Lake Havasu Groundwater Basin Profile

ARIZONA TRI-UNIVERSITY RECHARGE AND WATER RELIABILITY PROJECT

Basin Summary Statistics

Size[1]: 252 square miles
Elevation[2]: Range: 450-5,075 ft; Median: 1,191 ft
Top 3 land cover types by area[3]: Shrub/Scrub (81%), Developed – Medium Intensity (7.8%), Open Water (5.1%)
Major surface watershed(s)[4]: Havasu-Mohave Lakes (Colorado River)
Groundwater subbasins[1]: None
Groundwater-derived streamflow fraction[5]:

0.47 (Moderate)

0.01 avg (0.32) 0.73

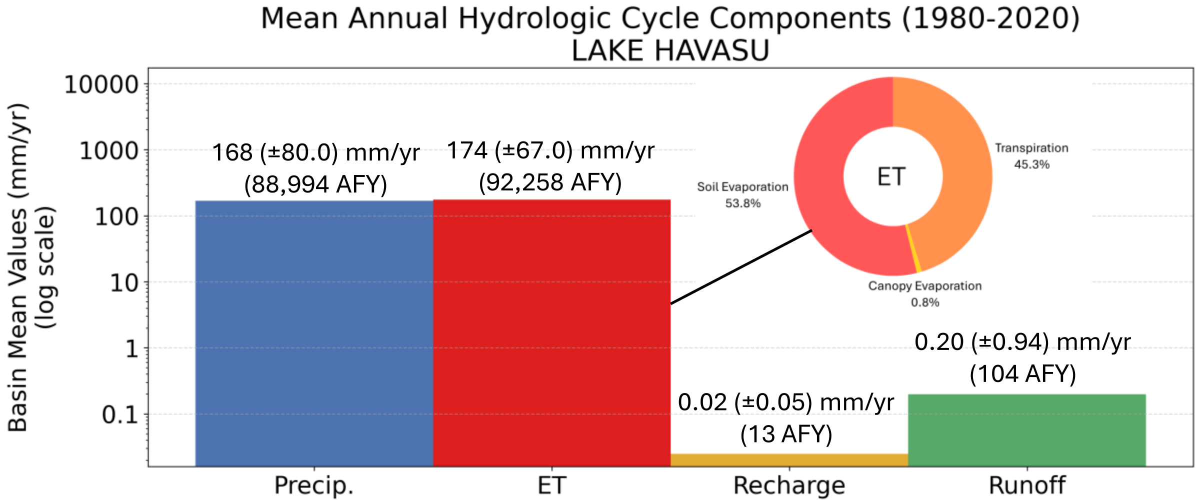

Figure 1 (above). Bar chart showing Noah-MP modeling results of the historical mean annual hydrologic cycle components (precipitation [P], evapotranspiration [ET], natural recharge, and runoff) in the basin from 1980-2020.[6] ET is partitioned into soil evaporation, canopy evaporation, and transpiration. It is possible for ET to be greater than P when there are other sources such as groundwater, surface water, or water in storage.

