Alberta Environmental Protection (AEP) defines the Base of Groundwater Protection as the elevation below which the groundwater is expected to have more than 4,000 mg/L of total dissolved solids. By using the ground elevation, the bedrock surface and the Base of Groundwater Protection provided by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board (EUB), a depth to the Base of Groundwater Protection can be determined. This depth, for the most part, would be the maximum drilling depth for a water well for agricultural purposes or for a potable water supply. If a water well is completed below the Base of Protection with the total dissolved solids of the groundwater exceeding 4,000 mg/L, then the groundwater use does not require licensing by AEP.

Over approximately 60% of the County, the depth to the Base of Groundwater Protection is more than 250 metres. There are only a few areas where the depth to the Base of Groundwater Protection is less than 100 metres; these areas are mainly within a few kilometres of the Battle River as shown on the adjacent map.

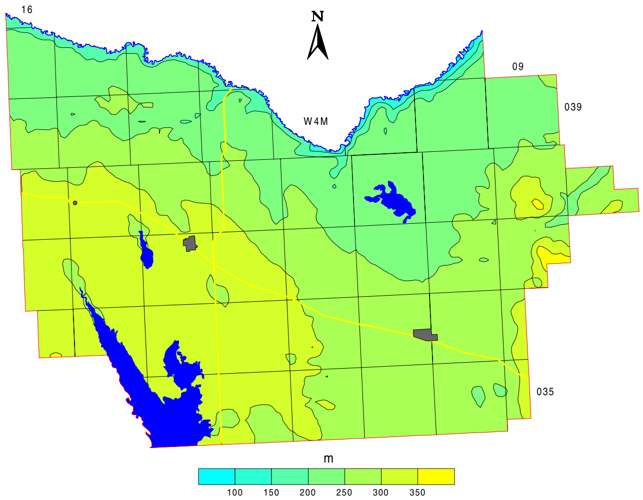

Figure 4. Depth to Base of Groundwater Protection (after EUB, 1995)

Proper management of the groundwater resource requires water-level data. These data are often collected from observation water wells. At the present time, there are two AEP-operated observation water wells within the County. Additional data can be obtained from some of the licensed groundwater diversions. In the past, these data for licensed diversions have been difficult to obtain from AEP, in part because of the failure of the licensee to provide the data.

However, even with the available sources of data, the number of water-level data points relative to the size of the County is too few to provide a reliable groundwater budget. The most cost-efficient method to collect additional groundwater monitoring data would be to have the water well owners measuring the water level in their own water well on a regular basis.

3 Terms

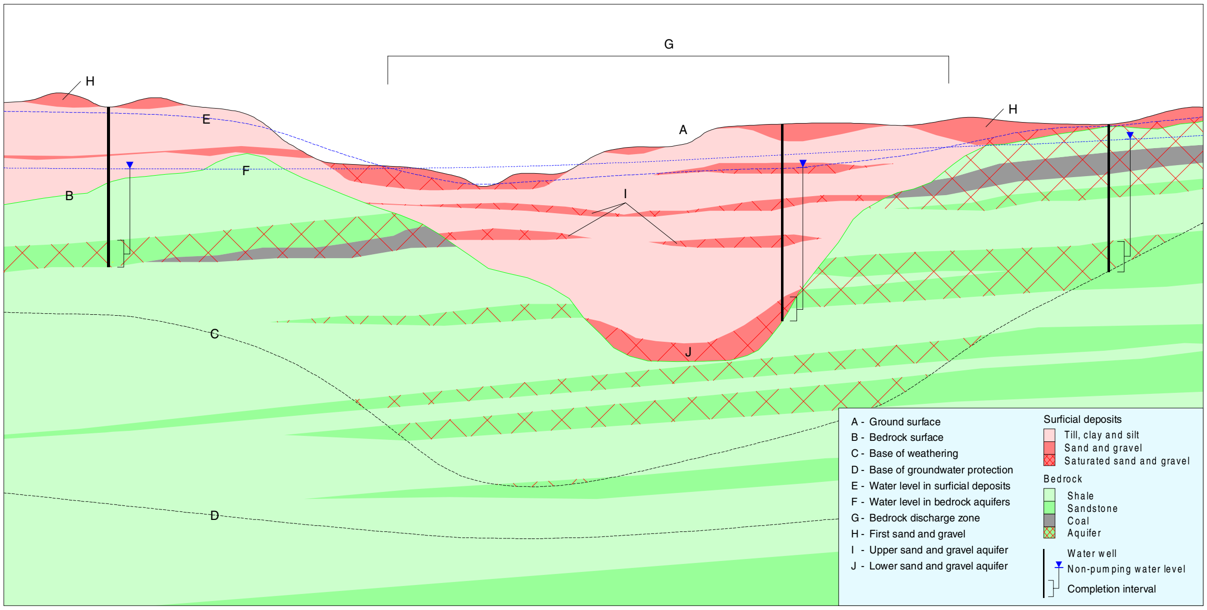

Figure 5. Generalized Cross-Section (for terminology only)

