

## ***January 1, 1999 - Today***

### **Big Country Electric Cooperative**

January 4, 1999, the board of directors of Big Country Electric Cooperative met to ratify the consolidation agreement and articles of consolidation as well as adopt the corporate logo and seal. The original BCEC board consisted of sixteen directors, 7 from Midwest EC and 9 from Stamford EC. All assets from the two separate entities were transferred to BCEC and membership fee was set at \$25.00 On January 19, 1999, the Texas PUC (Public Utilities Commission) approved the consolidation of MEC & SEC into BCEC.

An annual meeting was not held until April 29, 2000, so that the new cooperative had a full year of data to report on. At that meeting, the first step in a 4-year process of reducing the Board of Directors to 9 members from 19 occurred. For the past several years, retail competition was a prevalent issue among many cooperatives and in September 2000, the BCEC board voted not to opt into retail competition, as did most other Texas cooperatives. In May 2001, BCEC's economic development department was eliminated. February 2002 BCEC entered into a material purchasing alliance with three other cooperatives to achieve more competitive pricing on supplies: Concho Valley (San Angelo), Coleman County (Coleman), and Southwest Texas (Eldorado). By the end of 2002, margins were up from 2001.

Early in 2003, discussions of large-scale wind energy generation (Wind farms) intensified. By the latter portion of Spring, 2 wind energy projects were proposed in BCEC service territory. kWh sales continued to rise, increasing revenue for the cooperative. Summer of 2003, the co-op was hit by several storms which wreaked much havoc on the system. 142 outages affected 6,403 members. Of these outages, 94 were lightning-related, and a total of 96 poles were replaced.

2003 and 2004 brought much growth around Lake Alan Henry, which kept co-op workers very busy.

Investing in generation capabilities of Golden Spread Electric Cooperative proved to be greatly beneficial for all its member cooperatives: In the first 3 months of 2004, GSEC Mustang Station had a net margin of \$6.2 million, compared to a TOTAL net margin of \$7 million for 2003. Such margins represent a wonderful return-on-investment for the membership, as the margins are invested in future generation development and/or returned to member cooperatives in the form of Capital Credits. Big Country's TIER Rating (status of financial strength) was ranked at #205 out of 820, placing the cooperative in the top 25% of the nation.

A 2007 cost of service study revealed the need for a rate increase of 6.42%, and to raise the facility (minimum service) charge to \$18.50 per meter.

2008 was a busy, revolutionary year for the cooperative:

- A three-way partnership was formed between BCEC, Western Texas College (WTC) and Development Corporation of Snyder (DCOS) to begin the Electrical Lineman Technical Program. This accomplished many goals, specifically training a new generation to replace retiring lineman nationwide.

- Planning began to construct a new Snyder district office. The office on north College Avenue was no longer enough space to accommodate the needs of an office to serve the area. The new space would not only allow for greater office space, but a large, fully-functional warehouse facility and pole yard and transformer docks on site, making access to materials much more convenient for the linemen.
- Planning and pilot testing for the Advanced Meter Infrastructure (AMI) meter installation begin. These meters, commonly known as Smart Meters, will make identifying and responding to outages a much more speedy and efficient process, and allow for remote disconnects, decreasing expenses for the co-op and its members. Installation will be conducted in phases over three years, concluding at the end of 2012. All existing meters will be changed out and, following completion of the project, all new installations will have the AMI meters.

2009 and 2010 brought many new developments for the co-op:

- Donated a used service bucket truck to WTC for use in the lineman training program and, later, a digger derrick.
- Adopted resolution to build transmission & substation facilities at Lake Alan Henry for City of Lubbock.
- Began a program to conduct a GPS inventory of our system to utilize full functionality of our mapping software, supporting better system identification and lowering outage response time.
- Secured Smart Grid grant in partnership with several other cooperatives through GSEC, which will reimburse the co-op for a substantial portion of the expense of the AMI metering project.
- GSEC announced plans to buy 18 Wartsila 9.3 megawatt quick start generators to provide speedy backup generation for when wind energy contribution to the grid declines. These generators can provide full output in under 10 minutes and are located at Antelope Station, just outside of Abernathy. Outside of San Aneglo GSEC secured underground natural gas storage to fuel the Wartsila generators, and named the facility the Fort Concho gas storage facility. GSEC also dedicated the Panhandle Wind Ranch, a 78.2 MW Wind Ranch at Wildorado, TX, comprised of 34 Siemens SWT 2.3 – 101 Wind Turbines.
- An Arc Flash Study advised that all outside employees must wear FR (Fire Retardant) pants & shirts system-wide to meet OSHA requirements.
- Began installing secondary lightning arrestors on meters.

2011 will be forever engrained in the memories of co-op employees, members, and all other residents for the Big Country for its devastating wildfires. BCEC alone sustained well over \$1 Million in damages to its facilities – poles, transformers, wire, etc. Approximately 500 poles had to be replaced; almost 300,000 acres were charred. Thousands of hours of overtime were devoted into disconnects due to the imminent threat of fire, reconnects, reconstruction over a period of over 6 months. Rebuilding of services and reconnection had to be prioritized given the magnitude of the devastation, and contractor crews were brought in to assist. Considering cleanup efforts, work due to the 2011 wildfires continued through spring 2012 – well over one year. 10 affected services in 8 of 12 counties within BCEC's service

territory: Fisher, Scurry, Haskell, Jones, Garza, Kent, Shackelford and Stonewall. BCEC spent months working under the operations of our Emergency Work Plan, which proved to be a successful guide to operating under the most extreme circumstances. Work began almost instantly to secure reimbursement from FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency. During the rebuilding and reconstruction process that followed the devastation and complete destruction cause by the wildfires, the GPS mapping system proved to be an invaluable asset: Locations of obliterated facilities could be determined using the system.

Other noteworthy accomplishments of 2011, although later overshadowed by the wildfires, were:

- Partnership with DCOS to bring a second industrial park, rail spur, and manufacturing businesses to Snyder, adding jobs and enriching the local economy;
- February 2011 brought several unfortunate rolling blackouts statewide, due to generation failures and increased demand placed on the electric grid by extreme frigid temperatures. The effects of the rolling blackouts were not widespread in amongst BCEC members. Most of the load that had to be temporarily curtailed was oilfield; only a few residential customers were affected for a limited period of time. BCEC launched a series of announcements on local radio stations pleading with members to curb electric consumption as much as possible during this time. Thanks to the vigilant efforts of BCEC members and electric consumers statewide, the blackouts were limited and short-lived.

2012 saw the completion of the AMI metering project, the benefits of which were almost immediately realized by co-op employees. Of particular convenience, when members call to inquire about high bills and high usage, usage reporting is accurate almost instantaneously between the meter and the co-op, allowing us to target specific dates and times of day that usage is highest. Also, a signal is received in the co-op when a meter fails to “report in” – signifying an outage.

As of April 2013, it’s business as usual at your cooperative. This year, we will celebrate our roots and embody an innovative version of the same vision our forefathers had 75 years ago: we are committed to providing our member-owners with reliable service at a competitive cost while positively impacting our local communities. To the pioneers who made our 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary possible today, Thank You. We are proud of our heritage and strive to make the future as rich as the past.