



the power of human connections

sparks

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

a monthly newsletter from Steele-Waseca Cooperative Electric

March 2026

SWCE RATE INCREASE announced. For more information, see the Manager Connection column on Page 2, and the list of rate changes on Page 3. The rate changes are also posted on our website, swce.coop.

inside connections

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calendar of events

March

- 2** Dr. Suess' birthday; National Read Across America Day 23996
- 3** "The Star-Spangled Banner" became U.S. national anthem in 1931
- 6** National Employee Appreciation Day
- 8** Daylight saving time starts
- 14** National Pi Day
- 17** St. Patrick's Day
- 20** First day of spring; International Day of Happiness

Minnesota electric cooperatives: 2026 legislative priorities

Courtesy: Minnesota Rural Electric Association (MREA)

The 2026 Minnesota legislative session convened Feb. 17 and constitutionally must adjourn by May 18.

After passing the biennial state budget in 2025, lawmakers are expected to focus largely on policy issues and the state's capital investment bill, which funds public infrastructure projects. This session unfolds with legislators keenly aware that all 201 legislative seats and the state's constitutional offices will be on the ballot in November.

The political backdrop is headlined by the recent announcement by incumbent Democratic Gov. Tim Walz that he will not seek reelection. At this point, U.S.

Senator Amy Klobuchar will run on the Democratic side. However, there are 11 GOP candidates, including Speaker Lisa Demuth and Rep. Kristin Robbins, who are looking to fill the role. Little legislative progress is expected given the divided dynamics, but as history shows, the Minnesota Legislature often finds ways to surprise.

During this session, the Minnesota Rural Electric Association is advocating for policies that ensure reliable, affordable and sustainable energy for all Minnesotans. While the legislative climate may represent challenges, we see

(Legislative issues continued on Page 5)

Great River Energy, ITC Midwest, and Xcel Energy propose transmission line project with application for Certificate of Need

Great River Energy (GRE), ITC Midwest and Xcel Energy proposed a series of new electric transmission lines, Feb. 3, that will help deliver continued reliable electricity for energy consumers throughout the region, and connect new sources of electricity to the grid to serve increasing and evolving demands for electricity.

The project partners, Feb. 3, submitted an application for a Certificate of Need for PowerOn Midwest to the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MPUC).

PowerOn Midwest is a series of new electric transmission projects anchored by a 765 kilovolt (kV) backbone transmission line that will connect to the

existing transmission grid in eastern South Dakota, travel across southern Minnesota and connect to the broader regional grid. In Minnesota, the 765 kV line will connect the Lakefield, Pleasant Valley and North Rochester substations in Jackson, Mower, and Olmsted counties.

These projects are essential to move large volumes of electricity from where it's generated to where it's needed, ensuring reliable energy delivery in all seasons, at all times. This new infrastructure can accommodate energy from all sources—helping communities thrive as energy needs change.

The projects were part of the portfolio
(Certificate of Need continued on Page 7)

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This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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8:00 a.m.–4:30 p.m., Monday–Friday

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8:00 a.m.–3:30 p.m., Monday–Friday

For Customer Service, Billing Questions and Power Outages Phone:

507-451-7340 or 800-526-3514

Before calling to report an outage

1. Check fuses and circuit breakers in your home and on meter pole.
2. Check with your neighbors to see if they have power.
3. Look for possible causes such as a tree branch on wires, a broken pole, twisted wires, etc.

To leave a non-emergency message whenever SWCE’s office is closed:

Phone 507-451-7340 or 800-526-3514 and listen to the prompts. Please have your account number, phone number, and name on the account available.

Call *Before* You Dig
Gopher State One Call
811 or 800-252-1166

48-hour notice required for **ALL** underground cable locations

manager connection



*By Syd Briggs,
 General Manager*

As most of our members know, Steele-Waseca Cooperative Electric has not had a full system rate

increase since 2013.

We have been slowly adjusting the rates of the former Alliant members we acquired through the Southern Minnesota Energy Cooperative (SMEC) over the past 10 years to get close to our legacy rates, and will finally accomplish that this year.

