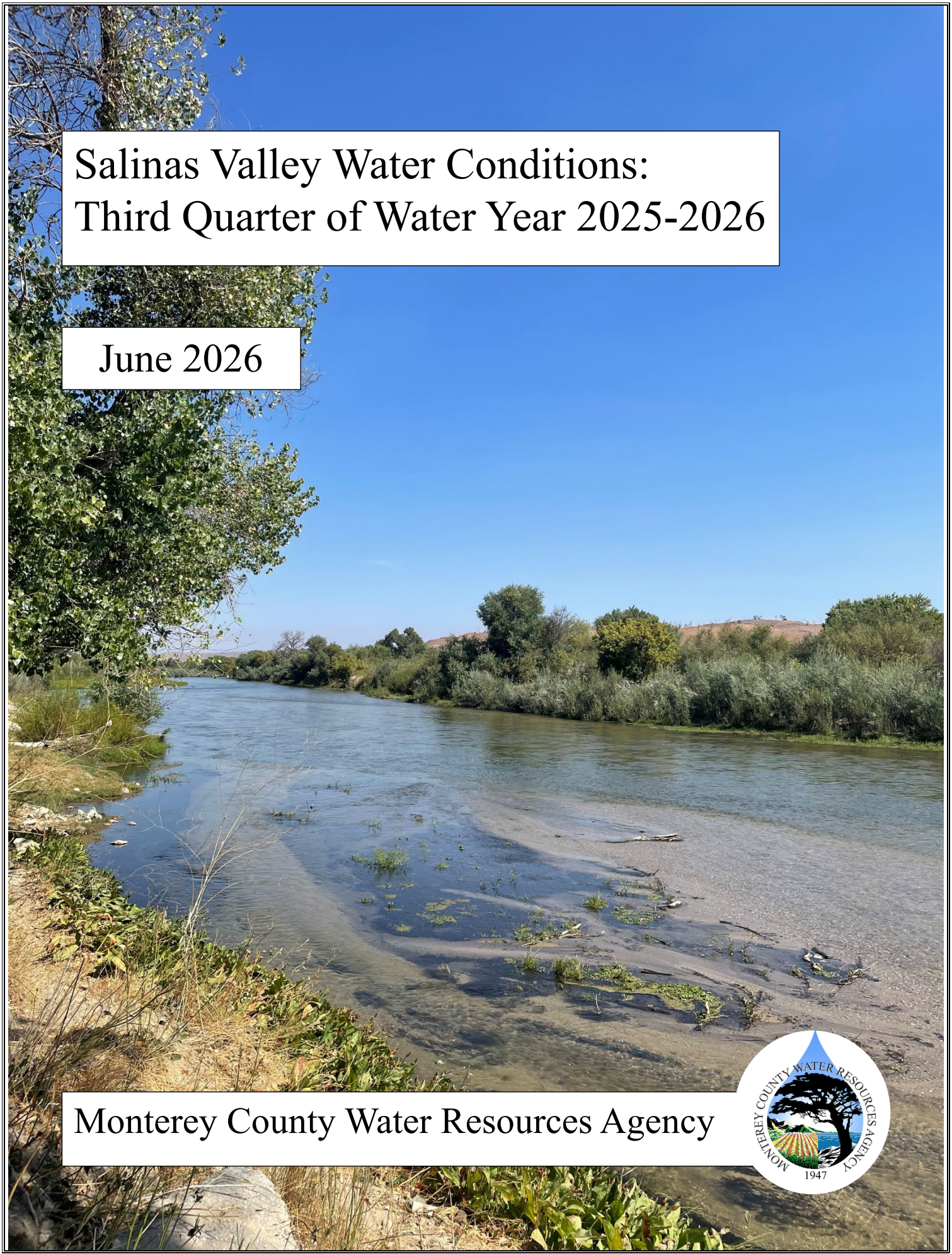
Salinas Valley Water Conditions: Third Quarter of Water Year 2025-2026

June 2026



Monterey County Water Resources Agency

MONTEREY COUNTY WATER RESOURCES AGENCY

Salinas Valley Water Conditions
Third Quarter of Water Year 2025-2026
July 2026

Prepared by Rocio Bravo, Guillermo Diaz Moreno and Amy Woodrow

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Overview

This report covers the third quarter of Water Year 2025-2026 (WY26), consisting of April through June 2026. 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 third quarter of WY26 indicates above normal rainfall based on the precipitation totals for the quarter. Storage is slightly higher in Nacimiento Reservoir and lower in San Antonio Reservoir Compared to June 2025. Over the third quarter of WY26, groundwater elevations generally decreased across all subareas and aquifers, which aligns with typical seasonal trends.

