



# PRECorp News

FEBRUARY 2025

# RELIABILITY **2025**

## Fire and ice (and small birds) force outage numbers higher

By Tim Velder, PRECorp Marketing/Communications

If it seemed to you there were more power outages for PRECorp members in 2024, you would be correct.

While there are a variety of reasons why outage numbers increased, the historic drought and fire weather precautions of August and September 2024 took the top spot.

There were also two ice storm events and fire weather restoration challenges which kept the power off for longer than expected.

There are no average years when it comes to weather-caused mayhem, but on average, PRECorp members experience a total of 327 minutes of power outages in a 12-month period. That’s about 5.5 hours a year and those are often contained in one or two outage events with lengthy restoration times.

Even with the higher frequency of outages in 2024, PRECorp members find that when they flip the switch, power is there 99.9% of the time.

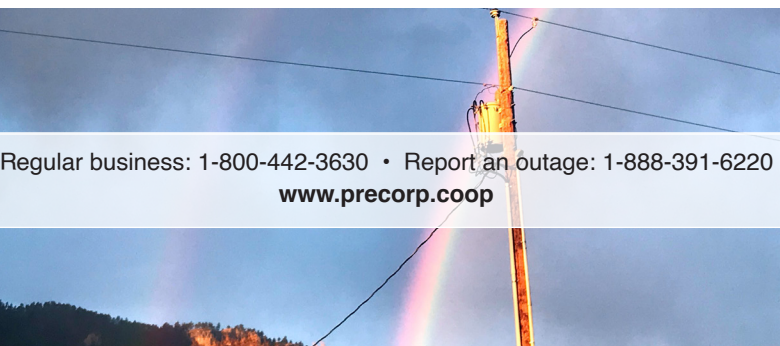
Since 2013, PRECorp’s outage minutes have trended to half that, or only 3 hours per member. This is attributed to a dedicated maintenance effort

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PRECorp photo

PRECorp crews replace poles in a burned area during a 2024 wildfire.



Regular business: 1-800-442-3630 • Report an outage: 1-888-391-6220  
[www.precorp.coop](http://www.precorp.coop)

### In This Issue:

CEO Straight Talk

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Darla Mouat retires

We have a podcast!

Update your contact info





BRIAN MILLS,  
CEO

## Telephone Townhall meeting Wednesday, February 26

Plan to join me on Wednesday, February 26, for our first Telephone Town Hall of the year. I will be joined by PRECorp engineering staff as we share some insights on PRECorp's load and construction forecasts and a look ahead to 2025. We will call PRECorp members at 6:30 p.m. to start the call. Also, join us on Facebook live, or dial toll free 888-886-6602 to participate via phone.

If we have said it once, we've said it a million times collectively throughout our storied past. "Our Goal is to provide you, our member-owners, with safe, \_\_\_\_\_, affordable energy". You fill in the blank.

What did you come up with? "Sometimes?" "Hope so." "Best-we-can?" How about "Reliable?" That sounds better. "Reliable Energy."

Let's slide back in time to the mid-40s when they used that same line for defining the cooperative's purpose. While the idea or definition of reliable energy hasn't changed in the last 80 years, there is something different around the idea of "Reliable Energy". As you can see in the other articles in this month's issue, our ability to deliver reliable power continues to evolve. And in stride with that, our member's expectations or what they are willing to accept in terms of reliable power continues to tighten as well...rightfully so. It is fair to say, this natural relationship will continue to evolve even further.

The difference around the idea of reliability, I think, comes down to the amount of our respective livelihoods that has continued to shift more and more in terms of its dependency on electricity. There is really no comparison to when we started in the mid-40s to today. So maybe a way to think about it is that reliability has become much more urgent in today's world.

Allow me to share just a little more perspective on how serving reliable energy has changed. Ten years after we started, our total plant in 1955 amounted to 2,586 meters and 2,229 miles of line. Today, we have nearly 27,000 meters, more than 11,000 miles of line and 50 substations, and we serve a peak load of 325 megawatts. What has led to our ability to continue to grow our reliability while adding more and more plant? While there are a number of reasons, I will mention a couple.

