

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



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Snow

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Rate Increase for 2024



Jay Spaans
Manager/Line Supt.

As I am writing this article in late December, we have been blessed with some very nice working conditions and temperatures here in Douglas County. This has allowed us to get more projects completed than we anticipated, which is great for system reliability heading into the winter!

We had our monthly board meeting on December 19, and we looked at the 2024 budget which currently reflects that we will need a rate increase in 2024. Right now, we are not exactly sure how large of an increase we will be making but I wanted to give you all a heads up. The last rate increase was in 2016 and to be quite honest I am surprised we made it this long. We have made some big improvements in 2018-2019 with a new headquarters facility and new metering system that have both been beneficial to the membership. We got the building up and meters installed before the Covid-19 pandemic, but since then the price increases on material has been about 23-30% and those costs have not come down much.

Pole prices, for example, have increased by about 90% in the last 3-4 years. In Sept 2020 we paid \$225 for a 35' pole which is our most commonly used pole, and in November of 2023 we paid \$428 for that same pole. Underground primary wire has seen some significant increases as well, going from \$2.25 per foot to \$3.55 per foot in this same time period.

While virtually all aspects of today's costs of living continue to rise, we pride ourselves in keeping your rates as low as realistically possible without sacrificing safety and reliability. To accomplish this goal, we must continue to upgrade the distribution system. Our system is in good condition and has proven to

be very reliable, but we cannot stop making improvements either as our system continues to age.

Douglas Electric was built in the late 40's and early 50's making some of the original poles and wires over 70 years old. While they have served us well for many many years, we also know that we need to keep making improvements. These improvements will come at a cost, and we need to protect the integrity of our financial stability also.

Each year we have been improving sections of lines and updating the system, and we want to reassure you that Douglas Electric will remain proactive in planning for your future energy needs. We have worked hard to anticipate any potential issues that could escalate the costs of energy, and whenever possible we have minimized the impact to our members. Although we must raise our rates to cover the costs of doing business, we are still following our mission statement:

**Dedicated to provide
safe, low-cost, reliable
electricity to all our
Members.**

While times have changed, our mission and outlook have not. To the board and staff at Douglas Electric, you are not just a customer, you are a member owner and without you we would not exist. I do not like to be the bearer of bad news, but I did want to give you a heads up. Right now, we are looking at implementing the rate increase in April of 2024.

I hope you had a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, and may God bless you and your families in 2024!

**COOPERATIVE
CONNECTIONS****DOUGLAS
ELECTRIC**

(USPS No. 019-046)

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**In case of a power outage, call
(605) 724-2323**

MISSION STATEMENT

Dedicated to provide safe, low-cost
reliable electricity to all our Members.



Douglas Electric Welcomes New Members

**Byron Storm
Jill VanDam**

Operating Report

	Nov 2023	Nov 2022
KWH Sold	2,090,708	2,305,960
Revenue	\$259,680.22	\$271,715.88
Cost of Power	\$128,794.07	\$90,250.57
Connected Consumers	825	824
Miles Energized	501.3	502.3
Consumers /Mile	1.65	1.64
Average KWH Used	2,534	2,798
Average Bill	\$314.76	\$329.75

Douglas Electric Outages

Date	Cause	Number of Members Affected
Dec. 6	Planned - pull in new wire	1
Dec. 12	Planned-hang new ACSR on Transformer	1
Dec. 15	Planned-re-route line	2



**Basin Scholarship
Applications
Due to Douglas Electric
February 10**

Cooking Safety

Watch What You Heat: Cooking is the Number One Cause of Home Fires

Plan A: Primary Prevention

- The best time to cook is when you are wide awake, and not drowsy from medications or alcohol.
- Always wipe clean the stove, oven, exhaust fan to prevent grease buildup.
- Wear short or close-fitting sleeves when cooking.
- Keep a pan lid and dry potholders or oven mitts near you EVERY time you cook.
- Turn pot or pan handles toward the back of the stove.
- When heating food in the microwave, use microwave- safe cookware that allows steam to escape.
- Allow food to rest before removing from the microwave.
- When frying, use a pan lid or splash guard to prevent grease splatter.
- Stay in the kitchen while you are frying, grilling, or broiling food. If you leave, turn off the stove.
- If you are simmering, baking, roasting, or boiling food, check it regularly. Remain in the home while food is cooking, and use a timer to remind you to check on your cooking.
- After cooking, check the kitchen to make sure all burners and other appliances are turned off.

