

Drought Response Committee Conference Call

Date: May 21, 2026

Time: 9:00 a.m.

A Drought Response Committee Conference Call was conducted at 9:00 a.m., May 21, 2026. Notice of the date, time, and call-in information was posted and provided on the scdrought.com website.

I. Introduction

- a. Tyler Brown (SCDNR) opens the meeting and reads the agenda.
 - i. Tyler Brown makes notice that this meeting is being recorded.
- b. Hope Mizzell (SCDNR) conducts the Drought Committee roll call.
 - i. There is a quorum in all drought management areas.
 - ii. She does a roll call of state agency members, media, and any additional attendees.
- c. Tyler Brown puts forth a motion to approve the minutes of the last meeting, which took place on April 30th.
 - i. Casey Moorer, 1st
 - ii. Lynn McEwen, 2ndMotion passes unanimously. Minutes have been approved.

II. PowerPoint Presentation

- a. Hope Mizzell begins with the presentation.
 - i. Reviews statewide precipitation rankings across multiple time periods, including precipitation totals, departure from average, and percent of average based on the 1991–2020 climate record. April ranked as the third driest on record for statewide precipitation.
 - ii. Discusses prolonged dry conditions across the state, with several time periods ranking as the driest in the 131-year climate record. Notes some areas have received only 50–60% of normal rainfall.
 - iii. References discussion regarding drought conditions in the Catawba River Basin, emphasizing the long duration of the current dry pattern dating back to late 2024.
 - iv. Reviews the January–April statewide precipitation time series dating back to 1895. Notes 2026 is nearly an inch below the previous driest January–April period on record, surpassing the previous record set in 1986.

- v. Reviews the March–April statewide precipitation time series, noting 2026 ranks as the driest on record with only 2.18 inches statewide, slightly below the previous record.
- vi. Provides a preliminary look at May rainfall totals and departures from normal across locations from Charleston to Charlotte. Notes some recent rainfall, including 2.22 inches in Greenville-Spartanburg, but many locations remain below normal, with Orangeburg nearly two inches below average for the month.
- vii. 30-day, 60-day, and 90-day rainfall totals remain below normal statewide. Isolated areas in Anderson, Greenwood, the lower Piedmont, and portions of the central Savannah River Basin received beneficial rainfall during the 30-day period, with some locations near to slightly above normal. No areas at or above normal in the 60-day period, with most locations receiving 25–50% of normal rainfall and some as low as 10–25%. Similar pattern continues in the 90-day period, with only one small area in the central Savannah River Basin slightly above normal.
- viii. PDSI – Showing conditions ranging from moderate drought to exceptional drought across the state.
- ix. CMI – Conditions showing mostly normal to slightly below normal, though noted the index does not fully reflect drought impacts currently being observed on the ground.
- x. SPI – Slight improvement in the 30-day SPI due to recent rainfall, with conditions ranging from incipient to moderate drought. The 60-day and 90-day SPI continue to show more severe to extreme drought conditions across much of the state, with a few incipient areas in the Upstate.
- xi. Drought Monitor – As of May 19, little change over the past few weeks. Most of the state remains in severe drought, with D4 conditions continuing in portions of the lower Savannah River Basin.
- xii. CoCoRaHS 30-day and 60-day – All drought management areas remain well below average precipitation totals. Only isolated stations in the West, Central, and Northeast DMAs reported above average rainfall during the 30-day period, while nearly all stations remained below average at 60 days. Southern DMA reported no stations above average during either period.

b. State Agency Reports

- i. SCDES (Alexis) – (Scott Harder) – 14-day streamflow conditions showing some improvement since the previous meeting, especially across portions of the Piedmont with several gauges returning to normal following recent rainfall. Pee Dee, Upper Piedmont, and southern portions of the state continue showing moderate to extreme drought conditions. Notes stream flows could decline quickly without additional rainfall.
1. Northeast DMA- Downward trends at all three gages, with record low flows for this time of year. All trends continue dry.
 1. West DMA – Hydrographs showing brief responses to May rainfall events, though streamflow levels continue receding back to pre-storm levels. Most sites remain at or below the 5th percentile flow despite some 14-day averages improving to normal conditions.
 2. Central DMA – Streamflow levels remain well below the 5th percentile despite brief improvements from May rainfall. Hydrographs showing receding levels following storm events, with Black River remaining especially dry. Conditions expected to decline quickly without additional rainfall.
 2. Southern DMA – Small response to May rainfall events, though daily flows remain at or below the 5th percentile with declining levels continuing
 3. Lake Level / Reservoirs – West DMA lakes continue declining, with levels 4–9 feet below normal. Keowee-Toxaway, Savannah River, and Catawba-Wateree projects remain in Stage 2 LIP. Some improvement noted in central reservoirs including Blalock, Greenwood, Wylie, and Wateree, with reduced outlet flows helping maintain lake levels.
 4. Hartwell – USACE Hartwell projection showing lake declines over the next couple months by a couple of feet, with continued downward trends expected.
 3. Groundwater – Below normal to well below normal conditions across the entire state, with continued declining trends. Northeast and West DMAs remain especially dry, while portions of the Piedmont show slightly less severe conditions following recent rainfall.

ii. Joe Koon (SCDES) – 14 water systems currently under mandatory conservation and 21 under voluntary conservation measures. Encouraged community water systems to complete reporting forms and contact DES if not currently receiving them.

iii. Darryl Jones (SC Forestry Commission) – KBDI showing some short-term improvement following recent rainfall, though underlying drought conditions persist. Coastal Plain remains driest with several stations showing severe drought, while much of the Midlands remains in moderate drought conditions. Only one station in the Upstate showing no drought conditions. Eight stations currently in severe drought. Fire activity continues statewide with 70 fires reported last week burning 446 acres. Increased humidity and rainfall have slowed fire spread, though concerns remain for increased wildfire potential if dry conditions return.

