

LOWER SAN DIEGO RIVER WATER QUALITY
ANNUAL WATER QUALITY MONITORING REPORT FOR WY25



*Creeping Water Primrose (Ludwiga peploides) proliferation in Walmart Ponds at Mast Park East
(WQM Site #13E, mid-January, 2025)*

A Compilation of WQM Data (October 2004 - September 2025)

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Lower San Diego River Water Quality 2005-2025

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Questions regarding the San Diego RiverWatch WQM database or technical interpretation of results expressed in this and similar LSDR WQ data monitoring reports provided on the SDRPF Online Information Center can be directed to the attention of John Kennedy, P.E. through contacting SDRPF at info@SanDiegoRiver.org or the current RiverWatch Coordinator.

Section 1 - Introduction

This report provides a summary of monthly values, seasonal patterns and annual trends in water quality monitoring data gathered and evaluated by SDRPF’s RiverWatch citizen volunteers. WQM data collected monthly over the past 21 years at all monitoring sites within the Lower San Diego River (LSDR) watershed have been aggregated, in conjunction with hydrologic streamflow data to develop a numeric water quality index (WQI). Basic monthly data regarding individual water quality parameters and river hydrology for each of the sites monitored are maintained in an extensive database file maintained at the SDRPF offices; this annual report examines Water Year 2025 (WY25) data in comparison to previous year results and 21-yr averages henceforth in this report referred to as ‘norms’. The LSDR water quality monitoring site locations are shown on **Figure 1-1**.



Figure 1-1 LSDR Watershed and Water Quality Monitoring Sites

Color Code for LSDR reaches on Figure 1-1 above: Estuary (orange), Lower Mission Valley (purple), Upper Mission Valley (red), Mission Gorge (green), Lower Santee Basin (pink), Upper Santee Basin (dark blue), Lakeside to El Capitan Reservoir (light green) and principal tributaries (light blue)

The water quality sites on Figure 1-1 and monthly water quality data can be viewed in detail on the SDRPF RiverWatch Online Information Center webpage available at <www.sandiegoriver/river_watch.html>. The portal also contains: San Diego StreamTeam Bio-assessment data, 401 Project information and USGS real-time streamflow data regarding daily peak discharge and gauge height for two San Diego River gauging stations (Fashion Valley & Mast/W.Hills Pkwy Bridge near Santee). The RiverWatch data portal is updated as information becomes available.

The water quality index (WQI) represents a response to questions and concerns from SDRPF staff and the general public regarding overall health of the lower river system. The index is a numeric (0-100) where increasing values indicate improving water quality. The numerical index incorporates basic physical, chemical and bacteriological water quality data by integrating six parameters: water temperature (Temp), pH, specific conductance (SpC), dissolved oxygen (DO), percent saturation (%DOSat) and streamflow (ADF); through determination of weighted factors for each metric. The resulting values are aggregated to arrive at an overall score for each site, reach, section as well as the entire lower watershed (LSDR). The range in index values, grades, color codes and general conventions utilized are presented in **Table 1.1**.

Table 1.1 LSDR Water Quality Index

SDR WQI (0-100)	Grade	Color Code	Percentile Range	Water Quality Threshold	General
75 or >	A - Very Good	Dark Blue	25%	Well above acceptable WQ criteria	Healthy (>50)
50 - 74	B - Good	Light Blue	25%	Meets acceptable WQ criteria	
38 - 49	C - Fair	Green	12.5%	Meets many (but not all) WQ criteria	Marginal (25-49)
25 - 37	D - Marginal	Yellow	12.5%	Meets few acceptable WQ criteria	
13 - 24	E - Poor	Brown	12.5%	Below most minimum WQ criteria	Unhealthy (< 25)
0 - 12	F - Very Poor	Pink/Rose	12.5%	Well below minimum WQ criteria	

Note: The WQI has been developed for inland fresh water quality metrics only; not applicable to estuarine or ocean waters.

In general, sites with WQI values of 50 or above (blue zone) exceed expectations for acceptable water quality and are indicative of relatively ‘healthy’ conditions. Scores between 25 and 49 (yellow zone) describe ‘impaired or ailing’ quality where quantifiable evidence exists regarding failure to meet specific water quality criteria. Waters’ with scores of less than 25 (red zone) do not meet minimum expectations and are considered ‘unhealthy’ and/or stressful to numerous aquatic life forms. For WQ parameters monitored by RiverWatch, the index expresses results relative to those levels necessary to sustain designated beneficial water uses for the LSDR (Hydrologic Area 907.1) based on California Water Quality Standards. Where criteria are non-specific, results are expressed relative to general freshwater objectives established for Southern California inland coastal areas. As such, the index does not apply to estuarine or ocean waters. Fresh water is typically defined as having an overall salt content of less than one percent.

Index values were calculated using two formulas; one involving four metrics (Temp, SpC and DO) monitored by RiverWatch combined with streamflow (ADF); the second with two additional parameters (pH and total coliform counts). The equations used for both formulas (WQI₄ and WQI₆) are presented in Appendix F. Differences between the two calculations were found to be minor, however, the initial determination (WQI₄) provides a broader range in values than the second, as the ‘normalizing’ effects of pH and total coliform values (both of which present less spatial and temporal variance) are excluded. The broader range WQI₄ values are expressed in both the annual and monthly water quality reports. Although specifically developed for the Lower San Diego River, the index can also be applied to other coastal and inland watercourses where the same metrics (i.e., DO, SpC, water temperature and streamflow) are monitored and available on a consistent basis. A technical report comparing relative water quality in three San Diego County watercourses; Los Penasquitos Creek below Poway, Santa Margarita River below Temecula/near Fallbrook, and Lower San Diego River near Santee and in Mission Valley, prepared through the RiverWatch program in 2015, is on file at SDRPF offices.

Section 2 - Spatial Analysis of WY25 Water Quality Metrics

Monthly water quality data collected and recorded at each site by RiverWatch WQM Team volunteers are used to determine averages, seasonal patterns and trends as presented in this annual report and appendices. Supporting USGS streamflow data are also included in the analyses. The annual average water quality values for each of the monitoring sites for WY25 and ‘norms’ i.e., averaged values over the past 21 years of monthly monitoring, are presented in **Table 2.1**. WY25 values (bold type) equal to or greater than site norms (in italics) are shown in black, whereas values below norms are in red. This year’s overall LSDR average values (of all 17 sites) are displayed in bottom two rows of the table.

Table 2.1 Average Annual WQ Metrics for WY25 and 21-yr Norms by Site, Reach and Section

WQM Site	LSDR Reach/Sect.		Temp, oC	SpC, mS/cm	pH	Dissolved Oxygen, mg/L (%Sat)	ADF, cfs	WQI, (Diff) & Grade ^a		
1	L M V	West	19.5 /19.7	3.05 /2.71	7.69 /7.75	7.30(80) /6.17(68)	17/30	43 /37 (+6)	C/D+	
2			19.2 /19.0	3.00 /2.65	7.63 /7.68	5.85(63) /4.60(48)		39 /31 (+8)	C-/D	
3			19.1 /19.2	2.81 /2.53	7.71 /7.75	4.68(49) /4.57(48)		32 /31 (+1)	D/D	
4	M M V		19.6 /19.5	2.77 /2.45	7.78 /7.78	6.40(69) /5.99(64)	15/27	42 /40 (+2)	C/C	
5			17.1 /17.2	2.72 /2.58	7.58 /7.63	5.54(57) /4.88(50)		36 /33 (+3)	D/D	
6	U M V		18.4 /18.3	2.64 /2.56	7.55 /7.61	3.43(35) /3.52(36)	14/25	23 /24 (-1)	E+/E+	
7			18.0 /18.1	2.34 /2.41	7.53 /7.58	4.66(48) /5.14(53)		32 /35 (-3)	D/D	
8	M G	Mid	16.7 /17.1	2.18 /2.26	7.89 /7.72	7.64(76) /7.29(74)	8/18	49 /48 (+1)	C+/C+	
9T ^b			14.7 /15.6	4.46 /4.61	8.23 /7.94	10.26(102) /9.33(94)		<1	35 /34 (+1)	D/D
10			16.6 /17.5	2.18 /2.20	7.74 /7.81	6.36(64) /6.83(71)		38 /43 (-5)	C-/C	
11	L S B	East	16.6 /16.7	2.11 /2.19	7.66 /7.59	6.15(62) /6.13(61)	5/10	40 /38 (+2)	C/C-	
12T ^b			14.1 /17.2	1.77 /1.59	7.95 /7.92	7.90(77) /7.11(73)		42 /37 (+5)	C/D+	
15T ^b			17.2 /17.8	2.25 /2.65	7.83 /8.02	6.68(69) /7.18(70)		39 /39 (-0)	C-/C-	
13W ^c	U S B		15.8 /15.8	1.57 /1.57	7.45 /7.58	3.41(34) /3.70(37)	3/7	19 /23 (-4)	E/E+	
13E			17.4 /18.2	1.77 /1.86	7.51 /7.62	1.65(16) /2.67(28)		10 /15 (-5)	F/E	
14			19.7 /18.0	1.57 /1.50	7.91 /7.84	5.49(59) /3.74(38)		32 /22 (+10)	C/E	
all	LSDR Avg.		17.7 /17.9	2.34 /2.26	7.65 /7.71	5.42(56) /5.30(54)	11 /21	34 /33 (+1)	C/D	
1-16	Rwt Avg^d		17.7 /17.9	2.33 /2.25	7.71 /7.74	5.56(53) /5.42(51)	11 /21	34 /33 (+1)	C/D	

a) Average annual water quality index values, change (+/-) and resultant WQ letter grade for WY25 (bold) and 21-yr norms (italics); WY25 values below site norms for each metric are in red; values above norms in black.

b) Lower San Diego River water quality monitoring sites located on tributary (T) streams; all others are main channel.

c) Mast Park West site (below Carlton Hill Blvd. bridge) was added in WY21; so yearly ‘norms’ are less statistically sound.

d) Reach-weighted (Rwt) WQI values are calculated based on the ‘reach’ of each site relative to total length of the lower river.

e) DO > 7.0 mg/L values shown in blue cells; DO < 5 mg/L values are shown in tan cells.

All 16 monitoring sites present average annual WQI values for WY25 very near the 21-yr norms. Average WY25 water temperatures were slightly above norms at 5 sites and below at 11; resulting in an overall decrease of 0.24 oC from the annual average of 17.9 oC. Specific Conductance values for WY25 were below norms at 7 monitoring sites and above at 9. The overall SpC (LSDR average) for WY25 is 4% above the annual norm of 2.25 mS/cm. DO values are greater than norms at 10 of 16 sites in WY25. Overall this year’s average DO value of 5.56 mg/L (53%Sat) is slightly above the annual norm of 5.42 mg/L (51%Sat). pH values are lower than norms at 10 out of 16 sites. Average daily streamflows (ADF) for WY25 (**bold red type**) were well below the 21-yr average daily norms (*shown in italics*). WQI values are below norms at 5 sites and above at 11 this year, resulting in a one point increase in the overall LSDR index.