Plan B: Secondary Prevention

If your food does catch on fire...

1. Cover the pan with its lid. A cookie sheet works too. Leave covered until the pan is cool. NEVER move the pot or carry it outside - the pot is too hot to handle and the contents may splash, causing a severe burn.
2. Turn the heat off. With the lid on and the heat off, the fire should quickly put itself out. NEVER use water to put out a kitchen fire. Water will cause the

oil to splatter and spread the fire, or scald you as it vaporizes.

3. If the fire is inside the oven or microwave, keep the door shut and turn it off. Keep closed until the oven is cool.
4. If the fire gets out of control- get out, stay out and call 9-1-1. Don't return inside for any reason.

STATS

- 47% of all home fires are caused by cooking
- Preventing a burn injury is always better than the pain and trauma of medical treatment afterward.

National Burn Awareness Week (Feb. 4-10, 2024) is a window of opportunity for organizations to mobilize burn, fire, and life safety educators to unite in sharing a common burn awareness and prevention message in our communities.

Source: American Burn Association



Call 811 Before You Dig

Lillee Pannell, Age 10

Lillee Pannell instructs readers to call 811 before digging. Lillee is the daughter of Scott and Kim Pannell from Sioux Falls, S.D., members of Southeastern Electric Cooperative.

Kids, send your drawing with an electrical safety tip to your local electric cooperative (address found on Page 3). If your poster is published, you'll receive a prize. All entries must include your name, age, mailing address and the names of your parents. Colored drawings are encouraged.



BRUNCH SPECIALS

FRENCH TOAST SUPREME

Ingredients:

1/2 cup butter
2 tbsps. white corn syrup
1 cup brown sugar
5 eggs
1 cup Carnation milk
1 tsp. vanilla
1/4 tsp. salt

Method

Boil together butter, corn syrup, and brown sugar for one minute. Grease a 9x13 pan and put the caramel mix in bottom. Slice French bread about one inch thick or use Texas toast. Put slices close together on top of the caramel sauce. Beat together eggs, milk, vanilla, and salt. Pour on top of bread. Cover and refrigerate overnight. Bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes. When ready to serve, turn the pieces over and caramel will be on top. Best served warm.

Brigitta Hofer
Bridgewater, S.D.

MINI FRITTATAS

Ingredients:

8 eggs
1/4 cup milk
1 1/2 tps. Italian seasoning
1/4 tsp. salt
1/8 tsp. ground black pepper
1 cup crumbled cooked bacon
1 med. onion, finely chopped
1 med. zucchini, finely chopped
1 cup shredded Cheddar cheese, divided

Method

Preheat oven to 350°F. Beat eggs, milk, Italian seasoning, salt and pepper in medium bowl until well blended. Add bacon, onion, zucchini and 1/2 cup of the cheese; mix well. Spray one (12-cup) muffin tin generously with no stick cooking spray. Spoon about 1/4 cup egg mixture into each cup. Sprinkle with remaining 1/2 cup cheese. Bake 20 to 22 minutes or just until eggs are set. Run small knife or spatula around each cup to loosen mini frittatas. Let stand five minutes before serving.

McCormick.com

CINNAMON PANCAKES

Ingredients:

2 cups pancake mix
1 tsp. cinnamon
2 eggs, beaten
1 cup milk
2 tbsps. vegetable oil
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract

Method

Stir pancake mix and cinnamon in large bowl until well blended. Stir in eggs, milk, oil, and vanilla just until blended.

Pour 1/4 cup of batter per pancake onto preheated lightly greased griddle or skillet. Cook one to two minutes per side or until golden brown, turning when pancakes begin to bubble. Serve pancakes with Spiced Syrup, if desired.

Kitchen Tip: To make flavorful Spiced syrup, mix one cup pancake syrup, one teaspoon pure vanilla extract and 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon in a small microwave-safe bowl and microwave on HIGH for one minute or until warm, stirring once.

McCormick.com

Please send your favorite recipes to your local electric cooperative (address found on Page 3). Each recipe printed will be entered into a drawing for a prize in December 2023. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

Efficiency Tips for Manufactured Homes



Miranda Boutelle
Efficiency Services
Group

Q: I live in a manufactured home. How can I keep the inside temperature more comfortable and save on energy bills?

