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Assessing soil water content variation in a small mountainous catchment over different time scales and land covers using geographical variables

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1 Introduction

Soil water content (SWC) is a key variable in hydrology because it affects soil-atmosphere interactions that control hydrological processes at the catchment scale (Quinn *et al.*, 1993; Bogena *et al.*, 2010). SWC observations are used for data aggregation, hydrological modeling, and upscaling (Romano, 2014) to study processes such as drought (Broedel *et al.*, 2017; Abdelli *et al.*, 2017), flood forecasting (Hapuarachchi *et al.*, 2011), soil-surface exchanges (Tromp-van Meerveld and McDonnell, 2006), rainfall-runoff transformations (Tramblay *et al.*, 2010), and aquifer recharge (Dobriyal *et al.*, 2012). Studying SWC spatio-temporal variability is a challenge because it is determined by numerous factors such as atmospheric forcing, topography, soil properties, and vegetation, which interact differently according to seasons and moisture conditions (Grayson and Western, 1998; Western *et al.*, 2004). Most studies on SWC spatial organization have focused on SWC temporal persistence through the identification of stable patterns (Comegna and Basile, 1994; Mohanty and Skaggs, 2001; De Lannoy *et al.*, 2006; Hu *et al.*, 2010). But in the case of flood generation processes, especially flash flood, the mapping of SWC is required at very short time steps (less than 20 min) to get the event dynamics. For example, event-scale SWC variation maps are needed for the identification of runoff-contributing areas dynamics within catchments. High frequency SWC mapping remains a methodological challenge because areal SWC estimation depends on both the investigation scale and the measurement technique (Robinson *et al.,* 2008) but also on the high heterogeneity of soil in three dimensions.

Several methods have been recently developed to measure SWC at the catchment scale. For example, airborne monitoring has emerged in recent years. These methods are based on remote sensing approaches using passive and active micro-waves as well as radar or multi-spectra waves (Ochsner et.al, 2013) that are characterized by a limited spatio-temporal resolution and accuracy (Brocca *et al,* 2012) even if new generation of SWC estimated from Sentinel-1 are produced at

high resolution in agricultural areas (El Hajj et al., 2017). Indeed, remote sensing provides observations at a resolution coarser than what is required for hillslope monitoring. Moreover, satellite soil moisture is generally representative of surface soil moisture because sensors cannot explore deep through the soil. The development of airborne based sensors (thermal infra-red) makes it possible to monitor soil moisture with higher accuracy and geometric correction has become easier with recent photogrammetry and drone mapping software but sensors and flight missions are expensive and time consuming especially in mountainous environments (Baghdadi, 2005). Space-averaged SWC is also assessed from the non-invasive cosmic ray sensor, which provides time-lapse measurements in a limited area defined by a radius of 300 m around the sensor (Zreda *et al.*, 2008; Bogena *et al.*, 2013; Köhli *et al.*, 2015). But SWC estimation is integrated over a 30 ha area and SWC variation over the measurement area is unknown. Hydrogeophysical techniques such as Ground Penetrating Radar (Huisman *et al.*, 2003; Dubreuil-Boisclair *et al.*, 2011), Electrical Resistivity Tomography (Zhou *et al.*, 2001), multi-temporal resistivity measurements (Brunet *et al.*, 2010) and Electromagnetic Induction (Kashanoski, 1988) have also been used to estimate SWC spatial variability (Michot *et al.*, 2003) on transects, hillslopes, and fields. The pedotransfer function approach has been tested using the relationship between soil electrical resistivity and soil moisture (Brillante et.al, 2014). But SWC retrieval from these techniques is discussed, especially due to their site-dependence (Calamita *et al.*, 2015). At the hillslope scale, recent studies showed that the use of fiber-optic distributed temperature sensing (Selker *et al.*, 2006; Cao *et al.* 2016) could be a valuable approach for 2D observation of soil water dynamics but this innovative method needs a complex calibration procedure according to soil type (porosity, mineralogy, diffusion coefficient) (Krzeminska *et al.* 2012).

In most cases, SWC rate variations across scales have been estimated from a network of local ground-based sensors. In situ SWC plot scale measurements have been greatly improved in the last several decades due to new technologies and devices allowing monitoring in almost all

kind of soils. Invasive methods such as Time Domain Reflectometry (TDR) (Topp *et al.*, 1980), Frequency Domain Reflectometry (FDR) (Jones *et al.*, 2005; Vereecken *et al.*, 2014), and Time Domain Transmissometry (TDT) (Blonquist *et al.*, 2005) make it possible to produce SWC time series along vertical or horizontal profiles (Martini *et al.*, 2017) using soil dielectric permittivity measurements. Nowadays, these probes are usually available at affordable prices and are easy to install in the field. However, significant uncertainties regarding actual values may arise owing to the derivation of SWC from the permittivity measurement or the sensor raw signal *via* calibration equations that depend on temperature and soil texture. Several methods have been proposed to obtain soil moisture maps at higher spatial and temporal resolution from plot scale measurements, primarily based on geostatistical analysis (Western *et al.*, 1999; Brocca *et al.*, 2010), temporal stability analysis (Vachaud *et al.*, 1985; Zhu *et al.*, 2020), the use of empirical orthogonal functions (Jawson and Niemann, 2007), or wavelet coherency analysis (Biswas and Si, 2011). Most of these geostatistical approaches have referred to multiple correlation analysis and variogram models (Ver Hoef, 1993). Geostatistical analyses aim at establishing space-time relationships between SWC and local variables such as porosity or soil electrical conductivity (Kachanosky *et al.*, 1990; Brevik *et al.*, 2006 ; Altdorff *et al.*, 2017), topography as a control of vegetation, soil depth, and by extension, evaporation and evapotranspiration processes (Blyth *et al.*, 2004), or land use (Bardossy, 1998).

Several recent studies using those techniques have investigated the links between land surface characteristics and the spatial distribution of SWC at the catchment scale, as well as the link between topography and SWC/runoff thresholds (Vanderlinden *et al.*, 2012; Penna *et al.*, 2013; Braud *et al.*, 2017). They have highlighted that these controls are very different according to the catchment geographic, climatic and physiographic properties. In a 1.9 km² alpine headwater catchment in the Italian Dolomites, Penna *et al.* (2011) observed that riparian zones reached rapidly saturation and contribute mainly to low runoff ratios. Conversely, high runoff ratios were

associated to subsurface flows on hillslopes occurring during wet period when soils were close to saturation and flowpaths between the hillslope and riparian zone became connected (Sidle *et al.*, 2000; Ocampo *et al.*, 2006; Zuecco *et al.*, 2013; Mallet *et al.*, 2018). This study also showed that during dry period streamflows occurred before SWC reached saturation and conversely during wet period. In a 0.08 km² forested catchment in Pennsylvania (USA), Fan *et al.* (2020) observed that SWC temporal variability was higher on north facing hillslopes compared to south facing hillslopes and that downslope areas were usually wetter than upslope areas. They also observed that SWC became spatially more variable but temporally more stable with depth, which was also observed by Zhu *et al.* (2020) in a subalpine semi-arid catchment in China. The same observation was made between dry warm seasons and wet cold seasons. Slope shape also impact SWC spatial variability, storage and water availability for runoff (Moore *et al.*, 1988; Liu and Luo, 2010; Corrao *et al.*, 2017). Concaved slopes favor water concentrations which lead to higher SWC spatial variability compared to flat areas. Conversely, convex slopes have shallower infiltration depth and lower near surface SWC (Green and Erskine, 2011). Vegetation cover and land use also have a strong impact on SWC spatial and temporal variability since it's highly correlated to topography (Vereecken, 2008). SWC variability among different vegetation types depend on complex variables such as vegetation coverage, root distribution and depth or tree size and spacing (Rodriguez-Iturbe, I., 2000; Ni *et al.*, 2019; Wei *et al.*, 2019; Stevens *et al.*, 2020). Eventually, geostatistical analyses help fill spatial SWC data gaps at the catchment scale but producing high frequency SWC maps at the event time scale in a mountainous catchment remains a methodological challenge (Tromp van Meerveld *et al.*, 2009).

SWC monitoring in sloppy catchments is challenging because they are highly complex. Topography and climatic forcing intensity and variability can make it difficult to access a large area of the catchment. Focusing on the hillslope scale is a way to monitor hydrological processes at smaller scale but some studies warn about the unique behavior of each hillslope which makes

their monitoring inappropriate to understand the catchment hydrological behavior (Beven, 2000; Sivapalan, 2003). These studies highlight the heterogeneity of soil hydraulic conductivity, lateral and vertical flow paths, soil depth and layers. To study subsurface flow processes in the Panola Mountains (PMRW, USA), Meerveld *et al.* (2006) developed a complex monitoring on a single hillslope. This kind of monitoring is very effective but difficult to reproduce elsewhere in the catchment because of its cost and extent. In arid badlands, Gallart *et al.* (2013) showed how complex it is to monitor soil water content because of the lack of vegetation and shallow soils. The lack of vegetation associated to sloppy areas induces large erosion rates and mass movements. Intense storms and wind erosion contributes to the development of dense gully network which make it difficult to make long time soil water content monitoring. In the Zin Valley badlands (Israel), Khun *et al.* (2004) studied runoff generation processes on hillslopes without soil water content probes because there is almost no soil layer. Moreover, only extreme rainfall intensities can generate runoff but at the same time high erosion rate.

In a mountainous, highly erosive environment, previous studies in the Draix-Bléone research observatory have focused on rainfall impacts on runoff and erosion rates (Borges, 1993; Descroix *et al.*, 2003), but also on infiltration processes in heterogeneous marl formations (Garel *et al.*, 2012), and on the discrimination of contributing reservoirs to outflow during flood events (Cras, 2007). Experiments have highlighted the strong variability of infiltration rates in black marl (from 9.E-7 $m.s^{-1}$ to 1E-5 $m.s^{-1}$) and the difficulty of precisely following water fluxes due to the diversity and complexity of the marl structure (Mathys *et al.*, 2006). Moreover, making direct measurements or field observations is not possible during rainfall events due to flash flood hazards. During inter-flood periods, field instrumentation is often damaged due to changes of river morphology or hillslope instability. This situation is common in headwater catchments and explains why soil water content has only been little investigated in such environments. The present study is innovative as it is the first attempt to measure in such environments water

content continuously at the catchment scale and not just on a plot, a hillslope, or a vertical profile. Moreover, measurements are made in different land covers and not only in bare areas.

In this context, the main objective of this study was to explore the short time SWC dynamics in a mountainous highly reactive headwater catchment and its distribution over area from a set of plot scale sensors. A capacitance sensors network has been used to monitor SWC every 15 min at the catchment scale in forest, grassland, and black marl (bare soil) during the summer and autumn periods. The resulting data were used as input in a geostatistical model that links SWC to catchment geomorphological variables by regression and kriging. The specific objectives of the study were to: 1/ analyze how geographical variables influence SWC variations at different time steps, 2/ quantify the relationships between rainfall, SWC, vegetation cover and outflow at the event scale, 3/ examine event scale SWC dynamics among land covers to identify partition between subsurface flow types.

2 Survey area

The study area is the Laval catchment, located within the Experimental Research Hydrological Network Draix-Bléone in the Southern Alps, France (part of the eLTER infrastructure DEIMS.iD: https://deims.org/be7fcb7d-d3c2-486d-a437-4754d18ca1ca). Instruments installed in the catchment have monitored outflow, rainfall and erosion (Fig. 1) since 1983. Outflows are measured at the outlet using a Parshall type gauging station. A rain gauge is installed at the outlet of the catchment while a second one is located on the ridges upstream. A weather station at the outlet of the catchment has provided data on wind speed and direction, solar radiation, relative humidity and air temperature since 2000. Analysis of aerial photographs made it possible to follow bare surfaces evolution since 1948. A first land use map was drawn up by Vallauri in 1997.

Recently, a LidAr survey provided a high spatial resolution DEM (1 m) (Sintegra, 2011). Elevations in this small torrential headwater catchment (0.86 km²) range from 850 m at the outlet to 1200 m. The Laval catchment is known for its high specific discharges during flood events, which may exceed 10 $m^3/s/km^2$ (Mathys *et al.*, 2003). The local climate is sub Mediterranean with continental trend (Joly, 2010) and is defined by high solar radiation (> 2300 hour / year) with mild winters (little snow cover) and very dry summers. Mean annual rainfall is 800 mm (STD = 170 mm; observed period from 1987 to 2015). The local relief and the presence of material that is extremely sensitive to erosion (black marl of Bathonian, Callovian, and lower Oxfordian ages) explain the permanent dense gully network. Rainfall impact varies across seasons with high rainfall intensity during summer storms whereas spring and fall events are characterized by lower intensity and longer duration rainfall. Previous studies have provided detailed information on soil types (Maquaire *et al.*, 2002), soil properties (hydraulic conductivity, porosity, bulk density) (Malet *et al.*, 2005), and black marl sensitivity to runoff (Mathys *et al.*, 2005).

Fig. 1. Survey area - Laval headwater catchment - ORE Draix-Bléone - Alpes-de-haute-Provence - Southern French Alps

3 Material and method

The methodological approach developed in this paper to better understand SWC variation in space and time consists in 3 steps (Fig. 2): 1/ Designing a capacitance sensor network to monitor SWC between 10 and 20 cm depth in various land use and soil types. Once the probes are setup in

the field, they are calibrated using soils samples extracted at each probe location. 2/ Monitoring SWC at a 15 min time step in addition to rainfall and outflow measurements to study the catchment hydrological behavior at the event time scale. 3/ Estimating SWC using a geostatistical model based on geographical variables to represent the probe location situation. 4/ identifying the dominant flow mechanism on hillslopes at the event time scale from the wetting curve maximum slope method (Lozano-Parra et al., 2015).

Fig. 2. Overview of the methodological approach

3.1 In situ measurements

3.1.1 Presentation of capacitance sensors

Selected sub-catchments were equipped for SWC monitoring from May 2016 to November 2016. This investigation was based on FDR probes (10HS by *Decagon Devices* ®). Less expensive than TDR and relatively easy to set in the soil, the 10HS probe makes it possible to measure SWC continuously on large scale through a network of autonomous sensors. The soil and the probe electrodes are used as a capacitor whose capacity varies according to the soil dielectric permittivity which is related to the presence of water (Qu et al., 2013). The sensor uses a 70 MHz frequency that minimizes salinity and textural effects, and the 10 cm long probe has an influence volume of about 1.3 liter. Fourteen capacitance probes were set up in different soil types in the survey area: 4 in the black marl, 4 in grassland, and 6 in forest (Table 1). The monitoring was carried out using a 15 min time step. The 10HS probes were vertically positioned to give an average SWC between -10 cm (bottom of electrode) and -20 cm (top of electrode) depth. At the plot scale, SWC was also measured vertically using PR2 probes (*Delta-T Devices* ®). These sensors were carried on to different points and measurements were done into a plastic tube. SWC were

obtained at four depths (10 cm, 20 cm, 30 cm and 40 cm) by measuring the dielectric constant of the soil using capacitance/time domain technology. Vertical monitoring from May to June 2016 showed that most SWC variations occurred between 10 cm and 20 cm in grassland and forest in the study area. It is important to note that some astonishing behavior could be monitored due to improper set up. Indeed, FDR probes present a high sensitivity to soil contact and can be strongly impacted in case of air gaps between the soil matrix and the sensor. Air gaps are due to black marl structure complexity and instability near surface, to stones and tunnels created by animals especially in grassland, and mainly to roots and stones in forest, but also to freeze/thaw process (Mallet, 2018).

