

December 2018

Alabama

LIVING

Wiregrass
Electric
Cooperative



**WE POWERED
THROUGH**
HURRICANE MICHAEL 2018

Hurricane Michael

*Wiregrass community
comes together during
massive outage*

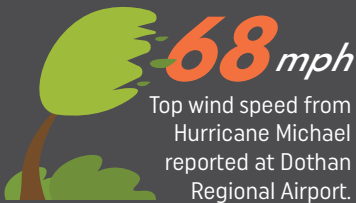
HURRICANE MICHAEL

By the numbers

18,000 members



Hurricane Michael took out power to just over 18,000 WEC members — that's 85% of all customers!



Top wind speed from Hurricane Michael reported at Dothan Regional Airport.

500+ broken poles

Crews replaced more than 500 poles damaged by high winds and fallen trees.



Crews rebuilt almost 60 road miles of electric service — about the distance from Dothan to Troy!

225 reinforcements

Cooperatives from across Alabama sent linemen and other specialists to help WEC restore power.



Crews restored power to some 18,000 members in nine days.

WEATHERING THE STORM TOGETHER

Hurricane restoration brings out the best in region's people

Hurricane Michael struck the Wiregrass on Oct. 10, slamming ashore as a Category 4 storm that would damage property and disrupt lives as it barreled inland.

For the members of Wiregrass Electric Cooperative, the damage was often overwhelming. Crops were destroyed. Homes were damaged. And just over 18,000 WEC members lost power in a tangle of downed trees, broken poles and twisted lines.

While stories of Hurricane Michael will be told for years to come, those of us at WEC wish to reflect now on a simple truth: When the Wiregrass faces great challenges, its residents show the greatest resilience and caring.

Restoring power required nine days, 45,000 hours of work, support from 19 other cooperative power companies, roughly 40 contractor and right of way crews and every WEC employee. One lineman cut a vacation short to return to help as the storm approached. The family of another team member postponed a funeral. And those were only two of the stories showing WEC's commitment to its members.

"The scope of this was beyond anything we have ever dealt with, and we hope we never have to deal with again," WEC CEO **Les Moreland** says.

Brad Kimbro, WEC's chief operating officer, says crews were humbled by the support they received. Volunteers from Watermark Church in Ashford, for example, washed uniforms for the crews. When the laundry was returned, linemen found notes tucked into their clothes letting them know the congregation was praying for their safety.

"We had several members who would bring them drinks or food, and they would cheer when their lights came back on," says



Jason Thrash, WEC vice president of engineering and operations.

And the commitment to helping those working in the field extended to every WEC department.

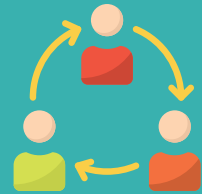
"The human resources department, as well as the accounting and billing departments were responsible for coordinating all meals and sleeping arrangements for all crews assisting our cooperative," says Chief Financial Officer Lisa LeNoir. "The employees in these areas were also working very long hours to support the restoration effort and help keep things running smoothly."

And throughout the effort, the professionalism of the men and women who make WEC's services possible showed through. Not a single accident was recorded.

"This is why we do what we do," says Kimbro. "We are here to serve our members. They understand that, and when hard times such as natural disasters come, they appreciate and support our crews as we do our best to restore power. That's what being a cooperative is all about." ■



COOPERATION AMONG COOPERATIVES



THANK YOU!

In times of natural disaster, electric cooperatives send crews to help one another restore power to their members. This map shows the cooperatives who assisted WEC in the recovery from Hurricane Michael. We want to thank the linemen, mechanics, materials and warehouse managers, right-of-way crews, and others who helped us bring the power back on for 18,000 WEC members. This is the principle of Cooperation Among Cooperatives in action!

NOTE: As the work in our service area was completed, WEC crews and the electric cooperatives from across our state headed to Georgia and Florida to help cooperatives there rebuild their hurricane-damaged systems.





HURRICANE MICHAEL

At A Glance

ASTOUNDING FACTS



At 155 mph, Michael was 2 mph away from being a Category 5 hurricane at landfall.



Storm surges reached 9-14 feet between Mexico Beach and Apalachee Bay.



Michael remained a major hurricane for nearly five hours after landfall.



Michael was downgraded to a tropical storm over Georgia, nearly 12 hours after landfall.



