



A micrometeorology / energy balance site in a tidal wetland in Puget Sound, Washington (Photo: F. Anderson)

11 Soil heat transfer

Learning objectives

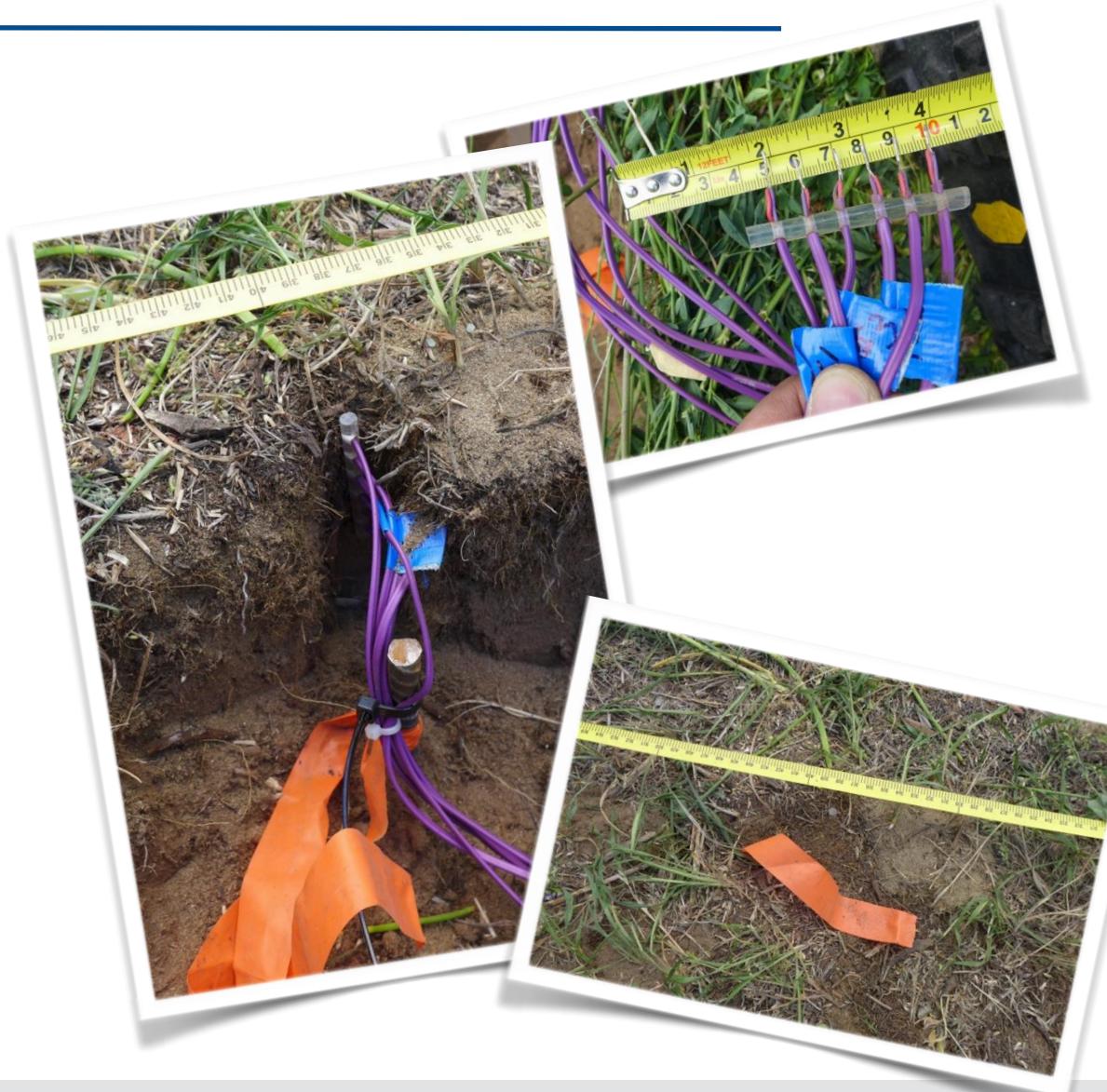
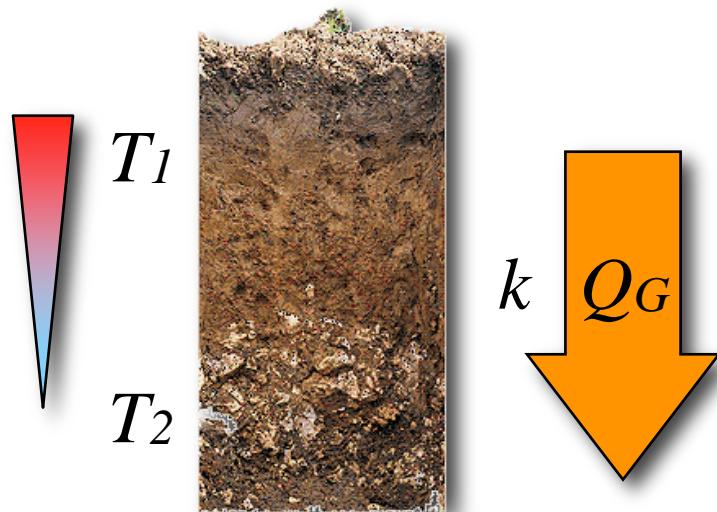
- Explain how we **measure** heat storage changes, and transfer in and out of soils.
- Describe how we **predict** and model heat storage changes, and transfer in and out of soils.
- Explain how heat storage in soils changes on diurnal and annual scales.



