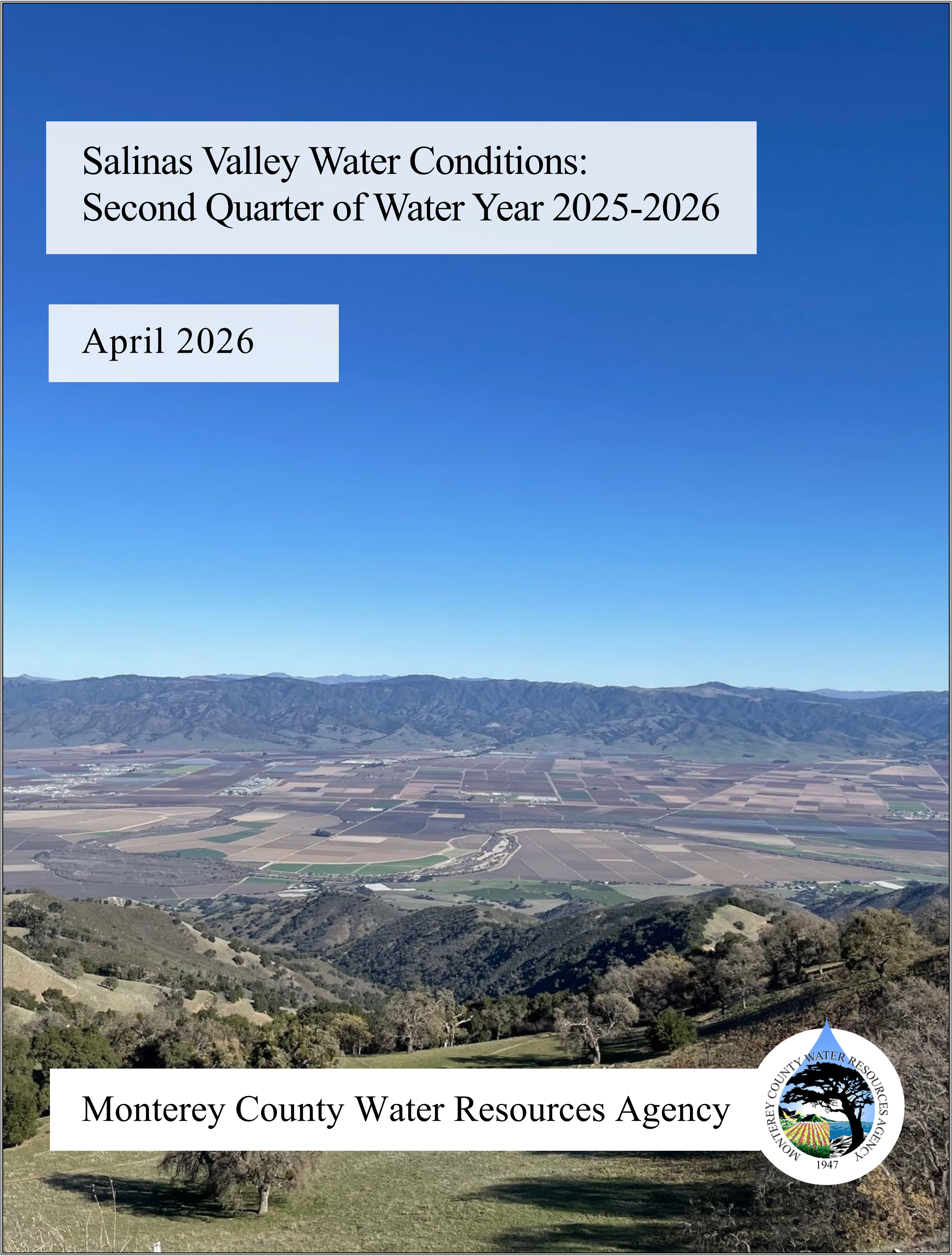
Salinas Valley Water Conditions: Second Quarter of Water Year 2025-2026

April 2026



Monterey County Water Resources Agency

MONTEREY COUNTY WATER RESOURCES AGENCY

Salinas Valley Water Conditions
Second Quarter of Water Year 2025-2026
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Introduction

This report covers the second quarter of Water Year 2025-2026 (WY26), consisting of January through March 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 second quarter of WY26 indicates slightly below normal rainfall for Salinas to slightly above normal rainfall for King City based on precipitation totals for the quarter. Storage is lower in both Nacimiento Reservoir and San Antonio Reservoir compared to March 2025. Over the second quarter of WY26, groundwater elevations generally increased across all subareas and aquifers, which aligns with typical seasonal trends.

