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### ► To cite this version:

Thomas Dépret, Clément Virmoux, Emmanuèle Gautier, Hervé Piégay, Mariya Doncheva, et al.. Lowland gravel-bed river recovery through former mining reaches, the key role of sand. *Geomorphology*, 2021, 373, pp.107493. 10.1016/j.geomorph.2020.107493 . hal-03793233

**HAL Id: hal-03793233**

**<https://hal.science/hal-03793233v1>**

Submitted on 21 Nov 2022

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1 **Lowland gravel-bed river recovery through former mining reaches, the key role of sand**

2  
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15  
16  
17 **Abstract**

18 Whereas the geomorphic effects of in-channel mining have been widely documented, very few studies  
19 have focused on recovery trajectories after mining ended. This paper describes and quantifies the  
20 channel adjustment of extended and over-widened mining pits located in a low energy gravel-bed  
21 river, and identifies the factors that control their recovery rate. The study was based on aerial  
22 photographs and LiDAR analysis, grain-size sampling, bedload computation and geophysical  
23 measurements made during ground penetrating radar (GPR) and electrical resistivity tomography  
24 (ERT) surveys. We describe the spatio-temporal changes in the morphology of former pits as well as  
25 the current surficial longitudinal grain-size pattern in pits and in neighbouring upstream and  
26 downstream reaches. Our results show a wide range of geomorphic readjustments. Between 23 and 47  
27 yr after the end of mining, the mining reaches have still not yet fully recovered. The planimetric  
28 recovery rate is closely correlated with the ratio of the volume deposited in the pits to their original

29 volume. Finally, the infilled material is only partly composed of bedload and the mainly sandy fine  
30 sediments play a primary role in the recovery process. The abundance of sand, controlled by the  
31 lithology of the watershed, explains the unexpectedly high recovery rates of some pits despite the low  
32 energy of the river.

33

34

### 35 **Keywords**

36 Channel mining; Geomorphic resilience; Sand; Low-energy river

37

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### 39 **Highlights**

- 40 - Characterisation of morphological and grain-size recovery of former in-channel pits
- 41 - Adjustment still underway 27-47 years after mining stopped
- 42 - Recovery rate controlled by pit volume, the volume of sediment supplied and pit trap  
43 efficiency
- 44 - The sand load plays an essential role in recovery processes
- 45 - Catchment lithology also crucial in recovery

46

47

### 48 **1. Introduction**

49 The alluvial resources provided by river corridors have been overused worldwide since the end of  
50 World War II because of the advent of concrete as a building material and to growing development.  
51 The detrimental social and environmental effects of this mining has led to control of, or to a complete  
52 ban on gravel mining in many countries in recent decades (Kondolf, 1997; Rinaldi et al., 2005). Gravel  
53 mining directly or indirectly modifies both the river bed geometry and the substrate, can lead to a  
54 profound and long-lasting alteration of aquatic and riparian habitats as well as to the destruction or  
55 weakening of fluvial engineering structures and loss of alluvial groundwater storage thereby reducing  
56 water resources (Kondolf, 1994; Bravard et al., 1997; Bravard et al., 1999a; Brown et al., 1998;

57 Koehnken et al., 2020). Although these effects and the factors that control them are widely  
58 documented (e.g., Bull and Scott, 1974; Collins and Dunne, 1989; Kondolf, 1994, 1997; Surian and  
59 Rinaldi, 2003; Simon and Rinaldi, 2006; Wyzga, 2007; Sreebha and Padmalal, 2011; Arróspide et al.,  
60 2018), very little is known about channel recovery after mining ends.

61 The present review focuses on in-stream dry-pit and wet-pit mining, which, as defined by Kondolf,  
62 (1994), both consist of dredging a pit in the channel of varying depth, width and length. We excluded  
63 bar skimming mining operations (Kondolf, 1994; Rempel and Church, 2009), defined as the scalping  
64 of the dry surficial layer of bars at low-flow. For these specific cases, both modelling and field  
65 approaches have already been explored. Physical, numerical or analytical modelling has focused on  
66 the spatio-temporal pattern of pit filling and/or how mining modifies hydrodynamics and bed  
67 morphology (e.g., Fredsoe, 1979; van Rijn, 1986; Kornis and Laczay, 1988; Lee et al., 1993; Gill,  
68 1994; Barman et al., 2017, 2018, 2019; Neyshabouri et al., 2002; Cao and Pender, 2004; Chen et al.,  
69 2010). These authors particularly highlight the downstream migration of pits as they fill up as well as  
70 the degradation of the bed both upstream and downstream from the initial location of the pits. Most  
71 studies using these approaches used pit dimensions (pit width  $\leq$  channel width, pit length  $\leq 2 \times$   
72 channel width) that are considerably smaller than those of the pits reported in most rivers (e.g., Lee et  
73 al., 1993; Gill, 1994; Barman et al., 2017, 2018, 2019; Neyshabouri et al., 2002; Chen et al., 2010).  
74 Two main infill stages have been identified (Lee et al., 1993). During the first stage, termed the  
75 convective stage, the maximum scour depth remains relatively constant and the upstream boundary of  
76 the pit migrates up to the original downstream edge. The following diffusion stage corresponds to  
77 complete pit infill and is characterised by the downstream migration and the progressive reduction of  
78 the maximum scour depth. The infilling rate of pits is theoretically controlled by the amount of  
79 upstream sediment supplied and by pit trap efficiency (van Rijn, 1986), which in turn, is mainly  
80 controlled by pit geometry (Neyshabouri et al., 2002).

81 Field studies have also been conducted to understand pit infilling. Yuill et al. (2016) used time-  
82 series bathymetric surveys of a 1.6 km length borrow-pit whose width occupies around a quarter of the  
83 lower Mississippi width combined with a 3D morphodynamic model to describe the morphological  
84 changes in the pit and to quantify its infilling rate. These authors showed that the pit traps a very small

85 fraction (5-11%) of the sandy bedload passing through it and that the infilling rate depends mainly on  
86 the supply of sediment and the dimensions of the pit. Lastly, the pit is hypothesised to be infilled after  
87 a period of 4.4 to 10 yr. Using a section of the gravel-bed Semois River (bankfull width = 50-55 m)  
88 dredged to a depth of two metres over a distance of one kilometre to prevent downstream flooding,  
89 and repeated topographical surveys, Gob et al. (2005) estimated the time needed to return to the initial  
90 state of the riverbed at ten years. Trap efficiency was assumed to be total. Many Italian rivers have  
91 undergone similar evolutionary trajectories characterised by incision and bed narrowing throughout  
92 the second half of the twentieth century because of the combination of human pressure, e.g.,  
93 channelling and damming, and gravel extraction (e.g., Surian et al., 2009; Comiti et al., 2011; Scorpio  
94 et al., 2015; Scorpio and Roszkopf, 2016; Belletti et al., 2016). These authors investigated recovery  
95 processes at the reach scale, mainly highlighting bed aggradation and widening, 15-20 yr after mining  
96 ended. The magnitude of recovery was considerably less than the magnitude of the changes caused by  
97 mining and is mainly controlled by the degree of coarse sediment connectivity between hillslopes or  
98 floodplain and the riverbed. In the Middle Loire River (France), bed incision caused by gravel mining  
99 stopped within 15 to 20 yr following the end of mining, but aggradation was only observed in a few  
100 short reaches (Latapie et al., 2014). Morpho-sedimentary recovery has also been characterised in  
101 ephemeral Mediterranean systems 12 to 24 yr after mining ended (Rovira et al., 2005; Calle et al.,  
102 2017; Sanchis-Ibor et al., 2017). Using a sediment budget along an 11-km long reach of the fine  
103 gravel-bed Tordera River with a mean incision of 1.5 m, Rovira et al. (2005) determined that the pre-  
104 extraction bed level would not be recovered for around 420 yr, and that most aggradation only  
105 occurred during small floods in dry periods. Calle et al. (2017) reconstituted the evolution of morpho-  
106 sedimentary units of the Rambla de la Viuda from aerial photographs before, during and after gravel  
107 mining ended. Using LiDAR analysis and RTK-DGPS surveys, these authors identified a 3.5-m  
108 incision that continued to exist 12 yr after a major reduction in mining activity. They pinpointed the  
109 role of major floods in the recovery processes but considered the bed degradation to be irreversible at  
110 multi-decadal scale because of the lack of in-channel sediment connectivity. Sanchis-Ibor et al. (2017)  
111 quantified bed degradation in the Palancia River using LiDAR and aerial photographs and examined  
112 its recovery through a morphological recovery index computed by combining the width of the flow

113 and active channels, the total sinuosity index and the channel count index from aerial photographs at  
114 each date.

115 In most rivers affected by mining, geomorphic recovery is usually reduced because of fairly low  
116 delivery of coarse sediments (e.g., Surian et al., 2009; Comiti et al., 2011; Belletti et al., 2016).  
117 Originating from the upstream part of the watershed or from the alluvial stock through lateral erosion,  
118 today most of these sediment sources are no longer available because of cumulative basin- and reach-  
119 scale effects of human activities (Downs and Piégay, 2019), particularly dams, which trap bedload  
120 sediments, and bank protection works (e.g., Nilsson, 2005; Lehner et al., 2011; Graf, 2006; Bravard et  
121 al., 1999b; Ollero, 2010; David et al., 2016; Dépret et al., 2017). In low-energy gravel-bed rivers, the  
122 potential for readjustment seems to be even lower because of the slowness of the processes. Broadly,  
123 even if these rivers are relatively common systems, knowledge of their morphodynamics remains  
124 scarce (Dépret et al., 2015, 2017; Lespez et al. 2015) and explains why management practices and  
125 restoration actions are often inappropriate (Lespez et al. 2015). In the case of the low-energy gravel-  
126 bed River Cher, the focus of this paper, sediments continued to be extracted from the riverbed until the  
127 early 1990s (Dépret et al., 2015, 2017) when this kind of mining was banned in France (Malavoi et al.,  
128 2011). At several locations along the river course, sediment mining occurred both in the riverbed and  
129 the alluvial plain. As a result, the river exhibits pit sections whose length and width are respectively  
130 more than ten and two times the width of the ‘natural’ active channel. These sections very likely act in  
131 the same way as floodplain pits captured by rivers, temporarily trapping all or most of the bedload  
132 (Mossa and Marks, 2011). Because of the analogy with the captured floodplain pits, we termed the  
133 over-widened sections of the Cher River pseudo-captures (PCs). PCs may also trap only part of the  
134 suspended load. Thanks to these features, PCs are interesting observatories to characterise and  
135 understand the mechanisms and potential for geomorphic recovery processes in low-energy gravel-bed  
136 rivers. More than 20 yr after the end of mining of the Cher River, recent aerial photographs show  
137 varying degrees of PC readjustment, some of which are surprisingly advanced. Following this  
138 observation, the aim of this paper is to explain the wide range of adjustment rates by analysing the  
139 pseudo-capture geomorphic recovery and by identifying the factors that control the recovery rate. In  
140 theory, the recovery rate is mainly controlled by the original volume of the PC, the volume of

141 sediment originating from upstream and the trap efficiency of the PC. The smaller the original volume,  
142 the bigger the supply of sediment, especially the bedload volume, and finally, the more sediment  
143 trapped in the PC, and the faster the recovery rate. To test this hypothesis, we used an original  
144 interdisciplinary methodological approach combining time-series aerial photographs and LiDAR  
145 analysis, grain-size sampling, bedload computation and geophysical measurements made using ground  
146 penetrating radar (GPR) and electrical resistivity tomography (ERT) surveys. Underground  
147 investigations using the two geophysical methods allowed us to confirm some of the results of our  
148 analysis of surface data. Finally, we discuss (i) the importance of the suspended load and of the  
149 bedload in the recovery processes, (ii) the key role of sand in the recovery processes of low-energy  
150 rivers, (iii) the need to consider lithology when estimating recovery potential, and (iv) the relative  
151 importance of PCs in the diversity of aquatic and riparian habitats.