Michael recorded 68 mph winds at the Dothan Airport in Houston County.



The hurricane took out power to thousands in southeast Alabama, including over 18,000 Wiregrass Electric Cooperative members.

'ONE WE'RE NEVER GOING TO FORGET'

Hurricane Michael: A history-making storm

While Hurricane Michael delivered a destructive blow to the Wiregrass, the effects of the Oct. 10 storm were even more severe to the east of our region. In fact, several states felt the force of this unique storm.

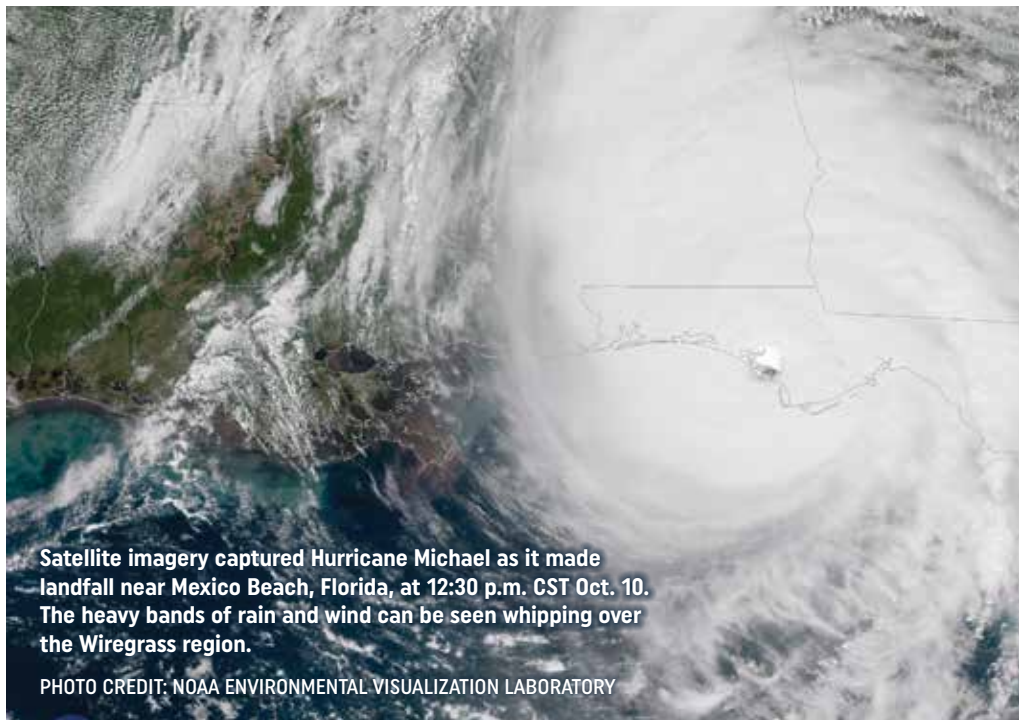
Hurricane Michael originated in the Caribbean Sea on Oct. 2 from a broad low-pressure area. One week later, by Oct. 9, the storm was measured as a Category 3 hurricane. Michael was a major storm, intensifying as it rapidly traveled across the Gulf of Mexico. Hundreds of thousands were ordered to evacuate.

A Category 4 storm at landfall, Michael brought sustained winds of 155 mph to the Florida Panhandle. Facing the brunt of the storm's power, the city of Mexico Beach, Florida, was leveled.

Florida Governor **Rick Scott** told the Weather Channel the damage from Panama City down to Mexico Beach was "way worse than anybody ever anticipated."

Bringing hurricane-force winds north as it moved inland, Hurricane Michael was only the fifth major hurricane to strike Georgia since reliable record keeping began in 1851, Atlanta's WSB-TV meteorologist **Brad Nitz** told The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. It was the first to impact Georgia coming up through Florida. "This is the first time in about 120 years there's been a major hurricane in Georgia," Nitz said.

As Hurricane Michael continued across the southeastern United States, it shattered homes and businesses, toppled trees and demolished crops. Millions of residents were left without power.



Satellite imagery captured Hurricane Michael as it made landfall near Mexico Beach, Florida, at 12:30 p.m. CST Oct. 10. The heavy bands of rain and wind can be seen whipping over the Wiregrass region.