A: There are several tasks you can complete to improve comfort and use less energy in your manufactured home. I started my career in energy efficiency as a weatherization technician in Wisconsin. In this role, I helped people in manufactured homes by air sealing, duct sealing, adding insulation and installing new windows, showerheads, faucet aerators and lightbulbs.

More than 22 million Americans live in manufactured homes, according to the National Association of State Energy Officials. Manufactured homes represent 15% of housing in rural areas, and only 3% in urban areas.

Knowing how manufactured homes are built helps us understand where we can seal in savings around the house. These homes are constructed in factories and then transported and set up on-site. Construction in a factory reduces costs, making manufactured homes an affordable option. That lower price point can come, in part, from the use of less expensive equipment and fewer materials, such as lower-efficiency heating equipment or less insulation.

If you are considering buying a manufactured home, ENERGY STAR®-certified manufactured homes are 30% more energy efficient than standard models, with a variety of options that increase the home's energy efficiency.

If you already live in a manufactured home, you likely know that manufactured homes are constructed in sections. One section is a single wide home, two are combined to make a double wide home and three make a triple wide home.

In my experience, the biggest issues were in the duct systems, which deliver heating and cooling throughout the homes. The ductwork is typically located in the cavity between the floor and the

transport barrier, which protects the underside of the manufactured home while it is transported from the factory to the site. Typically, one long duct runs the length of each section of the home, with the registers or vents cut into it.

The first step is making sure all registers are accessible, open and not covered by furniture, rugs, dog beds or anything else.

Next, check your ductwork by removing the registers and looking inside. Anything inside the duct will restrict airflow, so check that it is free and clear. Use a mirror and flashlight to look into the duct or take a picture by sticking a camera or phone inside and snapping some shots with flash in each direction. I've pulled all kinds of things out of ducts over the years, from garbage to toys to shoes.

If you have a double wide or triple wide, you will likely have a crossover duct, which joins the ducts in each section. The crossover duct is typically a large flexible duct with an inner liner, insulation and an outer cover to protect the insulation. Damaged or disconnected crossover ducts allow the air you pay to heat escape under the home. Often, damage is done by animals chewing or scratching to get inside the warm area. An inspection of the crossover duct requires crawling under the home. That's a dirty job and often a tight spot, so you might choose to hire a professional.

Another place to check is the joint joining the sections of a double wide or triple wide together. This is often covered by trim when the home is placed. You can caulk around the trim or remove it and caulk underneath to reduce air leakage.

Weatherstripping doors and windows to make sure they seal tightly will also reduce drafts and save energy. Some homes can benefit from additional insulation in the attic or under the floor. Those projects typically require specialized equipment or help from a professional.

Weatherization assistance programs, like the ones offered by the company I worked for in Wisconsin, provide discounted and no-cost energy-saving upgrades. Check with your county or electric utility for more information.

Rural Writings

Exploring Rural Art with Eliza Blue

Frank Turner

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In the tight-knit quarters of rural communities, where relationships are tightly woven, local art forms such as music and prose often reflect the unique character of the small towns they come from. Eliza Blue is one such writer, folk musician, mother, and self-described “accidental rancher” from the outskirts of Bison, S.D., who regularly captures the essence of rural living in every facet of her creative work.

However, Blue’s journey to the Northern Plains was unexpected. Originally from the big city, she first visited South Dakota as a temporary stop during one of her music tours. What was meant to be a brief visit transformed into a life-altering decision. Her visit turned into a permanent settlement, and Bison became the location where she would go on to marry, start a family, and immerse herself in rural life.

“It’s been a journey,” said Blue. “I started writing about these new experiences in motherhood and ranch life because they were all new to me. People really appreciated my perspective in a way that I didn’t see coming.”

With her touring days put on pause, Blue turned to writing as her creative outlet. A prolific artist, Blue began writing a column, “Little Pastures on the Prairie” for the Bison Courier. Her slice-of-life column that explored the quirks of living in one of the most remote locations in the U.S. quickly found an audience far and wide and is now published by 18 news outlets across the Upper Midwest.

In many ways, Blue’s column takes an ordinary rural experience and portraying it in a new, thoughtful way.

“A lot of my writing is about my interactions with the natural world and the relationships I have with my animals and the climate,” said Blue. “For example, I write a lot about the wind and what a dynamic force that is. It does almost become like a person that you are in a relationship with.”

