

# **National Rivers and Streams Assessment 2013–2014 Technical Support Document**

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

|       |   |
|-------|---|
| ANC   | Acid Neutralizing Capacity                            |
| CCE   | Calibrator Cell Equivalent                            |
| CPL   | Coastal Plain ecoregion                               |
| DII   | Dam Influence Index                                   |
| DOC   | Dissolved Organic Carbon                              |
| EMAP  | EPA's Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Program |
| EPA   | U.S. Environmental Protection Agency                  |
| FFG   | Functional feeding group                              |
| FMMI  | Fish Multimetric Index                                |
| HUC   | Hydrologic Unit Codes                                 |
| IBI   | Index of Biotic Integrity                             |
| IQR   | Interquartile Range                                   |
| Km    | kilometers  |
| MAHA  | Mid-Atlantic Highlands Assessment                     |
| MAIA  | Mid-Atlantic Integrated Assessment                    |
| MMI   | Multimetric Index                                     |
| NAP   | Northern Appalachians ecoregion                       |
| NARS  | National Aquatic Resource Surveys                     |
| NAWQA | National Ambient Water Quality Assessment             |
| NLCD  | National Land Cover Dataset                           |
| NPL   | Northern Plains ecoregion                             |
| NRSA  | National Rivers and Streams Assessment                |
| O/E   | Ratio of Observed to Expected                         |
| OTU   | Operational Taxonomic Unit                            |
| PCA   | Principal Component Analysis                          |
| QA    | Quality Assurance                                     |
| QC    | Quality Control                                       |
| RBS   | Relative Bed Stability                                |
| RF    | Random Forest   |
| RMSE  | Root Mean Squared Error                               |
| S:N   | Signal to Noise ratio                                 |
| SAP   | Southern Appalachians ecoregion                       |
| SD    | Standard Deviation                                    |
| SPL   | Southern Plains ecoregion                             |
| TPL   | Temperate Plains ecoregion                            |
| UMW   | Upper Midwest ecoregion                               |
| WMT   | Western Mountains ecoregion                           |
| WSA   | Wadeable Streams Assessment 2000-2004                 |
| XER   | Xeric ecoregion                                       |

# 1 INTRODUCTION

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*National Rivers and Streams Assessment 2013-2014: The Second Collaborative Survey* is the second in a series of National Rivers and Streams Assessment (NRSA) reports that utilize a randomized statistical survey design to assess the quality of the nation's perennial rivers and streams. The NRSA is one of the National Aquatic Resource Surveys (NARS), a set of collaborative programs between EPA, states, and tribes designed to assess the quality of the nation's waters using a statistical survey design. The survey data underlying this NRSA report were collected in the summers of 2013 and 2014; as such, the findings presented in the report show a snapshot in time. The key goals of the NRSA report are to describe the ecological and recreational quality of the nation's perennial river and stream resources, how those conditions are changing, and the key stressors affecting those waters. Clean Water Act (CWA) Sections 104(a) and (b) collectively grant the Administrator authority to investigate and report on water quality across the country. NARS data also inform and benefit the national water quality inventory report that EPA prepares for Congress pursuant to CWA Section 305(b)(2).

This technical support document provides information about the analytical approaches used for the NRSA 2013-14. National results from NRSA are included in the *National Rivers and Streams Assessment 2013-2014: The Second Collaborative Survey* report and results for subpopulations, including EPA regions and ecological regions, are presented in the online data dashboard (<https://riverstreamassessment.epa.gov/dashboard>).

## 1.1 ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR SURVEY OPERATIONS

A series of protocols were used to ensure consistency throughout the survey operations. The following documents provide the field sampling methods, laboratory procedures, quality measures, and site selection for the NRSA 2013-14. Data from the survey are available to download at <https://www.epa.gov/national-aquatic-resource-surveys/data-national-aquatic-resource-surveys>.

- U.S. EPA. 2013. National Rivers and Streams Assessment: Field Operations Manual. EPA-841-B-12-009a and EPA-841-B-12-009b. Washington, D.C.
- U.S. EPA. 2014. National Rivers and Streams Assessment: Laboratory Operations Methods Manual. EPA 841-B-12-010. Washington, D.C.
- U.S. EPA. 2015. National Rivers and Streams Assessment: Quality Assurance Project Plan. EPA 841-B-12-007. Washington, D.C.
- U.S. EPA. 2012. National Rivers and Streams Assessment: Site Evaluation Guidelines. EPA 841-B-12-008. Washington, D.C.

## 2 **QUALITY ASSURANCE**

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The NRSA implemented and assessed the quality of its operations and data throughout the NRSA 2013-14 survey. This chapter documents the NRSA's adherence to the requirements of EPA's quality system implemented by the Office of Water as explained in the introduction section below. The following sections describe the quality aspects of the statistical design, field operations, laboratory assessments, data management, and report writing.

### 2.1 **INTRODUCTION**

The EPA quality system incorporates a national consensus standard for quality systems authorized by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and developed by the American Society for Quality Control (ASQC), ANSI/ASQC E4-2004, *Quality Systems for Environmental Data and Technology Programs – Requirements with Guidance for Use*. EPA Order CIO 2105.0, dated May 5, 2000, requires all of its component organizations to participate in an agency-wide quality system. The EPA Order also requires quality assurance project plans or "equivalent documents" for all projects and tasks involving environmental data.

In accordance with the EPA Order, the Office of Water (OW) developed the Office of Water Quality Management Plan (QMP; USEPA 2015) to describe OW's quality system that applies to all water programs and activities, including the NRSA, collecting or using environmental data. As required by the EPA Order and OW QMP, the NRSA developed and abided by its QAPP throughout the survey. One significant challenge encountered was application of the quality control procedures for periphyton. As a result, EPA did not include periphyton in the NRSA 2013-14 report and is working with the United States Geological Survey (USGS) and other experts to improve periphyton (specifically diatom) taxonomy through development of tools and training materials. The NRSA QAPP contains elements of the overall project management, data quality objectives, measurement and data acquisition, and information management. The QAPP also deals with the data integration necessary between the Wadeable Streams Assessment (WSA), the NRSA, and EPA's Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Program (EMAP) Western Pilot Study (2001-2004) to create one comprehensive report on the ecological status of the nation's rivers and streams.

The following companion documents to the QAPP present detailed procedures for implementing the field and lab work for the NRSA 2013-14 survey:

- National Rivers and Streams Assessment: Site Evaluation Guidelines EPA 841-B-12-008
- National Rivers and Streams Assessment: Field Operations Manual (FOM), EPA-841-B-12-009a and EPA-841-B-12-009b
- National Rivers and Streams Assessment: Laboratory Operations Manual (LOM), EPA 841-B-12-010

The four documents together address all aspects of the NRSA's data acquisition and evaluation. The

LOM also lists measurement quality objectives (MQOs) which were used to evaluate the level of quality attainment for individual survey metrics. Every person involved in the NRSA was responsible for abiding by the QAPP and adhering to the procedures specified in its companion documents. Moreover, NRSA participants were instructed and/or trained in the requirements applicable to the person's role in the survey (*e.g.*, field crews were trained in the FOM procedures and applicable QAPP requirements). For example, field crews attended a combined classroom and hands-on training in field procedures. Laboratory personnel provided appropriate SOPs and certifications; and attended calls to discuss implementation of the lab procedures.

## 2.2 SURVEY DESIGN

The NRSA's survey design was based upon statistical concepts that are well accepted by the scientific community. As described in the following sections, the survey design objectives were met by requirements of the statistical design, completeness of implementing the design, and consistency with established procedures.

### 2.2.1 Statistical Design

There is a large body of statistical literature dealing with sample survey designs which addresses the challenge of making statements about many by sampling the few (Kish 1965). Sample surveys have been used in a variety of fields (*e.g.*, monthly labor estimates) to determine the status of populations of interest, especially if the population is too numerous to census or if it is unnecessary to census the population to reach the desired level of precision for describing the population's status. In natural resource fields, probability sampling surveys have been consistently used to estimate the conditions of the entire population. For example, the National Agricultural Statistics Survey (NASS) conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Forest Inventory Analysis (FIAT) conducted by the U.S. Forest Service (Bickford *et al.* 1963, Hazard and Law 1989) have both used probability-based sampling concepts to monitor and estimate the condition and productivity of agricultural and forest resources from a commodity perspective. The sampling design strategy for NRSA is based on the fundamental requirement for a probability sample of an explicitly defined resource population, where the sample is constrained to reflect the spatial dispersion of the population. This design has been documented in peer reviewed literature (Stevens 1994, Stevens and Olsen 1999). By applying the statistical concepts of this design, the survey was able to meet the following overarching data quality objectives:

- In the conterminous U.S., estimate the proportion of perennial river and stream length ( $\pm 5$  percent) that falls below the designated benchmark for "good" conditions for selected measures with 95 percent confidence.
- For each of the aggregated Omernik Level III Ecoregions, estimate the proportion of perennial river and stream length ( $\pm 15$  percent) that falls below the designated benchmark for "good" conditions for selected measures with 95 percent confidence.

## **2.2.2 Completeness**

To ensure that the implementation of the NRSA 2013-14 sample design resulted in adequate measurements, the survey included completeness requirements for field sampling and laboratory analyses. The QAPP requires that valid data for individual indicators must be acquired from a minimum number of sampling locations to make subpopulation estimates with a specified level of confidence or sampling precision. As the starting place for selecting field sites, EPA used the National Hydrography Dataset (NHD; <https://www.usgs.gov/core-science-systems/ngp/national-hydrography>) as the frame representing streams and rivers in the US because it was the most complete source of stream hydrology available at the national scale.<sup>1</sup> The data completeness requirements were achieved, and sites where data for an indicator could not be collected were classified as “Not Assessed” in the population estimates.

## **2.2.3 Comparability**

Comparability is defined as the confidence with which one data set can be compared to another (Stanley and Verner, 1985; Smith *et al.*, 1988). For all indicators, NRSA ensured comparability by the use of standardized sampling procedures, sampling equipment, and analytical methodologies by all sampling crews and laboratories. For all measurements, reporting units and format are specified, incorporated into standardized data recording forms, and securely transferred into a centralized information management system. Because NRSA 2013-14 used the same comparable methods to collect data in EMAP West and WSA studies, the data also can be compared across the studies. The following sections on field and laboratory operations describe additional measures to ensure consistency in NRSA.

## **2.3 QUALITY ASSURANCE IN FIELD OPERATIONS**

The requirements and methods presented in the Field Operations Manual (FOM) ensured that quality objectives were attainable and survey activities were manageable. As described below, NRSA tested its FOM, trained crews using the FOM, visited crews during the field season, and confirmed fish specimen identifications.

### **2.3.1 Field Method Pilot Testing**

Representatives from the NRSA team, logistics and data management contractors, and state partners

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<sup>1</sup> As EPA and the Department of the Army recognize in the Navigable Waters Protection Rule, “NHD at High Resolution . . . may not accurately identify on-the-ground flow conditions.” 85 FR 22294 (April 21, 2020). NHD-Plus maps surface waters at a coarser resolution (1:100,000) compared to the scale of NHD at High Resolution (1:24,000). 4,566 sites were evaluated as part of NRSA 2013-14. Of those, a total of 1,853 were sampled. 1,328 sites were target sites but not sampled (landowner denial, otherwise inaccessible or other), and 1,385 sites were identified as non-target. 755 of the 1,385 non-target sites were identified as non-perennial.

tested sampling methods, paper and electronic field forms, and equipment described in the FOM. The test run assessed the accuracy and clarity of the FOM's instructions for executing the procedures and quality steps. The test run also evaluated sampling logistics, sample preparation, and sample shipping instructions. As a result of lessons learned during the test run, NRSA staff corrected and improved the FOM prior to field crew training.

### **2.3.2 Training of Field Trainers and Assistance Visitors**

Before training field crews, members of the NRSA team, oversight staff, contractor trainers, and other experts tested the training materials during an intensive 4-day period that included classroom and hands on training sessions. This “train-the-trainer” event serves two primary purposes. First, the event is designed to make sure that all trainers understand the methods and are providing consistent instruction to field crews. Second, it provides another opportunity to ensure that the field documents and forms are clear and accurate. During this training event, the attendees tested the materials to ensure that the instructions were correct and easy to execute and practiced actually training the methods. The training materials included the FOM, Quick Reference Guide (QRG), field forms, and PowerPoint presentations. As a result of the training, practice training sessions and expert discussions, NRSA staff corrected and improved training materials, and the FOM and QRG before the field crew training.

### **2.3.3 Field Crew Training**

To ensure consistency across field crews, all field crews were required to attend a 4-day training session prior to visiting any field site. At a minimum, the field crew leader and the fish taxonomist from each crew were required to attend. NRSA trainers led regional field crew training sessions consisting of classroom and field-based lessons. The lessons included sessions on conducting site reconnaissance, recording field observations and *in situ* data, collecting field samples, preparing, packing and shipping sample containers, and use of the standardized field forms. The field crew leaders were taught to review every form and verify that all hand-entered data were complete and correct.

### **2.3.4 Field Assistance Visits**

To further assist the crews in correctly implementing the field procedures and quality steps, a NARS staff member or contractor trainer visited every NRSA field crew during the field season. These visits, known as assistance visits (AV), provided an opportunity to observe field crews in the normal course of a field day, assist in correctly applying the procedures, and document the crew's adherence to sampling procedures. 223 AVs were completed in the summers of 2013 and 2014. If circumstances were noted where a field crew was not conducting a procedure properly, the observer recorded the deficiency, reviewed the appropriate procedure with field team, and assisted the field crew until the procedure was completed correctly.

### **2.3.5 Revisits of Selected Field Sites**

To evaluate within-year sampling variability, the NRSA design called for crews to revisit 10 percent of the sites. These sites were sampled twice in the NRSA index period during a single year (visit 1 and visit 2). Useful metrics and indicators tend to have high repeatability, that is among site variability will be greater than sampling variability based on repeat sampling at a subset of sites. To quantify repeatability, NARS uses Signal:Noise (S:N), or the ratio of variance associated with sampling site (signal) to the variance associated with repeated visits to the same site (noise) (Kaufmann *et al.* 1999). All sites are included in the signal, whereas only revisit sites contribute to the noise component. Metrics with high S:N are more likely to show consistent responses to human caused disturbance, and S:N values  $\leq 1$  indicate that sampling a site twice yields as much or more metric variability as sampling two different sites (Stoddard *et al.* 2008). The S:N values were used by analysts in the process of selecting metrics and evaluating indicators.

### **2.3.6 Evaluation of Fish Identifications**

To ensure consistent naming conventions, field taxonomist and laboratory ichthyologists were required to use commonly accepted taxonomic references to identify fish vouchers. To evaluate their identifications, field taxonomists were required to send fish vouchers from one or more site visits to expert ichthyologists for a second, independent identification. The ichthyologists were able to determine the taxa for 2,481 vouchers which was  $\sim 10$  percent of the 26,030 unique fish by site visit collected for NRSA 2013-14. Overall, 82.3 percent of the 1,239 comparable 2013 records agreed at the species level, 93.7 percent agreed at the genus level, 98.3 percent at the family level, and 99.0 percent at the order level. For 2014, 85.6% of the 1,242 comparable 2014 records agreed at the species level, 95.9 percent agreed at the genus level, 99.4 percent at the family level, and 99.6 percent at the order level.

## **2.4 LABORATORY QUALITY ASSURANCE AND QUALITY CONTROL**

The NRSA laboratories used standard methods and/or followed the requirements (e.g., performance-based objectives) in the Laboratory Operations Manual (LOM). The QAPP identified the overall quality requirements and the LOM provided methods that could be used to achieve the quality requirements. If a laboratory chose a different method, it still had to meet the QA requirements as described below.

### **2.4.1 Basic Capabilities**

All laboratories were required to submit documentation of their analytical capabilities prior to analyzing any NRSA 2013-14 sample. NRSA team members reviewed documentation to ensure that the laboratories could meet required measurement quality objectives (MQOs; e.g., reporting limits, detection limits). National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Conference (NELAC) certification, satisfactory participation in round-robin, or other usual and customary types of



evaluations were considered acceptable capabilities documentation.

### **2.4.2 Benthic Macroinvertebrate Identifications**

For benthic macroinvertebrate taxonomy, laboratories were required to use the same taxa lists, conduct regular internal QC checks, and participate in an independent quality check. All participating laboratories identified organisms using the most appropriate technical literature that was accepted by the taxonomic discipline and reflected the accepted nomenclature at the time of the survey. USGS BioData (<https://aquatic.biodata.usgs.gov/>) and the Integrated Taxonomic Information System (ITIS, <https://www.itis.gov/>) were also used to verify nomenclatural validity and reporting.

Taxonomic accuracy is evaluated by comparing identifications of the same organisms by primary and secondary, independent laboratories. Each primary laboratory provided organisms from 10 percent of its samples, or least three samples if they had less than 10, to a secondary laboratory for an independent evaluation. EPA, supported by an expert contractor, assessed the primary and secondary identifications and then held reconciliation calls to allow the taxonomists to discuss organisms that were identified differently. As part of this process, recommendations and corrective actions were identified to address inaccurate taxonomic identification; and measurement objectives were calculated to ensure the data were of sufficient quality for the NRSA.

Of the 2,256 benthic macroinvertebrate samples, the secondary laboratory identified organisms in 202 samples. The mean percent taxonomic disagreement (PTD) between laboratories was 12 percent (better than the NRSA measurement objective of 15 percent as identified in the QAPP). The overall percent difference in enumeration (PDE) was 2 percent (better than the NRSA measurement objective of 5 percent as identified in the QAPP).

Even when the measurement objectives were met, laboratories implemented recommendations and corrective steps for the QC samples and all other samples with the same organisms. If, for example, it was evident that empty mollusk shells were being identified and recorded in one or more of the QC samples, the laboratories needed to verify that they had not counted empty mollusk shells in their other samples.

### **2.4.3 Chemical Analyses**

For quality assurance of chemical analyses, laboratories used QC samples which are similar in composition to samples being measured. They provide estimates of precision and bias that are applicable to sample measurements. To ensure the ongoing quality of data during analyses, every batch of water samples was required to include QA samples to verify the precision and accuracy of the equipment, reagent quality, and other quality measures. These checks were completed by analyzing blanks or samples spiked with known or unknown quantities of reference materials,

duplicate analyses of the same samples, blank analyses, or other appropriate evaluations. The laboratories reported QA results along with each batch of sample results. In addition, laboratories reported holding times. Holding time requirements for analyses ensure analytical results are representative of conditions at the time of sampling. The NARS team reviewed the data and noted any quality failures. The data analysts used the information about quality to determine whether to include or exclude data in the evaluations. As described in the next section, the consolidated NRSA database was further evaluated for quality issues.

## 2.5 DATA MANAGEMENT AND REVIEW

Information management (IM) is integral to all aspects of the NRSA from initial selection of sampling sites through dissemination and reporting of final, validated data. Quality measures implemented for the IM system are aimed at preventing corruption of data at the time of their initial incorporation into the system and maintaining the integrity of data and information after incorporation into the system.

Reconnaissance, field observation and laboratory analysis data were transferred from NRSA survey participants and collected and managed by the NARS IM center. Data and information were managed using a tiered approach. First, *all* data transferred from a field team or laboratory were physically organized (*e.g.*, system folders) and stored in their original state. Next, NARS IM created a synthesized and standardized version of the data to populate a database that represented the primary source for all subsequent data requests, uses and needs. All samples were tracked from collection to the laboratory.

The IM staff applied an iterative process in reviewing the database for completeness, transcription errors, formatting compatibility, consistency issues and other quality control-related topics. This first-line data review was performed primarily by NARS IM in consultation with the NRSA QA team. A second-phase data quality review consisted of evaluating the quality of data based on MQOs as described in the QAPP. This QA review was performed by the NRSA QA team using a variety of qualitative and quantitative analytical and visualization approaches. Data that met the MQOs were used without restriction. Data that did not meet the MQOs were qualified and further evaluated to determine the extent to which quality control results deviated from the target MQOs. Minor deviations, such as the field latitude and longitude did not fall on the mapped flow line, were noted and qualified but did not prevent data from being used in analyses. Major deviations were also noted and qualified, but data were excluded from the analyses. An example of a major deviation was insufficient fish assemblage sampling; when this occurred, the fish multimetric index was not calculated for a given site. Data not used for analyses because of quality control concerns account for a subset of the missing data for each indicator analysis and add to the uncertainty in condition estimates.

## 2.6 MAIN REPORT

The main report provides a summary of the findings of each of the data analyses and EPA's interpretation of them. After the main report was extensively reviewed in-house by the NRSA team, its partners, and other EPA experts, the report underwent outside peer review. The outside review was the final step in ensuring that the main report and its findings met the quality requirements of the QAPP. EPA contracted with an outside firm to conduct an Independent External Peer Review (IEPR) of the main report. The firm selected three peer reviewers who were experts in water resource monitoring and biological and ecosystem assessments. The firm provided the reviewers with a copy of the main report, along with supporting documentation and a charge that solicited comments specifically on the technical content, completeness and clarity, and scientific integrity of the main report. EPA used the comments from the peer reviewers to refine and review the main report.

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### **3 SELECTION OF PROBABILITY SITES**

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Using a statistical survey design, 1,853 sites were selected at random to represent the quality of the larger population (1.2 million miles) of perennial rivers and streams across the lower 48 states, from large rivers to small headwater streams. Sites were selected using a random sampling technique that uses a probability-based design described in this chapter. The following sections describe the statistical objectives, target population, sample frame, survey design, evaluation, and statistical analysis.

#### **3.1 OBJECTIVES**

The statistical design requirements for NRSA 2013-14 were:

- to estimate the proportion of perennial rivers and streams with a margin of error of  $\pm 5\%$  in the conterminous U.S. that fall below the designated benchmark for good conditions for selected indicators with 95% confidence
- to estimate the proportion of perennial rivers and streams with a margin of error of  $\pm 15\%$  in each of nine ecological reporting regions that fall below the designated benchmark for good conditions for selected indicators with 95% confidence.
- to estimate the difference in proportion of perennial river and streams in the conterminous U.S. from 2008-09 to 2013-14 that fall below the designated benchmark for good (or poor) condition for selected indicators. Difference estimates should have a margin of error of  $\pm 15\%$  at 95% confidence.
- to estimate the difference in proportion of perennial river and streams in the conterminous U.S. from 2008-09 to 2013-14 in each of nine ecological reporting regions that fall below the designated benchmark for good (or poor) condition for selected indicators. Difference estimates should have a margin of error of  $\pm 15\%$  at 95% confidence.
- accomplish the above while ensuring that the minimum sample size for a state will be 20.
- revisit 10% of the sites in 2013-14 for variance component estimation and quality assurance.

#### **3.2 TARGET POPULATION**

The target population consisted of all streams and rivers within the 48 contiguous states that had flowing water during the study index period (i.e., beginning of June through end of September for most regions). This included major rivers and small streams. Sites must have had  $> 50\%$  of the reach length with standing water and sites were to be sampled during base flow conditions. Sites with water in less than 50% of the reach length were dropped. The target population excludes tidal rivers and streams up to head of salt (defined as  $< 0.5$  ppt for this study), as well as run-of-the-river ponds and reservoirs with greater than 7-day residence time.

### 3.3 SAMPLE FRAME

The sample frame, used to represent the target population, was derived from the medium resolution National Hydrography Dataset (NHD-Plus). Attributes from NHD-Plus and additional attributes added to the sample frame that are used in the survey design are:

- MajorRiver: rivers identified as major rivers or additional rivers in the book: Rivers of North America (Benke and Cushing 2005)
- Strahler order
- Strahler category where categories are RiversMajor (5<sup>th</sup> order and higher), RiversOther (5<sup>th</sup> order and higher), LargeStreams (3<sup>rd</sup>,4<sup>th</sup> order), and SmallStreams (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> order)
- BorderRiver: rivers and streams that occur on state and country boundaries. Each reach is identified by two-state postal codes such as MO:IL for the portion of the Mississippi River that forms the boundary between Missouri and Illinois. A border river/stream is assigned to one of the two states for the survey design
- Ecological Reporting Region: Nine aggregated Omernik ecoregions that are used for reporting
- Omernik and North American ecoregions Levels I, II, III and IV
- Postal code (state)
- Urban and non-urban rivers and streams
- Landownership as non-federal, Forest Service, BLM, Tribal Land, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US National Park Service, and Department of Defense

The Urban/non-urban attribute was created by intersecting a modified version of the Census Bureau national urban boundary GIS coverage with NHD-Plus. The Census Bureau's boundaries were buffered 100 meters to include a majority of stream features intersecting and coincident with urban areas. Where this buffer did not completely gather all the river features within the urban areas (rivers intersecting cities are excluded from the Census Bureau's urban areas), the NHD-Plus river area (polygon) features were clipped at a three-kilometer buffer around the urban areas and combined with the buffered urban area to create the modified urban database. If a stream or river segment was within this boundary, it is designated as "Urban"; otherwise it is designated as "NonUrban".

FCODE is directly from NHD-Plus and is used to identify which segments in NHD were included in the sample frame. The FCODEs are a numeric identifier of the channel type. The attribute Frame07 identifies each segment as either "Include" or "Exclude." Frame07 was created so that segments included in the sample frame could be easily identified. All segments chosen to be sampled were evaluated in the field prior to sampling to ensure they met the target population of NRSA (i.e., perennial rivers and streams). Sites that were not perennial were not sampled but were instead replaced by the next perennial segment in the list. FCODE values included in the GIS shapefile:

#### **FCODEs Included in 2013-2014 sample frame:**

- 33600 Canal/Ditch
- 42801 Pipeline: Pipeline Type = Aqueduct; Relationship to Surface = At or Near

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| 46000 | Stream/River   |
| 46006 | Stream/River (Perennial)   |
| 58000 | Artificial Path (removed from dataset if coded through Lake/Pond and Reservoirs) |

### **FCODEs Excluded in 2013-2014 sample frame**

|       |   |
|-------|---|
| 33400 | Connector   |
| 46003 | Stream/River (Intermittent)   |
| 42800 | Pipeline  |
| 42802 | Pipeline: Pipeline Type = Aqueduct; Relationship to Surface = Elevated        |
| 42803 | Pipeline: Pipeline Type = Aqueduct; Relationship to Surface = Underground     |
| 42804 | Pipeline: Pipeline Type = Aqueduct; Relationship to Surface = Underwater      |
| 42806 | Pipeline: Pipeline Type = General Case; Relationship to Surface = Elevated    |
| 4280  | Pipeline: Pipeline Type = General Case; Relationship to Surface = Underground |
| 42809 | Pipeline: Pipeline Type = Penstock; Relationship to Surface = At or Near      |
| 42811 | Pipeline: Pipeline Type = Penstock; Relationship to Surface = Underground     |
| 42813 | Pipeline: Pipeline Type = Siphon  |
| 56600 | Coastline   |
| 58000 | Artificial Path if coded through Lake/Pond and Reservoirs                     |

## **3.4 SURVEY DESIGN**

The survey design consists of two major components (NRSA14 design and NRSA09 design) in order to address the dual objectives of (1) estimating current status of perennial rivers and streams and (2) estimating differences in status for perennial rivers and streams.

### **3.4.1 NRSA09 Design**

The NRSA09 survey design is a subsample of the NRSA 2008-09 sites that were in the target population and sampled in the NRSA 2008-09. The major objective for this design is difference estimation, although all sites sampled in 2013-14 were used when differences are estimated.

The expected sample sizes were based on the nine ecological reporting regions and two Strahler order categories of Rivers (5<sup>th</sup> and greater) and Streams (1<sup>st</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup>). Three ecological reporting regions (UMW, NPL, SPL) involve a smaller number of states and were allocated fewer sites than the other six regions (NAP, SAP, CPL, TPL, WMT, XER). Given these expected sample sizes, the number of sites for each state was allocated proportional to the medium resolution NHD Plus perennial River or Stream length in each state for each ecological reporting region.

**Table 3.1 Expected sample size for NRSA09 Design**

| Ecological Region | Expected Sample Size NRSA09 |        |       |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|--------|-------|
|                   | Rivers                      | Stream | Total |
| NAP               | 45                          | 50     | 95    |
| SAP               | 45                          | 50     | 95    |
| CPL               | 45                          | 50     | 95    |
| TPL               | 45                          | 50     | 95    |
| XER               | 45                          | 50     | 95    |
| WMT               | 45                          | 50     | 95    |
| UMW               | 40                          | 40     | 80    |
| NPL               | 40                          | 40     | 80    |
| SPL               | 40                          | 40     | 80    |
| Total             | 390                         | 420    | 810   |

The overall survey design included having 10% of the sites be visited twice in 2013-14. This was accomplished by allocating four sites (two Rivers sites and two Streams sites) to each of the 48 states for revisits (192 sites total). All of these revisit sites were assigned to the NRSA09 design. Moreover, the sites selected to be revisited were also the same sites that were visited twice in 2008-09. This results in 192 sites that were visited twice in 2008-09 and in 2013-14. The NRSA09 Design sites will also be resampled in NRSA 2018-19.

### **3.4.2 NRSA14 Design**

The NRSA14 survey design is a new survey design that selected new sites. The expected sample sizes were based on the nine ecological reporting regions and four categories of RiversMajor (5<sup>th</sup> and greater), RiversOther (5<sup>th</sup> and greater), LargeStreams (Strahler order 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>), and SmallStreams (Strahler order 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>). Three ecological reporting regions (UMW, NPL, SPL) involve a smaller number of states and were allocated fewer sites than the other six regions (NAP, SAP, CPL, TPL, WMT, XER). Given these expected sample sizes, the number of sites for each state was allocated proportional to the four medium resolution NHD Plus perennial river and stream category lengths in each state for each ecological reporting region. Adjustments to the number of sites for states were made to ensure that each state had a minimum of 20 sites from the NRSA09 and NRSA14 designs. The final number of sites was also adjusted to ensure that a total of 1,808 unique sites were selected.

### **3.4.3 Stratification**

The survey design is explicitly stratified by state for both the NRSA09 and NRSA14 designs.

### **3.4.4 Multi-Density Categories**

Within each state, unequal probability of selection was based on river and stream categories as well as ecological reporting regions.



**Table 3.2 Expected sample size for NRSA14 Design**

| Ecological Region | Expected Sample Size NRSA14 |             |              |              |       |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|-------|
|                   | RiversMajor                 | RiversOther | LargeStreams | SmallStreams | Total |
| NAP               | 29                          | 30          | 33           | 35           | 127   |
| SAP               | 29                          | 30          | 33           | 35           | 127   |
| CPL               | 29                          | 30          | 33           | 35           | 127   |
| TPL               | 29                          | 30          | 33           | 35           | 127   |
| XER               | 29                          | 30          | 33           | 35           | 127   |
| WMT               | 29                          | 30          | 33           | 35           | 127   |
| UMW               | 18                          | 19          | 19           | 22           | 78    |
| NPL               | 18                          | 19          | 19           | 22           | 78    |
| SPL               | 18                          | 19          | 19           | 22           | 78    |
| Total             | 228                         | 237         | 255          | 276          | 996   |

#### 3.4.4.1 NRSA09 Design

The target and sampled sites from NRSA 2008-09 were placed in siteID order within a state and within the River and Stream categories. The sites required for these categories were then selected as the first set of sites within that list required to meet the sample size requirements. That is, the sites were selected with equal probability within the categories.

The original NRSA 2008-09 survey design used unequal probability categories defined separately for streams (1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> order) and rivers (5<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> order). For the stream category, within each state unequal selection probabilities were defined for 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> order streams so that an equal number of sites would occur for each order. Then these unequal selection probabilities were adjusted by the nine ecological reporting regions so that an equal number of sites would occur in each region. For the river category, unequal selection probabilities were defined for 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup>+ order rivers. Then these unequal selection probabilities were adjusted by the nine ecological reporting regions so that an equal number of sites would occur in each region.

#### 3.4.4.2 NRSA14 design

The unequal probability of selection categories were the combination of state, ecological reporting region, and the four river and stream categories (RiversMajor, RiversOther, LargeStreams, and SmallStreams).

#### 3.4.5 Oversample and Site Replacement

Both the NRSA09 and NRSA14 designs include a set of oversample sites to be used when a base site cannot be sampled for any reason. The two designs have six categories within each state that are the basis for the oversample and site replacement:

**Table 3.3 Oversample replacement categories**

| <b>Replacement Category</b> | <b>Base Sites</b>                   | <b>Replace by Oversample Sites</b> |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| NRSA09 Rivers               | Base_09River &<br>Base09River_RVT   | Over_09River                       |
| NRSA09 Streams              | Base_09Stream &<br>Base09Stream_RVT | Over_09Stream                      |
| NRSA14 Rivers Major         | Base_NewRiversMajor                 | Over_NewRiversMajor                |
| NRSA14 Rivers Other         | Base_NewRiversOther                 | Over_NewRiversOther                |
| NRSA14 Large Streams        | Base_NewLargeStreams                | Over_NewLargeStreams               |
| NRSA14 Small Streams        | Base_NewSmallStreams                | Over_NewSmallStreams               |

Sites within each state and above six categories are provided in siteID order and the replacement must be in siteID order. The Base09River\_RVT and Base09Stream\_RVT sites identify the four sites within each state that must be visited twice in 2013-14. If one of those sites cannot be sampled, then the next site within the category then becomes a site to be visited twice.

### **3.4.6 State Designs**

States may elect to implement a state-wide survey design in collaboration with NRSA. The above survey design describes the national survey design and sets the required number of sites that must be sampled within each state and the six design categories. There are two general types of state scale surveys. The first type is one where a state may simply sample additional sites from the over NRSA sample list of sites within their state to achieve a minimum of 50 sites. The second type is where the state has state-specific survey design requirements. In this case a new survey design for the state is completed that meets both the national and state survey design requirements. The new design will include the NRSA09 design resample sites. This new survey design replaces the current national design sites for the state, and sites that are not part of the NRSA09 set of resample sites can be sampled in whatever manner that supports the state's monitoring program.

## **3.5 EVALUATION PROCESS**

The survey design weights in the design file assumed that the survey design was implemented as designed. To achieve the planned sample size, we replaced sites that could not be sampled with oversamples as described above. Because some sites were replaced, the original survey design weights are no longer correct and EPA statisticians had to adjust the weights. This weight adjustment process required the statisticians knowing what happened to each site in the base design and the oversample sites (e.g., was the site sampled or dropped and if dropped why?). EvalStatus (evaluation status) was initially set to "NotEval" to indicate that the site had yet to be evaluated for sampling. When a site was evaluated for sampling, then the EvalStatus for the site

was changed. Recommended codes are provided in Table 3.4.

**Table 3.4 Recommended Codes for Evaluating Sites**

| EvalStatus Code | Name             | Meaning   |
|-----------------|------------------|---|
| TS              | Target Sampled   | Site was a member of the target population and was sampled  |
| LD              | Landowner Denial | Landowner denied access to the site   |
| PB              | Physical Barrier | Physical barrier prevented access to the site   |
| NT              | Non-Target       | Site was not a member of the target population  |
| NN              | Not Needed       | Site was a member of the oversample and was not evaluated for sampling  |
| Other codes     |                  | Other codes were often useful. For example, rather than use NT, the status may include specific codes indicating why the site was non-target. |

### 3.6 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DESIGN

For NRSA 2013-14, 4,566 design sites were evaluated. Of these 1,853 were evaluated as target and sampled, with 192 sites sampled twice. The remaining sites were dropped and replaced for various reasons (**Table 3.5**). The margin of error for national estimates was +/- 3% and for ecoregion estimates was +/- 15% with 95% confidence. For the difference analysis, estimates had a margin of error of +/- 5% at the national level and +/- 18% at the ecoregional level with 95% confidence. A minimum of 20 sites were sampled in each state.

**Table 3.5 Evaluation Status of Dropped Sites**

| Category           | Number of sites dropped |
|--------------------|-------------------------|
| Canal              | 285                     |
| Impounded          | 89                      |
| Inaccessible       | 385                     |
| Landowner_NoAccess | 794                     |
| MapError           | 67                      |
| NonPerennial       | 755                     |
| NonTarget_Other    | 10                      |
| Target_Not_Sampled | 149                     |
| Tidal              | 97                      |
| Wetland            | 82                      |

### 3.7 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Any statistical analysis of the data must incorporate information about the monitoring survey design. For NRSA, when estimates of characteristics for the entire target population are computed, the statistical analysis must account for the stratifications and unequal probability selection in the design. Procedures for doing this are available from the Aquatic Resource Monitoring Web page (<https://archive.epa.gov/nheerl/arm/web/html/index.html>). A

statistical analysis library of functions to do common population estimates in the statistical software environment R is available from the webpage. In the NRSA 2013-14 Site Information data file, the adjusted weights used to calculate national condition estimates are in the column “WGT\_EXT\_SP”

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## **4 SELECTION OF SITES TO ESTABLISH REFERENCE CONDITIONS**

The selection of least-disturbed reference sites described here for macroinvertebrate assessment (and the initial screen for fish) was used with modifications for determining reference sites for fish, water chemistry, and physical habitat analysis. See Section 5, Section 6, Section 7, and Section 8 for additional details on the reference site process used for these indicators.

One way to assess current quality is to compare data to a benchmark. For a number of indicators, the NARS assessments apply a reference approach, in which the least-disturbed reference sites in each region of the U.S. are used to establish benchmarks for assessing quality at other sites. The Least-disturbed condition approach attempts to capture the best available chemical, physical and biological habitat conditions given the current state of the landscape. Data from reference sites were used to select metrics for benthic macroinvertebrate and fish multimetric indices (MMI), develop benthic macroinvertebrate Observed to Expected ratio (O/E) models, and define the ecoregion-specific benchmarks used in the NARS analyses. This chapter describes the methodology used to select the reference sites including the sources of potential reference sites; the chemical and physical screens; and geospatial screens for assessing the quality of the benthic macroinvertebrate assemblage.

Applying the reference approach involves selecting and identifying least-disturbed reference sites to establish a reference distribution from which benchmarks can be set. Using this approach, NRSA used the 5<sup>th</sup>/25<sup>th</sup> or the 75<sup>th</sup>/95<sup>th</sup> percentiles of the reference distribution for setting good/fair/poor benchmarks for a number of indicators (Hughes *et al.* 1986; USEPA 1996). See Section 5, Section 6, and Section 7 for additional details.

In the first nationwide NARS assessment, the 2004 Wadeable Streams Assessment (WSA; USEPA, 2006), the primary biological indicator was stream macroinvertebrate assemblages. Reference sites were compiled by filtering WSA sample sites for disturbance using a series of abiotic variables. Additional reference sites were needed and were obtained from other state, university, and federal monitoring programs. This pool of potential reference sites was then assessed for uniformity in site quality and comparability of macroinvertebrate sample data. Ultimately, 1,625 sites were used to set reference benchmarks for the WSA (Herlihy *et al.*, 2008). These reference sites were used to develop a macroinvertebrate multimetric index or MMI (Stoddard *et al.*, 2008) and an observed/expected (O/E) index generated from predictive models (Yuan *et al.*, 2008) as assessment measures for WSA.

The NRSA 2008-09 analysis used the reference site data from WSA as well as new reference site data from additional hand-picked and probability sites sampled during NRSA 2008-09. The NRSA MMI and O/E approaches were revised to take advantage of these additional reference sites that included both river and stream sites. For the NRSA 2013-14 analysis, potential additional reference sites were identified by filtering the 2013-14 sample for disturbance using the same WSA process. A comparison of existing NRSA 2008-09 benchmarks was made against potential new benchmarks calculated by adding the new NRSA 2013-14 reference site data. After analyzing the benchmarks with the addition

of the new NRSA 2013-14 reference site data, the best professional judgement of the analysts was that the differences compared to the NRSA 2008-09 benchmarks were large enough for certain indicators (i.e., fish MMI and three of the four physical habitat indicators) to warrant revision of the benchmarks for these indicators. For other indicators (i.e., benthic macroinvertebrate MMI, nutrients) based on this comparison, the best professional judgment of the analysts was that the differences did not warrant revision to the benchmarks for these indicators, and the existing NRSA 2008-09 benchmarks were applied.

#### **4.1 SOURCES OF REFERENCE SITES**

The fish and macroinvertebrate reference sites used in the NRSA came from four major activities:

1. First, we used sites sampled during the NRSA using consistent sampling protocols and analytical methods. These included both sites selected from the probability sample and sites hand-picked by best professional judgment and sampled using NRSA methods as part of the NRSA. Analysts applied a three-tiered, pre-screening approach to select hand-picked sites as potential reference sites for the NRSA.
  - First, sites throughout the country that were submitted as least disturbed by states, academics, USGS, and EPA Regions were screened using a quantitative disturbance score for the local watershed (the area draining to the reach segment).
  - Sites were then sent to the EPA Landscape Ecology Lab for a quantitative disturbance score for the cumulative watershed (includes the reach and all upstream reaches). Finally, the top 300 potential reference sites were ranked using a standardized qualitative visual assessment of disturbance using Google Earth or ArcGIS at the 1: 24,000 and 1: 3,000 scales.
  - In the end, we sampled approximately 200 of these hand-selected river and stream sites that covered the nine ecoregions and ranked high across all screens.
2. In addition to the sites sampled in the NRSA, we obtained data for potential reference site from USGS' National Water-Quality Assessment Program (NAWQA), EPA Region 7, the State of Wisconsin, and the State of Oklahoma. These data included fish and macroinvertebrate assemblage data as well as physical and chemical habitat data.
3. Benthic macroinvertebrate reference site data also came from the 1,655 wadeable stream sites in the EPA WSA. In the WSA, reference sites were obtained from two different approaches: first by screening the WSA survey data for physical and chemical criteria in the same manner described in #1 above, and second from macroinvertebrate data provided by other agencies, universities, or states from sites that were deemed to be suitable as reference sites by best professional judgment. These sites either were sampled with the same methodology as the WSA or had field and lab protocols with enough similarities that the data analysis group determined

that the data were comparable. The reference sites from this second approach were only used in developing an MMI for benthic macroinvertebrate samples, not for setting any benchmarks. The WSA reference site screening process and data sources are described in detail in Herlihy *et al.* (2008). In **Table 4.1**, the first two data columns summarize the number of available WSA benthic macroinvertebrate reference sites by ecoregion.

4. We also pulled in additional fish reference site data from stream and river sites used by Herlihy *et al.* (2006) in a national analysis of fish assemblage data. The screening process used to define reference sites is described in Herlihy *et al.* (2006) and defined in detail in Appendix 1 of that document. The Herlihy *et al.* (2006) study only used the first two years of data from EMAP (Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Program)-West. For NRSA, reference fish data from the last three years of EMAP-West were also available and were included as well. Final numbers of reference sites and screening used to refine the fish reference population are outlined in **Chapter 6**.

**Table 4.1 Macroinvertebrate reference sites available for use in the NRSA**

| Ecoregion                   | WSA Activities   |                  | NRSA Activities   |                   | Total |
|-----------------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------|
|                             | WSA—<br>External | WSA—<br>Screened | NRSA—<br>External | NRSA—<br>Screened |       |
| Northern Appalachians (NAP) | 114              | 27               | 2                 | 37                | 180   |
| Southern Appalachians (SAP) | 370              | 35               | 22                | 38                | 465   |
| Coastal Plain (CPL)         | 112              | 15               | 3                 | 46                | 176   |
| Upper Midwest (UMW)         | 68               | 12               | 38                | 30                | 148   |
| Temperate Plains (TPL)      | 124              | 38               | 50                | 22                | 234   |
| Northern Plains (NPL)       | 10               | 18               | 3                 | 47                | 78    |
| Southern Plains (SPL)       | 56               | 21               | 51                | 34                | 162   |
| Western Mountains (WMT)     | 335              | 129              | 4                 | 40                | 508   |
| Xeric Region (XER)          | 132              | 39               | 2                 | 33                | 206   |
| Total                       | 1,321            | 334              | 175               | 327               | 2,157 |

## 4.2 CHEMICAL AND PHYSICAL SCREENS

To select reference sites from all of the sites compiled as described in Section 4.1, we first used chemical and physical data collected at each site (*e.g.*, nutrients, turbidity, acidity, riparian condition) to determine whether any given site is in least disturbed condition for its ecoregion. In the NRSA, eight physical and chemical parameters were used to screen for reference sites, total N, total P, chloride, sulfate, acid neutralizing capacity, turbidity, % fine substrate, and riparian disturbance index. If a site exceeded the screening value for any one stressor it was dropped from reference consideration.

Given that expectations of least-disturbed condition vary across ecoregions, the criteria values for

exclusion varied by ecoregion. The nine aggregate level III ecoregions developed for the WSA assessment were used to regionalize reference conditions. Ecoregional specific screening criteria in the Western Mountains ecoregion was broken into three finer-scale ecoregion subgroups for screening to match EMAP-West's use of a somewhat finer spatial scale.

As noted in Section 4.1, in addition to the sites sampled in the NRSA, we obtained possible reference site external data from four other agencies. Data from these external surveys were screened for physical and chemical criteria using the same criteria used for NRSA sample sites in **Table 4.2** using whatever screening data were available in each survey.

All sites in the NRSA (both probability and hand-picked, boatable and wadeable) and the added external data that passed all criteria were considered to be candidate reference sites for the NRSA assessment. The number of reference sites that passed this screening is summarized in **Table 4.1**. These reference sites include both fish and macroinvertebrate data. The NRSA did not use data on the biological assemblages themselves for any screening as these are the primary components of the stream and river ecosystems being evaluated, and to use them would constitute circular reasoning.

Note that the Rapid Bioassessment Protocol (RBP) physical habitat score was used as a filter in WSA but was not available in the NRSA data to use as a screen. The six ecoregions in the top half of the table were used in WSA and reported in Herlihy *et al.* (2008), the ecoregions in the bottom half of the table were screened using criteria developed in EMAP-West.

Sites were also screened using the criteria in **Table 4.3** to identify sites that could be used to test responsiveness in method and indicator development.

### 4.3 GEOSPATIAL SCREENS

As a final screen, all sites that passed the chemical and physical screens were then screened using three additional landscape-GIS screening criteria. These screens included a dam influence index, urbanization influence, and agricultural influence.

The dam influence index (DII) was used to assess the influence of upstream dams and the largest reservoir on the current list of potential reference sites. The complete watershed was assessed for any of the sites with a watershed boundary with a maximum distance of less than 200 km upstream of the sampling point. Any site that had a watershed with a distance greater than 200 km upstream of the sample point, had a wedge-shaped area assessed until 200 km upstream was reached. A cut-off distance of 200 km upstream was used because it is unlikely land use activities occurring greater than 200 km upstream will directly influence a given sample reach downstream. For example, a sample reach on the lower Mississippi is more likely to be influenced by more proximal land use activities than by land use activities in Montana, even though the Missouri River occurring within Montana is part of the upstream watershed of the lower Mississippi. For all watersheds and wedges assessed, a calculation of the volume of the largest reservoir, the number of dams, and an index



that weighted the maximum reservoir volume within the watershed or wedge by its proximity to the sample point was conducted. Each upstream reservoir was inversely weighted by its upstream flow distance from the sample point as:

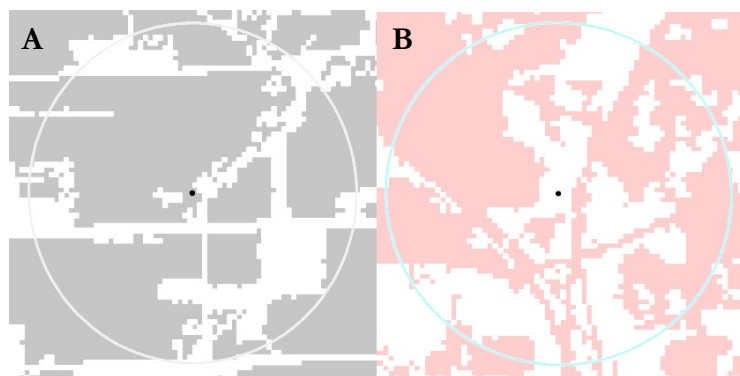
$$w_i = e^{-\left(\frac{D_{flow}}{D_{efolding}}\right)}$$

where  $D_{flow}$  is the flow distance to the sample site, and  $D_{efolding}$  is an e-folding value that determines the rate at which the weight exponentially decreases (here 100 km). DII equals the largest distance-weighted volume within the watershed:

$$DII = \max(w_i * D_i)$$

where  $D_i$  = reservoir volume ( $\text{km}^3$ ). The criteria for dropping a potential reference site was a DII value equal to or greater than one.

Percent urbanization and agricultural influence were assessed within a  $1 \text{ km}^2$  area around the mid-point of the sampled stream segment. To conduct this analysis a  $1 \text{ km}^2$  radius buffer around the mid-point was overlaid onto the National Land Cover Database 2006 (USGS 2011) to calculate the percentage of urban land cover and percent row crop, as defined by the NLCD (**Figure 4.1**). The criteria for dropping a potential reference sites was any greater than 5% urban land cover and 15% agricultural (row crop) land cover. The land cover percentages used for consistent screening of near-reach human influence were based on best professional judgement.



**Figure 4.1** Examples of percent urban (A, 60%) and row crop (B, 72%) from NLCD

#### 4.4 LITERATURE CITED

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**Table 4.2 Criteria for eight chemical and physical habitat filters used to identify the candidate least disturbed reference sites for benthic macroinvertebrate and fish indicators for each of the nine aggregate ecoregions for NRSA. A site must pass all eight filters to be considered a least-disturbed reference site.**

| Filter criterion                           | NAP               | SAP      | CPL      | UMW      | TPL      | SPL      | NPL      | XER      | WMT-SW <sup>e</sup>    | WMT-SRock <sup>e</sup> | WMT-Nrock/Pacific <sup>e</sup> |
|--|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Total P (µg/L)                             | ≤20               | ≤20      | ≤75      | ≤50      | ≤100     | ≤150     | ≤150     | ≤50      | ≤50                    | ≤25                    | ≤25                            |
| Total N (µg/L)                             | ≤750              | ≤750     | >2500    | ≤1000    | ≤3000    | ≤4500    | ≤4500    | ≤1500    | ≤750                   | ≤750                   | ≤750                           |
| Cl <sup>-</sup> (µeq/L)                    | ≤250 <sup>a</sup> | ≤200     | –        | ≤300     | ≤2000    | ≤1000    | ≤1000    | ≤1000    | ≤300                   | ≤200                   | ≤200 <sup>a</sup>              |
| SO <sub>4</sub> <sup>2-</sup> (µeq/L)      | ≤250              | ≤400     | ≤600     | ≤400     | –        | –        | –        | –        | –                      | ≤200                   | ≤200                           |
| ANC (µeq/L) +<br>DOC (mg/L) <sup>b</sup>   | ≥50 + ≥5          | ≥50 + ≥5 | ≥50 + ≥5 | ≥50 + ≥5 | ≥50 + ≥5 | ≥50 + ≥5 | ≥50 + ≥5 | ≥50 + ≥5 | ≥50 + ≥5               | ≥50 + ≥5               | ≥50 + ≥5                       |
| Turbidity (NTU)                            | ≤5                | ≤5       | ≤10      | ≤5       | ≤50      | ≤50      | ≤50      | ≤25      | ≤5                     | ≤5                     | ≤5                             |
| Riparian Disturbance<br>Index <sup>c</sup> | ≤2                | ≤2       | ≤2       | ≤2       | ≤2       | ≤2       | ≤2       | ≤1.5     | ≤0.5/≤1.5 <sup>d</sup> | ≤1/≤1.5 <sup>d</sup>   | ≤0.5/≤1.5 <sup>d</sup>         |
| % fine substrate                           | ≤25               | ≤25      | ≤50      | ≤40      | ≤80      | ≤90      | ≤90      | ≤50      | ≤15                    | ≤15                    | ≤15                            |

Values in red indicate a change from that used in WSA as reported in Herlihy *et al.* (2008).

– indicates filter criterion was not used in that ecoregion.

ANC = acid neutralizing capacity, DOC = dissolved organic carbon

<sup>a</sup> Cl<sup>-</sup> criterion not applied in Northeastern Coastal Zone (ecoregion 59) or Coast Range (ecoregion 1) sites

<sup>b</sup> Filter was specific for inorganic acidity; site had to exceed both criteria to fail

<sup>c</sup> Riparian disturbance index variable name is *WI\_HALL* in physical habitat database (see Chapter 7)

<sup>d</sup> Wadeable stream/Boatable river criteria. Different criteria were used by stream size in the Western Mountains.

<sup>e</sup> To match screening criteria to what was done in the EMAP-West component of WSA, the Western Mountains ecoregion was divided into three subgroups: SW = Southwestern Mountains (Omernik level III codes 8 and 23, Southern California Mts., and Arizona/New Mexico Mts.), SRock = Southern Rockies (Omernik 19 and 21, Southern Rockies and Wasatch/Uintias), and NRock/Pacific = Northern Rockies and Pacific Mountains (all other WMT level III ecoregions)

**Table 4.3 Criteria for eight chemical and physical habitat filters used to identify the candidate most-disturbed<sup>a</sup> sites for each of the nine aggregate ecoregions for NRSA. A site needed to pass one of the eight filters to be considered a most-disturbed site.**

| Filter criterion                        | NAP     | SAP     | CPL     | UMW     | TPL     | SPL     | NPL     | XER     | WMT-SW <sup>e</sup> | WMT-SRock <sup>e</sup> | WMT-NRock/Pacific <sup>e</sup> |
|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Total P (µg/L)                          | >100    | >100    | >250    | >150    | >500    | >500    | >500    | >150    | >150                | >100                   | >100                           |
| Total N (µg/L)                          | >3500   | >3500   | >8000   | >5000   | >15000  | >10000  | >10000  | >5000   | >1500               | >1500                  | >1500                          |
| Cl <sup>-</sup> (µeq/L)                 | >10000  | >1000   | –       | >2000   | >5000   | >5000   | >5000   | >5000   | >1000               | >1000                  | >1000                          |
| SO <sub>4</sub> <sup>2-</sup> (µeq/L)   | >1000   | >1000   | >4000   | >2000   | –       | –       | –       | –       | –                   | >1000                  | >1000                          |
| ANC (µeq/L) + DOC (mg/L) <sup>b</sup>   | <0 + <5 | <0 + <5 | <0 + <5 | <0 + <5 | <0 + <5 | <0 + <5 | <0 + <5 | <0 + <5 | <0 + <5             | <0 + <5                | <0 + <5                        |
| Turbidity (NTU)                         | >10     | >20     | >50     | >30     | >100    | >100    | >100    | >75     | >10                 | >10                    | >10                            |
| Riparian Disturbance Index <sup>c</sup> | >4      | >4      | >4      | >4      | >4      | >3      | >3      | >3      | >3                  | >3                     | >3                             |
| % fine substrate                        | >75     | >75     | >95     | >90     | ≥100    | >99     | >99     | >90     | >50                 | >50                    | >50                            |

<sup>a</sup> A set of most-disturbed sites in each ecoregion is needed to test metric and MMI responsiveness in discriminating between most- and least-disturbed sites. The criteria in Table 4.3 are the screening factors used to identify a set of most-disturbed sites in each ecoregion as reported in Stoddard *et al.* (2008).

– indicates filter criterion was not used in that ecoregion.

ANC = acid neutralizing capacity, DOC = dissolved organic carbon

<sup>b</sup> Filter was specific for inorganic acidity; site had to exceed both criteria to fail

<sup>c</sup> Riparian disturbance index variable name is *WI\_HALL* in physical habitat database (see Chapter 7).