PHOTO CREDIT: NOAA ENVIRONMENTAL VISUALIZATION LABORATORY

Michael Graham, director of the National Hurricane Center in Miami, told NBC News that Hurricane Michael was a “history-making, very devastating storm and one that we’re never going to forget.”

While many never expect major hurricanes to reach as far inland as Michael, National Hurricane Center meteorologist **Dennis Feltgen** told The Atlanta Journal-Constitution that not all hurricanes are limited to coastal events.

“As these storms move inland and have all that energy, it does take time for that atmospheric energy to power down. That was a major player in Michael,” said Feltgen.

Hurricane Michael continued to move toward the Atlantic coast, bringing torrential rain to millions in its path, including 9.62 inches to the Black Mountain area of North Carolina, not far from Asheville.

Thirty-six people died, and the storm caused more than \$11 billion in damages. Ranked by pressure, it registered as the third-most intense Atlantic hurricane to hit the U.S., and the strongest hurricane to make landfall on the Florida Panhandle since record keeping began.

For many, the recovery will take years. “It’s bad,” Franklin County, Florida, Sheriff **A.J. “Tony” Smith** said in an NBC News interview as he surveyed damage in Apalachicola. “For us, this is catastrophic.” ■



TIMELINE OF A HURRICANE

OCT. 2,
2018



Broad low-pressure area in southwestern Caribbean Sea

Tropical depression



OCT. 7,
2018

OCT. 8,
2018



Hurricane status

Major hurricane status
(Category 3 or higher)



OCT. 8,
2018

OCT. 10,
2018



Landfall

18,000 WEC members lose power



OCT. 10,
2018

OCT. 11,
2018



Tropical storm over Georgia

Extratropical cyclone off the coast of the mid-Atlantic states



OCT. 12,
2018

OCT. 16,
2018



Dissipated

Power restored to all WEC members with no structural damage



OCT. 19,
2018



STATE OF EMERGENCY

Alabama prepared for hurricane with state and national declarations

The Gulf Coast is no stranger to hurricanes. Fortunately, major storms often weaken before landfall. This was not the case with Hurricane Michael. It continued to build strength as it made its way toward Alabama and Florida.

“Michael went through a rapid intensification phase, and there was no weakening,” says **James Spann**, chief meteorologist for ABC 33/40 in Birmingham.

Warmer than normal sea surface temperatures in the Gulf of Mexico for October — 1.8 to 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit above average — powered the intensification. “There was also very little wind shear, which provided a favorable environment for strengthening,” says Spann, a certified broadcast meteorologist whose work has earned two Emmys along with awards from the National Weather Association and the American Meteorological Society.

As people in the Wiregrass watched local, state and national news in the days leading up to landfall, it became apparent that the eye of the storm would likely shift to the east. “The forecast track from the National Hurricane Center was, once again, remarkably good,” Spann says. “Alabama was always forecast to be on the ‘dry’ west side of the system, although Southeast Alabama was close enough to the core for wind damage.”

Indeed it was. The storm blew over hundreds of trees, taking down power lines and poles with them. “We knew we were in for a hit to our system,” says **Brad Kimbro**, chief operating officer of Wiregrass Electric Cooperative. “We activated our emergency operations plan and braced for the worst.”

Within a few hours, some 18,000 WEC members were without power — about 85 percent of the entire customer base.



This detail of a NOAA forecast map from Monday, Oct. 8, shows the anticipated path of Hurricane Michael two days before landfall. “The forecast track from the National Hurricane Center was, once again, remarkably good,” says meteorologist James Spann.

State of emergency

While the storm’s track became increasingly clear through the week, the power of the storm was a surprise. Spann says the skill set in forecasting rapid intensification is not as good as track projections. It was not until 24 hours before landfall that forecasters saw that Michael was going to come ashore as a Category 4 hurricane.

The state government enacted emergency efforts to ensure public safety and aid recovery. Governor **Kay Ivey** declared a state of emergency on Oct. 10, effective at 3 p.m., “in anticipation of widespread power outages, wind damage and debris produced by high winds and heavy rain.”

More than a warning, a state emergency declaration is an official act of the government that sets several things

into motion. To begin with, it activates the state’s emergency operations plan. It authorizes the state emergency management agency to make damage assessments after the storm. It also directs various state agencies to do what is necessary within their legal means to help communities harmed by the storm.

