

# NEWSLINE



## Step Beyond the Classroom and Build Leadership Skills: Apply to be our 2026 Youth Tour Representative!

Attention Itasca-Mantrap Area High School Sophomores and Juniors:

Some learning cannot happen inside a classroom.

The NRECA Youth Tour gives students the opportunity to develop leadership skills, gain real world experience and explore what is possible beyond their daily routine. Each year,

Itasca-Mantrap Electric Cooperative selects one student to represent the co-op on a trip to Washington, D.C.

Youth Tour brings together students from across Minnesota and the country for a week focused on leadership, civic engagement and personal growth. Delegates visit national monuments, museums and historic sites while learning

how government works and how individuals can make a difference.

2025 Youth Tour delegate Grace Officer of Park Rapids High School said the experience pushed her outside her comfort zone. "This trip encouraged me to connect with students from across the state and country and inspired me to take more initiative and be more involved in my community," Grace said. "It was interesting to see how similar we were, even though we came from different places."

### Trip details:

Dates: June 15-20, 2026

Application deadline: Feb. 20, 2026

### How to apply:

Applications are available at [itasca-mantrap.com/youth-tour](http://itasca-mantrap.com/youth-tour) or through your school's counseling office. Students must be a high school sophomore or junior and live within Itasca-Mantrap Electric Cooperative's service territory.



2025 Youth Tour winner: Grace Officer



## CEO UPDATE

BY STEVE JOHNSON, PRESIDENT & CEO

As we begin 2026, I want to share a clear picture of where your cooperative is heading. Last year was a period of transition—new leadership, new expectations, and a renewed alignment around our mission of Serving Our Members. This year is about momentum. We are moving forward with purpose in the areas that matter most to the safety, reliability, and long-term health of our system and the communities we serve.

### Safety First—Always

Our top priority remains the same: Nobody Gets Hurt. In 2026, we are strengthening our safety culture through updated protocols, annual safety and security audits, and hands-on emergency exercises. We are also enhancing cybersecurity readiness through assessments, staff training, and a long-range technology plan. Whether in the field or behind the scenes, safety is the foundation of everything we do.

### A More Resilient and Reliable Grid

We continue investing heavily in the systems that keep power flowing. That includes wildfire-mitigation programs, expanded right-of-way clearing, and modernization of equipment across our service territory. Upgrades such as a new Outage Management System, smart reclosers, and improved inspection programs will help shorten outage durations and identify issues before they become problems. These improvements help ensure our grid is prepared for both everyday operations and extreme-weather events.

### Stronger Member Connection

This year you'll see enhanced communication and engagement opportunities designed to meet members where they are. A redesigned website, more personalized digital updates, and real-time outage information will improve transparency and accessibility. We're also

expanding community outreach—listening sessions, educational events, and cooperative participation at local gatherings—to strengthen relationships and ensure the needs of the membership directly inform our decisions.

### Financial Stewardship for Long-Term Stability

We remain focused on the financial health of the cooperative. In 2026, we are implementing long-range planning around capital projects, equity management, and debt strategies. This includes evaluating funding options that reduce borrowing costs and support critical infrastructure work. These efforts help ensure that your cooperative stays strong, sustainable, and positioned to meet future demands.

### Preparing for the Future

The energy landscape is evolving quickly, and we are preparing accordingly. Programs that support grid modernization, demand-response, distributed energy resources, and long-range forecasting will help us adapt to changing member expectations and long-term system needs. We are also pursuing grants and partnerships that bring additional resources into our communities while reducing financial impact on the cooperative.

### Looking Ahead

2026 is a year of action. Everything we are doing—improving safety, strengthening the grid, deepening member engagement, and preparing for the future—reflects our commitment to serving you with excellence. Thank you for your trust and partnership as we continue building a reliable, resilient, member-focused cooperative for the years ahead.

## BOARD MEETING HIGHLIGHTS:

The regular meeting of the Board of Directors for Itasca-Mantrap Co-op. Electrical Ass'n. was held on Thursday, November 20, 2025, at 9:00 a.m. at the Itasca-Mantrap office.

A quorum of directors was present.

### Approved:

- Consent agenda
- October financials, subject to audit
- 2026 Financial Budget
- Adoption of PURPA Qualifying Facility rate (QF99)
- Revisions to rates – effective 01/01/2026
- Revisions to rates – effective 04/01/2026

### Reports heard:

- Operations and Safety
- Financial
- Marketing and Member Services
- CEO
- Summaries of meetings attended

### Reviewed:

- Changes to Itasca-Mantrap's membership
- Board Expenses to Budget YTD
- GRE Power Cost Adjustment detail for October 2025
- Scrap Disposition Sales & Certificates
- 2026 Construction Work Plan

### NEXT BOARD MEETING:

The next regular meeting of the Board of Directors is Thursday, February 26, 2026, at 9:00 a.m.