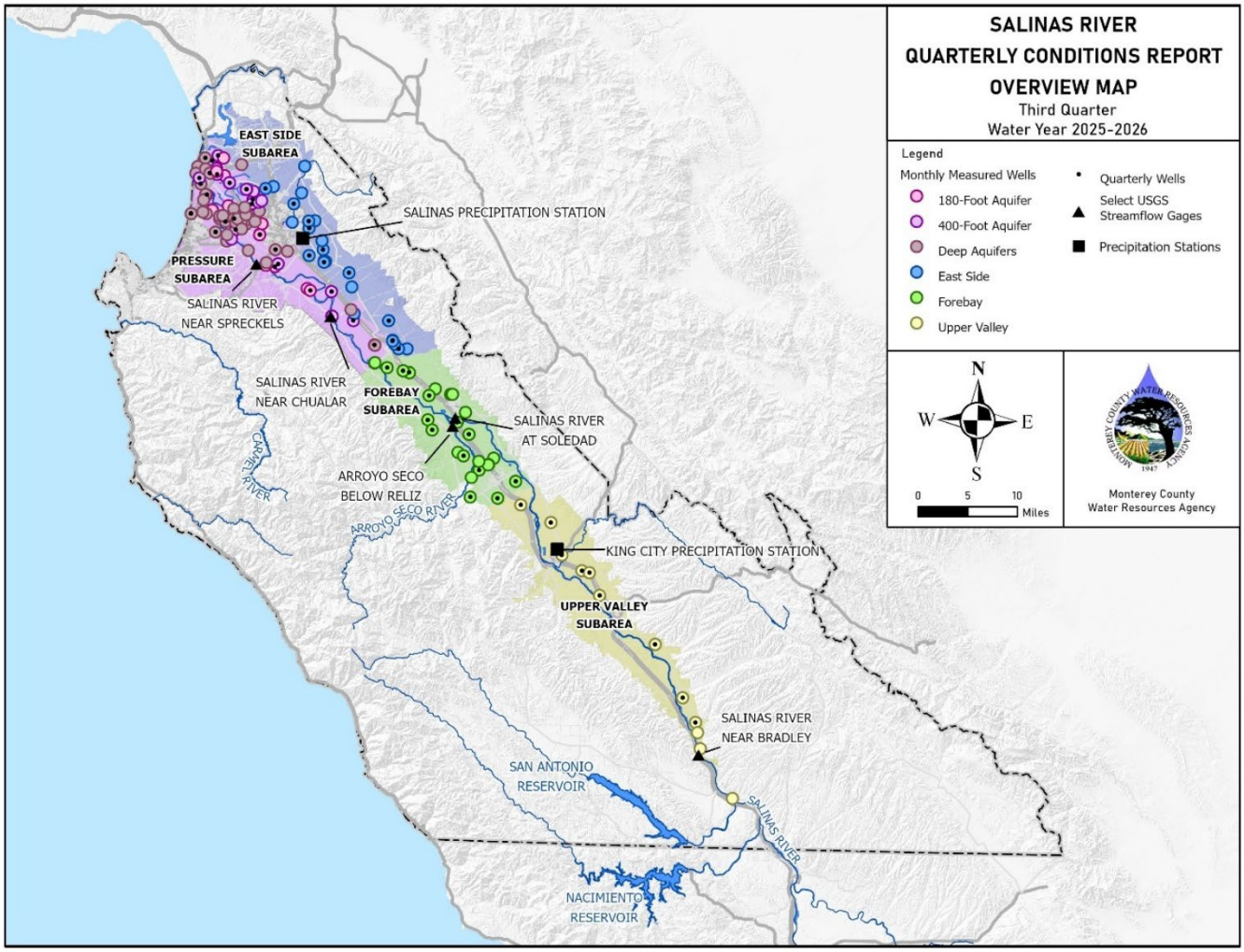
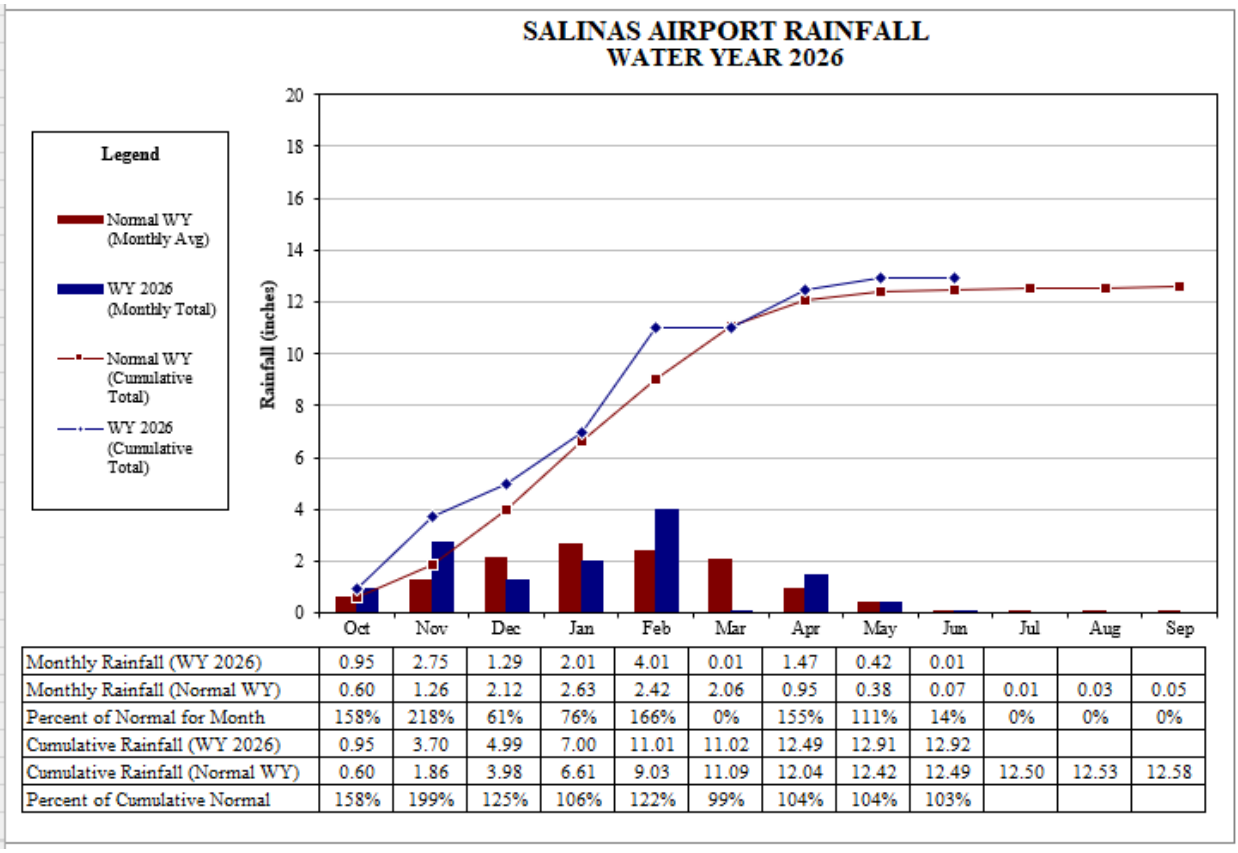


Figure 1 Geographic extent of the area covered by this report and supporting data sources.

Precipitation

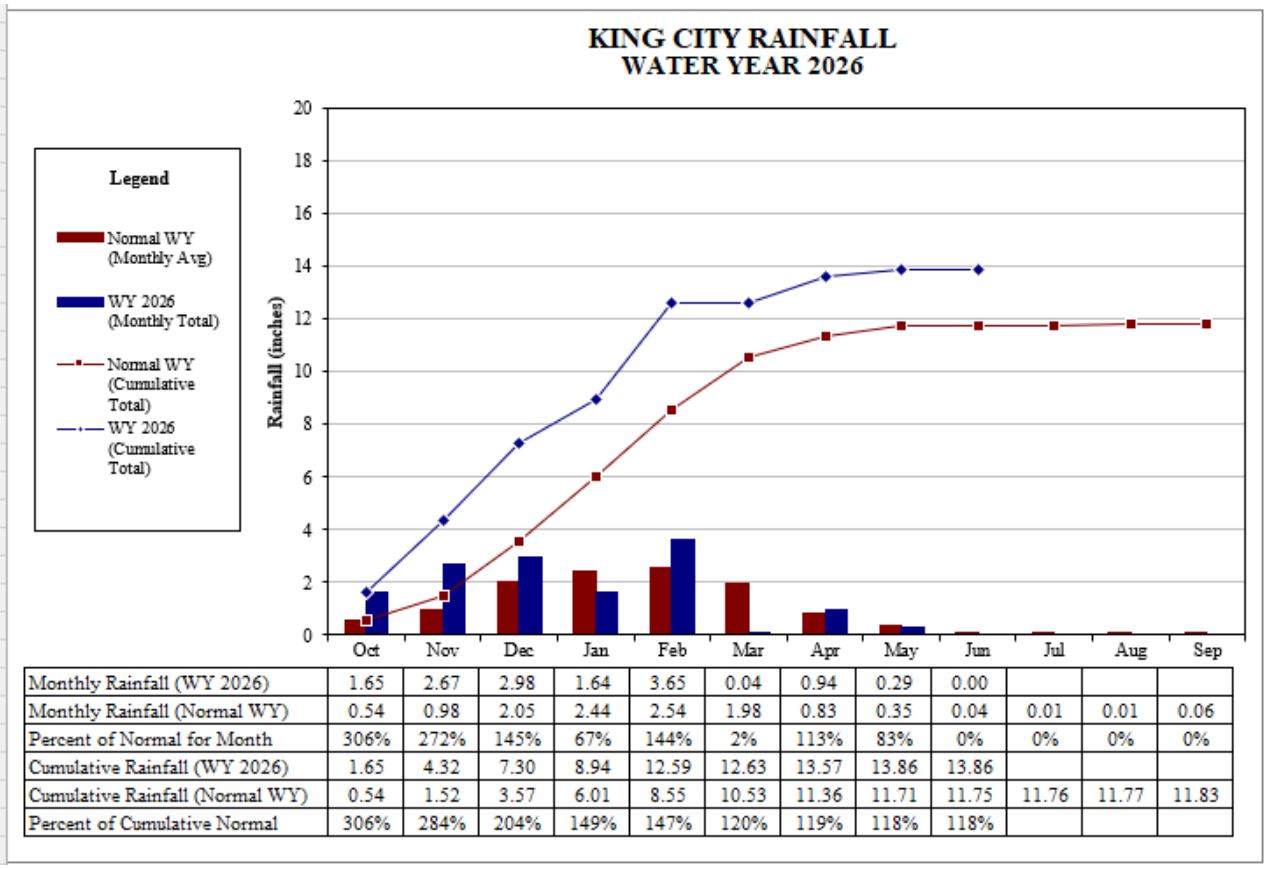
Preliminary National Weather Service rainfall data indicates that the third quarter of WY26 brought above normal rainfall to King City and slightly above normal for Salinas. Totals for the quarter were 1.9 inches at the Salinas Airport (136% of normal rainfall of 1.4 inches for the quarter) and 1.23 inches in King City (101% of normal rainfall of 1.22 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.