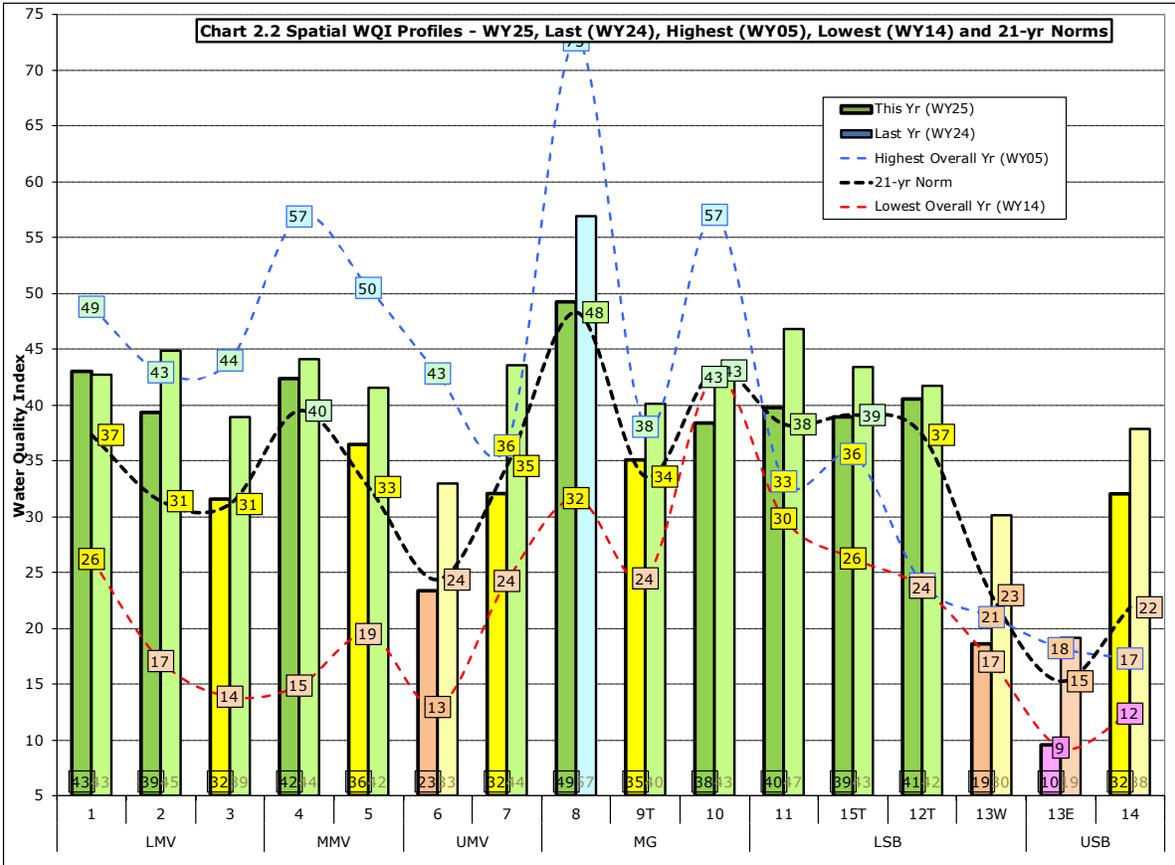
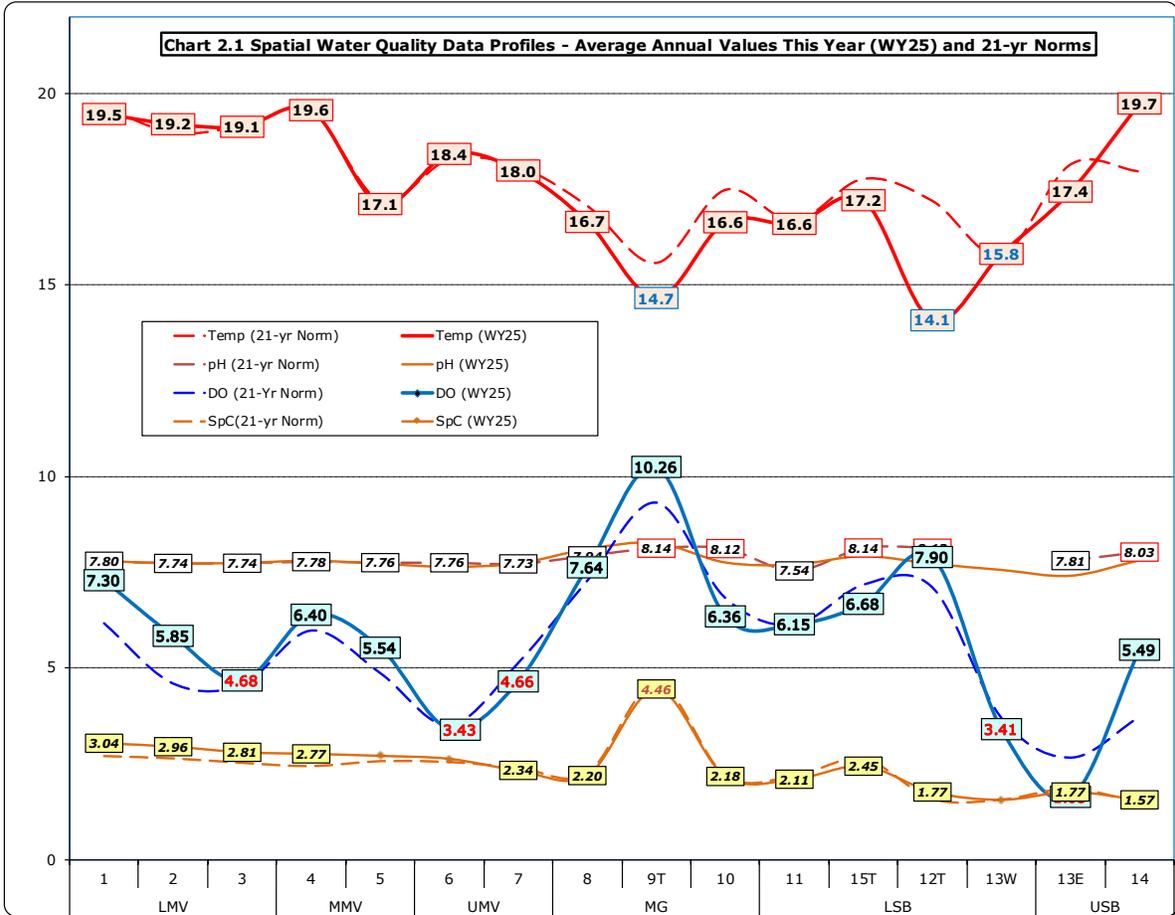
Average annual and monthly min.-max. range water quality metrics for WY25 and 21-yr norms are expressed for the overall river (LSDR) and by each reach/section in **Table 2.2**. Average annual water temperatures are slightly above norms in 4 out of 5 reaches while Specific Conductance (SpC) for all 5 reaches were below norms throughout the year. Mission Valley and Mid-Reach pH values were above norms while below in the Santee Basin. DO values in all 5 reaches were above norms. Streamflow (ADF) were well below norms in all reaches and sections throughout WY25. The greatest improvement in water quality metrics monitored within the lower river watershed occurred in the Lower Mission Valley (Sites 1-3) reach. WQI values remained unchanged from norms in the Santee Basin section. This year three reaches presented higher WQI values than norms while two (MG & UMV) were lower.

Table 2.2 Water Quality Metrics for WY25 and 21-yr Norms by Range, Reach and Section

Parameter, units	Temp, oC	SpC, mS/cm	pH	Dissolved Oxygen, mg/L (%Sat)	ADF, cfs	WQI, (Difference) and Grade ^a		
LSDR Max. Mo.	23.2 /25.2	2.70 /2.86	7.87 /8.60	8.46(74) /10.4(102)	59 /230	55/51 (+5)	B/B-	
Winter (D,J,F,M)	12.6 /13.4	1.56 /1.69	7.82 /7.78	7.68(73) /7.21(69)	24 /44	49/48 (+1)	C+/C	
Annual Wt Avg.	17.7 /17.9	1.73 /2.26	7.71 /7.74	5.56(57) /5.42(56)	11 /21	34/33 (+1)	D/D	
Summer (J,J,A,S)	22.7 /22.5	2.29 /2.74	7.63 /7.71	3.50(41) /3.72(43)	1.9 /2.7	21/19 (+2)	D-/E	
LSDR Min. Mo.	9.3 /9.3	1.00 /1.52	7.55 /7.07	2.89(34) /1.80(16)	1.3 /0.1	18/16 (+2)	E/E	
<i>LSDR Individual Reach Averages:</i>								
USB	East	18.7 /18.1	1.25 /1.74	7.69 /7.74	3.53(37) /3.01(31)	3.3 /7.3	17/17 (0)	E/E
LSB		17.4 /17.3	1.75 /2.22	7.66 /7.76	6.52(68) /6.49(64)	8.0 /18	38/38 (0)	C-/C-
MG	Mid	16.9 /17.0	1.55 /2.23	8.05 /7.82	7.55(76) /7.45(76)	9.7 /20	44/46 (-2)	C/C
UMV	West	18.4 /17.9	1.95 /2.51	7.71 /7.61	5.27(55) /4.51(46)	16 /29	28/29 (-1)	D/D
LMV		19.4 /19.3	2.17 /2.57	7.78 /7.74	5.84(63) /5.02(53)	17 /30	39/35(+4)	C-/D

a) Average annual water quality index value, difference (+/-) from 21-yr norms and resultant WQI letter grades. Current values (**bold-face type**) and grades below norms (*shown in italics*) are expressed in red; values and grades above norms are in black.
b) DO > 7.0 mg/L shown in light blue cells; DO < 5 mg/L shown in tan cells.

The water quality values expressed in Tables 2.1 and 2.2 for the LSDR system monitoring sites are presented in **Charts 2.1** (Water Quality Data Profiles) and **2.2** (Water Quality Index and LSDR Streamflow) on the next page.



Average annual water quality values for WY25 compared to 21-yr norms for water temperature, pH, DO and SpC at each monitoring site, river reach and section in order of their location upstream are presented on **Chart 2.1**. This year's results are shown as heavy solid lines with values listed in bold type; the dashed lines are 21-yr annual averages (or norms) for each site. With exception of Site 12, lowest water temperature values are typically monitored in the mid-portion (MG section) of the lower river. Average annual DO values at five sites (3,6,7,13W&E), three in the west and two in the east, are below the depletion threshold level of 5 mg/L. Monitored DO and DO%Sat results present the greatest variation between sites. Lowest values are typically recorded in the Upper Santee Basin and Upper Mission Valley reaches whereas highest values are observed in the Mission Gorge section (sites 8, 9 &10). Excluding tributary sites, average annual SpC values generally increase along the mainstem of the river from the upper reach (site 14) downstream to the estuary (site 1), somewhat similar to mainstream water temperatures. SpC averages for WY25 (solid blue line) are also similar to norms (dashed line) at all sites. In terms of spacial variance pH values vary the least while DO values present the greatest range between sites both this year (WY25) and over the past several decades (21-yr norms).

The spacial WQI results, an aggregate or composite index of water quality monitoring metrics for this year and last (both shown as bars), as well the 21-yr norms, overall best (WY05) and worst (WY14) year values (shown as lines) are presented in **Chart 2.2**. This year (WY25) and last (WY24) WQI values (shown as bars) together with the 21-yr norms and max/min values, show that the three monitoring locations furthest upstream; Mast Park (sites 13E&W) and Magnolia Ave (site 14), experience the poorest water quality followed by Kaiser Ponds (site 6) in Upper Mission Valley. On an average annual basis, highest WQI values continue to be associated with the Mission Gorge reach (sites 8,9&10). The overall WQI profile for WY25 bold values are less than last year's results at all but one site (#1-Estuary) and generally close to the 21-yr norms (heavy black dashed line). In general WY25 water quality index values throughout the LSDR system are slightly down from last year's (WY24) results to comperable levels as the 21-yr norms. As found in the past, significantly below normal streamflows escalates greater degregation of the watercourse resulting in lower overall water quality primarily due to depressed dissolved oxygen levels. WY25 experienced below normal dry weather flows as well as average annual streamflow which resulted in an overall decline in the river water quality index. Higher water temperatures and specific conductance values, as monitored throughout the water year, when combined with lower dissolved oxygen levels found at nearly all sites, result in lower overall water quality index values.

Water quality data monitored in WY25 are analysed by month and season in the following section of this report.

Section 3 - Temporal Analysis of LSDR WY25 Data

Monthly, seasonal and annual water quality monitoring metrics data and index results for the Lower San Diego River are presented in **Table 3.1** for this year (WY25) with comparison to 21-yr norms (shown italicized). WY25 values that are above norms are listed in black; values below norms in red. Temporal water quality values in WY25 vary little from the 21-yr norms on an annual basis with the exception of streamflow where this year's values are below norms for all but two months (Mar. & Aug.) of the water year. The resultant annual average WQI for WY25 is only one point (9%) above the 21-yr norm of 33 and six points lower (-15%) than last year's (WY24) overall value of 40.

