CALIFORNIA HYDROLOGY UPDATE

CONDITIONS AS OF SEPTEMBER 30, 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

The end of September concludes water year 2026, which resulted in being slightly below average for accumulated precipitation. Water year 2026 had an impressive start for October 2025 accumulated precipitation largely due to atmospheric rivers making landfall and low-pressure systems traveling through California. Above average precipitation continued in November 2025 due to atmospheric rivers, cut-off lows fueling moisture, and low-pressure systems traveling across California. The beginning of December 2025 was abnormally dry across the state, but this was interrupted with a series of winter storms and atmospheric rivers. January 2025 started with a series of two atmospheric rivers and winter storms, but then dry conditions set in thereafter for the rest of the month. Additional storms helped the statewide accumulated precipitation to be near the historical average until May 2026 (Figure 1). The statewide accumulated precipitation through the end of September 2026 was about 22.6 inches, which is 95% of average. During September, there were periods of a few scattered showers with minor precipitation generally during September 1-3, 5-6, 24, and 27-28 (shown in Figure 1).

During September 1-3, low-pressure developed off California's coast which resulted in cooler temperatures and minor precipitation in the North Coast and along the border with Oregon. During September 5-6, moisture traveled across Southern California which resulted in minor to moderate precipitation. During September 8-10, high pressure over the Desert Southwest resulted in higher temperatures and dry conditions for most of the state. Dry conditions were observed across California during September 11-15. During September 16-17, low-pressure moved into Northern California which resulted in scattered showers. Dry conditions resumed across California during September 18-20. On September 21, there were scattered showers and thunderstorms over Sierra Nevada. During September 27-28, low pressure traveled across Central and Southern California which resulted in scattered showers for Central and Southern Sierra and southeast portions of the state. After September 29, dry conditions were observed across the state.

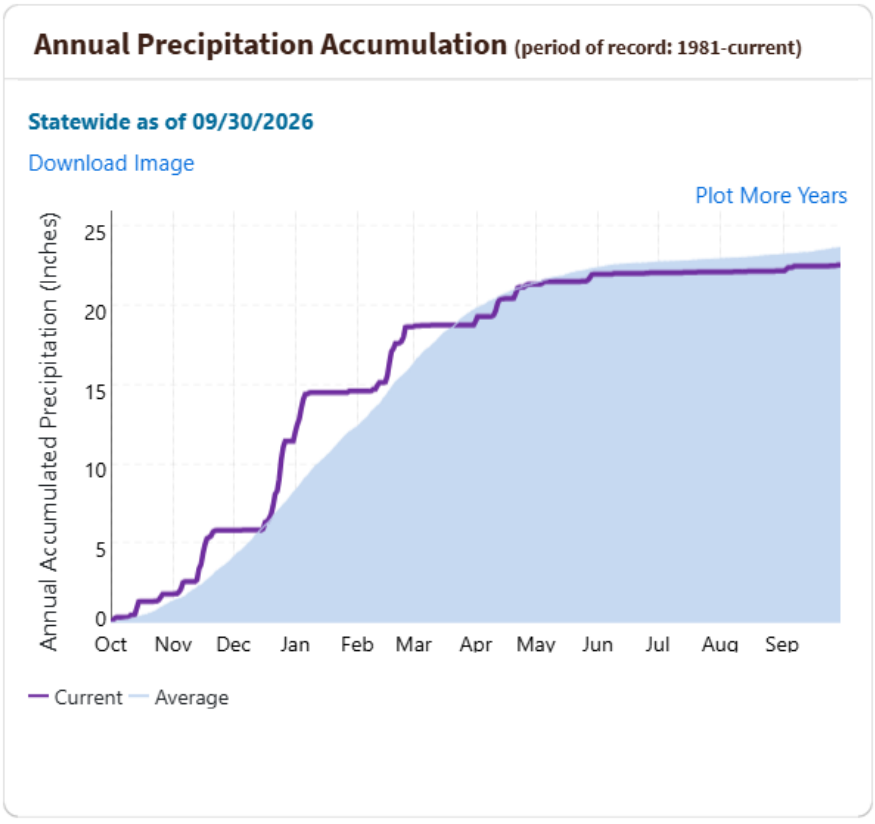


Figure 1. Statewide average accumulated precipitation from October 1, 2025 to September 30, 2026 (purple line) and historical average (shaded blue).

