

# South River EMC Communicator

January 2026

## New Era for U.S. Manufacturing and National Security

Vulcan Elements is opening a rare-earth magnet manufacturing and research and development facility in a 1-million-square-foot space in Benson. The \$918 million project is expected to bring 1,000 jobs to Johnston County. The company has received state and local incentives equal to nearly \$120 million.

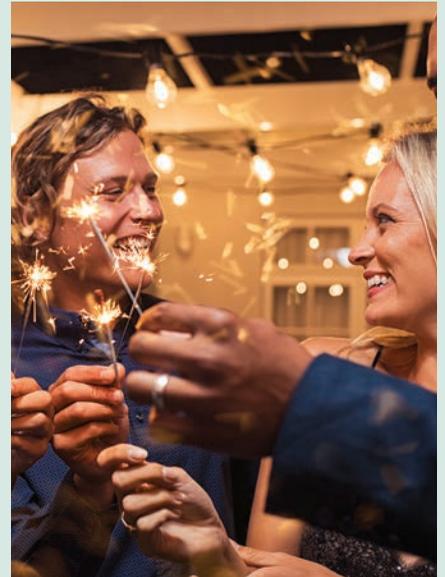
The plant will be located in the Crossroads Logistic Center on Morgan Rd. in Benson, strategically positioned near the I-95/I-40 interchange.

The Nov. 18 announcement garnered national attention and was attended by federal and state officials, including Senator Tedd Budd and Governor Josh Stein.

This plant is the first of its kind in the U.S. and marks a major step in bringing rare-earth magnet production back on American soil, which is important for economic and national security, receiving funding from the Pentagon's Office of Strategic Capital. Up until this point rare-earth magnets have primarily been produced overseas, specifically in China.

Opening this plant is "so much bigger than making a rare-earth magnet, it's fundamental to national security and the next generation of American economic competitiveness," said Vulcan Elements CEO John Maslin. "I started Vulcan Elements because I was fundamentally

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### Reminder:

South River EMC offices will be closed Jan. 1 in celebration of the New Year.



Vulcan CEO John Maslin with South River EMC CEO Chris Spears and board of directors. (l-r) J.W. Simmons, Wayne Collier Jr., Sue Flowers, John Maslin, George Williams, Chris Spears, Kayla Bartley and Rhonda Autry.



South River EMC earns this award based on data modeled by the ACSI® in 2024. Award criteria are determined by the ACSI based on customers rating their satisfaction with South River EMC in a survey independent of the syndicated ACSI Energy Utility Study. For more about the ACSI, visit [theacsi.org/](https://theacsi.org/) badges. ACSI and its logo are registered trademarks of the American Customer Satisfaction Index LLC.

Message from CEO Chris M. Spears  
and Board President C. Wayne Collier

## Preparing for the Future While Protecting Reliability

As we head into the new year, we have an important topic to discuss. As a member-owned electric cooperative, our responsibility to you is simple: to provide safe, reliable power at a fair and affordable price. We take that responsibility seriously because we understand the trust you place in us to carefully manage your cooperative's resources and operate efficiently. South River EMC is always strategically planning for the future.

Every day our senior management team works to balance rising industry costs with our obligation to provide reliable and affordable electric service. We want you to be assured that the decisions we make are thoughtful, measured and always grounded in what is best for our members.

Over the past few years, the electric utility industry has been in a state of flux and it is a completely different environment today than just a few years ago. Significant pressures within the industry are forcing a rate adjustment beginning in March. Although we have not completed our budget and rate analysis to know the exact amount, a change of rates is necessary. In the October CEO Column, it was reported that South River EMC will face a 10.55% rate increase in its wholesale power purchases in 2026 from our power supplier, NCEMC.

These challenges are not unique to us—they are affecting utilities nationwide. Key drivers are explained below.

### Early Retirement

In compliance with federal regulations, many coal-fired plants—still producing dependable electricity—are being retired prematurely. Removing these facilities before replacement generation is fully available creates a gap between supply and demand. When supply tightens and demand continues to grow, wholesale power costs rise. Building new generation facilities and grid infrastructure to fill that gap often requires billions of dollars and multi-year construction timelines, further contributing to increased costs.