We do pass on increases in the Cost of Power to our members through the WMA, or Wholesale Market Adjustment, and our last adjustment was in 2025, although it has not been needed every year. This year we expect an increase of 2.1% in Cost of Power, and we finally need a system-wide increase in addition to the Cost of Power increase to pay for increases we have experienced over the last 13 years in Cost of Service.

Steele-Waseca’s cost of power from Great River Energy (GRE), our wholesale energy provider, made up 71% of our total cost in 2025 with our operations and maintenance, depreciation, and interest on long-term debt making up the majority of the remaining 29%. It has been a good 13 years with the board and employees making decisions that have benefited and delayed the need for an increase in rates for the entire system, along with experiencing some growth in energy sales. 1009825

As successful as your cooperative is at reducing costs without reducing service (we have been having excellent years with very low instances of outages), we have come to a time of a necessary increase in our rates. In January, the board of directors reviewed a Cost of Service study performed by our consultant and agreed the recommendation of management and the consultant to increase rates an average of 2.5%.

We are very pleased that it has been 13 years since there was this type of increase, and many other utilities have been experiencing much larger and frequent increases. Your board of directors and employees have been working very hard year after year to minimize expenses without sacrificing service and the results have been excellent.

Our expenses, other than cost of power, have averaged only a 4.1% increase each year for the past two years, while our

energy sales have averaged an increase of 1.2% during the same period. We can operate with that difference for a short time (in this case two years), but eventually we must increase rates to match our increase in expenses.

Since it is important for each member to be able to plan and budget for the upcoming year, I want to provide the following analysis on the rate change for our residential members:

1. There will be an increase in the monthly service charge to \$30.

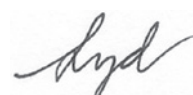
2. There will be an average 4.3%, or \$7/month, on the average residential account. Since there was an additional increase with some accounts being adjusted to our normal residential rate, there is a wide range of differences based on the rate and usage our members experience.

3. We expect 90% of our members will fall in the range of a 2%-5% increase depending on their rate adjustment and their usage. However, some may experience a much larger percent increase. Most will be under a 20% increase as we complete the adjustment to our legacy rates.

4. To help prepare for the new rates, the following page in this month’s *Sparks* newsletter has a list of all our rates with the present and new rates. The information will also be available on our website.

It is important for our rates to collect as much of the actual costs as is applicable. Even at \$30 per month, we must collect most of our costs of service through our energy charge. This structure of a higher monthly charge will help collect a fairer amount from each member rather than collecting most of our needed revenue just from those members that use energy.

We will continue to work hard to provide the best service and realize cost savings whenever possible. We also have an excellent section on our website, www.swce.coop, entitled “Rebates & Programs” that provides many ideas about not only rebates, but also efficiency and conservation. For most members, the rate change is not a large one, and as it will take effect on your statement received in March 2026, please feel free to call any of our member service representatives if you have a question or need further clarification.



 #swceTRUST

swce rate connection

Steele-Waseca Cooperative Electric Present and New Rate Schedule Effective Feb. 1, 2026*

