

*Pictured:  
A scenic,  
farmside road in  
Sussex REC's  
service territory  
during the winter.*



**Sussex Rural  
Electric Cooperative, Inc.**  
A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

SREC's Member Newsletter  
2026, Issue 1 of 4

# Currents

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## The Reliability Conundrum

By Chris Reese, President & CEO, [contactthceo@sussexrec.com](mailto:contactthceo@sussexrec.com)



As two centuries of the Old Farmer's Almanac comes to an end, we will have to continue to rely on Western Pennsylvania varmints for our weather predictions. True to form, the 2026 Farmer's Almanac called for a "wild ride" of cold and snow and predicted a cold, snowy, and active winter.

As we have endured snow and extremely cold weather, western states that rely on snow for their ski income are looking at snowless mountains. Alaska has been warmer than Florida most of the past few weeks and communities still rebuilding from last year's hurricane season have been blanketed in snow and ice. Studies show that wind levels in 2025 were some of the highest ever. I am not sure about you, but I could do with a little less "wild" in my weather.

Reliable electricity doesn't happen by accident. It requires ongoing investment in our local grid—through system repairs, maintenance, upgrades and the integration of new technologies that help us operate smarter and more efficiently. The windy weather in 2025 accounted for most of our outages. The Emerald Ash Borer has created a weaker ash tree population in our area. However, it is interesting to note that oak trees have been coming down in relative numbers to ash over the last few years and, due to ground conditions, trees are coming up by the roots.

In addition to how weather has made ensuring reliability more difficult, I am sure you've heard of the broader, nationwide shift in how

>> *Continued on pg. 2*

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about what  
you think.**

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## The Reliability Conundrum

<< *Continued from pg. 1*

electricity is produced, regulated, and consumed. Much of the energy system the country relies on today was built decades ago. The existing transmission network was never designed to move large volumes of renewable power from rural generation sites to urban demand centers. Yet, federal production tax credits have provided significant financial incentives for renewable energy development, particularly wind and solar. Building new lines to relieve congestion or connect new generation is essential, but it requires significant capital investment, often hundreds of millions of dollars, which becomes part of the cost of service.

While these policies have accelerated the transition toward cleaner energy, they have also had unintended consequences. By lowering the market price of renewable generation, it's made it more difficult for traditional plants (coal, natural gas, and nuclear) to remain financially viable. As a result, many of these plants have been retired years ahead of schedule, removing dependable 24/7 generation from the grid. The closure of these plants comes at a time when electricity demand is surging. Economic growth, population increases, and the electrification of transportation, heating, and manufacturing are all placing new demands on the grid.

Data centers, electric vehicles, and advanced manufacturing facilities require huge amounts of power. Renewable resources play a vital role, but they depend on weather conditions. Without enough baseload generation to cover periods of low wind or sunlight, the system becomes more vulnerable to shortages during extreme weather or high-demand periods.

An example of the extremes comes from the Energy Information Administration's February 10th report, which showed that the cost of natural gas (the Henry Hub spot price) in January shot up 81% from the previous month. Along with reduced production, this



increase was attributed to rising demand for heating in a particularly cold winter and the impact of Winter Storm Fern.

The North American Electric Reliability Corp's (NERC) latest assessment reinforces the need for energy policies that support reliable, affordable generation for electric cooperatives. The outlook for U.S. grid reliability is "worsening" amid projections for more power plant retirements and surging demand from data centers and other large loads in the next decade.

The National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) has advocated for such policy reforms. The association has backed legislation in Congress to ease the federal permitting process for energy projects and urged key agencies to remove regulatory threats to power generation and help electric cooperatives serve data centers and other large load growth.

The reality is that there is no single cause for the issues currently facing our industry. It's the result of a combination of market forces, policy decisions, infrastructure needs, and changing patterns of electricity use. Many of these forces are beyond the control of local utilities, but all of them influence what we pay for power—and, in turn, what appears on your bill.

