Environmental Flow Analysis for the Marcellus Shale Region

Authors: Brian Buchanan, Ryan McManamay, Dan Auerbach, Daniel Fuka, M.T. Walter
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A technical report submitted to the Appalachian Landscape Conservation Cooperative in completion of grant# 2012-03

Final Report

August 2015

Prepared by
Brian Buchanan¹
Ryan McManamay²
Dan Auerbach¹
Daniel Fuka³
M.T. Walter¹

Correspondence to:
Dr. Jean Brennan
Appalachian Landscape Conservation Cooperative
698 Conservation Way, I-W230
Shepherdstown, WV 25443

E-mail: Jean Brennan, jean_brennan@fws.gov

¹Cornell University; ²Oakridge National Laboratory; ³Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Acknowledgments

Thanks to the Appalachian Landscape Cooperative for financial and logistical support, patience and encouragement, especially Pat Ruble, Jean Brennan and Paul Leonard. We are also grateful to Mark Cantrell of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Greg Pond of the U.S. EPA Region III, and especially Paul Seelbach of the USGS Great Lakes Science Center for their scientific and editorial support, as well as helpful discussions.

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Forward

Researchers have grappled for decades with how to characterize ecosystem responses to human activities in ways that are useful for conservationists and environmental planners. While lots of ideas have been proposed, most have either languished as untested concepts or have struggled for clear and reproducible strategies for implementation. What makes this work exemplary is the way it innovatively combined disparate empirical datasets of hydrology and ecology with hydrological modeling to generate actionable information about how aquatic ecosystems are likely to respond to water withdrawals from regional streams. I do not want to minimize or “gloss-over” the very real challenges that persist, many having to do with objectively determining spatial scales over which information can be aggregated. But this effort constitutes one of the few successful attempts to bridge theory-to-application in the context of environmental flows. Furthermore, this group of researchers have provided a clear roadmap that allows their approach to be replicated for other regions.

One enormous barrier has been the fact that the empirical data necessary to implement the proposed ideas are, for the most part, simply not available in the tidy formats envisioned by researchers. In the case of this project, which generally tried to follow the Ecological Limits of Flow Alteration (ELOHA) framework proposed by the highly-esteemed aquatic ecologist LeRoy Poff and his colleagues, the researchers looked for sites where both hydrological and ecological data were available. Such data were highly rarified.

In the face of this challenge, researchers have often proposed that simulation models could be used in lieu of field measurements and observations; indeed, this has been proposed by ELOHA researchers. Here the researchers, many of whom are accomplished hydrological modelers, have thoroughly tested and shown that this is not currently a viable approach, at least in the geographical context of the Marcellus Gas Shale region of the United States. The reasons they were not able to model their way out of this dilemma are likely due to both limitations of the models they used and the sparse and biased data available to run and test their models.

So what are the lessons learned? First, this research team has demonstrated that there are tremendous opportunities to utilize available, though disparate, environmental data to develop scientifically defensible management rules. Researchers usually develop monitoring strategies that are optimized to answer a specific research question; such data are generally not available for regional-scale, ecosystem issues that we must deal with today and in the future. Second, it is clear that simulation models can play important roles in developing conservation strategies, but they need to be used appropriately and cannot, currently, substitute for empirical observations. Third, this project has shown, not for the first time, that transdisciplinary teams are necessary to address complicated social-environmental problems. Indeed, future phases of this research will need to engage economists and social scientists to fully implement findings from this work. And resources focused on projects, like this one, which intend to fully translate scientific theories into actionable environmental strategies, are likely to provide on-going opportunities to extend
the usability of the information generated. I sincerely hope to see the framework and information developed here transferred into user-friendly tools that allow conservationists and environmental planners to utilize the insights from this project to make management decisions.

As a final note, I would like to acknowledge the amazing altruism that made this project possible. Few of the researchers received financial support from the funding organization to participate and lend their expertise. This suggests sincere willingness, maybe desire, for collaboration among environmental scientists as opposed to the too-often perceived competition among scientists. Also, and equally important, was the Appalachian LCC’s leadership to directly engage with this gifted group of researchers to evaluate and allow changes in the project direction as new information was revealed. This point cannot be overemphasized. In short, this project exemplifies an ideal collaboration among researchers and between a research team and its funding source.

This project constitutes a model for future similar projects in a myriad of ways.

M. Todd Walter
New York State Water Resources Institute, Director
Cornell University
Ithaca, NY
Executive Summary

Human alteration of natural flow regimes has long been identified as a leading threat to surface water resources and aquatic ecosystems in the United States (USEPA, 1998). The most conspicuous and commonly studied sources of alteration are typically dams and water withdrawals associated with agricultural operations and industrial consumptive uses. The advent of horizontal hydraulic fracturing has led to a proliferation of natural gas drilling in the Marcellus Shale regions of West Virginia and Pennsylvania, with expansion likely in the neighboring states of Ohio, New York, Virginia and Maryland. The development of a typical gas well requires substantial amounts of water - often obtained via surface water withdrawal from nearby streams. Given the current extent of gas development and the fact that growing energy needs will continue to drive further development, hydraulic fracturing may pose an additional, potentially critical threat to aquatic biota in the region. Despite the serious implications of continued gas development, little guidance currently exists for water resource managers who are tasked with balancing human and ecosystem water demands. This project aims to establish ecologically-defined guidance on allowable water withdrawals for hydraulic fracturing through the application of the Ecological Limits of Hydrologic Alteration (ELOHA) approach.

The project has been divided into two phases. Phase I reviews existing tools and approaches, as well as gathers and formats available and relevant data within the Marcellus Shale Region (MSR); Phase II applies the most appropriate tools to: i) build a hydrologic foundation, ii) estimate flow alteration, iii) develop flow-ecology relationships to provide guidance for establishing quantitative limits to water withdrawals associated with gas development and iv) conduct a pumping scenario analysis to assess the potential hydrologic effects of water withdrawals and to inform a water resource risk assessment in the MSR. This document summarizes progress made towards the completion of both phases.

Phase I

One of the first steps in applying ELOHA involves establishing a hydrologic foundation of daily streamflow data for every stream reach under baseline (natural) and current (altered) conditions for a single time period. We investigated the suitability of two means of constructing a hydrologic foundation: (i) process-based hydrologic models, which simulate the dominant hydrological processes within a watershed through physically-based equations and (ii) an empirical approach which uses statistical relationships between hydrologic metrics calculated at gaged basins and physical basin characteristics (e.g. slope, elevation) to predict natural hydrologic indices across all basins of interest. In this way, a hydrologic foundation is built such that all streams of interest within the MSR will have estimated flow indices under reference and non-reference conditions.
The Marcellus Shale Region is roughly 172,000 km², has well over 135,000 streams/subbasins (Horizon Version 1; USGS, 2014), and encompasses six physiographic provinces and 79 Ecoregion IV zones. We found that attempting to apply a physically-based model across such a large and hydrologically diverse area at time-steps and periods relevant to both hydraulic fracturing effects and the ecology of interest (e.g. daily time-step and greater than 15 yrs of simulated flow) would prove prohibitively challenging in terms of parameterization and computation requirements, as well as regionalization of calibration parameters. A careful review of existing hydrologic models, as well as consultation with other researchers who have attempted similar regional model applications confirmed that process-based hydrological models may not be the most appropriate means of establishing a hydrologic foundation for the MSR. However, the Soil and Water Assessment Tool (SWAT) model was identified as being suitable for performing case-study analyses, such as assessing the local and cumulative effects of water withdrawal for gas development using a gradient of pumping scenarios in select study catchments. As an alternative to hydrologic modeling, we proposed to develop and apply statistical models which first calculated hydrologic indices (HIs) at all reference and non-reference gages, then use statistical relationships between the HIs and characteristics of their respective basins to extrapolate relevant flow metrics to basins of interest – thereby establishing a suitable hydrologic foundation.

In addition to a review of modeling approaches, we compiled a list of georeferenced stream gage databases for the Marcellus Region. The stream gage database includes both baseline and altered gages which will be used to characterize flows, classify river types, quantify flow alteration, relate ecological responses to flow alteration, and evaluate the status of sites relative to environmental flow standards. Through coordination with representatives of various state and federal agencies and accessing of online databases, we also compiled a georeferenced stream biological database which will be useful for calculating relevant ecological metrics. All datasets are in standardized format and can be made publically available.

**Phase II**

Using the statistical modeling approach identified in Phase 1, along with relevant hydrologic and ecological data, the second phase applies the ELOHA framework to provide guidance for the establishment of quantitative limits to water withdrawals associated with gas development. In addition to detailing the major steps of our application of the ELOHA process, Phase II includes a pumping and risk analysis designed to ascertain the nature and degree of potential hydrologic impacts from gas-related water withdrawals, and predict which streams within the MSR may be at highest risk to flow alteration.

**Methods and Findings**

The environmental flow assessment for the Marcellus Shale Region involved seven major steps: i) building a hydrologic foundation, ii) estimating flow alteration, iii) selecting flow metrics, iv) calculating ecological metrics, v) stream classification, vi) developing flow-ecology
relationships, vii) performing a pumping scenario and preliminary risk analysis. These analyses and associated datasets should assist in the formulation of scientifically and ecologically sound management strategies within the MSR.

**Hydrologic Foundation**

One hundred and seventy-one hydrologic indices (HIs) were computed for 198 reference and 373 non-reference USGS gaging stations using mean daily discharge data and the USGS HIT program. Following the recommendations outlined in Phase I, we then applied random forest (RF) models to predict natural flow indices at all non-reference flow gages. The RF models performed well, providing reasonable estimates of the expected (natural) magnitude-, duration-, and rate-of-change-related flow metrics. Thus, a hydrologic foundation was built consisting of predicted natural and observed altered flow metrics at all 373 non-reference gages.

**Flow Alteration**

The percent flow alteration in each flow index was determined as the observed – expected / expected *100. Consequently, positive percent alterations represented an increase in a particular index, while negative alteration indicated a reduced value. We observed that most HIs experienced both negative and positive alteration, and that the degree and direction of the alteration was often influenced by catchment area. For instance, the observed reference and non-reference mean annual flows (MA1) diverged at both smaller and larger basin sizes (Figure ES-1). Anthropogenic influences tended to augment mean annual flows in basins less than ~500 km$^2$ and decrease MA1 otherwise.

**Flow Index Selection**

We used the pseudo-$R^2$ values of the RF models to assess model performance and as a criterion for the selection of flow metrics for further analysis. Using a $R^2$ threshold of 0.8 reduced the suite of potential metrics from 171 to 60. The remaining 60 HIs covered the major facets of the natural flow regime. However, other than flow constancy and predictability, flow timing-related HIs were not well predicted by the RF models. The remaining HIs were winnowed down to a more tractable set of 28 by considering both the metric’s sensitivity to modeled water extraction and its importance according to ecological theory. A subset of monthly flow metrics was retained to characterize spring, summer, fall and winter flows as ecological responses to hydrologic alterations are highly seasonal (DePhilip and Moberg, 2010, 2013).
Ecological Metrics
We focused on fish populations in the MSR as: i) they have been shown to respond more predictably to anthropogenic flow alteration than macroinvertebrates or vegetation (McManamay et al., 2013; Poff and Zimmerman, 2010), ii) data availability and spatial coverage was better in the MSR, iii) fish are a highly valued resource and therefore represent a more charismatic biological endpoint that facilitates meaningful communication with the public and iv) fish encompass a wide range of life history characteristics, which helps reveal long-term disturbances to aquatic ecosystems over broad spatial scales (Karr, 1981, Barbour et al., 1999).

Using 186,518 fish sampling record compiled from various state and federal agencies, we computed 18 different ecological metrics at 11,104 different sampling sites throughout the study region. Ecological metrics covered a range of fish community and assemblage information, including: species richness, composition, tolerance to disturbance, trophic structure, life history strategies and functional guilds. For each ecological metric we provided hypotheses that linked them to changes in flow based on documented and theorized ecological responses to altered flow regimes.

Stream Classification
Classifying streams into hydrologic types is a fundamental step in the ELOHA process as it is thought to reduce natural variation in fish communities, thereby rendering flow-ecology relationships more predictable and statistically significant. All gaged streams and rivers in the MSR were classified into similar hydro-types using a Bayesian mixed-model approach based on principal component scores. We then used the clustering results to predict stream types at all ungaged basins using random forest models. All streams were classified into one of four categories listed and described in Table ES-1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Hypothesized Sensitivity to Water Withdrawals</th>
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<tr>
<td>Stable High Baseflow</td>
<td>High Baseflow Index, Low Variability, High minimum &amp; low flows, low frequency of high flow events, low rise rates</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perennial Runoff 1</td>
<td>Similar to SHBF but lower baseflows, semi-stable</td>
<td>Low-Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perennial Runoff 2</td>
<td>Similar to PR1, but lower baseflows and higher runoff than PR1</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perennial Flashy</td>
<td>minimum &amp; baseflows, high frequency of high flows, high rise rate</td>
<td>High</td>
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Based on the hydrologic characteristic of each class we hypothesized the different degrees of sensitivity to flow alteration due to water withdrawals associated with hydraulic fracturing activities (Table ES-1). For example, given the high flow variability, propensity for intermittent
flows and low minimum and baseflows, perennial flashy streams were theorized to be the most sensitive to water extraction. Variable importance analysis of all explanatory variables in the RF models revealed that baseflow index, drainage area, average temperature, mean elevation and percent of basin with poorly drained soils were the most influential predictors of stream class.

RF prediction results were mapped to all NHD stream lines in the Marcellus Region (Figure ES-2). The majority of basins were categorized as “Perennial Runoff” which is consistent with McManamay et al. (2014).

**Flow-Ecology Relationships**
Flow-ecology relationships were constructed using multivariate quantile regression. Drainage area was introduced as an explanatory variable in order to control for the potentially confounding effects of stream size on F-E relationships. Significant F-E relationships (90th quantile regressions with a p-value < 0.05) covered a range of fish assemblage and structure metrics, as well as a variety of seasonal and annual flow statistics. The vast majority of statistically significant F-E relationships were associated with negative flow alteration and generally resulted in diminished ecological metrics. Figure ES-3 provides a representative F-E relationship, which illustrates how species richness changes with increasing alteration in median August flow (MA19). The grey lines represent 90th quantile regressions, which provide an indication of how the best possible biological status changes across varying degrees of flow alteration. The red lines represent ordinary least squares regression, indicating of how the mean of the response variable changes with increasing flow alteration.
Water withdrawals associated with hydraulic fracturing activities would result in diminished as opposed to augmented August flows. Figure ES-3 shows that as August flow is reduced (right-to-left from zero along the x-axis), species richness in the MSR declines substantially. More specifically, a 10% reduction in August flow equates to a loss of roughly 3 species at the 90th quantile.

We formatted all F-E points with different colors (Figure ES-4) and shapes (legend in Figure ES-2) to represent the different hydrotypes (classes) and physiographic provinces that the streams fell within. We then evaluated the F-E distributions for clustering of points to assess whether F-E relationships were stream-class-specific or differed significantly between physiographic provinces.

Examination of the F-E points across all ecological endpoints revealed little clustering on the basis of stream class or physiographic province, suggesting that F-E relationships derived in this study can be applied across the entire MSR. However, we should caution that many stream classes and provinces were not well represented in our F-E dataset. The lack of adequate sample size precludes definitive evaluations of class-specific F-E relationships and should be considered as a topic for future research.

We anticipated that reductions in low-flow indices would prove the most significant and consistent predictor of adverse changes in the fish community. However, we found that many average- and high-flow HIs were also significant at the 90th quantile. This suggests that flow standards focused exclusively on low-flows may not provide sufficient protection for riverine ecosystems in the MSR. We also observed that some ecological metrics, such as life history traits and trophic structure displayed inconsistent or insignificant linkages with changes in flow regime. This may indicate that these metrics are not the most responsive to flow alteration or, perhaps, that small sample sizes or error in the F-E computations lead to spurious results.

**Pumping and Risk Analysis**

We simulated the hydrologic effects of hydraulic fracturing withdrawals by constructing a suite of low/high local (one pumping site per reach) and cumulative (multiple pumping sites within a drainage basin) extraction scenarios. The pumping analysis was implemented by subtracting the pumping rates associated with each scenario from daily flow data from gaged reference basins in...
the MSR. We then determined hydrologic sensitivity indices (HSI) of the various HIs to pumping as the median percent difference between the natural baseline HI value and the values under the high local and cumulative pumping scenarios across all reference gages. This analysis helped to: i) quantify the relationship between drainage area and a stream’s sensitivity to water withdrawal, ii) establish which hydrologic indices and stream classes are most sensitive to withdrawals, and iii) inform a Marcellus-wide risk assessment.

**Drainage area – hydrologic sensitivity relationship**

Figure ES-5 illustrates how the sensitivity of median August flow is affected by consumptive water extraction under the various pumping scenarios. The percent change in August flow increases with increasing abstraction rates (i.e. low local to high cumulative pumping). A drainage area threshold is evident at approximately 1,000 km\(^2\) – after which pumping has minimal effects (<5% change in MA19). This threshold held across all magnitude-related HIs, providing support for limiting the application of ELOHA in the context of hydraulic fracturing on the basis of drainage area. It also confirms the intuitive notion that water extraction will have a disproportionate effect on smaller streams.

**Sensitivity of hydrologic indices to surface water pumping**

By comparing the relative sensitivities of the various HIs to water withdrawals we found that low flow HIs were the most sensitive to pumping – especially 1-, 3- and 7-day low flow durations and seasonal low flows occurring during the summer and fall. In contrast, high flow duration HIs, as well as high flows during the winter and spring months were least sensitive. These results have implications for future studies and stream gaging campaigns designed to assess and monitor the long-term impacts of consumptive water withdrawals.

**Sensitivity of stream classes to surface water pumping**

The sensitivity of the various stream classes was consistent with their respective hydrologic characteristics. For instance, perennial runoff stream types possessed high baseflows and low flow variability and were shown to be least sensitive to withdrawals. On the other hand, perennial flashy streams were characterized by lower, sometimes intermittent flows, lower baseflows and higher flashiness indices and were showed to be the most sensitive to water withdrawals. This implies that streams possessing flashier flow patterns should be considered for more conservative flow protection standards.
Risk Analysis
We predicted the sensitivity of a select group of HIs to withdrawals across all streams in the MSR using random forest models. In general, we found that smaller catchments with lower temperatures, flatter slopes, shallower seasonal water tables, fewer dams, higher percentages of poorly drained soils and higher percentages of pasture and crop landuses were associated with higher HSI values. HSI predictions were mapped to polyline shapefiles of all NHD streamlines in the MSR, revealing meaningful spatiotemporal patterns (Figure ES-6). For instance, the majority of streams that are sensitive to water extraction (red lines in Figure ES-6) during the summer season are lower order systems located primarily in two areas within the MSR: (i) a southwestern zone (Upper Ohio River, Muskingum and Southern Lake Erie basins) and (ii) in a northern band (Upper Susquehanna River Basin and tributaries of the Upper Hudson River Basin). Streams at lower risk (blue) are generally located in the central MSR (West Branch of the Susquehanna River and Allegheny River Basins) and along the eastern border (Potomac River and eastern portions of the Upper Ohio River Basins). Additionally, there is a marked seasonal difference in HSIs, wherein high-flow periods such as spring (Figure ES-6A) and winter are far less sensitive to withdrawals than summer (Figure ES-6B) or fall.

![Figure ES-6](image)

The results of this analysis provide insights into how hydrologic sensitivity to water withdrawals varies spatially and should help identify particularly sensitive streams for targeted management. Moreover, the mapped HSIs can be overlaid with species distribution maps and the locations of
existing and projected natural gas development to further prioritize streams threatened by hydraulic fracturing activities that coincide with species of concern.

**Management Implications**
A thorough understanding of the effects of surface water withdrawals for hydraulic fracturing activities on riverine ecosystems is a crucial step in making prudent management decisions. Applying the ELOHA framework to stream systems within the Marcellus Shale Region revealed a number of significant findings that may be useful for defining environmental flow standards in the context of water withdrawals, as well as for providing guidance to water resource managers and future studies. Salient management and flow policy implications are as follows:

- Our pumping analysis suggests environmental flow standards and monitoring campaigns concerning water withdrawals for hydraulic fracturing should focus on low-flow hydrologic indices during the summer and fall, as these are most sensitive to alteration. However, higher low-flow requirements will only protect fish communities if depletion of low-flows is the principle hydrologic stressor acting on aquatic biota. Our flow-ecology relationships indicate that biotic integrity of fish communities is adversely affected by changes in average- and high-flow metrics, indicating that low-flow provisions alone may be inadequate to protect riverine ecosystems.
- Managers and policy makers should consider a conservative, perhaps season-specific, approach for particularly sensitive streams (e.g. low-order streams < 1000 km², with low annual precipitation or flashy hydrologic characteristics) or for streams lacking adequate hydrologic or biological data.
- The hydrologic risk maps presented here offer a useful initial screening tool, allowing water resource planners to identify streams or areas for targeted management, more conservative flow standards or areas that require more detailed analysis and monitoring (e.g. on-site evaluation). Species-specific risks to flow alteration from hydraulic fracturing withdrawals can also be assessed by combining the hydrologic risk maps with species distribution models and projections of future water use in the MSR.
- Streams with high observed flow alteration or those deemed a high risk to flow regime change due to water withdrawals may be good candidates for remediation, while streams with minimal alteration represent sites that may benefit from protection to prevent negative impacts to stream biota. The F-E relationships presented here could be used as decision support tools to evaluate whether an observed or predicted level of water extraction will result in unacceptable biological effects and devise an appropriate response that protects or restores the stream’s hydrology and ecology.
- Overall, our study provides support for the seasonally variable flow recommendations outlined by DePhilip and Moberg (2010, 2013) as opposed to fixed minimum annual flow standards.
Ultimately, the results from this study were intended to provide a scientific foundation for the development or refinement of defensible flow standards in the MSR. Actual ecological limits to flow alteration were not quantified in this report. This is the last step in the ELOHA process, requiring that acceptable ecological conditions and environmental flow standards be defined through an adaptive process of stakeholder input, scientific analysis, monitoring and feedback. This may be best “pursued at a watershed jurisdictional scale, in accordance with state- and local-level priorities, needs, and regulatory mandates” (USACE, 2013).
Introduction

Context
Horizontal hydraulic fracturing has led to rapid expansion of natural gas drilling in the Marcellus Shale deposit in West Virginia and Pennsylvania, and is projected to expand into Ohio and New York. Horizontal drilling describes the process by which a vertical bore hole is drilled to the depth of a shale deposit, redirected laterally to a horizontal orientation and driven for thousands of meters into the shale bed. Subsequently, high volumes of water, sand and other chemical additives (e.g. surfactants, biocides, corrosion inhibitors) are pumped under high pressure into perforations in the well casing. This creates a network of small interconnected fractures which propagate large distances into the surrounding shale (Figure 1). Together, these processes greatly increase the pay zone and extraction rate of a well by enhancing both borehole-shale contact and the density of interconnected pore space. Without these unconventional technologies, extraction of natural gas from the Marcellus Shale would not be a commercially viable enterprise.

