

# Official: Storms last week left 'wide

**'I've been at Blue Ridge for 48 years and have never before seen a situation like this one.'**

**Terry Ballenger**  
Blue Ridge Electric  
Cooperative spokesman

## Nearly 25 percent of Blue Ridge Electric customers lost power

**BY GREG OLIVER**  
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Thunderstorms and accompanying downed trees and power outages are often the results of the hot weather that hits this area each summer.

But Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative spokesman Terry Ballenger said last week's spate of storm-re-

lated outages "were quite unusual."

"I've been at Blue Ridge for 48 years and I've never before seen a situation like this one," Ballenger said.

Ballenger said the thunderstorms arose on five consecutive afternoons, starting June 23, and that the strange weather pattern was such that each of the five storm fronts followed a very similar path.

"These storms left a wide path of destruction in their wake," he said. "All told, the cooperative recorded 16,823 individual outages, equivalent to almost 25 percent of our total member base."

Ballenger said some of the outages took place on different days at the same locations, meaning a number of members saw service interrupted more than once during that five-day period. That did not go unnoticed by Blue Ridge crews working in the field.

"They saw this reoccur-

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# path of destruction' STORMS: Crews from other cooperatives helped

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rence day after day," Ballenger said. "They would be in the process of re-connecting service to the last members affected by the previous day's storm, only to have a new storm come roaring through the area. By our count, the cooperative also suffered 49 broken poles as a result of the storm damage, and anytime a broken pole is involved, it typically takes a crew four times

as long to restore service in comparison to outages where no broken poles are encountered."

However, Ballenger said the additional work failed to dampen efforts by Blue Ridge Electric employees, who "threw themselves at the storm emergency with their usual vigor." Eventually, the frequent storms and outages exceeded the physical limits of the workers and necessitated Blue Ridge calling in for assistance

from some of its fellow cooperatives. Employees of Jackson EMC in Jefferson, Ga., Snapping Shoals EMC in Covington, Ga., Walton EMC in Monroe, Ga., Berkeley EC in Moncks Corner and Aiken EC in Aiken joined forces with Blue Ridge employees to repair the damages.

A number of contractor organizations also provided linemen. All total, Ballenger said a large contingent of linemen

he described as "skilled, quality workers who don't mind taking on a challenge" came to help.

"That was certainly the case this time," Ballenger said. "These men, working alongside our Blue Ridge crews, gave a wonderful account of themselves."

Power was restored to the last affected members on Thursday, and Ballenger said that, by and large, many inconvenienced members "demonstrated

## Blue Ridge workers

admirable patience in the face of going without what is essential service."

"There's no denying that Blue Ridge is blessed to be serving some of the best people in the world," he said.

Duke Energy spokesman Ryan Mosier agreed that the frequency of storms over a short period of time were unusual. But Mosier added that back-to-back storms "are not unheard of this time of year."

"We expect outages to occur from strong winds and lightning associated with summer storms," Mosier said. "We were prepared and moved personnel from areas that weren't impacted to areas with more damage, as is part of our storm plans. Our crews did a great job of restoring service to the communities we serve in a safe and timely fashion."

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Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative spokesman Terry Ballenger said storms that swept across the area for five consecutive days last week broke 49 of the company's poles.