III. Groundwater Basin Conditions

Occurrence of Groundwater

Groundwater in the Santa Clara River Valley East groundwater subbasin occurs in two aquifer systems, the Alluvium associated with the Santa Clara River and its tributaries, and the Saugus Formation. There are also some scattered outcrops of Terrace deposits in the basin that likely have the capacity to contain limited amounts of groundwater; however, since these deposits are located in limited areas that are situated at elevations above the regional water table and are also of limited thickness, they are of no practical significance as aquifers and have consequently not been developed for water supply.

The Alluvial aquifer system, of Quaternary to Holocene (Recent) geologic age, consists primarily of stream channel and flood plain deposits of the Santa Clara River and its tributaries. The Alluvium is deepest along the center of the present river channel, with a maximum thickness of about 200 feet near the area known as Saugus. It thins toward the flanks of the adjoining hills and toward the eastern and western boundaries of the basin and, in the tributaries, becomes a mere veneer in their upper reaches. The spatial extent of the Alluvium throughout the basin is illustrated in Figure 3-1.

The Alluvium is the most permeable of the local aquifer units. Based on well yields and aquifer testing, transmissivity values in the range of 50,000 to 500,000 gallons per day per foot (gpd/ft) have been reported for the Alluvium, with the higher values where the Alluvium is thickest in the center of the valley and generally west of Bouquet Canyon (Slade 1986 and 2002). The amount of groundwater in storage can vary considerably because of the effects of recharge, discharge and pumping from the aquifer. The maximum storage capacity of the Alluvium has been estimated to be about 240,000 acre-feet (af) (Slade, 1986 and 2002).

The Saugus Formation, of Pliocene to Pleistocene geologic age, has traditionally been divided into two stratigraphic units: the lowermost, geologically older Sunshine Ranch member, which is of mixed marine to terrestrial (non-marine) origin; and the overlying, or upper, portion of the Formation which is entirely terrestrial in origin. The Sunshine Ranch Member of the Saugus Formation has a maximum thickness of about 3,000 to 3,500 feet in the central part of the valley;

however, due to its marine origin and fine-grained nature, it is not considered to be a viable source of groundwater for municipal or other comparable supply. Above the Sunshine Ranch Member, the Saugus Formation is coarser grained, consisting mainly of lenticular beds of sandstone and conglomerate that are interbedded with lesser amounts of sandy mudstone, which were deposited in stream channels, flood plains, and alluvial fans by one or more ancestral drainage systems in the valley. The sand and gravel units that represent aquifer materials in the upper part of the Saugus Formation are generally located between depths of about 300 and 2,500 feet. The spatial extent of the Saugus Formation throughout the basin is illustrated in Figure 3-1.

While much thicker and more spatially extensive throughout the basin when compared to the Alluvium, and while significant in terms of groundwater storage and individual well capacity, the Saugus Formation has typically lower values of transmissivity, in the range of 80,000 to 160,000 gpd/ft, with the higher values in the upper portions of the Formation (Slade, 1988 and 2002). The storage capacity of the Saugus has most recently been estimated to be 1.65 million acre-feet between depths of 300 feet and 2,500 feet (or the base of the Saugus or the base of fresh water if shallower than 2,500 ft.) (Slade, 2002).

Historical Groundwater Development

Of the two aquifer systems in the basin, the predominant development of groundwater for agricultural and municipal water supply has historically been from the Alluvium, a condition that remains the case at present. Prior to 1980, all water supply in the valley was developed from local groundwater; since 1980, local groundwater has been supplemented by imported surface water from the State Water Project. Details of historical water requirements, and water supplies to meet those requirements, are discussed and illustrated in Chapter IV of this Plan.

In general, over the last two decades, since the inception of SWP deliveries in 1980, total pumpage from the Alluvium has ranged from a low of about 20,000 afy (in 1983) to slightly more than 43,000 afy (in 1999). For comparison, agricultural pumpage from the Alluvium throughout the 1950's was consistently in the range of about 33,000 to 41,000 afy. During that same time, municipal pumpage was quite small, less than 4,000 afy. Overall, over the last two decades, there has been a change in municipal/agricultural pumping distribution, toward a slightly higher fraction for municipal water supply (from about 50% to nearly 60% of alluvial pumpage) which is indicative of the general land use changes in the area.