Figure 1. Conceptual diagram depicting the hydraulic fracturing process. Drilling rigs bore into shale formations and wells are lined with steel pipe. Well casings are then sealed with cement to limit groundwater contamination. Upon reaching the shale deposit, the bore-hole is directed horizontally, after which holes are blasted through the steel well casings. Water, chemicals and other additives are pumped into the well under high pressure, fracturing the shade-bed, thereby increasing the pay zone and extraction rate of wells by enhancing borehole-shale contact and the density of interconnected pore space. Associated activities include land clearing for well pads and supporting infrastructure (e.g. roads and pipelines), as well as the extraction and transportation of water from nearby freshwater bodies. Flowback water is stored in shallow holding
Environmental Flow Analysis for the Marcellus Shale Region

ponds until it can be transferred to treatment facilities or re-used in another hydraulic fracturing operation. These activities may impact nearby streams through surface and subsurface pathways. Adapted from Weltman-Fahs and Taylor (2013).

A typical hydraulic fracturing well requires between two and seven million gallons of water to fully develop and a single well pad often hosts as many as 20 wells (Rahm and Riha, 2012). Moreover, to maintain high yields, wells are frequently re-fractured several times over their life spans, which may last several decades (Entrekin et al., 2011). These large per-pad water requirements, in conjunction with burgeoning gas development across the region, suggests hydraulic fracturing activities may put substantial strain on already well-exploited regional water supplies (Rahm and Riha, 2012). Although the pool of streams and rivers that may be viable water sources is vast, only a small subsample of these will serve as practical withdrawal points for hydraulic fracturing activities due to logistical constraints primarily related to transport costs. Naturally, the natural gas industry will attempt to minimize these costs by preferentially locating withdrawal points proximal to their drilling pads. Additionally, well pad densities often vary greatly over the landscape due to the uneven spatial distribution of gas deposits, viable access points and available drilling leases. Altogether, this has the effect of concentrating water demands on an even smaller subset of surface water bodies, potentially compounding local water demands.

**Research Need**

The wide-spread, yet locally concentrated water consumption related to natural gas drilling, combined with existing concerns over climate change and future non-drilling water resource needs, have sparked concern among hydrologists and aquatic biologists regarding implications for freshwater ecosystems in the region. For example, the cumulative effects of rapid water extraction for multiple purposes may lead to altered flow regimes, changes in the diversity and composition of riverine ecosystems, reductions in the quality of critical habitat for freshwater biota and deleterious changes in important ecological processes (e.g. nutrient cycling). In addition to flow-related changes, hydraulic fracturing may impact aquatic biota by: i) reducing hydrologic connectivity leading to habitat fragmentation, ii) increasing sediment inputs which can adversely affect fish and macroinvertebrate communities and iii) degrading groundwater and surface water quality via contaminated flowback water (Entrekin et al., 2011; Rahm and Riha, 2012; Weltman-Fahs and Taylor, 2013). Importantly, these myriad effects do not operate in isolation, but may overlap in time and space, resulting in additive or synergistic effects.

Despite the serious ecological implications of continued gas development, little guidance currently exists for water resource managers who are tasked with balancing human and ecosystem water demands. Currently, regulations governing permitting procedures for water withdrawals related to hydraulic fracturing are developed and enforced by a confusing matrix of state and interstate agencies and river basin commissions. The lack of federal oversight, due to an exemption to the Safe Drinking Water Act written into the Energy Policy Act of 2005, has resulted in an incoherent, piecemeal regulatory framework where withdrawal limits (e.g. pass-by
flows) are based on hydrologic rules-of-thumb rather than credible, ecologically meaningful science. As Rahm and Rhia (2012) note, the lack of a coherent strategy for managing hydraulic fracking activities has contributed to a largely reactive rather than proactive regulatory approach— with environmental issues being detected and addressed after they have occurred.

**Task**

This project aims to provide guidance for water resource managers and environmental planners seeking to establish ecologically-defined limits on water withdrawals for hydraulic fracturing in the Marcellus Shale. To achieve this goal, we applied the Ecological Limits of Hydrologic Alteration (ELOHA) approach proposed by Poff et al. (2010). ELOHA provides a conceptual framework for quantifying environmental flows that “flexibly allows scientists, water resource managers and other stakeholders to analyze and synthesize available scientific information into coherent, ecologically based and socially acceptable goals and standards for management of environmental flows” (Poff et al., 2010). ELOHA is especially well suited for assessing environmental flow needs across larger regions such as the MSR, where time and resource constraints render river-by-river assessments unfeasible.

Thus, ELOHA seeks to establish credible, evidence-based flow limits that help sustain healthy aquatic ecosystems while recognizing the need to balance human water needs. Briefly, ELOHA is a systematic, five-step process that facilitates the analyzing and synthesizing of scientific information about streamflow and the flow-related needs of riverine ecosystems. The primary steps consist of (Figure 2):

**Scientific Process**

I. Building a hydrologic foundation by compiling all existing observed flow records for the region of interest (ROI). Using a combination of observed flow data and predictions from either statistical- or process-based hydrologic models, establish baseline (natural) and altered hydrologic characteristics for streams and rivers throughout the ROI.

II. Classify all basins into similar hydrologic types on the basis of their natural hydrologic characteristics. This serves to reduce natural biological variability, strengthening flow-ecology relationships.

III. Calculate flow alteration by computing the difference in natural vs. altered flows.

IV. Relate flow alteration to observed changes in meaningful ecological metrics for biological communities of concern. These so called “flow-ecology” relationships are generally developed for each individual hydro-type identified in step II.

**Social Process**

V. Use flow-ecology relationships to manage environmental flows through an informed social process.
This report outlines progress made towards the application of the scientific phase of the ELOHA framework. We comment on the implications for environmental flow standards, but stop short of specifying quantitative flow limits as this requires input and feedback from the social component of the ELOHA process, which is outside the scope of this project.

Objectives
To accomplish the task of applying ELOHA to the question of water resource impacts from shale gas development in the MSR, we divided the project into two phases.

Phase I
The goals of the first phase were to review existing tools and approaches, as well as gather and format available and relevant data within the Marcellus Shale Region. The specific objectives of Phase I were:

- Gather all relevant hydrologic data in the MSR and create georeferenced database of flow timeseries data.
- Identify the most appropriate biological community to use for ELOHA application in the MSR.
- Gather all relevant ecological data and format to a common, georeferenced database format.
Environmental Flow Analysis for the Marcellus Shale Region

- Determine whether a hydrologic foundation for the MSR is more appropriately established via process-based hydrologic models – or by applying statistical models.

**Phase II**
The second phase applies the most appropriate tools to: i) build a hydrologic foundation, ii) estimate flow alteration and iii) develop flow-ecology relationships which will provide guidance for establishing quantitative limits to water withdrawals associated with gas development.

Our specific objectives for this phase included:

- Selecting the most appropriate hydrologic indices to characterize alterations in flow regimes.
- Calculating the degree and direction of flow alteration at all basins of interest.
- Classifying all streams into similar hydrologic types according to their baseline hydrologic characteristics.
- Calculating a suite of meaningful ecological metrics to characterize fish communities in the MSR.
- Constructing flow-ecology relationships to quantify how flow alteration may be affecting aquatic ecosystems.
- Creating a series of consumptive water use scenarios to simulate the potential hydrologic effects of shale gas related water withdrawals across a range of development intensities. This analysis will also elucidate factors influencing a stream’s relative sensitivity to withdrawals.
- Results of the pumping analysis will be used to compute hydrologic sensitivity indices, which will inform Marcellus-wide risk assessment.
- Interpreting our results and translate to a clear set of management implications to support water resource decision making.

**Report Outline**
This report is divided into two primary sections corresponding to phases I and II. Phase I outlines the application of a process-based hydrologic model to a subset of stream basins in the MSR in order to test the feasibility of this approach. We also summarize the results of our consultation with other experts in the field of hydrologic modeling, as well as present the results of a literature review. Finally, we provide a set of recommendations, as well as describe our acquisition and formatting of pertinent ecohydrologic data.

The second section of the report details major steps involved in our application of ELOHA in the MSR. This section is formatted much like a standard scientific journal article with sub-sections including: methods, study area description, results and discussion, and conclusions. Appendices providing supplemental material are also included at the end of the report. References for both
report sections are compiled together and appear, along with Appendices, at the end of this report.
Phase I
One of the first steps in applying ELOHA involves establishing a hydrologic foundation of daily streamflow data for every stream reach under baseline (natural) and current (altered) conditions for a single time period. We investigated the suitability of two means of constructing a hydrologic foundation: (i) process-based hydrologic models, which simulate the dominant hydrological processes within a watershed through physically-based equations and (ii) an empirical approach which uses statistical relationships between hydrologic metrics calculated at gaged basins and physical basin characteristics (e.g. slope, elevation) to predict natural hydrologic indices across all basins of interest. In this way, a hydrologic foundation is built such that all streams in the Marcellus will have estimated flow indices under reference and non-reference conditions.

Evaluation of Process-Based Hydrologic Model Approach
Following the recommendations of the Marcellus Shale Milestone Report submitted to the AppLCC, we investigated the feasibility of applying the ABCD model to compute daily hydrographs for streams across the Marcellus Shale Region. We used a combination of approaches to corroborate our findings. For instance, we: i) contacted experts in the fields hydrologic modeling and environmental flows analysis, ii) performed preliminary hydrologic modeling with the ABCD and Soil and Water Assessment Tool (SWAT) and iii) performed a literature review.

Consultation with Modeling Experts
We contacted Austin Polebitski (U. of Wisconsin-Platteville) to obtain a newer version of the ABCD model that had been ported into the R programming environment. Dr. Polebitski informed us that their attempts to regionalize the ABCD model in the North Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative (NALCC) were largely unsuccessful. Additional consultation with Scott Steinschneider (UMass - Amherst) and Ben Letcher (USGS Silvio Conte Fish Center and UMass) corroborated Dr. Polebitski’s advice. Both Drs. Steinschneider and Letcher advised that trying to regionalize process-based hydrologic models across large geographic areas (i.e. the Marcellus) may prove prohibitively challenging at a daily time-step. They further advised us to consider a statistical approach to predicting hydrologic indices – emphasizing that data input requirements for a hydrologic model (e.g. existing sources of hydrologic alteration, such as dams and water withdrawals and climate data) would be extensive and that model uncertainty coupled with the challenges of model regionalization would likely result in inaccurate predictions and wide confidence bounds.

SWAT Modeling
In the interest of assuring due diligence regarding the questionable suitability of process-based hydrologic modeling across the Marcellus Region, we modeled a subset of reference and non-
reference basins in the Marcellus Region with the SWAT model. All model runs were calibrated using the DEoptim function in the R programming environment. We then quantified model performance by comparing observed and simulated flow and calculated Nash-Sutcliffe efficiencies (NSEs are similar to an $R^2$ - the closer to one, the better the model fit). We noted a very wide range of model performance with NSEs ranging from 0.14 to 0.92 over both the reference and non-reference catchments. In general, the reference gages were better simulated by SWAT. This is not surprising as it was very difficult to obtain all the data relevant to properly simulate altered flows. For example, many of the non-reference basins contained dams and it proved difficult to obtain the operations data for each dam. This is important as without the dam release data, SWAT could not properly account for dam effects, which can have a profound effect on flow regimes. This highlights one of the key limitations of the process-based hydrologic modeling approach - namely, that it would be exceedingly challenging to acquire quantitative data concerning all the relevant sources of anthropogenic alteration across the Marcellus Region (e.g. thousands of dams and ground- and surface-water withdrawals). Despite the lack of data concerning man-made alterations to natural flow regimes, SWAT did perform reasonably well in a number of catchments. This was due to the fact that SWAT was able to compensate for the lack of appropriate anthropogenic parameterization data through the calibration process. In other words, in many cases SWAT was able to arrive at the right answer, but for the wrong reasons.

Another key finding from the exploratory SWAT modeling was that the greatest uncertainty in model estimates were observed in the smaller catchments (refer to the large range of NSE values in basins smaller than 1000 km$^2$ in Figure 3). This is important because it indicates that the hydrologic model will perform most poorly in the basins that would be most sensitive to hydrologic alteration resulting from surface water pumping.
Unlike the ABCD model, SWAT is capable of simulating a complex system of water-related infrastructure such as inter-basin transfers, irrigation, surface and ground water withdrawal and dams. Despite, the mixed performance of the SWAT model, we determined that it would be suitable for performing case-study analyses, such as assessing the local and cumulative effects of water withdrawal for gas development using a gradient of pumping scenarios in select study catchments.

**Literature Review**

A review of relevant literature was performed in order to determine the current state of knowledge and guidance regarding methods of predicting baseline and altered hydrologic conditions across wide geographic areas. Below, we provide a brief summary of several particularly relevant articles. Additional supporting literature is provided in the annotated bibliography in Appendix G.

**Booker and Woods (2014)**

Booker and Woods (2014) compared a variety of available methods for estimating several hydrological indices and flow duration curves at ungaged catchments across New Zealand.
Specifically, they compared the following: i) a process-based spatially distributed hydrologic model (TopNet), ii) empirical regression models based on hydrologic theory, iii) empirically-based random forest models and iv) random forest corrected TopNet estimates. The purpose of this comparison was to assess which method best predicted several hydrological indices given current climatic and land cover conditions. Importantly, they found that empirically-based random forest models outperformed all other methods, including the process-based spatially distributed hydrologic model. This suggests that applying a statistical approach in the Marcellus Shale Region would prove more effective.

**Buchanan et al. (2013)**

The only peer-reviewed example of a process-based hydrologic model being applied across a large basin for the purposes of determining environmental flows following an ELOHA-style framework was that of Buchanan et al. (2013). In this study, the authors applied the Chesapeake Bay Program Hydrologic Simulation Program–FORTRAN (HSPF) model and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality Online Object Oriented Meta-Model (WOOOMM) routing module to the Potomac River Basin.

They found that the combined HSPF-WOOOMM model resulted in a wide range of Nash-Sutcliffe efficiencies (0.33 to 0.82), indicating a very wide range of model performance (i.e. very poor to good). The model performed most poorly in smaller urbanized basins or on or near karst geology. We should emphasize that this study likely represents a best case scenario in terms of data availability and parameterization. For instance, the study was conducted in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, which has been the subject of intensive study for many decades. Through the combined efforts of numerous non-profit organizations and state and federal agencies, an extensive database of information necessary for a well parameterized model has been amassed. Furthermore, the HSPF-WOOOMM model was expressively designed and calibrated for the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. Even under these relatively ideal conditions, the process-based model yielded results of questionable utility in many of the modeled catchments. This is in accordance with the result of our SWAT modeling – further suggesting that hydrologic modeling may be problematic at the scale of the Marcellus Region.

**Carlisle et al. (2010)**

Carlisle et al. (2010) used national- and regional-scale predictive models and models based on landscape classifications, including major river basins, ecoregions and hydrologic landscape regions (HLR) to estimate thirteen indices of the magnitude, frequency, duration, timing and rate of change of streamflow. They then compared model performance, measured with bias and precision metrics, to determine which method most accurately simulated the observed flow regime. They found that statistically-based random forest models provided substantially better estimates of hydrologic indices than the landscape stratification models. This provides further evidence that random forest models may provide the most accurate estimates of relevant hydrologic indices for the Marcellus Shale Region.
Kendy et al. (2012) offer a thorough overview of the recommended practices for conducting environmental flow analyses. They explicitly evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of the various methods of generating streamflow data necessary for constructing a hydrologic foundation, including: hydrologic simulation using process-based models, drainage area ratio methods, and regression modeling (Table 1). They point out that process-based models are not well-suited to large-scale regional applications (the intended geographic scope of ELOHA), due to their complexity. Moreover, when process models are applied at regional scales, computational challenges often limit spatial discretization to the scale of larger watersheds, which is too coarse for meaningful ELOHA results. However, a great strength of process models is the ability to simulate the hydrologic effects of future land use and climate change. Overall, Kendy et al. (2012) found that regression models were simpler to apply, faster, cheaper and more appropriate for regional scale ELOHA applications. Their primary limitations are: i) prediction inaccuracies at the extremes of the observed data (low and high flows in very small and large basins) and ii) predictions are generally limited to only certain set of flow indices as opposed to daily time series data from which hundreds of different indices could be calculated.

Table 1. Evaluation of the various means of establishing a hydrologic foundation for ELOHA applications, including examples, strengths and weaknesses of each approach. Methods are listed in order of complexity, expense and level of expertise required. Example applications are detailed in Kendy et al. (2012).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Limitations</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drainage-area ratio method</td>
<td>StateMod (Colorado), CT Basin flood flows</td>
<td>Low cost, easy to generate.</td>
<td>Limited accuracy if index gages do not represent the natural range of flow regimes. Dependent on gage availability. Current-condition only. Not a time series. Represents only one environmental flow component. Monthly time series only. Has not been tested outside Great Lakes basin. Difficult to simulate flows at hydrograph and basin-size extremes. Has not been applied outside eastern US. Relatively time-consuming (several years) to develop; requires two federal agencies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regression – generated monthly statistic</td>
<td>Median August flow (Michigan), mean September flow (Ohio)</td>
<td>Low cost, easy to generate, widely accepted.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regression with water accounting and flow routing</td>
<td>U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) AFINCH (No ELOHA case study)</td>
<td>High spatial resolution; linked to NHD+.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration-curve regression plus water accounting</td>
<td>USGS Sustainable Yield Estimator (SYE) (Massachusetts, Pennsylvania)</td>
<td>Relatively low cost, easy to generate. Daily time step.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration-curve regression plus dam operations model</td>
<td>USGS SYE plus US Army Corps of Engineers HEC-DSS (Connecticut River basin)</td>
<td>Same as above, with ability to model dam releases.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hydrologic process model plus water use accounting and channel routing

WOOOMM (Watershed Online Object Oriented Meta-Model) (Potomac River basin)

Can model land-use and climate change.

Resolution typically too coarse or area too small for regional application without modification.

**Recommendations for Future Work**

After conducting a preliminary feasibility analysis of the ABCD and SWAT models, performing a literature review, as well as consulting with other researchers who have attempted similar regional model applications, we determined that process-based hydrological models would not be the most appropriate means of establishing a hydrologic foundation for the Marcellus. We did, however, determine that SWAT may be useful for evaluating local and cumulative effects of surface water withdrawal, similar to those associated with hydro-fracking. This analysis could be conducted in a case-study format and would help to elucidate which hydrologic indices and stream classes within the Marcellus Region are most sensitive to hydrologic alteration. Another possibility is to construct a simpler water use accounting algorithm in a programming environment such as R. Water use scenarios covering a gradient of development intensities could be used to subtract water from daily flow data from gaged streams in the MSR. The main advantage of this approach is that the algorithm would be computationally efficient allowing for simulation of water withdrawal effects at all gaged basins.

As an alternative to hydrologic modeling for establishing a hydrologic foundation, we propose to develop and apply statistical models which first calculate hydrologic indices (HIs) at all reference and non-reference gages, then use statistical relationships between the HIs and characteristics of their respective basins to extrapolate relevant flow indices to all ungaged basins. We suggest using the powerful and recently developed technique of random forest regression to predict HIs based on topographic, geologic, land use and climate attributes of its respective basin. Random forests are a very robust statistical modeling technique that have been shown to explain complex variations in hydrologic patterns (e.g. timing, magnitude, frequency and duration of flows; Booker and Snelder, 2012; Snelder and Booker; Booker and Woods, 2014). The approach uses machine-learning through the synthesis of many regression trees into an ensemble prediction, resulting in more accurate/reliable regressions by drawing bootstrapped samples from the original “training” data and fitting a regression tree to each sample (Booker and Snelder, 2012).

**Acquisition of Relevant Hydrologic and Ecologic Data**

**Ecologic Data**

Ample research has demonstrated that most forms of aquatic biota are responsive to changes in the natural flow regime. Thus a variety of freshwater taxonomic groups may provide meaningful endpoints for establishing ecological limits to flow alteration. We chose to focus on fish as opposed to macroinvertebrates or aquatic/riparian vegetation because: i) they have been shown to
respond more predictably to anthropogenic flow alteration than macroinvertebrates or vegetation (McManamay et al., 2013; Poff and Zimmerman, 2010), ii) data availability and spatial coverage was better in the MSR, iii) fish are a highly valued resource and therefore represent a more charismatic biological endpoint which facilitates meaningful communication with the public and iv) fish encompass a wide range of life history characteristics (e.g. life-spans and mobility), which helps reveal long-term disturbances to aquatic ecosystems over broad spatial scales (Karr, 1981; Barbour et al., 1998).

Drawing on resources from multiple state and federal agencies, we created a database describing fish presence and abundance patterns in six states (i.e. MD, VA, WV, OH, PA and NY). We first obtained Multistate Aquatic Resource Information System (MARIS) fish data for NY, PA, WV, VA and MD. We then integrated fish survey data from the United States Geological Survey (USGS) (NAQWA) program, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) Mid-Atlantic EMAP program, and the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (OEPA). The database contained measures including the total number and species of fish observed at a particular sampling site, the location and sampling methodology, target standard, and, in some cases, the degree of sampling effort (recorded as either time or distance). The database was then clipped to the HUC-8 Marcellus boundary. The final database contained a total of 186,518 records at 11,104 unique fish sampling sites with over 220 unique species (Appendix A).

**Hydrologic Data**

We first defined a project boundary using all NHD HUC-8 subwatersheds that intersected the geologic boundary of the Marcellus Shale (n=661). This resulted in a hydrologically- as opposed to geologically-defined analysis extent that we deemed more appropriate for a water resource oriented study. Next, we downloaded daily discharge data associated with all USGS gages that were: i) located within the project boundary (n=571), and ii) contained greater than 15 years of largely continuous data to ensure flow regimes could be adequately characterized. A more detailed description of this step is presented in Phase II.
Environmental Flow Analysis for the Marcellus Shale Region

Phase II

Methods

Study Area
This study focused on the Marcellus Shale deposit, a geographically expansive US shale gas reservoir estimated to contain over 13 trillion m$^3$ of recoverable natural gas (Rozell and Reaven, 2012). Covering an area of over 170,000 km$^2$, the Marcellus Shale Region (MSR) underlies much of New York, Pennsylvania and West Virginia, as well as portions of Ohio, Virginia and Maryland (Figure 4). The recent development of horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing has facilitated rapid expansion of natural gas drilling in the Marcellus Shale. Intense activity in West Virginia and Pennsylvania is expected to continue, with expansion into Ohio (for increased extraction of the Utica Shale formation) and New York possible. On December 17$^{th}$, 2014 New York officially banned all high-volume hydraulic fracturing in shale formations, but conventional drilling practices are still allowed. This decision may reduce the future impacts of natural gas development on water resources in New York’s Southern Tier, but such a ban is subject to mercurial political forces, and we therefore included the MSR in New York in this analysis.

