

# Along these LINES

MAY/JUNE 2024

## Flying High

Magnolia Ridge Adventure Park attendees soar over and through Louisiana nature  
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A Magnolia Ridge Adventure Park guest turns for a photo on the last line over the scenic Comite River. PHOTO COURTESY OF MAGNOLIA RIDGE





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# How Energy Policy Impacts You



**Addie Armato**  
members with energy efficiency programs and cost-cutting tips.

It is no surprise that today's energy industry is ever-changing. Louisiana electric co-ops are leaning into change as we explore new ways to meet our members' ever-changing needs adequately and efficiently.

The primary responsibility of electric cooperatives is to our member-owners. This responsibility extends beyond merely ensuring the lights come on when the switch is flipped. Cooperatives remain committed to providing safe, reliable, affordable electric service while simultaneously adopting energy policies that further these goals.

Speaking to reliability, the North American Electric Reliability Corp., the watchdog for the nation's grid, has issued several warnings about threats to grid reliability. Specifically, NERC warns rolling blackouts will become a new norm. To that end, nine states experienced blackouts in 2022 when electricity supply could not meet demand.

Over the next five years, NERC forecasts that all or parts of 19 states from Montana to Louisiana are at high risk of rolling blackouts during normal peak conditions. NERC's 2023 Summer Risk Assessment will come out later this month.

Against this backdrop, electric cooperatives are pressing policymakers to recognize the need for more time, technology development and new infrastructure, alongside policies that include diverse energy sources to maintain reliable power.

As is evident in today's society, the economy

continues to rely heavily on electricity. From data centers and manufacturing to electric vehicles and electric heat pumps, electricity demand is set to rise dramatically.

Electric co-ops are planning for this surge in demand by investing in infrastructure to make it more reliable and resilient. Additionally, cooperatives are applying for grants with the Department of Energy.

In addition to grid investments, cooperatives around the state continue to implement new technologies such as automated metering infrastructure and outage reporting systems. Louisiana electric cooperatives have also signed new wholesale power supply contracts that will change how cooperatives buy the power we distribute to you, our member-consumers.

Despite this increasing electricity demand, many power plants that generate always-available electricity are being shut down without adequate replacements, posing a significant threat to reliability. The Environmental Protection Agency is pursuing sweeping new regulations that would force the premature closure of always-available power plants while making permitting, siting and building critical new plants harder.

Electric co-ops have urged the EPA to withdraw these proposed regulations, which could lead to more blackouts, higher costs and uncertainty for cooperative members.

To ensure electricity remains safe, affordable and reliable, electric co-ops are at the forefront of innovation and are already adapting to the

unique needs of the members we serve. Co-ops are leading the way by adding solar projects to their power supply portfolios and providing members with energy efficiency programs and cost-cutting tips.

Last month, your Louisiana electric cooperative leaders gathered in Washington, D.C., for the annual Legislative Conference, where they met with members of Congress and federal agencies to discuss critical issues and concerns surrounding reliability.

Leaders of your Louisiana electric cooperatives educated policymakers on the issues that matter most to the Louisiana families and businesses we serve, such as our opposition to the EPA's current power plant rule, protecting USDA funding for electric cooperatives, alleviating supply chain challenges, safeguarding the rural electric cooperative infrastructure and Federal Emergency Management Agency reform.

Because energy decisions and policies made today determine whether there are enough resources to meet tomorrow's energy needs, electric co-ops must continue advocating for their members to ensure a reliable supply of electricity that powers everyday life.

Source: [www.nerc.com/pa/RAPA/ra/Reliability%20Assessments%20DL/NERC\\_SRA\\_2022.pdf#search=louisiana%20high%20risk](http://www.nerc.com/pa/RAPA/ra/Reliability%20Assessments%20DL/NERC_SRA_2022.pdf#search=louisiana%20high%20risk)

## Association of Louisiana Electric Cooperatives Inc.

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## State of Adventure

Louisiana offers outdoor destinations for all **Page 12**

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# DEMCO

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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## Volume 39, Issue 3

### Mission

DEMCO is focused on enhancing the quality of life for members by providing safe, reliable and competitively priced energy services.

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DEMCO is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



**DEMCO Board members break ground March 20 for the Amite Solar Energy Center. Pictured, are, front from left, Steve Irving, Mike Anderson, Randy Lorio, Melissa Dufreche, Danny Berthelot, Elinda Taillon, Jill McGraw and Tresa Byrd; back from left, are CEO Randy Pierce, Dickie Sitman, Kevin Beauchamp, Dennis Lott and Leslie Falks. Board member Glenn DeLee is not pictured. PHOTO COURTESY OF DEMCO**

I'm pleased to report the Amite Solar Energy Center construction commenced March 20.

This solar array project, boasting a capacity of 100 megawatts, is slated to begin production April 1, 2025. DEMCO has secured exclusive rights as the sole buyer of energy and capacity from this facility for the next 25 years.

On April 1, 2024, DEMCO transitioned from its current Cleco Power wholesale power supply contract to the new NextEra contract. This marks a significant milestone, promising competitive wholesale power costs.

DEMCO will be able to lock in annual rates well before the beginning of each year to reduce month-to-month power supply price fluctuations. As technology evolves and power markets change, we will be able to adapt to find the best resources for our members.

Finally, this contract gives DEMCO more input and autonomy when it comes to power supply decisions, enabling DEMCO to make sure decisions are made while keeping the best interests of its members in mind.

What does this mean for you? Your electric rates will be reasonable with less fluctuation from month to month. As always, your energy use will vary depending on weather and habits, but your rate per kilowatt-hour will remain steady throughout the year.

In summary, with the commencement of the Amite Solar Energy Center construction and the transition to the NextEra contract, DEMCO ensures competitive wholesale power costs, offering stability and eliminating the fluctuating month-to-month power cost adjustment. This translates to consistent wholesale power charges per kilowatt-hour on your bill, providing relief and predictability for the next decade.

