Rains cause trail conditions to slide

By Joey Holleman
The State

Heavy summer rains, while great for the mountain region's drought-parched lakes and rivers, mauled some of the most popular hiking trails in state parks.

The most dramatic damage was caused by major rock slides on the Hospital Rock Trail at Jones Gap State Park in northern Greenville County. But numerous other trails suffered erosion damage. Hospital Rock remains closed and will have to be rerouted, said state parks director Phil Gaines.

Other trails need more minor repairs or slight reroutes. Employees from parks throughout the state will be spending part of the typically slow winter period at the mountain parks, helping with repairs. The parks service spent about $1,000 on tools, but it's saving money by doing the bulk of the work with its own employees.

"We're throwing some labor at it," Gaines said. "It's a good opportunity to expose folks from parks not in the mountains to sustainable trail design."

The mountain parks provide a history of trail building, from the 1930s Ci-

See TRAILS, Page 5B

TRAILS

Continued from Page 1B

vilian Conservation Corps paths at Table Rock State Park to the new design of the Rainbow Falls Trail at Jones Gap and Raven Cliff Falls Trail at Caesars Head. When five or six inches of rain falls in a day, all of the trails suffer some erosion. But the newer trails, with more switchbacks and terrain-conscious design, fared much better during the multiple deluges this summer, Gaines said.

National Weather Service offices in Anderson and Greenville-Spartanburg each registered four days with more than two inches of rain during the summer. Greenville-Spartanburg set a July record with 14.45 inches of rain.

And some of the cloudbursts were even more focused at higher elevations.

Six inches of rain in less than two hours prompted the rock slides on the Hospital Rock Trail in early June.

While Hospital Rock suffered the most damage, more people noticed the erosion gullies on the trail to the top of Table Rock, Gaines said. Parts of that popular trail had been renovated in recent years with new steps and water bars installed. The steps survived the flooding, but fast-moving water wore away the hard-packed soil around them.

"Trails are one of those things people think, 'How hard is it to maintain a trail?'" Gaines said. "But this was a crazy year for rain."

For now, the Hospital Rock and Dismal Loop trails are closed due to their poor condition, and the Rim of the Gap Trail is in its typical winter shutdown due to the possibility of slippery ice. The other trails are open, but hikers could run into park employees making repairs.

"The trails will be back, and in some places, better than ever by spring," Gaines said.