Monthly Rainfall (WY 2026)	0.95	2.75	1.29	2.01	4.01	0.01	1.47	0.42	0.01			
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%	76%	166%	0%	155%	111%	14%	0%	0%	0%
Cumulative Rainfall (WY 2026)	0.95	3.70	4.99	7.00	11.01	11.02	12.49	12.91	12.92			
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%	106%	122%	99%	104%	104%	103%			

Figure 2 Salinas Airport Rainfall for Water Year 2026



Monthly Rainfall (WY 2026)	1.65	2.67	2.98	1.64	3.65	0.04	0.94	0.29	0.00			
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%	67%	144%	2%	113%	83%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Cumulative Rainfall (WY 2026)	1.65	4.32	7.30	8.94	12.59	12.63	13.57	13.86	13.86			
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%	149%	147%	120%	119%	118%	118%			

Figure 3 King City Rainfall for Water Year 2026

Reservoir Storage

At the end of the third quarter of WY26, storage at Nacimiento Reservoir on June 30, 2026, was 201,743 acre-feet, which is 3,980 acre-feet higher than on the same day in June 2025. Storage in San Antonio Reservoir on June 30, 2026, was 192,650 acre-feet, which is 32,230 acre-feet lower than on the same day in June 2025.

Reservoir	**June 30, 2026 (WY26) Storage in acre-feet**	**June 30, 2025 (WY25) Storage in acre-feet**	**Difference in acre-feet**
Nacimiento	201,743	197,763	3,980
San Antonio	192,650	224,880	-32,230

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.

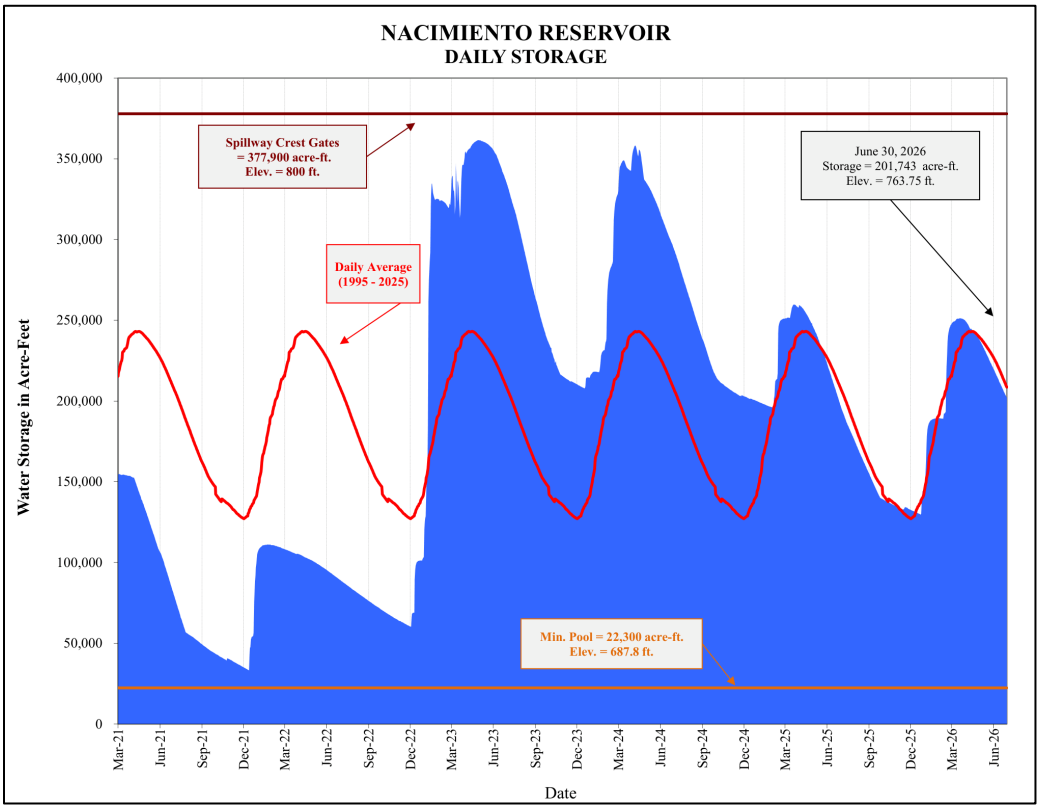


Figure 4 Nacimiento Reservoir Storage for Last Five Years

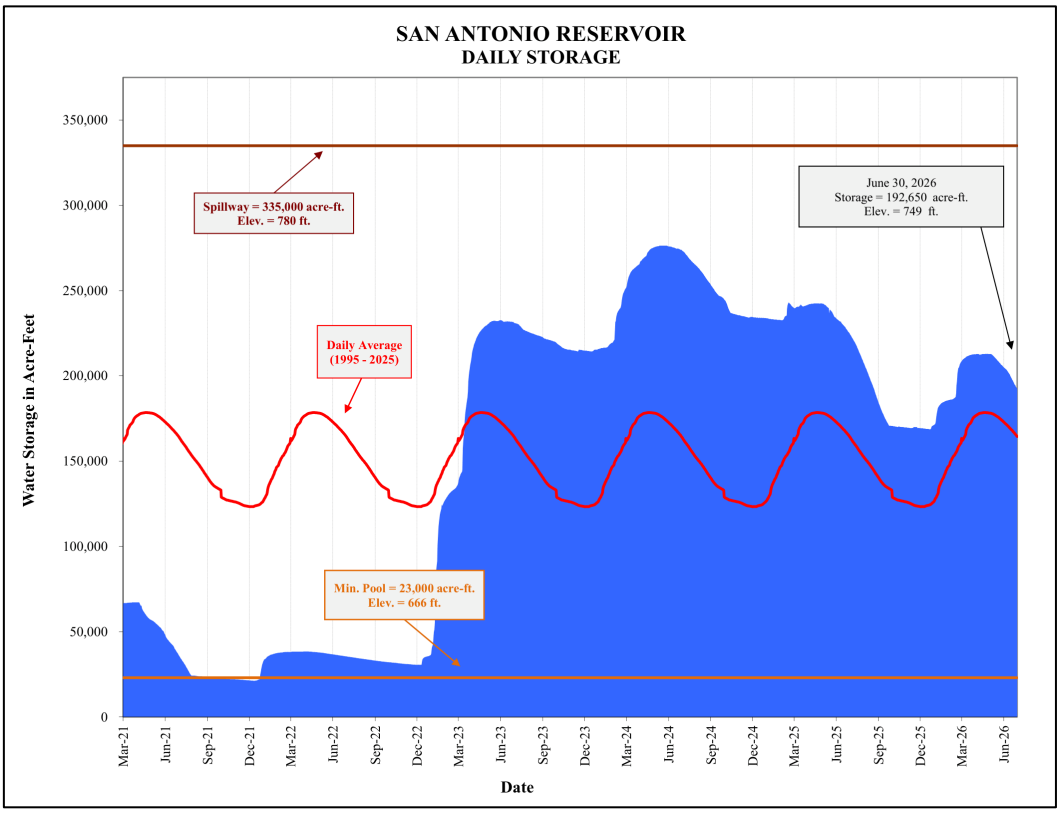


Figure 5 San Antonio Reservoir Storage for Last Five Years

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 daily flow, in cubic feet per second, from select gages on the Salinas River and Arroyo Seco for the last five years (WY 2021-2026) and the current water year (WY26).

Streamflow recorded during the third quarter of WY26 can be attributed to managed reservoir releases from the Nacimiento and San Antonio Reservoirs, as evidenced by the consistent streamflow measurements in the Salinas River and the lack of streamflow in the Arroyo Seco River. Reservoir releases are made for beneficial uses including groundwater recharge, Salinas River Diversion Facility operations, and fish and wildlife passage or habitat.

