

Since 1940

WISCONSIN ENERGY *Cooperative* NEWS

September 2026

VERNON
Electric
COOPERATIVE — WESTBY, WISCONSIN
Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

CELEBRATING FIBER ARTS

FROM LIGHT SWITCHES
TO LIFELONG HABITS

READER RECIPE CONTEST

KIDS AND CRITTERS



UNDERSTANDING YOUR ENERGY USE

by Trevor Clark, Director of Member Services



It's hard to believe we are nearing the end of summer as students head back to school and Wisconsinites begin preparing for fall and winter. As summer draws to a close, I thought it would be a good time to reflect on energy use.

Throughout the summer and winter months, we receive several phone calls from members inquiring why their electric bill is higher than expected. We are grateful for these calls because they give us an opportunity to talk with our members and help identify ways they can use energy more efficiently.

When we receive one of these calls, the first tool we look at is the SmartHub Usage Explorer. This allows us to review daily, monthly, and annual electricity consumption data to determine whether anything looks out of the ordinary.

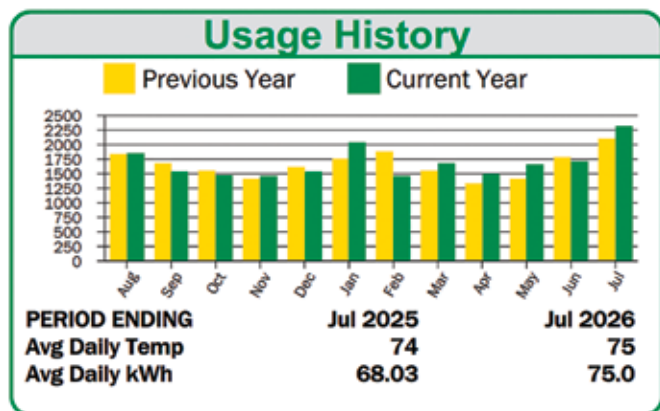
Is Your Bill Actually Unusually High?

First, let's answer an important question: Is your bill unusually high, or is it simply higher compared to the last couple of months?

This is important because summer energy use can look very different from that in April or May. The summer heat and humidity can cause air conditioners and other equipment to run much more frequently, while the spring months are typically cooler and require little to no heating or cooling.

During the spring and fall seasons, which we often refer to as "shoulder" months, energy use typically decreases as heating and air conditioning systems are used less. Those two systems can use a significant amount of energy in a short period of time.

When reviewing your bill, there is a lot of information available, but when troubleshooting your energy use, focus on the number of kilowatt-hours (kWh) used.



Ask yourself:

- **Is there a large spike compared to the same time last year?**
- **Is my average daily kWh use vastly different?**

Keep in mind that we aren't going to be too concerned about a 100-kWh difference over the course of a billing cycle. Depending on your household, that could be the result of several additional dishwasher cycles, more laundry or other everyday activities. However, when you see a difference of a few hundred kilowatt-hours or more, it may be worth taking a closer look.

If you notice a significant difference, ask yourself what has changed in your household over the past year.

- **Did you add a dehumidifier or an additional window air-conditioning unit?**
- **Did you add a pool for the kids, along with a pool pump?**
- **Speaking of kids, are more people home during the summer?**
- **When was the last time you had your A/C unit serviced?**
- **Are the coils dirty or full of debris?**

I can honestly say that two of these questions affected my most recent electric bill.

I have three young kids who are home most of the time during the summer, and I can't tell you how many times we've had to remind them to "close the door" when heading outside. It's even worse when we are outside and can't see that the door has been left wide open.

I also noticed that the coils on my A/C unit were extremely dirty. Dirty coils can cause an air conditioner to work significantly harder, increasing energy consumption.

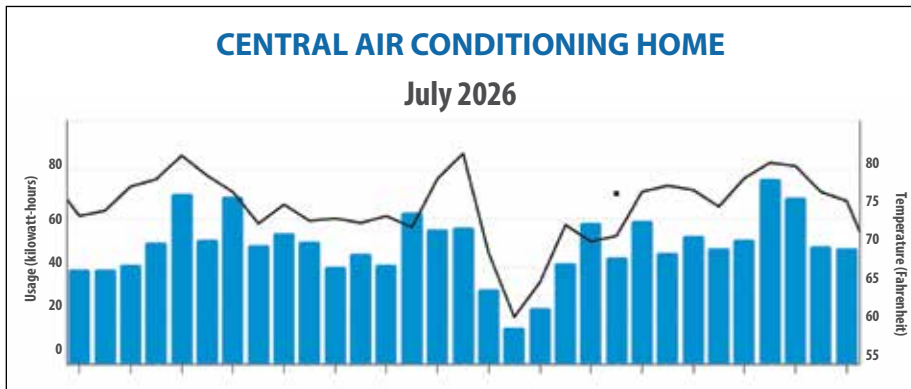
Digging Deeper with SmartHub

If you can't think of anything in particular that has changed since last year, it's time to do a little more digging.

The first stop is SmartHub. When you log in, navigate to the **Usage Explorer** to view your daily energy use. Pull up the month in question and look at the daily usage. What do you see?