“Alabama is once again in the path of a hurricane,” Gov. Ivey said in her Oct. 10 statement, “but I know Alabamians will once again come together and be prepared for whatever Michael may bring. On the state level we are prepared; now is the time for residents in south Alabama to review your emergency preparedness plans and also get prepared.”

Brian Hastings, director of the Alabama Emergency Management Agency,

agreed, warning residents that Hurricane Michael would “produce widespread power outages and debris that will challenge our response and recovery in the southern and Wiregrass counties.”

Historically strong

The storm lived up to the projections. Wind gusts as high as 68 miles per hour were recorded at the Dothan Regional Airport. Hurricane Michael’s eye may have been centered miles away from the Wiregrass, but the storm still leveled trees that took out power to thousands of homes and businesses in the region while damaging property.

“You can rate storms based on a number of parameters,” says Spann. “In terms of central pressure, Michael was the third strongest at the time of landfall.”

The Labor Day storm of 1935 was a Category 5 at landfall, as was Hurricane Camille in 1969. Camille claimed 259 lives when it hit the Mississippi coast. The fact that the death toll from Hurricane Michael stands at 36 is a sign that society has made improvements to storm prevention and preparedness. “No doubt the effective warning process and modern communication platforms saved many lives,” Spann says.

Federal assistance

The day after Hurricane Michael left its path of damage across several southeast Alabama counties, Ivey called on the federal government for assistance. President **Donald Trump** approved an emergency disaster declaration for the state, allowing the Federal Emergency Management Agency to provide assistance to the affected counties.

“This assistance will help us recover some of the cost of response and recovery efforts conducted by the state and local governments,” Ivey said in a statement. “This will be a huge benefit to the smaller communities in Alabama that have been affected.”

The federal declaration was for Dale, Geneva, Henry and Houston counties. Under FEMA’s Public Assistance Program, aid will be provided at 75 percent federal funding for approved costs related to the storm.

These declarations will hopefully help WEC recover some of the millions of dollars in expenses associated with repairing what Hurricane Michael destroyed, says Kimbro. ■



1. Manager of Operations Joey Brown monitors the outage map in WEC’s dispatch center on the morning after Hurricane Michael hit the Wiregrass.
2. WEC lineman Eddie Oviedo works the controls on a WEC bucket truck during the restoration efforts following Hurricane Michael.
3. A lineman from Marshall-DeKalb Electric Cooperative helps replace a damaged power line after Hurricane Michael.
4. A lineman from Tombigbee Electric Cooperative helps replace a power pole following Hurricane Michael. WEC had to replace 500 broken poles following the storm.



BEHIND THE SCENES

Hospitals, EMA and the media work around the clock to keep public safe



WTVY chief meteorologist David Paul monitored Hurricane Michael closely in the days leading up to it making landfall.

PHOTO CONTRIBUTED BY WTVY.

As chief meteorologist for WTVY, **David Paul** doesn't like to exaggerate a storm's influence. If anything, he tries to keep an even keel, making sure not to blow things out of proportion. He doesn't want people to panic, and he doesn't want to create undue anxiety.

But when Paul examined the science behind Hurricane Michael, he knew something was different. "I went into our 2 p.m. news meeting on the Tuesday before the storm hit, and I said to everyone, 'I'm scared.' I've never said that before in my 21 years of doing the weather. This one just felt different," he says.

And it was different. The Category 4 hurricane was the most powerful in recorded history to hit the Florida Panhandle and the third strongest on record to hit the U.S. It cut a swath of disaster from the coast through the Wiregrass region and beyond, toppling trees

and power lines, destroying homes, and endangering the millions of lives in its path. But local emergency management officials, hospitals and members of the press prepared for the worst, making sure they were ready to take care of residents and to keep the information coming.

"You don't realize the greatness of people until you are in an adverse situation," Wiregrass Electric Cooperative CEO **Les Moreland** says. "It's always overwhelming when I see people rise up in the middle of a disaster and do whatever is needed.

Gearing up for disaster

Paul says Michael contained all the ingredients for a disaster. The weather models were trending a little stronger, of course, but there were other signs.

"If you look at a tropical system, there are three key ingredients," he says. "You need to have a well-defined, low-level circulation, and we had that. You also need

warm water — it was 85 to 87 degrees out there. Then, there was also very good outflow up above — that's kind of like the exhaust for the storm. All three of those were working in tandem, and I was like, 'Wow. There's no reason this won't continue to strengthen up to landfall.'"