First, technology. The type of equipment that we use can help resolve one-time, hour-long outages to momentary blips. The quality of power that we distribute is better. The resiliency of the equipment to withstand adverse weather has improved. The AMI meters and SCADA system allows us to monitor and manage the system from our dispatch center. These are several examples of how technology has improved and enhanced our ability to serve electricity more reliably year over year.

The second reason I would cite is the quality of people who comprise the PRECorp Team. I have said before, reliable power can only be served by reliable people. It is the work that our engineering team does with our system planning and design coupled with the lineman and other field staff's construction, maintenance, and outage restoration.

The Member Service Reps that handle your calls, requests, and questions, all supported by a strong team of Accounting, IT, and Administrative professionals is a primary driver of our reliability. There are now close to 125 team members that unite in their purpose each day to serve you, our member-owners. We have three objectives we work to achieve in our service to you: A+ Member Experience, Great Rates, and being your Trusted Energy Partner. Serving "Reliable Energy" is a large part of all three objectives.

We know that reliability will continue to grow in importance as electricity demand increases. Challenge Accepted! Our strategy to meet this challenge? 1) continue to develop and invest in our people, and; 2) innovate with technology. The team takes pride in getting reliability right and there is no one else better to get it right for than you, our member-owners.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian Mills". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in the bottom right corner of the page.

## Calendar:

The list of PRECorp events includes Board meeting dates, holidays, telephone town hall meetings, and more.

- **Tuesday, February 18** - PRECorp Board of Directors meeting, 9:30 a.m., Gillette
- **Tuesday, February 25** - PRECorp Foundation Board meeting, 9 a.m., Gillette
- **Wednesday, February 26** - Telephone Town Hall meeting with CEO Brian Mills, 6:30 p.m.
- **Monday, March 3** - All-Employee Meeting, PRECorp **OFFICES CLOSED**. Call 888-391-6220 for an outage.
- **Tuesday, March 18** - PRECorp Board of Directors meeting, 9:30 a.m., Gillette
- **Tuesday, March 25** - PRECorp Foundation Board meeting, 9 a.m., teleconference
- **Wednesday, May 28** - Telephone Town Hall meeting with CEO Brian Mills, 6:30 p.m.
- **Saturday, June 7** - Durham Ranch Buffalo Stampede 5K/10K Walk/Run
- **Friday, June 13** - Deadline for PRECorp Director candidates to file nominating petitions
- **Saturday, August 23** - 80<sup>th</sup> PRECorp Annual Meeting, Gillette Cam-Plex
- **Monday, September 8** - PRECorp Foundation Golf Scramble, Golf Club at Devils Tower

## Darla Mouat retires after 27 years

When Darla Mouat retired from PRECorp on January 2, she ended a 27-year career in the Member Service department.

In April 1998, Darla – a military veteran - was a stay-at-home wife and mom in Sundance who was considering full-time work in the community. “I saw a ‘Help Wanted’ ad in the local newspaper for a Consumer Accountant [at PRECorp],” she said. “I was told by several locals that I would never get the job, and I submitted my resume and application with no hopes of getting a call.” Darla not only got an interview with the member services hiring team of Dolly Schloredt, Joanne Hoffine, and Larry Kreuter, she was hired for the job.

Darla started at PRECorp during a critical time in its history. Two cooperatives were joining forces. Tri-County Electric Association had recently merged with Sheridan-Johnson REA to form the new cooperative – Powder River Energy Corporation. Also, this new venture included a transition to a new computer software billing program. “I’ve been flying by the seat of my pants ever since,” Mouat said. “But my priority has always been assisting our members. It has been exciting to experience the many changes that continue to happen that make us take better and more efficient care of our members.”

