

In Katrina's Wake,

Norfolk Southern Shows its Spirit

Norfolk Southern's response to catastrophic weather events in 2005 demonstrated the culture and vitality of a company that after 175 years in business has plenty of resolve to face future challenges and opportunities.

On Aug. 29, Hurricane Katrina inflicted widespread destruction across Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi. NS facilities, track, signals, highway-rail grade crossing devices and microwave communication sites sustained heavy damage. The storm surge washed nearly five miles of track, ties and ballast from the NS trestle spanning Lake Pontchartrain north of New Orleans.

Before the storm's arrival, NS set up a command center in Atlanta to direct storm preparations and subsequent operations. The company rerouted traffic headed for New Orleans through other gateways and moved equipment to higher ground. Emergency repair



Floating cranes all in a row tower over the barren deck of the Lake Pontchartrain trestle following Hurricane Katrina. As seen at lower right, the cranes recovered 4.8 miles of track from the lake and lifted it back onto the bridge.

equipment was placed for easy transport to potentially affected areas. Employees were encouraged to evacuate.

Even as New Orleans still resembled a ghost town in Katrina's wake, a small army of determined Norfolk Southern

people came with a mission: quickly restore rail service in a region vital to national commerce.

Engineering personnel moved in as soon as it was safe to start repairs. "We really had to be on our toes

all the time to deal with numerous difficult circumstances that we just don't normally encounter," said Jeff McCracken, NS chief engineer for line maintenance, Western Region. "If it could happen, it did in this environment."

NS people cleared some 5,000 trees off the tracks as they made their way south from Birmingham.

To repair damage to the Lake Pontchartrain bridge – a major east-west rail link – McCracken's team devised an ingenious plan to recover track that had been washed into the lake. They used nine cranes on barges to lift the track back onto the bridge deck.

"It's very gratifying that it all worked out the way we had planned," McCracken said. "It would have taken weeks to reconstruct a new track in lieu of using the track that was there."

Bridge repairs were completed just 16 days after Katrina hit, and traffic to New Orleans was restored fully Oct. 3,



People and machinery join forces to repair a section of track damaged by Hurricane Katrina.

when NS' intermodal and automotive facilities reopened. Other divisions handled additional traffic until rail lines were restored.

"It was a team effort, as one big family," McCracken said. "People came up to me at the end of this project and

thanked me for allowing them to be part of it. They said this is something they would tell their grandchildren, and they were proud to be a part of it, and they wished they could have done more."

"It just goes to show what Norfolk Southern people can do when faced with a challenge," McCracken said, adding that the entire effort was accomplished without a single injury. "They put safety first."

The company offered financial assistance, temporary job relocations and short-term housing to employees affected by Katrina. Norfolk Southern also gave donations to communities and matched employee contributions to the American Red Cross and Salvation Army. Employees participated in volunteer relief efforts in storm-ravaged areas. 🐾



The first train moves across the Lake Pontchartrain trestle, restoring rail service to New Orleans just 16 days after Hurricane Katrina washed nearly five miles of track off the bridge into the lake. Norfolk Southern people repaired the bridge in record time, safely and under extremely challenging conditions.