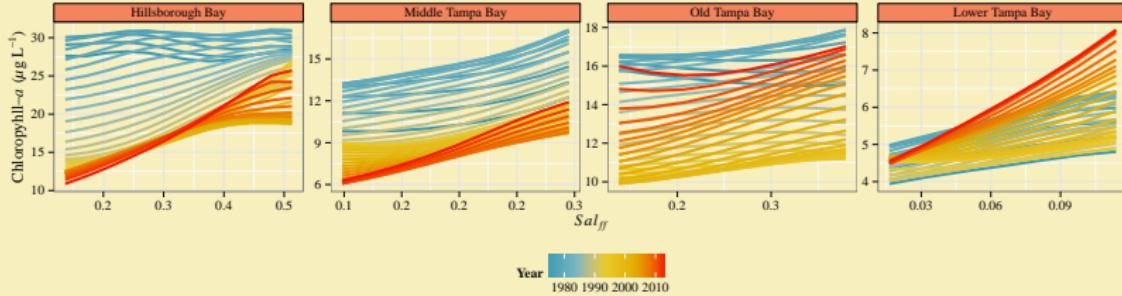


The search for truth in numbers: Quantitative approaches for evaluating trends in water quality data

Marcus W. Beck

ORISE post-doc, USEPA National Health and Environmental Effects Research Laboratory, Gulf Ecology Division, beck.marcus@epa.gov, Phone: 8509342480

Oct. 24, 2014



The eutrophication paradigm

Research and management in coastal waters

Eutrophication (noun) - an increase in the rate of supply of organic matter to an ecosystem

– [Nixon, 1995]

Adapted from [Cloern, 2001]

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Nutrient Loading

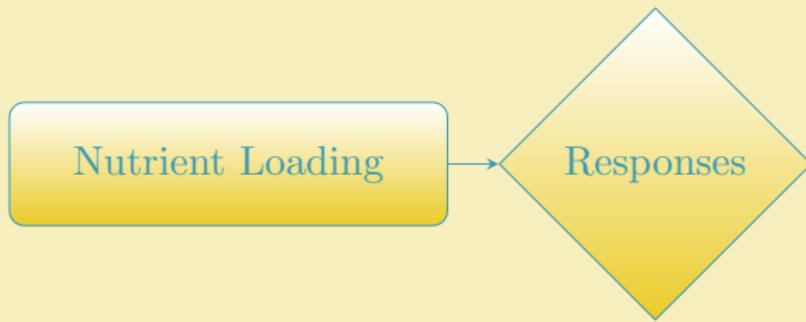
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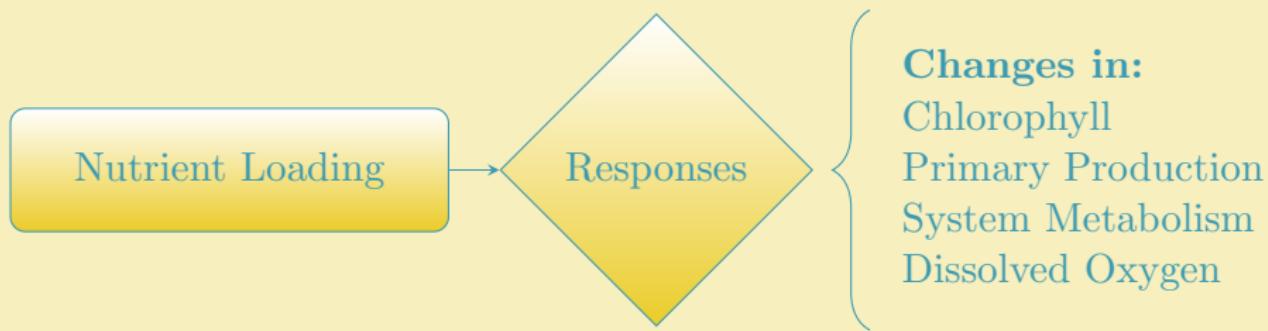
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Human inputs can greatly accelerate eutrophication... particularly for coastal waters

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- Depletion of bottom water dissolved oxygen
[Diaz and Rosenberg, 2008]

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The eutrophication paradigm

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- Propogated effects to upper trophic levels [Powers et al., 2005]

The eutrophication paradigm

Research and management in coastal waters

Red tide off northwest Florida may hit economy

Jason Dearen, Associated Press

2:40 p.m. CDT September 18, 2014



(Photo: Bruce Graner)

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CLEARWATER –

It's like Florida's version of The Blob. Slow moving glops of toxic algae in the northeast Gulf of Mexico are killing sea turtles, sharks and fish, and threatening the waters and beaches that fuel the

region's economy.

Known as "red tide," this particular strain called Karenia brevis is present almost every year off Florida, but large blooms can be particularly devastating. Right now, the algae is collecting in an area about 60 miles wide and 100 miles long, about 5 to 15 miles off St. Petersburg in the south and stretching north to Florida's Big Bend, where the peninsula ends and the Panhandle begins.



MORE STORIES



Forum faces economic realities

Oct. 14, 2014, 8:40 p.m.



Businessman buys block in downtown Pensacola

Oct. 14, 2014, 8:27 p.m.

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Research and management in coastal waters

Water Quality Act Amendments of 1972

- Federal mandates to protect and restore the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of surface waters
- Protection and restoration requires criteria

The eutrophication paradigm

Research and management in coastal waters

Water Quality Act Amendments of 1972

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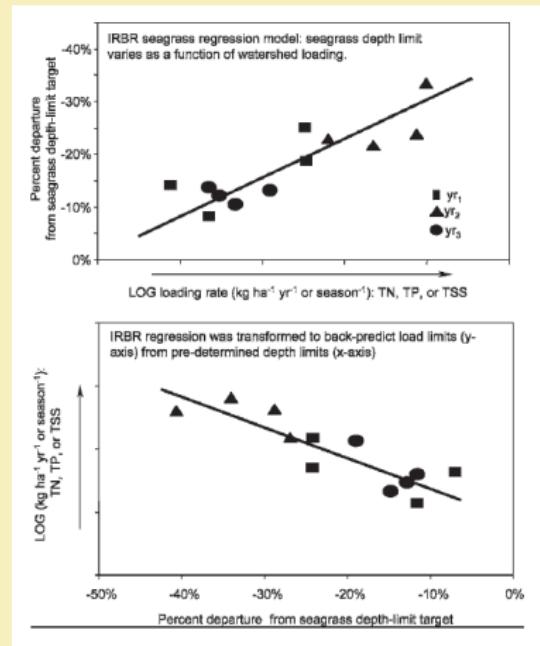
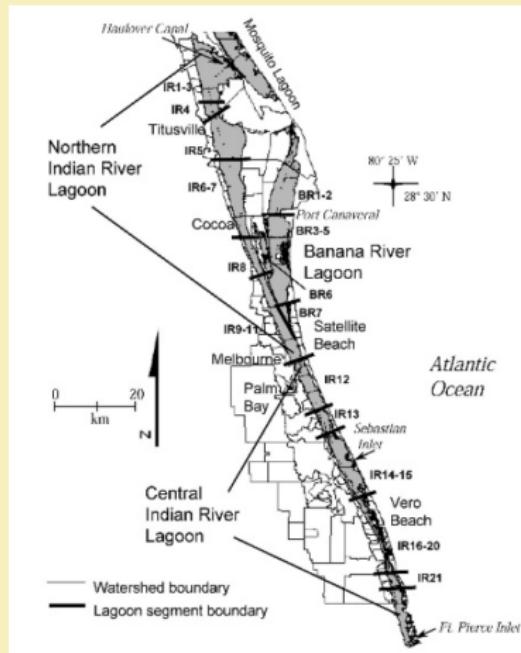
Numeric nutrient criteria