Figure 4. Overview of study area, Marcellus Shale Play (red polygon) and analysis extent (orange polygon).
The MSR encompasses substantial geologic, topographic and climatic variation, containing six physiographic provinces as well as 79 Level IV Ecoregions (USEPA, 2014). The resulting range of hydrologic conditions drives the formation of diverse stream habitats and aquatic communities. Stream classifications in the region have identified as many as 3 distinct types on the basis of natural hydrologic characteristics (McManamay et al., 2014b) and this abiotic variation supports considerable biodiversity. For example, field surveys summarized in this study suggest the MSR is home to more than 220 different fish species, including some threatened and locally endangered species (Appendix A).

The MSR’s ~135,000 streams (USGS, 2014) drain three major, economically and ecologically important watersheds: the Susquehanna, Ohio and Delaware River basins. High flow frequency and magnitude in the MSR is typically greatest in the spring and lowest in the summer and early fall. Due to relatively low evapotranspiration and intermittent snow melt, winter months are often characterized by moderately-high flow events. Dry periods, characterized by low and infrequent precipitation, can occur at any time during the year, but primarily result in diminished stream discharge during late summer. Although summer low-flows are important for maintaining adequate habitat volume, temperature and dissolved oxygen, natural flow regimes across all seasons are important for ensuring healthy aquatic communities in the MSR.

Even though the region generally has abundant precipitation relative to other areas of shale gas development (e.g. North Dakota), the additional water demand placed on lotic systems may prove deleterious to the MSR’s aquatic biota. Interestingly, the Energy Policy Act of 2005 rendered hydraulic fracturing activities exempt from the Safe Drinking Water Act, which limited federal regulation and oversight. This results in a complicated and largely inconsistent regulatory framework in the MSR with existing laws and regulations promulgated, monitored and enforced by a combination of state agencies and river basin commissions (e.g. Susquehanna River Basin Commission). The lack of a scientifically credible and coherent strategy for managing hydraulic fracking activities has contributed to the largely reactive rather than proactive regulatory approach – with environmental issues being detected and addressed after they have occurred (Rahm and Riha, 2012).

**ELOHA Application**

**Build a hydrologic foundation**

Our first step was to define an appropriate spatial extent within which to conduct our analyses. Given the goal of assessing water resource impacts, we delineated the analysis boundary as the intersection of the geographic Marcellus Shale Region with NHD HUC-8 catchment boundaries (USGS, 2014). The final extent included 661 NHD HUC-8 units either within or touching the Marcellus boundary (Figure 4). We then clipped NHD Version 1 streamlines and catchments, as well as all USGS streamflow gages and fish sampling sites to this boundary.
Streamflow gages were divided into reference and non-reference categories as per McManamay et al. (2014), designating a low or high degree of upstream anthropogenic disturbance (e.g., dams, diversions and native vegetation conversion). A total of 198 reference and 373 non-reference USGS gaging stations were available for analysis after removing stations with large continuous blocks of missing data and periods of record < 15 yrs (a period of record that adequately captures flow variability for hydrologic classification (Kennard et al., 2010).

After downloading mean daily flow records for each gage from the USGS National Water Information System, we used the Hydrologic Index Tool (HIT) program (Henriksen et al., 2006) to calculate 171 hydrologic indices for each discharge record. Hydrologic or “flow” indices measure various components of a hydrograph, often distinguished as the magnitude, timing, frequency, duration, and rate of change in the discharge time series (Gao et al., 2009; Olden and Poff, 2003). For each of the 571 focal gages, we merged the 171 HIT indices with 46 different basin attributes describing topographic, geologic, land use, climate and anthropogenic development variables from the GAGES II database (Table 2). In order to permit analyses at ungauged catchments (i.e., those where GAGES II data were not available), we also compiled comparable natural and anthropogenic watershed characteristics from the following sources: NHD Version 1, National Fish Habitat Partnership and data compiled by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) (Table 2). All basin attribute data represented accumulated attributes from the entire upstream contributing area, as opposed to only local characteristics (i.e. within the drainage area below the preceding stream junction).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basin Attribute Code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Data Source for Ungaged Basins</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COMID</td>
<td>HUC ID of Basin</td>
<td>NHD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRID_CODE</td>
<td>ArchHydro Grid Code of Basin</td>
<td>NHD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROD_UNIT</td>
<td>HUC Production Unit</td>
<td>NHD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRAIN_SQKM</td>
<td>Drainage Area (sq km)</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LONG_CENT</td>
<td>Longitude of Basin Centroid</td>
<td>NHD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAT_CENT</td>
<td>Latitude of Basin Centroid</td>
<td>NHD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AWCAVE</td>
<td>Average Available Water Content</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BDAVE</td>
<td>Average Bulk Density</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BFI_AVE</td>
<td>Average Baseflow Index</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLAYAVE</td>
<td>Average Clay Content</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONTACT</td>
<td>Average Contact Time</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELEV_MEAN_M_BASIN</td>
<td>Mean Elevation of Basin</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HGA</td>
<td>Percentage of Hydrologic Group A</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HGB</td>
<td>Percentage of Hydrologic Group B</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HGC</td>
<td>Percentage of Hydrologic Group C</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HGD</td>
<td>Percentage of Hydrologic Group D</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STOR_NID_2009</td>
<td>Dam Storage - National Inventory of Dams 2009</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO10AVE</td>
<td>Average percent by weight of soil &lt; 3&quot; in size and passing a No. 10 sieve</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO4AVE</td>
<td>Average percent by weight of soil &lt; 3&quot; in size and passing a No. 4 sieve</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO200AVE</td>
<td>Average percent by weight of soil &lt; 3&quot; in size and passing a No. 200 sieve</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OMAVE</td>
<td>Average Percent Organic Matter</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERMAVE</td>
<td>Average Permeability</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROCKDEPAVE</td>
<td>Average Depth to Rock</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SANDAVE</td>
<td>Average Percent Sand</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SILTAVE</td>
<td>Average Percent Silt</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLOPE_PCT</td>
<td>Average Percent Slope</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STREAMS_KM_SQ_KM</td>
<td>Stream Density</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WATERNLCD06</td>
<td>Percent Land Cover as Water</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEVOPENNLCD06</td>
<td>Percent Land Cover as Developed Open Land</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEVLOWNLCD06</td>
<td>Percent Land Cover as Developed - Low Density</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEVMEDNLCD06</td>
<td>Percent Land Cover as Developed - Med Density</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEVHINNLCD06</td>
<td>Percent Land Cover as Developed - High Density</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BARRLENLCD06</td>
<td>Percent Land Cover as Barren</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DECIDNLC06</td>
<td>Percent Land Cover as Deciduous Forest</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVERGRNLC06</td>
<td>Percent Land Cover as Evergreen Forest</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIXEDFORNLCD06</td>
<td>Percent Land Cover as Mixed Forest</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHRUBNLCD06</td>
<td>Percent Land Cover as Shrub</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRASSNLCD06</td>
<td>Percent Land Cover as Grass</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASTURENLCD06</td>
<td>Percent Land Cover as Pasture</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CROPSNLCD06</td>
<td>Percent Land Cover as Crop</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WOODYWETNLCD06</td>
<td>Percent Land Cover as Woody Wetland</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMERGWETNLCD06</td>
<td>Percent Land Cover as Emergent Wetland</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTDEPAVE</td>
<td>Average depth to seasonally high water table</td>
<td>TNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDEN_2000_BLOCK</td>
<td>Population Density</td>
<td>NFHAP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROADS_KM_SQ_KM</td>
<td>Road Density</td>
<td>NFHAP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDAMS_2009</td>
<td>Number of Dams</td>
<td>NFHAP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HYDRO_DISTURB_INDEX</td>
<td>Hydrologic Disturbance Index</td>
<td>NFHAP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPTAVG_BASIN</td>
<td>Average Precipitation in Basin</td>
<td>NHD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T_AVG_BASIN</td>
<td>Average Temperature in Basin</td>
<td>NHD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Calculating the Degree of Flow Alteration

In order to compute the degree of flow alteration, we constructed 171 random forest (RF) models that related each of the flow indices to the 46 basin attributes at all reference gages. From this training set, we could then predict the natural or “expected” flow indices at all 373 non-reference gages. The difference between the observed, potentially altered, index value and the predicted natural index value yielded a measure of flow alteration as:

$$ FA_{i,g} = 100 \times \left( \frac{Q_{Obs\ metric}_{i,g} - Q_{Expected\ metric}_{i,g}}{Q_{Expected\ metric}_{i,g}} \right) $$

where $i$ indexes the 171 indices, and $g$ indexes the 373 gages. Negative flow alteration therefore indicated a reduced value in a particular index (e.g. a smaller annual peak than predicted for that gage), whereas positive alteration represented an increase.

Briefly, a random forest is a machine learning method developed from partitioning trees (i.e., classification and regression trees, CART). A single “tree” consists of the hierarchical sequences of best-supported divisions in a response variable according to values of potentially many predictor variables. For instance, the distribution of mean annual flow for a sample of gages might be most strongly related to the mean annual basin precipitation among a pool of variables; some amount of precipitation then produces the best split among the gages according to a criterion such as minimizing the variance across subsidiary groups. Each of these “child” nodes is then further divided up to a pre-defined stopping rule (hence, “recursive partitioning”). A “forest” consists of a large number of such decision trees constructed using randomly chosen subsets of predictor variables and bootstrapped subsets of available observations. This provides an ensemble prediction that can overcome possible weaknesses in any single tree, and that can be validated via the “out-of-bag” (OOB) error rate calculated from mis-prediction of the observations withheld from the forest training set. The OOB validation procedure also helps to estimate the relative predictive power of each of the explanatory variables (i.e., “variable importance”). We chose to implement random forest models using “cForest” in the “Party” package (CITE) in the R programming environment. Conditional inference RF is suited to non-linear relationships, and correlated predictor variables of mixed types (i.e. continuous vs. categorical), and it provides a robust means to avoid the over-fitting to which standard RF is prone (by using permutation tests to define traditional statistical significance as a stopping rule). All HIT indices and explanatory variables were log(x+1) transformed.

We chose to focus our evaluation on watersheds smaller than 2,500 km$^2$. The training dataset of reference gages did not include an adequate sample of locations with larger drainage areas (Figure 5). Exceeding the support of the observed data undermines valid inference, and a preliminary evaluation of RF model performance across all drainage areas indicated 2,500 km$^2$ as a conservative threshold to ensure informative partitioning. This drainage area threshold corresponds to headwaters, creeks, small rivers and medium tributary river categories of the Northeast Aquatic Habitat Classification System (NEAHCS; Table 3). We assumed these
categories were also the most vulnerable to adverse ecohydrologic impacts of surface water pumping associated with gas development. Indeed, our pumping analysis (outlined below) revealed that realistic surface water pumping is not likely to have a substantial impact on catchments larger than roughly 1,000 km$^2$ (see Figures 31 and 32).

![Figure 5. Cumulative drainage areas for reference and non-reference gages.](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size Category</th>
<th>Headwaters</th>
<th>Creek</th>
<th>Small River</th>
<th>Medium Tributary River</th>
<th>Medium Mainstem River</th>
<th>Large River</th>
<th>Great River</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drainage Area (km$^2$)</td>
<td>&lt; 10 99 100 517 2,589 2,590 9,999 10,000 24,999 25,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Selecting Flow Indices**

Selection of appropriate, ecologically relevant hydrologic indices is a key step in the ELHOA process. Hydrologic indices are sometimes determined *a priori* based on established or hypothesized flow-ecology relationships, but we felt it necessary to take an exploratory, data-driven approach given the largely unstudied nature of possible gas development impacts. Desirable hydrologic indices have ecological significance (i.e., a measurable influence on
organismal success), and are accurately predicted across the landscape of interest in ELOHA. Thus, we began by determining which of the 171 hydrologic indices were accurately predicted, retaining only those that achieved an OOB $R^2$ value $\geq 0.8$ in RF models. This threshold ensured acceptable accuracy while allowing us to capture major facets of the hydrologic regime (i.e. magnitude, timing and duration and rate of change). We further reduced the set of accurately predicted indices, by focusing on those that were commonly used and easily understood, as well as those that minimized redundancy and those that were sensitive to surface water withdrawals. An additional consideration was whether the index was consistent with hypothesized flow-ecology relationships from two comprehensive environmental flow reports for two major basins within the MSR (i.e. the upper Susquehanna and Ohio River basins; DePhilip and Moberg, 2010 and 2013).

Calculating Ecological Metrics

We computed a total of 19 different ecological metrics from the MARIS database created in Phase I. Metrics covered a range of fish community and assemblage information, including: species richness, composition (total and relative abundance), tolerance to disturbance, trophic structure, and life history strategies (Table 4). We also provided flow-ecology hypotheses specific to each ecological metric based on documented and theorized ecological responses to altered flow regimes in the context of water withdrawals (i.e. reduced flows). The MARIS database contained roughly 64,000 records designated with a target standard of “Target”, meaning that field crews were targeting specific fish species and ignored all others caught. All such target records were removed for non-species-specific analyses. Importantly, different MARIS sites and NHD reaches may have had different levels of sampling effort (i.e. sampled a different number of times). To control for differing degrees of sampling effort, all metrics were normalized to the number of times a particular MARIS site was sampled and the number of MARIS sites in a given NHD reach (i.e. some reaches were associated with multiple MARIS sites).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ecologic Metric</th>
<th>Units &amp; Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Species Richness Metrics</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Species Richness</td>
<td># species within reach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fish Abundance Metrics</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Abundance</td>
<td>Catch per unit effort time (CPUE-T; hrs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tolerance Metrics</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Tolerant Species (USEPA)</td>
<td>Proportional abundance of non-sensitive species</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Intolerant Species (USEPA)</td>
<td>Proportional abundance of sensitive species</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator Guild/Species Metrics</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abundance of Cold Headwater Species</td>
<td>Proportional abundance (CPUE-T; hrs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abundance of Nest Builders</td>
<td>Proportional abundance (CPUE-T; hrs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abundance of Riffle Obligates</td>
<td>Proportional abundance (CPUE-T; hrs)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abundance of Riffle Associates  Proportional abundance (CPUE-T; hrs)
Abundance of Brook Trout  Proportional abundance (CPUE-T; hrs)
Abundance of Smallmouth Bass  Proportional abundance (CPUE-T; hrs)
Abundance of Northern Hog Sucker  Proportional abundance (CPUE-T; hrs)
Abundance of Central Stoneroller  Proportional abundance (CPUE-T; hrs)

**Trophic Composition Metrics**

- Percent Generalist (USEPA)  % of species with generalist feeding traits
- Percent Invertivore (USEPA)  % of species with invertivorous feeding traits
- Percent Herbivore (USEPA)  % of species with herbivorous feeding traits
- Percent Piscivore (USEPA)  % of species with piscivorous feeding traits

**Life History Metrics**

- Percent Periodic Species  % of species with periodic strategy
- Percent Opportunistic Species  % of species with opportunistic strategy
- Percent Equilibrium Species  % of species with equilibrium strategy

---

**Species Richness and Total Abundance**

Species richness provides a measure of the overall fish diversity of a particular stream reach, but ignores the abundance of each individual species. Total abundance, on the other hand, estimates the total number of individuals observed in a study reach without regard to species composition. Generally speaking, higher species richness and abundance scores are indicative of healthier stream ecosystems, although they can be strongly influenced by stream size. Species richness and total abundance were calculated as the total number of species and total number of individuals observed per NHD reach, respectively. We used raw measures of abundance, which were standardized to the number of fish caught per unit effort (hours).

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**Flow-Ecology Hypotheses**

- Both species richness and total abundance will decrease with increasing negative flow alteration (Bunn and Arthington, 2002; DePhilip and Moberg, 2010, 2013; Poff and Zimmerman, 2010)

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**Tolerance Metrics**

Tolerant species are typically comprised of fish well-adapted to a range of perturbed habitat conditions and are particularly tolerant of impaired water quality. Intolerant species, on the other hand, typically exhibit strong, predictable negative responses (e.g. reduced abundance) to anthropogenic perturbation and are often the first species to disappear following disturbance (Barbour et al., 1998; DePhilip and Moberg, 2013). Reductions in flow due to water abstraction for gas development will likely favor tolerant vs. intolerant species due to a combination of temperature and water quality stress due to less water available for dilution and the maintenance of thermal refugia. Tolerance values were assigned following Barbour et al. (1998).
Trophic Composition Metrics

Trophic composition metrics provide a measure of the “quality of the energy base and trophic dynamics of the fish assemblage” (Barbour et al., 1998). Published literature has documented shifts in trophic diversity and composition related to flow regime alteration (Horwitz, 1978; Gleason, 2007). Typically, more stable regimes are characterized by trophic and habitat specialists, whereas more hydrological variable or extreme sites possess more trophic generalist species (Hoeinghaus et al., 2007; Poff and Allan, 1995).

Fish were assigned to one of four trophic guilds based on their predominant feeding ecology as outlined by Barbour et al. (1998). Trophic guilds included: piscivores, invertivores, generalists and herbivores (Table 5). Note: the invertivore guild includes insectivores, while trophic generalists included omnivores. All trophic composition metrics were estimated as a proportional abundance.

Table 5. Description of trophic guilds.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trophic Guild</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Piscivores</td>
<td>opportunistic top predators consuming predominantly other fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invertivores</td>
<td>mostly consume immature and adult insects, as well as array of other invertebrates, including, mollusks and crustaceans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalists</td>
<td>quite adaptable and can consume both plant and animal matter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbivores</td>
<td>primarily of plant matter such as periphyton</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Barbour et al. (1998), the relative abundance of top-predators helps distinguish between moderate and high integrity aquatic ecosystems. Based on F-E hypotheses proposed by DePhilip and Moberg (2010, 2013; Appendix B), we posited that decreases in flow magnitudes during summer low-flow periods would result in a loss of refugia and a shift in trophic composition towards top-predator dominated systems.

Invertivores, principally insectivores, are likely the dominant trophic guild in most lentic systems in the MSR (Barbour et al., 1998) and are generally associated with high quality stream systems. Conversely, generalists are more often found in streams with degraded physical and chemical
Environmental Flow Analysis for the Marcellus Shale Region

habitat (Barbour et al., 1998; Gleason, 2007). Empirical data directly relating herbivorous trophic strategies to stream habitat quality are rare. Generally however, altered habitat conditions can precipitate a shift in the energy base of lentic ecosystems towards autotrophic processes – especially in headwaters (Karr et al., 1981). This may favor recruitment of herbivorous species and a decline in invertivory and piscivory. However, some forms of flow alteration may negatively affect aquatic vegetation (e.g. augmented high flows increase scour or sedimentation), which may lead to deterioration of herbivore populations.

Overall, we anticipated that reductions in habitat quality and availability due to changes in flow regime would result in declines in invertivore prey abundance (e.g. loss of macroinvertebrates), as well as potentially negative effects to aquatic vegetation. Thus, increasing flow alteration will result in a shift from trophic specialists (i.e. invertivores and herbivores) to trophic generalist fish species as generalists are better adapted to exploit a less diverse, often more variable food base (Gleason, 2007).

**Flow-Ecology Hypotheses**

- **Piscivores:**
  - Relative abundance will increase with reduced summer flows due to loss of refugia and increased predator-prey interactions (DePhilip and Moberg, 2010, 2013).

- **Invertivores & Herbivores:**
  - Relative abundance of these trophic specialists will decline with increasing flow alteration due to loss of food base (Knight et al., 2013).

- **Generalists:**
  - Relative abundance will increase with increasing flow alteration as they are better adapted to habitat disturbance (Freeman and Marcinek, 2006; Poff and Allan, 1995).

**Life History Strategies**

A number of studies have concluded that freshwater fish can be grouped, according to their life history traits, into three main strategies “that represent the endpoints of a triangular continuum arising from essential trade-offs among the basic demographic parameters of survival, fecundity, and onset and duration of reproduction” (Figure 5; Olden and Kennard, 2010).
Figure 6. Triangular life history model depicting environmental gradients selecting for endpoint strategies defined by optimization of demographic parameters generation time, age-specific survivorship, or age-specific fecundity (from Winemiller, 1995).

Table 6 provides additional description of the characteristic biological and environmental habitat attributes associated with the equilibrium, opportunistic and periodic strategies outlined in Figure 6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Body Size</th>
<th>Maturation Age</th>
<th>Fecundity per Spawning Event</th>
<th>Juvenile Survivorship</th>
<th>Habitat Preference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opportunistic</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Early</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>frequent and intense disturbances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equilibrium</td>
<td>Small-Medium</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>low variation in habitat quality and strong biotic interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Periodic</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Late</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>inhabit seasonal, periodically suitable environments with large-space spatial (patchiness) and temporal heterogeneity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to note that the three life history strategies represent a continuum rather than a discreet set of mutually exclusive attributes. Consequently, the life histories of most fish species fall into intermediate positions within the life history space outlined in Figure 6 (Olden & Kennard, 2010, Mims and Olden, 2012). Recognizing this fact, we calculated the proportional abundance of each strategy using weights rather than binary assignments to each strategy. This involved calculating the Euclidian distance in the trivariate life history space for each species, normalizing to a 0-1 scale, and then estimating the strategy weight as the inverse of these values.
Subsequently, strategy weights were multiplied by the relative abundance of each species at each site and then, summed and averaged over the entire reach.

