

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS?

Cooperative Principle #2 – Democratic Member Control



Steve Lucas, CEO

You, as the members of Scenic Rivers Energy Cooperative, elect the directors that comprise the nine-person SREC Board of Directors. Each year, three members are elected to ensure continuity of our leadership, from our nine districts. (See page 18 for specific information on our 2021 election).

But what exactly are the duties and responsibilities of elected directors?

There are two main functions of the board of directors—hiring the chief executive officer, me, and fiduciary responsibility. But that statement grossly underestimates the work and tasks that each board member fulfills.

When board members are elected, and throughout their tenure as a director, they attend a variety of seminars, conferences, and training sessions to stay up-to-date. Because the electric utility industry is complicated and ever evolving, we want informed directors who are able to make good decisions. They attend annual trainings locally, within the state, and nationally. Board members share their training with each other to maximize the benefits of the education and to ensure our board of directors is serving our membership to their utmost ability. All current board members receive mandatory training and many have earned Board Leadership and Gold Certification credentials, ensuring that they are continually prepared to lead our cooperative.

Board members attend a minimum of 12 monthly meetings. Directors spend about 15–20 hours per month reading in order to stay up-to-date with national, state, and local energy

news. Preparation for each regular monthly meeting includes reviewing financial and operational reports that are provided by the SREC staff.

Additionally, there are several committees within the board. Directors share the responsibility for writing and reviewing policies, strategic planning, overseeing Operation Round Up funds, and the planning and spending for the Federated Youth Foundation, as well as several others. Committee meetings are held regularly as well and require additional preparation.

As stated above, one of the biggest responsibilities that the board has is managing the finances of the cooperative. Our chief financial officer provides monthly reports to the directors and is responsive to their specific questions. To help the board with its financial oversight, the board hires an auditing firm each year to perform an annual audit. An Audit Committee is named (from current, non-board members representing each district) and convened annually to review that audit as well. The audit is then presented to the full membership at our annual meeting, held traditionally in April.

We have been continually fortunate to be served by directors who have acted with due care, dedication, and loyalty to you, the members, and to the cooperative. They have in the past, and continue to act with care for our mission, attention to the needs of our membership, and an ability to look forward acting on the best interest of the whole.

While you may not be interested in becoming a director, I would encourage all our members to participate in your cooperative by voting in your district's elections. You can find more information on our website, www.sre.coop, or by following us on Facebook.



MEMBER PHOTO OF THE MONTH

December's winning photo in SREC's 2020 Member Photo Contest is "Hoarfrost Morning" by Linda Hanson of Argyle. Winning photos from our 2020 contest are featured in our 2021 Member Photo Calendar.

Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

Energy bills can increase during winter for a variety of reasons, like houseguests, more time spent at home, and shorter days and longer nights. Small actions, like turning down your thermostat, replacing old bulbs with LEDs, and washing clothes in cold water can help you save.





Making Christmas Memories

AT COOKS' WOODS TREE FARM

Just a few miles east of Fennimore, down a gently rolling county road, you can look out and see the Cooks' Woods Christmas Tree Farm. Driving down the main driveway you see the farm buildings spread out as expected but instead of cattle and corn, the fields are full of trees—Christmas trees specifically. It is a rather unexpected site in Southwest Wisconsin, where the majority of these trees are not native. Now, after 25 years, the trees are well established and for many area families, visiting Cooks' Woods is an annual tradition.

The 250+-acre farm has been owned and operated by the Cook family since 1953 and originally the farm was nothing out of the ordinary. Dave indicated that his parents raised livestock, mainly hogs and cattle, plus the grain to feed them. The farm was a dream come true for his parents, who had been sharecroppers in the Shullsburg area for many years prior to purchasing the farm land.

So why plow under your crops, sell your animals, and plant trees? Why take such a risk? Perhaps the answers were not obvious at first, but with time it is clear that the reward was worth the risk to Dave and Barb.

After selling some timber in the early 1990s, the Cooks became aware of the unique landscape they owned. They joined the Wisconsin Christmas Trees Producers and asked lots of questions. The slopes and soil

on their farm could be conducive to pine trees and with the help of a friend, and lots of research, the farm was transformed before their very eyes. Twenty-five years later the Cooks couldn't be happier growing Christmas trees.

