# Report 75-1 HYDROGEOLOGY OF THE WAINWRIGHT AREA, ALBERTA

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#### **HYDROGEOLOGY**

### OF THE WAINWRIGHT AREA,

#### ALBERTA

#### Abstract

The Wainwright map area lies southeast of Edmonton between longitudes  $110^{\circ}$  and  $112^{\circ}$  west and latitudes  $52^{\circ}$  and  $53^{\circ}$  north. It covers about 6 000 square miles (15 500 km²), of mostly aspen parkland. Precipitation is about 14 inches (36 cm) annually, while potential evapotranspiration is about 21 inches (54 cm).

Hydrogeological information is abundant for depths less than about 500 feet (152 m). At depths greater than 500 feet (152 m) the hydrologic environment has been inferred from geological information. Geologic units of hydrogeological interest include the glacial drift, preglacial sands and gravels, Horseshoe Canyon Formation, Bearpaw Formation, Belly River Formation, and Lea Park Formation. The last-named four are Late Cretaceous in age.

Groundwater yields are generally between 0 and 25 igpm (about 0 to 100 l/min) with certain areas having much greater yields. Groundwater quality is not exceptionally good; one third to one half of the samples analyzed exceeded provincial standards for total dissolved solids, sulfate, alkalinity, or sodium. Nitrate represents a local pollution problem.

In addition to the groundwater availability map at 1:250 000 scale, maps at 1:1 000 000 scale are presented showing hydrochemistry of bedrock waters for the depth intervals 0 to 150 feet (0 to 46 m) 150 to 350 feet (46 to 107 m), and 350 to 500 feet (107 to 152 m). Hydrochemistry of drift waters from 0 to 150 feet (0 to 46 m) of depth is also presented.

#### INTRODUCTION

This report and map are part of a program of the Alberta Research Council to produce reconnaissance hydrogeological maps for the entire province under a uniform legend (Badry, 1972). They represent the interpretation by one groundwater hydrologist and one technician of existing hydrogeological data supplemented by one summer of field work.

The area covered by this study is located between longitudes 110° and 112° west and latitudes 52° and 53° north. It encompasses townships 35 through 46 and ranges 1 through 14, west of the fourth meridian, which is an area of about 6 000 square miles (15 500 km²). Under the National Topographic System the area is designated as map number 73D, Wainwright, Alberta.

The area is dominantly utilized for mixed farming with certain portions suitable only for stock raising due to relatively great local relief and poorly arable soils. Most of the area lies in the aspen parkland. The numerous farms result in much available groundwater information, both in terms of yield and chemistry, for depths less than 500 feet (152 m). At depths greater than 500 feet (152 m) information is quite sparse and is usually related to petroleum activities.

Petroleum production is a major industry of the area. Approximately half of the area contains established petroleum fields.

The work undertaken during one summer of field mapping included collection of about 300 water samples, and carrying out of 55 two-hour pump tests and two 4-day pump tests.

The references section of this paper is intended to be as complete a history as possible of published reports pertaining to the hydrology of the area and adjacent areas. Nielsen *et al.* (1972) present a bibliography of published and unpublished groundwater reports for all of Alberta.

#### Acknowledgments

Field and office technical assistance was provided by Mr. A. Beerwald. His diligent and capable help is gratefully acknowledged.

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O. Tokarsky and Miss Ann Badry reviewed and commented on the report. The help of these former members of the Alberta Research Council is appreciated.

#### **PHYSIOGRAPHY**

The land surface in the area generally falls from south to north. High areas, exceeding 2 800 feet (850 m) above sea level, occur in the Neutral Hills in the south-central portion of the area. Much of the rest of the southern one third of the area varies between 2 400 and 2 700 feet (730 to 820 m) above sea level; much of the northern half of the area is below 2 200 feet (670 m).

A large portion of the area is hummocky containing many undrained depressions, and internal drainage is characteristic. Surface water divides shown on the hydrogeological map are only approximate in many areas.

The Battle River has incised a valley several hundred feet deep through the area. This valley is usually fairly narrow in the upstream portions and widens in the downstream reaches. The river drops about 380 feet (about 120 m) while passing through the area. There are no gauging stations on the Battle River in the map area. At Forestburg, just upstream from the west map boundary, the mean discharge was 24 and 163 cfs (0.7 and 4.6 m³/sec) for 1968 and 1969, respectively, while at Unwin, Saskatchewan, just downstream from the east map boundary, the corresponding discharges were 118 and 368 cfs (3.3 and 10.3 m³/sec). This indicates a two- to five-fold increase in discharge while passing through the area.

