Upstate drought remains severe, according to state committee

STAFF REPORT
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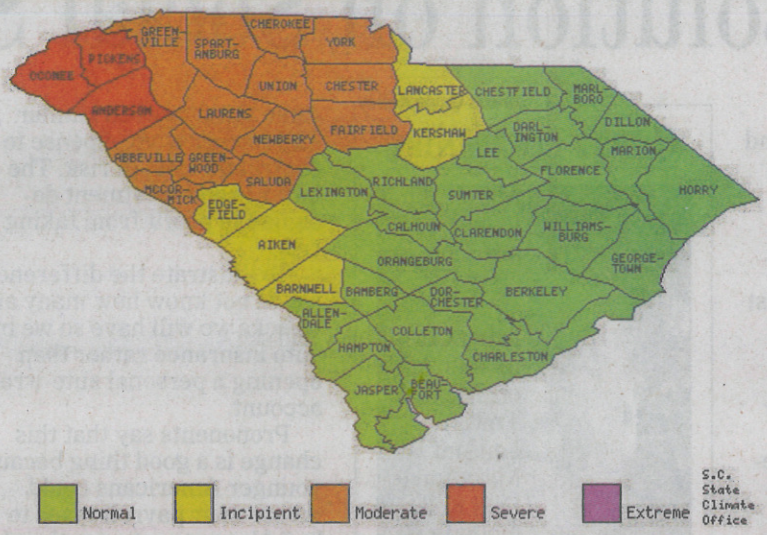
The state's ongoing drought seems to be getting better everywhere but the Upstate.

The South Carolina Drought Response Committee met Thursday and decided to keep Oconee, Pickens and Anderson counties in severe drought status, due to fire hazards and a continuing lack of moisture.

"As we enter our traditional wildfire season, fine fuels are very dry and wildfire occurrence has been increasing," State Forestry Commission Forest Protection Chief Darryl Jones stated in a news release after the meeting. "When frontal passages bring low relative humidity and higher winds, we do expect to have periods of high wildfire activity, and we expect it to continue until green-up begins in late April or early May."

Overall, the committee found that conditions have slightly improved in the Upstate over the past two months, but stream flow is still way down in the upper Saluda and Savannah basins. Lake Hartwell and Lake Thurmond each remain about seven feet below their respective winter pool levels.

"These below-normal levels offered support for keeping counties in the Piedmont in their current moderate or severe drought designation," SCDNR Hydrologist Scott Harder said. "Streamflow levels in the Coastal Plain are well within a normal range for this time of year, which supported a downgrade in drought status from incipient to normal for many counties in this area."



S.C. DROUGHT RESPONSE COMMITTEE

This map, provided the S.C. Drought Response Committee, shows the severity of the drought conditions in the Upstate, as compared to the rest of the state.

The news is better elsewhere. Richland and Lexington counties were downgraded to normal status, as were Abbeville and McCormick counties. Other counties, including Aiken and Barnwell, were downgraded to incipient drought status. All counties in the northeast region appear to be drought-free, according to the committee's news release.