Why Is My Electric Bill More Than My Neighbor's?

MESSAGE FROM
GENERAL MANAGER ALAN LESLEY

YOU HAVE A TV, video game system, microwave oven, electric range and cooktop, refrigerator/freezer, heat pump and personal computer. So does your next-door neighbor. So why is your electric bill almost twice as high every month?

Consider this: How well are your walls insulated compared to your neighbor's? Do you take longer, hotter showers? Are you cooking gourmet meals and baking from scratch while your neighbor subsists on quick-heating TV dinners? Does the TV keep you company even when you're not watching it?

No two families live alike. So no two electric bills are the same. Comparing your monthly statement to anyone else's would be like comparing your weekly grocery tabs. Two families of four will never spend exactly the same amount on food because their tastes and habits are different.

Think about the conveniences you might be willing to pay for, even though your neighbor isn't. Are you more comfortable sleeping in an extra-cool house on hot summer nights? Maybe your neighbor's set-back thermostat ekes the temperature up a few degrees at bedtime.

Do members of your family entertain themselves in separate rooms after dinner—watching TV or playing video games—while the folks next door all gather in a family room to play a board game?

Another major factor in today's electric bills is vampire energy loss. Virtually anything that's plugged in is drawing some current—even when it's off. Experts estimate that standby energy drain accounts for 5–10 percent of an average home's annual power usage. A plasma TV, for instance, can use $165 annually for electric power—when it's off.

Consider unplugging items when not in use or using a power strip to disconnect several items at once. There are also "smart" power strips available that automatically cut power to devices in standby mode.

The way to lower your electric costs is to use energy more efficiently before the bill comes. Contact Comanche Electric Cooperative or visit our website at www.ceca.coop for tips on how to save money by conserving energy around the house.

Cultivating a Brighter Future For Families and Communities

See Pages 20-21 to find out how CECA supports youth and communities through scholarships and environmental programs.

ADULT & NONTRADITIONAL STUDENT SCHOLARSHIPS

Going back to school? CECA has a program just for you!

"An investment in knowledge pays the best interest."
Benjamin Franklin

Through Operation Round-Up, CECA is proud to offer a nontraditional scholarship to adults returning to college or going to college for the first time.

To qualify, one must be an active member of CECA and participate in Operation Round-Up.

For program guidelines, or to find out if you qualify, contact Comanche Electric Cooperative's Member Service Department at 1-800-915-2533 or memberservices@ceca.coop.

Applications must be received no later than 4:30 p.m., August 31, 2016.

INDEPENDENCE DAY

MONDAY, JULY 4

CECA will be closed to celebrate our nation's independence.

TCP ANDREW RICH | ISTOCK.COM

P.O. Box 729, Comanche, TX 76442

Operating in Brown, Callahan, Comanche, Eastland, Mills, Shackelford and Stephens counties

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Comanche, TX 76442

EARLY OFFICE
1801 CR 338
Early, TX 76801

EASTLAND OFFICE
1311 W. Main St.
Eastland, TX 76448

OFFICE HOURS

Comanche Office: Monday–Friday, 7:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m.

Early Office: Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 7:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m., closed 1–2 p.m.

Eastland Office: Tuesday and Thursday, 8 a.m.–4 p.m.

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Report an Outage
CECA crews are available 24/7 in the event of a power quality issue by calling 1-800-915-2533.

Contact Us

CALL US
1-800-915-2533 toll-free

FIND US ON THE WEB
www.ceca.coop

facebook.com/CECA.coop

2016 Scholarship Recipients

Congratulations to the recipients of CECA's six $1,000 scholarships. We wish you the best of luck as you pursue your dream of a higher education!

Scholarship For Excellence

London Jones is the daughter of Nickey and Heather Jones and is a Dublin ISD graduate. She plans to attend Tarleton State University in pursuit of a degree in public health.

Holli Hullum plans to attend Texas A&M University to obtain a biomedical science degree. She is a graduate of Early High School and is the daughter of Tish and Rick Hullum.

Kaitlyn Hickman is the daughter of Marcy Hickman and is a Comanche ISD graduate. She plans to attend Tarleton State University in pursuit of a degree in kinesiology.

