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Citation

DOI
10.1016/j.geomorph.2014.03.009

Publisher
Elsevier

Version
Version of Record

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Suspended sediment behavior in a coastal dry-summer subtropical catchment: Effects of hydrologic preconditions

A.B. Gray a,⁎, J.A. Warrick b, G.B. Pasternack a, E.B. Watson a,1, M.A. Goñi c

a University of California, Davis, One Shields Avenue, Davis, CA 95616, USA
b United States Geological Survey, 400 Natural Bridges Drive, Santa Cruz, CA 95060, USA
c Oregon State University, 104 CECOS Administration Bldg., Corvallis, OR 97331–5503, USA

A R T I C L E   I N F O

Article history:
Received 20 September 2013
Received in revised form 1 March 2014
Accepted 3 March 2014
Available online 11 March 2014

Keywords:
Suspended sediment transport
Rating curves
Antecedent conditions
Small mountainous rivers
Arid rivers

A B S T R A C T

Variation in fluvial suspended sediment–discharge behavior is generally thought to be the product of changes in processes governing the delivery of sediment and water to the channel. The objective of this study was to infer sediment supply dynamics from the response of suspended sediment behavior to antecedent hydrologic factors. The Salinas River (California) is seasonally active, moderately sized, and potentially susceptible to lasting impacts of hydrologic event history because of aridity, high discharge variability, and in-channel terminating flows. Forty-five years of suspended sediment data from the lower Salinas and 80 years of hydrologic data were used to construct hydrologic descriptors of basin preconditioning and to test the effects of these preconditions on suspended sediment behavior. Hydrologic precondition factors—including change in mean daily discharge and increasing elapsed time since the last moderate discharge event (~10–20 times \(Q_{\text{mean}}\))—were found to have significant positive effects on discharge-corrected, fine suspended-sediment concentrations. Conversely, increased elapsed time since the last low discharge event (~0.1–0.4 times \(Q_{\text{mean}}\)), and the sum of low flow conditions over interannual time scales were found to cause significant negative trends in fine suspended sediment concentration residuals. Suspended sand concentrations are suppressed by increased elapsed time after threshold discharges of ~0.1–2 and 5–100 times \(Q_{\text{mean}}\), and increased low to no flow days over time scales from 1 to 2000 days. Current and previous year water yield and precipitation magnitudes correlate positively with sand concentration. Addition of fine sediment from lower Salinas hillslope or channel sources on the rising limb of the hydrograph is the major mechanism behind an overall positive hysteretic pattern, which was forensically supported by the annual occurrence of in-channel suspended sediment deposition by early season, channel terminating flows and by the flushing function of moderate hydrologic events found in this study. The importance of hillslope and/or channel fine sediment contributions proximal to the lower Salinas is further highlighted by the lack of control exerted by upper subbasin water provenance on fine suspended sediment concentration, while sand behavior is differentiated by upper basin water provenance. Investigation of suspension of bed-sized sediment showed that the channel bed could exert significant effects on fine and sand-sized suspended sediment dynamics, but this mediation for fine sediment was most likely small in terms of decadal-scale sediment budgets. The magnitude of the effects of hydrologic variables on sediment dynamics remains uncertain, but the factors identified here may play a significant role in water quality, if not long-term sediment flux to the ocean.

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1. Introduction

Rivers of small to moderate size (~10³–10⁴ km²) draining active margins are recognized as transporting the majority of terrestrial sediment to the oceans (Milliman and Syvitski, 1992). Sediment yields from their basins are often highly episodic, caused by rare high discharge floods (Gonzalez-Hidalgo et al., 2010; Wheatcroft et al., 2010).

Small rivers in dry-summer subtropical regions, such as coastal California, are particularly prone to episodic hydrologic event control on sediment discharge, as most precipitation occurs during a short winter season that occasionally produces intense storm events (Inman and Jenkins, 1999; Farnsworth and Milliman, 2003; Warrick and Mertes, 2009).

Sediment dynamics in systems with high discharge variability are further impacted by the deposition and/or reorganization of sediment in the channel by flow recession and ephemeral flows that terminate in the channel (López-Tarazón et al., 2011) as well as sediment supply augmentation or suppression associated with large precipitation/hydrologic events and prolonged periods of no precipitation (Lana-
the process of deciphering sediment supply dynamics at the basin scale. Event to interannual scale hydrologic precondition characterization into sediment dynamics. The results of hydrologic precondition analysis were nelized to the stream of channelized discharge as a proxy for the master variables controlling sediment delivery. The specific objectives were to (i) develop variables representing basin preconditions from hydrologic and precipitation time series data and (ii) determine if variability in suspended sediment behavior could be explained using the precondition variables. As the Salinas River flows only intermittently during the year, it was postulated that in-channel deposition of sediment from incipient flows, and the eventual reworking of this sediment, would have a significant effect on suspended sediment dynamics. The results of hydrologic precondition analysis were explored to infer the sediment supply processes. The most significant aspect of this work is that it provides an approach for incorporating event to interannual scale hydrologic precondition characterization into the process of deciphering sediment supply dynamics at the basin scale.