As shown in Figure 2, for water year 2026, North Coast received below average accumulated precipitation, Southern Cascades and Modoc Plateau received near to above average precipitation, below 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 44.9 inches of precipitation for the water year through end of September, which is 84% of average. The Sacramento River region has accumulated about 36.6 inches of precipitation for the water year through end of September, which is 100% of average. The San Joaquin River region has accumulated about 25.2 inches of precipitation for the water year through end of September, which is 93% of average. The Central Coast has accumulated about 23.2 inches of precipitation for the water year through end of September, which is 115% of average. The Tulare Lake region has accumulated about 16.8 inches of precipitation for the water year through end of September, which is 107% of average. The South Coast has accumulated about 18.2 inches of precipitation for the water year through end of September, which is 104% of average.

The Climate Prediction Center (CPC) monthly outlook issued on September 30, 2026 indicates below normal precipitation with 33-50% chance for Northern California, up to 40% chance of below normal precipitation for Central California, and equal chances of below, near, or above normal precipitation for Southern California during the month of October 2026. The CPC seasonal outlook covering the period of October 2026 through the end of December 2026 indicates 33-40% chance of above normal precipitation for Southern California, up to 40% chance of above normal precipitation for Central California, and equal chances of below, near, or above normal precipitation for Northern California.

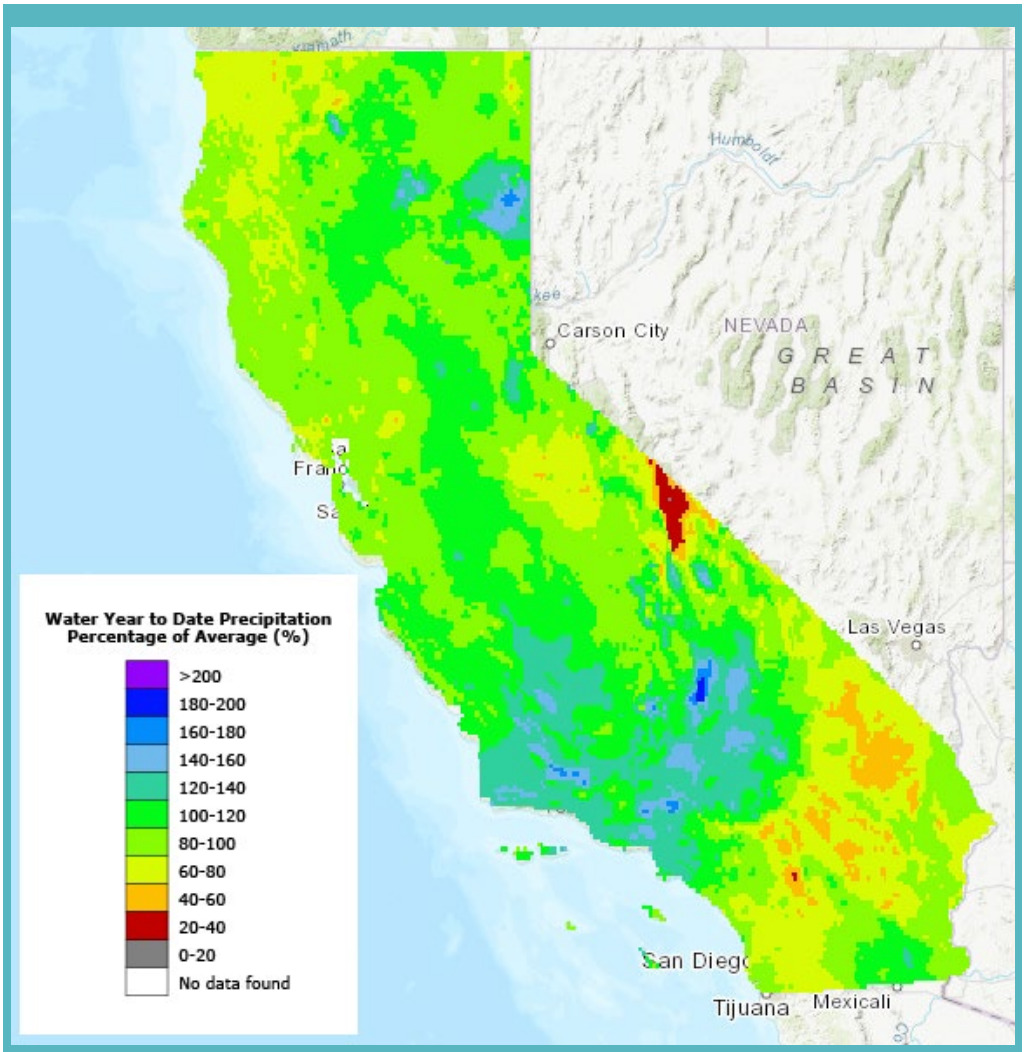


Figure 2. Percent of average for the accumulated precipitation from October 1, 2025 to September 30, 2026.

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 September was 67.2°F, which is near the historical average for this time of year. The statewide average temperature was near average for most of September, excluding around September 1-8 when it was below average and September 9-12 when it was above average temperature. The statewide average temperature reached the historical maximum mean temperature during September 10-11. The two graphs in Figure 3 show the statewide mean temperatures for the water year through September 30 (on the left) and month of September 2026 (on the right).

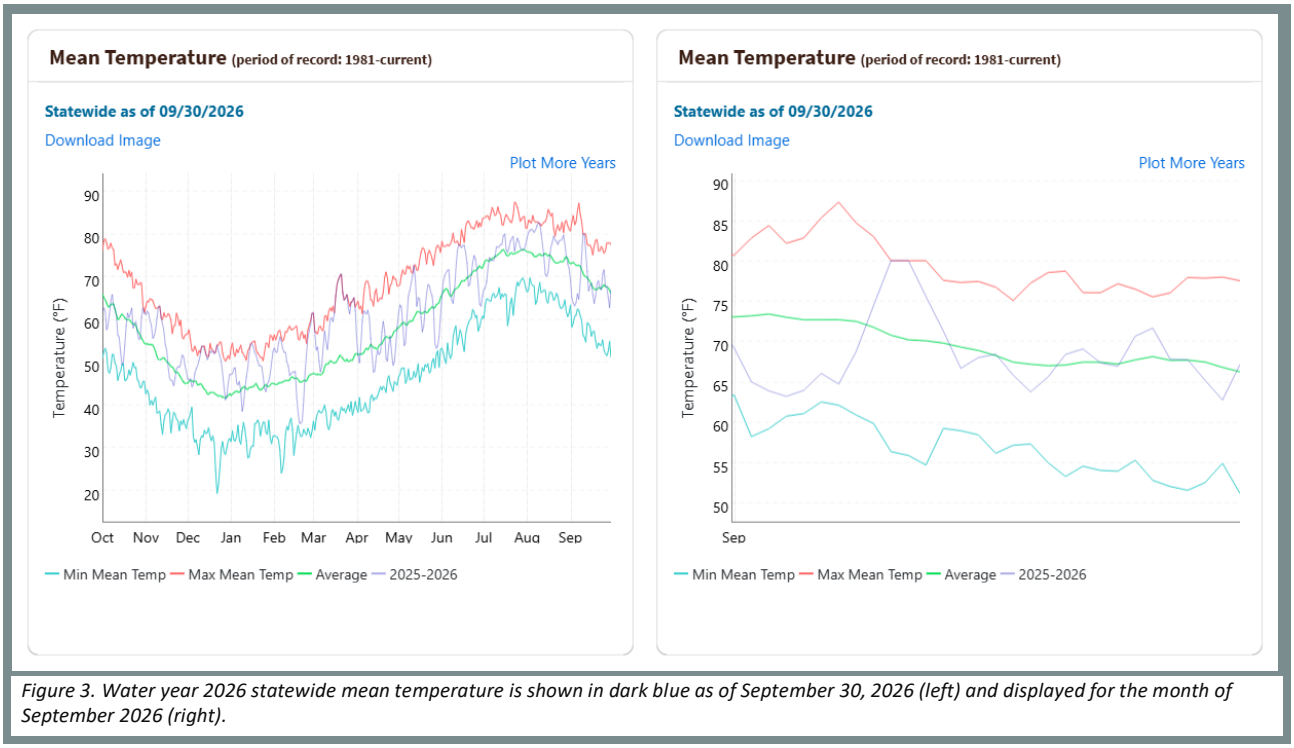


Figure 3. Water year 2026 statewide mean temperature is shown in dark blue as of September 30, 2026 (left) and displayed for the month of September 2026 (right).