Brooke Tomlinson plans to attend Tarleton State University to obtain a pre-vet degree. She is the daughter of Brad and Sherri Tomlinson and is a graduate of Hamilton ISD.

Operation Round-Up

Jordan Chasteen is the son of J.L. Chasteen. He is a graduate of Blanket High School. Jordan plans to attend Texas Tech University in pursuit of a biochemistry degree.

Mitchell Moreno plans to attend Angelo State University to obtain a mathematics and statistics degree. He is a graduate of Eastland High School and is the son of Kimberly Moreno.

Earth Day 2016

Thank you to all who visited our offices April 21–22 to join in our celebration of Earth Day! Approximately 100 trees were given away to aid in the protection of our environment and to make our world greener.

Rain Guzzlers, Surveys and Horny Toads:

Life at the Muse Wildlife Management Area

BY SHIRLEY DUKES AND LUCCHESE GORDON

"You're never bored on a wildlife management area."

Devin Erxleben, Texas Parks and Wildlife biologist

"THREE AND A HALF HOURS TRACKING HORNED LIZARDS and getting locations for them," Devin Erxleben remarks with a grin. "That's where I've been this morning." For Erxleben and the rest of the staff at the McGillivray and Leona McKie Muse Wildlife Management Area, that's all part of a normal day.

Texas horned lizards, which were once a common sight in parts of Texas, have been steadily dying out and today are considered a threatened species. At the Muse WMA, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department staff are studying the feasibility of re-establishing horned lizards into areas where they used to be prevalent. It's only one of the fascinating projects underway at the Muse WMA.

From Cattle Ranch to Research Site

The 1,975-acre wildlife management area belonged to McGillivray and Leona McKie Muse and was used as a cattle lease until it was deeded to the state of Texas upon their death in 2000. TPWD accepted the surface rights, took control of the property in 2006 and proceeded to carry out the wishes of their benefactors. The deed, as set forth in the will of Leona Muse, states that the land must be managed as a state wildlife management area to be used for wildlife conservation, wildlife-related research and public outreach.

The mission of TPWD's wildlife management area system is to: manage the native flora and fauna for public use; conduct research on the management of diverse wildlife species and habitats across the state; and disseminate the knowledge gained from that research in the form of publications and outreach events.

TPWD operates WMAs in every ecoregion of the state to provide research and assistance to support landowners. The Muse was the first WMA in the Cross Timbers and Prairies Ecosystem Management Project and, along with the Roger R. Fawcett WMA near Gordon, occupies much of North Central Texas.

Demonstrations, Field Days and Workshops

Putting together accurate information about the habitat, wildlife and general conditions of an area is one of the most important roles of a wildlife management area, as it allows the managers to understand the trends in the environment and gives them insight into the effectiveness of their management practices. Research conducted on the Muse WMA gives the biologists information that can be shared with landowners, providing sound advice on improving habitat and wildlife populations.

The Muse WMA's most recent habitat-related research project is the wintergrass study. Texas wintergrass is a cool-season grass that will outcompete other herbaceous species in a field and become a monoculture. In an effort to determine the most effective method of control, the Muse WMA and Tarleton State University have developed a five-acre test plot to study various wintergrass control methods. This site will also be used to show landowners the results of the different methods for reclaiming a Texas wintergrass field to a more diverse native grassland.

The wintergrass study site is divided into subplots that are randomly assigned various treatments. Treatments include herbicide, livestock grazing, prescribed fire, reseeding with native prairie grasses, or a combination of treatments. There are also untreated or control plots to compare the experimental treatments with the natural regrowth of Texas wintergrass. This will be a multiyear study to determine how those grasses respond to each treatment and which treatment is most effective in this part of the state.

Erxleben explained the operations of WMA best when he remarked, "We are the outdoor laboratories for testing those techniques for managing land."

The Muse WMA typically holds one to two public workshops per year, usually in spring or early fall. These workshops are developed principally for landowners, land managers and anyone interested in managing their property for native wildlife. The themes of the workshops change depending on trending management topics or the current public interest. Some of the recent ones include quail and turkey management, feral hog management, endangered species management and plant identification programs. The Muse WMA brings in additional TPWD biologists along with professionals from the National Resource Conservation Service and Texas Agri-Life Extension to present a broad spectrum of information. These workshops allows attendees the opportunity to learn from professionals who are experts in their respective fields.

