

Minnesota Legislature explores topics that may impact electric bills

By Joel Johnson, MREA Government Affairs

The 2013 Minnesota Legislative session with a Democratic governor and majorities in both the House and Senate could impact your electric bills. As a co-op member-owner, we want to keep you informed about the topics that may affect your electric rates.

Net metering/distributed generation

The Department of Energy Resources has worked for 18 months to modernize the state's net metering and distributed generation policies (connection of customer-owned wind and solar). The Minnesota Rural Electric Association (MREA) has worked with cooperatives across the state to assemble our own unified approach to any proposed changes to net metering. The result has been a set of principles, which guide our approach. Electric cooperatives have fundamentally changed the debate over net metering and distributed generation, focusing much of the discussion on costs and amount of subsidization occurring under existing policies.

- Minnesota's current net metering laws are unsustainable. They allow wind/solar customers to avoid paying for the infrastructure (power lines, substations, etc.) that allows them to self-generate, distributes their excess generation to others and provides them backup electricity when the sun isn't shining or the wind isn't blowing.
- These significant costs are shifted onto their neighbors. At a typical rural co-op a net-metered account shifts more than \$1,000 in infrastructure costs onto others. Because cooperatives have more lines and infrastructure and fewer members per mile of line than other utilities, this is of particular concern.
- Net metering encourages oversizing of wind/solar, which floods the system with



unnecessary, expensive electricity. As more small distributed generation comes onto the grid, the impact on rates increases exponentially because we have fewer members paying the infrastructure with more unnecessary and expensive electricity.

- Co-ops support changes that will make distributed generation fair for all of our members – avoid cost shifting and require all members to pay for the services they use – and ensure the long-term economic viability of the grid.

Sales tax on contributions to aid to construction

As member-owned cooperative organizations, electric cooperatives have always asked new members to help pay for the construction or expansion of electric lines. In fact, financial

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www.northstarelectric.coop

Members' corner

We added a section called members' corner. What we would like is for members to send in questions about your electric cooperative, and we will answer them for you. Please give us your name and a phone number in case we need to clarify the question, and send them to North Star Electric, PO Box 719, Baudette, MN, 56623, Attn: Wayne.

North Star Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Mission Statement

To improve the lives of our member-owners and community by responsibly providing electric energy and other beneficial services while maintaining the very highest standards of performance.

Highlights from the BOARDROOM

These are the highlights from the board of directors' February meeting. In addition to routine business, the board voted to approve the early, discounted retirement of estate capital credits up to \$50,000 this year, to allocate the 2012 margins to members' capital credit accounts, to accept the January 2013 Operation Round Up meeting minutes, to change two 2013 board meeting dates to coincide with other events and two others to avoid conflicts, and to approve a resolution honoring the memory of former board member Allan Nygaard.

Staff reports included the year-end financial report, the health and wellness program, sales tax refunds, DNR crossing permits, the annual IRS nonprofit tax return, off-peak load control, wholesale power billing peaks, high bill inquiries due to the return of a seasonably cold winter,

Operation Round Up, buildings, the line worker student power plant tour, member appreciation days scheduled for May 9 in Littlefork and May 10 in Baudette, legislative activity, promotions resulting from retirements, outages related to the ice and frost buildup and equipment (668-07-002-01, Steven Cassibo). Renewable energy projects and the competitive bid policy were discussed. Reports were also given on the Minnkota and Square Butte board meetings.

Detailed minutes are available at the cooperative for member review. Regular board meetings are generally held the first Wednesday of every month. If you wish to speak with the board, or have an item that you would like to have placed on the agenda, please contact Manager Dan Hoskins at least two weeks in advance to be included on the agenda.

ALWAYS CALL BEFORE YOU DIG

One free, easy call gets your utility lines marked AND helps protect you from injury and expense. Safe digging is no accident: always call 811 before you dig. Visit **call811.com** for more information.



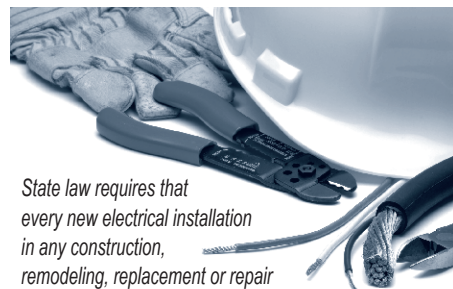
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Current electrical inspectors



State law requires that every new electrical installation in any construction, remodeling, replacement or repair shall file a certificate for inspection with the State Board of Electricity and be inspected by a Minnesota electrical inspector.