Installation of soil sensors in an organic soil of the Low Arctic (Illiisarvik)
Photo: W. Skeeter (UBC Geography)

Measurement of Q_G

Theoretically, soil heat flux could be simply measured using a vertical array of thermocouples using Fourier's law



Measuring soil heat flux using a temperature profile

Soil heat flux
at a given
depth
in W m^{-2}

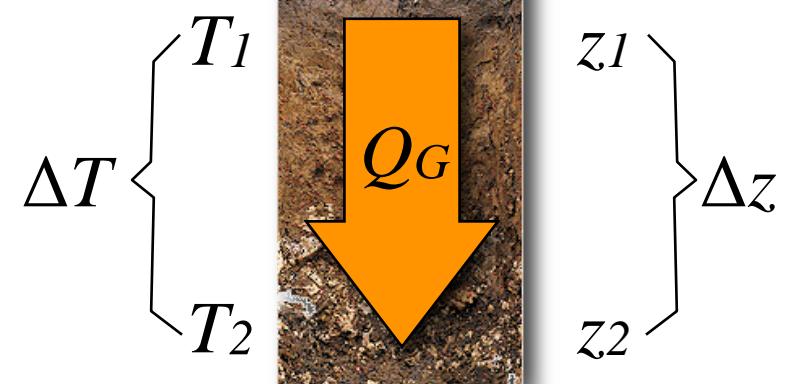
$$Q_G = -k \frac{\partial T}{\partial z} \approx -k \frac{T_2 - T_1}{z_2 - z_1}$$

Thermal conductivity
in $\text{W m}^{-1} \text{K}^{-1}$

Temperature
gradient (change
with depth)
in K m^{-1}

Difference between
two temperatures...

... measured at two
different depths



The role of soil water content

Practically, the problem is the variably k with water content. Requires continuous measurements of soil volumetric water content θ_w .

A UBC Geography undergraduate measures the volumetric water content of a soil using a TDR.



The role of soil water content

θ_w can be measured in the lab using the gravimetric method or using time domain reflectometry (TDR) (i.e. an indirect measure of soil water content based on the travel time of a high frequency electromagnetic pulse through the soil)

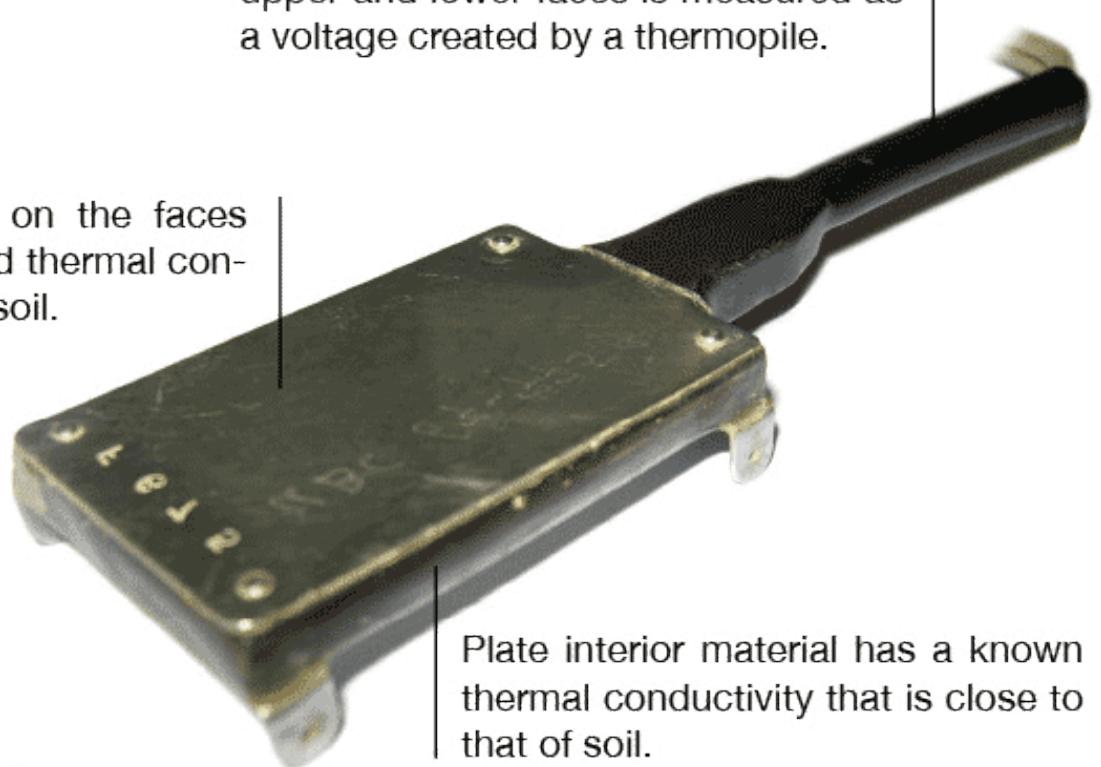


Soil heat flux density - direct measurement

More useful are **soil heat flux plates**:



Metal plates on the faces ensure a good thermal contact with the soil.





A floating flux tower
in
Burns Bog, Delta, BC
operated by UBC Geography



Soil heat flux plates - correction

Soil heat flux plates are inserted in undisturbed soil, not at the surface but in a few cm depth.

