

# Drought concerns grow as area lake levels fall

Dry wells, wildfires are threat if rains don't come

By Anna Simon  
Clemson bureau

As lake levels fall, lawns dry out and streams slow, concerns grow over deepening drought in the Upstate.

"Creeks and springs are drying up. If it stays like this any longer, there won't be any water out of our wells and springs to pump out," said vegetable farmer Billy Ledford, who owns Beechwood Farms in Marietta.

The sustained high temperatures are even harder on his crops than the lack of rain, said Ledford, 69, who was born and raised in northern Greenville County and has seen only a few years with such a duration of high temperatures.

"Tomatoes and green beans, they don't like it at all," Ledford said.

The popular Wildcat Wayside waterfall near the Greenville-Pickens line is barely flowing, said Dennis Chastain, a northern Pickens County resident and

member of the state drought response team that will meet next week. A stream by Chastain's house has about as much flow as a kitchen faucet, he said.

"Our situation has seriously deteriorated," Chastain said. "It's so dry the weeds are wilting."

The top six or so inches of soil "are very dry" at the weather station at Sumter National Forest in Oconee County, another troubling indicator, said Darryl Jones, forest protection and fire chief for the state Forestry Commission.

That increases wildfire risk. Drought causes vegetation to die earlier and makes it easier for a fire to spread, Jones said.

It will stay dry through Saturday, said Bryan McAvoy, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service at the Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport. What happens next week depends on a tropical system developing in the Gulf of Mexico, he said.

"That is the player in the weather,"

See DROUGHT, Page 2B

## DROUGHT

Continued from Page 1B

McAvoy said. It could leave the Upstate still dry or it could bring more water than needed at one time, he said.

August brought less than an inch of rain at the airport, three-and-a-half inches below normal, McAvoy said. "We are in moderate drought over much of the Upstate," with even drier conditions in Anderson County, McAvoy said.

Lake Jocassee was 16 feet below full pool Wednesday, and Lake Keowee was nearly five feet

below full pool, according to Duke Energy.

Lake Hartwell was nearly six feet below full pool and, along with lakes Thurmond and Russell, has fallen to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' second level drought category.

Hartwell is getting about 5 percent of the normal amount of water from rain, rivers and streams, and forecasts show little rain for the region in upcoming weeks.

Lake levels are expected to continue to drop unless a tropical system brings significant rain, said Stan Simpson, a water control manager with the Corps of Engineers.

Boaters need to be observant on the lakes because submerged objects are now closer to the surface, Duke and Corps officials warned.

There are no irrigation restrictions for Lake Keowee residents at this time, although that could be coming, said Sandra Magee, a Duke spokeswoman.

"If the dry conditions continue, it is something we'll need to revisit. We strongly encourage everyone to conserve water use," Magee said.

Dock owners may need to move their docks to stay in adequately deep water, the corps has advised.