Drought ebbs after wet storms

Status lowered in nearly half of state's counties

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The rains that have drenched the Upstate for the better part of this winter have made a significant dent in the region's drought status just as the entire state moved completely out of a case of "severe" drought.

The state Department of Natural Resources' drought response committee on Thursday lowered the drought status for nearly half of the state's counties.

Wet weather in just the first half of the cold season has brought the most winter rain the Upstate has seen in three years.

In the northernmost portions of the Upstate, as much as 18 inches of rain fell over the past two months — and just over 11 inches of rain in the Greenville area.

The rains came to the area of the state that needed it most, recharging groundwater and raising Lake Hartwell's water level by 6 feet, the committee said.

In Pickens and Oconee counties, so much rain fell that the committee considered dropping the drought status by two levels, from severe to "incipient," the level in which a region stands just outside a position of what is considered normal rainfall.

Instead, the two counties, along with Anderson County, were classified as "moderate."

"The committee electing to downgrade only one level was driven by an effort to balance an overly positive five to six weeks of rainfall against a longer-term trend of much below-normal rainfall," said Scott Willett, executive director of Anderson Regional Joint Water System executive director.

Long-term forecasts presented during the committee's meeting showed a trend toward below-normal rainfall in the coming months.

The status for Greenville was lowered from moderate to incipient.

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