You will see the new wholesale power charges beginning on your June bill. You will also receive an insert (if it is mailed) or an attachment (if it is emailed) with information about the new format of your bill. Also beginning June 1, you can view information at [DEMCO.org/Understanding-Your-Bill](http://DEMCO.org/Understanding-Your-Bill).

On another note, according to forecasts, the 2024 hurricane outlook calls for an above-average number of named storms. To help you prepare, DEMCO has a great checklist and safety tips you can download at [DEMCO.org/Storm-Checklist](http://DEMCO.org/Storm-Checklist).



**Elinda Taillon**



**Jill McGraw**



**Leslie Falks**



**Tresa Byrd**

## Four Incumbent Directors Are Reelected

The DEMCO Board of Directors is comprised of 13 individuals elected by members to represent the membership in all matters pertaining to their electric cooperative.

Each director is elected for a term of three years. Elections alternate, allowing four directors to be elected yearly, with five directors elected every third year. This year, four incumbent DEMCO directors were reelected to three-year terms.

Elinda Taillon was appointed to the board in 2020, representing Ascension Parish, District 1. She serves on the Operations Committee and is a lifelong resident of Ascension Parish.

Jill McGraw was appointed to the

board in 2018, representing East Baton Rouge Parish, District 2. She serves on the Purchasing Committee and is a lifelong resident of East Baton Rouge Parish.

Leslie Falks was appointed to the board in 1987, representing Livingston Parish, District 7. He serves on the Purchasing Committee and is a lifelong resident of Livingston Parish.

Tresa Byrd was appointed to the board in 2020, representing St. Helena Parish, District 11. She serves on the Finance Committee and is a lifelong resident of St. Helena Parish.

Each expressed their gratitude to the cooperative's members for their support. ■

## Official Notice: Annual Meeting

In accordance with the provisions of Article III, section 3.03 of the DEMCO Bylaws, notice is hereby given that the annual meeting of the members of the corporation is Saturday, May 11, 2024, at DEMCO's Headquarters Facility, 16262 Wax Road, Greenwell Springs, Louisiana. The meeting is scheduled to begin at 10 a.m. In accordance with Article IV, section 4.05 of the corporation Bylaws, notice is hereby given that the following persons have been nominated by the official nominating committee to fill the four positions on the board of directors in which vacancies occur this year.

### By Nomination:

Elinda Taillon, District 1

Jill McGraw, District 2

Leslie Falks, District 7

Tresa Byrd, District 11

## MyDEMCO Registered Member Accounts

Congratulations to these DEMCO members, winners of the random drawing for a \$50 gift card. You will each receive a gift card in the mail! Felicia W., Lucas B., Lucile W. and Destini C.

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## STATEWIDE NEWS



### Louisiana Electric Cooperatives Attend NRECA's PowerXChange

From left are Association of Louisiana Electric Cooperatives CEO Addie Armato, South Louisiana Electric Cooperative Association General Manager Matthew Peters, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association COO Jeffrey Connor, DEMCO CEO Randy Pierce, NRECA President Jim Matheson, Jeff Davis Electric Cooperative CEO Michael Heinen, Panola-Harrison Electric Cooperative General Manager Austin Haynes, Washington-St. Tammany General Manager Dane Hocott and Danny Berthelot who serves as a board member for NRECA, DEMCO and ALEC.



Addie with 2023 Youth Leadership Council Representative Gavin Bernard from Washington-St. Tammany Electric.



Louisiana voting delegates attend NRECA's general session during PowerXChange in San Antonio.

# APPLY TODAY FOR A \$500 COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIP

Altec, Altec Capital, Altec Truck, Altec Sentry, JJ Kane, Osmose and Tempest will award seven \$500 scholarships for fall 2024 at the Association of Louisiana Electric Cooperatives' annual meeting in July.

The following rules apply:

- Applicant must be the child of an ALEC member cooperative, including Beaugard Electric, Claiborne Electric, DEMCO, Jeff Davis Electric, Panola-Harrison Electric, South Louisiana Electric or Washington-St. Tammany Electric.
- Applicant must be a 2024 high school graduate.
- **Applicant must provide verification of a minimum 2.0 GPA before scholarship is awarded.**
- This is a one-time award.
- The award can be used for any college or university.

**Application and current transcript must be postmarked by June 30, 2024.** Altec is not responsible for mail delivery. Mail to Ed Amedee, 1443 City Place, Gonzales, LA 70737.

Name of applicant: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of parent or guardian: \_\_\_\_\_

Member co-op: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of high school: \_\_\_\_\_



## Help Fund a Scholarship, Gain a Chance to Win!

Donate \$1 to the Sandy Stockwell Cooperative Youth Leadership Scholarship Fund, and you could win a portable Hisencn flat top propane grill.

To buy a ticket, visit your electric cooperative.

The drawing is in July at the Association of Louisiana Electric Cooperatives' annual meeting banquet in Baton Rouge.

*You do not need to be present to win. The winner will be contacted by phone.*





DEMCO essay contest finalists are, front from left, Emily Doerr, Zachary High School; Parker Allen, Central High School; Sydnie Lott, Denham Springs High School; Kristen Cook, West Feliciana High School; Delasya Guinn, Central High School; and Jasmyn Brignac, Doyle High School; back from left, Remy Boudreaux, Central High School; Isabella Winter, Winter Classical Homeschool; Abrielle Steele, Live Oak High School; Nicholas Wadsack, West Feliciana High School; Maddy Snyder, Zachary High School; and Halle Harrell, Denham Springs High School.

PHOTOS BY TERESA ALVAREZ

## DEMCO Celebrates Local Talent

### Winners of 47th annual essay contest announced

In a celebration of community spirit and academic excellence, DEMCO recently hosted its 47th annual essay contest, spotlighting local high school juniors.

