

# TEXAS CO-OP POWER

## *The Rolling Plains*



**PLUS:**

**'Green' House**  
**Texas Blueberry Festival**  
**Quilt Legacy**

# TEXAS CO-OP POWER

A MAGAZINE ABOUT TEXAS LIVING

## Living Large

**W**hen non-natives think of Texas, they usually imagine cowboys and cattle ranches and wide-open spaces. As Texans, we know that our vast state encompasses many diverse and beautiful landscapes—from the deep green East Texas Piney Woods and the cerulean seascapes of the Coastal Bend, to the rolling Texas Hill Country and the magnificent mountains of Big Bend.

This month, Russell Graves tells us—in words and pictures—of his love for the Rolling Plains and its quintessential Texas terrain. But it’s not just the land that draws him to his Childress home: “In a lot of ways, the people who live in this part of Texas epitomize what it means to be a Texan—tough and resilient, but most of all, gracious and affable.”

And speaking of home, sweet home, Jody Horton shows us some ways to lower our energy usage, reduce costs and waste, and create a healthy living environment in “Green by Design.” The Cowels family’s response to the challenge of building under a scorching Texas sun was to build a “green” home. They had the means to design a very special home. We hope you can apply some of their inspiration to your current or future home as well.

Summer in Texas! We’ll cool you down with this month’s Focus on water and give you some recipes for blueberries—the sweetest of summer’s indulgences. You can even celebrate the blueberry harvest at the Texas Blueberry Festival in Nacogdoches June 10.

Enjoy!

Peg Champion  
VP, Communications/Publisher



**LACY CRAIG** had good intentions: She was going to help wash the family car. But that bucket of clean, soapy water was just too tempting, so she opted for a cool dip in the bucket. Her grandmother is Cherokee County Electric Cooperative member **FAYE LYNN RYAN**. For more “summer fun” photos, turn to page 37.

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The Caprock Escarpment marks the western edge of the Rolling Plains.

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He only intended to stay a couple of years, but the Rolling Plains has become photographer Russell Graves’ “field of dreams.” It’s a big, beautiful land, sparse in population but rich in history.

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A landscape photograph of a red rock plateau. The foreground is filled with dense, dark green vegetation. The middle ground shows a steep, reddish-brown cliff face with horizontal rock layers. In the background, more of the plateau extends into the distance under a sky with scattered clouds and a faint rainbow. The text 'THE ROLLING PLAINS' is centered in the upper half of the image in a gold, serif font.

# THE ROLLING PLAINS

PHOTOS AND TEXT BY RUSSELL A. GRAVES

# TWENTY-THREE AND NEARLY OUT OF COLLEGE, I TRAVELED UP THE RED RIVER SOME 250 MILES FROM MY HOME IN DODD CITY TO ACCEPT A JOB IN THE TOWN OF CHILDRESS.

I INTENDED TO WORK IN CHILDRESS FOR A couple of years, then migrate back to where I was raised.

Soon, however, these red dirt plains had a hold on me. Nearly 13 years and some 50,000 photographic images later, my commitment to this part of Texas is stronger than ever.

The Texas Rolling Plains is a big, beautiful land. Bounded on the south by the Edwards Plateau, the west by the Caprock Escarpment, the Cross Timbers on the east, and the Red River in the north, the red plains cut a broad swath through Texas' midsection.

Its population is sparse, but its history is rich with buffalo hunters, cattle ranches and Plains Indians. The Rolling Plains has been largely the focus of my magazine work and the inspiration for at least three of my books. It is my "field of dreams," and its infinite mystery continues to draw me afield.

Although the land is rugged, it still has a softness about it. Slight breezes make the junipers sway in rhythmic syncopation with the wind. Mornings bring crimson rays of sunlight spilling across the mesquite and prickly pear badlands, illuminating the landscape in clean light domed by an immense cobalt sky.

About a third of the region is used for agricultural crop production. Cotton and wheat are the predominant crops, but milo, peanuts and hay are also grown. During the spring and



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**Cattle and cotton dominate the economy of this rugged land.**

# IN A LOT OF WAYS, THE PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN THIS PART OF TEXAS EPITOMIZE WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A TEXAN—TOUGH AND RESILIENT, BUT MOST OF ALL GRACIOUS AND AFFABLE.



fall, when heavy plows furrow the land, huge clouds of red dirt help pinpoint the tractors from afar. Once the seeds lie in the ground, farmers look to the sky and wait for the rain to fall. Although not the driest region in Texas, much of the Rolling Plains gets only a couple of feet of rainfall annually. As the saying goes, “You should be here the day we get it ...”

The land that isn’t under tillage is home to some of the biggest ranches in Texas—legendary spreads like the Triangle, Waggoner, Pitchfork and Four Sixes. Much of Texas’ prosperity can be traced to the influence of West Texas ranches during the post-Civil War reconstruction era. The vast grasslands fattened cattle and helped shape Texas’ cultural and economic identity.

The grass, brush and empty space sustain a plentiful variety of wildlife. The Rolling Plains offers some of the last wild horned toad habitats. Mule and white-tailed deer intermingle with the Rio Grande turkey. Blue and bobwhite quail and the occasional ringneck pheasant strut and scratch the dirt while playing their eternal game of survival. As one of the last habitats of wild bobwhite quail left in the nation, the Rolling Plains plays host to hunters from all over the country who want their chance to chase the 6-ounce winged rocket.

The camouflaged and hunter-orange-clad tourists are a welcome sight, as hunting is arguably the num-

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**LEFT: This cowgirl and her horse epitomize the friendliness for which the Rolling Plains are known.**

# MORNINGS BRING CRIMSON RAYS OF SUNLIGHT SPILLING ACROSS THE MESQUITE AND PRICKLY PEAR BADLANDS.

ber-one tourist attraction for the region. Unfortunately, much of the Rolling Plains is depopulating. During the past 40 years, some counties have seen as much as 50 percent of their population leave to pursue economic opportunities elsewhere.

Abandoned farmhouses and empty stores still stand where people once bustled. Communities with colorful names like Whiteflat, Dumont, Medicine Mound, Purple Hill and Hackberry that once thrived with families are now little more than dots on a map. Their sunburnt buildings survive as best they can, silent sentinels in the constant West Texas wind.

Although the population has dwindled over much of the Rolling Plains, the pioneering spirit endures. In a lot of ways, the people who live in this part of Texas epitomize what it means to be a Texan—tough and resilient, but most of all gracious and affable.

After I first moved to Childress, musician Red Steagall autographed a book for me, *Ride for the Brand*. A passage in one of his pieces (“Born to This Land”) sums up what it means to live and thrive in the Rolling Plains:

*During the Dust Bowl we barely hung on.  
The north wind tried to blow us away.  
It seemed that the Lord took a likin’ to us.  
He kept turnin’ up ways we could stay.*

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Russell A. Graves is a professional photographer who also teaches agriculture at Childress High School.

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**TOP: Prairie dogs are more prolific than precious rain in this part of Texas. BOTTOM: The Pease River was the site of many battles between settlers and Indians in the 1800s.**

