Interactive comment on “On the Configuration and Initialization of a Large Scale Hydrological Land Surface Model to Represent Permafrost” by M. E. Elshamy et al.

Anonymous Referee #1

Received and published: 30 May 2019

General comments

Elshamy et al. detail testing and resultant guidelines for the configuration and initialization (especially ‘spinning up’) of permafrost in large-scale hydrologic models, with a focus in this study of the Mackenzie River Basin. Permafrost exerts primary control on hydrologic routing in cold regions, and thus this topic is critical for Canada and other countries with high latitude regions that are experiencing high rates of warming. As such, the manuscript scope is a good fit for HESS, and the collective authorship team offers many decades of modeling experience and insight. I think the paper will be a useful contribution to HESS, but I think it needs some reworking.

We would like to thank the reviewer for the time spent to carefully review our manuscript. We greatly appreciate the important points raised. We present our response to reviewer’s comments below. The reviewer comments are listed below in regular black text, and our response in regular blue text. Some of the reviewer’s suggestions have been addressed in the revised manuscript under preparation while other responses point towards what we intend to do further in the manuscript.

Major concerns

1. This is a vague concern, but this comes across as a bit of a high-end technical report in places, more than a research paper. Rather than detail why that is, I list a few specific concerns below that map to this general overarching theme.

While we appreciate this comment, this manuscript was written directly as a research paper. Hopefully by addressing the specific concerns below, in addition to the various revisions made to the manuscript, this concern will have been also addressed.

2. This discussion on changing annual discharge is a bit overly simplified. I’d break this down a bit more into different seasons. There is a pretty consistent increase in minimum flows across the pan-Arctic (see, for example, the recent ECCC report, Canada’s Changing Climate, or Walvoord and Striegl 2007 GRL, St Jacques and Sauchyn 2009 GRL, Duan et al. 2017 Water – for China)

Thanks for pointing out the importance of seasonal changes to streamflows and for the relevant literature. The discussion on that has been revised to reflect the complexity of streamflow response due to differences in seasonal changes based on the suggested literature – see L39-45 in the revised manuscript.

3. The intro is quite long – it is 6 paragraphs, of which several are long. Also, the objectives section which follows is normally embedded in the intro in most papers. This would add about another 2 paragraphs. This needs to be trimmed. Paragraph 4 is especially wordy. Paragraphs 5 and 6 could be cut by 50%.

Thanks for the suggestion to shorten the Introduction & Objectives sections. We have refocused the Introduction and shortened the paragraphs. We also removed the Objectives section and added a short paragraph for it at the end of the Introduction. Please see the revised Introduction Section.

4. Lists or bulleted sections are not written very parallel in this paper, and they are hard to relate and read. L155-168, L459-467, and L686-691 are examples.

Thanks for the suggestion. We have noted the issue and rephrased the bullets throughout the document to make them parallel.

5. L205-210, this is very late in the paper to be delineating the focus

The focus was already given in the objectives, now in L124-130, integrating the rationale for selecting the sites that was given by L205-210 in the original manuscript.

6. Because there are three sites, the site description is very long (Sections 3.2.1, 3.2.2, and 3.2.3. This takes up about 7 pages, which is similar in length to short paper on its own. Basically, some of this information (especially the inordinate focus on parameterization, when that is not the point of the study) needs to be moved to an electronic supplement. It detracts from the key messaging, and it's not a very invigorating read. I think the site description is key, but could be shorter, but I don't think the reader needs to wade through endless parameter justification, which could be built into tables in a supplement for interested readers.

Thanks for the suggestions. This is also suggested by Reviewer 2. We agree that Section 3.2 has become too lengthy and moved most of the text into a supplement and kept only relevant parts, in Section 2.2 of the revised manuscript.

7. Oct. 1979 is certainly late in history as a representative climate from which to base the model spin up. I realize this is briefly addressed later, but I suspect a permafrost modeler would object.

We agree that 1979 may be considered late to start model spin-up for permafrost. Previous work at Norman Wells (Sapriza-Azuri et al., 2018) showed some sensitivity of permafrost conditions to the spin-up year but only if a warm year is selected (Figure 12 in the above mentioned paper). Based on that, the authors suggested to use an average year for the spin-up. We checked that the selected hydrological year (Oct 1979-Sep 1980) is close to an average year based on available records (see Table 4 in the revised manuscript). There are severe logistical problems in using a longer period. One has to use another climatic dataset to use earlier years as WFDEI only starts in 1979. This means that alternative climatic forcing datasets have to be used and this will have impacts on the results, introducing considerable additional uncertainty. The selected year is performing well for most aspects of our simulation and is resulting in a colder rather than warmer temperatures for the minimum envelopes. Section 2.4 in revised manuscript gives some detail about the selection of the climate forcing dataset.

8. I think a small section on the thermal physics in the model (governing equations, soil freezing curves if any, etc.) would be far more useful to the reader than the emphasis on parameters.

Thanks for the suggestion. We have added that to Section 2.1 of the revised manuscript with more details in Section S1 of the supplementary material.

9. This contribution is very qualitative and even anecdotal in places. For example ‘seems’ should up 7 times in the manuscript, while ‘seem’ shows up in 8 places. The difference in model runs are not compared via standard metrics like RMSE or something like that. The discussion seems to rather focus on apparent discrepancies and vague explanations. For examples of this, just consider any section on model comparisons or differences. Also, note recurring appearances of ‘much more’ and ‘too small’ – a few actual numbers would be nice.

Thanks for the suggestion. We relied on visual comparisons to assess differences amongst the different simulations. To fully address this comment, we calculated RMSE for ALT, DZAA, and temperature envelopes in all results sections of the revised version. Despite the high uncertainty level in both observations and simulations, we have tried to use more definitive language and logical explanations.

10. The authors do not frame their permafrost modeling results in the discussion around past contributions. Cryosphere scientists have been modeling permafrost and considering spin up scenarios for a very long time. The authors’ work is new and interesting (especially the focus on the inclusion of permafrost in large-scale hydrologic modeling), but the thermal physics under consideration are not overly new, and it would make sense to relate their study findings.

Thanks for pointing out this and for describing the work as new and interesting. We revised the discussion to compare the results to other relevant studies.

Minor concerns
Many of these are quite trivial

Thanks for helping us improve the manuscript by taking the time to point out these.

L13, comma after ‘average’ L33, shouldn’t basin be capitalized here as elsewhere when preceded by Mackenzie or Mackenzie River?

Changed as advised.

L33, ‘heating up by 4 degC’ . . ..over what time period? 100,000 years? 50 years?

Revised to: “… by 4°C between 1948 and 2016.”

L36, ‘American rivers’ should just be ‘America’ and the subsequent semicolon should be a comma

Revised as advised.

L75, ‘implied’ should be ‘inferred’

Revised as advised.

L119, ‘In addition to: : :.for spinning’ is a fragment

Removed as it was not addressed in the paper.

L143 and elsewhere, ‘etc.’ occurs in the paper where it is entirely superfluous in a couple places. It tends to look choppy – ‘such as’ is sufficient.

Removed in the revised manuscript.

L141, Land does not need to be capitalized

Capitalization removed.

L152, does this mean that sandstone thermal properties are always used the for the bedrock conductivity everywhere? This seems less than ideal.

Well, we agree it is not ideal, but this is how it is implemented. We have added it to the discussions as a potential improvement to CLASS.

L161 ‘thus we use a thaw, rather than a freeze criterion’ – I have no idea what this means

“The active layer thickness is defined as the thickness of the layer that is subject to annual thawing and freezing in areas underlain by permafrost” (van Everdingen, 2005). “Strictly speaking, the active layer thickness is defined as the lesser of the maximum seasonal frost depth and the maximum seasonal thaw depth” (Walvoord and Kurylyk, 2016). The maximum frost depth can be different from the maximum thaw depth. In case the frost depth is less than the thaw depth, there is a layer above the permafrost that is warmer than 0°C but is not connected to the surface (a talik). Because active layer observations are usually based on measuring the maximum thaw depth, we adopted the same criterion when calculating active layer thickness in the model. This has been clarified further in L169-179 of the revised manuscript.

L167, This is more commonly called the ‘seasonal penetration depth’, at least in nonpermafrost regions

We do not disagree with the reviewer on the terminology. However, the work is about permafrost. Therefore, we revised the manuscript to use the more standard term – Depth of Zero Annual Amplitude (DZAA) depth as suggested by Reviewer 2.

L170, permafrost is not defined cryotically like this (frozen vs. unfrozen). It’s a temperature definition – i.e. ground below 0C for two or more consecutive years – see, for example, Dobinski, 2011, Earth Science Reviews.

Thanks for pointing this out. We revised the text accordingly and added references. See L169-179 of the revised manuscript.

L173, “MESH/CLASS used to output” should change to ‘Prior versions of MESH/CLASS outputted merely temperature profiles’ or something like this

Revised to “Prior versions of MESH/CLASS merely outputted …” on L180 of the revised manuscript.

175, ‘A CLASS typical’ should be ‘A typical CLASS’

Revised to “A typical CLASS …” on L181 of the revised manuscript.

L192, "these has' should be 'these have', and I'm not sure what 'to be carried back to the MRB scale' means

The aim is to establish a methodology that is applicable to the large scale rather than finding the best configuration for the selected sites if it cannot be implemented at the large scale. This has been included on L298-299 of the revised manuscript.

L197, 'North West' should be 'Northwest'

Revised as advised.

L216, 'with' should be 'by' and the rest of this sentence needs to be rewritten as it is confusing what it means

We revised the sentence to read: "The basin is located in the sporadic permafrost zone where permafrost underlies few spots only and is characterized by warm temperatures (> -1ºC) and limited (<10m) thickness (Smith and Burgess, 2002)". Now on L250-252 of the revised manuscript.

L220-221, Weather and North should not be capitalized

Revised as advised.

L302, should not be semicolon

Revised as advised – Now in supplementary material.

L304, why does deep permafrost imply no groundwater? It would make more sense to note that the cold climate prevents the formation of a lateral talik, and thus there is no perennial shallow groundwater. See Lamontagne-Halle et al. 2018 (Environmental Research Letters) or Connon et al. 2018, JGR-Earth Surface.

Thanks for pointing out this. We revised the text, which was moved to the supplementary material.

L316 (and elsewhere, do a word search), 'envelops' should be 'envelopes'

Thanks for pointing this out. We checked the manuscript for all instances and corrected accordingly.

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Interactive comment on “On the Configuration and Initialization of a Large Scale Hydrological Land Surface Model to Represent Permafrost” by M. E. Elshamy et al.

Anonymous Referee #2

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This study aims to derive a robust, yet computationally efficient initialization parameterization approach that can be applied to regions where data are scarce and simulations typically require large computational resources. An upscaling approach to inform large-scale ESM simulations based on the insights gained by modelling at small scales was performed. The results show that the model has good performance in reproducing present-climate permafrost properties at the three sites at the Mackenzie River Valley. The results also demonstrate that the simulations are sensitive to the soil layering scheme, the depth to bedrock, and the organic soil properties.

It is really important to investigate the performances of hydrological and land surface models in permafrost regions under climate change. However, there are some shortcomings that might affect the contribution of this study. My main concern and comments are listed as follow.

We would like to thank the reviewer for the time spent to carefully review our manuscript. We greatly appreciate the important points raised. We present our response to reviewer’s comments below. The reviewer comments are listed below in regular black text, and our response in regular blue text. Some of the reviewer’s suggestions have been addressed in the revised manuscript under preparation while other responses point towards what we intend to do.

General comments

1. Lin 34:...however, are not so clear…You should give citations.

The statement is followed by a couple of sentences that provide further explanation and citations and was further strengthened based on comments from Reviewer 1. Please check L34-45 of the revised manuscript.

2. Line 39: What do you mean “uncertainty”?

With the modifications to the first paragraph given above, we rephrased our statement to read:

“The hydrological response of cold regions to climate change is highly uncertain …”, now on L50-53 of the revised manuscript. The introduction have be refocused in the revised manuscript.

3. Line 46-50: You give importance of permafrost here, which may be not suite for this paragraph. I suggest that you provide separate paragraph to show the importance of permafrost and the progress in interaction between permafrost and hydrological at the beginning of the introduction.

As we have refocused the introduction, this has been addressed in paragraph 2 of the Introduction in the revised manuscript.

4. Line 51 and 91: Here the authors give the modeling work in hydrological processes in permafrost regions, I noticed that the models were all land surface models. As I know, there were many modeling work that has been done by hydrological models in cold regions, such as VIC, GBHM. I

would suggest that the authors to provide the different with hydrological models and land surface models on the previous modeling work in hydrological processes in cold regions, then clearly state why you choose the land surface model for this study.

While the contributions of the mentioned studies are significant, the emphasis herein was to consider those models that include robust representation of the energy balance and are able to produce detailed temperature profiles in multi-layer deep soil columns. Generally, hydrological models do not include the full energy balance and therefore they do not have a handle on permafrost unless they are coupled with other energy balance models, as Zhang et al. (2012) did with GBHM. VIC (Liang et al., 1994) is a special case of hydrological models and is often described as a land surface hydrological model which makes it similar to MESH in this regard. The modelling efforts also include thermal modelling (e.g. Wright et al., 2003) as mentioned in the manuscript. We revised the introduction and added some references to reviews of permafrost modelling such as Riseborough et al. (2008) and Walvoord and Kurylyk (2016) to guide the interested reader. See L59-62 of the revised manuscript.

5. Section 3.2 Study Sites and Data: This section is too long. Please make it concise using figures and tables. In addition, you may combine Section 3.5 (Climate Forcing) with this Section. They are all data introduction.

We agree with the Reviewer that Section 3.2 is too long (2.2 in the revised manuscript) and we have shortened it and moved most of the details to a supplement. This is also suggested by Reviewer 1. However, we kept the Climate Forcing (now Section 2.4) as a separate section.

6. Line 170-171, Permafrost, which is defined as ground in which temperatures have remained at or below 0°C for at least two consecutive years. There is variation in temperature between different years, the bottom of the active layer is not necessarily connected to permafrost table, and a melting sandwich may occur. The author judges the active layer thickness by the change of soil temperature one year. This should be distinguished from the permafrost table.

Thanks for pointing up this discussion. We fully agree with the reviewer and that is the reason we use a “thaw rather than freeze criterion” in the definition of the ALT and explicitly mention that it has to be connected to the surface. We revised the text to emphasize this difference. Please see L169-179 in the revised manuscript.

7. Line 190-193: As I know, there are two alternative schemes for soil organic layer in land surface models, one is assuming one or more organic matter layers cover the mineral layer at a vertical depth, the other is the weighted combination approach, such as in CLM. I suggest that you should compare the two schemes and give their different.

CLASS can either use a percentage of organic matter within a mineral soil layer or use fully organic layers. In the first case, the organic content is used to modify soil hydraulic and thermal properties - similar to CLM (Oleson et al., 2013). In the latter, CLASS has special values for those properties depending on the type of organic soil selected (Fibric, Hemic or Sapric) based on the work of Letts et al. (2000) for peat soils. This has been clarified in the revised manuscript in L213-228. We conducted additional simulations using the two alternative ways for all three sites and compared them in the revised manuscript Sections 3.1 and 3.2.

8. Line 343-344, 557-560: I am confused by the description of the lower boundary conditions of the model. The author should clearly state which boundary conditions are used in the model, the Dirichlet condition (fixed temperature in boundary), Neumann conditions (fixed geothermal flow in boundary) or Robin conditions (fixed temperature and geothermal flow in boundary). In addation, the upper boundary conditions should also be properly explained.

CLASS uses a constant geothermal flux at the bottom boundary (i.e. Neumann type condition – constant derivative). We used the default value for this flux (zero) and thus used the term no-flux boundary as mentioned in L343-344 and on L559 of the original manuscript. We noticed in simulations with shallower soil column depths that the temperature at the bottom boundary changes over time as mentioned in L461-463, which confirms that the boundary condition is not type 1 or 3 (Dirichlet or Robin). The Upper boundary condition depends on the meteorological forcing and how it is modified by the canopy and snow cover to determine the heat flux at the soil surface. Following the recommendations of Reviewer 1, we extended Section 2.1 to include the mathematical formulation with more details in Section S1 of the supplementary material.

9. Line 436-438， 455 :You also should give the soil moisture figure using different number of cycles, and when it stabilizes. Your title is "…a Large Scale Hydrological…", and your results were only soil temperature, how about the soil moisture?

We agree with the reviewer and we have added figures of soil moisture profiles and convergence for a few cases to illustrate the point – see Figure 6 and Section 3.1 of the revised manuscript.

10. Line 466-467: Please check this sentence, the temperature difference reached 1.0 k between 100 times and 2000 times cycles. It revealed that 100 times cycle was not stable, but you said that "there is no significant change after 100 cycles and sometimes less."(In Line 453-454), Why?

Thanks for pointing out this potential contradiction. We think that a temperature change of 1K over a period of 1900 years (cycles) is negligible. That's about 0.0005 K/year (cycle). This was not visible in Figure 7 (Figure 5 in the revised manuscript) where we plot the temperature profiles but is more visible on Figure 8 (Figure 7 in the revised manuscript) where the temperature sequence is plotted. We revised the manuscript to explain why such drifts occur in some cases. Additionally, the impact of the number of spinning cycles on the simulation of ALT and temperature envelopes is shown to be minimal in section 3.2 of the revised manuscript.

11. Line 481-482: The simulations have very longer time period (1979-2016), and the deep soil temperature change was evaluated. As you know, the geothermal flow will have a great influence on the deep ground temperature at a long-time scale, which may be more than the impact of climate change. Strongly recommend that you should use the geothermal flow for the lower boundary by observed data from drilling or the relevant data from references.

We have done additional simulations using geothermal heat flux and reported on that in the revised manuscript. They basically emphasize the previous findings of Sapriza-Azuri et al. (2018) for Norman Wells using the same land surface model we used (CLASS) that the geothermal flux has negligible impact on the results. In there paper, the authors compared two scenarios: 1) no heat flow at the bottom of the lowest soil layer, 2) a constant geothermal flow of 0.083 Wm-2 based on local measurement in Normal Wells. The scenarios were applied for a climate average year spin-up by 2000 cycles to several soil depth configurations and parameter values. Results reported by authors showed, as stated in the revised manuscript Section 3.4, that the impact of geothermal flux was minimal and the temperature difference between the two scenarios was small in most simulations and is within ±0.15°C in approximately 60 % of simulations. In fact, 1979-2016 is quite a short period specially to catch big differences for the deep soil temperature. In that sense Sapriza-Azuri et al. (2018) used a 2000-year simulation without getting too much difference. Our simulations confirmed those findings.

12. Line 492-494: It is very confusing here. Active layer thickness is only 3m at JMR. The soil temperature and moisture should be stable values, which are the initial conditions for the next step

simulation after 100 cycles (100 years) in theory. However, there were larger differences from simulation results given by Figure 9 because of the initial values of different cycles (50-2000 times). This is very abnormal. You should check the simulation results again, whether the cycle is not enough, or other reasons that make the initial value do not converge. Please give a detailed explanation.

We checked the results and did further investigations. We found that the less stable conditions at JMR are related to the thick organic layers. We also found that the water and ice contents to play a role in such situations. These have also caused the drifting in temperature shown for some layers in Figure 5 of the revised manuscript under the slightly warmer conditions at JMR compared to HPC and BWC. The explanation is discussed in the revised manuscript L437-453.

13. Line 527-528: Simulation results of temperature envelopes were lower than observed values, which may be caused by neglecting geothermal flow.

As mentioned in our response to point #11 above, we conducted simulations for all sites using the geothermal flux and it had minor effect as we will be reporting. We investigated the reasons of simulating colder than observed temperatures and found it to be related to the configuration of organic soils and the parameter values of the soil. The colder winter temperatures near the surface under peat soils was reported in the literature as discussed in the revised manuscript (see L507-512) and in Section 3.5. The quality of snow simulations cannot be over-ruled but it is beyond the scope of the paper to assess that.

14. Line 554-555: The explanation for the cooling effect of the model increased the depth of SDEP is unreasonable. From Figure 14, it can be seen that the location of SDEP after increasing is located in permafrost, and soil water content in this layer should be frozen throughout the year. I am not sure that the model could take into account the difference in thermal properties between permafrost including ice and ice-free bedrock, and the thermal convection generated by little unfrozen water in the frozen soil. These could explain the cooling effect. If so, further explanations should be provided.