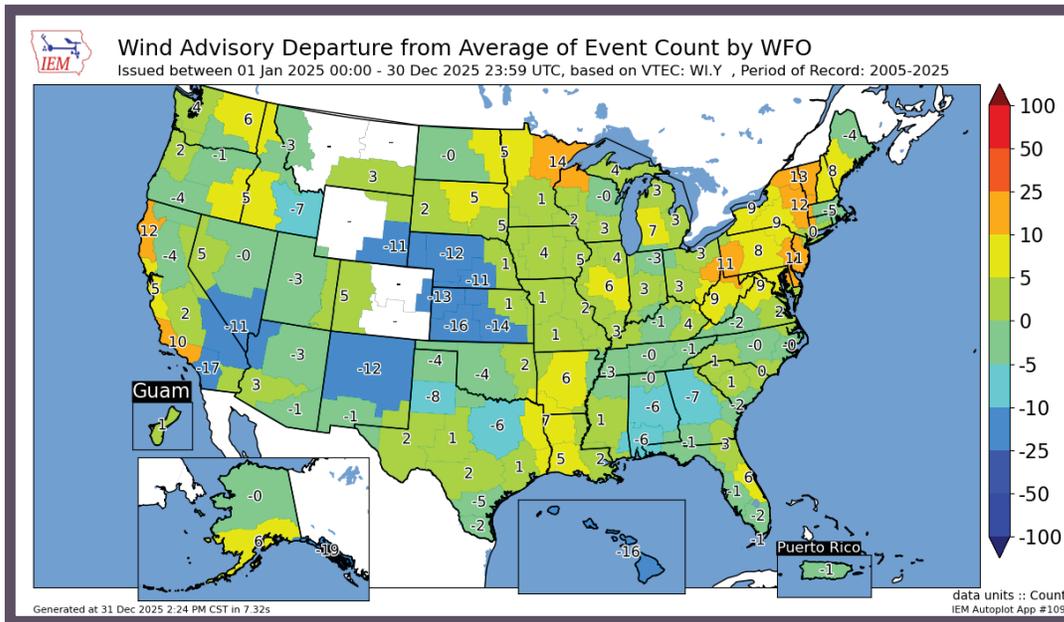
While we can't control these external pressures, just like we can't control the weather, your cooperative will continue working to manage costs, advocate for a balanced energy mix, and make strategic investments that protect both reliability and affordability for our members. ⚡

# Weather Woes Cap Off 2025

2025 was much windier than you may have thought! The year had multiple high wind events which affected our area, with some causing power outages for our members.

According to data by the National Weather Service, most of the northeastern U.S. had an above average count of high wind events in 2025. A wind advisory was issued in New Jersey 24 times — 11 more than the average for the state and higher than we've seen in 20 years!

In addition to this, we were hit with extraordinarily low temperatures in December 2025, which resulted in higher electric bills for many members due to heating costs. According to the National Weather Service's data (gathered just across the street from our office, at a station at Sussex Airport), our area's average temperature in December was 29.6° F, a big drop from the previous month's average of 42.5° F. The average daily minimum for our area was 20.6° F. Based on statewide data, New Jersey had its coldest December since 2010 and the third coldest since 2000!



Even though strong winds and cold temperatures can be a bad mix, know that Sussex REC stays as up-to-date as possible about incoming weather and temperatures. If an outage occurs, our crews will always be ready to respond! ⚡

*Pictured: A graphic showing 2025 high wind events across the U.S. which were "beyond normal," per data from the National Weather Service. New Jersey had 11 more high wind events than normal.*



## Why is the Demand for Electricity Rising?

Demand for electricity in the U.S. is booming. Recent data shows that power consumption nationwide is set to increase by at least 38 gigawatts (enough electricity to power 3,600 homes for one year) between now and 2028. Meeting this new demand will require a combination of new power plants, grid upgrades and energy storage technology advancements. Here are the key factors that are driving increased demand.