Families are welcome to start visiting the farm, which has been opened since November 21. Dave indicated that they are open daily from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. in order to accommodate working families and their busy schedules. Past visitors will notice some changes to provide for additional safety in light of the current health concerns. Dave and Barb want their guests

to know that their safety is important, and modifications are being made to allow the family traditions to continue this year.

Upon arriving, greeters will hand you a saw you can borrow, if you didn't bring your own. (Chainsaws are not allowed). They will direct you towards one of the half-dozen varieties of Christmas trees available (such as White Pine, Balsam or Frazier Firs), or you are welcome to roam the hillsides in search of the perfect tree. While you can select a pre-cut tree if you are short on time, most families come for the whole experience, including free hot chocolate and coffee on weekends.

After selecting that perfect tree, you might get some help from an area UTV/ATV driver to haul your find back to the



Dave and Barb Cook and the 2020 Grand Champion Wreath.
(courtesy of the Wisconsin Christmas Tree Producers Association)

barn. There you can watch the tree in the “shaker,” which gets rid of the loose needles and any other items you might not want to take home. It is a sight to see the trees taking their rides in the shaker, and kids of all ages enjoy watching the action over and over.

You can also take advantage of the free tree baling service. This is a great way to get your tree ready for the ride home and the best way to get a large tree into your home. The baling machine folds the branches in and encases the entire tree in netting, which can be cut off once your tree is in the perfect position at your home.

In addition to growing Christmas trees, the Cooks create garland, wreaths, and many more decorative pieces. This year, they have plans to build over a mile of garland. The construction process is slow going and requires a specific machine. Garland is very popular and there are ordering options available on the website as well as at the farm.

If there is one thing you don't want to miss during your visit to Cooks' Woods it is the wreaths. In fact, last year Cooks' Woods won the grand prize in the 2020 Wisconsin Christmas Tree Producer Associations wreath-making contest. While bragging rights are nice, it is important to note that the prize for winning is that Cooks' Woods will have the honor of creating a matching set of wreaths for the governor this holiday season. (*See story on page 12.*) Barb and her team have fun creating the trendy wreath designs each year and you can be sure that the products you take home have all been created by hand. The team has been working since early November and



there are many design options available both on their website and at the farm.

Cooks' Woods participated in a special new project this year, having built over 40 wreaths that were laid on veterans gravesites at their local cemetery. Having worked with the township, the Cooks had learned of this national program and plan to continue participating in the future. The wreaths were donated and laid to honor our veterans on November 11. Visitors can find the Ebenezer Cemetery just to the southwest of the farm

A visit to Cooks Woods on a quiet, warm, and sunny day in November does not quite feel the same as a visit on a snowy day in December, but you can sense the coming excitement in the air. Employees were busy creating decorations, constructing wreaths, and preparing the grounds for the hundreds of visitors soon to appear. If you listened

closely, and closed your eyes, you could practically hear the sounds of carols being sung as families walked through the snow-covered trees searching for a tree to call their own. You could almost see the children running through the snow while older teens throw snowballs at each other, families smiling and enjoying an outing together. Such tradition and warm feelings are what make the risk taken by Barb and Dave Cook over 25 years ago so utterly worth it.

