



KNOW YOUR POWER



What is an electric co-op?

Rural electric cooperatives or “co-ops” have existed throughout the U.S. since the 1930s. They were created to bring electricity to areas that private utilities, primarily focused on making a profit, were uninterested in serving.

As cooperatives, certain Alaska electric utilities are owned by their members—those they provide electricity to—not private investors or a corporate board of directors. Co-ops exist to serve their members. Their chief responsibility is providing members with reliable, affordable power in a sustainable, responsible manner. Most cooperatives adhere to 7 core principles.

7 Cooperative Principles

1. *Voluntary & Open Membership*
2. *Democratic Member Control*
3. *Members' Economic Participation*
4. *Autonomy & Independence*
5. *Education, Training, & Information*
6. *Cooperation Among Cooperatives*
7. *Concern for Community*

From the Fairbanks area through the Matanuska-Susitna Valley and Anchorage to the Kenai Peninsula, **Alaska's Railbelt region** is home to most of Alaska's population and is served by four electric co-ops—Golden Valley Electric Association (GVEA), Matanuska Electric Association (MEA), Chugach Electric Association (CEA), and Homer Electric Association (HEA). The City of Seward runs its own municipal electric utility. Alaska is also home to over 150 stand-alone electric grids serving rural villages and a few of other small regional grids that are not connected to the larger Railbelt electric transmission network, like in Southeast near Ketchikan, Wrangell, and Petersberg or in the Copper River basin near Valdez and Glennallen. Some of these other Alaskan grids are also run by cooperatives, while others are privately operated.

Who are the electric co-ops' owner-members?

Anyone who receives service from an electric co-op is an owner of that co-op. If you get an electric bill from a co-op with your name on it, congratulations—you are an owner-member eligible to vote and participate! Typically, there is only one member per household or business. Renters aren't co-op members if their landlord pays utility bills in their own name, nor are off-grid consumers. For multiple people in a single household, two individuals can apply for “joint membership,” but this is still ultimately one membership.

What POWER do owner-members have to influence their electric co-op and Alaska's energy future?

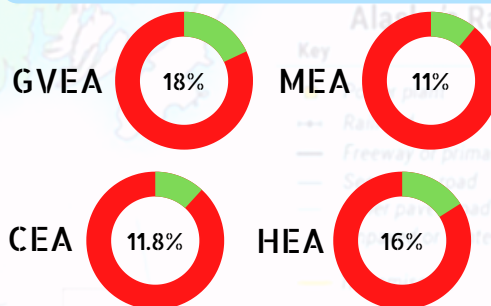
Owner-members can help shape the policies and decisions of their electric co-ops through its elected Board of Directors. The Board of Directors is a group of owner-members chosen to make strategic decisions about the cooperatives' future, to approve major policies, and ensure the co-op's long-term financial health. The co-op's priorities can have a huge impact on communities in a co-op's service territory, as well as the wider region and state as a whole. Here are 3 ways owner-members can influence the decisions of an electric co-op's Board of Directors:

1. Learn about candidates and vote in board elections for the people who represent your interests and values. **Only ~10 to 20%** (compared to ~50-65% voter turnout for general political elections) **of eligible owner-members participate in board elections for Alaska's electric co-ops, so each vote is crucial.** **The Railbelt co-ops hold elections in spring, between March and June. Every eligible owner-member gets one vote, regardless of how much power they use.** Most people now vote electronically in these elections— though some co-ops still send out paper ballots. All four Railbelt electric co-ops also allow people to vote in person at their Annual Meeting. Information about co-op elections can be found on each co-op's website, or on the Elections Page for the **Alaska Energy Transparency Project** [akenergytransparency.org/elections].