		Group and Formation		Member		Zone	
Lithology	**Lithologic Description**	**Thickness (m)**	**Designation**	**Thickness (m)**	**Designation**	**Thickness (m)**	**Designation**
	sand, gravel, till, clay, silt	<50	Surficial Deposits	<50	Upper	<15	First Sand and Gravel
	shale, sandstone, siltstone, coal, bentonite, limestone, ironstone	300-380	Edmonton Group – Horseshoe Canyon Formation	~100	Upper		
				~100	Middle		
				~170	Lower		
	shale, sandstone, siltstone	60-120	Bearpaw Formation				
	sandstone, siltstone, shale, coal	40-130	Belly River Group – Oldman Formation		Dinosaur Member	<0-25	Lethbridge Coal Zone
					Upper Siltstone Member		
					Comrey Member		
	sandstone, shale, coal	<200	Belly River Group – Foremost Formation	<70	Birch Lake Member		Taber Coal Zone
				<60	Ribstone Creek Member		
				<70	Victoria Member		
				<30	Brosseau Member		McKay Coal Zone
	shale, siltstone	30-60	Lea Park Formation				
	sandstone, siltstone, shale, coal	90-120	Milk River Formation				

Figure 6. Geologic Column

4 Methodology

4.1 Data Collection and Synthesis

The AEP groundwater database is the main source of groundwater data. The database includes the following:

1) water well drilling reports;
2) aquifer test results from some water wells;
3) location of some springs;
4) water well locations determined during water well surveys;
5) chemical analyses for some groundwaters;
6) location of flowing shot holes;
7) location of structure test holes; and
8) a variety of data related to the groundwater resource.

The main disadvantage to the database is the absence of quality control. Very little can be done to overcome this lack of quality control in the data collection, other than to assess the usefulness of control points relative to other data during the interpretation. Another disadvantage to the database is the lack of adequate spatial information. However, unlike other areas in the Province where there are numerous duplicate records, the present database for the County contains less than 50 duplicate water well IDs.

The AEP groundwater database uses a land-based system with only a limited number of records having a value for ground elevation. The locations for records usually include a quarter section description; a few records also have a land description that includes a Legal Subdivision (Lsd). For digital processing, a record location requires a horizontal coordinate system. In the absence of an actual location for a record, the record is given the coordinates for the centre of the land description.

The present project uses the 10TM coordinate system. This means that a record for the SE ¼ of section 13, township 036, range 11, W4M, would have a horizontal coordinate with an Easting of 243883 metres and a Northing of 5774310 metres, the centre of the quarter section. If the water well has been positioned by the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration (PFRA), the location will be more accurate, possibly within several 10s of metres of the actual location. Once the horizontal coordinates are determined for a record, a ground elevation for that record is obtained from the 1:20,000 Digital Elevation Model (DEM) from the Resource Data Division of AEP.

After assigning spatial control for the ground location for the records in the groundwater database, the data are processed to determine values for hydrogeological parameters. As part of the processing, obvious keying errors in the database are corrected.

Where possible, determinations are made from individual records for the following:

1) depth to bedrock;
2) total thickness of sand and gravel;
3) thickness of first sand and gravel when present within one metre of ground surface;
4) total thickness of saturated sand and gravel; and
5) depth to the top and bottom of completion intervals.

Also, where sufficient information is available, values for apparent transmissivity[3] and apparent yield[4] are calculated, based on the aquifer test summary data supplied on the water well drilling reports. Where valid detailed aquifer test results exist, the interpreted data provide values for aquifer transmissivity and effective transmissivity.

[3] For definitions of Transmissivity, see glossary
[4] For definitions of Yield, see glossary

The EUB well database includes records for all of the wells drilled by the oil and gas industry. The information from this source includes:

1) spatial control for each well site;
2) depth to the top of various geological units;
3) type and intervals for various down-hole geophysical logs; and
4) drill stem test (DST) summaries.

Values for apparent transmissivity, apparent yield and hydraulic conductivity[5] are calculated from the DST summaries.

