

MRES TODAY

December 2024

Red Rock Hydroelectric Project
Pella, Iowa

A NEWSLETTER OF



SCOPING MEETINGS SCHEDULED FOR BSSA TRANSMISSION PROJECT

In mid-January, the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission will be hosting scoping meetings for the Big Stone South to Alexandria (BSSA) transmission project, which is being developed by Missouri River Energy Services (MRES) and Otter Tail Power Company (OTP).

The meetings will offer key stakeholders the opportunity to comment on the project, including potential environmental impacts, route siting and key areas of concern.

There will be five meetings in total, held in various Minnesota communities near the planned transmission route. Dates, times and locations for all five scoping meetings are listed in the table to the right.

The 345-kilovolt transmission line is expected to range from 95 to 105 miles, and it is tentatively scheduled for completion in 2030 or 2031. This project will help ensure the regional transmission grid continues to provide reliable, cost-effective electricity to customers across the region. MRES represents Western Minnesota Municipal Power Agency (WMPMA) throughout the project's development, and WMPMA will jointly own the new line with OTP upon completion.

To learn more about the BSSA project, please visit bigstonesouthtoalexandria.com.

BSSA MEETING SCHEDULE

JANUARY 14

- | | | |
|--------------|------------------|---|
| ▶ Alexandria | 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. | Broadway Ballroom
115 30th Ave East
Alexandria, MN 56308 |
| ▶ Glenwood | 5 p.m. – 8 p.m. | Lakeside Restaurant
180 S Lakeshore Dr
Glenwood MN, 56334 |

JANUARY 15

- | | | |
|-----------|------------------|---|
| ▶ Hancock | 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. | Hancock City Hall
662 Sixth St
Hancock, MN 56244 |
| ▶ Benson | 5 p.m. – 8 p.m. | Benson High School
1400 Montana Avenue
Benson, MN 56215 |

JANUARY 16

- | | | |
|--------------|------------------|---|
| ▶ Ortonville | 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. | Sioux Historic Pavilion
1073 Lake Shore Dr
Ortonville, MN 56278 |
|--------------|------------------|---|



Big Stone South
to Alexandria

MRES TAKING PROACTIVE APPROACH TO LARGE LOAD REQUESTS

With the advent of advanced computing, data mining, cryptocurrency, and mineral and metal processing, electric utilities across the nation are receiving more and more requests for new, large loads to connect to their system. From a regional standpoint, area utilities are getting calls every week, according to a report published Dec. 7, 2024, by South Dakota Searchlight.

Recently, MRES has participated and been asked to present on the topic of



Large load requests from new data centers, such as the facility pictured here in Stutsman County, North Dakota, are a new challenge utilities in the region are facing.

large load requests in meetings with the South Dakota Governor's Office of Economic Development and public utilities commissions in a number of member states. These opportunities have allowed MRES to engage not only with regulatory bodies and legislative decision-makers, but also with other utilities and key stakeholders in a proactive effort to develop practices and programs that will support our members in preparing for large load requests.

Due to its cold-weather climate, the Upper Midwest is an appealing landing spot for large loads, especially data centers focused on advanced computing. The cooler weather can help cool large buildings filled with computers and servers, and the added possibility of tying into renewable generation such as wind power is another reason data centers and other businesses requiring large loads are targeting the region.

These load requests can be anywhere from 50 to 500 megawatts (MW). To put

that into perspective, 1 MW can power hundreds of homes. That said, each large load request is unique and presents many challenges that go beyond just the additional demand created by the load itself. In addition to finding or building more generation to support these requests, the current infrastructure of the grid — power plants, transmission lines, substations and distribution networks — limits its ability to absorb too much load at one time. At present, the grid cannot keep up with the pace of such large demand requests.

Members that receive large load requests should reach out to MRES early so we can help navigate the complexities of the request. If your utility is approached to serve a new, large load, please contact Vice President of Power Supply and Operations Terry Wolf at **605-338-4042** or info@mrenergy.com.

BRIGHT ENERGY SOLUTIONS UPDATES SEVERAL REBATES FOR 2025



For more information on all the BES rebates for residential and commercial customers, check with your local utility or visit brightenergysolutions.com. As a reminder, BES program availability may vary and can change anytime.

