

1 **Leveraging Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) to improve above-normal flow**  
2 **prediction in ungauged basins**

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9 **Key Points:**

- 10 • We integrate SAR data with the NWM to enhance predictions of above-normal flow in  
11 ungauged basins, improving accuracy and reliability
- 12 • The model results in significant improvements in predictive accuracy, particularly in  
13 areas lacking comprehensive streamflow measurements
- 14 • STHM-SAR model integrates predictors and GFDS-SAR data, enhancing 86% of natural  
15 basin sites and 76% of coastal basin sites' predictions.

16

17

18 **Abstract**

19 Effective flood prediction significantly enhances risk management and response strategies, yet  
20 remains challenging, particularly in ungauged basins. This study investigates the capacity for  
21 integrating streamflow derived from Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) and U.S. National Water  
22 Model (NWM) output to provide enhanced predictions of above-normal flow (ANF). Leveraging  
23 the Global Flood Detection System (GFDS) and Principal Component Regression (PCR) of SAR  
24 data, we apply the Spatial-temporal Hierarchical model (STHM) for ANF prediction replacing  
25 antecedent streamflow with SAR-derived flow. Our evaluation shows promising results, with  
26 STHM-SAR significantly improving prediction accuracy of NWM, especially coastal regions  
27 where approximately 60% of sites demonstrated enhanced performance compared to previous  
28 efforts. Spatial and temporal validations underscore the model's robustness, with SAR data  
29 contributing to explained variance by 24% on average. This approach not only streamlines post-  
30 processing modeling but also uniquely combines existing data, showcasing its potential to  
31 improve hydrological modeling, particularly in regions with limited measurements.

32 **Plain Language Summary**

33 This study explores improving flood prediction accuracy, which is vital for effective risk  
34 management and response planning. It focuses on integrating Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR)  
35 data and the U.S. National Water Model (NWM) to predict above-normal flow (ANF). By  
36 combining SAR and NWM data using advanced techniques like the Global Flood Detection  
37 System (GFDS) and Principal Component Regression (PCR), a Spatial-temporal Hierarchical  
38 model (STHM) was developed. This model showed promising results, especially in coastal  
39 regions, with SAR data contributing significantly to the model's accuracy. This approach  
40 streamlines the modeling process and showcases the potential of combining existing data sources  
41 to improve hydrological modeling, particularly in regions with limited measurements.

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43

44 **1. Introduction**

45         Developing accurate flood prediction models provides critical information to ensure  
46 sustainable flood risk management, early warning systems, and lifesaving responses (Johnson et  
47 al., 2016; Maidment, 2009). In the United States, the NOAA Office of Water Prediction provides  
48 runoff forecasts for the entire river network of the United States (National Weather Service,  
49 2022; Salas et al., 2023) through the National Water Model (NWM). The NWM forecasts are  
50 used to generate flood inundation maps (Johnson et al., 2019) which are being used by River  
51 Forecasting Centers to provide operational guidance during flood events. However, the  
52 operational skill can still benefit from improved above-normal flows (defined as exceeding the  
53 67<sup>th</sup> percentile flow, ANF) as the raw NWM outputs suffer from both marginal and conditional  
54 biases (Johnson et al., 2023).

55         Postprocessing model outputs has been shown to enhance the forecast skill, however,  
56 NSEs of forecasts for ANF conditions near gauged locations are only skilled in 50% of evaluated  
57 basins (Fang et al., 2024; Frame et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2023). The ability to predict above-  
58 normal flows is likely worse in ungauged basins highlighting the need for improved ANF  
59 prediction and the opportunity for utilizing using the unprecedented availability of NWM  
60 forecasts as a starting point.

61         Recent advancements in remote sensing (RS) data have emerged as a viable alternative to  
62 supplement *in situ* observations and process-based models (Sogno et al., 2022). Studies show  
63 they can benefit real-time forecasting capabilities, particularly in estimating the current stage and  
64 discharge (Van Dijk et al., 2015). RS data have been an important component of the Global  
65 Flood Monitor System (GFMS), which has been running in real-time for the last few years with  
66 results (including rainfall, flood, and Tropical Cyclone) being displayed at the NASA TRMM  
67 website (<http://trmm.gsfc.nasa.gov/>). The GFMS uses satellite-based estimates of precipitation to  
68 estimate runoff generation, routing, and flood inundation attributes such as stage. However, the  
69 challenge is effectively translating RS data into accurate streamflow forecasts in ungauged  
70 basins, despite its role in systems like the Global Flood Monitor System (GFMS) with the  
71 potential for real-time streamflow forecasting.

72         Streamflow forecasts can also be developed using process-based models (Archfield et al.,  
73 2015; Clark et al., 2015; Wood et al., 2011) and/or data-driven models (Kratzert et al., 2019).  
74 Traditionally Process based models have been used to tackle the “grand challenge of hydrology”  
75 of achieving consistence hydrologic prediction everywhere on earth (Sperna Weiland et al.,  
76 2012; Wood et al., 2011). And while efforts have substantially improved these modeling  
77 paradigms, successfully achieving accurate hydrologic prediction everywhere remains a  
78 challenge due to difficulties in estimating and maintaining antecedent conditions. Process-based  
79 models can utilize remotely derived variables like precipitation, soil moisture, and  
80 evapotranspiration (AghaKouchak et al., 2015; Vinukollu et al., 2011). To this end, there are  
81 numerous studies focused on incorporating synthetic, in situ, or remote sensing-derived water  
82 level observations into forecasting systems (Mazrooei et al., 2019; Mazrooei et al., 2021). For  
83 example, Revilla-Romero et al. (2016) utilized the ensemble Kalman filter to integrate low-  
84 resolution satellite-based flood extents from the GFDS into a global forecasting system aimed at  
85 real-time flood forecasting.