Table 1. Soil type and properties at the plot scale

Plot	Land Cover	Classification (INTL)	Porosity	Bulk density (kg/m^3)	Slope	Orientation
B1	Black marl	Clay loam	0.302	1.86	30	SE
B2	Black marl	Clay loam	0.356	1.73	10	S
B3	Black marl	Clay loam	0.409	1.55	25	NE
B4	Black marl	Clay loam	0.414	1.54	30	NE
F1	Forest	Silty loam	0.469	1.40	5	S
F2	Forest	Silty loam	0.434	1.49	15	W
F3	Forest	Silty loam	0.452	1.45	15	N
F4	Forest	Silty loam	0.502	1.32	15	N
F5	Forest	Silty loam	0.447	1.46	15	N
F6	Forest	Silty loam	0.494	1.36	20	NW
G1	Grassland	Silty clay loam	0.498	1.33	15	S
G2	Grassland	Silty clay loam	0.457	1.40	20	SW
G3	Grassland	Silty clay loam	0.466	1.41	20	SW
G4	Grassland	Silty clay loam	0.457	1.41	10	SE

3.1.2 Calibration of 10HS capacitance sensors

SWC values were obtained from soil electrical permittivity, which was computed from the raw 10HS probe signal. SWC data obtained from 10HS probe using the third-order polynomial calibration function provided by the manufacturer (Decagon Devices, 2016) were compared to water content values extracted from in situ soil samples collected from depths of -10 cm to -20 cm. Soil samples were collected from each plot scale using 10 cm long cores (from -10 cm to -20 cm depth) under different hydric conditions. Results showed that SWC monitored in forest fitted the manufacturer theoretical law. A different calibration function was developed from soils sampled in grassland and black marl (Mallet *et al*., 2018). Sensor accuracy was found to be +/- 3% in forest and +/- 4% in grassland and black marl, which is a reasonable estimate of mean SWC patterns at the watershed scale.

3.1.3 Network optimization

Studying spatial variability of water content in the upper soil layer is a complex task as it strongly depends on the scale of analysis. Using a sensor network continuously measuring SWC makes it possible to get spatial data at small scales such as plots, transects, hillslopes and small catchments. Regarding the Laval catchment size, the survey budget, manpower, and the distance from the lab to the experimental field, a network of few sensors was setup to provide data at the plot scale (Blume *et al.*, 2009). To optimize the spatial distribution of the network, homogeneous soil-landscape patterns with potentially specific hydrologic behaviors were delineated (Dehotin and Braud, 2008). Such landform-units were defined according to hydrological criteria (stream network and sub-catchment classification), land cover, soil type, and topography (slope, hillslope orientation). In this study, a four-step method has been applied (Fig. 3) as follows:

1/ Sub-catchments were delineated using the Strahler stream network classification (Strahler, 1952; Le Barbu, 2006). Only sub-catchments of order 3, 4 and 5 whose main talweg is connected to the main network were selected for this stage. They represent a minimum surface of 1 ha which exceeds the surface of an elementary gully whose hydrological behavior is already known (Mathys, 2006).

2/ Theoretical surface flow concentration areas were then mapped using the RuiCells cellular automaton (Langlois and Delahaye, 2002) which establishes a link between topographic variables, the catchment morphology (size and form), and hydraulic variables. Using a 10 m DEM (1 m DEM could not be used because of the model computational capacities), a spatially homogeneous rainfall, and considering a zero infiltration capacity of the soil, Ruicells produces a surface flow concentration map. Surface flow concentration is computed at each sub-catchment outlet by the Concentration Index (CI) which takes into account the density of the stream network upstream of each sub-catchment outlet (Douvinet *et.al*, 2015). The produced map makes it possible to better understand the catchment potential hydrological response from the sub-catchment to the final outlet (Douvinet, 2008). For instance, very marked surface water flow concentrations (CI > 10) can be observed at the outlets of several sub-basins of orders 3, 4 and 5 and at several confluences (in the main network) while some sub-catchments show very low IC index. This step highlights the heterogeneity of the catchment potential hydrological response and helps to identify potential SWC measurements plots.

3/ The percentage of bare and vegetated surfaces (forest, grassland) was then calculated on the sub-catchments and compared with the potential surface flow concentration areas identified in step 2. Sub-catchments marked with CI> 10 have various land covers: the proportion of vegetated areas varies from 11% to 82%, while bare soils are between 17% and 88%. It is

therefore interesting to target the investigation on sub-catchments with various CI and land cover. Eventually, four sub-catchments with various size, morphology, land cover, soil types and network ordination were selected for the investigation.

4/ Soil type map (Maquaire et.al, 2002) was then combined with land cover map which made it possible to identify the most represented land covers within the Laval basin. In order to concentrate the analysis on the most represented soil-vegetation units, only the first six classes obtained were retained which represent 72.9% of the Laval total surface.

5/ SWC probes were then setup in the six classes identified in step 4 within the selected sub-catchments in step 3. Final probe location depended on slope, hillslope orientation, and accessibility.

Fig. 3. A four-step method to obtain an optimal capacitance sensors network in the study area

Comparison of SWC values requires homogenous spatial distribution of rainfall over the catchment at the event scale. For this purpose, rainfall spatial variability was studied at the event scale with the addition of 3 rain gauges (*Rainwise*®) set up inside the catchment away from vegetation cover (Fig. 2). Their location was based on elevation, distance to the outlet, and accessibility (Table 2). Fourteen rainfall events were studied in 2016. For each event, each rain gauge data were compared to data measured at the catchment outlet (*Précis Mécanique* ®).

Table 2. Laval rain gauges

Rain Gauge	Setup	Elevation (m)	Distance from outlet (m)
P0	1984	851	0

P1	2015	900	690
P4	2015	890	380
P6	2015	915	878

3.2 Geostatistical modeling framework

3.2.1 Presentation of LISDQS

The LISDQS (Interpolation of Quantitative and Spatial Data) geostatistical model (developed by Joly and Vuidel in 2008 and presented in Joly *et al.*, 2008) was used to estimate SWC at the plot scale considering local geographical variables (Arnaud and Emery, 2000). LISDQS runs a global analysis that computes all measurement plots to produce a single geostatistical model fitting for all plots at each time step. Spatial interpolation of soil moisture measurements is performed by the combination of linear regressions (LR) (Joly *et al.*, 2011) followed by kriging of the residuals using the method « regression-kriging » (RK) described by Hengl et al. (2007). LR is used to fit the explained variation with spatial predictors. The subsequent kriging process used to fit the residuals, i.e. unexplained variation, is ordinary kriging fitted by a single variogram (Spherical model) (Matheron, 1970; Gratton, 2002).

3.2.2 A three-step analysis method

The LISDQS model combines kriging and regression in 3 steps: 1/ Linear Regression between all SWC plot and local variables (topography, vegetation, soil) reveals the variables that best explain the SWC space-time variations (highest R^2 for $P_{value} < 0.05$). These best explanatory variables are then associated 2 by 2, 3 by 3, 4 by 4, etc... (from the best to the worst) in stepwise

multiple regressions (Hocking, 1976). The best combination (with the highest R^2) is applied to all plots to obtain estimated values that are compared to measured values. 2/ Kriging shows the spatial structure of SWC distribution of residuals obtained in the first step. Kriging uses the semi-variogram properties and also computes residuals. 3/ Third step is Residual Kriging. At the end of the first step (LR) and the third step (RK), the estimated soil moisture values are validated by a "leave-one-out" cross-validation (Plutowsky *et al.*, 1994), the process of which is as follows: as many iterations are repeated as there are observations *i*. At each iteration, observation *i* is removed from the sample and the model runs with the new sample. Then using this new model, the predicted value of the withdrawn observation *i* is calculated. A series of predicted values is then obtained which can be compared with the observed values by calculating the residuals of the model. The residuals obtained at the end of phase 1 are estimated by kriging, those obtained at the end of phase 3 are used to estimate root-mean-square error (RMSE). This three-step method makes it possible to improve the spatial interpolation of SWC data by taking into account environmental heterogeneity.

3.2.3 Parameterization

The LISDQS geostatistical model automatically performs a sensitivity analysis for each time step. Linear regressions were computed between SWC measured at the plot scale and the mean value of local variables on a 9 m² area around the plot. This averaging method accounts for the environmental heterogeneity around the SWC probe and not only the value of a 1 m² plot. The linear regressions make it possible to identify the best variables among as many variables as needed to be tested.

SWC was driven by a set of local variables that are used in the geostatistical model. These variables drive different processes that affect SWC variations according to seasons and soil

moisture status. A high-resolution Digital Elevation Model (DEM) (LiDAR, 1m, Panissod *et al.*, 2010) was used to derive 4 topographic variables: curvature index (slope convexity or concavity), soil depth, hillslope orientation defined by sinus (West-Est orientation) and cosinus (North-South orientation). The Normalized Vegetation Index (NDVI) was computed from a SPOT 6/7 image[1] to take into account the land cover influence. It is the most common vegetation index for identifying areas with an elevated chlorophyll activity which are related to vegetation. It computes the difference between red and near-infrared wavelengths and is normalized by the addition of both which reduces the ground lightness. NDVI was calculated from the only SPOT image that covered the survey area during the study period.

Cross correlation analysis showed that the NDVI was positively correlated to solar theoretical radiation which gives for each DEM pixel the solar radiation in W/m² at different time scales. The latter was weakly positively correlated to hillslope orientation (R = 0.55), whereas slope was negatively correlated to NDVI (R = - 0.415) (Table 3). In the study area, gentle slopes are mostly associated with vegetation, which are also among the sunniest areas, while steep slopes are mostly associated with gullies and bare areas. Soil depth was positively correlated to NDVI (R = 0.58) because soils develop with vegetation growth, whereas bare areas are prone to erosion. NDVI is related to interception and evapotranspiration, slope affects subsurface flows (horizontal or vertical), and solar radiation is associated to evapotranspiration whereas soil water storage mostly depends on soil depth. The solar radiation curve followed the same dynamic as NDVI and had an increasing positive correlation with SWC from July to mid-October. Soil depth had a stable positive correlation with SWC over the study period.

Table 3. Correlation (R) between explanatory variables used for the geostatistical modeling.

[1] *Contains informations © 2014, Distribution Airbus Defense & GEOSUD, France, all rights reserved.*

	Sinus	Cosinus	NDVI	Curvature	Soil depth
Sinus	1	0.081	-0.538	-0.034	0.308
Cosinus		1	0.109	-0.04	0.631
NDVI			1	-0.286	0.598
Curvature				1	0.293
Soil depth					1

3.3 Identifying the dominant flow mechanism

Previous studies showed that surface runoff was the main hydrological processes during flood event in the Laval catchment. However, subsurface flow processes also play a key role on the catchment hydrological behavior. During rainfall, preferential flows contribute to fast wetting of shallow soil horizons and to outflows by rapid exchange from soil to streams. On the other hand matrix flows can be observed anytime and in every monitored land covers and affect soil moisture status and water availability for plants. During a rainfall event those two processes can occur simultaneously. To identify the dominant process, the method of the wetting curve maximum slope (*Smax*) as proposed by Lozano-Parra *et al.* (2015) was used. This analysis aims at identifying which process is dominant, but not to quantify its contribution to discharge.

$$\boldsymbol{S_{max} = max\left(\frac{\theta_{t+\Delta t} - \theta_t}{\Delta t}\right) * 10^4}$$

This parameter represents the maximum soil water content increase measured at the event time scale by each probe between two measurements. $\boldsymbol{\theta_t}$ is the SWC value at the time $\boldsymbol{t}$, and $\boldsymbol{\Delta t}$ is the 15 min interval between two measurements. *Smax* was used as an indicator for the degree of slow or fast flows. On this base, it was assumed that low *Smax* value was representative of matrix

flow while high *Smax* was associated to preferential flow (Fig. 4). Intermediate slopes were associated to a mix of both processes.

Fig. 4. Examples of different soil moisture increases monitored during three different flood events.

4 Results

The results are divided in four sections that address the questions proposed in this paper. First, rainfall variability was studied to ensure that SWC data obtained at different locations could be compared and that the geostatistical analysis could be conducted. Then relationship between SWC and discharge was analysed to take into account the catchment near-surface hydric status impact on the catchment hydrological response. Measured and estimated SWC data obtained at daily, hourly and 15 min time scales were then compared to see how geographical variables could be used to determine SWC at the catchment scale under various land use and hydric conditions. Eventually, SWC variations at 15 min time step were analysed and compared to rainfall properties to enhance SWC space-time variation and impact on subsurface flow types.

4.1 Low rainfall spatial variability at the event scale

The event scale analysis showed low variability between the 3 rain gauges inside the catchment (differences ranged from 0.3% to 3.4%) (Fig. 5). On the other hand, differences (from 0.4% to 21.5% of the cumulative rainfall event) occurred between P0 (located at the final outlet) and the other rain gauges, with higher cumulative values measured at P0 at the event scale (mean difference of 6.3%). The largest differences occurred during April 22 and June 16 events with cumulative rainfall lower than 31.2 mm (measured at P0). These differences come from the smaller diameter of P1, P4 and P6 compared to P0. The low spatial variations at the event time

scale showed that rainfall was relatively homogenous over the catchment, which made it possible to conduct the geostatistical analysis at the event scale.

Fig. 5. Cumulated rainfall monitored by 4 rain gauges for 14 rainfall events in 2016. The number over the bar chart is the difference between the highest and the lowest rainfall values recorded by the rain gauges at the event time scale. No rainfall data available on February 7 and March 5 at P4 gauge.

4.2 Relationship between SWC and discharge

Daily SWC variations provided an overview of the catchment wetting/drying dynamics over the study period (Fig. 6). Significant differences between measured SWC were observed among the three main land cover types.

SWC dynamics were similar in vegetated areas although a higher dispersion of SWC values was observed between forest plots (mean SWC difference of 3.9% between F1 and F4) as compared to grassland (mean SWC difference of 0.3% between G2 and G4) because forest sensors are setup on silty loams which have a higher water capacity than the other soils. F1 and F2 sensors globally monitored less variations than the other sensors located in forest. Soil evaporation which has been taken into account by the sensor placed at 10 cm has a strong dynamic especially during wetting period. While during dry period plants extract water in deeper layers and the sensor monitor less variations. It could also be explained by improper installation since F1 and F2 are installed in soils with a lot of roots and stones. The highest daily SWC was measured in forest (SWC = 41.8%) but the SWC variation (SWC max - SWC min) was lower than in the other land covers (SWC values ranging from 20.8% to 41.8% in forest, from 11.2% to 34.8% in grassland, and from 1.8% to 30% in black marl areas).

SWC dynamics was quite different among black marl plots (mean SWC difference of 8.7% between B1 and B2). SWC showed high amplitude (min = 2.5%; max = 30%) but daily SWC variations was smoother than what was observed in rooted soils. Only the B2 probe, located between bare soils and rooted soils, had a similar trend to that of vegetation probes with a short reaction to rainfall. The high variability of SWC across space and time in black marl showed that black marl had the capacity to store and release water during the entire study period which can be explained by the complexity of subsurface exchanges in this medium. This can be explained in particular by the spatial variability of infiltration between the different types of regoliths. Saturation hydraulic conductivities measured on hillslope summit were low which favored surface runoff. Saturation hydraulic conductivities measured on footslopes where weathered marl accumulated were higher and more propitious to infiltration (Mathys and Estèves, 2005).

During the study period, each rainfall events resulting in a flood event (Qmax > 500 l/s) provoked variations on all SWC probes measurements (Fig. 6) as expected since rainfall was found to be quite homogeneous over the catchment. Conversely, some rainfall events did not led to outflow variations despite variations recorded on SWC probes. Between May and the end of November, only 7 rainfall events on a total of 16 with cumulative amount over 30 mm gave rise to floods with discharges over 500 l/s (except for the September 12 event with 18 mm rainfall amount). This rainfall threshold is consistent with past observations (Mathys, 2006).

