



Literature Summary of Watershed Studies Involving AI/ML – Living Resources

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Leveraging Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning to
Advance Chesapeake Bay Research and Management
24-25 February 2025



[illegible]

Different ecological disciplines

Different extents

Rapidly evolving field

Let's start by looking at a few key papers

Many foundational papers

Journal of Animal Ecology



Journal of Animal Ecology 2008, 77, 802–813

doi: 10.1111/j.1365-2656.2008.01390.x

A working guide to boosted regression trees

J. Elith^{1*}, J. R. Leathwick² and T. Hastie³

¹School of Botany, The University of Melbourne, Parkville, Victoria, Australia 3010; ²National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research, PO Box 11115, Hamilton, New Zealand; and ³Department of Statistics, Stanford University, CA, USA

Ecology, 81(11), 2000, pp. 3178–3192
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CLASSIFICATION AND REGRESSION TREES: A POWERFUL YET SIMPLE TECHNIQUE FOR ECOLOGICAL DATA ANALYSIS

GLENN DE'ATH¹ AND KATHARINA E. FABRICIUS²

ECOGRAPHY 29: 129–151, 2006

Novel methods improve prediction of species' distributions from occurrence data

Jane Elith^a, Catherine H. Graham^a, Robert P. Anderson, Miroslav Dudík, Simon Ferrier, Antoine Guisan, Robert J. Hijmans, Falk Huettmann, John R. Leathwick, Anthony Lehmann, Jin Li, Lucia G. Lohmann, Bette A. Loiselle, Glenn Manion, Craig Moritz, Miguel Nakamura, Yoshinori Nakazawa, Jacob McC. Overton, A. Townsend Peterson, Steven J. Phillips, Karen Richardson, Ricardo Scachetti-Pereira, Robert E. Schapire, Jorge Soberón, Stephen Williams, Mary S. Wisz and Niklaus E. Zimmermann

Received: 1 August 2022 | Accepted: 5 December 2022
DOI: 10.1111/2041-210X.14061

REVIEW

Machine learning and deep learning—A review for ecologists

Maximilian Pichler¹ | Florian Hartig²

REVIEW

Applications for deep learning in ecology

Sylvain Christin¹ | Éric Hervet² | Nicolas Lecomte¹

REVIEW

Deep learning as a tool for ecology and evolution

Marek L. Borowiec^{1,2} | Rebecca B. Dikow³ | Paul B. Frandsen^{3,4} | Alexander McKeen¹ | Gabriele Valentini⁵ | Alexander E. White^{3,6}

Ecology, 88(11), 2007, pp. 2783–2792
© 2007 by the Ecological Society of America

RANDOM FORESTS FOR CLASSIFICATION IN ECOLOGY

D. RICHARD CUTLER,^{1,7} THOMAS C. EDWARDS, JR.,² KAREN H. BEARD,³ ADELE CUTLER,⁴ KYLE T. HESS,⁴ JACOB GIBSON,⁵ AND JOSHUA J. LAWLER⁶



Ecological Modelling 135 (2000) 147–186

ECOLOGICAL
MODELLING

www.elsevier.com/locate/ecolmodel

Predictive habitat distribution models in ecology

Antoine Guisan^{a,*}, Niklaus E. Zimmermann^{b,1}

^a Swiss Center for Faunal Cartography (CSCF), Terreaux 14, CH-2000 Neuchâtel, Switzerland
^b Swiss Federal Research Institute WSL, Zürcherstr. 111, 8903 Birmensdorf, Switzerland



Ecological Modelling 154 (2002) 135–150

ECOLOGICAL
MODELLING

www.elsevier.com/locate/ecolmodel

Illuminating the “black box”: a randomization approach for understanding variable contributions in artificial neural networks

Julian D. Olden^{*}, Donald A. Jackson

Methods in Ecology and Evolution

Ecological Monographs, 90(4), 2020, e01422

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A translucent box: interpretable machine learning in ecology

TIM C. D. LUCAS¹

VOLUME 83, No. 2

THE QUARTERLY REVIEW OF BIOLOGY

JUNE 2008



MACHINE LEARNING METHODS WITHOUT TEARS: A PRIMER FOR ECOLOGISTS

JULIAN D. OLDEN



Ecological Modelling 120 (1999) 65–73

ECOLOGICAL
MODELLING

www.elsevier.com/locate/ecolmodel

Artificial neural networks as a tool in ecological modelling, an introduction

Sovan Lek^{a,*}, J.F. Guégan^b



Available online at www.sciencedirect.com

SCIENCE @ DIRECT[®]

Ecological Modelling 190 (2006) 231–259

ECOLOGICAL
MODELLING

www.elsevier.com/locate/ecolmodel

Maximum entropy modeling of species geographic distributions

Steven J. Phillips^{a,*}, Robert P. Anderson^{b,c}, Robert E. Schapire^d

Available online at www.sciencedirect.com

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Ecological Modelling 190 (2006) 231–259

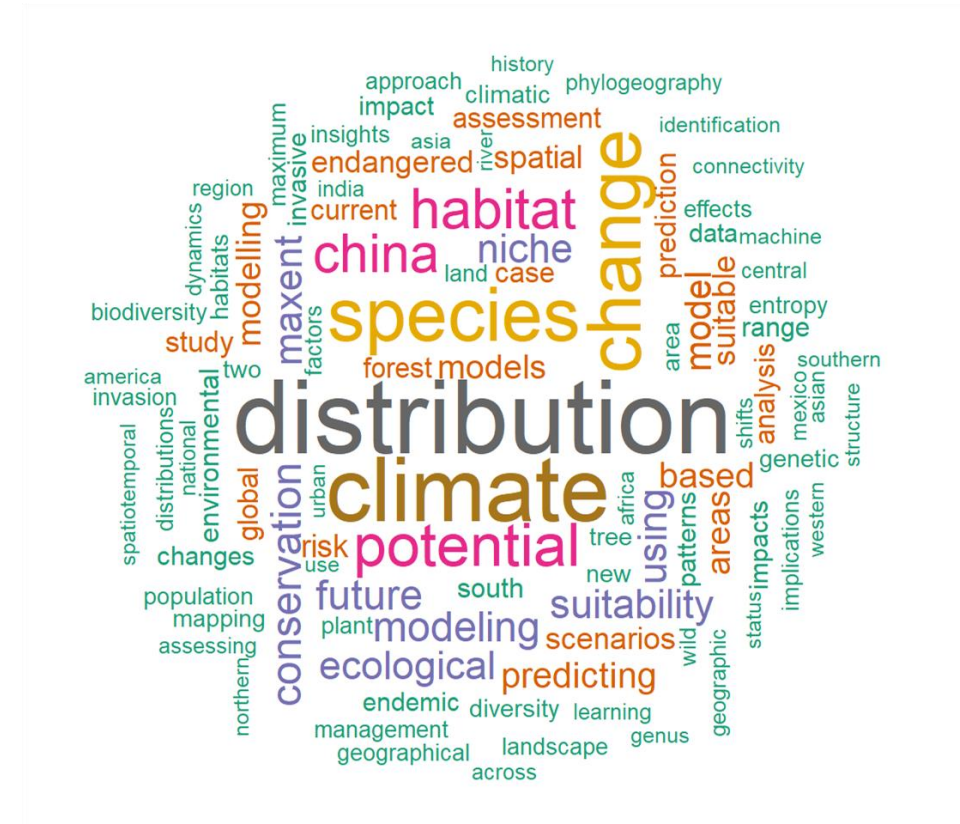
www.elsevier.com/locate/ecolmodel

**ECOLOGICAL
MODELLING**

Maximum entropy modeling of species geographic distributions

Steven J. Phillips^{a,*}, Robert P. Anderson^{b,c}, Robert E. Schapire^d

13,415 total citations



Preliminary Information-Subject to Revision. Not for Citation or Distribution

Ecology, 88(11), 2007, pp. 2783–2792
© 2007 by the Ecological Society of America

D. RICHARD CUTLER,^{1,7} THOMAS C. EDWARDS, JR.,² KAREN H. BEARD,³ ADELE CUTLER,⁴ KYLE T. HESS,⁴
JACOB GIBSON,⁵ AND JOSHUA J. LAWLER⁶