As the WTVY weather center and newsroom readied for the storm — giving staff members assignments, prepping generators and getting the word out to the public — Dothan Houston County Emergency Management Agency Director **Chris Judah** says his staff was already working with local organizations to secure emergency shelters for the public, as well as livestock.

But the agency's first order of business was to track the storm and its possible impact and then get the word out to citizens that they needed to stock food, water and basic necessities in the event of a true disaster.

As early as Oct. 7 — three days before the hurricane, when Michael was still a fast-moving tropical storm — agency officials started sending warnings to the public via social media and the press. From then on, Judah's crew saw little sleep as they prepared for the days ahead.

Hospital prep

Southeast Alabama Medical Center officials also prepared as the storm neared. The hospital enacted a “Code Enable,” says **Mark Stewart**, director of marketing. The code, he says, signifies the initial plan of action the hospital uses to prepare for natural disasters. “We do exercises throughout the year for hurricanes and tornadoes, and we critique them to make sure things go smoothly when something does happen,” Stewart says.

In the days leading up to the storm, hospital officials called in staff, including two shifts of nurses, clinicians, physicians, food service workers and maintenance personnel. They needed to make sure patients and services were covered in the event of an emergency. “Our No. 1 priority is our patients and their safety,” Stewart says.

Motion-sensing doors were secured and locked to protect from wind and flying debris, and signage was placed to notify visitors of the facility's working doors. Staffers were offered places to stay inside the hospital — conference rooms and break rooms — to keep them safe and off the roads. The hospital also offered the staff's children safe day care facilities and a place for pets to shelter in crates.

Hospital officials prepped its whole-hospital generators, which can



WTVY morning meteorologist Evan Chickvara kept the people of the Wiregrass informed as Hurricane Michael approached the region.

PHOTO CONTRIBUTED BY WTVY.

power the hospital for 96 hours. They also readied an extra fuel truck in case of an extended outage. Luckily, Stewart says, the hospital only lost grid power for a few hours.

Still, Stewart thinks the aftermath of the hurricane was the worst the community has experienced in his nearly 18 years as director of marketing, especially taking into account the number of people it affected. “This touched people all the way from the Gulf Coast to Georgia to southeast Alabama,” he says.

Some of those people ended up at SAMC. “We had one of our busiest days in the emergency department on Thursday, the day after the storm,” Stewart says. “We saw an increase in injuries — people falling off roofs after trying to secure their

homes, things like that. We were also seeing patients coming in from the Panhandle and southwest Georgia. Bay Medical Center in Panama City Beach was hit pretty hard, and expectant mothers from there were coming here to get their babies delivered.”

After the storm, Judah and his team worked with local first responders to secure neighborhoods, confirm residents of damaged homes were safe, and make sure roads were cleared.

But the hard work could last for months or years, Judah says. The city and county are still tallying the damage and working long days to get the necessary paperwork to federal, state and local authorities, he says.

“People think the Federal Emergency Management Agency just comes in and starts handing out checks,” he says. “But it doesn't work that way. There's still so much for us to do and assess.”

WEC's Moreland estimates there was \$7.5 million in damages, and the cooperative is hopeful of receiving federal assistance to minimize the financial burden for members.

“An event like this is not over in 10 days,” he says. “We have the potential to receive some assistance, so there is a massive amount of work that needs to be done over the next few months as we document the damage and associated costs.” ■



Hurricane Michael brought heavy winds to the Wiregrass, downing power poles and knocking out power for 18,000-plus members.

SAFETY THROUGH THE STORM

Crews rebuild from Hurricane Michael with no accidents

Recovering from a powerful hurricane creates countless hazardous situations for electric utility workers. Thanks to electric cooperatives' focus on safety, crews completed recovery from Hurricane Michael's destruction with no accidents.

Utility workers encounter many hazards during a normal workday, and those risks are multiplied when dealing with the circumstances surrounding a natural disaster:

- Crews work long days, often into the night.
- Recovery takes several days.
- Crews from other cooperatives come to help, working in unfamiliar areas.
- Heavy equipment is required to remove downed trees.

At Wiregrass Electric Cooperative, safety is a daily focus to keep hazards from becoming dangers. Those efforts paid off during the work to rebuild much of the system damaged by Hurricane Michael.

