

M I N N K O T A

# MESSENGER



JULY - AUGUST 2025





## 4 WINDS OF DESTRUCTION

On June 20, Minnkota's service territory was struck by one of the most destructive storm systems of the co-op's history. In the days that followed, crews overcame tough terrain and somber sights to restore infrastructure from Bismarck to Bemidji.

*On the cover: Minnkota utility worker Blake McDonald (left) and lineworker Nolan Belle work together to move a fallen power pole near Enderlin, North Dakota.*

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*Minnkota Power Cooperative is a generation and transmission cooperative headquartered in Grand Forks, North Dakota. It supplies wholesale electricity to 11 member-owner distribution cooperatives, three in eastern North Dakota and eight in northwestern Minnesota. Minnkota also serves as operating agent for the Northern Municipal Power Agency, an association of 12 municipal utilities in the same service region. Together, the Joint System serves more than 169,000 consumers.*

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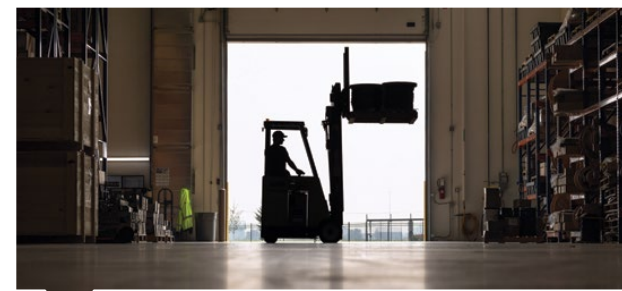
## 20 COOPERATIVE SPIRIT SPARKS MEMBER RESTORATION

Amid long days, muggy heat and severe damage, moments of joy and heartfelt support reminded Minnkota's member cooperatives of the strength and resilience found within their own members and communities.



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After the historic storm brought widespread damage to six of Minnkota's member co-ops, the unshaken support and teamwork of the remaining five brought swift, safe restoration — showing the true strength of the cooperative spirit.



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While crews worked in the field to repair and rebuild Minnkota's power delivery system, teams at the cooperative's offices coordinated efforts and secured necessary resources.



## 28 SAFETY ON THE SCENE

You could say they were in the right place at the right time. When a truck struck a power pole near Grand Forks, North Dakota, two co-op safety leaders teamed up to keep the site secure.



# WITH GRATITUDE



By Mac McLennan,  
Minnkota President and CEO

Every electric utility has its defining moments. These are the times that test your systems, stretch your resources and demand the very best of your people.

For Minnkota, the aftermath of a devastating June 20 storm was one of those moments.

The damage was staggering. Transmission structures were downed across hundreds of miles. Power lines lay tangled on the ground. Communication systems were disrupted. Urgency filled every hour. It was one of the most widespread and complex storm impacts we've ever encountered.

But even in the face of immense challenges, our team never wavered. As I reflect on the restoration efforts, one word continues to rise above all others: **gratitude**.

## I am grateful for **our people**.

Our power delivery crews faced the storm's destruction head-on, navigating dangerous conditions with resilience and resolve. Their tireless efforts were the driving force in bringing service back to our members. And they did so working long hours with no substantial injuries or safety incidents.

Behind the scenes, our power system operators managed the grid with precision in real time. Our engineers quickly

reworked plans and found creative solutions with the materials on hand. Our procurement and warehouse teams worked to source critical materials, organizing logistics and ensuring crews had what they needed when they needed it.

And the effort didn't stop there. From IT and communications to fleet and facilities, every corner of our organization came together with focus and determination.

## I am grateful for **our members**.

Many of our member cooperatives were also hit hard by the storm, facing significant system damage of their own. During their time of need, they leaned on their neighboring cooperatives to lend a helping hand. Extra crews were sent, equipment was

shared and support was offered without question.

This event reaffirmed something we've always known. The cooperative model is powerful. We face challenges together, and we overcome them together.

## I am grateful for **our partners**.

We could not have responded to this event at such a scale without the partnership of others in our industry. Basin Electric Power Cooperative, Western Area Power Administration and many neighboring

utilities and vendors came to our aid with crews, materials and resources. Your willingness to act in our time of need speaks volumes about the strength and solidarity of our industry.

## I am grateful for **our communities**.

Throughout the recovery, we witnessed remarkable patience, generosity and encouragement from the people we serve. From kind gestures to words of support, every act of goodwill made a difference.

It's usually in the toughest of times when you learn the

most about the people around you. The response to this event shows that our entire cooperative system is strong, selfless and committed to the member at the end of the line. Thank you to everyone who answered the call in the field, in the office and beyond.

**4**  
**345-KV SYSTEM**  
**STRUCTURES DAMAGED**

**33**  
*(WESTERN ND)*  
**230-KV LINE**  
**STRUCTURES DOWN**

**MORE THAN 74**  
*(ACROSS SERVICE TERRITORY)*  
**69-KV SYSTEM**  
**STRUCTURES DAMAGED,**  
**WITH ASSESSMENTS ONGOING**

**91**  
**SUBSTATIONS OUT**  
**OF SERVICE**

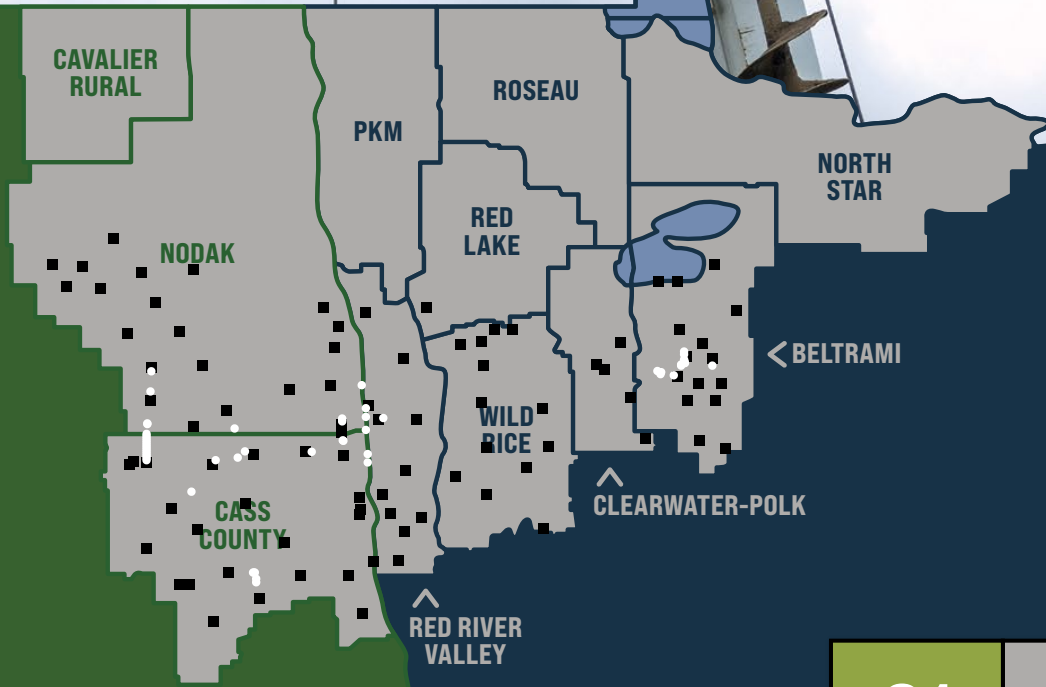
**1,100 HOURS**  
**TOTAL APPROX. OUTAGE TIME**

