

North Dakota's delicate electricity price balance

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The cost of nearly every input into the energy transmission and maintenance system rose, on average, as much as 50%, he said.

State Sen. Dale Patten (R-Watford City) said replacement and upgrade costs of infrastructure are also one key component, particularly to improve resilience against severe weather events in rural areas.

"A lot of the existing infrastructure is old, 50, 60, 70 years old in some cases, and the cost of replacing it is not cheap," said Patten, who chairs the legislature's Energy and Natural Resources committee.

Population growth and shifts in that growth toward the main cities in the state are also a driver, he said.

"You have to build the infrastructure to support that population growth and that corresponding economic growth," Patten said.

Another major driver is transmission costs.

"As we look at the regulated utilities when they come in for rate cases, it seems like one of the areas where their costs are exploding the most is transmission," said Public Service Commission commissioner Randy Christmann. "Transmission costs are exploding."

Christmann said some of the blame goes to buildout of remote renewables projects in the wider region, as well as the closure of coal fired power plants around the county leading to increased load on North Dakota power providers as regional transmission organizations spread costs around.

In 2024, North Dakota exported around 32% of generated electricity and exported 85% of natural gas extracted, according to the Department of Commerce.

Managing large loads

Adding large loads onto the grid across the country at the same time as all of these other cost increases has spiked energy prices in most other locations.

So far, North Dakota has dodged that for the most part, even as its lower electricity rates are attractive to industrial operations looking to add large loads in the system.

Large loads can include everything from operations like data centers, to oil refineries, to agricultural processing facilities and even the capital complex in Bismarck. Currently, there are 23 larger data centers in North Dakota.

When it comes to data centers, North Dakota has managed to add those large loads without jacking up electricity prices for consumers.

There are concerns about whether that can continue to be the case.

"I have seen them have very adverse impacts and very positive impacts," said Christmann. "It depends on the details of the specific data center."

Managing that going forward will be a challenge for the commission and legislators.

State Rep. Anna Novak (R-Hazen) is currently leading the legislature's interim Energy Development and Transmission Committee to study large loads such as data centers and try to find a way to balance attracting those projects without overburdening other electricity consumers.

"We need to strike a balance of making sure that we're open for business, but that we have a strong vetting process," Novak said. "I think that the vetting process is getting better."

Besides cheaper electricity prices and available power, the policy and regulatory climate in the state is also attractive for tech companies looking to site a data center.

Data centers are also attracted to North Dakota's readily available water supply and cooler temperatures, which cut operating costs.

Novak said cost savings for data centers choosing to locate here can amount to the billions.



A 2021 telephoto view of Highway 11 near Pheasant Lake illustrates the workaround procedures needed to install the new, modern line in the same path as the older line. Earth around each of the old poles was dug up and the poles tilted to keep the existing, live lines in service while the new poles went up and the new highline wires strung. The highline runs all the way from Leola, South Dakota to the massive substation west of Ellendale that was completed in 2018 (photo by Ken Smith April 2021)

"We are certainly a desirable place to put a data center," Novak said.

The most well-known data center in the state, Applied Digital's facilities near Ellendale, has become a case study for how to add a large load while keeping the local impact minimal and also providing benefits across the state.

By tapping into stranded power that was not being adequately used and making the capital investments on that instead of passing it to the utilities, the project has been able to actually decrease electricity rates for Montana-Dakota Utilities consumers across the state.

"We had involvement in that, in making sure that this big additional load was not only going to just not be detrimental to customers, but actually be very beneficial," Christmann. "Every single MDU customer in North Dakota is benefiting because of that facility on their electric rate."

Darcy Neigum, vice president of electric supply for Montana-Dakota Utilities, said that customers saved around \$70 last year because of the facility, and once it is fully built out, savings could come out to around \$250 per year per customer.

"We're very aware of the rates we're charging to our customers and the rate impacts," Neigum said. "The approach that we took (with the Ellendale facility) was to try to find some way to create value instead of just putting costs on customers."

Insulating consumers from costs

Investor-owned utilities like MDU as well as electric cooperatives like Basin Electric Power and Minnkota are all trying to figure out how to manage large loads going forward.

Basin Electric adopted a large load program in June as a way to minimize rate impacts for cooperative members and reduce the risk of stranded assets that come with single projects looking for 50, 100 or more megawatts of power in the future. Minnkota Power Cooperative has also adopted a similar policy.

"So, when we have those inquiries coming in, whether it's a large tech company or a large industrial load, we're saying we want to serve you, but to do that you're going to have to bear the costs associated with it," Kramer said. "That goes for if they need to add more infrastructure or generation or engineering studies."

