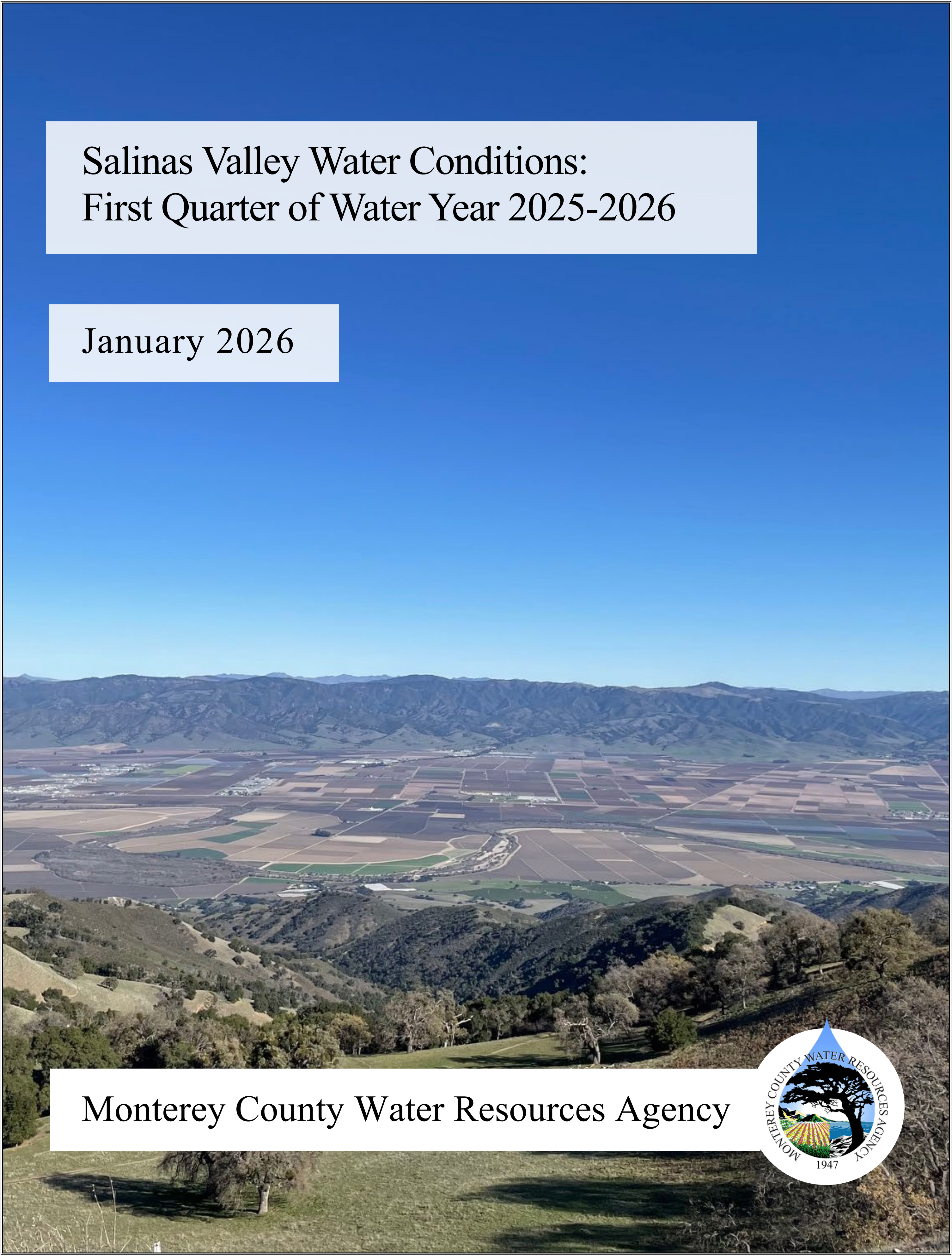
Salinas Valley Water Conditions: First Quarter of Water Year 2025-2026

January 2026



Monterey County Water Resources Agency

MONTEREY COUNTY WATER RESOURCES AGENCY

Salinas Valley Water Conditions
Quarterly Update for First Quarter of Water Year 2025-2026
January 2026

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Introduction

This report covers the first quarter of Water Year 2025-2026 (WY26), consisting of October through December 2025. It provides a brief overview and discussion of hydrologic conditions in the Salinas Valley including precipitation, reservoir storage, streamflow, and groundwater level trends (Figure 1).

Data for the first quarter of WY26 indicate above normal rainfall based on precipitation totals for the quarter. Storage is lower in both Nacimiento Reservoir and San Antonio Reservoir compared to December 2024. Over the first quarter of WY26, groundwater elevations increased across all subareas and aquifers, which aligns with typical seasonal trends.

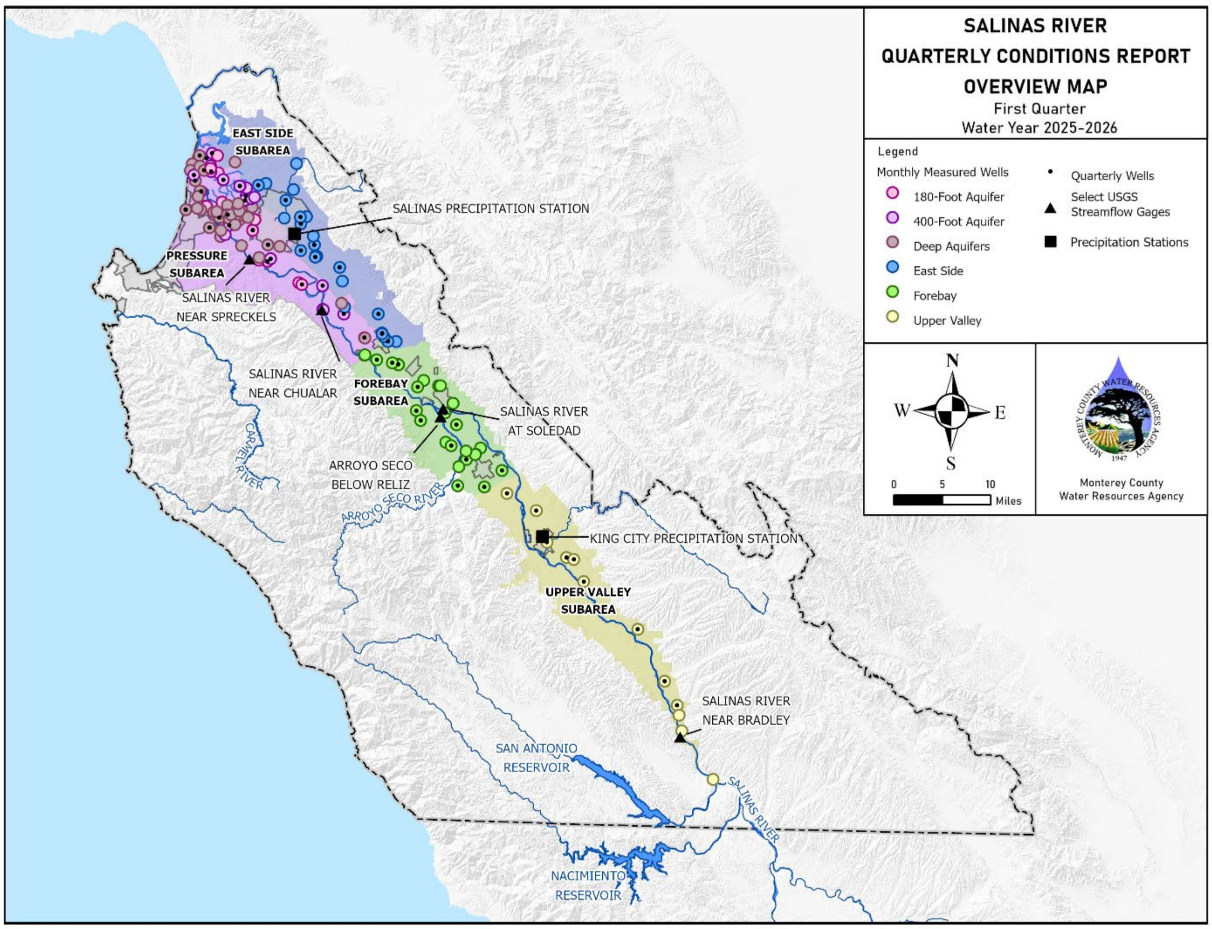
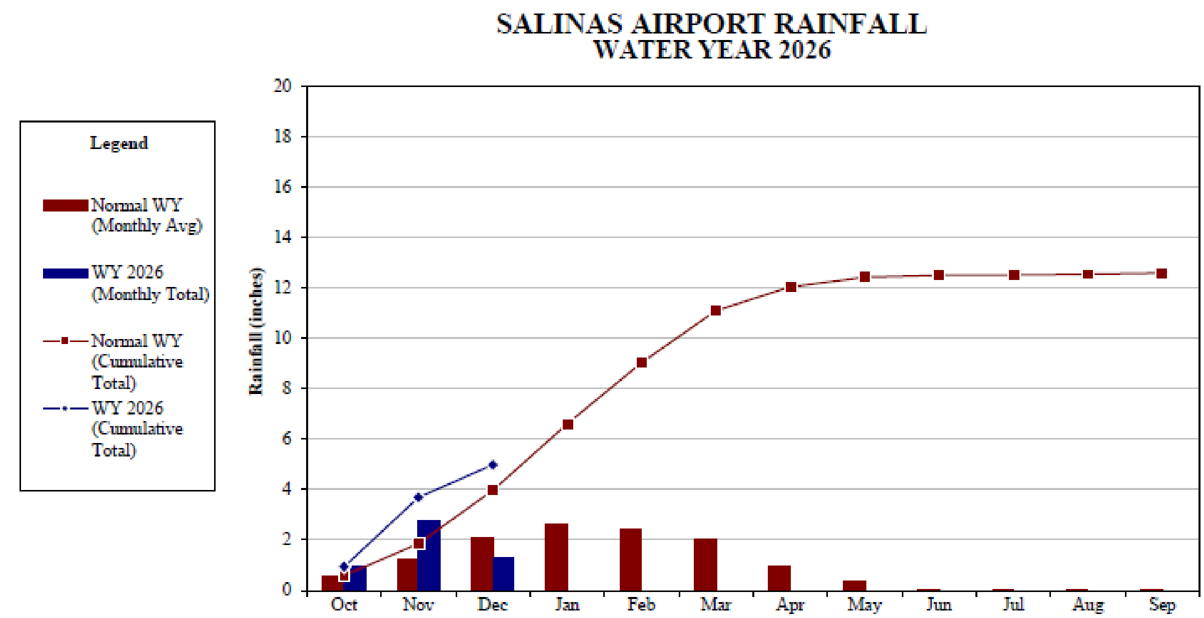


