2026 N.D. REC ENGINEERING AND OPERATIONS CONFERENCE
& EXHIBITOR SHOWCASE

Co-sponsored by: The N.D. REC Engineering and Operations Association & the N.D. Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives (NDAREC)

CONFERENCE DETAILS

Date: Dec. 1–3, 2026
Location: DoubleTree by Hilton
825 East Beaton Drive, West Fargo, N.D.

EXHIBITOR SHOWCASE

Date: Dec. 2, 2026 (5 p.m. – 7 p.m.)
Location: DoubleTree by Hilton
825 East Beaton Drive, West Fargo, N.D.

Join us at the annual conference!

The conference is intended for engineers, line superintendents, operations and construction personnel. Consulting engineers and NDAREC associate members are also invited to attend.

"What's New, What's Next" session on Dec. 2

NDAREC associate members and other vendors will have the opportunity to provide a five-minute update on their products and services, in advance of the Exhibitor Showcase. The Exhibitor Showcase is scheduled for 5-7 p.m. on Dec. 2 at the Double Tree by Hilton, West Fargo. There are limited time slots for this session so registrations will be honored on a first-come, first-served basis for those companies who are registered for the Exhibitor Showcase. Registration is required for "What's New, What's Next."

CONFERENCE AGENDA

Tuesday, Dec. 1 — General Session

11:30 a.m.-1 p.m. Conference Registration

1 p.m. Welcome and Opening Announcements

1:15 p.m. **Tips for Specifying and Purchasing Transformers**
Craig Turner, senior consultant, Katama Tech Inc./Utility Consulting

This opening session will address general transformer design issues, plant inspections, transformer manufacturing tests, and ideas for your transformer specifications and purchasing methods.

2 p.m. **2026 Cooperative Transformer Teardown**
Sherry Johnson, P.E., electrical engineer; Leo Williams, electrical engineer; and Mitchell Heltemes, P.E., supervisory electrical engineer – STAR Energy Services

Participants will gain insight on a three-day, hands-on evaluation of new and used overhead and pad mount service transformers from multiple manufacturers. The focus will be on overall construction and build quality, examination of key components and manufacturing practices, including paint thickness, welding, enclosure construction, connection methods, and the different core and coil configurations. The presentation will compare these findings across manufacturers and highlight notable differences, strengths, and areas of concern observed during the inspections.

2:45 p.m. Refreshment Break

3 p.m. **Engineering Insight for Everyone: Using Engineering Analysis Throughout the Enterprise**
Jeremy Lang, product manager, National Information Solutions Cooperative (NISC)

NISC is making detailed electric distribution engineering data available beyond a small group of specialists by building web front ends for system issues. This includes overloaded devices, voltage stability, load forecasting and system planning. This gives more users the information they need to make faster, better-informed decisions about improvements to the distribution network.

4:45 p.m. **Adjournment for the day**

5:30 p.m. **Bull N' Beer Welcome Reception – Fargo Billiards and Gastropub, 3234 43rd St. S, Fargo**
For conference attendees

NDAREC
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Wednesday, Dec. 2 — General Session

7:30 a.m. **Hot Breakfast Buffet**

7:30 a.m. **Engineering Managers Roundtable**
Engineering managers are invited to go through the hot breakfast buffet and then meet in the Elm 7 Room for roundtable discussion.

8 a.m. **Underground Cable Life Span and Inspection**
Jason Settle, P.E., Hi-Line Engineering

9:30 a.m. **Grounding for Underground Systems**
Jason Settle, P.E., Hi-Line Engineering

10:15 a.m. Refreshment Break

10:30 a.m. **Underground Fault Locating and Splicing**
Jason Settle, P.E., Hi-Line Engineering

12 p.m. Group Lunch

12:45 p.m. **Beyond the Fuse: Practical Coordination of Distribution System Protection**
Jason Settle, P.E., Hi-Line Engineering

2:15 p.m. Refreshment Break

2:30 p.m. **Improving Service Quality for Long Feeders**
Jason Settle, P.E., Hi-Line Engineering

4 p.m. **"What's New, What's Next" in Products and Services**
Time is reserved for NDAREC associate members and vendors to give 5-minute updates. Companies must be registered for the Exhibitor Showcase to participate in this session.

