The Role of Soils in Characterizing the Hydrology of California

Alan Flint and Lorrie Flint
U.S. Geological Survey
California Water Science Center
Sacramento, CA

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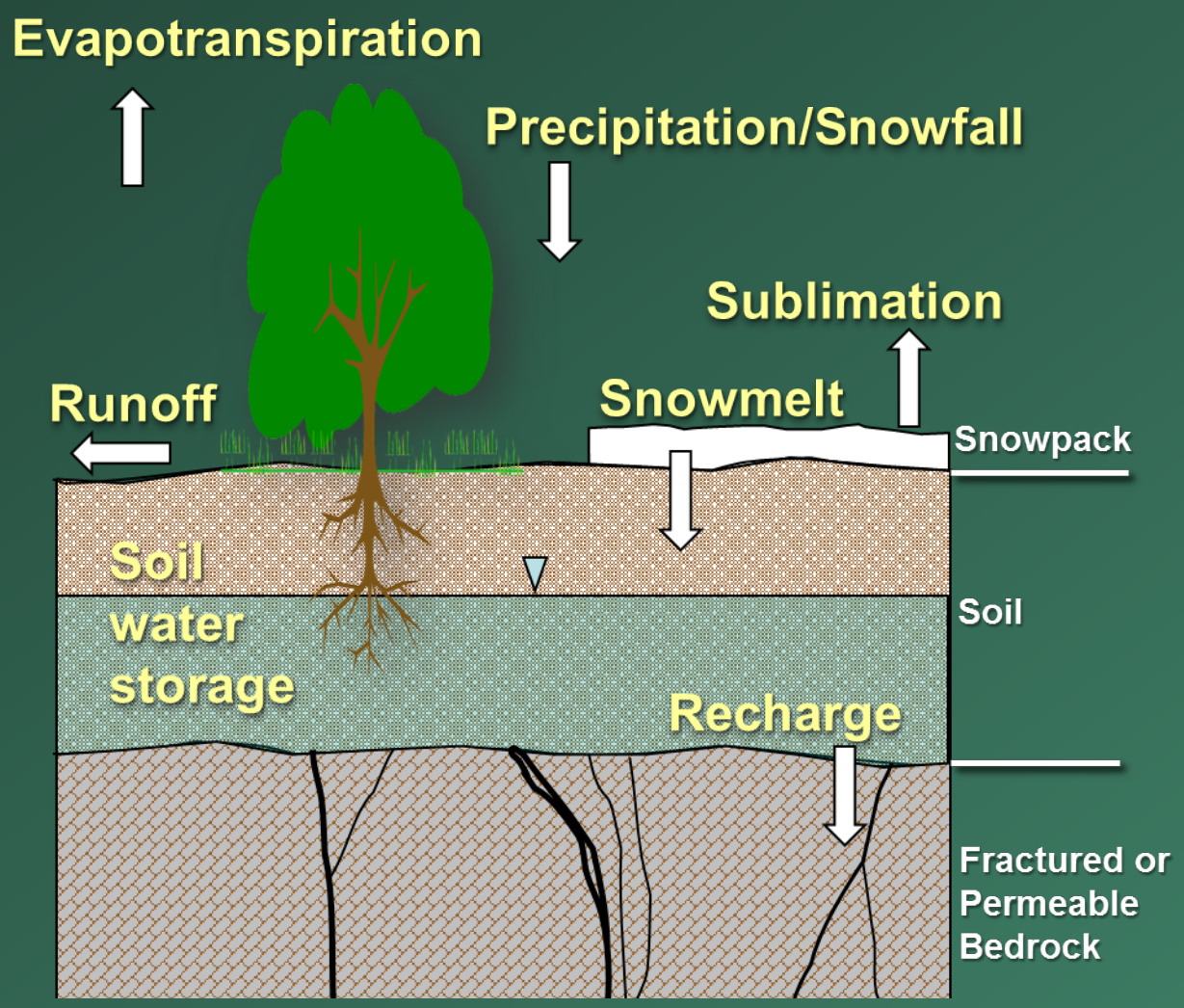
Estimating Recharge

- Recharge is difficult to accurately estimate
- Hydrologic modeling typically makes recharge the error term
- Water balance modeling can be used to improve estimates with calibration of all hydrologic components

Outline of talk

- **Water balance**
- **Conceptualizing a simple water balance model that describes hydrologic processes across large regions**
- **Model refinements to improve water balance and recharge**
  - **PET**
  - **Snow parameterization**
  - **Soil properties**
  - **Vegetation seasonality and actual evapotranspiration**
  - **Groundwater flow modeling**

The Water Balance



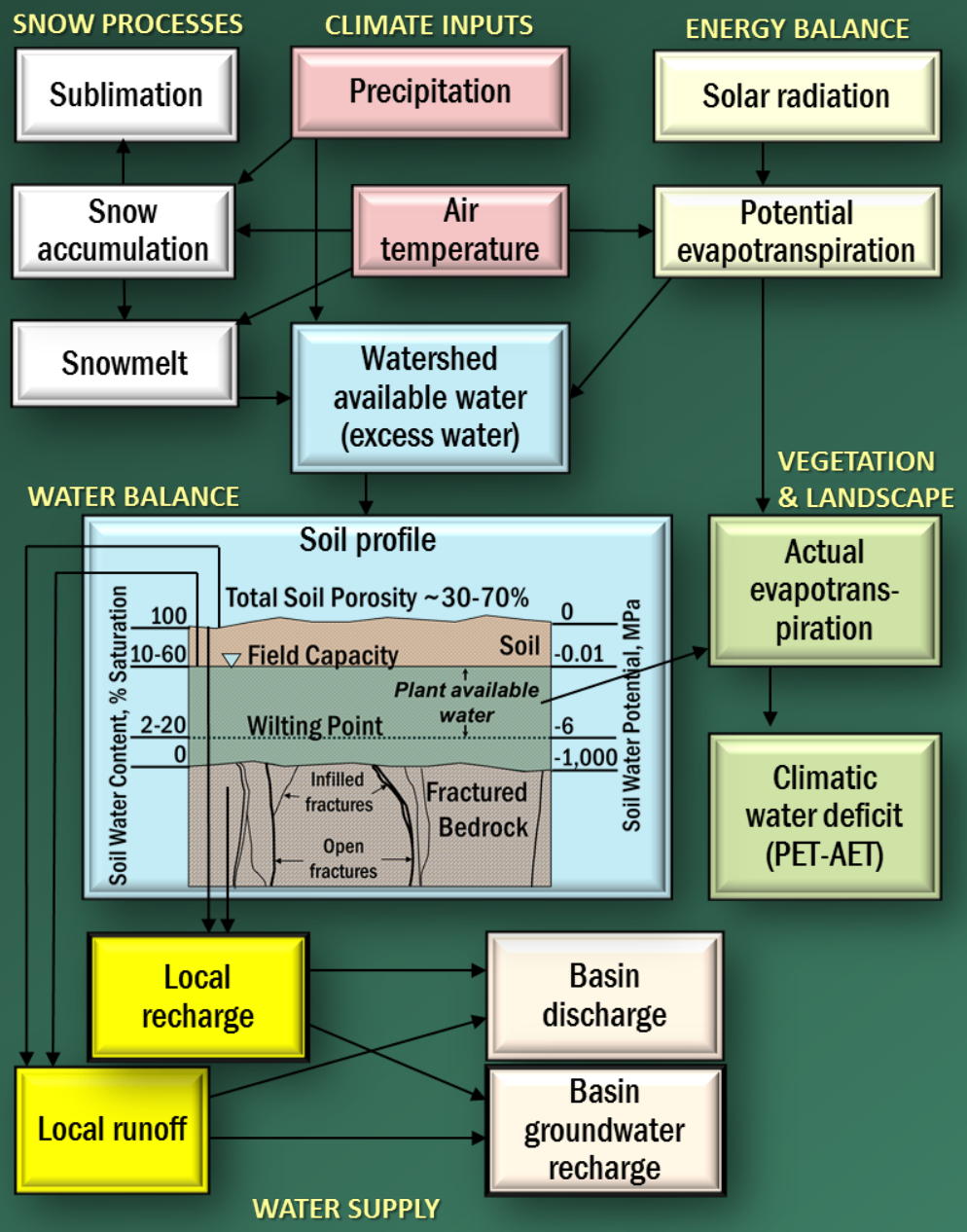
Precipitation = Evapotranspiration + Runoff + Sublimation + Recharge + ▲Soil Water Content

Transient regional scale modeling for the southwest

- Develop a model for basin characterization based on the conceptual model
- Geospatial dataset of the physical and climatic setting
  - Digital Elevation Model
  - Geology
  - Soils
  - Potential Evapotranspiration
  - Air Temperature
  - Precipitation

Basin Characterization Model

The soil profile is central to calculating the water balance



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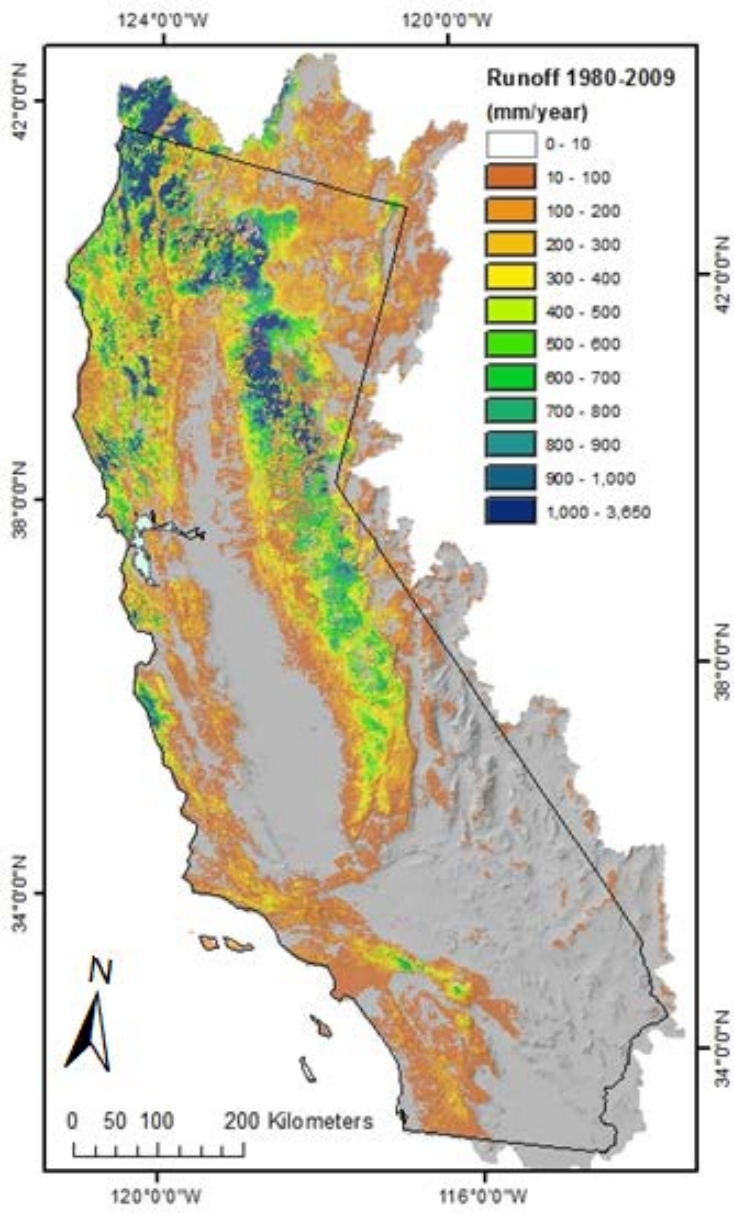
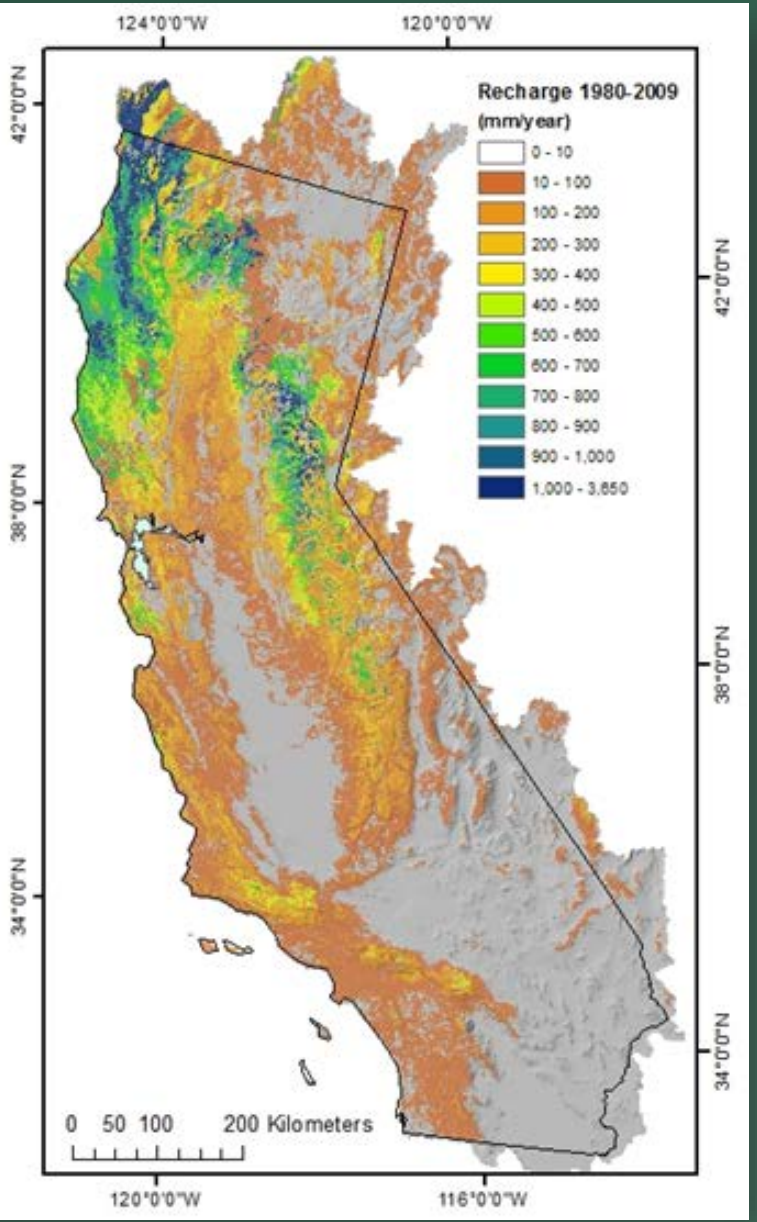
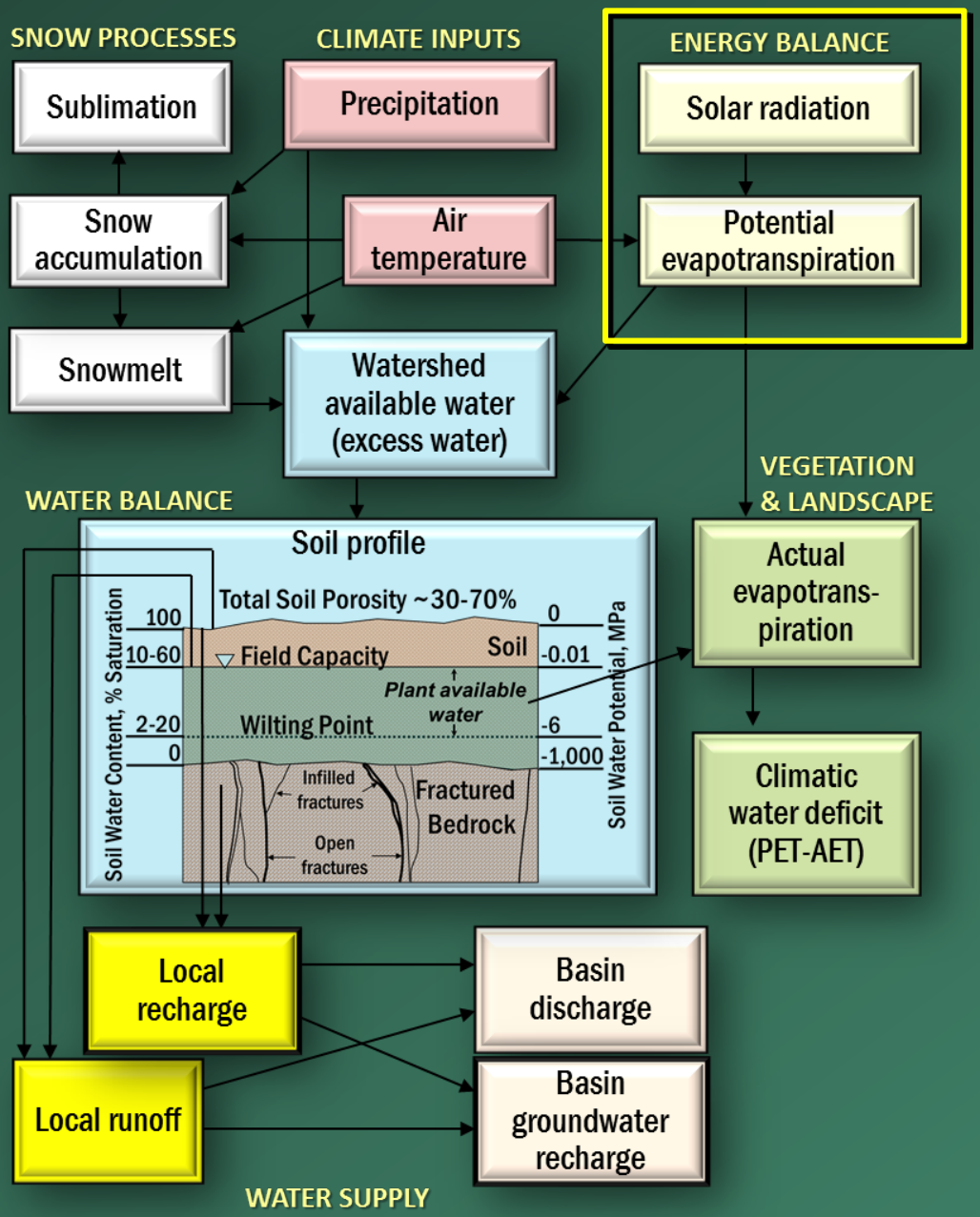
Runoff



