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People brave the January rains in Greenville. HEIDI HEILBRUNN/STAFF

End of drought wasn't in forecast

Summer rain included wettest July on record

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A little more than an inch of rain Sunday – likely the last of a wet 2013 – brought the total in Greenville to nearly 70 inches, a figure that surprised weather forecasters who did not expect a stubborn drought to end this year.

It was more than 22 inches above normal, and 30 inches above the total for 2012, a year that ended with the Upstate in severe drought, but also a glimmer of hope from a wet December that included a series of Upstate storms Dec. 24-26 that a story in The Greenville News called "a Christmas present of rain."

Drought status involves more than limited lawn watering and shorter showers. The economics are significant, impacting everything from how electricity is generated to whether the state can maintain recreation on lakes that can bring millions of dollars to the Upstate's economy.

Andrew Kimball, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service, said the chance of rain tonight will be about 20 percent, and just 2 percent on Tuesday, which means the total of 69.56 inches through Sunday probably will stand.

Kimball said the amount of rain in 2013 was surprising, especially the near-record breaking rains of summer.

"What makes it unusual, too, is we didn't have any tropical systems, land falling hurricanes or anything," he said. "We went into the season in a drought, so it was nice to finally get out of it."

The first rains of 2013 came hard and fast, sending the Reedy River over its banks in downtown Greenville and flooding parts of Cleveland Park in mid January. But two or three inches of rain was barely noticeable in Lake Hartwell, which was nearly 13 feet below full pool.

However, February brought reports of a significant dent in the regions drought status as December and January storms delivered 11 inches of rain to

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The Reedy River filled its banks again in May. HEIDI HEILBRUNN/STAFF

DROUGHT

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Flooding was reported throughout the Upstate in August. JOHN OLSON/STAFF

Greenville, and as much as 18 inches in the northern parts of the Upstate. Hartwell's water level rose six feet.

The winter rains continued through February, not much above normal, but it seemed like more after three years of drought. Finally, on April 24, the state Department of Natural Resources drought panel declared the entire state drought-free.

But not so fast. Less than two weeks later, Duke Energy disputed the panel's decision, insisting the region was still in a state of drought. Duke Energy operates hydroelectricity stations on man-made lakes Keowee and Jocassee and depends on water to cool its three reactors at the Oconee Nuclear Station.

Duke said its forecast called for below-normal rainfall into September. The company predicted a shift to above normal after that, but said that with evaporation becoming a factor as temperatures warmed, lake levels were not likely to improve.

There followed the summer deluge that included the wettest July on record at Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport since records were first kept in 1884. Greenville received 31.19 inches of rain from June 1 through Aug. 31, second only to the 33.33 inches that fell in 1908 over the same time period.

During the first week of June, Duke Energy agreed that the drought was officially over.