Journal of Animal Ecology

Journal of Animal Ecology 2008, **77**, 802–813

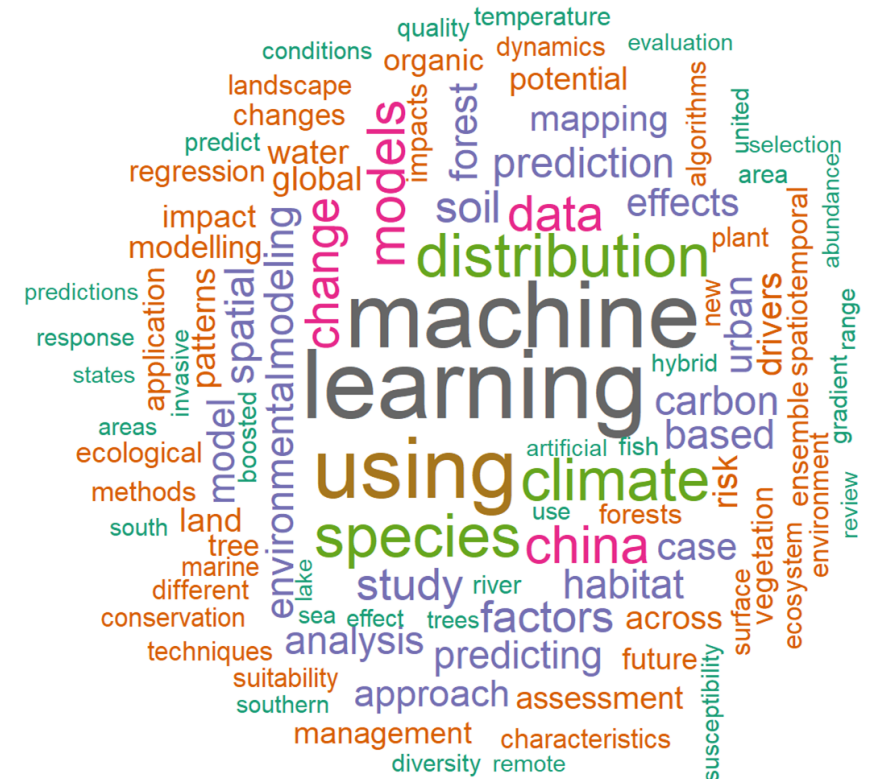
doi: 10.1111/j.1365-2656.2008.01390.x

A working guide to boosted regression trees

J. Elith¹*, J. R. Leathwick² and T. Hastie³

¹School of Botany, The University of Melbourne, Parkville, Victoria, Australia 3010; ²National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research, PO Box 11115, Hamilton, New Zealand; and ³Department of Statistics, Stanford University, CA, USA

4,899 total citations



Preliminary Information-Subject to Revision. Not for Citation or Distribution

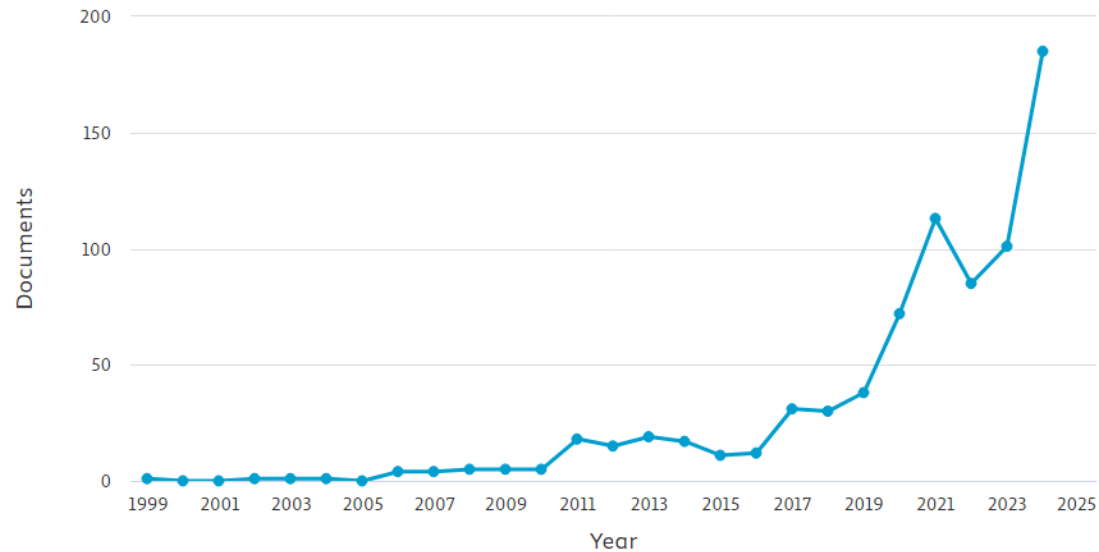
Scopus database query of AI/ML and species distribution

“Machine learning” and “Species Distribution” or “Artificial Intelligence” and “Species Distribution”

Scopus database query 06 Feb 2025

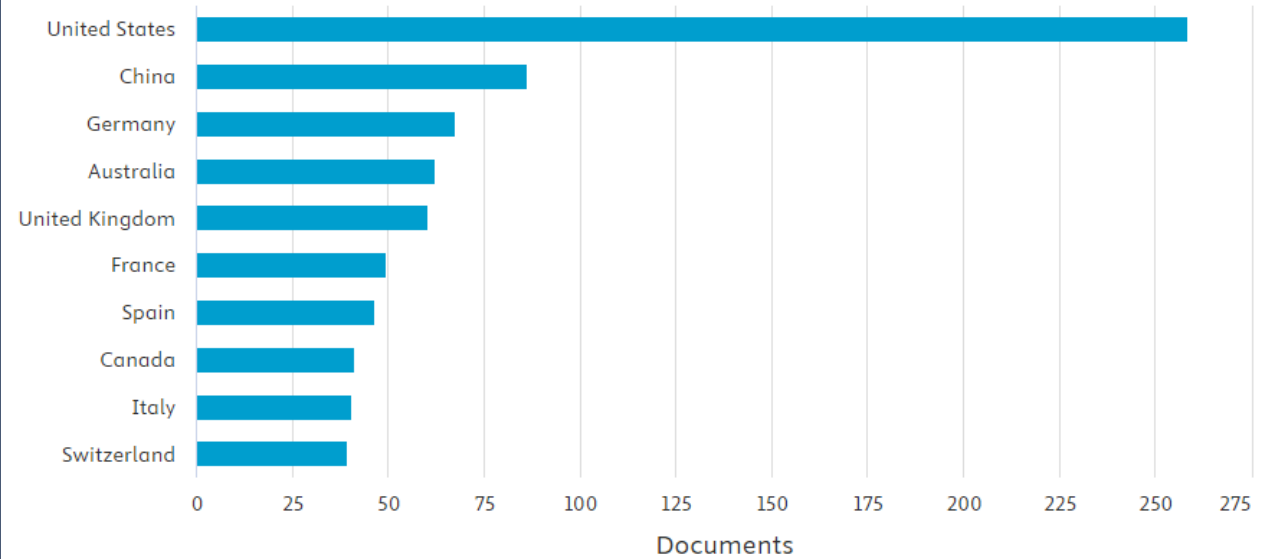
774 total citations

Documents by year



Documents by country or territory

Compare the document counts for up to 15 countries/territories.



