

Introduction

Cannon Air Force Base (Cannon AFB) is located in the High Plains physiographic region of east-central New Mexico (Miller, 2000), about 5 miles west of Clovis, N. Mex. Cannon AFB was originally established as a U.S. Army base in 1942 and then reactivated as the current Air Force base in 1951 following the U.S. Army base closure in 1947. The area surrounding Cannon AFB is primarily used for agriculture, including irrigated cropland and dairies. The Southern High Plains aquifer is the principal source of water for Cannon AFB, for the nearby town of Clovis, and for local agriculture and dairies (EPCOR Water, 2014). The Southern High Plains aquifer in the vicinity of Cannon AFB consists of three subsurface geological formations: the Chinle Formation of Triassic age, the Ogallala Formation of Tertiary age, and the Blackwater Draw Formation of Quaternary age (Langman and others, 2006). The Chinle Formation, 0–400 feet (ft) thick and locally known as the “red beds,” consists mostly of clay with some interbedded sand and silt in this area and forms the bottom of the unconfined Southern High Plains aquifer (Langman and others, 2006). The Ogallala Formation, 30–600 ft thick (Gustavson, 1996), is the main water-yielding formation of the Southern High Plains aquifer and consists of eolian

sand and silt and fluvial and lacustrine sand, silt, clay, and gravel (McLemore, 2001). The Blackwater Draw Formation, 0–80 ft thick, overlies the Ogallala Formation and consists mainly of eolian sand (McLemore, 2001; Langman and others, 2006). Groundwater-supplied, center-pivot irrigation (the circular features on figs. 1 and 2) dominates pumping from the Southern High Plains aquifer in the area surrounding Cannon AFB, where the irrigation season typically extends from early March through October (Marsalis, 2007; oral commun. with local farmers). The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) has a long history of groundwater hydrology and water-quality work on and surrounding Cannon AFB, with the most recent publications, Langman and others (2004) and Langman and others (2006), covering a period of study from 1994 to 2005. In addition, the USGS has been monitoring groundwater levels in the vicinity of Cannon AFB since 1954.

Langman and others (2006) reported that groundwater levels have declined in the Cannon AFB and surrounding area and noted that summer water-level declines were followed by partial recovery during the winter. Prior to this study, the most recent potentiometric-surface map in the study area was developed by Langman and others (2006) by using groundwater levels measured during the

winter of 1997. The 1997 potentiometric-surface map was developed by using data from approximately 27 wells located on Cannon AFB and in the surrounding area within about 3 miles of the boundary of the base. The 1997 potentiometric-surface map indicated a general northwest to southeast groundwater-flow direction, consistent with potentiometric-surface maps for groundwater conditions observed in 1962, 1967, 1977, and 1987 (Langman and others, 2006). In addition to the general northwest to southeast groundwater-flow direction observed in all these periods, a groundwater trough running diagonally from the northwest to the southeast becomes successively more distinct throughout the 1962–97 series of potentiometric-surface maps as the regional groundwater level declines (see fig. 3 in Langman and others, 2006).

The potentiometric-surface maps developed by Langman and others (2006) are useful in determining the regional direction of groundwater flow; however, the sparse number and distribution of wells used to create these potentiometric-surface maps (approximately one well every 3 square miles) resulted in maps that are too general for determining detailed groundwater-flow directions on a local scale. The USGS in cooperation with the Air Force Civil Engineering Center,

San Antonio, Texas, investigated the possible effects of seasonal groundwater-use differences (summer and winter) on groundwater-flow directions in the vicinity of Cannon AFB. To determine more local groundwater-flow directions, data from a dense well network in this study area were needed. In addition, because only groundwater levels measured during winter periods were used in the development of the Langman and others (2006) potentiometric-surface maps, an increased understanding of the effect of summer groundwater levels on the groundwater-flow directions was also needed.

