

San Joaquin Valley Groundwater Basin Delta-Mendota Subbasin

- Groundwater Subbasin Number: 5-22.07
- County: Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno
- Surface Area: 747,000 acres (1,170 square miles)

Basin Boundaries and Hydrology

The San Joaquin Valley is surrounded on the west by the Coast Ranges, on the south by the San Emigdio and Tehachapi Mountains, on the east by the Sierra Nevada and on the north by the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and Sacramento Valley. The northern portion of the San Joaquin Valley drains toward the Delta by the San Joaquin River and its tributaries, the Fresno, Merced, Tuolumne, and Stanislaus Rivers. The southern portion of the valley is internally drained by the Kings, Kaweah, Tule, and Kern Rivers that flow into the Tulare drainage basin including the beds of the former Tulare, Buena Vista, and Kern Lakes.

The Delta-Mendota subbasin is bounded on the west by the Tertiary and older marine sediments of the Coast Ranges, and on the north by the Stanislaus/San Joaquin county line. The eastern boundary follows the San Joaquin River to Township 11 S, where it jogs eastward and follows the eastern boundary of Columbia Canal company to the San Joaquin River, then follows the Chowchilla Bypass and the eastern border of Farmer's Water District. It then trends southerly through Township 14S Range 15E on the eastern side of Fresno Slough, then follows the Tranquility ID boundary to its southern extremity. Heading northward, it follows the eastern, northern, and northwestern boundary of San Joaquin Valley – Westside Groundwater Subbasin (corresponding with Westlands Water District boundaries). Average annual precipitation is nine to 11 inches, increasing northwards.

Hydrogeologic Information

The San Joaquin Valley represents the southern portion of the Great Central Valley of California. The San Joaquin Valley is a structural trough up to 200 miles long and 70 miles wide filled with up to 32,000 feet of marine and continental sediments deposited during periodic inundation by the Pacific Ocean and by erosion of the surrounding mountains, respectively. Continental deposits shed from the surrounding mountains form an alluvial wedge that thickens from the valley margins toward the axis of the structural trough. This depositional axis is below to slightly west of the series of rivers, lakes, sloughs, and marshes, which mark the current and historic axis of surface drainage in the San Joaquin Valley.

Water Bearing Formations

The geologic units that comprise the ground water reservoir in the Delta-Mendota subbasin consist of the Tulare Formation, terrace deposits, alluvium, and flood-basin deposits. The Tulare Formation is composed of beds, lenses, and tongues of clay, sand, and gravel that have been alternately deposited in oxidizing and reducing environments (Hotchkiss 1971). The Corcoran Clay Member of the formation underlies the basin at depths ranging about 100 to 500 feet and acts as a confining bed (DWR 1981).

Terrace deposits of Pleistocene age lie up to several feet higher than present streambeds. They are composed of yellow, tan, and light-to-dark brown silt, sand, and gravel with a matrix that varies from sand to clay (Hotchkiss 1971). The water table generally lies below the bottom of the terrace deposits. However, the relatively large grain size of the terrace deposits suggests their value as possible recharge sites.

Alluvium is composed of interbedded, poorly to well-sorted clay, silt, sand, and gravel and is divided based on its degree of dissection and soil formation. The flood-basin deposits are generally composed of light-to-dark brown and gray clay, silt, sand, and organic materials with locally high concentrations of salts and alkali. Stream channel deposits of coarse sand and gravel are also included.

Groundwater in the Delta-Mendota subbasin occurs in three water-bearing zones. These include the lower zone, which contains confined fresh water in the lower section of the Tulare Formation, an upper zone which contains confined, semi-confined, and unconfined water in the upper section of the Tulare Formation and younger deposits, and a shallow zone which contains unconfined water within about 25 feet of the land surface (Davis 1959).

The estimated specific yield of this subbasin is 11.8 percent (based on DWR San Joaquin District internal data and Davis 1959). Land subsidence up to about 16 feet has occurred in the southern portion of the basin due to artesian head decline (Ireland 1964).

Restrictive Structures

Groundwater flow was historically northwestward parallel to the San Joaquin River (Hotchkiss 1971). Recent data (DWR 2000) show flow to the north and eastward, toward the San Joaquin River. Based on current and historical groundwater elevation maps, groundwater barriers do not appear to exist in the subbasin.

Groundwater Level Trends

Changes in groundwater levels are based on annual water level measurements by DWR and cooperators. Water level changes were evaluated by quarter township and computed through a custom DWR computer program using geostatistics (kriging). On average, the subbasin water level has increased by 2.2 feet from 1970 through 2000. The period from 1970 through 1985 showed a general increase, topping out in 1985 at 7.5 feet above the 1970 water level. The nine-year period from 1985 to 1994 saw general declines in groundwater levels, reaching back down to the 1970 groundwater level in 1994. Groundwater levels rose in 1995 to about 2.2 feet above the 1970 groundwater level. Water levels fluctuated around this value until 2000.

Groundwater Storage

Estimations of the total storage capacity of the subbasin and the amount of water in storage as of 1995 were calculated using an estimated specific yield of 11.8 percent and water levels collected by DWR and cooperators.