Parents, school administrators, teachers, and DEMCO representatives enjoyed the insightful and thought-provoking essay presentations March 12 during a banquet celebrating 12 student finalists.

“Every year, we’re inspired by the diverse ideas and viewpoints shared by our young essayists,” DEMCO community relations specialist Chanon Martin says.

As part of the competition, finalists were tested on the history of rural electrification and DEMCO facts, followed by an oral presentation of their written essay. Students were scored on clarity of speech, poise, eye contact and overall confidence.

“These energetic youth are thought leaders, full of bright ideas for the future,” DEMCO Chief Executive Officer Randy Pierce says.

As we congratulate these six deserving winners, we are reminded of the remarkable potential that exists within our community.

Since its inception in 1978, DEMCO’s commitment to nurturing local talent has remained steadfast. The Youth Tour program, a cornerstone of this commitment, offers students a unique opportunity to explore the nation’s capital and gain



The six students who won a trip to Washington, D.C., to attend the 2024 Rural Electric Youth Tour are, from left, Remy Boudreaux, Central High School; Isabella Winter, Winter Classical Homeschool; Nicholas Wadsack, West Feliciana High School; Delasya Guinn, Central High School; Maddy Snyder, Zachary High School; and Halle Harrell, Denham Springs High School.

valuable insights into governance and civic engagement.

To learn more about this and other youth program opportunities offered by DEMCO, visit [DEMCO.org/Community](https://www.demco.org/Community). ■



## FEELING REJUVINATED

Everyone feels the hurt as you age, but CBD can help you deal with it.

BY BETH GILES

Life really does fly by. Before I knew it, my 60s had arrived, and with them came some new gifts from dear ol' Mother Nature—frequent knee pain, stress, low energy and sleeplessness. Now, I'm a realist about these things, I knew I wasn't going to be young and springy forever. But still, with "golden years" nearly on my doorstep, I couldn't help but feel a little cheated. It is until I found my own secret weapon. Another gift from Mother Nature.

It began a few months back when I was complaining about my aches and pains to my marathon-running granddaughter, Jen. She casually mentioned how she uses CBD oil to help with her joint pain. She said that CBD gave her more focus and clarity throughout the day and that her lingering muscle and joint discomfort no longer bothered her. She even felt comfortable signing up for back-to-back marathons two weekends in a row this year. That made even this self-proclaimed skeptic take notice.

But I still had some concerns. According to one study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 70% of CBD products didn't contain the amount of CBD stated on their labels. And, as a consumer, that's terrifying!

If I was going to try CBD, I needed to trust the source through and through. My two-fold research process naturally led me to Zebra CBD.

First, I started calling my family and friends. Call me old fashioned but I wanted to know if there were people whom I trusted (more than anonymous testimonials) who've had success using CBD besides my granddaughter.

Secondly, I wanted cold hard facts. Diving

deep into the world of CBD research and clinical studies, I came across Emily Gray M.D., a physician at the University of California at San Diego (UCSD) Medical School and medical advisor to Zebra CBD who is researching the effects of CBD. Dr. Gray wrote "early results with CBD have been promising and we have a lot of research underway now. I've had several patients using CBD with good success. It's important that you know your source of CBD and how to use it properly."

After hearing it from the doctor's mouth, I returned to my research, asking more people and was amazed by the number of close friends and family who were already on the CBD train. Apparently, I was the only one without a clue! And funny enough, a couple of friends who commented were using the same brand as my granddaughter—Zebra CBD. There was no consensus as to why they were using CBD, but the top reasons given were for muscle & joint discomfort, mood support, sleep support, stress and headaches, as well as supporting overall health & wellness.

Eventually, even the most skeptical of the bunch can be won over. With a trusted CBD source in mind, I decided to give it a go.

When I viewed Zebra CBD's selection online, I was impressed by its array of products, including CBD oils called tinctures, topicals, chewable tablets, mints and gummies. After reading on their website that all their products are made with organically-grown hemp, I ordered... and it arrived within 2 days!

The first product I tried was the Rub. Now this stuff was strong. Immediately after rubbing

it on my knee, the soothing effects kicked in. It had that familiar menthol cooling effect, which I personally find very relieving. And the best part is, after two weeks of using it, my knee pain no longer affected my daily mobility.

The Zebra Mint Oil, on the other hand, had a different but equally positive effect on my body. To take it, the instructions suggest holding the oil in your mouth for about 30 seconds. This was simple enough, and the mint taste was, well, minty. After about 15 minutes, a sense of calm came over my body. It's hard to describe exactly. It's more like an overall sense of relaxation—as if I just walked out of a spa, and now I'm ready to seize the day. Needless to say, I've really enjoyed the oil.

While it hasn't been a catch-all fix to every one of my health issues, it has eased the level and frequency of my aches. And it sure doesn't seem like a coincidence how much calmer and more focused I am.

All-in-all, CBD is one of those things that you have to try for yourself. Although I was skeptical at first, I can safely say that I'm now a Zebra CBD fan and that I highly recommend their products.

Also, I managed to speak with a Zebra CBD spokesperson willing to provide an exclusive offer. If you order this month, you'll receive \$10 off your first order by using promo code "IL10" at checkout. Plus, the company offers a 100% No-Hassle, Money-Back Guarantee. You can try it yourself and order Zebra CBD at [ZebraCBD.com/Louisiana](https://ZebraCBD.com/Louisiana) or at 1-888-762-2699.

# Anglers Enjoy Fast, Frenzied Action

## During a Bug Hatch

Story and photos by John N. Felsher

One hot afternoon, we struggled to find fish in a sweltering Louisiana bayou until we noticed some activity up ahead. In a stretch of cypress-lined shoreline about 20 yards long, water boiled with activity.

