



THE OUTLET

Monthly Publication of Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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MAY 2021

BILLING MADE EASY

Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative understands how busy life can get. Whether working, getting kids to activities, spending time with family, or running errands, it can be easy to forget to make a payment. Luckily, MLEC offers many ways to pay your bill, so you can use what is the most convenient and works the best for your lifestyle!



BILL PAYMENT OPTIONS:

Pay Online - Log in to view your bill electronically through the SmartHub site or the mobile app. You may authorize payment from your checking account or Visa/Mastercard.

Quick Pay - Do you want to make a quick, one-time online payment without logging into your SmartHub account? All you need is the account number and the first five letters of the primary member's last name. If you choose to allow another person to make a payment on your account by this method, please be advised they will be able to see your current balance or past due balance, but no other account information.

Auto Pay Program - Sign up for recurring payments through SmartHub using your bank account or a Visa/Mastercard. Simply sign-in or register for SmartHub to get started. Once you log in to SmartHub, choose Auto Pay Program under the Billing & Payments tab. After adding an account, the total bill amount will be withdrawn from your payment method on the due date each month. The program is ideal for travelers and snowbirds and assures your good credit rating with MLEC.

Pay by Phone - Make payments by phone with your credit/debit card or checking account using our automated phone system. This service is available 24/7. Just call 855-385-9813 and follow the step-by-step instructions.

Pay by Mail - Please allow mail time for payment to be received before the due date. Please call the billing team if additional time is needed. Mail billing remittance to:

Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative
P.O. Box 811
Albert Lea, MN 56007-0811

Pay in Person - Drop off your payment at our office located at 36559 US Highway 169, Aitkin, MN, 56431.

Questions? Call MLEC at 218-429-0430 or 877-634-4314 or visit www.mlecmn.net



THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

Air source heat pumps are a safe and efficient home solution!

A smarter solution is available for members seeking to more efficiently heat and cool their home year-round: air source heat pumps (ASHPs).

ASHPs provide a safe, environmentally-friendly solution for home comfort conditioning as well. They don't use an open flame or create products of combustion – such as carbon monoxide and other emissions – so there is no need for venting, and their extended equipment life means less pollution associated with discarding old units or parts and manufacturing their replacements.

Able to deliver hyper-efficient home heating and air conditioning, ASHPs help members realize savings in energy consumption as well as cost. You can save up to 30% on your home cooling expenses by using an Air-Source Heat Pump instead of other conventional air conditioning units. They are also 200-400% more efficient when it comes to home heating. This is possible because it uses advanced technology to transfer more energy than it consumes.

The warmth provided by ASHP technology is superior in quality compared to conventional furnaces. The heat distributed by an ASHP is distributed more evenly and holds its moisture better, resulting in more natural, comfortable warmth.

For a limited time, if installed in June, July or August, you can double your rebates on ducted air source heat pumps when installed by a qualified contractor and put on our dual fuel program.

Air Source Heat Pump	Regular Rebate	Promo Rebate
SEER 14.5	\$480	\$960
SEER 15	\$580	\$1,160
SEER 16+	\$630	\$1,260

* Ductless ASHP rebates are \$750

*Limited funds are available and awarded on a first-come, first-service basis. Rebate amount and programs are subject to change without notice. Low interest financing is available for qualified members. Mini-split ductless air source heat pumps do not qualify for the double rebate.