Preliminary Information-Subject to Revision. Not for Citation or Distribution

Case Studies – Regional and Chesapeake Bay

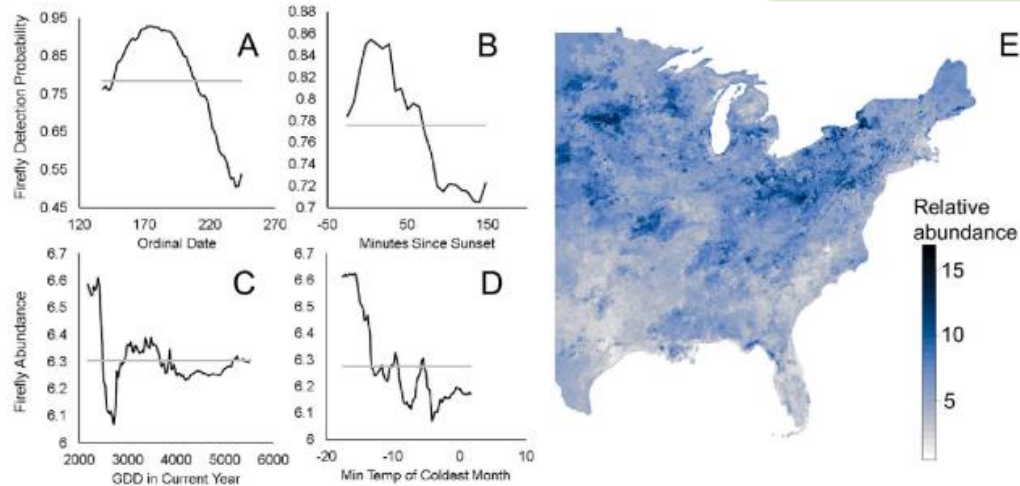


Illuminating patterns of firefly abundance using citizen science data and machine learning models
Darin J. McNeill^{1,*}, Sarah C. Goslee², Melanie Kammerer³, Sarah E. Lower⁴, John F. Tooker⁵, Christina M. Griesinger⁶

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2024.172329>

Species Distribution Fireflies and Fish

McNeill et al. 2024, Maloney et al. 2022



Data set: Firefly Watch

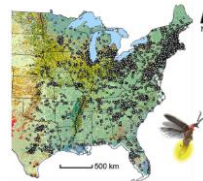
Response: Presence/absence & Relative abundance

Extent: Eastern US

Method: Random Forests

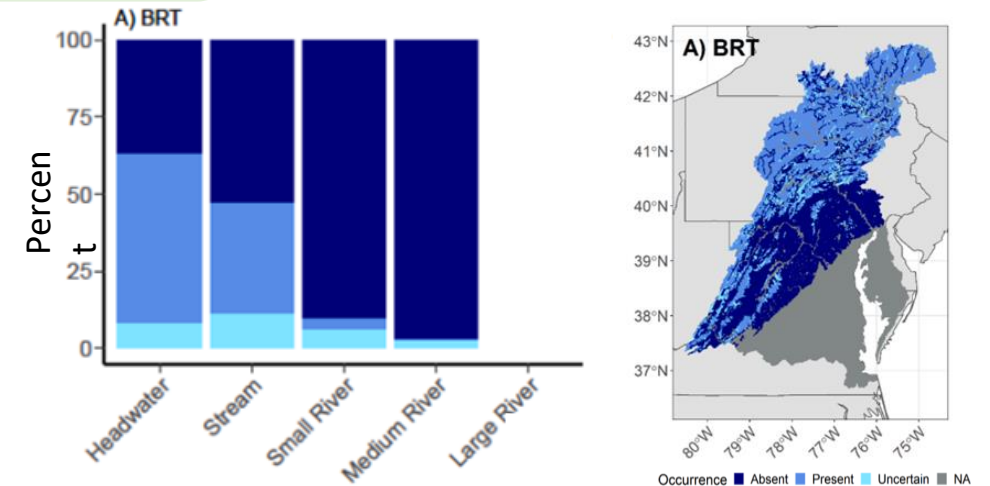
Example Result: "...variation in firefly abundance was explained by complex interactions among soil conditions, weather, and land cover characteristics..."

Take home: "...results support hypotheses related to factors threatening firefly populations, especially habitat loss, and suggest that climate change may pose a greater threat than appreciated in previous assessments"



Using fish community and population indicators to assess the biological condition of streams and rivers of the Chesapeake Bay watershed, USA
Kelly O. Maloney^{1,*}, Kevin F. Kraus^{2,3}, Matthew J. Cashman⁴, Wesley M. Daniel⁵, Benjamin P. Griesler⁶, Daniel J. Wroblewski⁷, John A. Young⁸

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolind.2021.108488>



Data set: Chesapeake Fish data set

Response: Presence/absence

Extent: Chesapeake Bay watershed

Method: Random Forests

Example Result: Predicted presence centered north and central portions and more often in headwaters and streams.

Take home: "...Random forests ML enable predictions of brook trout occurrence with uncertainty and enabled identification of key habitats (and change through time (not shown))...."

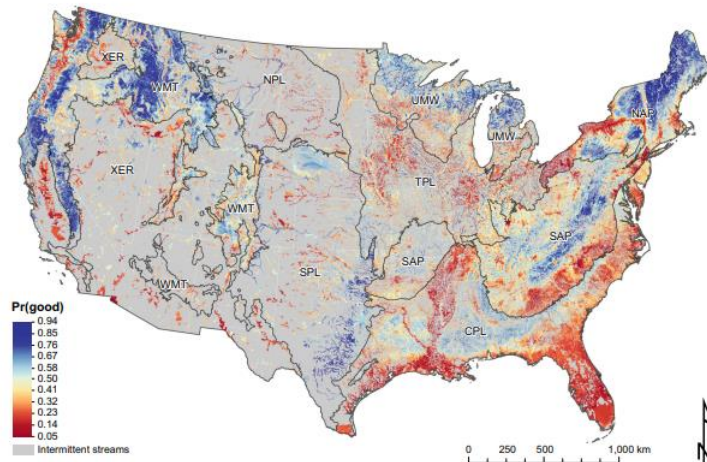
Case Studies – Regional and Chesapeake Bay

Ecological Applications, 0(0), 2017, pp. 1–19
© 2017 by the Ecological Society of America

Predictive mapping of the biotic condition of
conterminous U.S. rivers and streams

RYAN A. HILL,^{1,3} ERIC W. FOX,¹ SCOTT G. LEIBOWITZ,¹ ANTHONY R. OLSEN,¹
DARREN J. THORNBURGH,^{1,2} AND MARC H. WEBER¹

<https://doi.org/10.1002/eap.1617>



Data set: USEPA 2008-09 NRSA

Response: Benthic MMI, Probability of Good

Extent: CONUS

Method: Random Forests

Example Result: Probability of Good had low correlations with
%Agr and %Urb with non-linear functions.

Take home: “This study provides an important proof-of-concept
and approach for using this type of survey data to predict
stream condition at large scales with geospatial information.”

