

A blue heron flies above exposed rocks in low water along the Savannah River below the Hartwell Dam last year when lake levels were well below full pool. PHOTOS BY KEN RUINARD/STAFF

SC drought-free for first time in 2 years

Officials: State has seen 200-600% more rain than normal over past two weeks

Gabe Cavallaro Greenville News
USA TODAY NETWORK - SOUTH CAROLINA

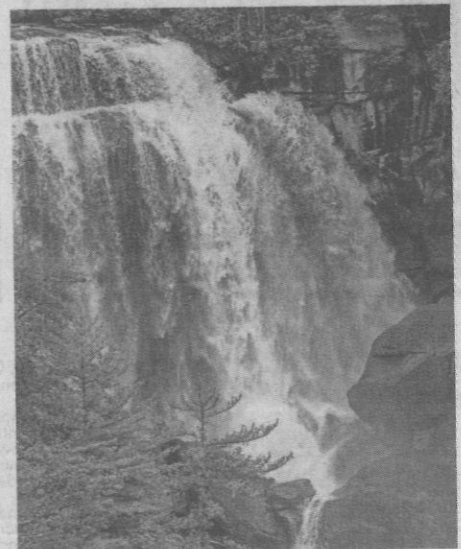
South Carolina was declared drought-free statewide Tuesday for the first time in two years after heavy rainfall has resulted in "improved conditions," according to a news release from the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources.

The drought status of 13 counties was updated to "normal" at a conference call meeting of the S.C. Drought Response Committee.

The following counties had previously been considered in the first level of drought:

- Abbeville
- Aiken
- Allendale
- Bamberg
- Barnwell
- Colleton
- Dorchester
- Edgefield
- Hampton
- Lexington
- McCormick
- Richland
- Saluda

"The last time the entire state was drought-free was July 8, 2016," said S.C.



Whitewater Falls is flowing swiftly as the state finally says goodbye, for now, to a prolonged drought.



Two years ago, Clemson's Larry Abernathy Waterfront Park was almost bone dry. FILE

Drought

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State Climatologist Hope Mizzell.

After starting the month of May with warm and dry conditions, South Carolina received between 200 to 600 percent more rain than normal over the past two weeks, said Leonard Vaughan, senior hydrologist/meteorologist with the National Weather Service.

"A persistent trough of low pressure produced a moist, southerly flow, which increased rainfall coverage," he said. "This, combined with the additional moisture from Sub-Tropical Storm Alberto, brought even more beneficial rainfall."

The rain has helped reduce the number of wildfires in the state and also "significantly improved" stream-flow levels, according to the release.

"According to the latest available data, lake levels and stream flows across the state are in good shape now," said Scott Harder, senior hydrologist with the Department of Natural Resources. "Overall groundwater levels look good as well."

More information about drought conditions and drought policy in South Carolina is available online at scdrought.com.