- The amounts of contaminants or pollutants that may be present without impairing aquatic life or human health
- E.g., nutrients limits for seagrass in Indian River Lagoon...

The eutrophication paradigm

Research and management in coastal waters

Nutrient limits using seagrass depth-limit targets [Steward and Green, 2007]



The eutrophication paradigm

Research and management in coastal waters

USEPA national strategy for the development of regional nutrient criteria

- Aid states' ability to control and reduce nutrient enrichments
- Responsibility of EPA to develop criteria guidance

[USEPA (US Environmental Protection Agency), 1998]

The eutrophication paradigm

Research and management in coastal waters

USEPA Gulf Ecology Division - guidance to Florida DEP and others
on criteria development for estuaries



The eutrophication paradigm

Challenges for criteria development

There are challenges to providing guidance...

Challenge 1: We don't fully understand eutrophication processes

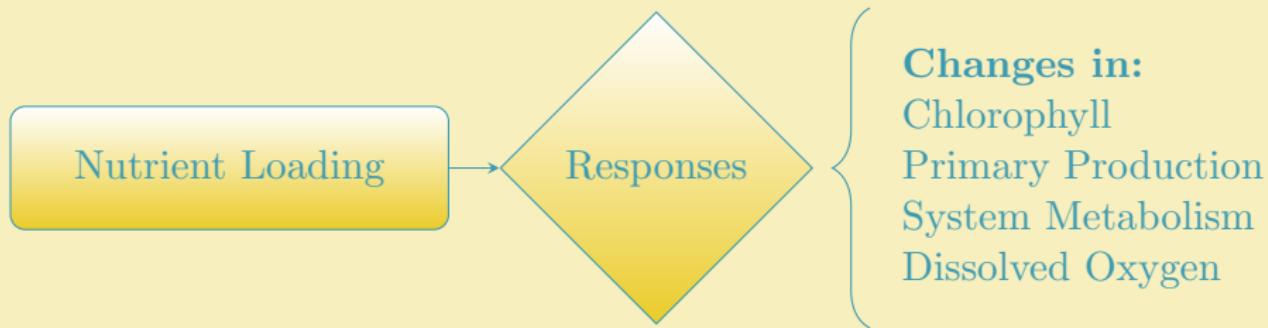
There are good reasons to believe that eutrophication will, in the near future, become a hazard in marine coastal areas in many parts of the world.

– [Rosenberg, 1985]

The eutrophication paradigm

Challenges for criteria development

Our conceptual model for understanding the effects of nutrient pollution is adopted from freshwater sciences.

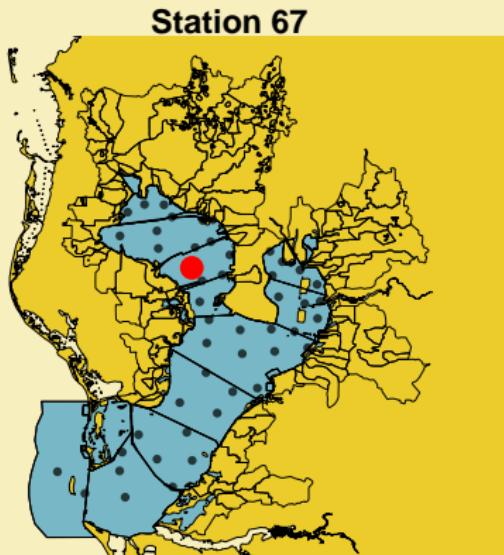
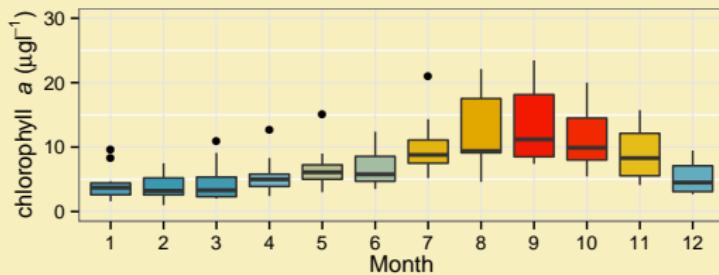
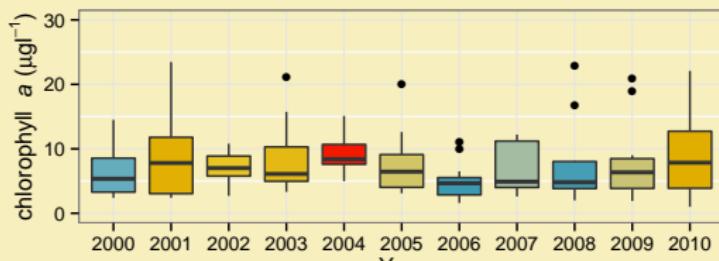