Inspired by the content from her column, Blue published a collection of essays, *Accidental Rancher: ‘Lambs in the Laundry Room and other stories from Perkins County,’* in 2020. She has since been featured in South Dakota Magazine, The Daily Yonder, and other noteworthy publications.

Although Blue found success in her writing, her connection to music has continued. In 2021, Blue began touring again, taking on a new role as the host of SDPB’s traveling concert series, “Wish You Were Here with Eliza Blue,” a series in its fourth season that celebrates rural artists across the state.

“The show has been a huge inspiration and part of my broader mission to highlight not only my own experiences in agriculture but also rural artists,” said Blue. “It’s really exciting to be a part of show that illuminates what the modern pastoral genre looks like. It’s celebrating not how things were but how things are, which is really the theme of the show.”

Whether it’s through a column or a public broadcast, Blue said she will continue to illuminate the unique aspects of rural life through her work, which can be found on her website: elizablue.net.

“I have a few big projects in the pipeline,” said Blue. “I’ve been working on a Folk Opera. Hopefully in 2024, I will be working with some amazing musicians to put something together, so people will have to keep an eye out for that.”



Eliza Blue, a musician, writer, and rancher, performs music with folk and blues roots for her rural community.



SOUTH DAKOTA'S SNOWMOBILE CLUBS

A group of Black Hills Snowmobile Club members enjoy a ride through the snow covered pines.

Snow Lovers Create Trails and Lifelong Friendships Through Club Membership

Shannon Marvel

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Being a member of one of South Dakota's many snowmobiling clubs is more like being a member of a big, adrenaline-loving family.

Being a part of a snowmobile club provides the opportunity to meet likeminded individuals that can easily turn into some of your best friends. That's the case for Mike Boock, of Rapid City, who is a longtime member of the Black Hills Snowmobile Club (BHSC).

"Most of the friendships that I have today are because of the snowmobile club. Many of us even camp together during the summer at the lake," Boock said.

Boock said the club boasts up to 70 members in all. While he primarily rides the mountains of Colorado and Wyoming, Boock loves riding in Black Hills when the area receives enough snow.

There are a total of 416 miles of groomed snowmobile trails

in the Black Hills National Forest, making it a pristine spot for snowmobiling.

The snowmobile clubs in the Black Hills have it a little easier than those out east as they don't have to mark, install, groom or repair trails.

"The state takes care of that," Boock said. "This allows clubs like the BHSC to become more of an educational and community support organization."

This allows club members more free time to volunteer or participate in community events, such as the Festival of Lights Parade and Storybook Island Christmas Nights of Light.

Kelly Weaver is the President of the South Dakota Snowmobile Association and a member of the Aberdeen Drift Busters Snowmobile Club.

The Aberdeen Drift Busters maintain what's called the Dakota Midland trail system, which connects Aberdeen, Mina Lake, Richmond Lake, Westport, Frederick and Columbia.

"This provides about 75 miles of riding in a safe, marked, and groomed corridor," Weaver said.

There are rules governing the trail system. While there are no posted speed limits on the trail, when the trail is located in a road right-of-way, the speed limit of the road applies.

There are also laws governing the type of vehicle that can be ridden on a snowmobile trail. Machines must meet the state definition of a snowmobile. ATV's and other motorized vehicles do not typically meet that definition.

Aberdeen Drift Busters has held the title of being the largest snowmobile club in the state for several years. It was established in 1969, the same year the South Dakota Snowmobile

Association was established.

“Currently, our membership is right around 100 families,” Weaver said. “The club has been as large as 225 members but membership has slowed over the past decade due to the lack of snow and the growing number of activities that families have an opportunity to participate in.”

Anyone can join a snowmobile club and snowmobile ownership is not a requirement.

“You are connected with very experienced snowmobilers who can provide information about machines, riding ventures and how organized snowmobiling operates,” Weaver said. “It is a way to connect with people who have a shared passion for the sport.”

Weaver had her first taste of snowmobiling as a young child with her father and neighbors.

“When I was young, I only rode as a passenger, which I found was not to my liking. When I met my future husband, he also had a snowmobile and I had to ride as a passenger once again,” Weaver said.

Weaver and her husband decided to join the Aberdeen Drift Busters while taking a break from riding for a bite to eat years ago.