Published and unpublished reports and maps provide the final source of information to be included in the new groundwater database. The reference section of this report lists the available reports. The only digital data from publications are from the Geological Atlas of the Western Canada Sedimentary Basin (Mossop and Shetsen, 1994). These data are used to verify the geological interpretation of geophysical logs but cannot be distributed because of a licensing agreement.

4.2 Spatial Distribution of Aquifers

Determination of the spatial distribution of the aquifers is based on:

1) lithologs provided by the water well drillers;
2) geophysical logs from structure test holes;
3) wells drilled by the oil and gas industry; and
4) data from existing cross-sections.

The identification of aquifers becomes a two-step process: first, mapping the tops and bottoms of individual geological units; and second, identifying the porous and permeable parts of each geological unit in which the aquifer is present.

After obtaining values for the elevation of the top and bottom of individual geological units at specific locations, the spatial distribution of the individual surfaces can be determined. Digitally, establishment of the distribution of a surface requires the preparation of a grid. The inconsistent quality of the data necessitates creating a representative sample set obtained from the entire data set. If the data set is large enough, it can be treated as a normal population and the removal of extreme values can be done statistically. When data sets are small, the process of data reduction involves a more direct assessment of the quality of individual points. Because of the uneven distribution of the data, all data sets are gridded using the Kriging[6] method.

The final definition of the individual surfaces becomes an iterative process involving the plotting of the surfaces on cross-sections and the adjusting of control points to fit with the surrounding data.

The porous and permeable parts of the individual geological units have been mainly determined from geophysical logs.

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5 See glossary
6 See glossary

4.3 Hydrogeological Parameters

Water well records that indicate the depths to the top and bottom of their completion interval are compared digitally to the spatial distribution of the various geological surfaces. This procedure allows for the determination of the aquifer in which individual water wells are completed. When the completion interval of a water well cannot be established unequivocally, the data from that water well are not used in determining the distribution of hydraulic parameters.

After the water wells are assigned to a specific aquifer, the parameters from the water well records are assigned to the individual aquifers. The parameters include non-pumping (static) water level (NPWL), transmissivity and projected water well yield. The total dissolved solids, chloride and sulfate concentrations from the chemical analysis of the groundwater are also assigned to applicable aquifers.

Once the values for the various parameters of the individual aquifers are established, the spatial distribution of these parameters must be determined. The distribution of individual parameters involves the same process as the distribution of geological surfaces. This means establishing a representative data set and then preparing a grid. Even when only limited data are available, grids are prepared. However, the data from these grids must be used with extreme caution because the gridding process can be unreliable.

4.3.1 Risk Criteria

The main source of groundwater contamination involves activities on or near the land surface. The risk of groundwater contamination is high when the near-surface materials are porous and permeable and low when the materials are less porous and less permeable. The two sources of data for the risk analysis include (a) a determination of when sand and gravel is or is not present within one metre of the ground surface, and (b) the surficial geology map. The presence or absence of sand and gravel within one metre of the land surface is based on a geological surface prepared from the data supplied on the water well drilling reports. The information available on the surficial geology map is categorized based on relative permeability. The information from these two sources is combined to form the risk assessment map. The criteria used in the classification of risk are given in the adjacent table.

Surface Permeability	Sand or Gravel Present - Top Within One Metre Of Ground Surface	Groundwater Contamination Risk
Low	No	Low
Moderate	No	Moderate
High	No	High
Low	Yes	High
Moderate	Yes	High
High	Yes	Very High

Table 3. Risk of Groundwater Contamination Criteria

4.4 Maps and Cross-Sections

Once grids for geological surfaces have been prepared, various grids need to be combined to establish the extent and thickness of individual geological units. For example, the relationship between an upper bedrock unit and the bedrock surface must be determined. This process provides both the outline and the thickness of the geological unit. The thickness of the porous and permeable part(s) of the geological unit is used to determine the aquifer transmissivity by multiplying the hydraulic conductivity by the thickness.

Grids must also be combined to allow the calculation of projected long-term yields for individual water wells. The grids related to the elevation of the NPWL and the elevation of the top of the aquifer are combined to determine the available drawdown[7]. The available drawdown data and the transmissivity values are used to calculate values for projected long-term yields for individual water wells, completed in a specific aquifer.

Once the appropriate grids are available, the maps are prepared by contouring the grids. The areal extent of individual parameters is outlined by masks to delineate individual aquifers. Appendix A includes page-size maps from the text, plus additional page-size maps and figures that support the discussion in the text. A list of maps and figures that are included on the CD-ROM is given in Appendix B.

