

Big Skylights



An internal newsletter of the STATEWIDE ASSOCIATION OF MONTANA RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES

A report from your Chief Executive Officer Dave Wheelihan

February 4, 2010

MECA candidate training schools set records for attendance

This year's candidate training schools co-sponsored by MECA, the Montana Credit Union Network and the Montana Chamber of Commerce may have set an attendance record for the six years they have been held in Montana. A total of 185 people showed up for the four schools, held in Great Falls, Missoula, Bozeman and Billings Jan. 26-29.

And the school in Billings appears to have set a national record for attendance at a single campaign school. A total of 65 people attended the Billings school, including 20 walk-in attendees who had not pre-registered. NRECA's **Gabe Snow**, who was an instructor for the Montana schools and who conducts similar schools in states across the nation, said he could not recall any campaign school anywhere else in the nation bigger than the one in Billings. His statement was echoed by Credit Union National Association's **Trey Hawkins**, who also was an instructor for the Montana schools and holds similar campaign schools across the nation on behalf of CUNA.

Attendees at the non-partisan schools, which are held biennially in election years, consisted of a broad cross-section of candidates or prospective candidates, ranging from people seeking election as clerk and recorder, city judge or sheriff to candidates for the Montana state senate and house. There was even a representative of a student-lead organization trying to draft Montana broadcaster and state Sen. **Taylor Brown** to run for governor in 2012. A number of incumbents also attended.

Various former and current elected officials were among the speakers. Sen. **Trudi Schmitt**, D-Great Falls, spoke at the Great Falls school. Senate Minority Leader **Carol Williams**, D-Missoula, spoke at the Missoula school, Rep. **Scott Sales**, R-Bozeman, a former Speaker of the House, spoke at the Bozeman school and former Sen. **Corey Stapleton**, R-Billings, was a speaker in Billings.

MECA holds training on tree trimming topics

Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association will hold a one-and-a-half day class on tree trimming, March 9-10. The class will be held in Billings. Topics to be covered include: Herbicides, tree trimming, public relations and legal issues; chain selection, chain sharpening and chain saw safety; directional tree falling, rigging and climbing trees; and, wood chipper safety and use.

The class will be at the Wingate Hotel, located at 1801 Majestic Lane, in Billings. The course will run from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Tuesday, March 9, and from 8 a.m. to 12 noon on Wednesday, March 10. Lunch will be served on March 9. The cost of the class is \$250 per person. The registration deadline for this class is Wednesday, Feb. 24.

For those participants needing overnight accommodations, please contact the Wingate Hotel at (406) 839-9300. Ask for the Montana Electric Co-ops' (MECA) room block. Reservations must be made by Tuesday, Feb. 9 to get the special rate of \$89.00 + tax.

To register, return the enclosed registration form to **Lea Potoczny** at the Statewide office. If you have any questions, please contact **Gordon McConkey** at (406) 868-0632 or Lea at meca@mtco-ops.com or, via telephone, (406) 761-8333.

Avian workshop planned for utility personnel

Rural Utilities Service is urging electric co-ops' attendance at an "Avian Interactions With Power Lines Workshop" Feb. 23-24 in Pierre, S.D. The workshop begins 8 a.m. on Feb. 23 at the Best Western Ramkota Hotel in Pierre. It concludes at noon on Feb. 24. Registration information is available on-line at www.aplic.org or contact Deborah Trotter at (202) 508-5583 or at dtrotter@eei.org.

Workshop topics will include: History of avian electrocutions, agency and utility resources; an overview of laws protecting avian species and applicable permits; an introduction to electrical systems; an overview of biological factors influencing electrocution risk; species that nest on power poles, reliability impacts and nest management; causes of avian collisions with power lines and methods for collision reduction; mitigation of utility project impacts; history of cooperative utility/agency efforts to reduce bird mortality and improve service reliability; examples of utility avian protection plans and programs and an open discussion and questions on various approaches to development and implementation of avian protection measures.

**Seminar planned
on cost-of-service,
rate design**

MECA will hold a training seminar on cost-of-service and rate design, March 9-10 in Great Falls. The seminar, which was recently requested by our membership, will be conducted by a reputable consulting company, C.H. Guernsey. Texas electric cooperatives are among those utilizing this company's training expertise in the near future.

Eight people are currently enrolled in the seminar. Anyone interested in attending should contact **Sharon McDonald** of our staff at (406) 761-8333 or sharonm@mtco-ops.com

**MECA to sponsor
two workshops
in Missoula**

MECA is sponsoring two back-to-back workshops focusing on the needs of member services staff. The first course, *Effective Lighting Retrofits (the basics and beyond) Workshop*, will be held March 9, 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. It will be taught by **Jeff Robins** of the Seattle Lighting Design Lab. The second workshop, *Improving Your Photoshop Skills*, will be held March 10-11, from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. each day. This workshop will be provided by the Rocky Mountain School of Photography.

The lighting retrofits workshop will examine how new or improved lamps, ballasts, and controls in this evolving and changing lighting industry are creating exciting retrofit opportunities. Among these are LED's, the new generation of electronic ballasts, and wireless controls. This class will look at how to effectively apply these advances, and how to calculate the economic justification behind the investment. Included in the discussion will be the latest updates in pertinent energy codes, and LEED language. The half day course will be held at the Hilton Garden Inn in Missoula and will begin at 1p.m.

The Photoshop skills workshop is designed to walk you through the latest version of Adobe Photoshop CS4. This hands-on learning experience will take place in Rocky Mountain School of Photography's digital lab in downtown Missoula. Learn how to manage and find your files easily, what new features Photoshop has to offer, review enhancing images for brochures, post cards and newsletters, and how to export into your desk top publisher, printer or an online photo finisher. This is a follow-up course to the one offered a few years ago; however, anyone can attend whether they attended the previous course or not. A minimum of 14 participants is required for the class to make with a maximum participation of 18.

A room block has been established at the Hilton Garden Inn where the Effective Lighting Retrofits course will be held. To make reservations, please call the hotel directly at (406) 532-5300. The cut-off date for hotel reservations is February 26, 2010.

To register for either or both workshops, please complete registration with the MECA office by Friday, Feb. 26. If you have any questions, please contact **Sharon McDonald** at sharonm@mtco-ops.com or 761.8333.

CALENDAR

February

15-17	NRECA Annual Meeting	Atlanta, GA
16	CFC Annual Meeting	Atlanta, GA
23-24	Avian Workshop	Pierre, SD
26	Vigilante Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Dillon, MT

March

4	Upper Missouri G&T Annual Meeting	Sidney, MT
9	Effective Lighting Retrofits (the basics and beyond) Workshop	Missoula, MT
9-10	Tree Trimming Class	Billings, MT
9-10	Understanding Rates and Cost of Service Workshop	Great Falls, MT
10-11	Improving Your Photoshop Skills Workshop	Missoula, MT
20	Flathead Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Kalispell, MT
20	Missoula Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Missoula, MT
23	Yellowstone Valley Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Billings, MT
24	Central MT G&T Annual Meeting	Great Falls, MT
26	Sun River Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Fairfield, MT
27	Lincoln Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Eureka, MT