5 p.m. Adjournment

5-7 p.m. **Exhibitor Showcase and Social**

Thursday, Dec. 3 — General Session

7:30 a.m. Hot Breakfast Buffet

8:15 a.m. **Business Meeting of the N.D. Engineering and Operations Association**

8:45 a.m. **From Peers to Partners! Roundtable Discussion**

This time on the agenda is dedicated to creating a collaborative space for knowledge exchange, problem-solving with your peers, and building relationships that outlast the conference. The roundtable discussion is a great opportunity to "admire and acquire" ideas and best practices!

9:30 a.m. **Energy Audits: Challenges & Solutions**
Josh Schaffner, energy services manager, Capital Electric Cooperative

Updated metering and load control capabilities give energy auditors access to more detailed, timely information about when and how energy is being used. This shifts auditing procedures from relying primarily on snapshots and estimates toward analyzing interval data, load patterns, peak demand, and controllable loads to identify opportunities. Auditors can then make more targeted recommendations and use ongoing meter and control data to verify savings, evaluate load-shifting strategies, and refine energy management over time.

10:15 a.m. Refreshment Break

10:30 a.m. **USDA Rural Utilities Service (RUS) Field Representative Update**
Eddie Thompson, general field representative – electric programs, USDA RUS

This update will provide a general overview of RUS electric programs, including new and anticipated funding opportunities.

RUS Environmental and Historic Preservation Division (EHPD) Updates
Russell Japuntich, environmental protection specialist, USDA RUS

Russell's presentation will include a summary of current updates including the new USDA National Environmental Policy Act regulations, requirements for project submissions, and ways to shorten review times.

11:15 a.m. **To Boldly Go: Stepping Out from Ordinary to Extraordinary**
Ray McElroy, former NFL football player, professional speaker and founder of Ray of Hope on Earth

What separates those who experience success from those who constantly find themselves falling short? How do individuals and organizations "boldly go" where they have never been before? Ray's message will focus on how ordinary people with average talent accomplish extraordinary things. He'll also address perceived reality, the effects of negative self-talk, and offer inspiration for individuals and organizations to create momentum toward greatness!

12:15 p.m. **Conference Evaluations and Adjournment**

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Craig Turner



Sherry Johnson



Leo Williams



Mitchell Heltemes



Jeremy Lang



Jason Settle



Josh Schaffner



Eddie Thompson



Russell Japuntich



Ray McElroy

MEET THE PRESENTERS

Craig Turner is a professional engineer, with more than 40 years of experience at several utilities. His experience includes transmission and distribution design, operations, relaying and planning.

He is a member of the Katama Technologies team who works with cooperatives and municipal utilities, to identify and implement technology. This involves helping each utility find their right fit, through the selection and implementation process with various utility software systems, including AMI, load management, SCADA and OMS.

Sherry Johnson began her career in 2021 as an interconnection engineer with Otter Tail Power Company. In 2023, she joined STAR Energy Services, LLC, where she currently serves as an electrical engineer supporting STAR's northwestern Minnesota clients.

Sherry earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Electrical Engineering from the University of Minnesota Duluth and is a licensed Professional Engineer in both Minnesota and North Dakota.

Leo Williams has been working with STAR Energy Services, LLC as an engineer for a year and a half. At STAR, he works with the North Engineering Team under Mitchell Heltemes.

He received his bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from North Dakota State University in 2025. While in college he completed an internship with STAR.

Mitchell Heltemes began his career in 2015 as a distribution system engineer with STAR Energy Services. He currently serves as the Supervisory Electrical Engineer for STAR's northern Minnesota and eastern North Dakota clients and oversees a team of three additional electrical engineers throughout the region.

Mitchell earned his bachelor's degree in Electrical Engineering from North Dakota State University and is a licensed professional engineer in Minnesota.

Jeremy Lang serves as the product manager at NISC with more than 23 years of experience. He currently leads a team of 5 product managers focused on operations, outage management, ticket management, work management and operations analytics/DEW.

