

Storm Troopers

The remnants of Hurricane Ike packed a mean punch Saturday, September 13, as the storm moved through East Texas. Tropical storm-force winds destroyed countless miles of transmission and distribution lines, leaving millions in East Texas without power. At peak, approximately 1,000 Wood Country Electric Cooperative (WCEC) members were among those left in the dark.

The hardest hit areas of WCEC's system were Mount Vernon, Red Springs and Quitman. In total, the distribution system suffered eight broken power poles and numerous lines downed by broken tree limbs and fallen trees. WCEC restoration efforts, including materials and labor, are estimated at a relatively modest \$36,000. Even with extreme challenges such as debris, inclement weather and saturated ground, WCEC crews had restored all storm-related power losses within 20 hours. Prior to the anticipated storm, linemen, right-of-way crew members, contractors, servicemen, engineers and



Lending a hand in St. Francisville, Louisiana, after Hurricane Gustav, were WCEC's Craig Kizer and Jerry Stegall. They joined a team that volunteered to help Dixie Electric Membership Cooperative.

warehouse personnel were put on standby. These workers, along with WCEC support staff such as member service representatives taking calls and dispatchers making assignments,

logged more than 665 storm response hours to bring WCEC's system fully up.

The swift restoration time was mostly due to the storm's track, which spared WCEC's system the strongest winds. But, high praise and credit are also due the line workers and right-of-way crews that maintain the system all year long. Their diligence made a difference.

Other cooperatives and investor-owned utilities in East Texas did not fare nearly as well as WCEC. Many customers were still without power more than a week later.



Chris McKnight and Kody Keith walk on point to scout out hazards as the WCEC truck negotiates downed trees and lines in restoration efforts after Hurricane Gustav hit Louisiana.

PUBLIC NOTICE

STATEMENT OF INTENT TO CONSIDER AND DETERMINE WHETHER TO IMPLEMENT NEW FEDERAL STANDARDS

At peak, 19,000 Rusk County Electric Cooperative members, 6,000 Upshur Rural Electric Cooperative members and 12,000 at Panola-Harrison Electric Cooperative were without power. And these outages do not include the significant numbers served by investor-owned utilities.

So, when WCEC got the call from some sister cooperatives, our crews responded. Volunteers from WCEC helped not only during the aftermath of Ike, but had already responded to damage left by Hurricane Gustav as well.

Responding to St. Francisville, Louisiana, after Gustav were: Rick Kvapil, Craig Kizer, Brandon Lankford, Chris McKnight, Kody Keith and Jerry Stegall.

Responding after Ike were: Harold Willis, Donny Brown, Ralph Shelton and Chance Holland, who supported Bowie-Cass EC; Wesley Price, Lance Shirley, Ramon Steward and Daniel Miller, who helped out Upshur Rural EC; and Bradley Martin and David Spindle, who worked at Cherokee County EC.

During circumstances such as these, the work is hard, dangerous and tiring. The men are not living in the best of conditions and generally must sleep on cots in spaces without air conditioning and alongside many other utility workers. They subsist on grab-and-eat meals and have few creature comforts with long working days. Many times they must deal with frustrated individuals, and they see firsthand the devastation and toll that a heavy weather event can bring to a region. But, whenever the call comes, without hesitation, they get up and do it all over again.

Next time you see a lineman, servicemen or right-of-way crewman, remember all that they do behind the scenes every single day and often-times into the wee hours. Steadfast and faithful, they work until the job gets done. Hats off to you, gents!

On September 15, 2008, the Board of Directors (the "Board") of Wood County Electric Cooperative, Inc. ("Cooperative") adopted a resolution initiating a proceeding to consider and determine whether to implement the federal standards in the Public Utility Regulatory Policies Act of 1978 ("PURPA"), 16 U.S.C. § 2621(d), as amended by the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 ("EISA 2007").

The Board will convene a public evidentiary hearing to consider the evidence and positions presented by the admitted parties participating in the proceeding regarding whether the Board should adopt the following standards:

1. Integrated Resource Planning. Each electric utility shall integrate energy efficiency into its plans and adopt policies establishing cost-effective energy efficiency as a priority resource.

2. Rate Design Modifications to Promote Energy-Efficiency Investments. Rates allowed to be charged by any electric utility shall align utility incentives with the delivery of cost-effective energy efficiency and promote energy-efficiency investments.

3. Smart Grid Information. All electricity purchasers shall be provided from their electricity provider direct access, in written or electronic machine-readable form as appropriate, information concerning time-based electricity prices in the wholesale electricity market, along with retail prices or rates that are available to purchasers. Further, purchasers shall be provided information on the sources of power provided by the utility, including the greenhouse gas emissions associated with each type of generation for intervals during which such information is available on a cost-effective basis.