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The eutrophication paradigm

Challenges for criteria development

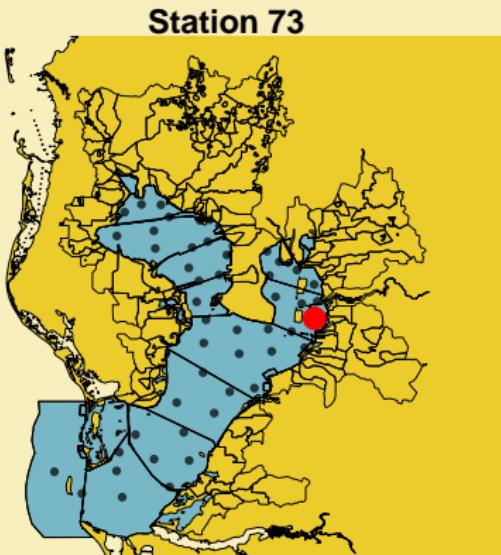
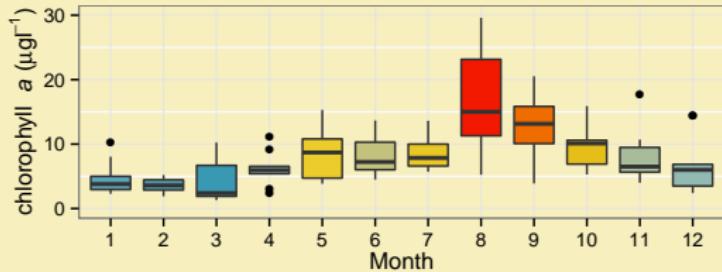
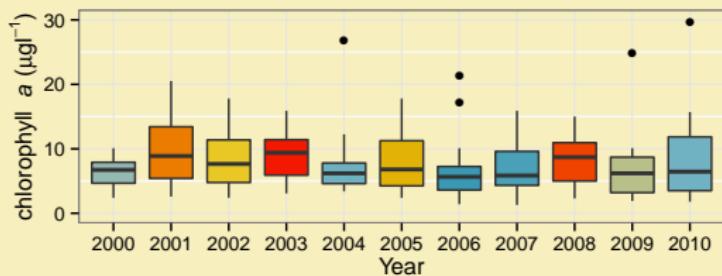
Spatial and temporal variation in chlorophyll for Tampa Bay



The eutrophication paradigm

Challenges for criteria development

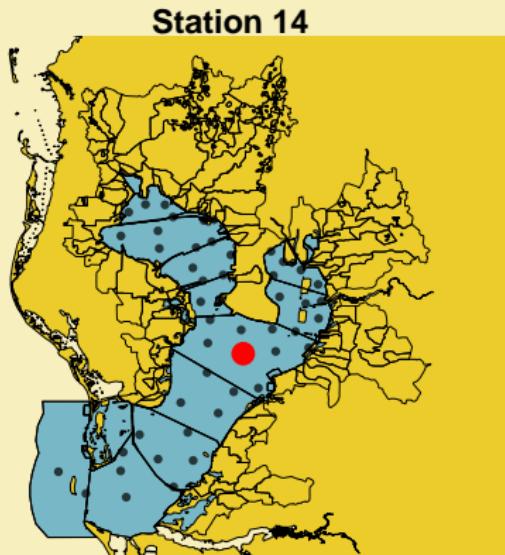
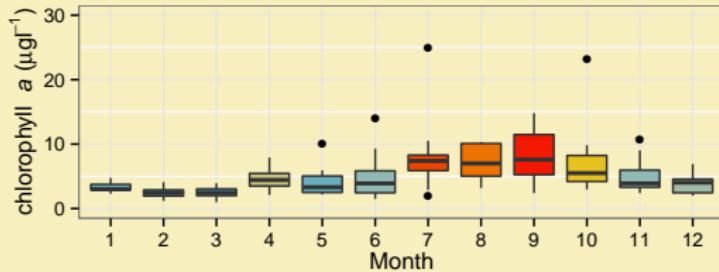
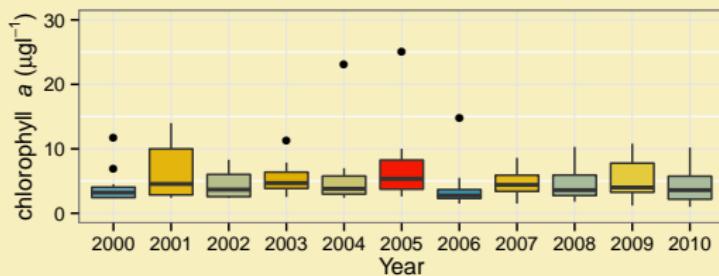
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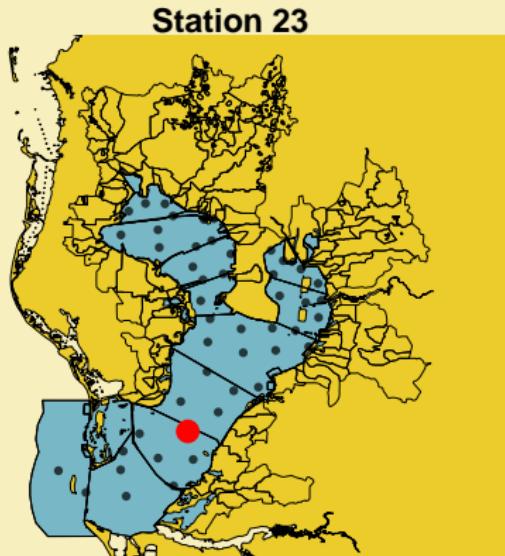
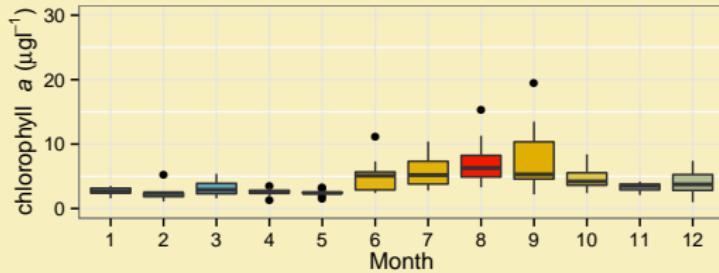
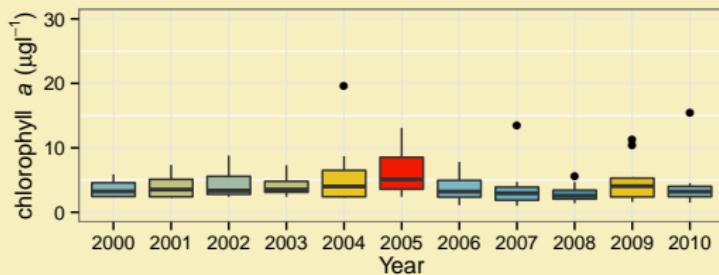
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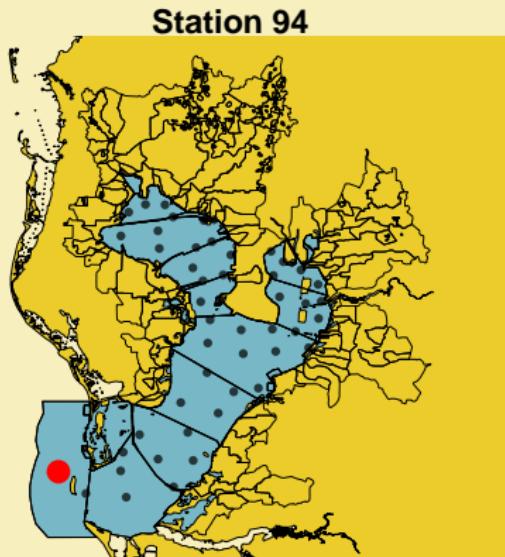
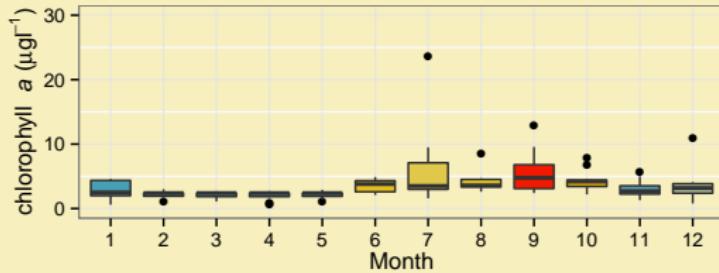
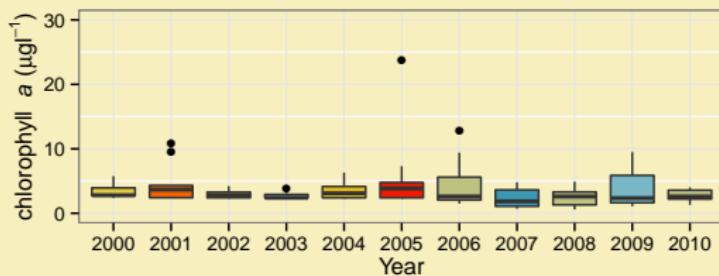
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The eutrophication paradigm