We agree with the reviewer. SDEP remains below the active layer and therefore any moisture in between will be frozen. CLASS differentiates between ice-free bedrock (below SDEP) and permafrost that contains ice. However, we further investigated the soil moisture content and checked the thermal properties of the soil above and below SDEP and expressed our findings on L547-550 of the revised manuscript.

15. Line 575: I suggest that you should check variation in the upper boundary drive (climate) during the simulation time. This may be the reason why the temperature envelope tends to be at a given temperature at lower boundary.

The upper boundary condition (climate) is transient for the 1979-2016 simulation, yet the temperature of the lowest layer barely changes over that period. We tested with shallower soil profiles and found it more responsive to changes. We beleive that the thermal properties and deep profile are the reasons for having such response at the lower boundary. Observations show small changes over the same period at the deepest observational levels which are not more than 15m (see Figure S1 in the supplemtary material) which gives reason to believe that changes at 50m would be negligible and that the model is behaving normally.

16. The discussion needs be strengthened. You should compare your results with others, then conclude what your new fingdings and contribution.

Thanks for pointing this out. We strengthened the discussions in the revised manuscript by framing it around previous work to better show the contribution as also suggested by Reviewer 1.

Specific comments

1. Line 101: What is ALD? When you give an abbreviation for the first time, you should give the explain. I found the explain in Line 158, but this is the first time here. In addition, active layer thickness is more commonly used, I suggest use ALT instead of ALD.

Thanks for noting this. ALD and ALT are equivalent because our model does not include land settlement and therefore the fixed reference level used to measure ALD is the ground surface - definition is given in Geological Survey Canada reports (e.g. Smith et al., 2004). However, we changed ALD to ALT in the whole document (inducing figures) to use the more standard terminology. We made sure all terms are spelled out on first use.

2. Line 166: The no (or zero) oscillation depth (ZOD) should be instead of depth of zero annual amplitude (DZAA). DZAA is a professional vocabulary in the field of permafrost research.

As we replaced ALD with ALT, we replaced ZOD with DZAA in the whole document to be using the standard terminology of permafrost research.

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On the Configuration and Initialization of a Large Scale Hydrological Land Surface Model to Represent Permafrost

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Abstract

Permafrost is an important feature of cold ~~regions~~region hydrology, particularly in river basins such as the Mackenzie River Basin (MRB), and needs to be properly represented in hydrological and land surface models (H-LSMs) built into existing Earth System models (~~ESM~~ESMs), especially under the unprecedented climate warming trends that have been observed. Higher rates of warming have been reported in high latitudes compared to the global average, resulting in permafrost thaw with wide-ranging implications for hydrology and feedbacks to climate. The current generation of H-LSMs is being improved to simulate permafrost dynamics by allowing deep soil profiles and incorporating organic soils explicitly. Deeper soil profiles have larger hydraulic and thermal memories that require more effort to initialize. This study aims to devise a robust, yet computationally efficient, initialization and parameterization approach applicable to regions where data are scarce and simulations typically require large computational resources. The study further demonstrates an upscaling approach to inform large-scale ESM simulations based on the insights gained by modelling at small scales. We used permafrost observations from three sites along the Mackenzie River Valley spanning different permafrost classes to test the validity of the approach. Results show generally good performance in reproducing present-climate permafrost properties at the three sites. The results also emphasize the sensitivity of the simulations to the soil layering scheme used, the depth to bedrock and the organic soil properties.

Keywords

Hydrological Land Surface Models, Permafrost, Initialization, Organic Soils, Mackenzie River Basin

1. Introduction

Earth system models (ESMs) are widely used to project climate change and they show a current global warming trend that is expected to continue during the 21st century and beyond (IPCC, 2014). Higher rates of warming have been observed in high latitudes compared to the global average (DeBeer et al., 2016; McBean et al., 2005) resulting in permafrost thaw with implications for soil moisture, hydraulic connectivity, streamflow seasonality, land subsidence, and vegetation (Walvoord and Kurylyk, 2016). Recent analyses provided by Environment and Climate Change Canada (Zhang et al., 2019) have shown that Canada's far north has already seen an increase in temperature of double the global average, with some portion of the Mackenzie ~~basin~~River Basin already heating up by 4°C~~.~~ between 1948 and 2016. Subsequent impacts on water resources in the region however, are not so clear. Recent analysis of trends in Arctic freshwater inputs (Durocher et al., 2019) highlights that Eurasian rivers show a significant annual discharge increase during 1975-2015 period while in North ~~American rivers;~~America, only rivers flowing into the Hudson Bay region in Canada show a significant annual discharge change during that same period. Those rivers in Canada flowing directly into the Arctic, of which the Mackenzie River provides the majority of flow, show very little change at the annual scale. However, while the annual scale change may be small, larger changes have been reported at the seasonal scale for Northern Canada (St. Jacques and Sauchyn, 2009; Walvoord and Striegl, 2007) and Northeastern China (Duan et al., 2017). In the most recent assessment of climate change impacts on Canada, Bonsal et al. (2019)~~.~~ reported that higher winter flows, earlier spring flows, and lower summer flows were observed for some Canadian rivers. However, they also state that "It is uncertain how projected higher temperatures and reductions in snow cover will combine to affect the frequency and magnitude of future snowmelt-related flooding".

As permafrost underlies about one quarter of the exposed land in the Northern hemisphere (Zhang et al., 2008), it is imperative to study and accurately model its behaviour under current and future climate conditions. Knowledge of permafrost conditions (temperature, active layer thickness - ALT, and ground ice conditions) and their spatial and temporal variations is critical for planning of development in Northern Canada (Smith et al., 2007)~~Deep uncertainty in hydrological response to a changing climate is resulting from poor understanding and characterization of cold regions processes in ESMs. Despite advances in cold-regions~~ and other Arctic environments. The hydrological response of cold regions to climate change is highly uncertain, due to a large extent to our limited understanding and representation of how the different hydrologic and thermal processes interact, especially under changing climate conditions. Despite advances in cold-region process understanding and modelling at the local scale (e.g. Pomeroy et al., 2007), their upscaling and systematic evaluation over large domains remain rather elusive. This is largely due to lack of observational data, the local nature of these phenomena and the complexity of cold-region systems. Hydrological response and land-surface feedbacks in cold-regions are generally complex and depend on a multitude of ~~several~~ inter-related factors including changes to precipitation intensity, timing, and phase as well as soil composition and hydraulic and thermal properties. ~~As permafrost underlies about one quarter of the exposed land in the Northern hemisphere , it is imperative to study and accurately model its behaviour under current and future climate conditions. Knowledge of permafrost conditions (temperature, active layer thickness, and ground ice conditions) and their spatial and temporal variations is critical for planning of development in Northern Canada and other Arctic environments.~~

There ~~has~~have been extensive regional and global modelling efforts ~~which involve cold-region processes including~~focusing on permafrost (refer to Riseborough et al., 2008; Walvoord and Kurylyk, 2016 for a review), using thermal models (e.g. Wright et al., 2003), global hydrological models coupled to energy balance models (e.g. Zhang et al., 2012) and, most notably, land surface models (e.g. Lawrence and Slater, 2005)~~.~~. These studies, however, have typically focused on and modeled only a shallow soil ~~profile~~column in the order of a few meters. For example, the Canadian Land Surface Scheme (CLASS) typically uses 4.1m (Verseghy, 2012) and the Joint UK Land Environment Simulator (JULES) standard configuration is only 3.0m (Best et al., 2011). These are too shallow to represent permafrost properly and could result in misleading projections. For example, Lawrence and Slater (2005) used a 3.43m soil column to project the impacts of climate change on near-surface permafrost degradation in the Northern hemisphere using the Community Climate System Model (CCSM3), which lead to overestimation of climate change impacts and raised considerable criticism (e.g. Burn and Nelson, 2006). It eventually lead to further development of the Community Land Model (CLM), the land surface scheme of the CCSM, to include deeper soil profiles (e.g. Swenson et al., 2012). Similarly, the first version of CHANGE land surface model had only an 11m soil column (Park et al., 2011), which was increased to 30.5m in subsequent versions (Park et al., 2013)~~Recognizing this issue, more~~. Recognizing this issue, most recent studies have indicated the need to have a deeper soil column (20-25m at least) in land surface models (run stand-alone or embedded within ESMs) than previously used, to properly capture changes in freeze and thaw cycles and active layer ~~depth~~ dynamics (Lawrence et al., 2012; Romanovsky and Osterkamp, 1995; Sapriza-Azuri et al., 2018).

However, a deeper soil column implies larger soil hydraulic and, more importantly, thermal memory that requires proper initialization to be able to capture the evolution of past, current and future changes. Initial conditions are established by either spinning up the model for many annual cycles (or multi-year historical cycles, sometimes de-trended) to reach some steady state or by running it for a long transient simulation for 100s of years or both (spinning to stabilization followed by a long transient simulation). Lawrence et al. (2008) spun up ~~CLM3~~CLM v3.5 for 400 cycles with year 1900 data for deep soil profiles (50-125m) to assess the sensitivity of model projections to soil column depth and organic soil representation. Dankers et al. (2011) used up 320 cycles of the first year of record to initialize JULES to simulate permafrost in the Arctic. Park et al. (2013) used 21 cycles of the first 20 years of ~~the~~their climate record~~ they used~~ (1948-2006) to initialize their CHANGE land surface model to study differences in active layer thickness between Eurasian and North American watersheds. ~~However~~

Conversely, Ednie et al. (2008) ~~implied~~inferred from borehole observations in the Mackenzie Valley that present day permafrost is in disequilibrium with current climate, and therefore, it is unlikely that we can establish a reasonable representation of current ground thermal conditions by employing present or 20th century climate conditions to start the simulations. ~~Nevertheless, their analysis~~Analysis of paleo-climatic records (Szeicz and MacDonald, 1995) of summer temperature at Fort Simpson, dating back to the early 1700s, shows that a negative (cooling) trend prevailed ~~till~~until the mid-1800s followed by a positive (warming) trend ~~till~~until present~~ and they~~. However the authors "assumed" a quasi-equilibrium period prior to 1720~~. Using that assumption, they used~~, using an equilibrium thermal model~~ called T-TOP~~ to establish the initial conditions of 1721 and then the temperature trends thereafter to carry out a transient simulation ~~till 2000 using the T-ONE thermal model. Those thermal~~until 2000. Thermal models use air temperature as their main input while land surface models (as used here and described below) ~~require~~consider a suite of meteorological inputs and consider the interaction between heat and moisture. The effect of soil moisture, and ice in particular, could be large on the thermal properties of the soil. Sapriza-Azuri et al. (2018) used tree-ring data from Szeicz and Macdonald (1995) to construct climate records for all variables required by CLASS at Norman Wells in the Mackenzie Valley since 1638 to initialize the soil profile of their model. While useful, such proxy records are not easily available at most sites. Additionally, re-constructing several climatic variables from summer temperature introduces significant uncertainties that need to be assessed. Thus, there is a need to formulate a more generic way to define the initial conditions of soil profiles ~~across~~for large domains.

~~Additionally, concerns are~~Concerns for appropriate subsurface representation not only ~~about~~include the profile depth. The vertical discretization of the ~~whole profile. The definition of~~ soil column (the ~~layer~~number of layers and their thicknesses) requires due attention. Land surface models that utilize deep soil profiles exponentially increase the layer thicknesses to reach the total depth using a ~~reasonably~~

tractable number of layers (15-20). For example, CLM 4.5 (Oleson et al., 2013) used 15 layers to reach a depth of 42.1m for the soil column. Sapriza-Azuri et al. (2018) used 20 layers to reach a depth of 71.6m in their experiments using MESH/CLASS. Park et al. (2013) had a 15-layer soil column with exponentially increasing depth to reach a total depth of 30.5m in the CHANGE land surface model. ~~However~~Clearly, the ~~first version~~role of ~~CHANGE had only 11m~~the soil column ~~depth .~~discretization needs to be addressed.

The importance of insulation from the snow cover on the ground and/or organic matter in the upper soil layers is key to the quality of ~~ALD simulation results~~ALT simulations (Lawrence et al., 2008; Park et al., 2013). Organic soils have large heat and moisture capacities that, depending on their depth and composition, moderate the effects of the atmosphere on the deeper permafrost layers and work all year round but could lead to deeper frost penetration in winter (Dobinski, 2011)~~.~~. Snow cover, in contrast, varies seasonally and inter-annually and can thus induce large variations to the ~~ALD~~ALT, especially in the absence of organic matter (Park et al., 2011). Climate change impacts on precipitation intensity, timing, and phase are translated to permafrost impacts via the changing the snow cover period, spatial extent, and depth. Therefore, it is critical to the simulation of ~~ALD~~permafrost that the model includes organic soils and has adequate representation of snow accumulation (including sublimation and transport) and melt processes.

~~2. Objectives~~

~~The main objective of the present~~ This study ~~is to devise an~~proposes a generic approach to ~~configure and~~ initialize ~~the~~deep soil ~~profile of a~~columns in land surface ~~model to account for permafrost in large-scale applications. The elements of this strategy include:~~

- ~~Defining how deep should the soil profile be, to allow proper simulation of the ALD dynamics for current and future climate.~~
- ~~Determining the appropriate vertical~~models and investigates the impact of the soil column discretization ~~to give enough accuracy in determining the ALD while optimizing computational resources for large-scale applications. This also includes configuring the~~ and the configurations of organic soil layers (how many~~,~~ and which ~~properties, etc.) and the depth to bedrock (see description below).~~
- ~~Determining how to initialize the deep soil profile, whether cycling a single year or multiple years and finding the appropriate number of cycles. In addition to studying the sensitivity of performance to the selected year(s) for spinning.~~

type) on the simulation of permafrost characteristics. This ~~study is part of a larger study that aims to develop a large-scale hydrological model for~~ is done through detailed studies conducted at three sites in the Mackenzie River valley, located in different permafrost zones. The objective is to be able to generalize the findings to the whole Mackenzie River Basin ~~(MRB) () using the MESH (Modélisation Environmentale Communautaire - Surface and Hydrology)~~and elsewhere, rather than finding the best configuration for the selected sites. Using the same modelling framework ~~and validate the model in order to use it to study climate and land use/cover change impacts on various aspects of its hydrology. Permafrost underlies 70-80% of the MRB and thus it exerts considerable control on its hydrology, especially in a warming climate. The next section describes the model briefly and the datasets and methods used in the study. Section displays the results of the analyses that are discussed in Section with some concluding remarks~~at both small and large scales is key to facilitating such generalization.

~~3.~~2. ~~Possible position for~~ Models, Methods, and Datasets

~~3.1~~2.1 The MESH Modelling Framework

MESH is a ~~semi-distributed~~community hydrological ~~-~~land surface model (H-LSM) coupled with ~~streamflow~~two-dimensional hydrological routing (Pietroniro et al., 2007). It has been widely used in Canada to study the Great Lakes Basin (Haghnegahdar et al., 2015) and the Saskatchewan River Basin (Yassin et al., 2017, 2019a) amongst others. Several applications to basins outside Canada are underway (e.g. Arboleda-Obando, 2018; Bahremand et al., 2018). The MESH framework allows coupling of a land surface model, either CLASS (Verseghy, 2012) or SVS (Husain et al., 2016) that ~~models~~simulates the vertical processes of heat and moisture flux transfers between the land surface and the atmosphere, with a horizontal routing component (WATROUTE) taken from the distributed hydrological model WATFLOOD (Kouwen, 1988). Unlike ~~most~~many land surface models, the vertical column in MESH has a slope that allows for lateral transfer of overland flow and interflow (Soulis et al., 2000) to an assumed stream within each grid cell of the model. MESH uses a regular latitude-longitude grid and represents subgrid heterogeneity using the grouped response unit (GRU) approach (Kouwen et al., 1993) which makes it semi-distributed. In the GRU approach, different land covers within a grid cell do not have a specific ~~locations~~location and ~~do not interact explicitly, making it easier for parameterization.~~common land covers in adjacent cells share a set of parameters, which simplifies basin characterization. While~~, Land~~ land cover classes are typically used to define a GRU, other factors can be included in the definition such as soil type, slope, aspect~~, etc. A tile, which is the smallest computational element, is defined by a specific GRU in a given grid cell.~~. MESH has been under continuous development; its new features include improved representation of baseflow (Luo et al., 2012), controlled reservoirs (Yassin et al., 2019b) as well as permafrost (this paper).~~ More details about MESH history and developments are provided in a companion paper (Davison et al., in preparation).~~ For this study, we use CLASS as the underlying land surface model within MESH.

Underground, CLASS couples the moisture and energy balances for a ~~pre~~user-specified number of soil layers of ~~pre~~user-specified thicknesses, which are uniform across the domain. Each soil layer, thus, has a diagnosed temperature and both liquid and frozen moisture contents down to the soil permeable depth or the "depth to bedrock – SDEP" below which there is no moisture and the thermal properties of the soil are assumed as those of bedrock material (sandstone). MESH ~~is~~ usually ~~run~~runs at 30min time ~~steps~~step and thus from the MESH-simulated continuous temperature profiles, one can determine several permafrost related aspects that are used in the presented analyses such as (see Figure 1):

- Temperature envelopes (Tmax and Tmin) at daily, monthly and annual time steps~~. Temperature envelopes are~~, defined by the maximum and minimum simulated temperature for each layer over the specified time period. To compare with available observations, we use the annual envelopes.
- ~~-~~Active layer thickness (~~or depth – ALD~~ALT) defined as the maximum depth, measured from the ground surface, of the zero isotherm over the year taken from the annual maximum temperature envelopes by linear interpolation between layers bracketing the zero value (freezing point depression is not considered~~). It~~) and has to be connected to the surface~~, thus we use a thaw, rather than freeze, criterion, which is compatible with the available measurements.~~
- ~~Daily~~. The daily progression of the ~~ALD, which~~ALT can also be ~~used~~generated to visualize the thaw and freeze fronts and determine the dates of thaw and freeze-up. These are calculated in a similar way to the annual ~~ALD~~ALT but using ~~the~~ daily envelopes.
- ~~The no (or~~Depth of the zero~~) oscillation depth (ZOD~~ annual amplitude (DZAA) where the annual temperature envelopes meet to within 0.1° (van Everdingen, 2005)~~(or other given accuracy threshold). In some literature,~~ and the temperature at this depth ~~is termed the zero amplitude depth (ZA~~(TZAA).

Possible position for ~~see~~ Figure 1

Permafrost is usually defined as ground ~~remaining frozen~~that remains cryotic (i.e. temperature ≤ 0°C) for at least two years (Dobinski, 2011; van Everdingen, 2005) but for modelling purposes and to validate against annual ground temperature ~~envelope~~envelopes and ~~ALD data~~ALT observations, a one-year cycle is adopted. This is common amongst the climate and land surface modelling community (e.g. Park et al., 2013). van Everdingen (2005) defined the active layer thickness as the thickness of the layer that is subject to annual thawing and freezing in areas underlain by permafrost. Strictly speaking, the active layer thickness should be the lesser of the maximum seasonal frost depth and the maximum seasonal thaw depth (Walvoord and Kurylyk, 2016). The maximum frost depth can be less than the maximum thaw depth and, in such a case there, is a layer above the permafrost that is warmer than 0°C but is not connected to the surface (a lateral talik). Because active layer observations are usually based on measuring the maximum thaw depth, we adopted the same (thaw rather than freeze) criterion when calculating ALT in the model.