Summer Potentiometric Surface

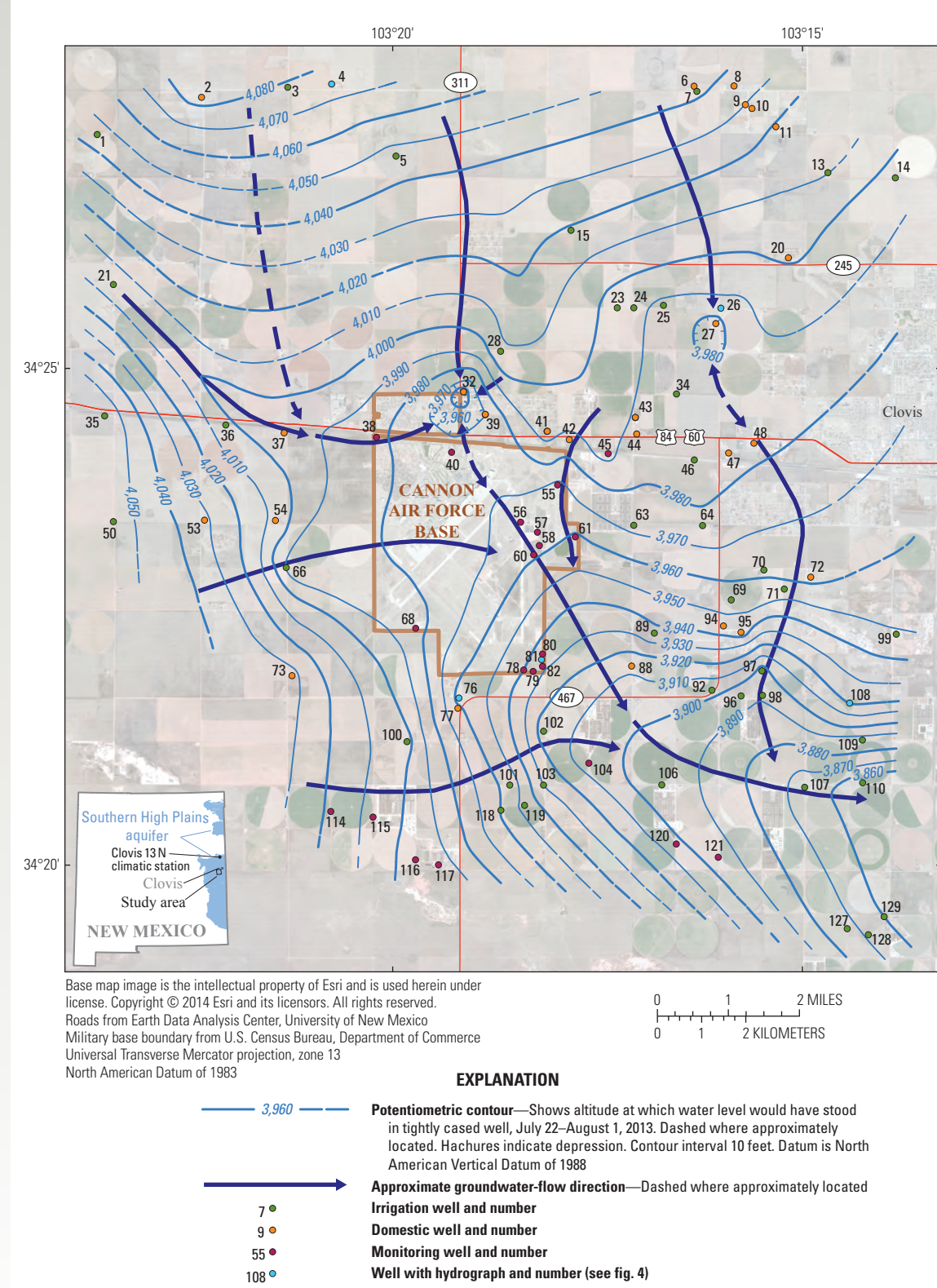


Figure 1. Potentiometric surface of summer groundwater conditions on and around Cannon Air Force Base, July 22–August 1, 2013, Curry County, New Mexico. Data shown in table 1.

