



January 2025



## Wheat Belt Sponsors Area Youth For Youth Energy Leadership Camp

Each year, Wheat Belt Public Power District offers a unique opportunity for local youth to attend the Youth Energy Leadership Camp at Camp Comeca near Cozad, Nebraska. Held annually in July, the camp provides a valuable, all-expenses-paid experience for young people interested in learning about the world of rural electric programs and energy production.

The Youth Energy Leadership Camp is a five-day program filled with engaging workshops, dynamic demonstrations, and insightful presentations by regional experts. Campers dive into a wide range of topics related to the electric industry, from the technology behind power generation to the challenges and solutions in rural electricity distribution. By the end of the



camp, participants leave with a deeper understanding of how electricity is produced and managed, and the critical role it plays in rural communities.

A highlight of the camp experience is the exclusive tour of two major energy facilities: the Gerald Gentleman Power Station and the Kingsley Hydro-Electric Power Plant. These tours provide campers with a first-hand look at the processes involved in generating electricity, making the camp a truly immersive learning experience.

The camp is entirely free of charge to area youth, thanks to

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## LUCKY DRAWING

Congratulations to University of Nebraska High Plains “Agricultural Laboratory our November “Lucky Draw Winner”!

The High Plains Agricultural Laboratory is located six miles north of Sidney, Nebraska. The Laboratory has been in service since 1967.

The High Plains Agricultural Laboratory (HPAL) is a satellite unit of the University of Nebraska Lincoln and the Panhandle Research Extension and Education Center in Scottsbluff. Their mission is to improve the profitability of dryland crop and livestock production through applied research responsive to the needs of local farm and ranch producers.

HPAL received a \$50 credit on their account for their prompt payment. If you would like to be included in our next drawing, and avoid a \$5 delinquent fee, please send your payment before the 16th of the month.

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*Editor - Kelli Chaon*

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# Reflecting on Success

## Wheat Belt's Strategic Plan Achievements and the Path Forward

BY: LACEY GULBRANSON General Manager/CEO

December marked the final month of our strategic plan. Over the past three years we have been reporting on the progress of the plan. I am proud of the District for the progress and impact the execution of the strategic plan has had on the District, the employees and the customers. The strategic initiatives in the 2022-2024 plan were Culture, Customer Experience, Operational Efficiency, and Safety.

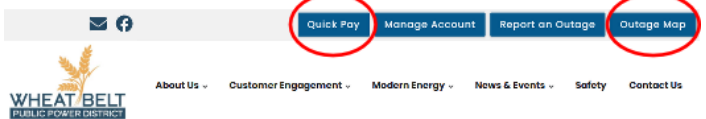
The key elements we set out to accomplish for the Culture initiative were 1) develop core values, 2) improve employee engagement, 3) implement performance development, and 4) refine policies & develop processes. In early 2022, the senior team worked with a leadership consultant to identify core values, these core values were then further

defined by all employees. Wheat Belt's core values are respect for individuals, produce quality work and value integrity. As for employee engagement, 2021 was the first year we measured employee engagement through Gallup. We then measured employee engagement in 2022 and 2023 – each

year we saw meaningful improvement to employee engagement. Performance development is the process of setting employee expectations, developing the workforce and reviewing employee performance. Over the past three years we have developed job descriptions, identified areas of employee development (lineman apprenticeship program, substation apprenticeship program, line design and staking certification, leadership development) and implemented an annual performance review process. Thirteen of our twenty-five employees are actively on an employee development path, the others are working through continued education as a part of their normal responsibilities. The fourth body of work for the culture initiative was refine policies & develop processes, in the past four years we have

developed an employee handbook, an emergency response plan and we have clarified many policies identifying responsibility and accountability for each board policy. Additionally, we have worked to define and document key processes across the company. We have seen the culture of Wheat Belt shift to a continuous improvement thought process to help ensure business continuity for the future.

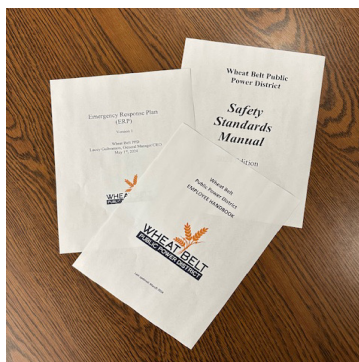
The Customer Experience initiative, as defined, was a lofty body of work and we knew going into it that it wouldn't be accomplished in the three-year plan...for that matter it will never be accomplished (you are all a valued part of the District and we would be doing you a disservice if we don't spend efforts continuing to improve our customer experience). In 2022, we conducted a customer service survey, thank you to those who participated, to understand how you feel we are doing and how that compares to the industry. The outcomes of the survey crafted initiative accomplishments over the past couple of years: we heard "provide more convenient ways to pay our bills" – we delivered the Quick Pay option on the www.wheatbelt.com website, we heard "we want to know more about the



qualified professional employees" – we are now featuring employee spotlights in the Nebraska Magazine and Facebook, and we heard "better communication of outages" – you will now find our outage map on our website. We have other items currently being worked on because of the invaluable feedback you provided to us, thank you!

