

Agua Fria Groundwater Basin Profile



Basin Summary Statistics

Size¹: 1,263 square miles

Elevation²: Range: 1,548-7,953 ft; Median: 4,065 ft

Top 3 land cover types by area³: Shrub/Scrub (86%), Evergreen Forest (10%), Grassland Herbaceous (1.7%)

Major surface watershed(s)⁴: Agua Fria River

Groundwater subbasins¹: None

Groundwater-derived streamflow fraction⁵:

0.43 (Moderate)



Mean Annual Hydrologic Cycle Components (1980-2020)
AGUA FRIA

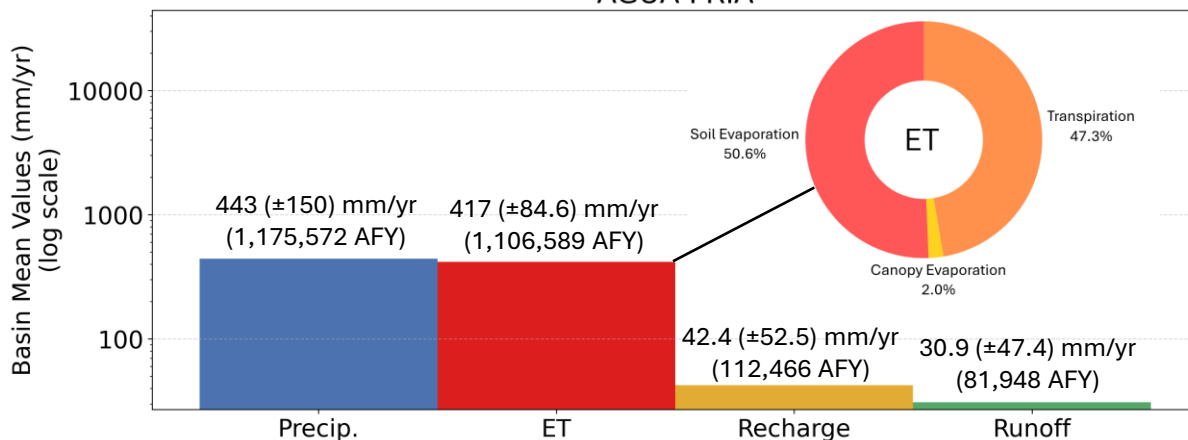


Figure 1 (above). Bar chart showing Noah-MP modeling results of the historical mean annual hydrologic cycle components (precipitation [P], evapotranspiration [ET], natural recharge, and runoff) in the basin from 1980-2020.⁶ ET is partitioned into soil evaporation, canopy evaporation, and transpiration. It is possible for ET to be greater than P when there are other sources such as groundwater, surface water, or water in storage.

Mean Monthly Hydrologic Cycle Components (1980-2020)
AGUA FRIA

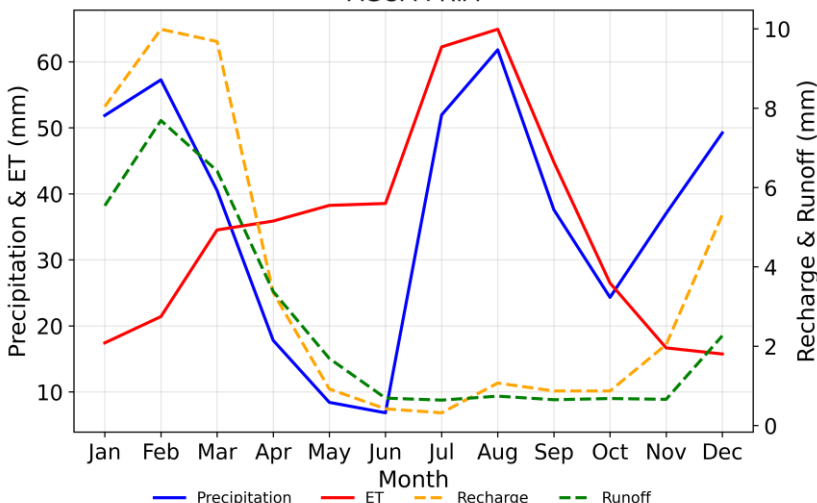


Figure 2. Graph showing monthly mean precipitation, ET, recharge, and runoff for the groundwater basin (1980-2020) from Noah-MP modeling results.⁶

Precipitation (P) in the Agua Fria basin is affected by the North American Monsoon during the summer months and large frontal systems during the winter. The greatest atmospheric losses occur during the summer months, where evapotranspiration (ET) exceeds P from mid-March through October. Natural recharge (42.4 mm/yr) and runoff (30.9 mm/yr) are highest in February as a result of springtime snowmelt and low evaporative demand. Soil evaporation makes up 50.6% of total ET in the basin, while transpiration comprises 47.3% and canopy evaporation accounts for the remainder (2.0%). Groundwater is estimated to supply 43% of total streamflow in the Agua Fria basin.