A sight any fly fisherman longs to see, millions of newly hatched mayflies covered the branches and bushes. Below the branches overhanging this bayou, the water churned as if frenzied piranhas were devouring a bleeding water buffalo. Fish of every species annihilated anything that touched the water.

My fishing partner and I immediately whipped out our fly rods and dropped cork poppers into the ruckus. Unfortunately, a roaring wind made stopping to fish the honey hole impossible. We had neither an

anchor nor trolling motor. In addition, the ancient 12-foot aluminum boat leaked so badly we had to bail it with a gallon milk jug about every 30 minutes just to stay afloat.

Still, we formulated a plan. Fortunately, the wind blew parallel to the bank where we wanted to fish. I cranked up the also-ancient 6-horsepower outboard and headed into the wind while my buddy bailed the boat. We stopped far enough past the sweet spot to get our gear ready for a quick drift, and by “quick,” I mean the brutal wind hurtled us past the bushes nearly as fast as the old motor could push us when it cranked.

We furiously made a cast or two as we shot past the strike zone, hoping we didn’t snag on anything. If the floating artificial bug hit the honey hole, a big bluegill or other fish instantly blasted it. If the bug

missed the sweet spot, nothing happened.

About the time we shot past where we wanted to be, the boat needed bailing again. We bailed the boat dry—or at least as dry as we could for something that resembled a noodle strainer with a motor—and hoped the old engine would crank again. Fortunately, it did. We ran the outboard upwind past the bug-laden bushes to make another drift. We repeated this effort many times that late spring afternoon until we grew tired of catching fish—and bailing.

Also called willow or shad flies, mayflies spend most of their lives underwater as nymphs. Called naiads in their aquatic form, the insects look somewhat like elongated or flattened crickets or a cross between a cricket and a shrimp.

When the weather turns warmer in late spring and summer, naiads sprout wings



Ruth Sykes holds a bluegill she caught while fishing a river backwater. Small fish can provide big action.



Amy Gable shows off a bluegill she caught on a beetle spinner while fishing a river backwater. Anglers can fish beetle spinners many ways from the surface to the bottom.

and emerge from the water. After emerging from the water, millions of flies cling to tree branches, low bushes, reeds or whatever else they can find to dry their new wings before taking flight. Thousands inevitably fall into the water, attracting every fish in the area.

An adult mayfly resembles a giant mosquito waiting to bite. That scares some people. Fortunately, adult mayflies cannot bite anything. The adult flies don't even have functional mouths, so they can't eat, bite or sting anything. Mayflies belong to the insect order Ephemeroptera, which means "lasting only a day." The winged adult form simply exists to procreate. They live just long enough to breed, if they make it that long. After mating, the flies die, adding more protein to the food chain.

Hatches—technically just bugs changing from aquatic nymphs into winged adults—normally occur in sluggish eddies or placid backwaters of freshwater systems. When they pop out as winged adults, the insects create massive swarms numbering in the millions or even billions of individuals. Sometimes, swarms grow so large that they show up on radar.

On July 3, 2020, a gigantic swarm appeared on National Weather Service radar 50 miles away and blanketed Burlington, Iowa. In June 2015, a hatch along the Susquehanna River near Columbia, Pennsylvania, grew so thick that police had

to close the bridge over the river because motorists couldn't see. In 2014, a hatch on the upper Mississippi River near La Crosse, Wisconsin, reached an altitude of 2,500 feet. On radar, it resembled a significant rainstorm. Sometimes, northern communities use snowplows to push piles of dead insects off bridges so people can drive safely.

When flies fall on the water's surface, they float. Copious amounts of free protein suddenly entering the food chain kick off a major feeding frenzy that attracts every fish around. Anyone who happens upon a hatch could load a boat with bluegills and other fish quickly—assuming they can stay in a good casting spot.

For the most fun, toss small poppers on light fly tackle. Floating insect imitations made of cork, foam, wood or plastic, often adorned with feathers and rubber "legs," make excellent bream enticements. Some creations resemble crickets, grasshoppers or other creatures that bluegills love to eat.

In a mayfly hatch, lure selection doesn't matter as much as placement. Cast a temptation as close to fly-laden bushes as possible without snagging. If the bug hits the hot zone, something should grab it instantly. If it falls outside the sweet spot, don't waste time. Make another cast. If the frenzy dies down, shake the bushes to make more flies fall into the water and reignite the frenzy or look for another hatching swarm.

Besides fly tackle, anglers can catch bream on other baits and lures. Many people fish with small beetle spinners around a hatch or hop jigs along the bottom.

Bass anglers can also benefit from a mayfly hatch. Some bass eat the insects, but larger bass gather to feed on swarming bluegills. For bass, fish crankbaits or spinnerbaits in bluegill colors or drag soft plastics under the bushes.

Depending on the location, hatches in Louisiana might erupt anytime from late March through early November. The peak hits from late June to mid-September. Anglers never know exactly when or where a major hatch might erupt, but anyone lucky enough to find one in progress never forgets the experience. A bug hatch can turn an otherwise humdrum day into an incredibly memorable and productive occasion. ■



An angler compares a bluegill, left, with a redear sunfish.



Rachel Delinski shows off a redear sunfish—or shellcracker—she caught. Shellcrackers feed mostly on snails and other shelled animals.

# State of

Louisiana offers  
outdoor  
destinations  
for all

By Cheré Coen

# ADVENTURE

There's a reason Louisiana is nicknamed Sportsman's Paradise. And we're not just talking about hunting and fishing, although those are major draws. Louisiana offers a slew of outdoor activities, including canoeing, kayaking, hiking, birding, biking and wildlife viewing. There's even the chance to sunbathe on pristine beaches and swim in warm Gulf waters.

