

Flathead Electric Co-op Receives Conservation Achievement Recognition April 2018 Pileated Post

Are you aware that the Flathead Valley has a community solar project? Did you know that methane gas from the Flathead County Land fill is being recovered and converted to electricity so that this potent greenhouse gas doesn't escape into the atmosphere or groundwater? Did you know that you can save about \$4/month by allowing your electric hot water heater to be occasionally turned off for short periods of time? These are just a few of the many innovative conservation and energy efficiency programs that Flathead Electric Co-op has implemented over the last 5-10 years. These new programs are some of the first in the state. And this is only the beginning; Flathead Electric has many more creative and forward-thinking plans in the works.

Flathead Audubon is pleased to recognize Flathead Electric Co-op for our Conservation Achievement Recognition award. Flathead Electric is one of the most progressive electric cooperatives in Montana and probably in the west and here are a few reasons why!

Landfill Gas Plant- “Your garbage is producing your power.” That’s how Flathead County Public Works Director Dave Prunty describes Flathead Electric Co-op’s biomass project at the landfill. Flathead Electric and Flathead County became business partners in 2009 and created what was the **first** methane gas-to-energy project in the state of Montana. Methane is a greenhouse gas that results from decaying garbage, and is 21-times more potent than carbon dioxide. The 1.6 megawatt generator that burns the methane provides enough electricity to serve up to 1,600 households. This project became possible through \$3.5 million in Clean Renewable Energy Bonds (CREBS) awarded to Flathead Electric. A second generator can be added to accommodate growth at the landfill. The generator helps Flathead County (and those of us who are residents) stay in compliance with environmental mandates.

F. H. Stoltze Land & Lumber- Flathead Electric Co-op and F.H. Stoltze Land & Lumber Company signed a 20-year Power Purchase Agreement in 2013. The long-term agreement was needed to help Stoltze secure the necessary finances to replace an antiquated boiler and construct a biomass-fueled electric generation facility at their plant near Columbia Falls. Flathead Electric purchases an annual average of 2.5 megawatts of power at a wholesale rate, and also receives Renewable Energy Credits in the transaction. Not only is the agreement good for the community, but it provides a renewable energy source and also helps manage the forests. Stoltze is able to maintain and strengthen local job opportunities and Flathead Electric is able to efficiently distribute electricity in our service territory.

Whitefish Hydro- In 2012, Flathead Electric Co-op signed a two-phase power purchase agreement with the City of Whitefish for the advance purchase of electricity generated from the city’s hydro-electric generator. Flathead Electric paid the city \$400,000 in advance for energy to be generated and delivered to the power grid during the first phase. This money, plus a \$200,000 energy efficiency and conservation block grant

was used to rebuild the hydroelectric facility. During Phase 2, energy generated will be credited to various city accounts. The project benefitted Whitefish who needed to refurbish the hydro power plant and gave Flathead Electric another local source of clean energy for its/our portfolio.

Community Solar -The SUN (Solar Utility Network), Montana's **first** community solar array, was officially dedicated in 2015. By 2016, all 356 solar panels in the array had been purchased (for \$900 per panel) by members who support investing in alternative energy. The solar power generated by each panels is credited to the corresponding accounts. The SUN was installed near the Stillwater Substation on Whitefish Stage Road in Kalispell, on property already owned by Flathead Electric. The 356 solar panels total 100kW of output. This enables people to participate in solar energy without the large expense of a complete system at their location and for those who don't have the proper roof orientation or those with shading issues. Flathead Electric received the coveted "Innovator Award" from Montana's Governor for building the array, and other cooperatives around the state then began to follow suit. Phase II of the SUN is currently under consideration.

Electric Vehicle Committee- In 2015, Flathead Electric Co-op formed an Electric Vehicle committee of employees and installed Montana's **first** Chargepoint Vehicle Charging Station in the front parking lot of their Kalispell Headquarters in Evergreen. The charging station is available for anyone who wants to pull in and power-up their electric vehicles. With this installation, Flathead Electric will find out how many plug-in vehicles there are in our service territory, gauge charging habits of drivers, look for opportunities for alternative rate designs to minimize FEC's power costs, since this load could be flexible for the time of day it is charged. In addition, we will learn about locations for other possible charging stations.

Rebates for Electric Hot Water Heaters- Recently, Flathead Electric developed a unit that can be placed on your residential electric water heater that allows the heater to be turned off briefly during peak demand times. The duration is short, maybe 30 minutes, and might only occur once a week. Participants are rewarded with a \$4/month credit to their account.

Flathead Electric Cooperative is working on many other conservation projects that will ultimately reduce electrical costs and increase efficiencies. They have clearly raised the bar for electric cooperatives across Montana and other states. These innovative and effective projects directly and clearly benefit not only Co-op members but also our environment, our children's future, and our bottom lines. We salute Flathead Electric for their accomplishments and encourage them to continue their innovative projects. For more information, visit <https://www.flatheadelectric.com/> or contact Wendy Ostrom-Price w.ostrom-price@flathead.coop or 406-751-1820.