Habitat Assessments Stream Condition

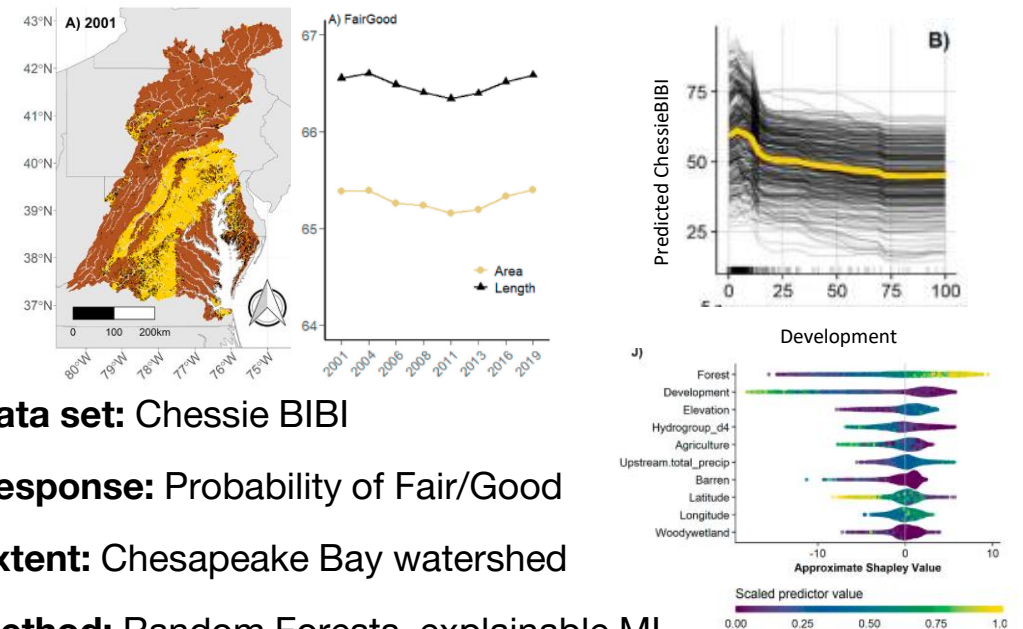
Hill et al. 2017, Maloney et al. 2022



Research article
Explainable machine learning improves interpretability in the predictive
modeling of biological stream conditions in the Chesapeake Bay
Watershed, USA

Kelly O. Maloney^{*,1}, Claire Buchanan², Rikke D. Jensen³, Kevin P. Krause⁴,
Matthew J. Cashman⁵, Benjamin P. Gressler⁶, John A. Young⁷, Matthias Schmid⁸

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2022.116068>



Data set: Chessie BIBI

Response: Probability of Fair/Good

Extent: Chesapeake Bay watershed

Method: Random Forests, explainable ML

Example Result: stream length/catchment area in FairGood condition
decreased/increased over 19 yrs. xML shows negative influence
of Dev and Agr at local (Shapley) and model average (PD) levels.

Take home: a random forests model predicted trends in stream
biological conditions over a 19-year period; xML improved
interpretability of global and local effects.

Case Studies – Regional and Chesapeake Bay

Species Distribution- Birds – CONUS Causal Inference Double Machine Learning Fink et al. 2023

Data set: citizen science eBird

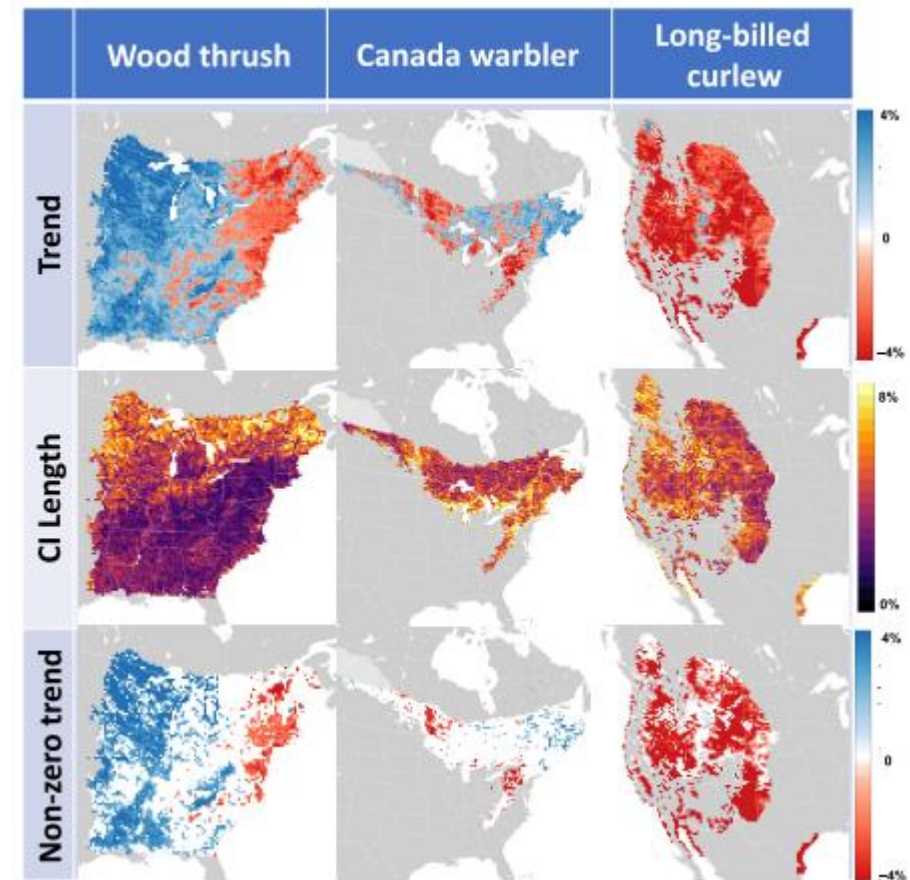
Response: abundance and trends of Wood Thrush, Canada Warbler, and Long-Billed Curlew.

Extent: North America

Method: Double machine learning

Example Result: Wood Thrush shows steep declines in the northeast and increases in the southwest of its breeding season population.

Take home: “The results show that DML can be used to reduce confounding bias leading to more accurate estimates and stronger associative inferences.”



Received: 21 December 2022 | Accepted: 26 June 2023
DOI: 10.1111/2041-210X.14186

RESEARCH ARTICLE

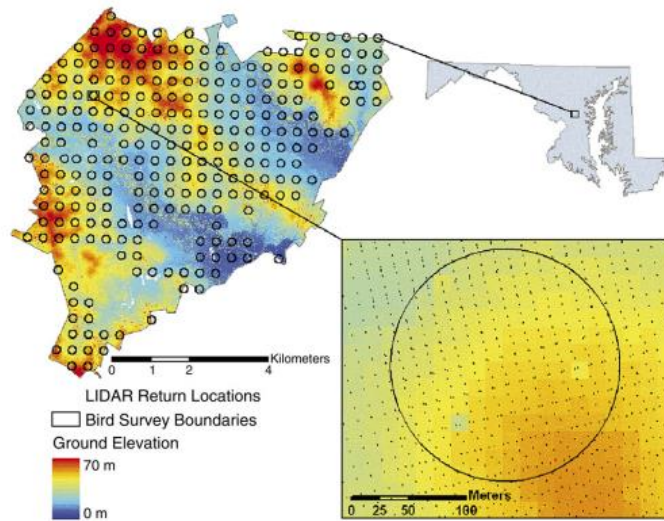
Methods in Ecology and Evolution

A Double machine learning trend model for citizen science data

Daniel Fink¹ | Alison Johnston² | Matt Strimas-Mackey¹ | Tom Auer¹ | Wesley M. Hochachka¹ | Shawn Ligocki¹ | Lauren Oldham Jaromczyk¹ | Orin Robinson¹ | Chris Wood¹ | Steve Kelling¹ | Amanda D. Rodewald¹

Fink, D., Johnston, A., Strimas-Mackey, M., Auer, T., Hochachka, W.M., Ligocki, S., Oldham Jaromczyk, L., Robinson, O., Wood, C., Kelling, S. and Rodewald, A.D., 2023. A double machine learning trend model for citizen science data. *Methods in Ecology and Evolution*, 14(9), pp.2435-2448. <https://doi.org/10.1111/2041-210X.14186>

