

Subject: Winter is Coming  
December 15, 2022

It's back, snow that is, and we all need to be prepared. The official winter season is just around the corner with next Wednesday being the first official day.

Last year we dodged a bullet with the winter storm that brought 12 inches of snow. Before the storm there were predictions of 16 to over 20 inches of snow. As the mayor those projections made the hair on the back of my head stand up straight. I had visions of the Blizzard of 1994 where Highlands was shut completely down for about two weeks.

Luckily, the big 12-inch snow storm last year did not cause any major long-term power outages. The roads were covered with heavy snow, and normally our road crews have equipment that can easily handle 3 to 6 inches of snow, but when we are trying to move 12 inches or more, that is a different situation. First, our snow shoveling equipment tends to break more often which means that unit has to go back to the town shed for repairs. Second, during exceptionally large snow storms, we have more instances where road plowing vehicles slide off the road and become stuck. That too requires more time for additional staff and equipment to pull the stuck vehicle back onto the road. And finally, plowing large amounts of snow is a management problem, for example, where do you put those large piles of snow?

Looking at existing storm patterns in the West and North makes me worry we could have another huge snow event. When those massive storms hit, it is not business as usual. A major blizzard in Western Carolina could be likened to a hurricane hitting Eastern North Carolina. Power could be lost for a long period of time and roads could be impassable for similar periods. So, my advice to those citizens with conditions that may be problematic in these kinds of emergency conditions, consider evacuating like in a hurricane to safer areas.

Nevertheless, we all need to be prepared for winter snow storms. Sallie and I make sure our pantry is full of food and that our propane tank is full. Before an impending snow storm I make sure our cars are topped off with gasoline. We do not have a generator so I have flash lights and lanterns with batteries on the ready, as well as an ample supply of firewood.

Some might say I am an alarmist, that with climate change we don't even get the snow and cold temperatures that Highlanders endured 30 years or so ago. But, with changing weather patterns those unusual storm events do happen. I won't even discuss the "ice" word. We are approaching 30 years since that epic blizzard of 1994, and some of the old time Highlanders tell me we are due for another anytime now. I hope not, but history has a way of repeating itself.

I look forward to a white Christmas in Highlands just as long as it only around 4 to 6 inches. We haven't had a good white Christmas for about a decade or more.