## BY THE COMMUNITY, FOR THE COMMUNITY:

HOW ITASCA-MANTRAP USES TOUCHSTONE ENERGY

TO POWER LOCAL CONNECTIONS



At Itasca-Mantrap Electric Cooperative, providing electricity is only one part of our mission. As a Touchstone Energy cooperative, our impact extends beyond the power lines and into the communities we serve. One of the ways members experience that commitment is through our Co-op Connections program, designed to support local businesses while helping members save money.

To highlight this local impact, Itasca-Mantrap is launching Plugged In and Local, a new series celebrating the businesses that help keep our communities humming. From shops to services and the occasional eatery, the series introduces the people behind the scenes, showcases what makes them unique, and shows how supporting local keeps dollars and connections right here at home.

Co-op Connections is more than a discount program. Members get great savings at participating businesses through Co-op

Connections. Every time they shop locally, they're helping out their community, supporting small businesses and keeping the local economy strong.

Touchstone Energy represents a nationwide network of locally owned electric cooperatives that share common values. Those values include integrity, accountability and a commitment to community, which Itasca-Mantrap strives to reflect in how it serves members and supports local businesses.

Through Co-op Connections, local businesses gain increased visibility and access to new consumers, while members are rewarded for supporting places they already know and trust. The program creates a mutually beneficial relationship that strengthens both the local economy and the cooperative model.

The benefits extend beyond local storefronts. Co-op Connections also offers national discounts and pharmacy savings, giving members additional ways to manage household expenses while staying connected to their cooperative.

We encourage participation in Co-op Connections because it is a simple way for members to make a meaningful impact. It reinforces the idea that local choices matter and that cooperation leads to stronger communities. To learn more about participating businesses and how to start saving, visit [itasca-mantrap.com/co-op-connections-savings](http://itasca-mantrap.com/co-op-connections-savings).

### Operation Round Up

Grant applications are now being accepted

The next ORU deadline is coming up and local businesses and organizations are encouraged to apply!

Operation Round Up Grants will be awarded to non-profit or community-based organizations that demonstrate a commitment to enhancing the quality of life in the region.

The funds raised through ORU will be distributed primarily in the local area served by Itasca-Mantrap. To be considered at the April Trust Board meeting, grant applications must be received in the Itasca-Mantrap office by Monday, March 16. Download the application form at [www.itasca-mantrap.com/operation-round](http://www.itasca-mantrap.com/operation-round).



# Basic Charge 101

Delivering electricity takes more than just the energy you use. It also requires a system that is built, maintained and ready to serve you at all times. As a member-owned cooperative, Itasca-Mantrap Electric Cooperative is committed to being transparent about how rates work and why adjustments are sometimes necessary.

## What Makes Up Your Electric Bill

Your electric bill has two main parts:

### **Energy Charge (kWh):**

This reflects the amount of electricity you use.

### **Basic Charge:**

This covers the fixed costs required to deliver electricity to your home or business, regardless of how much energy you use. Both are essential to providing safe and reliable electric service.

## What the Basic Charge Supports

The basic charge helps pay for the infrastructure and resources needed to deliver power, including:

- 17,211 power poles
- More than 11,856 transformers
- Over 2,167 miles of electric line, including 1,273 miles underground
- 11 substations
- Service vehicles and specialized equipment used for maintenance and outage response.

These costs exist whether you use a little electricity or a lot.

## Why the Basic Charge Matters in a Rural System

Investor-owned utilities average about 22 customers per mile of line. Itasca-Mantrap serves just 6.2 services per mile. With fewer members sharing the cost of building and maintaining infrastructure, expenses must be recovered either through higher energy charges or through the basic charge.

Using the basic charge to recover fixed costs is a fairer approach for all members.

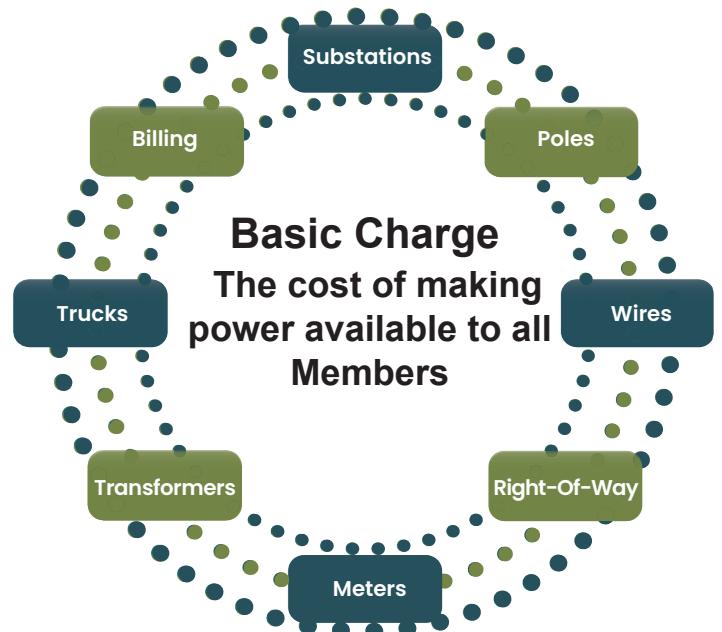
## Why Rates and the Basic Charge Are Adjusting Together

