

Snow...from Page 1A

4-inches of snow could cause so many problems, but it did - just ask the folks in Atlanta," Paris said. "This was one time that the snow stuck to the roads before it did anywhere else.

"Usually the heat of the pavement keeps the roads from slicking over for several hours after a snow begins," Paris said. "But the cold weather and the dry snow was a game changer. Normally we could scrape and salt the main roads and then begin on the secondary and smaller roads. But this snow



Donald Roseboom brought this snow pup with him when he moved to Blairsville from up North. He finally got to use it last week during the snowstorm. Photo/Alice Roseboom

was almost impossible to remove right from the start.

"Even on Saturday morning, we found several roads still with very slick spots on them. However, the main roads were in excellent shape from Wednesday on," Paris said.

"I also want to thank the Georgia Department of Transportation as they also did an exceptional job on the state highways," Paris said. "In preparation for future events,

we have acquired two additional smaller trucks and ordered blades for them. These vehicles will try to concentrate on smaller and steeper roads in the future. Thanks to the public for your support and patience and staying off the roads until they were safe. It made a big difference."

Paris said while they seldom get mentioned, "lets not forget our water departments, Blairsville, Coosa and Notla and the great water sup-

plies we have.

"Also Blue Ridge Mountain EMC and Windstream kept our power and telephones working uninterrupted and we sometimes take that for granted."

As for the students who missed three days of classes, they now await word on which days they'll use to make up for the three days of classes that they missed because of the snowstorm.

Gooch...from Page 1A

ing—what is a watershed?

A watershed is an area that drains to shared water sources such as lakes, streams or aquifers. These areas cross county and municipal boundaries, are linked by common water bodies and helps protect local water resources.

Furthermore, every single one of us lives in a watershed, and we are all responsible for the actions that affect the integrity of this area.

Current law says the Department of Natural Resources may develop minimum standards for the protection of natural resources statewide, including watersheds.

However, these standards are "one-size-fits-all" and not customized for local needs.

One of the most burdensome requirements is a 300-foot buffer mandate for streams seven miles upstream from a source that provides drinking water for the area.

This mandate means that property owners are kept from building on or making improvements to their own land, regardless of the precautions taken to preserve the watershed.

I have been working toward clarifying and improving these regulations since 2001 when I was elected Lumpkin County Commissioner.

At that time, watershed standards were tied to the ability to receive state loans and grants. When Lumpkin County did not adopt these standards, we lost the ability to receive these funds.

Eventually, the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) decided to repeal standards adoption as a condition for state loan and grant funding.

Over the years, there have been many public hearings held and legislation proposed regarding Georgia's watershed management regulations, and one common idea keeps resurfacing during these discussions: the suggestion that if the buffer zone is decreased, the regulations for monitoring and inspection must increase.

Although this appears to be a good idea, the enforcement of this idea would be very difficult on a state level.

However, the enforcement of these increased regulations on a local level would not be as difficult—and this is why I drafted SB 299.

This bill would clarify minimum standards for watershed protection and place this enforcement with local governments, who would be allowed to draft a customized watershed protection plan that best serves area needs. Plans would be required to include all measures taken to ensure water can still be treated to meet drinking water standards and also remove the 300-foot buffer zone mandate.

I firmly believe in the protection of our natural resources and that we must do all we can to preserve our water sources. Buffers act as natural filters and remove sediment and nitrates from water even before it's manually treated. But there is still a discrepancy on how large these buffers must be to actually work—and that a small buffer may be just as effective as a more sizeable buffer.

The problem with our current buffers is the "one-size-fits-all" regulations, not the buffers themselves. It should be noted that SB 299

in no way, shape or form reduces the 50-foot trout stream buffers that currently exist on North Georgia streams.

The passage of SB 299 would give local governments oversight of watershed management regulations and protect landowner rights. More importantly, it would provide stronger guidelines than a sole 300-foot buffer for protecting drinking water sources.

The bill is the result of many open conversations with stakeholders, local officials and the EPD, and I am confident this bill is taking the right step towards more efficient water conservation practices.

I was scheduled to present SB 299 in the Senate Natural Resources and Environment Committee meeting last week, but due to the winter storm, the meeting was cancelled.

I look forward to presenting the bill in committee this week with Lumpkin County Commissioner Doug Sherrill, who will be testifying in support of SB 299. I also expect several other commissioners to testify in favor of the bill.

Although the winter storm last week was severe and caused many problems in North Georgia, I was moved to see so many people joining together to help others in time of need. It is times like

these that make me proud to be from Georgia.

Due to Gov. Deal's decision to close all state offices, the Senate suspended all business on Jan. 29 and 30. However, these two days will count towards the 40 days we are allowed by the State Constitution. The Georgia General Assembly resumed business on January 31 for legislative day 14.

I will hold a Town Hall meeting this Saturday, Feb. 8, at 10 a.m. at the Lumpkin County Community Center on Riley Road. I will be briefing all in attendance on this proposed legislation and other legislative efforts under the Gold Dome. The general public is encouraged to attend.

I encourage anyone with questions about SB 299 to contact my office at any time.

I will be happy to discuss the legislation with you and address any concerns you may have. As always, it is an honor and a privilege to represent District 51 at the Georgia State Capitol.

Sen. Steve Gooch serves as Chairman of the Transportation Committee. He represents the 51st Senate District which includes Dawson, Fannin, Gilmer, Lumpkin, Union and White counties and portions of Forsyth and Pickens counties. He may be reached at (404) 656-9221 or via email at steve.gooch@senate.ga.gov