

The

Enlightener



North Star
Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Your Touchstone Energy® Partner



VOLUME 51 NUMBER 3

BAUDETTE, MINNESOTA

MARCH 2006

An astonishing discovery

Recent finding underscores cautionary approach

By Mike Nisbet, Communications Supervisor
Minnkota Power Cooperative, Inc.

Trees play an important role in nature. As part of the photosynthesis process, they absorb carbon dioxide and turn it into fresh, clean oxygen for humans and animals to breathe.

But a recent discovery has left some scientists puzzled. Researchers have found that the earth's vegetation is producing vast quantities of methane, a greenhouse gas far more potent than carbon dioxide.

This is not a product of trees and plants rotting, which was already identified as a source of methane. It is an entirely natural side effect of plant growth that scientists somehow missed. Yet it is, by no means, trivial. Preliminary estimates suggest that living trees and plants account for 10 to 30 percent of the methane entering the atmosphere.

The discovery, reported by an international team of scientists in a recent issue of the journal *Nature*, is adding fuel to the debate over the confidence in global warming science. It is also raising serious doubts about plans for combating the warming process – such as the Kyoto protocol.

Net benefit in question

The protocol allows countries to offset their greenhouse gas emissions through reforestation programs, with trees being thought to cancel out some of the warming effect by taking in carbon dioxide. The discovery that these new forests would themselves generate another greenhouse gas raises doubts about the size of the net benefit.

Environmentalists and some politicians, sensing a backlash from the research, are already insisting that the findings are preliminary and should not detract from the view that climate change is a genuine threat. Still the question remains: How could such a basic source of heat-trapping gases have gone undetected until now?

Evidence pointing to huge holes in the science of atmospheric methane has actually been circulating for several years. In 1998, *Nature* carried a study showing that global increases in methane were leveling off.

It now appears that deforestation may have actually helped decrease the amount of greenhouse gases.

“While no one is suggesting cutting down the world's trees, the new research highlights the astonishing complexity of climate change science,” said David Loer, Minnkota president & CEO. “Environmental groups would have us believe that global warming is real and the time for action is now. This discovery tells a different story and emphasizes a ‘go slow’ approach to climate change initiatives.”

Member Appreciation Days

On Monday, April 24, please join us at the Littlefork office from 11 a.m. until 5 p.m. and on Wednesday, April 26, at the Baudette office from 11 a.m. until 5 p.m. There will be refreshments with brats, chips, popcorn and cotton candy. Register for prizes as there will be drawings for both adults and children. Pick up balloons for the kids and watch an electrical safety demonstration.

For sale on bids

1997 Chevrolet ¾ ton Pickup with utility box and Boss plow frame.

This unit is ready to mount onto a Boss snowplow. There are approximately 119,000 miles on this vehicle. It will be sold as is and may be seen at North Star Electric Co-op Inc. headquarters in Baudette, Minn.

Please mark outside of envelope “Bid – 1997 Pickup” and mail to: North Star Electric Co-op, Attn: Steve Ellis, PO Box 719, Baudette, MN 56623

Bids will be accepted until 4:00 p.m. April 7, 2006. North Star Electric Cooperative, Inc. reserves the right to refuse any or all bids.

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**Electrical
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emergencies
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(1-888-668-8243)
634-2603**



January 2006 Operating Report

Revenue (Includes annual Seasonal Billing)	\$ 887,714
Cost of Power	\$ 442,994
Operation, Maintenance, Administration	\$ 188,080
Depreciation and Interest	\$ 145,932
Margin on Operations	\$ 110,708
Average use per Residential	2,180
Total kWhs Sold	13,020,514

Planning to build after the snow melts?



**You'll need
electricity on
your site**

Call North Star
Electric Co-op
now to make
arrangements.

