



CALIFORNIA HYDROLOGY UPDATE

CONDITIONS AS OF MAY 31, 2026



The California Hydrology Update is a regular summary of current weather conditions in the State of California and serves as a supplement to the data on the [California Water Watch](#) website. It is produced by the California Department of Water Resources Hydrology Section and Sustainable Groundwater Management Office teams. For tips and resources on how to make water conservation a way of life, please visit [saveourwater.com](#)

PRECIPITATION

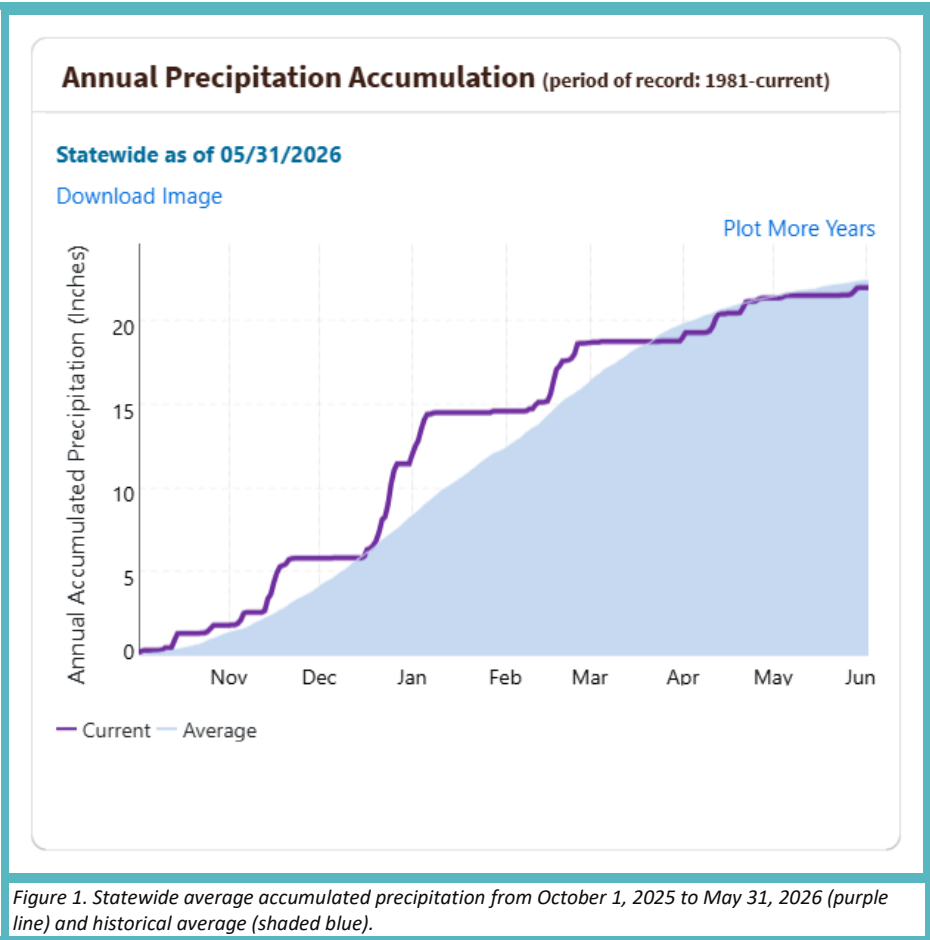
Water year 2026 accumulated precipitation continues to be near average when considering across the state at the end of May. The statewide accumulated precipitation through the end of May 2026 was about 22 inches, which is 98% of average. During the past month in May 2026, the main periods of precipitation were generally during May 3-5, 22, and 25-28 (shown in Figure 1).

May 2026 started with an area of high pressure off the southern coastline. During May 3-5, low pressure from the north moved south towards California's coast which resulted in thunderstorms and minor precipitation (mainly Northern California and along Sierra Nevada). Cooler temperatures during this period helped to slow snowmelt. As the low-pressure system moved across California, high pressure began to build off the coast. During May 6-21, dry conditions with rising temperatures were observed across California. Basins with snowpack, observed increase in river flow with warming temperatures and clear skies increasing snowmelt. On May 22, isolated showers resulted in trace amounts of precipitation along the crest of Sierra Nevada.