Agua Fria



Figure 3 (below). Gridded depiction of mean annual water fluxes across the groundwater basin from Noah-MP modeling (1980-2020): (a) precipitation, (b) evapotranspiration, (c) recharge, (d) runoff.⁶ Major cities/towns⁷ and Native American Reservation boundaries⁸ are shown (as applicable) to help orient the reader.

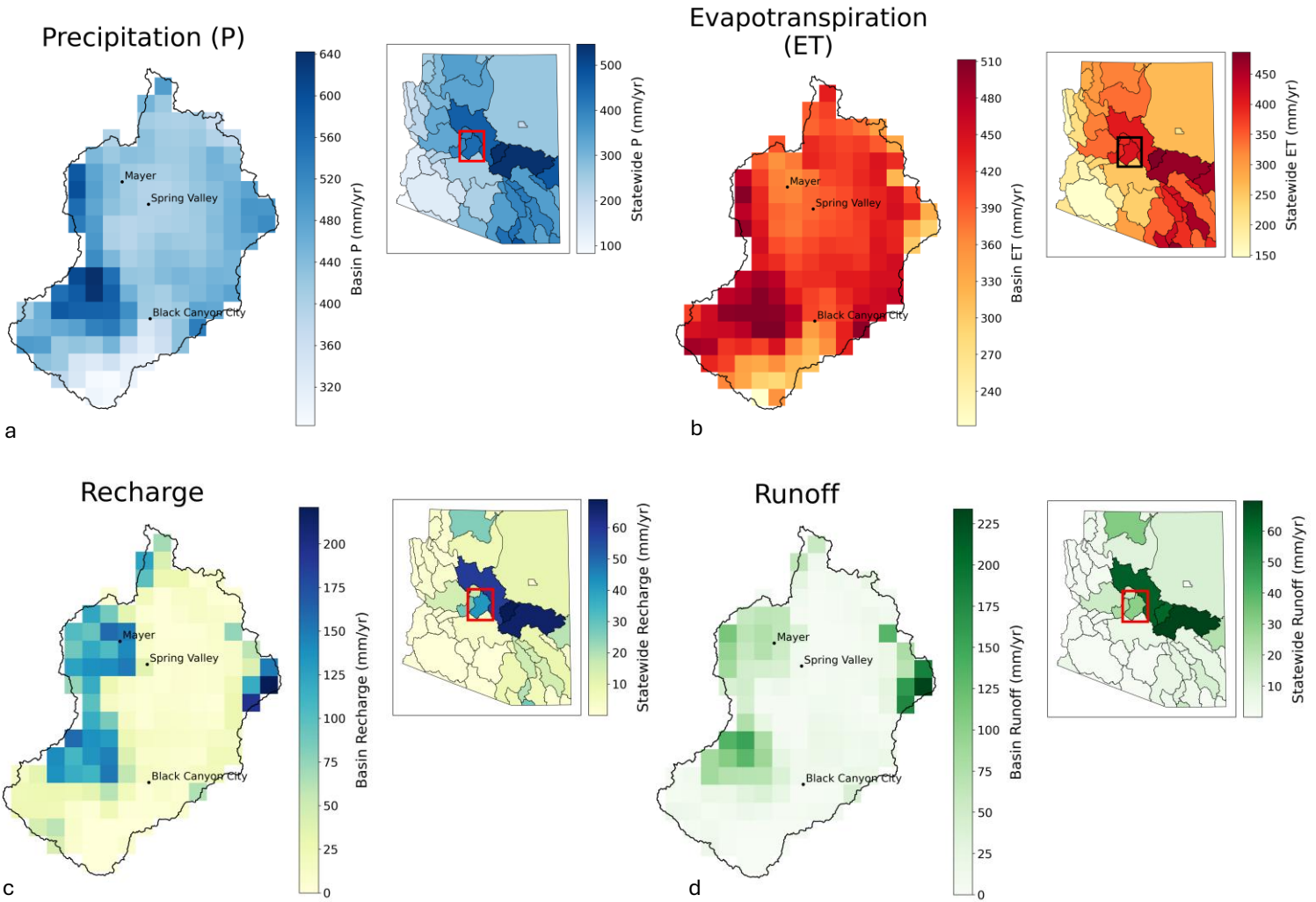
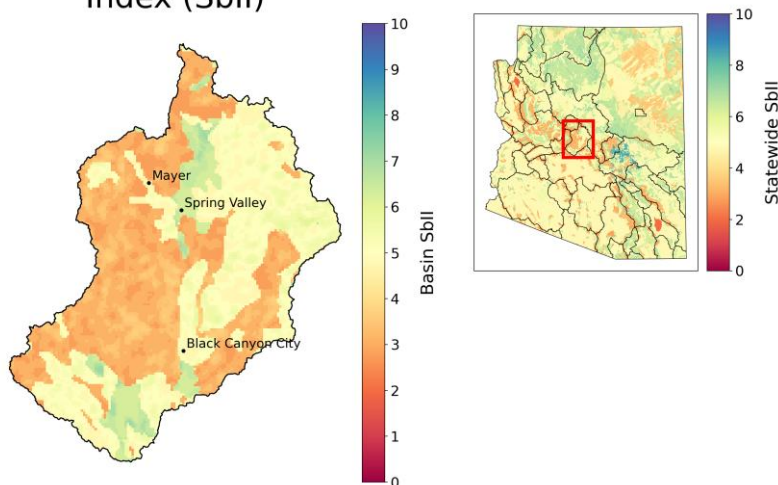


