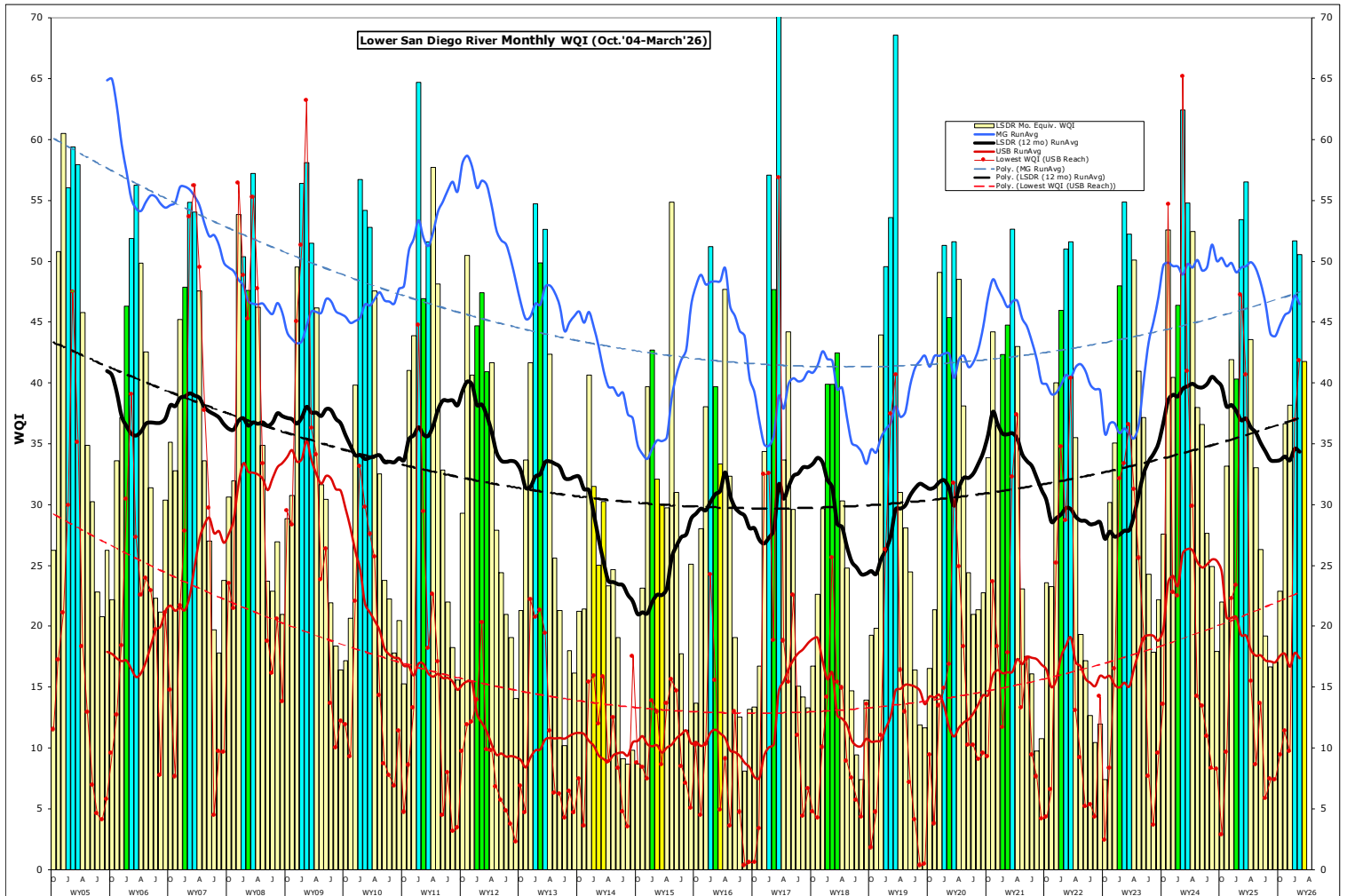


# Monthly WQM Report

## Lower San Diego River - March 2026



## Lower SDR Water Quality Monitoring Data Summary

**Table 1** presents a summary of water quality data monitored by the SDRPF RiverWatch Team within the Lower San Diego River (LSDR) watershed over the past two months (March/Feb). The overall index for March of C (Fair) is nine points (-17%) below last month, 15 points (-26%) under a year ago and seven points less than the 21+yr March norm of 49 (C+).