Fig. 6. SWC time-series data presentation. Daily mean SWC is monitored at 14 plots. River flows are measured at the Laval outlet by a Parshall flume. Rainfall was measured from May 11 until November 29 2016 at the Laval final outlet. Dashed lines indicate flood events (Discharge > 500 l/s).

These catchment outflow variations partly depend on the relative soil dryness/wetness which controls the occurrence of overland flows on the hillslopes. Based on the total volume flowed over the event, this relationship is evidenced by the positive trend observed between the

initial water content and the runoff coefficient, except for the most exceptional flood events where direct surface runoff occur over the main part of the event (Fig. 7, red dot). Peak discharges are usually higher in autumn when the catchment is wet than in summer due to higher cumulative rainfall in autumn compare to summer rainfalls. However, no correlation was observed between the initial soil moisture and the maximum flow rate reached at the outlet. This result illustrates the variability of runoff conditions on the slopes at the peak discharge which change highly according to the events (dominant contribution of hortonian flow or subsurface flow).

Fig. 7. Relationships between runoff coefficient and antecedent soil moisture at the event time scale. The runoff coefficient is the ratio (%) between the amount of water flow and the amount of water precipitated at the event time scale. Antecedent soil moisture is an average value computed from the values of each capacitance probe before rainfall.

4.3 Estimated SWC at daily and hourly time scales

4.3.1 Observed SWC VS estimated SWC

To validate the geostatistical modeling, the model was run using SWC data from 11 sensors instead of 14. Then the 3 remaining sensors (one in forest, one in grassland and one in black marl) were used to validate the model at the daily and hourly time scales which gave similar results (Fig 8). SWC were well estimated in all land uses throughout the study period. The mean error (+/- 2.3%) was lower than the in situ measurement error (from +/3% to +/- 4%). In spring, especially in May, SWC values were underestimated in all land uses. In summer, estimated SWC values fitted quite well with observations until August and early September rainfalls where estimated SWC values were overestimated in grassland and underestimated in forest and black

marl. Estimated SWC values appeared to be overestimated in grassland throughout fall especially from mid September until mid October. Conversely, estimated SWC values fitted with observations in forest and black marls despite underestimations in forest the days after long autumn rainfalls.

Fig. 8. Model validation at daily and hourly time scales.

Measured and estimated SWC values were compared using the linear least squares regression method. Variation of the determination coefficient (R^2) gives an overview of the statistical analysis and how geomorphological variables can be used to estimate SWC variations over different time scales (Fig. 9). However, R^2 values must be interpreted with care since there are only 14 data points in the regressions. First of all, correlations between measured and estimated SWC were better at the hourly time scale in May and June and from the October 14 flood event until the end of November (catchment wetting period) while relationships were better at the daily time scale during summer (catchment drying period). SWC variations often appeared at the same time with higher amplitude at the hourly time scale and a smoother dynamics with the daily data. In most cases, higher correlations were observed during no rainy periods, namely during soil drying by drainage or evaporation losses. However, sharp decreases of R^2 were observed at both time scales during flood events. The loss of correlation with the catchment morphological features at that times shows that SWC variations were mostly controlled by rainfall intensity.

Fig. 9. Relation between measured and estimated SWC (R^2) at daily and hourly time scales. R^2 were computed at both daily and hourly time scales by plotting the 14 measured SWC with the 14 estimated SWC to get one R^2 value every time step. The relationships are significant over the "Student" red dot line.

Time series plots show that SWC were generally correctly simulated in all land covers (Fig. 10). Nevertheless, a few probes showed singular behaviors. For instance, B1 probe (black marl) was poorly simulated (R^2 <0.4) compared to B3 and B4 probes. Also, B1 probe measured very low SWC values from summer until the end of September while B3 and B4 were highly reactive to the first autumn rainfall event (September 12). It could be explained by improper setup and air gaps between the marl and the probe electrodes since B1 is installed between marls layers. This installation was hard but it was important to monitor that kind of zone since it is highly represented at the catchment scale. Measurements obtained at this location need to be interpreted with caution. In grassland, G1 probe showed a very low R^2 (< 0.2) with lower values and larger variation of the simulated SWC compared to observations. Conversely, F1 probe set up in forest measured higher SWC values and much lower variations than the estimated SWC. These shortcomings were assumed to be the result of improper set up.

Fig. 10. Some examples of relationships between measured and estimated SWC (R^2) at some plots in various monitored land covers at the hourly time scale.

4.3.2 Weight of local geographical variables in the geostatistical model

At both daily and hourly time scales, the weighted model gives information about wetting/drying processes using mainly 3 variables: soil depth, curvature index and NDVI. During wetting periods, the model estimated SWC by combining mainly curvature index and NDVI (Fig. 11), except during high flows where rainfall intensity had a major impact on SWC variations. During drying periods, SWC was primarily estimated by combining soil depth and NDVI. NDVI weight never exceeds 20% but is constantly used over the study period as it is related to interception, evaporation and evapotranspiration processes. Curvature index controls drainage

processes and has a strong weight in the model during rainfall and from mid October until mid July. Soil depth has a strong weight from mid July until mid October as it is linked to recharge processes by controlling soil water storage capacity. In early fall (mid September until mi October), the weighted model varied using mainly soil depth, curvature index and cosinus (which is related to soil depth (R = 0.631)). No flood event appeared during this period but grouped rainfall events leaded to successive wetting/drainage processes at short time steps.

Fig. 11. Representation of the primary weighting of local variables in the weighted model at both daily and hourly time scales.

4.4 Estimated SWC at event time scale (15 min)

4.4.1 Observed SWC VS estimated SWC

The overall relationship between measured and estimated SWC was computed from all 14 capacitance probes for each of the 7 flood events that appeared from may until November 2016 (Fig. 12). The relationship is statistically significant over a threshold of $R^2 = 0.53$ ($P_{value} = 0.05$). At a 15 min time step, correlations between measured and estimated SWC (R^2) had the tendency to decrease when rainfall intensity increased and in return to increase when rainfall stopped or intensity was very low (< 2 mm/h at a 15 min time step). This increase of R^2 during drainage is consistent with observations made at the daily and hourly time steps. R^2 decreases were larger at the beginning of rainfall events. For instance, a rainfall intensity of 8 mm/h occurring at the beginning of the storm induced a higher R^2 decrease than a rainfall intensity of 40 mm/h that happened almost 2 hours after the rainfall began (Fig. 12, October 14 event). The same

observations could be made during a long autumn rainfall (840 min) where a maximum rainfall intensity of 8 mm/h (at a 15 min time step) during the first part of the event caused a higher R^2 decrease (from 0.8 to 0.6) than a maximum rainfall intensity of 10 mm/h (at a 15 min time step) that occurred later (Fig. 12, November 21/22 event). Also, a delay was observed between rainfall and R^2 variation induced by infiltration time and the different SWC rising times (for each probe, time between the beginning of rainfall and the change of the slope in the SWC rising). This delay was negatively related to rainfall intensity. SWC were better estimated during November storm flows caused by long rainfall events with low intensity when the catchment was wet (high mean SWC and low SWC variations). During summer, flood events caused by shorter and more intense rainfall when the catchment was dry (high SWC variations) resulted in poorer correlations.

Fig. 12. Overall relationships between measured and estimated SWC (R^2) at the event time scale.

Time series plot shows that SWC dynamics were well estimated in most situations (Fig. 13). Observed values were underestimated or overestimated according to the plot with a maximum deviation of about 5% water content. Nevertheless, singular behaviors were observed at few plots such as the absence of SWC reactions to rainfall (e.g. F1 and F2 probes) despite measurements recorded by the closest rain gauges under vegetation cover (10 m from F1 and 70 m from F2). This could be explained by soil hydrophobia due to the absence of rainfall event since 8 days. Moreover, no rainfall with amount over 6.8 mm happened since 16 days. Hydrophobia had already been observed in July 2015 during soil infiltration experiments.

Fig. 13. Some examples of different kind of relationships between SWC measured and estimated during the June 16 event.

4.4.2 Relationship between SWC and rainfall properties

At the event time scale, SWC variations mostly depend on rainfall intensity, which varies according to season, and on the initial SWC before rainfall which also varies according to land covers. The reaction time (*ReacT*) is defined as the time between the beginning of rainfall and the beginning of SWC increase at the sensor depth. Rising time (*RisT*) is defined as the time between the start of SWC increase at the sensor depth and the moment of the peak. Amplitude (*Amp*) is defined as the ratio between the SWC peak and the initial SWC value (before rainfall starts). *ReacT* (Table 4) was generally shorter in grassland than in black marl and forest. In black marl, the larger reactivity delay measured at the depth interval 10-20 cm can be explained by the material anisotropy due to marl layer bedding and orientation, which results in shallow preferential lateral subsurface flows (0 - 10cm) (Calvo-Cases *et al.*, 1991; Castillo *et al.*, 2003; Cantón *et al.*, 2011; Garel *et al.*, 2012). In forest areas, water reaches the soil with a delay that depends on tree canopy interception. *ReacT* observed during intense summer rainfall events was minimal in grassland. In black marl, the shortest *ReacT* was observed during autumn rainfall events. *Amp* dynamics in grassland and black marl were similar at the event time scale. Low *Amp* observed in forest areas was due to high SWC throughout the study period. Nonetheless, very similar SWC variations could be observed among all land covers during the November 24/25 rainfall event due to a high mean SWC value at the catchment scale (88.6 mm cumulative rainfall during the November 21/22 event). Eventually, there was a clear distinction between seasons, with shorter *ReacT* and *RisT* during summer events (June 16; June 18; September 12) than during autumn events (October 14; November 4/5; November 21/22; November 24/25).

Table 4. Plot scale SWC variation at the event time scale - mean values by land cover.

Event Rainfall		SWC rate variation	Black marl	Forest	Grassland
June 16					
Cumulative rainfall (mm)	31.2	Rising time (min)	65	61	35

Mean intensity (mm/h)	5.43	Increase time (min)	190	240	170
Maximum intensity (mm/h)	24.0	Amplitude (%)	23.4	16.5	33.1
June 18					
Cumulative rainfall (mm)	36.8	Rising time (min)	50	40	35
Mean intensity (mm/h)	8.66	Increase time (min)	120	100	55
Maximum intensity (mm/h)	31.2	Amplitude (%)	17.1	12.2	17.8
September 12					
Cumulative rainfall (mm)	17.8	Rising time (min)	72	68	65
Mean intensity (mm/h)	4.45	Increase time (min)	172	130	70
Maximum intensity (mm/h)	28.8	Amplitude (%)	18.6	19.1	28.7
October 14					
Cumulative rainfall (mm)	54.2	Rising time (min)	122	138	55
Mean intensity (mm/h)	2.85	Increase time (min)	155	240	215
Maximum intensity (mm/h)	40	Amplitude (%)	35.4	23.1	28.7
November 4/5					
Cumulative rainfall (mm)	46.8	Rising time (min)	235	240	210
Mean intensity (mm/h)	1.66	Increase time (min)	1040	1075	1090
Maximum intensity (mm/h)	12	Amplitude (%)	25.6	19.2	17.2
November 21/22					
Cumulative rainfall (mm)	88.6	Rising time (min)	255	287	195
Mean intensity (mm/h)	2.38	Increase time (min)	965	1100	1430
Maximum intensity (mm/h)	9.6	Amplitude (%)	19.2	11.6	16.1
November 24/25					
Cumulative rainfall (mm)	98.2	Rising time (min)	30	63	50
Mean intensity (mm/h)	2.85	Increase time (min)	130	916	85
Maximum intensity (mm/h)	12.8	Amplitude (%)	15.2	15.7	18.5

Several parameters such as the cumulative rainfall, the number of days since antecedent rainfall events, rainfall duration, rainfall mean and maximum intensity, initial SWC, *ReacT*, *RisT* and *Amp* were crossed in order to find out relationships allowing to better understand SWC dynamics at the event scale and among monitored land covers (Fig. 14). Three significant relationships emerged from this analysis. Mean rainfall intensity was inversely correlated to *ReacT* and *RisT*. High mean rainfall intensity leaded to short reaction and short rising time whatever the

land cover. An expected correlation was observed between initial SWC and *Amp*. Low initial SWC induced higher SWC variations. However, this relationship was different according to the monitored land covers: SWC variations proved lower in forest than in grassland and black marl. Moreover, initial SWC ranged from 7% to 27% in black marl, from 13% to 32% in grassland, and from 22% to 41% in forest. From these observations, it can be concluded that soils under forest have a greater storage capacity (higher porosity) but drainage is better in soils under grassland (higher transmissivity).

Fig. 14. Three significant relationships between rainfall properties and some SWC index (initial SWC, variation amplitude) at the plot scale and the event time scale.

4.4.3 Subsurface flow processes

98 *Smax* values were computed from the seven studied flood events (Fig. 15). Low *Smax* (< 1000) represented 45% of measured *Smax* and were mainly associated to November events. The frequency of low *Smax* increased from the beginning to the end of November according to the catchment wetting. Low *Smax* were almost equally observed in every monitored land cover with a higher number of observations in forest due to a higher number of monitored plots (6 against 4 in black marl and 4 in grassland). The frequency of *Smax* between 1000 and 5000 was lower in forest and black marl than in grassland. High *Smax* (> 5000) were only measured during summer events and during the first fall event (October 14). *Smax* > 6000 were mainly measured in grassland.

Relationships between *Smax*, land cover and initial SWC are consistent with observations made in Fig. 4. High *Smax* were more often observed in grassland where the probes reacted more quickly to rainfall due to higher transmissivity of soils and to the limited impact of interception.

Conversely, low *Smax* were predominant in forest due to lower drainage capacity and high interception by trees. *Smax* observed in black marl were similar to the *Smax* in the forest although isolated observations of very high *Smax* were observed. Occurrence of subsurface flow in black marl is explained by the anisotropic nature of the material involving preferential lateral flow.

Fig. 15. Frequency distribution of *Smax* calculated from all sensors at 15 cm depth. Left graph shows *Smax* frequency distribution by land cover. Right graph shows *Smax* frequency distribution by event.

