* Chapter 2: **The river corridor** is a significant reservoir for stream carbon
  + Introduction
  + Hypothesis
  + Methods
  + Analysis
  + Timeline

**Abstract:**

* The river corridor (RC)- the stream, its hyporheic zone, and its riparian wetland- is hypothesized to play a crucial role in lateral carbon exchange, however, the RC transport and storage has not been thoroughly investigated and is overlooked in carbon budgeting models.
* For this chapter, I aim to investigate the RC’s role on stream carbon fluxes within flatwood landscapes, and across confined and unconfined aquifer watersheds.
* Through sampling and point-recordings of nine Bradford Forest RCs and their adjacent streams, I aim to investigate RC influence on stream carbon dynamics within flatwood landscapes and improve understanding of flatwood-landscape carbon budgets.
* Through data query, I aim to gather data on RC influence and carbon contributions across different watershed types (confined and unconfined aquifer units) to broadly interrogate lateral carbon-transport mechanisms.
* I hypothesize that the RC is a tremendous source of stream carbon, with basins having greater wetland coverage exhibiting higher RC carbon-storage potential due to elevated water tables facilitating enhanced lateral subsurface transport. Additionally, I hypothesis RCs within confined aquifer units have greater influence on stream carbon, as the confining unit facilitates a shallow, nutrient-rich water table serving as a medium for greater lateral transport.

**Introduction:**

**Methods:**

Study Site:

The Bradford Forest tract, spanning 27,000 acres in Bradford County, Florida, encompasses a contiguous pine flatwoods landscape situated within the Hawthorne Formation. This formation comprises a substantial clay bed that confines the principal aquifer stretching from North Florida to South Carolina (Hensley & Cohen, 2017). Characterized by low-relief topography, the area is densely packed with depressional basin wetlands, typical of North Florida flatwoods. These wetlands, both isolated and riparian, are predominantly dominated by cypress domes and wiregrass.

Streams within the Bradford Forest area exhibit typical characteristics of blackwater systems: they are tannic, rich in dissolved organic carbon (DOC), with low pH levels and high concentrations of carbon dioxide (CO2). These streams, both permanent and intermittent, drain the landscape before discharging into either the Sampson River (at the southern extent) or Sampson Lake (at the northern extent). The land is primarily managed for silviculture and is owned entirely by the Rayonier Corporation, with only a few residential homes and businesses present.

For my research project, I will observe three streams from three distinct basins, each representing a gradient of wetland-area coverage (FIGURE 3). Alongside these streams, I will also observe the intermittently connected wetlands to estimate their carbon (C) contribution during periods of high discharge.

A screenshot of a map

Description automatically generated

FIGURE 3. A map depicting site locations and the surrounding landscape. The Bradford Forest tract, spanning 27,000 acres in Bradford County, Florida, encompasses a contiguous pine flatwoods landscape situated within the Hawthorne Formation. Characterized by low-relief topography, the area is densely packed with depressional basin wetlands, typical of North Florida flatwoods.

Water Sampling and High-Frequency Observations:

Each stream in the Bradford Forest tract will be equipped with a sensor package for tracking stream chemistry at hourly intervals. This package includes sensors for dissolved oxygen (DO), pH, CO2, and conductivity (SpC), along with two pressure transducers (PT) - one deployed in ambient air and the other in the water column. Groundwater wells will be strategically installed across the river corridor (RC) elevation and microsites, including locations on the stream bank, in the uplands, between the uplands and the stream bank, and in intermittent flow paths and depressions, if present.

During each monthly field visit, a roving pH and CO2 sensor will be placed in the wells to detect groundwater concentrations for point-readings. Additionally, water table depth will be measured using a water level meter. Water samples for DIC, DOC, particulate organic carbon (POC), and fluorescent dissolved organic matter (FDOM) will be collected from the streams and wells. During periods of high discharge, FDOM, DIC, DOC, and POC samples will be taken from intermittent flow paths and their associated wetlands. DOC analysis will be conducted using the Shimadzu TOC-L analyzer, while DIC concentrations will be analyzed on the Shimadzu and through titrations for alkalinity. POC concentrations will be determined using dry-weight and ash-free dry weight methods. FDOM samples will be analyzed using the HORIBA Aqualog. The PARAFAC model, akin to principal component analysis, will be employed to differentiate wetland, stream, and wetland C signatures, allowing estimation of upland and lowland contributions to C dynamics.

Discharge Estimates

The estimation of RC lateral discharge will use methods adapted from Kirk and Cohen (2020) and involves applying concepts and filtering techniques from Kalbus et al. (2016) and Leopold & Maddock (1953). This approach utilizes mass balance principles to divide spring discharge into low discharge (baseflow) and high discharge (surface run-off). Digital elevation model (DEM) data will be utilized to estimate the upslope contributing area (UCA) for each spring. This UCA represents the area of land that contributes water to the spring's discharge. From here, the interpolation of lateral discharge is achieved by multiplying the UCA by the baseflow.

Data synthesis

To compare RC influence across confined and unconfined aquifer units, available data on C concentrations (including IC and OC), discharge and DEMs from 2014 to the present will be collected from the literature and the Water Quality Portal (WQP). Sites with a minimum of ten water sample collections will be retained for analysis.

Statistical Analysis

To assess whether RC C-contributions to stream C vary across different wetland area coverages and discharge levels, linear regression analysis will be employed to evaluate the strength of correlation. To test whether RC contributions significantly differ between confined and unconfined basins, as well as to assess whether RC contributes more to stream C than wetlands, analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests will be conducted. ANOVA tests will allow for the comparison of mean C-stream contributions between confined and unconfined basins, as well as between RC contributions and wetland contributions, providing insights into the relative importance of RC in contributing to stream C compared to wetlands. By employing these statistical analyses, the study aims to interrogate the factors influencing RC C-stream contributions and assess their significance in comparison to wetland contributions, expanding the of C dynamics within the study area.

**Conclusion:**

A widely adopted best management practice for water conservation in North Florida is the water credits program. Simply, this program compensates forest and agriculture landowners for conserving water. For instance, pine stands, typical of the North Florida flatwoods, heavily rely on groundwater. Paying timber harvesters to reduce planting without sacrificing profit benefits both pine plantations and groundwater preservation.

Water management districts are now proposing a similar program for carbon (C) storage, known as carbon credits. The flatwoods of North Florida, characterized by their low-relief topography and confined aquifer, provide an ideal landscape for C storage due to their abundance of wetlands. Despite strong legal incentives in Florida to preserve wetlands and natural streams, forest landowners often clear ecotonal zones, such as riparian wetlands, in pursuit of greater profits- the more land cleared for pine stands, the greater the profit. The proposed carbon credit program has the potential to reverse this trend. By compensating forest landowners for stored C, the program promotes wetland conservation, offsets CO2 emissions, and benefits foresters.

However, there are significant knowledge gaps concerning C cycling in low-relief, wetland-rich plantation landscapes that need to be addressed. These include understanding river corridor C storage capacity and the overall influence of wetlands on stream CO2 emissions. Through my research, I aim to shed light on the often-overlooked role of riparian wetlands in inland water systems and provide insights into managing low-relief, wetland-rich landscapes for enhanced C storage.

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