

# Area in 'incipient drought,' with no measurable rainfall reported this month

BY GREG OLIVER  
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WALHALLA — September weather in the Upstate has been marked by two things so far — extreme heat and extreme dryness.

Walhalla resident Barbara Wilson, a volunteer weather observer for the National Weather Service in Greer, said the highest temperature so far this month has been 96 degrees and that no measurable precipitation had been reported in September as of Thursday. By comparison, the highest temperature a year ago was 92 degrees and there was 1.53 inches of precipitation.

"Some of that (precipitation last year) were the remnants of (Hurricane) Florence," Wilson said.

## WHAT IS AN 'INCIPIENT DROUGHT?'

According to the South Carolina Climatology Office website, Oconee and Pickens counties are in an "incipient drought." As defined by state law, an incipient drought means "there is a threat of a drought as demonstrated by drought indices" and that climatic variables, streamflow and water levels are monitored in potable above- and below-ground water tables and lakes. Notification must be given to the Drought Response Committee and relevant federal, state and local agencies that a portion of the state is experiencing an incipient drought condition.

## Oconee County rainfall totals by month (in inches)

	2018	2019
June	4.44	7.69
July	3.69	4.52
August	8.83	2.12
September	1.53	0*

\*Through Sept. 12

SOURCE: WALHALLA RESIDENT BARBARA WILSON

Oconee and Pickens counties have not been in what is considered a severe drought since 2017. But Wilson said in comparing rain totals from June to this point in September from a year ago, there has been a large disparity.

June and July of this year showed an increase in rainfall in Oconee County, from 4.44 inches a year ago to 7.69 inches this year in June, and the following month jumping from 3.69 inches to 4.52 inches. But August showed a huge drop in precipitation, from 8.83 inches last year to 2.12 inches this year.

"We had just a third of an inch occasionally, a fifth of an inch and 3/500ths of an inch the rest of the time here," Wilson said of August's

rainfall. "It's been dry here from Aug. 29 through yesterday, and that's exactly two weeks."

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers spokesman Billy Birdwell said Lake Hartwell is at 657.6 feet, or 2.3 feet below full pool of 660 feet. A total of 656 feet is considered Drought Level 1.

"We are projecting to be at Drought Level 1 over the next 10 weeks, and when that occurs, we restrict the amount of water going out of (Lake Strom) Thurmond and balance Hartwell to that," Birdwell said. "We measure all outflows from Thurmond, and this happens regularly, with one reservoir getting more water than another because rain doesn't fall evenly."

On a positive note, Birdwell said there's still plenty of water out there in the reservoirs.

"It's a great time to go fishing and boating and be on the water — just make sure you wear your life jacket anytime in the pond or in the water," he said.

But Wilson cautions that while this may still be a good time to get out in the water, current dry weather conditions aren't good for burning trash or other items.

"That would be like kindling," she said.

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