2. Study region characteristics

The ~11,000-km² Salinas River watershed drains a portion of the Central Coast Ranges of California, USA, flowing from the SE to NW along the Rinconada fault zone between the Sierra de Salinas and Santa Lucia Mountains to the SW and the Diablo and Gabilan Ranges to the NE (Rosenberg and Joseph, 2009) (Fig. 1). Maximum relief is ~1900 m; average watershed bounding ridge heights are 750 m to the NE and 1200 m in the SW, with ridge crest height generally decreasing toward the mouth of the Salinas (Neagley et al., 1990). Mountainous highlands are mostly composed of Mesozoic-aged sedimentary and metasedimentary rock with some igneous intrusions, while the northern extent of the mainstem valley floor is Tertiary and younger alluvial fill (Nutter, 1901). Land cover in the Salinas watershed largely follows local relief; with steep forested terrain giving way downslope to chaparral/scrub in the wetter western hills and grassland in the drier eastern hills (Farnsworth and Milliman, 2003). Valley bottoms were mostly converted to irrigated agriculture with a small proportion of urbanization (Thompson and Reynolds, 2002).

Climate along California’s central coast is dry-summer subtropical with most precipitation delivered by a few winter storms. The largest storms are produced during strong El Niño years (Farnsworth and Milliman, 2003; Andrews et al., 2004). Convection of western tropical moisture through westerly storm tracks generally leads to S–SW impingement of storms (Andrews et al., 2004). Because of the SE to NW orientation of the basin and its small size, such storms can simultaneously deliver precipitation to the entire watershed to produce the largest floods on record. Orographically forced precipitation in the SW mountain ranges coupled with the preponderance of smaller storms and prevailing storm tracks leads to average annual precipitation rates that are much higher (~1000 mm/y) than in the NE region (~300 mm/y) (Farnsworth and Milliman, 2003).

Average annual suspended sediment load was previously calculated as 1.7–3.3 Mt using monthly and daily Q with log-linear rating curves (Inman and Jenkins, 1999; Farnsworth and Milliman, 2003). Ongoing work in this system by the authors has found that suspended sediment load estimated from daily discharge data using a combination of sand and fine suspended sediment rating curves for temporal domains of distinct suspended sediment behavior resulted in an average annual load of ~2.2 Mt.

The Salinas is a losing stream with naturally transient flow and no surface water passing through the lower reaches for much of the summer. The aquifers in the alluvial valley are overdrafted for agriculture, causing saltwater intrusion. Three major dams emplaced from 1941 to 1965 on the San Antonio and Nacimiento tributaries, as well as the upper most reaches of the Salinas, moderate flow from a total of ~2100 km² of the Salinas watershed, primarily for groundwater recharge purposes (Fig. 1). Average sediment trapping efficiency for dams in the central California coastal region have been estimated as ~84% by Willis and Griggs (2003) with the simple Brune (1953) method. Estimations of trapping efficiency by the authors based on the methods of Brown (1943) and the improved Brune method from Heinemann (1981, 1984) place the Salinas basin reservoirs in the range of 94–99% for bulk sediment and ~90% or greater for fine sediment (clay and silt) trapping efficiency.

United States Geological Survey (USGS) daily average Q gaging stations on the mainstem and on the Arroyo Seco tributary date to 1901 (A3, Arroyo Seco near Greenfield) and 1931 (S1, Salinas River near Spreckels), respectively (Table 1; Fig. 1). The confluence of the Arroyo Seco and the Salinas is located 1.36 and 1.74 river kilometers below the nearest upstream gages on the Salinas (S3, Salinas River near Soledad) and the Arroyo Seco (A1, Arroyo Seco below Reliz Creek near Soledad), respectively. Below the Arroyo Seco/Salinas confluence is referred to as the ‘lower Salinas’ in this study, which bears two mainstem gages 28.41 km (S2, Salinas River near Chualar) and 51.92 km (S1, Salinas River near Spreckels) downstream, respectively.
both of which have a mean discharge of ~10 m$^3$/s with a 2-year return flood of 100–200 m$^3$/s. The 100-year flood is estimated to be ~3000 m$^3$/s, as per log-Pearson Type III flood frequency analysis (USGS NWIS, 2013). The mouth of the Salinas River is 21.14 km downstream from S1 and remains closed to the Monterey Bay via impounding sand bars, except under conditions of high river discharge and/or strong ocean waves (Watson et al., 2013).

The Arroyo Seco is the only undammed tributary of the Salinas River originating from the wet, mountainous western side of the basin and is also the last major tributary to enter the Salinas. In contrast, the Salinas watershed upstream of the confluence with the Arroyo Seco (referred to hereafter as the ‘upper Salinas’) is generally low gradient and bordered by intensively irrigated agriculture, while the Arroyo Seco is the least developed subbasin in the Salinas system, with ~95% chaparral/blue oak forest land cover and steep terrain. Most of the Salinas channel is broad and sand-bedded, with complex, braided, baseflow inset channels and low sandy banks with highly variable vegetation coverage. Transition to a primarily gravel bed occurs high in the upper Salinas, below the mainstem dam, while the Arroyo Seco transitions to a sand bed just before its confluence with the Salinas. Sediment export from the Arroyo Seco has been shown to be dominated by the convergence of wildfire and subsequent large precipitation events (Warrick et al., 2012). The flashy nature of discharge in the Arroyo Seco leads to large flows produced rapidly relative to the upper Salinas, which can lead to lower Salinas discharge events that are primarily expressions of Arroyo Seco runoff.