**\$4-5 MILLION**  
**ESTIMATED TOTAL FROM**  
**THE STORM DAMAGE**



# STORM DAMAGE MAP


MINNKOTA  
POWER  
COOPERATIVE  
SYSTEM



91

 SUBSTATION  
OUTAGES

139

 DAMAGED  
STRUCTURES  
30 MN Structures  
109 ND Structures



# WINDS OF DESTRUCTION

## Minnkota power delivery crews respond to historic, systemwide storm damage

By Kaylee Cusack  
Photography Michael Hoeft

**O**n June 20, the longest day of the Midwest summer, a storm began to build in western North Dakota. The severe weather watches were on everyone's lips, as is always the case in farming and ranching country. But no one knew, in the friendly chatter, what was really to come.

By daybreak on June 21, a path of devastation wrought by high winds and tornadoes stretched more than 300 miles from west of Bismarck, North Dakota, to the rural areas of Bemidji, Minnesota. Already, crews from Minnkota Power Cooperative and many of its member cooperatives had been working through the night, trying to assess the extent of the damage and restoring power where they could. The sunrise revealed this would be no quick fix.

## What is a **derecho**?

The storm that brought destructive high winds across Minnkota's service territory was categorized as a "**derecho**" by area meteorologists. According to the National Weather Service, a derecho is a widespread, long-lived wind storm associated with a band of rapidly moving showers or thunderstorms. To be classified as a derecho, the wind damage swath must extend more than 240 miles and include wind gusts of at least 60 mph along most of its length.



Minnkota lineworker Nolan Belle lifts conductor off a fallen pole near Enderlin, North Dakota, following a deadly tornado just days before.



# BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

**June 20-22**  
*The first 72 hours*

Minnkota Line Superintendent David Lagge's family was settling into a Friday night at the lake when the tornado warnings started to ping on June 20. The alerts were for the area between him and Minnkota's Milton R. Young Station power plant in Center, North Dakota, 45 miles to his south.

"The first call came in from dispatch to me at around 10:15 p.m.," Lagge said. He was told the 345-kilovolt transmission line, which carries power from western North Dakota to Minnkota's service territory on the eastern side of the state and northwestern Minnesota, was having challenges. "The relay data was showing it somewhere out by the plant."

Lagge called a crew out from Grand Forks to assess the line damage, which was impacting both 345-kV lines from the plant. Then, he was told part of the 345-kV stretch from Jamestown to Fargo was also off.

"The tornadoes and the storms were traveling east, kind of right there on the Interstate 94 corridor. As we watched the radar more, we knew – holy cow," he said. "It was traveling north of I-94, and our 345 line is just north



★ BISMARCK

Basin Electric Power Cooperative assists Minnkota with repairs to a transmission line near Jamestown, North Dakota.

*Photo courtesy of Emily Windjue*

of I-94. We were like, how much of that line is going to be laid down?"

The storm, having already damaged four 345-kV structures and more than 30 230-kV structures between the power plant and Bismarck, lost no

strength as it continued through the rest of the service territory. Lagge and his team continued to work with Minnkota's control center through the night to get a handle on where there was damage.

"It was challenging in the beginning for all of us who were trying to help guide and direct the restoration process," explained Power Delivery Operations Manager Harold Narlock. "We were trying to understand where we were as far as what's on the ground, where the structures are and where we should focus our resources."

Fog and wind were making it nearly impossible for Minnkota crews to assess the damage in the west, so Lagge teamed up with a helicopter pilot to patrol the 345-kV line from above. He was able to spot the damage and

develop a game plan to make repairs with the help of a crew from Western Area Power Administration (WAPA). Over the course of the next few days, assistance would come from WAPA, Basin Electric Cooperative and Otter Tail Power Company.

By the time the system exited Minnkota's region, nearly 140 structures laid broken or damaged and 91 substations had gone out of service. All substations were back online within 72 hours, and built-in redundancies allowed power system operators to reroute and restore power to member cooperatives, even as miles of line lay on the ground.

The crews of lineworkers, electricians and utility workers had already gone three days with little rest. But the restoration effort was just starting.

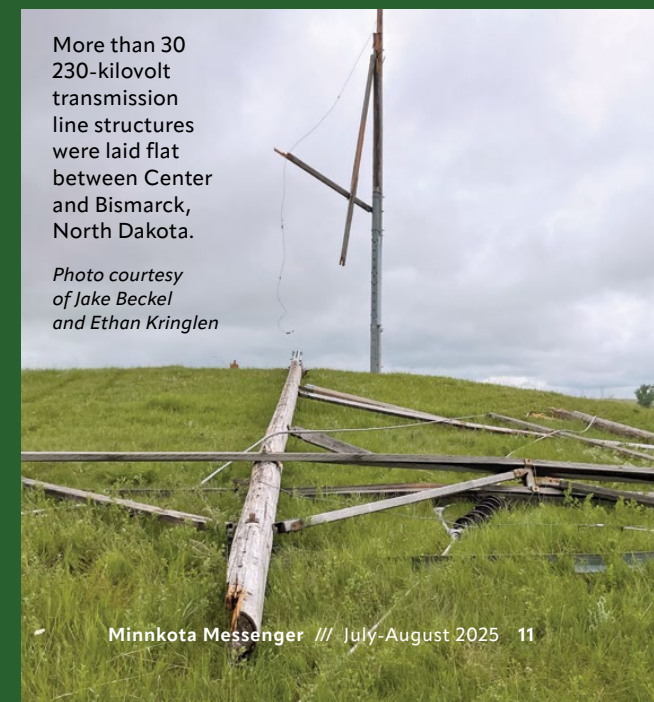
"If you have overboots on, and you walk in the mud out there, your feet now weigh between five and 20 pounds. That just wears you out. And they just keep going," Lagge said. "Minnkota's blessed to have the group that we have."

Crews worked through the night in the first couple of days following the storm.



More than 30 230-kilovolt transmission line structures were laid flat between Center and Bismarck, North Dakota.

*Photo courtesy of Jake Beckel and Ethan Kringlen*





# GRANDIN, NORTH DAKOTA

June 23

*Three days later*

Crumpled metal grain bins were strewn across the early growths of corn and beans northeast of Grandin, North Dakota. Derecho winds pushing 80 mph made short work of structures that had stood for decades, including several transmission power lines.

"It's amazing to see how many grain bins are a quarter mile out in the field away from the farm. It's like, holy moly," said Minnkota lineworker Nolan Belle, preparing to help replace another 69-kV pole at the edge of a bean crop. He had already patrolled several damage sites on the eastern side of the state, and he had one word for it – carnage. "There were a couple of times when we'd see a pine tree, without any other pine tree around, just laying out in the middle of the field."

