

# Microbursts blamed for storm damage in lake communities

## Seneca, Oconee County employees help with cleanup

BY NORM CANNADA  
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — A relaxing early-evening boat ride on Lake Keowee was suddenly interrupted about 20 minutes into the voyage by a storm Wednesday that brought rain, hail and damaging winds to an area off S.C. Highway 130.

Paul Cieslak maneuvered his 26-foot Cobalt R5 through the storm that slapped 6-foot waves across the boat, hitting the windshield.

"I drove through it," said Cieslak, who lives on the lake and operated the boat with his

wife, Lisa, and four of her relatives from Massachusetts on board. "To go a mile and a half, it took me about 45 minutes on the water. If you'd stayed off the power, it would have capsized the boat, so I had to just keep going. There's no stopping once you got in. My boat seems to be OK, other than being soaked. I've never seen anything like it.

"I didn't think a lake this small would see that type of swells," he added. "I've been in the ocean seeing that kind of swell. It was dangerous. It really was."

The storm took down trees in the Keowee 2 neighborhood

and other communities off Highway 130, starting around 6:15-6:30 p.m. and ending about 7 p.m., according to Keowee 2 residents.

Despite reports of "twisting" in some of the trees that came down, Upstate National Weather Service lead meteorologist Jake Wimberly said "the environment (Wednesday) did not support tornadoes."

"Tornadoes require a lot of wind shear, which is basically a rotation of the winds with height, so the direction the wind changes as you get

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Seneca Fire Chief Richie Caudill cuts up a fallen tree alongside other city employees during storm cleanup efforts in the Keowee 2 neighborhood on Thursday.



# DAMAGE: 'A reminder of those days two years ago'

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urther off the ground. There was not enough near (Wednesday) to support that," Wimberly told The Journal. "The damage that we heard about (Wednesday) was consistent with microbursts, which are just a very strong current of air that comes straight down onto the ground and fans out in all directions. "And microburst damage can be as significant as what a weak tornado can do, so sometimes people might think a tornado happened just based on the severity of the damage, but we have not seen anything that would suggest that there were any tornadoes."

## OCONEE COUNTY, CITY EMPLOYEES RESPOND

Employees of the Oconee County Roads and Bridges Department arrived on the scene Wednesday night and "stayed until about midnight," according to Keowee 2 resident John Hunter, who had several trees down, but no damage to his home, where he has lived since 2003.

"The neighbors did a superb job, but Oconee County deserves a ton of credit," Hunter said. "I was walking up here, probably about 7:30 (Thursday morning) and Seneca city (employees) came through. They said, 'Well, this isn't even our land, but we're from the parks and rec department



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**After showing up Wednesday night, Oconee County Roads and Bridges Department employees spent more time Thursday helping with cleanup efforts in the wake of storms in the Keowee 2 community.**

and we were asked to come around to help you in any way we can."

### 'SOBERING REMINDER'

Seneca Fire Chief Richie Caudill said the storm brought back memories of the EF3 tornado that ripped through Seneca on April 13, 2020.

"Ever since the tornado, I'll look at the sky now every time it storms, and so I noticed the wind was picking up and then I looked on the radar and we had a storm coming at

us with some hail right in the dead center of it," he said. "That was enough to kind of worry me. The wind started pretty heavy, and then it got really, really strong and then it started hailing and then the wind started changing directions and blowing in different directions. That's when I knew we were having a problem. So, I got the family basically ready to go into the stairwell.

"For the ones that went through the tornado, this

was a very kind of sobering reminder of what we went through."

Seneca city administrator Scott Moulder said some employees took a vacation day Thursday to help clean up the area,

where Caudill and two other city employees live.

"It was about 8:30 p.m., I guess. Initially, we were headed over to help Richie clean his yard. And when we got over there, we noticed how bad the damage was and based on what we saw, it appears as though they had either a small tornado or a series of microbursts," Moulder said. "We drove around and saw that there was some significant damage spread over a couple of blocks. I did not tell them they had to go over there and help. It was a matter of personal choice. Each of them took a vacation day in order to do that."

Like Caudill, Moulder said the experience was a reminder of the 2020 tornado and the people who helped.

"Obviously, their damage was not as widespread as what we experienced, but it certainly was a reminder of those days two years ago," he said. "The damage looks the same from a tree standpoint, and we wanted to give back to a community the same way other communities gave to us."