MDU's Neigum said the company doesn't have a formal policy yet, but the uptick in interest in adding large loads may necessitate one.

"We do have a process we go through, and we're kind of formalizing some of that, because there are just so many requests," Neigum said.

One delicate aspect in all of this is putting into place policies that protect consumers or co-op members from additional costs without scaring quality projects away from the state.

Kramer said that's not necessarily a bad thing. "It's probably helped separate the wheat from the chaff a bit," Kramer said.

ing well, the need for government programs naturally decreases. Continued efforts to open markets and reach stable, workable agreements will be critical to ensuring agriculture can thrive with less dependence on short-term assistance.

"We remain committed to working with federal leaders to ensure farmers and ranchers have the certainty they need to succeed well beyond this season."

Bismarck, ND - North Dakota Farm Bureau (NDFB) President Val Wagner spoke at the Waters of the United States Listening Session with the EPA Office of Water and U.S. Army – Civil Works on Friday, December 12, in Bismarck.

Wagner stressed the importance of a clear and limited WOTUS definition. "Past interpretations of WOTUS treated everyday puddles and sloughs as federally regulated waters, adding stress and instability to farmers' daily decisions," said Wagner.

She praised the proposed rule for narrowing federal oversight to waters with continuous surface connections while excluding seasonal puddles, sloughs, isolated wetlands, groundwater, and agricultural ditches. Wagner highlighted that the rule shifts the burden of proof to the federal government, allowing farmers to manage their land without unnecessary interference.

"The proposed rule is legally durable and faithfully implements the Supreme Court's recent Sackett decision," said Wagner. "It narrows the scope of federal oversight to waters that have continuous surface connections."

Wagner also emphasized the need for practical implementation, urging regulators to ensure the rule is workable on the ground. "Farmers and ranchers are the best stewards of the land—they simply need the freedom to do their jobs," she said.

NDFB supports the proposed WOTUS rule and encourages its swift adoption to provide certainty for landowners and strengthen the future of American agriculture.

NDFB is the most effective general farm and ranch organization in North Dakota, with 28,000 members and 50 organized county Farm Bureaus.

Landfill Hours
December 1 to March 31
Saturday: 10 am – 4 pm

A.I. Art: Good or Bad?

By Aidan Thurber

Recently, I had the opportunity to hear a speech given by the most popular epic fantasy writer of modern day, Brandon Sanderson. In the speech, which he gave at a writing convention I attended in Salt Lake City, Utah, Sanderson discussed the tricky topic of A.I. art. Specifically, he addressed his thoughts on A.I. writing, and whether it was good or bad. His thoughts were intriguing, and make me think a great deal about the future and how I plan to approach writing, both academically and fictionally.

Now, you might be able to take a guess about what an author who makes a living on writing his own books would say about A.I. writing: it's bad. And if you guessed that, well, you wouldn't be wrong—that's exactly what he said.

Sanderson felt A.I. writing took away the *point* of why we write in the first place. For example, writing an academic paper for a college class proves we have knowledge about the topic, rather than simply asking an A.I. to write it for us. It forces us to do the research, decide what we want to include in the paper, and write it, making sure the information is correct to the best of our ability. That's the point of academic writing: writing makes us learn something.

In terms of fantasy/novel writing, he felt the same way. He quickly addressed the elephant in the room, that the A.I. (if it eventually got good enough) could replace his job. He argued that he was popular enough that people would likely read his books regardless, so he doesn't have to worry about losing his job over it.

However, he is worried about new, up-and-coming authors. If A.I. starts writing amazing books, how can new authors get their actual written work published? In fact, how could one even tell the difference between A.I. and human writing? He tested this question by comparing four real life authors to one advanced A.I. writer, each one instructed to write a chapter of a fantasy book on the same topic. Sanderson then took the five chapters and challenged himself to guess which one was A.I.

To his surprise, he couldn't tell. This led him to his next point. If certain A.I. writing systems were already "good enough," then what could we possibly do to stop them from taking our jobs?

To illustrate this idea, he brought up the age-old American legend of John Henry. In the story, John Henry is a steel driver. One day, a company introduces him to a newly developed steam-powered drill. John Henry is skeptical of the machine, and challenges the machine to a race. If the machine beats him—and does a better job than him—then he and his coworkers will stop being steel drivers. But, if John manages to out-drive the machine,

then they get to keep their jobs.