86 While streamflow can be derived from remote sensing instruments, e.g., MODIS (Sahoo  
87 et al., 2022; Tarpanelli et al., 2019) or LANDSAT (Gleason et al., 2014) these sensors provide  
88 lower spatial resolution and can be impeded by clouds and other obstacles - particularly in  
89 periods of above-normal or high flows (Alquraish and Khadr, 2021). On the other hand,  
90 technologies such as synthetic aperture radar (SAR) can provide high-resolution images of water  
91 conditions, even in adverse weather conditions ((Tsokas et al., 2022; Yoon et al., 2022).  
92 Streamflow estimation using SAR data usually involves building empirical relationships between  
93 ground-measured streamflow and the SAR data to estimate above-normal/high flow signal(Yoon  
94 et al., 2022); a curve number approach by estimating runoff from rainfall amounts (Beck et al.,  
95 2009; Hong and Adler, 2008); or a histogram thresholding or clustering method to separate  
96 flooded from non-flooded areas in SAR imagery (Martinis et al., 2009). Hostache et al. (2018)  
97 employed a modified Particle Filter with Sequential Importance Sampling to integrate  
98 probabilistic flood maps from SAR into a hydrologic and hydraulic model, while Cooper et al.  
99 (2018) demonstrated that assimilating SAR backscatter could outperform transforming it into  
100 water levels in their study. While the mentioned studies have demonstrated notable skill in  
101 predicting streamflow at a basin scale, their applicability on a continental scale (e.g.,  
102 Coterminous US) has not been demonstrated to date. Largely, assimilating RS data into a  
103 process-based hydrological models at large scales is typically limited by computational time. In  
104 these cases, data-driven methods like Spatiotemporal Hierarchical Model (STHM) or Long  
105 short-term memory (LSTM) (Feng et al., 2020; Frame et al., 2021), can provide a hybrid  
106 approach that leverage remote sensing products and physics-based model outputs to inform  
107 statistical and machine learning models to combine the products into a n improved output. In  
108 2023, Fang et al. introduced a STHM model that improved NWM streamflow predictions using a  
109 set of geospatial catchment characteristics and a three-day averaged streamflow observation  
110 (aggregated to the HUC8 watershed level). This study presented a hierarchical spatial-temporal  
111 model (STHM) that improves above-normal flow (ANF) prediction across CONUS basins, with  
112 significant enhancements in ANF prediction for most sites, while also facing challenges in  
113 predicting ANF for coastal basins and obtaining antecedent streamflow conditions for ungauged  
114 basins.

115 The aim of this study is to understand if the process based NWM, a suite of geospatial  
116 catchment characteristics, and SAR streamflow data can be integrated to improve on previous  
117 STHM efforts to provide improved ANF estimates. The paper is structured as follows: Section 2  
118 outlines the materials and data used, Section 3 presents the results with a thorough analysis of the  
119 model's predictions, and Section 4 discusses the results, emphasizing research gaps and  
120 suggesting potential solutions to overcome challenges.

## 121 **2. Materials and Methods**

### 122 **2.1 Hydroclimate and land use data**

123 The NWM makes predictions across a modified version of the National Hydrographic  
124 Dataset (NHDPlusV2, McKay, 2012; Blodgett, 2023). To compare forecasts to observations, co-  
125 located common feature IDs and USGS National Water Information System (NWIS) gauges  
126 were extracted from the Routelink file associated with NWM v2.1. The dataRetrieval R package  
127 (De Cirro et al., 2018) was used to identify and retrieve streamflow data for sites with a  
128 minimum of 10 years of data between 1993 and 2018. Hourly simulations for NWM 2.1 were

129 obtained using the "nwmTools" package (Johnson et al, 2023b, Johnson et al, 2021) and  
130 aggregated to a daily mean. Catchment characteristics were accessed from Johnson, et al.,  
131 (2023), which summarized dam, hydroclimatic, land use, and anthropogenic characteristics to  
132 gage locations in the Gages II Network (Falcone, 2011). Furthermore, the GAGESII dataset  
133 includes the 2009 hydro-climatic network (HDCN) categories, distinguishing between controlled  
134 and natural basins. Lastly, the REACHCODE associated with the NHDPlusV2 COMID enables  
135 the identification of Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC) regions provided by the Watershed Boundary  
136 Dataset. All the above-mentioned data can be accessed at [https://github.com/LynkerIntel/nwm-](https://github.com/LynkerIntel/nwm-evaluation-2023)  
137 [evaluation-2023](https://github.com/LynkerIntel/nwm-evaluation-2023).

## 138 2.2 Water Surface Metrics from GFDS–SAR

139 The Global Flood Detection System (GFDS) provides a flood monitoring system created  
140 by the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission in partnership with the Dartmouth  
141 Flood Observatory at Colorado University  
142 ([https://www.gdacs.org/flooddetection/Download/Technical\\_Note\\_GFDS\\_Data\\_Products\\_v1.pdf](https://www.gdacs.org/flooddetection/Download/Technical_Note_GFDS_Data_Products_v1.pdf))  
143 f).

