

South Carolina Current Drought Status

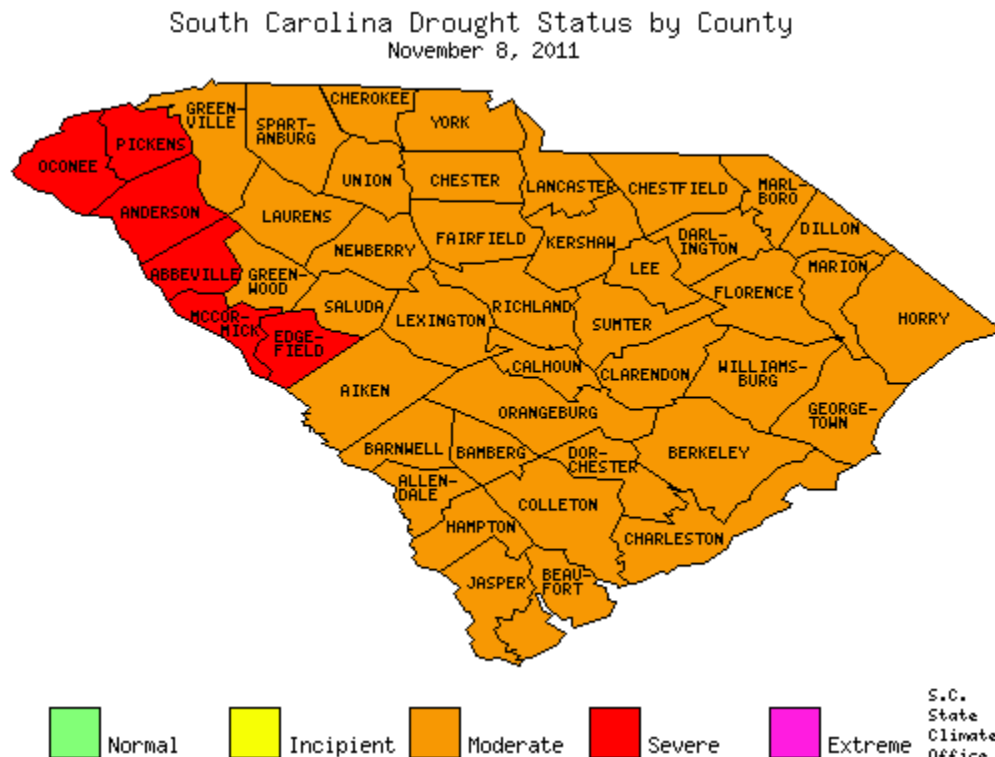
State Climate Office

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 Table

Current Drought Status by County				
Normal	Incipient	Moderate	Severe	Extreme
County Status	County Status	County Status	County Status	County Status
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	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				