Type of Service	Present Rate	New Rate	Type of Service	Present Rate	New Rate
Single Phase (RA-01)			General Demand Municipal (S390) => Three Phase ≤ 200 kW (TP-01D)		
Service Charge	\$25.00 /month	\$30.00 /month	Service Charge	\$47.50 /month	\$58.00 /month
Energy Charge			Demand		
First 1,000 kWh	\$0.13024 /kWh	\$0.13024 /kWh	Summer (June-Sept)	\$10.93 /kW	\$12.34 /kW
Excess kWh	\$0.11664 /kWh	\$0.11664 /kWh	Non-Summer (Oct-May)	\$7.05 /kW	\$7.05 /kW
WMA kWh	\$0.02344 /kWh	\$0.02344 /kWh	Energy	\$0.07123 /kWh	\$0.07669 /kWh
			WMA	\$0.01653 /kWh	\$0.02344 /kWh
Large Power (TP-03)			General Single Phase (S260, S26S) =====> Single Phase (RA-01)		
Service Charge	\$85.00 /month	\$150.00 /month	Service Charge	\$28.50 /month	\$30.00 /month
Demand Charge	\$12.75 /kW	\$12.75 /kW	Energy		
Energy Charge	\$0.07060 /kWh	\$0.07060 /kWh	Summer (June-Sept)		
WMA kWh	\$0.02344 /kWh	\$0.02344 /kWh	First 1,000 kWh	\$0.10896 /kWh	\$0.13024 /kWh
			Excess kWh	\$0.10352 /kWh	\$0.11664 /kWh
Small Power Interruptible (IR-03)			Non-Summer (Oct-May) Seasonal rate changes are being eliminated		
Service Charge	\$100.00 /month	\$150.00 /month	First 1,000 kWh	\$0.09750 /kWh	\$0.13024 /kWh
Distribution System	\$4.50 /kW	\$4.50 /kW	Excess kWh	\$0.09206 /kWh	\$0.11664 /kWh
Energy Charge	\$0.08023 /kWh	\$0.08023 /kWh	WMA	\$0.01653 /kWh	\$0.02344 /kWh
WMA kWh	\$0.01849 /kWh	\$0.01849 /kWh			
Residential (S160, S16S, S16X) =====> Single Phase (RA-01)			General Demand (S290, S29X) =====> Three Phase ≤ 200 kW (TP-01D)		
Service Charge	\$21.00 /month	\$30.00 /month	Service Charge	\$58.00 /month	\$58.00 /month
Energy			Demand		
Summer (June-Sept)			Summer (June-Sept)	\$12.34 /kW	\$12.34 /kW
First 1,000 kWh	\$0.12482 /kWh	\$0.13024 /kWh	Non-Summer (Oct-May)	\$7.05 /kW	\$7.05 /kW
Excess kWh	\$0.12482 /kWh	\$0.11664 /kWh	Energy	\$0.07274 /kWh	\$0.07669 /kWh
Non-Summer (Oct-May)	Seasonal rate changes are being eliminated		WMA	\$0.01653 /kWh	\$0.02344 /kWh
First 1,000 kWh	\$0.11715 /kWh	\$0.13024 /kWh			
Excess kWh	\$0.09442 /kWh	\$0.11664 /kWh			
WMA	\$0.01653 /kWh	\$0.02344 /kWh			
Farm Single Phase (S410) =====> Farm Single Phase (FS-01)			Large Power (S360) =====> Three Phase > 200 kW (TP-03)		
Service Charge	\$35.50 /month	\$35.50 /month	Service Charge	\$217.00 /month	\$150.00 /month
Energy			Demand	\$12.75 /kW	\$12.75 /kW
Summer (June-Sept)			Energy	\$0.06802 /kWh	\$0.07060 /kWh
First 1,000 kWh	\$0.11715 /kWh	\$0.13024 /kWh	WMA	\$0.01653 /kWh	\$0.02344 /kWh
Excess kWh	\$0.10736 /kWh	\$0.11664 /kWh			
Non-Summer (Oct-May)	Seasonal rate changes are being eliminated				
First 1,000 kWh	\$0.11715 /kWh	\$0.13024 /kWh			
Excess kWh	\$0.10421 /kWh	\$0.11664 /kWh			
WMA	\$0.01653 /kWh	\$0.02344 /kWh			
			Farm Three Phase (S420) =====> Three Phase ≤ 200 kW (TP-01D)		
			Service Charge	\$56.50 /month	\$58.00 /month
			Demand		
			Summer (June-Sept)	\$11.19 /kW	\$12.34 /kW
			Non-Summer (Oct-May)	\$7.05 /kW	\$7.05 /kW
			Energy	\$0.06614 /kWh	\$0.07669 /kWh
			WMA	\$0.01653 /kWh	\$0.02344 /kWh

* These new rates were approved by the Steele-Waseca Cooperative Electric board of directors on Jan 22, 2026. The new rates become effective with Feb. 1, 2026 usage, and will appear on energy bills mailed in March that are due April 2026. Rates that have not changed are not listed above.

SWCE will be contacting Contract rate accounts for 2026 changes.

cookin' connection

Swiss Steak

Christy Strobel

Kilkenny

1 can tomato soup
Heinz 57
ketchup
water

Brown steak, add above ingredients, sprinkle in some Season-All seasoned salt, and chopped onion. Mix together; heat and enjoy.