El Niño conditions are present, where sea surface temperature (SST) is above average across the equatorial central and eastern Pacific Ocean. According to the Climate Prediction Center (CPC), El Niño conditions will continue and expected to strengthen with a strong-to-very strong El Niño likely through January-March 2027 (with greater than 83% chance). The CPC temperature outlook issued on September 30, 2026 indicates above normal temperatures along the border with Arizona with 40-50% and 50-60% chance of above normal temperatures for the rest of the state during the month of October 2026. The CPC seasonal outlook covering the period of October 2026 through end of December 2026 indicates above normal temperatures with 33-50% chance for Northern California, 40-50% chance for Central California, and 33-50% chance for Southern California.

Sources: Statewide Hydroclimate and Water Supply Conditions, CPC 30-Day Forecasts

RESERVOIRS

Statewide reservoir storage at the end of September was about 107% of average. As shown in Figure 4, several reservoirs have near average storage for this time of year. In general, major water supply reservoirs have made steady releases necessary for water allocations.

Major flood control reservoirs continue to have a higher top of conservation level, which will gradually be lowered in the coming months to have space available to hold potential runoff from storms during the winter-spring months and mitigate downstream flooding.

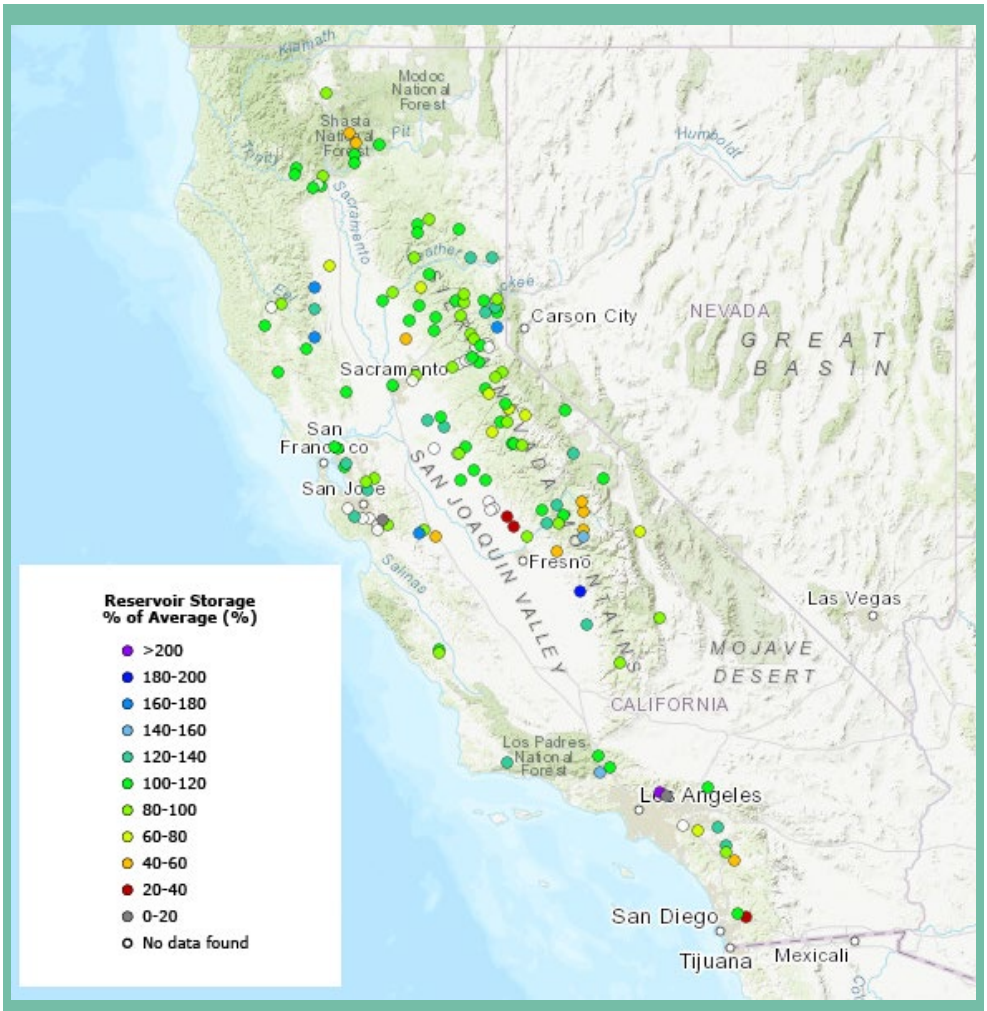


Figure 4. Reservoir storage percent of average for September 30, 2026.

Sources: California Water Watch, California Data Exchange Center Reservoirs Flood Control, CNRFC Observed Date of Peak Flow

SNOWPACK

The snowpack season for California has concluded for water year 2026. 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 17% of locations across California was near normal flow for the water year to September 30, 2026 according to California Nevada River Forecast Center (CNRFC) locations (Figure 5). About 9% of streamflow locations were flowing greater than normal, while about 74% of streamflow locations were flowing below normal for the water year to September 30, 2026.

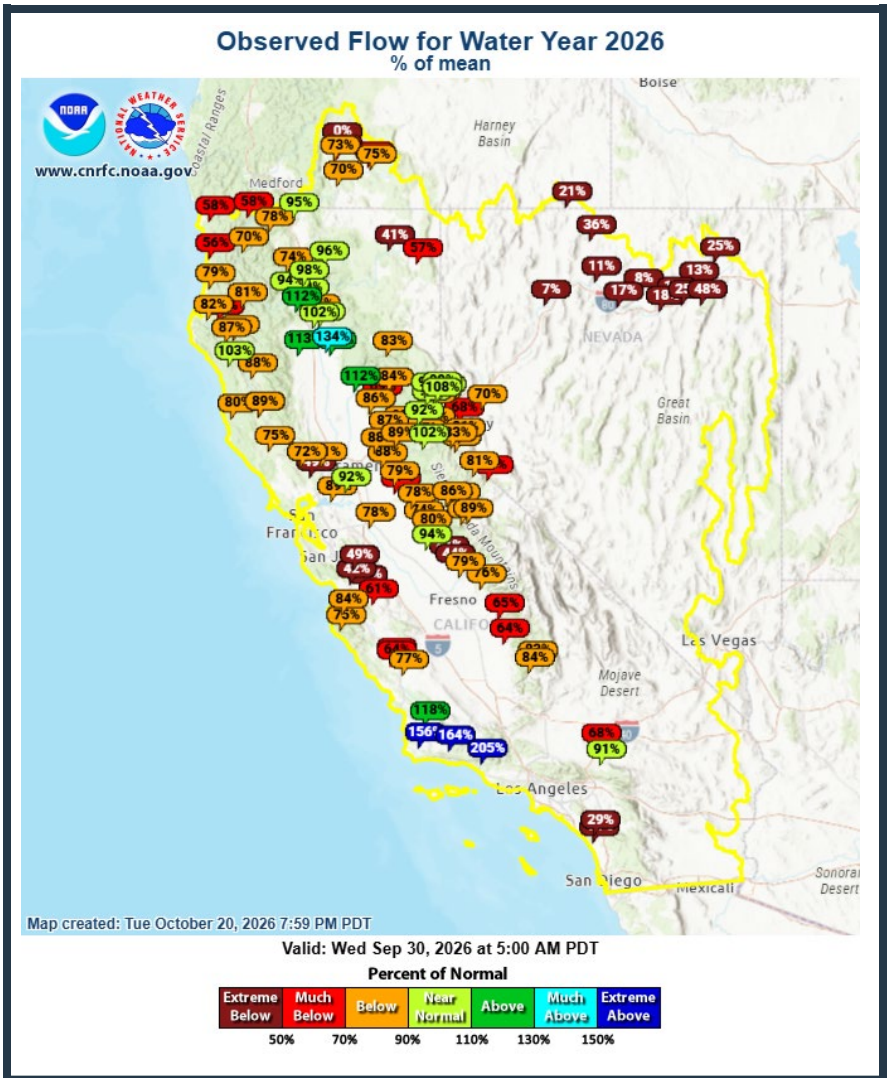


Figure 5. Observed water year flow percent of normal to September 30, 2026. Near normal (90-110%) shown in light green.