Ecological theory predicts that periodic life history strategists will be favored in streams with seasonal, yet predictable flow regimes that create periodically suitable environments (Winemiller, 2005). Such streams usually possess large spatial and temporal heterogeneity (i.e. patchiness and seasonality, respectively). Opportunistic fish species, on the other hand, are typically well-suited to stream environments characterized by frequent and intense disturbances. Equilibrium strategists are typically found in streams with stable, predictable flow regimes with low variation in habitat quality and strong biotic interactions. Accordingly, we formulated the following flow-ecology hypotheses:

**Flow-Ecology Hypotheses** (McManamay and Frimpong, 2015; Winemiller, 2005)

- **Equilibrium**
  - Decreased abundance with decreasing flow stability (i.e. increased flow variability, lower low flows and baseflows and lower predictability)

- **Periodic**
  - Reduced abundance with decreasing flow seasonality (i.e. higher flow variability, lower predictability)

- **Opportunistic**
  - Reduced abundance with increasing flow regime stability (i.e. lower variability, higher predictability, higher seasonality)

**Functional Guilds & Sentinel Species**

A suite of relative abundance metrics were calculated for four different functional guilds who shared common physical habitat requirements and life history strategies (Table 7). Functional guilds were derived from two comprehensive studies conducted in the Susquehanna and Ohio River Basins (DePhilip and Moberg, 2010, 2013). Fish were grouped according to whether they shared similar body size, fecundity, home range, habitat associations, feeding habits and flow-velocity tolerances. These common traits translate into similar flow requirements. For instance, all fish in the nest-building guild are predicted to be sensitive to spring high flows that may scour nests in channel margins (DePhilip and Moberg, 2010, 2013). Thus, the functional guilds are complementary to the life history ecological metrics, but perhaps more tailored to the MSR. We calculated all functional guild metrics as total vs. relative abundance due to sample size issues.
Table 7. Description of the key traits and species in each of four functional guilds. Sentinel species for each guild are indicated by bold font. Adapted from DePhilip and Moberg (2010, 2013).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Key Traits</th>
<th>Species</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cold Headwaters</td>
<td>Thermal tolerance limits distribution to cool and cold habitats; sensitive to decreases in dissolved oxygen or increases in turbidity; across group, spawning occurs in all seasons</td>
<td>brook trout, burbot, mottled sculpin, brown trout, Cottus spp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riffle Obligates</td>
<td>Small bodied, flow-velocity specialists who spend most of their life in moderate-fast velocity riffle/run habitat. Small home range renders them sensitive to localized disturbance</td>
<td>central stoneroller, margined madtom, longnose dace, blacknose dace, greenside darter, rainbow darter, tessellated darter, johnny darter, banded darter, fantail darter, bluntnose minnow, cutlip minnow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riffle Associates</td>
<td>Resident species with moderate-sized home range that migrate to spawn and need access to, and connectivity between, riffle habitats. Upstream migration is cued by both temperature and rising water levels. Have a preference for clear streams.</td>
<td>northern hog sucker, white sucker, Catostomus spp., shorthead redhorse, golden redhorse, silver redhorse, walleye, smallmouth buffalo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nest Builders</td>
<td>Similar timing of flow needs (during nest building, spawning, and egg and larval development), but a diverse group in terms of nesting strategy (includes true nests, mound construction and ledge spawners). Particularly sensitive to flow conditions during spring and summer nest building. Most require maintenance coarse substrate for nest building.</td>
<td>smallmouth bass, fallfish, creek chub, river chub, Nocomis spp., redbreast sunfish, spotted bass</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additionally, we also computed the abundance of four sentinel species - one per functional guild (species in bold font; Table 7) - in order to facilitate species-specific flow requirements and risk mapping. Species were chosen according to how well they were represented across the MSR.
Stream Classification

It is customary to classify streams and rivers in ELOHA applications into different hydrologic types on the basis of natural baseline hydrologic characteristics because it is hoped that doing so will potentially improve the statistical significance of F-E relationships by reducing natural variability in the biological communities of interest (Poff et al., 2010, USACE, 2013). Accordingly, streams within the Marcellus HUC-8 boundary were classified into stream classes or hydrologic types via a hierarchical clustering analysis developed for all reference gages in the Appalachian LCC region. All HIT metrics for all reference gages were log (x+1) transformed,
scaled and centered from 0-1 and used in a correlation-based principle component analysis (PCA). This effectively reduced the redundancy and dimensionality of the dataset while ensuring that the most important HIT metrics were retained for clustering. We found that over 90% of the variation was explained by the first 13 components.

We used a Bayesian mixed-model approach to cluster gauges on the basis of component scores. The approach applies multiple models and mixtures (clusters) to the data and uses Bayes Information Criteria (BIC) to determine the most likely model and number of clusters (Fraley et al., 2014). Hierarchical modeling is used to specify a prior number of clusters and then Gaussian mixture modeling is used to estimate parameters of each model. Ten different models with varying covariance structure and numbers of clusters are compared and the model-cluster combination with the highest BIC values is considered the optimal solution.

Using the clustering results, we then used a random forest model to predict stream class at all ungaged basins using the reference gages as training data. The prediction dataset for this model consisted of all ungaged NHD catchments in the HUC-8 Marcellus Region merged with basin attributes listed in Table 2. OOB error rates were used to assess model accuracy and variable importance plots of the various explanatory variables were generated.

**Flow-Ecology Relationships**

In order to establish flow-ecology relationships, it was necessary to devise an appropriate means of associating each MARIS site with a non-reference USGS gaging station. MARIS sites and USGS gaging stations do not necessarily overlap in space, so this is an important step. We chose to pair MARIS sites with USGS gages based on whether they shared the same National Hydrography Dataset (NHD) Version I “reachcode” (HSC, 2013). To accomplish this it was necessary to assign the NHD reachcodes to each MARIS and USGS site via a spatial join in a GIS program using a 350m join radius. This worked well, but did result in some USGS gages being paired with more than one MARIS site. Thus, it was necessary to calculate the average ecologic metric across all dates and MARIS sites per reach. Once each USGS gage had a single metric associated with it, we then began the process of using quantile regression to assess whether observed flow alteration was significantly related to ecological metrics.

Using the degree of flow alteration calculated as the difference between predicted reference and observed non-reference flows we then developed flow-ecology relationships by relating the percent alteration of particular flow indices to changes in the 19 ecologic metrics. Flow-ecology curves (F-E) were developed using quantile regression in R (quantreg package by R. Koenker, 27 February 2011, available at www.r-project.org). Quantile regression (QR) is particularly well-suited to F-E relationships as aquatic biota respond to a variety of non-flow related natural and anthropogenic factors (e.g. water temperature, contaminants, invasive species, lost connectivity, etc.). These multiple drivers produce scatter in the ecological response at any particular level of flow alteration. For example, two streams with similar flow alteration may exhibit very different ecological responses due to differing degrees of water quality impairment. The resulting scatter
weakens the statistical significance of the relationship between the explanatory variable(s) and
the mean of the response variable (the 50th quantile or standard OLS regression). By examining
other parts of the response variable distribution, QR is able to characterize significant trends
which may otherwise be missed. In the context of ELOHA, QR is often used to explore the
upper bounds of F-E relationships as this provides a description of how the best possible
biological status changes across varying degrees of flow alteration. For this study, we chose to
use 90th quantiles to describe the upper-bound response. Significance of the 90th quantile
regression was assessed via p-values derived from a xy-pair bootstrap procedure. Please refer to
Cade and Noon (2003) for a more detailed exploration of QR in the context of ecological studies.

One of the key principles of the ELOHA framework is the idea that streams that share similar
flow regimes (stream classes) will possess comparable ecological characteristics and thus, will
respond to flow alteration in similar ways. As previously mentioned, it is hoped that the process
of stream classification will reduce natural ecological variability within classes and improve F-E
relationships. To assess whether F-E relationships were stream-class-specific we visually
examined the wedge-shaped F-E distributions looking for clustering of points according to
stream class (Knight et al., 2013). We also investigated whether clustering according to
physiographic province was evident.

It is important to note many of our ecological metrics may be affected by the stream size. For
instance, both species richness and catch per unit effort are generally positively correlated with
watershed area (Barbour et al., 1998). This may confound flow-ecology relationships derived
from raw measures of ecological response to flow alteration (particularly when stream size is not
controlled in calculation of flow alteration). To control for this, we introduced drainage area as
an explanatory variable in a multivariate QR for all F-E relationships.

**Pumping Scenarios**

We performed a preliminary scenario analysis of consumptive surface water pumping associated
with hydraulic fracturing to: i) determine the relationship between sensitivity to withdrawals and
stream size, ii) establish which hydrologic indices and stream classes are most sensitive to
withdrawals, and iii) construct hydrologic sensitivity indices (HSIs) that could inform a
Marcellus-wide risk assessment.

As previously mentioned, it is difficult to synthesize the myriad rules, regulations and
management guidelines regarding limits to surface water abstraction for gas development
because of the diversity of regulatory policies within the MSR. In an effort to create a realistic
set of water withdrawal scenarios, we constructed a set of low and high pumping scenarios for all
reference gages within the HUC-8 Marcellus Basin under a range of different development
intensities. Pumping analyses were divided into two groups: (i) local pumping that reflects
consumptive surface water withdrawal only within the gaged reach and (ii) cumulative pumping
that reflects the collective impact of multiple pumping sites throughout the entire upstream basin.
Though clearly simplified, these scenarios are likely to cover the range of pumping rates and
development intensities that may occur in the field. Note: we are assuming that all water requirements for developing shale gas wells will derive from nearby streams. We are also assuming that no flowback water will be reused in the hydraulic fracturing process and that pass-by flow requirements are non-existent. These assumptions likely translate to conservative estimates as gas developers can obtain water from other surface water bodies, groundwater or municipal sources and often re-use a small fraction of flowback water (Rahm and Riha, 2012).

Pumping was implemented by subtracting the different scenario amounts from mean daily flows at each reference gaging station. Some smaller streams were pumped dry during certain parts of the year in which case the percent alteration due to pumping was capped at 100%. HSIs were then calculated as the median percent difference between the natural baseline HI value and the values under the high local and cumulative pumping scenarios across all reference gages. HSIs were computed for all HIs with an OOB pseudo-$R^2 \geq 0.8$. Additionally, HSIs were computed for median low, average and high flows (ML, MA and MH), as well as grouped by season. The relationship between stream size and sensitivity to pumping was explored by examining plots of drainage area and percent alteration in various hydrologic sensitivity indices. The sensitivity of the HIT indices was assessed by ranking the HSIs from most to least sensitive for both the high local and cumulative pumping scenarios.

**Local (pumped at the gaged reach):**
The "local" pumping scenarios reflect pumping from only one site within the gaged reach and were calculated as low and high. In lieu of actual recorded pumping rates we used permitted rates obtained by downloading all available surface water withdrawal data from the Susquehanna River Basin Commission (SRBC) and calculating the average and standard deviation of the permitted pumping rates. These were plotted against the mean annual flow for each pumping location to determine whether a relationship between pumping rate and flow could be established. Interestingly, no significant relationship existed, suggesting that permitted withdrawal rates are (curiously) independent of stream size (data not shown). The low local scenario was therefore calculated as the average SRBC (1.5 cfs) permitted pumping rate less 1 S.D. (0.5 cfs) and the high was the mean plus 1 S.D. (2.5 cfs). We assumed that the pumping occurred for 10 hours each day.

**Cumulative (pumped throughout basin):**
The cumulative scenario was calculated by assuming newly formed NY regulations regarding gas well development apply everywhere in the Marcellus Region (Best and Lowry, 2014). Specifically, NY regulations currently limit well pad density to no more than 1 pad per 1 mi$^2$. At each pad there can be as many as 4-9 wells – with wells using between 3-4 Mgal of water. We then developed a range of development scenarios which varied the pad density between 5-30%, number of wells per pad ranging between 4-9 and the number of gallons used per well ranging from 3-4. This equates to an overall water withdrawal ranging from 12-32 Mgal per pad.

According to the Susquehanna River Basin Commission, most wells take between 2-5 days to develop (Best and Lowry, 2014, SRBC, 2015). Wells were assumed to take 5 days to develop.
Environmental Flow Analysis for the Marcellus Shale Region

for the low cumulative scenario and 2 days for the high cumulative scenario. We further assumed that wells were developed sequentially rather than simultaneously per pad.

The assumptions necessary to make this analysis tractable result in a number of limitations regarding interpretation of results and realism of withdrawal estimates. For instance, the rate and timing of pumping will vary through time and space, but we applied a constant daily withdrawal across the entire period of record in order to establish the long-term annual, seasonal and monthly average effects. Accordingly, this approach was not appropriate to assess pumping impacts on the timing-related HIs. In addition, we note that this analysis ignores interactive cumulative impacts resulting from pumping in conjunction with multiple non-shale gas development activities such as industrial water withdrawals, irrigation withdrawals, etc.

**Risk Analysis**

The sensitivity of a select group of magnitude HIs to surface water withdrawals associated with shale gas development was predicted across all streams within the MSR using RF models. First, a sensitivity index for each HI (HSI) across all reference and non-reference gages was calculated as the percent change in a hydrologic index from the natural baseline under a subset of pumping scenarios chosen to represent low (low local), medium (high local) and high (cumulative high) extraction scenarios. HSI were predicted for monthly median low, average and high flows for February, April, August and October in order to capture the seasonal flow magnitudes for winter, spring, summer and fall, respectively. We also computed two annual flow magnitude HIs: annual runoff and median annual flow. Next, a training dataset was constructed by associating each HSI with the biophysical attributes of their respective catchments, including anthropogenic factors such as dams. The performance of the RF models was assessed via the OOB pseudo-$R^2$ and the predictive power of each of the independent variables was assessed via unbiased variable importance plots. HSI predictions were then mapped to polyline shapefiles of all NHD streamlines in the MSR. The results of this analysis should afford insights into how hydrologic sensitivity to water withdrawals varies spatially and should help identify particularly sensitive streams for targeted management. Moreover, the mapped HSIs can be overlaid with species distribution maps and the locations of existing and projected natural gas development to further prioritize streams threatened by hydraulic fracturing activities. For instance, it may be helpful to visualize the coincidence of sensitive streams, high gas development and the presence of a particularly important fish species or functional trait guild (threatened or endangered). Towards that end, we constructed a set of species distribution models (SDMs) for a select group of fish species using binomial RF models (Appendix F). Probabilities of occurrence of functional guilds were computed as the average of the individual species comprising that guild. This resulted in a probability of occurrence prediction at every stream in the MSR for every species and guild of interest.
Results and Discussion

Selecting Flow Indices

An OOB pseudo-$R^2$ threshold of $\geq 0.8$ reduced the number of HIT indices from 171 to 60 (Table 8). Of those 60, 47 were predicted with an R-squared $\geq 0.9$, indicating the RF regression models achieved acceptable performance. Applying the remainder of our selection criteria narrowed the list of HIs further to 28. The remaining 28 HIs captured critical components of the natural flow regime, including flow magnitude, duration, rate of change and timing. We chose to retain certain monthly flow magnitude HIs for further analysis as ecological responses to hydrologic alterations are highly seasonal (DePhilip and Moberg, 2010, 2013). Specifically, we chose February to represent winter flows, April to represent spring flows, July and August to represent summer flows and October to represent autumn flows. We should also point out that many of the HIs represent more than one flow regime component. For instance, mean low-flow for April (ML4) reflects both flow magnitude and timing as it is specific to the spring. Likewise, the annual minimum of 7-day moving average flow (DL3) represents both a flow duration and a magnitude.

Table 8. Hydrologic indices with OOB error rate $\leq 20\%$, retained for further analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
<th>OOB R-squared</th>
<th>Index Description</th>
<th>Flow Component</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ML2</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>Monthly Median Low Flow - February</td>
<td>Magnitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ML4</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>Monthly Median Low Flow - April</td>
<td>Magnitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ML7</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>Monthly Median Low Flow - July</td>
<td>Magnitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ML8</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>Monthly Median Low Flow - August</td>
<td>Magnitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ML10</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>Monthly Median Low Flow - October</td>
<td>Magnitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ML20</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>Base Flow</td>
<td>Magnitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA2</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>Median of the daily mean flow values</td>
<td>Magnitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA13</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>Monthly Median Average Flow - February</td>
<td>Magnitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA15</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>Monthly Median Average Flow - April</td>
<td>Magnitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA18</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>Monthly Median Average Flow - July</td>
<td>Magnitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA19</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>Monthly Median Average Flow - August</td>
<td>Magnitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA21</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>Monthly Median Average Flow - August</td>
<td>Magnitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA30</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>Variability of monthly flow values - July</td>
<td>Magnitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA31</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>Variability of monthly flow values - August</td>
<td>Magnitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA41</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>Annual runoff</td>
<td>Magnitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MH2</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>Monthly Median High Flow - February</td>
<td>Magnitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MH4</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>Monthly Median High Flow - April</td>
<td>Magnitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MH7</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>Monthly Median High Flow - July</td>
<td>Magnitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MH8</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>Monthly Median High Flow - August</td>
<td>Magnitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MH10</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>Monthly Median High Flow - October</td>
<td>Magnitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DH4</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>Annual maximum of 30-day moving average flows</td>
<td>Duration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Calculating the Degree of Flow Alteration

Consistent with other published studies, hydrologic alteration was both negative and positive at most non-reference stations for most indices (i.e. observed flows were both less than and greater than the expected natural flow index values predicted from RF models) (Eng et al., 2012; McManamay et al., 2013). Despite little change in overall annual discharge volumes, hydrologic alteration displayed an overall trend of decreased high flows, increased low flows, and greater flow stability (Figure 7; computed as the deviation between predicted and observed flow attributes for the non-reference gages below 2,500 km²). The largest flood magnitude decreases were evident in February and October, and were somewhat more pronounced for the NEAHCS “small” and “medium” river classes relative to the “headwater” and “creek” classes. In contrast, the percentage increases in low flows were greatest in July, August and October, and were strongest for the smallest systems. Notwithstanding these trends, substantial variation across individual gages was apparent, with the range of alteration extending to approximately 100% change in both positive and negative directions for most flow metrics.

| DH5 | 0.97 | Annual maximum of 90-day moving average flows | Duration |
| DL4 | 0.9  | Annual minimum of 30-day moving average flow  | Duration |
| DL5 | 0.94 | Annual minimum of 90-day moving average flow  | Duration |
| RA6 | 0.82 | Rise Rate - Median of log10 of positive flow changes over entire record | Rate of Change |
| RA7 | 0.8  | Fall Rate - Median of log10 of negative flow changes over entire record | Rate of Change |
| TA1 | 0.83 | Constancy                                      | Timing   |
| TA2 | 0.83 | Predictability                                 | Timing   |
Figure 7. Observed flow alteration for non-reference gages (n=298 with drainage area < 2500 km²) across well-predicted flow metrics (pseudo R² > 0.8). Median values for headwater reaches (green diamonds), small rivers (blue diamonds) and medium rivers (purple diamonds) are illustrated in addition to the full sample median (solid black bars). The red vertical line indicates no deviation between the value calculated from the observed flow record and the expected natural value predicted from the per-metric model fit to reference gages.

Stream Classification

The random forest classification model predicted a total of four different stream classes with an 87% OOB accuracy which we deemed acceptable (Table 9). Based on the hydrologic characteristics of each class we hypothesized the different degrees of sensitivity to flow alteration due to water withdrawals associated with hydraulic fracturing activities (Table 9). For example, given the high flow variability, propensity for intermittent flows and low minimum flows and low baseflows, perennial flashy streams were theorized to be the most sensitive to water extraction. We will test these hypotheses in the pumping scenario section.
Table 9. Stream class names, codes, narrative description and geographic setting as per McManamay et al. (2014).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Name</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Geography</th>
<th>Hypothesized Sensitivity to Withdrawals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stable High Baseflow</td>
<td>SHBF</td>
<td>High Baseflow Index, Low Variability, High minimum &amp; low flows, low frequency of high flow events, low rise rates</td>
<td>Blue Ridge Mountains</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perennial Runoff 1</td>
<td>PR1</td>
<td>Similar to SHBF but lower baseflows, semi-stable</td>
<td>Eastern piedmont</td>
<td>Low-Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perennial Runoff 2</td>
<td>PR2</td>
<td>Similar to PR1, but lower baseflows and higher runoff than PR1</td>
<td>Eastern Appalachians</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perennial Flashy</td>
<td>PF</td>
<td>High variability, some intermittency, low minimum &amp; baseflows, high frequency of high flows, high rise rate</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Variable importance analysis revealed that baseflow index, drainage area, average temperature, soil properties (e.g. percent silt or sand), mean elevation, percent of basin with poorly drained soils and latitude/longitude of the basin centroid were the some of most influential predictors of stream class (Figure 8).
Figure 8. Unbiased variable importance plot from conditional random forest model of stream class within the MSR. Variables are ranked from top-to-bottom according to their relative predictive power.

Figure 9 depicts the results of the random forest predictions across the Marcellus Region. The different colors represent different NHD reaches classified into one of the four stream types. The majority of the basins were classified as “perennial runoff”, which is consistent with McManamay et al. (2013).
Flow-Ecology Relationships

Flow-ecology relationships were developed by pairing the 373 non-reference USGS gages with 11,104 unique MARIS sites on the basis of whether they shared an NHD reachcode. This resulted in a total of 83 USGS gages paired with 176 MARIS fish sampling sites. In many cases, USGS stations were matched to more than one MARIS site, in which case a reach-averaged ecological metric was calculated in order to control for differing sampling efforts.

Quantile regression revealed significant relationships between % alteration in flow and numerous ecological metrics at the 90th quantile (α = 0.05). The majority of F-E relationships exhibited a wedge-shaped distribution with negative slopes and, in many cases, significant scatter. As previously mentioned, the high degree of variability is to be expected as aquatic biota respond to a variety of non-flow related natural and anthropogenic factors (e.g. eutrophication, toxic chemical pollution, acidity, sediment, temperature and pathogens). Flow alteration was predominantly in the negative direction for most HIs. Additionally, most statistically significant F-E relationships were associated with reduced HIs. This is consistent with Buchanan et al. (2013) and McManamay et al. (2013), who found that anthropogenic flow disturbance primarily reduced rather than increased HIs – especially magnitude-related HIs. They, along with Carlisle et al. (2010), also found that F-E relationships were much more predictable in the negative direction.
The x-axis of all F-E relationships depicts the degree of flow alteration in both negative and positive directions. Thus, zero represents no change in a given HI, indicating hydrological conditions are close to the natural baseline. Fish metrics that decline as % flow alteration becomes more negative (right-to-left from zero) indicate a decrease in fish-response with increasing negative flow alteration (i.e. a negative correlation). Similarly, fish metrics that decrease with increasing positive flow alteration (left-to-right from zero) indicate declining fish-response to inflation of a given flow index. Slopes of the QR regression lines provide a measure of the strength of the relationship between dependent and independent variables. Although we present F-E relationships for both negative and positive flow alteration, here we discuss only the negative side as this is more relevant to the effects of water withdrawals for gas development.

All points in the F-E distributions were colored according to like physiographic province – with different shapes indicating stream class membership. A key to the various physiographic provinces is provided in Figure 10.

Contrary to ELOHA theory, our visual examination of the F-E points across all ecological endpoints revealed little clustering on the basis of stream class or physiographic province. This suggests that F-E relationships derived in this study can be applied across the entire MSR. However, we should caution that many stream classes were not well represented in our paired USGS-MARIS sites. For instance, the vast majority of sites were in the “Perennial Runoff 1” stream class; with no sites characterized as “Stable High Baseflow”. The lack of adequate sample size precludes definitive evaluations of class-specific F-E relationships and should be considered as a topic for future research. In particular, the lack of flow-ecological data in several stream classes provides impetus for the design of targeted ecological monitoring campaigns to better describe F-E relationships in these classes.