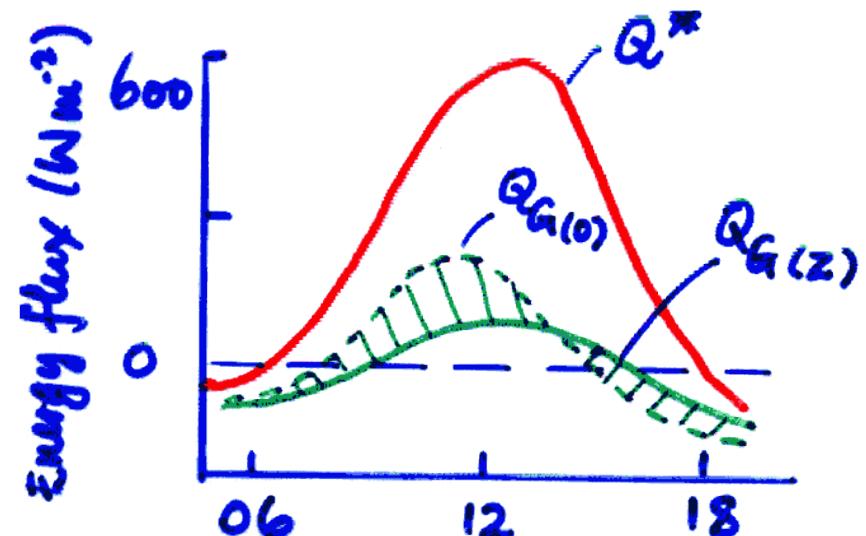
We have to consider the soil heat flux divergence / convergence in the topmost layer.

$$Q_{G(0)} = Q_{G(z)} + \Delta Q_{G(0-z)}$$

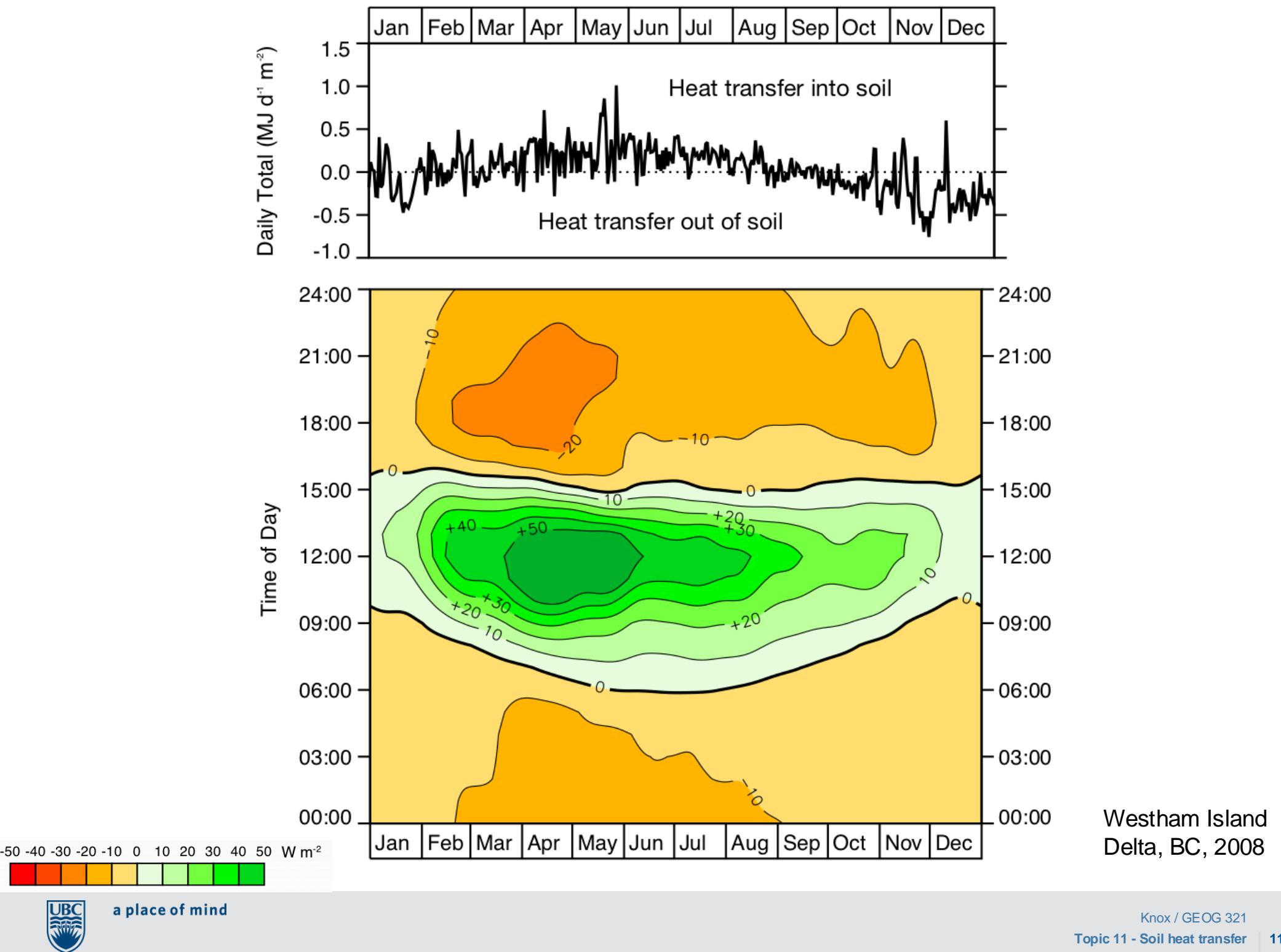
Using heat capacity:

$$\Delta Q_{G(0-z)} = C_s \left(\frac{\Delta T}{\Delta t} \right) \Delta z_{0-z}$$