During May 23-24, mostly dry conditions were observed across the state. During May 25-28, low pressure from the Pacific Northwest traveled south over the border with Oregon and slowly moved through California, which resulted in cooler temperatures and precipitation in Northern California and Central California (during May 27-28). During May 29-31, dry conditions resumed for most of the state. Precipitation totals during May 24 to May 31 include 0.1 to 0.5 inch for North Coast, up to 0.5 inch for Central Valley, up to an inch for Central Coast, 0.25 to 1.5 inches along Sierra Nevada, and 1.0 to 3.0 inches over Shasta Basin and along the border with Oregon.

As shown in Figure 2, for water year 2026 through end of May, North Coast received below average accumulated precipitation, Southern Cascades and Modoc Plateau received near to above average precipitation, below to near average accumulated precipitation along Sierra Nevada, Central California received near to well above average accumulated precipitation, and below average accumulated precipitation for most of Southern California. The North Coast has accumulated about 43.5 inches of precipitation for the water year through end of May, which is 86% of average. The Sacramento River region has accumulated about 35.8 inches of precipitation for the water year through end of May, which is 103% of average. The San Joaquin River region has accumulated about 25 inches of precipitation for the water year through end of May, which is 96% of average. The Central Coast has accumulated about 23.2 inches of precipitation for the water year through end of May, which is 117% of average. The Tulare Lake region has accumulated about 16.8 inches of precipitation for the water year through end of May, which is 111% of average. The South Coast has accumulated about 17.7 inches of precipitation for the water year through end of May, which is 106% of average.

