Dry winter to affect lakes, pastures

BY JESSICA SIBLEY
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CLEMSON — Predictions for a colder, drier winter are causing great concern for lake officials and farmers around the Upstate.

According to the Department of Natural Resources, every single county in South Carolina is suffering from moderate drought conditions and there doesn't seem to be much relief in sight.

The State Climatology Office held a meeting to discuss the drought conditions last month and opted to keep the moderate status active.

Reports from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers indicated the rain did little to improve lake elevation in the Savannah River Basin. The September soaking rains improved upper soil moisture, but reservoirs won't respond significantly until the soil is saturated prior to the rain event. Unfortunately, with no rain in the forecast for the next seven days, lake levels will likely continue to decline.

Hope Mizzell, state climatologist, said, "Heavy and extended rainfall this time of year is unusual outside impacts from a passing tropical system. It will be critical to monitor indices over the next several weeks for a potential deterioration of drought conditions."

While the 2011-2012 Farmer's Almanac is predicting a mild and wet winter for the Southeast, officials at the Army Corps of Engineers are preparing for a very different scenario.

Due to a very dry and cold winter forecast prediction, water levels being released from the Savannah River Basin are expected to decline.

The decision is based on the strengthening of La Nina, a weather system that normally indicates drier weather.

The water discharges are slated to decrease by 200 cubic square feet per second, from 4,000 to 3,800.

"We constantly look at forecasts and weather patterns so we can make the best scientific decisions on managing water in the Savannah River Basin," said Col. Jeff Hall, Savannah District commander. "Based on this, I concluded that reducing outflows was in the best long-range interest of the basin."

jsibley@dailyjm.com | (864) 882-2375



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Lake Hartwell is down 9 feet. Forecasters are hoping it doesn't get to the point where it was during the 2008-10 drought.