Monthly and seasonal variances in water quality monitoring metrics for the past two water years (WYs 25 & 24), displayed as lines, and the 21-yr norms, shown as bars, are expressed in **Chart 3.1** located on the next page. The numeric values presented in the chart are taken from columns 1-4 of Table 3.1. Dissolved oxygen values are highest during the winter months (Dec-March) whereas specific conductivity and water temperatures are greatest during the summer months (June-Sept.) extending into early autumn (Oct). The pH values show very little overall temporal variation. However, the broad range in DO, SpC and water temperature metrics, as monitored at nearly all sites throughout the year when considered collectively, provide strong indication of the significant variance in overall water quality. Temporal variance between this year's data (WY25), shown as solid lines, last year's results (dashed lines) and the 21-yr norms (colored bars) show similar patterns. The temporal variance in WY25 water quality data match more closely temporal patterns in the 21-yr norms, than do the WY24 values. This year's temporal water quality values are reflective of both normalized monthly occurrences as well as those monitored during previous years, with only slight variances for specific months. Seasonal variances are much the same.

Chart 3.2 provides an overall graphic presenting temporal variance in both streamflow and WQI values throughout WY25 compared to monthly averages for the previous water year (WY24) and the 21-yr norms. As shown in the chart, WQI values for WY25 (heavy black line), also listed in Table 3.1 (far right column), are fairly close to 21-yr norms (colored bars) for most months of the year. The positive correlation between streamflow (both wet weather and dry) and monthly water quality is also evident. Low DO levels throughout the summer and fall months, combined with below normal dry-weather flows, constitute the primary drivers in index values. In general, water quality for the Lower San Diego River watershed is highest (i.e., Good to Fair grades) when flows are greatest during the Winter months (Dec-March) and poorest (Poor to Very Poor) in Summer (June-Sept) when streamflow and DO values are lowest and water temperatures highest. The overall annual average WQI for the LSDR in WY25 of 34 (D Marginal) is one point above the overall 21-yr average index value of 33 and six points below the WY24 index of 40.

The temporal patterns in river water quality data, as expressed in this section of the report, are quite evident in context of monthly and seasonal values. The next section of this report examines the same temporal variances in river water quality data extending over the entire 21-year period based on computed 12-mo running average values. Examining the temporal patterns in running averages provides a sound basis of reviewing the trends in the water quality data over the past two decades.

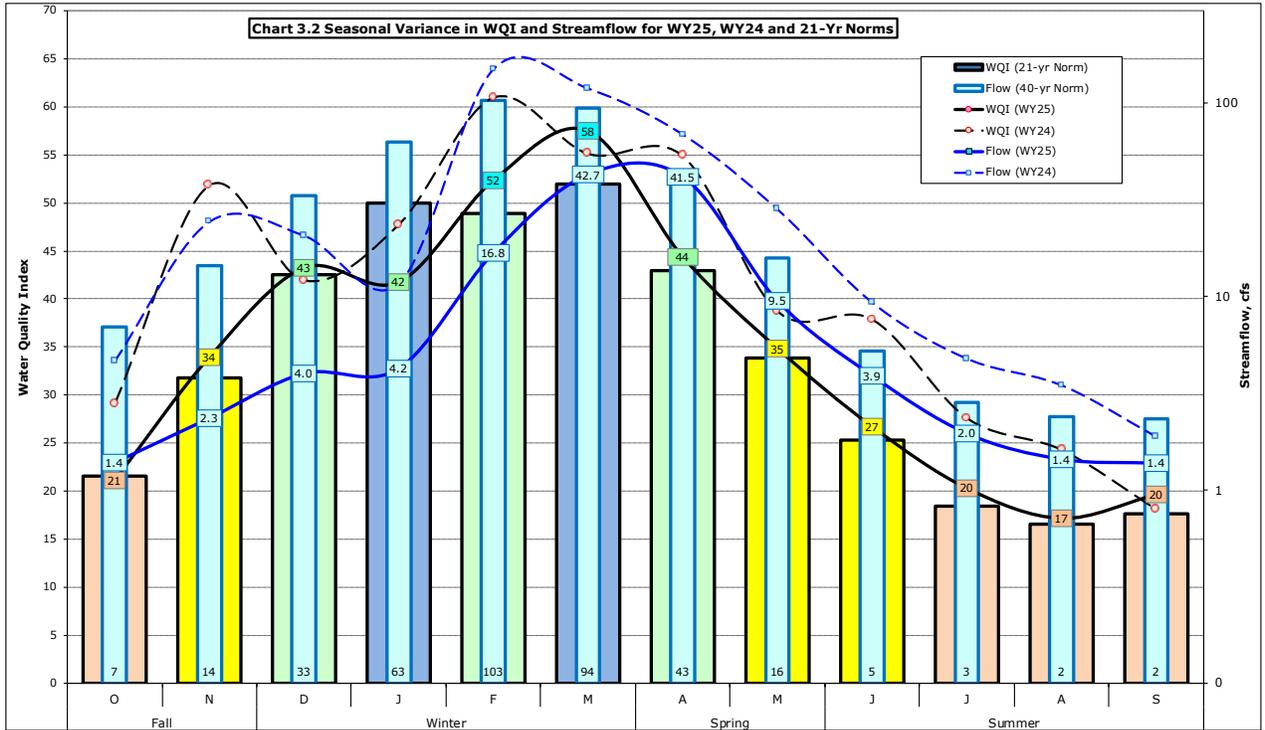
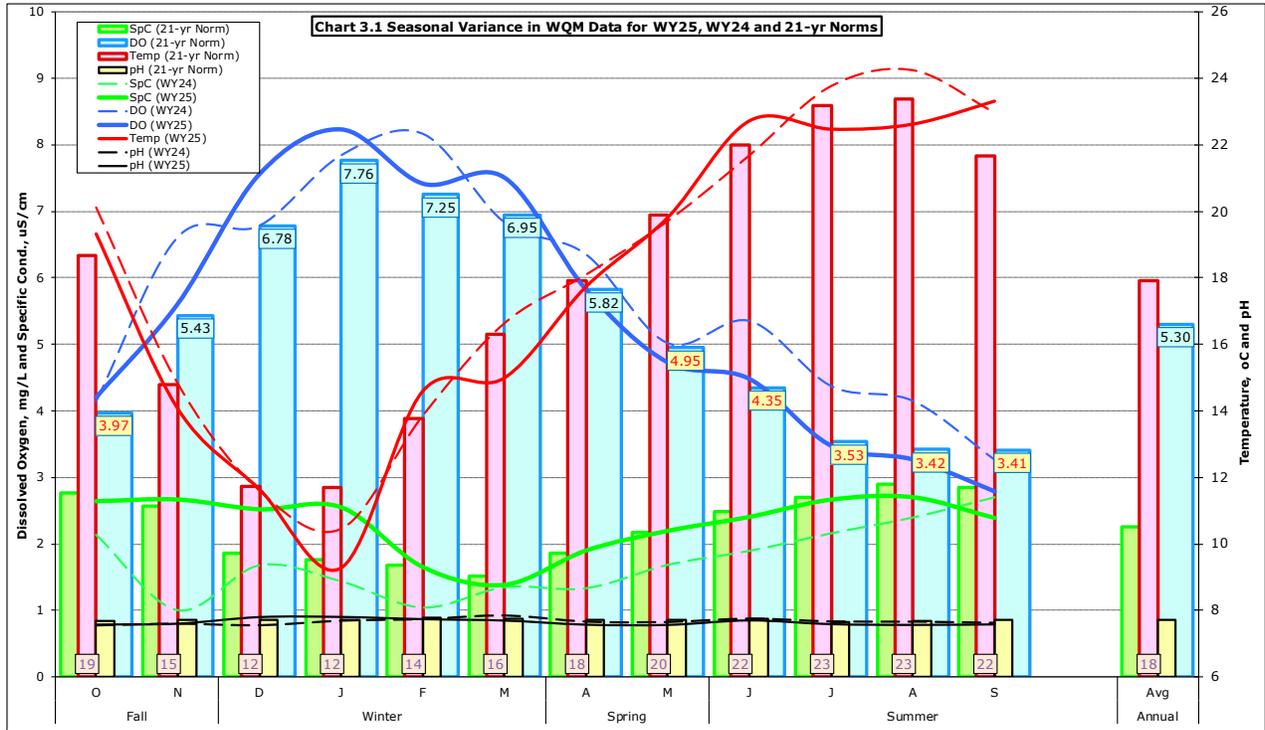
Table 3.1 LSDR WQM Metrics for WY25 and 21-yr Norms by Month and Season

Month	Season:	Temp, °C	Sp Cond, mS/cm	pH	Dissolved Oxygen, mg/L (%Sat)		ADF, cfs	WQI Value ^(a) and Grade	
Oct	Fall	19.30 /18.63	3.102 /2.791	7.66 /7.71	4.35 /4.05	47 /43	1.2 /2.2	22 /21	E/E
Nov		14.04 /14.77	2.666 /2.571	7.70 /7.73	5.86 /5.60	57 /55	2.2 /7.8	33 /32	D/D
Dec	Winter	11.65 /11.71	2.159 /1.861	7.86 /7.74	7.76 /6.99	72 /64	3.7 /25	42 /42	C/C
Jan		9.25 /11.70	2.550 /1.752	7.87 /7.74	8.46 /8.01	74 /73	3.7 /54	40 /49	C/C+
Feb		14.54 /13.78	1.651 /1.682	7.79 /7.82	7.41 /7.41	73 /71	28 /56	53 /48	B/C+
Mar		14.96 /16.30	1.384 /1.520	7.76 /7.79	7.68 /7.11	77 /72	58 /53	57 /51	B/B-
Apr	Spring	17.79 /17.92	1.899 /1.847	7.65 /7.76	6.04 /5.96	64 /63	16 /29	44 /43	C/C
May		19.82 /19.87	2.195 /2.171	7.65 /7.74	4.94 /5.06	54 /55	6.7 /11	33 /34	D/D
June	Summer	22.64 /21.92	2.405 /2.482	7.76 /7.77	4.49 /4.39	52 /50	2.7 /4.6	26 /26	D-/D-
July		22.36 /23.13	2.665 /2.692	7.61 /7.67	3.56 /3.58	41 /41	1.4 /2.2	19 /18	E/E
Aug		22.52 /23.28	2.700 /2.886	7.55 /7.70	3.31 /3.47	39 /40	1.3 /1.3	17 /16	E/E
Sept		23.23 /21.62	2.390 /2.845	7.60 /7.71	2.89 /3.45	34 /39	2.2 /2.5	17 /18	E/E
Fall (O&N)		16.67 /16.70	2.862 /2.681	7.68 /7.72	4.91 /4.81	50 /49	1.7 /5.0	28 /26	D/D-
Winter (D,J,F,M)		12.60 /13.37	2.021 /1.704	7.82 /7.77	7.68 /7.36	73 /70	24 /47	48 /48	C+/C+
Spring (A&M)		18.81 /18.90	1.779 /2.009	7.65 /7.75	5.27 /5.51	57 /59	11 /20	38 /38	C-/C-
Summer (J,J,A,S)		22.69 /22.49	2.526 /2.726	7.58 /7.71	3.50 /3.73	41 /43	1.9 /2.6	20 /20	E/E
Annual (O-S)		17.67 /17.89	2.333 /2.254	7.71 /7.74	5.88 /5.42	58 /56	11 /21	34 /33	D/D

a) WQ index values based on RiverWatch physical-chemical metrics combined with USGS streamflow data for East (West Hills Pkwy) and West sections (Fashion Valley). WY25 values/grades (in bold type) below 21-yr monthly norms (in italics) are shown in red; values equal to or above norms are in black.

b) DO > 7.0 mg/L (64% Sat) are shown in light blue cells; DO < 5.0 mg/L (55% Sat) are shown in tan cells.

c) WQI color coding as shown in Table 1.1: A (dark blue) Very Good, B (light blue) Good, C (green) Fair, D (yellow) Marginal, E (brown) Poor, and F (pink) Very Poor.