Several changes to the Bright Energy Solutions® (BES) incentive program will take effect Jan. 1, 2025. Here are some of the more notable changes to the residential program:

- A \$25 rebate for ENERGY STAR® ceiling fans has been added, and the rebate for heat-pump water heaters has been increased to \$200. In addition, the rebate for LED recessed downlights was increased to \$4, and the rebate for room air conditioners was increased to \$75.
- Several updates to HVAC-related incentives were also made, including increasing the rebate range for central air conditioners to \$250 – \$350. Plus, tune-ups for air conditioners and heat pumps were increased to \$40.
- The \$500 rebate for ChargePoint Level 2 electric vehicle (EV) chargers and \$150 rebate for other qualifying Level 2 EV chargers remains unchanged.

Members will receive updated 2025 brochures for the residential and commercial BES incentive programs in the next few weeks. In addition, the 2025 brochures will be available starting Jan. 1 on both mrenergy.com and brightenergysolutions.com.



COST-SHARE OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE FOR MRES MEMBERS

MRES offers a number of cost-share opportunities to help our member utilities engage with their customers and the communities they serve.

COMMUNITY EVENT SPONSORSHIP

Through the Community Event Sponsorship Program, MRES will help cover the cost of an event or project that includes an advertising or customer education component promoting the utility and MRES. When members are featured and/or play a role in a community event, customers ultimately gain a better understanding of the value of their local utility and, hopefully, of MRES as the utility's energy partner.

Here are some key program details:

- Sponsorship requests must come directly from the member utility, not a third party.
- Sponsorships must be cost-shared with the member, with MRES covering up to 50% of the total cost, subject to an annual limit based on total electric meters served by the utility.

The Community Event Sponsorship Program was refreshed in 2022 by encouraging more members to participate and providing ideas and examples of projects — fun runs, community golf tournaments or band concerts, t-shirts for town celebrations, etc. — that qualify for the program. A reminder will soon be sent to members asking them to consider a community event sponsorship for 2025. The events should benefit the entire community and align with the goals of promoting the value of the utility to its customers, raising awareness of the member utility and serving the community in an altruistic way, all while recognizing the utility as a sponsor.

BES AND VPP MARKETING MATERIALS

Members participating in the BES and Value of Public Power (VPP) programs are also eligible for additional cost-share benefits. These benefits include reimbursement of up to 50% for eligible advertising and promotional expenses, based on the number of meters served by the utility.

Eligible expenses for both programs include:

- Home shows and expos
- Newsletters
- Print and online advertising
- Promotional and giveaway items

To the right are examples of social media graphics found in the monthly BES and VPP marketing packages.

Additionally, MRES provides members with monthly BES and VPP marketing packages that are available for download from the **members-only section of mrenergy.com**.

BES marketing packages include bill inserts, print ads, flyers, social media posts and graphics, radio ads, and letters to the editor that can be customized by members. Each month these materials focus on a specific rebate or current promotion of the BES program.

For VPP, monthly social media packages include timely, relevant messaging, and graphics and videos that promote the fundamental aspects of public power, offer safety and energy-saving tips, promote cybersecurity awareness, and celebrate holidays. Quarterly marketing packages are also part of the VPP program, and these packages include print ads, bill inserts, videos and letters to the editor that MRES member utilities can use to promote public power.

Many of the BES and VPP materials are fully customizable, which means members can include their utility name, contact information and logo. If you want these materials customized for your utility or would like to request the original Adobe InDesign® files, please contact Director of Communications Valerie Larson-Holmes at **605-338-4042** or **info@mrenergy.com**.

COST-SHARE DEADLINE IS DEC. 31!

Time is running out to submit your cost-share dollars for 2024. If your utility took advantage of the cost-share opportunities through the community event sponsorship, BES or VPP programs this past year, submit your invoice for the MRES portion of the funding by Dec. 31.

PLEASE SUBMIT FORMS TO:

BES: Shannon Murfield, Director of Energy Services

Community Events: Amy Collins, Member Programs Coordinator

VPP: Valerie Larson-Holmes, Director of Communications



SMART ENERGY PROVIDER APPLICATION PERIOD NOW OPEN

Applications for the American Public Power Association's (APPA) Smart Energy Provider (SEP) designation opened Dec. 1. The SEP program provides national recognition for utilities excelling in energy efficiency, distributed energy resources, renewable energy and environmental initiatives.

Going through the SEP application process offers utilities valuable insights into their programs and services. Throughout the process, utilities receive detailed feedback from the review panel that highlights areas for improvement. As a result, if a utility does not secure the designation initially, it will have a clear roadmap for being successful in future applications.