Challenges for criteria development

Spatial and temporal variation in chlorophyll for Tampa Bay



The eutrophication paradigm

Challenges for criteria development

Challenge 2: We have the data but often lack tools to unambiguously and quantitatively characterize

The eutrophication paradigm

Challenges for criteria development

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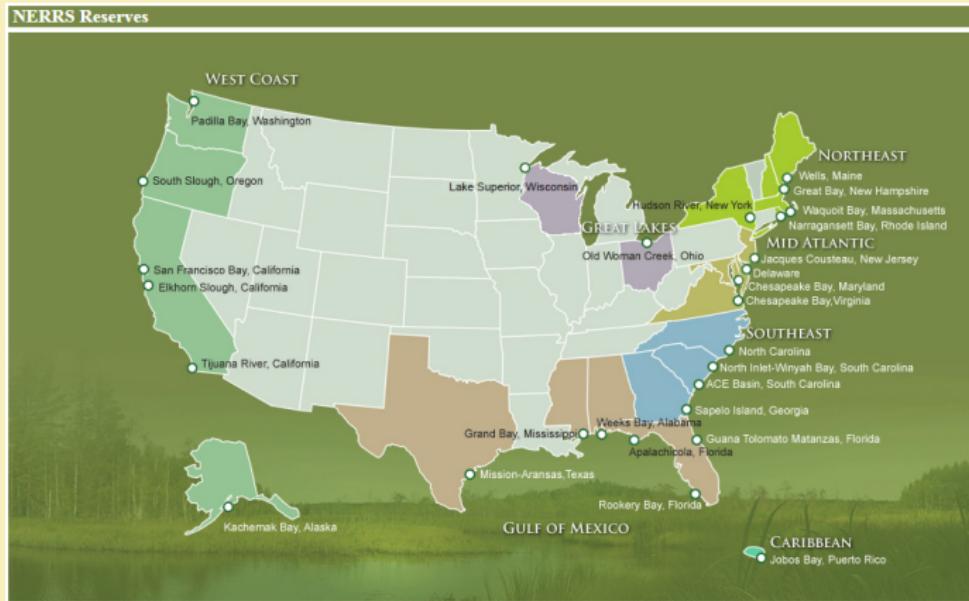
Data without models are chaos, but models without data are fantasy.

– NWQMC 2014 plenary, R. Hirsch via [Nisbet et al., 2014]

The eutrophication paradigm

Challenges for criteria development

System Wide Monitoring Program, initiated in 1995 to provide continuous data at over 300 stations in 28 US estuaries



<http://nerrs.noaa.gov/ReservesMap.aspx>

The eutrophication paradigm

Challenges for criteria development

SWMP - As of this month, over 56 million records

- Weather > 13 million
- Water quality > 43 million
- Nutrients > 93 thousand

The eutrophication paradigm

Challenges for criteria development

SWMP - As of this month, over 56 million records

- Weather > 13 million
- Water quality > 43 million
- Nutrients > 93 thousand

Despite the quantity and quality of the data, very few comparative analyses. Exceptions...

- Comparison of net metabolism [Caffrey, 2003], [Caffrey, 2004]
- DO variation between estuaries [Wenner et al., 2004]
- Synthesis reports [Wenner et al., 2001], [Sanger et al., 2002]

The eutrophication paradigm

Challenges for criteria development

Guidance may come in many forms - not just a number

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Case 1: Chlorophyll drivers in Tampa Bay

The eutrophication paradigm

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Case 2: Improving our understanding of seagrass growth and water quality

The eutrophication paradigm

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Case 1: Chlorophyll drivers in Tampa Bay

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Case 3: ‘Open-science’ tools for analysis of water quality

The eutrophication paradigm

Challenges for criteria development

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Case 1: Chlorophyll drivers in Tampa Bay

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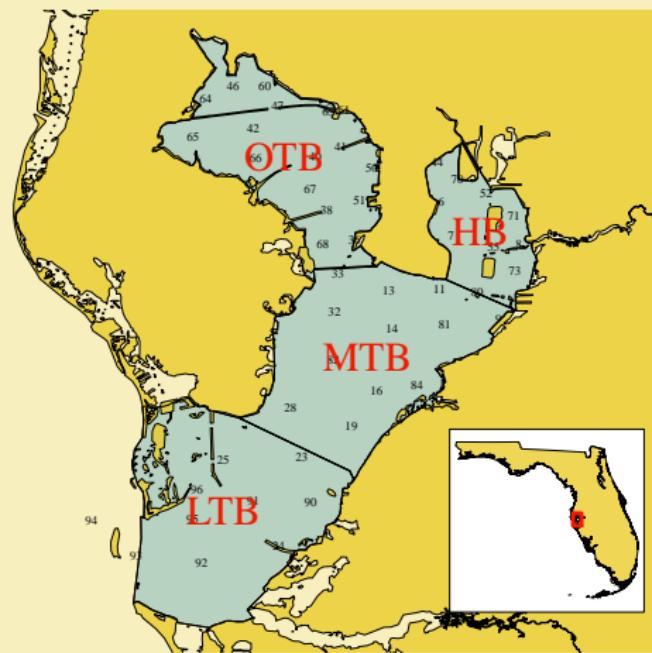
Each provides an example of addressing the dual challenges of understanding nutrient dynamics and developing quantitative tools for trend evaluation

