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PRESS RELEASE

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San Isabel Electric Association Restores Most Severe Outage in Twenty Years

PUEBLO WEST, CO – Late winter and early spring have brought some severe weather, especially wind and snow, causing serial outages for several rural electric cooperative Members of San Isabel Electric; however, the hurricane-force winds that swept across the service territory in the early morning of March 24, 2017 set the gears in motion for what our linemen are calling the “worst outage in over twenty years.” The outage peaked early-on, the morning of Friday, March 24, with a maximum of 5,000 Members out of power by around 10:30 a.m., with the loss of two transmission poles. Locations were scattered across the service territory but was most concentrated in the La Veta and Trinidad service territories. By the afternoon, it was decided that Huerfano and Las Animas Counties had suffered the worst structural damage, and an extended outage was looking very likely. Additional contracted crews were immediately contacted to aid in restoration efforts.

By 9:40 a.m. on Saturday, March 25, crews had made considerable progress and the number out was approximately 3,000. Our ten additional contracted crews were on site to join forces with SIEA line crews and repair the immense and widespread structural damage. By the outage’s end, over 250 poles and 100 cross arms were found downed or broken by the wind, and snow damage. By 9:00 p.m. on day two, numbers were down to less than 1,600 without power.

By March 26, day three of the outage, the threat of impending weather made prioritizing structural restoration operations’ main goal, to take advantage of the break in weather and repair the equipment necessary to restore power for thousands. Progress was slow and steady yet substantial. The structural gains on day three allowed for future progress to be successful. By the end of the workday, 1,500 remained without power, with crews optimistic they’d be able to rewire their advances the following day. The night’s precipitation had different plans, causing enough rain and snow to make mud the single biggest problem facing crews on March 27. Special mud-maneuvering equipment was rented to ensure repairs and restorations continued steadily. That morning, Las Animas County activated its emergency resource line and San Isabel Electric helped in communicating its availability to Members, as it was evident from the mud-delays, the outage would likely extend another night. Before 5:00 p.m., less than 700 meters remained out primarily in Huerfano and Las Animas Counties.

By the first briefing on the morning of March 28th, outage day five, 600 meters were showing as out in scattered locations but still primarily in Huerfano and Las Animas Counties. San Isabel Electric kept Members informed via automated phone messages, Facebook and website updates along with help from the media during these long days without power. By late afternoon, the message was released via these channels that some areas should anticipate an additional night without power due to more impending weather conditions and the amount of structural repairs required for re-energizing these communities. Before 8:00 p.m., SIEA released that

approximately 500 Members in scattered locations would be without power for the night.

The most substantial progress began showing signs of complete restoration on March 29, outage day six. Repairs on Highway 10, Highway 160 and in Gulnare made additional restorations possible. Favorable predictions with optimism of restoration were released from SIEA by late afternoon, while it was predicted also at that time that specific areas such as Boncarbo, Spanish Peaks Airfield and River Ridge Ranch could expect another night without power due to set backs in weather and working conditions. By the end of the night, numbers were estimated to be under 500 out.

By 9:15 a.m. on March 30, day seven of the outage, only 350 Members remained out of power, roughly 100 in Huerfano County and 250 in Las Animas County. Early predictions were made that a majority of Members would be back on before the end of the workday and crews worked late into the night making final restorations. By 9:30 a.m. the next morning (March 31, day eight of the outage) under 150 Members were out, as reported by operations. All majorly populated areas had been restored late the night before or early that morning and crews went to work on the straggling outages in isolated areas. It was announced that all residential homes would be back in power by the end of the workday, and that statement came to be. The outage was restored for all currently occupied-locations by then end of the workday, Friday, March 31st.

“This was a nine-day outage, but our crews only had three or four days of favorable conditions to complete work. It seemed every time the ground dried out and we started to make progress, the precipitation would come and delay our advances. It was the initial hurricane force winds that caused the damage, but the additional storms throughout the week dampened the restoration efforts. We empathize with our Members and know that after 3 or 4 days without power everyone gets tired and frustrated with the situation. Crews work extended hours to keep the lights on and in situations like this our main priority is to keep our workers and the public safe. Most people do not realize the hours our employees devote to get the power on; our field employees have worked 16 hour days for nine days straight and that does not include their regular work week completed before the storm hit or the work this week to complete temporary repairs. I am proud of our employees that worked in snow, mud and cold conditions to complete their task without injury.” Reflected Chief Operating Officer, Darryl Stewart, on the exhaustive outage and busy week.

Reprieve didn't last long for San Isabel crews, as outage reports began coming in early the very next day on April 1, 2017. As snow and freezing rain fell throughout the early morning and began to melt, an effect called “unloading” began to happen causing the lines to bounce as snow melts away and snap into each other causing a potential outage. At about 11:30 a.m., it was released that 1,300 were out in scattered locations, most densely in La Veta. Numbers fluctuated throughout the day as the unloading effect occurred in a number of areas, by 4:30 under 150 were out and by 10:00 it was announced that all homes were finally restored.

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April 1, 2017
Trinidad
Shows how lines can unload as
snow and ice melt.



March 24, 2017
Walsenburg, CO



March 26, 2017
Aguilar, CO



March 26, 2017
Highway 96



March 25, 2017
Walsenburg, CO