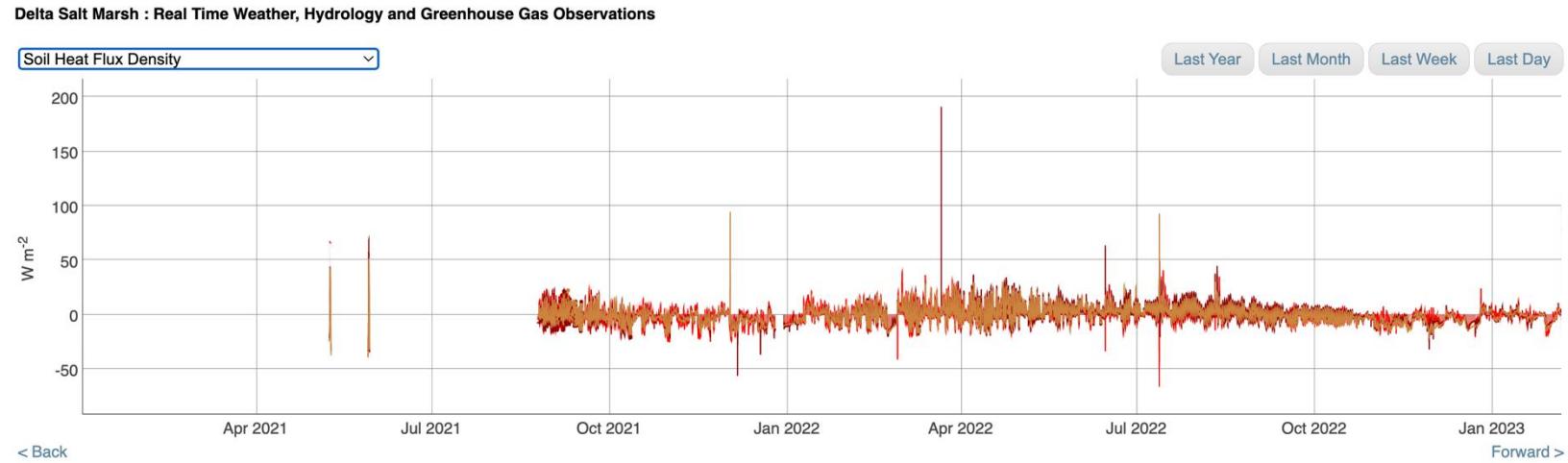
Measured using a temperature profile.



Typical effect of correction during a clear-sky day for bare soil.



Data from a tidal marsh in Delta – questions for discussion



- How does G vary between daytime and nighttime?
- Can you say anything about the spatial variability at the site?

<https://ibis.geog.ubc.ca/~micromet/data/DeltaSaltMarsh.html#>





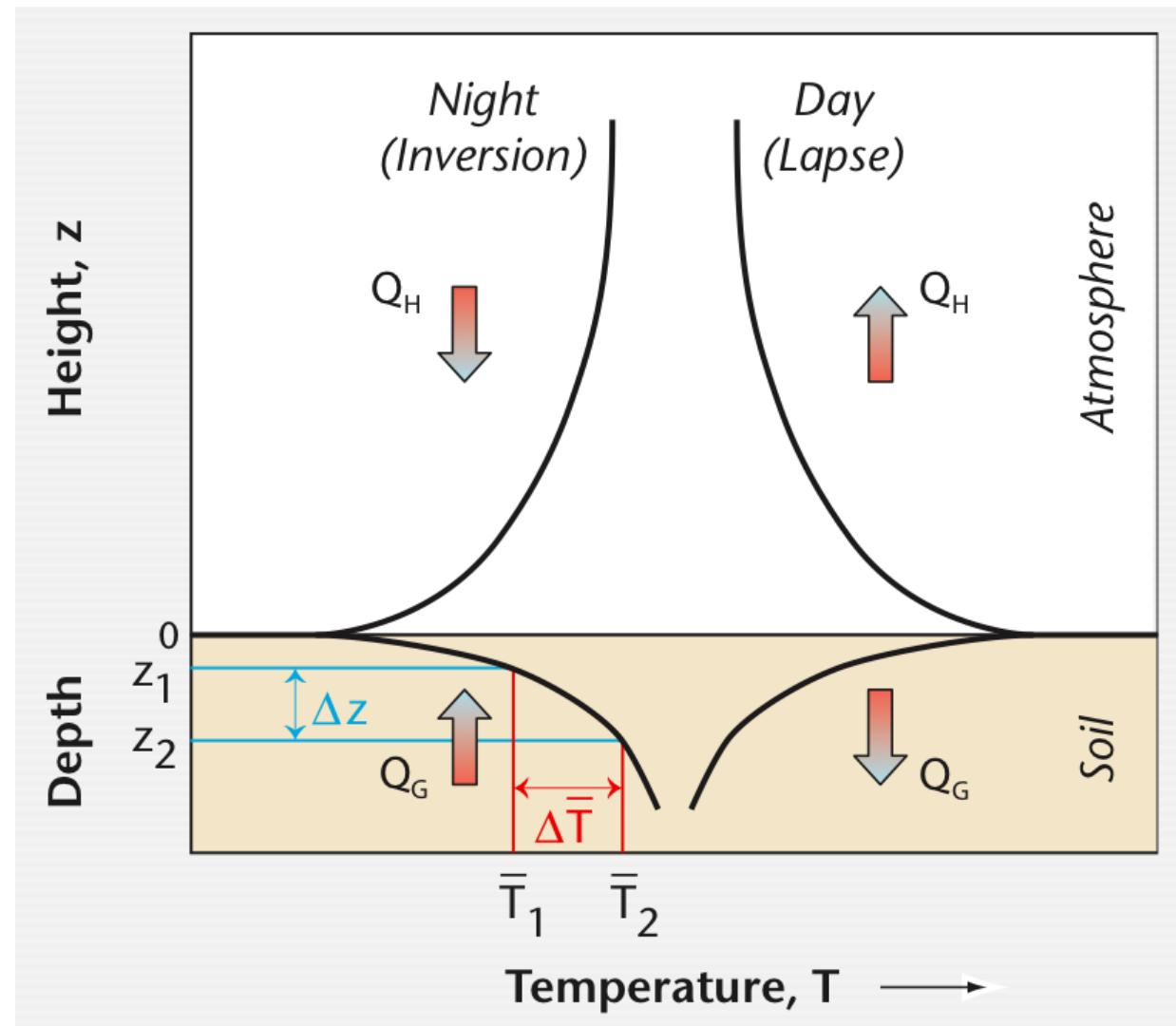
Test your knowledge (Class activity)