3. Data

3.1. Experimental design

This study attempted to determine the effect of antecedent hydrologic conditions on $C_{50}$ behavior and infer the physical mechanisms behind these effects, with a particular emphasis on the possibility of in-channel mediation. The first phase of this study involved testing the residuals of $C_{50}$–Q behavior for correlations with variables describing antecedent hydrology and comparing $C_{50}$–Q behavior between subgroups defined by hydrologic conditions. Physical mechanisms behind these behaviors were approached by investigating hysteresis, the effects of subbasin water provenance, and analysis of the evolution of suspended sediment particle size distribution in terms of discharge and long profile position.
3.2. Hydrologic data

This study was based on suspended sediment samples collected by the authors and historical USGS samples. Samples were collected for this study between water years 2008 and 2011 from bridges crossing the Salinas River at Davis Street (3.99 km river distance below S1) and the USGS gaging stations S1 and S2 (Figs. 1 and 2B; Table 1). Water years for this region begin October 1 of the previous calendar year and end on September 30 of the calendar year. Samples were collected as per Warrick et al. (2012), except for the following modifications. In all cases, samples were retrieved from the water surface at cross-channel stations of ~one-quarter, one-half, and three-quarters wetted channel width. Two 1-L samples from each cross-channel station were collected for (i) total suspended sediment concentration (CSS) and (ii) particle size distribution analysis. One event was sampled at high volumetrically and then filtered through preweighed, combusted, Whatman GF/A, 0.7 μm glass fiber filters. Filters were dried at 60 °C for >24 h, cooled to room temperature under vacuum in a desiccator, and then weighted to ± 0.0001 g. Sample sediment mass was obtained by subtracting filter mass from total mass. The CSS was then calculated by dividing sample sediment mass by water sample total volume.

Particle size distribution analysis began with centrifuging water samples at 3250 g in 500-mL bottles for 10 min. After removing the supernatant, the remaining sediment was transferred to 150-mL beakers and treated with unheated and heated 30% H2O2 aliquots to remove organic materials, dispersed with sodium metaphosphate solution, and run through a Beckman-Coulter LS 230 (Coulter, Fullerton, CA, USA) laser diffraction granulometer using polarization intensity differential scattering (PIDS) as per Gray et al. (2010).

Suspended sediment samples were collected from the surface of the river, and for this reason coarse suspended sediment particles were expected to be underrepresented. Simple sediment suspension calculations by particle size based on the characteristics of the highest and lowest flows showed that fine particles in the silt to clay range (diameter (D) < 62.5 μm) should be uniformly distributed throughout the vertical profile (Rouse, 1937, 1938; Hill et al., 1988). Thus, particle size distribution analysis was restricted to fine particles of D > 62.5 μm. For all samples containing coarse (D > 62.5 μm) sediments, values for fine suspended sediment concentration (CSSf) were calculated by multiplying CSS by the proportion of sediment occurring in the fine fraction:

\[
CSS_f = \frac{CSS \times \% \text{ particles < 62.5 μm}}{100}
\]  

The USGS collected flow-integrated CSS samples from the Salinas River at locations corresponding to S1 and S2 from water years 1969 to 1986 and 1967 to 2010, respectively (USGS NWIS) (Fig. 2A). Bed sediment samples were also collected between 1967 and 1992. The particle size distribution of bed sediments at S1 and S2 was characterized by sieving on nine and six occasions, respectively, between 1967 and 1992.

The USGS suspended sediment data had to uniquely represent a given discharge event and be associated with both instantaneous Q and particle size data for inclusion in this study. Multiple samples collected during the same event at constant discharge were combined into single samples through simple averaging of CSS, Q, and particle size distribution data. Most USGS suspended sediment samples were processed for particle size distribution by sieving to establish the relative contribution of coarse and fine fractions. The CSS for these samples was calculated using Eq. (1), and the concentration of sand-sized suspended sediment (CSSs) was obtained by subtracting CSSf from CSS.

Hereafter, the term CSSf is used as a general term for suspended sediment concentration when referring to tests that were conducted separately on CSS and on CSSf.

All suspended sediment data from the USGS were obtained with associated instantaneous discharge values. New samples collected in this study were assigned discharge values through linear interpolation between the two temporally nearest 15-min discharge data from the appropriate USGS gage. Discharge for Davis Street samples were obtained from the S1 record of 15-min discharge data, by lagging the time by the estimated transit time (tt), where tt was equal to the distance between Davis Street and S1 divided by the transit speed (m/s) of peak flow between S2 and S1 for each discharge event in question. Although transit speeds were found to be highly variable, ranging from 0.01 to 2.38 m/s, most values fell between 0.2 and 0.8 m/s. When the resulting lagged time fell between 15-min discharge records, the associated discharge was calculated through linear interpolation.

