

ECE ^{CO-OP} ADVANTAGE

New Year - New Look

On the move

Mobile substation helps keep the lights on

In an era where power plays an indispensable role in our daily lives, maintaining a reliable and robust power grid is important. To tackle this challenge, innovative solutions like mobile substations have emerged to enhance the resilience of distribution networks like ours. These units are equipped with transformers, circuit breakers, protective relays, and other necessary equipment to step down high-voltage electricity to levels suitable for distribution. As a versatile, self-contained unit designed to provide temporary power supply, a mobile substation can be used as a temporary resource to avoid outages due to maintenance.

In October, we were able to experience this rare occurrence (at least for ECE), when load was transferred from the Isle Substation to a mobile substation.

"Our power supplier, Great River Energy, needed to complete some work on our shared permanent substation in Isle," explains Joe Diethelm, ECE Construction and Maintenance Supervisor. "This was a great way for GRE to get some work done on the substation while avoiding a prolonged outage for members."



Joe continues, "The unit was installed on a Friday and powered up the following Monday. Essentially, we de-energized the line feeding into the permanent Isle sub, then set a temporary pole to feed the mobile unit. Next, we energized the mobile sub and shut down the substation."

The mobile unit was in place for about a month. After work was complete, crews safely removed the temporary substation and re-energized the permanent Isle sub.

"ECE doesn't use mobile substations often," Joe points out. "This was a flexible and efficient solution for our power supplier and our members, underscoring the importance we place on power reliability."



Joe Diethelm

ECE Annual Meeting



SAVE THE DATE

April 18, 2024

Braham Event Center

Keep an eye on
our website for details!

Checking in with our newest directors



When it comes to cooperative governance, the first year as a board member marks a significant milestone. For Mike Gainor (District 2) and Thomas Schoenecker (District 4), it has been a continuous learning curve.

The world of generation, transmission, and distribution

of electricity, as well as regulatory and financial requirements, can be humbling. "It's fascinating to find out what our employees do to keep our system working," describes Mike. "I've been impressed by all the thought and hard work that goes into each level of the process."

Thomas wholeheartedly agrees. "Year one is a literal flood of information. It's been described as 'drinking water from a fire hose' because serving as a board member comes with significant responsibility. We are directly impacting the daily lives of our members."

Both directors have been absorbing knowledge through countless meetings and discussions, realizing that each decision has the potential to enhance ECE's services. One example is the fiber project, as Mike explains, "ECE's broadband initiative is moving forward and the staff are putting in a tremendous effort to make this plan a reality."

Thomas appreciates how the co-op's unique structure fosters a sense of shared purpose. "ECE has established itself prominently among other cooperatives," he says. "It's like one big family working in harmony to provide a safe, reliable service for the betterment of the community."

Have you considered joining ECE's Board of Directors? If you live in District 1, 3, or 6 and are interested in becoming a nominee, visit eastcentralenergy.com > Your Cooperative > Director Election, for a wealth of information. Please consider joining us for a Nominee Information Session at 1 p.m. on January 25, virtual or in person. Director nomination packets must be completed and returned by 10 a.m. February 13, 2024, after which all nominees will be notified regarding the status of their candidacy.

You gotta be in it...
to **WIN** it!
Sign up for Auto Pay today!

ECE's Auto Pay program allows you to pay your bill automatically each month, saving you time and providing peace of mind. PLUS, all members enrolled in Auto Pay are automatically entered into a monthly **\$50 bill credit drawing!**

The benefits:

- Deducts payments automatically from a designated checking or savings account or credit card
- Payment is deducted on the due date of your bill
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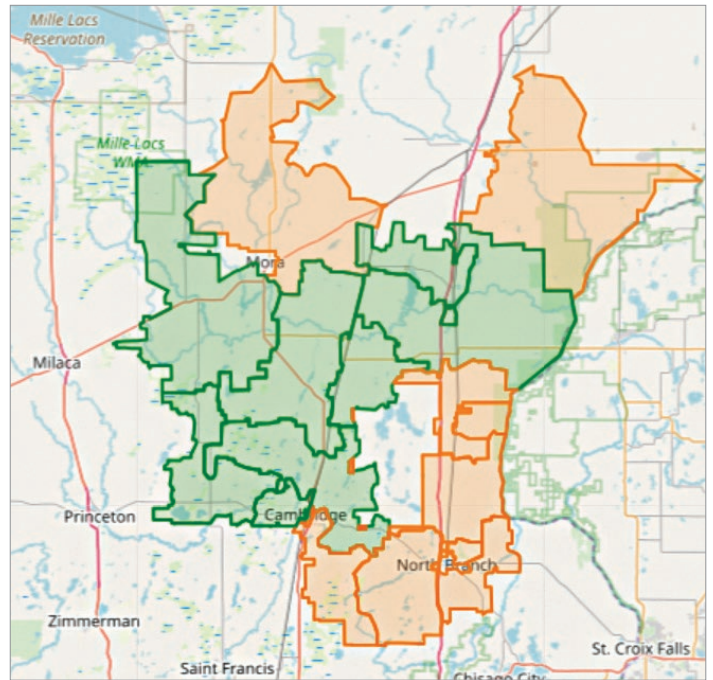


ECE FIBER 2024-25 PLANS

Throughout the last year, ECE Fiber has made huge progress. From hiring our first broadband employee, to the launch of ecefiber.com, to construction beginning in May, and finally to wrapping up the year with our first internet services going live, we are proud of the accomplishments that have been made! A big thank you goes to our dedicated employees and contractors, and of course to our members who have expressed interest and showed support—ECE Fiber wouldn't be possible without everyone involved.

