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MISSION STATEMENT
 Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative will operate as a competitive provider of energy services and a partner with local communities, with a focus on safety, service and integrity.

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This organization is an equal-opportunity provider.



A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



An effective remedy for storm outages

AS I'M PREPARING this report for the February edition of *South Carolina Living*, we have just finished working

a damaging windstorm. This early January weather event brought soaking rains plus straight-line and swirling winds that approached 50 miles per hour. That combination produced a multitude of uprooted trees.

Many of those falling trees tore into power lines in widespread portions of our territory. As a result of the destruction, we suffered 45 broken wood poles. At the height of the storm on the morning of Jan. 3, the co-op counted 8,920 members who were without electric service. Fifteen hours later, those outage numbers had been reduced to fewer than a thousand.

Another 14 to 15 hours

Unfortunately, it took another 14 to 15 hours to restore power to those remaining 950 or so members without service. Those folks were primarily in locations where most of the broken poles had been identified. A single broken pole can add many extra hours to the process of repairing an outage.

To all the 8,920 co-op members who were inconvenienced by this storm, I offer my sincerest regrets. It's a truly unhappy experience for us whenever any of our members are without electricity. At the same time, I tip my hat to our Blue Ridge employee team. These men and women attacked this latest storm emergency with the same vim and vigor they've displayed, without fail, on all other such occasions. The cooperative is blessed to have a workforce that's dedicated to the ideal of providing you with the best possible service.

One particular segment of the Blue Ridge membership was essentially unaffected by this latest episode of Mother Nature's wrath. I'm referring to those 651 members who had already enlisted the cooperative to install standby generators at their premises. Those Generac units operate automatically to supply backup power in the event electric service is interrupted. In addition, they can be fueled by either natural gas or propane—no need to store diesel cans for refueling.

24/7 technical support

When it comes to generators, the Blue Ridge philosophy conforms to every other aspect of our business: We believe in "the total package." That means we sell and service each one of these generators. A member can also rely on round-the-clock technical support. In addition, we strive to make the process as financially convenient as possible for the member. The chief mechanism for accomplishing that goal is five-year financing of the unit at a low 6% interest rate.

In 2021, Blue Ridge installed Generac models for 111 of our members. This manufacturer has a solid track record, with 70% of today's emergency generator installations nationwide carrying the Generac label. For complete details, I encourage you to contact our Blue Ridge Energy Services Department. I'm confident you'll be glad you did.

JIM LOVINGGOOD
 President and CEO



PHOTOS BY JESS TOLLISON

The Upcountry Fiber van is a welcome sight in neighborhoods where internet service is poor quality or non-existent. Blue Ridge is proud to partner with WCTEL to bring fiber into the home for reliable service.

A look forward for Upcountry Fiber

LAST MAY, BLUE RIDGE Electric Cooperative announced a partnership with West Carolina Telephone Cooperative (WCTEL) to address the lack of internet service in northwestern South Carolina’s rural areas. At that point in time, the project seemed almost overwhelming. However, a commitment was made that envisioned a \$150 million data backbone buildout. This project would bring high-speed internet access to an estimated quarter-million people residing in the five counties that comprise the Blue Ridge service territory. The partnership to carry out the planned broadband expansion is operating under the name of Upcountry Fiber.

In just six months of operation, Upcountry Fiber has already built about 300 miles of cable and connected 1,000 locations to the internet—persons previously without such access. Plans for this year have been unveiled, and the partnership hopes to install another 1,200 miles of fiber cable by the end of 2022. Blue Ridge President and CEO Jim Lovinggood states, “We’re quite happy with where we are today. Actually, we’re even a little ahead of our projections, with the work in Pickens County moving faster than we earlier would have thought.”

Upcountry Fiber is now on track to meet its goal of bringing internet

access to Anderson, Oconee, Pickens, northern Greenville, and northwestern Spartanburg counties within another five to six years. However, that timeline could be cut in half, if state and/or federal funds are made available for the project.

While there are federal and state dollars in the pipeline to support the provision of broadband, Big Cable is challenging who should have access to those funds. Recently, the cooperative has seen evidence of Big Cable activity within our service area designed to block any funding for Upcountry Fiber.

On the other hand, the rural areas are not viewed as very lucrative from a profitability standpoint. A similar scenario was played out more than 80 years ago when co-ops were first organized to take electricity to the countryside. Back then, investor-owned utilities were unwilling to assume that responsibility. Moreover, it’s our conviction that co-op members deserve the same level of internet service as that provided in more-populated areas. Consequently, we’re not waiting on the promise of additional funding, but are proceeding with the resources we’ve allocated for this project. Should you have an opportunity to contact your local legislators, please impress upon them your need for internet and ask for their assistance in assuring adequate funding of the service for rural areas.

Broadband buildout plans

The following locations are part of the 2022 broadband buildout plans:

- ▶ Central area—30 miles (Anderson County)
- ▶ Friendship community—60 miles (Oconee County)
- ▶ Marietta—50 miles (Pickens and Greenville counties)
- ▶ Oakway community—90 miles (Oconee County)
- ▶ Six Mile area—80 miles (Pickens County)
- ▶ Dacusville community—100 miles (Pickens County)
- ▶ Enon Church community—100 miles (Pickens County)
- ▶ Northern Greenville area—100 miles (Greenville County)
- ▶ Piercetown community—100 miles (Anderson County)
- ▶ Pickens area—70 miles (Pickens County)
- ▶ Fair Play/Townville communities—120 miles (Oconee and Anderson counties)
- ▶ Salem and Mountain Rest—75 miles (Oconee County)
- ▶ Easley and Powdersville—150 miles (Pickens and Anderson counties)
- ▶ Miscellaneous projects—75 miles (Oconee and Pickens counties)

In addition, if you are interested in receiving broadband, please visit upcountryfiber.com and register your home address for future service. As noted above, the 2022 plans call for an additional 1,200 miles of fiber installation. For more information on these plans, see the listing provided.