

SURFACE WATER

Runoff - Runoff is that portion of precipitation that leaves an area as streamflow. Average annual runoff for the Copper River basin ranges from less than 5 in. in the lowland areas to more than 54 in. in the high mountain area (fig. 8). Annual runoff for the entire basin above Chitina averages 24.8 in., or 37,680 ft³/a. The runoff values and patterns shown on the map are based on measured and estimated streamflow and on runoff factors such as estimated evapotranspiration and area-averaged runoff calculations. The map is intended only to delineate the general areal distribution of runoff from the basin and should not be used to estimate the flow of any specific stream.

Stream Types - The streams draining the Copper River basin can be classified into two general types: nonglacial streams, which drain lowland and low-altitude mountain areas, and glacial streams, which drain the high-altitude mountains.

Streams in the Copper River Lowland area (fig. 2), have a relatively low gradient and derive their flow from snowmelt and rain. Streamflow is low from September through March, but with the increased solar radiation and warmer temperatures of April and May, flow reaches a peak. This peak results mainly from melting of snow and channel ice. A general recession in flow then takes place during June, July, and August. About 75 percent of the total annual flow takes place between May and September, the open-water period. Squirrel Creek (fig. 9) northwest of Tonsina is an example of a lowland stream.

Low-altitude mountain streams are nonglacial, as their drainage basins lie along the mountain flanks at altitudes too low for glaciers to exist. The Little Tonsina River (fig. 9) typifies such streams. Flow of the Little Tonsina increases due to snowmelt from late April through June and then declines during July, August, and September. About 80 percent of the total annual flow takes place between May and September, the open-water period.

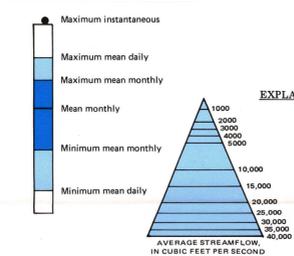
High-altitude mountain streams (glacial) exhibit the greatest seasonal variability of flow. About 88 percent of their total annual flow takes place during the approximately 5-month open-water period (May through September). High flows usually occur in July (fig. 9) when the highest seasonal temperatures cause maximum melting of glacier ice and snow.

The production of meltwater from a glaciated basin appears to be closely related to annual precipitation. This relation can be seen by comparing the cumulative departure of average annual flow of glaciated Tonsina River (fig. 10) to the departure curve of precipitation for the same period (fig. 4).

In the use and management of water, seasonal streamflow variation is of more concern than long-term variation. Streams throughout the basin experience high flows during the spring and summer and low flows during fall and winter. The seasonal and annual variability of streamflow is illustrated in figures 8a-f. In general, streamflow in the basin shows the greatest variability in mean annual discharge for nonglacial streams and the least in streams affected by glacial meltwater. Glaciers tend to reduce the variation in annual discharge because they release water from ice and firn storage in dry, warm years and store water as snow and firn during cool, wet years. However, during the relatively dry years of 1969-70 even glacial streams experienced the lowest annual average discharge in the period of record (figs. 8a, 8c, 8b, and 8d).

A typical hydrograph of nonglacial streams, such as the Gulkana River (fig. 11), shows sharp May rises during the spring snowmelt, a general recession during the summer months, and a slight increase in streamflow during the early fall rainy period. In contrast, high flow on glacial streams, such as the Tonsina River, coincides with the peak melting of snow and ice in June, July, and August (fig. 11). Rainfall during these same months may produce even higher discharge when the rivers are already high from glacial runoff.

EXPLANATION FOR FIGURES 8a-f



EXPLANATION FOR FIGURE 8

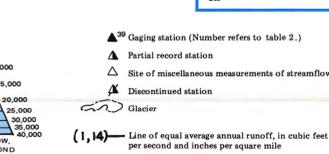


FIGURE 8. - SURFACE-WATER DATA-COLLECTION SITES, SUMMARY OF STREAMGAGING STATION RECORDS, AND BASIN AVERAGE ANNUAL RUNOFF.