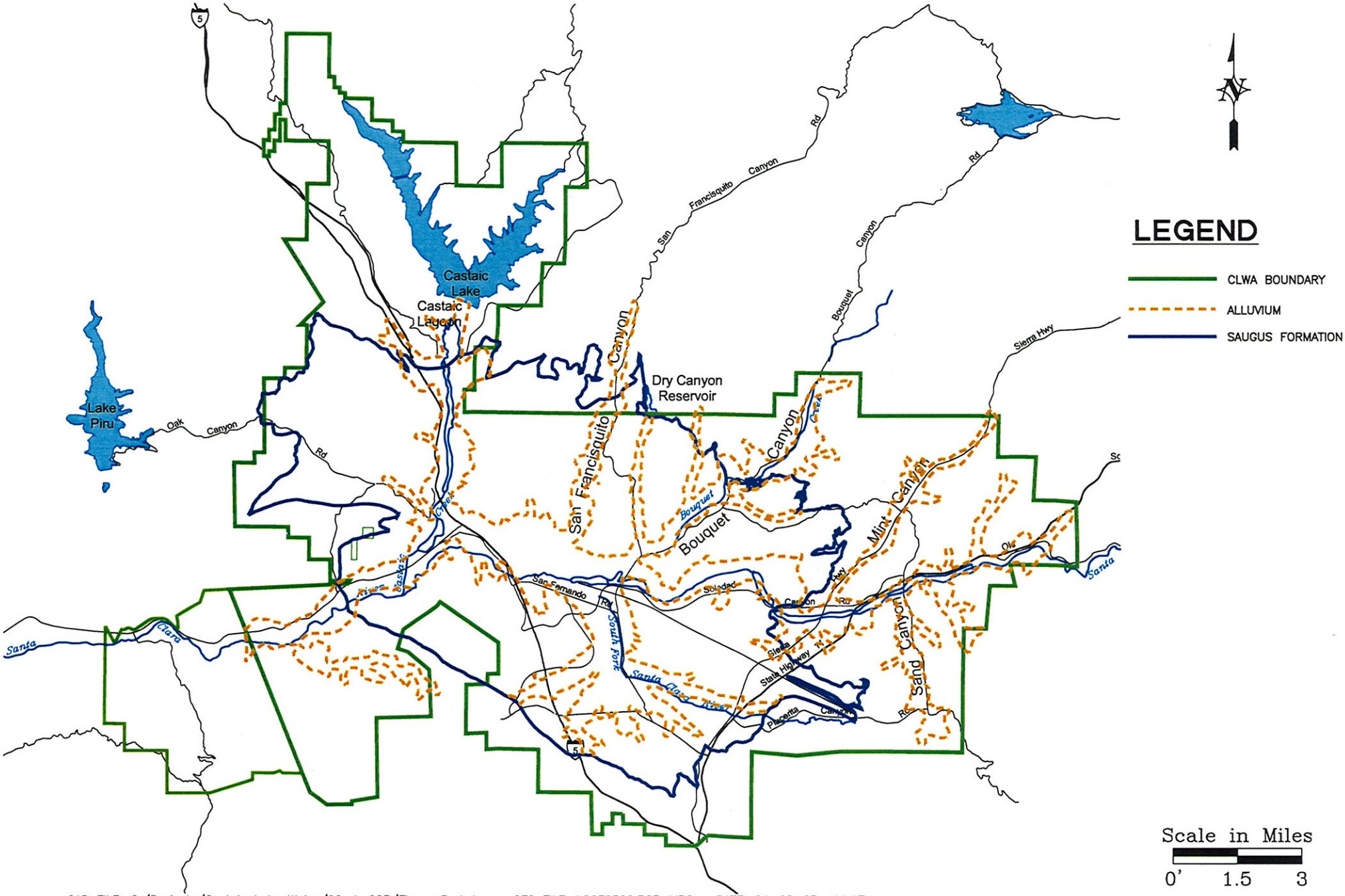

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Figure 3-1
Alluvial and Saugus Formations
Santa Clara River Valley East Groundwater Subbasin