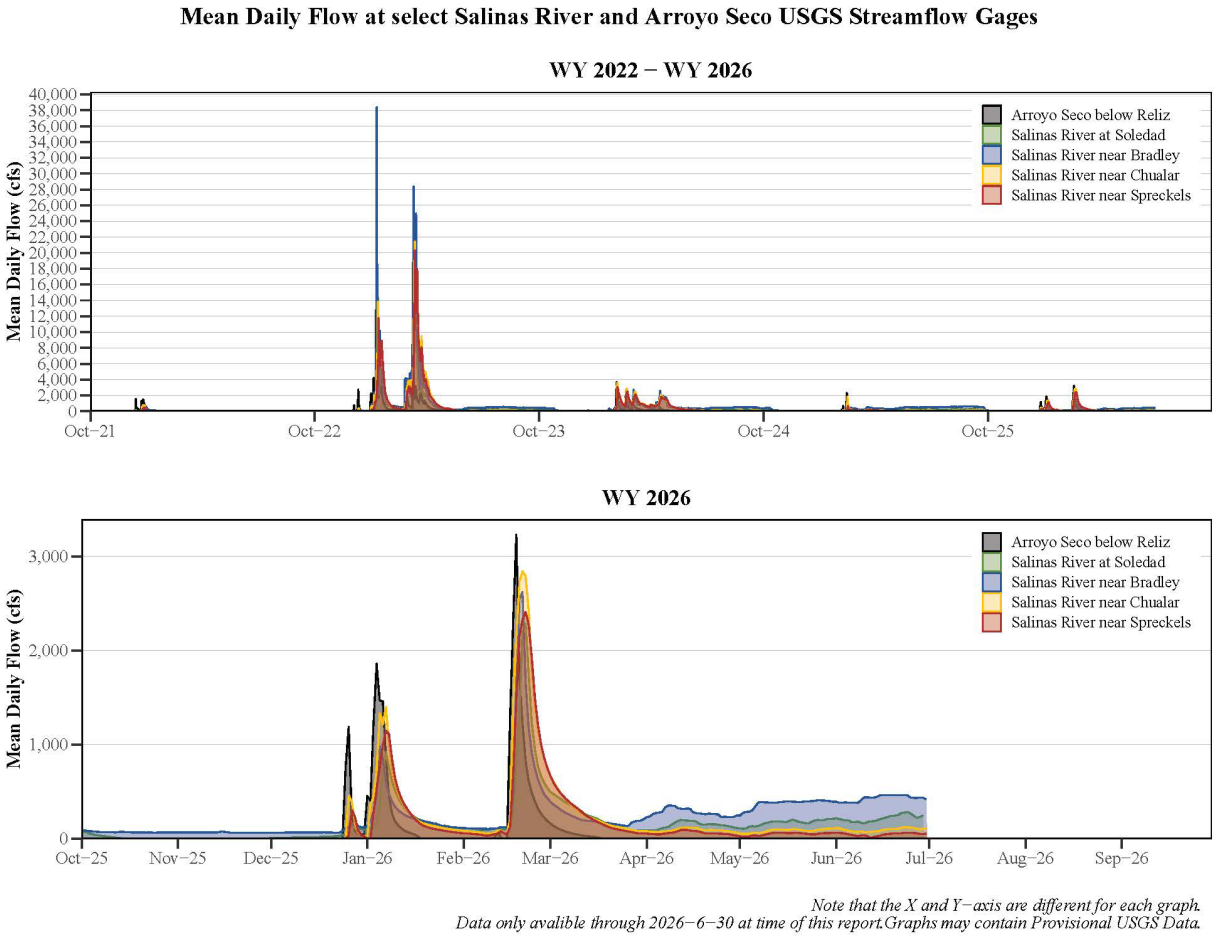


Figure 6 Mean Daily Flow at Selected Stream Gages

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 50 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 (WY95-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 June 2026 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 June 2026

Subarea/Aquifer	June 2026 Groundwater Elevation (ft-msl)	Change over Third Quarter	One Year Change	Difference from 30-Year Average Elevation
180-Foot Aquifer	7 ft-msl	Down 6 feet	Up 2 feet	Up 4 feet
400-Foot Aquifer	-5 ft-msl	Down 11 feet	Up <1 foot	Up 7 feet
Deep Aquifers	-29 ft-msl	Down 9 feet	Up 3 feet	Not applicable
East Side Subarea	-18 ft-msl	Down 19 feet	Up 5 feet	Up 3 feet
Forebay Subarea	164 ft-msl	Down 3 feet	Up <1 foot	Up 4 feet
Upper Valley Subarea	316 ft-msl	Down 3 feet	Up <1 foot	Up 3 feet

180-Foot Aquifer

Over the last quarter, groundwater elevations have decreased by six feet in the 180-Foot Aquifer (Figure 7). Groundwater elevations for June 2026 are down two feet compared to June 2025 and are up four feet from the 30-year average.

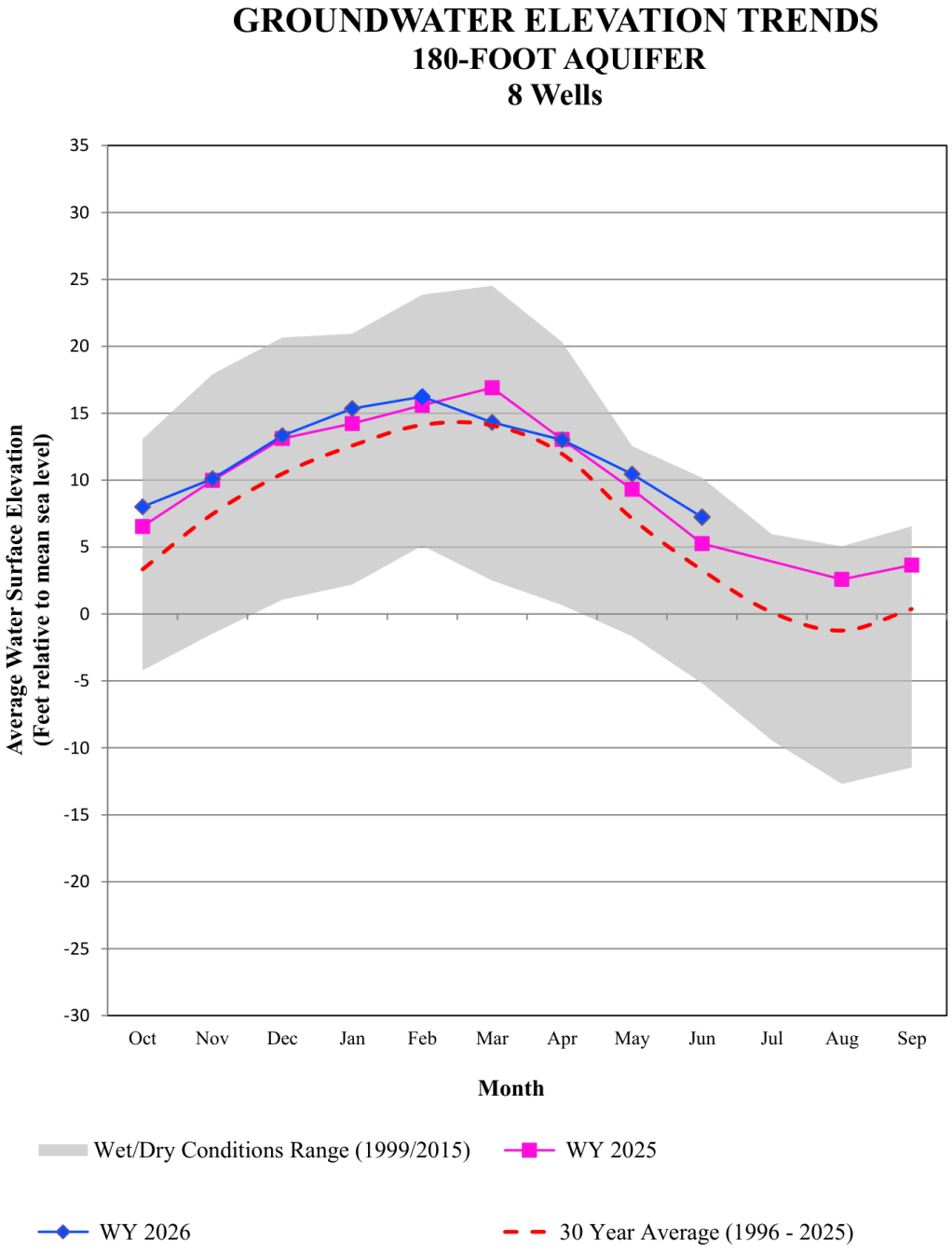


Figure 7 Groundwater Elevation Trends for the 180-Foot Aquifer

400-Foot Aquifer

Groundwater elevations in the 400-Foot Aquifer decreased eleven feet over the past quarter (Figure 8). Groundwater elevations for June 2026 are up less than one foot compared to June 2025 and up seven feet from the 30-year average.

