

# **South Carolina Drought News Release**

**South Carolina Department of Natural Resources  
Land, Water and Conservation Division  
South Carolina Drought Response Program  
Department of Natural Resources News (803) 734-4133**

SPECIAL NEWS RELEASE Drought Program Status Report July 1, 1998

## **South Carolina Department of Natural Resources Declares a Drought for South Carolina**

Under the authority of the S.C. Drought Response Act of 1985, the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources has issued an incipient drought declaration for the entire state. At the incipient drought level, one of four levels defined in the legislation, the DNR increases its monitoring activities of drought-related variables such as precipitation, temperature, runoff, streamflow, evaporation, groundwater levels, soil moisture, reservoir levels, and other data. The DNR is also required to notify the affected areas and to serve as the primary agency to coordinate the State's response.

According to Freddy Vang, Deputy Director for the Department's Land, Water & Conservation Division, "The current hot and dry conditions in South Carolina are of great concern to those individuals and organizations involved in agricultural and forestry activities. For the past three weeks, South Carolina has been under the influence of a very dry, hot high pressure ridge to the west. At this time, that high pressure ridge shows no sign of decreasing its influence. A "cool" frontal passage through South Carolina over the next 24-48 hours will probably not bring much rainfall to the state, nor will it greatly alleviate crop moisture stress. The National Weather Service predicts a decrease in temperatures to the mid and upper 90's for the next several days, but temperatures are forecasted to return to higher levels late next week."

The State Climatologist, Dr. Michael Helfert, describes June's precipitation as typical of droughts - short, intense, spotty, and often violent in nature. "Although June 1998 rainfall statewide was short in many areas, fortunately, excess water accumulated as a result of the wet El Nino winter," said Helfert. "This excess has delayed the impact of dry and hot meteorological conditions on the state's soil moisture, crops, and water supplies until this past week." Statewide rainfall has averaged 65% of normal for June. Rainfall deficits for specific areas of the state are as follows: Anderson (87%), Columbia (43%), Charleston (53%), Florence (88%), Greenville-Spartanburg (80%), Myrtle Beach (60%), and Saluda (56%). Statewide temperatures averaged 5-7 degrees above normal.

Despite rainfall deficits and above normal temperatures, streamflow measurements show slightly above normal June flow, while reservoir levels are stable. Water supplies remain generally good, with no major shortages reported other than some water suppliers having difficulty satisfying the demand. Sporadic water shortages are due more to distribution problems than to decreases in surface water.

More worrisome is that plant water-use rate, or evapotranspiration, is depleting soil moisture. The National Weather Service's drought index, the Palmer Drought Standardized Index, does not indicate that South Carolina is in a defined drought situation. South Carolina agricultural weather stations, however, are showing that plant response to hot and dry conditions is at a critical phase, especially in the Midlands.

According to the South Carolina Weekly Weather & Crop Bulletin, crops particularly at risk include corn, melons, and snap beans. Evaporation is intense with daily evaporation rates exceeding 0.50 inches on several occasions, and one occasion, a record 0.60 inches. "Such rates are usually typical of the arid Southwest U.S.", said Helfert. The South Carolina Agricultural Statistics Service reports 66% of agricultural areas have short to very short soil moisture. Insufficient rainfall within the next 7-10 days will cause severe crop damage.

Ken Cabe, Fire Information Officer from the South Carolina Forestry Commission, said "Hot, dry weather has significantly increased wildfire danger in South Carolina, prompting the South Carolina Forestry Commission to issue a Red Flag Fire Alert late last week. Firefighters from both the Fire Service and Forestry Commission have reported higher wildfire occurrence over the past two days. Wildfire managers are concerned that dry conditions coupled with high levels of outdoor activity and fireworks use over the holiday weekend could create serious fire problems. The public is asked to use extreme caution in the use of any potential source of ignition."

The National Weather Service 6-10 day outlook is for below normal precipitation and much above normal temperature. Mayors, county administrators, public service districts, and local water suppliers are asked to review their drought response plans and ordinances and notify the Department's Drought Information Center in Columbia at 803-737-0800 if drought ordinances or plans are implemented, or if other related problems arise.