Figure 1: Geographic extent of the area covered by this report and supporting data sources.

Precipitation

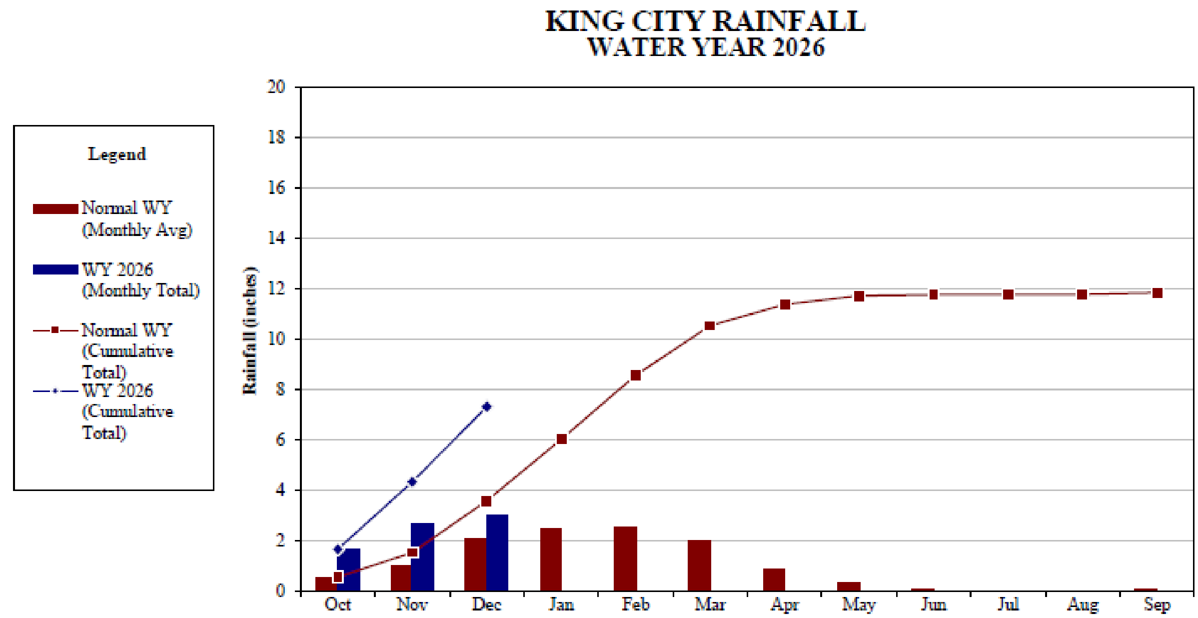
Preliminary National Weather Service rainfall data indicates that the first quarter of WY26 brought above normal rainfall to both Salinas and King City. Totals for the quarter were 4.99 inches at the Salinas Airport (125% of normal rainfall of 3.98 inches for the quarter) and 7.30 inches in King City (204% of normal rainfall of 3.57 inches for the quarter).

Figure 2 and Figure 3 show monthly and cumulative precipitation data for the current water year and for a “normal” water year, based on long-term monthly precipitation averages, for the Salinas Airport and King City sites, respectively. Included below each graph is a table showing the numeric values for precipitation as well as percent of “normal” precipitation. For the purposes of these graphs, a “normal” water year is the average precipitation over the most recent 30-year period ending in a decade. Currently, the period from 1991 to 2020 is used for this calculation.



	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
Monthly Rainfall (WY 2026)	0.95	2.75	1.29									
Monthly Rainfall (Normal WY)	0.60	1.26	2.12	2.63	2.42	2.06	0.95	0.38	0.07	0.01	0.03	0.05
Percent of Normal for Month	158%	218%	61%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Cumulative Rainfall (WY 2026)	0.95	3.70	4.99									
Cumulative Rainfall (Normal WY)	0.60	1.86	3.98	6.61	9.03	11.09	12.04	12.42	12.49	12.50	12.53	12.58
Percent of Cumulative Normal	158%	199%	125%									

Figure 2: Salinas Airport Rainfall for Water Year 2026



	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
Monthly Rainfall (WY 2026)	1.65	2.67	2.98									
Monthly Rainfall (Normal WY)	0.54	0.98	2.05	2.44	2.54	1.98	0.83	0.35	0.04	0.01	0.01	0.06
Percent of Normal for Month	306%	272%	145%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Cumulative Rainfall (WY 2026)	1.65	4.32	7.30									
Cumulative Rainfall (Normal WY)	0.54	1.52	3.57	6.01	8.55	10.53	11.36	11.71	11.75	11.76	11.77	11.83
Percent of Cumulative Normal	306%	284%	204%									

Figure 3: King City Rainfall for Water Year 2026

Reservoir Storage

At the end of the first quarter of WY26, storage at Nacimiento Reservoir on December 31, 2025 was 145,205 acre-feet, which is 54,543 acre-feet lower than on the same day in December 2024. Storage in San Antonio Reservoir on December 31, 2025 was 171,128 acre-feet, which is 62,522 acre-feet lower than on the same day in December 2024.

Reservoir	**December 31, 2025 (WY26) Storage in acre-feet**	**December 31, 2024 (WY25) Storage in acre-feet**	**Difference in acre-feet**
Nacimiento	145,205	199,748	-54,543
San Antonio	171,128	233,650	-62,522

Graphs showing daily reservoir storage for the last five water years, along with 30-year average daily storage for comparison, are included as Figure 4 and Figure 5.