“In 1986, my fiancé – now husband – and I were on a snowmobile ride and stopped to eat at a trailside business. Another snowmobiler, who we did not know, approached us and told us we needed to join the club. We did and have been actively involved ever since. That snowmobiling ‘stranger’ became a lifelong friend who we’ve shared many snowmobile memories with,” Weaver said. “Like most things we are drawn to, it is the ability to connect with others who share a common interest that keeps us involved. We have met so many people across the state and the nation through our involvement and have experienced some awesome and fun-filled trips over the years. There are so many ways to be involved that even members who are not avid riders can benefit from and enjoy

being part of the club.”

Once married, Weaver decided she’d need her own sled if she were to continue with snowmobiling. When her husband acquired a new Polaris, she was granted a used Arctic Cat Jag that she described as a “trusty starter sled.”

“Early on in our riding, we were able to make trips to the Black Hills, Big Horn Mountains and West Yellowstone. These venues are even more breathtaking in the winter,” Weaver said.

A long day on the trail in a large riding area might last six to eight hours. There needs to be a minimum of six inches of snow on the ground, depending on the terrain.

It may take several layers of snow to create a base for the trail, which can then be groomed and maintained throughout the season.

With adequate snow and a trail in place, an ideal riding day for Weaver would be sunny skies with a little wind, and temperatures between 0 and 30 degrees.

Over in the southeastern corner of

the state, Duane Duerr, President of the Siouxland Sno Trackers, finds great enjoyment in riding his Ski Doo 900 Ave Four Cycle snowmobile.

The Siouxland Sno Trackers is one of the original snowmobile clubs in South Dakota and has around 78 miles of groomed trails for its 80 members.

Duerr grew up in Minnesota and joined the club in 2006 when he moved to South Dakota. Joining the club helped him to learn the trails and rules, and provided him with many friendships.

“I think snowmobiling has become more popular, but involvement in all organizations is down,” Duerr said. “Many do not realize that snowmobile clubs are why we have a trail system and that they put it in and take it out. Without the clubs, we will no longer have trails in South Dakota. Member support is what makes a difference and too many take that involvement for granted.”

More information on the state’s snowmobile clubs can be found at the SDSA’s website at snowmobilesd.com.



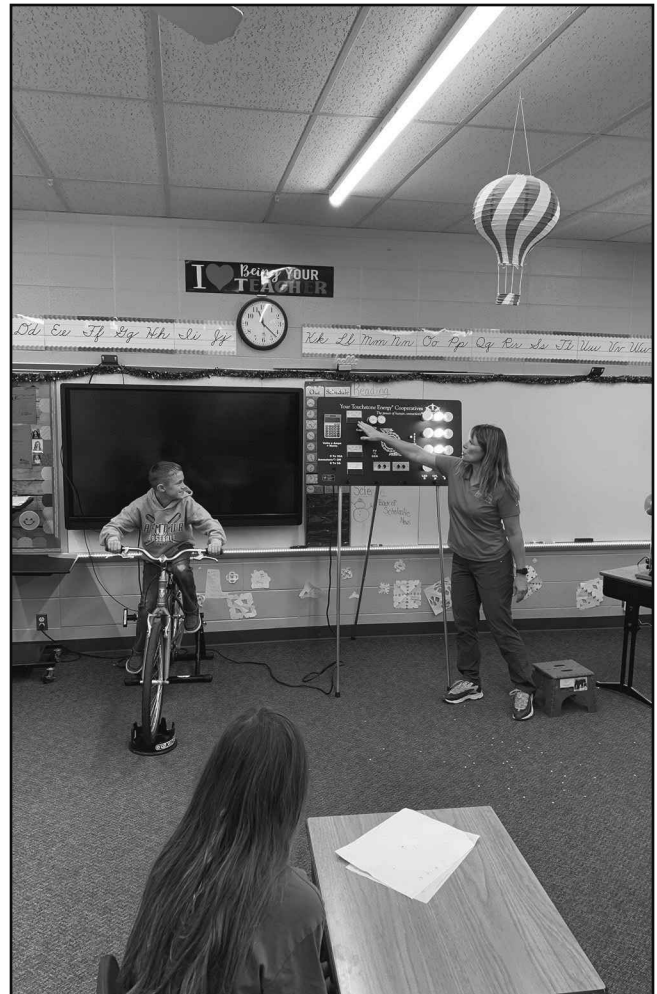
Watertown’s South Dakota Snowmobile Club members take a break during an outing.