Case Studies – Chesapeake Bay Examples



Species Distribution Bird Richness – PNWR Goetz et al. 2007



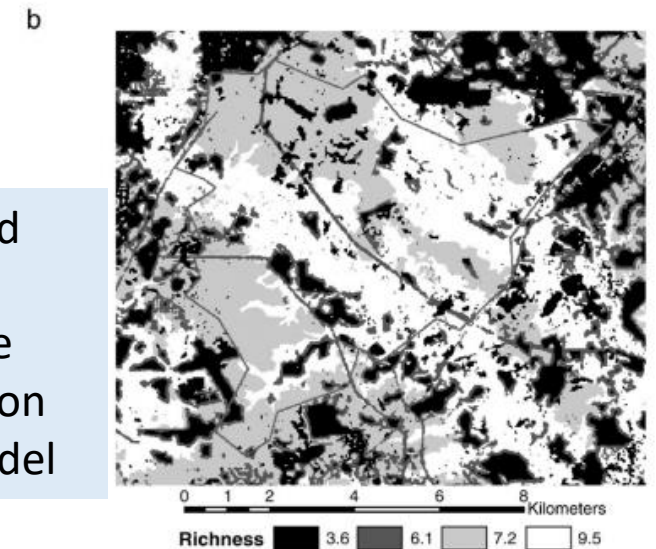
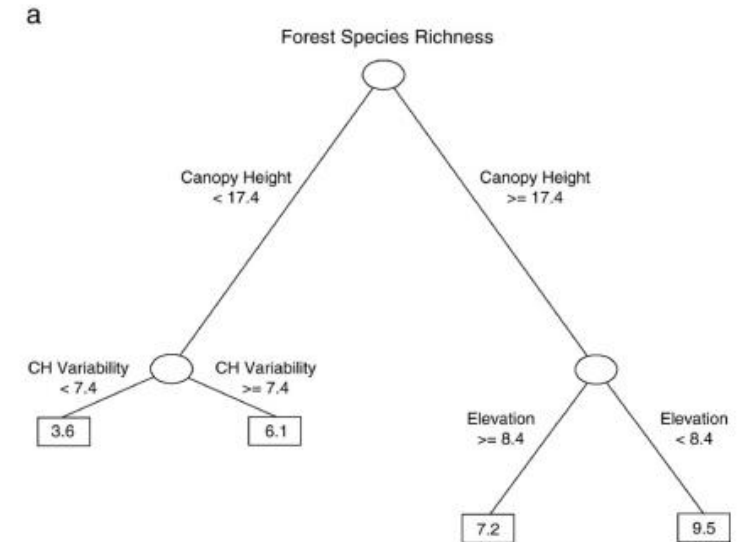
Available online at www.sciencedirect.com
ScienceDirect
Remote Sensing of Environment 108 (2007) 254–263

Remote Sensing
Environment
www.elsevier.com/locate/rse

Laser remote sensing of canopy habitat heterogeneity as a predictor of bird species richness in an eastern temperate forest, USA

Scott Goetz^{a,*}, Daniel Steinberg^a, Ralph Dubayah^b, Bryan Blair^c

Point abundance of species
within 100m radius



Data set: USGS Breeding Bird Survey, LIDAR & Optical image

Response: Richness and abundance

Extent: Patuxent National Wildlife Refuge, MD

Method: MLR, GAMs, Regression Trees

Example Result: Best model explained 45% of variation in species richness, more typically 30-40%.

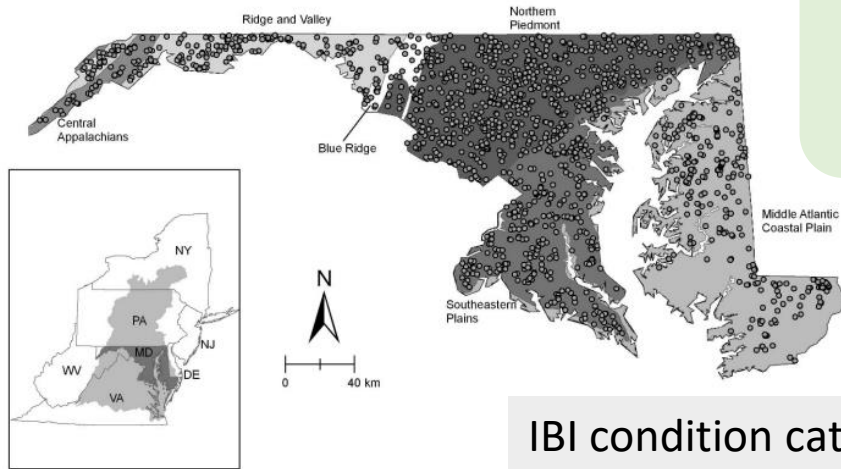
Take home: Found little advantage of Regression Trees or GAMs over MLR, attributed to not including interactions or limited tree depth.

Predicted
richness
using the
Regression
Tree model

Goetz, S., Steinberg, D., Dubayah, R. and Blair, B., 2007. Laser remote sensing of canopy habitat heterogeneity as a predictor of bird species richness in an eastern temperate forest, USA. *Remote Sensing of Environment*, 108(3), pp.254-263.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rse.2006.11.016>

Case Studies – Chesapeake Bay Examples

Assessment Maryland IBI Maloney et al. 2009



IBI condition categories based
on benthic
macroinvertebrates

Data set: Maryland Biological Stream Survey

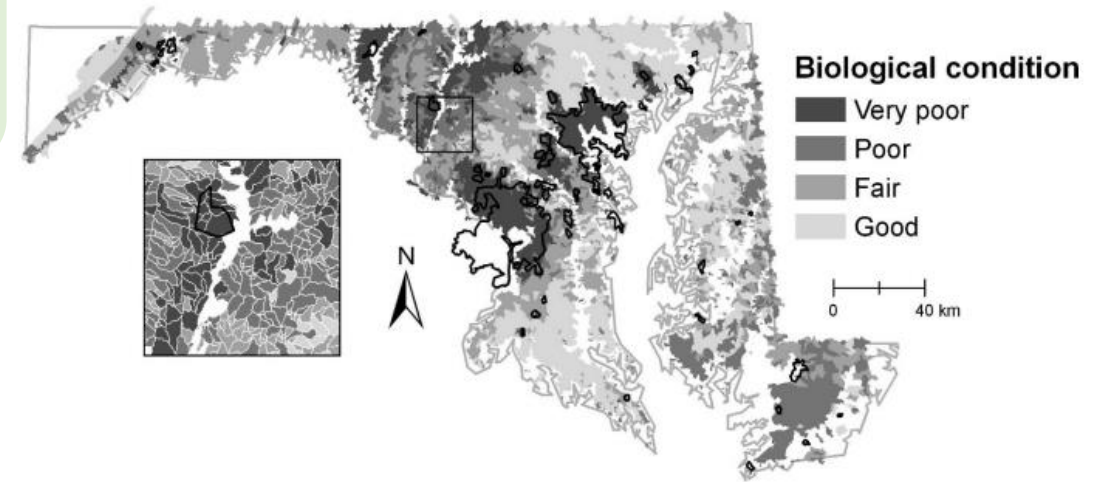
Response: Index of Biotic Integrity

Extent: Maryland portion of the Chesapeake Bay watershed

Method: Regression Trees, condition Regression Trees, Random Forests, conditional Random Forests, Ordinal Logistic Regression

Example Result: RF and cRF most accurate, select cRF due to bias in variable selection with RF, which predicted 33.8% of streams in fair, 29.9% in good, 22.7% in poor, and 13.6% in very poor biological condition

Take home: Both forests ML approaches were best at prediction of stream condition, but some biases were found with RF.



