MINNKOTA

MESSENGER



SEPTEMBER – OCTOBER 2026



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***Minnkota Messenger** is published six times a year by Minnkota Power Cooperative. Its mission is to communicate Minnkota's perspectives and concerns to its members, elected officials, employees and other business audiences. For editorial inquiries, call (701) 795-4282 or email bfladhammer@minnkota.com.*

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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 171,000 consumers.

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RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

Minnkota, industry partners unite to responsibly power Harwood data center

By Kaylee Cusack /// Photography Michael Hoeft

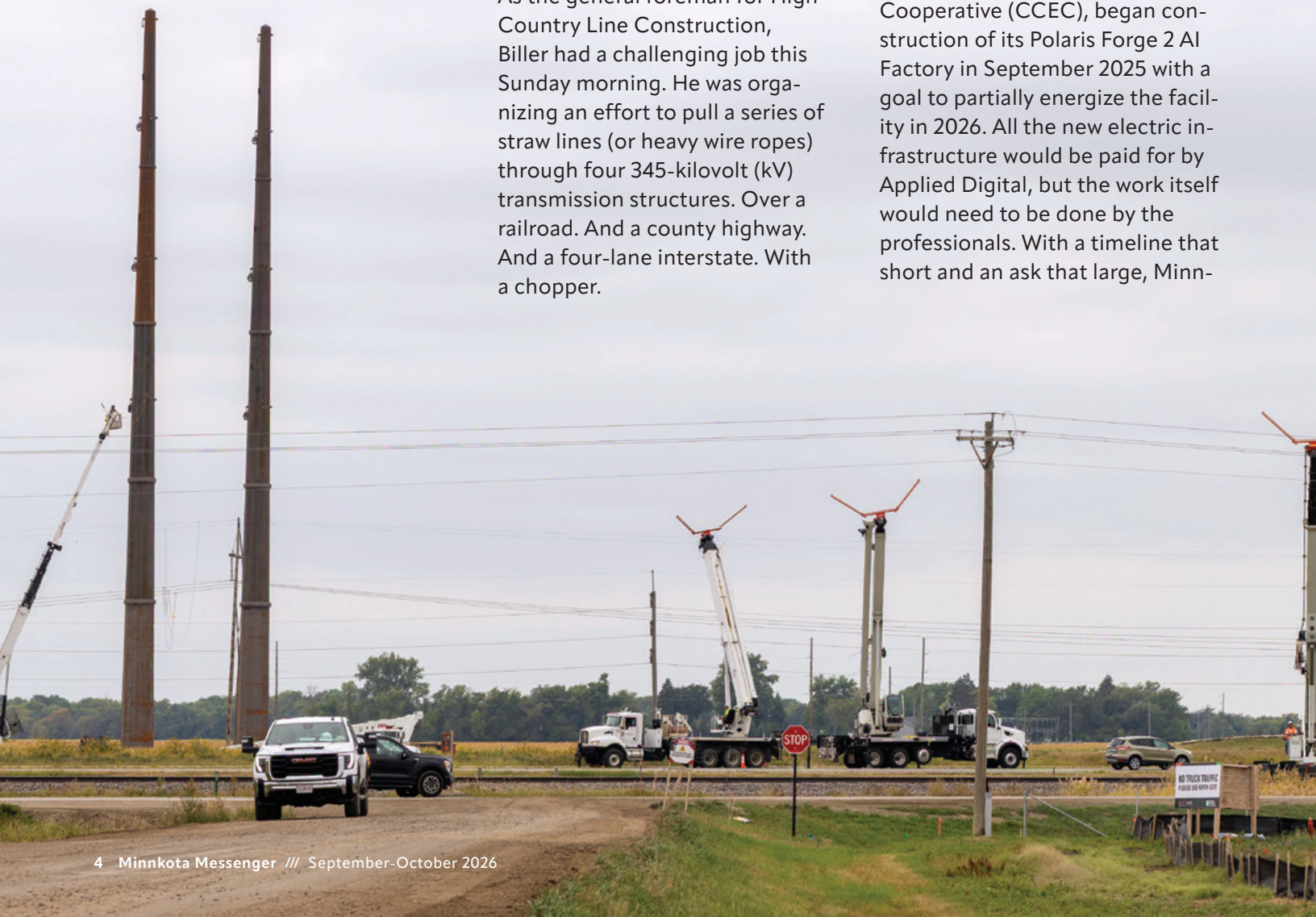
Shaun Biller stood among a crowd of people with many titles – engineers, lineworkers, North Dakota state troopers, utility and construction project managers, even a pilot. In the distance was the steel framework of a large, nearly completed substation. In the opposite direction, a helicopter sat motionless, awaiting the task ahead.

As the general foreman for High Country Line Construction, Biller had a challenging job this Sunday morning. He was organizing an effort to pull a series of straw lines (or heavy wire ropes) through four 345-kilovolt (kV) transmission structures. Over a railroad. And a county highway. And a four-lane interstate. With a chopper.

"Today is a complex day as far as for a pull. It's not bad, but we have a lot of moving parts this morning," Biller explained to the safety meeting attendees. "Everything's going to have to be coordinated and communicated."

The complexity of this mission was reflective of the entire power project at hand. Minnkota Power Cooperative and several contracted partners were in the middle of one of the cooperative's largest endeavors to date, building more than a mile and a half of 345-kV transmission line and a new substation to help power a 280-megawatt (MW) data center under construction near Harwood, North Dakota.

Applied Digital, now a business member of Cass County Electric Cooperative (CCEC), began construction of its Polaris Forge 2 AI Factory in September 2025 with a goal to partially energize the facility in 2026. All the new electric infrastructure would be paid for by Applied Digital, but the work itself would need to be done by the professionals. With a timeline that short and an ask that large, Minn-



kota and CCEC knew they would need to call in reinforcements.

Kara Laframboise, Minnkota's project manager overseeing the planning, design and construction of the new transmission line and substation (called Agassiz), says Minnkota began looking for an engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) contractor and consultant right away. The co-op ultimately joined forces with the firm Burns & McDonnell, who gathered the rest of the contractors who would help complete the project in record time.

"Yes, these structures are bigger than what we would normally see in our system, but the basis around



them is very similar to other work that we've done. What makes this project complex is the timeline, and just trying to meet the dates that are being asked of us by Applied Digital," Laframboise said.



Minnkota Project Manager Kara Laframboise (left) walks through the progress of Agassiz substation with area lineworker Rick Gefroh.



WHO IS APPLIED DIGITAL?

Applied Digital designs, builds and operates large-scale data center infrastructure for high-density GPU computing. Their AI factory campuses are rented by hyperscalers who use that infrastructure to run their AI systems. Applied Digital was founded in 2021 in Dallas, Texas.