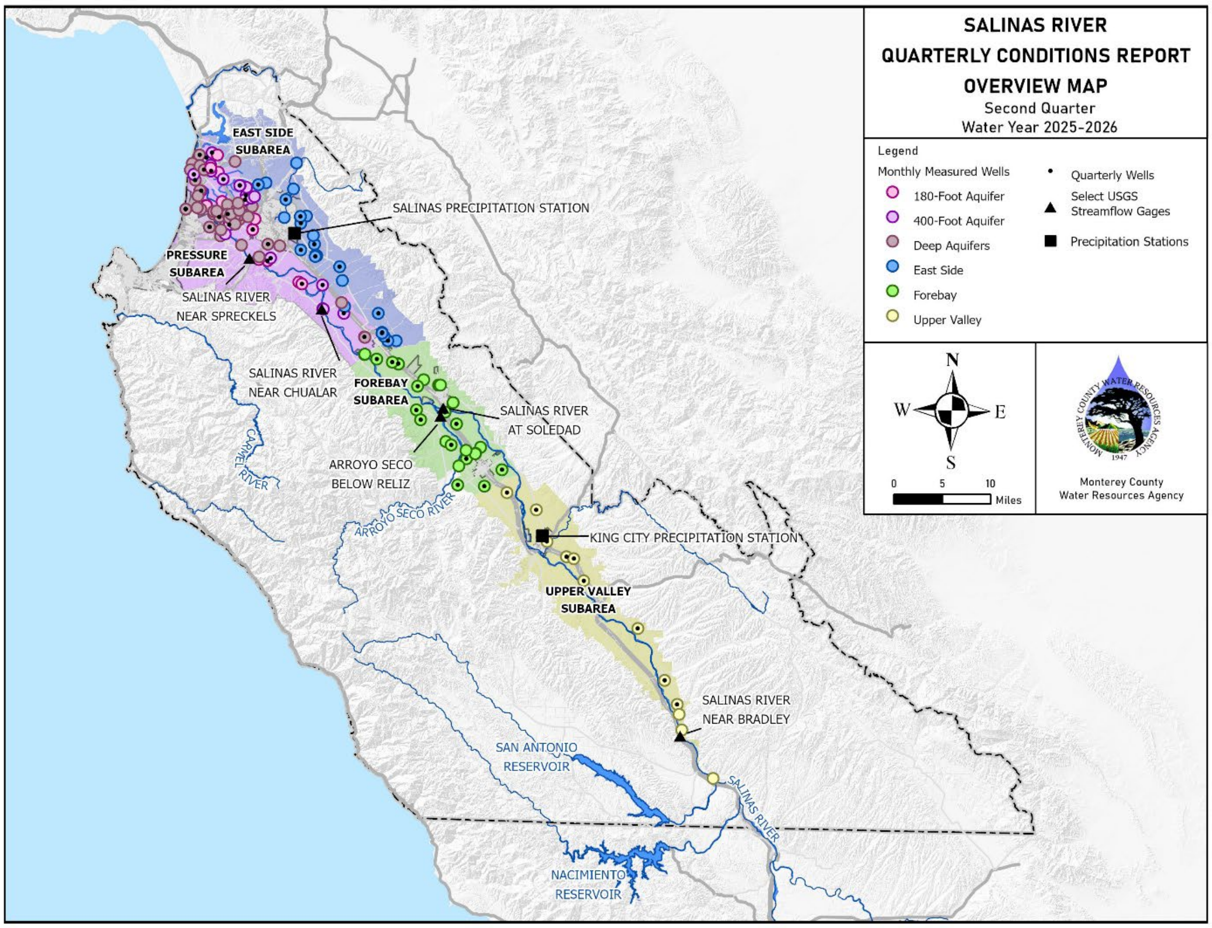
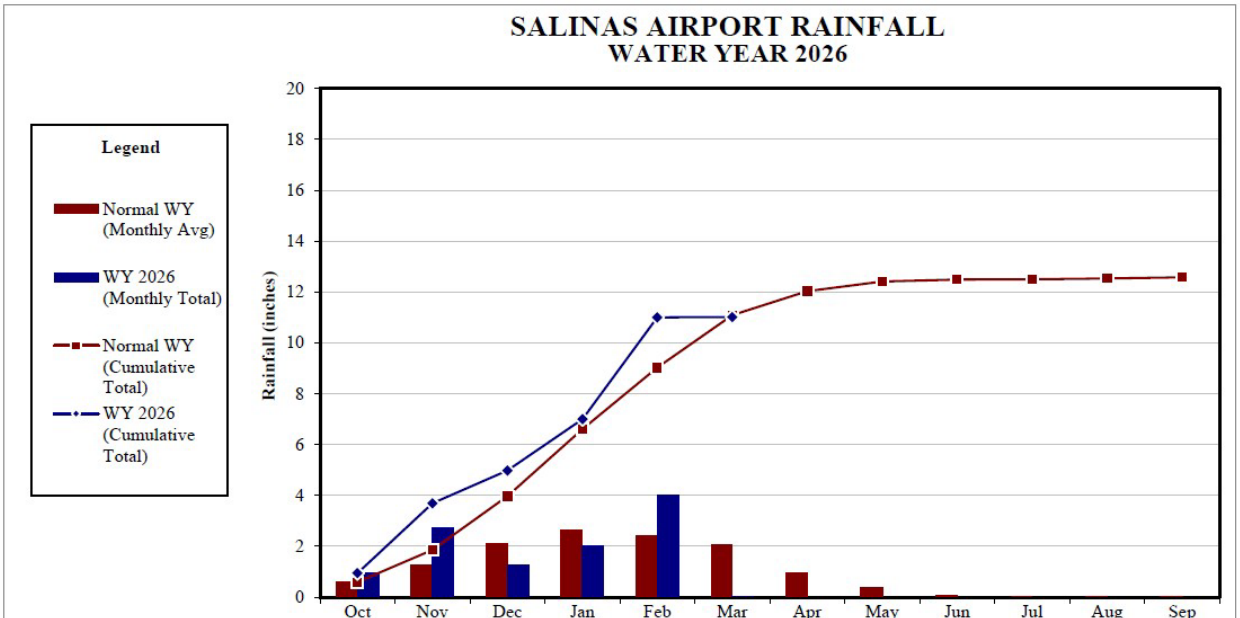


Figure 1: Geographic extent of the area covered by this report and supporting data sources.

Precipitation

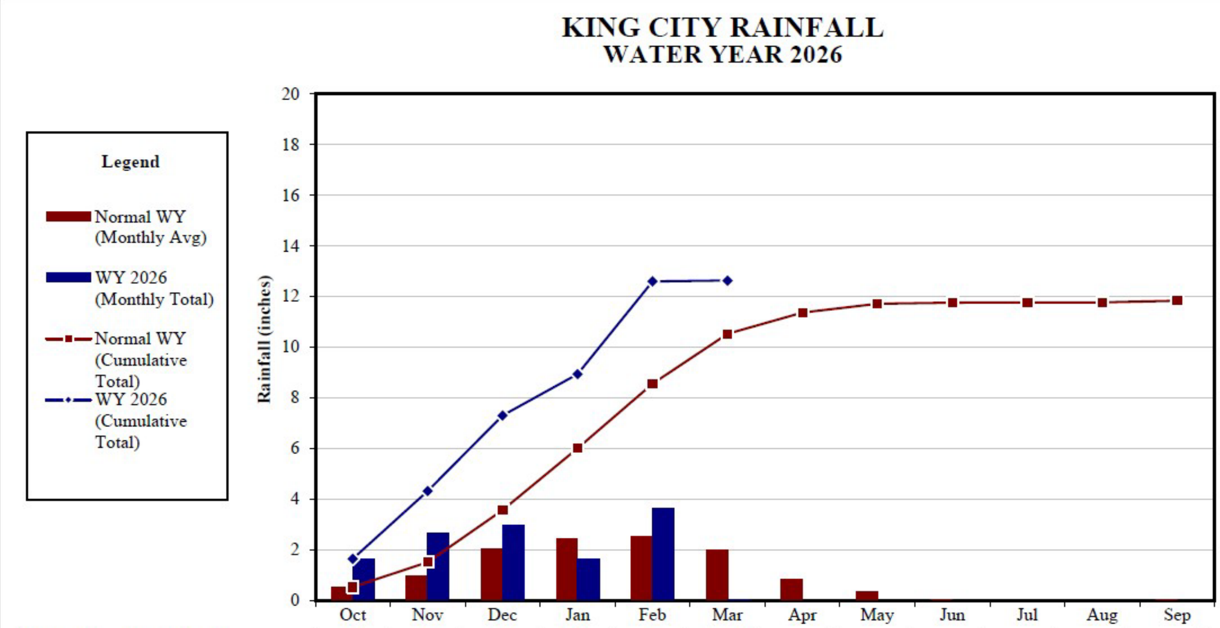
Preliminary National Weather Service rainfall data indicates that the second quarter of WY26 brought above normal rainfall to King City and above to slightly below average for Salinas. Totals for the quarter were 11.02 inches at the Salinas Airport (99% of normal rainfall of 11.09 inches for the quarter) and 12.63 inches in King City (120% of normal rainfall of 10.53 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	2.01	4.01	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%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Cumulative Rainfall (WY 2026)	0.95	3.70	4.99	7.00	11.01	11.02						
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%						

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	1.64	3.65	0.04						
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%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Cumulative Rainfall (WY 2026)	1.65	4.32	7.30	8.94	12.59	12.63						
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%						

Figure 3: King City Rainfall for Water Year 2026

Reservoir Storage

At the end of the second quarter of WY26, storage at Nacimiento Reservoir on March 31, 2026, was 249,780 acre-feet, which is 8,323 acre-feet lower than on the same day in March 2025. Storage in San Antonio Reservoir on March 31, 2026 was 212,588 acre-feet, which is 29,232 acre-feet lower than on the same day in March 2025.