<b>Table 1 - March'26/Feb.'26 WQM Data Summary</b>							
	West - MV	Mid - MG	East - SB	LSDR	Variance From		
[Site #s]	[1-7] Mar/Feb	[8-10] Mar/Feb	[11-15] Mar/Feb	[1-15] Mar/Feb	Last Mo. (2/'26)	Last Yr. (3/'25)	Norm (March)
Temperature, oC	20.7/13.6	17.7/12.7	18.8/13.7	19.3/13.5	43%	29%	18%
Sp.Cond., mS/cm	2.22/0.58	1.30/0.67	1.54/0.86	1.82/0.74	147%	31%	19%
DO, mg/L	5.25/8.08	8.39/9.75	4.90/6.79	5.52/7.85	-25%	-23%	-17%
DO, % of Sat.	59/78	89/93	54/65	60/76			
pH	7.58/7.60	7.98/8.00	7.66/7.63	7.62/7.62	0.0%	-0.9%	-1.6%
3-day ADF, cfs	15/282	9.6/172	8.6/152	12/210	-94%	-64%	-65%
WQ Index	42/46	62/60	31/50	42/51	-17%	-26%	-19%
Letter Grade	C/C	B/B	D/B-	C/B-			
Mar.'26/Feb.'26	Fair/ Fair	Good/ Good	Marginal/ Good	Fair/ Good	Index down 9 pts from last month		

Negative variance (declines from norms) and DO deficits (DO < 5.0 mg/L or 52% Sat) expressed in red.

LSDR **water temperatures** rose 5.8oC (43%) from last month to 29% above last March and 18% higher than the monthly norm of 16.3oC due to the recent record breaking hot spell. The overall **specific conductance** of 1.82 mS/cm increased 147% over last month to 31% above a year ago and 19% greater than the 21-yr norm of 1.52 mS/cm. The overall **dissolved oxygen** level of 5.52 mg/L (60%Sat.) fell 25% below last month to 22% less than last year and 17% below the 21-yr norm of 6.95 mg/L (70%Sat). **Streamflow** over the antecedent 3-days of 12 cfs is 94% less less than last month, 65% under both a year ago and the 21-yr March norm of 33 cfs. This month's overall LSDR **water quality index** (WQI) of 42 (C Fair) is 17% below last month, 26% less than a year ago and 19% under the 21-yr norm of 51 (B- Good) for March.

Monthly WQI values occurring over the past two years of RiverWatch record for the three main sections of the lower river system, the overall LSDR average, plus 30-day antecedent average daily streamflow (ADF) and total monthly rainfall (MRF) values, are expressed in **Table 2** on the next page.

<b>Table 2 - WQI Values, Average Daily Flow and Monthly Rainfall (Feb. '24 - March '26)</b>							
	Mission Valley	Mission Gorge	Santee Basin	LSDR		ADF,cfs	TMR,F,in
Feb.'24	58(B)	64(B)	65(B)	62(B)	WW	202	6.12
<b>March</b>	<b>55(B)</b>	<b>67(B)</b>	<b>48(C+)</b>	<b>55(B)</b>	<b>WW</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>1.62</b>
April	60(B)	61(B)	40(C)	52(B)	WW	62	1.92
May	40 (C)	54 (B-)	31 (D)	38 (C-)	T	16	0.03
June	40 (C)	51 (B-)	30 (D)	38 (C-)	DW	7.6	0.01
July	27 (D)	43 (C)	25 (D)	28 (D)	DW	3.8	0.00
Aug.	22 (E)	44 (C)	22 (E)	25 (E+)	DW	2.9	0.00
Sept	18 (E)	19 (E)	20 (E)	18 (E)	DW	1.6	0.01
Oct.	17 (E)	42 (C)	24 (E+)	25 (D-)	DW	1.2	0.01
Nov.	34 (D)	49 (C+)	23 (E+)	33 (D)	T	2.2	0.08
Dec.'24	45 (C)	53(B-)	33 (D)	42 (C)	T	3.7	0.05
Jan.'25	44 (C)	49 (C+)	32 (D)	40 (C)	T	3.8	0.00
Feb.'25	49 (C+)	68 (B)	50 (B-)	53 (B-)	WW	27	1.00
<b>March</b>	<b>59 (B)</b>	<b>68 (B)</b>	<b>48 (C+)</b>	<b>57 (B)</b>	<b>WW</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>2.40</b>
April	45 (C)	65 (B)	33 (D)	44 (C)	T	16	0.08
May	38 (C-)	48 (C+)	23 (E+)	33 (D)	DW	6.7	0.2
June	27 (D)	35 (D)	24 (E+)	26 (D-)	DW	2.7	0.00
July	22 (E)	22 (E)	17 (E)	19 (E)	DW	1.4	0.00
Aug.	19 (E)	15 (E)	18 (E)	17 (E)	DW	1.3	0.01
Sept	26 (D-)	16 (E)	10 (F)	17 (E)	DW	2.2	0.05
Oct.	18 (E)	48 (C)	19 (E)	23 (E+)	T	4.2	0.10
Nov.	33(D)	61(B)	28(D)	37(D+)	WW	18	2.90
Dec.'25	41(C)	56(B)	27(D-)	38(C-)	WW	15	0.15
Jan. '26	52 (B-)	63 (B)	41 (C)	50 (B-)	WW	81	4.19
Feb '26	46 (C)	59 (B)	50 (B-)	50 (B-)	WW	36	1.50
<b>March</b>	<b>42 (C)</b>	<b>62 (B)</b>	<b>31 (D)</b>	<b>42 (C)</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>0.00</b>