"The performance of our crews was outstanding," says **Jason Thrash**, WEC's vice president of engineering and operations. "They were very professional and safety-minded. We didn't have one incident, so in my mind that was a great performance. And they all had a caring nature. They wanted to assist our members and get the system back up. That drove them and pushed them."

Crews began work each day before daylight and worked late into the evening to restore power to WEC members.



Crews from cooperatives across the state came to help Wiregrass restore power to its members following Hurricane Michael.

During the recovery, crews staged at the National Peanut Festival facilities. Each morning, linemen gathered for a safety briefing before heading out to start another day of work.

"Restoring power to our members was our priority, but doing so in a safe manner was the No. 1 goal," says **Brad Kimbro**, chief operating officer and coordinator of safety functions for WEC. "Working safely is important for our employees, for visiting crews, for our members and for the community at large."

The fact that no injuries occurred during the recovery is something all WEC members can be proud of. "Our team and those who assisted us restored power to just over 18,000 members in a matter of nine days," Kimbro says. "And everyone involved returned to their family safe and whole. That is a blessing and something we are all thankful for."

Nineteen electric cooperatives from across Alabama and PowerSouth Energy Cooperative sent various crews to assist WEC's recovery. These efforts were coordinated by the Alabama Rural Electric Association, and their presence was welcomed.

WEC CEO **Les Moreland** says, "I was moved to the point of tears, and there were several times during reviews and conference calls that I could hardly speak because I was so appreciative."



Three linemen from Marshall-DeKalb Electric Cooperative work to replace a WEC power pole outside of Dothan the morning after Hurricane Michael.

Hurricane Michael marked the first time in recent history AREA dispatched more than linemen after a storm.

“We rolled warehouse personnel, materials management, mechanics and right-of-way crews,” says **Michael Kelley**, director of safety and regulatory compliance for AREA.

In fact, Kelley says the equipment and expertise of certain right-of-way crews “made the biggest difference, in my estimation, for Wiregrass in getting their system back up as quickly as they did.”

Three crews from visiting cooperatives brought in specialized equipment such as skid steers, Kelley says. These crews cleared the way so linemen could move into an area and begin restoring power faster without dealing with piles of downed trees.

Working with hundreds of trees toppled by hurricane winds is a big job. The situation also creates innumerable hazards. “Cutting a standing pine tree like a timber crew would cut is one thing,” Kelley says, “but you get a tree that is twisted and has pressure on it, a tree that’s wadded up in a big pile of trees ... you cut it loose and it can hurt somebody.”

However, because these right-of-way crews are experienced in cutting damaged trees, all work was completed safely.

“It’s their training,” Kelley explains. “It’s what they’ve been taught.”

Kelley says the damage he has seen in Alabama, Georgia and Florida is worse than what he saw from Hurricane Katrina, in terms of damage to utilities. He is proud of all the crews in the state for how quickly they worked together to restore power to Wiregrass Electric Cooperative members, and to do so with no accidents.

And the fact that crews were immediately ready to pack up and head to Georgia and Florida to help other communities recover illustrates how dedicated cooperative employees are to their cooperative families and members across the country.

“The good Lord had His hand on everybody,” Thrash says. “To have His hand of protection on all of our employees and the ones who helped is something we are very thankful for.” ■

100% SAFE



About **300** linemen and other specialists worked **45,000** hours to restore power to **18,000** members — with no accidents.



Hurricane Michael caused Jeff McCallister to lose thousands of acres of timber, cotton and peanuts on his farm in Gordon.

HUGE LOSS

Wiregrass farmers hit hard by Hurricane Michael

Jeff McCallister looks across his 4,000-acre farm and isn't sure what to think. More than a week earlier his cotton fields were white as snow, and he expected one of the best harvests he's had in recent years.

Then, it was gone. Of the three barns on the property, two were destroyed and the other damaged. Timber, an investment with his brother for retirement, was on the ground or trees too bent to harvest. The peanut fields were in a similar state.

Hurricane Michael hit hard. What took the family of McCallister, a fourth-generation farmer and Wiregrass Electric member, decades to build was destroyed in just a few hours.

"This is the worst catastrophe we've ever been through," he says. "We've been through hurricanes before and tornadoes. We've had wildfires, but nothing has compared to this."

McCallister isn't alone in his struggle. Hurricane Michael's heavy winds brought heavy damage to the Wiregrass. The local agriculture industry may have taken the biggest hit of them all.

