

Ready or not, winter is here

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It's not uncommon for winter weather to make an appearance in November in Northern Michigan, but Mother Nature's recent onslaught of cold and snow may have many area residents feeling like they skipped from Halloween to New Year's Day in the blink of an eye.

Indeed, records from the National Weather Service monitoring station at North Central Michigan College show the Petoskey area is well ahead of its normal to-date seasonal snowfall. As of Wednesday,

the station in Petoskey had recorded 39.8 inches of snowfall so far this season — more than 30 inches more than the 7.1 inches on average seen by this time of the year.

And if all that early snow and cold caught you not quite ready for Old Man Winter, you aren't alone.

Early re-tirement

Often the first few snowfalls of the year send more motorists sliding around than later in the season when area drivers have their winter driving skills more honed. However, the many inches of lake-effect snow that piled up around the area prompting many schools to close, also sent many people sliding into their favorite tire store looking to have snow tires — or new all-season tires put on their [vehicles](#).

Herb Friske at Petoskey's Royal Tire location said the fast and furious onset of winter weather brought droves of people to the store looking for a better grip on area roads.

Friske said although most year's first significant snow fall brings many people to the store, this year was much worse.

"We had no place to park in our parking lot or any of the side streets around here," Friske said. "We got caught up some today (Monday), but it's still pretty hectic."

Friske said they can still change out customers' all-season tires for their snow tires, but those who are looking to buy new snow tires might be out of luck. He said Royal's [stock](#) is running low and more won't likely be coming in. He noted that tire companies typically make their supply of snow tires many months in advance of when they are needed and then switch to making other types of tires.

Friske said he's amazed at how bad some people let the condition of their [vehicle's](#) tires get before having them replaced

"Somebody should do a study on how many accidents are caused by the bad tires people have on their car," Friske said.

Leaf it to winter

With the early arrival of snow, even the most dedicated leaf-raker may not have had time to remove all of fall's foliage from their yard before it was buried under a blanket of snow.

If you were among those scrambling who didn't get all your yard work done, you weren't alone.

Curtis Galvas, maintenance supervisor at Charlevoix-based Landscape Logic, said he and his crews heard of many people who didn't get their leaves picked up or holiday lights up in time.

"People just ran out of time. (The weather) had us re-organizing," Galvas said. "We pulled crews from the field and ran more crews on plant-wrapping, picking properties that had the highest [risk](#) of animal damage."

Galvas said in some cases crews had to shovel out shrubs to get them wrapped.

He said the warm-up that came Sunday into Monday which melted most of the foot of snow that had fallen was a lucky break for crews — and some area residents — who were able get some of those last minute projects done.

For those who still have a mat of leaves on their lawns under the snow, Galvas has two recommendations: First if another warm-up comes along, take advantage of it and get as many leaves off the yard as you can. If a thaw doesn't come, or you can't take advantage of one, get the leaves off your yard as soon as possible in the spring. He said that's because a thick blanket of leaves left on a lawn could cause the grass to thin out or die.

Road warriors

Charlevoix County Road [Commission](#) Manager Pat Harmon said his crews were ready to go when the winter weather hit and so far haven't had any trouble managing their plowing and salting/sanding duties.

However, unlike those hoping to get some last minute yard cleanup done, the thaw was anything but a blessing for his crews. While the warmer weather may have done away with most of the snowbanks that had already piled up, it has made a mess of many of the county's unpaved roads.

Harmon noted that crews were still hoping to get one last grading of some of the unpaved roads, especially those that had become riddled with potholes thanks to the wet fall. He said when the snow came, it actually improved driving conditions on some of those roads as snow filled in the potholes. But when the weather warmed up earlier this week, it turned those roads back in to a muddy mess, making potholes and ruts even worse. He noted in such a wet condition, running a grader over those roads will only make the situation worse.

Project on pause

The earlier than normal onset of winter weather didn't help crews working on the first phase of a Michigan Department of Transportation project on U.S. 31 in and near Petoskey.

The project, will ultimately include infrastructure work, widening the road to include a turning lane and resurfacing the road from U.S. 131 (Spring Street) to Camp Daggett Road.

The first phase of the project began this fall with traffic reduced to alternating one lane in each direction as crews did grading and underground work in advance of the remainder of the project, planned for the spring.

Michigan Department of Transportation spokesman James Lake said crews knew they would be on a tight schedule to get the first phase of the work done before winter, but the cold and snow came even earlier than expected.

Indeed, recently crews could be seen paving the south shoulder of the road as snow was flying through the air. Lake noted that normally those are far from ideal conditions — both for precipitation and temperature — in which to be paving a road. However, he said all of the asphalt put down this fall is only temporary and will be replaced when the project is resumed in the spring.

In fact, crews weren't able to complete all of the work they had hoped to before the weather turned bad.

"We had a couple of locations and a couple of commercial driveways where we were not able to complete top-course paving, and three culverts were only completed halfway across the road," Lake said. "These items weren't completed for a combination of reasons: Some delays earlier in the project due to rain, and the early onset of winter weather. With a few more good days of weather to pave, we might have been able to get everything done. The contractor may be doing some minor restoration work along the road yet this year, but otherwise we're wrapped up for the winter. The incomplete items will be the first thing we do when work resumes in the spring."

State officials will be hosting an open house during which members of the public will be able to get updated information on the project from 4:30-6 p.m. on Thursday, Dec. 4, at the Resort Township Hall, 2232 Resort Pike Road.

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