

Arizona Department of Water Resources

Drought Task Force – Monitoring Technical Committee

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Dry message from drought committee: Despite rain and snow, drought is not over

Winter has been a pleasant diversion, with plenty of snow in the high country and rain at lower elevations. Still, the long-term drought persists, according to the members of the State Drought Monitoring Technical Committee (MTC).

"The wet winter has definitely been a bonanza for us," said Tony Haffer with the National Weather Service, chair of the monitoring committee. "But the Southwest in general, and Arizona in particular, has been in deficit for many years. Naturally, it will take many winters like this one to get us back into balance."

"We are entering our 14th year of drought," said State Climatologist Nancy Selover. "I believe it started after the very wet winter of 1993, which was the end of the wet period. Lakes Powell and Mead were pretty full at that time."

The wet conditions experienced across most of Arizona over the past two months have been unusual for a La Niña event of this strength and magnitude. Intra-seasonal variability related to pulses of moisture traveling across the Pacific Ocean, in conjunction with a persistent jet-stream pattern favorable for Arizona precipitation, has produced the welcome wet winter conditions.

Precipitation totals for calendar year 2008 to date:

- Phoenix = 4.24" (.47" above normal)
- Tucson = 2.97" (.21" below normal)
- Flagstaff = 11.09" (1.51" above normal).

The MTC is a scientific working group that assesses drought status. It is made up of hydrologists and climatologists representing local, state and federal agencies and organizations. This group is tasked with monitoring current drought conditions, forecasting future conditions, and communicating that information to resource managers, decision-makers and the public.

The MTC, established by Gov. Janet Napolitano's Drought Task Force, meets each month and produces:

- A monthly short-term drought status map,
- A monthly Drought Monitor Report, and

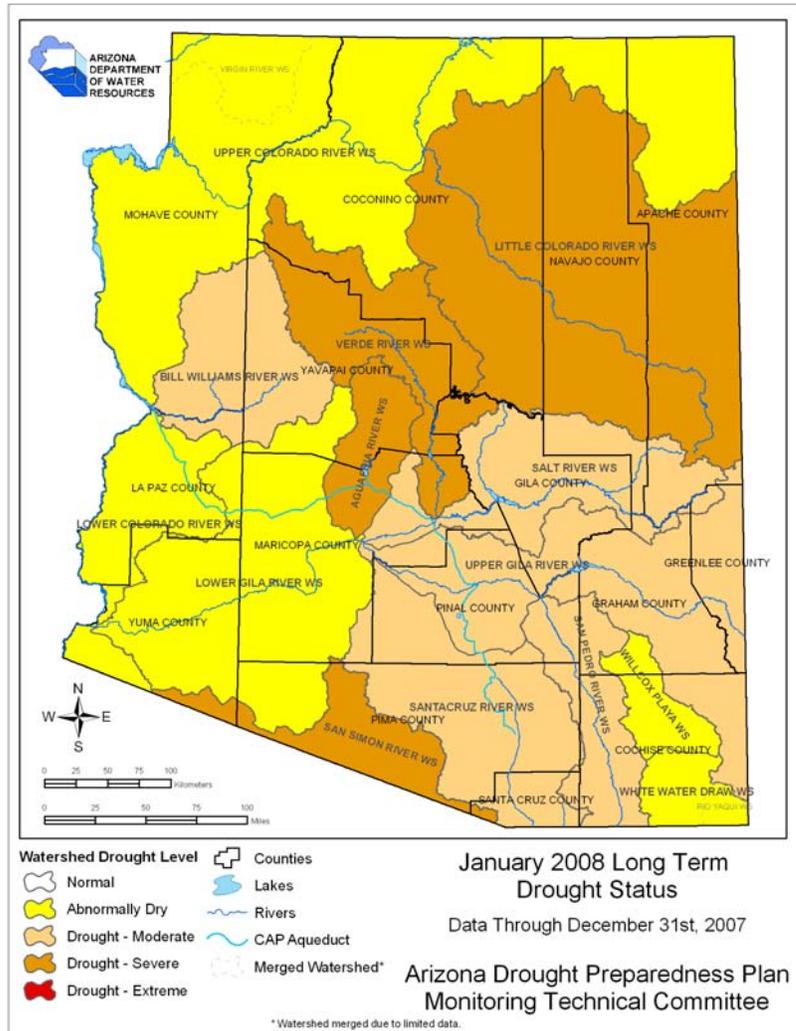
- Each quarter, a long-term drought status map.

This information is available on the Arizona Department of Water Resources web site at www.azwater.gov/dwr/drought/DroughtStatus.html .

The MTC met February 1 to discuss current conditions and forecast likely future conditions. Based on four years of data through Dec. 31, 2007, Arizona's long-term status is abnormally dry to severe throughout the state. On a quarterly basis, the MTC evaluates precipitation, streamflow, and qualitative drought impact information from various professionals and citizens across the state to determine the long-term drought status.

The current La Niña is expected to persist through the spring and consequently, the National Weather Service Climate Prediction Center continues to forecast warmer and drier than average conditions for the southwestern U.S.

A shift to warmer temperatures over the next two months may cause the snowpack to "sublimate" (the solid becomes vapor) or melt earlier than average, limiting streamflows later in the spring. The wet winter of 2007-2008 has certainly helped improve short-term drought conditions, but long-term drought continues.



The MTC will issue its next quarterly long-term drought status update in April.

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