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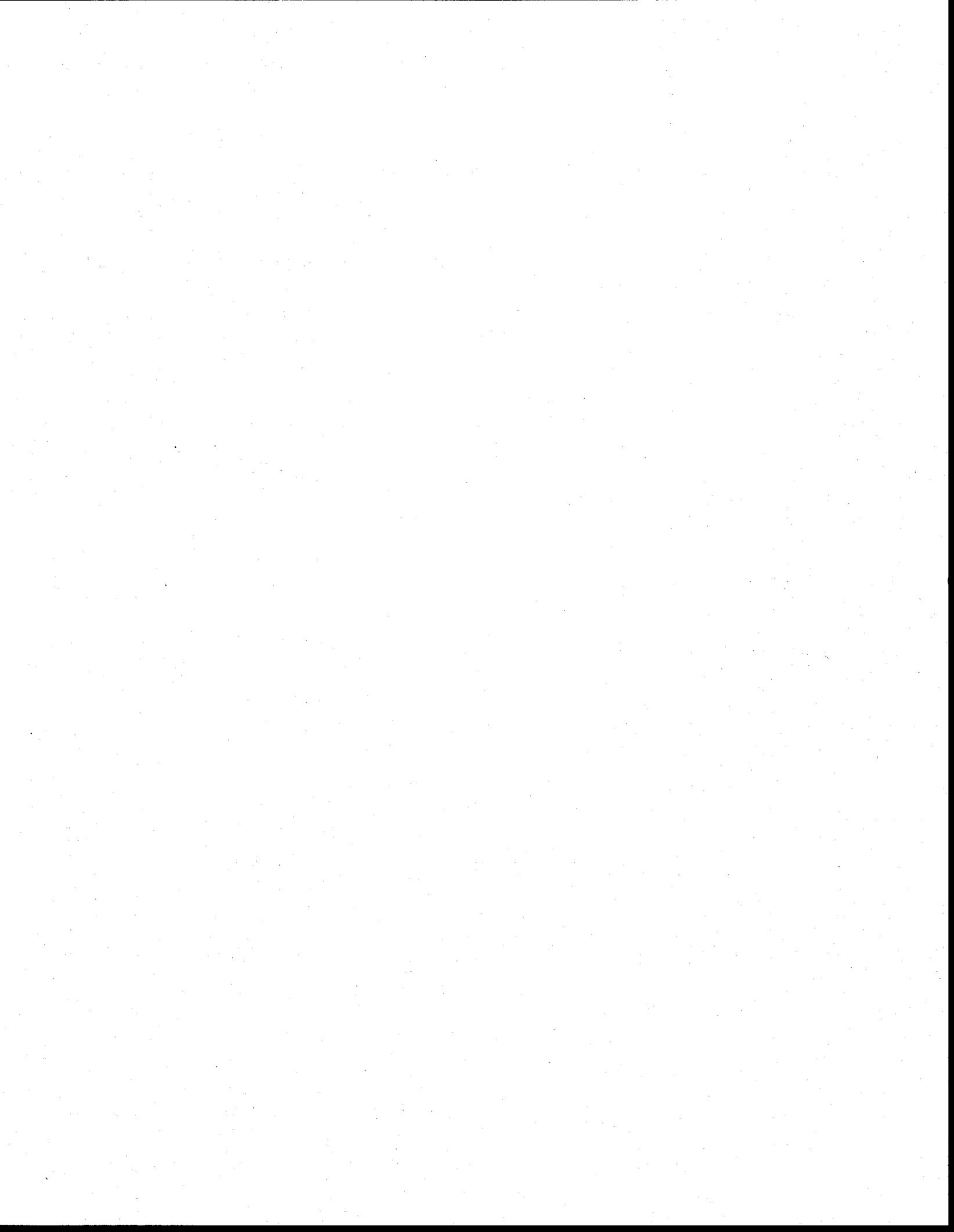
Hydrologie comparative des tourbières et des lacs de la Baie de James dans un contexte  
d'aqualyse.

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## Résumé

Bien que les tourbières couvrent environ 12% du territoire québécois, leur fonctionnement hydrologique est à ce jour à tel point méconnu qu'elles sont pratiquement toujours absentes des modèles hydrologiques déterministes de type pluie-débit. L'impact de la dynamique hydrologique des tourbières boréales de la région de la Baie de James est important tant au niveau des apports aux ouvrages hydroélectriques qu'au niveau des échanges de gaz à effet de serre à leur surface. En vue d'intégrer les processus hydrologiques spécifiques des tourbières dans les modèles, une meilleure compréhension de leur fonctionnement actuel s'avère nécessaire.

Améliorer l'état des connaissances sur le fonctionnement hydrologique des tourbières au moyen d'un suivi hydrométéorologique et d'analyses comparatives et discuter des modifications vraisemblables du régime hydrologique des tourbières associées aux changements climatiques constitue l'objectif général de cette thèse. Les objectifs spécifiques sont : (1) comparer la forme d'hydrogrammes produits par des événements de pluie ainsi que la relation entre la position de la nappe et le débit à l'exutoire; (2) comparer le bilan hydrologique aux pas de temps saisonnier et événementiel de sites représentant un large spectre de conditions d'humidité de surface; et (3), à partir d'événements de pluie de diverses intensités, comparer et essayer de prévoir les temps de réponses et leurs amplitudes.

Sept petits bassins versants (deux tourbières ombrotropes (TO), trois tourbières minérotropes (TM) et deux lacs) tous situés dans le bassin de la rivière La Grande et tous de superficie inférieure à 1 km<sup>2</sup> ont été instrumentés pour le suivi des précipitations, de l'écoulement de surface, de l'évapotranspiration et des variations de stockage. La prise de données a été effectuée en continue entre juillet 2005 et octobre 2007.

Les données obtenues ont permis : (1) d'analyser la forme des hydrogrammes de même que la fréquence et la durée des événements d'écoulement sur les TM et les lacs, (2) de produire et de comparer les bilans hydrologiques saisonniers et événementiels des sept sites, d'évaluer les méthodes de mesures utilisées et de développer une méthode

d'estimation de l'évapotranspiration permettant une différenciation des compartiments végétaux et d'eau libre et finalement, (3) de comparer et de prédire les temps de réponses des sites suite à des événements de pluies modérées et fortes. Les résultats obtenus ont permis d'atteindre les objectifs fixés.

Les principales conclusions de la thèse en fonction des analyses effectuées sont les suivantes. Les statistiques de forme des hydrogrammes sont généralement plus uniformes sur les lacs que sur les TM. Les hydrogrammes des lacs ont toujours des formes semblables, ce qui n'est pas le cas pour les TM qui ressemblent parfois à ceux des lacs. Les débits à l'exutoire des lacs ont des variations plus fréquentes mais de plus courte durée et de plus faible amplitude que ceux des TM. La relation entre le niveau d'eau sur le site et le débit à l'exutoire est presque linéaire sur les lacs mais beaucoup plus diffuse sur les TM, suggérant une réponse décalée sur ces dernières.

L'adaptation d'une méthode d'estimation d'évapotranspiration potentielle basée sur la différenciation de la végétation et de l'eau libre a permis d'obtenir des résultats cohérents à ceux obtenus par diverses méthodes de mesure d'évapotranspiration réelle en milieu nordique. Les données de débit obtenues par courbes de tarage et converties en écoulement montrent une surestimation des valeurs élevées. Le terme de bilan pour lequel chaque écosystème a un comportement particulier est le stockage pour les TO, l'écoulement pour les TM et l'évapotranspiration pour les lacs. Les précipitations ont montré une forte variabilité spatio-temporelle, les trois années d'études ayant eu des quantités totales très variables et le secteur Est du bassin recevant toujours plus de pluie que le secteur Ouest. À l'échelle saisonnière, la variabilité temporelle de l'écoulement dépend des conditions de précipitations tandis qu'elle dépend du type d'écosystème (TM ou lacs) à plus court terme. Les données d'évapotranspiration sont plus uniformes temporellement, les lacs évaporant plus que les TM et que les TO. Malgré d'importantes fluctuations du niveau de la nappe sur les TO dues à l'absence de ruissellement de surface, celle-ci demeure pratiquement toujours près de la surface à cause de la compaction-expansion de la tourbe.

Le temps de réponse de la montée de la nappe suivant des pluies modérées et fortes est proportionnel à la fraction superficielle d'eau libre tandis que le temps de réponse de la montée de l'écoulement est inversement proportionnel à cette même fraction, ceci suggère une importante inertie hydrologique des TM par rapport aux lacs. L'amplitude de la montée de la nappe est aussi proportionnelle à la fraction superficielle d'eau libre. Le niveau d'eau et sa phase de recharge/décharge, la quantité immédiate de pluie et le total des jours précédents sont les principales variables expliquant la variance des temps de réponses des montées de la nappe et de l'écoulement.

Les analyses des bilans événementiels, de la relation niveau-débit et des modèles de régression du temps de réponse montrent toutes l'importance de l'état de saturation des systèmes (conditions sèches ou humides) par rapport aux diverses réponses hydrologiques. Cet état de saturation est relié à la fraction superficielle d'eau libre, qui elle-même est un indicateur de l'état d'aqualyse des tourbières. En supposant que le climat futur cause effectivement une dégradation de la structure végétale des tourbières, on peut donc s'attendre à voir le comportement hydrologique des TM être graduellement modifié vers un comportement typique aux lacs à mesure que l'aqualyse se poursuivra.

Les résultats présentés dans cette thèse laissent entrevoir des pistes d'intégration pour la modélisation. L'inertie hydrologique des TM pourrait être modélisée en travaillant sur les paramètres de transfert horizontal, en introduisant une résistance au ruissellement de surface en fonction de l'importance de la fragmentation de la structure végétale du bassin ou encore en modifiant la définition des réservoirs servant à la production des débits de base et du ruissellement de surface. Les TO pourraient être intégrées en augmentant leur capacité de réserve, ce qui permettrait un ruissellement de surface uniquement en conditions d'extrême humidité.

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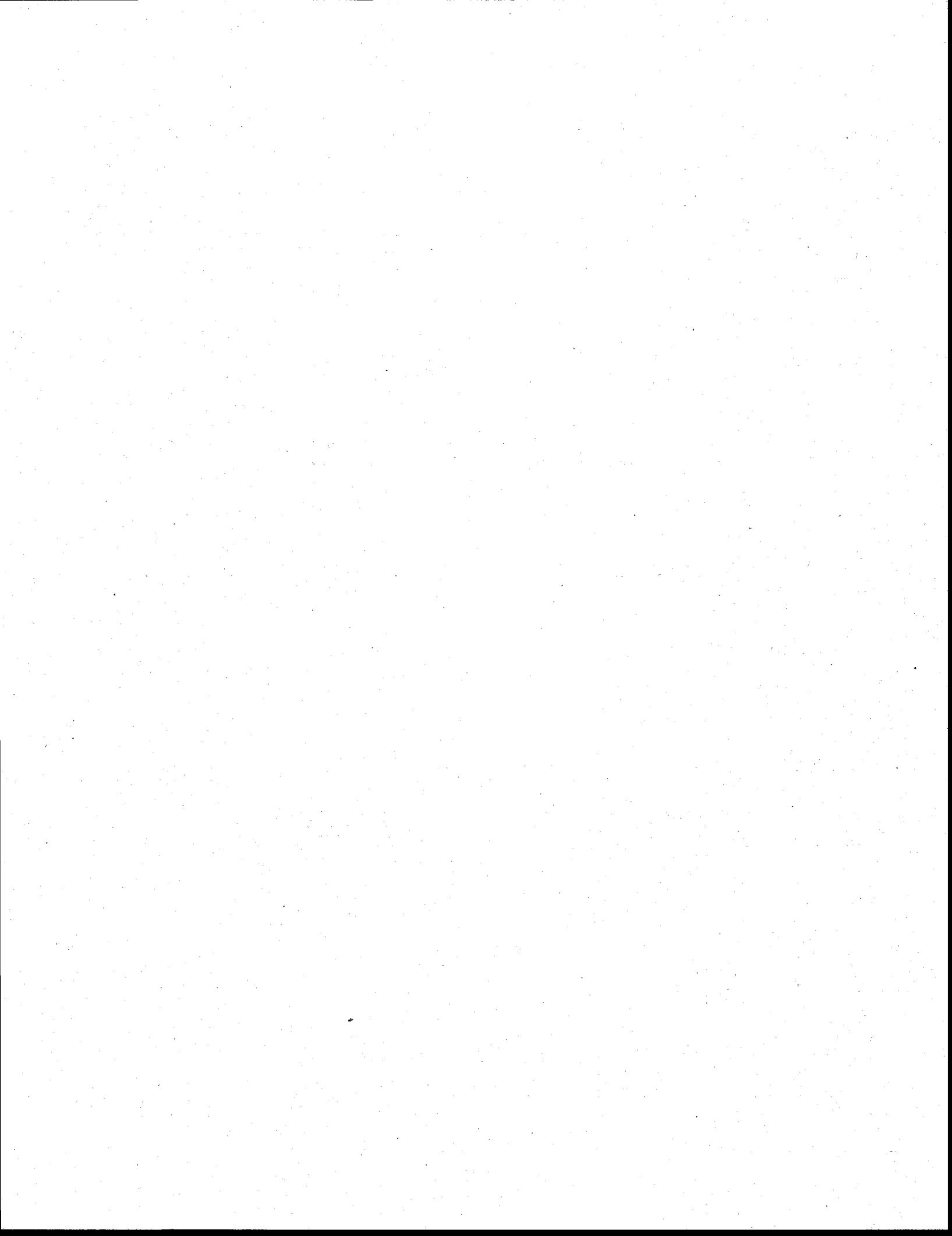
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## **Chapitre 1 : Introduction**

Les tourbières et autres milieux humides occupent une proportion importante du territoire canadien en composant environ 15% de sa superficie (Kettles et Tarnocai, 1999). Approximativement  $1,1 \times 10^6 \text{ km}^2$  sont recouverts de tourbières au Canada (Tarnocai et al, 2000), la majorité de cette superficie se situant dans la ceinture boréale du pays (Glaser et Janssens, 1986; Payette et Rochefort, 2001). Au Québec, la majorité des tourbières, dont la superficie totale est de l'ordre de  $1 \times 10^5 \text{ km}^2$ , soit environ 12% du territoire (Payette et Rochefort, 2001), se situe dans la région des basses terres hudsoniennes et jamesiennes, entre la forêt boréale au sud et la limite sud de la toundra arctique, i.e. approximativement entre les 49<sup>e</sup> et 58<sup>e</sup> parallèles.

La prépondérance de ces écosystèmes fait du Canada le pays disposant de la deuxième plus grande surface en tourbière au monde, celles-ci formant l'un des principaux réservoirs d'eau de l'hémisphère nord (National Wetlands Working Group, 1988) et influençant donc le bilan hydrique et la qualité de l'eau (Price et al, 2005). Les tourbières jouent aussi un rôle important dans les échanges de carbone (émissions de méthane ( $\text{CH}_4$ ) et séquestration du gaz carbonique ( $\text{CO}_2$ )) qui sont étroitement liés aux conditions hydrologiques (Blodau, 2002; Bubier et al., 2003; Belyea et Malmer, 2004).

La région de la Baie de James est primordiale au niveau de la production énergétique du Québec avec près de 50% de l'électricité annuelle produite via le complexe de la rivière La Grande qui est composé de sept centrales hydroélectriques et de six réservoirs sur un bassin de près de  $100\,000 \text{ km}^2$ . Actuellement, la gestion des installations se fait avec le support de modèles hydrologiques météo-apports qui fournissent quotidiennement les prévisions d'apports aux bassins. Malgré l'abondance de tourbières dans ce système hydrique, les processus hydrologiques contrôlant leur développement et leur fonctionnement sont encore mal connus. Cette méconnaissance des processus générant l'écoulement de surface et la connectivité hydraulique à l'intérieur des bassins explique leur absence actuelle de la plupart des modèles.

En plus de mal connaître le fonctionnement actuel des tourbières, l'étude du passé récent et les projections de conditions climatiques futures sur la région laissent présager une transformation des tourbières vers un état plus aquatique. Plusieurs études ont démontré que les conditions climatiques ayant prévaluées sur la partie nord du Québec au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle furent plus humides que celles des siècles précédents. Ces conditions humides ont eu des impacts sur les niveaux des lacs (Payette et Delwaide, 2004; Bégin, 2001; Payette et Delwaide, 1991) et des rivières subarctiques (Payette et Delwaide, 2000). Même si les impacts de ces changements sur les tourbières ne sont pas encore documentés, l'état actuel des TM permet de formuler l'hypothèse qu'elles ont subi une transformation nommée aqualyse, i.e. une dégradation de la structure végétale de surface qui amène une coalescence des mares et conséquemment, une augmentation de la fraction des bassins recouverte par de l'eau libre. Pour le moyen-nord québécois, le GIEC (Groupe d'experts Intergouvernemental sur l'Évolution du Climat) anticipe une hausse du total annuel de précipitation combinée à des températures plus chaudes au cours du prochain siècle (Christensen et al., 2007). Les conditions hydrologiques prévues par ce futur climat plus chaud et humide sont cohérentes et annoncent une hausse de l'écoulement annuel moyen (Frigon et al., 2007; Dibike et Coulibaly, 2005; Slivitzky et al., 2004; Clair et al., 1998). Ces conditions futures pourraient être favorables à la poursuite de l'aqualyse, c'est pourquoi la présente étude sur le fonctionnement hydrologique des tourbières se porte sur plusieurs sites formant un large spectre de conditions générales d'humidité de surface.

Pour toutes ces raisons, il est déterminant de s'interroger sur le fonctionnement des multiples fonctions climatiques, écologiques et hydrologiques des tourbières. Le projet « Aqualyse des tourbières » dans lequel s'inscrit cette thèse allait justement en ce sens avec une équipe multidisciplinaire qui a orienté ses recherches sur trois domaines : (1) la dynamique écologique passée et récente des TM structurées via respectivement la composition stratigraphique des mares et lanières végétales de même que par la datation des arbres morts, les taux de croissance des plantules et l'historique de leur expansion, (2) l'évolution récente de la structure végétale de leur surface via la comparaison d'images satellitaires et aériennes et finalement, (3) l'étude comparative du fonctionnement hydrologique actuel de sites aux diverses conditions d'humidité de surface. L'ensemble des travaux qui ont composé le volet hydrologique sont compilés dans cette thèse.

## **Chapitre 2 : Revue de littérature**

### **2.1 Écologie et développement des tourbières**

Les milieux humides en général sont des zones où la nappe est près, au niveau, ou au-dessus de la surface du sol suffisamment longtemps pour permettre la croissance d'une végétation hydrophile et une activité biologique adaptée aux environnements humides (Tarnocai, 1980). Plus spécifiquement, les tourbières sont des écosystèmes dont le développement est influencé par un substrat généralement mal drainé où la tourbe s'accumule plus qu'elle ne se décompose (Damman, 1979; Glaser, 1987) et avec une accumulation minimale de tourbe atteignant 40 cm (Price et Waddington, 2000).

Les TM et les TO se retrouvent principalement dans les régions boréales d'Amérique du Nord et d'Eurasie (Glaser et Janssens, 1986; Khury et al., 1993) où, dans ces deux régions, elles se retrouvent en majorité entre la forêt boréale au sud et la limite sud de la toundra arctique au nord. Elles forment souvent des complexes écologiques (Sjörs, 1963; Glaser, 1992) qui jouent un rôle important dans la dynamique du carbone atmosphérique (Blodau, 2002; Lafleur et al, 1997; Bubier et al, 2003b; 1993). En Amérique du Nord, ces deux types de tourbières sont souvent deux stades de développement d'un même écosystème. L'examen de carottes de tourbes montre fréquemment une succession végétale impliquant premièrement des plantes typiquement minérotrophes (carex et mousses brunes) puis, suite à une transition rapide, des populations typiquement ombrotrophes (sphaignes et lichens) (Gorham et Janssens, 1992; Kuhry et al., 1993).

Par définition, les TO reçoivent leur apport en eau uniquement par les précipitations. Avec le temps, l'accumulation de tourbe a pour effet de d'isoler progressivement les plantes de la tourbière de la source nutritive minérogène (Payette et Rochefort, 2001) lorsque la surface s'élève au-dessus de la nappe régionale. À ce stade, la tourbière atteint rapidement des conditions acides et s'appauvrit en espèces vasculaires. Ces conditions acides et pauvres en éléments minéraux font en sorte que les TO sont parmi les écosystèmes les plus pauvres de la planète (Damman, 1986). Par rapport aux TO, les TM ont généralement : (1) un plus jeune âge (2) une couverture de mares plus importante, (3) un apport provenant du ruissellement extérieur, (4) une nappe plus affleurante, (5) une

plus faible profondeur de tourbe accumulée, (6) la présence d'un exutoire net, (7) une végétation adaptée à des concentrations plus riches en éléments minéraux basiques (ions carbonates) et donc à des milieux moins acides, mais néanmoins aussi riches en éléments nutritifs (azote, phosphore, potassium) (Vitt et al., 1995).

On retrouve souvent une alternance de buttes et de dépression à la surface des tourbières, celles-ci seraient causées par des conditions hydrologiques différentes affectant directement le taux d'accumulation de la tourbe (Belyea et Clymo, 1998) qui lui, varie en fonction de la position de la nappe. La résultante des taux de croissance et de décomposition sur les buttes et les dépressions fait en sorte que celles-ci croissent en synchronie sur une longue période. Advenant une remontée à long terme de la position de la nappe d'eau dans les dépressions, ces dernières seraient complètement submergées, les plantes qui les occupent se noieraient, les processus biochimiques de décomposition seraient accélérés par les algues et les bactéries (Gorham, 1991) et éventuellement, elles se transformeraient en mares permanentes. Ainsi donc, globalement, la proportion de la surface d'une tourbière occupée par les compartiments aquatiques et végétaux (buttes, lanières, replats tourbeux, etc.) représente une mesure directe de l'état de saturation en eau de cet écosystème.

## **2.2 Aqualyse des tourbières**

Un inventaire aérien préliminaire effectué durant les étés 2002 et 2003 sur le bassin de la rivière La Grande suggère que plusieurs TM sont davantage aquatiques que terrestres. Un examen plus détaillé du contenu des mares a montré que plusieurs d'entre elles contiennent des restes de lanières végétales et des plaques de végétation ennoyées de différentes tailles et formes. Dans tous les cas, les parties aquatiques submergent une végétation morte depuis un certain temps, mortalité vraisemblablement due à une hausse relativement récente de la nappe phréatique.

Durant le dernier siècle et par rapport aux trois siècles précédents, des niveaux d'eau élevés ont été atteints dans les grands lacs (Bégin, 2001), les petits lacs (Payette et Delwaide, 1991; 2004) et les rivières subarctiques (Payette et Delwaide, 2000) du Québec nordique. Si tous ces systèmes hydriques de la région ont enregistré une telle signature

hydrologique, il est fort probable que les tourbières situées sur le complexe La Grande aient elles aussi subi une hausse prolongée des niveaux d'eau. Une telle hausse de la nappe aurait inévitablement eu des répercussions sur la structure végétale des tourbières, particulièrement sur les TM qui présentent un plus grand nombre de mares que les TO. Dissanska et al. (2009) ont d'ailleurs démontrés un accroissement des compartiments aquatiques entre 1957 et 2003 pour deux de leurs sept sites étudiés. Sur les TM, les impacts d'une nappe élevée durant une période prolongée pourrait inclure la formation de nouvelles mares, l'expansion des mares déjà existantes et une réduction de la population de petits arbres suivant une forte mortalité (Arlen-Pouliot, 2009).

La configuration particulière des TM structurées typiques du bassin de la rivière La Grande montre une alternance de longues mares parallèles et de lanières végétales alignées perpendiculairement à la direction de l'écoulement. L'observation de la disposition des restes végétaux sur les TM suggère que la hausse des niveaux d'eau pourrait avoir causé une dégradation des parties les plus basses des lanières, menant à une fusion entre certaines mares voisines. Ce processus, qui est une tendance inverse à l'évolution naturelle de l'écosystème, a été nommé *aqualyse* (publication en préparation). Bien qu'elle ne soit pas encore démontrée, l'hypothèse de l'aqualyse laisse envisager une transformation du comportement hydrologique des tourbières à mesure que ce processus s'accentue. Par exemple, on pourrait émettre l'hypothèse d'une hausse de la contribution des tourbières au système hydrologique régional suite à l'accroissement du ruissellement de surface causé par une connexion hydrologique qui passerait d'occasionnelle (aujourd'hui) à plus fréquente (dans le futur). L'aqualyse des TO demeure un sujet plus flou car les conditions futures plus humides pourraient favoriser la croissance du couvert végétal typique à ces tourbières, la position de la nappe étant connue pour être un prédateur de la croissance de la sphaigne (Bubier et al., 2003; Silvola et al., 1996).

### **2.3 Bilan hydrologique et ses termes**

Une façon simple et courante d'étudier le fonctionnement hydrologique d'un système est de mesurer et de comparer les termes du bilan hydrologique (Déry et al, 2005; Kane et Yang, 2004; Ingram, 1983). D'un point de vue mathématique, un bilan hydrologique peut s'exprimer de façon générale comme suit :

$$P + \frac{\Delta S_t - \Delta S_{t-1}}{\Delta t} - ET = Q + \eta \quad (2.1)$$

Où  $P$  représente les précipitations,  $\Delta S$  est le terme de variation de stockage par unité de temps,  $ET$  est l'évapotranspiration,  $Q$  est l'écoulement, et  $\eta$  est le terme résiduel. Cette équation très simple peut se complexifier selon les bassins étudiés. Ainsi,  $P$  peut inclure les précipitations liquides, solides et la condensation;  $ET$  peut inclure la sublimation nivale;  $Q$  peut différencier le ruissellement de surface de l'écoulement hypodermique et de base;  $\Delta S$  peut inclure la percolation, les fluctuations des zones saturées et non saturées et la redistribution de la neige par le vent. Bien que conceptuellement simple à concevoir sur un bassin, les termes de cette équation demeurent difficiles à évaluer quantitativement à partir de données récoltées sur le terrain (Kane et Yang, 2004). Produire des bilans à divers pas de temps est possible mais les différents processus hydrologiques étant variables dans l'espace comme dans le temps (Uhlenbrook, 2006), il est ardu de vouloir réaliser des bilans à des pas de temps courts. Ainsi, malgré la disponibilité fréquente de données journalières ou même horaires, il est rare de rencontrer dans la littérature des bilans effectués sur des périodes plus courtes que la saison (voir Kane et Yang, 2004). Par contre, et ce malgré la plus grande imprécision à court terme, des bilans sont néanmoins produits lors des prévisions effectuées pour l'exploitation des ressources hydriques.

Les sous-sections suivantes (2.3.1 à 2.3.4) sont dédiées à la description des principaux termes du bilan. Tous n'ont pas été directement considérés dans les travaux contenus dans cette thèse (chapitres 4 à 6). Ceux étudiés ont été choisis pour l'intérêt scientifique qu'ils représentent dans le cas spécifique des tourbières et des lacs du moyen nord québécois de même que par les limites de l'échantillonnage possible en fonction des contraintes logistiques, temporelles et financières reliées à un projet de recherche en milieu éloigné.

### **2.3.1 Précipitations**

Terme clé d'un bilan hydrologique en tant que principal intrant, les précipitations liquides et solides mesurées *in situ* comportent une marge d'erreur relativement importante.

Plusieurs études et ouvrages reconnaissent le vent comme principale cause d'incertitude dans les mesures de précipitations nivales (Weiss, 1961; Goodison et al, 1998; Ducharme et Nadeau, 2005; Gray et Male, 1981); l'augmentation de la vitesse du vent au-dessus du collecteur créant une augmentation de la turbulence et causant une sous-captation pouvant aller jusqu'à plus de 50%. Le choix d'un précipitomètre adapté aux conditions climatiques et l'utilisation d'un écran nival permet de réduire les erreurs d'échantillonnage (McClure, 1993). Les gouttes d'eau étant plus lourdes que les flocons de neige, les précipitations liquides sont moins sujettes à la turbulence. Dans ce cas, l'erreur de mesure (de l'ordre de 10%) viendrait plutôt de la forme du sommet du pluviomètre, plus précisément de la pente de l'entonnoir qui dirige la pluie vers les augets. Les données brutes peuvent être corrigées par un facteur de correction constant qui diminue la variance entre les mesures des appareils et celles des étalons (Ducharme et Nadeau, 2005). Les variations locales étant aussi une cause d'erreur importante lors de l'estimation d'un volume de précipitations régional, une densification du réseau d'instruments de mesure peut permettre une meilleure définition spatiale des précipitations (St-Hilaire et al, 2003).

### **2.3.2 Écoulement**

L'écoulement est l'eau transportée à l'extérieur du bassin par l'exutoire (Ward et Trimble, 2004) et combine l'eau provenant des processus suivants (Musy, 2003): a) le débit de base qui provient des réserves souterraines et qui assure un écoulement lent et quasi-constant même en période d'étiage, b) l'écoulement hypodermique défini comme étant l'eau qui s'infiltra dans les couches de tourbe décomposée et qui contribue au débit à l'exutoire et c) le ruissellement de surface qui se produit lorsque l'intensité des pluies dépasse la capacité d'infiltration du sol (qui elle-même varie, entre autres, selon l'humidité du sol). L'excès d'eau s'écoule alors par gravité le long des pentes et forme l'essentiel de l'écoulement rapide de crue.

Dans le présent contexte, l'écoulement est mesuré par le débit des exutoires des sites et englobe les trois processus décrits précédemment. Une façon commune et éprouvée de le calculer est de mesurer en continu le niveau d'eau à l'exutoire et d'établir une courbe de

tarage pour obtenir les débits sortants. La courbe de tarage est une relation entre le niveau d'eau à l'exutoire et le débit sortant, on obtient alors une équation qui permet l'interpolation des données de débit. Cette méthode est particulièrement utile lorsqu'il est impossible de mesurer le débit en continu à l'aide d'un seuil jaugeur, par exemple lorsque les sites d'études sont en milieu éloigné ou encore de faible topographie.

L'écoulement hypodermique est par contre beaucoup plus difficile à mesurer étant par définition difficile d'accès (sous-terrain). Diverses méthodes sont actuellement testées et utilisées: par traceurs chimiques (Weiler et Naef, 2003), à partir de gradients hydrauliques mesurés par la pente d'un plan obtenu par mesures de positions de nappe (Mouser et al., 2005), à partir d'expérimentations de drainage/remplissage de volumes contrôlés de tourbe (Hogan et al., 2006) ou à partir de calcul de perméabilité de la tourbe en fonction de la distribution des pores (Quinton et al., 2008)

### **2.3.3 Évapotranspiration**

L'évaporation est le processus de changement de phase par lequel l'eau sous forme liquide est transformée en vapeur et retourne à l'atmosphère (Ward et Trimble, 2004). Une certaine quantité d'énergie est requise pour ce changement de phase, les principales sources proviennent de la radiation solaire directe, de la température de l'air et du vent. À mesure que l'évaporation se produit, l'air au-dessus de la surface se sature et le taux d'évaporation diminue sauf si la vapeur d'eau est latéralement déplacée sous l'effet du vent. L'évaporation se produit sur n'importe quelle surface humide et est combinée à la transpiration si la surface est végétale, on parle alors d'évapotranspiration (ET). La transpiration est la vaporisation de l'eau liquide contenue à l'intérieur des tissus vivants. L'évapotranspiration demeure à ce jour un des termes sous-étudiés du bilan hydrologique des tourbières (Waddington et al., 2009).

Plusieurs méthodes de calcul ou d'estimation empiriques de l'ET sont proposées dans la littérature, Thornthwaite (1948) l'estime simplement en utilisant la température de l'air tandis que Baldocchi et al. (1988) la mesure de façon complexe par flux de chaleurs sensible et latente (méthode eddy covariance). Le modèle d'estimation d'ET de Penman-Monteith (PM) comprend l'équation atmosphérique empirique développée par Penman

(1948), cette équation tient compte à la fois de l'énergie disponible, de la capacité de l'air à contenir la vapeur d'eau et d'un mécanisme d'évacuation de la vapeur d'eau. L'ajout majeur au modèle de Penman est celui de Monteith (1965) qui introduit la résistance aérodynamique et la résistance stomatale de la surface au transfert de vapeur, ce dernier mécanisme impliquant la résistance physiologique de la végétation vasculaire à la dessiccation. PM s'exprime selon l'équation suivante (2.2) adaptée d'Allen et al. (2006):

$$ET = \frac{\Delta(R_n - G) + 86400 * \rho_a c_p \frac{(e_s - e_a)}{r_a}}{\lambda \rho_e \left( \Delta + \gamma \left( 1 + \frac{r_s}{r_a} \right) \right)} * 1000 \quad (2.2)$$

où  $ET$  est le taux d'évapotranspiration (mm/jour),  $\lambda$  est la chaleur latente de vaporisation (MJ/kg) est la quantité de chaleur impliquée dans les changements de phase liquide-gazeux pour l'eau.  $\Delta$  est la pente de la courbe pression de vapeur à saturation-température (kPa/°C). La pression de vapeur est la pression exercée par les molécules d'eau dans l'atmosphère et est fonction de la température.  $R_n$  est la radiation nette ( $MJ/m^2/jour$ ) et est la résultante de l'ensemble des processus suivants : la radiation visible directe provenant du soleil, la radiation visible diffuse issue de la diffusion de la lumière par les molécules de l'atmosphère et aussi la radiation infrarouge de la surface vers l'atmosphère qui est fonction de la température. Il est possible d'estimer la radiation nette à partir de la radiation incidente mesurée par un pyranomètre.  $G$  est le flux de chaleur vers le sol ( $MJ/m^2/jour$ ).  $\rho_a$  est la densité moyenne de l'air à pression constante ( $kg/m^3$ ).  $c_p$  est la chaleur spécifique de l'air (kJ/kg/K).  $e_s - e_a$  est le déficit de pression de vapeur entre les conditions actuelles ( $a$ ) et à saturation ( $s$ ) (kPa).  $r_a$  est la résistance aérodynamique (s/m), i.e. la diminution de l'effet du vent sur l'évacuation de la vapeur d'eau en fonction des caractéristiques physiques du couvert végétal.  $\gamma$  est la constante psychrométrique (kPa/°C) et  $r_s$  est la résistance stomatale ou de surface (s/m), i.e. le mécanisme de protection de la canopée végétale contre la dessiccation. L'introduction de  $\rho_e$  (densité de l'eau), des constantes 86400 et 1000 est nécessaire pour l'analyse dimensionnelle permettant d'obtenir l'évapotranspiration en millimètres par jour (mm/j).

