

West Texas/Southeast New Mexico Winter Storm 12/30/14 – 1/2/15

In the period between Tuesday December 30, 2014 and Friday January 2, 2015 the worst ice storm in recent memory occurred across the Permian Basin...Southeast New Mexico...and parts of the Trans Pecos. Starting Tuesday December 30th light freezing drizzle and freezing fog persisted almost non-stop through Wednesday night (New Years Eve) resulting in the gradual thickening of ice on exposed surfaces. The largest initial impacts were experienced along major roadways such as Interstate 20 as well as a temporary closure of the Midland International Airport. Some sleet and light snow mixed in with the light freezing drizzle and freezing fog on Wednesday...though no significant snow accumulations were reported...just enough to see it blowing across the icy roads and whiten the grass. However some snow did accumulate in Eddy County, New Mexico. To compound the hazardous conditions Pine Springs...in the Guadalupe Mountains...reported wind gusts in excess of 60 mph at times.

By early Wednesday evening...moderate to heavy sleet and freezing rain developed across the lower Trans Pecos and extended into the southern and southeastern Permian Basin including Pecos...Upton...Reagan...and Mitchell Counties resulting in ice and sleet accumulations between 0.25 inches to 2 inches. Elsewhere the remainder of New Years Eve night and early New Years Day a wintry mix of light freezing drizzle...freezing fog...and light snow occurred. Meanwhile travel became more difficult. Interstates 10 and 20 mostly stayed open...but with more frequent wrecks traffic would stack up. In addition...state highways...farm to market roads...and other secondary roads began to close.