Learn more about Applied Digital's data center in Harwood by watching their original docuseries, **Behind the Build**.



Progress on the Agassiz substation near Harwood, North Dakota, has moved quickly. A project that would typically take 2-3 years will be completed in mere months due to the ambitious timeline of the data center.

Large load opportunity

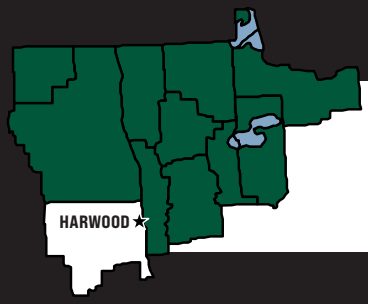
Serving a 280-MW load is not something Minnkota takes lightly. With cooperative values that put reliability, affordability and safety first, the leadership team knew well before Applied Digital that they would be facing growing requests of this kind. They began to develop a large load interconnection process for projects of 20 MW or more, through which applicants would agree to pay for not only the studies needed to ensure the project wouldn't negatively impact Minnkota's system and membership, but also for any new infrastructure necessary to serve the project.

When the large load interconnection process was ready in early 2025, Applied Digital was the first applicant in the queue, ready to pay for any system upgrades to serve their Harwood data center. After deep discussions with their respective boards – the voices of their member communities – Minnkota and CCEC got to work.

"We needed engineering studies on the transmission side and on the distribution side to find out if we could feasibly serve this load," said CCEC President and CEO Paul Matthys. "That was step one. Step two was determining if we have the energy capacity to serve them. And the answer is we do. In many cases, the Minnkota system is long on energy."

Through the early stages of exploring the data center project, Matthys and his co-op team engaged with their membership, explaining that CCEC had the capacity and energy to move forward with serving the data center. They also fielded many questions about how the data center would impact their electric rates. Rates would not go up as a result of the data center, Matthys told them. In fact, the data center could actually help stabilize rates by paying a larger portion of the fixed costs of upgrades in the area, which would be needed to keep power reliable in the quickly growing region.

"There's a tremendous amount of upward pressure on rates already



Served by
CASS COUNTY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE
Fargo, North Dakota

Incorporated: March 27, 1937
Board members: 9
Members: 60,646
Miles of line: 5,879

with inflation," he said. "If we can leverage these data centers to help drive down those capital costs and drive down the pressure on rates for our members, that is a win-win for everybody."

Nick Phillips, EVP of External Affairs for Applied Digital, said they were pleased to collaborate with Minnkota and CCEC and become a part of the community. "As part of this partnership, we're investing $112 million to support enhancements to the regional electric infrastructure via the Agassiz substation," he said. "This upgrade likely would have been needed in the future to support the regional grid, but we expedited the timeline at our expense because our tenants depend on highly reliable electric service for operating state-of-the-art data center infrastructure, 24/7."

As work progresses on the new Agassiz substation, Minnkota, CCEC and Applied Digital have worked in partnership to answer lingering questions about the data center project. The companies have been involved in public meetings, site tours, informational panels, and other print and digital communications to tell the Polaris Forge 2 story.

"One of the great parts of the cooperative model is we are owned and governed by the members that we serve, so there's a trust there, and we never want to do anything to jeopardize that," Matthys said. "I've had several conversations with members who call and talk directly to me, to hear it from me. After we explain what we're doing and why we're doing it, they feel a lot more comfortable and they feel that trust in their cooperative."

HARWOOD DATA CENTER FAQS

How big is the data center?

The Harwood data center will feature two purpose-built facilities totaling more than 1.8 million square feet.

How many people will work there?

Once fully operational, the site will employ more than 200 full-time personnel.

How much water will the data center use?

Applied Digital uses very little water in its processes (about as much as two average residential homes). The company uses an innovative, closed-loop water system that nearly eliminates the need for water consumption for cooling the equipment. This system ensures the data center operates sustainably without putting pressure on local water resources.

Will the facility be noisy?

The project uses sound mitigation strategies including sound barriers, setbacks and other tools to keep noise levels low. Computer equipment is housed inside precast concrete, sealed buildings, heat exchangers emit minimal noise, and backup generators are used only in emergencies or under maintenance at controlled times and are strictly regulated.

When will the data center be operational?

It will be partially operational by the end of 2026 and fully operational in 2027.



North Dakota State University students ask questions at an Applied Digital informational session hosted at the Harwood Community Center.



A member of the High Country Line Construction crew awaits a straw line from the HLH Aviation helicopter.

Coordination and communication

Kara Laframboise watched as the HLH Aviation helicopter delicately threaded the straw line through a pulley at the top of a 145-foot-tall transmission pole. In the next moment, the pilot pulled the line across Interstate 29, where Sunday traffic had been flagged to a temporary stop to ensure safety. In the following week, lineworkers would use the guiding line to pull the actual power conductor through the structures.

This day of work alone took the coordination of at least seven contracted companies and local entities. Laframboise says this level of collaboration has become common for the project.

"A large part of my role is really to help our EPC contractor keep everyone else on pace. I'm facilitating conversations, information flows, those sorts of things," she said. "Originally, the goal was to try and burden Minnkota employees as little as possible, because we have so much other work that we're trying to accomplish. Now, we're at a point where we're going to be taking this over at the end of the day, so we want to be involved a bit more so we can take it over with confidence."

Once the Agassiz substation is ready for commissioning, Minnkota crews will step in to test and update relays and telecommunications equipment and perform initial energization procedures. Then, the substation will become the newest piece of the Minnkota grid.

An electrical engineer by training, Laframboise is used to be-

ing involved in the intricacies of substations across the Minnkota footprint. Although this project is her main priority now, there are still projects moving forward in all corners of the territory.

"We have our transmission rebuilds. We have our substation rebuilds. We couldn't get distracted by this and let other projects fall off our radar," said Kasey Borboa, Minnkota senior manager of Power Delivery Engineering. "We're still doing great work on the rest of our system, and we're still meeting those timelines and budgets."

The challenges of providing power to Polaris Forge 2 have been great. Assessing and mitigating reliability risks, organizing the experts, securing substation materials, approving a flurry of designs – and doing it all at the speed-to-market pace expected by the AI sector.

"That's the stuff you're proud of. This was an insane timeline that we met," Borboa said, adding that Minnkota's typical substation timeline was condensed from three years to eight months for the data center. "This is new for us in terms of the EPC and how we're managing projects. For Kara, this is her first full year as project manager, so she's learning a lot on how to coordinate and communicate."

With the final straw line pulled and interstate traffic back on track, Laframboise was able to check another mini miracle off the list and prepare for the next.