According to these calculations, the total storage capacity of this subbasin is estimated to be 30,400,000 af to a depth of 300 feet and 81,800,000 af to the base of fresh groundwater. These same calculations give an estimate of 26,600,000 af of groundwater to a depth of 300 feet stored in this subbasin as of 1995 (DWR 1995). According to published literature, the amount of stored groundwater in this subbasin as of 1961 is 51,000,000 af to a depth of $\leq 1,000$ feet (Williamson 1989).

Groundwater Budget (Type B)

Although a detailed budget was not available for this subbasin, an estimate of groundwater demand was calculated based on the 1990 normalized year and data on land and water use. A subsequent analysis was done by a DWR water budget spreadsheet to estimate overall applied water demands, agricultural groundwater pumpage, urban pumping demand and other extraction data.

Natural recharge is estimated to be 8,000 af. Artificial recharge and subsurface inflow are not determined. Applied water recharge is approximately 74,000 af. Annual urban and agricultural extractions estimated to be 17,000 af and 491,000 af, respectively. Other extractions are approximately 3,000 af, and subsurface outflow is not determined.

Groundwater Quality

Characterization. The groundwater in this subbasin is characterized by mixed sulfate to bicarbonate types in the northern and central portion with areas of sodium chloride and sodium sulfate waters in the central and southern portion. TDS values range from 400 to 1,600 mg/L in the northern portion of the subbasin and from 730 to 6,000 mg/L in the southern portion of the subbasin (Hotchkiss 1971). The Department of Health Services (DHS), which monitors Title 22 water quality standards, reports TDS values in 44 public supply wells to range from 210 to 1,750 mg/L, with an average value of 770 mg/L. A typical range of water quality in wells is 700-1,000 mg/L.

Impairments. Shallow, saline groundwater occurs within about 10 feet of the ground surface over a large portion of the subbasin. There are also localized areas of high iron, fluoride, nitrate, and boron in the subbasin (Hotchkiss 1971).

Water Quality in Public Supply Wells

Constituent Group¹	Number of wells sampled²	Number of wells with a concentration above an MCL³
Inorganics – Primary	47	2
Radiological	47	1
Nitrates	51	4
Pesticides	47	1
VOCs and SVOCs	45	0
Inorganics – Secondary	47	18

¹ A description of each member in the constituent groups and a generalized discussion of the relevance of these groups are included in *California's Groundwater – Bulletin 118* by DWR (2003).

² Represents distinct number of wells sampled as required under DHS Title 22 program from 1994 through 2000.

³ Each well reported with a concentration above an MCL was confirmed with a second detection above an MCL. This information is intended as an indicator of the types of activities that cause contamination in a given basin. It represents the water quality at the sample location. It does not indicate the water quality delivered to the consumer. More detailed drinking water quality information can be obtained from the local water purveyor and its annual Consumer Confidence Report.

Well Characteristics

Well yields (gal/min)		
Municipal/Irrigation	Range: 20 – 5,000	Average: 800-2,000
Total depths (ft)		
Domestic		
Municipal/Irrigation	Range: 50 - 800	Average: 400-600

Active Monitoring Data

Agency	Parameter	Number of wells /measurement frequency
DWR (incl. Cooperators)	Groundwater levels	816 Semi-annually
DWR (incl. Cooperators) Department of Health Services (incl. Cooperators)	Mineral, nutrient, & minor element. Title 22 water quality	120 Varies

Basin Management

Groundwater management:	Panoche Water District is approximately 11 months into the AB3030 process and will be doing a joint plan with other districts and the county. San Luis and Delta-Mendota Water Authority North adopted an AB 3030 plan on December 5, 1997.
Water agencies	
Public	Merced County, Fresno County, Broadview WD, Centinella WD, Central California ID, Davis WD, Del Puerto WD, Eagle Field WD, El Solyo WD, Farmers WD, Firebaugh Canal WD, Foothill WD, Fresno Slough WD, Grasslands WD, Hospital WD, Kern Canon WD, Laguna WD, Mercy Springs WD, Mustang WD, Oak Flat WD, Orestimba WD, Oro Loma WD, Pacheco WD, Panoche WD, Patterson WD, Romero WD, Salado WD, San Luis Canal Company, San Luis WD, Santa Nella C.WD, Sunflower WD, Tranquility ID, West Stanislaus ID, Widren WD, Quinto WD
Private	None.

References Cited

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- _____. 2000. *Spring 1999, Lines of Equal Elevation of Water in Wells, Unconfined Aquifer*. 1:253,440 scale map sheet.
- Davis, GH, Green, JH, Olmstead, SH, and Brown, DW. 1959. *Ground Water Conditions and Storage Capacity in the San Joaquin Valley, California*. US Geological Survey Water Supply Paper No. 1469. 287p.
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- Williamson, Alex K, Prudic, David E, and Swain, Lindsay A. 989. *Groundwater flow in the Central Valley, California*. US Geological Survey Professional Paper 1401-D. 127 p.

Additional References

- California Department of Water Resources (DWR). 1994. Bulletin 160-93. *California Water Plan Update, Volume 1*.
- _____. 1980. Bulletin 118-80. *Ground Water Basins in California*.

Errata

Updated groundwater management information and added hotlinks to applicable websites.
(1/20/06)