

## **Drought Response Committee Conference Call**

**Date: April 30th, 2025**

**Time: 10:00 a.m.**

A Drought Response Committee Conference Call was conducted at 10:00 a.m., April 30th, 2025. Notice of the date, time and call-in information was posted and provided on the [scdrought.com](http://scdrought.com) website. Chairman Ken Rentiers, Deputy Director of SC Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) - Land, Water and Conservation Division presided at the meeting.

### **I. Introduction**

- a. Ken Rentiers (SCDNR) opens the meeting.
- b. Ken (SCDNR) turns it over to Hope Mizzell (SCDNR), who does the roll call.
- c. Ken (SCDNR) puts forth a motion to approve the minutes from the last meeting, which took place on March 26<sup>th</sup>.
  - i. Jason Thompson, 1<sup>st</sup>
  - ii. Jimmy Bagley, 2<sup>nd</sup>

### **II. PowerPoint**

- a. Hope (SCDNR) begins the PowerPoint presentation.
  - i. Much of the state had above normal temperatures in the spring.
  - ii. The upstate has received some rain. However, areas along the coast have received less than 50% of their normal rainfall.
  - iii. She shows the 30-day SPI and the U.S. Drought Monitor.
- b. Hope (SCDNR) continues to discuss the data.
  - i. She shows the CoCoRAHS totals for each DMA.
    1. The rainfall totals vary across each region. Areas along the coast are lacking rainfall; the Southern DMA has been the driest over the last 30 days.
  - ii. Per the NWS office in Charleston, it is their fourth driest spring on record.
- c. **State Agency Reports**
  - i. Alexis Modzelesky (SCDES) discusses the streamflow values. Overall, most streamflow gages are not in drought based on the regulatory method. However, the Wacammaw at Longs is in Extreme Drought. Hope (SCDNR) reminds group that the regulatory method triggers too late.

1. The streamflow in the Northeast DMA is below normal; The West and Central DMAs are starting to decrease. The Southern DMA streamflow is also decreasing.
  2. Lakes across the entire state are at their target levels. However, she mentions that the levels may begin to decrease as temperature rises.
    - a. Preston Pierce (West DMA) mentions how Lake Jocassee and Lake Keowee are not in a drought now but may be heading towards one.
  3. Groundwater levels are declining. Groundwater numbers reflect differently than surface-level water. Well levels across the entire state are beginning to decrease. The Charleston well is currently in the lowest percentile across the board.
  4. Hope (SCDNR) fields questions and asks some of her own. She wants to make the information clearer for people who are not involved with hydrology. It is vital to understand all the factors that go into a drought declaration, separate from the USDM.
  5. Scott Harder (SCDES) affirms Hope's thoughts surrounding the lack of rainfall. It is something to monitor as we head into the summer.
- ii. Doug Mills (SC Forestry Commission) discusses the KBDI values and recent fires.
1. There were 104 fires on March 1<sup>st</sup>. That same day, the Covington Drive Fire in Myrtle Beach began; and it is still not 100% contained.
  2. The Table Rock Complex Fire is completely contained.
  3. The state already has a 20% higher than average number of fires in a year.
  4. KBDI values are low in areas that are having the most fires, especially across the coast.
  5. Hope (SCDNR) mentions that the number of fires does not reflect how strong and dangerous they can be. Doug (SCFC) agrees, and says we need to hope it rains soon. The timber damage from Hurricane Helene is impeding efforts to put out fires, while also fueling them.
- iii. Jordan Van Delden (SCEMD) states that SCEMD just completed their drought response plan, and they plan to release it soon.
- d. Hope (SCDNR) resumes presenting the PowerPoint.

- i. She discusses the field reports that are provided by the USDA each week.
- ii. She shows the 7-day outlook and the 6–10-day outlook. It is supposed to be warmer, but there is also a higher chance of rain. Furthermore, the seasonal drought outlook from NOAA displays that the drought will begin to subside. It is highly dependent on receiving more precipitation.