Prior versions of MESH/CLASS ~~used to output~~merely outputted temperature profiles~~; the~~. The code has been amended to calculate the additional permafrost-related outputs detailed above~~ for each tile as well as the grid average allowing spatial and temporal mapping of permafrost characteristics. A CLASS~~. A typical CLASS configuration consists of 3 soil layers of 0.1, 0.25, and 3.75m thickness but in 2006, ~~it~~the CLASS code was ~~extended~~amended to accommodate as many layers as needed (Verseghy, 2012). ~~However, this was hard-coded within CLASS until it became configurable using an external file only within the MESH framework. The configuration file used to provide soil parameters (texture and initial temperature and moisture conditions) for each GRU for the top three layers and the model assumed the third layer values to apply to any additional layers below till bedrock. The code has been modified to enable specifying these parameters for as many layers as needed and was extended to allow a spatially variable specification (i.e. by grid) of these parameters as well as by GRU. However, the number and thickness of soil layers are still fixed for the whole domain.~~Neglecting lateral heat flow, the one dimensional finite difference heat conservation equation is applied to each layer to obtain the change in average layer temperature $\bar{T}_i$ over a time step Δt as:

$$\bar{T}_i^{t+1} = \bar{T}_i^{t} + \left[G_{i-1}^{t} - G_i^{t}\right]\frac{\Delta t}{C_i \Delta z_i} \pm S_i \qquad (1)$$

where, t denotes the time, i is the layer index, and G_{i-1} and G_i are the downward heat flux at the top and bottom of the soil layer, respectively, Δz_i is the thickness of the layer, C_i is the volumetric heat capacity and S_i is a correction term applied when the water phase changes (freezing or thawing) or the water percolates (exits the soil column at the lowest boundary). The volumetric heat capacity of the layer is calculated as the sum of the heat capacities, C_j, of its constituents (liquid water, ice, soil minerals, and organic matter), weighted by their volume fractions θ_j and, therefore, varies with time depending on the moisture content:

$$C_i = \sum_j C_j \theta_j \qquad (2)$$

Heat fluxes between soil layers are calculated using the layer temperatures at each time step using the one-dimensional heat conduction equation:

$$G(z) = -\lambda(z)\frac{dT}{dz} \qquad (3)$$

where $\lambda(z)$ is the thermal conductivity of the soil calculated analogously to the heat capacity. Temperature variation within each soil layer is assumed to follow a quadratic function of depth (z). Setting the flux at the bottom boundary to a constant (i.e. Neumann type boundary condition for the differential equation) and diagnosing the flux into the ground surface, $G(0)$, from the solution of the surface energy balance, results in a linear equation for $G(0)$ as a function of $\overline{T}_i$ for the different layers in addition to soil surface temperature, $T(0)$. This enables diagnosing the fluxes and temperatures of all layers using a forward explicit scheme. More details are given in Section S1 of the supplementary material and full details are given in Verseghy (2012, 1991).

The CLASS thermal boundary condition at the bottom of the soil column is either no-flux (i.e. the gradient of the temperature profile should be zero) or a constant geothermal flux. For this study, we considered the no-flux condition, as data for the geothermal flux are not easy to find at the MRB scale. Nicolsky et al. (2007) ignored the geothermal flux in their study over Alaska using CLM with an 80m soil column. Sapriza-Azuri et al. (2018) showed that the difference in temperature at DZAA between the two cases is within the error margin for geothermal temperature measurements for 60% of their simulations at Norman Wells. However, we also tested with a constant geothermal flux to verify those previous findings.

As for organic soils, CLASS can use a percentage of organic matter within a mineral soil layer, a fully organic layer, or thermal and hydraulic properties provided directly. As the latter are not usually available, especially at large scales, we used the first two options. In the first case, the organic content is used to modify soil hydraulic and thermal properties, similar to CLM (Oleson et al., 2013). For fully organic soils, CLASS has special values for those properties depending on the type of organic soil selected (fibric, hemic or sapric) based on the work of Letts et al. (2000)~~Organic soils are modelled in CLASS by deactivating mineral soils using a special flag to allow a soil layer to either be Fibric, Hemic, or Sapric after . Each type has a different degree of decomposition leading to different physical, hydraulic and thermal properties as~~

~~specified in Verseghy (2012). Usually, a soil layer is assumed to be fully organic if the organic content is 30% or more . Organic soils were mapped from the Soil Landscapes of Canada (SLC) v2.2 (Centre for Land and Biological Resources Research, 1996) for the whole MRB (). However, this dataset does not provide information as to the depth of the organic layers or their configuration (i.e. the thicknesses of Fibric, Hemic and Sapric layers). Therefore, different configurations have been tested at the study sites based on available local information keeping in mind that these has to be carried back to the MRB scale.~~

~~**Possible Position for**~~ for peat soils (see Section S1). In traditional CLASS applications, when the organic soil flag is activated, fibric (type 1) parameters are assigned to the first soil layer, hemic (type 2) parameters to the second, and sapric (type 3) parameters to deeper layers as soon (Verseghy, 2012) – see Supplement Table S1 for parameter values. The corresponding code in MESH was amended such that more than one fibric or hemic layer can be present, and that the organic soil flag can be switched off (returning to a mineral soil parameterization) for lower layers. In assigning the organic layer type, the same order is used (fibric at the surface, followed by hemic, then sapric with depth), as this represents the natural decomposition process, but with the introduction of many more layers with depth, it is necessary to have more flexibility in how the organic layers can be configured. The fully organic parameterization was activated when the organic content is 30% or more, based on recommendation by the Soil Classification Working Group (1998).

~~3.2~~2.2 Study Sites and Permafrost Data

The Mackenzie River Basin (MRB) extends between 102-140°W and 52-69°N (Figure 2). It drains an area of about 1.775 Mkm^2 of Western and Northwestern Canada and covers parts of the provinces of Saskatchewan, Alberta~~,~~ and British Colombia~~ provinces~~, as well as the Yukon and the ~~North West~~Northwest Territories. The average annual discharge at the basin outlet to the Beaufort Sea exceeds 300 km^3, which is the fifth largest discharge to the Arctic. Such a large discharge influences regional as well as global circulation patterns under the current climate, and is expected to have implications for climate change. Figure 2Figure 1 also shows the permafrost extent and categories for the MRB taken from the Canadian Permafrost Map (Hegginbottom et al., 1995). About 75% of the basin is underlain by permafrost that can be either continuous (in the far North and the Western Mountains), discontinuous (to the south of the continuous region), ~~or~~ sporadic (in the southern parts of the Liard and in the Hay sub-basin~~).~~), or patchy further south. It is important ~~, while building the MRB model,~~ to properly represent permafrost~~,~~ for the MRB model, given the current trends of thawing and its ~~vast~~major impacts on landforms, connectivity, and thus the hydrology of the basin. This is ~~the focus of this paper,~~achieved through detailed studies conducted at three sites ~~on~~along a transect near the Mackenzie River going from the Sporadic permafrost zone (Jean Marie River) to the Extensive Discontinuous zone (Norman Wells) and the Extensive Continuous zone (Havikpak Creek) as shown in Figure 3~~Figure 1.~~. The following ~~sections~~paragraphs give ~~a closer look at each site, the data available, and some~~brief descriptions of the ~~previous work conducted, focusing on~~three sites. Table 1 gives details of permafrost~~.~~ monitoring at the sites while more detailed descriptions are given in Section S2 of the supplementary material.

~~3.2.1~~ Possible position for Figure 2~~Jean Marie River~~

Possible position for Table 1

The Jean Marie River (JMR) is a tributary of the main Mackenzie River Basin (Figure 3~~)~~a)) in the Northwest Territories (NWT) ~~province~~ of Canada. ~~Its mouth is located upstream of Fort Simpson where the Liard River joins the main Mackenzie River. The gauged area up to the WSC station at the river intersection with Highway 1 is about 1240 km²~~. The basin is dominated by boreal (deciduous, coniferous and mixed) forest on raised peat plateaux and bogs. The basin is located in the sporadic permafrost zone where permafrost underlies few spots only and is characterized ~~with~~by warm ~~permafrost (temperature >~~temperatures (> -1°C) ~~that underlies some parts and does not exist in others with~~and limited (<10m) thickness (Smith and Burgess, 2002).

~~**Possible Position for**~~

~~The nearest Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) Weather station is located at Fort Simpson to the North of the Basin. The Canadian Climate Normals (1981–2010, ECCC) at Fort Simpson indicates that the mean annual temperature is -2.8°C with temperatures generally below freezing during October to April while a maximum summer temperature of 17.4°C is reached in July. Mean annual precipitation is about 388 mm/year, of which around 60% falls as rain while the rest is snowfall.~~

~~The streamflow at Water Survey of Canada (WSC) gauge 10FB005 has a good record for the period 1972-2015.~~ The basin ~~is snow-melt dominated with flow peaks normally occurring in May/June with some years having secondary summer peaks. The mean annual streamflow at the station over the period 1980-2015 is 5.5 m³/s, while the highest recorded streamflow reached 211 m³/s on July 3, 1988. Baseflow is usually small but the river does not run completely dry in winter despite surface freezing.~~

~~The gauged part of the basin, modelled for this study, is covered by 14 grid cells of the MRB model grid (0.125° x 0.125°) and can thus be hydrologically assessed in terms of the quality of the streamflow simulations. However, this is not the main focus of this study. Parameters for the MESH model are taken from calibrations of the adjacent Liard sub-basin (Elshamy et al., in preparation).~~

~~The basin~~ and adjacent basins (e.g. Scotty Creek) have been subject to extensive studies ~~as~~because the warm, thin, and sporadic permafrost underling the region has been rapidly degrading (Calmels et al., 2015; Quinton et al., 2011). ~~The region is vulnerable to permafrost thaw, which is changing the landscape of the region, the vegetation, and wildlife habitat with significant implications for First Nations livelihoods and access to their cultural resources. Collapse of forested peat plateaux into wetland areas has been reported by several researchers~~ Several permafrost-monitoring sites have been established in and around the basin mostly as part of the Norman Wells to Zama pipeline monitoring program launched by the Government of Canada and Enbridge Pipeline Inc. in 1984-1985 (Smith et al., 2004)~~in 1984-1985 to investigate the impact of the pipeline on the permafrost and terrain conditions . The details of those sites are given in Table 1 while shows their locations. We focus on sites 85-12A and 85-12B as representative of the basin. We use Cables T4 at each site as they are the least affected by the pipeline, being out of its right of way (at least 20m away).~~ to investigate the pipeline impact on permafrost conditions. This study uses data from sites 85-12A and 85-12B (see Table 1). Site 85-12A has no permafrost while site 85-12B, in close proximity, has a thin (3-4m) permafrost layer with ~~ALD of about 1.5m as estimated from soil temperature envelopes over the period 1986-2000. All other monitoring points on have no permafrost conditions since their records began in the 1980s and 1990s. The sites 85-12A & B have a ground moraine landform with open black spruce, ericaceous shrubs, moss-lichen woodland on a peat plateau . It is challenging to model two different conditions in such close proximity (within the same model grid cell and having the same vegetation). The difference in permafrost conditions is possibly related to the thickness of the peat as shown in the borehole logs . Borehole 85-12A-T4 has a little over 1m thick layer of peat while borehole 85-12B-T4 has close to 5m peat providing more insulation that keeps the ground from thawing during summer~~an ALT of about 1.5m as estimated from soil temperature envelopes over the period 1986-2000. See Figure S1 in the supplementary material for a plot of observed temperature envelopes.

Possible ~~Position of~~position for Figure 3

Field Code Changed

~~*3.2.2 Bosworth Creek (Norman Wells)*~~

Bosworth Creek (BWC) ~~is~~has a small basin ~~(126 km²) on the Eastern/Northern Side of the Mackenzie River ()~~ draining from the northeast to the main Mackenzie ~~river~~River near Norman Wells (Figure 3~~.~~b).

Permafrost monitoring activities started in the region in 1984 with the construction of the Norman Wells ~~to -~~Zama buried oil pipeline (as ~~mentioned~~described above~~.~~). The basin is dominated by boreal (deciduous, coniferous and mixed) forest. It is located in the extensive discontinuous permafrost zone with relatively deep active layer (1-3 m) and relatively thick (10-50m) permafrost (Smith and Burgess, 2002)

~~There is an ECCC weather station nearby at Norman Wells with complete temperature and precipitation records from 1980. The Canadian Climate Normals (1981–2010, ECCC) at Norman Wells indicate that the mean annual temperature is -5.1°C with temperatures generally below freezing during October to April while the maximum summer temperature of 17.1°C is reached in July. Mean annual precipitation is about 294 mm/year, of which around 60% falls as rain while the rest is snowfall.~~

~~Similar to the Jean Marie River Basin, the streamflow is dominated by snowmelt with a peak in May and a secondary summer peak in some years. WSC Gauge 10KA007 at the outlet of the basin near its confluence with the Mackenzie River has a good record over the period 1980-2016 with a long gap from 1995-2008. The mean annual discharge over the available period of record is 0.67 m³/s with peaks ranging normally between 2.5 and 15 m³/s. The highest daily flow on record reached about 20 m³/s in May 1991. There is a visible baseflow component for this basin. The basin covers portions of three grid cells of the MRB grid () and therefore it is not expected to have adequate simulation for streamflow comparisons.~~

~~Possible Position of~~

~~The basin itself has not been the focus of previous hydrological studies, but there are several permafrost studies of Norman Wells, being at the Northern end of the important pipeline.~~. Sapriza-Azuri et al. (2018) used cable T5 at the pump station site (84-1) to investigate the appropriate soil depth and initial conditions for their permafrost simulations, which ~~is~~serve as a pre-cursor for this current study. They ~~recommend~~recommended a soil depth of ~~a~~at least 20m to ensure that the simulated ~~ZOD~~DZAA is within the soil profile. However, they based their analysis on cable T5, which is within the right of way of the pipeline and is likely to be affected by its construction/operation.

~~There are several thermal monitoring sites within and close to the basin and the adjacent Canyon Creek basin to its south East – . There are also a few thaw tubes but their records are short and intermittent.~~ We focus on the Norman Wells pump station site (84-1) and for this study we choose cable T4 as it is more likely to reflect the natural permafrost conditions being out of the right of way of the pipeline. It has a continuous record since 1985 (Smith et al., 2004; Duchesne, personal communication, 2017).

~~3.2.3~~ *Havikpak Creek*

~~Havikpak Creek~~ (HPC) is a small arctic research basin (Figure 3~~(about 15 km^2 in area~~c) located in the ~~Eastern~~eastern part of the Mackenzie River basin delta, 2km north of ~~the~~ Inuvik Airport ~~(68°18'15" N, 133°28'58" W)~~ in the Northwest Territories (NWT~~) ()~~.). The basin is dominated by sparse taiga forest and shrubs~~, has a cold sub-arctic climate~~ and is underlain by thick permafrost (>300m). ~~The basin is characterized by mild slopes and has an elevation ranging between 60-240m (Krogh et al., 2017).~~

~~Possible Position of~~

~~There is an ECCC weather station at nearby Inuvik airport with hourly temperature record from 1980 and daily precipitation record from 1960. The Canadian Climate Normals (1981–2010, ECCC) at Inuvik indicates that the mean annual temperature is -8.2°C with temperatures generally below freezing during October to April while a maximum summer temperature of 14.1°C is reached in July. Mean annual precipitation is about 241 mm/year; close to half of which is rainfall while the rest falls as snow.~~

~~The streamflow flow of the basin is dominated by snowmelt with no winter streamflow due to the lack of groundwater contribution (deep permafrost), and some smaller summer events. The streamflow at the outlet of the basin has been measured by ECCC WSC gauge 10LC017 since 1995. The mean annual streamflow at the outlet is about 0.07 m^3/s with a maximum of 4.65 m^3/s reached in the summer of 2000. The summer peak discharge varied greatly between 0.7 and 4.0 m^3/s over the period 1995-2017. However, the basin covers portions of only two grid cells of the MRB grid () and therefore is not expected to have adequate simulation for streamflow comparisons.~~

The basin has been subject to several hydrological studies, especially during the Mackenzie GEWEX Study (MAGS). ~~For example, studied the water and energy fluxes from HPC for the important 1994/95 hydrological year. More recently~~Recently, Krogh et al. (2017) modelled its hydrological and permafrost conditions using the Cold Regional Hydrological Model (CRHM) (Pomeroy et al., 2007). They integrated a ground freeze/thaw algorithm called XG (Changwei and Gough, 2013) within CRHM to simulate the active layer thickness and the progression of the freeze/thaw front with time but they did not attempt to simulate the temperature ~~envelops or the depth/temperature of ZOD.~~

~~In terms of permafrost-related measurements, soil temperature~~ envelopes ~~are available from Inuvik airport forest and bog sites 01TC02 and 01TC03 respectively.~~or DZAA. Ground temperatures are measured with ~~multi-sensor~~ temperature cables installed in boreholes ~~going down to 10m and 6.5m in depth at~~at two sites 01TC02 and 01TC03 respectively ~~and both are equipped with data loggers~~ (Smith et al., 2016)~~.~~

~~Temperature sensors failed on the bog site (01TC03) in 2010 and the site was replaced by 12TC01 in the same conditions. ~~. In addition, there are three thaw tubes at Inuvik Upper Air ~~station~~Station (90-TT-16) just to the west of the basin, at HPC proper (93-TT-02), and at the Inuvik Airport bog site (01-TT-03) measuring the active layer depth and ground settlement (Smith et al., 2009). ~~The land form and vegetation at Inuvik Airport forest site (01TC02) is described as fluted till plain with open black spruce trees while the other site (01TC03) is an open bog between ridges on the fluted till plain with scattered shrubs in an open bog. The HPC thaw tube is located in a back spruce forest .~~

2.3 Land Cover Parameterization

Parameterizations for the three selected basins were extracted from a larger MRB model, described in Elshamy et al. (in preparation). This includes the land cover characterization and parameters for vegetation and hydrology. The land cover data are based on the CCRS 2005 dataset (Canada Centre for Remote Sensing (CCRS) et al., 2010). The parameterization of certain land cover types differentiates between the eastern and western sides of the basin using the Mackenzie River as a divide, informed by calibrations of the MRB model. HPC and BWC are on the east side of the river while JMR is on the west side and therefore these setups have different parameter values for certain GRU types (e.g. Needleleaf Forest). SDEP, soil texture information and initial conditions were taken as described above and adjusted according to model evaluation versus permafrost related observations (ALT, DZAA, temperature envelopes) with the aim to develop an initialization and configuration strategy that can be implemented for the larger MRB model.

Provisions for special land covers within the MESH framework include inland water.. Because of limitations in the current model framework, inland water must be represented as a porous soil, which is parameterized such that it remains as saturated as possible, drainage is prohibited from the bottom of the soil column and it is modelled using CLASS with a large hydraulic conductivity value and no slope. Additionally, it was initialized to have a positive bottom temperature and therefore, it does not develop permafrost. Wetlands are treated in a similar way (impeded drainage and no slope) but with grassy vegetation and preserving the soil parameterization as described in below in Sections 2.5 and 2.6. It remains close to saturation but can still be underlain by permafrost, depending on location. Taliks are allowed to develop under wetlands this way.

2.4 Climate Forcing

MESH requires seven climatic variables at a sub-daily time step to drive CLASS. For this study we used the WFDEI dataset that covers the period 1979-2016 at 3 hourly resolution (Weedon et al., 2014). The dataset was linearly interpolated from its original 0.5° x 0.5° resolution to the MRB model grid resolution of 0.125° x 0.125°. The high resolution forecasts of the Global Environmental Multiscale atmospheric model – GEM (Côté et al., 1998b, 1998a; Yeh et al., 2002), and the Canadian Precipitation Analysis – CaPA (Mahfouf et al., 2007) datasets, often combined as (GEM-CaPA), provide the most accurate gridded climatic dataset for Canada in general (Wong et al., 2017). Unfortunately, these datasets are not available prior to 2002 when most of the permafrost observations used for model evaluation are available. However, an analysis by Wong et al. (2017) showed that precipitation estimates from the CaPA and WFDEI products are in reasonable agreement with station observations. Alternative datasets such as WFD (Weedon et al., 2011) and Princeton (Sheffield et al., 2006) go earlier in time (1901) but are not being updated (WFD stops 2001 while Princeton stops 2012). Additionally, Wong et al. (2017) showed that the Princeton dataset has large precipitation biases for many parts of Canada. Analysis of the sensitivity of the results presented here to the choice of the climatic dataset is beyond the scope of this work.