Used cRF model to
predict stream biological
condition for non-tidal
streams

J. N. Am. Benthol. Soc., 2009, 28(4):869-884
© 2009 by The North American Benthological Society
DOI: 10.1899/08-142.1
Published online: 29 September 2009

Classifying the biological condition of small streams: an example using benthic macroinvertebrates

Kelly O. Maloney¹ and Donald E. Weller²

Smithsonian Environmental Research Center (SERC), 647 Centes Wharf Rd., P.O. Box 28, Edgewater, Maryland 21037-0028 USA

Marc J. Russell³

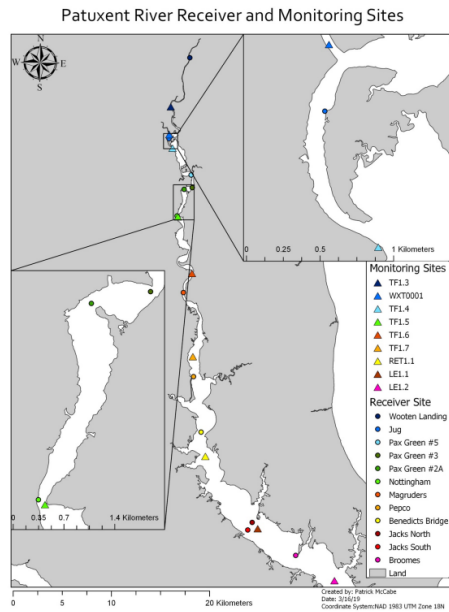
Gulf Ecology Division, US Environmental Protection Agency, 1 Sabine Island Dr., Gulf Breeze, Florida 32561 USA

Torsten Hothorn⁴

Institut für Statistik, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Ludwigstraße 33, D-80539 München, Germany

Maloney, K.O., Weller, D.E., Russell, M.J. and Hothorn, T., 2009. Classifying the biological condition of small streams: an example using benthic macroinvertebrates. *Journal of the North American Benthological Society*, 28(4), pp.869-884. <https://doi.org/10.1899/08-142.1>

Case Studies – Chesapeake Bay Examples



Invasive Species Blue Catfish in Patuxent River McCabe 2019 Master's

Patrick McCabe, 2019, Habitat Modeling of Invasive Blue Catfish in the Patuxent River, Chesapeake Bay, Master's degree Duke University,
<https://dukespace.lib.duke.edu/items/87838f61-7d55-4b08-ba39-28c5e4a5a236>

Data set: acoustic telemetry, tagging

Response: Presence/Absence, monthly

Extent: Patuxent River, Chesapeake Bay watershed

Method: Boosted Regression Trees

Example Result: “..highest presence probability is confined to the channels and deep holes from Nottingham to Pepco,
”
..

Take home: “This study identified abiotic environmental variables most essential to blue catfish habitat and demonstrate seasonal habitat and movement patterns of blue catfish within the Patuxent.”

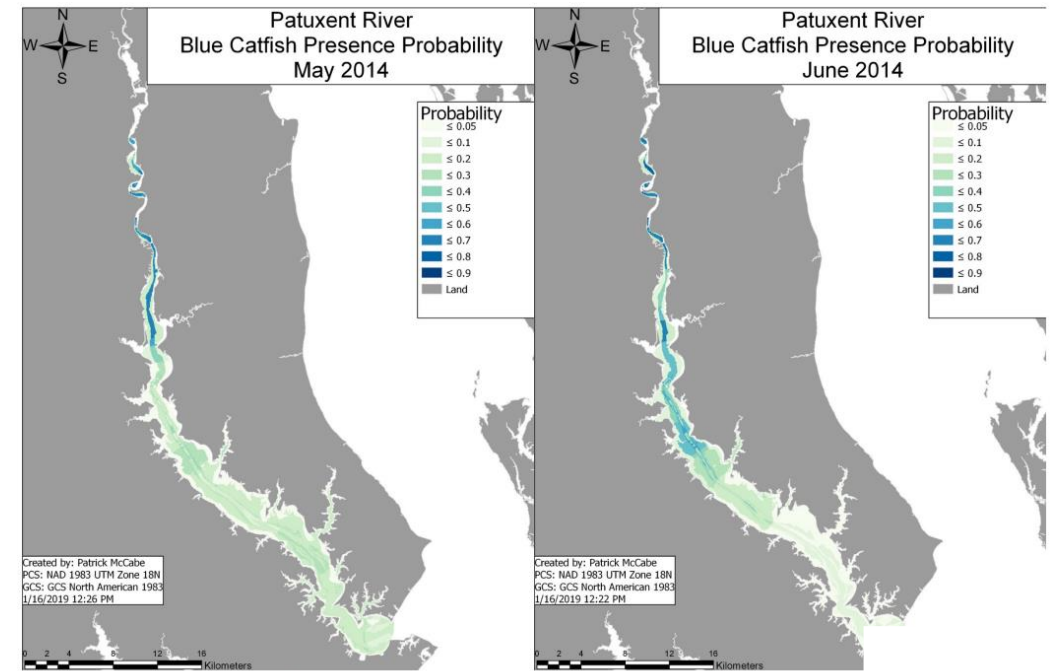
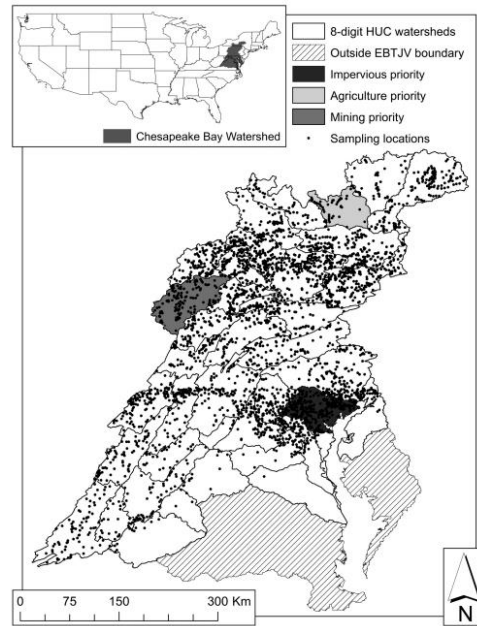


Figure 18. Blue Catfish Presence Probability in the Patuxent River for May 2014.

Figure 19. Blue Catfish Presence Probability in the Patuxent River for June 2014.

Case Studies – Chesapeake Bay Examples



Distribution & Assessment Merriam et al. 2019 Brook Trout

Modeled
occurrence of
Brook Trout

Predicted occurrence,
overall anthropogenic
stress index (ASI),
natural habitat quality
(NHQi) and potential
change in fishery to
future climate (Δ NHQi)

Data set: Compiled Brook Trout dataset

Response: Occurrence

Extent: Chesapeake Bay watershed

Method: Boosted Regression Trees

Example Result: Current land use predicted loss of occurrence in 11,000 stream segments (40% suitable habitat) climate change projected 3,000 additional segments (19% current).