APPA also announced that beginning with 2023 designees, SEP designations last for three years rather than two. Currently, Moorhead (Minnesota) Public Service is the sole MRES member holding the SEP designation.

SEP applications are due April 30, 2025. For more information or to apply, please visit the APPA website.

TIS THE SEASON: SHOW OFF YOUR HOLIDAY DISPLAYS!

The holiday season is a time for celebration and joy, and there is no better way to spread cheer than through lights and festive decorations.

We're inviting MRES members to showcase their community's holiday spirit by sending us photos of the lights and other holiday decorations their community has on display.

Whether it's downtown lit up at night, a beautifully decorated Christmas tree in the park or a light display in front of city hall, we want to see it all! Your photos will be featured in the January issue of MRES Today, as well as shared on our social media pages throughout the holiday season.



To send photos, email them to info@mrenergy.com. Please be sure to include the name of your community in the email subject line. We can't wait to see your holiday decorations!



EVENTS CALENDAR

NOV 29 –
DEC 31

GARDEN OF LIGHTS WALKING TOUR

Alexandria, Minnesota
explorealex.com/events

DEC
13-14

SHARPSHOOTER CLASSIC

Winner, South Dakota
winnersdchamber.org

DEC
20

JORDAN SMITH CHRISTMAS CONCERT

Pella, Iowa
pellaoperahouse.org

DEC
21

DONNA REED IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE MARATHON

Denison, Iowa
donnareed.org

JAN
7-9

DAKOTA FARM SHOW

Vermillion, South Dakota
dakotafarmshow.com

JAN 31 –
FEB 8

FROSTIVAL

Moorhead, Minnesota
frostival.com

FEB
8

FROSTBITE 4

Beresford, South Dakota
facebook.com/frostbitefour

FEB
15

VINTAGE SNOWMOBILE RALLY AND SWAP MEET

Detroit Lakes, Minnesota
visitdetroitlakes.com

To have your event listed, send the event's date, name, location and contact information to info@mrenergy.com.

Visit mrenergy.com/events to see a full listing of calendar events for MRES and its members.



 MRES Events

APPLICATIONS LAUNCHED FOR 2025 MRES SCHOLARSHIPS

Applications are now open for our 2025 scholarship program. The program supports graduating high school students by providing financial assistance for their education, helping to build a skilled and capable workforce for the future.

- Five \$1,000 scholarships are available for current high school seniors enrolling next fall in a full-time undergraduate program at an accredited two- or four-year college, university or technical school. These scholarships can be renewed up to three times, making them worth up to \$4,000.
- Seven \$2,000 scholarships are available for graduating high school seniors planning to enroll in a full-time powerline or lineworker program at an eligible technical college. These scholarships are one-time only and not renewable.

Member utilities are encouraged to share this scholarship opportunity through local newsletters, social media, websites and other channels. Marketing materials for the scholarship

program are available on the [members-only section of mrenergy.com](https://mrenergy.com).

Eligibility requirements and application forms for each type of scholarship can be found on mrenergy.com. As a reminder, the deadline to apply is March 14, 2025.

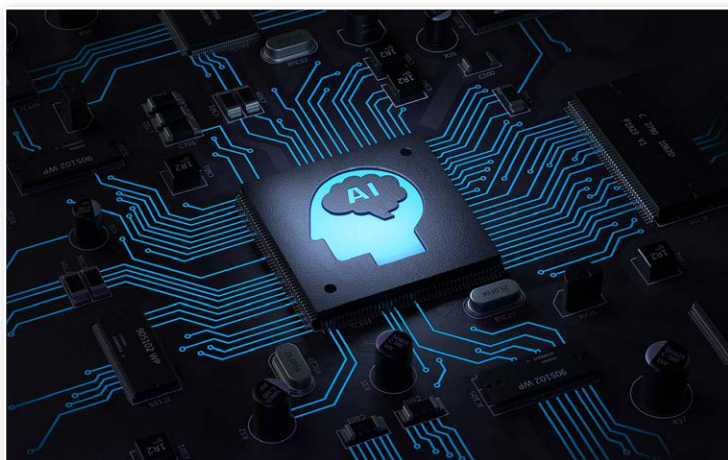
A promotional banner for the Missouri River Energy Services Scholarship Program. It features a smiling woman wearing a hard hat and safety glasses. The text reads: "Missouri River Energy Services SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM". Below this, it lists two scholarship types: "\$1,000 COLLEGE/UNDERGRAD SCHOLARSHIPS" and "\$2,000 LINeworker/POWERLINE SCHOLARSHIPS". At the bottom, it says "Deadline to Apply MARCH 14, 2025" and "APPLY NOW!" in a yellow banner.

