IndependentMail.com
ANDERSON, SOUTH CAROLINA

Printer-friendly story
Read more at Independentmail.com

Weather sparks concerns about wildfires

By Jennifer Crossley Howard

Originally published 06:29 p.m., November 8, 2010
Updated 06:44 p.m., November 8, 2010

Though the start of wildfire season is months away, the weather is ripe for fires and there are warnings for some counties in northeast Georgia.

Meteorologists forecast dry conditions and warmer-than-usual temperatures for the rest of the week in the Upstate, conditions that are ideal for wildfires.

On Monday, the Georgia Forestry Commission issued a moderate alert for northeast Georgia, which includes Stephens, Franklin and Hart counties. The warning may carry into Tuesday, said Wendy Burnett, spokeswoman for the Georgia Forestry Commission. No restrictions have resulted from the alert.

The National Weather Service in Greer issued a red-flag warning for northeast Georgia counties that will continue into Tuesday until 7 p.m., said Blair Holloway, a meteorologist at the weather service.

"Basically, the red flag warning is kind of talking about critical fire weather conditions that are expected or are occurring," he said.

A combination of strong winds and low relative humidity increase the chances of fire.

Wildfire season starts late winter and continues in early spring, said Scott Hawkins, public information director for the South Carolina Forestry Commission.

"Dry conditions, especially in South Carolina in the wintertime, mean fires," he said.

It doesn't help that rain is absent from Anderson's forecast through the coming weekend. Rainfall recorded at the Anderson Regional Airport to date falls seven inches below the amount from the same time period in 2009. Rainfall at the Anderson airport to date is 34.54 inches and in 2009 was 41.75 inches.

The lack of rain has sent most of Anderson County into a slight drought, Holloway said.

"That is subject to change," he said.

Upstate counties toward the east remain in a moderate drought category.

The lack of rain continues to lower lake levels.

Hartwell Lake fell to 654.62 feet above sea level from 655 in the last week, according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Lake Keowee remains about three feet below its target level of 98 feet, and Lake Jocassee is 2 feet below its target of 86 feet.

The upside of the dry weather is sunny warm November days. Highs for this week are expected to reach into the low 70s. The lowest temperature predicted falls to 39 degrees on Friday.

"For much of the week we are going to continue to be warm," Holloway said. A cold front may come through late in the weekend.

"We're going to be dry this week and even with the cold front coming through, it doesn't look like it's a particularly wet system," Holloway said.



© 2010 Scripps Newspaper Group — Online