Recharge



Basin Characterization Model



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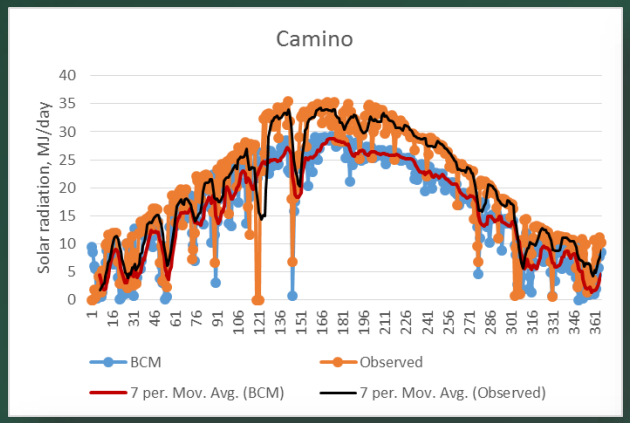
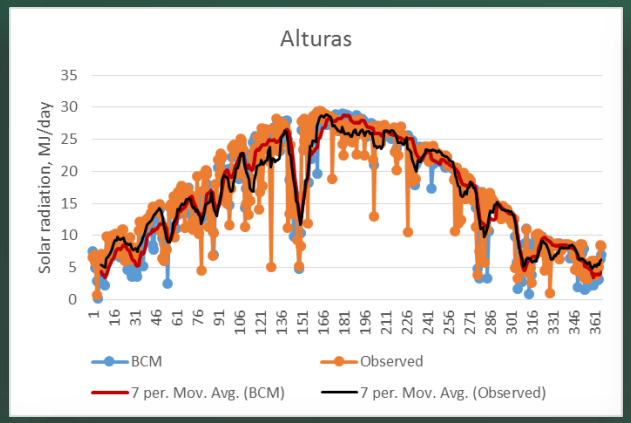
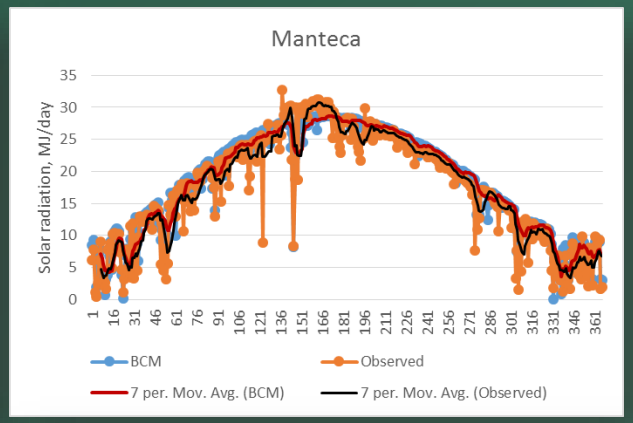
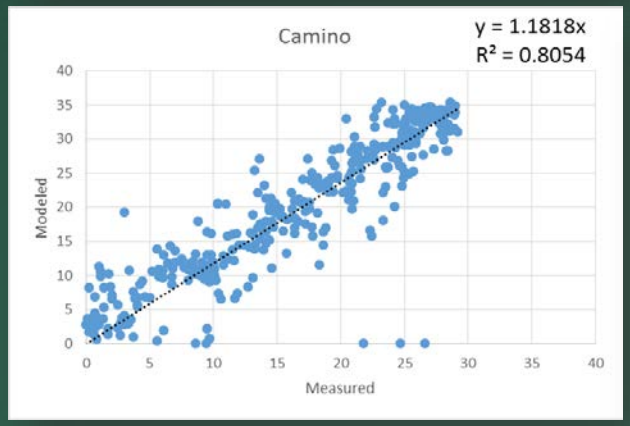
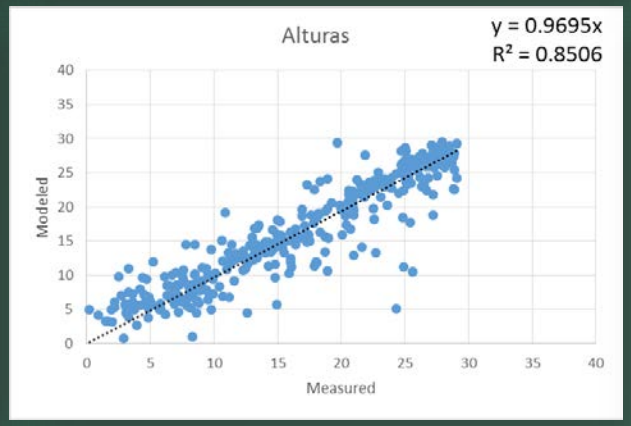
Solar Radiation

