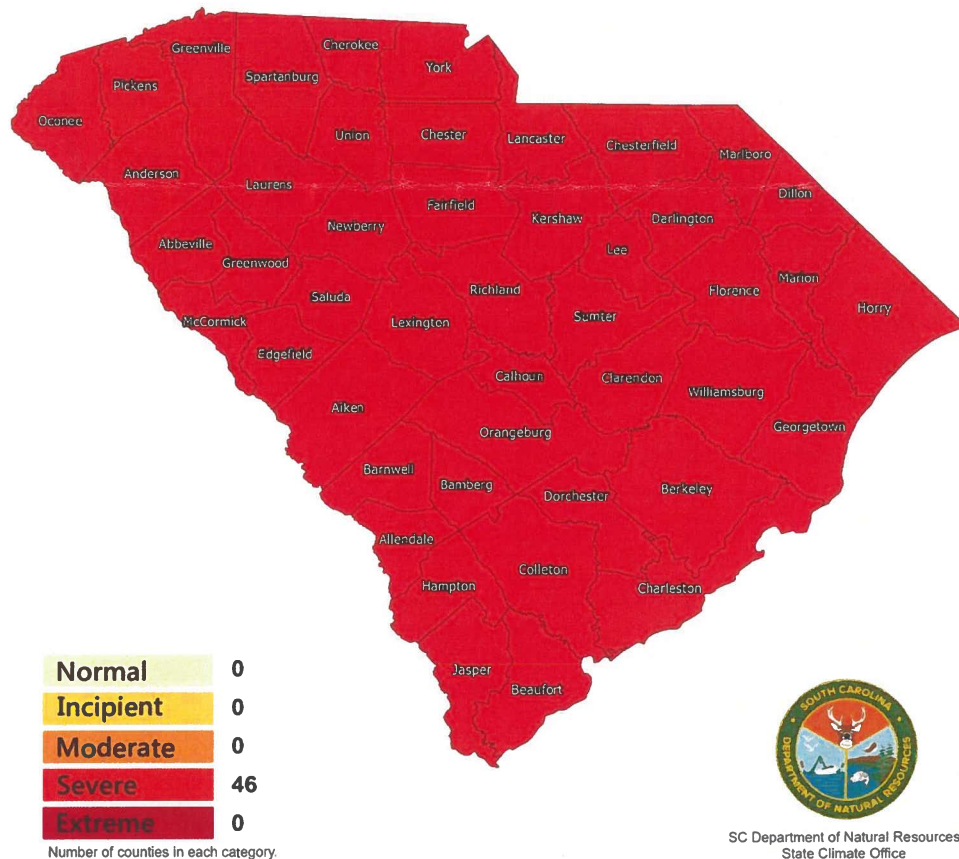


Late April Showers Bring Relief, but Not Nearly Enough

Severe Drought Declared for All Counties

Drought Status: 04-30-2026



The S.C. Drought Response Committee (DRC) upgraded South Carolina's drought status from moderate to severe statewide, including 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.

The decision to move to severe drought status was unanimous when members of the S.C. Drought Response Committee met on April 30. The Committee received reports of

widespread record-low streamflows, declining groundwater levels, increase in wildfire risk, and alarming reports from farmers across the State on crops and livestock.

According to the S.C. State Climate Office, the recent rain showers have been a welcome sight, but not nearly enough to offset the rainfall deficit that has been building since September 2025. Over the last few days, isolated locations across the State received up to an inch of rain. However, the deficit is over 8 inches since January 1st and greater than 14” since September 1, 2025. The Committee is hopeful the rainfall forecast for the weekend will verify and ease the severity, but it will take almost twice the normal rainfall per week, for several months, to see a significant improvement in the drought.

Locations around the State had a four-to-six-inch deficit by the end of Fall 2025. It grew rapidly reaching a seven-to-nine-inch deficit by the end of winter. As we wrap up April, the rainfall deficit, since the beginning of fall, is approaching 12 to 15 inches. The official statewide precipitation totals for April will not be available for a few more days, but all indications suggest that it will be in the top three driest September through April timeframe in the 131 years of record.

Select stations with the largest precipitation deficit since January 1, 2026

Station	2026 Rainfall Deficit
Traveler’s Rest 8.9 N	-9.81”
Manning	-9.68”
Gaston Shoals	-9.49”
Walterboro 3.0 NNW	-9.41”
Pickens 6.9 W	-9.07”
Charleston 0.3 ESE	-8.77”
Chapin 5.0 ESE	-8.65”
Lyman 4.1 WNW	-8.43”
Salley 4.9 NNE	-7.74”
Pageland 9.0 WNW	-7.47”
York 5 SSE	-6.17”

The Committee heard alarming reports from South Carolina agricultural producers. The unusually dry winter combined with a dry spring is significantly taking a toll on all agricultural production. Some farmers said it was the worst planting conditions in 50 years. Farmers have not been able to plant corn, peanuts, cotton or soybean. It is not too late for some row crops, but moisture is desperately needed for germination and

growth. Any surface water used for irrigation is on the cusp of drying to a point of non-use.

Spring predominately produces the best hay yields which has not happened so far this season. Livestock producers are already concerned about hay supplies. Low spring hay yields can have a compounding effect on their cattle until the spring of next year.

It is too late for winter small grain crops such as wheat, rye, and oats. Any yield from these crops will be minimal.

According to the S.C. Department of Environmental Services (SCDES), the drought's impact across the state continues to grow and supports the upgrade from moderate to severe status. Streamflows are showing record lows for this time of the year. Major reservoirs in the Savannah River Basin continue to decline and groundwater is well below normal to low at numerous locations across the state.

The State did not receive the winter rainfall that is critical for recharging our surface and groundwater. Winter groundwater recharge is important for sustaining aquifer and stream baseflow levels later in the spring and summer.

SCDES and the SCDNR Drought Information Center have received reports of a few private wells going dry and several water systems are requesting voluntary water conservation. All water systems should take the opportunity to review their local drought plans and ordinances and, when needed, implement conservation accordingly. The public should check with their local water supply systems for any information on water use restrictions that may be in place.

The drought led to a very active spring wildfire season, and the S.C. Forestry Commission (SCFC) responded to an above average number of wildfires in both March and April. As drought conditions intensified, wildfires were burning more aggressively and taking more firefighters, equipment, and time to control. Since January 1, SCFC responded to 1,216 wildfires that burned more than 11,600 acres. Many fires continued to smolder for weeks and required daily monitoring to make sure containment lines were held, leading to a long-term commitment of resources. The State Forester's Burn Ban that was put in place on April 17 for all counties helped reduce new ignitions when fuel and weather conditions were at critical levels, and we appreciate the wide adherence to the ban. As soon as the state began receiving rain, the SCFC lifted the ban in counties where conditions improved. The burn ban was lifted for all remaining counties on May 1.

Even when we start receiving additional rain, SCFC asks everyone to stay vigilant when

conducting outdoor burning. Most wildfires in our state start because of careless outdoor burning, and wildfires can occur almost any day, regardless of our drought status.

The last time all counties in South Carolina were in at least a severe drought was September 2002. During that record drought, as of late September 2002, 36 counties were in severe drought and 10 counties in extreme drought (the highest level).

The Drought Response Committee will reconvene on Thursday, May 21, 2026.

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