144 The system integrates satellite measurements from sensors including the Tropical  
145 Rainfall Measuring Mission (TRMM), Global Precipitation Measuring (GPM), Advanced  
146 Microwave Scanning Radiometer-Earth (AMSRE), and AMSR2. These measurements are  
147 amalgamated to generate a variety of products displaying flood signals. GFDS water surface  
148 metrics have been instrumental in numerous studies (Van Dijk et al., 2016; Yoon et al., 2022).  
149 Moreover, various real-time flood monitoring applications rely on the data streams provided by  
150 GFDS.

151 GFDS estimates water surface metrics using brightness temperatures. If the physical  
152 temperature remains constant, changes in brightness can be assumed to be caused by changes in  
153 water in the pixel. Since the raw values are influenced by factors such as physical temperature,  
154 permittivity, surface roughness, vegetation, atmospheric moisture, and other environmental  
155 variables (Kugler and De Groeve, 2007; Van Dijk et al., 2016),  $T_{b,measurement}$  is scaled by the  
156 signal of land observation of surface temperature.

157 An M/C value can be defined as the ratio of measurement/wet signal ( $T_{b,measurement}$ )  
158 over calibration/dry observations, which is detected by SAR as water surface signal for proxy  
159 streamflow:

$$160 \quad s = \frac{M}{C} = \frac{T_{b,measurement}}{T_{b,calibration}} \quad (1)$$

161 where,  $T_b$  is passive microwave radiometers, brightness temperature, subscript  
162 “measurement” and “calibration” M and C, respectively. These can be accessed from GFDS  
163 website (<https://www.gdacs.org/flooddetection/DATA/SINGLE/SignalTiffs/>).  
164

## 165 2.3 Principal Component Regression (PCR) of M/C ratio

166 Since the M/C ratio provided by GFSD is spatially explicit, we use Principal Component  
167 Analysis (PCA) to reduce the dimension to estimate the conditions of a given river. Principal  
168 Component Analysis (PCA) helps convert the correlated time series available at multiple grid  
169 points into orthogonal components, so that fewer components can explain the observed variance  
170 across space. For each gauged location, we retain two components of brightness temperature (T)

171 by performing PCA on the 24 nearest GFDS grid cells and developed a regression with the  
 172 observed depth of daily streamflow (discharge divided by the drainage area). When doing this.  
 173 we pool stations by HUC08 (See Figure 1 for detailed steps). Thus, each HUC08 will have a  
 174 unique regression that can convert the PCs of the M/C ratio available for any given location to  
 175 estimate the depth of streamflow at ungauged locations. By utilizing Principal Component  
 176 Analysis (PCA) to reduce the dimensionality of the M/C ratio from GFDS data, we can  
 177 effectively capture the essential features for estimating streamflow conditions in ungauged  
 178 basins.

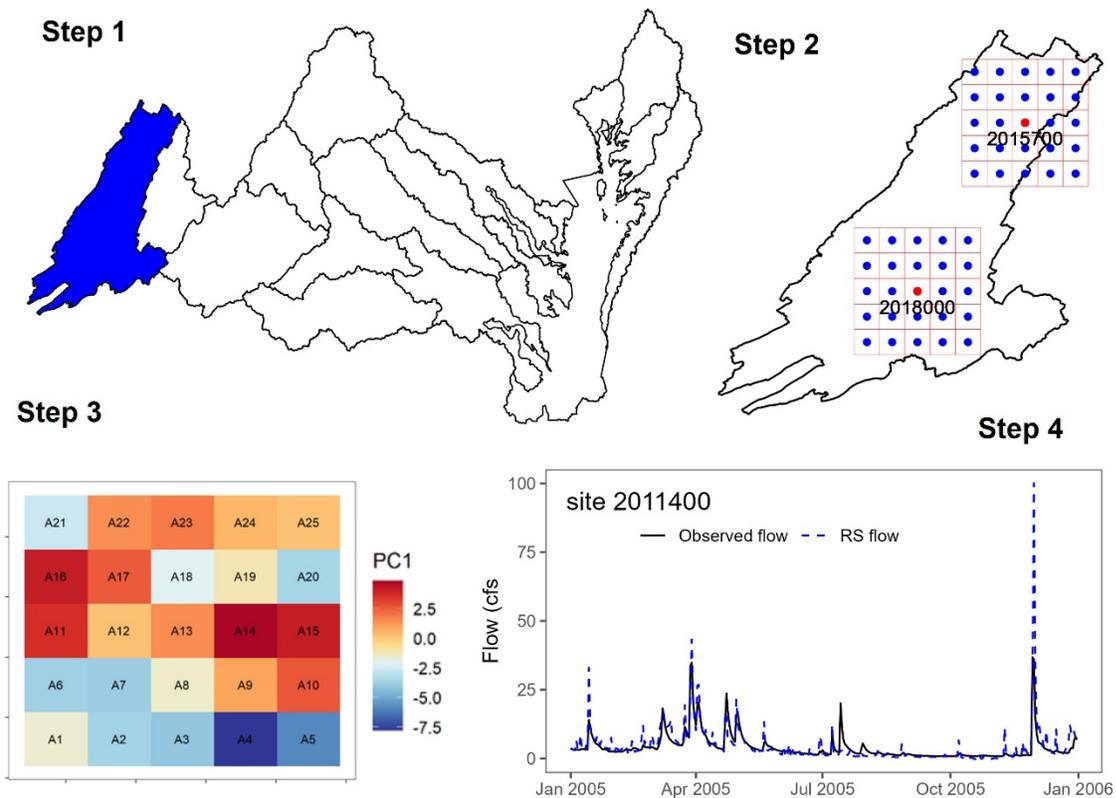
179 Thus, PCR is that after choosing two PCs that is indexed as “g”, the important features of  
 180  $X$  have been retained by score matrix ( $T_g$ ) (Camps-Valls and Bruzzone, 2005), and then applied a  
 181 multiple linear regression (MLR) with  $T_g$  instead of  $X$  (M/C ratio) for calibration data matrix  $Y$   
 182 (observed depth of daily streamflow):

