Botanical Garden continues recovery efforts after recent flooding

BY GREG OLIVER
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CLEMSON — The South Carolina Botanical Garden, considered the essence of grace and beauty to the 450,000 visitors who frequent it each year, still faces an extensive recovery period after heavy rains flooded the site last month.

Clemson University forestry and natural resources department chair Pat Layton told Clemson City Council on Monday night that the Natural Heritage Garden was one of the hardest-hit areas, sustaining more than $200,000 in damage. She said the Clemson University Extension Service and other fundraising efforts are taking place to fund repairs to the site.

"July 13 was devastating to all of us," Layton said of the morning when nine inches of rain hit Clemson within a few hours. "We were very blessed to have lost only a few plants, but there are issues with stormwater and where all the water goes."

In addition to the entire route of the Natural Heritage Garden sustaining damage, several bridges were compromised or washed away, along with the entire irrigation system. Layton said bridges damaged by the flooding might have to be moved to higher ground as a precautionary measure for future weather events. She added that decisions made must involve ways to ensure this type of damage doesn't occur again.



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Some parts of the South Carolina Botanical Garden in Clemson still remain inaccessible to visitors after last month's flooding.

"We've cleaned up all the bridges, but it's going to take a lot of engineering," she said. "I've already contacted the city for GIS maps, so we can start understanding what the land looks like and where the water is moving."

During the days initially following the flooding, volunteers spent time saving, replanting or strengthening more than 1,000 varieties of native plants in their natural habitats. They also worked to minimize damage to the foundation of the Hunt Cabin, located at the edge of the garden.

According to Layton, no monetary figure has been determined as far as the overall damage to the Botanical Garden. For now, she said efforts are being made to find the best way to restore it.

"If we restore it and keep it the way it is, we're looking at another disaster when another rain of this magnitude hits," Layton said.

Anyone willing to make donations in helping the garden rebuild can visit https://cualumni.clemson.edu/give/scbg, www.clemson.edu/scbg or Facebook at https://www.facebook.com/pages/South-Carolina-Botanical-Garden/103813554908.

Katie Olbrich, who accompanied Layton to the meeting, said she is working with a number of local civic clubs in an effort to raise funds for restoration.

Layton said the South Carolina Botanical Garden has impacted the lives of virtually all local residents at some point.

"Many of you had your wedding pictures, children's pictures, prom pictures and parties there," she said. "Most everyone who lives in Clemson has done that, as well as schools that have taken field trips to the Botanical Garden.

"Not many communities can say they have a 295-acre jewel sitting next to them."

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