**Baudette 218-634-2202 or 888-634-2202
Littlefork 218-278-6658 or 888-258-2008**

WE NEED YOUR METER READING

Please read your meter on or as near the 25th of EACH month as possible. We must have your reading by the 5th of the next month to avoid an estimated bill. If a bill consecutively estimates two times, the crew will read the meter and a \$15 fee will be added to the account.

— Please Note —

Bills that are past due will be charged a 1.5 percent late payment fee. Bills that are 30 days past due will also be charged a \$2 delinquent notice fee.



Lighting the world

By Dan Hoskins
General Manager

Have you ever stopped to think about how lucky and blessed we are in these United States of America? No matter where you live, you have the capability of TV, computer, telephone and, of course, the greatest product of all, electricity. As I watch the news and see how the people in other parts of the world live, I wonder if the people in the U.S. realize how lucky they are.

Here's a quick story to lead into my talk with you. Our daughter, Brittany, received an Ipod as a gift. Now for those of you who don't know what an Ipod is, it's kinda along the same line as the old transistor radio. It is a small device approximately 2" x 3" x 3/8", but computerized, and it can hold as many as 10,000 songs. Are you kidding me, 10,000 songs! Heck, I can only dance to one at a time!

Anyway, you hook it up to a computer to download your songs and then, when you are out and about, take it with you and listen to 10,000 of your favorite tunes. Well, anyway, as I looked at this thing, I wondered about the children in some of the other countries

that don't even have electricity!

Our national association, NRECA, (National Rural Electric Cooperative Association) has what they call the International Program, and their mission is to light up the world, one village at a time. Even though access to electric power has been shown to contribute substantially to improvements in living standards, (which we all know about), in rural areas of developing countries, 2,000,000,000 people still do not have the benefit of electricity; that's right, 2 Billion! Unfortunately, achieving the goal of reliable, affordable power (something that your Cooperative, North Star Electric Cooperative, brings to your home daily) for rural areas is usually fraught with difficulties because of the complex convergence of technical, institutional, political, economical and other problems.

Since first being contracted in 1962 by the U.S. Agency for International Development to provide assessments and services in Nicaragua, NRECA International has helped more than 70 million people in over 35 countries gain access to electricity. (Now those are some great numbers.) With

over 40 years of experience, the program is committed to contributing to economic development and to improving in the well-being of rural populations through the provision of affordable electric power supplied by sustainable, well-managed utility systems.

Many of your local Minnesota Electrical Cooperatives are supporting this cause by donating used electrical supplies, such as meters, transformers, line hardware, etc., or vehicles or just sending money, and some Minnesota Electrical Cooperatives have sent employees to construct electrical power lines to some places such as Pignon, Haiti. (675-05-010-05 Scott MacMillan) The heroes of our state, Minnesota Valley Electric Cooperative (MVEC) and their electrical engineer, Michael Calles, have been the driving force behind the Pignon project and have brought that ray of hope and light to Pignon; a town of about 30,000 people that, before MVEC came along, had no hopes of electricity.

Here's a little of what MVEC and others have done just to give you an idea of the power of electricity. At an NRECA function last fall, there was a portion of the program dedicated to the International Program with a short film clip. Imagine a whole town turning out to watch a city light come on, and when it did, erupting into cheers and screams of joy! My goodness, you would have thought they had just won a very important ballgame or maybe the lottery, but no, they just got a light in their town that had been dark forever! It was so amazing to witness that part of the program and to think that all that excitement was over a light bulb. Heck, we don't get excited over a light bulb unless it's burned

CURRENT ELECTRICAL INSPECTORS

State law requires that every new electrical installation in any construction, remodeling, replacement or repair shall file a certificate for inspection with the State Board of Electricity and be inspected by a Minnesota electrical inspector.

- *St. Louis county:*
Lee Herseth
10078 Gappa Road
Ray, MN 56669
Phone: (218) 875-3028
7:00 a.m. - 8:30 a.m. (Mon. thru Fri.)
- *Roseau, Lake of the Woods and Koochiching counties:*
William Crunden
29513 Corlan Dr. N.E.
Blackduck, MN 56630
Phone: (218) 835-8567
7:00 a.m. - 8:30 a.m. (Mon. thru Fri.)