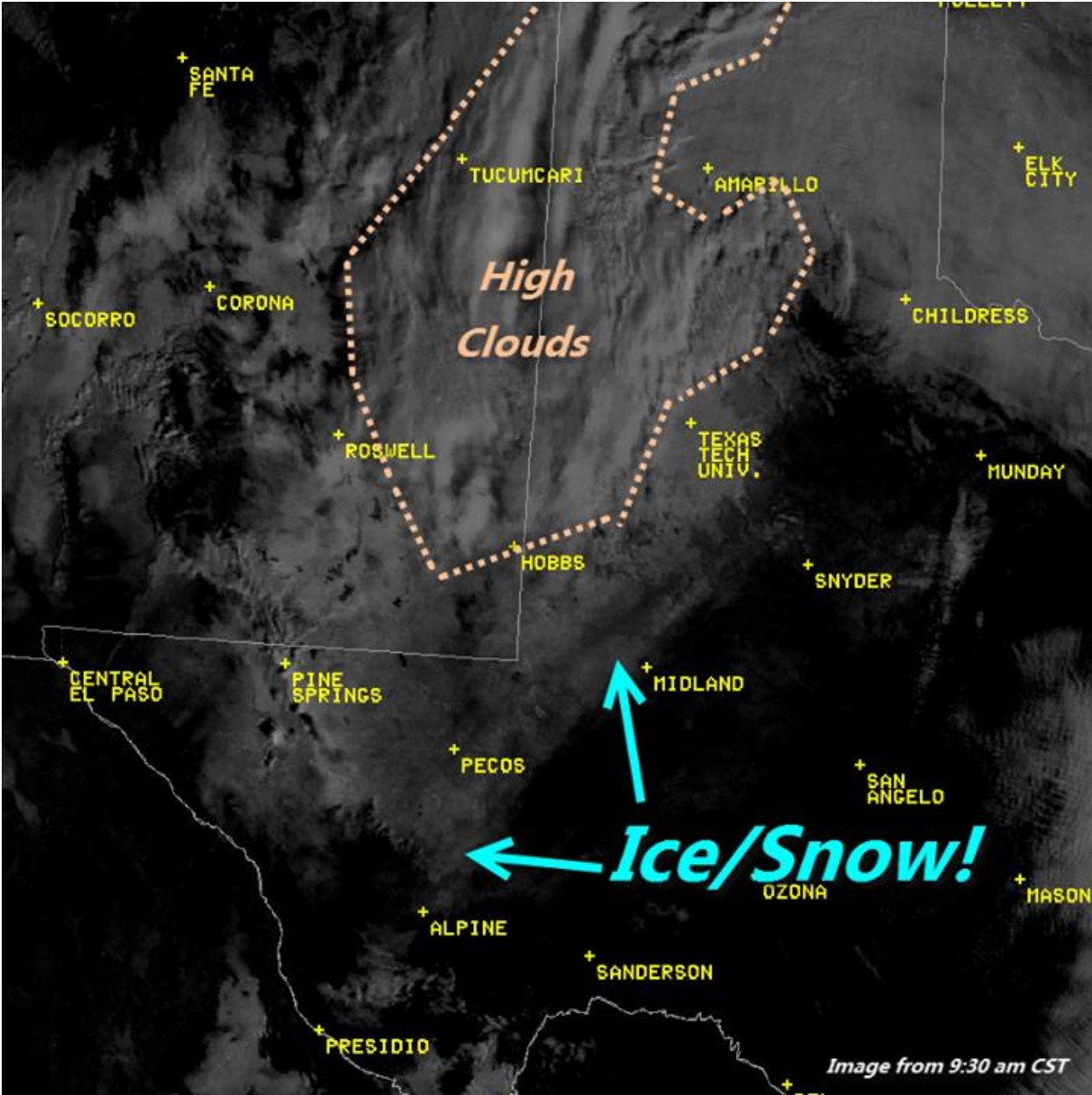
Late New Years Day a band of rain...freezing rain...sleet...and snow extended from the Big Bend south of Fort Stockton northeastward...producing locally significant icing amounts across Terrell and Pecos Counties. This band of precipitation slowly moved northward...where it became nearly stationary along the Interstate 20 corridor from the I-20/I-10 split through Midland/Odessa and toward Abilene early Friday morning. What began as light freezing rain early Friday transitioned to a mix of heavy rain...freezing rain...and sleet across large parts of the Permian Basin by mid-morning which persisted through much of the day. This resulted in a daily liquid equivalent precipitation record at Midland International Airport of 1.45 inches. Meanwhile...temperatures had been slowly warming from the mid 20s in the early morning hours Friday to 32 degrees by 4 pm CST...and ice on the roads began to melt and turn to slush. Flooding then became a concern as drainage areas were impeded by accumulated slush with rain continuing to fall...resulting in multiple road closures due to high water as well as numerous high water rescues in Odessa. However...despite the melting and flooding on roadways trees and power lines continued to accumulate ice...resulting in widespread damage to trees in Midland and Odessa as well as power outages. At one point on late Friday Oncor Electric reported over 22,000 people without power across the Permian Basin. There was also heavy snow with this event...mainly across Culberson County in Texas and Eddy County in New Mexico where some areas reported total snow amounts to around 5 inches. Snow packed roads late Friday and early Saturday morning resulted in the closure of US 62/180 from the Texas

state line to Guadalupe Pass and Interstate 10 near Van Horn where shelters were set up for stranded travelers.

This was a high impact winter weather event which was of unusually long duration for the area. Below is a summary of some of the greater impacts that occurred:

- Three vehicle related fatalities;
- Over 350 vehicle accidents (number of injuries is unknown);
- Over 22,000 people without power;
- At least 85 power poles down;
- Shelters open or set up in Midland...Ector...Pecos...Culberson...and Reeves Counties
- Widespread road closures including parts of Interstates 10 and 20. Highways 62/180...82...191...JBS Parkway...Loops 250 and 338;
- Temporary closure of Midland International Airport;
- Closure of numerous State/Local government offices...businesses...daycares...and pre-schools;
- Numerous high water rescues in Odessa;
- Daily liquid equivalent precipitation record for Friday January 2nd at Midland International Airport of 1.45 inches (previous record was 0.23 inches in 1995).

Visible satellite imagery from the morning of January 3, 2015 indicating the areas of ice and snow.



Pictures from Midland January 2nd and 3rd, 2015.





