Rain, rain go away

BY GREG OLIVER
THE JOURNAL

One of the wettest summers in recent memory will apparently continue as more rain is expected through Friday and possibly longer depending on whether Tropical Storm Chantal hits the Carolinas this weekend.

That type of news isn't what officials from Oconee and Pickens counties want to hear. Rains, often heavy at times, have been an almost daily occurrence since last week. One of the major concerns is localized flooding, and Oconee County Emergency Management Director Scott Krein said low-lying areas, such as Whitewater Lake Road, McGee Road, Camp Road, Crystal Lake Road, Old Liberty Road and River Road, the latter of which is in the Cleveland community, have been the most impacted.

"Those areas are receiving water due to how high Lake Hartwell is," Krein said. "The whole county has been inundated (with rain), but the mountain areas have received a tremendous amount of rain."

Krein said officials are monitoring the areas and dealing with localized flooding issues as they occur. Fortunately, he added, there have been enough breaks in the weather that have enabled floodwaters to recede.

"We went a large portion of the day Monday without rain, which allowed streams to reduce and take on even more water," Krein said.

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A couple refuses to allow flood conditions at Clemson's Abernathy Park to prevent them from sitting in the swing and enjoying sunny weather Tuesday. Weather experts say more rain is on the way throughout the remainder of the week.

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RAIN: 'We've received almost 52 inches so far this year'

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"As long as the rains are spread out, most of our areas can handle it, but every bit of water has to go somewhere."

Pickens County Emergency Management Director Chuck Haynes said there have been issues involving trees and power lines all over the county.

"These issues have resulted in some power outages, but nothing extensive," Haynes said. "We do have some areas that have flooded out and some roads actually have washed out. The roads where we have issues are Old Jewell Bridge Road, that eases into S.C. Highway 133, Lenhardt Road in Easley and U.S. Highway 178 in Rocky Bottom."

Clemson Public Works Director David Conner said Abernathy Park "is pretty much underwater" and that power had to be cut off because some of the light poles are standing in the water.

"We went ahead and closed all the entrances to keep people out of there," Conner said, adding that flooding at the park began last weekend and water has risen steadily during the past couple of days. "It's dangerous because of the height of the water and the fact it's at the point where some of the areas of the boardwalk without a railing are underwater and a child could step off."

In addition to Abernathy Park, Conner said Issaqueena Trail and Nettles Park are experiencing flooding issues and Berkeley Drive had to be closed due to the amount of water coming off the banks.

"When you receive 3 to 4 inches of rain in about two hours, there's going to be flooding," he said.

Conner also said that Riggs Drive and Poole Lane are among several areas reporting large trees down.

The constant and heavy rains have significantly affected Lake Hartwell, which the National Weather Service reported Tuesday is at flood stage. Hartwell stands at 664.8 feet, or nearly 5 feet above its normal full pool level of 660 feet.

Billy Birdwell, a spokesman for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, said the last time Hartwell was above 664 feet was Aug. 25, 1994.

Barbara Wilson, of Walhalla, who is a National Weather Observer volunteer, said she has recorded more than 4 inches of rain since July 4 and nearly 9 inches since the first of the month.

"We've received almost 52 inches so far this year, which surpasses the total of 48.96 we received all of last year," Wilson said.

Wilson added some mountains in Oconee County have received more rainfall than Walhalla.

Doug Outlaw, meteorologist for the National Weather Service, said the recent weather system is due to a combination of high pressure near Bermuda and low pressure over the Southeast that is bringing up extremely moist air from the Gulf of Mexico.

Outlaw said the rain chances will again increase to 60 percent Thursday and Friday.

While those chances may decrease somewhat this weekend, Outlaw said there is "great concern" over Tropical Storm Chantal coming up from the Caribbean.

"If Chantal comes over the Carolinas, we will get a tremendous amount of rain ...," Outlaw said.

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