## **Birds and Beaches: Creole Nature Trail All-American Road**

There's something for everyone on the Creole Nature Trail, known as Louisiana's Outback. There's fishing, crabbing, hiking and birdwatching—as many as 400 bird species frequent the area. Also, the trail has one of the state's largest populations of easily viewable alligators. Visitors can spot gators sunning themselves right alongside the road.

Exit Interstate 10 at Sulphur and check out Creole Nature Trail Adventure Point, where interactive exhibits explain the trail's

wildlife refuges, rookeries, fishing opportunities and beaches where the trail hits the Gulf. Grab a map and head south.

The trail is a stopping point for thousands of migratory birds and millions of butterflies along the Trans-Gulf migration path. It's routinely named one of the finest birdwatching spots in the nation. At the center of the migration path on the edge of the Gulf of Mexico lies Peveto Woods Sanctuary, a habitat run by the Baton Rouge Audubon Society.

The Creole Nature Trail includes three national wildlife refuges and one state refuge. The Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Refuge lets visitors explore a freshwater marsh and learn more in its visitors center. The 3-mile Pintail Wildlife Drive and half-mile boardwalk are ideal for birdwatching and other adventures.

For those wanting to see gators, the Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge offers the highest alligator nesting densities in the United States. There are many places to fish and crab throughout the



# NATURE

region, and hunting opportunities include deer, geese, ducks, dove and other game.

At the bottom of the trail, at the south end of the loop, are 26 miles of accessible Gulf Coast beaches, such as Rutherford Beach and Holly Beach. Visitors can swim in Gulf waters, collect seashells or just relax in the quiet of the Louisiana coast.

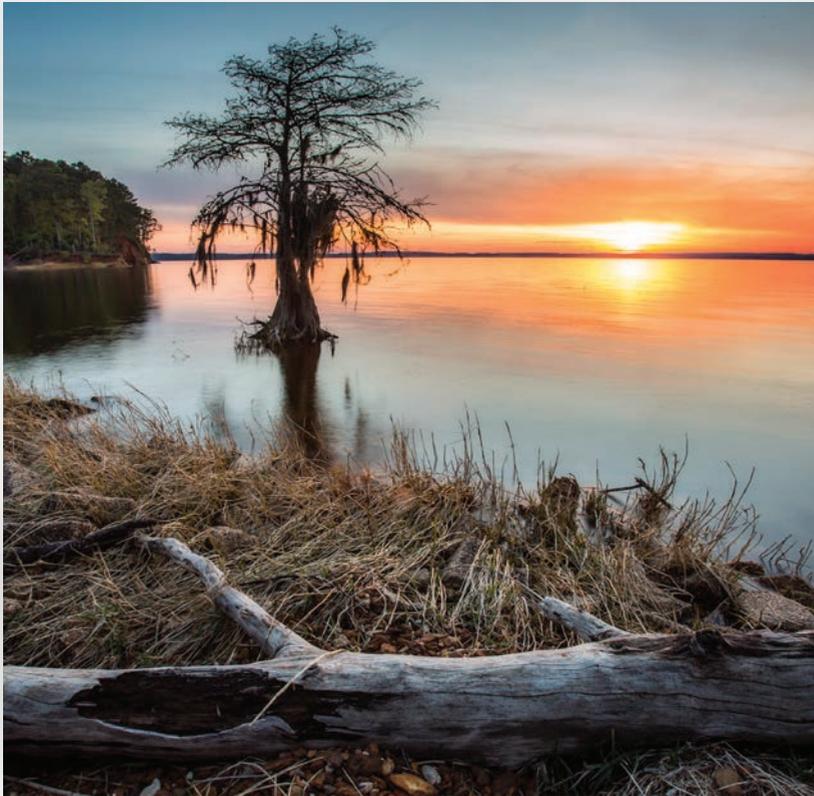
## **Birds and Gators: Cypress Island Preserve, Lake Martin**

This time of year, thousands of egrets, roseate spoonbills, herons and other birds flock to Cypress Island Preserve to nest. The birds love the cypress-tupelo swamp and bottomland hardwood forest in the 9,000-acre preserve on Lake Martin, owned by The Nature Conservancy of Louisiana.

The proximity to local crawfish and shallow water appeals, as well. Now is peak season to view the rookery, one of the largest avian sanctuaries in North America, so bring binoculars and a camera to catch chicks peeking out of their nests.

**There are numerous places to pause along the Creole Nature Trail and explore the outdoors, from walking trails and boardwalks to Gulf beaches.** PHOTO COURTESY OF VISIT LAKE CHARLES





The sun sets on Toledo Bend Lake. PHOTO COURTESY OF TOLEDO BEND LAKE COUNTRY



Alligators may be spotted along the Creole Nature Trail All-American Road. PHOTO COURTESY CHERE COEN



Species like this great blue heron are common at the secluded Cypress Island Preserve at Lake Martin, only 20 minutes outside Lafayette. PHOTO COURTESY CHERE COEN

Alligators swim below the rookery, so it's a great opportunity to view Louisiana's resident reptile. According to Nancy Camel, author of "The Nature of Things at Lake Martin," birds choose areas with alligators because they "ward off more predacious mammals such as raccoons, possums, minks and rats."

Stop at the visitors center and view a handy map of the preserve with its walking trails and boardwalk. A good portion of the Rookery Road next to the water was closed after a flood, but it's still walkable, says Jill Andrew, Cypress Island program and volunteer manager.

"The parish still maintains the road," she says. "That makes it walkable. I tell people the Rookery Road's now an extension of our trails."

Another conservancy trail, this one strictly a walking trail, takes visitors halfway around the lake. But don't wait until summer to explore. The trail closes around June 1 through August 31 for alligator nesting season, when the reptiles get especially protective.

"We keep an eye on it in August," Jill says. "If we don't see anything, we open the trail back up."