**Questions or concerns?
MLEC's Board of Directors
represent you!**

As of May 1, 2021

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bwelty@mlecmn.com
Secretary/Treasurer

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Find minutes from
MLEC Board meetings at:
<http://www.mlecmn.net>
under **My Co-op**

*This newsletter is the voice of
your tax and interest paying
RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE,
an organization which was
formed to supply you with
low-cost, dependable
electricity when other sources
failed to do so.*

Managing Editor: Kassie Peterson,
Communications Specialist

***Questions? Contact our Energy Services Team
at 218-429-0432 or 888-433-4279.***



BALANCING CO-OP FINANCIALS

Dear Member:

Operating an electric cooperative has an interesting set of challenges. Serving our members' needs, upholding our Board of Director's objectives, and meeting our annual financial projections is a unique balancing act; and this is especially true in an ever-changing energy industry. Electric utilities require immense investments in fixed assets (infrastructure like poles, wires, transformers, new technologies, etc.) in order to effectively serve their end consumer. I am proud to say that your MLEC management team is facing these challenges head-on and doing a good job addressing them.

The energy industry is dependent on the sale of electricity to simply survive as a business. In Central Minnesota, warm winters and mild summers can completely shatter MLEC's financial projections for the year. In today's energy market, we also have other factors to consider when measuring success. For instance, across the United States, we are seeing widespread declining energy sales. In fact, energy sales over the past decade dropped by 2% even though the United States population grew by 6%. According to CleanCapital, "This divergence of energy use from population and economic growth reflects improvements in both energy efficiency and productivity." In Minnesota, we can also contribute energy sales reductions to the state's Conservation Improvement Program (CIP). CIP requires electric utilities in the State of Minnesota to reduce their electricity sales by at least 1.5% every single year, and it requires them to spend at least 1.5% of their revenue on energy conservation measures. This is not a viable long-term business model for any industry.

In addition to declining energy sales, electric utility infrastructure is aging. Even as energy sales are reduced, each year new capital must be budgeted to replace old and aging infrastructure. Additionally, as technology changes, that must also be integrated into our infrastructure upgrade plan. In 2017, Bloomberg New Energy Finance indicated that investor-owned utilities and independent transmission developers invested an additional 91% in fixed assets over 2011 levels. MLEC is not immune to these types of statistics. In the last five years, we have invested millions in our Automated Metering Infrastructure (AMI) system deployment, Right-Of-Way Reclaiming/Maintaining, and general system upgrades. Once again, I am proud to say that we have been able to achieve these upgrades with little to no impact on you, our member.

Another interesting challenge facing our ever-changing industry is the rapid growth of distributed energy resources (home or business-installed wind, solar, and storage alternatives). Not only does this distributed generation reduce sales at the distribution level (like MLEC), it makes it harder for our wholesale power provider (Great River Energy) to plan for their energy production and purchase needs as state-wide distributed generation resources fluctuate on their system.

Cumulatively, these things have the potential to have a negative impact on your MLEC power bill; however, to date, your MLEC management team has been working together to find the advantages of our investments and put your dollars to work for you. For example: In the first quarter of 2021 alone, our investment in the new AMI system has saved MLEC 149 truck rolls. Through remote investigation, we have been able to



Sarah Cron
CEO

handle service calls in the office versus sending a line worker to the premises. As a result, our line workers were able to spend more time on capital projects versus general expenses. This is a big benefit to MLEC's bottom line. Additionally, our Right-Of-Way Reclaiming/Maintaining and Small Animal Protection investment has shown a marked reduction of both blinks and outages on the circuits that we have completed – reducing annoying outages for you, while saving valuable cooperative resources.

We will continue to look at these, and all of our long-term investments to ensure that we are doing right by you – our member, and by future generations of MLEC members.

Until next month,

A handwritten signature in white ink, appearing to be 'Sm', located below the text 'Until next month,'.

LET'S DISH

Thank you to Ellie Baumgartner of Onamia for sharing this month's recipe.

SEND US YOUR RECIPES!