John and the machine begin the race. It was long and grueling, but after a while, John proved his merit as the superior driver by out-driving the machine a farther distance down the tunnel. It was simple. The story seemed to be telling us that humans can work harder than machines, simply because we're more determined.

However, the story ends immediately after, as after John Henry finishes the race, he suddenly dies from exhaustion.

Nowadays, none of us would bat an eye at steam-powered drills. In fact, steel workers are probably quite thankful for them. So why would we ever go back? Obviously the machine is more efficient than the human, so why not use the machine?

Well, this led him to his final point. The point of creating something—the point of working at something—isn't to create a product. It may feel like that—oftentimes our goal is to create the best product or outcome. But that's not the point. What makes us who we are as humans? The act of creating, the hard work that builds our character, the long hours spent researching, the times you *fail* while creating something, that's what makes us who we are. The point of art isn't the product. Art exists to be created, not simply to spit out a product. It exists to build our character, whether that be through learning, or whether that be through struggling through draft after draft, refining every word in an attempt to write the best fantasy story possible.

But in the end, like steam-powered drills, A.I. art is likely here to stay. However, Sanderson stressed that each one of us has a choice in how we use it, so I stress too: let's choose to use it wisely.



Fantasy author Brandon Sanderson



Character John Henry from the 2000 Disney shortfilm

Matt Perdue elected president of North Dakota Farmers Union

(Jamestown, N.D.) – The election of a new state president capped off North Dakota Farmers Union's 99th annual state convention Dec. 12-13 in Bismarck. Matt Perdue, a farmer from Ray, was elected to lead the state's largest general farm organization. He is just the tenth person to hold that leadership position and the youngest at 33 years of age.

Perdue previously worked at NDFU and National Farmers Union, where he advocated for family farmers and ranchers. Former NDFU President Mark Watne did not seek reelection to the post.

Over the two-day event, more than 600 members enjoyed

speakers, breakout sessions, a tailgate party, youth activities and more. In policy debate, Farmers Union delegates adopted their 2026 Program of Policy & Action and four special orders of business. Those orders focused on completing a comprehensive farm bill, strengthening rural health systems, restoring predictable and rules-based trade policy, and extending Affordable Care Act premium tax credits.

Speakers included National Farmers Union President Rob Larew, Gov. Kelly Armstrong, Rep. Julie Fedorchak, Sen. John Hoeven, geopolitical analyst Jacob Shapiro, constitutional expert Jon Bouker, and Miss North Dakota 2025 Kennedy DeLap. The Agraria Mutual Group (dba Farmers Union Insurance Company) also held its 82nd annual meeting in conjunction with the NDFU state convention.

In other elections, Bob Kuylen of South Heart was reelected as vice president. Jon Iverson of Langdon was reelected District 1 director for Benson, Cavalier, Grand Forks, Nelson, Pembina, Ramsey, Towner and Walsh



Matt Purdue, who farms near Ray, ND, is the new NDFU president. Ray and his competitor for the position, Shelly Ziesch of Pettibone, both spoke at last month's Farmers Union annual meeting in Ellendale. (Photo via NDFU)

counties. Tyler Stafslie of Makoti was reelected to the District 3 seat. That district encompasses the counties of Burke, Divide, Mountrail, Renville and Williams counties. Dave Berger of Center was elected to the District 5 seat. Members also elected 56 delegates to represent North Dakota at the 124th National Farmers Union Convention, slated for March 7-9 in New Orleans.

NDFB President Val Wagner on \$12 Billion Bridge Payments, WOTUS reform

Editor's note for our readers who may be unfamiliar with some current agricultural issues: President Trump recently authorized \$12 billion in payments to farmers to compensate for impacts associated with the administration's 2025 tariff actions. WOTUS refers to federal "Waters of the United States" regulations that have often deprived farmers from using property arbitrarily defined as containing wetlands. Tariffs and WOTUS are both issues that have long been sources of unrest within the agricultural community.

Bismarck, ND - North Dakota Farm Bureau President Val Wagner issued the following statement regarding the proposed \$12 Billion Bridge Payments.

"North Dakota Farm Bureau (NDFB) recognizes the administration's efforts to address the challenges facing farmers and ranchers and the proposal to provide \$12 billion in farm aid. While this support will help some producers navigate a difficult year, it also highlights the need for long-term solutions. NDFB recognizes the importance of both national security and fair trade, and we understand that recent tariff actions are part of broader efforts to ensure American industries—including agriculture—can compete on a level playing field while strengthening our nation's security.

"NDFB supports free-market policies that give farmers and ranchers the freedom to conduct business and participate fully in free enterprise. When markets are free and function-