<sup>e</sup> To match screening criteria to what was done in the EMAP-West component of WSA, the Western Mountains ecoregion was divided into three subgroups: SW = Southwestern Mountains (Omernik level III codes 8 and 23, Southern California Mts., and Arizona/New Mexico Mts.), SRock = Southern Rockies (Omernik 19 and 21, Southern Rockies and Wasatch/Uintas), and NRock/Pacific = Northern Rockies and Pacific Mountains (all other WMT level III ecoregions)

## 5 BENTHIC MACROINVERTEBRATES

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Benthic macroinvertebrates were collected using a D-frame net with 500 µm mesh openings at 11 transects equally distributed along the targeted reach. Samples were composited from the 11 transects and the material was field preserved with ~95% ethanol. Organisms were enumerated and identified to the lowest possible taxonomic level (generally genus) using specified standard keys and references (see the NRSA 2013-14 Field Operations Manual and Laboratory Operations Manual for additional details). Benthic macroinvertebrate counts, metrics, and multimetric index condition from NRSA are available to download from the NARS data webpage - <https://www.epa.gov/national-aquatic-resource-surveys/data-national-aquatic-resource-surveys>

The taxonomic composition and relative abundance of different taxa that make up the benthic macroinvertebrate assemblage present in a stream have been used extensively in North America, Europe, and Australia to assess how human activities affect ecological condition (Barbour *et al.* 1995, 1999; Karr and Chu 1999). As explained in general terms in the NRSA 2008-09 Technical Report (USEPA 2016; see Section 5.2) two principal types of ecological assessment tools to assess condition based on benthic macroinvertebrates are currently prevalent: multimetric indices and predictive models of taxa richness. The purpose of these indicators is to present the complex community taxonomic data represented within an assemblage in a way that is understandable and informative to resource managers and the public. The following sections provide an overview of the approaches used to develop ecological indicators based on benthic macroinvertebrate assemblages, followed by details regarding data preparation and the process used for each approach to arrive at a final indicator. The same analyses and benchmarks were used in NRSA 2008-09 and NRSA 2013-14.

### 5.1 OVERVIEW

Multimetric indicators have been used in the U.S. to assess stream condition based on fish and macroinvertebrate assemblage data (*e.g.*, Karr and Chu, 1999; Barbour *et al.*, 1999; Barbour *et al.*, 1995). The multimetric approach involves summarizing various assemblage attributes (*e.g.*, composition, tolerance to disturbance, trophic and habitat preferences) as individual “metrics” or measures of the biological community. Candidate metrics are then evaluated for various aspects of performance and a subset of the best performing metrics are then combined into an index, referred to as a multimetric index or MMI. For NRSA 2013-14 and NRSA 2008-09, the benthic macroinvertebrate MMI developed in the WSA was used to generate the population estimates used in the assessment. The WSA MMI is detailed in Stoddard *et al.* (2008).

The predictive model approach was initially developed in Europe and Australia, and is becoming more prevalent within the U.S. The approach estimates the expected taxonomic composition of an assemblage in the absence of human stressors (Hawkins *et al.*, 2000; Wright, 2000), using a set of “least-disturbed” sites and other variables related natural gradients (such as elevation, stream size, stream gradient, latitude, longitude). The resulting models are then used to estimate the expected taxa composition (expressed as taxa richness) at each stream site sampled. The number of

expected taxa observed at a site is compared to the total number of expected taxa as an observed:expected ratio (O/E index). Departures from a ratio of 1.0 indicate that the taxonomic composition in a stream sample differs from that expected under less disturbed conditions.

## **5.2 DATA PREPARATION**

### **5.2.1 Standardizing Counts**

The number of individuals in a sample was standardized to a constant number to provide an adequate number of individuals that was the same for the most samples and that could be used for both multimetric index development and O/E predictive modeling index. A subsampling technique involving random sampling without replacement was used to extract a true “fixed count” of 300 individuals from the total number of individuals enumerated for a sample (target lab count was 500 individuals). Samples that did not contain at least 300 individuals were used in the assessment because low counts can indicate a response to one or more stressors. Only those sites with at least 250 individuals, however, were used as least-disturbed reference sites.

### **5.2.2 Operational Taxonomic Units**

For the predictive model approach, it was necessary to combine taxa to a coarser level of common taxonomy. This new combination of taxa is termed an “operational taxonomic unit” or OTU, and results in fewer taxa than are present in the initial benthic macroinvertebrate count data.

### **5.2.3 Autecological Characteristics**

Autecological characteristics refer to specific ecological requirements or preferences of a taxon for habitat preference, feeding behavior, and tolerance to human disturbance. These characteristics are prerequisites for identifying and calculating many metrics. A number of state/regional organizations and research centers have developed autecological characteristics for benthic macroinvertebrates in their region. For the WSA and NRSA, a consistent “national” list of characteristics that consolidated and reconciled any discrepancies among the regional lists was needed before certain biological metrics could be developed and calibrated and an MMI could be constructed. The same autecological information used in WSA was used in NRSA 2008-09 and 2013-14.

Members of the data analysis group pulled together autecological information from five existing sources: (1) the EPA Rapid Bioassessment Protocols document; (2) the USGS National Ambient Water Quality Assessment (NAWQA) national and northwest lists; (3) the Utah State University list; (4) the EMAP Mid-Atlantic Highlands (MAHA); and (5) the EMAP Mid-Atlantic Integrated Assessment (MAIA) list. These five were chosen because they were thought to be the most independent of each other and the most inclusive. A single national-level list was developed based on the decision rules described in the following sections.

#### **5.2.3.1 Tolerance Values**

Tolerance value assignments followed the convention for macroinvertebrates, ranging between 0 (least tolerant or most sensitive) and 10 (most tolerant). For each taxon, tolerance values from all five sources were reviewed and a final assignment made according to the following rules:

- If values from different lists were all <3 (sensitive), final value = mean.
- If values from different lists were all >3 and <7 (facultative), final value = mean.
- If values from different lists were all >7 (tolerant), final value = mean.
- If values from different lists spanned sensitive, facultative, and tolerant categories, best professional judgment was used, along with alternative sources of information (if available) to assign a final tolerance value.
- Tolerance values of 0 to ≤3 were considered “sensitive” or “intolerant.” Tolerance values ≥7 to 10 were considered “tolerant,” and values in between were considered “facultative.”

### 5.2.3.2 *Functional Feeding Group and Habitat Preferences*

In many cases, there was agreement among the five data sources identified in Section 5.2.3. When discrepancies in functional feeding group (FFG) or habitat preference (“habit”) assignments among the five primary data sources were identified, a final assignment was made based on the most prevalent assignment. In cases where there was no prevalent assignment, the workgroup examined why disagreements existed, flagged the taxon, and used best professional judgment to make the final assignment.

## 5.3 MULTIMETRIC INDEX DEVELOPMENT

### 5.3.1 *Regional Multimetric Development*

The same autecology and taxonomic resolution used in WSA was applied to the NRSA macroinvertebrate 300 fixed count data to calculate the community metrics used to calculate the MMI. In the WSA, a best ecoregional MMI was developed by summing the six metrics that performed best in that ecoregion (the national aggregate nine ecoregions). Each of the six metrics was scored on a 0–10 scale by interpolating metrics between a floor and ceiling value. The six metric 0-10 point scaled scores were then summed and normalized to a 0–100 scale by multiplying by 100/60 to calculate the final MMI. Details of this process are described in Stoddard *et al.* (2008).

The final metrics used in each ecoregion, metric direction, and floor and ceiling values are summarized in **Table 5.1**. Scoring equations are different depending on if the metric responds positively (high values good) or negatively (high values bad) with disturbance. For positive metrics, values above the ceiling get 10 points, and values below the floor get 0 points. For negative metrics, values above the ceiling get 0 points, and values below the floor get 10 points. The interpolation equations for scoring the 0-10 points for metrics between the floor and ceiling values are:

- Positive Metrics: Metric Points =  $10 * ((\text{metric value} - \text{floor}) / (\text{ceiling} - \text{floor}))$

- Negative Metrics: Metric Points =  $10 * (1 - ((\text{metric value} - \text{floor}) / (\text{ceiling} - \text{floor})))$ .

The MMI used in the NRSA report is identical to the WSA MMI in terms of metrics and scoring. Based on NRSA revisit data, the MMI had a S:N ratio of 2.8 and a pooled standard deviation of 10.0 (out of 0–100).



**Table 5.1 Six benthic community metrics, scoring direction, and floor and ceiling values used in calculating the NRSA and WSA MMI in each of the nine aggregate ecoregions.**

| <b>Ecoregion</b> | <b>Direction</b> | <b>Metric</b>                 | <b>Floor</b> | <b>Ceiling</b> |
|------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| <b>CPL</b>       | Negative         | Non-Insect % Individuals      | 0.70         | 73.0           |
|                  | Positive         | Shannon Diversity             | 1.62         | 3.31           |
|                  | Positive         | Shredder Taxa Richness        | 1            | 9              |
|                  | Positive         | Clinger % Taxa Richness       | 14.3         | 54.8           |
|                  | Positive         | EPT Taxa Richness             | 1            | 17             |
|                  | Negative         | Tolerant % Taxa Richness      | 5.56         | 50.0           |
| <b>NAP</b>       | Positive         | EPT % Taxa Richness           | 9.52         | 57.6           |
|                  | Negative         | % Individuals in Top 5 Taxa   | 37.2         | 76.2           |
|                  | Positive         | Scraper Taxa Richness         | 3            | 12             |
|                  | Positive         | Clinger % Taxa Richness       | 28.6         | 70.0           |
|                  | Positive         | EPT Taxa Richness             | 3            | 24             |
|                  | Positive         | PTV 0-5.9 % Taxa Richness     | 46.2         | 86.1           |
| <b>NPL</b>       | Positive         | EPT % Taxa Richness           | 3.85         | 50.0           |
|                  | Positive         | Shannon Diversity             | 1.10         | 3.07           |
|                  | Positive         | Scraper Taxa Richness         | 1            | 6              |
|                  | Negative         | Burrower % Taxa Richness      | 6.45         | 35.3           |
|                  | Positive         | Ephemeroptera Taxa Richness   | 0            | 7              |
|                  | Positive         | PTV 0-5.9 Taxa Richness       | 4            | 28             |
| <b>SAP</b>       | Positive         | Ephemeroptera % Taxa Richness | 5.41         | 28.6           |
|                  | Positive         | Shannon Diversity             | 2.05         | 3.44           |
|                  | Positive         | Scraper Taxa Richness         | 3            | 12             |
|                  | Negative         | Burrower % Taxa Richness      | 3.45         | 25.0           |
|                  | Positive         | EPT Taxa Richness             | 5            | 25             |
|                  | Negative         | Tolerant % Taxa Richness      | 2.44         | 27.6           |
| <b>SPL</b>       | Positive         | EPT % Individuals             | 0.67         | 66.0           |
|                  | Positive         | Shannon Diversity             | 1.16         | 3.27           |
|                  | Positive         | Scraper Taxa Richness         | 1            | 8              |
|                  | Negative         | Burrower % Taxa Richness      | 5.0          | 36.1           |
|                  | Positive         | EPT Taxa Richness             | 1            | 16             |
|                  | Positive         | Intolerant Taxa Richness      | 1            | 8              |
| <b>TPL</b>       | Positive         | EPT % Individuals             | 0.67         | 80.3           |
|                  | Positive         | Shannon Diversity             | 1.41         | 3.17           |
|                  | Positive         | Scraper Taxa Richness         | 1            | 9              |
|                  | Positive         | Clinger Taxa Richness         | 3            | 20             |
|                  | Positive         | Ephemeroptera Taxa Richness   | 1            | 11             |
|                  | Negative         | PTV 8-9.9 % Taxa Richness     | 4.35         | 33.3           |
| <b>UMW</b>       | Negative         | Chironomid % Taxa Richness    | 11.2         | 50.8           |
|                  | Positive         | Shannon Diversity             | 2.01         | 3.56           |
|                  | Positive         | Shredder Taxa Richness        | 3            | 10             |
|                  | Negative         | Burrower % Taxa Richness      | 3.77         | 28.6           |
|                  | Positive         | EPT Taxa Richness             | 4            | 22             |
|                  | Negative         | PTV 8-9.9 % Taxa Richness     | 2.51         | 29.5           |
| <b>WMT</b>       | Positive         | EPT % Taxa Richness           | 18.5         | 62.9           |
|                  | Negative         | % Individuals in Top 5 Taxa   | 40.6         | 82.3           |
|                  | Positive         | Scraper Taxa Richness         | 1            | 8              |
|                  | Positive         | Clinger % Taxa Richness       | 27.0         | 69.6           |
|                  | Positive         | EPT Taxa Richness             | 6            | 23             |
|                  | Negative         | Tolerant % Taxa Richness      | 2.27         | 25             |
| <b>XER</b>       | Negative         | Non-Insect % Individuals      | 3.33         | 36.0           |
|                  | Negative         | % Individuals in Top 5 Taxa   | 44.7         | 92.3           |
|                  | Positive         | Scraper Taxa Richness         | 0            | 7              |
|                  | Positive         | Clinger % Taxa Richness       | 15.8         | 65.8           |
|                  | Positive         | EPT Taxa Richness             | 1            | 18             |
|                  | Negative         | Tolerant % Taxa Richness      | 3.57         | 36.4           |

### 5.3.2 Modeling of MMI Benchmarks

Previous large-scale assessments have converted MMI scores into classes of assemblage quality by comparing those scores to the distribution of scores observed at least-disturbed reference sites. If a site's MMI score was less than the 5<sup>th</sup> percentile of the reference distribution, it was classified as "poor" quality; scores between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> percentile were classified as "fair"; and scores in the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile or higher were classified as "good." This approach assumes that the distribution of MMI scores at reference sites reflects an approximately equal, minimum level of human disturbance across those sites. But this assumption did not appear to be valid for some of the nine WSA regions, which was confirmed by state and regional parties at meetings to review the draft results.

For the WSA, the project team performed a principal components analysis (PCA) of the physical habitat and water chemistry variables (Total P, Total N, pH, Chloride, Sulfate, Turbidity, %Fine Substrate, Riparian Disturbance Index) that had originally been used to screen for biological reference sites as described in **Chapter 4**. The first principal component (Factor 1) of this PCA well represented a generalized gradient of human disturbance. MMI scores at the reference sites, however, were weakly, but significantly, related to this disturbance gradient in some of the aggregate ecoregions. Thus, MMI reference distributions from these regions may be biased downward, because they include somewhat disturbed sites which may have lower MMI scores. As part of the WSA, Herlihy *et al.* (2008) developed a process that used this PCA disturbance gradient to reduce the effects of disturbance on benchmark values within the reference site population. The process uses multiple regression modeling to develop adjusted benchmarks analogous to the 5<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> percentiles of reference sites in each ecoregion based on the slope of the MMI-disturbance relationship in each ecoregion.

These adjusted benchmarks were used in the WSA but were based on a fairly small sample size of reference sites. To increase the sample size used in the regression model, the benchmark adjustment process was rerun for NRSA using the original WSA reference sites plus the additional NRSA reference sites identified in Section 4. As in the WSA analysis and other benchmark setting, we used a 1.5\*interquartile range (IQR) outlier screening test in each ecoregion to drop MMI outliers from the analysis (sites with values outside the range of  $Q1 - 1.5 * IQR$  or  $Q3 + 1.5 * IQR$  were dropped). This removed 6 sites from the analysis (all low; 3 in WMT, and 3 in XER). There were a grand total of 647 least-disturbed reference sites used for the benchmark regression adjustment modeling and the resulting regression statistics for each ecoregion are shown in **Table 5.2**. The process for calculating these adjusted benchmarks and fitting the regression model is detailed in Herlihy *et al.* (2008). Briefly, the process involves setting the goal for disturbance to the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile of the Factor 1 disturbance score for reference sites in each ecoregion. The ecoregion MMI value at that goal is predicted from the MMI-disturbance regression as:

$$\text{MMI}_{\text{pred}} = (\text{GOAL} * \text{SLOPE}) + \text{INTERCEPT}$$

Then the percentiles to be used as the adjusted benchmarks are calculated assuming there is a

normal distribution around this predicted mean using the RMSE of the regression model as the standard error,

$$\text{Good-Fair 25}^{\text{th}} \text{ benchmark} = \text{MMI}_{\text{pred}} - 0.675 * \text{RMSE}$$

$$\text{Fair-Poor 5}^{\text{th}} \text{ benchmark} = \text{MMI}_{\text{pred}} - 1.650 * \text{RMSE}$$

The resulting adjusted MMI benchmark values for the condition classes in each ecoregion used in the NRSA report are given in **Table 5.3**.

**Table 5.2 MMI-Disturbance Regression Model Statistics Used for Setting Benchmarks**

| Ecoregion | Number of Reference Sites | Factor 1 Goal* | Regression RMSE | Regression Slope | Regression Intercept |
|-----------|---------------------------|----------------|-----------------|------------------|----------------------|
| CPL       | 32                        | -0.1501        | 14.55           | 0                | 64.74                |
| NAP       | 56                        | -0.5247        | 14.55           | -7.257           | 61.06                |
| NPL       | 65                        | 0.8723         | 14.55           | -14.95           | 79.66                |
| SAP       | 64                        | -0.5531        | 14.55           | -7.257           | 50.78                |
| SPL       | 43                        | 0.7637         | 14.55           | -7.257           | 50.84                |
| TPL       | 49                        | 1.045          | 14.55           | -7.257           | 57.75                |
| UMW       | 39                        | -0.1138        | 14.55           | 0                | 46.74                |
| WMT       | 209                       | -1.326         | 14.55           | -7.257           | 50.27                |
| XER       | 90                        | -0.4628        | 14.55           | -7.257           | 63.44                |

\* The 25<sup>th</sup> percentile of Factor 1 score was the “goal” on the PCA factor 1 disturbance gradient for hindcasting ecoregional benchmarks.

**Table 5.3 Benchmark Values for the Nine Regional Benthic MMIs**

| Ecoregion | Good Benchmark | Poor Benchmark |
|-----------|----------------|----------------|
| CPL       | ≥54.9          | <40.7          |
| NAP       | ≥55.0          | <40.9          |
| NPL       | ≥56.8          | <42.6          |
| SAP       | ≥45.0          | <30.8          |
| SPL       | ≥35.5          | <21.3          |
| TPL       | ≥40.3          | <26.2          |
| UMW       | ≥36.9          | <22.7          |
| WMT       | ≥50.1          | <35.9          |
| XER       | ≥57.0          | <42.8          |

\*Any site with an MMI score that was not “good” or “poor” was considered “fair.”

## 5.4 PREDICTED O/E MODELING

In addition to the benthic macroinvertebrate MMI approach, predictive O/E modeling was used to assess benthic macroinvertebrate condition. The O/E model compares the observed benthic assemblage at a site to an expected assemblage derived from the reference sites.

Stressors and anthropogenic impacts typically lead to a reduction in the number of taxa that are

expected to be present under reference conditions. The predictive model approach is used by several states and is a primary assessment tool of Great Britain and Australia. The O/E ratio predicted by the model for any site expresses the number of taxa found at that site (O), as a proportion of the number that would be expected (E) if the site was in least disturbed condition. Ideally, a site in reference condition has  $O/E = 1.0$ . An O/E value of 0.70 indicates that 70% of the “expected” taxa at a site were actually observed at the site. This is interpreted as a 30% loss of taxa relative to the site’s predicted reference condition. However, O/E values vary among reference sites themselves, around the idealized value of 1.0, because such sites rarely conform to an idealized reference condition, and because of model error and sampling variation. The standard deviation of O/E (**Table 5.4**) indicates the breadth of O/E variation at reference sites. Thus, the O/E value of an individual site should not be interpreted as (1 – taxa loss) without taking account of this variability in O/E. Individual O/E values are most reliably interpreted relative to the entire O/E distribution for reference sites.

A nationally distributed collection of reference sites was first identified, drawn from a pool of sites whose macroinvertebrates were sampled using NRSA protocols. This pool included only NRSA, WSA, EMAP-West, STAR-Hawkins, USGS NAWQA, and MAHA/MAIA sites. One hundred reference sites were set aside to validate the models, and the remaining reference sites were used to calibrate the models (**Table 5.4**). Each site contributed a single sampled macroinvertebrate assemblage to model calibration and validation. Each sampled macroinvertebrate assemblage comprising more than 300 identified individuals was randomly subsampled to yield 300 individuals. 300-count subsamples were used to build models and assess all NRSA sites.

The predictive modeling approach assumes that expected assemblages vary across reference sites throughout a region, due to natural (non-anthropogenic) environmental features such as geology, soil type, elevation, and precipitation. To model these effects, the approach first classifies reference sites based on similarities of their macroinvertebrate assemblages (**Table 5.4**). A random forest model is then built to predict the membership of any site in these classes, using natural environmental features as predictor variables (**Table 5.4**). The predicted occurrence probability of a reference taxon at a site is then predicted to be the weighted average of that taxon’s occurrence frequencies in all reference site classes, using the site’s predicted group membership probabilities in the classes as weights. Finally, E for any site is the sum, over a subset of reference taxa, of predicted taxon occurrence probabilities. O is the number of taxa in that subset that were observed to be present at the site. The subset of reference taxa used for any site was defined as those taxa with predicted occurrence probabilities exceeding 0.5 at that site.

Final predictive models performed better than corresponding null models (no adjustment for natural-factor effects), as judged by their smaller standard deviation of O/E across calibration sites (**Table 5.4**). Similar to the IBI, two scaled approaches were used to develop the O/E model. A national model was initially developed to predict taxa loss at sites. Three models were developed for NRSA usage, together covering the contiguous USA (**Table 5.4**). The regional models performed better and were used in the NRSA to predict taxa loss at the sites.

**Table 5.4 Benthic Macroinvertebrate Predictive Models**

| Model Name                                      | Eastern Highlands  | Plains and Lowlands  | West   |
|---|--|--|--|
| Regions covered                                 | NAP, SAP   | CPL, UMW, TPL, NPL, SPL  | WMT, XER   |
| Number of calibration sites                     | 297  | 241  | 659  |
| Number of validation sites                      | 31   | 21   | 48   |
| Number of site classes                          | 17   | 16   |  |
| Random Forest predictor variables               | Predicted mean summer stream temperature, watershed area, watershed mean minimum annual temperature, predicted mean annual stream temperature, watershed mean annual temperature, watershed mean minimum precipitation | Predicted mean annual stream temperature, watershed mean date of last freeze, watershed mean soil permeability, watershed mean runoff, watershed maximum elevation | Watershed area, watershed mean annual temperature, watershed mean precipitation accumulation, predicted mean annual stream temperature, watershed mean maximum temperature, watershed mean elevation |
| Standard deviation of O/E at calibration sites: |  |  |  |
| -- Predictive model                             | 0.18   | 0.23   | 0.18   |
| -- Null model                                   | 0.22   | 0.26   | 0.25   |

## 5.5 LITERATURE CITED

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## 6 **FISH ASSEMBLAGE**

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### 6.1 **BACKGROUND**

Fish assemblages in streams and rivers offer several unique advantages to assess ecological quality, based on their mobility, longevity, trophic relationships, and socioeconomic importance (Barbour *et al.* 1999, Roset *et al.* 2007). For fish assemblages, assessing ecological quality has generally been based on developing and using multimetric indices (MMIs), which are derivations of the original Index of Biotic Integrity (IBI) developed by Karr (Karr 1981). There are numerous examples of MMIs developed for fish assemblages in smaller streams (e.g., McCormick *et al.* 2001, Hughes *et al.* 2004, Bramblett *et al.* 2005, Roset *et al.* 2007) as well as for larger rivers (Lyons *et al.* 2001, Emery *et al.* 2003, Mebane *et al.* 2003, Pearson *et al.* 2011).

#### 6.1.1 **Multimetric Indicator for NRSA 2008-09**

For the NRSA 2008-09, we developed fish MMIs using predictive models of metric response (e.g., Oberdorff *et al.* 2002, Tejerina-Garro *et al.* 2006, Pont *et al.* 2007, Pont *et al.* 2009). This approach essentially provided an estimate of expected quality (in terms of metric values) at individual sites, rather than using a set of regional least-disturbed reference sites to define expected values for a particular metric. Several studies concluded that the combined approach resulted in MMIs that performed better in terms of their ability to discern deviation from expected condition (Oberdorff *et al.* 2002, Tejerina-Garro *et al.* 2006, Pont *et al.* 2007, Pont *et al.* 2009, Hawkins *et al.* 2010a). Details regarding the development and performance of these fish MMIs are presented in the technical support document for NRSA 2008-09 (U.S. EPA 2016).

#### 6.1.2 **Multimetric Indicator for NRSA 2013-14**

The fish MMIs developed and used for the NRSA 2008-09 assessment performed adequately in terms of their responsiveness to disturbance and repeatability (USEPA 2016). However, there were several major constraints associated with these MMIs. The two major constraints were: 1) the large number of least-disturbed reference sites required to construct the predictive models of metric response, which limited our ability to develop MMIs for smaller regions; and 2) the difficulty in transferring the model outputs, R scripts, etc. to potential users to apply to their own data. These constraints, along with new approaches to constructing and evaluating MMIs that became available since the original fish MMIs were developed, led us to investigate using a more traditional approach to MMI development. This more traditional approach adjusted metrics for watershed area using linear regression if the effect was large enough.

The NRSA 2008-09 fish data were used to develop and evaluate fish MMIs based on the traditional approach. We compared the performance of the traditional fish MMIs to the original model-based MMIs (see **Appendix 7.A**), and then applied the traditional MMI approach to both the NRSA 2008-09 and 2013-14 data for use in the 2013-14 survey report.

### **6.1.3 Regionalization**

We developed three original model-based fish MMIs for NRSA 2008-09, one for each of the three climatic regions (Eastern Highlands, Plains and Lowlands, and the West; **Figure 6.1**). We developed separate traditional fish MMIs for each of the nine NARS reporting regions for NRSA 2013-14 (**Figure 6.2**).

## **6.2 METHODS**

### **6.2.1 Field methods**

Collection methods for fish are described in the NRSA 2013-14 field operations manuals (USEPA 2013a, b). Collection methods used for NRSA 2013-14 were essentially unchanged from those used for NRSA 2008-09 (USEPA 2009). These minor changes included sorting fish into 6-inch size classes instead of recording only minimum and maximum length, and minor text changes to help clarify sampling procedures or field forms. Three variants of the basic sampling protocol (using electrofishing) were used depending on the width of the stream and if it was wadeable. For wadeable streams less than 12.5 m wide, a reach length equal to 40 channel widths was sampled for fish. For larger wadeable streams (> 12.5 m wide), a reach length of 500 m or 20 channel widths was sampled (whichever was longer). For non-wadeable streams and rivers, at least a reach length of 20 channel widths was sampled. At large wadeable and non-wadeable sites, sampling continued past the established reach length until 500 individuals were collected (or a reach length equal to 40 channel widths was sampled).

For fish, 2,261 site visits were initially available. These included 2,045 visits to 1,853 probability sites and 216 hand-picked sites (single visit) that were evaluated as potential least-disturbed reference sites (see **Section 4.1**). There were 192 revisits to a subset of the 1,853 probability sites (either within a single year or across the two years of sampling). Fish sampling was attempted at 2,059 sites (not including revisits). A sufficient sample (based on length of reach sampled for fish and the number of individuals collected) was obtained at 1,847 sites, with no fish collected at 64 sites. Seining only was conducted at 36 sites, and conditions prevented a sufficient sample from being collected at 167 sites. No fish data were obtained from 133 sites, due to the lack of required permits (66 sites), equipment failure (8 sites), site conditions (44 sites), loss of data after collection (9 sites), or other reasons (6 sites).

### **6.2.2 Counting, Taxonomy, and Autecology**

Fish were tallied and identified in the field, then released alive unless used for fish tissue or vouchers. Voucher specimens were collected if field identification could not be accomplished. Voucher samples of all species collected were also prepared at 10% of sites for each field taxonomist. Voucher samples were sent to an independent taxonomist to evaluate taxonomic proficiency of each field taxonomist. All names submitted on field data forms were reviewed and



revised when necessary to create a listing of nationally consistent common and scientific names. Where possible, taxonomic names (common and scientific) were based on Nelson *et al.* (2004) and Page *et al.* (2013). The online database FishBase (<http://www.fishbase.org>) served as a secondary source of taxonomic names. In rare cases, a journal article of a newly described species was used. Collection maps for each taxon were prepared and compared to published maps in Page and Burr (2011) or alternative web publications for a few rare endemic species. A total of 631 unique taxa were identified, excluding unknowns, hybrids, and amphibians. Amphibians were not used in the fish MMIs but were retained in the database for potential use by other users of NRSA data.

Each taxon was characterized for several different autecological traits, based on available sources of published information (e.g., McCormick *et al.* 2001, Goldstein and Meador 2004, Whittier *et al.* 2007b, Frimpong and Angermeier 2009). Traits included habitat guilds (lotic habitat and temperature), trophic guild, reproductive guild, migration strategy, and tolerance to human disturbance. A file of all fish taxa and their associated autecological assignments is available on the NRSA website.

Assignments of native status were based primarily on shapefiles of individual species distribution from NatureServe (<http://www.natureserve.org>). Alternative sources included the USGS Nonindigenous Species database (<http://nas.er.usgs.gov>), FishBase, published maps in Page and Burr (2011), and relevant state fish publications (if available).

Because fish collected at a site cannot always be confidently identified to species, there is a risk of inflating the number of species actually collected. For each sample, we reviewed the list of taxa to determine whether they were represented at more than one level of resolution. For example, if an “Unknown *Catostomus*” was collected, and it was the only representative of the genus at the site, we assigned it as a distinct taxon. If any other species of the genus were collected, then we considered the unknown as not distinct. We used only the number of distinct taxa in the sample to calculate any metrics based on species richness.

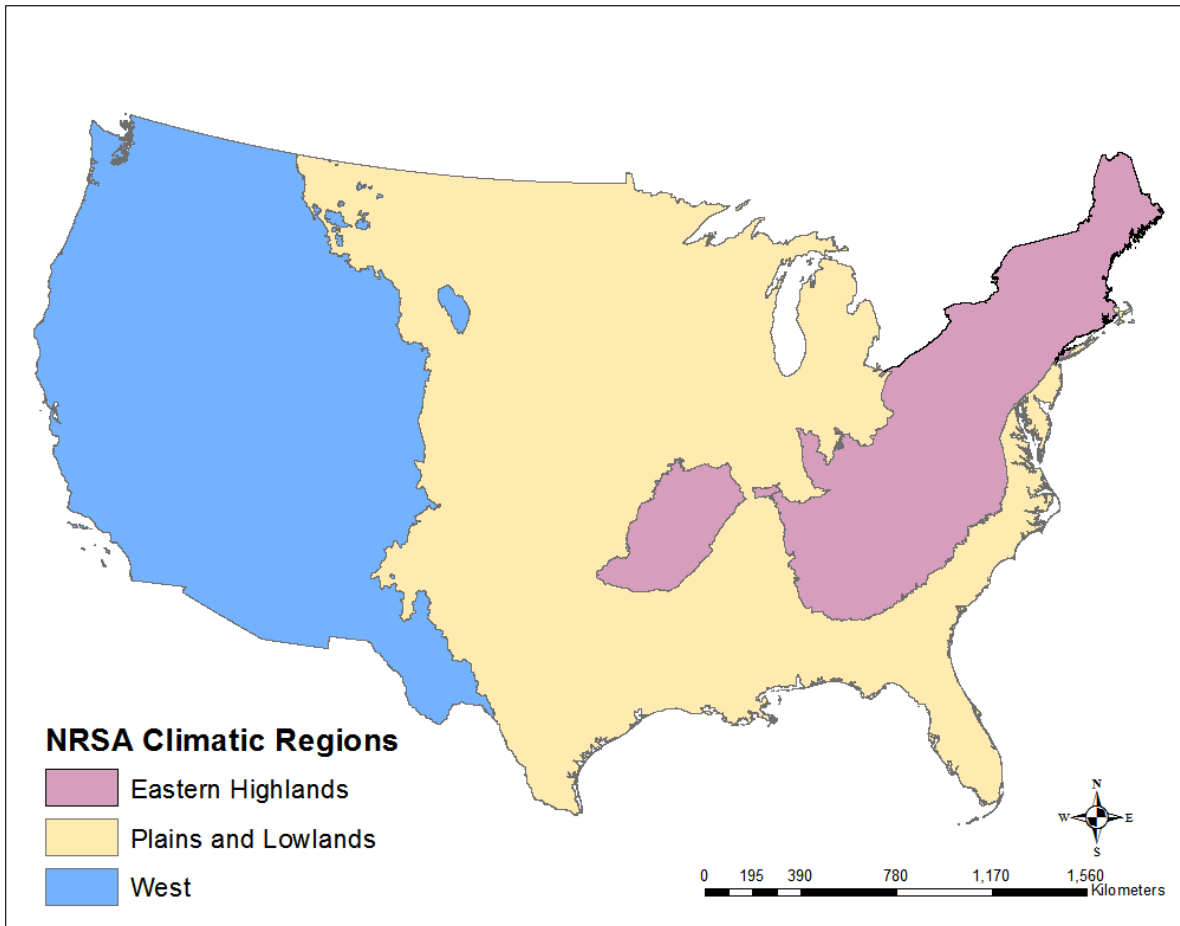
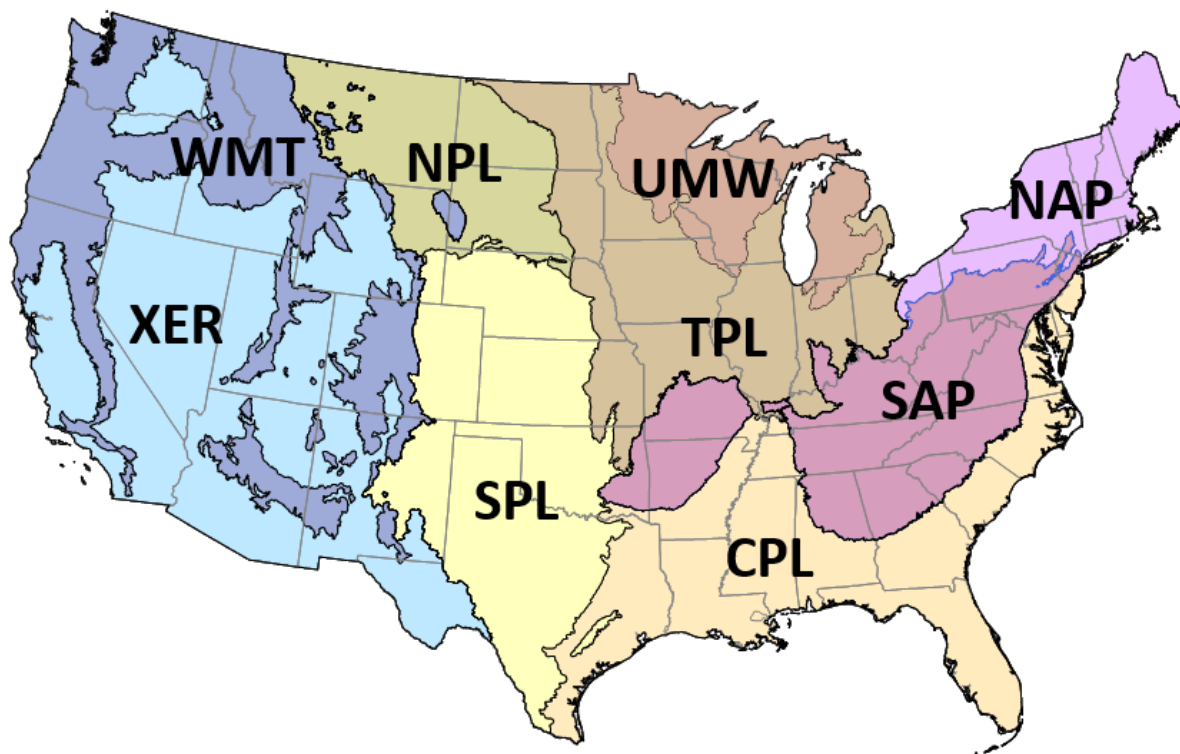


Figure 6.1 Aggregated Omernik ecoregions used to develop model-based fish MMIs for NRSA 2008-09. A separate fish MMI was developed for each of the three climatic regions.



**Figure 6.2 Aggregated Omernik ecoregions used to develop traditional fish MMIs for NRSA 2013-14. A separate fish MMI was developed for each of the nine aggregated ecoregions. NAP=Northern Appalachians, SAP=Southern Appalachians, CPL=Coastal Plains, TPL=Temperate Plains, UMW=Upper Midwest, SPL=Southern Plains, NPL=Northern Plains, XER=Xeric West, WMT=Western Mountains.**

### **6.3 FISH MULTIMETRIC INDEX DEVELOPMENT**

We used a consistent process to develop a multimetric index for fish for each of the nine aggregated ecoregions. We used the sites from the NRSA 2008-09 to develop and evaluate the fish MMIs, then calculated fish MMI scores for the NRSA 2013-14 data. We evaluated each metric for its responsiveness to disturbance, *i.e.*, its ability to discern between least-disturbed and most-disturbed sites (following Stoddard *et al.* 2008). We then selected metrics representing different dimensions of assemblage structure or function to include in the fish MMI based on responsiveness and lack of correlation with other metrics, following Whittier *et al.* (2007b) and Stoddard *et al.* (2008).

### **6.3.1 Least-Disturbed Reference Sites for Fish**

We modified the base list of least-disturbed reference sites (Section 4) determined for NRSA to eliminate additional fish samples that might not be representative of least-disturbed conditions (i.e., excluded sites where < 25 fish were caught or had >50% non-native individuals) (**Table 6.1**). The final set of least-disturbed reference sites are identified in the NRSA database (variable RT\_NRSA\_FISH=R).

To validate the fish MMIs and their component metrics, we identified a random subset of least-disturbed sites (validation sites) within each aggregated ecoregion and excluded them from fish MMI development. We set aside 29 validation sites in the Eastern Highlands (NAP=16, SAP=13), 66 sites in the Plains and Lowlands (CPL=10, NPL=16, SPL=13, TPL=14, UMW=13), and 23 sites in the West region (WMT=13, XER=10). We expected the distribution of fish MMI scores calculated for the validation sites would be similar to the distribution of fish MMI scores calculated for the calibration sites that were used to develop the fish MMIs.

### **6.3.2 Candidate Metrics**

We calculated 162 candidate metrics (**Appendix 7.B**) representing the following dimensions of fish assemblage structure and function (following Stoddard *et al.* 2008):

- Nonnative species (ALIEN) based on presence in 8-digit USGS Hydrologic Units
- Taxonomic composition (COMP)
- Species richness (RICH)
- Habitat guild (HABIT)
- Life history/migratory strategy (LIFE)
- Reproductive guild (REPRO)
- Trophic guild (TROPH)
- Tolerance (TOLER) to anthropogenic disturbance

The codes (in uppercase) for each category are used in the NRSA database to identify metric categories. For nearly all metrics, we derived three variants based on all taxa in the sample and for only native taxa in the sample: one based on distinct taxa richness, one based on the percent of individuals in the sample, and one based on the percent of distinct taxa in the sample (potentially yielding 6 different variants). For some trophic metrics, additional variants were derived using only taxa that were not considered tolerant to disturbance. We included only those tolerance metrics based on sensitive and tolerant taxa, because the “intermediate tolerance” assignments included taxa with unknown tolerance.

### **6.3.3 Adjustment of Metric Response for Watershed Area**

We used the set of least-disturbed reference sites in each aggregated ecoregion to evaluate whether metrics should be adjusted for stream size. Many studies have shown that some metrics (especially

those based on species richness) vary naturally with stream size (e.g., Fausch *et al.* 1984, Simon and Lyons 1995, McCormick *et al.* 2001). We used watershed area (in km<sup>2</sup>) as our measure of stream size and compared the metric response to watershed area (transformed using log<sub>10</sub>) using linear regression. We used an R<sup>2</sup> value >0.10 (following the rationale of Hawkins *et al.* (2010a) and Vander Laan and Hawkins (2014)) in deciding whether or not to use the model-adjusted responses for a particular metric. For metrics requiring adjustment, we used the residual values from the regression as the adjusted metric response (Stoddard *et al.* 2008).

**Table 6.1 Criteria used to select least-disturbed sites for use in developing the regional NRSA fish multimetric indices (MMIs) based on 2008-09 data.**

| <b>Criteria</b>   |     |                   |                  |       |
|---|-----|-------------------|------------------|-------|
| Start with the base set of NRSA least-disturbed reference sites   |     |                   |                  |       |
| Keep sites with fish samples  |     |                   |                  |       |
| Drop sites where seining was the only sampling method   |     |                   |                  |       |
| Drop sites with insufficient sampling   |     |                   |                  |       |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wadeable: Reach length sampled was less than 20 channel widths and less than 500 individuals were collected</li> </ul>   |     |                   |                  |       |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large Wadeable: Reach length sampled was less than 500 m and less than 500 individuals were collected</li> </ul>   |     |                   |                  |       |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boatable: Reach length sampled was less than 20 channel widths sampled</li> </ul>  |     |                   |                  |       |
| Drop sites with sufficient sampling where less than 30 individuals were collected   |     |                   |                  |       |
| Drop sites with sufficient sampling where nonnative individuals comprised >50% of total number of individuals collected   |     |                   |                  |       |
| Drop non-wadeable sites hand-selected from the EMAP-Western Pilot Study that were sampled for fish. These sites were sampled using a much larger reach length (100 channel widths) than the reach length used for NRSA (40 channel widths). |     |                   |                  |       |
| <b>Final Number of Least-Disturbed Reference Sites</b>  |     |                   |                  |       |
|   |     | Calibration Sites | Validation Sites | Total |
| Northern Appalachians   | NAP | 43                | 16               | 59    |
| Southern Appalachians   | SAP | 72                | 13               | 85    |
| Coastal Plains  | CPL | 27                | 10               | 37    |
| Northern Plains   | NPL | 33                | 16               | 49    |
| Southern Plains   | SPL | 34                | 13               | 47    |
| Temperate Plains  | TPL | 31                | 14               | 45    |
| Upper Midwest   | UMW | 48                | 13               | 61    |
| Western Mountains   | WMT | 77                | 13               | 90    |
| Xeric West  | XER | 30                | 10               | 40    |
| Total   |     | 395               | 118              | 513   |

### 6.3.4 Selection of Final Candidate Metrics

We reduced the number of candidate metrics using a series of screening procedures, following Stoddard *et al.* (2008). The original (i.e., prior to any adjustment for watershed area) metric response values were evaluated for range. To evaluate repeatability, we calculated Signal:Noise (S:N) for each metric following Kaufmann *et al.* (1999), to compare the variance observed at revisit sites (within the index period) with the total variance observed across all sites. For adjusted metrics, the S:N value was calculated after adjusting for watershed area to remove the effects of natural variability from the “signal”, as suggested by Esselman *et al.* (2013). For both original and adjusted metrics, the mean response values of the set of least-disturbed reference sites and the set of most-disturbed sites were compared with two-sample *t*-tests (assuming unequal variances). Stoddard *et al.* (2008) present the advantages of using *t* values over other statistics as an indicator of metric responsiveness to disturbance. A candidate metric was not generally considered further if it met any of the following conditions:

- A richness metric (NTAX) had a range < 4
- A percentage metrics (PTAX, PIND) had a range < 10%, or had a 90th percentile value=0
- A metric had a S:N value < 1.25
- A metric had an absolute value of *t* < 1.73
- The set of least-disturbed validation sites was significantly different ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) from the set of least-disturbed calibration sites (two sample *t*-test)

Exceptions were made if there were no metrics in a category that passed all the screens. In these cases, we chose the metric with the best *t* value to include in the final set of candidate metrics.

Metrics that passed these screens were then sorted by metric category and *t*-value. In cases where the “native only” variant was similar in *t*-value to the “all species” variant, only one was retained (usually the all species variant unless there was a sizable difference in the S:N value, and then both variants were retained in the final list of candidate metrics).

### 6.3.5 Metric Scoring

We rescaled response values for each of the final suite of metrics to a score ranging between 0 and 10. For “positive” metrics (those having higher values in least-disturbed sites) we used the 5<sup>th</sup> percentile of all sites to set the “floor” (below which a score of 0 was assigned), and the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile of least-disturbed sites to set the “ceiling” (above which a score of 10 was assigned) following Stoddard *et al.* (2008) and as described by Blocksom (2003). For “negative” metrics (where values were higher in the more disturbed sites), the floor was set at the 5<sup>th</sup> percentile of least-disturbed sites, and the ceiling was set at the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile of all sites. We assigned a score to response values between the floor and ceiling using linear interpolation.

We summed the metric scores for each site to derive the fish MMI score. We then multiplied the fish MMI score by (10/number of metrics) to rescale the score to range between 0 and 100.

### **6.3.6 Selection of Final Fish MMIs**

For each of the nine aggregated ecoregions, we used the final list of candidate metrics, and calculated thousands of candidate fish MMIs based on all possible combinations of the eight metrics (one from each category), as recommended by Van Sickle (2010). This approach allowed us to evaluate not only the maximum pairwise correlation among a suite of metrics comprising a fish MMI, but also the mean pairwise correlation of the suite itself. Indices having low mean correlations among pairs of metrics may perform better than an index containing component metrics selected to minimize redundancy based on a maximum allowable correlation coefficient (Van Sickle 2010).

For each candidate fish MMI, we determined:

1. The  $F$  value based on comparing the set of least-disturbed vs. the set of more highly disturbed sites. We derived a  $t$ -value as  $\sqrt{F}$ .
2. The difference between the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile of the set of least-disturbed sites and the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of the set of more highly disturbed sites. This value (SEPDIFF) is an estimate of the degree of overlap of the respective boxplots, which has been used to evaluate metric and index performance (Barbour *et al.* 1996).

To select the “best” fish MMI from the large number of potential candidates, we excluded any candidate fish MMIs that had a maximum pairwise correlation of  $>0.7$ , or which had a S:N ratio of  $<2.5$  (**Table 6.2**). We input the  $t$  values and the SEPDIFF values for the remaining candidate fish MMIs into a principal components analysis. We selected the candidate fish MMI that had the highest score for the first PCA axis for further evaluation. Combining the values for  $t$  and SEPDIFF into a single PCA axis score provided a simple, objective, and repeatable way to select a fish MMI that had optimal responsiveness to anthropogenic alteration.

We examined the performance of the component metrics across the range of stream sizes sampled for NRSA. The potential exists for bias in the fish MMI due to different fish species pools being available for larger rivers versus smaller streams. Differences across the size range might also result from the different sampling protocols that were used (wadeable, large wadeable, and boatable). We used the set of least-disturbed sites to examine patterns in metric response values across Strahler stream order categories. If one of the component metrics in the “best” fish MMI identified for an aggregated ecoregion showed a noticeable pattern of either increasing or decreasing response with Strahler order based on examining boxplots of least-disturbed sites across stream orders, we selected the fish MMI with the next highest PCA axis score.

**Table 6.3** presents the regression equations used to adjust metrics that were included in each of the

nine regional fish MMIs. The number of adjusted metrics included in a final suite of eight metrics ranged from two (Southern Plains) to six (Northern Plains). For two aggregated ecoregions (Coastal Plain and Temperate Plains), the ALIEN metric performed better after adjusting for watershed area. While it is expected that many richness-based metrics would require adjustment, there are a fair number of proportional metrics (based on either individuals or taxa) that performed better after adjustment. This may be due to NRSA including a wider range of stream sizes than many other MMI development efforts that are based on a smaller set of streams (either smaller or larger).

**Table 6.2 Number of final candidate fish multimetric indices (MMIs) calculated from the final set of passed metrics, before and after screening for maximum pairwise correlation among metrics and signal:noise ratio.**

| <b>Aggregated Ecoregion</b> | <b>Number of Candidate fish MMIs calculated</b> | <b>Number of Candidate Fish MMIs remaining after screening</b> |
|-----------------------------|---|--|
| Northern Appalachians (NAP) | 33,264  | 9,472  |
| Southern Appalachians (SAP) | 36,288  | 21,976   |
| Coastal Plains (CPL)        | 9,072   | 1,494  |
| Southern Plains (SPL)       | 8,064   | 2,084  |
| Northern Plains (NPL)       | 27,648  | 5,092  |
| Temperate Plains (TPL)      | 21,600  | 3,115  |
| Upper Midwest (UMW)         | 90,720  | 25,692   |
| Western Mountains (WMT)     | 84,000  | 7,120  |
| Xeric West (XER)            | 32,400  | 13,220   |

**Table 6.3 Regression equations for adjusting metrics for watershed area. LWSAREA\_NEW is the log<sub>10</sub>-transformed value of watershed area in km<sup>2</sup>. Only metrics that were included in the final suite of metrics used to construct one of the nine regional fish MMIs are presented.**

| <b>Coastal Plain Aggregated Ecoregion (CPL)</b>                  |
|--|
| ALIENPIND_WS=ALIENPIND-(-0.219734+(0.178533*LWSAREA_NEW));       |
| LOTPIND_WS=LOTPIND-(83.680193+(-5.644243*LWSAREA_NEW));          |
| LITHPIND_WS=LITHPIND-(90.591166+(-21.2575*LWSAREA_NEW));         |
| NAT_TOTLNTAX_WS=NAT_TOTLNTAX-(10.929299+(2.873952*LWSAREA_NEW)); |
| TOLRNTAX_WS=TOLRNTAX-(1.831029+(1.559498*LWSAREA_NEW));          |
| <b>Northern Appalachians Aggregated Ecoregion (NAP)</b>          |
| LITHPTAX_WS=LITHPTAX-(91.493806+(-9.389536*LWSAREA_NEW));        |
| NTOLPTAX_WS=NTOLPTAX-(83.244125+(-5.594874*LWSAREA_NEW));        |
| TOLRNTAX_WS=TOLRNTAX-(-0.072385+(1.002947*LWSAREA_NEW));         |
| <b>Northern Plains Aggregated Ecoregion (NPL)</b>                |
| LOTNTAX_WS=LOTNTAX-(0.878392+(1.759049*LWSAREA_NEW));            |
| MIGRNTAX_WS=MIGRNTAX-(0.438798+(0.39651*LWSAREA_NEW));           |



|  |
|--|
| $LITHPIND\_WS=LITHPIND-(81.213041+(-13.064343*LWSAREA\_NEW));$           |
| $NTOLPTAX\_WS=NTOLPTAX-(121.656224+(-18.471843*LWSAREA\_NEW));$          |
| $NAT\_INTLPIND\_WS=NAT\_INTLPIND-(84.560234+(-21.788603*LWSAREA\_NEW));$ |
| $NAT\_CARNNTAX\_WS=NAT\_CARNNTAX-(-1.380617+(0.928968*LWSAREA\_NEW));$   |

|  |
|--|
| <b>Southern Appalachians Aggregated Ecoregion (SAP)</b>                  |
| $NAT\_CENTNTAX\_WS=NAT\_CENTNTAX-(-0.017051+(0.776488*LWSAREA\_NEW));$   |
| $NAT\_LITHPIND\_WS=NAT\_LITHPIND-(85.390153+(-10.818128*LWSAREA\_NEW));$ |
| $INVPIND\_WS=INVPIND-(26.04262+(11.423482*LWSAREA\_NEW));$               |

|  |
|--|
| <b>Southern Plains Aggregated Ecoregion (SPL)</b>                      |
| $CYPRPTAX\_WS=CYPRPTAX-(45.705777+(-9.448293*LWSAREA\_NEW));$          |
| $NAT\_MIGRPTAX\_WS=NAT\_MIGRPTAX-(-0.604356+(0.532868*LWSAREA\_NEW));$ |

|  |
|--|
| <b>Temperate Plains Aggregated Ecoregion (TPL)</b>                     |
| $ALIENNTAX\_WS=ALIENNTAX-(-0.22423+(0.200411*LWSAREA\_NEW));$          |
| $NAT\_ICTAPIND\_WS=NAT\_ICTAPIND-(-0.189542+(0.816572*LWSAREA\_NEW));$ |
| $NAT\_NTOLNTAX\_WS=NAT\_NTOLNTAX-(1.946393+(2.107837*LWSAREA\_NEW));$  |
| $CARNNTAX\_WS=CARNNTAX-(-0.005878+(1.292597*LWSAREA\_NEW));$           |

|  |
|--|
| <b>Upper Midwest Aggregated Ecoregion (UMW)</b>                  |
| $INTLLOTNTAX\_WS=INTLLOTNTAX-(1.09723+(0.659379*LWSAREA\_NEW));$ |
| $NTOLNTAX\_WS=NTOLNTAX-(2.216995+(2.870941*LWSAREA\_NEW));$      |
| $TOLRNTAX\_WS=TOLRNTAX-(0.398305+(1.755202*LWSAREA\_NEW));$      |

|  |
|--|
| <b>Western Mountains Aggregated Ecoregion (WMT)</b>                      |
| $INTLLOTPTAX\_WS=INTLLOTPTAX-(110.962575+(-21.540681*LWSAREA\_NEW));$    |
| $NAT\_MIGRPTAX\_WS=NAT\_MIGRPTAX-(90.991326+(-15.318296*LWSAREA\_NEW));$ |
| $NAT\_TOTLNTAX\_WS=NAT\_TOTLNTAX-(0.748128+(1.104128*LWSAREA\_NEW));$    |

|  |
|--|
| <b>Xeric West Aggregated Ecoregion (XER)</b>                       |
| $MIGRPTAX\_WS=MIGRPTAX-(93.412006+(-20.33135*LWSAREA\_NEW));$      |
| $LITHNTAX\_WS=LITHNTAX-(-0.265844+(1.369981*LWSAREA\_NEW));$       |
| $TOLRNTAX\_WS=TOLRNTAX-(-0.142977+(0.094138*LWSAREA\_NEW));$       |
| $BENTINVPTAX\_WS=BENTINVPTAX-(-5.705387+(9.987192*LWSAREA\_NEW));$ |

The following subsections provide information on the performance of each of the metrics that were used to construct a regional fish MMI. The information includes the floor and ceiling values that were used to develop a score for each metric (Section 6.3.5).

#### 6.3.6.1 Metric Performance and Scoring: Coastal Plain Aggregated Ecoregion

**Table 6.4** presents the performance and scoring information for the eight metrics that were used to construct the fish MMI for the Coastal Plain aggregated ecoregion (CPL). The final suite

included two negative metrics (the alien and tolerance metrics), and five metrics that were adjusted for watershed area (**Table 6.3**). Absolute values of  $t$  ranged from 2.05 to 5.04, with only two metrics having a  $t$ -value  $> 4$ . Signal to noise ratios ranged from 0.6 to 61.7. The life history metric (percent of migratory taxa that were intolerant to disturbance) had a low S:N ratio, but it was the best-performing of any of the life history metrics in this aggregated ecoregion.

#### *6.3.6.2 Metric Performance and Scoring: Northern Appalachians Aggregated Ecoregion*

**Table 6.5** presents the performance and scoring information for the eight metrics that were used to construct the fish MMI for the Northern Appalachians aggregated ecoregion (NAP). The final suite included three negative metrics (the alien, tolerance, and trophic metrics), and three metrics that were adjusted for watershed area (**Table 6.3**). Absolute values of  $t$  ranged from 2.40 to 8.39, with five metrics having a  $t$ -value  $> 4$ . Signal to noise ratios ranged from 1.9 to 180. The trophic metric (number of invertivore taxa) did not respond as we expected; it is a negative metric in this fish MMI, indicating that there were more invertivore species in the set of most-disturbed sites than in the set of least-disturbed sites. However, fish MMIs that included trophic metrics that responded as expected did not perform as well as the fish MMI constructed using the metrics in **Table 6.5**. The INVNTAX metric was the most responsive trophic metric based on the  $t$ -value (**Table 6.5**) and had a higher S:N ratio than other trophic metrics with similar  $t$ -values.

