



Rio Grande Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Update



A Message From The General Manager/CEO

By Dan Laws

*“This year will go down
in the record books.”*

As I write this article, we are preparing for another winter blast in the western part of our system. This year will go in the record books for sure. 2015 began with an ice storm that was not as bad as the 2013/2014 winter ice storm, but it was bad enough. Unfortunately, some members were hit by both of these ice storms. Members around Guadalupe Mountains National Park and the state line were hammered by both storms. Here are some of the vital statistics: 482 downed poles, 621 spans of conductor on the ground, and 130 broken cross arms. We had approximately 100 contractor employees assisting our crews in the restoration of power. Muddy conditions necessitated the use of bulldozers in order to get trucks into position to replace broken poles. We had six dozers scattered around the system to facilitate repairs.

We lost power to all of the portions of Brewster County the Cooperative serves on Friday, January 2. Ice accumulations on the transmission line that serves this area caused the line to sag too low over highway 67, just north of US 90. The low hanging conductor was snagged by a truck, resulting in a domino effect. Poles and cross arms began to snap, throwing additional weight to the remaining structures until they began to fail. During the time power was out in Terlingua Ranch, Study Butte, Terlingua Ghost Town and Lajitas, we stayed in contact with emergency first responders, providing updates about our progress restoring power. Power was restored at approximately 6:45 PM, Tuesday, January 6. According to power monitoring equipment installed to keep an eye on power quality in South Brewster County, the outage lasted 103 hours, or 4.3 days.

Obviously, all the linemen were exposed to treacherous conditions as they worked to restore power all over West Texas. Likewise, members without power were exposed to very cold temperatures. Thankfully, we only had one vehicle accident when a truck lost control and hit one of our bucket trucks from behind. We also had one employee injured when a line being repaired snapped unexpectedly, causing him to fall from the side bins of his truck. He fractured both of his wrists.

We will continue to harden our system this spring and summer, but please be aware that when a severe storm hits like what we experienced this winter and last winter, things are going to fail. Although there is no comfort in what I am about to say, it is nevertheless noteworthy. Every utility in the affected area lost lines, too. Midland, Odessa, Fort Stockton, Alpine, Marfa and Fort Davis all lost power for various lengths of time. There is a temptation among a few to feel that only RGEC loses power during these types of weather events. Such is not the case, however. Sometimes RGEC takes longer to restore power because of the many miles it serves. The reason is never because we don't maintain our system, or that we simply don't care.

I want to thank everyone for your patience, as we worked through the problems. I know living without electric energy is difficult, but the vast majority of our members were understanding and encouraging.