Section 4 - LSDR Running Average Water Quality Metrics (WY05-WY25)

Variations in SDRPF monitored water quality metrics for the LSDR, based on data collected by RiverWatch from Sept. '04 through Sept. of 2025, are presented in this chapter. The metrics include water temperature, specific conductance, pH, dissolved oxygen, streamflow and the water quality index. Twelve month running average values considered with overall best-fit trendline equations represent a rational expression of relative change in values over 21 years of continuous monthly monitoring.

Table 4.1 presents 12-month running average values for each of the key water quality metrics monitored by RiverWatch. Running averages above norms are listed in black; values below norms are in red. Norms for each metric are expressed in italics in the bottom row of the table. The running average water temperature for WY25 of 17.67 oC is 1.3% below the norm. The WY25 SpC average of 2.344 mS/cm is 3.8% above the 21-yr norm. Running average pH for WY25 is slightly down from last year to just below the norm of 7.74. The average DO level for WY25 was down slightly from last year but remains above the 21-yr norm. Running average daily flow this year is well below the norm. The resultant average LSDR WQI for WY25 is down six points from last year to only one point above the 21-yr norm of 33. A more definitive view of the changes over the 21 years in LSDR running averages, their range and trendlines for each metric is provided in subsequent charts (4.1-4.7) of this section.

Monthly **Water Temperatures**, running averages and trends are shown on **Chart 4.1**. Temperatures are cyclic with warmest temps occurring in Aug. and coolest in Dec. Summertime maximum water temps. are 150% greater than the average annual (norm) of 17.9 oC, while the winter lows reach 50% below the 21-yr annual norm. Variations in running average water temperature over the past 21 years fall within the range of 3% above to 3% below the norm. Although monthly variance in max. (red), min. (blue) and average (black) water temperatures for the LSDR are both large and cyclic; whereas the 12-month running average values show minimal variance. A very slight warming trend in running average water temperatures may have occurred over the monitoring period. As shown on the chart, maximum temperature values monitored at all sites seem to have increased slightly (<1 oC), while minimums have remained near constant. A small but discernable increase in average LSDR water temperatures from sub-18.0 oC to slightly above the normative value (by 0.2-0.4 oC) is evident based the data.

Variance in monthly monitored **Specific Conductance** (SpC) values for the LSDR are presented in **Chart 4.2**. Min. (blue) and max. (red) running averages for all sites monitored have varied measurably over the 21-yr period, however, the overall LSDR running average ranged from a low 1.73 mS/cm range (23% below norm) this year to 2.77 mS/cm (22% above) in WY18. The overall trend in maximum SpC for all sections of the river has shown some decline over the last decade of monitoring. The rate of decline in minimums for all sites (blue) has been less, however, the resultant overall average values (black line) have seen a decrease. The river's SpC values increase during periods of extended drought and decline when annual streamflow averages rise. High specific conductance levels are primarily the result of extended below average dry weather streamflow that are intensified during drought conditions. Low streamflow also effects river water temperatures; where, in general, less flow results in higher water temperatures under equivalent ambient air temperature and sunlight levels.

Variance in monthly **pH** values are presented in **Chart 4.3**. The overall or general trend in values monitored for the LSDR has been relatively consistent over the last 21 years (WY05-WY25). The initial years (WY05-WY09) of below average pH are due, at least in part, to faulty equipment as monthly minima and maxima values (since WY10) have recorded higher on a consistent basis. Excluding the initial year's, there has been but small variance (<3%) in the overall running average pH from the 21-yr norm of 7.74. The overall trend in pH for the river seems to be slightly positive. Values have increased by an average of about 0.3% per annum since RiverWatch monitoring began, primarily as minima values have risen. It is concluded that the lower river may be very gradually becoming slightly more alkaline

(basic) as average streamflow declines, water temperatures grow warmer and increased anerobic respiration occurs.

Table 4.1 - LSDR 12-mo Running Average WQM Metrics (WY05-WY25)

	Temp, oC	SpC, mS/ cm	pH, unit	Disslov. Oxygen, mg/L (%ofSat)	ADF, cfs	WQI ^(a) Values, Grade & (Diff.)
WY05	17.81	2.061	7.62	6.84 (65%)	58	41 C Fair (+8)
WY06	18.29	2.140	7.39	6.04 (59%)	13	37 D+ Marginal (+4)
WY07	17.62	2.344	7.52	5.95 (60%)	8.6	37 D+ Marginal (+4)
WY08	17.55	2.222	7.90	6.20 (62%)	17	37 D+ Marginal (+4)
WY09	17.65	2.390	7.64	6.20 (63%)	20	37 D+ Marginal (+4)
WY10	18.03	2.281	7.86	5.35 (56%)	28	34 D Marginal (+1)
WY11	17.76	2.170	7.88	5.76 (50%)	26	38 C- Fair (+5)
WY12	18.00	2.331	7.69	5.41 (56%)	13	33 D Marginal (0)
WY13	17.29	2.433	7.78	5.51 (56%)	8.3	32 D Marginal (-1)
WY14	17.81	2.500	7.67	3.95 (41%)	4.9	22 E Poor (-11)
WY15	18.70	2.177	7.79	4.62 (49%)	9.6	29 D Marginal (-5)
WY16	18.23	2.257	7.75	4.82 (50%)	14	28 D Marginal (-6)
WY17	18.54	2.141	7.80	5.19 (55%)	45	33 D Marginal (0)
WY18	18.09	2.774	7.97	4.42 (46%)	5.4	24 E+ Poor (-9)
WY19	17.74	2.162	7.77	5.11 (53%)	24	32 D Marginal (-1)
WY20	18.29	2.149	7.83	5.52 (58%)	31	34 D Marginal (+1)
WY21	17.23	2.439	7.89	5.37 (54%)	8.2	31 D Marginal (-2)
WY22	18.08	2.306	7.68	4.73 (49%)	9.7	29 D Marginal (-4)
WY23	17.08	2.006	7.70	5.48 (56%)	49	35 D Marginal (+2)
WY24	18.13	1.733	7.76	5.88 (61%)	34.0	40 C Fair (+7)
WY25	17.67	2.344	7.71	5.56 (57%)	10.7	34 D Marginal (+1)
<i>21-yr Norm</i>	<i>(17.91)</i>	<i>(2.258)</i>	<i>(7.74)</i>	<i>(5.42) (56%)</i>	<i>(20.7)</i>	<i>33 (D Marginal)</i>

a) Values based on SDRPF RiverWatch phys-chem monitoring results combined with USGS streamflow records for eastern (West Hills Pkwy) and western (Fashion Valley) gauging stations. Water year values/grades below 21-yr norms (in italics) are in red; those equal to or above norms in black. WY25 values are presented in bold type.

b) LSDR DO < 5 mg/L (< 51% Sat) are shown in light brown cells; years with Poor WQIs (> 25) are in brown.

The most common cause of higher pH water is less available carbon dioxide caused by elevated rates of aerobic respiration (decomposition) that typically accompany warmer, still waters. Tracking the trend in pH can be a general indicator of the natural process of eutrophication occurring throughout many portions of the lower river. WY25 marks a small decline in the overall running average pH from the 21-yr norm

duing a year of below average streamflow and elevated eutrophication levels. The variance in pH shows a definite cyclic pattern with little discernable decadal trends, irrespective of individual sites, reaches or sections of the river. Both surface and ground waters of the lower river system act as a natural buffer to fluctuations in pH at individual monitoring sites.

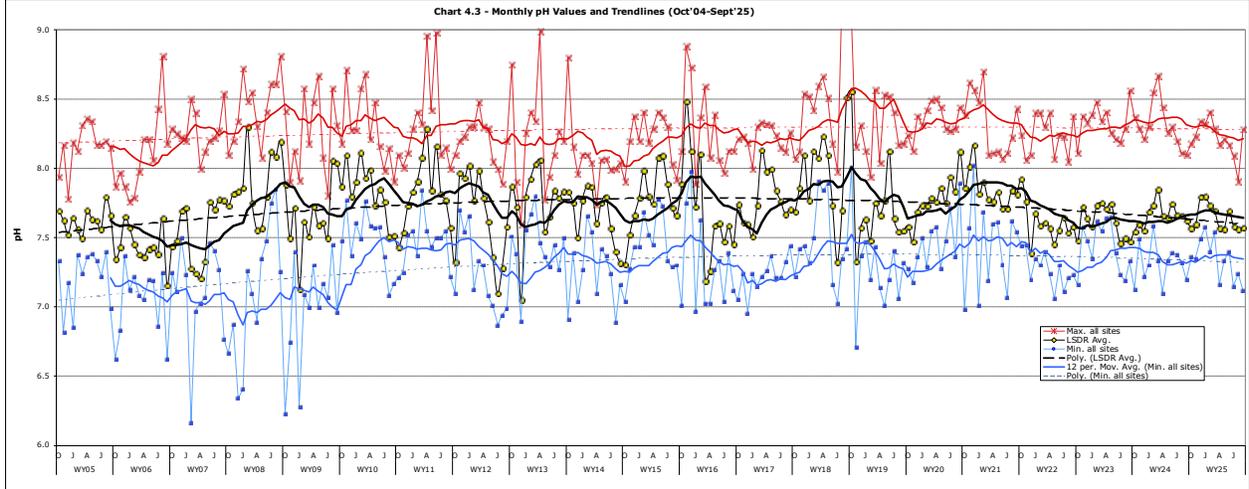
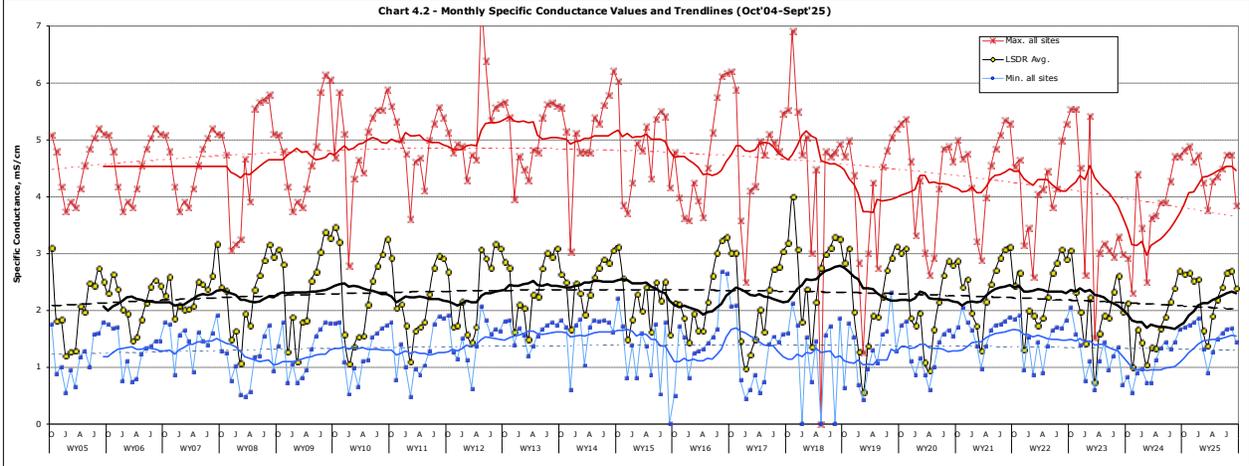
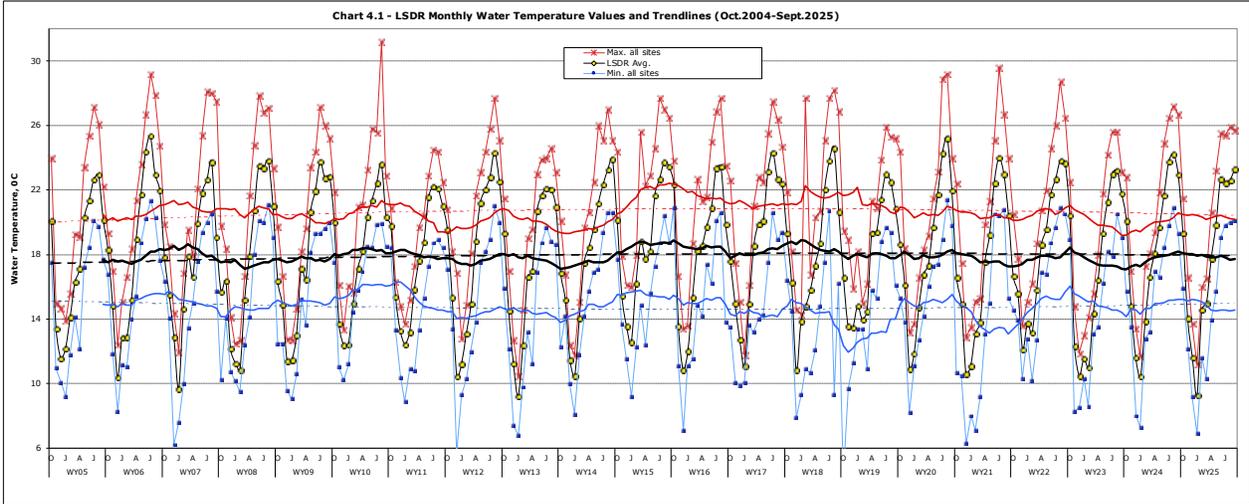
Running average **dissolved oxygen** (DO) values and monthly minima-maxima are presented in **Chart 4.4**. An overall irregular decline in average DO as well as min/max values from Oct. 2004 through 2015 is evident. LSDR max. monthly values from WY15 through WY21 increased to near 21-yr norms. The current running average DO value of 5.56 mg/L (Sept 2025) is just above the 21-yr norm of 5.42 mg/L. Low oxygen levels that have been monitored throughout various reaches and segments of the lower river result from low flow, especially during the dry-weather months, combined with elevated water temperatures and the subsequent rapid decomposition of oxygen demanding organic matter. With a lack of significant flushing action during recent relatively mild stormflow events from 2013 through 2019, a large amount of decomposing biomass accrued within slow moving portions of the lower river. Overall running average DO values typically increase subsequent to one or more major stormflow events resulting in significant channel flushing, displacement of organic-rich sediments and reduction of poorly-rooted and free-floating invasive aquatic plants*. The trend in overall LSDR DO values has, over the past 21 yrs, declined in excess of 1.5 mg/L from roughly 7.0 to 5.5 mg/L; representing an average annual decline in DO of 0.075 mg/L since RiverWatch monitoring started. As can also be seen on Chart 4.4, the rate of decline in minimum values is considerably greater than the rate of decline in maxima (3.0% vs 0.5%/yr). Extended periods of low-flow minima at many sites have resulted in lower overall average DO levels. DO averages have declined over the past year due to less streamflow stemming from lower rainfall.