We'll credit your account **\$10.00** if it's printed in THE OUTLET

MAIL TO:

Kassie Peterson
Mille Lacs Energy, P.O. Box 230 Aitkin,
MN 56431

OR E-MAIL:

kpeterson@mlecmm.com



LAYERED CHICKEN SALAD

1 1/2 cups uncooked small shell pasta	3 cups cooked diced chicken
1 tbsp olive oil	2 cups frozen peas (thawed)
3 cups shredded lettuce	1 tbsp chopped onion
4 hard boiled eggs (chopped)	1 1/2 cups coleslaw dressing
1/2 tsp salt	1 cup shredded mild cheddar cheese
1/4 tsp pepper	

Cook pasta according to package until tender. Drain and drizzle with olive oil. Place lettuce in clear glass serving bowl and top with cooled pasta. Spread chopped eggs over pasta and season with salt and pepper. Layer on chicken, peas, and onion. Spread dressing on top and sprinkle on cheese. Cover and refrigerate several hours or overnight. Serves about 10 people. Enjoy!

STANDBY GENERATOR PROGRAM

Reliability is of utmost importance at MLEC. However, we sometimes experience outages due to a variety of causes, such as weather, animals, or damaged power lines from digging or car crashes. For most members, being without power is merely an inconvenience, but for others, continuity of service is very important. For this reason, we offer a standby generator program that is ideal for members with a home business, sump pump, medical needs, or simply desire to always have the comfort and conveniences that electricity provides.

MLEC is now offering Briggs and Stratton standby generators. When the power goes out, the generator automatically takes over. All generators are professionally installed and serviced by MLEC and come with a 10-year parts and labor warranty.



Call Mille Lacs Energy for more information or a price quote at 218-429-0432.

SYMMETRICAL INTERNET SPEEDS

What is symmetrical Internet? What makes it better?

Symmetrical Internet has upload speeds that are the same as its download speeds. Download speed refers to how quickly you can access things on the Internet. The faster your download speed, the faster you can browse social media or watch shows and movies on Netflix. Your upload speed is how quickly you can put things on the Internet. Faster upload speeds let you share photos on social media or post videos on YouTube.

For instance, if you have symmetrical Internet with a download speed of 100 Mbps, your upload speed will also be 100 Mbps.

MLEC Fiber is a symmetrical Internet service. It is what makes MLEC Fiber the fastest Internet available in our area. We offer speeds from 100 Mbps all the way up to 1Gbps!

Most DSL and cable Internet plans don't offer symmetrical speeds—with these types of Internet, your download speed

is typically a lot faster than your upload speed. This is called asymmetrical Internet.

Having symmetrical Internet is a huge plus if you're a student, business owner, telecommuter, or gamer. This is because these people often upload PDFs, large graphic files, and videos to the Internet so that they can share them with clients, coworkers, teachers, and students.

Are you in a MLEC Fiber project area? Go online to view project maps or give our office a call at 218-429-0433. Construction is resuming, sign up to guarantee service to your home, cabin, or business.


Powered by Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative

WE NEED YOUR HELP!

Unclaimed Capital Credits Checks

Capital credits, patronage dividends, patronage refunds—these are all familiar terms with similar meanings: the allocation of operating margins as equity and, when appropriate, retiring them to the members of the co-op in the form of money or credit on the bill. The retirement of capital credits is one of the most important things we do as co-ops. It's unique to the cooperative business model.

Even if you move and are no longer a member of the cooperative, the capital credits remain in your account. Be sure to update your mailing address with MLEC if you move so we can send future capital credit checks to the correct address. If you are an heir to an estate, please contact MLEC if you think capital credits remain in the estate's account.

A list of unclaimed capital credits can be found on our website at www.mlecmn.net/capital-credits. Maybe a check is waiting for you! If you know someone and how to contact them, please call our capital credits team at 218-429-0431.



Regular office hours are
Mon-Fri 8:00 to 4:30

927-2191 or
800-450-2191 (toll free)



48 hours before you dig
Dial 811 - Gopher State
One Call or log on to:
www.gopherstateonecall.org

Then contact a licensed electrician
to locate your secondary wires.

