

Red River Valley Cooperative Power Association

SPARKS

July 2026

**NEVER SETTLE
FOR SUB-PAR**

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SPARKS

Red River Valley Co-op Power is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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Halstad, Minnesota (USPS 509-300)

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Scheduled Board Meeting

Board meetings are held in Halstad at the cooperative office starting at 8:30 a.m. on the next-to-last Monday of each month.

Outages:
800-788-7784

On the cover: Minnkota Power Cooperative's electricians set steel columns for the new Sabin substation.



Data centers and electric rates

by Rich Whitcomb, CEO

While your cooperative does not currently serve a large-scale data center, or any data center for that manner, I wanted to spend this month's column discussing the positive impact a data center could have on your future electric rates.

This topic is pertinent because we are all aware that Applied Digital is building a large data center with Oracle as its core tenant just across the Red River in Harwood, North Dakota. Since we share the same wholesale power supplier, Minnkota Power Cooperative, as Cass County Electric Cooperative, which will provide power to the load, there will be potential secondary effects here as well.

Like most things, if the terms are structured thoughtfully and its effects on the transmission and generation of electricity are studied carefully, responsible development can actually help keep electric rates stable. We believe this to be the case with this situation for a few reasons.

First, Applied Digital is paying all of the upfront costs for the substation and regional transmission upgrades necessary to connect to the larger and localized transmission grid. These costs are not insignificant and are in the tens of millions of dollars.

Second, there are benefits here that go toward what we all pay for the existing system through our electric rates. The more a larger load pays into the system, the less pressure there is on "legacy" members to pay for these fixed costs. These contributions can help keep rates stable and lessen the need for future increases.

Third, our wholesale power supplier can now budget for excess kWh that would have gone into the widely variable wholesale power

market, at a set price, which allows a degree of price protection.

Now, the flip side of this coin is that wholesale power rates will still likely go up for other reasons. Pressures from inflation of materials, actually getting supplies, meeting carbon-free mandates, and building more electric generation to replace the aging fleet of assets will exist regardless.

Let's talk about that last part. Minnkota's two coal power plants have been the backbone of its system since 1970 and 1977. Like the rest of us, they are inching closer to retirement age. And like us, thoughtful planning should occur before retirement. Building new 24/7 generation typically takes upwards of 5-7 years, so preparations need to start now. The price tag of new generation to serve existing members, in this case natural gas, will be in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

We are simply nearing the end of a cycle of generation and transmission that started almost six decades before. All utilities must go through this cycle.

With careful planning and risk mitigation, I think we can certainly temper impacts somewhat to continue providing extreme value to our members.

After all, the value of electricity in improving the lives of all of Americans within a generation cannot be overestimated. Along with the Industrial Revolution of the 1800s, its positive overall transformation of society has been truly remarkable.



NEVER SETTLE FOR SUB-PAR



Minnkota Substation Engineer Jeff Johnke (right) reviews the Sabin substation plans with fellow engineer Jay Bushy.

New rural Sabin substation design to enhance site mobility, reliability

By Kaylee Cusack /// Photography Michael Hoeft

Foreman Dean Swatlowski was ready to work. After a couple of cold and drizzly May days, his Minnkota Power Cooperative (your cooperative's wholesale power supplier) crew of electricians pulled up to the site of the Sabin substation, sun shining and temperature climbing.

Swatlowski just had to wait for his lineworker counterparts to string the new switch tower, one part of a full rebuild of the aging substation. Then, his team could get rolling on the newly designed "low side" of the fresh facility – the first of its kind constructed by Minnkota crews.

The Sabin distribution substation, which serves the members of Red River Valley Co-op Power Association, is the latest project in Minnkota's multiyear substation rebuild

program. Kicked off in the fall of 2025, the new substation will be energized at the start of summer 2026, at which time the aging substation next to it will be decommissioned and torn down.

But this isn't a one-for-one swap. After more than 60 years of the same template, Minnkota engineers reevaluated the low side design of the standard distribution substation (the side of the transformer connected to the lower-voltage system, containing equipment that feeds electricity to distribution co-ops like Red River). Leveraging 3D drafting technology and a lot of collaboration, they discovered small changes that could make construction faster, maintenance safer and easier, and reliability higher as the rebuild program continues.

