

Area residents asked to 'carefully

Forecast for warmer, drier spring puts drought committee on alert

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COLUMBIA — The State Drought Response Committee on Thursday expanded drought status to the entire state and kept the extreme drought for the Upstate after hearing a

forecast for a warmer and drier spring.

The bleak rain forecast prompted some committee members to urge a more proactive stance and to look at the state's water needs beyond the immediate future. The committee unanimously asked residents in the Upstate to

"carefully" consider their watering needs in the spring and to "reduce unnecessary water use."

The committee also unanimously voted to ask the Army Corps of Engineers to reduce flow downstream from Lake Thurmond from 3,600 cubic feet per second to 3,100 cfs from March to May and to conduct an environmental assessment on the reduction "expeditiously."

consider' water use

The reduction, which was used in December and January, is designed to help keep water in the Savannah River basin, including Lake Hartwell and Lake Keowee, in the face of a drought now in its 11th year. Hartwell dipped to record low levels last fall.

Forecasts show no significant increase in lake levels this year, spurring some to plead with the committee not to wait until

the summer before acting to increase storage.

"We need to be thinking through those scenarios now, not in July," said Dennis Chastain, who lives near Table Rock State Park and serves on the committee.

The request to the Corps of Engineers came as committee members heard that the vast majority of streams monitored by the state are in the extreme

drought category and Upstate groundwater wells are struggling.

"Unless we have more soaking rain, it just doesn't look good," said Masaaki Kiuchi, a hydrologist with the state Department of Natural Resources.

Lake Hartwell is 12.35 feet below target levels, Lake Jocassee is down 22.4 feet and Lake Thurmond is down 12.77 feet, officials said.