**Table 6.4 Performance information of metrics used to construct the fish MMI for the Coastal Plain aggregated ecoregion. Column name is the field name in the NRSA database.**

| Metric Category           | Column Name     | Description  | <i>t</i> -value <sup>a</sup> | Signal: Noise Value <sup>b</sup> | Scoring Information <sup>c</sup> |        |         |
|---------------------------|-----------------|--|------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------|---------|
|                           |                 |  |                              |                                  | Direction of Response            | Floor  | Ceiling |
| Alien                     | ALIENPIND_WS    | % nonnative individuals (adjusted for watershed area)      | -2.88                        | 15.8                             | NEG                              | -0.49  | 14.28   |
| Composition               | RBCATONTAX      | Number of round-bodied sucker taxa                         | 5.04                         | 2.7                              | POS                              | 0      | 3.00    |
| Habitat <sup>d</sup>      | LOTPIND_WS      | % Lotic individuals (adjusted for watershed area)          | 3.65                         | 7.4                              | POS                              | -73.80 | 30.66   |
| Life History              | INTLMIGRPTAX    | % of taxa that are migratory and intolerant to disturbance | 2.30                         | 0.6                              | POS                              | 0      | 5.88    |
| Reproductive <sup>e</sup> | LITHPIND_WS     | % lithophil individuals (adjusted for watershed area)      | 4.71                         | 61.7                             | POS                              | -81.39 | 33.83   |
| Richness                  | NAT_TOTLNTAX_WS | Number of native taxa (adjusted for watershed area)        | 2.60                         | 6.8                              | POS                              | -15.49 | 7.21    |
| Tolerance                 | TOLRNTAX_WS     | Number of tolerant taxa (adjusted for watershed area)      | -2.05                        | 11.8                             | NEG                              | -3.60  | 7.12    |
| Trophic                   | INVPTAX         | % of taxa that are invertivores                            | 3.90                         | 7.1                              | POS                              | 9.09   | 68.75   |

<sup>a</sup> Based on comparisons of mean values of least-disturbed and most-disturbed sites (validation sites have been excluded).

<sup>b</sup> Based on variability among sites vs. variability within sites.

<sup>c</sup> Direction: POS=Positive metric (mean value for least-disturbed sites is greater than mean value for most-disturbed sites). NEG=negative metric (mean value for most-disturbed sites is greater than the mean value for least-disturbed sites). For positive metrics, the floor=5<sup>th</sup> percentile of all sites (a metric value ≤ floor is assigned a score of 0), and the ceiling=95<sup>th</sup> percentile of least-disturbed sites (a metric value ≥ ceiling is assigned a score of 10). For negative metrics, the floor=5<sup>th</sup> percentile of least-disturbed sites (a metric value ≤ floor is assigned a score of 10), and the ceiling=95<sup>th</sup> percentile of all sites (a metric value ≥ ceiling is assigned a score of 0).

<sup>d</sup> Habitat metrics: Lotic: Occupies flowing water habitats; Rheophils occupy fast water habitats.

<sup>e</sup> Reproductive metrics: Lithophils require clean substrate for spawning.

**Table 6.5 Performance information of metrics used to construct the fish MMI for the Northern Appalachians aggregated ecoregion. Column name is the field name in the NRSA database.**

| Metric Category           | Column Name  | Description  | <i>t</i> -value <sup>a</sup> | Signal: Noise Value <sup>b</sup> | Scoring Information <sup>c</sup> |         |         |
|---------------------------|--------------|--|------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------|---------|
|                           |              |  |                              |                                  | Direction of Response            | Floor   | Ceiling |
| Alien                     | ALIENNTAX    | Number of nonnative taxa                                       | -4.02                        | 1.9                              | NEG                              | 0       | 4       |
| Composition               | SALMNTAX     | Number of taxa in family Salmonidae                            | 6.06                         | 5.4                              | POS                              | 0       | 2       |
| Habitat <sup>d</sup>      | NAT_RHEOPIND | % individuals that are native and rheophils                    | 6.37                         | 10.2                             | POS                              | 0       | 100     |
| Life History              | INTLMIGRPIND | % individuals that are migratory and intolerant to disturbance | 2.40                         | 180                              | POS                              | 0       | 8       |
| Reproductive <sup>e</sup> | LITHPTAX_WS  | % of taxa that are lithophils (adjusted for watershed area)    | 7.46                         | 14.2                             | POS                              | -55.684 | 23.496  |
| Richness                  | NTOLPTAX_WS  | % of taxa that are not tolerant (adjusted for watershed area)  | 3.55                         | 3.8                              | POS                              | -39.539 | 22.490  |
| Tolerance                 | TOLRNTAX_WS  | Number of tolerant taxa (adjusted for watershed area)          | -8.39                        | 3.1                              | NEG                              | -1.611  | 6.853   |
| Trophic                   | INVNTAX      | Number of taxa that are invertivores                           | -5.54                        | 4.0                              | NEG                              | 0       | 9       |

<sup>a</sup> Based on comparison of mean values of least disturbed and most disturbed sites (validation sites have been excluded).

<sup>b</sup> Based on variability among sites vs. variability within sites (validation sites have been excluded).

<sup>c</sup> Direction: POS=Positive metric (mean value for least-disturbed sites is greater than mean value for most-disturbed sites). NEG=negative metric (mean value for most-disturbed sites is greater than the mean value for least-disturbed sites). For positive metrics, the floor= 5<sup>th</sup> percentile of all sites (a metric value  $\leq$  floor is assigned a score of 0), and the ceiling=95<sup>th</sup> percentile of least-disturbed sites (a metric value  $\geq$  ceiling is assigned a score of 10). For negative metrics, the floor= 5<sup>th</sup> percentile of least-disturbed sites (a metric value  $\leq$  floor is assigned a score of 10), and the ceiling=95<sup>th</sup> percentile of all sites (a metric value  $\geq$  ceiling is assigned a score of 0).

<sup>d</sup> Habitat metrics: Lotic species occupy flowing water habitats; Rheophils occupy fast water habitats.

<sup>e</sup> Reproductive metrics: Lithophils require clean substrate for spawning.

### 6.3.6.3 *Metric Performance and Scoring: Northern Plains Aggregated Ecoregion*

**Table 6.6** presents the performance and scoring information for the eight metrics that were used to construct the fish MMI for the Northern Plains aggregated ecoregion (NPL). The final suite included two negative metrics (the alien and composition metrics), and six metrics that were adjusted for watershed area (**Table 6.3**). Absolute values of  $t$  ranged from 1.24 to 4.59, with only one metric having a  $t$ -value  $> 4$ . Signal to noise ratios ranged from 0.4 to 332. The most responsive alien metric (number of nonnative taxa, a negative metric) did not meet the criteria for responsiveness or repeatability (Section 6.3.4). Other alien metrics did not show much response to disturbance, suggesting that the set of least-disturbed sites in this aggregated ecoregion were similar in terms of the number of nonnative taxa, the percent of nonnative individuals, and the percent of nonnative taxa to the set of most-disturbed sites. Because nonnative species typically represent a direct stressor to native fish communities, native/nonnative metrics are commonly used by fishery biologists in assessing fish community health (e.g., Simon and Lyons 1995, McCormick et al. 2000, Hughes et al. 2004, Bramblett et al. 2005, Whittier et al. 2007b). The low values for responsiveness of metrics based on nonnative species or individuals has been observed in other studies (McCormick et al. 2000, Hughes et al. 2004, Bramblett et al. 2005, Whittier et al. 2007b). The number of nonnative taxa metric was included to represent the alien metric category, even though its influence was negligible on the overall MMI for the ecoregion.

### 6.3.6.4 *Metric Performance and Scoring: Southern Appalachians Aggregated Ecoregion*

**Table 6.7** presents the performance and scoring information for the eight metrics that were used to construct the fish MMI for the Southern Appalachians aggregated ecoregion (SAP). The final suite included three negative metrics (the composition, life history, and tolerance metrics), and three metrics that were adjusted for watershed area (**Table 6.3**). Absolute values of  $t$  ranged from 0.58 to 12.15, with seven metrics having a  $t$ -value  $> 4$ . Signal to noise ratios ranged from 1.5 to 23.4. The best alien metric, percent of taxa that are native, was not very responsive. However, the percent of native taxa is considered to have a positive influence on a fish assemblage, and thus was included as the alien metric in the regional fish MMI.

### 6.3.6.5 *Metric Performance and Scoring: Southern Plains Aggregated Ecoregion*

**Table 6.8** presents the performance and scoring information for the eight metrics that were used to construct the fish MMI for the Southern Plains aggregated ecoregion (SPL). The final suite included three negative metrics (the composition, life history, and tolerance metrics), and two metrics that were adjusted for watershed area (**Table 6.3**). Absolute values of  $t$  ranged from 0.61 to 4.26, with only one metric having a  $t$ -value  $> 4$ . Signal to noise ratios ranged from 4.6 to 113.4. The most responsive metrics in three categories (composition, life history, and tolerance) did not meet the criteria for responsiveness (Section 6.3.4).

**Table 6.6 Performance information of metrics used to construct the fish MMI for the Northern Plains aggregated ecoregion. Column name is the field names in the NRSA database.**

| Metric Category           | Column Name     | Description   | t-value <sup>a</sup> | Signal: Noise Value <sup>b</sup> | Scoring Information <sup>c</sup> |         |         |
|---------------------------|-----------------|---|----------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------|---------|
|                           |                 |   |                      |                                  | Direction of Response            | Floor   | Ceiling |
| Alien                     | ALIENNTAX       | Number of nonnative taxa  | 1.24                 | -0.4                             | NEG                              | 0       | 2       |
| Composition               | NAT_CYPRPIND    | % individuals that are native and within the family Cyprinidae              | -2.54                | 2.3                              | NEG                              | 0       | 100     |
| Habitat <sup>d</sup>      | LOTNTAX_WS      | Number of lotic taxa (adjusted for watershed area)                          | 4.59                 | 1.5                              | POS                              | -5.045  | 4.352   |
| Life History              | MIGRNTAX_WS     | Number of migratory taxa (adjusted for watershed area)                      | 2.69                 | 0.7                              | POS                              | -1.907  | 1.579   |
| Reproductive <sup>e</sup> | LITHPIND_WS     | % individuals that are lithophils (adjusted for watershed area)             | 3.14                 | 6.1                              | POS                              | -52.180 | 53.848  |
| Richness                  | NTOLPTAX_WS     | % taxa that are not tolerant (adjusted for watershed area)                  | 2.52                 | 6.3                              | POS                              | -66.112 | 29.110  |
| Tolerance                 | NAT_INTLPIND_WS | % individuals that are native and intolerant (adjusted for watershed area)  | 1.82                 | 332.4                            | POS                              | -42.369 | 62.153  |
| Trophic                   | NAT_CARNNTAX_WS | Number of taxa that are native and carnivores (adjusted for watershed area) | 3.81                 | 1.3                              | POS                              | -2.091  | 1.960   |

<sup>a</sup> Based on comparison of mean values of least disturbed and most disturbed sites (validation sites have been excluded).

<sup>b</sup> Based on variability among sites vs. variability within sites (validation sites have been excluded).

<sup>c</sup> Direction: POS=Positive metric (mean value for least-disturbed sites is greater than mean value for most-disturbed sites). NEG=negative metric (mean value for most-disturbed sites is greater than the mean value for least-disturbed sites). For positive metrics, the floor= 5<sup>th</sup> percentile of all sites (a metric value ≤ floor is assigned a score of 0), and the ceiling=95<sup>th</sup> percentile of least-disturbed sites (a metric value ≥ ceiling is assigned a score of 10). For negative metrics, the floor= 5<sup>th</sup> percentile of least-disturbed sites (a metric value ≤ floor is assigned a score of 10), and the ceiling=95<sup>th</sup> percentile of all sites (a metric value ≥ ceiling is assigned a score of 0).

<sup>d</sup> Habitat metrics: Lotic species occupy flowing water habitats; Rheophils occupy fast water habitats.

<sup>e</sup> Reproductive metrics: Lithophils require clean substrate for spawning.

**Table 6.7 Performance information of metrics used to construct the fish MMI for the Southern Appalachians aggregated ecoregion. Column name is the field names in the NRSA database.**

| Metric Category           | Column Name      | Description   | t-value <sup>a</sup> | Signal: Noise Value <sup>b</sup> | Scoring Information <sup>c</sup> |         |         |
|---------------------------|------------------|---|----------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------|---------|
|                           |                  |   |                      |                                  | Direction of Response            | Floor   | Ceiling |
| Alien                     | NAT_PTAX         | % of taxa that are native   | -0.58                | 23.4                             | POS                              | 80      | 100     |
| Composition               | NAT_CENTNTAX_WS  | Number of taxa within the family Centrarchidae (adjusted for watershed area)  | -4.30                | 1.5                              | NEG                              | -1.535  | 3.620   |
| Habitat <sup>d</sup>      | NAT_NTOLBENTPTAX | % of taxa that are native, benthic and not tolerant                           | 9.19                 | 3.9                              | POS                              | 0       | 66.670  |
| Life History              | NAT_MIGRNTAX     | Number of taxa that are native and migratory                                  | -5.42                | 2.2                              | NEG                              | 0       | 4       |
| Reproductive <sup>e</sup> | NAT_LITHPIND_WS  | % of individuals that are native and lithophils (adjusted for watershed area) | 5.85                 | 7.7                              | POS                              | -56.528 | 28.448  |
| Richness                  | NTOLPTAX         | % of taxa that are not tolerant   | 8.72                 | 8.7                              | POS                              | 31.820  | 100     |
| Tolerance                 | TOLRPTAX         | % of taxa that are tolerant   | -12.15               | 9.7                              | NEG                              | 0       | 66.670  |
| Trophic                   | INVPIND_WS       | % of individuals that are invertivores (adjusted for watershed area)          | 5.01                 | 8.1                              | POS                              | -60.259 | 38.399  |

<sup>a</sup> Based on comparison of mean values of least disturbed and most disturbed sites (validation sites have been excluded).

<sup>b</sup> Based on variability among sites vs. variability within sites (validation sites have been excluded).

<sup>c</sup> Direction: POS=Positive metric (mean value for least-disturbed sites is greater than mean value for most-disturbed sites). NEG=negative metric (mean value for most-disturbed sites is greater than the mean value for least-disturbed sites). For positive metrics, the floor= 5<sup>th</sup> percentile of all sites (a metric value ≤ floor is assigned a score of 0), and the ceiling=95<sup>th</sup> percentile of least-disturbed sites (a metric value ≥ ceiling is assigned a score of 10). For negative metrics, the floor= 5<sup>th</sup> percentile of least-disturbed sites (a metric value ≤ floor is assigned a score of 10), and the ceiling=95<sup>th</sup> percentile of all sites (a metric value ≥ ceiling is assigned a score of 0).

<sup>d</sup> Habitat metrics: Lotic species occupy flowing water habitats; Rheophils occupy fast water habitats.

<sup>e</sup> Reproductive metrics: Lithophils require clean substrate for spawning.

**Table 6.8 Performance information of metrics used to construct the fish MMI for the Southern Plains aggregated ecoregion. Column name is the field names in the NRSA database.**

| Metric Category           | Column Name     | Description   | t-value <sup>a</sup> | Signal: Noise Value <sup>b</sup> | Scoring Information <sup>c</sup> |         |         |
|---------------------------|-----------------|---|----------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------|---------|
|                           |                 |   |                      |                                  | Direction of Response            | Floor   | Ceiling |
| Alien                     | NAT_PIND        | % of individuals that are native                                      | 1.98                 | 113.4                            | POS                              | 67.610  | 100     |
| Composition               | CYPRPTAX_WS     | % of taxa within the family Cyprinidae (adjusted for watershed area)  | -1.71                | 4.8                              | NEG                              | -16.787 | 62.614  |
| Habitat <sup>d</sup>      | RHEOPIND        | % of individuals that are rheophils                                   | 3.49                 | 51.3                             | POS                              | 0       | 92.710  |
| Life History              | NAT_MIGRPTAX_WS | % of taxa that are native and migratory (adjusted for watershed area) | -0.61                | 6.3                              | NEG                              | -1.326  | 31.490  |
| Reproductive <sup>e</sup> | LITHNTAX        | Number of taxa that are lithophils                                    | 4.26                 | 6.9                              | POS                              | 0       | 6       |
| Richness                  | NAT_NTOLNTAX    | Number of taxa that are native and not tolerant                       | 1.85                 | 4.6                              | POS                              | 1       | 8       |
| Tolerance                 | TOLRNTAX        | Number of tolerant taxa   | -1.54                | 14.4                             | NEG                              | 2       | 14      |
| Trophic                   | HERBPTAX        | % of taxa that are herbivores   | 3.96                 | 19.0                             | POS                              | 0       | 25      |

<sup>a</sup> Based on comparison of mean values of least disturbed and most disturbed sites (validation sites have been excluded).

<sup>b</sup> Based on variability among sites vs. variability within sites (validation sites have been excluded).

<sup>c</sup> Direction: POS=Positive metric (mean value for least-disturbed sites is greater than mean value for most-disturbed sites). NEG=negative metric (mean value for most-disturbed sites is greater than the mean value for least-disturbed sites). For positive metrics, the floor= 5<sup>th</sup> percentile of all sites (a metric value  $\leq$  floor is assigned a score of 0), and the ceiling=95<sup>th</sup> percentile of least-disturbed sites (a metric value  $\geq$  ceiling is assigned a score of 10). For negative metrics, the floor= 5<sup>th</sup> percentile of least-disturbed sites (a metric value  $\leq$  floor is assigned a score of 10), and the ceiling=95<sup>th</sup> percentile of all sites (a metric value  $\geq$  ceiling is assigned a score of 0).

<sup>d</sup> Habitat metrics: Lotic species occupy flowing water habitats; Rheophils occupy fast water habitats.

<sup>e</sup> Reproductive metrics: Lithophils require clean substrate for spawning.



#### 6.3.6.6 *Metric Performance and Scoring: Temperate Plains Aggregated Ecoregion*

**Table 6.9** presents the performance and scoring information for the eight metrics that were used to construct the fish MMI for the Temperate Plains aggregated ecoregion (TPL). The final suite included three negative metrics (the alien, composition, and life history metrics), and four metrics that were adjusted for watershed area (**Table 6.3**). Absolute values of  $t$  ranged from 1.69 to 6.96, with three metrics having a  $t$ -value  $> 4$ . Signal to noise ratios ranged from 1.2 to 12.6. The most responsive metric in the life history category did not quite meet the criteria for responsiveness (Section 6.3.4). The life history metric (number of taxa that are migratory and intolerant) also did not respond as we expected; it is a negative metric in this fish MMI, indicating that there were more intolerant migratory species in the set of most-disturbed sites than in the set of least-disturbed sites.

#### 6.3.6.7 *Metric Performance and Scoring: Upper Midwest Aggregated Ecoregion*

**Table 6.10** presents the performance and scoring information for the eight metrics that were used to construct the fish MMI for the Upper Midwest aggregated ecoregion (UMW). The final suite included only one negative metric (the tolerance metric), and three metrics that were adjusted for watershed area (**Table 6.3**). Absolute values of  $t$  ranged from 0.22 to 5.91, with four metrics having a  $t$ -value  $> 4$ . Signal to noise ratios ranged from 2.3 to 12.7. The best alien metric, percent of taxa that are native, was not very responsive. However, the percent of native taxa is considered to have a positive influence on a fish assemblage, and thus was included as the alien metric in the regional fish MMI

#### 6.3.6.8 *Metric Performance and Scoring: Western Mountains Aggregated Ecoregion*

**Table 6.11** presents the performance and scoring information for the eight metrics that were used to construct the fish MMI for the Western Mountains aggregated ecoregion (WMI). The final suite included three negative metrics (the composition, tolerance, and trophic metrics), and three metrics that were adjusted for watershed area (**Table 6.3**). Absolute values of  $t$  ranged from 1.45 to 5.56, with five metrics having a  $t$ -value  $> 4$ . Signal to noise ratios ranged from 1.3 to 23.2. The most responsive reproductive metric (% of taxa that are lithophils) did not quite meet the criteria for responsiveness (Section 6.3.4).

**Table 6.9 Performance information of metrics used to construct the fish MMI for the Temperate Plains aggregated ecoregion. Column name is the field names in the NRSA database.**

| Metric Category           | Column Name     | Description  | t-value <sup>a</sup> | Signal: Noise Value <sup>b</sup> | Scoring Information <sup>c</sup> |        |         |
|---------------------------|-----------------|--|----------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------|---------|
|                           |                 |  |                      |                                  | Direction of Response            | Floor  | Ceiling |
| Alien                     | ALIENNTAX_WS    | Number of nonnative taxa (adjusted for watershed area)   | -4.12                | 2.1                              | NEG                              | -0.298 | 2.045   |
| Composition               | NAT_ICTAPIND_WS | % of individuals that are native and within the family Ictaluridae (adjusted for watershed area) | -2.94                | 12.6                             | NEG                              | -1.940 | 17.204  |
| Habitat <sup>d</sup>      | RHEONTAX        | Number of taxa that are rheophils  | 5.02                 | 1.7                              | POS                              | 0      | 4       |
| Life History              | INTLMIGRNTAX    | Number of taxa that are migratory and intolerant   | -1.69                | 1.2                              | NEG                              | 0      | 1       |
| Reproductive <sup>e</sup> | LITHPIND        | % of individuals that are lithophils   | 2.93                 | 1.4                              | POS                              | 0      | 97.520  |
| Richness                  | NAT_NTOLNTAX_WS | Number of taxa that are native and not tolerant (adjusted for watershed area)                    | 6.96                 | 2.7                              | POS                              | -9.403 | 4.824   |
| Tolerance                 | INTLPTAX        | % of taxa that are intolerant  | 3.19                 | 4.2                              | POS                              | 0      | 50      |
| Trophic                   | CARNNTAX_WS     | Number of taxa that are carnivores (adjusted for watershed area)                                 | 3.40                 | 2.5                              | POS                              | -3.761 | 2.235   |

<sup>a</sup> Based on comparison of mean values of least disturbed and most disturbed sites (validation sites have been excluded).

<sup>b</sup> Based on variability among sites vs. variability within sites (validation sites have been excluded).

<sup>c</sup> Direction: POS=Positive metric (mean value for least-disturbed sites is greater than mean value for most-disturbed sites). NEG=negative metric (mean value for most-disturbed sites is greater than the mean value for least-disturbed sites). For positive metrics, the floor= 5<sup>th</sup> percentile of all sites (a metric value ≤ floor is assigned a score of 0), and the ceiling=95<sup>th</sup> percentile of least-disturbed sites (a metric value ≥ ceiling is assigned a score of 10). For negative metrics, the floor= 5<sup>th</sup> percentile of least-disturbed sites (a metric value ≤ floor is assigned a score of 10), and the ceiling=95<sup>th</sup> percentile of all sites (a metric value ≥ ceiling is assigned a score of 0).

<sup>d</sup> Habitat metrics: Lotic species occupy flowing water habitats; Rheophils occupy fast water habitats.

<sup>e</sup> Reproductive metrics: Lithophils require clean substrate for spawning.

**Table 6.10 Performance information of metrics used to construct the fish MMI for the Upper Midwest aggregated ecoregion. Column name is the field names in the NRSA database.**

| Metric Category           | Column Name    | Description  | t-value <sup>a</sup> | Signal: Noise Value <sup>b</sup> | Scoring Information <sup>c</sup> |        |         |
|---------------------------|----------------|--|----------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------|---------|
|                           |                |  |                      |                                  | Direction of Response            | Floor  | Ceiling |
| Alien                     | NAT_PTAX       | % of taxa that are native  | -0.22                | 4.8                              | POS                              | 85.710 | 100     |
| Composition               | CYPRNTAX       | Number of taxa within the family Cyprinidae                                | 2.19                 | 3.6                              | POS                              | 0      | 9       |
| Habitat <sup>d</sup>      | INTLLOTNTAX_WS | Number of taxa that are lotic and intolerant (adjusted for watershed area) | 5.91                 | 2.9                              | POS                              | -3.287 | 2.110   |
| Life History              | INTLMIGRPTAX   | % of taxa that are migratory and intolerant                                | 3.04                 | 2.3                              | POS                              | 0      | 13.330  |
| Reproductive <sup>e</sup> | LITHPIND       | % of individuals that are lithophils                                       | 4.22                 | 12.7                             | POS                              | 0      | 95.350  |
| Richness                  | NTOLNTAX_WS    | Number of taxa that are not tolerant (adjusted for watershed area)         | 4.54                 | 8.2                              | POS                              | -8.389 | 6.445   |
| Tolerance                 | TOLRNTAX_WS    | Number of tolerant taxa (adjusted for watershed area)                      | -3.02                | 3.1                              | NEG                              | -3.785 | 5.549   |
| Trophic                   | INTLINVPTAX    | % of taxa that are invertivores and intolerant                             | 5.40                 | 7.5                              | POS                              | 0      | 33.330  |

<sup>a</sup> Based on the comparison of mean values of least disturbed and most disturbed sites (validation sites have been excluded).

<sup>b</sup> Based on variability among sites vs. variability within sites (validation sites have been excluded).

<sup>c</sup> Direction: POS=Positive metric (mean value for least-disturbed sites is greater than mean value for most-disturbed sites). NEG=negative metric (mean value for most-disturbed sites is greater than the mean value for least-disturbed sites). For positive metrics, the floor= 5<sup>th</sup> percentile of all sites (a metric value  $\leq$  floor is assigned a score of 0), and the ceiling=95<sup>th</sup> percentile of least-disturbed sites (a metric value  $\geq$  ceiling is assigned a score of 10). For negative metrics, the floor= 5<sup>th</sup> percentile of least-disturbed sites (a metric value  $\leq$  floor is assigned a score of 10), and the ceiling=95<sup>th</sup> percentile of all sites (a metric value  $\geq$  ceiling is assigned a score of 0).

<sup>d</sup> Habitat metrics: Lotic species occupy flowing water habitats; Rheophils occupy fast water habitats.

<sup>e</sup> Reproductive metrics: Lithophils require clean substrate for spawning.

**Table 6.11 Performance information of metrics used to construct the fish MMI for the Western Mountains aggregated ecoregion. Column name is the field names in the NRSA database.**

| Metric Category           | Column Name     | Description   | t-value <sup>a</sup> | Signal: Noise Value <sup>b</sup> | Scoring Information <sup>c</sup> |         |         |
|---------------------------|-----------------|---|----------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------|---------|
|                           |                 |   |                      |                                  | Direction of Response            | Floor   | Ceiling |
| Alien                     | NAT_PIND        | % of individuals that are native                                      | 5.56                 | 10.5                             | POS                              | 0       | 100     |
| Composition               | NAT_CATOPIND    | % of individuals that are native and within the family Catastomidae   | -4.20                | 15.2                             | NEG                              | 0.000   | 68      |
| Habitat <sup>d</sup>      | INTLLOTPTAX_WS  | % of taxa that are lotic and intolerant (adjusted for watershed area) | 4.23                 | 7.3                              | POS                              | -72.045 | 27.826  |
| Life History              | NAT_MIGRPTAX_WS | % of taxa that are native and migratory (adjusted for watershed area) | 2.10                 | 23.2                             | POS                              | -74.290 | 40.433  |
| Reproductive <sup>e</sup> | LITHPTAX        | % of taxa that are lithophils   | 1.45                 | 16.6                             | POS                              | 25.000  | 100     |
| Richness                  | NAT_TOTLNTAX_WS | Number of native taxa (adjusted for watershed area)                   | 2.39                 | 1.5                              | POS                              | -3.009  | 3.272   |
| Tolerance                 | TOLRNTAX        | Number of tolerant taxa   | -4.71                | 1.3                              | NEG                              | 0       | 2       |
| Trophic                   | NAT_HERBPTAX    | % of taxa that are native and herbivores                              | -4.20                | 8.2                              | NEG                              | 0       | 33.330  |

<sup>a</sup> Based on the comparison of mean values of least disturbed and most disturbed sites (validation sites have been excluded).

<sup>b</sup> Based on variability among sites vs. variability within sites (validation sites have been excluded).

<sup>c</sup> Direction: POS=Positive metric (mean value for least-disturbed sites is greater than mean value for most-disturbed sites). NEG=negative metric (mean value for most-disturbed sites is greater than the mean value for least-disturbed sites). For positive metrics, the floor= 5<sup>th</sup> percentile of all sites (a metric value  $\leq$  floor is assigned a score of 0), and the ceiling=95<sup>th</sup> percentile of least-disturbed sites (a metric value  $\geq$  ceiling is assigned a score of 10). For negative metrics, the floor= 5<sup>th</sup> percentile of least-disturbed sites (a metric value  $\leq$  floor is assigned a score of 10), and the ceiling=95<sup>th</sup> percentile of all sites (a metric value  $\geq$  ceiling is assigned a score of 0).

<sup>d</sup> Habitat metrics: Lotic species occupy flowing water habitats; Rheophils occupy fast water habitats.

<sup>e</sup> Reproductive metrics: Lithophils require clean substrate for spawning.

### 6.3.6.9 Metric Performance and Scoring: Xeric West Aggregated Ecoregion

**Table 6.12** presents the performance and scoring information for the eight metrics that were used to construct the fish MMI for the Xeric West aggregated ecoregion (XER). The final suite included two negative metrics (the composition and tolerance metrics), and four metrics that were adjusted for watershed area (**Table 6.3**). Absolute values of  $t$  ranged from 1.45 to 5.56, with five metrics having a  $t$ -value  $> 4$ . Signal to noise ratios ranged from 3.4 to 21.8.

## 6.4 FISH MMI PERFORMANCE

We evaluated several aspects of performance of the nine regional fish MMIs (**Table 6.13**). We compared the fish MMI scores from a set of validation least-disturbed sites to those of the set of calibration least-disturbed sites to confirm that the models were behaving as anticipated. For all nine regional fish MMIs, the mean values of the validation sites and sites used to evaluate the metrics and construct the fish MMIs were not significantly different (two-sample  $t$ -test).

We evaluated the responsiveness of the regional fish MMIs to disturbance using two measures: 1)  $t$ -tests to compare the fish MMI scores for the set of least-disturbed sites to those for the set of more highly disturbed sites (Stoddard *et al.* 2008), and 2) the difference between the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile of least-disturbed sites and the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of the set of most-disturbed sites. Boxplots are presented in **Figure 6.3**. The results of  $t$ -tests (two sample tests assuming unequal variances) and the percentile differences are presented in **Table 6.13**. The  $t$ -values ranged from 5.71 for the Northern Plains to 15.38 for the Northern Appalachians. The percentile differences were all positive (i.e., the boxes did not overlap), and ranged from 0.75 for the Western Mountains to 22.4 for the Northern Appalachians.

We estimated precision of the fish MMIs by calculating the standard deviation of standardized fish MMI scores (dividing each value by the mean) from all least-disturbed sites. Precision values greater than zero provide an indication of the remaining disturbance signal left in the set of least-disturbed sites, plus measurement error. Precision values ranged from 0.10 in the Xeric West aggregated ecoregion to 0.28 in the Northern Plains and the Upper Midwest aggregated ecoregions. Precision values between 0.10 and 0.25 are comparable to values obtained for other predictive models of taxa loss (Hawkins *et al.* 2010a).

We evaluated the repeatability of the regional fish MMIs using a set of sites that were visited at least twice during the course of the NRSA 2008-09 project, typically two times in a single year (Kaufmann *et al.* 1999, Stoddard *et al.* 2008). We used a general linear model (PROC GLM, SAS v. 9.12) to obtain estimates of among-site and within-site (from repeat visits) variability. PROC GLM was used because of the highly unbalanced design (only a small subset of sites had repeat visits). We used a nested model (sites within year) where both site and year were random effects.

**Table 6.12 Performance information of metrics used to construct the fish MMI for the Xeric West aggregated ecoregion. Column name is the field name in the NRSA database.**

| Metric Category           | Column Name    | Description   | t-value <sup>a</sup> | Signal: Noise Value <sup>b</sup> | Scoring Information <sup>c</sup> |         |         |
|---------------------------|----------------|---|----------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------|---------|
|                           |                |   |                      |                                  | Direction of Response            | Floor   | Ceiling |
| Alien                     | NAT_PIND       | % of individuals that are native                                      | 7.75                 | 5.4                              | POS                              | 0       | 100     |
| Composition               | CENTPTAX       | % of taxa that are within the family Centrarchidae                    | -4.12                | 3.4                              | NEG                              | 0       | 25.000  |
| Habitat <sup>d</sup>      | RHEOPIND       | % of individuals that are rheophils                                   | 5.03                 | 13.1                             | POS                              | 0       | 100     |
| Life History              | MIGRPTAX_WS    | % of taxa that are migratory (adjusted for watershed area)            | 1.79                 | 7.9                              | POS                              | -64.832 | 38.279  |
| Reproductive <sup>e</sup> | LITHNTAX_WS    | Number of taxa that are lithophils (adjusted for watershed area)      | 8.39                 | 6.4                              | POS                              | -6.202  | 1.649   |
| Richness                  | NTOLPTAX       | % of taxa that are not tolerant                                       | 8.02                 | 8.9                              | POS                              | 0       | 100     |
| Tolerance                 | TOLRNTAX_WS    | Number of taxa that are tolerant (adjusted for watershed area)        | -8.56                | 3.7                              | NEG                              | -0.129  | 4.670   |
| Trophic                   | BENTINVPTAX_WS | % of taxa that are benthic invertivores (adjusted for watershed area) | 6.43                 | 21.8                             | POS                              | -48.740 | 23.306  |

<sup>a</sup> Based on the comparison of mean values of least disturbed and most disturbed sites (validation sites have been excluded).

<sup>b</sup> Based on variability among sites vs. variability within sites (validation sites have been excluded).

<sup>c</sup> Direction: POS=Positive metric (mean value for least-disturbed sites is greater than mean value for most-disturbed sites). NEG=negative metric (mean value for most-disturbed sites is greater than the mean value for least-disturbed sites). For positive metrics, the floor= 5<sup>th</sup> percentile of all sites (a metric value  $\leq$  floor is assigned a score of 0), and the ceiling=95<sup>th</sup> percentile of least-disturbed sites (a metric value  $\geq$  ceiling is assigned a score of 10). For negative metrics, the floor= 5<sup>th</sup> percentile of least-disturbed sites (a metric value  $\leq$  floor is assigned a score of 10), and the ceiling=95<sup>th</sup> percentile of all sites (a metric value  $\geq$  ceiling is assigned a score of 0).

<sup>d</sup> Habitat metrics: Lotic species occupy flowing water habitats; Rheophils occupy fast water habitats.

<sup>e</sup> Reproductive metrics: Lithophils require clean substrate for spawning.

**Table 6.13 Performance statistics for the nine regional fish MMIs.**

| <b>Performance Characteristic</b>   | <b>Coastal Plain Fish MMI</b> | <b>Northern Appalachians Fish MMI</b> | <b>Northern Plains Fish MMI</b> | <b>Southern Appalachians Fish MMI</b> | <b>Southern Plains Fish MMI</b> | <b>Temperate Plains Fish MMI</b> | <b>Upper Midwest Fish MMI</b> | <b>Western Mountains Fish MMI</b> | <b>Xeric West Fish MMI</b> |
|---|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Validation least-disturbed sites vs. least-disturbed sites used in MMI development  | <i>t</i> =-1.22               | <i>t</i> =1.00                        | <i>t</i> =1.12                  | <i>t</i> =0.92                        | <i>t</i> =-0.02                 | <i>t</i> =0.41                   | <i>t</i> =1.40                | <i>t</i> =0.43                    | <i>t</i> =0.86             |
| Least-disturbed sites vs. most-disturbed sites  | <i>t</i> =10.3                | <i>t</i> =15.38                       | <i>t</i> =5.71                  | <i>t</i> =14.7                        | <i>t</i> =8.07                  | <i>t</i> =9.76                   | <i>t</i> =7.45                | <i>t</i> =7.74                    | <i>t</i> =11.42            |
| Difference between 25 <sup>th</sup> percentile of least-disturbed sites and 75 <sup>th</sup> percentile of most-disturbed sites | +6.2                          | +22.4                                 | +1.6                            | +8.8                                  | +2.4                            | +8.5                             | +1.42                         | +0.75                             | +9.5                       |
| Model precision (SD of least-disturbed sites)   | 0.17                          | 0.22                                  | 0.28                            | 0.17                                  | 0.14                            | 0.15                             | 0.28                          | 0.011                             | 0.10                       |
| Repeatability (Signal:Noise)  | 6.6                           | 71.2                                  | 4.4                             | 6.5                                   | 13.5                            | 6.2                              | 4.3                           | 29.1                              | 9.8                        |

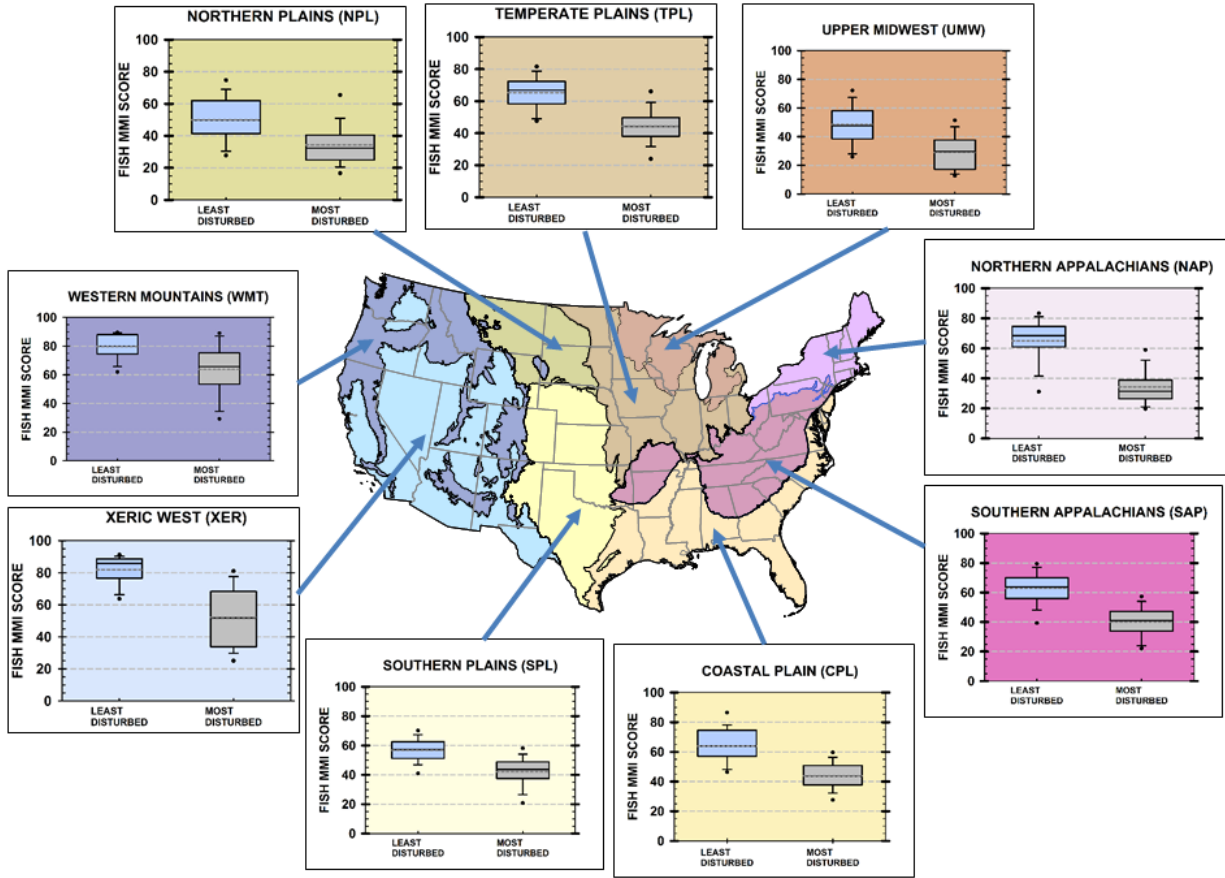


Figure 6.3 Boxplots comparing regional fish MMI scores of least-disturbed sites to most-disturbed sites. Whiskers indicate 10<sup>th</sup> and 90<sup>th</sup> percentiles. Points indicate 5<sup>th</sup> and 95<sup>th</sup> percentiles.



We estimated repeatability by deriving a Signal:Noise (S:N) ratio as  $(F - 1)/c$ , where  $F$  is the  $F$ -statistic from the ANOVA, and  $c$  is a coefficient in the equation used to estimate the expected mean square. If all sites had repeat visits,  $c$  would equal 2 (Kaufmann *et al.* 1999). If no sites had repeat visits,  $c$  would equal 1. Signal:Noise ratios ranged from 4.3 in the Upper Midwest aggregated ecoregion to 71.2 in the Northern Appalachians aggregated ecoregion. High values of S:N need to be interpreted in the context of the number of repeat visit sites included in the analysis. Artificially high values of S:N can result if there are a small number of repeat visit sites that have little (or no) variance in fish MMI scores among them.

We examined the performance of the fish MMIs across the range of stream sizes sampled for NRSA. The potential exists for bias in the fish MMI due to different fish species pools being available for larger rivers versus smaller streams. Differences across the size range might also result from the different sampling protocols that were used according to river or stream size (wadeable, large wadeable, and boatable). We used the set of least-disturbed sites to examine patterns in fish MMI scores across three size categories based on Strahler order (**Figure 6.4**). In most aggregated ecoregions, there is little difference between the distribution of fish MMI scores among stream size classes. In the Northern Appalachians aggregated ecoregion, fish MMI scores at the least-disturbed sites that are 5<sup>th</sup> order or larger are significantly different from fish MMI scores in least-disturbed sites that are first or second order (one-way ANOVA with Tukey multiple comparisons test,  $p < 0.05$ ).

We examined the potential effect of the three different fish sampling protocols for streams of different sizes (**Figure 6.5**). The distribution of fish MMI scores in least-disturbed sites were similar among the three protocols for most of the nine aggregated ecoregions. In the Northern Appalachians, this appears to be a tendency for fish MMI scores for least-disturbed sites sampled using the boatable protocol to be lower than fish MMI scores for least-disturbed sites sampled using either the wadeable or large wadeable protocols, but the difference is not significantly different (one-way ANOVA with Tukey multiple comparisons test). In the Northern Plains aggregated ecoregion, fish MMI scores for least-disturbed sites sampled with the boatable protocol are significantly higher than fish MMI scores at least-disturbed sites sampled using either the wadeable or large wadeable protocol (one-way ANOVA with Tukey multiple comparisons test,  $p < 0.05$ ). The effect of sampling protocol in the Upper Midwest and Xeric West aggregated ecoregions are difficult to evaluate, as there was only one least-disturbed site sampled each using the large wadeable and boatable protocols.

The NRSA includes streams of different temperature regimes as well as a broad range of stream sizes. We used the predicted summer (July-August) daily stream temperatures ( $^{\circ}\text{C}$ ) based on reference condition USGS stream temperature stations (Hill *et al.* 2013) to estimate the mean summer stream temperature (MSST). We classified the set of least-disturbed streams in each aggregated ecoregion as either cold water (MSST  $< 17^{\circ}\text{C}$ ), cool water (MSST between 17 and  $20^{\circ}\text{C}$ ) or warm water (MSST  $\geq 20^{\circ}\text{C}$ ). **Figure 6.6** shows the distribution of fish MMI scores among the three temperature classes for each aggregated ecoregion. The Coastal Plains aggregated ecoregion did not have any least-disturbed sites that were classified as either cold or cool water. The Southern Plains aggregated ecoregion did not have any least disturbed sites classified as cold water (and only two sites classified as

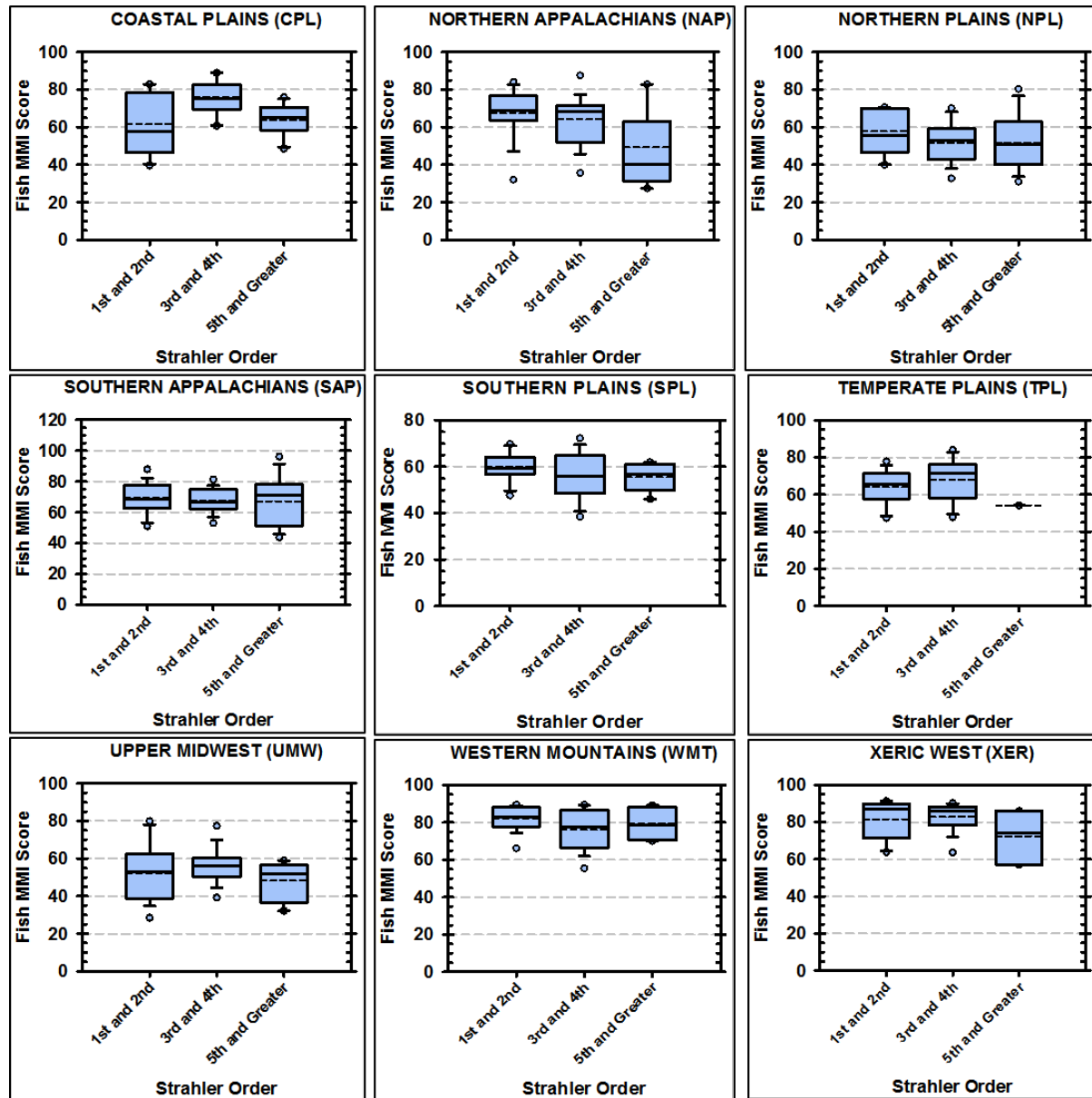


Figure 6.4 Regional fish MMI scores versus Strahler order category (least-disturbed sites).

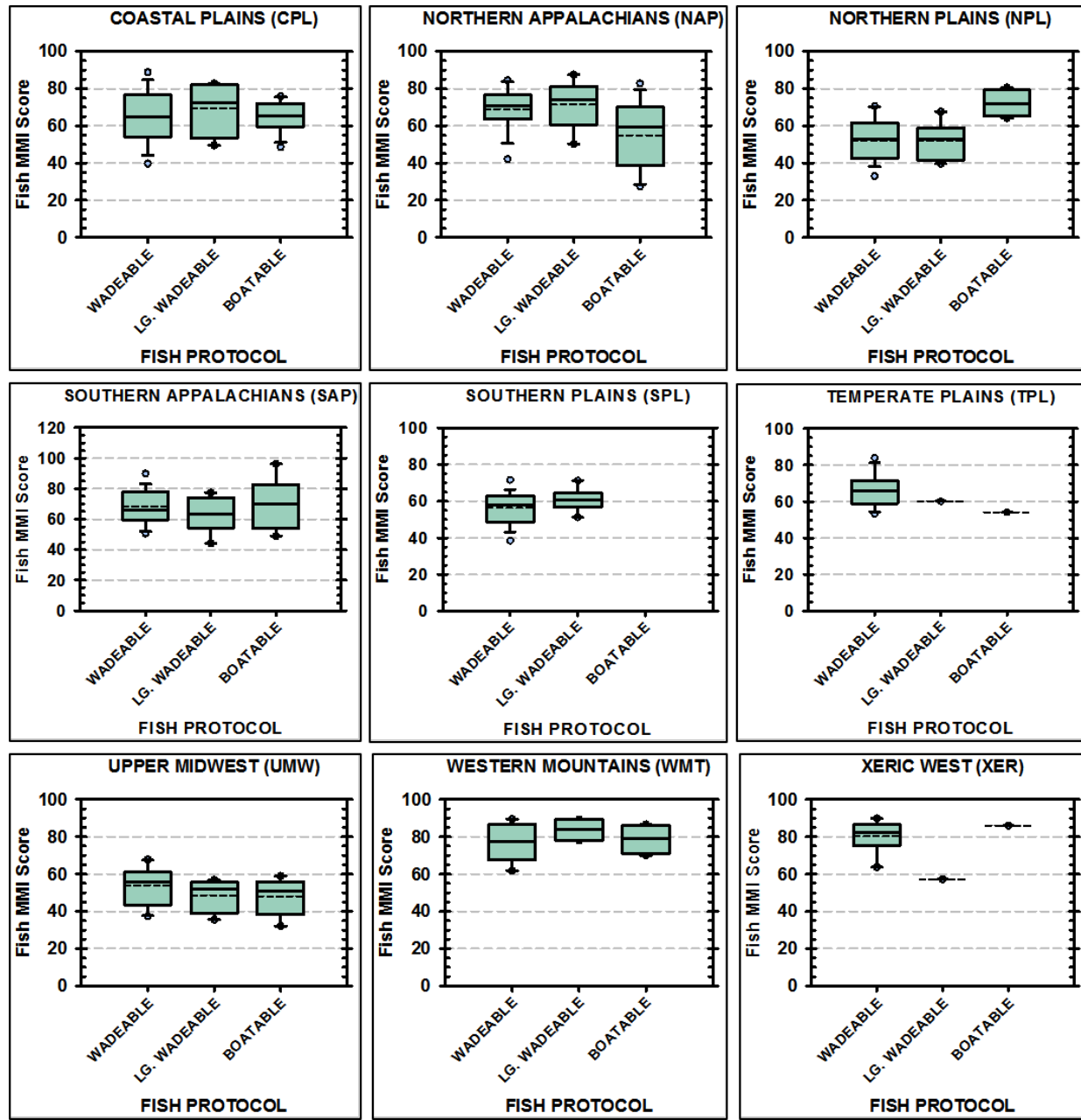


Figure 6.5 Regional fish MMI scores versus fish sampling protocol (least-disturbed sites).

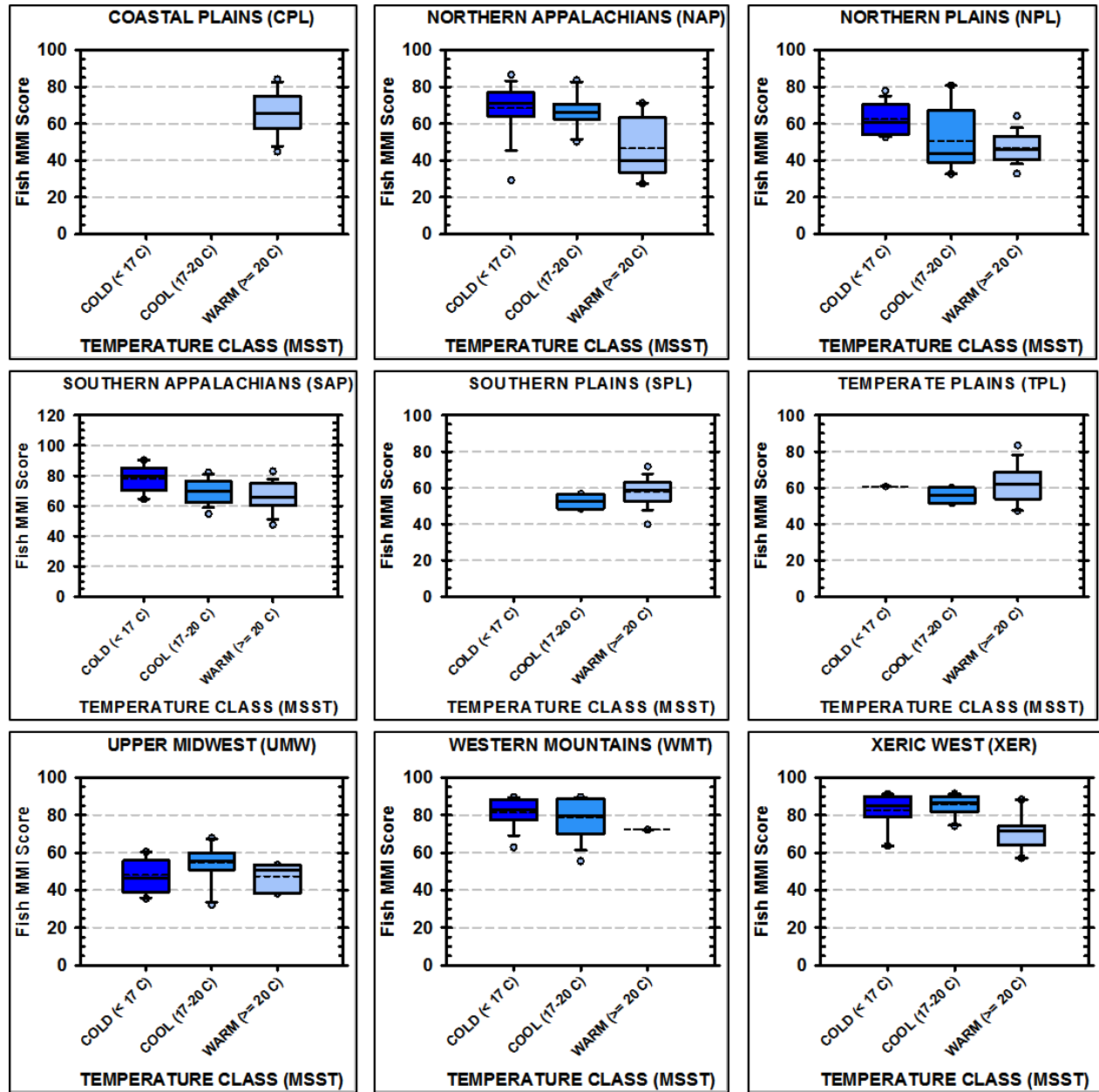


Figure 6.6 Regional fish MMI scores versus stream temperature class (least-disturbed sites). Temperature based on modeled mean summer stream temperature (MSST)

cool water), and the Temperate Plains aggregated ecoregion only had one least-disturbed site classified as cold water (and only two sites classified as cool water). The Upper Midwest aggregated ecoregion only had three least-disturbed sites classified as warm water. The Western Mountains aggregated ecoregion had only one least-disturbed site classified as warm water. In the Northern Appalachians aggregated ecoregion, fish MMI scores for warm water sites are significantly lower than fish MMI scores for either cool water or cold water sites (one-way ANOVA with Tukey multiple comparisons test,  $p < 0.001$ ). In the Northern Plains aggregated ecoregion, fish MMI scores for warm water and cool water sites are significantly lower than fish MMI scores at cold water sites (one-way ANOVA with Tukey multiple comparisons test,  $p < 0.001$ ). In the Xeric West aggregated ecoregion, fish MMI scores for warm water sites are significantly lower than fish MMI scores for either cool water or cold water sites (one-way ANOVA with Tukey multiple comparisons test,  $p < 0.01$ ).