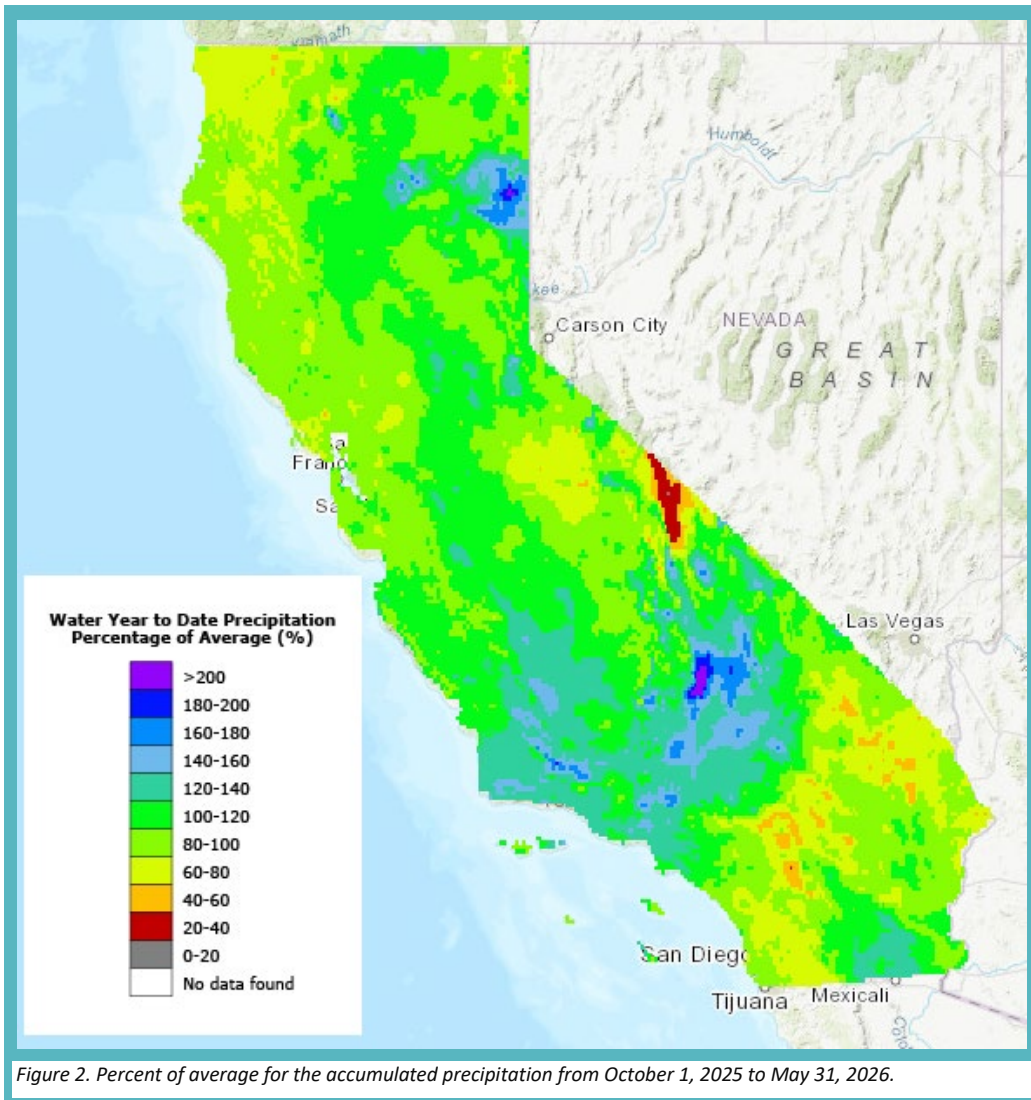


The San Joaquin River region has accumulated about 25 inches of precipitation for the water year through end of May, which is 96% of average. The Central Coast has accumulated about 23.2 inches of precipitation for the water year through end of May, which is 117% of average. The Tulare Lake region has accumulated about 16.8 inches of precipitation for the water year through end of May, which is 111% of average. The South Coast has accumulated about 17.7 inches of precipitation for the water year through end of May, which is 106% of average.

The Climate Prediction Center (CPC) monthly outlook issued on May 31, 2026 indicates up to 40% chance of below normal precipitation for June 2026 and equal chances of below, near, or above normal precipitation for the rest of state for the month of June 2026. The CPC seasonal outlook covering the



period of June 2026 through the end of August 2026 indicates equal chances of below, near, or above normal precipitation across the state.



Sources: [Statewide Hydroclimate and Water Supply Conditions, Forecast Information](#), [Center for Western Weather Water Extremes \(CW3E\) Event Summaries](#), [California Nevada River Forecast Center \(CNRFC\) Data Archive](#), [Western Regional Climate Center \(WRCC\) Monthly Updates](#)



TEMPERATURE

The statewide average temperature for the end of May was 60.9°F, which is about 4.4 degrees below the historical average for this time of year. The statewide average temperature was near average for the month of May, excluding around May 7-14 when it was above average temperature and around May 26-30 when it was below average temperature. The high-pressure ridge peaked around May 11-12, which also resulted in well above normal temperatures across California and the statewide average temperature reaching the historical maximum mean temperature on May 12. The two graphs in Figure 3 show the statewide mean temperatures for the water year through May 31 (on the left) and month of May 2026 (on the right).