### Shifts in the Generation Mix

National energy regulations have shifted our wholesale power portfolio toward more renewable sources, such as solar and wind. While these resources can be beneficial, they require substantial upfront investments. Additionally, because of the intermittent nature of renewables, they are not available around the clock, so utilities must build backup generation to ensure reliability. These added layers increase overall power supply costs.

### Rapidly Increasing Demand

After several years of declining electrical demand, the trend has gone in the opposite direction and demand is now soaring. Expansion of data centers, population growth in the Southeast, and the rise of beneficial electrification are placing new demands on the grid. Meanwhile, dependable “baseload” generation is retiring faster than it can be replaced. With higher demand and limited immediate supply, the cost of the power we purchase is increasing.

### Equipment Costs

We continue to experience increased costs combined with long lead times for equipment, necessary to operate an electric system and build new facilities to accommodate growth. The past five years have been a period of rising costs for the electric utility industry, pushed by soaring demand, supply-chain challenges, raw materials shortages, increased labor costs and tariffs. The impact has been rapid increases in the cost of producing power, longer and more unpredictable project timelines and the need for more financing, all of which have driven up electric rates.

In order to meet the increasing demand for electricity, the U.S. will need significant investment in electric generation and to fast track construction. It is estimated that the U.S. needs an additional 38 gigawatts – that's 38 million kilowatts – of electricity by 2030.

Although we have trimmed our budgets where possible, it is important to note that 62.5% of our entire budget is the cost of energy. This means that we only have actual control of a small portion of the budget. We have been streamlining processes, reducing redundancy, refining inventory control and using technology and analytics to improve efficiency

### Advocating for You

While we continue refining our operations, we are also working on your behalf at the state and federal levels. We regularly engage with members of the North Carolina General Assembly and Congress to ensure energy policies are crafted with affordability, reliability, and practicality in mind. Together we have been successful in the rollback of several power sector regulations.

To help offset energy cost changes, we have energy-saving advice on [sremc.com](http://sremc.com). Additionally, our three energy advisors, the "Advise Guys", are available to help make efficiency recommendations – they are also available to perform a free energy analysis on your home.

### Our Commitment to You

We understand that any rate change affects each member differently. That is why transparency is so important. We will keep you informed about the challenges affecting the energy industry and how they influence costs at South River EMC. We will notify our membership as soon as possible so you can prepare for the upcoming change.

As always, we welcome input from you. Therefore, you are welcome to send an email to [CEO@sremc.com](mailto:CEO@sremc.com) and share your comments and suggestions. You may also call the CEO's direct phone number, which is 910-230-2990.

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*John Maslin,  
Vulcan Elements CEO*

convicted that the United States needed to manufacture three things super well domestically over the next three years; semi-conductors, batteries and rare-earth magnets."

Rare-earth magnets convert electricity into motion. They are the strongest type of permanent magnets, along with semiconductors and batteries are used in all sectors of our economy including defense, satellites, AI, semiconductor fabrication, consumer electronics, industrial motors, power tools and non-drive train motors.

"This veteran-owned company will enable North Carolina to keep leading the way on national security, as well as building the economy of the future," said Stein.

In addition to its size and job creation, the facility will be one of the region's largest energy users. The facility is expected to have an energy demand of 150 megawatts, which will be delivered by South River EMC.

"It is a privilege for South River EMC to provide electric service to Vulcan Elements, and I am grateful that they selected North Carolina

and Benson as the location of its new facility," said South River EMC CEO Chris M. Spears. "The impact of a local investment of almost \$1 billion and the addition of 1,000 high-paying jobs will truly be a blessing to our region. More importantly, Vulcan Elements will provide critical support to our military and improving upon the economic security of the United States of America. Our Cooperative prides itself on providing excellent service to all of our members and we are committed to meeting and exceeding the expectations of Vulcan Elements."

Another key aspect of this project is that the annual salary for planned positions is \$81,900. If you are interested in learning more about Vulcan Elements or upcoming employment opportunities, visit [vulcanelements.com](http://vulcanelements.com).



# Phone it in!

Make a secure payment any time, anywhere. Call **(800) 338-5530** or **(910) 892-8071** and select option **1** to use our automated system.

## Basketball Camp Opportunity For Students

South River EMC is on the lookout for current fifth and sixth graders interested in attending the All-Stars Sports Camps offered at NC State and UNC-Chapel Hill.

The camp opportunity gives boys and girls a unique experience to attend basketball camp on one of two of the state's largest college campuses.