## 6.5 SITES WITH LOW FISH ABUNDANCE

The target population of streams and rivers for NRSA includes small perennial headwater streams. Some very small streams may not contain fish even in the absence of human disturbance. We followed the approach described by McCormick *et al.* (2001) and used least-disturbed sites to estimate a drainage area below which the probability was high that no fish would be present (**Table 6.14**). This approach uses the relationship between a set of four physical habitat variables that characterize habitat volume and the number of fish collected. This relationship defines a habitat volume value below which nearly all sites sampled were devoid of fish. Then this habitat volume value is related to watershed area to determine the drainage area below which streams are expected to be naturally fishless.

**Figure 6.7** shows the results of this analysis. The value for the habitat volume index below which almost all sites were fishless is 0.41. When habitat volume is plotted against watershed area, this value corresponds to a watershed area of approximately 2 km<sup>2</sup>. For sites with watershed areas less than 2 km<sup>2</sup> where no fish were collected, we do not report the fish MMI score. Otherwise, we assign a fish MMI score of zero to sites with no fish collected.

## 6.6 BENCHMARKS FOR ASSIGNING ECOLOGICAL CONDITION

For NRSA, ecological condition is based on the deviation from least-disturbed condition (Stoddard *et al.* 2006, Hawkins *et al.* 2010b). Within each of the nine aggregated ecoregions regions, benchmarks for defining “good” condition and “poor” condition are based on the distribution of fish MMI scores in least-disturbed sites.

Benchmarks were set following the same process used for benthic macroinvertebrate condition (see **Section 5.3.2**). We combined the least-disturbed sites identified for NRSA 2008-09 and 2013-14 to develop benchmarks that were then applied to the fish MMI scores from both assessments. We used a single visit per site and used the latest visit if a least-disturbed site was sampled in 2008-09 and resampled in 2013-14. We attempted to adjust for differences in the quality of least-disturbed sites across the nine aggregated ecoregions by applying the “hindcasting” approach described in **Section**

5.3.2 and by Herlihy *et al.* (2008), and the NRSA 2008-09 technical report (USEPA 2016).

**Table 6.14 Determining the minimum drainage area expected to reliably support the presence of fish (adapted from McCormick et al (2001)). Variable names are from the NRSA database. Scores for each metric between the upper and lower criteria were estimated by linear interpolation.**

|  |
|--|
| <b>SET OF SITES</b>  |
| Use least-disturbed sites only (RT_NRSA_FISH="R") to minimize effects of human disturbance |
| <b>HABITAT VOLUME INDEX</b>  |
| Percent of support reach length that is dry (PCT_DRS)                                      |
| If PCT_DR < 1%, score = 1. If PCT-DR ≥ 20%, then score = 0.                                |
| Log <sub>10</sub> [(mean wetted width x mean thalweg depth) +0.001] (LXWXD)                |
| If LXWXD > 1, score=1. If LXWXD ≤ -1.4, then score = 0.                                    |
| Residual pool depth (RP100)  |
| If RP100 ≥ 20, then score=1. If RP100 ≤ 0, then score = 0.                                 |
| Mean wetted width  |
| If XWIDTH ≥ 6, then score = 1. If XWIDTH = 0, then score = 0.                              |
| HABITAT VOLUME INDEX = (PCT_DR score + LXWXD score + RP100 score + XWIDTH score)/4         |
| <b>PLOT NUMBER OF FISH COLLECTED (TOTLNIND) VS. HABITAT VOLUME INDEX (QVOLX)</b>           |
| Value for QVOLX below which most sites have no fish = 0.41                                 |
| <b>PLOT HABITAT VOLUME INDEX VS. WATERSHED AREA (WSAREA_KM2)</b>                           |
| QVOLX = 0.41 corresponds to a watershed area of ~ 2 km <sup>2</sup>                        |

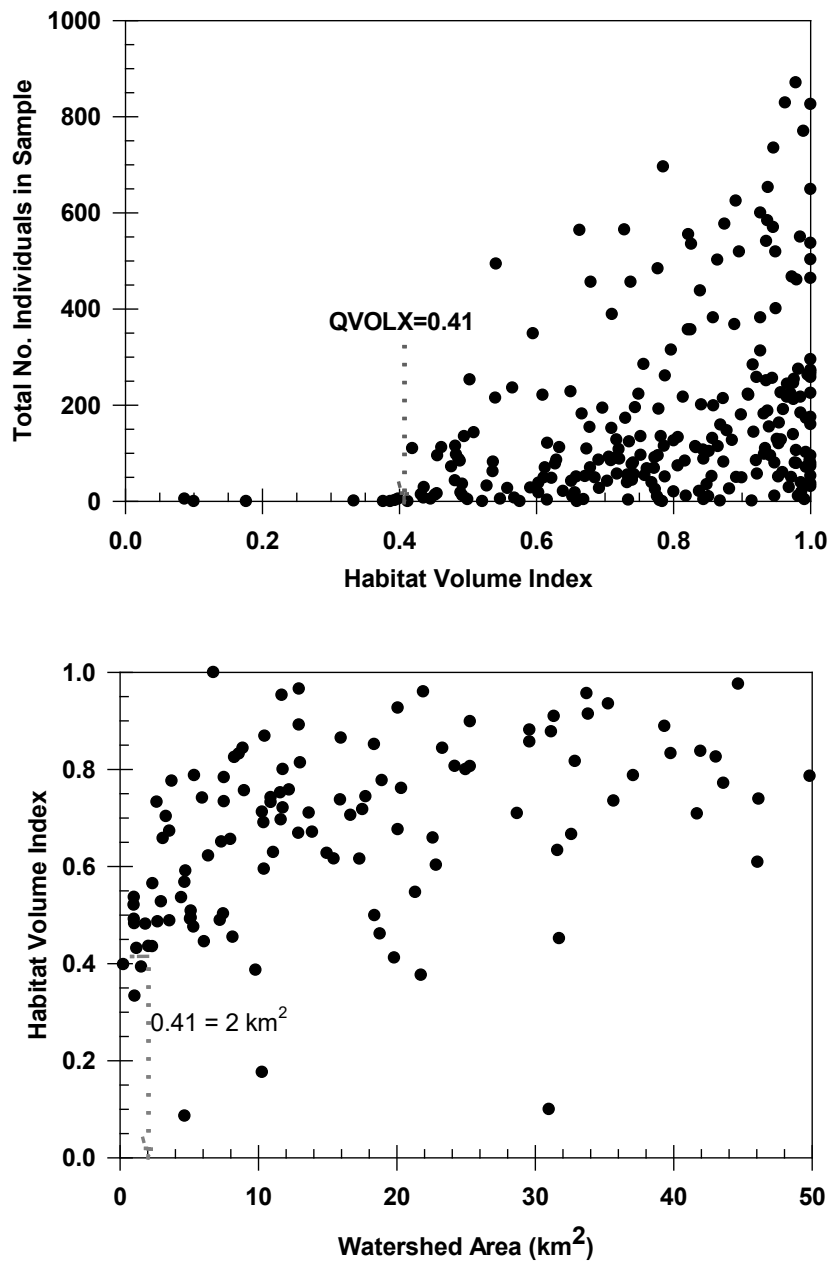


Figure 6.7 Relationship between number of fish collected, reduced habitat volume, and small watershed size at least-disturbed sites. Fish are not likely to be found in streams with a watershed area of  $< 2 \text{ km}^2$ . The scales of total number of fish collected and watershed area axes have been truncated for clarity.

The benchmarks for each aggregated ecoregion are presented in **Table 6.15**. The benchmarks for assigning “good” condition range between  $\geq 39.8$  for the Upper Midwest to  $\geq 76.8$  for the Xeric West. The benchmarks for assigning “poor” condition range from  $< 29.3$  in the Upper Midwest to  $< 65.4$  in the Western Mountains. The hindcasting approach results in the benchmarks in each aggregated ecoregion differing by 10.5. Note that even though the fish MMI for the Upper Midwest has lower benchmarks than the other aggregated ecoregions, the fish MMI still performs well (**Table 6.13; Figure 6.3**).

## 6.7 DISCUSSION

For NRSA 2008-09, we initially used a model-based approach that adjusted metric responses to account for natural variability (USEPA 2016; **Appendix 7.A**) to develop three regional fish MMIs (Section 6.1.1; **Figure 6.1**). While these fish MMIs performed adequately for use in the 2008-09 assessment, several constraints limited the ability for users outside of NRSA to make use of that approach for their data. We evaluated a more traditional approach to developing and evaluating fish MMIs based on approaches that have evolved from our experience with other regional-scale assessment efforts (e.g., McCormick *et al.* 2001, Whittier *et al.* 2007b, Stoddard *et al.* 2008, Van Sickle 2010). Using this approach, we constructed a fish MMI that was responsive to disturbance and repeatable for each of the nine aggregated ecoregions (**Table 6.13** and **Figure 6.3**). The performance of the nine regional fish MMIs was similar to or better than fish MMIs constructed using random forest modelling to adjust metric responses for natural variability (**Section 6.1.2, Appendix 7.A**). Our evaluation approach focuses on selecting metrics and fish MMIs that maximize responsiveness to disturbance and have adequate values for other performance criteria such as repeatability. In all nine aggregated ecoregions, the fish MMIs tend to be more responsive to disturbance and repeatable than any of their component metrics (**Table 6.4** through **Table 6.13**).

We calculate candidate metrics based on the percent of taxa, which are not commonly considered for fish. For each of the nine regional fish MMIs, one or more of the final metrics is based on the percent of taxa (**Table 6.4** through **Table 6.12**). We examine the relationship between watershed area and metric response for all candidate metrics (not just richness metrics) and adjust the metric response value when the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) for the linear regression is  $> 0.10$ . The fish MMIs for eight of the nine aggregated ecoregions have at least one metric that is not a richness metric where the adjusted metric performs better than the unadjusted metric (**Table 6.3**).

The ability to calculate large numbers of candidate MMIs from a set of metrics that met all our evaluation criteria is an improvement over stepwise selection of metrics based on correlations with metrics already selected (Stoddard *et al.* 2008, Van Sickle 2010). This approach provides the opportunity to evaluate MMIs based on suites of metrics that might not otherwise be considered and helps to ensure that the best-performing MMI is selected. Incorporating the difference between the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile of least-disturbed and 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of more disturbed sites (**Table 6.13**) and the  $F$ -score (or  $t$ -value) provides a quick and reproducible way of selecting a final fish MMI from the tens of thousands of candidate fish MMIs that can be generated (**Table 6.2**). However, within each



**Table 6.15 Benchmarks for assigning ecological condition based on the distribution of regional fish MMI scores in least-disturbed sites sampled in NRSA 2008-09 or NRSA 2013-14, adjusted using the hindcasting approach of Herlihy *et al.* (2008). Aggregated ecoregions are shown in Figure 6.2. Sample sizes are in parentheses.**

| Aggregated Ecoregion       | Good/Fair   | Fair/Poor |
|----------------------------|-------------|-----------|
| Eastern Highlands          |             |           |
| Northern Appalachians (60) | $\geq 57.6$ | $< 47.1$  |
| Southern Appalachian (94)  | $\geq 60.3$ | $< 49.8$  |
| Plains and Lowlands        |             |           |
| Coastal Plains (39)        | $\geq 57.3$ | $< 46.8$  |
| Northern Plains (42)       | $\geq 46.3$ | $< 35.8$  |
| Southern Plains (43)       | $\geq 50.2$ | $< 39.7$  |
| Temperate Plains (28)      | $\geq 58.0$ | $< 47.5$  |
| Upper Midwest (28)         | $\geq 39.8$ | $< 29.3$  |
| West                       |             |           |
| Western Mountains (70)     | $\geq 75.9$ | $< 65.4$  |
| Xeric West (25)            | $\geq 76.8$ | $< 63.7$  |

aggregated ecoregion, there may be several alternative fish MMIs with similar performance (i.e., a slightly lower PCA axis score, *t*-value, and signal:noise ratio) to the fish MMI we selected as the final.

We did note some potential influence of stream size, sampling protocol, and temperature regime on fish MMI scores in least-disturbed sites in some aggregated ecoregions (**Figure 6.4 through Figure 6.6**). These patterns were less evident in the original fish MMIs we developed for the three climatic regions (**Figure 6.1**; USEPA 2016). The fish MMIs in these aggregated ecoregions still performed well despite these influences (**Figure 6.3, Table 6.13**). At the scale of our aggregated ecoregions, small sample sizes and, in some cases, a limited geographic range of some classes of least-disturbed sites, make developing separate MMIs for different types of streams (e.g., larger streams or warm water streams) impractical.

We can consider several future refinements to the NRSA fish MMI development process as data are acquired from future rounds of NRSA. At present, we cannot develop fish MMIs for those relatively few NRSA sites that are sampled by seining. These sites tend to be confined to certain geographic areas. Once we have acquired seining data from enough sites, we may be able to construct a fish MMI that performs well and is compatible with the fish MMIs developed based on electrofishing data. An increased pool of least-disturbed sites in each of the nine aggregated ecoregions would allow for a more rigorous evaluation of the potential influence of factors such as stream size, protocol, and temperature regime. For larger streams, a national-scale index might be feasible given the advances in available techniques used to construct and evaluate MMIs. We have the data to construct numeric tolerance values for individual fish species based on a national-scale data, which would expand upon previous efforts (Meador and Carlisle 2007, Whittier *et al.* 2007a) and provide a tool with broad applicability to bioassessment activities. The fish MMIs we developed are tailored to respond to a general measure of disturbance, rather than being comprised of metrics that are responsive to different types of specific stressors. Examining the relationships between metrics and individual stressors would

improve the interpretability of the fish MMI and the resultant estimates of risk that are produced as part of the overall assessment in NRSA.

Fish counts, metrics, and multimetric index condition from NRSA are available to download from the NARS data webpage - <https://www.epa.gov/national-aquatic-resource-surveys/data-national-aquatic-resource-surveys>

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## **APPENDIX 6.A COMPARISON OF MODEL-BASED AND TRADITIONAL FISH MULTIMETRIC INDICES FOR NRSA 2008-09**

We used the data from the NRSA 2008-09 study to compare the performance of fish MMIs developed with predictive models (random forests) to adjust metric responses for natural variability to the performance of fish MMIs developed with a more traditional approach, where metric responses are adjusted for watershed area using linear regression (Sections 6.1.1 and 6.1.2). The development and evaluation process for both approaches is essentially the same; the objective being that the fish MMIs are the best representation of fish ecology that is responsive to disturbance (Sections 6.4 through 6.6). Both fish MMIs are developed using the same sets of least disturbed (LD) and most disturbed (MD) sites. Both fish MMIs are comprised of eight metrics and include a combination of adjusted and unadjusted metrics. Condition classes were developed for both fish MMIs in the same manner (Section 6.7).

We evaluated four aspects of the performance of the fish MMIs: responsiveness to disturbance, precision, repeatability, and sensitivity.

### **6.A.1 RESPONSIVENESS TO DISTURBANCE AND PRECISION**

**Figure 6.A.1** compares scores for both types of fish MMIs in least disturbed and most disturbed sites in each of the nine aggregated ecoregions. The model-based fish MMI was developed for the three large climatic regions (**Figure 6.1**), but the fish MMI scores are broken down for each of the nine aggregated ecoregions. In general, the distributions of least disturbed and most disturbed sites are similar for both types of fish MMIs.

We used a *t*-test between least disturbed and most disturbed sites as our performance test for responsiveness to disturbance (**Figure 6.A.2**). Sample sizes of least disturbed and most disturbed sites within each ecoregion were similar if not identical for both types of fish MMI. For both types of fish MMI, differences between mean values of least disturbed and most disturbed sites were highly significant in all aggregated ecoregions ( $p < 0.0001$ ). The traditional fish MMIs had higher values for *t* in all but one aggregated ecoregion (Xeric West).

We used the standard deviation of fish MMI scores in least disturbed sites, after adjusting scores by dividing by the mean value, as our performance test for precision. Precision is expected to be zero if our adjustments have accounted for natural variability. Precision values greater than zero represent any disturbance signal remaining after adjustment as well as measurement error. Neither approach to constructing the fish MMI completely adjusted for natural variability (**Figure 6.A.2**), but the amount of unexplained variability in both types of fish MMIs did not impact the ability of the fish MMIs to be responsive to disturbance (e.g., in the Northern Appalachians aggregated ecoregion, the traditional fish MMI was comparatively imprecise, but was very responsive to disturbance). The model-based fish MMIs tended to be slightly more precise than the traditional MMIs. Both types of fish MMIs were comparatively imprecise in the aggregated ecoregions that were included in the Plains and Lowlands climatic region.

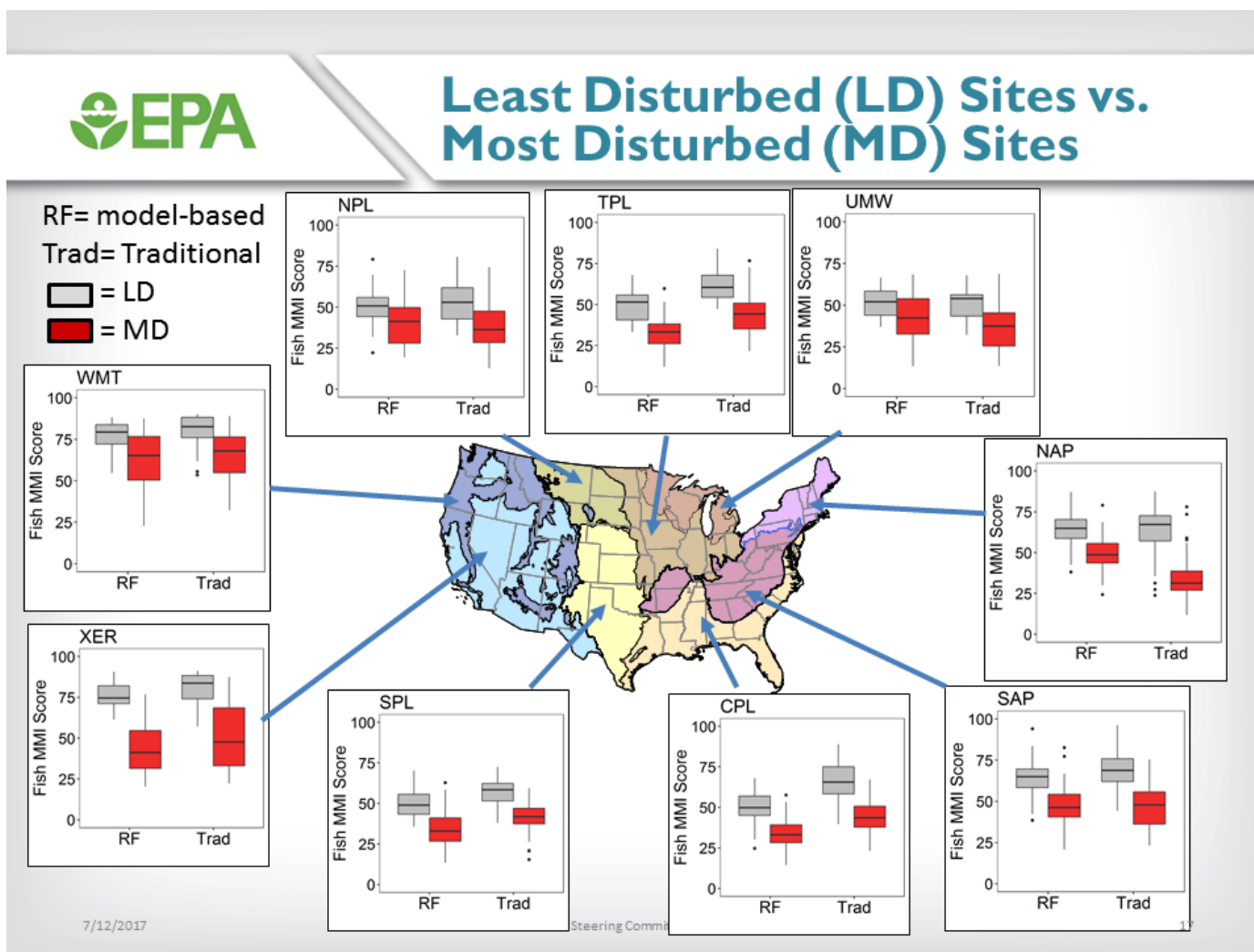
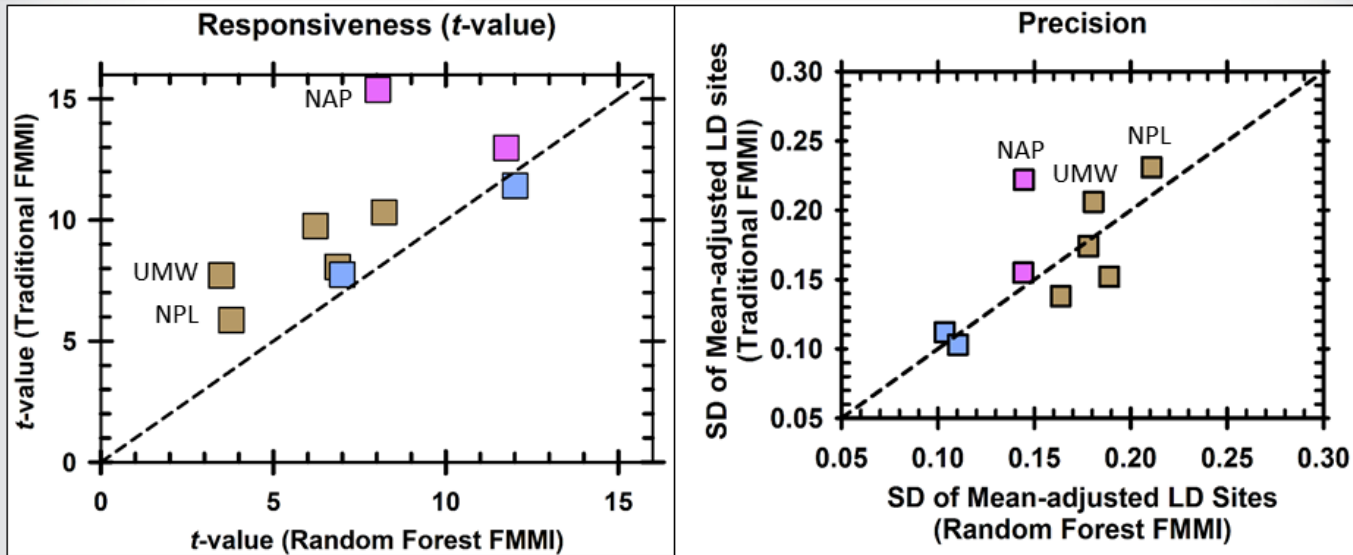
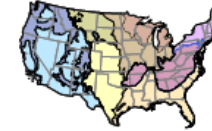


Figure 6.A.1 Distribution of fish MMI scores in least-disturbed vs. most-disturbed sites in NRSA 2008-09. For each aggregated ecoregion (see Figure 6.2), the left-hand pair of boxplots are for the model-based fish MMI (RF), and the right-hand pair are for the “traditional” fish MMI (Trad). Gray boxes=least-disturbed sites and red boxes=most-disturbed sites.



## Responsiveness and Precision



- Traditional FMMIs have higher *t*-values
- All are significant at  $p < 0.0001$  for both FMMIs

- Modeled FMMIs slightly more precise
- FMMIs in Plains and Lowlands ecoregions have poorest precision
- Still a fair amount of unexplained variability in both types of FMMIs, but it seems to have little impact on responsiveness

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Figure 6.A.2 Comparison of two types of fish MMI scores for responsiveness to disturbance and precision in nine aggregated ecoregions (see Figure 6.2). Y-axis= Traditional fish MMI score; X-axis=model-based fish MMI score; line is a 1:1 line. Colors coincide with regions on map inset (violet=Eastern Highlands, brown=Plains and Lowlands, blue=Western Mountains and Xeric).

## 6.A.2 REPEATABILITY AND SENSITIVITY

We evaluated repeatability of the fish MMIs by calculating a Signal:Noise ratio (S:N; see Section 6.4), which compared the variance among sites to variance within sites (from repeat visits). We estimated the sensitivity of the fish MMIs based on the proportion of most disturbed sites that were significantly different (using an interval test) from the set of least disturbed sites. The interval test is more conservative than simply looking at the number of most disturbed sites that are below a single percentile value (e.g., the 5<sup>th</sup> percentile) of the least disturbed sites.

**Figure 6.A.3** shows the results of the comparisons for repeatability and sensitivity. S:N ratios for both types of fish MMIs are adequate for use in NRSA. The model-based fish MMIs tend to have slightly higher values of S:N than the traditional fish MMIs. In some aggregated ecoregions (e.g., the Northern Appalachians or the Upper Midwest), there is a small number of sites with repeat visits. If there is little or no variability in the fish MMI scores at these sites between visits, it will result in a very high estimate of S:N that is mostly a function of small sample size.

Sensitivity values are similar for both types of fish MMIs and are nearly identical for those aggregated ecoregions in the Plains and Lowlands climatic regions. The low values (< 40% for all but one aggregated ecoregion) reflect the variability present in both the least disturbed and most disturbed sites at the scale of the aggregated ecoregions. The lowest sensitivity was seen in the Northern Plains aggregated ecoregion, while the greatest sensitivity was observed in the Xeric West aggregated ecoregion.

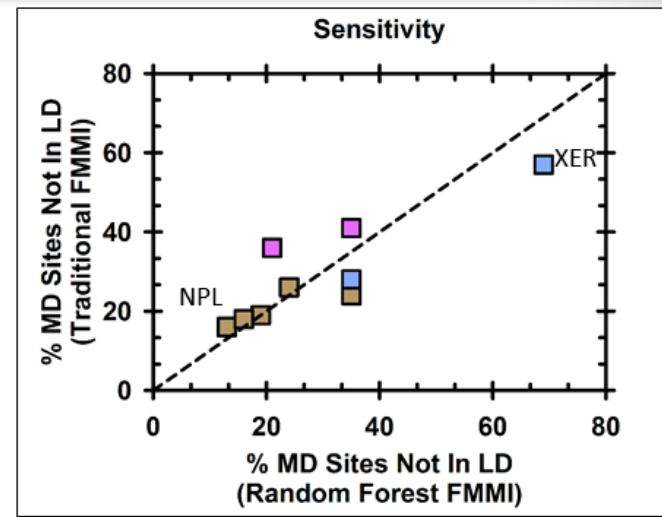
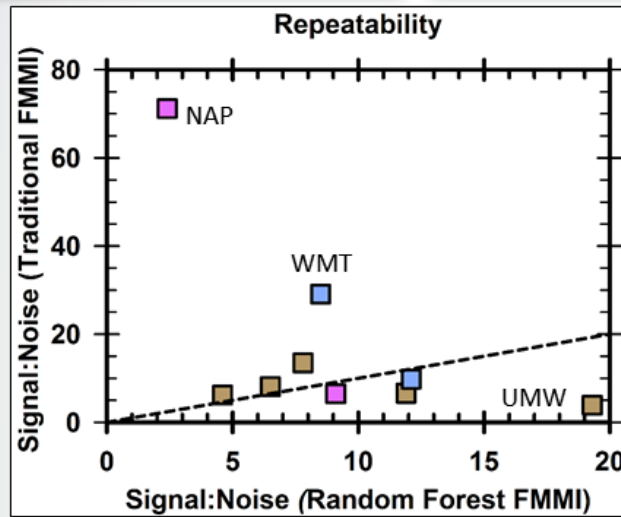
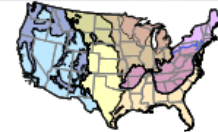
## 6.A.3 CORRELATION OF FISH MMI SCORES

We looked at how similar the traditional fish MMI scores were to the model-based fish MMI scores at all sites. For each aggregated ecoregion, we calculated the Pearson correlation coefficient, and calculated the geometric mean functional regression (GMFR) because each fish MMI is measured with error. We used a single index visit for each site and excluded sites where no fish were collected. Correlation coefficients are > 0.7 for all but the Northern Plains aggregated ecoregion (**Figure 6.A.4**). The GMFR analysis indicates that for two aggregated ecoregions (the Upper Midwest and the Western Mountains), the two fish MMIs are identical (slope=1, intercept=0). In the Xeric West aggregated ecoregion, the traditional fish MMI scores are consistently higher by a small amount than the model-based fish MMI scores (slope=1, intercept > 0). For the remaining aggregated ecoregions, slopes are >1 except in the Southern Plains aggregated ecoregion.





## Repeatability and Sensitivity



- Modeled FMMIs slightly more repeatable
- Affected by number of repeat visits (little or no within site variance would inflate the S:N value)

- Sensitivity is similar for PLNLOW regions
- Traditional MMI is slightly more sensitive in EHIGH, RF slightly better in WMTNS regions

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Figure 6.A.3 Comparison of two types of fish MMI scores for repeatability and sensitivity in nine aggregated ecoregions (see Figure 6.2). Y-axis= Traditional fish MMI score; X-axis=model-based fish MMI score; line is a 1:1 line. Colors coincide with regions on map inset (violet=Eastern Highlands, brown=Plains and Lowlands, blue=Western Mountains and Xeric).



## FMMI Scores Are Correlated

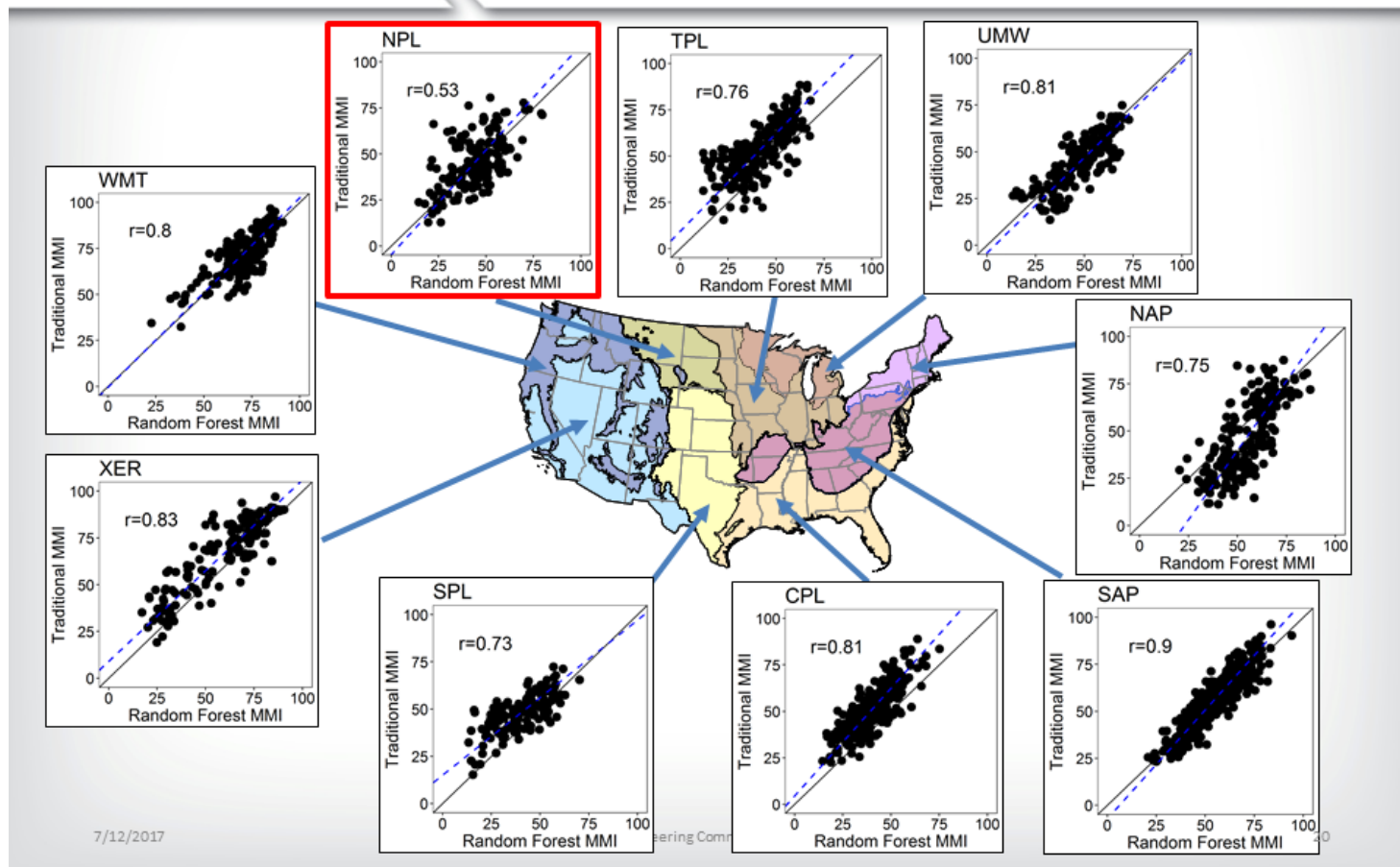


Figure 6.A.4 Comparison of two types of fish MMI scores in nine aggregated ecoregions (see Figure 6.2). Points are index visits only, and sites where no fish were collected are excluded. Y-axis=Traditional fish MMI score; X-axis=model-based fish MMI score. Solid black line: 1:1 line; Dashed Blue line: Regression line based on geometric mean functional regression.

## 6.A.4 POPULATION ESTIMATES

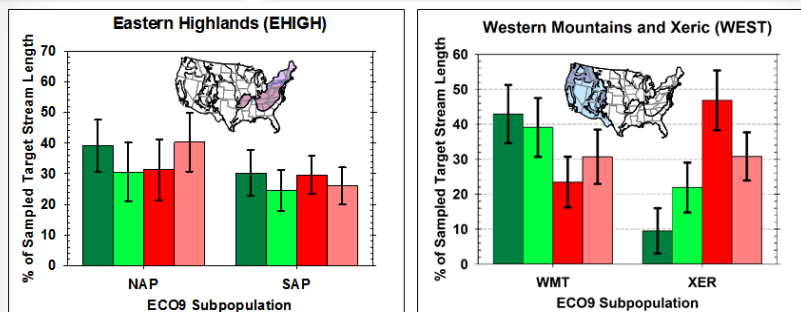
The survey design for NRSA allows us to make inferences from the set of sampled sites to a much larger target population. We wanted to know if the two types of fish MMIs would yield different estimates of biological condition for the target population. We assigned condition classes for each type of fish MMI in each aggregated ecoregion using the approach described in Section 6.5. Condition class is assigned for each of the nine aggregated ecoregions based on the deviation from the set of LD sites. For the four aggregated ecoregions in the Eastern Highlands and Western Mountains climatic regions, the two types of fish MMIs yield similar estimates of the percent of stream length in both good and poor condition (**Figure 6.A.5**); the largest differences in length are in the Xeric West aggregated ecoregion. In the Plains and Lowlands climatic region, the two types of fish MMIs yield similar estimates of the percent of stream length in good and poor condition for all aggregated ecoregions except for the Coastal Plains, where the traditional fish MMI produces a smaller percent of stream length in good condition and a larger percent of stream length in poor condition compared to the model-based fish MMI. One or both types of fish MMIs in the Northern Plains and the Upper Midwest aggregated ecoregions had some performance issues, yet the condition class estimates for the sampled target population were similar.

Based on our evaluations, both types of fish MMIs generally have similar performance and provide similar estimates of biological condition for the samples target population in each aggregated ecoregion. Scores for the two types of fish MMIs are well correlated despite differences in component metrics and the scale at which metric adjustments are made (climatic region for the model-based fish MMI and aggregated ecoregion for the traditional fish MMI). The quality of least-disturbed sites may be less similar among the five aggregated ecoregions that are included in the Plains and Lowlands climatic region than the aggregated ecoregions that are included in either the Eastern Highlands or Western Mountains climatic regions.

We calculated the traditional fish MMI scores for all sites in the NRSA 2008-09 and the NRSA 2013-14. The scale of traditional fish MMI development (i.e., the nine aggregated ecoregions) is consistent with the MMI developed for the benthic macroinvertebrate assemblage in NRSA. We did not use any least-disturbed sites identified in NRSA 2013-14 to develop the fish MMIs, but we did pool the least-disturbed sites from both studies to estimate the benchmark values to assign biological condition.



## Extent Estimates are Similar



RF GOOD TR GOOD RF POOR TR POOR

GOOD= similar to LD sites POOR= different from LD sites

|                         | NAP     | SAP     | WMT     | XER    |
|-------------------------|---------|---------|---------|--------|
| Est. stream length (km) | 189,488 | 509,319 | 243,444 | 72,330 |

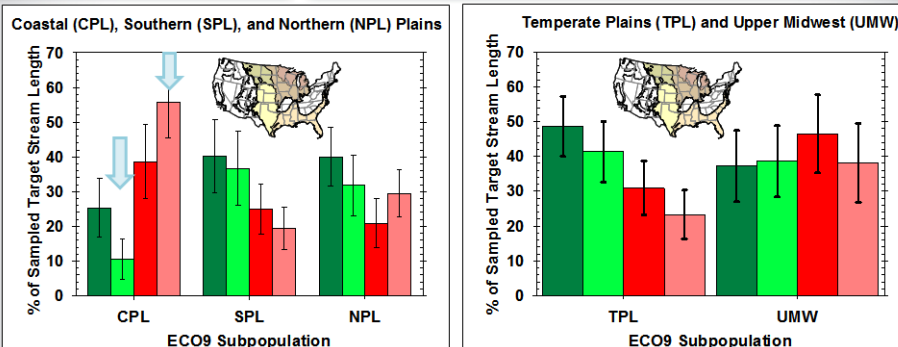
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## Coastal Plains Estimates are Less Similar



RF GOOD TR GOOD RF POOR TR POOR

|                         | CPL     | SPL    | NPL    | TPL     | UMW     |
|-------------------------|---------|--------|--------|---------|---------|
| Est. stream length (km) | 284,065 | 58,853 | 43,432 | 371,316 | 148,951 |

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Figure 6.A.5 Biological condition in nine aggregated ecoregions (ECO9) (see Figure 6.2) for the NRSA 2008-09 based on two types of fish MMIs. Top panel shows aggregated ecoregions within the Eastern Highlands and Western Mountains climatic regions. Lower panel shows aggregated ecoregions within the Plains and Lowlands climatic regions. Bars represent the percent of the length of the sampled target population inferred from the set of sampled sites; error bars are 95% confidence intervals. RF=model-based fish MMI; TR=traditional fish MMI. Good=similar to least-disturbed sites; Poor=different from least-disturbed sites (see Section 6.5 and Table 6.15). The total estimated length of the sampled target population for each aggregated ecoregion is shown in the table.

## APPENDIX 6.B CANDIDATE METRICS CONSIDERED FOR FISH MMI DEVELOPMENT

**Table 6.B.1** presents the candidate metrics that were evaluated for potential inclusions in the regional fish MMIs. Metric classes represent different attributes of fish assemblage structure or function. Some metrics are combinations of two different metric classes. Composition metrics generally focus on the family level of taxonomic resolution. Round-bodied suckers include the following genera: *Catostomus*, *Cycleptus*, *Erimyzon*, *Hypentelium*, *Minytrema*, *Moxostoma*, *Pantosteus*, and *Thoburnia*. Migratory species include both diadromous and anadromous species. “Not tolerant” metrics include all species not classified as tolerant (and thus include intolerant species, moderately tolerant species, and species that have no tolerance category assigned). We use “intolerant” here in the same context as others use “sensitive.”

**Table 6.B.1** List of candidate metrics

| METRIC CLASS | METRIC VARIABLE NAME | DESCRIPTION   |
|--------------|----------------------|---|
| ALIEN        | ALIENNTAX            | No. Non-native species                                    |
| ALIEN        | ALIENPIND            | % Non-native individuals                                  |
| ALIEN        | ALIENPTAX            | % Non-native taxa   |
| ALIEN        | NAT_PIND             | % Native individuals                                      |
| ALIEN        | NAT_PTAX             | % Native taxa   |
| COMPOSITION  | CATONTAX             | No. Catostomid species                                    |
| COMPOSITION  | CATOPIND             | % Catostomid individuals                                  |
| COMPOSITION  | CATOPTAX             | % Catostomid taxa   |
| COMPOSITION  | NAT_CATONTAX         | No. Native catostomid species                             |
| COMPOSITION  | NAT_CATOPIND         | % Native catostomid individuals                           |
| COMPOSITION  | NAT_CATOPTAX         | % Native catostomid taxa                                  |
| COMPOSITION  | RBCATONTAX           | No. Round-bodied catostomid species                       |
| COMPOSITION  | RBCATOPIND           | % Round-bodied catostomid individuals                     |
| COMPOSITION  | RBCATOPTAX           | % Round-bodied catostomid taxa                            |
| COMPOSITION  | NAT_RBCATONTAX       | No. Native round-bodied catostomid species                |
| COMPOSITION  | NAT_RBCATOPIND       | % Native round-bodied catostomid individuals              |
| COMPOSITION  | NAT_RBCATOPTAX       | % Native round-bodied catostomid taxa                     |
| COMPOSITION  | CENTNTAX             | No. Centrarchid species (excl. <i>Micropterus</i> spp.)   |
| COMPOSITION  | CENTPIND             | % Centrarchid individuals (excl. <i>Micropterus</i> spp.) |

| <b>METRIC CLASS</b> | <b>METRIC VARIABLE NAME</b> | <b>DESCRIPTION</b>   |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| COMPOSITION         | CENTPTAX                    | % Centrarchid taxa (excl. <i>Micropterus</i> spp.)               |
| COMPOSITION         | NAT_CENTNTAX                | No. Native centrarchid species (excl. <i>Micropterus</i> spp.)   |
| COMPOSITION         | NAT_CENTPIND                | % native centrarchid individuals (excl. <i>Micropterus</i> spp.) |
| COMPOSITION         | NAT_CENTPTAX                | % Native centrarchid taxa (excl. <i>Micropterus</i> spp.)        |
| COMPOSITION         | CYPRNTAX                    | No. Cyprinid species (excluding all carps and goldfish)          |
| COMPOSITION         | CYPRPIND                    | % Cyprinid individuals (excluding all carps and goldfish)        |
| COMPOSITION         | CYPRPTAX                    | % Cyprinid individuals (excluding all carps and goldfish)        |
| COMPOSITION         | NAT_CYPRNTAX                | No. Native cyprinid species (excluding all carps and goldfish)   |
| COMPOSITION         | NAT_CYPRPIND                | % Native cyprinid individuals (excluding all carps and goldfish) |
| COMPOSITION         | NAT_CYPRPTAX                | % Native cyprinid individuals (excluding all carps and goldfish) |
| COMPOSITION         | ICTANTAX                    | No. Ictalurid species  |
| COMPOSITION         | ICTAPIND                    | % Ictalurid individuals  |
| COMPOSITION         | ICTAPTAX                    | % Ictalurid taxa   |
| COMPOSITION         | NAT_ICTANTAX                | No. Native ictalurid species                                     |
| COMPOSITION         | NAT_ICTAPIND                | % Native ictalurid individuals                                   |
| COMPOSITION         | NAT_ICTAPTAX                | % Native ictalurid taxa  |
| COMPOSITION         | SALMNTAX                    | No. Salmonid species   |
| COMPOSITION         | SALMPIND                    | % Salmonid individuals   |
| COMPOSITION         | SALMPTAX                    | % Salmonid taxa  |
| COMPOSITION         | NAT_SALMNTAX                | No. Native salmonid species                                      |
| COMPOSITION         | NAT_SALMPIND                | % Native salmonid individuals                                    |
| COMPOSITION         | NAT_SALMPTAX                | % Native salmonid taxa   |
| HABITAT             | COLDNTAX                    | No. Coldwater species  |
| HABITAT             | COLDPIND                    | % Coldwater individuals  |
| HABITAT             | COLDPTAX                    | % Coldwater taxa   |
| HABITAT             | NAT_COLDNTAX                | No. Native coldwater species                                     |
| HABITAT             | NAT_COLDPIND                | % Native coldwater individuals                                   |
| HABITAT             | NAT_COLDPTAX                | % Native coldwater taxa  |
| HABITAT             | LOTNTAX                     | No. Lotic species  |

| <b>METRIC CLASS</b>                  | <b>METRIC VARIABLE NAME</b> | <b>DESCRIPTION</b>   |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| HABITAT                              | LOTPIND                     | % Lotic individuals  |
| HABITAT                              | LOTPTAX                     | % Lotic taxa   |
| HABITAT                              | NAT_LOTNTAX                 | No. Native lotic species   |
| HABITAT                              | NAT_LOTPIND                 | % Native lotic individuals   |
| HABITAT                              | NAT_LOTPTAX                 | % Native lotic taxa  |
| HABITAT                              | NAT_NTOLBENTNTAX            | No. of Native not tolerant benthic species (BPJ based tolerance assignments) |
| HABITAT                              | NAT_NTOLBENTPIND            | % Native not tolerant benthic individuals (BPJ based tolerance assignments)  |
| HABITAT                              | NAT_NTOLBENTPTAX            | % Native not tolerant benthic taxa (BPJ based tolerance assignments)         |
| HABITAT                              | RHEONTAX                    | No. Rheophilic species   |
| HABITAT                              | RHEOPIND                    | % Rheophilic individuals   |
| HABITAT                              | RHEOPTAX                    | % Rheophilic taxa  |
| HABITAT                              | NAT_RHEONTAX                | No. Native rheophilic species  |
| HABITAT                              | NAT_RHEOPIND                | % Native rheophilic individuals  |
| HABITAT                              | NAT_RHEOPTAX                | % Native rheophilic taxa   |
| HABITAT                              | NTOLBENTNTAX                | No. Not tolerant benthic species   |
| HABITAT                              | NTOLBENTPIND                | % Not tolerant benthic species   |
| HABITAT                              | NTOLBENTPTAX                | % not tolerant benthic taxa  |
| HABITAT (TOLERANCE)                  | INTLLOTNTAX                 | No. Intolerant lotic species   |
| HABITAT (TOLERANCE)                  | INTLLOTPIND                 | % Intolerant lotic individuals   |
| HABITAT (TOLERANCE)                  | INTLLOTPTAX                 | % Intolerant lotic taxa  |
| HABITAT (TOLERANCE)                  | NAT_INTLLOTNTAX             | No. Native intolerant lotic species  |
| HABITAT (TOLERANCE)                  | NAT_INTLLOTPIND             | % Native intolerant lotic individuals  |
| HABITAT (TOLERANCE)                  | NAT_INTLLOTPTAX             | % Native intolerant lotic taxa   |
| HABITAT (TOLERANCE)                  | INTLRHEONTAX                | No. Intolerant rheophilic species  |
| HABITAT (TOLERANCE)                  | INTLRHEOPIND                | % Intolerant rheophilic individuals  |
| HABITAT (TOLERANCE)                  | INTLRHEOPTAX                | % Intolerant rheophilic taxa   |
| HABITAT (TOLERANCE)                  | NAT_INTLRHEONTAX            | No. Native intolerant rheophilic species                                     |
| HABITAT (TOLERANCE)                  | NAT_INTLRHEOPIND            | % Native intolerant rheophilic individuals                                   |
| HABITAT (TOLERANCE)                  | NAT_INTLRHEOPTAX            | % Native intolerant rheophilic taxa  |
| LIFE HISTORY<br>(MIGRATION STRATEGY) | MIGRNTAX                    | No. Migratory species  |

| <b>METRIC CLASS</b>                  | <b>METRIC VARIABLE NAME</b> | <b>DESCRIPTION</b>                                       |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| LIFE HISTORY<br>(MIGRATION STRATEGY) | MIGRPIND                    | % Migratory individuals                                  |
| LIFE HISTORY<br>(MIGRATION STRATEGY) | MIGRPTAX                    | % Migratory taxa   |
| LIFE HISTORY<br>(MIGRATION STRATEGY) | NAT_MIGRNTAX                | No. Native migratory species                             |
| LIFE HISTORY<br>(MIGRATION STRATEGY) | NAT_MIGRPIND                | % Native migratory individuals                           |
| LIFE HISTORY<br>(MIGRATION STRATEGY) | NAT_MIGRPTAX                | % Native migratory taxa                                  |
| LIFE HISTORY<br>(TOLERANCE)          | INTLMIGRNTAX                | No. Intolerant migratory species                         |
| LIFE HISTORY<br>(TOLERANCE)          | INTLMIGRPIND                | % Intolerant migratory individuals                       |
| LIFE HISTORY<br>(TOLERANCE)          | INTLMIGRPTAX                | % Intolerant migratory taxa                              |
| LIFE HISTORY<br>(TOLERANCE)          | NAT_INTLMIGRNTAX            | No. Native intolerant migratory species                  |
| LIFE HISTORY<br>(TOLERANCE)          | NAT_INTLMIGRPIND            | % Native intolerant migratory individuals                |
| LIFE HISTORY<br>(TOLERANCE)          | NAT_INTLMIGRPTAX            | % Native intolerant migratory taxa                       |
| REPRODUCTIVE                         | LITHNTAX                    | No. Lithophilic spawner species                          |
| REPRODUCTIVE                         | LITHPIND                    | % Lithophilic spawner individuals                        |
| REPRODUCTIVE                         | LITHPTAX                    | % Lithophilic spawner taxa                               |
| REPRODUCTIVE                         | NAT_LITHNTAX                | No. Native lithophilic spawner species                   |
| REPRODUCTIVE                         | NAT_LITHPIND                | % Native lithophilic spawner individuals                 |
| REPRODUCTIVE                         | NAT_LITHPTAX                | % Native lithophilic spawner taxa                        |
| RICHNESS                             | TOTLNTAX                    | Total no. distinct species collected                     |
| RICHNESS                             | NAT_TOTLNTAX                | No. Native distinct species collected                    |
| RICHNESS                             | NTOLNTAX                    | No. Not tolerant species                                 |
| RICHNESS                             | NTOLPIND                    | % Not tolerant individuals                               |
| RICHNESS                             | NTOLPTAX                    | % Not tolerant taxa                                      |
| RICHNESS                             | NAT_NTOLNTAX                | No. Native not tolerant species                          |
| RICHNESS                             | NAT_NTOLPIND                | % Native not tolerant individuals                        |
| RICHNESS                             | NAT_NTOLPTAX                | % Native not tolerant taxa                               |
| TOLERANCE                            | INTLNTAX                    | No. Intolerant species (BPJ-based tolerance assignments) |



| <b>METRIC CLASS</b> | <b>METRIC VARIABLE NAME</b> | <b>DESCRIPTION</b>  |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| TOLERANCE           | INTLPIND                    | % Intolerant individuals (BPJ-based tolerance assignments)        |
| TOLERANCE           | INTLPTAX                    | % Intolerant taxa (BPJ-based tolerance assignments)               |
| TOLERANCE           | NAT_INTLNNTAX               | No. Native intolerant species (BPJ-based tolerance assignments)   |
| TOLERANCE           | NAT_INTLPIND                | % Native intolerant individuals (BPJ-based tolerance assignments) |
| TOLERANCE           | NAT_INTLPTAX                | % Native intolerant taxa (BPJ-based tolerance assignments)        |
| TOLERANCE           | NAT_TOLRNTAX                | No. Native tolerant species (BPJ-based tolerance assignments)     |
| TOLERANCE           | NAT_TOLRPIND                | % Native tolerant individuals (BPJ-based tolerance assignments)   |
| TOLERANCE           | NAT_TOLRPTAX                | % Native tolerant taxa (BPJ-based tolerance assignments)          |
| TOLERANCE           | TOLRNTAX                    | No. Tolerant species (BPJ-based tolerance assignments)            |
| TOLERANCE           | TOLRPIND                    | % Tolerant individuals (BPJ-based tolerance assignments)          |
| TOLERANCE           | TOLRPTAX                    | % Tolerant taxa (BPJ-based tolerance assignments)                 |
| TROPHIC             | CARNNTAX                    | No. Carnivore species   |
| TROPHIC             | CARNPIND                    | % Carnivore individuals   |
| TROPHIC             | CARNPTAX                    | % Carnivore taxa  |
| TROPHIC             | NAT_CARNNTAX                | No. Native carnivore species                                      |
| TROPHIC             | NAT_CARNPIND                | % Native carnivore individuals                                    |
| TROPHIC             | NAT_CARNPTAX                | % Native carnivore taxa   |
| TROPHIC             | NTOLCARNNTAX                | No. Not tolerant carnivore species                                |
| TROPHIC             | NTOLCARNPIND                | % Not tolerant carnivore individuals                              |
| TROPHIC             | NTOLCARNPTAX                | % Not tolerant carnivore taxa                                     |
| TROPHIC             | NAT_NTOLCARNNTAX            | No. Native not tolerant carnivore species                         |
| TROPHIC             | NAT_NTOLCARNPIND            | % Native not tolerant carnivore individuals                       |
| TROPHIC             | NAT_NTOLCARNPTAX            | % Native not tolerant carnivore taxa                              |
| TROPHIC             | HERBNTAX                    | No. Herbivore species   |
| TROPHIC             | HERBPIND                    | % Herbivore individuals   |
| TROPHIC             | HERBPTAX                    | % Herbivore taxa  |

| <b>METRIC CLASS</b> | <b>METRIC VARIABLE NAME</b> | <b>DESCRIPTION</b>                            |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| TROPHIC             | NAT_HERBNTAX                | No. Native herbivore species                  |
| TROPHIC             | NAT_HERBPIND                | % Native herbivore individuals                |
| TROPHIC             | NAT_HERBPTAX                | % Native herbivore taxa                       |
| TROPHIC             | INVNTAX                     | No. Invertivore species                       |
| TROPHIC             | INVPIND                     | % Invertivore individuals                     |
| TROPHIC             | INVPTAX                     | % Invertivore taxa                            |
| TROPHIC             | NAT_INVNTAX                 | No. Native invertivore species                |
| TROPHIC             | NAT_INVNPIND                | % Native invertivore individuals              |
| TROPHIC             | NAT_INVPTAX                 | % Native invertivore taxa                     |
| TROPHIC             | NTOLINVNTAX                 | No. Not tolerant invertivore species          |
| TROPHIC             | NTOLINVPIND                 | % Not tolerant invertivore individuals        |
| TROPHIC             | NTOLINVPTAX                 | % Not tolerant invertivore taxa               |
| TROPHIC             | NAT_NTOLINVNTAX             | No. Native not tolerant invertivore species   |
| TROPHIC             | NAT_NTOLINVPIND             | % Native not tolerant invertivore individuals |
| TROPHIC             | NAT_NTOLINVPTAX             | % Native not tolerant invertivore taxa        |
| TROPHIC             | OMNINTAX                    | No. Omnivore species                          |
| TROPHIC             | OMNIPIND                    | % Omnivore individuals                        |
| TROPHIC             | OMNIPTAX                    | % Omnivore taxa                               |
| TROPHIC             | NAT_OMNINTAX                | No. Native omnivore species                   |
| TROPHIC             | NAT_OMNIPIND                | % Native omnivore individuals                 |
| TROPHIC             | NAT_OMNIPTAX                | % Native omnivore taxa                        |
| TROPHIC (HABITAT)   | BENTINVNTAX                 | No. Benthic invertivore species               |
| TROPHIC (HABITAT)   | BENTINVPIND                 | % Benthic invertivore individuals             |
| TROPHIC (HABITAT)   | BENTINVPTAX                 | % benthic invertivore taxa                    |
| TROPHIC (HABITAT)   | NAT_BENTINVNTAX             | No. Native benthic invertivore species        |
| TROPHIC (HABITAT)   | NAT_BENTINVPIND             | % Native benthic invertivore individuals      |
| TROPHIC (HABITAT)   | NAT_BENTINVPTAX             | % Native benthic invertivore taxa             |
| TROPHIC (HABITAT)   | INTLINVNTAX                 | No. Intolerant invertivore species            |
| TROPHIC (HABITAT)   | INTLINVPIND                 | % Intolerant invertivore species              |
| TROPHIC (HABITAT)   | INTLINVPTAX                 | % Intolerant invertivore taxa                 |
| TROPHIC (HABITAT)   | NAT_INTLINVNTAX             | No. Native intolerant invertivore species     |
| TROPHIC (HABITAT)   | NAT_INTLINVPIND             | % Native intolerant invertivore species       |

| <b>METRIC CLASS</b> | <b>METRIC VARIABLE<br/>NAME</b> | <b>DESCRIPTION</b>                      |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|---|
| TROPHIC (HABITAT)   | NAT_INTLINVPTAX                 | % Native intolerant invertivore<br>taxa |

## **7 WATER CHEMISTRY ANALYSES**

Water samples were collected as a grab sample from the X site at the midpoint of the reach in wadeable systems and at Transect A in boatable systems (see NRSA 2013-14 Field Operations Manual and Laboratory Operations Manual for additional details). The main report presents assessments for four chemical stressors: total nitrogen (TN), total phosphorus (TP), acidity, and salinity. These benchmark values and class definitions were identical to those used in the NRSA 2008-09. Water chemistry data, including additional parameters not assessed in the report, are available to download from the NARS data webpage - <https://www.epa.gov/national-aquatic-resource-surveys/data-national-aquatic-resource-surveys>

### **7.1 ACIDITY AND SALINITY BENCHMARKS**

For acidity, criteria values were determined based on values derived during the National Acid Precipitation Assessment Program (Baker *et al.* 1990; Kaufmann *et al.* 1991). Sites with acid neutralizing capacity (ANC) less than zero were considered acidic. Acidic sites with dissolved organic carbon (DOC) greater than 10 mg/L were classified as organically acidic (natural). Acidic sites with DOC less than 10 and sulfate less than 300  $\mu\text{eq/L}$  were classified as acidic deposition impacted, while those with sulfate above 300  $\mu\text{eq/L}$  were considered acid mine drainage impacted. Sites with ANC between 0 and 25  $\mu\text{eq/L}$  and DOC less than 10 mg/L were considered acidic-deposition-influenced but not currently acidic. These low ANC sites typically become acidic during high flow events (episodic acidity).

