San Joaquin Valley Groundwater Basin
Westside Subbasin

- Groundwater Subbasin Number: 5-22.09
- County: Fresno, Kings
- Surface Area: 640,000 acres (1,000 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 Westside Subbasin consists mainly of the lands in Westlands Water District. It is located between the Coast Range foothills on the west and the San Joaquin River drainage and Fresno Slough on the east. The subbasin is bordered on the southwest by the Pleasant Valley Groundwater Subbasin and on the west by Tertiary marine sediments of the Coast Ranges, on the north and northeast by the Delta-Mendota Groundwater Subbasin, and on the east and southeast by the Kings and Tulare Lake Groundwater Subbasins. Average annual precipitation varies across the subbasin from 7 inches in the south to 9 inches in the north.

Hydrogeologic Information

Water Bearing Formations

The aquifer system comprising the Westside Subbasin consists of unconsolidated continental deposits of Tertiary and Quaternary age. These deposits form an unconfined to semi-confined upper aquifer and a confined lower aquifer. These aquifers are separated by an aquitard named the Corcoran Clay (E-Clay) member of the Tulare Formation.

The unconfined to semi-confined aquifer (upper zone) above the Corcoran Clay includes younger alluvium, older alluvium, and part of the Tulare Formation. These deposits consist of highly lenticular, poorly sorted clay, silt, and sand intercalated with occasional beds of well-sorted fine to medium grained sand. The depth to the top of the Corcoran Clay varies from approximately 500 feet to 850 feet (DWR 1981).

The confined aquifer (lower zone) consists of the lower part of the Tulare Formation and possibly the uppermost part of the San Joaquin Formation. This unit is composed of lenticular beds of silty clay, clay, silt, and sand interbedded with occasional strata of well-sorted sand. Brackish or saline water underlies the usable groundwater in the lower zone.

Unpublished DWR (San Joaquin District) information indicates specific yield ranges from 5.1 to 17.8 percent to a depth of 300 feet. The highest specific yields are associated with coarser sediments distributed along the eastern portion of the subbasin from the Sierra Nevada Mountains. The USGS (Williamson and others 1989) used a subbasin average specific yield of 10.3 percent for groundwater modeling purposes. Earlier USGS work estimated an average specific yield of 9 percent from a depth of 10 to 200 feet (Davis and others 1959).

Restrictive Structures

Flood basin deposits along the eastern subbasin have caused near surface soils to drain poorly thus restricting the downward movement of percolating water. This causes agriculturally applied water to buildup as shallow water in the near surface zone. Areas prone to this buildup are often referred to as drainage problem areas.

The Corcoran Clay is a lacustrine diatomaceous clay unit that underlies much of the subbasin. Within the subbasin it varies in thickness from 20 to 120 feet (Belitz and Heimes 1990). Prior to groundwater development, the Corcoran Clay effectively separated the upper and lower zones. Numerous wells penetrate the clay and have allowed partial interaction between the zones.

Recharge Areas

Primary recharge to the aquifer system is from the seepage of Coast Range streams along the west side of the subbasin and the deep percolation of surface irrigation. Davis and Poland (1957) indicated that secondary recharge to the upper and lower aquifers occurred from areas to the east and northeast as subsurface flows.

Groundwater Level Trends

Groundwater levels were generally at their lowest levels in the late 1960s, prior to importation of surface water. The Central Valley Project began delivering surface water to the San Luis Unit in 1967-68. Water levels gradually increased to a maximum in about 1987-88, falling briefly during the 1976-77 drought. Water levels began dropping again during the 1987-92 drought with water levels showing the effects until 1994. Through a series of wet years, after the drought, 1998 water levels recovered nearly to 1987-88 levels.

Groundwater Storage

Groundwater Storage Capacity. Davis and others (1959) estimated the groundwater storage capacity at 10,940,000 af in the depth zone from 10 to 200 feet of the Mendota-Huron storage unit. This was over an area of 639,000 acres and a specific yield varying from 8.0 to 9.6 percent. This occupies a portion of the upper aquifer.

Using an average thickness of 675 feet (ground surface to top of Corcoran Clay), specific yield of 9 percent, over an area of 600,000 acres; the storage capacity of the upper aquifer is approximately 36,500,000 af.

Using a thickness of 1,200 feet from the average base of the Corcoran Clay to the average base of fresh groundwater, a specific yield of 9 percent, over

600,000 acres; the storage capacity of the lower aquifer is approximately 65,000,000 af.

Groundwater in Storage. The USGS estimated the water in storage in 1961 was 52,000,000 af (Williamson 1989). This estimate was to a depth of less than or equal to 1,000 feet.
Using an average depth to water in October 1984 of 111 feet, a specific yield of 9 percent, over an area of 600,000 acres; the available storage is estimated to be 6,000,000 af.

Groundwater Budget (Type C)

Davis and Poland (1957) estimated seepage from west side streams amounted to 30,000-40,000 af per year. For 1951, secondary recharge from the east into the upper aquifer was 20,000-30,000 af and was 150,000-200,000 af into the lower aquifer (Davis and Poland 1957).

Westlands Water District (1999) estimated the average deep percolation between 1978 and 1996 was 244,000 af per year. The District (1998) also estimated the average applied groundwater between 1978 and 1997 was 193,000 af per year.

Groundwater Quality

Characterization. Groundwaters of the west side of the San Joaquin Valley are generally of the sulfate or bicarbonate type (Davis and others 1959).

The waters of the upper aquifer, generally, are high in calcium and magnesium sulfate (Davis and Poland 1957). Groundwater below 300 feet and above the Corcoran Clay shows a tendency of decreased dissolved solids with increased depth. Most of the groundwater of the lower aquifer is of the sodium sulfate type (Davis and Poland 1957). The difference in quality between the upper and lower aquifers is that the confined zone contains less dissolved solids (Davis and others 1959). Groundwater in western Fresno County can have an upper range between 2,000 and 3,000 mg/L (Davis and others 1959).

DHS data indicates an average TDS of 520 mg/L in the subbasin with a range from 220 mg/L to 1,300 mg/L based on the analyses of six Title 22 monitoring wells.

Dubrovsky and others (1993) indicated dissolved solids in shallow groundwater can be greater than 10,000 mg/L at some locations in the lower fan areas. One sample had a TDS of 35,000 mg/L.

Impairments. High total dissolved solids is one impairment of groundwater in the subbasin. Groundwaters at certain locations contain selenium and boron that may affect usability.

Water Quality in Public Supply Wells

Constituent Group[1]	Number of wells sampled[2]	Number of wells with a concentration above an MCL[3]
Inorganics – Primary	2	0
Radiological	1	0
Nitrates	2	0
Pesticides	2	0
VOCs and SVOCs	2	0
Inorganics – Secondary	2	2

[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: – 560-2,000	Average: 1,100 (Davis and Poland 1957)
	Total depths (ft)	
Domestic	Range: - Not determined	Average: Not determined
Municipal/Irrigation	Range: - 120-3,000	Average: 600-1,800 varies by type and location

Active Monitoring Data

Agency	Parameter	Number of wells /measurement frequency
Westlands Water District	Groundwater levels	960 Annually and may vary
Westlands Water District	Miscellaneous water quality	Varies
Department of Health Services and cooperators	Title 22 water quality	50 Varies

Basin Management

Groundwater management:	AB 3030 Plan adopted by Westlands Water District
Water agencies	
Public	Westlands Water District
Private	

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Errata

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