- 1 Increased Electrification:** Electric vehicle adoption, electrification of home heating and industrial electrification are increasing overall U.S. energy consumption.
- 2 Data Centers:** Driven by explosions in AI, cryptocurrency and cloud computing, total U.S. data center load is projected to increase by 65% by 2050.
- 3 Economic Growth:** Residential power consumption is expected to increase by 14% to 22% through 2050 due to increases in population and steady economic growth.
- 4 Manufacturing Growth/Onshoring:** New, expanding and "onshored/reshored" manufacturing capacity driven by federal incentives is expected to increase industrial demand by 13,000 GWh per year.

## DISCONNECT/RECONNECT



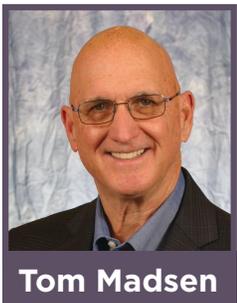
SREC offers members **FREE Disconnect/Reconnect** service from 8am - 2:30pm, Monday-Friday

When your electrician needs to work behind the SREC-owned meter on your home, call us at **973-875-5101** to schedule service



**Pictured (above):** Sussex's Tom Madsen (center) with the NRECA Board of Directors, representing electric cooperatives in 48 states.

## Local Leaders, National Stage



**Tom Madsen**

Tom Madsen has served as a member of the Sussex REC Board of Directors since December of 2000, representing District One. He is a Certified Credentialed Co-op Director and holds Board Leadership Certificate designation. Tom is a long-time member of the co-op community and is very passionate about the continued success of the rural electric cooperative program.

Since 2003, Tom has represented New Jersey as a director on the National Rural Electric Association (NRECA) Board of Directors, on which he served on the Administrative Committee and as chairman of the Building Committee.

As the owner of the general contracting firm Tom Madsen, LLC for over 35 years, he's also found time to support our community through several organizations and serving in key roles such as: past president & member of the Sussex Kiwanis Club, past chairman of the Sussex County Chamber of Commerce Board of Trustees, and past chairman of the Sussex County Economic Development Partnership. Tom is a commissioner and past chairman of the Sussex County Municipal Utilities Authorities.

After serving on the NRECA Board for 23 years Tom said, "I have worked alongside some of the most amazing, intelligent, motivated and passionate NRECA Staff, three CEOs, and many different Board of Directors from 48 states."

Sussex REC Board member Brad Sparta will be taking on the role of representing New Jersey and is one of 16 new representatives on the NRECA Board of Directors.

Thank you, Tom, for representing Sussex Rural Electric Cooperative so well. We wish Brad well in his future representation of our state, our cooperative, and our members at NRECA. 



**Brad Sparta**



**Currents**  
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Sussex Rural Electric Cooperative  
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**Sussex Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.**

**President & CEO** - Christopher P. Reese

### Our Board of Directors

**Chairman** - Jack Haggerty, Jr.

**Vice Chairman** - William Kovach

**Sec./Treasurer** - Ronald Dupont

Thomas Madsen      Barbara Miller

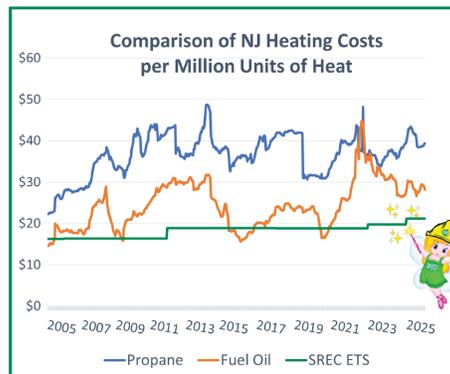
Brad Sparta      Joseph Barca

Michael Abate      Karen McDougal

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**ETS is the answer!**  
Electric Thermal Storage can heat your home with off-peak electric heat. Visit [www.yes2ets.com](http://www.yes2ets.com) for more information.



Made in the USA

**Sussex Rural Electric Cooperative**

## Why Does My Bill Change?

### When Medical Alerts Are a Must

There's nothing more important than guaranteeing the health and safety of yourself and your loved ones.

Those who rely on medical equipment for their daily medical needs and those who take care of them know this all too well. An unexpected power outage can cause a lot of stress for these individuals, as electricity is critical to meeting their medical needs.