Belle's foreman, Butch Tester, had seen much of the same over the past few days.

"This is the worst summer storm that I've ever been on, since I've been here – 28 years,"

he said, driving his truck to the next broken pole a couple miles down a gravel road. "And it was so widespread, from Center to Bemidji, and a wide path. That hardly ever happens. We literally had issues across pretty much our whole system."

Tester was called out to the damage near Center and Bismarck at 10:30 p.m. on June 20, at the start of the night of mayhem to come. He was out working until 9 p.m. the

following night. He'd been pulling similar hours for the past three days, as had his crew. But he was still upbeat.

"We don't want stuff to fall down, and we don't want people to be out of power, we don't want major disasters. But when the [stuff] does hit the fan, the linemen step

up. That's just how we are. That's our mentality," he said. "Yes, we get tired, hungry and thirsty. But we just push through."

Lineworkers get used to work like this. But what happens when a "100-year storm" strikes when you've marked fewer than 100 days on the job, like apprentice lineworker Drew Boen? "He got his baptism by fire with Nolan and these guys on his first night," Tester said with a paternal grin.

Boen was anointed that week, but it's hard to feel heaven-bound when you're working through hell.

"I heard in Enderlin, they can't even find some of the poles that are supposed to be there," Belle said as his crewmates cracked open energy drinks behind him.

GRANDIN ★



Minnkota lineworker Matt Setter prepares a new pole for setting near Grandin, North Dakota.



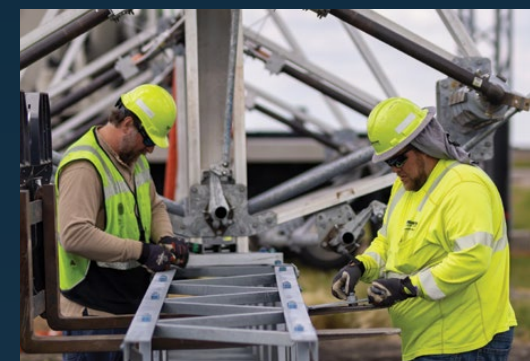
Line crew foreman Butch Tester uses a plumb bob level to gauge a new pole.



Minnkota lineworkers guide a new pole into the right setting.



The Elm River line switch was one of the larger pieces of infrastructure destroyed by the storm's derecho winds north of Grandin. Its repair took collaboration between many power delivery teams.





# ENDERLIN, NORTH DAKOTA

**June 25**  
*Five days later*

Just east of Enderlin, North Dakota, an EF-3 tornado with winds exceeding 165 mph cut a trail 12 miles long and 3 miles wide across the prairie. Homes, barns and equipment were destroyed, claiming the lives of three people and breaking the spirit of many others.

Minnkota line foreman Tyler Pawlowski looked at the broken trees surrounding the creek, his eyes following the power line pulled across a flattened field to the northeast. "You can tell the tornado went right through where we're standing," he said.

A 1.1-mile stretch of 69-kV transmission line fell victim to the tornado, with 16 poles snapped and thrown up to 500 yards in opposite directions. When crews first arrived on scene, they couldn't even find the structures – the very ones Pawlowski set his first summer with Minnkota, nearly two decades ago.

"We built this line back in 2006," he said. "It's pretty crazy."

As the line crew began to prepare new poles to fill the void left by the twister, Minnkota's utility crew cleaned up the broken remains tossed across the acreage.



A Minnkota crew works through another round of rain to clear the destruction from a tornado near Enderlin, North Dakota.



Line crews stage and prepare several poles to replace those blown away by a tornado.



Line crew foreman Tyler Pawlowski (left) guides his team through pole assembly.

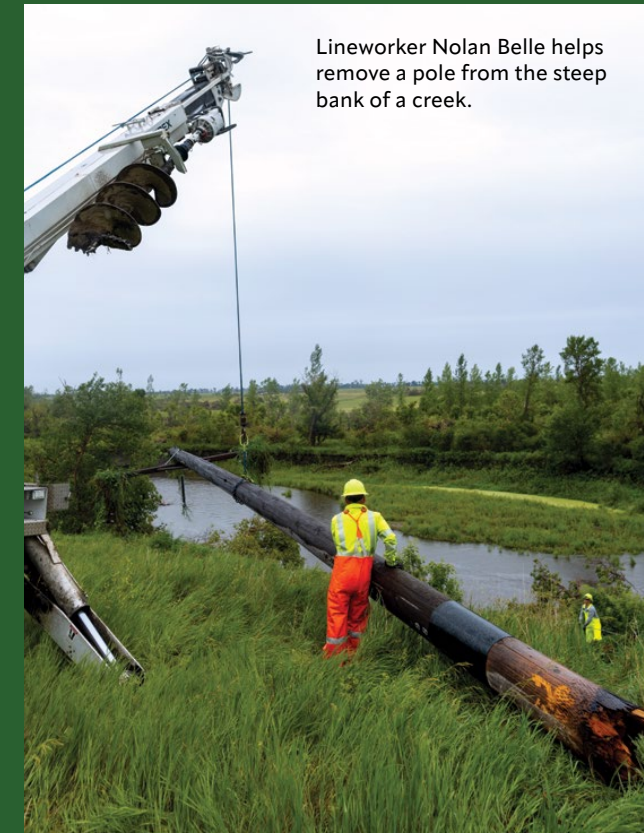
Like nearly all the co-op's power delivery crews, utility workers Blake McDonald and Casey Anderson had been working long hours for many days.

"Sunday I saw a bunch of poles – some were just barely broken, and some were snapped off completely. There are lines down, some of them sitting on the road. People can't get to their houses and their farmsteads," McDonald said. "It's a mess."

"It's a nightmare," Anderson added in calm disbelief. "It's going to be a long time before people get back to their norm."

Pawlowski has never seen a summer storm of this intensity – of this breadth – in his career. Nor had his crew mates. They spoke of laminate power poles, known for their unbreakable strength and weight, snapped in half, one after another, for miles near Bismarck. Another 300 miles away in Bemidji, Pawlowski's parents were enjoying a weekend away when the same system blew through.

"They were in their camper and they thought it was going to tip over," he said. "My parents have been camping for 20, 30 years, and that's the most scared they've ever been."



Lineworker Nolan Belle helps remove a pole from the steep bank of a creek.



Lineworkers Justin Nord (left) and Drew Boen prep a new pole.



The Enderlin tornado snapped hundreds of established trees in its path.



# BEMIDJI, MINNESOTA

June 27  
Seven days later



A week after the storm, line foreman Nick Bye and his crew were finally getting to the puzzle of replacing a seven-pole span of transmission line in Bemidji. While half of the line lay tangled in trees and a marshy, poison-ivy-and-tick-infested clearing, the other half was twisted into a salvage yard of bent-up, rusted-out husks of automobiles past.