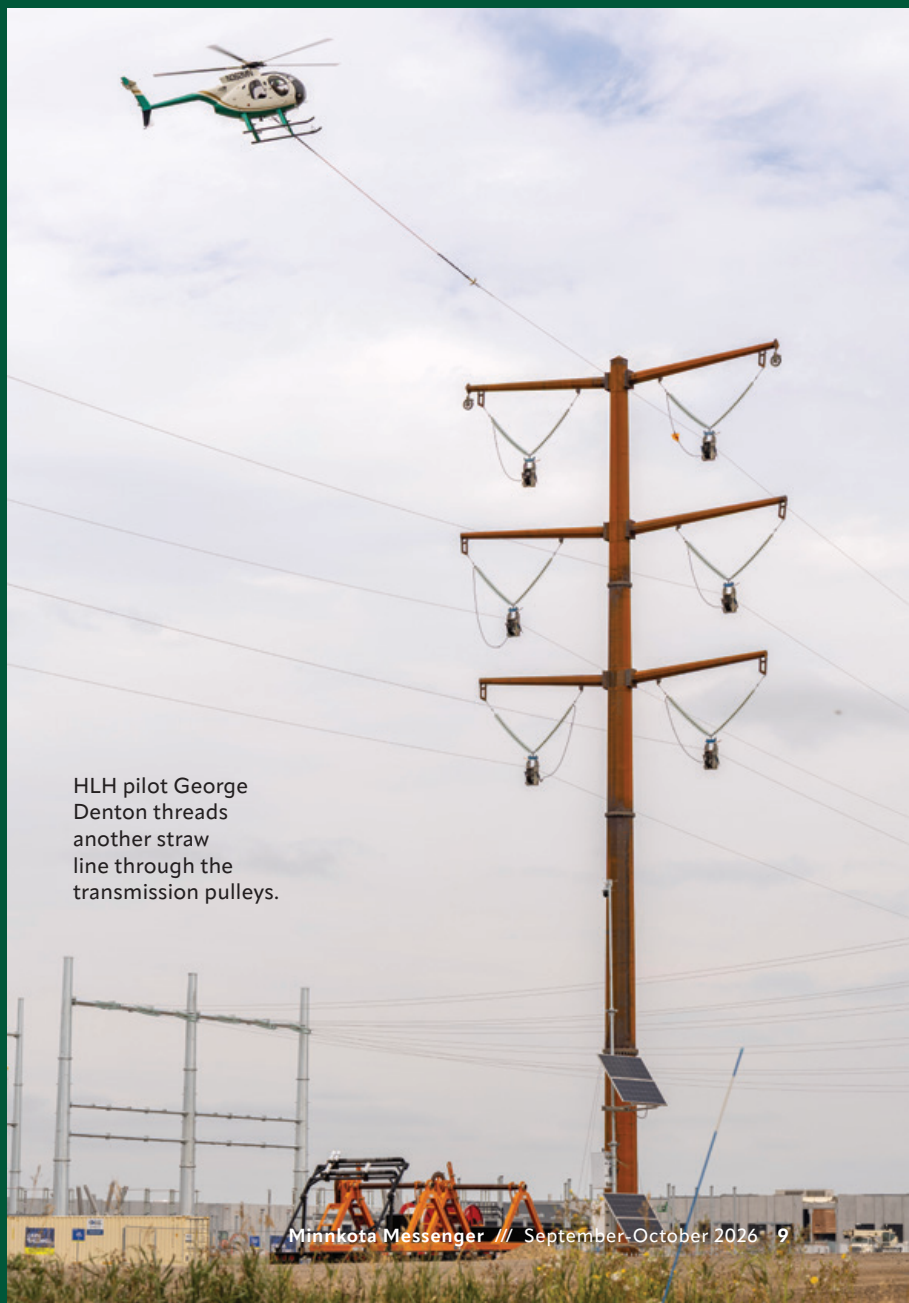
"I'm really happy I was chosen for this project," she said. "I'm excited to see this substation get energized and see Minnkota hit this major milestone."



Flaggers hold traffic on Interstate 29 as a helicopter pulls a guiding line overhead.



Minnkota area lineworker Rick Gefroh speaks with Kara Laframboise at the Agassiz substation site.



HLH pilot George Denton threads another straw line through the transmission pulleys.

A DECADE UNDER THE SUN

After 10 years, Minnkota members gain experience, data from solar arrays

By Ben Fladhammer /// Photography Michael Hoeft

A decade of North Dakota weather has passed over the rows of solar panels on the south side of Fargo.

Blizzards have buried them. Summer sun has scorched their dark blue surfaces. Rain, wind and stretches of bitter cold have come and gone. Native prairie grasses have grown around the steel frames holding Cass County Electric Cooperative's (CCEC) 101-kilowatt (kW) Prairie Sun Community Solar Garden.

On a bright September morning, Troy Knutson and Chad Brousseau walked between the rows and considered what nearly 10 years of operation had taught them.

Quite a bit, as it turns out.

"We wanted to see what solar actually does here," recalled Knutson, CCEC vice president of engineering and operations, who helped lead the project's design. "We wanted to know how much it produces through the seasons, what kind of maintenance it actually requires and what parts of the system might need attention over time. There was really no substitute for having a system here and learning ourselves."

That learning was a major reason Prairie Sun was built. The cooperative wanted to better understand a technology its members were increasingly asking about – not from internet searches or a manufacturer's projection, but from experience in its own backyard.

"We want to be the energy experts for our members," said Brousseau, CCEC vice president of member and energy services. "If someone calls us with a question about solar, we want to be able to answer it with real-world experience and real-world data."



An option for members

When CCEC developed Prairie Sun in 2016, members were expressing interest in solar generation, but putting panels on a home isn't practical for everyone. Rental properties, roof orientation, insurance, maintenance or upfront cost can all create hurdles.

Community solar offered members an opportunity to purchase the output of a panel or half panel at the centralized facility while CCEC handled the installation, operation and maintenance. Most participants originally bought into Prairie Sun for $700 and now receive a monthly bill credit based on the facility's production. Approximately 80% of the project is subscribed.

"It takes a lot of the complications out of it for our members," Knutson said. "You don't have to figure out whether your roof is right for solar or worry about maintaining the equipment. We take care of that."

Around the same time, cooperatives elsewhere in Minnkota's membership were looking for answers to many of the same questions.

Beltrami Electric Cooperative developed its 80-kW Northern Solar community garden in Bemidji. Roseau Electric Cooperative installed a 10-kW demonstration array, while Red River Valley Co-op Power and North Star Electric Cooperative each developed 5-kW systems.

For Beltrami Electric, the project offered both a learning opportunity and an alternative for members surrounded by the thick tree cover common across northern Minnesota.

"We wanted that firsthand knowledge on solar so that we can help our members," said Bob Gregg, Beltrami Electric business development manager. "We also wanted to provide an opportunity for those who wanted to install solar but didn't have the right property to do so. We have some folks in heavily wooded areas where solar isn't viable."