183 
$$y = T_g C + \epsilon(2)$$

184 Where, the coefficient of regression ( $C$ ) is given by:

185 
$$\hat{C} = (T_g^T T_g)^{-1} T_g^T y \quad (3)$$

186  
 187



188  
 189 **Figure 1. Key steps of deriving satellite remotely sensed ANF signals to streamflow. Step 1:**

190 **Identify all Gages-II basins, grouped within the same HUC8 (colored in blue); Step 2:**

191 **Sampling M/C data for the gauged location and the 24 neighboring cells; Step 3: Principal**  
 192 **Component regression for neighbors is applied; Step 4: Using top 2 a a polynomial**  
 193 **regression is defined as described in Equation 2.**

194 **2.4 Spatial-temporal Hierarchical model for above-normal flow prediction using SAR data**  
 195 **(STHM-SAR)**

196 The aim of the study is to use SAR-estimated streamflow to further advance post  
 197 processing techniques that can be applied to large scale process-based models. Here we start with  
 198 the STHM defined in Fang et al, 2024 and replace the 3-day area-weighted gaged flows with the  
 199 SAR-derived streamflow for the previous 3 days. Thus the new SAR informed STHM-SAR can  
 200 be written as:

$$201 \quad Q_{\{t(\tau,i,j,k)\}} = \beta_{\{000,\tau\}} + \beta_{\{1(\tau,i,j,k)\}} Q_{\{t(\tau,i,j,k)\}}^{NWM} + \beta_{\{2(\tau,i,j,k)\}} Q_{\{t(\tau,i,j,k)\}}^{SAR} + \beta_{\{01(\tau,j,k)\}} PET_{\{\tau(j,k)\}} + \\
 202 \quad \beta_{\{001,\tau\}} AI_{\{i(j,k)\}} + \beta_{\{002,\tau\}} Imp_{\{i(j,k)\}} + \beta_{\{003,\tau\}} \rho_{\{i(j,k)\}} + \varepsilon_{\{t(\tau,i,j,k)\}} \quad (4)$$

203 where,  $Q^{NWM}$  is the NWM daily flow;  $\rho$  is the Spearman correlation indicating moisture  
 204 and energy being in-phase or out-phase; PET is the mean 10-day potential evaporation as  
 205 mentioned above; S is the upstream total dam storage; AI is the aridity index; *Imp* is the percent  
 206 impervious; and  $\varepsilon$  is the residual.

207 **2.5 Model evaluation**

208 To evaluate the skill of our model, we use the Nash–Sutcliffe efficiency (NSE) metric  
 209 which is widely used to measure the predictive skill of hydrological models (McCuen et al.,  
 210 2006). In a perfect model with an estimation error variance equal to zero, the resulting NSE  
 211 equals 1. A model with an estimation error variance equal to the variance of the observed time  
 212 series, results in an NSE of 0. Conversely, an NSE less than zero occurs when the observed mean  
 213 is a better predictor than the model. The model performance criteria recommended by Moriasi et  
 214 al. (2007) was used for evaluating performance meaning predictions were considered  
 215 “acceptable” if NSE scores are greater than 0.5 and “good” if the NSE is above 0.67.