• St. Louis and Koochiching counties:

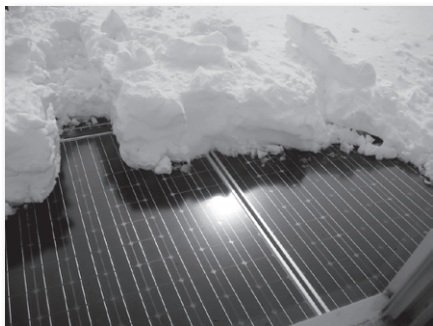
Richard Jenko
P.O. Box 523, Buhl, MN 55713
Cell: (218) 258-8338
New hours: Tue., Wed. & Thurs. will take calls from 7 a.m. - 8:30 a.m. Inspection will be on Tue. and Thurs. only.

• Roseau and Lake of the Woods counties:

Scott Stenvik
16409 State Hwy 1 N.W.
Thief River Falls, MN 56701
Phone: (218) 689-5406
7 a.m. - 8:30 a.m. (Mon. thru Fri.)

Solar mandate won't work in Minnesota

North Star Electric, Minnkota concerned about bills introduced in state Legislature



One bill in front of the Minnesota Legislature would require the state's power companies to derive 10 percent of their electricity from solar by 2030 and another would mandate utilities to derive 40

percent of their electricity from renewable energy by 2030.

North Star Electric Cooperative, Minnkota Power Cooperative, our wholesale energy provider, and the Minnesota Rural Electric Association (MREA) oppose these bills and others, all of which would eventually lead to significant rate hikes.

Under Bill HF 773, introduced by Rep. Will Morgan and Sen. Chris Eaton, a 10 percent solar mandate would cost Minnesotans \$22 billion just for the solar panels and installation. That equates to \$20,000 for a family of four. The MREA says that owning, operating and maintaining a solar facility in Minnesota would cost 25 cents per kilowatt-hour (kWh), which is four to five times more than what it costs Minnkota for coal and wind. The solar bill also would require utilities to pay a 1.33 percent tax on their annual revenue to the Department of Commerce to subsidize solar panel installations.

Let local state legislators know this bill does not make sense for North Star, Minnkota and the state of Minnesota. Neither do other bills such as HF 880 introduced by Reps. Frank Hornstein and John Persell, and Sen. Kevin Dahle. Their bill increases and extends the current Renewable Energy Standard from 25 percent by 2025 to 40 percent by 2030. Additionally, the bill includes a solar mandate, though the exact standard is unknown because the bill's sponsors left it blank.

The state of Minnesota already has one of the most aggressive renewable energy mandates in the country. The 10 percent solar addition would be on top of the 25 percent by 2025 standard, which will be met mostly through large utility-scale wind farms.

Mandating that 35 to 40 percent or more of a utility's generation is derived from intermittent resources would be costly for Minnkota and, ultimately, its cooperatives' consumers in northwest Minnesota and eastern North Dakota.

Remember, electricity from solar isn't as available as baseload electricity such as coal. Solar panels only produce when the sun

shines. They don't work at night. They don't work well on a cloudy day. They don't work well when covered with ice and snow.

Thus, the capacity factor for solar is only 15 to 18 percent in this area. In 2012 Minnkota's baseload coal-fired fleet produced power 93 percent of the time, and its contracted wind farms produced electricity 39 percent of the time. So it would take a lot of solar panels covering several hundreds of acres of land to meet a 10 percent mandate.

North Dakota and Minnesota don't show up as high potential areas on solar energy maps. The southwest region of the United States is where the sun shines the most. While Phoenix receives sunshine 85 percent of the time, Minnesota and North Dakota receive sunshine less than 60 percent of the time. This includes days that are both sunny and partly sunny.

A 10 percent solar mandate also reneges on the negotiated 2007 Renewable Energy Standard agreement of allowing utilities to decide the best approach to meeting the standard for their system.

