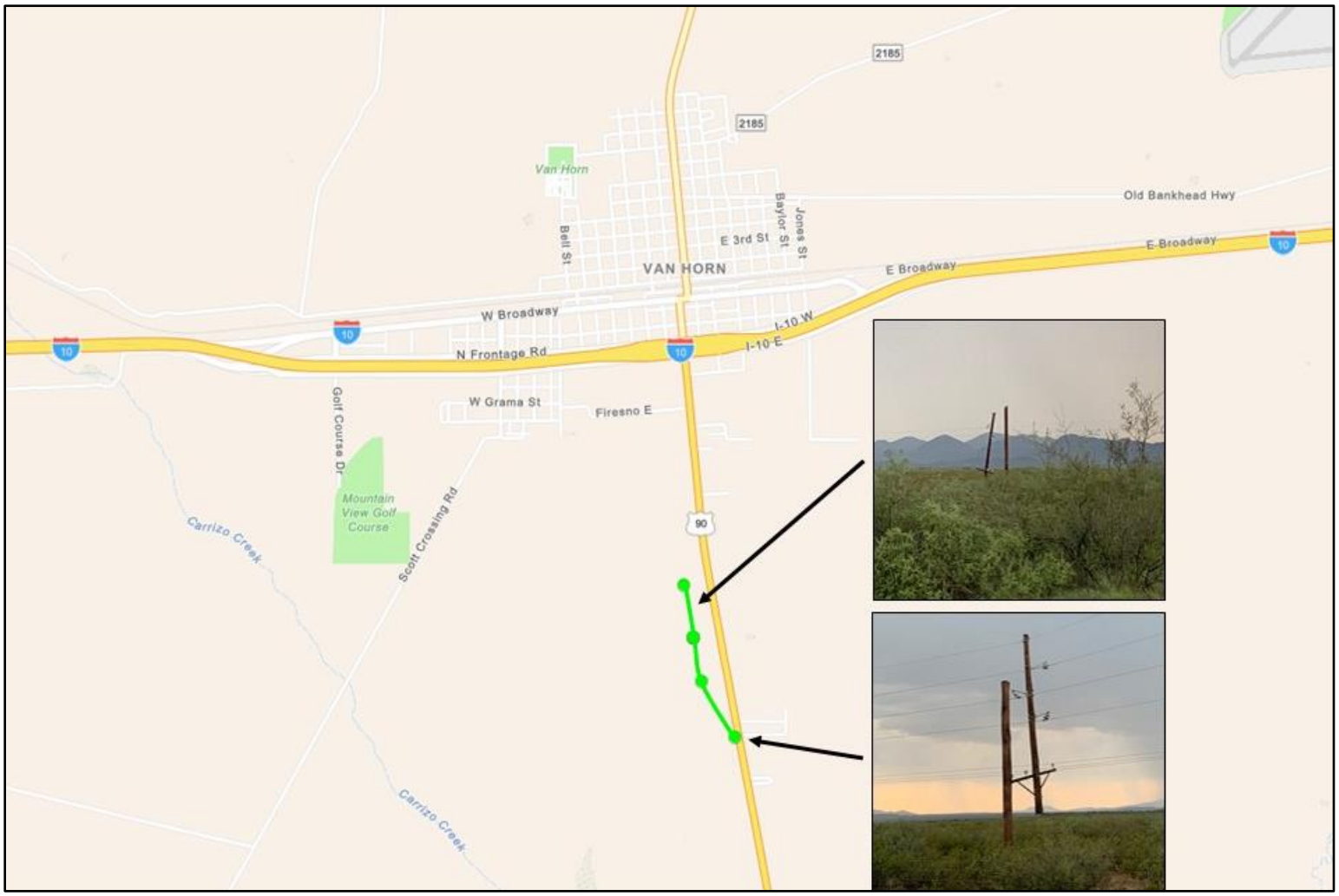
Culberson County Microburst

Scattered showers and thunderstorms developed across portions of West Texas and southeastern New Mexico during the afternoon hours of August 17, 2020. Most of this activity remained sub severe through the evening hours, producing some lightning and brief periods of heavy rainfall. However, one particular storm that moved over the city of Van Horn, TX produced a localized area of damaging straight-line winds as the core of this storm collapsed just south of the city around 6:30pm CDT. By 7pm CDT, Culberson County Office of Emergency Management (OEM) reported 10 snapped powerline poles 1-2 miles south of Van Horn along Highway 90 that resulted in a city-wide power outage. After re-evaluating radar data and assessing the damage remotely using photos sent in by Culberson County OEM, the National Weather Service determined that the damage was caused by a microburst (definition is provided below) with estimated wind speeds near 100 mph, which is equivalent to an EF-1 tornado!

Special thanks to Cody Davis with Culberson County Emergency Management for providing the damage photos and assisting with this damage survey.



Microburst Definition - A microburst is a localized column of sinking air within a thunderstorm that rushes to the ground and spreads out in all directions. These downbursts are usually less than or equal to 2.5 miles in diameter and can cause extensive damage at the surface. Wind speeds near 100 mph is common but can be up to 150 mph in extreme cases.