

Drought Status Update

A series of cold winter storms that passed through Arizona in December 2011 brought much needed drought relief to southern Arizona. Enough precipitation fell to cause a one category improvement to the drought-stricken southern counties. While the rains came a bit late for setting winter grasses, they did help to increase water levels in stock ponds and improve soil moisture conditions.

At this time there are no further improvements anticipated, as the circulation has shifted to a dry pattern over the southwest. This La Niña is weak to moderate, and so far has not proven to be a repeat of last year's moderate to strong La Niña across most of the nation.

Currently, the snowpack in the mountains of central and southern Arizona is well above normal, however, there are deficiencies from the San Francisco Peaks to the north (including the Chuskas). For the remainder of the winter, below-normal snowpack conditions are expected. Significant snowfall has been absent across the Sierra Nevada, Wasatch and Rocky Mountains, so the winter moisture source for the Colorado River is deficient at this time. The outlook in Arizona continues to favor increased chances of below-average precipitation and slightly increased chances of above-average temperatures through the middle of the spring season.

The long-term drought status will be updated at the end of January when we have received all the December precipitation data.

Summary produced by the State Drought Monitoring Technical Committee - January 6, 2012.