"Right now, we're getting the wires off of all of the vehicles and getting them up in dollies so we can bring the wire up on a dead-end pole that broke down here," Bye said, pointing far past the pickups and mud pits to the end of the line.

The community of Bemidji was one of the hardest hit by the June storm system. Torrential rain led to flash flooding in lower areas, and the wind leveled acres of woodland the northern Minnesota region is known for.

"Over here, trees are taken down – all the trees. A lot of roofs blown off around here. It's been a little bit of everything," Bye said. "We've had our small storm jobs, but nothing to this scale. This is life-changing for them."

However, through this disaster, those living in the community remained resilient. Neat piles of logs began to accumulate in yards as neighbors helped others clear fallen trees, many over a century old. The #BemidjiStrong hashtag quickly gained traction on social media. Signs began to appear, voicing gratitude for the first responders and line crews.

"There was a guy the other night who stopped us and said, 'Thank you guys – appreciate it,'" Bye said.

As terrible as the aftermath of the storm was in Bemidji, Bye had already experienced a lot of devastation across Minnkota's footprint over the past week of restoration. The night of June 20, he was one of the first lineworkers to arrive on the scene in Enderlin, where a tornado had just laid waste to the countryside a couple of hours before. Driving through the dark, he couldn't yet see much of the damage, but he came upon a car

parked on the side of the road. He stopped to see if he could offer help to the two people inside.

"A woman walks up, and she's like, 'It's gone. It's all gone.' And her voice was just shaking," he recalled. "I was like, 'Your house?' And she said, 'Yeah. We lost it all.'"

Bye says he remained with the couple until he knew they had a plan and then continued to patrol.

"Once it got light out, I saw that just everything was gone. Then I started walking," he said, describing the wet fields where Minnkota's transmission line stood just hours before. "There you could see there was a quilt out there, and then I was walking and there was a senior picture."

Minnkota lineworkers make a game plan for removing fallen conductor from vehicles and trees.



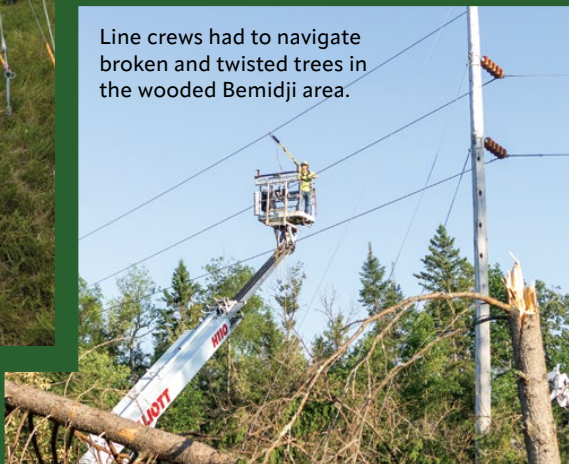
Conductor is hung on a new 69-kilovolt pole.



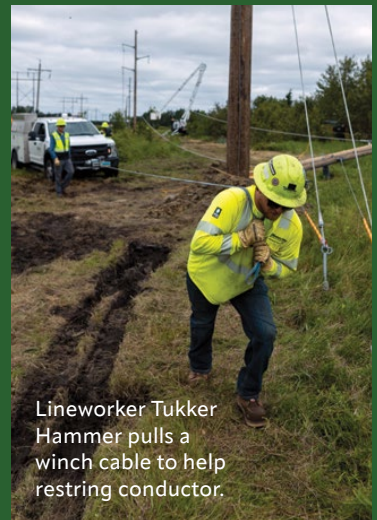
Line crew foreman Nick Bye stabilizes a pole for adjustments.



Line crews had to navigate broken and twisted trees in the wooded Bemidji area.



Lineworker Tukker Hammer pulls a winch cable to help restring conductor.



Lineworker Luke Boman helps align a new 69-kilovolt pole near Bemidji, Minnesota.







## Stronger together

A majority of Minnkota's system was repaired in under two weeks due to the tenacity of the lineworkers, electricians, utility workers and others who devoted the entirety of the summer's first days to restoring power to the region. The June 20-21 storm activated one of the largest collaborative response efforts in the cooperative's history.

It was difficult. At times, it was heartbreaking. But Minnkota and its members will be stronger because of it.

"We can run scenarios, we can do training. But there's no better experience than living through it," Narlock said. "We don't want storms, but we learn a lot every single time. And I think the crews just keep getting better at what they do."

## Safety is a core value.

*"We always say safety is of utmost importance. The number of structures that were down that got put back up, the trees being cleared – it was all hands on deck. Literally every electrician, utility worker, lineman and outpost were all out working. They got all of this up and on within one week's time. **And we didn't have a single serious injury.** And that, to me, is pretty amazing."*

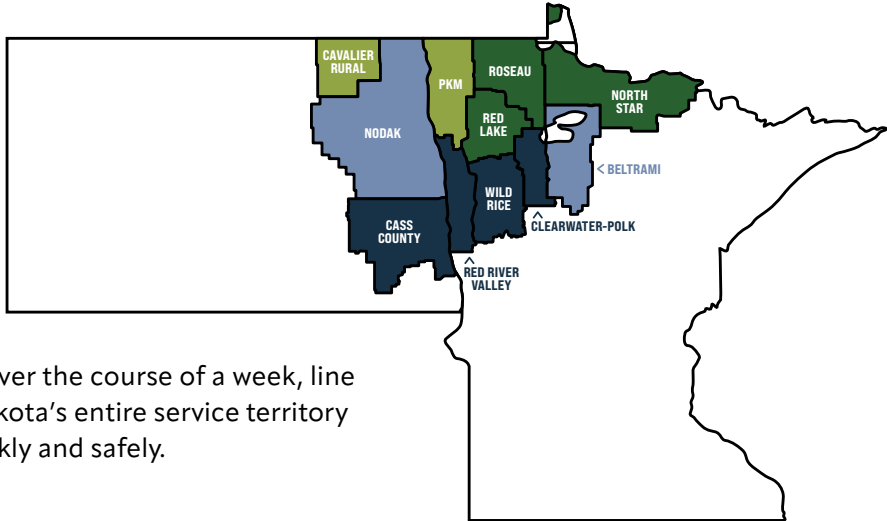
– David Lagge,  
Minnkota Transmission Superintendent



# COOPERATIVE SPIRIT SPARKS MEMBER RESTORATION

By Emily Windjue /// Photography Submitted

The damage from the June 20 storm didn't just stop with Minnkota's infrastructure. Six out of its 11 member cooperatives experienced snapped poles, downed power lines and severe community damage during this historic storm. But in true cooperative spirit, the five unaffected member cooperatives didn't just step aside after the storm, they stepped up. Over the course of a week, line crews were dispatched from across Minnkota's entire service territory to help the impacted restore service quickly and safely.