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.

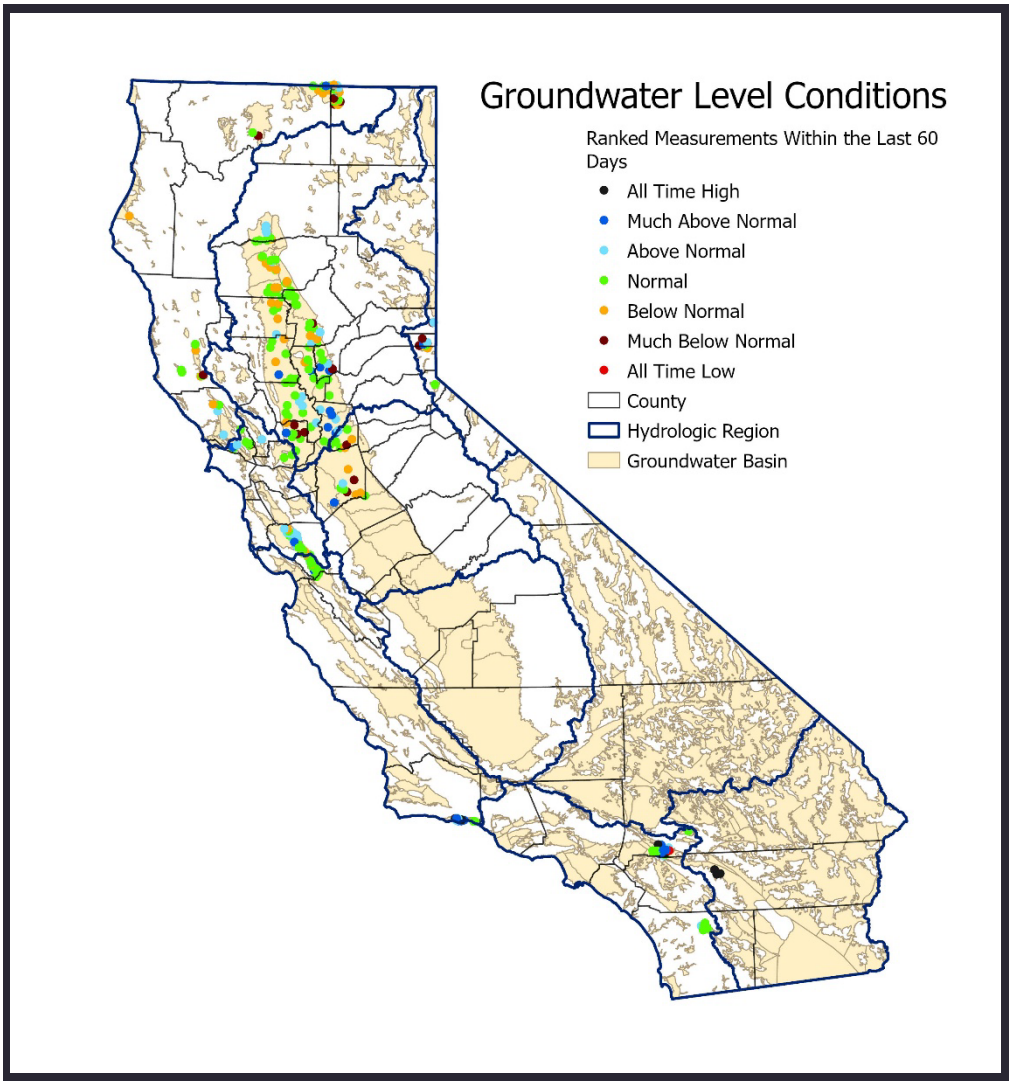


Figure 6. Map of Current Groundwater Conditions Based on Historical Averages.

Recently-measured monitoring wells show groundwater levels in 23% of monitoring wells across California are below normal, 49% are normal, and 28% are above normal. These statistics are based on 395 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 October 12, 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 south-facing drone view from the Forni Ridge weather station, in the Sierra Nevada Mountain range in El Dorado County. The water runoff from this area is part of the American River water basin in Northern California. Photo taken September 3, 2026.