Unlike state parks, the Muse WMA and many others are closed to the public except for workshops and public hunting. The small number of employees on-site and the need to control the impacts of humans on the research sites means that public use has to be limited. "We just have to have a little more control over the property for our research," Erxleben says. One example is their research of Texas horned lizards.

The Texas Horned Lizard

Now in its third year, this research project relies on a delicate balance among the lizards, the environment and man. One wrong step, and an entire nest of the species could be eradicated. To understand the full scope of the project, however, one must go back much further than the release date of these creatures.

The first step was to research where the lizards would live. Through conversations with neighbors who had grown up around what is now the Muse WMA and played with the horned lizards as kids, they were able to determine the general area where the species had once lived.

"We immediately recognized that the area had good, sandy loam soils that horned lizards like," Erxleben says. "It had a good density of red harvester ants. That's the primary diet for the lizards. But we had a lot of brush."

After several years of brush removal, reseeding of prairie grasses and general habitat restoration work, the chosen location was deemed ready for its first release of Texas horned lizards. In 2013, 15 horned lizards were introduced to their new home. With a radio transmitter installed on each reptile's back, Erxleben and his assistants were able to track the lizards daily, enabling them to learn their habits: where they

When the Muse WMA first opened, only a few bluebirds were present. Devin Erxleben and his staff installed 20 bluebird houses, and the birds began coming immediately. The houses are monitored during spring and summer. "We clean them out each year and we count nests, we count eggs, all the way until they fledge," Erxleben says. The WMA now has a plethora of bluebirds, and the project is one of their success stories.

Cameron Martin, Muse WMA wildlife biologist, uses a radio telemetry device to locate and track the Texas horned lizards. The Muse WMA plans to release an additional 45 lizards this year.

Lizard #5 is one of the Muse WMA's largest Texas horned lizards and is Devin Erxleben's favorite. What makes a favorite lizard? For one thing, her coloring. "I call her our poster child," says Erxleben. "She's the one we always take pictures of because she's so pretty." Furthermore, Lizard #5 has her own story to tell. She was about 2 years old when she was transferred to the area and is one of the first lizards released on the property. She is also the one who has taught them the most. Originally, it was believed that the lizard's home range was about 2 acres. However, upon her release, Lizard #5 traveled approximately 750 yards from her home base, then traveled over to a ridge on neighboring property where she summered. When it came time to hibernate, she traveled back to her release site to winter. Two years ago, Lizard #5 disappeared. Unable to locate her, the staff of the Muse WMA assumed she had become a victim of predation. Just before hibernation time that year, Erxleben spotted a lizard that did not register on their radio telemetry. On picking her up, Erxleben discovered she was none other than Lizard #5, whose transmitter had failed. Even with three months of lost data, Lizard #5 continues to tell her story.

The Muse WMA uses a "soft release" method when relocating horned lizards. "We don't just bring them in a shoebox and let them out," says Erxleben. Instead, staff builds predator-proof enclosures where the reptiles spend their first two weeks. In this safe environment, the lizards become acclimated to the soils, trees and climate of their new home. Each cage is built around a harvester ant colony so the lizards have a native food source during their acclimation period. Once their two weeks are up, Erxleben says, "We open up these little doors on the side, and then we let them disperse on their own."

feed and where they rest, whether they prefer brush or grassland, where and how far they would go, and whether they would recolonize.

By the end of year one, six of the 15 original horned lizards remained accounted for. Erxleben says, "We've had mortality, but we've had reproduction, also. Now that we are in our third year, we have hatchlings alive that were born two years ago. So that's really encouraging."

The mortality rate among lizards in the wild is extremely high, with only about a 10 percent annual survival rate. For this reason, it is important that they reproduce to keep the population at a threshold that allows survival. An additional 35 lizards were translocated last year, and at one time the Muse WMA had as many as 43 adults with transmitters. Muse WMA staff plans to release and monitor an additional 45 lizards during 2016.

Endangered Species

The Muse Wildlife Management Area does play host to at least one endangered species: the black-capped vireo, a migratory songbird found in the U.S. only in Texas and Oklahoma. This territorial white bird is about 4½ inches long, and sports a black head with some yellow on the shoulder area.