152

153

## 154 **2. Study sites**

### 155 *Geological and hydrological context*

156 After leaving its source at 713 m asl., the Cher River mainly flows through gorges across steep slopes  
157 or in deep valleys with a very narrow floodplain (upstream Cher in Figure 1). The upstream section of  
158 the river is located at the northwest end of the low altitude mountainous Massif Central, which mainly  
159 consists of crystalline and metamorphic rocks (Larue, 1981, 2011). After 63 km, the Cher alluvial  
160 plain begins (Alluvial Cher in Figure 1) and the river becomes single thread with numerous  
161 meandering reaches. After first occupying the Tertiary graben of Montluçon, which continues for 45  
162 km to the confluence with the Aumance River (Larue, 1981, 2011; Simon-Coinçon et al., 2000), the  
163 river then crosses the sedimentary domain of the Parisian Basin, where it joins the Loire River at a 38  
164 m asl. Here, the annual average discharge is  $90 \text{ m}^3 \text{ s}^{-1}$  and the catchment area covers 13,615 km<sup>2</sup>. The  
165 study section is the first 140 km of the Alluvial Cher between Montluçon and Vierzon. Here, the Cher  
166 River has developed a meandering pattern for the last millennia (Vayssière et al., 2020). In addition to  
167 intense gravel mining in the riverbed from 1950 to 1990, the river is densely equipped with ancient  
168 fluvial engineering works including bank protections and weirs that are major obstacles to local

169 sediment supply through lateral erosion (Dépret et al., 2015, 2017; Vayssière et al., 2020). The  
170 hydrological regime is mainly influenced by a pluvio-evaporal oceanic climate and is characteristic of  
171 lowland rivers in the western part of mid-latitude regions. Maximum flow occurs in February and  
172 minimum flow in August. Because of the construction of the Rochebut dam in the early twentieth  
173 century, the hydrological regime has become partly artificial, particularly during low flow and  
174 especially upstream from the confluence with the Aumance River (Figure 1).

175

176

### 177 *Gravel mining*

178 The period of gravel mining was reconstituted by examining all aerial photographs taken between  
179 1950 and 2016 (available on <https://remonterletemps.ign.fr>) and the archives of the former Directorate  
180 for Industry, Research and the Environment (*Direction de l'Industrie, de la Recherche et de*  
181 *l'Environnement*, French acronym DRIRE), local state agencies in the Cher and Allier administrative  
182 departments. On the aerial photographs, we looked at signs of mining activity indicated by the  
183 presence/absence of the equipment and infrastructure required for mining and sediment sorting. In the  
184 archives, we found some of the official authorisation documents granted to the mining companies  
185 (Rollet et al., 2008). Gravel mining began and expanded between the late 1940s and the early 1970s  
186 and ended between 1983 and 1993, except at one study site (PRE) where it ended in 1968 (Table 1).

187

### 188 *Site selection*

189 Twelve PCs were identified along the 140-km stretch of the river between Montluçon and Vierzon,  
190 in aerial photographs taken between 1950 and 2016 (available on <https://remonterletemps.ign.fr>).  
191 Among these, we selected six (Figure 1) by excluding those located immediately upstream or  
192 downstream from a weir, or complex planform configuration caused by a neighbouring floodplain pit  
193 capture after mining. The sites are named using the three first letters of the main municipality in which  
194 they are located, from upstream to downstream: AUD, BOU, BRU, SFL, STH and PRE (Figure 1).  
195 Their planimetric, hydraulic and grain-size features are summarised in Table 1. Details on the method  
196 used to identify these features are given in Section 3.



197

198 **Figure 1** – Location of the study sites.

199

200 **Table 1** – Hydraulic and geometric parameters, grain-size, and periods of gravel mining activity in the  
 201 study reaches.

Site	A (km <sup>2</sup> )	L PC t <sub>0</sub> (m)	w PC t <sub>0</sub> (m)	w up t <sub>0</sub> (m)	w PC t <sub>0</sub> / w up t <sub>0</sub>	Ws up (W m <sup>-2</sup> )	Ws PC t <sub>0</sub> (W m <sup>-2</sup> )	D <sub>50</sub> up (mm)	D <sub>84</sub> up (mm)	Start year	End year
<b>AUD</b>	2112	807	131	49	2.7	7-16	4-6	18-44	39-67	1973	1983
<b>BOU</b>	3492	1107	145	48	3	8-15	2-4	8-21	18-41	1950/59- 1967	1983
<b>BRU</b>	3924	1641	106	58	1.8	5-9	1-2	5-24	19-38	1950- 1959	1989
<b>SFL</b>	4298	2079	77	45	1.7	32-52	2-3	11	24	pre-1950	1993
<b>STH</b>	4385	876	96	43	2.2	28-58	3-6	23	59	1950- 1959	1986
<b>PRE</b>	4422	665	183	50	3.4	3-7	1-2	NA	NA	pre-1950	1968

202 A: Watershed area. L PC t<sub>0</sub>: Initial length of PCs, with t<sub>0</sub> the ending of gravel mining activity. w PC t<sub>0</sub>:

203 Initial width of PCs. w up t<sub>0</sub>: Initial width of active bed upstream of PCs. w PC t<sub>0</sub> / w up t<sub>0</sub>: ratio

204 between w PC t<sub>0</sub> and w up t<sub>0</sub>. Ws up: Range of specific stream power upstream of PCs for discharge

205 not exceeding 0.99 % of time (94.5 m<sup>3</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> for AUD, 191 m<sup>3</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> for the other sites) and along reaches

206 whose length is between 12 and 60 times the active bed width (see Section 3 for explanations and the

207 formula). This discharge was chosen to enable comparison of AUD and the other sites, whose

208 hydrological regime differs because of the Aumance River confluence (Figure 1). It is higher than the

209 critical discharge for bedload incipient motion (Dépret et al., 2015, 2017) and close to the bankfull

210 discharge (85 m<sup>3</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> for AUD, 178-245 m<sup>3</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> for the other sites) (Dépret, 2014). The specific stream

211 power is given by the following formula:  $\rho_w g Q S / w$ , where  $\rho_w$  is the density of water (1000 kg m<sup>-3</sup>),

212  $g$  is the gravitational acceleration (9.81 m s<sup>-2</sup>),  $Q$  is the discharge (m<sup>3</sup> s<sup>-1</sup>),  $S$  is the bed slope (m m<sup>-1</sup>),

213 and  $w$  is the bankfull bed width (m). Ws PC t<sub>0</sub>: Minimum and mean specific stream power in PC

214 discharge not exceeding 0.99% of time. D<sub>50</sub> up and D<sub>84</sub> up: Range of size of bed surface material for

215 which respectively 50% and 84% of the number of sediment clasts are smaller (see Section 3 for  
216 explanations).

217

218 Between AUD and the five downstream PCs, the discharge is almost doubled because of inputs of  
219 water from the Aumance River, the main tributaries of the Cher River between Montluçon and  
220 Vierzon (Figure 1). Only minor tributaries join the Cher River between the reference gauge stations  
221 and the PCs (Montluçon for AUD and Saint-Amand-Montrond for the other PCs).

222 In AUD, the bedrock is composed of Eocene-Miocene sand and clays and of conglomeratic or non-  
223 conglomeratic Stephanian facies, (Turland et al., 1989a, 1989b). In BOU, the bedrock is Triassic  
224 sandstone, sands, argillite and dolomite (Lablanche, 1994; Lablanche et al., 1994). In BRU, the  
225 bedrock is Middle Jurassic oolitic and bioclastic limestone as well as of Early Jurassic bioclastic  
226 limestone, marl and marl-limestone and Eocene lacustrine limestone and clay (Lablanche, 1994;  
227 Lablanche et al., 1994). In SFL, the bedrock is Late Jurassic oolitic or stratified limestone (Debrand-  
228 Passard et al., 1997a, 1977b). In STH, the bedrock is stratified or unstratified Late Jurassic limestone  
229 and Eocene limestone and clay (Debrand-Passard et al., 1997a, 1977b). Finally, the bedrock in PRE is  
230 Eocene limestone and clay (Debrand-Passard et al., 1997a, 1977b).

231

232

### 233 **3. Material and Methods**

234 Our methodological approach combined time-series aerial photographs and LiDAR analysis, grain-  
235 size sampling, bedload computation and geophysical measurements using ground penetrating radar  
236 (GPR) and electrical resistivity tomography (ERT) surveys.

237

#### 238 **3.1 PC adjustment patterns and recovery rates**

239 The magnitude of PC recovery was determined from planimetric, topographic and granulometric  
240 indexes, presented in that order.

241

242 *Planimetric adjustments*

243 Planimetric adjustment of the PCs was characterised from the end of mining to 2016 by digitising  
244 the surface colonised by perennial vegetation on all the available aerial photos with a GIS (ArcGIS  
245 10.6 - ESRI) (Table 2). Vegetated surfaces were used to characterise planimetric recovery because  
246 they are the direct result of infilling of PCs and because they make it possible to precisely describe and  
247 quantify the spatial and temporal pattern of floodplain and channel reconstruction. Vegetated surfaces  
248 were digitised at a scale ranging from 1:500 to 1:800, allowing a good trade-off between their visual  
249 identification and the precise delimitation of their boundaries. Most of the photos from the French  
250 National Geographic Institute (*Institut Géographique National, IGN*) or the Centre-Val-de-Loire  
251 Regional Direction for the Environment, Planning and Housing (*Direction Régionale de*  
252 *l'Environnement, du de l'Aménagement et du Logement, DREAL*) used here were taken at low flow  
253 (Table 2). The most recent ones (i.e., most of those taken between 2002 and 2016) were already  
254 orthorectified (resolution range: 0.2-1 m). We rectified and georeferenced the others (maximum  
255 RMSE among PCs between 1.4 m and 3.2 m; resolution range: 0.25-1.7 m). In addition, we digitised  
256 the active channel (formed by flow channels and bare gravel bars) along a 4-km stretch upstream from  
257 the entrance of the PCs. From these data, two main metrics were used to describe the magnitude and  
258 the recovery rate. The first, named the width index, is the ratio between the mean width of the active  
259 channel in and upstream from the PCs. It was computed at  $t_0$  and in 2016. The upstream width is  
260 considered here as the reference width. The closer the index is to 1, the more advanced the recovery.  
261 Widths were computed using the Fluvial Corridor Toolbox (Roux et al., 2015). The widths correspond  
262 to the mean length of cross sections roughly spaced at one active channel width (30 m for AUD, 40-50  
263 m for the other PCs). The second metric describes the planimetric recovery rate. It corresponds to the  
264 percentage reduction in the initial surface area of the PC. It was obtained through the yearly ratio  
265 (expressed in percentage per year) between the surface area colonised by perennial vegetation in 2016  
266 and the surface area of the PC at  $t_0$ .