The new low side utilizes deeper pier foundations instead of spread footings, improved clearances and shielding (for lightning protection), and stouter steel for better structural loading capacity. This helps better meet current loading criteria, or protection from forces like wind, ice and overhead distribution lines.

"We took feedback from Operations. They wanted the bays bigger and they wanted a little more height because equipment's getting larger," explained Jay Bushy, the original engineering lead on the low side redesign. He added that the new design also creates an additional foot of spacing between phases, the conductors that carry electricity. "Another reason why we went to the larger phase spacing is sometimes birds or rodents get in there, and that additional clearance allows them space. That helps with preventing outages."

An additional benefit of the new low side design is the preassembled nature of the substation's steel components. Before, electricians would have to build many of the pieces in the shop during the winter and then haul those sections to the worksite and construct them further. Now, those parts and pieces are more modular, which will ultimately cut down on assembly time.

However, the Sabin substation is the team's first time trying out the new low side build. They'll use the experience to see what works well, and what can be changed for the better.

As Minnkota strategically moves forward in its substation rebuild program, reconstructing 2-3 substations annually according to age and condition, crews will become more familiar with the new design. The 3D blueprint will also translate to any entirely new substations under development to meet the needs of new load.

POWERING THE FRONT LINE OF THE COLD WAR



Editor's note: This story appeared in Minnkota's monthly publication. We are republishing it here due to its regional and historical interest.

Preserved missile site offers a look back at American history – and Minnkota history

By Ben Fladhammer /// Photography Jennifer Erickson

The elevator groans before it moves.

Then, with a slow mechanical rumble, it begins its descent into the earth.

Fifty feet below the North Dakota prairie, the Oscar Zero Launch Control Center feels frozen in time.

Behind steel blast doors and thick concrete walls, two Air Force officers once stood watch around the clock during the height of the Cold War, prepared to carry out orders they hoped would never come.

"It was hours of boredom punctuated by seconds of terror," said Rob Branting, supervisor of the Ronald Reagan Minuteman Missile State Historic Site near Cooperstown, North Dakota.

Fortunately, the true terror never came. Instead, what remains is one of the most remarkably preserved snapshots of Cold War America anywhere in the country.

For more than three decades, from the mid-1960s until deactivation in the late 1990s, North Dakota was home to one of America's most important nuclear defense networks. Spread across eastern North Dakota were 150 Minuteman missile silos and 15 launch control facilities connected by hundreds of miles of hardened communications cable buried beneath farmland. The missile fields reported to Grand Forks Air Force Base as part of the nation's nuclear deterrence strategy.

"Peace is our profession," Branting said, recalling the motto of the U.S. Strategic Air Command. "It's kind of a strange model when you're in charge of thousands of nuclear weapons. But the whole idea was to provide nuclear deterrence and hopefully prevent a war."

Life inside the bunker

For all the technology and geopolitical significance, daily life at the missile sites could be surprisingly ordinary.

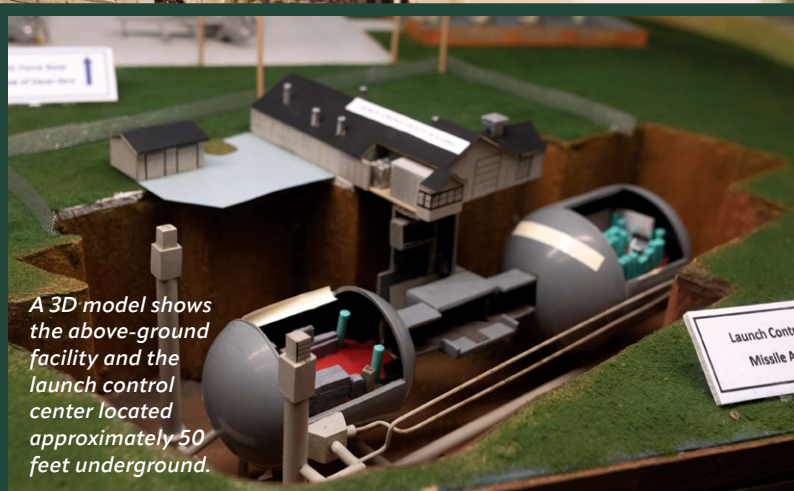
Walking through the top-level of the facility feels less like visiting a museum and more like stepping into the 1990s. The bedrooms remain largely unchanged. Magazines and handwritten notes still rest on tables. Ashtrays sit where they were left decades ago. Everywhere you look, small details create the feeling that Air Force personnel simply left for a moment and never returned.

