Seasonal variation in apparent conductivity and soil salinity at two Narragansett Bay, RI salt marshes

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Measurement of the apparent conductivity of salt marsh sediments using electromagnetic induction (EMI) is a rapid alternative to traditional methods of salinity determination that can be used to map soil salinity across a marsh surface. Soil salinity measures can provide information about marsh processes, since salinity is important in determining the structure and function of tidally influenced marsh communities. While EMI has been shown to accurately reflect salinity to a specified depth, more information is needed on the potential for spatial and temporal variability in apparent conductivity measures that may impact the interpretation of salinity data. In this study we mapped soil salinity at two salt marshes in the Narragansett Bay, RI estuary monthly over the course of several years to examine spatial and temporal trends in marsh salinity. Mean monthly calculated salinity was 25.8 ± 5.5 ppt at Narrow River marsh (NAR), located near the mouth of the Bay, and 17.7 ± 5.3 ppt at Passeonkquis marsh (PAS) located in the upper Bay. Salinity varied seasonally with both marshes, showing the lowest values (16.3 and 8.3 ppt, respectively) in April and highest values (35.4 and 26.2 ppt, respectively) in August. Contour plots of calculated salinities showed that while the mean whole-marsh calculated salinity at both sites changed over time, within-marsh patterns of higher versus lower salinity were maintained at NAR but changed over time at PAS. Calculated salinity was significantly negatively correlated with elevation at NAR during a sub-set of 12 sample events, but not at PAS. Best-supported linear regression models for both sites included one-month and 6-month cumulative rainfall, and tide state as potential factors driving observed changes in calculated salinity. Mapping apparent conductivity of salt marsh sediments may be useful both identifying within-marsh micro-habitats, and documenting marsh-wide changes in salinity over time.

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Abstract

Background

Measurement of the apparent conductivity of salt marsh sediments using electromagnetic induction (EMI) is a rapid alternative to traditional methods of salinity determination that can be used to map soil salinity across a marsh surface. Soil salinity measures can provide information about marsh processes, since salinity is important in determining the structure and function of tidally influenced marsh communities. While EMI has been shown to accurately reflect salinity to a specified depth, more information is needed on the potential for spatial and temporal variability in apparent conductivity measures that may impact the interpretation of salinity data.

Methods

We used EMI to map soil salinity at two salt marshes in the Narragansett Bay, RI estuary monthly over the course of several years to examine spatial and temporal trends in marsh salinity. A portable conductivity meter was used to generate apparent conductivity values along randomly-oriented transects across the marsh surface, which were then calibrated with traditional porewater salinity measures taken at a randomly selected sub-set of sample points and converted to salinity values. Data were stored in a shapefile and subsequently used to create contour maps of salinity across the marsh surface.

Results

Mean monthly calculated salinity was 25.8 ± 5.5 ppt at Narrow River marsh (NAR), located near the mouth of the Bay, and 17.7 ± 5.3 ppt at Passeonkquis marsh (PAS) located in the upper Bay. Salinity varied seasonally with both marshes, showing the lowest values (16.3 and 8.3 ppt, respectively) in April and highest values (35.4 and 26.2 ppt, respectively) in August. Contour plots of calculated salinities showed that while the mean whole-marsh calculated salinity at both

sites changed over time, within-marsh patterns of higher versus lower salinity were maintained at NAR but changed over time at PAS. Calculated salinity was significantly negatively correlated with elevation at NAR during a sub-set of 12 sample events, but not at PAS. Best-supported linear regression models for both sites included one-month and 6-month cumulative rainfall, and tide state as potential factors driving observed changes in calculated salinity. Mapping apparent conductivity of salt marsh sediments may be useful both identifying within-marsh micro-habitats, and documenting marsh-wide changes in salinity over time.

Introduction

Salt marshes are productive ecosystems that by nature of their position in the landscape are subject to many natural and anthropogenic stressors. In the Northeast US there is concern about the impact of accelerated sea level rise on salt marsh hydrology (e.g., Watson et al. 2017), and how changes in marsh flooding might impact vegetation community structure (Smith et al. 2017). Changes in vegetation communities may impact ecosystem services provided by salt marshes, and hence may have implications for their conservation and role in coastal ecosystems. For example, plant community structure can influence belowground biomass accumulation, which in northeastern US salt marshes is an important mechanism for marsh accretion that can mitigate the effects of sea-level rise (Bricker-Urso et al. 1989, Turner et al. 2000). Alteration of vegetation community structure may also impact the provision of other ecosystem services such as nutrient storage, habitat availability for fauna, and fisheries production (Kelleway et al. 2017).

Tidal inundation is an important determinant of salt marsh vegetation community structure, realized in part through the species-specific differences in physiological responses of plants to salinity. As sea level rises the extent of tidal inundation will increase, potentially altering the distribution of plant species across a marsh. Since increased inundation will alter soil porewater

64 salinity, and the primary route of water uptake in salt marsh plants is through porewater (e.g., Al
65 Hassan et al. 2017), measurement of soil porewater salinity could provide insight into potential
66 vegetation community changes resulting from sea-level rise (Silvestri and Marani 2004).
67 However, few studies have examined whole-marsh porewater salinity, in part because of the
68 labor-intensive sampling required and the difficulty in consistently obtaining porewater samples
69 at depth. An alternative is to estimate salt marsh porewater salinity by measuring the apparent
70 conductivity (EC_a) of salt marsh sediments using electromagnetic induction. This approach
71 provides estimates of soil salinity at many points in a marsh even in the absence of available
72 porewater, and can be used to gather sufficient data over the course of several hours to map soil
73 salinity across a marsh surface.
74 Measurement of EC_a in soils has been used since the mid-20th century to aid in mineral and
75 petroleum exploration and extraction, and over the past 40 years to characterize the salinity of
76 agricultural soils (DeJong et al. 1979). More recently the emergence of portable instrumentation
77 capable of rapid field measurements has allowed for its use in the estimation of other soil
78 parameters (Robinson et al. 2004). In simplest terms, at a given temperature EC_a is primarily
79 influenced by four characteristics: soil composition, i.e, mineral or clay content; bulk density;
80 moisture content; and ion concentrations, which can be representative of soil salinity (Corwin
81 and Lesch 2005). Each of these characteristics affects the bulk conductivity of soils, which in
82 turn influences the extent to which an induced electromagnetic field can be generated through the
83 soil. EC_a is determined by measuring this induced electromagnetic field, which in turn reflects
84 the average conductivity, influenced by all soil characteristics, over a volume of soil (Doolittle et
85 al. 2001). Differences in instrument response can be experimentally calibrated to changes in a

selected soil characteristic, allowing, under the assumption that all other characteristics are constant, for a proxy measure of changes in that characteristic in the soil.