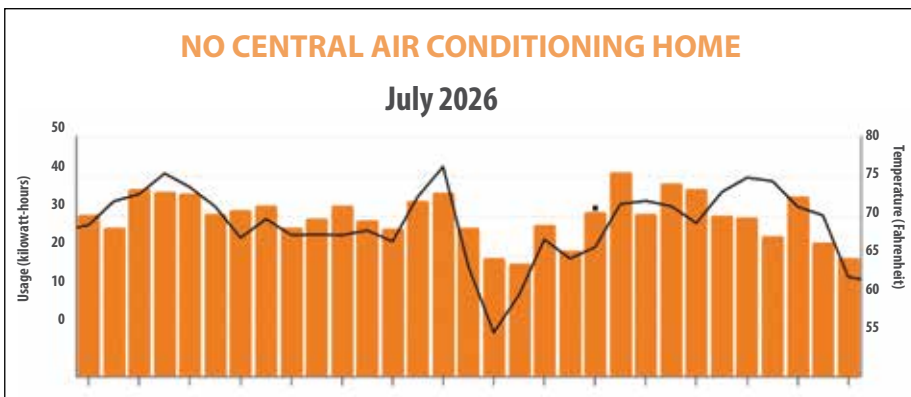
Is your daily usage roughly the same every day? If so, that tells us you may have something drawing a relatively consistent amount of energy each day. In other words, it may not be something that turns on and off based on the temperature, such as your HVAC system.

Let's look at two different examples that tell us two very different stories.



The household in the first graph has central air conditioning. Their energy usage visibly goes up and down with the black temperature line. As the temperature increases, the air conditioner works harder and runs more frequently, resulting in higher energy use.

The household in the graph below does not have central air conditioning. Their usage is relatively flat and minimally follows the temperature line. This member has a dehumidifier that runs throughout the summer, along with fans and a window A/C unit that is used when temperatures get particularly hot. This combination results in a more consistent daily energy draw.



So, what does your graph tell you? Is this month's kWh use in line with the same time last year?

Is your monthly kWh use relatively flat because something is running consistently, or does it increase and decrease with the temperature?

If your energy use has historically gone up and down with the temperature but is now staying relatively flat, it could be a clue that something new is plugged in and drawing power consistently.

Over the years, we've helped members identify problems they never realized were affecting their energy use. Some examples include well pumps that were running continuously, forgotten space heaters that were still plugged in, outdoor faucets that had been left running, baseboard heat that wasn't turning off, or even leaky water heaters.

These are the kinds of issues you can often identify simply by logging into your **SmartHub account** and looking at your energy use. A quick look at your usage patterns can sometimes tell you a lot about what's happening in your home.

Think of it as an energy-use investigation. Historical data can provide clues that help you figure out what is driving your electric consumption.

And, as always, if you need help understanding how your energy use is impacting your bill, we're just a phone call or email away.

TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR ENERGY USE WITH SMARTHUB



SmartHub makes it easy to track and manage your energy usage—anytime, anywhere.

- ▶ View daily and hourly usage
- ▶ Compare month-to-month trends
- ▶ Track high-usage days
- ▶ Monitor billing history
- ▶ Set notifications and alerts

Log in at vernonelectric.org or download the SmartHub app today!





By Leah Call

Starting a business comes with plenty of uncertainties, but after two decades of operating dirt-moving and land-clearing equipment in the construction industry, Tyler Lowinski was confident he could make it work. In October 2021, he made the leap and launched Twisted Oak Land Services, LLC.

“I bought a skid steer and started doing side jobs,” Lowinski said. “As I got busier and busier, I decided to quit my job and do this full time.”

Today, Twisted Oak Land Services, based in Viroqua, serves homeowners, farmers, and other customers throughout the surrounding area. This Vernon Electric Cooperative member provides a range of land services including brush clearing, excavation, grading, driveway and road work, trail creation, demolition, and snow removal in the winter months.

Filling a Gap

Lowinski runs the business with his wife Jamie, who handles the marketing and accounting. Together they have

built a business that fills a need in Vernon County.

“There are bigger excavating companies in the area, which typically focus on big jobs,” he explained. “But there are a lot of smaller projects that the bigger companies don’t want to do—or are too busy to do. We try to pick up those jobs.”

That willingness to tackle jobs of all sizes has allowed Twisted Oak to expand both its customer base and the range of services it offers. What began with brush hogging, skid steer work, and gravel and dirt work has grown to include specialized mulching equipment, a mini excavator with a mulching head, and compactors for driveways, private roads, and small parking lots.

Twisted Oak works primarily with residential customers, but its projects vary widely. For farmers, much of the work involves reclaiming land lost to brush and tree growth along field edges. For homeowners, projects can include everything from clearing overgrown areas to improving driveways, creating trails, clearing debris, or shaping and grading around new and existing buildings. The company also does



Twisted Oak Land Services transforms an overgrown property by clearing brush and vegetation and preparing the land for future use.

light excavating, including digging trenches for water and electrical lines, as well as building demolition.

One particularly unique project involved work for the Prairie Enthusiasts Southwest Chapter. In 2024 and 2025, Twisted Oak removed invasive vegetation from the 181-acre Borah Creek property. The grant-funded project gave Prairie Enthusiasts a head start on restoring the property and managing invasive growth.

Committed to Quality Service

While they've added equipment and services since launching the business, the Lowinskis remain committed to a personal approach, serving the community where they have spent their lives.

For new customers, Lowinski starts by walking the property and identifying areas that need attention. From there, he discusses options and costs. For big projects, he might recommend tackling one section at a time and returning to address other areas in the future.



Tyler and Jamie Lowinski operate Twisted Oak Land Services, LLC, based in Viroqua.

"We'll look at the trouble areas that need attention," he says. "Then we'll figure out a plan and go through the costs. I'm always willing to work with people to figure out what's the best bang for their buck. It's more about helping people. That's how I like to do business."



Twisted Oak Land Services uses specialized equipment to clear brush and reclaim overgrown land for property owners throughout the area.

VERNON COUNTY FAIR

September 16–20

Heading to the Vernon County Fair? Be sure to stop by the Vernon Electric Cooperative booth!



Craig Buros, CEO & General Manager

110 Saugstad Road, Westby, WI 54667

608-634-3121 • 608-447-5051

email: info@vernonelectric.org

website: www.vernonelectric.org

Trevor Clark, Editor