Winter Potentiometric Surface

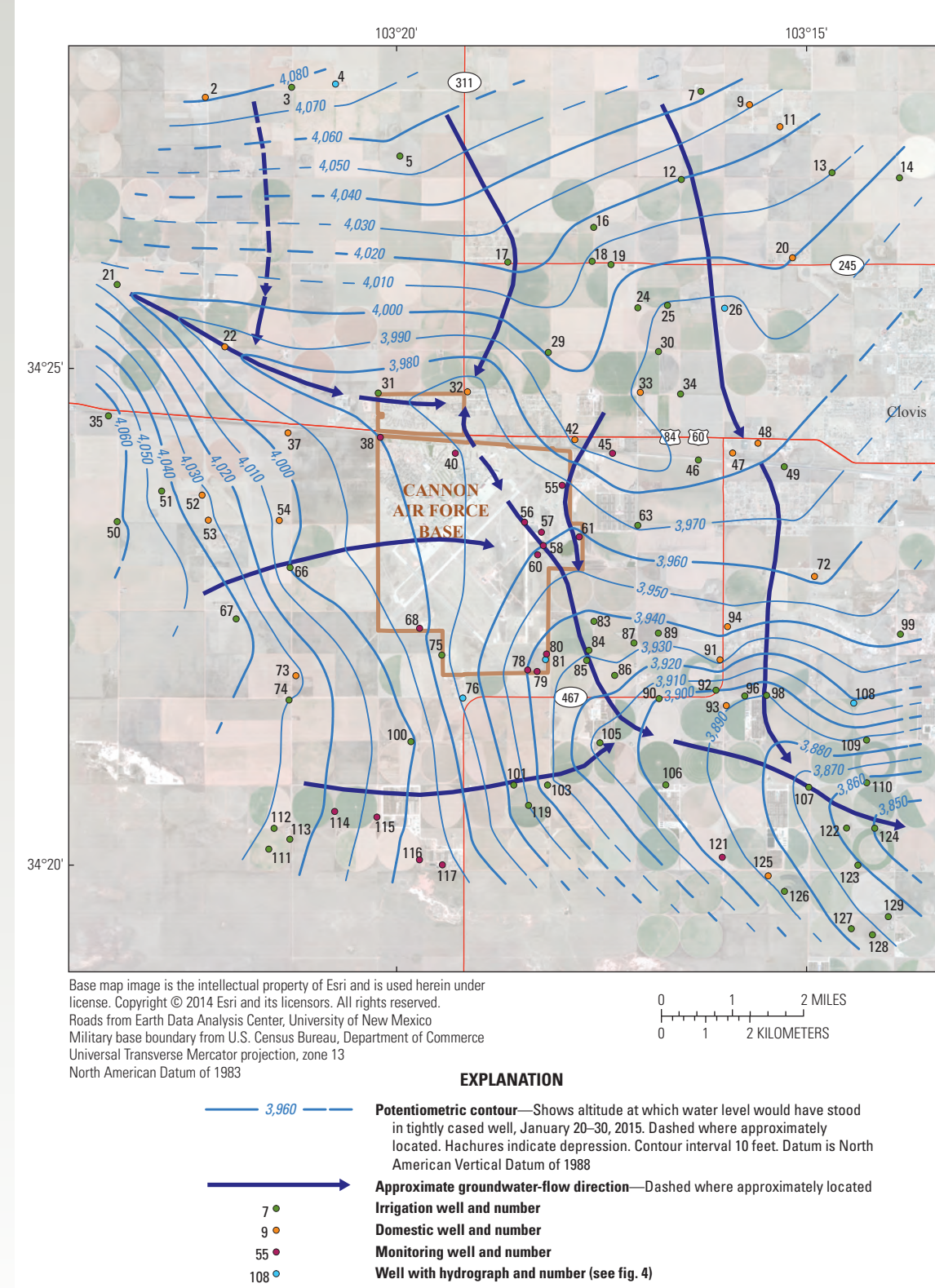


Figure 2. Potentiometric surface of winter groundwater conditions on and around Cannon Air Force Base, January 20–30, 2015, Curry County, New Mexico. Data shown in table 1.