Application of EC_a measures in salt marshes to map soil porewater salinity was first explored in the early 2000s (Paine et al. 2004) but later developed by Moore et al. (2011). The approach uses an EMI instrument to measure EC_a at a series of sample points across a marsh surface. At a subset of sample points, EC_a is calibrated with soil porewater salinity, measured using a sipper technique (Portnoy and Valiela 1997). The resulting calibration curve is then used to calculate salinity based solely on EC_a, which can then be mapped in a GIS to develop contours of salinity values across the marsh surface. This technique has been used to examine the relationship between plant species distribution and soil salinity during the growing season, but to our knowledge no earlier studies have looked at inter-annual changes in soil salinity patterns. In this study, we measured EC_a across two southern New England salt marshes along an estuarine salinity gradient over a period of 2 years to investigate intra-marsh variability in soil salinity, as well as potential drivers of seasonal changes in mean salinity observed at each marsh. The underlying assumption of this technique is that in uniformly saturated soils, such as those found in salt marshes, the contribution of soil moisture content to EC_a will be constant, and that variability contributed by other soil characteristics is limited, such that changes in EC_a values will accurately reflect changes in porewater salinity. To begin to evaluate the validity of this assumption, we also examined changes in the relationship of EC_a and measured porewater salinity at our sites with respect to potentially confounding factors such as bulk density and percent moisture of the soil, and marsh elevation. Our results will provide information about the magnitude of seasonal salinity change observed at a marsh, as well as identify potential drivers of that change. Our study will also aid in evaluating EC_a as a surrogate for porewater salinity,

provide insight into potential factors influencing EC_a in salt marsh soils, and help identify environmental factors that could confound the relationship between EC_a and salinity. This information may allow for more widespread application of the technique, for example to use in monitoring the trajectory of marsh degradation or recovery during salt marsh restoration efforts.

Materials & Methods

Site Descriptions

The study area was two salt marshes sites located in the Narragansett Bay estuary, Rhode Island, USA (Figure 1). The southern site (NAR) was near the mouth of the Pettaquamscutt sub-estuary (41° 26' 49.6"N, 71° 26' 58.0"W), and had a total area of 5.89 ha. The upland edge of the site was bordered by an equal proportion of private residences and forest habitat. The marsh surface consisted of low marsh habitat dominated by short form *Spartina alterniflora*, and high marsh habitat dominated by *Spartina patens*, *Distichlis spicata*, and *Juncus gerardii*. The high marsh – upland border consisted primarily of *Iva frutescens*, and small patches of *Typha spp* and *Scirpus spp*. The northern site (PAS) was within the Passeonkquis Cove sub-estuary (41° 44' 52.8"N, 71° 23' 5.2"W), and had a total area of 2.35 ha. The upland edge of the site was bordered by an approximately 100m-wide patch of trees and dense understory vegetation, transitioning to dense residential land use. The marsh surface consisted of low marsh habitat dominated by tall form *Spartina alterniflora*, and high marsh habitat dominated by *Spartina patens* and *Distichlis spicata*. The high marsh – upland border consisted primarily of *Iva frutescens*, with a 0.68 ha patch of Typha *spp*. at the northern edge of the border.

Field Measurements

A Geonics Model EM38-MK 2 Conductivity Meter (Geonics Ltd, Mississauga, Ontario, Canada) was used in horizontal mode, held 50 cm over the marsh surface, to record EC_a readings. The

readings were the result of an induced current generated by the instrument through a maximum penetration depth of approximately 1.0 m of soil at randomly distributed sample points across each marsh surface. EC_a values in milliSeimans meter^{-1} (mS m^{-1}) along with the latitude and longitude of the sample point and vegetation characteristics were entered into an ArcGIS shapefile using ArcPad software (ESRI, Redlands, CA) on a Trimble Nomad hand-held field computer (Trimble Navigation Ltd., Sunnyvale, CA USA). Samples were taken approximately every 30 days beginning October, 2015 through October 2017 (n = 24 sample events). Both sites were surveyed on the same day at approximate 10:00 am (NAR site) and 12:00 pm (PAS site). The surveys consisted of a random transect pattern walked across the marsh surface, with EC_a values, vegetation characteristics, and sample point position recorded approximately every 5 m. Porewater salinity measures were taken at a randomly selected sub-set of sample points using a sipper consisting of a 0.5 m long piece of 1.0 mm diameter serrated metal tubing inserted in the soil to a depth of 0.25 m. Once inserted, approximately 25 ml of porewater was withdrawn and its salinity measured using a refractometer. Porewater salinity readings, when taken, were also stored in the ArcGIS shapefile.

Following field sampling, shapefiles were transferred to a GIS where contour maps of calculated salinity across each marsh surface were created using the ArcGIS version 10.3 Spatial Data Analyst, inverse distance-weighted interpolation function (ESRI, Redlands, CA). EC_a data were first converted to calculated salinity values using marsh and survey-specific calibration curves constructed from a least-squares regression of EC_a values and measured porewater salinities. Calculated salinity values were then used in the ArcGIS software inverse distance-weighted interpolation function to create marsh-specific contour maps for each sample event.

Elevation values were collected using an RTK GPS Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) receiver (Trimble Navigation Limited, Dayton, Ohio) at approximately 100 locations per marsh. Each sample location was selected at approximately 5 m intervals along randomly-placed transects across the marsh surface. Elevations were referenced to nearby benchmarks, and the WGS84 ellipsoid model was used to determine vertical and horizontal position. The National Geodetic Survey Geoid 12A (CONUS) model was used to calculate elevations from orthometric heights (North American Vertical Datum of 1988 [NAVD88]), and all points were projected to North American Datum of 1983 (NAD83) Universal Transverse Mercator zone 19. Digital elevation models (DEMs) were created from survey points using the inverse distance weighting function in ArcGIS software. Elevation values corresponding to sample point locations were interpolated from the DEMs for 12 sample events corresponding to maxima and minima values of mean whole-marsh calculated salinity. Three sample events were chosen to bracket each of two occurrences of maxima and minima over the course of the study. Interpolated elevations ranged from 0.24 – 0.76 m above mean sea level (MSL) for NAR, and from 0.49 – 1.04 ft above MSL for PAS. We estimated bulk density and moisture content of soil by collecting 6 soil cores of 25 cm depth along a randomly-placed transect from the upland to seaward edge at each site. Two cores were collected at the mid-point of the high and low marsh zones as determined by dominant plant species, and at the mid-point of the transect (mid marsh). Each core was sectioned in 5 cm increments and a soil subsample from each depth was weighed, dried, and then re-weighed to determine bulk density and percent moisture.

Total rainfall was obtained from the NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information, Climate Data Online website (https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/cdo-web/) for the stations Kingston, RI (41° 29' 25.1"N, 71° 32' 34.8"W), located approximately 9 km northwest of NAR, and

Providence, RI (41° 50' 33.7"N, 71° 23' 6.7"W), located approximately 10.5 km north of PAS. Daily rainfall amounts were aggregated into cumulative amounts over 24 hr, 36 hr, 1 month, 3 month, and 6 month periods prior to each sample event. Using Spearman Rank Correlation analysis we found that 24 hr and 36 hr values were significantly correlated ($r^2 = 0.88$, $p = 0.001$), as were 1 month and 3 month cumulative values ($r^2 = 0.45$, $p = 0.001$). We therefore included only 24 hr, 1 month, and 6 month cumulative rainfall in our models. Tide heights were obtained using online tide charts containing the time of low and high tides and corresponding tide heights relative to mean low water (NOAA Tides and Currents, https://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/). We used data from sites at Narragansett Pier, RI (41° 25' 56.0"N, 71° 27' 25.2"W) located approximately 2 km south of NAR, and Pawtuxet Cove, RI (41° 44' 53.6"N, 71° 23' 0.6"W) located approximately 1.3 km north of PAS. Tide height was extrapolated at time of sampling from predicted tide ranges and expressed as a proportion of the maximum tide height for the tide cycle during which the sample occurred. To indicate whether sampling occurred during a flood or ebb tide, we added 1.0 to the proportions that occurred during flood tides. As a result, the proportions were expressed within a range from 0.0 – 2.0, with values from 0.0 to 1.0 representing proportion of maximum tide height during an ebb tide, and values from 1.0 to 2.0 representing proportion of maximum tide height during a flood tide.

