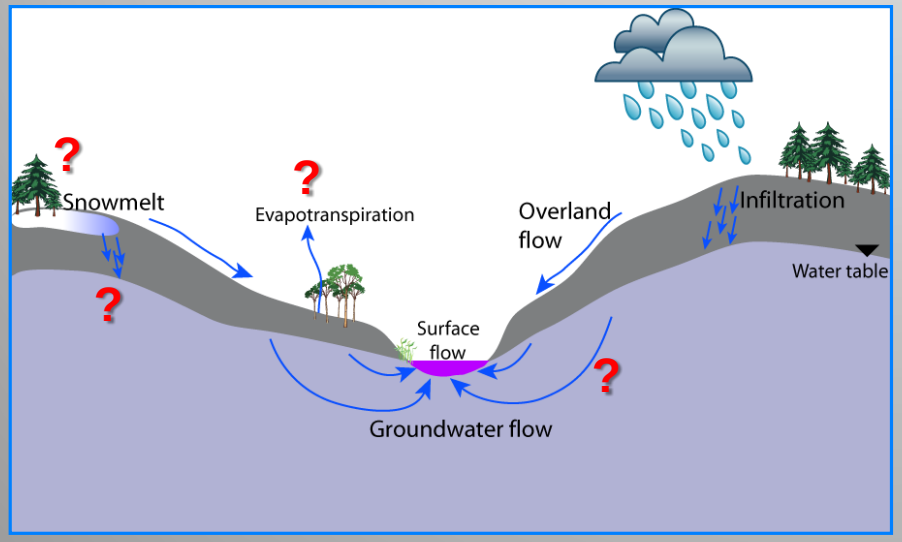
GRA Annual Meeting 2016:

Delineating Recharge Elevation in Headwater Catchments

Jean E. Moran, Ate Visser, Elizabeth Peters, Bradley K. Esser, Michael J. Singleton

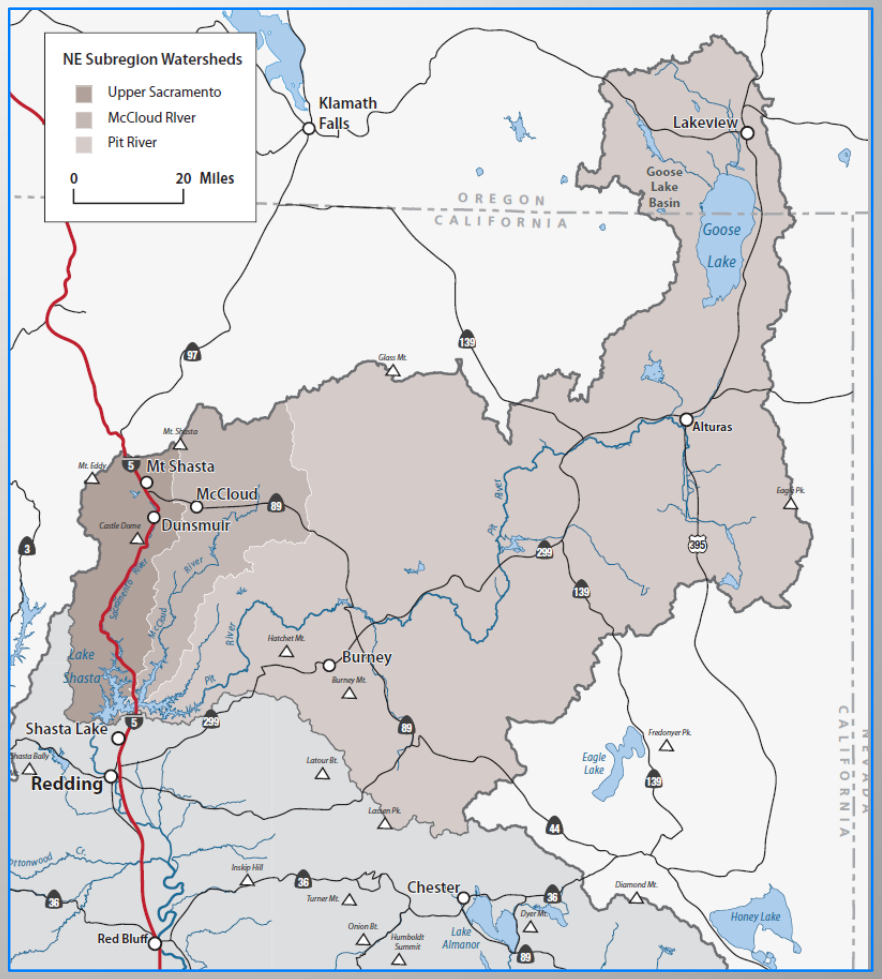
California AB 2480:

- "…it is state policy to recognize and define source watersheds as integral components of California's water system, and eligible for financing on an equivalent basis with other water infrastructure projects."
- "…(funding for) projects with a demonstrated likelihood of increasing conditions for water and snow attraction, retention, and release under changing climate conditions."



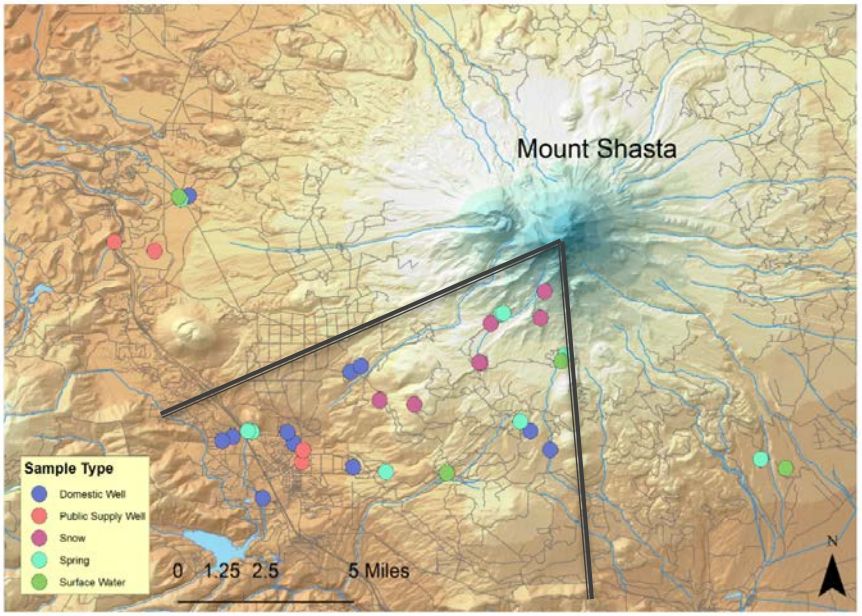
Volcanic, alpine hydrologic setting

- Highly permeable surface materials
- Stream generation from springs
  - Upper Sacramento, McCloud, and Pit River headwaters
  - Springs and wells provide supply for logging operations, towns of Mount Shasta and Weed, bottled water facility, etc.
- ET likely energy (rather than water) limited

