Rainfall up in August, but drought likely not over

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Water, water, everywhere? Well, not exactly.

While rainfall in Oconee County and the Upstate were above normal in the month of August, the amount of rain does not appear to have ended the area's "moderate" drought status.

"We need an inch a week just to keep up with evaporation (in summer months)," said State Climatologist Hope Mizzell. "People see that it has rained a lot, but 4½ to 5 inches of rain is normal for July and August."

Reports from Clemson and Long Creek weather stations reported rainfall in 16 of 31 days in August..

Mizzell said preliminary data for August showed rainfall in Oconee County ranged from 5.46 inches in Mountain Rest to 8.59 inches of rain in Salem. In Seneca, August brought 5.88 inches of rain.

The July-August rainfall totals ranged from 7.1 inches in Mountain Rest to 15.03 inches in Salem. Seneca received a total of 9.56 inches of rain for the two months, based on the preliminary reports.

That rainfall data, along with other information from local areas across the state, will be examined before determinations are made about changing the drought status of any counties.

Recent rains have not significantly improved water levels at local lakes. Lake Jocassee is 22.5 feet below the target level and Lake Keowee is 3.8 feet below its targeted level. Lake Hartwell water levels are 7.61 feet below average.

"I can tell you that recent rains have had very little, if any, impact on improving lake levels," said Sandra Magee, a spokeswoman for Duke Energy. "We usually get pretty heavy rainfall in the winter to recharge the lakes, but we didn't see as much of that as much as in the past. The rainfall we have had has been fairly spotty, with some areas getting more than others."

Magee said the flow of water from creeks into the two lakes is much lower than long-term averages.

"The averages have been in place for decades," said Magee. "Some of these gauges have been there for as much as 70 years," Magee said.

Prospects for the rain to end are not bright. Accuweather calls for showers today and a good chance of more showers Thursday before skies begin to clear Friday in time for the Apple Festival parade and rodeo.

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Clemson University students make their way around campus despite sporadic rain showers on Tuesday. August was a rainy month in the area with 16 days of rain. Forecasts call for more of the same most of this week.