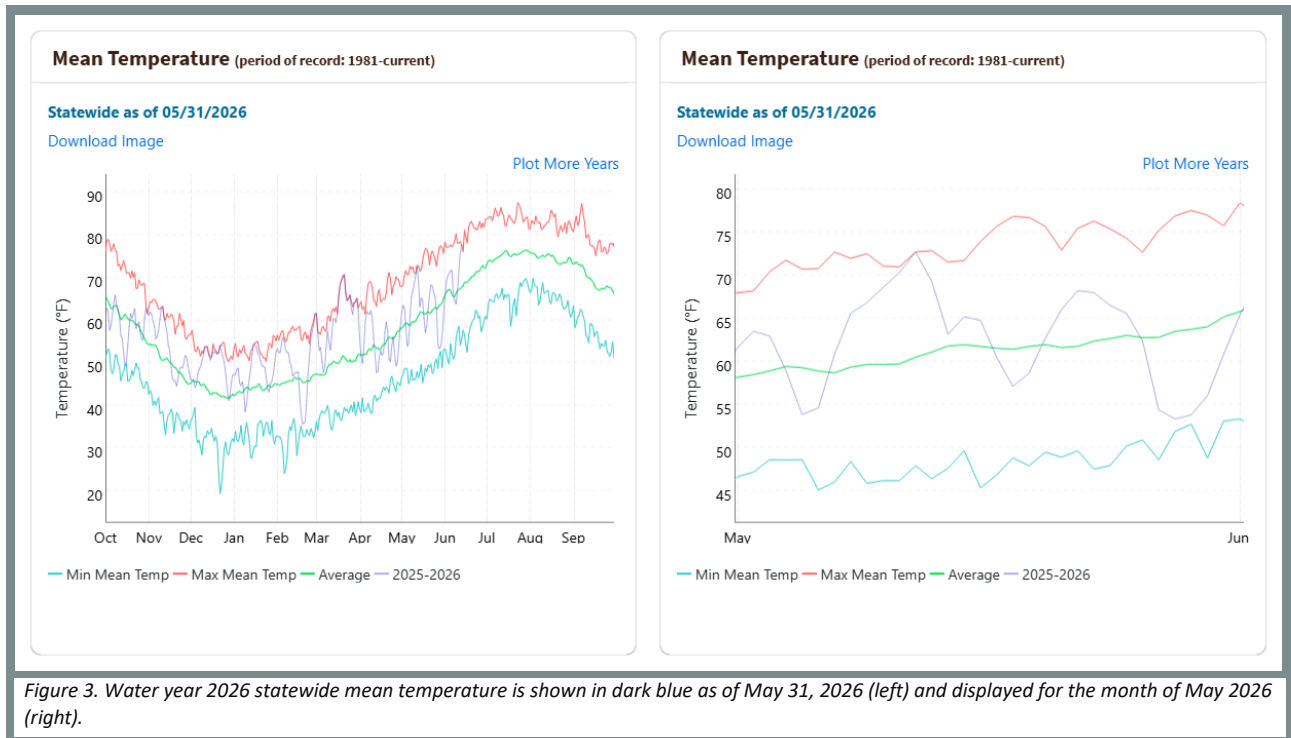


Figure 3. Water year 2026 statewide mean temperature is shown in dark blue as of May 31, 2026 (left) and displayed for the month of May 2026 (right).

El Niño conditions have developed over the past month, due to above-average sea surface temperatures (SSTs) across the equatorial central and east Pacific Ocean. According to the Climate Prediction Center (CPC), El Niño conditions are expected to persist and strengthen into winter 2026-2027, with 63% chance of a very strong El Niño during November 2026-January 2027. The CPC temperature outlook issued on May 31, 2026 indicates above normal temperatures with 40-60% chance for Northern California and 40-50% chance for Central California and Southern California during the month of June 2026. The CPC seasonal outlook covering the period of June 2026 through end of August 2026 indicates above normal temperatures with 50-70% chance for Northern California, 40-60% for Central California, and 40-50% chance for Southern California.

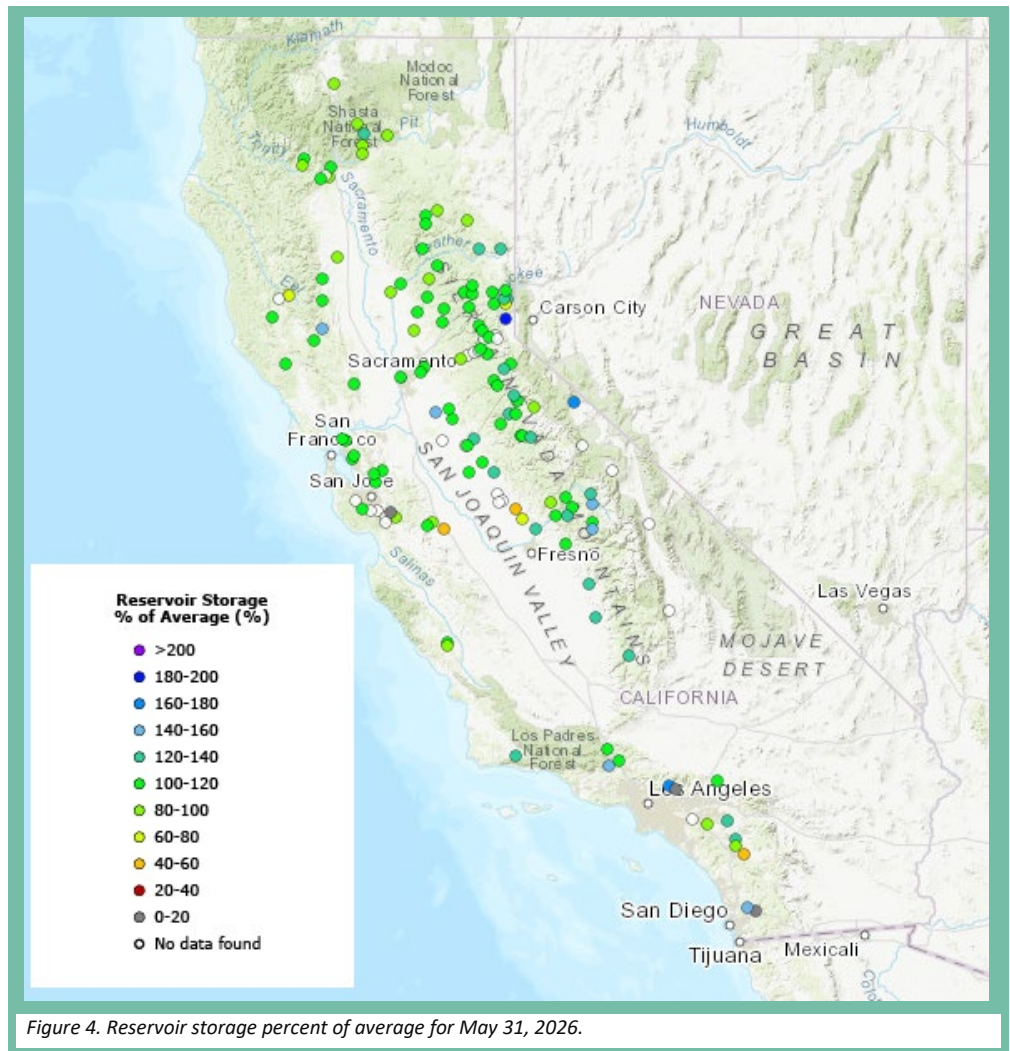
Sources: [Statewide Hydroclimate and Water Supply Conditions](#), [CPC 30-Day Forecasts](#)



