

SURFACE WATER

TABLE 1.—BASIN CHARACTERISTICS OF STATIONS USED IN REGRESSION ANALYSIS.

Table with 13 columns: Station number, Station name, Drainage area (mi²), Main channel slope (ft/mi), Stream length (mi), Mean basin elevation (ft), Area of lakes and ponds (sq ft), Forest area (sq ft), Glacier area (sq ft), Annual precipitation (inches), Annual snowfall (inches), January minimum temp. (°F).

As an example of a calculation of discharge for an ungaged basin, the mean annual discharge for the Sustina River near its mouth is estimated as follows: The three significant independent variables were determined from the appropriate maps as: Drainage area (A) = 19,400 mi²; mean basin elevation (E) = 3,200 ft; mean annual precipitation (P) = 45 in.

ANNUAL DISCHARGE

The annual discharge of streams in the Cook Inlet basin is dependent on many variables, of which the dominant one is the size of the drainage basin. The Sustina River drains slightly more than one-half of the Cook Inlet basin and has the largest mean annual discharge, about 49,000 ft³/s (cubic feet per second). This figure is based on 3 years of record for a station near the mouth and comparison with a long-term station upstream. In declining order of discharge are other large rivers, the Veneta and Chulitna (both tributaries of the Sustina), the Knik, the Skwentna, and the Kenai.

Information about the physical characteristics was obtained from U.S. Geological Survey topographic maps. Drainage area (A), in square miles (mi²), is the total drainage area upstream from the gaging site and is determined by planimetry. Main-channel slope (S), in feet per mile, is the average slope between points 10 percent and 85 percent of the distance along the main stream from the gaging site to the basin divide. Stream length (L), in miles, is the length of the main channel between the gaging site and the basin divide measured along the channel that drains the largest basin. Mean basin elevation (E), in feet above sea level, is the mean elevation of the drainage basin measured by the grid-sampling method. Area of lakes and ponds (LP), in percent, is the percentage of the total drainage area occupied by lakes and ponds and is measured by the grid-sampling method from topographic maps having a blue overprint which indicates lakes and ponds. Area of forests (F), in percent, is the percentage of the total drainage area shown as forested. This is measured by the grid-sampling method from topographic maps having a green overprint which indicates forest cover.

The three climatic characteristics were determined from isohyetal maps using the grid-sampling method. Mean annual precipitation (P) and mean annual snowfall (Sn), both in inches, were obtained from National Weather Service publications (National Weather Service, 1972). The mean minimum January temperature (T), in degrees Fahrenheit, was calculated from a map by Johnson and Hartman (1969).

Gaging stations with 5 or more years of annual discharge record were selected for use in the regression analysis. Thirty-eight gaging stations in the Cook Inlet basin meet this criterion, and their mean annual discharge are shown in table 2. The basin characteristics for the 38 gaging stations used in the annual discharge regression analysis and for additional stations used in other regression analyses explained in later sections of this report are included in table 1. It was necessary to add the value of 1 to LP, F, and T and the value of 19 to Sn to avoid 0 or negative numbers in using the logarithms of the variables.

Using the standard step-backward regression procedure, only A, P, and E were seen to be significant at the five percent level, and mean annual discharge could be calculated with a standard error of +24 and -20 percent. The relationship $Q_a = 0.0119 A^{0.99} P^{0.22} E^{0.93}$ indicates that the mean annual discharge is almost directly proportional to drainage area. Mean annual precipitation is a significant factor in determining mean annual discharge, and mean elevation of the basin is a positive, but less significant, factor.

In estimating discharge characteristics for ungaged streams in the basin, it is important to use the same methods and maps as were used in the report in deriving the basin characteristics for the ungaged site. It is also important to use values within the range of basin characteristics values used in the regression analysis. Unrealistic values of discharge may result if these guidelines are not followed.