Figure 4 (below). Subsurface infiltration index (SbII) showing infiltration potential of the subsurface across the groundwater basin on a scale of 1-10 based on geologic features.⁹

Subsurface Infiltration Index (SbII)



Precipitation (P) in the Agua Fria basin is greatest in the Bradshaw Mountains in the western portion of the basin where it can exceed 600 mm/yr on average. Evapotranspiration (ET) is also highest in this region (~500 mm/yr). Natural recharge (150-200 mm/yr) and runoff (150-200 mm/yr) are greatest in the higher elevation regions of the basin, namely the Pine Mountain Wilderness to the east and the Bradshaw Mountains to the west. The Agua Fria basin contains pockets of moderate infiltration potential in the alluvial drainage to Lake Pleasant in the south and in the areas of moderately consolidated, limestone-containing conglomerate north of Spring Valley.



Climate Change Projections: Changes in Temperature, Precipitation, ET, Recharge, and Runoff (2060-2099 vs. 1981-2020)

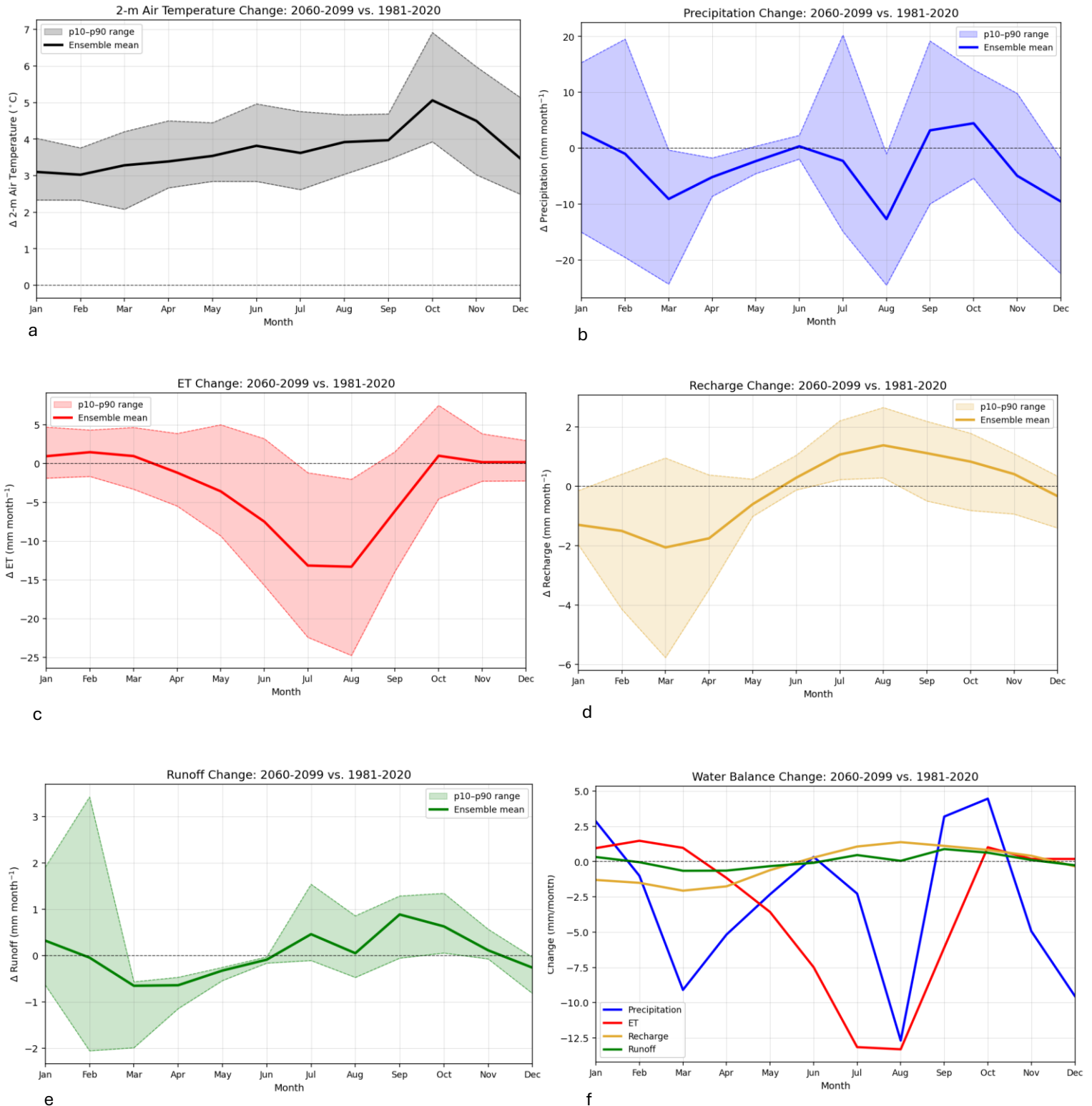


Figure 5. Plots (a)-(e) show projected changes in (a) temperature, (b) precipitation, (c) evapotranspiration (ET), (d) natural recharge, and (e) runoff statewide, comparing end of the 21st century to the historical record from 1981-2020 under the IPCC Scenario SSP3-7.0.¹⁰ Plot (f) shows the change in the water balance components (P, ET, recharge, and runoff) on a single graph for direct comparison. The analysis uses 14 dynamically downscaled global climate models (GCM) at 9-km resolution and the Noah-MP land surface model. The ensemble mean of the 14 GCMs is shown in bold for each component of the hydrologic cycle, with the 10-90th percentile shaded to show model projection uncertainty.



