Rain pulls S.C. from early drought

By Bruce Smith
Associated Press

CHARLESTON — Winter rains have pulled South Carolina out of the early stages of drought.

The South Carolina Drought Response Committee in November had declared the entire state to be in an incipient drought — the lowest of four stages of drought severity.

But this month the committee removed the designation, determining that conditions statewide have largely returned to normal.

Assistant State Climatologist Wes Tyler said there were not a lot of rainy days in recent weeks. But he says when rains did come, they provided areas with a good soaking, as did a system in December a few days before Christmas.

"Seventy-five percent of the month was quite dry," he said. "But we had a lengthy period of rainfall beginning on the 20th that continued into Christmas Eve. Most everyone got their rains during that period. You got five straight days of rain and that was pretty much statewide."

Hemingway, in the Pee Dee region, received more than 10 inches of rain between mid-December and mid-January. Winnsboro, north of Columbia, received 9 inches.

Another system moving through this weekend will mean another soaking for the state. Forecasters say it could bring upward to 2 inches of rain in some areas.

Rainfall for the next few months is expected to be near normal, according to the National Climate Prediction Center. Its drought monitor map shows no sign of drought in South Carolina at least through the end of April.

That's good news for the South Carolina Forestry Commission. A dry winter and spring can mean problems during wildfire season.