While not all outages can be predicted, we can provide these members with advanced knowledge of planned outages through enrollment in our Medical Alert program. Planned outages are those scheduled by the Co-op so maintenance or repairs can be done safely.

If you or someone in your household relies on electricity to power medical equipment, enroll in our Medical Alert program at [www.sussexrec.com/medalert](http://www.sussexrec.com/medalert), and be sure to update us yearly to guarantee your account remains on our Medical Alert list.

This ensures we know to contact you before planned outages, so you can prepare alternative accommodations, such as use of a generator or temporary relocation to another place, as needed. 📞



Have you wondered why your electric bill may vary month-to-month, even when you feel your usage habits haven't changed? You're not alone! The energy you use, and thus your bill, is influenced by many factors.

**Weather** - Heating and cooling account for the majority of the average home's energy use. Most homeowners keep their thermostat set to a specific temperature, sometimes varying it by season. However, this does not mean it's always using the same amount of power. When outside temperatures hit extremes, your heating and cooling systems will need to work harder to maintain that selected temperature. The larger the difference from outside's temperature, the more energy will be needed.

**Rates** - Your monthly bill is created using kWh usage recorded by your meter in conjunction with our kWh rate, which for residential members is currently \$0.15 per kWh. After a rate adjustment goes into effect, a slightly higher kWh rate means that your routine usage will cost a little more. Our current rate was implemented at the end of 2025 to help cover the rising costs of providing reliable electric service. We always provide notice of planned rate adjustments in advance, so our members understand the reasons behind the change.

**Longer Billing Cycles** - Our billing system will show your usage for a specific period of time. That period of time may be a few days longer or shorter, depending on the number of days in the month, affecting how much kWh usage is factored in.

**Lifestyle Changes** - Even if you think your energy habits are mostly consistent, consider things you may have done differently during a billing period. If you had guests visiting, had seasonal decorations up, or even cooked at home more than usual, those activities will be reflected on your energy bill.

**Aging Appliances** - Appliances can become less efficient over time and use more energy to accomplish the same task. Make note of the age of your appliances and consider when may be the best time to replace them with more efficient models. When it's time to upgrade, you should know that ENERGY STAR-certified clothes washers, clothes, dryers, and refrigerators qualify for a \$50 rebate through your Co-op! For more information on this program, visit [www.sussexrec.com/rebates](http://www.sussexrec.com/rebates). ⚡



### MEDICAL ALERT PROGRAM

Do you rely on electric-powered medical equipment?

Enroll in our Medical Alert Program to receive advance notice of planned outages.

[www.sussexrec.com/medalert](http://www.sussexrec.com/medalert)



## The Value of Going Paperless Saving Money for the Co-op AND its Members

by Steve Sokolowski, Marketing & Member Services Associate  
ssokolowski@sussexrec.com

More and more members are adopting paperless billing as their preferred means to get their electric bill. While some may prefer to get their bills by mail, I'm here to make the case for why this convenient online billing method is better for everyone involved!

When you switch to paperless billing through your account at [www.srecbillpay.com](http://www.srecbillpay.com), your monthly electric bill will no longer be sent to you by mail. Instead, it will be sent directly to your preferred email address as soon as it's generated.

In addition to the convenience of getting your bill online, paperless billing also avoids postal issues that can cause your bill or payment to arrive late (or not arrive at all...). It also removes unneeded paper waste, which makes up roughly 26% of landfills.

On top of all these benefits, paperless billing is an important way for the Co-op, and thus its members, to save money! Sussex REC is a not-for-profit co-op that operates at cost. Among the important costs covered by our monthly System Connection Fee are those associated with billing—for traditional mailed bills, that's the printing and mailing costs. These expenses have risen steadily over recent years, coinciding with increases in paper prices and postage.

This can cost utilities up to \$6 per invoice, which adds up over time! When a member switches to paperless billing, it removes those costs from the equation, reducing expenses which would have to be covered by the membership. Once you enroll, you are always able to switch back if you want to go back to mailed statements.

For another convenient online option, try Auto Pay! Auto Pay ensures your bill is paid on-time each month, automatically. Even better, using a bank account as your payment method means you're never charged credit card convenience fees.

