

Method for Determining Drought Categories in Arizona

Beginning in January 2011, the State Drought Monitoring Technical Committee changed the percentiles of precipitation and streamflow represented by the drought categories from beginning below the 40th percentile to beginning below the 30th percentile. Since Arizona is an arid state, and precipitation and streamflow frequently fall between the 30th and 40th percentiles, beginning drought in that range caused some watersheds to bounce in and out of drought categories, while conditions on the ground may not have supported the drought condition. Old and new ranges are shown in the table below:

Drought Category	Old percentile range	New percentile range
DO - Abnormally Dry	25-40	21-30
D1 - Moderate Drought	16-25	11-20
D2 – Severe Drought	6-15	6-10
D3 – Extreme Drought	1-5	2-5
D4 – Exceptional Drought	NA	1-2

In addition to better reflecting actual drought rather than our normal precipitation variability, maps will be more consistent with the U.S. Drought Monitor maps that also use these percentile ranges.