Data analysis

We examined temporal variability in calculated salinity for each marsh by plotting mean salinity versus sample date. The effect of cumulative rainfall and tide height on mean calculated salinity in the marsh was examined by constructing a series of linear regression models and evaluating the models using small sample Akaike Information Criteria (AIC_c), which accounts for biases that might arise from relatively small sample size (Burnham and Anderson 2002). Candidate linear regression models (n = 15) were ranked by computing AIC_c differences or Akaike weights

as $\Delta AIC_c = AIC_{ci} - AIC_{cmin}$ (Burnham and Anderson, 2002, pp. 70–72). We then selected models best supported by the data as having ΔAIC_c values between 0.00 and 2.00 (Burnham and Anderson 2002, pp. 75–77), and calculated the relative importance (*w+(j)*) of each parameter by summing the Akaike weights of all models that included this characteristic (Burnham and Anderson 2002, pp. 167–169). Relative importance values provide a means to incorporate selection uncertainty in the evaluation of a set of parameters, and larger values of *w+(j)* indicate whether a parameter may be a better predictor variable (Burnham and Anderson 2002). Statistical analyses were performed with SAS for Windows ver. 9.41 (SAS Institute, Inc., Carey, NC, USA).

We examined intra-marsh spatial and temporal variability in calculated salinity qualitatively by visually comparing contour maps, and quantitatively by plotting calculated salinity versus elevation at the sample points. We used least-squares regression of calculated salinity and corresponding elevation values obtained using the DEM for a given marsh and sample event for a sub-set of 12 sampling events chosen to correspond with maxima and minima in mean salinity values observed over time. We then compared regression statistics to trends in overall mean salinity for each marsh over time.

Results

Contour plots of calculated salinities showed that while the mean calculated salinity for the whole marsh changed over time, patterns within marsh of higher versus lower salinity were maintained for the NAR marsh, at least during the times of maximum and minimum salinity (Figure 2). For example, patterns of higher salinity near the seaward edge of the marsh (right hand edge of the marsh in the plot) and lower salinity towards the upland border (left hand edge of the marsh in the plot) were evident both at times of maximum and minimum salinity. For PAS, contour plots show a more uniform distribution of salinity values across the marsh surface,

particularly at calculated salinity minima (Figure 3). During the October 2017 calculated salinity maximum, there was some evidence of a pattern of lower salinity towards the upland border (Figure 3a, upper edge of the marsh in the plot), but that pattern was not evident during the other maximum or the minima.

Calculated salinities for each sample event at NAR ranged from 16.3 – 35.4 ppt, with an overall mean for the entire study of 25.8 ± 5.5 ppt (Table 1). Calculated salinities at PAS ranged from 8.3 – 26.2 ppt, with an overall mean for the entire study of 17.7 ± 5.3 ppt (Table 1). While the overall mean calculated salinity showed a difference of 8.1 ppt between the two sites, for a given sample event the differences varied from 0.8 – 15.8 ppt. Mean calculated salinities for both sites showed maxima during the September 16, 2016 and October 27, 2017 sampling events (Figure 4). Mean calculated salinities showed minima during the May 4, 2016 and June 15, 2017 sampling events for NAR, and the May 4, 2016 and July 21, 2017 sampling events for PAS (Figure 4).

Linear regression models of calculated salinity versus environmental factors best supported by the data included one-month and 6-month cumulative rainfall and tide state for both sites (Table 2). At NAR, 6-month cumulative rainfall had the highest relative importance, about 1.7 times that of tide state and 3 times that of one-month cumulative rainfall (Table 2). At PAS, the factors 6-month and one-month cumulative rainfall had essentially equivalent relative importance, slightly greater than that of tidal height (Table 3).

The calibration coefficients for the least-squares regressions of porewater salinity versus conductivity for the 24 sample events ranged from 0.13 - 0.92 at the NAR site and 0.01 - 0.75 at PAS (Table 1). The coefficients were highly variable between events, without any consistent patterns or trends in the values at either site.

Soil bulk density ranged from 0.16 – 0.34 g cm^{-3} across the two sites (Table 4) and differed among marsh zones at PAS (ANOVA: df = 2, F = 7.952, p = 0.006; Tukey – Kramer test: low marsh differs significantly from mid and high marsh). Soil percent moisture ranged from 69.0 – 84.3 % (Table 4), and, when averaged across the entire marsh, was greater at PAS (81.5 ± 3.6 %) than at NAR (74.9 ± 11.5 %; t-test: df = 28; t = 2.105; p = 0.044). Percent moisture also differed among zones at PAS (ANOVA: df = 2, F = 27.276, p < 0.001; Tukey – Kramer test: low marsh differs significantly from mid and high marsh).

Calculated salinity was significantly negatively correlated with elevation at NAR during the 12 sample events on or around the salinity maxima and minima (Table 5). Slopes of the regression equations did not differ significantly between the maximum and minimum events. Elevation at NAR across all sample points during the 12 sample events ranged from 1.06 – 1.90 ft, with a mean of 1.54 ft. At the PAS site, calculated salinity was significantly negatively correlated with elevation for only the June and August 2017 maxima, and the October 2016 and September 2017 minima (Table 5). At PAS slopes of the regression equations also did not differ significantly between the maximum and minimum events. Elevation at PAS across all sample points during the 12 sample events ranged from 0.62 – 1.02 m, with a mean of 0.87 m.

Discussion

Contours of calculated salinity showed both inter- and intra-marsh differences at our sites, and differences were variable over time throughout the study. At NAR, contours showed an expected pattern of soil salinity with higher values near the creek edge and lower towards the upland border. This pattern was generally maintained except during one period of high salinity incorporating the September 16, 2016 sampling event, when overall marsh salinity was at its highest. This sampling event followed a period of relatively severe drought in the region which

occurred from early spring through the fall of 2016. During this drought, the impact of evapotranspiration on marsh hydrology may have been more pronounced and could have resulted in a lower water table, and hence greater seawater influence. Several studies have modeled salt marsh groundwater dynamics and water table position by considering groundwater flow as a shallow, rigid aquifer in contact with a sinusoidally oscillating reservoir, and predicted the potential for greater seawater inflow in the absence of groundwater inputs (Montalto et al 2007, Li and Jiao 2003). Seawater influence has been shown to diminish as distance from tidal creeks increases (Hemmond and Fifield 1982), but during periods of extreme drought and lowered water table levels the effects of seawater inundation may be seen even in more interior portions of the marsh. At PAS, intra-marsh differences were not as distinct, and the marsh often showed homogeneous salinity patterns exemplified by the September 16, 2016 and July 21, 2017 sample events. This may have been a result of the marsh having a relatively small surface area, or of enhanced surface freshwater and groundwater inputs. Elevation increases rapidly in the upland area immediately bordering the marsh, and there is a small stream bordering the western portion. If the steep elevation serves to focus groundwater to the marsh, that along with the presence of the stream may result in lower salinity levels during times of the year when there is little evapotranspiration, and the effect may predominate over that of tidal inundation. During the periods of maximum salinity, an area of the marsh near the upland border showed relatively low salinity compared to those observed during the same sample events at NAR, which would further support the enhanced influenced of freshwater inputs on marsh hydrology at PAS.

