



Rare snow covers south Louisiana, Miss.

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN – 1 hour ago

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — A rare snowfall blanketed south Louisiana and parts of Mississippi Thursday, closing schools, government offices and bridges, triggering crashes on major highways and leaving thousands of people without power.

Parts of Louisiana were expected to get up to four inches of snow. Snow also covered a broad swath of Mississippi, including the Jackson area, and closed schools in more than a dozen districts. The National Weather Service in Jackson said up to 8 inches was possible in the southern and eastern parts of the state.

A heavy band of snow coated windshields and grassy areas in New Orleans, where the National Weather Service issued a winter storm warning.

Office workers stepped out of high-rises to catch a snowflake, snap pictures with cell-phone cameras and swap snow stories.

At a park in New Orleans' Uptown neighborhood, Sara Echaniz, 41, snapped photos and dodged snowballs thrown by her son, 3-year-old Sam. "He didn't believe it was snow until it started sticking to the ground," said Echaniz, a native of Rochester, N.Y., who was pregnant with the child the last time it snowed in New Orleans, in December 2004.

In Alabama, heavy rains prompted forecasters to issue a flood watch for parts of the state. Wintry precipitation also was possible later Thursday as temperatures were expected to drop.

Flood watches were issued through Thursday night for much of North Carolina ahead of the storm system. Colder air behind the front could produce snow late Thursday and early Friday in the mountains.

In Louisiana, nearly 7,000 power outages were reported in south-central parishes as falling tree limbs snapped under the weight of ice and snow.

Some flights at Louis Armstrong International Airport outside New Orleans were delayed and canceled. Airport spokeswoman Michelle Wilcut said deicing equipment was being used on planes. Cleco Corp., one of the state's largest power providers, said the number of outages was expected to grow.

Forecasters said the mix of sleet and snow was expected to diminish later in the day as the weather system moved east.

In southeast Louisiana, temperatures were above freezing so accumulations were not expected to linger much beyond Thursday. An inch was forecast for New Orleans.

The wintry weather is rare in south Louisiana, though the state's northern parishes see it about once a year. New Orleans' last snowfall, in 2004, was a dusting that came nine months before Hurricane Katrina struck. The record snowfall for the city is about 5 inches, recorded Dec. 30, 1963.

The weather service said the previous earliest date for measurable snowfall in New Orleans was Dec. 22, 1989.