Summer 2013 to Winter 2015 Change

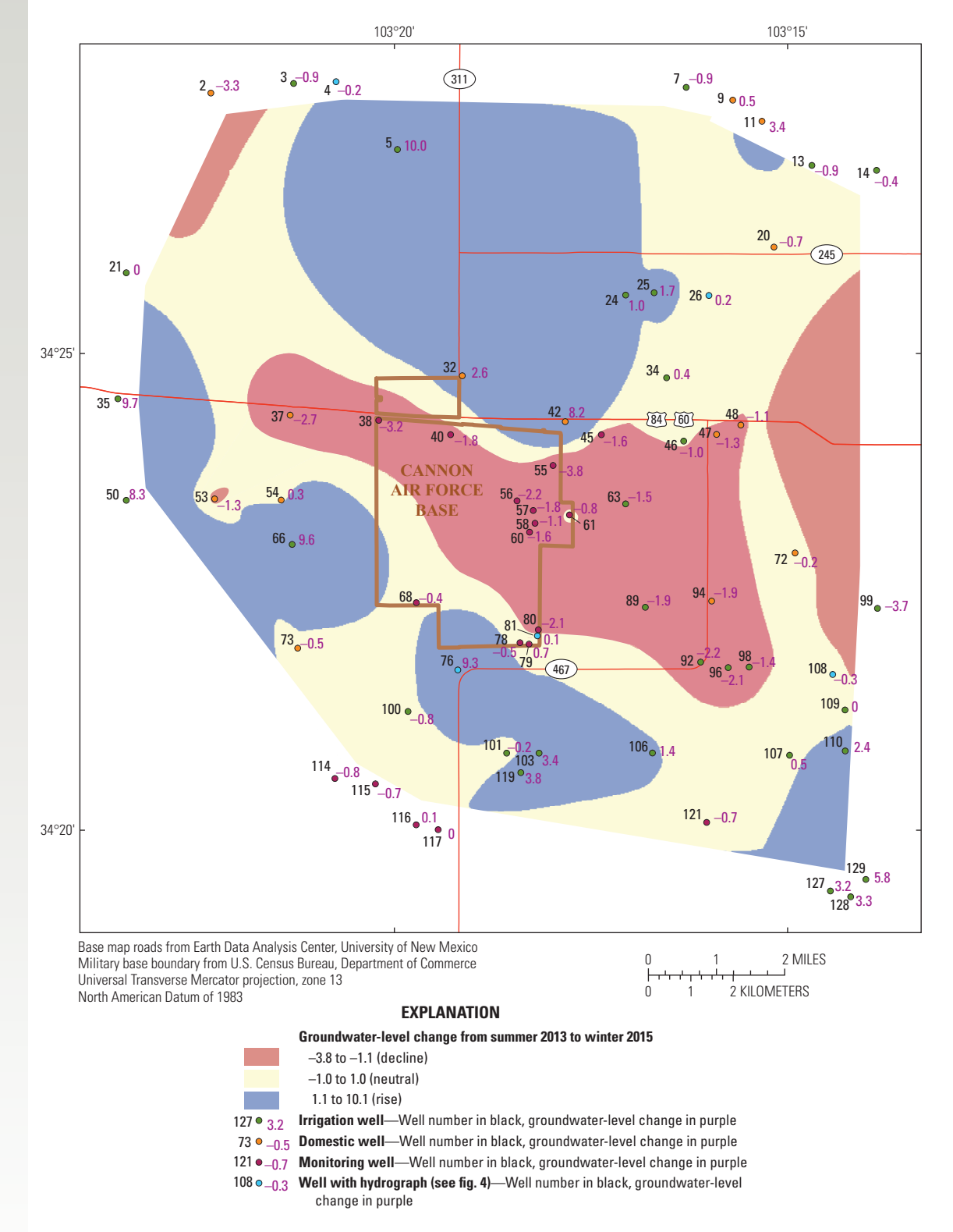


Figure 3. Map of groundwater-level change between summer 2013 (July 22–August 1) and winter 2015 (January 20–30) on and around Cannon Air Force Base, Curry County, New Mexico.