#### Take a Hike: Mary Ann Brown Nature Preserve, Tunica Hills

A 110-acre preserve in Tunica Hills, only 40 minutes from downtown Baton Rouge and a short drive from the New Orleans area, allows visitors a chance to bask in its mixed pine-hardwood forest. But the 2 miles of hiking trails offer something unique to

Louisiana, says William deGravelles, director of land protection and stewardship for The Nature Conservancy of Louisiana, which owns and operates the preserve.

"During the glacial and interglacial periods, the Mississippi River would get enormous and would produce this enormous flood plain," he says. "When the river receded, the winds picked up soil and dumped it on either side of the river, mostly on the east side."

This loess, or sedimentary soil deposit, is responsible for the Tunica Hills, where the top of Louisiana's "boot" touches Mississippi near the river. And it's what makes Mary Ann Brown Nature Preserve so special. Louisiana residents will enjoy a rare opportunity to walk through rolling terrain.

In addition, there's a chance to spot wildlife. Mary Ann Brown is home to the eastern chipmunk, whose southernmost range ends in Tunica Hills. Breeding and migratory species of birds rest here, as well as box turtles and a variety of snakes, William says.

The Nature Conservancy allows organizations working with children and nature to camp or use the pavilion. Visitors should know there are no restrooms, and the trails are not Americans with Disabilities Act compliant.

The preserve is open during daylight hours year-round.

#### Travel in Time: Poverty Point World Heritage Site, Pioneer

An enormous amount of soil was moved thousands of years ago to build a complex set of earthen mounds in northeastern Louisiana,

creating a unique settlement and culture along the Mississippi River floodplain.

Residents of this enclave also traded raw materials from the Southeast between 1700 and 1100 B.C. Because of its scale and unique cultural makeup, Poverty Point became a Smithsonian Affiliate in 2010 and a coveted United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization World Heritage Site in 2014.

Why the mounds were created is unclear. The largest—now standing 72 feet high and likely 90 feet tall at its start—is shaped like a T. Believed to contain 390,000 tons of dirt, the equivalent of 30,000 dump trucks, the mounds were not the home of a chief.

“There’s no evidence of hierarchy on the site,” says Mark E. Brink Jr., park manager at Poverty Point. “There’s a lot of mystery here.”

Former owners—who gave the property its name—plowed the land for years, destroying much of the original plaza, but it appears timber posts were implanted in circles within the plaza, like a wooden Stonehenge—another mystery.

“We have direct evidence that these timber posts existed,” Mark says.

Visitors may enjoy the interpretive museum, with self-guided or guided tours. Special events are held throughout the year at this Louisiana state park. Nearby is Poverty Point Reservoir State Park, which offers overnight accommodations in cabins

overlooking the lake and within the woods, and fishing and wildlife viewing.

### Cast a Line: Toledo Bend

Ideal fishing exists throughout Louisiana, from freshwater species to the bounty of Gulf waters. Toledo Bend, a top bass-fishing lake, is one of many hot spots. It was the first lake to rank No. 1 on Bassmaster Magazine’s 100 Best Bass Lakes list two years in a row.

It all came about when enterprising folks dammed the Sabine River, and the lake filled up too fast—swallowing trees in its path. That’s why stumps remain under the lake’s surface today, making it imperative that boaters follow the marked canals. But those stumps are popular with fish, such as largemouth bass, bream, crappie or sac-a-lait, catfish, and white and striped bass.

As you explore the vibrant landscapes and diverse ecosystems of Louisiana, from the untamed beauty of the Creole Nature Trail to the serene tranquility of Mary Ann Brown Nature Preserve, one thing becomes abundantly clear: Louisiana is truly a state of adventure. So, pack your binoculars, lace up your hiking boots and embark on a journey through Louisiana’s rich tapestry of natural wonders. After all, in this paradise, every trail leads to a new discovery, and every moment is an opportunity to connect with the great outdoors. ■



Visitors may dock their boats at the lakeside cabins at Poverty Point Reservoir State Park. PHOTO COURTESY OF LOUISIANA STATE PARKS



There is fun for the entire family at Toledo Bend. PHOTO COURTESY OF TOLEDO BEND LAKE COUNTRY



Because of its unique cultural makeup, such as the massive mounds created here, Poverty Point State Park became a coveted UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2014. PHOTO COURTESY OF LOUISIANA STATE PARKS



Toledo Bend is a hot spot for bass fishing. PHOTO COURTESY OF TOLEDO BEND LAKE COUNTRY

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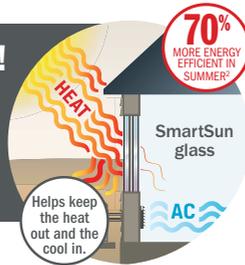
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# AMITE SOLAR ENERGY CENTER is Underway

The DEMCO Board of Directors and co-op staff gathered with NextEra Energy Inc. representatives, Louisiana Public Service commissioners, local officials and other stakeholders to commemorate the groundbreaking of Louisiana's newest solar energy project, the Amite Solar Energy Center, in Tangipahoa Parish.

A subsidiary of NextEra Energy Resources LLC will build, own and operate the project.

Production is scheduled to begin in April 2025. DEMCO will be the recipient of all capacity and energy generated from this solar array for a fixed price, 25-year contract period.

DEMCO CEO and General Manager Randy Pierce emphasizes the significance of diversifying the energy mix to ensure stability and affordability for the cooperative's members.

"Our goal was to put together a mix of power supply options that would give our members stability in the future with power supply at a reasonable cost," Pierce says.

The Amite Solar Energy Center is the largest Louisiana Public Service Commission jurisdictional solar project to break ground to date.

Eric Skrmetta, Louisiana Public Service commissioner, District 1, underscored the importance of balancing reliability and affordability in energy provisioning.

"It's about reliability and it's about price, and in between those two moments, there are enormous calculations that take place," Skrmetta says.

Dr. Craig Greene, Louisiana Public Service commissioner, District 2, talked about the collaborative spirit of this project.