Rising costs across the electric industry require Itasca-Mantrap to adjust rates to maintain reliability and invest in the system. Increasing the basic charge allows the cooperative to more accurately recover fixed costs, rather than placing that burden only on energy usage.

This balanced approach supports system reliability today and long-term service for the future.

## Our Commitment to Members

Rate adjustments are carefully reviewed and made with the long-term interests of our members in mind. By aligning rates with the true cost of service, Itasca-Mantrap is working to ensure reliable, affordable electricity for years to come.



**Shared equally by all Itasca-Mantrap Members**



**Itasca-Mantrap**  
6.2 services per mile  
to share costs

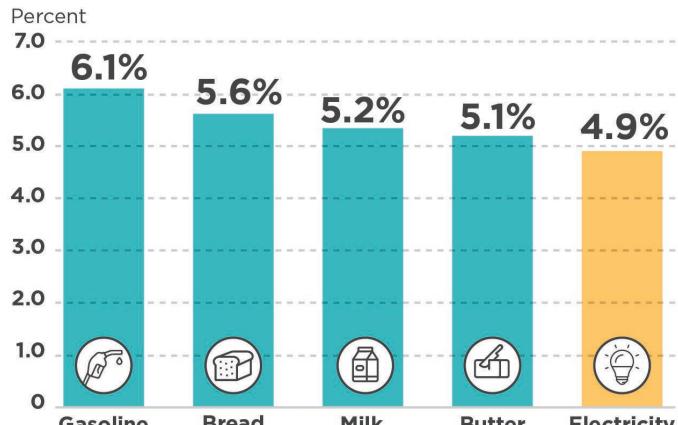


**Other Utilities**  
22 customers per mile  
to share costs

## ELECTRICITY REMAINS A GOOD VALUE

Although inflation has led to increasing costs in many areas of our lives, the cost of powering your home rises slowly when compared to other common goods. Looking at price increases over the last five years, electricity remains a good value.

### Average Annual Price Increase 2018-2023



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics  
Consumer Price Index

# Become A Director!

Itasca-Mantrap is seeking candidates from Districts 1, 2 and 3 for our Board of Directors. Director elections are held in conjunction with the Itasca-Mantrap annual meeting on June 11.

Candidates must meet eligibility requirements as specified in the Itasca-Mantrap Bylaws. Board directors serve three-year terms and represent all co-op Members.

Wondering what's involved in being a director?

## Duties and Responsibilities:

- Establish relationships between the board, the membership and the President-CEO.
- Report to the membership.
- Maintain legal entity and practices.
- Review and update bylaws and policies, as needed.
- Attend meetings and conferences.
- and more!

Interested? Contact Itasca-Mantrap for a director candidate packet. Completed petitions and forms must be received in the Itasca-Mantrap office by 4:30 p.m. Monday, April 13.