Since 1980, total pumpage from the Saugus Formation has ranged between about 3,850 afy and nearly 15,000 afy; average pumpage over that period has been about 6,900 afy. The great majority of pumpage from the Saugus is for municipal supply (nearly 6,300 afy, or 92 percent, on average). For comparison, although historical Saugus pumping records prior to 1980 are limited, there appears to have been essentially no pumping from the Saugus prior to 1960 (on the order of about 100 af in most years, beginning in 1948), and some increased pumping for agricultural water supply beginning in about 1962 (about 900 af). The largest amount of agricultural pumping from the Saugus was during the mid-1960's, when annual Saugus pumpage was about 3,000 af. Agricultural pumping from the Saugus declined to near zero by the late 1970's, but has been generally in the 500 to 1,000 afy range since 1982. There was no Saugus pumpage for municipal supply in the early 1960's; limited data suggests that municipal pumping from the Saugus began in the 1970's, and reached nearly 5,000 afy by 1980-81. The most significant period of Saugus pumpage was 1991 through 1994, when pumpage ranged from 10,600 afy to nearly 15,000 afy and averaged over 12,000 afy, during which time SWP water deliveries were reduced at the end of extended drought conditions.

Groundwater Monitoring Network and Program

There is no formal groundwater monitoring network of wells for groundwater level measurements and/or groundwater quality sampling in the basin. Consequently, one component of this Plan is to formalize both a network of wells for groundwater monitoring and a program for water level measurements, water quality sampling, and other pertinent groundwater data collection (Primary Plan Element 1). Despite the lack of an existing formal groundwater monitoring network and program, however, there is a significant amount of historical groundwater data, some of which dates back into the 1940's, on which to base reasonable assessments of groundwater conditions in the basin. For example, groundwater level measurements have been made over varying periods of record in a total of 154 wells, mostly alluvial wells, throughout the basin. Similarly, groundwater quality data, consisting of varying numbers of constituents analyzed, are available from some wells, but a much smaller number than is the case for groundwater level data. These data, along with direct measurements or indirect estimates of pumpage, primarily from high capacity municipal and agricultural wells, allow for analysis of groundwater basin conditions, as discussed in this Plan, and also provide the bases on which a groundwater model can be developed (Primary Plan Element 3) and on which various management criteria such as operational yield, baseline groundwater quality, etc. can be determined (Primary Plan Elements 3, 6, etc.).

Groundwater Levels and Storage

Groundwater level data in various parts of the basin illustrate basin response to the historical pumpage from the Alluvium. Organized into hydrograph form (depth to groundwater or groundwater elevation vs. time), historical groundwater levels were lower in the 1950's and 60's than current levels in the middle to western part of the basin, logically in response to the higher pumpage of the 1950's before the importation of SWP water and the associated increase in return flows to the river that have augmented groundwater recharge in that part of the basin. Groundwater levels in those areas notably recovered as pumpage declined through the 1960's and 1970's. They have subsequently sustained generally high levels for much of the last 30 years, with two dry-period exceptions: mid-1970's and late 1980's - early 1990's; recoveries to previous high groundwater levels have followed both of those dry-period declines. Based on this data, there is no evidence of any historic or recent trend toward permanent water level or storage decline. In general, throughout the Alluvium, groundwater levels have been generally higher over the last 30 years than was consistently the case for the preceding 20 years (1950's - 60's).

During the last 20 to 30 years, in essentially all the alluvial portions of the basin, groundwater levels have fluctuated from near the ground surface when the basin is full, to as much as 100 feet lower during intermittent dry periods of reduced recharge. Selected hydrographs of groundwater elevations illustrate the above described conditions throughout the basin. Figure 3-2 illustrates groundwater level conditions and trends at multiple locations in the Alluvium along the main channel of the Santa Clara River, from east near the mouth of Sand Canyon, to the area between Mint Canyon and Bouquet Canyon, to farther west immediately below the mouth of Bouquet Canyon. Similar long-term conditions are evident in the tributary canyons.

A comment about some of the groundwater fluctuations illustrated in Figure 3-2 is appropriate since they are illustrative of the most substantial intermittent changes in the basin. As noted above, the Alluvium has historically experienced a number of alternating wet and dry hydrologic conditions as illustrated in Figure 3-2. Since the Alluvium is thinner to the east, the fluctuations in water levels of 75 to 100 feet impact well yields and pumping capacities when water levels are occasionally lower. When that occurs, as is currently the case due to locally dry hydrologic conditions, the affected purveyors shift a portion of their water demands to imported SWP water, thus reducing pumpage and reducing drawdown of water levels. Recovery of groundwater levels

