NASA/CR- -97- 207560

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Thermal and Hydrologic Signatures of Soil Controls on Evaporation: A Combined Energy and Water Balance Approach with Implications for Remote Sensing of Evaporation

(NASA New Investigator Program, NAGW 5255 7/1/96-12/31/97)

Summary of Research

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I. Background

The overall goal of this research, as detailed in the original project description, is to examine the feasibility of applying a newly developed diagnostic model of soil water evaporation to large land areas using remotely sensed input parameters. The model, described in *Salvucci* [1997a], estimates the rate of soil evaporation during periods when it is limited by the net transport resulting from competing effects of capillary rise and drainage. The critical soil hydraulic properties are implicitly estimated via the intensity and duration of the first stage (energy limited) evaporation, removing a major obstacle in the remote estimation of evaporation over large areas. This duration, or "time to drying" (t_d), is revealed through three signatures detectable in time series of remote sensing variables. The first is a break in soil albedo that occurs as a small vapor transmission zone develops near the surface [*Idso et al.*, 1974]. The second is a break in either surface to air temperature differences or in the diurnal surface temperature range, both of which indicate increased sensible heat flux (and/or storage) required to balance the decrease in latent heat flux (e.g. *Diak and Whipple*, [1995]; *Shouse et al.* [1982]). The third is a break in the temporal pattern of near surface soil moisture. Soil moisture tends to decrease rapidly during stage I drying (as water is removed from storage), and then become more or less constant during soil limited, or "stage II" drying (as water is merely transmitted from deeper soil storage). The research tasks, as described in the initial proposal, address: 1) improvements in model structure, including extensions to transpiration and aggregation over spatially variable soil and topographic landscape attributes; and 2) applications of the model using remotely sensed input parameters.

II. Progress to Date

Progress to date can be grouped into three related efforts: 1) Testing the diagnostic model and the ability to detect the time to drying (t_d) at the FIFE site; 2) Extending the basic structure of the model to explicitly address transpiration dynamics; and 3) Incorporating soil and topographic induced heterogeneity into soil moisture and evaporation predictions. Below our progress in each effort is discussed, along with a listing of publications and presentations of results.

FIFE Tests: The time series of evaporation from each eddy correlation and bowen ratio station were analyzed in detail for the period spanning 1987 to 1989. Four major dry-downs were identified during periods of measurement, and for those we analyzed the temporal patterns of albedo, surface temperature, soil moisture (where available), rainfall, and leaf area index. Most of the station data supported both the evaporation model, and the ability to estimate the critical input parameter t_d from the concurrent albedo, moisture and temperature measurements. In general the model worked best for long dry-downs.

To test the diagnostic model using satellite sensed t_d, the data were spatially aggregated. Albedo and daytime temperature differences measured by GOES gave the best estimates of time to drying. During the drydown spanning September 10 (day 255) to October 12 1987, for example, the best fit transition time based on the evaporation data was day 268, while surface measured temperature, moisture, and albedo indices estimated day 273, 270, and 267 respectively. GOES-7 estimated albedo and temperature difference index (thermal radiance at 1:30pm minus 7:30 am) each yielded and estimate of day 270. These evaporation, temperature, moisture and albedo series are illustrated in Figure 1. For this month long dry down, the error in estimation of t_d causes less than ten percent error in cumulative evaporation. Regarding remote sensing capabilities, we conclude that one strength of our approach is that it does not rely on absolute values of surface parameters, but rather on their relative variations in time.

While the temperature and moisture indices appear to offer a clear signature of soil limited evaporation, there is some uncertainty at this point as to the relative contributions of soil and vegetation in the albedo measurements. While the dramatic increase in albedo could be attributed to senescence, we found that in general the ground based and satellite measured albedo *did not* follow the temporal pattern of surface measured green LAI, as one might expect. This could mean that the dramatic increase in albedo was indeed mostly caused by the brightening of the soil background, as found for example by *Idso et al.* [1974].