MN Electrical Inspectors

Aitkin County &
South East Crow Wing County
Mike Wenzel 218-270-2265

Northern Crow Wing County
Bradley Rasmussen 218-543-1023

Mille Lacs County
Benjamin Husom 320-277-6277

Off-peak and dual fuel system
consumers should call an
electrician or heating contractor for
service or repairs.

Find load control schedule at
www.mlecmn.net under *Quick Links*.



Visit our website -
www.mlecmn.net
E-mail us - mlec@mlcmmn.net

AMI METERING SYSTEM

At Mille Lacs Energy, we are constantly striving to provide greater value to our members. This involves exploring new sources of technology that will increase efficiency, provide better service and ultimately lower the cost of energy for members.

The decision to move towards an Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) and Meter Data Management System (MDMS) was driven by advancements in smart grid technologies. AMI "raises the bar" with regard to traditional Automatic Meter Reading in that it enables two-way communications with the meter, resulting in better service.

AMI automates metering functions and reduces read times from 27 hours to 30 minutes. AMI meters read up-to-the-minute electric energy use information and allow members to track their electricity use online. The AMI system also is upgradable to accommodate additional and future technologies. "Having AMI means more data, more often," said our own Ann Espeseth, AMI/OMS/DIS Specialist. "The MDMS will enable us to manage that data more efficiently."

We are in the final stages of deploying the AMI metering system that began in 2019. From January to March of 2021, we have already saved 149 truck rolls! This is a significant cost-saver for the cooperative. Not only do these new meters help identify outages, they have other alerts for hot sockets, meter tampering, power blinks, and more. Overall, the AMI system has been a beneficial investment for MLEC and we are happy to report that it will be fully deployed soon.



Benefits of AMI Smart Meters

Reliability - These meters allow us to expedite power restoration by quickly and accurately pinpointing outage locations. They also record power quality (such as blinks) so we can correct problems before they cause outages.

Efficiency - With these meters, MLEC can both read, and in some cases, disconnect or reconnect meters from the office. This technology reduces fleet mileage and expedites business processes. Better information on system demand and usage helps us distribute power more efficiently and cost-effectively.

Affordability - Operating more efficiently helps us reduce overall costs. The updated meters allow for daily usage data retrieval so members can manage their own electric usage and costs.

Data Retrieval - Members will have the opportunity to view daily usage data in electronic format from their home PC, tablet, or smartphone via SmartHub.



2022 PHOTO CALENDAR

Submit your photos for a chance to be featured in the 2022 photo calendar and win a \$10 credit on your electricity bill! To view the photo guidelines and details visit our website at www.mlecmm.net/photo-contest.

DIRECTOR ELECTION NOTICE



We are sorry to inform our members that Dennis Charles has withdrew from the 2021 board election race. Even though his name still appeared on the ballot, Carol Pundt was re-elected for District 2 by acclamation.

Thank you to all who voted in this years' election. We appreciate your participation. Annual Meeting highlights will be featured in next month's Outlet.



**OUR OFFICE WILL BE CLOSED
MONDAY, MAY 31ST
IN HONOR OF MEMORIAL DAY**

*In memory of many, in honor of all.
Thank You!*

SIGN UP TODAY! Call our office at
218-429-0433 or 800-497-5310

NOW UP TO
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Mbps



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Viasat

GIFT CARD TRIVIA!

Correctly answer the question below for your chance to win a gift card from a local business within our service area. The answer can be found within this issue of The Outlet. You must be an MLEC member to participate. Be sure to include your name and service address! Entries must be received by **May 31st**.

MAIL TO:
Kassie Peterson
Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative
P.O. Box 230
Aitkin, MN 56431

OR E-MAIL:
kpeterson@mlecmm.com

What is one of the six ways you can pay your MLEC energy bill?

Name:

Address:

Congrats to Dianna Weidenaar of Aitkin, the March gift card trivia winner!

 **MILLE LACS ENERGY COOPERATIVE**

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Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative is an equal opportunity provider and employer.