### III. Open Discussion and Vote

- a. Hope (SCDNR) briefly reviews the indicators and moves onto the discussion. She mentions that the next meeting will be on May 22<sup>nd</sup>.
- b. The discussion begins with the Northeast DMA.
  - i. Karolan Ohanesian believes the area should remain in Incipient drought. The streamflow values, as well as current fires, indicate that they should remain incipient. Doug Mills (SCFC) mentions how the KBDI holds importance in this area, since it has been dry.
  - ii. Athena Strickland believes that Horry and Marion counties could be moved up to a moderate drought. She is torn about the rest of the DMA. The Waccamaw River is very low and affecting nearby counties.
    - 1. Karolan Ohanesian agrees, saying it would bring the public's attention to that area. Dillon County can be added to this as well.
  - iii. Joe Ghent, from Lancaster, supports staying in the current declaration in that county, but he would also support moving up in the coastal areas.
  - iv. Lindsay Privette says the coast is very dry and is much drier than it was a month ago. Athena Strickland says Dillon County should remain Incipient; Darlington and Florence are also very dry.
  - v. Hope (SCDNR) asks for input from state agency members. Scott Harder (SCDES) is comfortable keeping all the counties in incipient except for Marion and Horry counties.
  - vi. **Motion:** Horry and Marion counties move to moderate drought; the rest of the counties can remain incipient.
    - 1. Karolan Ohanesian, 1<sup>st</sup>
    - 2. Athena Strickland, 2<sup>nd</sup>
- c. Next, the Central DMA has the floor.
  - i. Hope (SCDNR) mentions that Georgetown County has been very dry. She asks what to do about Williamsburg County and the other surrounding areas.

- ii. Peggy Swearingen says the rain that is received does not last, and it is very dry in Fairfield.
- iii. Fred Castles, who is in Chester, says that area is also very dry and needs rainfall. He supports remaining in incipient drought.
- iv. Ken Tuck says the upstate has received some rain as well, but it is not enough. He supports staying in incipient drought and reevaluate in a month at the next meeting. Hope (SCDNR) is concerned about wildfires in the area.
- v. Landrum Weathers mentions that Calhoun and Clarendon counties have not received much rainfall; he believes they should move to incipient drought. He says that a farmer in Calhoun let him know that there has been very little rainfall.
- vi. Scott Harder (SCDES) says there is support from a streamflow and groundwater standpoint for an incipient drought.
  - 1. Doug Mills (SCFC) agrees, but from a forestry perspective.
- vii. Brad Powers supports all counties moving to incipient, except for Georgetown moving to moderate.
- viii. **Motion:** Georgetown moves to moderate, all other counties either move to or remain incipient.
  - 1. Brad Powers, 1<sup>st</sup>
  - 2. Jimmy Bagley, 2<sup>nd</sup>
- d. Continuing onto the Southern DMA.
  - i. Jason Thompson says the area is a mixed bag, but none of the counties are improving. The reservoirs in the area are normal, and the utility demand is not as high as they expected; he is worried about moving into the warmer months.
  - ii. Chris Wallace says Bamberg County got about two inches of rain last week, but it has been very windy. None of the rain is being absorbed.
    - 1. Eric Odom agrees, says Orangeburg County is very dry.
  - iii. Marion Rizer sent a message to Hope (SCDNR), stating that Colleton County is also very dry.
  - iv. Landrum Weathers supports moving all counties to incipient but is open to suggestions with Charleston County.
  - v. Russ Cornette supports staying in incipient for Berkeley and Dorchester counties but not moving up or down.
  - vi. Matt McCants agrees with the previous points. He is open to moving Berkeley and Charleston counties to moderate. Russ Cornette agrees.

Hope (SCDNR) mentions how the numbers are showing a borderline moderate drought.

vii. Jason Thompson says Dorchester County has been very dry in the southern area, but the northern area is not as dry.

viii. **Motion:** Move Orangeburg, Colleton, and Bamberg to Incipient Drought, Dorchester remains in Incipient, and Berkeley and Charleston move to Moderate drought.

1. Jason Thompson, 1<sup>st</sup>

2. Matthew McCants, 2<sup>nd</sup>

e. West DMA.

i. Brian Chemsak believes Beaufort and Jasper counties should move to incipient drought. Customer usage has surged, and farmers are irrigating more in response to low rainfall totals.

ii. Lynn McEwen says 3.5 inches of rain fell in Barnwell County last week. Unfortunately, it all turned into runoff and did not help the drought conditions. She supports moving all counties in a normal drought to an incipient drought.

iii. Preston Pierce says the northern area of the DMA should remain in incipient.

iv. **Motion:** Entire area goes to or remains at incipient drought.