Case 1: Tampa Bay

Understanding chlorophyll response to eutrophication

- Four bay segments
- Monthly wq data at 50 stations from 1974 to present
- Longitudinal profile of nutrient load and salinity

Data from [TBEP (Tampa Bay Estuary Program), 2011]



Case 1: Tampa Bay

Understanding chlorophyll response to eutrophication

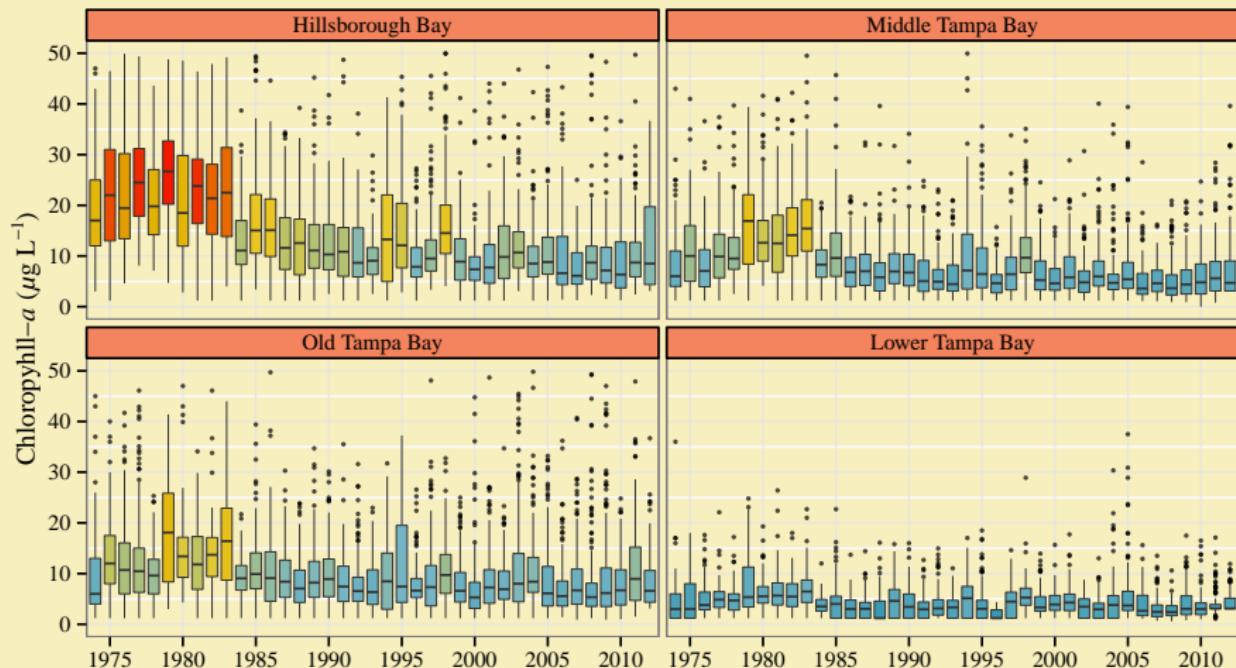


Figure : Annual trends in chlorophyll for each bay segment.

Case 1: Tampa Bay

Understanding chlorophyll response to eutrophication

What affects our interpretation of chlorophyll response to nutrients?

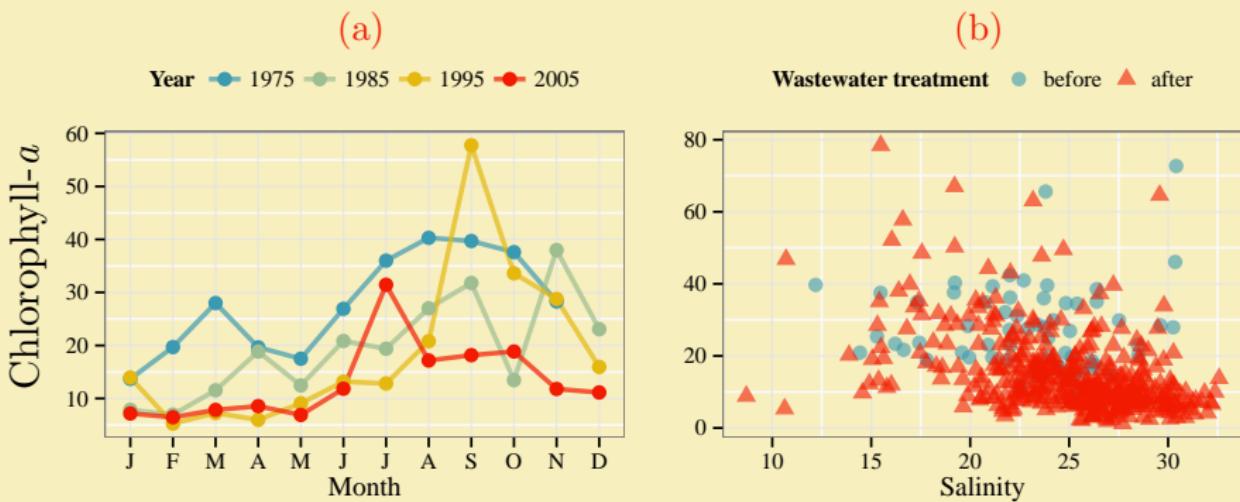


Figure : Variation in chlorophyll by (a) time and (b) salinity and management in Hillsborough Bay. Panel (a) is colored before and after wastewater treatment in 1979.

Case 1: Tampa Bay

Understanding chlorophyll response to eutrophication

Study objective

Adapt and apply nutrient response model for estuaries that leverages the descriptive capabilities of large datasets

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Questions of management concern – Can we...

- ...provide a natural history of water quality that is temporally consistent with drivers of change?

Case 1: Tampa Bay

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- ...characterize changes in extreme events in addition to describing the mean response?

Case 1: Tampa Bay

Understanding chlorophyll response to eutrophication

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Adapt and apply nutrient response model for estuaries that leverages the descriptive capabilities of large datasets

Questions of management concern – Can we...

- ...provide a natural history of water quality that is temporally consistent with drivers of change?
- ...characterize changes in extreme events in addition to describing the mean response?
- ...improve our understanding of the nutrient-response paradigm in estuaries?