Salinity data values were divided into good, fair, or poor classes. Salinity classes were defined by specific conductance using ecoregional specific values (**Table 7.1**).

### **7.2 TOTAL PHOSPHORUS AND TOTAL NITROGEN BENCHMARKS**

Total nitrogen and phosphorus concentrations were classified as “good”, “fair,” or “poor” using a method similar to that used for macroinvertebrate IBI classes using deviation from reference site distribution percentiles by aggregate ecoregion (see Herlihy and Sifneos, 2008 for details).

For nutrients, the value at (and below) the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of the reference distribution was used for each ecoregion to define the least-disturbed condition class (good–fair boundary). The 95<sup>th</sup> percentile (and above) of the reference distribution in each ecoregion defines the most disturbed condition class (fair-poor boundary) (**Table 7.1**).

A set of “nutrient reference sites” was defined for this analysis using both WSA and NRSA data. All available WSA and NRSA sample sites were screened for water chemical and physical habitat disturbances using the process described in **Chapter 4** with the exception that total phosphorus and total nitrogen values were not used as screens to avoid circularity in defining nutrient

benchmarks. Sites with screening values exceeding criteria for the remaining parameters in **Table 4.2** were excluded as nutrient reference sites.

To adjust the process after the removal of the nutrient screens, we incorporated screens for land cover disturbance. A single national criterion was used to exclude sites that had watershed %Urban LULC (Land Use Land Cover) >10%, watershed road density > 3 km/km<sup>2</sup>, and watershed population density >100 people/km<sup>2</sup>. For watershed %Agriculture LULC screening, ecoregional specific criteria were used as screens; NAP, WMT, XER (>10%), CPL, NPL, SAP, SPL, UMW (>25%), TPL (>50%). Before calculating ecoregional nutrient reference site percentiles, outliers (values outside 1.5 times the interquartile range above and below the quartiles) were removed.

**Table 7.1 Nutrient and Salinity Category Benchmarks for NRSA Assessment**

| Ecoregion | Salinity as Conductivity (µS/cm) Good-Fair | Salinity as Conductivity (µS/cm) Fair-Poor | Total N (µg/L) Good-Fair | Total N (µg/L) Fair-Poor | Total P (µg/L) Good-Fair | Total P (µg/L) Fair-Poor |
|-----------|--|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| CPL       | 500  | 1000                                       | 624                      | 1081                     | 55.9                     | 103                      |
| NAP       | 500  | 1000                                       | 345                      | 482                      | 17.1                     | 32.6                     |
| SAP       | 500  | 1000                                       | 240                      | 456                      | 14.8                     | 24.4                     |
| UMW       | 500  | 1000                                       | 583                      | 1024                     | 36.3                     | 49.9                     |
| TPL       | 1000                                       | 2000                                       | 700                      | 1274                     | 88.6                     | 143                      |
| NPL       | 1000                                       | 2000                                       | 575                      | 937                      | 64.0                     | 107                      |
| SPL       | 1000                                       | 2000                                       | 581                      | 1069                     | 55.8                     | 127                      |
| WMT       | 500  | 1000                                       | 139                      | 249                      | 17.7                     | 41.0                     |
| XER       | 500  | 1000                                       | 285                      | 529                      | 52.0                     | 95.9                     |

### 7.3 SIGNAL TO NOISE

To examine within-year variability of water chemistry data, analysts used the revisit sites from the Wadeable Streams Assessment, NRSA 2008-09, and NRSA 2013-14 to calculate signal:noise (S:N) estimates for the national dataset. The results were a S:N ratio of 12.3 for total nitrogen, 10.2 for total phosphorus, 31.2 for conductivity, and 39.2 for ANC.

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## 8 PHYSICAL HABITAT ASSESSMENT

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An assessment of river and stream (fluvial) physical habitat (PHab) condition is a major component of the National Rivers and Streams Assessment (NRSA). Of many possible general and specific fluvial habitat indicators measured in the NRSA surveys, the assessment team chose streambed stability and excess fine sediments, instream habitat cover complexity, riparian vegetation, and riparian human disturbances for the 2013-14 assessment. These four indicators have been used in earlier U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) national assessments, are important nationwide, can be reliably and economically measured, and their reference conditions and degree of anthropogenic alteration can be interpreted with reasonable confidence (Paulsen et al., 2008).

In the broadest sense, fluvial habitat includes all physical, chemical, and biological attributes that influence or sustain organisms within streams or rivers. We use the term *physical habitat* to refer to the structural attributes of habitat. NRSA made field measurements aimed at quantifying eight general attributes of physical habitat condition, including direct measures of human disturbance.

- Habitat Volume/Stream Size
- Habitat Complexity and Cover for Aquatic Biota
- Streambed Particle Size
- Bed Stability and Hydraulic Conditions
- Channel-Riparian and Floodplain Interaction
- Hydrologic Regime
- Riparian Vegetation Cover and Structure
- Riparian Disturbance

These attributes were previously identified during EPA's 1992 national stream monitoring workshop (Kaufmann 1993) as those essential for evaluating physical habitat in regional monitoring and assessments. They are typically incorporated in some fashion in regional habitat survey protocols (Platts *et al.* 1983, Fitzpatrick *et al.* 1998, Lazorchak *et al.* 1998, Peck *et al.* 2006, USEPA 2004) and were applied in the NRSA 2008-09 assessment (USEPA 2016), the National Wadeable Streams Assessment (WSA: USEPA 2006) and the Western Rivers and Streams Pilot (EMAP-W) surveys conducted between 2000 and 2005 (Stoddard *et al.* 2005a, b). The major habitat metrics used in those past assessments and considered in NRSA are listed and defined in **Table 8.1**. Some measures of these attributes are useful measures of habitat condition in their own right (*e.g.*, channel incision as a measure of channel-riparian interaction); others are important controls on ecological processes and biota (*e.g.*, bed substrate size), still others are important in the computation of more complex habitat condition metrics (*e.g.*, bankfull depth is used to calculate Relative Bed Stability [RBS]). Like biological characteristics, most habitat attributes vary according to their geomorphic and ecological setting. Even direct measures of riparian human activities and disturbances are strongly influenced by their geomorphic setting. And even within a region, differences in precipitation and stream drainage area channel gradient (slope) lead to variation in many aspects of

stream habitat. Those geoclimatic factors influence discharge, flood stage, stream power (the product of discharge times gradient), bed shear stress (proportional to the product of depth and slope), and riparian vegetation. However, all eight of the major habitat attributes can be directly or indirectly altered by anthropogenic activities.

NRSA follows the precedent of EMAP-W and WSA in reporting the condition of fluvial physical habitat condition on the basis of four habitat indicators that are important nationwide, can be reliably and economically measured, and their reference condition under minimal anthropogenic disturbance can be interpreted with reasonable confidence. These are: relative bed stability (RBS) as an indicator of bed sedimentation or hydrologic alteration, the areal cover and variety of fish concealment features as a measure of in-stream habitat complexity, riparian vegetation cover and structure as an indicator of riparian vegetation condition, and a proximity-weighted tally of streamside human activities as an indicator of riparian human disturbances (Paulsen *et al.*, 2008).

In this document, we describe the approach taken by NRSA in 2013-14 for assessing physical habitat condition in rivers and streams based on the four above-mentioned indicators. We revisited the screening of reference sites, consistently defining a set of reference sites from the combined 2013-14 and 2008-09 NRSA surveys, thereby increasing the number of sample sites available for modeling expected condition, and for evaluating precision and responsiveness. We recalculated PHab condition assignments in all previous surveys using the current NRSA 2013-14 assessment procedures described here for our estimates of change or trends in PHab. We also examined the rationale, importance, and measurement precision of each of the four indicators, including the analytical approach for estimating reference conditions for each. Reference conditions for each indicator were interpreted as their expected value in sites having the least amount of anthropogenic disturbance within appropriately stratified regions. In most cases, we also refine the expected values as a function of geoclimatic controlling factors within regions. Finally, we examine patterns of association between physical habitat indicators and anthropogenic disturbance by contrasting habitat indicator values in least-, moderately-, and most-disturbed sites nationally and within regions.

Physical habitat metrics and condition assessment data from NRSA are available to download from the NARS data webpage - <https://www.epa.gov/national-aquatic-resource-surveys/data-national-aquatic-resource-surveys>

## 8.1 METHODS

### 8.1.1 Physical Habitat Sampling and Data Processing

Sample sites visited in NRSA are shown in **Figure 8.1**. In the wadeable streams sampled in NRSA, field crews took measurements while wading the length of each sample reach (Peck *et al.* 2006); in non-wadeable rivers, these measurements were made from boats (Hughes and Peck 2008). Physical



habitat data were collected from longitudinal profiles and from 11 cross-sectional transects and streamside riparian plots evenly spaced along each sampled stream reach (USEPA 2007, 2013a, b). The length of each sampling reach was defined proportional to the wetted channel width, and measurements were placed systematically along that length to represent the entire reach. Sample reach lengths were 40 times the wetted channel-width (ChW) long in wadeable streams and rivers, with a minimum reach length of 150 m for channels less than 3.5 m wide. In non-wadeable (boatable) rivers, reach lengths were also set to 40 ChW with a maximum length of 2,000 m. Thalweg (maximum) depth measurements (in the deepest part of channel), habitat classification, and mid-channel substrate observations were made at tightly spaced intervals; whereas channel cross-sections and shoreline-riparian stations for measuring or observing substrate, fish cover (concealment features), large woody debris, bank characteristics and riparian vegetation structure were spaced further apart. Thalweg depth was measured at points evenly spaced every 0.4 ChW along these reaches to give profiles consisting of 100 measurements (150 in streams <2.5 m wide). The tightly spaced depth measures allow calculation of indices of channel structural complexity, objective classification of channel units such as pools, and quantification of residual pool depth, pool volume, and total stream volume. Channel slope and sinuosity on non-wadeable rivers were estimated from 1:24,000-scale digital topographic maps.

In wadeable streams and rivers, wetted width was measured and substrate size and embeddedness were evaluated using a modified Wolman pebble count of 105 particles spaced systematically along 21 equally spaced cross-sections (Faustini and Kaufmann 2007), in which individual particles were classified visually into seven size-classes plus bedrock, hardpan and other (*e.g.*, organic material). The numbers of pieces of large woody debris in the bankfull channel were tallied in 12 size classes (3 length by 4 width classes) along the entire length of sample reaches. Channel incision and the dimensions of the wetted and bankfull stream channel were measured at 11 equally-spaced transects. Bank characteristics and areal cover of fish concealment features were visually assessed in 10 m long instream plots centered on transects, while riparian vegetation structure, presence of large (legacy) riparian trees, non-native (alien) riparian plants, and evidence of human disturbances (presence/absence and proximity) in 11 categories were visually assessed on adjacent 10 × 10 m riparian plots on both banks. NRSA 2013-14 did not assess presence of large (legacy) trees and non-native (alien) riparian plants, as had been done in previous surveys. In addition, channel gradient (slope) in wadeable streams was measured to provide information necessary for calculating residual pool depth and RBS. In wadeable streams, crews used laser or hydrostatic levels, but if necessary, were allowed to use hand-held clinometers in channels with slopes >2.5%. Compass bearings between stations were obtained for calculating channel sinuosity. Channel constraint and evidence of debris torrents and major floods were assessed over the whole reach after the other components were completed. Discharge was measured by the velocity-area method at the time of sampling, or by other approximations if that method was not practicable (Peck *et al.* 2006; USEPA 2007, 2013a, b).

In boatable rivers, NRSA field crews measured the longitudinal thalweg depth profile

(approximated at mid-channel) using 7.5 m telescoping survey rods or SONAR. At the same time, crews tallied snags and off-channel habitats, classified main channel habitat types, and characterized mid-channel substrate by probing the bottom. At 11 littoral/riparian plots (each 10 m wide x 20 m long) spaced systematically and alternating sides along the river sample reach, field crews measured channel wetted width, bankfull channel dimensions, incision, channel constraint. They assessed near-shore, shoreline, and riparian physical habitat characteristics by measuring or observing littoral depths, riparian canopy cover, substrate, large woody debris, fish cover, bank characteristics, riparian vegetation structure, presence of large (“legacy”) riparian trees, non-native riparian plants, and evidence of human activities. As was the case for wadeable streams, NRSA 2013-14 did not assess presence of large (legacy) trees and non-native (alien) riparian plants in boatable rivers, as had been done in previous surveys. After all the thalweg and littoral/riparian measurements and observations were completed, the crews estimated the extent and type of channel constraint (see USEPA 2007, 2013a, b). Channel slope and sinuosity on all boatable rivers were estimated from 1:24,000-scale digital topographic maps.

See Kaufmann *et al.* (1999) for calculations of reach-scale summary metrics from field data, including mean channel dimensions, residual pool depth, bed particle size distribution, wood volume, riparian vegetation cover and complexity, and proximity-weighted indices of riparian human disturbances. See Faustini and Kaufmann (2007) for details on the calculation of geometric mean streambed particle diameter, Kaufmann *et al.* (2008, 2009) for calculation of bed shear stress and relative bed stability (modified since published by Kaufmann *et al.* 1999), and Kaufmann and Faustini (2012) for demonstrating the utility of EMAP and NRSA channel morphologic data to estimate transient storage and hydraulic retention in wadeable streams.

### **8.1.2 Quantifying the Precision of Physical Habitat Indicators**

The absolute and relative precision of the physical habitat condition metrics used in NRSA are shown in **Table 8.2**, based on data from 4,193 sites (2,113 from NRSA 2008-09 and 2,080 from NRSA 2013-14) and repeat visits to a random subset of 388 of those sites (197 and 191 revisits in the two surveys). The  $RMS_{rep}$  expresses the precision or replicability of field measurements, quantifying the average variation in a measured value between same-season site revisits, pooled across all sites where measurements were repeated. We calculated  $RMS_{rep}$  as the root-mean-square error of repeat visits during the same year, equivalent to the pooled standard deviation of repeat visits relative to their site means, as discussed Kaufmann *et al.* (1999) and Stoddard *et al.* (2005a). S:N is the ratio of variance among streams (“signal”) to that for repeat visits to the same stream (“noise”) as described by Kaufmann *et al.* (1999).

The ability of a monitoring program to detect trends is sensitive to the spatial and temporal variation in the target indicators as well as the design choices for the network of sites and the timing and frequency of sampling. Sufficient temporal sampling of sites was not available to

estimate all relevant components of variance for the entire U.S. However, Larsen *et al.* (2004) examined the survey sampling variance components for a number of the EMAP-NARS physical habitat variables, including some of interest in this chapter (residual depth, canopy cover, fine sediment, and in-channel large wood). Their analysis was based on evaluation on six Pacific Northwest surveys that included 392 stream reaches and 200 repeat visits. These surveys were conducted in Oregon and Washington from 1993 to 1999. Most were from one to three years in duration, but one survey lasted six years. They modeled the likelihood of detecting a 1–2% per year trend in the selected physical habitat characteristics, if such a trend occurs, as a function of the duration of a survey. To calculate the number of years required to detect the defined trends in a monitoring network with a set number of sites, they set the detection probability at >80% with <5% probability of incorrectly asserting a trend if one is not present. We used the same survey data sets to duplicate their analysis for several variables not included in the Larsen *et al.* (2004) publication, including log transformed relative bed stability (*LRBS\_BW5*) and riparian vegetation cover complexity (*XCMGW*, the combined cover of three layers of riparian woody vegetation); the results of that trend detection potential is summarized in **Table 8.3**.

## 8.2 PHYSICAL HABITAT CONDITION INDICATORS

### 8.2.1 *Relative Bed Stability and Excess Fines*

Streambed characteristics (e.g., bedrock, cobbles, silt) are often cited as major controls on the species composition of macroinvertebrate, periphyton, and fish assemblages in streams (e.g., Hynes 1970, Cummins 1974, Platts *et al.* 1983, Barbour *et al.* 1999, Bryce *et al.* 2008, 2010). Along with bedform (e.g., riffles and pools), streambed particle size influences the hydraulic roughness and consequently the range of water velocities in a stream channel. It also influences the size range of interstices that provide living space and cover for macroinvertebrates and smaller vertebrates. Accumulations of fine substrate particles (excess fine sediments) fill the interstices of coarser bed materials, reducing habitat space and its availability for benthic fish and macroinvertebrates (Hawkins *et al.* 1983, Platts *et al.* 1983, Rinne 1988). In addition, these fine particles impede circulation of oxygenated water into hyporheic habitats reducing egg-to-emergence survival and growth of juvenile salmonids (Suttle *et al.* 2004). Streambed characteristics are often sensitive indicators of the effects of human activities on streams (MacDonald *et al.* 1991, Barbour *et al.* 1999, Kaufmann *et al.* 2009). Decreases in the mean particle size and increases in streambed fine sediments can destabilize stream channels (Wilcock 1997, 1998) and may indicate increases in the rates of upland erosion and sediment supply (Lisle 1982, Dietrich *et al.* 1989).

“Unscaled” measures of surficial streambed particle size, such as percent fines or  $D_{50}$ , can be useful descriptors of streambed conditions. In a given stream, increases in percent fines or decreases in  $D_{50}$  may result from anthropogenic increases in bank and hillslope erosion. However, a great deal of the variation in bed particle size among streams is natural: the result of differences in stream or river size, slope, and basin lithology. The power of streams to transport progressively larger

sediment particles increases in direct proportion to the product of flow depth and slope. All else being equal, steep streams tend to have coarser beds than similar size streams on gentle slopes. Similarly, the larger of two streams flowing at the same slope will tend to have coarser bed material, because its deeper flow has more power to scour and transport fine particles downstream (Leopold *et al.* 1964, Morisawa 1968). For these reasons, we “scale” bed particle size metrics, expressing bed particle size in each stream as a deviation from that expected as a result of its size, power, and landscape setting (Kaufmann *et al.*, 1999, 2008, 2009).

The scaled median streambed particle size is expressed as Relative Bed Stability (*RBS*), calculated as the ratio of the geometric mean diameter,  $D_{gm}$ , divided by  $D_{cbf}$ , the critical diameter (maximum mobile diameter) at bankfull flow (Gordon *et al.*, 1992), where  $D_{gm}$  is based on systematic streambed particle sampling (“pebble counts”) and  $D_{cbf}$  is based on the estimated streambed shear stress calculated from slope, channel dimensions, and hydraulic roughness during bankfull flow conditions.

*RBS* is a measure of habitat stability for aquatic organisms as well as an indication of the potential for economic risk to streamside property and structures from stream channel movement. In many regions of the U.S., we may also be able to use *RBS* to infer whether sediment supply is augmented by upslope or bank erosion from anthropogenic or other disturbances, because it can indicate the degree of departure from a balance between sediment supply and transport. In interpreting *RBS* on a regional scale, Kaufmann *et al.* (1999, 2009) argued that, over time, streams and rivers adjust sediment transport to match supply from natural weathering and delivery mechanisms driven by the natural disturbance regime, so that *RBS* in appropriately stratified regional reference sites should tend towards a range characteristic of the climate, lithology, and natural disturbance regime. Values of the *RBS* index either substantially lower (finer, more unstable streambeds) or higher (coarser, more stable streambeds) than those expected based on the range found in least-disturbed reference sites within an ecoregion are considered to be indicators of ecological stress.

Excess fine sediments can destabilize streambeds when the supply of sediments from the landscape exceeds the ability of the stream to move them downstream. This imbalance can result from numerous human uses of the landscape, including agriculture, road building, construction, and grazing. Lower-than-expected streambed stability may result either from high inputs of fine sediments (from erosion) or increases in flood magnitude or frequency (hydrologic alteration). When low *RBS* results from fine sediment inputs, stressful ecological conditions result from fine sediments filling in the habitat spaces between stream cobbles and boulders (Bryce *et al.* 2008, 2010). Instability (low *RBS*) resulting from hydrologic alteration can be a precursor to channel incision and arroyo formation (Kaufmann *et al.* 2009). Perhaps less well recognized, streams that have higher than expected streambed stability can also be considered stressed—very high bed stability is typified by hard, armored streambeds, such as those often found below dams where fine sediment flows are interrupted, or within channels where banks are highly altered. Values of *RBS* higher than reference expectations can indicate anthropogenic coarsening or armoring of

streambeds, but streams containing substantial amounts of bedrock may also have very high *RBS*, and at this time it is difficult to determine the role of human alteration in stream coarsening on a national scale. For this reason, NRSA reported only on the “low end” of *RBS* relative to reference conditions, generally indicating streambed excess fine sediments or augmented stormflows associated with human disturbance of stream drainages and riparian zones.

### 8.2.1.1 Precision of Sediment and Bed Stability Measurements

The geometric mean bed particle diameter ( $D_{gm}$ ) and *RBS*, respectively, varied over 6 and 9 orders of magnitude in the NRSA surveys. Because of this wide variation and the fact that both exhibit repeat-visit variation that is proportional to their magnitude at individual streams, it is useful and necessary to log transform these variables (*LSUB\_DMM* and *LRBS\_g08*). The  $RMS_{rep}$  of *LSUB\_DMM* in the two combined NRSA surveys was 0.39, but the wadeable stream “pebble count” procedure was more precise ( $RMS_{rep}=0.25$ ) than the bottom-probing procedure applied in boatable rivers ( $RMS_{rep}=0.51$ ). For NRSA’s wadeable streams, this precision for *LSUB-DMM* was similar to that reported by Faustini and Kaufmann (2007) for EMAP-W (0.21). For a  $D_{gm} = “y”$  mm, the log-based  $RMS_{rep}$  of 0.25 translates to an asymmetrical 1SD error bound of 0.56y to 1.78y mm, and for a log-based  $RMS_{rep}$  of 0.51, a 1SD error bound of 0.31y to 3.24y mm.

The  $RMS_{rep}$  of *LRBS\_g08* in NRSA wadeable and boatable sites was 0.52, approximately 6% of its observed range, but less precise (surprisingly) than that for EMAP-W ( $RMS_{rep} = 0.365$ ). The log-based  $RMS_{rep}$  of 0.52 for NRSA *LRBS\_g08* translates to an asymmetrical error bound of 0.30y to 3.3y around an untransformed *RBS* value of “y” (**Table 8.2**). Compared with the high S:N ratio for *LSUB\_DMM* in NRSA wadeable+boatable waters (S:N=10.9), relative precision for *LRBS\_g08* was lower (S:N=4.2), reflecting the reduction in total variance that results from “modeled out” a large component of natural variability by scaling for channel gradient, water depth, and channel roughness. Nevertheless, the moderate relative precision of *LRBS\_g08* is easily adequate to make it a useful variable in regional and national assessments (Kaufmann *et al.* 1999, 2008, Faustini and Kaufmann 2007). The transformation of the unscaled geometric mean bed particle diameter  $D_{gm}$  to the ratio *RBS* by dividing by the critical diameter reduced the within-region variation by accounting for some natural controlling factors. As a result, we feel that the scaled variable helps to reveal alteration of bed particle size and mobility from anthropogenic erosion and sedimentation (Kaufmann *et al.* 2008, 2009).

We have examined the components of variability of *LRBS* based on earlier surveys and modeled its potential utility in trend detection in the Pacific Northwest region of the U.S. with the same data and procedures as used by Larsen *et al.* (2004), in which all methods were the same as used in EMAP-W and WSA except that bed substrate mean diameter data used by Larsen *et al.* was determined based on 55, rather than 105 particles. (NRSA data differed from data used in that analysis by using laser levels rather than hand-held clinometers to measure wadeable stream slopes <2.5%) That analysis showed that a 50-site monitoring program could detect a subtle trend in

*LRBS\_BW5* of 2% per year within 8 years, if sites were visited every year (**Table 8.3**).

## **8.2.2 Riparian Vegetation**

### **8.2.2.1 Quantifying Riparian Vegetation Cover Complexity**

The importance of riparian vegetation to channel structure, cover, shading, inputs of nutrients and large wood, and as a wildlife corridor and buffer against anthropogenic disturbance is well recognized (Naiman *et al.* 1988, Gregory *et al.* 1991). Riparian vegetation not only moderates stream temperatures through shading, but also increases bank stability and the potential for inputs of coarse and fine particulate organic material. Organic inputs from riparian vegetation become food for stream organisms and provide structure that creates and maintains complex channel habitat.

The presence of a complex, multi-layered vegetation corridor along streams and rivers is an indicator of how well the stream network is buffered against sources of stress in the watershed. Intact riparian areas can help reduce nutrient and sediment runoff from the surrounding landscape, prevent streambank erosion, provide shade to reduce water temperature, and provide leaf litter and large wood that serve as food and habitat for stream organisms (Gregory *et al.*, 1991). The presence of large, mature canopy trees in the riparian corridor reflects its longevity, whereas the presence of smaller woody vegetation typically indicates that riparian vegetation is reproducing, and suggests the potential for future sustainability of the riparian corridor (Kaufmann and Hughes 2006).

NRSA evaluated the cover and complexity of riparian vegetation based on the metric *XCMGW*, which is calculated from visual estimates made by field crews of the areal cover and type of vegetation in three layers: the ground layer (<0.5 m), mid-layer (0.5-5.0 m) and upper layer (>5.0 m). The separate measures of large and small diameter trees, woody and non-woody mid-layer vegetation, and woody and non-woody ground cover are all visual estimates of areal cover. *XCMGW* sums the cover of *woody* vegetation over these three vegetation layers, expressing both the abundance of vegetation cover and its structural complexity. Its theoretical maximum is 3.0 if there is 100% cover in each of the three vegetation layers. *XCMGW* gives an indication of the longevity and sustainability of perennial vegetation in the riparian corridor (Kaufmann *et al.* 1999, Kaufmann and Hughes 2006).

### **8.2.2.2 Precision of Riparian Vegetation Index**

*XCMGW* ranged from 0 to 2.6 (260% cover), with  $\text{RMS}_{\text{rep}}$  of  $\text{Log}(0.01 + XCMGW) = 0.148$  (**Table 8.2**), meaning that an *XCMGW* value of 10% at a single stream site has a  $\pm 1.0$   $\text{RMS}_{\text{rep}}$  error bound of 7% to 14%. Its S:N ratio was 8.45, indicating very good potential for discerning differences among sites. We examined the components of variability of *XCMGW* and modeled its potential utility in trend detection in the Pacific Northwest region of the U.S. with the same data and procedures used by Larsen *et al.* (2004). Based on that analysis, a 50-site monitoring program could detect a subtle trend in *XCMGW* of 2% per year within 8 years, if sites were visited every year

(Table 8.3).

### 8.2.3 Instream Habitat Cover Complexity

Although the precise mechanisms are not completely understood, the most diverse fish and macroinvertebrate assemblages are usually found in streams that have complex mixtures of habitat features: large wood, boulders, undercut banks, tree roots, etc. (see Kovalenko *et al.* 2011). When other needs are met, complex habitat with abundant cover should generally support greater biodiversity than simple habitats that lack cover (Gorman and Karr 1978, Benson and Magnuson 1992). Human use of streams and riparian areas often results in the simplification of this habitat, with potential effects on biotic integrity (Kovalenko *et al.* 2011). For this assessment, we use a measure (*XFC\_NAT* in Kaufmann *et al.* 1999) that sums the amount of instream habitat consisting of undercut banks, boulders, large pieces of wood, brush, and cover from overhanging vegetation within a meter of the water surface, all of which were estimated visually by NRSA field crews.

#### 8.2.3.1 Quantifying Instream Habitat Complexity

Habitat complexity is difficult to quantify, and could be quantified or approximated by a wide variety of measures. The NRSA Physical Habitat protocols provide estimates for nearly all of the following components of complexity identified during EPA's 1992 stream monitoring workshop (Kaufmann 1993):

- Habitat type and distribution (*e.g.*, Bisson *et al.* 1982, O'Neill and Abrahams 1984, Frissell *et al.* 1986, Hankin and Reeves 1988, Hawkins *et al.* 1993, Montgomery and Buffington 1993, 1997, 1998).
- Large wood count and size (*e.g.*, Harmon *et al.* 1986, Robison and Beschta 1989, Peck *et al.* 2006).
- In-channel cover: percentage areal cover of fish concealment features, including undercut banks, overhanging vegetation, large wood, boulders (Hankin and Reeves 1988, Kaufmann and Whittier 1997, Peck *et al.* 2006).
- Residual pools, channel complexity, hydraulic roughness (*e.g.*, Kaufmann 1987a, b, Lisle 1987, Stack and Beschta, 1989; Lisle and Hilton 1992, Robison and Kaufmann 1994, Kaufmann *et al.* 1999, Kaufmann *et al.* 2008, Kiem *et al.*, 2002; Kaufmann *et al.* 2011).
- Width and depth variance, bank sinuosity (Kaufmann 1987a, Moore and Gregory 1988, Kaufmann *et al.* 1999, Madej 1999, 2001, Kaufmann *et al.* 2008, Mossop and Bradford 2006, Pearsons and Temple 2007, 2010, Kaufmann and Faustini 2012).

Residual depth is a measure of habitat volume, but also serves as one of the indicators of channel habitat complexity, particularly when expressed as a deviation from reference expectations, including the influences of basin size. A stream with more complex bottom profile will have greater residual depth than one with similar drainage area, discharge and slope, but lacking that complexity

(Kaufmann 1987a). Conversely, between two streams of equal discharge and slope, the one with greater residual depth (*i.e.*, larger, more abundant residual pools) will have greater variation in cross-sectional area, slope, and substrate size. A related measure of the complexity of channel morphology is the coefficient of variation in thalweg depth, calculated entirely from the thalweg depth profile ( $SDDEPTH / XDEPTH$ ). The thalweg profile is a systematic survey of depth in the stream channel along the path of maximum depth (*i.e.*, the thalweg). In addition to measures of channel morphometric complexity, NRSA physical habitat protocols measure in-channel large wood (sometimes called “large woody debris” or simply “LWD”), and several estimates of the areal cover of various types of fish and macroinvertebrate “cover” or concealment features. The large wood metrics include counts of wood pieces per 100 m of bankfull channel and estimates of large wood volume in the sample reach expressed in cubic meters of wood per square meter of bankfull channel. The “fish cover” variables are visual estimates of the areal cover of single or combined types of habitat features.

NRSA required a general summary metric as a holistic indicator of many aspects of habitat complexity, so NRSA used the metric  $XFC\_NAT$ , summing the areal cover from large wood, brush, overhanging vegetation, live trees and roots, boulders, rock ledges, and undercut banks in the wetted stream channel. Habitat complexity and the abundance of particular types of habitat features differ naturally with stream size, slope, lithology, flow regime, and potential natural vegetation. For example, boulder cover will not occur naturally in streams draining deep deposits of loess or alluvium that do not contain large rocks. Similarly, large wood will not be found naturally in streams located in regions where riparian or upland trees do not grow naturally. Though the index  $XFC\_NAT$  partially overcomes these differences by summing divergent types of cover, we set stream-specific expectations for habitat complexity metrics in NRSA based on region-specific reference sites and further refined them as a function of geoclimatic controls.

### 8.2.3.2 Precision of habitat complexity measures

The instream habitat complexity index  $XFC\_NAT$  ranged from 0 to 2.3, or 0% to 230% in NRSA (2008-09 and 2013-14 combined), expressing the combined areal cover of the five cover elements contributing to its sum. The  $RMS_{rep}$  of  $\text{Log}(0.01 + XFC\_NAT)$  was 0.21, meaning that an  $XFC\_NAT$  value of 10% cover at a single stream site has a  $\pm 1.0$   $RMS_{rep}$  error bound of 6% to 16% (**Table 8.2**). S:N was relatively low for this indicator (2.27), though higher in wadeable streams (2.76) than in boatable rivers (1.66). Despite its relatively low S:N, the  $RMS_{rep}$  for  $LXFC\_NAT$  was 9% of its observed range. It was retained as a habitat complexity indicator because it contains biologically relevant information not available in other metrics, showed moderate responsiveness to human disturbances, and has precision adequate to discern relatively large differences in habitat complexity.



### 8.2.4 Riparian Human Disturbances

Agriculture, roads, buildings, and other evidence of human activities in or near stream and river channels may exert stress on aquatic ecosystems and may also serve as indicators of overall anthropogenic stress. EPA's 1992 stream monitoring workshop recommended field assessment of the frequency and extent of both in-channel and near-channel human activities and disturbances (Kaufmann 1993). The vulnerability of the stream network to potentially detrimental human activities increases with the proximity of those activities to the streams themselves. NRSA follows Stoddard *et al.* (2005b) and U.S. EPA (2006) in using a direct measure of riparian human disturbance that tallies 11 specific forms of human activities and disturbances (walls, dikes, revetments or dams; buildings; pavement or cleared lots; roads or railroads; influent or effluent pipes; landfills or trash; parks or lawns; row crop agriculture; pasture or rangeland; logging; and mining) at 22 separate locations along the stream reach, and weights them according to how close to the channel they are observed ( $W1\_HALL$  in Kaufmann *et al.* 1999). Observations within the stream or on its banks are weighted by 1.5, those within the  $10 \times 10$  m plots are weighted by 1.0, and those visible beyond the plots are weighted by 0.5. The index  $W1\_HALL$  ranged from 0 (no observed disturbance) to  $\sim 7$  (*e.g.*, equivalent to four or 5 types of disturbance observed in the stream, throughout the reach; or seven types observed within all 22 riparian plots bounding the stream reach). Although direct human activities certainly affect riparian vegetation complexity and layering measured by the Riparian Vegetation Index (previous paragraph), the Riparian Disturbance Index is more encompassing, and differs by being a *direct* measure of observable human activities that are presently or potentially detrimental to streams.

#### 8.2.4.1 Precision of riparian disturbance indicators

The proximity-weighted human disturbance indicator  $W1\_HALL$  ranged from 0 to 8.3 in NRSA, and its precision was proportional to the level of disturbance. The  $RMS_{rep}$  of  $\log(0.1+W1\_HALL)$  was 0.178 (**Table 8.2**), meaning that a  $W1\_HALL$  value of 1.0 at a single stream site has a  $\pm 1.0$   $RMS_{rep}$  error bound of 0.66 to 1.51. The relative precision of  $\log(0.1+W1\_HALL)$  was moderate (S:N=5.46), indicating good potential for discerning differences among sites.

## 8.3 ESTIMATING REFERENCE CONDITION FOR PHYSICAL HABITAT

### 8.3.1 Reference Site Screening and Anthropogenic Disturbance Classifications

As part of the routine application of its field and GIS protocols, NRSA (2008-09 and 2013-14 combined) obtained various measures of human disturbance associated with each site and its catchment. Site-scale indicators of human disturbance included field observations of various human activities including nearby roads, riprap, agricultural activities, riparian vegetation disturbance, etc., as detailed by Kaufmann *et al.* (1999). These indicators of local scale disturbance were used in combination with water chemistry (Chloride, Total Phosphorus, Total Nitrogen, Sulfate, and Turbidity), as described in **Section 4** and by Herlihy *et al.* (2008), to screen probability and hand-

picked sites and designate them as least-, moderately-, and most-disturbed, relative to other sites within each of the regions of NRSA. To avoid circularity, we did not use any field measures of sediment, in-channel habitat complexity, or riparian vegetation to screen least-disturbed sites used to estimate reference condition for excess streambed fining, instream fish cover, and riparian vegetation. Nor did we use such measures in defining levels of disturbance to use in examining the associations of these habitat metrics with human disturbances. We did, however, use field observations of the level and proximity of streamside human activities (*W1-HALL*, *W1-HAG*, *W1H-CROP*, and *W1H-WALL*) in screening reference sites and defining levels of disturbance for evaluating indicator responsiveness (**Table 8.4**). In this chapter, the designation “**R**” refers to least-disturbed (“reference”) sites; “**S**” to moderately-disturbed sites, and “**T**” to the most-disturbed sites within each of the nine aggregate ecoregions discussed herein. We defined these site disturbance categories independent of the habitat indicators we evaluate in this report (other than riparian human disturbances), allowing an assessment of fluvial habitat response to a gradient of human activities and disturbances. We also used sub-basin row crop and urban land use percentages, and the density of dams and impoundments to reject potential reference sites.

Screening the NRSA 2008-09 and 2013-14 survey sites by the disturbance variables in **Table 8.4** yielded 708 reference sites, 349 from the first survey and 359 from the second (**Table 8.5**). Fewer reference sites were identified for boatable (281) than for wadeable (427) streams and rivers; except in several regions, reference sites were approximately evenly distributed between the two surveys. Notably, only 2 boatable reference sites were identified in the SPL (both in the 2008-09 survey), and only 7 boatable and 7 wadeable reference sites were identified in the SAP. Interestingly, more reference sites were identified in the 2013-14 survey of the CENPL and Western regions than in the 2008-09 survey of those regions. The opposite was true of the Appalachians.

### **8.3.2 Modeling Expected Reference Values of the Indicators**

#### **8.3.2.1 Modeling Approaches**

In the following paragraphs, we describe the conceptual basis for modeling the expected range of values for the each of the physical habitat indicators under least-disturbed (reference) condition. The details of these models are presented in **Table 8.6 – Table 8.8**, and with more detail in **Appendix 8.A**. For riparian human activities, we applied uniform criteria based on professional judgement and literature to assign high, medium and low disturbance to individual sample sites across the entire U.S. For the other three PHab indicators, we assigned habitat condition based on the distribution of PHab metric values within the combined set of NRSA reference sites, employing several types of modeling:

**NULL MODELS** based expected least-disturbance values and their distribution on the mean and SD of the indicator metric (e.g., *LRBS\_g08*, *XCMGW*, or *XFC\_Nat*) in the set of reference sites representing least-disturbed condition within resource types (e.g., wadeable and boatable) in their respective regions (*ECOnsa9*) or aggregations of those regions (e.g., Central Plains = CENPL =

NPL+SPL+TPL). For example, in NAP boatable sites, *LRBS\_g08* null model condition classes were defined based on normal approximations of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> percentiles of the actual reference distributions. The definition of “Poor” condition was set for those sites with *LRBS\_g08* < the reference mean *LRBS\_g08* minus 1.65( $SD_{ref}$ ). Sites in “Good” condition with respect to this indicator were those with *LRBS\_g08* > the reference mean *LRBS\_g08* minus 0.67( $SD_{ref}$ ). As for *RBS\_g08*, we log-transformed *XCMGW* and *XFC\_Nat* to approximate statistical normality in distributions (e.g.,  $LRBS\_g08 = \text{Log}_{10}[RBS\_g08]$ ,  $LPl01\_XCMGW = \text{Log}_{10}[0.01+XCMGW]$ , and  $LPl01\_XFC\_Nat = \text{Log}_{10}[0.01+XFC\_Nat]$ ).

**REFERENCE-SITE OBSERVED/EXPECTED (O/E) MODELS:** In cases where reference sites were sufficiently numerous and spanned a representative range of the natural controlling variables, we applied Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) to regional reference sites (only) in order to factor out the influence of natural controlling factors on habitat separate from the influences of anthropogenic disturbances. These MLR models estimate site-specific expected values of habitat metrics under least-disturbed conditions, given their geoclimatic and geomorphic setting (e.g., ecoregion, latitude, longitude, drainage area, channel width, slope, elevation, and soil erodibility). If there were less than 22 reference sites in a region, or we determined that reference sites may not fully encompass the geoclimatic variables controlling a habitat metric, we combined regions with similar controlling factors in the modelling. The variables made available to MLR were *LAT\_DD83*, *LON\_DD83*, *L\_AreaWSkm2\_use*, *ELEV\_PT\_use*, *LXSlope\_use*, *LXWidth\_use*, and *KFCT\_WS\_use*. We then calculated observed/expected (O/E) values of the habitat metrics for every site within the modelled region, including non-reference sites. We set expectations of the O/E values based on the mean and SD of the O/E values in the regional reference distribution, and set Good, Fair, and Poor condition determinations based on normal approximation of log-transformed O/E values as described for the *LRBS* null model in the previous paragraph.

**REFERENCE-SITE O/E MODELS WITH DISTURBANCE ADJUSTMENT:** In cases where reference sites were sufficiently numerous and spanned a representative range of the natural controlling variables, but had substantial anthropogenic disturbances that influenced the habitat metric response variable, we included riparian and basin disturbance variable(s) as predictors in the Reference Site MLRs. As with the Reference Site models with no adjustment, we combined regions with similar controlling factors in the modelling, where the number and representativeness of reference sites were inadequate in a given region. Besides the geoclimatic and geomorphic variables listed in the previous paragraph, we considered the following disturbance variables in these MLRs: *W1\_Hall*, *W1\_HNOAG*, *W1\_HAG*, *W1H\_Crop*, *DAM\_dii*, *AG\_1KMCircle*, *URB\_1KMCircle*, *RDDEN\_WS\_use*, *PCT\_AG\_WS\_use*, and *AGws\_X\_KFct* (interaction of basin % crop agriculture with soil erodibility factor). Site-specific expected (“E”) values of the habitat metric were then calculated by setting the anthropogenic disturbance metric values to the lowest value observed (“O”) among reference sites in the modelled region. Because we had already modeled-out disturbance to some extent in our calculation of E values, the distributions of O/E in reference sites did not necessarily have a mean of 1/1 ( $\text{Log}=0$ ), although means were very close to 1/1. We

then calculated O/E values of the habitat metrics for every site within the modelled region, including non-reference sites. We set expectations of the O/E values based on the mean and SD of the distributions of  $\text{Log}_{10}(\text{O/E})$  values in regional reference sites, analogous to that described for reference site regressions in the previous paragraph, and set Good, Fair, and Poor condition determinations based on normal approximation of log-transformed O/E values analogous to that described for the *LRBS* null model above.

**“All-Sites” O/E MODELS:** In cases where reference sites were generally disturbed and where the number and distribution of minimally-disturbed reference sites were insufficient to accurately quantify geoclimatic influences on a given habitat metric, we employed “All-Sites” O/E models. We used two steps to calculate reference expected values. The first step was to calculate expected values from MLRs that employed all sites (not just reference sites) in the model region, and considered both geoclimatic and anthropogenic predictors. Site-specific expected (“E”) values of the habitat metric were then calculated using the MLR equation with the anthropogenic disturbance metric values set to their lowest value observed (“O”) in the modelled region. We then calculated O/E values of the habitat metrics for every site within the modelled region. In the second step, we examined the distribution of O/E values in reference sites and their association with anthropogenic disturbance within the region. In cases where reference site O/E values showed no association with disturbance, we based reference expectations on the mean and SD of the distributions of  $\text{Log}_{10}(\text{O/E})$  values in these regional reference sites, analogous to that described for unadjusted regression site regressions in the previous paragraph. We then set Good, Fair, and Poor condition determinations based on normal approximation of log-transformed O/E values analogous to that described for the *LRBS* null model in the previous paragraph. In cases where reference site O/E values were still associated with anthropogenic disturbance, our second step included regressing the  $\text{Log}_{10}(\text{O/E})$  values against anthropogenic disturbance variables to determine expected O/E values under least-disturbed conditions. We then set the anthropogenic disturbance variables in the MLR to their regional minimum values, effectively choosing the y-intercept of these equations as the central tendency for expected reference condition. We set expectations of the O/E values based on the y-intercept and regression RMSE of  $\text{Log}_{10}(\text{O/E})$  values in regional reference sites, analogous to that described for unadjusted reference site regressions in the previous paragraph, and set Good, Fair, and Poor condition determinations based on normal approximation of log-transformed O/E values analogous to that described for the *LRBS* null model above.

### 8.3.2.2 *Bed Sediment Condition Modeling*

We used reference site null models to estimate expected reference values of  $\text{Log}_{10}$  Relative Bed Stability (*LRBS\_g08*) in boatable rivers and streams in 5 of the 9 ecoregions (NAP, SAP, CPL, WMT, and XER). RMSE's for these null models ranged from 0.365 in the WMT to 1.539 in the NAP. Modeling for boatable sites in the 4 remaining regions were MLR models with  $R^2$  ranging from 18% to 56%, RMSE from 0.365 to 1.539, and included one to three predictors. Predictors were primarily drainage area (*LAns*), channel width (*LXWidth*), and extent of agricultural land use

in the contributing drainages, or within a 1 km radius of the sample sites on these rivers (**Table 8.6**, and more detail in **Appendix 8.A**). For boatable rivers in the NPL, SPL, and TPL, we employed All-Sites MLR models that incorporated similar predictors as those used in the reference site MLRs.

For wadeable streams in all except the Central Plains regions (NPL, SPL, and TPL), we used reference site MLRs to estimate Log10 Relative Bed Stability (*LRBS\_g08*) in least-disturbed sites. These MLRs most commonly included a basin or stream size variable (*LAns* or *LXWidth*), slope (*LXSlope*), and usually a site-scale or basin measure of human land use intensity. In the NPL, SPL, and TPL, we employed All-Sites MLR models typically incorporating *Lat* and/or *Lon* with *LAns*, Elevation or Slope and one or more variables representing the intensity of human land use activity in the drainage basin, vicinity, or near the banks of the sample reaches. MLR model R<sup>2</sup> values ranged from 20% to 41%, and RMSE ranged from 0.430 to 0.990. The reference site models had 1 to 3 predictors and the All-Sites models had 4 to 5 predictors.

### 8.3.2.3 Riparian Vegetation Cover & Structure Condition Modeling

Reference site null models were employed for estimating expected reference condition for Riparian Vegetation Cover & Structure (*LPt01\_XCMGW*) only for boatable rivers in the TPL and WMT (**Table 8.7** with greater detail in **Appendix 8.A**). All-Sites MLR models were used for boatable rivers in the combined NPL and SPL and for wadeable streams in the NPL. The boatable All-Sites MLR incorporated *Lat*, *Lon*, site-level agriculture (*W1\_HAG*), basin road density (*RDDEN\_ms*), and % of agricultural land use in the drainage basin (*PCT\_AG\_ms*). The NPL wadeable stream All-Sites model was similar, incorporating *Lat*, *Lon*, *LXSlope*, *LXWidth*, site-level agriculture (*W1\_HAG*), basin road density (*RDDEN\_ms*), and *PCT\_AG\_ms*. Expected condition models for boatable or wadeable streams in all the remaining ecoregions were reference site regression models with 1 to 4 geoclimatic predictors including *Lat* or *Lon*, along with *LAns*, *LXWidth*, *LXSlope*, or *Elev*. Most of these MLRs also included one or more variables representing the intensity of human land use activity in the drainage basin, vicinity, or near the banks of the sample reaches. Model R<sup>2</sup> was 1% for CPL wadeable streams, and 14% to 40% elsewhere. The precision of these reference site MLRs and All-Sites models (RMSE 0.119 to 0.487) was generally greater (smaller RMSE) for these riparian vegetation models than for the *LRBS* models.

### 8.3.2.4 Instream Habitat Cover & Complexity Condition Modeling

Reference site null models were employed for estimating expected reference condition for Instream Habitat Cover Complexity (*LPt01\_XFC\_Nat*) only in the CPL, where we used separate null models for wadeable and boatable sites (**Table 8.8** with greater detail in **Appendix 8.A**). All the remaining expected condition models were reference site regression models incorporating 1 to 5 predictors, with R<sup>2</sup> ranging from 7% to 53% and RMSE's from 0.175-0.335, somewhat less precise (larger) than those for riparian vegetation condition. These expected condition MLRs typically included 1 to 3 predictors from the set of geoclimatic variables including *Lat*, *Lon*, *LAns*, *LXWidth*, *LXSlope*, or *Elev*. Except for NAP and UMW wadeable stream MLRs and the XER boatable river model, all

the other instream habitat condition MLRs also included one or more variables representing the intensity of human land use activity in the drainage basin, vicinity, or near the banks of the sample reaches.

### 8.3.2.5 Riparian Human Disturbance Indicator Condition Determination

For the riparian human disturbance indicator, we did not base condition benchmarks on the reference distributions or expected condition MLRs, as was done for bed sediments, riparian vegetation condition and habitat complexity. Instead, we set these classes using uniform judgement-based criteria for all regions. *W1\_Hall*, the database variable name for this indicator, is a direct measure of human disturbance “pressure,” unlike the other habitat indicators, which are actually measures of habitat response to human disturbance pressures. It is very difficult to define reference sites without screening sites based on *W1\_Hall*. For this reason, we took this different approach for setting riparian disturbance benchmarks, defining low disturbance sites as those with *W1\_Hall* < 0.33 and high riparian disturbance sites as those with *W1\_Hall* ≥ 1.5; we applied these same benchmarks in all ecoregions. A value of 1.5 for a stream means, for example, that at 22 locations along the stream the field crews found an average of one of 11 types of human disturbance within the stream or its immediate banks. A value of 0.33 means that, on average, one type of human disturbance was observed at one-third of the 22 riparian plots along a sample stream or river.

## 8.4 RESPONSE OF THE PHYSICAL HABITAT INDICATORS TO HUMAN DISTURBANCE

Riparian human disturbance (*W1\_Hall*) values between 0 and 3 were found in all regions and in both boatable and wadeable sites (**Figure 8.2**). Among regional reference sites, UMW boatable and wadeable reference sites and WMT wadeable reference sites had the lowest riparian disturbance (**Figure 8.3**). Very high values of *W1\_Hall* were found in all regions with the exception of wadeable streams in the UMW (note tradition of riparian buffer protection that is visible from the air), and steep gradients of *W1\_Hall* were found across the three disturbance classes in all regions (**Figure 8.3**). Because the field-obtained measures of riparian disturbance used in the NRSA are themselves direct indicators of human disturbance, and were used to screen reference sites, we did not do t-tests to quantify the strength of relationship between *W1\_Hall* and general disturbance class in **Table 8.9**. However, we do illustrate the relationship of *W1\_Hall* to the human disturbance gradient in **Figure 8.3** to compare the relative magnitudes of *W1\_Hall* among least-, moderately-, and most-disturbed streams in the various regions of the U.S.

We quantified the responsiveness of NRSA physical habitat condition metrics to levels of human disturbance by the t-values ( $t_t$ ) of the difference between mean of the indicator  $\text{Log}_{10}(\text{O}/\text{E})$  values in least-disturbed reference sites ( $\text{prk3RRT\_NRS}A1314=\text{R}$ ) minus the mean for the most-disturbed sites (those screened as  $\text{prk3RRT\_NRS}A1314=\text{T}$ ). Throughout the text, figures and tables, we indicate the order of magnitude of p-values of these comparisons by the number of asterisks following the t value. For example,  $t_t = +2.34^*$  indicates that the mean  $\text{Log}_{10}(\text{O}/\text{E})$  in reference sites exceeds that in the most-disturbed sites by 2.34 log units, and  $p \sim 0.1$ . Multiple asterisks

denote the magnitude of p values (\* =  $p \sim 0.1$ ; \*\* =  $p \sim 0.01$ ; \*\*\* =  $p \sim 0.001$ ; and \*\*\*\* =  $p \sim 0.0001$ ).

Regional differences in bed substrate texture do not necessarily indicate anthropogenic sedimentation. In other words, there are streams and rivers that are naturally fine-bedded. Examination of the distribution of the  $\text{Log}_{10}$  of geometric mean bed surface substrate diameter (*LSUB\_dmm*) shows that the wadeable streams clearly separate into fine-bedded and coarse-bedded regions (**Figure 8.4**). Wadeable streams in CPL, UMW, and Central Plains (NPL, SPL, TPL) are largely low gradient streams, and median bed sediments with *LSUB\_dmm*  $\leq 0$  ( $\leq 1$  mm) which is sand or finer (**Figure 8.4b**). A similar, but less distinct pattern is seen in boatable rivers, but NPL and XER rivers are relatively more coarse-bedded than expected from the pattern in wadeable streams. These patterns are driven largely by the slope and lithology of these sites. Patterns in the distribution of *LRBS\_g08* (= *LRBS\_usel*) show less difference among regions, and a number of the fine-bedded regions have similar bed stability as those found in coarser regions (**Figure 8.4a** and **Figure 8.4b**). Once scaled as an O/E variable (*LOE\_LRBS\_usel*) to adjust for natural controls on bed material size and more clearly reflect anthropogenic influences, *LRBS* showed modest to strong negative response to human disturbance for combined boatable and wadeable sites in most regions and aggregations of regions, as illustrated by  $t_{rt}$  values ranging from +3.38\*\*\* to +12.84\*\*\*\*, showing substantial and statistically significant differences between means of least-disturbed minus most-disturbed sites (**Table 8.9**). The strength of associations of instream sediments with human disturbance (**Table 8.9** and **Figure 8.5**) tended to be similar and relatively strong for both boatable and wadeable rivers and streams ( $t_{rt} = +2.24^{**}$  to +11.32\*\*\*\*). We observed moderate to strong declines *LRBS* with disturbance in all regions, the strongest associations were in the UMW boatable sites ( $t_{rt} = 6.59^{****}$ ), the Western Rivers ( $t_{rt} = 3.96^{***}$ ), and in EHIGH, CENPL, and WEST wadeable sites ( $t_{rt} = 4.12^{****}$  to 8.25\*\*\*\*).