Reservoir	March 31, 2026 (WY26) Storage in acre-feet	March 31, 2025 (WY25) Storage in acre-feet	Difference in acre-feet
Nacimiento	249,780	258,103	-8,323
San Antonio	212,588	241,820	-29,232

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.

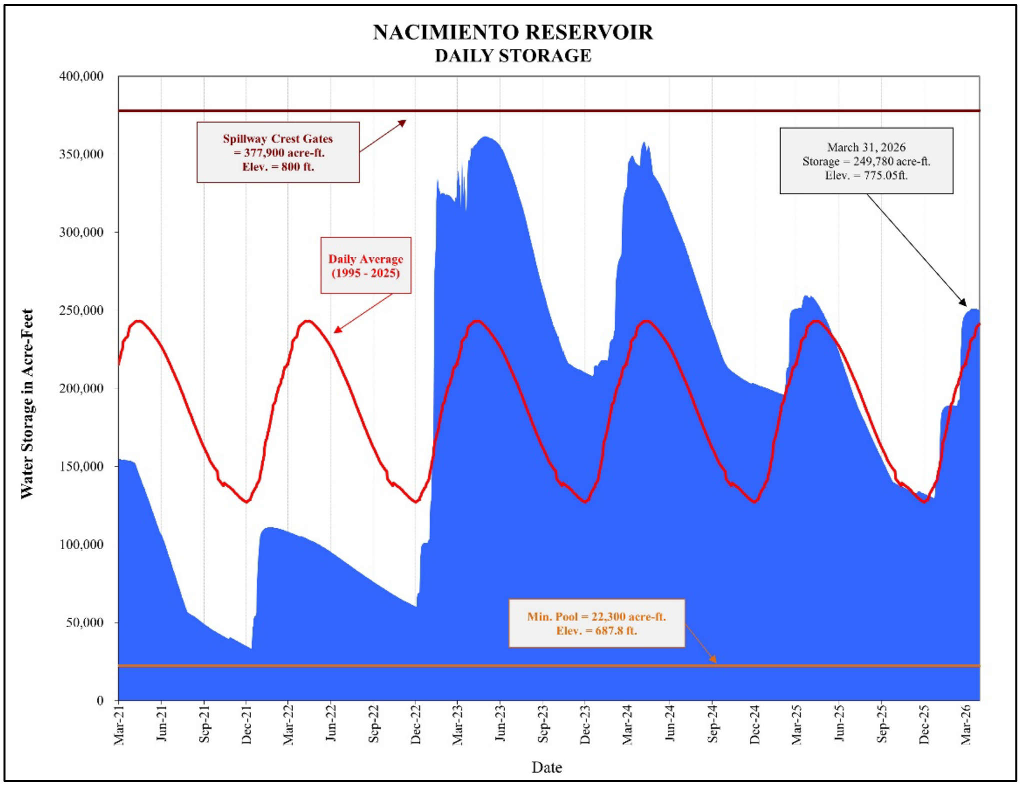


Figure 4: Nacimiento Reservoir Storage for Last Five Years

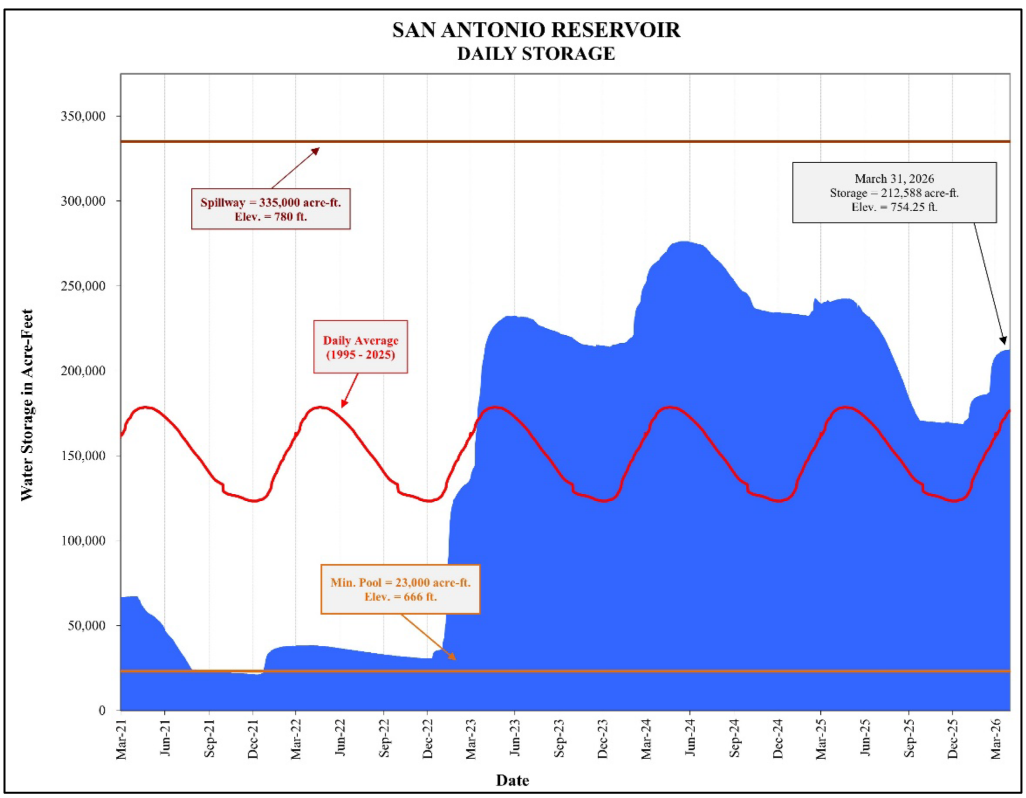


Figure 5: San Antonio Reservoir Storage for Last Five Years

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 2021-2026) and the current water year (WY26).

Streamflow recorded during the second quarter of WY26 can be attributed to a combination of managed reservoir releases and a rain event. Hydrographs from January to March showcase 3 peaks, which coincided with rainfall events. Between those rainfall events, releases were made from the Nacimiento and San Antonio reservoirs to support habitat downstream of the dams.