Jason Settle is a senior project manager at Hi-Line Engineering, a GDS Associates, Inc. company with more than 30 years of experience in the power engineering industry. He prepares engineering studies, performs distribution line design, and performs work order inspection for cooperatives in multiple states.

Jason is a Hi-Line Engineering training instructor and teaches courses in distribution line design, application and use of the National Electrical Safety Code, distribution engineering fundamentals, overcurrent protection, transformer sizing and banking, and electric distribution operations.

Prior to joining Hi-Line Engineering, Jason spent 17 years at Pioneer Electric Cooperative as the Vice President of Engineering and Operations for 10 years and as a system engineer for seven years.

He earned his Bachelor of Science degree in Electrical Engineering Technology and Math from Southern Polytechnic State University. He is a Registered Professional Engineer in Alabama, Georgia, Indiana and Virginia.

Josh Schaffner is the Energy Services Manager with Capital Electric Cooperative. He holds degrees in electronic technology and operations management. He is an IGSHPA certified installer, N.A.T.E certified technician, a member of

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the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) REWIRED task force, and an energy audit trainer for NRECA. He has worked with renewable energy for more than 20 years, and currently manages the cooperative's geothermal, solar and electric vehicle programs. His expertise in renewable energy has taken him to projects in Dubai, Alaska and throughout North Dakota.

Eddie Thompson has been the General Field Representative (GFR) for North Dakota since October 2025 and has been with USDA RUS since 2015. In addition to his GFR role, Eddie manages the Rural Energy Savings Program (RESP). He has also held roles with USDA as the Community Programs State Office Specialist for Louisiana and Community Development Specialist.

Eddie received a Bachelor of Science degree in psychology from Louisiana State University at Alexandria and received a Master of Public Administration degree at the University of Louisiana at Monroe.

Russell Japuntich is an environmental protection specialist for USDA Rural Utilities Service under the Environmental and Historic Preservation Division. He has more than 20 years of federal government experience, specializing in NEPA, and has worked for RUS for 2½ years. He lives in Gunnison, Colo. with his wife and two children and enjoys hunting, fishing and watching the Packers.

Ray McElroy, a former NFL player, has spent more than 20 years inspiring individuals and organizations through his "Life Beyond the Game" initiative. Known for his unique blend of entertainment and powerful messages of desire, discipline and dedication, Ray has impacted thousands across various industries.

Beyond speaking, Ray is dedicated to community transformation. He leads youth programs, mentoring more than 80 students weekly, and hosts football camps for at-risk youth through his non-profit, A Ray of Hope on Earth. As a team chaplain for the Chicago Bears and associate pastor, Ray's work extends to faith-based initiatives, where he partners with his wife, Michelle, to coach couples in strengthening their relationships.

His mission is simple: to help others achieve their best — whether in sports, business or personal growth.

REGISTRATION & EVENT DETAILS

PLANNING COMMITTEE

Braden Klose
Dakota Valley Electric

Chris Pierson
Northern Plains Electric

Mitchell Nistler
Nodak Electric

Ryan Soyring
Cass County Electric

Tyler Hill
HDR

Pamela Clark-Stein
NDAREC

REGISTRATION & FEE

Deadline: Please register by **Nov. 20**.

Online Registration: www.ndarec.com/ndarec-education-programs

Registration Fee: $550 / person (covers course materials, meals and refreshment breaks).

HOTEL ACCOMMODATIONS

A block of sleeping rooms is reserved for Dec. 1 & 2 at **DoubleTree by Hilton** and **Homewood Suites by Hilton** (825 East Beaton Drive, West Fargo). Room Block Release Date: Nov. 20

- **DoubleTree by Hilton:** (701) 551-1020
  NDAREC Engineering & Operations - Doubletree Room Block
- **Homewood Suites:** (701) 551-5800
  NDAREC Engineering & Operations - Homewood Suites Room Block

CANCELLATIONS & ACCOMMODATIONS

If you need to cancel your registration, please notify Pamela Clark-Stein at pstein@ndarec.com 14 days in advance of the program. If notice is provided 14 days or more in advance, there is no cancellation fee. If notice is provided less than 14 days in advance, a cancellation fee of $70/day will be charged. Please note: Substitutions are permitted at no extra charge if NDAREC is notified of the substitution prior to the conference.

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