

The

Enlightener



North Star
Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Your Touchstone Energy® Partner 

VOLUME 51 NUMBER 4

BAUDETTE, MINNESOTA

April 2006

Load control history



By Dan Hoskins
General Manager

Well, good day, everyone. I hope that, by the time you get a chance to read this, spring has sprung, and you are deep into spring cleaning, or maybe you are done already.

You know, I was thinking about this past winter's heating season and load control, and I thought that, maybe, I should touch on that subject a little bit. I know it has been a kinda sore subject in the past and rightfully so. When Minnkota Power Cooperative started the load management program back in 1977, they were expecting to control loads for 72 hours straight and 500 hours per year. For the first 23 years, it wasn't needed, but that all changed in 2000.

Let's look at some of the totals of load control since the grand old year of 2000. During the heating season of 2000-2001, we had a modest 171 hours of load control, and in 2001-2002, we had 22 hours (are you kidding me, 22 hours for a whole heating season!), but then things changed dramatically; 2002-2003, we had 407

hours; 2003-2004, we saw 419 hours; 2004-2005, we tipped the scales at an all-time high of 527 hours, and for the heating season of 2005-2006, Minnkota had a projection of 400 to 600 hours of load control, but so far, we have kinda snuck by with only 250 hours.

I wonder if our cheering the low totals of 250 hours is a good sign, or maybe we have be-

come used to 400+ hours per year. Whatever the case, 250 hours, or 10 days, of load control for the entire heating season is pretty good.

Some of you are probably wondering how Minnkota comes to that number of hours with the fine winter we just had. Well, first of all, as I have mentioned to you in the past, load control is not only weather re-

lated. (Lance Hardwig 654-24-018-08) We could have load control because of high energy prices, power plant maintenance or some kind of malfunction at the generator site, transmission line constraints, or as we had this past year, a major ice

storm that crippled Minnkota's transmission system for a period of time.

So, if you look at the totals for this past winter, 250 hours, compared to the previ-

ous three winter heating seasons and compared to the projection of 400 - 600 hours by Minnkota, I believe the 250 hours wasn't so bad, or maybe, we are just used to it now, and everyone has a good backup system. No matter what, we still enjoy some of the lowest electricity rates in the na-

"We still enjoy some of the lowest electricity rates in the nation."

Continued on page 4

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.



Office notes

From Ann Ellis, Manager of Finance and Administration

“Life’s problems wouldn’t be called ‘hurdles’ if there wasn’t a way to get over them.”

~ Unknown

Do I still have to read my meter?

That depends. We are communicating with about a third of all of the meters out there. Is yours one of them? If your remittance stub has the words, “Co-op Reads” taking up the area where you normally write in your meter reading, you’re one of the lucky 33 percent. If the box is open, you got it, keep on reading...for now.

There are several stages to getting to the final communication with the AMR (automated meter reading) meter to the office. Replacing your old mechanical meter with the new electronic version is just the first step, and the line crew is two-thirds finished with this step. Then there are installations of equipment in the substations and communications using our existing radio system. Computer files to request the data and then link the meter information to the billing account must also be created. And, then, there is that moment when the first test is run from each substation to see what areas need “tweaking.”

Pat has a request for those of you with off-peak who still need to read your meters. She’d appreciate it if you would make sure that the readings you write in correspond to the co-op number on the stub. (Keith Bowers 438-23-007-01) The new co-op numbers are not as prominent on the face of the meter as they were on the old meters, but they are either a five-digit number starting with “5” or a six-digit number starting with “9.”

We hope to have this project completed by the end of the year before the new snowbanks form. We appreciate your patience while this work continues.

The shrinking *Enlightener*

You will notice some changes to the look of *The Enlightener*. To cut postage costs, we need to keep the total weight of the bill, the outgoing and return envelopes, and the newsletter to under an ounce. The initial target is *The Enlightener*. It will shrink from eight pages to six in order to cut this postage cost. We hope that we will be able to get all of the information you need and want in this smaller format. Your comments are always welcome, so please let us know what you think.

Member Appreciation Days are just around the corner. I hope to see you in Littlefork on the 24th or in Baudette on the 26th!

At your service, we remain. . .

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.