INTERVENTION DEADLINE: Interested persons who wish to present evidence and participate in the evidentiary hearing should notify the Cooperative and the law firm of Brickfield Burchette Ritts & Stone, P.C. ("Law Firm") by sending a written request to be admitted as a party to the proceeding. Requests to participate should be sent or delivered to the Cooperative at P.O. Box 1827, Quitman, TX 75783 and to the Law Firm, at 1005 Congress Avenue, Suite 400, Austin, TX 78701. Requests must be received no later than December 15, 2008.

HEARING SCHEDULE. A Presiding Officer will schedule a prehearing conference after the intervention deadline in order to (1) rule on intervention requests; and (2) establish a procedural schedule including hearing dates and briefing deadlines, if necessary.

PUBLIC COMMENTS. Persons who wish to comment on this proceeding, but not present evidence and participate in the hearing, may send their comments in writing to the Cooperative at P.O. Box 1827, Quitman, TX 75783 and to the Law Firm, at 1005 Congress Avenue, Suite 400, Austin, TX 78701.

Requests for further information about the proceeding and a copy of the Board Resolutions authorizing the proceeding should be sent to the Cooperative at P.O. Box 1827, Quitman, TX 75783, attention Paige Eaton.

Here, Gator, Gator!

Many are very surprised to find that almost every one of the featured reptiles at the East Texas Gators and Wildlife Park are locals. All but two of the some 50 American alligator residents at the park were trapped within 50 miles of the new Grand Saline family attraction.

Texas alligator habitat includes freshwater environments such as ponds, lakes, marshes, wetlands, rivers, reservoirs and brackish wetlands. According to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, the alligator's range in Texas is from East Texas' Sabine River down to the Gulf and spreads across the coastal marshes to the Rio Grande and west to about Interstate 35.

Scientists say the American alligator is akin to a living fossil because it has roamed the earth for 200 million years. Alligators are protected in Texas, so owners of the park, Charlie and Jana Harris, get their gargantuan reptiles from a licensed trapper. Some of the gators were declared a nuisance because of their proximity to communities and needed to be removed. So, these fortunate beasts have come to live in style in a serene park-like setting.

In the wild, adult gators would normally eat fish, crabs, turtles, birds and other animals that wade near the shore. Here, the gators get a fresh and steady diet—about 50 pounds of raw meat a day. They usually get fed alligator-bite-sized chicken quarters, beef hearts or beef livers. But their diets are also supplemented with alligator chow.

And don't get in the way when their dinner bell tolls. When patrons throughout the park hear the clang-clang of the bell, it means it's feeding time for the gators. And the big reptiles know it, too. Once the sound rings out, it's amazing how fast these short-legged, long-tailed creatures can glide through the water and make it to



Summoned by the dinner bell, the reptiles that live in the big gator pond crowd together for food.

shore. There, they stand leathery shoulder to leathery shoulder, expectantly waiting for Charlie to throw them a chicken dinner. Any squabbling for food is minimal, as Charlie pitches pretty accurately to make sure each animal gets a share.

When the food bag is empty, Charlie gives it a shake, and it seems to act as a signal to the gators. Many immediately turn an about-face to loudly splash back into the water while others back ever so slowly into the pond. Here they submerge with eyes exposed above water to remain watchful, just in case there should be more chow.

There are two large alligator ponds at the park, with the specimens segregated by length. The 6- to 12-footers are kept in one, with the 4- to 5-footers in another. Another pond is in the planning stages. Hatchlings are kept under a roof in contained aquariums for now, where they will stay until they are big enough to go in a pond.

The eggs for the hatchery come from the nests that female alligators make on-site. Charlie explains that female gators build nests from about May to June, depending on the temperatures. Then, over a period of a few weeks, a female will lay anywhere from 15 to 60 eggs. Left to nature, these eggs would hatch in about 65 days in late August to mid-September. The gender of a hatchling is determined by

the temperature of the nest when the alligator is born. Warmer temperatures in the 91- to 94-degree range produce males, while temperatures in the 84- to 87-degree range produce females. When left up to the elements, generally more females are born.

