

## Estimating Groundwater Recharge

Understanding groundwater recharge is essential for the successful management of water resources and modeling fluid and contaminant transport within the subsurface. This book provides a critical evaluation of the theory and assumptions that underlie methods for estimating rates of groundwater recharge. Detailed explanations of the methods are provided – allowing readers to apply many of the techniques themselves without needing to consult additional references. Numerous practical examples highlight the benefits and limitations of each method and provide guidance on the selection and application of methods under both ideal and less-than-ideal conditions. More than 800 references allow advanced practitioners to pursue additional information on any method.

For the first time, theoretical and practical considerations for selecting and applying methods for estimating groundwater recharge are covered in a single volume with uniform presentation. Hydrogeologists, water-resource specialists, civil and agricultural engineers, earth and environmental scientists, and agronomists will benefit from this informative and practical book, which

is also a useful adjunct text for advanced courses in groundwater or hydrogeology.

For more than 30 years, Rick Healy has been conducting research for the US Geological Survey on groundwater recharge, water budgets of natural and human-impacted hydrologic systems, and fluid and contaminant transport through soils. He has taught numerous short courses on unsaturated zone flow and transport, and groundwater flow modeling. He first presented a short course on methods for estimating recharge in 1994, and over the intervening 15 years the course has been presented to several hundred professionals and students. The material in that course has been expanded and refined over the years and forms the basis of *Estimating Groundwater Recharge*. Rick has authored more than 60 scientific publications and developed the VS2DI suite of models for simulating water, solute, and heat transport through variably saturated porous media. He is a member of the Soil Science Society of America, the American Geophysical Union, and the Geological Society of America.

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# Estimating Groundwater Recharge

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## Contents

Preface	page ix
Acknowledgments	x
<hr/>	
<b>I   Groundwater recharge</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Terminology	3
1.3 Overview of the text	4
1.4 Developing a conceptual model of recharge processes	5
1.4.1 Spatial and temporal variability in recharge	6
1.4.2 Climate	7
1.4.3 Soils and geology	8
1.4.4 Surface topography	9
1.4.5 Hydrology	9
1.4.6 Vegetation and land use	9
1.4.7 Integration of multiple factors	11
1.4.8 Use of existing data	11
1.4.9 Intersite comparison	11
1.5 Challenges in estimating recharge	12
1.5.1 Uncertainty in recharge estimates	12
1.5.2 Spatial and temporal scales of recharge estimates	12
1.5.3 Expense	13
1.6 Discussion	13
<hr/>	
<b>2   Water-budget methods</b>	<b>15</b>
2.1 Introduction	15
2.2 Water budgets	16
2.2.1 Uncertainty in water budgets	19
2.3 Local-scale application	21
2.3.1 Precipitation	21
2.3.2 Evapotranspiration	23
2.3.3 Change in storage	24
2.3.4 Surface flow	27
2.3.5 Subsurface flow	28
2.4 Mesoscale application	31
2.4.1 Precipitation	32
2.4.2 Evapotranspiration	32
2.4.3 Change in storage	34
2.4.4 Surface flow	34
2.4.5 Subsurface flow	35
2.5 Macroscale application	38
2.5.1 Precipitation	40
2.5.2 Evapotranspiration	40
2.5.3 Change in storage	41

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 VI | CONTENTS
 

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2.5.4 Indirect use of remotely sensed data	41
2.6 Discussion	42
<hr/>	
<b>3   Modeling methods</b>	<b>43</b>
3.1 Introduction	43
3.1.1 Data sources	44
3.2 Model calibration and inverse modeling	45
3.3 Unsaturated zone water-budget models	47
3.3.1 Soil water-budget models	47
3.3.2 Models based on the Richards equation	50
3.4 Watershed models	52
3.4.1 Precipitation runoff modeling system (PRMS)	54
3.5 Groundwater-flow models	57
3.6 Combined watershed/groundwater-flow models	63
3.7 Upscaling of recharge estimates	66
3.7.1 Simple empirical models	66
3.7.2 Regression techniques	67
3.7.3 Geostatistical techniques	69
3.7.4 Geographical information systems	69
3.8 Aquifer vulnerability analysis	70
3.9 Discussion	72
<hr/>	
<b>4   Methods based on surface-water data</b>	<b>74</b>
4.1 Introduction	74
4.1.1 Groundwater/surface-water exchange	74
4.1.2 Base flow	76
4.2 Stream water-budget methods	77
4.3 Streambed seepage determination	79
4.3.1 Seepage meters	79
4.3.2 Darcy method	82
4.3.3 Analytical step-response function	82
4.4 Streamflow duration curves	82
4.5 Physical streamflow hydrograph analysis	85
4.5.1 Empirical hydrograph separation methods	85
4.5.2 Recession-curve displacement analysis	87
4.6 Chemical and isotopic streamflow hydrograph analysis	91
4.6.1 End-member mixing analysis	91
4.6.2 Tracer-injection method	93
4.7 Discussion	94
<hr/>	
<b>5   Physical methods: unsaturated zone</b>	<b>97</b>
5.1 Introduction	97
5.2 Measurement of unsaturated-zone physical properties	97
5.2.1 Soil-water content	97
5.2.2 Pressure head	99
5.2.3 Water-retention and hydraulic conductivity curves	100