The NAR site is in the southern portion near the mouth of the Narragansett Bay estuary, and this probably accounts for its measured mean whole-marsh calculated salinity being consistently higher than that at PAS, which is located approximately 35 km to the north near the head of the

295 estuary. Mean surface seawater salinity at a long-term water quality sample site in Narragansett
296 Bay, located approximately 1 km north of PAS, averaged 25.1 ± 0.8 ppt, while a site
297 approximately 4 km north of NAR averaged 31.5 ± 0.2 ppt (RM, unpublished data). These
298 values should approximate the salinity of the seawater inundating each marsh during flood tides.
299 Salinity of freshwater sources would likely vary somewhat both spatially and temporally, but
300 most likely had salinities less than 5 ppt (Dodds 2002). Nothing is known of the relative
301 contribution of each salinity end-member to porewater salinity at each site, still it is likely that
302 the lower seawater salinity near PAS contributed to the lower mean calculated salinities we
303 observed.
304 Mean calculated salinities for the marshes showed maxima roughly corresponding to late
305 summer, when plant biomass is high and evapotranspiration is assumed to be at its peak, and
306 minima in early to mid-spring when evapotranspiration is low and snow melt and rainfall could
307 lead to increased freshwater input to the marshes. Several studies have suggested a conceptual
308 model of factors influencing near-surface tidal marsh porewater salinity, lower salinity
309 freshwater inputs arising from groundwater flow under the marsh and surface water inputs
310 interacting with periodic inputs of higher salinity seawater delivered during semi-diurnal flood
311 tides (Barry et al. 1996, Li and Jiao 2003, Parlange et al. 1984). Variation in the position of the
312 water table both spatially and temporally will determine soil saturation patterns and will
313 influence observed soil salinities across the marsh surface (Montalto et al. 2007). Results of
314 multiple linear regression models of cumulative regional rainfall, a driver of groundwater and
315 surface water inputs, and tide state versus our observed mean salinities in the marsh lend some
316 support to this model at our sites, with longer-term cumulative rainfall showing a greater relative
317 importance in our models than shorter-term precipitation, particularly at the PAS site. Longer-

318 term cumulative rainfall patterns may be more indicative of the magnitude of groundwater flow
319 to coastal marshes if groundwater flow in the watershed is relatively slow. However, many other
320 factors not measured or accounted for in our study, including the timing and magnitude of
321 evapotranspiration, groundwater flow patterns under a marsh, marsh topography, mean
322 temperature, and variability in tidal inundation patterns will interact to influence soil saturation
323 and observed patterns of soil salinity across a marsh.
324 In soils with similar clay and organic matter content, EC_a values will respond to changes in soil
325 composition, bulk density, moisture content, and soil salinity (Corwin and Lesch 2005).
326 Previous studies have suggested EC_a could be a reliable means to rapidly assess soil salinity,
327 particularly in hydric soils (Sheets 1994, Hanson and Kaita 1997). In homogenous, uniformly
328 saturated salt marsh soils it may be reasonable to assume that EC_a may accurately reflect changes
329 in soil salinity. However, regression statistics of the equations used to generate our calculated
330 salinity values, for example the variable correlation coefficient and slope values observed, could
331 be an indication that other soil parameters may be influencing EC_a values at our sites. Soils at
332 our sites were consistently at or around 70 % moisture, suggesting uniformly saturated soils that
333 would satisfy this assumption of the technique. We did see some intra-marsh differences in soil
334 bulk density at PAS that may have contributed somewhat to variability in EC_a values. It may also
335 be possible that our samples may have reflected spatial variation in soil composition at the sites:
336 if different regions of the marsh differed in soil composition, combining calibration data across
337 these regions may increase observed variability. Another possible explanation could be non-
338 homogeneous presence of conductive clay minerals or iron sulfate in the soils, both of which
339 may directly impact EC_a values (Laforet 2011).

Variability in regression statistics can also be the result of spatial variability in porewater salinity values, from vagaries in water table levels or groundwater flow at out sites. For example, in our study EC_a values reflected soil characteristics to 0.5 m below the marsh surface, while porewater salinities used in the calibration equations were measured at a depth of 25 cm. Spatial variability in soil porewater salinity either above or below our porewater sample depth would be reflected in EC_a values, but not necessarily in our measured pore water salinity values. Differences in soil saturation may also have influenced our measured EC_a values, although to what extent is not clear. In a model of water table dynamics and groundwater movement in a tidal marsh, Ursino et al. (2004) found that a zone of unsaturated, aerated soil could form in a marsh in areas away from the hydraulic influence of tidal creeks, and that this aerated zone could migrate toward the inner part of the marsh over time. They also found that evapotranspiration can result in the formation of an unsaturated aerated layer trapped underneath saturated surface soil, particularly in areas away from the influence of tidal creek hydrology (Ursino et al. 2004). Either of these phenomena could impact EC_a values while conceivably not impacting measured porewater salinity, and hence may contribute to the variability in calibration statistics.

Correlations of calculated salinity with marsh elevation supported our qualitative assessment of intra-marsh salinity variation shown by the contour plots. Calculated salinity at NAR significantly correlated with elevation over all the examined sample events, reinforcing observed patterns of higher soil salinity near the creek edge and lower salinity towards the upland border. At PAS, the lack of significant correlation may have resulted from the more homogenous salinity patterns observed across the marsh surface, or may have reflected the predominance of groundwater or surface freshwater inputs at the site. Interestingly, we did not consistently see a

significant correlation between calculated salinity and elevation despite the site having about a 35% greater range in elevation than NAR.

Conclusions

Results of our study suggest that despite variability in calibration coefficients, EC_a values reflect longer-term changes in porewater salinity at a single marsh. Therefore, EC_a values show promise in tracking patterns of soil salinity over time at a given site, which could aid in identifying changes in marsh biogeochemistry that could ultimately impact plant zonation. For example, EC_a surveys of a marsh may aid in identifying areas of irregular seawater or freshwater infiltration and help increase our understanding of marsh hydrology at a given site. In addition, ECa mapping may aid in restoration planning and monitoring, especially of low-lying and vulnerable coastal salt marshes. However, our results also suggest that inter-marsh comparisons of EC_a values and calculated salinities should be interpreted with caution: to accurately compare values, soil composition will either need to be similar, or between marsh differences adequately characterized and considered during the calibration process.