Scaling Transpiration Dynamics: As it currently exists, the model does not explicitly account for the effects of transpiration. To complement the analysis of the FIFE data (which, surprisingly, showed little relation between total evapotranspiration and LAI, further supporting the analysis of *Stewart and Verma* [1992]), we have coupled the unsaturated flow model developed by Chris Milly of GFDL [*Milly,* 1982] with the root sink model of *Cowan* [1965]. Preliminary analysis, reported in *Amano* [1997], indicates that a similar temporal scaling property may exist for transpiration as does for bare soil evaporation, i.e. stressed transpiration proceeds at a rate that may be scaled by "t_s", the time to stress, such that soil hydraulic properties need not be measured *in situ*. Essentially the same type of physical processes apply, except that transpiration becomes limited by competing capillary rise to and drainage from the root zone, as opposed to the soil surface.

Unlike the bare soil evaporation case which can be specified entirely in terms of time-to-drying and potential evaporation, the transpiration case requires one parameter group (initial moisture volume in the root zone) to be specified. If further modeling and data analysis support this method, the applicability of the model will be greatly enhanced (e.g. to grasslands and agricultural sites). An example of how well the simulated stressed transpiration drydowns collapse onto a common (scaled) curve is shown in figure 2. A large range of rooting depths, potential evaporation rates, and initial moisture contents were assumed to simulate each drydown, resulting in vastly different transpiration rates and times-to-stress ranging from 4 to 45 days. When time is scaled by t_s , and transpiration rate by a function of potential evaporation and root zone water storage, all of the transpiration traces collapse onto a more-or-less universal curve determined by the competing effects of capillary rise to and drainage from the root zone.

Incorporating soil and topographic induced heterogeneity: The final major effort over the past year has been a modeling and field analysis of the role of soil texture and topography in determining the near surface moisture content after rainfall, and thus in determining the spatial variability and patterns in evaporation and time to drying. This work has included theoretical and field analysis of the relation between soil moisture and the so called scale factor (α) [*Warrick et al.*, 1977], and the modeling of coupled groundwater and surface water flows to explore the role of these couplings in spatial patterns of moisture, evaporation, and time to drying. The scale factor (α) is a parameter related to soil pore size distributions which has been widely used to simultaneously model random spatial variations in the Soil Water Retention Curve (SWRC) and hydraulic conductivity.

The groundwater-surface water modeling work, which is based on *Salvucci and Entekhabi* [1995], has lead us to a predictive description of *deterministic* spatial patterns of time to drying, which will be applied to the Southern Great Plains 97 Soil Moisture Remote Sensing Project Sites. John Levine developed the model and participated in SGP97 while working as a research assistant on this grant, but is currently applying the model to a related issue of groundwater-surface water interaction in the Canadian plains under an NSF supported grant. His masters thesis will primarily reflect the NSF work, after which he will return to the NASA grant and the SGP97 applications for his Ph.D. dissertation.

Regarding the field analysis of soil texture effects, we have (to date) collected over 120 surface soil cores during rainstorms and drydowns, and performed laboratory analysis of their soil water retention to estimate the scale factor (α). The results have been very encouraging. We have found a simple power law relationship between the scale factor and the field moisture content of the form: $S_i = \langle s \rangle (\alpha_i / \langle \alpha \rangle)^n$ where the subscript i denotes the point-scale (i.e. soil core) value of saturation (S) and scale factor (α) and the angle brackets denote spatial averaging. The exponent of the power law (n) has been derived theoretically (from Richards equation of moisture flow) to be related in a simple fashion to the slope of the SWRC for the limiting cases of early time infiltration, long time infiltration, and long time transpiration, and long time bare soil evaporation. The analytical framework for this approach and comparisons with numerically simulated soil moisture fields have been summarized in a paper submitted to *Geophysical Research Letters* [Salvucci, 1998]. Figure 3a illustrates the temporal behavior of the exponent n under wetting and drying conditions as found in numerical simulations, along with the 4 analytically derived limits (solid lines). Figure 3b illustrates one example of of this relation for field measured soil moisture. This work has strong implications for scaling up the basic evaporation model because the derived power law implies a related power law relation between time to drying and α, from which we have derived a statistically spatially integrated dry down law [*Amano*, 1997]). This work also has strong implications for the interpretation and relation of in situ and remotely sensed soil moisture.