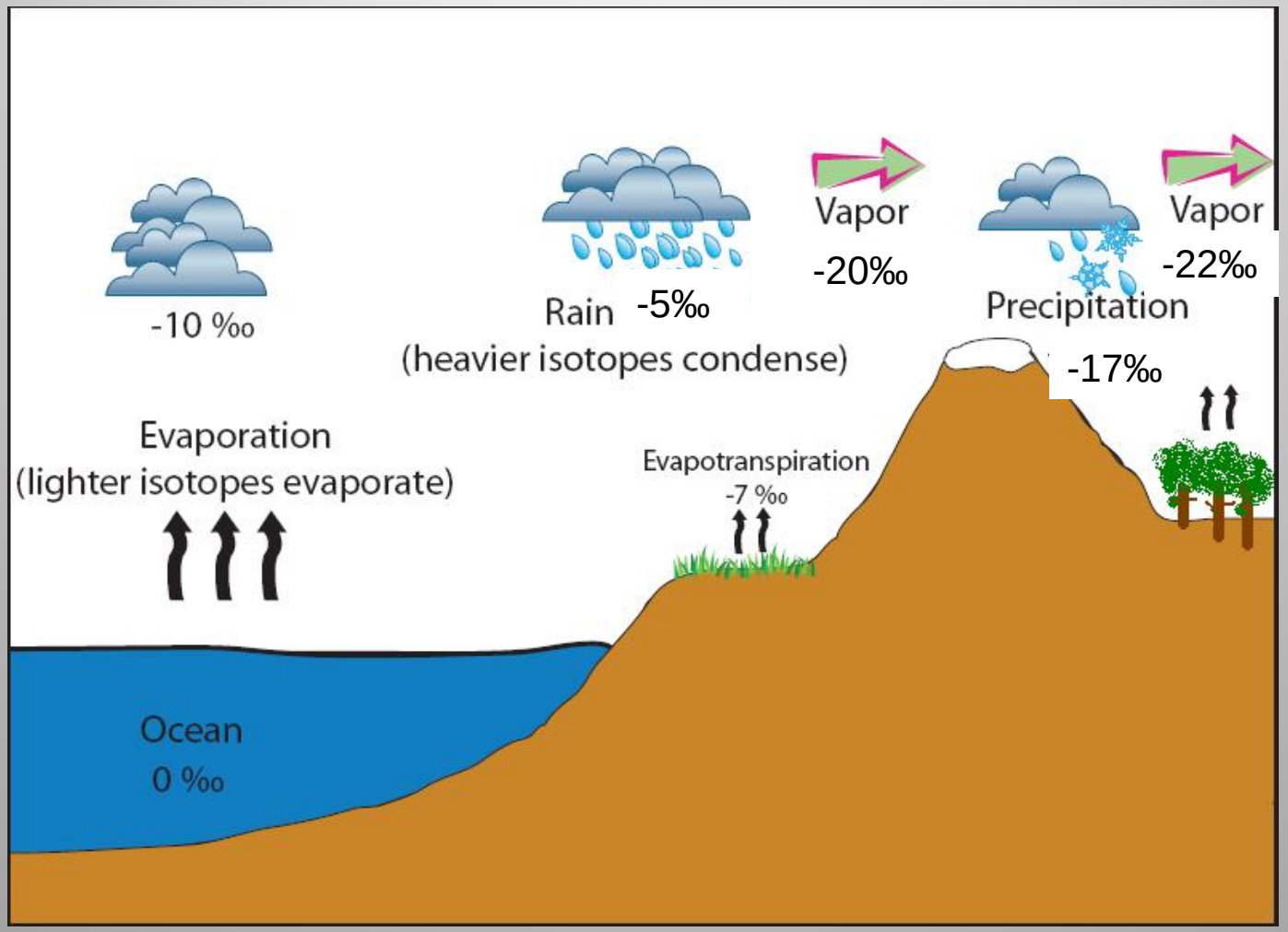


Sampling in headwater areas

- Limited sampling locations
- Sampled during extreme drought (May and Sept. of 2015)

