

South Carolina Current Drought Status

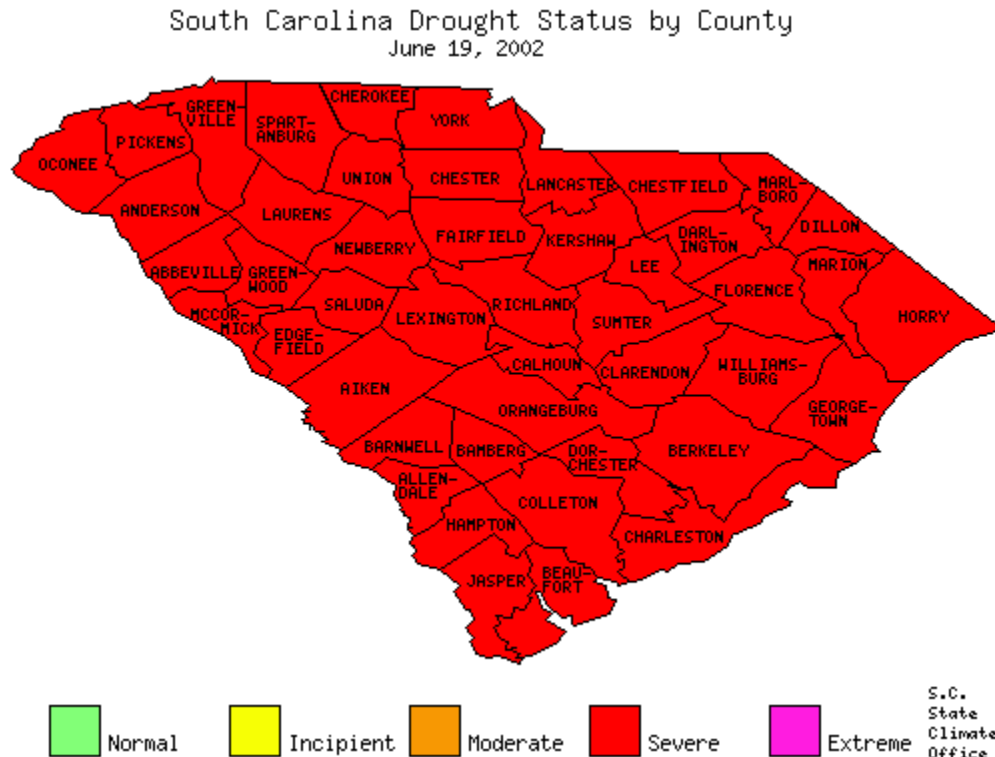
State Climate Office

NEWS RELEASE

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June 19, 2002

DROUGHT UPGRADED TO SEVERE STATEWIDE IN SOUTH CAROLINA



The S.C. Department of Natural Resources has upgraded South Carolina's drought status from moderate to severe statewide, including all 46 counties. The decision to move to the severe stage was unanimous when members of the state and four regional S.C. Drought Response Committees met today (Wednesday, June 19) in Columbia in Richland County Council Chambers.

The entire state has reached severe drought status, which was the consensus today of all four regional Drought Response Committees, said Hope Mizzell, the state's drought program coordinator with the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (DNR), based on below normal precipitation, record low streamflow levels, agricultural stress and the potential threat of forest fires. The state had been under a "moderate" drought declaration since Sept. 11, 2001.

Alfred Vang, DNR Deputy Director of the Land, Water and Conservation Division, stressed that the committee voted to upgrade the state's drought status to severe on the side of caution to protect life and property during the coming days of potential water shortages. The

committee wants to ensure that everyone is prepared for more serious drought conditions and not caught off guard by these impacts.

According to Tom Ardrey with the National Weather Service in Columbia and Milt Brown, Acting State Climatologist with DNR, the summer precipitation outlook does not show any substantial relief from the drought. We're not going to overcome this drought with a pattern of evening thunderstorms because it's just too spotty, Brown said. It would take a tropical system to have an impact on this drought."

"Most stream flows in South Carolina are currently at their historical lowest flows for this time of the year, according to DNR hydrologist Bud Badr. Water levels in shallow and deep water wells continue to decline."

During today's drought committee meeting Ted Cooney, data chief for the U.S. Geological Survey in South Carolina presented computer graphs from June 18 showing that many streamflow monitoring gauges in the state have reached are very near to new record low levels. He said that some of the stream gauges date back to the turn of the century.

