



South Dakota Electric Cooperatives Send Linemen to Aid Hurricane Helene Recovery

For Immediate Release:

PIERRE, S.D. – Linemen from five of South Dakota’s rural electric cooperatives left for South Carolina Wednesday to help restore power along Hurricane Helene’s path of destruction.

The 18 linemen – eight from Sioux Valley Energy, four from East River Electric Power Cooperative, two from Oahe Electric Cooperative, two from Bon Homme Yankton Electric Association and two from West River Electric Association – will work alongside Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative crews near Pickens to get members’ power back online.

The storm, which made landfall last week as a Category 4 hurricane with 140-plus mph winds, ripped through the Southeastern U.S., with high winds and falling trees causing catastrophic damage to power distribution lines. After the storm, Blue Ridge Electric reported over 450 downed utility poles, leaving 90% of its service area, or 64,000 meters, without power.

When Blue Ridge Electric sent out a call for help, South Dakota’s cooperatives answered.

“Mutual aid is one of our main principles in the co-op family,” said Mark Patterson, Manager of Loss Control Services at South Dakota Rural Electric Association. “When our sister co-ops are in trouble, we’re there to assist, and we’re sending guys and equipment 1,200-plus miles to get there.”

The convoy includes bucket trucks, skid steers, an ATV, and other equipment crews will need to make repairs in the swampy and mountainous terrain.

East River Electric’s transmission maintenance superintendent, Wade Bialas, who is coordinating the relief effort, told linemen to expect to stay in tents, work long days, and to prepare for less-than-ideal conditions. The volunteering linemen are prepared to stay in

South Carolina between two and four weeks. Despite the challenges, Bialas says the linemen who volunteered are excited to have the opportunity to do some good and help people in the wake of the disaster.

“I have 34 linemen that report under me, and I guarantee you all 34 would have stepped up to go,” Bialas said. “Everybody from the Midwest has that willingness to step up and help out any way they can.”

One of those linemen stepping up is Zach Hansen from West River Electric, who says going with the crew was an easy decision.

“It’s just the co-op way,” he said. “There are people in need down there who lost their houses, lost their lives, and this is something we know we can do to help. It’s kind of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.”

SDREA General Manager Steve Barnett extends his best wishes to Hansen and his fellow linemen as they prepare to face the challenges of the coming days.

“Their unwavering dedication and service are an amazing testament of cooperation among cooperatives,” Barnett said. “I am praying for their success and safety in the days ahead.”

About South Dakota’s Electric Cooperatives – South Dakota’s electric cooperatives provide electricity to more than 126,000 homes, farms and businesses in the state, averaging only 2.5 consumers per mile of line. SDREA is a member-owned, member-controlled association of 31 electric cooperatives in South Dakota. SDREA is devoted to unifying, promoting and protecting the interests of member electric cooperatives in South Dakota by providing leadership, training, communication, legislative representation and other member services.