5.3 Zero-flux plane method	102
5.4 Darcy methods	107
5.5 Lysimetry	110
5.6 Discussion	116
<hr/>	
<b>6 Physical methods: saturated zone</b>	<b>117</b>
6.1 Introduction	117
6.1.1 Groundwater-level data	117
6.2 Water-table fluctuation method	118
6.2.1 Causes of water-table fluctuations in unconfined aquifers	119
6.2.2 Specific yield	122
6.2.3 Fractured-rock systems	127
6.3 Methods based on the Darcy equation	132
6.3.1 Theis (1937)	132
6.3.2 Hantush (1956)	132
6.3.3 Flow nets	132
6.4 Time-series analyses	133
6.5 Other methods	134
6.6 Discussion	135
<hr/>	
<b>7 Chemical tracer methods (by Bridget R. Scanlon)</b>	<b>136</b>
7.1 Introduction	136
7.2 Tracers in the unsaturated zone	138
7.2.1 Tracer sampling: unsaturated zone	141
7.2.2 Natural environmental tracers	142
7.2.3 Historical tracers	147
7.2.4 Applied tracers	150
7.3 Groundwater tracers	152
7.3.1 Age-dating methods	153
7.3.2 Natural environmental tracers	156
7.3.3 Historical tracers	158
7.4 Discussion	164
<hr/>	
<b>8 Heat tracer methods</b>	<b>166</b>
8.1 Introduction	166
8.2 Subsurface heat flow	166
8.2.1 Temperature measurements	169
8.3 Diffuse recharge	169
8.3.1 Diffuse drainage in the geothermal zone	169
8.3.2 Diffuse drainage in the surficial zone	172
8.4 Focused recharge	173
8.5 Discussion	178

VIII | CONTENTS

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<b>9</b>	<b>Linking estimation methods to conceptual models of groundwater recharge</b>	<b>180</b>
9.1	Introduction	180
9.2	Considerations in selecting methods for estimating recharge	180
9.3	Comparison of methods	182
9.4	Recharge characteristics of groundwater regions of the United States	189
9.4.1	Western Mountain Ranges	191
9.4.2	Alluvial Basins	192
9.4.3	Columbia Lava Plateau	194
9.4.4	Colorado Plateau	195
9.4.5	High Plains	195
9.4.6	Unglaciaded Central Region	197
9.4.7	Glaciaded Central Region	199
9.4.8	Unglaciaded Appalachians Region	200
9.4.9	Glaciaded Appalachians Region	200
9.4.10	Atlantic and Gulf Coastal Plain	201
9.4.11	Recharge in urban settings	202
9.5	Final thoughts	203
	References	205
	Index	238

## Preface

Groundwater is an integral part of natural hydrologic systems. Humans have used groundwater for thousands of years. Its use has increased greatly over time, but only in the last few decades has our appreciation of the limitations of its supply and its vulnerability to contamination grown to the point where steps are being taken to protect this valuable resource. One of the most important components in any assessment of groundwater supply or aquifer vulnerability is the rate at which water in the system is replenished – the rate of recharge.

A number of textbooks are devoted to hydrogeology, groundwater flow, and contaminant transport (e.g. Freeze and Cherry, 1979; Domenico and Schwartz, 1998; Todd and Mays, 2005). The importance of recharge is cited in all of these textbooks, but only limited information is provided on the description and analysis of techniques for estimating recharge. Similarly, undergraduate and graduate courses on hydrogeology, groundwater flow, and contaminant transport are offered at many universities, but we know of no university level courses specifically devoted to groundwater recharge. This book attempts to fill these gaps by providing a systematic and comprehensive analysis of methods for estimating recharge.

The book is aimed at practicing hydrogeologists who are actively involved in groundwater studies. The material contained in the text should also be useful to water-resource specialists, civil and agricultural engineers, geologists, geochemists, environmental scientists, soil physicists, agriculturalists, irrigators, and scientists from other fields that have an elemental understanding of hydrologic processes. The book can be used as an adjunct text or reference in an advanced undergraduate or graduate groundwater or hydrogeology course; it can also serve as a primary text in courses on groundwater recharge. Theoretical as well as practical considerations for selecting and applying techniques are discussed. Theoretical analysis of the

methods allows the evaluation of assumptions inherent in each method. Practical examples of applications provide guidance for readers in applying methods in their own studies.

Over the years, hydrology has become a diverse field with the development of many new topic areas. Few hydrologists can claim expertise in all areas of hydrology; specialization in groundwater, surface water, unsaturated-zone flow and transport, geochemistry, or other subfields has become more the norm. We anticipate that most readers will have a background in groundwater hydrology. However, application of many of the methods described herein (e.g. streamflow hydrograph separation, the zero-flux plane method, and watershed modeling) requires knowledge of areas outside of groundwater hydrology. A challenge in writing this text was to bring together a number of methods that are drawn from fields outside of groundwater hydrology, fields such as surface-water hydrology, flow and transport through the unsaturated zone, geophysics, remote sensing, and water chemistry. Unsaturated-zone processes, in particular, are described in some detail. Many methods for estimating recharge require assumptions about the mechanisms by which water moves through the unsaturated zone; insight into unsaturated-zone processes provides a basis for evaluating the validity of those assumptions.



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