Variances and their trends for total monthly **rainfall** and running average **streamflow** for the Santee Basin (SB) and Mission Valley (MV) sections of the lower river system are expressed in **Chart 4.5**. The trend in average daily streamflow throughout the LSDR watershed fell by a full order of magnitude (from 58 cfs to 5 cfs) between WY05 to WY14, then rose to 45 cfs in WY17. Lowest running average annual streamflow of 7-8 cfs for Mission Valley and 3 cfs for the Santee Basin, occurred in WY14. Due to the distribution and magnitude of rainfall in both WY15 and WY16, running average streamflow rose to 15-20 cfs (Mission Valley) and 8-12 cfs (Santee Basin). Streamflow again fell sharply in WY18 as the watershed received near record low rainfall. With above normal rainfall in WY19 and WY20, streamflows climbed back to above norms. Dry weather flows from June through Sept. of WY21 were some of the lowest recorded in the past 4-5 decades. WY23 and WY24 witnessed considerably greater total rainfall than in previous years, resulting in above normal streamflow. The current running average annual flow of 11 cfs is well below norms. Significant variance in average annual streamflow, as well as maxima and minima values found within the lower river watershed can be expected to persist as rainfall and stormwater runoff remain driving factors.

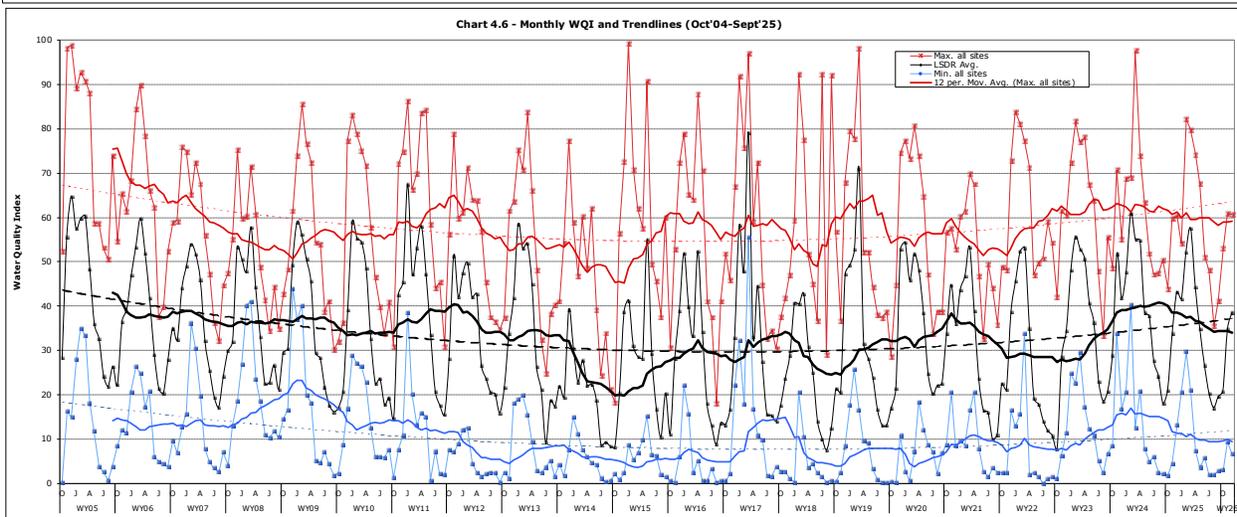
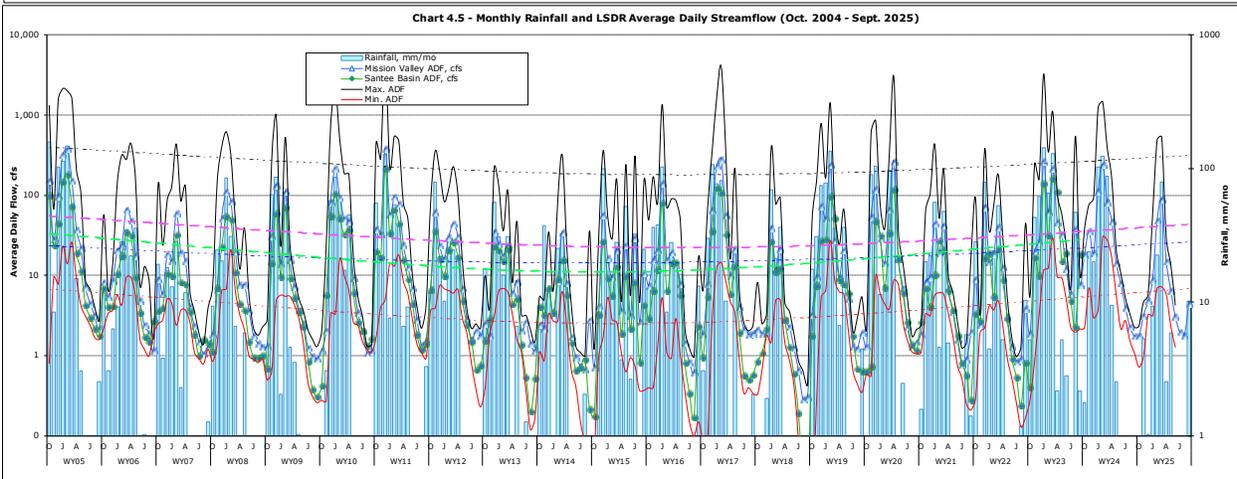
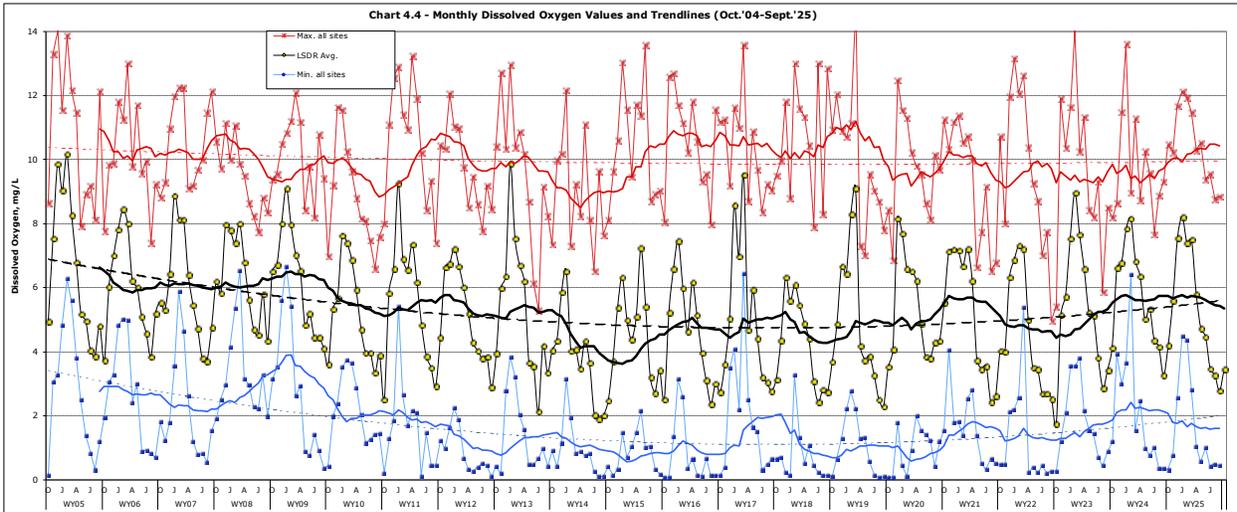
The overall **water quality index** (WQI) for LSDR as well as minimum and maximum running average values for all monitoring sites within the watershed are presented in the last two charts of this section. **Chart 4.6** expresses average, minimum and maximum WQI for the entire LSDR system based on distance (reach) averaging of index values calculated for each monitoring site. The greatest positive variance from norm (blue line) is associated with the Mission Gorge section (sites 8,9&10) whereas the greatest negative variance is found in the Upper Santee Basin (USB) reach. The overall LSDR reach-averaged running average variance from the norm are shown as black lines. The trendlines for each section and overall river system are shown as dashed lines with the same colors.

