

Upstate's drought status

Moderate conditions may lead to active wildfire season, official says

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The Upstate's drought status has been increased from incipient to moderate, as water systems say they are "holding their own" but need rain and are "dusting off plans" to ask customers to take

conservation measures.

The state Drought Response Committee has voted to upgrade drought status in the Upstate and reduced the severity of drought in Horry and Marion counties.

That means all the state now is officially in a moderate drought status.

Committee members

considered a rare two-level jump to severe for some counties along the Savannah River Basin, including Pickens, Anderson and Oconee, but they instead agreed to monitor the situation and meet again in three weeks.

With dropping lake levels and climbing water demand, "We will be down 10 feet by the end of the fall if we continue on the course we are on," said Scott Willett, executive di-

rector of Anderson Regional Joint Water System that draws from Lake Hartwell.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers reported that inflow to Hartwell, which is more than six feet low, is 2 percent of its normal 30-day average.

Duke Energy's forecast predicted that the drought will persist at least through the fall and possibly through the winter.

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Lake Jocassee is down 16 feet, and Lake Keowee is down five feet.

Agricultural reports showed farmers are hurting, grasses are drying and indicators are approaching emergency levels, another concern that will be monitored and could lead to another upgrade when the committee meets in three weeks.

Northern Pickens County resident Dennis Chastain, a committee

member, told Greenville-Online.com,

"I have talked with cattle farmers that have been feeding hay for two months -- that's terrible.

People don't usually start feeding hay until sometime in November."

Darryl Jones, forest protection and fire chief for South Carolina Forestry Commission, predicted an active wildfire season across the state due to drought conditions.