Cass County Electric's Chad Brousseau (left) and Troy Knutson stand near the Prairie Sun solar array, which has provided the cooperative with a decade of firsthand experience operating solar generation in North Dakota.

What the numbers show

Nearly a decade of data has also created a clearer picture of what solar generation looks like this far north.

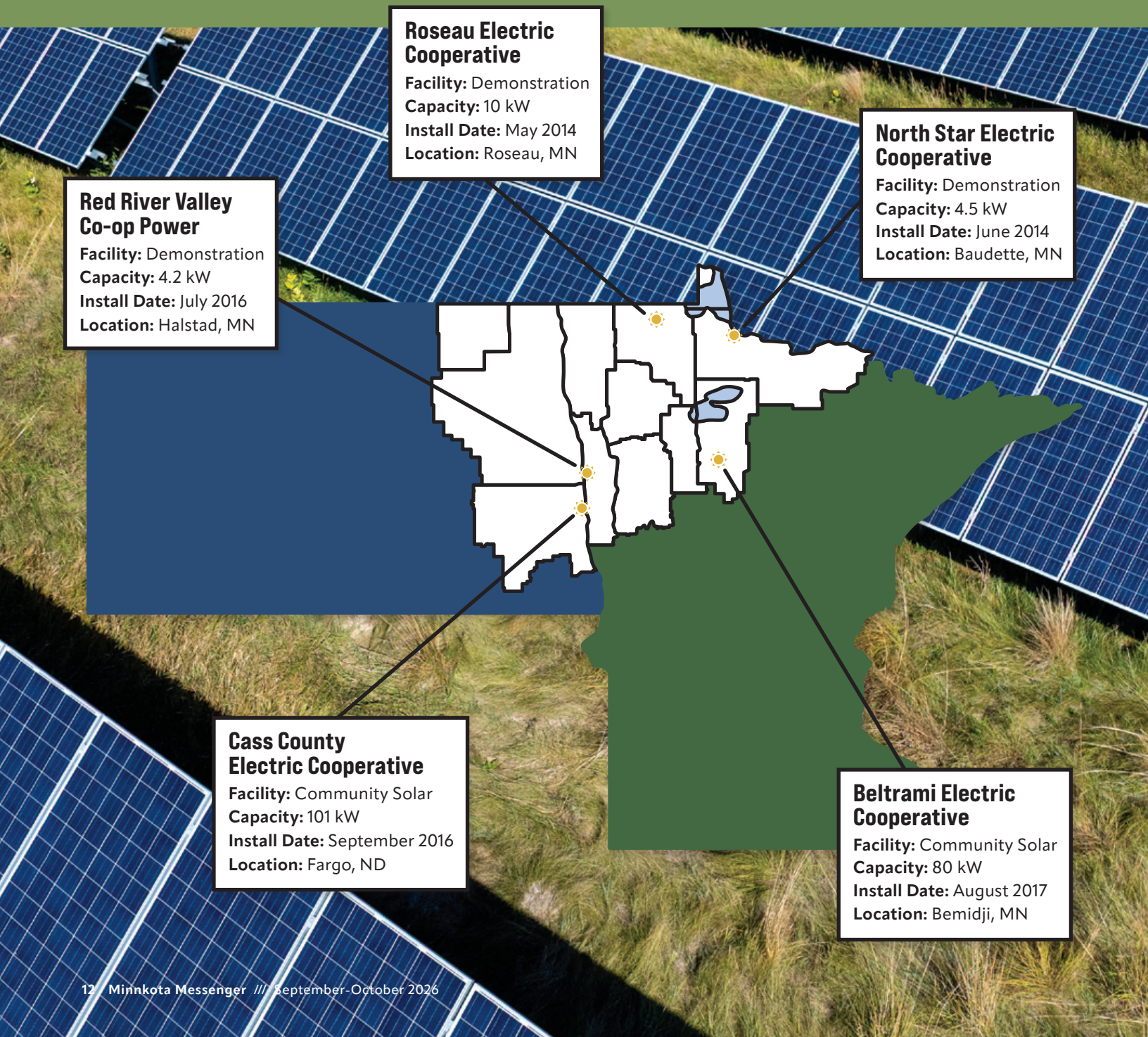
Prairie Sun has averaged an annual capacity factor of roughly 14%. Capacity factor is simply a comparison between how much electricity a resource actually produces and how much it could produce if it operated at full output every hour of the year. The other projects in the Minnkota system ranged from 10-15% during most years.

Not surprisingly, production changes dramatically with the seasons.

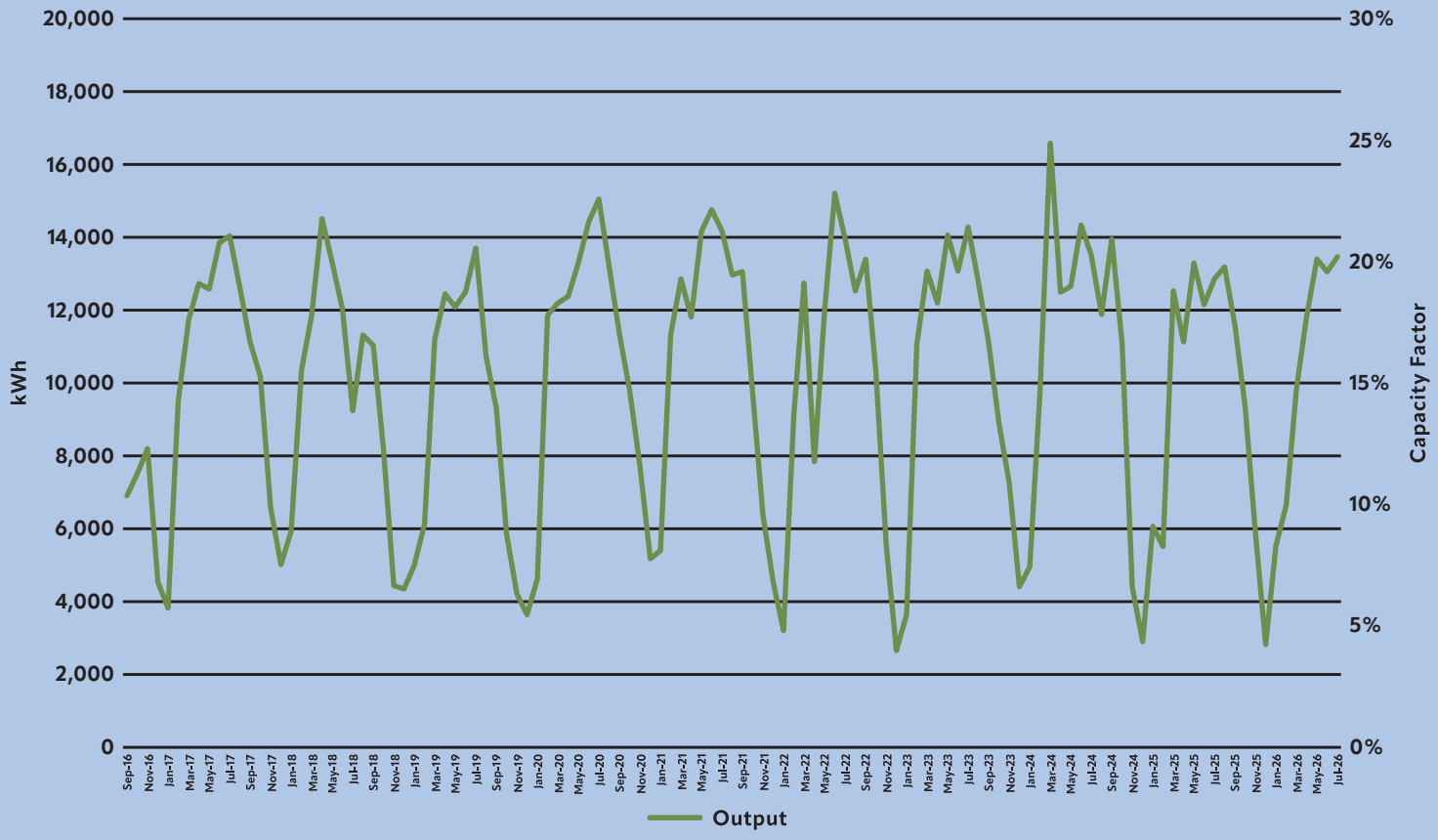
During strong summer months, Prairie Sun has reached capacity factors in the low-20% range.

