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COMMUNITY VOICES

Advanced nuclear power a clean energy solution - Brent Ridge

Brent Ridge Dairyland Power Cooperative President & CEO

Dec 14, 2024

Electricity is the foundation of modern life; it enables every task during our waking hours and keeps us safe and comfortable while we sleep.

Dairyland Power Cooperative was formed in 1941 to provide safe and reliable electricity to rural residents here in the Upper Midwest. Nearly 85 years later, Dairyland's mission to power communities remains essentially the same, but how we do our job as a critical services provider is changing dramatically.

Dairyland continues to walk the talk on reducing CO₂. In the past decade, we have retired 579 megawatts of coal-fired generation; our coal footprint has been reduced by 60% since 1999. However, grid regulators, such as the North American Electric Reliability Corporation, are sounding the alarm on complex reliability challenges resulting from power plant retirements. To ensure we are safe and reliable during the clean energy transition, Dairyland will continue to:

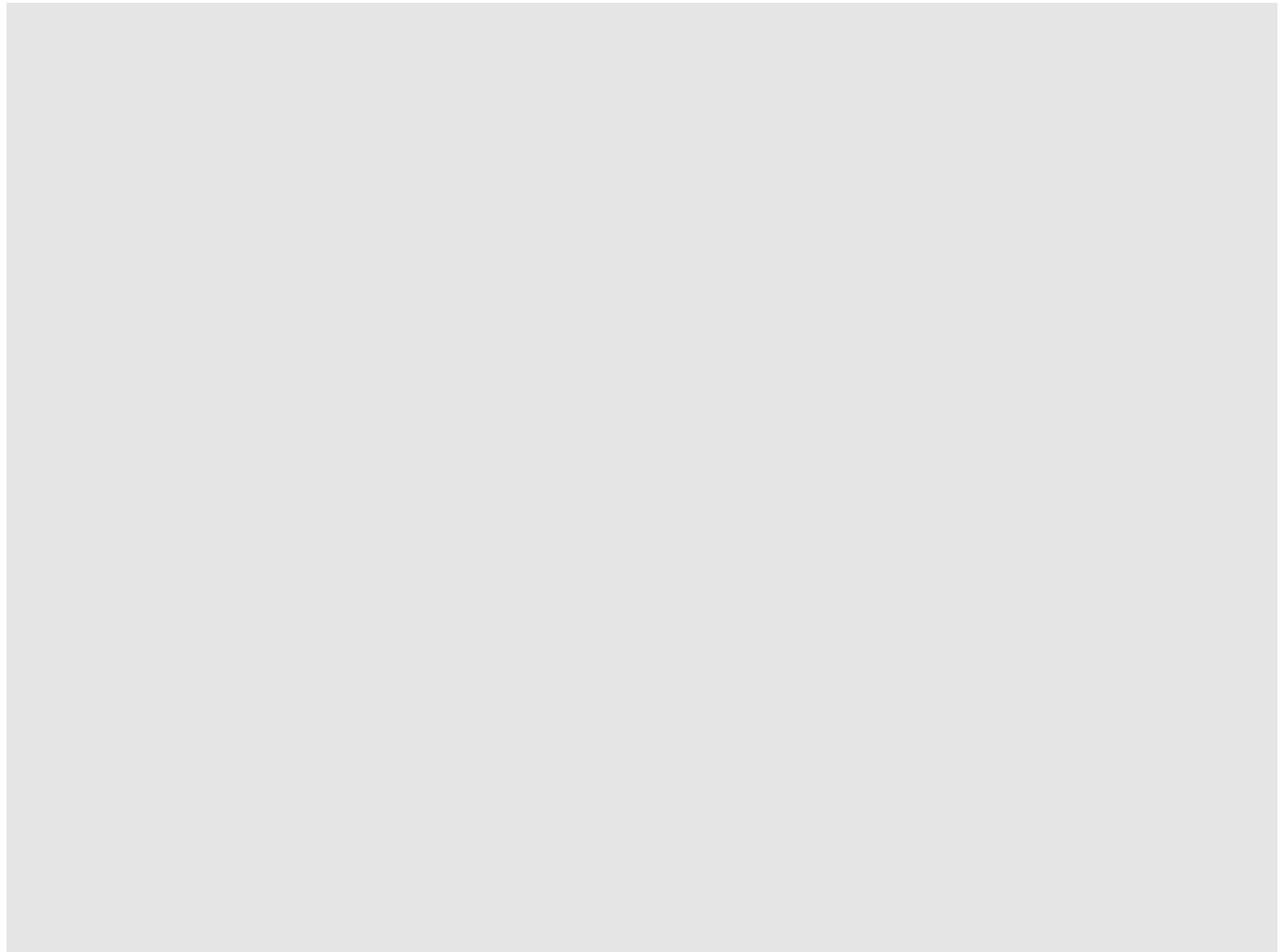
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- Invest in renewables. In September, the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced Dairyland's \$579 million New ERA grant award. New ERA is the