~~3.3~~2.5 Soil Profile and ~~Organic Soils~~Permeable Depth

As mentioned earlier, Sapriza-Azuri et al. (2018) recommended a total soil column depth (D) of no less than 20m to enable reliable simulation of permafrost dynamics considering the uncertainties involved ~~including parameter uncertainty.~~mainly due to parameters. Their study is relevant because they used the same model used ~~here~~in this study (MESH/CLASS). They studied several profiles, down to 71.6m depth. Recent applications of other H-LSMs also considered deep soil column depths; e.g. CLM 4.5 used 42.1m (Oleson et al., 2013) and CHANGE (Park et al., 2013) used 30.5m. After a few test trials with D = 20, 25, 30, 40, 50 and 100m at the ~~different~~study sites, we found that the additional computation time when adding more layers to increase D is outweighed by the reliability of the simulations. The reliability criterion used here is that the temperature envelopes meet (i.e. DZAA) well within the soil column depth over the simulation period (including spinning-up) such that the bottom boundary condition ~~is~~does not ~~disturbing~~disturb the simulated temperature profiles/envelopes and ~~ALD~~ALT (Nicolsky et al., 2007). ~~ZOD (refer to Section) represents~~DZAA is a relatively stable ~~condition to assess that~~indicator for this criterion (Alexeev et al., 2007). ~~ZOD~~The simulated DZAA reached a maximum of ~~25m~~20m at one of the sites in a few years and thus ~~the~~a total depth ~~was increased to~~of 50m was used in anticipation for possible changes in ~~ZOD~~DZAA with future warming. We show that this depth is adequate at the three sites selected in the subsequent sections.

~~The CLASS thermal boundary condition at the bottom of the soil column is either no-flux (i.e. the gradient of the temperature profile should be zero) or a constant geothermal flux. For this study, we considered the no-flux condition, as data for the geothermal flux are not easy to find at the MRB scale. ignored the geothermal flux in their study over Alaska using CLM with an 80m soil column. Sapriza-Azuri et al. (2018) showed that the difference in temperature at ZOD between the two cases is within the error margin for geothermal temperature measurements for 60% of their simulations at Norman Wells.~~

~~The~~As noted above, the total soil column depth is only one factor in the configuration of the soil. The layering is as critical. In ~~the above-mentioned~~former modelling studies, exponentially increasing soil layer thicknesses were used, aiming to reach the required depth with a minimum number of layers. The exponential formulation creates more layers near the surface, which allows the models to capture the strong soil moisture and temperature gradients there and yet have a reasonable number of layers (15-20) to reduce the computational burden. However, for most of the MRB, the observed ~~ALD~~ALT is in the range of 1-2m from the surface and the exponential formulations increase layer thickness quickly after the first 0.5-1.0m, which reduces the accuracy of the ~~models~~model, especially for transient simulations. Therefore, we adopted two layering schemes that have more layers in the top 2m, and increased ~~the~~ layer ~~thickness~~thicknesses at lower depths, to a total depth near 50m. The first scheme has the first meter divided into 10 layers, the second meter divided into 5 layers and the total soil column has 23 layers. The second scheme has soil thicknesses increasing more gradually to reach 51.24m in 25 layers following a scaled power law. This latter scheme has an advantage that each layer is always thicker than the one above it (except the second layer~~) which showed improvements in numerical stability for both temperature and moisture calculations. The minimum soil layer thickness is taken as 10cm as advised by Verseghy (2012) for numerical reasons. CLASS uses an~~), as the explicit forward difference numerical scheme to solve the energy and water ~~budgets, which~~ balances in CLASS can have instabilities when layers in succession have the same thickness. The minimum soil layer thickness is taken as 10cm as advised by Verseghy (2012). Table 2 shows the soil layer ~~thickness~~thicknesses and centers (used for plotting temperature profiles/envelopes) for both soil layering schemes.

Possible ~~Position~~position of Table 2

As mentioned before, the permeable depth (SDEP) marks the hydrologically active horizon below which the soil is not permeable and where its thermal properties are changed to those of bedrock material. This makes it an important parameter for not only for water storage but also for thermal conductance. It was set for the various study basins from the Shangguan et al. (2017) dataset interpolated to 0.125°, the MRB model grid resolution, by Keshav et al. (2019b). The sensitivity of the results to SDEP is assessed by perturbing it within a reasonable range at each site as shown in the results.

2.6 Organic Soil Configuration

Organic soils were mapped from the Soil Landscapes of Canada (SLC) v2.2 (Centre for Land and Biological Resources Research, 1996) for the whole MRB (Figure 4) at 0.125° resolution by Keshav et al. (2019a). However, this dataset does not provide information on the depth of the organic layers or their configuration (i.e. the thicknesses of Fibric, Hemic and Sapric layers in peaty soils). Therefore, different configurations have been tested at the study sites based on available local information (Table 3~~Finally, the discretization of organic soil is considered separately for each basin based on local information together with the gridded SLC v2.2 at 0.125° resolution . The flexibility of the model can be utilized for the selected basins when modelled separately but to take the information back to the whole MRB, one has to rely on more general information that is available basin-wide. As discussed above, CLASS originally configured the first layer as fibric (type 1), the second as hemic (type 2) and the rest as sapric (type 3) as soon as the organic soil flag is activated. We modified that to be configurable such that one can have more than one fibric or hemic layer and switch off the organic soils for the lower layers. Typically we use them in the same order as it reflects the natural decomposition process (fibric at the surface, followed by hemic, then sapric) but with the introduction of configurable layer depths, texture, and initial conditions, it is necessary to have organic layers configurable as well. Fully organic soils are activated when the organic content is 30% or more (Soil Classification Working Group, 1998).~~

). We also compared fully organic configurations (ORG) at the three sites with mineral configurations with organic content (M-org) to investigate the appropriate configuration at each site, keeping in mind the need to generalize it for larger basins.

Possible Position for Figure 4

For JMR, we tested configurations with about 0.~~6m~~3m organic soil (~~6~~3 layers~~ using SC1 and 5 under SC2~~) to over 2m of organic soil, where organic content from SLC v2.2 ranged between 48-59% (Figure 4~~. The~~). The soil texture immediately below these layers was characterized as a mineral soil ~~is assumed to be~~ of uniform ~~below the fully organic layers and the soil~~ texture ~~is taken from the gridded SLC v2.2 mapping for the MRB mentioned above giving~~with 15% ~~SAND~~sand and 15% ~~CLAY and an organic~~clay content ~~ranging between 48-59% ().~~, with the remainder assigned as silt. 4-7m peat depths ~~have been reported~~ in the surrounding region have been identified in reports (Quinton et al., 2011) and by borehole data ~~of the specific~~at permafrost monitoring sites (Smith et al., 2004). Therefore, ~~the organic content in the mineral~~ layers ~~below the fully organic layers is set to 50%~~ at these depths until bedrock~~.~~ were characterized as mineral soils (as described above), but with 50% organic content. These deeper layers, while having considerable organic content, do not use the previously described parameterization for fully organic soils. This is an exception for this basin, which ~~can~~could be generalized for the MRB ~~for~~ in areas with high organic content (e.g. > 50%) like this region. These configurations are summarized in Table 3~~The organic configurations used are listed in . SDEP is set to 7m based on gridding the) dataset at the 0.125° resolution . As mentioned in Section , SDEP marks the hydrologically active horizon below which the soil is not permeable and its thermal properties are changed to those of bedrock material. This makes it an important parameter and the sensitivity of the results to it is assessed by perturbing it within a range (5-15m).~~. For the M-org configuration, we used a decreasing organic content with depth.

Possible ~~Position~~position of Table 3

For BWC, the organic map ~~()~~ indicated that organic matter ranges between 27-34%. We tested configurations with 0.3 – 0.8m organic layers. A borehole log for 84-1-T4 site (Smith et al., 2004) shows a thin organic silty layer at the top (close to 0.2-0.3m). Sand and clay content below the organic layers are uniformly taken to be 24% and 24% respectively based again on ~~the gridded~~ SLC v2.2 ~~as above and~~with the remainder (52%) ~~is~~ assumed ~~to be~~ silt ~~by CLASS. SDEP ranges between 5-12m. Thus, several values within this range have been~~. We tested ORG and M-org configurations as shown Table 3~~.~~.

The organic content indicated by the gridded soil information at HPC is only 18%, which is lower than the 30% threshold ~~to activate~~decided for fully organic soils. However, Quinton and Marsh (1999) used a 0.5m thick organic layer in their conceptual framework developed to characterise runoff generation in the nearby Siksik creek. Krogh et al. (2017) adopted the same depth for their modelling study of HPC. Therefore, we tested configurations with 0.3-0.8m fully organic layers~~.~~ as well as the M-org configuration with a uniform 18% organic content. Below that, soil texture values are taken ~~from the gridded SLC v2.2~~ to be 24% ~~Sand~~sand and 32% ~~Clay. A mineral soil configuration with 18% organic matter for the top few layers has been also tested (denoted “M-org”). SDEP ranges between 8-10m but values ranging between 5-12m have been tested.~~clay from SLC v2.2.

~~3.4 Land Cover Parameterization~~

~~As noted above, the model parameters for the three selected basins were pre-specified, given the specific aims of this study. The setups use land cover, vegetation, and hydrology parameters from the MRB setup, which is described in Elshamy et al. (in preparation). The land cover data are based on the CCRS 2005 dataset and the calibration differentiates between the Eastern and Western sides of the basin using the Mackenzie River as a divide. HPC and BWC are on the East side of the river while JMR is on the west side and therefore they have different parameters for some GRU types (e.g. Needleleaf Forest). SDEP, soil texture information and initial conditions were taken as described above and adjusted according to model evaluation versus permafrost related observations (ALD, Temperature envelopes) with the aim to develop an initialization and configuration strategy that can be implemented for the larger MRB model.~~

~~Special land covers within the MESH framework include inland water, which is parameterized such that it remains saturated. Thus, drainage is prohibited from the bottom of the soil column and it is modelled using flat CLASS (no slope) with a large hydraulic conductivity value. Ideally, water should have no limitation on evaporation but being still treated as a porous media within the current version of CLASS, the top layers are not always fully saturated. Additionally, it was initialized to have a positive bottom temperature and therefore, it does not develop permafrost. Wetlands are treated in a similar way (impeded drainage and no slope) but it has grassy vegetation and it takes the soil properties as described above (Section). It remains close to saturation but, depending on location, can still be underlain by permafrost. Taliks are easier to develop under wetlands this way.~~

~~3.5 Climate Forcing~~

~~MESH requires climate forcing data for seven climatic variables at a sub-daily time step. For this study we used the WFDEI dataset that covers the period 1979-2016 at 3 hourly resolution . The dataset was interpolated linearly from its original 0.5° resolution to the MRB model resolution of 0.125°. The high resolution forecasts of the Global Environmental Multiscale atmospheric model – GEM , and the Canadian Precipitation Analysis – CaPA datasets, often combined as (GEM-CaPA), provide the most accurate gridded climatic dataset for Canada. Unfortunately, these datasets are not available prior to 2002 when most of the permafrost observations used for model evaluation are available. performed an inter-comparison of precipitation estimates from several products against observed station data over Canada and found that CaPA and WFDEI products are in good agreement with station observations.~~

~~3.6~~2.7 Spinning up and Stabilization

We used the first hydrological year of the climate forcing (Oct 1979-Sep 1980) to spin up the model repeatedly for 2000 cycles while monitoring the temperature and moisture (~~liquid~~water and ice ~~content~~contents) profiles at the end of each cycle for stabilization. We checked that the selected year was close to average in terms of temperature and precipitation compared to the WFDEI record (1979-2016) – Table 4~~)~~.. The start of the hydrological year was selected because it is easier to initialize ~~the first cycle at the end of summer~~CLASS when there is no snow cover or frozen soil moisture content. Stabilization is assessed visually using various plots as well as by computing the difference between each cycle and the previous one making sure the absolute difference does not exceed 0.1~~º~~°C for temperature (which is the accuracy of measurement ~~thermostats~~of the temperature sensors) and 0.01 m^3/m^3 for moisture components for all soil layers~~ in the profile.~~. The aim is to determine the minimum number of cycles that ~~can be used to~~could inform the ~~MRB model~~ongoing development of the MRB model, as it is computationally very expensive to spin up the whole MRB ~~model~~domain for 2000 cycles. We then assessed the impact of running the model for the period 1980-2016 after 50, 100, 200, 500, 1000, and 2000 spin-up cycles ~~(using the first hydrological year)~~ on the ~~ALD, ZOD~~ALT, DZAA, and the temperature envelopes at the three sites for selected years depending on the available observations. ~~We focused on temperature changes as we found moisture profiles to stabilize quickly~~We assessed the quality of the simulations visually as well as quantitatively by calculating the root mean squared error (RMSE) for ALT, DZAA, and the temperature profiles.

Possible position of Table 4

~~4.~~3. RESULTS

~~4.1~~3.1 Establishing Initial Conditions

Figure 5 shows the temperature profiles at the end of spinning cycles for a selected GRU (Needleleaf – NL Forest) for the three selected sites using the two suggested soil layering schemes (SC1 and SC2) and using two different organic configuration (ORG vs M-org) for SC2. NL Forest is representative of the vegetation at the selected thermal sites for the three studied basins (except HPC bog site). As expected, the profile changes quickly for the first few cycles then tends to stabilize ~~so~~such that ~~there is~~ no significant change occurs after 100 cycles and ~~sometimes~~ less~~.~~ in most cases. Similar observations can be made for soil moisture (both water and ice contents) from Figure 6. Changes in moisture content tend to diminish more quickly than those for temperature, especially for ORG, and thus we will focus on temperature changes in the remaining results. However, water and ice fractions play important roles in defining the thermal properties of the soil and provide useful insights to understand certain behaviours in the simulations. Figure 7 shows the temperature of each layer for the same cases ~~as in~~ versus the cycle number to visualize the ~~change~~ patterns ~~between~~of change over the cycles. ~~There are some small~~Small oscillations are observed, indicating ~~some~~minor numerical ~~issues~~instabilities in the model, but ~~they~~these do not cause major differences for the simulations. ~~For~~In some cases~~/layers~~, the temperature keeps drifting ~~(mostly cooling)~~ for several hundred cycles before stabilizing (if ~~it~~stabilization occurs). We note a few important ~~things~~findings:

- ~~Changes to the~~The temperature of the bottom layer (TBOT) remains virtually unchanged from ~~the~~its initial value ~~are too small to have any significance; this~~. This triggered further testing using different initial values and the ~~impact~~impacts on stabilization were similar, as shown in the next sections. We also checked the model behaviour for shallower soil columns and found that the bottom temperature did change with spinning up, within a range that decreased as the total soil depth increased.
- The vertical discretization of the soil plays an important role in the evolution of temporal moisture and temperature profiles. SC2 ~~gives much more stable~~ results ~~than SC1 with~~ in faster stabilization ~~and~~ than SC1 with less drifting for all cases ~~indicating the importance of the vertical discretization scheme~~.
  - ~~For layers where the temperature is drifting, the difference between the temperature after 2000 and 100 cycles is usually within 1.0 K.~~
- The depth of organic layers, and their sub-type in fully organic soils, controls the shape of the moisture content profiles and the ice/water content partitioning. This in turn influences the soil thermal properties (drier soils are generally less conductive, icy soils are more conductive) and thus affects the number of cycles needed to reach stable conditions. Deeper fully organic soils (JMR) require more cycles to stabilize than mineral ones with organic content.

Possible Position of Figure 5

Possible Position of Figure 6

The temperature gradient ~~from South to North~~northward is clear comparing the different sites as well as the impact of the deeper ~~permafrost in the North~~ organic layers at JMR on the ~~faster~~slower stabilization of temperature and, to a lesser extent, moisture content. This is related to the low thermal conductivity of organic matter as well as the low moisture content below the organic layers as peat acts as a sponge absorbing water and heat and disallowing downward propagation, especially in the absence of ice (i.e. in summer). Hemic and sapric peat soils have relatively high minimum water contents as shown in Figure

6~~at HPC. Stabilization takes generally longer~~ (see also Table S1 in the Supplement). The M-org configuration allows more moisture to seep below the organic layers and have some higher ice content at some depth that depends on the thickness of the organic layers and the general site conditions. For example, it forms below the thick organic layers for ~~middle layers~~JMR but it formed at ~~JMR than for~~a deeper depth at BWC ~~or HPC. For the~~as the organic thickness is smaller. HPC has a comparable organic depth to BWC but the layers with high ice content formed at a sallower depth because the site is colder. At all three sites, and for both ORG and M-org configurations, there is a change in the slope of the temperature profile at the depth corresponding to the interface of the soil to bedrock, illustrating the importance of the SDEP ~~showing the importance of this~~ parameter for permafrost simulations. This is ~~due to~~caused by the change in soil thermal ~~and hydraulic~~ properties above and below SDEP ~~as well as the change~~(respective of the ~~heat transfer mechanism to become purely conductive~~two different mediums above and below ~~SDEP (there is no~~ this interface) and the moisture~~). Above SDEP, there~~ contents therein; bedrock is ~~some role for convective heat transfer~~assumed to remain dry at all times while soil will always have a minimum liquid water content depending on ~~the moisture content and state (frozen/unfrozen) which in turn depend on soil properties and organic content.~~its type.

Possible Position of Figure 7

Given the above findings, the remainder of the results focus on SC2 only. Additionally, we considered different values for the bottom temperature based on site location and extrapolation of observed temperature profiles ~~as~~, because it cannot be established through ~~spinning~~spin-up~~. Ground~~ and ground temperature measurements rarely go deeper than 20m ~~and thus we do not know whether they are changing or not~~. There are established strong correlations between near surface ground temperature and air temperature at the annual scale (e.g. Smith and Burgess, 2000) but the near surface ground temperature is taken just a few centimeters below the surface. We spin up the model at the three sites for 2000 cycles for a few cases and then use the initial conditions after a selected number of cycles to run a simulation for the period of record (1979-2016) and assess the differences for ~~ALD, ZOD~~ALT, DZAA, and temperature profiles ~~for selected years within that period.~~. The sensitivity of the results to SDEP, TBOT, and the organic ~~content/configuration~~soil depth will then be assessed using 100 spin cycles only.

~~4.2~~3.2 Impact of Spinning up

Figure 8, Figure 9 and Figure 10 show the simulated ~~ALD, ZOD~~ALT, DZAA and temperature envelopes (selected years) at the three study sites respectively using initial conditions after 50, 100, 200, 500, 1000, and 2000 spin-up cycles using SC2 and the stated configuration for SDEP, TBOT, and ORG/M-org. Most differences across the spin-up range are negligible~~ and it is not easy to distinguish the different lines on those figures except for JMR where there~~. What stands out are some ~~larger~~large differences in ~~ALD~~ALT and ~~ZOD~~DZAA at JMR for some years (ORG configuration only) depending on the initial conditions (i.e. number of cycles) used. The low thermal conductivity of the thick fully organic layers slows the stabilization process and thus yields slightly different initial conditions depending on the number of cycles used. That does not happen for the two other sites with thinner ORG layers or for M-org configurations. This further emphasized by the RMSE values for ALT and DZAA shown in the legends of Figure 8 and Figure 9.

Possible Position of Figure 8

Assuming that more ~~spinning~~ spin-up ~~get us closer~~cycles would lead to ~~the correct values~~diminished differences, and thus considering the results initiated after 2000 cycles as a benchmark, one can accept an error of a few centimeters in simulated ~~ALD with~~ALT using a smaller number of spin-up cycles. For JMR, this error is about 10% on average, which is much smaller than the error in ~~estimating ALD~~simulating ALT at this site. ~~We are thus trading~~Thus, there is a trade-off in computational time by limiting the number of cycles required for a slight loss of accuracy at some sites, particularly those located in the more challenging sporadic zone.

Possible Position of Figure 9

The figures also include relevant observations, and RMSE values, to assess the quality of simulations. The simulated ~~ALDs~~ALT at JMR ~~and HPC~~ are ~~generally~~ over-estimated (Figure 8~~). For HPC, two configurations are displayed: one with mineral soil that has 18% organic matter for~~) by the ~~top 0.6m (denoted~~ORG configuration. The M-org~~), which seems to~~ configuration does better ~~represent the conditions~~for mean ALT at ~~01TC02; the other has a fully organic soil~~JMR but is much worse than ORG for ~~the same depth (denoted ORG) which results in a much smaller ALD and is closer to the thaw tube measurements at HPC (93-TT-02). This indicates the large heterogeneity of conditions that can occur in close proximity of each other. Temperature profiles are only shown for the first case as there are no observed temperature at the HPC thaw tube site. For~~ BWC~~, the ALD~~ which overestimates ALT by about 8m. For BWC, the ALT simulation under ORG is close to~~ the~~ observations for most years but the simulation shows more inter-annual variability while observations show a small upward trend after an initial period of large increase (1988-1992~~)~~), which may be the result of the disturbance of establishing the site. A couple of observations are marked “extrapolated” as the zero isotherm falls above the first thermistor (located 1m deep). For HPC, M-org better represents the conditions at 01TC02 while ORG resulting in a smaller ALT on average and is closer to the thaw tube measurements at HPC (93-TT-02), as indicated by the RMSE values. This is indicative of the large heterogeneity of conditions that can occur in close proximity to each other and that require different modelling configurations. M-org configurations generally show little to no inter-annual variability (except for HPC) while ORG ones show more inter-annual variability.

