LOCAL NEWS

Corps stops Hartwell outflows

Rain, snow helping lake levels rise

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CLEMSON — Weekend rain and snow that is adding water to Upstate reservoirs also has allowed the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to stop releasing water downstream, increasing retention of water in lakes Hartwell, Thurmond and Russell.

Because of abundant rains in the upper Savannah River Basin and in particular Stevens Creek, which is just below the J. Strom Thurmond Dam, the Corps has stopped outflows from the Thurmond Dam at least through today, said Corps spokesman Billy Birdwell.

Outflows from the three lakes were stopped late Saturday evening and most likely will resume Wednesday afternoon unless there's more rain, Birdwell said.

Aside from scattered showers predicted to begin Sunday, no significant precipitation is forecast for the next seven days, said Bryan McAvoy, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Greer.

Lake Hartwell was 646.59 feet above mean sea level Monday afternoon, which is 13 feet below full pool, according to Corps data. Hartwell is at its highest level since last Sept. 1, up 9 feet from its Dec. 9 low.

Hartwell has flirted with the 646-foot level, not showing any real increase for a month, according to Corps data. The level should continue to rise in coming days as runoff from recent rain and melting snow continue to feed it.

Flow into Hartwell from Upstate rivers has "shot way up, even for tributaries that are small," Birdwell said.

Hartwell should continue to fill even when outflows resume because the majority of downstream needs will come from Thurmond, Birdwell said.

Despite the rain and snow, drought continues in the Upstate and Hartwell, an important source of water and an economic driver, is more than five feet below a level state Climatologist Hope Mizzell wants to see before summer water demands resume: the 2008 crest of 652.15 feet reached last May 5.

The Corps will evaluate each rain storm for the ability to retain more water in the three Savannah River reservoirs it controls, Birdwell said. Not all storms will provide the needed downstream flow long enough to make suspending discharges practical, he added.