Methods

Groundwater levels were measured synoptically during both an irrigation season (summer of 2013) and a non-irrigation season (winter of 2015). Irrigation, domestic, and monitoring wells within approximately 3 miles of the Cannon AFB boundary were selected for measurement. All selected wells were assumed to be screened in the Ogallala Formation, with the total depth of the wells generally being the top of the Chinle Formation. This assumption is based on the few available drilling logs and discussions by the author with local farmers and drillers. Summer and winter groundwater potentiometric-surface maps were created from 93 and 100 groundwater altitudes, respectively (table 1). Groundwater levels in pumping wells were not measured, and the presence

of pumping wells near measured wells was noted on field forms and taken into consideration during the development of figures 1 and 2. Groundwater-level measurement and quality-control procedures set forth by Cunningham and Schalk (2011) were followed; specifically, a minimum of two groundwater-level measurements that were within 0.02 ft of each other were required at each well measured.

Real-time kinetic (RTK) survey-grade Global Positioning System equipment, with an error of plus or minus 2 inches, was used to survey the altitude of the land surface and the height of the measuring point above land surface for each well during March 30–April 7, 2015. An Online Positioning User Service occupation was conducted on four Cannon AFB wells (wells

31, 55, 68, and 81); these four wells served as locations for the base station during the RTK survey. The depth to groundwater below land surface was calculated by subtracting the height of the measuring point from the groundwater-level depth measured below the measuring point. The depth to groundwater below land surface was then subtracted from the surveyed land-surface altitude to calculate the groundwater-level altitude.

The groundwater-level altitudes were used in a geographic information system program to interpolate potentiometric surfaces by using the natural-neighbor method (Childs, 2004), and equipotential contours at 10-ft intervals were added to each seasonal map. Contour results were visually inspected for reasonability and corrected as necessary. Additionally,

finer interval, 2-ft, contour lines were used to manually draw flow-direction arrows orthogonal to equipotential lines in the direction of decreasing gradient; these 2-ft interval contour lines were not included on the potentiometric-surface maps for increased readability. Lastly, the starting point for each flow-direction arrow originated at the same location on each potentiometric-surface map to aid in discerning differences in flow paths between seasons.

A groundwater-level change map (fig. 3) was created by using groundwater-level differences (winter 2015 groundwater levels minus summer 2013 groundwater levels) from 67 wells. The groundwater-level changes were divided into three groups by using the natural-neighbor interpolation method (Childs,

2004): (1) greater than a 1.1-ft decrease indicated a decline in groundwater level, (2) from -1.0 through +1.0 ft indicated a neutral change in groundwater level, and (3) more than a 1.0-ft increase indicated a rise in groundwater level. The three groups were visually inspected for reasonability and corrected as necessary. Data collected for this study are in the USGS National Water Information System database (<http://nwis.waterdata.usgs.gov/usa/nwis/gwlevels>).

Potentiometric Surfaces

The July 22–August 1, 2013, potentiometric surface, representing summer conditions, is presented in figure 1. The summer measurement period was towards the end of the main irrigation season for wheat crops. According to Marsalis (2007), summer irrigation starts each year in March, peaks in June, declines to a low in September, resumes briefly in October in preparation for the next year's winter-wheat crops, and then declines to annual lows through the winter dormancy period. The January 20–30, 2015, groundwater-measurement period that occurred during the winter dormancy period is presented in figure 2.

Figures 1 and 2 in this report display the presence of what is interpreted to be a groundwater trough, trending from the northwest to the southeast through the study area. This groundwater trough may be the hydraulic expression of a

Tertiary-age paleochannel, commonly observed in the Southern High Plains aquifer (Gustavson, 1996), that contains coarser, more hydraulically conductive material than the surrounding subsurface material into which the paleochannel eroded (Fahlquist, 2003). Figures 1 and 2 in this report indicate that groundwater north of the trough flows in a southerly direction into the trough and groundwater south of the trough flows in an easterly direction into the trough.