~~**Possible Position of**~~ The simulated ~~ZOD~~DZAA (Figure 9) is ~~also~~ over-estimated ~~for JMR~~at JMR under both ORG and M-org configurations while it is close to values deduced from observations ~~for~~at BWC and HPC. In contrast to ~~ALD,~~ALT, DZAA observations have larger inter-annual variability than simulation, possibly due to the large spacing of measuring thermistors and the failure of some in some years. For HPC, ~~the fully organic configuration~~ (both ORG~~) is~~ and M-org simulations are showing more variability in DZAA than the ~~mineral one (M-org) but both match the~~ depth deduced from observations for 01TC02~~.~~ and both underestimate it. In general, matching ~~ZOD~~DZAA to observations is not an objective in itself but its occurrence well within the selected soil depth is more important. The largest value simulated is about ~~23m~~19m for HPC, which is less than half the total soil depth. ~~That~~This indicates that a smaller soil column depth would not be ~~recommended~~suitable for HPC but could be used for JMR and BWC.

Possible Position of Figure 10

Comparing ~~to the observed envelopes~~temperature profiles for a selected year at each site (Figure 10~~), the simulations look satisfactory in general.~~) reveals large difference between ORG and M-org configurations, especially at HPC and BWC. The overall shapes of the profiles ~~are captured~~ depend on the selected configuration. M-org works better for HPC while ORG is better at BWC. Both configurations do relatively well for JMR ~~and HPC despite the general over estimation of ALD for both sites.~~although this site is characterized with deep peat. At BWC, the ~~active layer depth~~ ORG simulation agrees well with observations in terms of ALT but the temperature envelopes are generally colder than observed ~~and gets the~~. The M-org configuration at this site results in a talik between 2 and 9m which is not seen in the observations. The minimum envelope ~~gets~~is too cold near the surface for ORG configurations at the three sites because of the thermal properties of the peat (Dobinski, 2011; Kujala et al., 2008). This is discussed further in Section 3.5.

To aid with the selection of the best configuration for each site, we calculated RMSE for the temperature envelopes (Tmax and Tmin separately) by interpolating the simulation results at the depths of observations, discarding points/years where/when the sensors fail. The available records vary from site to site. The results are shown in Figure 11~~. A~~ for the simulations stared after 2000 spin-up cycles with a small inset table on each panel showing how the mean RMSE over the simulation period changes with spin-up cycles. The change in RMSE with cycles is small to negligible. In general, Tmax is better simulated than the Tmin, except for BWC M-org configuration. M-org has lower errors than ORG for HPC while the situation is reversed for HPC (i.e. M-org is better than ORG). For JMR, the performance of the ORG configuration is similar ~~issue happens~~to M-org for ~~JMR. This~~Tmax but is ~~not~~better for Tmin. The shape of the ~~case for HPC despite it being~~Tmin envelope is better. Given the ~~coldest site. This turned out~~requirement to have generic rules to be ~~related to the specification of fully~~applicable at the MRB scale, we prefer to use the ORG configuration at this site. The following sections assess the sensitivity of the results to SDEP, TBOT, and organic ~~soils at JMR and BWC while the envelopes shown for HPC are taken from the mineral configuration that uses 18% organic content. This is discussed further in Section .~~depth for the preferred configuration at each site.

Possible Position of Figure 11

~~4.3~~3.3 Impact of Permeable Depth ~~to Bedrock~~ (SDEP)

SDEP for the above mentioned configurations for each site was perturbed in the range of 5-15m keeping other studied parameters (TBOT and organic configuration) fixed. Figure 12 ~~and show~~shows the impact for each site on the average ~~ALD~~ALT and ~~ZOD~~DZAA over the analysis period (1980-2016) for all land cover types. 100 spinning-up cycles were used to initialize those simulations~~ and~~. The land cover derived GRUs vary between the sites. For JMR, wetlands do not develop permafrost while at shallower SDEP values, ~~talik formations~~taliks (i.e. no permafrost – NPF on the figures) develop under forest GRUs in some years ~~and thus~~. Thus, the ~~shown~~ averages shown on Figure 12 are for those years when the soil is ~~frozen~~croytic all year round~~.~~, which varies across the tested SDEP range. There is a general tendency for ~~ALD~~ALT to slightly decrease with deeper SDEP values for all land cover types, ~~especially~~except for ~~fully organic soils (JMR, BWC,~~grass and shrubs at HPC~~ ORG configuration).~~. SDEP~~ has a similar~~ impact on ~~ZOD () for HPC, as the latter seems to decrease with deeper SDEP, but the impact is not the same for BWC and JMR where ALD~~DZAA varies across sites and GRUs. While DZAA increases initially ~~increases/decreases for JMR, BWC respectively~~with SDEP at JMR then becomes insensitive~~ to SDEP. This possibly depends on the organic configuration. ZOD~~, it initially decreases with SDEP for HPC then increases at a slower rate. At BWC it initially decreases with larger SDEP then increases before becoming insensitive to SDEP. DZAA is generally shallower for JMR followed by BWC and then HPC~~. Thus, this~~ in close correlation with the depth of organic layers. This behaviour ~~might~~may also be correlated to the thickness of permafrost that increases in the same order.

Possible Position of Figure 12

Figure 13~~**Possible Position of**~~ (top) shows how these changes to ~~ALD~~ALT and ~~ZOD~~DZAA are occurring via changes in the shape of the temperature envelopes for a selected year. Increasing SDEP actually allows more cooling of the middle soil layers (between 0.5 – 10m) which pushes the maximum ~~envelop~~envelope upwards reducing ~~ALD~~ALT. The envelopes bend again to reach the specified bottom temperature, which is much clearer for JMR (because it is set to +0.80°C) than BWC and HPC where it is set to a negative value. Differences across the SDEP range are ~~larger~~small for HPC ~~for~~because of the ~~fully organic soil~~M-org configuration ~~(ORG) compared to the mineral configuration with 18% organic content (M-org).~~. The straighter envelopes of HPC tend to meet (i.e. at ~~ZOD~~DZAA) at larger depths than the curved ones at BWC and JMR. This cooling effect is possibly related to having moisture, especially ice, in deeper soil layers with deeper SDEP, which affects the thermal properties of the soil. The presence of ice increases the thermal conductivity of the soil in general, compared to dry soil (see Section S1 in the supplement). The bottom panel of Figure 13 summarizes the impact of SDEP on RMSE for ALT, DZAA, Tmax and Tmin over the simulation periods (years with observations as shown in Figure 11~~well~~). There are trade-offs in simulating the various aspects as ~~induces convective heat transfer~~the minimum RMSE values are attained at the maximum SDEP used for Tmin, Tmax and DZAA at JMR and BWC while the minimum RMSE values for ALT is attained at the maximum used SDEP value. Except for ALT, RMSE seem insensitive to SDEP at HPC.

Possible Position of Figure 13

~~4.4~~3.4 Impact of Bottom Temperature (TBOT)

As shown by the spinning-up experiments above, the initial temperature of the deepest layer remains virtually unchanged through the spin-up and thus has to be specified. It was expected that simulations might converge to a possibly different steady state value at the end of spin-up but they did not. The bottom of soil column has a ~~zero~~constant flux boundary condition (Section 2.1~~)~~). We used the default zero value for this constant, implying no gradient at the bottom, while TBOT is only an initial condition for the first spin-up cycle. We also tested values for the geothermal flux of 0.083 Wm^{-2} at the three sites and found negligible impact confirming the previous findings of Sapriza-Azuri et al. (2018). This value for the heat flux is the maximum of the range specified for Western Canada by Garland and Lennox (1962)~~that was expected to converge to a possibly different steady state value at the end of spin-up.~~. Temperature observations as deep as 50m are rare and relationships between that temperature and air or near surface soil temperature are neither available nor appropriate. For the studied sites, it has been estimated from the observed profiles, and perturbed within a range (-3.0 to +1.5°C), which was varied depending on the site condition/location. Figure 14 shows the impact ~~on~~of changing the temperature of the deepest layer on ~~ALD while shows the impact on ZOD.~~ALT and DZAA. For JMR, increasing TBOT increases ~~ALD~~ALT quickly so that taliks form under wetlands if TBOT > 0°C and other land cover types follow at higher temperatures such that permafrost does not develop under most canopy types if TBOT > 1.5°C. This gives a way to simulate the no permafrost conditions observed at all sites in the basin (except 85-12B-T4). A similar relationship is simulated for BWC as increasing TBOT increases ~~ALD~~ALT especially for wetlands. ~~ALD~~ALT at HPC ~~seems little affected by the bottom temperature with either organic configuration~~is insensitive to TBOT because of the generally colder conditions~~. ZOD~~ and thicker permafrost. DZAA is showing low sensitivity to TBOT except for wetlands at JMR.

Possible Position of Figure 14

Field Code Changed

Figure 15~~**Possible Position of** ~~(top) shows how the temperature envelopes respond to changes in TBOT. In all cases, the envelopes seem to bend at some depth to try to reach the given bottom temperature. SDEP seems to influence the start of that inflection. This bending towards the given temperature causes another inflection of the maximum envelope closer to the surface. Depending on the depth of that first inflection, ~~ALD~~ALT may or may not be affected. ~~ZOD~~DZAA is not affected as much but the temperature at ~~ZOD~~DZAA depends on TBOT. There is a noticeable difference ~~at HPC~~ between the ~~fully organic~~M-org configuration ~~(ORG)~~of HPC on one hand and the ~~mineral~~ORG configuration at JMR and BWC on the other. Figure 15(bottom) shows the impact of TBOT on model performance as measured by RMSE of ALT, DZAA, Tmin and Tmax. Again we see trade-offs between getting the proper shape for the envelopes (as measured by RMSE for Tmax and Tmin) and the ALT for JMR indicating that ~~has 18% organic content (M-org) with the same depth (~~a range between 0.~~6m).~~5°C to 1.0°C for TBOT gives reasonable performance across the four metrics. For BWC, ALT and DZAA are little sensitive to TBOT a range of -0.5°C to -1°C gives the best overall performance. For HPC, the colder the TBOT, the lower the RMSE values for most metrics, a value around -2°C is reasonable.

Possible Position of Figure 15

~~4.5~~3.5 Impact of Organic Depth (ORG) and Configuration

It is believed that organic soils provide insulation to the impacts of the atmosphere on the soil temperature, which would lead to a thinner active layer than ~~the case of~~in a fully mineral soil. This assumption has been tested for the three sites by changing the depth of the fully organic layers (ORG) for JMR and BWC~~)~~ as well as ~~against a~~the mineral ~~soil with relatively high~~layers containing organic content (M-org) at HPC. The results are sometimes counter-intuitive. Peat plateaux are widespread in the JMR region and thus the fully organic layers are followed by layers of high organic content (50%) till SDEP. Increasing the fully organic layers initially reduces ~~ALD~~ALT (Figure 16~~ top)~~) as expected but also reduces ~~ZOD (bottom)~~DZAA quickly. Then the ~~ALD~~ALT (which is defined mainly by the maximum temperature ~~envelop~~envelope) increases again which means that ~~more~~a deeper fully organic ~~layers~~layer provides less insulation~~ than mineral layers with high organic content.~~. The reason ~~may be~~is related to the ~~larger moisture holding capacity provided by fully organic layers or because the sand content is small~~thermal and ~~thus the~~ hydraulic ~~conductivity~~properties of the ~~mineral layers is low. HPC shows a similar behaviour where 3 organic layers have a similar effect on ALD as 6 layers and the minimum ALD is reached by 4-5 layers.~~peat. BWC ~~has a~~exhibits different behaviour ~~than the other two sites~~to JMR as ~~ALD~~ALT increases initially when increasing the fully organic layers from 3 to 4 then decreases gradually. ~~ZOD~~DZAA seems to decrease with increasing the organic depth for most land cover types at the three sites. DZAA and ALT show little sensitivity to the depth organic layers at HPC because the thermal and hydraulic properties under the M-org configuration are affected by the sand and clay fractions while they are set to specific values for fully organic soils (ORG). Wetlands behave in a different way compared to other land cover types at the different sites because ~~it is~~they are configured to remain close to saturation as much as possible. At JMR, wetlands are not underlain by permafrost for all organic configurations, which agrees with the literature.

Possible Position of Figure 16

Figure 17(top) shows the response of the temperature envelopes to changes in the organic depth. Increasing the organic depth causes much larger negative temperatures near the surface for the minimum envelope for ORG but causes the inflection of the minimum ~~envelop~~envelope to occur at slightly higher temperatures. A similar, but smaller, effect can be seen for the maximum ~~envelop~~envelope. The maximum envelopes for the different organic depth intersect, which corroborates with the above results for ~~ALD~~ALT. Another interesting feature can be observed comparing the ORG and M-org configurations~~ for HPC in and .~~. The M-org ~~configuration~~configurations has a much smaller temperature range near the surface than the fully organic soil and causes less cooling in the intermediate soil layers (above SDEP) such that the observed profiles are better matched HPC. The high thermal capacity of the peat combined with its high thermal conductivity when containing ice in winter cause this cooling at the surface (Dobinski, 2011)~~for this site. These results emphasize the need to investigate the soil hydraulic and thermal properties for each case to better understand the role of organic matter and fully organic layers on the moisture and temperature simulations.~~.

Figure 17(bottom) summarizes the impact of organic depth (ORG for JMR and BWC, and M-org for HPC) on the RMSE of ALT, DZAA, and the temperature envelopes. The impact in JMR is interesting as there are clear optimal values for ALT and Tmin and, to some extent, Tmax, although the optimal value is not the same for each aspect, leading to trade-offs. The selected 1.46m depth (8 ORG layers) provides the best performance overall. For BWC, RMSE for Tmax and Tmin move in opposite directions (Tmin RMSE generally reduces while Tmax RMSE increases with deeper ORG). A depth around 0.5m is generally satisfactory. For HPC, depths containing organic matter less then 0.6m provide the optimal performance across the different aspects. A multi-criteria calibration framework can be setup using those performance metrics if the aim is the find the best configuration (including SDEP and TBOT) for each site. However, we are seeking generic rules that can be applied at larger scales, such as that of the MRB as a whole.

Possible Position of Figure 17

~~5.~~4. Discussion and Conclusions

Permafrost is an important feature of cold regions, such as the Mackenzie River Basin, and needs to be properly represented in land surface hydrological models, especially under the unprecedented climate warming trends that have been observed~~.~~ in these regions. The current generation of LSMs ~~are~~is being improved to simulate permafrost dynamics by allowing deeper soil profiles than typically used and incorporating organic soils explicitly. Deeper soil profiles have larger hydraulic and thermal memories that require more effort to initialize. We followed the recommendations of previous studies (e.g. Lawrence et al., 2012; Sapriza-Azuri et al., 2018) to select the total soil column depth to be around 50m. The temperature envelopes meet (at DZAA) well within the 50m soil column over the simulation period (including spinning-up), ~~i.e.~~such that the bottom boundary condition is not disturbing the simulated temperature profiles/envelopes and ~~ALD~~ALT.

We analysed the conventional layering schemes used by other LSMs, which tend to use an exponential formulation to maximize the number of layers near the surface and minimize the total number of layers

(Oleson et al., 2013; Park et al., 2014)~~,~~. We found that the exponential formulation is not adequate to capture the dynamics of the active layer depth and thus tested two other alternative schemes that have smaller thicknesses for the first 2 meters, instead of the conventional ~~exponentially increasing thicknesses.~~ones. The first scheme (SC1) had equally-sized layers in the first 1m, followed by thicker but equally-sized layers in the second 1m. The second scheme (SC2) was formulated to have increasing thicknesses with depth following a scaled power law, which we found to be more suitable for the explicit forward numerical solution used by CLASS.

We discussed the common initialization approaches, including spinning up the model repeatedly using a single year (e.g. Dankers et al., 2011; Nishimura et al., 2009) or a sequence of years (e.g. Park et al., 2013)~~;~~, spinning up the model in a transient condition on long paleo-climatic records (e.g. Ednie et al., 2008)~~;~~, or combining both of these approaches (Sapriza-Azuri et al., 2018)~~,~~. Paleo-climatic reconstructions are scarce and provide limited information (e.g. mean summer temperature or total annual precipitation), while LSMs typically require a suite of meteorological variables at a high temporal resolution for the whole study domain. These variables can be stochastically generated at the resolution of interest informed by paleo-records. However, such practice is computationally expensive, especially for large domains and also introduces additional uncertainties. The approach of spinning-up using available 20th century data has been criticized as picking up the anthropogenic climate warming signal that started around 1850 and thus would yield initial conditions that are not representative. However, paleo climatic records also show that the climate has always been transient and there may not exist a long enough period of quasi-equilibrium to start the spinning-up process (Razavi et al., 2015). Spinning-up using a sequence of years is thus more prone to having a trend than a single year and de-trending the sequence is not free of assumptions either.

Given the above complications, we investigated the impact of the simplest approach, which is spinning-up using a single year (similar to Burke et al., 2013; Dankers et al., 2011)~~;~~, on several permafrost metrics (active layer depth – ~~ALD,~~ALT, depth of zero ~~oscillation depth where the temperature envelopes meet – ZOD~~annual amplitude – DZAA, and annual temperature envelopes). The aim was to determine the minimum number of spinning-up cycles to have satisfactory performance (if reached) and to know how much accuracy is lost by not spinning more. We did this for three sites along a south-north transect in the Mackenzie River Valley sampling the different permafrost zones (sporadic, extensive discontinuous and continuous) in order to be able to generalize the findings to the whole MRB domain. Additionally, we investigated the sensitivity of the results to some important parameters such as the depth to bedrock (SDEP), the temperature of the deepest layer (TBOT), and the organic soil configuration (ORG).

The results show that temperature profiles at the end of spinning cycles remained virtually unchanged (i.e. reached a quasi steady state) after 50-100 cycles, when benchmarked against the results of 2000 cycles. We focused on temperature profiles for this stability analysis, because we found that the soil moisture profiles (both liquid and frozen) stabilize much earlier during spin-up. In some cases, changes in the middle layers occurred after 100 cycles but the influence of that on the simulated envelopes, ~~ALD~~ALT and ~~ZOD~~DZAA was found to be small to negligible compared to the uncertainty of observations and the scale of our model. We also found that the selection of the layering scheme has an effect on stabilization and our proposed scheme (SC2) with increasing thicknesses with depth reached stability faster and had less drifting. Therefore, the simple single-year spinning approach seems to be sufficient for our purpose using SC2. This agrees with Dankers et al. (2011) who showed that a higher vertical resolution improved the simulation of ALT using JULES.

We also found that the temperature of the deepest soil layer (TBOT) remained virtually unchanged from the specified initial value even after 2000 spinning cycles. Therefore, this temperature has to be specified by the modeller. For the study sites, we extrapolated it from the observed envelopes and studied the effect of perturbing it around the extrapolated value. This perturbation had small impacts on ~~ALD~~ALT and ~~ZOD~~DZAA except for JMR which is located in the sporadic permafrost zone, but it had a significant impact on the shape of the envelopes. Temperature observations going as deep as 50m are rare. Most of the permafrost monitoring sites in the MRB have up to 20m cables and thus we do not know ~~if~~whether the temperature of deeper soil layers has been changing over time, and if so, by how much. Changes in temperature at the deepest sensors at each of the three sites can be seen in Figure S1 of the supplementary material. To take the information back to ~~MRB~~the large scale, we recommend using a south to north gradient moving from +1.0 in the sporadic zone to -2.0 in the continuous zone and specifying a spatially variable field as an input initial condition. ~~For this study, we considered only the zero-flux boundary condition. It is possible to test whether a non-zero thermal flux boundary condition could resolve this issue. However, available datasets for the geothermal flux are not transient and estimate those fluxes at depths greater than the 50m used and thus the issue may need further investigation~~These effects show the regional variability which needs to be assessed for different applications such as other basins affected by permafrost, or using other LSMs. This could lead to the verification of such finding and to the preparation of a global map of initial values for TBOT by combining observations and modelling. We have not seen such detailed analyses in the literature.