**IMPACTED:**  
Cass County  
Electric Cooperative

CASS  
COUNTY

Poles down: ~200

Number of member-consumers  
without power at peak:  
14% (~8,500 members)

Power fully restored:  
Thursday, June 26

**SUPPORT:**  
Cavalier Rural  
Electric Cooperative

Sent two lineworkers  
to Wild Rice Electric  
Cooperative, June 22-23

Sent two lineworkers  
to Beltrami  
Electric  
Cooperative,  
June 24-26

CAVALIER  
RURAL

**IMPACTED:**  
Clearwater-Polk Electric  
Cooperative

Poles down: 62

Number of member-consumers  
without power at the peak:  
67% (3,000 members)

Power fully restored:  
Monday, June 23

CLEARWATER-POLK

**IMPACTED:**  
Beltrami Electric Cooperative

Poles down: 80+

Number of member-consumers  
without power at peak:  
87% (19,560 members)

Power fully restored:  
Thursday, June 26

BELTRAMI

**SUPPORT:**  
Red Lake Electric Cooperative

Sent five lineworkers  
to Wild Rice Electric  
Cooperative, June 22-23

Sent two lineworkers to  
Clearwater-Polk Electric  
Cooperative, June 24-25

RED  
LAKE

**SUPPORT:**  
PKM Electric Cooperative

Sent four lineworkers to Red  
River Valley Cooperative Power  
Association, June 21-22

Sent one crew of three and  
then a crew of two to Beltrami  
Electric Cooperative, June 21-26

PKM

**SUPPORT:**  
North Star Electric Cooperative

Sent three lineworkers to  
Clearwater-Polk Electric,  
June 21-26

NORTH  
STAR

**IMPACTED:**  
Red River Valley Co-op Power Association

Poles down: 45

Number of member-consumers  
without power at peak:  
41% (2,000 members)

Power fully restored:  
Sunday, June 22

RED RIVER VALLEY

WILD  
RICE

**IMPACTED:**  
Wild Rice Electric Cooperative

Poles down: ~60

Number of member-consumers  
without power at peak:  
37% (~5,433 members)

Power fully restored:  
Monday, June 23

**IMPACTED:**  
Nodak Electric Cooperative

Poles down: 63

Number of member-consumers  
without power at peak:  
10.5% (2,200 meters)

Power fully restored:  
Monday, June 23

NODAK

ROSEAU

**SUPPORT:**  
Roseau Electric  
Cooperative

Sent three  
lineworkers to  
Beltrami Electric  
Cooperative,  
June 21-26



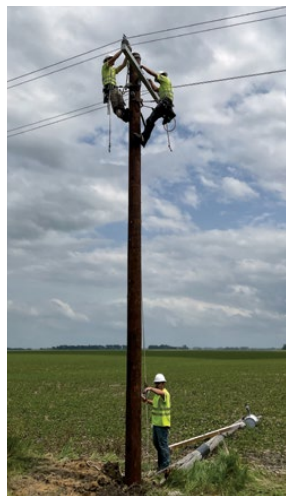
# NEIGHBORS IN ACTION

Cooperative employees and community members work behind the scenes to keep crews fed, spirits high after June 20 storm

By Emily Windjue /// Photography Submitted

Between the long days, muggy temperatures and destruction, little moments of joy were found throughout this all-hands-on-deck storm cleanup. With an outpouring of love and support from those directly affected by the storm, Minnkota's member cooperatives shared some of the moments that showcased the strength of their people and the resiliency of their communities.

## Red River Valley Co-op Power



The Hendrum community in the Red River Valley Co-op Power area experienced considerable damage. As lineworkers from Red River and PKM Electric rolled into town, they found families outside playing yard games, having picnics and helping their neighbors clean up after the storm. The strength of the community pushed the crews to get the lights on as quickly and safely as possible.

## Clearwater-Polk Electric Cooperative



"It's our co-op tradition that when an employee has a birthday, they get their favorite dessert made and we all share it to celebrate. Today is Wayne's birthday, and although he is on loan from North Star Electric Co-op, he was treated like one of our own and got to enjoy his favorite dessert with everyone – strawberry rhubarb pie! Happy Birthday, Wayne!"

North Star Electric lineworker Jesse Huot spent the storm restoration alongside his brother, Clearwater-Polk lineworker Travis Huot. Travis and Jesse worked side by side one last time, as Travis is hanging up his climbing gear this upcoming October as he prepares for his new role as Operations Manager in the new year.



## Wild Rice Electric Cooperative



Randy Degerness, a Wild Rice Electric member, dropped off some goodies as a thank-you to the entire Wild Rice team. It was a great reminder that the effort and dedication their team showed did not go unnoticed.

## Nodak Electric Cooperative



One member in the Mayville, North Dakota, area anonymously dropped off a case of water, Gatorade and a box of individual chips in the back of a Nodak bucket truck as they were working in the field.

## Beltrami Electric Cooperative



On June 26, Beltrami Electric gathered all the restoration line crews and thanked them for their hard work. Throughout the week, they had 52 people out in the field working to restore power with 20 of those #StormSoliders from other co-ops. Even Beltrami's retired warehouse manager offered a helping hand!

Behind the scenes, Beltrami Electric office staff prepared hot breakfast and packed coolers of food for every crew helping in the field. Their coordination and helping hands were crucial during the storm cleanup.



## Wild Rice Electric

Thank you again!! Your selfless efforts have not gone unnoticed. You are appreciated beyond words ♥ Blessings to you all!!

*Ramona Leiseth*

## Cass County Electric

Our mothers and fathers would quickly say when asked the greatest improvement to their farm lives: "The REA cooperative bringing electricity to their farms!" Imagine living not a few days but every day without power!! In the scheme of things it wasn't that long ago!! It is so true that we take so many miracles of convenience for granted!! We owe not only the brave cooperative employees for their truly outstanding dedication but also those that worked hard to bring the power to us back in those very hard times! We are grateful and must realize how fortunate we are to live where all this has been made possible. We are so grateful!!! Praise be!

*Sheryl Dagman*

## Nodak Electric

I couldn't thank you enough for everyone's dedication and hard work! We got power this afternoon, thank you!

*September Peterson-Homan*

## Red River Valley Co-op Power

To all who worked to get power restored, thank you! Thank you! Thank you!!! x 1,000

*Wayne Andree*

## Clearwater-Polk Electric

Thank you ALL for your efforts! The helpers, linemen, office people answering the phones and everyone who made it possible to get power back!! Thank you and you are appreciated!

*Dustin Grimsley*

## Beltrami Electric

Everyone has been so amazing during such a chaotic time. So many with great expertise to help one another out. Electric co-ops helping one another just so amazing! Truly Minnesota nice. Can't thank you all enough!

*Kate Anthony*





(Left to right) Power system operators Jeremy Wiegandt, Tanner Stegman and Terry Peoples monitor the electric grid inside Minnkota's Energy Control Center. The trio played a key role in responding to the June 20 storm outages.

# FROM ADVERSITY TO ACTION

## Behind the scenes, Minnkota employees answered the call

By Ben Fladhammer /// Photography Michael Hoeft

As the final hours of June 20 ticked away, alarms lit up Minnkota's Energy Control Center like warning flares in the night. Outside, lightning streaked across the sky. Inside, the system's massive digital board, which offers a live view of the regional power grid, flashed with signs of chaos.

