

PIONEER



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The Pioneer Newsletter is the official Cooperative publication.
Meeker Energy is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

FROM MEMBER TO INFORMED MEMBER-OWNER

For many of us, electricity is something we rarely think about until it isn't there. Flip a switch, and the lights come on. Plug in a device, and it charges.

Bruce and Bev Barrett admit they once thought much the same way. "We took it for granted that when you turn on the light switch it will work," they said. "We have learned how much work goes into getting electricity to us for a reasonable cost."

That new perspective is exactly what Meeker Energy's Co-op 101 Member Group was created to provide.

Established in 2009, Co-op 101 gives members a deeper look at the

Cooperative's operations, programs, goals, values and mission. The two-year program meets four times each year and offers a behind-the-scenes view of what it takes to provide electricity and broadband service.

"Co-op 101 is an opportunity to better understand the Cooperative," said Meeker Energy's CEO Luke Johnson. "It gives members a deeper dive and behind-the-scenes look at what we do, what it takes to provide both electricity and internet service and how the Cooperative form of business is different from other business models."

Continued on page 2.

CO-OP 101 CONTINUED...

The program was also created to encourage greater member participation and appreciation for the Cooperative. “The generations that remember life without electricity are slowly disappearing,” Johnson said. 25-36-103 “We wanted to create a new generation of appreciation and understanding of who and what Meeker Energy is.”

That understanding matters because Meeker Energy members are also owners of the Cooperative. “As member-owners, they are who we work for every day,” Johnson said.

Over eight sessions, participants are introduced to a broad range of topics, including Cooperative history, power supply, substations, vegetation management, energy management programs, outage restoration, line staking, metering, cybersecurity, Vibrant Broadband, Operation Round Up®, legislative issues, net metering and Cooperative finances.

Much of the learning, however, happens beyond the presentations.

Members tour facilities, see equipment up close and talk directly with employees who use it every day. They may watch lineworkers demonstrate the tools used to restore power or learn how broadband technicians connect fiber to bring high-speed internet into homes and businesses.

Those hands-on experiences stood out to Bruce and Bev. “It was interesting to see all the equipment and tools used up close and learn how they were used,” they said. “The fiber optic part of Vibrant is especially amazing, how they connect all the wires by color.”

The Barretts became Meeker Energy members in 2009. After participating in the 2024 Energy Tour, where they toured coal mines and the Garrison Dam and learned more about electric generation, they wanted to learn even more.

Co-op 101 gave them that opportunity. One of their biggest takeaways has been a better understanding of the costs and planning behind reliable service. They were surprised by how much the prices of poles, wires, equipment and other supplies have increased, as well as the long lead times sometimes required to obtain materials.

“We learned how difficult it is to keep electric prices reasonable as all the prices of equipment and supplies have gone up,” they said.

They also gained a greater appreciation for the people behind the service. “The eight sessions were very organized, often with lots of interesting topics, so the time passed quickly,” they said.

That interaction is one of the most valuable parts of the program. “I think the one-on-one time with employees builds trust as members build connections with staff,” Johnson said.



Over the years, some participants have taken that involvement even further. Johnson said many become stronger advocates for the Cooperative, and several former Co-op 101 participants have gone on to run for and serve on Meeker Energy’s Board of Directors.

For Bruce and Bev, the experience has also changed how they think about energy at home. They say they are more aware of their electricity use, have switched to energy-efficient lights and appliances and have a greater appreciation for the equipment and employees needed to keep power flowing. “Being a member of 101 has been a great opportunity,” they said.

Johnson hopes every participant leaves with that same sense of connection. “We hope they leave with a better understanding of the Cooperative, the importance of the Cooperative form of business and our sincere commitment of service to them, our member-owners,” he said.



INTERESTED IN CO-OP 101?

Learn more or let us know you are interested at www.meeker.coop/co-op101, scan the QR code or call Meeker Energy at 320-693-3231. The deadline to apply for our 2027-2028 group is October 15, 2026. Three participants per district will be appointed by the Board of Directors.



WHAT THIS SUMMER TAUGHT US ABOUT THE ELECTRIC GRID

This summer gave us a real reminder of how much we depend on the electric grid and how quickly conditions can change when temperatures climb and demand follows.

July was exceptionally warm across Minnesota, with state climatologists reporting temperatures roughly 4 to 6 degrees above normal in many areas. The prolonged heat increased air conditioning, agricultural ventilation, irrigation and commercial cooling loads.

Here at Meeker Energy, we saw the impact firsthand.

Our system reached a July peak demand of 44,251 kilowatts (kW) on July 17, the highest July peak in the 10-year history we reviewed. That was nearly 13% higher than July 2025 and 11% higher than the previous July record set in 2022. Total energy use also reached a new July high at 20.74 million kilowatt-hours (kWh), up more than 9% from July 2025.