For this study, we tested whether a non-zero thermal flux boundary condition could resolve this issue but the impacts were negligible using the literature values for the geothermal flux (0.083 Wm^{-2}) in the region. However, available datasets for the geothermal flux (e.g. Bachu, 1993) are not transient and estimate those fluxes at depths greater than the 50m used. Our results agree with those of Nishimura et al. (2009) and Sapriza-Azuri et al. (2018) who showed that the geothermal heat flux had negligible effect on most simulations in study areas in Siberia and Canada respectively. Nevertheless, the issue may need further investigation using other models (including thermal ones) and tests in other regions before generalizing such conclusion.

The analyses also demonstrated the importance of the organic soil configuration (i.e. ~~how many~~number of layers and their parameterization respective of organic sub-types) ~~and depth to bedrock~~ on the simulated temperature profiles and active layer dynamics. This has been illustrated in the literature. For example, Dankers et al. (2011) found that adjusting soil parameters for organic content to have relatively little effect on ALT simulations of the Arctic region while Nicolsky et al. (2007) and Park et al. (2013) stressed the importance of organic content to the fidelity of permafrost simulations. Park et al. (2013) further indicated that organic matter evolves dynamically as it decomposes over time and depends on biogeochemical processes such as plant growth, root development, and littering. This could be simulated in LSMs by including the carbon cycle. However, fully organic soils were not extensively tested in permafrost context as shown in our study.

In most cases, we found combinations of TBOT, SDEP, and ORG that produced satisfactory simulations but the impact of organic layering seems to require further investigation, as increasing the thickness of organic layers does not always act to reduce ~~ALD~~ALT or reduce the cooling in the middle soil layers that should result from increased insulation. There is an interplay between the moisture properties/content and thermal properties of organic soils that needs further investigation. Additionally, we cannot represent ~~mixed~~stacked canopies using CLASS, e.g. trees or shrubs underlain by moss~~. Moss~~ or the effect of litter under (deciduous) trees/shrubs. Moss or litter could be providing additional insulation under those canopies that is not represented. The quality of snow simulations can also impact the quality of permafrost simulations. For example, Burke et al. (2013) showed that a multi-layer snow model improved ALT simulations in JULES; CLASS has a single layer snow model.

To conclude, we ~~now~~ have ~~an~~formulated a generic approach to represent permafrost ~~in MESS/~~within the MESH framework (running CLASS) for applications at ~~the MRB~~large scales that has the following features:

- ~~Around a~~A 50m deep soil profile with increasing soil thickness with depth;
- 50-100 Spinning ~~50-100~~ cycles of the first year of record to initialize the moisture and temperature profiles; and
- Spatially distributed TBOT, SDEP, and soil texture parameters ~~are~~, with a systematic guideline to ~~be specified spatially. We have processed gridded data for SDEP and soil texture (including organic matter) and modified MESH/CLASS to read these by grid. In preparing these fields, we will~~ use the 30% threshold to ~~activate~~identify fully organic soils.

The generic nature of this approach comes from testing it at three sites within different permafrost classes (sporadic, discontinuous and continuous). However, testing the approach is other regions, and with other LSMs (e.g. CLM, MESH/SVS), is necessary before pursuing it for wider applications. This can be done using representative sub-basins where permafrost observations exist to test the above mentioned elements and make any necessary adjustments for application at large scales. Additionally, this study demonstrated a simple and effective way to use small-scale investigations to inform larger scale modelling. While the GRU-based parameterization approach facilitates such transferability, the key is to use the same physics at both scales.

It was necessary to increase the flexibility of the MESH framework to accommodate these input formats as well as to produce relevant permafrost outputs. However, the model is still deficient in some ways. For example, the explicit forward numerical solution may ~~be limiting our choices for~~limit how soil layering ~~and the~~ should be defined. The lack of complex canopies, ~~amongst other things,~~the use of a single layer snow model, and the static nature of soil organic content may be affecting our parameterization of MESH. The parameterization of bedrock as sandstone requires further investigation as it does not reflect the spatial variability of thermal properties of bedrock material. These findings are not specific to MESS/CLASS and could be beneficial for the LSM community~~. This study also demonstrated a simple~~ in general. Therefore, further analysis and ~~effective way~~model development is required towards improving the realism of the simulations in permafrost regions. It is vitally required to ~~use small-scale investigations~~incorporate key features of permafrost dynamics (e.g. taliks, land subsidence, and thermokarst) into LSMs, as well as the linkages between permafrost evolution phase (aggradation/degradation) and carbon-climate feedback cycles under the changing climatic conditions. The inclusion of such features could enhance the representation of hydrological processes within LSMs and, consequently, ESMs. Accordingly, there is a pressing need to ~~inform larger scale modelling. The key is to use the same model at both scales.~~promote multidisciplinary research in permafrost territories among hydrologists, climatologists, geomorphologists, and geotechnical engineers.

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Author Contributions

M.E., A.P. and H.W. conceived the experimental design of this study. G.S.-A. provided the original MESH setup of the MRB. G.S.-A. and M.E. collected the permafrost observations. D.P. provided the MESH code and implemented the necessary code changes. M.E. conducted the simulation work and analysed the results. M.A. participated in the interpretation of results and preparation of some illustrations. M.E. prepared the manuscript with contributions from all co-authors.

Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Code and Data Availability

MESH code is available from the MESH wiki page (https://wiki.usask.ca/display/MESH/Releases).

Distributed soil texture and SDEP data are available from Keshav et al. (2019b, 2019a). Permafrost observations were collected from various reports of Geological Survey Canada as referenced in the manuscript.

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Figures

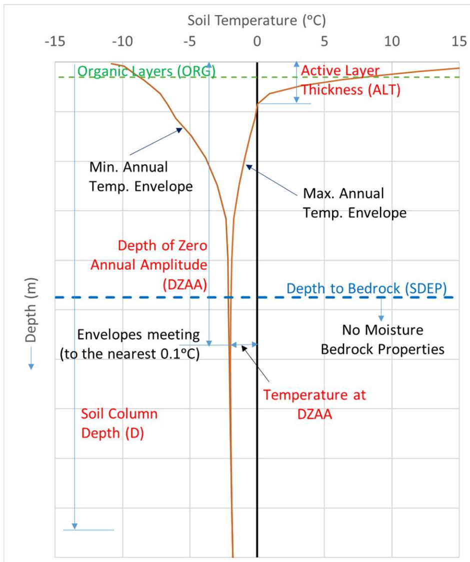


Figure 1 Schematic of the soil column showing the variables used to diagnose permafrost

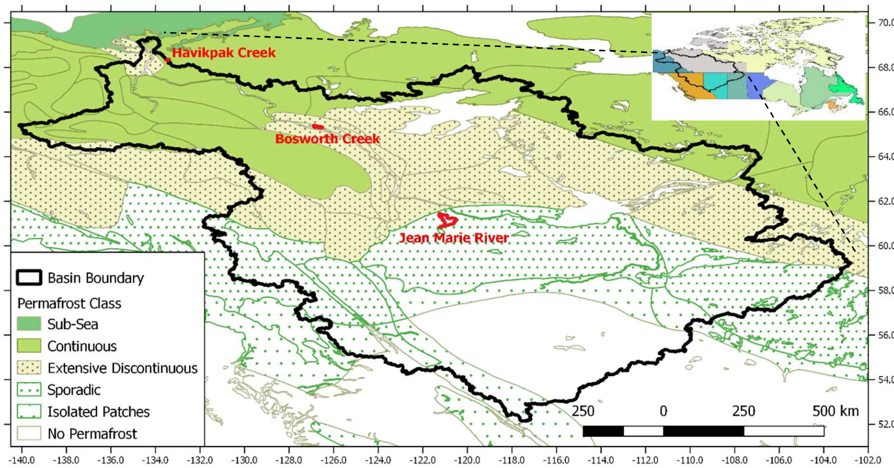
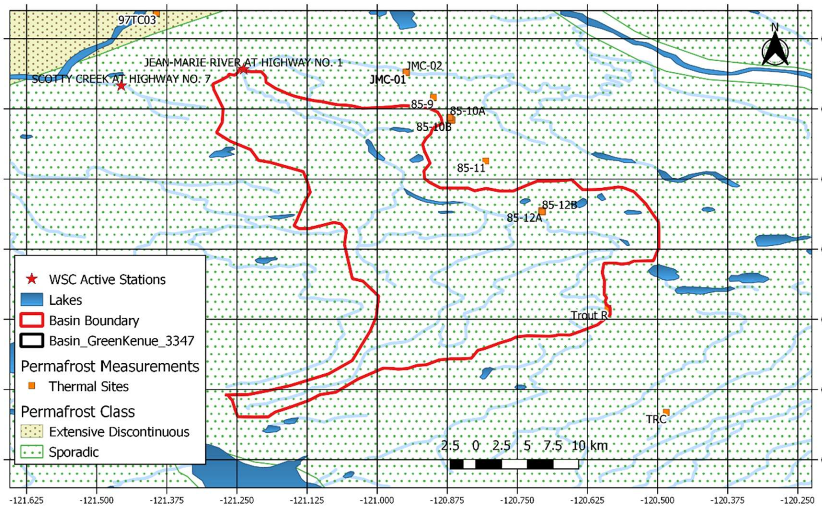
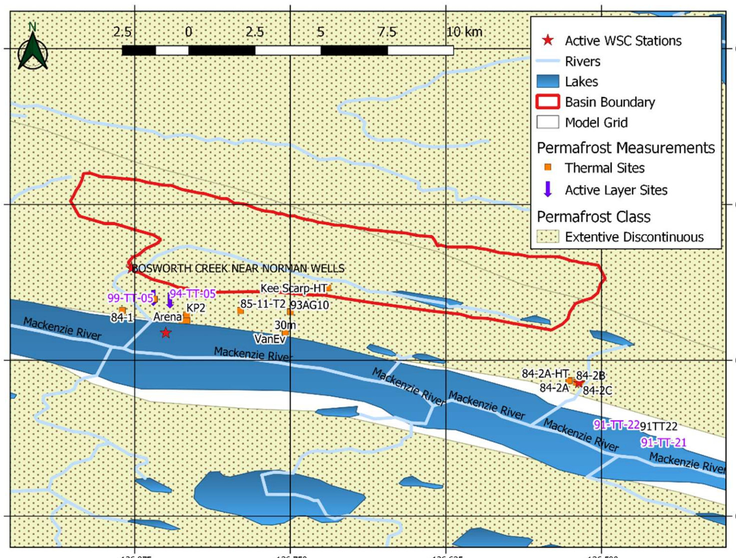


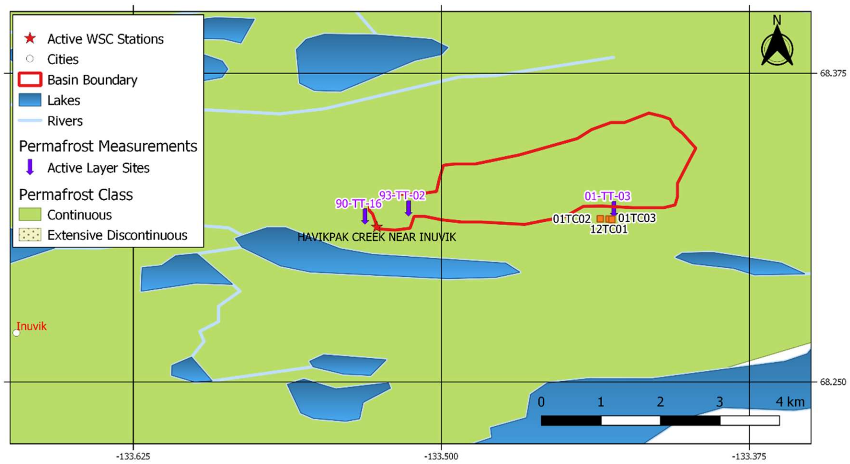
Figure 2 Mackenzie River Basin: Location, permafrost classification, and the three study sites



a) Jean Marie River Basin



b) Bosworth Creek Basin



c) Havikpak Creek Basin

1251 *Figure 3 Location of and Permafrost measurement sites in a) Jean Marie River sub-basin, b) Bosworth*
1252 *Creek sub-basin, and c) Havikpak Creek sub-basin*

1253

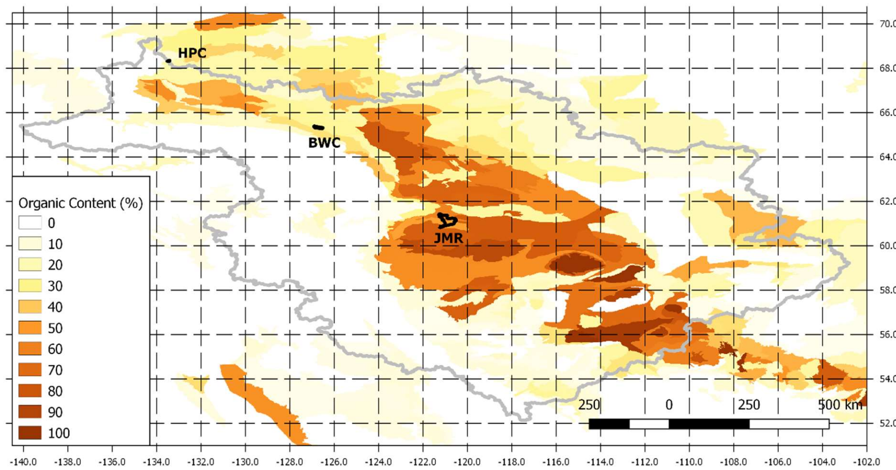


Figure 4 Gridded organic matter in soil at 0.125° resolution for the MRB, processed from the Soil Landscapes of Canada (SLC) v2.2 dataset (Centre for Land and Biological Resources Research, 1996)

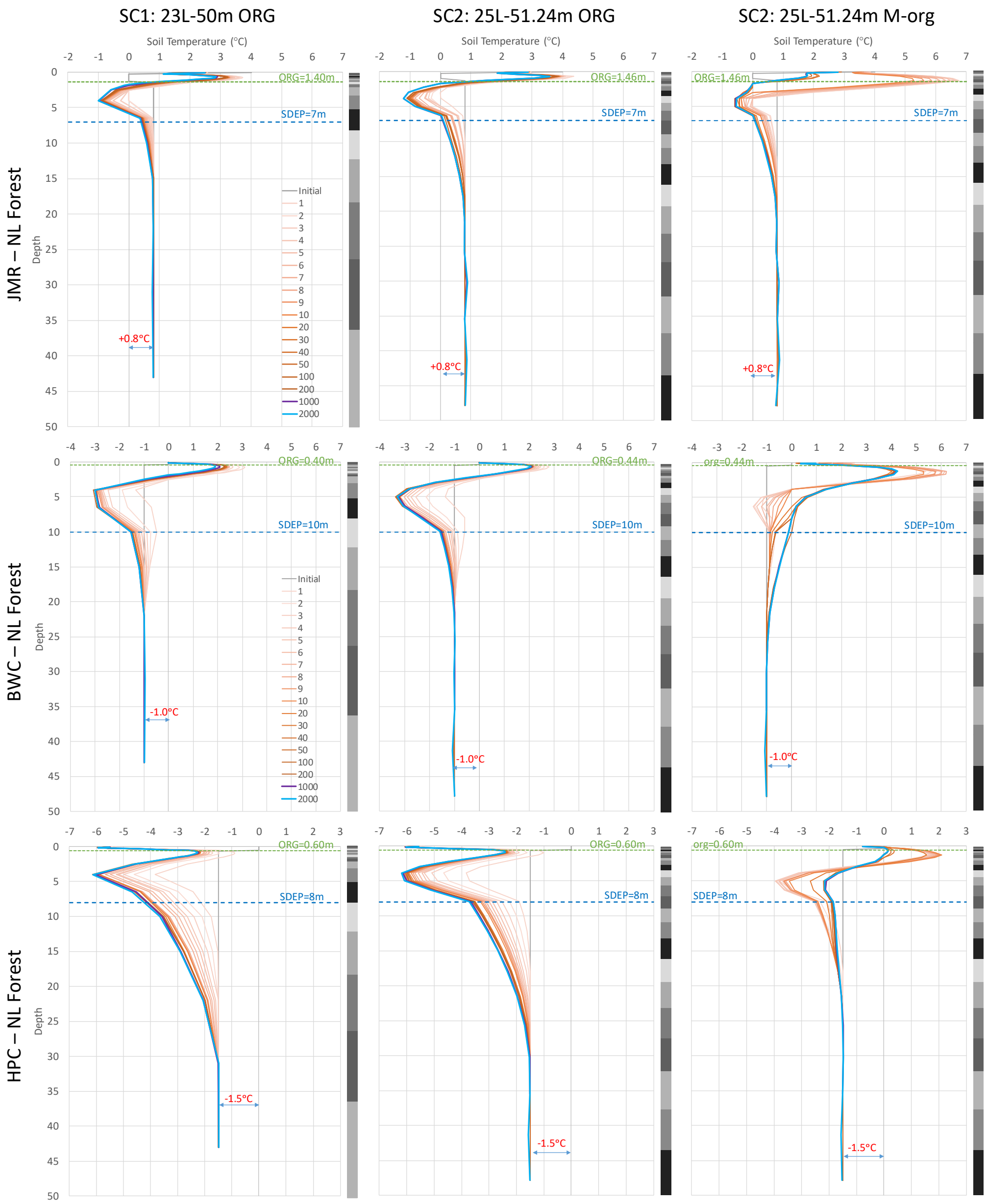


Figure 5 Soil temperature profiles at the end of selected spin-up Cycles for the NL Forest GRU at all three sites using different soil layering schemes and organic configurations

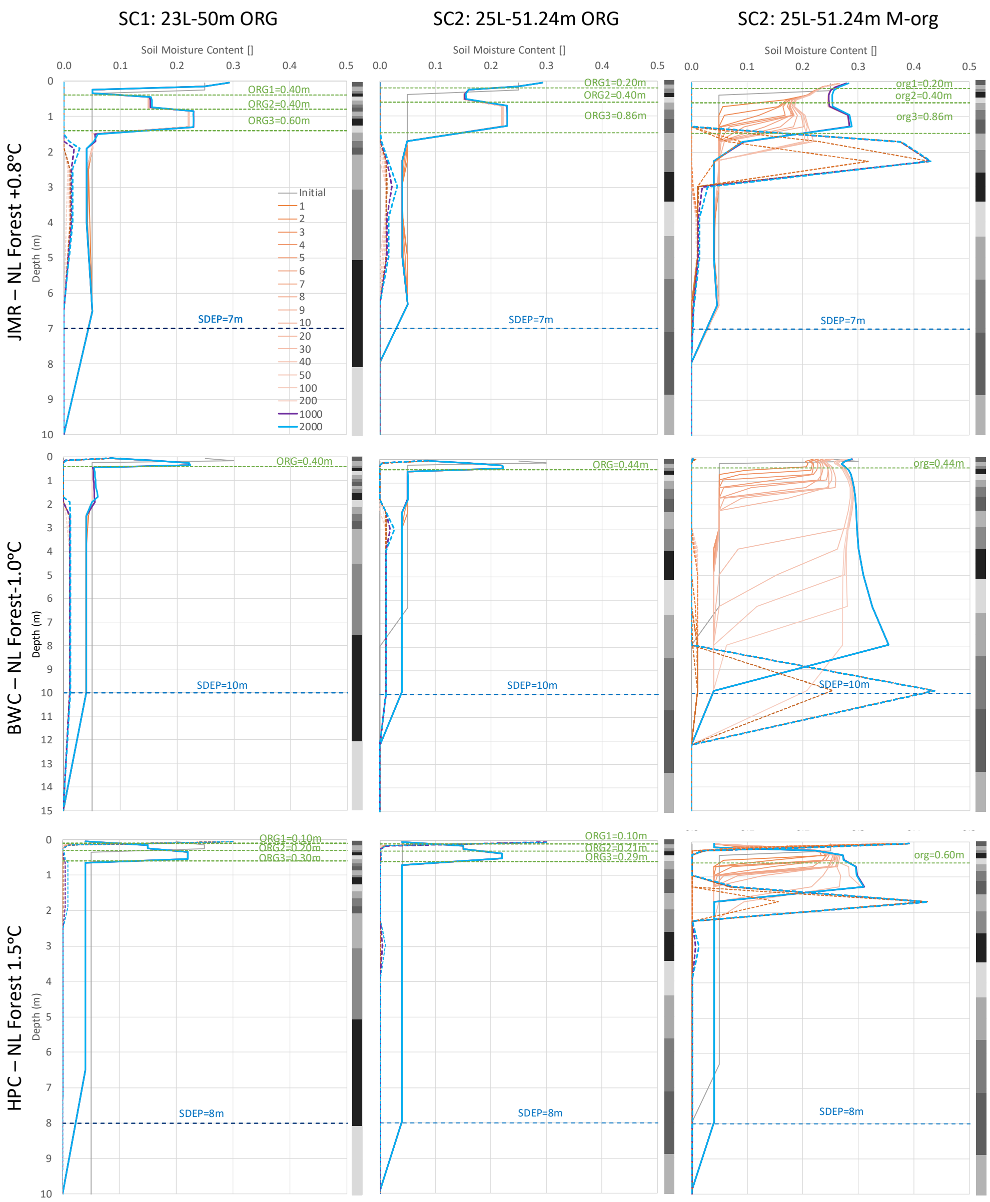


Figure 6 Soil moisture profiles at the end of selected spin-up cycles for the NL Forest GRU at all three sites using different soil layering schemes and organic configurations (solid lines for liquid and dashed lines for ice)