Continued on page 8



Office notes

From Ann Ellis, Manager of Finance and Administration

“Whether you think you can or you think you can’t, you’re right.”

~ Henry Ford

Your capital credits

Your capital credit account balance just got bigger. The seesaw effect was on the upswing this month when the board approved allocating the 2005 margins to members’ capital credit accounts. Basically, 5 percent of your power bill was “margin,” revenue left over after the expenses were recorded. That 5 percent is set aside to be repaid to you in the future. The downswing, which means money is moved from the co-op pocket to yours, generally occurs in the fall when capital credits are paid.

Are you curious about how much you have in your capital credit account? We’ve listed it on this month’s electric bill. This is your ownership of North Star Electric Cooperative.

Tired of the telemarketing phone calls?

And to make it more annoying, now your cell phone is ringing with these unwanted calls. I know this has nothing to do with electricity, but I think some of you might like this information. The National Do-Not-Call Registry gives you a choice about whether or not to receive telemarketing calls at home or on your mobile phone. Most telemarketers should not call your number once it has been on the registry for 31 days. Go to www.donotcall.gov to quickly register your phone number(s). Or, from the phone that you want to register, call 1-888-382-1222 (toll-free). Within a month, you should have fewer unwanted phone calls.

At your service, we remain. . .

Time to reset clocks and change smoke alarm batteries

With daylight saving time starting April 2, you should remember to change something other than your clocks. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) recommends that you change the batteries in all your smoke detectors. According to NFPA, smoke detectors have reduced the number of home fire deaths by half since they were installed in homes during the 1970s. Ninety-three percent of homes have at least one smoke detector. Unfortunately, a third of those smoke alarms won’t sound due to dead, missing or disconnected batteries according to NFPA.

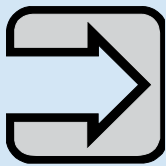
- Don’t paint the smoke alarm or place decorations near it, which might cause it to not work properly.
- Test smoke alarms monthly by using the alarm’s “test button.”
- Replace the batteries for your smoke alarms every spring or when the alarm “chirps.”
- Regularly clean your smoke alarm to keep it in working order.
- Your smoke alarms should be replaced once every 10 years.

Employee Patsy Olson: billing coordinator



If you have had a question on your electric bill during the past 20 years or so, you have probably talked with Patsy. Patsy began her employment at North Star in 1974 as a bookkeeper and held that position until 1978 when she went part-time to raise her family. She came back to work full-time in 1987 as the billing coordinator. What she likes best about her job is helping the members when they have questions on their electric bill, including all the seasonal members who go south for the winter. This year, she also has a lot of extra work transferring information on the computer for the new automated meter reading system so all the meters can be read from our office.

Patsy moved to Baudette from International Falls in 1966 with her mother and sisters and has lived in Baudette since. Patsy, and her husband, Lanis, have three grown children. Their daughter, Tina, and her husband, Tim, live in Arizona, as does their youngest son, Corey. Their older son, Shane, lives in Baudette. While her kids were in school, she was a hockey and volleyball mom and attended many games at home and out of town. Now, in her spare time, she enjoys traveling, walking, dancing, visiting family and friends and playing with her four dogs.



West End News

By Steve Ellis
Baudette District Operations Supervisor



Our crews are continuing to change out meters to the AMR (automated meter reading) meters during our annual line inspection; our goal is to have all meters automatically reporting to us by the end of 2006.

Meters on the Williams and Big Falls substations have been changed out, and the AMR equipment has been installed in these substations.

Testing is being done and, in a short time, these two substations will join the Wheelers Point and Kabetogama substations as being AMR read.

From here, we will start on the International Falls and Birchdale substations. Most of the meters have already been changed out on these substations. Remember, though, that you still need to read your meter(s) and send the reading(s) into us, as usual, until you are notified.