267 In addition, the longitudinal recovery pattern was characterised by computing the width colonised  
268 by perennial vegetation (terrestrialised width) at 10-m intervals along the length of the channel and at  
269 each date. This procedure enabled us to reconstruct and quantify the spatio-temporal pattern of PC  
270 filling.

271

272 **Table 2** – Temporal resolution at which the PCs’ planimetric trajectories were reconstructed. Q =  
273 Discharge. Gauging stations: MTL = Montluçon; STA = Saint-Amand-Montrond.

Site	$t_0$	First photo	Most recent photo	Study duration (yr)	N° of dates	Photo interval (yr)	Q range ( $m^3 s^{-1}$ )	Min monthly Q ( $m^3 s^{-1}$ )	Gauging station
<b>AUD</b>	1983	1983		33	9	3.7	1.3-6.9	3	MTL
<b>BOU</b>	1983	1983		33	12	2.8	1.9-54.6	7.1	STA
<b>BRU</b>	1989	1994	2016	27	10	2.7	1.9-54.6	7.1	STA
<b>SFL</b>	1993	1994		23	11	2.1	1.9-25.3	7.1	STA
<b>STH</b>	1986	1986		30	12	2.5	1.9-15.1	7.1	STA
<b>PRE</b>	1969	1969		47	18	2.6	1.8-85.5	7.1	STA

274

275

276 *Vertical adjustments*

277 We computed the mean height of the emerged bare and vegetated surfaces above the low-water  
278 level in 2011 from a LiDAR DEM (provided by the DREAL Centre-Val-de-Loire and used ‘as is’)  
279 whose mean vertical precision of the original point cloud was +/- 0.089 m (minimum: +/- 0.15 m). We  
280 also extracted the low-water elevation from the LiDAR DEM (Biron et al., 2013). In the same way as  
281 for the planimetric adjustment, we examined the longitudinal pattern of the height of the emerged  
282 deposits in PCs by computing the mean height along cross sections spaced at 10-m intervals along the  
283 whole length of the channel. Here, we propose two hypotheses. First, a decrease in height in the  
284 downstream direction, expressing the progradation of the deposits through the PCs. Second, the higher  
285 the recovery, and hence the planimetric rate, the smaller the height downstream.

286 For the purpose of comparison, in the same way, we computed the mean height of the ‘old’  
287 floodplain, namely, that of the deposits beyond the limits of the PC and prior to  $t_0$ . This height was  
288 determined on a narrow (30-m wide) strip along the PCs. A 10-m buffer zone was established between  
289 the edge of the PCs and the edge of the 30 m strip to exclude low bank heights from the computation.

290

291

## 292 *Grain-size adjustments*

293 Lastly, the recovery of PCs was characterised by grain size. We determined the grain size in the PC  
294 bed as well as upstream and downstream (at distances ranging between 2.5 km and 4 km). Sediment  
295 size was first determined from photos of coarse grain-size patches on each bar along the study reaches.  
296 The photos were taken vertically during the 2018 low-flow period and the target area was protected  
297 from direct solar radiation. The resolution of the photos was high enough to enable us to identify  
298 particles as small as coarse sand. On each photo, we used GIS (ArcGIS 10.6) to measure the apparent  
299 b-axis of 100 particles located at the intersection of a regular grid with spacing higher than the  
300 maximum longest particle axis (a-axis). Second, sediment size was determined through 400-particle  
301 Wolman samples taken on each riffle (the particles were measured with a calliper). Particles were  
302 sampled according to a regular grid covering the whole surface of the riffles.

303 We examined the longitudinal pattern of the  $D_{50}$  and the  $D_{95}$ . Here we hypothesise that grain-size  
304 sorting will continue until recovery is complete, the more advanced the recovery, the smaller the  
305 decrease in grain size expected downstream.

306

### 307 **3.2 Size and origin of deposited sediments**

308 We first estimated to what extent suspended load and bedload could have been trapped by PCs at  $t_0$ .  
309 For this purpose, we computed their trap efficiency at intervals of  $10 \text{ m}^3 \text{ s}^{-1}$  over the whole discharge  
310 range throughout the study period and for each grain-size phi interval from fine silt (4-8  $\mu\text{m}$ ) to coarse  
311 gravel (32-64 mm). We used a simple theoretical reservoir trap efficiency formula developed from  
312 modified overflow rate models and for turbulent flows and varying discharge conditions. Originally  
313 proposed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (1986, cited in Haan et al., 1994), it was  
314 subsequently modified by Verstraeten and Poesen (2000). We applied the formula to PCs because at  
315 least during the initial years after mining ended, they may be considered as weir reservoirs. The  
316 formula provides an insight into the trap efficiency of the PC at  $t_0$ , with a decrease in efficiency over  
317 time as the PC fills up.

318

319 
$$TE = 100 \left[ \frac{AV_s}{1.2q_p} \right]$$

320 where  $TE$  is the trap efficiency (in %),  $A$  is the original surface area of the PC ( $m^2$ ),  $V_s$  is the  $10^\circ C$   
321 clear water settling velocity of each grain size ( $m\ s^{-1}$ ), extracted from Table 5.4 in Julien (2010).

322  
323 We then investigated the role of the suspended load and the bedload in the recovery process by  
324 estimating the proportion of fine and coarse material (1 mm threshold) in the infilled volumes of BOU.  
325 For this purpose, we combined electrical resistivity tomography (ERT) surveys and grain-size  
326 sampling (Figure 2). We first conducted 20 ERT surveys and then took 15 samples at different  
327 resistivity measuring points (for resistivity values ranging from  $82\ \Omega\ m$  to  $3535\ \Omega\ m$ ). ERT profiles  
328 were carried out using a Wenner-Schlumberger array (Loke, 2000) that has a strong signal to noise  
329 ratio, which means that with the electrode spaced 1 m apart, we can reach an investigation depth of 12  
330 m, which is sufficient to map the entire thickness of the infilling of the PCs and the surface of the  
331 bedrock. The device we used was a multi-electrode Abem Terrameter LS with 64 electrodes. Field  
332 data were acquired in February 2019 and the water table level remained steady throughout the survey  
333 period. Data inversion was carried out by Res2dinv software (Loke and Barker, 1996) using a least  
334 square inversion technique. All ERT profiles had an RMS error  $<5\%$  before five iterations. Eleven of  
335 the samples were taken manually at depths ranging from 0.25 to 0.8 m, with the mass of the largest  
336 particle being less than 1% of the total mass of the sample, as recommended by Church et al. (1987) to  
337 obtain a representative grain size. The four last samples were extracted from a 4-m core drilled in 2019  
338 with a Cobra type TT power core drill. These different grain sizes enabled us to establish a  
339 relationship between resistivity value and the percentage of sediment volume of less than 1 mm. We  
340 then applied this relationship to each of the resistivity measuring points to estimate the percentage of  
341 sediment volume less than 1 mm in the vicinity of these points. Bedrock elevation was obtained  
342 through complementary GPR surveys and was validated thanks to the existence of logs from locations  
343 close to the PCs (see Section 3.3).

344

345 **Figure 2** – Location of electrical resistivity surveys and grain-size samples in BOU PC.

346

347 To estimate the contribution of bedload to the recovery process, we compared the volumes  
348 deposited in the PCs (see Section 3.3) with a maximum estimation of the bedload volumes from  
349 Recking's formula (2010, 2013). Four calculation steps are needed to get these estimations:

350 (1) Calculation of the critical Shields number for the  $D_{84}$  surface:

351 
$$\tau_{c84}^* = (5S + 0.06) \left( \frac{D_{84}}{D_{50}} \right)^{4.4\sqrt{S}-1.5}$$

352 where  $S$  is the bed slope ( $\text{m m}^{-1}$ ),  $D_{50}$  is the median (m) and  $D_{84}$  is the 84<sup>th</sup> percentile of the bed  
353 surface grain-size distribution (m).

354

355 (2) Calculation of the Shields number applied to the  $D_{84}$  for a given discharge:

356 
$$\tau_{84}^* = \frac{S}{(s-1)D_{84} \left[ 2/w + 74p^{2.6}(gS)^p q^{-2p} D_{84}^{3p-1} \right]}$$

357 where  $S$  is the bed slope ( $\text{m m}^{-1}$ ),  $w$  is the bankfull width (m),  $g$  is gravitational acceleration ( $9.81 \text{ m s}^{-2}$ ),  
358  $q$  is the specific discharge ( $\text{m}^3 \text{ s}^{-1} \text{ m}^{-1}$ ) defined by the ratio of flow discharge to channel width, and  
359  $p = 0.3$  when, like in this case,  $\frac{q}{\sqrt{gSD_{84}^3}} > 100$ .

360

361 (3) Calculation of the Einstein dimensionless parameter:

362 
$$\Phi = \frac{14\tau_{84}^{*2.5}}{\left[ 1 + \left( \frac{\tau_{c84}^*}{\tau_{84}^*} \right)^4 \right]}$$

363

364 (4) Calculation of the volumetric bedload transport rate ( $\text{m}^3 \text{ s}^{-1}$ ):

365 
$$q_{sv} = w \sqrt{g(s-1)D_{84}^3} \Phi$$

366 where  $w$  is the bankfull width (m) and  $s$  is the relative sediment density, i.e., the ratio of sediment  
367 density to flow density (=2.65).

368

369 The data needed to calculate volumes are:

370       ▪ The bed slope, computed from the LiDAR DEM. The reliability of the method was tested with  
371 a set of RTK-DGPS low-water levels. The bed slope was surveyed in 2010 and 2011 in 37 sections  
372 whose length was around 10 times the width of the active channel (length range: 320-900 m). The  
373 LiDAR slope was slightly underestimated but close to the 1:1 line and the correlation with the DGPS  
374 slope was strong and highly significant (LiDAR slope =  $0.83 \times \text{DGPS slope} + 0.0001$ ;  $R^2 = 0.83$ ,  $p$ -  
375 value < 0.0001). Furthermore, the relation is similar to that obtained by Biron et al. (2013) ((LiDAR  
376 slope =  $0.91 \times \text{DGPS slope} + 0.002$ ;  $R^2 = 0.75$ ), who concluded that the LiDAR slope can be  
377 confidently used to compute stream power.

- 378       ▪ The bed width, obtained from GIS analysis and expressed by two parameters:
- 379           (i) bankfull width, which allows computation of the specific water discharge (water discharge  
380 per unit width).
- 381           (ii) active channel width, which allows calculation of the total bedload discharge.
- 382       ▪ The grain-size distribution determined from photos as explained previously.
- 383       ▪ Daily discharges at Montluçon gauging stations for AUD and Saint-Amand-Montrond gauging  
384 stations for the other sites (from <http://www.hydro.eaufrance.fr/>) (Figure 1).

385       In each site, several bedload volume estimations were obtained by applying the formula upstream  
386 to PCs to different reach lengths equal to 12, 18, and 24 times the width of the active channel. The  
387 slope, active channel width and bankfull width specific to each reach were used. The slope was  
388 obtained from 2011 LiDAR DEM. The bankfull width was obtained from the ratio of the active  
389 channel width to the bankfull width computed by Dépret et al. (2015). Different grain sizes were  
390 tested. We used the mean grain size available for each reach, the grain size of the last bar just upstream  
391 from the entrance to each PC, the grain size of the bar just downstream from the entrance to the PC,  
392 and the mean grain size of all bars in all the PCs. Among these combinations, we retained the highest  
393 bedload value. It was finally multiplied by two, as Recking et al. (2012) reported that at the decadal  
394 scale, the formula provides reliable estimations within a factor envelope of two. For comparison with  
395 the bedload volumes, the deposited volumes were corrected using porosity. Because field data were  
396 missing, we chose two values (0.1 and 0.5), which represent the wide porosity spectrum encountered  
397 in sand and gravel bed rivers (Frings et al., 2011; Liang et al., 2015; Tabesh et al., 2019).