Black-capped vireos exclusively utilize shin oak for their nesting habitats. Due to encroachment by juniper and mesquite, much of the vireos' potential habitat cannot be used. When the Muse WMA first opened, no black-capped vireos could be found. It is believed this was due to overgrazed land, along with the presence of brown-headed cowbirds, which push the vireos' eggs out of the nest and lay their own. Three years ago, after much habitat management and cowbird control, the first black-capped vireo made its appearance on the WMA. Last year, TPWD staff counted 12 on the WMA.

Earlier this year, the first one of the season arrived. It distinctly answered Erxleben's bird call. Because they are so territorial, if a male black-capped vireo thinks he hears another male in his territory, he will come right up to you, sometimes as close as a few feet, and scold you from a nearby tree.

Erxleben and his staff do surveys of the birds annually, documenting as much of their nature and habits as possible.

Additional Wildlife

In addition to a healthy population of white-tailed deer, turkey, quail and dove are native to the property.

Turkeys need lush native grassland, but overgrazing of the area had taken a toll on the nesting grounds, and the turkeys were few. However, with the clearing of brush and reseeding of the native grasses, the area has seen a rebirth of not only turkeys but also many other species of wildlife.

Food plots and reseeding of cleared areas are also being nurtured this year to increase the number of quail and dove. Quail have proven to be a cyclical bird, responding best to areas with good habitat and healthy rainfall. Past drought conditions were tough, but the past two years' increased rainfall amounts have aided in the revival of the quail, and biologists at the Muse WMA are hoping to see the numbers continue to grow.

> *"When you can build a cooperative with your neighbors, you have a much greater impact on managing the outdoors."*
>
> *Devin Erxleben, Texas Parks and Wildlife biologist*

This year, the Muse WMA will host their annual adult and youth-only white-tail deer hunts in the fall, and wild turkey hunts in the spring. All hunting on the Muse WMA is conducted through the TPWD public hunt drawing system.

Changes and Challenges

The recent Texas drought created problems for Muse WMA, just as it did for everyone else. Erxleben and his staff observed a lot of changes brought about by the drought, including a reduced fawn crop and changing patterns in animal movements. Overall, he says, the Muse WMA fared better than the surrounding areas, partly because the wildlife was not having to compete with livestock for water and resources.

Another big help to the Muse WMA wildlife was their "water guzzler," a simple but effective rainwater harvest device. "That really helped us out during the drought," Erxleben says, "We had just enough rain to be able to keep water in the guzzler, and then when our ponds went dry, the guzzler really kept a lot of wildlife alive. A lot of things were getting water there."

Weather isn't the only unpredictable challenge in the Texas outdoors. In the past years, feral hogs have grown from being a nuisance to a destructive, invasive species. When Erxleben first arrived on the Muse WMA in 2008, there were few feral hogs in the surrounding area. But in recent years, those numbers have grown considerably. Erxleben and his staff manage the challenge by running traps that they check daily. "We try to keep them out of here because they shouldn't be here," he says. "They're not native." It's a problem faced by landowners all over Texas and one of the most common concerns landowners call with questions about, Erxleben says.

Horned lizards and rain guzzlers are only a few of the projects, practices and experiments underway at the Muse WMA. Whether it's prairie restoration, studying a threatened species living on the area or passing along conservation ethics to youngsters, the Muse WMA staff are always busy. As Erxleben puts it, "You're never bored on a wildlife management area."

Your Biologist

While most of Devin Erxleben's and Cameron Martin's time is spent conducting habitat projects, research and demonstrations, they also spend a great deal of time in private land work. It is a free service of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department for a biologist to come out at a landowner's request, evaluate their land and advise them as to the best management techniques. Other agencies perform this service, but they are usually focused on agricultural practices. A TPWD biologist's evaluation emphasizes improving the habitat for wildlife. If you want to improve your deer herd, are interested in implementing a wildlife management program on your land to get your 1-D-1 ag valuation, or simply want to improve your management techniques, consider contacting a TPWD biologist. To find the name and contact information of the nearest biologist, go to the TPWD website, tpwd.texas.gov, and click on the "Find a biologist" button under the Wildlife tab at the top of the page.