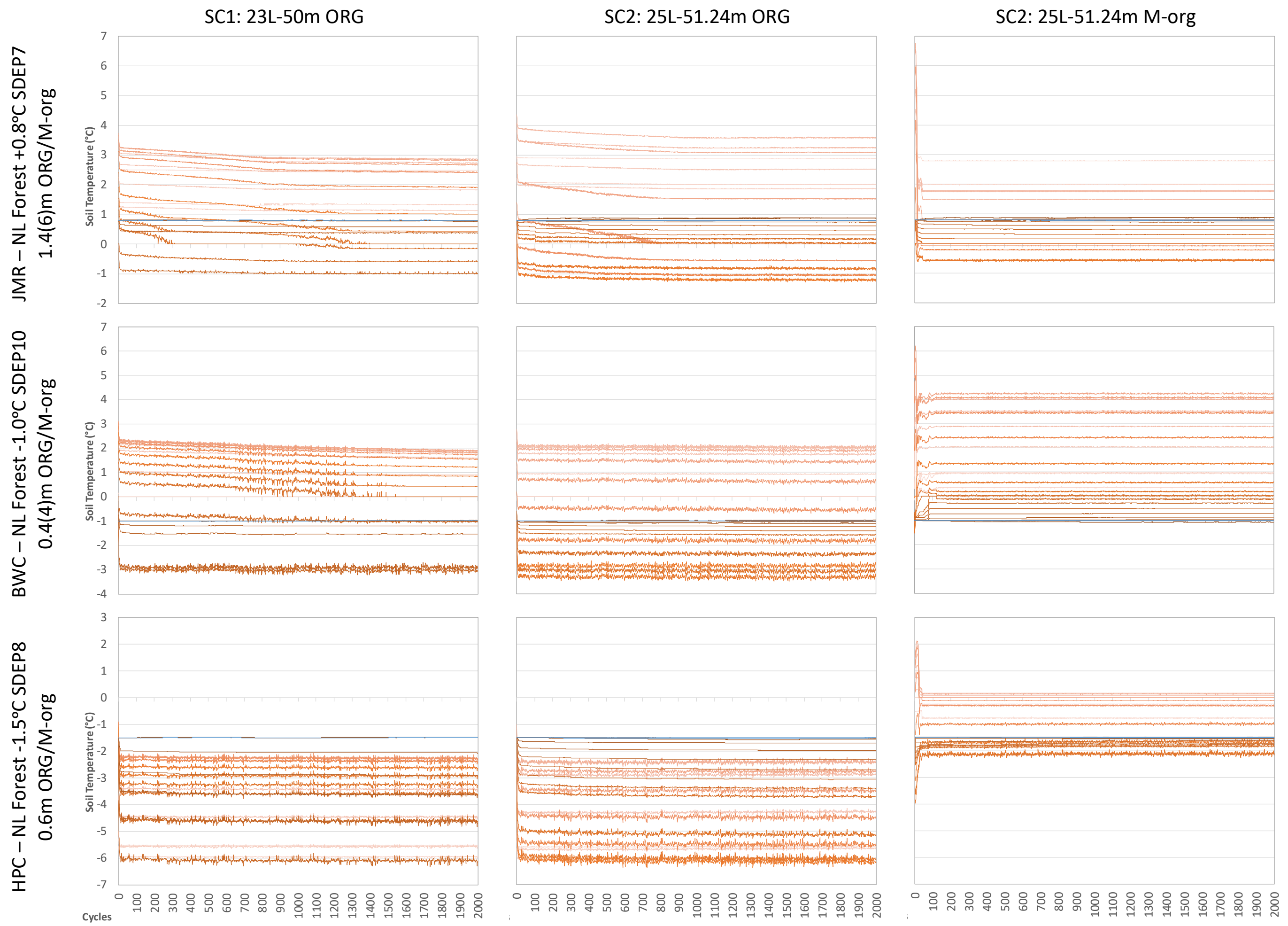
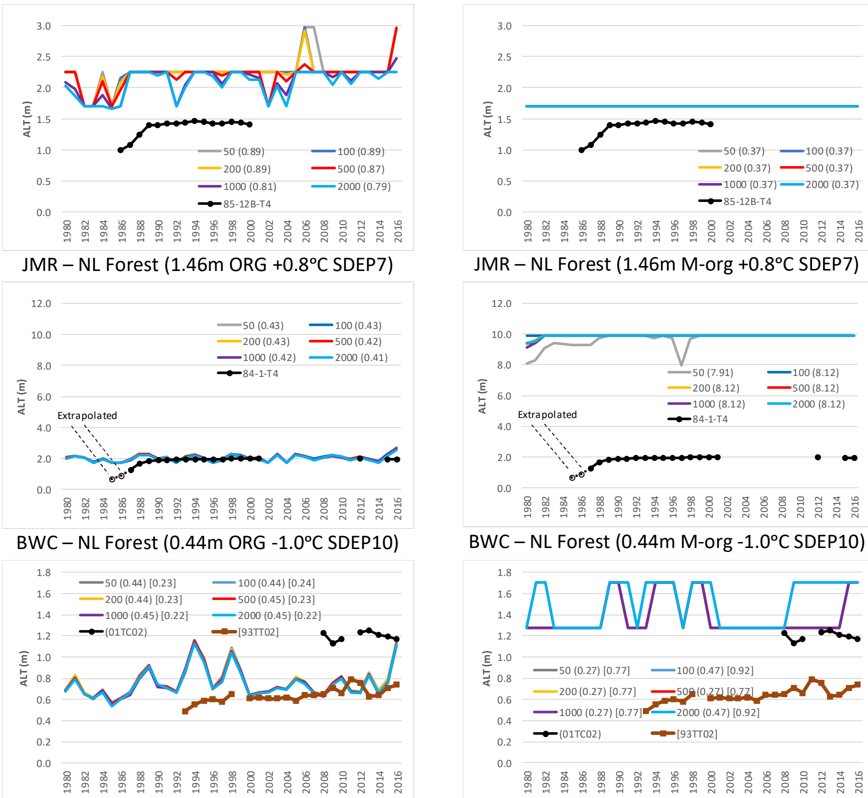


Figure 7 Impact of the soil layering scheme selection on spin-up convergence at the three study sites (the darker the color, the deeper the layer, deepest layer is colored blue)



JMR – NL Forest (1.46m ORG +0.8°C SDEP7)

JMR – NL Forest (1.46m M-org +0.8°C SDEP7)

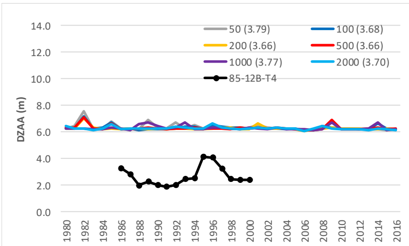
BWC – NL Forest (0.44m ORG -1.0°C SDEP10)

BWC – NL Forest (0.44m M-org -1.0°C SDEP10)

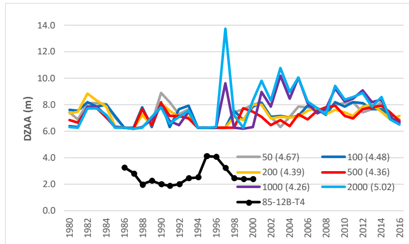
HPC – NL Forest (0.6m ORG -1.5°C SDEP8)

HPC – NL Forest (0.6m M-org -1.5°C SDEP8)

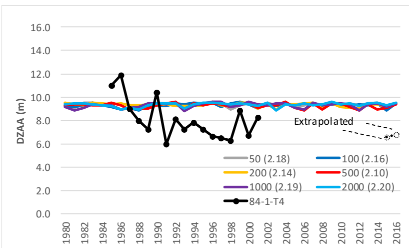
Figure 8 Impact of the number of spin-up cycles on simulated ALT on the Needleleaf Forest GRU at all sites – 2 organic configurations were used for each site using SC2 layering scheme, RMSE is shown in parenthesis



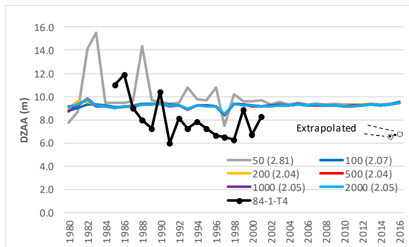
JMR – NL Forest (1.46m ORG +0.8°C SDEP7)



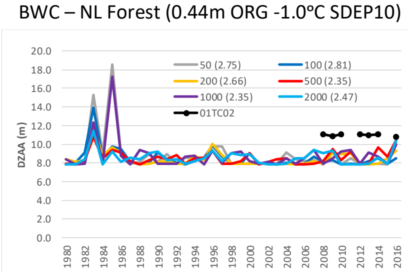
JMR – NL Forest (1.46m M-org +0.8°C SDEP7)



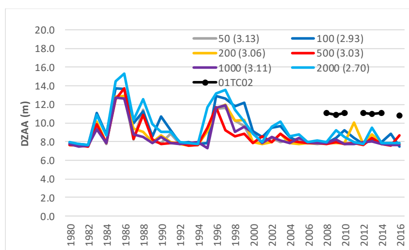
BWC – NL Forest (0.44m ORG -1.0°C SDEP10)



BWC – NL Forest (0.44m M-org -1.0°C SDEP10)



HPC – NL Forest (0.6m ORG -1.5°C SDEP8)



HPC – NL Forest (0.6m M-org -1.5°C SDEP8)

Figure 9 Impact of the number of spin-up cycles on simulated DZAA on the Needleleaf Forest GRU at all three sites – 2 organic configurations were used for each site using SC2 layering scheme, RMSE is shown in parenthesis

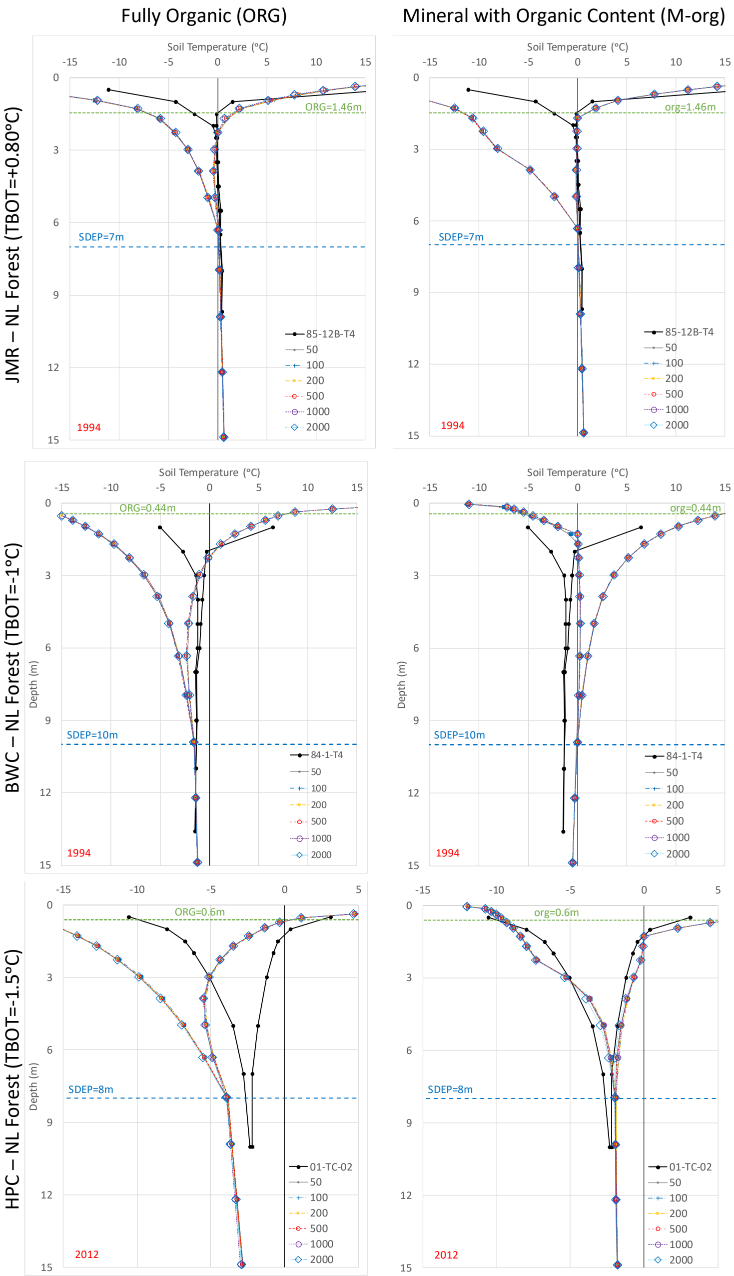


Figure 10 Impact of the number of spin-up cycles on simulated temperature envelopes for the Needleleaf Forest GRU for a selected year at each study site – 2 organic configurations used for each site using SC2 layering scheme

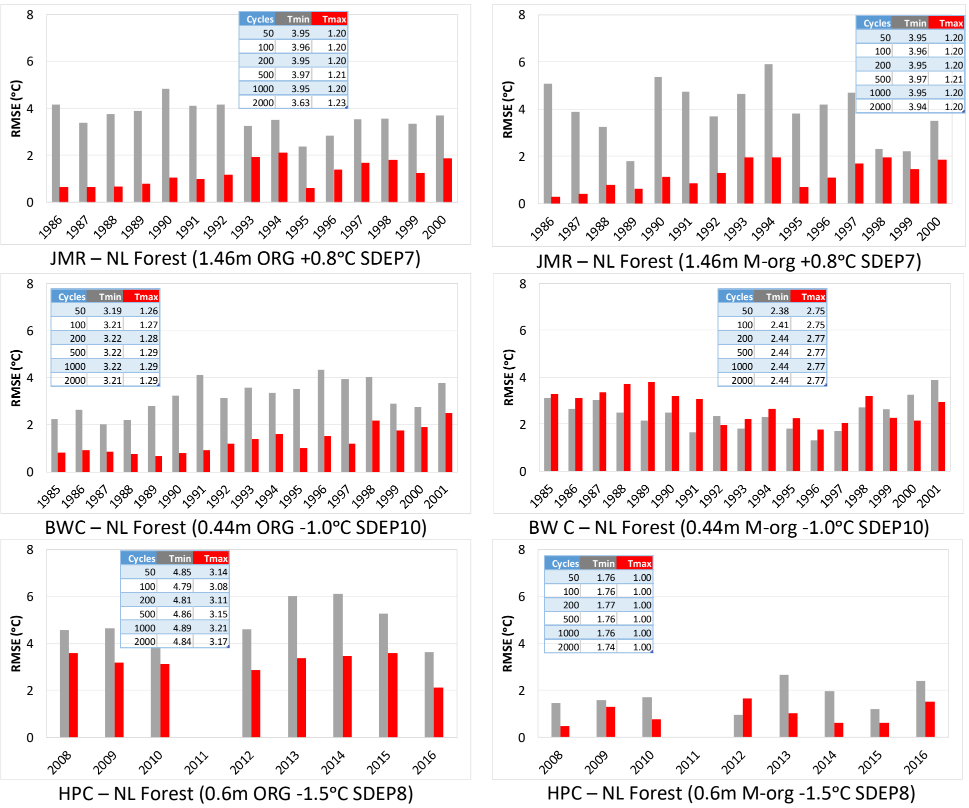


Figure 11 Time series of RMSE of simulated envelopes at all three sites at the end of 2000 cycles
2 organic configurations were used for each site using SC2 layering scheme
Table insets show the change in mean RMSE over the period of available record for simulations initiated after the shown number of spin-up cycles

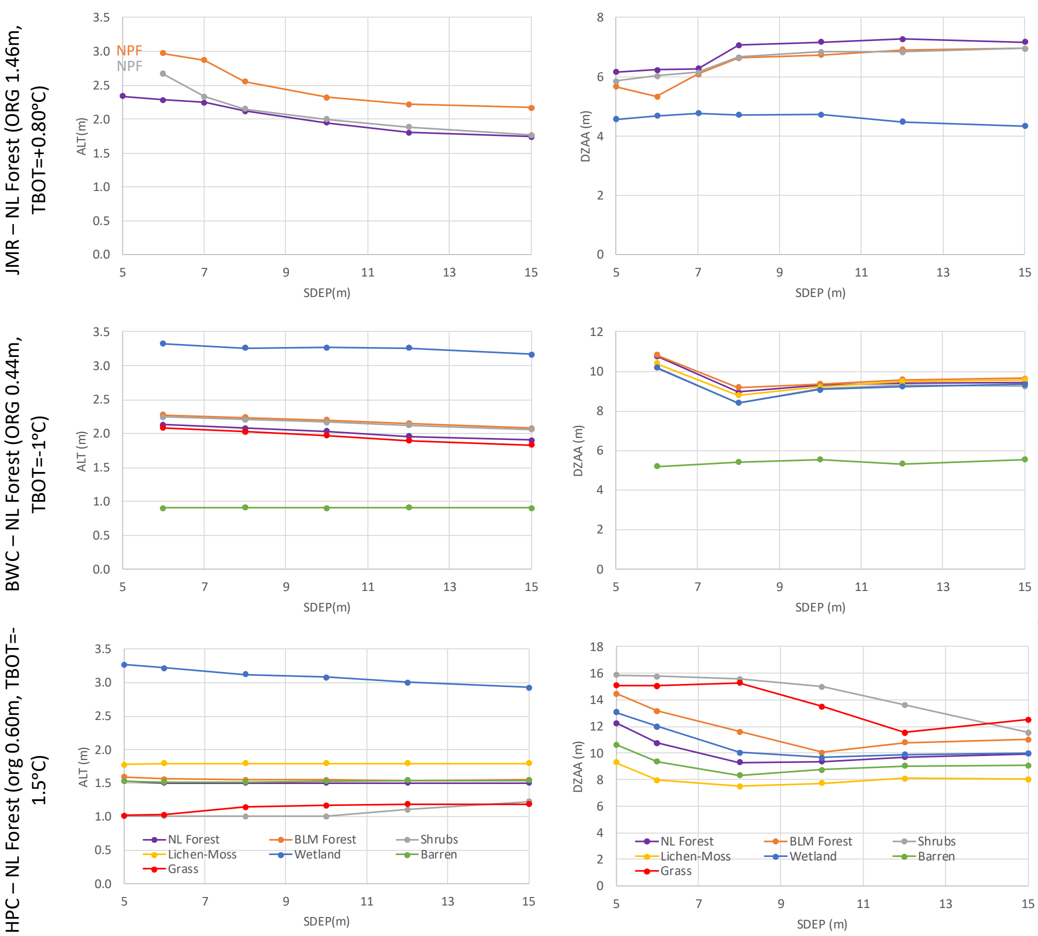


Figure 12 Impact of SDEP on average simulated ALT and DZAA for different GRUs at the three study sites over the 1980-2016 period