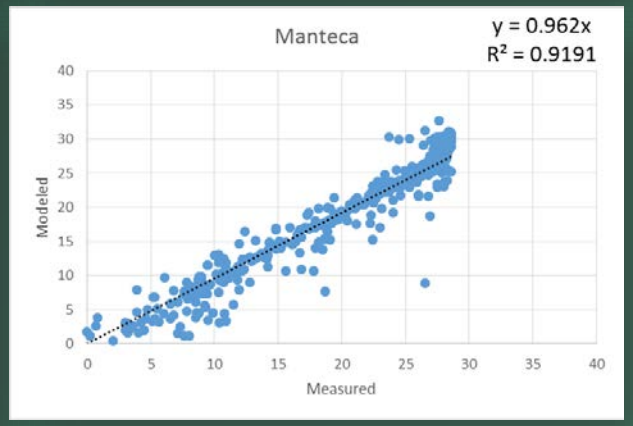




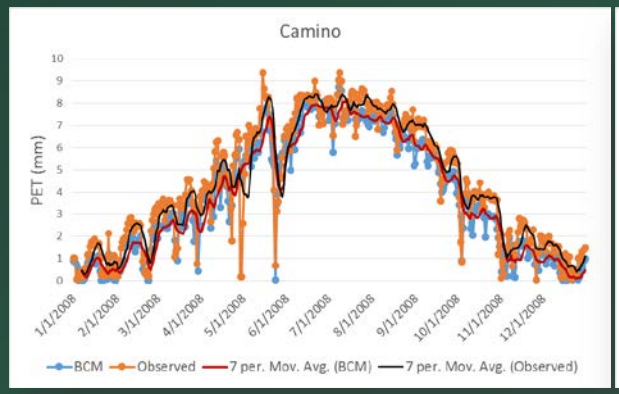


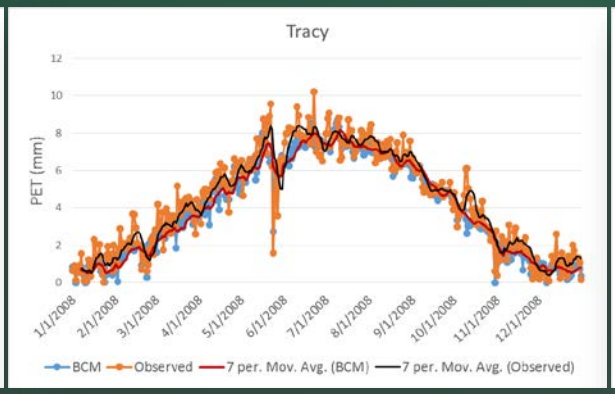


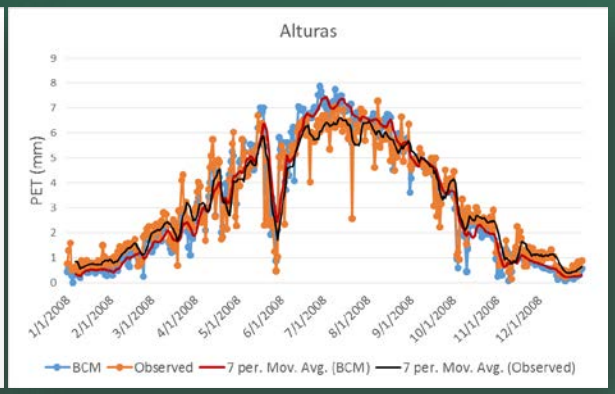


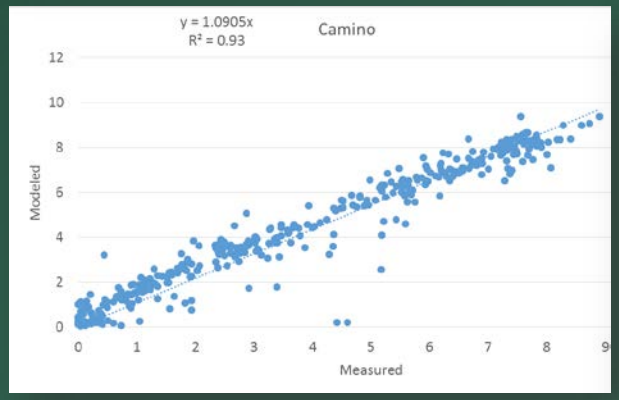


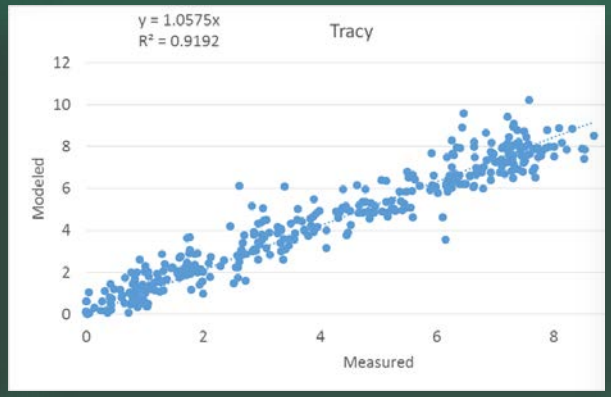
Daily Potential Evapotranspiration

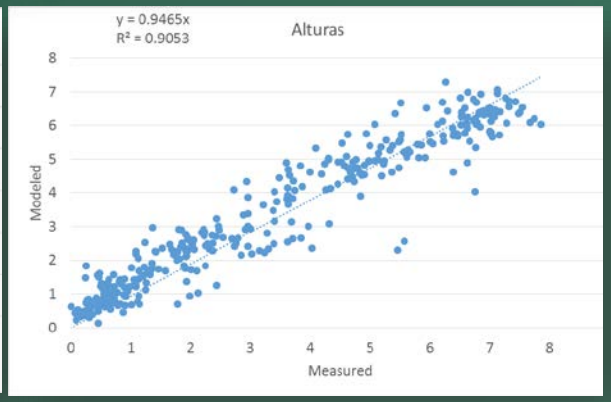




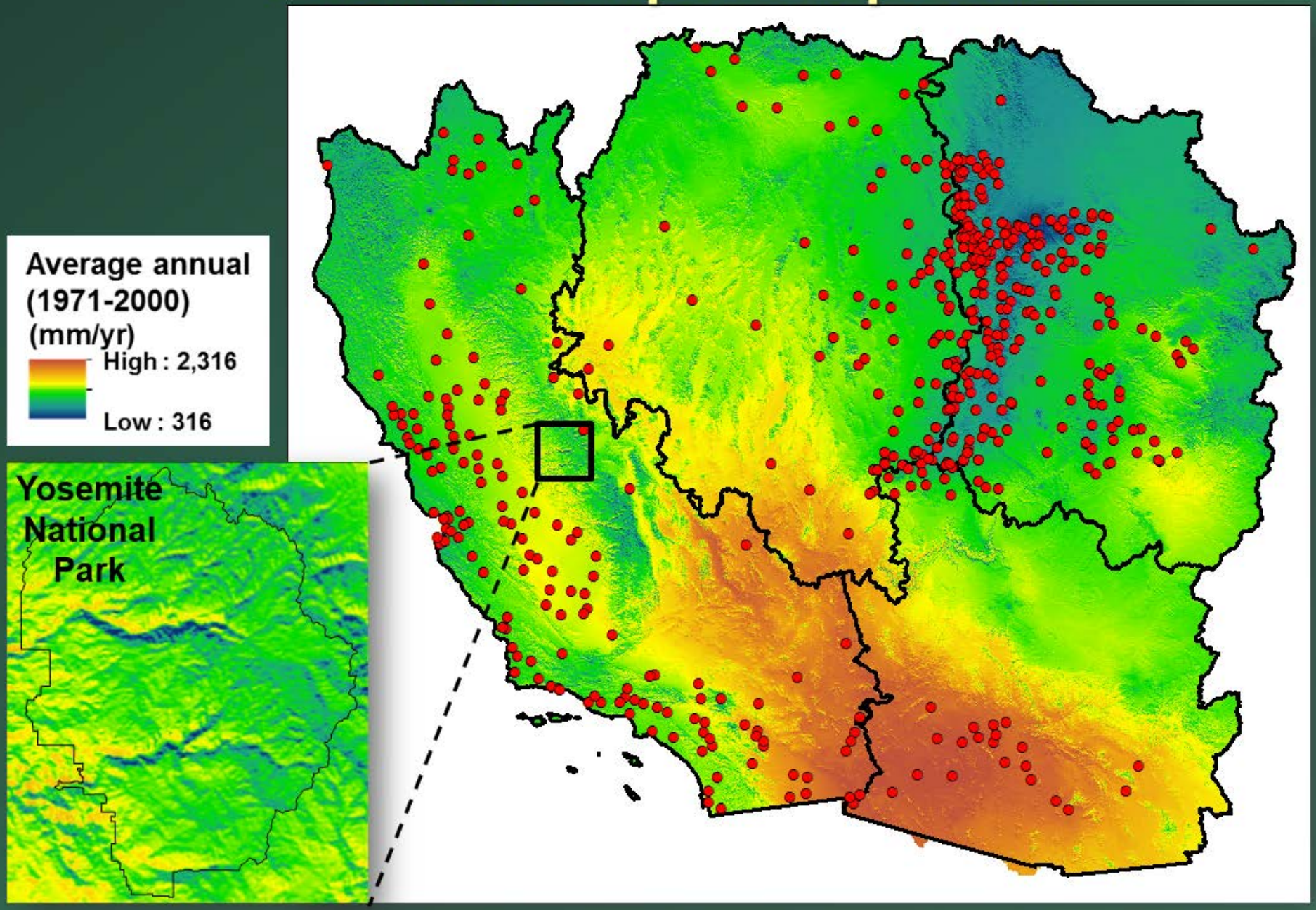


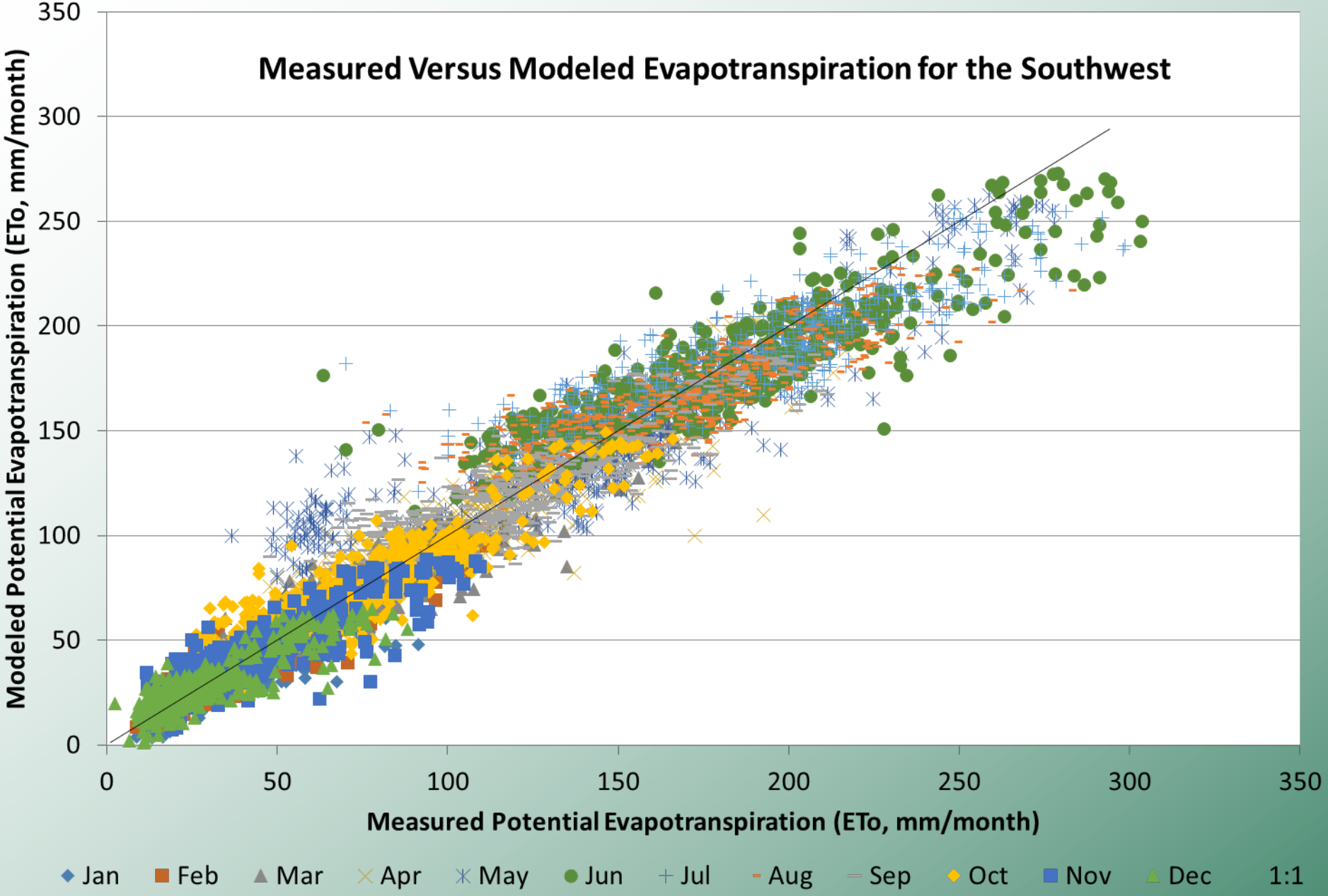




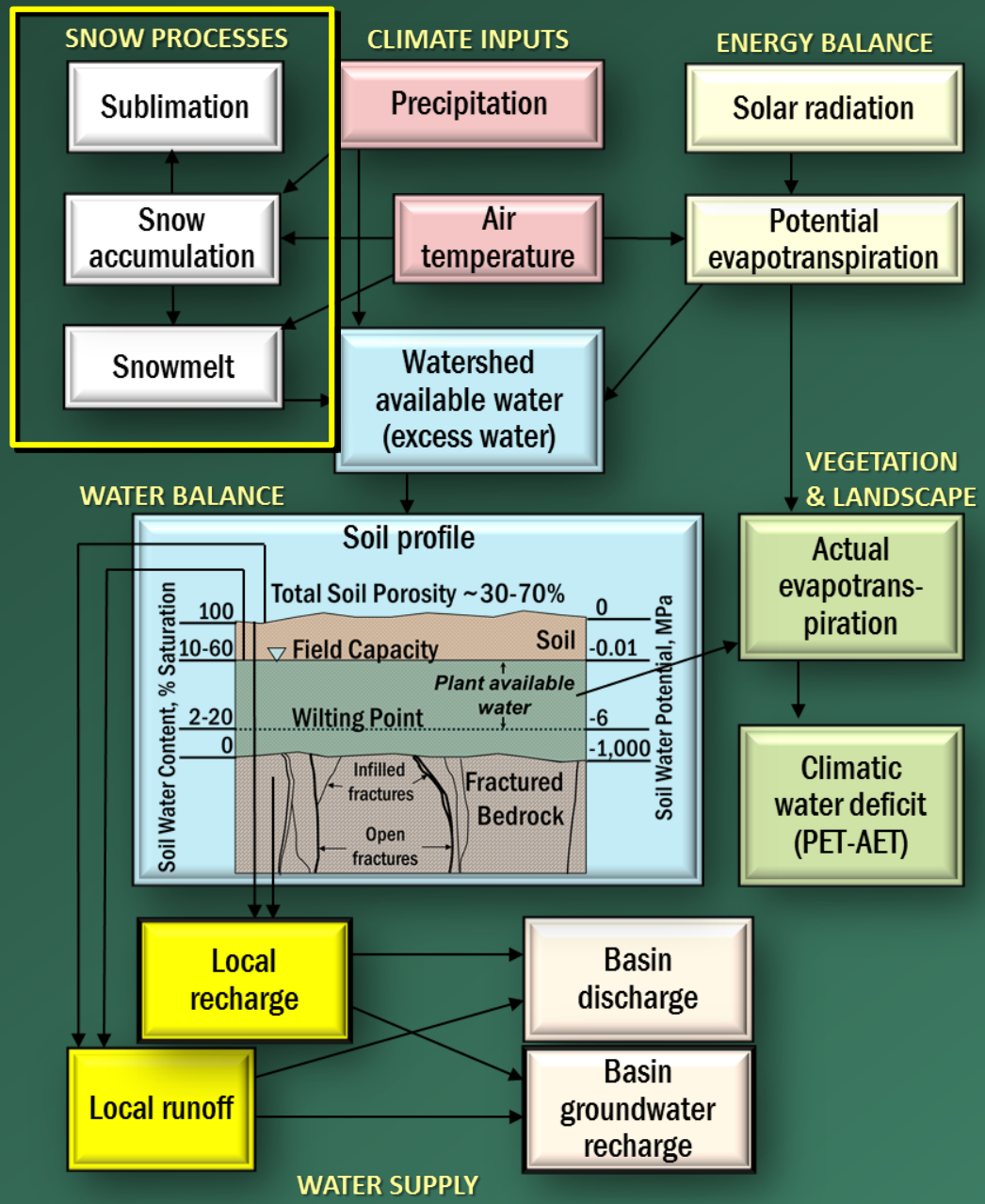


Potential Evapotranspiration




Measured Versus Modeled Evapotranspiration for the Southwest
Modeled Potential Evapotranspiration (ETo, mm/month)
Measured Potential Evapotranspiration (ETo, mm/month)
0
50
100
150
200
250
300
350
Jan
Feb
Mar
Apr
May
Jun
Jul
Aug
Sep
Oct
Nov
Dec
1:1

Basin Characterization Model



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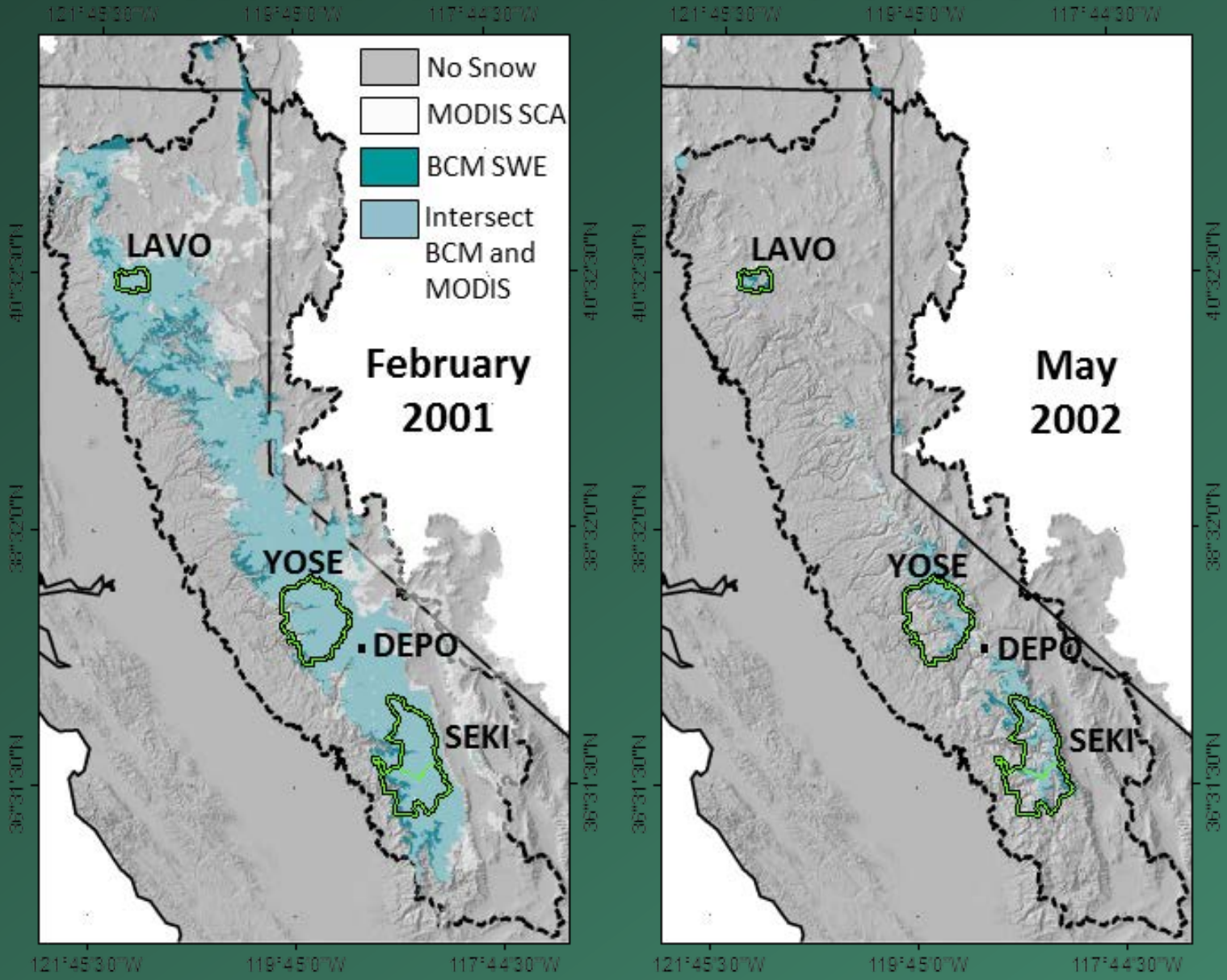
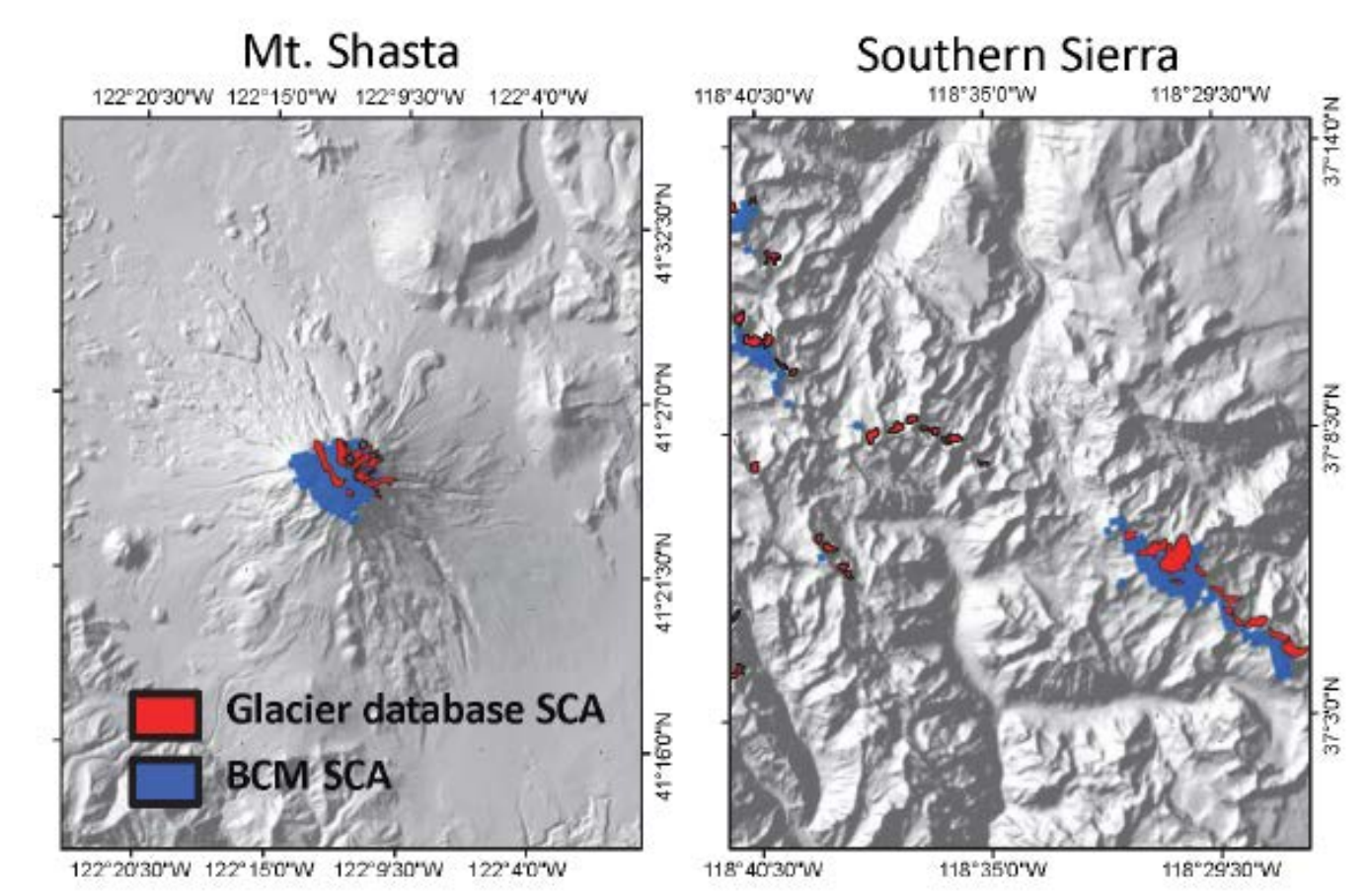
Snow covered area: accumulation and melt seasons

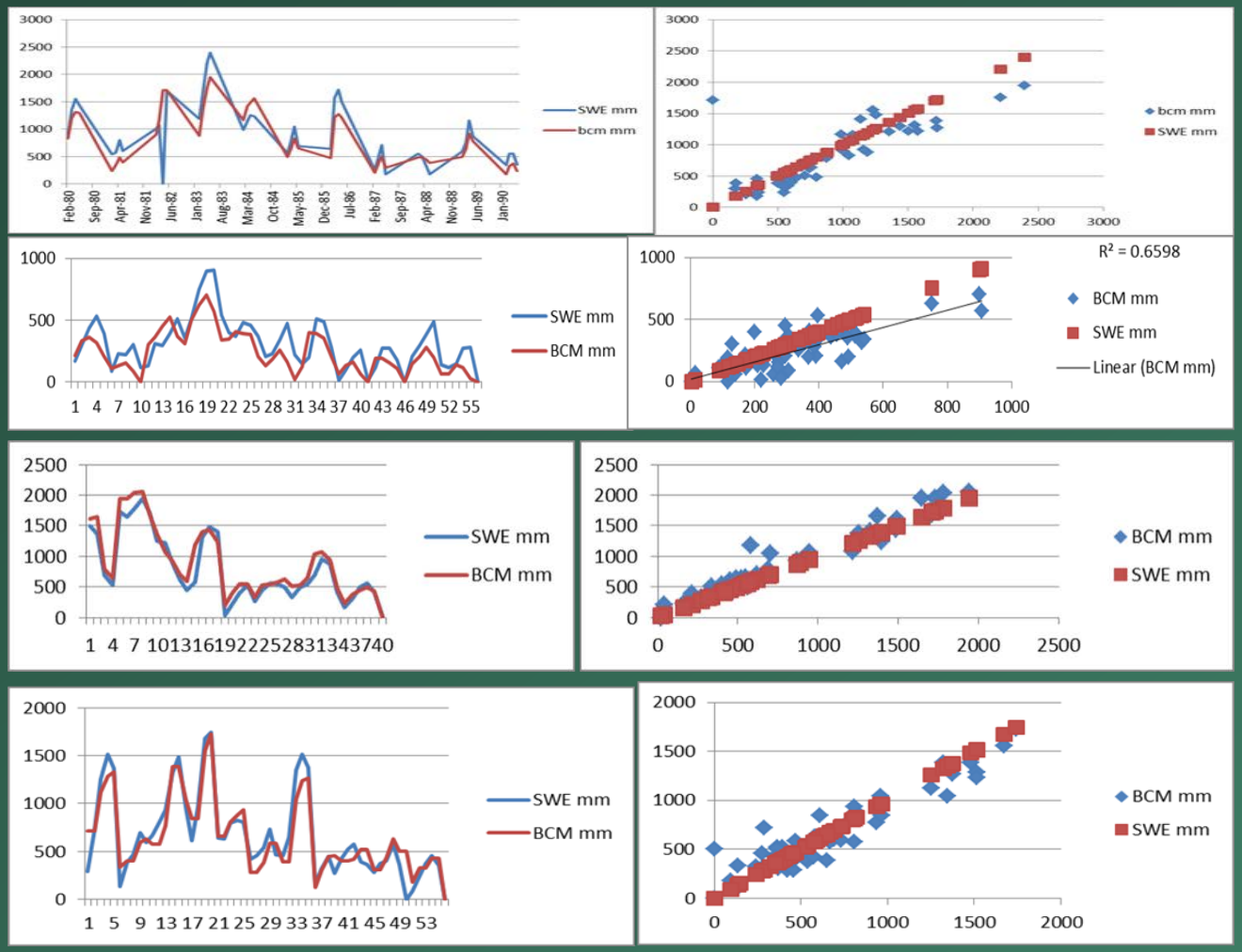


Year round snow: glaciers



NWS Snow 17 Parameter Calibration
Spatially distributing coefficients (87 courses)