Co-ops In The Classroom

Jennifer Gross, East River's Education and Outreach Coordinator and Jay Spaans, Manager of Douglas Electric recently visited the 5th grade students at the Armour School to present Co-ops in the Classroom. This program is geared to teaching children the importance of respecting electricity. Co-ops in the Classroom offers a hands-on approach that teaches ways to conserve energy, recognizes where electricity comes from, and evaluates electrical usage through classroom instruction and demonstrations. By instilling these concepts in children from an early age, they will be better prepared to make wise energy decisions now and be conscientious consumers of energy in the future.

A variety of hands-on demonstrations engages the students. A Van de Graaff generator demonstrated the movement of electrons with some hair-raising results. Another device that invokes a lot of excitement is the Pedal Power bicycle generator. Students are asked to become power plants as they provide the energy that produces electricity for LED, CFL & Incandescent light bulbs. Some of the students also tried on the gear that the Lineman wear.

Jennifer Gross, East River's Education and Outreach Coordinator, did a great job of teaching the kids about the difference between static electricity and man-made electricity.





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Jocelyn Cihak takes a dual-credit calculus class offered by Northern State University. Photo courtesy of Northern State University

DUAL-CREDIT

High Schoolers are Gaining College Credits

Scott Waltman

Some graduates of South Dakota high schools are showing up on college campuses with a semester's worth of credits.

Sometimes even more.

The dual-credit program has proven to be both beneficial and popular since it was introduced by Gov. Dennis Daugaard in 2014.

It's easy to understand why. Here's how the program works. High school juniors and seniors at any South Dakota high school can take classes for which they get both high school and college credits. There are scores of

classes to choose from, and the cost to take them is steeply discounted.

For instance, once a student enrolls at any of the state's six public schools or universities, they pay between \$253.85 and \$260.55 per credit hour. That cost for a high school student taking a college-level class through the dual-credit program? It's a mere \$48.33 per credit hour.

That's why education officials in South Dakota love the program.

Nathan Lukkes, executive director and chief executive officer for the South Dakota Board of Regents, said providing an affordable education has been a priority for the regents in

recent years. Tuition freezes and an increased number of scholarships are part of that work. But so are dual-credit classes, he said.

Most of the dual-credit courses are general education classes – or generals, as college students often call them – he said. Through the program, students can have some of those courses out of the way before they even get their high school degrees.

The work done by the regents and the universities resulted in Forbes naming South Dakota the most affordable state in which to get a high school education, Lukkes said.

All six South Dakota public universities offer dual-credit classes, and the number of high school students taking advantage has been going up in recent years.

The number of students taking dual-credit classes changes throughout

the year, but there were 1,223 taking classes at Northern State University in Aberdeen in fall 2023 compared to 1,141 the year before. And at South Dakota State University in Brookings, the number jumped from 903 to 1,031 in fall 2023, according to statistics from the board of regents.

Here's how the systemwide numbers are trending based on the number of students taking dual-credit classes, according to the 2023 South Dakota Board of Regents Fact Book, which was issued during summer at the end of the most recent fiscal year.

2021-2022: 4,300

2020-2021: 3,919

2019-2020: 3,781

2018-2019: 3,168

The 10 most popular classes all had more than 150 students.

College algebra: 990

Fundamentals of speech: 905

Composition I (English 101): 830

General psychology: 513

U.S. history I: 379

American government: 317

Music appreciation (Music 101): 280

Introduction to sociology: 241

Biology survey I (Biology 101): 157

Biology survey lab: 156

In 2021, there were 9,523 dual-credit courses taken by South Dakota high school students, according to information from the regents. That number includes summer courses and students who took more than one course.

At Northwestern High School in Mellette, Superintendent Rob Lewis said about 25% of the juniors and seniors are taking advantage of dual-credit courses. One student has taken a full semester's worth, he said.

Do the math over the course of a semester, and that's a savings of north of \$2,300. And that doesn't take on-campus housing and food into account.

That's just a great deal for high school kids, Lewis said.

Chris Ulrich, the middle school and high school principal at Northwestern, agrees.

"It's a nice opportunity for kids

to get not only college credits, but also experience what college is like," he said.

And they get to do it within the comfort of their high school, Ulrich said. The program is a great transitional step leading from high school to college, he said.

AP, or Advanced Placement classes, were great, but dual-credit classes are even better, Lewis said.

