

Rainfall outlook not enough to overcome drought

By Jennifer Crossley Howard

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ANDERSON — Six South Carolina counties including Anderson are weathering a severe third-level drought, and only an excess of rainfall can improve conditions for spring and summer, says a state hydrologist.

The Climate Prediction Center's three-month outlook for Anderson County is above-normal temperatures and normal precipitation, said James Oh, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service.

That is not enough to counter a rainfall deficit that has been building since late fall, said hydrologist Scott Harder of the S.C. Department of Natural Resources.

March rainfall for Anderson County at 2.7 inches is an inch shy of normal rainfall, Oh said. This weekend could make up the monthly deficit if the chance for rainfall increases.

Oconee, Pickens, McCormick, and Edgefield counties also are under a severe drought.

This week starts warm and sunny and ends with a slight chance of rain on the weekend. Today's high is a sunny 70 degrees, dropping to 51 at night. Temperatures warm to 82 by Thursday and clouds move in Saturday.

But the long-term drought outlook is a bit more grim.

"It's likely that the Savannah lakes aren't going to fill up this summer," Harder said. "They're going to start lowering soon unless we start getting that above-normal rainfall."

If rainfall doesn't increase, Hartwell Lake and other lakes could drop this month, he added.

Hartwell Lake stood at 652.92 feet above sea level Monday, according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 6 feet lower than it was a year ago on the same day.

Billy Birdwell, spokesman for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, said outflow measured at Thurmond Dam is minimum at 3,800 cubic feet per second. He said that is typical output during drought.

Lake Jocassee was 22 feet below target level Monday, according to the Corps of Engineers, and Lake Keowee was 4 feet below target.