Climate change projections across the Agua Fria basin show drier springs (21-34% drier March through May) and a drier July (4%), August (19%), November (15%), and December (19%). September and October are projected to be 8-16% (2.8-4.4 mm/month) wetter on average by the end of the century, which is consistent with a projected increase in extreme events associated with hurricane and tropical cyclone activity. Declines in natural recharge of 37-49% (-1.6 to -2.1 mm/month) are projected for the highest recharge months (February-April), while projections for June-December show negative recharge (-0.47 to -1.6 mm/month).^{*} Negative recharge is projected despite less water loss in the system (shown as an increase from the baseline in Figure 8(d)). Runoff is projected to decrease March-May (49-85%), or -0.33 to -0.66 mm/month), while increasing in July (0.46 mm), September (0.88 mm), and October (0.64 mm). Projected increases in temperature range from approximately 3.0 °C in February to 5.1 °C in October. Less precipitation in August leads to a projected 19% (-13 mm) decrease in evapotranspiration (ET) during that month.

^{*}Projected negative recharge values are attributed to increased capillary rise from the aquifer through the vadose zone due to climate factors, resulting in water loss from the system. Because the Noah-MP model does not include groundwater pumping, this indicates that climate-driven factors play a significant role in groundwater storage decline in Arizona.

References

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