Hope Mizzell, Drought Program Coordinator urged recreational boaters to watch dropping water levels in streams and lakes that could create hazardous conditions and to proceed with extreme caution. All boaters need to be alert to the new water hazards such as shallow water, stumps, logs and old pilings and rocks created by low water conditions.

South Carolina Forestry Commission spokesman Ken Cabe said that careless burning is the leading cause of wildfires in South Carolina. Careless burning, including failure to tend an outdoor fire, is a violation of state law. In addition to criminal charges, careless burners are also liable for civil damages if their fire burns someone else's property. Forestry Commission officials said drought conditions mean outdoor burning must be handled with extreme caution. Any outdoor fire should be tended constantly until the fire is out and all embers are extinguished.

David Baize, Water Monitoring division director with the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC), said there are no reported water quality problems at this time; however, DHEC is issuing letters to all water system owners and dischargers requesting their attention to the drought conditions. Both DNR and DHEC stress to the public and water suppliers that while water restrictions are not popular, early and effective use of voluntary restrictions, where needed, may be necessary to protect water integrity and quality.

"Agriculture is in a critical situation because of the continuing drought, possibly the worst in many years, said David Tompkins, State Farmers Market administrator with the S.C. Department of Agriculture. It's critical at this time of year for our corn crop to get rain, and we are already seeing damage. For many fruits and vegetables it will be a much shorter season with good quality watermelons and cantaloupes ripening and coming into the market over a short time period, rather than prolonged as it should be. The drought is making peaches smaller, but they are just as tasty as ever. The state's farmers are experiencing a natural disaster and hopefully there will be some financial assistance because of it."

According to Gene Cornett in the Central Drought Management region cattle producers around the state are already feeding hay because the grassland and summer forages are not growing. The first cutting of hay was less than 50 percent of average amounts. Many cattle producers are considering herd reductions.

Dean Moss, general manager of the Beaufort - Jasper Water and Sewer Authority, speaking for the Western Drought Management Committee that includes 13 counties in the Savannah River drainage, reported that his group voted to increase the area's drought status from moderate to severe due to present and diminishing stream and ground water levels. "We encourage individual water users in our area to voluntarily implement water conservation measures. Also, municipal users should consider implementing mandatory water conservation."

Representing the Northeastern Drought Management Committee that includes 10 counties in the Pee Dee drainage, Mike Hancock, general manager of the Lugoff - Elgin Water Authority, said, "We are in unanimous agreement to declare a severe drought in our region. We encourage local governments to institute water conservation measures."

Sumter City Manager Talmadge Tobias, a member of the Central Drought Management Committee which includes 18 counties in the Santee Drainage, said his group recommended escalation to a severe drought status in their region, which extends from the North Carolina state line south to the coast. There is no recommendation for mandatory water restrictions in the Central Drought Management Area unless required by local government agencies.

Representing the Southern Drought Management Committee that covers six counties in the ACE Basin, Terry Tudor of the Goose Creek Special Purpose District said her group voted to upgrade the region's drought status from moderate to severe in light of the scientific evidence for greatly reduced water levels and the current outlook. She said that while everybody in the region is not experiencing the same drought-related problems, many people currently are, and more may be impacted.

DNR will continue to monitor the statewide drought and provide updates as needed. The public should contact the center for more information or if other problems arise. Hope Mizzell is State Drought Program coordinator in the DNR State Climatology Office.

Contact Dr. Mizzell in Columbia at (803) 734-9568 or e-mail at mizzellh@dnr.sc.gov for more information.

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: 06-19-2002

County	Status
Abbeville	Severe
Aiken	Severe
Allendale	Severe
Anderson	Severe
Bamberg	Severe
Barnwell	Severe
Beaufort	Severe
Berkeley	Severe
Calhoun	Severe
Charleston	Severe
Cherokee	Severe
Chester	Severe
Chesterfield	Severe
Clarendon	Severe
Colleton	Severe
Darlington	Severe
Dillon	Severe
Dorchester	Severe
Edgefield	Severe
Fairfield	Severe
Florence	Severe
Georgetown	Severe
Greenville	Severe
Greenwood	Severe
Hampton	Severe
Horry	Severe
Jasper	Severe
Kershaw	Severe
Lancaster	Severe
Laurens	Severe
Lee	Severe
Lexington	Severe
Marion	Severe

County	Status
Marlboro	Severe
McCormick	Severe
Newberry	Severe
Oconee	Severe
Orangeburg	Severe
Pickens	Severe
Richland	Severe
Saluda	Severe
Spartanburg	Severe
Sumter	Severe
Union	Severe
Williamsburg	Severe
York	Severe