RESERVOIRS

Statewide reservoir storage at the end of May was 113% of average. As shown in Figure 4, several reservoirs have near to above average storage for this time of year.

All major water supply reservoirs are near or above their historical average for storage at the end of May. Major water supply reservoirs continued to retain inflow and capture the snowmelt runoff from the last month, to be used during the upcoming dry months of summer and early fall when water demand increases across the state. Table 1 shows the observed one day peak inflow and the date from this past season, where it was generally on April 3, April 13-14, or May 12-13.



At the end of May, most water supply reservoirs are 80-100% of their total capacity. At the end of May, three water supply reservoirs that were below 80% of their total storage capacity were Lake Sonoma (68% of capacity and 111% of historical average), San Luis Reservoir (74% of capacity and 107% of historical average), and New Melones Lake (76% of capacity and 121% of historical average).

Sources: [California Water Watch](#), [California Data Exchange Center Reservoirs Flood Control](#), [CNRFC Observed Date of Peak Flow](#)



Table 1. One-day peak observed inflow from April 1 to May 31, 2026 in cubic feet per second (CFS) and date of occurrence.

RESERVOIR	I-DAY PEAK OBSERVED INFLOW, CUBIC FEET PER SECOND (CFS)	DATE
Lake Shasta	9,985	April 13
Lake Oroville	14,624	April 14
New Bullards Bar Reservoir	3,782	April 3
Folsom Lake	14,776	April 3
Pardee Reservoir	3,530	April 3
New Melones Lake	4,337	April 22
Don Pedro Reservoir	6,505	May 12
Lake McClure	2,975	May 13
Millerton Lake	6,152	May 12
Pine Flat Reservoir	6,051	May 13
Lake Kaweah	1,059	May 12
Lake Success	303	April 27
Lake Isabella	4,539	April 5



SNOWPACK

The statewide average snow water equivalent (SWE) was 0.5 inch for May 31, which is 7% percent of normal for this time of year. After the beginning of May, the return of clear skies and warmer temperatures resulted in steady snowmelt.