**Species Richness**

Based on F-E hypotheses from DePhilip and Moberg (2010, 2013; Appendix B) and a preponderance of published literature, we anticipated that species richness and abundance would respond negatively to reductions in magnitude, timing and duration of flows. DePhilip and Moberg (2010, 2013) also suggest that increased rate of change or flashiness should result in similar ecological declines, however evidence predicting fish response to decreases in flashiness is less consistent. In the absence of clear guidance, we make the assumption that any substantial departure from natural fall rates (negative or positive) will result in reduced species richness and abundance. It is important to note that while water withdrawals for hydraulic fracturing purposes are extremely unlikely to increase magnitude or duration HIs. In the case of rate-of-change indices, we expect withdrawals to reduce rise rates (RA6), whereas fall rates (RA7) may increase (a positive % flow alteration).
Three ecological metrics were significantly related to fluvial-fish species richness at the 90th quantile, including: average August flow (MA19), rise rate (RA6) and annual runoff (MA41; Figure 11). In the case of MA19 and MA41, species richness declines with increasing departure from natural baseline conditions (i.e. depleted flow magnitudes). Reductions in flow magnitude are generally associated with decreases in habitat availability and quality. Negative effects may include: accumulation of fine sediments due to a reduction in flushing events, reduction in depth and associated dewatering of riffle habitats, increases in stream temperatures and decreases in dissolved oxygen (D.O.), reductions in preferred spawning habitat, and increases in predator-prey interactions (DePhilip and Moberg, 2010, 2013). Numerous researchers have documented significant, predominantly deleterious, changes to native species richness, abundance and assemblage composition resulting from these direct and indirect effects of flow regime alteration (Knight et al., 2013; McManamay et al., 2013; Poff and Zimmerman, 2010; Rolls and Arthington, 2014). Of particular relevance to this study are the finding of Armstrong et al. (2010) who showed that depletion of median August discharge due to water abstraction resulted in substantial declines in both species richness and abundance.

The slope value associated with MA41 suggests that every 10% drop in annual runoff will result in a loss of approximately five fluvial fish species (Figure 11). The higher slope value of MA41 relative to MA19 suggests that fish diversity is more sensitive to changes in annual runoff than to reductions in average August flow. This is somewhat counterintuitive as August generally represents a warm, low-flow period during which many fish species are particularly vulnerable to hydrologic alterations (DePhilip and Moberg, 2010). In Massachusetts, Armstrong et al. (2010) observed a loss of one fluvial species with each 14% decline in August median flow at the 90th quantile. Here in the MSR, an equivalent drop in August flow would result in a loss of roughly 4 species.

On the other hand, increased negative alteration in rise rate (RA6) was associated with increased species richness. This implies that a more stable flow regime leads to greater species diversity, perhaps due to a reduction in scouring events and extreme changes in flow rates that may set an ecological limit on fish populations. This is consistent with other studies that detected reduced native species richness due to increasing flow variability – especially for species with narrow hydraulic niches such as shallow, fast-flowing riffles (Gehrke et al., 1995; Meador and Carlisle, 2012; Rolls and Arthington, 2014).
Figure 11. Plots of species richness vs. percent alteration in median August flow (MA19), rise rate (RA6) and annual runoff (MA41). P-values (red text) and slopes (blue text) associated with the 90th quantile regression line are indicated.

As previously noted, water abstraction for hydraulic fracturing purposes may increase fall rates (RA7), resulting in a positive alteration. We found a significant negative correlation between species richness and increased fall rate (i.e. positive alteration; Figure 12). Among other adverse effects, accelerated fall rates may limit time for passage of fish between feeding and spawning areas and can lead to the stranding of fish in isolated pools (Knight et al., 2008).

Interestingly, although the relationship was not significant (p-value=0.09), we observed a positive relationship between negative alteration in RA7 and fish diversity, similar to RA6. The opposite responses to positive and negative alteration in RA7 indicate an overall preference for less flashy flow regimes. However, since we did not distinguish between native and non-native
species, we cannot rule out the possibility that a more stable flow regime is favoring an influx of non-native species – inflating the total species richness score.

Figure 12. Plot of species richness vs. percent alteration in fall rate (RA7). P-values (red text) and slopes (blue text) associated with the 90th quantile regression line are indicated.

Total Abundance
Total fish abundance (CPUE) at the 90th quantile was negatively correlated with % alteration of two different flow magnitude-related HIs: April high flow (MH4) and August mean flow (MA19) (Figure 13). Similar to total species richness, this indicates that fish abundance in the MSR is also sensitive to a loss of habitat availability and quality associated with reduced flows. In particular, it seems abundance is sensitive to reductions in spring and summer discharge. The steepest 90th quantile slope was observed for mean August flow, indicating total fish abundance is more responsive to disturbance during this season. Spring flows help to maintain sandy spawning substrates, serve as important spawning cues and ensure connectivity to upstream tributary habitats (DePhilip and Moberg, 2010). Thus, reductions in spring discharge may disrupt flows during the breeding season for many species resulting in decreased recruitment due to impaired growth and survival of eggs and juvenile fish. However, we should emphasize the presence of a clear outlier, as well as the lack of parallel least squares and 90th quantile regressions lines suggests the April high flow F-E relationship may be spurious.
Summer flows (i.e. MA19) generally set strong ecological limits on fish populations. Depletion of summer discharge reduces available habitat volume, increases stream temperatures, lowers D.O., and dewater vulnerable shallow-water habitats (DePhilip and Moberg, 2010). This explains the negative correlation between fish abundance and median August flows. These findings are corroborated by numerous other researchers who found lowered fish abundance in response to flow alteration. For instance, Freeman and Marcinek (2006) found that reduced flows negatively affected the persistent of shallow habitats, which was shown to be strongly related to juvenile fish abundance in the Tallapoose River, Alabama. Likewise, researchers in Massachusetts found that fluvial species abundance was negatively correlated with alteration of August median flow (Armstrong et al., 2011). Moreover, McManamay et al. (2013) and Poff and Zimmerman (2010) demonstrated that changes in flow magnitudes lead to predictable declines in fish abundance.

![Figure 13. Plots of total abundance vs. percent alteration in April high flow (MH4) and median August flow (MA19). P-values (red text) and slopes (blue text) associated with the 90th quantile regression line are indicated.](image)
Tolerance

We anticipated that the proportion of fish species tolerant to environmental degradation would increase in response to increasing flow alteration. However, we detected no significant relationships between the proportional abundance of tolerant species and % flow alteration, suggesting tolerance is relatively insensitive to changes in flow regime in the study region.

In contrast, the proportional abundance of species intolerant to anthropogenic disturbance decreased, significantly, as HIs departed from their natural baseline conditions (i.e. flow variability in July and August (MA30 and MA31, respectively), February high flow (MH2) and increased fall rates (RA7) (Figures 14 and 15). These relationships are consistent with the intuitive notion that species intolerant to habitat degradation would decline in the face of progressively altered flow regimes. Slopes of the 90th quantile regression lines were > 0.7 in most cases, indicating that every 10% change in these HIs result in the loss of roughly 7 individuals poorly adapted to habitat degradation and water quality impairment. Knight et al. (2013) observed lower rates of intolerant species loss with increasing flow alteration in the Tennessee River Basin than shown here (i.e. roughly 3 vs. 7). Our results are not, however, directly comparable to Knight et al. (2013) as they computed flow alteration as the cumulative departure from the natural baseline, regardless of whether the alteration was positive or negative. In addition, they determined flow alteration as the percent difference between observed vs. an estimated regional baseline.

Rolls et al. (2012) suggest that such flow regime changes can lead to reduced habitat and water quality through increased contaminant concentrations due to less water available for dilution. Similarly, other studies have found that flow regime changes decreased the proportion of intolerant fish and macroinvertebrate species and attribute it to the combined effects of cumulative thermal and water quality stress and habitat degradation (DePhilip and Moberg, 2010, 2013)
Figure 14. Plots of relative abundance of intolerant species vs. percent alteration August and July flow variability (MA31 and MA30, respectively) and February high flow (MH2). P-values (red text) and slopes (blue text) associated with the 90th quantile regression line are indicated.
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Figure 15. Plot of relative abundance of intolerant species vs. percent alteration in fall rate (RA7). P-values (red text) and slopes (blue text) associated with the 90th quantile regression line are indicated.

**Trophic Structure**

**Piscivores**

Based on F-E hypotheses proposed by DePhilip and Moberg (2010, 2013; Appendix B), we anticipated that decreases in flow magnitudes during summer low-flow periods would result in a loss of refugia and a shift in trophic composition towards top-predator dominated systems. The positive correlation between reductions in August flow (MA19) and the relative abundance of piscivorous species supports this hypothesis (Figure 16). It is also worth noting that relative abundance of top predators between 5 and 20% has been associated with healthy, trophically diverse fish communities. However an overabundance of piscivores (>20%) suggests stream degradation (Gleason, 2007). The slope of the 90th quantile line suggests that once August flow has been reduced by greater than 17%, piscivores exceed 20% of the community abundance – indicating impaired ecological conditions.

Lower summer flow variability (MA30 and MA31) and spring flows (MA15) were associated with lower proportional abundance of piscivorous fish. Although not directly comparable, our findings seem to contradict those of Poff and Allan (1995) and Pyron and Lauer (2004) who
generally found that piscivory increased with increasing hydrologic stability. We speculate that reduced piscivory with decreasing July and August flow variability may be related to indirect adverse effects to their prey-base. For instance, lower August flow variability may limit periphyton and macroinvertebrates, which, in turn, reduces the abundance of prey-fish for piscivores (Delong et al., 2011; Osmundson et al., 2002). This is in accordance with the idea that trophic specialists may respond more negatively to flow disturbance, relative to generalists, as this may decrease the diversity of the overall food web (Gleason, 2007).

Similarly, depressed spring flows (MA15) may reduce piscivory by disrupting spawning of native fish (spawning mis-cues and altered nursery habitat), decreasing the abundance of suitably-sized prey. Indeed, Franssen et al. (2007) found that natural flow regimes favored higher densities of prey fish that were within the gape dimensions of the piscivorous Pike minnow (Ptychocheilus lucius), while “under an artificially depressed flow regime, native prey fishes have lowered spawning success and nonnative species often exceed the gape dimensions of age-1 P. lucius until later in the summer”.
Invertivores
Generally speaking, a high relative abundance of invertivores is indicative of a healthy fish community (Niemela and Feist, 2002). Thus, we hypothesized that increased flow alteration would result in reduced invertivore abundance. The proportional abundance of invertivorous fish was significantly related to only one hydrologic index: February high flow (MH2) (Figure 17). Compared to other seasons, there are relatively few studies evaluating fish responses to flow alteration in winter, but there is evidence that overwinter survival of insectivores may be reduced because changes in winter flows can result in decreased prey abundance. Research has demonstrated, for example, that macroinvertebrate communities are substantially impaired by reductions in winter low- and high-flows (Rader and Belish, 1999; Carlisle et al. (2012). Whether this is related to increased anchor ice formation, thermal modification, changes in migration cues or reductions in macroinvertebrate species with a high-flow preference remains to be seen.
Generalist

Based on previous research, we anticipated that the abundance of fish in the generalist trophic guild would be favored in increasingly altered flow environments. For example, Poff and Allan (1995) found that sites characterized by heightened flow regime disturbance were associated with trophic and habitat generalist species. Similarly, Freeman and Marcinek (2006) observed that altered hydrology related to water withdrawals in Piedmont streams were associated with marked declines in fluvial specialist species, favoring instead, trophic and habitat generalists.

In contrast to these previous studies, we detected a significant negative correlation between trophic generalist abundance and percent negative flow alteration in October flow (MA21) (Figure 18). In a study designed to evaluate the effects of water withdrawals on fish assemblages in the Susquehanna River Basin, Shank and Stauffer (2014) also expected to find increases in macrohabitat generalists. Instead, they noted greater proportions of generalists in less altered
sites and suggested that flow changes resulting from withdrawals may not substantially impact macrohabitat generalists.

As previously stated, we combined omnivores and trophic generalists together for analysis. Although studies directly linking omnivorous fish guilds with flow alteration are rare, limited existing data suggests that the abundance of omnivorous fish should actually decrease in the face of increasing flow alteration. For instance, in streams located in the Ridge and Valley physiographic province of the Tennessee River Basin, Knight et al. (2013) demonstrated that omnivores decline significantly at the 85th, 80th and 30th quantiles with increasing hydrologic departure. In the Wabash River in Indiana, Pyron and Lauer (2004) found that sites with higher hydrologic variability were negatively correlated with omnivorous feeding strategies. The fact that we combined omnivores and generalists may have confounded this analysis.

![Graph](image)

**Figure 18.** Plot of relative abundance of generalists and omnivores vs. percent alteration October flow (MA21). P-values (red text) and slopes (blue text) associated with the 90th quantile regression line are indicated.

*Herbivores*

Literature examining relationships between herbivorous fish and flow alteration is lacking. Thus, it was difficult to formulate F-E hypotheses specific to this group. Intuitively, one might expect that changes in flow will lead to alterations in siltation rates, substrate composition and
aquatic vegetation assemblages, which may affect herbivores. Although they did not specifically evaluate fish, Chester and Norris (2006) found that sites downstream of dams with altered hydrology experienced shifts in periphyton composition. This brought about substantial declines in herbivorous macroinvertebrates utilizing periphyton as a food source. Berkman and Rabeni (1987) and Osmundson et al. (2002) both found that higher sedimentation rates negatively affected herbivorous fish – hence, any flow disturbance that alters sediment transport dynamics may cause trophic shifts away from herbivorous strategists.

Results of our quantile regression analyses indicate somewhat inconsistent relationships between herbivory and negative flow alteration (Figure 19). For instance, decreasing magnitudes of 30-day low flow (DL4) were positively correlated with herbivory, whereas annual runoff (MA41) was negatively correlated. Additionally, increased fall rates (RA7) resulted in significant reductions in the relative abundance of herbivores (Figure 20). The lack of consistent trends suggests herbivores may not provide a suitable, predictable measure of flow alteration.

Figure 19. Plots of relative abundance of herbivores vs. percent alteration 30-day low flow (DL4) and annual runoff (MA41). P-values (red text) and slopes (blue text) associated with the 90th quantile regression line are indicated.
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Life History Strategies
Ecological theory predicts that periodic life history strategists will be favored in streams with seasonal, yet predictable flow regimes that create periodically suitable environments (Winemiller and Rose, 1992; Winemiller, 2005). Opportunistic fish species, on the other hand, are typically well-suited to stream environments characterized by frequent and intense disturbances. Equilibrium strategists are typically found in streams with stable, predictable flow regimes with low variation in habitat quality and strong biotic interactions. Accordingly, we formulated the following flow-ecology hypotheses.

Periodic Strategy Weights
We anticipated that periodic life history strategists would decline in the face of reduced seasonality or predictability of flow (Winemiller and Rose 1992; Winemiller 1995). Our quantile regression results support this hypothesis in that reduced seasonal flows in the month of October (MH10) were associated with reduced abundance of periodic strategists (Figure 21). However, the negative relationship between periodic abundance and % alteration in July and August flow variability (MA30 and MA31, respectively) was somewhat unexpected. Typically, periodic strategists, with high fecundity and large age at maturity are negatively related to flow variability (McManamay et al., 2014a; Mims and Olden, 2013). Gido et al. (2013) also observed responses in fish life history strategies that were in conflict with ecological theory. They attributed discrepancies to “greater variation in key aspects of flow regimes (variability, predictability, and seasonality) across regions than within river systems across years. Even
within the limited regional extent of our study, there was as much variation in flow attributes among river systems as within systems. Thus, species with different life-history strategies, once established, might not respond consistently to more subtle differences in flows across years”. They further suggest that “differences in other ecological traits might override interannual variation in abundance attributed to trilateral life-history traits (fecundity, size and maturity, and parental investment). For example, because flow magnitude is tightly linked to temperature (e.g., Gido and Propst, 2012), a species’ thermal preference might predict response to flow attributes such as mean spring or summer discharge”.

Figure 21. Plots of relative abundance of periodic strategists vs. percent alteration in October high flow (MH10), and August and July flow variability (MA31 and MA30, respectively). P-values (red text) and slopes (blue text) associated with the 90th quantile regression line are indicated.
**Opportunistic Strategy Weights**

Our findings regarding opportunistic strategists are somewhat contradictory to ecologic theory in that lower winter flows (ML2) were significantly associated with fewer opportunistic strategists (Figure 22). Discrepancies between our results and the expected ecological outcome may be explained by the fact that we did not distinguish between native and non-native species in our analysis of life history strategies. Research has demonstrated that anthropogenic flow alteration can have opposite effects on native vs. non-native opportunistic species, whereby non-natives are favored in increasingly disturbed flow regimes.

We should note, however, that we did observe a borderline significant (p-value = 0.054) positive relationship between annual runoff (MA41) and the relative abundance of opportunists. This suggests that opportunistic strategists are favored in streams with artificially low annual flows, whereas reduced winter flow has the opposite effect.

![Figure 22. Plot of relative abundance of opportunistic species vs. percent alteration in February high flow (ML2). P-values (red text) and slopes (blue text) associated with the 90th quantile regression line are indicated.](image)
Percent Equilibrium Weights per REACH
Quantile regression revealed no significant relationships in equilibrium strategists and flow alteration. This may be due to the fact that the stream systems within the MSR are likely dominated by equilibrium species. In contrast, opportunistic and periodic species are far fewer and, therefore, may be more likely to demonstrate stronger F-E patterns.

Functional Guild & Sentinel Species

Cold Headwaters Guild
The cold headwaters functional guild consisted of sculpins, brook trout, and brown trout. As they share similar thermal requirements, it was expected that they would respond similarly to flow alteration. In particular, we hypothesized that they would decline with increasing flow alteration as this may alter thermal regimes. QR results support this supposition in that February low flow (ML2) and base flow index (ML20) were significantly negatively correlated with abundance of cold headwater species (Figure 23). The slope of ML20 was especially high, indicating that each 10% drop in baseflow would result in a 55% decline in these species. Seasonal baseflows (winter and summer) are particularly important for coldwater fish as they maintain critical thermal refuge for these temperature-sensitive species. They also help ensure the integrity of spawning habitats and maintain healthy nest conditions throughout the winter. In addition, macroinvertebrate communities, upon which many coldwater species depend, have been shown to be negatively affected by reductions in winter and summer baseflows (Wills et al. 2006, Dewson et al. 2007). The importance of median and low flows during fall and winter for cold headwater species is also well established (DePhilip and Moberg, 2010, 2013).
Figure 23. Plots of cold headwater species abundance vs. percent alteration in February low flow (ML2) and baseflow (ML20). P-values (red text) and slopes (blue text) associated with the 90th quantile regression line are indicated.

**Brook Trout**

We chose brook trout as a sentinel species for the cold headwater guild as they are a native, recreationally important and particularly temperature-sensitive species (Raleigh et al., 1986). We expected that brook trout would exhibit a similar; perhaps more pronounced relationship with low flow and baseflow – especially during winter and summer seasons. Interestingly, brook trout abundance was negatively correlated with summer flow variability (MA31, MA30), rise rate (RA6) and February high flows (MH2) (Figure 24). Meador and Carlisle (2012) provide some support for this finding in that they showed a loss of streamflow variability was associated with a 35% reduction in native fish species and over a 50% loss of riffle-dependent species. Also, it is possible that reduced flashiness may favor other fish species which, in turn, out-compete brook trout for food and habitat. Additionally, a loss of high flows may lead to increase sedimentation of redds which can limit recruitment (Alexander and Hansen, 1986, Argent and Flebbe, 1999).
Riffle Obligate Guild

For this study, riffle obligates were comprised of margined madtoms (*Notorus insignis*), longnose dace (*Rhinichthys cataractae*), blacknose dace (*Rhinichthys atratulus*), central stoneroller (*Campostoma anomalum*), fantail darter (*Etheostoma flabellare*), rainbow darter (*Etheostoma caeruleum*), greenside darter (*Etheostoma blennioides*), tessellated darter (*Etheostoma olmstedi*), johnny darter (*Etheostoma nigrum*), banded darter (*Etheostoma zonale*), bluntnose minnow (*Pimephales notatus*), and cutlip minnow (*Exoglossum maxilllingua*).

Unfortunately, this guild was not well represented in our flow-ecology dataset. This resulted in small sample sizes, reducing statistical inference. Even so, three HIs were significantly related to riffle obligate abundance. Specifically, riffle obligate abundance was negatively correlated with decreasing median August flows. The slope of the QR regression line was very high suggesting this guild was extremely sensitive to changes in August flow. However, this slope was undoubtedly influenced by potential outliers (Figure 25). Nonetheless, the strong
association with August flow is in accordance with the life history traits of this guild. For instance, according to the DePhilip and Moberg (2010), reduced summer discharge (i.e. MA19) is particularly detrimental to riffle obligates who “specialize in highly oxygenated, lower riffle/plunge turbulent environments”, because they are “sensitive to decreasing flow magnitude which would contract or eliminate this habitat niche”. Among the various negative effects of artificially lowered August flows are impaired egg and larval development and lowered recruitment from reduced juvenile growth. Riffle obligate abundance was also reduced by declines in April and October high flows (MH4 and MH10, respectively). Substrate specialists such as riffle obligates require high flow events to maintain sandy substrates. Reductions in high flows may adversely affect habitat quality or abundance. Furthermore, riffle obligates need stable flows during spawning and egg and larval development – a significant decrease in high flows in the spring may reduce recruitment (i.e. many species are spring spawners and rely on high flows as spawning cues).
Central Stoneroller

Being a riffle obligate species, central stonerollers prefer the shallow, fast-flowing environments associated with riffle habitats, although they will occupy deeper pools during low-flow periods (Power and Matthews, 1983). Although our sample size of central stonerollers was relatively small, we did detect significant relationships between their abundance and two HIs: duration of 90-day high flows (DH5), April high flows (MH4) (Figure 26). The small sample size suggests QR results should be interpreted with caution – however, the near-parallel association of the least squared error (LSE) fit and the 90th quantile regression lines indicates the negative correlation is consistent across numerous quantiles, boosting confidence in the QR results.

Reductions in high flows may lead to inadequate flushing of fine sediments, compromising the integrity of spawning substrates. Additionally, central stonerollers have been shown to be
relatively intolerant to siltation as it negatively effects algal growth, their preferred food (DePhilip and Moberg, 2010, 2013). Alteration in MH4 likely reduces stoneroller abundance because it disrupts flows during the critical spawning period (i.e. reduces access to off-channel habitats and backwaters, thereby increasing predation risk (Gido et al., 2013).

![Figure 26](image)

**Figure 26.** Plots of central stoneroller abundance vs. percent alteration in 90-day high flow (DH5) and April high flow (MH4). P-values (red text) and slopes (blue text) associated with the 90th quantile regression line are indicated.