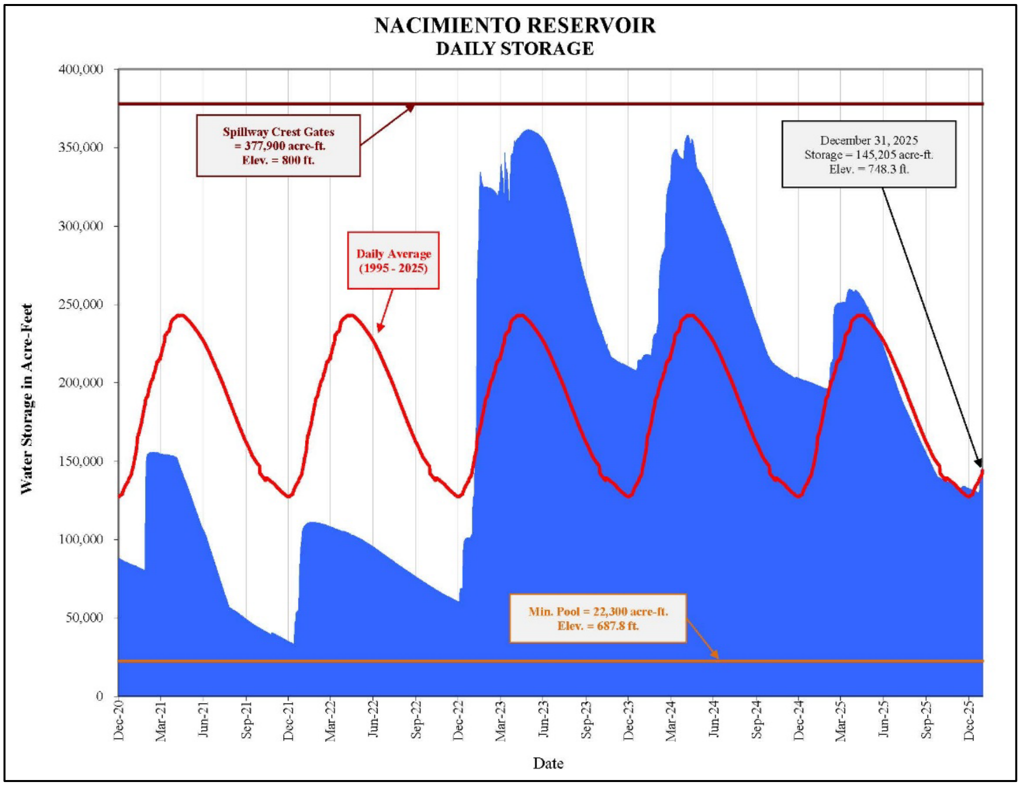


Figure 4: Nacimiento Reservoir Storage for Last Five Years

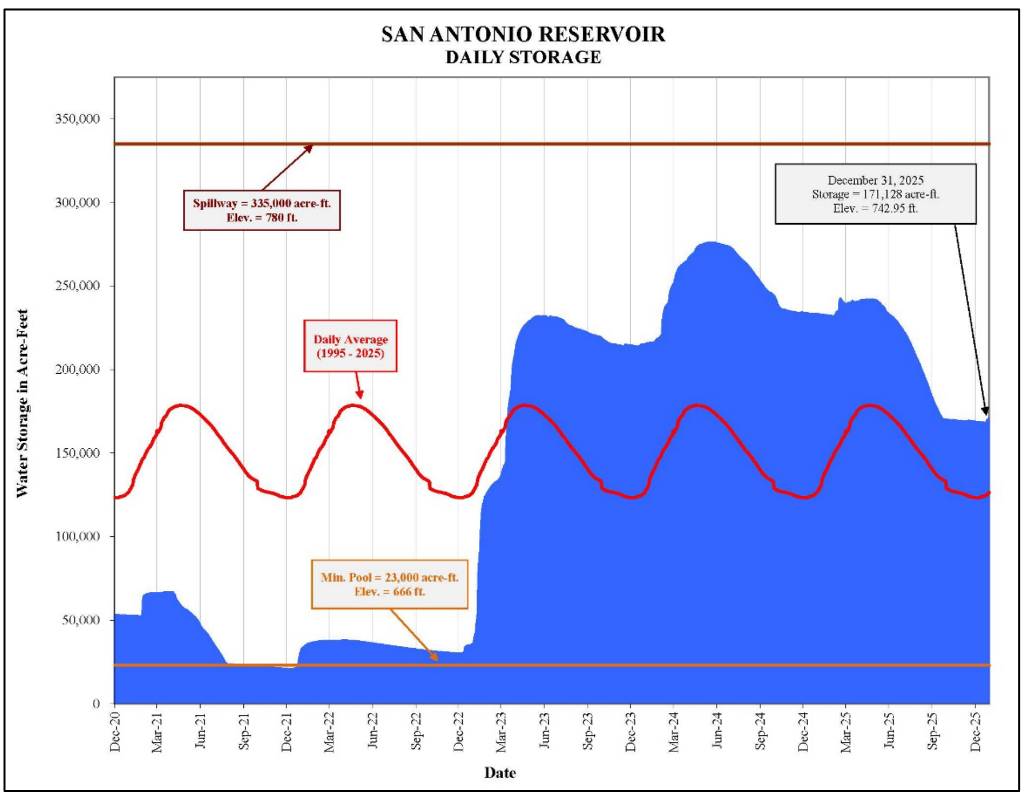


Figure 5: San Antonio Reservoir Storage for Last Five Years

Streamflow

The Salinas River is predominately a losing stream, meaning streamflow moves from the streambed into the underlying aquifers. The U.S. Geological Survey maintains several streamflow gages throughout the Salinas River watershed that continuously measure discharge or flow in the river (Figure 1). Figure 6 shows mean daily flow, in cubic feet per second, from select gages on the Salinas River and Arroyo Seco for the last five years (WY 2022-2026) and the current water year (WY26).

Streamflow recorded during the first quarter of WY26 can be attributed to a combination of managed reservoir releases and a rain event. Flows from October to mid-December are primarily due to minimum releases from the Nacimiento and San Antonio reservoirs to support habitat downstream of the dams. The peak in streamflow observed in late December is the result of a rain event which prompted increases across all pictured stream gages.