Cross-sections are prepared by first choosing control points from the database along preferred lines of section. Data from these control points are then obtained from the database and placed in an AutoCAD drawing with an appropriate vertical exaggeration. The data placed in the AutoCAD drawing include the geo-referenced lithology, completion intervals and NPWLs. Data from individual geological units are then transferred to the cross-section from the digitally prepared surfaces.

Once the technical details of a cross-section are correct, the drawing file is moved to the software package CorelDRAW! for simplification and presentation in a hard-copy form. These cross-sections are presented in this report and as poster-size drawings forwarded with this report. The cross-sections also are in Appendix A, and are included on the CD-ROM; page-size maps of the poster-size cross-sections are included in Appendix D of this report.

4.5 Software

The files on the CD-ROM have been generated from the following software:

- Acrobat 4.0
- ArcView 3.1
- AutoCAD 14.01
- CorelDRAW! 8.0
- Microsoft Professional Office 97
- Surfer 6.04

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7 See glossary

5 Aquifers

5.1 Background

An aquifer is a porous and permeable rock that is saturated. If the NPWL is above the top of the rock unit, this type of aquifer is an artesian aquifer. If the rock unit is not entirely saturated and the water level is below the top of the unit, this type of aquifer is a water-table aquifer. These types of aquifers occur in one of two general geological settings in the County. The first geological setting includes the sediments that overlie the bedrock surface. In this report, these are referred to as the surficial deposits. The second geological setting includes aquifers in the upper bedrock. The geological settings, the nature of the deposits making up the aquifers within each setting, the expected yield of water wells completed in aquifer(s) within different geological units, and the general chemical quality of the groundwater associated with each setting are reviewed separately.

5.1.1 Surficial Aquifers

Surficial deposits in the County are mainly less than ten metres thick, except in areas of linear bedrock lows where the thickness of the surficial deposits can exceed 30 metres. There are a series of linear bedrock lows in the eastern part of the County that trend generally from northwest to southeast. Cross-section A-A' passes across these linear bedrock lows, and shows the thickness of the surficial deposits varying from less than five to more than 30 metres.

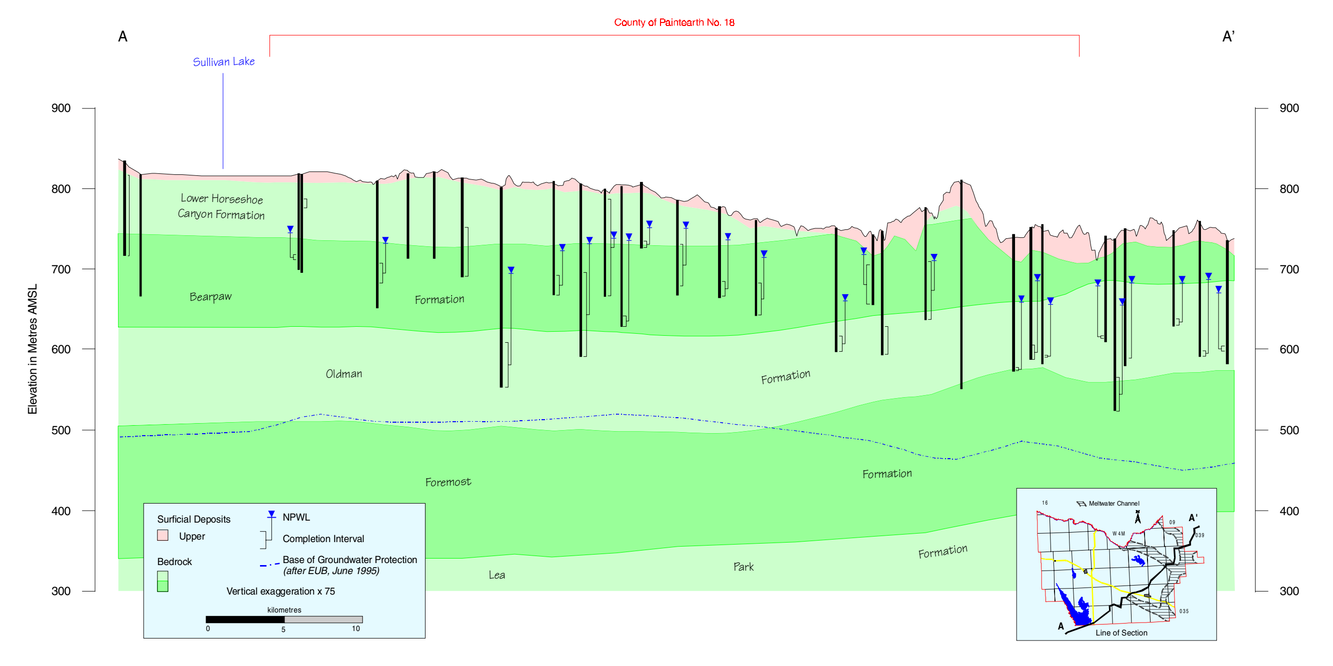

Figure 7. Cross-Section A - A'