Our crews will be coming to your door, if you are an off-peak user, to change out your off-peak meter. We appreciate your cooperation in this project, as we will need to change all meters before the system can be fully utilized. Added trips will only add to the cost of the change-over. Thank you.

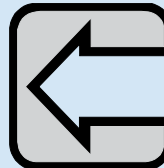
New service plans, anyone? If you plan on building, or just simply need to upgrade your existing service, please contact us well in advance so that your project may be scheduled in our work plans.

Please be careful around overhead lines as they are very dangerous when working around them. Always keep their presence in mind; if you see anything unusual, or have any questions about your power lines, contact us for help.



East End News

By Allan Baumgartner
Littlefork District Operations Supervisor



Our crews have been working on line maintenance items starting with our pole replacement program. North Star Electric has roughly 10,000 poles spread out between Ash Lake and Warroad. In order to get completely through our system in 10 years, our program tests 1,000 poles a year, and our crews change out the rejected poles. We are in the second shift through our system at this time.

We also have been mowing brush and cutting down weak and leaning trees along our power lines, which have been reported along with other specific power line problems during our annual line inspection program.

Minnkota's line crews were here and finished their work in the Big Falls substation for our new AMR (automated meter reading) metering project. (121-35-010-01 Beryl Bailey) Bruce Peterson, our foreman, is getting equipment ready so that our crew will be able to get this area up and working early this spring.

We had a wire break on a phase feeding west to Loman early in the morning on February 18. It was our first outage for the month.

Problems paying your electric bill?

Energy assistance may be available!

If you are receiving a low income or suffering from a temporary financial shortfall, the following agencies may be able to assist you with your electric bill. We urge you to contact them immediately to avoid disconnection if you feel you are eligible for aid.

- **Lake of the Woods County Community Services**
P.O. Box G-0200
Baudette, MN 56623
Phone: 634-2642
- **Northwest Community Action Council**
P.O. Box 67
Badger, MN 56714-0067
Phone: 1-800-568-5329
- **Koochiching County Community Services**
1000 5th St.
International Falls, MN 56649
Phone: 283-7000
- **Kootasca Community Action, Inc.**
2232 2nd Ave. E.
P.O. Box 44
International Falls, MN 56649
Phone: 283-9491 or 1-800-559-9491
- **Kootasca Community Action, Inc.**
1213 SE 2nd Ave.
Grand Rapids, MN 55744-3984
Phone: 1-800-422-0312
- **Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency**
702 3rd Ave. S.
Virginia, MN 55792-2797
Phone: 1-800-662-5711

The shocking truth!

You can never tell when contact with electricity will be fatal, but you can be sure it will always hurt. Electric shock can cause muscle spasms, weakness, shallow breathing, rapid pulse, severe burns, unconsciousness or death.

In a shock incident, the path that electric current takes through the body gets very hot. Burns occur all along that path, including the places on the skin where the current enters and leaves the body. It's not only giant power lines that can kill or injure you if you contact them. You can also be killed by a shock from an appliance or power cord in your home.



*A milliamper is 1/1000th of an ampere, a measure of electric current.
**A GFCI is a ground fault circuit interrupter, a device that protects against serious shock.

ICE your cell phone

In case of emergency, ICE. Paramedics will turn to a victim's cell phone for clues to that person's identity. You can make their job much easier with a simple idea that they are trying to get everyone to adopt: ICE, which stands for In Case of Emergency.

If you add an entry in the contact list in your cell phone under ICE, with the name and phone number of that person that the emergency services should call on your behalf, you can save them a lot of time and have your loved ones contacted quickly.

It only takes a few moments of your time to do. Paramedics know what ICE means and they look for it immediately. ICE your cell phone NOW!

When should you shut off your lights?