5 Discussions

5.1 Remarks on SWC measurements

Detailed knowledge of SWC absolute values over the catchment would require a network of numerous probes that would entail high costs to install and to maintain in good conditions. Finally, a capacitance sensor network composed of a small number of low cost probes was suitable for studying SWC mean variation at daily, hourly and event time scales in the Laval catchment. This is supported by recent findings of Mälicke *et al.* (2020) who demonstrated (from a study in the 19.4 km² Colpach catchment) that a minimal number of SWC sensors could capture soil moisture dynamics at the catchment scale and explain its hydrological dynamic. Sensors location strategy is a key point in the purpose of estimating soil moisture mean status at the catchment scale. This strategy is usually based on identified soil-landscape units using different geostatistical methodologies (Corradini, 2014 ; Zhuo *et al*., 2020). Backing up the existing probe network with other sensors to monitor SWC in the identified soil-landscape units elsewhere in the catchment could enhance the proposed methodology by validating mean porosity values measured among land covers to characterize SWC more accurately. Eventually, *Smax* analysis

741 would have been enhanced if SWC data obtained by the same sensors at multiple depths were
742 available.
743
744 Extreme SWC values (dry or wet) are a key point impacting soil water exchanges (Teuling *et*
745 *al.*, 2006). Mittlebach *et al.* (2011) showed that accuracy measurement of 10HS sensor decreases
746 with increased SWC, which results in overestimation at low SWC and underestimation at high
747 SWC (> 40%) especially in clay soils. Extreme SWC values measured by 10HS in the Laval
748 catchment (values corrected by field-calibration) were near 0% but never exceeded 40% in black
749 marl, whereas they were never less than 12% and regularly exceeded 40% in forest and grassland
750 at the event time scale. It is well known that SWC capacitance sensor accuracy depends on the
751 effect of the monitored soil properties on site-specific calibration. On this basis, a specific effort
752 must be made to reduce measurement errors, especially for extreme high values. Mittlebach *et*
753 *al.* (2011) showed that specific site-calibration of the 10HS sensor can help reduce measurement
754 error to 2% (with error values ranging from -7% to 3% in loamy soils and from -8% to 5% in clayey
755 soils). In the Laval catchment, the forest field-site calibration was similar to the manufacturer's
756 calibration, whereas the field-site calibration was different in grassland and black marl. The field-
757 site calibration reduced the 10HS sensor mean measurement error from 12% to 3% in grassland
758 and from 11% to 4% in black marl. It is assumed that a 4% mean measurement error is reasonable
759 for estimating mean SWC patterns at the catchment scale. Moreover, estimated SWC values in
760 the investigated and validation plots were primarily less than measurement error.
761
762 **5.2 Explanatory variables and SWC estimation**
763
764 The five variables used in the geostatistical model were appropriate for estimating SWC at
765 the catchment scale. Regarding relationships between some of these variables, questions about
766 the impact of each variable in the geostatistical model could be asked. What impact if only NDVI

767 and soil depth were used to run the model? Different combinations from 2 to 5 variables were
768 tested. The difference in estimated SWC using two variables (mean R^2 = 0.84) and five variables
769 (R^2 = 0.88) was very low. But except for curvature index, each variable enhanced the SWC
770 estimation during rainfall periods. However, these variables give a simplified understanding of
771 SWC variation at the catchment scale. Using soil properties could help explain SWC variation at
772 the event time scale. Indeed, regolith type, thickness, dip orientation, porosity, and soil infiltration
773 capacity are parameters that affect SWC and runoff generation at the hillslope scale, which
774 contribute to the hydrological complexity of badlands (Kuhn *et al.*, 2004). But at present time it
775 was not possible to properly map these data.
776
777 Finally, model uncertainties can be attributed to the low number of measurement plots
778 and the high natural heterogeneity of SWC in a mountainous and steep environment. Even if the
779 model takes into account local variables that affect SWC at the plot scale, estimated values at
780 unmeasured plots are influenced by SWC values of the nearest measured plots (Lhottelier, 2006).
781
782 **5.3 Impact of the catchment hydric status, geomorphology and landuse on SWC-runoff thresholds and**
783 **SWC space-time variability**
784
785 In dry period, peakflow measured in the Laval resulted mainly from hortonian runoff and
786 occurred before peak SWC. In wet period, higher subsurface flow occurrence resulted in an earlier
787 reaction of SWC than streamflow. These delays between max SWC and peakflow are similar to
788 what Penna *et al.* (2011) observed in the 1.9 km² moutainous Rio Vauz catchment (elevations
789 ranging from 1835 m to 3152 m) mainly composed of Dolomitic rock cliffs, steep slopes and a
790 valley bottom covered by Quaternary till. These results highlight a reproducibility of soil
791 hydrological processes despite various land uses and geomorphology. At the seasonal scale, Fan
792 *et. al* (2020) observed in a 0.08 km² forested catchment in Pennsylvania (USA) dominated by a

humid continental climate that SWC was spatially more variable but temporally more stable during wet cold season compared to dry warm season. Observations made in the Laval are different since the Mediterranean climate is very contrasted with a long dry period with rare, short and intense storms while the wet period has a temporally heterogeneous distribution of long and high cumulative rainfalls. Recharge and drainage phases are then easily identified regarding to SWC spatial and temporal dynamic.

In terms of hillslope morphology, Moore *et al.* (1998) observed in a 0.075 km² gully catchment located in New South Wales (Australia) that topographic nonuniformity within small catchments controlled SWC spatial variability and the location of ephemeral gullies. They showed that dry near-surface soils were quite propitious to gullies development. Similar observations were made in the Laval catchment which also has a very dense gully network located on bare areas (Thommeret, 2012). In the Laval the deepest and most durable gullies are located at the bottom of concave hillslopes where near-surface SWC is greater than SWC measured at upslope and mid-slope areas which are more propitious to ephemeral gullies whatever the slope shape. In a 0.56 km² agricultural (essentially wheat) and semi-arid catchment located in Eastern Colorado (USA), Green and Erskine (2011) showed that vertical processes appeared to control SWC profile dynamics at summit positions while infrequent overland flow and unsaturated subsurface lateral flow appeared to control SWC dynamics at downslope positions. Subsurface lateral flow type is also dominant downslope in the Laval catchment whatever the land use. However, situations is quite different at summit and mid-slope in black marl areas regarding to the variability of soil hydraulic conductivity values, material anisotropy and rainfall intensity (Estèves *et al.*, 2005). Thus, summit are more associated to overland flow type while water is transported from summit to hillslope bottom by a combination of overland and lateral subsurface flow processes.

6 Conclusions and outlook

This study showed that mean SWC dynamics can be related to specific soil-vegetation patterns in badlands and that it is possible to distinguish SWC signatures among land covers. Geostatistical modeling using a small number of geographical variables makes it possible to estimate SWC at the plot scale and at daily and hourly time steps. These geographical variables are useful to predict wetness/dryness status at the catchment scale apart from flash flood events. However, it is not possible to determine the impact of these variables on the studied land covers separately. At the event scale, SWC dynamic analysis (*Smax* index) made it possible to show that matrix flow would be associated to long autumn rainfall with low intensity producing low outflow (Qmax < 1500 l/s) and would appear in every land covers (Fig. 16). While preferential flows would be caused by summer storm with high rainfall intensity giving birth to large flood such as the October 14 event (Qmax = 10 000 l/s) and would be more often observed in grassland.

Fig. 16. Relationships between SWC measurement time steps, variables determining SWC, hydrological processes and land covers.

Future work will focus on validating this methodology by modeling hydrological processes with a physically-based model that integrates climate forcing especially on surface runoff. Regarding to high SWC variations it is assumed that black marls area have a major contribution to stream flows whereas water stored in grassland and especially in forests where soils are deeper is primarily lost for runoff. The goal of the future work will be to assess independently the impact of the areal distribution of SWC on runoff generation.

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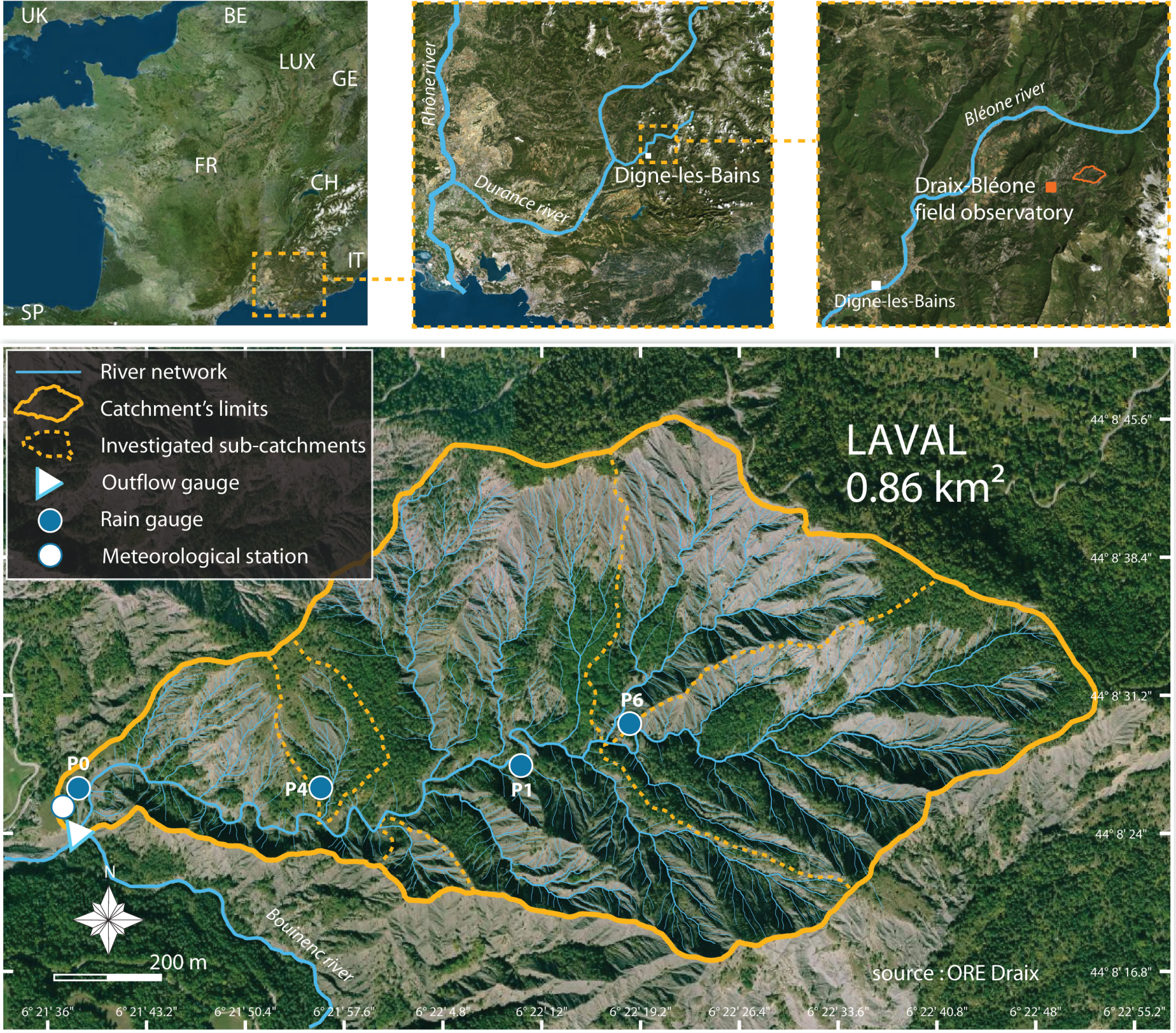
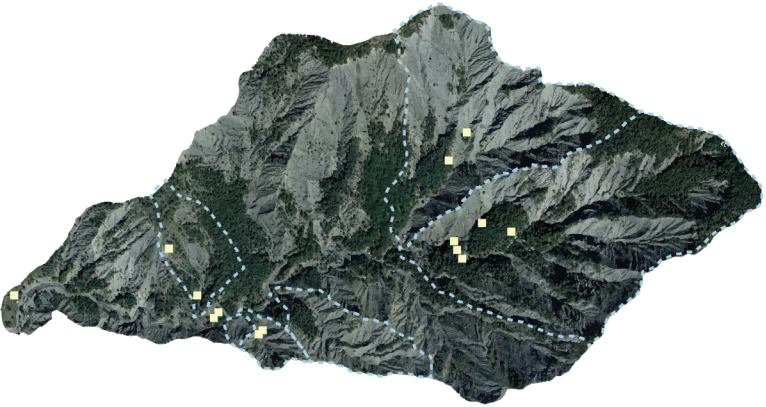
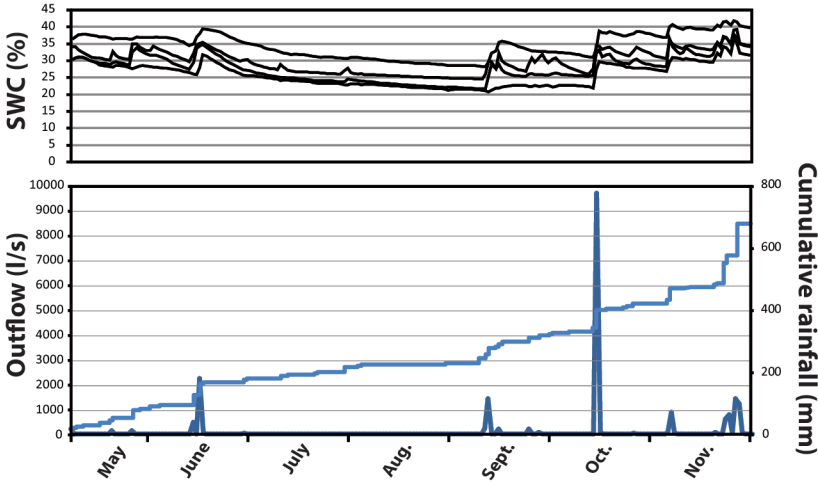

UK
BE
LUX
GE
FR
CH
IT
SP
Rhône river
Durance river
Digne-les-Bains
Bléone river
Draix-Bléone
field observatory
Digne-les-Bains
River network
Catchment's limits
Investigated sub-catchments
Outflow gauge
Rain gauge
Meteorological station
LAVAL
0.86 km²
P0
P4
P1
P6
N
200 m
Bouinenc river
source : ORE Draix
44° 8' 45.6"
44° 8' 38.4"
44° 8' 31.2"
44° 8' 24"
44° 8' 16.8"
6° 21' 36"
6° 21' 43.2"
6° 21' 50.4"
6° 21' 57.6"
6° 22' 4.8"
6° 22' 12"
6° 22' 19.2"
6° 22' 26.4"
6° 22' 33.6"
6° 22' 40.8"
6° 22' 48"
6° 22' 55.2"

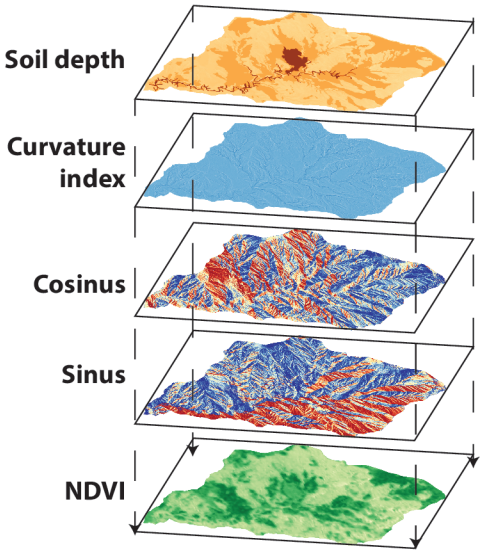
1/ Capacitance sensors nework design, setup and calibration



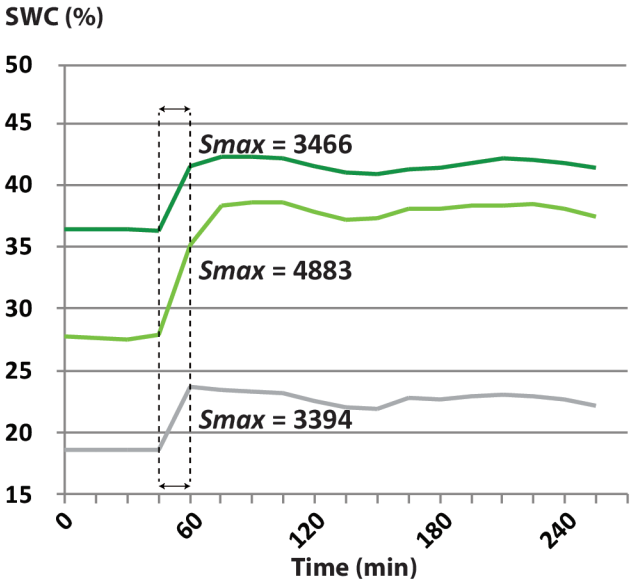
2/ SWC, rainfall and outflow monitoring



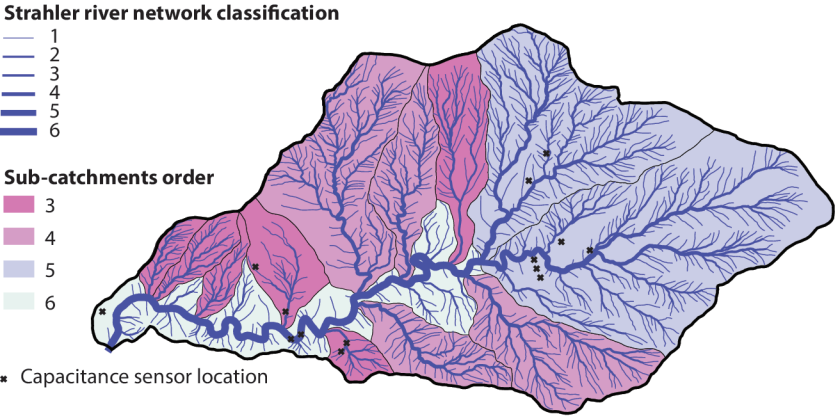
3/ SWC estimation using spatial interpolation based on geographical variables