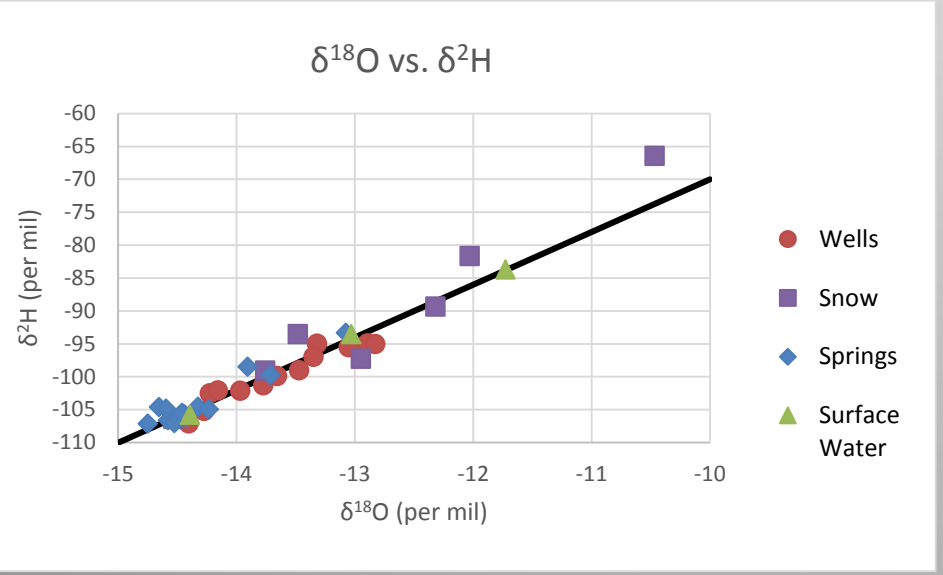


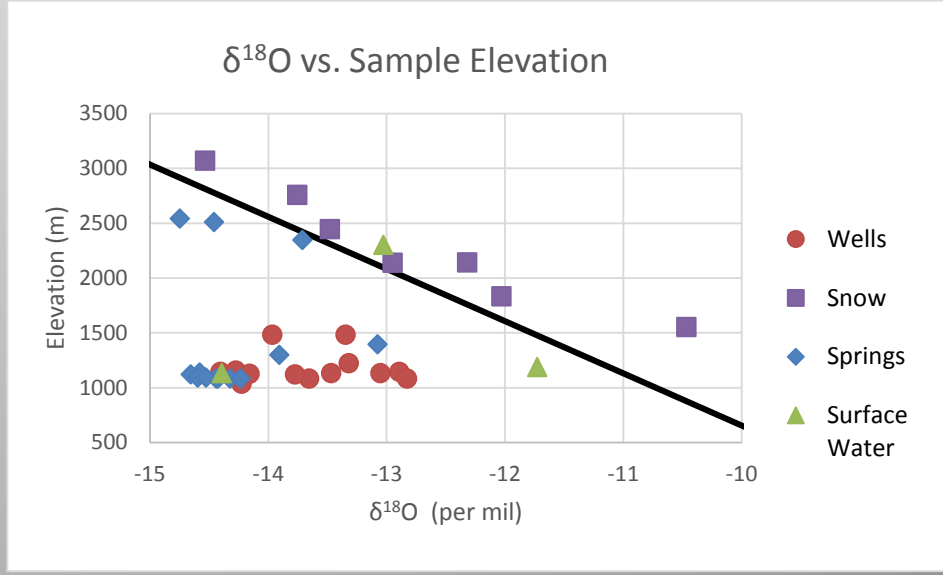
Stable isotope signature: How it works



Stable isotopes: recharge elevation

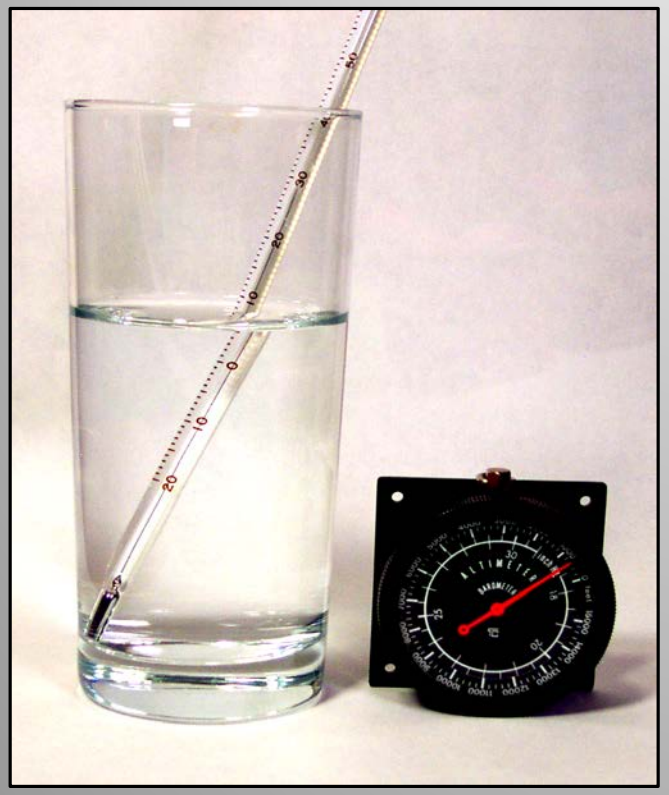
- All samples fall on or near the Global Meteoric Water Line
- No $\delta^{18}O$ results < -15‰
- Precipitation (snow) follows 'lapse rate' (from Rose et al., 1996)
- Points that fall below the line indicate a source area at higher elevation