The nerve center of Minnkota's power delivery system was under siege.

"We just started losing lines all over the place," said Reed Daws, system operations superintendent. "It's some of the worst lightning we've ever seen. It was intense, and it just kept rolling east. We had

lines down from Mandan (North Dakota) to Bemidji (Minnesota). It was 300 miles of pure damage."

For Jeremy Wiegandt, it was his first major storm since becoming a power system operator in the Control Center two years earlier. As conditions worsened, he called in fellow operator Terry Peoples to

provide support, while Daws and others joined to help with the massive undertaking. Together, they faced a barrage of phone calls, alerts and escalating outages.

"It was really stressful at first," Wiegandt said. "But once the storm started rolling in, the mind-set totally changes. You just lock in and do what needs to be done."

From their stations at the Control Center, power system operators keep a watchful eye on the electric grid. With just a few commands, they can energize, de-energize or reroute power across the system. But during this event, the scope of the damage wasn't fully understood until line crews reached the

scene and navigated pitch-black conditions and unpredictable hazards.

Cell service was spotty, making real-time communication difficult. Still, coordination between operators and crews remained critical. With new challenges surfacing by the minute, even routine tasks demanded extra focus and care.

Above all, safety came first for the crews in the field and the public. Working together, operators and field personnel cleared debris from roads, secured downed lines and even removed damaged poles from a hospital parking lot.

Peoples compared the teamwork to a fast-paced basketball game.

"You're in the game, but you're not alone," he said. "You're passing the ball back and forth – it's all about working together to get the job done safely and quickly."

The next day, the ball was passed to operators Tanner Stegman and Kevin Kennelly, who carried the restoration work forward.

"The communication was strong," Wiegandt said. "When I came back the next night, the day shift had already made a lot of progress. Clearances were written up and ready to go; it was impressive. We've got a great team."



Warehouse worker Nick Bushaw transports materials with a forklift in Minnkota's operations area.

# Supply chain initiative pays off

While power system operators managed the real-time storm response, Minnkota's warehouse and procurement teams ran their own race against the clock.

At 1:30 a.m., Nick Bushaw's phone rang. He grabbed a quick breakfast bar and headed straight to the warehouse, unsure of what he'd be walking into. It didn't take long to find out.

As repair orders began flooding in, Bushaw, a warehouse worker, began pulling, packing and loading the critical materials crews would need to begin restoring power.

"I was actually pretty excited to get the call," he said. "Every nut and bolt, all the way up to a transformer, comes through us in the warehouse. It's our chance to help."

Throughout the early morning, Bushaw hustled to stay ahead of crew requests, making sure no one was delayed waiting on parts. Quick-reference documents from Engineering helped him match the right materials to the right job.

"Even though I was alone, I didn't feel alone," Bushaw said. "The procurement team was always reaching out to see if I needed anything. I'm just proud of our team and the people who work with me. They're all hard workers and good people to deal with."

In the office, Procurement Manager Scott Schreiner ran lunch over to Bushaw while coordinating materials, contractors and equipment on the fly.

That scramble was made far smoother thanks to a 2024 initiative in Minnkota's annual Business Plan aimed at improving the cooperative's supply chain readiness. A comprehensive overhaul of the inventory system and the addition of materials ensured that most critical components were already in stock and ready to deploy.

Still, Schreiner said, the most powerful resource in a crisis is relationships.

"When I opened my computer, I already had messages from suppliers offering help," he said. "They knew we had storms and were ready to support us. They're in the industry and know the expectations and responsibilities we have as a power supplier."

The first urgent request was for truckloads of rock – necessary for setting and stabilizing dozens of new 69-kilovolt poles. Soon after, Schreiner's team was securing a helicopter to conduct aerial assessments. Those views gave engineers a much-needed edge in identifying and prioritizing problem areas across the storm-ravaged region.

# Engineering the comeback

With miles of lines down and assessments coming in, Minnkota's engineers were already working on the recovery. Engineering Manager Wayne Lembke and his team gathered in the office over the weekend, mapping out the restoration plan and determining how to best utilize the materials available on-site.

"Engineering's role starts long before the storm ever happens,"

Lembke explained. "We've already assessed our system. We know what we have out there. We have our project records updated, we've gone through our storm stock and recently completed a big upgrade to that to make sure we have material here and ready to go."

When the storm hits, those preparations enabled the team to shift from planning to execution.

"There's always going to be that portion that we just can't respond to with on-hand material," Lembke said. "But this storm proved that we had a lot of the materials we needed and had a good plan to respond."

With so many moving parts, Minnkota's Project Management Office (PMO) played a vital role in keeping every business unit aligned. The group meticulously tracked each project, which is essential not only for guiding ongoing work but also for meeting potential federal requirements if disaster assistance becomes available.

"Anytime an emergency situation happens, we immediately think of FEMA," said Wade Horner, portfolio/project manager. "With that likelihood, we know there are requirements that will need to be fulfilled, so we try to get ahead of things as much as possible. Immediately, work orders were needed so material can be defined and tracked toward each respective project."

The effort required close teamwork at every level. PMO worked hand in hand with crews, engineering and other support staff, ensuring that critical information flowed quickly.

"In PMO, we're really a conduit for communication," Horner said. "We consider many of the business units at Minnkota to be part of our team. Everyone understands the needs of our members and, simply enough, want to get the lights back on as soon as they can."



Wayne Lembke (left) and Wade Horner review engineering plans. Both helped lead efforts in engineering and project management during the outage response.



# SAFETY ON THE SCENE

By Kaylee Cusack /// Photography Michael Hoeft



Nodak's Derek Sondreal (left) and Minnkota's Brandon Greene worked together to ensure site safety after a pole strike in June.



## Minnkota and Nodak safety pros team up for emergency power pole collision response

You never know when your skills will be called upon to make a difference.

June 11, 2025, was Brandon Greene's day. With his quick action and the assistance of a fellow co-op, he helped ensure the safety of two individuals caught in a dangerous situation.

Greene, Minnkota Power Cooperative's safety administrator, had just finished conducting a training session at a substation just south of Grand Forks, North Dakota. The training was attended by several employees of Nodak Electric Cooperative, along with lineworkers from municipal utilities in the region. After wrapping up some final questions with Nodak Assistant Line Superintendent and Safety Coordinator Derek Sondreal and his team, it was time to head back to headquarters.

As Greene drove to the west, something strange caught his attention to the south. At first, he thought a farmer's auger was placed close to another utility's power line.

"It didn't look right," he recalled. "As I got closer and closer, it looked like there was, maybe, dust coming up or something. Well, it was the grass on fire, and the power pole was on top of a vehicle."

Greene immediately called Sondreal, who was close behind with some of the Nodak crew. As Sondreal pulled up, he saw two

men in the vehicle that had hit the pole. The passenger was opening his door to get out – a potentially deadly decision after striking a power pole, as the vehicle and surrounding ground could be energized.