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Table 1(on next page)

Mean whole-marsh conductivity, pore water salinity, calculated salinity, and regression coefficients for 24 sample events at the a) southern (NAR) and b) northern (PAS) study sites.

Conductivity and calculated salinity were averaged across all sample points on the marsh surface, and measured pore water salinity was averaged across the sub-set of sample points where pore water was collected. Calibration coefficients for the corresponding calibration curves were constructed from a least-squares regression of apparent conductivity (EC_a) values and measured pore water salinities.

1 a.)

NAR Sample Date	Mean Conductivity (mS m^{-1})	Mean Measured Pore Water Salinity (ppt)	Mean Calculated Salinity (ppt)	Calibration Coefficient (r^2)
10/30/2015	317.7 ± 24.5	24.3 ± 4.0	23.4 ± 1.5	0.78
12/4/2015	238.4 ± 18.8	25.1 ± 2.9	26.2 ± 1.3	0.56
12/30/2015	249.4 ± 21.4	23.7 ± 3.1	24.5 ± 1.0	0.46
1/29/2016	222.7 ± 20.5	25.6 ± 2.4	24.7 ± 0.8	0.16
3/7/2016	213.6 ± 20.2	22.8 ± 3.8	18.2 ± 1.6	0.66
4/6/2016	191.6 ± 17.8	21.4 ± 2.3	21.5 ± 0.8	0.13
5/4/2016	193.6 ± 18.3	20.0 ± 2.5	16.3 ± 0.9	0.25
6/1/2016	261.5 ± 24.3	15.9 ± 3.8	17.7 ± 1.6	0.92
6/24/2016	305.7 ± 23.2	22.7 ± 2.3	20.3 ± 1.0	0.63
8/4/2016	402.6 ± 21.9	34.0 ± 2.0	33.9 ± 1.3	0.44
9/16/2016	389.0 ± 21.6	36.1 ± 1.3	35.4 ± 0.4	0.27
10/7/2016	388.1 ± 18.0	34.4 ± 1.3	34.6 ± 1.1	0.61
10/28/2016	386.7 ± 19.4	35.3 ± 1.4	35.2 ± 1.0	0.42
12/1/2016	491.5 ± 33.9	32.7 ± 1.4	31.2 ± 1.1	0.41
12/30/2016	263.1 ± 20.2	29.6 ± 2.3	28.8 ± 1.0	0.37
1/29/2017	269.6 ± 16.9	28.8 ± 2.7	27.1 ± 1.2	0.41
3/2/2017	252.2 ± 19.4	21.3 ± 2.4	22.6 ± 1.3	0.66
3/29/2017	253.0 ± 22.5	23.5 ± 2.1	23.1 ± 1.0	0.37
5/3/2017	245.0 ± 16.9	24.7 ± 1.9	23.0 ± 1.0	0.36
6/15/2017	295.7 ± 20.7	21.6 ± 2.1	21.3 ± 0.9	0.44
7/21/2017	347.8 ± 19.4	26.6 ± 2.1	24.9 ± 1.2	0.77
8/16/2017	353.9 ± 18.4	27.9 ± 1.9	26.7 ± 0.9	0.51
9/14/2017	381.3 ± 16.8	27.0 ± 2.1	27.6 ± 0.9	0.67
10/27/2017	339.4 ± 18.6	30.5 ± 1.5	30.2 ± 1.0	0.54

2

3

b.)

PAS Sample Date	Mean Conductivity (mS m^{-1})	Mean Measured Pore Water Salinity (ppt)	Mean Calculated Salinity (ppt)	Calibration Coefficient (r^2)
10/30/2015	249.7 ± 9.5	20.5 ± 2.0	21.3 ± 1.0	0.72
12/4/2015	207.7 ± 7.5	21.9 ± 1.4	22.4 ± 0.9	0.12
12/30/2015	193.8 ± 7.6	16.6 ± 2.8	16.7 ± 1.2	0.58
1/29/2016	176.7 ± 7.8	15.1 ± 1.3	14.7 ± 1.1	0.31
3/7/2016	151.7 ± 6.4	11.9 ± 1.3	17.4 ± 0.7	0.53
4/6/2016	146.9 ± 6.7	10.9 ± 1.6	11.4 ± 1.0	0.34
5/4/2016	154.1 ± 6.7	8.7 ± 1.3	8.3 ± 0.5	0.33
6/1/2016	183.2 ± 7.3	9.1 ± 1.4	8.6 ± 0.5	0.13
6/24/2016	227.8 ± 8.7	14.4 ± 1.7	16.8 ± 0.8	0.01
8/4/2016	272.4 ± 9.7	22.5 ± 1.8	23.7 ± 1.6	0.65
9/16/2016	301.9 ± 10.9	26.7 ± 1.0	26.2 ± 1.4	0.19
10/7/2016	296.7 ± 8.6	23.3 ± 1.4	23.7 ± 1.3	0.42
10/28/2016	251.1 ± 7.3	25.6 ± 0.8	25.3 ± 1.1	0.29
12/1/2016	233.7 ± 5.9	21.8 ± 1.0	22.0 ± 1.1	0.28
12/30/2016	178.5 ± 6.1	22.3 ± 1.3	22.3 ± 1.3	0.59
1/29/2017	172.5 ± 5.6	18.2 ± 1.5	18.9 ± 0.9	0.20
3/2/2017	186.2 ± 8.5	13.7 ± 1.2	14.1 ± 0.8	0.29
3/29/2017	168.9 ± 6.2	17.6 ± 1.6	17.3 ± 0.9	0.52
5/3/2017	157.7 ± 6.9	14.7 ± 2.2	20.0 ± 1.3	0.59
6/15/2017	199.1 ± 8.4	10.6 ± 1.3	12.3 ± 0.7	0.75
7/21/2017	194.4 ± 7.1	9.0 ± 0.5	9.1 ± 0.4	0.13
8/16/2017	240.4 ± 6.6	12.7 ± 1.1	13.2 ± 0.6	0.16
9/14/2017	274.3 ± 6.6	18.4 ± 1.0	18.1 ± 0.7	0.52
10/27/2017	263.0 ± 6.1	21.4 ± 1.5	21.1 ± 1.0	0.59

Table 2(on next page)

Best predictive models incorporating the effect of cumulative rainfall amounts and tide state on calculated salinity values at the a) southern (NAR) and b) northern (PAS) study sites.

Models best supported by the data, or those having ΔAIC_c values between 0.00 and 2.00, are listed.

a.)

NAR Model[a]	R^2	AIC_c	ΔAIC_c[b]
48.77 – 0.831(6 MON) – 3.193(TIDE)	0.55	69.12	0.00
44.22 – 0.781(6 MON)	0.48	70.13	1.01
47.54 – 0.873(6 MON) – 3.124(TIDE) + 0.531(1 MON)	0.57	70.78	1.66

b.)

PAS Model[a]	R^2	AIC_c	ΔAIC_c[b]
37.41 – 0.873(6 MON) – 3.124(TIDE) + 0.531(1 MON)	0.80	50.55	0.00

[a]1 MON = cumulative rainfall 30 days prior to sample event; 6 MON = cumulative rainfall 180 days prior to sample event; TIDE = tide state.