**Riffle Associates Guild**

The riffle associate guild was comprised of *Catostomus* spp. (e.g. white sucker), *Moxostoma* spp. (e.g. shorthead redhorse, golden redhorse, silver redhorse), northern hogsucker (*Hypentelium nigricans*), walleye (*Sander vitreus*) and smallmouth buffalo (*Ictiobus bubalus*). These species are characterized by a moderate home range, typically migrate to spawn and “need access to, and connectivity between, riffle habitats” (DePhilip and Moberg, 2010). Based on life history traits and TNC flow-ecology hypotheses (Appendix B), we expected riffle associates to respond
primarily to spring and summer HIs as these reflect flow requirements for migration, spawning and adult and juvenile growth. Our data did not support this theory (Figure 27). However, the significant negative trend between reductions in annual runoff (MA41) and abundance of riffle associates lends credence to the hypothesis that the overall maintenance of flow is important to maintain connectivity and quality of spawning habitat. The significance of October high-flows (MH10, suggests high flows in fall may also play an important role in the health and integrity of riffle associates by maintaining the flushing of fine sediments from spawning gravels.

The slopes of all significant relationships were quite high relative to other life history guilds indicating that riffle associates are more sensitive to flow alteration than many other fish. This is likely related to their reliance on riffle habitats which are disproportionately negatively affected by flow reductions and changes in variability.

Figure 27. Plots of riffle associates abundance vs. percent alteration in October high flow (MH10) and annual runoff (MA41). P-values (red text) and slopes (blue text) associated with the 90th quantile regression line are indicated.
Northern Hog Sucker Abundance

Interestingly, Northern hog suckers seemed to respond differently to flow alteration than their guild as a whole. In particular, their abundance declined with decreases in August flow variability (MA31) and rise rate (RA6) (Figure 28). This may reflect the deleterious effects of enhanced interspecific competition from other species that are able to invade and out-compete hog suckers when flashier flow regimes are stabilized. Indeed, Meador and Carlisle (2012) showed that reduced streamflow variability was related to a 35% loss in native fish species, on average, and a >50% loss of species with a preference for riffle habitats.

Figure 28. Plots of northern hog sucker abundance vs. percent alteration in August flow variability (MA31), rise rate (RA6) and February flow (MA2). P-values (red text) and slopes (blue text) associated with the 90th quantile regression line are indicated.
Nest Builders Guild
The nest building fish guild included smallmouth bass (*Micropterus dolomieu*), fallfish (*Semotilus corporalis*), *Nocomis* spp. (e.g. creek chub, river chub), redbreast sunfish (*Lepomis auritus*), rock bass (*Ambloplites rupestris*) and spotted bass (*Micropterus punctulatus*). These species are spring spawners, typically constructing nests on sand, gravel, or rocky ledges along channel margins (DePhilip and Moberg, 2010). Thus, they share similar flow requirements during nest building, spawning, and egg and larval development. For instance, if discharge is too low for nest builders, “siltation may occur or nests may be dewatered, desiccating eggs and stranding larvae” (DePhilip and Moberg, 2010). Additionally, nest degradation may have negative implications for numerous other minnow species which either co-inhabit or take over abandoned *Nocomis* nests to spawn. The summer months are also important to nest builders as juvenile growth occurs predominantly during this season.

Accordingly, TNC flow hypotheses (Appendix B) suggest nest builders are sensitive to flow alteration during the spring and summer nest building seasons as they require suitable flows to maintain coarse substrate for nest building. Moreover, nest builders may be affected by changes in the frequency and magnitude of high flow events. Our QR results support these hypotheses in that they demonstrated strong negative correlations with a number of low, median and high flow magnitudes (Figure 29). Median and high April flow (MA15 and MH4, respectively), for example, indicated highly significant trends at the 90\textsuperscript{th} quantile, with relatively steep slopes. Specifically, for every 10% decrease in April high flow, the QR results suggest abundance of nest builders will decrease by 19 individuals. The lower nest builder abundance with decreasing annual flows (MA41) also points to sensitivity to reduced habitat volume and nest degradation. Additionally, sensitivity to February and October high flows (MH2 and MH10, respectively) suggests that nest builders require adequate high flows to prevent siltation and maintain coarse substrate for nest building (DePhilip and Moberg, 2010, 2013).

Many nest builders exhibit higher parental care as they will often guard their nests. We observed a declined in nest builders with reduced August flow variability (MA31), implying that they prefer less stable flow environments. This is consonant with McManamay and Frimpong (2015), who noted a positive correlation between daily flow variation and nest-guarding fish.
Small Mouth Bass

Smallmouth bass were chosen as a suitable sentinel species for the nest building guild, due to the fact that they were well represented in the MSR and are recreationally important. Perhaps unsurprisingly, smallmouth bass possessed similar flow requirements to their fellow guild members in that they responded to decreases in October high-flow events (MH10) (Figure 30). However, they were less sensitive overall as indicated by shallower regression slopes. Smallmouth bass also showed considerable dependence on the maintenance of 30-day high flow...
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(DH4). The maintenance of high flow volumes likely indicates a need to maintain channel margin spawning habitat.

![Graph showing plots of smallmouth bass abundance vs. percent alteration in 30-day high flow (DH4) and October high flow (MH10). P-values (red text) and slopes (blue text) associated with the 90th quantile regression line are indicated.](image)

Figure 30. Plots of smallmouth bass abundance vs. percent alteration in 30-day high flow (DH4) and October high flow (MH10). P-values (red text) and slopes (blue text) associated with the 90th quantile regression line are indicated.

With the exception of percent tolerant species and two life history groups, all ecological metrics were significantly related to alteration in at least one hydrologic index. Indeed, in most cases, measures of fish assemblage health and integrity were related to multiple HIs (Table 10). F-E relationships were most commonly driven by seasonal (monthly) flow indices, particularly summer HIs. Timing-related HIs (i.e. TA1 and TA2) were not significantly related to any ecological metrics – though we did note several trends with p-values between 0.05 and 0.1 (data not shown). With few exceptions, all F-E relationships were negative suggesting that deflated
HIs consistently resulted in reduced ecological metrics. The majority of QR slopes for proportional abundance F-E curves were between 1-1.5, indicating that 10% reductions in most flow indices roughly translate to 10-15% reductions in relative abundance metrics.

Table 10. Hydrologic indices that demonstrated a significant relationship (α = 0.05) with various ecological metrics. HIs in bold font represent positive slopes with increasingly negative HIs, while non-bold font represents negative slopes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ecological Metric</th>
<th>Seasonal HIs</th>
<th>Annual HIs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>Summer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Species Richness</td>
<td>MA19</td>
<td>RA6, RA7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abundance</td>
<td>MH4, MA19</td>
<td>RA6, RA7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Intolerant</td>
<td>MA30, MA31</td>
<td>RA7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Piscivore</td>
<td>MA19</td>
<td>RA7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Invertivore</td>
<td>MA15, MA30, MA31</td>
<td>MH2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Generalist</td>
<td>MA21</td>
<td>RA7</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Herbivores</td>
<td>MA21</td>
<td>RA7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Periodic</td>
<td>MA30, MA31</td>
<td>MH10</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Opportunistic</td>
<td>ML2, ML2</td>
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<tr>
<td># Cold Headwater</td>
<td>MA30, MA31</td>
<td>MH2, RA6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brook Trout</td>
<td>MA15, MA19, MH4</td>
<td>MH10</td>
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<tr>
<td># Nest Builders</td>
<td>MA31</td>
<td>MH10, MA19, MH4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Smallmouth Bass</td>
<td>MA31</td>
<td>MH10, MA19, MH4</td>
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<tr>
<td># Riffle Obligates</td>
<td>MH4</td>
<td>MH10, MA19, MH4</td>
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<td># Central Stoneroller</td>
<td>MH4</td>
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<td># Riffle Associates</td>
<td>MH10</td>
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<tr>
<td># Northern Hog Sucker</td>
<td>MA31</td>
<td>MA2, RA6</td>
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</table>

We expected low flow HIs, principally during dry seasons, to dominate the F-E curves. However, significant seasonal HIs covered a range of low-, median- and high-flows during all four seasons (Table 10). This suggests fish communities in the MSR have diverse flow requirements, which is consistent with the flow-ecology hypotheses of DePhilip and Moberg (2010, 2013; Appendix B). Although not as common, several annual HIs, regarding flow magnitude, rate of change and flow duration were also significant. The unexpected lack of
significant low flow F-E relationships is likely attributable to the fact that anthropogenic flow disturbance in the MSR has primarily increased low flows (Figure 7). As the variable importance plots in Appendix D suggest, the most influential anthropogenic explanatory variable in predicting hydrologic sensitivity across most HIs was the number of dams. Dam operations often result in attenuation of peak and low flows, which explains the pattern of decreased high flows vs. increased low flows in Figure 7. The overall inflation of low flow HIs greatly reduced the sample size of fish sampling sites paired with negative low flow alteration, contributing to the lack of significant low-flow F-E relationships. This is a clear limitation of this study. However, monthly medians were reasonably well correlated with low flows (data not shown); suggesting it is reasonable to conclude that F-E relationships based on median flows would translate, at least qualitatively, to low flow metrics.

The majority of F-E relationships were consistent with ecological theory and our flow-ecology hypotheses. In a few instances, such as the proportion of trophic generalists, the F-E curves were contrary to our expectations or were not well supported by the published literature. This could be reflective of flow-ecology interactions unique to the MSR or perhaps, to errors related to low sample sizes. It could also be related to uncertainty in the estimates of both flow alteration and fish metrics. Lotic ecosystems are generally complex, possessing a high degree of structural uncertainty (Williams et al., 1996). Moreover, it is often challenging to accurately quantify fish metrics such as species richness or abundance due to “partial observability”. Although, measurement error of biological metrics is often <20% (Wright et al., 2000; Ostermiller and Hawkins, 2004, Van Sickle et al., 2007), this degree of uncertainty can make it difficult to accurately predict the effects of flow alteration. Furthermore, errors in observed discharge and geospatial data used to construct RF models can lead to inaccuracies in model predictions. In this study, the majority of RF models explained > 90% of variance in HIs. This implies only flow alterations that exceed 10% would be reliably predicted with our RF models. This may further compound uncertainty in F-E curves, rendering interpretation and application of results problematic.

Overall, the QR analysis indicates that flow alteration in the MSR results in a suite of adverse ecological impacts, including: (i) reduced species richness, total abundance and relative abundance of intolerant species, (ii) changes in trophic structure and life history strategies and (iii) declines in certain functional guilds and sentinel species. The proportional abundance of nest builders appear to be a particularly sensitive metric in the MSR as it was related to 6 different HIs. Other sensitive ecological metrics (significant F-E relationships are ≥ 4) include species richness, proportion of intolerant species, proportion of piscivores, and abundance of brook trout.

The question remains: will water extraction from gas development activities result in the exceedance of flow alteration thresholds thereby causing significant ecological impairment? Our consumptive water use analysis in the following section elucidates this question.
Pumping Scenarios
The pumping analysis explores the following three research questions: i) what is the relationship between stream size and sensitivity to realistic surface water pumping associated with hydraulic fracturing, ii) which hydrologic indices and stream classes are most sensitive to surface water pumping and iii) can hydrologic sensitivity be reliably predicted across the Marcellus Shale Region? A total of 138 of 195 reference stations in the Marcellus Region were included in the pumping analysis. As previously stated, we applied a constant daily withdrawal across the entire period of record in order to establish long-term annual, seasonal and monthly-average effects of pumping. Accordingly, this analysis was only used to evaluate pumping effects on HIs pertaining to magnitude, duration and rate of change flow regime components (i.e. timing and frequency HIs will experience little change).

Relationship between Stream Size and Hydrologic Sensitivity
Figure 31 depicts the relationship between drainage area and magnitude-related HSIs constructed by taking the mean of the percent change in a hydrologic index from the natural baseline due to the cumulative high pumping scenario. Cumulative high pumping rates represent a worst-case-scenario and should therefore provide conservative estimates. HSIs were calculated over all seasons for low, median and high flow indices (HSI_ML, HSI_MA, HSI_MA, respectively). It is clear that as drainage area increases, magnitude-related HSIs decline exponentially. Moreover, low-flows have the highest sensitivity to pumping, followed by average and high flows. This is to be expected as surface water withdrawals will disproportionately affect low-flow magnitudes. Figure 31 clearly demonstrates a strong seasonal pattern in sensitivity; summer is the most sensitive, followed by fall, winter and spring. Moreover, low flow HSIs (Figure 31B) are considerably more variable than median or high flows HSIs (Figure 31C and D, respectively). Overall, this suggests that, concerning monthly magnitude HIs, low-flow HIs during the summer and fall are the most responsive to surface water withdrawal. Additionally, it is evident that under all scenarios, a threshold in drainage area can be seen at roughly 1000 km² – after which pumping has minimal effects.
Figure 31. Relationship between drainage area and magnitude-related HSIs constructed by taking the mean of the percent change in a hydrologic index from the natural baseline due to cumulative high pumping. Plot (A) represents HSIs for all seasons and plots (B-D) represent low-, median and high-flows for all for seasons.

Figure 32 illustrates how the sensitivity of median August flow (MA19), a commonly used flow index, is affected by consumptive water extraction under a variety of pumping scenarios. The percent change in MA19 increases with increasing abstraction rates (i.e. low local to high cumulative pumping). Similar to Figure 31 above, a drainage area threshold is evident at approximately 1,000 km$^2$ – after which pumping has minimal effects. This finding supports our decision to limit the ELOHA application in the context of hydraulic fracturing on the basis of drainage area, as well as confirms the intuitive notion that water extraction will have a disproportionate effect on smaller streams. The strong influence catchment area exerts on sensitivity to surface water pumping also suggests that it should be feasible to accurately predict pumping sensitivity across the landscape and that catchment area should prove an important predictor.
Figure 32. Percent change in mean August flow as a function of basin drainage area for the low/high local and cumulative pumping scenarios. Curvilinear lines represent locally weighted regression (LOWESS) curves fit to the data to guide the eye.

**Sensitivity of hydrologic indices to surface water pumping**

The pumping analysis also helped to determine which HIs are most sensitive to surface water pumping associated with shale gas development. Table 11 lists all HIs that were predicted via RF models with R-squared values ≥ 0.8, ranked according to the median percent change across all USGS reference gages as a result of the high local and high cumulative pumping scenarios. Please refer to Henriksen et al. (2006) for a description of each index. A full list of all HIT indices ranked according withdrawal sensitivity is provided in Appendix C. In general, low flow HIs were the most sensitive to pumping – especially 1-, 3- and 7-day low flow durations and seasonal low flows occurring during the summer and fall. On the other hand, high flow duration HIs, as well as high flows during the winter and spring months were least sensitive. These results confirm the idea that low flow hydrologic indices, particularly during low flow periods, are most responsive to hydraulic fracturing-related water withdrawals; and further, that these indices would be good candidates for future monitoring programs – especially those designed to detect the long-term impacts of local and cumulative surface water pumping.
Table 11. Median percent difference between natural and pumped scenarios for all HIs with an OOB error rate less than 20%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HI</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Local High</th>
<th>Cumulative High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DL1</td>
<td>1-day low flow</td>
<td>26.06</td>
<td>30.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DL2</td>
<td>3-day low flow</td>
<td>24.645</td>
<td>29.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DL3</td>
<td>7-day low flow</td>
<td>21.815</td>
<td>25.655</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ML9</td>
<td>Median September low flow</td>
<td>15.235</td>
<td>18.035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ML8</td>
<td>Median August low flow</td>
<td>13.365</td>
<td>15.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DL4</td>
<td>30-day low flow</td>
<td>11.99</td>
<td>14.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ML7</td>
<td>Median July low flow</td>
<td>11.28</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ML10</td>
<td>Median October low flow</td>
<td>9.25</td>
<td>10.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ML6</td>
<td>Median June low flow</td>
<td>6.635</td>
<td>7.875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ML11</td>
<td>Median November low flow</td>
<td>5.43</td>
<td>6.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA1</td>
<td>Constancy</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DL5</td>
<td>90-day low flow</td>
<td>4.725</td>
<td>5.615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA19</td>
<td>August flow</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>4.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ML12</td>
<td>Median December low flow</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>4.265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA20</td>
<td>September flow</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>4.105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ML1</td>
<td>Median January low flow</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>4.075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA2</td>
<td>Predictability</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>3.825</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ML5</td>
<td>Median May low flow</td>
<td>3.285</td>
<td>3.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ML20</td>
<td>Base flow</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>3.495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA18</td>
<td>July flow</td>
<td>2.935</td>
<td>3.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA2</td>
<td>Median of daily mean flows</td>
<td>2.765</td>
<td>3.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA21</td>
<td>October flow</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>3.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ML3</td>
<td>Median March low flow</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>2.625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ML4</td>
<td>Median April low flow</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>2.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ML20</td>
<td>Base flow</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>2.245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA17</td>
<td>June flow</td>
<td>1.845</td>
<td>2.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA22</td>
<td>November flow</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA1</td>
<td>Mean of daily flows</td>
<td>1.235</td>
<td>1.465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA41</td>
<td>Annual runoff</td>
<td>1.225</td>
<td>1.405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA16</td>
<td>May flow</td>
<td>1.035</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA23</td>
<td>December flow</td>
<td>1.035</td>
<td>1.235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA12</td>
<td>Jan flow</td>
<td>0.965</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA13</td>
<td>February flow</td>
<td>0.855</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MH8</td>
<td>August high flow</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA15</td>
<td>April flow</td>
<td>0.705</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA14</td>
<td>March flow</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MH9</td>
<td>September high flow</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DH5</td>
<td>90-day high flow</td>
<td>0.605</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MH7</td>
<td>July high flow</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.665</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Environmental Flow Analysis for the Marcellus Shale Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stream Class</th>
<th>Local High</th>
<th>Cumulative High</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perennial Runoff 1</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perennial Runoff 2</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perennial Flashy</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sensitivity of stream classes to surface water pumping**

Regarding which stream classes were more responsive to surface water abstraction, it is clear that of the three predominant classes, perennial flashy stream types (PF) were the most sensitive to withdrawals (Table 12). The least sensitive was perennial runoff 1 (PR1), followed by perennial runoff 2 (PR2). This is consistent with the characteristics of each class. For example, PR1 possesses the highest baseflows and least variability, rendering it the most resilient to surface water pumping. PR2 is characterized by more flow variability and lower baseflows, translating to an intermediate level of sensitivity. Finally, PF stream types have lower, sometimes intermittent flows, lower baseflows, and higher rise/fall rates. Naturally then, these flashier systems would be the least resilient to flow perturbation. As such, they should be considered higher priority management concerns. The stable high baseflow class was omitted from this analysis because it comprised a very small portion of the MSR.

**Table 12. Mean HSIs for the high local, high cumulative and average pumping scenarios for each stream class.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stream Class</th>
<th>Local High</th>
<th>Cumulative High</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perennial Runoff 1</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perennial Runoff 2</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perennial Flashy</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Risk Analysis**

In general, the RF models for predicting hydrologic sensitivity to surface water withdrawals across the Marcellus achieved acceptable accuracy (i.e. most $R^2$ values were $> 0.65$; Table 13). HSIs were predicted for mean low, average and high flows, as well as for annual runoff and median annual flow. In general, average and low flow sensitivities were better predicted than high flows. Moreover, the high cumulative scenario was better predicted than either low- or high-local pumping scenarios.
Table 13. Variance explained by each RF model for mean low (ML), mean annual (MA), and mean high (MH) flows across three pumping scenarios.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metric</th>
<th>Low Local</th>
<th>High Local</th>
<th>High Cumulative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ML2</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ML4</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ML7</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ML8</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ML10</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA13</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA15</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA18</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA19</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA21</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MH2</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MH4</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MH7</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MH8</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MH10</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA2</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA41</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding the relative importance of predictor variables, drainage area, average precipitation, land cover type and number of dams were consistently the most influential explanatory variables across scenarios (Appendix D). It was further noted that for lower and lower flows during dry seasons, more basin attributes (e.g. baseflow index, average available water content, mean elevation) played a larger predictive role. Additionally, mean basin precipitation and elevation were much more influential in predicting low-flow sensitivity (Figure 33A), whereas high-flow sensitivities were more influenced by land cover characteristics and mean basin slope (Figure 33B).
Predicted hydrologic sensitivities to surface water withdrawals were highest during summer for magnitude-related HIs; followed by the fall, winter and spring seasons (Figures 34-36). Low flows were altered considerably more than median or high flows (Figures 34-36). For example, the maximum predicted alteration in low flows was > 50%, whereas the maximum predicted alteration in high flows was almost an order of magnitude lower (< 6%, Figure 34-36). In general, smaller catchments with lower annual rainfall, smaller baseflow indices, more dams and higher percentages of pasture and developed land were associated with higher HSI values.

Figure 33. Top ten unbiased variable importance scores for the low-flow (A) and high-flow (B) sensitivity indices.
Figure 34. Boxplots of percent alteration from natural baseline in seasonal low-flows over three pumping scenarios.

Figure 35. Boxplots of percent alteration from natural baseline in seasonal median-flows over three pumping scenarios.
Mapping the predicted HSI across all NHD streams in the MSR revealed interesting spatiotemporal patterns (Figures 37-39 and Appendix E). For instance, the majority of streams that are sensitive to water extraction during the summer season are lower order systems located primarily in two areas within the MSR: (i) a southwestern zone (Western Allegheny Plateau and Erie Drift Plain level III ecoregions located in the Upper Ohio River, Muskingum and Southern Lake Erie basins) and (ii) in a northern band (Northern Allegheny Plateau ecoregion located in the Upper Susquehanna River Basin and tributaries of the Upper Hudson River Basin). Streams at lower risk are generally located in the central MSR (Central and North Central Appalachian ecoregions located in the West Branch of the Susquehanna and Allegheny River Basins) and along the eastern border (Ridge and Valley ecoregion located in the Potomac River Basin).

Additionally, high risk stream reaches were generally characterized by the following biophysical and anthropogenic attributes: i) smaller drainage areas (headwaters and creeks), ii) fewer dams and lower overall dam storage, iii) lower average depth to seasonal water table, iv) lower elevation basins with lower average temperatures and flatter slopes, v) higher percentages of pasture and crop landuses, vi) lower percentages of evergreen and mixed forest and vii) higher percentages of poorly drained soils. Below, we provide risk maps associated with the local low pumping scenario. Risk maps for the remaining pumping scenarios are provided in Appendix E.
Figure 37. Maps of hydrologic risk to low-flows from the local low pumping scenario during spring (A), summer (B), fall (C) and winter (D). Note the legend scale relative to other pumping risk figures.
Figure 38. Maps of hydrologic risk to median-flows from the local low pumping scenario during spring (A), summer (B), fall (C) and winter (D). Note the legend scale relative to other pumping risk figures.
Combining our F-E relationships with predictions of hydrologic alteration allows us to visualize how ecological responses to hydrologic alteration vary spatially across the MSR. For example, applying the slope of the 90th QR for nest builders to projected changes in annual runoff (MA41) due to withdrawals from the local low, local high and cumulative high pumping scenarios.
Environmental Flow Analysis for the Marcellus Shale Region

highlights streams likely to experience larger shifts in nest builder abundance at increasing levels of extraction. According to Figure 40, some catchments in the MSR are predicted to experience substantial reductions (>20%) in nest builder abundance under the cumulative high scenario.

