Many natural resource disciplines have gradually shifted towards system-wide approaches that attempt to maximize the health of, and services provided by, ecological aggregates, rather than their individual components. For example, many agencies tasked with managing multispecies fisheries have begun to transition from single-species stock assessments to an ecosystem based approach that evaluates the status of multiple trophic levels. One of the key benefits of such a strategy is that the dynamics of ecological aggregates are often buffered by components varying asynchronously with one another and the availability of ecosystem services are stabilized as a result. The tendency for more diverse systems to exhibit decreased temporal variability has been long recognized in ecology and is commonly referred to as the portfolio effect.

Portfolio effect 🡪 larger number of components, greater aggregate stability

* However, many ecological aggregates have exhibited evidence of increased temporal variability in recent years, despite containing the same number of components
  + Such collapsed aggregates are generally less capable of providing key ecosystem services and their individual components may be at increased risk of extirpation.
* Although changes in aggregate variability are generally associated with anthropogenic disturbance, it is rarely possible to identify specific events that lead to instability
  + Efforts are hampered by the observational nature of the data collected, as well as relatively low statistical power since it is difficult to directly compare aggregates to one another.
* Yet we can detect important clues about causal mechanisms by examining temporal trends in the processes that contribute to aggregate variability, rather than aggregate variability itself.
  + For example, while aggregate variability is clearly associated with the number of components it is also influenced by the attributes of the components themselves, namely their synchrony (i.e. covariance) and individual variability
    - E.g. assuming the number of components is stable, changes in aggregate variability may be driven by either process.
  + Recent work (Thibaut and Connolly) has provided a framework to estimate the relative contribution of each of these processes by decomposing aggregate variability into an index of synchrony and an estimate of component-level variability, weighted by abundance
    - Importantly these metrics are robust to differences in evenness, as well as abundance, allowing for comparisons among distinct aggregates
* Decomposing changes in aggregate variability into trends in synchrony and component variability may provide clues that are critical to identifying destabilizing ecological processes.
  + For example, if the variability of a subset of dominant components has dramatically increased, but synchrony has remained relatively stable, then it would suggest that localized processes are responsible.
  + Conversely, if synchrony and aggregate variability have increased in tandem, it would suggest that regional processes are at wrok.
* Moreover, temporal patterns in synchrony and component variability may be useful in guiding conservation efforts and management interventions.
  + A targeted effort to increase the productivity of an unstable subpopulation may lead to substantial benefits at the aggregate level, but these benefits may be dampened if the aggregate has become highly synchronized.
  + Similarly, a larger number of components may be required to stabilize the ecosystem functions of a highly synchronized aggregate
* We use an empirical dataset to first present evidence that increased aggregate variability in a Pacific salmon metapopulation is associated with greater levels of synchrony, rather than changes in the variability of the components.
* We then use a stochastic closed-loop simulation model to explore how long-term changes in aggregate variable (mediated by synchrony and component variability) may influence the outcomes of large-scale recovery efforts.

**Methods**

*Sockeye salmon*

* Generic information on biology
* Information on CUs as unit of management conservation
* Description of fishery

*Synchrony metrics*

* We examined temporal changes in three metrics of metapopulation variability defined by Loreau and de Mazancourt 2008 and Thibaut and Connolly 2013
  + Synchrony – defined as the variance of total metapopulation abundance of *n* components (i.e. sum of all elements of variance-covariance matrix), divided by the variance of a hypothetical metapopulation with same component variances, but perfect covariance (i.e. synchrony)
    - Eq. 2
    - Makes no assumptions about distributions of pairwise correlation coefficients, is normalized (i.e. always varies between 0 and 1), and explicitly accounts for unequal component variances
  + Average component CV weighted by abundance
  + Aggregate variability – sqrt(synch) \* average component CV
    - Component and aggregate variability are linearly proportional to one another, with a constant of proportionality driven by synchrony of components
      * When highly synch, agg perfect tracks components
      * When asynch, agg variability strongly dampened