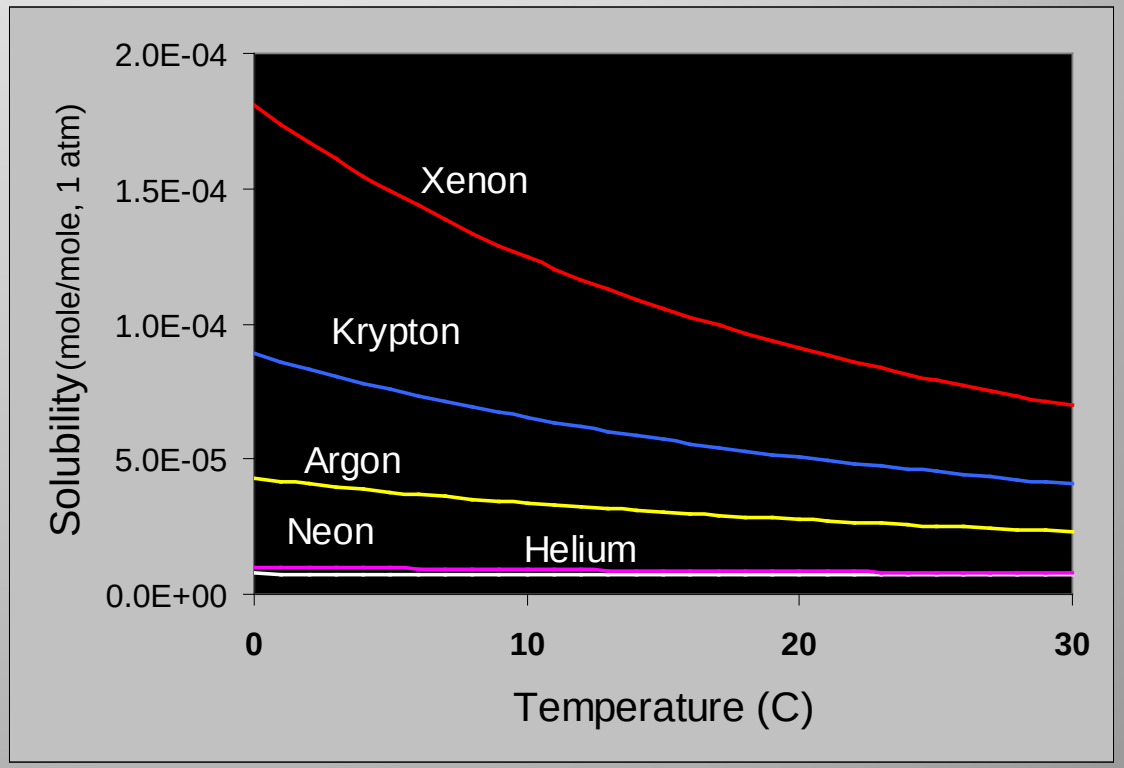




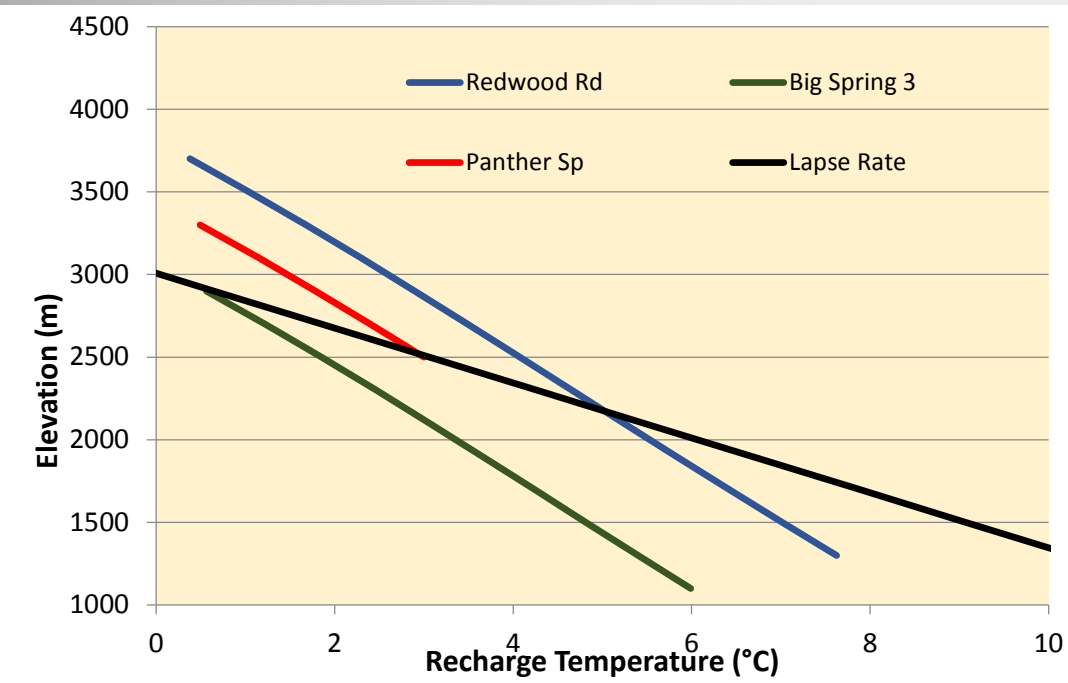
Noble gas signature: How it works

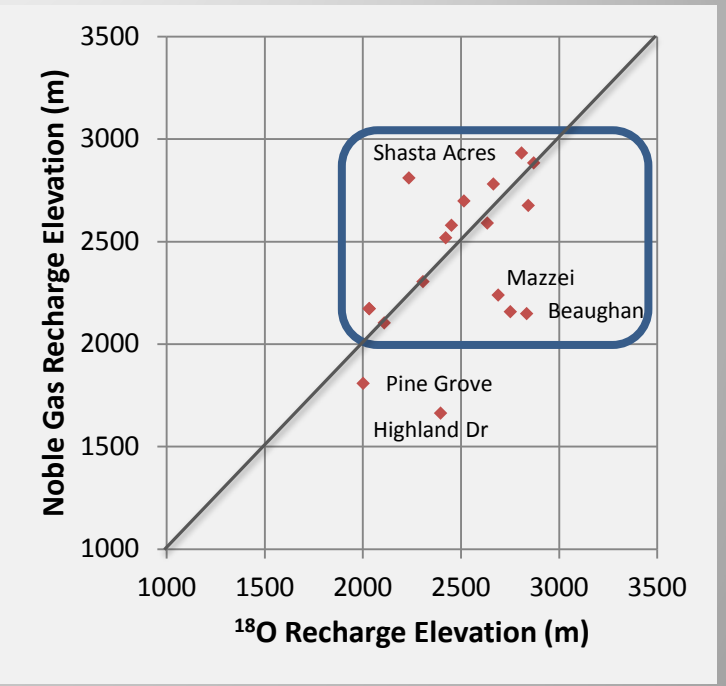
- Solubility depends on temperature and pressure
- Heavier gases have stronger T dependence





Noble gases: recharge elevation

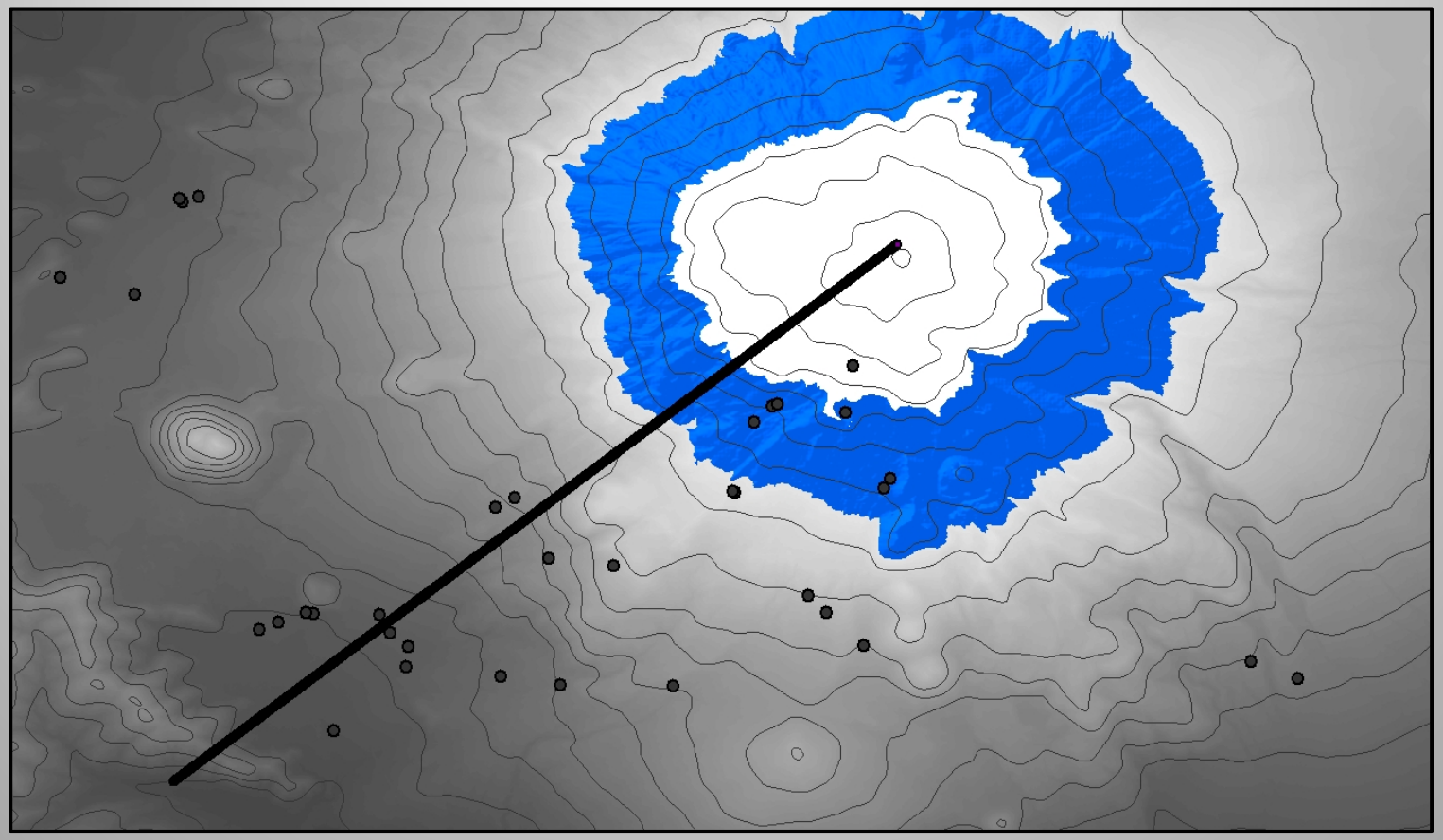




- 3 examples
- Constraints:
  - elevation (top of mountain to sampling elevation)
  - temperature (greater than 0°C, less than discharge temperature)