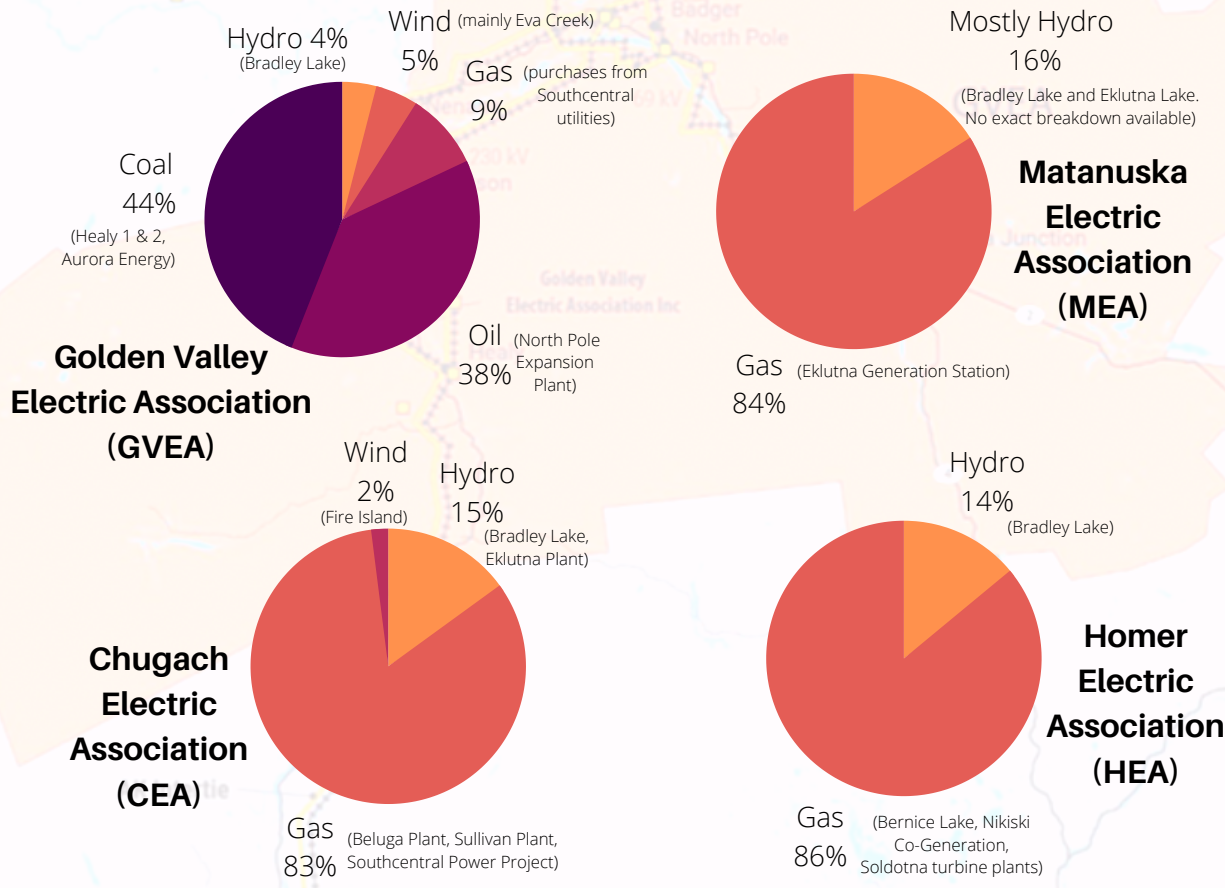
2. Contact your co-op board members and let them know how you feel about issues the Board is considering, or alert the Board to issues or opportunities you think should be addressed. **Each Board holds monthly public meetings that members are encouraged to attend, with time set aside for member-owner comments.** Member-owners can also attend their co-op's annual meeting in the spring. Some co-ops have subcommittees you may also participate in.

3. Have the time and interest? **Run for the Board yourself!**

2022 Electric Co-op Elections Voter Participation



Main Sources of Electric Generation for Railbelt Region



What drives the costs of your electricity?

If you're in Anchorage, the Kenai Peninsula, or the Matanuska Susitna Valley, the single largest contributor to your electric bill is the high cost of Cook Inlet natural gas (mostly supplied by one monopoly producer--Hilcorp). Gas, the non-renewable and carbon-emitting fuel for most of our electricity, makes up about 29-33%, or roughly a third, of your electrical bill. Other big expenses include operation and maintenance of generators and transmission lines. But if the goal is to keep electric bills from growing, gas is not only the largest expense but the easiest to cut--by finding fuel-free, renewable alternatives.

What is an Integrated Resource Plan (IRP)?

An Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) is a comprehensive 20 year plan for where our electricity will come from and how clean that power will be. IRPs examine foreseeable future resources with regard to transmission lines, substations, power plants, costs, environmental consequences, and input from diverse stakeholders and users, as well as utilities, independent power producers, and operators who transmit and distribute the electricity. In 2015, fragmented and uncooperative Railbelt electric utility planning resulted in investments of nearly \$1.5 billion in new generation over a short period of time. The **Regulatory Commission of Alaska (RCA)**, the state agency responsible for regulating our utilities, scolded the utilities for their inefficiency and lack of cooperation. In 2020, the Alaska Legislature passed SB 123, requiring the formation of a regional electric reliability organization (ERO) to establish and enforce clear rules of reliable operation for all entities connected to the electric grid in order to maintain a high level of reliability for consumers, as well as conduct a public integrated resource planning process for the entire Railbelt. The **Railbelt Reliability Council (RRC)** has a pending application with the RCA to become the Railbelt region's ERO and develop an IRP for our foreseeable future. The IRP process is time intensive, with multiple steps, and requires extensive public input and oversight at the RRC from Alaskans like you!

What other ways can ALASKANS living in the Railbelt Region (Co-op Member or Not!) engage and use our PEOPLE POWER?

Read the AK Energy Transparency Project (AETP) & Sign-up for AKPIRG info

akenergytransparency.org
AKPIRG.org

Attend Monthly RRC Board Meetings & Public Comment to RRC on Developments

alaskapower.org/rrc/

Participate in RRC Working Groups to Develop Reliability Standards & IRP (technical expertise NOT required!)

alaskapower.org/rrc/

Attend RCA Meetings & Public Comment to RCA

rca.alaska.gov