Specifically, Mouat recalls two initiatives that changed the cooperative for the better. When she started, the billing process began with human meter readers who obtained readings in person. Nearly every week, Mouat and others on the Member Service and Billing team would enter and verify meter readings, print bills, stuff the bills in envelopes and run them on a conveyor machine to stamp them for transport in bins to the post office for mailing.

“The machine acted up often, and it was like trying to fix a small aircraft,” Darla said. “Then, something wonderful happened. Our metering infrastructure was switched out so that meters would send in readings electronically, and our software provider handled the billing process for us. It felt like a national holiday for me.”

Secondly, Mouat said the development of the Operation RoundUp® program in 2007 and the creation of the Powder River Energy Foundation as a charitable arm of the cooperative, changed things dramatically in how the cooperative cares for the communities it serves. “Most of our members are happy to participate (in Operation RoundUp®). This program is so important to me, that I am donating the money that would have been spent on my retirement party, to the Foundation.”

Darla had been planning to retire to the tropics “and become a beach bum,” but the sudden passing of her father in 2024 (and two hurricanes in Florida) influenced her to stay closer to family and see where life leads from here. Having three adult children and two grandchildren in the area is also part of that decision.

Darla is grateful for PRECorp’s linkage to the past and focus on the future. “I love that our members can still come into our local offices and take care of business. And, those members who cannot, or choose not to come to an office, have tools to assist them in the way that best works for them.” These include automated payment systems, outage reporting, account management, and other online and mobile phone resources. “These improvements through the years not only help our members, but employees as well. No more typewriters or paper files!”



Mouat

# Reliability...

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to inspect, detect, protect and repair equipment before it causes an outage. Storm hardening is one aspect of that, but extreme events where wind and ice combine to tear things apart, cannot be avoided.

Then came the firecracker dry conditions in August/September 2024. A half-million acres burned in northeast Wyoming counties and caused more than a million dollars in damage just to PRECorp infrastructure, and repairs to hundreds of poles and miles of line. Even though PRECorp line crews worked to rebuild - often in the midst of the flames - outages for many members lasted days, not hours.

As always, there are two types of power outages that PRECorp personnel deal with – controllable and uncontrollable.

Controllable outages link directly to maintenance and inspections and replacement of worn equipment. There are times when these repairs can be done safely and more quickly by taking a planned outage during daylight hours. These outages include substations where multiple projects can be done all in one outage with coordinated crews and delivery of equipment.

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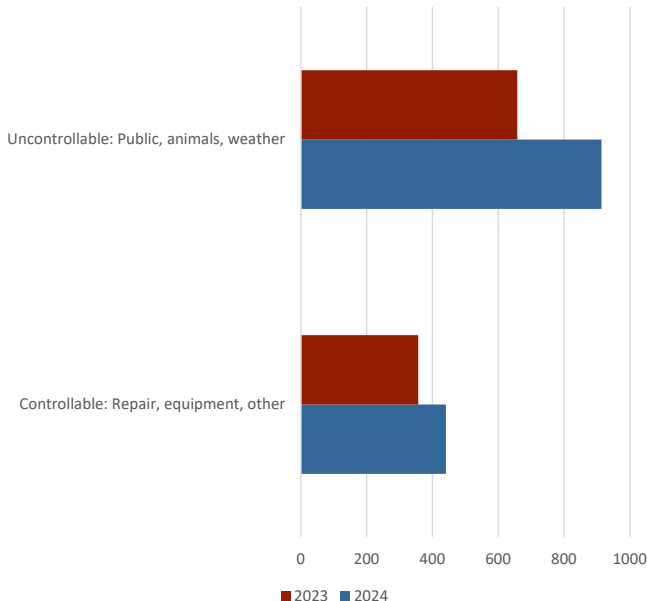
Crews trailer in supplies for a 2024 fire north of Gillette.



PRECORP photos

PRECORP crews repair downed line in the forest after a 2024 spring snowstorm.