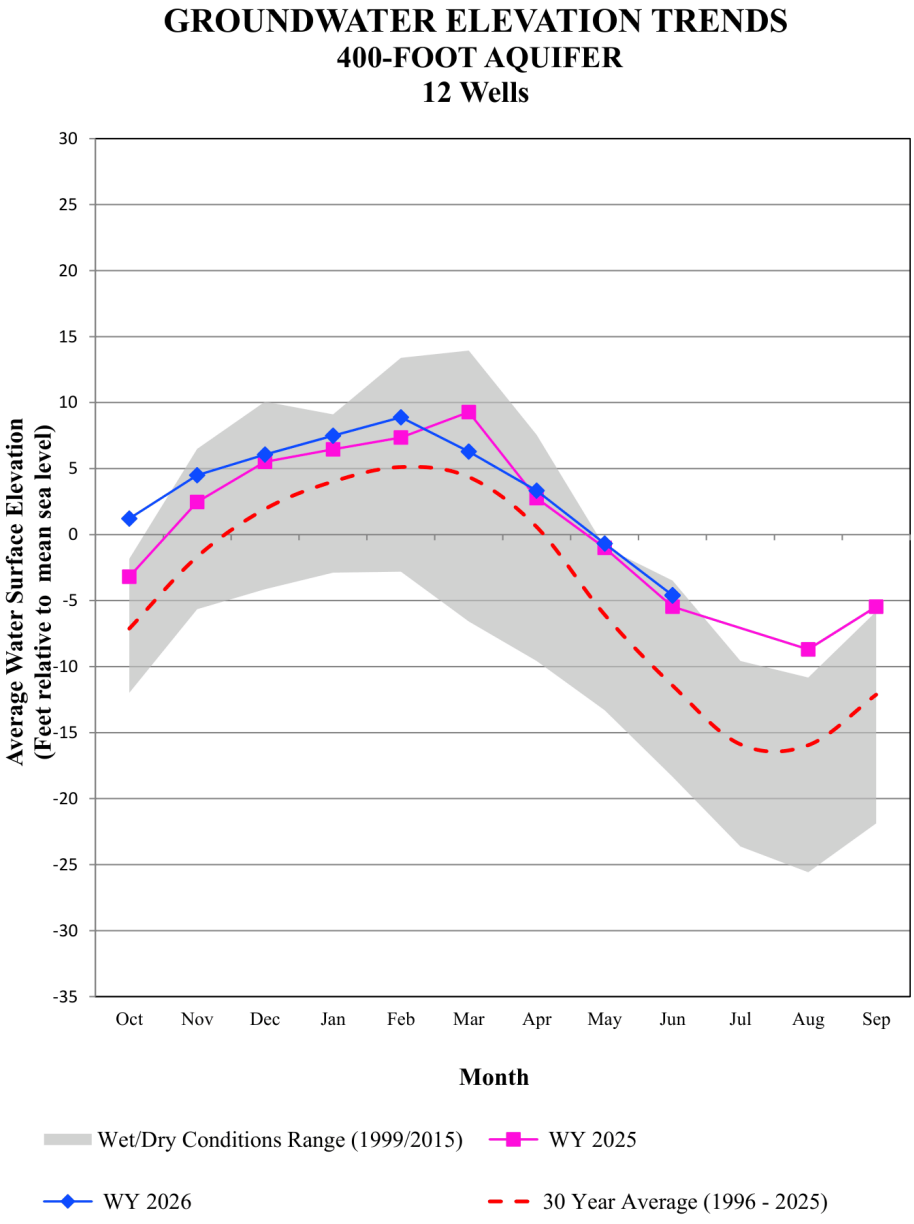


Figure 8 Groundwater Elevation Trends in the 400-Foot Aquifer

Deep Aquifers

Over the last quarter, groundwater elevations decreased by nine feet in the Deep Aquifers. Groundwater elevations for June 2026 are up three feet compared to June 2025. 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. Instead, the 20-year and 10-year averages are presented. The 10-year average, which uses data from 2016 to 2025, best captures groundwater level conditions with the current number of wells and volume of annual groundwater extractions. The 20-year average, which uses data from 2006 to 2025, covers a period during which there were significant increases in the number of wells and volume of annual groundwater extraction from the Deep Aquifers, with the first ten years (2006-2015) differing from the latter ten years (2016-2025).

Figure 9 also 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.