Ce modèle demeure abondamment utilisé dans les milieux de tourbières (Lafleur et al, 2005; Lott et Hunt, 2001; Kellner, 2001a; Campbell et Williamson, 1997). Les composantes du modèle PM posent peu de problèmes dans leur conceptualisation à l'exception de la résistance de la surface ( $r_s$ ). Certaines réserves ont été émises quant à l'application de cette variable sur des surfaces composées de plantes non-vasculaires comme la sphaigne (Lafleur et Roulet, 1992), puisque  $r_s$  implique le fonctionnement de structures physiologiques absentes chez ce type de plante. Les plantes non-vasculaires étant dominantes dans les tourbières, la résistance de surface est un terme nul ( $r_s = 0$ ) dans certaines études (Lafleur et Rouse, 1990; Lafleur et al, 2005). L'équivalent de cette paramétrisation d'une résistance de surface nulle consiste à considérer l'ET potentielle (ETP) égale à l'ET réelle (ETR), ce qui correspond en d'autres termes à négliger à la fois l'effet métabolique de la végétation sur le processus mais aussi la résistance même de la surface qui ne dépend pas de la physiologie végétale. Cette hypothèse est fréquemment postulée lorsque la nappe fluctue à l'intérieur de la zone racinaire (Kim et Verma, 1996; Kellner, 2001b; Laio, 2001; Hasholt et Mernild, 2004). Cette hypothèse (ETP = ETR) est par contre contestée dans les deux sens par des résultats d'études montrant que ETP < ETR (Lafleur et Rouse, 1990; Campbell et Williamson, 1997 Shutov, 2004) mais aussi parfois que ETP > ETR (Nichols et Brown, 1980).

Un cas particulier de ce terme clé du bilan hydrologique en milieu nordique concerne la sublimation nivale. Ce processus relatif au changement de phase solide-gazeux est fréquemment négligé lors d'études de bilans hydrologiques (Balonishnikova et al, 2004; Shutov, 2004; Reid et Faria, 2004). Certains auteurs se sont récemment penchés sur la question (Van Den Broeke, 1997; Déry et Yau, 2002; Zhang et al, 2004; Pomeroy et al, 1999) et leurs résultats respectifs font état de taux de sublimation importants de l'ordre de 10-15%, 7%, 14% et même jusqu'à 40% du total annuel de précipitations.

### **2.3.4 Variations de stockage**

Le terme de stockage peut être subdivisé entre le stockage des zones saturées ou non-saturées. Le stockage d'eau dans un bassin influence à quel moment il y aura production de ruissellement de surface. La présence de seuils de stockage jouerait aussi un rôle

crucial sur l'efficacité d'un bassin à transférer l'eau vers son exutoire (Spence, 2007). Tel que mentionné à la section sur l'écoulement (2.3.2), l'évaluation du stockage est plus complexe dans le cas d'écosystèmes tourbeux dû au phénomène d'expansion et de contraction de la matrice tourbeuse. Price et Schlotzhauer (1999) ont montré que la matrice de tourbe se compactait en s'asséchant, ce qui avait pour conséquence de faire varier temporellement la conductivité hydraulique de la surface (Price, 2003). Cette « respiration » de la tourbe peut expliquer une part relativement importante des variations de niveaux d'eau des TO (Kellner et Halldin, 2002). Les variations de niveaux de la surface pourraient aussi être causées simultanément et en partie par les émissions périodiques de gaz présents dans les couches inférieures de tourbe en fonction des conditions atmosphériques (Strack et al., 2006).

La position de la nappe, i.e. le dessus de la zone saturée, est un paramètre hydrologique fréquemment utilisé de par sa simplicité à être mesurée et à sa signification hydrologique (Thompson et Waddington, 2008). La position de la nappe permet une estimation du volume de stockage et peut être calculée selon un référentiel uni ou pluridimensionnel. Par exemple, Kellner et Halldin (2002) affirment que la similarité des fluctuations de la nappe sur de grandes superficies de tourbières donne la possibilité de modéliser celles-ci selon un système unidimensionnel. Par contre, Mouser et al (2005) et Price et Maloney (1994) utilisent des gradients hydrauliques qui sont des calculs de pentes dans la position de la nappe et donc des systèmes tridimensionnels. D'autres études géostatistiques ont démontré qu'il peut y avoir une variabilité spatiale dans les fluctuations de la nappe causées par les structures microtopographiques et végétales (Lyon et al., 2006a,b; Petrone et al., 2004). Une autre alternative consiste aussi à considérer les variations de stockage (ou de niveau) comme étant le terme résiduel de l'équation de bilan hydrologique (Hirashima et al, 2004; Young et Woo, 2004), cette méthode comporte cependant le désavantage d'inclure les processus qui ont été considérés soit négligeables, soit incalculables, de même que le terme d'erreur. Cette méthode est aussi inutilisable sur de courts pas de temps (quelques jours) puisque les processus d'écoulement et de variation de stockage n'opèrent pas nécessairement de manière synchrone (Tardif et al., en préparation). Les variations de stockage dans un milieu poreux peuvent être estimées par l'équation 2.3 (Spence et Woo, 2003; Price et Schlotzhauer, 1999) dans laquelle  $\Delta S$  est la

variation de stockage,  $\Delta n$  est la variation du niveau de la nappe et  $S_y$  est le rendement spécifique du milieu poreux. La littérature fournit des mesures très variables de  $S_y$  en milieu tourbeux, la valeur empirique ici utilisée est 0.26 (Hogan et al., 2006; Price et Maloney, 1994) puisque cette valeur a été mesurée sur des tourbières possédant une végétation correspondante à celles des sites ici étudiés.

$$\Delta S = \Delta n * S_y \quad (2.3)$$

La percolation, i.e. le mouvement descendant vertical de l'eau à travers le sol est un autre processus relié aux variations de stockage ou de niveau. Ce mouvement descendant est induit par la gravité et contribue à la recharge de la nappe souterraine. La nature et le degré de compaction du sol sous-jacent au bassin, la nature et la densité de la couverture végétale, la pente du bassin et aussi les conditions d'humidité du sol antécédentes aux événements de précipitations sont les principaux facteurs influençant la percolation. Des méthodes empiriques ou physiques sont utilisées pour la quantification de la percolation. Les équations physiques utilisent comme principe de base la loi de Darcy qui stipule que la vitesse d'écoulement de l'eau à travers une couche poreuse est proportionnelle au produit de la conductivité hydraulique et du gradient de charge. Une des solutions particulière des équations physiques utilisant cette loi concerne les milieux saturés, car puisque la teneur en eau et les propriétés du sol y sont constantes, le taux de percolation devient aussi constant (Ward et Trimble, 2004) et ne dépend donc plus que de la nature du substrat minéral du bassin.

## **2.4 Hydrologie des tourbières**

Alors que la section précédente était une récapitulation des processus hydrologiques présents de façon plus ou moins importante sur n'importe quel bassin, cette section se veut un récapitulatif de l'état actuel des connaissances des processus hydrologiques spécifiques aux tourbières. Les sous-sections suivantes décrivent respectivement les spécificités des TO, celles des TM et finalement les similitudes et les différences hydrologiques entre les deux types de tourbières.

#### **2.4.1 Hydrologie des tourbières ombrotropes**

Les TO sont reconnues pour stocker la plupart de l'eau qu'elles reçoivent (Quinton et al., 2003). Grâce à leur grande capacité d'absorption, elles peuvent subir d'importantes variations de stockage lors de précipitations lorsque les conditions initiales sont sèches (Tardif et al., en préparation). Cette forte capacité de stockage est temporaire puisqu'elles subissent néanmoins des pertes latérales et verticales. Certaines TO se drainent par percolation (Hayashi et al., 2004), la connexion entre la tourbière et les terres environnantes étant plus forte lorsque l'épaisseur du substrat minéral augmente (Devito et al., 1996). Puisque le ruissellement de surface est rare, l'écoulement hypodermique est la principale forme de mouvement latéral de l'eau (Quinton et Marsh, 1999) et s'effectue surtout dans la zone non-saturée. Une importante part de cet écoulement a lieu dans une faible fraction du volume total de tourbe, par des chemins préférentiels qui sont fonction de la taille des pores de la matrice tourbeuse (Holden, 2009). En été et en automne, les précipitations, le niveau de la nappe et l'évapotranspiration contrôlent l'écoulement hypodermique (Mouser et al., 2005). Lafleur et al. (2005) ont rassemblé des valeurs d'évapotranspiration (mesurées et/ou estimées) estivales quotidiennes moyennes pour des tourbières canadiennes variant entre 1.8 et 4.5 mm/jour. L'importance de l'évapotranspiration semblerait variable selon le type de couvert végétal des buttes et des creux, qui est composé d'un mélange de végétation vasculaire et non-vasculaire (Admiral et Lafleur, 2007). Devito et al. (1996) ont aussi montré que durant les années de fortes précipitations, les sites étaient hydrologiquement connectés et caractérisés par une nappe élevée et un temps de réponse rapide tandis que durant les années de faibles précipitations, ils montraient une diminution de l'écoulement combiné à des fluctuations de la nappe au rythme des événements pluvieux.

#### **2.4.2 Hydrologie des tourbières minérotropes**

Pour les TM, la structure physique alternant mares et lanières influence le comportement hydrologique. Sur un bassin, une même superficie d'eau libre mais organisée spatialement différemment influencerait le ruissellement à méso-échelle ( $\approx 100 \text{ km}^2$ ) (Spence, 2006) de même qu'à petite échelle ( $< 1 \text{ km}^2$ ) (Tardif et al., 2009). Les mares sont

de formes et de tailles variables et majoritairement orientées perpendiculairement à la pente (Sjörs, 1959; Glaser et Janssens, 1986). Elles influencent la capacité de stockage des tourbières (Price et Maloney, 1994) et retardent les pointes de crues (Holden et Burt, 2003; Kvaerner et Klove, 2008). La superficie des mares est sujette à des variations continues en fonction des conditions météorologiques. Certaines mares (les moins profondes) peuvent s'assécher complètement lors d'épisodes secs tandis que d'autres (les plus profondes) conserveront presque la même surface. Ces variations de superficies peuvent influencer le régime d'écoulement (Glenn et Woo, 1997), la capacité tampon et le temps de concentration seraient en effet fortement diminués en conditions humides lorsque le niveau de nappe dépasse les dépressions (Quinton et Roulet, 1998; Price et Waddington, 2000). Bien que les TM fassent généralement partie intégrale du réseau de drainage de surface des bassins (Quinton et al., 2003), elles sont parfois déconnectées lors d'épisodes de faibles débits (Hayashi et al., 2004).

#### **2.4.3 Similitudes et différences entre les deux types de tourbières**

Les TO et les TM sont connues pour avoir un effet tampon inversement proportionnel au niveau de la nappe (Quinton et Roulet, 1998; Price et Waddington, 2000). Dans les deux cas, l'effet tampon est relié à la conductivité hydraulique, qui est inversement proportionnelle à la profondeur (Baird et al., 2008; Kvaerner et Klove, 2008; Quinton et al., 2008) mais aussi variable relativement à la nature compressible-expansible de la tourbe (Price et Schlotzhauer, 1999; Kellner et Halldin, 2002; Whittington et Price, 2006; Petrone et al., 2008). Ce phénomène de compression-expansion, nommé « respiration de la tourbe », permet à la couche de végétation vivante de surface de suivre les fréquentes variations de niveau de nappe qui ont lieu durant l'été et l'automne (Roulet, 1991).

Au niveau des différences, les basins contenant une grande proportion de terrains organiques montrent des hydrogrammes plus larges (Roulet and Woo, 1988) et ayant de plus longues courbes de récession que les bassins avec une faible proportion (Roulet 1986; Chapman, 1987). Dans un bassin subarctique des Territoires du Nord-Ouest, Quinton et al. (2003) ont démontré que le ruissellement de surface était négativement (positivement) corrélé à la couverture spatiale de TO (TM).

Il semblerait aussi que les processus générant l'écoulement soient différents en conditions sèches et humides. Les débits d'étiages seraient principalement contrôlés par la position de la nappe (Branfireun and Roulet, 1998), i.e. par la quantité d'eau stockée dans la tourbe sous la surface (Kvaerner et Klove, 2008; Holden et Burt, 2003). Les débits de crues seraient plutôt produits lorsque l'acrotelme (la couche supérieure de tourbe saturée de façon non-permanente) est saturé, i.e. lorsque le niveau de la nappe est élevée (Kvaerner et Klove, 2008; Holden et Burt, 2003; Evans, 1999) et que l'humidité stockée dans les terres environnantes est élevée (Branfireun and Roulet, 1998). Durant les épisodes où la nappe est haute, la connexion hydrologique entre les mares est augmentée et on se rapproche alors du comportement qui se retrouve sur les lacs, ces derniers n'ayant pas de résistance latérale à vaincre afin d'évacuer le surplus d'eau nécessaire à leur équilibre.

## **2.5 Hypothèses et objectifs**

La revue de littérature ayant été effectuée en préparation à la première campagne de terrain nécessaire à l'instrumentation des sites (printemps 2005) et à la proposition de recherche (décembre 2006), les hypothèses de travail suivantes ont ensuite été émises :

1. Les tourbières actuelles ayant atteint des stades de maturité variables, leur fonctionnement hydrologique serait lui aussi variable tant dans l'importance relative des différents termes de leur bilan que dans leur variabilité temporelle.
2. En relation avec les conditions générales d'humidité de surface des sites, plus une tourbière aurait une importante fraction de surface en eau libre, plus son bilan se rapprocherait de celui d'un lac et plus sa contribution hydrologique régionale serait importante, i.e. plus d'écoulement.
3. La variabilité hydrologique anticipée sur des écosystèmes de taille semblable pourrait être expliquée par leurs caractéristiques physiographiques, écologiques et climatiques propres.

L'objectif général de ce projet de recherche était de comparer le fonctionnement hydrologique de tourbières et de lacs de la région de la rivière La Grande formant un

large spectre de conditions d'humidité de surface et de discuter des modifications vraisemblables du régime hydrologique des tourbières associées aux changements climatiques. Les objectifs spécifiques se résumaient ainsi :

1. Sur des tourbières minérotrophes et des lacs, évaluer et comparer la forme d'hydrogrammes produits par des événements de pluie ainsi que la relation entre la position de la nappe et le débit à l'exutoire.
2. Comparer le bilan hydrologique aux pas de temps saisonnier et évènementiel de sites représentant un large spectre de conditions d'humidité de surface.
3. À partir d'événements de pluie de diverses intensités et sur tous les sites, comparer et essayer de prévoir les temps de réponses et leurs amplitudes.

## **Chapitre 3 : Résumé des travaux de recherche**

### **3.1 Propriétés statistiques des hydrogrammes de tourbières minérotropes et de lacs aux latitudes moyennes du Québec, Canada.**

Les propriétés hydrologiques des tourbières sont mal connues à plusieurs niveaux, tant pour leur comportement actuel que futur (tel qu'anticipé par la poursuite du processus d'aqualyse). Même si certains comportements sont connus, tels que la diminution du pouvoir tampon des tourbières en conditions humides (Quinton and Roulet, 1998; Price and Waddington, 2000) ou encore que la proportion de TM (ombrotropes) sur un bassin est positivement (négativement) corrélée avec l'importance de l'écoulement de surface (Quinton et al., 2003), la façon dont les tourbières alimentent en eau les bassins de plus grande échelle qui les contiennent reste à ce jour encore mal comprise et documentée. L'objectif principal du premier article de cette thèse (chapitre 4) est de comparer le comportement hydrologique de TM et de lacs peu profonds durant des événements estivaux et automnaux de pluie. Plus spécifiquement, il s'agit de comparaisons intersites des propriétés statistiques d'hydrogrammes de même que de la relation entre le niveau de la nappe (niveau d'eau pour les lacs) et le débit à l'exutoire.

#### **3.1.1 Méthodes**

Quatre sites situés dans la partie est du bassin de la rivière La Grande ont été sélectionnés pour cette étude, deux TM (sites 4 et 5) et deux lacs (sites 6 et 7) (Figure 4.1). Ces quatre petits bassins ont tous une superficie semblable (entre 40 et 90 ha) et possèdent le même type de couvert forestier mature (*Picea Mariana*) et de tapis de lichens en périphérie des tourbières et lacs qui occupent une fraction superficielle semblable des bassins (entre 32% et 47%). La prise de données quotidiennes a eu lieu en 2005 et 2006 durant la période allant de la mi-juillet à la fin d'octobre. Les précipitations ont été mesurées à l'aide de pluviomètres à augets et corrigées pour la sous-captation. Les données de débits (L/s) ont été établies à partir de mesures de niveaux converties en débits à l'aide de courbes de tarage effectuées à chaque site. Un échantillon de mesures ponctuelles prises

au micro-moulinet et représentant diverses conditions hydrologiques ont permis la construction de ces courbes. Les mesures de débit ont ensuite été transformées en données d'écoulement (mm/j). Les données de niveaux d'eau ont été obtenues à l'aide de sondes à pression hydrostatiques déployées dans un puits de stabilisation installé en rive de l'exutoire.

Des échantillons d'événements hydrologiques ont ensuite été créés à partir des séries chronologiques. Un événement se définissait sur la série chronologique des débits comme allant d'un creux à une pointe à un creux. Les événements de trop faible amplitude (<0.1 mm/jour) étaient éliminés. Par la suite, six mesures de forme de ces hydrogrammes ont été calculées et comparées à l'aide des tests de Kruskal-Wallis (analyse de variance non-paramétrique) et de Tukey-Kramer (test *a posteriori* qui définit quels sites diffèrent entre eux). Les six mesures sont la moyenne et la variance de la forme de l'hydrogramme (voir équations 4.2 et 4.3), la pente ascendante et descendante, l'asymétrie et l'aplatissement.

L'analyse de la relation entre le niveau d'eau et l'écoulement fut aussi explorée à l'aide d'analyses de covariance (ANCOVA) sur l'ensemble des données mais aussi en conditions sèches et humides, i.e. respectivement lorsque le niveau d'eau se situait en-dessous et au-dessus de la médiane des séries chronologiques.

### **3.1.2 Résultats**

Sur l'ensemble de la période d'étude, les quatre sites ont reçu respectivement 938, 1165, 1168 et 942 mm de pluie et ont produit 37, 37, 51 et 37 hydrogrammes distincts. À noter que le site 7 a eu une durée d'échantillonnage légèrement plus courte en 2005 dû à des délais d'installations d'équipement. La durée moyenne de ces événements a été de 6.00, 6.22, 4.53 et 4.86 jours, ceux-ci étant donc en moyenne plus courts mais plus nombreux sur les lacs que sur les tourbières.

Quatre des six statistiques de formes ont montré des différences significatives entre les sites. Le site 5 s'est avéré différent des trois autres au niveau de la moyenne de la forme de l'hydrogramme et des pentes de crues et de décrue alors que le site 4 est différent des trois autres au niveau de la variance de la forme de l'hydrogramme. Les deux lacs (sites 6

et 7) se situaient toujours dans un même groupe homogène, ce qui ne fut pas le cas pour les deux tourbières. Les coefficients d'asymétrie et d'aplatissement des hydrogrammes n'ont montré aucune différence significative.

L'analyse de la relation entre la position de la nappe et l'écoulement a montré que sur l'ensemble des données, les pentes débits-niveaux des deux tourbières étaient plus fortes que celles des lacs, le site 5 étant significativement différent des trois autres. Le même patron se produit en conditions sèches mais la différence entre les pentes est beaucoup moins marquée. L'analyse en conditions humides a montré une grande variabilité de réponse, le nuage de points étant beaucoup plus dispersé sur les deux tourbières que sur les lacs. Alors que les débits sont semblables en magnitude pour tous les sites en conditions sèches (Fig. 4.11), la différence s'amplifie en conditions humides alors que les valeurs des tourbières sont nettement supérieures à celles des lacs (Fig. 4.12).

### **3.1.3 Conclusions**

Cette étude a tout d'abord montré que pour une quantité de précipitations équivalente, les lacs produisaient plus d'événements hydrologiques que les tourbières, mais généralement de plus courte durée et de plus faible amplitude. L'examen visuel des nuages de points d'écoulement en fonction du niveau d'eau montre que les lacs tendent à avoir un comportement plus linéaire que les tourbières. Ces dernières sont plus souvent caractérisées par un point de rupture dans la relation, celle-ci étant presque linéaire en conditions sèches mais beaucoup plus diffuse en conditions humides. Selon les analyses produites dans cet article, il semblerait que les lacs aient un comportement hydrologique plus stable que les tourbières, i.e. un plus grand nombre d'événements mais de plus faible amplitude et durée, ainsi qu'avec des formes d'hydrogrammes plus régulières et un comportement globalement plus uniforme, et ce peu importe la position du niveau d'eau.

### **3.2 Analyse de bilans hydrologiques de tourbières à sphagnes, de tourbières minérotropes structurées et de lacs dans le bassin de la rivière La Grande, Québec.**

Le suivi hydrologique de grands et moyens bassins versants à plus ou moins long terme est bien documenté en milieu boréal et subarctique. La plupart des études du genre utilisent une approche de type bilan hydrologique (Kane et Yang, 2004; Déry et al., 2005) en étudiant un ou plusieurs termes du bilan. Le suivi de petits bassins ( $<1 \text{ km}^2$ ) est par contre beaucoup moins fréquent et s'effectue rarement en comparaisons simultanées sur divers écosystèmes typiques du milieu boréal; les TO, les TM structurées et les lacs. La compréhension du fonctionnement hydrologique de ces écosystèmes à divers pas de temps est importante dans l'optique d'une intégration éventuelle des processus de ruissellement de surface dans les modèles d'apports utilisés dans la gestion des ouvrages hydroélectriques du Québec, en particulier pour les bassins des régions de latitude moyenne. La compréhension hydrologique actuelle est aussi importante dans l'optique d'une possible transformation (aqualyse) des tourbières vers des conditions plus humides telles qu'anticipées par les modèles climatiques pour le nord du Québec (Christensen et al., 2007).

#### **3.2.1 Méthodes**

Le suivi hydrométéorologique nécessaire à la production de bilans a été fait sur des données quotidiennes pour une période allant de juillet 2005 à octobre 2007. Sept petits bassins de la rivière La Grande ( $<1 \text{ km}^2$ ) représentant trois types d'écosystèmes ont été instrumentés, ces sites couvrant un large spectre de conditions d'humidité de surface. Il s'agit de deux TO (0% et 1% de superficie couverte d'eau libre en surface), trois TM structurées (4%, 35% et 35% de superficie en eau libre) et finalement deux lacs (100% de superficie en eau libre).

Les précipitations ont été mesurées à l'aide de pluviomètres à augets et corrigées pour la sous-captation. Les données de débits (L/s) ont été établies à partir de courbes de tarage sur les TM et les lacs et ont ensuite été transformées en écoulement (mm/j). Les données de niveaux de nappe ont été obtenues à l'aide de sondes à pression hydrostatique

installées dans des puits. L'évapotranspiration (ET) a été estimée avec une variante inédite de la méthode Penman-Monteith (Monteith, 1965). Cette adaptation de la méthode classique permettait de faire une distinction entre les compartiments aquatiques et végétaux des sites, ce qui était fort utile compte tenu du contexte d'aqualyse. Les méthodes utilisées pour mesurer (estimer) les termes du bilan ont aussi été évaluées.

Le bilan hydrologique a été effectué aux pas de temps saisonnier pour une tourbière minerotrophe et un lac et sur une base événementielle pour l'ensemble des sites. Les trois événements étudiés étaient concomitants, d'une durée d'une dizaine de jours, et isolés pour représenter les conditions suivantes : (1) précipitations fortes sur nappes hautes, (2) précipitations faibles sur nappes basses et (3) précipitations fortes sur nappes basses. Le calcul des bilans s'est effectué selon l'équation suivante (3.1) où  $\Delta S$  représente la variation de stockage,  $P$  représente les précipitations,  $ET$  représente l'évapotranspiration,  $Q$  représente l'écoulement, et  $\eta$  représente le terme résiduel :

$$\frac{\Delta S_t - \Delta S_{t-1}}{\Delta t} + P - ET = Q + \eta \quad (3.1)$$

### 3.2.2 Résultats

Les données de précipitations ont montré une grande variabilité spatiale à une échelle de temps fine. La saison 2006 fut très sèche (totaux saisonniers variant entre 239 et 433 mm) tandis que 2007 fut très humide (485 à 649 mm) et que 2005 fut plus normale (309 à 589 mm). Les courbes de tarage ont donné des estimations réalistes des débits lors de conditions sèches à normales mais des surestimations importantes sur certains sites lors d'épisodes de forts débits (à cause du peu de points de contrôle sur la courbe de tarage en conditions très humides). Même si les conditions de pluviométrie ont été très variables durant la période d'étude, les données d'ET ont montré une plus grande stabilité avec de faibles différences entre les années et des totaux variant entre 136 et 182 mm pour 2005, entre 150 et 179 mm pour 2006 et finalement entre 117 et 141 mm pour 2007.

L'analyse des bilans saisonniers des sites 4 et 6 (Tableau 5.4) montre que pour l'année sèche (2006), les totaux de précipitations furent de 290 et 433 mm, les totaux

d'écoulement furent de 222 et 159 mm, les totaux d'évapotranspiration furent de 151 et 179 mm et les variations de stockage entre le début et la fin de la période furent de -19 et -39 mm. Pour l'année humide (2007), les totaux de précipitations furent de 581 et 649 mm, les totaux d'écoulement furent de 351 et 287 mm, les totaux d'évapotranspiration furent de 122 et 140 mm et les variations de stockage furent de 5 et -5 mm. Pour l'année moyenne (2005), les totaux de précipitations furent de 472 et 559 mm, les totaux de d'écoulement furent de 298 et 208 mm, les totaux d'évapotranspiration furent de 154 et 182 mm et les variations de stockage furent de 19 et 40 mm. Les termes résiduels relatifs aux totaux de précipitations ont été respectivement de 8% et 37% en 2005, de -35% et 13% en 2006 et de 19% et 33% en 2007, la plus grande part de ce terme résiduel provenant de la surestimation des débits comme le montre la plus grande précision du bilan pour l'année la plus sèche (2006) durant laquelle les débits furent globalement plus faibles.

Pour les bilans événementiels (Tableau 5.5), la pluie forte sur nappe haute (événement #1) montre une forte surestimation des débits pour les TM et les lacs, menant à un bilan fortement négatif pour quatre de ces cinq sites. Les TO à sphaignes (sans ruissellement de surface), grâce à la conjonction du stockage et probablement d'un écoulement hypodermique plus lent qu'en surface, montrent un bilan fortement positif. La pluie faible sur nappe basse (événement #2) montre un bilan nettement mieux équilibré sur les TM et les lacs puisque les débits étaient faibles à ce moment. En combinant, les précipitations à la hausse du stockage, les TO montrent par contre un surplus d'eau durant la période, le ruissellement hypodermique étant possiblement absent à ce moment puisque la capacité d'absorption est alors maximisée. La pluie forte sur nappe basse montre un même comportement sur six des sept sites, i.e. un surplus d'eau causé par une forte hausse du stockage qui n'a cependant pas été (encore) convertie en hausse de débit.

### **3.2.3 Conclusions**

La variabilité spatiale des données quotidiennes de précipitations laisse entrevoir la nécessité d'avoir des mesures *in situ* lors d'études de très petits bassins. L'établissement de courbe de tarage en milieu tourbeux s'est avéré non-optimal compte tenu de

l'éloignement des sites d'étude, des faibles débits et de l'instabilité des sections de mesure due au transport de sédiment. D'autres méthodes de mesures devraient être envisagées pour des contextes semblables. L'adaptation de la méthode de Penman-Monteith a donné de bonnes estimations pour la majorité de la distribution des données quotidiennes.

Les conclusions suivantes ont été relevées suite à l'analyse des données et des bilans hydrologiques. Malgré d'importantes variations du niveau de la nappe au cours des saisons estivales et automnales, celle-ci demeure pratiquement toujours près de la surface, ce qui suggère l'action du phénomène de compression-expansion de la matrice de tourbe, en particulier pour les TO à sphaignes qui sont plus vieilles et plus épaisses. Les bassins étant tous similaires quant à leur superficie et à leur couvert forestier, les différences d'ET résident dans la configuration des fractions superficielles d'eau libre et de végétations. La méthode ici développée tient efficacement compte de ces divers types de surface typiques aux écosystèmes boréaux. N'ayant pas de ruissellement de surface, les TO, contrairement aux TM et aux lacs, se régulent hydrologiquement par d'importantes hausses de niveaux de nappe dues à leur grande capacité d'absorption, ainsi que par évapotranspiration et par un lent écoulement hypodermique (non mesuré dans le présent projet). Les TM ont d'occasionnels épisodes d'écoulement qui sont plus longs et plus marqués que ceux des lacs (Tardif et al., 2009), ce qui suggère une influence des mares et lanières végétales. Le lien demeure hypothétique mais advenant une poursuite du phénomène d'aqualyse (ce qui apparaît probable selon les modifications au climat anticipé pour cette région), le comportement hydrologique des TM pourrait se rapprocher de celui des lacs actuels.

### ***3.3 Réactions hydrologiques post-pluies de petits bassins du moyen nord québécois formant un large spectre de conditions d'humidité de surface.***

Les tourbières de la ceinture boréale québécoise couvrent une grande variabilité de conditions d'humidité de surface, allant de TO à sphaignes plutôt sèches à des TM structurées qui sont presque des lacs. Les connaissances de l'hydrologie des tourbières s'améliorent. On sait entre autres qu'il y existe des délais dans les pointes de crues (Holden and Burt, 2003; Kvaerner and Klove, 2008) et les épisodes d'écoulement qui sont moins fréquents que dans les lacs (Tardif et al., 2009), mais avec des hydrogrammes plus larges (Roulet et Woo, 1988). Les objectifs de l'article présenté au chapitre 6 sont de comparer et d'expliquer les temps de réponses de la nappe et de l'écoulement à la suite d'une pluie, de même que l'amplitude de réponse de la nappe pour les trois types d'écosystèmes boréaux étudiés.

#### **3.3.1 Méthodes**

Le suivi hydrométéorologique a été fait sur des données agrégées à un pas de temps de six heures pour une période allant de mi-juillet à fin octobre pour les années 2005 à 2007.

Les données des sept sites instrumentés qui ont été décrits précédemment ont été utilisées dans l'étude du chapitre 6 (voir section 6.2).

La première étape du calcul des temps de réponses de l'écoulement et de montée de la nappe fut d'isoler les événements de précipitations. Deux niveaux d'intensité ont été choisis : les pluies modérées (entre 5 et 10 mm) et les fortes pluies ( $>10$  mm). Le temps de réponse était ensuite défini comme le temps nécessaire pour atteindre le prochain sommet dans les séries chronologiques tandis que l'amplitude de réaction était la différence du niveau de la nappe entre le moment de la pluie et ce même sommet (Figure 6.2).

Deux analyses ont ensuite été effectuées sur ces échantillons de variables hydrologiques. Premièrement, une analyse de variance (ANOVA) non-paramétrique (Kruskal-Wallis) a mis en exergue les différences inter-stations significatives entre les médianes des

variables hydrologiques mentionnées ci-haut. Deuxièmement, des régressions multiples ont été utilisées afin d'identifier les variables hydrométéorologiques expliquant les temps de réponse en diverses conditions : pluie modérée et forte, conditions sèches et humides, types d'écosystème.

### **3.3.2 Résultats**

Durant la période d'étude, le nombre pluies modérées sur les sites 1 à 7 fut respectivement de 40, 39, 43, 50, 53, 64 et 53 tandis que le nombre de pluies fortes fut de 21, 28, 32, 30, 45, 37 et 37. Dans les deux cas, le nombre de pluies fut plus grand dans le secteur Est que dans le secteur Ouest du bassin de la rivière La Grande.

Les temps de réponses de la montée de la nappe lors de pluies fortes (modérées) ont été trouvés significativement (non-significativement) différents pour certains sites mais non selon un patron systématique entre les écosystèmes. L'observation des distributions complètes révèle dans les deux régimes pluviaux que les temps de réponse furent plus courts sur les TO que sur deux des trois TM et les lacs. Globalement, la vitesse de réaction de la nappe semble inversement proportionnelle à la fraction superficielle d'eau libre (Fig 6.2 et 6.3). Les temps de réponse moyens respectifs sont de 9.9, 9.4, 12.0, 14.8, 14.3, 14.8 et 12.0 heures pour les pluies modérées et de 9.7, 9.0, 12.6, 14.8, 7.3, 17.8 et 18.0 heures pour les pluies fortes. En ce qui concerne les temps de réponse de l'écoulement (applicable seulement pour les TM et les lacs), la tendance est inversée et beaucoup plus nette, les lacs ayant une réponse moyenne environ deux fois plus rapide que les TM (Fig 6.4 et 6.5). Les temps de réponse moyens respectifs sont de 24.8, 27.5, 39.2, 17.6 et 10.6 pour les pluies modérées et de 22.3, 22.8, 23.7, 17.5 et 12.4 heures pour les pluies fortes

En ce qui concerne l'amplitude de la montée de la nappe lors de fortes pluies, la tendance générale est aussi d'être inversement proportionnelle à la fraction superficielle d'eau libre (Fig. 6.6). Les réactions moyennes sur les sites sont de 54.8, 26.2, 84.7, 45.9, 11.7, 26.2 et 20.2 mm. La tendance est semblable mais moins nette lors de pluies modérées, alors que les réactions moyennes sur les sites sont de 24.4, 16.6, 36.8, 25.4, 7.2, 15.9 et 12.3 mm (Fig. 6.7).

