Eyes on the skies

Potential exists for heavy rains in coming days



REX BROWN | THE JOURNAL

Although a slight drizzle fell across the area at times on Wednesday, things could get much wetter in the coming days, according to weather experts.

BY ERIC SPROTT
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — With an ever-changing forecast that's leaving people up and down the Atlantic Coast wondering just how much rain they'll be forced to deal with in the coming days, it comes as no surprise almost everyone is constantly checking for the latest projections.

South Carolina Foothills Heritage Fair chairman Stanley Gibson has been seeing that firsthand, as organizers for the seventh annual event can't help but stay glued to their smartphones as they try to stay ahead of the weather.

"It seems like everybody on the fair board, every time you see them, they've got their phones out looking at the radar to see what's coming next," Gibson said Wednesday. "It seems like every source you check has a different story."

With an uncertain weather pattern that's complicated by a cold front making its way toward the area, which already has plenty of moisture in the area to produce showers and storms, and Hurricane Joaquin slowly churning in the Bahamas and tracking north — with U.S. landfall possible — it's hard for even the National Weather Service to say exactly what's in store through the weekend.

Joshua Palmer, a meteorologist with the NWS's Greer office, said Wednesday to expect "along the lines of 2 to 3 inches at a minimum" through Sunday, but added there's a distinct possibly that

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total could be far less, or far more.

"Unfortunately, the next several days we don't really see any real prolonged breaks from the rainfall," he said. "As we get toward (this) afternoon and evening, there'll be better coverage of showers and storms (than Wednesday), and then as we head toward Friday evening and especially Saturday, that's when we'll start to feel the effects of the incoming cold front and of course any influence of Hurricane Joaquin as well.

"That forecast will be changing, I'm sure, for the better or for the worse over the next couple of days. But right now, it looks wet."

For Gibson and the folks at the Heritage Fair — which runs through Sunday across from Blue Ridge Electric on U.S. Highway 123 between Seneca and Westminster — that means preparing for the worst.

While turnout for the event is the greatest concern for the fair, Gibson said organizers have plenty of gravel dust and mulch to spread as a form of preventative maintenance to protect festivalgoers and fair workers in wet areas.

And in terms of the turnout, Gibson added there are numerous activities and displays in covered areas, and rides will still be run during inclement weather for those who are willing to brave the elements.

"People don't like riding rides with ponchos on, but once you get strapped in there, it doesn't matter," he said with a laugh. "It may add to the adventure, who knows?

"(Rain) would just kind of put a damper on the outdoor events, but we'll be open."

There's another large outdoor event on tap for Saturday night in the area, as No. 12 Clemson will play host to No. 6 Notre Dame at Memorial Stadium for the first time since 1977.

The matchup between the unbeaten squads, which is scheduled to kick off shortly after 8 p.m., has brought ESPN's "College GameDay" pregame show to town, and it will emanate from Bowman Field on the Clemson campus Saturday morning.

But for those who plan to attend the live show, tailgate throughout the day or attend the highly anticipated game at night, Palmer said they should be prepared to get wet.

"Right now, it looks like it's going to be a pretty wet game," he said.

IPTAY assistant executive director Jason Wilson said a significant amount of rain creates challenges on game days, particularly in grass parking lots.

"The fields drain well, but there are some low-lying areas that will be difficult to park in, so we have other areas we can direct to and help people get parked and into the game," he said. "We have great fans who are tailgating pros, so we ask that they prepare accordingly, arrive early and be patient with law enforcement and other game-day staff as they work to get everyone into the town and the campus for another great game in Death Valley."

Palmer said to expect winds out of the north at 10-15 mph, though the winds could be higher depending on how close Hurricane Joaquin — whose westward trajectory is hard to predict due to an area of high pressure far off the Atlantic Coast that could push the storm toward the coast if it continues to expand — tracks toward the Upstate.

While the forecast remains uncertain, Palmer expects the area to begin drying out and experiencing sunshine again at the start of next week, "but unfortunately, it's going to be a pretty wet period for the area."

"I think there's still a good chance it could end up being not as bad, but unfortunately there's an equal chance it could end up being as bad or worse," he added. "Nothing is set in stone as far as rainfall this weekend, in terms of coverage and amounts."

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