"I think of these three words when I see this coming together today: vision, teamwork and stewardship," Dr. Greene says, invoking Abraham Lincoln's wisdom, emphasizing the power of synthesis born out of disparate viewpoints.

Commissioner Davante Lewis, District 3, hailed the project as an emblem of an energy revolution.

"Not only are we talking about energy transformation, but we're talking about jobs, we're talking about strong communities, and I think oftentimes we forget that these are all tenets that go together with one another," Lewis says.

In a moment of reflection and reverence, Commissioner Mike Francis, District 4, proceeded in prayer, saying, "It was a golden opportunity to ask God's blessings on this vision."

Others on the program included Stuart McCurdy, vice president of Renewable Development, NextEra Energy Resources; Karl Kremser, director of Development, NextEra Energy Resources; Tangipahoa Parish President Robby Miller; Tangipahoa Parish District Counselman Louis Nick Joseph; and Kyle Ardoin, director of Intergovernmental Affairs and Rural Revitalization.

In April 2024, DEMCO began its 10-year wholesale power supply contract with NextEra Energy Marketing LLC, heralding a new era of stability and adaptability in energy procurement.

"DEMCO will be able to lock in annual rates each year to reduce month-to-month power supply fluctuations," Pierce says. "As technology evolves and power markets change, DEMCO will be able to adapt to find competitively priced resources for our members."

On October 19, 2022, DEMCO received unanimous approval from the Louisiana Public Service Commission on two new wholesale power contracts with affiliates NextEra Energy Inc. ■

**DEMCO Board members break ground March 20 for the Amite Solar Energy Center. Pictured, are, front from left, Steve Irving, Mike Anderson, Randy Lorio, Melissa Dufreche, Danny Berthelot, Elinda Tailon, Jill McGraw and Tresa Byrd; back from left, are CEO Randy Pierce, Dickie Sitman, Kevin Beauchamp, Dennis Lott and Leslie Falks. Board member Glenn DeLee is not pictured. PHOTO COURTESY OF DEMCO**

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# FLYING HIGH

Magnolia Ridge Adventure Park attendees soar over and through Louisiana nature

By EmmaLee Tingle

Nestled along DEMCO lines in the East Feliciana Parish hills, Magnolia Ridge Adventure Park offers guests the chance to soar over and through Louisiana's natural elements in an experience that feels more like a vacation excursion.

Co-owner Gabe Ligon's extensive world travels led to a vision of extreme adventure paired with Louisiana's natural beauty, and Magnolia Ridge Adventure Park was born.

Gabe built a successful animal encounter experience with Barnhill Preserve, a park in Ethel where visitors can participate in guided interactive tours with more than 50 species of exotic animals. He founded Barnhill Preserve in 2012 and opened the park to guests in 2015. Barnhill Preserve was established with a goal to educate students about wildlife and conservation.

With significant travel history under his belt, Gabe decided to use land near Barnhill Preserve to replicate the feeling of a tropical travel expedition. He opened Magnolia Ridge Adventure Park in 2020. Encompassing 32 acres, it is the largest zipline course in the state.

At the park, visitors are outfitted in harnesses and safety gear before beginning the climb that leads them over a suspended bridge and to the first zipline platform. The high elements course consists of eight ziplines running tree-to-tree.

While height varies with each line, some points are as high as 60 feet. Course participants spend nearly two hours soaring above ancient magnolias, oaks and elm trees. Guests routinely see native wildlife along the way, including deer, turkeys, otters, raccoons



and a variety of birds.

The final leg of the tour, which is the longest zipline in the state, takes visitors over the edge of the Comite River before landing safely and taking a short trek back to the beginning of the course.

The park can facilitate three tours a day, with each tour averaging 10-15 participants, although larger groups are common. Each tour has at least two staff guides, with one leading the group and one coming along after the last participant.

When guides are not on a tour, they keep the adventure park in working order. Guides arrive well before tours begin to make sure the park is clean, prepare and check all gear for scheduled tours, and go through the zipline course to make sure each platform is unlocked, and each line of the course is in good working order with no obstructions.

After each tour, guides complete a comprehensive check of all gear before cleaning and storing it for the next tour. Before each tour, guides conduct ground school with each group. During this process, participants are properly fitted with gear and educated about safety, proper equipment use and what to expect during the tour.

All guides have extensive safety and rescue training, and safety is paramount at the park. The course was designed with a continuous delay system, which makes it impossible to fall from the line or a platform. The park uses industry-leading safety gear rated to hold thousands of pounds.

Leading the pack of guides at Magnolia Ridge Adventure Park is Park Manager Samantha Stuckey. Local to the area, Samantha is from Clinton and grew up in Zachary. After earning a degree



in agricultural education, she began work as an animal educator at Barnhill Preserve.

Samantha was at Barnhill for about three years when the park manager job at Magnolia Ridge opened in 2023. She decided to take on a dual role, becoming the park manager at Magnolia Ridge while continuing her work at Barnhill Preserve.

“I would consider myself a pretty daring individual,” Samantha says. “When this opportunity presented itself, it seemed like a challenge, and I love a good challenge.”

In her role, Samantha says she sees many repeat customers. She also meets new people, many of whom are from out of state as the park is a popular attraction for families and groups vacationing in Louisiana. The park also hosts birthday parties and

team-building retreats.

Samantha says the park also offers night flights once a month during the weekend closest to a full moon. Night flights are also available during special events, such as Christmas and Halloween.

The park is on Highway 955 in Ethel. Participants meet guides at Barnhill Preserve before driving to Magnolia Ridge Adventure Park. Pricing bundles are available at a significant savings for people who want to experience both parks. Reservations, pricing and details can be found at [www.magnoliaridgepark.com](http://www.magnoliaridgepark.com).