A heavy toll

According to the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, Houston County suffered more than \$100 million in damage to agriculture.

Most of McCallister's cotton was blown away, and most of what is left is either damaged or stained. He says it costs about \$700 per acre to harvest cotton. This year, the crop was expected to generate about \$1,000 per acre, with about \$300 per acre in profit. Now, it would be lucky if the fields produced \$200 per acre, as opposed to \$1,000, which would create a significant loss.

"We are faced with not being able to pay back our crop loans," he says. "We are in a bad situation. And this kind of storm will affect us for years to come."

Farming is a staple of the Wiregrass community, and also to Wiregrass Electric Cooperative.

"Agriculture is vital to this area," says Chief Operating Officer Brad Kimbro. "When this cooperative was formed almost 80 years ago, it was the farmers who needed electricity to help them get the technology needed to operate. We all suffered greatly from this storm, and we are going to band together to recover and rebuild."



George Jeffcoat's barn was destroyed by the heavy winds from Hurricane Michael.



Pete Solomon worked day and night following Hurricane Michael to keep his generators working properly so his four chicken houses could have power.

Coping with loss

George Jeffcoat is a fifth-generation farmer in Gordon and has been a WEC member his whole life. He serves as the Houston County Farmers Federation president, as well as the southeast area vice president for the Alabama Farmers Federation.

Like McCallister, Jeffcoat's cotton fields are bare. He plans to try to harvest what he can, but he doesn't think he'll get much. He lost some of his peanut crop, but this year's crop was a good one, so it will be a small loss. He also has patches of timber that won't be harvested because of the damage from the storm.

Last year, when Hurricane Irma slowly crept toward Florida as a Category 5 hurricane, he expected damage to his farm. That storm, however, shifted east and mostly spared his operation. This year he hoped for a similar outcome, but Hurricane Michael did not cooperate.

"The day after the storm, I really saw the damage it had done," he says. "It was a lot worse than I thought it would be. When I went out the next day, I could see cotton in front of my house, and I knew that it was gone."

The power of electricity

Pete Solomon was fortunate his four chicken houses in Kinsey only had minimal storm damage, but the work required to keep his farm going after the hurricane was monumental.

Electricity is crucial to a poultry farm to keep the houses cool in the summer and warm in the winter. A large generator powers each of Solomon's chicken houses. Following the storm, he monitored the

generator day and night to keep it operational. Without the power to the houses, the chickens could suffocate. He burned 800 gallons of fuel in his generator in five days.

"I was very fortunate," he says. "I've seen photos of roofs being blown off of houses, and the chickens are everywhere. A lot of people have it worse than I do."

Solomon, a WEC member, was grateful for the work his cooperative did to restore power.

"I talked with Wiregrass Electric every day, and I knew they were doing the best they could," Solomon says. "They were

having to cut and work their way to my area. They did a great job, and I appreciate them getting the power back on."

Now, most local farmers will have to wait to see what the future will hold and what relief they will receive.

McCallister and Jeffcoat have crop insurance, but that will only cover about half of their losses. For the federal government to intervene, the area will need to be classified as a disaster area, which requires \$7.1 million in damage. Early estimates show damage will far exceed that amount.

Local officials like State Rep. Paul Lee, Houston County EMA Director Chris Judah and Houston County Commissioner Doug Siquefield have visited McCallister's farm. U.S. Rep Martha Roby visited Jeffcoat's farm. Field representatives from U.S. Senator Richard Shelby's office also visited the Wiregrass to see the damage first-hand and pledged support for assistance.

"We as farmers have a lot of tough decisions that will need to be made," McCallister says. "We are just praying that the good Lord will help us make the right decisions and we can get out of this situation. Right now, it's like looking up at the top of a well, and it's a long way to seeing the light." ■



George Jeffcoat surveys the damage to his cotton fields following Hurricane Michael.

CONNECTING DURING THE STORM

WEC is committed to connecting the Wiregrass — from electricity and energy services to broadband internet access. During times of severe weather, our focus is also on connecting you with information during our restoration efforts.

“When forecasters started talking about the potential impact of Hurricane Michael, we went into crisis communications mode,” says **Brad Kimbro**, chief operating officer for Wiregrass Electric Cooperative. “We wanted our members to understand what could be coming and how to prepare themselves for the impact.”