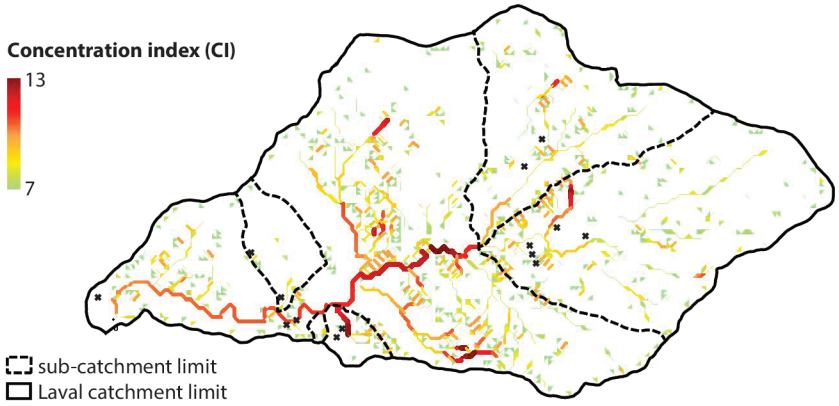
4/ Identifying the dominant flow mechanism from the wetting curve maximum slope method



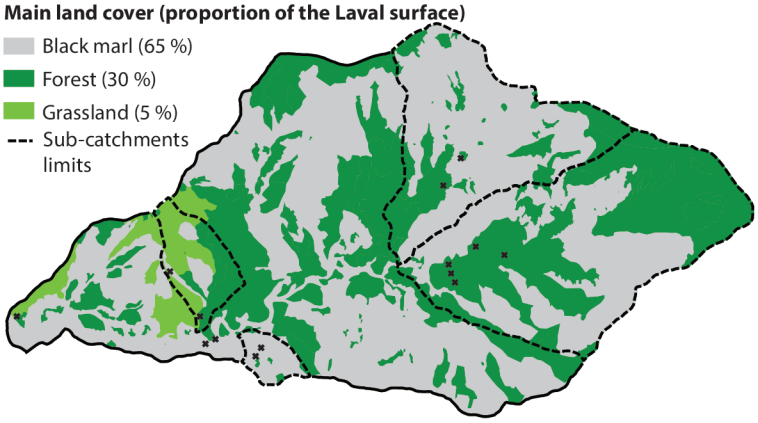
1/ Sub-catchments classification



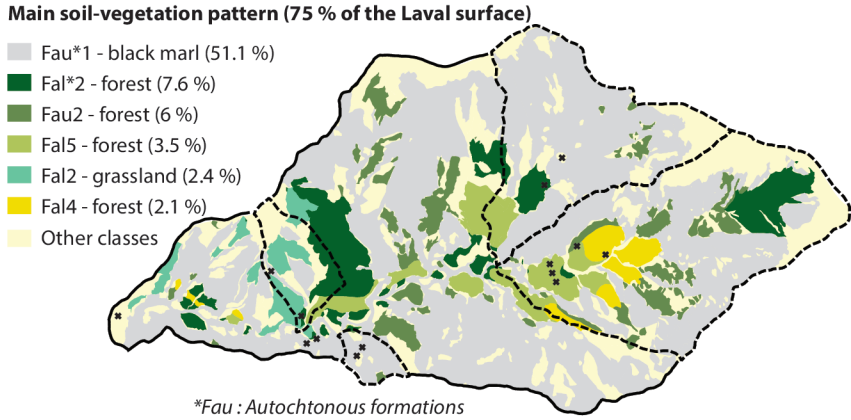
2/ Identification of theoretical surface flow concentration areas



3/ Selection of 4 sub-catchments based on land uses

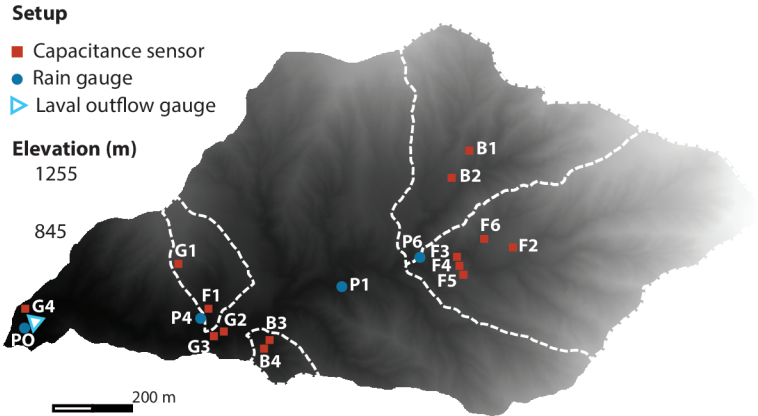


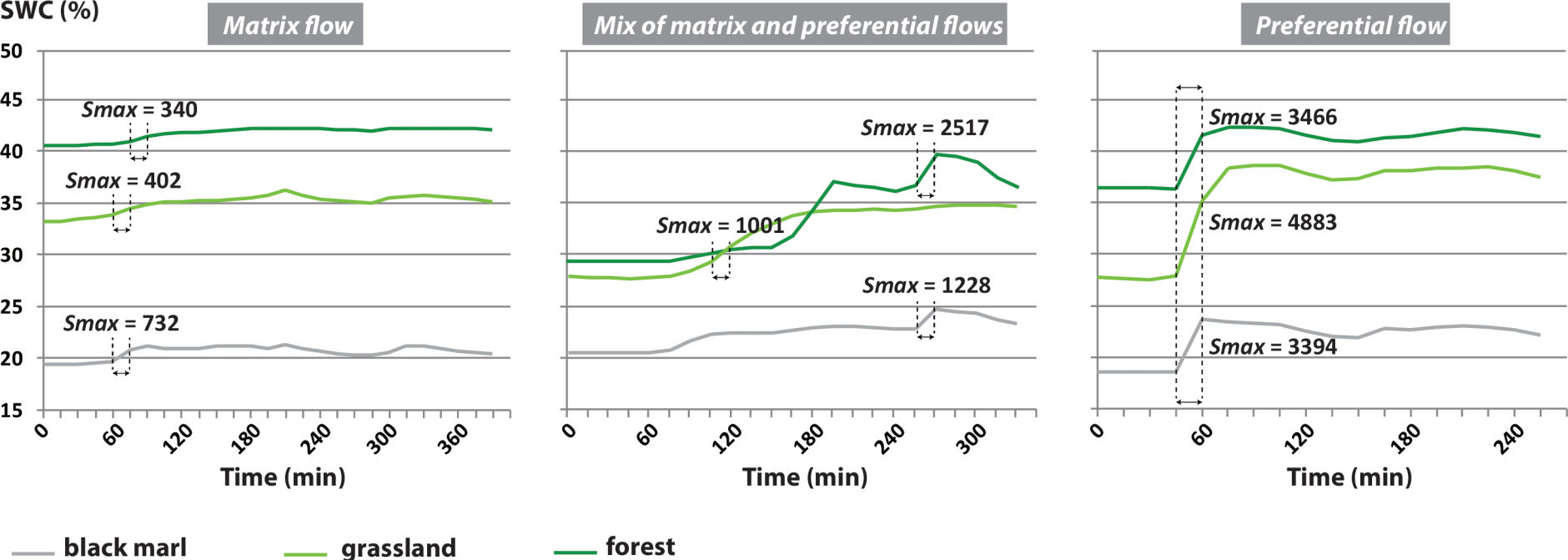
4/ Soil-vegetation map

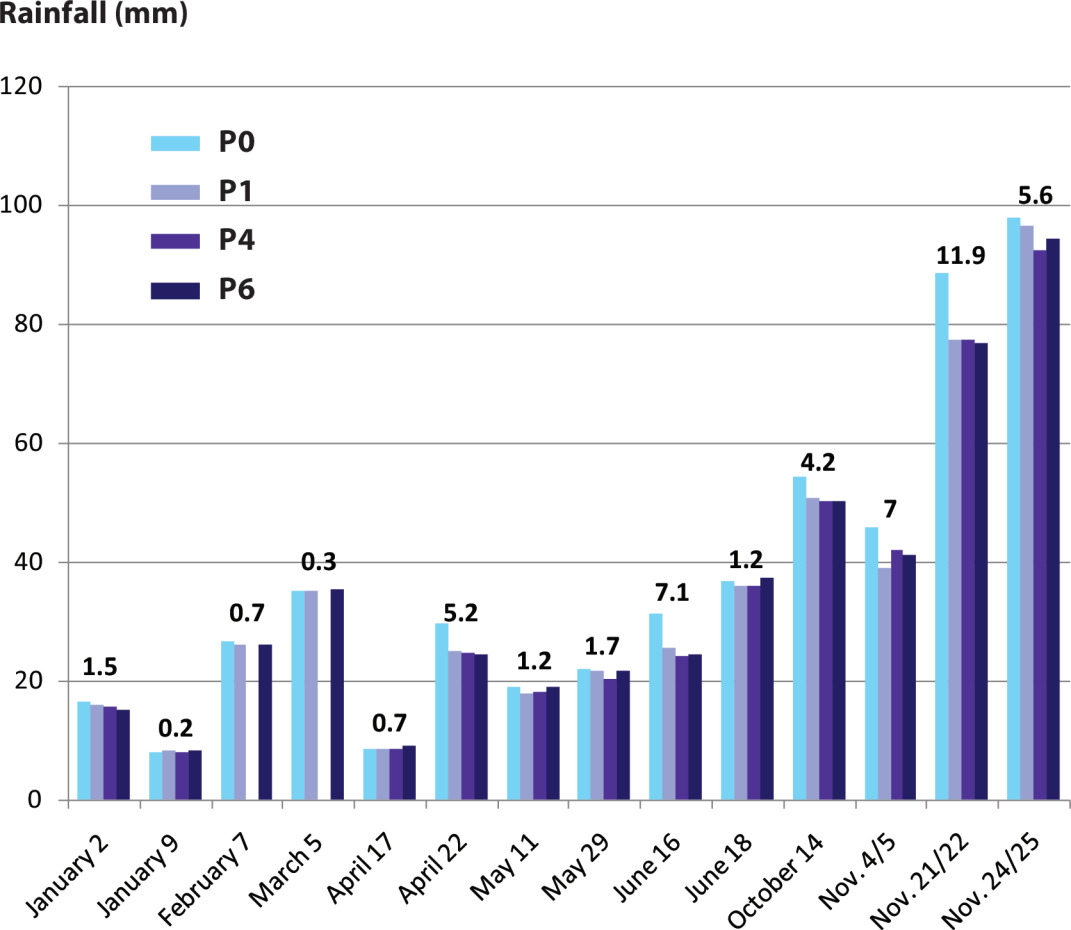


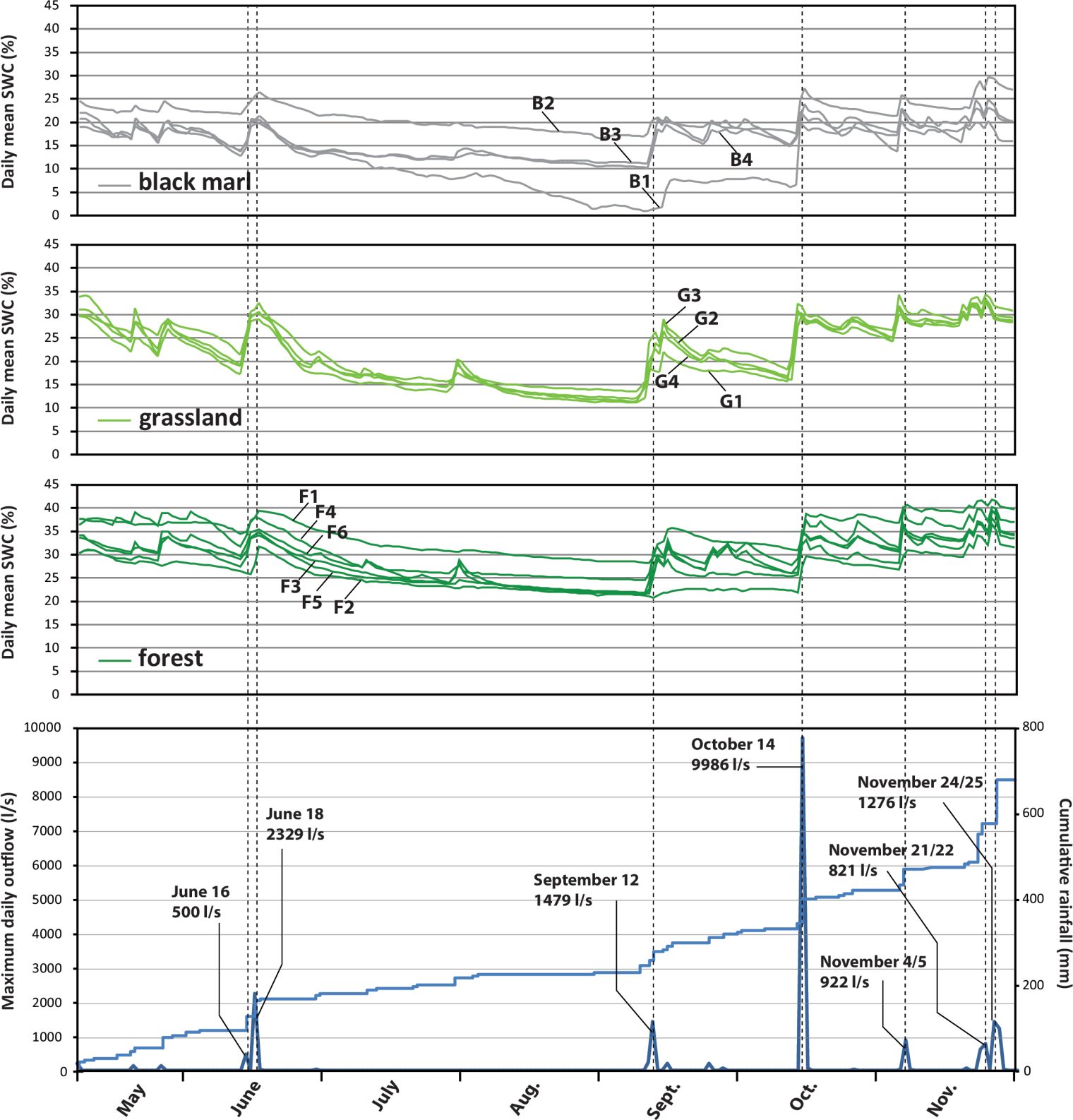
*Fau : Autochtonous formations
*Fal : Allochtonous formations