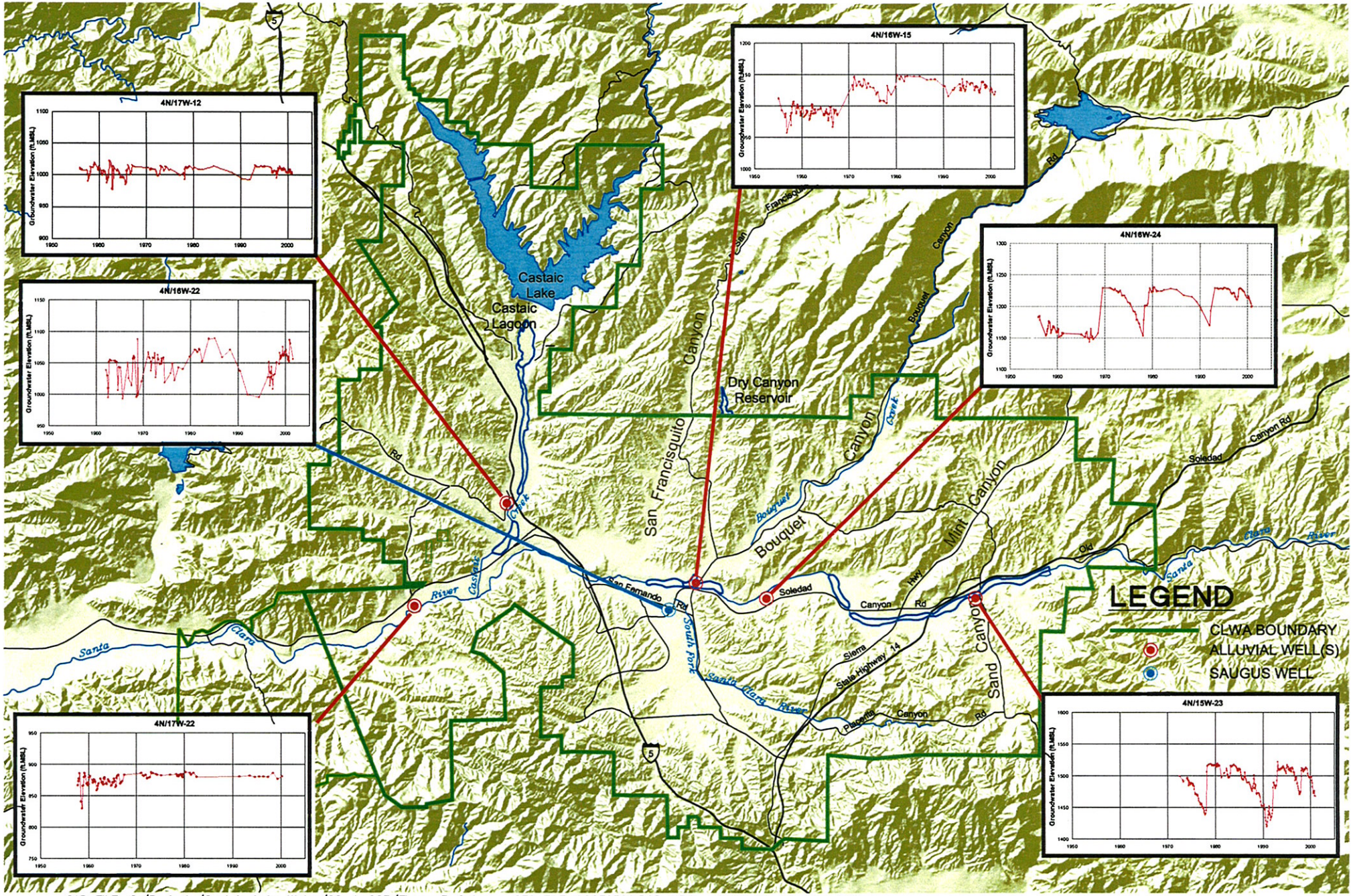

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Figure 3-2
Historical Groundwater Elevations
Santa Clara River Valley East Groundwater Subbasin

and storage occurs upon a return of stream flow to contribute to natural recharge.

Depending on the period of available data, all the hydrographs of alluvial groundwater levels show the same general picture: recent (last 30 years) groundwater levels are generally higher than over the preceding 20 years. In some locations, there are intermittent dry-period declines (and an associated use of some groundwater from storage) followed by wet-period recoveries (and associated refilling of storage space). On a long-term basis, whether over the last 20 years since the inception of conjunctive use via importation of SWP water, or over the last 40 to 50 years, the Alluvium shows no signs of water level-related overdraft, i.e., no trend toward decreasing groundwater levels and storage, a condition that is intended to be maintained via implementation of this Plan, e.g. via Primary Plan Elements 3 and 5.