Field measurements of flow characteristics collected between 1974 and 2012 were used in hydraulic geometry calculations for sites S1, S2, S3, and A1, which were measured for instantaneous discharge, flow area (a), flow width (w), and average velocity (u) by the USGS between 1974 and 2012.

3.3. Precipitation data

Three National Weather Service monthly precipitation records were used in this study, including those from stations at Big Sur State Park (BGS), Priest Valley (PSV), and Salinas no. 2 (SAP) (Fig. 1). The BGS gage is located outside of the Salinas watershed, just inland from the coast at 36.247° N., 121.811° W.; while PSV sits in the central, western portion of the upper Salinas at 36.183° N., 120.700° W.; and SAP in the lower Salinas at 36.667° N., 121.667° W. The BGS data set contained the fewest gaps. Regression between log-transformed annual

![Fig. 2. Lower Salinas suspended sediment samples collected by the (A) USGS and (B) the authors (UCD) at stations S1 and S2, which correspond to the USGS gaging stations #11152500 (Salinas Spreckels) and #11152300 (Salinas Chualar), respectively.](image-url)
precipitation \((P)\) and log-transformed annual water yield at S1 fitted by station also showed that more variation in water yield was explained by BGS than the other two precipitation stations, so BGS was used in further analyses. Precipitation data gaps for years 1981, 1982, and 1983 were reconstructed using the inverse of the water yield–precipitation rating curve.

3.4. Bias analysis

The effects of the inclusion of two sampling sites and the selection of certain samples for particle size distribution analysis by the USGS were found to not bias the ensuing analyses. For further details see Appendix A.

4. Suspended sediment rating curves and residuals

Available \(C_{SS}\) and associated \(Q\) data were used to model the dependence of \(C_{SS}\) on \(Q\) for the system (hereafter referred to in the form of \(C_{SS}-Q\)). A log-linear sediment rating curve describes this relationship through a linear regression fitted to log-transformed data in the form

\[
\log(C_{SS}) = a \log(Q) + b \log(Q) + \varepsilon. \tag{2}
\]

Log-linear rating curves were constructed for the entire lower Salinas \(C_{SS}\) and \(C_{SS}\) data set (USGS and data collected for this study at sites S1 and S2; Fig. 3A,B). These rating curves accounted for a moderate proportion of variation in \(C_{SS}\), with \(r^2\) values of 0.55 and a standard error of 0.63 log (mg/l) for the linear regression model and an \(r^2\) value of 0.70 with a standard error of 0.60 log (mg/l) for \(C_{SS}\).

Ratings curve residuals, which are the difference between sample values of \(C_{SS}\) and the value of the rating curve, can be used to reveal systematic departures in sample \(C_{SS}\) behavior from that of the rating curve model (Fig. 3C,D). Residual values plotted by discharge for lower Salinas fine suspended sediment show that the log-linear rating curve generally underestimated the lowest \((q < 1 \, \text{m}^3/\text{s})\) and highest \((q > 800 \, \text{m}^3/\text{s})\) discharge range \(C_{SS}\) (positive rating curve residuals), and slightly overestimated moderate discharge range \(C_{SS}\) (negative rating curve residuals) (Fig. 3C). The concentration of sand in suspension was also consistently underestimated for the lowest discharge range of \(q < 1 \, \text{m}^3/\text{s}\) (Fig. 3D). It has been recognized that the \(C_{SS}-Q\) relationships of many episodic river systems on the west coast of North America often systematically depart from the log-linear rating curve, particularly at low and high discharge (Farnsworth and Warrick, 2007; Warrick et al., 2013).

To avoid potential bias from the systematically poor fit of log-linear curves, LOESS curves were fitted to the \(C_{SS}-Q\) data sets for subsequent residual analysis, as well as particle size distribution estimation, using \(\alpha = 0.75\) and second-degree polynomials (Cleveland, 1979; Cleveland and Devlin, 1988; Helsel and Hirsch, 2002). LOESS curves fit to each of the entire fine and sand data sets produced standard errors of 0.59 and 0.55 log (mg/l) respectively (Fig. 3A,B). LOESS residuals for fine sediment appeared to have low structure with discharge (Fig. 3E,F). This was confirmed by sequential summation of linear regression and LOESS residuals over the discharge domain, as LOESS rating curves displayed less persistent dependence on discharge than the corresponding linear regression curves (Fig. 3G,H). Note that rating curves in this study were not adjusted for log-transform bias (i.e., Ferguson, 1986), as they were used solely for intercurve comparison rather than prediction of \(C_{SS}\) in terms of untransformed units of measure.