By John Krigger, author of numerous energy efficiency books

Lots of people wonder whether it saves energy to turn their lights off every time they leave a room. The answer depends on two things: the type of lamp (the technical term for what most of us call light bulbs) in your fixtures, and how long you'll leave it off.

If you are still using incandescent lamps, then you should shut them off whenever you'll be out of the room for at least four minutes. But experts from the U.S. Department of Energy's Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory advise that fluorescent lamps are different, whether you are using long tube type fluorescents or the compact fluorescent lamps that screw into standard light fixtures. They suggest turning off fluorescent lamps only when you won't need them for 10 to 15 minutes.

The recommendations for these two types of lamps are different because the life span of incandescent lamps isn't affected by the numbers of times they are switched on and off, while the life span of fluorescent lamps is slightly shortened every time they start up.

These recommendations also account for the varying life span of fluorescent lamps, depending upon the number of hours they are used per start. For example, if you use a fluorescent lamp for three hours per start, it will last for about 20,000 hours; if you use it for six hours per start, you'll get an increased lamp life of about 24,000 hours.

You may also have heard that turning off a fluorescent lamp doesn't save much energy because the saving is erased by a surge in current when it is first switched on. This isn't really true: there is indeed a startup surge, but it lasts only a fraction of a second and the energy consumption during this small time interval is negligible.

North Star Electric Cooperative, Inc. Mission Statement

To improve the lives of our member-owners and community by responsibly providing electric energy and other beneficial services while maintaining the very highest standards of performance.

Parents of high school seniors

Are you aware of North Star Electric's Knowledge Scholarship? To qualify, the parent/guardian must be a member of North Star Electric, and your child must take a short test about your cooperative that provides electricity to your home. North Star Electric will be awarding five scholarships, one for \$1,000 and four for \$400, plus a chance to win one of eight \$50 cash awards for scoring more than 50 percent on the test.

Most of the test answers will be included in the six pages of study material that North Star provides. A couple hours of study time could pay off with a \$1,000 scholarship. Last year, only 34 students took the test.

Highlights of the board of directors meeting

February 1, 2006

These are the highlights from the board of directors meeting held on February 1, 2006. Detailed minutes are available at the Cooperative for member review. Regular board meetings are generally held the first Wednesday of every month. If you wish to speak with the board, or have an item that you would like to have placed on the agenda, please contact Manager Dan Hoskins at least one week in advance to be included on the agenda.

All directors were present except Director Brzoznowski. They acted upon usual, routine business. In addition, they voted to approve the 2006-2009 Construction Work Plan following review of the projects with Engineer Doug Joens and to alter the time for the March board meeting to begin at noon.

Management and operations report

Manager Hoskins reported on Minnkota meetings, projected growth in kWh sales for the North Star area, the lessening of off-peak control times resulting from raising the threshold price when replacement power is purchased and warmer weather, Minnkota's EMS program to reach the public during critical times, the MREA Grassroots Committee meeting, upcoming annual meetings, progress of the AMR (automated meter reading) project with the Big Falls and Williams substations chosen as the next two to convert, the favorable safety inspection report, and outages. Reports from the Operations Departments were also reviewed.

Office report

Finance Manager Ellis provided the financial report for 2005. She also reported on office activities including AMR readings being used in the billing system, mem-

ber phone calls regarding the rate realignment that increased the fixed charge but decreased the cost of the kWh, postage costs, and responding to past-due electric accounts with the use of load limiters that permit electrical usage to allow heating systems, freezers, and all other appliances to function 50 percent of the time as opposed to a full disconnect, which can be done during the winter.

Compliance and member services report

Manager of Compliance and Member Services Haukaas reported that there have been only five more hours of dual heat load control since the previous month, that they are busy changing out off-peak meters to the AMR electronic meters, the CIP (conservation improvement program), contractor training, changes to the Center Bus Tour, dates for the Member Appreciation Days, and the Touchstone Energy Co-op Connections Card.