#### CLIMATE

Climatic averages for the area are presented on the meteorological side map. Mean annual precipitation varies from about 13 inches (33 cm) in the southeast to slightly over 15 inches (38 cm) in the northwest. The average annual temperature is about 36°F (2°C). Potential evapotranspiration (Thornthwaite and Mather, 1957) is about 21 inches (54 cm) per year, while evaporation (Bruce and Weisman, 1967) is slightly less than 35 inches (90 cm) per year.

#### **GEOLOGY**

#### Surficial Geology

Bayrock (1957, 1958, 1967), Gravenor (1956), Gravenor and Bayrock (1955), and Gravenor and Ellwood (1957) have mapped the surficial deposits of the entire area. Although many types occur, the most prevalent are morainal deposits, outwash sand deposits, and lake deposits.

Carlson and Topp (1971) show that about one half of the area is covered with drift less than 50 feet (15 m) thick (Fig. 1) and that surficial deposits up to about 150 feet (46 m) thick cover about one quarter of the area. A major preglacial valley, the Battleford Valley (Christiansen, 1965) [also referred to as the Red Deer Bedrock Channel (Farvolden, 1963) and the Wainwright Valley (Carlson and Topp, 1971)], extending from Chauvin to north of Hardisty, has deposits comprised mostly of sand and gravel which are up to 450 feet (about 140 m) thick in some locales. The exact extent of gravel deposits in this channel is not well known but it is probable that some occur along the thalwegs indicated on the hydrogeological map.

#### Bedrock Geology

The bedrock units of significant hydrogeological interest are all of Late Cretaceous age; these are the Horseshoe Canyon, Bearpaw, Belly River, and Lea Park Formations. The following descriptions are provided by Green (1972):

Horseshoe Canyon Formation: grey, feldspathic, clayey sandstone; grey bentonitic mudstone and carbonaceous shale; concretionary ironstone beds, scattered coal, and bentonite beds of variable thickness, minor limestone beds; mainly nonmarine

**Bearpaw Formation:** dark grey blocky shale and silty shale; greenish glauconitic and grey clayey sandstone; thin concretionary ironstone and bentonite beds; marine

**Belly River Formation:** grey to greenish grey, thick-bedded, feldspathic sandstone; grey clayey siltstone, grey and green mudstone; concretionary ironstone beds; nonmarine

Lea Park Formation: dark grey shale; pale grey, glauconitic, silty shale with ironstone concretions; marine

The Horseshoe Canyon Formation contains a basal sandstone unit which is utilized for water supply in the southwestern portion of the area. Locally, coal beds may be of importance.

The Bearpaw Formation contains three major sandstone members, locally known as the "Bulwark sands." The geological side map shows the subcrop of the upper or first Bulwark sand as well as the subcrop and structural contours on the lower or third Bulwark sand.

The Belly River Formation contains several "zones" within which sandstones are very prevalent. Structure contours and the subcrop of one major sand sequence are presented on the geological side map.

The top of the Lea Park Formation represents a boundary separating comparatively high yielding, good quality aquifers from much lower yielding, poorer quality aquifers.

For more detailed discussion of the stratigraphy of the area the reader is referred to Shaw and Harding (1954) and Nichols and Wyman (1969).

## **HYDROGEOLOGY**

#### Groundwater Flow

The water levels shown on the main map are dominantly those of the Belly River sand zone depicted on the geological side map and defined above. In those areas where the sand zone does not exist the water levels presented are those from wells of an approximately equivalent depth. Groundwater flow within this zone is basically from southwest to northeast. Locally flow is directed into the Battle River valley and into the preglacial Battleford Valley.

Data seem to indicate that the water table can be approximated by the land surface, and that it is usually within 50 feet (15 m) of the surface.

Areas of major groundwater discharge are limited to certain portions of townships 42 and 43, ranges 1, 2, and 3. Here flowing wells, salt deposits, springs, and very saline lakes are observed. Evidence of major groundwater discharge into the Battle River valley is lacking: large springs are not frequently observed but minor seepage areas are common; surficial salt deposits do occur but they are neither extremely common nor heavy; of the few wells that do exist in the valley most do not flow (see main map). It appears likely that the Battle River valley receives groundwater discharge only from local flow systems, not from regional systems, thus accounting for the general lack of salt deposits and major seepage areas.

The many closed topographic depressions of the area probably result in the development of numerous local groundwater flow systems. It is hypothesized that most of these behave very similarly to the "temporary" sloughs described by Meyboom (1966). He demonstrated that this type of slough is: 1) a recharge area during fall and spring; 2) a discharge area during summer; and 3) hydrologically nonexistent during much of the winter.