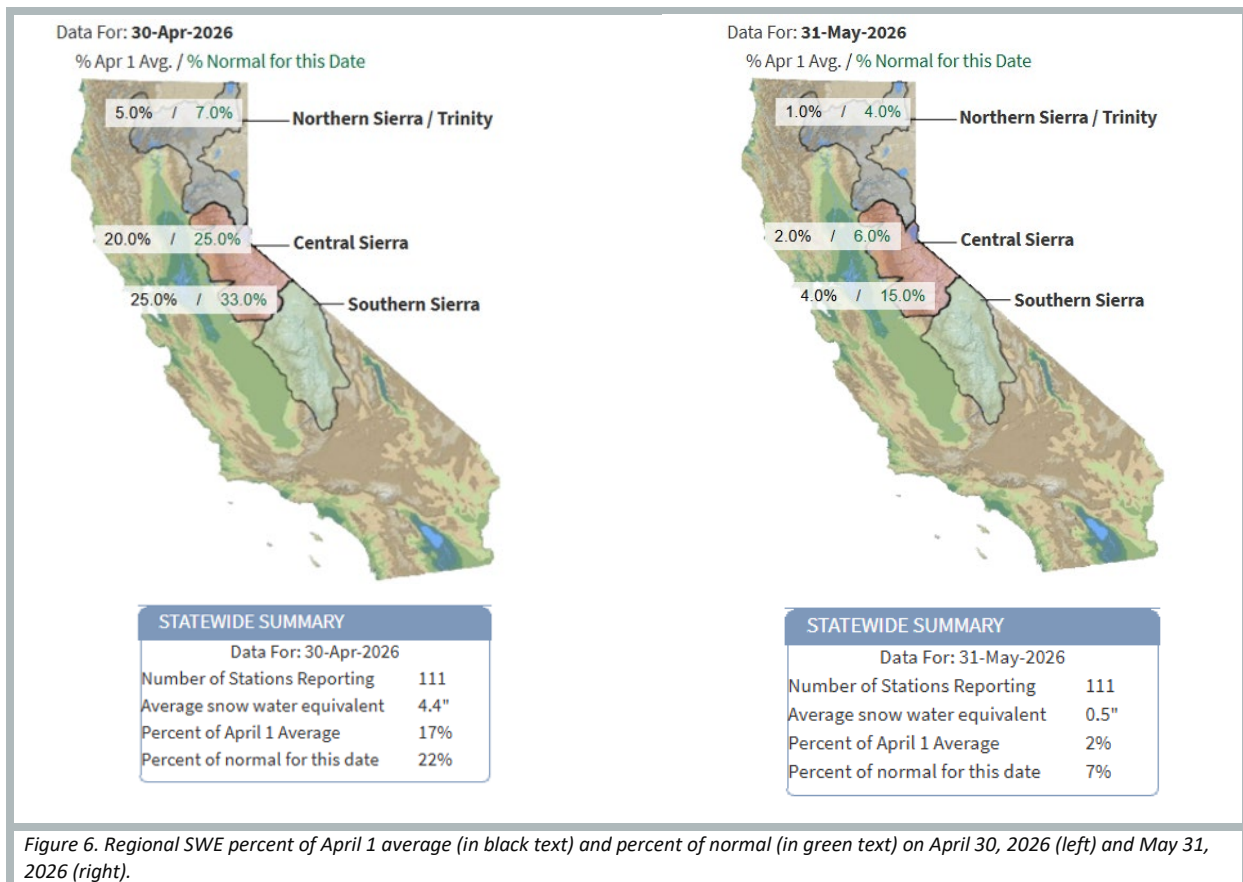
The snow sensor readings for SWE percent of average at the end of May for each region include 4% of normal for Northern Sierra and Trinity, 6% of normal for Central Sierra, and 15% of normal for Southern Sierra. Figure 6 shows regional SWE



conditions at the end of April 2026 (left) and end of May 2026 (right).

In general, for the Sierra Nevada, snowpack accumulation peaks around April 1 each year, and thereafter begins to melt with longer days and longer exposure to solar radiation. Several factors involving the timing, pace, and scale of storms and their temperature characteristics through the end of March can influence the total amount of snowpack and when it will begin to melt. The snowmelt period typically is from April through July, where the runoff is collected by major reservoirs for water supply during the dry months of summer and beginning of fall.

