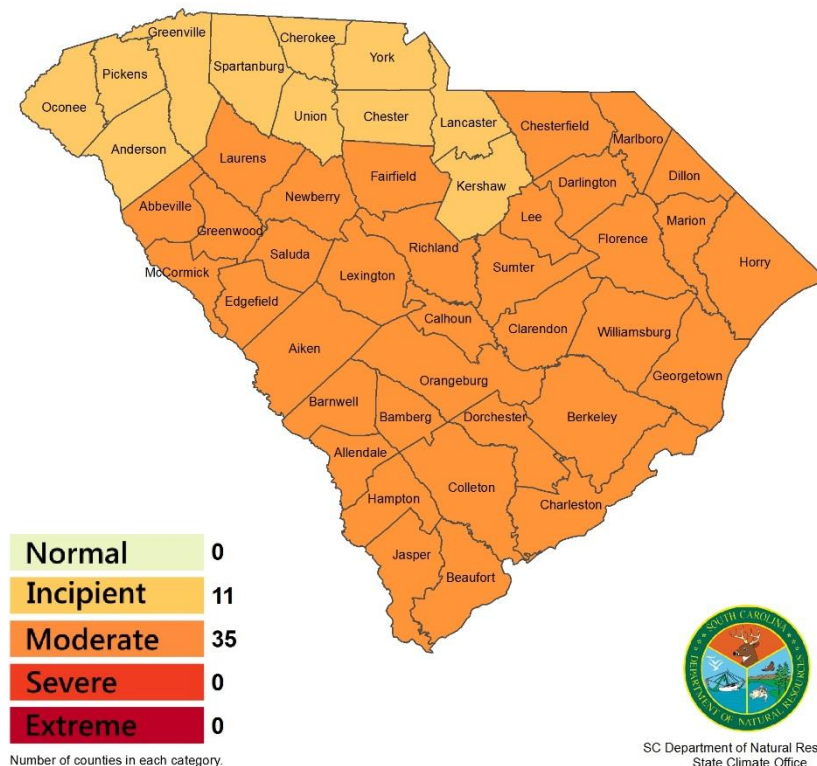


# S.C. Drought Response Committee upgrades all county drought levels

Drought Status: 06-06-2019



**COLUMBIA, S.C. (June 6, 2019)** — The S.C. Drought Response Committee, meeting via conference call on June 6, upgraded the drought status of all 46 counties in the state.

Conditions have deteriorated rapidly over the past 21 days due to extreme heat and little to no precipitation across the state resulting in much of the Upstate, including Oconee, Pickens, Greenville, Anderson, Spartanburg, Cherokee, Union, York, Lancaster and Kershaw counties--being upgraded to Incipient level drought.

The remaining 35 counties in South Carolina have been upgraded to Moderate level drought status.

As designated by the South Carolina Drought Response Act, Incipient is the first level of drought, followed by Moderate, Severe and Extreme. There was support from multiple indicators, such as the Keetch-Byram Drought Index, the U.S. Drought Monitor, Palmer Drought Severity Index and the Crop Moisture Index to upgrade all counties.

Some areas finally received measurable rainfall this week leading up to the meeting. Unfortunately, many of the impacts from the lack of rain and excessive heat has caused irreversible damage to some agriculture, an increased threat for wildfires, record demands for water and a significant drop in streamflows.

"While the forecast for rainfall is encouraging, the committee declarations were heavily weighted-on conditions and indicators at the time of the meeting," said S.C. State Climatologist Hope Mizzell.

Based on information gathered from row crop farmers and from county extension agents, Trish DeHond from Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service, reported that crop conditions are very poor throughout most of the Pee Dee Region. Field corn is rolled up and scorched, and pasture conditions are very poor. Livestock producers are already feeding hay and are now looking at putting drought-stressed corn into baleage to feed to cattle.

However, the rain Wednesday and overnight into Thursday has helped.

"We only upgraded one level to moderate drought because of the recent rainfall without this rain it would have been necessary to consider a severe drought declaration for counties in the Lowcountry," said Marion Rizer, Colleton Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioner Emeritus.

During the month of May, multiple public water supply systems reported setting numerous daily water demand records.

"Even with the excessive water demands, there were no reported concerns of water shortages," said Rob Devlin, Director of Water Monitoring, Assessment & Protection at S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control. "However, several public water supply systems are calling for voluntary conservation. If the high temperatures and abnormally low rainfall persists, voluntarily restrictions may need to be enacted by more public water supply systems."

The public should remain vigilant when outdoor burning despite the recent rains. Dry fuels still make it easy for small fires to escape and turn into wildfires, according to Forest Protection Chief Darryl Jones with the S.C. Forestry Commission (SCFC).

Wildfire activity significantly increased in late May and early June. SCFC responded to more than 312 wildfires across the state that burned almost 2,000 acres. These numbers exceed the 10-year average number of fires for May and June, and many of these fires are still being monitored because they are smoldering within the firebreaks.

"Fuels dried significantly with the extended high temperatures, and the lack of rain combined with dry air made it very easy for wildfires to start along roadsides from discarded cigarettes, sparks from vehicles and equipment, and when backyard debris burns escaped. The high temperatures made it very difficult for firefighters working to control these fires, and we hope the forecasted rain in the next few days materializes," said Jones.

The committee is hopeful that rainfall forecasts for the next few days will verify and plans to reconvene later next week to reevaluate conditions.