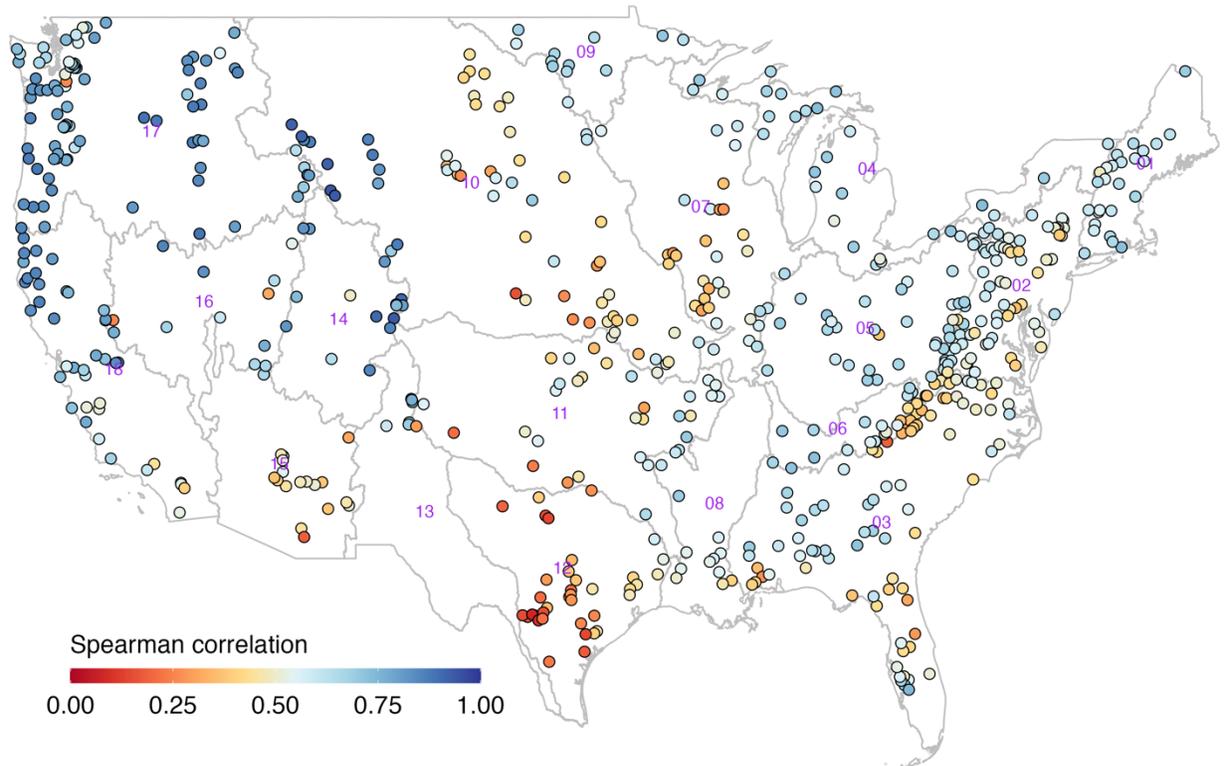
216 Since we are interested in assessing the performance of the model for estimating flows in  
 217 ungauged locations, we use both spatial and temporal validation procedures similar to that of  
 218 Fang et al., (2024). For spatial validation, we used a k(20)-fold cross-validation method  
 219 (Browne, 2000) treating 5% of locations as ungauged within each hierarchical group and fit the  
 220 remaining 95% of stations for the period 1993 and 2018. We evaluated the STHM-SAR  
 221 performance for the period 2009 to 2018 for the left-out basins. This process of leaving out 5%  
 222 of the basins is repeated until all evaluated in a cross-validation mode. The temporal validation is  
 223 performed to evaluate the STHM-SAR performance over a period different from the calibration,  
 224 whereas the spatial validation is performed to evaluate the STHM-SAR for application in  
 225 ungauged basins. The temporal validation is performed by calibrating the STHM-SAR model  
 226 using the data from 1993 to 2008 with the remaining data from 2009 to 2018 being considered  
 227 for validation. Thus, all the reported model evaluation, NSEs in Figures 2-4, are for the period  
 228 2009 to 2018 based on k(20)-fold cross-validation.

229 **3. Results**

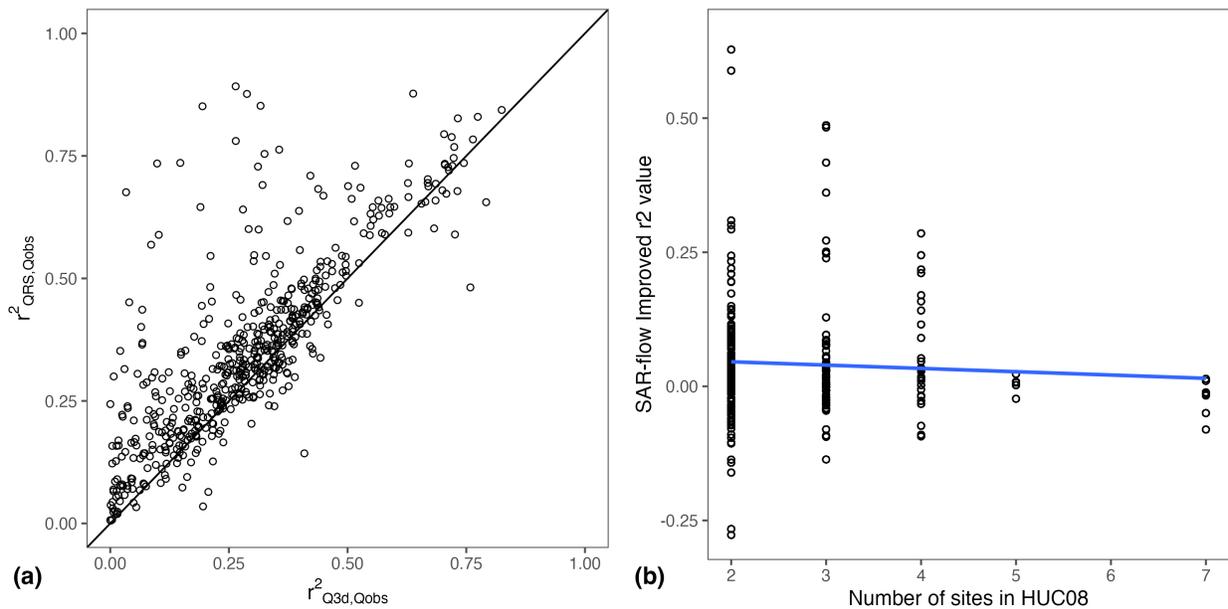
230 We first evaluated the correlation between GFDS SAR-derived and observed daily  
231 streamflow across all natural basins (Figure 2) and also calculated the NSE between the 3-day  
232 average streamflow from the GFDS-SAR and observed 3-day average streamflow (Y axis)  
233 (Figure 3). Figure 3a also compares the NSE from the GFDS-SAR with the NSE (X-axis)  
234 between the 3-day average streamflow estimated based on the simple depth of streamflow (i.e.,  
235 without using the GFDS-SAR stage estimates) with the observed streamflow. We then conducted  
236 an analysis of model performance using SAR-derived data (Figure 4) and present an examination  
237 of contributing factors in the STHM-SAR compared to the base STHM (Fang et al., 2024).