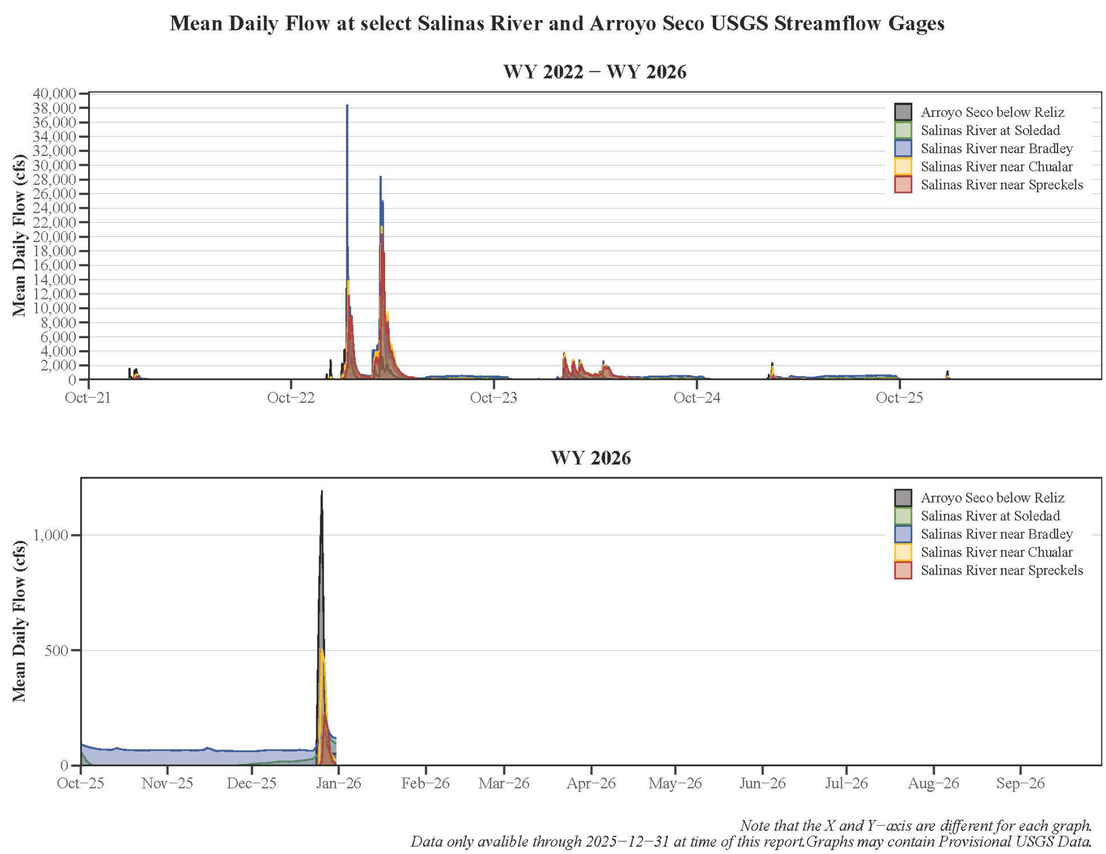


Figure 6: Mean Daily Flow at Selected Stream Gages

Groundwater Elevations

Groundwater elevation data provides insight into how an aquifer or subarea responds to hydrologic conditions over time, such as changes in precipitation and reservoir releases. A one-year comparison can show the short-term effects of a single wet or dry year while a long-term comparison will help provide information on general trends in groundwater storage and demonstrate effects that occur on a longer time scale as surface hydrology interacts with the underlying geology. Subareas or aquifers will respond differently to these hydrologic conditions. For example, groundwater elevations in shallower aquifers may respond more quickly to a wet season while aquifers that are confined, deeper, or more depleted may take longer to show a response to hydrologic conditions. Changes in groundwater elevations within a confined aquifer will also occur in response to groundwater pumping demands.

More than 130 wells are measured monthly by hand throughout the Salinas Valley to monitor seasonal groundwater elevation fluctuations. Additionally, continuous groundwater data are collected from pressure transducers installed in approximately 40 monitoring wells on a quarterly basis. Data from 65 of these wells are used in the preparation of this report (Figure 1). The measurements are grouped by hydrologic subarea, averaged, and a single groundwater elevation value for the wells within each subarea is graphed to compare current groundwater elevations (WY26) with past conditions. Graphs for individual subareas, showing the current year's groundwater elevation conditions, last year's conditions (WY25), and the range between wet conditions (WY99) and dry conditions (WY15) are found in the following sections. No groundwater elevation data are available for July 2025 due to funding constraints during that period that precluded data collection from occurring.

For comparison to long term conditions, a curve showing monthly groundwater elevations averaged over the most recent 30 years (WY96-WY25) is included on each graph. The Deep Aquifers graph (Figure 9) does not include a 30-year average because there is not yet a 30-year period of record to make that comparison. Table 1 provides a summary of the groundwater elevation trends for December 2025 in units of feet relative to mean sea level (ft-msl), with additional detail provided on Figures 7-12.

Table 1: Groundwater Elevation Trends Summary for December 2025

Subarea/Aquifer	December 2025 Groundwater Elevation (ft-msl)	Change during First Quarter	One Year Change	Difference from 30-Year Average Elevation
180-Foot Aquifer	13 ft-msl	Up 10 feet	Up <1 foot	Up 3 feet
400-Foot Aquifer	6 ft-msl	Up 12 feet	Up <1 foot	Up 4 feet
Deep Aquifers	-22 ft-msl	Up 15 feet	Up 2 feet	Not applicable
East Side	3 ft-msl	Up 26 feet	Down <1 foot	Up 1 foot
Forebay	163 ft-msl	Up 4 feet	Down 2 feet	Up 4 feet
Upper Valley	319 ft-msl	Up 3 feet	Up <1 foot	Up 4 feet

180-Foot Aquifer

Over the last quarter, groundwater elevations increased ten feet in the 180-Foot Aquifer (Figure 7). Groundwater elevations for December 2025 are up less than one foot compared to December 2024 and are up three feet from the 30-year average.

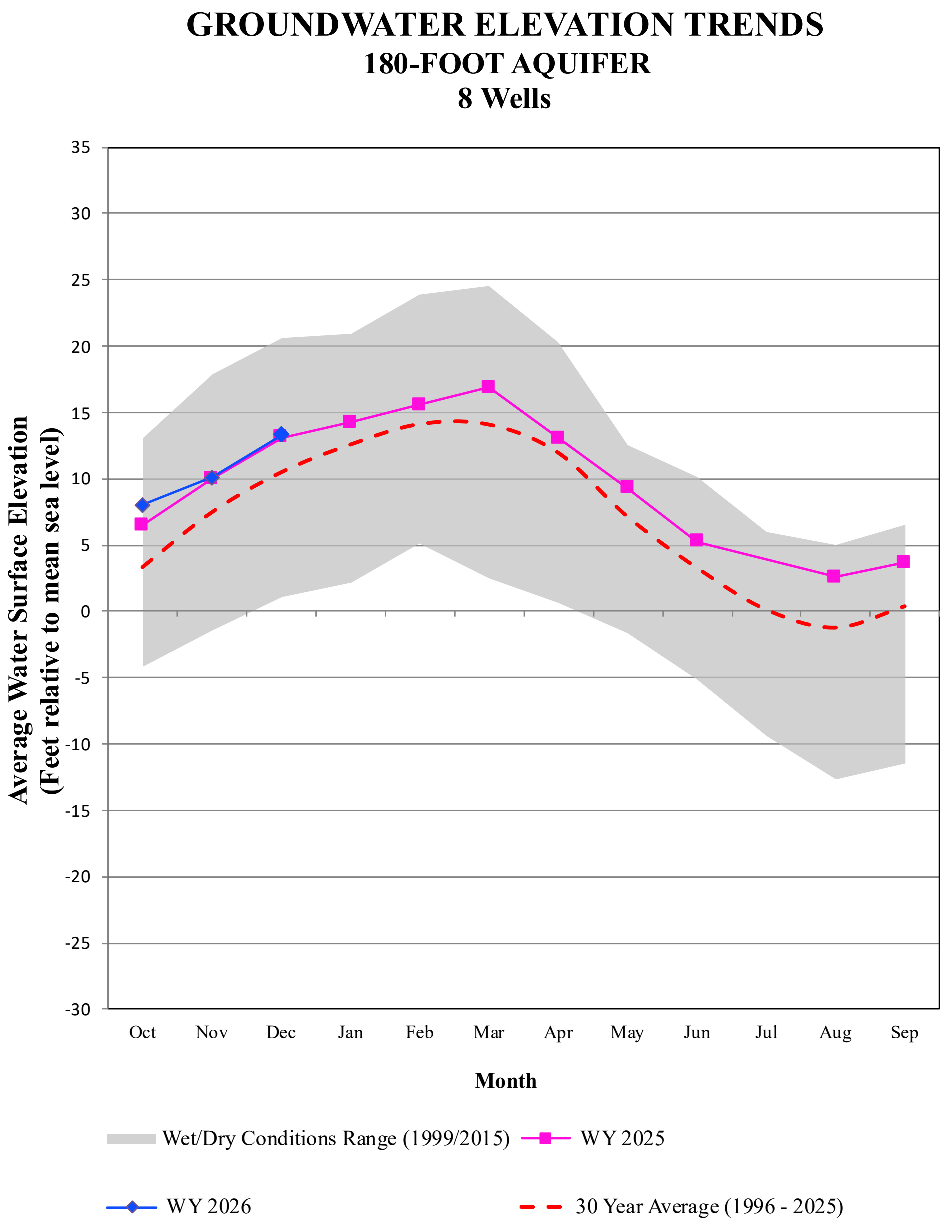


Figure 7: Groundwater Elevation Trends for the 180-Foot Aquifer

400-Foot Aquifer

Groundwater elevations in the 400-Foot Aquifer increased twelve feet over the past quarter (Figure 8). Groundwater elevations for December 2025 are up less than one foot compared to December 2024 and up four feet from the 30-year average.