AP classes are college-level courses taught by high school teachers. But they don't always equate to college credit. Dual-credit courses are taught by college instructors and professors and always result in college credit, if a student passes.

In South Dakota, dual-credit courses can be taken on any of the six public university campuses, in Sioux Falls, Rapid City, Huron, Pierre, Watertown and online.

And there's another benefit, Lukkes said. Dual-credit classes create a tie between South Dakota high school students and the regental schools. Any chance a high school student has a chance to engage with a state school creates a bond that could help keep that kid in South Dakota, he said.

Perhaps a Spearfish High School student takes a dual-credit class at Black Hills State University and it's a good experience. Maybe that high school graduate stays in town and enrolls at BHSU.

Lewis, too, said the program is a great way to keep students in South Dakota for college and perhaps beyond.

That's also a focus for the Aberdeen Development Corp., which is starting a program aimed at keeping more Northern graduates in town to start their professional careers.



Rhianna Troske, a student at Northwestern High School in Mellette, takes a dual-credit class while at school. Photo by Scott Waltman



Basin Electric Security and Response Services dispatchers take calls from rural electric cooperative members at Basin's headquarters in Bismarck, N.D.

SRS Dispatchers Keep Watch Over South Dakota Linemen

Shannon Marvel

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No matter the time of day or night, nor outdoor conditions, members can be assured their calls will be taken during an outage thanks to the Security and Response Services (SRS), a 24-hour dispatching service provided by Basin Electric in Bismarck, N.D.

When a rural electric cooperative is closed, the SRS team takes incoming outage calls from members. "Safety is the reason we exist," said Chad Reisenauer, Director of Community and Member Relations for Basin Electric.

The SRS program started in 1992. Reisenauer has been in charge of the

dispatch team for just over a decade.

"We started with one or two cooperatives that were asking us to monitor alarms and dispatch linemen. Back then it was nothing but a phone and a computer screen where we typed notes. Now we're integrated into outage management systems, we're doing all sorts of things to predict outages and this technology has grown leaps and bounds," Reisenauer said.

The team is comprised of 22 dispatchers total, with 18 of those positions dedicated to dispatching full time, while the other four dedicate half their time to dispatching and the other half to alarm monitoring. Each dispatcher works 12 hour shifts with

four to six dispatchers working per shift, depending on what they're expecting for the day. These shifts begin at 4 p.m. and end at 4 a.m.

"Our job is to be the cooperative during the hours they are closed," said Jolene Johnson, dispatch supervisor.

"We'll back them a little bit if they have a safety meeting or a funeral where they're shutting the office down. We oversee 18 cooperatives in South Dakota. We're a little bit of feast and famine," Johnson said.

Overall, Basin SRS oversees 13 states, from Washington to Illinois to Texas. On any one day, dispatchers could be dealing with a blizzard in the Dakotas, freezing rain in Nebraska and a tornado in Texas.

On a light day, the SRS team will receive 600 to 700 calls for assistance. That number quells in comparison to the number of calls SRS dispatchers receive during major storm events, such as the winter storms events in April of 2021, when a couple of huge blizzards came through the Northern Great Plains region. During that storm, the

SRS team took in around 33,000 calls for service in a 24-hour period.

“That’s a stressful day for our dispatchers. They’re getting beat up continually, then they have to get onto the next call and maintain the safety of the linemen,” Reisenauer said.

“The other type of stress is if Bismarck is getting hit by a blizzard. Then there’s the stress of employees getting into work.”

A new dispatch center equipped with a sleeping room for dispatchers was recently built at the headquarters in Bismarck, which has no windows and a locking door so dispatchers can get as good of sleep as they’re going to get if the weather prevents them from traveling back home.

Dispatchers are also trained to remain calm under high stress situations, especially when the caller on the other end has lost power and is having a stressful day as a result.

“We reassure them that crews are working on it. We do call backs to make sure they’re not left in the dark, no pun intended. We just remain calm, we can’t

let them get us worked up,” said Seth Neer, lead dispatcher.

“No one ever calls us to tell us thanks for keeping the lights on,” joked Reisenauer. “It’s the worst day in the world for them if they’ve got water freezing and pipes bursting. They’re mad about the situation and we stress to our dispatchers that we’re just the voice on the phone and focal point of their anger.”

Neer added that it’s one of those jobs where you have to have the right mentality and the calls are something you cannot take personally.