Please use a 3 x 5 card when submitting your recipe. The member whose recipe is published will receive a \$7 energy credit. 31333



Steele-Waseca Cooperative Electric's solar subscribers will see a 27 kWh credit per panel on this month's statement for energy generated during January 2026. Learn more about community solar and The Sunna Project by visiting Steele-Waseca's website, swce.coop. #swceINNOVATION

Was your account number in Sparks?

Each month five account numbers are printed in *Sparks* and a minimum bill credit of \$15 is awarded among however many of those members find their account number. For example, if all numbers are found, a credit of \$15 will be applied to the members' following month's electric bill; or, if only one member finds their number, that member receives a \$35 credit. Members finding their numbers who have a load management receiver on their dual fuel, electric water heater, air conditioner, or genset will receive an additional \$7 credit. When you find your number, phone our office no later than the 3rd of the month following receipt of the *Sparks*, or the amount will be forfeited.

February issue of Sparks



Numbers found:

Janette Emde
Rena Axt
Jason Thayer

Numbers not found:

Layne Janike
Stephen Nelson



Sparks in brief . . .

• **Want easy energy payments?** Sign up for **EnergyPay Plus**, our automatic payment plan, or **Energy Prepay**, our discounted advance payment plan. Contact our office for details. You may also pay your bill online at www.swce.coop, or register your account with SmartHub. For instructions to use SmartHub, visit swce.coop/smarthub.

• **If you have changed or added phone numbers**, please contact SWCE to update your information, or change it through your SWCE SmartHub account.

• **Need a new water heater?** For information about our Westinghouse Electric Water Heater Program, phone the SWCE office weekdays between 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m., or email rebates@swce.coop.

• **January temps** – The average high temperature for January was 21° F, while the average low was 5° F. This resulted in 1,625.5 Heating Degree Days (HDDs), and 0 Cooling Degree Days (CDDs). They compare to last year's average high of 24° F and average low of 5° F. This resulted in 1,572 HDDs and 0 CDDs.

• **ENERGY STAR® Rebates** – For a complete list of residential, commercial, industrial, and agricultural rebates, and their respective rebate form, visit swce.coop/rebates/. For more information or to receive a rebate request form, email rebates@swce.coop, or call 507-451-7340 or 800-526-3514.

• **Steele-Waseca's tree service contractor** – Carr's Tree Service, Inc., is contracted to do SWCE's tree trimming. To report a tree concern, phone:

**507-451-7340 or
800-526-3514**

STEELE COUNTY TIP LINE

866-878-7964

TO BE USED TO REPORT ANY CRIME OR SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY ANONYMOUSLY

COVERS ALL OF STEELE COUNTY INCLUDING THE CITIES OF:

**OWATONNA ELLENDALE
BLOOMING PRAIRIE MEDFORD**



School visit regarding electrical safety

Steele-Waseca Cooperative Electric Line Foreman Pete Hines (standing) and Safety Coordinator Cindy Butterfield (standing left) recently visited kindergartners at Greenvale Park Elementary School in Northfield. Both shared information regarding safety around power lines. Pete demonstrated equipment worn as part of his job. [#swceLIFE+](#)

(Legislative issues continued from Page 1)

opportunities to make progress on key issues that benefit rural communities, strengthen the grid and advance innovative energy solutions.

This year, two priorities lead our efforts: lifting Minnesota's moratorium on nuclear energy and reforming outdated net metering policies.

Lifting Minnesota's Nuclear Energy Moratorium

For decades, Minnesota has maintained a moratorium on new nuclear energy projects, limiting the state's ability to explore carbon-free and reliable power generation. As electric cooperatives work to meet growing demand and integrate more renewable energy, baseload power from advanced nuclear technologies offers immense potential.