*Retrospective analysis*

* We first explored metapopulation dynamics by decomposing the variability of a case study aggregate (Fraser River sockeye salmon) into each component’s variability and synchrony among components.
  + Component variability is weighted by the CU’s mean abundance
* We examined these indices in two metrics
  + First, residuals from a basic stock-recruit relationship, providing an index of deviations in per capita productivity.
    - Define model
    - A subset of Fraser River sockeye salmon populations exhibit cyclic dynamics and these CUs’ dynamics were simulated using a Larkin model, an extension of the Ricker that accounts for delayed density dependence among cycle lines
    - Define model
    - Whether CUs were modeled with the Ricker or Larkin was based upon their most recent assessment (WSP 2017 doc)
    - Recruits are enumerated after returning to coastal waters and being captured in fisheries, dying en route to spawning grounds, or successfully reaching spawning habitat.
    - This metric represents trends in metapopulation dynamics independent of two major mechanisms of disturbance in Pacific salmon populations - exploitation in fisheries and en route mortality.
    - By including Larkin model residuals we were also able to account for cyclic dynamics which may confound apparent trends in population dynamics
  + Second we examined trends in absolute spawner abundance, which is simply the number of recruits that successfully reach the spawning grounds
    - By comparing empirical trends in these two metrics we can explore the relative importance of variation in exploitation rate, en route mortality, and cyclic dynamics
* We calculated ten-year moving window averages of each metric and used linear models to test two hypotheses
  + 1) Has there been a significant increase in aggregate variability, consistent with a collapsed portfolio?
  + 2) Is aggregate variability more strongly correlated with component variability or synchrony, consistent with a shift in the dynamics of specific CUs or the metapopulation as a whole.

*Forward simulation*

* To explore the potential consequences of different aggregate variability scenarios, we used a stochastic closed-loop model to forward simulate the dynamics of Fraser River sockeye salmon.
  + The model includes population dynamics and harvesting, as well as process, observation, and management implementation uncertainty.
* Salmon metapopulation dynamics were modeled using the same age-structured Ricker or Larkin models, with demographic stochasticity incorporated with random deviations in recruitment and age at maturity
  + To generate future recruits we used alpha and beta parameters that were estimated from CU-specific stock recruit models.
    - To account for uncertainty in the true underlying stock recruit relationship we sampled with replacement from the posterior distribution of each CU’s estimated parameters each simulation run.
    - Note that although these models provide estimates of stock-recruit deviations, we parameterized sigma independently by drawing CU-specific values from a normal distribution with mu and sigma.
      * Mu varied depending on operating model scenario
* Harvest occurred each year with exploitation rates determined by a harvest control rule replicating the TAM rule that has been used to regulate catch rates on the Fraser River since X
  + A forecast of recruit abundance was made each year at the management unit level, the scale at which harvest typically occurs in mixed stock, marine fisheries.
  + A total exploitation rate was set based whether forecasted abundance was below or above two MU- and cycle line-specific reference points after accounting for losses due to en route mortality.
    - Provide details of TAM rule as supplement
* **Any need to incorporate observation component?**
* To explore the consequences of aggregate variability on long term conservation and economic goals, we ran simulations across a suite of operating models that altered component variability and synchrony via changes in recruitment deviations.
  + To increase component variability we adjusted the mean of the sigma distribution from 0.1 to 0.8.
  + Synchrony among CUs was introduced by drawing annual recruitment deviations from a variance-covariance matrix.
    - The variance-covariance matrix contained CU-specific sigma squared along the diagonal, while the off-diagonal was the product of sigma squared times a correlation coefficient
  + Hence aggregate variability could be increased using either or both variables, while maintaining realistic levels of stochasticity.
  + To explore the relative importance of either process we increased each in isolation, as well as in tandem, resulting in a total of 12 distinct variance scenarios.
* We first confirmed that these scenarios produced realistic patterns in per capita productivity and recruit abundance.
* We then used four performance metrics to assess how changes in aggregate variability influenced long-term conservation outcomes.
  + Mean recruit abundance – indicates how strongly abundance is influenced by variance and covariance
  + Mean catch – indicates how strongly environmental services are impacted by dynamics, while accounting for the realistic buffering effect of harvest control rules
  + Ppn of years aggregate below reference point - provides an estimate of aggregate conservation status that is a useful proxy for total ecosystem health
  + Ppn of CUs above specific reference points at end of sim – provides an index of CU-specific conservation status, which is the focus of most management and conservation interventions
* Simulation specifics
  + Instead of a priming period to initiate the simulation, we used CU-specific observations of recruits and spawners; ensured that populations were at realistic levels of abundance and that cyclic stocks generated realistic patterns
  + The simulation period was set at 60 years (15 sockeye generations) and each synchrony scenario was simulated 1000 times (reference to simulation sensitivity analysis)
  + All output metrics represented by the median value plus/minus 90th/10th percentiles