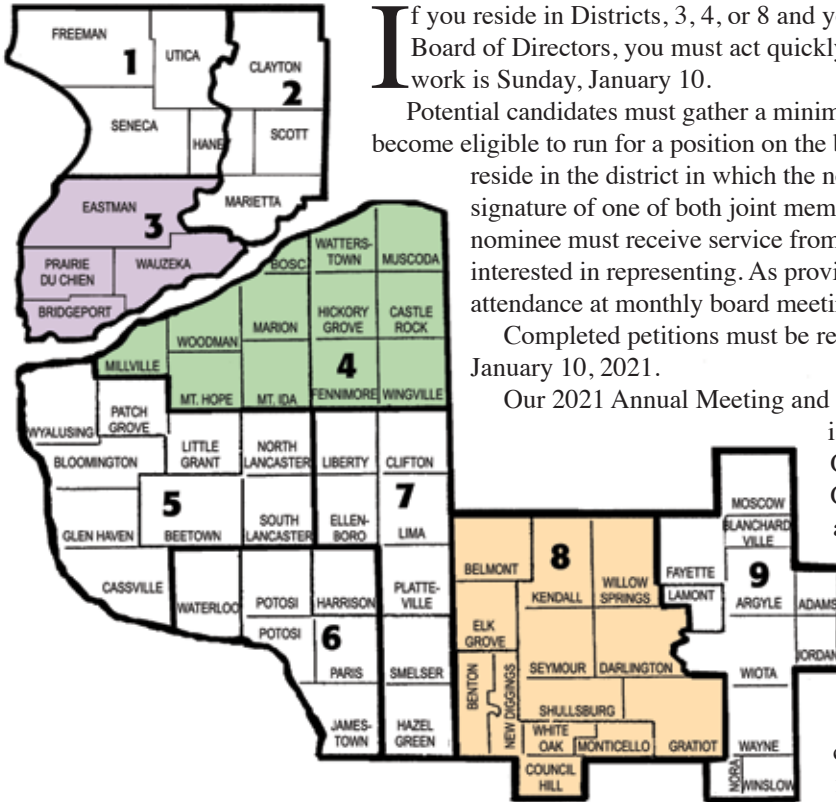
Cooks' Woods is located at 2176 Ebenezer Road, Fennimore 53809. You can reach them by phone at 608-943-8099 or 608-778-6954, by email at dave@cookswoods.biz or barb@cookswoods.biz, or find them on the web at www.cookswoods.biz. — *Judy Mims*



After finding the perfect Christmas tree, guests can shop for wreaths, garland, and other decorations that are available in the Greenery Room. (*Photo Courtesy of the Cooks Woods Christmas Tree Farm*)



DIRECTOR CANDIDATE PAPERWORK DUE JANUARY 10, 2021



If you reside in Districts, 3, 4, or 8 and you are interested in running for a seat on the SREC Board of Directors, you must act quickly. The deadline for turning in the necessary paperwork is Sunday, January 10.

Potential candidates must gather a minimum of 15 signatures on the petition form in order to become eligible to run for a position on the board. Petitions must be signed by 15 members who reside in the district in which the nominee resides. In the case of a joint membership, the signature of one of both joint members counts as one (1) signature per the Bylaws. The nominee must receive service from the cooperative, at the address in the district they are interested in representing. As provided by the Bylaws, directors receive a per diem for attendance at monthly board meetings. The current per diem is \$500 per meeting.

Completed petitions must be received at the SREC office in Lancaster no later than January 10, 2021.

Our 2021 Annual Meeting and election will be held on Saturday, April 10, and is tentatively scheduled to be held in person at the Grant County Youth & Ag Building in Lancaster. Current incumbents Charles Simmons, Ellen Conley, and Steve Carpenter, respectively, are all seeking re-election. Petition forms are available on our website or by calling our offices.

For additional information about the petition process or qualifications for directors, please refer to the Bylaws, the sample petition form, and the director district map which are available on the cooperative's website at www.sre.coop. Please feel free to contact us at 800-236-2141 x554.

ADD ENERGY EFFICIENCY TO YOUR HOLIDAY LIST

Rebate Submission Deadline Approaching

If you are planning to ring in the new year with new appliances or lighting, please keep energy efficiency, rebate qualifications, and rebate deadlines in mind. Details and rebate application forms can be found on our website at sre.coop/energy-rebates. Rebates are available in the following categories: Appliances, HVAC, Water Heaters,

Lighting, Electric Heating, Agricultural and several others.

Before heading out shopping, we encourage you to consider the following:

- Is the item Energy Star rated?
- Is the bargain priced item the most efficient?
- Look for the Lighting Facts guide to LED lights and consider the



energy savings.

- Will our rebate form require specific documentation from the vendor?

If you have questions about a rebate, please feel free to call us at 800-236-2141 ext. 563.



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Board of Directors

- Chuck Simmons, Chairman
- Donald Schaefer, Vice Chairman
- Sandra Davidson, Secretary-Treasurer
- Ellen Conley, Asst. Secretary-Treasurer
- Larry Butson, Director
- Steve Carpenter, Director
- Delbert Reuter, Director
- Jack Larson, Director
- Marcus Saegrove, Director