Oconee, Pickens still in moderate drought status

THE JOURNAL STAFF

SENECA — Oconee and Pickens counties remain in moderate drought status, according to the South Carolina Drought Response Committee.

The committee met via conference call Wednesday and upgraded the drought status for 17 counties in the state.

Fourteen counties were upgraded to "incipient," the first level of drought: Lancaster, Kershaw, Chesterfield, Marlboro, Darlington, Lee, Florence, Dillon, Marion, Williamsburg, Georgetown, Horry, Beaufort and Jasper.

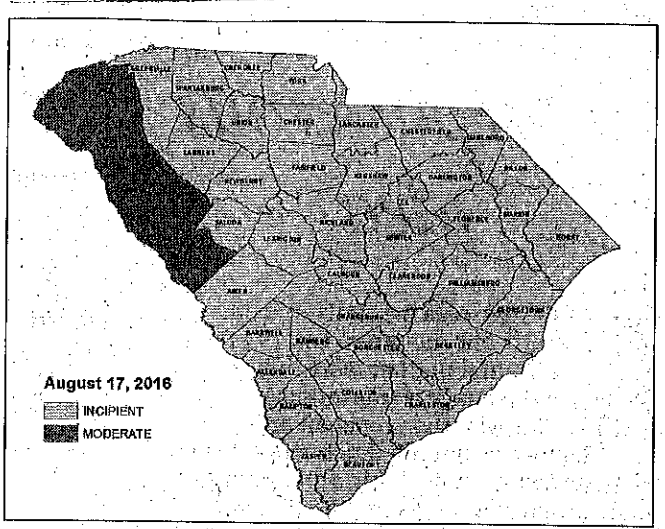
Three counties were upgraded to "moderate," the second level of drought: McCormick, Greenwood and Edgefield. Oconee, Pickens, Anderson and Abbeville counties remain in moderate drought, and all other counties remain in incipient status

According to South Carolina state climatologist Hope Mizzell, there has been a shift in the rainfall pattern over the past few weeks, with the very dry Upstate finally receiving some much-needed rain, while rainfall for the Pee Dee region has significantly decreased.

Despite improved rainfall coverage for the Upstate, the committee decided to maintain the drought status of those counties out of concern the rainfall relief may be short-lived.

The committee decided that the lack of rainfall in the Pee Dee was sufficient to warrant an upgrade to incipient for all counties in that region.

"Most of the Pee Dee region received regular afternoon showers up until about three weeks ago, when they turned the spigot off," Clemson Extension agronomy agent Trish DeHond said. "We've been getting a few scattered showers, but only about 1/10th of an inch at a time, which isn't nearly enough to keep up with evaporation in this heat. Crops are suffering, and farmers are forced to run their irrigation systems, if they have them."



SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

The South Carolina Drought Response Committee upgraded the drought status for 17 counties in the state on Wednesday.

The primary drought effects being reported at this time are to agriculture, and for some counties, those effects are highly variable and may be significant.

"While we on the drought committee recognize that the agriculture community is possibly experiencing a moderate drought; there are not enough other indicators at this time to justify an overall upgrade to moderate drought for the Southern Drought Management Area," committee member and Colleton County farmer Marion Rizer said.

According to Mizzell, the committee faces a challenge as they try to agree on a declaration for each county that takes into consideration multiple factors, including agriculture, forest fire risk, water supply and water quality.

Conditions for each of these factors can vary widely across a particular county. For example, rainfall for portions of Colleton County over the past 30 days have ranged from only 3.6 inches to 10.16 inches, a range of almost 7 inches in one county.

Another factor contributing to the drought and effects to agriculture is the above-normal temperatures that have persisted throughout summer. Evaporation rates are elevated and areas need higher rainfall frequency and totals just to keep up with water loss to evaporation.

S.C. Department of Natural Resources hydrologist Scott Harder said that though streamflow levels have not dropped to levels associated with past major droughts, streamflow conditions in much of the state have been hovering between normal to below normal.

The committee will continue to monitor the situation closely and will reevaluate conditions in four to six weeks.