Good agreement between independent methods

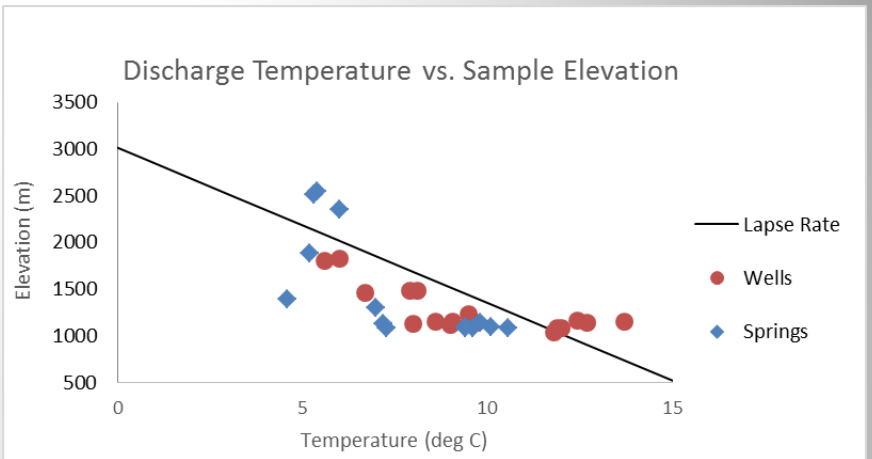
Delineating the recharge area

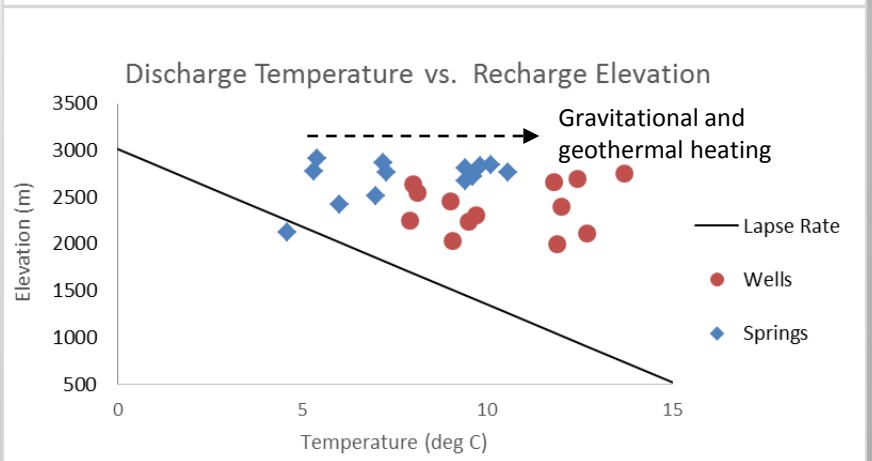


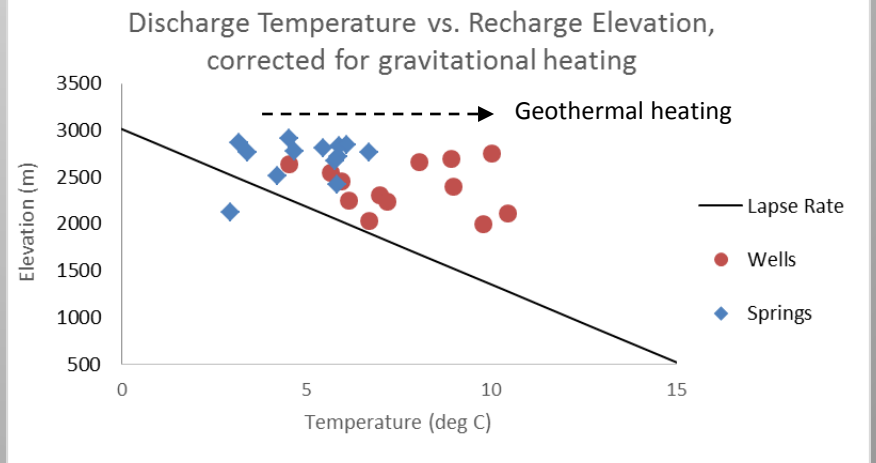
- Elevation range 2200-2800 m
- Do not observe signals from higher or lower elevations

Subsurface Heating

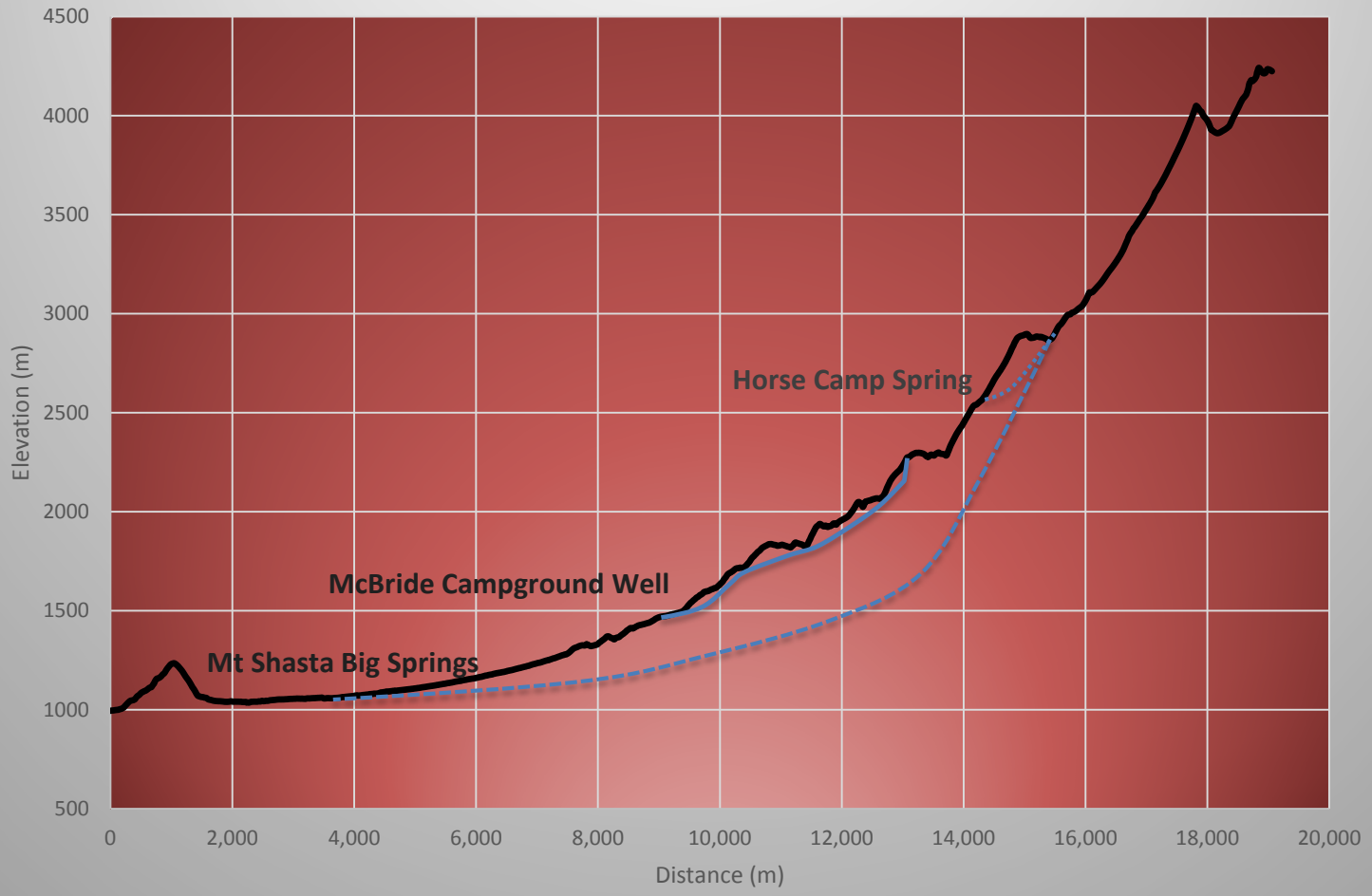
- The rate of change of thermal energy in a parcel of groundwater is the sum of (Manga and Kirchner, 2004):
  - gravitational potential energy dissipation
  - heat transfer to/from the surface by circulating water by conduction (negligible in this setting)
  - geothermal heating
- For a 8°C DT-RT difference and a geothermal gradient of 15°C/km, a maximum flow depth of appx. 500 m is calculated