Kilowatt-hours tell us how much electricity was used throughout the month, while kilowatts tell us how much our system needed at one time. When many homes, farms and businesses use large amounts of electricity simultaneously, pressure on the system increases.

That pressure was felt well beyond Meeker Energy's service territory.

On July 15, the Midcontinent Independent System Operator, or MISO, issued escalating emergency notifications, including an Energy Emergency Alert Level 2, or EEA2. MISO coordinates electricity across a 15-state region, and the alert came as above-normal temperatures, higher-than-expected demand and unavailable generation tightened power supplies.

Reliability depends on keeping electricity supply and demand in balance. When demand climbs quickly, grid operators and utilities use several tools, including load management.

During periods of high demand, qualifying equipment can be temporarily cycled or interrupted to reduce electricity use. Dispatchable generation, storage and reserves can also support the system.

This summer showed why a variety of resources matters. Always-available generation, peaking resources, renewable energy, energy storage and load management each play a role in maintaining reliability.

That same principle is at the heart of Meeker Energy's energy-management programs. By shifting or reducing use during peak periods, we can help lower demand when wholesale electricity is often most expensive and the grid is under the greatest pressure. Thousands of small reductions at the right time can make a significant difference.

Members can help, too, by delaying laundry or dishwashing, safely adjusting thermostats and turning off unnecessary lights and electronics.

That is why we often talk about not only how much electricity we use, but when we use it.

July also reminded us that reliability does not happen by accident. It requires planning, investment and cooperation across a much larger electric system.

The energy industry is changing. Electricity demand is growing, large new electric loads are coming onto the system, the generation mix is evolving, and new generation and transmission investments are needed.

Those changes raise questions about affordability, reliability and who pays for the infrastructure needed to meet future demand, and public policy helps shape the answers.

As we head toward the November election, I encourage our members to learn more about the energy issues facing Minnesota and our nation and make their voices heard at the ballot box. Decisions made by elected officials can influence how electricity is generated, what infrastructure is built and what those choices mean for the people paying the bill.

Meeker Energy will never tell you who to vote for. That decision belongs to you. Our responsibility is to advocate for policies that allow us to provide safe, reliable and affordable electricity to the members we serve.

This summer was a reminder that periods of high demand can challenge the electric system, making thoughtful planning, responsible energy use and member participation increasingly important as we look ahead.

Dedicated to keeping the lights on and the data flowing,

Luke Johnson
CEO, Meeker Energy

MEMBER NOTICE: MINNESOTA COLD WEATHER RULE



The Cold Weather Rule, Section 216B.097 of the Public Utilities Act, in effect from October 1 through April 30 in Minnesota, governs how we handle disconnects; it does not prohibit them. Electric cooperatives cannot disconnect a residential consumer for nonpayment if the disconnection would affect the primary heat source, **and all of the following conditions are met:**

1. You declare the inability to pay by completing the Inability to Pay Form. Household income must include proof of one-month gross total household income or be verified on a form provided either by Meeker Energy or by a local energy assistance provider.
2. Your household income is at or below 50% of the state median household income and/or you are a recipient of energy assistance for this heating season.
3. You must have entered into a payment agreement and remain current under that agreement.

We want to ensure that you are well-informed about your energy payments and the protection offered by the Cold Weather Rule during the winter months. It's essential to be aware that Meeker Energy will be conducting disconnects as per legal requirements, even during the cold weather period.

To ensure transparency and assist you in navigating this process, Meeker Energy will provide the following information:

Advance Notice of Disconnection: You will receive a notice of disconnection at least 30 days before any action is taken.

Member Rights and Responsibilities Statement: A document outlining your rights and responsibilities as a member will be provided to you.

Local Energy Assistance Providers: You will be given a list of local energy assistance providers who can offer support in times of financial difficulty.

Cold Weather Rule Protection Request Forms: Forms enabling you to request protection will be available.

Payment Plan Options and Alternatives: Information about available payment plans and alternative options to maintain uninterrupted service will be presented.

It is crucial for you to take proactive steps to avoid disconnection. We strongly encourage you to act promptly. The sooner you reach out to us, the better your chances of retaining electricity service throughout the winter season.

Should you require assistance or wish to discuss options for shut-off protection or payment arrangements, please do not hesitate to contact us at 320-693-3231. You can also access the Cold Weather Rule & Shut-Off Protection form on our website's download forms page: meeker.coop/download-forms.

ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROVIDERS FIND LOCAL HELP WITH HEATING & UTILITY COSTS

KANDIYOHI, MCLEOD & MEEKER COUNTIES

UNITED COMMUNITY ACTION PARTNERSHIP

P.O. Box 1359, 200 4th Street SW, Willmar, MN 56201
320-235-0850 | 800-992-1710

904 Hwy 15 S, Hutchinson, MN 55350
320-587-5244 | 800-992-1710

120 N. Sibley Avenue, Litchfield, MN 55355
320-693-7911 | 800-992-1710

MCLEOD COUNTY AREA

MCLEOD COUNTY SOCIAL SERVICE CENTER

1805 Ford Avenue N, Glencoe, MN 55336
320-864-3144 | 320-484-4330 | 800-247-1756

RENVILLE COUNTY AREA

UNITED COMMUNITY ACTION PARTNERSHIP

500 E DePue Avenue, Olivia, MN 56277
320-523-1842 | 800-363-2533

WRIGHT COUNTY AREA

WRIGHT COUNTY COMMUNITY ACTION

130 West Division Street, Maple Lake, MN 55358
320-963-6500

STEARNS COUNTY AREA

STEARNS TRI-COUNTY ACTION PROGRAMS

1210 23rd Avenue S, P.O. Box 683, Waite Park, MN 56387
320-251-1612 | 888-765-5597



Four location numbers are hidden in this issue of the Pioneer. If you find your location number, call Meeker Energy before September 30 to claim a \$10 bill credit. To receive the credit, your location number must appear in this issue. When you call to claim it, we will also verify that your account information is correct in our system. Members who find and claim their location number will receive an additional bill credit equal to one month's output from a Member Solar Panel.

MEMBERS HELP DISTRIBUTE \$21,174 TO LOCAL CAUSES

Meeker Energy members and Vibrant subscribers are once again making a difference close to home. Through Operation Round Up®, the Meeker Cooperative Electric Trust Board awarded \$21,174 in grants this August to support local organizations, community programs and schools throughout the area.

Operation Round Up® makes it simple for members and subscribers to give back. By rounding up their monthly electric or broadband bills to the nearest dollar, participants turn pocket change into powerful change. 24-07-208 Meeker Energy Employees can also contribute by rounding down their paycheck. Together, those small contributions provide meaningful support for organizations and projects serving our local communities.

“Every time our members and subscribers round up, they’re helping local organizations,” said Trust Chair Laura Niece. “It might not seem like much, but all those nickels and dimes add up to make a real difference in our communities.”

As a not-for-profit, member-owned cooperative, Meeker Energy is committed to improving the quality of life in the communities it serves. Operation Round Up® is one way that commitment comes to life, directing the generosity of participating members and subscribers to organizations doing important work right here at home.

The Meeker Cooperative Electric Trust Board meets three times a year to review applications and award funding. The final 2026 application deadline is November 5. Applications and program guidelines are available at www.meeker.coop.

AUGUST 2026 RECIPIENT LIST

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Darwin Tourism & Promotions Committee	\$500
Dassel Red Rooster Days	\$500
Kimball Days	\$500
Living at Home/BN Prog., Grove City C.A.R.E.	\$750
Ness Church Preservation Foundation	\$3,360
Windmill Days, Grove City	\$500

EDUCATION & YOUTH

Crow River Trail Guards	\$600
PACT for Families Collaborative	\$1,000
True Friends and Friendship Ventures	\$1,500

K-12 TEACHER GRANT

ACGC Jr./Sr. High School - Joy of Reading Project	\$5,000
Eden Valley Watkins High School - Promoting Positive School Culture	\$5,000
Lake Ripley Elementary School - Student Incentive Program & Pizza Party	\$1,014
St. Philip School - Learn Guitar Music Program	\$950

TOTAL **\$21,174**

LEARN MORE ABOUT OPERATION ROUND UP AT:
www.meeker.coop/operationroundup



**WILLIE WIREDHAND'S
ELECTRICITY FUN FACT**

During harvest season, farms produce plenty of organic waste, including corn stalks, crop residue and manure. Through a process called anaerobic digestion, these materials can be broken down to create biogas, which can then be used to generate electricity. Some farms use this technology to produce renewable energy right on site.

MEMBER NEWS

SAVE THE DATE FOR THE 2027 MEEKER ENERGY ANNUAL MEETING AND MEMBER APPRECIATION EVENT

Mark your calendar for the 2027 Meeker Energy Annual Meeting and Member Appreciation Event on Wednesday, May 19, 2027. Join fellow members for an evening of cooperative updates, connection and information about the year ahead.

More details, including event time, location and registration information, will be shared closer to the meeting date.

ENERGY MANAGEMENT RATE REMINDER

Non-summer rates go into effect on September 1, 2026. The energy management rate will return to the fall/winter rate of 5.7¢/kWh and remain in place until May 31, 2027. Your September usage will be reflected on your October bill.

For more information on Meeker Energy electric rates visit www.meeker.coop/rates or contact us at 320-693-3231.