Dispatchers must successfully pass a training program, which is self-directed.

From the time the dispatcher is hired to the time they are allowed to go live on the phones typically takes two months.

Reisenauer said he wouldn’t put anyone on the phone that he feels wouldn’t be able to handle an emergency.

“This is lineman safety. We literally have their lives in our hands,” he added.

Johnson said the SRS dispatchers are

also taken out into the field to visit local member cooperatives, such as Moreau-Grand Rural Electric, so they can go out and see what linemen are looking at.

“It’s hard for any dispatcher to get a call about a transformer if they don’t know what a transformer looks like,” she said.

Dispatchers track the locations of all linemen and check in with them every 90 minutes. If they miss a status check, dispatch will be sending someone their way. Their duty is to keep track of linemen at all times.

“We’re talking to them everyday. They do get to be family in some ways,” Reisenauer said.

“It’s funny when we bring operations and linemen in and they’ll go ‘I recognize that voice!’ And it turns out they’re good friends with the dispatcher but they’ve never met in person before,” Reisenauer said.

For more information on the SRS team, including quarterly newsletters on the department’s activities, go to Basin Electric’s website – www.basinelectric.com.





FEB. 24, 2024
Nemo 500 Outhouse
Races & Chili Cookoff
 10 a.m.
 Nemo Guest Ranch
 Nemo, SD

To have your event listed on this page, send complete information, including date, event, place and contact to your local electric cooperative. Include your name, address and daytime telephone number. Information must be submitted at least eight weeks prior to your event. Please call ahead to confirm date, time and location of event.

FEB. 3
Lake Hendricks Fishing Derby
 11 a.m.
 City Boat Landing
 Hendricks, MN

FEB. 9-10
Mardi Gras Weekend
 Historic Downtown Deadwood
 Deadwood, SD

FEB. 10
Polar Bear Chili Cook-Off
 11 a.m.
 Main Street
 Hill City, SD

FEB. 11
Beadle County Humane Society Bingo, Silent Auction & Bake Sale Benefit
 2 p.m.
 Huron Community Center
 Huron, SD

FEB. 18-20
MASC presents Disaster! the Musical
 Vesta Community Center
 Vesta, MN

FEB. 22
The Starlets: Pop Female Trio
Aberdeen Community Concert Association
 7 p.m.
 Johnson Fine Arts Center NSU
 Aberdeen, SD

FEB. 23-24
Women in Blue Jeans Conference
 Highland Conference Center
 Mitchell, SD

MARCH 1-3
National Pheasant Fest & Quail Classic
 Denny Sanford Premier Center
 Sioux Falls, SD

MARCH 2
Live on Stage
 High Country Guest Ranch
 Hill City, SD

MARCH 7
Elevate Rapid City Economic Summit
 8 a.m.
 The Monument
 Rapid City, SD

MARCH 9
French Toast/Pancake Feed & Health Fair
 8:30 a.m.
 Tea Community Building
 Tea, SD

MARCH 9
SunCatcher Therapeutic Riding Academy & 3rd Annual Shamrock Gala and Benefit Auction
 5 p.m.
 Alex Johnson Ballroom
 Rapid City, SD

MARCH 11-15
Black Hills Institute's 50th Anniversary Celebration
 Hill City, SD

MARCH 15
East Dakota Chapter NWFT 31st Annual Banquet
 Ramkota Exhibit Hall
 Sioux Falls, SD

MARCH 16
Live On Stage
 High Country Guest Ranch
 Hill City, SD

MARCH 16-17
Hill City Antiques, Railroad & Collectibles Show & Sale
 Hill City Center
 Hill City, SD

MARCH 17
St. Patrick's Day Green Pancakes and Sausage
 8:30 a.m.
 RVUMC
 Rapid City, SD

MARCH 20-23
Hill City Restaurant Week
 Hill City, SD

MARCH 23
Tyndall VFW Vegas Night
 7:30 p.m.
 Tyndall Community Center
 Tyndall, SD

MARCH 23
Hill City Children's Easter Egg Hunt
 Visitor Info Center
 Hill City, SD

MARCH 24
Ham Dinner & Silent Auction
 11:45 a.m.
 RVUMC
 Rapid City, SD

MARCH 24
Run for the Rangers
 Hill City, SD

Note: Please make sure to call ahead to verify the event is still being held.