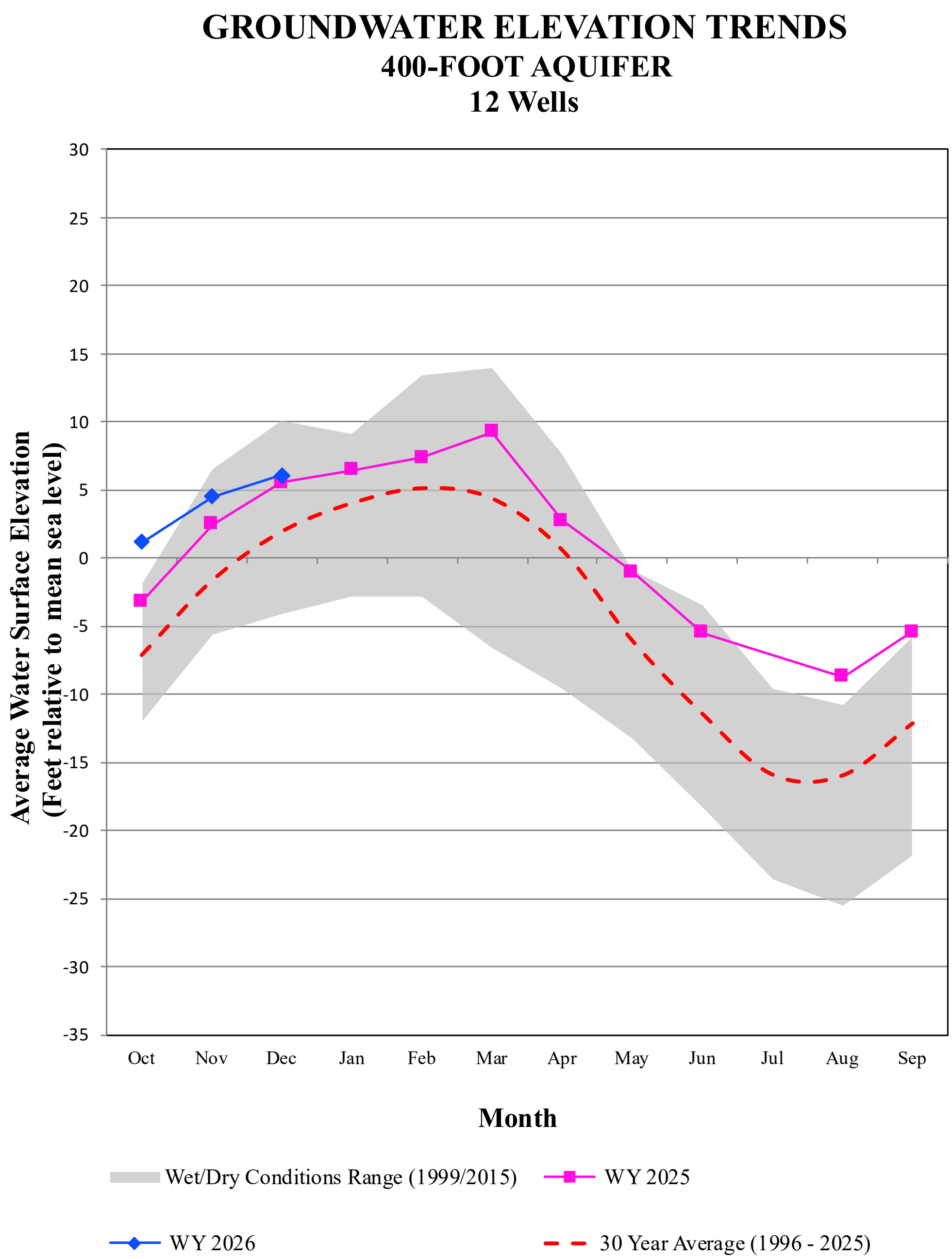


Figure 8: Groundwater Elevation Trends in the 400-Foot Aquifer

Deep Aquifers

Over the last quarter, groundwater elevations increased fifteen feet in the Deep Aquifers, which is consistent with previous observations of seasonal recovery corresponding with a decrease in pumping (Figure 9). Groundwater elevations for December 2025 are up two feet compared to December 2024. Given the shorter period of record available for some of the wells monitored in the Deep Aquifers, a 30-year average cannot yet be calculated. In lieu of a long-term average, Figure 9 includes a 30-year time series graph with groundwater elevation data from the eleven Deep Aquifers wells that are utilized for this report to show the seasonal and long-term trends in these wells.

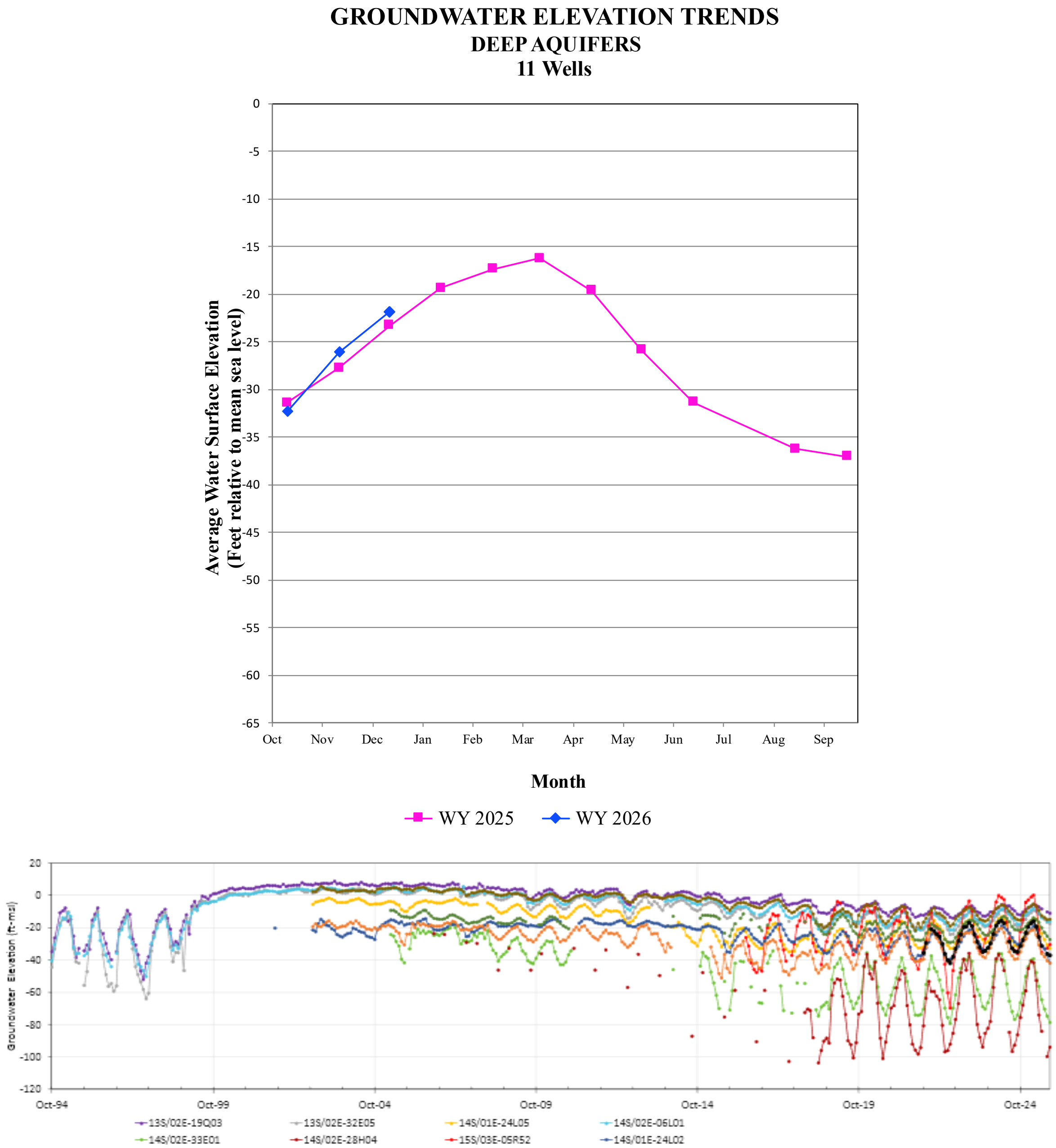


Figure 9: Groundwater Elevation Data from the Deep Aquifers Quarterly Report Wells

East Side Subarea

East Side groundwater elevations increased twenty-six feet over the last quarter (Figure 10). Groundwater elevations for December 2025 are down less than one foot from December 2024 elevations and up one foot from the 30-year average.