Unlike the Alluvium, there are limited Saugus water level data; however, the limited data indicate that, although there have been seasonal water level changes in response to pumpage, the long-term trend in the Saugus (over the last 35 to 40 years) has been one of relative groundwater level stability (see, for example, Figure 3-2). There is no trend toward a sustained decline in Saugus water levels or storage that would be indicative of overdraft.

Land subsidence as a result of groundwater extractions is a concern in a number of groundwater basins in California. The potential for land subsidence caused by groundwater extractions derives from a combination of the geologic makeup of the aquifer materials and the history of groundwater level fluctuations. In the Santa Clara Valley East Subbasin, the most notable groundwater level fluctuations have occurred in the Alluvium to the east of Bouquet Canyon, with the greatest fluctuations (up to nearly 100 feet) recorded in the vicinity of Sand Canyon. Fortunately, those fluctuations have been intermittent, and have varied directly with local wet and dry conditions. From a subsidence perspective, they have also fluctuated in an unconfined aquifer that is comprised of essentially all coarse-grained material. The lack of any significant fine-grained material in the aquifer where groundwater levels have fluctuated results in two notable local conditions in regards to subsidence: there is no recorded historical subsidence or indirect evidence of its occurrence, i.e. subsidence-related impacts on surface structures, drainage facilities, etc.; and there is minimal potential for inelastic subsidence to occur in response to ongoing groundwater level fluctuations in the Alluvium.

The Saugus Formation contains a greater fraction of fine-grained material interbedded with the coarser aquifer materials that yield water to wells. Consequently, the Saugus has a greater

potential to undergo consolidation, with attenuant subsidence impacts at the ground surface, if groundwater levels are substantially lowered for long time periods. Historical Saugus pumping has not caused such conditions to occur. Current water supply planning, as described in this Plan, is to rely on the Saugus Formation for a relatively small component of water supply on an ongoing basis, with intermittent increased pumping during dry periods.

The long-term objective for groundwater management, as described in this Plan, is to not overdraft either the Alluvium or the Saugus, i.e. to not chronically lower groundwater levels. Satisfaction of the latter objective will have the correlative impact of minimizing the potential for inelastic land subsidence attributable to pumping from the Saugus Formation; combined with the lack of fine-grained material in the Alluvium, satisfaction of that objective will also have the correlative impact of ensuring the improbability of any subsidence attributable to pumping from that aquifer.

Groundwater Quality

Groundwater quality is, or course, a key factor in assessing both the Alluvial aquifer and the Saugus Formation as municipal and agricultural water supplies. At present, however, there is no convenient long-term record of water quality, i.e. water quality data in one or more wells that span several decades and continue to the present. Thus, in order to examine a long-term record of water quality in the Alluvium, an integration of individual records from several wells, completed in the same aquifer materials and in close proximity to each other, can be used to generally show long-term trends in groundwater quality. Figure 3-3 illustrates groundwater quality conditions and trends at multiple locations in the Alluvium along the main channel of the Santa Clara River from the area near the mouth of Mint Canyon, to areas immediately above and near the mouth of Bouquet Canyon, to the area below San Francisquito Canyon. Based on these records of groundwater quality, there have been historical fluctuations in concentrations of total dissolved solids (TDS), as well as corresponding fluctuations of individual constituents of TDS. In general, however, and similar to groundwater levels, there has been no long-term trend toward groundwater quality degradation.

Groundwater quality variations are common throughout the Alluvium and generally correlate inversely with precipitation and stream flow: wet periods have produced substantial recharge of higher quality (low TDS) water and dry periods have resulted in the notable declines in water levels described above, with a corresponding increase in TDS (and individual component

