



Co-op Advantage

Floating like a butterfly

Last December, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced the monarch butterfly would be listed as necessary under the Endangered Species Act, but delayed addition due to higher-priority needs. When the 2020-21 overwintering population numbers were released, a catastrophic decline was revealed. The Western monarch population sits at just under 2,000 individuals, meaning a 99.9% total loss, and a 26% decline from the previous year was shown for the Eastern monarch population.

Unfortunately, this news comes as no surprise and is one reason ECE enrolled in the first-ever nationwide Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCA) for the monarch in 2020. "As the first rural electric cooperative to receive our Certificate of Inclusion in the CCA, we are committed to conserving and creating habitat in an effort to preserve the monarch and other pollinator species," says pollinator initiative lead Alicia Kroll, ECE Member Account Analyst.

One part of our involvement in the CCA includes monitoring habitat on rights-of-ways. As a distribution cooperative, we are required to conduct habitat assessment on at least ten plots that must contain a minimum of six stems per acre of milkweed, and at least 10% flowering nectar plants.

"We're proud to have reached that goal," Alicia mentions. "The co-op plans to increase our habitat monitoring sites in 2021. Gathering this data gives us a better picture of what is growing on our rights-of-ways and where improvement may be needed."

In addition to conservation efforts on rights-of-ways, native pollinator habitat was seeded at two facility sites: ECE Headquarters in Braham, MN, and the Superior Operations Center in WI. Research and population models underscore the fact that change is imperative to the success of monarchs. As Alicia stresses, "We need to shift our esthetic mindset from nutrient-deficient lawns to ecologically-rich habitat. The warning bells are ringing and it's up to us to put out the fire."

Join the movement! Become an advocate for pollinators by learning what to plant and urge your community to reduce the use of insecticides. Today's collective efforts will have an impact on the final ruling and listing for the monarch in 2024. For more information about ECE's pollinator projects, visit eastcentralenergy.com.

Pollinator Week June 21-27

Housekeeping

Important notices about our services

BRAHAM LOBBY

Our Braham Headquarters lobby is set to reopen in mid-June! Rest assured, we are following social distancing protocol to keep members and employees safe. Signs explaining our guidelines are posted; however, lobby access is subject to change so please visit our website for the latest updates. While we're anxious to see everyone again, we encourage you to continue visiting us online, through SmartHub, or by phone.

MILACA LOBBY CLOSED

The Milaca lobby is permanently closed due to a decline in foot traffic and the need to reorganize our resources. Staff continues to work at the office and the drop box is still available for ECE payments. The lobby closure will not affect the great relationships we've built with our Milaca membership.

DROP BOX CHANGES

With the increase in electronic and self-service payment options, plus the decrease in drop box payments, the cost to maintain the Pine City and Cambridge drop boxes is significant. The decision has been made to close the drop boxes at these two locations. The last day to drop a payment is June 29. Boxes will then be sealed and removed.



Milaca Local Link was owned by ECE and Benton Communications. After careful consideration, our portion is being sold to Benton Communications. The Benton drop box in Rice, MN, is no longer accepting ECE payments, and the ECE drop box in Milaca is no longer accepting Milaca Local Link and Benton Communications payments.

ELECTRICITY 101

DON'T OVERLOAD OUTLETS OR CIRCUITS
Plugging in too many items or drawing too much power on a circuit can cause overheating, fire, and damage to devices.

MAKE SURE YOUR HOME IS UP TO CODE
Your home should be properly wired and electrically sound. Contact a reputable electrician to evaluate your home.

The graphic has a teal background. At the top, a yellow banner contains the text 'ELECTRICITY 101'. Below it, an illustration shows several black power outlets with red flames rising from them. To the right, there is an illustration of a house with a yellow shield containing a lightning bolt.

Contact-free payments using SmartHub

SmartHub, our free account management app, can be downloaded to your mobile device, offering secure access with a contactless payment option. View your bill and pay it in minutes.

Better yet, use SmartHub to enroll in Auto Pay. Your monthly payment will be automatically deducted on your due date. You can also change the payment method or credit card on file. Plus, all members enrolled in Auto Pay are automatically entered into a drawing for a \$25 bill credit!

Download the free SmartHub app today!



Congratulations
Kurt Bauerly, Milaca, MN

Visit our website to learn more about Auto Pay.

CHARGING FORWARD with an EV network

We are proud to partner with 30 other electric cooperatives to create a regional electric vehicle (EV) charging network across Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, and Illinois as part of a program called CHARGE™. The network includes more than thirty Level 2 and Level 3 charging stations.

“ECE wants to ensure drivers are able to access chargers,” mentions Mark Nelson, Manager of Government & Business Relations. “As EV sales increase, our goal is to help alleviate range anxiety. We’re also encouraging visitors to stop in our rural communities.”

Future plans for the initiative include promoting EV test drives while educating members about home chargers. “ECE is offering a \$750 rebate to install a level 2 charger at your home,” Mark adds. In 2018, the co-op purchased an all-electric Chevrolet Bolt to help educate members and surrounding communities about electric vehicles.

All Wisconsin electric cooperatives are participating in CHARGE. As one of the largest co-ops in Minnesota, we provide an important corridor between Minneapolis-St. Paul and the Duluth-Superior metro areas. Charger locations and other information can be found at www.CHARGE.coop.

Royalton Elementary celebrates Arbor Day



On April 30, ECE employees Debbie Elsner, Forestry Assistant, and Ryan Johnson, Forestry Services Lead, worked with Royalton Elementary fourth-grade teacher Dawn Hofstad (middle) to distribute 60 backpacks filled with educational pamphlets, water bottles, earbuds, seedling bookmarks, and saplings.