Stepping into the common area feels like stepping back to 1997, with the space preserved much as it was during the site's final years of operation.





Site Supervisor Rob Branting explains that inside the launch control center, two officers stood watch around the clock, ready to respond if called upon during the Cold War.



A 3D model shows the above-ground facility and the launch control center located approximately 50 feet underground.

"We tried to keep everything as it was in 1997," Branting said. "People obviously want to go see the missile bunker, but we also want to show how the technicians, cooks and guards lived."

If launch orders ever came, the officers in the underground capsule would have only moments to verify the commands and carry them out. Fortunately, no launch orders were ever issued from North Dakota's Minuteman sites and the missiles remained silent through decades of Cold War tension.

Massive buildout for Minnkota co-ops

As the Air Force raced to construct the Minuteman system in the mid-1960s, Minnkota and its North Dakota member distribution cooperatives found themselves supporting one of the largest infrastructure projects in state history.

Approximately 5,000 workers poured into the region to build the missile network. Minnkota and its members ultimately provided electric service to 144 of the state's Minuteman facilities. Doing so required an extensive substation construction program and significant expansion of the rural electric distribution system.

"Keeping reliable electricity to these sites was critical to national defense," Branting said. "The Air Force couldn't have succeeded without that."

The launch control facilities were designed with multiple layers of redundancy. Cooperative power supplied the sites under normal conditions, while diesel generators stood ready if the grid failed. Branting said the facilities carried enough fuel to continue operating for up to six weeks.

"If we were under attack, the hope was you'd get the generators kicked on so they could launch the missiles if necessary," Branting said. "That was a big thing to advertise to the Soviet Union – that these missiles could still work if we lost the grid."

Preserving a legacy

The Ronald Reagan Minuteman Missile State Historic Site welcomes approximately 4,000 visitors each year. The site continues to grow as a destination for history enthusiasts.

"This facility is a part of North Dakota's legacy of protecting the United States," Branting said. "It demonstrates the first time when nuclear war could be moments away. It's an important period of history to remember."

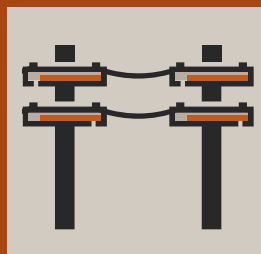
The Ronald Reagan Minuteman Missile State Historic Site is available for tours from Memorial Weekend through Labor Day daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and by appointment during the winter months.

LEARN BEFORE YOU BURN

There are many benefits to rural controlled burns (also called prescribed burns), from managing crop debris to protecting the soil from disease. However, these burns present real wildfire and electrical risks if handled carelessly. Before you plan a burn, make sure you understand these foundational safety guidelines.



FIRST, WATCH THE WIRES – NEVER BURN NEAR POWER LINES.



Heat, smoke and flames can damage power lines or cause electrical arcing. Smoke can also reduce air insulation and increase the risk of electrical discharge through the air. And if a power pole catches fire, it can continue to burn inside even if the fire looks like it has stopped. Keep a safe distance and notify the co-op if a burn is planned nearby.

KNOW THE SPECIFIC WEATHER AND WIND CONDITIONS.



Burns should only happen under specific conditions: light winds, moderate humidity and no extreme heat. Our region has open landscapes that allow wind to pick up and shift

unpredictably. Even a “moderate” 10-15 mph wind can push a grass fire faster than a person can run. If it feels breezy, it’s probably too risky to burn.

GET A PERMIT AND FOLLOW LOCAL REGULATIONS.



In Minnesota, permits are typically required through the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and burning is often restricted during spring wildfire season when grasses are dry. In North Dakota, local fire departments or county officials usually issue permission, and burn bans are common during high winds or drought. Always check daily restrictions.

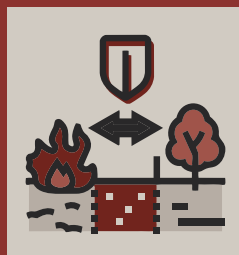
HAVE SUPPRESSION TOOLS AND A PLAN READY.