#### **Groundwater Yields**

Groundwater yields presented on the cross sections represent the probable 20-year safe yields to wells completed by usual present-day techniques. The various colored areas can be considered as hydrogeologic units throughout which conditions are very similar. The value presented on the main map is the sum of all groundwater probabilities occurring in the section to a depth of 500 feet (150 m).

Most groundwater yield information is obtained from water well drillers' reports containing only a static water level and a water level after some stated period of pumping. This type of information allows the calculation of "apparent transmissivity" (Farvolden, 1961) from which an "apparent 20-year safe yield" has been calculated. The approach is parallel to the Jacob method:

$$T_{\Delta} = 264Q/\Delta s$$

where  $T_A$  = apparent transmissivity, Q = pumping rate in igpm,  $\Delta s$  = drawdown in feet per log cycle as inferred from using static water level and the one available pumping water level. Therefore:

$$Q_{A20} = T_A H/2110$$

where  $Q_{A20}$  = apparent 20-year safe yield, H = total available drawdown, commonly taken to the top of the open interval of the well.

The results of this approach are probably conservative due to the nature of As. Correlation of these values with those from longer production tests (indicated on main map) has produced the final product. Where quantitative information was lacking groundwater yields were inferred from geologic information.

The preglacial Battleford Valley is the major high-yield area of the region. The sands and gravels in this buried valley contain abundant amounts of water. A four-day pump test in the valley south of the town of Wainwright indicated a 20-year safe yield in excess of 1 000 igpm (4 500 l/min).

The high yield area in township 40, ranges 5, 6, and 7, is based on wells at Hughenden and Metiskow and on electrolog correlation of the probable sandstone aquifer. It must be remembered, however, that dissolved gas was abundant in the well at Metiskow and that this factor, which may tend to exaggerate the actual amount of water available, was not taken into consideration in presenting the groundwater probability.

The 25 to 100 igpm (100 to 450 I/min) yield area in the southeast corner of the map area is from sandstone units in the bedrock. These units are encountered at elevations of about 1 900 to 2 000 feet (580 to 610 m) along cross section B-B'.

Over the rest of the map area groundwater yields vary from about 1 to 25 igpm (5 to 100 l/min). The reader is urged to make frequent reference to the cross sections for the vertical distribution of aquifers.

The top of the Lea Park Formation (see geological side map) usually represents the lower limit of useful yields to wells. In most instances drilling into this formation is not warranted. Suitable volumes of water would probably only be obtained from boreholes having a very great open portion.

#### Groundwater Chemistry

Table 1 presents a summary of chemical constituents from groundwater in the area. A significant number of water analyses have values for these constituents in excess of the Alberta standard (Table 1). Nonetheless, most analyses represent water which is or will be used for domestic purposes.

The four hydrochemical side maps present the chemistry of waters from drift and bedrock for various depth intervals in percent of total cations or anions. The calculation of epm was based on procedures outlined by Le Breton and Vanden-Berg (1965). The reader should make use of the drift thickness map (Fig. 1) to determine whether a well at a particular location will be completed in drift or bedrock.

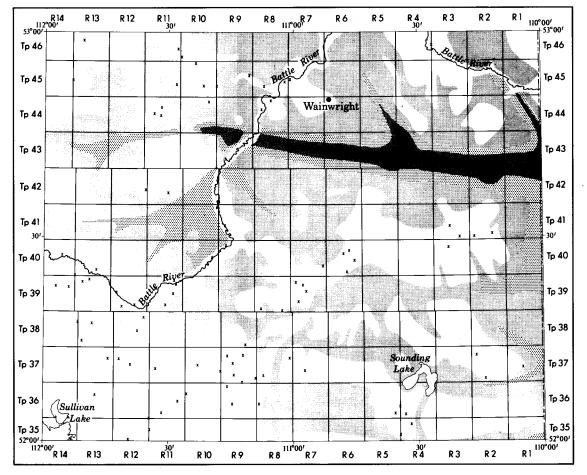


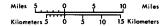
Figure 1. Drift thickness in Wainwright map area

#### LEGEND

Thickness of drift in feet:



x selected bedrock outcrop



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Table 1. Comparison of Alberta Drinking Water Standards
to Water Analyses from Wainwright Area

Constituent	Alberta Standard*	Number of Analyses Exceeding Standard	Number of Analyses	Percent of Analyses Exceeding Standard
Total dissolved solids	1 000	679	1 452	46
Hardness	500	192	1 452	13
Sulfate	250	546	1 452	37
Chloride	250	119	1 452	8
Alkalinity	500	631	1 452	43
Nitrate	45	138	1 411	9
Fluoride	1.5	32	641	4
Calcium	200	17	529	3
Magnesium	150	0	526	0
Sodium	300	131	241	54

<sup>\*</sup>Canada Department of National Health and Welfare (1969).