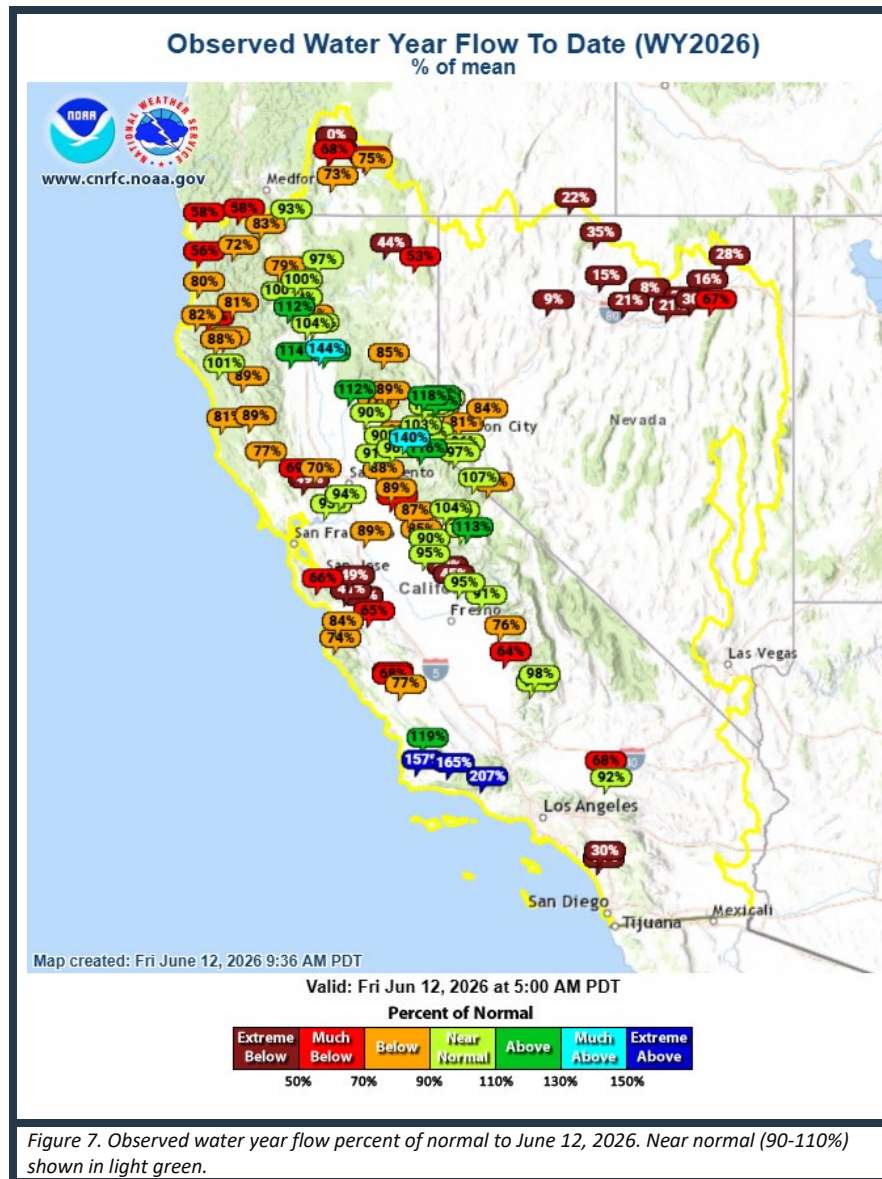
Sources: [California Water Watch](#), [CDEC Snow Water Equivalent Plot](#)





STREAMFLOW

Streamflow for about 27% of locations across California was near normal flow rate for the water year to June 12, 2026 according to California Nevada River Forecast Center (CNRFC) locations (Figure 7). About 14% of streamflow locations were flowing greater than normal, while about 59% of streamflow locations were flowing below normal for the water year to June 12, 2026. Sierra Nevada river basins were flowing below their monthly average for May. Although there were rises in rivers from either snowmelt or runoff from rain, none of the CNRFC forecast locations exceeded their respective flood stages during May.