[b]$\Delta AIC_c = AIC_{ci} - AIC_{cmin}$

Table 3(on next page)

Relative importance of rainfall and tide parameters in regression models explaining calculated salinity values during 24 sample events at the southern (NAR) and northern (PAS) study sites.

24 HR = cumulative rainfall 24 hours prior to sampling event; 1 MON = cumulative rainfall 30 days prior to sample event; 6 MON = cumulative rainfall 180 days prior to sample event; TIDE = tide state.

1

Parameter	NAR Relative Importance	PAS Relative Importance
24 HR	0.195	0.188
1 MON	0.327	0.999
6 MON	1.000	1.000
TIDE	0.596	0.966

2

Table 4(on next page)

Mean bulk density and percent moisture in soil samples to 25 cm depth collected in high, mid, and low marsh locations at the a) southern (NAR) and b) northern (PAS) study sites.

1

Site	Location	Bulk Density (g cm^{-3})	Percent Moisture (%)
NAR	High marsh	0.31 ± 0.04	71.3 ± 3.3
NAR	Mid marsh	0.19 ± 0.01	84.3 ± 1.4
NAR	Low marsh	0.34 ± 0.29	69.0 ± 16.8
PAS	High marsh	0.24 ± 0.05	77.1 ± 0.6
PAS	Mid marsh	0.17 ± 0.02	84.2 ± 1.4
PAS	Low marsh	0.16 ± 0.03	83.2 ± 2.4

2

Table 5(on next page)

Least squares regression statistics for the relationship between calculated salinity and elevation at the a) NAR and b) PAS.

1 a.)

NAR Minima				
Sample Date	**Slope**	**R^2**	**Degrees of Freedom**	**p**
4/6/2016	-8.42	0.35	44	< 0.001
5/4/2016	-25.47	0.54	52	< 0.001
6/1/2016	-38.62	0.42	34	< 0.001
6/15/2017	-21.72	0.55	58	< 0.001
7/21/2017	-36.09	0.59	60	< 0.001
8/16/2017	-24.99	0.63	61	< 0.001
NAR Maxima				
Sample Date	**Slope**	**R^2**	**Degrees of Freedom**	**p**
9/16/2016	-11.90	0.61	47	< 0.001
10/7/2016	-15.56	0.57	52	< 0.001
10/28/2016	-9.75	0.33	54	< 0.001
9/14/2017	-27.62	0.53	76	< 0.001
10/27/2017	-18.05	0.57	54	< 0.001
11/21/2017	-24.68	0.55	61	< 0.001

2

3 b.)

PAS Minima				
Sample Date	**Slope**	**R^2**	**Degrees of Freedom**	**p**
4/6/2016	0.71	0.01	25	0.643
5/4/2016	-0.34	0.01	30	0.556
6/1/2016	-0.67	0.07	30	0.149
6/15/2017	-4.10	0.37	36	< 0.001
7/21/2017	0.03	0.01	29	0.897
8/16/2017	-1.11	0.20	33	0.007
PAS Maxima				
Sample Date	**Slope**	**R^2**	**Degrees of Freedom**	**p**
9/16/2016	-0.25	0.00	25	0.746
10/7/2016	-4.54	0.34	30	< 0.001
10/28/2016	0.89	0.07	31	0.124
9/14/2017	-1.51	0.12	39	0.024
10/27/2017	-0.51	0.01	33	0.601
11/21/2017	-0.11	0.00	35	0.907

4

Figure 1

Location of the two salt marshes study sites Narrow River marsh (NAR) and Passeonkquis marsh (PAS) in the Narragansett Bay estuary, Rhode Island, USA.

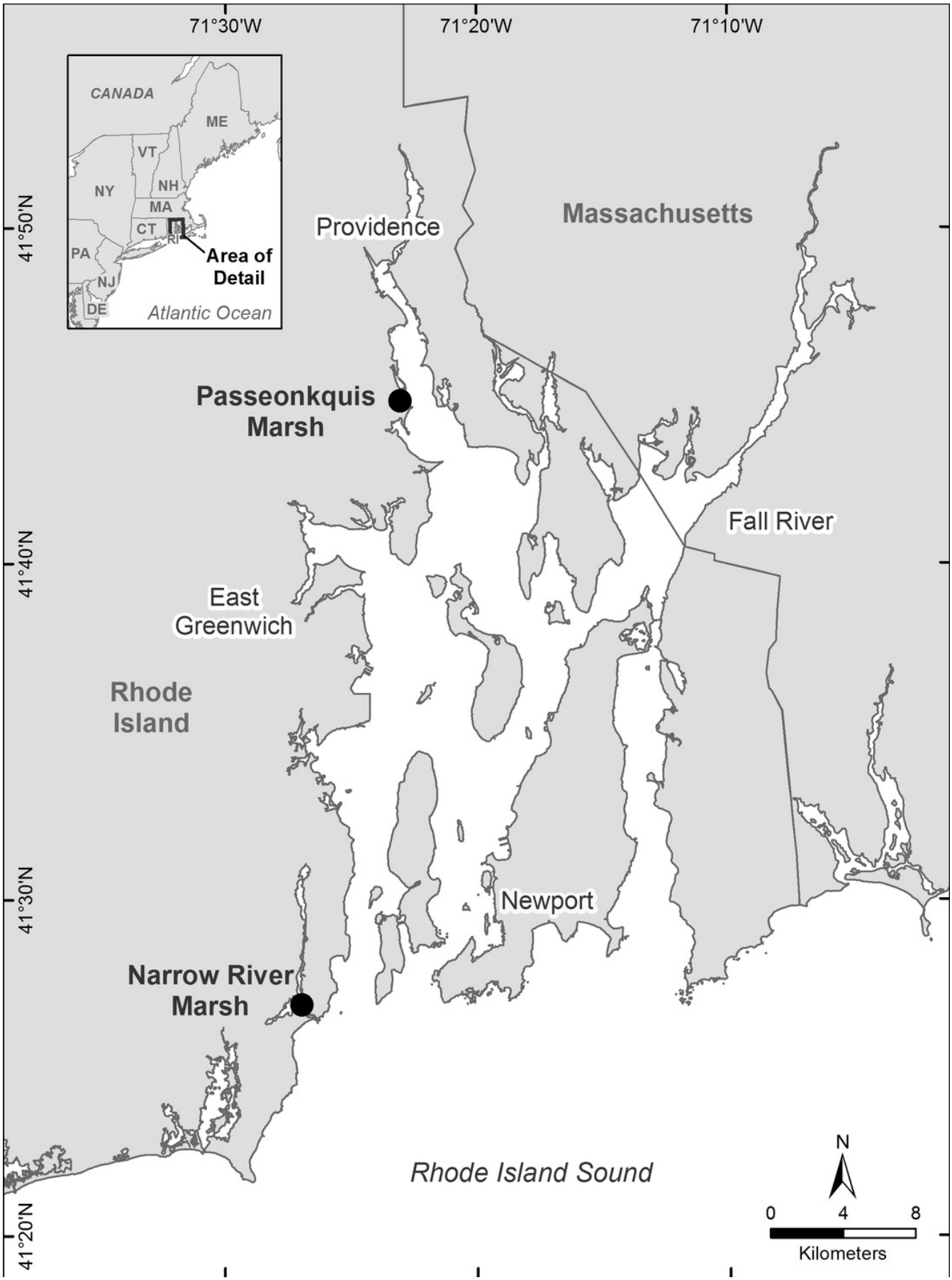
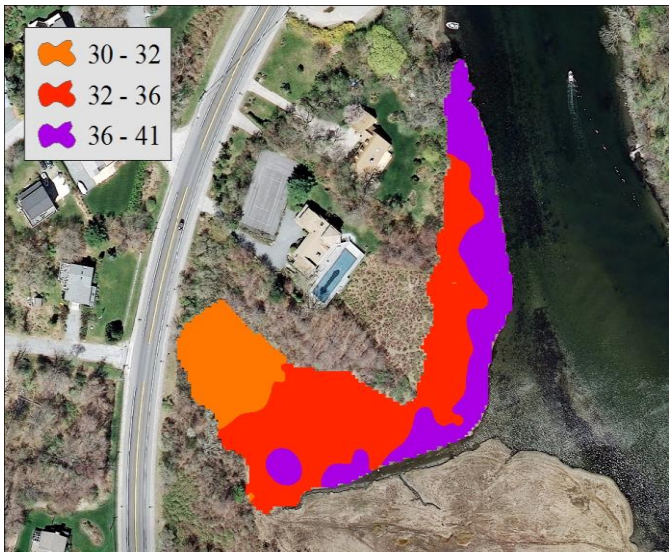