Although regional groundwater-flow directions are generally the same for the summer and winter potentiometric-surface maps, there are differences between the maps on a localized scale, including cones of depression around wells 27 and 32 as seen in figure 1. The cone of depression around well 32 (figs. 1 and 2) appears to have an influence on the direction of groundwater flow in

the groundwater trough. The cone of depression around well 27 may also be present in the winter, but well 27 was not measured in the winter because of active pumping. The groundwater-flow directions around both of these cones of depression were created by using 2-ft interval contour lines, which provided more detail about the effects of the cones of depression on the groundwater-flow direction than can be seen in the 10-ft contours.

The groundwater-level change map (fig. 3) is a visual representation of the change in groundwater level during the 18-month period between the summer 2013 and winter 2015 measurement events. The period between both groundwater-level measurement events contained the remaining months of one irrigation season, one full winter dormancy period, one full irrigation season,

and a partial winter dormancy period. In figure 3, wells 5 and 35 showed the largest rise in groundwater levels, a rise of 10.0 and 9.7 ft, respectively. Wells 99 and 55 showed the largest decline in groundwater levels, a decline of 3.7 and 3.8 ft, respectively. The regions to the north and south of the groundwater trough contained the majority of the rises in groundwater levels, whereas the regions within the trough contained the majority of the declines in groundwater levels.

Potentiometric Surfaces, Summer 2013 and Winter 2015, and Select Hydrographs for the Southern High Plains Aquifer, Cannon Air Force Base, Curry County, New Mexico

By
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2016

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Table 1. Groundwater-level altitude data used to construct summer (July 22–August 1, 2013) and winter (January 20–30, 2015) potentiometric-surface maps and groundwater-level change data used to construct the change map for the area on and around Cannon Air Force Base, Curry County, New Mexico.

[Well number corresponds to figures 1, 2, and 3 well numbers; groundwater-level change rounded to nearest tenth of a foot; USGS, U.S. Geological Survey; ID, identifier; NAVD 88, North American Vertical Datum of 1988; --, no data]

Table with 15 columns: USGS site ID, Well number, Summer groundwater-level altitude (feet above NAVD 88), Winter groundwater-level altitude (feet above NAVD 88), Groundwater-level change from summer 2013 to winter 2015 (feet), and similar columns for a second set of wells.

Hydrographs

Five hydrographs created from periodic measurements of groundwater levels in wells on and around Cannon Air Force Base were developed to provide information about historic groundwater-level changes (fig. 4). The five wells with the most complete and longest groundwater-level records were selected to represent areas on and around Cannon Air Force Base. The five hydrograph wells are measured up to twice a year by the USGS in cooperation with the New Mexico Office of the State Engineer. Data from Bhathe and Trinity (2013) were used to fill in data gaps for the monitoring well on Cannon Air Force Base (well 81). In figure 4, the axes of the hydrographs are standardized to include the same time period (1954–2015) on the horizontal axis and the same amount of groundwater-level change (120 ft) on the vertical axis, allowing for comparison of groundwater levels and trends across the five hydrographs.

abundant moisture from 1984 to 1988 may have resulted in less groundwater pumping during this period. Except for this period in the mid- to late 1980s, there is a common trend of steady groundwater-level decline for this region. Well 4, north-northwest of Cannon AFB, had the smallest average annual groundwater-level decline of 0.41 feet per year (ft/yr). Well 26, northeast of Cannon AFB, had an average annual groundwater-level decline of 0.86 ft/yr for the period of record. Well 26 is also located near the local cone of depression formed by well 27. Well 76, directly south of Cannon AFB, had an average annual groundwater-level decline of 1.36 ft/yr for the period of record. Lastly, the two wells with the greatest average annual groundwater-level decline for the period of record were well 81, near the southeastern corner of Cannon AFB, and well 108, east-southeast of Cannon AFB, with declines of 2.81 and 1.99 ft/yr, respectively (fig. 4). Overall, the southeastern part of the study area exhibits the greatest average annual groundwater-level decline, and the northwestern part of the study area exhibits the smallest average annual decline. Additionally, the hydrographs of wells in proximity to the groundwater trough (76, 81, and 108) show the most rapid declines in groundwater levels (fig. 4). Langman and others (2006) also showed that the most rapid groundwater-level declines occurred in three wells within or near the trough, while wells farther away from the trough had a less rapid decline.