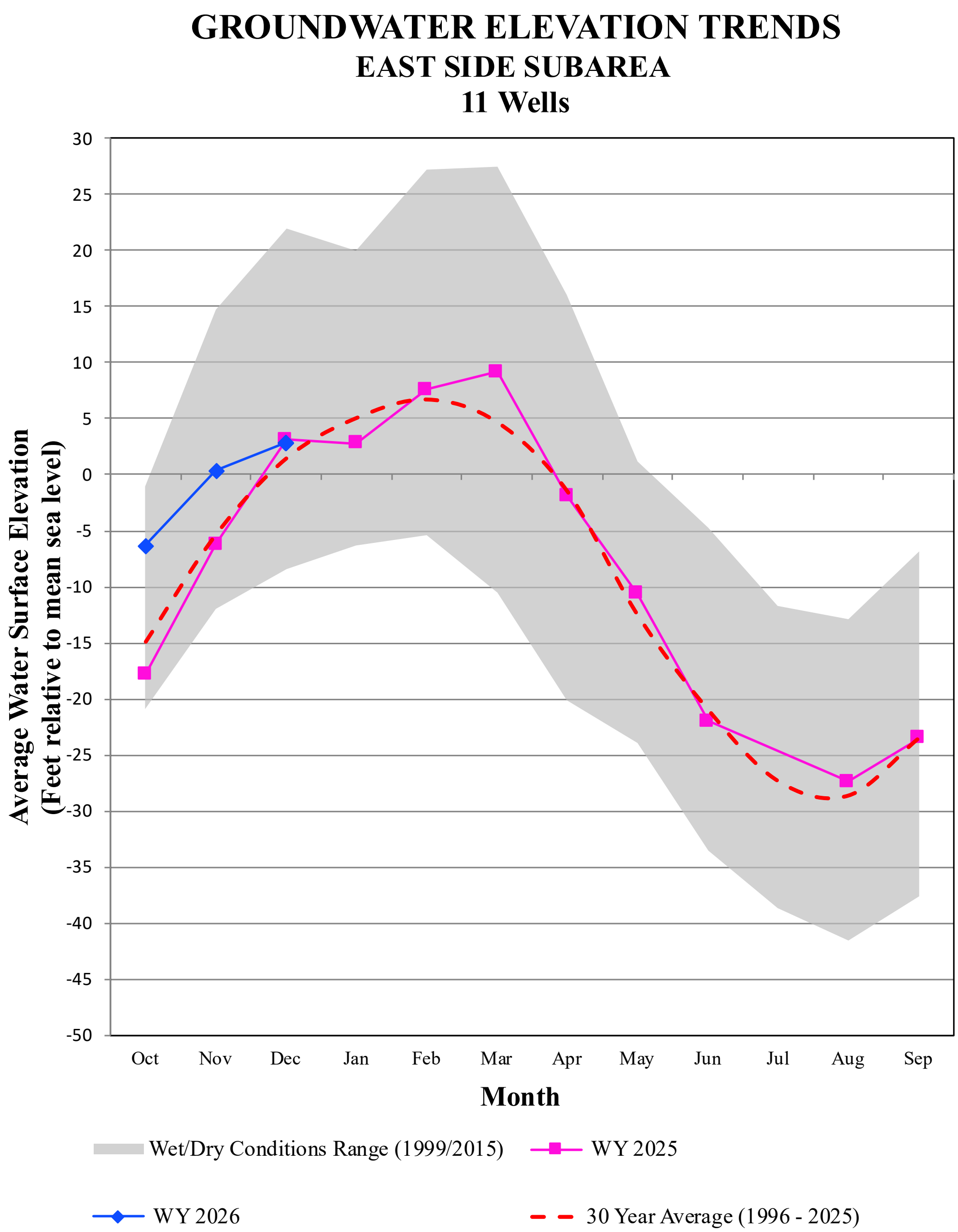


Figure 10: Groundwater Elevation Trends in the East Side Subarea

Forebay Subarea

Over the last quarter, groundwater elevations have increased four feet in the Forebay (Figure 11). Groundwater elevations for December 2025 are down two feet from December 2024 elevations and are up four feet from the 30-year average.

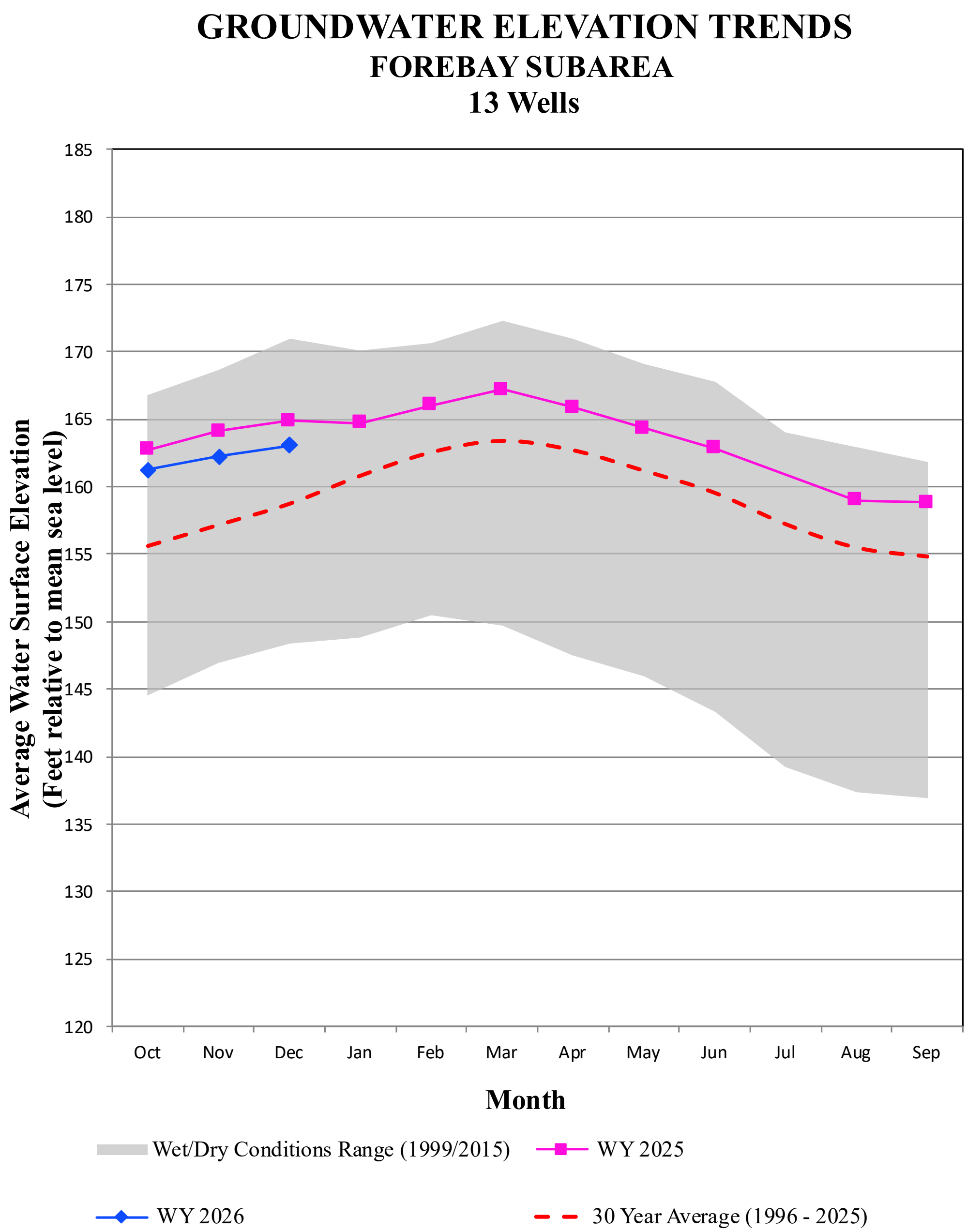


Figure 11: Groundwater Elevation Trends in the Forebay Subarea

Upper Valley Subarea

Upper Valley groundwater elevations have increased by three feet over the last quarter (Figure 12). Groundwater elevations for December 2025 are up less than one foot from December 2024 elevations and up four feet from the 30-year average.