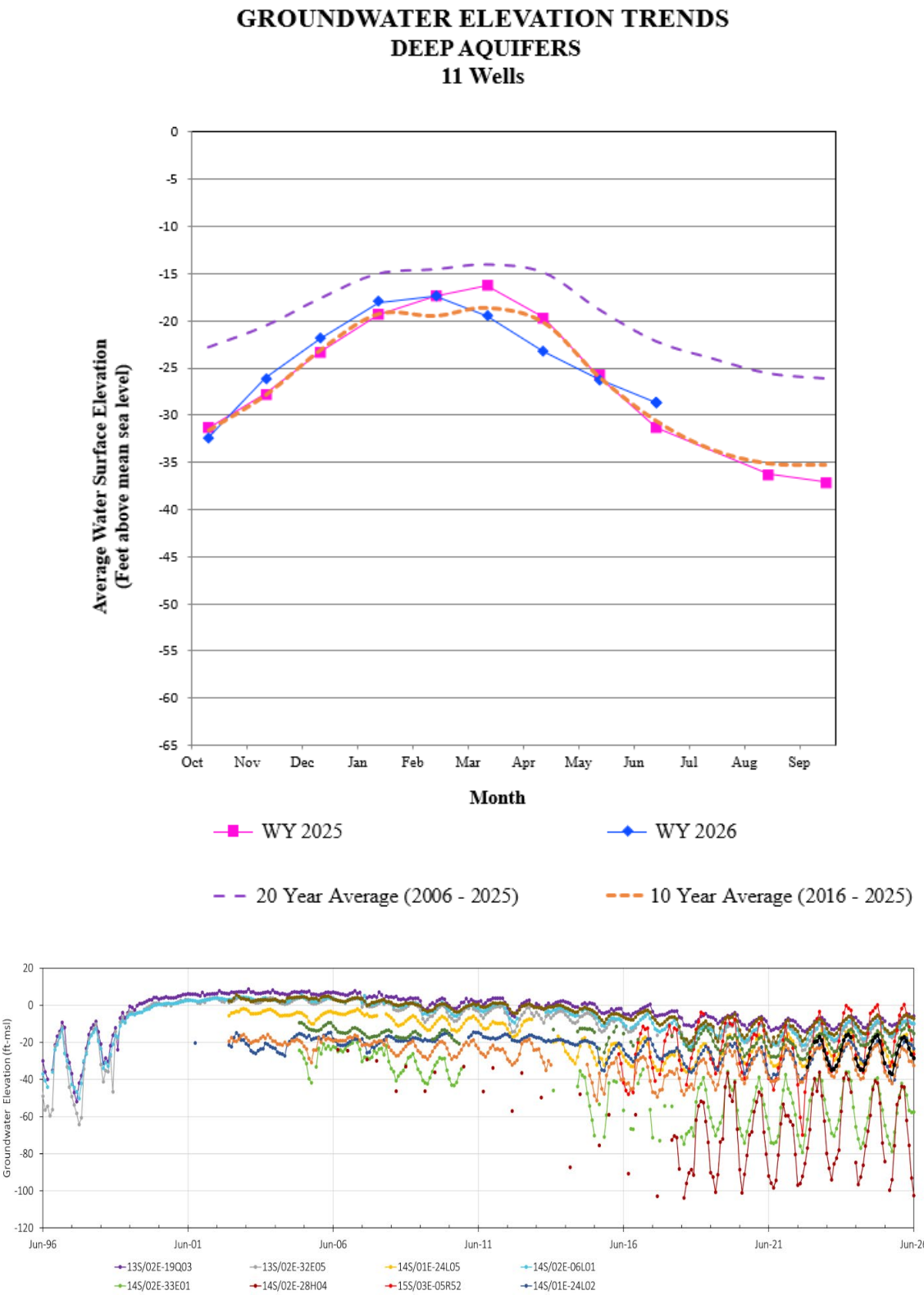


Figure 9 Groundwater Elevation Data from the Deep Aquifers Quarterly Report Wells

East Side Subarea

East Side groundwater elevations decreased by nineteen feet over the last quarter (Figure 10). Groundwater elevations for June 2026 are up by five feet from June 2025 and up by three feet from the 30-year average.

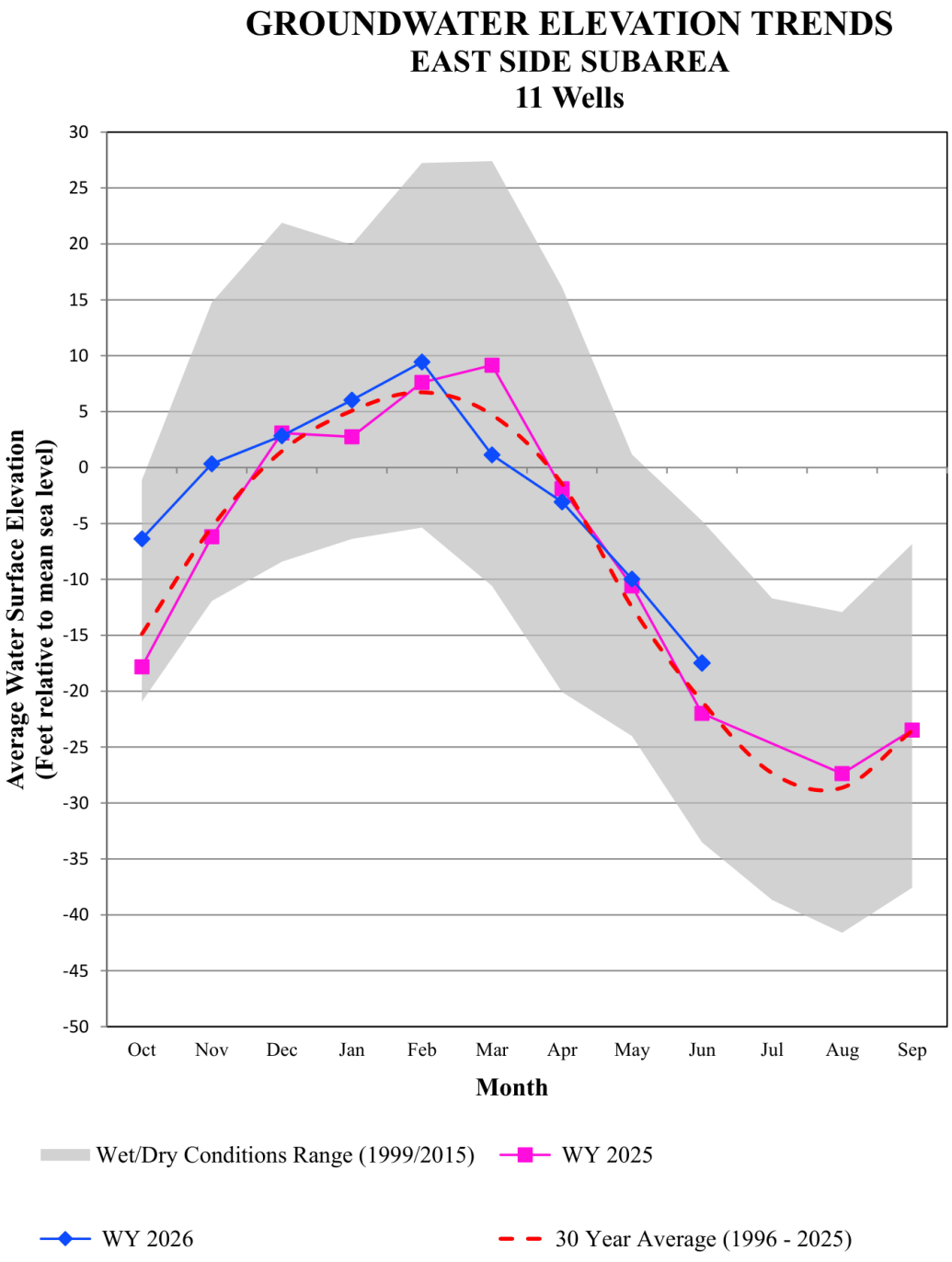


Figure 10 Groundwater Elevation Trends in the East Side Subarea

Forebay Subarea

Over the last quarter, groundwater elevations have decreased by three feet in the Forebay (Figure 11). Groundwater elevations for June 2026 are down less than one foot from June 2025 elevations and are up four feet from the 30-year average.