#### Drift waters from 0 to 150 feet (0 to 46 m) deep

Anions in this interval tend to be bicarbonate plus carbonate with large areas over which no one ion dominates. The bicarbonate plus carbonate facies tends to occur in the central part of the area where total dissolved solids are below 1 000 ppm.

The cations of this upper portion of the drift tend to be calcium plus magnesium. Major areas of sodium plus potassium domination occur in the south and east where the drift cover is thin.

The pattern of total dissolved solids reflects drift thickness somewhat (Fig. 1). In areas where drift is thin the total dissolved solids content of the drift waters tends to rise. This is probably due to the large proportion of bedrock material in the thin drift. At the scale of presentation virtually all water could be expected to have total dissolved solids in excess of 500 ppm; however, lesser values are observed locally.

#### Drift waters from 150 to 350 feet (46 to 107 m) deep

Figure 2 shows a modified version of a hydrochemical side map for water in the Battleford Valley. Water here tends to be of generally good quality in spite of the depth.

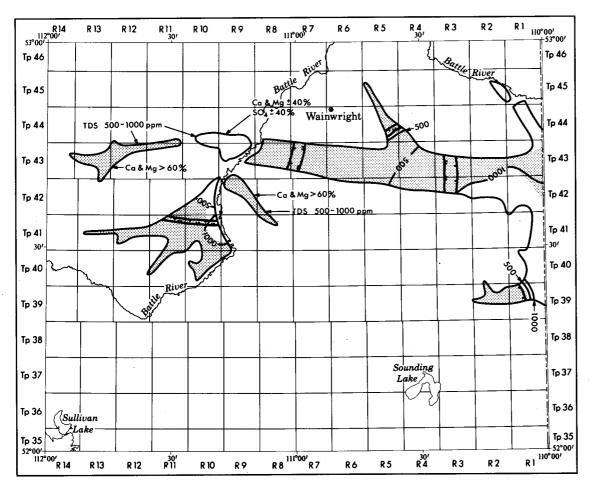
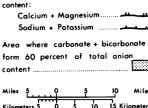


Figure 2. Hydrochemistry of drift waters from 150-350 foot depth

#### LEGEND

Boundary of area of drift .....

Total dissolved solids(ppm) .... - 500 -lsogram along which cation forms 60
percent of total cations; teeth
indicate direction of lesser cation
content:



9

Calcium and magnesium tend to dominate the cations in the western reaches of the channel while sodium and potassium are more abundant to the east. The dominant anions are carbonate and bicarbonate. Total dissolved solids content tends to be fairly low, and is less than 500 ppm in several areas. The areas of low TDS reflect the rapid infiltration in areas of very sandy drift.

#### Bedrock waters from 0 to 150 feet (0 to 46 m) deep

The chemistry of waters in this interval is substantially different from the waters in the drift for the same interval.

Sodium plus potassium tend to dominate the cations around the outer perimeter of the area while calcium plus magnesium are dominant in the central and northern portions. This reflects the drift thickness pattern of the area; there is more drift material (with calcium-magnesium water) in the central portion of the area than around the outer edges. It also indicates downward moving groundwater. This pool of calcium-magnesium rich water exerts its influence to a greater depth than in areas of thinner drift.

Bicarbonate plus carbonate dominates the anions of waters in this depth interval. Sulfate anions are dominant in several areas, particularly where the Bearpaw Formation outcrops in the southwest.

An area in which chloride ion dominates the anions is shown. This area coincides quite closely with a closed water-table contour area shown on the main map. The lack of significant areas of chloride ion substantiates the observation (Groundwater Flow) that regional discharge areas are lacking.

The total dissolved solids content shows a similar pattern to that of the cations, it tends to be lower in the central portion of the area and higher around the edges. This is similar to the total disssolved solids pattern for drift waters in the same interval and in fact reflects the recharge of this low TDS water into the bedrock.

The TDS content of this interval is quite variable but can be expected to virtually always be above 1 000 ppm.

The fluoride content of waters in this depth interval is low. In most cases the fluoride level is less than 0.5 ppm in areas where a significant drift cover overlies the bedrock. Where the drift cover is thin the fluoride content increases slightly but remains, however, less than 1.0 ppm.

