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Hydrology and Earth System Sciences
Discussions

Interactive comment on "Predictive power of a shallow landslide model in a high resolution landscape: dissecting the effects of forest roads" *by* D. Penna et al.

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General Comment

This paper applies and existing landslide model to a catchment with mapped landslides, many of which were triggered by a single large storm. The model is applied to topographic data at 4 resolutions and the authors demonstrate that intermediate resolutions (4 & 10 m) out perform the highest (2 m) and lowest (20 m) resolutions. The authors explain this in terms of modification to the derived parameters (slope and effective upslope area) which are resolution dependent. The result is robust and confirms

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what others have already shown with other similar landslide models (Claessens et al., 2005, Tarolli and Tarboton, 2006). This result is valuable to those looking to apply this particular landslide model (QDSLAM) and of some interest more generally in confirming the behaviour found elsewhere. The authors also demonstrate that the model performs significantly worse at predicting road failures, especially with high resolution topographic data. They suggest that this is due to diversion of the flowpaths by roads that are included in the DEM once the resolution becomes sufficiently fine. This may be a novel finding, it is relatively intuitive. Roads do divert flow paths but the resolution of the topographic data is never sufficient to represent these diversions. This makes sense since very minor changes in road topography or drainage could divert all the water flowing on a road onto the adjacent hillslope. However, this paper doesn't provide a way to predict road related landslides it tests the existing model's ability to predict road related landslides and shows that it cannot do so effectively. This is its contribution.

To go further with this the authors could ask: how does the model perform for failures upslope of roads versus downslope of roads? This would help to test their hypothesis, since only landslides downslope of roads would be affected by the road runoff.

Specific Comments

L58-69: The discussion of the importance of landslides could be slightly shorter, and needs to remain relevant to shallow landslides.

L61: "the proportion of individual fatalities" I'm not clear what you mean by this.

L82: Freer et al., 2002 does not discuss landslide locations, what statement do these references relate to?

From "The effect of this. . ." (L116) to ". . .receiving areas" (L119) is not needed.

L138: what does "small scale" mean in the context of a landscape?

L173: your explanation of h is confusing, my understanding from equation 2 is that h is the height of the water table above an impeding layer, measured perpendicular to

HESSD

10, C4156–C4163, 2013

that layer but this is not clear from the sentence in which h is defined and it could be misinterpreted as the water table depth from the surface. You should also explain that you assume that: 1) there is an impeding layer at depth z (i.e. the impeding layer is the soil bedrock interface), 2) the layer is slope parallel, and 3) the failure plane for the landslide is on this impeding layer.

L184: you should include a reference on the original authors of the infinite slope model

L200: “many slides are actually triggered by the transient response of pore pressures to burst of intense rainfall, which may occur on short timescales of less than 1 day” you correctly identify this as a problem with the steady state approach, which will be addressed to some extent by your quasi-dynamic approach. However, Iverson (2000) and others since have argued that migration of the pressure wave vertically through the soil profile can take minutes to hours while the lateral subsurface flow contribution can take hours to days. This is relevant to your study because you assume that infiltration is instantaneous and you should justify this assumption. It is also relevant because you observe that landslides in your study area are triggered by short duration high intensity rainfall, (3 hours (L271) and 8 hours (L273)). However you do not use these durations in your model runs. Iverson (2000) would suggest that the pressure wave would take around 20 minutes to travel 1 m into the soil profile, and would argue that the observed landslides were triggered before pore pressures could be strongly influenced by lateral subsurface flow. Your Figure 4 shows that 3 hours of rainfall results in a maximum effective area of $\sim$16 m2/m. That said, Iverson (2000) and others recognise the importance of initial water table height in defining the pore pressure response to rainfall and lateral subsurface flow may play an important role in defining those initial conditions.

Reference

Iverson, R. M. (2000), Landslide triggering by rain infiltration, Water Resour. Res., 36, 1897– 1910.

HESSD

10, C4156–C4163, 2013

L221: the language that you use for rainfall intensities here is confusing; I think that you are using rainfall intensity, rainfall depth, and rainfall rate interchangeably. If they are the same thing use a single term if not you need to define each term.

L264 “road cuts truncate colluvial fills in topographic hollows and weathered bedrock in noses” this suggests that while you don’t have hard data on soil depth in the study area it does varying consistently and is correlated with topography. A decline in root strength with depth and spatial variability in soil depth in space may be a large part of the explanation for soil observed in many locations that are unconditionally unstable according to the model.

L283: Why are some of the landslides intersecting the road network classed as non-road related?

L293: is this really the total landslide area? I count >130 landslides, in which case the mean landslide size is ∼0.5 m2. That could be something like 1 m long by 0.5 m wide, this would need to be <4 cm deep to have a length depth ratio >25. However you are using 1 m depth in the model and the photos look like the failure plane is on that order. I think something is wrong here.

L294: when you say “conventional wisdom” you should include references.

L321: What are the details of the rainfall data from which the GEV parameters have been estimated?

L344: more detail is required on the method of calculating local slope, which method did you use? Include a reference.

L358: I don’t think remarkably is a suitable word here, you could just say “increases with”.

L372: It is difficult to be sure what you mean by left and right tails on a box plot. My interpretation is that left tail refers to values above the median and right tail to values below. If this is the case though I am surprised that the left tails of the contributing area

HESSD

10, C4156–C4163, 2013

and QDWI distributions are most interesting, the right tail contains the highest values which should correspond to higher pore pressures.