During the darkest and shortest days of winter, production can fall into the single digits, including around 5% in December.

"That's one of the things we wanted to understand," Knutson said. "Solar can produce well on a clear summer day, but when you look at the entire year, you get a much better picture of what you can realistically expect."



Prairie Sun Community Solar - Historical Monthly Output



Ten winters later

Perhaps surprisingly, North Dakota winter weather has not proven particularly hard on the panels themselves.

Snow generally slides or melts away without intervention. Crews have occasionally cleared panels following significant snowfall and extreme cold, but winter maintenance has otherwise been limited.

At Prairie Sun, the panels have proven durable. CCEC has even used infrared-equipped drones to inspect the array for potential problems. After nearly a decade, crews had not identified a failed panel.

Instead, the inverters have emerged as the common trouble spot across Minnkota member solar installations. Inverters convert the direct-current electricity produced by solar panels into the alternating current used by the electric grid. Every Minnkota member project has experienced inverter failures during its operating life.

"The inverter is probably the weakest link on the equipment side," Knutson said. "That's probably been one of the clearest maintenance lessons we've learned."

And then there is the question that eventually follows almost every conversation about an energy investment: Does it pay for itself?

The answer requires patience. Prairie Sun received a $150,000 grant that significantly reduced its upfront cost. Even with that assistance, the original member participation model was designed around roughly a 20-year payback. Without grant funding, cooperative staff calculated that timeline would have stretched considerably longer.

That economic experience has become another important part of what the cooperatives can share with members. After nearly a decade of watching production, maintaining equipment and tracking costs, employees can speak about both the opportunities and limitations of solar in this region.

"We can just show them: Here's what we've seen. Here's what it produces. Here's what we've had to maintain. Then they can make a more informed decision," Brousseau said.

A STORY WORTH STARTING

Minnkota's Cusack helps bring Dolly Parton's Imagination Library to Grand Forks County

By Ben Fladhammer /// Photography Michael Hoeft



Kaylee Cusack speaks during the launch of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library at the Grand Forks Public Library, celebrating a new effort to provide free books to young children throughout Grand Forks County.

Long before Kaylee Cusack built a career around storytelling, she was a farm kid in rural Grand Forks County who loved to read.

Cusack, Minnkota Power Cooperative's senior communications strategist, grew up outside of Larimore, North Dakota, considerably younger than her two sisters and with plenty of time to herself. Reading became both an escape and a constant companion.

"We didn't have a lot of things, but we did have a lot of books," she recalled.

Some of her most meaningful memories, however, are not of what she read, but who read with her. Her dad, a multigenerational farmer she describes as stoic, found a way to connect with his young daughter through bedtime stories. Whether he had just come in from the field or finished chores with the cattle, he made time to sit down with her.

"That was his way of connecting with me," Cusack said. "I think that bonding experience with my dad was really the start of me loving reading and loving the process of storytelling."

That early connection eventually helped lead her into journalism, communications and a career built around writing. Years later, it would also become the driving force behind her effort to bring Dolly Parton's Imagination Library to Grand Forks County.

"How do I make this happen?"

Working in the electric cooperative industry, Cusack regularly saw stories about cooperatives supporting Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, an early childhood literacy program that mails free, age-appropriate books to enrolled children from birth until age 5.

The cooperative connection caught her eye.

"I knew that our region did not have Dolly Parton's Imagination Library," Cusack said. "And I thought to myself, maybe this is something that I could step up and take the lead on."

In spring 2025, Cusack began contacting Imagination Library representatives to learn what it would take to start the program locally. Minnkota leadership encouraged the idea, offering meeting space, printing assistance and early financial support. Cusack then began reaching out to community leaders, businesses and service organizations to see whether others would get behind it.

They did.

People shared stories about their own children receiving Imagination Library books in other communities. Even those who couldn't provide financial support often became advocates.

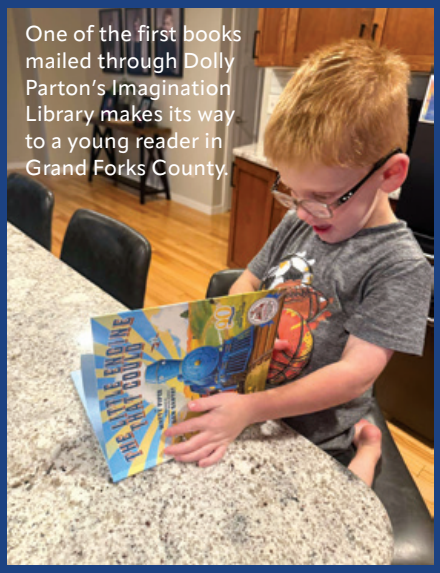
By summer, Cusack had teamed up with the Community Foundation of Grand Forks, East Grand Forks and Region. The organization became the official local affiliate and helped turn the idea into a communitywide initiative.