Les résultats des régressions pour les temps de réponses de la nappe sont variables selon les conditions humides ou sèches et selon les précipitations modérées ou fortes. En général, il a été possible d'obtenir des modèles significatifs, les coefficients de détermination ( $R^2$ ) variant entre 0.12 et 0.99 et les erreurs quadratiques moyennes (RMSE) variant entre 0.27 et 1.64 pas de temps (6 heures). Pour les temps de réponses de l'écoulement, les  $R^2$  varient entre 0.20 et 0.50 et les RMSE varient entre 1.83 et 2.51 pas de temps (6 heures). Pour les amplitudes de variations de nappe, les  $R^2$  varient entre 0.31 et 0.99 et les RMSE varient entre 1.5 et 20.2 mm. Les variables explicatives les plus fréquemment sélectionnées sont le niveau d'eau au moment de la pluie, la phase de la nappe par rapport au pas de temps précédent la pluie, la quantité immédiate de pluie tombée et le total de pluie durant les 1, 2 ou 3 jours précédents.

### **3.3.3 Conclusions**

Selon les résultats obtenus, le comportement hydrologique diffère selon le type d'écosystème. À part le pourcentage de surface d'eau libre, les autres caractéristiques physiographiques des bassins (superficie totale, fraction du bassin en forêt, distance et nombre de mares entre la sonde de niveau de nappe et l'exutoire) n'ont montré aucune relation linéaire claire avec les temps de réponse de la nappe et de l'écoulement.

Lors de pluies modérées, les temps de réponse de la nappe sont plus rapides sur les TO que sur les deux autres écosystèmes qui sont semblables. La différence entre les TM et les lacs s'accentue lors des fortes pluies, les lacs étant alors plus lents à réagir. Le patron s'inverse pour les temps de réponse de l'écoulement, les lacs étant beaucoup plus rapides à réagir que les TM. La structure végétale de surface de ces dernières, semblable à une cascade de réservoirs partiellement interconnectés, cause une résistance dans le processus d'écoulement. La réaction lors de pluies modérées est plus susceptible d'être décalée que lors de pluies fortes, ces dernières passant plus facilement outre la résistance à l'écoulement des tourbières alors que la hausse de la nappe engendrée par la pluie permet un ruissellement de surface plus aisé entre les mares.

Le temps de réponse de la nappe (écoulement) est inversement proportionnel (proportionnel) à la fraction superficielle d'eau libre, ces deux processus fonctionnent

donc en sens opposés. Durant un même intervalle de temps, les lacs ayant une décharge rapide sont moins susceptibles d'avoir une hausse de leur niveau, vice-versa pour les TM. Les TO ayant seulement un écoulement hypodermique qui est forcément plus lent que le ruissellement de surface, la montée de la nappe y est plus importante et rapide.

Le niveau d'eau au moment de la pluie, la phase de recharge ou de décharge de la nappe précédant la pluie, la quantité immédiate de pluie et le total de précipitation durant les jours précédents sont les quatre principales variables qui ont permis d'expliquer et de prédire la durée des temps de réponse en conditions sèches et humides, pour les pluies modérées et fortes, et pour les trois types d'écosystèmes.

Le comportement opposé entre les variations de nappes et d'écoulement suggère une inertie hydrologique des tourbières plus importante que celle des lacs. Dans le but d'améliorer le réalisme et la performance des prévisions d'apports, cette inertie devrait être spécifiquement introduite, surtout pour la prévision à court terme, dans les schémas de routage de l'eau des modèles hydrologiques.

### **3.4 Contribution originale du candidat aux articles de la thèse**

Les trois articles contenus dans cette thèse sont le fruit d'une démarche de recherche complète, i.e., de la conception du protocole d'échantillonnage, à la prise de mesures sur le terrain et jusqu'à l'article accepté (chapitre 4) et ceux sur le point d'être soumis (chapitres 5 et 6).

Le candidat a établi le protocole expérimental en collaboration avec le comité de direction, choisi les sites d'études, commandé et installé l'équipement nécessaire au protocole d'échantillonnage, entretenu les équipements et récolté les données brutes des sept sites durant plus de trois ans. Le traitement des données, les analyses et la rédaction des manuscrits sont aussi le fruit du candidat.

Durant la même période, les co-auteurs (André St-Hilaire, René Roy, Monique Bernier et Serge Payette) ont mis sur pied le projet de recherche « Aqualyse des tourbières » et géré ses aspects financiers, collaboré à l'élaboration du protocole expérimental, participé aux

travaux de terrains, fourni une partie des équipements nécessaires, suggéré diverses analyses et révisé les manuscrits.

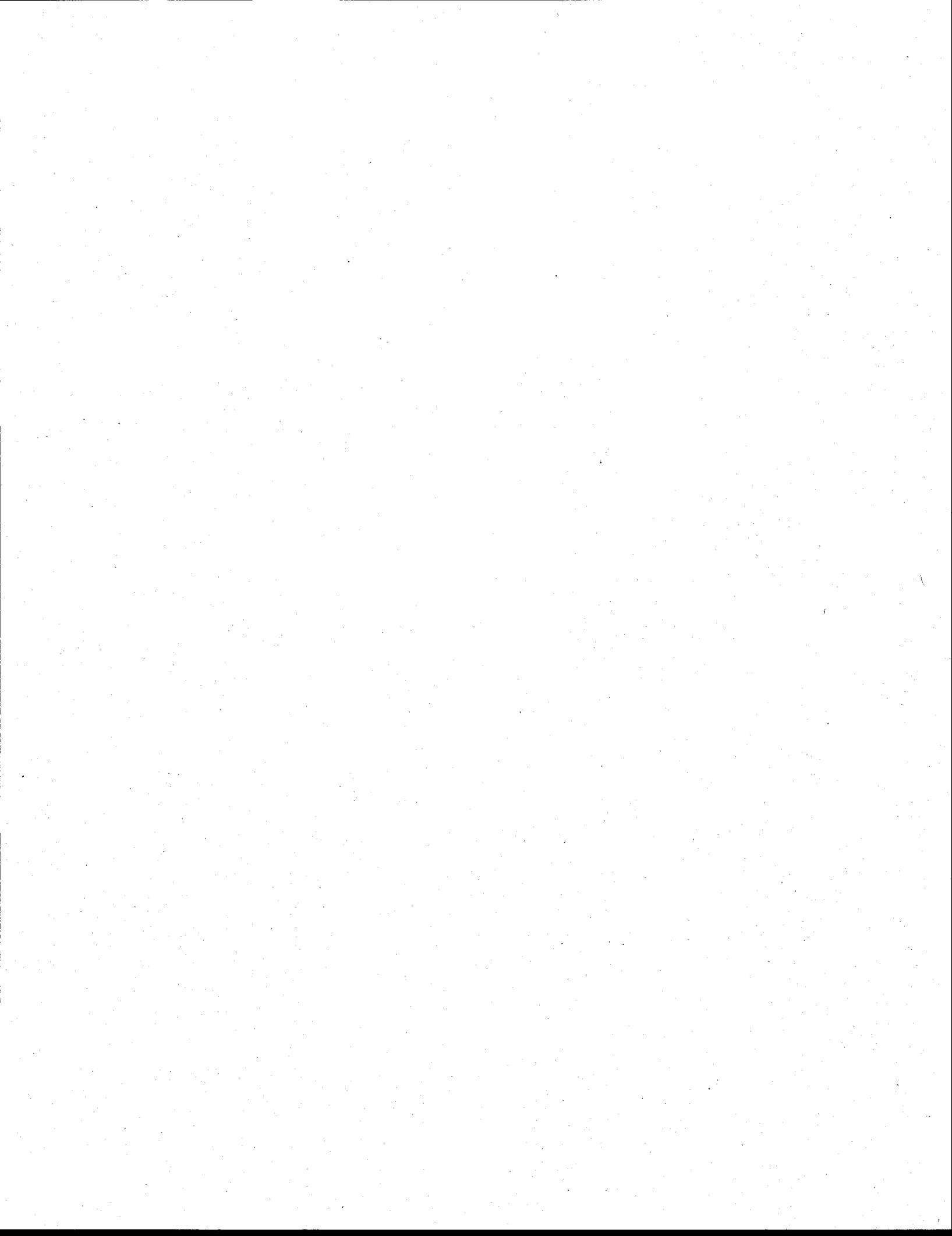
Les principales contributions scientifiques de cette thèse sont d'avoir documenté un suivi hydrométéorologique concomitant et comparatif de plusieurs petits bassins comprenant trois types d'écosystèmes boréaux sur trois années qui se sont avérées être très variables du point de vue hydrologique. Les travaux ici compilés apportent aussi une contribution sur la couverture spatiale de l'étude de l'hydrologie des tourbières, la région de la Baie de James étant une région importante mais peu étudiée.

Au niveau méthodologique, une nouvelle approche de calcul d'évapotranspiration tenant compte de la structure végétale et des compartiments humides de surface a été développée et a donné d'encourageants résultats.

Pour une première fois, les statistiques de formes d'hydrogrammes ont été comparées afin de différencier les réponses hydrologiques de différents milieux humides. L'ajout des statistiques linéaires (comme la moyenne de la forme) est digne de mention puisqu'elle atténue l'impact des valeurs extrêmes dans l'analyse comparative.

L'étude de sites situés sur un large spectre de conditions d'humidité de surface permet une anticipation du comportement hydrologique futur des tourbières du bassin de La Grande Rivière. Les travaux ont aussi permis d'inférer l'importance que pourrait avoir une continuation et/ou une intensification de l'aqualyse sur la connexion hydrologique directe (par ruissellement de surface) des tourbières avec leur bassin versant, ce qui est aussi une première.

**Chapitre 4 : Propriétés statistiques des hydrogrammes  
de tourbières minérotropes et de lacs aux latitudes  
moyennes du Québec, Canada.**



Statistical properties of hydrographs in minerotrophic fens and small lakes in mid-latitude  
Québec, Canada.

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## **Abstract**

Minerotrophic fens cover a large proportion of the land in mid-latitude Québec. Since the last century, they have been subjected to an increase in mean water levels, which translates over a long period into an increase in the fraction of area covered by water-filled hollows, hypothetically slowly transforming them into shallow lakes as the hollows coalesce in larger ponds (aqualysis). This phenomenon progressively changes the hydrological reaction of aqualysed fens to rain events. Four sites (two fens and two shallow lakes), were monitored for rainfall, water table levels and surface runoff during two years in the La Grande River basin, Québec, Canada. Summer and fall hydrographs for rainfall generated events as well as the relationship between *in situ* water table and surface runoff at the outlet were compared, respectively via shape statistics and analyses of covariance. Depending on the hydrological property, results show some differences between sites, but not always systematically between fens and lakes. Fens had fewer runoff events than lakes but the events were of greater magnitude and duration. Four of the six hydrographs shape statistics (shape mean and variance, rising and falling slopes) were found to be significantly different between some sites, lakes (contrary to fens) being always in the same category. These results also indicate that the location and shape of individual ponds may play an important role in runoff generation. Concerning the relationship between water table level and outlet runoff, regression slopes of fens were found to be steeper than those of lakes, especially in wet conditions. Results of climate change impact studies results suggest increases in annual runoff in this region in the future; this paper gives some insights about future hydrologic response of fens.

## **4.1 Introduction**

Peatlands are common ecosystems in northern latitudes, representing around 15% of total surface area in Canada (Tarnocai et al., 2000). The majority of these peatlands are located in the taiga (Glaser and Janssens, 1986), a large belt located between the southern boreal forest and the northern tundra, approximately between 52°N and 57°N. Peatlands are also present, but to a lesser degree, outside this belt. In Québec, where the present study is located, peatlands cover a total area of about  $1 \times 10^5 \text{ km}^2$  (Payette and Rochefort, 2001). Numerous ombrotrophic bogs are found in southern Québec and around James Bay, but most minerotrophic fens are found in the mid-latitudes of Québec. Their importance, in numbers and area, make them one of the principal water reservoirs of the northern hemisphere (National Wetlands Working Group, 1988). In mid-latitude Québec, a large number of these small reservoirs feed the large scale hydrological system of La Grande River that produces up to 50% of the province's hydroelectricity generation. Even though peatlands are predominant in this area, their hydrological functioning is still unresolved in the operational rainfall-runoff models used to forecast water inflows to reservoirs, mainly because of the relatively poor understanding of processes generating runoff in both bogs and fens. These inflow forecasts are important for electricity production management. A key factor toward successful modelling of peatlands is to determine the degree of hydrologic connectivity within the drainage basin.

Bogs and fens are two different stages of the same ecosystem. The natural evolution pattern of peatlands found over all North America consists of a younger stage (fen) that change, via vegetal transition and peat accumulation, to a more mature stage (bog) (Gorham and Janssens, 1992; Kuhry et al., 1993). This transition operates at a relatively short time scale (several decades), compared to peatlands lifespan.

Both bogs and fens have been the subject of numerous field studies in recent decades. Recent research on peatland hydrology focuses on atmospheric, surface and groundwater fluxes, as well as carbon cycling (Price et al., 2005). As a result of this research, understanding of the hydrological processes associated with peatlands has improved. Runoff was found to be positively (negatively) correlated with the percentage of the basin

covered by fens (bogs) (Quinton et al., 2003). The buffer effect of peatlands (both bogs and fens) is inversely proportional to water table level (Quinton and Roulet, 1998; Price and Waddington, 2000). Bogs seldom have surface runoff so subsurface flow is the dominant lateral flow path (Quinton and Marsh, 1999). Bogs lack surface runoff most of the time and are disconnected from the larger drainage basin except for the subsurface flow contribution, they are therefore less interesting than fens for the purpose of the present study.

The coverage of wetlands in watersheds has an impact on runoff temporal distribution. Summer hydrographs of basins containing a large proportion of wet organic terrain, were found to produce broader flood hydrographs (i.e., low kurtosis, or peakedness) (Roulet and Woo, 1988) and longer flow recessions curves (Roulet, 1986; Chapman, 1987) than those without.

The physical structure of patterned fens (the type of fens present in mid-latitude of Québec) is an alternation of ponds and vegetated strings. This microtopography influences their water storage capacity (Price and Maloney, 1994). This storage capacity is also modulated by total pond area, which regulates surface runoff (Glenn and Woo, 1997). In contrast with the so-called natural evolution previously described, an interesting phenomenon has been observed in the La Grande River watershed during recent field surveys. Many fens show signs of becoming more aquatic. Over northern Québec, the 20th century was wetter than previously; this had impacts on lakes (Bégin, 2001; Payette and Delwaide, 1991; 2004) and subarctic rivers (Payette and Delwaide, 2000). These wet conditions associated with a high water table over a long period probably also had impacts on peatlands, especially on fens with open water. Remote sensing data indeed reveal an increase in aquatic areas between 1957 and 2003 for two of seven studied sites (Dissanska et al., 2009). This physical degradation of the structure caused by high water table conditions was termed “aqualysis”. In that perspective, transformation of a fen to a shallow lake represents the ultimate phase of aqualysis.

Recent updates in climate change studies report that the study area will probably experience an increase in mean annual precipitation combined with warmer temperatures

during the next century (Christensen et al., 2007). Effects of climate changes on watersheds are now relatively well documented for mid-latitude Québec and to our current knowledge, all results are consistent for the region, i.e., an increase in annual runoff is anticipated (Dibike and Coulibaly, 2005; Slivitzky et al., 2004; Clair et al., 1998). These new climatic conditions could be favourable to the persistence and/or intensification of the aqualysis phenomenon. Therefore, further investigations on changing hydrological behaviour of aqualysed peatlands and shallow lakes are required. The main objective of this study is to compare hydrological behaviour of minerotrophic fens and small shallow lakes during summer and fall rain events. More specifically, the objective is to compare inter-site shape properties of flood hydrographs as well as the relationship between water level and runoff. By comparing sites in low and high aqualysis states, a better understanding of the hydrological consequences of the long-term increase in aqualysis (as anticipated from climate change impact studies in this region) could be gained.

## **4.2. Methodology**

### **4.2.1 Study sites**

Four sites, all located in the La Grande River watershed in mid-latitude Québec were selected for this study: two minerotrophic fens (Sites 4-5) and two small headwater lakes (Sites 6-7). All sites are located in the eastern, upper (400 m ASL) and wetter part of the La Grande River watershed (Figure 4.1), and in the same area, all within a 10 km radius. There is no long-term meteorological record in this sector, the closest long-term station being about 300 km westward in warmer (mean annual temperature: -3.1°C) and dryer (mean total precipitation: 680 mm) conditions. The characterisation of aqualysis in the present study focused more on the degree of “wetness” of a site (open water surface/total surface) than on the structural advancement of the aqualysis phenomenon. The two small shallow lakes selected are not a true representation of totally aqualysed fens but are proxies that were nonetheless selected due to logistic reasons (mainly accessibility of sites) and were still hypothesised to be a fair representation of a mature, fully aqualysed system. Both fens have 35% of open water fraction while both lakes have 100%. Even if their open water fraction is the same, the configuration of ponds is different for both fens

(Figure 4.1), Site 4 has a single large pond directly next to the outlet whereas Site 5 has a larger pond in its middle. Specific ponds configuration could produce differences in hydrological behaviour.

Physiographic data characterizing each site were extracted from a georeferenced database composed from aerial pictures using a Geographical Information System (GIS). All sites have only one visible outlet and also have drainage areas of the same order of magnitude (Table 4.1). The vegetation of all sites is composed of a mix of mature black spruce population (*Picea mariana*) and lichens on the forested parts of the watersheds (Figure 4.1 and Table 4.1). Their topography is also quite similar for all sites, the surface of fens (lakes) being almost (totally) flat. Field data show that both fens and bogs tend to have developed themselves with gentle slopes of about 1%, which are sometimes hard to appreciate visually. Minerotrophic fens have the following in situ vegetal composition: small trees (*Picea mariana* and *Larix laricina*), ericaceae (*Kalmia polifolia*, *Chamaedaphne calyculata*), cyperaceae (*Carex sp.*) and a dense layer of bryophytes with a dominance of brown mosses in the hollows and around the pools as well as an important presence of *Sphagnum sp.* on the strings.

#### **4.2.2 Hydrometeorological data**

Daily data were gathered between 07/01 and 10/31 for the years 2005 and 2006 for all sites except Site 4 which has slightly less data for 2005, i.e., from 08/26 to 10/31 because of delays in equipment installation. Year 2006 has concomitant data for all sites. Rainfall was measured (except for Site 7) with a tipping bucket rain gauge (CS700, Campbell Scientific). Precipitation was also corrected for sampling error according to the recommendation of Ducharme and Nadeau (2005), i.e., an increase of nine percent for each event, which is the mean ratio obtained from their study of three commercial tipping bucket rain gauges of the same size. Site 7, which does not have an installed rain gauge, is assumed to have the same precipitation as Site 6, which is the nearest (less than two kilometres) and with the most similar configuration (altitude, topography). Surface runoff was calculated via stage-discharge curves at each site. Instantaneous runoff was obtained at each visit on sites by integrating velocities measured with a flowmeter (Marsh-

McBirney flowmate 2000) at a cross-section of the outlet. Water levels used to calculate discharge from the stage-discharge curve were measured continuously at each outlet with a hydrostatic pressure gauge (Levelogger model 3001, Solinst) located in a stilling well installed on the bank of each outlet. The recorded levels were corrected for barometric fluctuations using a linear regression between data from a barologger (Solinst) and another barometric pressure gauge located in the nearby meteorological tower (61205V, R.M. Young). The regressions were required at each site to avoid risks of error induced from the sole use of the barologger (frost vulnerability was one potential source of error). Regression equations obtained with two month worth of data in the summer of 2005 (values ranged from 935 to 1015 hPa) have a  $R^2$  of at least 0.97. For water budget calculations (not shown here) and in order to further compare with precipitation and water table, runoff ( $L/d$ ) was converted to specific runoff (runoff/watershed area) to give data as mm/d.

*In situ* water table levels were also measured in peatlands with a network of wells equipped with hydrostatic pressure gauges (Levelogger, Solinst). To avoid displacement of the gauges by winter ice, lakes levels were monitored using the same equipment but installed on a concrete block at the bottom of the lakes rather than in a well. Because pressure gauges were not all installed at the same depth considering the specific physical configuration of all sites, water table data were standardized in order to make them comparable. Data from each well were standardised following Equation 4.1.

$$SD = \frac{(MD - \mu)}{\sigma} \quad (4.1)$$

Where  $SD$  are standardised data,  $MD$  are measured data and  $\mu$  and  $\sigma$  are respectively the well specific mean and standard deviation of each time series. Water level data were required in order to define dry and wet conditions in subsequent analyses. Finally, using the terms "water table level" for fens and "lake level" for lakes may be confusing; the term "water level" will therefore be used henceforth. Daily average data were used to avoid misinterpretations that may be caused by noisy data at a shorter time step (e.g., from pressure gauges).

### **4.2.3 Event definition**

Isolating hydrological events from the gathered time series was the first step toward the comparison of summer and fall hydrological behaviour of fens and lakes. This may be a complex task, and several definitions are proposed in the literature. Carey and Woo (2001) defined an event by projecting a straight line across the hydrograph from the time of hydrograph rise to the point where discharge returns to its pre-storm level. Spence (2006) defined the runoff volume of an event as the difference between measured runoff and an estimate of the baseflow obtained with a recession curve equation. Even if numerous definitions or graphical techniques exist to separate baseflow from direct runoff (defining an event), none appear more physically justifiable than the others (McNamara et al., 1998). In this study, a new approach was developed that enables the study of a relatively large number of shorter events during summer and fall. For this, time series of daily runoff on each site, between 07/01 and 10/31 for both years 2005 and 2006 were used. From these series, the positions of “peaks” and “troughs” were identified on the inflection points, i.e., respectively when the slope changed sign for peaks and for troughs. As shown in Figure 4.2, an event is defined from a trough to a peak back to a trough. Only events with both rising and falling limbs slopes greater than 0.1 mm/day, which is roughly a rise or fall of 10% of the typical baseflow, were kept during the selection process. Using this approach, a sampling of events was completed for all sites. Such a definition implies that the falling limb of an event may be interrupted when a rainfall event happened prior to the end of the recession curve and this may influence our intuitive understanding of shape statistics. On the other hand, this approach provides a clearer definition of both the total amount and timing of precipitation prior to the event. Validation of this selection method showed that the number of “problematic” cases remains low (less than 10%) compare to the total number of events.

### **4.2.4 Hydrograph statistics**

To quantify the shape of these hydrographs, several descriptive statistics were used: the mean slopes of the rising ( $R_s$ ) and falling ( $F_s$ ) limbs of hydrographs as well as their third and fourth order moments, i.e., skewness ( $S_k$ ) and kurtosis ( $K_u$ ). Two complementary

statistics that are akin to a linearized version of skewness and kurtosis were also used. These two statistics were defined by Yue et al. (2002) and are called shape mean and shape variance (Equations 4.2 and 4.3). Shape mean ( $S_m$ ) is the centroid or the central tendency of a hydrograph. Considering the point discussed in the previous section about incomplete hydrographs, a positively skewed hydrograph will have a smaller  $S_m$  than a negatively skewed hydrograph (see Figure 4.2 for examples). Shape variance ( $S_v$ ) is the spreadedness of  $S_m$ . Both statistics were calculated on unit hydrographs, i.e., when both amplitude and duration were scaled and varied from 0 and 1.

$$S_m = \frac{1}{A} \sum_{i=1}^n t_i A_i \quad (4.2)$$

$$S_v = \sum_{i=1}^n (t_i - S_m)^2 \times A_i \quad (4.3)$$

Where  $n$  is the length of the event (in days),  $t_i$  is the horizontal distance or duration (in days) from the starting point of the hydrograph,  $A_i$  is the surface of the sub-area between  $t_i$  and  $t_{i-1}$  and  $A$  is the total area under the curve of the hydrograph (the sum of  $A_i$ , in mm). All of the statistics described above were calculated for each event.

#### **4.2.5 Statistical analysis**

In order to investigate potential differences in the hydrological behaviour of the four sites using the aforementioned descriptive statistics, the null hypothesis of equality of a given statistic was tested. All samples of shape statistics were also tested for normality using the Lilliefors Test. Most of them were found to be non-normal. The hypothesis of equality of medians was verified using the Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA, which is a non-parametric version of the one-way analysis of variance. This test uses the ranks of the data values rather than the ratio of intra-site to inter-site variance used in the ANOVA. The test statistic is compared to a critical Chi-squared theoretical value for a given confidence level ( $\alpha = 0.05$  in the present study).

Comparing differences in slopes of scatter plots representing in situ water level and specific runoff is another way to find differences between wet and dry conditions and/or

between fens and lakes. Dry (wet) condition was defined as the negative (positive) values of standardized water levels (eq. 4.1). Here again, the null hypothesis of equality of slopes can be tested with an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). For all analyses, significant differences were further analysed using an a posteriori test (Tukey-Kramer) to identify which sites differ within the group. This test is also based on mean ranks rather than data values.

## **4.3 Results**

### **4.3.1 Times series and events**

Total precipitation and number of events were similar between sites as shown in Table 4.2, which contains information about events sampling (number, mean duration, and amplitude). It can be seen that precipitation were of similar magnitudes at all sites, with total accumulation of 938, 1165, 1168, and 942 mm. Sites 4 and 7 have received approximately 225 mm less than Sites 2 and 3 over the sampling period but for different reasons. Site 4 is located 10 to 15 km away from the Sites 5, 6, and 7 and received systematically less precipitation. Site 7, on the other hand, had a smaller total precipitation than others only because of the shorter length of record due to the delay in the equipment installation at the beginning of summer 2005. This shorter time series also explains why Site 7 had a smaller number of events than Site 6 (the other lake). During the common period of record, both lakes have the same number of events. For all sites, the total number of events is deemed sufficient to produce comparative statistics and associated tests.

Time series of precipitation and specific runoff are shown for summer and fall of 2006 for all sites in Figure 4.3. The majority of the recorded rainfall events occurred almost simultaneously at all sites while their magnitude varies slightly from site to site. It can be seen that runoff of lakes had more stable runoff than for fens. Lake base flow was seldom as low as fens base flow (they have almost no surface runoff during dry periods) and lakes typically had lower flood peaks. This relative stability of lake outflows can also be seen in Table 4.2 with statistics calculated from events and related to frequency, duration and amplitude. Events were less frequent in fens (37 events for both fens and 51 and 37

for the lakes). Mean duration of runoff events was greater in fens (6.00 and 6.22 days) than in lakes (4.53 and 4.86 days). Mean amplitude of events was also equal or greater in fens (0.71 and 1.83 mm/d) than in lakes (0.32 and 0.79 mm/d). Intuitively, in the case of comparing single events, a shorter duration may be associated with a higher flood peak but since this study includes a large number of events, the balance in runoff is provided by the difference in the number of events, rather than compensating duration by peakedness.

#### **4.3.2 hydrographs shape comparison**

Results of the Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA on shape statistics and their respective Chi-square and p-values statistics are presented in Table 4.3. Figures 4.4 to 4.9 show the boxplots describing the complete distribution of shape statistics as well as results of the a posteriori Tukey-Kramer test. Different letters above the boxplots show significant differences. Results of the Kruskall-Wallis tests reveal that four of the six descriptive statistics were significantly different between sites (Table 4.3).

Shape means were significantly different for Site 5 (median  $S_m = 0.21$ ) compare to Sites 4, 6, and 7 (median  $S_m = 0.27, 0.32, 0.30$ ). The lower values of shape mean indicate that the rising limbs of the hydrographs were longer than the falling limbs, i.e., that hydrographs were more asymmetric on Site 5. Shape variance was greater on Site 4 (median  $S_v = 0.83$ ) compared to Sites 5, 6, and 7 (median  $S_v = 0.53, 0.62, 0.62$ ), indicating that the shape of hydrographs was more variable at the former. Both the rising and falling limbs had different mean slopes. The Tukey-Kramer test also reveals that median slopes for Site 5 had significantly steeper slopes (median  $R_s = 0.76, F_s = -0.49$ ) than all others sites (median  $R_s = 0.22, 0.13, 0.30$  and  $F_s = -0.14, -0.08, -0.24$ , respectively). Skewness of events shows no significant results. All values were relatively small, i.e., near zero (median between -0.19 and 0.11). Kurtosis of events also shows no significant results with almost the same values on all sites (median between 1.84 and 1.93), which reflects that hydrographs on both fens and lakes are not dominated by their peak values.

### **4.3.3 analysis of covariance (ANCOVA)**

The relationship between the water level and the runoff response at the outlets was examined with an analysis of covariance. When the slopes were found to be different ( $p<0.05$ ), the Tukey-Kramer test was subsequently applied to identify which sites were different. The first step was to perform the analysis with data from the entire study period; results are shown in Figure 4.10. It appears there that the site-specific relationship between water level and runoff varies significantly from fens and lakes. The regression slope was steeper for fens compared to lakes, especially for Site 5 which differs from all other sites. Both fens differ from Site 4 and both lakes were similar. Sites 4 and 6 had intermediate slopes.

Visual inspection of data in this scatter plot (Figure 4.10) reveals a break point in the relationship with water level. Prior to this break point, a given rise in the water level is converted into a small increase in runoff. After the break point, when the slope is getting steeper, the same rise of water level leads to a much more important increase in runoff. Figures 4.11 and 4.12 give detailed information related to the hydrological behaviour of sites prior to and after the breakpoint that was fixed as the median of the water level time series. Figure 4.11 gives the results of the ANCOVA related to the dryer conditions, i.e., data on the left of the breakpoint of Figure 4.10. It appears there that slopes were almost the same, only Site 5 having significantly steeper slope than both lakes. Figure 4.12 gives wet conditions results, i.e., data on the right of the breakpoint in Figure 4.10. Site 5 was once again the only one with significant slope differences with all three other sites. Even if it is the only statistically significant result, greater differences in slope values were observed during the wet conditions (Figure 4.12) in comparison to dry conditions (Figure 4.11), as well as data much more scattered, especially for fens. Data is more scattered in fens due to a delayed response of outlet compare to *in situ* WL.

### **4.4 Discussion and conclusion**

The general objective of this paper was to compare hydrological behaviour of minerotrophic fens and small lakes of the La Grande River basin during summer and fall rainfall events. More specifically, to compare inter-site shape properties of rainfall

induced hydrographs in order to compare the response to rainfall events by aquaflooded fens and lakes. As stated before, many definitions of a hydrological event are used in the literature and the discussion about their physical or hydrological validity is ongoing. With relatively short time series a definition of events that is solely based on the recession curve may have prevented some of the statistical analyses because of the smaller sample size associated with such a definition. A compromise was made and a simpler definition i.e. from a trough to a peak to a trough in runoff time series was used. This definition had the advantage of isolating a greater number of events that were of similar duration. It also minimized the risk that more than one precipitation event would be used to generate a hydrological event.

Using this event definition, results of Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA shows that 4 of 6 hydrograph shape statistics were significantly different: shape mean, shape variance, rising and falling slopes. Lakes had less asymmetric hydrographs than fens as shown by results of shape mean. Concerning shape variance, results are not as clear, one fen having a lower value than lakes while the other had a higher value. These two linear versions of skewness and kurtosis seem nonetheless to be more sensitive to hydrograph variability than the more traditional shape statistics. The third and fourth order moments (skewness and kurtosis) could be more affected by outliers, which may imply that one or two events define the intra site variance for skewness and kurtosis, while shape mean and shape variance are less affected by outliers.

When there were differences, it was always fens that differ from other sites. The two lakes always had a similar hydrologic behaviour; this was not the case for fens. Results about studied hydrological characteristics are not all convergent for all characteristics but most of them indicate that runoff seems to be more stable for lakes than for fens according to amplitude of variations. Even if lakes had more frequent variations in water level and runoff than fens, these variations had most of the time a lesser amplitude and a shorter duration, which confirm results obtained from previous studies, i.e. that basins with a high proportion of wetlands have broader hydrographs (Roulet and Woo, 1998) than ones with a low proportion as well as longer recession curves (Roulet, 1986) which is similar to a positive skew or low shape mean value.

It is interesting to note that for equivalent precipitation in time and space, fens produce less runoff events than lakes; this is probably an effect of the vegetal structure of fens, i.e. the spatial organisation of strings and ponds that acts as a hydraulic resistance. Buttle (2006) discussed the three controls on the runoff characteristics for a given hydroclimatic condition, i.e. (1) landscape elements, (2) their hydrological linkage and (3) their drainage capacity. Because of their typical spatial organisation, these three control structures are present at a small scale in a very complex way in patterned fens compare to lakes. The results of this study seem to support the importance of the three control processes described by Buttle (2006). Thus, both fens have the same open water area over fen area ratio (35%) but nonetheless, they sometimes show differences in runoff response under similar conditions. This ratio alone seems to be an important, but incomplete criterion to qualify how aquaflooded a fen is. This is in contrast with the great hydrological similarity between both lakes that had almost the same watershed configuration. In fens, the size and disposition of ponds seems to influence hydrological reaction, e.g., a single big pond (around 30% of total open water surface) just upstream of site 4 outlet seems to act as a small lake and produces shifts in the hydrological behaviour towards an intermediate state between a typical fen and a lake, as shown with the water table-runoff relationship where site 4 has a fen-like behaviour in dry conditions but a lake-like one in wet conditions. This confirms but at a much smaller scale (watersheds area < 1 km<sup>2</sup>) that different geometric distributions of the same percentage of lake (ponds) area will produce different streamflow regimes (Spence, 2006).