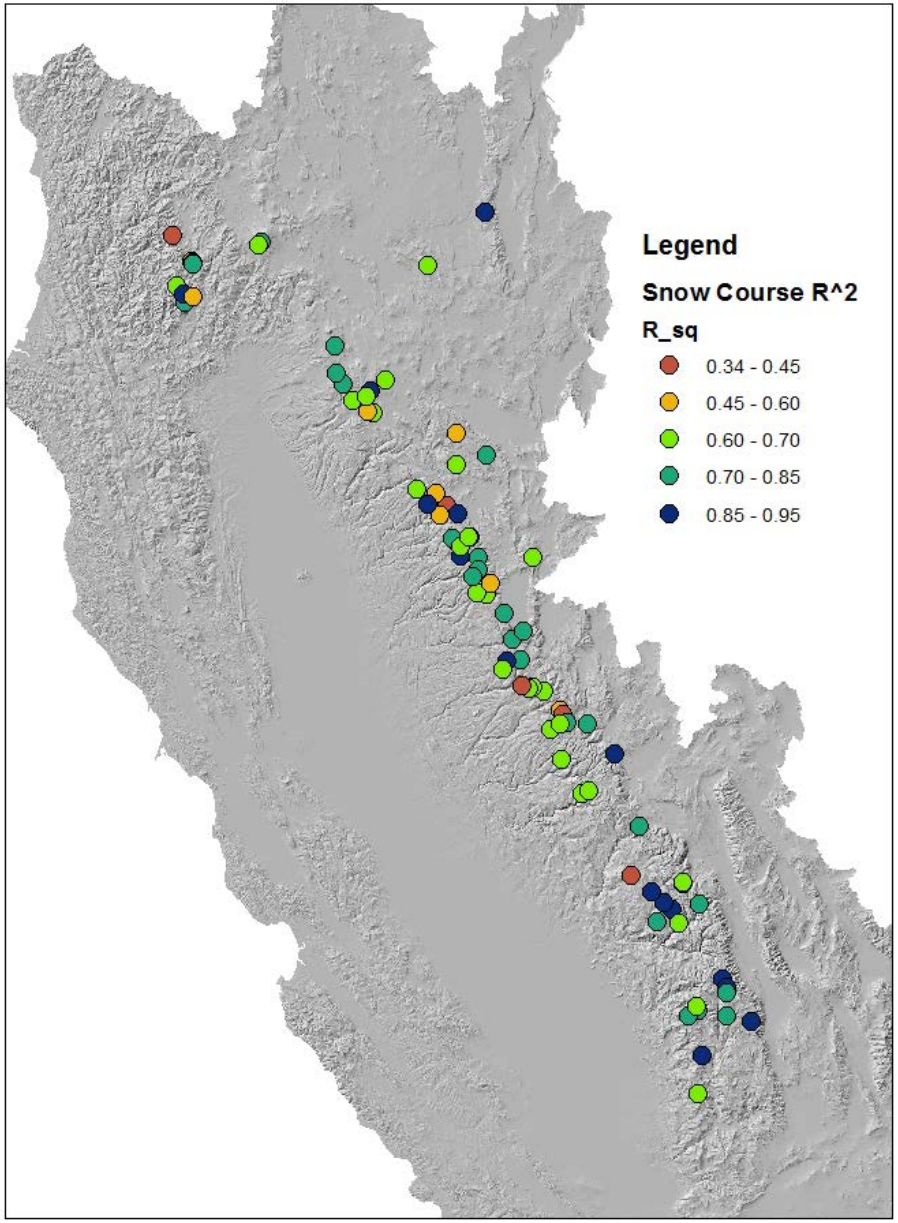
SWE, mm/month



Measured SWE

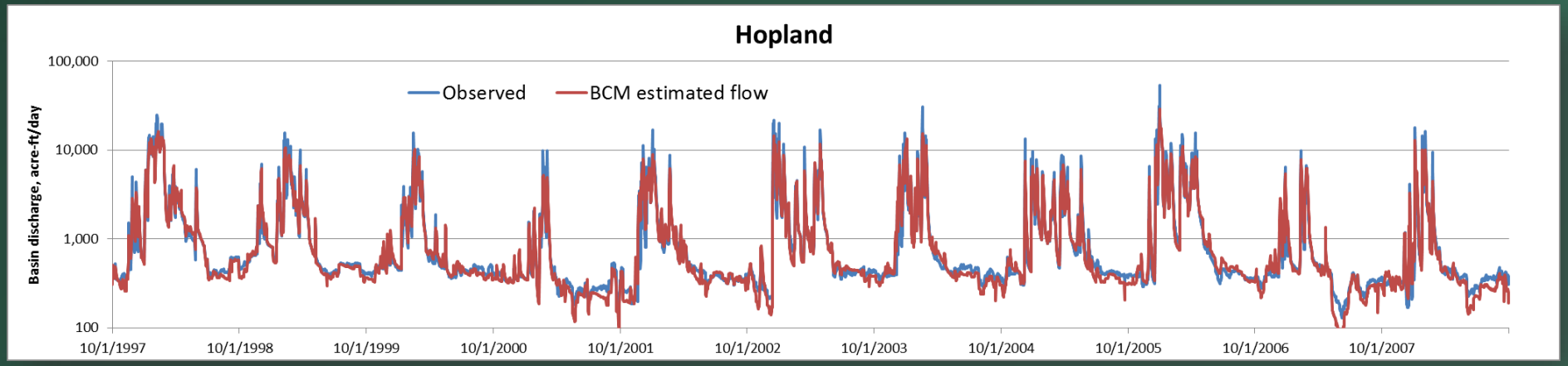
10 years →

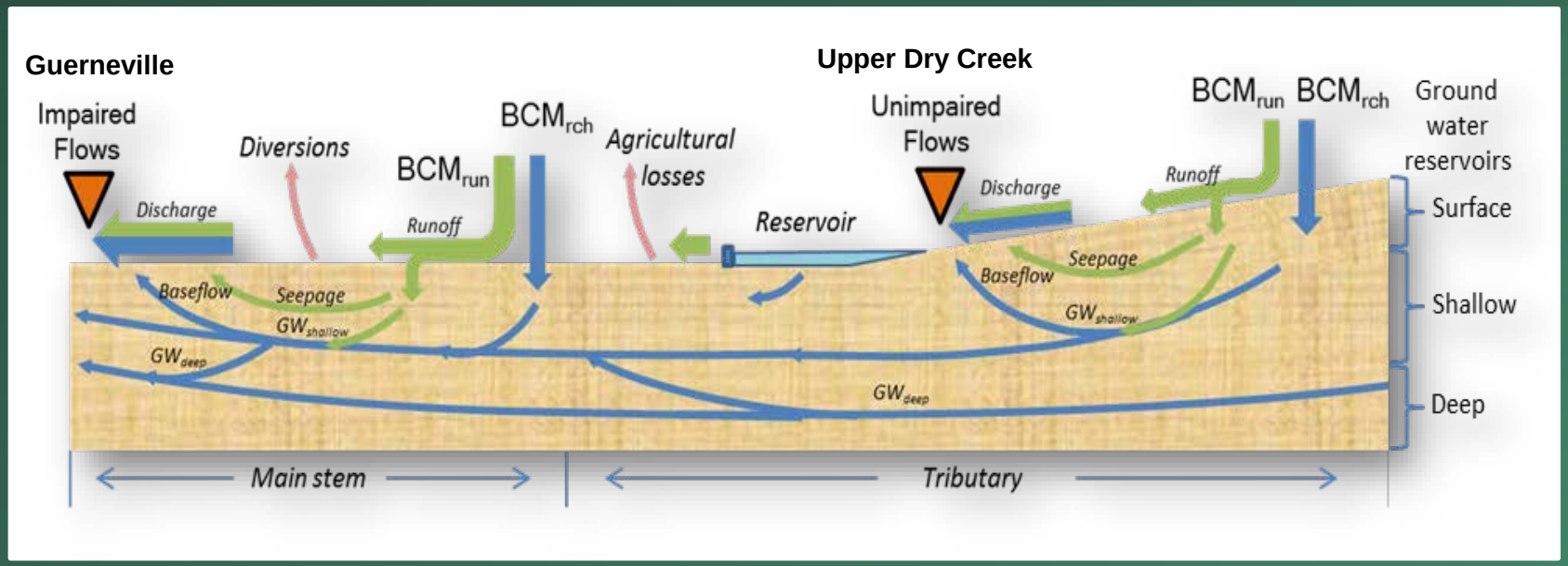
Modeled SWE



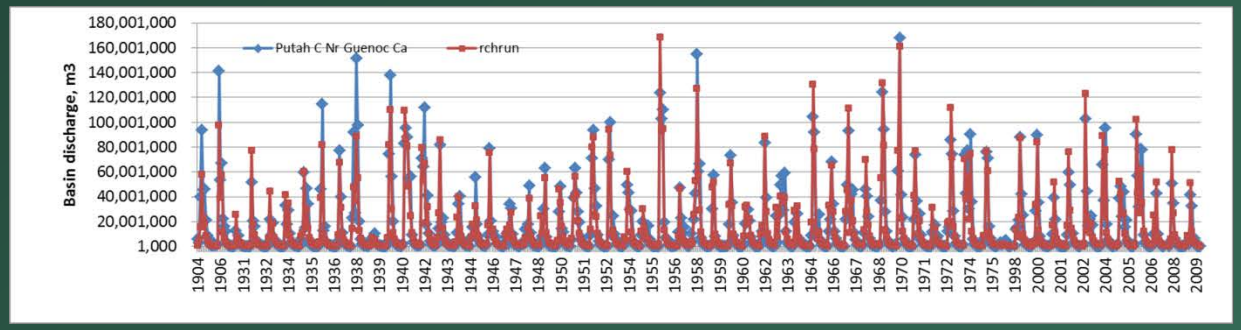
Spatially distributing snow accumulation and melt parameters to capture the range of snow conditions throughout California

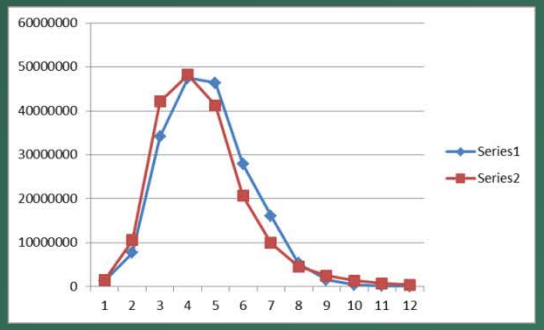
Calculating Basin Discharge from Recharge and Runoff to Match Streamflow Measurements