STAY SAFE AROUND ELECTRICITY THIS HARVEST SEASON



As combines, grain carts and other large equipment return to the fields this fall, harvest season brings long days, tight schedules and plenty of activity across Meeker Energy's service territory. With so much happening at once, electrical safety should remain top of mind. A few extra seconds of awareness can help prevent serious accidents and keep everyone working safely.

One of the most important things you can do is know where power lines, poles, guy wires and other electrical equipment are located before work begins. Modern farm machinery continues to increase in size and height, making clearance around overhead power lines especially important. Take time to plan travel routes and identify areas where equipment could come too close to electrical facilities.

Harvest also brings more slow-moving equipment onto rural roads. 30-14-451 Before heading out, make sure lights, reflectors and slow-moving vehicle signs are clean, visible and working properly. Give yourself plenty of time when entering or crossing roadways, and use additional lighting or escort vehicles when appropriate. Drivers should also be prepared to slow down and give farm equipment extra space.

Electrical safety matters around grain handling equipment, too. Augers, elevators and other portable equipment can create hazards when they are moved near overhead power lines. Before repositioning equipment, look up and carefully evaluate the entire path. Never assume there is enough room simply because equipment has traveled through the area before.

Farm buildings deserve attention as harvest activity increases as well. Inspect cords, outlets and electrical equipment for wear or damage before use. Avoid overloaded outlets and extension cords, and keep electrical equipment away from moisture, dust and other conditions that could create additional hazards.

Fall harvest is an important time for farms and families throughout our area. Meeker Energy encourages everyone working in and around agriculture to stay alert, communicate with coworkers and make electrical safety part of every day's plan. Taking a little extra time to recognize hazards can help make sure everyone returns home safely at the end of the day.

REMEMBER THESE FALL HARVEST SAFETY TIPS

TRAIN OTHERS

Train anyone working on your farm, including family members and seasonal workers, about electrical hazards.



WAIT TO UNFOLD

Remind workers to fold or unfold extensions well into the field, not close to the field's edge where power lines are typically located.



USE A SPOTTER

When working in the vicinity of power lines, always have a spotter on the ground who can direct you away from power lines or poles if you are getting too close.



DO NOT EXIT YOUR CAB

If your machine or truck makes contact with a power line, pole, or guy wire, you could become electricity's path to ground and become electrocuted if you step out of the cab.

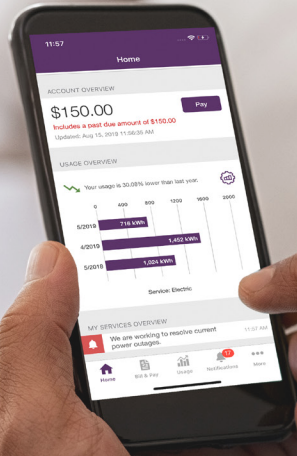


CALL 911

Call 911 to have your electric utility dispatched to de-energize the power source. Only exit the cab if your equipment is on fire. If that happens, make a solid jump out and hop away with feet together as far as you can.



IT'S SMART TO USE SMARTHUB



SmartHub makes it easier to manage your Meeker Energy account anytime, anywhere. Whether you want to pay your bill, review your energy use or stay informed about your service, SmartHub puts helpful account tools right at your fingertips.

MANAGE YOUR ACCOUNT

View current and past bills, check your account balance and access important account information whenever it is convenient for you.

TRACK YOUR ENERGY USE

See how much electricity you are using over time. Reviewing daily, weekly and monthly usage can help you better understand your energy habits, recognize trends and identify opportunities to save energy.

MAKE PAYMENTS CONVENIENTLY

Pay your bill securely online and choose from available payment options. You can also set up automatic payments to make monthly bill payment one less thing to remember.

CHOOSE YOUR NOTIFICATIONS

Customize alerts for billing, payments, energy use and other account activity. SmartHub notifications can help you stay informed and keep important account information from catching you by surprise.

FIND ANSWERS FASTER

Many routine account tasks can be handled directly through SmartHub, giving you quick access to the information and tools you need without having to make a phone call.

SmartHub gives Meeker Energy members greater visibility and control over their electric accounts. 24-19-101 Available online or through the SmartHub mobile app, it is a simple way to stay connected to your cooperative and make managing your electric service easier.

VISIT WWW.MEEKER.COOP TO GET STARTED

✦ COMING SOON: LOAD CONTROL TEXT NOTIFICATIONS!
Watch for more details in the next *Pioneer*.

Welcome Home. Stay Protected.

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MORE NEWS & CLASSIFIEDS ONLINE

Keep up-to-date with your Cooperative in-between issues of the Pioneer and browse our classifieds online at:
www.meeker.coop/news.

Game Day Starts with a Great Connection.

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Call **320-693-3231** or visit **vibrantbroadband.com/26vikings** to learn more.

*Offer valid for new residential customers subscribing to internet speeds of 200 Mbps or higher. Promotion expires October 30th, 2026.