Board reports

Director Bergan suggested that the nomination and election process should be discussed, including mail-in ballots and broader democratic control by the members. Minnkota Delegate Arnesen reported on the Minnkota board meeting.



Mandarin orange cake

- 1 yellow cake mix
- 4 eggs
- 1/2 cup oil
- 1 small can mandarin oranges with juice

Mix for 2 minutes. Put in 9"x 13" cake pan. Bake for 30 minutes at 350°

Frosting:

- 1 carton (8 oz.) Cool Whip topping
- 1 small package instant vanilla pudding
- 1 can (20 oz.) crushed pineapple and juice

Whip frosting with spoon. Spread on cooled cake. Store in refrigerator.

Submitted by: *Lee Konen Ray, Minn.*

Gopher State One Call



It's the **LAW**
CALL BEFORE YOU DIG
Minnesota Statewide One Call
Notification Center
1-800-252-1166

Startling smoke detector statistics

The National Fire Protection Association estimates that 93 percent of American homes have at least one smoke detector. But consider these startling facts:

Almost 50 percent of all home fires and 60 percent of fire deaths occur in homes without a working detector.

There are more homes with non-working smoker detectors than there are homes without any smoke detectors.

Homes with a non-working smoke detector only create a false sense of security which can be deadly.

The chance of dying in a home fire is cut in half with a working detector.



State Farm Insurance offers these tips for purchasing a smoke detector

Standard smoke detectors cost \$10-\$15. Make sure they're approved by an independent testing laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratory (UL).

The number of detectors you need depends on the size of your house or apartment. There should be a smoke detector outside each sleeping area and at least one on every level of the home, including the basement.

Smoke rises – smoke detectors should be mounted high on a wall or on the ceiling. However, in a closed stairway (such as those leading to a basement), mount a detector at the bottom of the stairway.

Install the detector away from windows, doors or forced-air registers, where drafts could interfere with the detector's operation.

Make regular inspection of detectors a priority

Check batteries regularly and test detectors according to instructions. Normally, batteries must be replaced every nine to 12 months.

Whether your smoke detectors are battery-power or hard-wired into your home's electrical system, check and clean them once a month according to instructions.

Remember to plan escape routes for your family and hold drills. If you have questions about the best place to install detectors, call your fire department. In addition, many fire departments will conduct home detector inspections for free or for a nominal fee.

Provided by State Farm Insurance



Share a favorite recipe with your North Country neighbors!

Send to:
North Star Electric
Cooperative, Inc.
Attn: The Enlightener
P.O. Box 719
Baudette, MN 56623



From page 3

out, and then, all we have to do is change it!

Another short story concerning the International Program. . . forgive me, if I mess it up or leave something out, but I think you will get the point of it. Caleb Lucien, a pastor and school administrator from Pignon, told the story about starting a school in Pignon in 1998, and he had, I believe he said, 13 students that year, and he needed electricity. So, he found a generator that a company in Florida was selling on bids so he thought he would bid on it. He bid a dollar and, believe it or not, he got the generator for a buck. After a few more donations and volunteers, the generator made its way to Pignon; now the school has electricity and has grown to over 1,300 students in 2005.

The generation facility was constructed to house the main generator, and work was completed by a volunteer team in January, 2005. (121-32-003-04 Michael D./Sandra Fish) In February, 2005, a team of 10 line workers from the Minnesota cooperatives visited the site to make the initial connections from the generator to the town square and, if you listen really hard, you can probably hear those people cheering yet today!

So, there you have it, just a little reminder of the greatest product in the world with some of the greatest people behind it. Your Cooperative, North Star Electric, is a proud member of NRECA and of being a part of the International Program.

Before I close, I hope you see that the power of electricity can change lives forever, and if our men and women hadn't fought for our freedom, and many are still doing so today, the people of imagination couldn't have created electricity; then, we might be the ones standing on a street corner, waiting for a light to come on.

God Bless you and our Ambulance, Firefighters and Emergency personnel.

Dan