Water sources, hoses, shovels and even tractors should be on hand before starting. More importantly, there needs to be a clear plan for what to do if the fire escapes, including who

calls emergency services and how people will respond quickly.

REMEMBER TO PLAN FIREBREAKS BEFORE YOU BURN.



The dominant fuels in North Dakota and Minnesota field burns are grasses and crop residue, which ignite easily and spread fast. Before you burn, create wide,

well-maintained firebreaks, like disked soil or wet lines.



SUMMER GETAWAY

Energy Savings

Close blinds and curtains

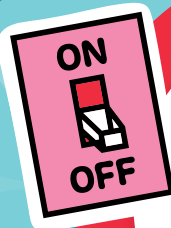
Keeping blinds closed helps block summer heat and retain warmth during colder months.



When it gets hot, the coolest thing you can do is save on your energy bill – even when you're not at home. While planning your next lake weekend or extended family vacation, keep these few simple steps in mind and see your savings shine!

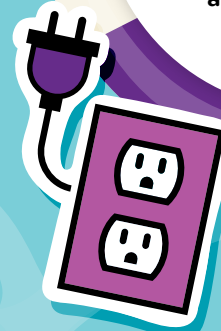
Turn off lights

Make sure all indoor lights are turned off before leaving. If you want the home to look occupied, consider putting one light on a smart timer.



Unplug electronics

Devices like TVs, coffee makers, gaming systems and phone chargers still use energy when plugged in. Unplug them or use a power strip you can switch off.



Adjust the thermostat

Set your thermostat to at least 78 degrees in summer and 60 degrees in winter while you're away. Even a small change can reduce energy use while keeping your home safe.



Wherever you're spending it, Red River Valley Co-op Power wishes you a safe and memorable summer!

MINNKOTA TRANSMISSION LINE INSPECTIONS SCHEDULED FOR FALL

Minnkota Power Cooperative, Red River Valley Co-op Power's wholesale power provider, will be inspecting its transmission line structures in preparation for upcoming project work. EXO, a contractor, will be assisting Minnkota personnel in the pole testing. All inspections will be completed using ATVs/UTVs. Minimal land disturbance is anticipated.

The purpose of these inspections is to ensure that electricity can be delivered safely and reliably to your area, as well as prioritize project work. If you have questions, please visit minnkota.com or call 701-795-4000.



**RED RIVER VALLEY
CO-OP POWER**

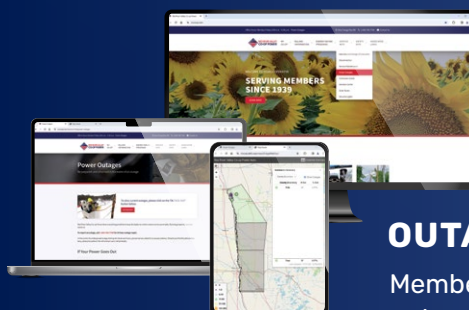
SAVE MONEY AND ENERGY IN 2026 WITH ENERGY EFFICIENCY REBATES!

Energy efficiency rebates for members remain in effect for 2026. Please see the chart below for a sample of incentives.

EQUIPMENT	SPECIFICATIONS	REBATES
Air-source heat pump	> 16 SEER	\$500/ton*
Ground-source heat pump	Energy Star-rated	\$500/ton*
Electric water heater	Min. 80-gallon capacity, must be on off-peak program	\$300-\$650 per unit
Off-peak electric heat (plenum, baseboard, hanging heater, etc.)	Must be resistance electric on off-peak program	\$25/kW*
Electric boiler, brick storage, slab storage	Must be on off-peak program	\$45/kW*
Electric vehicle (EV) charger	240V-rated Level 2 charger on off-peak program	\$50/kW/limit \$750 per account

Every install must be new equipment and provide proof of purchase unless site verification is approved.

**These amounts include a rebate from Minnkota Power Cooperative, which has a capped rebate, so call for details.*



RRVCP OUTAGE MAP

Members can see current power outage information live at **rrvcoop.com/service-info/power-outages**.

All incentives, criteria and guidelines for resident and business members can be found at **rrvcoop.com** or by calling **800-788-7784**.

All criteria are listed on the rebate form.