The main aquifers in the surficial materials are sand and gravel deposits. In order for a sand and gravel deposit to be an aquifer, it must be saturated; if not saturated, a sand and gravel deposit is not an aquifer. The top of the surficial aquifers has been determined from the NPWL in water wells that are less than 15 metres deep. The base of the surficial deposits is the bedrock surface.

For a water well with a small-diameter casing to be effective in surficial deposits and to provide sand-free groundwater, the water well must be completed with a water well screen. Some water wells completed in the surficial deposits are completed in low-permeability aquifers and have a large-diameter casing. The large-diameter water wells may have been hand dug or bored and because they are completed in very low permeability aquifers, most of these water wells would not benefit from water well screens. The groundwater from an aquifer in the surficial deposits usually has a chemical hardness of at least a few hundred milligrams per litre and a dissolved iron concentration such that the groundwater must be treated before being used for domestic needs. Within the County, casing diameter information is available for 165 of the 285 water wells completed in the surficial deposits; 41 of these have a casing diameter of more than 300 millimetres, and are assumed to be bored or dug water wells.

5.1.2 Bedrock Aquifers

The upper bedrock includes rocks that are less than 200 metres below the bedrock surface and above the Lea Park Formation. Some of this bedrock contains porous, permeable and saturated rocks that are permeable enough to transmit groundwater for a specific need. Water wells completed in bedrock aquifers usually do not require water well screens, although some of the sandstones are friable[8] and water well screens are a necessity. The groundwater from the bedrock aquifers is usually chemically soft.

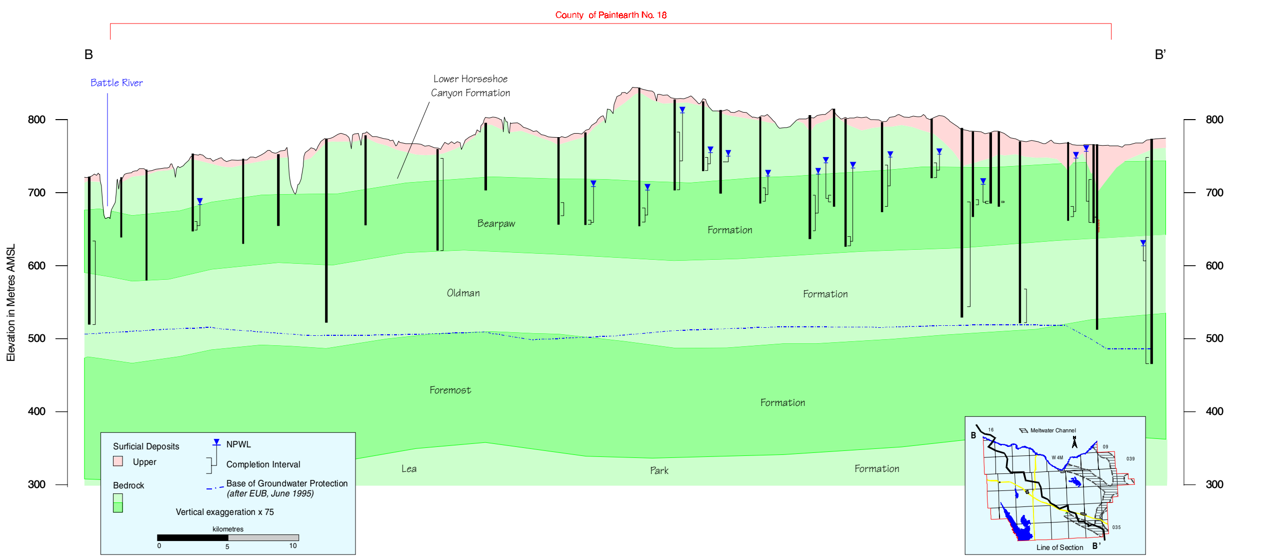

Figure 8. Cross-Section B - B'

The data for 845 water wells show that the top of the water well completion interval is below the bedrock surface, indicating that the water wells are completed in at least one bedrock aquifer. Within the County, casing diameter information is available for 498 of the 845 water wells completed in the bedrock aquifers. Of these 498 water wells, 95% have surface casing diameters of less than 275 mm and these bedrock water wells have been mainly completed with either a slotted liner or as open hole. There were 53 bedrock water wells that were completed with a water well screen.

