

Lea County Damaging Winds May 31st, 2023

During the afternoon of May 31st, 2023, a thunderstorm developed over Loving County. This thunderstorm split and a left-moving supercell rapidly intensified. This supercell produced straight-line winds of 77 mph at an observing station near the Loving/Lea County line and 65 mph west of Jal in southern Lea County. The left-moving supercell continued towards the northeast and rapidly intensified, likely reaching peak intensity as it approached Arkansas Junction west of Hobbs. A combination of the fast storm movement of nearly 50 mph, the atmospheric environment, and winds within the supercell combined to produce a series of intense wet-microbursts and high-end straight-line winds. Damage at the intersection included a roof ripped off a small retail building, the complete collapse of a large metal building, and numerous snapped power poles. Peak winds with this area of damage were estimated to be 130 mph.

Further damage was surveyed along Stiles Road, Lovington Highway, and Caudill Road to the north of Hobbs. Damage in this area include numerous snapped power poles, roof damage to numerous buildings, and overturned irrigation pivots. A hundred or more cattle hutches at a dairy farm were carried up to 3 miles downwind. The thunderstorm produced a stampede at the dairy farm and resulted in dozens of cattle fatalities. Additionally, a piece of a combine tractor was torn off and thrown into a vehicle along State Highway 83. The peak estimated wind speeds with this area of damage was found to be 110 mph.

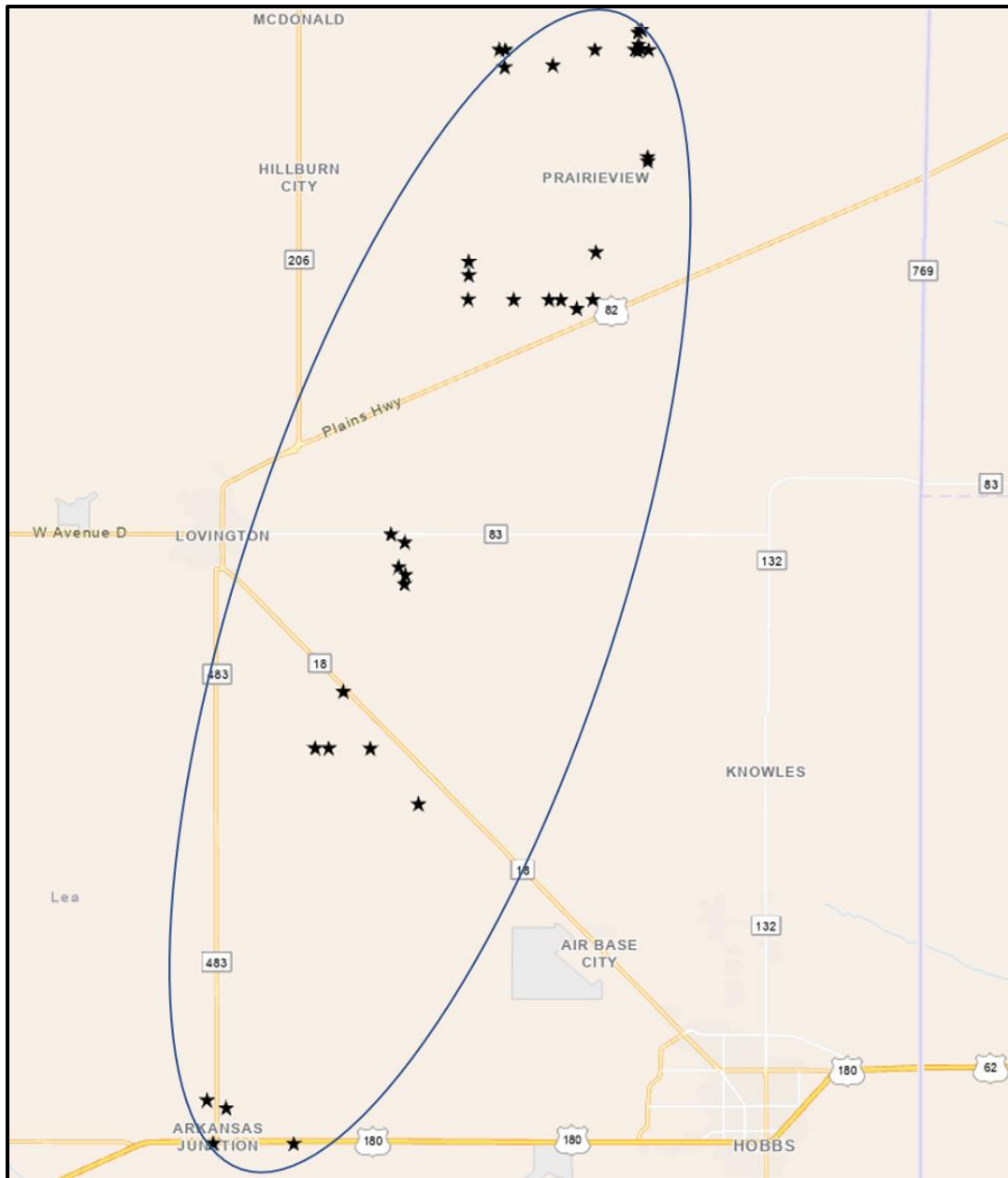
The last major area of damage was surveyed north of US Highway 82 and included the intersection of Pope Road and E McDonald Road, as well as areas of Hennington Road and East Crockett Road. Damage in this area include numerous power poles, several overturned and severely

twisted irrigation pivots, snapped trees, roof damage to a home, and other damage to small outbuilding. The most significant damage surveyed in this area was a barn along East McDonald Road that had been completely destroyed, and projectiles from this barn were found embedded in trees, powerline poles, and a field across the road.

In total, dozens of structures sustained damage or were completely destroyed, approximately 180 power poles were snapped, and there were dozens of cattle fatalities. This swath of wind damage was approximately 25 miles in length with a width upwards of half a mile. This was a very unusual high-end wind event with winds speeds equivalent to a high-end EF-2 tornado. Total property damage from this event had an estimated cost of at least half a million dollars.



Left: Roof torn off a building near Arkansas Junction. **Right:** A large barn destroyed along Simpson Rd near intersection of E McDonald Rd. Photos courtesy of NWS Midland.



There was a large swath of damage stretching from Hwy 180 west of Hobbs up to areas north of Hwy 82. Each star designates an area of damage found.

Special thanks to Lea County OEM, Carlie Pruitt, for assisting with this damage survey.

Thanks to all the spotters, chasers, and local emergency personnel for sending in your reports and photos. This greatly aides in warning operations and post-storm surveys.