Nuclear energy plays a key role in the clean energy transition. Unlike wind

or solar, it provides constant, reliable power regardless of weather conditions or time of day. With advancing technologies like small modular reactors (SMRs), nuclear energy can complement renewables while reducing carbon emissions. 1078786

Removing the moratorium doesn't commit Minnesota to nuclear projects today, but it opens the door to important conversations about ensuring a balanced energy mix for the future. MREA is co-leading efforts to lift the moratorium alongside more than 40 partners, including utilities, labor unions, environmental groups and county governments, through the Minnesota Nuclear Energy Alliance. This coalition is bringing together members from across the political spectrum, and we're optimistic 2026 can be the year Minnesota reopens the nuclear discussion. Learn

(Legislative issues continued on Page 7)

TIPS TO AVOID ENERGY SCAMS

Enrolling in autodraft payments with your utility provider can help prevent certain types of utility bill scams. If a scammer contacts you with fake disconnection threats, you can rest easy knowing your bill is paid automatically through a pre-arranged, secure channel. Autodraft payments also eliminate the risk of exposing checks and personal banking info through the mail. If your utility offers autodraft payments, consider enrolling to stay on track and avoid certain scams.

Source: AARP



ad connection

give away

2 OLDER UPRIGHT FREEZERS, wrking. 213-0443.

FREE ONLINE CLASSIFIEDS, you place & remove your own ad on SWCE's website, swce.coop, these are separate from Sparks & will not appear in Sparks unless mailed, delivered, or emailed to SWCE.

wanted

JUNKERS & REPAIRABLES, top \$ paid for cars, trucks, farm tractors, & newer repairables. 332-2300.

USED 13.6 BY 28 TRACTOR TIRE; 8-BOLT WHEEL for Allis Chalmers WD tractor. 684-3081.

FORD DIESEL SKID STEER. 330-1849.

RETIRED PHYSICAL THERAPIST ASSISTANT WILL ASSIST w/personal cares, exercises, meal prep, errands, light housekeeping. 456-0076.

LOOKING FOR CARPENTERS & REMODELERS! Flexible hrs, full- or part-time work, no experience needed, must have a valid driver's license, \$18-25 an hour. Set up an interview w/Eric. 676-4886.

JD D TRACTOR, flywheel start, running or not. 571-1222/leave message.

BARN, GRANARY, &/OR OUTBUILDINGS, I remove to repurpose the lumber; **OLD TIN; BARN SIDING; LUMBER.** 330-0258/Tim.

14" RIM for Minnesota wagon. 663-1275.

TDR TRANSFER DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS in Erin & Forest Twsp, CPI vs CER calculation, are you losing them? Sell & transfer off before deadline. 612-756-0271/Dan.

USED/WASTE OIL, 200 gal. min., call to set up a pick up of your used/waste oil. 420-7429/Quentin.

for sale

MINI STORAGE UNITS in Morristown, any size. 330-4776.

GERMAN SHEP. PUPS; PORTABLE AIR COMPRESSOR; DIAMOND T TRUCK; FORD 550 LOADER; TRACTOR; RV FRAME. 402-7679.

RENTAL, Izaak Walton League bldg, 4 mi. south of Owat., seats 100, full kitchen, grill, Wi-Fi, \$175. 451-7946.

All area codes are 507 unless otherwise noted

1994 IH STRAIGHT TRUCK w/18' freezer box, \$4800. 334-7177.

GUINEAS. 390-0487.

GRASS HAY BALES, full size, small square, no rain. 451-2978.

USED AUTO PARTS, TRANSMISSIONS, MOTORS, AXLES, & ALL BODY PARTS. 332-2300.

BOAT/RV STORAGE FOR RENT; 1999 CRESTLINER, 1-yr-old trailer, \$6900/obo; **SM. STRAW & HAY BALES.** 475-2322.

TREK 700, men's, 18 spd, 700x35c wheels, \$100; **CANNONDALE MEN'S HYB.**, dual disc brakes, F.S. Fork, 24 spd, \$200; **GARY FISHER MEN'S MTB**, 26x175, alloy whls, 24 spd, F.S. Frk, \$150. 330-3178.

55-GAL. PLASTIC & STEEL BARRELS w/covers, \$5-\$15; **220-GAL. POLY TANK** w/valve in forklift frame, \$75. 421-2521.

DRILL SEEDER in exc. cond, always been shedded; **WAGON** w/sides, gd cond., shedded. 455-1502.

HUNTING BLINDS, weather/rodent proof, insulated & much more. 330-2452.

FLEXSTEEL LIFT CHAIR, like new. 456-4992.

CASE IH 950, 8 row, 30" planter, exc. cond.; **(2) SEED WAGONS** w/brush augers, exc. cond.; **GEHL 125 MIXER MILL**, exc. cond. 838-8583.