398

399 Finally, we looked at the extent to which deposited material in PCs could have originated from the  
400 upper reach via vertical or lateral erosion. As no topo-bathymetric data were available, we used low-  
401 water elevation surveyed upstream from PCs from 1989-1995 to 2011-2016 as a proxy of vertical  
402 erosion (Gurnell et al., 2003; Wyzga, 2007). These data were provided by DREAL Centre-Val-de-  
403 Loire and different private engineering companies brought together for the purpose of 1D hydraulic  
404 modelling of flood hazards. On a section of the river roughly equal to 60 times the bankfull width (3  
405 km for AUD, 3.6 km for the five other sites), we estimated the volume of sediment supplied to the  
406 riverbed by lateral erosion of the floodplain using the 2011 LiDAR as well as  $t_0$  and 2011 aerial photos  
407 (acquired in 2013 for AUD and in 2010 for PRE). In the first step, eroded surfaces between  $t_0$  and  
408 2011 were determined using GIS following the method applied by Dépret et al. (2015, 2017). In the  
409 second step, their surface area was multiplied by the height of the floodplain above the riverbed. For  
410 this purpose, we estimated the height of the floodplain above the water level along each of the eroded  
411 surfaces, applying the method presented previously, to compare the height of deposits in the PCs and  
412 height of the floodplain along the PCs. We then added +0.5 m to account for water depth (considered  
413 as the mean water depth at low flow).

414

### 415 **3.3 Controlling variables of the recovery rates**

416 In theory, the planimetric recovery rate is mainly controlled by the original volume of the PC, the  
417 volume of sediment originating from upstream and the trap efficiency of the PC. The smaller the  
418 original volume, the bigger the supply of sediment, especially the bedload volume, and finally, the  
419 more will be trapped in the PC, and the faster the recovery rate. To test this hypothesis, we examined  
420 Spearman's correlation between the 2011 recovery rate and the ratio of the volume deposited in the  
421 PCs to the original volume. This ratio expresses the three above-mentioned explanatory variables with  
422 the deposited volume in PCs combining the influence of the amount of sediments supplied to PCs as  
423 bedload or suspended load on one hand, and their trapping efficiency on the other hand. We used the  
424 2011 recovery rate rather than the 2016 rate, because the explanatory variable we tested was obtained  
425 from the 2011 LiDAR DEM.

426 The original volume was defined as the volume between the low-water level and the bedrock level  
427 and was obtained by subtracting the low-water level DEM from the bedrock surface DEM. The low-  
428 water level DEM was built from the 2011 LiDAR DEM, assuming the water level at low flow  
429 remained constant from  $t_0$  to 2011. This assumption seems to be confirmed by the comparison of low-  
430 flow level upstream and downstream from the PCs (no data were available for the PCs) from the end  
431 of the 1980s / beginning of 1990s which are clearly stable. In absence of topo-bathymetric data at  $t_0$ ,  
432 we used the bedrock elevation as reference. Here we assume that because the mining companies  
433 wished to extract as much sediment as possible, they dug down to the bedrock. The bedrock elevation  
434 was estimated along several sections thanks to GPR transects of the PCs at low flow in 2018 (Figure  
435 3). GPR images were acquired with a MALA Ramac CUII (Mala geosciences) coupled with a 100  
436 MHz shielded antenna to reduce unwanted reflections from trees in areas of alluvial forest (Neal,  
437 2004). Topographical surveys were made with an RTK DGPS. GPR observations were recorded at an  
438 in-line sampling interval of 0.2 m, a time window of 548 ns and a sampling frequency of 1079 MHz.  
439 GPR data were processed with Reflex® software (Jol, 2009; Sandmaier, 2016). The processing flow  
440 consisted of six steps. We started with static correction of the first arrival, which sometimes showed  
441 irregularities. Then we de-wowed data to remove very low frequency components. Next, we applied a  
442 gain correction and energy decay gain to preserve relative amplitude information. Data were then  
443 filtered to remove low and high frequency noise using a band-pass Butterworth filter. A topographic  
444 profile was then added to each profile to correct topographic effects. Finally, a time-depth conversion  
445 was applied based on the diffraction hyperbola fitting (Santaniello et al., 2013). No velocity analysis  
446 was performed during the field campaign. A specific velocity pattern was defined for each transect.  
447 Velocity ranged from  $0.065 \text{ m ns}^{-1}$  to  $0.095 \text{ m ns}^{-1}$ . The dominant bedrock geology is sandy-clay for  
448 AUD and BOU and limestone and clay for PRE, STH, SFL and BRU, so in all cases the dielectric  
449 constant of the bedrock is higher than the dielectric constant of PC filling, thus we were able to  
450 observe the bedrock upper boundary in the form of a more or less continuous reflector (Figure 4). In  
451 some cases, the GPR signal was too weak to detect the upper boundary of the bedrock. This can be  
452 explained by (1) a clayey deposit that weakened the GPR wave or (2) weathering of the upper part of  
453 the bedrock so there was no obvious boundary. In the later case, we chose a discontinuous picking

454 method to map the bedrock upper boundary. The determination of bedrock elevation through GPR was  
455 enabled by the existence of logs located near or in the vicinity of the PCs. Logs were reported by the  
456 BSS-BRGM database belonging to the Mining and Geological Research Institute (*Bureau des*  
457 *Recherches Géologiques et Minières*) and by the Centre for Studies and Expertise on Risks,  
458 Environment, Mobility and Development (*Centre d'études et d'expertise sur les risques,*  
459 *l'environnement, la mobilité et l'aménagement*, French acronym CEREMA). With the GIS, the  
460 estimated elevations of the bedrock were then assigned to cross sections passing through each  
461 measurement point and perpendicular to the central line. A 1-m resolution bedrock surface DEM was  
462 then built from these cross sections.

463

464

465

466 **Figure 3** – Location of ground penetrating radar surveys of the six mined river reaches.

467

468

469

470 **Figure 4** – (A) 100 Mhz Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) profile at BOU. The solid black line  
471 represents the surface of the bedrock. (B) The GPR trace (the vertical dashed green line in A) shows  
472 the negative-positive-negative reflection corresponding to the bedrock upper boundary (dashed red  
473 line).

474

475 The volume deposited in the PCs was calculated by subtracting the 2011 LiDAR DEM from the  
476 bedrock surface DEM. Such volumes are an underestimation of the actual volumes deposited because  
477 submerged deposits could not be taken into account (the 2011 active channel was excluded from the  
478 analysis). Furthermore, because of the reduction in the trap efficiency of PCs over time, the  
479 longitudinal sediment connectivity may have been restored before the LiDAR survey, and some  
480 deposited particles may have been remobilized and exported to downstream PCs.

481

482

## 483 4. Results

### 484 4.1 Channel adjustments

#### 485 *Planimetric adjustments*

486 The changes in the width index indicate that the six sites have begun to recover as the index has  
487 decreased since the end of gravel mining, which happened between 23 and 47 yr before the most  
488 recent aerial photograph (2016) we used was taken (Figure 5A). Whereas it originally ranged between  
489 1.71 and 3.66, in 2016, it was between 0.96 and 3.43. BOU has fully recovered with an index close to  
490 one in 2016. Among the five others, four have a relatively low index, ranging from 1.17 to 1.40. Only  
491 PRE, with an index that evolved from 3.66 in 1969 to 3.43 in 2016, has almost not recovered at all.

492 As shown by the annual percentage reduction in the original surface area, the recovery rate ranges  
493 from 0.12 to 1.99% yr<sup>-1</sup> (AUD: 1.72%, BOU: 1.99%, BRU: 1.28%, SFL: 1.56%, STH: 1.52%, PRE:  
494 0.12%). If we exclude PRE, the range is narrower, 1.28 to 1.99% yr<sup>-1</sup>. As indicated by the very high  
495 coefficients of determination of the linear regressions between the percentage of reduction with respect  
496 to the original surface area and the time that has elapsed since the end of gravel mining, vegetation  
497 encroachment evolves mainly at a linear rate (Figure 5B).

498

499

500

501 **Figure 5** – Changes in the width index (ratio of the width of the PC to the width of the control reach)  
502 (A) and percentage of the original surface area occupied by riparian vegetation (B).

503

504 Nevertheless, the width index alone is not sufficient to characterise the degree of planimetric  
505 adjustment. Although the Cher River is a single thread river, Fig. 6 shows that in 2016, all the sites are  
506 occupied by two or more channels separated by relatively big islands at least for part of the year.  
507 However, in the four sites (AUD, BOU, SFL, STH) that have recovered the most (based on changes in  
508 the width index), a main channel was clearly visible in 2016. The other branches, currently functioning

509 as secondary or abandoned channels, are in the process of being filled and encroached by woody  
510 riparian vegetation.

511

512

513 **Figure 6** – Extent of terrestrialization in 2016.

514

515 Overall, the longitudinal pattern of terrestrialization in 2016 mimics that of the longitudinal  
516 variability of the original width (Figure 7 and Figure 8). Most of the 2016 terrestrialized surfaces are  
517 located where the original width exceeds a threshold value roughly equal to twice the river bed width  
518 along the control reach. Table 3 shows that along these sections, the percentage of the total  
519 terrestrialized surface ranges from 69% to 86% depending on the PC. Lastly, except for AUD and  
520 BOU, which are the two PCs that have recovered the most, and PRE, which has almost not recovered  
521 at all, the 20% downstream part of the sites are the least readjusted (Figure 7).

522

523

524 **Figure 7** – Longitudinal pattern of the terrestrialized width from the end of mining until 2013-2016.

525 Only the years preceding major changes are shown.

526

527

528 **Figure 8** – Relationship between terrestrialized width in 2016 and original width.

529

530

531 **Table 3** – Percentage of terrestrialized area and of the length of PCs located where the original width  
532 of the PCs is double the width of the reference bed upstream.

	<b>AUD</b>	<b>BOU</b>	<b>BRU</b>	<b>SFL</b>	<b>STH</b>	<b>PRE</b>
<b>% of terrestrialized surface</b>	93	96	69	82	89	95
<b>% of PC length</b>	71	87	38	51	46	76

533

534

535 *Vertical adjustments*

536 In 2011, the mean elevation of sediment accumulations (bare and vegetated surfaces) above the  
537 low-water level ranged between 0.4 and 1.2 m, corresponding to rates of between 0.009 and 0.065 cm  
538 yr<sup>-1</sup>. This is much lower than the mean elevation of the floodplain, ranging from 2.5 to 4.1 m above the  
539 low-water level (Table 4). Furthermore, the accumulation rate and the rate of planimetric change  
540 (computed from bare and vegetated surfaces) in 2011 are not significantly correlated (Spearman  
541 correlation test:  $R^2 = 0.1$ ,  $p = 0.54$ ), indicating different trajectories of change at the different mining  
542 sites.