SURFACE WATER

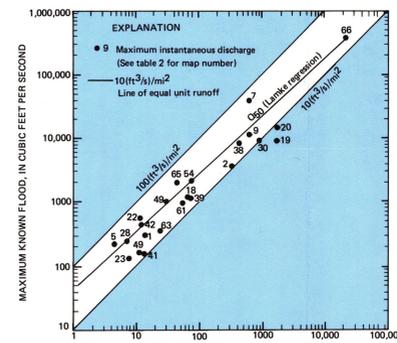
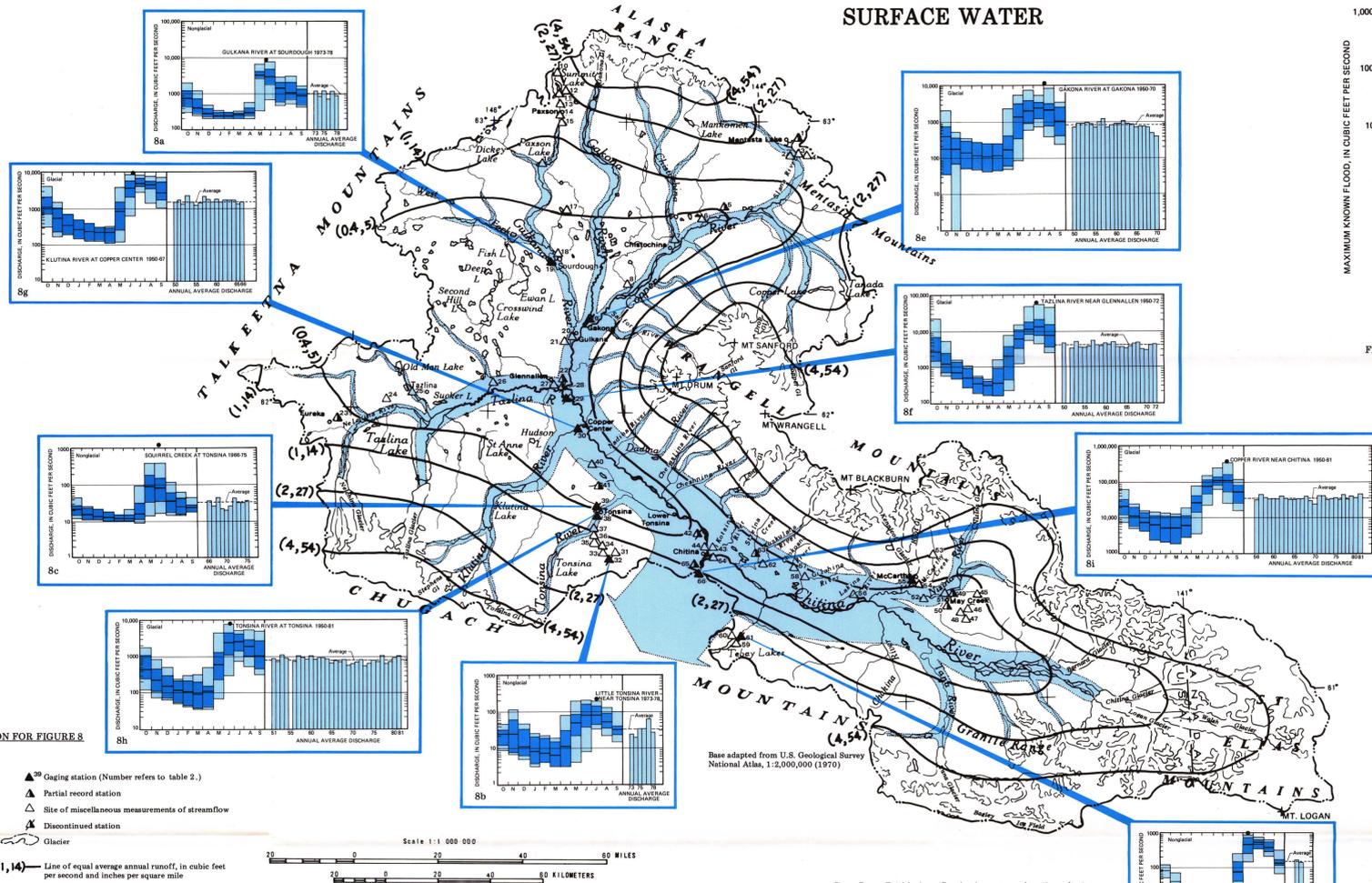


FIGURE 14. - RELATION BETWEEN MAXIMUM DISCHARGE AND DRAINAGE AREA.

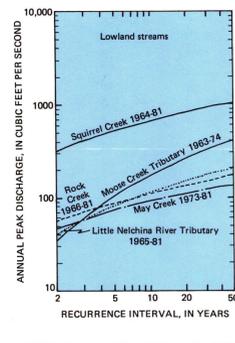


FIGURE 15. - FLOOD MAGNITUDE AND FREQUENCY FOR SELECTED LOWLAND STREAMS.