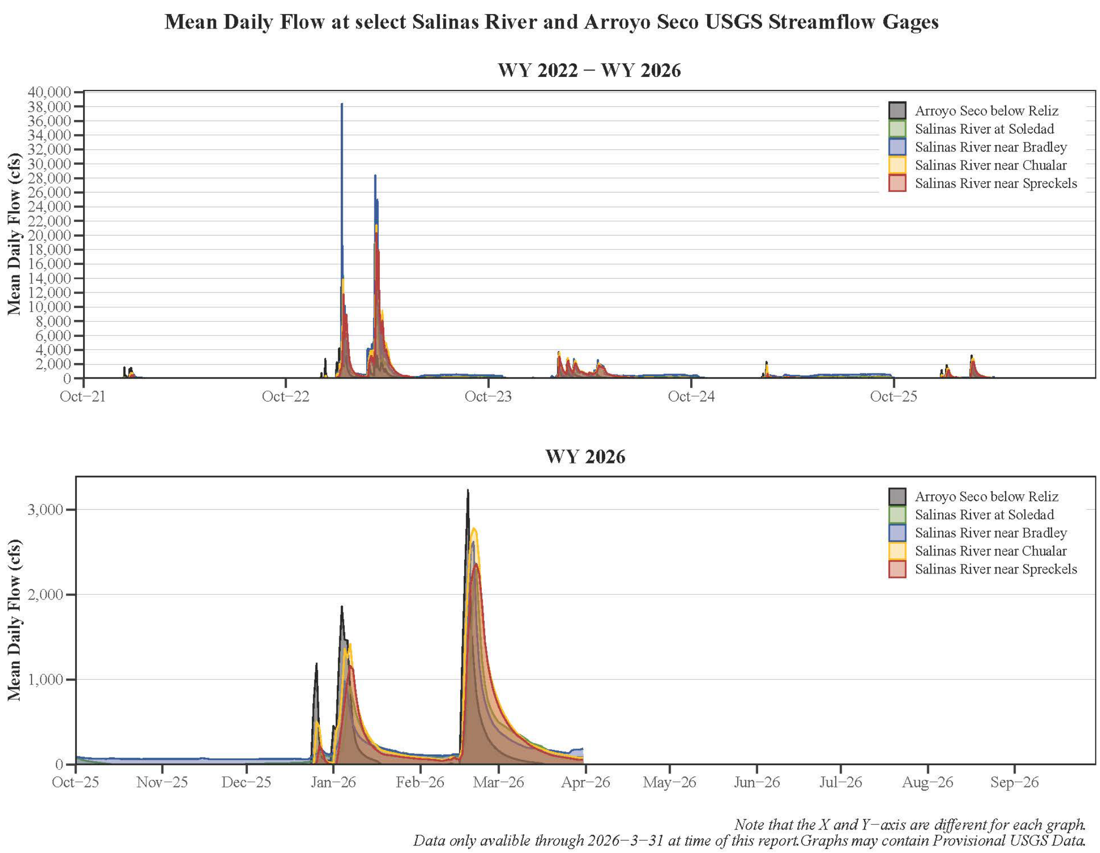


Figure 6: Mean Daily Flow at Selected Stream Gages

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 March 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 March 2026

Subarea/Aquifer	March 2026 Groundwater Elevation (ft-msl)	Change during Second Quarter	One Year Change	Difference from 30-Year Average Elevation
180-Foot Aquifer	14 ft-msl	Up 1 foot	Down 3 feet	Up <1 foot
400-Foot Aquifer	6 ft-msl	Up <1 foot	Down 3 feet	Up 2 feet
Deep Aquifers	-19 ft-msl	Up 3 feet	Down 3 feet	Not applicable
East Side	1 ft-msl	Down 2 feet	Down 8 feet	Down 4 feet
Forebay	167 ft-msl	Up 4 feet	Down <1 foot	Up 4 feet
Upper Valley	319 ft-msl	No Change	Up <1 foot	Up 3 feet

180-Foot Aquifer

Over the last quarter, groundwater elevations increased one foot in the 180-Foot Aquifer (Figure 7). Groundwater elevations for March 2026 are down three feet compared to March 2025 and are up less than one foot from the 30-year average.

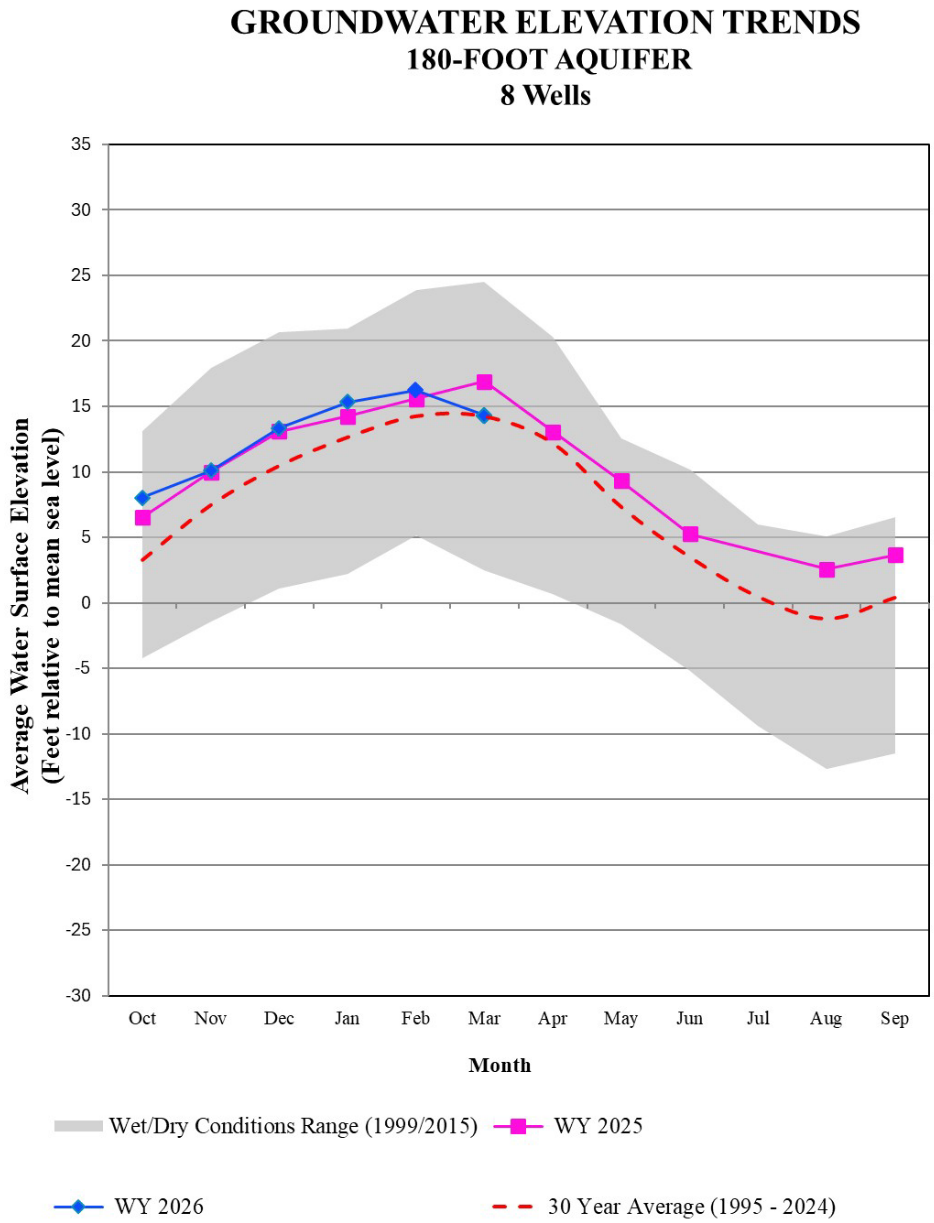


Figure 7: Groundwater Elevation Trends for the 180-Foot Aquifer

400-Foot Aquifer

Groundwater elevations in the 400-Foot Aquifer increased less than one foot over the past quarter (Figure 8). Groundwater elevations for March 2026 are down three feet compared to March 2025 and up two feet from the 30-year average.