largest investment in rural electrification since President Franklin Roosevelt signed the Rural Electrification Act in 1936. Once complete, the over 1,000 megawatts of clean energy investments will reduce carbon emissions by over 3 million metric tons per year.

- Evaluate and explore innovative new technologies that will drive the transition, such as advanced nuclear technologies and energy storage.
- Ensure “always available” resources help keep the lights on during the energy transition. This includes natural gas to step in for renewable energy when the sun doesn’t shine and the wind doesn’t blow.
- Deliver on our mission of providing affordable, reliable electricity to our rural members across our four-state service territory.



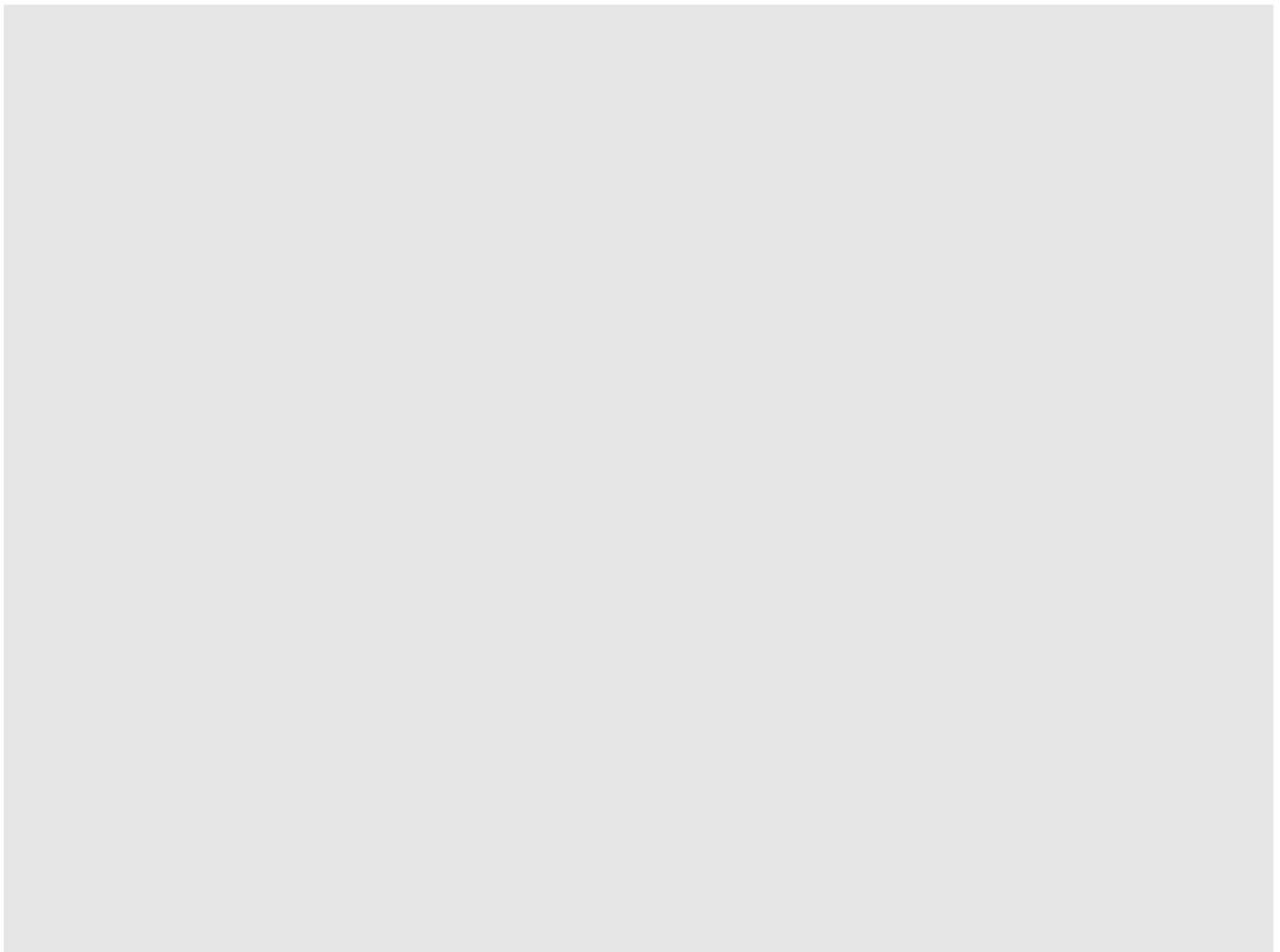
System Operator Scott Brennan works in the new control room of Dairyland Power Cooperative in La Crosse in December 2023.