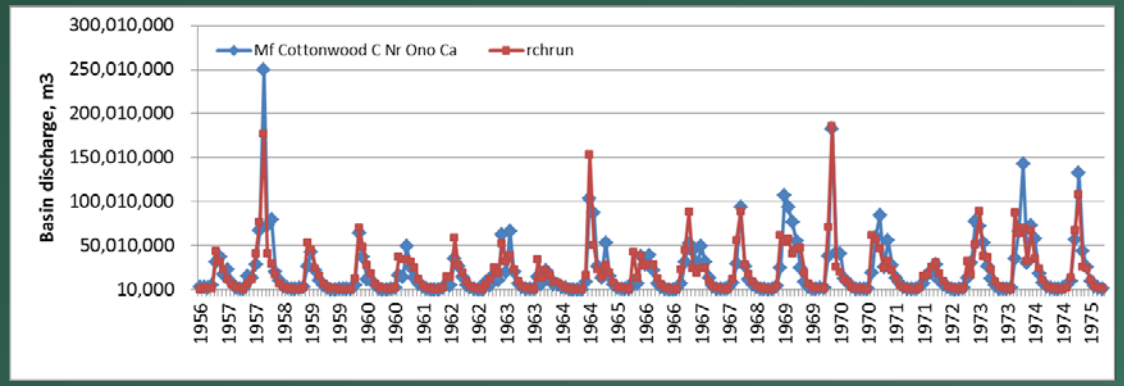


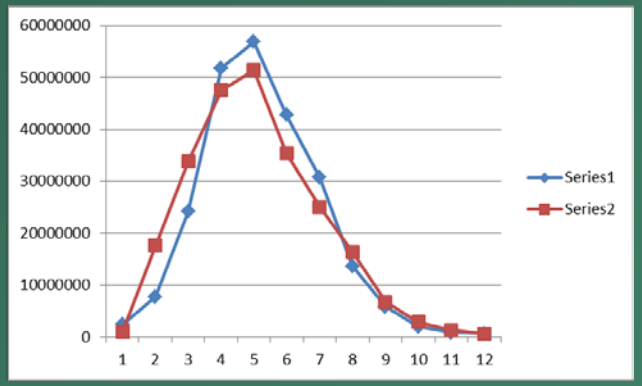


Seasonal Timing of Runoff for Proofing Snow Module

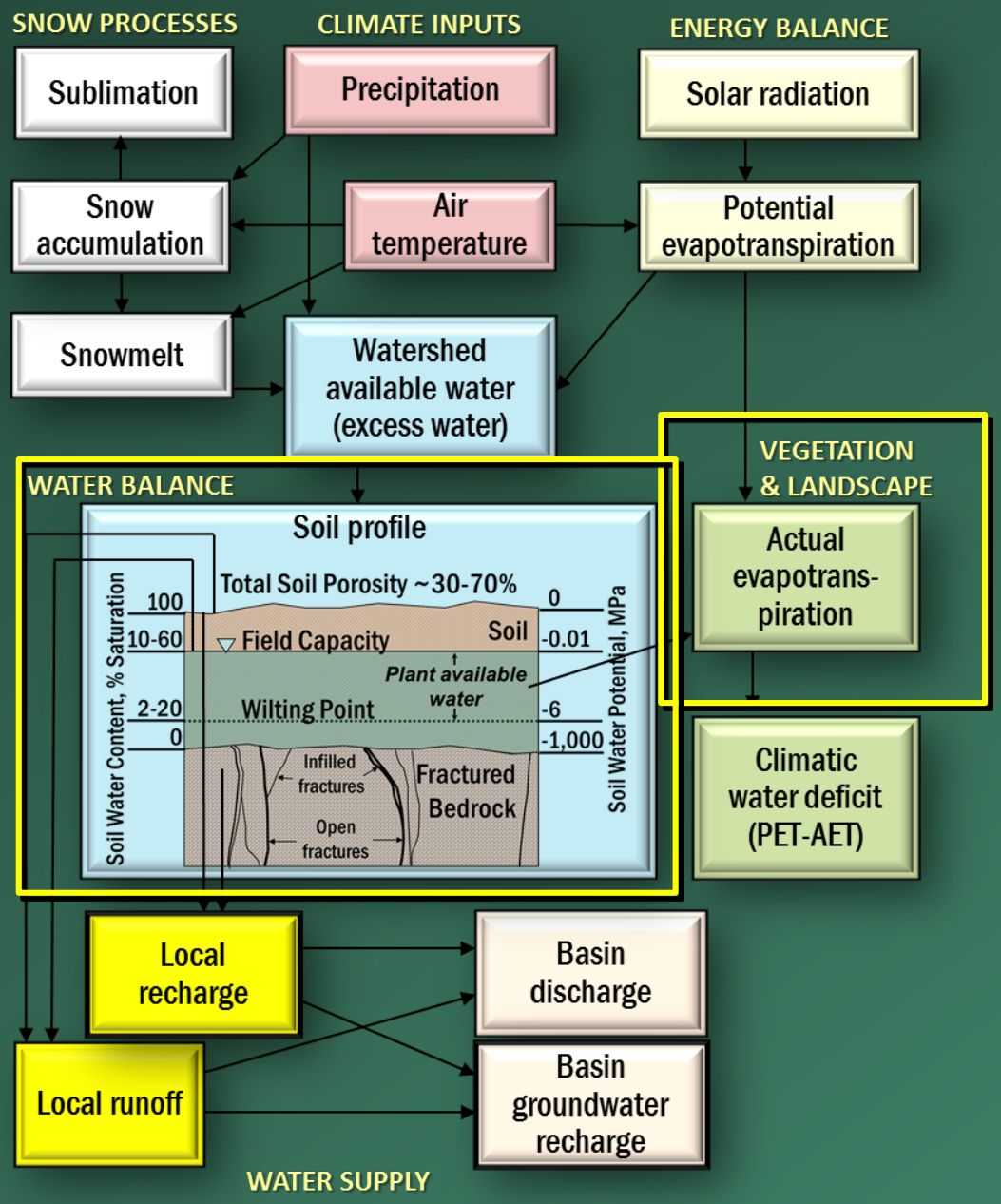








Basin Characterization Model



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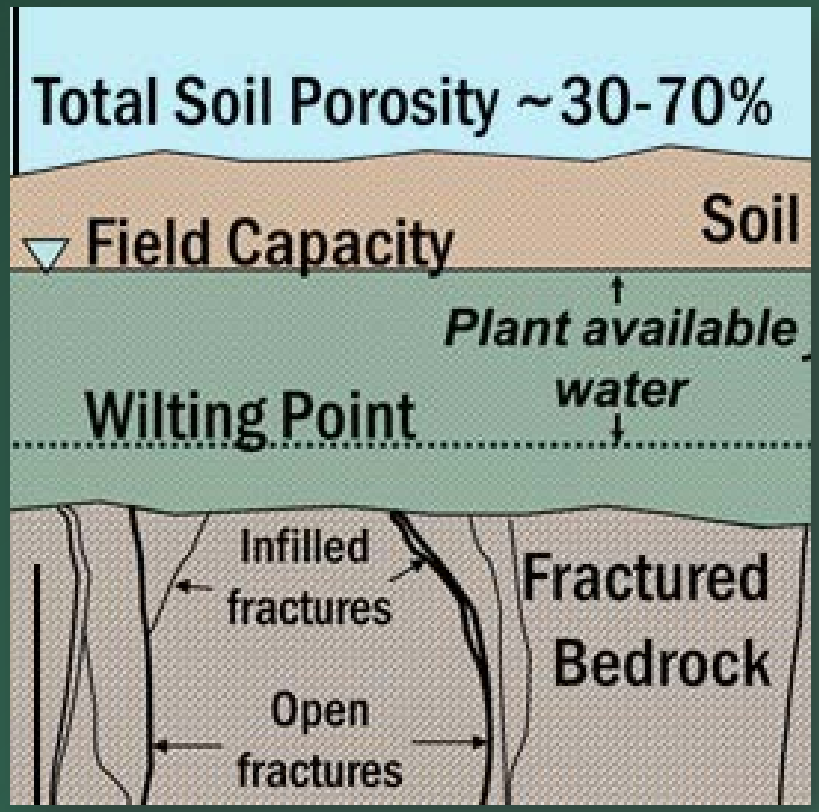
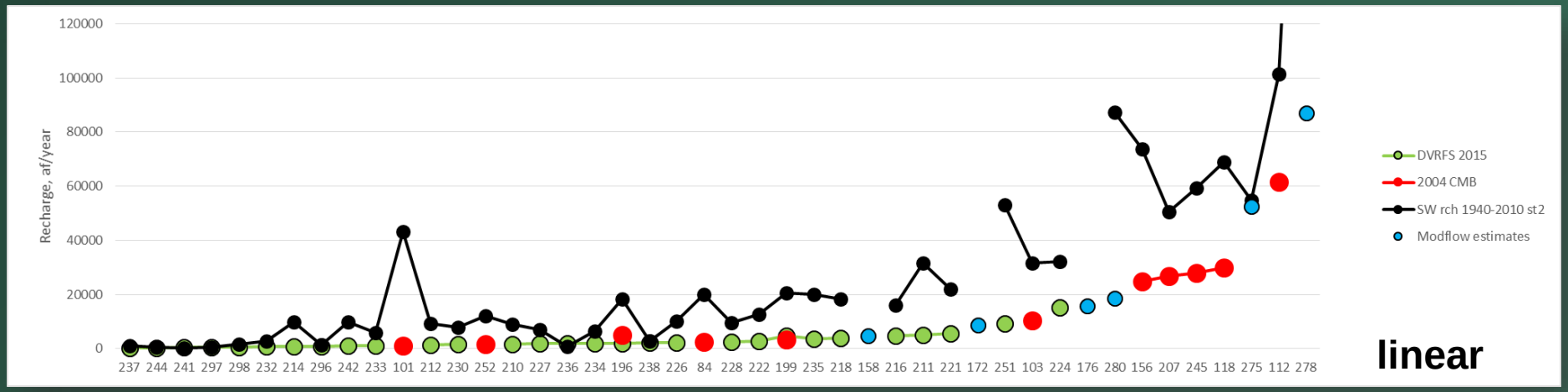
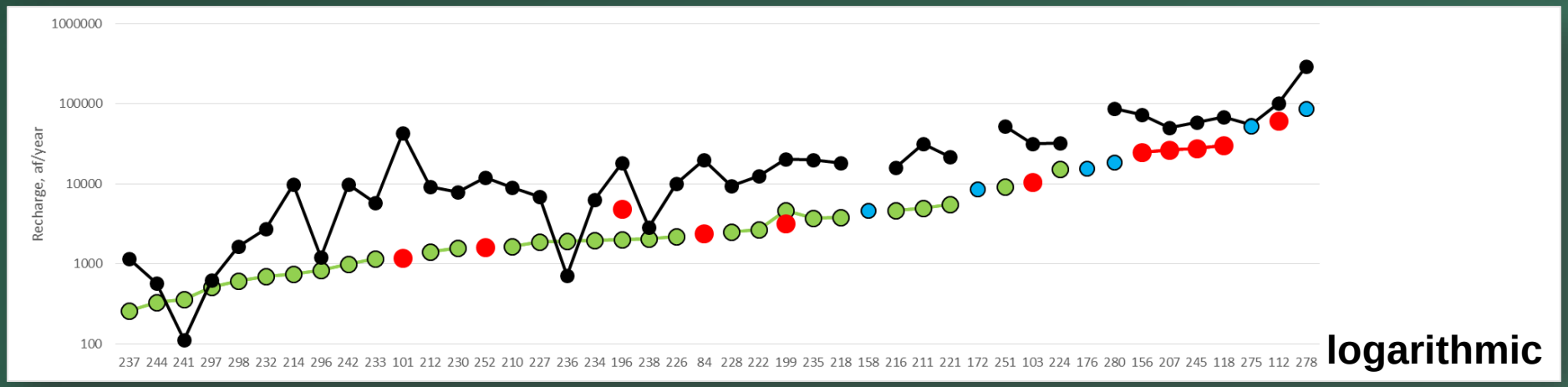
Soil Properties



- SSURGO soils have field capacity of -0.03 MPa and wilting point of -1.5 MPa
- Plant available water is between these values

Great Basin Recharge

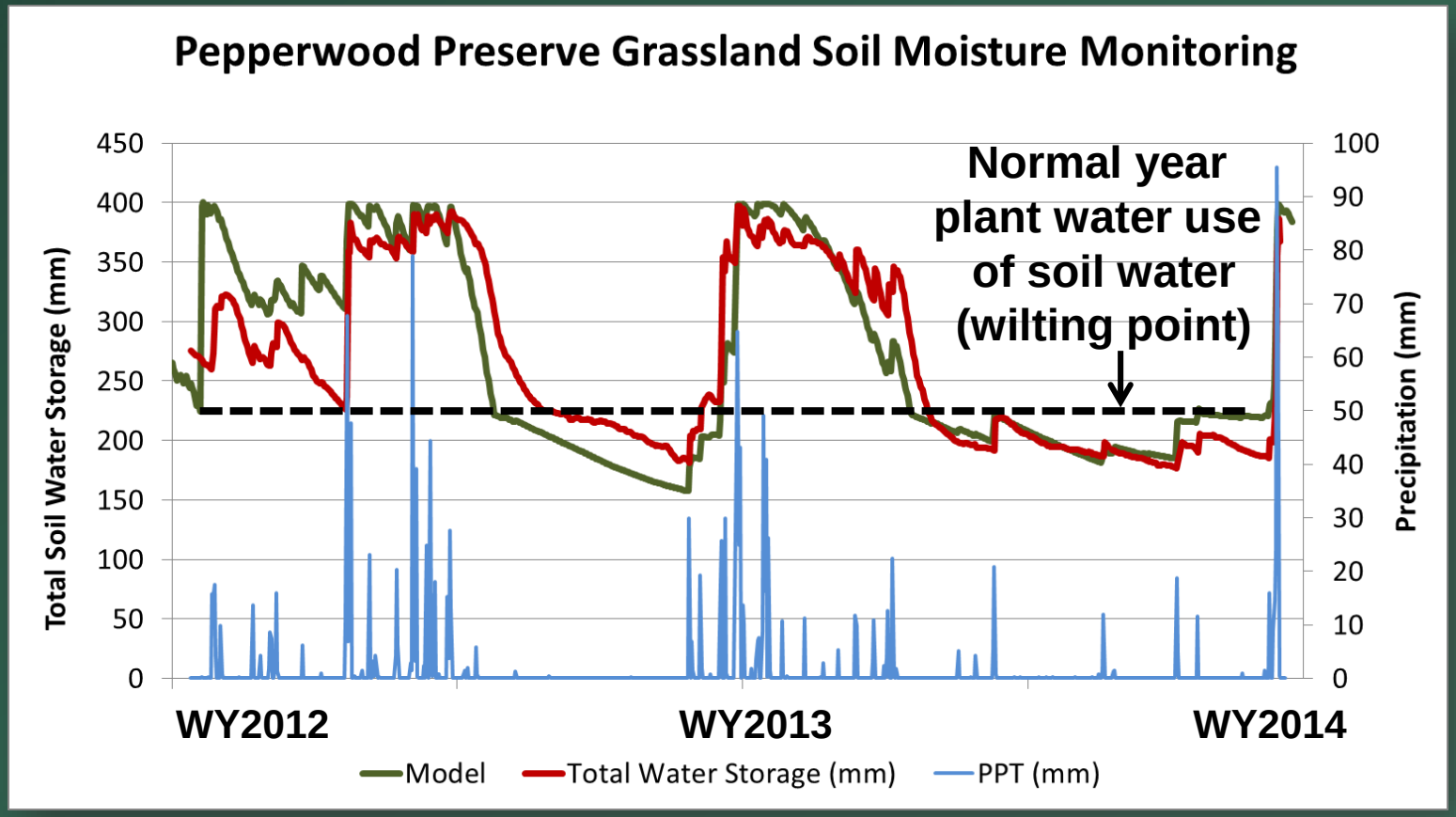




Alluvial valleys 2.01 m soil depth
SSURGO hydraulic properties

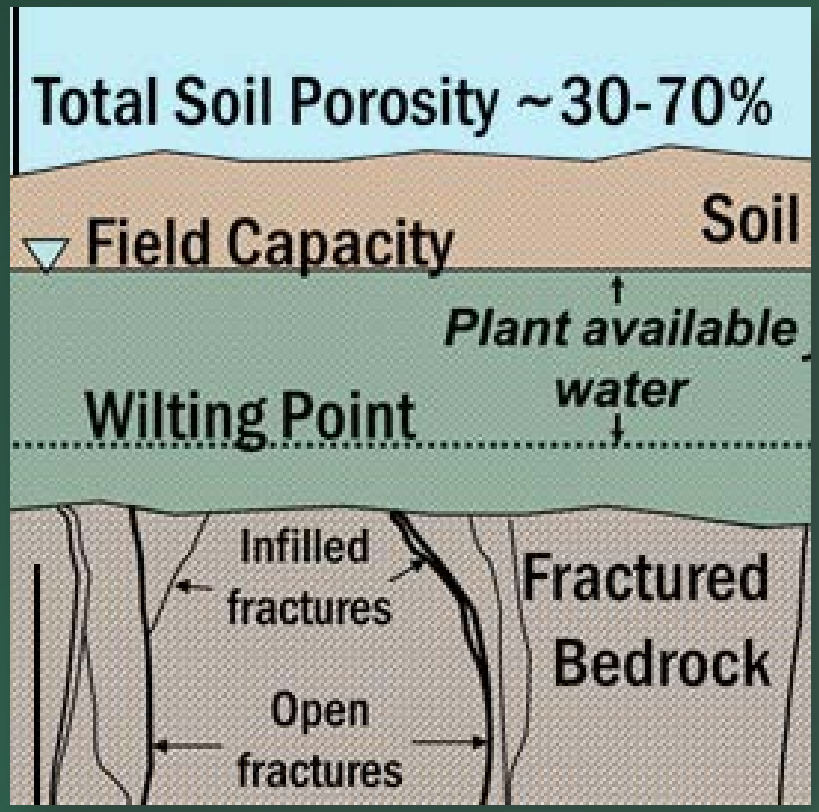
Soil Moisture Monitoring

(headwaters of Mark West Creek)



Data US Geological Survey

Soil Properties



- SSURGO soils have field capacity of -0.03 MPa and wilting point of -1.5 MPa
- Texture can be used to estimate field capacity and wilting point
- We used -0.01 MPa for field capacity and -3.0 MPa for wilting point to increase water holding capacity

Using Soil Physics Equations to Develop New Soil Properties

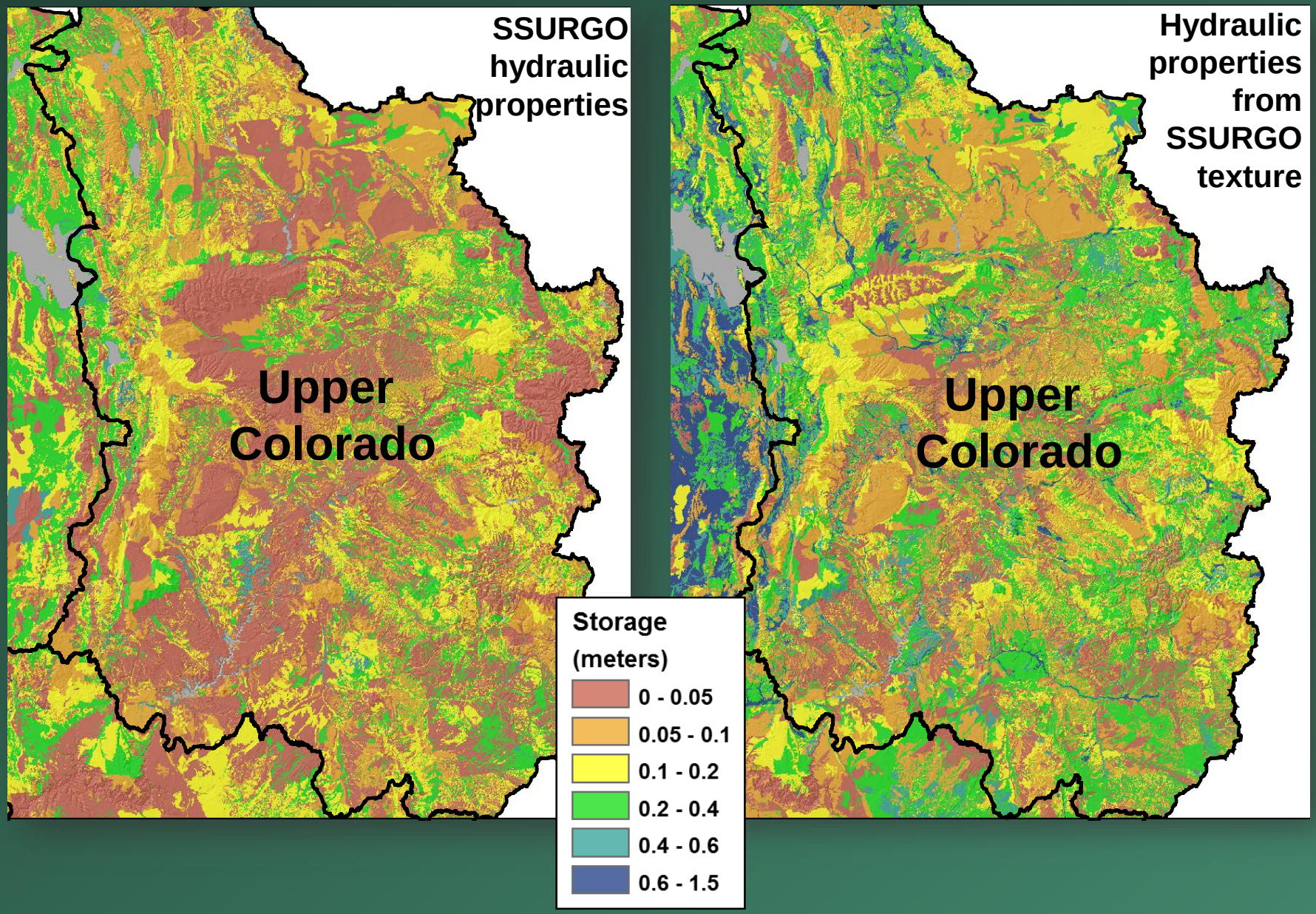
Campbell, G.S., 1985) Soil physics with basic, transport models for soil-plant systems, Elsevier, New York, 150pp.

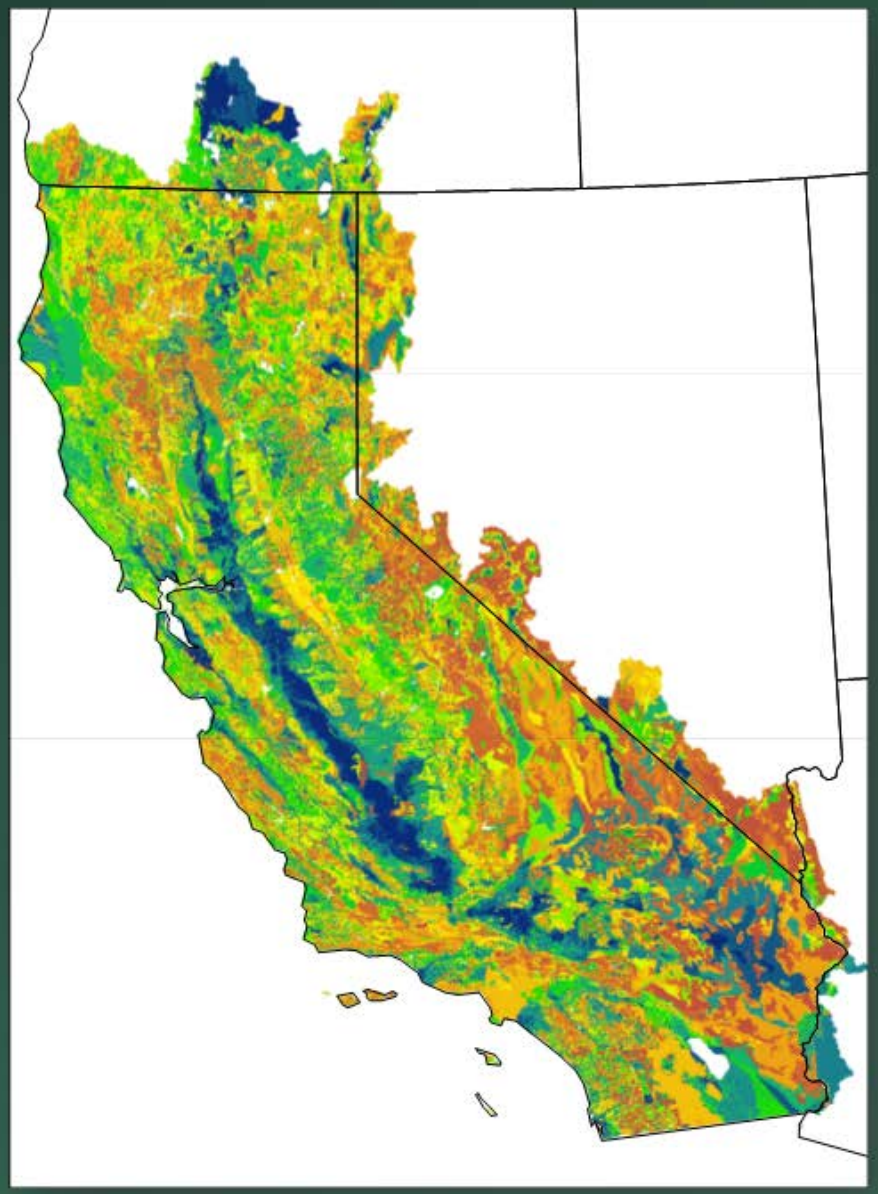
Gupta, S.C. and Larson, W.E., 1979, Estimating soil water retention characteristics from particle size distribution, organic matter percent, and bulk density, Water Resources Research Vol. 15, No.6.