Remember, Minnkota invested in the renewable energy capacity it needed when it added 357 megawatts of wind in the late 2000s. The output will allow Minnkota to meet the 25 percent standard. But, as a result of these wind purchases, Minnkota has excess electricity it is currently selling into the wholesale energy market at a loss.

Those markets, not mandates, should drive energy development. Solar energy is presently not cost-effective compared to other forms of renewable energy, including wind and hydroelectric.

Hydro-based generation is normally classified as a renewable energy source as it is derived from naturally replenished resources. Minnkota has a significant amount of firm hydroelectric energy generation. About 10 percent of the Minnkota energy resource mix comes from hydro. However, the state of Minnesota does not recognize large amounts of hydro as a renewable source.

It's interesting to note that the Morgan-Eaton bill is referred to as the "Solar Energy Jobs Act of 2013." While the solar industry creates manufacturing and installation positions, operating solar farms have few employees. For instance, the Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association, which is headquartered in Colorado, has two full-time employees for its 30-megawatt Cimarron Solar Facility.

Contact your local state legislators and let them know a solar mandate is not right for Minnkota and Minnesota.

The value is electric!

One tank of gas for your car

20 gallons at \$3.85/gallon = **\$77.00**

23 days of electricity for your entire home = **\$77.00***

*Based on North Star Electric average residential usage of 875 kWh per month at the residential rate of \$.113/kWh + Minnkota surcharge of \$.003/kWh
(Does not include the \$36 basic service fee)



Routine dryer maintenance *can save you money...* and your life

When it comes to clothing, the focus tends to be on functionality, comfort or fashion. Yet, washing and drying our clothes has become part of our regular routines. Other than dreading the task, most of us don't give much of a second-thought to the machines that help us get the job done — even though giving them some occasional maintenance could save us money...or possibly even our lives.



The California Energy Commission has some suggestions on how to make the most efficient use of your clothes dryer:

- ✓ Clean the lint filter after every load. A dirty lint screen can lead to 30 percent more energy usage and can be a fire hazard.
- ✓ Occasionally use the attachments on your vacuum cleaner to remove lint that falls off of the lint filter and in the filter enclosure.
- ✓ Occasionally clean the ductwork that vents your dryer. The filter does not catch all of the lint, and it can build up in the ductwork. This buildup decreases the efficiency of your dryer and can become a fire hazard.
- ✓ Make sure your dryer is vented properly. If you vent the exhaust outside, use the straightest and shortest metal duct available. Flexible vinyl duct is not recommended because it restricts the airflow, can be crushed, and may not withstand high temperatures from the dryer.
- ✓ If your dryer has a moisture sensor that shuts off the dryer when the clothes are dry — use it.

Additional ways to save money include filling your dryer — but not packing it too full and placing your dryer in a heated space (251-24-132-07, Richard Gratzek). Also periodically check the outside dryer exhaust vent. If it does not close tightly, replace it with one that does to keep the outside air from leaking in.

Lint and other debris can build up in your dryer and not only decrease the efficiency of your unit, but also cause fire hazards. According to the Federal Emergency Disaster Agency, an estimated 2,900 clothes dryer fires are reported each year, resulting in an estimated five deaths, 100 injuries and \$35 million in property loss. The buildup can also cause carbon monoxide to be forced back into your home, creating a potentially fatal situation

for you and your family. In addition to the cleaning of your vent system, the Chimney Safety Institute of America passes along these other safety tips:

- Dryer vents should be completely separate from all other systems and terminate outside, not into a chimney, crawl space or attic.
- Your outside dryer exhaust vent's termination hood should have a back draft damper so that the exhaust does not come back in your home.

For more information on electrical safety, visit SafeElectricity.org.

Operation Round Up application deadline is May 31

The deadline to submit Operation Round Up grant applications is May 31. Community organizations may apply for an Operation Round Up grant by completing and returning an application form, available at either North Star office or from a director of the North Star Electric Community Trust Board. The directors are Peter Granger, Gretchen Thompson, Margie Sporlein, Zelpha Crawford, Mary Ellen Lehman, Julie Lepisto and Larry Warrington.

Grants will be awarded to nonprofit or community-based organizations that demonstrate a commitment to enhancing the quality of life in our region.

We would like to say THANK YOU to all the North Star members who are participating in the Operation Round Up program. About 80 percent of the membership is contributing to this great cause to help our local communities.