#### Bedrock waters from 150 to 350 feet (46 to 107 m) deep

The dominant anions continue to be bicarbonate plus carbonate. The pattern for these constituents is much more uniform than in the overlying interval and

reflects the greater continuity of these deeper bedrock units and the lessening of influences of local flow systems.

Chloride continues to dominate the anions in a small area near Hardisty. This ion also is dominant in the northwest area. The discharge area in township 42, ranges 1 and 2, shows some minor areas of chloride dominance.

The major cations are sodium and potassium. Calcium and magnesium appear as dominant ions in areas where drift is thick and probably reflect rapid recharge from these overlying aquifers.

As in the previously mentioned depth intervals total dissolved solids concentration tends to be lowest in the central portion of the map area. This again reflects the great depth of influence of the low TDS drift waters. The previously mentioned discharge area is reflected by a small 1 500 ppm closed contour in township 42, range 2.

In general, one can expect TDS in waters from this interval to exceed 1 000 ppm.

The fluoride side map indicates the fluoride content of waters obtained from wells 150 to 350 feet (46 to 107 m) deep which terminate in bedrock. The average values in this interval are substantially higher than in the bedrock above although still below recommended health standards for most of the area. The areas of low fluoride content continue to generally correspond with areas of thick overlying drift. The presence of the more shaly Bearpaw and Horseshoe Canyon Formations produces higher fluoride values to the western edge of the area.

# Bedrock waters from 350 to 500 feet (107 to 152 m) deep

The dominant anions are virtually always bicarbonate plus carbonate. Chloride ions become more prevalent, especially in the western and northeastern sectors. This may be due in large part to the presence of marine deposits (Bearpaw and Lea Park) at this depth in these areas.

Cations are mostly sodium plus potassium; only one small area in the southeast has sodium plus potassium values of less than sixty percent.

Total dissolved solids continue to show a low-value area in the central portions of the area with higher values elsewhere. Thus the effects of water recharging in this area are reflected to great depth.

Fluoride values in the bedrock at depths of 350 to 500 feet (107 to 152 m) are also indicated on the fluoride side map. The values in this depth range are substantially higher than in the overlying bedrock interval. The area of low fluoride values just north of the center of the map continues to correspond to the location

of thick drift. Fluoride values rise rapidly to the east reflecting a local high in the Lea Park Formation. High fluoride values to the northwest reflect the influence of the Bearpaw Formation.

## Nitrate pollution

Nitrate pollution of shallow wells has been noted to be a significant problem in the Wainwright area. Of 590 water analyses from wells less than 100 feet (30 m) deep, 130 (22%) exhibited nitrate values in excess of 45 ppm (the Provincial Health limit). In addition, 69 (12%) of the water analyses of these 590 wells showed values in excess of 20 ppm but less than 45 ppm, indicating a significant degree of contamination.

Nitrate contamination results from poor well completion or poor location or both, and can commonly be traced to sites of concentrated animal waste (barnyards, feedlots, corrals) or human waste (privies, sewage lagoons, leach fields).

To date the towns of Hayter, Czar, Metiskow, Sedgewick, and Killam have large numbers of water analyses from shallow wells [less than 100 feet (30 m) deep] which show nitrates in excess of provincial standards. Sedgewick also has a large number of water analyses from shallow wells which have nitrate levels between 20 and 45 ppm. The local contamination at Sedgewick and Killam is of concern as these towns are located over bedrock channels which contain major groundwater aquifers (see main map).

#### CONCLUSIONS

Groundwater yields to wells in the Wainwright area can generally be expected to be in the range of 1 to 25 igpm (5 to 100 l/min). Higher yields are available in many areas. For practical purposes the Lea Park Formation represents the lower limit of abundant, potable water supplies.

The general quality of groundwater in the area is not exceptionally good with respect to potability. A large percentage of analyses have total dissolved solids, sulfate, alkalinity, and sodium in excess of provincial standards. Nitrate pollution is definitely a problem in many localized areas.

Except for very localized situations the entire area appears to lie in a regional recharge area. The only major discharge area [about 50 square miles  $(130 \text{ km}^2)$ ] is located just west of Chauvin. The Battle River valley does not appear to be a major discharge area.