Case 1: Tampa Bay

Understanding chlorophyll response to eutrophication

The weighted regression (WRTDS) model is being developed by USGS for pollutant modelling in rivers [Hirsch et al., 2010]

Based on the idea that pollution concentration is a function of time, discharge, and season

Case 1: Tampa Bay

Understanding chlorophyll response to eutrophication

The weighted regression (WRTDS) model is being developed by USGS for pollutant modelling in rivers [Hirsch et al., 2010]

Based on the idea that pollution concentration is a function of **time**, **discharge**, and **season**

Problem: We want to see if management has an effect on reducing pollutant load over time, but pollutant load varies with discharge.

Solution: Develop a model that accounts for changes in relationships between drivers of pollution over time.

Adaptation: Can this approach be used to evaluate chlorophyll trends in Tampa Bay?

Case 1: Tampa Bay

Understanding chlorophyll response to eutrophication

How does weighted regression work?

Case 1: Tampa Bay

Understanding chlorophyll response to eutrophication

This gives us improved predictions of chlorophyll dynamics...

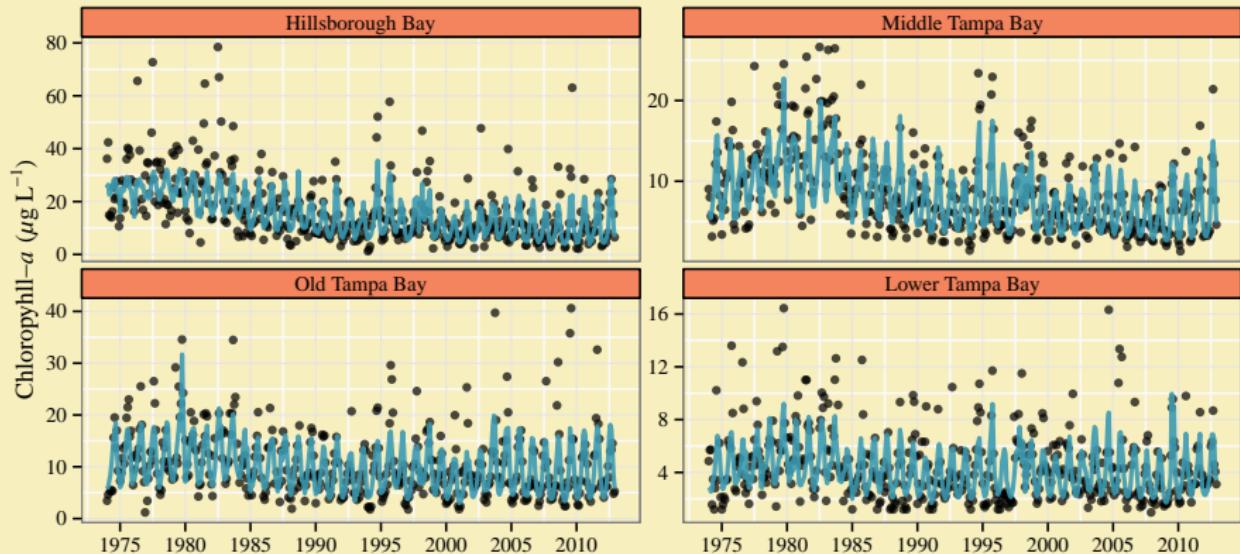
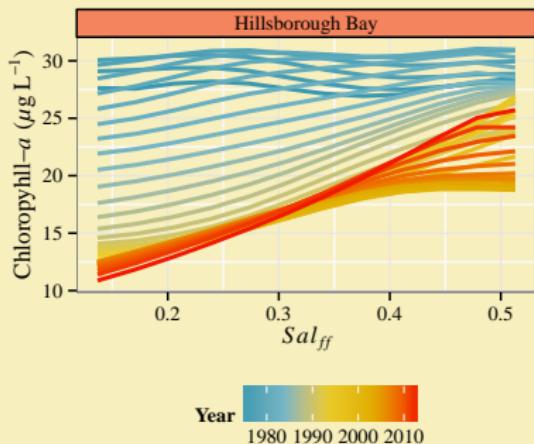


Figure : Predicted and observed monthly chlorophyll by segment.

Case 1: Tampa Bay

Understanding chlorophyll response to eutrophication

Because the model is dynamic, we have parameters describing the relationship of chlorophyll with other factors specific to different time periods



- Early period (blue) - point-sources
- Late period (red) - non-point sources
- Chlorophyll shows increasing response to freshwater input in recent years

Case 1: Tampa Bay

Understanding chlorophyll response to eutrophication

What does this mean for Tampa Bay?

- Predictions followed observed chlorophyll – but increased clarity in the description
- More detailed evaluation of trends allows greater insight into drivers of change

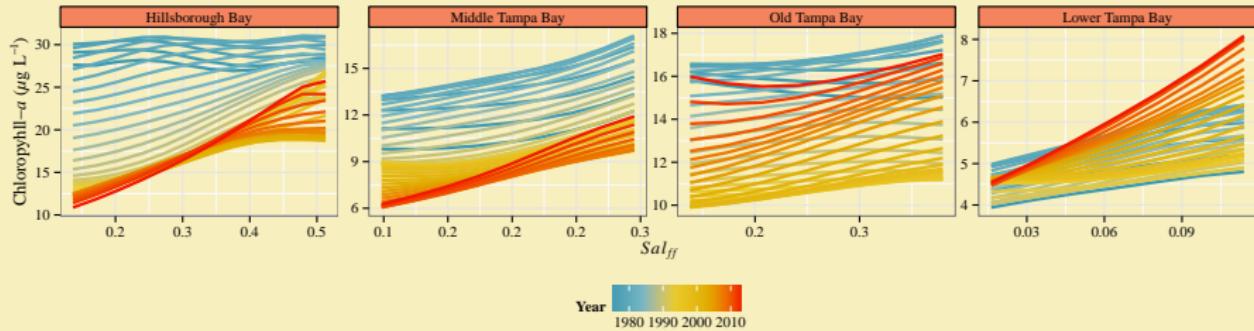
Case 1: Tampa Bay

Understanding chlorophyll response to eutrophication

What does this mean for Tampa Bay?

- Predictions followed observed chlorophyll – but increased clarity in the description
- More detailed evaluation of trends allows greater insight into drivers of change

The model parameters show us a picture...