238 **3.1 SAR-derived streamflow represents observed streamflow moderately well**

239 The correlation between SAR-derived and observed discharge varies across the CONUS  
240 is important to understand when looking to use SAR-derived products as a proxy for flow  
241 prediction (Figure 2), but Figure 2 shows improvement in estimating 3-day streamflow using the  
242 SAR-derived streamflow when compared with the 3-day streamflow estimated using the simple  
243 depth of streamflow. The correlation between SAR-derived streamflow and observed above  
244 average streamflow is notably strong, as depicted in Figure 2. Across all Gages-II basins, the  
245 mean correlation exceeded 0.53 for high flows during validation, underscoring the reliability of  
246 the SAR-derived streamflow. Spatially, the Northwest regions exhibited the highest correlation,  
247 while the lowest correlation was observed around the 95<sup>th</sup> meridian (Seager, 2017; Johnson et al  
248 2023a; Johnson et al 2023b). Notably, the Tennessee River Basins demonstrated limited  
249 performance by using SAR-derived high streamflow. Prior work from Van Dijk et al. (2016)  
250 suggested that the most successful sites (with  $R > 0.8$ ) are concentrated in the southeast of the  
251 USA. However, their focus was on the entire daily streamflow time series whereas we focus  
252 primarily in estimating high flows in Figure 2.  
253



254  
 255 **Figure 2. Spearman Rank correlation between above average SAR-derived and observed**  
 256 **streamflow (all conditions) for Gages-II basins during the validation period (2010-2018).**



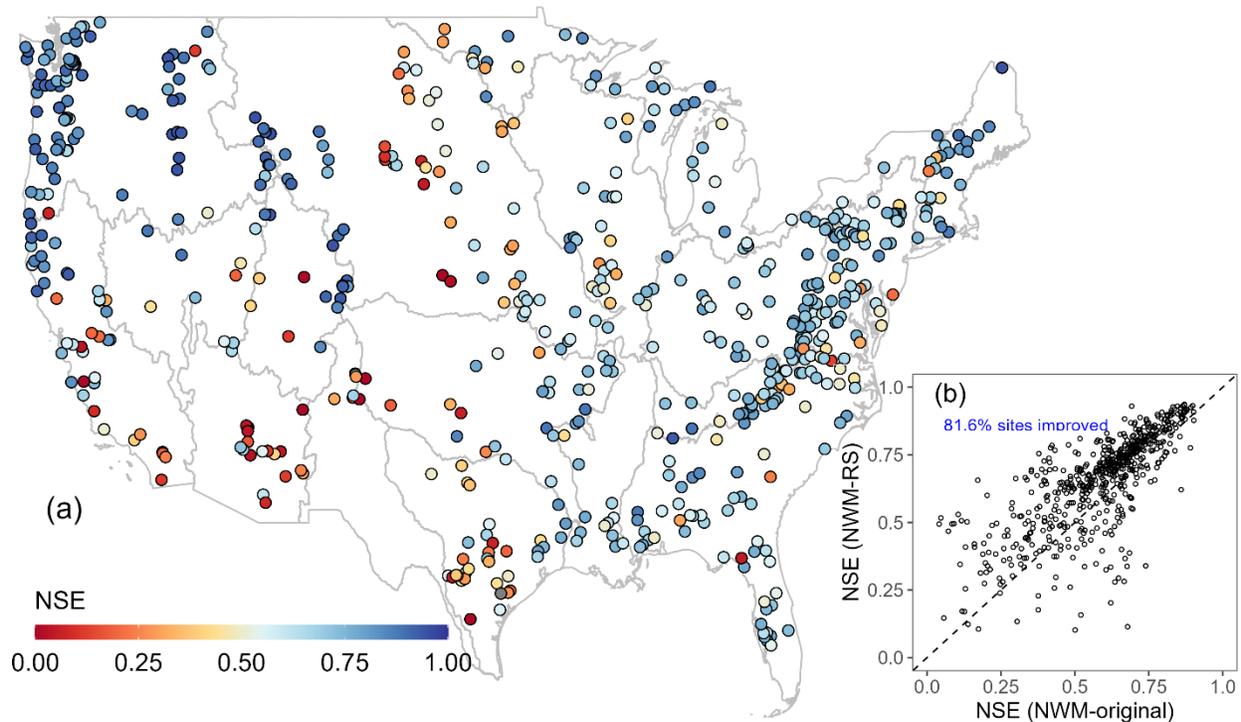
257  
 258 **Figure 3 Left: SAR-derived streamflow compared with previous 3-day streamflow as the**  
 259 **antecedent condition in Fang et al. 2024 by comparing the r-squared values with observed**

260 **streamflow. Right: SAR-derived streamflow r-squared values improvements from previous**  
261 **3-day streamflow relationship as the number of sites within the same HUC08.**

262 The analysis conducted in Fang et al. (2024), comparing the R-squared values between  
263 GFDS SAR-derived streamflow and the 3-day average streamflow estimated from the simple  
264 depth method, demonstrates that GFDS-SAR derived streamflow consistently surpasses the  
265 performance of the simple depth approach in explaining the variability observed in streamflow  
266 (see Figure 3a). This suggests that GFDS-SAR derived streamflow better captures the underlying  
267 variability in streamflow dynamics compared to the traditional 3-day flow approach. Moreover,  
268 Figure 3b shows that the improved performance of SAR derived streamflow decreased as the  
269 number of gauges increases in the same HUC08. The relationship underscores that these  
270 performance enhancements are notably more significant in basins with limited gauged locations,  
271 where 29% of these basins with  $\leq 2$  gauges often located within coastal basins ( $<150\text{km}$  along  
272 coastal line, Fang et al. 2024).

