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Unlike last October's superstorm, Hurricane Matthew is not expected to affect this year's fall color season.

Clemson expert: Fall color season likely to avoid hurricane's wrath

THE JOURNAL STAFF

CLEMSON — Though Hurricane Matthew is threatening the coasts of at least three southeastern states, it appears likely its projected path will not extend far enough inland to have much of an effect on the upcoming fall color season, which is already underway in the upper heights.

Last October's superstorm marched across South Carolina from the Atlantic Ocean all the way up to the southern Blue Ridge Mountains, with its winds and rainfall still powerful enough to knock leaves off trees and put a damper on fall color in the higher elevations. But Hurricane Matthew will probably not have the same effect on locations favored by leaf seekers, which is good news for the multibillion-dollar autumn foliage tourism industry.

"Even winds up to 25 mph, especially if they only last for a day or so, won't do much damage to the leaves, except maybe to trees that are already drought-stressed and dropping leaves, such as yellow poplars," Clemson University forest ecologist Donald Hagan said. "As long as Hurricane Matthew doesn't veer too much to the west over the coming days, it should have little overall effect on the fall color season in the southern Appalachian Mountains."