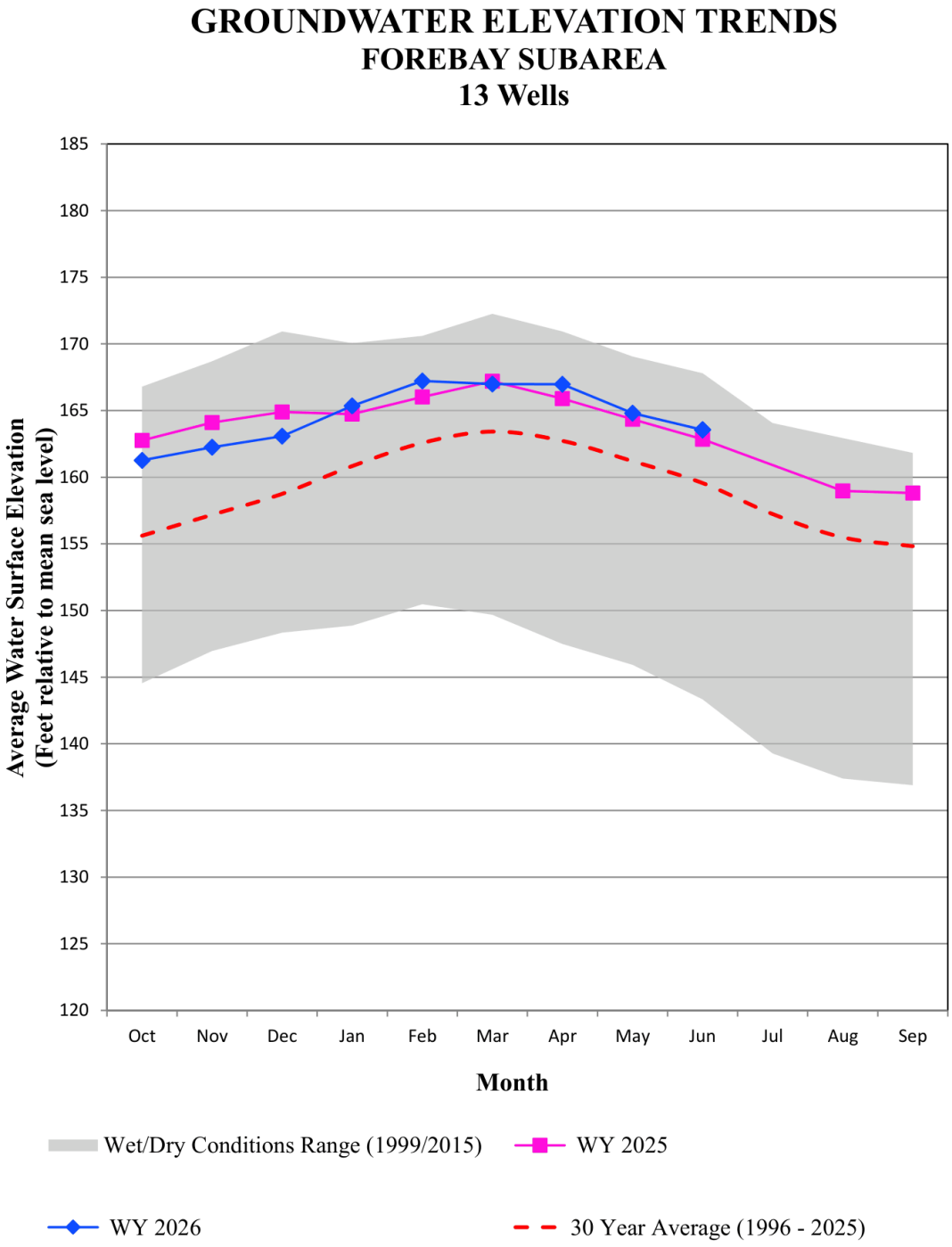


Figure 11 Groundwater Elevation Trends in the Forebay Subarea

Upper Valley Subarea

Upper Valley groundwater elevations have decreased by three feet over the last quarter (Figure 12). Groundwater elevations for June 2026 are up less than one foot from June 2025 elevations and up three feet from the 30-year average.

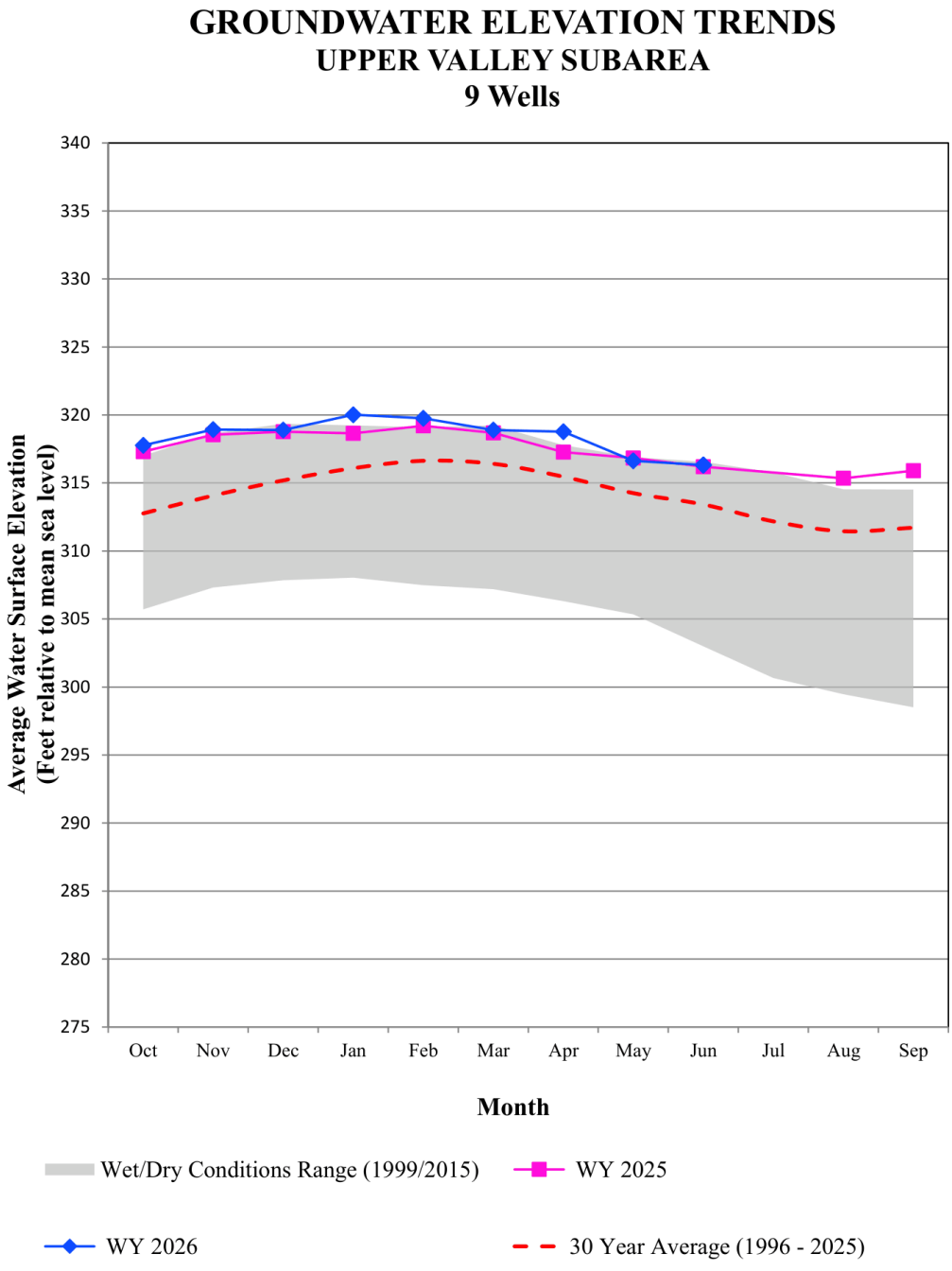


Figure 12 Groundwater Elevation Trends in the Upper Valley Subarea

Figure 13 shows the spatial distribution of changes in groundwater elevations from June 2025 to June 2026. 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 variation in groundwater elevation trends was observed, with two wells in the East Side subarea experiencing an increase in elevation between 5 and 15 feet, and one well experiencing a decrease between 5 and 15 feet. The Deep Aquifers had three wells increase between 5 and 15 feet in elevation, and one well decrease between 5 and 15 feet.

