Oconee, Pickens drought status unchanged

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Drought Response Committee keeps first level drought status for 37 counties

BY CARLOS GALARZA
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SENECA — Oconee and Pickens County, along with 35 other South Carolina counties will have to wait until mid-January to see if their first level of drought status will become more severe.

For the time being, however, the state's Drought Response Committee is holding the line on the 37 counties.

The DRC maintained the status quo following a recent meeting in Columbia.

South Carolina's Department of Natural Resources convened the DRC meeting last week to make sure that members and the public were prepared for potential worsening drought conditions.

South Carolina Climatologist Hope Mizzell, who heads the DRC, said officials are closely monitoring drought conditions because most of the state has experienced below normal rainfall since early September.

The rainfall deficit, coupled with a forecast for a dry winter, has many on edge about a possible repeat of the 2008 drought that severely impacted most of the Southeast, including the Upstate.

The National Weather Service has rain in the forecast for today through Wednesday night for the Seneca and Clemson area.

However, the two days of rain, although helpful, is not expected to make a dent in the deficit.

Mike Hancock, of the Lugoff-Elgin Water Authority and a member of the DRC, said meteorologists have predicted a

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FILE PHOTO

South Carolina Drought Response Committee members are monitoring drought conditions they fear could result in the kind of low lake levels that plagued Lake Hartwell and other areas in 2008.

DROUGHT: Area dry

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weather pattern known as La Nina this winter, which historically results in substantially lower rainfall through the spring.

Stan Simpson with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers said the Corps already has reacted to the initial drought stage by lowering outflow the Savannah River Basin lakes, including Hartwell.

Simpson said outflow was reduced from 4,200 cubic feet per second (CFS) in August to 4000 CFS in October.

"We expect that number to drop further still to 3,800 in mid-January," Simpson said.

Only nine counties in South Carolina have dodged drought status: Dillon, Marlboro, Marion, Florence, Horry, Williamsburg, Georgetown, Berkeley and Charleston.

carlos@dailyjm.com | (864) 973-6685