Thursday
August 26, 2010

Upstate left high and dry despite rain

Recent storms of little benefit to lakes, which are nearing drought level

By Anna Simon
CLEMSON BUREAU
asimon@greenvillenews.com

Incipient drought status could soon be lifted for much of the state, but despite recent rain, Greenville, Pickens, Anderson and Oconee counties will remain in the lowest level of drought and Upstate lakes could reach drought level this weekend.

Rainfall for the first 24 days of August has varied widely across the state, with 13.72 inches in Hilton Head compared to 1.9 inches in Simpsonville and Anderson, according to reports from the state's Community Collaborative Rain, Hail and Snow Network, said Hope Mizzell, the state climatologist.

Although Inman, in Spartanburg County, received 7.09 inches, and parts of Laurens County have had up to nine inches of rain, the rest of the Upstate has received little rain, Mizzell said.

The 14-day short-term weather outlook for the Upstate calls for below-normal precipitation, Mizzell said.

When a final indicator that guides drought status declarations is released today, Mizzell said she expects to begin the process of lifting drought status in much of the state, but not in Greenville, Pickens, Anderson and Oconee.

The entire state has been in incipient drought since July 9.

Lake Hartwell was 656.93 inches above mean sea level Wednesday — three feet below full pool and less than a foot above the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' level-one drought trigger at 656 feet.

Lake Thurmond, at 326.26 feet above mean sea level Wednesday, was a few inches above the level one trigger at 326 feet.

Thurmond will likely drop into level one over the weekend, taking Hartwell and Lake Russell with it, because the corps manages all three of its Upstate lakes as a single system, said Billy Birdwell, a corps spokesman.

Hartwell should stay above 656 feet through the weekend because the corps releases no water from Hartwell on weekends and Duke Energy is sending full discharges from Keowee to Hartwell, Birdwell said.

See DRY on page 5B

DRY

FROM PAGE 1B

If Thurmond does drop below the level-one trigger, it should be back above the trigger Monday after releases from Hartwell resume, although the reprieve could be brief.

"Without a rainstorm, one or the other (Hartwell or Thurmond) is expected to reach level one over Labor Day weekend," Birdwell said.

The National Weather Service is predicting dry weather, "which is common for this time of year," Birdwell said.

After Labor Day, the corps' lakes are likely to stay in level one "for awhile, until there's significant rain," Birdwell said.

Very hot weather this summer caused "a lot of water to evaporate from lakes, but we have held above level one all summer, which is good. But we are entering a very dry time of year until December when rains typically return," Birdwell said.

Level one requires outflow from Thurmond to be no more than 4,200 cubic feet per second.

Discharge from Hartwell is based on maintaining balance between the three lakes while still meeting the needs downstream, Birdwell said.

Recent currently unrestricted outflow from Thurmond has been between 5,300 and 7,200 cubic feet per second. The corps started cutting back this week and will cut back significantly starting Saturday, reducing outflow to 3,800 cubic feet per second, Birdwell said.

Recent outflow from Hartwell has ranged from 4,400 cubic feet per second to 5,900 cubic feet per second, Birdwell said.

Today and Friday, discharge from Hartwell will be cut to 4,800 cubic feet per second, and no water will be released from Hartwell over the weekend.

Monday, discharge from Hartwell will increase to close to 5,900 cubic feet per second to keep a balance between the lakes, Birdwell said.

Lakes Jocassee, owned by Duke Energy, was more than three feet below full pool Wednesday, and Duke's Lake Keowee was five feet below full pool.