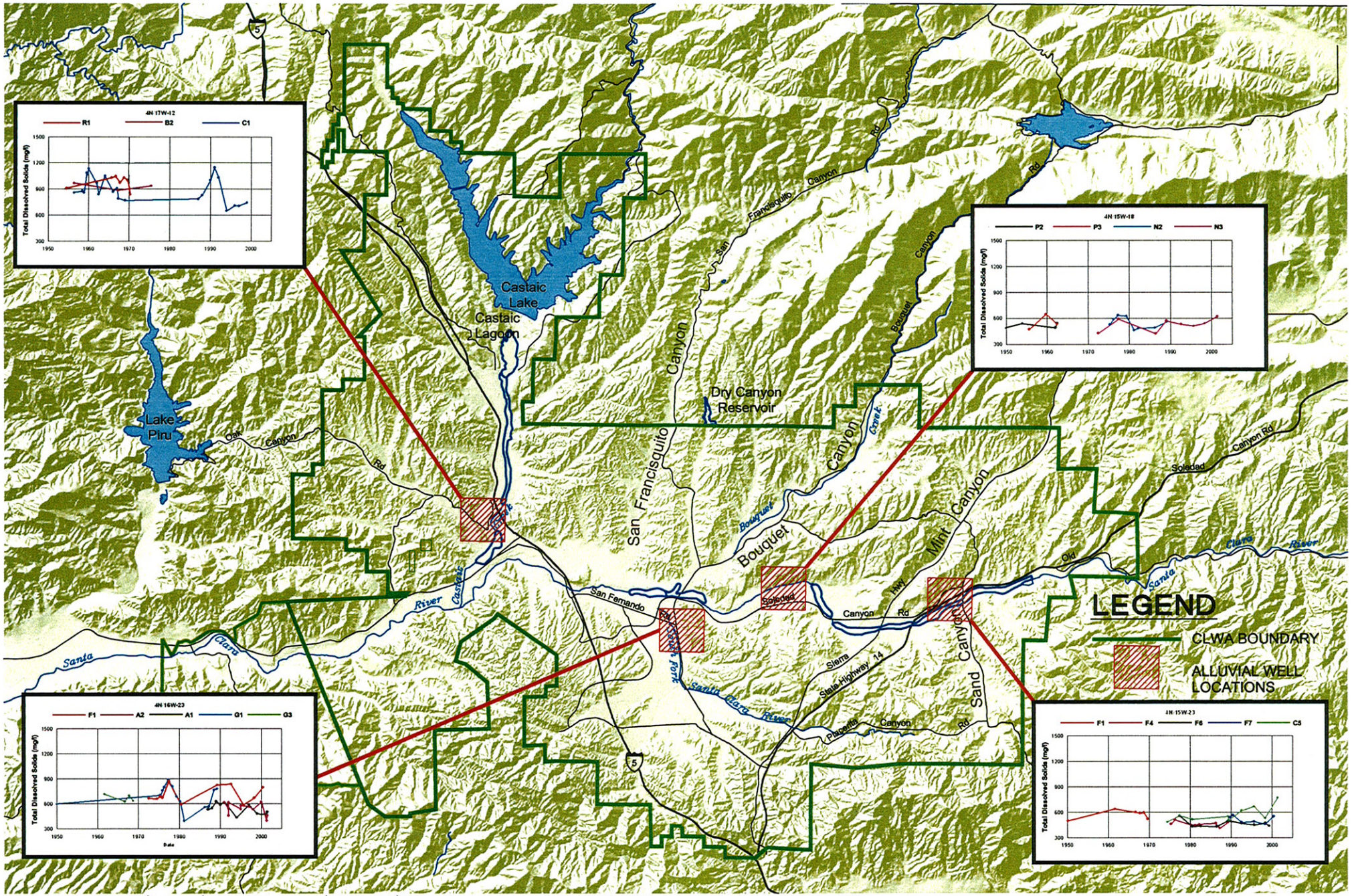

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Figure 3-3
Historical Groundwater Quality by Section
Santa Clara River Valley East Groundwater Subbasin

constituents) in the deeper parts of the Alluvium.

Due to a much more limited number of wells and the limited spatial extent of groundwater development in the Saugus Formation, long-term Saugus groundwater quality data are not sufficiently extensive to permit any sort of basin-wide analysis or assessment of pumping-related impacts on quality. Based on the most complete historical record, over the last 35 years, however, groundwater quality in the Saugus has remained generally constant. The Saugus Formation is, on a groundwater quality basis, a viable agricultural and municipal water supply.