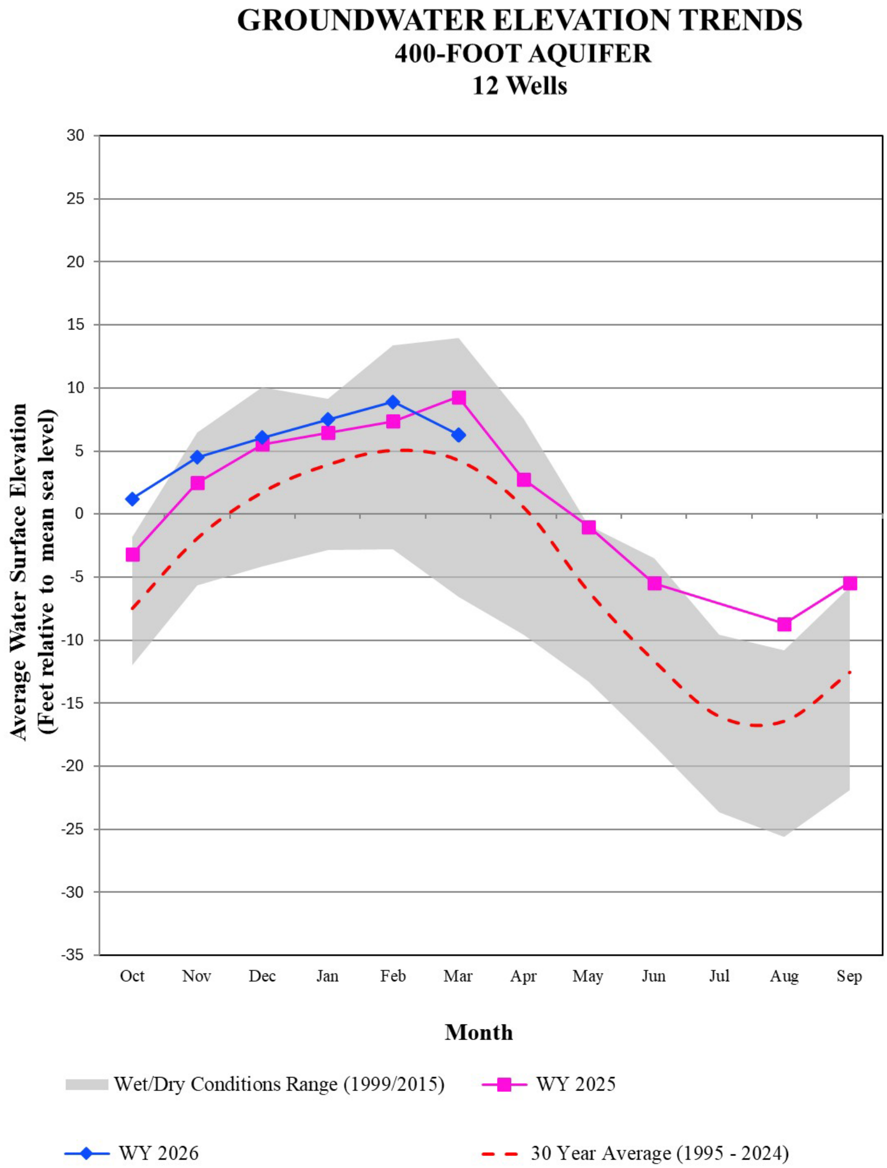
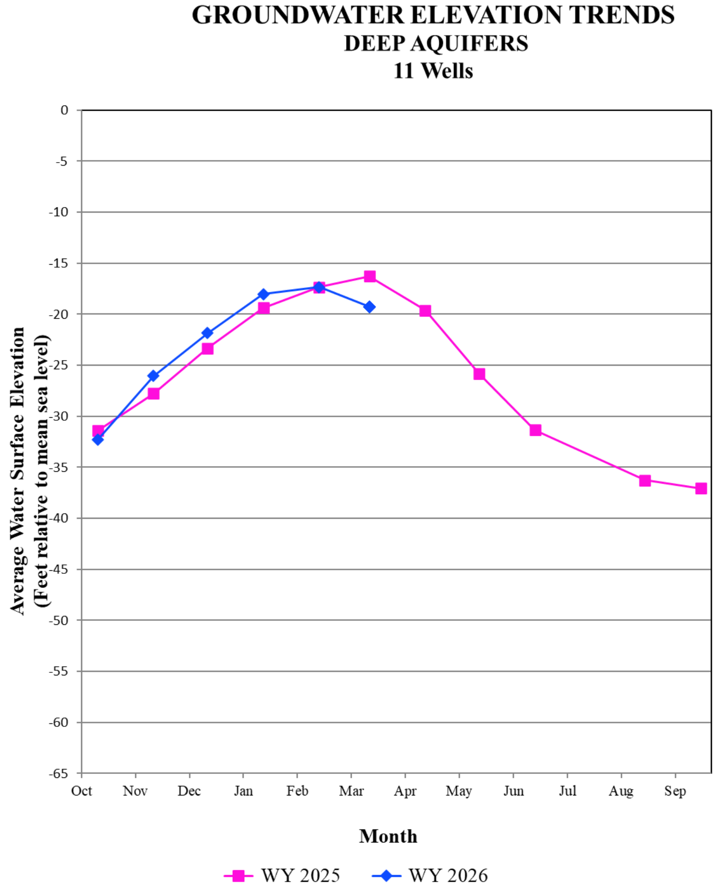


Figure 8: Groundwater Elevation Trends in the 400-Foot Aquifer

Deep Aquifers

Over the last quarter, groundwater elevations increased three feet in the Deep Aquifers. Groundwater elevations for March 2026 are down three feet compared to March 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. 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.



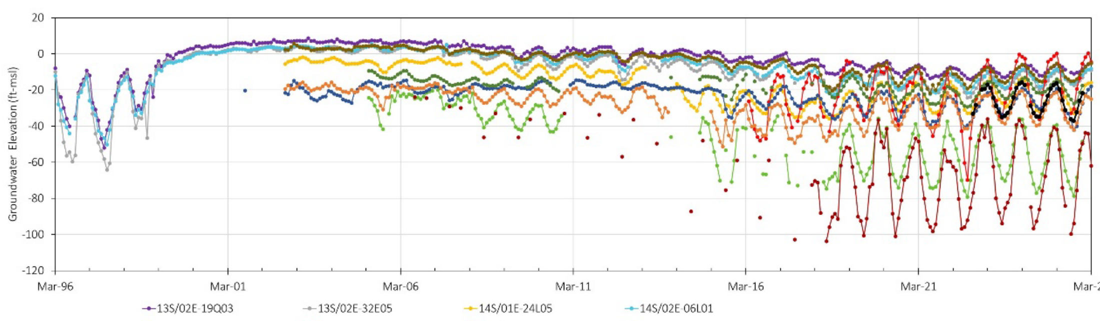


Figure 9: Groundwater Elevation Data from the Deep Aquifers Quarterly Report Wells

East Side Subarea

East Side groundwater elevations decreased by two feet over the last quarter (Figure 10). Groundwater elevations for March 2026 are down eight feet from March 2025 and down four feet from the 30-year average.

