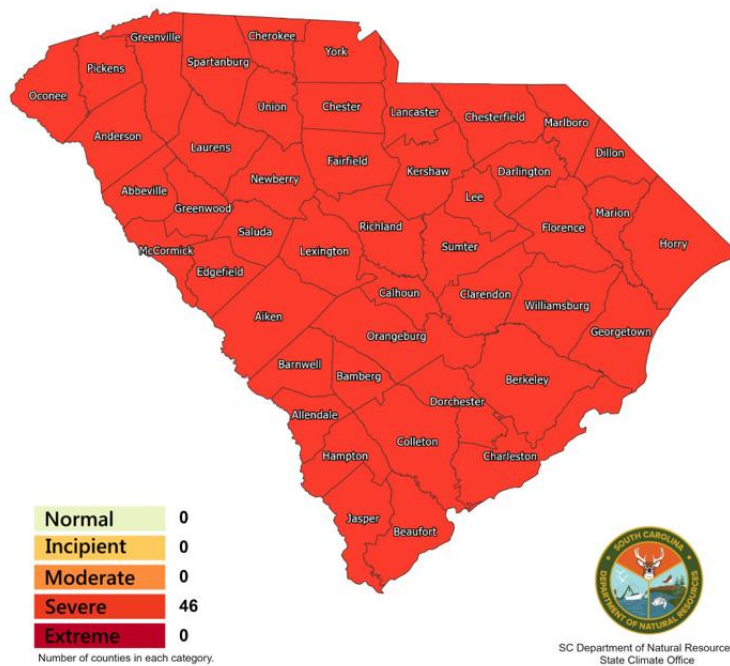


Severe Drought Continues Statewide

May 22, 2026

The S.C. Drought Response Committee (DRC) maintained the severe drought status for all 46 counties. The DRC is the state’s major drought decision making entity and determines drought severity as defined by the S.C. Drought Response Act to protect the state’s natural resources. The act establishes four levels of drought: incipient, moderate, severe and extreme. For more information about the DRC and the S.C. Drought Response Program, visit scdrought.com.

Drought Status: 05-21-2026



The Committee continued to receive reports of near record to record-low streamflows, declining groundwater levels, wildfire risk, and dire reports from farmers across the State on crops and livestock.

According to the SC State Climatology Office, the drought conditions have been intensifying since last September. The precipitation deficits have been growing month after month. These low statewide rainfall totals have been breaking records for eight months.

Statewide Average Precipitation Total, Departures, and Rankings (131 Years of Record)

Time Frame	Precipitation Total	% of Average	Rank
Mar. to Apr. 2026	2.18"	29%	1
Jan. to Apr. 2026	7.03"	46%	1
Nov. 2025 to Apr. 2026	10.02"	46%	1
Sep. 2025 to Apr. 2026	16.30"	57%	1

The drought is taking a significant toll on our farmers. The long-running drought presents another challenge to South Carolina's farmers who are already facing uncertain times. Farmers are seeing wilting corn, increased irrigation costs, lack of forage for livestock grazing, low yielding hay fields, and delayed cotton, peanuts, and soybean planting. Moisture is desperately needed for germination and growth. Some growers are reporting that the 2026 wheat crop will be a total loss. One livestock farmer reported that his first cutting of hay yielded 80 percent lower than normal. Low spring hay yields will jeopardize winter hay stores for feeding cattle.



The S.C. Forestry Commission reported that the recent rain and higher relative humidity has helped moderate fuel conditions for the short term across the state, but if we stay dry and receive several days of high temperatures, the State can easily see fire danger reach critical levels again. The underlying drought is still making the fires more difficult to fully suppress and leads to long-term smoldering.

While there is not currently a burning ban in place, the S.C. Forestry Commission would like to remind everyone that conducts an outdoor burn to make sure you have an adequate firebreak and stay with your fire until it is safe.

According to the S.C. Department of Environmental Services (SCDES), recent rains have improved streamflow conditions in parts of the Piedmont, however, most of the State is continuing to experience well below normal streamflow conditions, and most reservoirs are continuing to experience water levels below their target levels. In addition, groundwater levels continue to decline with most sites experiencing a below normal to well below normal drought status.



As of May 22, 13 water systems are requesting mandatory water restrictions, and 28 water systems are requesting voluntary water conservation.

Both SCDNR and SCDES stress to the public and water suppliers that voluntary water conservation can help mitigate or delay mandatory water restrictions. Acting early can help prevent even tougher restrictions in the weeks ahead if the drought persists or intensifies throughout the hotter months. By reducing non-essential use early in a drought, communities lower overall demand and preserve storage.

The S.C. Drought Response Committee commend water systems that have taken action to conserve water and encourage all South Carolinians to be good stewards of the State's water resources.

The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources urges recreational boaters to watch dropping water levels in streams, rivers and lakes that could create hazardous conditions and to proceed with extreme caution. All boaters need to be alert to the new water hazards such as narrow waterways, shallow water, and exposed stumps and vegetation created by low water levels.

The Committee is hopeful the rainfall forecast for the weekend will verify and ease the drought severity, but it will take almost twice the normal rainfall per week, for several months to see a significant improvement in the drought.

The Drought Response Committee will reconvene on June 11, 2026.

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