Results presented in this paper provide some insights related to future behaviour of fens assuming the continuity and/or expansion of the aquaflood phenomenon. If we extrapolate from the present results, it can be hypothesized that if fens become more aquatic, their hydrological reactions to rainfall events will tend to become more uniform and more stable, i.e. with more frequent runoff perturbations but of lesser amplitude. It was previously noted that the response of runoff to water level rises is much more scattered for fens than for lakes, which may be an effect of the vegetation structure (microtopography of ponds and strings) that is known to influence water stocking capacity (Price and Maloney, 1994) and to regulate surface runoff (Glenn and Woo,

1997). As previously discussed, some characteristics of ponds configuration (number, size, position) also seems to have an importance that remain unclear at this point.

Further research is needed on peatlands hydrology in relation to vegetation absorption capacity as well as fens microtopography, notably by studying time lag between rain events and water table as well as runoff rises. This type of study should also include ombrotrophic bogs that cover an important portion of the western part of the La Grande River basin.

### **Acknowledgment**

This research implying researchers and graduate students from Institut National de la Recherche Scientifique (INRS-ETE), Université Laval and Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) was co-funded by FQRNT, NSERC and by Hydro-Québec in association with Ouranos Consortium on Regional Climatology and Adaptation to Climate Change. Two anonymous reviewers are also thanked for their constructive comments on an earlier version of this paper.

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Table 4.1: Physiographic characteristics of study sites.

	Site 4	Site 5	Site 6	Site 7
Ecosystem	fen	fen	lake	lake
Watershed area (m <sup>2</sup> )	40500	64500	77700	89300
Fen or lake area (m <sup>2</sup> )	14200	27600	36900	28600
Fraction of watershed occupied by uplands (%)	65%	57%	53%	68%
Open water area (m <sup>2</sup> )	4900	9600	36900	28600
Fraction of fen or lake occupied by open water (%)	35%	35%	100%	100%

Table 4.2: Descriptive statistics of hydrological events during the study period between 07/01 and 10/31 for both years 2005 and 2006.

	Site 4	Site 5	Site 6	Site 7
Number of events	37	37	51	37
Number of days with data during period	241	239	236	190
Mean duration of events (days)	6.00	6.22	4.53	4.86
Mean amplitude of events (mm/day)	0.71	1.83	0.32	0.79
Total precipitations during period (mm)	938	1165	1168	942

Table 4.3: Medians of shape statistics calculated for each site, followed by the results of the Kruskal-Wallis and Tukey-Kramer tests for inter site comparisons. Bold means significant results. For a given statistics, same letters mean no significant differences.

Sites	$S_m$	$S_v$	$R_s$	$F_s$	$S_k$	$K_u$
4	0,27 b	0,83 a	0,22 b	-0,14 b	-0,19	1,93
5	0,21 a	0,53 b	0,76 a	-0,49 a	0,11	1,84
6	0,32 b	0,62 b	0,13 b	-0,08 b	-0,18	1,93
7	0,30 b	0,62 b	0,30 b	-0,24 b	-0,05	1,89
$\chi^2$	19.78	10.69	36.43	44.82	5.5	2.86
p	0,0002	0,0135	<0,0001	<0,0001	0,1388	0,4131

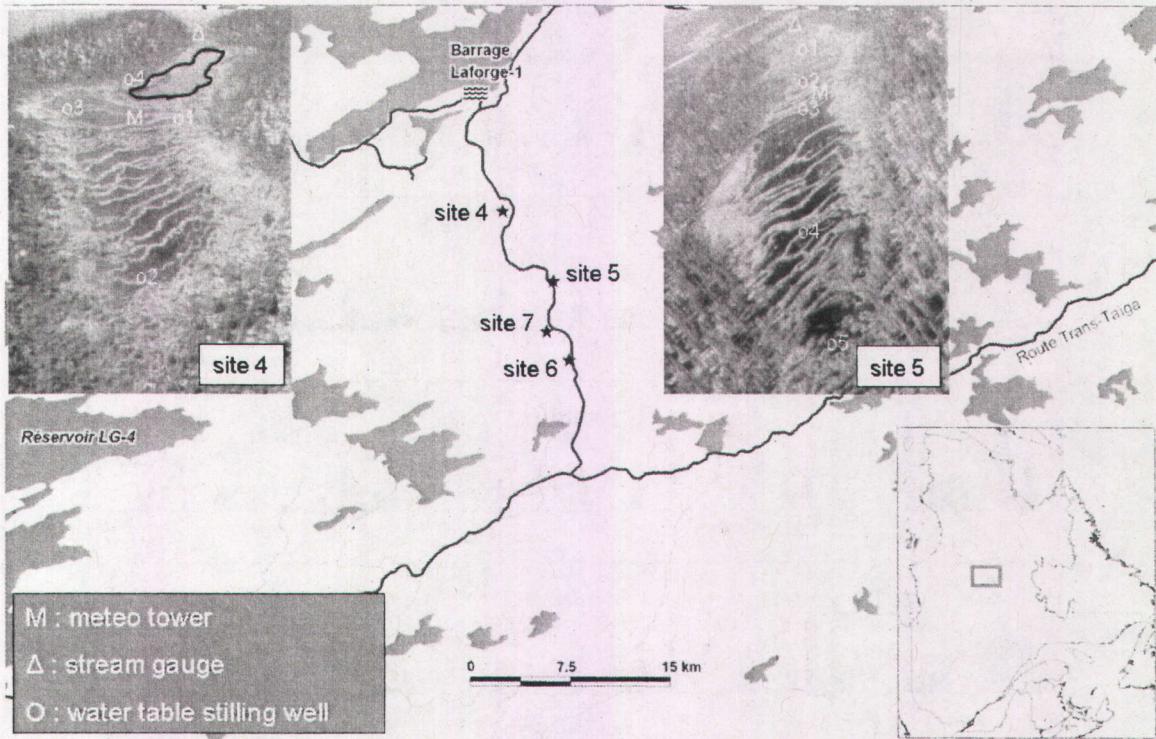


Figure 4.1: Pictures of study sites. For sites 4-5, outlet is visible at the upper part of the pictures

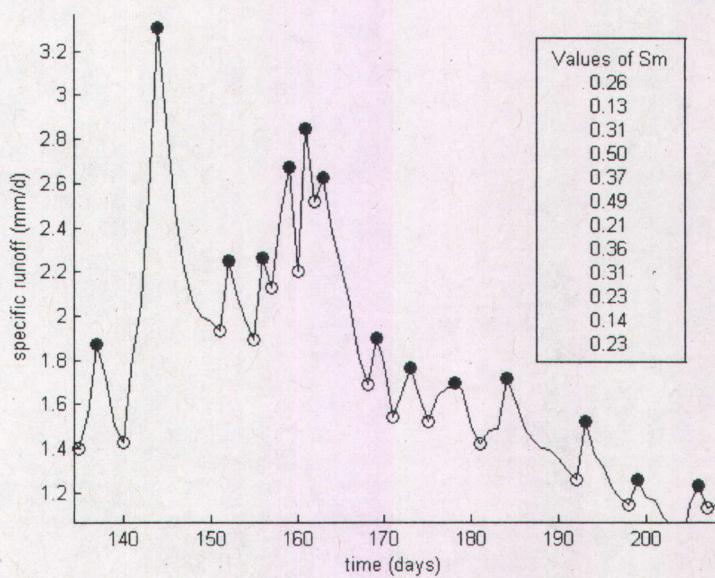


Figure 4.2: Visual definition of events and shape mean (Sm) values of the 12 first events.

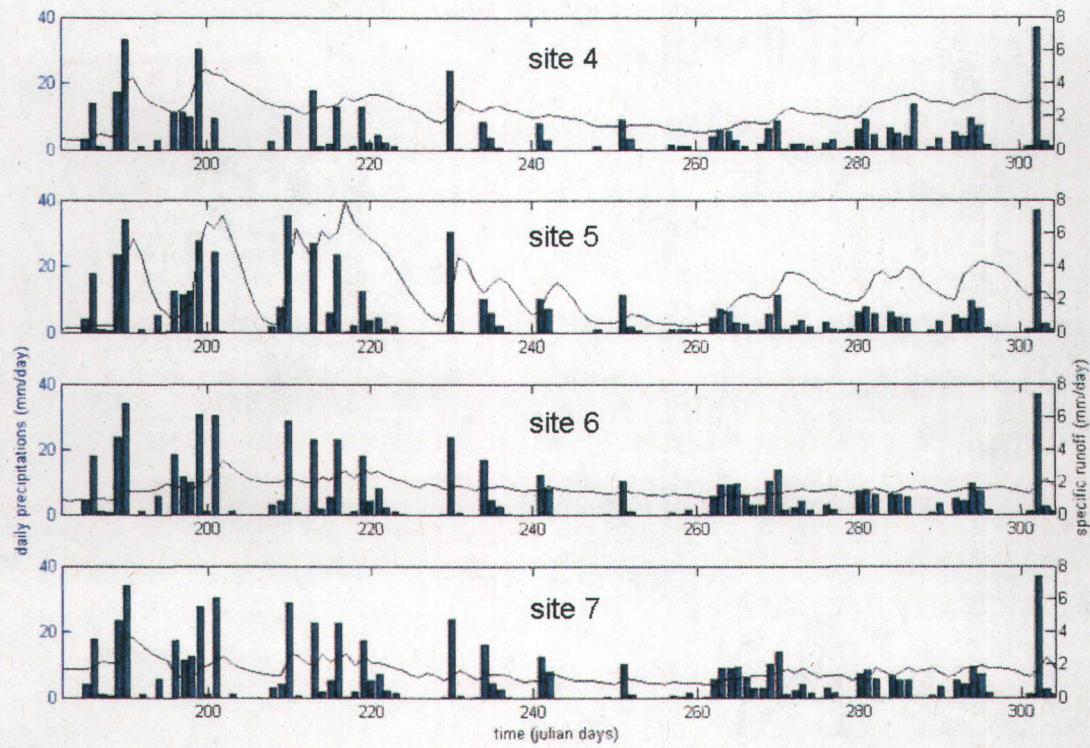


Figure 4.3: Time series of daily precipitations and specific runoff for summer and fall 2006. Sites 6 and 7 has the same precipitation.

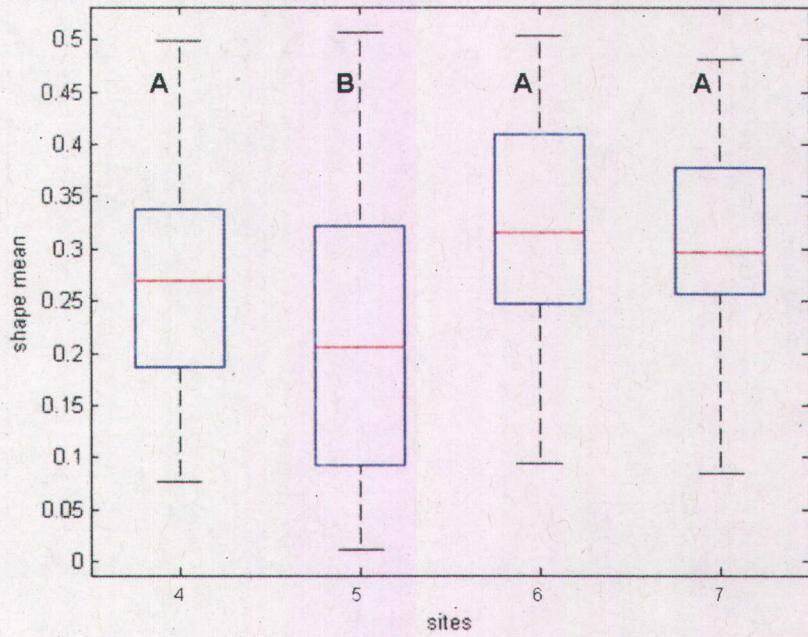


Figure 4.4: Shape mean ( $S_m$ ) boxplots. The figure shows the median, quartiles and 5<sup>th</sup> as well as 95th percentile for each site. Letters indicate which medians are significantly different based on the Tukey-Kramer test.

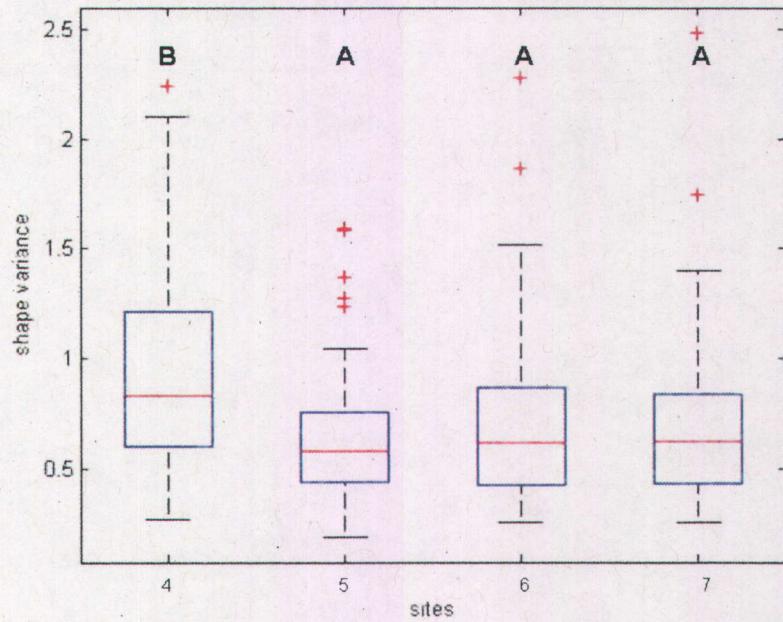


Figure 4.5: Shape variance ( $S_v$ ) boxplots. The figure shows the median, quartiles and 5<sup>th</sup> as well as 95th percentile for each site. The crosses indicate outliers. Letters indicate which medians are significantly different based on the Tukey-Kramer test.

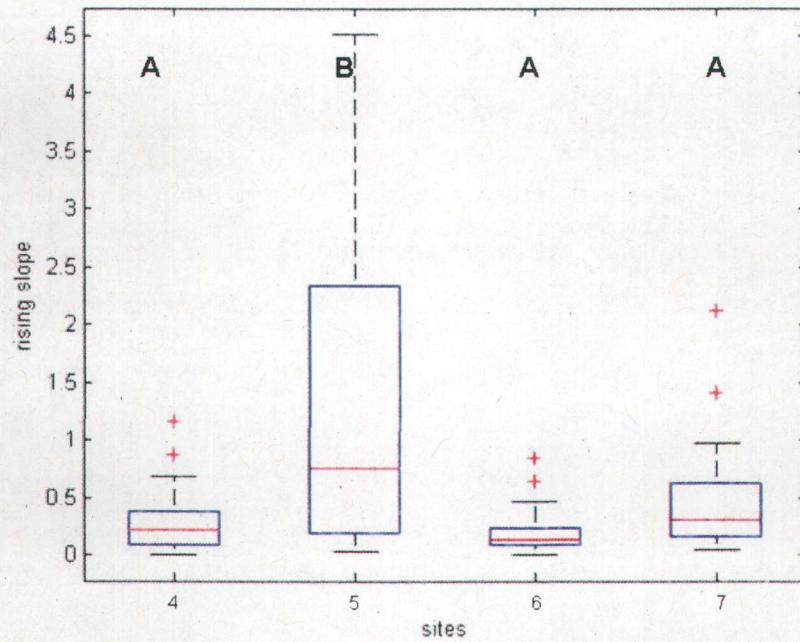


Figure 4.6: Rising slope ( $R_s$ ) boxplots. The figure shows the median, quartiles and 5<sup>th</sup> as well as 95th percentile for each site. The crosses indicate outliers. Letters indicate which medians are significantly different based on the Tukey-Kramer test.

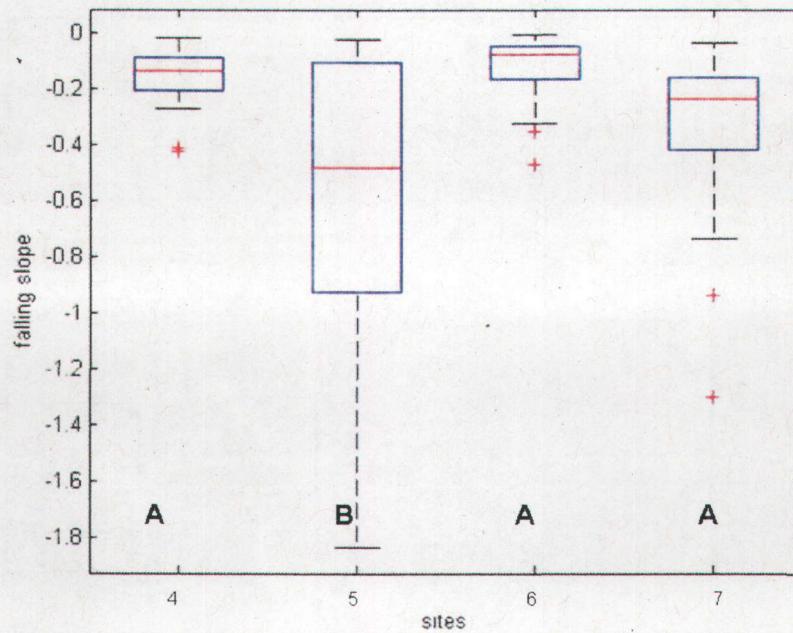


Figure 4.7: Falling slope ( $F_s$ ) boxplots. The figure shows the median, quartiles and 5<sup>th</sup> as well as 95th percentile for each site. The crosses indicate outliers. Letters indicate which medians are significantly different based on the Tukey-Kramer test.

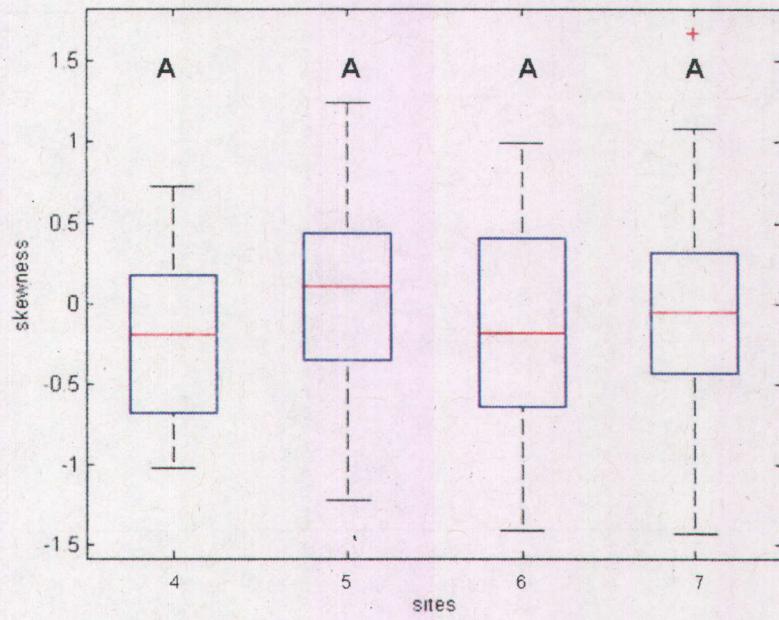


Figure 4.8: Skewness ( $S_k$ ) boxplots. The figure shows the median, quartiles and 5<sup>th</sup> as well as 95th percentile for each site. The crosses indicate outliers. Letters indicate which medians are significantly different based on the Tukey-Kramer test.

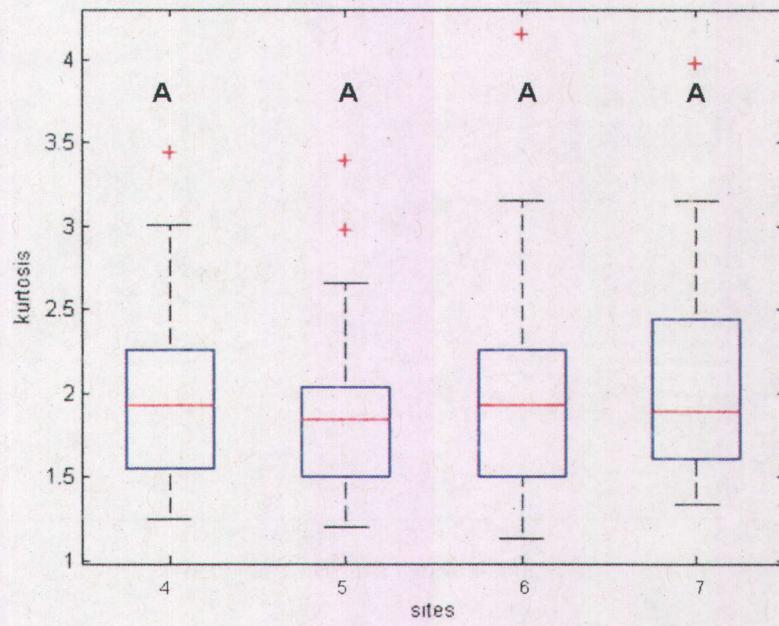


Figure 4.9: Kurtosis ( $K_u$ ) boxplots. The figure shows the median, quartiles and 5<sup>th</sup> as well as 95th percentile for each site. The crosses indicate outliers. Letters indicate which medians are significantly different based on the Tukey-Kramer test.

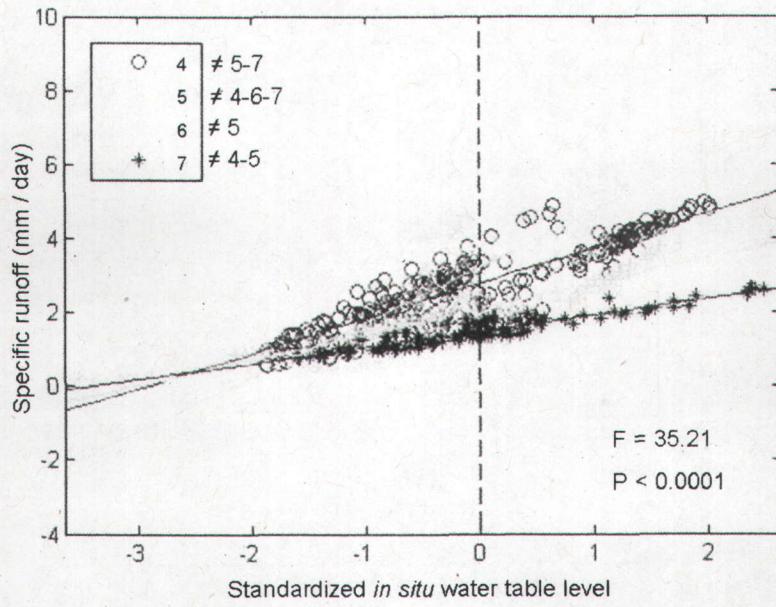


Figure 4.10: Results of ANCOVA using standardized water table level and specific runoff for all the study period. Numbers next to the legend indicate which slopes are significantly different based on the Tukey-Kramer test results.

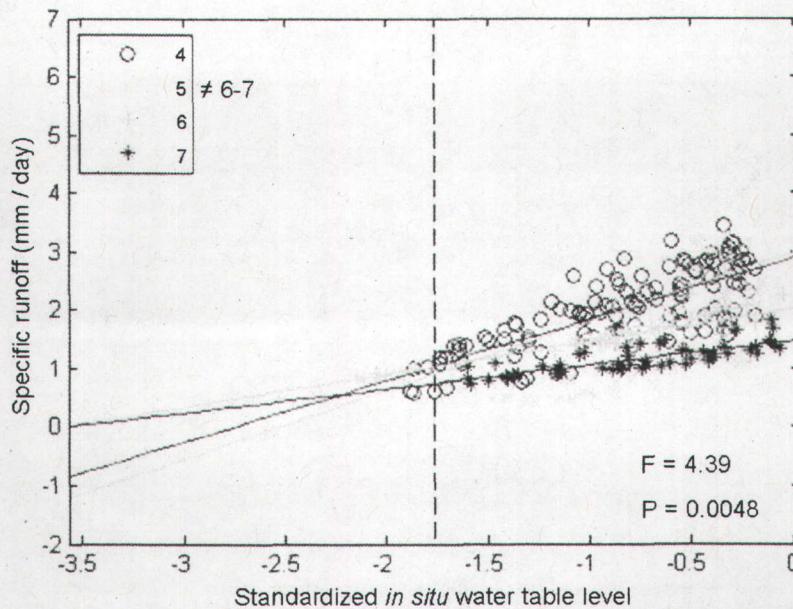


Figure 4.11: Results of ANCOVA using standardized water table level data that are lower to the median value of the study period and their corresponding specific runoff. Numbers next to the legend indicate which slopes are significantly different based on the Tukey-Kramer test results.

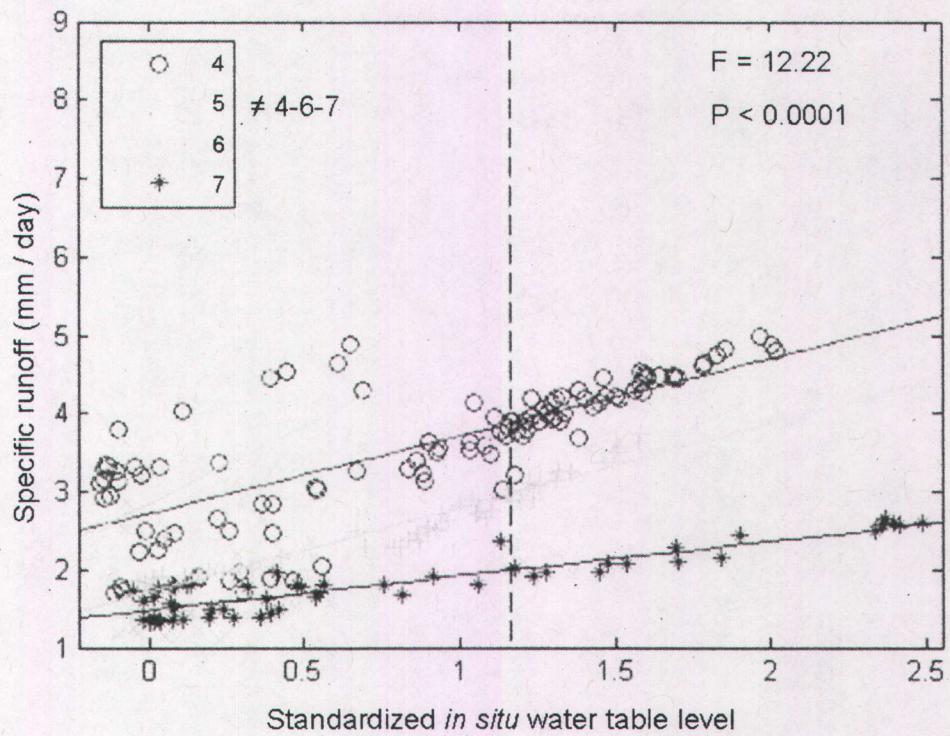
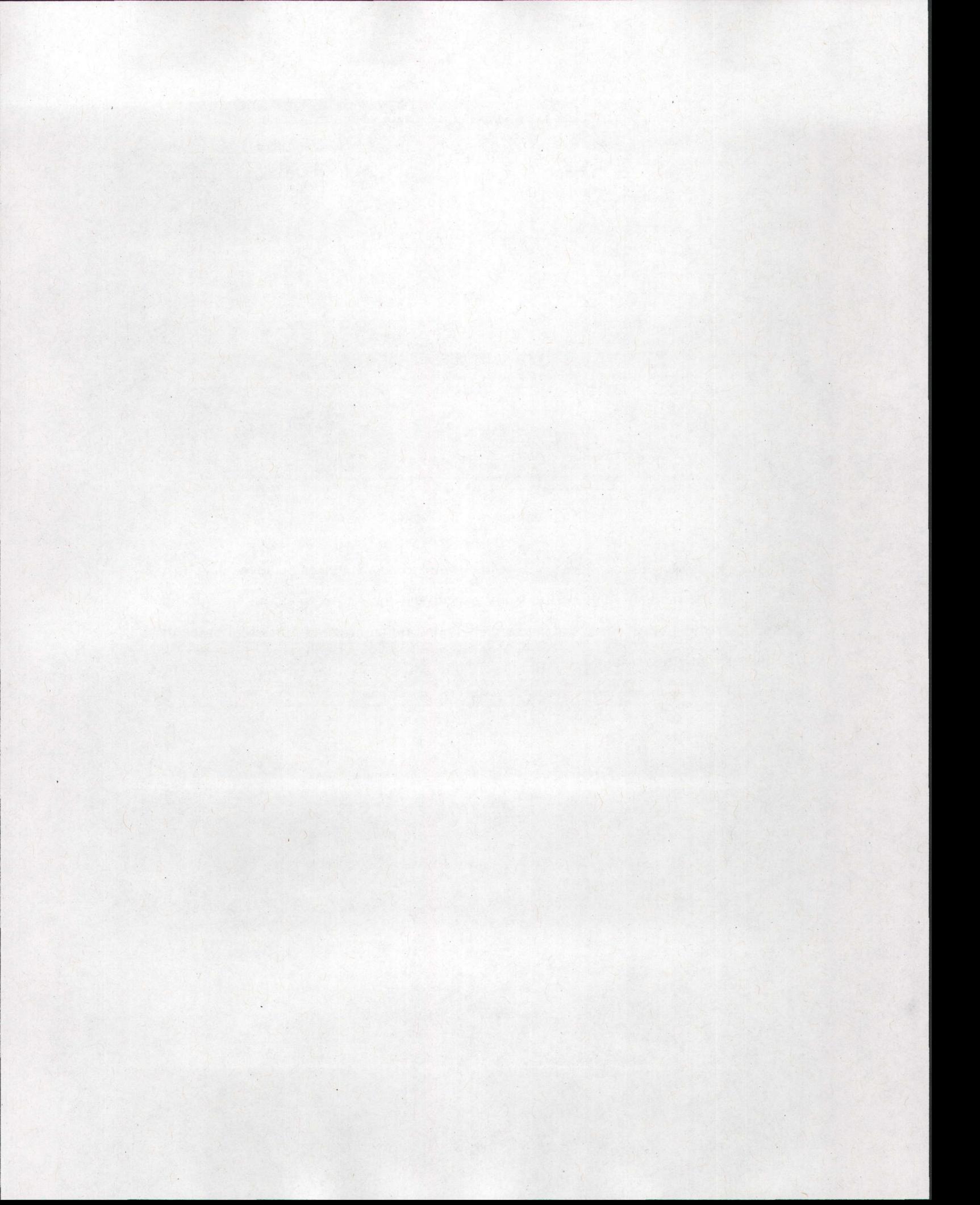
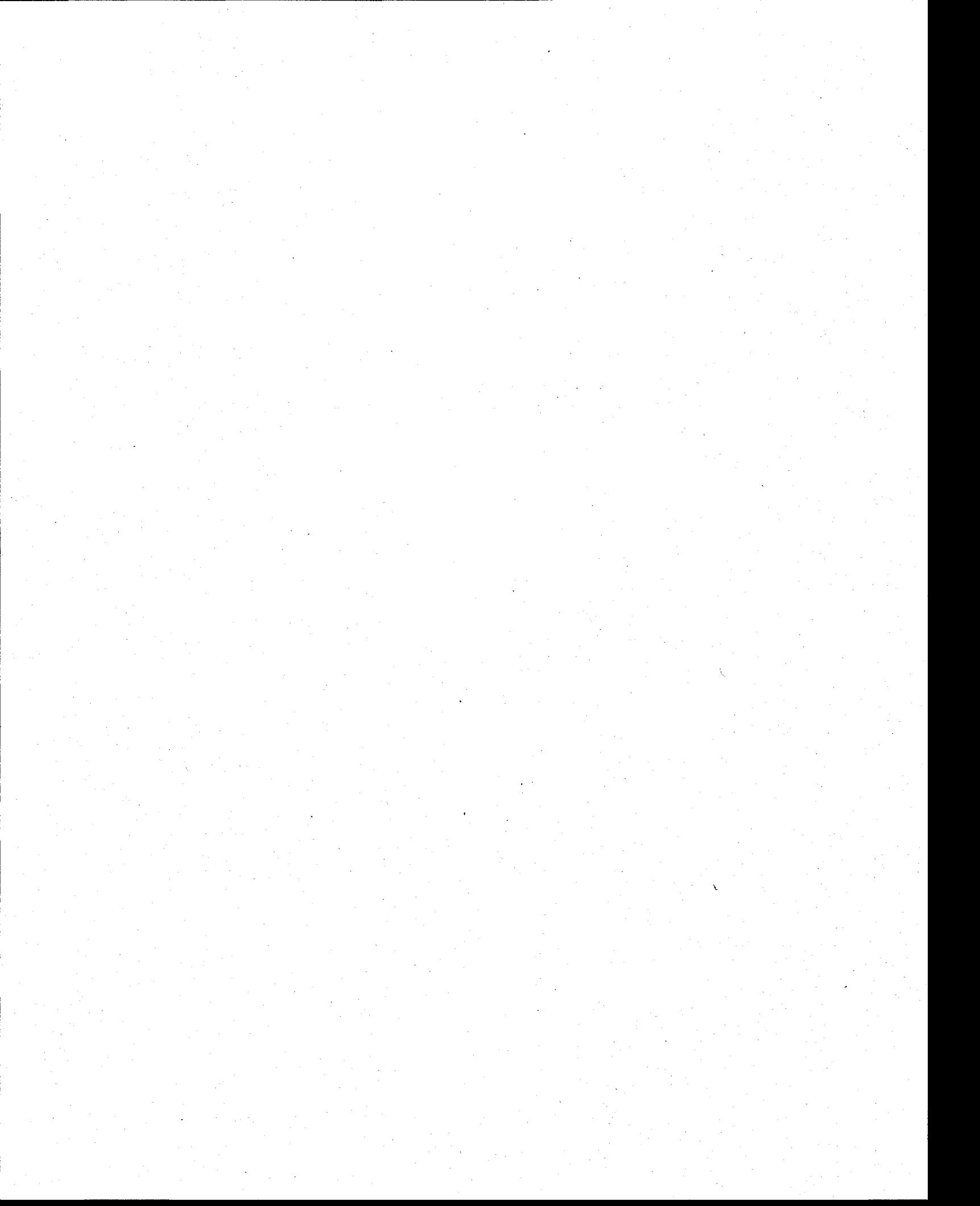


Figure 4.12: Results of ANCOVA using standardized water table level data that are higher to the median value of the study period and their corresponding specific runoff. Numbers next to the legend indicate which slopes are significantly different based on the Tukey-Kramer test results.