Students statewide are encouraged to apply for one of 50 all-expenses-paid scholarships to attend the Carolina Basketball Camp at the University of North

Carolina at Chapel Hill (June 27-30) and the Wolfpack Women's Basketball Academy at North Carolina State University in Raleigh (June 14-17).

At the overnight camps, campers work closely with coaches and players to develop fundamental skills, helping them perform and excel both on and off the court. The Cooperative funds one scholarship to each camp. Last year, we were able to send Kyrin Ford (left) and Rayleigh Arnold (right).

Campers must:

- ▶ Be a rising sixth or seventh grader. This means the student should currently be in fifth or sixth grade.
- ▶ Attend a school in the Cooperative service area. (Please email [connections@sremc.com](mailto:connections@sremc.com) if you have any questions.)
- ▶ Have permission from a parent or guardian to attend. An information sheet must be signed.

- ▶ Provide their own transportation to and from camp.

Winners will attend the camps courtesy of South River EMC.

Applications are scored on academics, extracurricular activities and essay questions that must accompany the application.

The application period runs from Jan. 2 to March 31.

Eligible students interested in the scholarships can get more information and access the applications through [sremc.com/basketball-camps](https://sremc.com/basketball-camps).



# Time For That Work To Shine!

It's January and that means we're at least halfway through the school year. It also means it's time to grab your child's most recent report card with at least one "A" on it.

That's right, it's time to send in those recent report cards for the "Give Us An A" drawing, to be held Feb. 5.

The drawing is for students achieving at least one A on their report card. Each of the 15 students whose names are drawn will receive a \$25 gift card.

The program is open to students who are members, or children of members, of South River EMC. Just make a copy of

the most recent report card with at least one A, and send it to the Cooperative.

You must include the member's name, South River EMC account number and a daytime telephone number, report cards will not be accepted without this information.

Report cards should be sent to:  
South River EMC  
"Give Us An A"  
PO Box 931  
Dunn, NC 28335

Or scanned and

e-mailed to [connections@sremc.com](mailto:connections@sremc.com).

Report cards are due by close of business, Feb. 3.



# Cold Weather Savings

As we settle into the cooler weather, let's look at a few ways to keep energy costs in check.

For example, if you have a fireplace and you aren't using it? Close the flue.

- ▶ Make sure your home is weather stripped and caulking is good. If you're missing stripping or caulk is cracking, replace it to prevent air infiltration, or the loss of heated air outside.
- ▶ Insulation is important too, having the appropriate amount prevents heat transfer, or the loss of heated air to a cool space.
- ▶ Make sure to clean your dryer's

lint trap, and that the outdoor exhaust door is not blocked or clogged. As much as possible, harvest heat from previous loads of laundry.

- ▶ Set your thermostat and try not to touch it, unless you can turn it down a little more. The recommended setting for

heating is 68 degrees

- ▶ When heating, keep your windows locked.
- ▶ Open drapes and shades during the sunny days to gather heat, and make sure they're closed up in the evening.
- ▶ Minimize space heater use, not only do they use a lot of energy, but depending on the activity in your home, they could be in the way.



Saving money during these cooler times might seem impossible, but trying a few items can help from time to time.



## Boost Comfort And Cut Costs

South River EMC offers the energy-efficient heating and cooling rebate for members who purchase more energy efficient heating and cooling units.

Efficiency for heat pumps is measured by their seasonal

energy efficiency ratio 2, or SEER 2, rating.

Energy-efficient systems, usually 16 SEER 2 or greater, not only use less electricity — they deliver more consistent temperatures, reduce strain on

equipment, and often extend the lifespan of the units.

For details on the rebates offered by South River EMC, scan the QR code.

## A More Comfortable Home Awaits

Comfortability depends on many items. The one we will look at is temperature.

The temperature of your home is controlled by several things, one is heating and cooling, another is air infiltration and heat transfer.

When one of those is off, you might lean harder on another, i.e. if you're cold, you might adjust your thermostat. In reality, you might just have a leaky window

that is letting in cold air.

Small improvements can reap rewards, but sometimes larger, or more extensive work needs done.

Community Action offers a weatherization package for single family or manufactured low-income homes, which includes: air/duct sealing, improved insulation, an HVAC tune-up or replacement, and a programmable thermostat in a home with a heat pump or an electric

furnace/central AC.

If you take part in this program, you could be eligible for a rebate.