The 38 gaging stations are not evenly distributed throughout the Cook Inlet basin; 25 stations are on the Kenai Peninsula or in the Anchorage area. Therefore, use of the equation in areas such as the west side of Cook Inlet or the nonmountainous areas of the Sustina River basin may also give unrealistic results.

Dividing the mean annual discharge by the drainage area gives the mean annual unit runoff (discharge per square mile). Mean annual precipitation is the dominant factor in determining mean annual unit runoff. In the study area, the largest amounts of precipitation occur at the lower elevations of the Chugach and Kenai Mountains. The Kenai lowlands, Anchorage flats, and the low-lying areas between the Knik Arm and Mount Sustina have annual unit runoff of less than 0.5 (ft³/s)/mi². The accompanying map shows areal distribution of mean annual unit runoff in the Cook Inlet basin. This map was drawn on the basis of mean annual unit runoff values for the 38 gaging stations and computed values from the mean annual discharge regression equation given above. The contours are highly speculative on the west side of Cook Inlet, on the west side of the Sustina River basin, and in most mountain areas.

MEAN ANNUAL RUNOFF, IN CUBIC FEET PER SECOND PER SQUARE MILE (Based on annual runoff for 38 gaging stations and regression equation).



MONTHLY DISCHARGE

The seasonal distribution of streamflow reflects the influence of precipitation, air temperature, solar radiation, and natural storage in the drainage basin. Figure 10 shows the seasonal trend for three types of streams in the Cook Inlet basin—the lowland streams, typified by streams on the west side of the Kenai Peninsula and in the Anchorage area; the low-elevation mountain streams which do not flow from glaciers; and the high-elevation mountain streams which usually are fed by glaciers.

Kenai Peninsula—Anchorage Lowlands
Streamflow generally decreases from November through March, with the annual minimum occurring in February or March. During the period from December to March, 20 percent of the annual flow is discharged, with about 4 percent being discharged during the month having minimum flow. The increase in solar radiation in April and May and above-freezing air temperatures result in snowmelt-related peak discharges in April or early May. About 17 percent of the annual discharge occurs during May, the month of maximum flow in this part of the study area. Streamflow decreases during the dry period, June and July; summer low flows are only slightly greater than winter low flows. Streamflow increases in August, September, and October due to rainstorms and decreased evapotranspiration. During the period May through September, 53 percent of the annual flow is discharged.

Low-Elevation Mountain Area

Streamflow in this area begins to decrease in October and reaches its minimum in March. From December through March, 10 percent of the annual flow is discharged; March, the minimum flow month, contributes about 2 percent of the annual flow. Streamflow begins to increase in late April due to snowmelt and increases through June, the maximum flow month, when about 22 percent of the annual flow is discharged. After most of the snow has melted, streamflow diminishes through July and August, but summer low flows are from four to eight times greater than winter low flows. Fall rainstorms tend to moderate the rate of recession, so that September streamflow is only slightly less than that of August. Between May and September, 73 percent of the annual flow is discharged.

High-Elevation Mountain Area

The seasonal distribution of streamflow in this area exhibits the widest range of values of the study area. Only 6 percent of the annual flow occurs from December through March, whereas 84 percent occurs between May and September. Streamflow is at a minimum in March or April; each of these months accounts for only 1 percent of the annual flow. Streamflow begins to increase in May due to snowmelt and increases rapidly throughout June. The flow peaks in July or August, and July is usually the maximum flow month. During September the decrease in streamflow caused by the decrease in solar radiation and lower air temperatures frequently exceeds any increase due to rainstorms. The rapid decrease continues through October.

Monthly discharge equations for ungaged sites

Equations to estimate monthly streamflow at ungaged sites in Cook Inlet basin were obtained by regression analysis. The number of streams representing each of the three basin types discussed above is too small to give statistically reliable results from regression analysis for each basin type. The mean monthly discharge for each month for the 38 gaging stations that have 5 or more years of record and the basin characteristics that are described in "Annual Discharge" were used as input. The mean monthly discharges are shown in table 3.