**Chapitre 5: Analyse de bilans hydrologiques de  
tourbières à sphaignes, de tourbières minérotropes  
structurées et de lacs dans le bassin de la rivière La  
Grande, Québec.**



Water budget analysis of *Sphagnum* bog, patterned fen and lakes in the La Grande River region, Québec.

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Key words: water budget, fens, bogs, lakes, evapotranspiration, aqualysis.

## **Abstract**

A water budget analysis (precipitation (P), surface runoff (Q), evapotranspiration (ET) and storage variations ( $\Delta S$ )) was performed over a three years span for two bogs, three fens and two lakes located in the La Grande River watershed in central Québec. The high variability of P from 2005 to 2007 during summer and fall (July to October) allowed the production of water budgets over a large spectrum of wetness conditions at seasonal and event time scales. Both field observations and data showed that bogs and fens have the intrinsic ability to keep water level near the surface most of the time, which affects Q. Fens and lakes showed a similar hydrological behaviour when compared to bogs, despite differences in Q and  $\Delta S$  variability due to the typical vegetal structure of fens. This structure also tends to produce sharper rises of Q when compared to lakes that have overall smoother hydrograms. Since bogs have no definite outlet, dramatic storage rises were observed when P was occurring during dry periods. The dominant water budget term for bogs, fens and lakes was respectively  $\Delta S$ , Q and ET. Finally, an adaptation of the Penman-Monteith equation was used for ET. This new method is based on a weighting factor corresponding to vegetation and open water surface area and gave good results for all ecosystem types.

## **5.1 Introduction**

Peatlands are common ecosystems across Canada, covering about 15% of total land surface (Tarnocai et al., 2000). Peatlands are the dominant wetland type of the boreal forest biome (Glaser and Janssens, 1986) and they are one of the main water reservoirs of the northern hemisphere (National Wetlands Working Group, 1988). In Québec, at least 12% of the land surface is covered by peatlands (Payette and Rochefort, 2001) which are largely distributed in a belt between the southern boreal forest and the southern limit of the arctic tundra, i.e., from 49°N to 58°N. The study area, the La Grande River watershed (97600 km<sup>2</sup>), is located in the middle of this belt. Despite the large distribution of peatlands in the boreal biome, hydrological processes controlling their development and functioning are still ill-defined in rainfall-runoff models used to forecast and simulate water inflows to reservoirs. The poorly-known processes generating surface runoff and hydrological connectivity within the drainage basin explains the absence of peatland water-routing in models. Hydrological forecasts are important for water management upstream power houses and also for the design of future facilities, especially in the study area that hosts a major hydroelectric complex that is producing close to 50% of Québec's electricity needs. Given current concerns on climate change issues, wetlands are also of great interest because hydrological fluctuations influences methane (CH<sub>4</sub>) emission and/or carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) sequestration (Blodau, 2002; Bubier et al., 2003; Belyea and Malmer, 2004), two key-greenhouse gases. For those reasons, a better understanding of the hydrology of bogs and fens is necessary as a first step towards improving forecast models for different uses.

From an ecological point of view, bogs and fens are often two developmental stages of the same ecosystem. In North America, the natural developmental pattern of peatlands consists of a young stage (fen) that evolves towards a mature stage (bog) through continuous peat accumulation (Gorham and Janssens, 1992; Kuhry et al., 1993). Recent research on both bog and fen hydrology focused on atmospheric, surface and groundwater fluxes, as well as carbon cycling (Price et al., 2005). As a result, our understanding of the hydrological processes in peatland ecosystems has improved in

recent years. Most of these studies used a water budget approach and focused on some or all terms of the budget (Kane and Yang, 2004; Déry et al., 2005).

Bogs are known to lack, or to have strongly reduced surface runoff most of the time, with subsurface flow being the dominant lateral flow path (Quinton and Marsh, 1999). The lack of surface hydrological connection at the local scale leads to underestimated runoff at the larger scale of the watershed. Quinton et al. (2003) indeed showed that, at the watershed scale, runoff was negatively (positively) correlated with the importance of bogs (fens) areal coverage. On the other hand, patterned fens, with their typical surface structure composed of an alternation of ponds and vegetated strings, seldom lack surface runoff. The fen microtopography influences water storage capacity (Price and Maloney, 1994) whereas the total pond area regulates surface runoff (Glenn and Woo, 1997). To add more complexity, the geometric distribution of a same open water area influences runoff regimes at both mid-size scale ( $\approx 100 \text{ km}^2$ ) (Spence, 2006) and local scale ( $< 1 \text{ km}^2$ ) (Tardif et al., 2009). Hydrological similarities exist between bogs and fens, with the buffer effect being inversely proportional to water table level (Quinton and Roulet, 1998; Price and Waddington, 2000). The buffer effect is related to hydraulic conductivity, which is dependant of the structure of the peat, the latter being dependant of both depth (Holden and Burt, 2003) but also of the compressive-expansive nature of peat in relation with saturation conditions. This phenomenon, known as “mire breathing” (Kellner and Haldin, 2002), allows the peat surface to follow the frequent water table rises and drawdowns during summer and fall (Roulet, 1991).

In northern Québec, when compared to previous decades or centuries, wet conditions prevailed during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Increased wetness had an impact on both lakes (Bégin, 2001; Payette and Delwaide, 1991; 2004) and subarctic rivers (Payette and Delwaide, 2000). These wet conditions associated with a high water table over a long period also impacted peatland development. In fens, several vegetated strings are degraded and submerged, causing increased impoundment through pond coalescence. The degradation of the vegetation structure in the last century and the correlative increase of the pond surface caused by high water table conditions have been termed “aqualysis”, a phenomenon that is described in details by parallel ecological studies (Arlen-Pouliot,

2009) and partially confirmed by preliminary remote sensing data (Dissanska et al., 2009). Will this transformation into wetter conditions continue in the next decades? Recent updates in climate change studies anticipate for the next century a probable increase in mean annual precipitations combined with warmer temperatures (Christensen et al., 2007). Hydrological effects of a warmer and wetter climate are now relatively well documented for mid-latitude Québec and, to our knowledge, all results show a consistent pattern, i.e. an increase in annual runoff is anticipated (Frigon et al., 2007; Dibike and Coulibaly, 2005; Slivitzky et al., 2004; Clair et al., 1998). Because projected climatic scenarios could be favourable to the maintain of wet conditions (high water table), further comparisons on hydrological behaviour of watersheds over a spectrum of surface wetness conditions are therefore required for this region.

The first objective of this study is to compare water budgets of bogs, fens and small shallow lakes at both seasonal and event time scales. The second objective is to evaluate the field methods used for water budget terms calculations. The final objective is to present an original adaptation of evapotranspiration estimation method developed from field observations. By comparing sites showing a relatively large spectrum of surface wetness conditions, a better understanding of current peatland hydrology as well as some insights to their responses to the future climatic conditions will be gained.

## ***5.2 Methodology***

### **5.2.1 Study sites**

Seven small watersheds ( $<1 \text{ km}^2$ ) located in the La Grande river watershed in mid-latitude Québec were selected for this study: two bogs (sites 1 and 2), three fens (sites 3, 4 and 5) and two headwater lakes (sites 6 and 7). Sites 1, 2 and 3 are located in the western ( $54^\circ\text{N}, 77^\circ\text{W}$ ), lower (100 m above sea level – a.s.l.) and drier part of the La Grande river watershed whereas sites 4, 5, 6 and 7 are located in the eastern ( $54^\circ\text{N}, 75^\circ\text{W}$ ), upper (400 m a.s.l.) and wetter part of the watershed (Figure 5.1). For the western sector (not available for eastern sector), long term climate normals at the LG-2 airport station for the reference period (1971-2000) are the following:  $-3.1^\circ\text{C}$  for mean annual temperature and 680 mm for mean annual precipitation (Environment Canada, 2008).

Both bogs have almost no open water (0% and 1% of total area respectively). The studied fens at sites 3, 4 and 5 have open water ratio of 4%, 35% and 35% respectively. Small shallow lakes, at the other end of the wetness spectrum, have 100% cover of open water.

Physiographic data characterizing each site were extracted from a database constructed in a Geographical Information System (GIS) and using georeferenced aerial pictures. All sites except the two bogs have only one visible outlet and all have drainage areas roughly the same size (< 250 ha) (Table 5.1). Vegetation surrounding all sites is composed of a mixture of mature black spruce (*Picea mariana*) and lichens woodlands in the forested parts of the watersheds (Figure 5.1 and Table 5.1). In their middle part are nested the bogs, fens and lakes. Bogs hummocks are covered by small trees (*Picea mariana* and *Larix laricina*), shrubs (*Kalmia polifolia*, *Chamaedaphne calyculata*, *Vaccinium oxycoccus*), mosses (*Sphagnum fuscum* and *Sphagnum rubellum*) and lichens whereas hollows are generally covered by sedges and aquatic *Sphagnum* species. Both bogs have the same vegetation cover but trees in site 1 are more abundant and larger than in site 2. Fen vegetation is composed of small trees (*Picea mariana* and *Larix laricina*), shrubs (*Kalmia polifolia*, *Chamaedaphne calyculata*), sedges and a dense moss carpet with a dominance of brown mosses in hollows and around pools, and several *Sphagnum* species on the strings.

### **5.2.2 Hydrometeorological data and water budget terms**

Data from three summers and falls are presented in this paper. Concomitant daily data were gathered between July 11<sup>th</sup> and October 31<sup>st</sup> for the years 2005, 2006 and 2007. The period covered in this study corresponds to the time when sites were cleared from the influence of spring snow melting until shortly prior to winter freezing. Data were collected during those periods at all sites except for site 7 which did not record data between July 11<sup>th</sup> and October 31<sup>st</sup> 2005 and lacked runoff data for 2007.

Meteorological data were obtained using sensors connected to CR10 and CR10x dataloggers (Campbell Scientific) installed in towers powered by a 12V battery and 20W solar panel. Air temperature, relative humidity, wind speed, barometric pressure, incoming radiation and soil temperature were measured. Data were sampled every 30

seconds, integrated into an hourly time step and then converted into daily data. Site 7 did not have its own meteorological tower and therefore used data from site 6 because of the small distance between the two sites (less than 2 km) and the close physical similarity of their watershed.

The water budget is calculated using Equation (5.1):

$$P + \frac{\Delta S_t - \Delta S_{t-1}}{\Delta t} - ET = Q + \eta \quad (5.1)$$

where  $P$  is precipitation,  $\Delta S$  is storage variation per time unit,  $ET$  is evapotranspiration,  $Q$  is runoff and  $\eta$  is the residual term (all units being in mm/day).

### 5.2.2a Precipitation

Rainfall was measured *in situ* (except for site 7) with a tipping bucket rain gauge (CS700 or TE525 combined with a CS705 glycol-methanol reservoir for winter precipitation, Campbell scientific). Precipitations were corrected for sampling error according to the method described by Ducharme and Nadeau (2005), i.e. an increase of 9% for each liquid precipitation event.

### 5.2.2b Storage

In situ water level (WL) was first measured in bogs and fens with a network of wells equipped with hydrostatic pressure gauges (Levelogger, Solinst) and corrected for barometric fluctuations using the aforementioned method (section 4.2.2). Wells were made of a long perforated PVC pipe inserted in the peat matrix until they reach the mineral substrate (between 1 and 2.5 m for sites 1-3-4-5, and up to 4 m for site 2). Prior to installation, wells were inserted in nylon stockings to prevent peat particles from filling up the pipes. The pressure gauges were suspended near the pipes bottom using a tin wire attached to the wells cap. Lakes WL were monitored using the same pressure gauges but anchored on a concrete block at the bottom of the lake rather than in a well. WL was used subsequently to define the dry and wet conditions in analysis of water budget at event time scale.

Next step was to convert WL data into storage variations ( $\Delta S$ ) using eq. 5.2 (Spence and Woo, 2003; Price and Schlotzhauer, 1999):

$$\Delta S = \Delta wl * S_y * A_v + \Delta wl * A_w \quad (5.2)$$

where  $\Delta wl$  is water level variation,  $S_y$  is specific yield of peat and  $A$  is fraction of surface area of the two compartment types ( $v$  for vegetation and  $w$  for open water). We used an empirical  $S_y$  value of 0.26 that was measured in peatlands with similar vegetation (Hogan et al., 2006; Price et Maloney, 1994).

### 5.2.2c Evapotranspiration

Daily evapotranspiration (ET) was estimated using an adaptation of the well-known Penman-Monteith (PM) model from Monteith (1965) as shown in Allen et al. (2006). This ET model is often used in peatlands (Lafleur et al., 2005; Kellner, 2001; Campbell and Williamson, 1997) because of its ability to model the vegetation-atmosphere interactions (eq. 5.3):

$$ET = \frac{\Delta(R_n - G) + 86400 * \rho_a c_p \frac{(e_s - e_a)}{r_a}}{\lambda \rho_w \left( \Delta + \gamma \left( 1 + \frac{r_s}{r_a} \right) \right)} * 1000 \quad (5.3)$$

where  $ET$  is evapotranspiration (mm/day),  $\lambda$  is latent heat of vaporisation (MJ/kg),  $\Delta$  is slope of the vapor pressure-temperature curve (kPa/°C),  $R_n$  is net radiation (MJ/m<sup>2</sup>/day),  $G$  is heat flux density to the ground (MJ/m<sup>2</sup>/day),  $\rho_a$  is mean air density at constant pressure (kg/m<sup>3</sup>),  $C_p$  is specific heat of the air (J/kg/°K),  $e_s - e_a$  is vapor pressure deficit between saturation ( $s$ ) and actual conditions ( $a$ ) (kPa),  $r_a$  is aerodynamic resistance (s/m),  $\rho_w$  is water density (kg/m<sup>3</sup>),  $\gamma$  is psychrometric constant (kPa/°C),  $r_s$  is surface resistance (s/m) of vegetation and 86400 and 1000 are conversion factors required to obtain ET in mm/d. Data required for computation are: air temperature, incoming radiation, surface albedo, latitude, barometric pressure, relative humidity, wind speed and height of

vegetation. The calculation procedure of the required variables for PM model is following Ward and Trimble (2004) and Allen et al. (1998) protocols.

The heat flux density to the ground ( $G$ ) was computed with eq. 5.4 (Ward and Trimble, 2004) where  $T_{t+1}$  and  $T_{t-1}$  are mean daily temperatures during the following and previous days and  $\Delta t$  is duration (in days) between  $T_{t+1}$  and  $T_{t-1}$ .

$$G = 4.2 * \frac{(T_{t+1} - T_{t-1})}{\Delta t} \quad (5.4)$$

Aerodynamical resistances over water ( $r_{a-water}$ ) and vegetation ( $r_{a-vegetation}$ ) were computed with eq. 5.5 and 5.6 from Shuttleworth (1996) where  $w$  is wind speed (m/s at two meters),  $d$  is zero plane displacement height (m),  $zov$  is roughness length governing momentum transfer (m),  $zoh$  is roughness length governing transfer of heat and vapour (m)  $zhum$  is height of humidity measurements (m) and  $k$  is von Karman's constant (-0.41):

$$r_{a-water} = \frac{4.72 * \log\left(\frac{2}{0.00137}\right)^2}{(1 + 0.536 * w)} \quad (5.5)$$

$$r_{a-vegetation} = \frac{\left[ \log\left(\frac{2-d}{zov}\right) * \log\left(\frac{zhum-d}{zoh}\right) \right]}{k^2 w} \quad (5.6)$$

Some criticisms have been made on the use of surface resistance ( $r_s$ ) in peatlands (Lafleur and Roulet, 1992) because an important part of their surface is composed of a cryptogam canopy (non-vascular), and accordingly, direct application of the PM model may be considered inadequate. To solve this problem, Lafleur et al. (2005) used a correction factor based on the slope of a linear regression between calculated PET using PM with a null surface resistance ( $r_s = 0$ ) and spot measurements of actual ET (AET) using eddy covariance technique. Since AET measurements were not available for this study, a different approach was used based on knowledge of watershed vegetation, here defined as the field method. The first step was to define values of  $r_s$  in the same way as Sumner and Jacobs (2005), i.e. as a function of vapour pressure deficit (eq. 5.7):

$$r_s = \frac{1}{(-0.2 * \ln(e_s - e_a) + 0.25) * \frac{1}{70}} \quad (5.7)$$

where  $e_s$  and  $e_a$  are respectively vapor pressure at saturation and actual condition. The logarithmic function was then adjusted to fit the range of values proposed by Kellner (2001) for Swedish boreal bogs with a vegetation cover similar to that of our study sites. The second step was to quantify the fraction of site (Table 1) composed of vegetation and of open water (with aerial photographs). The last step was to calculate site ET (eq. 5.8), i.e. the sum of each surface ET multiplied by their respective fraction of site area (obtained from Table 5.1):

$$ET = ET_w * A_w + ET_v * A_v \quad (5.8)$$

where  $A$  are fraction of surface area and  $w, v$  refer to the two compartment types, i.e., open water ( $r_{a-water}$  but no  $r_s$ ) and vegetation (both  $r_{a-vegetation}$  and  $r_s$ ).

### 5.2.2d Runoff

Surface runoff was calculated via stage-discharge curves established at each site except for sites 1 and 2 (bogs) where there was no visible surface runoff. Instantaneous discharge was measured at each visit with an integration of water velocities measured at a wetted cross-section of the outlet, near the stilling well and using a flowmeter (Marsh-McBirney flowmate 2000). Water levels at each outlet were measured continuously with a hydrostatic pressure gauge (Levellogger model 3001, Solinst) located in a stilling well installed on the bank of each outlet. The recorded levels were corrected for barometric fluctuations using a linear regression between data from a Barologger (Solinst) and another barometric pressure gauge located in the nearby meteorological tower (61205V, R.M. Young). The uses of regressions were required at each site because of risk of error from the sole use of the Barologger that were affected by frost during winter months of 2005-2006 and also because R.M. Young sensors give data in hPa rather than in mm (unit required for barometric correction of Levellogger probes). Regression equations of data collected over a two-months period in summer of 2005 (values ranged from 935 to 1015 hPa) have a  $R^2$  of at least 0.97. In order to be comparable with precipitation,

evapotranspiration and storage data, discharge data ( $L/d$ ) were finally converted into specific runoff ( $mm/d$ ) by dividing them by watershed area.

## **5.3 Results**

### **5.3.1 Data of water budget terms**

Before analyzing results from water budget at both seasonal and event time scale, it is necessary to control the quality of the observations, in order to identify some of the potential caveats of the proposed methods. Concerning P, the quality of data was verified by comparing observations of site 3 with those from the Environment Canada station at LG-2 airport located 10 to 20 km away from sites 1, 2 and 3 as well as those from the Hydro-Québec station on the Necopastic river which is slightly closer, i.e. 1 to 10 km away from the same sites. Globally, over a season, measurements were coherent with those obtained at other stations. On the other hand, when shorter timescales are considered, data from sites 1, 2 and 3 sometimes show important differences (caused by local rainfall and not by sampling error) in precipitation measured from various storm events in summer (Figure 5.2).

Rating curves for Q were difficult to establish for two main reasons. First of all and because of the remoteness of sites, only few points were available for curves fitting ( $\leq 10$  at each site). From those few points, most of them were measured in summer under low flow conditions and only sites 4 and 6 have points associated to extreme flows during snowmelt. The second reason is related to the very low water velocities ( $< 10$  cm/s) that were near the flowmeter detection limit and leads to higher relative errors in discharge values. Flow data for dry and normal conditions, i.e. in the lower to middle portion of the rating curves are more accurate. On the other hand, the lack of points under high flow conditions (especially for sites 3, 5 and 7) led to an overestimation of Q during wet spells (Fig. 5.3). This is reflected in results of the water budgets, especially at the seasonal timescale where the runoff overestimation was accumulated over a longer period. This is indeed less problematic at shorter time scale, especially when events occurred during dry or normal conditions (section 5.3.3). For those reasons only seasonal water budget of sites 4 and 6 are presented in the next section.

Concerning ET, the original field-based method developed gives good results that are coherent with other boreal studies (Lafleur et al., 2005), i.e. mean values for summer of about 2.0 to 2.5 mm/day. Figure 5.4 shows ET distributions for all sites for 2005 season. Figure 5.5 show temporal ET data of sites 1, 4 and 6 during 2005, we can see there that most of ET occurred during the first half of the season.

WL data (not shown here) from replicate wells located in fens and bogs showed that, although small differences exist in water table movements related to the location of the well in a pond or in a vegetated string, recorded levels generally move in a synchronous way. Data from a single well (the most representative of the mean conditions of all wells) were therefore used in the water budget calculations for the storage term.

### **5.3.2 Seasonal water budget**

Seasonal water budget were computed for a concomitant period from mid-July to end of October of years 2005, 2006 and 2007. Interestingly, those three years had highly variable wetness conditions (Table 5.2): 2006 was the driest year with total precipitation of 239 mm to 434 mm during the study period whereas 2007 was much wetter with totals of 485 mm to 649 mm and 2005 had intermediate (normal) conditions with totals of 309 mm to 589 mm. During all years, sites 4, 5, 6 and 7 located in the eastern and upper part of the watershed received systematically more precipitation than sites 1, 2 and 3 located in the western part, which is coherent with the general regional pattern.

Meanwhile, ET values remained relatively stable between years (Table 5.2). Table 5.3 contains a summary of main atmospheric data involved in the ET process. The wetter year (2007) was the one with the lowest total of ET ranging from 117 mm (site 1) to 141 mm (site 6). Both 2005 and 2006 had similar values of respectively 136 mm to 182 mm and 150 mm to 179 mm. When referred to P in the ET/P ratios, we can see that ET accounts for between 26% and 45% of total precipitation during a more typical year in terms of total precipitation (2005). This percentage rose to 38% to 63% in a dry year (2006) but dropped to 18% to 24% in a wet year (2007). For all years, because of their important fraction of open water, lakes tend to have higher total ET than bogs and fens, which were more similar. Sites 4 and 5 (fens) had very similar ET total for all years.

Bogs, as well as site 3 (the fen with only 4% of open water), also shows similar ET totals that are lesser than for two other fens as well as for lakes. Both lakes showed the same ET total because they used the same meteorological data (site 6).

Depending on the year, runoff is by far the most variable term. Unfortunately, because of the aforementioned error problems with stage-discharge curves, only data from sites 4 and 6 are presented here (Table 5.4). Year 2006 was the driest one with total runoff values of respectively 221 mm and 159 mm while 2005 (intermediate) and 2007 (wet) had respectively values of 298 mm and 208 mm and 351 mm and 287 mm.

Storage variation was defined as the sum of daily storage variations between the end of the study (10/31) and the beginning (07/10) (Table 5.4). For 2005, data from both sites showed a rise during the season (19 mm for site 4 and 40 mm for site 6). On the other hand, 2006 showed a drawdown during the season (-19 mm for site 4 and -39 mm for site 6 that received much more P during the same period) whereas 2007 showed marginal WL fluctuations during the season (5 mm for site 4 and -5 mm for site 6).

Finally, Table 5.4 contains complete water budgets for sites 4 and 6 for all years. Depending of the years, budgets “closed” in different ways, as shown by  $\eta$  values in both absolute and relative residuals. For 2005, site 4 and site 6 showed an excess of 39 mm (8.3% of total P over the period) and 209 mm (37.4%) respectively. The residual term for 2006 (dry year) was -102 mm (35.1%) and 56 mm (12.9%), as expected because runoff was restricted in the more reliable part of the stage-discharge curves most of the season. On the other hand, 2007 (wet year) showed greater residual values of 113 mm (19.4%) and 217 mm (33.4%). Figure 5.6 shows the cumulative curves of daily data for all terms for years 2006 and 2007, we can see there that both sites produce similar response in ET and Q for similar P curves.

### **5.3.3 Specific events water budget**

At the scale of events, our analyses were focused on few sequences of concomitant rainfall happening under known soil wetness conditions, thus generating a single hydrological event at each site. Using Q time series, we defined a hydrological event

from a trough to a peak back to a trough (Tardif et al., 2009) and only kept those with roughly the same duration of about ten days. We also selected them to have a variety of hydrological conditions from dry to wet. Water budget results of the three specific studied events are presented in Table 5.5 and Figure 5.7 and analysed below. Table 5.5 contains all terms for all sites, complementary information related to their date and duration as well as the mean standardized WL at the beginning of each event. The last statistic is used to qualify the general wetness state of sites when the rainfall happened. Figure 5.7 contain histograms of the same events.

Event #1 happened in late September of 2005, lasts 11 days and the rainfall (28 to 67 mm) happened when the mean standardised WL was 0.79, which means that *in situ* WL were relatively high. This event is therefore defined as “high precipitation on wetter than normal conditions”. Event #2 happened in mid-September of 2006, lasts 8 days and the rainfall (12 to 34 mm) happened when the mean standardised WL was -1.58, which means that *in situ* WL were quite low. This event is therefore defined as “low precipitation on drier than normal conditions”. Finally, event #3 happened in early August of 2006, lasts 7 days and the rainfall (33 to 62 mm) happened when the mean standardised WL was -1.22, which means that *in situ* WL were also relatively low. This event is therefore defined as “high precipitation on drier than normal conditions”.

Rainfall of event #1 (high P on high WL) happened when WL were already high due to another important rain spell in the previous week. Spatially, total P were registered from a single storm in the western part of the basin (Sites 1-2-3) while the eastern part received another one, but smaller near the end of the event. This spatial variability explains differences in total P. Meanwhile, ET data were more homogeneous and ranged from 7.9 to 12.3 mm while  $\Delta S$  showed a general drawdown (on 6 sites of 7) during the 11 days period with variations of +2.7 to -6.4 mm. Q values were highly variable with 0 mm for both bogs to 144.7 mm. Sites 3, 5, and 7 had very high Q values (144.7, 95.4 and 77.5 mm respectively) and are good examples of the overestimation of Q in the wetter parts of stage-discharge curves as mentioned in section 3.1. On the other hand, sites 4 and 6 showed realistic Q values (44.4 and 31.6 mm), thus the residual term are smaller (-14.2 and 16.9 mm) by opposition to higher values for sites 3, 5 and 7 (-122, -36 and -26.3

mm). Despite the absence of Q for the bogs, they show small and positive  $\eta$  terms of 15.8 and 11.3 mm. Since  $\Delta S$  is negative and there is no Q, we consider that the budget is positive for bogs due to subsurface runoff while they are in discharge phase, i.e. when water table is high and their water storage capacity therefore limited.

Event #2 (low P on low WL) was a low to moderate rain storm that happened after a 10 days period without P. The storm was stronger in western part of the watershed (24.1 to 33.8 mm) than in its eastern part (11.9 to 14.4 mm). As in event #1, ET values were still quite similar (9.6 to 11.3 mm). Because of the dryer conditions, i.e. in the portion of stage-discharge curves with high confidence, Q values were more homogenous and small (0.4 to 18.6 mm). On the other hand, the  $\Delta S$  were highly variable for this event (-10.1 to 27.2 mm). Western sites (1-2-3) received more P and also had higher  $\Delta S$  values (3.5 to 27.3 mm). Eastern sites showed smaller and lower  $\Delta S$  values (-10.3 to 0.3 mm). From an ecosystem point of view, bogs seem to be in recharge phase with high  $\Delta S$  rises (even higher than P total for site 1) and hypothetically no subsurface runoff at this time. Despite low Q values, both fens and lakes kept their surface runoff production abilities.

Event #3 happened also during dry conditions but the context is slightly different for eastern and western part. Precipitation came in a single storm for the western part and in two storms in 4 days for the eastern part. Prior to P, western part had a 10-days long drought. Eastern part had a 7-days dry spell followed with a storm 3 days before the beginning but their water levels were still low despite this storm. Once again ET values were still quite similar (10.9 to 13.5 mm). Q values were in the same range for sites 3, 4, 6 and 7, were nonexistent for bogs and rather important for site 5 where we observed the highest standardized WL before the event due to the highest P total in the pre-event storm. All  $\Delta S$  values except for site 7 (-7.9 mm) were positive (0.2 to 32.1 mm) during the period, indicating that storage were higher at the end of the event compared to the beginning. This is especially true for both bogs that experienced a dramatic storage rise during the event. This is the opposite of event #1 and similar to event #2, bogs here seems to be in a very effective recharge phase.

Isolating synchronous hydrological event in seven sites smaller than 1 km<sup>2</sup> in a natural and remote watershed is not an easy task. Water budget at this time scale seldom “close” very well since various hydrological processes generating runoff operate at different speed from fast (rain storm) to slow (storage drawdown in bogs). For example, an event water budget can be positive (water excess) only because a second rain event happened before storage return to its initial condition. Fortunately, an important residual term doesn't mean that useful information cannot be extracted from data.

#### **5.4 Discussion**

This water budget study of *Sphagnum* bogs, patterned fens and shallow lakes aimed to better understand hydrological behaviour of mid-latitude Québec wetlands over a three year summer and fall span. It confirmed the variability of water budget terms during dry, average and wet years. Budget calculations were assessed in the context of peatland hydrology and/or small lake dominated watersheds (<1 km<sup>2</sup>). From this assessment, we learned the following three teachings that we will be useful for further similar studies:

- a) In summer and fall, when local storms prevailed, the spatial heterogeneity of precipitation (Table 5.2 and Figure 5.2) confirms that when working with small spatial and/or time scales hydrological issues, a dense network of stations is important to keep a good areal coverage (St-Hilaire et al, 2003). As shown from results of this study, with watersheds smaller than 1 km<sup>2</sup>, the installation of an *in situ* precipitation gauge is strongly recommended.
- b) The method based on the field structure gives a good estimate of ET values. Summer data were in the same range of AET values than most studies related to subarctic wetlands (Lafleur et al, 2005). Separated calculations for open water and vegetation provide a more realistic description of peatlands surface structure than usual methods. Overall results of the field structure method provide an interesting way to get a good estimation of ET without the need of punctual AET measures that are difficult and costly to acquire.

c) The method used to measure flow, i.e. a stilling well located at the outlet associated with the production of stage-discharge curves was found to be sub-optimal. Remoteness of study sites, low flow velocities (few cm/s) and instability of the outlet's cross-section in fens due to sediment transportation are the main error sources that leads to important overestimation of runoff in higher than mean wetness conditions. The method gives acceptable results in drier than average conditions when runoff data are estimated using the lower portion of stage-discharge curves. Overall, we do not recommend this method for similar watershed settings. Parshall flumes or trapezoidal channels (Jutras et al., 2007) may represent a better option, provided they have suitable dimensions to capture both low flow and flood events.

Furthermore, the water budget analysis reveals important knowledge on the hydrological behaviour of those boreal wetlands. First, precipitations were highly variable in the region between the three years. In the same time, runoff was also variable and in relation with water levels fluctuations but in complex ways that required further investigations. The relation between WL and Q seems different between fens and lakes. For both bogs and fens, water table was almost always near the surface despite important precipitation events or several days droughts. The compressive-expansive nature of peat (peat elasticity) in bogs and fens may provide an intrinsic regulation that sustains water levels within the acrotelm (Roulet, 1991).

Second, fens ET data were generally closer to bogs than to lakes that were slightly higher due to the absence of surface resistance. Considering that all sites have a similar type of upland (roughly the same forested coverage), differences in total ET are associated with the respective importance of the structural entities (open water and vegetation) as well as their watershed configuration that influence exposition to wind and radiation. At the seasonal time step, most of ET totals unsurprisingly occurred during July and August (Figure 5.5). During fall, all sites had few negative ET data that must be interpreted as condensation (water gain) when the heat flux to the ground (G) became also negative due to lesser radiations and colder air.

Third, bogs regulate themselves mainly with slow and regular storage drawdown caused by ET and probably by subsurface runoff (not measured). Dramatic rises in  $\Delta S$  can occur with heavy rainfall following dry conditions. The processes generating these important rises could be hypothetically linked to both influence of effective porosity of the peat matrix (in comparison with open water) combined with a strong capillarity pressure of the dry bog vegetation when water becomes available.

Fourth, patterned fens with a moderate degree of aquafication regulate themselves with occasional burst of runoff that last longer and with greater amplitude than lakes (used to represent a high degree of aquafication) (Tardif et al., 2009). This behaviour is probably due to their typical structure of ponds and vegetal strings. This variability in runoff conditions could be related to runoff generation processes proper to high and low water table exposed by Kvaerner and Klove (2008), i.e. a release from peat storage during low water table spells that is added to overland flow during high water table spells. Between those extreme states, ponds configuration play a complex but crucial and rather misunderstood role in runoff generation. Both aquafication and climate change effects are hard to quantify for runoff, nonetheless, one can argue that runoff rises anticipated from climate change in the region could be counterbalanced by a less variable behaviour when open water fraction from fens will approach those from lakes.

Finally, lacking the typical vegetation structure of peatlands, shallow lakes tend to have a much simpler hydrology. ET is more important over open water than on peatlands and runoff is generated more easily, without lateral interference from vegetation. They often produce short, quick and small runoff rises. Remembering the hypothesis of aquafication expansion over the course of next decades due to the anticipated rises in both precipitation and runoff for the La Grande region, we should anticipate more “lake type” runoff behaviour in highly aquaficated peatlands, that could become therefore simpler to model than fens with low open water ratios.

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Table 5.1: Physiographic characteristics of study sites

	Site 1	Site 2	Site 3	Site 4	Site 5	Site 6	Site 7
ecosystem	bog	bog	fen	fen	fen	lake	lake
watershed area (m <sup>2</sup> )	21300	154600	217100	40500	64500	77700	89300
bog/fen/lake area (m <sup>2</sup> )	6100	117100	76200	14200	27600	36900	28600
fraction of watershed occupied by uplands (%)	71%	24%	65%	65%	57%	53%	68%
open water area (m <sup>2</sup> )	0	150	2900	4900	9600	36900	28600
fraction of bog/fen/lake occupied by open water (%)	0%	1%	4%	35%	35%	100%	100%
vascular vegetation (%)	50%	49.5%	57.6%	45.5%	45.5%	0%	0%
non-vascular vegetation (%)	50%	49.5%	38.4%	19.5%	19.5%	0%	0%

Table 5.2: Data of P, ET losses (in mm) and ET/P ratios for all sites and years. Asterisks beside values of site 7 refer to a slightly shorter study period 2005.