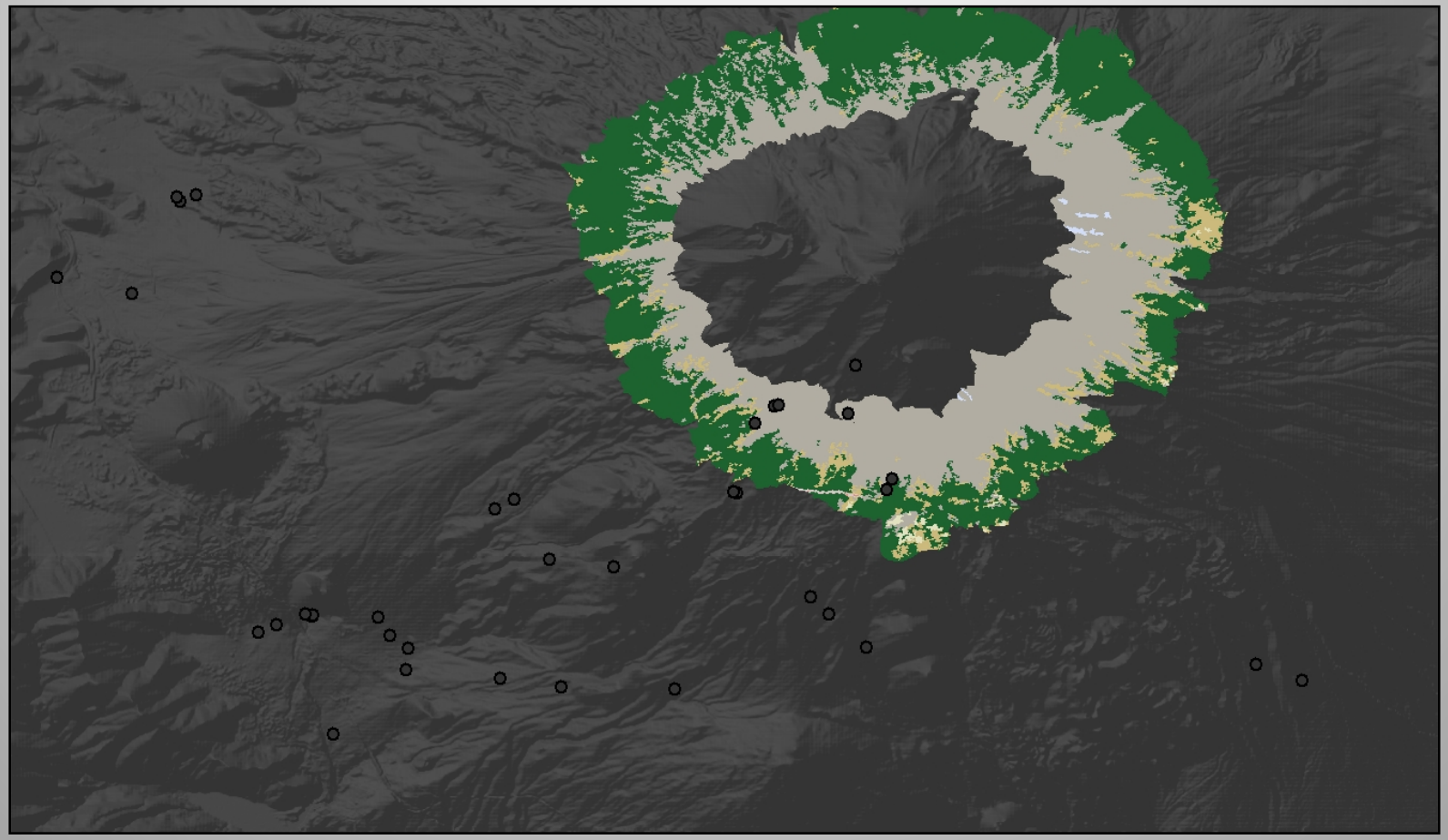


Delineating groundwater flow on Mount Shasta



4:1 VE

Land cover in the recharge area



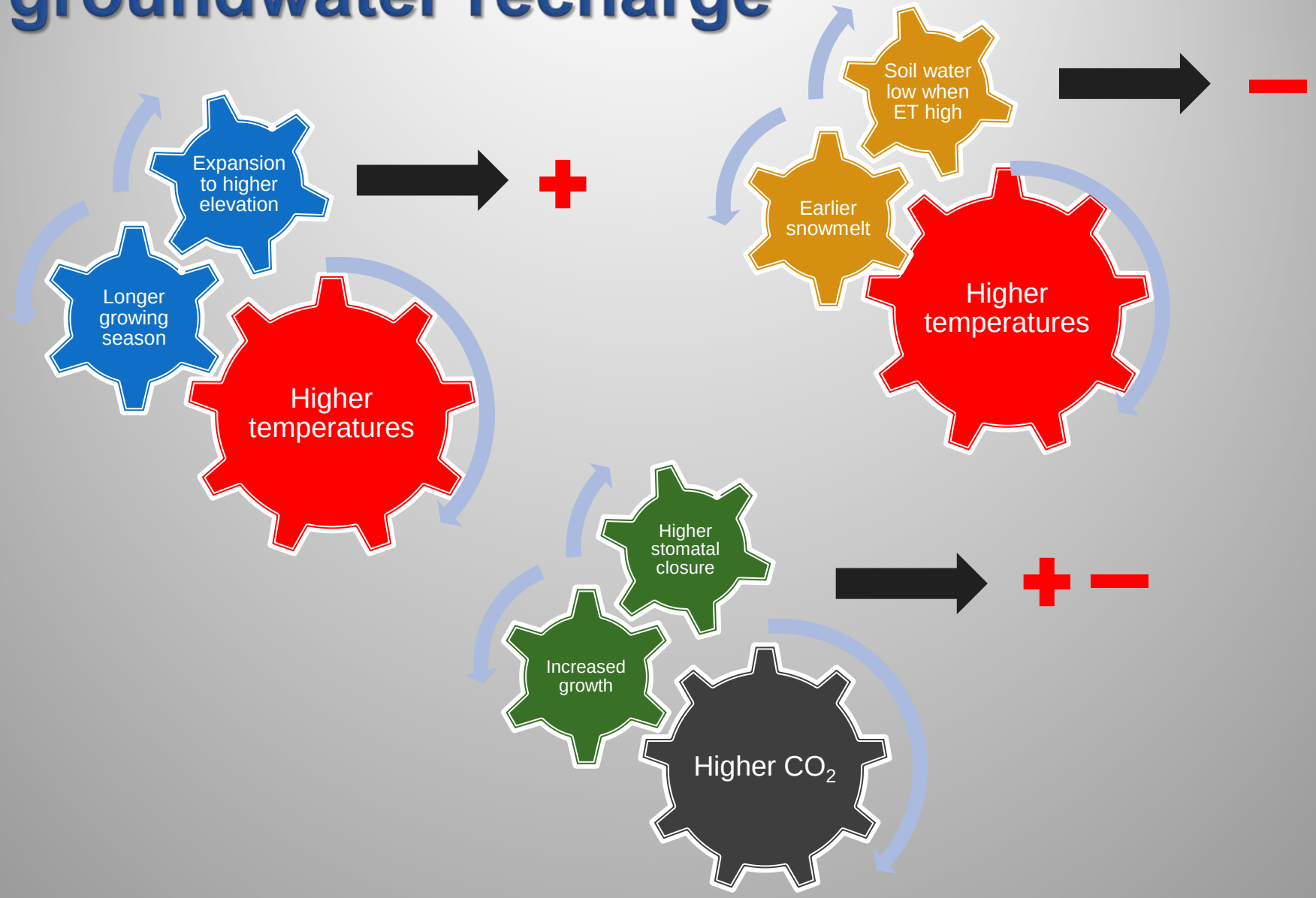
Forest ET likely plays a key role in limiting percolation and recharge