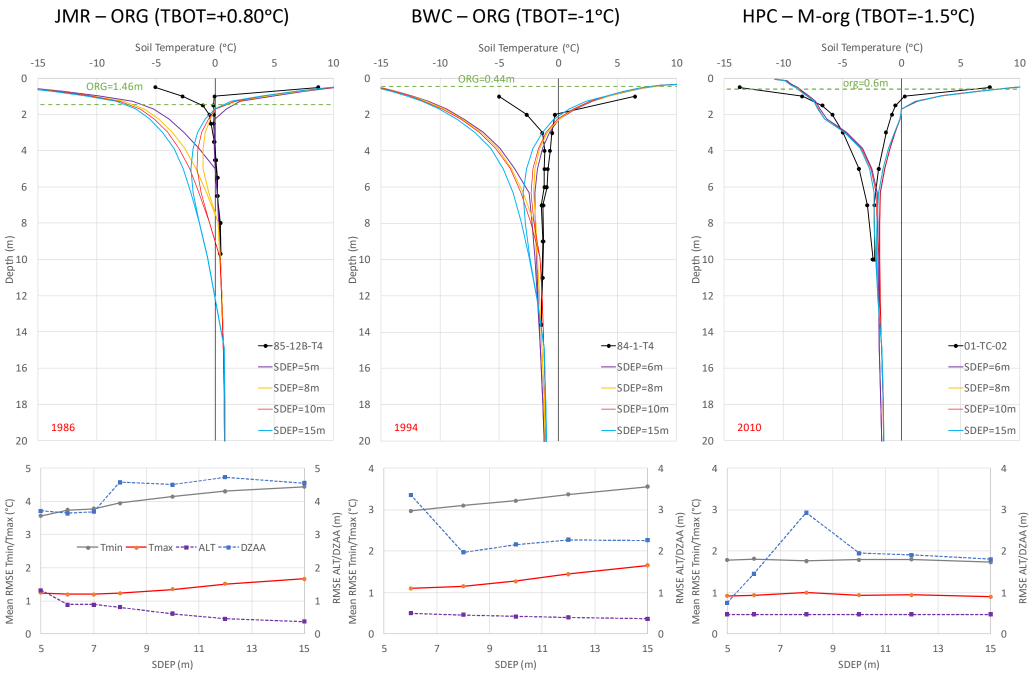


Figure 13 Impact of SDEP on simulated temperature envelopes for a selected year (top panel) and RSME for envelopes, ALT and DZAA over the simulation period for the Needleleaf Forest GRU at each study site

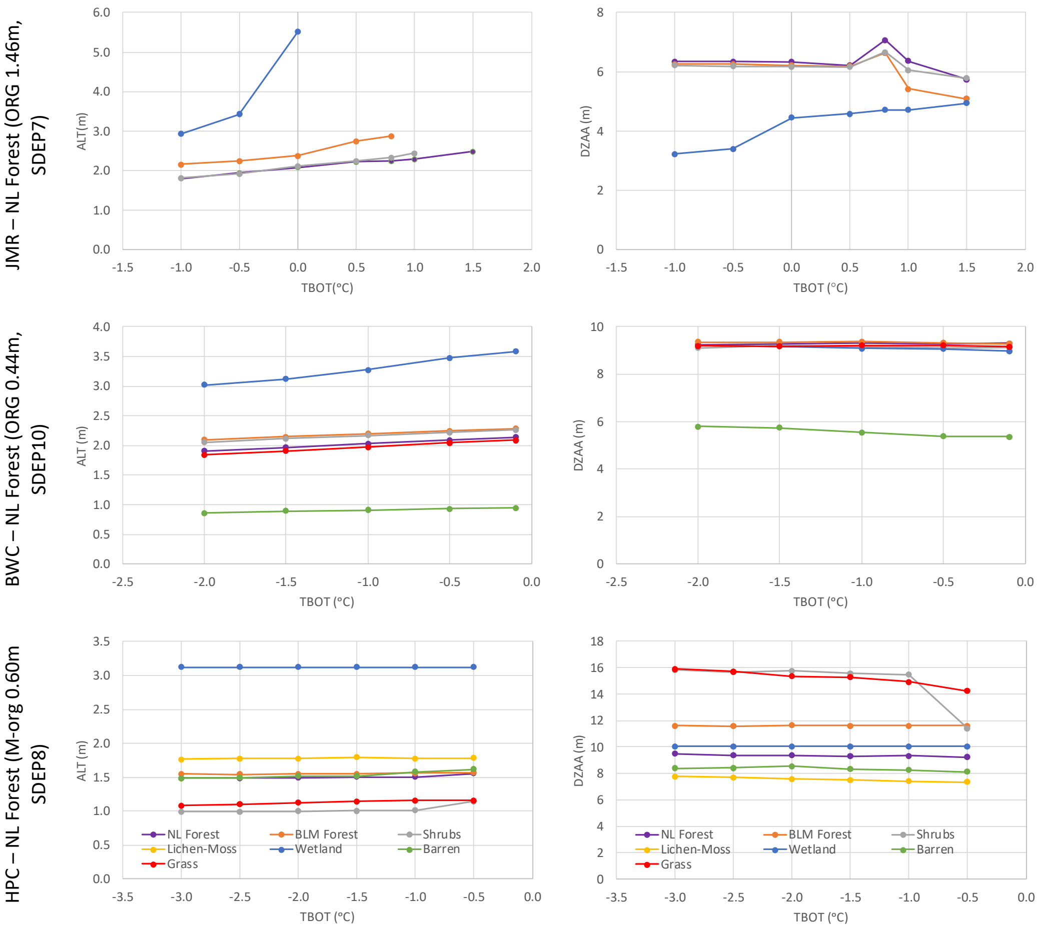


Figure 14 Impact of TBOT on average simulated ALT and DZAA for different GRUs at the three study sites over the 1980-2016 period

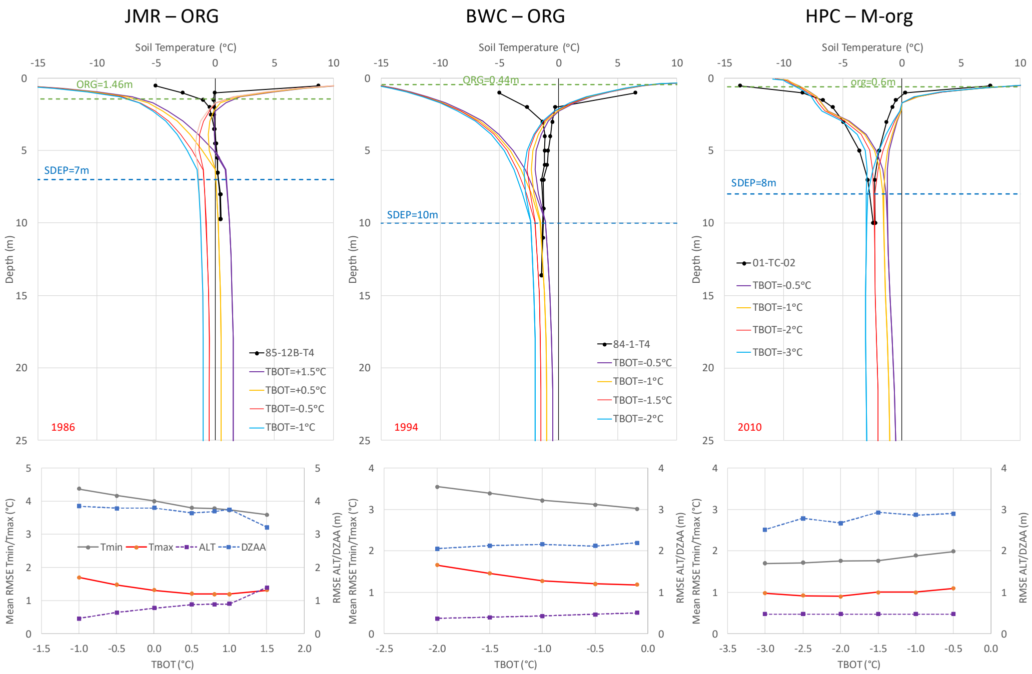


Figure 15 Impact of TBOT on simulated temperature envelopes for the Needleleaf Forest GRU for a selected year at each study site

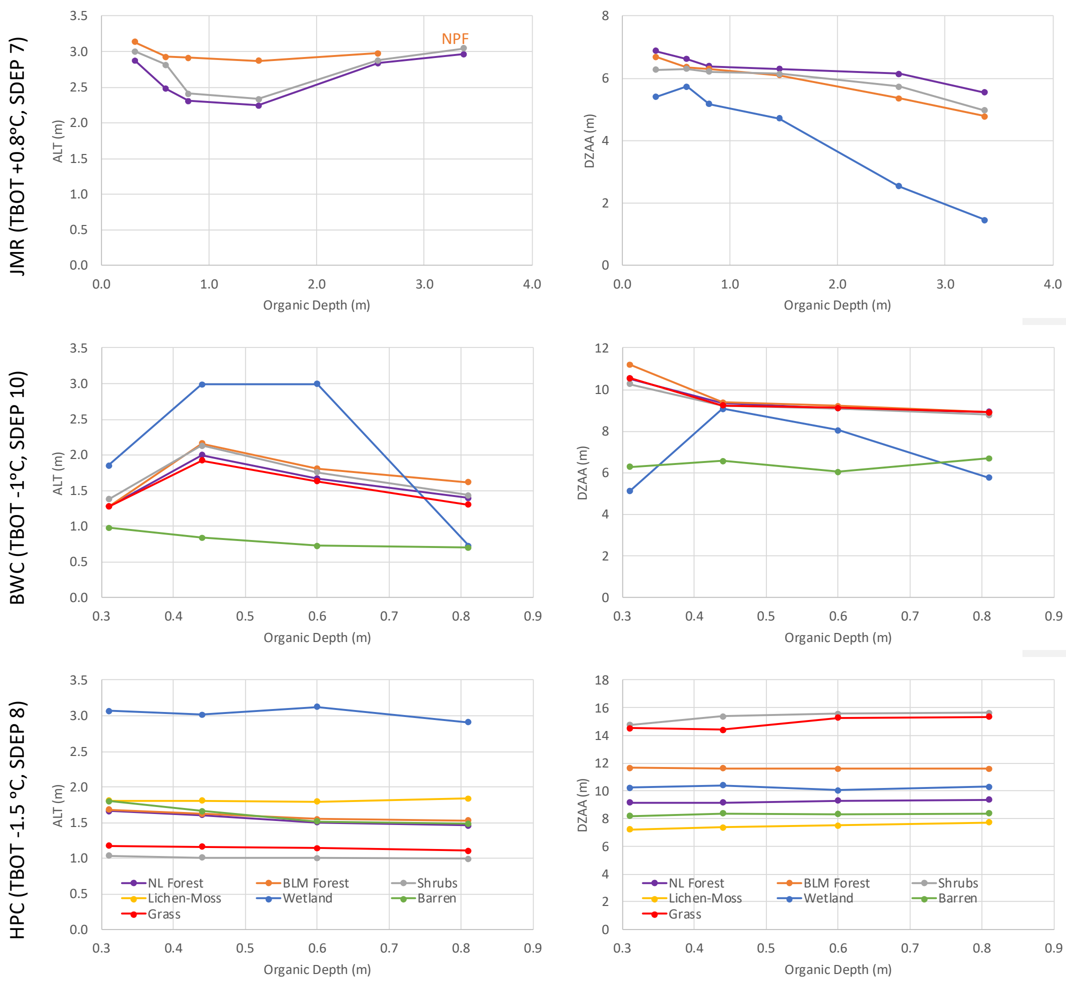


Figure 16 Impact of the depth of organic soil layers on average simulated ALT and DZAA for different GRUs at the three study sites for the 1980-2016 period

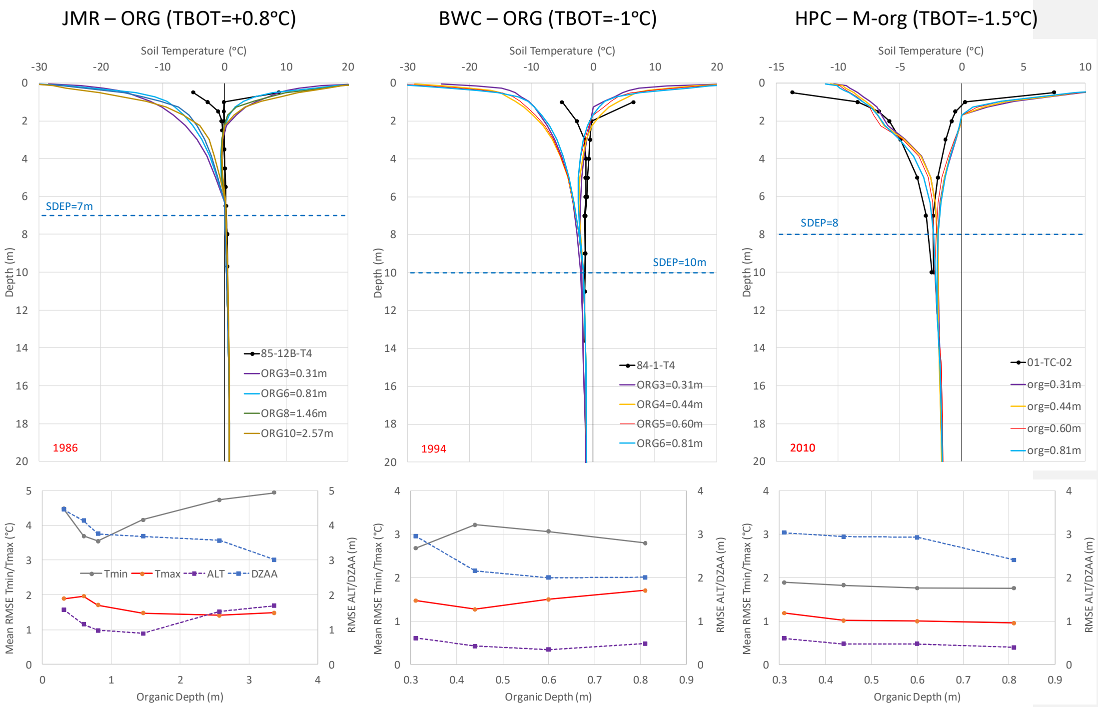


Figure 17 Impact of the depth of organic soil layers on simulated temperature envelopes for the Needleleaf Forest GRU for a selected year at each study site

Tables

Table 1 Permafrost sites and important measurements for the study sites

Site Name	Site ID	Type	Cables (Depth in m)	Data*	Vegetation	Permafrost Condition
JMR (Fort Simpson)						
Jean-Marie Creek	JMC-01	Thermal	T1 (5)	2008-2016	Shrub Fen	No
	JMC-02	Thermal	T1 (5)	2008-2016	Needle Leaf Forest	No
Pump Station 3	85-9 (NWZ9)	Thermal	T1 (5), T2 (5), T3 (20), T4 (20)	1986-1995, 2012-2016	Needle Leaf Forest/Shrubs/ Moss	No
Jean Marie Creek A	85-12A	Thermal	T1 (5), T2 (5), T3 (16.4), T4 (12)	1986-1995		No
Jean Marie Creek B	85-12B (NWZ12)	Thermal	T1 (5), T2 (5), T3 (17.2), T4 (9.7)	1986-2000		Yes
Mackenzie Hwy S	85-10A	Thermal	T1 (5), T2 (5), T3 (20), T4 (20)	1986-1995	N/A	No
	85-10B	Thermal	T1 (5), T2 (5), T3 (10.5), T4 (10.5)	1986-1995	N/A	No
Moraine South	85-11	Thermal	T1 (5), T2 (5), T3 (12), T4 (12)	1986-1995, 2014-2016	N/A	No
BWC (Norman Wells)						
NW Fen	99-TT-05	Thaw Tube		2009	Needle Leaf Forest/Moss	Yes
	99-TC-05	Thermal	Near Surface	2004-2008		
Normal Wells Town	Arena	Thermal	T1 (16)	2014-2015	Disturbed area adjacent to parking lot	Yes
	WTP	Thermal	T1 (30)	2014-2017		Yes
KP 2 - Off R.O.W.	94-TT-05	Thaw Tube		1995-2007	Needle Leaf Forest/Shrubs/ Moss	Yes
Norman Wells (Pump Stn 1)	84-1	Thermal	T1 (5.1), T2 (5), T3 (10.4), T4 (13.6), T5 (19.6)	1985-2000 1985-2016		Yes
van Everdingen	30m	Thermal	T1 (30)	2014-2017	Needle Leaf /Mixed Forest	Yes
Kee Scrap	Kee Scrap-HT	Thermal	T1 (128)	2015-2017	Mixed Forest	No
HPC (Inuvik)						
Havikpak Creek	01-TT-02	Thaw Tube		1993-2017	Needle Leaf Forest	Yes
Inuvik Airport	01-TT-03	Thaw Tube		2008-2017		Yes
Inuvik Airport	90-TT-16	Thaw Tube		2008		Yes
Upper Air	01-TT-02	Thaw Tube		2008-2017	N/A	Yes
Inuvik Airport (Trees)	01-TC-02	Thermal	T1 (10)	2008-2017	Needle Leaf Forest	Yes
Inuvik Airport (Bog)	01-TC-03	Thermal	T1 (8.35)		Wetland	Yes
	12-TC-01	Thermal	T1 (6.5)	2013-2017		Yes

Table 2 Soil profile layering schemes

	First Scheme (SC1)			Second Scheme (SC2)		
Layer	**Thickness**	**Bottom**	**Center**	**Thickness**	**Bottom**	**Center**
1	0.10	0.10	0.05	0.10	0.10	0.05
2	0.10	0.20	0.15	0.10	0.20	0.15
3	0.10	0.30	0.25	0.11	0.31	0.26
4	0.10	0.40	0.35	0.13	0.44	0.38
5	0.10	0.50	0.45	0.16	0.60	0.52
6	0.10	0.60	0.55	0.21	0.81	0.71
7	0.10	0.70	0.65	0.28	1.09	0.95
8	0.10	0.80	0.75	0.37	1.46	1.28
9	0.10	0.90	0.85	0.48	1.94	1.70
10	0.10	1.00	0.95	0.63	2.57	2.26
11	0.20	1.20	1.10	0.80	3.37	2.97
12	0.20	1.40	1.30	0.99	4.36	3.87
13	0.20	1.60	1.50	1.22	5.58	4.97
14	0.20	1.80	1.70	1.48	7.06	6.32
15	0.20	2.00	1.90	1.78	8.84	7.95
16	1.00	3.00	2.50	2.11	10.95	9.90
17	2.00	5.00	4.00	2.48	13.43	12.19
18	3.00	8.00	6.50	2.88	16.31	14.87
19	4.00	12.00	10.00	3.33	19.64	17.98
20	6.00	18.00	15.00	3.81	23.45	21.55
21	8.00	26.00	22.00	4.34	27.79	25.62
22	10.00	36.00	31.00	4.90	32.69	30.24
23	14.00	50.00	43.00	5.51	38.20	35.45
24				6.17	44.37	41.29
25				6.87	51.24	47.81

Table 3 The number of layers of each organic sub-type for fully organic soil configurations (ORG) and organic content for mineral configurations (M-org)

# Organic	Organic Sub-Type (ORG)			Organic Content % (M-org)		
layers	**1 (Fibric)**	**2 (Hemic)**	**3 (Sapric)**	**JMR**	**BWC**	**HPC**
3	1	1	1			3@18, 0 →
4	1	1	2		2@35, 30, 25, 0 →	4@18, 0 →
5	1	2	2			4@18, 0 →
6	2	2	2			4@18, 0 →
8*	2	3	3	2@60, 2@50, 2@40, 30 →		
10*	3	3	4			
11*	3	4	4			

*Only used for JMR, x@y means x layers with the specificed %, and x → means the value is for the remainder of the layers below

Table 4 Comparison of temperature and precipitation of the selected spinning year to mean climate of the WFDEI Dataset

	Mean Annual Temperature (°C)			Total Annual Precipitation (mm/yr)		
	WFDEI 1979-2016		Oct 1979 – Sep 1980	WFDEI 1979-2016		Oct 1979 – Sep 1980
Site	Mean	Std Dev		Mean	Std Dev	
JMR	-2.65	1.06	-1.81	418.1	64.5	338.4
BWC	-5.65	1.01	-4.36	403.9	74.7	394.3
HPC	-8.73	1.17	-7.82	295.7	40.0	301.2