The **cover page** of this report presents monthly WQI values and range (high/low) for the Lower San Diego River watershed over the past 21+ years. Each year's values are expressed as color-shaded bars; **blue (50 or >) A-B/Good**, **green (38-49) C/Fair**, yellow (25-37) D/Marginal, **brown (13-24) E/Poor**, and **pink (12 or <) F/Very Poor**. Running average index values for the LSDR (distance weighted averages of all sites) are shown as a heavy black line. Running averages for the consistently highest (best) quality section of the river (Mission Gorge) are shown as a 'blue' line, while the consistently lowest (poorest) reach (Upper Santee Basin) is shown in 'red'. The dashed lines represent overall (21-yr) trends. This month's overall value of 42 is only the 4th time over the past two decades that the March. index has declined to C Fair .

WQI values extending from Sept.'05 thru March '26 are presented in **Chart 1** (next page) together with 12-mo. running averages for each of the five reaches and overall (i.e., LSDR) for the entire lower river watershed. The current running average WQI of 33.1 is 0.2% below of the long-range norm of 33.2. The running average low for March of 23 (32% below norm) occurred in 2015. The previous highest running average WQI for the month of 39 (17% above norm) occurred in 2007. Ten of 16 sites monitored exhibited declines in water quality this month compared to last. The greatest decline, dropping from C (Fair) to F (Very Poor), was at the Mast Park East site (Walmart Ponds Outlet).

Monthly and 12-mo. running average WQI values for the commonly 'lowest' (Upper Santee Basin) and typically "highest" (Mission Gorge) reaches of the lower watershed are presented in **Chart 2**. The greatest downward trends (**red-dashed line**) over time have been associated with the lowest quality reach (Upper Santee Basin) encompassing sites 13E and 14. The Mission Gorge (**blue line**) section, extending from Old Mission Dam through Mission Trails, continues to demonstrate the least change in index values. The increases in water quality values experienced over the previous wet weather months have declined significantly due to the recent record breaking hot dry spell. WY 26 index values are likely to be well below the highs reached during the previous two water years. The general trend upward from lows experienced during the last extended drought during mid-decade is, however, expected to persist.

Spatial WQI values determined over the last three months, expressed in order of location upstream, are shown in **Charts 3, 4 and 5** on page 6. This month's results (color bars w/values in bold black shown on Chart 5) are much lower than last month (middle bar) at ten of 16 sites. This month; four sites (38%) are Good (B), six Fair (C) and five Marginal (D). Last month nine sites (56%) were Good (B) and six were Fair. During the previous month (Jan) 11 over two-thirds (68%) were found Good. Index values can be expected to continue to decline over the next month based on anticipated rainfall, less streamflow, lower DO levels and increased conductivity values. It is reasonably likely that this year's overall water quality compared to the last several water years will witness decline due to below normal annual rainfall, less runoff/streamflow, elevated water temperatures and specific conductivities combined with depressed dissolved oxygen levels throughout the lower river system. The cyclic patterns in monthly, seasonal and annual water quality values, as expressed in the charts presented in this report clearly demonstrate that the lower San Diego River remains in a continued state of flux due to predominately natural causes.