Rawls, W.J., Pachepsky, Y.A., Ritchie, J.C., Sobecki, T.M., and Bloodworth, 2003, Effect of soil organic carbon on soil water retention, Geoderma, 116, pp61-76.

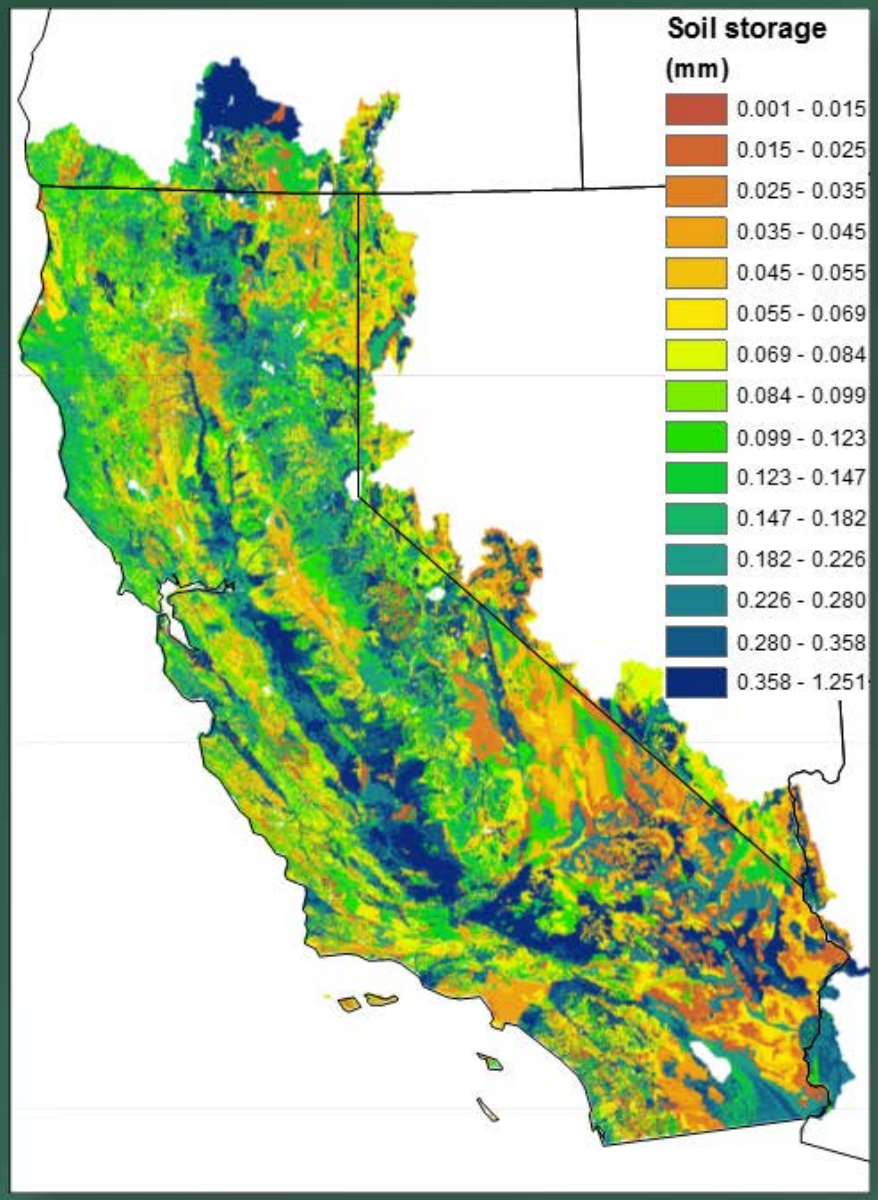
Saxton, K.E. and Rawls, W.J., 2006, Soil water characteristic by texture and organic matter for hydrologic solutions, Soil Sci. Soc. Am. J. 70:1569-1578.

Soil Water Storage Capacity

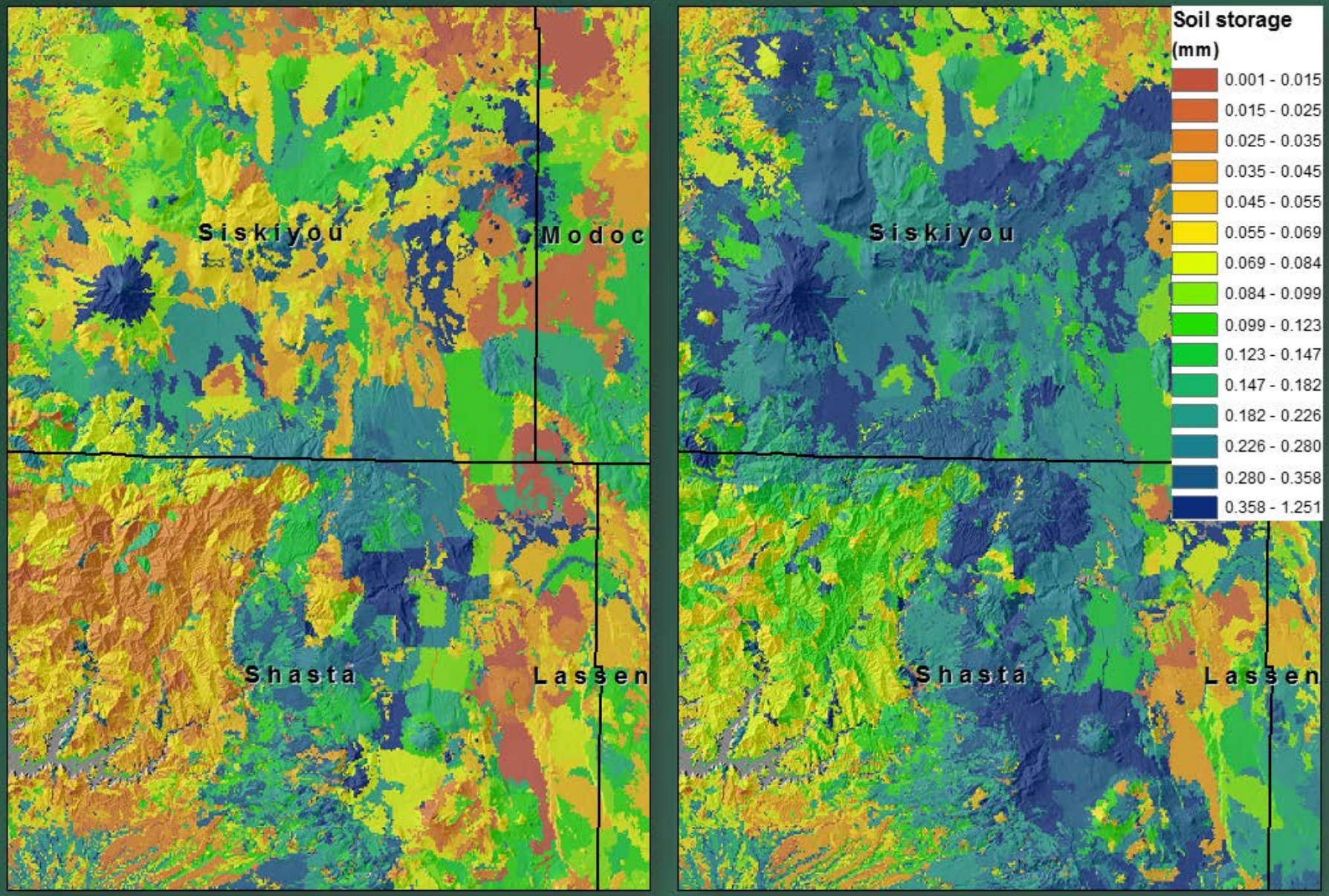




SSURGO hydraulic properties



Hydraulic properties from SSURGO texture



SSURGO hydraulic properties

Hydraulic properties from SSURGO texture

Testing Recharge Results

- Comparing new results against estimates of basin recharge
  - Chloride Mass Balance
  - ModFlow
    - Death Valley Regional Flow System
    - Lower Walker Valley, Tooele Valley, Utah Valley
  - Discharge Measurements
  - California ModFlow Model

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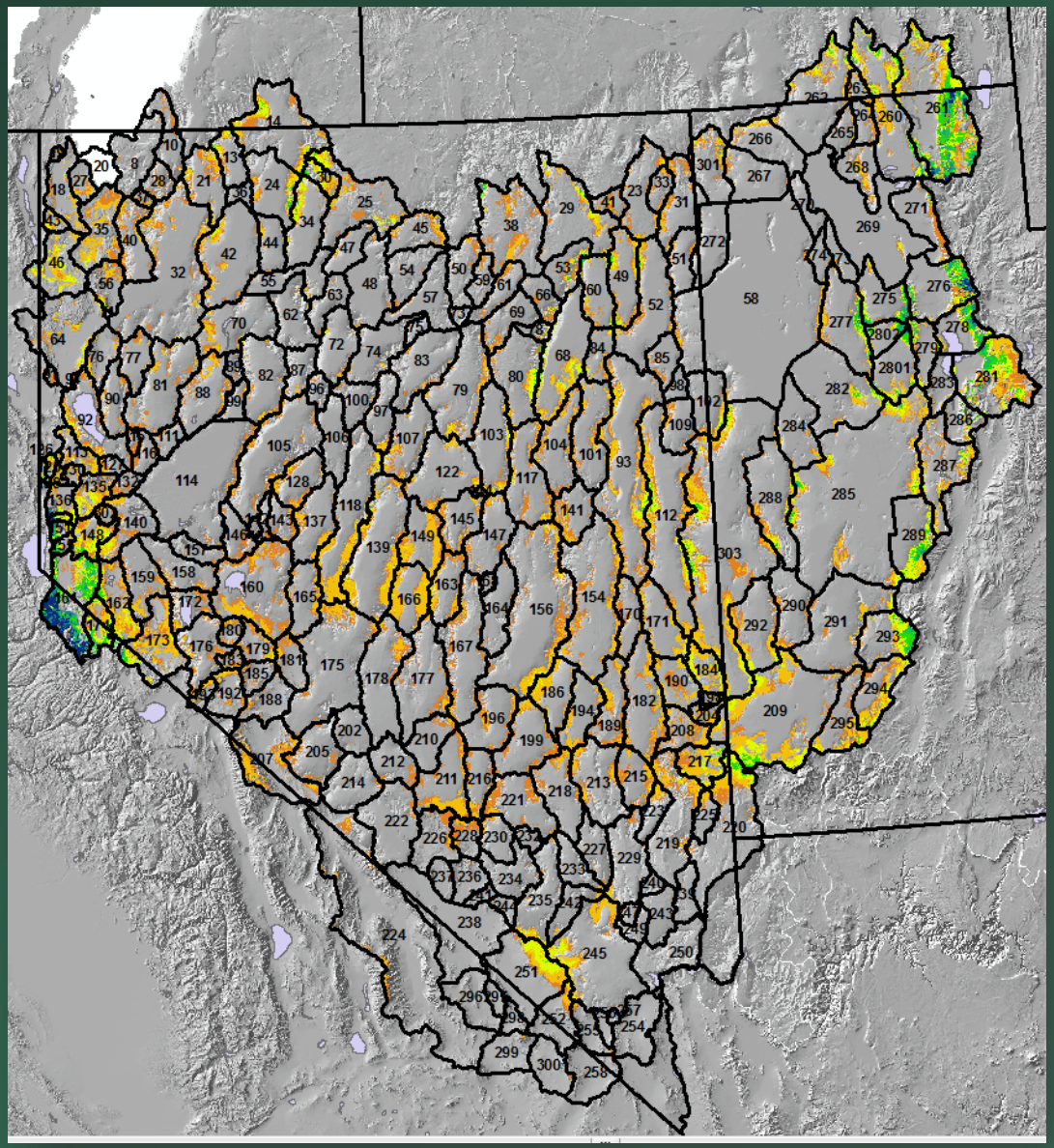
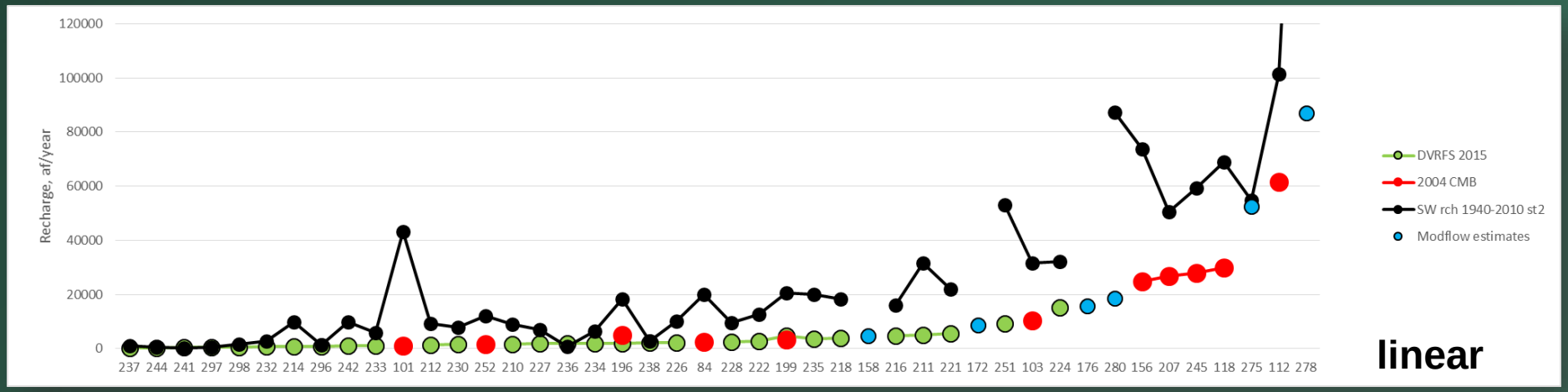
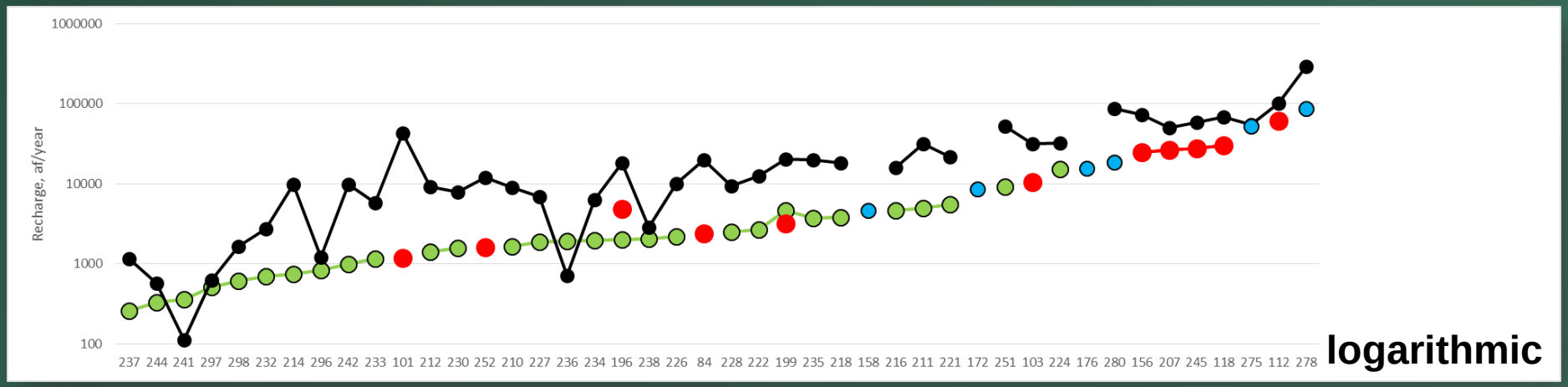