At 11:30 in the morning, we measure a soil heat flux density $Q_G(5\text{cm})$ of 25 W m^{-2} using a heat flux plate installed at 5 cm depth. Calculate the soil heat flux density at the surface $Q_G(0)$, if the soil's heat capacity in the layer from 0 to 5 cm depth is $2 \text{ MJ m}^{-3} \text{ K}^{-1}$ and the temperature in the same layer changed from 24.8°C at 11:00 to 25.3°C at 12:00.

$$Q_{G(0)} = Q_{G(z)} + \Delta Q_{G(0-z)}$$

$$\Delta Q_{G(0-z)} = C_s \left(\frac{\Delta T}{\Delta t} \right) \Delta z_{0-z}$$

Soil temperatures and heat flux profiles



The heat conduction equation.

$$\frac{\partial Q_G}{\partial z} = C_s \frac{\partial T}{\partial t}$$

$$Q_G = -k \frac{\partial T}{\partial z}$$

Second law of thermodynamics
(Eq. 1)

Fourier's law of heat conduction (Eq. 2)

$$\frac{\partial T}{\partial t} = -\frac{k}{C_s} \frac{\partial}{\partial z} \left(\frac{\partial T}{\partial z} \right) = -\kappa_s \frac{\partial^2 T}{\partial z^2}$$

Solving the heat conduction equation.

$$\frac{\partial T}{\partial t} = -\kappa_s \frac{\partial^2 T}{\partial z^2}$$

This is a **partial differential equation**, for which **no general analytic solution** exists. There are solutions for selected boundary conditions (see Lecture 12).

Often we approximate the equation with **multi-level soil models** (e.g. in numerical weather forecasting or climate models).

Alternatively one can neglect the variation with depth and look at **heat sharing** between air and soil.

Thermal admittance

The **thermal admittance μ** is the ability of a surface or system to accept or release heat following a change in (soil) heat flux $\partial Q_G / \partial t$.

$$\mu = \sqrt{kC} \quad *$$

Units are: $\text{J m}^{-2} \text{K}^{-1} \text{s}^{-1/2}$.

Thermal admittance

For a given change in ΔQ_G the change in surface temperature ΔT_s is inversely proportional to μ .

$$\frac{\partial T_s}{\partial t} \propto \frac{1}{\mu} \frac{\partial Q_G}{\partial t}$$

Test your knowledge

Surface temperature fluctuations for soils with **low thermal** admittance are:

- a) Small
- b) Large

$$\frac{\partial T_s}{\partial t} \propto \frac{1}{\mu} \frac{\partial Q_G}{\partial t}$$

Test your knowledge

Surface temperature fluctuations for soils with **low thermal** admittance are:

- a) Small
- b) Large

$$\frac{\partial T_s}{\partial t} \propto \frac{1}{\mu} \frac{\partial Q_G}{\partial t}$$

Thermal admittance of soils

High μ environments - relatively small T range (wet areas, clay, bare rock)

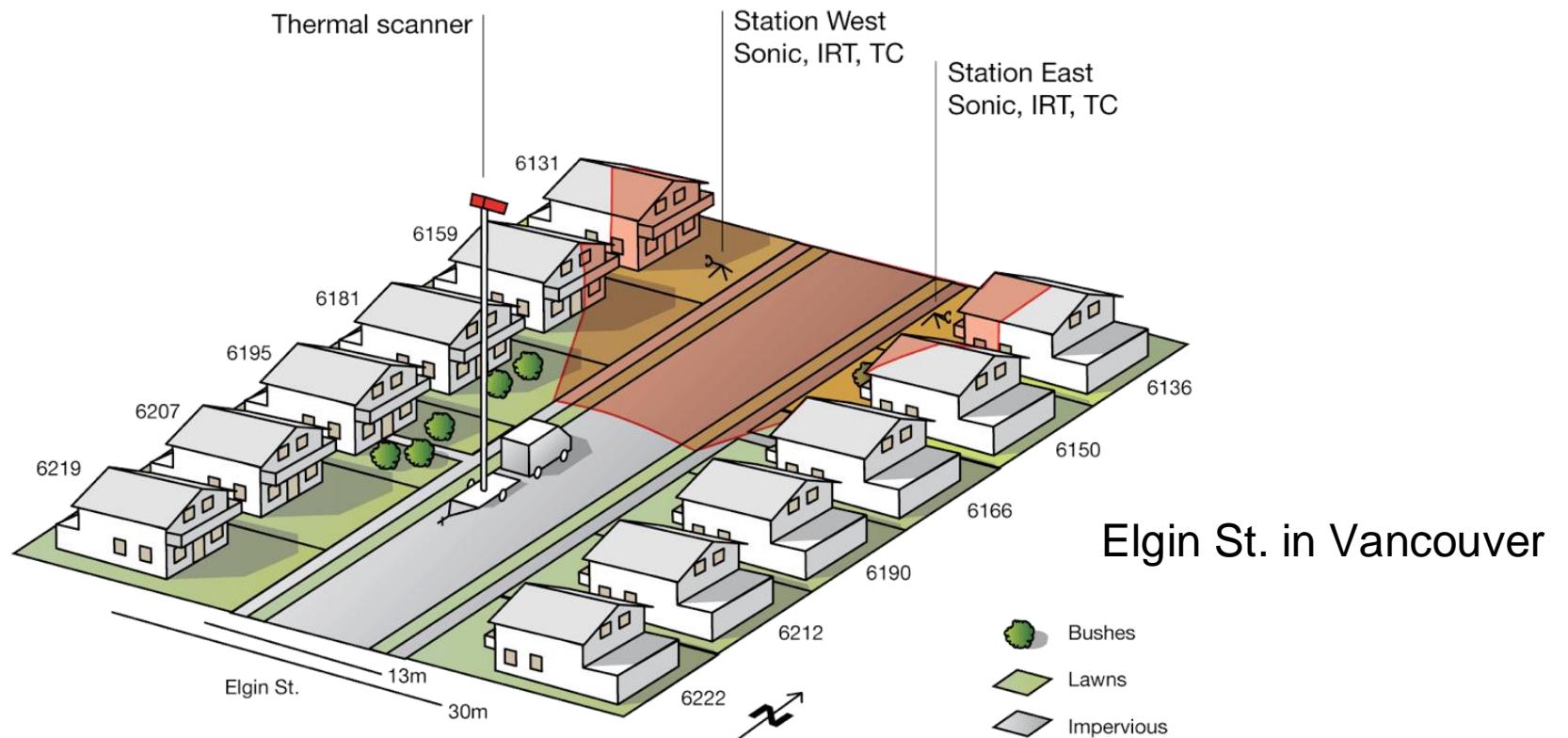
Low μ environments - large daily T range (dry areas, sandy, organic soils, vegetation cover, snow)

