

South Carolina Current Drought Status

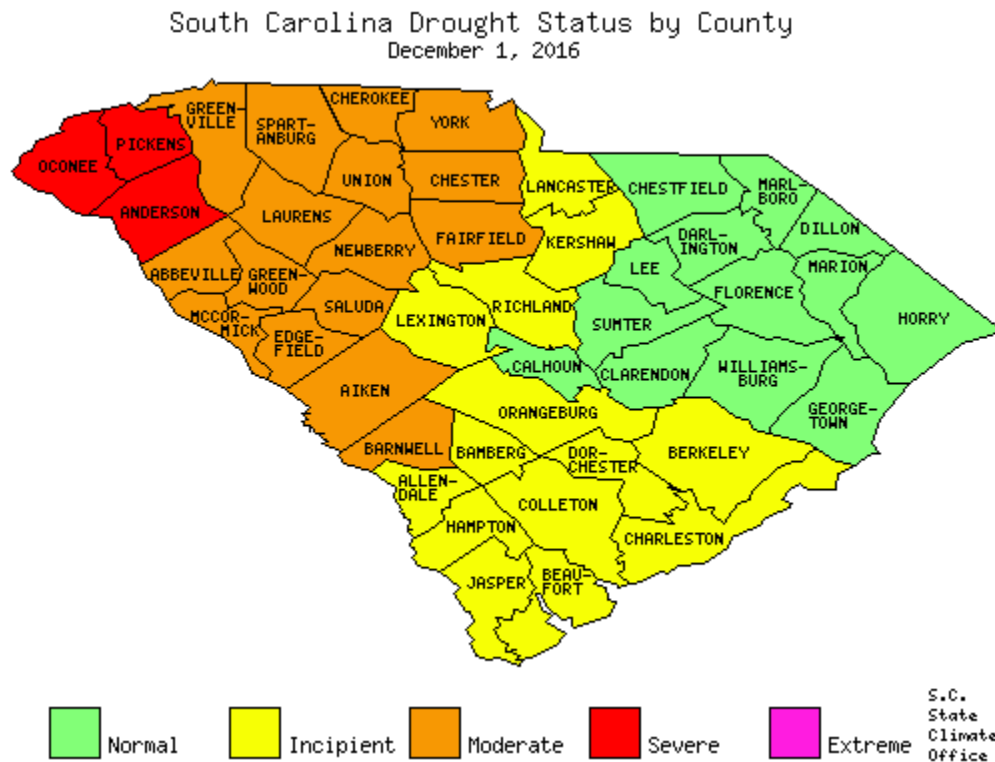
State Climate Office

NEWS RELEASE

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S.C. Drought Response Committee updates drought statuses for 11 counties



After meeting at the South Carolina Forestry Commission Thursday morning, the South Carolina Drought Response Committee changed the drought statuses for eleven counties in the state.

All counties in the southern portion of the state have been upgraded from normal to incipient, the first level of drought. The coastal counties in the Lower Savannah River Basin of the state have also been upgraded to incipient, and Barnwell County has been moved to moderate status.

"It's hard to believe that, in early October, many of these counties received more than ten inches of rain," South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) State Climatologist Hope Mizzell said. "But with no rain since then, they've now slipped into a drought."

All other counties maintained their current drought levels. There was not overwhelming support for an upgrade in these counties due to recent rains and more rain in the forecast.

The severe drought in the Upstate has played a big role in the Pinnacle Mountain Fire and, according to the South Carolina Forestry Commission (SCFC), the benefits from this week's rain may only be temporary.

"Long-range predictions continue to show above-normal wildfire potential through the month of December," SCFC Fire Duty Officer Doug Mills said. "The concern for wildfires will be exasperated by leaf fall occurring on top of already-dry fuels, creating yet another layer of fuel in the short term. Normal winter conditions are expected to prevail in January and February with occasional periods of increased fire activity."

The Pinnacle Mountain Fire has grown to 10,560 acres, the third-largest in state history. The current expense of the fire is an estimated \$4.57 million. The fire is at 62 percent containment and all burn bans have been lifted.

While the Upstate battles the mountain blaze, farmers statewide are facing issues with their crops and livestock. The South Carolina Department of Agriculture is encouraging farmers to use the hay exchange on its website or in the Market Bulletin as yields across the board are mixed due to both the drought and the effects of Hurricane Matthew.

"There's not much forage for grazing and farmers have not been able to plant for winter grazing," Assistant Commissioner Aaron Wood stated. "While drier conditions have allowed row crop harvest to progress ahead of schedule, annual small grain planting and forage stockpiling are well below normal due to a lack of soil moisture. From an agricultural perspective, the drought is becoming more severe, respectively, across the state. But since we're at the end of the growing season, we're hoping that the rain forecasted over the next 14 days materializes."

According to SCDNR Hydrologist Scott Harder, stream flow levels in much of the Upstate have remained well below normal and reservoir levels continue to decline.

"These conditions support remaining in the severe drought statuses in the three counties in the Upstate."

Some members of the committee have lived in South Carolina for decades and say they have never seen a drought of this magnitude.

"I wish we had a drought designation that was called profound because this is one of the most profound droughts I've ever experienced," Committee Member Dennis Chastain pointed out. "It's probably going to get worse before it gets better but, because of the time of the year, we're going to take a look in a couple of weeks."

The National Weather Service in Columbia also continues to monitor the weather conditions and is hoping more rain will fall into the forecast.

"Even though we've had some recent widespread rainfall across the state, it's not enough to improve the drought conditions that currently exist," Leonard Vaughan stated. "Even rain that is forecast in the near future would not be significant enough to make a big change. We need more frequent rainfall events to make a big dent in the current drought."

Committee Chairman Ken Rentiers said more changes will be made as necessary.

"The committee will closely monitor conditions over the next few weeks and reconvene as needed."

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 Table

| Current Drought Status by County | | | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| Normal | Incipient | Moderate | Severe | Extreme |
| County Status | County Status | County Status | County Status | County Status |
| ABBEVILLE Moderate | AIKEN Moderate | ALLENDALE Incipient | ANDERSON Severe | BAMBERG Incipient |
| BARNWELL Moderate | BEAUFORT Incipient | BERKELEY Incipient | CALHOUN Normal | CHARLESTON Incipient |
| CHEROKEE Moderate | CHESTER Moderate | CHESTERFIELD Normal | CLARENDON Normal | COLLETON Incipient |
| DARLINGTON Normal | DILLON Normal | DORCHESTER Incipient | EDGEFIELD Moderate | FAIRFIELD Moderate |
| FLORENCE Normal | GEORGETOWN Normal | GREENVILLE Moderate | GREENWOOD Moderate | HAMPTON Incipient |
| HORRY Normal | JASPER Incipient | KERSHAW Incipient | LANCASTER Incipient | LAURENS Moderate |
| LEE Normal | LEXINGTON Incipient | MARION Normal | MARLBORO Normal | MCCORMICK Moderate |
| NEWBERRY Moderate | OCONEE Severe | ORANGEBURG Incipient | PICKENS Severe | RICHLAND Incipient |
| SALUDA Moderate | SPARTANBURG Moderate | SUMTER Normal | UNION Moderate | WILLIAMSBURG Normal |
| YORK Moderate | | | | |