543

544 **Table 4** – Mean elevation (m) of sediment accumulation above the low-water level in PCs (bare and  
545 vegetated surfaces) and of the floodplains in 2011 (in m above the low-water level).

	<b>AUD</b>	<b>BOU</b>	<b>BRU</b>	<b>SFL</b>	<b>STH</b>	<b>PRE</b>
<b>PC</b>	0.8	0.9	0.6	1.2	1.0	0.4
<b>Floodplain</b>	2.5	4.0	4.1	4.0	3.7	2.8

546

547

548 Concerning the longitudinal pattern, we first expected that the relative depth of the sediment  
549 accumulation would decrease downstream, and second that the higher the planimetric evolution rate  
550 and the more advanced the recovery, the smaller the downstream decrease in sediment accumulation  
551 would be. However, as indicated by the black curve in Figure 9, such a decrease in downstream  
552 accumulation was only observed in AUD and BOU, which are the two PCs that have recovered the  
553 most from a planimetric point of view (Figure 5B). In the four others PCs, accumulation increased  
554 slightly downstream, but the trend was only statistically significant in PRE (Figure 9).

555

556

557

558 **Figure 9** – Longitudinal pattern of sediment elevation above the low-water level in 2011.

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*Grain-size adjustments*

Except in PRE, where only one bar was established, and except for D<sub>95</sub> in SFL, there was a decreasing downstream trend in D<sub>50</sub> or D<sub>95</sub> that seems to indicate that grain-size adjustment is ongoing (Figure 10). The rate of decrease was even higher when the range of grain size in the PC was wide, pointing to a probable role for the range of available grain size upstream from the PCs. What is more, the rate was very low in BRU and SFL. All sites considered, the decrease was nevertheless only statistically significant for both D<sub>50</sub> and D<sub>95</sub> in AUD and BOU. It was also significant for D<sub>50</sub> in SFL and in STH (but only for the Wolman samples in STH).

The D<sub>50</sub> ranged from very fine or fine to medium gravels in BOU, BRU, SFL and PRE (respectively 8-17 mm, 4-11 mm, 3-11 mm, 3-12 mm) and from very fine or fine to very coarse gravels in AUD and STH (respectively, 2-42 mm and 7-47 mm).

Three distinct situations can be highlighted concerning the upstream and downstream context. In AUD, bedload transport appears to be relatively active and sediment availability quite high: the density of alluvial riffles and bars upstream/downstream from the PC was high (see spacing of riffle and bars in Table 5) and the grain-size along these two reaches resembled that of the PC (Figure 10). The minimum D<sub>50</sub> in the PC is nevertheless much lower than the minimum D<sub>50</sub> upstream/downstream. In the case of BOU and BRU, the density of riffles and bars in the upstream reach was much higher than in the downstream reach (Table 5 and Figure 10). Furthermore, the minimum D<sub>50</sub> in the PC was close to the minimum D<sub>50</sub> upstream/downstream. The upstream grain-size trend in BOU and BRU nevertheless clearly differed, as it was relatively stable in BOU but underwent a marked decrease in BRU. Then in SFL, STH and PRE, bed sediment availability, and hence likely bedload transport, appeared to be very low as demonstrated by the absence or almost complete absence of bars and alluvial riffles (Table 5 and Figure 10).

**Figure 10** – Longitudinal grain-size pattern (D<sub>50</sub> and D<sub>95</sub>) in and around PCs.

587 **Table 5** – Mean distance (in metres normalised by the active bed width in the control reaches)  
 588 between riffles and bars in the PCs and along their upstream or downstream control reaches (computed  
 589 on a length equal to that of the PCs) in 2018.

		AUD	BOU	BRU	SFL	STH	PRE
<b>Riffle</b>	<b>PC</b>	5	11	7	17	7	NA
	<b>Control reach</b>	10	9	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>Bar</b>	<b>Control reach</b>	5	5	10	NA	33	NA

590

591

## 592 **4.2 Size and origin of deposited sediments**

### 593 *Size of the infilling sediments*

594 The trap efficiency formula indicates that at  $t_0$ , all PCs trapped all particles coarser than medium  
 595 (0.25 mm) or coarse sand (0.5 mm), depending on the PC, and consequently the entire bedload (Fig.  
 596 S1). The trap efficiency for particles finer than medium silt (16  $\mu\text{m}$ ) was almost zero whatever the  
 597 discharge considered. The trap efficiency for coarse silts (32  $\mu\text{m}$ ) was very low at almost all  
 598 discharges. All these observations imply that at  $t_0$ , most of the sandy fraction of the suspended load  
 599 was deposited in the PCs and that conversely, most of the silty fraction was flushed through.

600

601

602 **Figure S1** – Trap efficiency from very fine silt (4  $\mu\text{m}$ ) to medium sand (0.25 mm). Whatever the  
 603 discharge considered, the trap efficiency of particles coarser than medium sand reached 100%.

604

605 Compared with the volumes deposited in the PCs, the estimated maximum bedload volume were  
 606 low in the three upstream PCs (AUD, BOU and BRU), and much higher in the three downstream ones  
 607 (SFL, STH and PRE) (Table 6). This indicates that, at least in the case of AUD, BOU and BRU, a  
 608 large proportion of the deposited material was transported into the PCs by uniform or graded  
 609 suspension and is thus composed of silt and/or sand.

610



611 **Table 6** – Original volumes of PCs, deposited volumes in 2011 in PCs in 2011, maximum bedload  
612 volumes supplied to PCs from  $t_0$  to 2011 ( $m^3$ ), and maximum volumes delivered from the riverbed  
613 adjustment upstream to PCs by lateral erosion and by possible bed degradation from  $t_0$  to 2011.

	<b>AUD</b>	<b>BOU</b>	<b>BRU</b>	<b>SFL</b>	<b>STH</b>	<b>PRE</b>
<b>Original vol. of PCs</b>	347,050	336,050	493,400	163,500	267,500	447,250
<b>Deposited vol. in PCs in 2011</b>	255,900	280,950	139,500	100,000	149,400	22,600
<b>Max. bedload vol.</b>	13,900	19,250	18,900	1,363,050	576,050	85,800
<b>Upstream laterally eroded vol.</b>	81,700	59,950	20,100	700	73,350	0
<b>Upstream degraded vol.</b>	29,750	34,350	41,550	32,500	31,200	35,900
<b>Laterally eroded + Degraded vol.</b>	111,450	94,300	61,650	33,200	104,550	35,900
<b>Ratio of maximum bedload volumes / deposited vol. (porosity 0.5)</b>	0.11	0.14	0.27	25	7.69	7.69
<b>Ratio of maximum bedload volumes / deposited vol. (porosity 0.1)</b>	0.06	0.08	0.15	14.29	4.35	4.17
<b>Ratio of laterally eroded vol. / deposited vol.</b>	0.32	0.21	0.14	0.01	0.49	0.00
<b>Ratio of degraded vol. / deposited vol.</b>	0.12	0.12	0.30	0.32	0.21	1.59
<b>Ratio of total reinjected vol. / deposited vol.</b>	0.44	0.34	0.44	0.33	0.70	1.59

614

615

616 A good example of the major role played by fine sediments in the infilling of the PCs, and their  
617 geomorphic recovery, is BOU, where the percentage of sediment size lower than 1 mm, considered as  
618 the approximate limit between bedload and suspension, was roughly estimated (Figure 11). We  
619 identified two main types of deposits located in distinct areas when we examined the five longitudinal  
620 profiles surveyed along the PC. The resistivity of the deposits located on the right-hand bank in the  
621 upstream half of the PC (P4 ERT profile) was very high (median 1435  $\Omega$  m) and the proportion of  
622 sediments < 1 mm was relatively low (35%). In the rest of the PC, resistivity decreased considerably  
623 (median between 101  $\Omega$  m and 182  $\Omega$  m for P10, P11, P12 and P13) and the proportion of sediments <

624 1 mm increased significantly (70%, 58%, 71% and 61% for P10, P11, P12 and P13, respectively)  
625 (Figure 12). Finally, particles < 1 mm were estimated to account for 56% of the total deposited  
626 volumes in 2011.

627

628 **Figure 11** – Relation between resistivity and percentage of sediment volume < 1 mm in BOU.

629

630

631 **Figure 12** – Electrical resistivity tomography in BOU.

632

633 *Upstream delivery*

634 Only a relatively small fraction of the deposited volumes can have originated from vertical or  
635 lateral erosion of the upstream reach. The hypothesis of a PC being infilled because of a massive  
636 sediment supply from headward erosion can very likely be rejected because the comparison of the  
637 low-water level upstream from the PCs from the end of the 1980s / beginning of 1990s until the early  
638 2010s was clearly stable, except for SFL1 located 4 km upstream from the entrance of SFL (Fig. S2).  
639 In PRE, mining ended in 1969 so the vertical evolution of the bed for the first 20 yr following mining  
640 could not be characterised. A bias associated with the comparison of low-water levels is nevertheless  
641 possible, as a slight bed degradation (up to 0.1-0.2 m) might have not been detected using this method  
642 and/or the few available points of comparison might not be representative of the vertical changes to  
643 the riverbed upstream from the PCs. If we consider a 0.2 m bed degradation upstream from the PCs  
644 over a river reach equal to 60 times the bankfull width (3 km for AUD, 3.6 km for the other PCs)  
645 between  $t_0$  and 2011 and if we consider that the whole degraded volume was trapped by PCs over the  
646 study period, we obtain a very low ratio between the degraded volume and the deposited volume  
647 (Table 6). Only PRE might have been filled by sediment originating from bed degradation, mainly  
648 because its deposited volume is very small. The values of the ratios are nonetheless overestimated  
649 because the deposited volumes in PCs are underestimated and the degraded volumes are probably also  
650 overestimated. A similar conclusion can be drawn concerning lateral erosion in the upstream reach  
651 (Table 6). The volumes involved are indeed much smaller than the infilled volumes. Furthermore,

652 whereas we considered that all the laterally reinjected volumes reached the PCs, in fact, part of the  
653 volume is very likely stored in the riverbed upstream from the PCs (Table 6), as indicated by the many  
654 newly created areas colonized by vegetation upstream from the PCs between  $t_0$  and 2011, especially in  
655 AUD, BOU, BRU and STH. Taking the degraded and the laterally eroded volumes together, the  
656 findings remain the same (Table 6).

657

658

659 **Figure S2**– Changes in the low-water level between 1989 and 2016 in the reach located upstream  
660 from the gravel pits (Minimum monthly discharge:  $3.4 \text{ m}^3 \text{ s}^{-1}$  for AUD and  $7.1 \text{ m}^3 \text{ s}^{-1}$  for the other  
661 sites).

662

#### 663 **4.2 Controlling factors**

664 The overall planimetric recovery rate was highly and significantly correlated with the deposited  
665 volume / original volume ratio ( $R^2 = 0.89$ ;  $p\text{-value} = 0.0048$ ), thus confirming our initial assumption of  
666 a recovery rate controlled by the original volume of PCs, by the volume of sediment supplied from  
667 upstream and by the trap efficiency of the PCs.

668

669

670

671 **Figure 13** – Relationship between 2011 planimetric recovery rate and the ratio between the deposited  
672 volume in 2011 and the original volume.