5. Antecedent hydrologic conditions

5.1. Hydrologic variable effects on \(C_{SS}-Q\) residuals

Hydrologic variables representing event conditions, basin wetness, seasonality, basin aridity, and hydrologic event history were computed from discharge data to account for variability in suspended sediment concentration not explained by instantaneous discharge (Table 2). Event scale hydrology was described using the change in daily discharge \(\Delta Q_{d}\) (Table 2), calculated as

\[
\Delta Q_{d} = Q_{d,\text{ts}} - Q_{d,\text{ts}-1}\tag{3}
\]

where \(Q_{d,\text{ts}}\) is the mean daily discharge value for the day of a given \(C_{SS}\) sample, and \(Q_{d,\text{ts}-1}\) is the mean daily discharge value for the day before the sample. Basin wetness was represented by lower Salinas annual water yield computed from mean daily discharge at S1 and annual precipitation at BGS for the current and previous water years. The effects of seasonality and basin aridity were both examined through the set of variables called \(\Sigma Q_{d,1}\), calculated as the sum of days that satisfied the hydrologic argument of daily average \(Q \leq 0.1 \, \text{m}^3/\text{s}\) in a given \(t_{s} - t_{e}\) to \(t_{e} - x\) temporal window, where \(t_{s}\) is the day that a given \(C_{SS}\) Sample was collected and \(x\) is the number of days prescribed by the sampling window. The value of 0.1 \(\text{m}^3/\text{s}\) was chosen because of the accuracy of the hydrologic gages in the lower Salinas, whereby flows \(\leq 0.1 \, \text{m}^3/\text{s}\) could be considered as ‘no-flow’ conditions. The \(\Sigma Q_{d,1}\) variable set was generated by calculating \(2\Sigma Q_{d,1}\) for each suspended sediment sample using sampling windows from 1 to 2000 days, in one-day increments. Shorter sampling windows (~10–100 days) tested season-scale effects, as lower Salinas discharge during the summer dry season is often ~ 0.1 \(\text{m}^3/\text{s}\). Longer
than or equal to 0.1 m\(^3\)/s, with individual variables de-

5.2. Hydrologic variable test results

Fine and sand-sized sediment responded differently to antecedent hydrologic conditions. Fine sediment concentration was found to have a weak though significant, positive correlation with \( \Delta Q_f \) (Table 3). The set of variables \( \Sigma Q_{0.1} \) produced consistently negative and significant trends for summation windows between ~1150 and 2000 days, with slightly stronger (larger \( T \) magnitude) correlations found with increasing summation window size (Fig. 4A). This suggests that long-term arid conditions decreased fine sediment supply. The set of hydrologic event history variables (\( Q_\text{time} \)) produced significant negative trends in fine suspended sediment rating curve residuals with increasing elapsed time since the last low flow \((Q \geq 1, 2, \text{and } 4 \text{ m}^3\text{/s})\), while moderate events of ~100 to 200 m\(^3\)/s produced significant positive trends in residuals with increasing elapsed time (Fig. 5A). The former result is evidence that sediment supply is suppressed by prolonged low flow (dry) conditions, while the latter provides some insight into how wetter conditions, resulting in moderately high discharges, may act as flushing functions, decreasing fine sediment supply for a time after the event.

Sand concentration exhibited significant positive correlations with wet conditions, and negative correlations with dry conditions (Table 3). Significant negative trends were found for sand-sized suspended sediment residuals and the entire \( \Sigma Q_{0.1} \) variable set, from window sizes 1–2000 days (Fig. 4B). Significant negative trends were found in \( (CSS_s-Q) \) residuals for the \( Q \_\text{time} \) variable set for \( Q \) values between 1–20 and 50–1000 m\(^3\)/s, which also points to a general decrease in sand-sized sediment supply with less discharge in the lower Salinas (Fig. 5B). Larger \( T \) magnitudes — indicating stronger monotonic trends — were found at \( Q_f \approx 400 \text{ m}^3\)/s and \( \Sigma Q_{0.1} \) for summation windows of 75–100 days, suggesting perhaps threshold sediment supply production associated with discharges around 400 m\(^3\)/s and a seasonal suppression of sand supply for flows after the summer dry season.

Although Mann–Kendall tests are not as sensitive as linear regression to outliers positioned at the beginning or end of data series, problems with outliers can arise. Furthermore, proper use of the

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Mann–Kendall test requires that the dependent variable response is monotonic in relation to the independent variable. Values of $C_{SS} - Q$ LOESS rating curve residuals were plotted against $2Q_{0.1}$ and $Q_j$ time values found to be significant (Fig. 6). All linear regressions, added for illustrative purposes, were found to be significant, except for fine suspended sediment residuals vs. $2Q_{0.1}$ variables, which appeared to be compromised by nonlinear responses (Fig. 6A,B,C). The other representative scatter plots reveal generally monotonic structures that do not appear to be highly steered by outliers, with the exception of the response of fine sediment to the $Q_j$ time variable at $j = 200 \text{ m}^3/\text{s}$ (Fig. 6F), which was highly steered by a few values above 1500 d (results not shown).

Analysis of hydrologic variables showed that the behaviors of fine and sand fractions in the lower Salinas River are affected by hydrologic event history. But which pools of sediment are impacted by these factors: the hillslope, channel banks, or channel bed? The remainder of this study is oriented toward this question.

6. Effects of hydrographic position and flow regime

6.1. Rating curve subgroup comparison with ANCOVA

The first step toward deciphering process was to test for differences in $C_{SS}$ behavior resulting from hydrographic position and flow regime. The $C_{SS}$ data sets were split into subgroups (rising/falling or storm/winter recession/summer base flow, respectively). Log-linear rating curves were then fitted to each subgroup and tested for differences in behavior. An ANCOVA approach was used to determine if the rating curves were statistically ‘coincident’ (indistinguishable), and if not, whether they differed in rating curve slope or offset. The homoscedasticity of all hydrologic position subsets was tested using a two sample $F$-test statistic (e.g., Larsen, 2003). In all cases the subgroups were found to be homoscedastic unless otherwise noted. For a detailed account of the ANCOVA approach to comparing rating curves, see Appendix A.

