

TRAILBLAZERS: Phase one nearly complete of Rails to Trails project

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By this time next year, Greenwood, McCormick and Abbeville residents could have up to 35 miles of cleared trail, ready for hiking, biking and walking.

The Savannah Valley Rail Road Trail, known as Rails to Trails, follows part of the old C & WC Railroad, constructed in 1885, along the Savannah River and Little River areas. When Rails to Trails is completed, the goal is to ultimately connect Calhoun Falls to McCormick with Baker Creek, Hickory Knob and Calhoun Falls state parks.

Rail service along the tracks was discontinued in 1978, and the South Carolina Department of Commerce bought the roadway in 1983.

Proposals to turn the roadway into a trail have been discussed since the mid-1990s, but it wasn't until the Ninety Six District Resource, Conservation and Development Council obtained a license from the department that work began on the trail.

The trail has been divided into four phases: Willington to Barksdale Ferry Road; Barksdale Ferry Road to McCormick and Willington to Route 81, north of Mount Carmel; Baker Creek and Hickory Knob state parks; and Calhoun Falls and Calhoun Falls State Park.

Currently, phase one is close to completion, said Savannah Lakes Village resident Don Norton.

Along with other McCormick residents, representatives from the council and volunteers, an eight-mile stretch has been roughly cleared of undergrowth, vines, briars and some trees that had fallen down or grown over the trail.

Norton said it took three days with between 30 and 45 people for that first phase. Even a Marine Corps group going through special operations training in Willington donated a day to work on the trail, which Norton said was very helpful.

In order to complete the first phase, volunteers will have to go back through and do some "finishing work," including removing tree stumps.

Norton said he was "intrigued" by the project when he heard about it several years ago.