L367: “Grid size” previously you have talked in terms of resolution, you should be consistent in referring either to resolution or to grid size rather than using them interchangeably.

L368: Areas that are predicted as unconditionally unstable should not be able to sustain a soil mantle (i.e. they should be bare rock). You should comment on whether this is what you observe here. If 10% of the catchment is unconditionally unstable and not bare rock then to me this suggests that one of the parameters is overly conservative. As I suggest above, my first thought would be that these are places where the soil is shallower than 1 m and / or basal root cohesion is greater than 1kPa. My second suggestion would be that the friction angle is a little low or perhaps if these areas are preferentially found in woodland that root cohesion is higher here allowing steeper slopes to be sustained.

L407: “Larger QDWI values at the left tail” this is confusing since I expect large QDWI values to make up the right tail. Does it mean that there are now more high QDWI values? Or that the left tail has become heavier, i.e. more low QDWI values? This relates to my confusion on L372. I think both could be solved by clearly defining what you mean by left and right tails.

L425: do these fractions include unconditionally unstable cells?

L459: It is difficult to compare performance since there are two metrics varying together: percentage of unstable cells in the catchment and percentage of landslides predicted. I think comparing the two as you do in Figure 7 is the best way to do this. You could easily present the same data for all 4 resolutions and I would find this helpful.

L462: the percentage of cells that are either unconditionally unstable or fail with some rainfall return period is the most relevant metric here. These should be reported in one

HESSD

10, C4156–C4163, 2013

of the tables rather than just in the text. Fine scale variability in the topographic data is moving some cells from conditionally unstable at low return period to unconditionally unstable. Either way though, they are being predicted as unstable by the model so they should be included both in the percentage catchment area and percentage of landslides hit.

L466: "the general tendency of process based models" statement needs a reference.

L473: why only include 10 m results in Fig 7? If you are trying to compare different resolutions this looks like it might be the best way to compare all 4 and I don't think readability would suffer.

L484: I think you need to explain what you mean by "the QD-SLaM model does not incorporate the description required to predict road related failures". What would that description include?

L484-7: I don't find this a persuasive explanation for why the model out performs the naïve case. While the over-prediction problem is recognised I don't think it explains why the model still does slightly better than random. Instead I would expect the explanation for this to be related to the continued relevance of slope in defining failure likelihood. Since steeper slopes are more likely to be unstable both in the model and at road cuts I would expect that the model (which is strongly dependent on slope) would continue to perform a little better than a random classifier (i.e. the naïve case).

L494-497: It is not clear what point you are making in this sentence or how it follows from your results. What are "external processes"?

L531-533: As above, I don't find this a persuasive explanation, why is there a general trend towards over-estimating unstable areas and why should this be true for road related failures just as it is for natural failures?

L545-550: These statements are comments rather than conclusions; they do not follow logically from the results that you have presented. I don't think they should be included

HESSD

10, C4156–C4163, 2013

here.

Tables 3, 4, 5 and 6: I think these could be more clearly expressed by combining tables 3 and 5 and doing the same with tables 4 and 6.

Table 7: I think it might be useful to include one sentence explanation of the efficiency index in the caption.

Figure 4: You should note in the caption that the y-axis changes between plots, the lettering for the plots is incorrect, repeating a-c.

Figure 5: as far as I can see this is a copy of the top six panels in Figure 4, you should drop this figure.

Figure 6 is very hard to read beyond a very rough idea that variability increases at finer resolution. The maps are small and the white outlines of the landslides are hard to see against the pattern of the predictions.

Figure 7: I think that FL(q) and FB(q) should be defined in the caption and that you should also include the curves for the other 3 resolutions.

It would be nice to see an additional Figure illustrating the diversion of specific catchment area that you suggest as an explanation for the poor prediction of road related failures.

Grammatical and Typographic errors

L61: Replace “in debris flows” with “into debris flows”. L67: Replace “showed also” with “also showed”. L88: Replace “is it” with “it is”. L94: Delete “kind of”. L96: Delete “configuration”. L104: Delete “degree of”. L106: “other error sources may add to this one” This doesn’t make sense as a sentence on its own, I think you could combine it with the sentence below. L106: Replace “networks, associated” with “networks, and their associated”. L110: Delete “at or near the earth’s surface” I think this is implied. L113: Replace “than the one” with “that”. L114-116: this sentence doesn’t make sense

HESSD

10, C4156–C4163, 2013

to me. L127: the content of the brackets could be removed since this is repetition. L148: replace “interested” with “intersected”. L149: replace “made available” with “provided”, delete “were”, replace “into” with “between”. L222: move “well” to the end of the sentence. L266: replace “culvers” with “culverts’, replace “into valley” with “into the valley”. L266: replace “width is ranging between 4 and 6 m” with “width ranges from 4 to 6 m”. L267:replace “roads” with “road”. L281: replace “within 6 km distance from the” with “within 6 km of the”. L305: replace “Contrarily” with “Unlike”. L308: replace “associated to” with “associated with". L310: replace “owing to this reason” with “instead”. L330: replace “affect” with “effect”. L360: replace “contrarily to” with “unlike”. L482: delete “as expected”. L489: replace “to” with “with”, replace “thanks to the” with “for”. L490: replace “roads” with “road”. L521: delete “in simple terms”. L541: replace “shows” with “show”.

Interactive comment on Hydrol. Earth Syst. Sci. Discuss., 10, 9761, 2013.