

Oconee, Pickens no longer in drought

THE JOURNAL STAFF

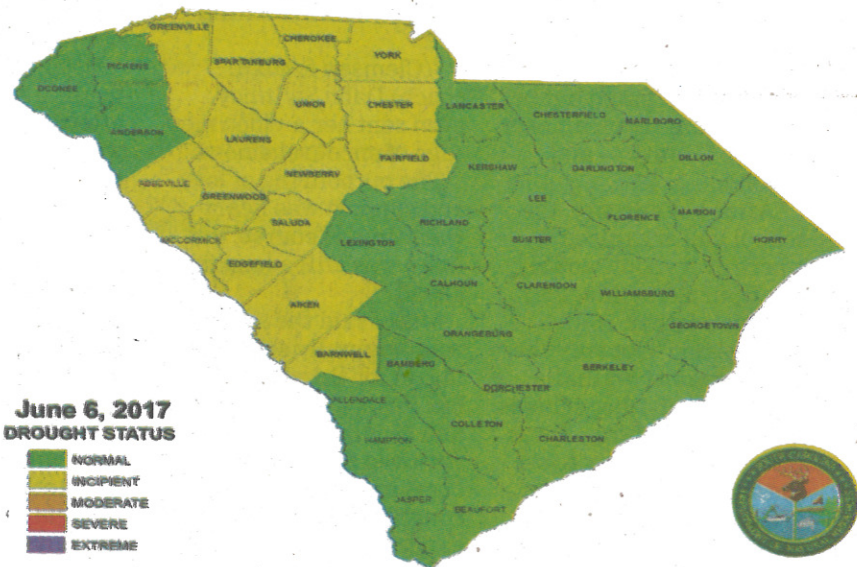
SENECA — The Palmetto State has seen a good amount of rain since the South Carolina Drought Response Committee met in April, and members discussed the state's overall improved drought conditions on Tuesday.

All counties in the state are now at either normal or incipient drought status. The northeast region was downgraded from incipient to normal, and all counties in the south region remained at normal status.

Georgetown County in the central region was downgraded from incipient to normal, counties in the Midlands remained at normal status and Upstate counties were downgraded to incipient.

In the west region, Abbeville and McCormick counties were downgraded from moderate to incipient. Aiken, Edgefield and Barnwell counties remained in incipient status. The southern Savannah counties remained normal, while the upper Savannah Basin counties of Oconee, Pickens and Anderson, which were previously in severe drought status, have also been downgraded to normal. This dramatic change in drought status brought about a lengthy discussion among committee members.

"We've experienced a drastic turnaround in just two months' time," naturalist and west region drought committee member Dennis Chastain said. "Groundwater has significantly improved. Streams are flowing well. There are no water supply problems. And agriculture at all levels seems to be in great shape. These changes justified the downgrading of Oconee, Pickens and Anderson counties."



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The South Carolina Drought Response Committee has downgraded the statuses of multiple counties around the state due to recent increased precipitation. Oconee, Pickens and Anderson, which were previously in severe drought status, have been downgraded to normal.

Improved conditions in other parts of the state also served as evidence that downgraded drought statuses were warranted.

"Stream flow conditions and groundwater conditions have greatly improved throughout the state over the past two months," S.C. Department of Natural Resources hydrologist Scott Harder added. "In addition, reservoirs across much of the state are near or above their target levels for this time of year, and though lakes in the Savannah Basin are still approximately five to six feet below their targets, water levels have risen substantially in these reservoirs over the past several months."

Regarding the Upstate counties in the central drought management area, a number of indicators do lend support to a designation of no drought normal status at this time. But others indicate the region may not have fully crossed over into that status.

"Periodic rains boost stream flows, and then they fall back to the low end of normal range or below," Spartanburg Water Compliance manager John Westcott said. "April was a great rainfall month, May was a good one and the jury is still out for June. For these reasons, we decided to make the more conservative call of incipient drought, the lowest level of drought status for certain counties."