TREE TRIMMING, REMOVAL, & STUMP GRINDING, professional climber & aerial lift to U of M guidelines; **2007 FRONT CHROME BUMPER** for an F-650, new. 456-1609.

1939 CHEVY PICKUP CAB ONLY, front bumper, hood, front fenders, running boards, \$2500; **CHAINS FOR TRACTORS**, #2, 10'4" long, 28" wide, \$200. 491-4565.

FARMALL A & B PARADE TRACTORS, \$2000/ea.; **JD 8RX TRACTOR**, 18 WTS & bracket, \$3000; **PO-TATO PLANTER & DIGGER**, \$100/ea. 330-3750.

VINTAGE HAY HOOK LAMPS, \$500/obo; **VINTAGE HOMS GRAM SCALE**, Model 1000, \$100. 440-8831.

BEACHFRONT VACATION CONDOS FOR RENT in Fort Myers Beach, South Padre Island & Mexico, visit www.sandysbeachfrontcondo.com for details & photos. 612-865-9604/Sandy.

1938 FORD PICKUP, professionally built, lowered on '07 Ford Ranger chassis, motor, lots of new parts, like a new pickup box, in primer, \$28,565. 327-2741.

FORTUNE CREEK TRL LOTS, the covenant allows for a pole shed, starting at \$75,000. 332-4623/John.

VEXILAR FL-18 FISH FINDER w/DVD & manual; **FEDERAL REMINGTON 209 SHOT SHELL PRIMERS**, reload for spring. 451-9445.

4 X 5 NET-WRAPPED BALES, some for \$40 & some for \$45; **55-GAL. BARRELS**, \$12. 676-6094 or 390-0600.

GRASS HAY, sm. sq. bales by Waldorf. 327-3672.

AUDIOBOX STEREO, AM/FM, (5) CD player, continuous play, many functions, 4 speakers, surround sound, like new, hardly used, gray finish, \$50. 363-2219.

SM. METAL OFFICE DESK; LIFT CHAIR in gd working cond.; **LOVE SEAT** in gd shape. 213-0443.

MINI STORAGE UNITS, Blmg Prairie. 456-2957.

2 DOWNHILL ROSSIGNOL SKIS. 678-978-7444.

LIGHT CONSTRUCTION, SHINGLING, free estimates. 456-0296.

HAY, 4x5 net wrapped, \$30/bale. 213-8670.

Steele-Waseca Cooperative Electric (SWCE) assumes no liability for the content of, or reply to, any item posted. The party posting any advertisement assumes complete liability for the content of, and all replies to, any advertisement and for any claims against SWCE as a result thereof, and agrees to indemnify and hold SWCE harmless from all costs, expenses, liabilities and damages resulting from, or caused by, any advertisement or reply thereto.

Sparks Free Classified Ad Form for all SWCE Members

Ads need to be received in our office **by March 3** to ensure being printed in the April Sparks. **Please print neatly or type** your ad of **20 words or less** on this form. We reserve the right to edit ad copy to allow space for more ads. Ads received after the 3rd will be printed in the May issue.

For Sale Wanted Give Away

Phone # _____ Account # _____

Name _____

Clip and mail to: SWCE, PO Box 485, Owatonna MN 55060-0485, deliver to the SWCE office, or email your ad to: sparks@swce.coop.



member connection

(Legislative issues continued from Page 5)
more at mnnuclearenergyalliance.org.

Reforming Net Metering

Reforming Minnesota's outdated net metering policies is another top priority. While net metering has encouraged the growth of distributed generation

like rooftop solar, the current framework unfairly shifts costs to non-solar members.

Electric cooperatives fully support renewable energy, but policies must ensure fair and equitable treatment for all cooperative members, whether or not they generate their own power. MREA is working toward reforms that

balance affordability with encouraging renewable energy growth. By aligning incentives with the true costs and benefits of distributed energy resources, we can foster continued innovation without overburdening those who can least afford it.

Additional Areas of Focus

While lifting the nuclear moratorium and reforming net metering are MREA's top priorities, several other issues remain important:

- **Wildfire Mitigation:** Rural utilities and cooperatives are key players in reducing wildfire risks. MREA is working with stakeholders to coordinate strategies that protect communities and critical infrastructure.