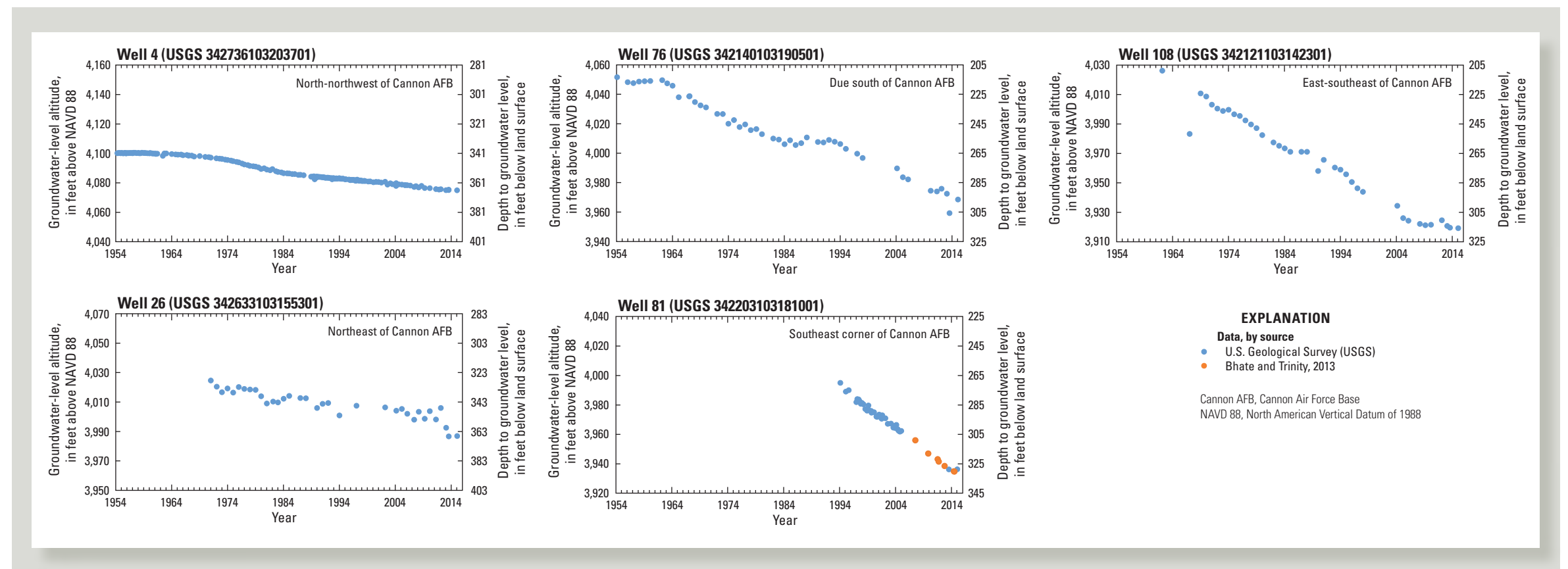


Figure 4. Groundwater-level altitude hydrographs from selected wells on and around Cannon Air Force Base, Curry County, New Mexico, 1954–2015.