### Controllable vs. Uncontrollable outage causes



# RELIABILITY *of the network.*

## Cyber security adapting to new threats

By Tim Velder, PRECorp Marketing/Communications

One never wants to spike the football when it comes to cybersecurity and computer hacks. Avoidance of current dangers is no guarantee against future attacks.

In 2024, PRECorp did not suffer any economic or reputational damages from data breaches or hacks into our systems by bad actors. Thanks to a robust system of employee training, testing, exercises, and scouting of new external threats, PRECorp has been adapting to the ever-dangerous capabilities of people who want to do harm to the electrical grid.

One example, according to PRECorp Cybersecurity Program Manager Joe Chesney, is an attack on the technology that operates the physical infrastructure of the electric grid. Electric utilities of any size can be targeted, and the concept is to interrupt feedback systems so human controllers get bad data from these devices and cannot take proper actions to prevent an outage. Or worse, utility controllers cannot prevent a major event from shutting down an entire substation.

While many hacks in the past were quick strikes when a group infiltrated a system and immediately caused havoc, today's attackers break in and wait. They spend time collecting information, observing responses to information, and steal months or years of information. "Ultimately, they could damage equipment, cause outages, or threaten the safety of our employees," Chesney said.

The risks to critical systems are increasing, Chesney said, and the technology that individuals and companies use every day are under constant threat. Ransomware attacks, shutdowns of critical systems, and jamming up supply chains are common across the globe.

Chesney cited an example of a Chinese-sponsored group called Volt Typhoon. They were recently discovered infiltrating a midsized electric utility where they downloaded sensitive data over a 300+ day timeframe.

Their behaviors demonstrate an increased interest by foreign governments in U.S. based electric utilities.

Over the past five years, PRECorp has developed a fortress with multiple layers and backup systems to shield the cooperative from a variety of threats. Chesney said the cooperative is now moving into a second phase of defending the fortress by fine tuning what has been put into place. "Our goal is to reduce the economic and reputational damage of any cyber security related incident to as close to zero as possible," Chesney said.

Without divulging the specifics of PRECorp's plans, Chesney said much of the frontline work is handled every day by PRECorp staff. This includes shoring up remote access systems, adding layers of authentications (to make sure bad people cannot enter the system from afar), and simple ways to detect malicious links or emails before opening them.

In 2025, PRECorp is ramping up its usage of artificial intelligence (AI) to improve security. Other activities include adding layers of real-time monitoring of facilities, while holding the line on costs. "The trends are showing that the threats are moving toward smaller utilities and municipal systems because they often have to operate on smaller budgets," Chesney said. "We understand that we need to stay ahead of the threats, use the technology that we already have to protect the cooperative, and come up with cost-effective solutions. The juice has to be worth the squeeze."

### Members are also targets

PRECorp members should also expect to be targets of scam calls and attempts at stealing personal information. Most of the scams use the same tactics to achieve their goal: "Send money now or your power will be shut off." Members are encouraged to report any strange activity regarding their PRECorp account – including phone calls. Take measures to protect your own data and remember the only number you can trust when in doubt is 1-800-442-3630 for PRECorp Member Service.

## Reliability...

Uncontrollable outages related to forces outside of regular maintenance such as weather, wildlife and public interference. Since PRECorp's miles of line run through rugged northeast Wyoming landscapes, they are naturally exposed to extreme weather, birds, bugs and other critters that attack the system all day long. There was a noticeable increase in small-bird-caused outages in 2024, where a beak or wing caused a fault on a line that is equipped to detect even small problems during the height of the fire season.

Throughout much of the summer of 2024, the PRECorp breakers were set to be extra sensitive to faults in hopes of avoiding unnecessary sparking. During Red Flag Fire Weather days, crews would be dispatched to areas where a bird or branch might be contacting the line to physically inspect and secure these incidents against starting a fire.

"Outage minutes during fire season are likely going to be longer than normal because we are taking the extra precautions before safely restoring power," said PRECorp VP of System Operations Rich Halloran. "We have reclosers that will automatically restore power when the fire danger is low, but those were shut off during our extended 2024 fire season."

