A multi-sensor evaluation of precipitation uncertainty for landslide-triggering storm events

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There are many sources of uncertainty that present challenges to skillful predictions of rainfall-triggered landslides. One of the largest source of uncertainty in landslide probability comes from the volume and spatial distribution of precipitation volume and intensity during and immediately preceding the landslide event. A key challenge for practitioners is selecting among the wide range of precipitation measurements across different available datasets. Here we investigate the degree of precipitation uncertainty in these landslide-triggering storm events and the impact of that uncertainty on predicted landslide probability using established operational models. First, we compare precipitation at 257 landslide locations across the continental US and Canada. Precipitation data are taken from five products that cover disparate measurement methods: two satellite (Global Precipitation Mission IMERG Early and Final calibrated precipitation), radar (Multi-Radar Multi-Sensor gauge bias-corrected precipitation), gauge (North American Land Data Assimilation System v. 2 Forcing precipitation), and numerical weather prediction (High-Resolution Rapid Refresh real-time precipitation). These products also cover a range of spatial and temporal resolutions as well as spatial extent and real-time or near real-time availability. We compare the average intensity, peak intensity at the smallest interval available, duration of the landslide-triggering storms, and return period as measured by each product. Next, we compare the intensity and duration of the precipitation to existing regional Intensity-Duration Threshold landslide prediction models. In order to evaluate the effects of resolution on the results, we also included a comparison of each dataset re-gridded to match the coarsest spatial and temporal resolution (NLDAS2). The implications of uncertainty in precipitation landslide predictions in the context of making real-time predictions are explored relative to historical datasets.