1. Preston Pierce, 1<sup>st</sup>

2. Scott Willett, 2<sup>nd</sup>

v. Motion passes unanimously.

f. Hope (SCDNR) reviews the motions that have been made. She briefly discusses the U.S. Drought Monitor, and thanks everyone for their participation.

g. Ken (SCDNR) inputs a motion to adjourn the meeting.

i. Joe Ghent, 1<sup>st</sup>

ii. Karolan Ohanesian, 2<sup>nd</sup>

h. This meeting has been adjourned. The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, May 22<sup>nd</sup> at 10:00am.

Committee Members	Group	Attendance 04/30/2025
West DMA		
Reg Williams	Agriculture	X
Cheryl Daniels	Commission of Public Works	X

Mark Warner	Counties	<b>X</b>
	Domestic User	VACANT
David Evans	Industry	<b>X</b>
Lynn McEwen	Municipalities	<b>X</b>
Preston Pierce	Power Generation Facilities	<b>X</b>
J. Scott Willett	Private Water Supplier	<b>X</b>
Chris Rasco	Public Service District	
Rick Green	Regional Council of Gov.	<b>X</b>
Yvonne Kling	Soil and Water Conservation Dist.	
Brian Chemsak	Special Purpose District	<b>X</b>
<b>Central DMA</b>		
John Irwin	Agriculture	
Ken Tuck	Commission of Public Works	<b>X</b>
Peggy Swearingen	Counties	<b>X</b>
Christy Jones	Domestic User	<b>X</b>
Ed Holder	Industry	<b>X</b>
James G. Bagley	Municipalities	<b>X</b>
Alan Stuart	Power Generation Facilities	<b>X</b>
Brad C. Powers	Private Water Supplier	<b>X</b>
	Public Service District	VACANT
Gregory Sprouse	Regional Council of Gov.	
John T. Rivers	Soil and Water Conservation Dist.	
Fred Castles	Special Purpose District	<b>X</b>
<b>Northeast DMA</b>		
Caleb Miller	Agriculture	
	Commission of Public Works	VACANT
Karolan Ohanesian	Domestic User	<b>X</b>
Athena Strickland	Industry	<b>X</b>
Clint Elliott	Municipality	<b>X</b>
	Power Generation Facilities	VACANT
	Private Water Supplier	VACANT
Alan Watkins	Counties	<b>X</b>

Elbert Warren	Public Service District	<b>X</b>
Lindsay Privette	Regional Council of Gov.	<b>X</b>
Joe Ghent	Soil and Water Conservation Dist.	<b>X</b>
Nathan Ward	Special Purpose District	<b>X</b>
<b>Southern DMA</b>		
Landrum Weathers	Agriculture	<b>X</b>
Jason Thompson	Commission of Public Works	<b>X</b>
Larry Harper	Counties	Appointment Pend.
Chris Wallace	Domestic User	<b>X</b>
Chris Muckenfuss	Industry	Appointment Pend.
Eric Odom	Municipalities	<b>X</b>
Matt McCants	Power Generation Facilities	<b>X</b>
	Private Water Supplier	VACANT
Russell Cornette	Public Service District	<b>X</b>
Ronald E. Mitchum	Regional Council of Gov.	
Marion L. Rizer	Soil and Water Conservation Dist.	
	Special Purpose District	VACANT
<b>State Agency Members</b>		
Ken Rentiers	SCDNR, LWC Division	<b>X</b>
Jordan Van Delden	SC Emergency Management Divis.	<b>X</b>
Joe Koon	SC Dept. of Environ. Services	<b>X</b>
Doug Mills	SC Forestry Commission	<b>X</b>
Sam Quinney	SC Department of Agriculture	
<b>Other Participants</b>		
Hope Mizzell	SCDNR, LWC Division	<b>X</b>
Melissa Griffin	SCDNR, LWC Division	<b>X</b>
Alyssa Paguaga	SCDNR, LWC Division	<b>X</b>
Scott Harder	SCDES	<b>X</b>
Leonard Vaughn	NWS Columbia	<b>X</b>
Tyler Greiner		<b>X</b>
Dwight Cauthen	SC Farm Bureau	<b>X</b>