	Site 1	Site 2	Site 3	Site 4	Site 5	Site 6	Site 7
P (2005)	375	309	408	472	589	559	334*
P (2006)	239	278	252	290	394	433	
P (2007)	485	551	621	581	649	649	649
ET (2005)	136	140	141	154	151	182	57*
ET (2006)	150	150	151	152	151	179	179
ET (2007)	117	117	120	122	120	141	141
ET/P (2005)	36%	45%	35%	33%	26%	33%	17%*
ET/P (2006)	63%	54%	60%	52%	38%	41%	41%
ET/P (2007)	24%	21%	19%	21%	18%	22%	22%

Table 5.3: Summary of mean daily meteorological data for all sites and years.

		Site 1	Site 2	Site 3	Site 4	Site 5	Site 6	Site 7
air temperature (°C)	2005	10.7	11.1	10.4	9.6	9.3	9.5	9.5
	2006	9.3	9.6	9.0	8.2	7.8	8.0	8.0
	2007	9.8	10.0	9.5	8.0	8.8	7.7	7.7
relative humidity (%)	2005	83.5	81.2	80.7	81.2	82.6	79.7	79.7
	2006	81.0	79.2	78.4	81.5	82.2	78.3	78.3
	2007	84.0	82.0	81.1	84.3	84.4	84.8	84.8
wind speed (m/s)	2005	1.0	2.1	1.9	1.7	1.8	1.2	1.2
	2006	1.1	2.2	2.0	1.8	1.9	1.3	1.3
	2007	1.2	2.5	2.2	1.9	2.0	1.9	1.9
solar radiation (kJ/h)	2005	471	497	499	476	473	473	473
	2006	541	545	545	494	502	494	494
	2007	476	471	484	411	447	410	410

Table 5.4: Seasonal water budgets of sites 4 (fen) and 6 (lake) for years 2005 to 2007.

	2005		2006		2007	
	Site 4	Site 6	Site 4	Site 6	Site 4	Site 6
P (mm)	472	559	290	433	581	649
$\Delta S$ (mm)	19	40	-19	-39	5	-5
ET (mm)	154	182	151	179	122	140
Q (mm)	298	208	222	159	351	287
$\eta$ (mm)	39	209	-102	56	113	217
$\eta$ (% of total P)	8.3%	37.4%	-35.1%	12.9%	19.4%	33.4%

Table 5.5: Water budget for all sites for three events generated by concomitant rainfalls.  
All values are in millimetres (mm). Below  $\eta$  values are percentages of  $\eta$  over total P

		Site 1	Site 2	Site 3	Site 4	Site 5	Site 6	Site 7
Event #1 (high P on wet condition)	P	30.7	28.0	34.1	47.1	66.4	66.7	66.7
Date: 09/17/05-09/27/05	ET	9.8	10.4	10.4	10.4	9.7	12.3	12.3
Duration: 11 days	Q	0.0	0.0	144.7	44.4	95.4	31.6	77.5
Mean standardized WL at the beginning: 0.79	$\Delta S$	-5.1	-6.3	-0.9	-6.4	2.7	-5.9	-3.2
	$\eta$	15.8	11.3	-122.0	-14.2	-36.0	16.9	-26.3
		51%	40%	-358%	-30%	-54%	25%	-39%
Event #2 (low P on dry condition)	P	27.4	33.8	24.1	14.1	14.4	11.9	11.9
Date: 09/07/06-09/14/06	ET	10.0	10.3	10.6	9.6	9.9	11.3	11.3
Duration: 8 days	Q	0.0	0.0	18.6	11.1	0.4	10.3	7.7
Mean standardized WL at the beginning: -1.58	$\Delta S$	27.3	10.0	3.5	-1.7	-0.3	-10.1	0.3
	$\eta$	44.8	33.5	-1.5	-8.3	3.9	-19.8	-6.8
		163%	99%	-6%	-59%	27%	-166%	-57%
Event #3 (high P on dry condition)	P	46.8	66.2	32.9	34.1	59.0	53.7	54.3
Date: 07/31/06-08/06/06	ET	12.7	12.5	12.3	10.9	11.4	13.5	13.5
Duration: 7 days	Q	0.0	0.0	19.3	18.5	65.8	15.6	15.8
Mean standardized WL at the beginning: -1.22	$\Delta S$	32.1	25.7	5.0	15.4	0.2	3.8	-7.9
	$\eta$	66.1	79.3	6.4	20.1	-17.9	28.4	17.1
		141%	120%	19.3%	59%	-30%	53%	32%

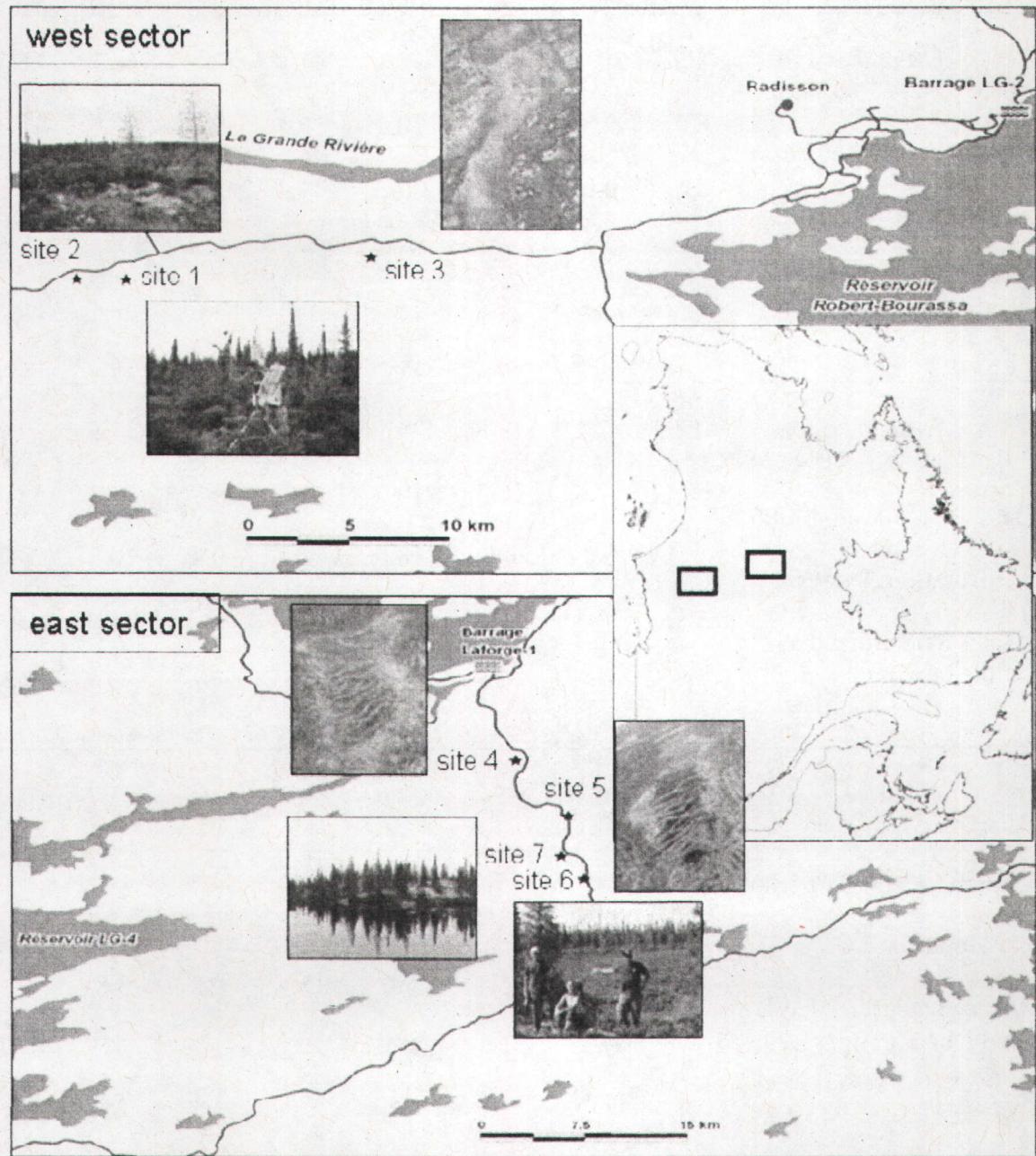


Figure 5.1: Location and pictures of the study sites. Sites 1, 2 and 3 are in the western sector of the La Grande River basin ( $54^{\circ}\text{N } 77^{\circ}\text{W}$ ) whereas sites 4, 5, 6 and 7 are in the eastern sector ( $54^{\circ}\text{N } 75^{\circ}\text{W}$ ). For sites 3, 4 and 5, the outlet is visible at the upper part of the pictures.

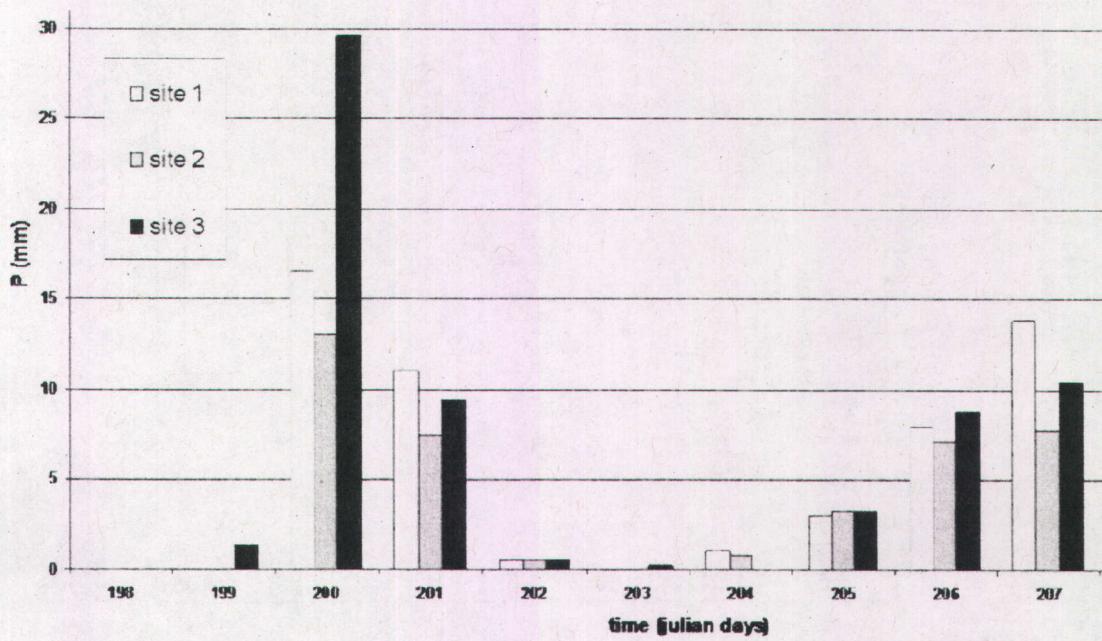


Figure 5.2: Histograms of precipitation for sites 1, 2 and 3 over a 10-day period in 2005.

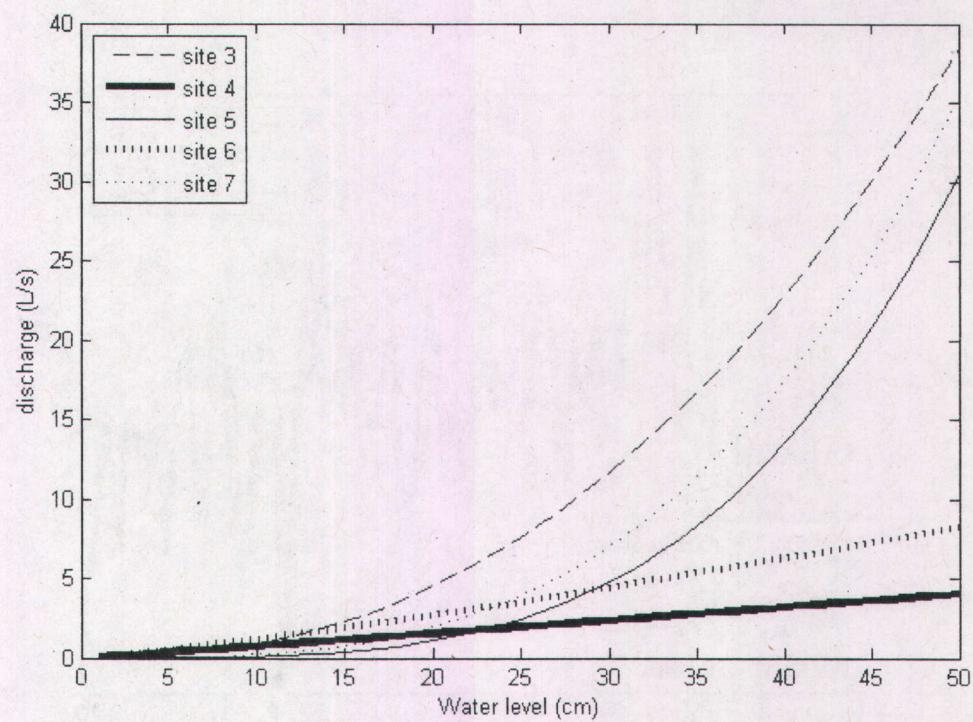


Figure 5.3: Rating curves showing overestimation of discharge in sites 3, 5 and 7 during wet conditions.

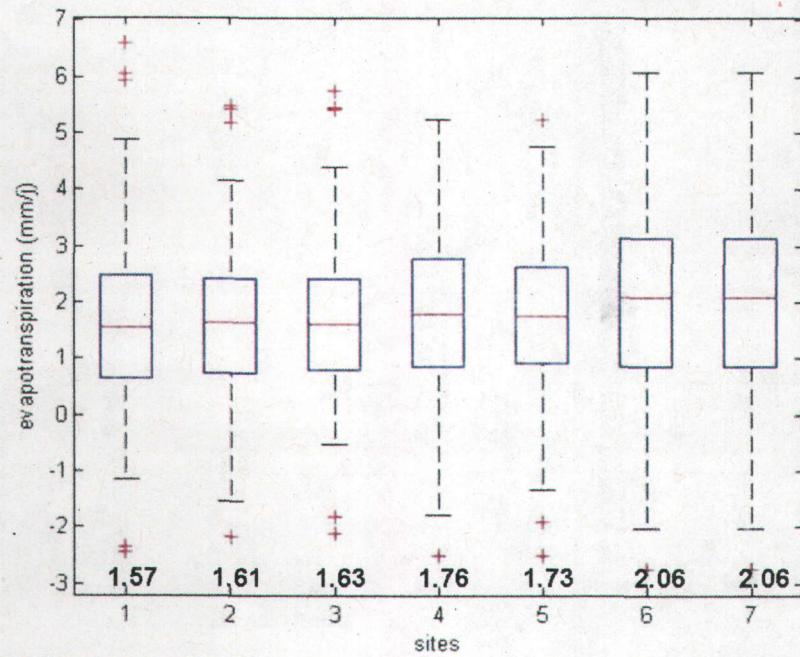


Figure 5.4: ET boxplot for season 2005. Values over site numbers are mean values for season 2005.

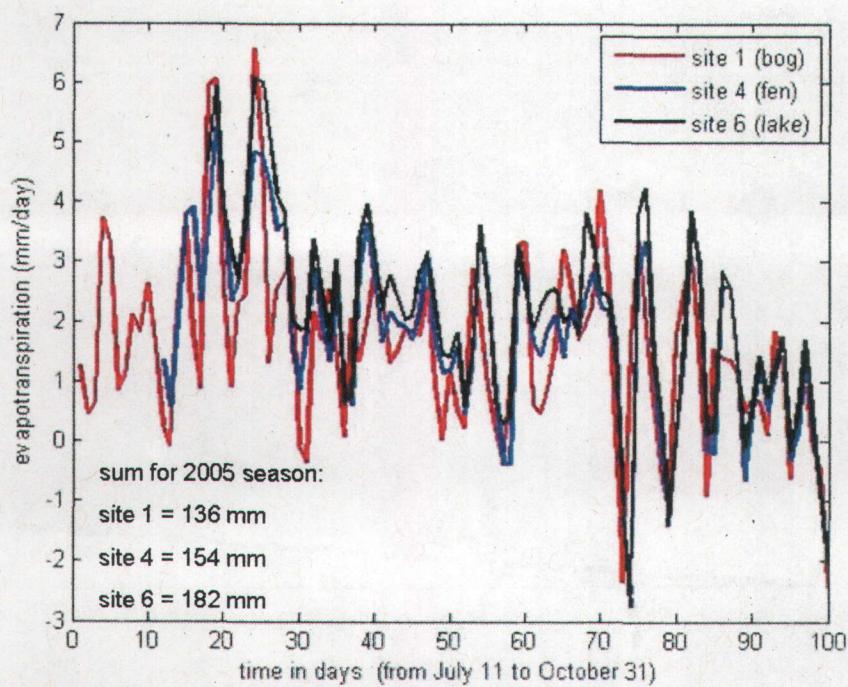


Figure 5.5: Temporal evolution of ET for sites 1, 4 and 6 for season 2005.

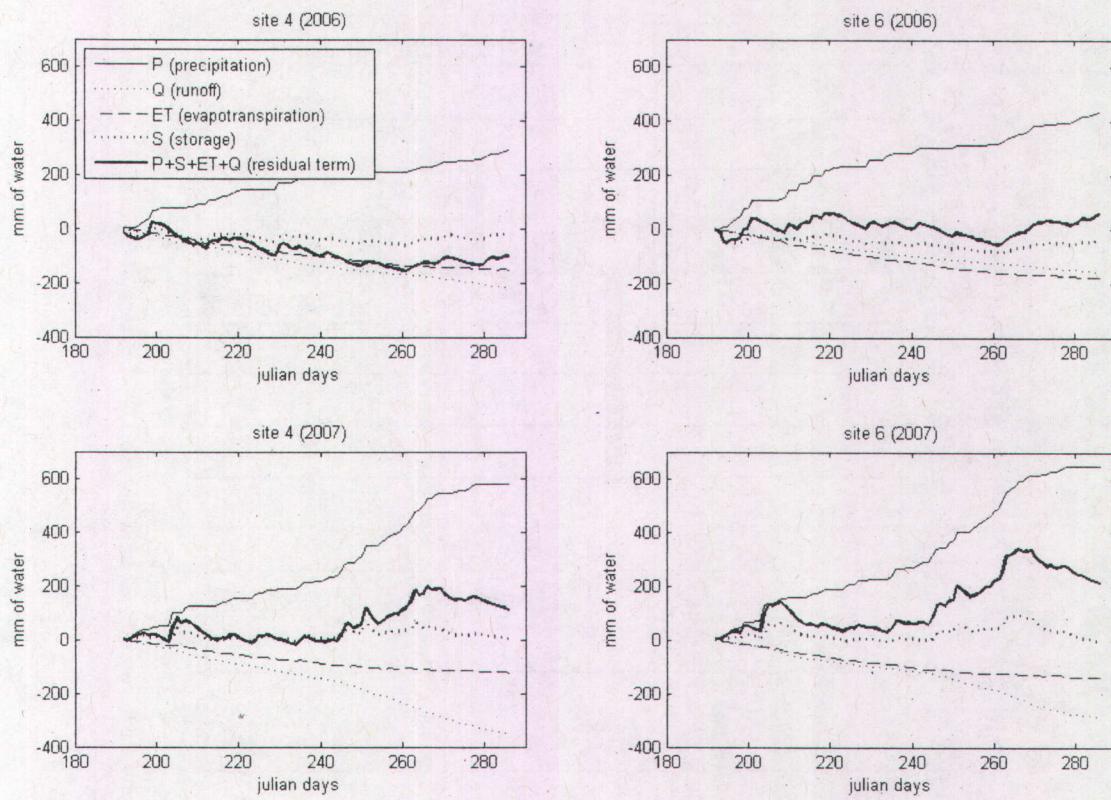


Figure 5.6: Seasonal water budget of 2006 (dry) and 2007 (wet) for sites 4 and 6. Water losses ( $Q$ ,  $ET$  and sometimes  $\Delta S$  and  $\eta$ ) were shown as negative values.

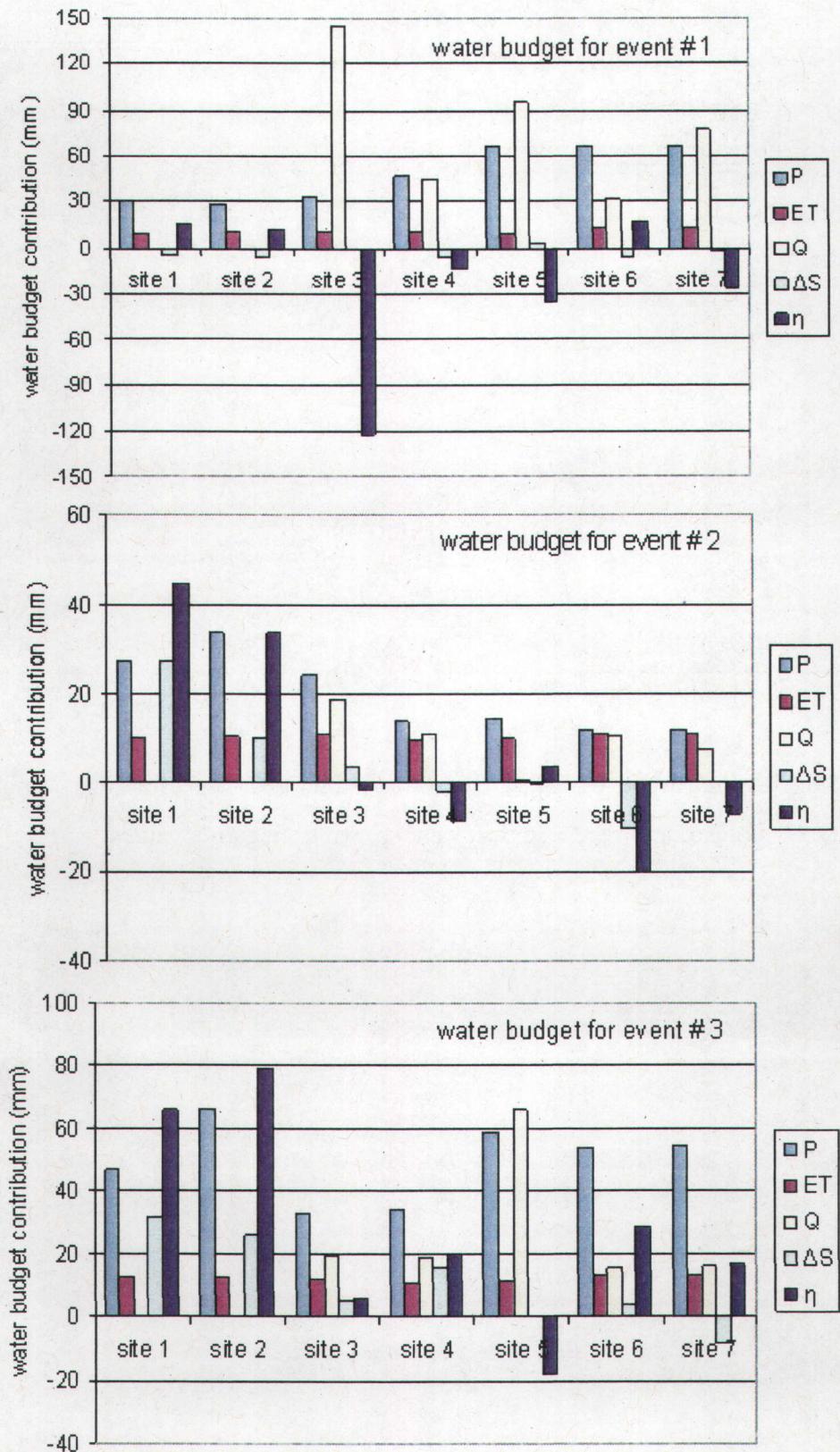
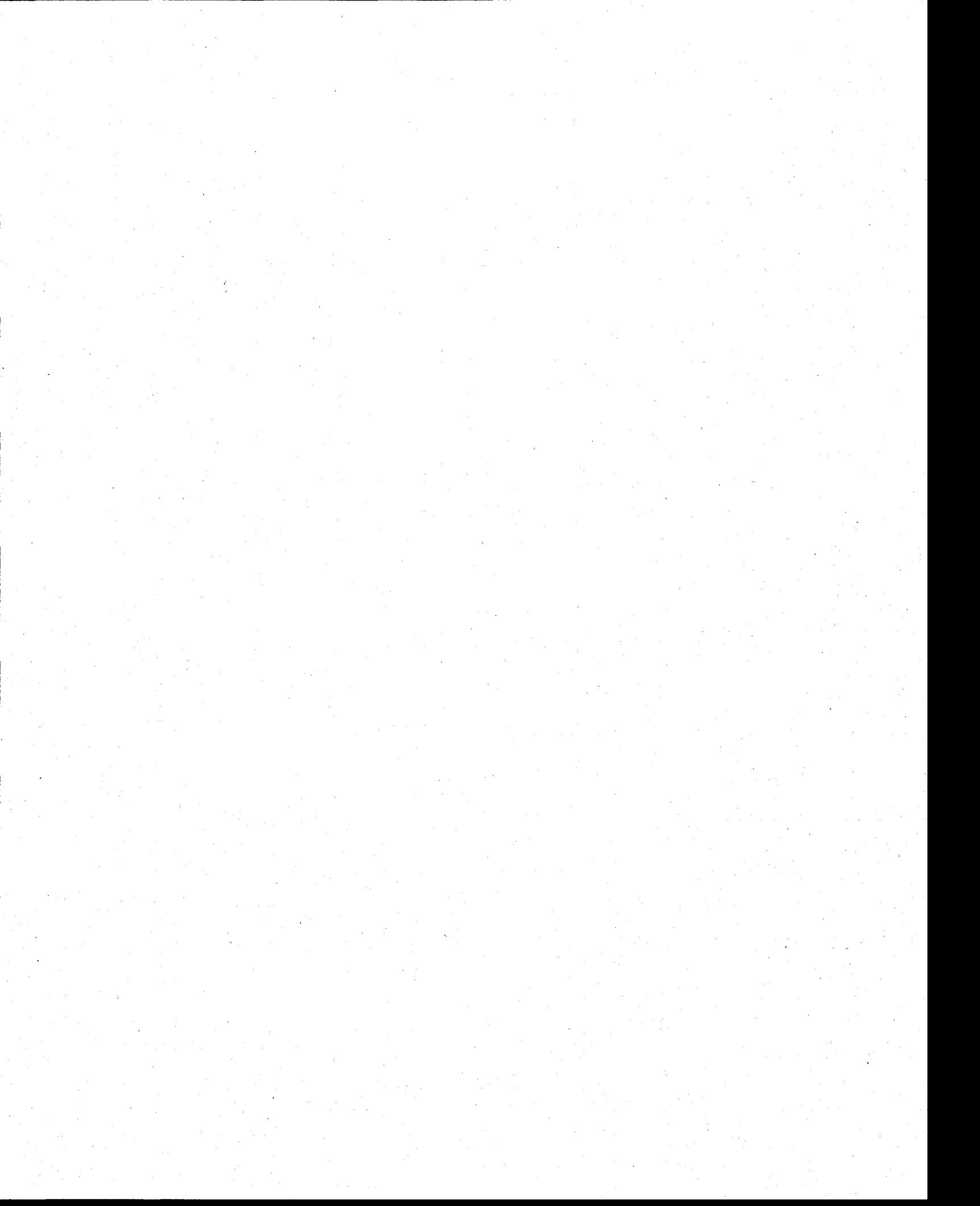


Figure 5.7: Water budget histograms for events #1, #2 and #3.

**Chapitre 6: Réponses hydrologiques post-pluies de  
petits bassins du moyen nord québécois en fonction  
des conditions générales d'humidité de surface.**



Post-rainfall hydrological responses of small watersheds over a large spectrum of open  
water conditions.

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## **Abstract**

In mid-latitude Québec, seven small watersheds ( $<1 \text{ km}^2$ ) with a central *Sphagnum* bog, patterned fen or shallow lake were monitored for a comparative water budget study from July 2005 to October 2007. These seven sites, located over a spectrum of surface wetness conditions, were studied for water level (WL) and runoff (Q) response following moderate and heavy rainfall events during summer and fall. WL rise time lags after a rainfall event were found to be proportional to areal fraction of open water, bogs being the quickest to respond followed by fens and lakes. Q time lags in fens were found to be significantly longer than in lakes, the latter responding almost twice as fast as fens. WL and Q time lags relations with surface wetness are thus opposite, suggesting a hydrological inertia in fens that is absent in lakes. Stepwise regression analysis indicates that wet/dry initial conditions, *in situ* water level, recharge/discharge phase and immediate and total amount of precipitation in the previous days are the main variables explaining time lags and amplitude of responses.

### **6.1. Introduction**

In Québec, peatlands are largely distributed in a belt between the southern boreal forest and the southern limit of the arctic tundra, i.e., from  $49^\circ\text{N}$  to  $58^\circ\text{N}$  and cover at least 12% of the land surface (Payette and Rochefort, 2001). They are the dominant wetland type of the boreal forest biome (Glaser and Janssens, 1986) and an important water reservoir (NWWG, 1988). Despite their large spatial distribution in the boreal biome, processes controlling peatland development and generating surface runoff and hydrological connectivity within the drainage basin are still poorly understood. This lack of knowledge explains their absence from the water routing algorithms of rainfall-runoff models used to forecast and simulate water inflows to reservoirs. Hydrological modeling is important for dams and reservoirs management, especially in the study area that hosts a major hydroelectric complex that is producing close to 50% of Québec's electricity. Considering important climate change issues, wetlands are also of great interest because hydrological fluctuations affect methane ( $\text{CH}_4$ ) emission and carbon dioxide ( $\text{CO}_2$ ) sequestration (Blodau, 2002; Bubier et al., 2003; Belyea and Malmer, 2004). For these reasons, a better understanding of the hydrology of bogs and fens is necessary as a first

step towards improving hydrological forecast models used in areas where peatlands are prominent. Bogs and fens understanding improved in the last decade with recent research focused on atmospheric, surface and groundwater fluxes, as well as carbon cycling (Price et al., 2005).

In North America, *Sphagnum* bogs and patterned fens are often two developmental stages of the same ecosystem. The younger and wetter stage (fen) with a typical structure of ponds and vegetated strings develops through continuous peat accumulation (Gorham and Janssens, 1992; Kuhry et al., 1993) towards a mature stage (bog) that has a drier surface because precipitation is its single water source. *Sphagnum* bogs are known to have little or no surface runoff, with subsurface flow being the dominant lateral flow path (Quinton and Marsh, 1999). The subsurface water circulation is controlled by precipitation, water level of ponds and evapotranspiration in summer and fall (Mouser et al., 2005). At the watershed scale, this frequent or quasi-permanent surface hydrological disconnection of bogs can lead to an overestimated runoff in models that cannot account for non contributing areas such as bogs. On the other hand, patterned fens seldom lack surface runoff but the structure of their surface affect runoff in many ways. The typical fen microtopography affects water storage capacity (Quinton et al., 2003; Price and Maloney, 1994) and often delays peak runoff (Holden and Burt, 2003; Kvaerner and Klove, 2008) whereas total pond area regulates surface runoff (Glenn and Woo, 1997). Moreover, the areal pattern of open water in watersheds regulates surface runoff (Glenn and Woo, 1997) at both local ( $<1 \text{ km}^2$ ) (Tardif et al., 2009) and mid-size scale ( $\approx 100 \text{ km}^2$ ) (Spence, 2006). Summer hydrographs of basins containing a large proportion of wet organic terrain were found to produce broader flood hydrographs (Roulet and Woo, 1988) and longer flow recession curves (Roulet 1986; Chapman, 1987) than those without. In a subarctic basin of Northwest Territories, Quinton et al. (2003) showed that runoff was negatively (positively) correlated with bogs (fens) areal coverage.

Bogs and fens also have hydrological similarities, their buffer effect being inversely proportional to water table level (Quinton and Roulet, 1998; Price and Waddington, 2000). In both cases, the buffer effect is related to hydraulic conductivity, which is inversely proportional to depth (Kvaerner and Klove, 2008) but is also variable due to the

compressive-expansive nature of peat (Price and Schlotzhauer, 1999; Kellner and Haldin, 2002; Whittington and Price, 2006; Petrone et al., 2008). The so-called “mire breathing” allows the peat surface to follow the frequent water table rises and drawdowns during summer and fall seasons (Roulet, 1991). Finally, runoff generating processes seem to be different for dry and wet conditions. Low flows are most likely controlled by water table position (Branfireun and Roulet, 1998) and subsurface water storage (Kvaerner and Klove, 2008; Holden and Burt, 2003). High flows occur over land when the acrotelm is saturated, i.e., during high water table spells (Kvaerner and Klove, 2008; Holden and Burt, 2003; Evans, 1999), when moisture storage is high in uplands (Branfireun and Roulet, 1998) and connection between fen ponds is enhanced. Position and fluctuations of water tables are driven by climate conditions and are thus a prime factor in peatland hydrology.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, both subarctic rivers and lakes in Québec were impacted by climatic conditions wetter than in the previous centuries (Bégin, 2001; Payette and Delwaide, 2004; 2000; 1991). On patterned fens, impacts of a high water table over a long period could include formation of new ponds, expansion of existing ponds and reduction of tree population through enhanced mortality (Arlen-Pouliot, 2009). As shown by Dissanska et al. (2009) using remote sensing data, vegetated strings in two of seven studied fens of the La Grande watershed are currently degrading, causing pond coalescence and creation of larger reservoirs. Recent climatic data are coherent and indicate that a probable increase in annual precipitations combined with warmer temperatures (Christensen et al., 2007) is anticipated over northern Québec by the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Hydrological effects of a warmer and wetter climate for mid-latitude Québec are now well documented and results show a consistent pattern, i.e. that an increase in annual runoff is anticipated (Frigon et al., 2007; Dibike and Coulibaly, 2005; Slivitzky et al., 2004; Clair et al., 1998). Uncertainties associated with climatic projections and potential vegetal transformation explains why we focused on watersheds covering a large spectrum of wetness conditions.