Magnolia Ridge Adventure Park offers visitors of all ages and skill levels a chance to hike through the treetops. The park was born out of a desire for adventure, and the goal is to meet that desire for every adventure-seeking park visitor now and for many years to come. ■

**Magnolia Ridge Adventure Park employee Caleb Yantis instructs park guests as they gear-up.** PHOTO COURTESY OF MAGNOLIA RIDGE



# UNDER THE SURFACE

Know the dangers lurking in the water before you take the plunge

By Nina Todea

With the long-awaited warmth of summer arriving soon comes the desire to spend our days outside, whether swimming, boating or camping. Although we're far more unplugged outdoors, many electrical hazards still accompany these leisurely summer activities—and they often lurk beneath the surface.

Water safety is more than just boating speeds and life jackets. Electric shock drowning, dubbed the “silent killer,” occurs when faulty wiring sends electric current into a body of water. The current then passes through the body and causes paralysis, which can ultimately result in drowning.

This current isn't nearly as visible as a bolt of lightning. According to Electrical Safety Foundation International, as little as 10 milliamps of current—1/50 the amount used by a 60-watt lightbulb—can cause

paralysis and drowning. Even the best swimmers will feel their bodies freeze as they lose muscular control.

Often misclassified as drowning, ESD injures and kills people every year, whether it happens around a dock, or in a pool or hot tub. Unfortunately, there is no ESD statistics database, and—partly due to inaccuracies in reporting—many people are still unaware of the threat.

“Most people are unaware because there is no visible warning to electrified water,” says ESFI President Brett Brenner. “Without that visual, they are unaware of the dangers of electrified water.”

## Boating and Marina

Just like your home, having your boat inspected regularly by a licensed electrician is critical. Familiarize yourself with the electrical system so you can identify and correct any potential hazards.

ESFI encourages boat owners to routinely

inspect boats and stay up to date on maintenance.

Ground fault and equipment leakage circuit interrupters—both safety devices required at marinas—should be tested monthly. A leakage test determines if electrical current is escaping the vessel.

In an emergency, an informed owner who knows where the main breakers are on the boat and the shore power source can respond quickly and effectively.

Alongside the safety of your boat's electrical system, make sure all boat operators and swimmers understand the hazards so everyone works to keep them at bay. Never allow swimming near the boat, marina or launching ramp. Residual current could flow into the water from the boat or the marina's wiring, potentially putting anyone in the water at risk of ESD.

Marina owners should do their part, too. “Plan annual safety events at your marina where owners can learn about boat and



dock electrical safety and have their boats inspected by licensed electricians,” Brett says.

### Home Recreation

Pools and hot tubs can be just as dangerous.

In 2020, a 15-year-old boy was electrocuted after touching exposed wire in a Texas hotel pool that had failed multiple inspections, according to news reports from the Harris County area.

Faulty pool lights, old wiring or even electrical equipment—such as pool heaters, vacuums, pumps or extension cords—can cause electricity to flood a pool or hot tub, resulting in serious injuries or fatalities.

Electric shock drowning at home often results from failing to install the correct protective devices. All underwater lighting circuits and lighting around pools, hot tubs and spas should have GCFI protection, as should all electrical outlets within 20 feet of a pool.

Safe Electricity recommends pools and decks be built at least 5 feet from all underground electric lines and at least 25 feet from overhead electric lines. To locate underground electric lines, call 811 before you dig.

Follow these tips from Safe Electricity to keep your family and friends safe:

- Do not put electric appliances

within 10 feet of a swimming pool. When practical, use battery-operated appliances near swimming pools.

- When you leave the pool, don't touch any electrical appliances until you are dry. Never touch any electrical appliances when you are wet or standing in water.

### Camping

Water safety outdoors isn't just about bodies of water—natural or artificial. Campers should also be cautious of rain when packing electric camping materials or traveling in RVs that hook up to power poles.

Always err on the safe side, whether you're experiencing a light rain or a torrential downpour. Before connecting to or disconnecting an RV from a power pole, switch off the breaker. When you're hooked up, make sure to use a dry, nonconductive item to turn the breaker back on. Doing so can also protect circuits within your camper.

If you're unsure, ask a fellow traveler. If you're parked in an RV park, there could be another camper willing to help.

The 2017 National Electrical Code requires marinas and boat docks to post electric shock warning signs where electricity is used near water; many campgrounds also have warning signs.

## You suspect a swimmer has been shocked. What do you do?

A telltale sign of electric shock drowning is the tingling that occurs when current passes through the body. But how can you tell if a swimmer is a victim of ESD if you're not in the water with them?

A swimmer exhibiting signs of ESD can be visibly panicked and attempting to swim away from the electrified area, or they may be motionless. If you suspect someone is being shocked, do not jump in. Chances are you will be shocked, too. Instead, follow these tips to bring everyone to safety:

- ▶ Cut off all electrical power to the area. Knowing where the circuit breakers are is important to act quickly in an emergency.
- ▶ Call 911 immediately. You want a medical professional to assess the situation and administer CPR if necessary.
- ▶ If the swimmer is still mobile and can swim toward land or exit the pool, make sure there is an area where they can exit the water without using a metal ladder. If the swimmer cannot swim to safety, throw them a life ring or extend a carbon fiber rod, such as a fiberglass rescue hook. Any life-saving efforts should be made with an insulated device.

“While you cannot prevent individuals from acting on their own accord, posting signs prohibiting swimming, as required by the 2017 NEC, is an easy way to help prevent ESD,” Brett says.

However, the responsibility does not solely fall on these signs, Brett says. Swimmers, boat operators and marina owners should all be aware of electric shock hazards and how to prevent them.

“Unknowingly, many swimmers and boat and marina operators place themselves in the face of danger,” he says. “This innocent act of fun can turn tragic. Raising awareness among swimmers and marina and boat operators can help prevent ESD or other electrical injuries while out on the water.” ■



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