"The program is here because of Kaylee," said Becca Baumbach, president and CEO of the Community Foundation. "She brought the idea to us, she made the case to our staff and board of directors, and she has done the unglamorous work ever since. Registrations, partner outreach, event logistics, all of it as a volunteer. Good ideas usually stall somewhere between the pitch and the operating budget. Kaylee is the reason this one didn't."

That success became official July 1, when Dolly Parton's Imagination Library launched in Grand Forks County. A community celebration followed Aug. 11.

The group ultimately raised $90,000 to get the program started, which is enough to support its first two years of operation as enrollments ramp up to the anticipated 65% coverage of eligible recipients. The long-term goal is to serve as many as 3,000 Grand Forks County children, requiring continued fundraising and community support.




One of the first books mailed through Dolly Parton's Imagination Library makes its way to a young reader in Grand Forks County.


Community members gather at the Grand Forks Public Library to celebrate the launch of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library in Grand Forks County.

"We enrolled over 900 children in the first six weeks, which tells you the need is real," Baumbach said. "That happened because a group of partners, Minnkota among them, decided this was worth funding for the long haul."

Keeping the pages turning

Cusack now serves as the Community Foundation's volunteer Imagination Library coordinator. She leads committees, helps with fundraising and community outreach, assists families with registrations and account changes, and works to build long-term financial support for the program.

For Cusack, the early response can still be difficult to comprehend.

"I just can't stop thinking about all the kids – especially the farm kids out there – that are going to get a book in the mail now every month until they turn five," she said. "That makes me so incredibly happy and so incredibly proud."

For someone whose own life was shaped by evenings spent reading with her dad, there are some clear parallels. The stories that meant so much to one little girl in rural Grand Forks County are now opening that same door for a new generation.

"I think just the compassion and empathy that I was able to get out of those initial stories kind of carried throughout my entire life," Cusack said. "The importance of books to me when I was younger, I want other kids, especially rural farm kids, to have that same opportunity surrounded by books."

A NEW VIEW OF BUILDING HEALTH

Aethero's UAS-based facility analysis captures structural health and energy efficiency

By Kaylee Cusack /// Photography Michael Hoeft



The Aethero Advanced Analytics team, left to right: Samuel Afari, Ajan Meenakshisundaram, Matt Dunlevy, Wyatt Bell and Karthik Balaji

Before the sun began to peek over the east horizon, a data analyst and drone specialist walked the perimeter of Minnkota Power Cooperative's facility in Grand Forks, North Dakota. This calm, early summer morning was chosen by Aethero Advanced Analytics for a reason. As they performed a full aerial scan of the co-op's building, they needed to avoid heat buildup on the exterior that could hide any interior heat loss captured in their thermal imaging.

The mission was complex, but the goal was simple: collect all the data necessary to reveal structural or energy concerns before they become expensive problems.

As CEO and founder of Grand Forks-based Aethero, Dr. Matt Dunlevy assembled a team of fellow University of North Dakota engineering graduates in 2021 to develop an offering that harnesses what the state does best to fix a universal pain point.

"It really started with the intersection of aviation and energy. There was a practical problem. Buildings often waste a lot of energy, and human beings spend 90% of their time in buildings," Dunlevy said. "That's not just why it started, but also why we like to talk to energy companies such as Minnkota. We have a North Dakota-aligned industry, which is UAS, collaborating with another sector that North Dakota knows very well, which is energy."

This year, Aethero contacted Minnkota about the potential of running a building health assessment on the co-op's Grand Forks headquarters, which would provide 3D thermal imaging and high-resolution photography of the facilities, along with deep, AI-driven analysis to put all the data into long-term perspective.

"I wanted to make sure our product was in front of the experts here for the validation and feedback. I saw it as a natural partnership," Dunlevy said. "It's one of the most iconic structures in Grand Forks and one of the most beautiful in the state. Of course, we wanted that in the portfolio."





Aethero uses a Skydio X10 to capture its facility data. The drone is designed and assembled in the United States.

An energy benchmark

Minnkota's board of directors approved the construction of a new headquarters more than a decade ago, a move that would transition the Grand Forks workforce from a 70-year-old building into a space of heightened efficiency, modernity and security.

"When the headquarters was built in 2017, it was about investing in the future of our whole cooperative system and the members who own us," said Jami Hovet, Minnkota Executive Vice President and Chief Administrative Officer. "We wanted a facility that could support our employees and the members for any changing needs that could emerge in the decades ahead. Working with Aethero is just another way to maintain that investment."

Within three weeks of meeting with Minnkota and sketching out the project scope, Aethero arrived on-site with a Skydio X10 drone. It took approximately seven hours of orbits to collect data on every corner and crevice of the facility's roof, windows and facade.

Once the data was gathered and backed up, Aethero's analysts got to work. Every image was GPS-aligned to create a 3D model of Minnkota's headquarters. Any visual concerns, such as cracks or rust spots, were annotated for further review. On the energy side, Aethero uses its own proprietary thermodynamics equations to extract how the outside materials are performing against commercial building standards and where there may be energy waste.

"What comes out of this is a complete picture on the outside of your building – what work may be needed now in the next one to two years, or what may be needed in five to 10 years," explained Aethero's Dr. Karthik Balaji, Senior Director of Technology and Product Development. "This helps the facility manager and those running the buildings to have an idea of the facade-related capital expenditures which are coming, and they have time to budget for that."

“Minnkota is going to great lengths to be efficient for their members, to make sure they’re doing whatever they can to not let building bills blossom.”

Matt Dunlevy
Aethero Advanced Analytics CEO

Everything Aethero collects is loaded into TELOS, a proprietary platform that makes the data understandable and pliable to the needs of the customer. In Minnkota’s case, the TELOS dashboard laid out the top 10 energy efficiency and structural items that could offer the best return on investment (ROI) if updated. However, those 10 items are just a subset of potential areas for improvement.



“Their analysis found areas where you could see there was some thermal penetration from the inside out,” said Minnkota Buildings and Grounds Supervisor Justin Swanson. “Those are areas that we can explore now and find the best fix for each area.”

Facilities Manager Dave Whalen added that TELOS breaks all findings into categories and offers user-friendly filters to compare and evaluate projects and their ROIs. “They also give you a picture of each individual concern and a GPS location on the map where exactly on the building are they looking,” he said. “If it’s just a little picture of a crack, you know exactly where it is.”

The building analysis will help Minnkota satisfy its insurance



Buildings and Grounds Supervisor Justin Swanson (middle) reviews Minnkota’s building assessment with Chief Administrative Officer Jami Hovet (left) and Facilities Manager Dave Whalen (right).

inspection commitments for this year, but Hovet doesn't expect this to be a one-and-done partnership. She and her team will meet with Aethero again to dive deeper into the flight's findings and offer feedback for the future. The initial assessment has delivered a baseline view of a young, healthy facility, and leaders will reengage with Aethero in the years ahead to fly comparative scans.