Great Basin Recharge

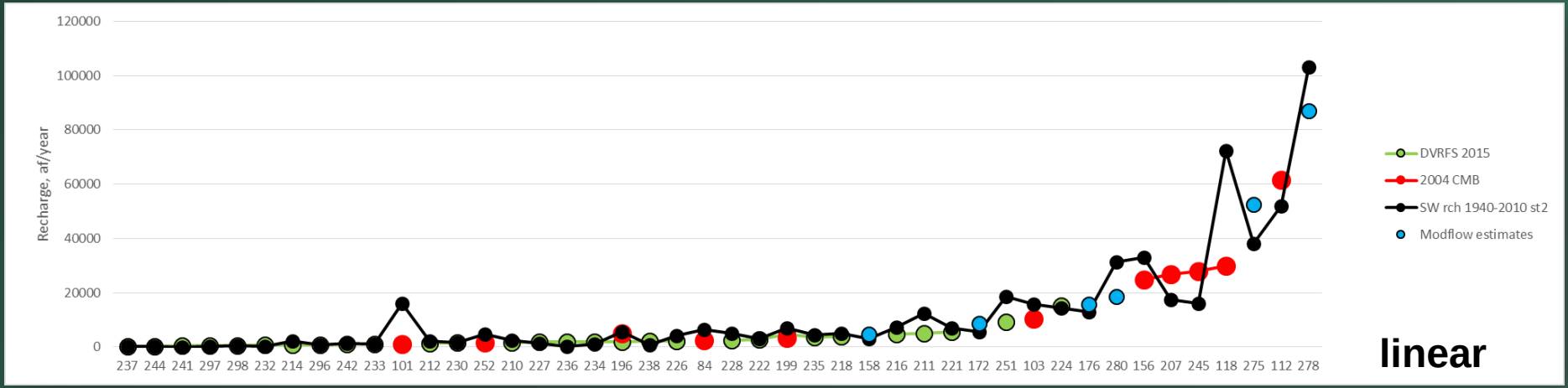
Great Basin Recharge

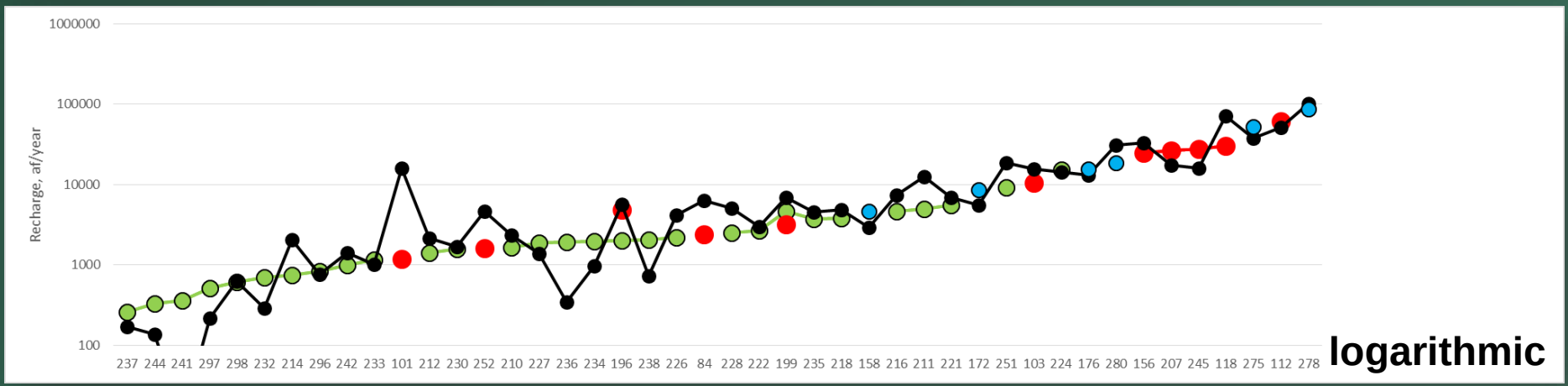




Alluvial valleys 2.01 m soil depth
SSURGO hydraulic properties

Great Basin Recharge



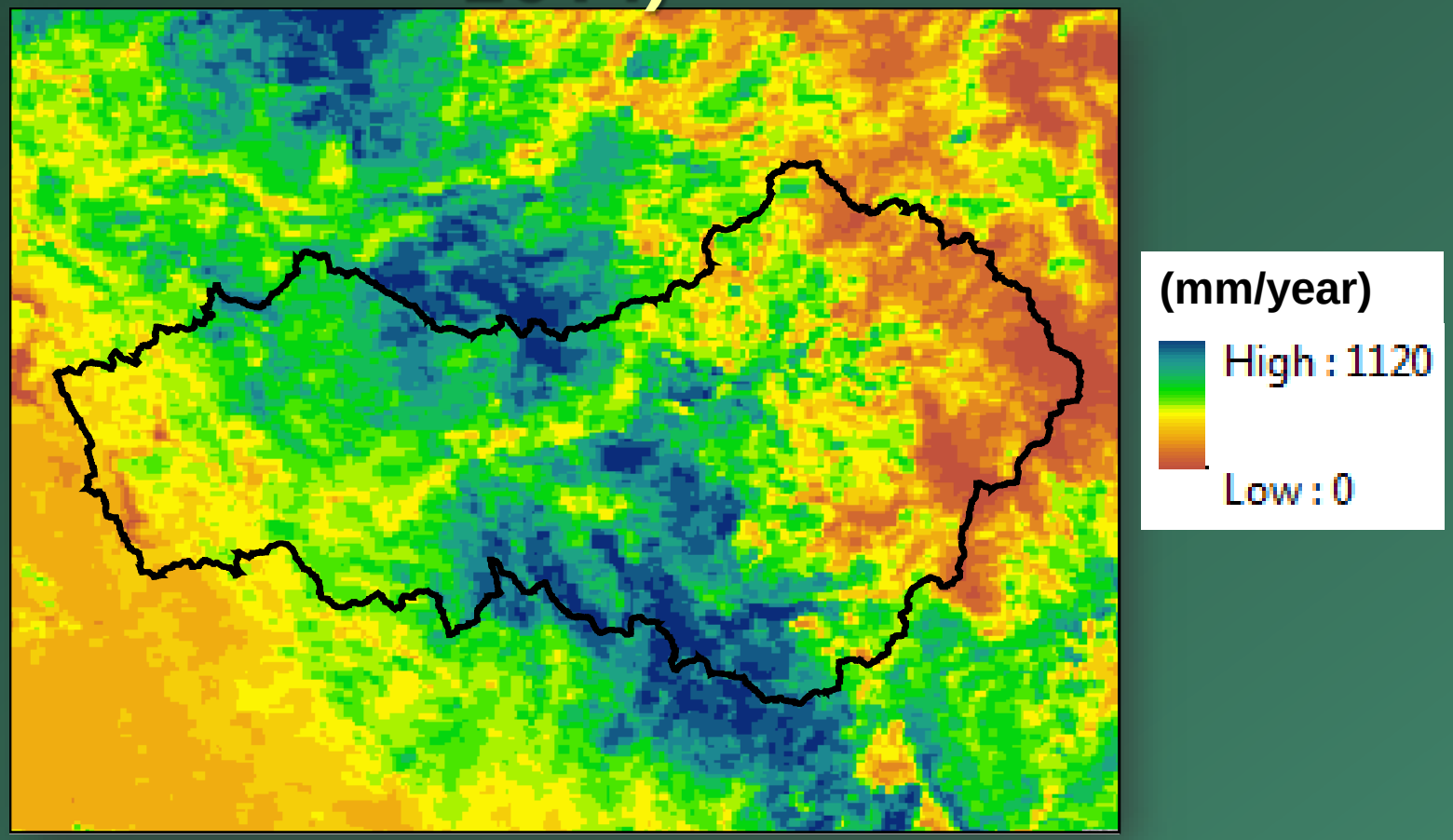


Alluvial valleys 4 m soil depth
SSURGO texture for hydraulic properties

Ongoing Model Development

- Recent research to provide gridded estimates of actual evapotranspiration are allowing the incorporation of vegetation specific seasonal evapotranspiration
- This serves to constrain another component of the water balance, reducing uncertainty in recharge estimates

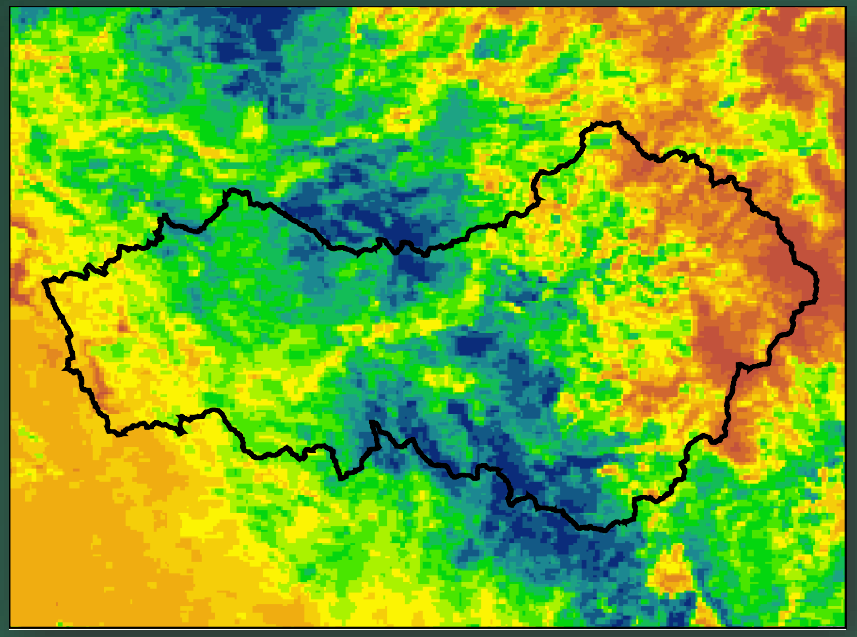
Actual ET calculated from NDVI and flux towers (Goulden and Bales 2014)