Public interactions such as vehicle accidents or construction site incidents are also outside of PRECorp's control. The 2024 public-caused outage numbers skewed higher because a number of fire-related outages were lumped into that category.

### Pursuit of backup plans

The PRECorp engineering team develops long-range construction plans to create alternative ways to deliver power to the members in case the power is offline for any period of time. This includes creation of robust systems and backup systems to ensure the lights can come back on as quickly as possible by rerouting power through a different circuit. This ensures that crews can isolate a trouble area, such as a single broken pole or downed line, and get the power back on to the majority of the members.

A new concept being developed for testing is a solar-powered battery system near Moorcroft. This is a federally-funded project where PRECorp is exploring installation of a solar array to create battery power storage for approximately 1,800 services. "We anticipate this

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PRECorp photo

PRECorp crews fix a storm-damaged pole in the middle of the night.

project could provide a new range of options when dealing with unplanned outages and larger-scale substation maintenance projects," said VP of Engineering and Technical Services Quentin Rogers. "We can ensure the services in and around Moorcroft can be operational while our crews work behind the scenes. We see this as a pilot project for potential applications in other areas where we can deliver alternative sources of power to our members."

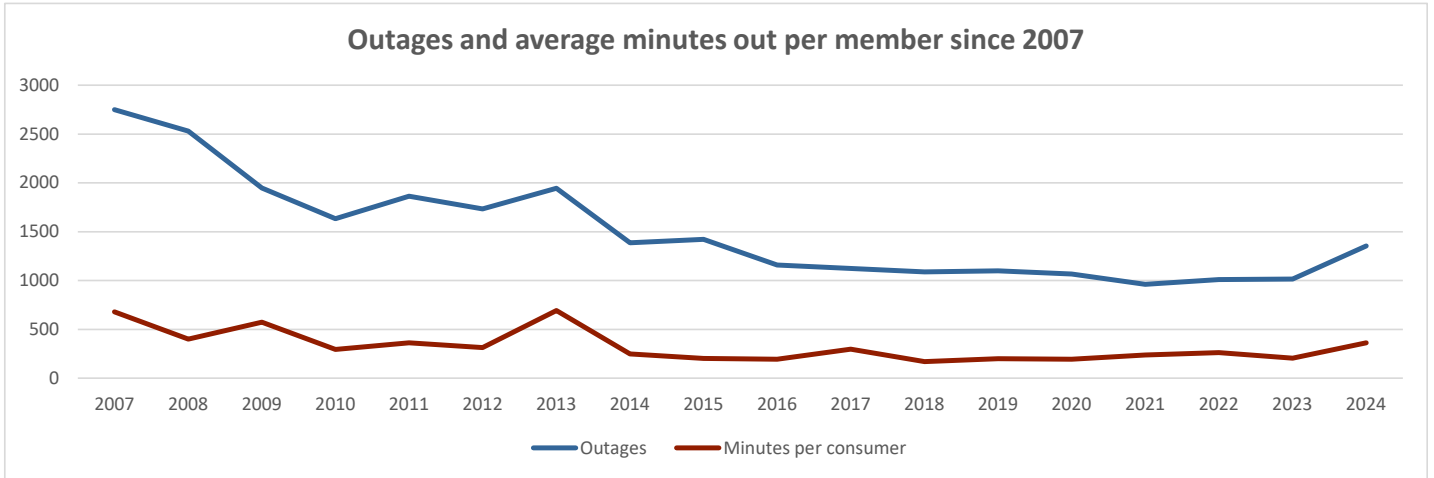
### You can help

Safe interaction with PRECorp infrastructure is a must for members' safety and power reliability. Always be aware of overhead power lines and transformer boxes when navigating around PRECorp poles and line. Do not stack or store large items under power lines.

If you see a damaged line or pole, or experience power bumps, contact us right away.

Before digging, call 811 for an underground line locate. This is required for major construction projects, but also for simple projects such as building fence or planting a tree.