Acknowledgments

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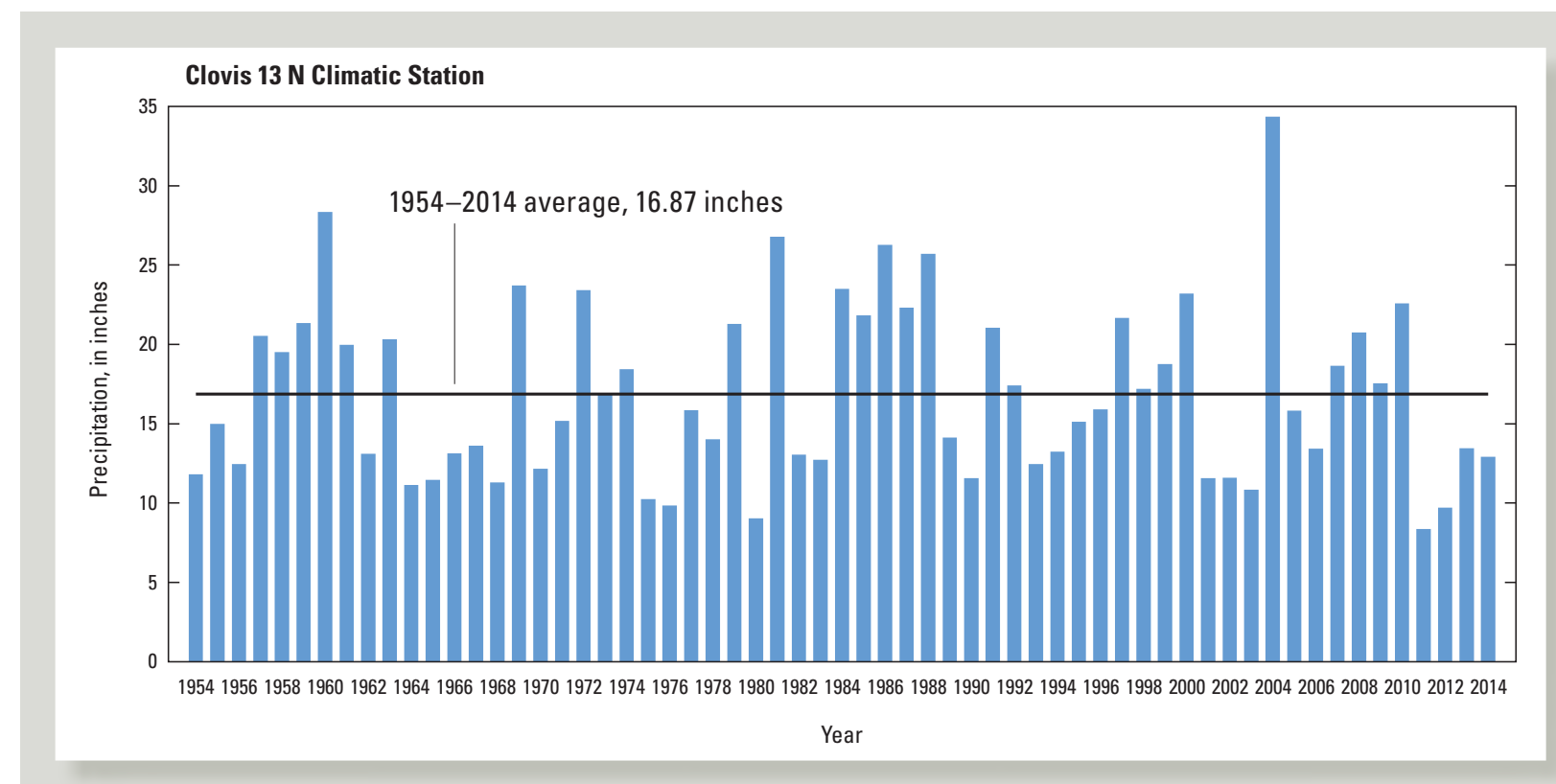


Figure 5. Annual precipitation at the Clovis 13 N climatic station and 1954–2014 average (16.87 inches). Data from National Climatic Data Center (2016).

References

List of references including Bhathe and Trinity (2013), EPCOR Water (2014), Langman et al. (2006), Marsalis (2007), National Climatic Data Center (2016), and others.

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