71°30'W
71°20'W
71°10'W
41°50'N
41°40'N
41°30'N
41°20'N
CANADA
ME
VT
NH
NY
MA
CT
RI
PA
NJ
DE
Area of Detail
Atlantic Ocean
Providence
Massachusetts
Passeonkquis Marsh
Fall River
East Greenwich
Rhode Island
Newport
Narrow River Marsh
Rhode Island Sound
N
0
4
8
Kilometers

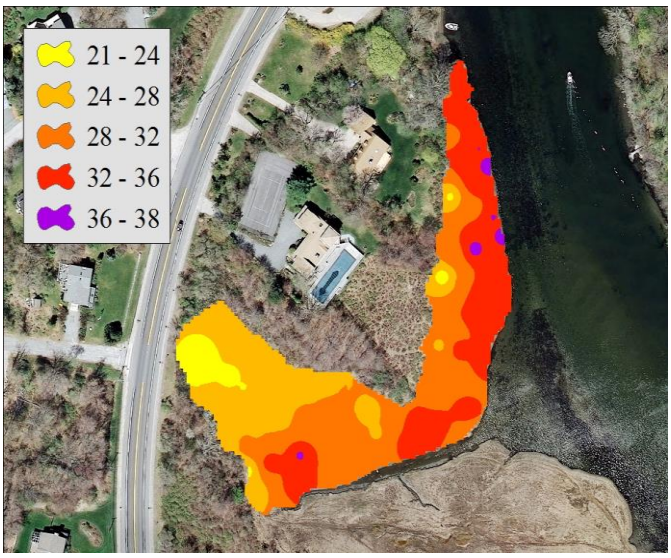
Figure 2(on next page)

Contour plots of calculated salinity across the marsh surface of NAR corresponding to the a.) mean calculated salinity maxima and b.) mean calculated salinity minima.

a)

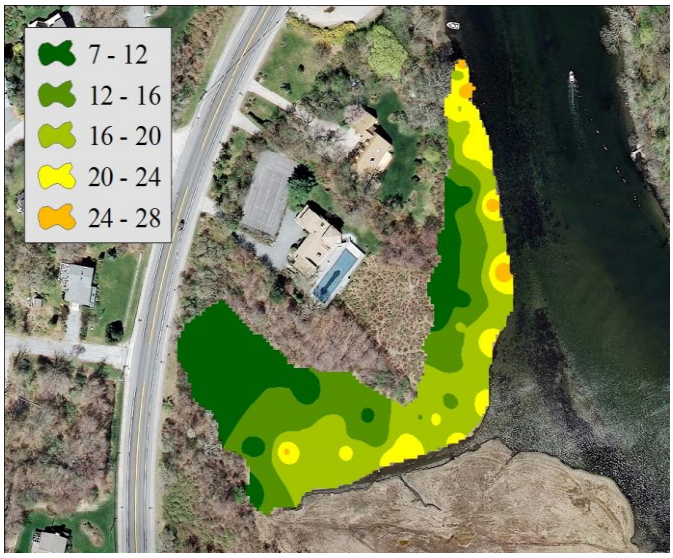


September 16, 2016

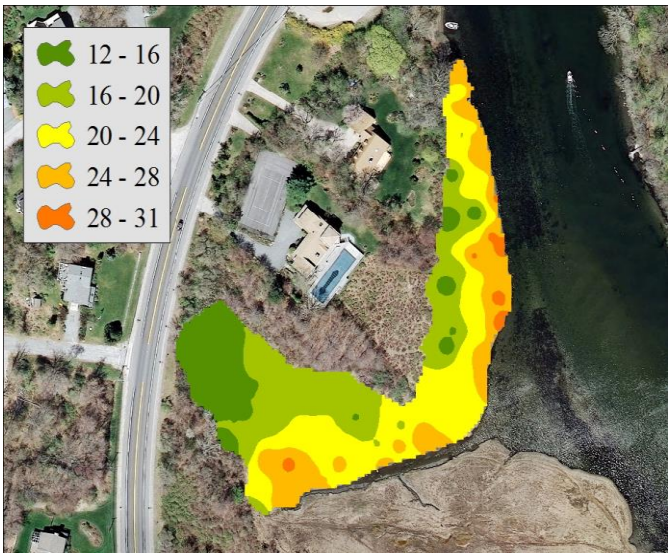


October 27, 2017

b)