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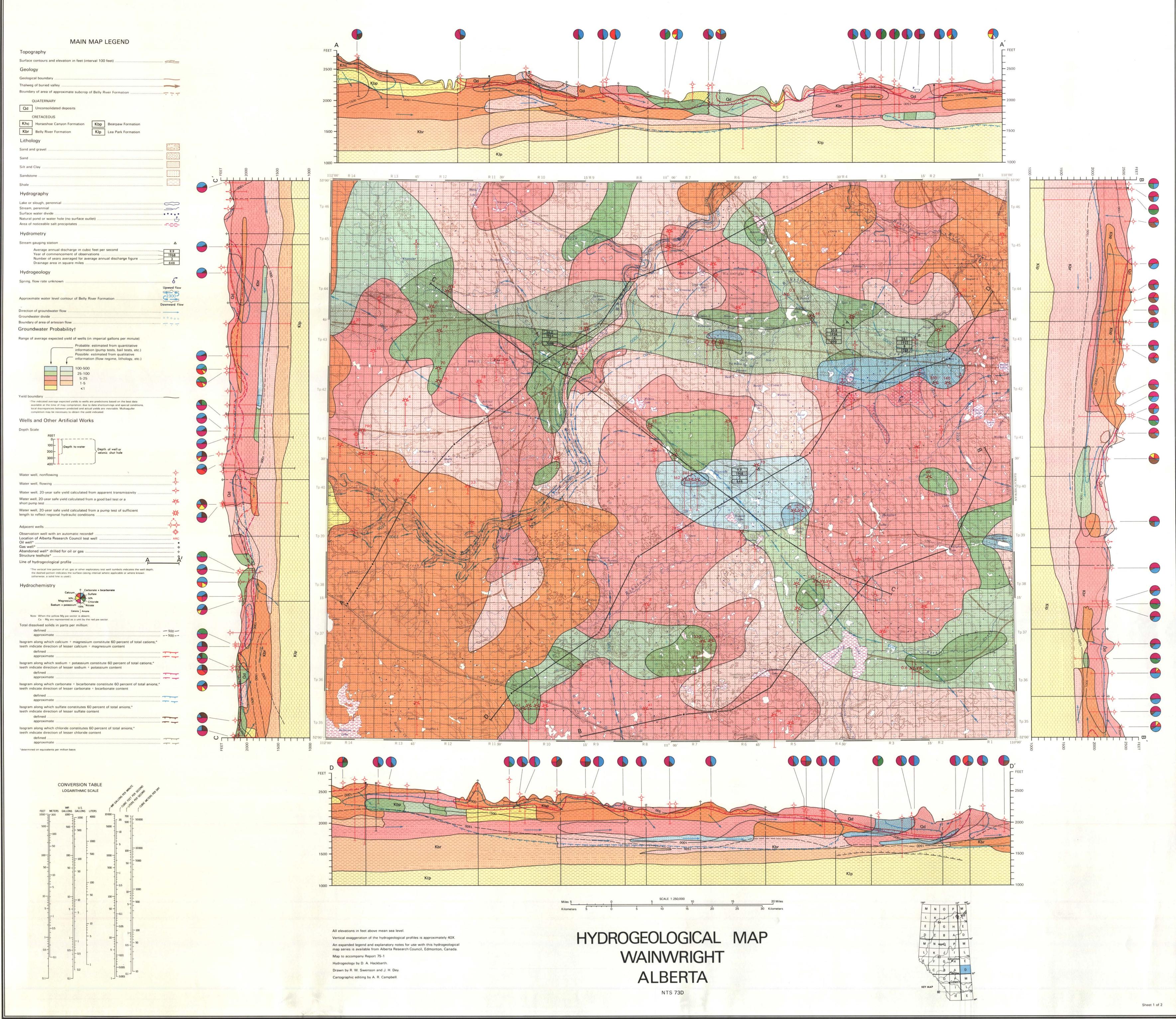
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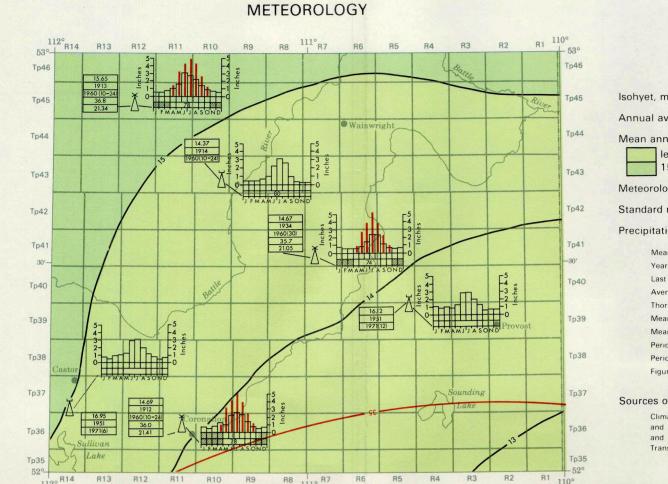
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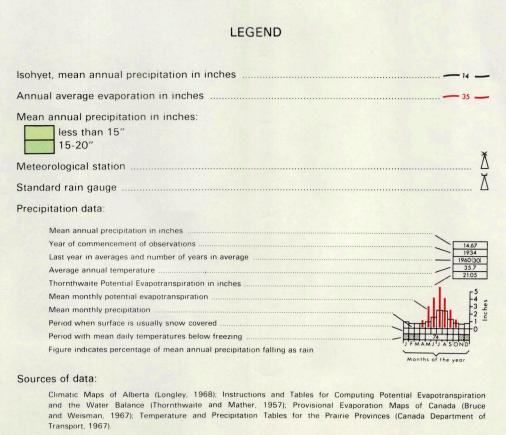


