

Snowy surprise

First snowfall of 2020 is small, but closes schools

THE JOURNAL STAFF

SENECA — Heather McCall and 14-year-old Morgan Miller laughed as they took turns letting 4-year-old Grayson McCall throw snowballs at them at the Stumphouse Ranger Station near Mountain Rest on Friday morning.

The three of them traveled from Six Mile to the ranger station shortly after learning Friday's snowfall was sticking to the ground in the Mountain Rest area.

"He really enjoys the snow," Heather McCall said as



Even the livestock enjoyed themselves in the snow in Oconee County's higher elevations on Friday morning.

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PHOTOS BY SAVANNAH BLAKE | THE JOURNAL

Heather McCall laughs as her 4-year-old son Grayson McCall tries to catch a snowball in his mouth on Friday at the Stumphouse Ranger Station near Mountain Rest.

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Grayson took a bite of snow from his mitten while making a snowman.

The first snow of 2020 caught most people in the area by surprise. It didn't last long or create much accumulation, but it was enough to spark some excitement for adults and children alike. And when snow began sticking to roads in some of the higher elevations such as Mountain Rest, officials in Oconee and Pickens counties dismissed schools Friday morning, giving students time to enjoy the miniature winter wonderland with an early start to the weekend.

Rodney Hinson, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Greer, said the mostly unexpected snowfall didn't bring more than about an inch of accumulation to any area of the Upstate.

"We weren't expecting it to be this snowy," Hinson said. "We knew it was going to be potentially cold enough for snow, but it looked like the warm air near the surface was going to be warm enough that any snow was going to melt before it reached the ground. It looks like the warm air wasn't as deep as we were thinking it was going to be, and that allowed the snow to reach the ground instead of melting before."

Oconee's first snow of the season came a little later than the past couple of years, when the first snow came in December.

"It's unusual, but not rare," Hinson said of the Jan. 31 date for the first snowfall.

Students in Oconee and Pickens schools were dismissed before noon.



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A sheep looks through a fence during Friday morning's snowfall in Oconee County.

and home extracurricular activities — including Friday night high school basketball games — were cancelled.

"This morning's decision to dismiss early was based on worsening road conditions in the mountain areas of the county," School District of Oconee County associate superintendent Steve Hanvey said. "As always, decisions on school closings due to weather are hard to predict, just like the weather. Student safety is our absolute first priority."

Officials said the frozen precipitation didn't cause any major problems on the roads.

Joe Hovis of the South Carolina Highway Patrol said troopers investigated four accidents in Oconee County, three in Pickens County and six in Greenville County before noon on Friday.

"It looks like a normal rain day to me," he said.

Oconee County Emergency Services Shift Capt. Scott Long said first responders worked five vehicle accidents Friday, but none of them were in the Mountain Rest area, where more snow was sticking to

the roads. He said the number of accidents in Oconee on Friday was "no more than average."

"It was nothing out of the ordinary," Long said.

Looking ahead, February is usually the month with the highest levels of snowfall, but Hinson said Oconee and Pickens residents shouldn't get their hopes up that more, heavier snowfall is coming soon.

"The outlook for February is above-normal temperatures and above-normal precipitation," Hinson said. "Right now, it's not looking great for additional snow, but individual storm systems may vary."

— Savannah Blake, Greg Oliver and Norm Cannada contributed to this report.