Flow regime assignment was determined by examination of the precipitation record at BGS and discharge at S1, S2, and S3. Samples were identified as originating from storm flow if they were collected during the rising or falling limb of a hydrographic event that occurred because of precipitation, with the end of the falling limb identified as a change in concavity. This was visually assessed for those samples that were located far from the concavity change or found by computing the second derivative of a fitted fourth-order polynomial when samples were proximal to the shift. Winter recessional samples were those that were collected during the precipitation season but after the end of a given falling limb. The precipitation season was determined by examination of the monthly precipitation record. Summer base flow samples were those collected after the final falling limb of the winter precipitation season.

6.2. Rating curve subgroup ANCOVA results

Hydrologic variable correlation analyses indicated significant differences in $(C_{SS} - Q)$ behavior with $\Delta Q_j$, while previous studies suggested that there may be large differences in suspended sediment behavior between different flow regimes (i.e., storm, winter recessional, and summer base flow) for most rivers (e.g., Walling, 1977; Estrany et al., 2009). A trend in $C_{SS}$ dependence on $\Delta Q_j$ implies that consistent hysteretic patterns in $C_{SS}$ behavior based on hydrographic position may occur in the system. Fine sediment from rising limb samples was found to have a greater slope than falling limb samples and a slightly higher offset (Fig. 7A), while the sand-sized hydrologic position rating curves were almost identical (Fig. 7B). Results of the ANCOVA tests indicated that the rating curves for the fine suspended sediment hydrologic position subgroups could be considered parallel and offset equivalent, but were not coincident; while the rising and falling limbs of sand-sized suspended sediment were statistically coincident (Table 4; Fig. 7A,B). ANCOVA results for storm, winter recessional, and summer base flow rating curves were not significantly different in terms of parallelism, offset, or total coincidence, nor were the summer and winter recessional flow curves (Table 4; Fig. 7C,D). Thus a weak hysteretic pattern was evident for fine suspended sediment, but not sand, over the entire sample record; while no evidence was found of flow regime control on suspended sediment concentration.

7. Suspended sediment hysteresis

7.1. Hysteresis identification

The next step in the investigation of physical processes was to examine event-scale patterns in suspended sediment hysteresis. Six events sampled by the USGS between 1970 and 1978 and two by the authors in 2010 were sampled sufficiently for some degree of fine sediment hysteresis determination. Sampling resolution from the USGS data set was also sufficient to compare fine and sand-sized sediment behavior over the course of seven events. ‘Positive’ hysteresis occurs when rising limb $C_{SS}$ values are larger than $C_{SS}$ values of corresponding discharge magnitude on the falling limb, while ‘negative’ hysteresis occurs because of the opposite effect (Hudson, 2003). Log–log plots of sequential samples collected over a given discharge event, with $C_{SS}$ on the ordinate and $Q$ on the abscissa, were used to assess the presence of hysteresis.

7.2. Hysteresis results

Only eight hydrologic events were sampled sufficiently for some insight into event scale hysteretic behavior of fine sediment; of these, six were sampled at S1 and two at S2 (see Fig. 8). Log–log plots of $C_{SS}$...
against Q revealed evidence for positive, negative, and mixed positive/negative hysteretic patterns for five events with low to moderate peak discharges (~10–100 m³/s; see Fig. 8A–E) and evidence of positive hysteresis for three high peak discharge events (~250, 450, and 1600 m³/s, respectively, which were the peak discharge events for water years 1974, 1973, and 1978, respectively, see Fig. 8G,H). Sample density for most of the events with indications of positive or negative behavior was not sufficient to rule out more complex, mixed hysteretic; behaviors, however, these plots do show that the lower Salinas fine suspended sediment exhibited positive and negative hysteresis behavior over a wide range of discharges.

Although few events were sampled sufficiently for determination of sand hysteresis, seven were sampled adequately for comparisons of rising/falling limb behavior between the fine and sand fractions of suspended sediment (Fig. 9). Three events showed fine and sand-sized sediment behaving very similarly, with indications of negative (Fig. 9A–D) and positive (Fig. 9E,F) hysteresis. For those events when the rising/falling limb relationship of fine and sand fraction behavior was found to differ, it consistently manifested as an increase in the concentration magnitude of falling limb samples relative to rising limb samples in the sand fraction (Fig. 9G–N). Next, the potential mechanisms associated with hysteretic behavior in the lower Salinas were assessed.
by examining subbasin routing effects on $C_{35}$ behavior (Section 8) and channel bed contributions to suspended sediment (Section 9).

8. Effects of subbasin water provenance

8.1. Routing analysis

Hysteresis in $C_{35}–Q$ relationships in rivers of moderate to large size can result from differences in subbasin suspended sediment dynamics (Shi et al., 1985; Asselman, 1999). Examination of the potential for such routing effects on $C_{35}$ in the lower Salinas was motivated by a bifurcation of the Salinas system that occurs 28.4 km upstream from S2, at the confluence of the Salinas and Arroyo Seco (Fig. 1; Table 1). Because of large differences in subbasin characteristics, differential contribution of the upper Salinas and the Arroyo Seco could be a major driver of hysteretic suspended sediment behavior.

