Drought returns to the Upstate

Friday, September 4, 2009

Daily Journal • Daily Messenger

By ANDREW MOORE
andrew@dailyjm.com

It may not be as serious a situation as it was last fall, but low rainfall totals have once again taken all of Upstate South Carolina into drought.

Hope Mizzell, South Carolina's state climatologist, confirmed that all of the Upstate, including Oconee, Pickens, Anderson, Greenville and Spartanburg counties, is now in incipient, or the least severe category of drought.

"We have certainly not reached the dire conditions experienced during the past few years, but everyone needs to be aware of the situation and industries and water systems should review their drought plans," encouraged Ken Rentiers, chairman of the South Carolina Drought Response Committee.

A year ago, Gov. Mark Sanford made a request to the federal government for disaster declaration due to the arid conditions throughout the state. Those conditions persisted into the fall, as Oconee and Pickens counties were declared to be in "extreme" drought, the worst category. An unusually wet winter, however, helped the state begin to climb out of the once-desperate situation, and by June of this year, the drought was declared over in every county in the state.

But most of the Upstate saw only roughly three inches of rain throughout July and August.

"We were optimistic in early June that maybe we would finally get an extended break from the drought, but only two months have passed since we removed the drought declaration and here we go again," Mizzell said.

Mizzell added that the short-term forecast is not encouraging, with little relief expected over the next week. She provided an ominous reminder — as the Palmetto State heads into the fall and winter — that October and November are usually the driest months of the year.



Jessica Nelms/Staff

The waters of Lake Hartwell are still low, as the drought in Upstate South Carolina has re-emerged.