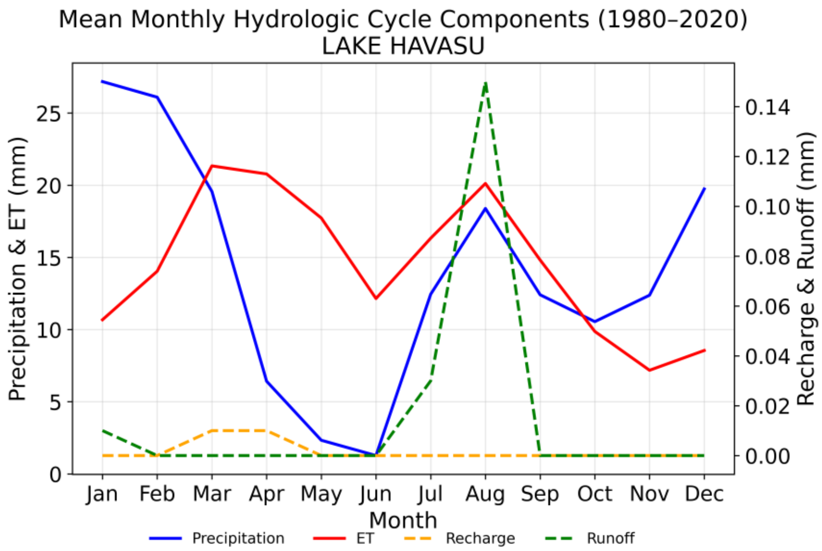

Figure 2. Graph showing monthly mean precipitation, ET, recharge, and runoff for the groundwater basin (1980-2020) from Noah-MP modeling results.[6]

On annual timescales, evapotranspiration (ET) exceeds precipitation (P), resulting in near-zero values for natural recharge and runoff in the Lake Havasu basin. P is affected by the North American Monsoon during the summer months and large frontal systems in the winter. ET exceeds P during