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Pickens County's drought is officially over

Recent rains have all but filled local lakes after decade-long dry spell

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The drought that dried up Pickens County lawns and sent Lake Hartwell to record low levels is officially over.

State Climatologist Hope Mizzell said last week that the state drought committee voted to declare the three-year drought at an end for the Upstate and all of South Carolina.

Seeing what he calls a "wet weather spring" of water pop up recently in his garden at his home north of Pickens was a momentous sign for Dennis Chastain, a member of the committee.

"I haven't seen that in 10 years. That's about as clear an indication as you can get," Chastain said.

While putting an official end to this drought is cause for celebration, Upstate residents are asked to continue to voluntarily conserve water this summer. "If we learned anything from 10 years of drought, it's that no one in the Upstate of South Carolina should be wasting water," Chastain said.

Mizzell looks at the big picture. August of 1998 started a decade of drought that, with the exception of 2003, 2005 and 2006, has impacted some part of the state. While all areas of the state experienced drought conditions, different regions were hit the hardest in different years. However, every area of the state was affected.

"We learned that we can run out of water," Mizzell said.

State Department of Natural Resources hydrologist Masaaki Kiuchi said the Savannah River Basin lakes in the Upstate are "slightly below normal" and are the only lakes in the state that remain below normal.

Upstate wells show improvement and water levels are rising in most monitoring wells, however, groundwater levels in some areas of the Upstate may not be sufficient to adequately support stream flow if rainfall declines, Kiuchi said.