

# Crews work to keep roads, utilities going

BY JEFF LOWE  
DISPATCH RECORD

City of Lampasas crews began preparing for severe winter weather last week.

"We put 20 tons of sand out on low-water crossings, bridges on Key Avenue and in residential areas – around the fire department, everywhere we were called to go," Street Superintendent Carlos Garcia said.

Garcia said the Texas Department of Transportation applied brine on state-maintained roads such as Key Avenue.

"With all the traffic coming through Lampasas," Garcia said, those de-icing measures "would probably last 24 hours."

The Electric Reliability Council of Texas predicted high electric demand during extreme cold could cause rolling blackouts.

On Monday about 9 a.m., City Manager Finley deGraffenried said southern parts of Lampasas had experienced a few power outages of about 30 minutes and a few of more than an hour.

AdventHealth Rollins Brook is a high-priority facility where officials are trying to avoid power loss, deGraffenried said. As of mid-morning Monday, no power outages had affected the hospital or other northern parts of town, deGraffenried said.

Intermittent blackouts are possible throughout the state through the morning

of Feb. 18, deGraffenried said. The city has urged utility customers to limit appliance use and lower thermostats to conserve energy and possibly prevent power loss.

Officials with Pedernales Electric Cooperative said overall its system had performed well through the start of the harsh weather event. Marble Falls, Bertram, Liberty Hill and Cedar Park were the areas affected the most last week, as some outages were caused by iced tree limbs falling onto power lines.

In a 24-hour period from Thursday to Friday afternoon, approximately 18,000 PEC member meters were affected by short-term outages, but PEC said it had 103 crews working overnight throughout the service territory to restore electricity.

Joe Raibourn with Hamilton County Electric Cooperative acknowledged that system also had some weather-related outages last week.

"We got very fortunate with the freezing rain," he said, compared to what could have occurred. "To the east of us got hit pretty hard," particularly in Bell County and Falls County, he added.

He also mentioned one outage at 3 a.m. Friday that affected about 400 people. Hamilton County Electric crews were on the scene for about 1 1/2 hours in Mills County near Priddy, working to restore the power.



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The Texas Department of Transportation has been treating many state-maintained highways with brine to help de-ice surfaces. The city of Lampasas street department had put out 20 tons of sand on bridges and low-water crossings as of Friday.

"We've spent a lot of money over the last 15-20 years to get the system in shape – pole changeouts, tree trimming, engineering studies," Raibourn said.

"So our system is in real good shape." He acknowledged, though, that the cold temperatures can play havoc with electric lines.

"If it gets to zero ... we are expecting some overloaded lines, and it just takes some time to bring those back," Raibourn said.

## This winter's toll on livestock, wildlife not yet known

Humans aren't the only ones who suffer in frigid temperatures. Farm and ranch animals – who may be accustomed to Texas heat in the summer – may not be prepared to handle the wintry conditions predicted to linger this week.

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service agent Heath Lusty said British and Continental breeds of cattle are more cold-resistant animals than Brahman, Brangus and American breeds.

Many American cattle "don't have the hair" to sustain extended periods of cold, Lusty said. "You never see any Brahman cattle really north of the Red River."

The Lampasas County-based Extension agent noted the extra nutrition requirements for cattle during tough winter weather.

"A friend of mine who was a beef cattle specialist, Robert Wells with the Noble Foundation out of Oklahoma, said with a dry winter coat, for every degree below 32 F, maintenance requirements increase by at least 1% in how much feed [cattle] have to consume," Lusty said.

If cattle are wet, cold stress starts at 59 degrees, he added.

"The challenge we have right now is with all this precipitation on the ground ... that's gonna limit those cattle's ability to get out and graze," Lusty said. "This is when if you normally don't feed hay, guys will be putting hay out."

Frostbite also can be an issue, Lusty said. Ice needs to be broken daily at water sources for animals. Even though they may not drink as much in winter, cattle still can be expected to drink 15-20 gallons a day, he added.

"Sheep will do a lot better than goats will just naturally because they have wool," Lusty said. "Goats are probably the more susceptible of the three major livestock [raised in this area]."