As we move forward, progress will continue with several new areas being constructed in 2024-25. The map shows the areas we are currently focusing on for construction, with green representing the 2023-24 construction areas and orange representing 2024-25. Our mission is to ensure every ECE member has access to reliable, high-speed internet.

Building this new service will take several years and many resources to complete. We are fortunate to have a team of employees researching and applying for different funding opportunities. Between awarded grants and community support, we have secured roughly \$21 million to fund ECE Fiber. We will continue working to secure additional funding to supplement the project as we move forward!



To learn more about our newest endeavor or express interest in ECE Fiber services, we encourage you to visit ecefiber.com.

Do you have a power concern?

Low levels of A/C (alternating current) voltage on the grounded conductors of an electrical wiring system are a normal and unavoidable consequence of operating electrical equipment. This voltage, sometimes called stray voltage, is referred to as neutral-to-earth voltage (NEV) when it can be measured between two objects which may be simultaneously contacted by livestock.

If you suspect NEV or other electricity-related issues, such as low voltage, electromagnetic fields, or power quality concerns, contact us. We have qualified employees who can answer your questions and investigate any suspected problems.

Please note: if a person feels an uncomfortable tingling sensation, the condition is probably not NEV but faulty equipment or a serious problem with your wiring system. This situation requires immediate attention and an electrician should be contacted to investigate and correct the problem.

NEW YEARS SAFETY RESOLUTIONS

CONSIDER THESE SAFETY-THEMED RESOLUTIONS THIS YEAR.

1. Do not place mobile devices on bedding or under pillows.
2. Look up for overhead power lines when working outside.
3. Slow down and move over when passing utility work zones.
4. Call 911 and stay back if you encounter a downed power line.
5. Don't overload outlets, extension cords, or power strips and replace all cords that have frayed or bare wires.





The rate realignment goes into effect this month for bills due in February, and I'd like to continue the conversation we started a few months ago. Thank you to those who have reached out with questions, comments, and concerns—we're listening.

Considering the challenges we've faced together, such as a pandemic, inflation, and supply chain issues, it's remarkable to reflect on the fact that ECE had not adjusted residential rates since 2018. While the North Branch acquisition, combined with moderate growth in our previous service areas, allowed us to meet our financial needs, we reached a point where an adjustment became necessary.

This month's rate realignment reflects a budgeted 5% increase in overall revenue (spread over the last six years, this translates to an annual increase of less than 1%). On a positive note, because

we switched to one lower year-round rate, every kilowatt-hour you purchase this year will be cheaper than last year. For instance, running your air conditioner this summer will save you more than 16%.

You may be wondering if our fiber broadband initiative is contributing to the rate change. The financial aspects of fiber construction expenses and future revenue are separate from the electric portion of the cooperative's finances. We can leverage the financial strength of ECE's electric business to develop the fiber network, accessing low-cost loans for construction costs, but electric revenue is not being used to directly subsidize the fiber project.

We are preserving the strength of the cooperative we inherited from those who came before us. Our commitment remains the same: to enhance the quality of life in our service area. This rate adjustment is a proactive step to address inflationary costs, strengthen your co-op during challenging times, and ensure a robust future.

At your service we remain,

SCHOLARSHIPS



Five \$1,500 Power Up scholarships will soon be awarded to non-traditional students, which include those already in college or those returning to college after a hiatus; high school seniors who attend homeschool, private educational institutions, or a high school located outside our service territory; or seasonal members who have high school seniors attending college in the fall.

Applicants must be an ECE member or their dependent. The application form and more information can be

found on our website under Community > Scholarships > Non-traditional. Applications are being accepted until February 26.

We also provide scholarship opportunities to college-bound seniors at participating high schools within our service territory. Most of these scholarships are funded by unclaimed capital credits. A list of participating high schools is available on our website. Contact your high school for information and to apply.



Email: info@ecemn.com

East Central Energy
PO Box 39, Braham, MN 55006

Braham Service Center
Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

1.800.254.7944
General business calls are answered
Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-5 p.m.

Emergency and outage calls are
answered 24 hours a day.

The ECE Board of Directors meets monthly. Please call 1-800-254-7944 and ask to talk to our Executive Administrator to confirm meeting information. Monthly board meeting minutes and board operating policies can be found on SmartHub.

The Co-op Advantage newsletter is published by East Central Energy, your not-for-profit, member-owned, local electric cooperative.

ECE is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

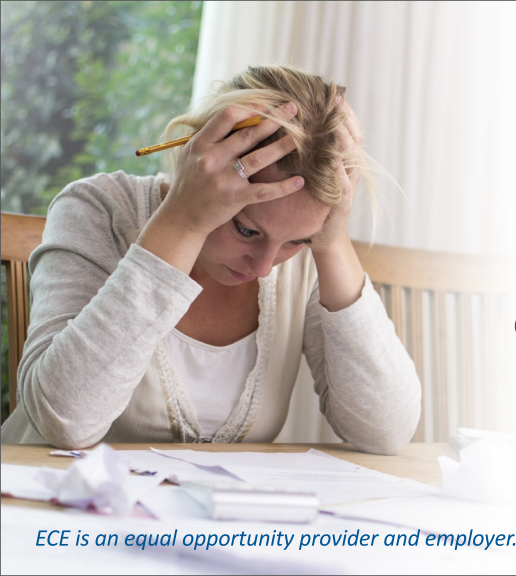
Website:
eastcentralenergy.com



Email: info@ecefiber.com

Website: ecefiber.com





STRUGGLING WITH YOUR ELECTRIC BILL?

We are here for you!

Help may be available.
Call us today for resources like budget
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