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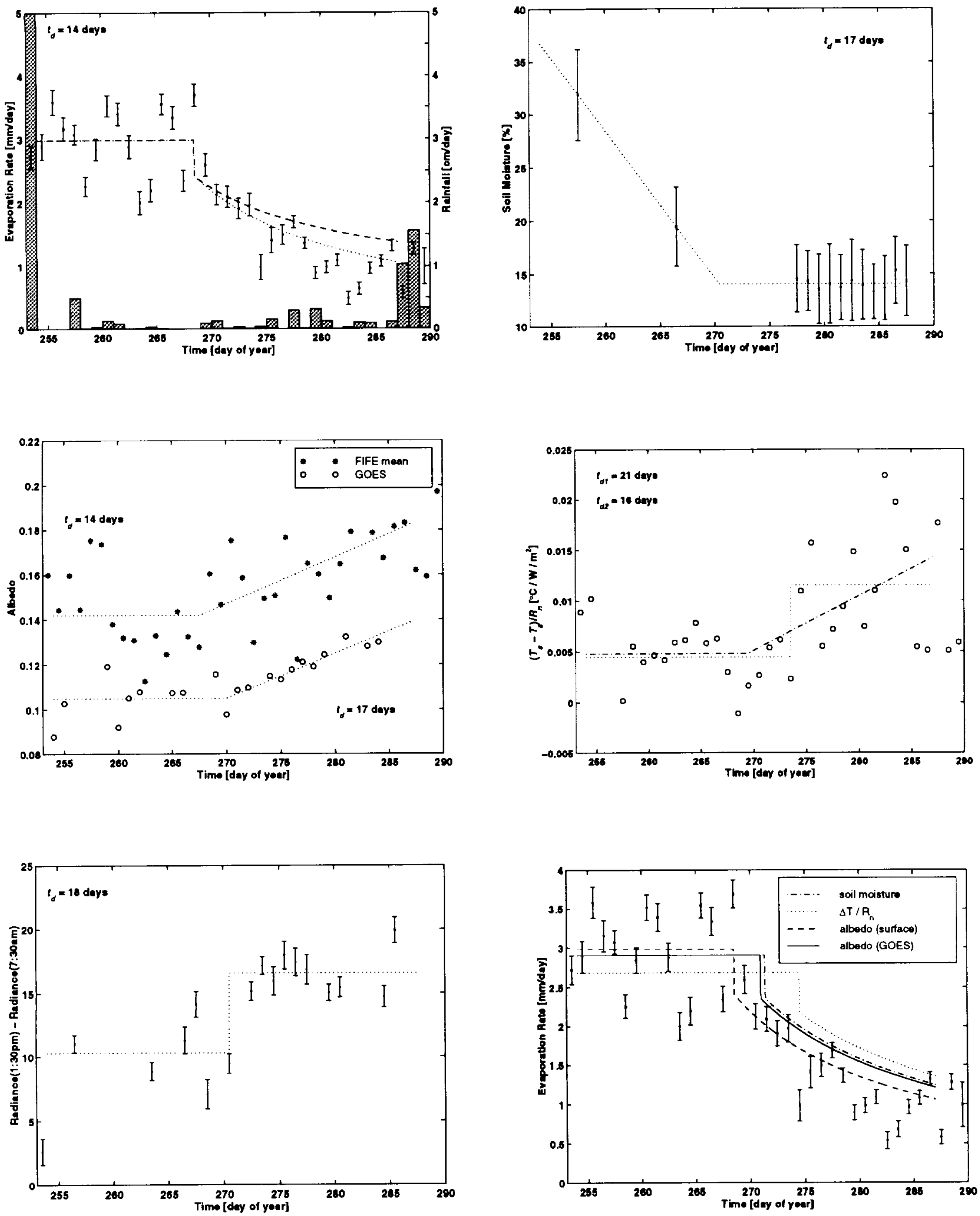


Figure 1: Stages of drying at FIFE revealed in series of evaporation, albedo, temperature, and moisture.