Throughout the storm, WEC sent press releases to local media outlets like WTVY NEWS 4, WDHN-TV 18, Rickey Stokes News and WOOF radio. The goal was to keep people informed of the extent of damage, locations impacted, recovery progress and anticipated restoration timelines. The most direct communications, however, came through social media.



WTVY anchor Devon Sellers interviews WEC Chief Operating Officer Brad Kimbro about WEC's restoration efforts during the nightly news.

“We use Facebook as part of our normal communications program to keep members informed about their cooperative,” says Kimbro. “During Hurricane Michael, we used it extensively to connect with our members.”

Losing power after a storm can be frustrating, Kimbro says, but having information helps members set expectations. “The unknown adds to people's anxiety during stressful situations,” he says. “The details we were able to share through social media helped our members know what to expect in terms of power restoration, and they really appreciated it.”

Kimbro encourages all WEC members to follow the cooperative on social media. “It's a great way for us to connect with everyone directly, which is especially important during times of widespread natural disasters such as Hurricane Michael,” he says. ■

TOTAL TEAM EFFORT

When a powerful, damaging storm like Hurricane Michael strikes, every employee of the cooperative, and even some outside help, is needed to support the linemen working to restore power to Wiregrass Electric Cooperative members.

“This was a team effort, and nothing gets done if we don't have everyone pitching in,” says Chief Financial Officer **Lisa LeNoir**. “That's how we looked at it in our department. We weren't out working on power lines, but we knew the guys couldn't do their job without us doing our job.”

When it became evident Hurricane Michael would hit WEC's system, the cooperative held meetings to review the Emergency Response Plan, which outlines the specific roles played by each

department before, during and after the storm.

LeNoir, the accounting and billing department, and Human Resources Manager Bethany Retherford were in charge of supporting the crews.

They prepared snacks, helped organize three meals a day, coordinated laundry efforts and made sure crews arriving from outside the region to help had bedding. They served 300 linemen based in one of two locations: the National Peanut Festival in Dothan and Camp Wiregrass in Hartford.

LeNoir and her department did have assistance. Local restaurants helped provide meals, the Alabama Baptist Association brought a shower trailer for the linemen, and Watermark Church in Dothan helped with laundry. Also, the linemen's wives helped in whatever ways they could.

“I believe everybody went above and beyond what their job was,” LeNoir says. “Our employees put everything aside to get this done, and everybody was willing to help. We have a great team.” ■



WEC employees and volunteers made sure crews had a hot breakfast before beginning work each day at 6 a.m.



The National Peanut Festival hosted more than 200 linemen during WEC's nine-day restoration effort.

THANK YOU!

Countless members used the Wiregrass Electric Cooperative Facebook page to express their encouragement during the Hurricane Michael recovery process. Thank you for your thoughts, prayers and support as we worked to rebuild our storm-ravaged system and bring power back to the region.

YOU ARE OUR REASON!



Thanks for all the hard work and dedication, you guys and girls are awesome. Never thought my power would come on as soon as it did. Thanks.



Thank you all so much for what you do!! We see you and appreciate all your doing to restore our power!! God Bless and be safe out there!



Power came on last night about 8ish. It is wonderful to have and we are so very thankful to all of WEC for the long outs of work and time away from families. Being without power for over 48 hours was a small inconvenience compared to what many are facing in this disaster! 🙏



Thank you for replying to me we appreciate all that that they are doing for everyone in the path of the storm



Thank you so much for all you are doing, and for explaining it to me, God bless all of you



My power was restored just minutes ago and I wanted to let you know how much I appreciate your entire staff for the work you do. I live in the Slocomb/Faydette area. Even though some folks in my area got power yesterday, I knew that you all were working as hard as you could to get service to everyone. Thank you again, for all you do.



I do want to thank everyone of you for help restoring my power. I am so thankful for everything yall have done. Thank you so much, I appreciate y'all.



we have lights now... Thank you so very much for all your help



We got our power back. Thank you so much. We are praying for each of you as you go out. I know there is so much to be done. Bless you all.



Thank you Wiregrass electric for your hard work. Thanks for working hard to get power back on for the Wiregrass. Keep up the good work



Be sure to like us on Facebook to view more of these comments and also to get up to date information about WEC.



WIREFRASS

ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

A PowerSouth Energy Cooperative



HEADQUARTERS

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