

AFTER THE FLOOD



KIM KIM FOSTER/Staff

Detour: Flooding last month at McAlpine Creek Park has left 71-year-old Dot Lorenz and many other exercisers stepping around mud and standing water on trails. Park officials are not sure when the park will be completely restored.

McAlpine Park slowly recovering

Th - Sep. 28, 95

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Special Correspondent

The flowers are back in bloom and people have returned to many of the trails at McAlpine Creek Park.

But this pastoral scene is only one month old. In August the east Charlotte park and connecting greenways were damaged by one of the worst floods to ever hit that area.

"The whole park was covered in water, and the only thing you could see was the roof of the fishing pier. Even the soccer goals were floating down the creek," said Lola Massad, district supervisor for the park.

Much of the park has been restored. But park officials say they're not sure when the park will be completely repaired. According to Massad and other park officials, Hurricane Hugo caused less damage than last month's heavy rains.

More than 8 inches of rain fell Aug. 26 and 27. The creek flowed over its 15-foot banks and connected with a nearby lake, also in the park.

When the waters began to recede on

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Aug. 28, the damage had been done. More than 1,600 tons of pit gravel and 1,000 tons of stone had been washed from creek-side jogging and nature trails, Massad said.

The surging waters forced a gazebo and adjoining bridge almost 40 feet from their girders.

"This was certainly one of the more destructive floods we've had," said Mark Gillespie, division manager of parks services for Mecklenburg County.

He said the rain caused about \$39,000 in damage to the park and greenways. McAlpine park is connected to two greenways, the one around the park and Campbell Creek Greenway.

The course is the site of state, conference and regional high school cross-country competition. Some national events also are held at the park course. Officials were forced to turn their attention first to the cross-country course because East Mecklenburg High was to participate in a meet there on Aug. 31.

So the most immediate need was to rebuild the 5-kilometer jogging trail. The county's greenway construction crew, which builds running and nature trails, was dispatched.

The crew had to cut leaning trees and branches that were blocking the trail and remove other debris. East Mecklenburg track coach Larry McAfee heard about the damage and asked if he and his team could help with the cleanup. McAfee admits he had selfish motives. He designed the running course in 1978. Since then, his team has trained there.

On Aug. 29 the team brought hedge clippers and lots of enthusiasm to help

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clear the course.

"They did most of the work," McAfee said of park employees. "They did a great job getting the trail ready for our meet."

The meet was held on schedule.

"The bulk of the damage was to the greenway proper," said Gillespie, who added that more than \$6,800 will be needed in materials alone to make the repairs. "And we don't have the money to do the job in our present budget."

Park planner John DeKemper said he hopes the fall bond referendum will provide much of the money needed to complete repairs at McAlpine.

"I hope they finish the repairs soon," says 71-year-old Dot Lorenz, while finishing the last quarter-mile of her daily 3-mile walk.

Lorenz said the park was a big selling point when she and her husband bought a nearby condominium three years ago.

Weekdays, during the lunch hour, the park teems with visitors from all over the region who read in parked cars, eat lunch under the trees or take a midday stroll around the lake.

William Sweat takes his lunch break by dropping his homemade pole in the lake or creek, in search of an elusive bass named "Bubba."

"I've seen it," Sweat said. "Bubba took my bait and line one day and just took off, and I know he's still here."