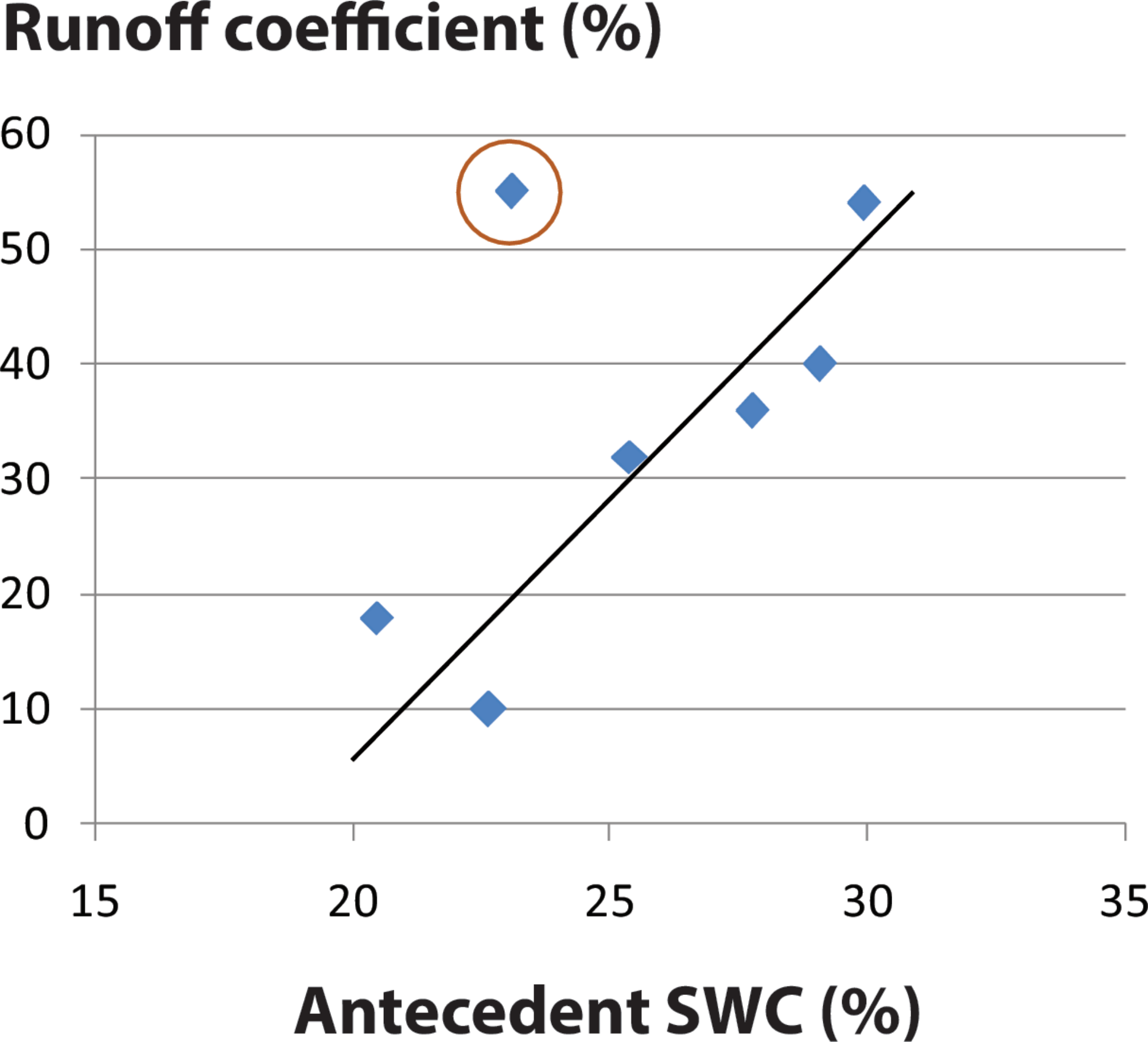
5/ SWC monitoring network

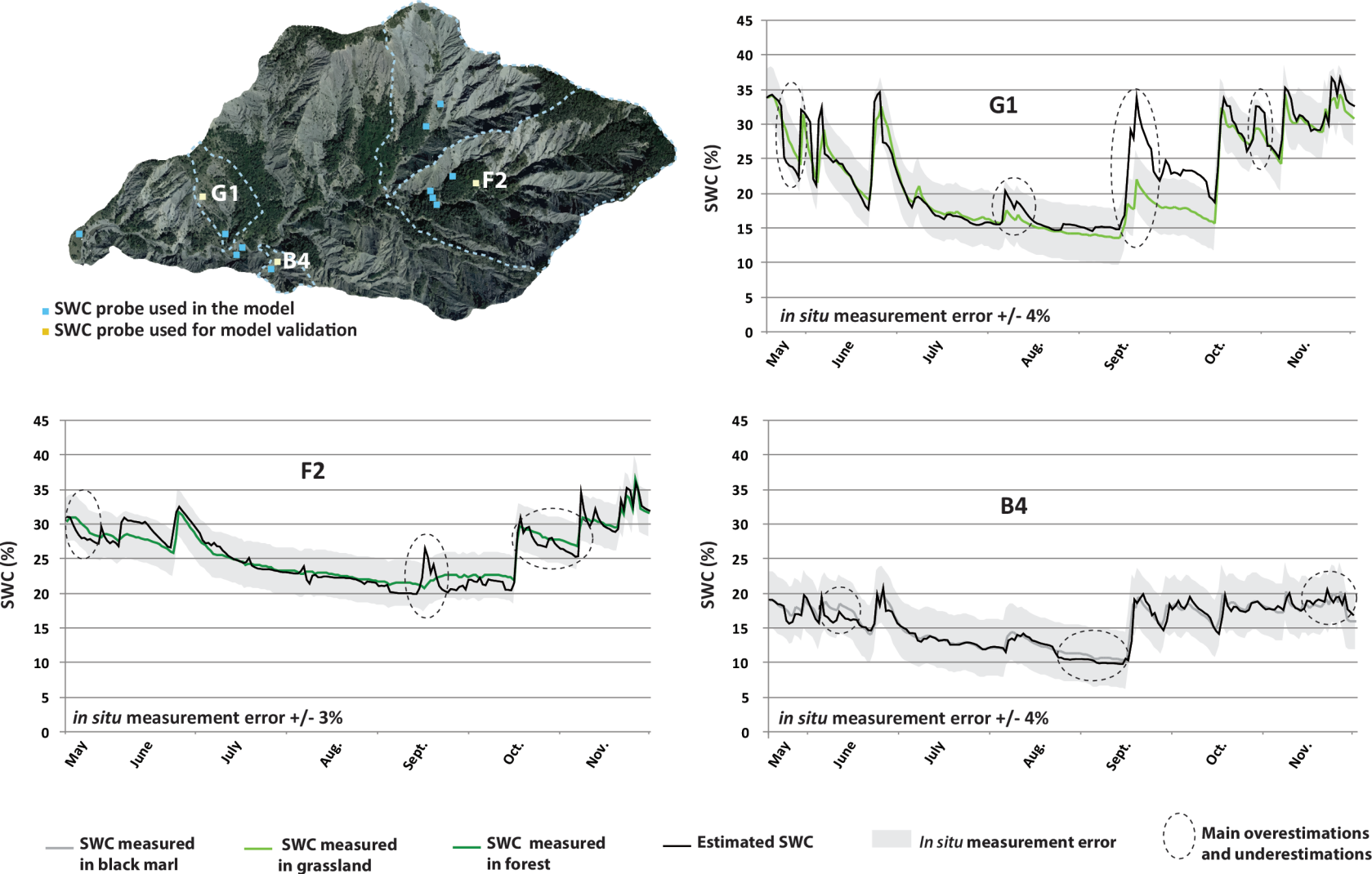


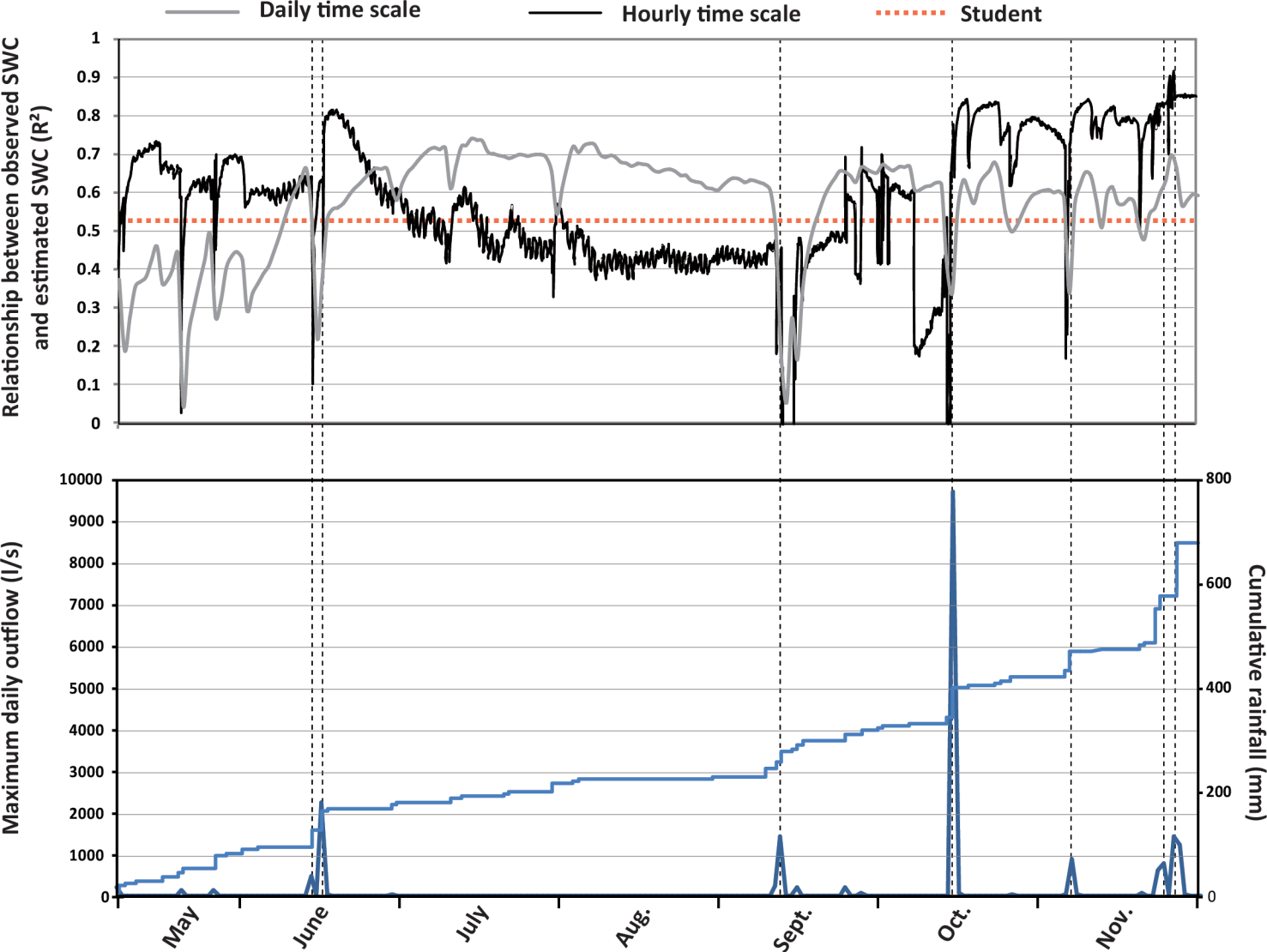

SWC (%)
Matrix flow
Mix of matrix and preferential flows
Preferential flow
Smax = 340
Smax = 402
Smax = 732
Smax = 2517
Smax = 1001
Smax = 1228
Smax = 3466
Smax = 4883
Smax = 3394
50
45
40
35
30
25
20
15
0
60
120
180
240
300
360
Time (min)
black marl
grassland
forest


Rainfall (mm)
120
100
80
60
40
20
0
P0
P1
P4
P6
1.5
0.2
0.7
0.3
0.7
5.2
1.2
1.7
7.1
1.2
4.2
7
11.9
5.6
January 2
January 9
February 7
March 5
April 17
April 22
May 11
May 29
June 16
June 18
October 14
Nov. 4/5
Nov. 21/22
Nov. 24/25


Daily mean SWC (%)
black marl
B1
B2
B3
B4
grassland
G1
G2
G3
G4
forest
F1
F2
F3
F4
F5
F6
Maximum daily outflow (l/s)
Cumulative rainfall (mm)
June 16
500 l/s
June 18
2329 l/s
September 12
1479 l/s
October 14
9986 l/s
November 21/22
821 l/s
November 4/5
922 l/s
November 24/25
1276 l/s
May
June
July
Aug.
Sept.
Oct.
Nov.

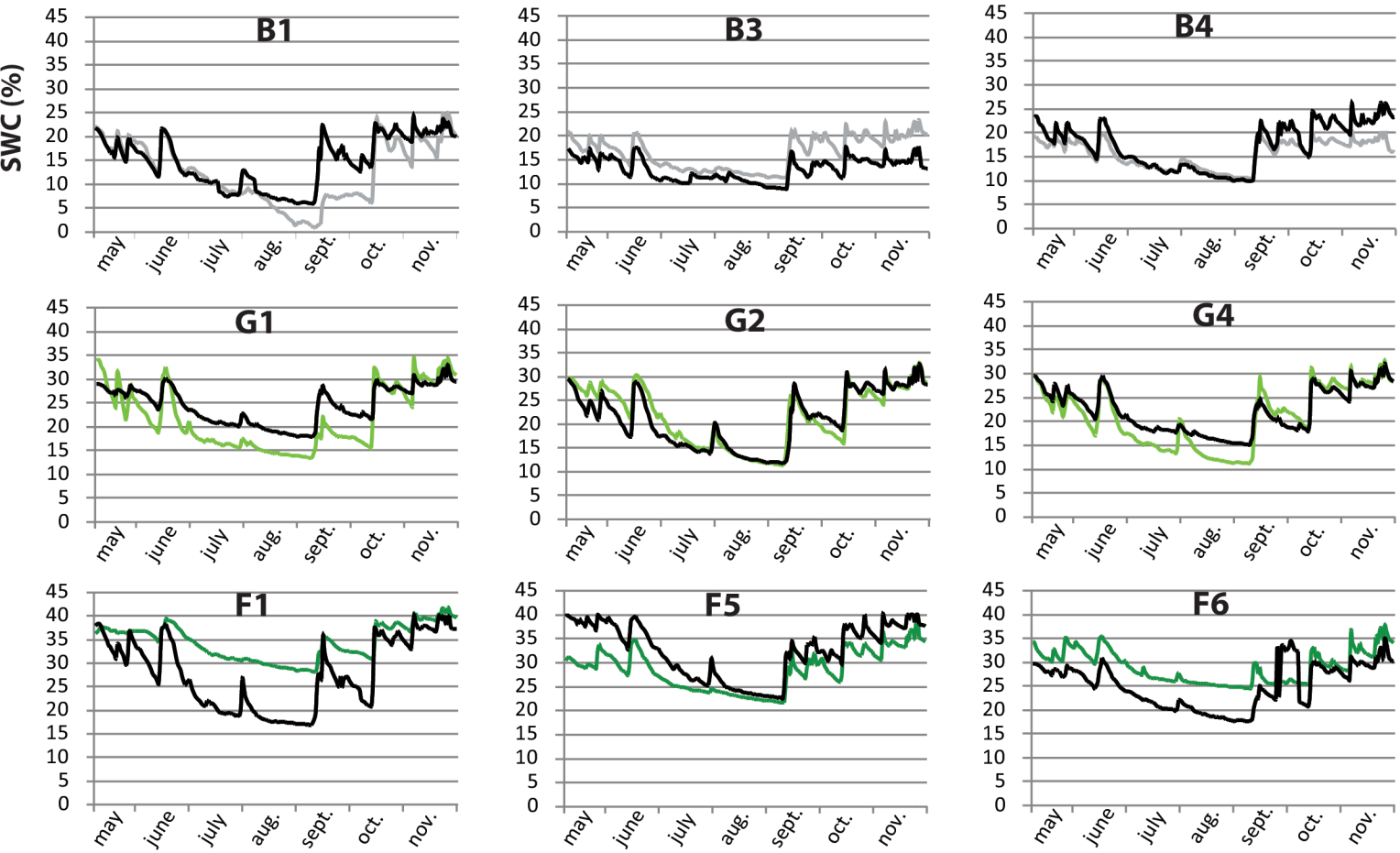

Runoff coefficient (%)
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
15
20
25
30
35
Antecedent SWC (%)

