Long-term trends of specific conductance in waters discharged by coal-mine valley fills in Virginia, USA

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Effects of Total Dissolved Solids in Streams?
Mining and valley fills have been linked to elevated TDS in streams
Questions

• Does TDS (specific conductance; SC) change during and after the valley fill construction?

• How long does SC stay elevated?

• What are the peak levels of SC?

• Does SC return to background levels? How long does it take?
Our dataset is your dataset

- Publicly available water monitoring data from the Virginia DMME database.
- SC is monitored for each Virginia valley fill. Data are stored by Virginia DMME.
- Collected at underdrain outflow.
- Sampling often begins just before valley fill construction and continues for at least 5 years after completion.
Step 1. Valley Fill Selection

• Starting w/ full underdrain dataset
• Removed sites that
  – were not valley fills, had sorting or prep facilities, coal storage or permanent development.
  – did not have valley fill polygons describing the excess spoil material disposal area in the DMME database.
• Selected 137 valley fills with at least 20 samples and 1 year of sampling.
Mean Fill Area = 12.0 (±12.9) ha
Mean Watershed Area = 62.2 (±62.6) ha
Step 2. Breaking data set into disturbance periods for analysis

Before valley fill disturbance

During valley fill disturbance

Post valley fill disturbance
Estimating Disturbance Timelines

• Database was not adequate to estimate disturbance timelines.


• Bare ground estimates derived from Landsat images (1984-2008) (Sen et al. 2012).

• We separated data for each valley fill into three disturbance periods.
During Disturbance After Disturbance
• Mean of 160 samples (21-417)
• Mean of 19.2 samples yr\(^{-1}\) (3.2-26.3)
Results: Mean SC for VA Valley Fills

- SC Increases
- High Variability
During Disturbance After Disturbance
Linear Analysis

![Graph showing Δ of SC during and after disturbance](image)

- **Δ of SC during disturbance (μS cm⁻¹ yr⁻¹)**
  - Significant
  - Not-Significant

- **Years sampled during disturbance**

- **Δ of SC after disturbance (μS cm⁻¹ yr⁻¹)**
  - Significant
  - Not-Significant

- **Years sampled after disturbance**
Spearman correlations: SC vs. Time

- Positive
- Negative
- Insignificant

Disturbance Period

- Pre
- During
- Post

# of Valley Fills

- Values range from 0 to 120.
Can we model the peak of SC?
Can we project the return to background levels?
• 77 out of 137 valley fills datasets had significant negative quadratic terms (convex form)
Projecting Future SC levels

- Of the 77 valley fills with significant negative quadratic terms, 62 had achieved green up.

- Of the 62, 16 valley fills had at least 5 years of data past the quadratic peak.

- These 16 valley fills are used for more conservative projections.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years After Disturbance to Axis of Symmetry</th>
<th>Specific Conductance at Axis of Symmetry (µS cm⁻¹)</th>
<th>Years after Revegetation to Axis of Symmetry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subset (N=16)</td>
<td>Subset (N=16)</td>
<td>Subset (N=16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Set (N=62)</td>
<td>Full Set (N=62)</td>
<td>Full Set (N=62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Min</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>-4.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Max</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>9.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
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<td>2.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Years after Revegetation to 500 µS cm\(^{-1}\)

- 12.5 ± 7.6 years for conservative dataset (N=16)
- 11.5 ± 7.5 years for full dataset (N=62)
What is causing all the variability?

- Forward Stepwise Regression \((N=137)\) \((a=0.10)\)
- Dependent: Mean SC during and after revegetation
- Independent:
  - Valley fill area (ha)
  - Watershed area (ha)
  - Max watershed bare ground (%)
  - Mean watershed bare ground (%)
  - % of watershed deep mined
  - # of years the watershed was disturbed
  - Fraction of upper geologic layer dominated by sandstone
  - # of years of data after revegetation

\[ R^2 = 18\% \text{ and } 14\% \]
Conclusions

• Data show that SC is generally increasing during disturbance.

• SC continues to increase for several years after green-up. High variability.

• Projected ~19 years (average) after initial disturbance for return to 500 μS cm⁻¹. High variability and only 77 of the 137 valley fills.

• Variability suggests that there are site or engineering factors that affect TDS production.
Thank You to:

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• Sen et al. (2012) for providing NDVI analysis data for our study area.
Questions?

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