Saskia Hatvany

Today, I would like to particularly focus on the potential of advanced nuclear energy to help America safely and effectively transition to a lower carbon economy. If we as a nation are serious about achieving carbon goals while maintaining a reliable and affordable grid, nuclear energy must be part of the conversation.

Dairyland is exploring carbon-free power supply technologies, including small modular reactor (SMR) nuclear plants. SMRs have the potential for flexible, high-capacity, zero-carbon energy production. No matter what the weather, SMRs can power your life without leaving a carbon footprint. In addition, SMR facilities can bring family-supporting jobs and economic benefits to communities.

But change doesn't happen overnight. Now is the time to prepare for a pivot towards nuclear for energy transition success. How? By engaging with local communities, elected officials, industry and academic experts and anyone interested in dialogue about the future.

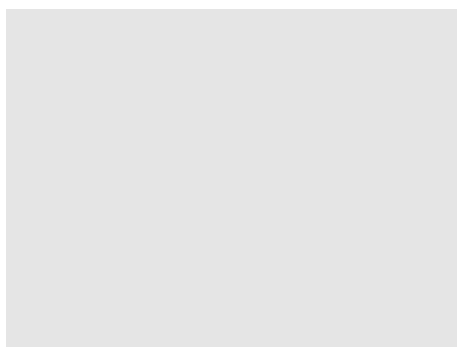


Dairyland Electric Cooperative CEO Brent Ridge, right, speaks about the need for nuclear energy in the future as U.S. Rep. Derrick Van Orden listens Oct. 29.

STEVE RUNDIO, River Valley News Group file photo

In addition to advanced nuclear, Dairyland is interested in pumped storage hydro and long-duration energy storage (LDES) technologies. Recently, Dairyland received a \$28 million U.S. Department of Energy award to bring LDES projects to rural communities. The federal funding supports the development of three battery storage facilities in Wyeville, Wisconsin; Fretress Lake, Illinois; and Waukon, Iowa.

It is a thrilling time to work in the energy sector, with emerging technologies and opportunities that will require new skillsets and innovative thinkers to propel the energy transition forward. Dairyland looks forward to collaborating with our members, communities and the next generation of visionaries to improve quality of life everywhere we serve.



Brent Ridge

Brent J. Ridge is President and CEO of Dairyland Power Cooperative. Formed in 1941 and headquartered in La Crosse, Dairyland is a generation and transmission cooperative providing the wholesale electrical requirements for 24 distribution cooperatives and 27 municipal utilities. These cooperatives and municipals supply the energy needs for 700,000 people in a four-state area.

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