### 273 **3.2 STHM-SAR improves above-normal streamflow predictions**

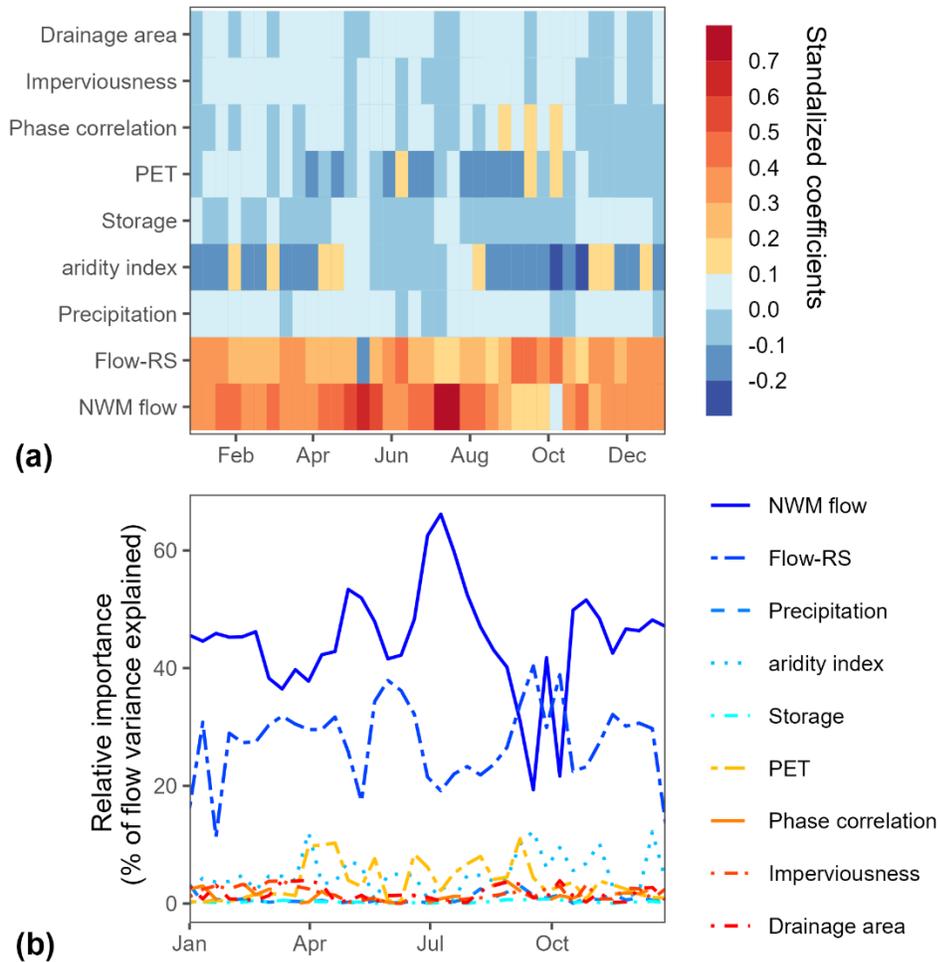
274 Next we look more closely at how the STHM-SAR enhances NWM predictions in ANF  
275 events (as illustrated in Figure 4). The results show 81.6% of the sites exhibit improved skill  
276 compared to the NWM alone. Most of these improved sites were concentrated in HUC2 regions  
277 (01-06, 15-18 as shown in Figure 2). The most substantial enhancements were observed in the  
278 northwest regions, where over 85% of the sites exhibited NSE values greater than 0.67. In  
279 comparison with the findings of the gage aggregated STHM, the STHM-SAR demonstrated  
280 notable improvements, particularly in coastal sites, showcasing an average NSE improvement of  
281 0.15. This highlights the benefits of refining predictions with RS inputs to better predict high-  
282 flow events. The accuracy of streamflow forecasting provides the capability for continuous  
283 adjustments and updates to the forecast as new and relevant data becomes available (for example  
284 through the Next Generation Water Resource Modeling Framework (Odgen, 2021,  
285 <https://www.weather.gov/media/owp/oh/docs/2021-OWP-NWM-NextGen-Framework.pdf> ).  
286 This adaptability is crucial for maintaining the forecast's precision and relevance.



287  
 288 **Figure 4 (a) Spatial distribution of NWM (RS) model predicted high streamflow (>67%)**  
 289 **multiple years average performance (as in NSE) for HCDN basins during calibration**  
 290 **period (2010-2018); (b) NWM(RS) model predicted high streamflow (>67%) improvement**  
 291 **(as in NSE performance) for each site compared with NWM (original) streamflow during**  
 292 **calibration period (2010-2018).**

293 **3.3 STHM-SAR predictors' contribution**

294 The STHM-SAR model, incorporating all predictors from Fang et al., (2023) along with  
 295 the 3-day average streamflow estimated from GFDS-SAR estimates, resulted in improvements in  
 296 86% of sites from natural basins, and 76% of sites from coastal basins. To better understand the  
 297 impact of individual predictors, each predictor was assessed using the relative importance  
 298 estimator proposed by Grömping (2007) (Figure 5). The NWM streamflow alone accounts for  
 299 more ~43% of the variance in observed above-normal streamflow across the CONUS proving  
 300 the value of having an operational, process-based model to draw on. Critically, this suggests that  
 301 the NWM prediction is doing well at capturing variation in flow regimes but not magnitudes.  
 302 SAR-derived flow contributes significantly as well, explaining 27% of the corresponding  
 303 variance. The remaining predictors contribute between 5-12% of the observed streamflow  
 304 variance, as depicted in Figure 5.  
 305



