

# South Carolina Current Drought Status

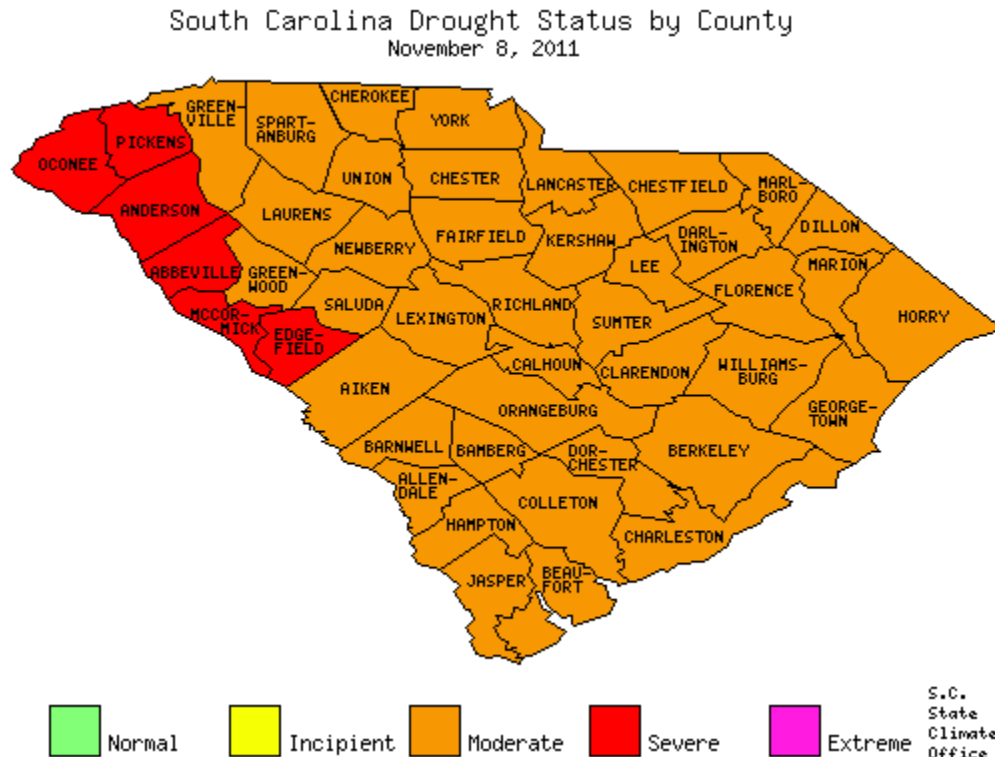
State Climate Office

NEWS RELEASE

DNR News 803-667-0696

November 8, 2011

## Drought Response Committee upgrades six Upper Savannah Basin counties to severe



### Discussion:

Members of the S.C. Drought Response Committee, meeting via tele-conference on Nov. 8, upgraded six counties in the Upper Savannah Basin to severe status. Those counties include: Oconee, Pickens, Anderson, Abbeville, McCormick and Edgefield. All other counties in the state remain at moderate drought status.

The Committee upgraded the drought status for the six counties due to concerns about deficit levels in the upper Savannah lakes of Jocassee, Keowee, Hartwell and Thurmond. Low streamflow in the basin such as Little River and the Chattooga was also a factor in the decision to upgrade.

According to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Drought Contingency Plan, the Savannah River Lakes are in drought trigger level 2. Based on the dry conditions and forecast for below normal winter precipitation the projected elevations put the basin at drought level 3 by mid-

January. Jason Ward, Hydrologist, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Savannah River Basin Water Management, explained "The Corps reservoir levels in the Savannah Basin are continuing to decline due to inflows near 10% of normal. Releases are being held to the minimum levels in our drought contingency plan to conserve water."

Scott Harder, S.C. Department of Natural Resources (DNR) hydrologist, summarized that streamflow conditions across the State continue to run below normal for this time of year. Drought conditions have been most severe in the Upper Savannah Basin, where streamflows have been well below normal for much of the summer and fall. He also reported that most major lakes around the state are below their target level with Jocassee, Hartwell and Thurmond lakes the hardest hit by drought. He concluded by discussing the steady decline observed in most Upstate groundwater wells.

David Tompkins with the S.C. Department of Agriculture reported, "The growing season in South Carolina is wrapping up so we don't have drought to contend with, but the problem we face is with ponds and irrigation. All of those need to recharge over the winter or we face water problems in the spring."

Darryl Jones with the S.C. Forestry Commission reported, "Based on the long-term deficit of rainfall, we are very concerned about the upcoming wildfire season. Some parts of the state are already very dry and recent frosts have helped to dry out grasses, leaves and other light fuels where most wildfires start. The seasonal outlook for the next few months indicates an increasing potential for high wildfire activity in most of South Carolina. Wildfire occurrence picks up in fall and winter, and during the upcoming holidays there will be more people cleaning up their yards and enjoying the outdoors. Last year over 96% of the wildfires in South Carolina were human-caused, including fires started from escaped leaf burns, woods arson, and equipment use. We encourage everyone to be very careful with fire, especially during the ongoing drought."

Dennis Chastain, West Drought Management Area committee member, emphasized, "If the dry weather forecast follows through as predicted for this fall and winter and we don't get groundwater, surface water recharge, then the state may be facing a serious problem in the spring."

Hope Mizzell, SC State Climatologist said, "For the second winter in a row, La Nina is expected to influence weather patterns across the country. NOAA expects La Nina, which returned in August, to gradually strengthen and continue through the upcoming winter which typically results in a drier than normal winter for South Carolina." La Nina is associated with cooler than normal water temperatures in the tropical Pacific Ocean, which influences weather throughout the world. It's the opposite of El Nino in which warmer ocean temperatures are seen in the same region.

Other parts of the state were maintained in moderate drought. As Brad Powers, General Manager of Blue Ridge Water and Central Drought Management Committee Member, summarized, "From a water supply perspective for our basin, most water suppliers are experiencing a decrease in consumption and reservoirs are holding their own for now."

Ken Rentiers, Deputy Director, Land, Water, and Conservation Division noted, "The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources will closely monitor the ongoing drought and will reconvene the committee in approximately six to eight weeks."

DNR protects and manages South Carolina's natural resources by making wise and balanced decisions for the benefit of the state's natural resources and its people. Find out more about DNR at [the DNR Web site](#).

**Drought Status: 11-08-2011**

<b>County</b>	<b>Status</b>
Abbeville	Severe
Aiken	Moderate
Allendale	Moderate
Anderson	Severe
Bamberg	Moderate
Barnwell	Moderate
Beaufort	Moderate
Berkeley	Moderate
Calhoun	Moderate
Charleston	Moderate
Cherokee	Moderate
Chester	Moderate
Chesterfield	Moderate
Clarendon	Moderate
Colleton	Moderate
Darlington	Moderate
Dillon	Moderate
Dorchester	Moderate
Edgefield	Severe
Fairfield	Moderate
Florence	Moderate
Georgetown	Moderate
Greenville	Moderate
Greenwood	Moderate
Hampton	Moderate
Horry	Moderate
Jasper	Moderate

County	Status
Kershaw	Moderate
Lancaster	Moderate
Laurens	Moderate
Lee	Moderate
Lexington	Moderate
Marion	Moderate
Marlboro	Moderate
McCormick	Severe
Newberry	Moderate
Oconee	Severe
Orangeburg	Moderate
Pickens	Severe
Richland	Moderate
Saluda	Moderate
Spartanburg	Moderate
Sumter	Moderate
Union	Moderate
Williamsburg	Moderate
York	Moderate