Missouri River Energy Services
SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM
\$1,000 COLLEGE/UNDERGRAD SCHOLARSHIPS | **\$2,000** LINeworker/POWERLINE SCHOLARSHIPS
Deadline to Apply **MARCH 14, 2025** **APPLY NOW!**

CYBERSECURITY CORNER

Artificial intelligence in IT security By KnowBe4

Artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming the landscape of IT security by enhancing the ability to detect and mitigate threats in real time. AI surpasses human capabilities by learning from vast datasets and identifying real-time patterns. This allows AI systems to rapidly detect and neutralize cyber threats by predicting vulnerabilities and automating defensive measures, safeguarding users from data breaches and malicious attacks.



At the same time, however, this technology can also be weaponized by cybercriminals, making it a double-edged sword. Today, attackers are leveraging AI to launch highly targeted phishing campaigns, develop nearly undetectable malicious software and manipulate information for financial gain.

While organizations and governments are consistently working toward better AI governance, we all play a vital role in ensuring the ethical use of AI in our daily lives. Here's how you can protect yourself:

- **Stay informed:** Familiarize yourself with the AI systems you interact with and understand what data they collect and how they make decisions.
- **Review privacy policies:** Before using any AI-driven service, carefully review the privacy policies to ensure that your data is handled in compliance with relevant regulations.
- **Exercise your rights:** Know your rights under data protection laws. If you believe an AI system is mishandling your data or making unfair decisions, you have the legal right to challenge it.
- **Demand transparency:** Push for companies to disclose how their AI systems work, especially regarding data collection, decision-making processes and the use of personal information.
- **Be wary:** As AI scams and attacks evolve, always verify any requests that require an immediate or pressing action from you. And always get your news from reputable news sources.

As AI continues to revolutionize the digital world, the ethical, security and compliance challenges will also grow and evolve. Understanding the challenges and actively engaging with AI platforms responsibly can help ensure that AI remains an ethical and secure tool.

MEMBER PROFILE — WILLMAR, MINNESOTA

Willmar can trace its roots to the 1850s when the first European settlers were drawn to the area's fertile soil and tranquil landscape. Though the Dakota War of 1862 briefly disrupted settlement, the arrival of the Great Northern Railroad in the late 1860s reignited interest in the region. Soon after, Willmar emerged as a hub for transportation and commerce in central Minnesota, and it was designated as the county seat of Kandiyohi County in 1871.



A vast majority of the first European immigrants were from Norway, Sweden and Germany, and they brought their traditions to the area, many of which are still celebrated. Over time, however, Willmar's population has grown more and more diverse, and now the city celebrates its multicultural heritage through annual events such as the weeklong Willmar Fests each summer, and the newer International Heritage Festival held each spring, which highlights the food, music and customs of the many cultures represented in the area.

Willmar is the largest city in Kandiyohi County, and with industries ranging from agriculture and manufacturing to healthcare and retail, it serves as the epicenter of the county's economy. The city's downtown district adds to its economic flavor, featuring a mix of retail shops, restaurants and service-based businesses.

Additionally, Willmar has a thriving technology park built on a historic campus, plus an expansive, shovel-ready industrial park. As a result, Willmar continues to attract new businesses and industries while supporting the growth of its long-established local businesses.

Willmar sits on the southern edge of Minnesota's lake country, so plenty of boating, fishing and hunting opportunities are within minutes of the city limits. Plus, Willmar has over 30 parks spread throughout the community, including the 55-acre Robbins Island Regional Park, a fan favorite thanks to its beautiful lakeside setting, trails and recreation areas. Willmar's cultural scene and community involvement also thrive thanks to organizations such as The Barn Theatre and the Willmar Area Arts Council hosting year-round events and programs.

Willmar Municipal Utilities (WMU) was established in 1895 and provides electric, water and wastewater services to more than 21,000 people who call Willmar home. WMU Commissioner Bruce DeBlieck currently serves as the alternate representative to MRES.

To learn more about Willmar, visit willmarmn.gov.

Willmar 
Municipal
Utilities 