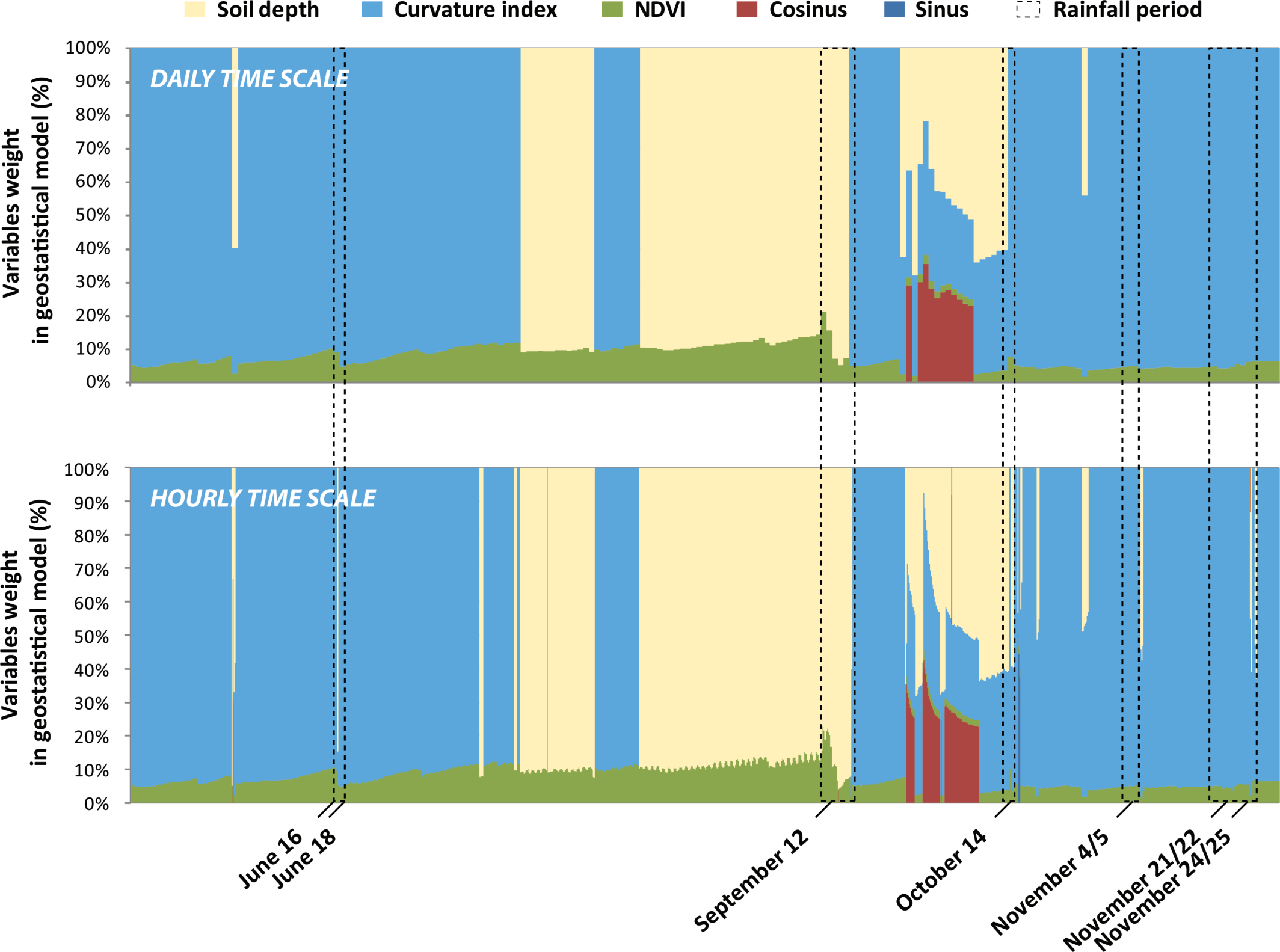

G1
F2
B4
SWC probe used in the model
SWC probe used for model validation
G1
SWC (%)
in situ measurement error +/- 4%
F2
in situ measurement error +/- 3%
B4
in situ measurement error +/- 4%
May
June
July
Aug.
Sept.
Oct.
Nov.
SWC measured in black marl
SWC measured in grassland
SWC measured in forest
Estimated SWC
In situ measurement error
Main overestimations and underestimations

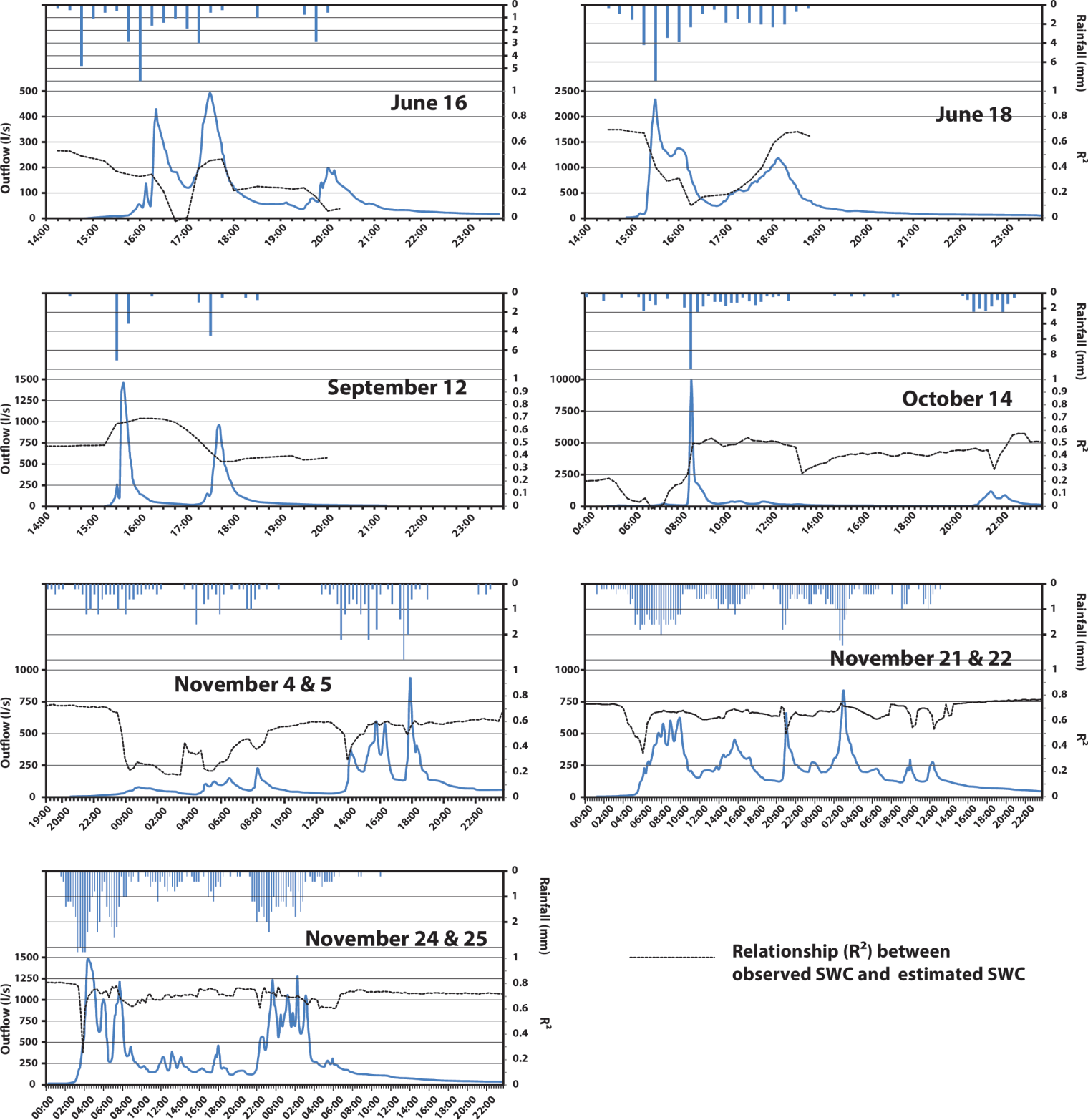

Daily time scale
Hourly time scale
Student
Relationship between observed SWC and estimated SWC (R²)
1
0.9
0.8
0.7
0.6
0.5
0.4
0.3
0.2
0.1
0
Maximum daily outflow (l/s)
10000
9000
8000
7000
6000
5000
4000
3000
2000
1000
0
Cumulative rainfall (mm)
800
600
400
200
0
May
June
July
Aug.
Sept.
Oct.
Nov.

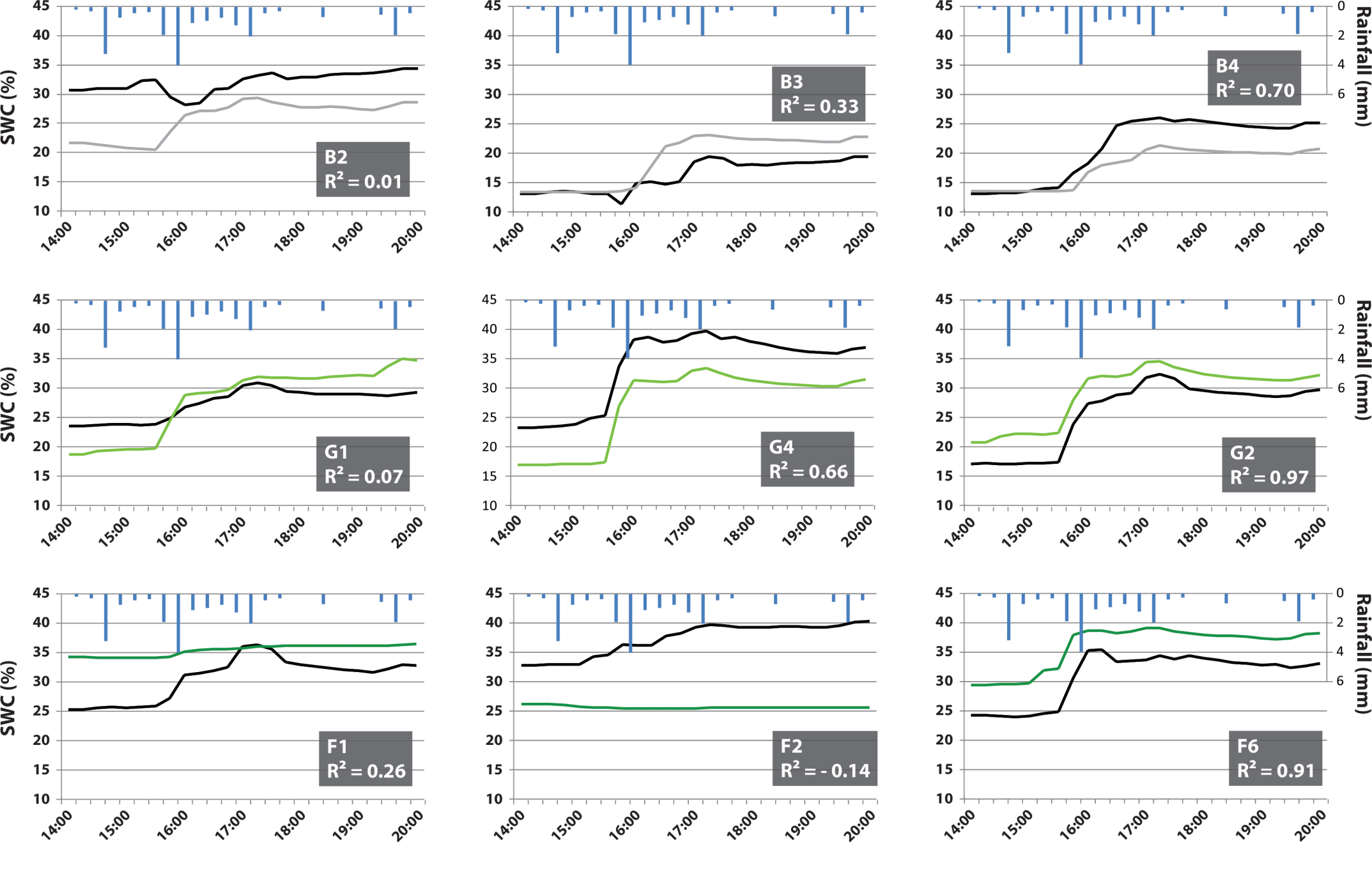
Relationship between measured and estimated SWC (R^2)

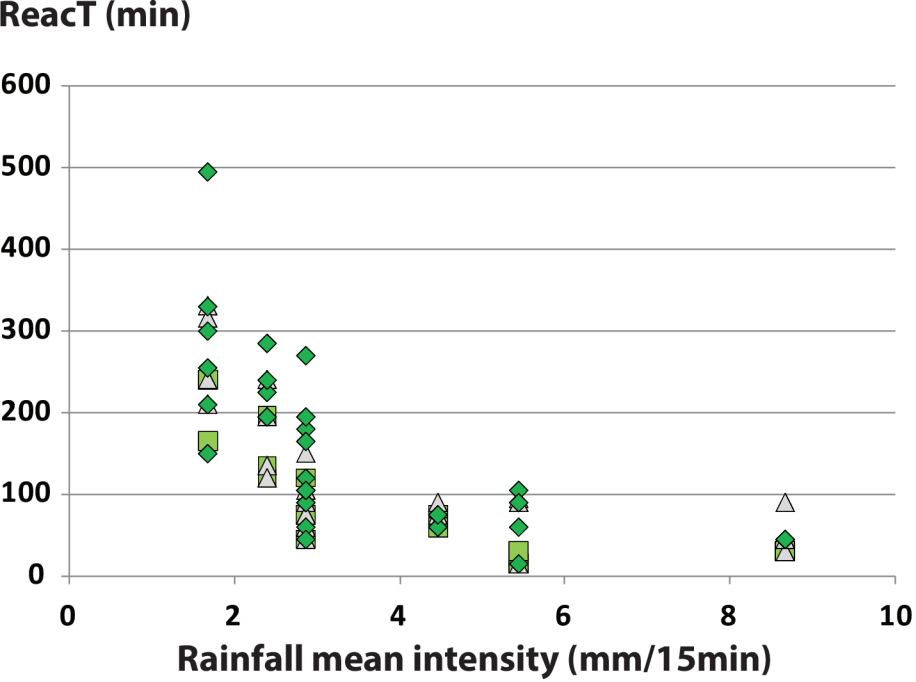
	B1	B2	B3	B4	G1	G2	G3	G4	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
Daily time scale	0.394	0.533	0.932	0.889	0.189	0.996	0.995	0.692	0.607	0.802	0.886	0.952	0.861	0.528
Hourly time scale	0.393	0.515	0.933	0.884	0.167	0.996	0.995	0.691	0.605	0.782	0.881	0.949	0.859	0.529

