Severe drought plagues Upstate counties

Pickens, Anderson, Oconee among six with too little rain

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Six Upstate counties remain in severe drought status, and the rest of the state remains in moderate drought status after the state Drought Response Committee examined weather and water data.

Pickens, Anderson, Oconee, Abbeville, McCormick and Edgefield counties remain in severe drought.

"There is a general nervousness throughout the state. The ground at deeper depths appears to be very dry," said Dennis Chastain, a Pickens County member of the committee.

"Of all the things we consider, it was really the reservoir levels and the ground water that give us cause for concern."

The Upstate had substantial rain in December and January; however, precipitation dropped to less than 30 percent of normal in the last three weeks, said state climatologist Hope Mizzell.

Lake Hartwell is 7.5 feet below full pond and remains in Level 2 drought, according to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers data.

Lake Jocassee is nearly 23 feet below full pond, and Lake Keowee is 4 feet below full pond, according to Duke Energy data.

While lakes in the Savannah River Basin aren't as low as was anticipated at the beginning of winter, they are below normal elevation for this time of year, Mizzell said.

Recent rains helped, but recharge isn't where state Department of Natural Resources hydrologist Scott Harder would like it to be.

With spring knocking at the door, residential water demand and evaporation rates will increase significantly in a few weeks, Harder said. Depending on how much rain falls in the next few weeks, lakes and ponds that are below normal now may not refill this spring.

The committee will meet again next month when there will be more information about how much winter recharge occurred and how much lakes and ponds have filled, Mizzell said.