LOCAL NEWS

Upstate drought status downgraded

State climatologist: 'We haven't fully recovered'

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The state Drought Response Committee downgraded the Upstate from extreme to moderate drought Wednesday after spring rains brought relief to parched lawns and low water levels in reservoirs.

Greenville, Pickens, Oconee, Anderson, Spartanburg, Abbeville, Laurens, Greenwood, Cherokee and Union counties all were downgraded to moderate drought, said state Climatologist Hope Mizzell.

Chester, Edgefield, Fairfield, Kershaw, Lancaster, McCormick, Newberry, Saluda and York counties were downgraded to incipient drought.

The drought declaration was removed completely from counties in the southern Midlands, along the coast and in the Pee Dee.

Still, even with the recent rain in the Upstate, the drought isn't over, especially where groundwater levels haven't recharged completely, Mizzell said.

"We have to retain some level of awareness," she said. "We haven't fully recovered."

Statewide, lake levels are normal with the exception of the Savannah River Basin here in the Upstate, "which is still well below normal, although recent precipitation has improved lake levels," said state Department of Natural Resources hydrologist Masaaki Kiuchi.

Lake Hartwell was 654.07 feet above mean sea level Wednesday, according to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers data.

Hartwell is less than 6 feet shy of full pond after dropping to a record 22-foot low this past winter and nearly 2 feet above its highest point last year. Lake Jocassee is 17 feet below full pond and Lake Keowee is 4 feet below full pond, according to Duke Energy data.