"Having this technology, something as new and upcoming as the UAS analysis that Aethero offers, is a benefit for us, especially having them right in our backyard in Grand Forks," Hovet said.

North Dakota ecosystem

The origins of Aethero hark back to 2016, when the North Dakota University System allowed Dunlevy to fly all 11 state colleges and universities. He collected millions of thermal images of the campuses, then partnered with the University of North Dakota's College of Engineering and Mines to make that data collection go further. And it did. Dunlevy began building his team, integrating artificial intelligence and developing new patents for analysis software.

"We fly drones and this is a drone state, but at the end of the day, Aethero is not a drone company. We're a data company," he said. "AI is extremely important. It was the thing I could see was needed to really change the business model."

Dunlevy says he sees AI as a "force multiplier" for the already crystallized ecosystem of UAS companies that have found a home in North Dakota. Just as UAS development was spurred from strong aviation and higher education sectors in the region, AI will be the next step in the state's innovation evolution.

"North Dakota has every piece of the jigsaw puzzle, and in many cases, we have the best of the pieces," he said. "That's why we're so best of breed in our state when it comes to UAS. And AI is just amplifying all of that."

Learn more about Aethero Advanced Analytics at **aethero.ai**.

MINNKOTA FACILITY ASSESSMENT

Building Score:

8/10 (Excellent)

RGB & Thermal Files Collected:

3,182

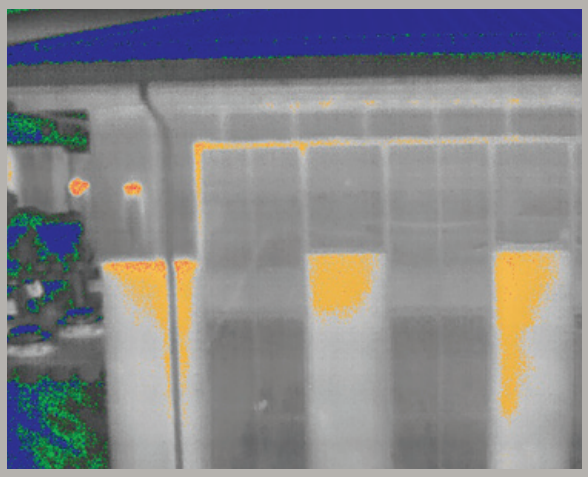
Size of Data Collected & Analyzed:

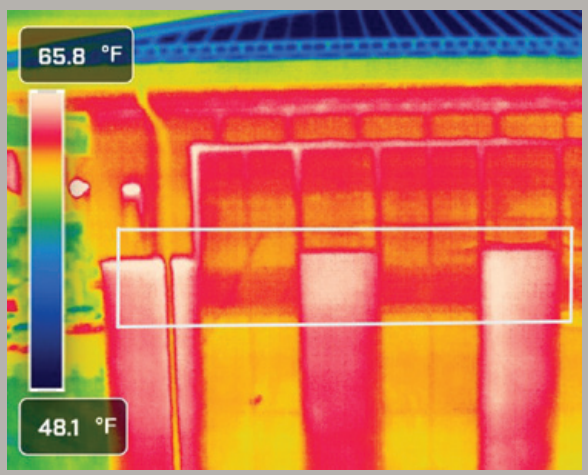
48.5 GB

Primary Suggestions:

- Caulking improvements
- Small wall crack repairs
- Insulation evening







(Right) The Aethero building assessment provides multiple layers of thermal imaging to precisely illustrate potential heat loss.

MINNKOTA EARNS RISING STAR AWARD FOR MONARCH CONSERVATION EFFORTS



Minnkota environmental specialist II Kacey Borin holds up the Rising Star Award certificate.

Minnkota Power Cooperative has been recognized with the Rising Star Award from the Rights-of-Way as Habitat Working Group for its successful implementation of the Monarch Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA).

The Rising Star Award recognizes a CCAA partner that demonstrated standout implementation or reporting during its first year of enrollment. In presenting the award, the Working Group specifically praised Minnkota for the level of detail included in its tracking and reporting for 2025.

"Tracking and interpreting data about habitat throughout our territory alongside our management practices is foundational to successfully implementing the CCAA program," said Kacey Borin, Minnkota environmental specialist II. "Receiving this award is therefore an encouraging reflection of our efforts heading in the right direction. We're excited to continue to integrate what we're learning from our data and the Working Group in the years ahead."

Through the CCAA, Minnkota supports monarch butterfly conservation by managing habitat along portions of its power delivery system right of way and other areas. Rights of way can provide important wildlife habitat by connecting fragmented landscapes and creating areas that support butterflies, birds and other species. The Working Group includes more than 400 organizations from private industry, government, nonprofit organizations and academia across the United States and Canada.

Minnkota's recognition reflects the cooperative's ongoing effort to balance the reliable operation of its power delivery system with responsible stewardship of the land it manages.







Photos courtesy of Kacey Borin

MINNKOTA EARNS DISTINGUISHED SAFETY AWARD



The Milton R. Young Station has been recognized with the Lignite Energy Council's 2025 Distinguished Safety Award, honoring the plant's strong safety performance.

Troy Karlberg, Minnkota's safety and physical security supervisor at the Young Station, accepted the award on behalf of the cooperative during the Lignite Energy Council's Annual Conference Awards Recognition Program on Sept. 9 in Bismarck.

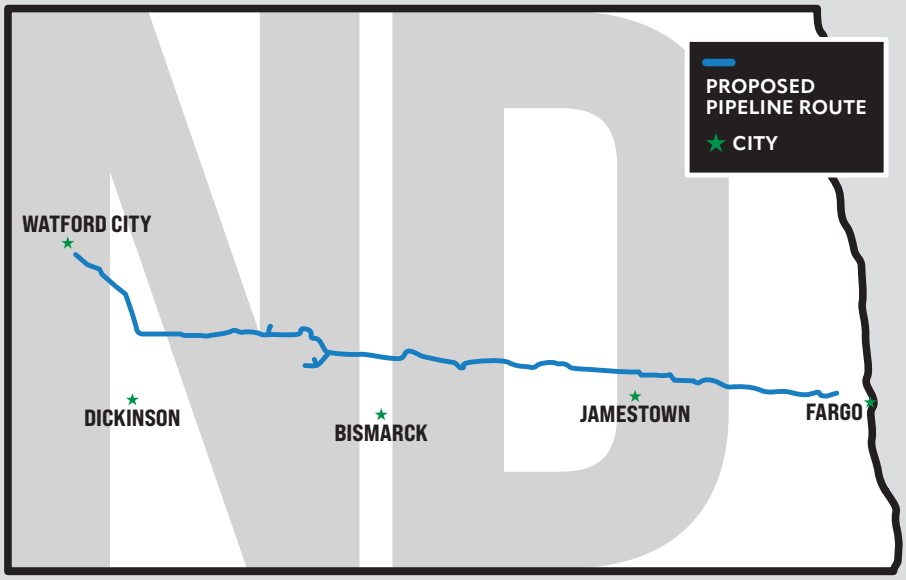
The Distinguished Safety Award recognizes lignite mines and power plants that maintain an accident rate below the national average. The honor reflects the continued commitment of employees across the Young Station to maintaining a safe workplace while reliably operating and maintaining the facility.