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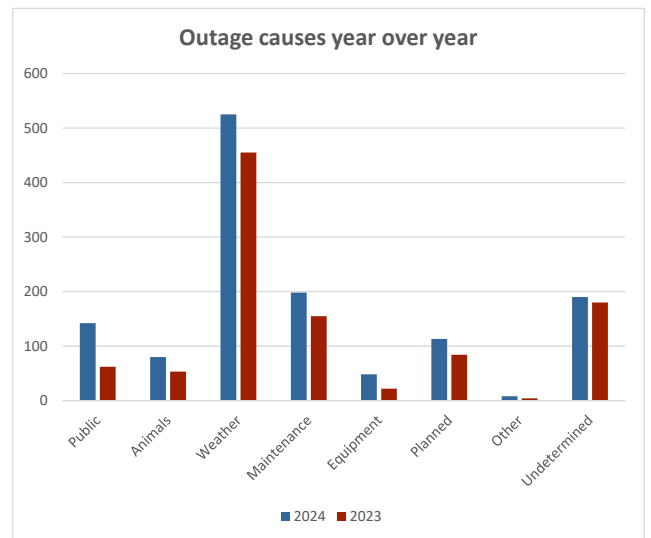
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When inspectors are scheduled to work in members’ private property areas and easements, PRECorp attempts to notify members of the scheduled inspection within a few weeks. Members who see PRECorp employees or contractors inspecting lines, should also expect to see a drone flight going on as well.

“One area we strive to improve is updating contact information for our members,” Rogers said. “There are times we make best attempts to give members advance notice that drone inspections are planned for their area, but those notifications aren’t received on the other end. We need to make sure we have current phone and email contacts for all of our members.”

Members who would like to update their contact information should call PRECorp at 1-800-442-3630. **See the form on Page 8 to enter a drawing for a \$100 bill credit.**



## 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



### PRECorp launches podcast

Members can now listen to monthly updates on aspects of the cooperative culture at Powder River Energy. Anyone can stream new content every month on the podcast titled ‘Watts Up with PRECorp.’ Available free wherever you get your podcasts.

## Update your contact info and you could win \$100

When Powder River Energy Corporation (PRECorp) employees need to contact members about service issues, account matters, upcoming field work, or safety issues, the information can be delivered more quickly when current contact information is available.

If you change addresses or phase out land-line telephones for mobile phones, contact information can quickly become outdated. This makes it difficult for PRECorp to contact you ahead of time for planned outages, field inspections with crews or drones, tree trimming, and other service-related reasons.

Your primary contact phone can be a home phone, a cell phone, a business phone - or all three. PRECorp representatives rely upon this contact information, especially during emergencies.

Our automated notification system will let you know about planned outages or outage restorations, as well as other important information from PRECorp.

These updates can also be sent via email, or text, to keep you informed about PRECorp's operations. PRECorp WILL NOT sell or share these numbers with other organizations. Use will be limited to important cooperative business mentioned earlier. PRECorp will not contact you to promote any products or services.

If the phone number(s) shown on your SmartHub account are incorrect, please go to the "Notifications" tab and select "Manage Contacts" to update your preferred telephone number.

If you would like to take care of your phone number update right now, fill in the form below. You can mail this with your bill payment, drop it off at either PRECorp office in Gillette or Sundance, or speak with a Member Service representative at 1-800-442-3630 during business hours. Business hours are Monday-Friday, 9 a.m. to Noon, and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

**Members who update their information by Monday, March 31, will be entered in a drawing for a \$100 bill credit or a \$100 gift card of their choice.**



### Please help us keep contact information updated for your account.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Business Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

Preferred way to reach me for service matters:  Text me  E-mail me  Call me

**If you update your information by Monday, March 31, 2025, you'll be entered in a drawing for \$100 bill credit or gift card of your choice.**



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Report an outage: 1-888-391-6220

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Powder River Energy Corporation is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

