



BENTON
RURAL ELECTRIC
ASSOCIATION

High-Voltage News

2026 | QUARTER 1

MEMBER NEWSLETTER

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Upcoming Adjustment to the Residential Base Charge

Beginning March 1, Benton REA will adjust the residential base charge from \$23 to \$29.95 per month. This change is necessary to continue providing the safe, reliable and affordable power members expect.

The base charge is a fixed cost on each electric bill that helps cover essential services required to power homes such as maintaining lines, poles, substations, transformers, meters and member services. Even when electricity use is low, these costs remain constant so our system can operate at all times.

Why is the change necessary?

Like many utilities across the region and nation, Benton REA is experiencing rising costs related to wholesale power supply, maintaining aging infrastructure, and the materials and equipment required for system maintenance.

Inflation and higher operational costs have outpaced current rates.

Benton REA continues to deliver some of the lowest electric rates in the region, despite serving a vast and geographically challenging territory spanning rural portions of Benton, Lewis and Yakima counties, including the rugged terrain of the Cascade Mountains at White Pass. Among the nine utilities in the region, Benton REA maintains the fourth-lowest average bill, trailing only larger utilities that benefit from denser, more compact service areas.

Adjusting the base charge ensures Benton REA

can continue improving and maintaining the electric system that serves you every day—especially during storms and peak use periods.

Our Commitment to Members

Benton REA is a not-for-profit cooperative, and every dollar collected goes directly toward powering our communities and keeping the system reliable. We carefully evaluate all utility costs and financial needs to limit the impact on members while supporting responsible financial planning and long-term system reliability. We know any increase matters to households, and Benton REA is committed to managing your cooperative's finances prudently while working hard to keep rates as stable as possible.

Need help? We're here.

If you have questions about your bill or would like to learn about payment programs, energy assistance or income based discounts, Benton REA's member experience representatives are available to help. Call 509-786-2913.

Members also have access to in-house energy-efficiency advisors to guide you toward rebates and tools to manage electrical use throughout the year.



Programs That Support You All Year Long

At Benton REA, we understand managing household expenses can be challenging, particularly for members on fixed or limited incomes. That's why we offer programs designed to provide financial relief, predictability and peace of mind.

From income-qualified discounts to levelized billing to payment assistance, these programs reflect our cooperative commitment to caring for our members.

Income-Qualified Discounts for Seniors and Members with Disabilities

Benton REA offers a monthly \$33 bill discount for income-qualified seniors or members with disabilities. This program is designed to help those who may be most affected by rising costs while living on fixed incomes.

Eligibility requirements include:

- Applicants must be 62 years of age or older, or provide proof of disability.
- Annual combined household gross income must be at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Guideline for a two-member household, currently \$42,300. *Household income includes spouses or co-tenants.*

Applicants are asked to provide documentation to verify eligibility, and participation must be renewed every three years to ensure continued qualification.

Members may apply for a discount by visiting the Benton REA website at bentonrea.org/payments-services.

Levelized Billing: Predictable Payments All Year Long

For members looking for consistency in their monthly bills, Benton REA offers Levelized Budget Billing. This program averages your

electricity use over the past 12 months to calculate your monthly payment amount.

With levelized billing:

- You receive a bill every month showing your actual use.
- Your bill includes the levelized payment amount and any balance on your account.
- Seasonal highs and lows are smoothed out, helping avoid large winter or summer bill spikes.

Members can request levelized billing at any time throughout the year. To enroll or learn more, call Benton REA's member experience department at 509-786-2913 or email billing@bentonrea.org.

Power to Care: Extra Help When It's Needed Most

Benton REA's Power to Care program provides direct payment assistance to income-qualified members who are experiencing difficulty paying their electric bill.

- Assistance amounts vary based on family size, household income and the amount due on the account.
- Eligible households may receive assistance once per calendar year.

Members may apply for Power to Care by visiting the Benton REA website at bentonrea.org/payments-services.

A Cooperative Commitment to Our Members

As a member-owned cooperative, Benton REA is committed to more than just delivering reliable electricity—we're here to support our members. If you or someone you know may benefit from one of these programs, we encourage you to contact us. We're here to help.

How to Report a Power Outage

As winter approaches and the potential for severe weather increases, we want to remind our members that Benton REA is available 24/7 to restore power when outages occur. If you experience an outage, please report it right away so crews can respond as quickly and safely as possible. Our crews are on call around the clock, and outages can be reported the following ways:

By Phone

Call our 24/7 outage reporting line at (509) 786-2913. Crews are ready to be dispatched day or night—rain or shine.

On the SmatHub App

Select 'Contact Us' then select 'Report Power Outage'.



Follow Benton REA on Facebook for outage updates.



TIPS TO AVOID ENERGY SCAMS



Beware of “winter bill relief” energy scams. Scammers often exploit high winter bills by offering fake discount or relief programs. They may ask for upfront payments or personal details to lower your rate. Legitimate utilities never demand gift cards, wire transfers or payment through apps like PayPal or Venmo. Always verify offers directly by calling your utility’s phone number located on your energy bill—do not call any phone numbers provided in a suspicious email or text. Remember to take time to confirm before you pay; real savings programs won’t pressure you for immediate action.



Efficiency Tips for a Smooth Start to the New Year

The new year is a great time to show your home some care. Simple monthly tasks can keep your equipment running efficiently, improve comfort and help you save money.

Here are a few quick tips to carry you through the first few months of 2026.

January: Change Your Air Filter

Kick off the year by swapping out your HVAC air filter. A clean filter helps your system run efficiently, preserves the life of your equipment and can lower your energy use.

Regular monthly or quarterly filter changes—depending on your system and household needs—keep the air in your home cleaner and your heating costs down.

February: Seal Drafts and Save

Cold winter air has a way of sneaking in through small gaps around windows and doors. Check these areas for drafts and seal any leaks with caulk or weatherstripping. This simple step reduces energy waste, helps maintain a consistent indoor temperature and saves money on your heating bill.

March: Check Your Water Heater Temperature

As the weather warms up, it’s a great time to take a look at your

water heater settings. Lowering the temperature to 120°F uses less energy while still providing plenty of hot water for everyday needs. This small adjustment helps reduce your monthly energy costs and extends the life of your water heater.



2026 Ruralite Calendars Are Here

Pick up your copy at a Benton REA office

The 2026 Ruralite wall calendar features 13 wildlife and landscape photos by public power consumers. Members may pick up a free calendar at either of Benton REA's offices in West Richland or Prosser, while supplies last.

Call 509-786-2913 or email memberservices@bentonrea.org to request one be mailed to you.



Our Promise to You

As the demand for electricity continues to grow, our commitment to providing you with reliable power remains steadfast. Looking ahead, we are dedicated to:

- Advocating for energy policies that support our local communities.
- Leveraging innovative technologies to strengthen our grid.
- Listening to your feedback to enhance co-op programs and services.