Coverage from: National Land Cover Dataset from the Multi-Resolution Land Characteristic Consortium, www.mrlc.gov, Homer, 2015

There may be a ‘sweet spot’ in tree coverage

- Too many trees
  - Increased ET
  - Decreased groundwater flow to streams
  - Insufficient openings for snow accumulation
- Too few trees
  - Increased runoff
  - Increased sediment
  - Increased stream temperature
  - Not enough shade to extend snowmelt season

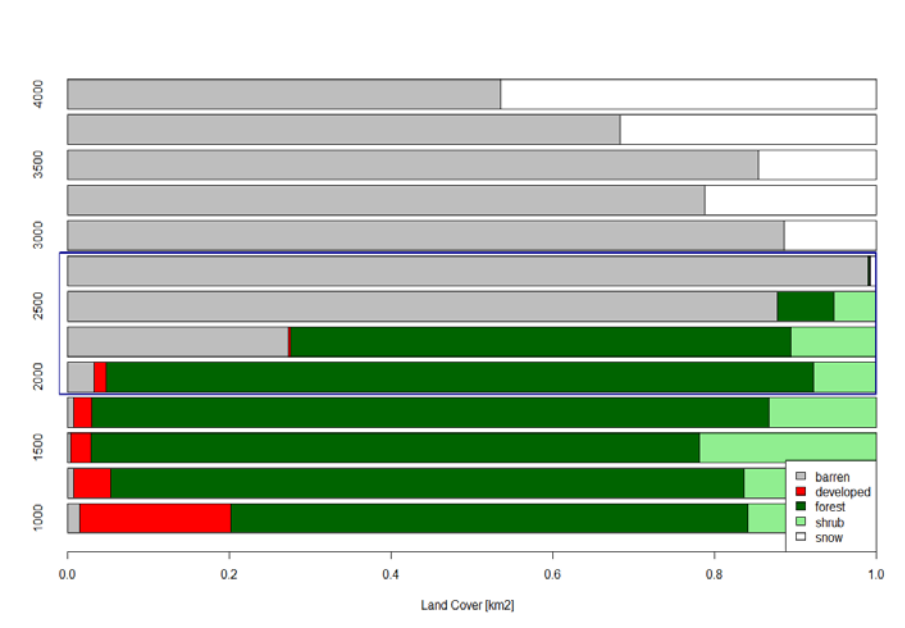
Effects of climate change on ET and groundwater recharge