For details, scan the QR code.



## Rebates Also Still Offered

South River EMC offers rebates on high efficiency residential

option, or HERO, homes, as well as variable and two-speed

pool pumps.

Learn more, scan the QR code.

## A Clear Choice for Comfort

Windows are important, they show us many things, as well as protecting us.

However, when they need replaced is not always clear.

Broken windows, obvious, leaky windows, a little less obvious at

times. But, if you do an assessment of your windows and feel some air around them, see condensation between panes and if caulking and weatherstripping is breaking off, it's time to replace and South River EMC

offers a rebate.

For details on the rebate, scan the QR code.

And remember, only one window rebate per home per 20-year period.

## Tap Into Savings with Energy-Efficient Water Heaters

Looking to lower costs and boost home efficiency? South River EMC offers rebates for energy-efficient water heaters, like heat-pump and solar water heaters.

Both options can save energy and money, but in different ways.

Heat-pump water heaters move heat from the air into water, using 60–70% less electricity than standard electric water heaters. This type of unit delivers reliable, year-round performance, no matter the

weather. It can also install easily indoors, with a shorter payback period.

Solar water heaters use free, renewable sunlight to heat your water, cutting down monthly water heating costs. They can last 20–30 years with proper maintenance. Solar water heaters are typically helpful for homes with a lot of sun and large water use.

So, which is right for you?

Choose a heat-pump water

heater for predictable savings and simple installation.

Choose a solar water heater to maximize renewable energy and long-term cost reduction.

No matter your choice, South River EMC's rebate can make upgrading to an energy-efficient water heater more affordable.

Learn more about rebates and eligibility by scanning the QR code.



## 7 Reasons the Energy Saver NC Program Is a Game-Changer

### 1. Slash Monthly Energy Bills

Energy Saver NC provides tools, assessments, and recommendations that help homeowners cut wasted energy.

### 2. Free or Low-Cost Home Energy Assessments

Many participants qualify for no-cost home energy checkups, identifying everything from leaky ductwork to inefficient appliances. South River EMC has the Energy Service Advisors who perform these tasks as well.

### 3. Upgrades That Pay for Themselves

The program offers rebates and incentives for upgrades like insulation, air sealing, smart thermostats, and Energy Star appliances—helping improvements pay off faster.

### 4. Healthier, More Comfortable Homes

Better insulation and air sealing don't just save energy—they reduce drafts, moisture, and allergens to keep your living space more comfortable year-round.

### 5. Support for Low- and Moderate-Income Households

Energy Saver NC works with community organizations to ensure income-qualified households get the biggest savings and assistance options.

### 6. Expert Guidance You Don't Have to Google

Participants get personalized recommendations from trained energy advisors who understand local building styles, weather patterns, and utility programs across North Carolina.

### 7. A Greener North Carolina

Saving energy means reducing carbon emissions—so participating helps protect NC's forests, coastlines, and communities for future generations.

Many of the rebates listed here can be combined with rebates offered by South River EMC. If you scan the QR code on the preceding page, you can learn more about those.

Scan the QR code on this page to learn more about Energy Saver NC and their rebates.

**ENERGY SAVER NC REBATES**

Scan here for complete details

- HVAC Heat Pump\*** (up to \$8,000)
- Insulation, Air Sealing and Ventilation\*** (up to \$3,000)
- Electric Wiring** (up to \$2,500)
- Electric Load Service Center** (up to \$4,000)
- Energy Assessment** (to determine up to \$30,000 in eligible rebates)
- Heat Pump Water Heater\*** (up to \$3,750)
- Electric Stove, Cooktop, Range or Oven\*** (up to \$2,000)
- Heat Pump Clothes Dryer\*** (up to \$2,000)

**Note:** On average, 52% of a household's annual energy consumption is for heating and cooling. With proper insulation, an efficient electric heat pump offers big opportunities to save. Source: EPA

**Are you a contractor?**  
Become an Energy Saver North Carolina Registered Contractor to grow your business with access to marketing resources, training, support and HOMES and HEAR rebates. Visit [EnergySaverNC.org/for-contractors](http://EnergySaverNC.org/for-contractors) to learn more.

South River EMC is a Member of the Energy STAR program.

South River EMC  
**Communicator**

PO Box 931  
Dunn, NC 28335  
910.892.8071  
800.338.5530  
[sremc.com](http://sremc.com)

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