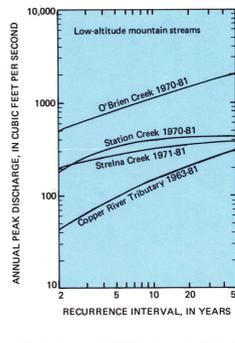


FIGURE 16. - FLOOD MAGNITUDE AND FREQUENCY FOR SELECTED LOW-ALTITUDE MOUNTAIN STREAMS.

Floods - Floods on glacial streams coincide with the peak rates of melting of ice and snow in June and July and the rainstorms of late summer and fall. Floods on nonglacial streams in the Copper River Lowland and Gulkana Upland result primarily from snowmelt in the spring and stream overflow in frozen and ice-jammed channels.

The relation of maximum discharge to drainage area for 23 selected streams in the Copper River basin is shown in figure 14. For comparison purposes, a line corresponding to the peak discharge for a 50-year recurrence interval, computed by the flood-frequency regression equation of Lamke (1979), is also drawn on the graph. Maximum observed instantaneous runoff rates range from 5 (ft³/s)/mi² for lowland drainages to 96 (ft³/s)/mi² for mountain basins (table 2).

The peak discharges for recurrence intervals from 2 to 50 years for representative lowland, low-altitude mountain, and high-altitude mountain streams are shown in figures 15, 16, and 17. Recurrence intervals are the average period of time (in years) within which a flood of specified magnitude will be equaled or exceeded once. For a given recurrence interval, the probability of a flood of specified magnitude occurring in any one year can be estimated. For example, if the recurrence interval of a flood of specified magnitude is 25 years (0.2), the probability that such a flood will occur in any one year is 4 percent (1 chance in 25). For ungauged streams in the study area, the flood discharges for selected recurrence intervals can be estimated using regional flood-frequency regression methods given by Lamke (1979).

Comparison of such estimates for a peak discharge that has an average recurrence interval of 50 years (0.2) with the Q₅₀ calculated from gaging station records is shown in figure 18. Streams included in the analyses were those for which 10 or more years of gaging station data were available. The analysis and resulting graphs (such as figure 18) indicate that the regression method provides reliable estimates for flood flows only for basins larger than 50 mi².

In addition to runoff from rainfall and "normal" melting of snow and ice, several other events or phenomena may lead to flooding in the Copper River basin. These include stream overflow (spring and backwater) from ice jams and release of water temporarily dammed by snow or debris slides. Also, of particular concern, are outburst floods associated with glacial outbursts (by rapid subglacial melting by volcanic heat (Post and Mayo, 1971). Mt. Wrangell, a glacial-cold volcano, has shown a major increase in heat flux at its summit during the last decade (Benson and Motyka, 1979). Therefore, it appears that the potential for outburst flooding from subglacial thermal activity does exist. This type of flooding has occurred in other areas of the world, including the States of Washington and Iceland. The areas subject to flooding from glacial-dammed lakes and the effects of subglacial thermal activity are shown in figure 19.

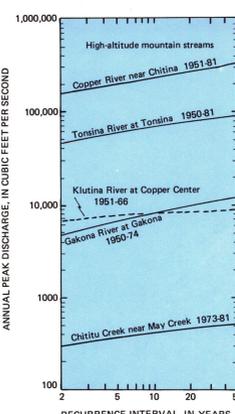


FIGURE 17. - FLOOD MAGNITUDE AND FREQUENCY FOR SELECTED HIGH-ALTITUDE MOUNTAIN STREAMS.

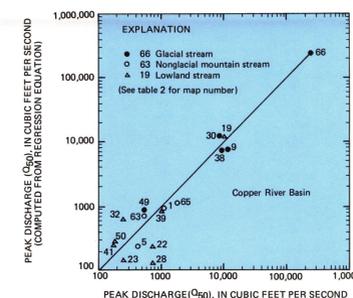


FIGURE 18. - RELIABILITY OF ESTIMATED Q50 FROM REGRESSION METHOD AT GAGING STATIONS AND PARTIAL-RECORD STATIONS.