306  
 307 **Figure 5. (a) Standardized model coefficients of selected predictor variables; (b) Overall**  
 308 **average relative importance of selected predictor variables, expressed as % variance**  
 309 **explained by the hierarchical model for HCDN basins.**

310 From Figure 5a, it is evident that, apart from the coefficients associated with SAR-flow  
 311 and NWM, the coefficients of other predictors were predominantly negative. This indicates an  
 312 inverse relationship between these predictors and the observed streamflow. According to Figure  
 313 5b, the impact of individual hydroclimatic predictors on regionalization performance is relatively  
 314 limited. In contrast, combinations of these predictors play a more substantial role, especially  
 315 during specific periods. Notably, the combination of PET and aridity index together explained  
 316 over 10% of the streamflow variance. This underscores the importance of considering specific  
 317 combinations of hydroclimatic information, as they can substantially enhance the understanding  
 318 and prediction of streamflow patterns across CONUS.

319 In Figure 5b, it is evident that NWM reanalysis streamflow predominantly  
 320 contributes in explaining the observed streamflow variance particularly accounting for 54%  
 321 overall on average in warmer seasons. Notably, SAR-flow provides better antecedent conditions,  
 322 particularly when NWM experiences below-average performance in the summer and fall months.

323 This demonstrates the synergy between these predictors, where SAR-flow fills in the gaps and  
324 enhances predictive accuracy, ensuring a more reliable estimation. Particularly, during the  
325 months of June and September, SAR-flow becomes especially influential, explaining over 35%  
326 of the streamflow variance.

#### 327 **4. Discussion**

328 The proposed STHM-SAR framework used the same model structure as STHM (Fang et  
329 al. 2024), while showing more local accuracy through improvements in antecedent conditions by  
330 replacing the previous subbasin averaged 3-day streamflow with SAR-derived flow. The results  
331 of our study confirm the effectiveness of the proposed framework in GAGES-II basins. The  
332 spatial calibration of the modeled streamflow, illustrated in Figure 4, indicates that a well-tuned  
333 model can improve predictive accuracy. One of the notable strengths of the suggested approach  
334 lies in its simplicity; it does not require complex models or additional predictors to enhance  
335 streamflow predictions and relies on open data and products. It leverages the inherent dynamics  
336 present in remote sensing data to effectively improve antecedent conditions as illustrated in  
337 Figure 5. This approach not only simplifies the post processing modeling process but also  
338 demonstrates the potential of utilizing existing data creatively to address challenges in  
339 hydrological modeling, especially in regions lacking comprehensive streamflow measurements  
340 (Figure 3).

341 The modeled above-normal streamflow, as depicted in Figure 4, aligns closely with the  
342 magnitude of the observed streamflow, surpassing the performance of STHM flow from Fang et  
343 al. 2023. This alignment underscores the utility of the proposed SAR-derived flow in better  
344 representing all locations across a diverse domain. This achievement is attributed to the  
345 integration of the correlation between the M/C ratio and observed flow from neighboring  
346 locations, accomplished through the PCR method. By leveraging these correlations, the SAR-  
347 derived flow not only captures the high streamflow patterns more effectively but demonstrates its  
348 capability in bridging the gap in data-scarce regions.

349  
350 Compared with STHM (Fang et al. 2024), the substantial improvement in the STHM-  
351 SAR performance stems from the addition of SAR-derived data. Satellite products provide  
352 valuable information about ANF conditions that can complement or substitute in-situ readings.  
353 The increasing availability of high-resolution Earth Observation data, offered freely by numerous  
354 space agencies, opens avenues for enhancing above-normal flow forecasting and reanalysis  
355 based on Earth Observation.

#### 356 **5. Conclusion**

357 The study demonstrates the effectiveness of integrating Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR)  
358 data with the National Water Model (NWM) to enhance predictions of above-normal flow  
359 (ANF) in ungauged basins. The Spatial-temporal Hierarchical model for ANF prediction using  
360 SAR data (STHM-SAR) shows a significant improvement of 54% on average compared to  
361 previous STHM results (Fang et al., 2024), particularly benefiting coastal regions. The  
362 evaluation results indicate promising performance, with SAR data contributing substantially to  
363 explaining variance by 27% on average.

364 The correlation analysis between SAR-derived and observed streamflow highlights the  
365 reliability of SAR-derived streamflow as a proxy for flow prediction, especially during high-flow  
366 events. The STHM-SAR model, incorporating SAR-derived streamflow, outperforms the NWM  
367 alone, with 81.6% of sites showing improved skill. The spatial distribution of model-predicted  
368 high streamflow demonstrates significant enhancements, particularly in basins lacking gauged  
369 locations.

370 The contribution analysis of predictors in the STHM-SAR model emphasizes the  
371 importance of NWM reanalysis streamflow and SAR-derived flow, which together explain a  
372 significant portion of observed streamflow variance. The study underscores the value of  
373 considering specific hydroclimatic factors and leveraging remote sensing data to enhance flood  
374 prediction capabilities, especially in data-scarce regions and ungauged basins. Overall, the  
375 findings of this study highlight the potential of remote sensing data integration and suggest  
376 avenues for further research and improvements in flood prediction modeling, contributing to  
377 more effective risk management and response strategies.  
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380

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383 2151651.

## 384 **Open Research**

### 385 Data Availability Statement

386 The GFDL data can be accessed at

387 <https://www.gdacs.org/flooddetection/DATA/SINGLE/SignalTiffs/>

388 The complete data workflow including data download on S. Fang (2023)

389 <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7574439> from Zenodo repository.

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