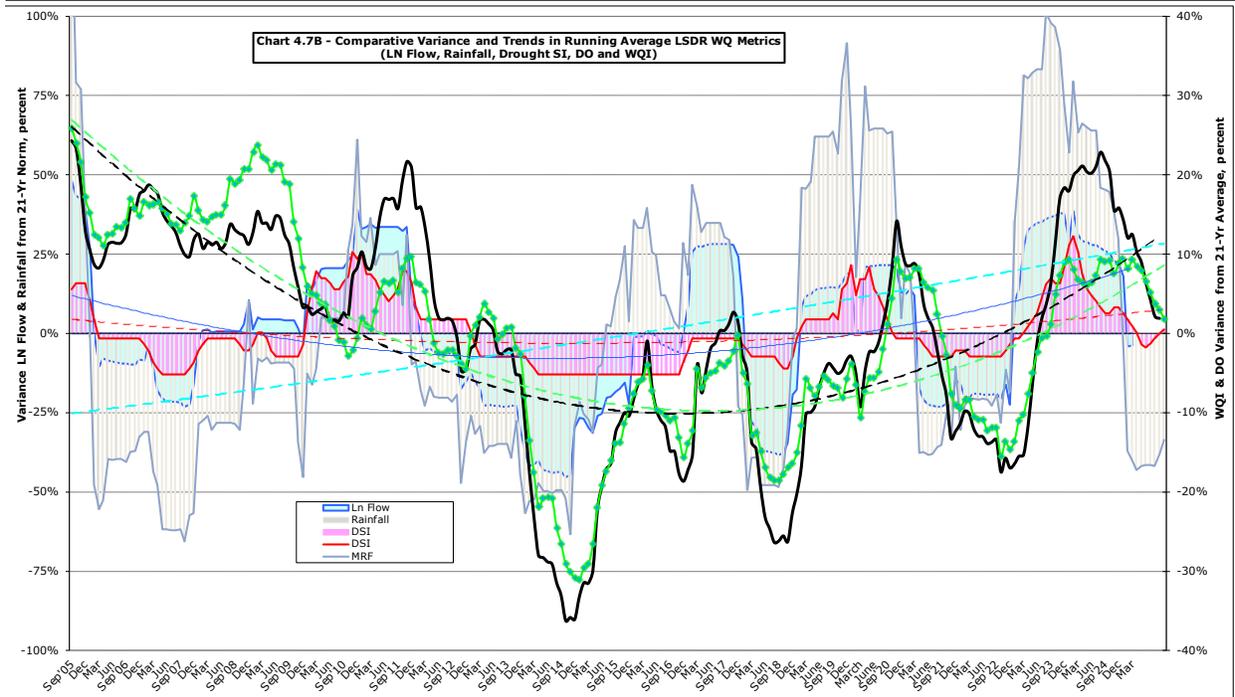
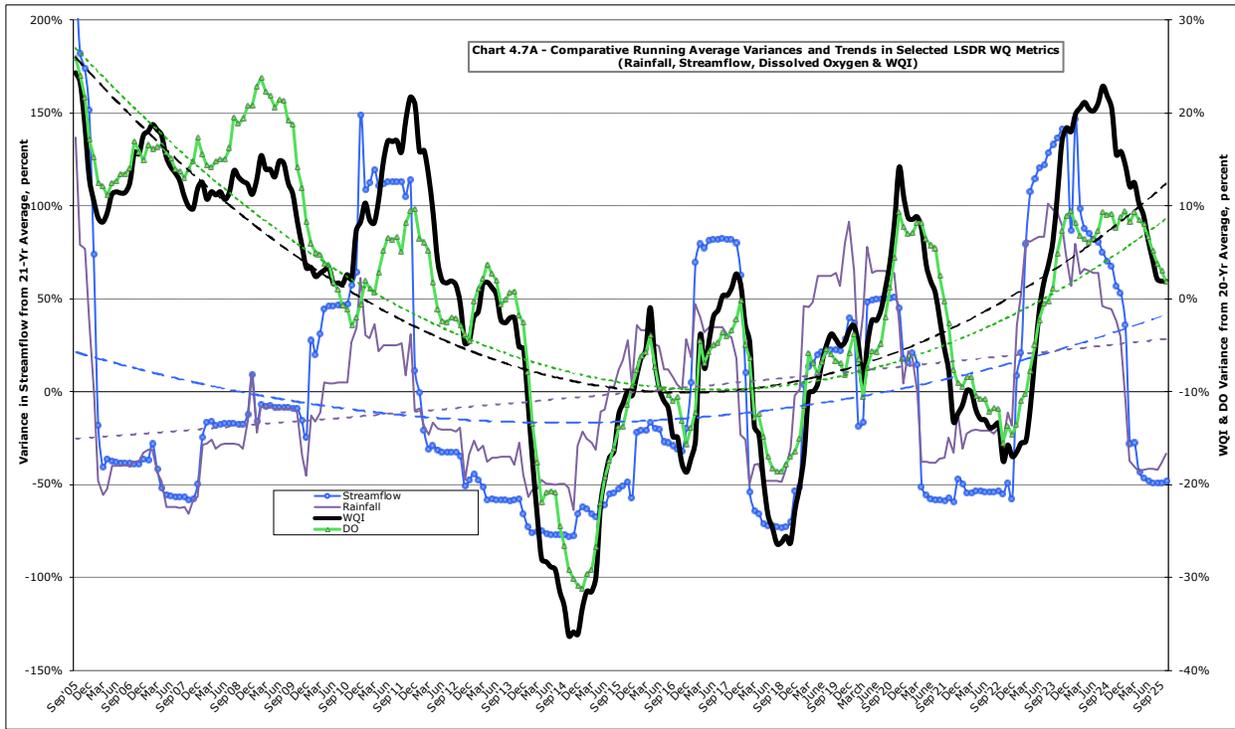
Charts 4.7A&B express four key water quality metrics (rainfall, streamflow, dissolved oxygen and the WQI) as 12-month running average values in percent variance from their respective 21-yr norms. All four metrics are displayed arithmetically on Chart 4.7A, whereas, rainfall and streamflow values are shown on (natural) log scale in Chart 4.7B while WQI, DSI, and DO variances remain arithmetic. The very strong

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correlations between variances are evident. The trends in running averages over the past two decades, shown as dashed lines for each metric, describe the high degree of correlation as well amplify the degree of decline over the initial decade followed by the sporadic partial return to values above norms in wet years. Running average variance in index values and trends by individual river reach and river section for each of the water quality metrics are examined on the following pages in Section 5.

Section 5 - WQ Index by Site, Reach and Section (WY05 through WY25)

Annual and seasonal LSDR WQI values are presented in **Table 5.1** by river reach, section, and overall (LSDR) for each water year (WY05-WY25) of monitoring. Values and grades above norms are in black; values below italicized norms (bottom row) are shown in red. The WY25 values, expressed in bold font, have decreased from last year’s results for all reaches and sections of the Lower River. Overall the LSDR average annual WQI fell six points from last year’s value of 40 to less than one point above the 21-year norm. The overall annual WQI average reached Marginal grade (D) in WY25 similar to 16 of the prior 21 years. In addition to annual averages, the seasonal range, represented by winter highs and summer lows are also presented by reach, section and overall in Table 5.1. WY25 winter (D-M) WQIs are less than last year’s values within all but one reach (MG) while this past summer’s (J-S) index values are also lower in all reaches.

The running averages and variances in monthly index values, for each reach of the lower watershed are presented in the series of charts (5.1 through 5.6) on pages 19 and 20 of this section. Trends in values taken over the monitoring period are shown as dashed lines based on best-fit, using second-order polynomial equations. The range in trendlines between the highest (red) and lowest (blue) sites located within each reach are also shown.

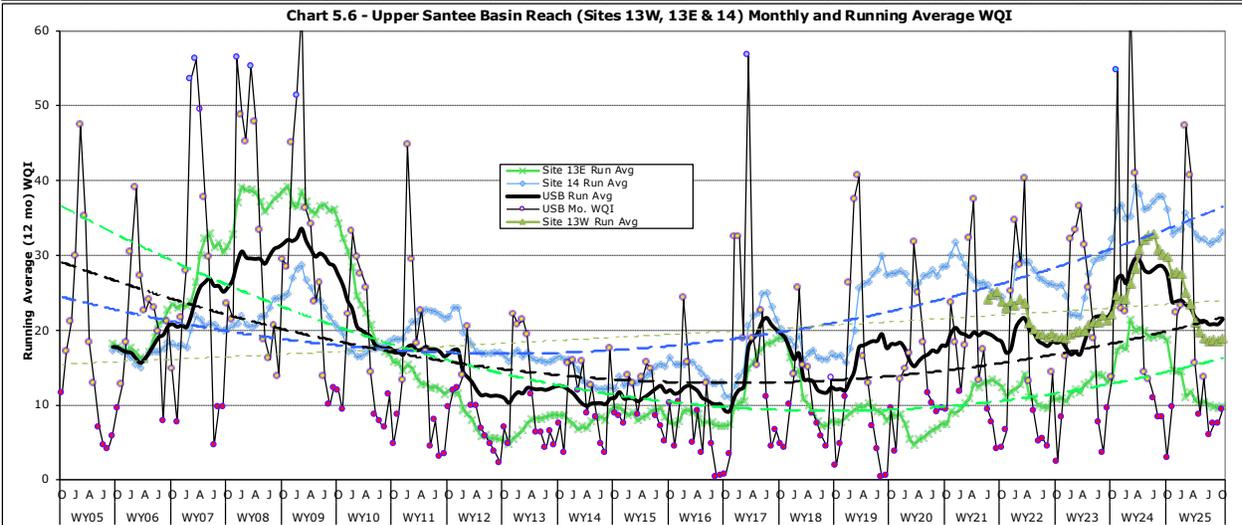
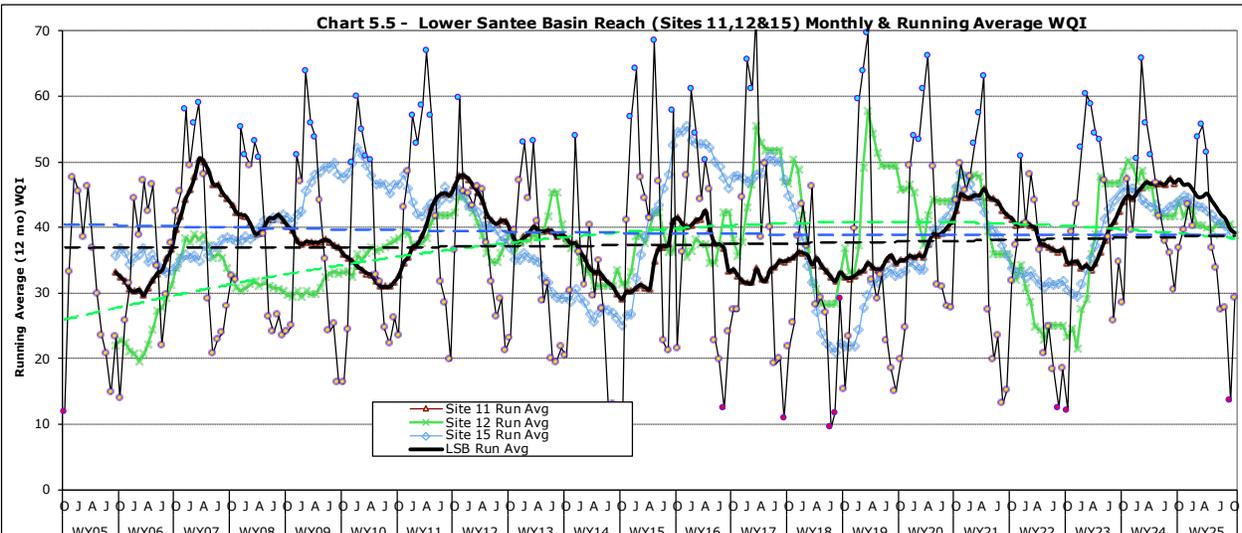
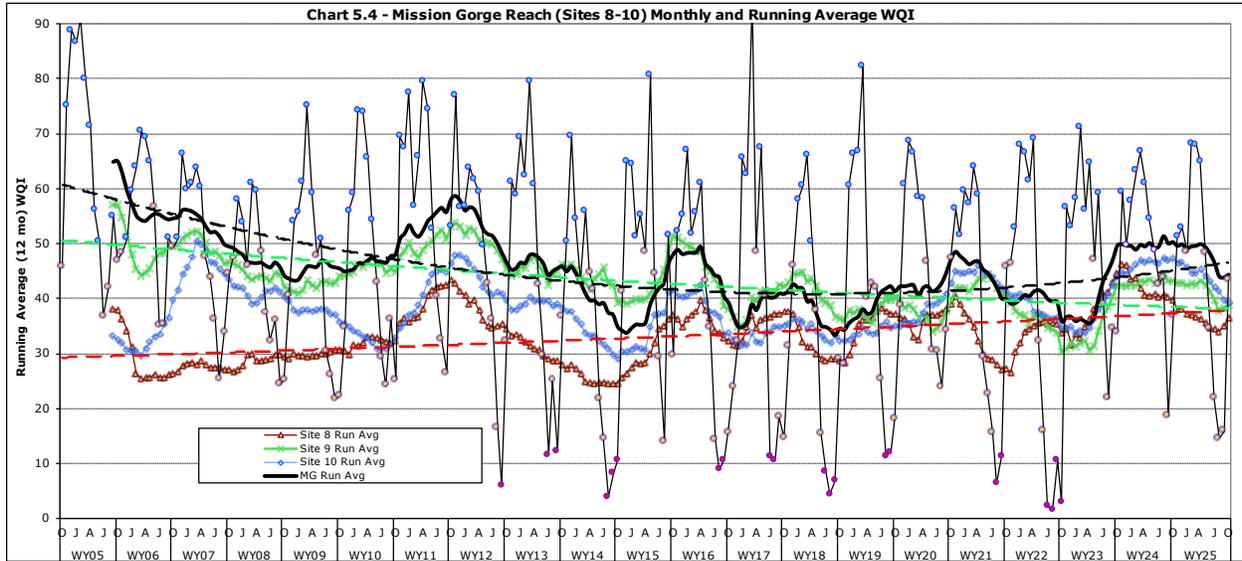
Table 5.1 - Average Annual and Seasonal WQI by Reach and Section (WY05-WY25)