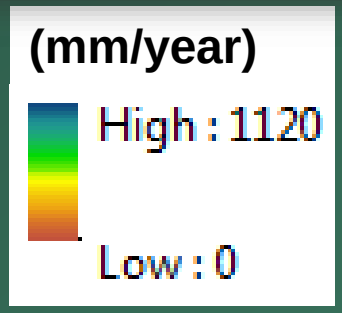


Merced River Basin 2003-2011

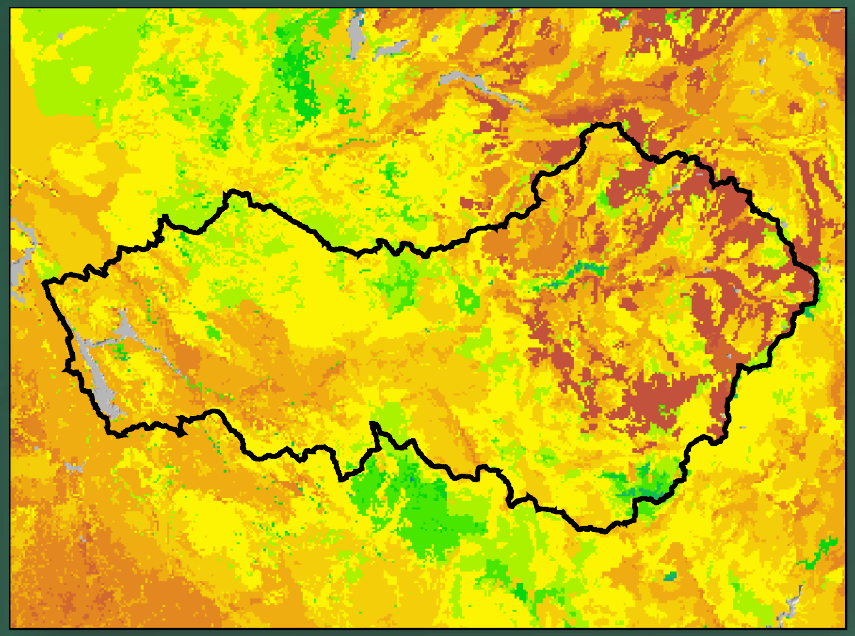
Actual ET

NDVI and flux measurements

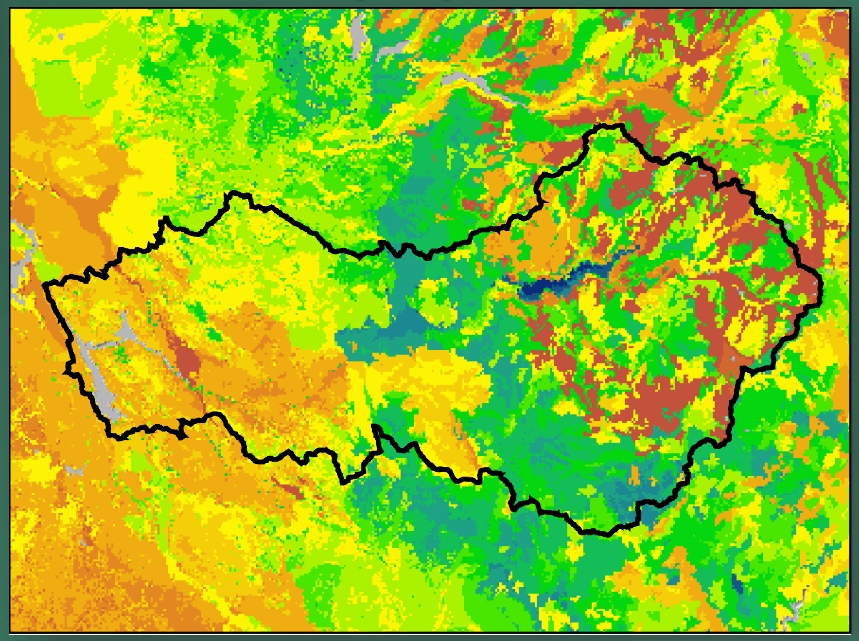




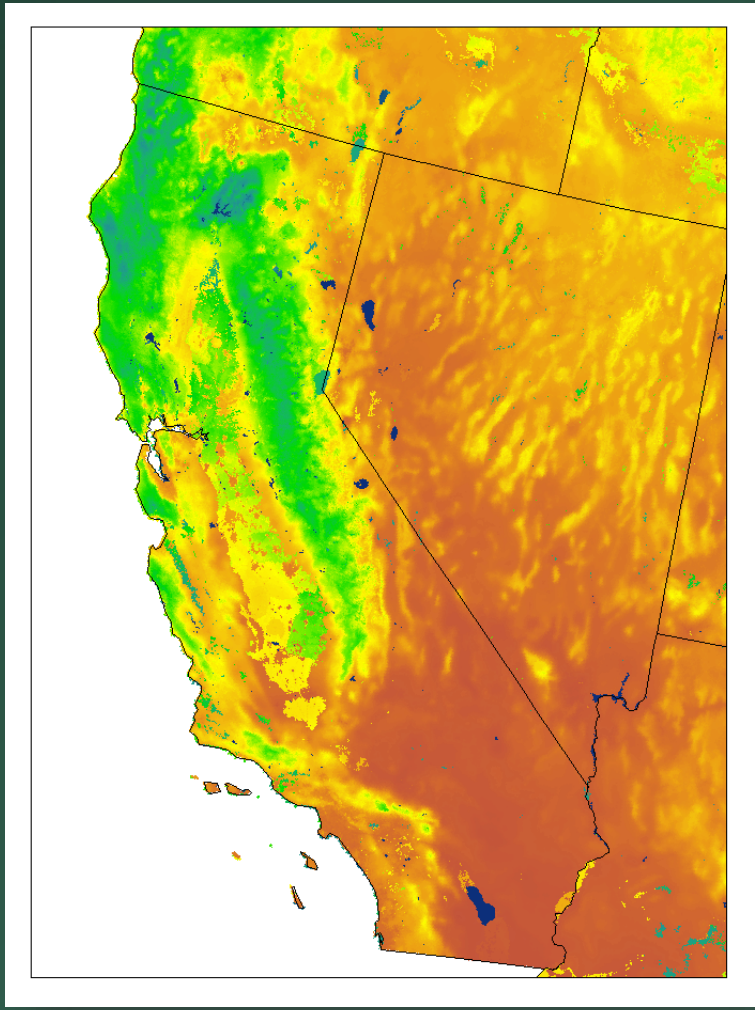
BCM SSURGO hydraulic properties



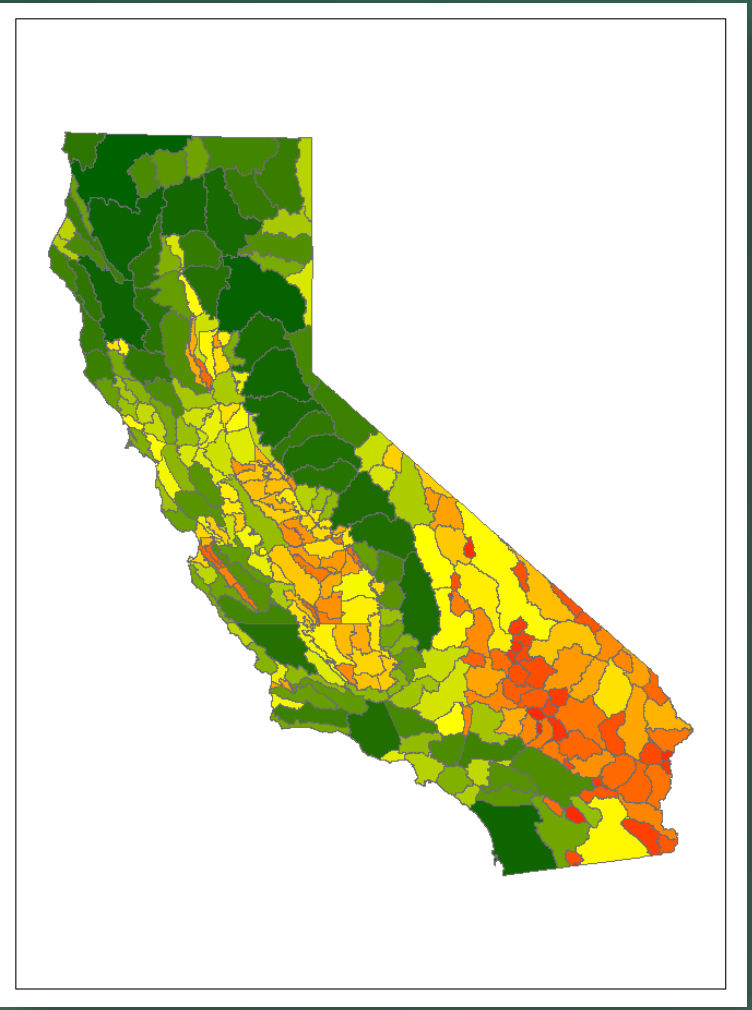
BCM SSURGO properties from texture



Estimates of Actual ET

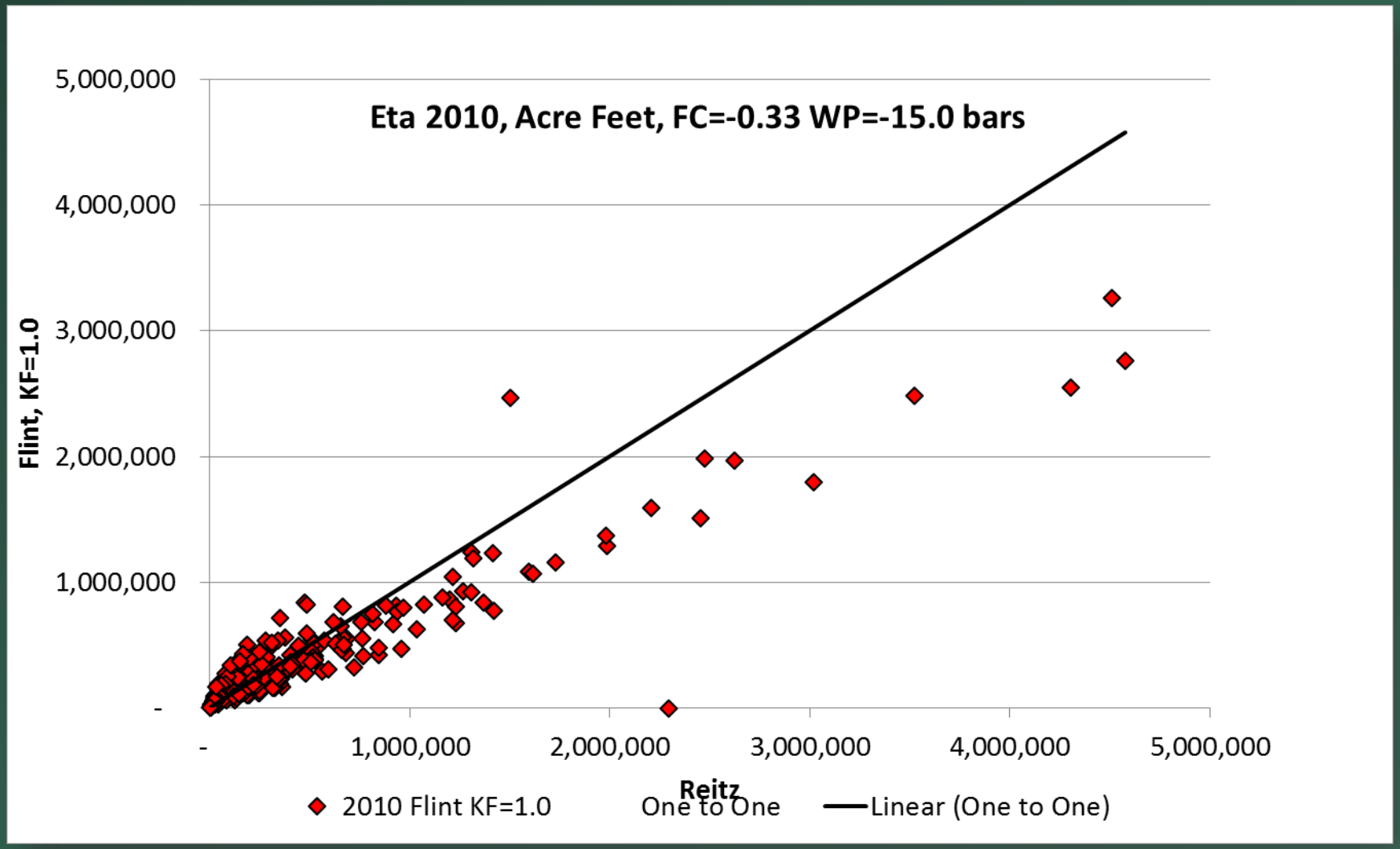


Annual, Meredith Reitz, USGS Reston

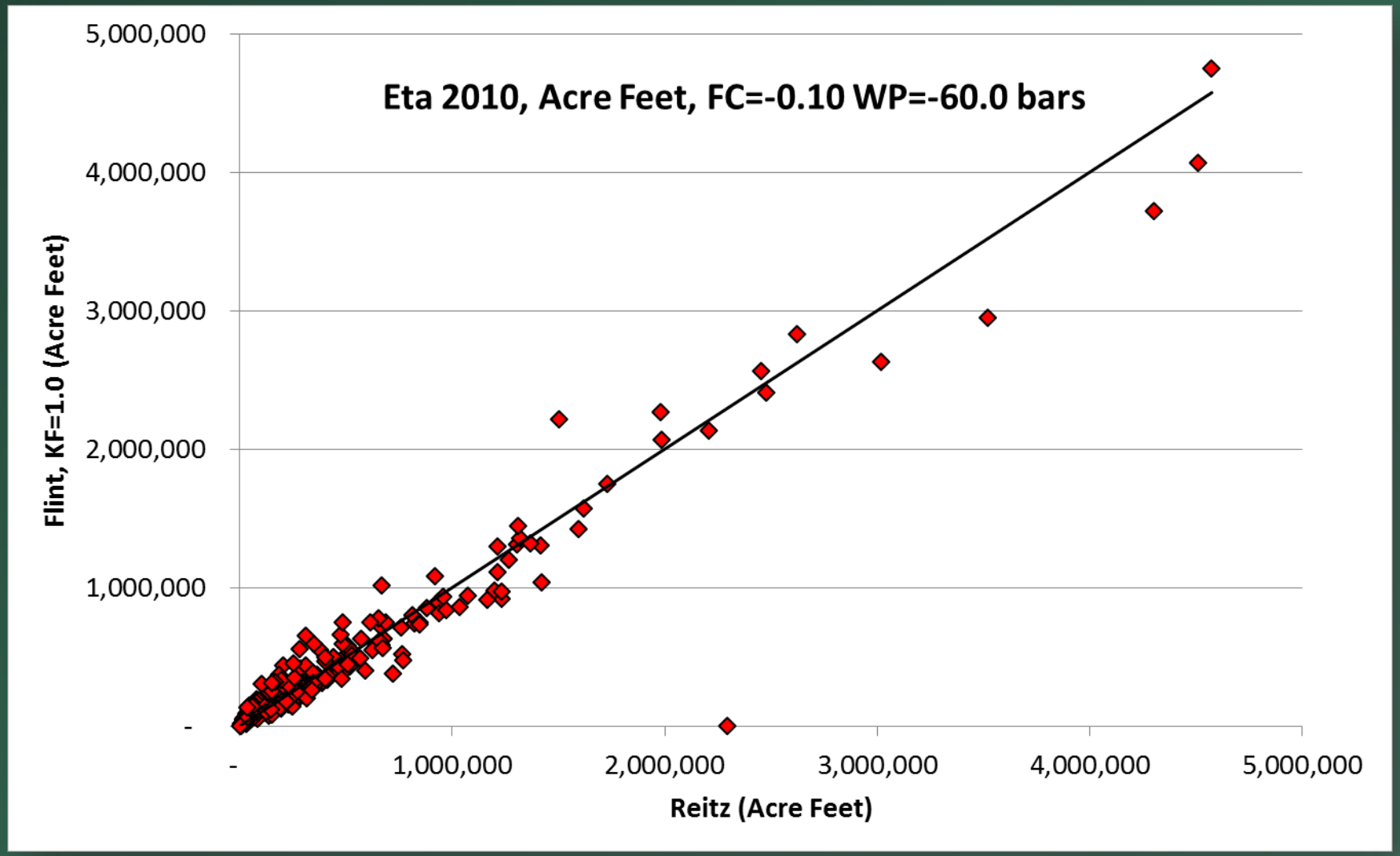


Monthly 2010-2015 Formation Environmental LCC

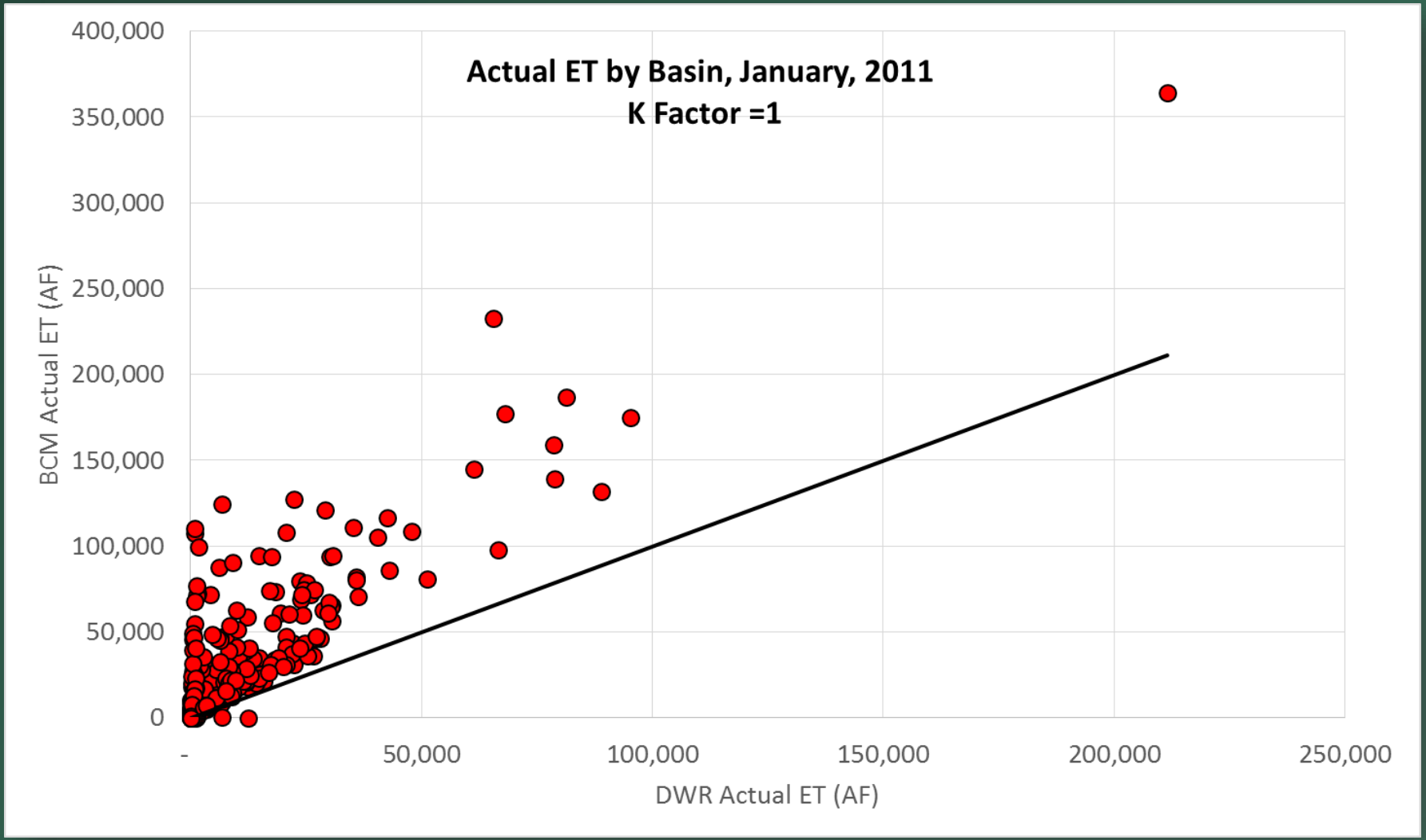
Matching Annual Estimates of Actual ET



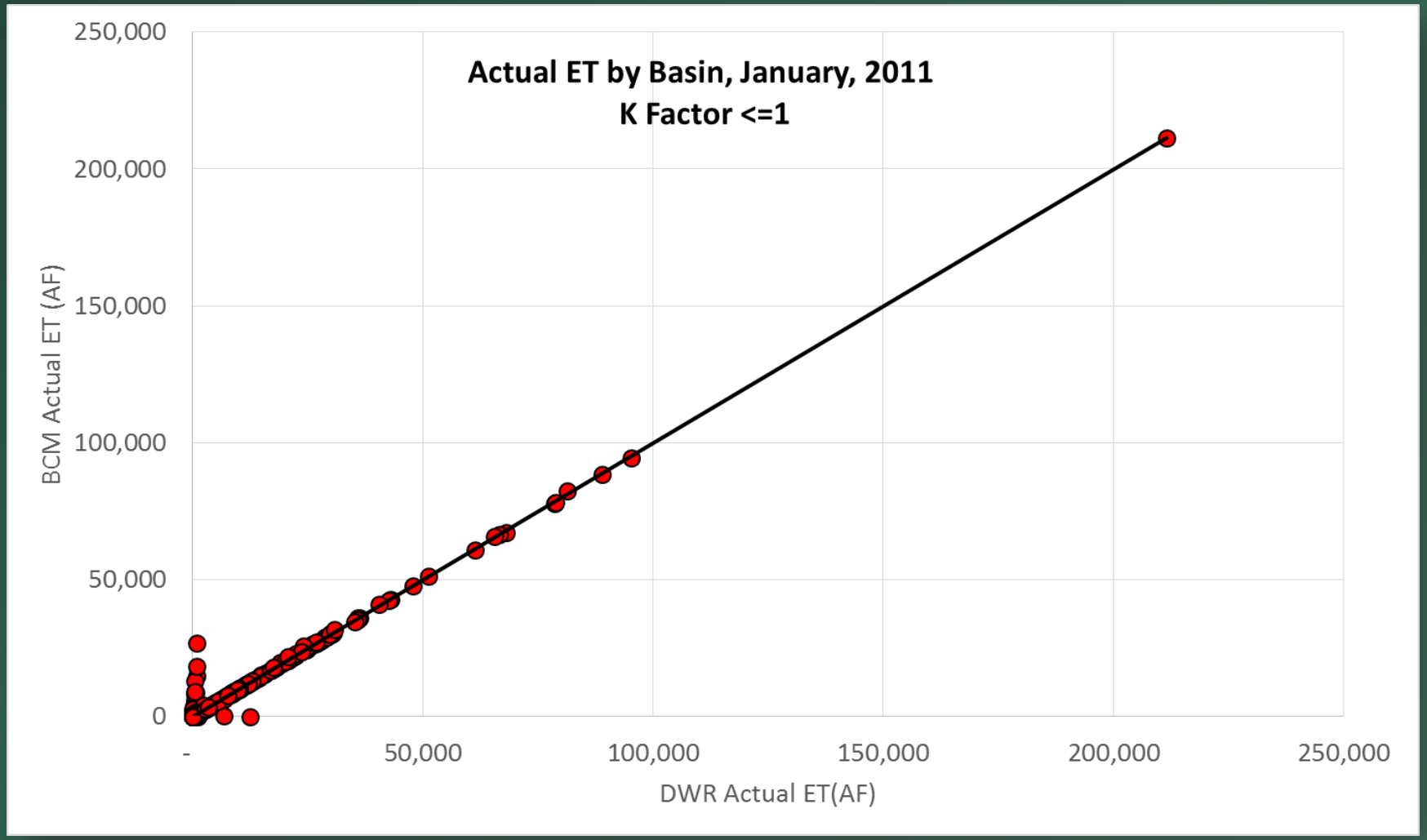
Matching Annual Estimates of Actual ET



Allowing Actual ET to Equal PET



Limit Actual ET using variable K Factor <=1



Ongoing Refinements

- Incorporation of species' specific monthly evapotranspiration
  - To enable more realistic seasonality
  - To enable the representation of disturbance
- Modeled soil water content at multiple measurement locations statewide
- Recharge comparisons to Modflow model estimates

Summary

- The BCM was developed on the basis of fundamental processes, observations, and physics
- Calibration of the various components are used to improve the estimates of the water balance and recharge
- Mapped soil properties do not represent the rooting zone, they underestimate actual ET and overestimate recharge
- Combining remote sensing and field measurements can help develop actual rooting depth and soil water storage
- Increasing soil water holding capacity improves estimates of actual ET and recharge

Thank you!