Identification of lower Salinas sampled flows that were dominated by contributions of the upper Salinas or the Arroyo Seco and testing of these subgroups for differences in $C_{35}–Q$ behavior allowed for a joint assessment of the potential differences in subbasin suspended sediment behavior and the attenuation of this signal downstream. The entire lower Salinas fine and sand-sized suspended sediment data sets were sorted into those samples grossly dominated by one tributary or the other by following peak flow transmission of daily discharge data from gages throughout the basin. Because of the low temporal resolution of the discharge data (daily average Q) that could be used for samples collected before 1989, only 198 of the 330 fine sediment and 123 out of 248 sand-sized sediment sampled discharges were identified as originating primarily from one of the two basins. The data set was then trimmed of upper Salinas data points from the lowest and highest discharges in order to match the discharge range of the Arroyo Seco dominated subset to remove the potential bias of rating curves calculated over different ranges of discharge. These ‘dominant tributary’ subsets were then tested using the ANCOVA methodology (see Section 6.1 and Appendix A).

8.2. Routing results

No significant differences in $C_{35}–Q$ behavior were identified between the Arroyo Seco and upper Salinas dominated flows (Table 4; Fig. 10A). Significant differences were found in terms of slope and offset for sand-sized suspended sediment rating curves partitioned by subbasin, with Arroyo Seco dominated samples resulting in a lower slope and higher offset (Table 4; Fig. 10B). Thus, subbasin water contribution control on fine suspended sediment behavior in the lower Salinas was eliminated as a significant contributing mechanism to the overall positive hysteresis observed in fine suspended sediment in the lower Salinas, implicating significant lower Salinas control on fine sediment dynamics, and more distributed control of sand-sized sediment.

9. The channel bed and suspended sediment

9.1. Channel bed analyses

In the absence of an intensive channel-oriented field campaign, here the possibility of significant lower Salinas channel mediation of suspended sediment behavior through storage and resuspension of suspended sediment material was addressed through comparative
Fig. 8. Diagrams of all fine suspended sediment hysteresis events identified from the lower Salinas USGS and UCD data sets plotted in log-log scale and organized by discharge magnitude of the peak event flow. Rising flows progress in temporal sequence from left to right (low to high discharge), while falling flows progress from right to left (high to low discharge). Positive or clockwise hysteresis occurs when rising limb flows have higher suspended sediment concentrations than falling limb flows. Negative or counter-clockwise hysteresis occurs when falling limb samples have higher suspended sediment concentrations than rising limb flows. Mixed hysteresis events display each of these patterns over different ranges of discharge magnitude. Sample were collected from the lower Salinas at location S1 (USGS Spreckels gage) during events plotted in (A), (B), (D) and (F–H), and at S2 (USGS Chualar gage) for (C) and (E). Samples (C) and (E) were collected by UCD, all others by the USGS. Event date ranges are as follows: (A) 12/10–14/1974, (B) 12/27/1971–1/1/1972, (C) 2/25–26/2010, (D) 1/11–17/1970, (E) 1/20–25/2010, (F) 1/5–25/1974, (G) 2/10–22/1973, (H) 2/8–27/1978.

particle size distribution characteristics between the channel bed and suspended sediment pools at S1 and S2 and through estimation of fine sediment content of the channel bed. Hydraulic geometry relationships were also calculated to assess how the lower Salinas flow characteristics changed with discharge.

Average particle size distribution characteristics were compared for bed sediment at stations S1 and S2 and suspended sediment samples in relation to discharge. Log-linear rating curves were constructed for USGS suspended sediment samples by standard USGS particle size classes of whole intervals as well as the sand fraction that accounted for most of the bed sediment at both S1 and S2 (125 to 2000 μm) over the range of discharges shown to approximate log-linear behavior for CSS and CSS (q ≥ 1 m³/s). Particle size range rating curves were then compared by station (S1, S2) using the ANCOVA methods introduced in Section 6. Suspended sediment concentration of particle size ranges that behaved in a statistically coincident manner between sites were then described by LOESS rating curves computed from joint S1 and S2 data, while size ranges with significantly different log-linear behavior were described with separate rating curves by station. Average particle size distributions by percent mass for each station for discharges spanning five orders of magnitude (0.1–1000 m³/s) were calculated from the particle size range LOESS curves. Particle size distribution characteristics and average lower Salinas channel width from S1 to S2 were used to estimate the mass of bed sediment by particle class for the top 10 cm of reach channel surface assuming a planimetric channel for simplicity of calculation. Width, average depth (d), and mean velocity were related to Q through a power law function with exponential terms of b, f, and m, respectively, for sites S1, S2, S3, and A1 (Leopold and Maddock, 1953).  