the warmer months from March to October. Soil evaporation makes up 53.8% of total ET, while transpiration comprises 45.3% and canopy evaporation accounts for the remainder (0.8%).

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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/towns[7] and Native American Reservation boundaries[8] are shown (as applicable) to help orient the reader.

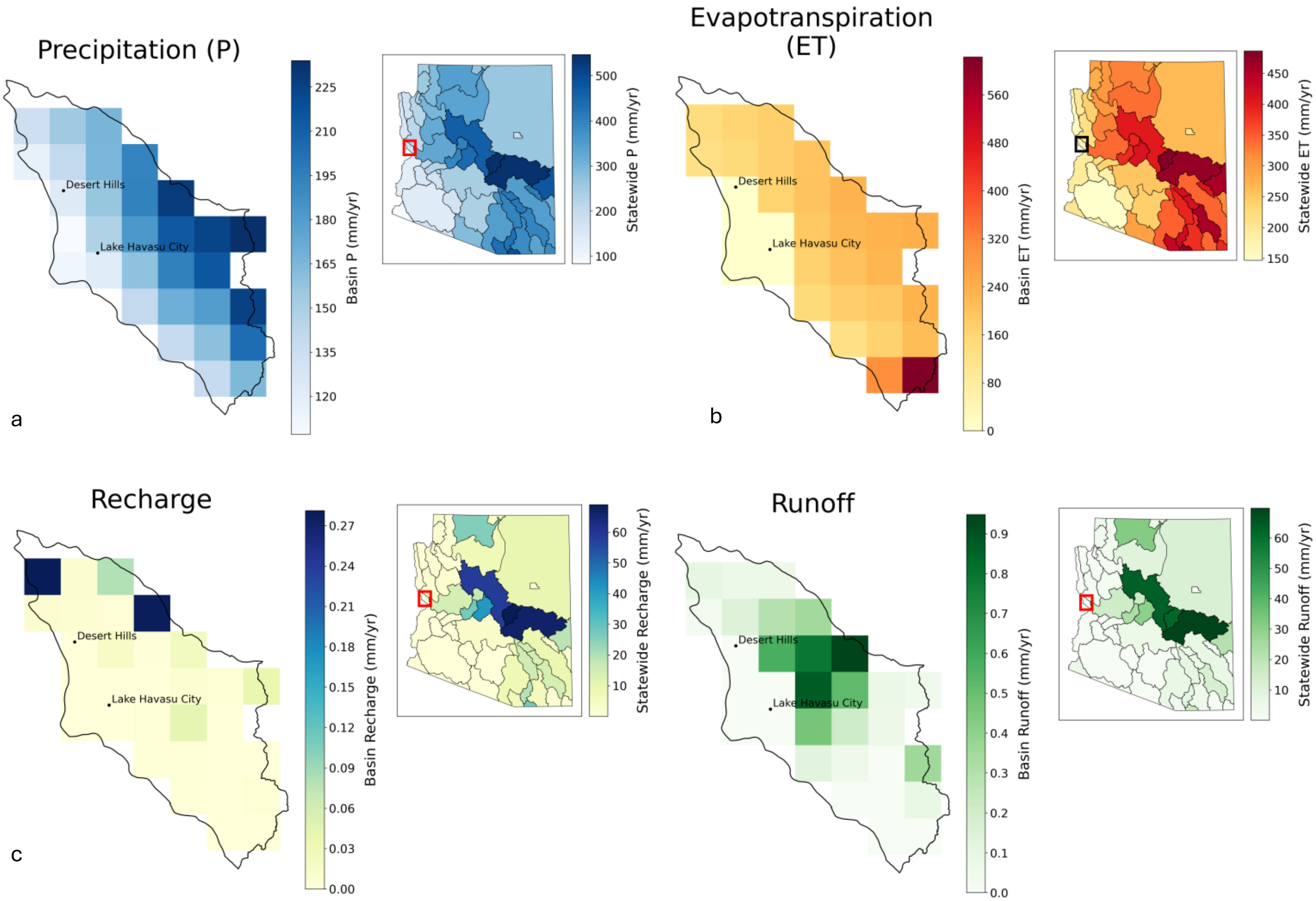
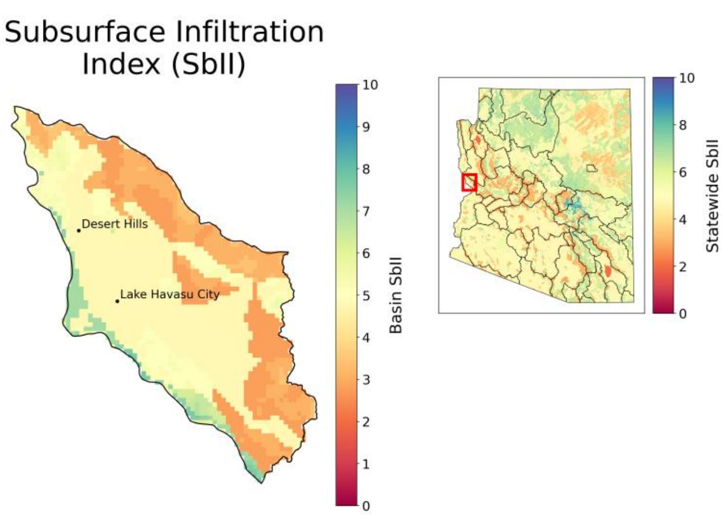