673

674

### 675 **5. Discussion**

#### 676 **5.1 The role of suspended load and bedload in the recovery rates**

677 Our results indicate that at least in the three upstream PCs (AUD, BOU, BRU), the filling material  
678 is only partially composed of bedload sediments (Table 6). In contrast, in the three downstream PCs  
679 (SFL, STH and PRE), all the filling originated from bedload, because the deposited volumes are

680 clearly lower than the bedload supply computed using Recking's formula (Table 6). This observation  
681 nevertheless seems quite paradoxical given the apparent limited bed sediment availability upstream  
682 from these PCs, as indicated by the total absence of bars and alluvial riffles (Figure 10 and Table 5).  
683 This absence does not seem to be the expression of the progression of a headward erosion front from  
684 PCs since the beginning of mining because bars are also rare in aerial photos acquired before sediment  
685 mining began. This is evidence for strongly limited transport conditions and overestimation of the  
686 maximum bedload volumes obtained from grain-size in the PCs. The paradox is even more striking  
687 when we compare the bedload volumes in the three upstream and the three downstream PCs. In SFL,  
688 STH and PRE, the maximum bedload estimations are respectively between 88 and 163, 27 and 50, and  
689 2 and 5 times higher than in the three upstream PCs. Yet, in contrast to the downstream PCs, the  
690 reaches located immediately upstream from the three upstream PCs show a relative abundance of bars  
691 and alluvial riffles, suggesting active bedload transport (Figure 10 and Table 5). Expressed in terms of  
692 specific transport rates, the bedload was between  $0.52 \text{ t km}^2 \text{ yr}^{-1}$  and  $0.58 \text{ t km}^2 \text{ yr}^{-1}$  for the three  
693 upstream PCs whereas it was  $46.7 \text{ t km}^2 \text{ yr}^{-1}$ ,  $13.9 \text{ t km}^2 \text{ yr}^{-1}$  and  $1.3 \text{ t km}^2 \text{ yr}^{-1}$  for SFL, STH and PRE,  
694 respectively. The values for the three upstream PCs and PRE are in agreement with those provided by  
695 Houbrechts et al. (2008) for 16 rivers flowing in a relatively similar climatic and geological context,  
696 which range from  $0.3 \text{ t km}^2 \text{ yr}^{-1}$  to  $2.8 \text{ t km}^2 \text{ yr}^{-1}$  (periods: 2-31 yr, watershed areas: 0.26-2691 km<sup>2</sup>,  
697 bankfull specific stream power: 17-140 W m<sup>-2</sup>). In contrast, the bedload rates for SFL and STH are  
698 extremely unlikely, because they are close to the highest rates reported worldwide, and exceed several  
699 tens of  $\text{t km}^2 \text{ yr}^{-1}$  (e.g., Powell et al., 1996; Rickenmann, 1997; Ziegler et al., 2014). If we apply a rate  
700 of  $0.6 \text{ t km}^2 \text{ yr}^{-1}$  to SFL and STH, i.e., the maximum estimated rate amongst the three upstream PCs,  
701 we obtain bedload volumes between 2.9 and 5.4 times lower than the deposited volumes. All the  
702 above-mentioned considerations suggest that the filling material in SFL and STH is only partially  
703 composed of bedload sediments. Lastly, only PRE could have been completely filled with bedload  
704 because if we apply the same correction as the one we used for SFL and STH, the deposited volume is  
705 2-3.6 times lower than that of the bedload. Nevertheless, considering that the specific stream power  
706 upstream to PRE is the lowest amongst the six PCs and that the maximum  $D_{50}$  in PRE is 3 mm, it can  
707 reasonably be hypothesised that the deposited volume is partly composed of suspended load. Finally,

708 the importance of the suspended load in the recovery potential of PCs is emphasised by assuming 56%  
709 of the deposited volume in BOU in 2011 was made up of particles < 1 mm, as estimated from the  
710 combination of geophysical surveys and grain-size analysis (Figure 11 and Figure 12). If we consider  
711 this grain size as a rough limit between bedload and suspended load processes, this implies that only  
712 44% of the infilled volume in BOU can be attributed to bedload transport.

713

714

715

## 716 **5.2 The influence of the sand load on the recovery processes**

717 Whatever the PC considered, a large proportion of the deposited volume comprised of particles < 2  
718 mm is hypothesised to be sand. At  $t_0$ , the trap efficiency for silt would be almost null for particles smaller than medium silt and very low for coarse silt. Furthermore, because of the progressive infilling of the PCs, trap efficiency in submerged areas decreases over time (Verstraeten and Poesen, 2000). As long as a PC remains submerged, silt is highly unlikely to be deposited. However, once the deposits emerge at low flow and have begun to be encroached by vegetation, the trap efficiency for suspended load is hypothesised to become significant (Corenblit et al., 2007; 2020). Trap efficiency on these elevated vegetated surfaces should thus result in a thick layer of silty material, transported as a uniform suspended load in the upper part of the water column. Yet, comparing the elevation in the 2011 LiDAR data and the DGPS data acquired in 2019 along the ERT survey sections in BOU on surfaces colonized by vegetation in 2011 shows almost complete absence of aggradation and thus probably a low silty load in the Cher River. For this comparison, we selected LiDAR points located less than 20 cm from DGPS points (giving a total of 526 points). Our comparison shows that for 75% of the paired points, the absolute difference in elevation is lower than the total error in elevation measurement (equal to 0.096 m and computed as proposed by Taylor (1997) when different components of a total error are considered as independent and are assumed to follow a Gaussian distribution:

734  $\sqrt{E_{DGPS}^2 + E_{LiDAR}^2}$ , with  $E_{DGPS}^2$  the DGPS vertical error and  $E_{LiDAR}^2$  the LiDAR vertical error equal to

735 the mean absolute difference from control points). Moreover, the difference in 95% of the paired  
736 points is less than 0.2 m. Most of the suspended material and hence a large proportion of the total  
737 volume deposited in PCs is consequently hypothesised to be mainly composed of sand. Transported as  
738 a uniform suspension for its finest grain-size fraction, or as a graded suspension or as bedload (at low  
739 discharges) for its coarsest fraction, sand is therefore hypothesised to be the main determining factor in  
740 the morpho-sedimentary recovery potential of PCs in the Cher River. Furthermore, the role of sand in  
741 the recovery process probably goes even further because, at least up to a certain threshold (40% in  
742 Miwa and Parker, 2017, 50% in Dudill et al., 2018), the sand content increases gravel mobility, which,  
743 in turn, increases the bedload rate (e.g., Jackson and Beschta, 1984; Iseya and Ikeda, 1987; Wilcock et  
744 al., 2001; Curran and Wilcock, 2005; Miwa and Parker, 2017; Perret et al., 2018; Dudill et al., 2018).  
745 Such an effect is especially important in gravel-bed low-energy rivers as most of bedload very likely  
746 occurs under partial transport conditions, namely with shear stress barely higher than the critical shear.  
747 This implies that the role of gravels in the PCs recovery rates increases with an increase in the  
748 proportion of sand in the subsurface layer. For example, compared to a river deprived of, or with a  
749 very low sand content, the gravel mobility in the Cher River has very probably risen because the sand  
750 content is between 22% and 28% (Dépret, 2014). Broadly, the volume of sand load can be considered  
751 as a major control of the geomorphic recovery capacity of low energy gravel-bed systems.

752

### 753 **5.3 The need to account for the lithology when assessing recovery potential**

754 In addition, the role of the sand load in the Cher River PCs recovery highlights the importance of  
755 watershed lithology in recovery potential. As exemplified by Macaire et al. (1997, 2001, 2002, 2013),  
756 the amount of sand flux is strongly controlled by the lithological composition of the watershed.  
757 Macaire et al. (1997, 2001, 2002) studied the Holocene sediment yield and flux in two small  
758 lithologically contrasted basins in the Loire watershed, considered to be representative of the two main  
759 lithological units that make up the Loire watershed (like the Cher River), the Massif Central upstream  
760 and the Parisian Basin downstream. Macaire et al. (1997, 2001) showed that the total specific sediment  
761 yield and the total amount of sediment flowing out of the Chambon watershed, located in the Massif  
762 Central and mainly composed of granite, metamorphic and volcanic rocks, are largely dominated by a

763 solid load at the expense of a dissolved load. The opposite was reported for the Négron watershed,  
764 located in the Parisian Basin and mainly composed of Cenomanian sand and marl, Oxfordian  
765 limestone and marl as well as of Turonian chalk (Macaire et al., 2001, 2002). Extrapolating their  
766 results to the whole Loire basin, Macaire et al. (2001) estimated that 91% of the total solid yield  
767 originated from the Massif Central. The remaining 9% would thus have been produced in the  
768 sedimentary context of the Parisian Basin. The minor role played by the Parisian Basin in the sediment  
769 delivery is supported by the very low proportion of sand originating from sedimentary rocks in the  
770 path of the Loire River through the Parisian Basin (Macaire et al., 2013). This means that if the  
771 lithology of the Cher watershed had been dominated by limestone, especially in its upper part, the sand  
772 load, and hence the recovery rate of the PCs, would have been much lower. It also implies that the  
773 recovery capacity of low-energy gravel-bed rivers increases with an increase in sand content and thus  
774 unquestionably depends on the geological context. Finally, it stresses the need for low-energy rivers to  
775 include watershed lithology when designing a recovery plan that incorporates morpho-sedimentary  
776 aspects. The same maintenance or restoration practices can indeed lead to significantly different  
777 results depending on the watershed lithology.

778

#### 779 **5.4 The role of PCs in habitat diversity**

780 Shifting riverscape mosaic processes are known to trigger rejuvenation of riparian successions  
781 associated with pulse disturbance and their conservation or restoration is an issue in biodiversity  
782 conservation (e.g., Stanford et al., 2005; Tockner et al., 2010; Hauer et al., 2016; Diaz-Redondo et al.,  
783 2018;). The Cher River has been subject to longstanding anthropogenic inhibition of lateral mobility  
784 that has strongly limited such processes (Dépret et al., 2015, 2017; Vayssière et al., 2016, 2020).  
785 Moreover, its riparian forest, currently composed of a thin discontinuous strip, is in a remnant state  
786 because of the pressure exerted by farming and pasture in the floodplain. What is more, the riparian  
787 forest is also threatened by the drop in the alluvial water table caused by the bed incision (up to 2.5 m  
788 in some reaches) that followed gravel mining (Dépret, 2014). In this context, PCs play a paradoxical  
789 role. Drivers of the bed incision, and thus partly responsible for the deterioration of riparian forests,  
790 PCs are nevertheless currently transient hotspots for riparian diversity, in particular, by allowing

791 pioneer vegetation to encroach. This is apparent when one compares the surface of newly deposited  
792 bars available for vegetation colonization inside the PCs and outside. The latter data are available  
793 between BRU and Vierzon for the period 1959-2016. Along this reach, the area of deposited surfaces  
794 colonized by vegetation in the PCs (BRU, SFL, STH, PRE and two others not included in the present  
795 study) represents 35% of the total area of deposited surfaces along this reach, whereas their course  
796 occupies only 10% of the total length of the river. Managers should thus pay particular attention to  
797 these woody pioneer habitats located inside the PCs. Nonetheless, their ecological benefits could be  
798 short lived because they are not able to self-maintain. With the progressive aggradation of their  
799 surfaces, which reduces stresses caused by flooding and increases the depth of the water table, the  
800 pioneer habitats will inevitably evolve towards the mature stage dominated by hardwood species  
801 similar to those composing the remnant riparian forest in the floodplain. The question remains of when  
802 this succession will occur. The almost complete absence of aggradation observed in BOU between  
803 2011 and 2019 on surfaces occupied by pioneer vegetation (reported in Section 5.2) as well as the  
804 thinness of the layer of silty deposits on these surfaces suggest that the establishment of a hardwood  
805 forest could take at least a few decades starting now. A similar issue of sustainability applies to the  
806 aquatic habitats. PCs also increase their heterogeneity because of the creation of abandoned channels  
807 and to the diversification of geomorphic units (riffles, pools and bars), especially in the three  
808 downstream PCs surrounded by reaches that are almost completely deprived of such units (Fig. 10 and  
809 Table 4).

