Oconee benefits from wettest fall on record

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WALHALLA — Oconee and Pickens counties have gone from scorched to soggy in the course of a year, as statistics from the South Carolina State Climatology Office indicate the area has received historic rainfall in September, October and November.

State Climatologist Hope Mizzell confirmed Monday that, according to data collected in Walhalla, Oconee County has received 27.65 inches of rain since Sept. 1, which is the most for that time period since such recordings began there in 1896.

"I show 2009 has been the wettest fall on record already, even though we have a few days left in November," Mizzell said. "It surpasses the wettest fall prior to this in 2004, which had 27.09 inches."

Pickens County measurements show that area received 17.55 inches of rain in the three-month span, the eighth wettest time period since 1951.



JESSICA NELMS | STAFF

It's raincoats and umbrellas for these Clemson University students as they head to class earlier this month. Oconee and Pickens counties have seen historic levels of precipitation from September to November.

In 2008, Oconee and Pickens counties were suffering through a severe drought that gripped the entire Upstate. Oconee County didn't even receive seven total inches of rainfall from September to November that year, causing bodies of water such as Lake Hartwell to drop 22 feet below normal.

As of Monday, the more than seven inches of November rain received on Hartwell had helped its waters to swell to more than 661 feet above mean sea level, some six feet above its average elevation, and more than a foot above the targeted level of 660.

Jason Ward, a hydrologist for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, said outflows from Hartwell will be ramped up significantly beginning this week to try to meet the target elevation mark.

The daily average outflow from Hartwell has been ratcheted up from a mere 2,500 cubic feet per second last week to a scheduled daily average of 9,200 this week, which is expected to bring Hartwell down to its target elevation

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by the end of the week, Ward said.

Meanwhile, lakes Keowee and Jocassee are at nearly equal capacity, hovering near 98 feet of full pond, roughly a foot above their respective targeted elevations.

The winter is not expected this year to brings its usual dry spells, Mizzell said.

'Most of the indications are that we'll have at least normal to slightly above normal rainfall ...'

Hope Mizell
State climatologist

"Most of the indications are that we'll have at least normal to slightly above normal rainfall due to El Nino in the equatorial Pacific," Mizzell said.