jck (3/20)

Chart 1 - LSDR Monthly WQI, Running Averages and Trendlines by River Reach (Sept. 2005 thru March 2026)

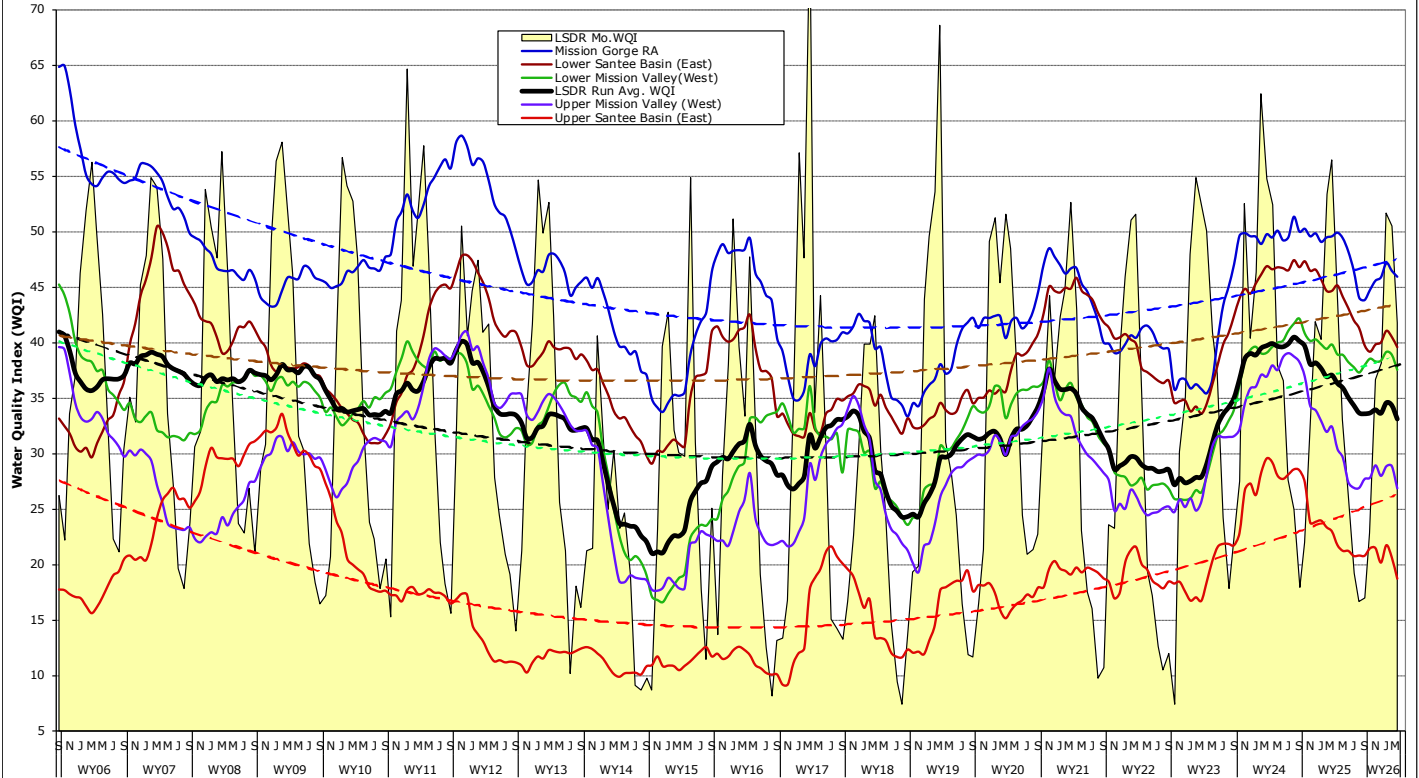


Chart 2 - Mast Park East (Site 13E) and Mission Gorge (Sites 8-10) Monthly WQI, 12-mo Running Averages and 21-yr Trendlines

