. Like us on Facebook, Community Cupboard of Underwood, for food pantry distributions, thrift store and other information.
- **Garrison Area Resource Center & Food Pantry, Garrison:** Aug. 25, noon-2 p.m. and 5-7 p.m., former Lazy J's building back door.
- **Our Savior Lord's Food Pantry, Max:** Aug. 15, noon-3 p.m. and 5-7 p.m., Max City Hall, 215 Main St.
- **The Lord's Pantry, Turtle Lake:** Thursdays 2-4 p.m. and Saturdays 10 a.m.-noon, Trinity Lutheran Church, 515 Kundert St.
- **Wilton Food Pantry, Wilton:** "Mini" distributions every Friday, 11:30 a.m. until gone; full food distribution, 4-6 p.m. Aug. 18, Wilton Senior Citizens Center, 42 Dakota Ave.

Area food pantries often experience high needs for these items: baked beans, pork and beans, canned fruit, tuna, chicken, cereal, oatmeal, granola and breakfast bars, juice, mac and cheese, hamburger and tuna helper, pancake mix, syrup, pasta, pasta sauce, peanut butter, jelly, rice side dishes, soups and household items such as body wash and soap, dish soap, laundry detergent, shampoo and conditioner, toilet paper, toothpaste and toothbrushes. Contact local food pantries for drop-off information or a list of additional needs in your community.

August and September Labor Day activities:

- **Aug. 2, 9, 16, 23 and 30:** Harvest Market on Main every Tuesday in August, Garrison, 4:30 p.m.
- **Aug. 13:** Aw Shucks Corn Fest, Garrison City Park, Main St., 3-6 p.m.
- **Aug. 19:** Indian Hills Resort "Bite Me" fishing tournament, Lake Sakakawea.
- **Aug. 20:** Evening Hike Series, Fort Stevenson State Park Sensory Hike, Garrison, 9:30 p.m.
- **Aug. 26:** Blood Drive, Garrison City Auditorium, 11 a.m.-5 p.m.
- **Sept. 3:** Fort Stevenson State Park Regatta, Garrison, beginning with noon racing.
- **Sept. 5:** Labor Day, McLean Electric Cooperative closed for the holiday.

Nonprofit organizations and communities throughout McLean County are encouraged to contact Patricia Stockdill, stockdill.patricia@gmail.com, or telephone 701-337-5462, to submit community events. ■

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