iv. Jordan Van Delden (SCEMD) – No updates.

v. Michael Kule (SC Dept. of Agriculture) – Dry conditions continue impacting planting and crop emergence statewide. Recent rainfall provided short-term moisture for cotton and peanut planting, though many areas quickly dried again. Corn showing drought stress and irrigation use increasing significantly. Pasture and hay conditions remain poor, with major reductions in hay yields reported.

vi. Andrew Shull (Duke Energy) – Keowee-Toxaway and Catawba-Wateree systems remain in Stage 2 LIP. Slight improvement noted in the Catawba-Wateree reservoir storage index following recent rainfall, mandatory water restrictions, and reduced flow releases from dams. Stage 2 LIP goals remain focused on reducing water withdrawals by 5–10%, with continued monitoring of water use trends and reservoir conditions.

c. Short- and Long-term Forecast

- i. Weekly QPF – Forecast showing 2–4 inches across much of the Upstate and northern Midlands over the next seven days, with lower amounts along the coast and some areas below 0.5 inches.
- ii. 6–10 Day Outlook – Higher likelihood of above normal temperatures continuing through the end of the month with continued chances for above normal precipitation.

- iii. Seasonal outlook – CPC outlook showing increased chances for above normal temperatures and precipitation through summer, though confidence remains low.
- iv. Drought Outlook – Updated outlook continues showing drought persistence across much of the Southeast, with some areas potentially improving.
- v. Frank Strait (SCDNR) – Additional wet pattern expected into early June, including another potential heavy rainfall period next week. June outlook favoring above average precipitation, while July and August may trend drier. Notes potential for tropical development during early June, though uncertainty remains high. Continued rainfall over multiple months needed for meaningful drought improvement.

III. Open Discussion and Vote

Hope Mizzell (SCDNR): Quorum in all DMAs:

a. West DMA

- i. Lynn M. - Recent rainfall provided only short-term improvement and dried quickly. Supports remaining in severe drought status and continuing public outreach and conservation education efforts.
- ii. Yvonne K. – Conditions remain very dry across portions of Aiken County despite recent rainfall. Supports remaining in severe drought status and continuing public education efforts.
- iii. Mark W. – Lake levels remain relatively stable since the previous meeting. Supports remaining in severe drought status.
- iv. Brian C.- Supports holding severe drought status, particularly across the lower portion of the West DMA.
- v. Scott W. – Supports remaining in severe drought status until additional data and longer-term trends support a change.
- vi. Rick G.- Agrees with previous comments and supports holding current drought status.
- vii. Motion: Leave all West DMA counties in severe drought status.
 - 1. David Evans, 1st.
 - 2. Lynn McEwen, 2nd
- viii. Motion passes unanimously.

b. Central DMA

- i. Ken T. - Beneficial rainfall received, though streamflows remain historically low. Spartanburg Water implementing voluntary water use restrictions focused on conservation education. Supports remaining in severe drought status.
- ii. John I. - Recent rainfall quickly disappeared with pasture conditions continuing to deteriorate and hay feeding ongoing. Supports remaining in severe drought status.
- iii. John R. - Agriculture impacts worsening across the Central DMA. Planting largely stopped, dryland corn conditions poor, and farmer morale extremely low.
- v. Motion: Keep the entire Central DMA in severe drought status.
 - 1. Ken Tuck, 1st
 - 2. John Irwin, 2nd
- iii. Motion passes unanimously.

c. Southern DMA

- i. Casey M.- Santee Cooper operating at minimum flows across hydro facilities and preparing for possible drought contingency plan activation if reservoirs decline another 1.5 feet below rule curve. Regional water systems seeing summer-like demand levels and preparing conservation efforts. Supports remaining in severe drought status.
- ii. Michael M. - Low inflow protocol trigger approaching, though current operations already reflect minimum flow conditions. No major operational changes expected at this time.
- iii. Jason T- Supports maintaining severe drought status based on current conditions and indicators.
- iv. Landrum W. - Agricultural conditions remain extremely dry with planting largely stopped and non-irrigated corn under significant stress. Notes consistent rainfall will be needed for meaningful improvement. Supports remaining in severe drought status.
- v. Eric O. – Edisto and Norfolk systems continue declining with possible voluntary restrictions being discussed if rainfall does not materialize. Supports remaining in severe drought status.

- vi. Russ Cornette – Agrees with previous comments and supports maintaining severe drought status.
- vii. Motion: Keep the entire Southern DMA in severe drought status.
 - 1. Mary Rosar, 1st
 - 2. Russell Cornette, 2nd
- iv. Motion passes unanimously.

d. Northeast DMA

- i. Athena Strickland – No indicators support improving drought conditions. Supports remaining in severe drought status
- ii. Karolan O. – Concurs with maintaining current severe drought status.
- iii. Alan Watkins – Supports remaining in severe drought status for the Northeast DMA.
- iv. Clint Elliott – Horry and Georgetown Counties received minimal rainfall with conditions remaining very dry.
- v. Joe Ghent – Agrees the Northeast DMA should remain in severe drought status.
- vi. Nathan W. – Agrees with maintaining current drought status.
- vii. Motion: Keep the entire Northeast DMA in severe drought status.
 - 1. Athena Strickland, 1st
 - 2. Clint Elliot, 2nd
- iv. Motion passes unanimously.

IV. Closing Remarks

- a. The next meeting date will be June 11th at 10AM.
- b. Tyler (SCDNR) puts forth a motion to adjourn:
 - 1. Casey Moorer, 1st
 - 2. Jason Thompson, 2nd
- c. Meeting is adjourned at 10:43am.