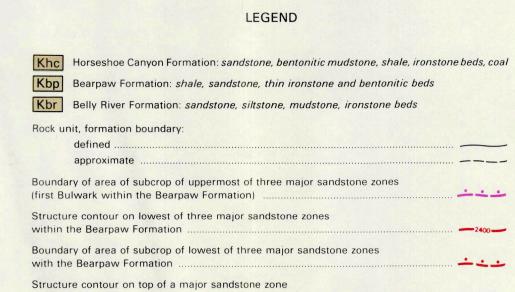


Base map provided by Surveys and Mapping Branch, Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, Ottawa; modified by Surveys Branch, Alberta Highways Published









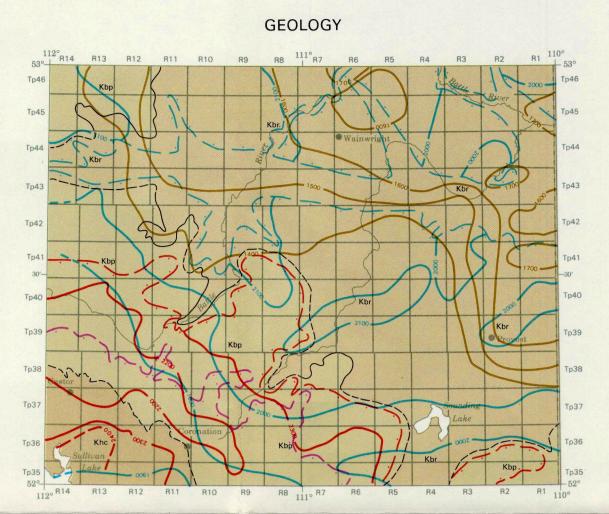
within the Belly River Formation ..

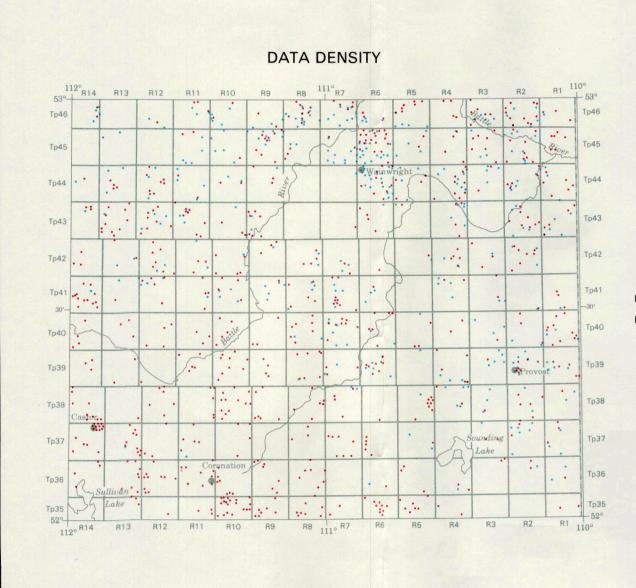
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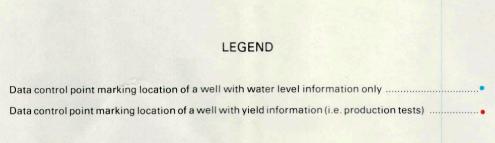
Boundary of area of subcrop of a major sandstone zone

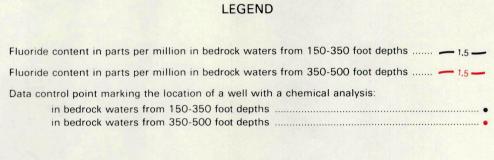
Structure contour on the top of the Lea Park Formation