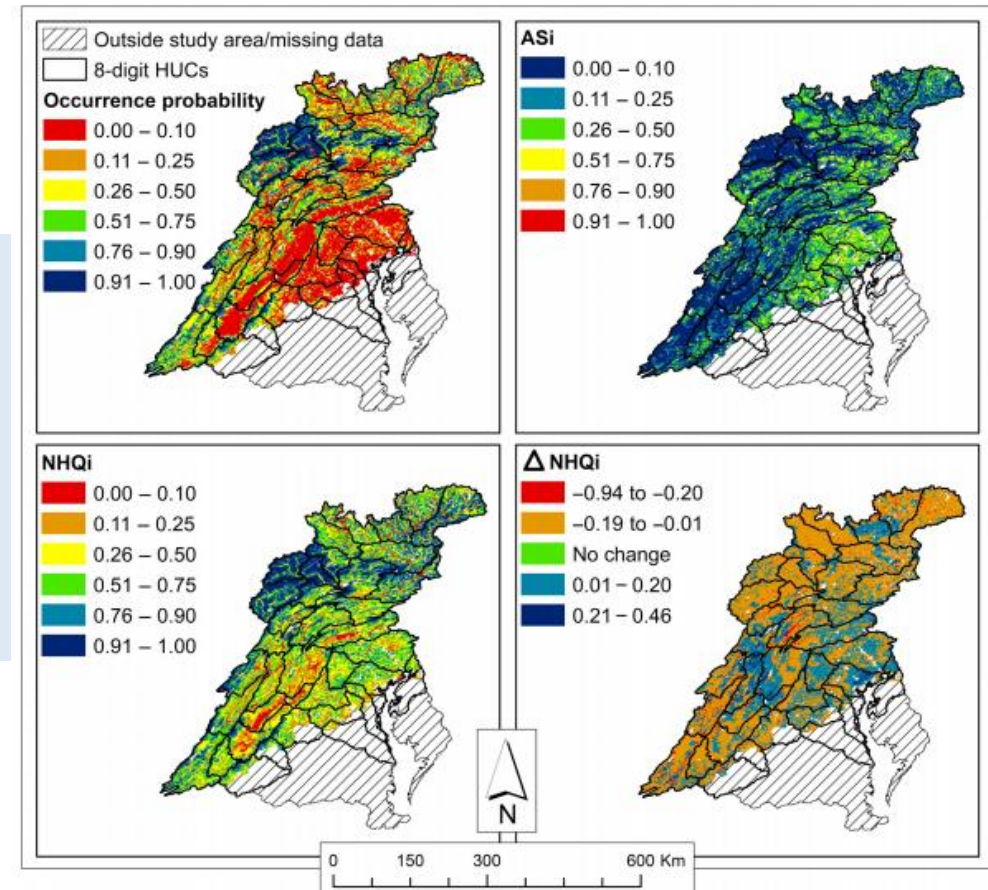
Take home: “Our results suggest that land use activities interact strongly with water temperature and precipitation and how we manage this interaction likely will determine the fate of brook trout populations throughout this region.”

esa

ECOSPHERE

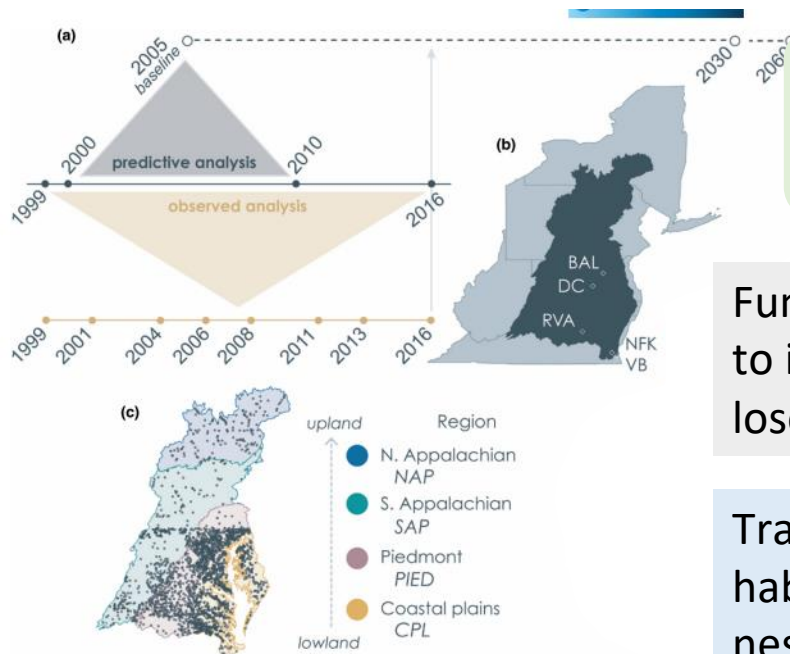
Conservation planning at the intersection of landscape and climate change: brook trout in the Chesapeake Bay watershed

ERIC R. MERRIAM,^{1,3} J. TODD PETTY,^{1,†} AND JASON CLINGERMAN²



Merriam, E.R., Petty, J.T. and Clingerman, J., 2019. Conservation planning at the intersection of landscape and climate change: brook trout in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. *Ecosphere*, 10(2), p.e02585. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ecs2.2585>

Case Studies – Chesapeake Bay Examples



Distribution & Assessment Woods et al. 2023 Fish Traits

Functional traits groups
to identify winner and
loser traits

Traits preferences for warm water, pool
habitats, fine or vegetated substrates,
nest-guarding reproductive strategies,
and carnivores may gain suitable habitat.

Data set: Cbay watershed fish data set

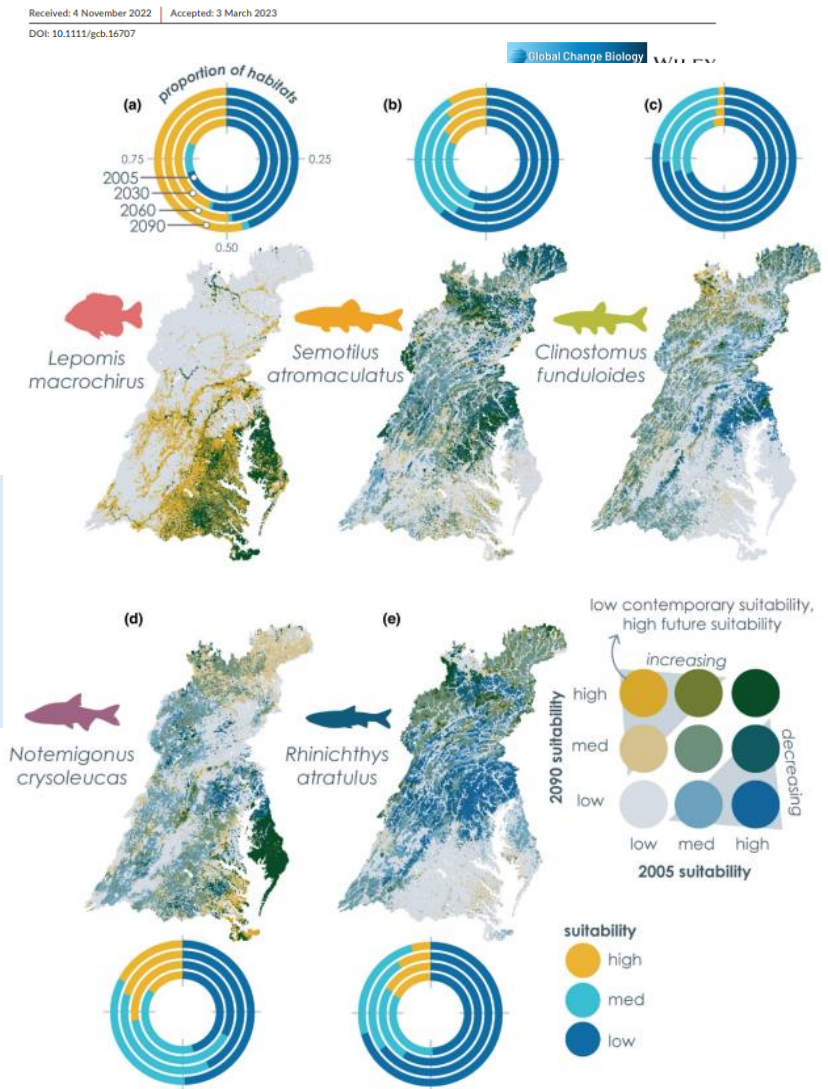
Response: Functional Traits to enable winner vs. loser analysis

Extent: Chesapeake Bay watershed

Method: Random Forests, land use and climate futures

Example Result: “At the assemblage level, models projected decreasing habitat suitability for cold-water, rheophilic, and lithophilic individuals but increasing suitability for carnivores in the future across all regions.”