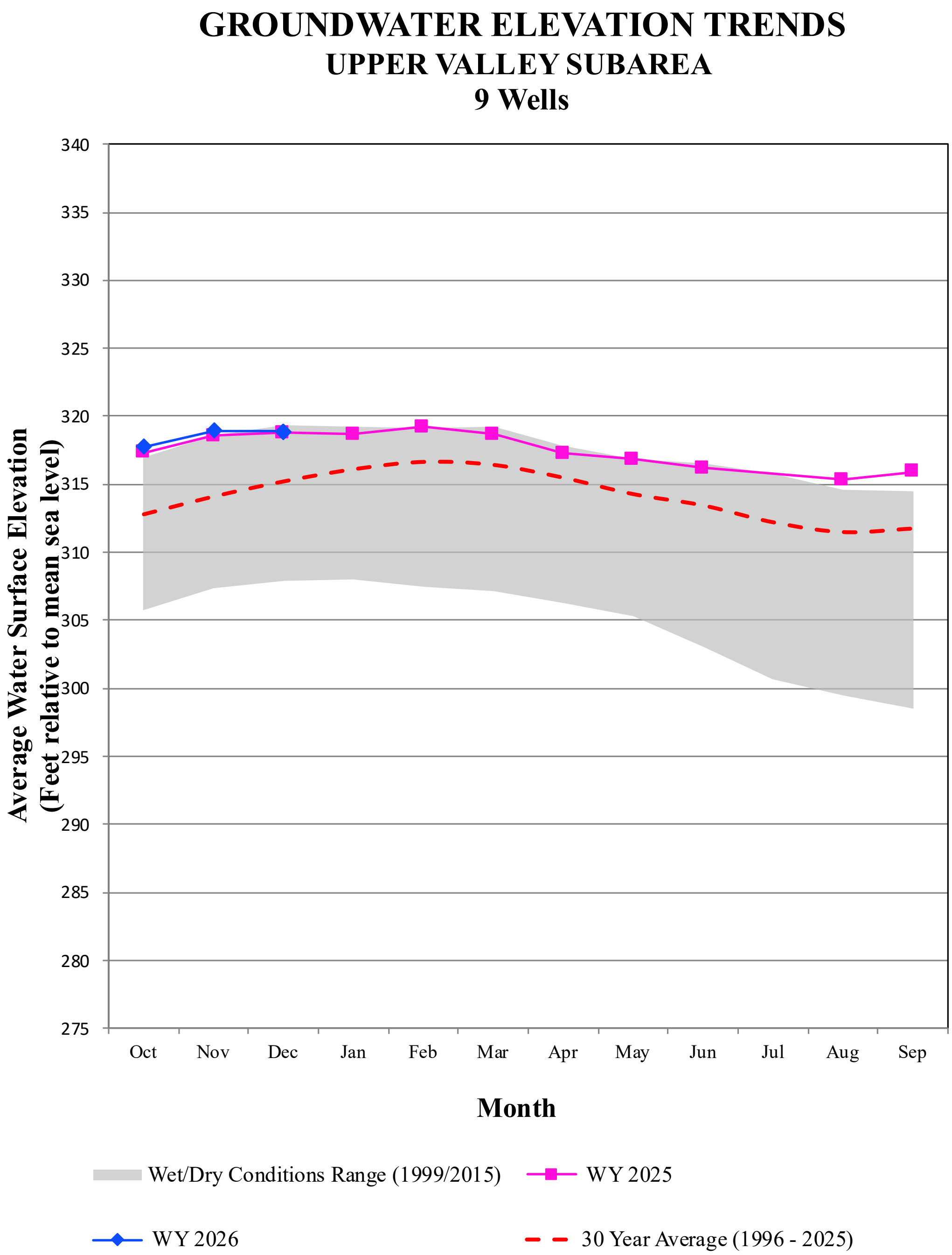


Figure 12: Groundwater Elevation Trends in the Upper Valley Subarea

Figure 13 shows the spatial distribution of changes in groundwater elevations from December 2024 to December 2025. Over the last Water Year, most of the monitored wells in all hydrologic subareas experienced no significant change in groundwater elevation, meaning that fluctuations were within five feet of the prior year's value. However, some sporadic variability in groundwater elevation trends was observed, with one well in the 180-Foot aquifer, East Side subarea, and Forebay subarea each exhibiting a decrease between 5 and 15 feet. One well in the Deep Aquifers saw an increase between 5 and 15 feet compared to the prior year.