- **Utility Worker Protection:** Existing laws mostly protect utility workers, but increasing public awareness remains a priority. We want to extend the cooperative culture of safety across our state.

- **Energy Affordability:** Co-ops prioritize keeping electricity affordable and will continue defending against mandates that raise costs and undermine reliable, balanced energy solutions.

A Trusted Voice for Rural Energy

MREA is dedicated to standing up for electric cooperatives and promoting policies that safeguard affordability, reliability and local control. Whether through testimony, outreach or collaboration, we will work to ensure the cooperative difference is front and center in Minnesota's energy discussions.

From lifting the nuclear moratorium to reforming net metering, 2026 offers a chance to shape a stronger, more sustainable energy future. Together, we can ensure energy policies serve all communities fairly and equitably.

To stay informed and join the conversation, visit voicesforcooperative-power.com/minnesota.

#swceTRUST



SWCE seeking bids for truck

Steele-Waseca Cooperative Electric (SWCE) is conducting a sealed bid auction (minimum bid \$25,000) for their 2016 Ram 5500, 109,550 miles, 6.7 Cummins, 6 Speed auto 4x4 dump truck with a T. L. Woods I-Box backpack and 9' Crysteel contractors' box. Sealed bids must be received at Steele-Waseca's office, 2411 W. Bridge St., Owatonna, by noon Wednesday, April 1. If you would like to see the truck, please call SWCE at 507-451-7340 to schedule an appointment with Matt. If you have questions, please call SWCE at the phone number above and ask for Matt. The person with the winning bid will be notified by phone by the end of the day Thursday, April 2. 1117511

#swceTRUST

Supporting our community needs since 1994.

2026 HOMETOWN Sampler

32nd Annual CONCERT SERIES

COMMUNITY PATHWAYS OF SWEELE COUNTY, INC. United Way

Bad Tangerines the Crogs Turn the Page No Coast

Join us for a weekend of concerts featuring talented, local musicians and support our community hunger needs.

Thank You to our Corporate Sponsors

Admission: food or monetary donation

Friday, February 27 @ 7 PM
Saturday, February 28 @ 3 PM & 7 PM
Sunday, March 1 @ 2 PM

Little Theatre of Owatonna
560 Dunnell Drive, Owatonna

BOHLEN FURNITURE & HOME DECOR, ENHAUS, MATTHEWS, GARVER & HAREMAN, PA, FEDERATED INSURANCE, GOPHER SPORT, KOWZ 100.9 FM, NORTH RISK PARTNERS, Owatonna

(Certificate of Need continued from Page 1)

lio approved in December 2024 by the region's grid operator, the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO), as part of the second set of projects in its Long Range Transmission Plan. In this historic portfolio, MISO approved 24 transmission projects including several 345 kV projects in Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota, as well as the 765 kV transmission backbone in-

frastructure.

Pending approval of the Certificate of Need application in Minnesota, the companies will work closely with landowners and communities throughout the project area to seek input that will help determine the best line route to propose in their future Route Permit applications to be filed with the MPUC in 2027.

Subject to regulatory approvals, the

companies expect construction of the transmission line to begin by 2030 and the line to be operational in 2034.

More info at poweronmidwest.com.

Home Lighting 101: Feeling good about available choices

by Abby Berry, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA)

Lighting is something most of us don't think much about—until it's wrong.

Maybe the living room feels too dim for reading, or the kitchen lights cast an odd yellow glow. We often grab whatever bulb or fixture looks good without considering how it will actually perform in the space. But with a little planning, you can make your home brighter, cozier, and more energy efficient.

Watts vs. Lumens

When you're shopping for lightbulbs, it's easy to focus on watts, but watts only measure how much energy a bulb uses. When it comes to brightness, what really matters is the lumen count. Lumens measure the actual light output. For example, an 800-lumen bulb gives off about the same amount of light as an old-fashioned 60-watt incandescent bulb. (You've likely replaced all incandescent bulbs with long-lasting, energy efficient LEDs, but if not—it's time to make the switch!)

A helpful rule of thumb: higher lumens mean brighter light, while lower watts mean less energy consumed. Remember to check wattage ratings for fixtures and only install bulbs that meet the fixture's wattage safety requirements.