The key items in the Operational Efficiency initiative were 1) Finance, 2) Drive Data Integrity, 3) Aging to Resilient Infrastructure. The finance body of work included refining the investment strategy, finding a new rate consultant to conduct a cost-of-service study, initiating the use of a statement of cash flow, and working with one of the industry financial institutions to develop our long-term financial forecast. As for data integrity, over the years we spent the first part of the plan collecting field data, validating the data and importing the verified data into our systems of record. This process has given us confidence and helped

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# NOVEMBER BOARD MEETING UPDATE



- The Budget Hearing kicked off the meeting. It was reported that the 2024 projected budget will come in approximately 650k less than budgeted. Wheat Belt Staff have been working to cut costs this year. The Tri-State power cost increase did not take effect until August 2024, which is where most of Wheat Belt's savings came into play.
- The 2025 Budget was presented to the Board and after discussion, the Board approved the 2025 budget as presented.
- Gulbranson, Wheat Belt General Manager, reported that we are working closely with FEMA representatives on storm damage and the Post Storm Damage Assessment. The Board approved the contract for the contractor who will be doing an inspection of 50 miles of line to certify the rebuild. This will be for future items that need to be repaired.
- Jay Spearman was present to discuss bond options and processes for the district. The Board of Directors asked questions and received clarification on long-term financing vs. short-term financing options and the best scenarios. Gulbranson proposed two resolutions for the Board to approve giving the District the option to issue bonds in 2025 if necessary.
- Operations Manager, Rollie Waite, reviewed the accomplishments of the 2024 Work Plan. He then reported what the 2025 Work Plan is comprised of.
- Rich Nelson, NREA Manager, was in attendance, along with Greg Strehle, NREA Board President. They discussed LB1370 which provides requirements for electric generation facilities, transmission lines, wind energy conversion systems, and retirement of a dispatchable electric generation facility and change provisions relating to public power districts.
- Gulbranson reminded the board that Wheat Belt's strategic planning session is planned for January 29 & 30th at Tri-State headquarters.

## Reflecting on Success cont'd from 3-B

define processes. Additionally, PCB (polychlorinated biphenyls) is an environmental hazard that was historically used in transformer oil. In 2022 and 2023 the line crew worked diligently to finish sampling transformer oil to then test and report that all transformers had been tested and any transformers out of specification were disposed of as required. We are still working to digitize our electric plant records. Since 2022 we have started working with contractor line crews to help accomplish our work plan at an accelerated pace, and have restructured the line crews to be more flexible and cross train skills. In 2023 the new four-year work plan was developed and presented to the board for approval. The April 2024 storm was a good reminder that no matter what is done to improve the infrastructure for resiliency there are things out of our control.....plan for the worst and hope for the best.



Safety was an initiative placed in the strategic plan to reinforce the continued importance of safety in our industry and in the workplace. The areas of focus were to 1) keep safety important and 2) embrace a safety improvement plan. Monthly our employees meet for a safety meeting. We are contracted with the Nebraska Rural Electric Association to provide job and safety training, and at least six times a year their facilitators are onsite communicating and training employees on safety topics. Additionally, we have a safety committee that meets quarterly to plan the safety meetings, review incidents, and define the safety improvement plan for the year. Over the past few years, we have focused on OSHA 10-hour training, where nearly all employees have completed this course. Additionally, we have identified topics such as marking circuits/phases coming out of the substations and conducting more crew observations. Safety must remain a key component of the business.

We have been busy over the past few years, and we have confidence that we have worked on the right things for the Board of Directors, for the customers, and for the employees. I am proud of the efforts the employees invested in the strategic plan and I'm looking forward to what the new strategic plan has for the District.

*Wheat Belt Sponsors Area Youth cont'd from 3-A*



the sponsorship from Wheat Belt Public Power District. This generous support ensures that all eligible youth in the area have the chance to participate, regardless

of financial background. It's an invaluable opportunity for young people to learn about energy, leadership, and the importance of rural electric systems.

For many, the Youth Energy Leadership Camp is not just an educational experience but also a chance to develop lifelong connections with peers who share similar interests and values, all while fostering a sense of responsibility for the energy systems that power their communities.

Contact Shelley Peterson at Wheat Belt PPD for more information or check out the Youth Tab on our website, [wheatbelt.com](http://wheatbelt.com).

## ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP OF THE MONTH

Taking steps to help your home heating system run more efficiently can reduce energy use and lower your winter bills. Check to see if any air vents around your home are blocked by furniture, curtains or other items. Obstructed vents force your heating system to work harder than necessary and can increase pressure in the ductwork, causing cracks and leaks to form. If necessary, consider purchasing a vent extender, which can be placed over a vent to redirect air flow from underneath furniture or other obstructions.

Source: [energy.gov](http://energy.gov)



## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Jennifer Eckhardt, *Dalton*

### DIRECTOR

Collin Anderson, *Dalton*

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### GENERAL MANAGER / CEO

Lacey Gulbranson

### FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES MANAGER

Tim Jones

### OPERATIONS MANAGER

Rollie Waite

### FIELD ENGINEER

Mark Cape

### MANAGER OF TECHNOLOGIES

Jim Weeda

### CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT MANAGER

Kelli Chaon

### OFFICE HOURS:

7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

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## Our Mission

Deliver electricity safely, reliably and efficiently.