	LMV Reach	MMV Reach	UMV Reach	West (MV) Section	MG Section	LSB Reach	USB Reach	East (SB) Section	LSDR Overall Avg.	
WY05	48	54	40	46	65	31	18	24	41	C (high)
WY06	39	47	30	37	54	34	21	28	37	D+
WY07	36	43	23	33	50	40	27	34	37	D+
WY08	38	39	28	35	46	39	33	36	37	D+
WY09	38	37	30	34	46	39	31	35	37	D+
WY10	36	36	31	34	48	37	17	27	34	D
WY11	39	39	39	39	56	44	15	29	38	C-
WY12	35	38	35	35	48	39	9	24	33	D
WY13	37	38	32	35	45	35	11	23	32	D
WY14	18	17	19	18	37	28	10	19	22	E (low)
WY15	24	22	23	23	46	43	10	27	29	D
WY16	35	30	22	29	40	37	8	23	28	D
WY17	34	34	33	33	41	40	19	29	33	D
WY18	26	28	21	24	33	29	11	20	24	E+
WY19	36	37	30	34	42	35	14	24	32	D
WY20	37	37	34	36	45	41	14	28	34	D
WY21	31	33	28	31	40	38	17	28	31	D
WY22	29	31	25	28	39	32	16	24	29	D
WY23	34	35	32	34	47	43	19	31	35	D
WY24	43	43	38	41	50	44	25	35	40	C
WY25	39	39	28	33	44	38	17	28	34	D
21yr Norm	(34.9)	(36.2)	(29.4)	(33.0)	(45.9)	(37.5)	(17.3)	(27.4)	(33.2)	(Marginal)
<i>Winter</i>	<i>LMV</i>	<i>MMV</i>	<i>UMV</i>	<i>MV</i>	<i>MG</i>	<i>LSB</i>	<i>USB</i>	<i>SB</i>	<i>LSDR Overall</i>	
WY05	63	72	61	64	87	44	33	39	58	B (high)
WY06	54	63	49	52	61	40	29	35	48	C+
WY07	49	54	41	46	63	56	40	48	50	B-

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WY08	56	52	47	52	55	52	52	52	52	B-
WY09	57	53	49	53	62	54	49	52	54	B
WY10	54	55	54	54	66	54	28	41	51	B-
WY11	57	55	57	56	67	54	27	40	52	B-
WY12	48	52	50	49	60	45	14	29	43	C
WY13	58	56	55	56	68	49	21	35	50	B-
WY14	26	25	26	26	55	39	15	27	31	D (low)
WY15	33	31	27	31	59	53	11	32	36	D+
WY16	44	42	38	41	57	52	14	33	41	C
WY17	53	55	60	55	64	61	35	48	54	B
WY18	38	40	37	38	58	41	16	29	38	C-
WY19	58	58	57	57	69	58	29	43	54	B
WY20	54	55	57	55	64	54	19	37	49	C+
WY21	47	48	44	47	58	51	20	35	44	C
WY22	47	50	48	47	62	46	32	39	47	C Fair
WY23	47	49	48	48	60	56	30	42	48	C Fair
WY24	50	53	55	52	59	53	38	45	51	B-
WY25	50	52	49	49	59	48	33	41	48	C
<i>21yr Norm</i>	<i>(49.6)</i>	<i>(51.0)</i>	<i>(48.1)</i>	<i>(49.0)</i>	<i>(62.4)</i>	<i>(50.5)</i>	<i>(27.8)</i>	<i>(39.1)</i>	<i>(47.6)</i>	<i>(C Fair)</i>
Summer	LMV	MMV	UMV	MV	MG	LSB	USB	SB	LSDR Overall	
WY05	31	36	18	28	46	21	5	13	25	D-
WY06	23	31	8	19	45	31	18	24	26	D-
WY07	23	31	7	19	35	24	13	19	22	E
WY08	23	28	16	22	33	25	17	21	24	E+
WY09	21	21	14	18	32	25	16	20	22	E
WY10	21	22	16	20	33	26	9	17	21	E
WY11	23	21	16	20	38	30	5	18	22	E
WY12	22	23	18	20	25	27	4	16	20	E
WY13	18	23	11	16	20	23	5	14	16	E
WY14	10	10	12	10	12	16	9	12	12	F+
WY15	15	12	14	14	35	37	9	23	21	E
WY16	18	14	7	13	17	20	5	12	13	E-
WY17	20	20	16	18	20	22	11	17	18	E
WY18	12	14	6	10	9	19	8	14	11	F (low)
WY19	23	19	10	18	23	22	3	13	16	E
WY20	25	24	17	22	30	29	10	20	22	E
WY21	14	16	10	13	14	18	10	14	14	E-
WY22	17	19	12	15	8	19	7	13	13	E-
WY23	27	24	15	22	39	37	10	23	25	D-
WY24	31	28	17	27	38	36	10	23	27	D (high)
WY25	29	27	11	23	22	26	9	17	20	E
<i>21yr Norm</i>	<i>(21.2)</i>	<i>(22.1)</i>	<i>(12.9)</i>	<i>(18.4)</i>	<i>(27.3)</i>	<i>(25.4)</i>	<i>(9.1)</i>	<i>(17.3)</i>	<i>(19.6)</i>	<i>(E Poor)</i>

Table 5.1 WQI Letter/Color Code: A (>75) Very Good (dark blue), B (50-74) Good (light blue), C (38-49) Fair (green), D (25-37) Marginal (yellow), E (13-24) Poor (brown), and F (0-12) Very Poor (pink). WQI values below 21-yr norms (bottom row in italics and parentheses) are listed in red for the same reach/section of the river; values at or above norms are shown in black. Overall LSDR WQI values are reach-weighted averages of all 16 monitoring sites.



As shown in **Chart 5.1**, average annual WQI values associated with the **Lower Mission Valley Reach** (Sites 1-3) have varied from a high of 50 (B-Good) in WY05 to a low of 18 (E Poor) in WY14. The general trend in running average WQI for this lower-most reach, as well as the individual monitoring sites, declined from the mid 40's (C Fair) in WY05 to below 25 (E Poor) by WYs14-15. The running average WQI (*black line*) recovered to the mid-30's during WYs16-17, declined to the mid 20's in WY18, rose back up in WY's19-20, to again fall below 30 in WY22. WY23 and WY24 signify two years of overall recovery. WY25 was a year of general decline with exception of Site 1. Site 3 (FVM) the *blue line* has since WY11 exhibited the lowest running average WQI, while Site 1 (*brown line*) has typically witnessed the highest values for the reach. The most significant decline in the WQI for the reach and at all three sites occurred in WY14. The running average index for this reach fell from the mid-40's to the present upper-30's (an approximate 5% decline) over the 21-yr monitoring period. The overall trend for this reach has been positive since WY15.

As shown in **Chart 5.2**, the range in monthly WQI values for the **Mid-Mission Valley Reach** (Sites 4&5) are similar to those in Lower Mission Valley, although slightly more elevated. Site 4 (FSDRIP at Mission Center Rd, *blue line*) presents the highest WQI values of all seven Mission Valley sites. Site 5 (Ward Rd bridge, *red line*) is commonly five to eight points lower, although in recent years index differences are somewhat less by 3-5 points. The patterns of improvement and decline in index values over time are very similar to the three Lower Mission Valley sites. Highest values (grade B Good) were in WYs 05-06 while minimums (grade E Poor) occurred in WY14. WY25 was a year of slight decline in index values from WY24 to a level just under 40.

As shown in **Chart 5.3**, the range in monthly WQI values for the **Upper Mission Valley Reach** (Sites 6&7) of the river are similar to those in Lower and Mid-Mission Valley, although less variable. Site 6 (Kaiser Ponds outlet at Mission Valley Rd, *green line*) has continuously presented lowest running average WQI values since 2017, while Site 7 (Admiral Baker Field at Zion, *blue line*), situated just upstream of the ponds, has presented higher values on an extended basis since mid-2008. The highest average annual WQI reading of 65 (A Very Good) for the Upper Mission Valley reach occurred in WY05, whereas the lowest reading of 19 (E Poor) was in WY14. The overall Upper Mission Valley trend since 2006 has been downward as growth of invasive aquatic plants and increase in biomass has proliferated throughout much of this reach during extended low-flow periods. The rate of decline in running average index in this reach over 21 years is about two percent/annum, decreasing from 40 in WY05 to the present value of 27. Significant recovery in this reach is problematic without improved channel maintenance due to the extensive accrual of biomass, deep ponding and inadequate flushing during peak flows.

Overall running average WQI for the **Mission Gorge Reach** (Sites 8-10) of the river, as shown in **Chart 5.4** on the previous page, has also declined, especially during WY12 through WY14. Highest annual WQI values of 63 (B Good) occurred in WY05, contrasted with a low of 33 (C Marginal) in WY18. In general running average WQI values for this reach are the highest of all five reaches with an average WQI of 46 (B Good). The trend in Mission Gorge WQI values (*black line*) are, however, comparable to those in the Mission Valley reaches. General decline in index values from WY06 through WY09, followed by a slight upturn in WY10 and WY11, and a more significant decline in subsequent water years to a low of 33 (D Marginal) in early WY15. WY17 witnessed an overall recovery in the running average WQI, however the index in this reach fell during the second half of WY18 to a record low of 33. The overall index has declined 26 points (from 60 down to 35) over 21 years in this section of the river. The running average index value has remained below the norm of 46 since WY13. Site 8 (Mission Trails Crossing) has shown the more steady positive trend in index value over the last two decades of monitoring. The second half of WY25 was a period of declining index values.