All forcing being equal soil with high μ will have a smaller surface temperature wave.
Low μ produces a larger surface temperature wave.

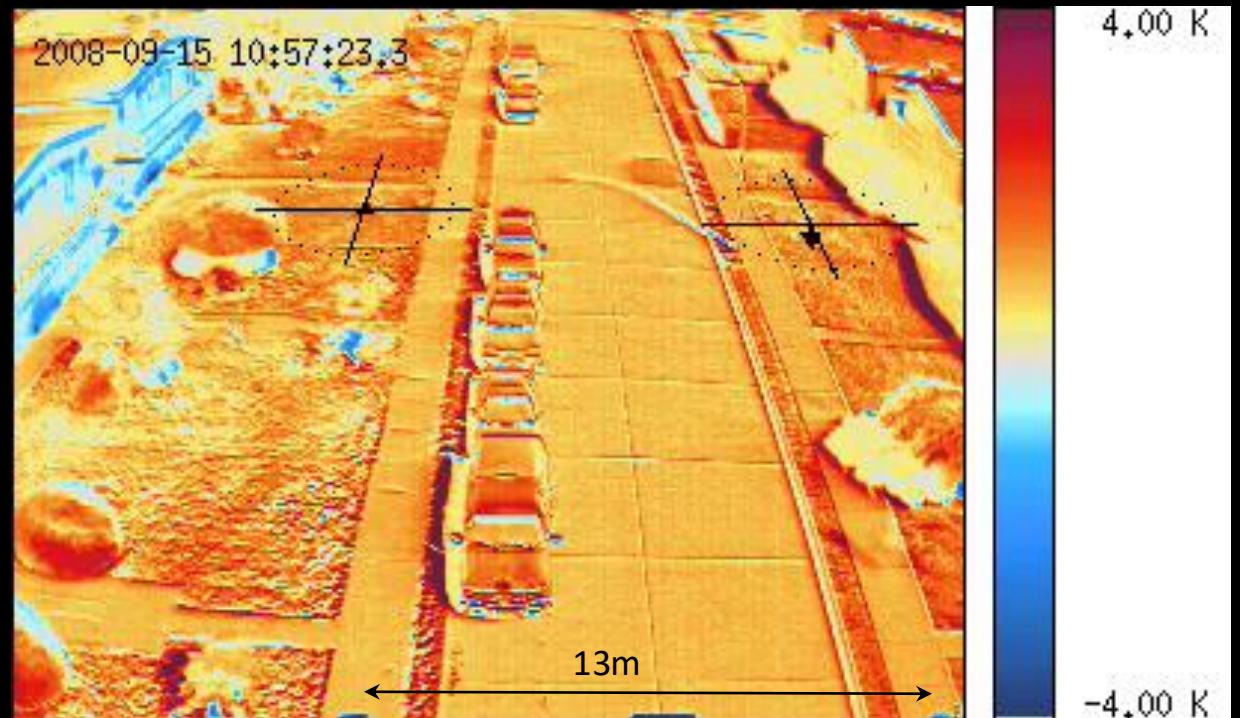


Visualizing the effect of thermal admittance

Thermal admittance controls how quickly the surface accepts heat, i.e. how much temperature fluctuation a surface is experiencing.



Fast thermal infrared thermography of temperature fluctuations at the surface with wind vectors overlaid

