Drought conditions loom, despite rain

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SENECA — Sunday and Monday's rain — and more expected today — has helped restore some color to the grass and trees, but more is needed for local lakes and farms.

Oconee County is not suffering from drought, according to the Clemson Extension Service; however, this recent spate of rain needs to be repeated regularly for the sake of local growers.

"What we need is regular rain, probably weekly, to sustain the soil moisture needed to keep crops growing," says Morris Warner, senior county extension agent for Oconee County. "We just don't have the residual soil moisture to carry the crops right now."

The only local crops at risk from rainy weather are peaches and apples. Should it remain wet and overcast, Warner says these crops may have to fight off fungal diseases.

Local lakes and aquifers are suffering from the lack of recent rain, too. Duke Energy reported Monday that Lake Jocassee is still 23 feet below full pool and Lake Keowee is down nearly 5 feet.

"So while the recent rain helps, we need significantly more to make up for the precipitation deficit," according to Duke spokeswoman Sandra Magee. "Stream flows into the Keowee-Toxaway basin are at all-time lows."

Oconee County Fire Chief Charlie King is glad to see the rain, but he isn't overly worried about the recent dry spell increasing the risk of wildfires breaking out.

"This weather is typical for spring," King says.

State officials agree with King.

"In your part of the state, when things get wet they stay wet," says state forestry commission spokesman Scott Hawkins. "Right now, the risks are very low" of wildfires in the Upstate.

Thunderstorms are likely today and tonight. Except for a chance of more storms Thursday afternoon, local skies should be mostly clear through the middle of next week.

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