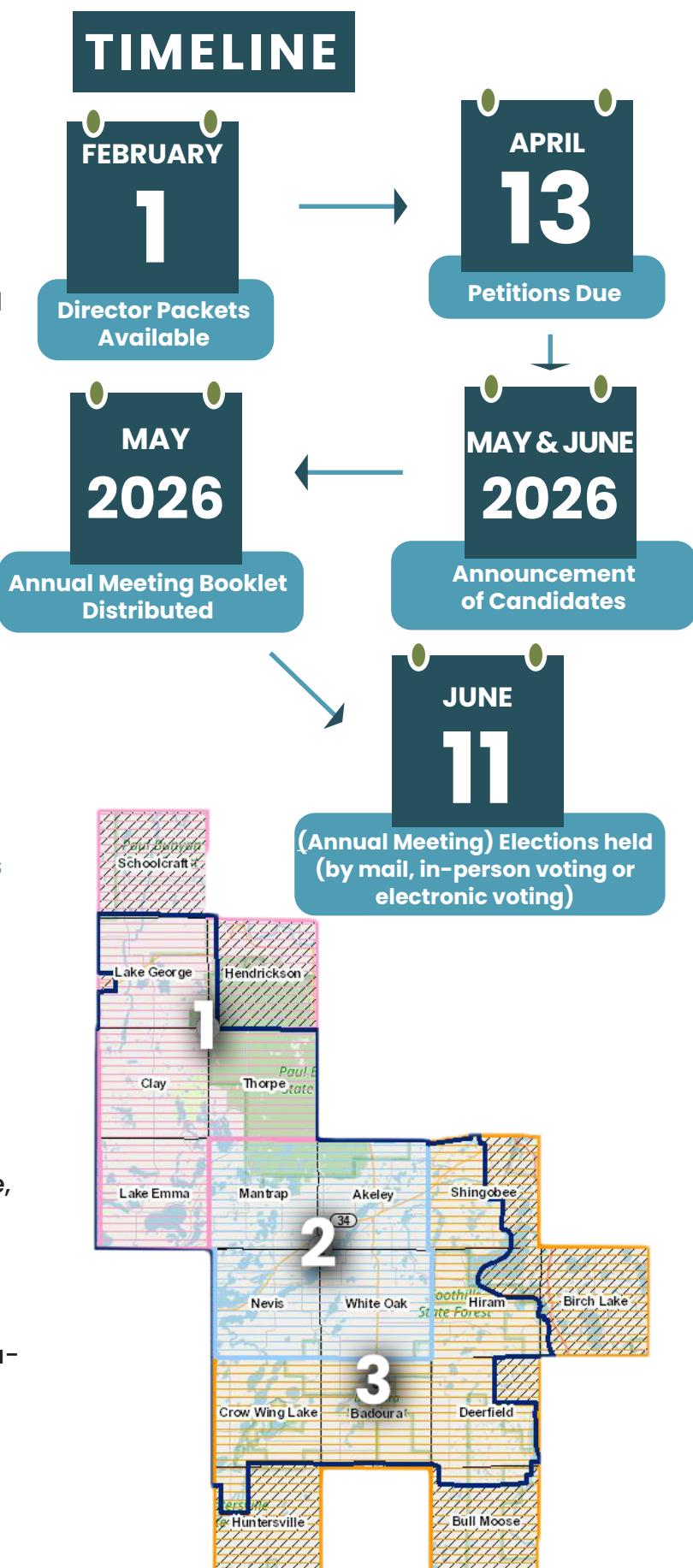
**DISTRICT 1** – includes Schoolcraft, Lake George, Hendrickson, Clay, Thorpe, and Lake Emma townships.

**DISTRICT 2** – includes Mantrap, Akeley, Nevis, and White Oak townships.

**DISTRICT 3** – includes Shingobee, Hiram, Birch Lake, Crow Wing Lake, Badoura, Deerfield, Huntersville and Bull Moose townships.

For more information, contact Itasca-Mantrap at 218-732-3377. More details about serving on the Itasca-Mantrap Board, including director qualifications can be found at [www.itasca-mantrap.com/board-directors](http://www.itasca-mantrap.com/board-directors).

## TIMELINE





## ITASCA-MANTRAP ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

### ITASCA-MANTRAP ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

16930 County 6, PO Box 192  
Park Rapids, MN 56470

(218) 732-3377 | (888) 713-3377  
itasca@itasca-mantrap.com  
www.itasca-mantrap.com



#### OFFICE HOURS

Monday - Friday: 8:00 AM - 4:30 PM

#### GOPHER STATE ONE CALL

(800) 252-1166

www.gopherstateonecall.org

#### OFFICERS & DIRECTORS

##### DISTRICT 1

Brian Behrens, Chair

##### DISTRICT 2

Patricia Roehl, Treasurer

##### DISTRICT 3

Terrence Cook, Vice Chair

##### DISTRICT 4

Al Czeczk, Assistant Secretary-

Treasurer

##### DISTRICT 5

Nancy M. Utke, Director\*

##### DISTRICT 6

Tim Kivi, Secretary

##### DISTRICT 7

Dan Breitbach, Director

#### PRESIDENT & CEO

Steve Johnson

\*Great River Energy Director Representative

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

*Itasca-Mantrap Electric Cooperative is an equal opportunity provider and employer.*



The SmartHub online and mobile app help you manage your account by providing many features including, but not limited to:

- Auto Pay
- Billing & Payment Information
- Outage Reporting
- Quick, Easy Communication
- Billing Alerts
- Detailed Usage Reports

Make account management easier and sign up today!

#### Statement of Nondiscrimination

Itasca-Mantrap is an equal opportunity provider and employer. In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the Cooperative prohibits discrimination based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by the Cooperative (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the Cooperative or USDA's TARGET Center at (202)720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800)877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at [http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint\\_filing\\_cust.html](http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html) and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

(1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).