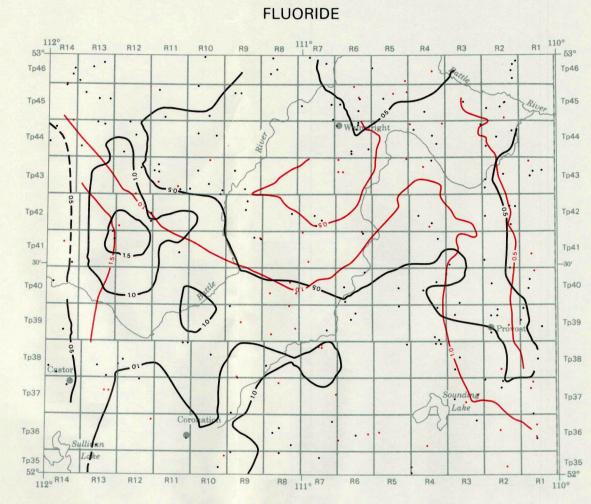
(only values above 1,400 ft. are contoured) .

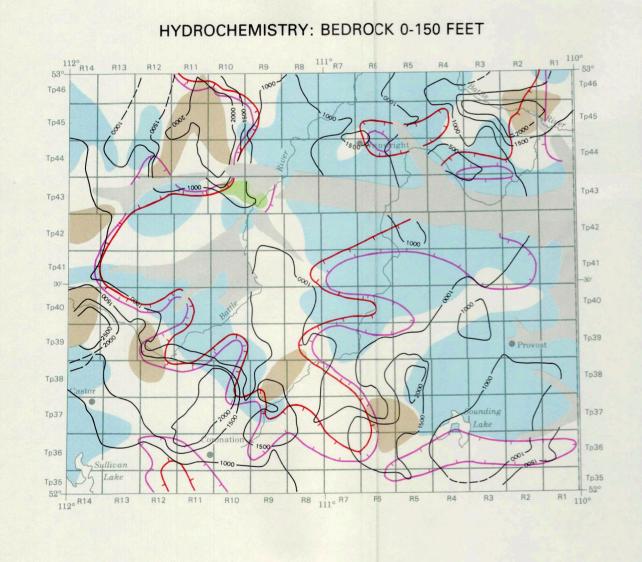


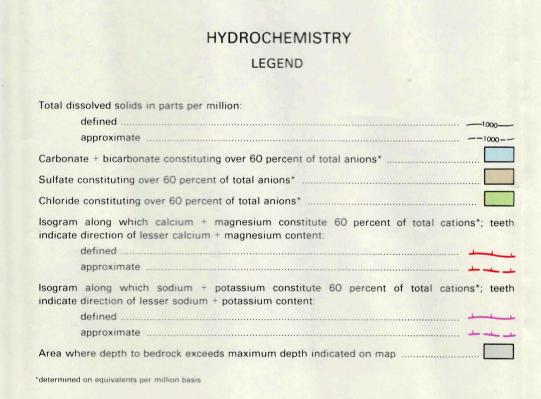




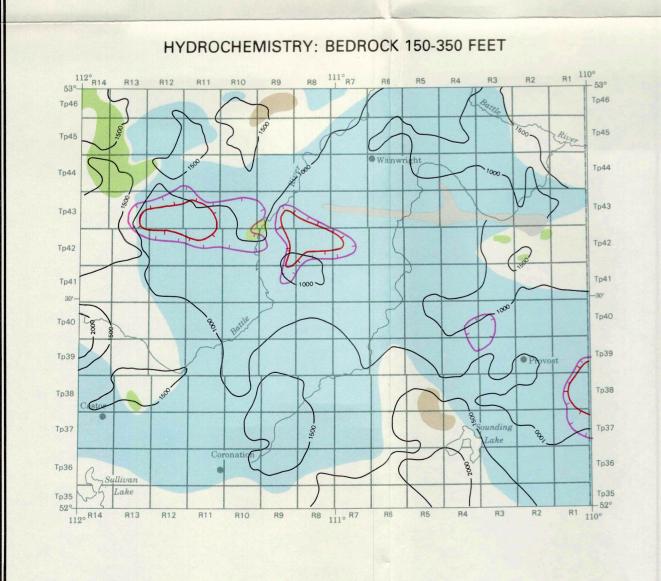


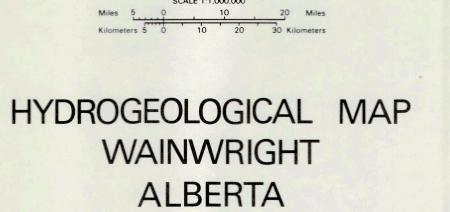












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