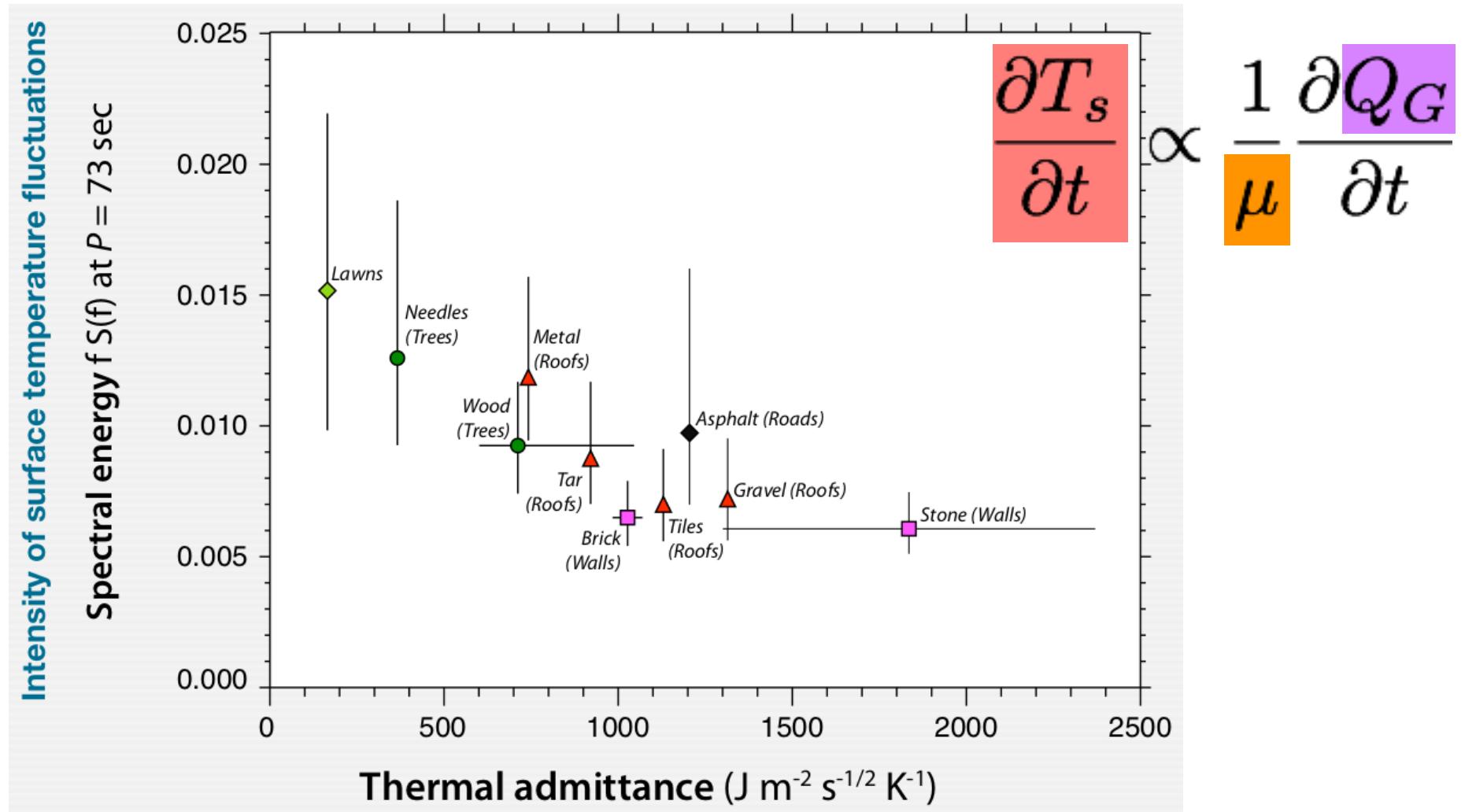


Approximate visible field of view



A.. Christen, J. A., Voogt (2010): 'Inferring turbulent exchange processes in an urban street canyon from high-frequency thermography', *19th Symposium on Boundary Layers and Turbulence*, Keystone CO, USA.

Surface temperature fluctuations correlate with thermal admittance.



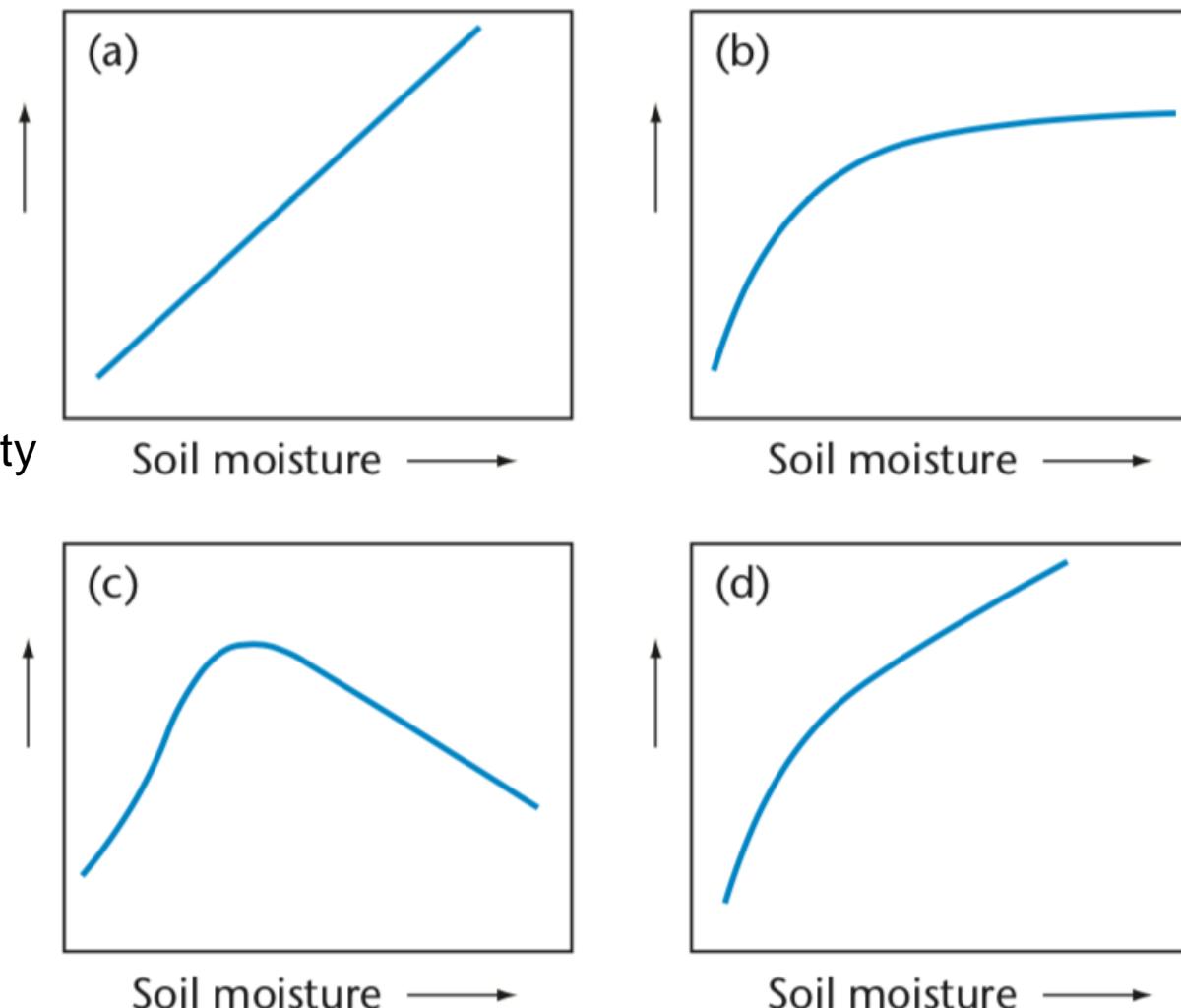
Effect of soil water content on thermal properties