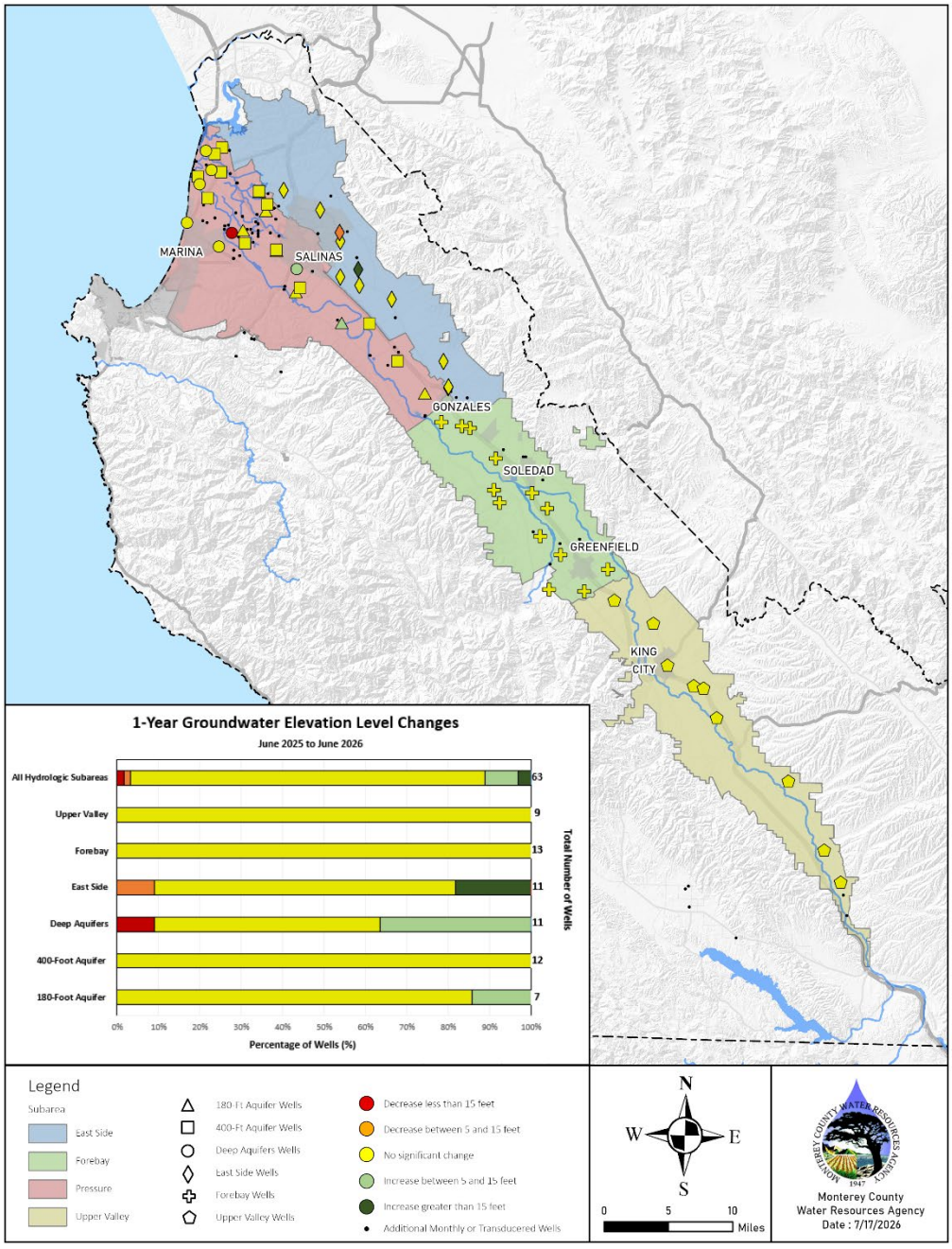


Figure 13 One-Year Groundwater Elevation Changes

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.

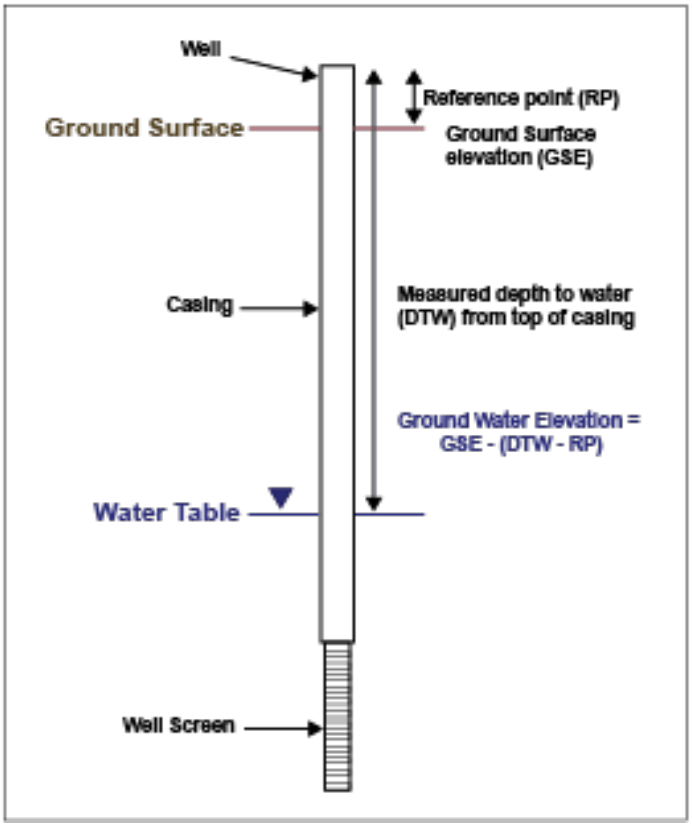
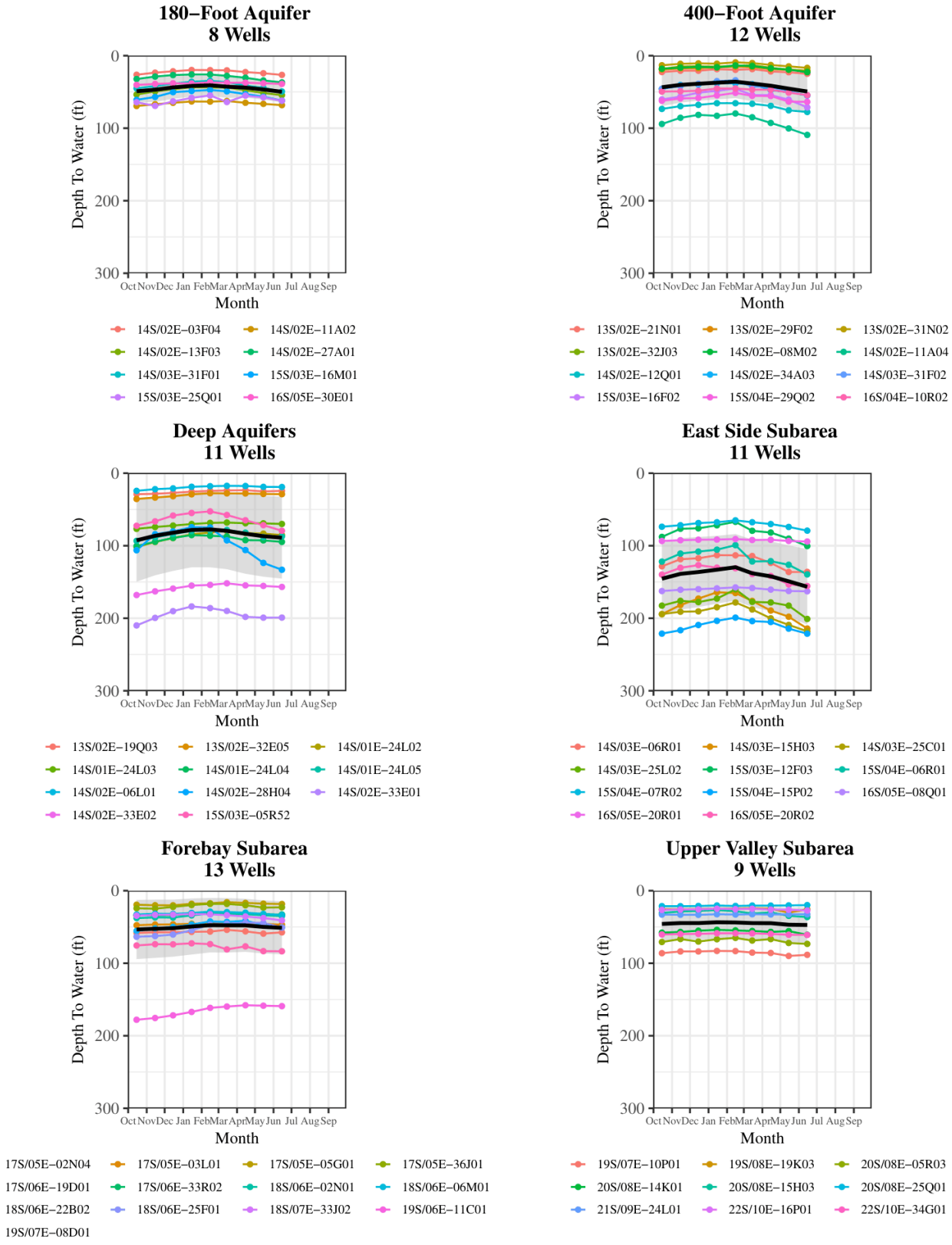


Figure 14 Relationship between Depth to Groundwater and Groundwater Elevation

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.



Depth to Water is measured in feet below a standard reference point at each well. This may be close to, but not always equal to, the ground surface. The black line on each graph shows the average depth to water for each set of wells. The grey shaded area shows the standard deviation.

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