Figure 40. Maps of projected loss to the relative abundance of nest builder species (%) due to local low (A), local high (B) and cumulative high (C) pumping scenarios.

Importantly, Figure 40 represents reductions in nest builder abundance without regard to whether they existed in the stream in the first place. To obtain a more realistic estimate of the cumulative risk to particular fish groups due to withdrawals we combined HSI maps with empirical flow-ecology relationships and overlayed them with maps of projected gas development intensity, and probability of occurrence of particular species and functional guilds. Again, using nest builders
as an example, we first calculated the probability of occurrence as the mean of occurrence probabilities of all nest builders (refer to Appendix F for a brief description of methods; Figure 41). We then overlayed it with the predicted loss of nest builder abundance maps (Figure 40, normalized from 0-1) to obtain an estimate of the relative risk of nest builder degradation resulting from hydraulic fracturing withdrawals.

Figure 41. Results of species distribution models for smallmouth bass (A), spotted bass (B), fallfish (C) and red breasted sunfish (D). Legend displays probability of occurrence based on random forest model output. The probability of occurrence of nest builders was computed as the mean of all species comprising this guild.
In addition to hydrologic sensitivity to withdrawals, our cumulative risk assessment also incorporated a measure of the intensity of projected shale gas development in the MSR. Dunscomb et al. (2014) calculated the potential relative risk of shale gas development for every HUC-12 watershed in the AppLCC region (Figure 42). Although the analysis boundaries do not directly overlap, by overlaying their results with maps of nest builder occurrence and HSIs, we obtain a map of cumulative risk to nest builders that accounts for hydrologic sensitivity, probability of species presence and likelihood of exposure to pumping activities for most of the MSR. Accordingly, areas highlighted as high risk in Figure 43 (red lines) represent streams habitats favorable to nest builders, but also with a high relative risk of flow regime alteration from water withdrawals and high probability of shale gas development. Areas highlighted as high risk may be candidates for more judicious flow permitting, further study, and monitoring.

Figure 42. Map of potential relative risk to shale gas development for all HUC-12 watersheds in the MSR. Note, portions of the MSR were not included in the original analysis for the AppLCC region. Watersheds falling outside the AppLCC boundary, but within the MSR
Management Implications

A key challenge facing water resource managers and conservation planners is the translation of quantitative flow-ecology relationships into actionable management strategies and tools. The ELOHA framework specifies that this step be informed by a social process (Figure 2), whereby acceptable ecological conditions and environmental flow standards are defined through an adaptive process of stakeholder input, scientific analysis, monitoring and feedback. Although this is beyond the scope of this report, we offer an example of how some of the more compelling F-E relationships may be applied to management questions within the MSR. Using fluvial species richness (Figure 11) as an example and applying the biological condition categories listed in Table 14, we can visualize how species loss associated with declining August flows interacts with boundaries of acceptable ecological status – as well as the maximum potential flow alteration resulting from four different pumping scenarios. The biological conditions categories in Table 14 and Figure 44 are hypothetical. Poff et al. (2010) suggests that: “one possible process for setting such risk levels is to use expert panels to identify ‘thresholds of potential
concern’ (Biggs and Rogers 2003; Acreman et al. 2008), which establish where along the flow alteration gradient there is agreement among stakeholders (including scientists and managers) that further hydrologic change carries with it unacceptably high ecological risk.”

**Table 14. Hypothetical biological condition categories.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biological Condition Category</th>
<th>Loss of Species Richness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt; 5% (Healthy level of biodiversity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 - 15% (Reductions in sensitive species)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>15 - 35% (Moderate loss of sensitive species)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>35 - 65% (Severe loss of sensitive species)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>&gt; 65% (Substantial overall reduction in biodiversity)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Figure 44, it is evident that maintaining biological condition (BC) 1 requires roughly <5% alteration in August flow and that even under the maximum level of flow alteration for the “local low” pumping scenario predicted in the MSR by the RF models (vertical black dashed line), this threshold would not be exceeded. The lack of significant reduction in biological status under the “Local Low” pumping scenario suggests this level of extraction is not likely a management concern. Though not directly comparable, this level of flow alteration is similar to that of Shank and Stauffer (2014) who observed localized water withdrawals for hydraulic fracturing purposes rarely exceeded 6.5% of the mean daily flow in the Susquehanna River Basin. Indeed, most withdrawals were on the order of 0.04% and 0.10% of average daily flow in cold water and larger warm water streams, respectively. They also found that permitted withdrawals rates were generally substantially higher than actual withdrawals across all streams in their study, suggesting our pumping rates may be overly conservative. However, their analysis was based on only 12 streams and did not reflect the potential effects of cumulative water extraction.
Progressively higher extraction scenarios result in the potential for increased biological degradation. Under the worst-case-scenario (Cumulative High, dashed vertical blue line), it is possible that fluvial species richness may be reduced by approximately 25%, which equates to biological condition 3. Thus, under no extraction scenario would we see more than a “moderate” loss of species richness.

We must stress, however, that Figure 44 represents the predicted relationship under more ideal biological conditions (i.e. solid line in Figure 45). Streams that may be impaired due to other non-flow factors, such as water quality (dashed line, Figure 45) may exceed acceptable biological thresholds at lower levels of flow alteration (point B; Buchanan et al., 2013).
Figure 45. Conceptual relationship between stream biological condition and flow alteration in high- (solid line) and low-quality streams (dashed line). Points A and B highlight the lower levels of flow alteration required to exceed the threshold of acceptable biological status in high-quality vs. impaired stream systems. Adapted from Buchanan et al. (2013)

Streams with high observed flow alteration or those deemed a high risk to flow regime change due to water withdrawals may be good candidates for remediation, while streams with minimal alteration represent sites that would benefit from protection to prevent negative impacts to stream biota. The linear F-E relationships presented here could be used as decision support tools by managers and policy makers to decide where a particular level of water extraction falls on the biological condition continuum (i.e. worst, moderate or best-case scenario) and devise an appropriate response that protects or restores the streams hydrology and ecology.

Examining multiple quantiles within the wedge-shaped distribution of points in the species richness-August flow F-E relationship reveals several important points (Figure 46). First, all interior quantiles between 40 and 90 are significant, indicating that the explanatory variable (August flow alteration), is a principle limiting factor for species richness within this analytical space (Knight et al., 2013). Second, stream sites with lower or impaired species richness, such as indicated by the 70th quantile, would indeed exceed acceptable biological thresholds at lower levels of flow alteration. Third, the non-parallel slopes between significant interior quantiles (e.g. 40th, 50th, 70th and 90th) indicate that other non-flow related environmental factors are interacting with hydrology to influence species richness. The lower the quantile slope value, the more other non-flow related environmental factors play a role in influencing the dependent variable. Thus, in our example, species richness in the lower quantiles is influenced by August flow alteration and, increasingly, by an interaction with another unmeasured environmental
factor(s). Consequently, interpreting quantile regression results and using them to inform policy decisions is not as straightforward as Figure 44 implies.

We anticipated that fish communities in the MSR would be most responsive to alterations in flow during low-flow periods such as the summer and fall. However, our F-E relationships suggested that fish were sensitive to flow regime alteration throughout the year. Interestingly, we also found that low-flow periods were more important than low-flow statistics in the F-E relationships. At the same time, our pumping analysis revealed that flow regimes were particularly sensitive to water withdrawals during the summer and fall - confirming the intuitive notion that abstractions will have a disproportionate effect during low-flow periods.

Thus, our pumping analysis suggests environmental flow standards and monitoring campaigns concerning water withdrawals for hydraulic fracturing should focus on low-flow hydrologic indices during the summer and fall as these are most sensitive to alteration. However, higher low-flow requirements will only protect fish communities if depletion of low-flows is the principle hydrologic stressor acting on aquatic biota. Our flow-ecology relationships indicate that biotic integrity of fish communities is also adversely affected by changes in average- and high-flow indices, indicating that low-flow provisions alone may be inadequate to protect riverine ecosystems in the MSR.
Altogether, these findings support multi-season flow recommendations that are protective of a range of natural flow regime components, such as those outlined by DePhilip and Moberg (2010, 2013). In the context of water withdrawals for hydraulic fracturing, it may also be prudent to ensure more conservative flow requirements for specific stream types (e.g. high risk streams), seasons and flow regime components that were shown to be more responsive to withdrawals. For example, DePhilip and Moberg (2013) suggest “higher levels of protection (i.e., more conservative limits to hydrologic alteration):

- To small streams as compared to large rivers (e.g., no change to monthly median in headwaters, < 10% change in small rivers, and < 15% change in medium tributaries and large rivers).
- In dry seasons compared to wet seasons (e.g., for medium tributaries and large rivers: no change to monthly Q90 in summer and fall and < 10% change to monthly Q90 in winter and spring).
- For low flow conditions than median or high flow conditions. (e.g., for medium tributaries and large rivers: <15% change to monthly median and < 10% change to monthly Q90).

According to the withdrawal analysis, hydrologic disturbance from a single withdrawal point (local scenario) would not likely result in significant ecological effects except under the high local pumping scenario during summer and fall. In many cases, withdrawing at the “local high” rate of 2.5 cfs would exceed 6.8% of the mean daily flow – the maximum level of water extraction for hydraulic fracturing observed by Shank and Stauffer (2014). In addition, this level of extraction might be prohibited in many areas in the MSR due to pass-by flow regulations (i.e. a prescribed streamflow below which withdrawal must cease). For instance, for the vast majority of permits it issues, the Susquehanna River Basin Commission (SRBC) currently applies pass-by flow requirements that are a function of the lowest average flow that would be experienced during a consecutive 7-day period estimated to occur only once in 10 years (Q7-10). More specifically, the SRBC has determined that pass-by flows apply “if a proposed withdrawal, either individually or cumulatively when coupled with withdrawals for upstream users, exceeds 10 percent of the Q7-10 flow” (SRBC, 2015). Thus, the pumping analysis is likely overly conservative in many basins with pre-existing low-flow requirements. Given the lack of consistent environmental flow standards across the MSR and the dearth of empirical data on actual withdrawal rates, it is difficult to ascertain the degree to which our pumping analysis overestimates hydrologic risk. A potentially very useful exercise for water resource managers and conservation planners is to overlay regulatory boundaries with the HSI maps (Figures 37-39 and Appendix E) to highlight areas that are at high risk, but currently under-protected. These areas should be prioritized for management and monitoring.

An additional concern, which may complicate future water resource management decisions in the MSR, is global climate change. However, predicting the ecological consequences of water
withdrawals in the context of climate change is not trivial given the host of other potential factors, including land-cover change, water-related infrastructure (e.g. dams), and other non-gas-development related consumptive water uses. Looking at the combined effects of projected changes in impervious cover, water withdrawals and climate change under both low and high growth and emission scenarios, Caldwell et al. (2012) showed that much of the northern and eastern portions of the MSR will experience modest increases in annual flows by 2060 (Figure 47). This was corroborated by Palmer et al. (2009) who conducted a similar study by evaluating projections from 12 different climate models. Caldwell et al. (2012) attributed enhanced annual flows mostly to increased precipitation and impervious surface, resulting in more runoff which exceeded projected increases in water withdrawals. Nevertheless, some watersheds in the southwestern MSR may experience up to a 10% reduction in average annual discharge, which may lead to adverse ecological impacts, particularly in streams with existing impairment. Moreover, the areas predicted to be more affected by climate, water use and land cover change overlap with the perennial flashy stream type, which our pumping analysis indicated would be particularly sensitive of withdrawals.
Figure 47. Projected changes in mean annual flows in 2060 given land use, population, and climate change under low (a) and high (b) growth and emission scenarios. Dark red polygons represent the approximate boundary of the Marcellus Shale Region. Black polygons represent watershed where gross demand exceeds the sum of surface water supply and groundwater withdrawals, indicating likely transfer of water from other watersheds. Adapted from Caldwell et al. (2012).

While this suggests that future climate and land use change may buffer increased withdrawals in much of the MSR, such analyses do not address the issue of increased climate variability on flow regimes. Hejazi and Moglen (2008) found that increased temperature and precipitation extremes associated with climate projections will lead to lower low-flows and higher peak flows in 6 urbanizing watersheds in the Piedmont region of Maryland. Such flow effects will likely disproportionately impact intermittent and flashy stream systems such as those identified in this report (Brooks, 2009). Given the lack of consensus and uncertainties regarding climate change
there is a clear need for further research into the combined effects of climate change, water abstraction for gas development and other anthropogenic disturbances on freshwater ecosystems.

**Limitations, Knowledge Gaps and Future Directions**

We encountered a number of data limitations and knowledge gaps in the process of applying the ELOHA framework to the MSR. They are summarized as follows:

- Although our reference USGS gages were chosen because they were minimally altered, many have experience some level of human disturbance. Indeed, few watersheds in North America can reasonably be considered “pristine”. This may obfuscate F-E relationships.
- Sampling periods of fish and hydrologic datasets did not necessary overlap directly in time. Thus, it is possible that in some cases, historical flow records, which partially overlapped fish sampling efforts in time, may not accurately reflect the degree of flow alteration experienced by the fish community at that site.
- The smaller range of drainage areas in the reference gage dataset restricted our analysis to basins <2,500 km\(^2\), limiting the applicability of our F-E relationships to smaller streams and rivers. However, as the pumping analysis revealed, even the cumulative effect of multiple water extraction sites within the same watershed is not likely to result in appreciable flow alteration in basins larger than this threshold.
- Our analysis did not account for stream temperature classes due to a lack of temperature data in the MSR. This may also help to further refine F-E relationships.
- Our fish database contained fish sampling data from a variety of sources, which may introduce a certain degree of sampling error. For instance, different agencies may employ different sampling protocols (e.g. gear, gear deployment, sampling seasons, etc.) and data collection methods. To maintain a sufficient sample size it was necessary to make the assumption that the differences in sampling methodologies are negligible, but this is not necessarily the case.
- For ease of calculation we only determined statistical significance of F-E relationships by examining p-values associated with 90\(^{th}\) quantile regressions. To some extent, the choice of the 90\(^{th}\) quantile is arbitrary. Had we investigated other quantiles we would likely have observed other interesting F-E relationships. Future studies may want to pursue this line of inquiry.
- The pumping analysis was difficult to construct given the lack of data concerning actual observed water withdrawals by the gas industry. To date, there is only one study that explicitly evaluated empirical effects of hydraulic fracturing withdrawals in the MSR. More real-world data regarding the activities of hydraulic fracturing operators would greatly benefit future studies.
- The limited sample size of paired USGS gages and MARIS fish sampling sites prevented us from constructing F-E relationships specific to particular stream classes or
physiographic regions. An expanded flow-ecology dataset may allow for refinement of the F-E curves outlined here. Towards this end, it may be useful to develop RF models to predict natural and altered HIs across all basins in the MSR. This would greatly expand the flow-ecology dataset. However, it would come at the cost of additional uncertainty in estimates of flow alteration.

- Streams or basins within the MSR found to be at high risk and possessing good ecological data, yet with little existing flow data or flow standards in place may be good candidates for more detailed flow simulation using a process-based hydrologic model such as SWAT. For this step, it may be advisable to identify a subset of representative reference stream basins in each hydro-type identified by our stream classification effort. SWAT models could then be developed for each basin under “natural” and “altered” conditions to estimate flow alteration in all streams within the study basins. Consumptive pumping scenarios, which vary the rate and density at which surface water is withdrawn from subbasins within chosen catchments, could also be simulated.

Conclusions

Understanding the potential effects of surface water withdrawals for hydraulic fracturing activities on riverine ecosystems is a key step in making informed and prudent management decisions. Applying the ELOHA framework to stream systems within the Marcellus Shale Region revealed a number of significant findings that may be useful for defining environmental flow standards in the context of surface water withdrawals, as well as for providing guidance to future studies. For clarity, we summarize our salient findings by topic.

Constructing a hydrologic foundation

- Statistically based models performed well and provided reasonable estimates of natural flow regimes. This method is likely preferable to process-based hydrologic models over such a broad region due to excessive parameterization requirements, computational challenges, difficulties associated with the regionalization of calibration parameters and a lack of data regarding existing anthropogenic impacts (e.g. dam operations, industrial and agricultural water withdrawals) necessary to accurately simulate natural and altered flows in the MSR.

Selecting Flow Indices

- Using RF model performance (i.e. out-of-bag error) as a first cut of our HI selection protocol proved effective and practical. Using a threshold of 0.8 reduced the field of potential indices from 171 to 60. The remaining 60 HIs covered the major facets of the natural flow regime. However, other than flow constancy and predictability, flow timing-related HIs were not well predicted by the RF models, yet these could be affected by withdrawals and may be important to the fish community. The remaining HIs were
further winnowed down to a more tractable set of 28 by considering both the indices sensitivity to modeled water extraction and its importance according to ecological theory.

Stream Classification

- Using a hierarchical stream classification of the Appalachian LCC and a set of geomorphic and climatic basin characteristics as training data for RF models, we predicted a total of four different stream classes in the MSR: i) Perennial Runoff 1, ii) Perennial Runoff 2, iii) Stable High Baseflow and iv) Perennial Flashy.
- Conceptually, streams in the perennial flashy category should be more sensitive to flow alteration than other classes in the MSR. These may be candidates for more targeted or conservative management.

Flow-Ecology Relationships

- Significant F-E relationships covered a range of fish assemblage and structure metrics, as well as a variety of seasonal and annual flow statistics.
- The vast majority of significant relationships were associated with negative flow alteration and resulted in declining ecological metrics.
- Some ecological metrics, such as life history traits and trophic structure displayed inconsistent or mostly insignificant linkages with changes in flow regime. This may indicate that these metrics are not the most responsive to flow alteration, or perhaps, that errors and uncertainties in our analysis, due to small sample sizes, lead to some spurious results.
- Sample size limitations also prevented a rigorous investigation of class- or region-specific F-E relationships. Even so, our F-E relationships achieved significance for numerous ecological endpoints, suggesting many of the relationships hold over the entire MSR, regardless of hydro-type or bioregion.

Pumping Scenarios

- Our consumptive water use analysis revealed that the hydrologic effects of water abstraction decay exponentially with increasing drainage area across all pumping scenarios. Importantly, we noted a threshold in the flow alteration-area relationship. Specifically, basins larger than roughly 1000 km² would not likely experience substantial flow alteration from local or cumulative water withdrawals associated with hydraulic fracturing activities. This provides guidance for managers in that it suggests smaller watersheds should be prioritized for hydraulic fracturing related flow standards.
- The pumping scenarios also revealed that low-flow statistics including low-flow duration and seasonal low-flows (summer and fall) were most sensitive to withdrawals, while high flows were least sensitive. The nature of our pumping analyses precluded evaluation of withdrawal effects on timing- or frequency-related HIs.
Local or cumulative pumping rates are much less likely to substantially affect stream hydrology during high flow seasons such as the winter and spring (median predicted percent alteration in median low flows during spring or winter < 15%). Additionally, median and high monthly flow statistics are unlikely to be altered much by hydraulic fracturing withdrawals. However, pumping during low flow seasons (summer and fall), especially during low flow periods (median low flows), may result in considerable changes in flow regimes (e.g. flow alteration in median low flows during the summer season across all pumping scenarios ranged from ~8–40%).

The lack of pass-by flow limitations and re-use of flowback water likely resulted in conservative estimates.

Based on the findings of Shank and Stauffer (2014), the local low scenario may represent the most realistic pumping rate for single withdrawal sites.

Perennial flashy stream types are more sensitive than other stream classes in the MSR. These would also be good candidates for targeted management. In addition, stream flow depletion associated with climate, land use and water use change is projected to be strongest over this region of the MSR.

**Risk Analysis**

- RF models achieved acceptable performance in predicting hydrologic sensitivity indices across the MSR (i.e. most OOB pseudo-R\(^2\) values exceeded 0.85).
- Mapping hydrologic sensitivity indices across the MSR revealed spatial and temporal patterns in risk of flow alteration due to withdrawals. Few streams are at high risk during the spring and winter, whereas a considerable number are at risk during the summer and fall seasons. In general, high risk streams are located in the southwestern (i.e. western portions of the Ohio River Basin) and northern (i.e. headwaters of the Upper Susquehanna and Hudson River Basins) sections of the MSR.
- High risk streams are characterized by smaller drainage areas, lower average annual precipitation, greater number of dams, higher elevation, fewer dams and lower overall dam storage, lower average depth to seasonal water table, lower elevation basins with lower average temperatures and flatter slopes, higher percentages of pasture and crop landuses, lower percentages of evergreen and mixed forest and higher percentages of poorly drained soils.
- The analysis provided information for targeted management by highlighting areas at greater risk of alteration. Combining the HSI mapping with species distribution models and existing or projected hydraulic fracturing well densities also provided species-specific risk assessments. Such assessments are important for evaluating the locations where species of concern (i.e. threaten, endangered or simply of particular management concern) are at greatest risk.
Management Implications

The above findings can ultimately be distilled to a number of important management implications and guidelines.

- Environmental flow standards and monitoring campaigns concerning water withdrawals for hydraulic fracturing should focus on low flow hydrologic indices during the summer and fall as these are most sensitive to alteration. However, our flow-ecology relationships indicate that fish communities are also adversely affected by changes in average- and high-flow indices, indicating that low-flow provisions alone (e.g. Q7-10) may be inadequate to protect riverine ecosystems in the MSR. Thus, we suggest multi-season flow standards that are protective of a range of natural flow regime components, such as those outlined by DePhilip and Moberg (2010, 2013).

- In the context of water withdrawals for hydro-fracking, it may also be prudent to ensure more conservative flow requirements for specific stream types (small streams with high risk indices), seasons and flow regime components that were shown to be more responsive to withdrawals.

- Many of the existing pass-by flow requirements in the MSR are based more on hydrologic rules-of-thumb rather than empirically-based quantitative analyses. The F-E relationships outlined here may provide guidance for the refinement and justification of environmental flow regulations. Likewise, in areas with minimal flow protections in place this analysis should provide necessary baseline data for constructing defensible initial flow standards.