"Brandon jumped out and yelled at him, 'No, no, no! Stay inside!'" Sondreal said. The passenger did just that.

"I told them they needed to stay in there until we made sure the line was de-energized, that no power was going to it anymore," Greene said. He continued to talk to the passengers through their open window at a safe distance, as the Nodak crew got to work directing traffic around the site and monitoring the grass fire. The co-op vehicles were equipped with fire extinguishers, but they couldn't approach until they knew power wasn't feeding into the ground.

"At one point, the grass fire was getting worse, so we thought maybe we would have to have them jump out of the vehicle," Greene said. He calmly explained the situation to the men in the vehicle and described the steps for safely jumping from a potentially energized vehicle (see Bunny Hop Method above). However, the fire went out before an escape was necessary.

The driver had already called 911, so soon the Grand Forks Sheriff's Department, Thompson Fire Department and an Altru Health Services ambulance were all on the scene. Sondreal called his contacts with the utility that owned the line, and they were able to confirm the line was de-energized. Ultimately, no one was seriously injured.

## BUNNY HOP METHOD

If you contact a power pole or line, **STAY IN THE VEHICLE** until help arrives. Do not exit until it's confirmed that the line is de-energized. If there is smoke or fire and you **MUST** exit, follow these steps.

1

**Cross your arms** tightly across your chest.

2

**Jump out with your feet tightly together** (*don't touch the ground and vehicle at the same time*).

3

**Shuffle or bunny hop** far away. **Do not** let your feet come apart.

"Brandon did a phenomenal job. He was the guy calling the shots," Sondreal said. "He told our guys what to do, and they started directing traffic. We sent one to each side and Brandon just made sure the guys stayed there and watched over that area."

Greene said he was nervous throughout the situation, but he was grateful to find a calm focus in his response. "What came into play and helped me out a lot was just having worked with our crews through the years and gaining all the knowledge they have," he said. "I definitely have to give them a lot of credit."



# HERE FOR THE TURKEY

A heartwarming, stomach-filling first visit to the Aneta Turkey Barbecue

By Kaylee Cusack  
Photography Jennifer Erickson

Ever been to Aneta, North Dakota? Before June 21, 2025, neither had I. That's saying something, since I grew up only 30 minutes away on a farm in the heart of Nodak Electric Cooperative country. But I'd been hearing rumors that the tiny town of 200 puts on one of the best summer parties in the state so, naturally, I had to see it for myself.

But here's the thing about the famous Aneta Turkey Barbecue – you smell it before you see it. That's what happens when you slow-roast more than 280 turkeys in the open air of the city park.

The poultry-infused charcoal haze I stepped through that Saturday has been the siren song of sorts for Aneta for 64 years now, since the first turkey barbecue back in 1961. Around 3,000 people fill the town for the feast and other ancillary festival events like a rhubarb tasting (how North Dakota) and parade, which is where I stood



Turkeys continue to roast over the spit as people gather in line for the Aneta Turkey Barbecue on June 21, 2025.



The Aneta Turkey Barbecue is preceded by a parade down Main Avenue that draws the whole town - and more. (Photo courtesy of Brita Endrud)



Volunteers of all ages keep the turkey coming.



Young foodie Hailey enjoys the watermelon portion of her meal with her family.



Organizer Mandy Wentz (middle) directs volunteers before the feast begins.

when I received a text from event organizer Mandy Wentz. She had some time to chat in the moments between the parade and the start of the turkey feed at 4:30 p.m.

She's a busy lady on this specific day of the year and has been for a long time.

"I've been involved with the Aneta Turkey Barbeque since I could lift a brick at about age 6," Mandy laughed, referencing the cement blocks assembled for the yards-long turkey spit. "I grew up right across the street from the park and my dad's always been a part

of it. I just kind of followed him around when it was set-up time, and I've been doing it every year."

Mandy, a Nodak Electric member, is a member of the Aneta Booster Club charged with the annual planning of the turkey barbecue. She's become a bit of a local star for her leadership, which I realized when a stranger approached her. "So you're the famous Mandy?"

"I'm Mandy!" she beamed, extending her hand. "Nice to meet you!"

Mandy and the Booster Club aren't alone in the effort of feeding nearly 2,000 visitors a buffet of turkey, beans, potato salad, rolls and more. The team is joined by volunteers who come home to Aneta from around the country. "It's incredible. They come back because they love it and it's so fun," Mandy said. "Everybody has a spot, they know what to do and they just jump in."



Organizer Mandy Wentz, donning a "Talk Turkey to Me" T-shirt, walks by the hundreds in line for turkey and the fixings.





## The original gobble

The story goes that the Aneta Turkey Barbecue was started in 1961 as way to thank the area's growing population of turkey farmers. The local elevator was selling feed for the turkeys, so the town had a lot to celebrate. Turkey farms are harder to find in eastern North Dakota now, but the celebration continues.

By pure luck in the herd of hungry hundreds, I ran into 100-year-old Anez Thompson, Aneta's eldest resident, enjoying turkey and the fixings with her family at one of the park's shaded picnic tables. She's also a bit of a local celebrity, serving as the Aneta parade's grand marshal two years ago at the young age of 98.

"I wouldn't miss it. I gotta come every time," she said. Her loved ones smiled as she reminisced. "I lived out on the farm, and we raised turkeys. Somehow or another, my husband brought the turkeys in town here, where they cleaned them up. And that's how it started."

Anez isn't the only one with ties to the original turkey bash. Sisters Pat Solberg and Marilyn Lind

Short are the daughters of Jack Lind, one of the partners who organized the first Aneta Turkey Barbecue over six decades ago. Pat now lives in Fargo, but makes the trip back to Aneta every year for the barbecue. It's an opportunity to catch up with family and old friends – and eat the best white meat you can find.

"The turkey is wonderful. It is every year. And I have all this to take home," Pat said, pointing to a plate still heaping with turkey. "They don't give you enough," she added with deadpan sarcasm.

Pat's sister Marilyn moved back to Aneta in 1993, so Pat always has a place to stay when she returns to town. They count on the annual turkey barbecue as a time to reconnect. I think.

"We love each other," Marilyn told me. "We love doing things together."

"Well, speak for yourself," Pat poked, in a way only an older sister could.

Marilyn smirked. "She's sleeping on my couch. I might just put her on the floor."



Aneta resident Anez Thompson (second from right) enjoys a turkey dinner with family.



Nodak board member Steve Smaaladen prepares lemonade for barbecue guests.

## Preserving tradition

All the talking turkey made me want to eat turkey, so I finally found my way into one of the six long lines of people waiting for their plate. The volunteers have created a well-oiled machine, so I was dishing up in less than 10 minutes. The whirl of electric carving knives would be cut every so often with a carver yelling, "Turkey!" – a signal to take another one off the spit.

Plate in hand, I stopped by the lemonade table and spotted Steve Smaaladen, vice chair of the Nodak Electric Cooperative board of directors. As an event volunteer, he was pouring and setting cups as fast as he could. I didn't want to interrupt his process, so I told him I'd catch him after I ate.