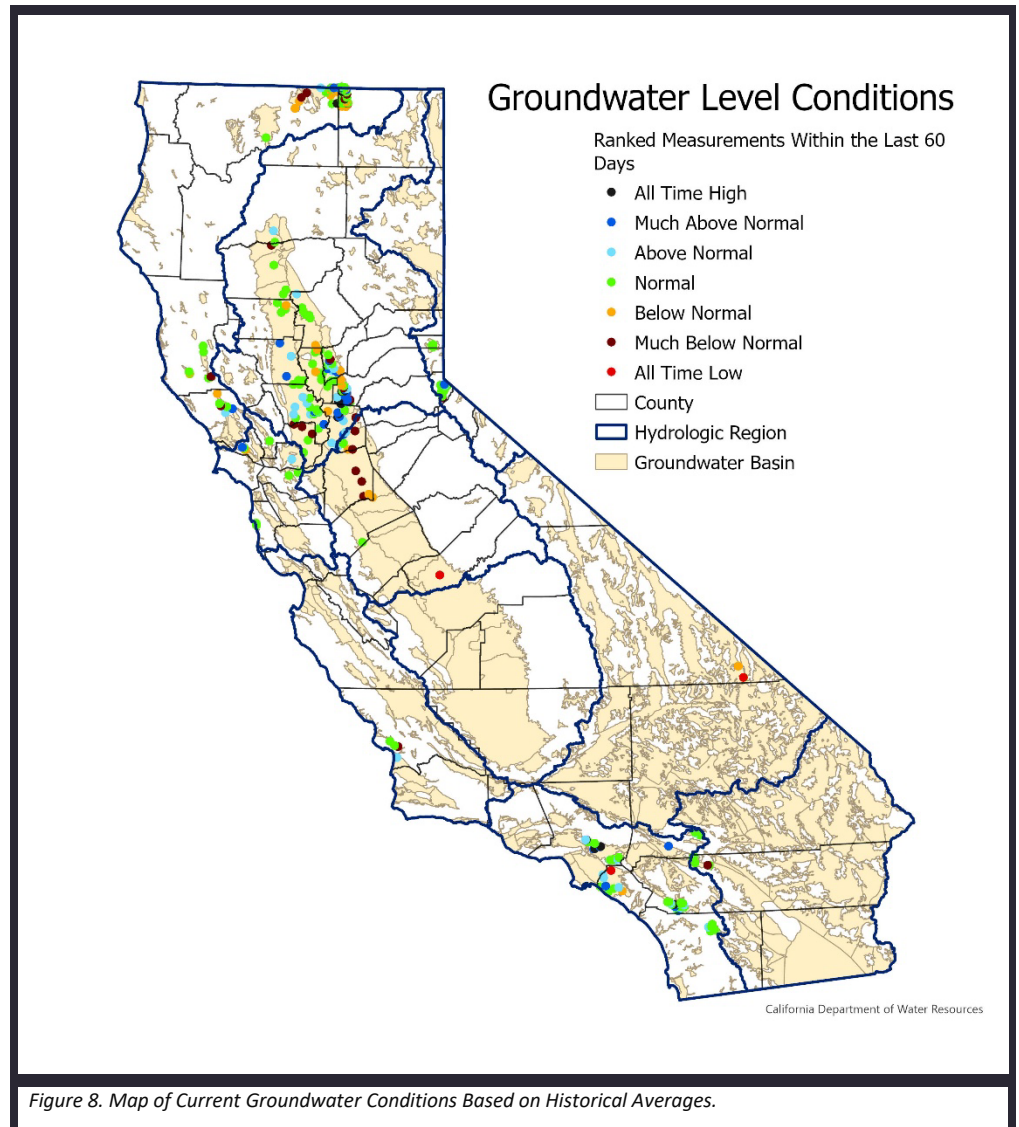
Sources: [USGS Water Watch](#), [California Nevada River Forecast Center \(CNRFC\)](#), [CDEC Daily Full Natural Flows](#)

GROUNDWATER

Groundwater conditions in California during Water Year (WY) 2025 and early WY 2026 reflect more hydrologic volatility. WY 2025 followed two wet years but was characterized by below-average precipitation, uneven storm timing, and regional differences in precipitation and snowpack. Early WY 2026 conditions further highlight this variability, with a warm, dry late winter reducing snowpack to near historic lows and limiting sustained spring runoff. Groundwater levels showed mixed responses across timescales. While short-term improvements occur during wetter periods, long-term declines persist.

Recently-measured monitoring wells show groundwater levels in 20% of monitoring wells across California are below normal, 50% are normal, and 30% are above normal. These statistics are based on 407 wells where groundwater levels have been collected for at least 10 years, and the most recent measurements were collected within the last 60 days. There was one dry domestic well reported in the last 30 days. Data reported is as of June 11, 2026. Visit DWR's California's Groundwater Live for the latest groundwater conditions across the state.

Source: [DWR California's Groundwater Live](#)



Cover page photo: A drone view of Thermalito Diversion Dam releasing water into the Feather River in Oroville, California, located in Butte County. Photo taken May 29, 2026.