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participation is one of the Seven Cooperative Principles that guide our operations. This has often taken the form of Contributions in Aid to Construction (429-45-405-04, John E Lund). Until recently, these contributions were not subject to Minnesota sales tax. We continue to believe that sales tax should not be added to these contributions. We will remind policymakers that generating revenue through electric bills is extremely regressive for residents and makes it harder for Minnesota businesses to compete.

Renewable energy mandates and carve-outs

Meeting Minnesota's 25 percent by 2025 Renewable Energy Standard has already been extremely costly for cooperative

members. Adding more renewable energy mandates or solar carve-outs (mandates) increases those costs.

New technologies, expanded natural gas resources, rising prices and growing environmental regulations are changing the ways we produce, distribute and use electricity. The co-op members' needs remain in the forefront and we will continue to deliver safe, abundant, reliable and affordable electricity.



Tips for copper theft prevention

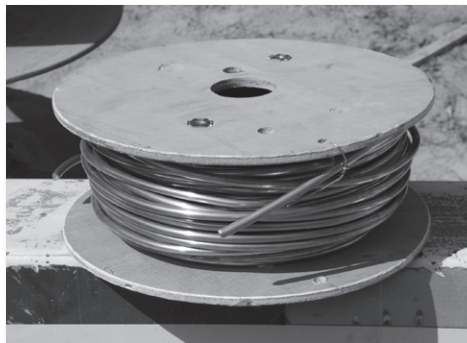
As the price of copper has increased, so has copper theft. While trying to make a quick dollar by stealing copper, thieves risk their own lives and cause dangerous and expensive damage. Common targets for copper thieves are farming equipment, air conditioners, vacant buildings, construction sites and electric utility properties, including substations and power poles. The Safe Electricity program encourages you to help stop copper theft by reporting suspicious activity near any of these locations.

Copper theft from electric utilities is particularly hazardous to thieves and also to those who rely on electricity. In the past few years, copper thieves have caused power outages at businesses and homes, shut down traffic lights and forced hospitals to run on backup generators. In the worst cases, copper thefts have caused fires and explosions that have taken innocent lives.

Safe Electricity suggests the following tips to stay safe and help stop copper theft:

- Never enter or touch equipment inside a substation; stay away from power lines and anything touching a power line.
- If you notice anything unusual with electric facilities, such as an open substation gate, open equipment, hanging wire, etc., contact your electric utility immediately.
- If you see suspicious activities near electric facilities, call emergency services or your local utility. Do not intervene. Allow officials to handle the situation.
- If you work in construction, store copper securely, especially overnight.
- Install motion-sensor lights on the outside of your house and business to deter possible thieves.
- Store tools and wire cutters in a secure location, and never leave them out while away.

For more information on staying safe around electricity, visit SafeElectricity.org.



Attention: Parents of high school seniors

Are you aware of North Star Electric's Knowledge Scholarship? To qualify, the parent/guardian must be an active member of North Star Electric, and your child must take a test about your cooperative that provides electricity to your home. North Star Electric will be awarding five scholarships, one \$1,000 and four \$400, plus a chance to win one of eight \$50 cash awards for scoring more than 50 percent on the test. Most of the answers will be in the study material that North Star provides. A couple hours of study time could pay off with a \$1,000 scholarship. Last year only 35 students took the test. The information meeting and the test will be given in mid-April. For more information about the scholarships, please call Wayne at North Star Electric or check with your school guidance counselor.

Summer seminar opportunity

Offers educators a first-hand look at mines and power plants

The Lignite Energy Council is a trade association that represents more than 300 companies that are involved in the region's energy industry. Each year, nearly 30 million tons of lignite are produced in North Dakota and converted to electricity, synthetic natural gas, fertilizer and other products. The lignite industry employs more than 27,000 people, has an economic impact of more than \$3 billion in North Dakota and generates more than \$100 million in state tax revenue.

The Lignite Energy Council, based in Bismarck, N.D., is sponsoring a teacher seminar titled *2013 Lignite Teacher Education Seminar: Energy, Economics and Environment*. The seminar will be June 17-20, 2013, at the National Energy Center of Excellence on the campus of Bismarck State College, Bismarck, N.D.