The main objective of this study is to compare temporal delays (lags) between moderate and heavy rainfall events and water level in Sphagnum bogs, patterned fens and small

shallow lakes during summer and fall. For the latter two ecosystems, lags between rainfall and runoff responses are also investigated. The second objective is to investigate the main processes driving time lags over wet and dry conditions. Comparing responses of sites over different surface wetness conditions (bogs<fens<lakes) will lead to a better understanding of current peatland hydrology.

## **6.2. Methodology**

### **6.2.1 Study sites**

Seven sites located in two sectors of the La Grande River watershed ( $\approx 100000 \text{ km}^2$ ) were selected for this study: two *Sphagnum* bogs (sites 1 and 2), three patterned fens (sites 3, 4 and 5) and two headwater shallow lakes (sites 6 and 7) (Figure 6.1). They are all located in depressions of the Precambrian Shield. Sites 1, 2 and 3 are located in the western ( $54^\circ\text{N}$ ,  $77^\circ\text{W}$ ), lower (100 m above sea level – a.s.l.) and dryer part of the watershed. Peatlands developed in depressions filled with glacial tills, littoral sands and marine clays (Beaulieu-Audy et al., 2008) following the Tyrrell Sea invasion around 7800BP (Dyke and Prest, 1987), after Wisconsin deglaciation. Sites 4, 5, 6 and 7 are located in the eastern ( $54^\circ\text{N}$ ,  $75^\circ\text{W}$ ), upper (400 m a.s.l.) and wetter portions of the watershed. Peatlands formed in this sector after the collapse of the Laurentide Ice Sheet ca. 8200 BP (Barber et al., 1999). For the western sector (unavailable for eastern sector), long term climate normals of the reference period (1971-2000) are  $-3.1^\circ\text{C}$  for mean annual temperature and 680 mm for mean annual precipitation (Environment Canada, 2008).

Physiographic data characterizing each site were extracted from georeferenced aerial pictures and using a Geographical Information System (GIS). All sites, with the exception of the two bogs, have only one visible outlet and all have drainage areas of the same order of magnitude (Table 6.1). Peat depth vary between 1 and 4 m. Site 5 shows a peculiar topography, with water draining along two opposed slopes, one with an outlet, the other with subsurface runoff. Both bogs have almost no open water surface (respectively 0% and 1% of total area) whereas fens (sites 3, 4 and 5) have an open water surface ratio of respectively 4%, 35% and 35%. Shallow lakes have 100% of open water surface ratio and complete the spectrum of surface wetness conditions.

The vegetation surrounding all sites is composed of mature black spruce (*Picea mariana*)-lichen woodlands in the forested parts of the watersheds (Figure 6.1) that covers between 24% and 71% of watersheds area (Table 6.1). Bog hummocks are covered by small trees (*Picea mariana* and *Larix laricina*), shrubs (*Kalmia polifolia*, *Chamaedaphne calyculata*, *Vaccinium oxycoccus*), mosses (*Sphagnum fuscum* and *S. rubellum*) and lichens whereas hollows are generally covered by sedges and aquatic *Sphagnum* species. Both bogs have the same vegetation cover except that trees in site 1 are more abundant and larger than in site 2. Fen vegetation is composed of small trees (*Picea mariana* and *Larix laricina*), shrubs (*Kalmia polifolia*, *Chamaedaphne calyculata*), sedges and a dense moss carpet with a dominance of brown mosses in hollows and around pools, and several *Sphagnum* species on the strings. Maximum peat thickness is respectively between 1.6 and 2.7 m for fens and 2.5 and 6 m for bogs.

## 6.2.2 Hydrometeorological data

Data from three summers and falls are presented in this paper. The study period was between July 11<sup>th</sup> and October 31<sup>st</sup> for the years 2005, 2006 and 2007. During this period, sites were monitored once cleared from the influence of spring melting until shortly prior to winter freezing. Data were collected during those periods at all sites except for site 7 where data were not recorded between July 11<sup>th</sup> and October 31<sup>st</sup> 2005 and has no runoff data for 2007. A database was then built for precipitation (P), water level (WL) and runoff (Q), all units being in mm/time unit. All data were sampled every 30 seconds by various sensors (see next sections), then integrated into an hourly time step and converted into six-hour time step. Four measures per day were considered a compromise between having enough resolution to study efficiently Q and WL lags while avoid the intrinsic noise in data at very short time scales.

### 6.2.2a Precipitation

Rainfall (P) was measured at each site (except for site 7) with a tipping bucket rain gauge (CS700 or TE525, Campbell scientific). Rain gauges were connected to CR10 and CR10x dataloggers (Campbell Scientific) installed on towers powered by a 12V battery and a 20W solar panel. P underestimation was corrected for sampling error according to

the method of Ducharme and Nadeau (2005), i.e., an increase of 9% for each liquid rainfall event to compensate for gauge undercatch. Because of the physical similitude of their watershed and the small distance between the two sites (less than 2 km), site 7 (no gauge) uses P data measured at site 6.

### **6.2.2b Runoff**

Surface runoff (Q) was calculated by stage-discharge curves made at each site except for sites 1 and 2 (bogs) where there is no outlet. Instantaneous discharges were measured with an integration of water velocities measured at a wetted cross-section of the outlet, near the stilling well and using a flowmeter (Marsh-McBirney flowmate 2000). WL at each outlet were measured continuously with a hydrostatic pressure gauge (Levelogger model 3001, Solinst) located in a stilling well (an L-shape PVC pipe) installed on the bank of each outlet. Because WL levels are influenced by barometric pressure, the recorded WL were corrected using *in situ* linear regression between data from a Barologger (Solinst) and another barometric pressure gauge located in the nearby meteorological tower (61205V, R.M. Young). The uses of regressions were required because the Barologger were affected by frost during winter months of 2005-2006. Data for regression ( $R^2$  of at least 0.97) were collected over a two-month period in summer of 2005 and ranged from 935 to 1015 hPa. In order to be comparable with P and WL data, discharge data (L/6h) were converted into specific runoff (mm/6h).

### **6.2.2c Water level**

*In situ* groundwater level (WL) was measured in peatlands with wells equipped with hydrostatic pressure gauges (Levelogger, Solinst) and corrected for barometric fluctuations using the aforementioned methods (section 6.2.2b). Wells were long pierced PVC pipes installed in the peat matrix until they reach the mineral substrate (except site 2 where peat matrix was too thick ( $\approx 4$  m)). Prior to installation, wells were inserted in nylon stockings to prevent peat particles from filling up the pipes. Pressure gauges were thereafter suspended near the bottom of the pipes using a tin wire attached to the cap. Lake levels were monitored using the same pressure gauges but anchored on a concrete block at the bottom of the lake, at approximately 1.5 m depth.

### **6.2.3 Rainfall events and lags definition**

Isolating rainfall events from P time series was the first step toward the comparison of hydrological lags on bogs, fens and lakes. In order to separately study moderate from heavy rainfall events, we defined two classes of P: “moderate” events with between 5 and 10 mm ( $P_{mod}$ ) and “heavy” rainfall events, with more than 10 mm ( $P_{heavy}$ ). Other classifications have been tested but this one provides (1) a sound hydrological meaning, the reaction to rainfall events lesser than 5 mm being indeed harder to identify and (2) a sufficiently large sample of events at each site (Table 6.2).

After the sampling of P events, Q and WL lags were calculated as the time between the rainfall peak and the next runoff peak. The positions of peaks were identified using the inflection points in both WL and Q time series, i.e., when the slope changed from positive to negative. The positions of peaks were also used to calculate WL variations, the difference between WL at peak and at the moment when P occurred (Figure 6.2).

### **6.2.4 Statistical analysis**

In the investigation of potential differences in WL and Q lags as well as the WL variation following P, the null hypothesis of equality of statistics of central tendency was verified. All samples were tested for normality using the Lilliefors Test and most of them were found to be non-normal. The hypothesis of equality of medians was therefore verified using the Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA, which is a non-parametric version of the one-way analysis of variance. This test uses the ranks of the data values rather than the ratio of intra-site to inter-site variance used in the ANOVA. The test statistic is compared to a critical Chi-squared theoretical value for a given confidence level ( $\alpha = 0.05$  in the present study). When Kruskal-Wallis showed significant differences between sites, we used an *a posteriori* test (Tukey-Kramer) to identify which sites differ within the group. This test is also based on mean ranks rather than data values.

In the second part, stepwise regression was used to find which hydrological variables can explained the length of time lags and the amplitude of WL variations. Seven variables related to water budget terms (WL, Q, P) were identified (descriptions in Table 6.3):

water level and water level phase, runoff phase, and total rainfall for the event as well as previous days (1, 2 and 3 days ago). Goodness of fits and performance in prediction were respectively evaluated using the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) and root mean square error (RMSE).

## 6.3 Results

### 6.3.1 Intersite comparison

Before analysing time lags specifically, we present an overview of the meteorological conditions that prevailed during the study period, covering mid-July to end of October of 2005 to 2007. Variable moisture conditions prevailed during the study period, as shown by total amounts of precipitations (Table 6.2). The climatic normal recorded at the LG2 airport station ( $53^{\circ}38'N$ ,  $77^{\circ}42'W$ ) (Environnement Canada, 2008) for July to October is 358 mm. 2006 was the driest year with P ranging from 239 to 433 mm. 2007 was the wettest year with P totals between 485 and 649 mm. 2005 was closer to normal with P ranging from 309 to 589 mm. In all years, sites from the western sector of the watershed (sites 1-2-3) received systematically less precipitations than those located in the eastern part (sites 4-5-6-7). Intuitively, the number of  $P_{mod}$  and  $P_{heavy}$  rainfall events each year is closely related to the total P amount over the period that is also closely related to the number of P events that occurred over dry and wet conditions. For example, most rainfall events in 2006, the driest year, happened during dry conditions and vice versa for 2007. Overall, the number of  $P_{mod}$  events for sites 1 to 7 was respectively 40, 39, 43, 50, 53, 64 and 53 whereas the number of  $P_{heavy}$  events was 21, 28, 32, 30, 45, 37 and 37.

Figures 6.3 to 6.8 show the boxplots of each WL and Q time lag as well as WL variations for  $P_{mod}$  and  $P_{heavy}$ . Each figure includes mean values, results of the Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA with their respective  $\chi^2$  and p-values statistics and Tukey-Kramer results. Exponents next to the mean values refer to site numbers that are significantly different. Even if the Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA tests the equality of medians (red lines in box plots), means are also showed in Figures 6.3 to 6.8 since they provide a greater precision than medians considering the few time lags values that are possible when working with six-hour time step data. Results of the *a posteriori* test of time lags of WL following  $P_{heavy}$

(Fig. 6.3) show that there are some significant differences between sites. Bogs (sites 1 and 2) and site 5 (mean time lags of 9.7, 9.0 and 7.3 hours, respectively) display a quicker rise in WL following  $P_{heavy}$  than the two other fens (sites 3 and 4) and the two lakes (sites 6 and 7) (respective mean time lags of 12.6, 14.8, 17.8 and 18.0 hours, respectively). Besides having a quicker response, it also appears that these sites have less variation in time lags between each heavy rainfall event as shown by the height (inter-quartile range) of the boxes. Finally, except for site 5, all sites showed a gradient of time lags that follows roughly the surface wetness percentage. For  $P_{mod}$  (Fig. 6.4), the pattern is similar but without significant differences. Bogs once again having the quickest WL rises (mean time lags of 9.9 and 9.4 hours, respectively) compared to fens and lakes that have a similar behaviour (mean time lags of sites 3 to 7 of 12.0, 14.8, 14.3, 14.8 and 12.0 hours, respectively). Once again, WL rises of bogs have less variability.

Similarly, inter-site comparison of time lags of Q following  $P_{heavy}$  (Fig. 6.5) show significant results. Because bogs lack surface runoff, they are absent from Figures 6.5 and 6.6. Contrary to WL time lags, lags between Q and  $P_{heavy}$  are smaller for lakes (mean time lags of 17.5 and 12.4 hours, respectively) when compared to fens (mean time lags of 22.3, 22.8 and 23.7 hours, respectively), sites 3 and 5 being significantly different from site 7. Sites showed time lags to be inversely proportional to the surface wetness percentage. For  $P_{mod}$  (Fig. 6.6), the pattern is quite the same but with even sharper differences. Lakes (mean time lags of 17.6 and 10.6 hours, respectively) are this time all significantly quicker to respond to rainfall than fens are (mean time lags of 24.8, 27.5 and 39.2 hours, respectively).

Finally, WL variations following  $P_{heavy}$  (Fig. 6.7) also show significant differences. Sites 1, 3 and 4 had the highest amplitude of WL variations with mean values of 54.8, 84.7 and 45.9 mm, respectively, whereas sites 2, 6 and 7 had lower values of 26.2, 26.2 and 20.2 mm, respectively. Site 5 had the lowest WL variations with 11.7 mm as mean value and also showed the least variable response to  $P_{heavy}$ . WL variations to  $P_{mod}$  (Fig. 6.8) also had significant differences and showed a similar pattern as for  $P_{heavy}$  but with lower WL variations, which is expected, considering that rainfall events were also lower than for  $P_{heavy}$ . Once again, sites 1, 3 and 4 had the highest amplitude of WL variations with

respectively mean values of 24.4, 36.8 and 25.4 mm whereas sites 2, 6 and 7 had lower values of 16.6, 15.9 and 12.3 mm respectively. In Figure 6.8, even if site 3 seems to be less variable than sites 1, 2, 4 and 6, it had the highest mean value due to some very high rises. Site 5 had the lowest WL variations with 7.2 mm as mean value and this site had also the least variable response to  $P_{heavy}$ . For both  $P_{heavy}$  and  $P_{mod}$ , the relation between WL variations and surface open water percentage is less evident than for time lags. For  $P_{heavy}$ , it seems that WL variation is inversely proportional to open water percentage, for  $P_{mod}$ , the relation is less obvious but present.

For all data showed in Figures 6.3 to 6.8, and except for open water areal fraction, it seems that no clear linear relationships exists between watersheds physical features of Table 6.1 (total area, distance from WL gauges to outlets, number of ponds between WL gauges and outlets and finally fraction of uplands) and studied hydrological reactions. For all data contained in Figure 6.3 to 6.8, inter-site comparisons were also attempted but with a previous splitting of data in two subsamples (wet and dry initial conditions). The separation of P events in subsamples was made according the position of WL at the moment they happened. When P event happened with WL under (over) the mean value of the study period, we considered it happened under dry (wet) conditions. Results of Kruskall-Wallis and Tukey-Kramer tests are very similar to those obtained from full samples; they are therefore not shown here.

### **6.3.2 Can we explain and/or predict time lags and WL variations?**

Considering the large amount of studied variables, i.e., 7 sites x 3 variables (Q and WL time lags and amplitude of WL variations) x 4 conditions (classes of P and wet/dry state), no single and all-encompassing regression model could be developed. Site-specific results are therefore presented. Bogs, fens and lakes were respectively represented by site 1, 4 and 6 and their results are globally coherent to those from sites that are not shown. Sites 4 and 6 were also selected because they are known to have the better rating curves than sites 3, 5 and 7. WL and Q time lags and amplitude of WL variations are shown in Tables 6.4 to 6.6, respectively.

Concerning WL time lags (Table 6.4) and for site 1 (bog), the four models (wetness condition x P classes) explain between 0.12 and 0.99 of the variance of time lags and the RMSE is between 0.27 and 1.64 time steps (6 hours). Under dry conditions, the amount of P in the previous days explain WL time lags for both  $P_{mod}$  and  $P_{heavy}$ , the latter also being explained by initial water level. Under wet conditions, water level is the main explicative variable but WL time lags in  $P_{heavy}$  conditions are also explained by water level phase and rainfall of the event. For site 4 (fen), the four models explain between 0.19 and 0.99 of the variance of time lags and the RMSE is between 0.26 and 1.46 time steps. Under dry conditions, water level, the amount of P in the previous two or three days and both water level and runoff phases explain  $P_{mod}$  and  $P_{heavy}$ . Under wet conditions, water level and water level phase explains  $P_{mod}$  but  $P_{heavy}$  time lags are only explained by total amount of P in the previous three days. Finally, for site 6 (lake), the three models (no model for  $P_{mod}$  in wet conditions) explain between 0.12 and 0.52 of the variance of time lags and the RMSE is between 1.54 and 2.29 time steps. Under dry conditions, water level phase explain  $P_{mod}$  whereas  $P_{heavy}$  is explained by the amount of P in the previous three days. Under wet conditions, water level phase, rainfall of the event and P in the previous day explains  $P_{heavy}$  time lags.

Concerning Q time lags (Table 6.5) for site 4 (fen), no significant model was found to explain runoff time lags under dry conditions. Under wet conditions, the two models explain 0.20 and 0.50 of the variance of time lags and the RMSE is 1.83 and 2.51 time steps (6 hours). Water level explain  $P_{mod}$  but  $P_{heavy}$  time lags are explained by total amount of P in the previous two and three days. For site 6 (lake), no model can explain runoff time lags of  $P_{mod}$ . The two models for  $P_{heavy}$  explain 0.22 and 0.43 of the variance of time lags and the RMSE is 1.79 and 2.48 time steps. Under dry conditions, water level phase explain  $P_{mod}$  whereas  $P_{heavy}$  is explained by the amount of P in the previous three days. In wet conditions, water level phase, rainfall of the event and in the previous day explains  $P_{heavy}$  time lags.

Concerning amplitude of the WL variations (Table 6.6) for site 1 (bog), the four models (wetness condition x P classes) explain between 0.31 and 0.99 of the variance of WL variations and the RMSE is between 1.5 and 20.2 mm. Under dry conditions, rainfall of

the event and the amount of P in the previous days explains both  $P_{mod}$  and  $P_{heavy}$ , the latter being also explained by water level and water level phase. Under wet conditions, water level is the main independent variable but WL variations following  $P_{mod}$  are also explained by rainfall of the event. For site 4 (fen), the four models explain between 0.16 and 0.93 of the variance of WL variations and the RMSE is between 15.1 and 32.8 mm. In dry conditions, WL variations in both  $P_{mod}$  and  $P_{heavy}$  conditions are explained by rainfall amount during the event but also respectively by initial water level and amount of P in the previous two and three days. Under wet conditions, initial water level explains WL variations for  $P_{mod}$  and the rainfall amount of the event explains WL variations for  $P_{heavy}$ . Finally, for site 6 (lake), no model can explain amplitude of WL variations for  $P_{mod}$  conditions. The two models for  $P_{heavy}$  explain 0.36 and 0.42 of the variance of WL variations and the RMSE is 12.8 and 24.3 mm. WL variations associated with  $P_{heavy}$  are explained by water level phase and rainfall of the event under dry conditions but by the amount of P in the previous three days under wet conditions.

#### **6.4 Discussion**

This study provides new insights to boreal peatlands hydrology. More specifically, it focused on providing: (1) a comparative approach of different boreal typical ecosystems, (2) insights on the hydrological behaviour of peatlands from a under-studied area, and finally, (3) some initial insights to the potential future responses of peatlands and lakes, given the fact that the La Grande River basin is expected to become more humid in the future (Frigon et al., 2007; Christensen et al., 2007).

Hydrological behaviour of a specific site is different according to its position on an open water spectrum made of three representative ecosystems of the boreal biome: bogs, fens and lakes. Except for open water areal fraction, it seems that no clear linear relationship exists between other physical features of watersheds (total area, distance from WL gauges to outlets, number of ponds in a straight line between WL gauges and outlets as well as fraction of uplands (Table 6.1)) and the studied hydrological responses. This may be an artifact associated with the small number of sites and replicates but probably also because sites were selected for their physiographical homogeneity.

WL time lags following  $P_{mod}$  show that bogs have the quickest WL rises, followed by fens and lakes, the latter two responding similarly. Concerning  $P_{heavy}$  events, the pattern is similar, once again with bogs being the quickest to rise. Two of the three studied fens show an intermediate behaviour between bogs and lakes, the later having the slowest WL rises. Results from WL time lags are interesting but those from Q time lags are still better and clearer. For both  $P_{mod}$  and  $P_{heavy}$ , results clearly show that delays between rainfall events and following runoff peaks is significantly shorter for lakes than for fens, roughly twice quicker (fig. 6.4 and 6.5), the vegetation structure of fens acting as a cascade of partially interconnected reservoirs (always connected in subsurface but intermittantly in surface) and thus producing interference in the surface runoff generation processes. Our results confirm the runoff delaying capacities of fens (Kvearner and Klove, 2008; Holden and Burt, 2003), especially under dry conditions or during moderate rainfall events, when pond/string interference is maximized.

Results from amplitude of WL variations following rainfall events show a similar pattern than WL time lags, i.e. the amplitude is inversely proportional to general wetness conditions, the open water areal fraction being in close relation with the effective porosity of the total surface layer. The difference between sites is small for moderate rainfall events ( $5 < P < 10$  mm) but more important for heavier events ( $P > 10$  mm). Site 5 seems to react differently from the two other fens, probably because of its unique topography with two opposed slopes. Comparing the amplitude of Q variations following rainfall events could also have been of great interest but the small number of high flow measurements in the stage-discharge curves leads to a relatively large error in peak flow estimation, thereby rendering this analysis highly uncertain. This overestimation does not influence the timing of peaks but only its amplitude.

When we look at WL and Q time lags simultaneously with amplitude of WL variations, we can see that the general pattern (mean values) of WL time lags and amplitude of WL variations is contrary to Q time lags, which is an intuitive observation. Since lakes evacuate rainfall water quickly, the associated WL rise is minimal, and vice versa for fens. Due to the absence of open water and surface runoff in bogs, WL rises are therefore quicker and with greater amplitude than both fens and lakes; subsurface runoff being a

slower process than surface runoff. The buffer effect of peatlands is not only inversely proportionnal to water table (Quinton and Roulet, 1998; Price and Waddington, 2000) but also to general surface wetness conditions (surface area of open water).

Relatively simple variables can explain both WL and Q time lags and amplitude of WL variations. The best predictors concerning WL time lags are initial WL and its phase for  $P_{mod}$ . For  $P_{heavy}$ , initial WL and P amounts are the most relevant predictors. From an initial condition point of view, length of time lags is driven mainly by WL and amount of P in the previous days under dry condition whereas it is driven by water level phase and immediate P under wet conditions. From an ecosystem point of view, our results are not systematic but nonetheless suggest that bogs WL time lags are influence by WL and P whereas fens are influenced by WL, its phase and P of the previous days. Lakes are influenced by water level phase and immediate P. Those results are complementary and coherent with WL time lags length analysis. Q time lag regressions are less conclusive, especially under dry conditions and for  $P_{mod}$  where several models were not statistically significant. For  $P_{heavy}$  and wet conditions, WL and P in the previous days are the main predictors. Unfortunately, the distinction of predictors between fens and lakes is difficult to make with our dataset, even if we now know that Q time lags are much quicker for lakes. The amplitude of WL variations following rainfall can also be relatively well explained and predicted. Results are similar for  $P_{mod}$  and  $P_{heavy}$ ; WL and immediate P being the overall dominant variables. All ecosystems seem to be especially sensitive to immediate P under dry conditions whereas WL seems to be the key factor under wet conditions.

Most studies trying to explain which hydrometeorological variables generate high or low flows used an *a posteriori* approach that by definition cannot be used in a predictive model (Kvaerner and Klove, 2008; Emili and Price, 2006, Holden and Burt, 2003; Evans, 1999). Our predictive approach using simple hydrometeorological variables is original and allows us to anticipate post-rainfall hydrological responses of small watersheds of various boreal ecosystems in a promising way that can be strengthen with longer time series and additional sites.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

The main conclusions of our analysis of water level and runoff time lags following summer and fall rainfall events of seven sites covering a large spectrum of open water conditions are as follows: (i) The mean response time of water level is inversely proportional to the open water areal fraction of sites, bogs being quicker to rise than fens and finally than lakes. (ii) Meanwhile, the mean response time of runoff is inversely proportional to the open water areal fraction, lakes being quicker to runoff than fens. This suggests a form of hydrological inertia in fens that is absent in lakes. In the optic of optimising their hydrological forecasts, or at least making them closer to field reality, modellers should therefore try to introduce this hydrological inertia of peatlands into the water routing scheme and model calibration. This introduction could be done through parameters related to horizontal transfer of water or through a capacity increase of reservoirs generating intermediate and surface runoff.

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Table 6.1: Physiographic characteristics of study sites.

	Site 1	Site 2	Site 3	Site 4	Site 5	Site 6	Site 7
ecosystem	bog	bog	fen	fen	fen	lake	lake
watershed area (m <sup>2</sup> )	21300	154600	217100	40500	64500	77700	89300
bog/fen/lake area (m <sup>2</sup> )	6100	117100	76200	14200	27600	36900	28600
fraction of watershed occupied by uplands (%)	71%	24%	65%	65%	57%	53%	68%
open water area (m <sup>2</sup> )	0	150	2900	4900	9600	36900	28600
fraction of bog/fen/lake occupied by open water (%)	0%	1%	4%	35%	35%	100%	100%
distance between WL gauge and outlet (m)	n/a	n/a	185	55	165	20	20
number of ponds between WL gauge and outlet	n/a	n/a	11	0	19	0	0

Table 6.2: Number of moderate and heavy rainfall events during the study period. Parentheses contain the number of events that occurred during dry and wet conditions. Asterisks next to P values of site 7 refer to a slightly shorter study period in 2005.

		Site 1	Site 2	Site 3	Site 4	Site 5	Site 6	Site 7
2005	Total P (mm)	375	309	408	472	589	559	334*
	moderate event	14 (5/9)	14 (8/6)	16 (8/8)	19 (2/17)	24 (0/24)	25 (0/25)	18 (13/5)
	heavy event	9 (4/5)	6 (1/5)	10 (6/4)	12 (1/11)	15 (1/14)	12 (0/12)	7 (6/1)
2006	Total P (mm)	239	278	252	290	394	433	433
	moderate event	7 (5/2)	11 (7/4)	11 (10/1)	12 (12/0)	10 (6/4)	15 (15/0)	16 (12/4)
	heavy event	2 (2/0)	6 (3/3)	4 (4/0)	4 (2/2)	10 (6/4)	9 (9/0)	10 (5/5)
2007	Total P (mm)	485	551	621	581	649	649	649
	moderate event	19 (1/18)	14 (2/12)	16 (4/12)	19 (6/13)	19 (7/12)	24 (19/5)	19 (1/18)
	heavy event	10 (0/10)	16 (2/14)	18 (4/14)	14 (3/11)	20 (6/14)	16 (16/0)	20 (0/20)

Table 6.3: Hydrological variables used in stepwise regressions.

Variables	Symbols	Descriptions
water level	wl	<i>In situ</i> water level from stilling well (mm).
water level phase	wlph	<i>In situ</i> water level variation between the moment of rainfall event ( $T_0$ ) and the previous time step ( $T_{-1}$ ) (mm).
runoff phase	qph	Runoff variation between the moment of rainfall event ( $T_0$ ) and the previous time step ( $T_{-1}$ ) (mm).
rainfall of the event	p0	Amount of P in the rainfall event at $T_0$ (mm).
rainfall 1 day	p1	Amount of P for the day prior to the rainfall event (mm).
rainfall 2 days	p2	Amount of P 2 days prior to the rainfall event (mm).
rainfall 3 days	p3	Amount of P 3 days prior to the rainfall event (mm).

Table 6.4: Results of stepwise regression modeling of time lags between rainfall events and next water level peak using subsamples of events happening over dry and wet conditions.

site	condition	n	P <sub>moderate</sub> (5<P<10 mm)			P <sub>heavy</sub> (P>10 mm)		
			variables	R <sup>2</sup>	RMSE (6h)	n	variables	R <sup>2</sup>
1 (bog)	wet	29	wl	0.12*	1.09	15	wl,wlph,p0	0.54
	dry	11	p1,p2	0.67	1.64	6	wl,p2,p3	0.99
4 (fen)	wet	30	wl,wlph	0.33	1.46	24	p3	0.19
	dry	20	wl,wlph,p2	0.46	1.11	6	wl,qph,p3	0.99
6 (lake)	wet	30		n/a		12	wlph,p0,p1	0.52*
	dry	33	wlph	0.12	1.54	25	p3	0.13*

n/a means no significant model, \* means significant at 10%, otherwise significant at 5%.

Table 6.5: Results of stepwise regression modeling of time lags between rainfall events and next runoff peak using subsamples of events happening over dry and wet conditions.

site	condition	n	P <sub>moderate</sub> (5<P<10 mm)			P <sub>heavy</sub> (P>10 mm)		
			variables	R <sup>2</sup>	RMSE	n	variables	R <sup>2</sup>
4 (fen)	wet	30	wl	0.2	2.51	24	p2,p3	0.5
	dry	20		n/a		6		n/a
6 (lake)	wet	30		n/a		12	p0,p2	0.43*
	dry	33		n/a		25	wl,p3	0.22*

n/a means no significant model, \* means significant at 10%, otherwise significant at 5%.

Table 6.6: Results of stepwise regression modeling amplitude of WL variations between rainfall events and next WL peak using subsamples of events happening over dry and wet conditions.

site	condition	P <sub>moderate</sub> (5<P<10 mm)				P <sub>heavy</sub> (P>10 mm)			
		n	variables	R <sup>2</sup>	RMSE (mm)	n	variables	R <sup>2</sup>	RMSE (mm)
1 (bog)	wet	29	wl,p0	0.31	20.2	15	wl	0.93	10.9
	dry	11	p0,p1,p2	0.92	16.4	6	wl,wlph,p0,p3	0.99	1.5
4 (fen)	wet	30	wl	0.16	23.3	24	p0	0.4	30.3
	dry	20	wl,p0	0.35	32.8	6	p0,p2,p3	0.93*	15.1
6 (lake)	wet	30		n/a		12	p3	0.42	12.8
	dry	33		n/a		25	wlph,p0	0.36	24.3

n/a means no significant model, \* means significant at 10%, otherwise significant at 5%.