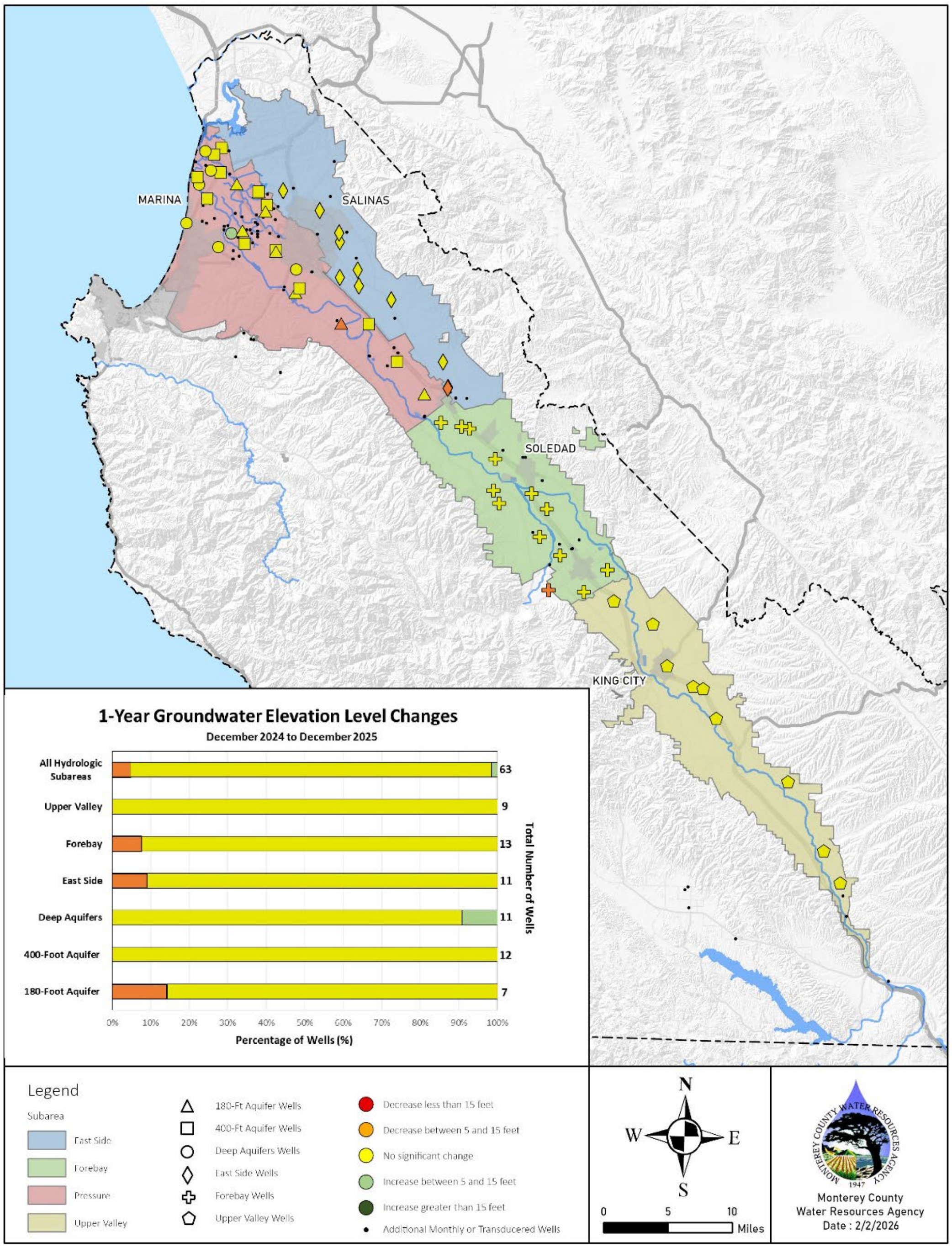


Figure 13: One-Year Groundwater Elevation Changes

Depth to Groundwater vs Groundwater Elevation

Most of the figures in this report use groundwater elevation as a means of describing where groundwater was observed in a well. Using groundwater elevation to describe and analyze the regional groundwater surface allows for comparison of data to determine things such as direction of groundwater flow and groundwater gradient while removing well-to-well variability introduced by topography and well construction design. By measuring the depth to groundwater from a known and consistently used elevation at each well, often referred to as a reference point, it is possible to compare data between wells or to other relevant metrics, such as sea level. Groundwater elevation is calculated from the measured depth to groundwater using the reference point elevation and ground surface elevation. Figure 14 shows the relationship between the reference point and measured depth to water, along with how groundwater elevation is calculated.

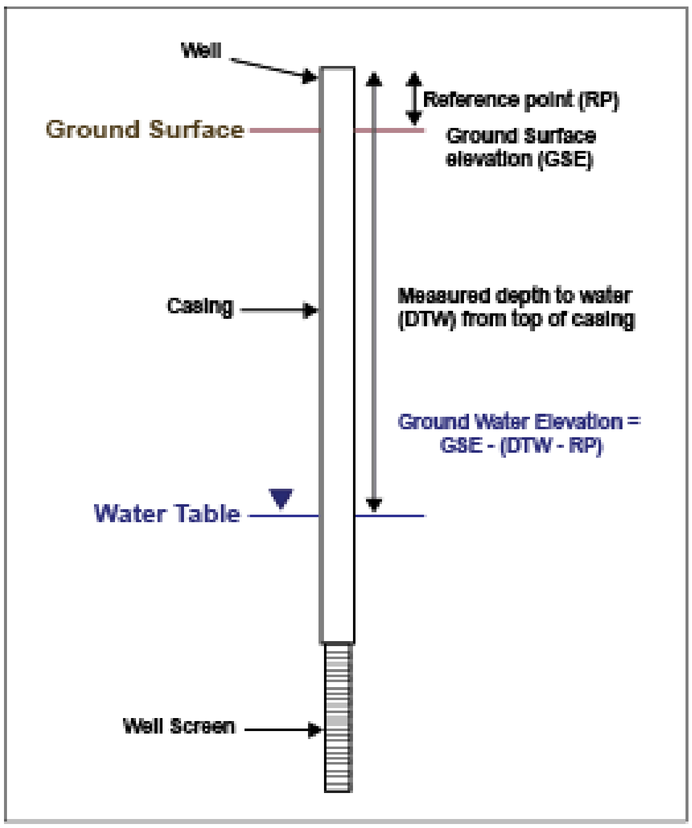


Figure 14: Relationship between Depth to Groundwater and Groundwater Elevation.

Figure 15 shows the depth to groundwater that was measured in each of the wells, within a given subarea, that is used for developing this quarterly water conditions report. As shown on Figure 15, there is a range of depth to water values within each subarea with some, like the East Side Subarea, having a wider range of measured values than others, like the 180-Foot Aquifer. The black line on each of the subarea graphs in Figure 15 is the average depth to groundwater for each set of wells. This value is converted from “depth to groundwater” to “groundwater elevation” by accounting for the reference point and elevation of the ground surface and graphed as the blue "WY 2026" line on each of the preceding subarea-specific graphs (Figures 7-12). The range in depth to water values is the result of many factors (e.g., variations in topography, thickness of the aquifer, and the length of screen in the well) and illustrates the reason why groundwater elevation is the standard method for evaluating the groundwater system on a regional scale. However, the depth-to-water data have been included with this report as a means of demonstrating the methodology behind the groundwater elevation data that are used throughout the rest of the document.

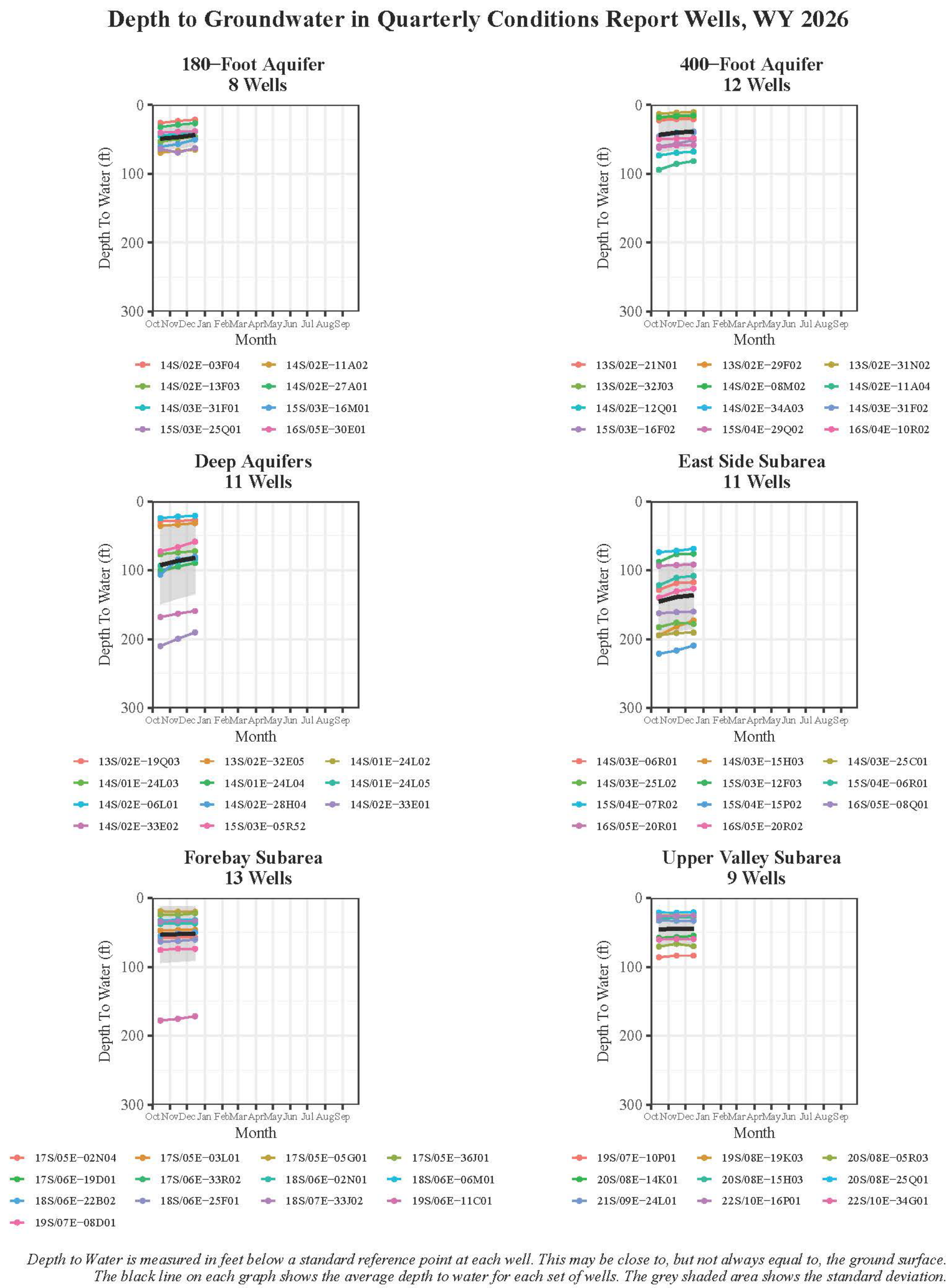


Figure 15: Depth to Groundwater in Wells Used for Quarterly Conditions Report, WY 2026