Lusty, a longtime Central Texas resident, said the 1983-84 winter may be the last prolonged cold blast similar to this one.

It may be hard to predict what effects the freezing weather will have on crops, Lusty said. Warm-season perennials are dormant and shouldn't be affected.

"If we get some freeze damage on wheat or oats, it'll probably kill them," he said.

Much depends on what stage of growth the crop is in.

"When wheat reaches a certain maturity, if it gets a prolonged freeze, it can drastically reduce the grain yield," Lusty said.

"Any fruit trees that have bloomed, they're probably going to be history," he said. "I wouldn't think native trees out in the pasture, especially deciduous, would have problems. Where we could see damage on trees is from ice accumulation, which would cause branches to break."

The ag specialist added that severe winter weather could have an impact on wildlife, such as the abundant whitetail deer in the area.

"A lot of that goes back to what kind of body condition are they in to begin with," Lusty said. "On managed ranches, those deer are probably gonna be in a whole lot better shape than our native, wild deer on low-fenced places."

Bucks often suffer more, Lusty added, as they are in rough condition coming off rut.

## Engineering firm suggests improvements to Hostess House

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restore the building functionally and aesthetically.

The Hostess House kitchen and elevator are built for residential use, according to the report, and should be brought to commercial grade. The building also requires plumbing, electrical and mechanical upgrades.

The building envelope should be reinforced to cut energy costs, the report recommended.

City Manager Finley deGraffenried requested council members' input on the scope of the project before soliciting a proposal from Reliance Architecture, LLC for the project. Reliance Architecture constructed the water and wastewater department's shop and lab.

Councilman Randy Clark said some aspects of the Hostess House are functional yet unattractive and ought to be restored.

"We need to restore and maintain it to a level the community can be proud of," he said.

Clark said the city must be mindful to stay within budget, though.

Mayor Misti Talbert said the city has a duty to upgrade the Hostess House and make it usable, yet maintain its historic value and appearance. She said she does not believe the city should add a full commercial kitchen to the property.

Mayor Pro Tem TJ Monroe suggested city staff get input from local caterers to determine how the kitchen might be made useful for catering.

Councilwoman Catherine Kuehne said the city should work to "keep the historical integrity of the building, even if it costs a little more."

In other business at last week's meeting, Chief of Police Sammy Bailey presented the department's annual racial profiling report, as required by state law.

"The Lampasas Police Department does not engage in racial profiling, nor do we have a culture of racial profiling," she said.

Officers must record and submit information from



COURTESY PHOTO

The Lampasas City Council recently discussed potential improvements to the historic Hostess House.

motor-vehicle stops on the subjects' race and ethnicity, and footage from officers' body cameras is randomly reviewed by supervisors, Bailey said.

Anyone who feels unfairly treated by the Lampasas Police Department may file a complaint, she said, and the department will "take corrective action if it finds an officer engages in racial profiling."

"Racial profiling is not tolerated by the Lampasas Police Department, regardless of statistics, law, policy," Bailey said. "We have a much higher calling. We treat all people with dignity and respect, regardless of color."

On another matter, the council voted to authorize the 2021 Spring Ho Festival for July 5-July 11.

During his city manager's operational report, deGraffenried said a couple has asked to purchase from the city the monarch butterfly sculpture in front of City Hall. They said it was a "favorite symbol of their late daughter," according to deGraffenried.

DeGraffenried said preparations for skate park and pavilion construction in Campbell Park are underway, and city

staff received aerial photographs and survey information for the prospective sites.

Also at its meeting, the City Council voted to grant a specific-use permit to allow for an accessory dwelling at 8 Chris James Ave., which is in a single-family residential zoning area.

The Planning & Zoning Commission recommended approval of the project Feb. 4.

City Secretary and Permitting Technician Becky Sims said she received two letters in favor and two letters in protest of the accessory structure. Some property owners in the vicinity said they believe the accessory dwelling, which is 16 feet by 40 feet, is too large and might require city utilities.

Sims said the property owners plan to use the accessory dwelling to allow a family member to move in with them while retaining her independence, and that the city would not be responsible for providing utilities to the structure. The city could rescind the permit as necessary, Sims said.

Clark opposed the permit, while the remaining council members approved it.