If you haven't yet made the switch to paperless or Auto Pay, or don't even have an online account, I encourage you to try them out to see if they work for you! 

Make your inbox  
your new mailbox.  
Go paperless!

Choose the payment method  
that works for you!

SIGN UP TODAY!



### ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP

Mid-winter is a great time to ensure you're making the most of your home heating system. Replace or clean filters to keep your furnace or heat pump running efficiently. Listen for strange noises and check for uneven heating—these signs indicate that the system may need servicing. Ensure vents and radiators aren't blocked by furniture or rugs as proper airflow helps your system work less and saves energy. A little maintenance along the way can prevent costly repairs and keep your home cozy through winter.





# KIDS' CORNER

## with Pluggy the Pug

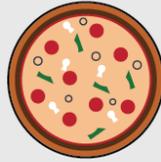
Did you know the average daily cost of electricity is about \$5? When you think about all the ways we use electricity every day, that's a great value!

A day's worth of electricity powers home heating or cooling, electronics, lights, major appliances, and MORE!

In this activity, look at the everyday items then add a plus (+) sign next to the ones you think cost more than daily electricity. For items you think cost less, add a minus (-) sign.



1.



Large Pizza

2.



1 Movie Ticket

3.



Candy Bar

4.



Video Game

5.



Ice Cream Cone

6.



Plush Toy

Answer Key: + '9 - '5 + '7 - '2 + '2 + '1



## Easy Tips to Save Energy

Want to cut costs and make your home more comfortable? Your monthly kWh usage is in your hands. Your cooperative can provide some insight on easy, low-cost ways to do this!

A DIY home energy audit can uncover hidden energy drains, like leaky windows, drafty ducts, and inefficient appliances. Identifying trouble spots now can set you up for savings and comfort year-round. Here's some examples to get started!

We'll start with simple, no-cost changes you can do right away. Small adjustments in temperature, in both your thermostat and water heater, can reduce energy used without being too noticeable.

### Adjust your thermostat

- Revisit your thermostat settings each season. Lowering the temperature at night or when no one is home is a simple way to cut costs.
- Use a smart thermostat for even greater savings. It automatically adjusts based on your schedule.

### Lower Water Heater Temperature

- Lower your water heater temperature. Some water heaters are factory-set to 140° F, but most households only need 120° F.

We plan to share more tips like these in upcoming issues. You can also follow us on social media for weekly tips about #WattYouCanDo to improve energy efficiency in your home! New tips are shared each Wednesday and include ideas to boost efficiency for every season. 🌱



# IN THIS ISSUE OF Currents

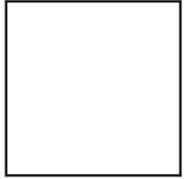


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-  **Pluggy the Pug's Kids Corner**
-  **Stay Away from Downed Lines**

## STAY AWAY FROM DOWNED LINES

Always assume a downed power line **is energized and dangerous**, even if it's not sparking or making noise. Know what to do to save lives.



**STAY AT LEAST  
50 FEET AWAY.**

### Keep your distance:

- Stay at least 50 feet away.
- Do not touch the line, or anything or anyone it's touching.
- Warn others to stay far back.
- Do not touch or step in water near a downed line. Water conducts electricity and creates a dangerous mix.
- Call 911 and state it's an electrical emergency.

### If you're inside your vehicle:

- Stay inside and call 911.
- Wait for utility or emergency crews to tell you it's safe to exit.
- Only leave the vehicle if there is immediate danger, like a fire.

### If you must exit the vehicle due to fire or other danger:

1. Open a door that's not touching the ground, if possible.
2. Cross your arms over your chest. Jump clear without touching the vehicle and ground at the same time.
3. Land with your feet together. Shuffle or bunny hop, keeping your feet together, and get as far away as you can.
4. Avoid power lines that are on the ground or sagging overhead.
5. Do not go back to the vehicle until it's confirmed safe.



**NEVER DRIVE  
OVER A DOWNED  
POWER LINE.**

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