“The pandemic has changed the way we celebrate Arbor Day for the second year in a row,” Ryan mentions. “We appreciate the opportunity to connect with students and share with them our love and respect for trees.”

Storage space heating Save energy and money

At ECE, we offer three types of storage space heating: central storage furnace, room storage heaters, and slab heat. These are practical for all types of buildings, including homes, shops, cabins, or businesses. Even better, you can take advantage of the low off-peak electric rate of 5.3 cents per kWh. We’re also offering a \$100/kW rebate for qualifying systems installed in 2021.

1. Central Storage Furnace

No chimneys, flues, backdrafts, or carbon monoxide! Central storage furnaces and boilers use electric thermal storage technology to convert electricity to heat during low-cost, off-peak hours and store the heat in specially designed, high-density bricks, which provide enough heat during the 16-hour on-peak portion of the day. Heat is distributed through forced air or hot water systems. A sensor monitors outdoor temps to determine how much heat must be stored in the bricks. Coupled with an air source heat pump, this option is good for new home builds.

2. Room Storage Heaters

A five-year warranty and no duct work make room storage heaters a great option. Sleek cabinet units offer individual room control for safe, clean, comfortable heat anywhere you need it. When the thermostat calls for heat, a quiet fan circulates warmth from the bricks into the room. Room storage heaters can be easily installed during remodeling projects and retrofitted into existing homes or businesses.

3. Slab Heat

Enjoy warm floors with slab heating. Electric heating panels, mats, tubing, or cables are installed in soil or sand under the concrete slab. The ground underneath becomes an efficient, large mass of thermal energy that is only released when the area above becomes cooler. A central storage boiler can be used for slab heat as well.

Call your ECE energy experts at 1.800.254.7944 or visit our website for more information.



East Central Energy
P.O. Box 39
Braham, MN 55006

Service Center location:
Braham
Monday-Friday
8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

1.800.254.7944
General business calls are answered from 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday-Friday.

Emergency and outage calls are answered 24 hours a day.

Email: info@ecemn.com

The ECE Board of Directors meets monthly. Please call Executive Assistant Wendy Leibel at 763-689-8046 to confirm meeting information. Monthly board meeting highlights 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



Consider this: from 2016 to 2020, the average ECE member experienced one hour and forty minutes without electricity per year, which includes planned outages for maintenance, outages from our wholesale provider, storms, and other unplanned incidents. That reliability of 99.98% required years of careful consideration and planning.

Technology continues to change our everyday lives, and the software that is available for engineering and design has greatly improved. We can analyze voltage and electrical load during energy peaks, and we can forecast electrical load to determine where the distribution system needs to be enhanced and rebuilt. We also look for ways to improve reliability by reviewing outage records and patterns. As problem areas are analyzed, we consider options to modify the design of our system while ensuring safety.

Dependable electricity does not happen by accident—it takes a solid work plan. We utilize long-term planning to maintain a

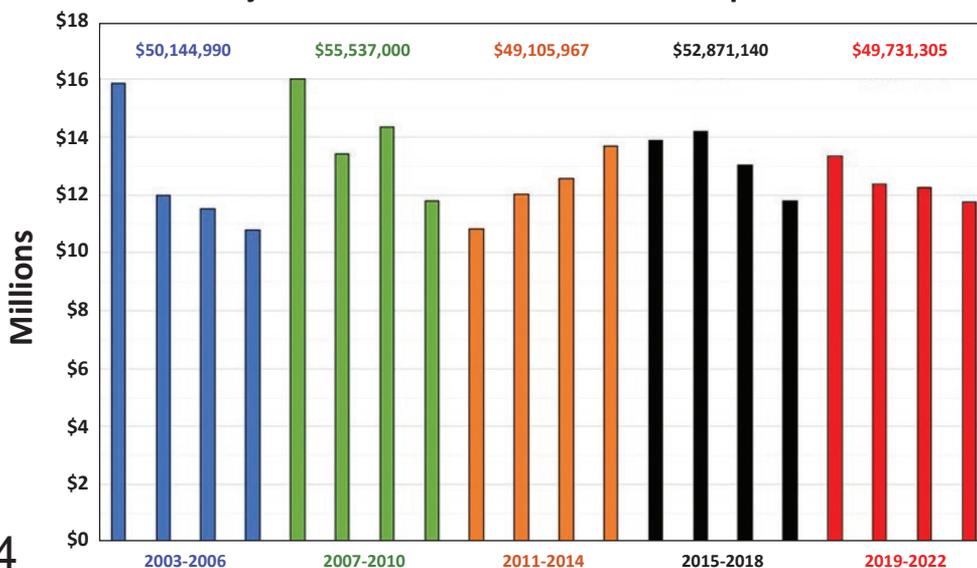
“big picture” view and select the most appropriate projects for a given year.

Each year, our employees carry out a \$10 to \$15 million work plan to continually enhance the performance and reliability of our distribution system. We identify deteriorated equipment like poles and wires that have served their useful life. For example, we have approximately 610 miles of old overhead conductor; the current work plan will aim to replace 135 miles of that line.

We have a long history of making wise investments in our distribution system, thereby creating a strong grid. As a significant component of our annual workload, ECE’s work plan is designed to reflect our commitment to serving members safe and reliable electricity.

At your service we remain,

Projected Construction Work Plan Expenditures



Building or remodeling?

Why not consider one of ECE's **storage space heating** options?

Save money with our low off-peak electric rates and special rebates.

Visit our website for more information.

 1.800.254.7944
eastcentralenergy.com

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