Riparian vegetation cover (*LP101\_XCMGW*) adjacent to both wadeable and boatable rivers and streams was markedly lower in the NPL than in any other region (**Figure 8.6**). By contrast, riparian vegetation cover for both types of waters was consistently higher in the CPL, NAP, and SAP, with the other regions having moderately high median values of riparian cover. Once scaled as an O/E variable to adjust for natural geoclimatic controls (*LOE\_XCMGW\_usel*), riparian vegetation cover complexity showed modest to strong negative response to human disturbance for combined boatable and wadeable sites in most regions and aggregations of regions, as illustrated by  $t_{rt}$  values from +2.95\*\*\* to +14.17\*\*\*\*), showing substantial and statistically significant differences between means of least-disturbed minus most-disturbed sites (**Table 8.9**). Compared with the similar response of sediment to disturbance in boatable and wadeable sites, the association between riparian vegetation and disturbance was much stronger for wadeable sites ( $t_{rt} = +4.06^{****}$  to +13.46\*\*\*\*) than for boatable sites ( $t_{rt} = -0.13$  to +3.44\*\*\*\*) sites (**Table 8.9** and **Figure 8.7**). Among boatable rivers, riparian vegetation cover complexity was moderately correlated with the disturbance levels only in the Coastal Plain ( $t_{rt} = 2.99^{***}$ ) and West ( $t_{rt} = 2.24^{**}$ ), and relatively weakly associated elsewhere ( $t_{rt} = -0.13^{n.s.}$  to 1.73\*). Among wadeable streams, however, riparian

vegetation was strongly correlated with disturbance in all regions ( $t_{rt} = 4.06^{****}$  in the UMW to  $7.35^{****}$  in CENPL). Note of course that expected riparian vegetation cover complexity is much higher in the CPL and EHIGH, for example, than in the CENPL.

Instream habitat cover complexity (*LP#01\_XFC\_NAT*) in boatable and wadeable rivers and streams was markedly lower in the NPL than in any other region (**Figure 8.8**). In wadeable streams, the Central Plains ecoregions (NPL, SPL, and TPL) had markedly lower instream cover complexity than the other regions. Boatable and wadeable rivers and streams in the SAP, CPL, and NAP, and wadeable rivers and streams in the WMT had generally higher instream habitat cover complexity than the other regions (**Figure 8.8**). We scaled instream cover complexity as an O/E variable (*LOE\_XFC\_NAT\_use*) to adjust for geoclimatic influences on instream cover, we examined the associations between instream cover and anthropogenic influences (**Table 8.9** and **Figure 8.9**). Except for the weak response in the Upper Midwest ( $t_{rt} = +1.08^*$ ), the instream habitat complexity indicator showed moderate response to human disturbance, with  $t_{rt}$  values ranging from  $+2.30^{**}$  to  $+6.62^{****}$  for combined boatable and wadeable sites (**Table 8.9**). However, as was the case for the riparian vegetation indicators, associations were in most cases much stronger for wadeable ( $t_{rt} = +1.73^*$  to  $8.16^{****}$ ), than for boatable sites (**Figure 8.9**), where most regional associations of instream habitat complexity to human disturbance levels were non-significant, with low or negative  $t$  values ( $-1.78^*$  to  $+0.91^*$ ). Among wadeable sites, however, the associations of instream habitat complexity with disturbance ranged from weak in the EHIGH and UMW ( $t_{rt} = 1.73^*$  and  $2.02^{**}$ ) to very strong in the WEST ( $t_{rt} = 8.16$  and  $p < 0.0001$ ). Note that expected instream habitat complexity is generally higher in the CPL and upland regions (EHIGH and WEST) than for the CENPL and UMW.

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**Table 8.1 Metrics used to characterize the general attributes of stream/river physical habitat.****Habitat Volume:**

- $LRP100 = \log(RP100) = \text{Log of Mean Residual Depth (cm)}$

**Scaled Habitat Volume:**

- $LDVRP100 = \log(RP100) - \log(\text{Predicted } RP100) = \text{Deviation in Mean Residual Depth from expected value}$

**Habitat Complexity:**

- $CVDPTH = SDDEPTH / XDEPTH = \text{Coefficient of Thalweg Depth Variation}$
- $CIWM100 = \text{Number of Large Woody Debris pieces/100m of channel.}$
- $LVIW\_MSQ = \log[\text{Volume of Large Woody Debris per m}^2 \text{ of bankfull channel area (m}^3\text{/m}^2)].$
- $XFC\_NAT = \text{Areal Cover of Woody Debris, Brush, Undercut Banks, Overhanging Vegetation, plus Boulders and Rock Ledges.}$
- $XFC\_NORK = \text{Areal Cover of Woody Debris, Brush, Undercut Banks, Overhanging Veg.}$
- $XFC\_AQM = \text{Areal Cover of Aquatic Macrophytes}$
- $XFC\_ALG = \text{Areal Cover of Filamentous Algae detectable by the unaided eye.}$

**Streambed Particle Size:**

- $LSUB\_dmm = \log[\text{Streambed surface particle } D_{gm} - \text{mm}] = \log \text{ of geometric mean diameter of bed surface sediments in millimeters.}$
- $PCT\_FN = \% \text{ Streambed Silt \& Finer}$
- $PCT\_SAFN = \% \text{ Streambed Sand \& Finer}$
- $XEMBEDI = \% \text{ Substrate Embedded by Sand and Fines}$

**Scaled Streambed Particle Size:**

- $DPCT\_FN = \text{Deviation of } PCT\_FN \text{ from expected value ("excess Fines")}$
- $DPCT\_SF = \text{Deviation of } PCT\_SAFN \text{ from expected value ("excess Sand+Fines")}$
- $DEVL\_SUB = \text{Deviation of } LSUB\_DMM \text{ from expected value (Streambed Fining Index)}$

**Relative Bed Stability:**

- $LRBS = \log_{10} \text{ of diameter ratio: Geometric mean bed particle diameter / Critical (mobile) diameter at bankfull flow stage. (LRBS\_bw5: see Kaufmann } et \text{ al. 1999; LRBS\_g08: see Kaufmann } et \text{ al. 2008, 2009).}$

**Floodplain Interaction:**

- $LSINU = \text{Log}(SINU) = \text{Log(Channel Sinuosity).}$
- $LINCIS\_H = \log(XINC\_H - XBKF\_H + 0.1) = \text{Log of Incision from terrace to bankfull ht (m).}$
- $LBFWDRAT = \log\{BKF\_W / BKF\_H + (XDEPTH/100)\} = \log \text{ (Bankfull Width/Depth Ratio)}$
- $LBFXWRAT = \log(BKF\_W / XWIDTH) = \log \text{ (Bankfull Width / Wetted Width) (an index of streamside flood inundation potential)}$

**Hydrologic Regime:**

- $LQSLTR\_RAT = \log\{(Qsp + 0.0000001) / LTROFF\_M\} = \log\{\text{low flow / annual mean runoff}\} (\sim \text{an inverse index of "droughtiness"},$   
where:  $Qsp = \text{Flow } mps / WSAREAKM = (\text{flow } cfs / 35.315) / WSAREAKM$
- $LBFXDRAT = \log\{(XBKF\_H + (XDEPTH/100)) / (XDEPTH/100)\} = \log(\text{ratio of bankfull depth / wetted depth}), \text{ a morphometric index of "flashiness"}.}$

**Riparian Vegetation:**

- $XCDENMID = \% \text{ Canopy Density measured midstream.}$
- $XCMG = \text{Riparian Canopy+Mid+Ground Layer Vegetation (areal cover proportion)}$
- $XCMGW = \text{Riparian Canopy+Mid+Ground Layer } \underline{\text{Woody}} \text{ Veg. (areal cover proportion)}$

**Riparian Habitat Alteration:**

- $QRI = (QRVEG1 * QRVEG2 * QRDISTI)^{0.3333}$ ; where:  
if  $XCMGW \leq 2.00$  then  $QRVeg1 = 1 + (0.9 * (XCMGW / 2.00))$ ;  
if  $XCMGW > 2.00$  then  $QRVeg1 = 1$ ;
- $QRVeg2 = 1 + (0.9 * (XCDENBK / 100))$ ; and  $QRDISTI = 1 / (1 + WI\_HALL)$

**Riparian Human Disturbances:**

- $WI\_HAG = \text{Riparian \& near-Stream Agriculture - all types (proximity-weighted tally)}$
- $WIH\_ROAD = \text{Riparian \& near-Stream Roads (proximity-weighted tally)}$
- $WIH\_CROP = \text{Riparian \& near-Stream Row Crop Agriculture (proximity-weighted tally)}$
- $WIH\_WALL = \text{Riparian \& near-Stream Walls, Dikes, Revetment (proximity-weighted tally)}$
- $WI\_HALL = \text{Proximity-weighted Index of Human Disturbances of All Types}$
- $QRDISTI = 1 / (1 + WI\_HALL) = \text{Proximity-weighted Inverse Index of Human Disturbances of All Types}$

**Table 8.2 Sampling revisit precision (repeatability) of the four physical habitat condition indicators. Repeat visits within the summer sampling season were used to calculate  $RMS_{rep}$ , which is essentially the standard deviation of repeat sampling pairs to the same stream or river reach. Dividing the square of the  $RMS_{rep}$  into the variance among sites gives the S:N variance ratio. (See Kaufmann *et al.* 1999 for ANOVA methods to calculate  $RMS_{rep}$  and S:N, where  $RMS_{rep}$  is equal to their RMSE.)**

| <u>Metric</u>    | <u>Group</u>      | <u>Sites (n)</u> | <u>mean</u>       | <u>Repeat pairs (n)</u> | <u><math>RMS_{rep}</math></u> | <u>S:N</u>    |
|------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------|
| <i>LRBS_g08</i>  | <b>All Sites</b>  | <b>4058</b>      | <b>-0.938</b>     | <b>375</b>              | <b>0.519</b>                  | <b>4.17</b>   |
|                  | All (0809 / 1314) | (2032 / 2025)    | (-0.942 / -0.933) | (191 / 184)             | (0.482 / 0.556)               | (5.13 / 3.42) |
|                  | Boatable          | 1484             | -0.661            | 178                     | 0.479                         | 6.70          |
|                  | Wadeable          | 2573             | -1.104            | 197                     | 0.553                         | 2.58          |
|                  | EHIGH             | 1075             | -0.541            | 134                     | 0.539                         | 3.65          |
|                  | PLNLOW            | 2060             | -1.242            | 164                     | 0.514                         | 3.89          |
|                  | WMTNS             | 921              | -0.740            | 77                      | 0.493                         | 4.07          |
| <i>L_xcmgw</i>   | <b>All Sites</b>  | <b>4193</b>      | <b>-0.252</b>     | <b>388</b>              | <b>0.148</b>                  | <b>8.45</b>   |
|                  | All (0809 / 1314) | (2112 / 2080)    | (-0.286 / -0.218) | (197 / 191)             | (0.146 / 0.150)               | (9.38 / 7.46) |
|                  | Boatable          | 1599             | -0.154            | 187                     | 0.144                         | 4.70          |
|                  | Wadeable          | 2593             | -0.315            | 201                     | 0.151                         | 10.08         |
|                  | EHIGH             | 1100             | -0.051            | 138                     | 0.083                         | 8.05          |
|                  | PLNLOW            | 2158             | -0.341            | 173                     | 0.188                         | 6.72          |
|                  | WMTNS             | 933              | -0.293            | 77                      | 0.135                         | 7.79          |
| <i>L_xfc_nat</i> | <b>All Sites</b>  | <b>4193</b>      | <b>-0.603</b>     | <b>388</b>              | <b>0.214</b>                  | <b>2.27</b>   |
|                  | All (0809 / 1314) | (2112 / 2080)    | (-0.590 / -0.617) | (197 / 191)             | (0.240 / 0.184)               | (1.87 / 2.99) |
|                  | Boatable          | 1599             | -0.626            | 187                     | 0.220                         | 1.66          |
|                  | Wadeable          | 2593             | -0.589            | 201                     | 0.209                         | 2.76          |
|                  | EHIGH             | 1100             | -0.494            | 138                     | 0.200                         | 1.57          |
|                  | PLNLOW            | 2158             | -0.670            | 173                     | 0.227                         | 2.24          |
|                  | WMTNS             | 933              | -0.584            | 77                      | 0.211                         | 2.28          |
| <i>L_W1_Hall</i> | <b>All Sites</b>  | <b>4193</b>      | <b>-0.129</b>     | <b>388</b>              | <b>0.178</b>                  | <b>5.46</b>   |
|                  | All (0809 / 1314) | (2112 / 2080)    | (-0.152 / -0.106) | (197 / 191)             | (0.186 / 0.170)               | (5.18 / 5.76) |
|                  | Boatable          | 1599             | -0.091            | 187                     | 0.137                         | 9.03          |
|                  | Wadeable          | 2593             | -0.154            | 201                     | 0.210                         | 3.89          |
|                  | EHIGH             | 1100             | -0.078            | 138                     | 0.181                         | 5.15          |
|                  | PLNLOW            | 2158             | -0.151            | 173                     | 0.168                         | 5.85          |
|                  | WMTNS             | 933              | -0.142            | 77                      | 0.196                         | 5.10          |

**Table 8.3 Estimated number of years to detect trends in habitat attributes. Number of years required for a 50-site monitoring network to detect 1% and 2% per year trends in habitat attributes with 80% likelihood (beta, or power) and alpha = 0.05, if specified trends occur, and sites are visited each year. Data were taken from Larsen *et al.* (2004),<sup>a</sup> or calculated using the same data and analytical procedures used in that publication.<sup>b</sup>**

| <b><u>Variable</u></b>       | <b><u>Description</u></b>                | <b><u>1% trend</u></b> | <b><u>2% trend</u></b> |
|------------------------------|--|------------------------|------------------------|
| <i>SDDEPTH</i> <sup>b</sup>  | (Std. Deviation of Thalweg Depth)        | 13 years               | 8 years                |
| <i>LRP100</i> <sup>a</sup>   | (log[Mean Residual Depth])               | 20                     | 12                     |
| <i>PCT_SAFN</i> <sup>a</sup> | (% Sand + Silt)                          | 21                     | 13                     |
| <i>XEMBED</i> <sup>b</sup>   | (% Embeddedness)                         | 20                     | 12                     |
| <i>LRBS_BW5</i> <sup>b</sup> | (log[Rel. Bed Stability])                | 12                     | 8                      |
| <i>LV1W_MSQ</i> <sup>a</sup> | (log[Large Wood Volume/m <sup>2</sup> ]) | 27                     | 17                     |
| <i>XCMGW</i> <sup>b</sup>    | (3-Layer Riparian Woody Veg Areal Cover) | 12                     | 8                      |
| <i>XCENMID</i> <sup>a</sup>  | (Canopy Density measured midstream)      | 13                     | 8                      |



**Table 8.4 Anthropogenic disturbance screening criteria**

| <p>Criteria used to characterize least-disturbed reference (R), moderately-disturbed (S), and most-disturbed (T) sample reaches for developing physical habitat condition criteria. In addition to the tabulated criteria, potential reference sites were rejected if DAM_DII &gt; 1, or URB_1KMCIRCLE &gt; 5%, or AG_1KMCIRCLE &gt; 15%.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Values &gt; than those before the slash (/) are EXCLUSION criteria for least-disturbed reference sites.</li> <li>• Values ≥ those after slash are INCLUSION criteria for most-disturbed sites.</li> <li>• W, B, and G refer to Wadeable, Boatable, and Great River sites.</li> </ul> |            |            |                   |                   |             |                          |                           |                             |                             |
|---|------------|------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <u>Region</u>   | <u>PTL</u> | <u>NTL</u> | <u>Cl</u>         | <u>SO4</u>        | <u>Turb</u> | <u>W1 HALL</u>           | <u>W1 HAG</u><br>Wadeable | <u>W1H CROP</u><br>Wadeable | <u>W1H WALL</u><br>Wadeable |
| <b>NAP</b>  | 20/100     | 750/3500   | 250/10000         | 250/1000          | 5/10        | 2.0/4.0                  | 0.1/0.4                   | 0.05/0.10                   | 0.2/0.4                     |
| <b>SAP</b>  | 20/100     | 750/3500   | 200/1000          | 400/1000          | 5/20        | 2.0/4.0                  | 0.1/0.4                   | 0.05/0.10                   | 0.2/0.4                     |
| <b>UMW</b>  | 50/150     | 1000/5000  | 300/2000          | 400/2000          | 5/30        | 2.0/4.0                  | 0.15/1.4                  | 0.1/0.4                     | 0.2/0.4                     |
| <b>CPL</b>  | 75/250     | 2500/8000  | 999999/<br>999999 | 600/4000          | 10/50       | 2.0/4.0                  | 0.15/1.4                  | 0.05/ 0.4                   | 0.2/0.4                     |
| <b>TPL</b>  | 100/500    | 3000/15000 | 2000/5000         | 999999/<br>999999 | 50/100      | 2.0/4.0                  | 0.67/1.4                  | 0.25/0.48                   | 0.4/0.6                     |
| <b>NPL &amp;<br/>SPL</b>  | 150/500    | 4500/10000 | 1000/5000         | 999999/<br>999999 | 50/100      | 2.0/3.0                  | 1.0/1.4                   | 0.15/ 0.25                  | 0.2/0.4                     |
| <b>WMT:</b>   |            |            |                   |                   |             |                          |                           |                             |                             |
| Southwest   | 50/100     | 750/1500   | 300/1000          | 99999/<br>99999   | 5/10        | W:0.5/3.0<br>B,G:1.5/3.0 | 0.25/1.4                  | 0.10/0.25                   | 0.2/0.4                     |
| S.Rockies   | 25/100     | 750/1500   | 200/1000          | 200/1000          | 5/10        | W:1.0/3.0<br>B,G:1.5/3.0 | 0.3/1.4                   | 0.1/0.25                    | 0.2/0.4                     |
| N.Rockies<br>& Pacific  | 25/100     | 750/1500   | 200/1000          | 200/1000          | 5/10        | W:0.5/3.0<br>B,G:1.5/3.0 | 0.3/1.4                   | 0.10/0.25                   | 0.2/0.4                     |
| <b>XER</b>  | 50/150     | 1500/5000  | 1000/5000         | 999999/<br>999999 | 25/75       | 1.5/3.0                  | 0.6/1.4                   | 0.15/0.25                   | 0.2/0.4                     |

**Table 8.5 NRSA boatable and wadeable least-disturbed reference sites from combined 2008-09 & 2013-14 surveys, selected using consistent criteria listed in Table 8.4. Numbers of reference sites identified from the 2008-09 and 2013-14 surveys are parenthesized and separated by a slash (/).**

| <b>ECO9</b>                       | <b>ECOp5</b> | <b>Total</b>         | <b>Boatable</b>      | <b>Wadeable</b>      |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| NAP                               | APPAL        | 88 (45/43)           | 47 (24/23)           | 41 (21/20)           |
| SAP                               | APPAL        | 54 (40/14)           | 22 (15/7)            | 32 (25/7)            |
| CPL                               | CPL          | 103 (55/48)          | 52 (25/27)           | 51 (30/21)           |
| UMW                               | UMW          | 79 (40/39)           | 36 (18/18)           | 43 (22/21)           |
| TPL                               | CENPL        | 83 (44/39)           | 22 (12/10)           | 61 (32/29)           |
| NPL                               | CENPL        | 85 (29/56)           | 33 (11/22)           | 52 (18/34)           |
| SPL                               | CENPL        | 44 (23/21)           | 2 (2/0)              | 42 (21/21)           |
| WMT                               | WEST         | 112 (47/65)          | 43 (16/27)           | 69 (31/38)           |
| XER                               | WEST         | 60 (26/34)           | 24 (6/18)            | 36 (20/16)           |
| <b>Totals for lower 48 states</b> |              | <b>708 (349/359)</b> | <b>281 (129/152)</b> | <b>427 (220/207)</b> |

**Table 8.6 Summary of regression models used in estimating site-specific expected values of Log<sub>10</sub> Relative Bed Stability (*LRBS<sub>g08</sub>*) under least-disturbed reference conditions. See Appendix 8.A for model details.**

**REGION/Realm**

**NAP/Boatable**

$$\text{ExpRef LRBS}_{g08} = (\text{mean})_{\text{REF-47}} \quad (R^2=0\%, \text{RMSE}=1.539)$$

**NAP/Wadeable**

$$\text{ExpRef LRBS}_{g08} = f(\text{LAws}, \text{W1\_HAG})_{\text{REF-41}}, \text{ where } \text{W1\_HAG}=0 \quad (R^2=22\%, \text{RMSE}=0.525)$$

**SAP/Boatable**

$$\text{ExpRef LRBS}_{g08} = (\text{mean})_{\text{REF-22}} \quad (R^2=0\%, \text{RMSE}=0.704)$$

**SAP/Wadeable**

$$\text{ExpRef LRBS}_{g08} = f(\text{LAws}, \text{W1\_Hall})_{\text{REF-32}} \text{ where } \text{W1\_Hall}=0 \quad (R^2=28\%, \text{RMSE}=0.691)$$

**CPL/Boatable**

$$\text{ExpRef LRBS}_{g08} = (\text{mean})_{\text{REF-52}} \quad (R^2=0\%, \text{RMSE}=1.331)$$

**CPL/Wadeable**

$$\text{ExpRef LRBS}_{g08} = f(\text{LSlope}, \text{LWidth}, \text{W1\_Hall})_{\text{REF-51}} \text{ where } \text{W1\_Hall}=0 \quad (R^2=35\%, \text{RMSE}=0.736)$$

**UMW/Boatable**

$$\text{ExpRef LRBS}_{g08} = (\text{Lat}, \text{W1\_Hall})_{\text{REF-36}} \text{ where } \text{W1\_Hall}=0 \quad (R^2=18\%, \text{RMSE}=1.259)$$

**UMW/Wadeable**

$$\text{ExpRef LRBS}_{g08} = (\text{LSlope}, \text{W1\_Hall})_{\text{REF-43}} \text{ where } \text{W1\_Hall}=0 \quad (R^2=41\%, \text{RMSE}=0.925)$$

**NPL/Boatable**

$$\text{Exp LRBS}_{g08} = f(\text{LAws}, \text{LSlope}, [\text{AGws-x-KFct}])_{\text{ALL-51}}, \text{ where } \text{AGws-x-KFct} = 0 \quad (R^2=56\%, \text{RMSE}=0.610)$$

$$\text{ExpRef } (\text{LRBS}_{g08}/\text{Exp LRBS}_{g08}) = f(\text{PCT\_AG\_WS})_{\text{REF-28}} \text{ where } \text{PCT\_AG\_WS} = 0 \quad (R^2=23\%, \text{RMSE}=0.512)$$

**NPL/Wadeable**

$$\text{Exp LRBS}_{g08} = f(\text{Elev}, \text{LSlope}, \text{LWidth}, \text{W1\_Hall}, \text{W1\_Crop})_{\text{ALL-314}} \text{ where } \text{W1\_Hall}, \text{W1\_Crop} [\text{AGws-x-KFct}] = 0 \quad (R^2=39\%, \text{RMSE}=0.837)$$

$$\text{ExpRef } (\text{LRBS}_{g08}/\text{Exp LRBS}_{g08}) = f(\text{W1\_Hall})_{\text{REF-51}} \text{ where } \text{W1\_Hall}=0 \quad (R^2=3\%, \text{RMSE}=0.839)$$

**SPL+TPL/Boatable**

$$\text{Exp LRBS}_{g08} = f(\text{LAws}, \text{AG\_1KMCircle})_{\text{REF-47}} (\text{SPL+TPL+NPL}) \text{ where } \text{AG\_1KMCircle} = 0 \quad (R^2=18\%, \text{RMSE}=1.139)$$

**SPL/Wadeable**

$$\text{Exp LRBS}_{g08} = f(\text{Lat}, \text{LAws}, \text{LSlope}, \text{W1\_HAG}, \text{AG\_1KMCircle})_{\text{ALL-297}} \text{ where } \text{W1\_HAG}, \text{AG\_1KMCircle} = 0 \quad (R^2=35\%, \text{RMSE}=0.952)$$

$$\text{ExpRef } (\text{LRBS}_{g08}/\text{Exp LRBS}_{g08}) = f(\text{W1H\_NOAG}, \text{Dam\_dii}, \text{RdDen\_ws}, \text{PCT\_AG\_ws})_{\text{REF-42}} \text{ where } \text{W1H\_NOAG}, \text{Dam\_dii}, \text{RdDen\_ws}, \text{PCT\_AG\_ws} = 0 \quad (R^2=26\%, \text{RMSE}=0.990)$$

**TPL/Wadeable**

$$\text{Exp LRBS}_{g08} = f(\text{Lat}, \text{Lon}, \text{LSlope})_{\text{ALL-342}} \quad (R^2=20\%, \text{RMSE}=0.976)$$

$$\text{ExpRef } (\text{LRBS}_{g08}/\text{Exp LRBS}_{g08}) = f(\text{W1H\_NOAG}, \text{W1H\_Crop}, \text{AG\_1KMCircle}, \text{PCT\_AG\_WS}, \text{AgWS-x-KFct})_{\text{REF-58}} \text{ where } \text{W1H\_NOAG}, \text{W1H\_Crop}, \text{AG\_1KMCircle}, \text{PCT\_AG\_WS}, \text{AgWS-x-KFct} = 0 \quad (R^2=26\%, \text{RMSE}=0.990)$$

**WMT/Boatable**

$$\text{ExpRef LRBS}_{g08} = (\text{mean})_{\text{REF-43}} \quad (R^2=0\%, \text{RMSE}=0.365)$$

**WMT/Wadeable**

$$\text{ExpRef LRBS}_{g08} = f(\text{LSlope}, \text{LWidth})_{\text{REF-69}}, \quad (R^2=27\%, \text{RMSE}=0.430)$$

**XER/Boatable**

$$\text{ExpRef LRBS}_{g08} = (\text{mean})_{\text{REF-24}} \quad (R^2=0\%, \text{RMSE}=0.985)$$

**XER/Wadeable**

$$\text{ExpRef LRBS}_{g08} = f(\text{LWidth})_{\text{REF-36}}, \quad (R^2=23\%, \text{RMSE}=0.794)$$

**Table 8.7 Summary of regression models used in estimating site-specific expected values of Riparian Vegetation Cover and Structure (Log10[0.01+XCMGW]) under least-disturbed reference conditions. See Appendix 8.A for model details.**

**REGION/Realm** \_\_\_\_\_

**NAP/Boatable**

$ExpRef\ L\_XCMGW = f(Lat, , AG\_1KMCircle, PCT\_AG\_WS, AgWS-x-KFct)_{REF-47}$  (R<sup>2</sup>=40%, RMSE=0.156)  
 where  $AG\_1KMCircle, PCT\_AG\_WS, AgWS-x-KFct = 0$

**NAP/Wadeable**

$ExpRef\ L\_XCMGW = f(LAws, LWidth, W1\_Hall)_{REF-41},$  where  $W1\_Hall=0$  (R<sup>2</sup>=24%, RMSE=0.121)

**SAP/Boatable**

$ExpRef\ L\_XCMGW = f(W1\_HAG)_{REF-22},$  where  $W1\_HAG=0$  (R<sup>2</sup>=17%, RMSE=0.141)

**SAP/Wadeable**

$ExpRef\ L\_XCMGW = f(LAws, ELEV, W1\_Hall)_{REF-32},$  where  $W1\_Hall=0$  (R<sup>2</sup>=32%, RMSE=0.141)

**CPL/Boatable**

$ExpRef\ L\_XCMGW = f(Lon, LAws, W1\_HAG)_{REF-52},$  where  $W1\_HAG=0$  (R<sup>2</sup>=26%, RMSE=0.119)

**CPL/Wadeable**

$ExpRef\ L\_XCMGW = f(Lon)_{REF-51}$  (R<sup>2</sup>=1%, RMSE=0.152)

**UMW/Boatable**

$ExpRef\ L\_XCMGW = f(Lat, LAws, LSlope, LWidth)_{REF-55 (SPL+TPL+UMW)}$  (R<sup>2</sup>=34%, RMSE=0.373)

**UMW/Wadeable**

$ExpRef\ L\_XCMGW = f(LSlope, LWidth, W1\_Hall)_{REF-43},$  where  $W1\_Hall=0$  (R<sup>2</sup>=33%, RMSE=0.130)

**NPL+SPL /Boatable**

$Exp\ L\_XCMGW = f(Lat, Lon, W1\_HAG, RDDEN\_ws, PCT\_AG\_ws)_{ALL-249 (NPL+SPL+TPL)}$  (R<sup>2</sup>=25%, RMSE=0.362)  
 where  $W1\_HAG, RDDEN\_ws, PCT\_AG\_ws = 0$

$ExpRef\ (L\_XCMGW/Exp\ L\_XCMGW) = f(PCT\_AG\_WS)_{REF-28},$  where  $PCT\_AG\_WS = 0$  (R<sup>2</sup>=31%, RMSE=0.324)

**TPL/Boatable**

$ExpRef\ L\_XCMGW = (mean)_{REF-22}$  (R<sup>2</sup>= 0%, RMSE=0.159)

**NPL/Wadeable**

$Exp\ L\_XCMGW = f(Lat, Lon, LSlope, LWidth, W1\_HAG, PCT\_AG\_ws)_{ALL-922 (NPL+SPL+TPL)}$  (R<sup>2</sup>=31%, RMSE=0.487)

where  $W1\_HAG, PCT\_AG\_ws = 0$

$ExpRef\ (L\_XCMGW/Exp\ L\_XCMGW) = f(Damm\_dii, PCT\_AG\_ws, AgWS-x-KFct)_{REF-152 (NPL+SPL+TPL)}$  (R<sup>2</sup>=14%, RMSE=0.386)  
 where  $Damm\_dii, PCT\_AG\_ws, AgWS-x-KFct = 0$

**SPL+TPL/Wadeable**

$ExpRef\ L\_XCMGW = f(Lon, ELEV, AG\_1KMCircle, PCT\_AG\_ws, AGWS-x-KFct)_{REF-143 (SPL+TPL+UMW)}$  R<sup>2</sup>=40%, RMSE=0.267  
 where  $AG\_1KMCircle, PCT\_AG\_ws, AGWS-x-KFct = 0$

**WMT/Boatable**

$ExpRef\ L\_XCMGW = (mean)_{REF-43}$  (R<sup>2</sup>= 0%, RMSE=0.262)

**WMT/Wadeable**

$ExpRef\ L\_XCMGW = f(LAws, ELEV, LSlope,)_{REF-68},$  (R<sup>2</sup>=20%, RMSE=0.153)

**XER/Boatable**

$ExpRef\ L\_XCMGW = f(W1\_HNOAG, W1\_HAG)_{REF-24},$  where  $W1\_HNOAG, W1\_HAG = 0$  (R<sup>2</sup>=29%, RMSE=0.153)

**XER/Wadeable**

$ExpRef\ L\_XCMGW = f(LAws, LSlope, LWidth)_{REF-36},$  (R<sup>2</sup>=23%, RMSE=0.253)

**Table 8.8 Summary of regression models used in estimating site-specific expected values of Instream Habitat Cover Complexity (Log10[0.01+XFC\_NAT]) under least-disturbed reference conditions. See Appendix 8.A for model details.**

**REGION/Realm**

**NAP/Boatable**

$ExpRef L\_XFC\_NAT = f(Lon, LAws, LWidth, W1H\_Crop)_{REF-47}$ , where  $W1H\_Crop = 0$  (R<sup>2</sup>=34%, RMSE=0.319)

**NAP/Wadeable**

$ExpRef L\_XFC\_NAT = f(LWidth)_{REF-41}$  (R<sup>2</sup>= 7%, RMSE=0.285)

**SAP/Boatable**

$ExpRef L\_XFC\_NAT = f(Lat, W1\_Hall)_{REF-22}$ , where  $W1\_Hall = 0$  (R<sup>2</sup>=53%, RMSE=0.175)

**SAP/Wadeable**

$ExpRef L\_XFC\_NAT = f(Lat, ELEV, W1\_HAG)_{REF-32}$ , where  $W1\_HAG = 0$  (R<sup>2</sup>=42%, RMSE=0.310)

**CPL/Boatable**

$ExpRef L\_XFC\_NAT = (mean)_{REF-52}$  (R<sup>2</sup>= 0%, RMSE=0.235)

**CPL/Wadeable**

$ExpRef L\_XFC\_NAT = (mean)_{REF-51}$  (R<sup>2</sup>= 0%, RMSE=0.298)

**UMW/Boatable**

$ExpRef L\_XFC\_NAT = f(Lon, W1\_HAG)_{REF-36}$ , where  $W1\_HAG = 0$  (R<sup>2</sup>=23%, RMSE=0.316)

**UMW/Wadeable**

$ExpRef L\_XFC\_NAT = f(LAws, LWidth)_{REF-43}$ , (R<sup>2</sup>= 7%, RMSE=0.290)

**NPL+SPL+TPL/Boatable**

$Exp L\_XFC\_NAT = f(Lat, Lon, LAws, ELEV, AG\_1KMCircle)_{REF-47}$  (NPL+SPL+TPL) (R<sup>2</sup>=34%, RMSE=0.323)  
where  $AG\_1KMCircle = 0$

**NPL+SPL+TPL/Wadeable**

$Exp L\_XFC\_NAT = f(Lon, LAws, ELEV, AG\_1KMCircle, URB\_1KMCircle)_{REF-152}$  (NPL+SPL+TPL) (R<sup>2</sup>=17%, RMSE=0.335)  
where  $AG\_1KMCircle, URB\_1KMCircle = 0$

**WMT/Boatable**

$ExpRef L\_XFC\_NAT = f(LWidth, W1H\_Crop, RDDEN\_ws)_{REF-43}$ , (R<sup>2</sup>= 24%, RMSE=0.230)  
where  $W1H\_Crop, RDDEN\_ws = 0$

**WMT/Wadeable**

$ExpRef L\_XFC\_NAT = f(Lat, Lon, LAws, W1\_HAG, RDDEN\_ws)_{REF-68}$ , (R<sup>2</sup>=35%, RMSE=0.217)  
where  $W1\_HAG, RDDEN\_ws = 0$

**XER/Boatable**

$ExpRef L\_XFC\_NAT = f(ELEV, LWidth)_{REF-23}$ , (R<sup>2</sup>=13%, RMSE=0.310)

**XER/Wadeable**

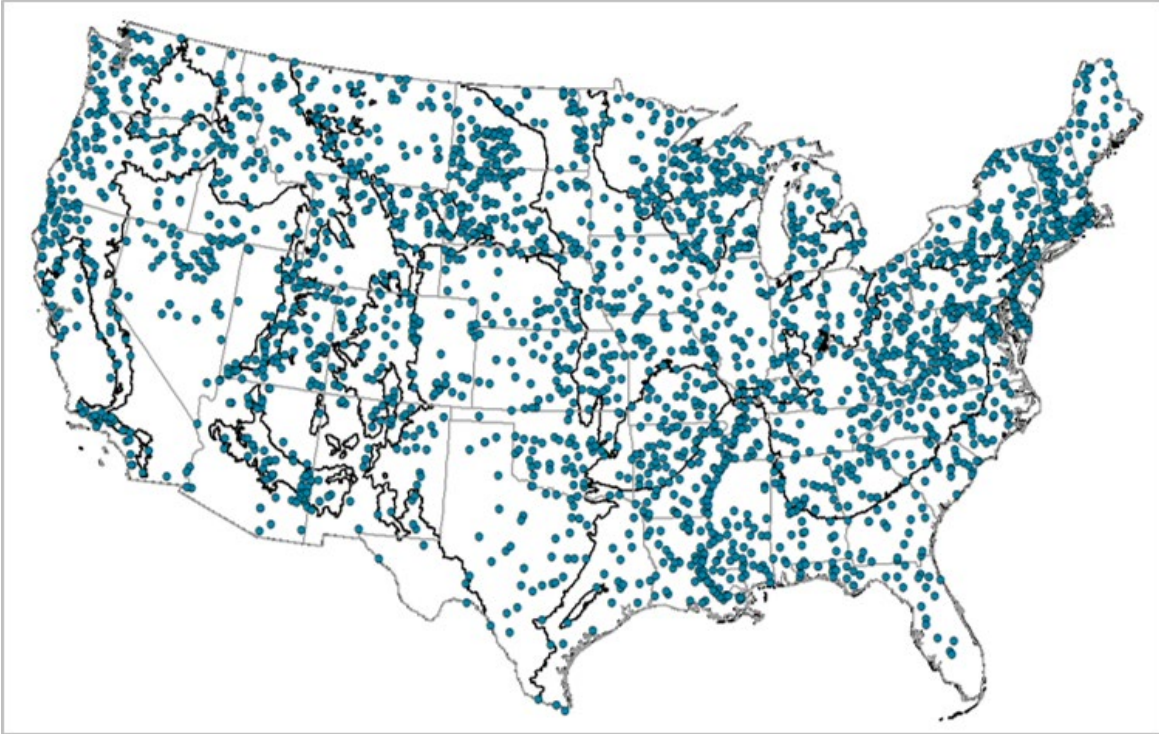
$ExpRef L\_XFC\_NAT = f(Lon, LSlope, W1H\_Crop)_{REF-36}$ , where  $W1H\_Crop = 0$  (R<sup>2</sup>=27%, RMSE=0.242)

**Table 8.9 Responsiveness to levels of human disturbance**

| Responsiveness of NRSA physical habitat condition metrics to levels of human disturbance, as quantified by t-values of the difference between means of least-disturbed reference sites (prk3RRT_NRSA1314=R) minus most-disturbed sites (those screened as prkRRT_NRSA1314=T). Values shown in red have a sign contrary to expectations. Order of magnitude of p-values shown by number of asterisks (e.g., * = $p \leq 0.1$ ; **** = $p \leq 0.0001$ ) |                     |                                   |                                   |                                    |
|--|---------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <b>Metric</b>  | <b>Region</b>       | <b>t-value R-T<br/>(Boatable)</b> | <b>t-value R-T<br/>(Wadeable)</b> | <b>t-value R-T<br/>(All sites)</b> |
| <b>LOE_RBS_g08</b>   | USA-48              | +11.32****                        | +7.26****                         | +12.84****                         |
|  | CPL                 | +2.47**                           | +2.68**                           | +3.38***                           |
|  | EHIGH (NAP+SAP)     | +3.22***                          | +4.12****                         | +4.79****                          |
|  | UMW                 | +6.59****                         | +2.24**                           | +5.32****                          |
|  | CENPL (TPL+NPL+SPL) | +2.64**                           | +6.39****                         | +6.93****                          |
|  | West (WMT+XER)      | +3.96****                         | +8.25****                         | +8.98****                          |
| <b>LOE_XCMGW</b>   | USA-48              | +3.44***                          | +13.46****                        | +14.17****                         |
|  | CPL                 | +2.99***                          | +5.69****                         | +6.32****                          |
|  | EHIGH (NAP+SAP)     | +1.73*                            | +5.61****                         | +5.25****                          |
|  | UMW                 | -0.13                             | +4.06****                         | +2.95***                           |
|  | CENPL (TPL+NPL+SPL) | +1.43                             | +7.35****                         | +7.95****                          |
|  | West (WMT+XER)      | +2.24**                           | +7.16****                         | +7.35****                          |
| <b>LOE_XFC_Nat</b>   | USA-48              | -0.64                             | +7.84****                         | +6.62****                          |
|  | CPL                 | +0.59                             | +3.64****                         | +3.52***                           |
|  | EHIGH (NAP+SAP)     | +0.91*                            | +1.73*                            | +2.30**                            |
|  | UMW                 | -0.85                             | +2.02**                           | +1.08*                             |
|  | CENPL (TPL+NPL+SPL) | +0.56                             | +3.68****                         | +2.82**                            |
|  | West (WMT+XER)      | -1.78*                            | +8.16****                         | +5.37****                          |

**Figure 8.1 Sample sites for NRSA 2008-09 and NRSA 2013-14.**

A. NRSA 2008-09 sample sites



B. NRSA 2013-14 sample sites

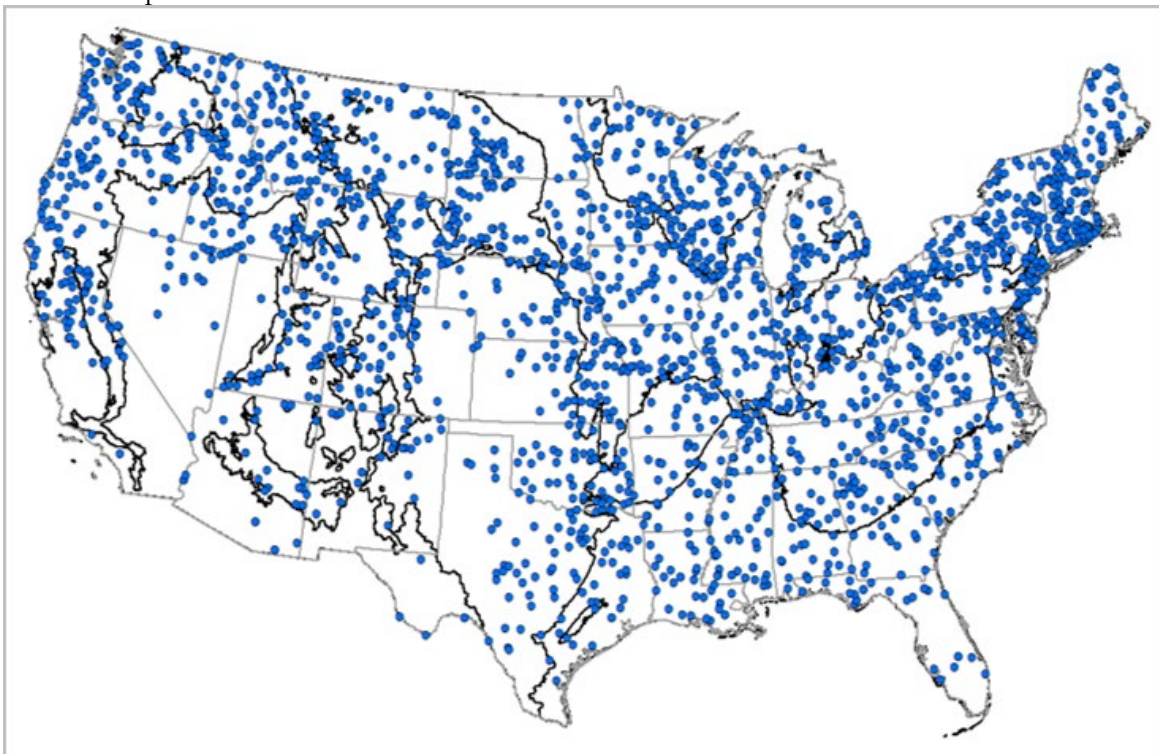
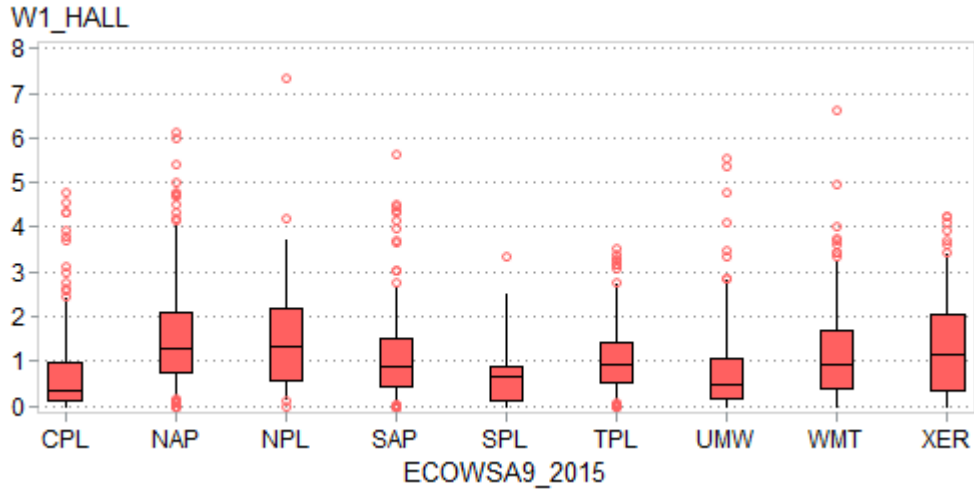
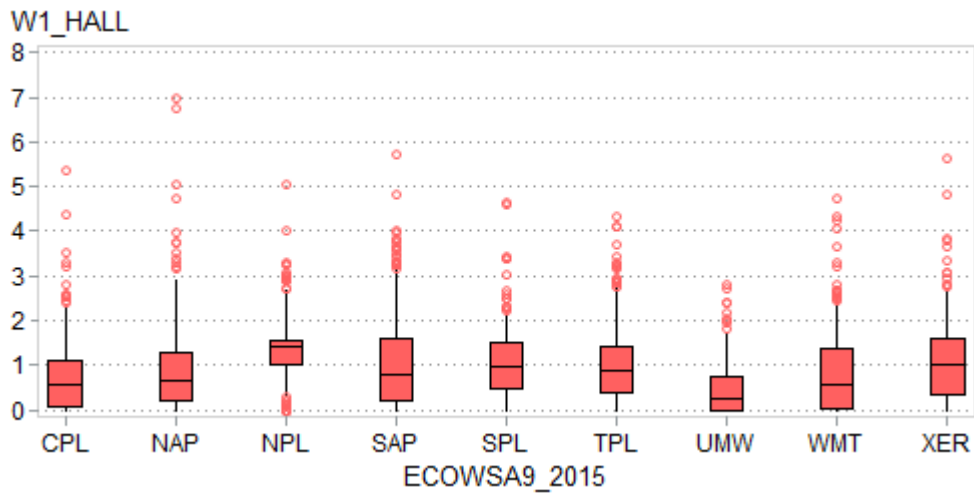


Figure 8.2. Riparian Disturbance (W1\_Hall) in combined NRSA 2008-09 and 2013-14 sample sites in 9 aggregate ecoregions of the conterminous U.S. Boxplots show 5<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, median, 75<sup>th</sup>, and 95<sup>th</sup> percentiles of the unweighted sample distributions (not population estimates). A. Boatable sites; B. Wadeable sites.

A. Boatable



B. Wadeable





**Figure 8.3 Riparian Disturbance (W1\_Hall) in combined NRSA 2008-09 and 2013-14 sample sites in 9 aggregate ecoregions of the conterminous U.S., contrasting distributions in least-, moderately-, and most-disturbed sites within each aggregated ecoregion. Boxplots show 5<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, median, 75<sup>th</sup>, and 95<sup>th</sup> percentiles of the unweighted \sample distributions (not population estimates). A. Boatable sites; B. Wadeable sites.**

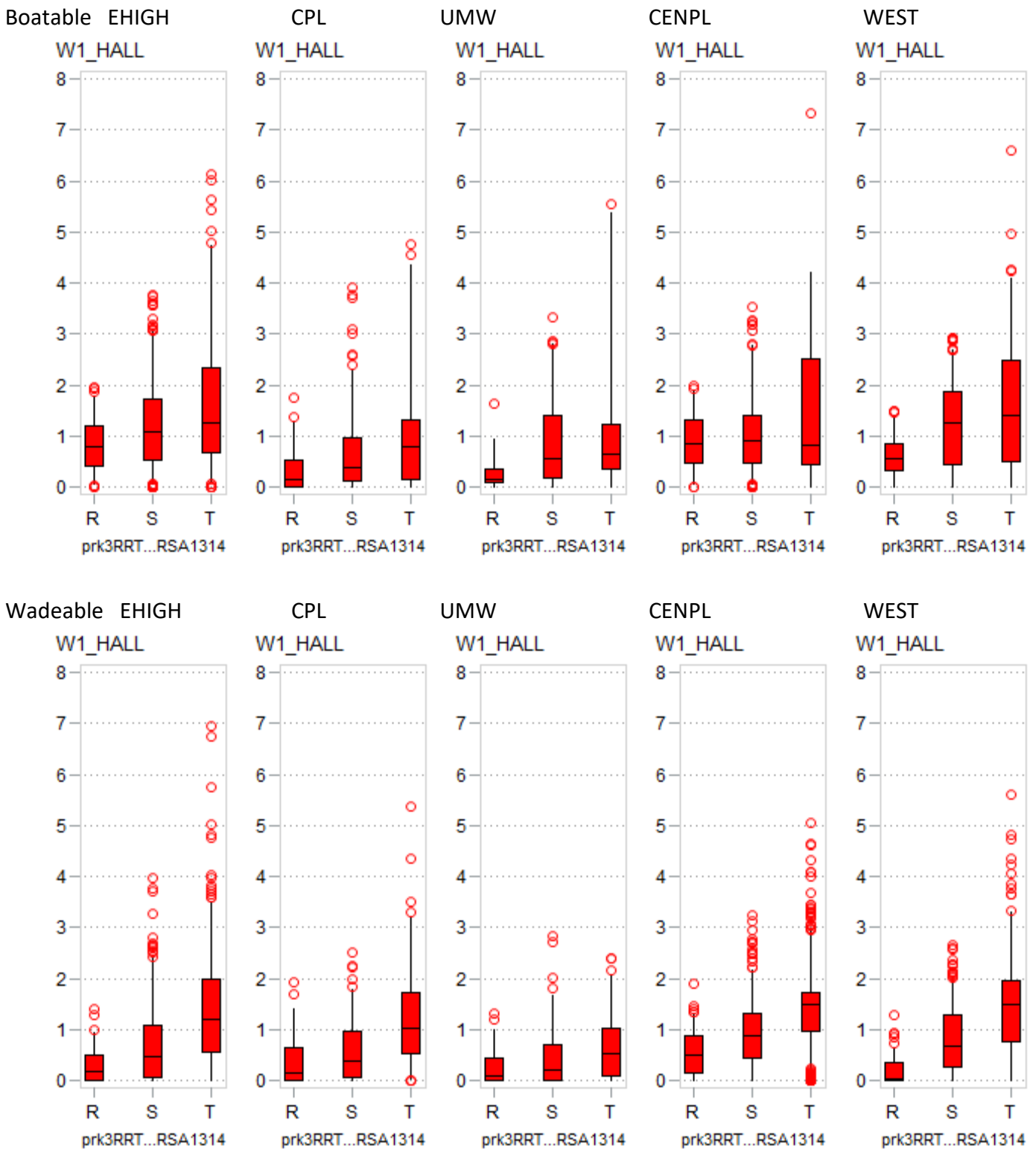
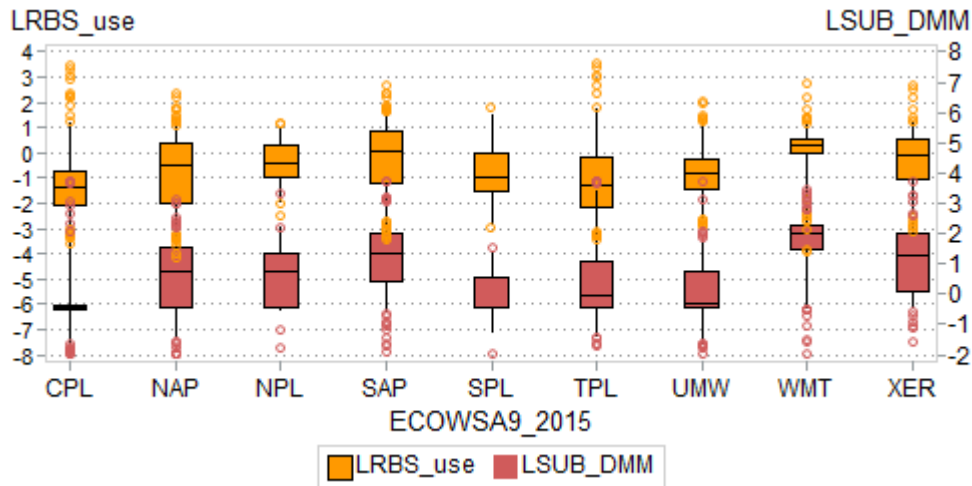
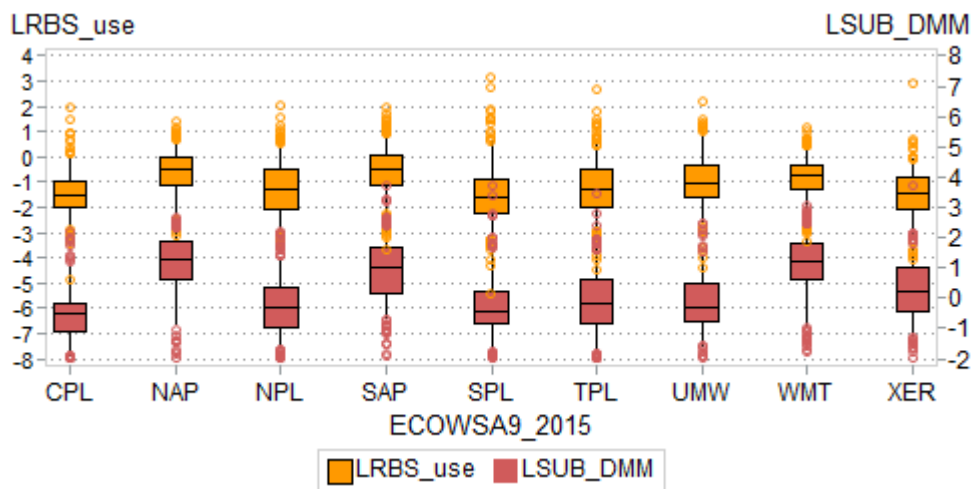


Figure 8.4 Log Relative Bed Stability (LRBS\_use) and Log<sub>10</sub> geometric mean bed surface substrate diameter (LSUB\_dmm) in combined NRSA 2008-09 and 2013-14 sample sites in 9 aggregate ecoregions of the conterminous U.S. Boxplots show 5<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, median, 75<sup>th</sup>, and 95<sup>th</sup> percentiles of the unweighted sample distributions (not population estimates). A. Boatable sites; B. Wadeable sites.

