

# Tri-county area no longer in drought

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COLUMBIA — South Carolina is no longer in a drought, as the state Drought Response Committee on Wednesday voted to move the state up a level from incipient to no drought due to increased rainfall the past couple of months.

“Oconee, Pickens and Anderson (counties)

have experienced a good amount of rainfall,” state climatologist Hope Mizzell said during a conference call Wednesday morning.

The purpose of the meeting was to evaluate the drought status state-wide. Some portions of the state, such as Bluffton and Myrtle Beach, have experienced rainfall totals

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in the double digits over the past 60 days, while Orangeburg was one of the driest areas.

“Normal rainfall for October and November is around 6 to 6 1/2 inches,” Mizzell said. “Most sites in the state have had at least normal rainfall in the last 60 days.”

Mizzell said Oconee has been “more wet and close to normal the last 60 days” and that the Upstate has experienced “one of the more heavier periods of rain during the past seven days we’ve seen.”

Groundwater conditions in Oconee were above normal last month, and are now at normal status.

Walhalla resident Barbara Wilson, a volunteer weather observer for the National Weather Service

in Greer, said she measured 3.31 inches of rain in November, but 6.38 inches in October. Although those numbers were improvements from August, when she measured 2.12 inches, both totals are lower than the 5.15 inches and 9.73 inches in October and November of last year.

Mizzell said the seven-day weather outlook calls for the heaviest rainfall to occur in the Upstate, with significantly less rainfall along the coast. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is calling for above-normal temperatures and precipitation from Dec. 8-12.

In addition to the western region of Oconee, Pickens and Anderson counties, the rest of the state was either moved from incipient to normal or

from moderate to incipient.

The committee looks at factors such as agriculture, forest fire risk, water supply and water quality when assessing drought conditions.

Anderson Regional Joint Water System executive director Scott Willett said precipitation in the three counties “has been more than sufficient to improve the mild drought that occurred during the last part of summer.”

“Crop and soil moisture levels are normal, fire hazard is low, public demand for water has been slightly depressed this fall as the home irrigation season has ended and rains have further reduced the need for outdoor

irrigation,” Willett said. “More rains are in the immediate forecast.”

Agriculture officials said the recent rains have hampered farmers from getting into the field and harvesting crops. They say that, hopefully, the rain will hold off so farmers can start planting winter wheat. While beef producers hope to plant some winter rye grass for cattle grazing, they add current cold temperatures don’t encourage a lot of grass growth.

The committee plans to meet again next month to assess weather conditions throughout the state.

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