This seminar is designed to provide teachers with a broader understanding of the lignite coal industry and the important role it plays in providing electricity to consumers, farmers and businesses in North Dakota, Minnesota, South Dakota and Montana. The seminar includes discussions on how lignite coal is mined and converted into energy, and the economic impact of the industry on the region. It also includes a tour of a lignite mine, a lignite-based power plant and the Great Plains Synfuels Plant (which converts coal into synthetic natural gas and other



valuable byproducts).

Minnkota Power Cooperative is sponsoring 10 teachers from its Minnesota service area by paying the registration fee, plus round-trip mileage to the seminar in Bismarck. Rooms are provided at Bismarck State College at no charge. Meals are also included.

Teachers who attend the four-day seminar and complete a lesson plan are eligible to receive two semester graduate credits in education, economics or science from one of three North Dakota universities: University of North Dakota, North Dakota State University and Minot State University.

Application materials will be mailed to schools throughout the region or are available at www.minnkota.com. All applications need to be submitted to Sue Black, Minnkota Power Cooperative, Inc., PO Box 13200, Grand Forks, ND 58208-3200 by April 12, 2013.

Please welcome Darren Koschak, our new journeyman lineman!



Darren Koschak has been hired as a journeyman lineman working out of the Baudette office. Darren is originally from Ely, Minn. After graduating from Ely High School in 2004, he attended MState electrical line worker school in Wadena, Minn., and graduated in 2005. The first summer after graduation he worked for Lake States Construction and in the fall he was hired by the Hibbing

Public Utility. He worked there as an apprentice lineman from 2005 to 2009 and as a journeyman lineman from 2009 until 2013.

Last fall Darren saw that North Star had job openings for two journeyman linemen because one of North Star's linemen had moved, another was promoted and they were in need of help. He had wanted to work for an electric co-op and the time and location was right, so he applied. Darren said the location is good for him because of the great hunting and fishing. Some of his other hobbies include 4-wheeling, snowmobiling and about anything else outdoors.

Capital credit allocation

Your March bill will show your share of the 2012 margins (revenue in excess of expenses) and your accumulated capital credit balance. Because North Star Electric Cooperative is a nonprofit and owned by those who purchase electricity from it, all margins are returned to you and the other members. Current margins are temporarily held in your capital credit account, which is your share of the ownership of the cooperative's assets. Over time, these capital credits are repaid to the members. Payment or bill credit are typically made in September. We have returned more than \$9,300,000 of capital credits to our members and hold approximately \$12,345,000.



North Star offices will be closed Friday, March 29, in observance of Good Friday.

Staff Report

Daylight savings has already begun, spring is just around the corner and we still have 2 feet of snow on the ground. I think we just got back to our normal northern Minnesota winters.

Last fall at our load management meeting in Grand Forks, we were told that we should expect about 245 hours of load control for our off-peak members. Last year we only had 30 hours of control, but I think everyone would agree that last winter was one of the nicest winters anyone can remember. When the Coyote power plant went down on Nov. 19 and we found out it would be down for three months, I thought we would be well over the 245 hours.

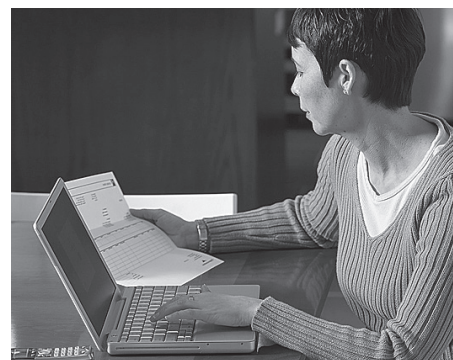
Sometimes it is really nice to be wrong, and so far we have only had 120 hours of control, and we are about done with load control for this winter season. The most intense load control we had this season was in the cold snap from Jan. 21-24. During that time we had about 40 hours of control and Minnkota did all of its billing peaks over those four days. Minnkota does its billing peaks during the coldest days of the winter and each

billing peak is three hours long. Minnkota likes to get at least three peaks each winter, but this year with the cold weather it did six and used the three that had the largest demand to determine our winter demand. This winter demand is one of the major factors that determines what we will pay Minnkota in electric rates for the next year. The smaller the demand the less we need to pay Minnkota next year.