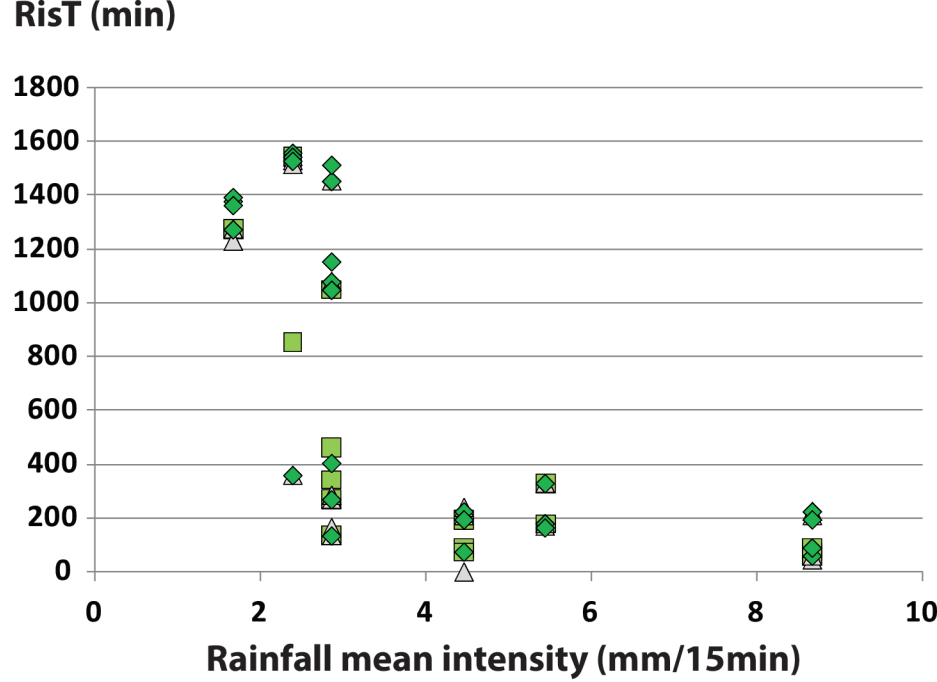


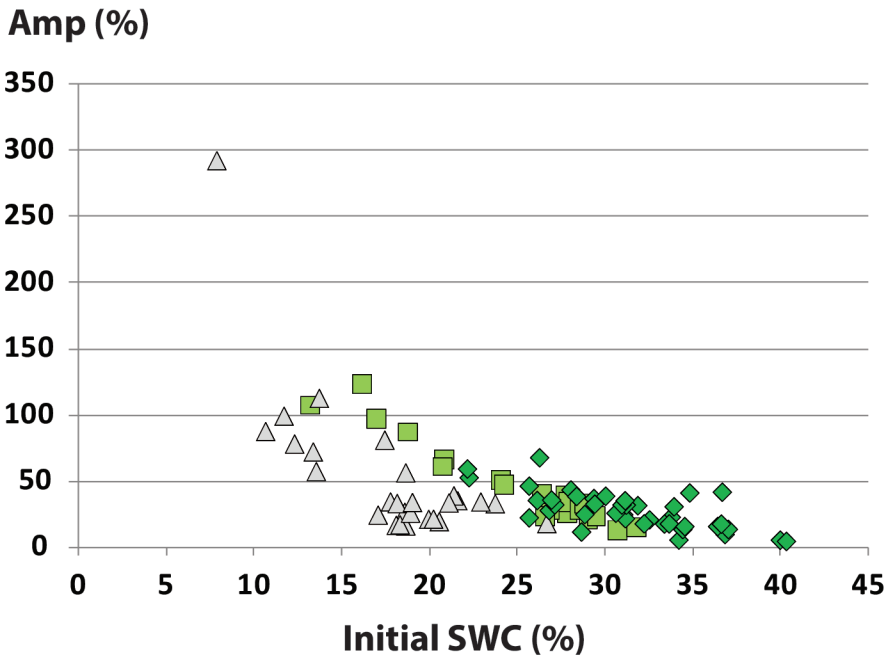

Soil depth
Curvature index
NDVI
Cosinus
Sinus
Rainfall period
DAILY TIME SCALE
HOURLY TIME SCALE
Variables weight in geostatistical model (%)
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
June 16
June 18
September 12
October 14
November 4/5
November 21/22
November 24/25


June 16
June 18
September 12
October 14
November 4 & 5
November 21 & 22
November 24 & 25
Outflow (l/s)
Rainfall (mm)
R²
Relationship (R²) between observed SWC and estimated SWC


SWC (%)
Rainfall (mm)
B2
$R^2 = 0.01$
B3
$R^2 = 0.33$
B4
$R^2 = 0.70$
G1
$R^2 = 0.07$
G4
$R^2 = 0.66$
G2
$R^2 = 0.97$
F1
$R^2 = 0.26$
F2
$R^2 = -0.14$
F6
$R^2 = 0.91$
14:00
15:00
16:00
17:00
18:00
19:00
20:00
SWC measured in black marl
SWC measured in grassland
SWC measured in forest
estimated SWC

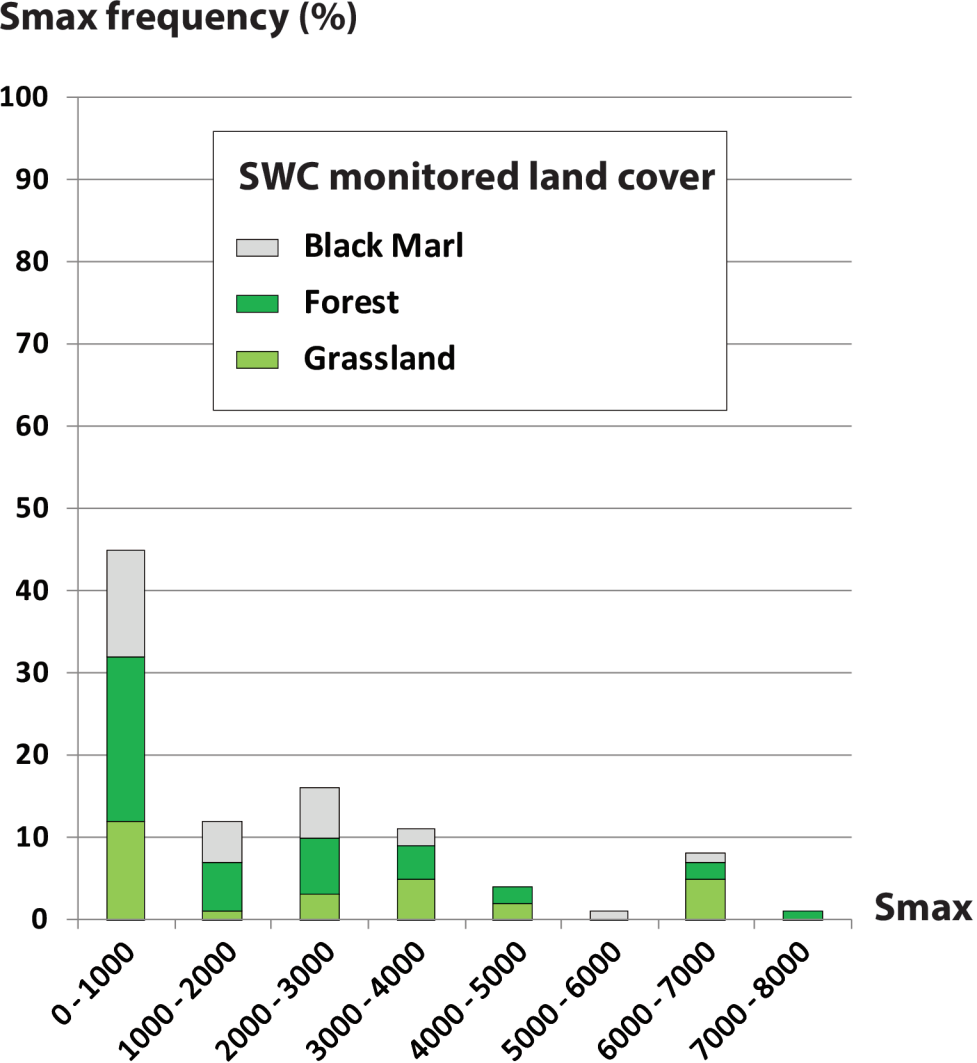


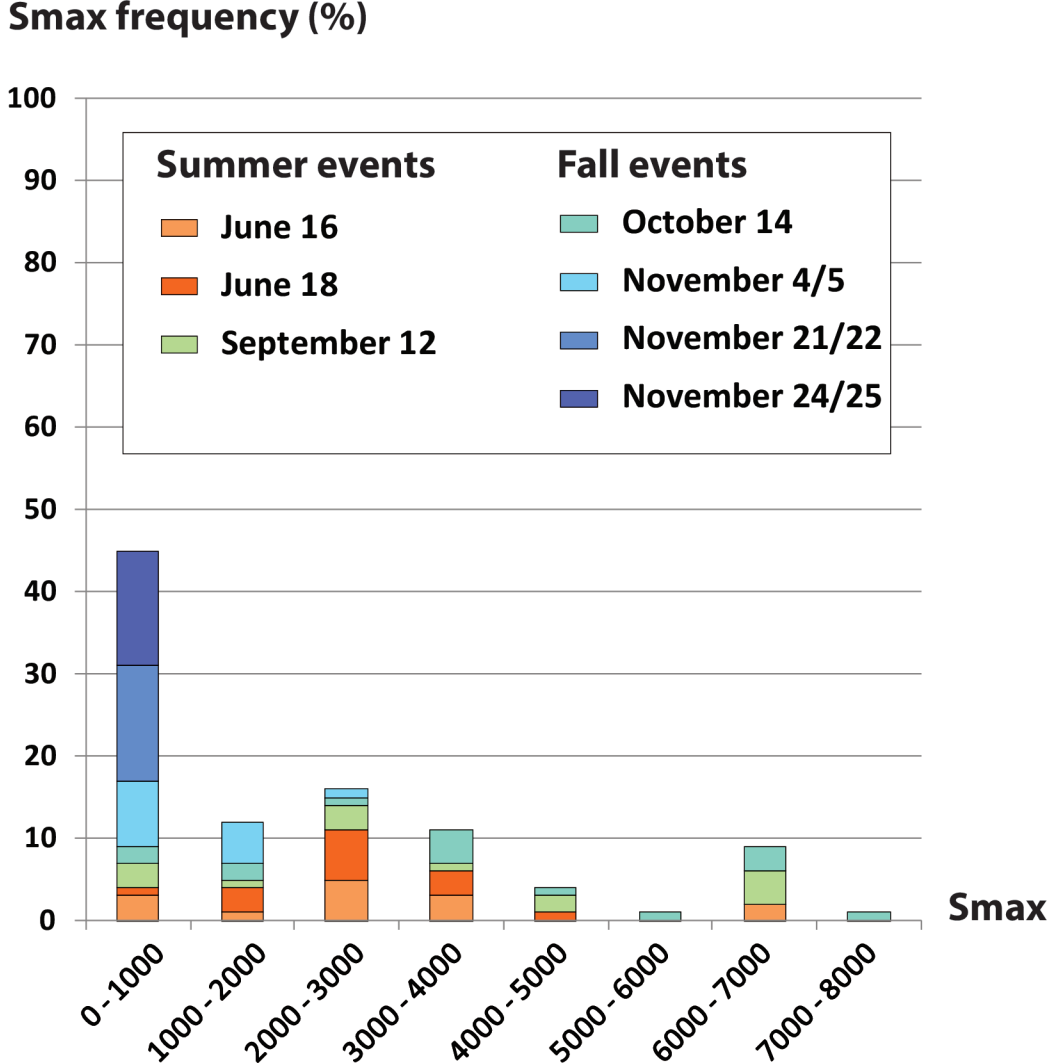


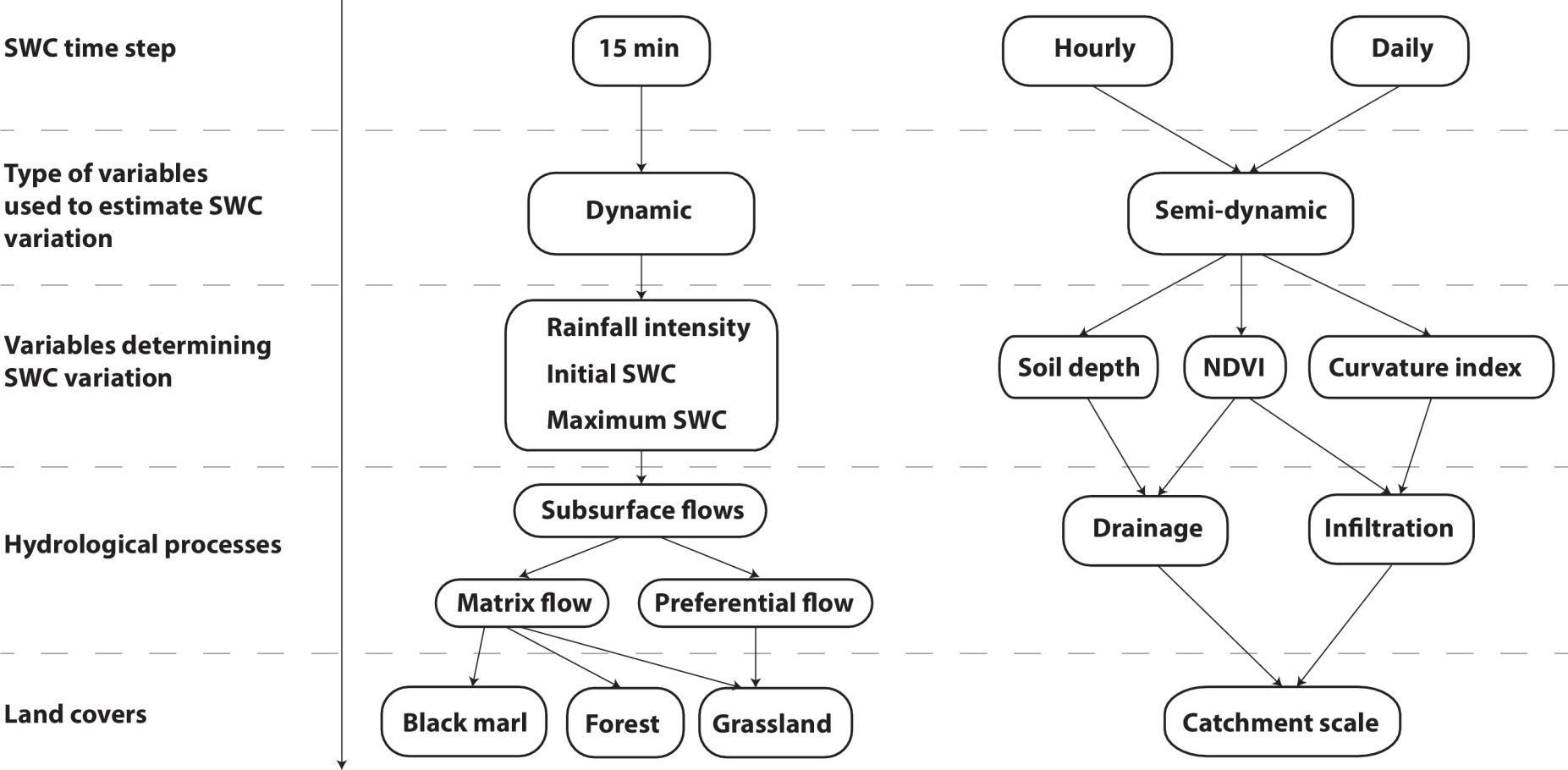


SWC monitored land cover

- Black Marl
- Forest
- Grassland


Smax frequency (%)
100
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
SWC monitored land cover
Black Marl
Forest
Grassland
Smax
0 - 1000
1000 - 2000
2000 - 3000
3000 - 4000
4000 - 5000
5000 - 6000
6000 - 7000
7000 - 8000


Smax frequency (%)
100
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
Summer events
June 16
June 18
September 12
Fall events
October 14
November 4/5
November 21/22
November 24/25
Smax
0 - 1000
1000 - 2000
2000 - 3000
3000 - 4000
4000 - 5000
5000 - 6000
6000 - 7000
7000 - 8000


SWC time step
15 min
Hourly
Daily
Type of variables used to estimate SWC variation
Dynamic
Semi-dynamic
Variables determining SWC variation
Rainfall intensity
Initial SWC
Maximum SWC
Soil depth
NDVI
Curvature index
Hydrological processes
Subsurface flows
Drainage
Infiltration
Matrix flow
Preferential flow
Land covers
Black marl
Forest
Grassland
Catchment scale