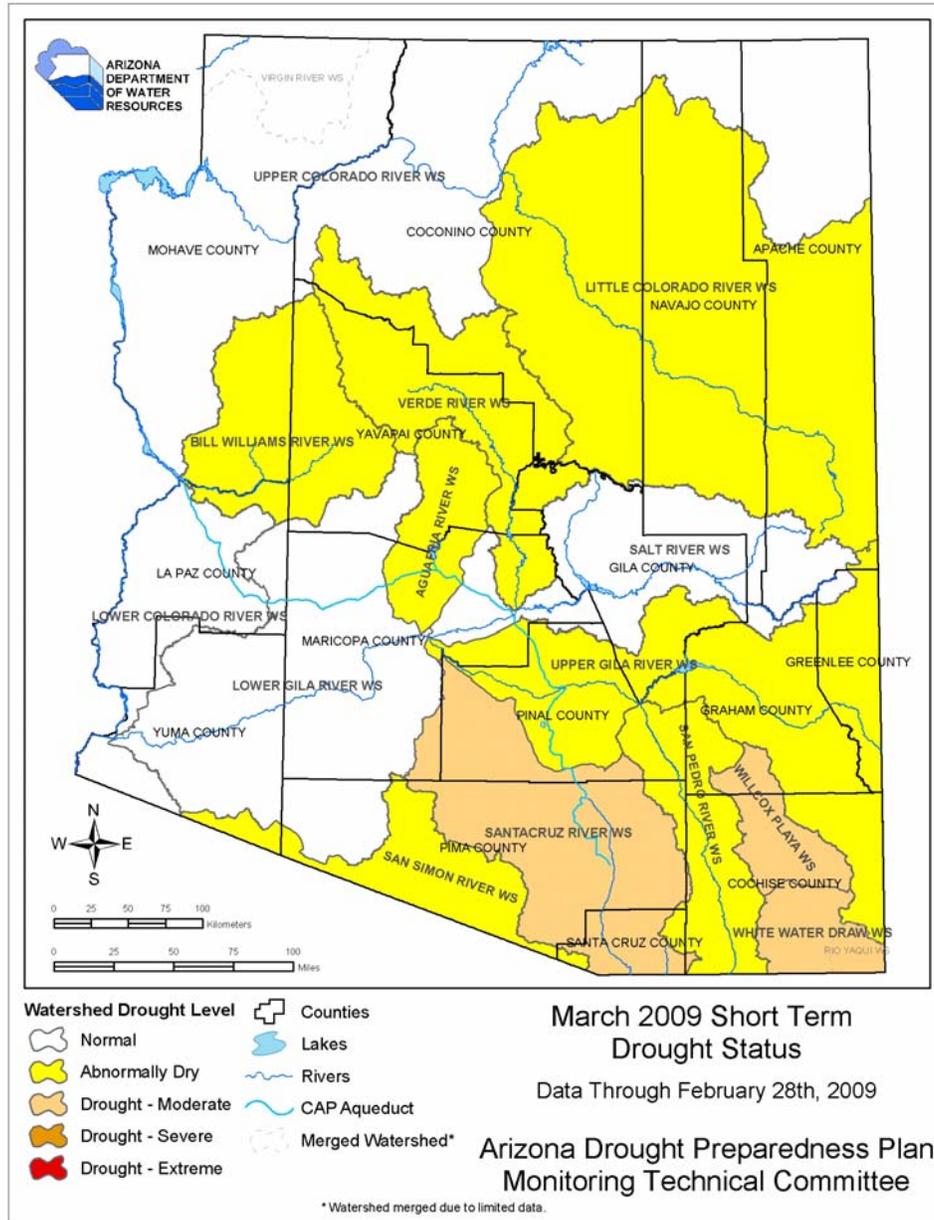


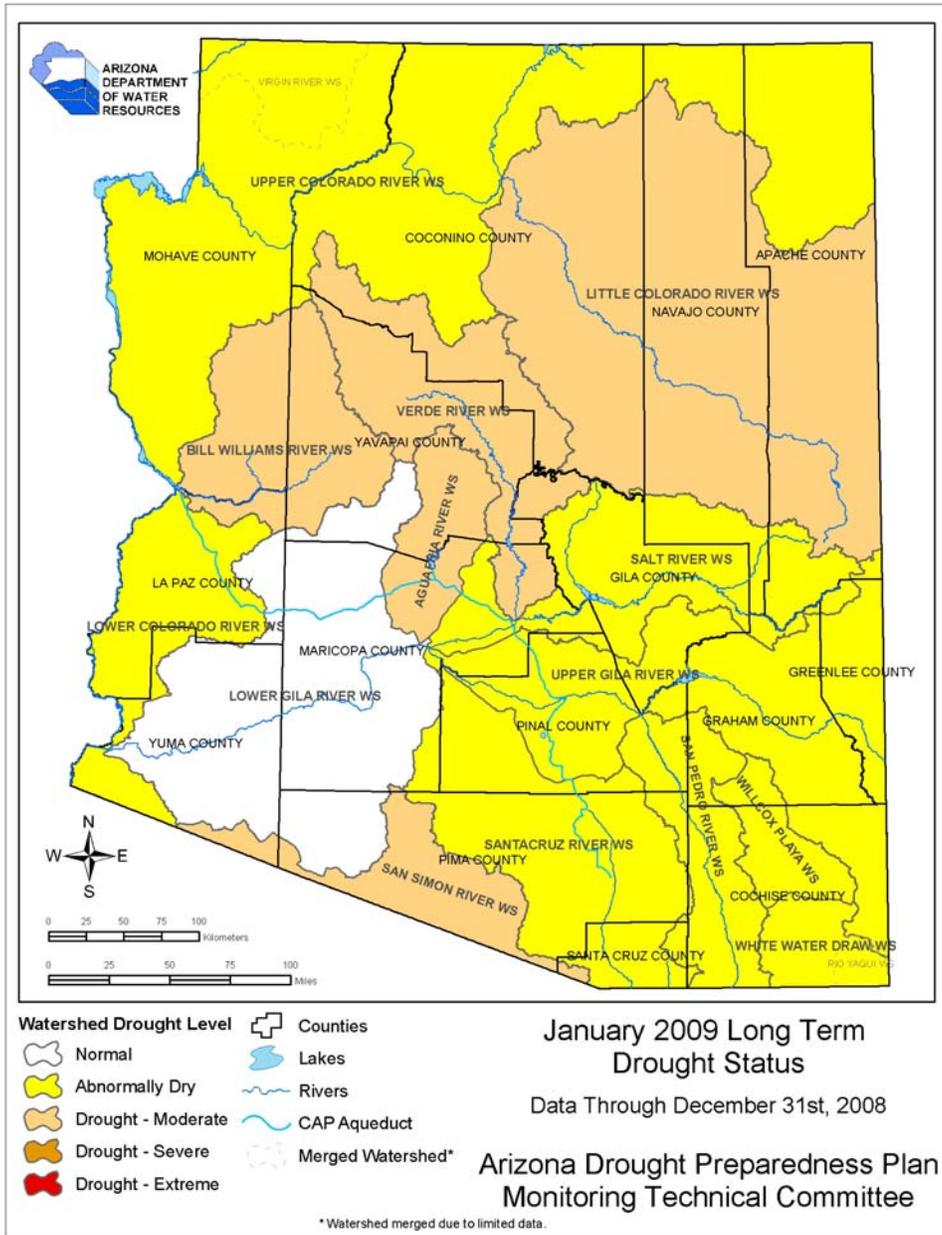
Drought Status Update

March 2009



Short-term Drought Status Update

December through February brought near average or above average precipitation to most of Arizona. However, the southeastern watersheds have been very dry for the past six months. During February, winter storms that moved across northern and central Arizona did not dip southward into southern Arizona. This has adversely impacted short term drought conditions in the Upper Gila, San Simon and Santa Cruz watersheds. The Santa Cruz watershed has worsened from abnormally dry to moderate drought, while the Upper Gila and San Simon watersheds worsened from no drought to abnormally dry. In the Upper Gila, snowpack has dropped from 91% of average on February 1st to 54% of average on March 1st. Vegetation across southern Arizona also shows more stress than at the same time last year, so even though this winter began much like last winter, it has become much drier in the southern third of the state.



Long-term Drought Status

The long-term drought status map will not be updated until April when the wet winter season is over. The map above includes data from the last four years, through December 2008.

Although November and December were very wet, the La Niña storm track finally shifted to its historic pattern, which leads to dry winter conditions in much of Arizona. Most of January was drier than average across the entire state, as was February, so this may signal a shift back to dry winters.

While the current high stream flows and full reservoirs within Arizona may seem to indicate the long-term drought is over, most of the state gets its water from the Colorado River system or groundwater. Colorado River basin reservoirs are still near 50% of capacity, and groundwater basins are generally slow to recharge, unless there is an exceptionally wet season, such as during 1982-1983.