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## Drought officially over in metro Atlanta

### But state keeps watering restrictions in place

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The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Monday, March 30, 2009

The drought is over in metro Atlanta — three years after it began and more than a year after a dwindling Lake Lanier made national news.

State climatologist David Stooksbury made the declaration Monday.

But keep those rusty sprinklers in the garage. Outdoor watering restrictions will remain indefinitely because Lanier is still recovering and still stands more than 9 feet below full. The lake is the water source for more than 3 million metro Atlantans.

“Soil moisture is near normal, stream flows are near normal. Small and medium-sized reservoirs are full,” Stooksbury said. “But there is still the 500-pound gorilla sitting in the room and that’s Lanier.”

Atlanta is still more than an inch below normal rainfall this year. But this is the first time the drought has loosened the vise-like grip that reignited the water war with Alabama and Florida.

According to state rules, it takes four months of improved conditions to end outdoor watering restrictions, though they have been eased. March counts as the first month, Stooksbury said.

State Environmental Protection Division Director Carol Couch, who makes the call on watering restrictions, said Monday it will take a lot more rain to pull Lanier out of the hole. She doesn’t expect that to happen this year and may ask the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which operates Lanier, to release only a minimum amount through the summer.

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