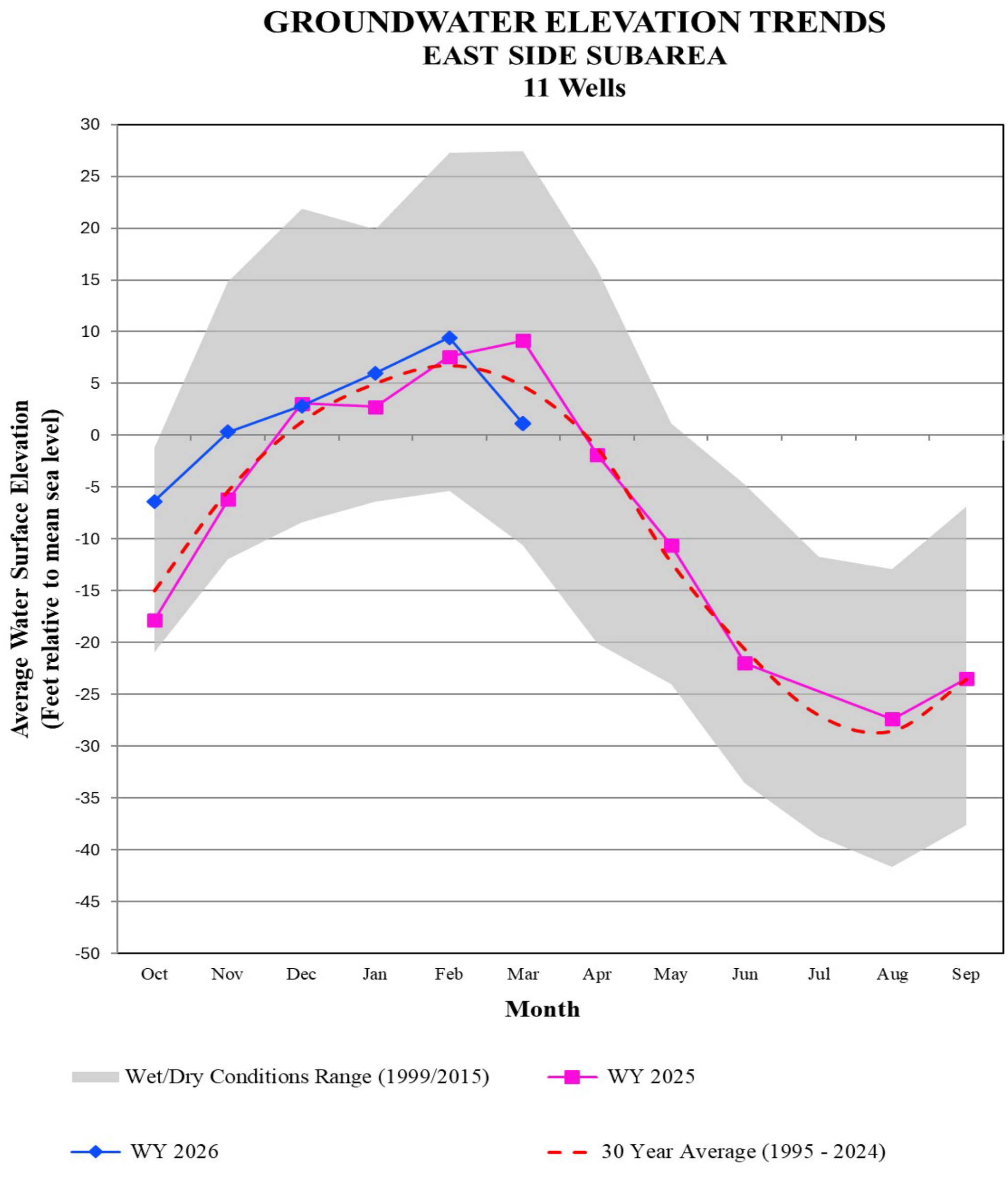


Figure 10: Groundwater Elevation Trends in the East Side Subarea

Forebay Subarea

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

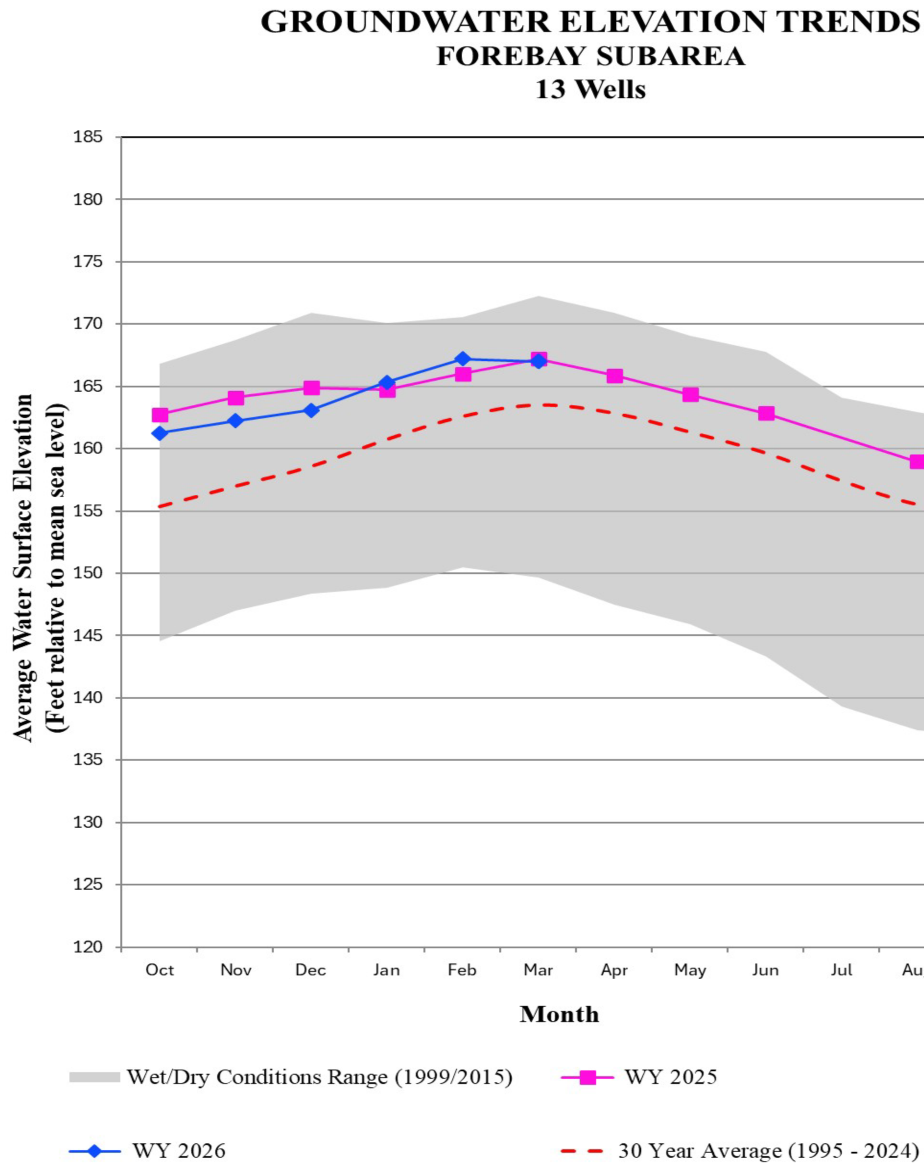


Figure 11: Groundwater Elevation Trends in the Forebay Subarea

Upper Valley Subarea

Upper Valley groundwater elevations did not change over the last quarter (Figure 12). Groundwater elevations for March 2026 are up less than one foot from March 2025 elevations and up three feet from the 30-year average.