May 4, 2016

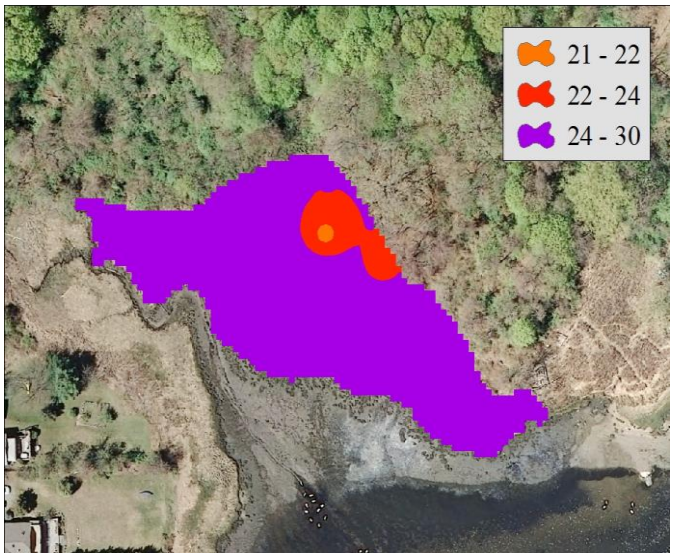


June 15, 2017

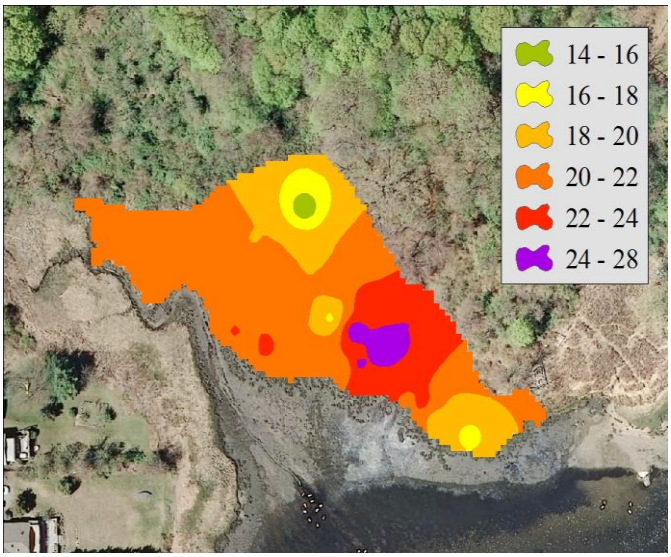
Figure 3(on next page)

Contour plots of calculated salinity across the marsh surface of PAS corresponding to the a.) mean calculated salinity maxima and b.) mean calculated salinity minima.

a)

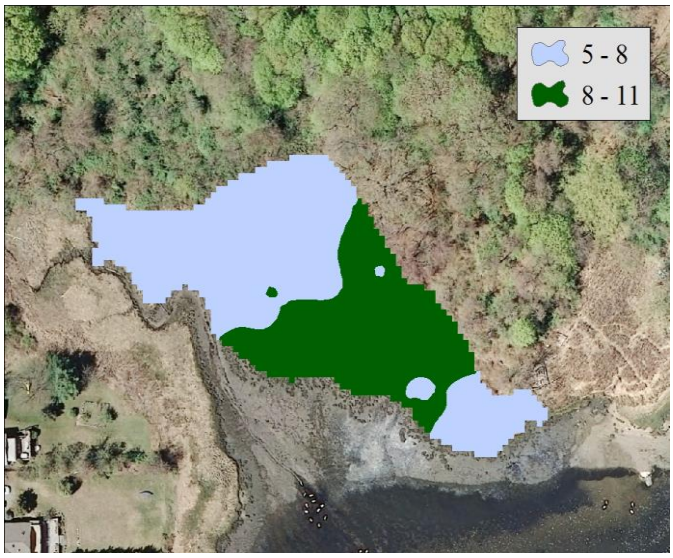


September 16, 2016



October 27, 2017

b)



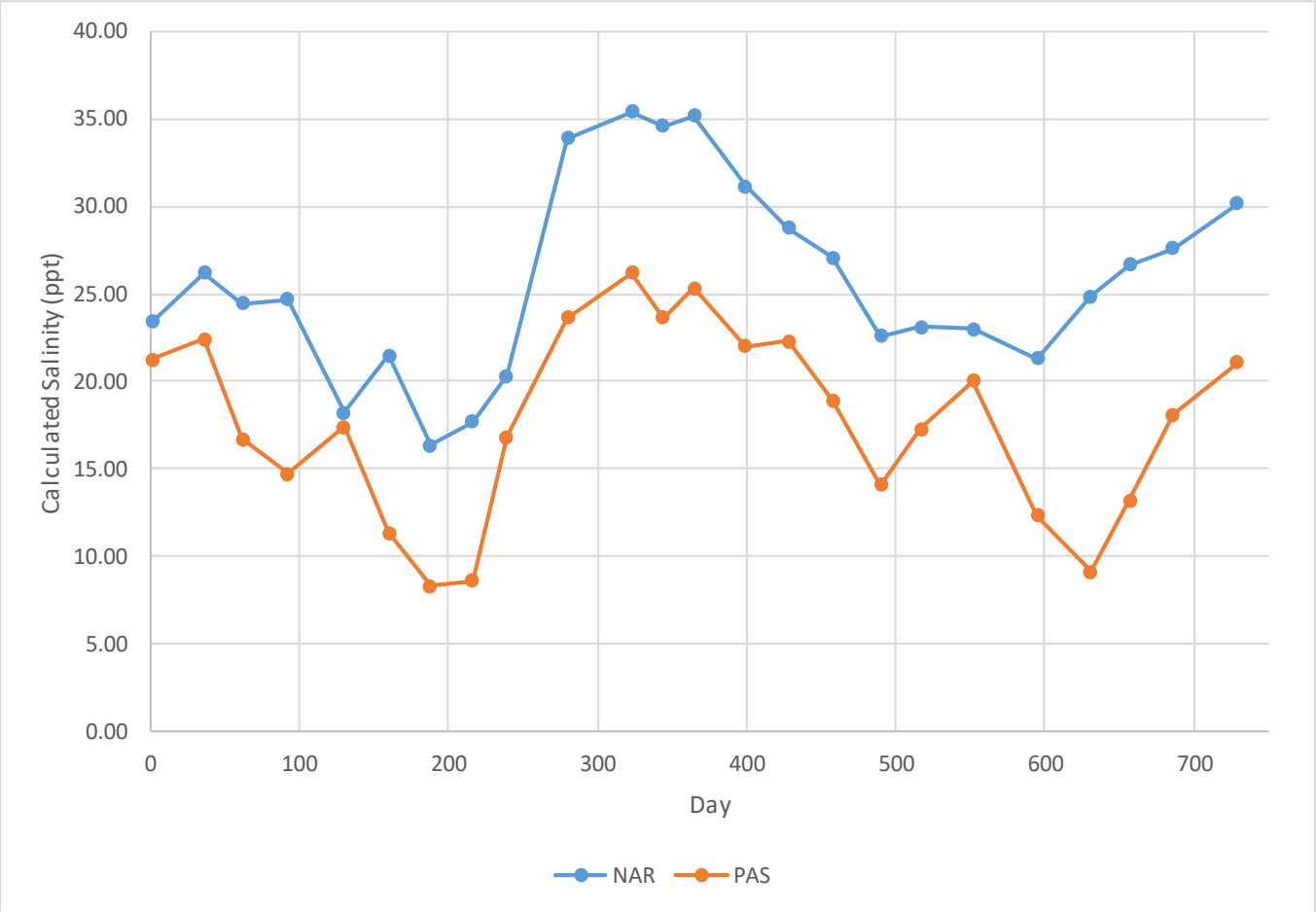
May 4, 2016

July 21, 2017

Figure 4(on next page)

Plot of mean whole-marsh calculated salinity versus day of sampling for the NAR and PAS study sites.

The date of the initial sample event October 30, 2015 was designated as day 1. Sample minima at days 188 and 631 corresponded to the dates May 4, 2016 and July 21, 2017. Sample maxima at days 323 and 729 corresponded to the dates September 16, 2016 and October 27, 2017.


40.00
35.00
30.00
25.00
20.00
15.00
10.00
5.00
0.00
Calculated Salinity (ppt)
0
100
200
300
400
500
600
700
Day
NAR
PAS