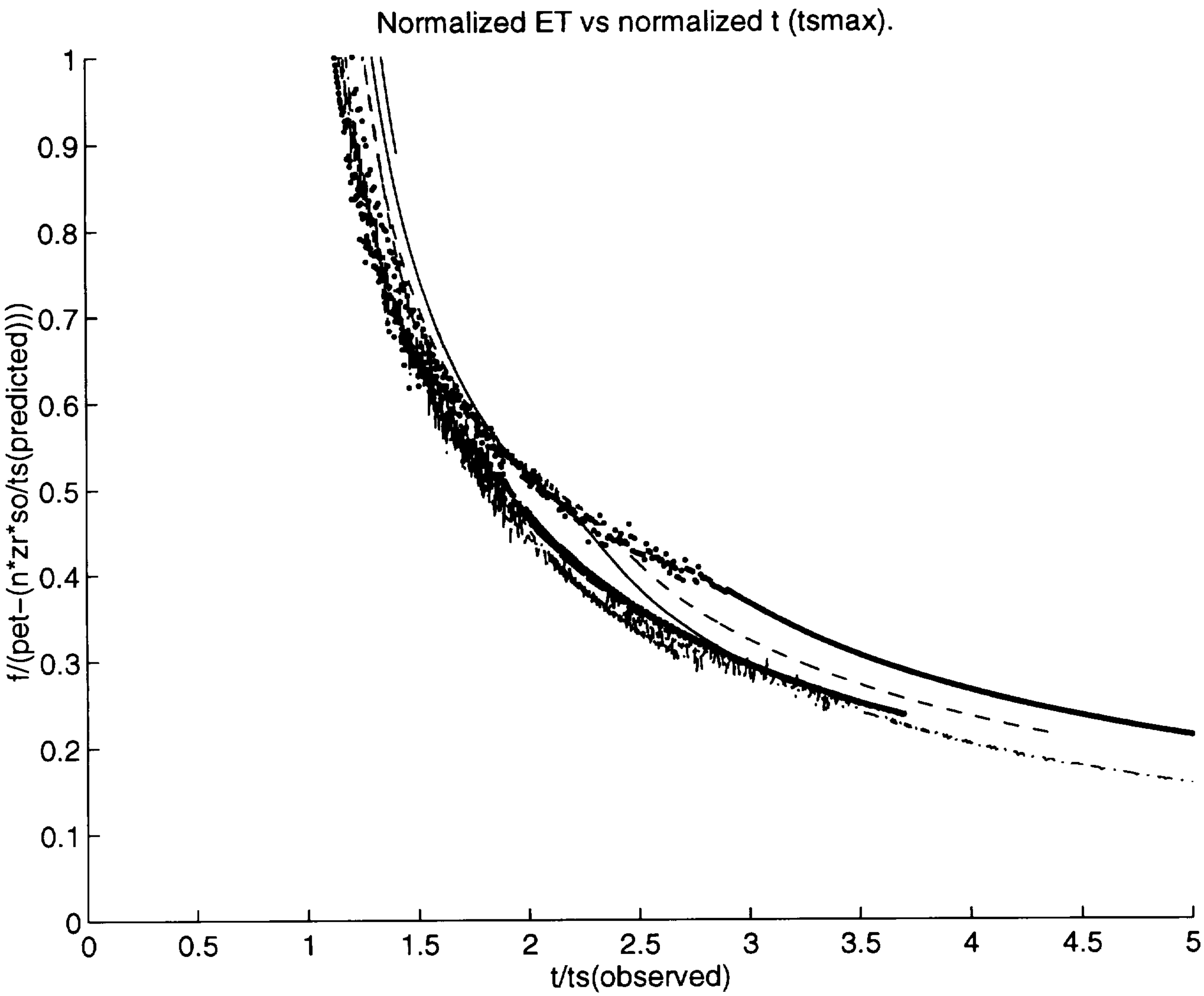
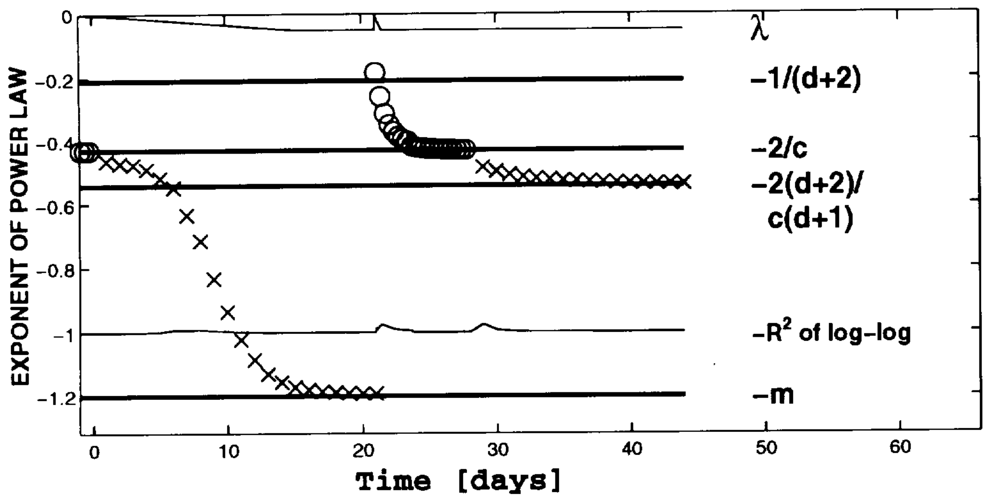