Readers, turkey from the Aneta Turkey Barbecue is some of the best I've had. Juicy, smoky deliciousness. It lives up to the smell, and I now understand why people drive 100 miles for it.

After overeating my way to nirvana, I followed Steve on his break from lemonade duty. He had packaged turkey dinners for

himself and his wife, Marsha, who was manning their greenhouse stand a block away.

"I grew up in Aneta. This has been going 60-plus years, so you're a part of it as a kid," Steve said. "I was on cleanup to start with after high school, and then they migrated me to lemonade, and that's just where I've been."

Steve isn't the only Nodak board member who volunteers at the barbecue, and many other Nodak committee members and member-consumers are intertwined in the event.

"At Nodak, we just have a lot of great people, and I think they like to be tied into communities," he

## DID YOU KNOW?

 The Aneta Turkey Barbecue is the unofficial world record holder for World's Largest Turkey Barbecue. Organizers hope to make it official with Guinness World Records in 2026.

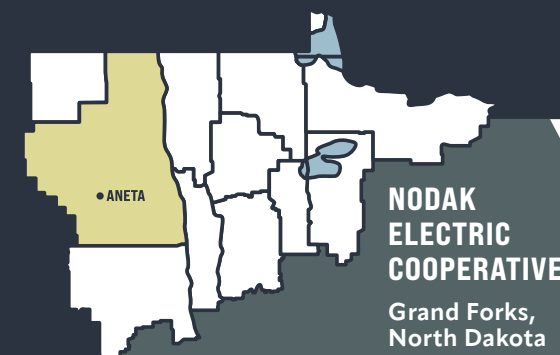
 In 2021, during Aneta's 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, the turkey barbecue fed 3,500 people – the most in the event's history. Usually, around 2,000 dish up.

 Richard Thompson, late husband to Anez and one of the first turkey farmers involved in the Aneta Turkey Barbecue, was also a board member for Sheyenne Valley Electric Cooperative, which later merged with Nodak Electric Cooperative.

said. "We're pretty determined not to give up some traditions, not to give up something that draws people back."

Steve was distracted by two people approaching the stand. "Oh, here's a couple I just married three weeks ago," he said, greeting the newlyweds. Apparently, he had just been ordained to officiate their nuptials.

You have to love a small town.



**Incorporated:**  
January 17, 1940  
**Board members:** 9  
**Manager:** Mylo Einarson  
**Members:** 21,384  
**Miles of line:** 7,882

## HOW DO THEY COOK ALL THOSE TURKEYS?

**Thursday:**  
Turkeys begin to thaw

**Friday:**  
Turkeys injected with a special recipe

**Saturday, 7 a.m.:**  
Turkeys are prepped, netted and added to rods

**Saturday, 9:30 a.m.:**  
Fire up the 180-foot spit!

**Saturday, 4:30 p.m.:**  
Turkeys are ready to eat



## MINNKOTA BOARD HOLDS BUSINESS PLANNING SESSION

In conjunction with its July meeting, the Minnkota Board participated in a Business Planning Session alongside member-cooperative managers and Minnkota's executive team. The day-long session served as a valuable opportunity for key cooperative leaders to step back from day-to-day operations, take a broad view of the current energy landscape and collaborate on strategies to guide the organization forward.

To help spark meaningful conversation and align perspectives, the agenda included a variety of interactive surveys, breakout exercises and facilitated discussions. These tools were designed to generate ideas, encourage

engagement from all participants and ensure that the group explored both challenges and opportunities from multiple angles.

A wide range of topics were discussed, including power supply planning, rate structures, large load development, workforce needs, and shifting regulatory and policy dynamics. The structure of the session allowed participants to dig deeper into these complex issues and consider how they

might impact the cooperative system in the years to come.

The insights and feedback from the session will be carried forward into the business planning process over the coming months as the 2026 Business Plan is developed.



## EMPLOYEES EARN PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATIONS

Congratulations to Minnkota's Brandon Greene and Garret Reineke on earning professional certifications.



Brandon Greene

Greene, safety administrator, received his Certified Loss Control Professional (CLCP) certification in July. Co-sponsored by the Na-

tional Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) and the National Utility Training and Safety Education Association (NUTSEA), the CLCP program is a chance for safety professionals to gain information and tools needed to be effective leaders of safety in our industry. To earn this certification, Greene had to complete four Loss Control Internship seminars (all with homework and projects), a 30-hour OSHA course and several other requirements.

Reineke, a lineworker, recently graduated from the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) apprenticeship program. Apprenticeship programs allow individuals to gain experience, training and nationally recognized credentials in a paid

work environment. A full apprenticeship consists of at least two years of online classroom work and 8,000 hours of on-the-job training.



Left to right: Garret Reineke, David Lagge, line superintendent, and Harold Narlock, operations manager.

## GRANT SUPPORTS MINNKOTA POLLINATOR PROJECT



There is a buzz of excitement at Minnkota's Grand Forks offices after receiving reimbursement grants for a pollinator project that will support bees and butterflies while strengthening community ties.

The Rights-of-Way as Habitat Working Group, based at the University of Illinois Chicago, awarded \$7,500 to help transform several acres near Minnkota's headquarters into pollinator habitat by next summer. The

site will feature walking trails and educational signage, making it a space for both ecological restoration and community enjoyment.

Minnkota's approximately half-mile trail will loop around 5 to 6 acres of native prairie, to be developed just outside its home offices. Invasive plants will be removed by contractors before the area is seeded with native grasses and forbs. The restored prairie is expected to bloom in the spring, welcoming monarch butterflies,

bees and other pollinators, said Kacey Borin, Minnkota environmental specialist.

This effort will also help Minnkota and its members meet acreage obligations under the Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) for the monarch, which the G&T signed earlier this year. The voluntary agreement protects enrollees from additional conservation requirements should the monarch be listed under the Endangered Species Act.

"We are looking forward to this space serving as a multidisciplinary hub for our board, staff and visitors," said Borin. "We host tours for many groups of industry professionals and students, and this pollinator trail will provide an enjoyable checkpoint for them to learn about our CCAA commitments."

## MINNKOTA EMPLOYEES SHOW OFF UTILITY VEHICLES FOR A GOOD CAUSE

Minnkota employees from the Milton R. Young Station rolled into the Hazen, North Dakota, Touch-a-Truck event on July 17 to show-



case their utility vehicles, connect with community members and support local charities. The free, family-friendly event featured

face painting, bouncy houses, and an impressive lineup of trucks and equipment. All proceeds benefited

local libraries, food pantries and Youthworks, a program supporting at-risk kids and teens.

We know our employees had a great time and loved being out in the community. Thank you for partaking in the fun and highlighting the important work Minnkota does to help maintain energy infrastructure in the region!







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IMPACT VIDEO ➤



Thank you to our  
**EMPLOYEES**  
for their dedication.

Thank you to our  
**MEMBER-CO-OPS**  
for your support and patience.

Thank you to our  
**COMMUNITIES**  
for helping us power on.