810

811

## 812 **6. Conclusion**

813 This study investigated the recovery of a low energy gravel-bed river more than 20 yr after gravel  
814 mining ended. Our specific objectives were to describe and quantify the morpho-sedimentary  
815 readjustment of extended and over-widened mining pits (we named pseudo-captures) and to identify  
816 the factors that control their recovery rate, which we defined using criteria of perennial vegetation  
817 encroachment. Thanks to an interdisciplinary methodological approach, we identified a wide spectrum  
818 of recovery magnitude closely correlated with the ratio of the volume of sediment deposited in pits to



819 their volume when mining ended. In addition, we demonstrated that the infilled material is only partly  
820 composed of bedload and consequently that the suspended load, mainly sand, plays the main role in  
821 the recovery process. Whereas the watershed is separated into two main lithological units, with  
822 crystalline and metamorphic rocks upstream and sedimentary rocks downstream, most of the sand is  
823 assumed to have originated from the upper watershed, highlighting the importance of the surficial  
824 lithology in the recovery potential. The abundance of sand explains the unexpectedly high recovery  
825 rate of some pseudo-captures despite the low energy of the river. Our results highlight the need to  
826 further improve our knowledge in the morphogenic role of sand in gravel-bed rivers. Progress is  
827 required particularly in quantifying the proportion of sand in the total solid load of rivers as well as in  
828 identifying the conditions under which it is transported as suspended material or as bedload.  
829 Measuring fluxes remains a complex task and methods to achieve it are still rare and those that exist  
830 are associated with high uncertainty particularly because of the spatio-temporal variability at which the  
831 sand-size classes flows in suspension or as bedload (Camenen et al., 2019). Lastly, from a  
832 methodological point of view, our study illustrates how our understanding of geomorphic processes  
833 can be improved by the combined use of standard geomorphological methods, which mainly provide  
834 information concerning surface changes (grain-size, topography, planimetry, etc.), and the use of  
835 geophysical methods such as ground penetrating radar or electrical resistivity tomography, which  
836 make it possible to investigate the texture and structure of sediments beneath the surface.

837

838

### 839 **Acknowledgements**

840 This research was conducted in the framework of the *Plan Loire Grandeur Nature*. It was funded by  
841 the FEDER *Bassin de la Loire* and the *Agence de l'Eau Loire-Bretagne*. The authors thank Anaëlle  
842 Vayssière and Agnès Gauthier for their help with the core interpretation. Finally, the authors would  
843 like to express their gratitude to the editor, Scott Lecce, to Lorenzo Marchi and to a second  
844 anonymous reviewer for their constructive comments and suggestions that have significantly improved  
845 this paper.

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847

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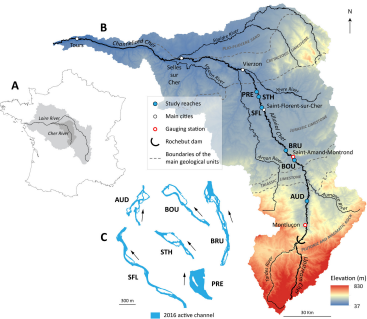
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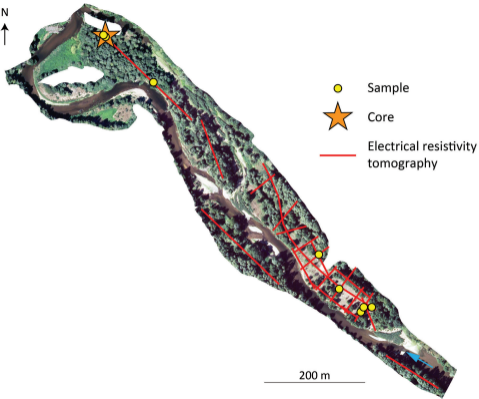
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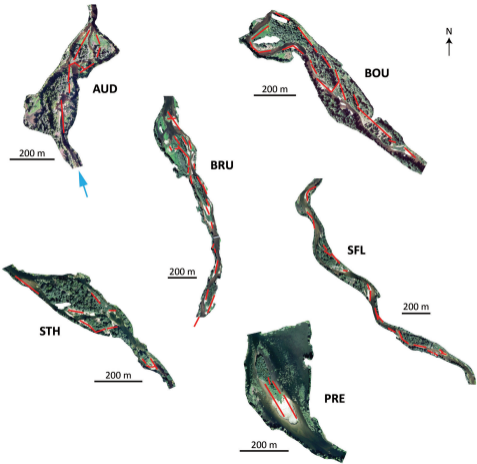
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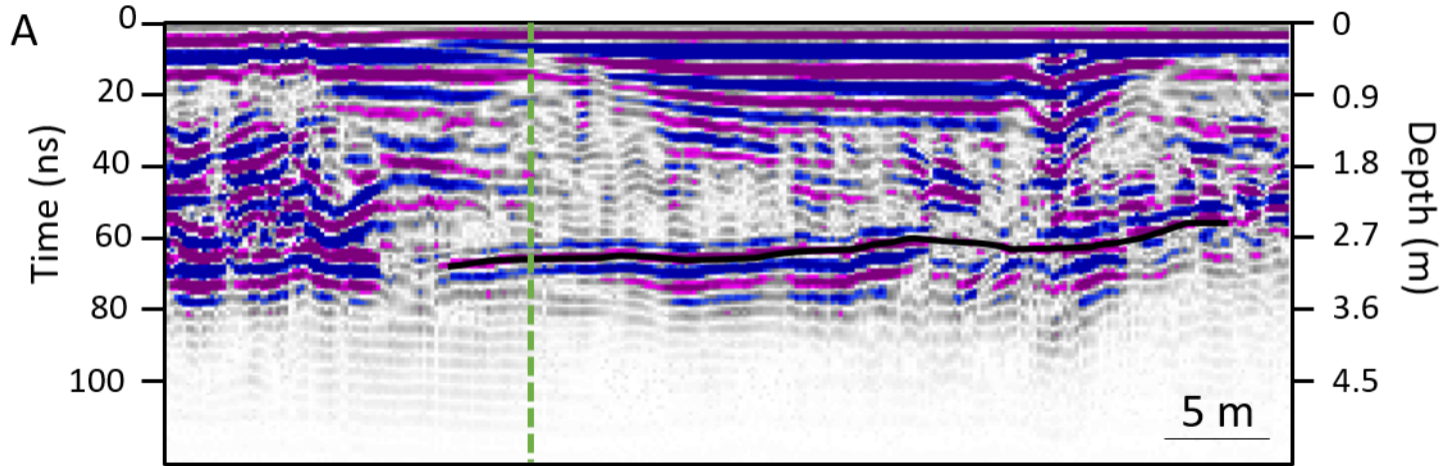


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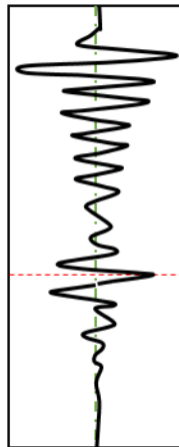


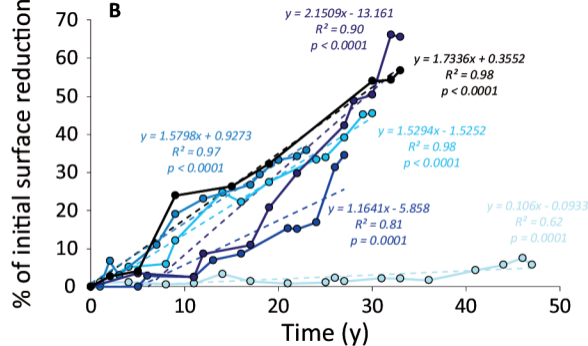
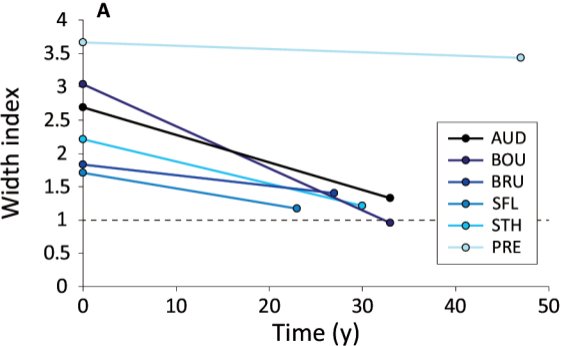