With spring on the way you may be thinking about building, remodeling or changing out some of your older, less efficient appliances. Before you buy a new appliance, be sure you consider buying an Energy Star® appliance. Yes, you will pay more upfront, but an Energy Star® appliance will save you money in the long run because it uses less electricity. Make sure you check our website at www.northstarelectric.coop and click on forms to see if there is a rebate for your new Energy Star® appliance.



Wayne Haukaas
Manager of Compliance
and Member Services



Problems paying your electric bill?

Energy assistance may be available!

If you are receiving a low income or suffering from a temporary financial shortfall, the following agencies may be able to assist you with your electric bill. We urge you to contact them immediately to avoid disconnection if you feel you are eligible for aid.

Lake of the Woods County Social Services

206 8th Ave. SE, Suite 200
Baudette, MN 56623
634-2642

Northwest Community Action Council

P.O. Box 67
Badger, MN 56714-0067
800-568-5329

Koochiching County Community Services

1000 5th St.
International Falls, MN 56649
283-7000

Kootasca Community Action, Inc.

2232 2nd Ave. E.
P.O. Box 44
International Falls, MN 56649
283-9491 or 800-559-9491

Kootasca Community Action, Inc.

1213 SE 2nd Ave.
Grand Rapids, MN 55744-3984
800-422-0312

Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency

702 3rd Ave. S.
Virginia, MN 55792-2797
800-662-5711

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President Barack Obama

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Giving kids the power to save

North Star Electric distributes energy-savings kits to area schools



Sara Wendt with her sixth grade class at Indus school.

Rarely can elementary school students say they saved their family money by finishing a homework assignment.

But with the help of a grown-up and the right supplies and instructions from their local electric co-op, students were finding energy and cash savings just in time for the holiday season.

Through the PowerSavers Conservation Improvement Program, North Star Electric presented students at area schools with an energy-savings kit packed full of CFL bulbs, low-flow showerheads and high-efficiency faucet aerators. If all the energy-efficient devices were installed, the household could expect to save up to 1,700 kilowatt-hours (kWh) or \$200 each year.

The utilities in the PowerSavers program contacted elementary school teachers and invited them to participate in the energy-savings kit project this year. Nearly 2,300 kits were distributed to students in Minnesota school districts throughout the Minnkota Power Cooperative service area.

Upon completing all the tasks in the kit and filling out a brief worksheet, students received a free LED night light. The class with the highest percentage of participation and most kWh savings received a pizza party or money donated to a field trip.

Even without the grand prize, the kits and presentation have the full endorsement of the students, who enthusiastically inspected the hot water gauge, shower flow meter and other energy-saving devices.

Minnesota cooperatives and municipals in Minnkota's service area started PowerSavers in 2008 in an effort to meet standards for energy efficiency and conservation in the state. The group has programs and incentives available for qualifying residential and commercial consumers.



Jeni Krause and Ron Rudd with their fifth grade class at Lake of the Woods school.

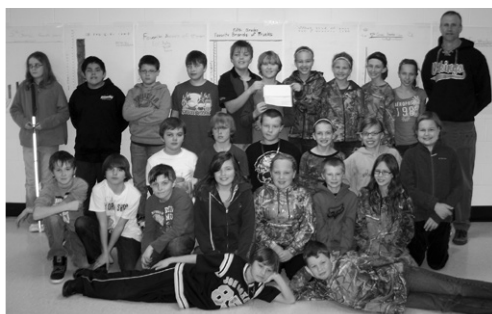
Lisa Pickard, Minnkota energy conservation coordinator, said the goal of the project is to help students learn where electricity comes from and why it's important not to waste it.

"Kids sometimes feel there isn't much they can do financially to help out around the house," Pickard said. "What we're trying to show them is that every little bit adds up."

The group is pleased with the way students and classrooms are responding to the program.

"This is a great way for us to talk to new generations of electric consumers about how energy is produced and how it can be used more efficiently," Pickard said.

The winner at Lake of the Woods school was the fifth grade class of Jeni Krause and Ron Rudd, which will save 28,705 kWh per year. The winner at Indus school was Sara Wendt's sixth grade class, which will save 5,433 kWh per year. The winner at Littlefork/Big Falls school was Scott Jean's fifth grade class, which will save 23,444 kWh per year.



Scott Jean with his fifth grade class at Littlefork/Big Falls school.