Because Charlie and his crew want to be able to control the outcome of the sexes, they rob the nests, which are guarded by female alligators. When asked how they get the job done, he says with a grin, "Verrrry carefully." Actually, he went on to explain, it is a very tedious process because the eggs are more delicate than one would think. If an alligator egg is turned after it has been laid, it will not produce. So, when robbing the nest, one person must attend to the female alligator, staving her off with a long pole. And Charlie says she's usually angry. Then, with a lot of mad momma alligator roaring going on, two other people run to the nest, which is made of a compressed mound of vegetation and mud. Digging furiously, they get to the clutch of eggs and carefully mark each one, so they are sure to place it into the incubator right side up. Once in the incubator, the eggs can be warmed to the proper temperature to ensure a good mix of male and female hatchlings.

The park has been open since August 2008. And when Jana was asked "Why an alligator park?" she

said Charlie has always loved alligators. She added, “We love all kinds of animals. We love nature and being able to show various types of animals to children and others that may not ever get the opportunity to see them.”

And once you get to the park, you’ll see that it’s not all about alligators. It’s about nature in a rustic setting with lots of creatures tucked here and there. As for other reptiles, there are many, including an 8 1/2-foot Burmese python and a tail-shaking rattlesnake. There are also turtles and various frogs and lizards, such as a bearded dragon. But, the park does not just cater to reptiles. There are a few surprises of the feathery and furry kind because the park is also an official wildlife rehabilitation facility.

Recently, Jana and Charlie briefly housed and cared for an injured red-tailed hawk as part of rescue efforts by the local sheriff’s office in concert with game wardens. They also had a pair of baby raccoons that will be released once they are old enough to fend for themselves. Another crowd pleaser is the baby pig, which will get bottle-fed until it’s old enough to be weaned. The Harris family also care for countless domestic birds whose owners have abandoned them. In that flock, there’s

a large parrot, who may say a word or two if he’s in the mood, and many finches and parakeets.

More aquatic feathered friends spend their time gliding in and out of the large koi pond, where they flash their feathers and call to one another. Colorful mallards swim alongside African geese and a pair of long-necked black swans. These more exotic fowl are complemented by some domestic white Pekin ducks that may not be as glamorous, but make up for it with their loud, quacky talking. Think Donald Duck on megaphone.

In addition to taking in the sights and sounds, guests who work up a hunger can sate their appetites at the on-site restaurant which offers hefty handmade burgers with fried potatoes, smoked turkey legs and other concession favorites such as 14 flavors of snow cones. Shrimp baskets are also available. The more adventurous eater may want to try the grilled alligator kabobs or a plate of fried alligator tail.

The park welcomes and accepts private catered parties and can accommodate about 100. There’s a bounce house for kid-themed parties, and the park can even accommodate evening affairs that are more adult-oriented in a fun and relaxing environment. There

are several covered areas, and the out-buildings are rustic and beautiful, all hand-built from reclaimed wood and metal by Charlie and his friends.

As for future plans, Charlie and Jana will be expanding the park. They are planning a petting zoo that will house furry and fluffy types, such as goats, lambs and other gentle creatures, and they have plans for adding an enclosed aviary.

The Harris family’s dream was to build an entertaining and serene spot for a whole family to spend some time without spending a lot of money. Charlie says, “This is a great country atmosphere, and we have everything as close to a natural setting as possible.” Mission accomplished.

Wood County Electric Cooperative serves East Texas Gators & Wildlife Park.

EAST TEXAS GATORS & WILDLIFE PARK

9515 FM 1255

Grand Saline, TX 75140

Phone: (903) 962-5630

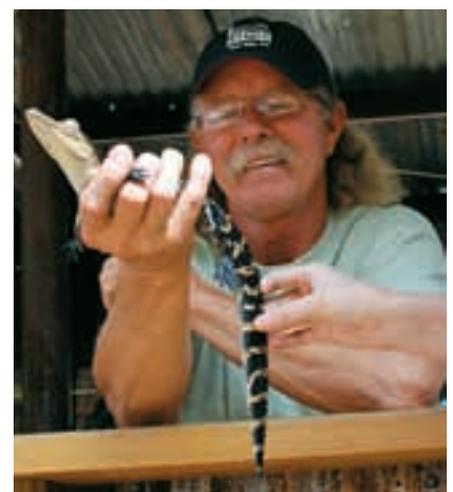
Website:

[hstrial-JHarris772 .homestead.com](http://hstrial-JHarris772.homestead.com)

The park is open 7 days a week. Admission is \$5 for adults and \$4 for children 12 and younger and for senior adults.

Summer hours: 9 a.m.-7 p.m.

Winter hours: 10 a.m. until dark



A young visitor (left photo) was amazed and enthralled to watch Jana Harris feed a 2-week-old rescued piglet until, off camera, Charlie Harris (right photo) displayed a hatchling alligator, making the youngster’s eyes open wide.