Case 2: Seagrass and water quality

Making the most of existing data

Seagrass have long been considered sentinels of water quality



Seagrass provide numerous benefits - healthy seagrass, healthy estuary

Credit: flickr.com/photos/swimvixen2

Case 2: Seagrass and water quality

Making the most of existing data

The maximum depth of colonization is a useful proxy for trophic state

Often used as a basis for establishing nutrient criteria

Case 2: Seagrass and water quality

Making the most of existing data

The maximum depth of colonization is a useful proxy for trophic state

Often used as a basis for establishing nutrient criteria

Problem 1: No consensus on the best way to measure depth of colonization

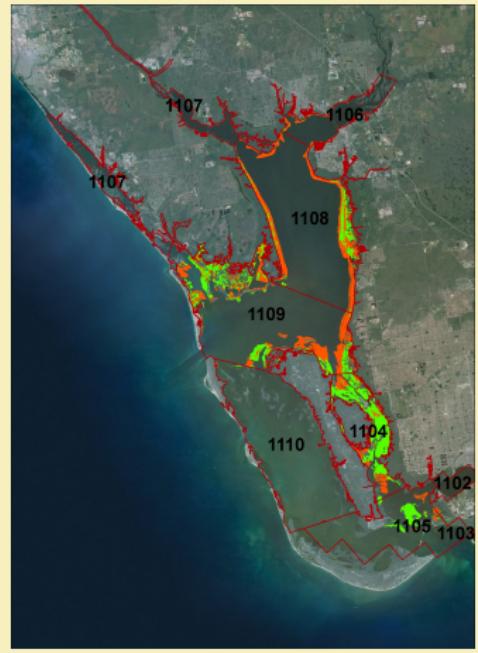
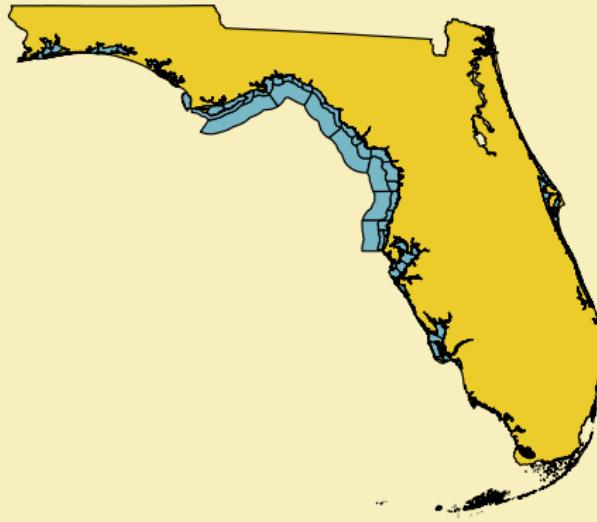
Problem 2: Plenty of data are available but standardized techniques have not been developed

Case 2: Seagrass and water quality

Making the most of existing data

Solution 1: Develop a reproducible and empirical method for estimating depth of colonization that can be universally applied

Segment-based approach



Case 2: Seagrass and water quality

Making the most of existing data

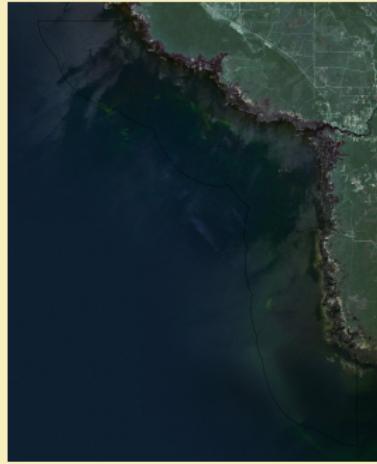
How can we estimate depth of colonization?

Case 2: Seagrass and water quality

Making the most of existing data

How can we estimate depth of colonization?

Pick a segment

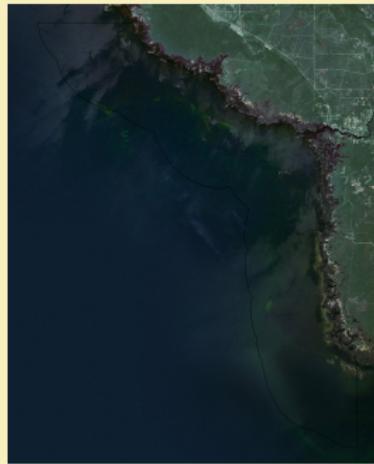


Case 2: Seagrass and water quality

Making the most of existing data

How can we estimate depth of colonization?

Pick a segment



Get seagrass coverage

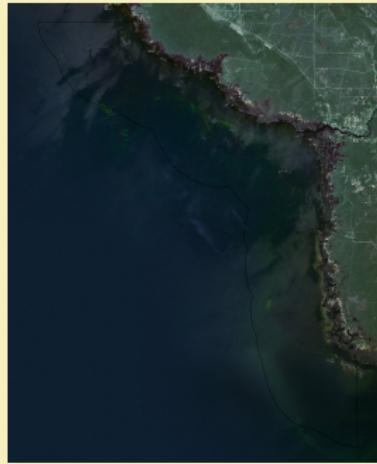


Case 2: Seagrass and water quality

Making the most of existing data

How can we estimate depth of colonization?

Pick a segment



Get seagrass coverage



Get depth points

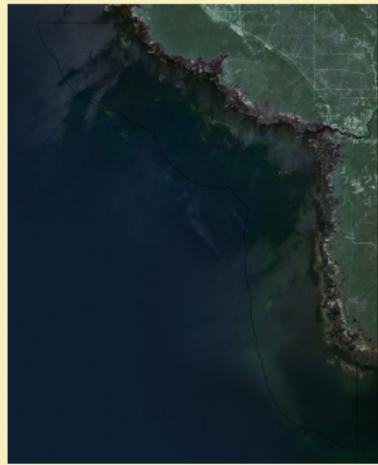


Case 2: Seagrass and water quality

Making the most of existing data

How can we estimate depth of colonization?

Pick a segment



Get seagrass coverage



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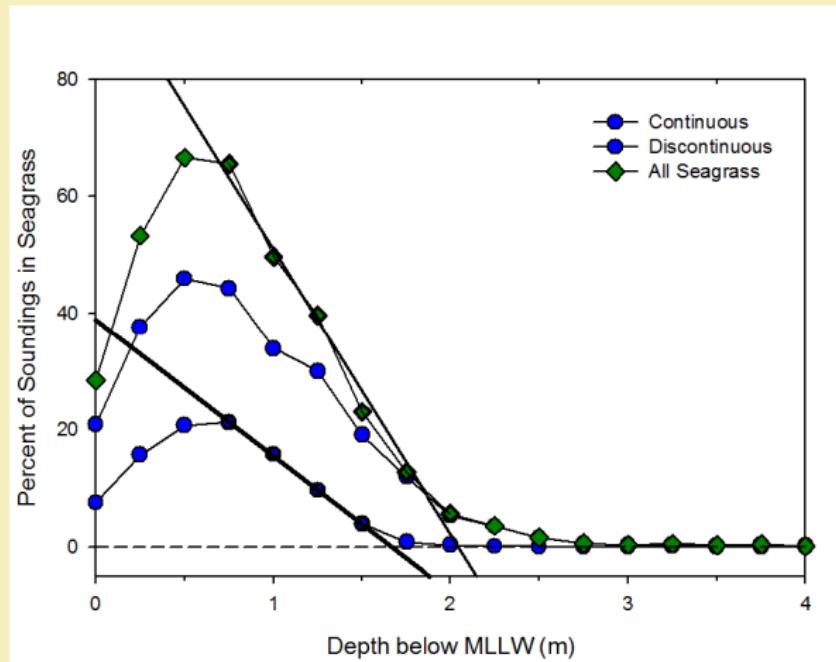