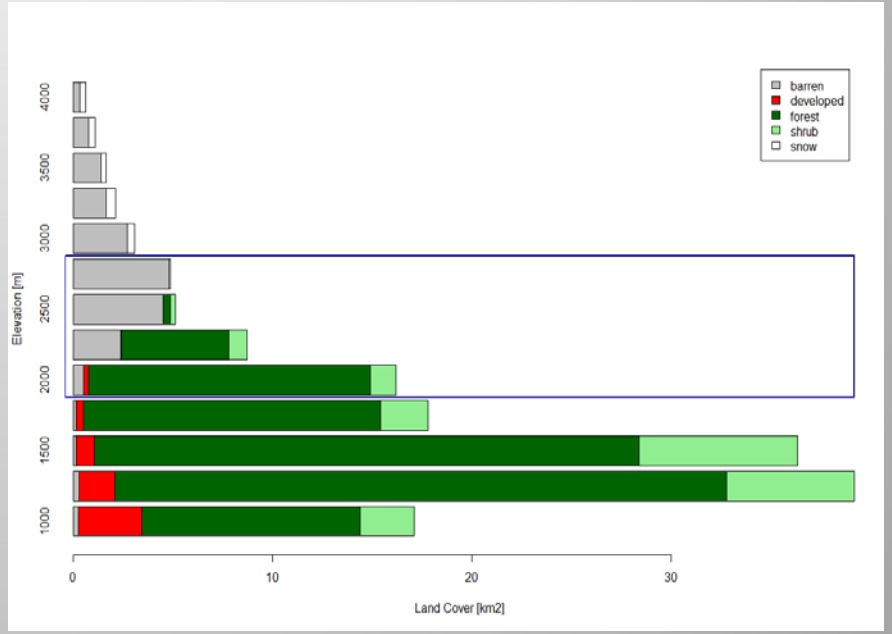


Conclusions

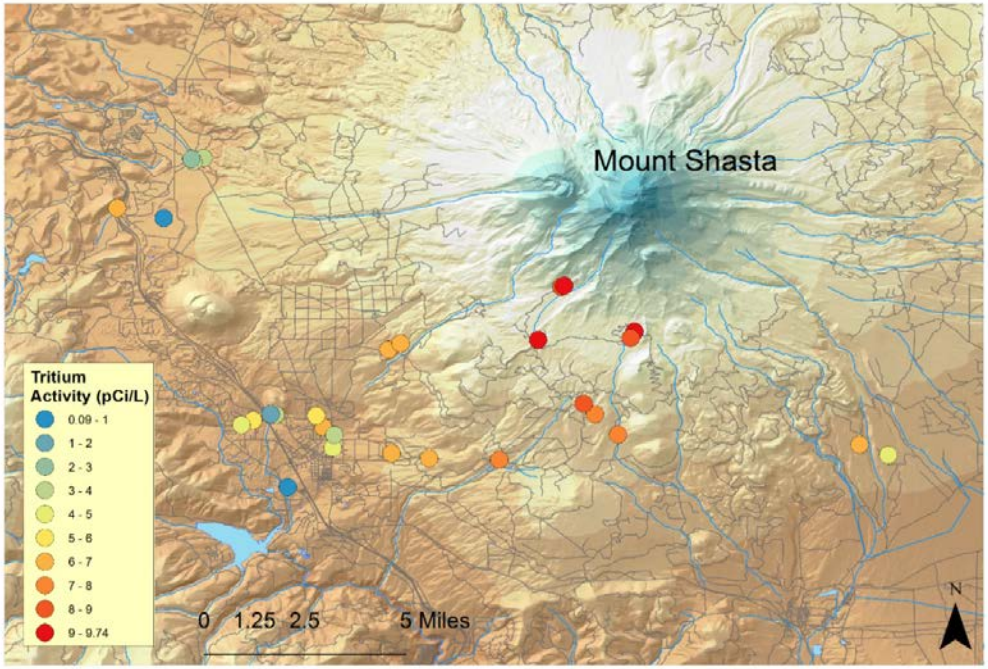
- Headwater areas provide critical late season flow and ecosystem functions
- On Mount Shasta, stable isotopes and noble gas recharge temperatures indicate that recharge occurs predominantly over the elevation range 2200-2900 m (7200 ft to 9500 ft)
- Higher elevations are disproportionately represented because of high precipitation rates and low evapotranspiration over bare ground

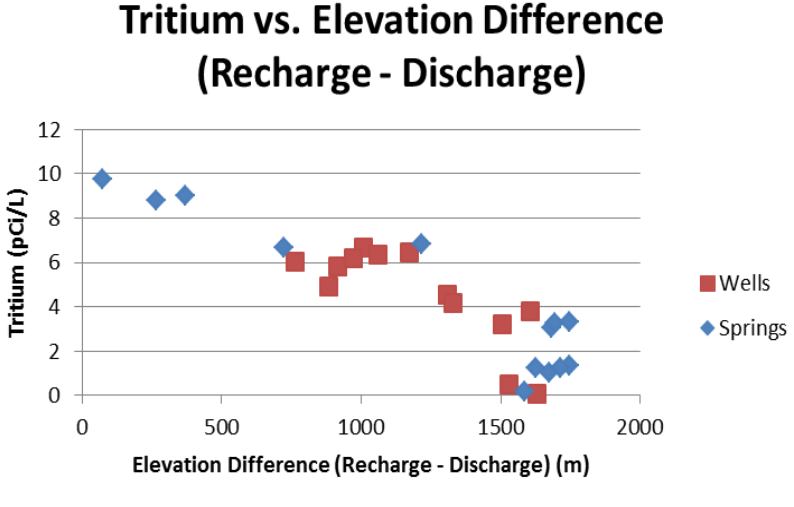
Relationships between elevation and land cover/area

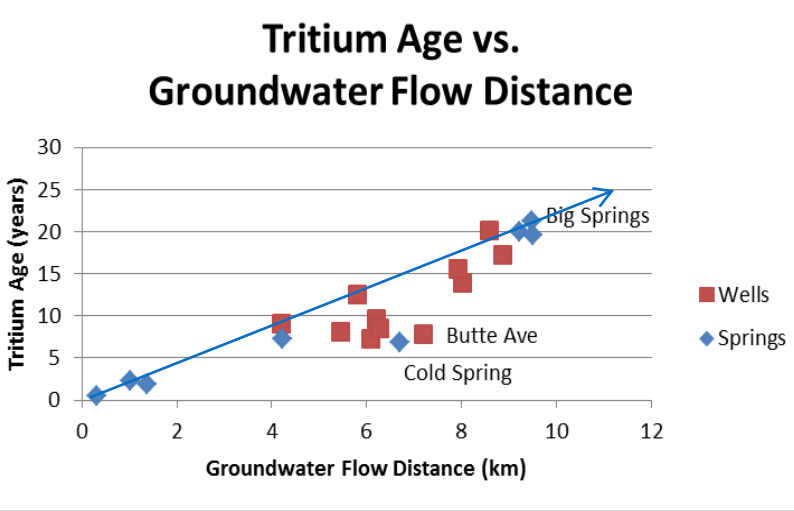




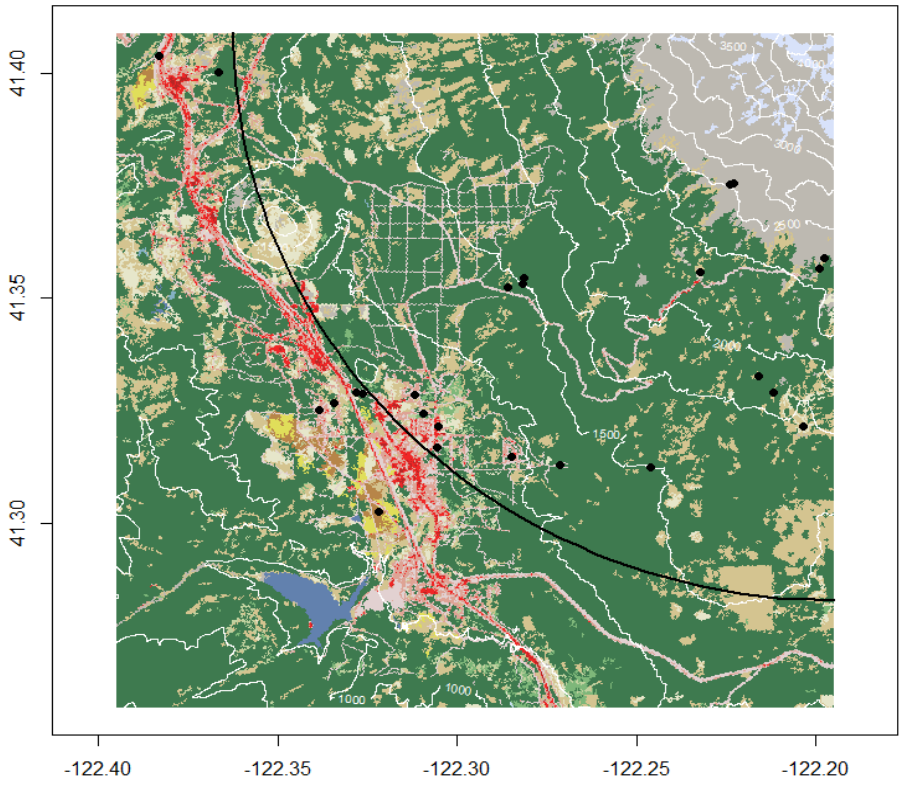
Groundwater ages and flow rates







Land coverage, ET, and recharge



- How much of the melting snow goes to ET instead of infiltrating?
- Changes due to warming climate?

Coverage from: National Land Cover Dataset from the Multi-Resolution Land Characteristic Consortium, www.mrlc.gov, Homer, 2015