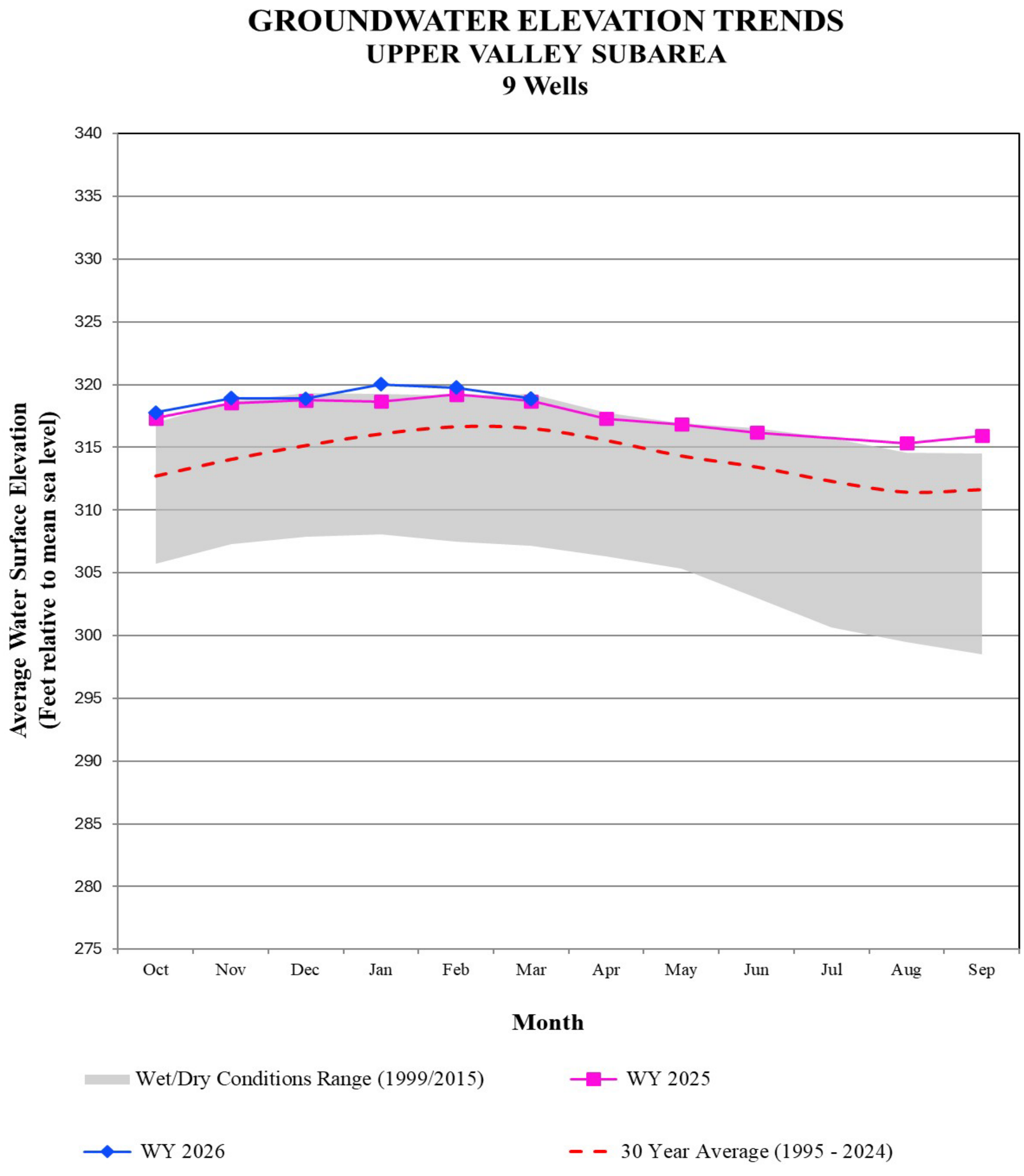


Figure 12: Groundwater Elevation Trends in the Upper Valley Subarea

Figure 13 shows the spatial distribution of changes in groundwater elevations from March 2025 to March 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 three wells in the East Side subarea experiencing a decrease in elevation greater than 15 feet and three more wells experiencing the an elevation decrease between 5 and 15 feet. The Deep Aquifers had one well decrease between 5 and 15 feet in elevation and one well decrease greater than 15 feet. The 180- and 400-foot subarea each had two wells that decreased between 5 and 15 feet in elevation.