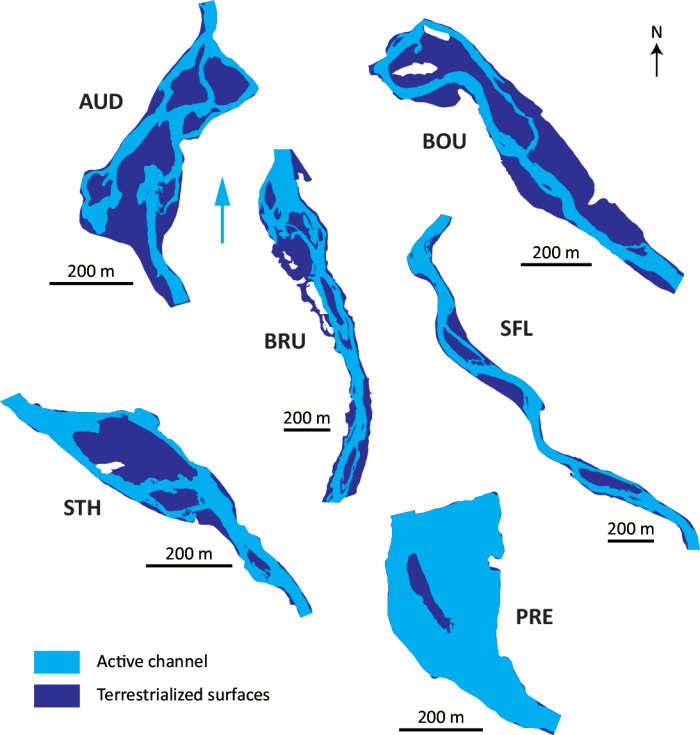


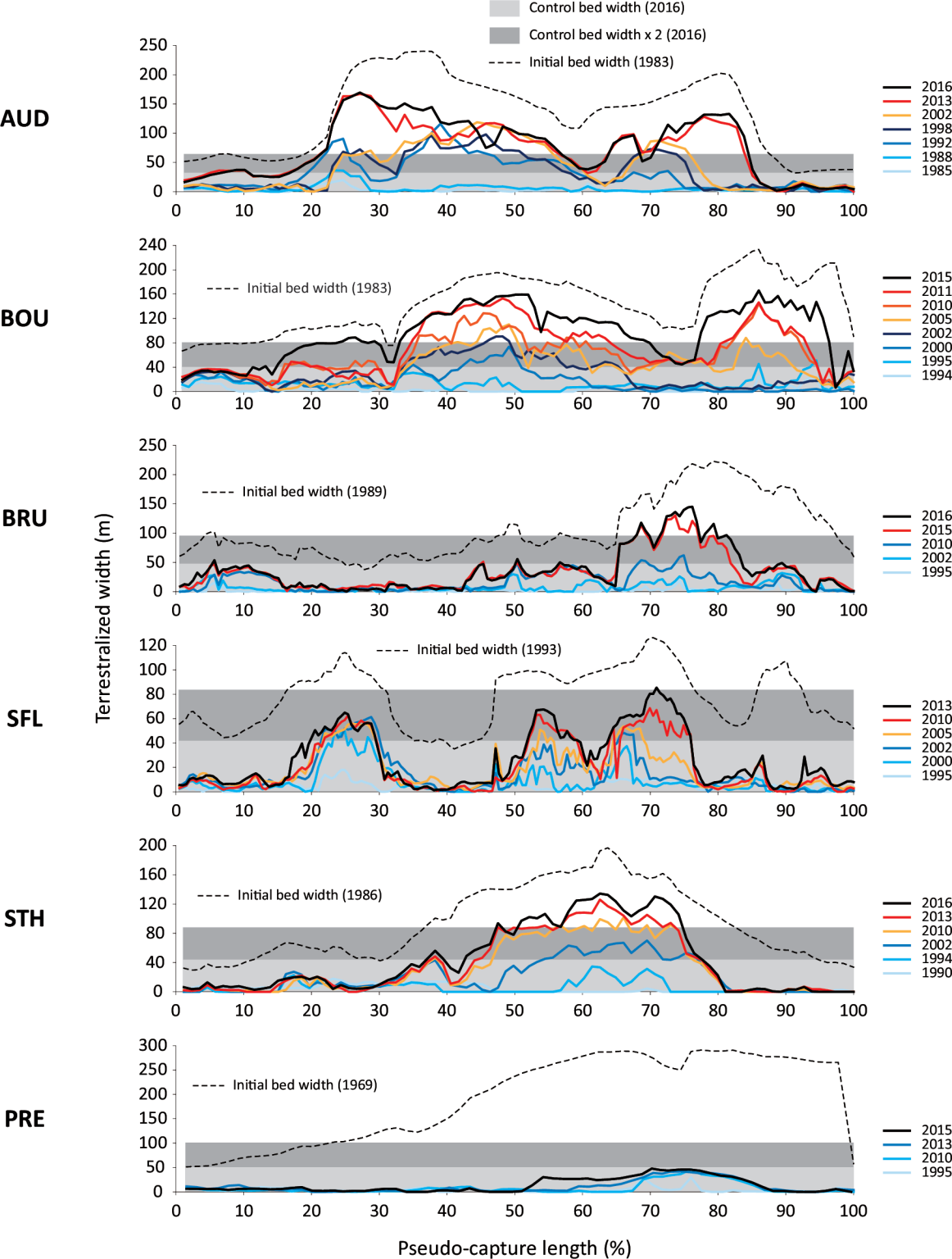


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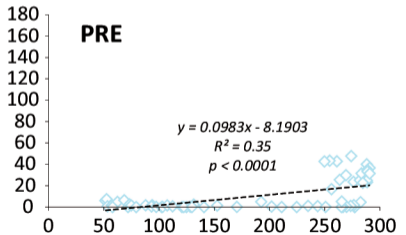
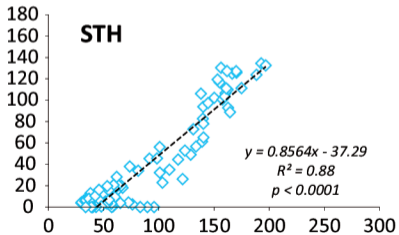
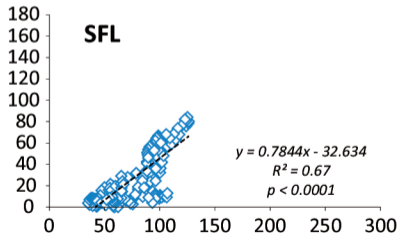
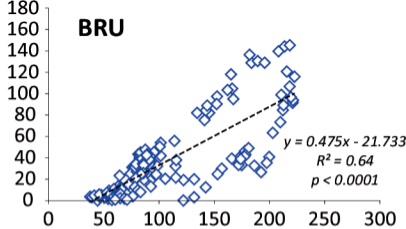
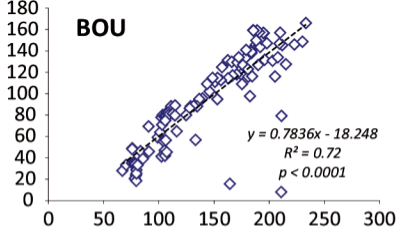
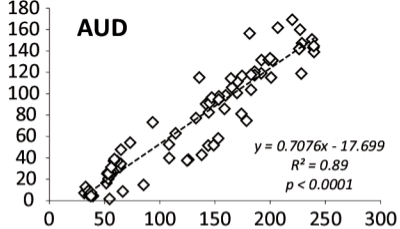




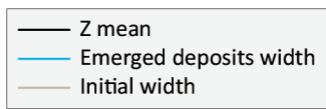
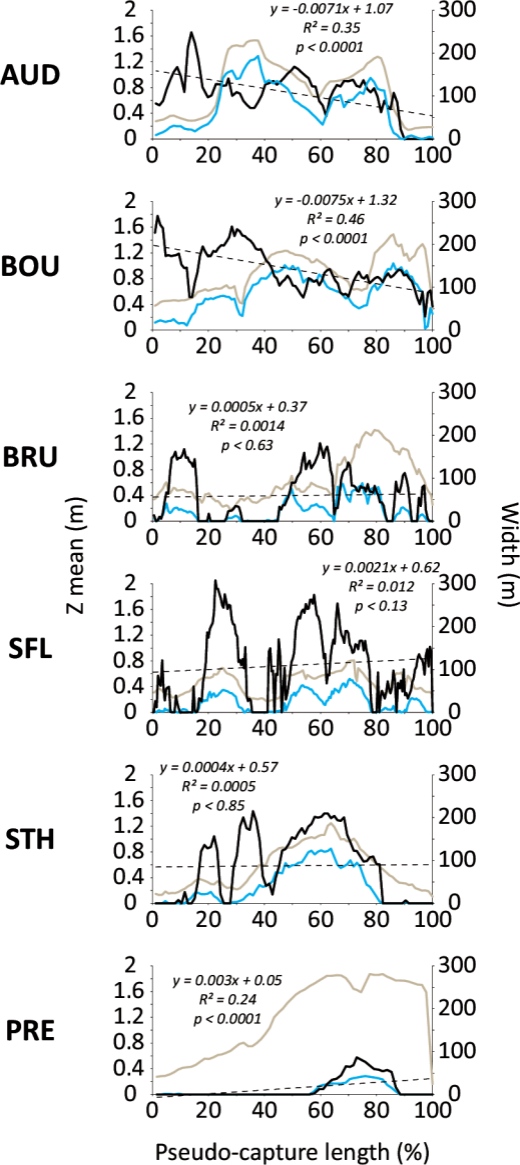


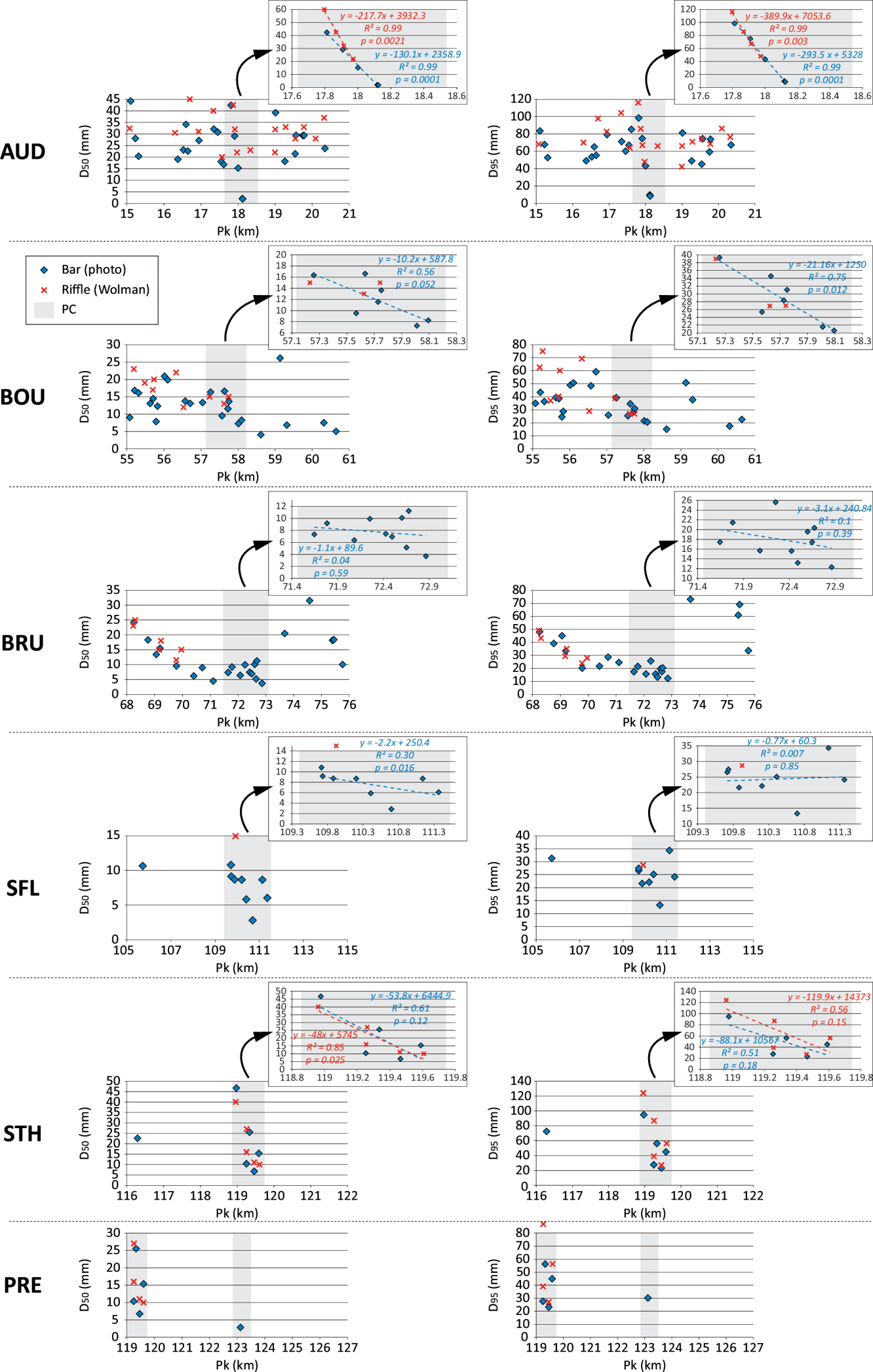


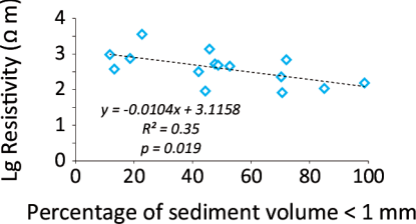
2016 terrestrial width (m)



Initial width (m)











- Sample
- Core
- Electrical resistivity tomography longitudinal profile
- Bedrock limit