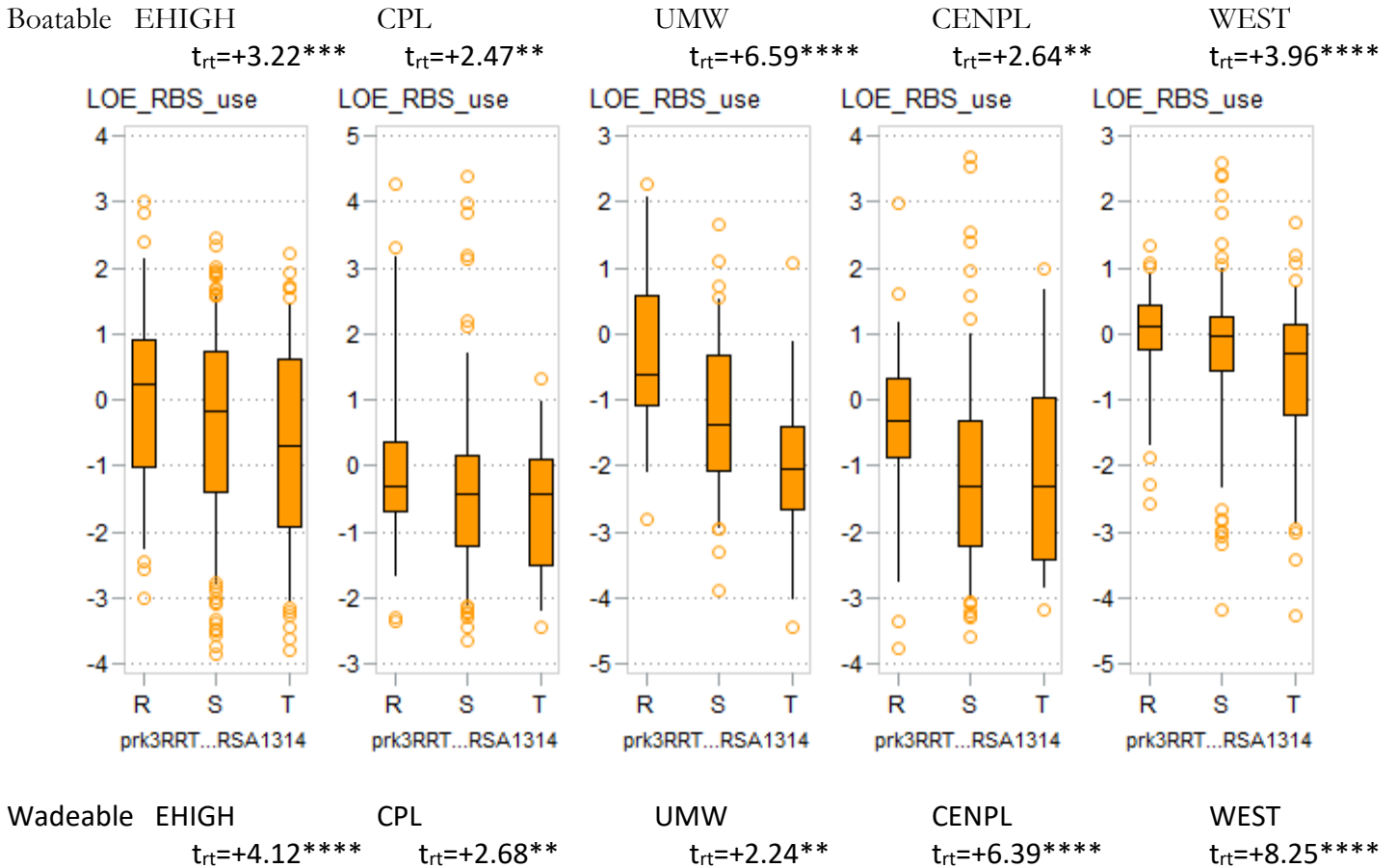
Boatable



Wadeable



**Figure 8.5 Observed/Expected Relative Bed Stability (LOE\_LRBS\_use) in combined NRSA 2008-09 and 2013-14 sample sites in 9 aggregate ecoregions of the conterminous U.S., contrasting distributions in least-, moderately-, and most-disturbed sites within each aggregated ecoregion. Boxplots show 5<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, median, 75<sup>th</sup>, and 95<sup>th</sup> percentiles of the unweighted sample distributions (not population estimates). A. Boatable sites; B. Wadeable sites.**



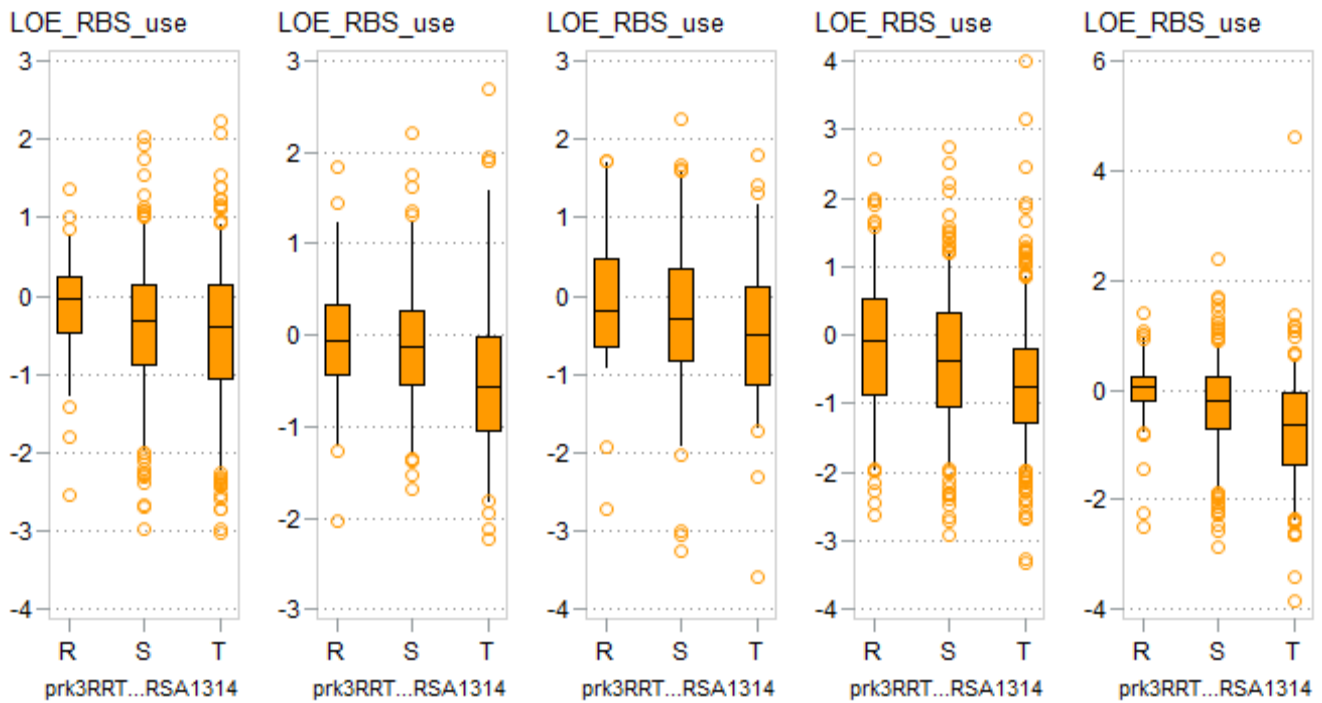
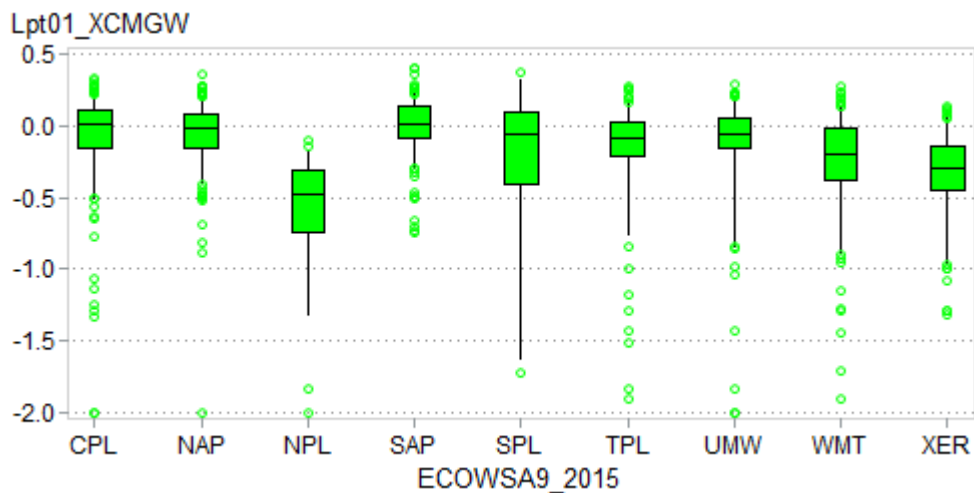
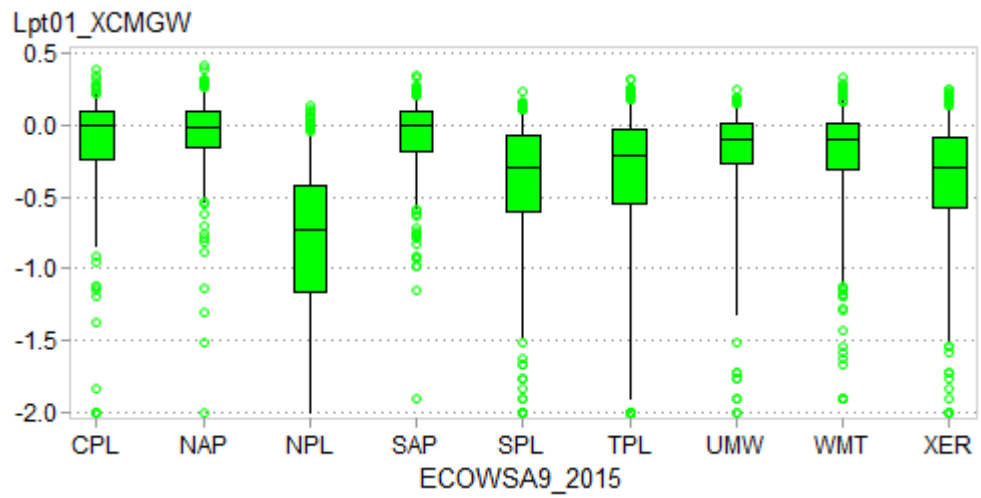


Figure 8.6 Riparian Vegetation Cover Complexity (*LPt01\_XCMGW*) in combined NRSA 2008-09 and 2013-14 sample sites in 9 aggregate ecoregions of the conterminous U.S. Boxplots show 5<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, median, 75<sup>th</sup>, and 95<sup>th</sup> percentiles of the unweighted sample distributions (not population estimates). A. Boatable sites; B. Wadeable sites.

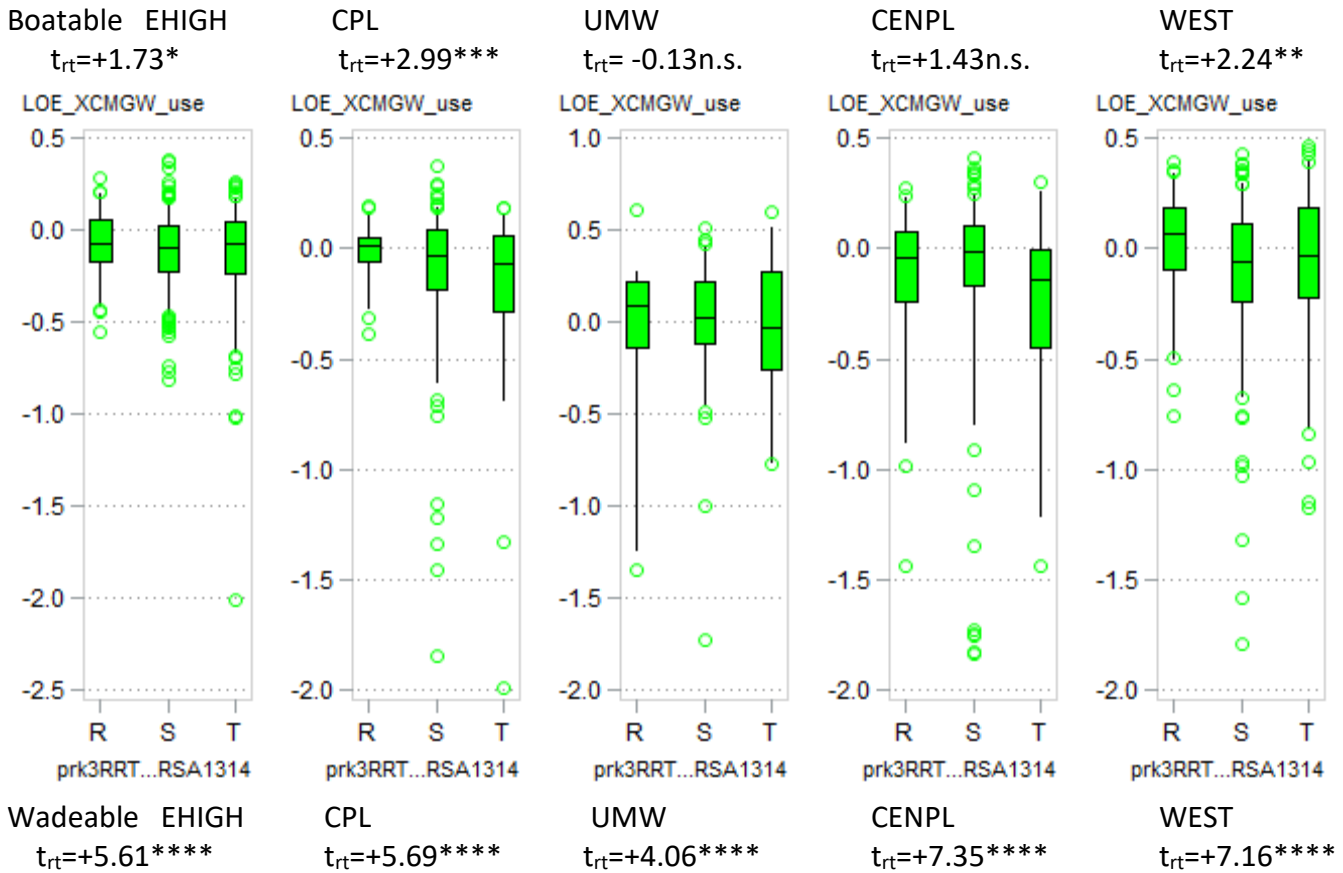
Boatable

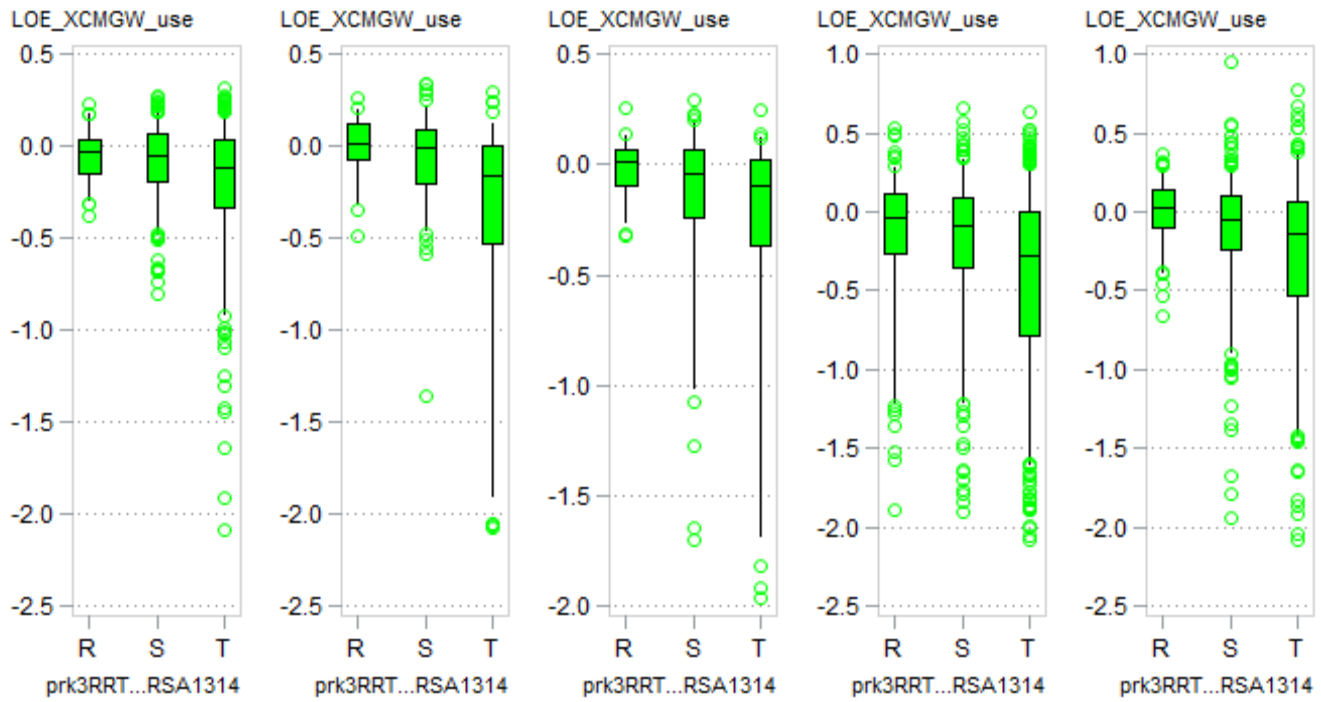


Wadeable



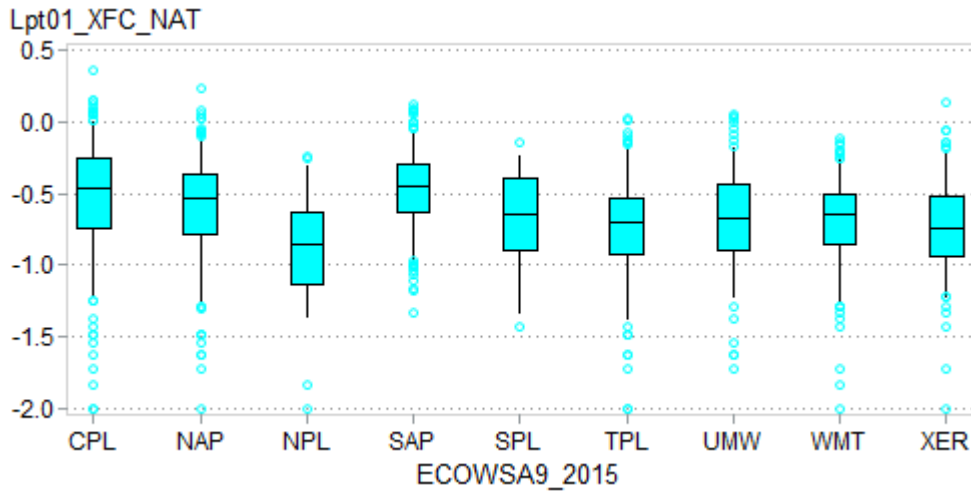
**Figure 8.7 Observed/Expected Riparian Vegetation Cover Complexity (*LOE\_XCMGW\_use*) in combined NRSA 2008-09 and 2013-14 sample sites in 9 aggregate ecoregions of the conterminous U.S., contrasting distributions in least-, moderately-, and most-disturbed sites within each aggregated ecoregion. Boxplots show 5<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, median, 75<sup>th</sup>, and 95<sup>th</sup> percentiles of the unweighted sample distributions (not population estimates). A. Boatable sites; B. Wadeable sites.**



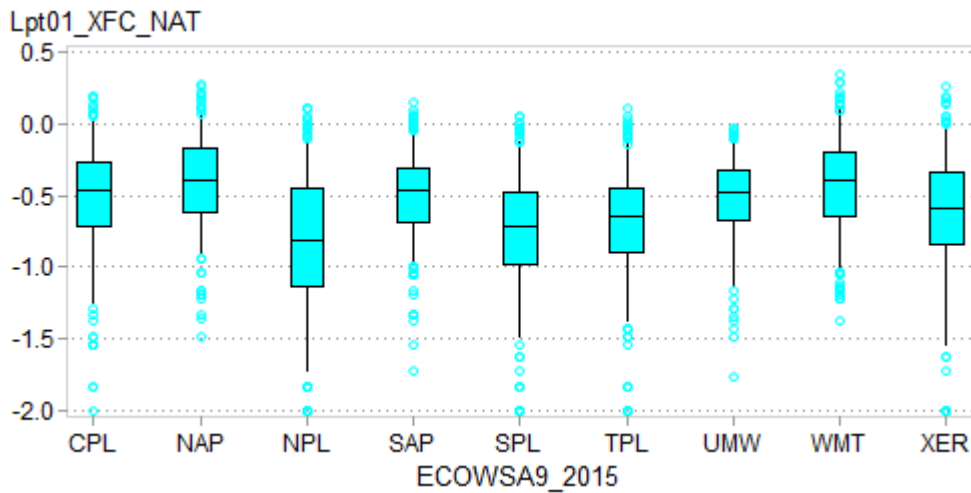


**Figure 8.8 Instream Habitat Complexity (*Lpt01\_XFC\_NAT*) in combined NRSA 2008-09 and 2013-14 sample sites in 9 aggregate ecoregions of the conterminous U.S. Boxplots show 5<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, median, 75<sup>th</sup>, and 95<sup>th</sup> percentiles of the unweighted sample distributions (not population estimates). A. Boatable sites; B. Wadeable sites.**

Boatable

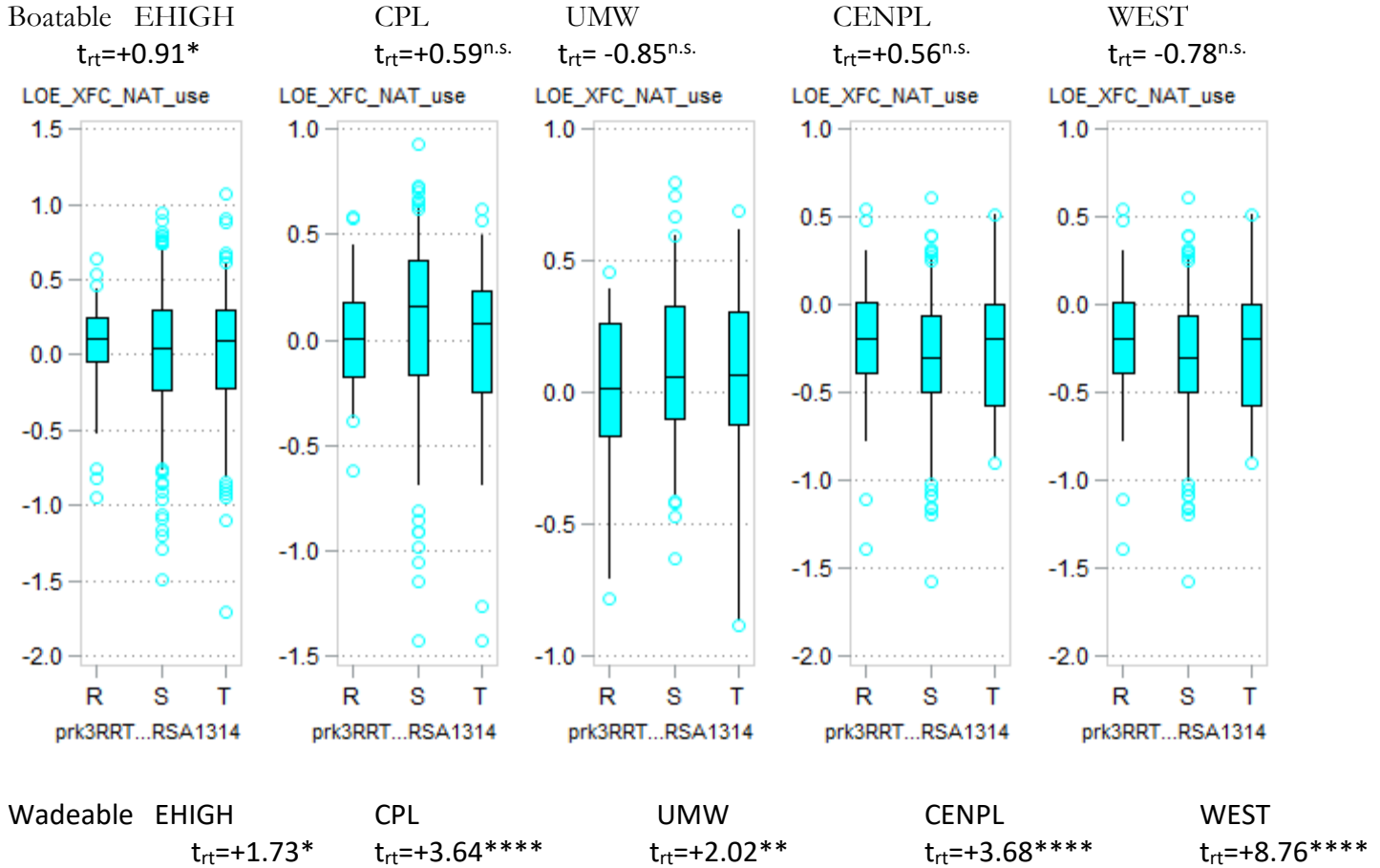


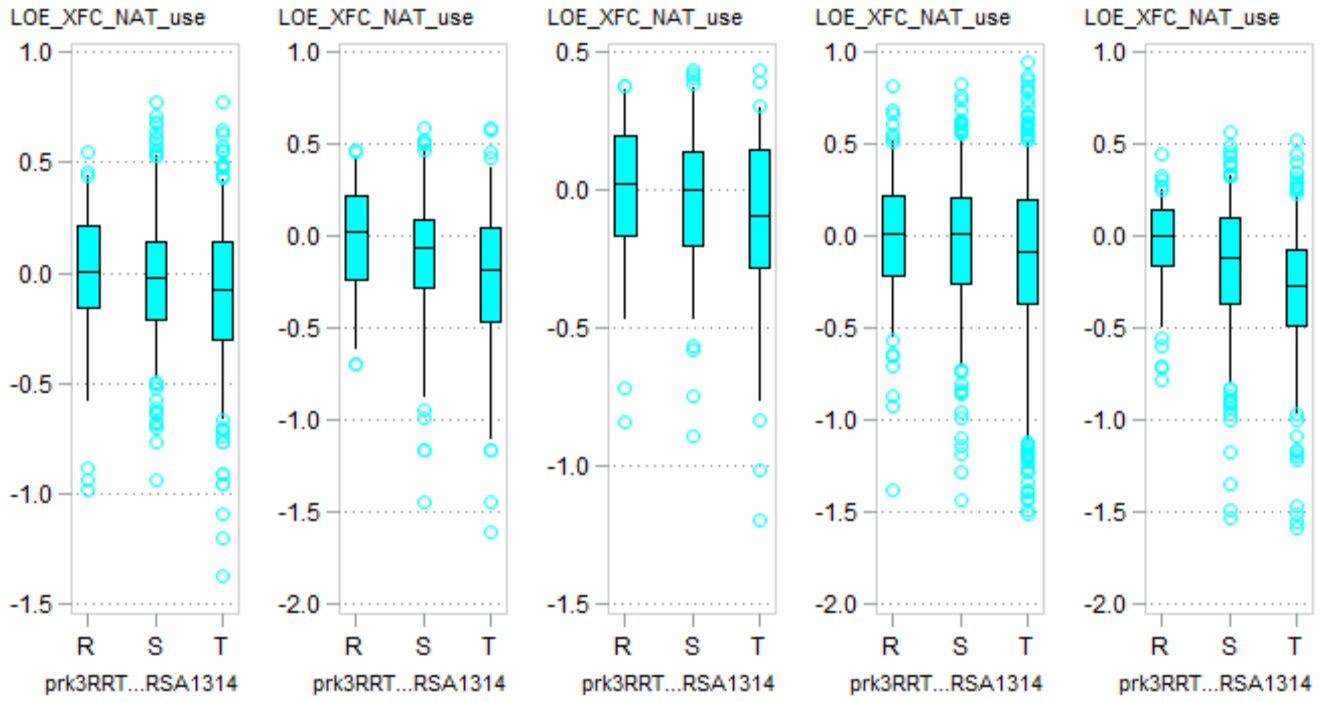
Wadeable





**Figure 8.9 Observed/Expected Instream Habitat Complexity (*LOE\_XFC\_NAT\_use*) in combined NRSA 2008-09 and 2013-14 sample sites in 9 aggregate ecoregions of the conterminous U.S., contrasting distributions in least-, moderately-, and most-disturbed sites within each aggregated ecoregion. Boxplots show 5<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, median, 75<sup>th</sup>, and 95<sup>th</sup> percentiles of the unweighted sample distributions (not population estimates). A. Boatable sites; B. Wadeable sites.**





## APPENDIX 8.A

### NRSA 2008-09 & 2013-14 Expected Condition Models and Condition Criteria

#### NOTES:

- Uni-Fixed Models are fixed values of a metric that are uniform across all ecoregions and both Boatable and Wadeable “Realms.”
- NULL MODELS are based on mean & SD for reference sites (prk3RRT\_NRSA1314=R) from NRSA0809 and NRSA1314.
- Cond\_1 and Cond\_1b MODELS are MLRs using reference sites (prk3RRT\_NRSA1314=R) from NRSA0809 and NRSA1314. Cond\_1 MLRs may have disturbance variable(s) as predictors in cases where reference sites have anthropogenic disturbance that influences response variable.
- Cond\_1D MODELS are “All-Sites” MLRs using all sites (except Great Rivers) and incorporate disturbance variables as predictors. We use 2-steps to calculate reference expected values. First step is to calculate All-Sites Model Expected values then calculate O/E values by setting disturbance to empirical minimum values for the ecoregion/realm. Second value is to examine distribution of All-Sites Model O/E values within the Reference Sites of the appropriate ecoregion/realm.
- The expected reference value of the All-Sites Model OE is calculated from the reference site distribution of All-Sites model O/E values (refOE mean & refSD) or a regression factoring out disturbance in the reference sites (refOE y-intercept and refRMSE from disturbance regression) \*\*\* note that there is no requirement that the disturbance variable be the same as in the All-Sites model regression --- in fact it is likely to be a different variable because the influence of the disturbance variable used in the “All-Sites Model” has already been accounted for.

### Condition Benchmarks for Riparian Human Disturbances (RDist\_COND) based on W1\_HALL

We applied uniform condition benchmarks nationwide. The Low (1 Low), Medium (2 Medi), and High (3 High) disturbance levels are analogous to the Good, Fair, Poor condition classification used for the other indicators.

#### All Ecoregions and both Boatable and Wadeable sites

If W1\_Hall<0.33 then RDIST\_COND= ‘1 Low’;  
If W1\_Hall>=0.33 and W1\_Hall<1.5 then RDIST\_COND=’2 Medi’;  
If W1\_Hall>=1.5 then RDIST\_COND=’3 High’;

## Reference Condition Models for Channel Bed Sedimentation based on Relative Bed Stability (LRBS\_use = LRBS\_g08)

### Coastal Plain (CPL) Boatable Sites

Cond\_Null (eco9-B n=52)

RfNullM\_LRBS= -0.92405

RfNullSD\_LRBS= 1.33124

### Coastal Plain (CPL) Wadeable Sites

Cond\_1 (eco9-W n=51):

LRBS\_use= -1.67044 -0.77290(LXSlope\_use)-0.49218(LXWidth\_use) -0.12031(W1\_Hall)

R<sup>2</sup>=0.3497; AdjR<sup>2</sup>=0.3054; RMSE=0.73642; n=48/51; p=0.0003;p1<0.0001; p2=0.2637; p3=0.5799

---- Set W1\_Hall= 0 = minimum in ref sites:

RfE1\_LRBS=-1.67044 -0.77290(LXSlope\_use) -0.49218(LXWidth\_use)

RfE1\_RMSE\_LRBS=0.73642

### Northern Appalachian (NAP) Boatable Sites

---

Cond\_Null (eco9-B n=47):

RfNullM\_LRBS= -0.63226

RfNullSD\_LRBS= 1.53888

### Northern Appalachian (NAP) Wadeable Sites

Cond\_1 (eco9-W n=41):

LRBS\_use= -0.64678 +0.32478(L\_AreaWSkm2\_use) -8.04380(W1\_HAG)

R<sup>2</sup>= 0.2250; AdjR<sup>2</sup>=0.1842; RMSE=0.52529; n=41/41; p=0.0079;p1=0.0097;p2=0.1123

---- Set W1\_HAG=0 = minimum in ref sites:

RfE1\_LRBS= -0.64678 +0.32478(L\_AreaWSkm2\_use)

RfE1\_RMSE\_LRBS=0.52529

### Southern Appalachian (SAP) Boatable Sites

Cond\_Null (eco9-B n=22):

RfNullM\_LRBS= 0.44138;

RfNullSD\_LRBS=0.70357;

### Southern Appalachian (SAP) Wadeable Sites

Cond\_1 (eco9-W n=32):

LRBS\_use= -0.74349 +0.48842(L\_AreaWSkm2\_use) -0.75562(W1\_Hall)

R<sup>2</sup>= 0.2835; AdjR<sup>2</sup>=0.2341; RMSE=0.69081; n=32/32; p=0.0079;p1=0.0026;p2=0.0472

---- Set W1\_Hall=0 = minimum in ref sites:

RfE1\_LRBS= -0.74349 +0.48842(L\_AreaWSkm2\_use)

RfE1\_RMSE\_LRBS=0.69081

### **Northern Plains (NPL) Boatable Sites**

Cond\_1D (eco9-B n= 51)

“All-Sites Model” Regression on all 51 NPL boatable sites:

$LRBS\_use = -0.42002 + 0.44371(L\_AreaWSkm2\_use) + 1.26686(LXSlope\_use) - 0.08698(AGws\_X\_KFct)$

--- Set AGws\_X\_KFct = 0 = minimum for the ecoregion:

$RfE1D\_LRBS = -0.42002 + (0.44371 * L\_AreaWSkm2\_use) + (1.26686 * LXSlope\_use)$

$R^2 = 0.5598$ ; Adj $R^2 = 0.5311$ ; RMSE All-Sites model = 0.61027; n=50/51;

$p < 0.0001$ ;  $p_1 = 0.0089$ ;  $p_2 < 0.0001$ ;  $p_3 = 0.0011$

*If don't have KFactor the following is very equivalent, as KFactors are close to 0.35:*

$LRBS\_use = -0.50236 + 0.44371(L\_AreaWSkm2\_use) + 1.29164(LXSlope\_use) - 0.02628(PCT\_AG\_WS\_use)$

$RfOE1D\_LRBS = LRBS\_use - RfE1D\_LRBS$

Regression using only NPL boatable Reference sites (n=28):

$RfOE1D\_LRBS = 0.15939 - 0.02276(PCT\_AG\_WS\_use)$

$R^2 = 0.2322$ ; Adj $R^2 = 0.2026$ ; RMSE=0.51215; n=28/28;  $p = 0.0094$ ;  $p_1 = 0.0094$

-- Set PCT\_AG\_WS\_use=0 = minimum in ref sites.

$RfE\_OE1D\_LRBS = 0.15939$

$RfE\_OE1D\_RMSE\_LRBS = 0.51215$ ;

### **Northern Plains (NPL) Wadeable Sites**

Cond\_1D (eco9-W n=314)

“All-Sites Model” Regression on all 314 NPL wadeable sites:

$LRBS\_use = -2.80718 + 0.00084015(ELEV\_PT\_use) - 0.70092(LXSlope\_use) + 0.64948(LXWidth\_use) - 0.20932(W1\_HALL) - 0.49739(W1H\_Crop)$

--- Set W1\_HALL and W1\_Crop = 0, the minima for the ecoregion:

$RfE1D\_LRBS = -2.80718 + 0.00084015(ELEV\_PT\_use) - 0.70092(LXSlope\_use) + 0.64948(LXWidth\_use)$  ;

$R^2 = 0.3854$ ; Adj $R^2 = 0.3754$ ; RMSE All-Sites model = 0.83720; n=314;

$p < 0.0001$ ;  $p_1 - 3 < 0.0001$ ;  $p_4 = 0.0048$ ;  $p_5 = 0.0553$ ;

$RfOE1D\_LRBS = LRBS\_use - RfE1D\_LRBS$ ;

Regression using only NPL Wadeable Reference sites (n=52):

$RfOE1D\_LRBS = +0.19752 - 0.31987(W1\_Hall)$ ;

$R^2 = 0.0280$ ; Adj $R^2 = 0.0086$ ; RMSE=0.83941; n=51/52;  $p = 0.2356$ ;  $p_1 = 0.2356$

$RfE\_OE1D\_LRBS = 0.19752$

$RfE\_OE1D\_RMSE\_LRBS = 0.83941$

### **Southern Plains & Temperate Plains (SPL + TPL) Boatable Sites**

Cond\_1 (cenpl-B) ----- n=47 ref sites from TPL, SPL, and NPL

$LRBS\_use = 1.44046 - 0.32356 * L\_AreaWSkm2\_use - 0.02377 * AG\_1KMCIRCLE$

$R^2 = 0.1789$ ; Adj  $R^2 = 0.1416$ ; RMSE=1.13936; n=47/47;  $p = 0.0131$ ;  $p_1 = 0.0852$ ;  $p_2 = 0.0084$

---- Set AG\_1KMCircle=0 = minimum in reference sites:

$RfE1\_LRBS = 1.44046 - 0.32356(L\_AreaWSkm2\_use)$

$RfE1\_RMSE\_LRBS = 1.14939$

### **Southern Plains (SPL) Wadeable Sites**

Cond\_1D (eco9-W) n= 301

“All-Sites Model” Regression on all SPL wadeable sites:

LRBS\_use= 0.89319 -0.06565(LAT\_DD83) -0.09181(L\_AreaWSkm2\_use) -0.86897(LXSlope\_use)  
-0.24209(W1\_HAG) -0.00308(AG\_1KMCIRCLE) -0.02727(AGws\_X\_KFct)

R<sup>2</sup>=0.3525; Adj R<sup>2</sup>=0.3391; RMSE All-Sites=0.95158; n=297/301;

p<0.0001;p1=0.0002;p2=0.0519;p3<0.0001;p4=0.0155;p5=0.2490;p6=0.0049

--- Set W1\_HAG, AG\_1KMCircle, AGws\_x\_KFct = 0 = minima for SPL wadeable sites:

RfE1D\_LRBS= +0.89319 -0.06565(LAT\_DD83) -0.09181(L\_AreaWSkm2\_use) -  
0.86897(LXSlope\_use)

RfOE1D\_LRBS= LRBS\_use - RfE1D\_LRBS

Regression on SPL wadeable ref sites:

RfE1D\_LRBS=

-0.00983 -0.83096(W1\_HNOAG) -3.3658(Dam\_dii) +0.6857(RdDen\_ws\_use) -  
0.02242(PCT\_Ag\_ws\_use)

R<sup>2</sup> = 0.2616; Adj R<sup>2</sup>=0.1817; RMSE=0.99030; n=42/42;

p=0.0214;p1=0.0618;p2=0.2056;p3=0.0364;p4=0.0338

---- Set W1\_HNOAG, Dam\_dii, PCT\_Ag\_ws\_use = 0 = minima for ref sites;

-----Set RdDen\_ws\_use = 0 (Ref site mimimum = 0.19) ----- zero leads to more lenient expected condition.

RfE\_OE1D\_LRBS= -0.00983

RfE\_OE1D\_RMSE\_LRBS= 0.99030

### **Temperate Plains (TPL) Wadeable Sites**

Cond\_1D (eco9-W) -- All-Sites Model Regression on all 344 TPL wadeable sites:

LRBS\_use= 0.22205 +0.04387(LAT\_DD83) +0.03596(LON\_DD83) -0.49057(LXSlope\_use)  
-0.08247(W1\_HAG) -0.01116(AG\_1KMCIRCLE);

--- Set W1\_HAG and AG\_1KMCIRCLE = 0 = minima for region:

RfE1D\_LRBS=0.22205 +0.04387(LAT\_DD83) +0.03596(LON\_DD83) -0.49057(LXSlope\_use);

R<sup>2</sup>=0.1974; Adj R<sup>2</sup>=0.1854; RMSE- All-Sites =0.97639; n=342/344;

p<0.0001;p1=0.0556;p2=0.0074;p3<0.0001;p4=0.4971;p5<0.0001

RfOE1D\_LRBS= LRBS\_use - RfE1D\_LRBS

Regression on TPL ref sites:

RfE1D\_LRBS= +0.21704 -0.83169(W1\_HNOAG) +6.55336(W1H\_Crop) -0.0228(Ag\_1KmCircle)  
-0.05988(PCT\_Ag\_ws\_use) +0.19465(AgWS\_x\_KFct)

R<sup>2</sup> = 0.3279; Adj R<sup>2</sup>=0.2633; RMSE=0.93335; n=58

/61 ; p=0.0007;p1=0.0608;p2=0.0295;p3=0.0065;p4=0.0107;p5=0.0036

--- Set W1\_HNOAG, W1H\_Crop, Ag\_1KmCircle, PCT\_Ag\_ws\_use, and AgWS\_x\_KFct = 0 = minima for ref sites;

RfE\_OE1D\_LRBS=0.21704 = y-intercept from above

RfE\_OE1D\_RMSE\_LRBS=0.93335

### **Upper Midwest (UMW) Boatable Sites**

Cond\_1 (eco9-B n=36):

LRBS\_use = 22.86206 - 0.50298(LAT\_DD83) - 0.92704(W1\_HALL)

R<sup>2</sup>=0.1820; Adj R<sup>2</sup>=0.1324; RMSE=1.25933; n=36/36; p=0.0363; p1=0.0113; p2=0.2028

--- Set W1\_HALL = 0 = minimum for regional ref sites

RfE1\_LRBS = 22.86206 - 0.50298(LAT\_DD83)

RfE1\_RMSE\_LRBS = 1.25933;

### **Upper Midwest (UMW) Wadeable Sites**

Cond\_1 (eco9-W n=43):

LRBS\_use = -1.38974 - 0.69289(LXSlope\_use) - 0.26824(W1\_HALL)

R<sup>2</sup>=0.4103; Adj R<sup>2</sup>=0.3808; RMSE=0.92535; n=43/43; p<0.0001; p1<0.0001; p2=0.5347

--- Set W1\_HALL = 0 = minimum for regional ref sites:

RfE1\_LRBS = -1.38974 - 0.69289(LXSlope\_use)

RfE1\_RMSE\_LRBS = 0.92535

### **Western Mountain (WMT) Boatable Sites**

Cond\_N (eco9-B n=43):

RfNullM\_LRBS = 0.36550

RfNullSD\_LRBS = 0.48996

### **Western Mountain (WMT) Wadeable Sites**

Cond\_1 (eco9-B n=69):

LRBS\_use = -0.77810 - 0.31541(LXSlope\_use) + 0.48616(LXWidth\_use)

R<sup>2</sup> = 0.2739; Adj R<sup>2</sup> = 0.2516; RMSE = 0.42995; n = 68/69; p < 0.0001; p1 = 0.0382; p2 = 0.022333

RfE1\_LRBS = -0.77810 - 0.31541(LXSlope\_use) + 0.48616(LXWidth\_use)

RfE1\_RMSE\_LRBS = 0.42995

### **Xeric (XER) Boatable Sites**

Cond\_N (eco9-B n=24):

RfNullM\_LRBS = 0.08641

RfNullSD\_LRBS = 0.98518

### **Xeric (XER) Wadeable Sites**

Cond\_1 (eco9-W n=36):

LRBS\_use = -2.01510 + 1.33328(LXWidth\_use)

R<sup>2</sup> = 0.2333; Adj R<sup>2</sup> = 0.2107; RMSE = 0.79439; n = 36/36 ; p = 0.0028; p1 = 0.0028

RfE1\_LRBS = -2.01510 + 1.33328(LXWidth\_use)

RfE1\_RMSE\_LRBS = 0.79439

**CONDITION ASSIGNMENTS FOR LRBS\_use NULL MODELS:**

RfNull25\_LRBS=RfNullM\_LRBS-(0.67\*RfNullSD\_LRBS);  
RfNull05\_LRBS=RfNullM\_LRBS-(1.65\*RfNullSD\_LRBS);

RfOENull\_LRBS=LRBS\_use-RfNullM\_LRBS;

LRBS\_Cond\_N='XXXX';  
if LRBS\_use<=RfNull05\_LRBS then LRBS\_Cond\_N='Poor';  
if LRBS\_use>RfNull05\_LRBS and LRBS\_use<=RfNull25\_LRBS  
then LRBS\_Cond\_N='Medi';  
if LRBS\_use>RfNull25\_LRBS then LRBS\_Cond\_N='Good';

If RfOENull\_LRBS=. then LRBS\_COND\_N='XXXX';  
If LRBS\_use=. then LRBS\_COND\_N='XXXX';

**CONDITION ASSIGNMENTS FOR LRBS\_use COND\_1 O/E MODELS:**

RfOE1\_LRBS=LRBS\_use-RfE1\_LRBS;

RfE1\_25\_LRBS=RfE1\_LRBS-(0.67\*RfE1\_RMSE\_LRBS);  
RfE1\_05\_LRBS=RfE1\_LRBS-(1.65\*RfE1\_RMSE\_LRBS);

LRBS\_Cond\_1='XXXX';  
if LRBS\_use<=RfE1\_05\_LRBS then LRBS\_Cond\_1='Poor';  
if LRBS\_use>RfE1\_05\_LRBS and LRBS\_use<=RfE1\_25\_LRBS  
then LRBS\_Cond\_1='Medi';  
if LRBS\_use>RfE1\_25\_LRBS then LRBS\_Cond\_1='Good';

If RfE1\_LRBS=. then LRBS\_COND\_1='XXXX';  
If LRBS\_use=. then LRBS\_COND\_1='XXXX';

**CONDITION ASSIGNMENTS FOR LRBS\_use COND\_1D (“All-Sites”) O/E MODELS:**

\*\*\* NOTE RfOE1D\_LRBS=LRBS\_use-RfE1D\_LRBS;  
\*\*\* We base expectations on the distribution of OE in ref sites;

RfE\_OE1D\_25\_LRBS=RfE\_OE1D\_LRBS-(0.67\*RfE\_OE1D\_RMSE\_LRBS);  
RfE\_OE1D\_05\_LRBS=RfE\_OE1D\_LRBS-(1.65\*RfE\_OE1D\_RMSE\_LRBS);

if RfOE1D\_LRBS<=RfE\_OE1D\_05\_LRBS then LRBS\_Cond\_1D='Poor';  
if RfOE1D\_LRBS> RfE\_OE1D\_05\_LRBS and RfOE1D\_LRBS<=RfE\_OE1D\_25\_LRBS  
then LRBS\_Cond\_1D='Medi';  
if RfOE1D\_LRBS> RfE\_OE1D\_25\_LRBS then LRBS\_Cond\_1D='Good';

If RfOE1D\_LRBS=. then LRBS\_COND\_1D='XXXX';  
If LRBS\_use=. then LRBS\_COND\_1D='XXXX';



## Reference Condition Models for Riparian Vegetation Cover Condition based on $\text{Log}_{10}(0.01+\text{XCMGW})$

### Coastal Plain (CPL) Boatable Sites

Cond\_1 (eco9-B n=52):

$\text{LPt01\_XCMGW} = 0.83657 + 0.00658(\text{LON\_DD83}) - 0.06020(\text{L\_AreaWSkm2\_use}) - 0.57160(\text{W1\_HAG});$

$R^2 = 0.2583; \text{Adj}R^2 = 0.2121; \text{RMSE} = 0.11862; n = 52/52; p = 0.0023; p1 = 0.0570; p2 = 0.0461; p3 = 0.0166$

--- Set  $\text{W1\_HAG} = 0$  = minimum for ref sites in region:

$\text{RfE1\_LXCMGW} = 0.83657 + 0.00658(\text{LON\_DD83}) - 0.06020(\text{L\_AreaWSkm2\_use});$

$\text{RfE1\_RMSE\_LXCMGW} = 0.11862;$

### Coastal Plain (CPL) Wadeable Sites

Cond\_1 (eco9-W n=51):

$\text{LPt01\_XCMGW} = -0.58185 - 0.00700(\text{LON\_DD83})$

$R^2 = 0.0551; \text{Adj}R^2 = 0.0358; \text{RMSE} = 0.15238; n = 51/51; p = 0.0972; p1 = 0.0972$

$\text{RfE1\_LXCMGW} = -0.58185 - 0.00700(\text{LON\_DD83})$

$\text{RfE1\_RMSE\_LXCMGW} = 0.15238$

### Northern Appalachian (NAP) Boatable Sites

Cond\_1-eco9-B:

$\text{LPt01\_XCMGW} = 2.51398 - 0.05498(\text{LAT\_DD83})$

$-0.00786(\text{AG\_1KMCIRCLE}) - 0.79370(\text{PCT\_AG\_WS\_use}) + 2.68820(\text{AGws\_X\_KFct})$

$R^2 = 0.4025; \text{Adj}R^2 = 0.3456; \text{RMSE} = 0.15628; n = 47/47; p = 0.0002; p1 = 0.0056;$

$p2 = 0.0107; p3 = 0.0005; p4 = 0.0007$

--- Set  $\text{AG\_1KMCIRCLE}, \text{PCT\_AG\_WS\_use}$  and  $\text{AGws\_X\_KFct} = 0$  = minima for reference sites:

$\text{RfE1\_LXCMGW} = 2.51398 - 0.05498(\text{LAT\_DD83})$

$\text{RfE1\_RMSE\_LXCMGW} = 0.15628$

### Northern Appalachian (NAP) Wadeable Sites

Cond\_1 (eco9-W n=41):

$\text{LPt01\_XCMGW} = 0.21141 + 0.09026(\text{L\_AreaWSkm2\_use}) - 0.30883(\text{LXWidth\_use}) - 0.14456(\text{W1\_HALL})$

$R^2 = 0.2411; \text{Adj}R^2 = 0.1795; \text{RMSE} = 0.12059; n = 41/41; p = 0.0159; p1 = 0.0894; p2 = 0.0130; p3 = 0.0293$

--- Set  $\text{W1\_HALL} = 0$  = minimum for reference sites:

$\text{RfE1\_LXCMGW} = 0.21141 + 0.09026(\text{L\_AreaWSkm2\_use}) - 0.30883(\text{LXWidth\_use});$

$\text{RfE1\_RMSE\_LXCMGW} = 0.12059$

### **Southern Appalachian (SAP) Boatable Sites**

Cond\_1 (eco9-B n=22):

LPt01\_XCMGW= 0.02698 -0.44778(W1\_HAG)

R<sup>2</sup> = 0.1689; AdjR<sup>2</sup>=0.1274; RMSE= 0.14138; n= 22/22 p=0.0574; p1=0.0574

--- Set W1\_HAG = 0 = minimum for reference sites:

RfE1\_LXCMGW= 0.02698

RfE1\_RMSE\_LXCMGW=0.14138;

### **Southern Appalachian (SAP) Wadeable Sites**

Cond\_1 (eco9-W n=32):

LPt01\_XCMGW= -0.14633+0.04120(L\_AreaWSkm2\_use) +0.00051106(ELEV\_PT\_use)

-0.16089(W1\_HALL);

R<sup>2</sup>=0.3232; AdjR<sup>2</sup>=0.2507; RMSE= 0.14090; n= 32/32 ; p=0.0111; p1=0.2142; p2=0.0028; p3=0.0429

Set W1\_HALL = 0 = minimum for reference sites:

RfE1\_LXCMGW= -0.14633 +0.04120(L\_AreaWSkm2\_use) +0.00051106(ELEV\_PT\_use);

RfE1\_RMSE\_LXCMGW=0.14090;

### **Northern Plains (NPL) & Southern Plains (SPL) Boatable Sites**

Cond\_1D (CENPL-B n=249): -- All-Sites Regression on All CENPL Boatable sites (NPL, SPL, & TPL)

LPt01\_XCMGW= 1.80926 -0.02245(LAT\_DD83) +0.01036(LON\_DD83)

-0.24323(W1\_HAG) -0.11970(RDDEN\_WS\_use)+0.00306(PCT\_AG\_WS\_use)

R<sup>2</sup> = 0.2485; AdjR<sup>2</sup>=0.2331; RMSE All-Sites= 0.36204; n= 249/249

p<0.0001;p1=0.0685;p2<0.0001;p3=0.0283;p4=0.0113.