Figure 2: Traces of simulated stressed transpiration under vastly different initial moisture content, potential evaporation rates, and rooting depths. Time is scaled by "ts", the time from rainfall until the onset of stress. Transpiration is scaled by the difference between potential evapotranspiration and a function of root zone water storage. All traces collapse onto a common curve determined by competing effects of gravity drainage from and capillary rise to the root zone. As for the bare soil case [*Salvucci*, 1997a], detailed soil hydraulic characterization need not be specified because it is reflected in the time-to-stress.



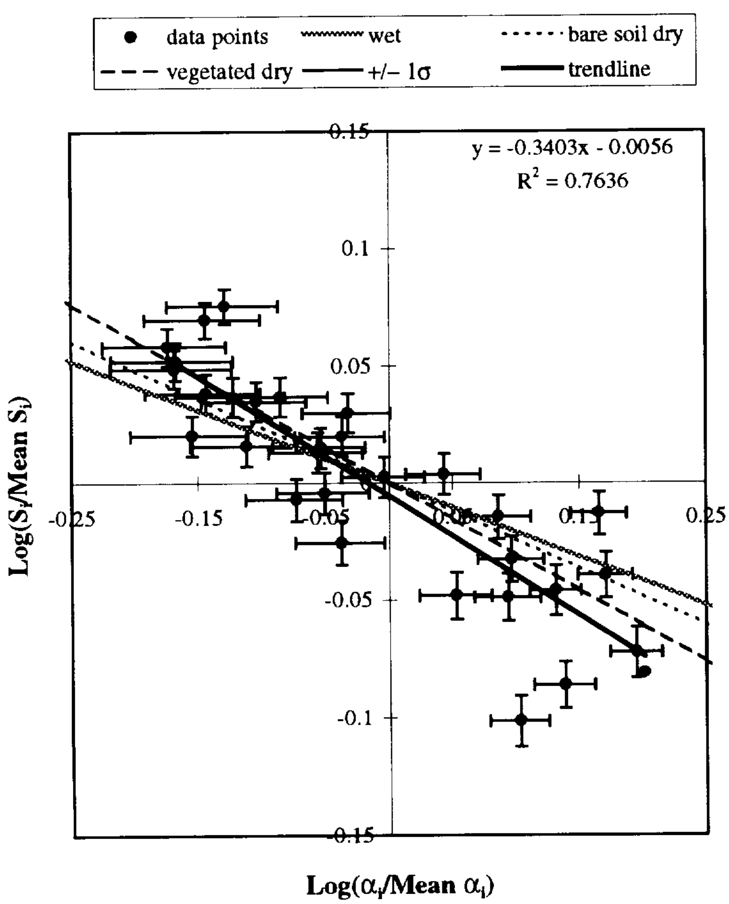


Figure 3a: (top) Behavior of simulated exponents of power law relation between soil saturation and the Miller and Miller scaling parameter alpha [*Salvucci*, 1998].

Figure 3b: (bottom) Example field test of power law relation between soil moisture and alpha [*Ravella*, 1998].