The regression equation takes the form:
 $Q_m = aA^b E^c LP^d (G + 1)^e (T + 1)^f (S + 1)^g (L + 1)^h$
where:
 Q_m = dependent variable, the mean monthly discharge for the nth month where n=1-January, n=10-October, and so forth.
a = regression constant
b to g = regression coefficients for the independent variables (basin characteristics).
A, E, LP, G, T, S, and L = basin characteristics as defined in "Annual Discharge"

The results of the regression analysis including the standard error of estimate are given in the table below. Only the independent variables that were statistically significant were used in the final equations.

TABLE 2.—MEAN ANNUAL DISCHARGE (DATA THROUGH 1976 WATER YEAR).

Table with 6 columns: Station number, Station name, Drainage area (mi²), Mean annual discharge (ft³/s), Mean annual discharge (cfs), Years of record.

TABLE 3.—MEAN MONTHLY DISCHARGE (DATA THROUGH 1976 WATER YEAR).

Table with 13 columns: Station number, Station name, and monthly discharge (cfs) for Oct, Nov, Dec, Jan, Feb, Mar, Apr, May, June, July, Aug, Sept.

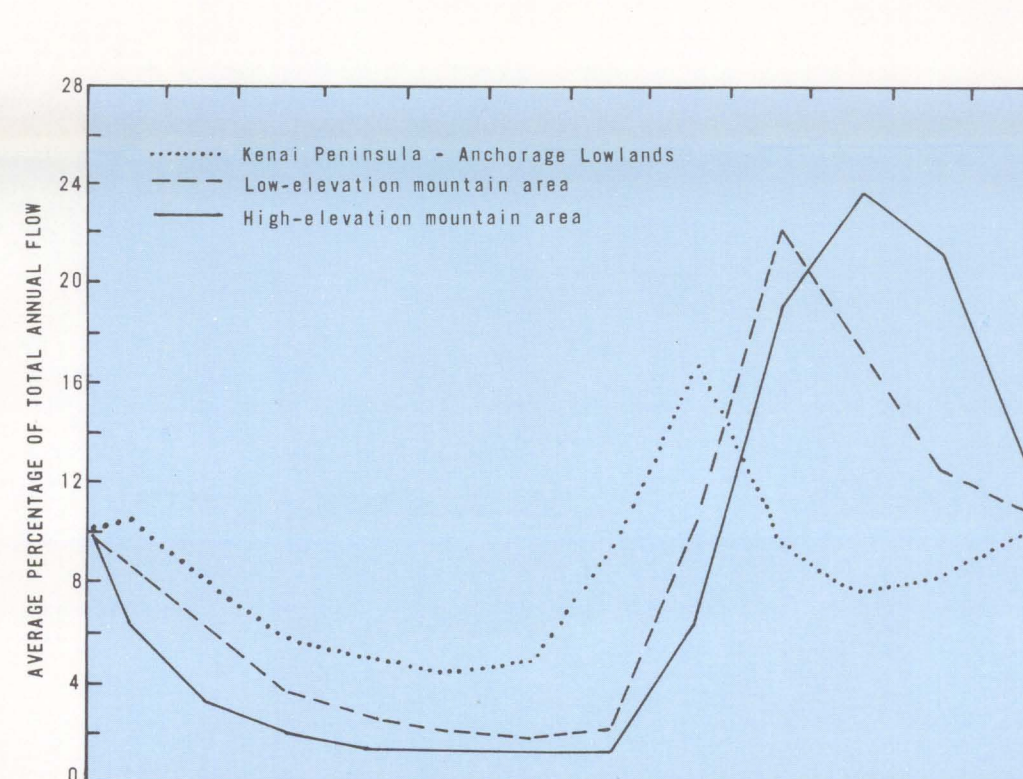


FIGURE 10.—Monthly contribution to total annual streamflow.

WATER RESOURCES OF THE COOK INLET BASIN, ALASKA