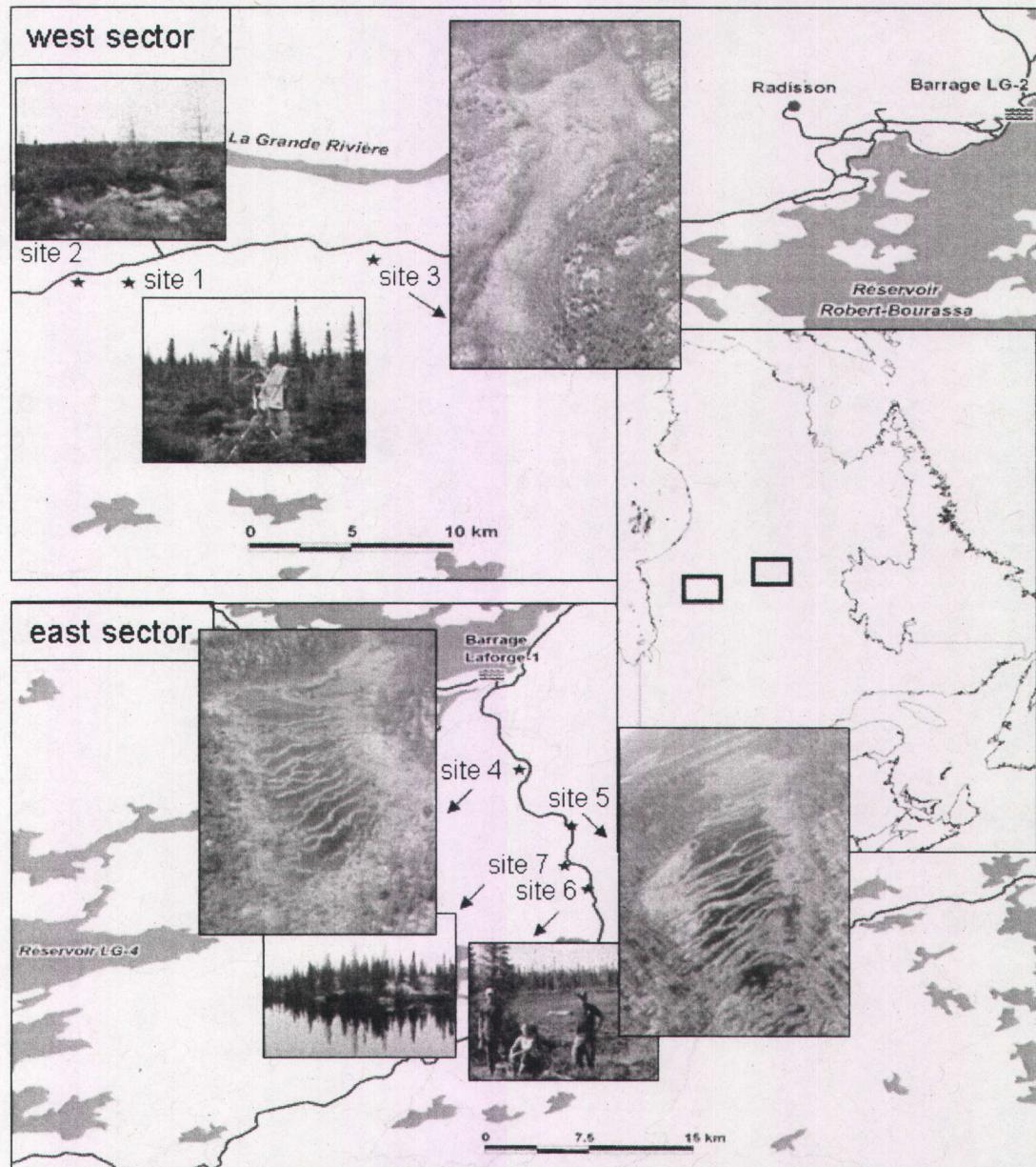
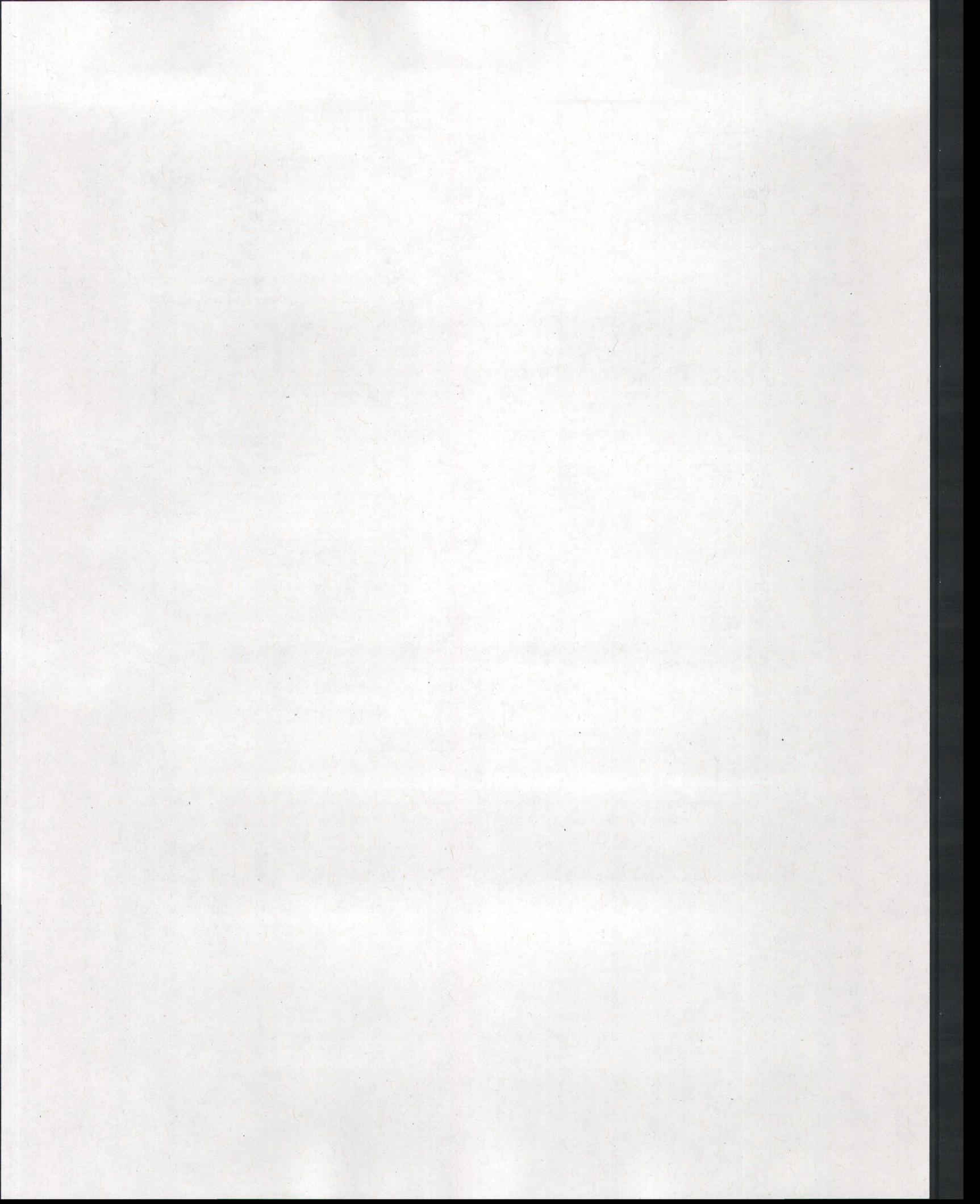


Figure 6.1: Location and pictures of the study sites. Sites 1, 2 and 3 are in the western sector of the La Grande River basin ( $54^{\circ}\text{N } 77^{\circ}\text{W}$ ) whereas sites 4, 5, 6 and 7 are in the eastern sector ( $54^{\circ}\text{N } 75^{\circ}\text{W}$ ). For sites 3, 4 and 5, the outlet is visible at the upper part of the pictures.



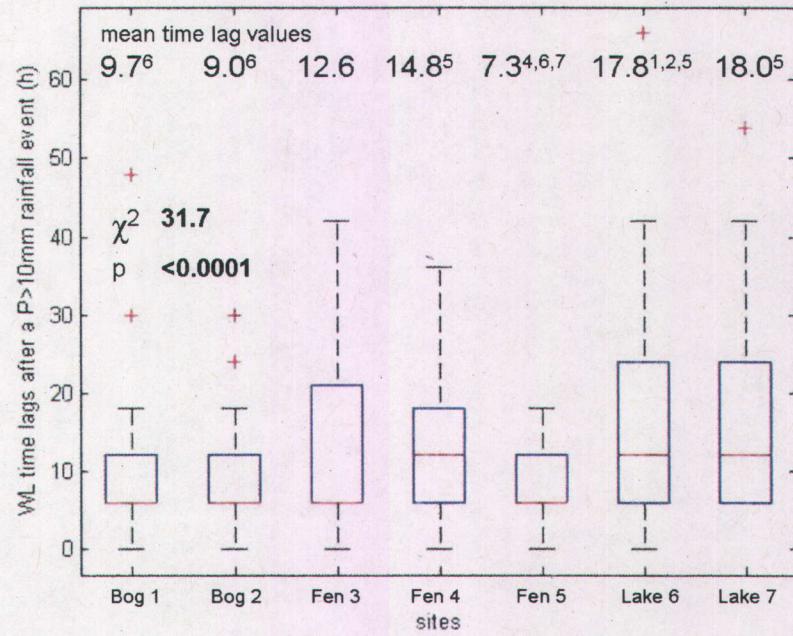


Figure 6.3: Boxplots of water level (WL) lags (h) following heavy rainfall ( $P>10\text{mm}$ ). Bold means significant differences whereas exponents indicate sites that are significantly different.

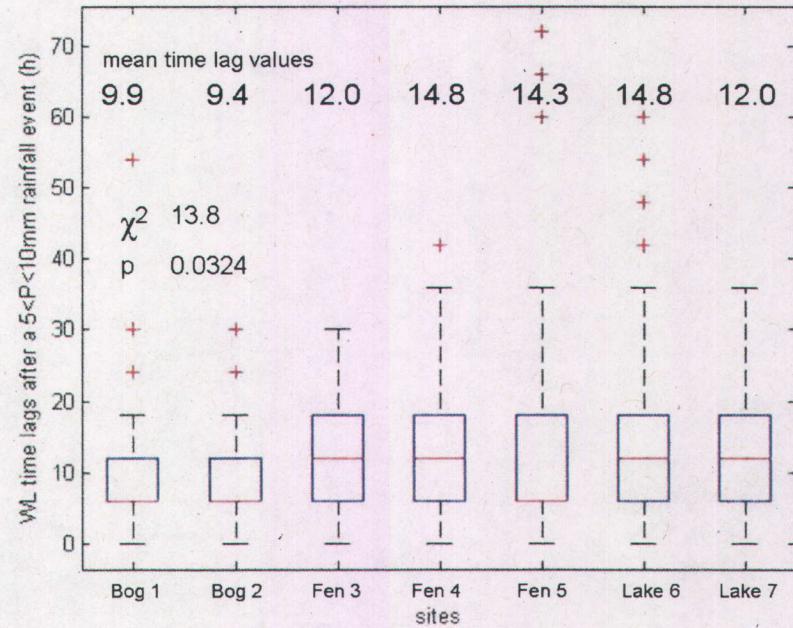
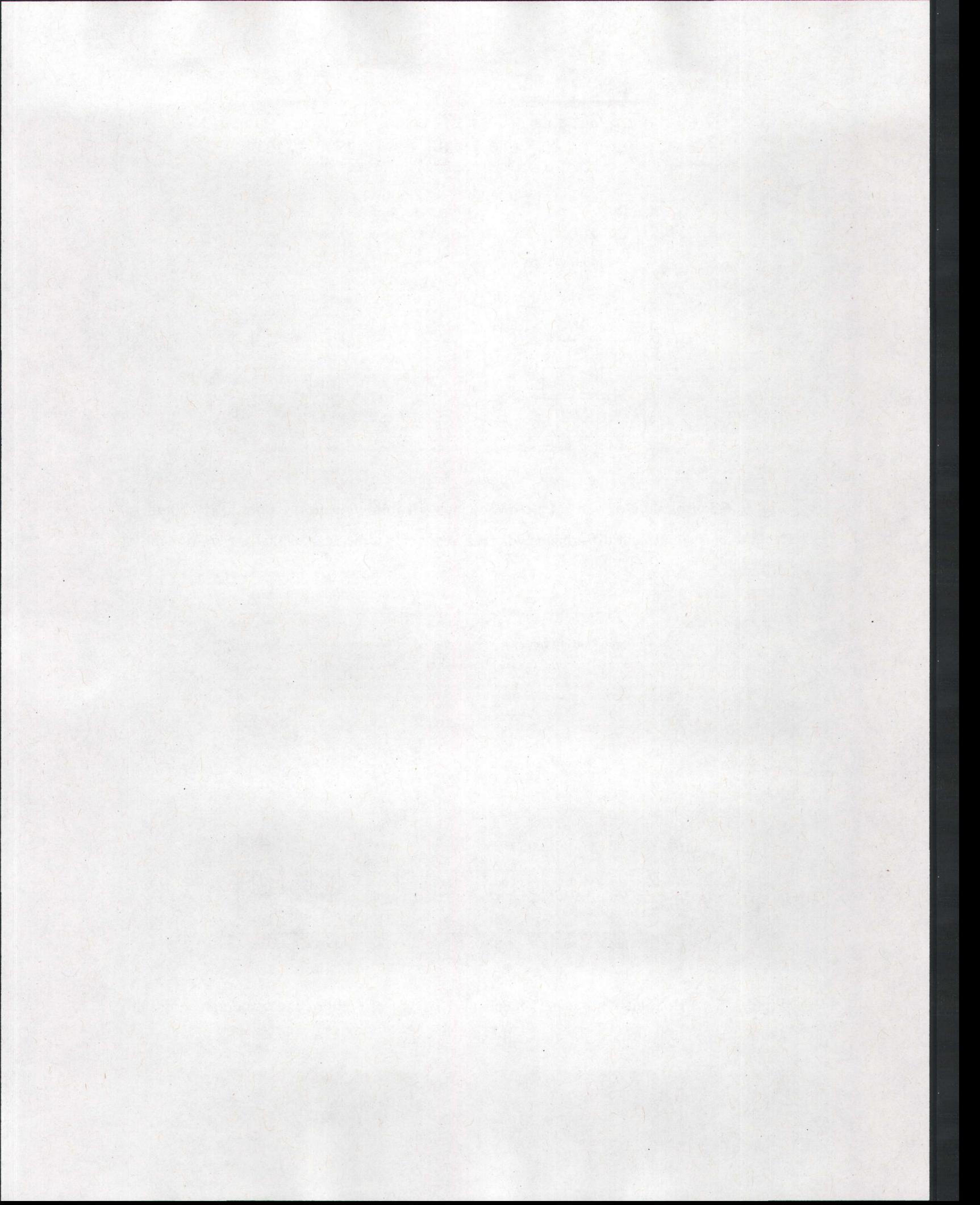


Figure 6.4: Boxplots of water level (WL) lags (h) following moderate rainfall ( $5 < P < 10\text{mm}$ ). Results are not statistically significant.



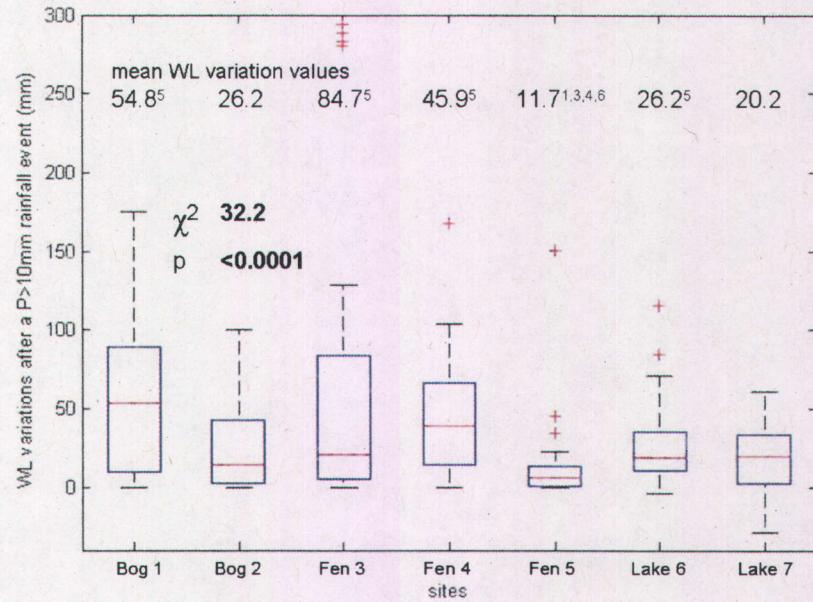


Figure 6.7: Boxplots of water level (WL) variations following heavy rainfall ( $P>10\text{mm}$ ). Bold means significant differences whereas exponents indicate sites that are significantly different.

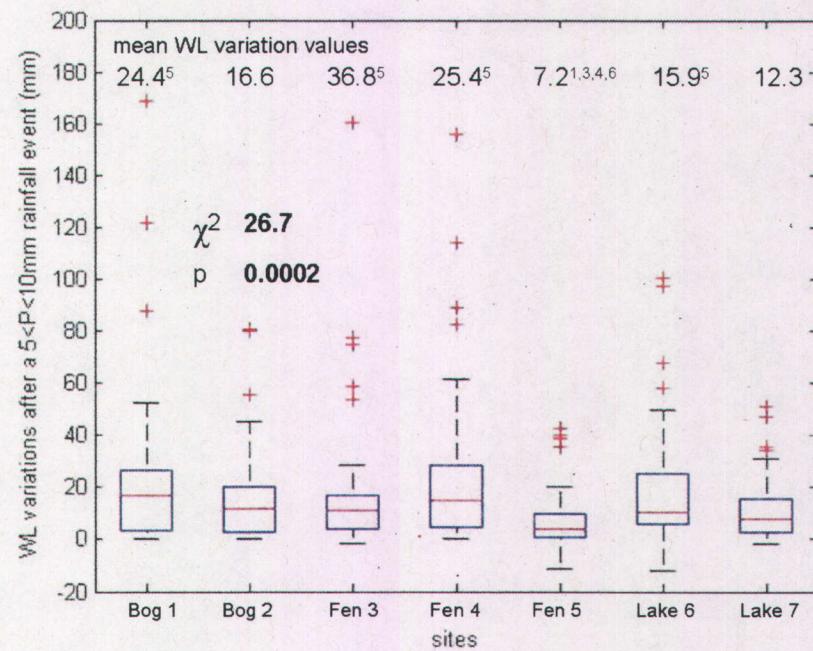
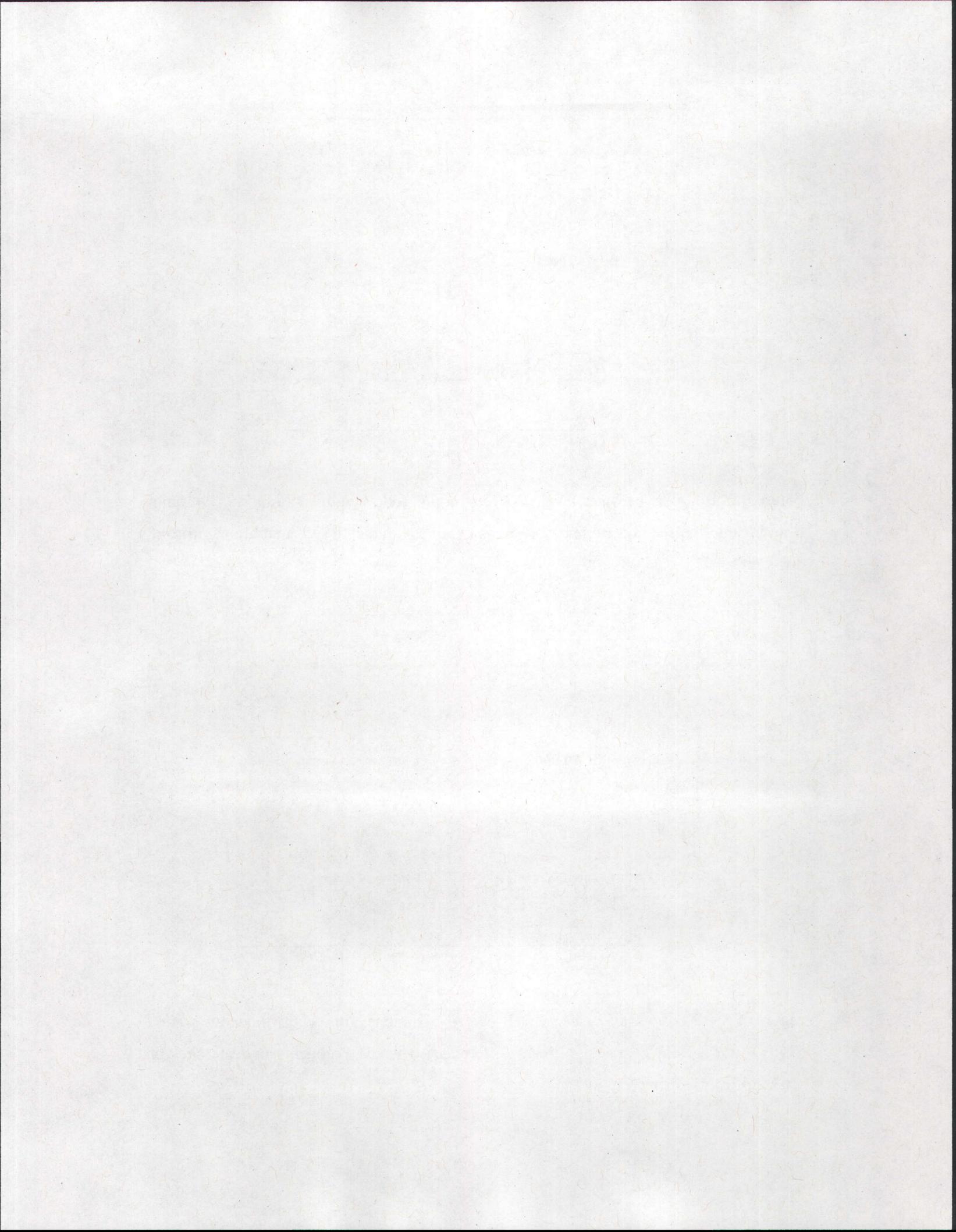


Figure 6.8: Boxplots of water level (WL) variations following moderate rainfall ( $5 < P < 10\text{mm}$ ). Bold means significant differences whereas exponents indicate sites that are significantly different.



## **Chapitre 7: Conclusion de la thèse**

L'objectif général de cette thèse était de comparer le fonctionnement hydrologique de TO, de TM et de lacs peu profonds de la région de la rivière La Grande. Pour ce faire, sept petits bassins choisis pour représenter différentes proportions de surface d'eau libre ont été suivis durant trois étés et trois automnes, de mi-juillet à fin octobre. Un tel choix de sites a été considéré comme un bon moyen pour simuler différentes conditions d'aqualyse et de faire une première inférence qualitative des impacts éventuels des changements climatiques dans une étude comparative. Les données obtenues ont permis d'acquérir une meilleure compréhension de leur fonctionnement hydrologique de même que de dégager certaines avenues potentielles pour l'intégration des tourbières dans les modèles d'apports. Les travaux effectués dans le cadre des trois articles contenus dans cette thèse (chapitres 4 à 6) ont permis d'atteindre à divers degrés (ci-dessous) les objectifs spécifiques précédemment formulés (section 2.5).

Produire des bilans annuels était un objectif initial qui n'a pu être réalisé compte tenu de l'incertitude des courbes de tarage qui amenaient une surestimation du ruissellement lors des événements de crue. Par contre, l'étude de bilans hydrologiques aux pas de temps saisonnier et événementiel a permis d'évaluer la variabilité spatio-temporelle des termes du bilan. Les années 2005 à 2007 ont montré des conditions de précipitations variées, i.e. sous les normales pour 2006, près des normales pour 2005 et au-dessus des normales pour 2007. Malgré ces conditions variations annuelles importantes au niveau des précipitations, l'évapotranspiration restait cependant beaucoup plus uniforme. Il s'est avéré que l'année sèche (humide) fut celle ayant les plus forts (faibles) totaux d'évapotranspiration. Au niveau spatial les sites du secteur Est du bassin de la rivière La Grande ont toujours reçu plus de précipitations et subi plus d'évapotranspiration que ceux du secteur Ouest. L'altitude et la fraction superficielle d'eau libre expliquent respectivement les différences spatiales de précipitations et d'évapotranspiration. Comme on s'y attendait, la variabilité temporelle saisonnière de l'écoulement est directement reliée au total de précipitations. À plus court terme cependant, la variabilité de l'écoulement est plus tributaire du type d'écosystème que du total de précipitations. En

excluant les TO qui ne produisent du ruissellement de surface qu'en cas de conditions humides extrêmes, les lacs montrent une plus grande stabilité d'écoulement que les TM. Par stabilité, il est entendu que les lacs produisent moins d'épisodes d'écoulement de fortes amplitudes que les TM, i.e. qu'ils produisent des variations d'écoulement plus fréquentes mais de faible durée et amplitude, par opposition aux TM qui réagissent moins souvent mais de façon plus marquée et plus durable. En excluant la percolation vers la nappe régionale et l'écoulement hypodermique dans la matrice tourbeuse, les TM sont parfois complètement déconnectées du réseau de drainage alors que leur ruissellement de surface cesse complètement. Par contre, le ruissellement de surface est plus important lors d'événements très humides. Sur l'ensemble de la période étudiée et pour les trois années, le total écoulé des TM fut supérieur à celui des lacs. L'analyse de la forme des hydrogrammes lors d'épisodes d'écoulement a aussi montré qu'il existait des différences significatives entre les lacs et les TM. Les statistiques de forme des lacs ont systématiquement montré des valeurs similaires tandis que les TM avaient tendance à avoir des valeurs de statistiques plus variables, ressemblant tantôt aux lacs, tantôt à l'autre TM. Au niveau du total d'évapotranspiration, ce sont les lacs qui évaporent le plus, suivis de façon assez similaire par les TM et les TO. Au niveau du stockage et de par la grande capacité de rétention de leur couvert végétal, les TO ont montré qu'elles subissaient les plus grandes variations au pas de temps événementiel, celles-ci n'ayant pas de ruissellement de surface pour évacuer le surplus d'eau apporté lors d'épisodes de pluie.

Les différentes analyses ont aussi montré la grande importance de l'état initial des trois types d'écosystèmes par rapport à leurs réponses hydrologiques. Lors de pluies fortes en conditions sèches, les TO ont subi d'importantes hausses de stockage par rapport aux TM et aux lacs qui canalisent une partie des précipitations directement en écoulement. Lors de pluies intenses en conditions humides par contre, les TO étaient déjà saturées, n'ont pu stocker l'arrivée de nouvelle eau et ont donc dû l'évacuer par écoulement hypodermique. Durant ces mêmes pluies, la situation a été semblable sur les TM et les lacs qui ont subi d'importantes montées d'écoulement combinées à de marginales hausses de stockage. La modélisation des temps de réponse de la montée de la nappe et de l'écoulement suite à des événements de pluies modérées et fortes a fait ressortir, dans plusieurs cas, le niveau

de la nappe comme variable explicative. La phase de recharge/décharge, la quantité de pluie immédiate et le cumul de pluie lors des jours précédents sont les autres principales variables explicatives permettant de prévoir les délais de réponse des TO, des TM et des lacs. Finalement, la relation entre le niveau de la nappe sur le site et le ruissellement à l'exutoire montre une tendance quasi-linéaire pour les lacs. Les TM par contre ont cette même relation similaire aux lacs en conditions sèches mais beaucoup plus variable en conditions humides, suggérant une complexité plus grande des processus impliqués alors que les lacs sont toujours plus synchrones.

L'analyse du temps de réponse des sites selon deux intensités d'événements de pluie a montré que le délai entre la pluie et la pointe de la montée de la nappe est proportionnel à la fraction superficielle d'eau de surface, les TO réagissant plus vite que les TM et les lacs. Concernant le temps de réponse entre la pluie et la pointe d'écoulement, le délai est alors inversement proportionnel à la fraction d'eau libre, les lacs réagissant alors plus vite que les TM.

Plusieurs caractéristiques des bassins ont été considérées durant les analyses effectuées dans le cadre de cette thèse. Ainsi, des variables de superficie des sites et d'eau libre en surface ont été considérées, de même que la distance et le nombre de mares entre les divers instruments et l'exutoire, la fraction superficielle de végétation vasculaire, non-vasculaire, d'eau libre ainsi que le pourcentage de terres boisées dans le bassin. De toutes ces variables, seulement la fraction superficielle d'eau libre s'est avérée fréquemment liée à divers comportement hydrologiques, tel que mentionné précédemment. Dans le cas des TM, la disposition géométrique d'une même superficie totale de mares semble aussi avoir une influence sur la forme des hydrogrammes. Ces conclusions n'excluent cependant pas que les autres variables physiographiques puissent aussi influencer le comportement hydrologique, mais la sélection de sites selon une homogénéité des bassins fait en sorte que les résultats de la présente étude ne les ont pas fait ressortir comme variables explicatrices.

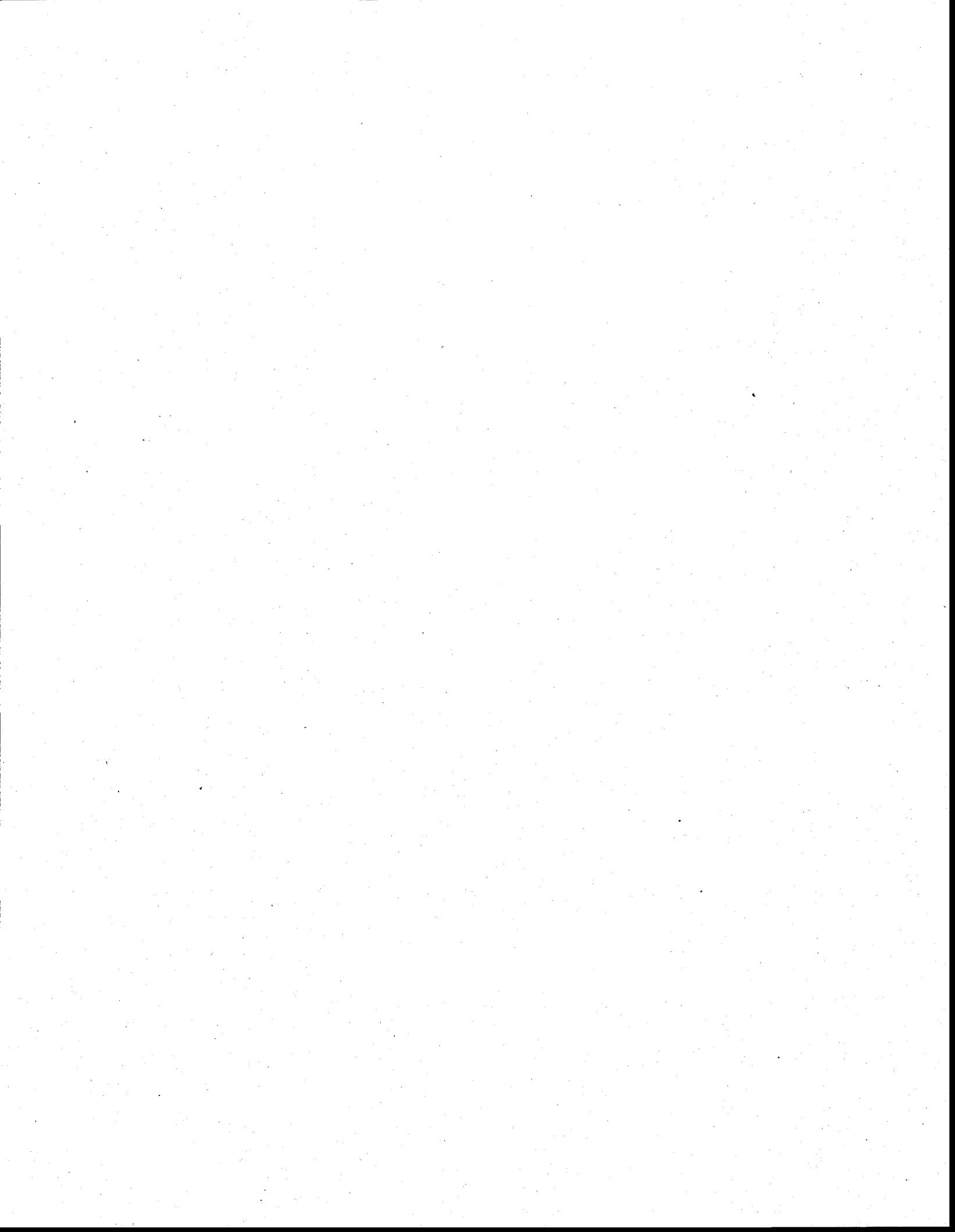
Le fait que la fraction superficielle d'eau libre influence directement plusieurs comportements hydrologiques des petits bassins boréaux permet de faire le lien entre une

éventuelle poursuite de l'aqualyse, ou du moins de discuter du comportement général futur des TM et des lacs de la région de la Baie de James qui seront vraisemblablement plus régulièrement soumis à des conditions plus humides. À la lumière des résultats obtenus, on pourrait stipuler que les TM soumises à des conditions humides plus fréquentes et/ou sur de plus longues périodes auraient un temps de réponse plus long au niveau de la montée de la nappe mais plus court au niveau de l'écoulement. On pourrait aussi s'attendre à ce que leurs hydrogrammes de pluies d'été et d'automne soient moins variables et plus symétriques et que les événements d'écoulement soient plus fréquents mais plus courts et de plus faible amplitude. La poursuite de l'aqualyse pourrait se résumer en une diminution de l'inertie naturelle des TM à produire de l'écoulement.

Suite à l'ensemble des travaux réalisés, les hypothèses de départ (section 2.5) ont été confirmées à divers degrés. L'hypothèse 1 selon laquelle les deux stades de développement montreraient des différences dans l'importance et la variabilité temporelle des termes du bilan a été confirmée, les TO étant plus sujettes à d'importantes variations de stockage que les TM qui subissent plutôt d'importantes variations d'écoulement. L'hypothèse 2 selon laquelle la fraction superficielle d'eau libre rendrait le comportement général du bilan des TM plus semblable à celui des lacs que les TO a été confirmée. Au niveau de la contribution au réseau de drainage, et bien que l'écoulement hypodermique n'ait pas été mesuré, les TM semblent avoir une part plus importante des précipitations reçues qui ruissellent que les TO et même que les lacs, ces derniers évaporant plus. L'hypothèse 3 selon laquelle les caractéristiques physiographiques et climatiques expliqueraient la variabilité hydrologique des TO, des TM et des lacs n'a été vérifiée qu'en partie. Tout d'abord, l'emplacement des écosystèmes sur le territoire est principalement expliqué par l'historique post-glaciation et les conditions climatiques différentes sur le bassin de la rivière La Grande. Le secteur Ouest plus chaud et avec moins de précipitations abrite contient la majorité des TO alors que le secteur Est, plus frais et avec plus de précipitations, compte la majorité des TM. La seule caractéristique physiographique qui a été identifiée comme explicative du comportement hydrologique des sites, en se rappelant que les sites ont été choisis pour être le plus homogène possible, est la fraction superficielle d'eau libre dont l'influence a été démontrée préalablement.

Le présent projet de recherche a permis de faire avancer les connaissances en hydrologie des tourbières boréales, particulièrement en ce qui concerne les très petits bassins qui sont nombreux dans le bassin de la rivière La Grande mais qui sont pourtant peu étudiés. La différenciation des comportements hydrologiques des TO, des TM et des lacs permet une meilleure compréhension à petite échelle. Les bassins de méso-échelle de cette région étant souvent une mosaïque de ces trois écosystèmes, le suivi de bassins de taille intermédiaire (quelques km<sup>2</sup>) serait souhaitable pour mieux comprendre comment s'intègre alors les différentes contributions à plus grande échelle. L'adaptation d'une méthode d'évapotranspiration est une contribution originale aux techniques d'estimation de ce terme sous-étudié du bilan hydrologique (Waddington et al., 2009).

Les résultats obtenus lors des travaux de cette thèse, en particulier l'inertie hydrologique des TM, la grande capacité d'absorption des TO et les réponses rapides et fréquentes des lacs offrent des pistes pour leur intégration spécifique dans les modèles d'apports. L'inertie hydrologique pourrait être modélisée en travaillant sur les paramètres gérant le transfert horizontal de l'eau, en introduisant une résistance à combattre avant que le ruissellement de surface puisse être effectif ou encore en modifiant la définition des réservoirs servant à la production du débit intermédiaire et du ruissellement de surface. Les TO pourraient aussi être intégrées en augmentant leur capacité de réserve et en ne permettant un ruissellement de surface uniquement lors de conditions extrêmes. Une meilleure définition de l'écoulement hypodermique pourrait aussi être envisagée mais les travaux contenus dans cette thèse n'ont pas permis d'explorer cette avenue. Les connaissances actuelles en hydrologie des tourbières montrant un fort couplage entre les processus écologiques, biogéochimiques et hydrologiques (Waddington et al., 2009), l'étude de bassins aux conditions générales d'humidité de surface diverses simulant le concept d'aqualyse apporte une contribution supplémentaire en ce sens.



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