The most notable groundwater quality issue in the basin centers around the detection and impact of perchlorate on several Saugus wells and one Alluvial well in the central part of the basin near the location of the former Whittaker Bermite facility, which is immediately southeast of the confluence of the main Santa Clara River and its South Fork tributary. In 1997, routine water quality sampling detected the presence of perchlorate in four municipal wells completed in the Saugus Formation (CLWA Santa Clarita Water Division Saugus Wells 1 and 2, Newhall County Water District Well 11, and Valencia Water Company Well 157). While there remains no primary or secondary drinking water standard for perchlorate, and although only some of the detected concentrations of perchlorate in the Saugus wells exceeded the Action Level established by the State Department of Health Services at that time (18 ug/l), all those wells were inactivated by their respective owners after detection of perchlorate; those wells remain out of municipal water supply service since then.

More recently, in late 2002, routine water quality sampling of Alluvial wells detected perchlorate in one of them (CLWA Santa Clarita Water Division Stadium Well) at a concentration which slightly exceeds the current Action Level (4 ug/l). This well has also been voluntarily inactivated, and remains removed from municipal water supply service.

This Plan, notably through Primary Plan Elements 1, 6 and 8, is intended to incorporate both short-term and long-term groundwater quality considerations in the management of the groundwater basin in order to formalize groundwater quality monitoring and assessment, to investigate and correct groundwater contamination problems, and to preserve or improve groundwater quality for ongoing water supply as well as for avoiding adverse water quality impacts on interconnected surface waters.

Areas of Concern and Identified Problems

A number of concerns have been expressed about groundwater conditions in the basin. While not all of the expressed concerns have been substantiated, they are listed and briefly discussed here, and they are addressed in the management objectives for the basin, intended to be achieved via implementation of the various primary and secondary elements in this Plan.

At present, the most notable concern in the basin is the impact of perchlorate contamination on a number of municipal water supply wells, thus affecting the available pumping capacity from some municipal wells. While perchlorate impacts on a few wells do not preclude the ability to pump groundwater in accordance with existing water supply plans, activities to characterize the contamination, and ultimately to control it and treat it, have been initiated in order to return the impacted wells' pumping capacity to water supply service. Primary Element 8 is included in this Plan to formalize the addressing of groundwater contamination issues in the basin.

Concern has also been expressed that groundwater development in the basin will adversely impact the quantity and/or quality of surface flows leaving the basin via the Santa Clara River. Such concern extends to the potential impact on groundwater in the next downstream basin, the Piru Basin in Ventura County. While there are no established provisions regarding surface flows out of the Santa Clara River Valley East subbasin, Primary Element 2 is included in this Plan to formally address the monitoring and management of surface water flows and quality within, and flowing out of, the basin. Some work is already ongoing related to this area of concern via a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among CLWA, other retail water purveyors within CLWA's service area, and United Water Conservation District, which manages surface water and groundwater in the downstream basins on the Santa Clara River in Ventura County. That cooperative effort, which is incorporated into this Plan via Primary Element 9, includes integration of databases, development of a numerical groundwater flow model, and interpretation and reporting on surface water and groundwater conditions.

A third expressed concern in the basin, is that groundwater is already overdrafted. Associated with that expressed concern is a related issue that reliance on overdrafted groundwater results in an overstated water supply in the basin. As discussed earlier in this section, long-term groundwater levels, storage, and quality all indicate the basin is in balance (i.e., no overdraft exists). As also discussed above, the importation of supplemental surface water over the last 23 years, and the associated initiation of conjunctive use operations have directly resulted in an

overall adequacy of water supplies while sustaining an undepleted groundwater supply. Primary Elements 3, 4 and 5 are key parts of this Plan to more formally quantify the yield of the groundwater basin, and to continue to meet overall water requirements via continuation of conjunctive use of local groundwater with imported supplemental surface water, ultimately complemented by integration of recycled water for non-potable water supply (Primary Element 7).

Finally with regard to areas of concern in the basin, the historically larger fluctuations in the eastern part of the basin have been highlighted for their impacts on private wells in that area. Some focused study has been done to address whether certain pumping directly affects private wells in Sand Canyon; its conclusions were that such direct effects were not occurring. Subsequently, a nearby development contracted for delivery of up to 120 acre-feet of imported SWP water from CLWA in order to reduce its use of groundwater for domestic and irrigation water supply. Primary Element 1 is partly intended to acquire site-specific data regarding private wells, their locations, the aquifers in which they are completed, their yields and pumping capacities as well as their quality, and their water level records. Primary Element 3 is partly intended to analyze such data in order to assess whether local aquifer depletion is occurring and, if so, what remedy is appropriate.