- Streams with high observed flow alteration or those deemed a high risk to flow regime change due to water withdrawals may be good candidates for remediation, while streams with minimal alteration represent sites that would benefit from protection to prevent negative impacts to stream biota. The linear F-E relationships presented here could be used as decision support tools by managers and policy makers to pinpoint where a particular level of water extraction falls on the biological condition continuum (i.e. worst, moderate or best-case scenario) and devise an appropriate response that protects or restores the stream’s hydrology and ecology.

- Another concern is that managers and policy makers understand that these estimates have a degree of uncertainty that remains unquantified. Thus, policy decisions based on these findings should occur as part of an adaptive process, wherein flow provisions are designed and implemented as experiments with appropriate monitoring and feedback.

Water resources and rainfall in the Marcellus Shale Region are abundant. The total amount of water required for gas development is small relative to the overall regional water demand. However, this report demonstrates that, while seemingly trivial at a regional scale, surface water withdrawals at the scale of individual streams, especially headwaters, can be considerable and
must be appropriately managed to ensure that human water needs are well balanced with those of riverine ecosystems.
References


SRBC. Susquehanna River Basin Commission Information Sheet: Natural Gas Well Development in the Susquehanna River Basin


Appendix A – Fish Lists

Table A-1. Common names, scientific names, and number and percentage of individuals observed at fish sampling sites within the MSR.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Name</th>
<th>Scientific Name</th>
<th>Total Catch</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
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<td>Central Stoneroller</td>
<td>Campostoma anomalum</td>
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<td>Salmo trutta</td>
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## Environmental Flow Analysis for the Marcellus Shale Region

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Environmental Flow Analysis for the Marcellus Shale Region

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Table A-2. Common names, scientific names, and percentage of sites sorted by the number of sites at which each species was observed.

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<th>Common Name</th>
<th>Scientific Name</th>
<th># of Sites</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
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<td>decrease depth and temperature. These conditions may encourage ice infiltration</td>
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<td>of salmonid eggs leading to reduced survival or impaired development.</td>
<td>x x x</td>
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<td>During winter, a decrease in streamflow and groundwater contributions may</td>
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<td>After spawning, during egg and larval development, a decrease in seasonal</td>
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<td>During spring, seasonal flows needed to maintain sediment free salmonid redds.</td>
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<td>A decrease in flow magnitude may lead to suffocation.</td>
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Table B-1. Flow-ecology hypotheses from DePhilip and Moberg (2010).
During spawning and egg and larval development, riffle obligates need stable flows, if the magnitude of low flows decreases, fines may accumulate, suffocating eggs.

During March and April, riffle associates (redhorses) and potadromous fish (specifically walleye, sauger and Escocids), rely on temperature and increased streamflow to provide spawning cues. If low flow magnitude decreases, spawning cues and connectivity may be lost.

Similarly, if high flow magnitude and duration increase, upstream spawning migration may be delayed (salmonids, burbot, migratory residents, riffle associates).

From March to June, a decrease in median flows may reduce fish movement to, and availability of, preferred spawning habitats. Fish spawning in riffles are especially sensitive and they vary in body-size and river types (eg darters, redhorses, paddlefish).

From March to June, great river fish and riffle associates in the navigation reaches need high flows to provide connectivity to upstream tributary habitats.

From April to July, the larvae larvae of migratory residents (walleye) and riffle associates (suckers) need slackwater habitats (often in stream margin), for development. An increase in the magnitude or frequency of high flow events would increase the velocity along stream margins reducing available slackwater habitat.

From April to July, larvae of migratory residents (walleye) and riffle associates (suckers) need slackwater habitats (often in stream margin), for development. A decrease in low flow magnitude may disconnect stream margin and backwater habitats from the main channel.

From April to June, great river species including longnose gar and bigmouth buffalo need SAV or floodplain access for adhesive egg laying. Flooding duration must allow larvae to move back out into the channel.
During spring, an increase in the magnitude or frequency of high flows can scour nests. River chub may be particularly sensitive to this change in tributaries and large rivers and hornyhead chub in headwaters and small rivers.

During nest building and egg and larval development (spring) increased flashiness, may dewater nests and has been associated with decreased abundance of YOY.

During egg and larval development (spring), increased magnitude, frequency or duration of high flows may decrease egg and larval survival and associated year class strength.

From April through August, in riffles, if seasonal flows are too low then egg and larval development may be impaired by oxygen depletion, desiccation or suffocation.

From April through August, in riffles, if high flow magnitude or frequency increase, developing eggs and larvae may be scoured and/or physically damaged.

During summer months, a decrease in median flow may limit the quality and availability of riffle habitats for riffle obligate fishes.

During the summer low flow period, a decrease in low flow magnitude can result in downstream migration of headwater fishes, compressing the species and thermal gradient, and increasing predator-prey interactions (eg brook trout and brown trout).

During the summer low flow period, a decrease in low flow magnitude may result in loss of refugia and a shift toward a top-predator dominated system.

During summer months, riffle obligates that specialize in highly oxygenated, lower riffle/plunge turbulent environments (redside dace in headwaters, rosyface shiner in small warm streams, silver shiner in small cool-cold streams) are sensitive to decreasing flow magnitude which would contract or eliminate this habitat niche.

A decrease in the magnitude of summer low flows may restrict access for centrarchids and escocids to SAV habitats.
For substrate specialists an increase in high flow frequency, magnitude or duration may destabilize habitats and flush preferred substrates

<table>
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<tr>
<th>All river types</th>
<th>Small river, cool glaciated and Medium tributary, warm glaciated</th>
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Appendix C – HI Sensitivity

Please refer to Henrikson et al. (2006) for a detailed description of each hydrologic index.

Table C-1. Hydrologic indices and descriptions ranked according to their sensitivity to water withdrawals under high local and cumulative pumping scenarios.

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<td>RA9</td>
<td>Reversal variability</td>
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Appendix D – Variable Importance Plots

Figure D-1. Unbiased variable importance plot for the winter low-flow hydrologic sensitivity RF model.
Figure D-2. Unbiased variable importance plot for the spring low-flow hydrologic sensitivity RF model
Figure D-3. Unbiased variable importance plot for the summer low-flow hydrologic sensitivity RF model
Figure D-4. Unbiased variable importance plot for the fall low-flow hydrologic sensitivity RF model.
Figure D-5. Unbiased variable importance plot for the winter median-flow hydrologic sensitivity RF model.
Figure D-6. Unbiased variable importance plot for the spring median-flow hydrologic sensitivity RF model.
Figure D-7. Unbiased variable importance plot for the summer median-flow hydrologic sensitivity RF model.
Figure D-8. Unbiased variable importance plot for the fall median-flow hydrologic sensitivity RF model.
Figure D-9. Unbiased variable importance plot for the winter high-flow hydrologic sensitivity RF model.
Figure D-10. Unbiased variable importance plot for the spring high-flow hydrologic sensitivity RF model.
Figure D-11. Unbiased variable importance plot for the summer high-flow hydrologic sensitivity RF model.
Figure D-12. Unbiased variable importance plot for the fall high-flow hydrologic sensitivity RF model.
Appendix E – Risk Maps

Local High Pumping Scenario – Low-Flows

Figure E-1. Maps of hydrologic risk to low-flow from the local high pumping scenario during spring (A), summer (B), fall (C) and winter (D). Note the legend scale relative to other pumping risk figures.
Local High Pumping Scenario – Median-Flows

Figure E-2. Maps of hydrologic risk to median-flow from the local high pumping scenario during spring (A), summer (B), fall (C) and winter (D). Note the legend scale relative to other pumping risk figures.
Local High Pumping Scenario – High-Flows

Figure E-3. Maps of hydrologic risk to high-flow from the local high pumping scenario during spring (A), summer (B), fall (C) and winter (D). Note the legend scale relative to other pumping risk figures.
Figure E-4. Maps of hydrologic risk to low-flow from the cumulative high pumping scenario during spring (A), summer (B), fall (C) and winter (D). Note the legend scale relative to other pumping risk figures.
Cumulative High Pumping Scenario – Median-Flows

Figure E-5. Maps of hydrologic risk to median-flow from the cumulative high pumping scenario during spring (A), summer (B), fall (C) and winter (D). Note the legend scale relative to other pumping risk figures.
Cumulative High Pumping Scenario – High-Flows

Figure E-6. Maps of hydrologic risk to high-flow from the cumulative high pumping scenario during spring (A), summer (B), fall (C) and winter (D). Note the legend scale relative to other pumping risk figures.
Appendix F – Species Distribution Models

Methods
Using the MARIS fish database, we assembled a species presence/absence matrix according to occurrences within National Hydrography Dataset (NHD V1) catchments (based on distance thresholds to stream lines). A total of 119 predictor variables were assembled for NHD catchments and represented natural characteristics, landscape disturbances, habitat fragmentation, and sampling effort. Natural characteristics included (but were not limited to) drainage area, mean annual flow, climate, gradient, soils, bedrock geology, level III Ecoregions, and hydrologic classes. Landscape disturbances included variables such as upstream dams, urbanization, agriculture, roads. Habitat fragmentation represented river length measures of fragmented habitats (bounded by up-and down-stream dams) or binary measures of whether NHD stream reaches had unobstructed flow to the ocean or Great Lakes. Because species occupancy is partially an artifact of detection probability (MacKenzie et al. 2006), we included two measures of sampling effort, one being the number of sites sampled within each reach and the second being the number of sampling occurrences within each reach.

Based on regional expertise (DePhilip and Moberg 2010, 2013), we identified seven functional trait groups of fish species, each representing hypothesized linkages between different components of the flow regime (Table 7). Hence, these functional groups are expected to respond differently to hydrologic alterations, depending on which aspects of flow regimes are disturbed. In total, we used 42 different species or guilds (i.e., combinations of species if individual species sample size was too low) to represent functional trait groups. This roughly translated to 4 to 8 species or guilds representing each functional trait group; the lamprey functional group was represented by only one guild, which consisted of all lamprey species (Ichthyomyzon or Lampetra). Random forests (Breiman 2001) were used to model presences or absences of each species or guild, which then yielded presence probabilities based on maximum values for sampling effort measures.

Probabilities of presence were then averaged to provide a measure of functional trait prevalence within each NHD reach. These were then overlain with maps of hydrologic risk, representing different aspects of flow regimes at risk from hydrologic fracturing pumping scenarios. Depending on hypothesized functional trait–flow regime linkages, catchments with higher risk were prioritized if functional trait prevalence was also high.

Results
Random forest model performance was satisfactory at predicting species or guild presence, with out-of-bag (OOB) error rates ranging from 1.3% to 23%.
Table F-1. Out-of-bag (OOB) error rates from random forest models of species presence/absence across the Marcellus Shale region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>OOB Error (%)</th>
<th>Species</th>
<th>OOB Error (%)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Shorthead Redhorse</td>
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<td>Striped Shiner</td>
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<td>Spotted Bass</td>
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<td>Tessellated Darter</td>
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<td>Creek Chub</td>
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**Literature Cited**

Appendix G – Annotated Bibliography


Booker and Woods (2014) compared a variety of available methods for estimating several hydrological indices and flow duration curves at ungauged catchments across New Zealand. Specifically, they compared a process-based spatially distributed hydrologic model (TopNet), empirical regression models based on hydrologic theory, empirically-based random forest models and random forest corrected TopNet estimates in order to assess which method best predicted several hydrological indices given current climatic and land cover conditions. Importantly, they found that empirically-based random forest models outperformed all other methods, including the process-based spatially distributed hydrologic model. This suggests that applying a statistical approach in the Marcellus Shale Region would prove more effective.


The only peer-reviewed example of a process-based hydrologic model being applied across a large basin for the purposes of determining environmental flows following an ELOHA-style framework was that of Buchanan et al. (2013). In this study, the authors applied the Chesapeake Bay Program Hydrologic Simulation Program–FORTRAN (HSPF) model and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality Online Object Oriented Meta-Model (WOOOMM) routing module to the Potomac River Basin.

They found that the combined HSPF-WOOOMM model failed to properly simulate streamflow in smaller urbanized basins or on or near karst geology. In addition, Nash-Sutcliffe efficiencies, ranged from 0.33 to 0.82, indicating a very wide range of model performance (i.e. very poor to good). We should emphasize that this study likely represents a best case scenario in terms of data availability and parameterization. For instance, the study was conducted in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, which has been the subject of intensive study for many decades. Through the combined efforts of numerous non-profit organizations and state and federal agencies, an extensive database of information necessary for a well parameterized model has been amassed. Furthermore, the HSPF-WOOOMM model was expressively designed and calibrated for the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. Even under these relatively ideal conditions, the process-based model yielded results of questionable utility in many of the modeled catchments. This is in accordance with the result of our SWAT modeling.

This paper investigated the ability of statistical models developed using random forest modeling at national and regional scales to correctly predict 13 flow indices. The authors found that the random forest-based national and regional scale models performed equally well and outperformed landscape stratification models, which were based on classifications such as ecoregions and major river basins. The authors assert that such models can be applied to accurately predict natural flow regimes at ungaged catchments and that they are sensitive to long-term land use change.


This paper presents a national scale analysis of 2888 streamflow monitoring sites in the U.S. The authors detected changes in the magnitudes of mean annual, minimum and maximum streamflows. A second analysis conducted on a subset of these stream gages suggested that reduced flow magnitudes were the primary predictors of biologic integrity for fish and aquatic insect communities.


This document presents a set of flow recommendations for the Susquehanna River Basin developed by The Nature Conservancy for the Susquehanna River Basin Commission (SRBC) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). The flow recommendations address the full range of ecologically relevant flow conditions (i.e. low and high flows, seasonal flows, etc.) across the suite of characteristics that comprise the “natural flow regime” (i.e. timing, magnitude, frequency and duration of flows). The ultimate goal of the report is to provide key guidance for the establishment of flow limitations for water withdrawals within the Susquehanna River basin that minimize ecological impacts of consumptive water use – especially during critical low flow periods. The authors made use of existing field data, hydrologic analyses, published literature and expert opinion to develop their recommendations. Additionally, the flow recommendations were devised taking into account a wide range of aquatic and terrestrial biota, including: birds, mammals, riparian and aquatic vegetation, reptiles and amphibians, fish, mussels and aquatic macroinvertebrates. The resulting flow recommendations are summarized as follows:

**High flows**
For all streams and rivers
- Maintain magnitude and frequency of 20-yr (large) flood
- Maintain magnitude and frequency of 5-yr (small) flood
- Maintain magnitude and frequency of 1 to 2-yr high flow (bankfull) event
- Limit the change to the monthly Q10 to less than 10%
- Maintain the long-term frequency of high pulse events during summer and fall

Seasonal flows
For all streams and rivers
- Maintain the long-term monthly median between the 45th and 55th percentiles
- Limit change to “typical monthly range” to less than 20%

Low flows
For all streams and rivers with drainage areas greater than 50 square miles
- Limit change to “monthly low flow range” to less than 10%
- Maintain the long-term monthly Q95

For headwater streams with drainage areas less than 50 square miles
- Maintain the long-term “monthly low flow range”
- Maintain the long-term monthly Q75


This study highlights ecological threats that natural gas extraction poses to aquatic biota. The authors explore a host of potential impacts, including increased sediment loads from road runoff and pipeline construction, flow regime alteration from surface water pumping activities, and water quality degradation through the introduction of hydraulic fracturing chemicals and/or flowback water. The paper concludes that our understanding of these potential effects is currently lacking and that additional study is needed in order to ensure appropriate management policies are developed.

This paper describes the construction of the GAGESII database, which contains several hundred watershed and site characteristics associated with 6,785 USGS stream gages. The attributes were calculated or compiled from national data sources and include environmental features (e.g., climate, geology, soils, topography) and anthropogenic influences (e.g., land use, roads, presence of dams, or canals). The USGS gages were also classified into reference and non-reference groups based on their level of anthropogenic disturbance.


This program facilitates the calculation of HIT indices used in this study.


This study provides critical guidance regarding the effect of discharge record length and time period of record on uncertainty in the calculation of 120 commonly used hydrologic metrics. The authors conclude that: 1) hydrologic indices should be calculated based on a minimum of 15 years of discharge data and 2) discharge records should have considerable overlap (ideally >50%).


Using 66 hydrologic indices, this study classified 292 streams across an eight state region of the Southeastern U.S. The authors identified a total of six stream types within the study region and also provide recommendation for a reduced set of hydrologic indices based on a classification tree analysis. Additionally, the study found that flow classification schemes are sensitive to the spatial resolution of the analysis.


This study applied the ELOHA framework to inform flow restoration recommendations in the Upper Tennessee River Basin. The authors constructed univariate flow-ecology
relationships and compared their predictive ability to that of multivariate flow-ecology models. Results suggest that the univariate models were outperformed by the multivariate models in terms of providing guidance for flow restoration in regulated rivers. The multivariate models indicated an inverse relationship between flow magnitude and riparian encroachment – and further, that alterations in substrate, stream temperature and the disturbance regime may reduce fish colonization.


Empirical and theoretical flow-ecology relationships were compiled from numerous studies in the South Atlantic region (SAR) of the U.S. The authors found that ecological responses to natural source of flow alteration were highly variable and difficult to generalize. However, they found consistent negative relationships between ecology (fish abundance, diversity, reproduction and diversity) and anthropogenic sources of flow alteration. Some ecological responses (aquatic insects and riparian vegetation) were inconsistent and in some cases exhibited a positive response to flow alteration (algal abundance). Importantly, the authors also found that developing flow-ecology relationships at a regional scale is challenging and suggest instead that the relationships are far more meaningful when stratified into specific flow categories or by geomorphic setting.


This study compared the performance of two different methods for estimating indicators of hydrologic alteration (IHA): 1) a simple drainage area ratio (DAR) technique and 2) lumped parameter hydrologic model developed for the Chesapeake Bay region (Chesapeake Bay Program Phase 5 Model). IHAs were calculated using both methods and results were compared with IHAs calculated from observed data. The authors found that the simple DAR method characterized low-flow IHAs better than the far more complex, difficult to parameterize and calibrate Chesapeake Bay Program Model.


The National Hydrography Dataset is a data-rich This database contains georeferenced national hydrography for the US, including stream networks, watershed boundaries,
headwater nodes, cumulative drainage area characteristics, flow direction and accumulation grids and flow volume and velocity estimates for all stream segments in the network. It is particularly useful as a source of physical basin characteristics for use in predictive statistical models.


This paper evaluates 171 hydrologic indices to provide guidance for researchers who must choose metrics that will minimize computational effort and reduce redundancy and multicollinearity. The authors also explore the transferability of the recommended indices over different stream types in order to ensure accurate flow regime characterization across different geological and climatic environments.


This is the seminal paper which first outlined the ecological limits of hydrologic alteration (ELOHA) framework. The authors synthesize a number of pre-existing environmental flow analysis techniques into a cohesive framework for regional flow management. The method involves first building a hydrologic foundation consisting of baseline flow patterns for relevant streams in the area of interest. Secondly, streams area classified into flow regime types based on ecologically relevant flow variables. Third, the degree of hydrologic alteration is calculated as the difference in baseline vs. current flow metrics. Finally, a set of flow-ecology relationships are constructed for each of the stream types identified in the second step. The authors also emphasize the importance of acknowledging uncertainty in flow-ecology relationships and recommend applying the ELOHA method in a “consensus context where stakeholders and decision-makers explicitly evaluate acceptable risk as a balance between the perceived value of the ecological goals, the economic costs involved and the scientific uncertainties in functional relationships between ecological responses and flow alteration”.


This paper points out that while significant progress has been made in the field of environmental flow protection, it is unlikely that the newly developed techniques will be successfully applied to most rivers in the U.S. and especially in more data-scarce regions.
around the world. The authors suggest that this will leave most rivers unprotected from flow alteration and argue for the adoption of a “presumptive standard” based on the Sustainability Boundary Approach of Richter (2009). They go one to discuss the management implications of their proposed approach.


This study presents the development of the Watershed Flow Evaluation Tool (WFET) to “estimate flow-related ecological risk in the state of Colorado. The model was applied to two watersheds with differing data availability. The WFET successfully applied to assess ecological risk associated with flow alteration in one of the study watersheds. However, in the other watershed, active channel erosion and bed degradation prevented successful application of the tool. Despite the limited success for the tool, the authors conclude that it is appropriate for evaluating ecological risk associated with anthropogenic flow alteration.


The authors used the Variable Infiltration Capacity (VIC) hydrologic model in two headwater catchments in the Fraser River, British Columbia, Canada to evaluate whether the model was able to accurately simulate a suite of water resource indicators (WRIs) and indicators of hydrologic alteration (IHAs). The VIC model yielded mixed results – correctly simulating some WRIs and IHAs, but demonstrated statistically significant differences in modeled and observed WRIs and IHAs. The authors go on to point out specific model issues which contributed to discrepancies in modeled and observed flow statistics (e.g. model input/output data) and emphasize caution when using model-derived flow indicators.


This report provides an excellent summary of efforts of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, The Nature Conservancy, and Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin to conduct a Sustainable Flow and Water Resources Analysis for the Potomac River Basin. It details their collaborative to determine the “relationship between streamflow alteration and ecological response in the Potomac River and its tributaries”. The assessment is divided into five sub-groups, including i) a large river environmental flow needs assessment, ii) a stream and small rivers environmental flow needs
assessment, iii) a projection of future water uses, iv) a stakeholder engagement process, and v) development of a concept or scope for a strategic comprehensive plan for watershed management. The analysis was further broken up into two separate flow assessment strategies: i) large rivers were evaluated using the Ecologically Sustainable Water Management (ESWM) approach, and ii) ELOHA was used for streams and small rivers. Importantly, they found that “in the large rivers included in this study, based on currently available information, there has been no discernible adverse ecological impact on focal species due to human modification of flows”. This suggests that smaller rivers and streams should be the focus of the Marcellus Shale study - and indeed, these would be the most sensitive to hydraulic fracturing related water withdrawals. “As a precautionary measure, the team did recommend that the current large river flow regime be maintained for the entire range of flows as defined by 20 flow statistics based on a 21-year period of record (1984-2005)”. They did find that small stream and rivers were quite sensitive to hydrologic alteration resulting from urbanization (e.g. increases in impervious surface). Interestingly, land use change was found to be a stronger cause for hydrologic alteration than water withdrawals and impoundments. The team used macroinvertebrate metrics as their ecological endpoints for measuring degradation. They found strong relationships between increase flashiness and decrease indices of biotic integrity, but little response from changes to low flow magnitudes. They also conducted a scenario analysis which evaluated the effects of: i) three different forecasts of per capita domestic water use, ii) climate change, iii) hot and dry summer conditions, and iv) conversion of power plants to closed cycle operation. They found no regional pattern of flow alteration applied to all scenarios and, “within scenarios, impacts on flow varied for each subwatershed’s unique combination of land and water uses”.

The Appalachian LCC is a self-directed regional partnership. The Department of the Interior through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is providing project support and staff to facilitate this partnership.