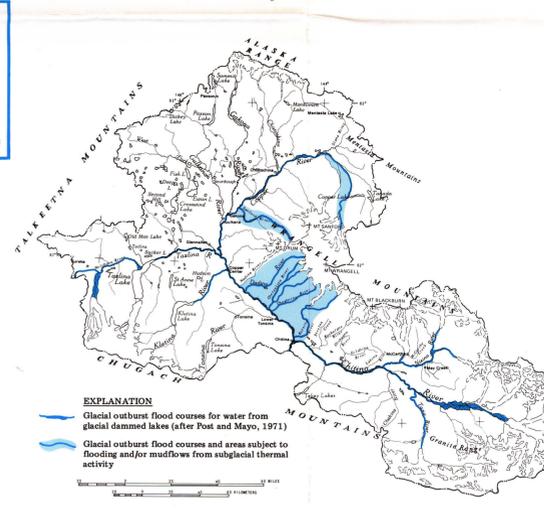


FIGURE 19. - AREAS SUBJECT TO FLOODING FROM GLACIAL OUTBURSTS.

TABLE 2. - SUMMARY OF SURFACE-WATER GAGING STATIONS (G), PARTIAL-RECORD STATIONS (P), AND SITES OF MISCELLANEOUS MEASUREMENTS OF STREAMFLOW (M)

| No. | Station No. | Station Name | Type of record | Drainage area (mi ²) | Minimum discharge (cfs) | | Maximum discharge (cfs) | | Water quality | | | | | |
|-----|-------------|--|----------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------|-------------------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|----------|------------|--|--|
| | | | | | Date | Value | Date | Value | Chemical | Temperature | Sediment | Biological | | |
| 1 | 1500000 | Station Creek near Masta | G | 15 | 1950-52 | 400 | 400 | July 29, 1957 | 300 | 20.2 | | | | |
| 2 | 1500000 | Squirrel Creek near Tonsina | G | 33 | 1950-52 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 11, 1971 | 2,100 | 1.00 | | | | |
| 3 | 1500000 | Little Tonsina River near Tonsina | G | 1.32 | 1960-61 | 400 | 400 | June 1960 | 200 | 47.5 | | | | |
| 4 | 1500000 | Copper River tributary near Slane | G | 1.32 | 1960-61 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 400,000 | 60.8 | | | | |
| 5 | 1500000 | Christine River near Chitina | G | 110 | 1950-52 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 400,000 | 60.8 | | | | |
| 6 | 1500000 | Talons Creek near Talons | G | 21.9 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 3.0 | 0.41 | | | |
| 7 | 1500000 | Gulkana River at Gulkana | G | 400 | 1950-52 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 8 | 1500000 | Gulkana River at Sourdough | G | 41.5 | 1950-52 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 9 | 1500000 | Gulkana River near Tonsina | G | 71.2 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 10 | 1500000 | Gulkana River near Tonsina | G | 11.9 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 11 | 1500000 | Gulkana River near Tonsina | G | 11.9 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 12 | 1500000 | Gulkana River near Tonsina | G | 11.9 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 13 | 1500000 | Gulkana River near Tonsina | G | 11.9 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 14 | 1500000 | Gulkana River near Tonsina | G | 11.9 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 15 | 1500000 | Gulkana River near Tonsina | G | 11.9 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 16 | 1500000 | Gulkana River near Tonsina | G | 11.9 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 17 | 1500000 | Gulkana River near Tonsina | G | 11.9 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 18 | 1500000 | Gulkana River near Tonsina | G | 11.9 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 19 | 1500000 | Gulkana River near Tonsina | G | 11.9 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 20 | 1500000 | Gulkana River at Gulkana | G | 1,070 | 1946-1949, 1950-1952, 1957-1962 | 400 | 400 | June 2, 1964 | 15,300 | 6.27 | | | | |
| 21 | 1500000 | May Creek near Gulkana | G | 1.67 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | May 29, 1957 | 127 | 16.3 | | | | |
| 22 | 1500000 | May Creek near Gulkana | G | 1.67 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | May 29, 1957 | 127 | 16.3 | | | | |
| 23 | 1500000 | Little Nelchina River tributary near Tonsina | G | 7.81 | 1960-61 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 24 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 25 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 26 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 27 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 28 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 29 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 30 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 31 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 32 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 33 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 34 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 35 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 36 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 37 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 38 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 39 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 40 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 41 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 42 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 43 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 44 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 45 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 46 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 47 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 48 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 49 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 50 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 51 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 52 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 53 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 54 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 55 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 56 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 57 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 58 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | 400 | 400 | Aug. 1971 | 100,000 | 1.11 | | | | |
| 59 | 1500000 | House Creek near Tonsina | G | 196 | 1957-62 | | | | | | | | | |