May is Safety Month

Keep your family safe by using this checklist to go through your home. Conduct a thorough inspection and make a list of the following:

1. Test your smoke alarm. If you do not have one, install one immediately.
2. Test your carbon monoxide detector. If you do not have one, install one immediately.
3. Make sure your emergency numbers are posted by the phones in your home and outbuildings.
4. Feel your switch plates to see if any of them are warm or hot.
5. Check your outlets to see if the electrical plug is loose or if there are sparks when you insert the plug.
6. Check all of your cords (lamps, extension, etc.) to make sure the cords are not cracked, frayed or covered by rugs or furniture.
7. Make sure the watts on your light bulbs do not exceed the watts listed on that socket (lamps, ceilings, etc.).
8. See if your electrical appliances are away from water, hot surfaces and have enough air circulation.
9. Note any areas of your home or outbuildings that have dimming or flickering of lights.
10. Note any arcs, sparks, sizzling or buzzing sounds from your electrical system.
11. Note any hot or burning smells, which seem to come from electrical sources.
12. Note repeated blowing of fuses or circuit breakers.



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 changeover.

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.

Remember, with spring here, a lot of you will be doing outside projects. If any of these involve digging and excavating, you must call Gopher State One Call (1-800-252-1166) Before You Dig!

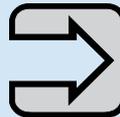
Please be careful around overhead lines as they are very dangerous when working around them. Always keep their presence in mind; if you see anything unusual, or have any questions about your power lines, contact us for help.



East End News

By Allan Baumgartner

Littlefork District Operations Supervisor



Our crews finished up our pole replacement program for this winter. We still have poles with underground lines attached to them to get later this summer when it dries up. We were also able to clean up some of our power lines with our brush mower in the Kabetogama, Ray and Eric'sburg areas. Both of these projects have to end when road restrictions are posted.

We will be replacing all of the underground cable for our three main feeders out of our Kabetogama substation this year. This job is part of our 2006 - 2009 Work Plan. We would like to get the new cables energized by late summer or early fall.

New services and service upgrades are starting to come in for this summer already. (Kenneth E. Walters 251-24-141-02) If you are planning on building or have other construction plans, please call North Star Electric Cooperative in advance to set up an appointment to meet with you.

Our crews will continue working on our AMR meter project this spring in the International Falls and Littlefork areas. Please keep in mind, even after all the equipment gets installed, that we will still have some work to do on our power lines in order to get good readings coming back to the office.

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

Highlights of the board of directors meeting

March 1, 2006

These are the highlights from the board of directors meeting held on March 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 Trueman. They acted upon usual, routine business. In addition, they voted to allocate 2005 margins to members' capital credit accounts and to designate the charitable organizations that will receive a portion of the unclaimed capital credits.

Management and operations report

Manager Hoskins reported on Minnkota meetings, progress of the AMR (automated meter reading) project, the City of Baudette's Centennial Celebration, annexation possibilities being explored by the City of Baudette, and concerns raised by five members regarding the rate realignment. Operations Department issues included replacing a recently retired lineman with two summer apprentice linemen as a cost-saving measure. A lengthy outage in the Kabetogama area was discussed, and replacement of that cable will occur this summer.

Office report

Finance Manager Ellis provided the financial report and a complete

review of the year end RUS Form 7. She also reported on the lean budget for 2006 and the downward trend of kWh sales. If sales do not recover by year-end, wholesale power prices increase as expected, and cost cutting does not offset these factors, a rate increase in 2007 will be likely.

Compliance and member services report

Manager of Compliance and Member Services Haukaas reported on load control, the CIP (Conservation Improvement Program), options for cost savings regarding *The Enlightener*, and creation of the Operation Round Up Trust board of directors.

Board reports

Board members attending the NRECA annual meeting reported favorably.

From page 1

tion, and off-peak electric heat is still number 1.

Before I sign off, I would like for all of you to pay special attention to *The Enlightener* during the next couple of months. We will be beginning our Operation Round Up program (this is a great program) and, remember, we round up your power bill to the nearest dollar amount, and that amount goes into a larger pot that includes all North Star members; then a Round Up board of directors will determine where to donate the money.

I can tell you that it will stay within the North Star Electric system and help our area communities and members. So, if you would like to participate in the Round Up program, you are automatically in; if you would not like to participate, just follow the instructions in the enclosed information.

God bless you, our Troops and the folks that volunteer at our animal shelters.