--- Set W1\_HAG and PCT\_AG\_WS\_use = 0 = minimum in NPL+SPL ref sites

--- Set RDDEN\_WS\_use, = 0 ----- (minimum for NPL+SPL ref sites = 0.043):

RfE1D\_LXCMGW= 1.80926 -0.02245\*LAT\_DD83)+(0.01036\*LON\_DD83)

Regression on TPL CENPL ref sites:

RfOE1D\_LXCMGW=LPt01\_XCMGW - RfE1D\_LXCMGW;

RfE\_OE1D\_LXCMGW = -0.08047 -0.01773(PCT\_AG\_WS\_use)

R<sup>2</sup> = 0.3141; AdjR<sup>2</sup>=0.2877; RMSE = 0.32423; n= 28/28; p=0.0019;p1=0.0019

--- Set PCT\_AG\_WS\_use = 0 = min in ref sites

RfE\_OE1D\_LXCMGW = -0.08047 ;

RfE\_OE1D\_RMSE\_LXCMGW=0.32423;

### **Northern Plains (NPL) Wadeable Sites**

Cond\_1D (CENPL-W n=959) All-Sites Regression on All CENPL Wadeable sites (NPL, SPL, & TPL) :  
LPt01\_XCMGW= 2.43249 -0.02325(LAT\_DD83) +0.01579(LON\_DD83)+0.16417(LXSlope\_use)  
-0.32696(W1\_HAG) -0.00256(PCT\_AG\_WS\_use)

R<sup>2</sup> = 0.3126; AdjR<sup>2</sup>=0.3088; RMSE- All-Sites =0.48720; n=922/959; p<0.0001;p1-p4<0.0001;p5=0.0002

--- Set W1\_HAG and PCT\_AG\_WS\_use = 0 = minima in ref sites of NPL (also SPL & TPL):

RfE1D\_LXCMGW= 2.43249 -0.02325\*LAT\_DD83) +(0.01579\*LON\_DD83)  
+(0.16417\*LXSlope\_use)

RfOE1D\_LXCMGW=LPt01\_XCMGW - RfE1D\_LXCMGW;

---- Regression using only CENPL Wadeable Ref sites (155)

RfOE1D\_LXCMGW = -0.13159 -2.01216(Dam\_dii) -0.02708(PCT\_AG\_WS\_use) +  
0.08125(AgWs\_x\_KFct);

R<sup>2</sup>=0.1443; AdjR<sup>2</sup>=0.1270; RMSE=0.38555; n=152/155; p<0.0001;p1=0.0015;p2=0.0006;p3=0.0006

--- Set Dam\_dii, PCT\_AG\_WS\_use & AgWs\_x\_KFct = 0 = minima in CENPL and NPL alone:

RfE\_OE1D\_LXCMGW=-0.13159;

RfE\_OE1D\_RMSE\_LXCMGW=0.38555;

### **Southern Plains (SPL) Boatable Sites**

----- see combined NPL & SPL Boatable Sites above

### **Southern Plains (SPL) & Temperate Plains (TPL) Wadeable Sites**

Cond\_1b (spl-tpl-umw-W -- ref sites only n=146):

LPt01\_XCMGW= 1.25746 +0.01355(LON\_DD83) -0.00024404(ELEV\_PT\_use)  
-0.00636(AG\_1KMCIRCLE) -0.02587(PCT\_AG\_WS\_use) +0.08055(AGws\_X\_KFct)

R<sup>2</sup>=0.3956; AdjR<sup>2</sup>=0.3735; RMSE=0.26692; n=143/146 p<0.0001;p1=0.0088;p2=0.0048;p3=0.0013;p4-  
5<0.0001

--- Set AG\_1KMCIRCLE, PCT\_AG\_WS\_use & AGws\_X\_KFct = 0 = minima in both SPL and TPL ref sites:

RfE1b\_LXCMGW= 1.25746 +0.01355(LON\_DD83) -0.00024404(ELEV\_PT\_use);

RfE1b\_RMSE\_LXCMGW=0.26692;

### **Temperate Plains (TPL) Boatable Sites**

Cond\_N (eco9-B n=22):

RfNullM\_LXCMGW= -0.08249 ;

RfNullSD\_LXCMGW= 0.15980 ;

### **Temperate Plains (TPL) Wadeable Sites**

----- see combined SPL & TPL Wadeable sites above

### **Upper Midwest (UMW) Boatable Sites**

Cond\_1b (SPL + TPL+ UMW Boatable Ref sites n=55):

$$\text{LPt01\_XCMGW} = 1.52755 - 0.03762(\text{LAT\_DD83}) - 0.33101(\text{L\_AreaWSkm2\_use}) \\ + 0.17072(\text{LXSlope\_use}) + 0.82145(\text{LXWidth\_use})$$

R<sup>2</sup>-Square=0.3354 AdjR<sup>2</sup>=0.2822; RMSE=0.37273 n=55/55;  
p=0.0003;p1=0.0057;p2=0.0019;p3=0.0284;p4=0.0003

Expected Ref condition model applied only to UMW Boatable sites:

$$\text{RfE1b\_LXCMGW} = 1.52755 - 0.03762 * \text{LAT\_DD83} - 0.33101 * \text{L\_AreaWSkm2\_use} \\ + (0.17072 * \text{LXSlope\_use}) + (0.82145 * \text{LXWidth\_use})$$

$$\text{RfE1b\_RMSE\_LXCMGW} = 0.37273$$

### **Upper Midwest (UMW) Wadeable Sites**

Cond\_1 (eco9-W n=43):

$$\text{LPt01\_XCMGW} = -0.13511 + 0.05069(\text{LXSlope\_use}) + 0.17937(\text{LXWidth\_use}) \\ - 0.06747(\text{W1\_HALL})$$

R<sup>2</sup>=0.3303 AdjR<sup>2</sup>=0.2465; RMSE=0.12999 n=43/43 ; p=0.0028;p1=0.0115;p2=0.0025;p3=0.2867  
--- Set W1\_HALL = 0 = minimum for ref sites:

$$\text{RfE1\_LXCMGW} = -0.13511 + (0.05069 * \text{LXSlope\_use}) + (0.17937 * \text{LXWidth\_use})$$

$$\text{RfE1\_RMSE\_LXCMGW} = 0.12999$$

### **Western Mountains (WMT) Boatable Sites**

Cond\_N (eco9-B n=43):

$$\text{RfNullM\_LXCMGW} = -0.12272$$

$$\text{RfNullSD\_LXCMGW} = 0.26191$$

### **Western Mountains (WMT) Wadeable Sites**

Cond\_1 (eco9-W n=69):

$$\text{LPt01\_XCMGW} = 0.24290 - 0.09638(\text{L\_AreaWSkm2\_use}) - 0.00007192(\text{ELEV\_PT\_use}) - \\ .11520(\text{LXSlope\_use})$$

R<sup>2</sup>= 0.2037; AdjR<sup>2</sup>=0.1669; RMSE= 0.15289; n=68/69; p=0.0019;p1=0.0063;p2=0.0024;p3=0.0425

$$\text{RfE1\_LXCMGW} = 0.24290 - 0.09638(\text{L\_AreaWSkm2\_use}) - 0.00007192(\text{ELEV\_PT\_use}) - \\ 0.11520 * \text{LXSlope\_use}$$

$$\text{RfE1\_RMSE\_LXCMGW} = 0.15289$$

### **Xeric (XER) Boatable Sites**

Cond\_1 (eco9-B n=24):

$$\text{LPt01\_XCMGW} = -0.32820 + 0.24638(\text{W1\_HNOAG}) - 0.15614(\text{W1\_HAG})$$

R<sup>2</sup>=0.2896; AdjR<sup>2</sup>=0.2220; RMSE=0.15263; n=24/24 ; p=0.0276;p1=0.0273;p2=0.1633;

Set W1\_HNOAG (positive beta) and W1\_HAG (negative beta) = 0 = minima for ref sites;

Note this results in lower ref mean, smaller RMSE, but lower (more lenient) percentile values than NULL

$$\text{RfE1\_LXCMGW} = -0.32820$$

$$\text{RfE1\_RMSE\_LXCMGW} = 0.15263$$

### **Xeric (XER) Wadeable Sites**

Cond\_1 (eco9-W n=36):

LPt01\_XCMGW =  $-0.21113 - 0.19122(L\_AreaWSkm2\_use) + 0.19148(LXSlope\_use) + 0.65498(LXWidth\_use)$

$R^2=0.2294$ ;  $AdjR^2=0.1571$ ;  $RMSE=0.25328$ ;  $n=36/36$ ;  $p=0.0374$ ;  $p1=0.0695$ ;  $p2=0.0730$ ;  $p3=0.0086$

RfE1\_LXCMGW =  $-0.21113 - 0.19122 * L\_AreaWSkm2\_use + (0.19148 * LXslope\_use) + (0.65498 * LXWidth\_use)$ ;

RfE1\_RMSE\_LXCMGW = 0.25328

### **CONDITION ASSIGNMENTS FOR RIPARIAN VEGETATION COVER NULL MODELS:**

RfNull25\_LXCMGW =  $RfNullIM\_LXCMGW - (0.67 * RfNullSD\_LXCMGW)$ ;

RfNull05\_LXCMGW =  $RfNullIM\_LXCMGW - (1.65 * RfNullSD\_LXCMGW)$ ;

RfOENull\_LXCMGW =  $LPt01\_XCMGW - RfNullIM\_LXCMGW$ ;

LXCMGW\_Cond\_N = 'XXXX';

if  $LPt01\_XCMGW \leq RfNull05\_LXCMGW$  then LXCMGW\_Cond\_N = 'Poor';

if  $LPt01\_XCMGW > RfNull05\_LXCMGW$  and  $LPt01\_XCMGW \leq RfNull25\_LXCMGW$  then LXCMGW\_Cond\_N = 'Medi';

if  $LPt01\_XCMGW > RfNull25\_LXCMGW$  then LXCMGW\_Cond\_N = 'Good';

if  $LPt01\_XCMGW = .$  then LXCMGW\_Cond\_N = 'XXXX';

### **CONDITION ASSIGNMENTS FOR RIPARIAN VEGETATION COVER COND\_1 O/E MODELS:**

RfOE1\_LXCMGW =  $LPt01\_XCMGW - RfE1\_LXCMGW$ ;

RfE1\_25\_LXCMGW =  $RfE1\_LXCMGW - (0.67 * RfE1\_RMSE\_LXCMGW)$ ;

RfE1\_05\_LXCMGW =  $RfE1\_LXCMGW - (1.65 * RfE1\_RMSE\_LXCMGW)$ ;

LXCMGW\_Cond\_1 = 'XXXX';

if  $LPt01\_XCMGW \leq RfE1_05\_LXCMGW$  then LXCMGW\_Cond\_1 = 'Poor';

if  $LPt01\_XCMGW > RfE1_05\_LXCMGW$  and  $LPt01\_XCMGW \leq RfE1_25\_LXCMGW$  then LXCMGW\_Cond\_1 = 'Medi';

if  $LPt01\_XCMGW > RfE1_25\_LXCMGW$  then LXCMGW\_Cond\_1 = 'Good';

If  $RfE1\_LXCMGW = .$  then LXCMGW\_Cond\_1 = 'XXXX';

if  $LPt01\_XCMGW = .$  then LXCMGW\_Cond\_1 = 'XXXX';

### **CONDITION ASSIGNMENTS FOR RIPARIAN VEGETATION COVER COND\_1b O/E MODELS:**

RfE1b\_25\_LXCMGW =  $RfE1b\_LXCMGW - (0.67 * RfE1b\_RMSE\_LXCMGW)$ ;

RfE1b\_05\_LXCMGW =  $RfE1b\_LXCMGW - (1.65 * RfE1b\_RMSE\_LXCMGW)$ ;

LXCMGW\_Cond\_1b = 'XXXX';

if  $LPt01\_XCMGW \leq RfE1b_05\_LXCMGW$  then LXCMGW\_Cond\_1b = 'Poor';

if  $LPt01\_XCMGW > RfE1b_05\_LXCMGW$  and  $LPt01\_XCMGW \leq RfE1b_25\_LXCMGW$  then LXCMGW\_Cond\_1b = 'Medi';

```
if LPt01_XCMGW>RfE1b_25_LXCMGW then LXCMGW_Cond_1b='Good';  
If RfE1b_LXCMGW=. then LXCMGW_Cond_1b='XXXX';  
if LPt01_XCMGW =. then LXCMGW_Cond_1b='XXXX';
```

**CONDITION ASSIGNMENTS FOR RIPARIAN VEGETATION COVER COND\_1D  
("All-Sites") O/E MODELS:**

```
RfE_OE1D_25_LXCMGW=RfE_OE1D_LXCMGW-(0.67*RfE_OE1D_RMSE_LXCMGW);  
RfE_OE1D_05_LXCMGW=RfE_OE1D_LXCMGW-(1.65*RfE_OE1D_RMSE_LXCMGW);
```

```
LXCMGW_Cond_1D='XXXX';  
if RfOE1D_LXCMGW<=RfE_OE1D_05_LXCMGW then LXCMGW_Cond_1D='Poor';  
if RfOE1D_LXCMGW> RfE_OE1D_05_LXCMGW and  
RfOE1D_LXCMGW<=RfE_OE1D_25_LXCMGW  
then LXCMGW_Cond_1D='Medi';  
if RfOE1D_LXCMGW> RfE_OE1D_25_LXCMGW then LXCMGW_Cond_1D='Good';
```

```
If RfE_OE1D_LXCMGW=. then LXCMGW_Cond_1D='XXXX';  
if RfOE1D_LXCMGW =. then LXCMGW_Cond_1D='XXXX';
```

## Reference Condition Models for Instream Fish Cover based on $\text{Log}_{10}(0.01+\text{XFC\_NAT})$

### Coastal Plain (CPL) Boatable Sites

Cond\_N (eco9-B n=52):  
RfNullM\_LXFC\_NAT= -0.57048 ;  
RfNullSD\_LXFC\_NAT= 0.23527 ;

### Coastal Plain (CPL) Wadeable Sites

Cond\_N (eco9-B n=51):  
RfNullM\_LXFC\_NAT= -0.39218 ;  
RfNullSD\_LXFC\_NAT=0.29820 ;

### Northern Appalachian (NAP) Boatable Sites

Cond\_1 (eco9-B n=47):  
LPt01\_XFC\_NAT= -5.46962 -0.06654(LON\_DD83) -0.46088(L\_AreaWSkm2\_use)  
+0.92383(LXWidth\_use)  
-1.05887(W1H\_Crop);  
 $R^2= 0.3404$ ;  $\text{Adj}R^2=0.2776$ ;  $\text{RMSE}=0.31921$ ;  $n=47$ ;  
 $p=0.0013$ ;  $p1=0.0047$ ;  $p2=0.0897$ ;  $p3=0.0483$ ;  $p4=0.0082$   
--- Set W1H\_Crop = 0 = minimum in ref sites:

RfE1\_LXFC\_NAT= -5.46962 -0.06654(LON\_DD83) -0.46088(L\_AreaWSkm2\_use)  
+(0.92383(LXWidth\_use) ;  
RfE1\_RMSE\_LXFC\_NAT=0.31921;

### Northern Appalachian (NAP) Wadeable Sites

Cond\_1 (eco9-W n=41):  
LPt01\_XFC\_NAT= -0.08246 -0.26338(LXWidth\_use) ;  
 $R^2=0.0736$ ;  $\text{Adj}R^2=0.0499$ ;  $\text{RMSE}=0.28459$ ;  $n=41$ ;  $p=0.0862$ ;  $p1=0.0862$

RfE1\_LXFC\_NAT= -0.08246 -0.26338(LXWidth\_use);  
RfE1\_RMSE\_LXFC\_NAT=0.28459;

### Southern Appalachian (SAP) Boatable Sites

Cond\_1 (eco9-W n=22) :  
LPt01\_XFC\_NAT= -3.54570+0.07646(LAT\_DD83) +0.22940(W1\_HALL);  
 $R^2= 0.5343$ ;  $\text{Adj}R^2=0.4852$ ;  $\text{RMSE}=0.17528$ ;  $n=22/22$ ;  $p=0.0007$ ;  $p1=0.0089$ ;  $p2=0.0065$   
--- Set W1\_HALL= 0 -- note it is a positive association (mimimum in ref sites=0.03; in all sites=0):

RfE1\_LXFC\_NAT= -3.54570+(0.07646\*LAT\_DD83);  
RfE1\_RMSE\_LXFC\_NAT= 0.17528;

### **Southern Appalachian (SAP) Wadeable Sites**

Cond\_1 (eco9-W n=32):

$L_{Pt01\_XFC\_NAT} = -2.89088 + 0.06090(LAT\_DD83) + 0.00062631(ELEV\_PT\_use) - 7.37514(W1\_HAG)$ ;

$R^2=0.4169$ ;  $AdjR^2=0.3544$ ;  $RMSE=0.31006$ ;  $n=32/32$ ;  $p=0.0015$ ;  $p_1=0.0896$ ;  $p_2=0.0785$ ;  $p_3=0.0041$

--- Set  $W1\_HAG = 0$  = minimum for ref sites:

$R_{fE1\_LXFC\_NAT} = -2.89088 + (0.06090 * LAT\_DD83) + (0.00062631 * ELEV\_PT\_use)$ ;

$R_{fE1\_RMSE\_LXFC\_NAT} = 0.31006$ ;

### **CENPL (NPL, SPL, TPL) Northern, Southern & Temperate Plains -- Boatable Sites**

Cond\_1 (CENPL-B n=47):

$L_{Pt01\_XFC\_NAT} = 2.42961 - 0.02335(LAT\_DD83) + 0.01564(LON\_DD83) - 0.11096(L\_AreaWSkm2\_use)$

$- 0.00934(AG\_1KMCIRCLE)$ ;

$R^2=0.3446$ ;  $AdjR^2=0.2822$ ;  $RMSE=0.32257$ ;  $n=47/47$ ;

$p=0.0012$ ;  $p_1=0.1204$ ;  $p_2=0.1228$ ;  $p_3=0.0400$ ;  $p_4=0.0070$

--- Set  $AG\_1KMCIRCLE = 0$  = min for CENPL {Minima are 0%, 3.6%, 0.06% for NPL(n=33), SPL(n=2), TPL(n=22)}:

$R_{fE1\_LXFC\_NAT} = 2.42961 - 0.02335 * LAT\_DD83 + (0.01564 * LON\_DD83) - 0.11096 * L\_AreaWSkm2\_use$ ;

$R_{fE1\_RMSE\_LXFC\_NAT} = 0.32279$ ;

### **CENPL (NPL, SPL, TPL) Northern, Southern & Temperate Plains -- Wadeable Sites**

Cond\_1 (CENPL-W n=155):

$L_{Pt01\_XFC\_NAT} = -0.20615 + 0.00409(LON\_DD83) - 0.08735(L\_AREAWskm2\_use) + 0.00025270(ELEV\_PT\_use)$

$- 0.00258(AG\_1KMCIRCLE) + 0.04332(URB\_1KMCIRCLE)$ ;

$R^2 = 0.1740$ ;  $AdjR^2=0.1457$ ;  $RMSE=0.33531$ ;  $n=152/155$ ;

$p < 0.0001$ ;  $p_1=0.5890$ ;  $p_2=0.0039$ ;  $p_3=0.0154$ ;  $p_4=0.1134$ ;  $p_5=0.0032$

---- Set  $AG\_1KMCIRCLE$  and  $URB\_1KMCIRCLE = 0$  = minima for ref sites each of the 3 regions:

$R_{fE1\_LXFC\_NAT} = -0.20615 + (0.00409 * LON\_DD83) - 0.08735 * L\_AREAWskm2\_use + (0.00025270 * ELEV\_PT\_use)$ ;

$R_{fE1\_RMSE\_LXFC\_NAT} = 0.33531$ ;

### **Upper Midwest (UMW) Boatable Sites**

Cond\_1 (eco9-B n=36)

$L_{Pt01\_XFC\_NAT} = 3.97716 + 0.05232(LON\_DD83) - 0.20032(W1\_HAG)$ ;

$R^2=0.2349$   $AdjR^2=0.1885$ ;  $RMSE=0.31606$ ;  $n=36/36$  ;  $p=0.0121$ ;  $p_1=0.0049$ ;  $p_2=0.8532$

--- Set  $W1\_HAG = 0$  = minimum in ref sites:

$R_{fE1\_LXFC\_NAT} = 3.97716 + (0.05232 * LON\_DD83)$ ;

$R_{fE1\_RMSE\_LXFC\_NAT} = 0.31606$ ;



### **Upper Midwest (UMW) Wadeable Sites**

Cond\_1 (eco9-W n=43):

LPt01\_XFC\_NAT= -0.48451 +0.17605(L\_AreaWSkm2\_use) -0.35844(LXWidth\_use) ;  
R<sup>2</sup> =0.0740; AdjR<sup>2</sup>=0.0277; RMSE=0.29010; n=43/43; p=0.2151; p1=0.0818; p2=0.1406

RfE1\_LXFC\_NAT= -0.48451 +(0.17605\*L\_AreaWSkm2\_use) -0.35844\*LXWidth\_use);  
RfE1\_RMSE\_LXFC\_NAT= 0.29010;

### **Western Mountain (WMT) Boatable Sites**

Cond\_1 (eco9-B n=43):

LPt01\_XFC\_NAT= -1.40552 +0.48649(LXWidth\_use)  
-5.67454(W1H\_Crop) -0.11975(RDDEN\_WS\_use) ;  
R<sup>2</sup>=0.2408; AdjR<sup>2</sup>=0.1824; RMSE=0.23044; n=43/43; p=0.0124; p1=0.0175; p2=0.0077; p3=0.0654  
--- Set W1H\_Crop and RDDEN\_WS\_use = 0 = minima for ref sites:

RfE1\_LXFC\_NAT= -1.40552 +(0.48649\*LXWidth\_use)  
RfE1\_RMSE\_LXFC\_NAT= 0.23044;

### **Western Mountain (WMT) Wadeable Sites**

Cond\_1 (eco9-W n=69):

LPt01\_XFC\_NAT= 1.57993 +0.01058(LAT\_DD83) +0.01895(LON\_DD83) -  
0.08287(L\_AreaWSkm2\_use)  
-11.24156(W1\_HAG) -0.05374(RDDEN\_WS\_use) ;  
R<sup>2</sup> =0.3466; AdjR<sup>2</sup>=0.2939; RMSE=0.21669 n=68/69;  
p<0.0001; p1=0.1652; p2=0.0013; p3=0.0414; p4=0.0054; p5=0.1064  
--- Set W1\_HAG and RDDEN\_WS\_use = 0 = minima for ref sites:

RfE1\_LXFC\_NAT= 1.57993 +(0.01058\*LAT\_DD83) +(0.01895LON\_DD83) -  
0.08287(L\_AreaWSkm2\_use);  
RfE1\_RMSE\_LXFC\_NAT=0.21669;

### **Xeric (XER) Boatable Sites**

Cond\_1 (eco9-B n=24):

LPt01\_XFC\_NAT= -0.03292 -0.00013276(ELEV\_PT\_use) -0.42159(LXWidth\_use) ;  
R<sup>2</sup> =0.1266; AdjR<sup>2</sup>=0.1266; RMSE=0.31024; n=23/24; p=0.2582; p1=0.1323; p2=0.1973

RfE1\_LXFC\_NAT= -0.03292 -0.00013276\*ELEV\_PT\_use) -0.42159\*LXWidth\_use) ;  
RfE1\_RMSE\_LXFC\_NAT= 0.31024;

### **Xeric (XER) Wadeable Sites**

Cond\_1 (eco9-W n=36):

LPt01\_XFC\_NAT= 0.96284 +0.01132(LON\_DD83)+0.18104(LXSlope\_use) -19.86518(W1H\_Crop);  
R<sup>2</sup>=0.2738; AdjR<sup>2</sup>=0.2057; RMSE=0.24231 n=36/36; p=0.0155; p1=0.1628; p2=0.0431; p3=0.0353  
--- note LXSlope distribution is similar across the range of the other model variables in all sites;  
--- Set W1H\_Crop = 0 = minimum in ref sites:

RfE1\_LXFC\_NAT= 0.96284 +(0.01132\*LON\_DD83) +(0.18104\*LXSlope\_use);  
RfE1\_RMSE\_LXFC\_NAT=0.24231;

**CONDITION ASSIGNMENTS FOR INSTREAM FISH COVER NULL MODELS:**

RfNull25\_LXFC\_NAT=RfNullIM\_LXFC\_NAT-(0.67\*RfNullSD\_LXFC\_NAT);  
RfNull05\_LXFC\_NAT=RfNullIM\_LXFC\_NAT-(1.65\*RfNullSD\_LXFC\_NAT);  
RfOENull\_LXFC\_NAT=Lp01\_XFC\_NAT-RfNullIM\_LXFC\_NAT;

LXFC\_NAT\_Cond\_N='XXXX';  
if Lp01\_XFC\_NAT<=RfNull05\_LXFC\_NAT then LXFC\_NAT\_Cond\_N='Poor';  
if Lp01\_XFC\_NAT>RfNull05\_LXFC\_NAT and Lp01\_XFC\_NAT<=RfNull25\_LXFC\_NAT  
then LXFC\_NAT\_Cond\_N='Medi';  
if Lp01\_XFC\_NAT>RfNull25\_LXFC\_NAT then LXFC\_NAT\_Cond\_N='Good';  
If Lp01\_XFC\_NAT =. then LXFC\_NAT\_Cond\_N='XXXX';

**CONDITION ASSIGNMENTS FOR INSTREAM FISH COVER COND\_1 O/E MODELS:**

RfE1\_25\_LXFC\_NAT=RfE1\_LXFC\_NAT-(0.67\*RfE1\_RMSE\_LXFC\_NAT);  
RfE1\_05\_LXFC\_NAT=RfE1\_LXFC\_NAT-(1.65\*RfE1\_RMSE\_LXFC\_NAT);  
RfOE1\_LXFC\_NAT=Lp01\_XFC\_NAT-RfE1\_LXFC\_NAT;

if Lp01\_XFC\_NAT<=RfE1\_05\_LXFC\_NAT then LXFC\_NAT\_Cond\_1='Poor';  
if Lp01\_XFC\_NAT>RfE1\_05\_LXFC\_NAT and Lp01\_XFC\_NAT<=RfE1\_25\_LXFC\_NAT  
then LXFC\_NAT\_Cond\_1='Medi';  
if Lp01\_XFC\_NAT>RfE1\_25\_LXFC\_NAT then LXFC\_NAT\_Cond\_1='Good';  
If RfE1\_LXFC\_NAT =. then LXFC\_NAT\_COND\_1='XXXX';  
If Lp01\_XFC\_NAT =. then LXFC\_NAT\_Cond\_1='XXXX';

## 9 HUMAN HEALTH FISH TISSUE INDICATOR

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Fish are time-integrating indicators of persistent pollutants, and contaminant bioaccumulation in fish tissue has important human health implications. Contaminants in fish pose various health risks (*e.g.*, cancer risks, and noncancer risks such as reproduction or neurological development impacts) to human consumers. The NRSA 2013-14 human health fish tissue indicator provides information on the national distribution of selected persistent, bioaccumulative, and toxic (PBT) chemical residues (*e.g.*, mercury, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), and per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in fish species that people might catch and eat from rivers 5<sup>th</sup> order and greater in size in the conterminous United States. Results of analyses of mercury, PCB, and PFAS fillet tissue concentrations are presented for this indicator.

The human health fish tissue indicator field and analysis procedures described below were based on EPA's National Study of Chemical Residues in Lake Fish Tissue (EPA 2009) and EPA's *Guidance for Assessing Chemical Contaminant Data for Use in Fish Advisories*, Volumes 1-2 (third edition) (EPA 2000).

### 9.1 FIELD FISH COLLECTION

#### 9.1.1 Fish Tissue Fillets

The NRSA 2013-14 crews collected fish for the fillet tissue indicator from a subset of rivers 5<sup>th</sup> order and greater in size. The fish samples collected for fillet tissue analysis consisted of a composite of fish (*i.e.*, five individuals of one target species)<sup>2</sup> from each site. The fish had to be large enough to provide sufficient tissue for analysis (*i.e.*, 540 grams of fillets, collectively). Additional criteria for each fish composite sample included fish that were:

- All of the same species (for each site);
- Harvestable size per legal requirements or of consumable size if there were no harvest limits; and
- Similar size so that the smallest individual in the composite was no less than 75% of the total length of the largest individual in the composite.

Crews were provided with a recommended list of target fish species (**Table 9.1**), but they could choose an appropriate substitute if none of the recommended fish were available.

#### 9.1.2 Fish Tissue Plugs

The NRSA 2013-14 crews collected fish for the tissue plug analysis from all river and stream sites regardless of river or stream size. Two fish tissue plugs for mercury analysis were collected from two fish of the same species (one plug per fish) from the target list. These fish are collected during the fish

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<sup>2</sup> Use of composite sampling for screening studies is a cost-effective way to estimate average contaminant concentrations while also ensuring that there is sufficient fish tissue to analyze for all contaminants of concern. However, average concentrations from composite samples may represent an over- or underestimation of a contaminant as compared to the actual concentration in a single fish sample.

assemblage sample collection effort. A plug tissue sample was collected by inserting a biopsy punch into a descaled thicker area of dorsal muscle section of a live fish. After collection, antibiotic salve was placed over the wound and the fish was released.

**Table 9.1 Recommended Target Species for Fish Tissue Indicator Sample Collection**

| Target Species | Family Name     | Common Name                  | Scientific Name                | Length Guideline (Estimated Minimum) |
|----------------|-----------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
|                | Centrarchidae   | Spotted bass                 | <i>Micropterus punctulatus</i> | ~280 mm                              |
|                |                 | Largemouth bass              | <i>Micropterus salmoides</i>   | ~280 mm                              |
|                |                 | Smallmouth bass              | <i>Micropterus dolomieu</i>    | ~300 mm                              |
|                |                 | Black crappie                | <i>Pomoxis nigromaculatus</i>  | ~330 mm                              |
|                |                 | White crappie                | <i>Pomoxis annularis</i>       | ~330 mm                              |
|                | Ictaluridae     | Channel catfish              | <i>Ictalurus punctatus</i>     | ~300 mm                              |
|                |                 | Blue catfish                 | <i>Ictalurus furcatus</i>      | ~300 mm                              |
|                |                 | Flathead catfish             | <i>Pylodictis olivaris</i>     | ~300 mm                              |
|                | Percidae        | Sauger                       | <i>Sander canadensis</i>       | ~380 mm                              |
| Walleye        |                 | <i>Sander vitreus</i>        | ~380 mm                        |                                      |
| Yellow perch   |                 | <i>Perca flavescens</i>      | ~330 mm                        |                                      |
| Moronidae      | White bass      | <i>Morone chrysops</i>       | ~330 mm                        |                                      |
| Esocidae       | Northern pike   | <i>Esox lucius</i>           | ~430 mm                        |                                      |
|                | Chain pickerel  | <i>Esox niger</i>            | ~430 mm                        |                                      |
| Salmonidae     | Brown trout     | <i>Salmo trutta</i>          | ~300 mm                        |                                      |
|                | Cutthroat trout | <i>Oncorhynchus clarkii</i>  | ~300 mm                        |                                      |
|                | Rainbow trout   | <i>Oncorhynchus mykiss</i>   | ~300 mm                        |                                      |
|                | Brook trout     | <i>Salvelinus fontinalis</i> | ~330 mm                        |                                      |

## 9.2 MERCURY ANALYSIS AND HUMAN HEALTH FISH TISSUE BENCHMARKS

Fish tissue composite fillet and plug samples were analyzed for total mercury. The samples were prepared using EPA Method 1631B, Appendix A (EPA 2001a) and analyzed using EPA Method 1631E (EPA 2002), which utilizes approximately 1 g of fillet tissue for analysis. In screening-level studies of fish contamination, EPA guidance recommends monitoring for total mercury rather than methylmercury (an organic form of mercury) since most mercury in adult fish is in the toxic form of methylmercury, which will be captured during an analysis for total mercury. Applying the assumption that all mercury is present in fish tissue as methylmercury is also protective of human health. The human health fish tissue benchmark used to interpret mercury concentrations in fillet tissue is 0.3 milligrams (mg) of methylmercury per kilogram (kg) of tissue (wet weight), or 300 parts per billion (ppb), which is EPA's fish tissue-based CWA Section 304(a) water quality criterion recommendation for methylmercury (EPA 2001b). For more information on the human health fish tissue benchmarks, see Section 9.5. This

benchmark represents the concentration that, if exceeded, may adversely impact human health. Fish collection data were screened to exclude samples where non-target species were used or the average fish length was less than 190 mm. Application of this benchmark to the fish tissue fillet composite data from this study identifies the number and percentage of river miles in the sampled population containing fish with mercury tissue fillet composite concentrations that are above the mercury human health fish tissue benchmark. Results for the fish tissue fillet composite data are presented for the miles of 5<sup>th</sup> order and larger rivers that could be sampled, and for the percentage of miles containing fish with tissue fillet composite mercury concentrations that are above the benchmark. Results for the fish tissue plugs are presented for all rivers and streams in the NRSA target population. To examine within-year variability, analysts used the revisit sites to calculate a signal: noise estimate for the national mercury in fish tissue plug dataset. The result was a S:N value of 6.35. Mercury concentration data from fish tissue plugs are available to download from the NARS data webpage - <https://www.epa.gov/national-aquatic-resource-surveys/data-national-aquatic-resource-surveys>. Mercury concentration data from fish fillet composite samples are available to download from (<https://www.epa.gov/fish-tech/2013-2014-national-rivers-and-streams-assessment-fish-tissue-study>)

### 9.3 PCB ANALYSIS AND HUMAN HEALTH FISH TISSUE BENCHMARKS

A subset of 223 fish fillet composite samples collected at river sites were analyzed for PCBs. EPA Method 1668C (EPA 2010) was used to analyze homogenized fillet tissue samples from each fish composite sample. This method uses approximately 10 g of fillet tissue for analysis and provides results for the full suite of 209 PCB congeners. The total PCB concentration for each sample was determined by summing the results for any of the 209 congeners that were detected, using zero for any congeners that were not detected in the sample. Two EPA human health fish tissue benchmarks were applied to interpret total PCB concentrations in each fillet tissue composite sample: a benchmark of 18 ppb (wet weight) for cancer risk and a benchmark of 73 ppb (wet weight) for noncancer risks (*e.g.*, liver disease and reproductive impacts). For more information on the human health fish tissue benchmarks, see Section 9.5. Application of these benchmarks to the total PCB fillet tissue composite data identifies the number and percentage of river miles in the sampled population containing fish with total PCB concentrations that are above each PCB human health fish tissue benchmark. Results are presented for the miles of rivers, which are defined as 5<sup>th</sup> order or larger, that could be sampled and for the percentage of river miles containing fish with fillet PCB concentrations that are above each total PCB human health fish tissue benchmark. PCB concentration data from fish fillet composite samples are available to download from (<https://www.epa.gov/fish-tech/2013-2014-national-rivers-and-streams-assessment-fish-tissue-study>)

### 9.4 PFAS ANALYSIS AND HUMAN HEALTH FISH TISSUE BENCHMARK

Fillet tissue samples from 349 fish samples collected at river sites were analyzed for 13 per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), including perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS), which is the most commonly detected PFAS in fish. There are no standard EPA methods for PFAS analysis of tissue

samples, so the samples were analyzed by TestAmerica using a proprietary procedure developed by their laboratory in West Sacramento, CA. That procedure, which utilizes approximately 1 g of fillet tissue for analysis, uses high performance liquid chromatography with tandem mass spectrometry (HPLC-MS/MS) and applies the technique known as isotope dilution to determine the concentration of each of the 13 PFAS. A human health fish tissue benchmark of 68 ppb (wet weight) was applied to interpret PFOS concentrations in each fillet tissue composite sample. This benchmark was derived from the human health reference dose published in EPA's Health Effects Support Document for PFOS in 2016 (EPA 2016).<sup>3</sup> For more information on the human health fish tissue benchmarks, see Section 9.5. Application of this benchmark to the PFOS fillet tissue data identifies the number and percentage of river miles in the sampled population containing fish with fillet tissue PFOS concentrations that are above the PFOS human health fish tissue benchmark. Results are presented for the miles of rivers (defined as 5<sup>th</sup> order or larger) that could be sampled and for the percentage of river miles containing fish with fillet tissue PFOS concentrations that are above the PFOS human health fish tissue benchmark. PFAS concentration data from fish fillet tissue composite samples are available to download from (<https://www.epa.gov/fish-tech/2013-2014-national-rivers-and-streams-assessment-fish-tissue-study>). Summary statistics, including the number of detections for mercury, total PCBs, and each of the 13 PFAS are provided in **Table 9.2**.

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<sup>3</sup> While there were other PFAS chemicals detected in fish in this study, EPA does not have a reference dose to use in development of a human health fish tissue benchmark for those other PFAS chemicals. Additionally, even though EPA has a reference dose for PFOA, it was not commonly detected in fish in this study and therefore, EPA did not determine a benchmark for PFOA in fish tissue.

Table 9.2 NRSA 2013-14 Composite Fish Fillet Tissue Summary Data

| Chemical                             | Number of Detections | Detection Frequency (%) | MDLs (ppb)        | Measured Minimum Concentration (ppb) * | Weighted Median Concentration (ppb) * | Measured Maximum Concentration (ppb) * |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|--|---------------------------------------|--|
| Mercury                              | 353                  | 100                     | 0.060             | 8.60                                   | 180                                   | 1070.00                                |
| Total PCBs                           | 223                  | 100                     | 0.00006-0.00098** | 0.06                                   | 11.6                                  | 4616.59                                |
| Perfluorobutyric acid (PFBA)         | 29                   | 8                       | 0.100             | 0.11                                   | <MDL                                  | 48.1                                   |
| Perfluorobutanesulfonic acid (PFBS)  | 3                    | 1                       | 0.100             | 0.15                                   | <MDL                                  | 0.57                                   |
| Perfluoropentanoic acid (PFPeA)      | 11                   | 3                       | 0.069             | 0.36                                   | <MDL                                  | 0.88                                   |
| Perfluorohexanoic acid (PFHxA)       | 32                   | 9                       | 0.052             | 0.12                                   | <MDL                                  | 1.44                                   |
| Perfluorohexanesulfonic acid (PFHxS) | 32                   | 9                       | 0.066             | 0.12                                   | <MDL                                  | 0.98                                   |
| Perfluoroheptanoic acid (PFHpA)      | 1                    | <1                      | 0.060             | 0.66                                   | <MDL                                  | 0.66                                   |
| Perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA)        | 15                   | 4                       | 0.110             | 0.11                                   | <MDL                                  | 0.27                                   |
| Perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS)     | 346                  | 99                      | 0.077             | 0.16                                   | 6.33                                  | 283.00                                 |
| Perfluorooctanesulfonamide (PFOSA)   | 79                   | 23                      | 0.071             | 0.12                                   | <MDL                                  | 35.00                                  |
| Perfluorononanoic acid (PFNA)        | 135                  | 39                      | 0.043             | 0.10                                   | <MDL                                  | 1.91                                   |
| Perfluorodecanoic acid (PFDA)        | 293                  | 84                      | 0.073             | 0.12                                   | 0.519                                 | 18.00                                  |
| Perfluoroundecanoic acid (PFUnA)     | 308                  | 88                      | 0.074             | 0.13                                   | 0.495                                 | 53.90                                  |
| Perfluorododecanoic acid (PFDoA)     | 244                  | 70                      | 0.059             | 0.10                                   | 0.154                                 | 99.50                                  |

\*Detection frequencies and concentrations are for fish fillet tissue composite samples.

\*\*PCB MDLs presented as a range because there are 209 PCB congeners with associated MDLs.

## 9.5 CALCULATION OF HUMAN HEALTH FISH TISSUE BENCHMARKS

For the 2013-14 NRSA, EPA analyzed fish fillet composite samples<sup>4</sup> for three contaminants/classes of contaminants: methylmercury (measured as total mercury), polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), and 13 per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). For each contaminant, EPA utilized a different approach for benchmark development as described below.

**Methylmercury:** EPA developed a human health fish tissue-based ambient water quality criteria

<sup>4</sup> For the NRSA 2013-14 survey, a composite sample was formed by combining fillet tissue from up to five adult fish of the same species and similar size from the same site. Use of composite sampling for screening studies is a cost-effective way to estimate average contaminant concentrations while also ensuring that there is sufficient fish tissue to analyze for all contaminants of concern. However, average concentrations from composite samples may represent an over- or underestimation of a contaminant as compared to the actual concentration in a single fish sample.

recommendation for methylmercury in 2001 (EPA 2001b). For methylmercury, consistent with the 2008-2009 NRSA report, EPA used this recommended fish tissue-based criterion as the benchmark to evaluate mercury fish tissue results.<sup>5</sup>

**PCBs:** For PCBs, EPA has a recommended ambient water quality human health criterion that is expressed as a concentration in ambient water, not as a fish tissue concentration. EPA used the chronic reference dose (RfD) value,<sup>6</sup> cancer slope factor, and equations found in EPA's Guidance for Assessing Chemical Contaminant Data for Use in Fish Advisories (EPA 2000) to calculate fish tissue benchmarks for evaluating the fish tissue results in the 2013-14 NRSA report. EPA developed two human health fish tissue benchmarks for PCBs for the purpose of directly comparing to fish tissue results – one based on carcinogenic effects and one based on non-carcinogenic effects. Except for the revisions of equation inputs for body weight and fish consumption rate described later in this section, the approach to develop the benchmarks for PCBs was the same as EPA used in the 2008-09 NRSA.

**PFAS:** For the 2013-14 NRSA report, EPA tested fish tissue samples for 13 PFAS chemicals. EPA does not have the toxicity information available to develop human health fish tissue benchmarks for most of these PFAS chemicals. EPA has developed RfD values for PFOA and PFOS (EPA 2016b, EPA 2016c). In the summers of 2013 and 2014, PFOA was only detected in 4% of fish fillet composite samples; thus, the Agency did not develop human health fish tissue benchmarks for PFOA to evaluate results for this report. However, during the 2013-14 sampling period, PFOS was detected in 99% of fish fillet composite samples. Therefore, EPA utilized the Agency's RfD value for PFOS and the equations found in EPA's Guidance for Assessing Chemical Contaminant Data for Use in Fish Advisories to develop human health fish tissue benchmarks to evaluate PFOS results for this report. For the 2008-09 NRSA, which was published prior to development of the Agency's PFOS RfD, EPA used a human health fish tissue benchmark developed by the State of Minnesota.

In using the equations found in its Guidance for Assessing Chemical Contaminant Data for Use in Fish Advisories for developing human health fish tissue benchmarks for PCBs and PFOS, EPA revised two of the inputs for use in the 2013-14 NRSA report compared to the 2008-09 NRSA report. EPA made this change to ensure that the Agency's calculations most closely represent expected exposures and to increase consistency between guidance for the fish advisory program and the water quality standards program. Specifically, for both contaminants, EPA used updated body weights and fish consumption rates in the equations for calculating the benchmarks. EPA used the body weight found in EPA's 2011 Exposure Factors Handbook (EPA 2011) associated with the target population for which the RfD value or cancer slope factor was developed for each contaminant.<sup>7</sup>

EPA previously used the average adult weight of 70 kg as recommended in EPA's Guidance for Assessing Chemical Contaminant Data for Use in Fish Advisories. For the 2013-14 NRSA report, EPA used up-to-date body weights: 80 kg for the average adult for the PCB benchmark and 75 kg for pregnant/lactating women for the PFOS benchmark. EPA revised the default fish consumption rate in the equation to better

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<sup>5</sup> EPA notes that it analyzed the effect of changing equation inputs on the methylmercury benchmark and, even with updated fish consumption rates and use of 75 kg body weight, the benchmark value is unchanged when rounded to appropriate significant digits.

<sup>6</sup> Chronic reference dose values represent the amount of a substance that a human can ingest each day without an appreciable risk of negative health effects during a lifetime.

<sup>7</sup> For PCBs, the reference dose value and cancer slope factor were based on non-developmental effects (immune, dermal and ocular effects and cancer) so the target population is the general adult population. For PFOS, the reference dose value was based on developmental effects, so the target population is pregnant/lactating women.



reflect the national average fish consumption rate as opposed to a value based on the U.S. Health and Human Services Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2015-2020 (HHS 2015) which is a nutrition goal-based recommendation. Previously for the NRSA 2008-09 report, EPA calculated the fish tissue benchmarks for PCBs and PFOS based on the Dietary Guidelines of four, eight-ounce meals per month (29.8 grams/day). In this NRSA 2013-14 report, EPA used the national default fish consumption rate of 22 grams/day from EPA's Estimated Fish Consumption Rates for the U.S. Population and Selected Subpopulations (EPA 2014) that is used to calculate EPA's national ambient water quality human health criteria recommendations. This revision is a better reflection of actual exposures. The difference in outcome using the 2013-2014 versus 2008-2009 methodology is 40% versus 49% of river miles above the benchmark for the PCB cancer benchmark; 17% versus 21% of river miles above the benchmark for the PCB non-cancer benchmark; and 3% versus 8% of river miles above the benchmark for PFOS.

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## 10 ENTEROCOCCI INDICATOR

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The EPA has developed and validated a molecular testing method employing quantitative polymerase chain reaction (qPCR) as a rapid approach for the detection of enterococci in recreational water. NRSA used this method to estimate the presence and quantity of these fecal indicator bacteria in the nation's rivers and streams. The statistical threshold value of 1,280 calibrator cell equivalents (CCE)/100 mL from EPA's 2012 *Recreational Water Quality Criteria* document (RWQC) was then applied to the enterococci data to assess the recreational condition of rivers and streams.

### 10.1 FIELD COLLECTION

To collect enterococci samples, field crews took a water sample for the fecal indicator at the last transect after all other sampling was completed. Using a pre-sterilized 250 mL bottle, they collected the sample approximately 1 m off the bank at about 0.3 m (12 inches) below the water. Following collection, crews placed the sample in a cooler and kept it on ice prior to filtration of two 50 mL volumes. Samples were filtered and frozen on dry ice within 6 hours of collection. In addition to collecting the sample, crews looked for signs of disturbance throughout the reach that would contribute to the presence of fecal contamination to the waterbody.

### 10.2 LAB METHODS

The sample collections and the laboratory method followed EPA's *Enterococcus* qPCR Method 1609.1 (USEPA 2015; available on-line at <https://www.epa.gov/cwa-methods/other-clean-water-act-test-methods-microbiological>). As with EPA Draft Method A, used in the NRSA 2008-09 study, Method 1609.1 describes a quantitative polymerase chain reaction (qPCR) procedure for the detection of DNA from enterococci bacteria in ambient water matrices based on the amplification and detection of a specific region of the large subunit ribosomal RNA gene (*lsrRNA*, 23S rRNA) from these organisms. Both methods use an arithmetic formula (the comparative cycle threshold ( $C_T$ ) method; Applied Biosystems, 1997) to calculate the ratio of enterococcus *lsrRNA* gene target sequence copies (TSC) recovered in total DNA extracts from the water samples relative to those recovered from similarly prepared extracts of calibrator samples containing a consistent, pre-determined quantity of *Enterococcus* cells. Mean estimates of the absolute quantities of TSC recovered from the calibrator sample extracts were then used to determine the quantities of TSC in the water samples and then converted to CCE values as described in the section below. To normalize results for potential differences in DNA recovery, monitor signal inhibition or fluorescence quenching of the PCR analysis caused by a sample matrix component, or detect possible technical error,  $C_T$  measurements of sample processing control (SPC) and internal amplification control (IAC) target sequences were performed as described in Method 1609.1. The primary differences between EPA Draft Method A (subsequently published as EPA Method 1611, USEPA 2012a) and Method 1609.1 are that Method 1609.1 includes the IAC assay, an improved

polymerase reagent with greater resistance to inhibitory compounds and allows direct analyses of undiluted sample DNA extracts. Analyses of diverse river water samples have indicated no significant difference in the quantitative estimates obtained by the two methods (Sivaganesan *et al.* 2014).

## 10.3 APPLICATION OF THRESHOLDS

### 10.3.1 Calibration

Estimates of absolute TSC recoveries from the calibrator samples were determined from standard curves using EPA-developed plasmid DNA standards of known TSC concentrations as described in Method 1609.1. Estimates of TSC recovered from the test samples were determined by the comparative cycle threshold ( $C_T$ ) method, as also described in Method 1609.1. Before applying the EPA thresholds to the qPCR data, it was necessary to convert the TSC estimates to CCE values. The standardized approach developed for this conversion is to assume 15 TSC/CCE (USEPA 2015). This approach allows the CCE values to be directly compared to the EPA RWQC values (Haugland *et al.*, 2014). A slightly modified approach was employed in the NRSA 2008-09 study to obtain the same conversions of TSC to standardized CCE units.

### 10.3.2 Thresholds

For the data analysis of the enterococci measurements determined by Method 1609.1, EPA used thresholds as defined and outlined in the 2012 RWQC document (USEPA 2012b). The document contains the EPA's ambient water quality criteria recommendations for protecting human health in marine and freshwaters. Enterococci CCE/100 mL values were compared to the EPA statistical threshold value of 1280 CCE/100 mL<sup>8</sup> (USEPA 2012b). Enterococci concentration data are available to download from the NARS data webpage - <https://www.epa.gov/national-aquatic-resource-surveys/data-national-aquatic-resource-surveys>.

To examine within-year variability, analysts used the revisit sites to analyze signal to noise of enterococci concentrations and to analyze condition classes in a 2x2 contingency table. Condition classes were defined as “above threshold” and “at or below threshold” based on the EPA threshold value of 1,280 CCE/100 mL. The S:N ratio for concentration values was 0.36. However, results from the contingency table analysis show that 78% of sites had the same condition class during both visits (*i.e.*, 64.7% of the 184 revisits that were assessed were at or below threshold in both visits and 13.6% were above threshold in both visits) and 21.7% had mixed classes between visits.

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<sup>8</sup> Estimated Illness Rate (NGI): 32/1000 primary contact recreators. See USEPA 2012b for more information on additional NGI statistical threshold values for the qPCR method.

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## **11 MICROCYSTINS**

Microcystin is a potent liver toxin produced by various cyanobacteria (blue-green algae). Microcystins refers to the entire group of toxins, all of the different congeners, rather than just one congener. Cyanobacteria can produce one or many different congeners at any one time, including Microcystin-LR (used in the kit's calibration standards), Microcystin-LA, and Microcystin-RR. The different letters on the end signify the chemical structure (each one is slightly different) which makes each congener different.

### **11.1 FIELD METHODS**

Microcystin was collected as a grab water sample from Transect A (non-wadeable) or at the X-site (wadeable) in a flowing portion near the middle of the channel. Water was collected using a 3 L beaker and then transferred to a 500 mL bottle. The bottle was kept on ice and then stored frozen until analysis.

### **11.2 MICROCYSTIN ANALYSIS AND APPLICATION OF BENCHMARKS**

Microcystin was measured using an enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) procedure with an Abraxis' Microcystins-ADDA Test Kits. For freshwater samples, the procedure's reporting range is 0.15 µg/L to 5.0 µg/L, although, theoretically, the procedure can detect, but not quantify, microcystins concentrations as low as 0.10 µg/L. Microcystin concentrations were evaluated against the EPA recommended swimming advisory level of 8 µg/L (USEPA 2019). Microcystin concentration data are available to download from the NARS data webpage - <https://www.epa.gov/national-aquatic-resource-surveys/data-national-aquatic-resource-surveys>.

To examine within-year variability, analysts used the revisit sites to calculate a S:N ratio estimate for the national microcystin dataset. The result was a S:N value of 4.8. For this calculation, non-detect values were excluded due to the fact that no variance between repeat sites when both were non-detect may overestimate the S:N.

### **11.3 LITERATURE CITED**

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## 12 FROM ANALYSES TO RESULTS

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### 12.1 EXTENT AND RISK ESTIMATION AND ASSESSMENT

A major goal of the National Aquatic Resource Surveys is to assess the relative importance of stressors that impact aquatic biota on a national basis. EPA assesses the influence of stressors in three ways: relative extent, relative risk, and attributable risk. The following discussion describes the condition class assignments and calculations used in EPA's assessments. This discussion has been adapted from a journal article by Van Sickle and Paulsen (2008).

#### 12.1.1 Condition Classes

The NRSA database contains the field and laboratory data for all sampled sites, whether selected as potential reference sites (*i.e.*, hand-selected sites) or from the statistical design. For a number of indicators, least-disturbed sites (*i.e.*, reference sites described in **Chapter 4**) provided a benchmark against which all other sites were compared and classified within each region. The condition classes for each stressor and biological response were determined from data and observations from the least-disturbed sites in each ecoregion and the continuous gradient of observed values at all sites. For other indicators, for example microcystins, nationally established benchmarks were used.

The resulting three reference-based condition classes were defined as follows:

- Good: As good as the best 75 percent of the reference sites;
- Fair: Quality falling in between good and poor; and
- Poor: Worse than 95 percent of the reference sites.

The resulting two condition classes based on the nationally established benchmarks were defined as follows:

- Above Benchmark
- At or Below Benchmark.

The condition classes were then used to estimate the extent, relative extent, relative risk, and attributable risk as described in the following sections. Only sites that were included in the probability design and were evaluated as "Target\_Sampled" were used to calculate extent and risk estimates (*i.e.*, SITETYPE = "PROB" and EVALSTAT = "TARGET\_SAMPLED"). For sites that were visited twice during NRSA 2013-14 (*i.e.*, the ~10% of sites that were used to assess indicator S:N), only data from one site visit were included (*i.e.*, "Visit 1"; in the datafiles these sites are denoted as VISIT\_NO = "1"). Sites that were hand-selected during 2013-14 (denoted as SITETYPE = "HAND" and SITE\_ID in the format of "XXRF-XXXX") were not included in estimates.

When a nationally established thresholds was available for a given indicator (e.g., microcystins,

PFOA, fish tissue Mercury), the condition classification was set to either exceeding or not exceeding. These indicators did not use reference condition to set the given benchmarks.

### 12.1.2 Estimating the Extent for Each Condition

The estimated extent  $\hat{E}$  measures the prevalence of a particular condition  $k$  (good, fair, or poor). For each  $Y$ , either a stressor or biological response,  $\hat{E}$  provides an estimate of the miles of rivers and streams in that condition. For example,  $\hat{E}$  could be the estimated miles of rivers and streams rated as “poor” for phosphorus concentrations in the lower 48 states.

The extent is estimated in two steps for each condition. The first step classifies each statistically selected site into one of the three conditions for each  $Y$ . The second step estimates the miles using the estimated survey weights  $\hat{w}_i$  for each site  $i$ , classified into condition  $k$ . Applying weights to the data allows inferences to be made about all river and streams in the target population, not just the sites from which physical samples were collected. Each sampled site is assigned an estimated weight for the number of miles that it represents. For example, one site might represent 10,000 miles of rivers and streams in the entire target population, and thus, its sample weight would be  $\hat{w}_{Yki} = 10,000$ . The following equation shows the estimation of extent ( $\hat{E}_{Yk}$ ) for condition class  $k$  for each  $Y$ .

$$\hat{E}_{Yk} = \sum_i w_{Yki} \quad (12-1)$$

### 12.1.3 Relative Extent

For each particular  $Y$  (*i.e.*, stressor or biological response), *Relative Extent* ( $RE_X$ ) is the *proportion* of “poor” miles in the target population.  $RE_X$  can also be interpreted as the probability that a river or stream  $i$  chosen at random from the population will have poor conditions for  $Y_i$ . In statistical terms where  $k$ =poor, this probability can be written as:

$$RE_{Y_{Poor}} = \Pr(Y_i = Poor) \quad (12-2)$$

$RE$  is estimated as the ratio of the sums of the sampling weights for the probability selected sites  $i$  assessed as: (1) poor condition and (2) all sites regardless of condition. Where  $n_k$  is the number of sites in each condition,  $\widehat{RE}$  can be expressed in statistical terms as follows:

$$\widehat{RE}_{Y_{poor}} = \frac{\hat{E}_{Y_{poor}}}{\hat{E}_Y} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n_{poor}} \hat{w}_{Y_{poor}i}}{\sum_{i=1}^{n_{poor}} \hat{w}_{Y_{poor}i} + \sum_{i=1}^{n_{fair}} \hat{w}_{Y_{fair}i} + \sum_{i=1}^{n_{good}} \hat{w}_{Y_{good}i}} \quad (12-3)$$



### 12.1.4 Relative Risk

Relative risk (RR) measures the likelihood (that is, the “risk” or probability) of finding poor ( $P$ ) biological response  $B$  in a river or stream when the condition of a specific stressor  $S$  is also poor. For relative risk, the good and fair sites are combined into a single non-poor ( $NP$ ) category. RR’s likelihood is expressed relative to the likelihood of poor biological response condition  $B$  in rivers and streams that have non-poor stressor conditions  $S$ . That is,

$$RR = \frac{\Pr(B=P|S=P)}{\Pr(B=P|S=NP)} \quad (12-4)$$

To simplify the calculations, consider the notation in **Table 12.1**.

**Table 12.1 Simplified Notation**

|                             | Stressor ( $S$ )          |                          |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Biological Response ( $B$ ) | Not-Poor ( $NP$ )         | Poor ( $P$ )             |
| Not-Poor ( $NP$ )           | $Pr(B = NP   S = NP) = a$ | $Pr(B = NP   S = P) = b$ |
| Poor ( $P$ )                | $Pr(B = P   S = NP) = c$  | $Pr(B = P   S = P) = d$  |

Using the simplified notation, RR is estimated as follows:

$$\widehat{RR} = \frac{d}{\frac{b+d}{a+c}} \quad (12-5)$$

$RR = 1.0$  indicates “No association” between stressor and response, that is, poor biological condition in a river or stream is equally likely to occur whether or not the stressor condition is poor.  $RR < 1.0$  indicates that poor response condition is actually less likely to occur when the stressor is poor.

As a side note, using the simplified notation of **Table 12.1**,  $\widehat{RE}_{S_{poor}}$  from the previous section (Equation 12-3) can be more simply written as:

$$\widehat{RE}_{S_{poor}} = \frac{b+d}{a+b+c+d} \quad (12-6)$$

for a stressor  $S$  in poor condition.

### 12.1.5 Attributable Risk

Attributable risk ( $AR$ ) estimates the change in ecological conditions when a stressor or biological response is reduced or removed.  $AR$  is based on a scenario in which the stressor would be restored through restoration activities to Not-Poor condition. For simplicity in terminology, this discussion refers to the stressor as being “eliminated.”  $AR$  is then defined as the proportional decrease in the extent of poor biological response condition that would occur if the stressor were eliminated from rivers and streams.

Attributable risk is derived by combining relative extent and relative risk from the preceding sections into a single estimate of the expected improvement in biological conditions if a particular stressor is eliminated on a national or regional basis. Mathematically,  $AR$  is defined as:

$$AR = \frac{\Pr(Y=P) - \Pr(Y=P|S=NP)}{\Pr(Y=P)} \quad (12-7)$$

We first calculated  $RE_{Y,est}$  as shown in Equation 12-6 which is an estimate of  $\Pr(Y = P)$ . Then, using the notation in **Table 12.1**,

$$AR_{est} = \frac{\frac{RE_{Y,est} - c}{(a+c)}}{RE_{Y,est}} \quad (12-8)$$

Confidence intervals were calculated following the methodology described in Van Sickle and Paulsen (2008).

## 12.2 DIFFERENCE ANALYSES

One of the objectives of the NRSA is to track changes in the condition of rivers and streams over time. Previously, EPA and partners reported on the condition of all rivers and streams in the NRSA 2008-09 and on the condition of wadeable streams in the Wadeable Streams Assessment (WSA) 2004. The NRSA 2013-14 report presents the difference in percentage points of stream miles in “good,” “fair,” and “poor” condition between NRSA 2008-09 and NRSA 2013-14. Additional difference analyses were performed to determine the difference in the condition of the wadeable streams population between 2004 and 2013-14 (see the NRSA interactive data dashboard). This analysis does not represent a trend; until additional surveys are implemented, the NRSA can only analyze differences between two survey time periods.

### 12.2.1 Data Preparation

Due to improvements in the sample frame for 2013-14, survey weights were updated for 2008-09 in

order to make the population directly comparable to 2013-14. Analyses that were modified in NRSA 2013-14 (*i.e.*, physical habitat metrics, fish MMI) were applied to previous applicable datasets (WSA, NRSA 2008-09) in order for data to be directly comparable. Difference analysis was not conducted for mercury in fish plugs or microcystin since these indicators were not included in NRSA 2008-09.

### **12.2.2 Analysis**

Difference analysis was conducted through the use of the `spsurvey` 3.3 package in R (Kincaid and Olsen, 2016). Within the GRTS (Generalized Random Tessellation Stratified) survey design, difference analysis can be conducted on continuous or categorical variables. When using categorical variables, difference is estimated by the difference in category estimates from the two surveys. Category estimates were defined as the estimated proportion of values in each category (*i.e.*, good, fair, and poor categories). Difference between the two years was statistically significant when the resulting error bars around the difference estimate did not cross zero.

## **12.3 LITERATURE CITED**

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