Thermal
admittance

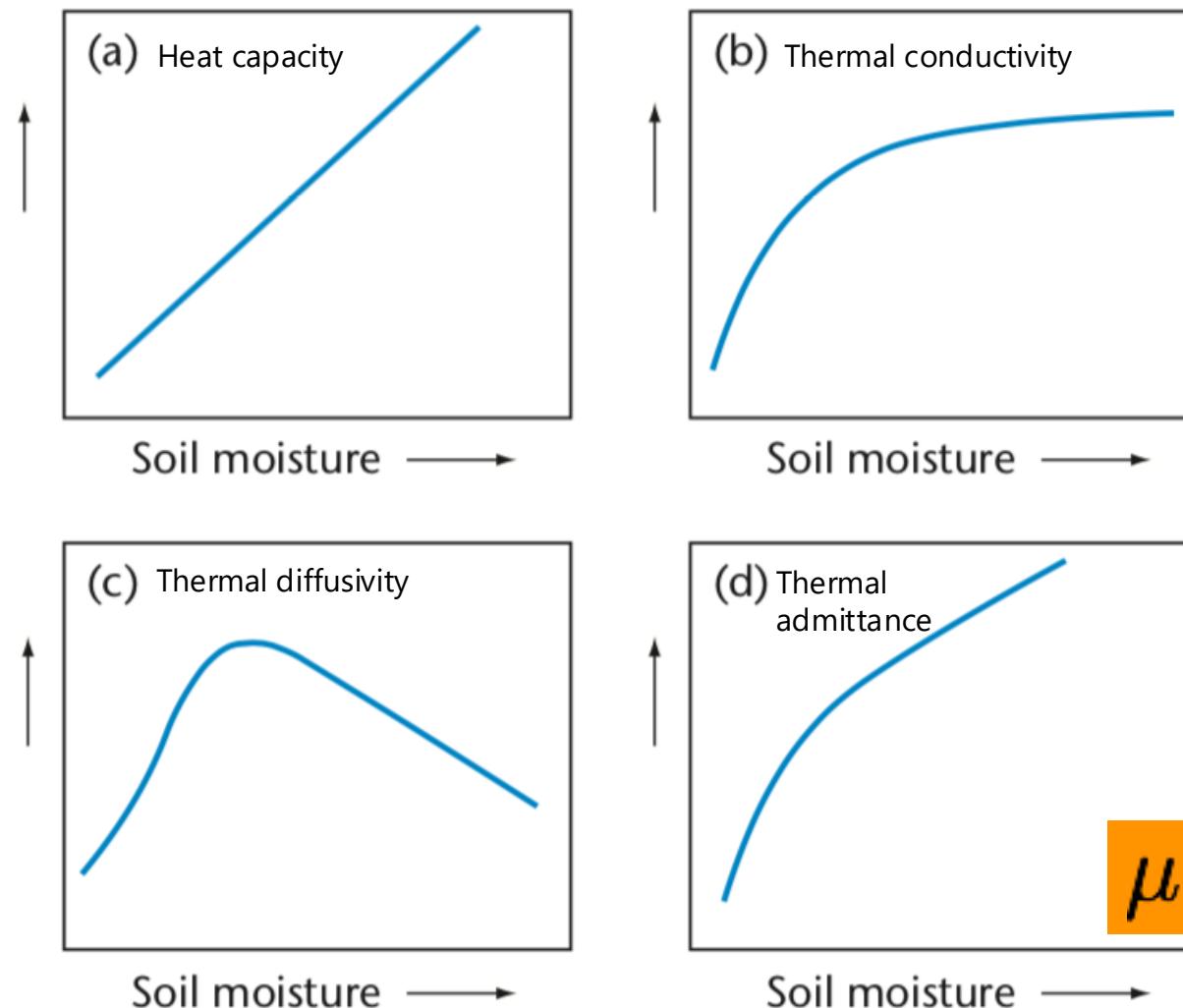
Heat capacity

Thermal diffusivity

Thermal conductivity



Effect of soil water content on thermal properties



$$\mu = \sqrt{kC} \quad *$$

Take home points

- Soils heat fluxes can be measured using **heat flux plates** inserted into some depth below the surface. Need to be corrected for divergence of heat above measurement level.
- The general **equation for heat conduction** describes how soil temperatures change over time and with depth. It has no general analytical solution, but we can approximate it or solve for selected boundary conditions.