**Gopher State
One Call**



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

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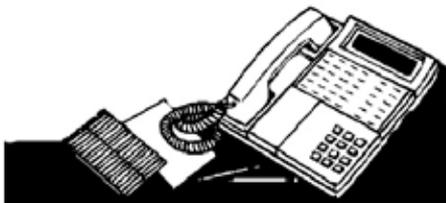
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**Electrical
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 1-888-6OUTAGE
 (1-888-668-8243)
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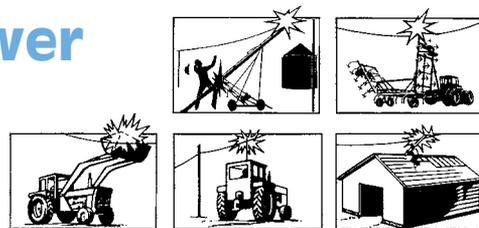


February 2006 Operating Report

Revenue (Includes annual Seasonal Billing)	\$ 899,477
Cost of Power	\$ 473,587
Operation, Maintenance, Administration	\$ 170,636
Depreciation and Interest	\$ 167,233
Margin on Operations	\$ 88,021
Average use per Residential.....	2,361
Total kWhs Sold	14,138,825

Work safely around power lines!

Look up ... power lines are hot!



Electricity is important to everyone, but it presents a more potential hazard for outdoor workers than indoor workers. Every year, serious electrical accidents occur outdoors just because people don't look up. The sad part is that most of these accidents could have been prevented with a few simple steps.

First, make sure that you, your family and co-workers know the location of overhead power lines, and map out ways to avoid them when moving equipment. Make sure that everyone understands that any contact with these lines creates a path to the ground for electricity and carries the potential for a serious, even fatal, accident.

Everyone should know the height of all your equipment and how high the power lines are to prevent accidental contact. A good rule of thumb is to stay at least 10 feet away from power lines.

Electrical accidents happen fast! LOOK UP! Be extra careful when moving large farming or logging equipment; the equipment today is a lot larger than it used to be. The combination of large equipment and power lines can be deadly.

Avoid moving large equipment by yourself. Have someone watch for you as you drive equipment to ensure that you stay clear of the power lines.

These rules also apply to guy wires that support power line poles. Damaging guy wires can bring live power lines down to unsafe clearances over the ground, buildings or roads and can create extremely hazardous situations.

If you have any questions about the clearance of power lines, please give our office a call.

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 \$5 delinquent notice fee.

Would you help your neighbor for 3 cents a day?

That's the most it would cost you to participate in Operation Round Up. North Star will round up your power bill to the next whole dollar amount. For example, if your electric bill was \$129.69, your adjusted bill would be \$130. The extra 31 cents would go into the Operation Round Up Trust Fund. The most you could contribute is \$11.88 per year, and that could only happen if you contributed 99 cents each month.

This is a great program, funded by North Star members, to help local charities and organizations. These organizations need your help more now than ever. Our economy is slowing down, and many of them are losing government funding.

Your North Star board of directors will choose members to be on the Operation Round Up Trust board. This separate board will meet twice a year to award grants to organizations that have applied for funds. North Star will manage these funds, but will NOT use any of these funds for management expenses. The money from the Operation Round Up Trust will go to charities or organizations in need.

If 50 percent of our members choose to participate in Operation Round Up, we can expect contributions to be about \$18,700 each year. That money goes right back into the community to local charities and organizations.

Operation Round Up will start collecting funds starting on June 25.

If you wish to join Operation Round Up, you don't need to do anything; you are already in. If you wish to NOT be in Operation Round Up, just give us a call, or fill out the form below, and mail it with your electric bill.

I DO NOT wish to join Operation Round Up at this time.

Name: _____

Account # _____

Phone # _____

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) 766-4606
7:00 a.m. - 8:30 a.m. (Mon. thru Fri.)

Help Keep Your Lights On



Careless ditch burning can destroy utility poles and junction boxes, leading to unnecessary power outages. Pole damage ranges from surface charring to destruction, and may cost landowners anywhere from \$2,000 on up, depending on the location of the pole and the severity of the damage.

Please use extreme caution when burning around our electrical equipment, and always tend to a fire once it is lit. Let's all do our part to keep the lights on and costs down.