The upper bedrock includes the Middle and Lower Horseshoe Canyon formations, the Bearpaw Formation and the Oldman Formation (Figure 8). The Foremost Formation underlies the Oldman Formation; the Lea Park Formation underlies the Foremost Formation and is a regional aquitard[9].

8 See glossary
9 See glossary

5.2 Aquifers in Surficial Deposits

The surficial deposits are the sediments above the bedrock surface. This includes pre-glacial materials, which were deposited before glaciation, and materials deposited directly or indirectly by glaciation. The *lower surficial deposits* include pre-glacial fluvial[10] and lacustrine[11] deposits. The lacustrine deposits include clay, silt and fine-grained sand. The *upper surficial deposits* include the more traditional glacial deposits of till[12] and meltwater deposits. In the County, no lower surficial deposits have been defined to date and the upper surficial deposits include mainly till.

5.2.1 Geological Characteristics of Surficial Deposits

While the surficial deposits are treated as one hydrogeological unit, they consist of three hydraulic units. The first unit is the sand and gravel deposits of the lower surficial deposits when present. These deposits are mainly saturated, where present. The second and third hydraulic units are associated with the sand and gravel deposits in the upper surficial deposits. The sand and gravel deposits in the upper surficial deposits occur mainly as pockets. The second hydraulic unit is the saturated part of these sand and gravel deposits; the third hydraulic unit is the unsaturated part of these deposits. See Figure 5 for a graphical depiction of the above description. While the unsaturated deposits are not technically an aquifer, they are significant as they provide a pathway for liquid contaminants to move downward into the groundwater. Because of the significance of the shallow sand and gravel deposits, they have been mapped where the tops of these deposits are present within one metre of the ground surface; these shallow deposits are referred to as the “first sand and gravel”.

Over the majority of the County, the upper surficial deposits are less than ten metres thick. The exceptions are mainly in association with areas where linear bedrock lows are indicated, where the deposits can have a thickness of up to 30 metres. There are several connecting linear bedrock lows in the County as shown on the adjacent bedrock topography map. These lows trend mainly northwest to southeast in the County and are indicated as being of meltwater origin. One linear bedrock low trends northeast to southwest and occupies the present-day Ribstone Creek.

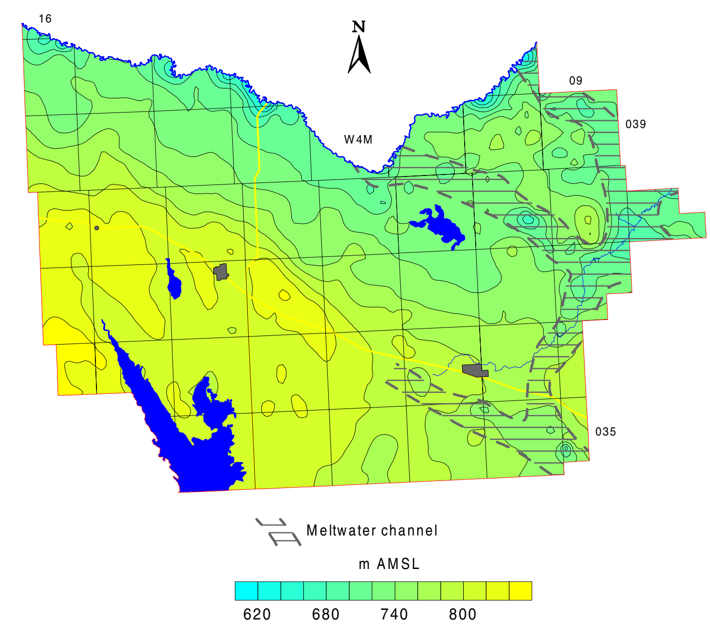

Figure 9. Bedrock Topography

Sand and gravel deposits can occur throughout the surficial deposits. The total thickness of sand and gravel deposits is generally less than five metres but can be more than 15 metres in the areas of the linear bedrock lows.

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[10] See glossary
[11] See glossary
[12] See glossary