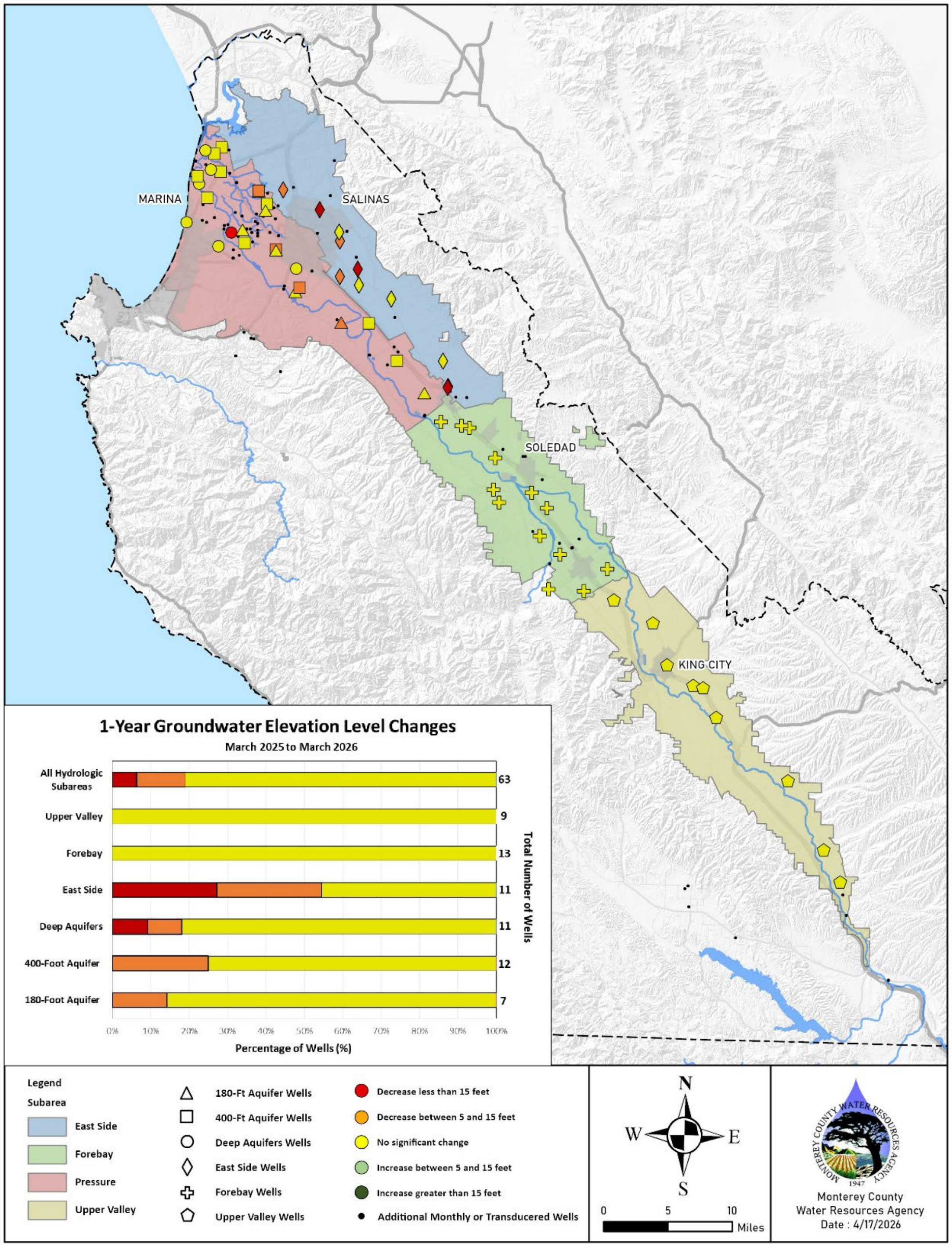


Figure 13: One-Year Groundwater Elevation Changes

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.

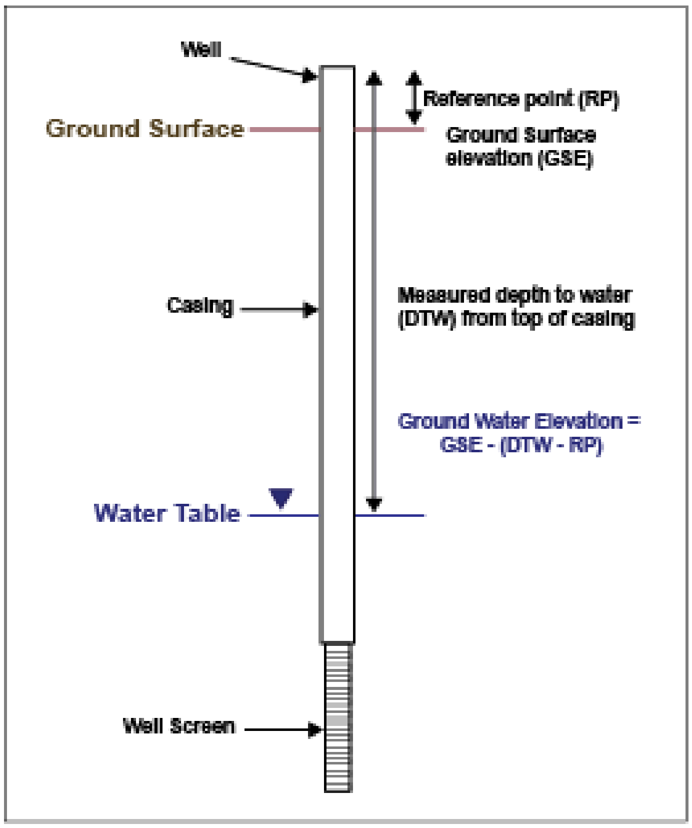


Figure 14: Relationship between Depth to Groundwater and Groundwater Elevation.

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.

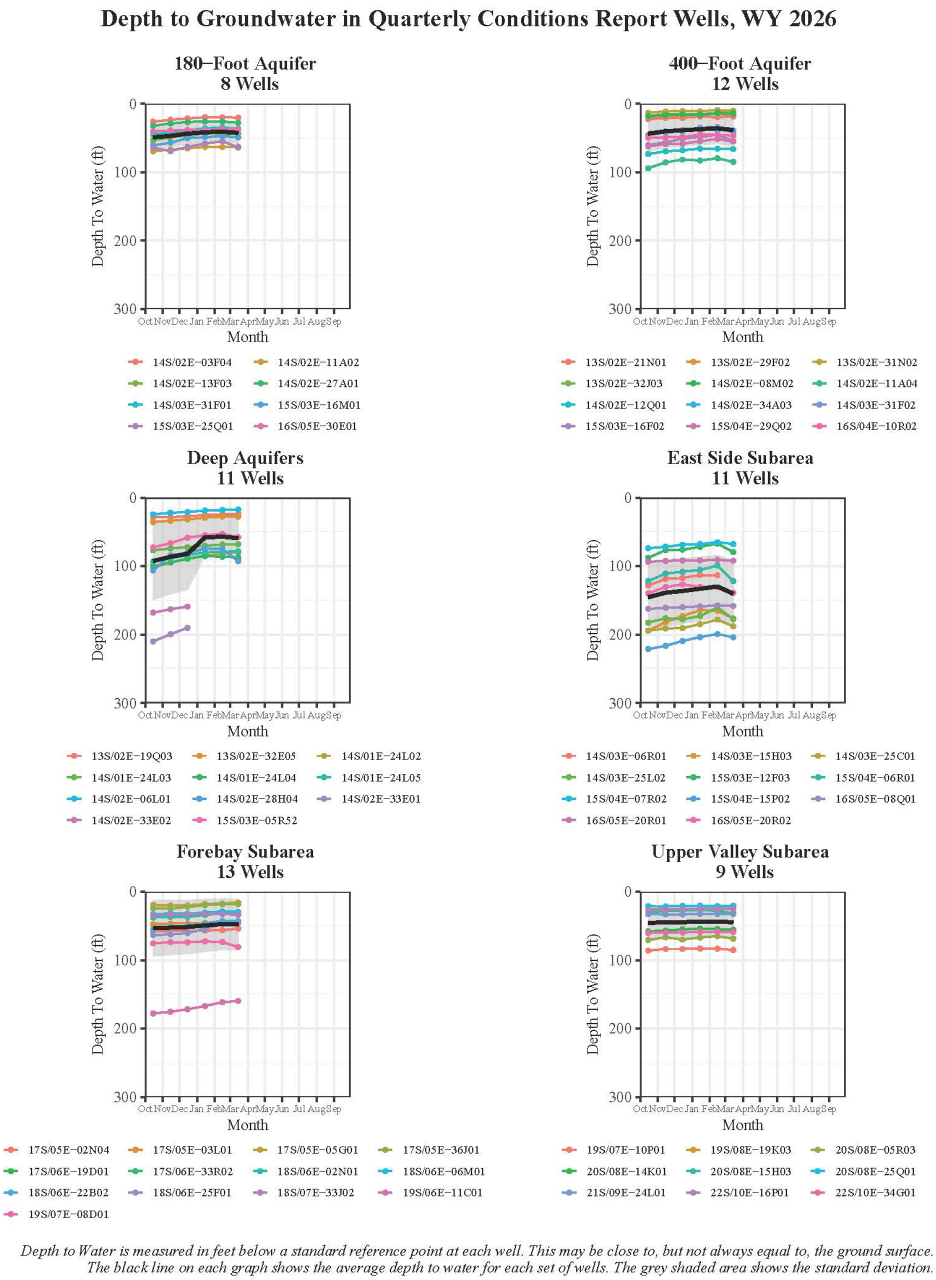


Figure 15: Depth to Groundwater in Wells Used for Quarterly Conditions Report, WY 2026