The **Lower Santee Basin Reach** (Sites 11, 15T, 12T) WQI values and running averages are shown on **Chart 5.5**. The range from winter month highs in the 50-70 range (B Good) to summer lows in the 10-15 range (E

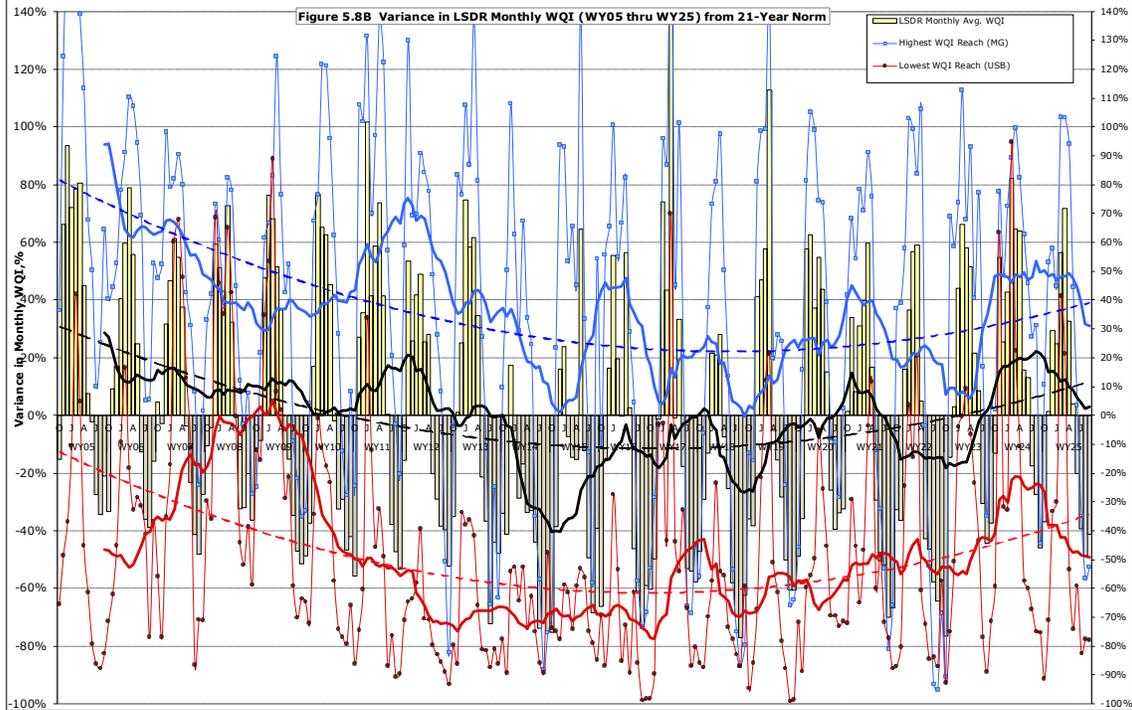
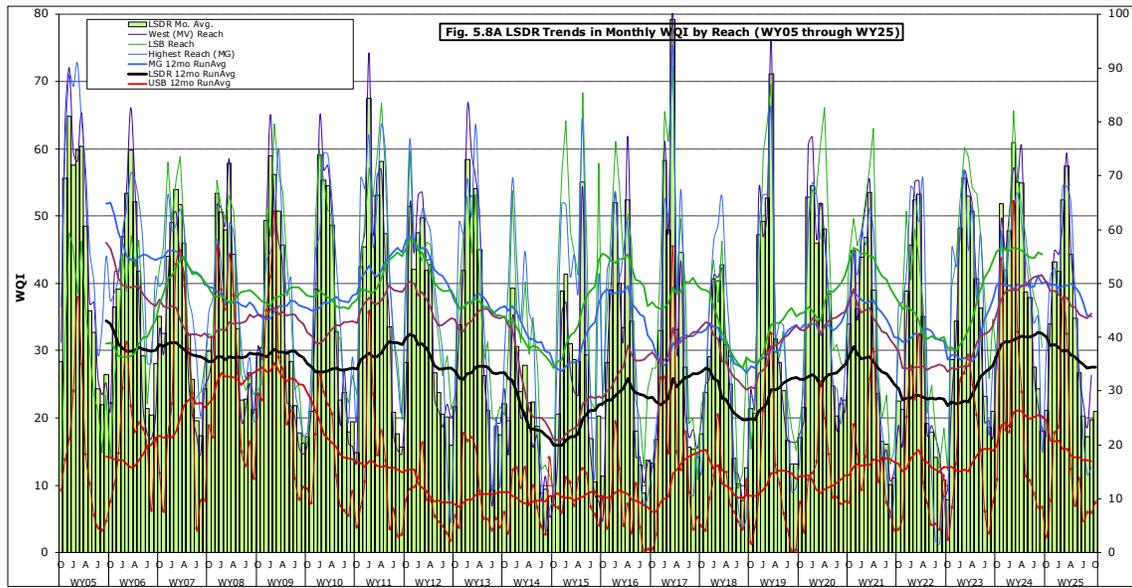
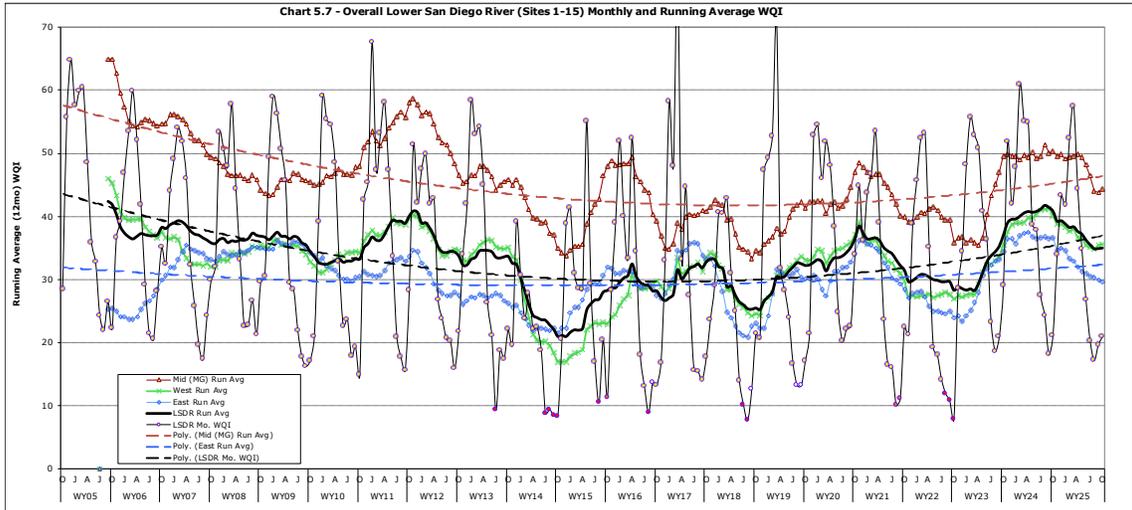
Poor) are quite common. Water quality improved in this reach from WY06 through WY11, then declined in subsequent water years, reaching a running average low of 27 (D- low-Marginal) in 2015, before recovering to the mid-40s (C Fair) throughout WY16 and low 40's in WY17. The previous low was surpassed by one point in both August and September of WY18. WY19 witnessed partial recovery to the mid 30's reaching 41 in 2020, 42 in WY21 but falling to 37 this past year.. Completion of the Forester Creek enhancement project (expressed by the *blue line*) extending from Prospect Ave. to Mission Gorge Rd. has had a significant impact on overall river quality (*black line*) in the Lower Santee Basin portion of the river system. With above normal rainfall experienced in WY19 and WY20, the Lower Santee Basin running average index improved to values comparable to those experienced in WY07 through WY11. The overall change in the index between WY05 and WY25 is roughly one percent per annum. This reach of the river has shown the least variance in index values over time.

Chart 5.6 presents monthly and running average WQI values for the **Upper Santee Basin Reach** (Sites 13W,13E&14) of the river. This reach presents the poorest water quality values of all sections of the lower river system. Monthly values seldom exceed 20 (E Poor) since the summer of 2011 and are often less than 12 (F+ Very Poor) throughout all but the wet-weather/winter months. The running average WQI for this reach has declined from highs above 30 (D Marginal) in WY09 to continuously between 10 and 12 (F Very Poor) during the 5-yr drought period (WY12-WY16). WY17 saw a noticeable increase (ten points) in the running average index from early in the year reaching 18 (E-Poor) in September, however WY18 witnessed a reversal with a steady decline toward previous lows. WY19 witnessed partial recovery to prior highs, especially at site 14. The greatest variability has been associated with site 13E, Mast Park East (*green line*). The index for this reach has fallen 88% (from 32 in WY to 17) over the last 13 years presenting the greatest decline in running average values of all reaches. Advanced eutrophication within multiple ponds and backwaters within and upstream of Mast Park has lead to high levels of oxygen depletion recorded throughout the year. Hypoxic conditions ($DO < 2.5$ mg/L) are common at Site 13E (Walmart Ponds) in all but the highest runoff months of the year. WY25 was a year of significant decline in index values at all three monitoring sites compared to WY23 and the first half of WY24.

The monthly and running average variation in WQI values for the three main sections of the lower river (i.e., Santee Basin, Mission Gorge and Mission Valley) and the overall **Lower San Diego River** system (distance-weighted average of all 16 monitoring sites) are presented in **Chart 5.7** on pg 24. WQI running average values recovered from WY14 lows in all three sections of the lower river system during WY15 through WY17. Values declined in WY18 then rebounded in WYs19/20. WYs21/22 again experienced declines in all three sections of the lower river followed by recovery in WYs23/24 and a return to partial decline during WY25. The Mission Gorge section (*green*) changed least, while the upstream section (Santee Basin *blue*) the most. The current LSDR running average WQI of 35 (D Marginal) is two percent above the 21-yr norm of 33. WQI values typically increase when streamflow exceeds annual norms and aquatic growth abatement occurs through natural flushing (or periodic control measures) within specific reaches of the river. Higher minimum index values during the dry summer months often result in positive gradients for 12-mo. running averages within a single water year, especially the case in the Mission Gorge section. Without human intervention, however, overall negative trends in WQI values can be expected to repeat for many portions of the lower river due to natural processes of organics deposition and subsequent eutrofication especially in the deeper ponded reaches.

Charts 5.8A and 5.8B summarize the differences in running average WQI values over the past two decades by individual reach and overall as well as the range from minimum to maximum expressed as variance from the overall 21-year LSDR norm. The primary drivers of annual changes in water quality within the watershed, as expressed in Chapter 4 (refer to Charts 4.7A&B) are rainfall and resultant runoff/streamflow to the lower river system.

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Variances from norm as shown in chart 5.8A are an accurate indicator of the relative change in overall (LSDR) water quality considered over the entire 21-yr period of monitoring. Highest LSDR index values and associated greatest positive variance from norms occurred in the initial year of monitoring (WY05), followed by unsteady, fluctuating declines in index values over the next decade extending through 2014. Since 2015 there has been a similarly unsteady, fluctuating rise in running average index values extending through WY24 while WY25 has witnessed an overall decline in values. The Mission Gorge section of the river has consistently shown highest index values, while the Santee Basin (blue) section is typically the lowest. River water quality conditions continue to be greatly dependent on total rainfall and resultant streamflow. An above average year of precipitation results in higher running average index values whereas dry years (e.g., WY25) result in relative decline in LSDR water quality.

The overall WQ index for WY25 of 34 (D Marginal) is one point above the 21-yr average annual norm of 33. This year's value remains 12 points above the lowest average annual WQI of 22 (E Poor) experienced in WY14. The river's highest overall average annual index of 40 (Fair) occurred in WY05. Two water year's (WY14&WY18) presented an overall average index value in the Poor E (WQI 13-24) range, while two others (WY05&WY11) had values in the Fair C (WQI 38-49) range. Marginal (D) water quality (WQI 25-37) has occurred 15 out of the past 21 years (70% of the time).

The key water quality metric for the lower river is the relative level of dissolved oxygen present. Low DO levels are the result of extensive and persistent eutrophication caused by buildup of organic-rich detritus that, when combined with restricted water movement within specific reaches, especially in deeper pools and slack water, can become pervasive. Until the spread of invasive aquatic plants such as creeping water primrose (Ludwigia, et al.)^a are effectively managed and the effects of eutrophication better controlled, water quality index values can be expected to remain significantly below those monitored at river sites where improved circulation, mixing and re-oxygenation occurs naturally.

a) *Ludwigia peploides*, *L. grandiflora*, *L. hexapetala* are all members of a highly productive emergent aquatic perennial native to the Americas and likely Australia (USDA-ARS, 1997). It was 'introduced' in France in 1830 and rapidly became one of the most damaging invasive plants growing there. It is a perennial herb (a dicot) also termed marsh purslane; a member of family ORAGRACEAE. More recently it was introduced to areas beyond its native range in the U.S. where it is often considered a noxious weed. *L. grandiflora*, et. al. are adaptable and tolerate a wide variety of habitats where they can transform ecosystems both physically and chemically. It sometimes grows in nearly impenetrable mats; can displace native flora and interfere with flood control and drainage systems, clog waterways and adversely impact recreation. The plant also has 'allelopathic' properties that can lead to dissolved oxygen crashes, the accumulation of sulphide and phosphate, 'dystrophic crises' and what ecologists term 'intoxicated' ecosystems (Dandelot et al., 2005). The common names are "floating water primrose" or "creeping primrose willow"; the plant produces a distinctive small yellow or white flower during its summer bloom cycle (May-Nov.). *L. peploides*, the green colored plant extending across Walmart Pond (site 13E) as shown on this report's cover page, is pervasive growing throughout much of the lower reaches of the San Diego River.