RAIN COMING FROM ISAAC

Not much damage expected in Upstate

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Tropical Storm Isaac is expected to make an imprint on the Upstate as it continues its path across the Gulf of Mexico — but just how much of one is far from certain.

For now, weather experts here say the Upstate shouldn't be bracing for ruinous conditions.

However, the Upstate could get a lot of what it needs — perhaps up to 4 inches of rain based on the most-recent predictions of how Isaac will make landfall, said Pat Tanner, a hydrologist for the National Weather Service in Greer.

"It's going to be over a long period of time," Tanner said, noting that flooding wouldn't be a major issue because whatever rain that would come from the storm would be spread out over a couple of days. "It's going to be a prolonged, steady rain."

The rain would likely begin late Tuesday or early Wednesday and carry through until Friday, Tanner said, with flooding issues seen in isolated pockets of thunderstorms along with winds that could gust between 30 to 35 mph.

A high-pressure weather system over South Carolina is expected to push Isaac's track somewhere between the Florida panhandle, Alabama and Mississippi and possibly as far west as Louisiana, Tanner said.

To what level Isaac could become a hurricane as it passes over the warm Gulf waters that feed storms is still a matter of conjecture depending on varying computer models.

The National Hurricane Center said Isaac could be a Category 2 storm (sustained winds between 96 to 110 mph) by the time it makes landfall somewhere along the northern Gulf Coast.

The storm should strengthen into a hurricane "in a day or two," the center said.

The rain expected to come has the potential to put a dent in the long drought that has lingered over the Upstate region, said Dennis Chastain, a member of South Carolina's Drought Response Committee.

"It would certainly make a difference," Chastain said.

The type of rain that forecasters

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are calling for would produce mostly runoff stormwater, he said.

Such a rainfall would do much to raise lake levels that are direly low, but it wouldn't replenish the supply of groundwater needed because that requires a steady, seasonal rain, Chastain said.

If the storm passes west enough, it could draw moisture away from the Carolinas and leave us with clear skies instead, Chastain said.

"These tropical systems can act like a huge vacuum cleaner," he said.

In case a storm does bring significant rain, the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control has asked owners and operators of small reservoirs to check their dams.

Owners of ponds and small lakes should lower the water level safely and clear any debris before and after the storm, said John Poole, director of DHEC's dam safety program."