This marks the 11th time the Young Station has received the Distinguished Safety Award since 2003. Other 2025 recipients included BNI Coal's Center Mine, Falkirk Mining Company's Falkirk Mine, The Coteau Properties Company's Freedom Mine, Coyote Creek Mining Company's Coyote Creek Mine and Dakota Gasification Company.

WBI MOVES FORWARD WITH BAKKEN EAST NATURAL GAS PIPELINE

WBI Energy is moving forward with construction of the Bakken East Natural Gas Pipeline, a major project that would carry natural gas from western North Dakota to the Fargo area.

MDU Resources Group announced Sept. 30 that its board approved a final investment decision for the approximately 350-mile pipeline. The project is expected to cost between $2.7 billion and $3.2 billion and initially transport up to 1.4 billion cubic feet of natural gas per day. Minnkota supports development of the pipeline as the cooperative evaluates new natural gas generation to help meet the growing electricity needs of its legacy members, including homes, farms and businesses.



"Reaching FID (final investment decision) on the Bakken East Pipeline Project marks a significant milestone in our commitment to expanding critical natural gas infrastructure in the region. The project will serve the growing demand for natural gas transportation, enable production from the Bakken region to serve customers in central and eastern North Dakota, and further enhance security and reliability of our existing pipeline system," said Nicole A. Kivisto, President and CEO of MDU Resources Group.

Construction is expected from 2028 through 2030, with the eastern portion of the pipeline becoming operational by late 2030.

COOPERATIVE VIRTUAL 5K RAISES MORE THAN $8,200 FOR FAMILIES

Beltrami Electric Cooperative's first Cooperative Virtual 5K raised more than $8,200 for the Cooperative Family Fund, which provides support to families of electric cooperative employees who have passed away.

The weeklong event, held Sept. 20-26, drew 143 participants from 13 states and included representation from 31 partner cooperatives. Participants could complete the 5K wherever and however it worked best for them, helping extend the event's reach across the cooperative network.

Minnkota employees were among those who participated. A group of Grand Forks employees completed the 5K together Sept. 25 on the employee walking path.

In a social media post, Jared Echternach, president and CEO of Beltrami Electric Cooperative, thanked participants and partner cooperatives for making the inaugural event a success and said Beltrami hopes to make the fundraiser an annual tradition.









MINNKOTA HOSTS NATIONAL HR CONFERENCE



Minnkota welcomed human resources professionals from generation and transmission cooperatives across the country for the HR Shirtsleeve Conference, held Sept. 29-Oct. 1 at Minnkota's Grand Forks offices.

The conference provided an opportunity for attendees to share ideas, discuss emerging workforce challenges and learn from one another about industry trends and best practices. Sessions covered a broad range of human resources topics, including recruiting, onboarding and employee retention; workplace policies and compliance; labor relations; employee benefits and wellness; compensation; artificial intelligence; and training and professional development.

By bringing together HR professionals from across the cooperative network, the conference helps G&T cooperatives strengthen their workplaces and support employees.

EPA ROLLS BACK MAJOR PORTIONS OF POWER PLANT GREENHOUSE GAS RULE

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has rolled back major portions of its 2024 greenhouse gas regulations for power plants, removing requirements that could have significantly affected existing coal plants and new natural gas generation.

Minnkota has advocated for changes to the rule because of concerns about electric reliability, affordability and the ability to maintain enough dependable generation to meet growing electricity demand.

The EPA action, announced Sept. 14, repeals greenhouse gas requirements for existing coal-based power plants, including provisions that would have required many plants operating long term to capture 90% of their carbon dioxide emissions beginning in 2032. The agency also removed carbon capture requirements for certain new natural gas plants. EPA has separately proposed repealing the remaining federal greenhouse gas standards for power plants.

While EPA repealed certain carbon capture requirements, other federal greenhouse gas standards continue to apply until EPA finalizes its broader proposal to repeal the remaining power-sector greenhouse gas regulations. Under the remaining federal framework, many proposed natural gas facilities may operate at relatively low utilization levels, often around or below a 40% capacity factor, to avoid more stringent regulatory requirements. Minnkota and electric cooperatives across the nation are urging EPA to move quickly to repeal those remaining standards.

The changes are significant for Minnkota, which operates the Milton R. Young Station near Center, North Dakota. The coal-based power plant remains a key source of reliable electricity for Minnkota's members. At the same time, Minnkota is planning for future power supply investments, including the potential development of new natural gas generation to help meet growing demand, diversify its generation portfolio and provide greater flexibility to respond to changing grid conditions.

"Our members are counting on us to make long-term power supply decisions that keep reliability and affordability at the forefront," said Mac McLennan, Minnkota president and CEO. "We need the flexibility to invest in dependable generation that can operate when the grid needs it most. Federal regulations should support that goal rather than unnecessarily restrict the operation of resources that are essential to meeting growing electricity demand."

Minnkota will continue to follow the EPA rulemaking process and advocate for policies that support reliable, resilient and affordable electricity for its members.



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MINNKOTA LINEWORKERS PARTICIPATE IN LIVE-LINE TRAINING

Minnkota's line crews joined counterparts from Otter Tail Power Company for critical safety training the week of Sept. 8-11. More than 20 lineworkers participated in four days of live-line barehand training, conducted by CHANCE live-line demonstrator Kyle Broyles.

This year's training consisted of a mix of classroom and field work focused on the safety procedures necessary for live-line maintenance. On the first day, participants tested the insulation level of a Minnkota bucket truck against the Center-to-Grand-Forks 345-kV transmission line. The following days included trips to the Elm River switch for simulated live-line jumper installation and to the Poland switch for training on cutting in insulators on an energized 69-kV line.

"This training is something we need to conduct in order to stay efficient on the barehand techniques," said Minnkota Line Superintendent David Lagge. "As you would imagine, this type of work would be extremely dangerous if employees aren't properly trained."

Lagge explained that when crews perform barehand work, they install a metal cage that sits inside of the insulated bucket. The lineworkers have jumpers (flexible, insulated cables) hooked to the cage that they bond onto the energized conductor, essentially energizing themselves so they are at the same potential as the conductor. This allows them to work on the conductor safely with just leather gloves. Minnkota anticipates offering this training every three years.