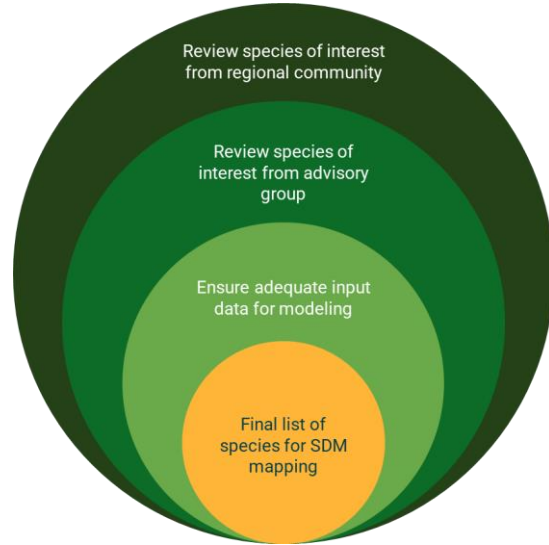
Take home: “...highlight the complexity of global change impacts across broad landscapes that likely relate to differences in assemblages' intrinsic sensitivities and external exposure to stressors.”



Woods, T., Freeman, M.C., Krause, K.P. and Maloney, K.O., 2023. Observed and projected functional reorganization of riverine fish assemblages from global change. *Global Change Biology*, 29(13), pp.3759-3780. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gcb.16707>

Case Studies – Chesapeake Bay Examples

Distribution & Assessment Kiser, Young, Mainali et al. In Progress Multi-species Biodiversity Mapping



Data set: multiple species, Cbay24k predictors

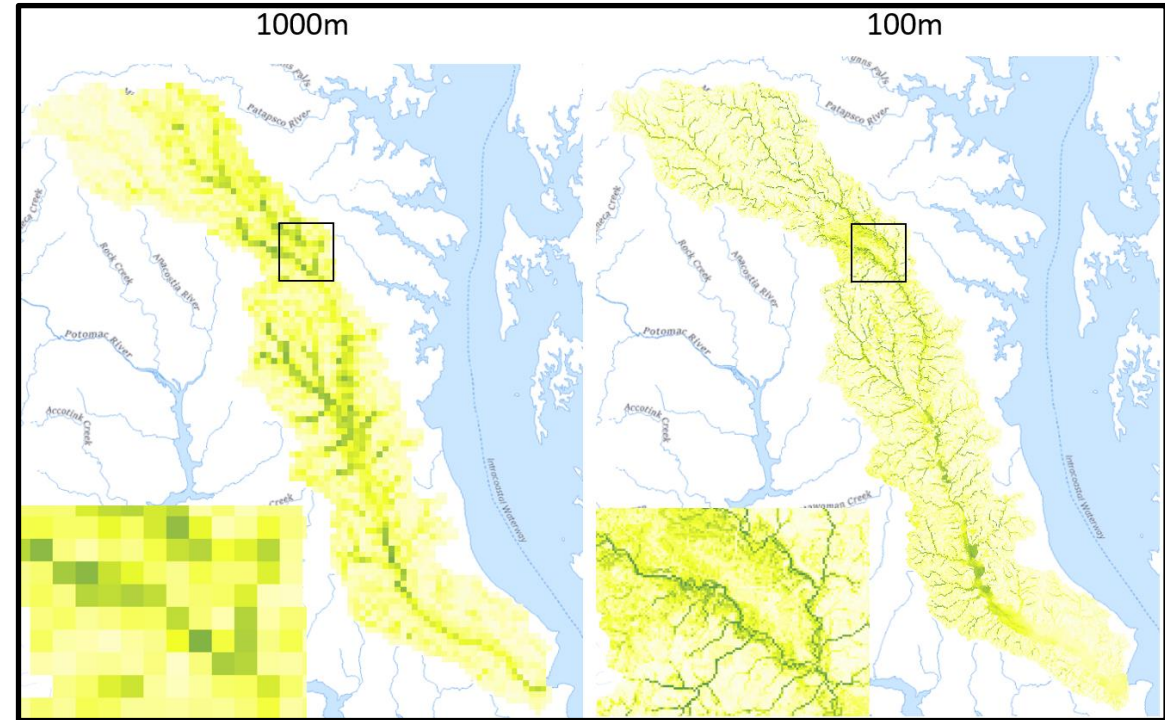
Response: Presence/Absence, Presence only

Extent: Chesapeake Bay watershed

Method: Ensemble and Nested Modeling Approach - Random Forests, Gradient Boosting (Boosted Regression Trees), MaxEnt

Example Result: In Progress

Take home: In Progress



Probability of occurrence of American eel at two spatial scale

Alex Kiser (USGS) - akiser@usgs.gov

John Young (USGS) – jyoung@usgs.gov

Kumar Mainali (Cbay Conservancy) - kmainali@chesapeakeconservancy.org

Preliminary Information-Subject to Revision.
Not for Citation or Distribution

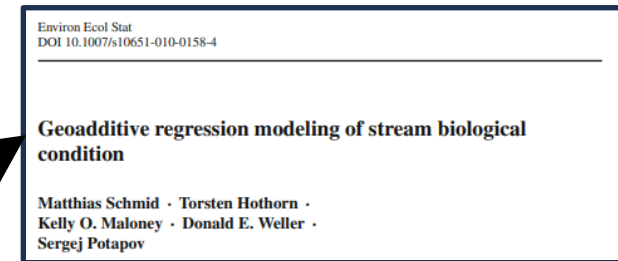


Case Studies – Collaboration with Statisticians

Building Cross-Disciplinary Collaborations Outside the Ecological or Life Sciences Field

CONUS – used USEPA National Lakes Assessment Survey data, developed a RF ML method for bounded outcomes, %Ephemeroptera

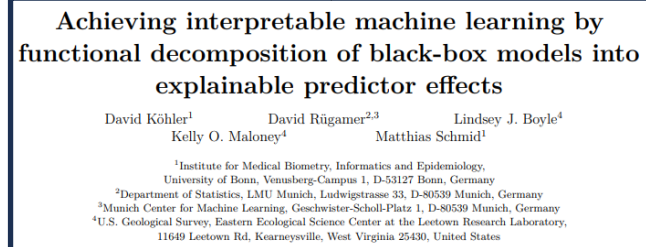
Maryland – used MBSS IBI data, developed a proportional odds model for ordinal outcomes with a functional gradient boosting approach for estimation.



We have excellent data sets and interesting questions.

Combined Expertise

Statisticians often faced with challenging questions and have expertise to develop novel techniques.



Currently In Review

Case Studies – Some Review Papers

Benos, L., Tagarakis, A.C., Dolias, G., Berruto, R., Kateris, D. and Bochtis, D., 2021. Machine learning in agriculture: A comprehensive updated review. *Sensors*, 21(11), p.3758. <https://doi.org/10.3390/s21113758>

Crisci, C., Ghattas, B. and Perera, G., 2012. A review of supervised machine learning algorithms and their applications to ecological data. *Ecological Modelling*, 240, pp.113-122. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolmodel.2012.03.001>

Jordan, M.I. and Mitchell, T.M., 2015. Machine learning: Trends, perspectives, and prospects. *Science*, 349(6245), pp.255-260. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aaa8415>

Karpatne, A. I. Ebert-Uphoff, S. Ravela, H. A. Babaie and V. Kumar, "Machine Learning for the Geosciences: Challenges and Opportunities," in IEEE Transactions on Knowledge and Data Engineering, vol. 31, no. 8, pp. 1544-1554, 1 Aug. 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1109/TKDE.2018.2861006>

Liakos, K.G., Busato, P., Moshou, D., Pearson, S. and Bochtis, D., 2018. Machine learning in agriculture: A review. *Sensors*, 18(8), p.2674. <https://doi.org/10.3390/s18082674>

Liu, Z., Peng, C., Work, T., Candau, J.N., DesRochers, A. and Kneeshaw, D., 2018. Application of machine-learning methods in forest ecology: recent progress and future challenges. *Environmental Reviews*, 26(4), pp.339-350. <https://doi.org/10.1139/er-2018-0034>

Pichler, M. and Hartig, F., 2023. Machine learning and deep learning—A review for ecologists. *Methods in Ecology and Evolution*, 14(4), pp.994-1016. <https://doi.org/10.1111/2041-210X.14061>

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