Color Temperature and Consistency

Lightbulbs also vary in color temperature, which ranges from warm yellow to cool white or even bluish tones. This detail often gets overlooked—until you replace one bulb and notice the new light doesn't quite match the others. If mismatched tones drive you crazy, consider buying and installing bulbs of the same brand and wattage in a room at the same time. That way, the look stays consistent, and you won't be stuck hunting for a perfect match later.

Dimmers and Switches

Installing dimmers instead of standard on/off switches can be a game changer. Dimmers give you more control over brightness, help save energy and create a more comfortable atmosphere. Not all bulbs are dimmable, so double check labels before buying.

While you're thinking about switches, consider whether you have enough of

them—and in the right places. A light you can only turn off from one end of a hallway quickly becomes annoying. For new installations or upgrades, it's best to hire a licensed electrician to ensure everything is wired safely and efficiently.

Fixtures: Form Meets Function

Bulbs are only part of the equation—fixtures matter too. Each type serves a purpose. Ambient lighting, like sconces or glass-covered ceiling fixtures, provides general illumination. Task lighting, like pendants, desk lamps or track lighting, focuses light where you need it most.

When choosing a fixture, think beyond looks. Ask yourself: does this light provide the right amount of brightness for the space? A beautiful chandelier might look perfect over the dining table but leave the rest of the room too dim. Alternatively, an oversized fixture could flood the room with more light than you need, wasting both energy and money.








Smart Lighting: Energy Efficiency Meets Convenience

Smart lighting adds another layer of control for illuminating your home. But the real magic is convenience. With smart bulbs, you can adjust brightness, set schedules or even change colors—all from your phone or a voice assistant like Alexa or Google Assistant. Want the lights to dim automatically for movie night? Or to turn on before you get home? Smart bulbs make it easy.

Smart lighting also lets you personalize your space. You can go classic with warm white tones or experiment with colors to set the mood—anything from a soft glow for winding down to vibrant hues for a party. Remember, smart bulbs still rely on power from your wall switch, which needs to stay in the "on" position for remote controls to work. If you prefer using a physical switch, consider pairing smart bulbs with a smart light switch. Many of today's smart switches also come with motion detectors, adding

another level of efficiency and convenience.

Good lighting doesn't just make your home look better—it makes it feel better too. With a little planning, you can create spaces that are welcoming, functional and energy efficient. Whether you stick to traditional bulbs and fixtures or explore the flexibility of smart lighting, thoughtful choices today will brighten your home for years to come.

Home Lighting Guide 			
<small>The following information outlines recommendations for home lighting, however, additional options for bulbs, fixtures and spaces in your home may be available. Sources: Home Depot, Alcon Lighting</small>			
Room/Area	Recommended Lumens	Fixture Types	Smart Tips
 Living Room	15-30 per sq. ft. 150 sq. ft. room 2,250 - 4,500 lumens	Ceiling fixtures, can lighting, lamps/ accent lighting	Use smart bulbs to adjust color temp and control remotely.
 Kitchen	30-40 per sq. ft. 100 sq. ft. room 3,000 - 4,000 lumens	Recessed ceiling lights or flush mounts	Smart switches can be used to control zones (dining vs. prep); undercabinet motion lights offer late-night illumination.
 Dining Room	10-20 per sq. ft. 100 sq. ft. room 1,000 - 2,000 lumens	Pendant or chandelier fixture	Smart, dimmable bulbs allow various levels of brightness for ambiance.
 Bedroom	10-20 per sq. ft. 120 sq. ft. room 1,200 - 2,400 lumens	Ceiling fixtures or recessed lighting	Motion sensors are great options for nighttime use.
 Bathroom	50-80 per sq. ft. 60 sq. ft. room 3,000 - 4,000 lumens	Over-vanity fixtures and/or recessed lighting	Cool LED bulbs provide brighter light for shaving, applying makeup, etc.
 Porch/ Home Entry	100-200 per sq. ft. 100 sq. ft. entry 10,000 - 20,800 lumens	Wall lanterns, ceiling mount and/or floodlights	Motion-activated flood lights and/or smart outdoor bulbs are energy efficient and boost home security.