All data are publically available

Case 2: Seagrass and water quality

Making the most of existing data

Plot the distribution of seagrass by increasing depth

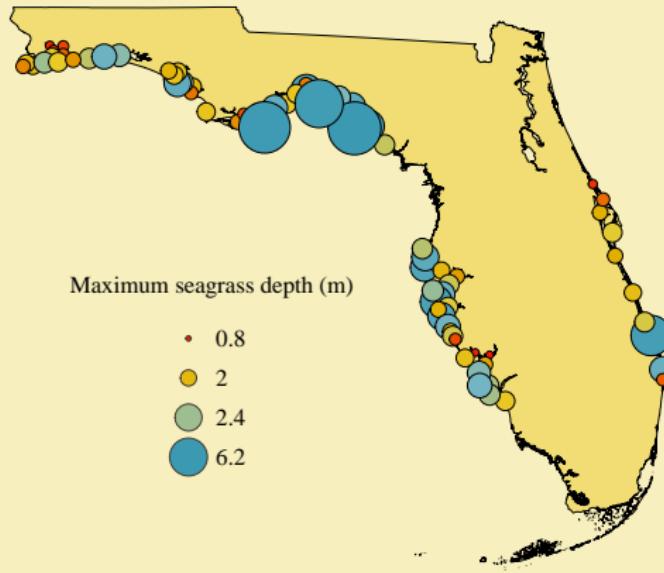


Credit: [Hagy et al., in prep]

Case 2: Seagrass and water quality

Making the most of existing data

We can get an estimate of seagrass depth of colonization for each segment in Florida [Hagy et al., in prep]



Case 2: Seagrass and water quality

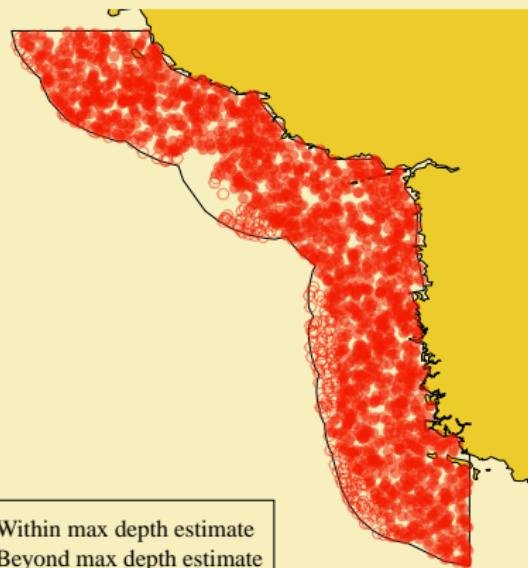
Making the most of existing data

This approach works if the segment is an appropriate spatial unit to characterize seagrass...

Case 2: Seagrass and water quality

Making the most of existing data

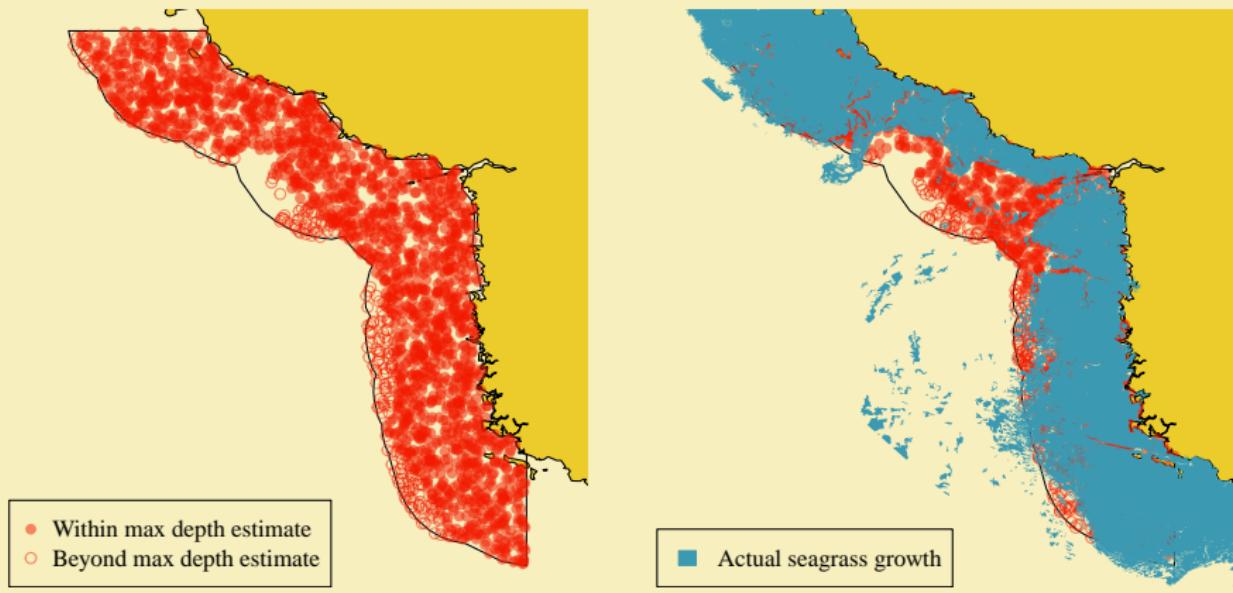
This approach works if the segment is an appropriate spatial unit to characterize seagrass...



Case 2: Seagrass and water quality

Making the most of existing data

This approach works if the segment is an appropriate spatial unit to characterize seagrass...



Case 2: Seagrass and water quality

Making the most of existing data

If segment is not appropriate, can we define a spatial boundary for estimating seagrass depth of colonization?

Case 2: Seagrass and water quality

Making the most of existing data

This can be repeated for a number of points until we get estimates that make sense

Case 2: Seagrass and water quality

Making the most of existing data

Benefits of the approach:



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