

The Herald

SC moves into severe drought as conditions worsen

BY JOHN MARKS jmarks@heraldonline.com

The Rock Hill region and the entire state of South Carolina is now in severe drought, following an upgrade on Thursday from the South Carolina Drought Response Committee.

South Carolina lists drought in order of severity from incipient to moderate, severe and extreme. The drought response group listed all 46 counties in the state as having moderate drought on April 9. Every county was upgraded when the committee reconvened Thursday.

Drought listings are based on stream flow, farming impact, wildfire conditions and of course most noticeably, recent rainfall. From September to March the state got less than half the rain it typically does, making it the driest span between those months on the 131-year record, the South Carolina State Climatology Office announced this month. Rain has remained sparse since.

The statewide listing is one of several indicators showing drought conditions in South Carolina. The U.S. Drought Monitor uses a five-stage listing of drought conditions. It shows a spot near the southern tip of the state, covering parts of five counties, in the most severe category on that scale — exceptional drought.

York, Lancaster and Chester counties are one rank lower, in extreme drought.

DROUGHT CONDITIONS IN ROCK HILL AREA

Yet another drought monitoring group has a more direct impact on water users throughout the Rock Hill Region.

Duke Energy and municipal water providers partner for a low inflow protocol system to conserve water during dry seasons. As ratings become more severe there, mandatory water use restrictions can be instituted by cities or counties that provide water.

Duke Energy moved to Stage 1 of its protocol on April 16. That listing asks people to voluntarily reduce water usage like watering lawns.

Some of the region's largest lakes are dipping as a result of drought.

Duke Energy typically aims to maintain lakes at about three feet below their full pond, or point at which lakes would flood if they continued to rise. Lake Wylie and Lake Norman are more than five feet below full pond on Thursday afternoon.

Both lakes are less than two feet above their critical minimum levels. If lakes drop below that point, there can be threats from public drinking water intake exposure to lake access points closed for boaters.

The drought is widespread and doesn't follow county or state lines.

Charlotte is facing some of the driest conditions across North Carolina too, according to the Charlotte Observer.



Six Flags Entertainment Corp.

Bridgette Bywater was named park president of Carowinds on April 22 by parent company Six Flags, based in Charlotte. She brings 36 years of amusement park industry experience to the role.

Q&A with new Carowinds boss Bridgette Bywater

BY CATHERINE MUCCIGROSSO cmuccigrosso@charlotteobserver.com

Just seven days into her newly created leadership role as park president, Bridgette Bywater is focused on connecting with staff and guests at Carowinds. This comes as the park's parent company, North America's largest regional amusement operator, attempts to chart a new track for a financial turnaround.

Last week, Bywater was named as one of 10 "key" amusement park presidents by Carowinds' parent company Six Flags Entertainment Corp., which is headquartered in Charlotte.

headquartered in Charlotte.

Six Flags has struggled with debt, declining attendance and reported a net revenue loss of \$1.6 billion last year. Six Flags' new CEO and president, John Reilly, replaced Richard Zimmerman in December.

Each president is responsible for overseeing park performance, operations and overall guest experience. "These changes are about putting leadership, expertise and accountability as close to our guests and team members as possible," Reilly said in a April 22 announcement.

Bywater has decades of experience in the industry as general manager of Kings Dominion and Soak City water park in Doswell, Virginia, and as corporate director of operations for Cedar Fair. That's Carowinds' former parent company, which merged with Six Flags in 2024 in a blockbuster \$8 billion deal.

Coming off a nearly year-long sabbatical from the industry, Bywater said she's excited to be coming back and being in Charlotte.

"It was not a difficult decision, and Charlotte's beautiful," Bywater said. "I'm glad to be here."

The 400-acre Carowinds amusement park straddles the North Carolina and

SEE BYWATER, 4A

Rock Hill School District increases starting teacher salary

BY JOHN MARKS jmarks@heraldonline.com

Starting teacher pay is going up this fall in Rock Hill. It'll be a while still before other area districts decide whether to follow suit.

The Rock Hill School District voted unanimously on Tuesday to increase its pay by \$2,000 across its salary scale. A first-year teacher with a bachelor's degree would make \$54,000 starting in July. That's a 3.8% increase. Master's degrees, doctorates and years of experience can increase pay from there.

A first-year teacher with a doctorate would earn \$68,000 while a teacher with a bachelor's degree and 28 years of experience would earn more than \$75,000.

The \$54,000 starting teacher salary is above the \$50,500 statewide minimum pay for next school year that still is in draft form with the state legislature. Other area school districts contacted by The Herald are still working on their budgets for next year and haven't set pay scales.

TEACHER PAY AROUND SOUTH CAROLINA

Teacher pay can vary among districts, even with the same starting teacher pay.

Some districts have pay scales that put more money toward teachers who have been there many years. Others have flatter salary growth, but higher starting pay to attract new teachers.

Numerous districts across South Carolina start teacher pay each year at the minimum level required by law, which is \$48,500 now.

Charleston County is the district with the highest starting pay in the state this year at \$67,382. Many districts across South Carolina pay the minimum statewide rate.

SC State to change graduation speaker after protests

BY JOSEPH BUSTOS jbustos@thestate.com

South Carolina State University is relenting and is changing its May 8 commencement speaker following students protests over the choice of Lt. Gov. Pamela Evette.

"Out of an abundance of caution for safety and with careful consideration, the university has decided to move in a

different direction for this spring commencement," SC State President Alexander Conyers said in a statement.

"Commencement should remain a moment of celebration focused on our graduates and their achievements, and we are committed to ensuring an environment that reflects that purpose," Conyers added.

After the school's announcement, Evette on social media reiterated her call to end college tenure, a stance she

has repeatedly said while running for governor.

"The fact that a speech had to be canceled for credible safety threats is exactly why we cannot give up the fight to end indoctrination and DEI on campuses once and for all," Evette posted. "The root problem is professors who gin up feigned outrage at the detriment of their students, who they should be

SEE PROTESTS, 4A



We're dedicated to delivering the journalism you rely on. Discover the stories that matter to you inside. Subscribers, explore more stories and features like puzzles and games at heraldonline.com/edition.

FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE QUESTIONS, CALL US AT: 877-421-6397 OR REACH US ONLINE AT: heraldonline.com/customer-service