Figure 4 (below). Subsurface infiltration index (SbII) showing infiltration potential of the subsurface across the groundwater basin on a scale of 1-10 based on geologic features.[9]



Precipitation (P) in the Lake Havasu basin is greatest in the Mohave Mountains east of Lake Havasu City where it can exceed 220 mm/yr on average. Evapotranspiration (ET) is highest in the southern tip of the basin (~500 mm/yr). Natural recharge and runoff are near zero throughout the basin. Infiltration potential varies across the basin, with the least potential in the metamorphic rocks of the Mohave Mountains and the highest potential in the bed of the Colorado River.

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

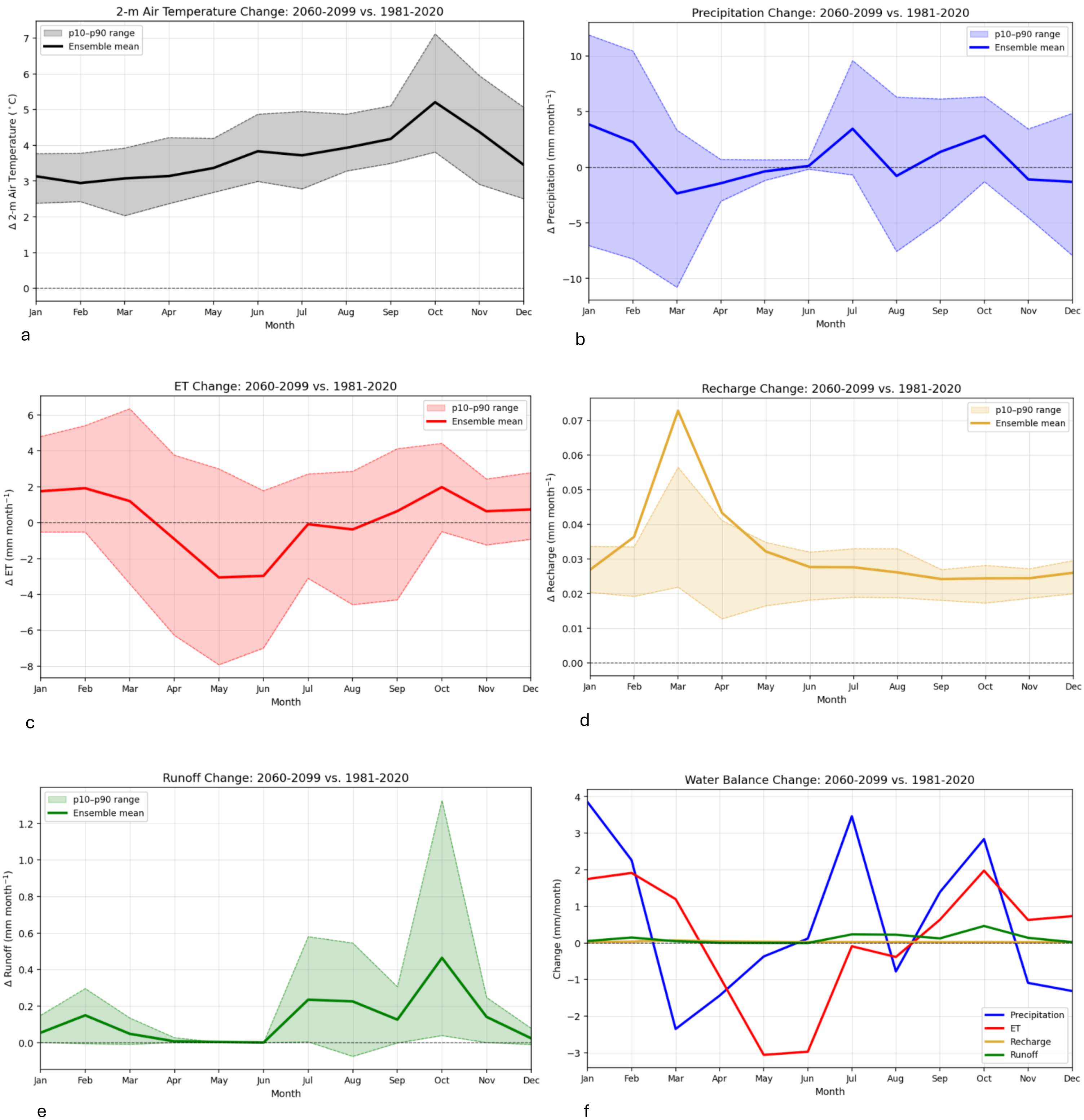

Figure 5. Plots (a)-(e) show projected changes in (a) temperature, (b) precipitation, (c) evapotranspiration (ET), (d) natural recharge, and (e) runoff statewide, comparing end of the 21st century to the historical record from 1981-2020 under the IPCC Scenario SSP3-7.0.[10] Plot (f) shows the change 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.

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Climate change projections across the Lake Havasu basin show drier springs (11-26% drier March through May) and a drier August (4%), November (10%), and December (6%). July, September, and October are projected to be 10-29% (1.3-3.6 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. Natural recharge is projected to remain near zero, with slightly negative projections in January-February and from May through December (-0.01 to -0.02 mm/month).* While runoff is projected to remain below 0.7 mm/month, minor increases of 0.12-0.48 mm/month are projected for July-October. Projected increases in temperature range from approximately 3.0 °C in February to 5.3 °C in October. Less precipitation leads to a projected 4-26% (-1.0 to -3.1 mm/month) decrease in evapotranspiration (ET) April-June, while higher temperatures and greater water availability lead to a projected 20% (2.0 mm) increase in ET in October compared to the baseline period.

*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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