9.2. Channel bed results

Rating curves constructed for each standard USGS particle size range by station exhibited very little difference in suspended sediment behavior between S1 and S2 for clay and silt particle sizes, although some sand classes appeared to increase in concentration between S1 and S2 (linear rating curve comparison not shown). This observation was confirmed by ANCOVA tests, which showed no statistically significant difference in rating curves between stations for all particle size ranges except 62.5–125, 125–250, and 125–2000 μm sands. In each of these sand ranges, the condition of coincident rating curves was significantly violated, mostly because of differences in rating curve offsets, which were just below the p < 0.05 threshold for significance (Table 4). Thus some
sand concentrations slightly increase downstream from station S2 to S1, including the broad range encompassing most bed-sized sediment (d > 125 μm), but fine suspended sediment concentrations behave identically between stations.

Lower Salinas CSS-Q LOESS rating curves by texture classes (clay, silt, and sand) showed that clay-sized particles rapidly become dominant between 0.1 and 1 m³/s and remain so for all higher flows (Fig. 11A). Sand CSS values increase rapidly between 1 and 10 m³/s to join the silt curve, and the two follow nearly the same path for much of the discharge range between 10 and 1000 m³/s. Particle size range LOESS curves (Fig. 11B–E) were used to compute average particle size distributions at S1 and S2 for discharge classes 0.1, 1, 10, 100, and 1000 m³/s (Fig. 12). Differences in suspended sand behavior between S1 and S2 were evident in the evolution of sharp, single-peaked sand distributions at S1 with increasing discharge from 1 to 100 m³/s, in comparison to the maintenance of a low percentage, flat-peaked sand distribution at S2 (Fig. 12C–H).

The average bed sediment composition between 1967 and 1992 at stations S1 and S2 was 2.7 and 5.2% fines (d < 62.5 μm), respectively (Fig. 12KL). Assuming a bulk density of 1.3 g/cm³ for fine sediment, the channel bed at these sites could potentially yield 0.35–0.68 g/cm² of fines in the top 10 cm. Applying the average of these values and assuming the average flow width measured by the USGS at S1 and S2 of 161 m, a gross estimate of available fine sediment, respectively.

The results of hydraulic geometry analysis at S1, S2, S3, and A1 showed a dominance of width response to flow changes (Table 5). Depth was more responsive than velocity at Salinas sites, while the inverse was true for the steeper, rougher Arroyo Seco site; however, all four sites primarily responded through width adjustment. Because the capability to entrain sediment is dependent on stream power (in steady, uniform flow), which is dependent on depth, the ability to erode and transport sediment increases relatively slowly with discharge at these sites (Leopold and Maddock, 1953; Kale and Hire, 2004).
10. Discussion

10.1. Synthesis

The following antecedent hydrologic condition effects on suspended sediment behavior were found for the lower Salinas River:

• Fine sediment concentration decreased with:
  ○ Dry conditions over interannual time scales
  ○ Falling flows

• Fine sediment concentration increased with:
  ○ Rising flows
  ○ Longer elapsed time since the last moderate flow \( (10-20 \cdot Q_{\text{mean}}) \)

• Sand concentration decreased with:
  ○ Dry conditions over seasonal to interannual time scales
  ○ Upper Salinas water provenance for \( 10-50 \cdot Q_{\text{mean}} \) flows

• Sand concentration increased with:
  ○ Wetter conditions during the current and previous water year
  ○ Recent flow activity
  ○ Upper Salinas water provenance for low flows \( (< Q_{\text{mean}}) \)

Prolonged dry conditions were found to reduce both fine and sand-sized suspended sediment concentrations. No significant seasonal signal was observed for fine sediment in the lower Salinas, while sand supply to the suspended sediment transport appears to be strongly linked to preceding discharge magnitudes and to the amount of time that the channel experienced very low to no flow conditions over temporal scales that range from days to years. Fine sediment concentrations also increased in the lower Salinas with increasing elapsed time since moderate discharges of around 100–200 m\(^3\)/s, long periods of which were also associated with prolonged droughts. Thus, there appear to be competing factors influencing fine sediment response to prolonged dry conditions, while sand supply is consistently suppressed.

The decrease in sand-sized sediment after the dry season and decreases in both fine and sand-sized sediment over seasonal to
interannual periods of dry conditions is contrary to the pattern of sediment exhaustion commonly observed over the course of the wet season in monsoonal systems (Paustian and Beschta, 1979; McCulloch et al., 2003; Kale and Hire, 2004; López-Tarazón et al., 2010; Warrick et al., 2013). The phenomenon of seasonal and interannual decreases in suspended sediment during dry periods in the lower Salinas may be caused in part by changes in surface erodibility. In coastal dry-summer subtropical climates such as that of the Salinas with warm, dry summers and cool, wet winters, the lack of flow and elevated temperatures of the summer dry season may dry out surficial channel sediments, particularly since the lower Salinas River bed is perched above groundwater. Fine, cohesive sediment is generally more difficult to entrain with increased deposition age, as interparticle bonding strength can increase drastically with dewatering; subaerial exposure can also lead to increases in the hydrophobicity of sediment (Mehta et al., 1989; Winterwerp et al., 1990). Prolonged intervals of low to no-flow conditions could also reduce channel and hillslope sediment contribution through the incursion of vegetation in channels, gullies, and other intense precipitation/discharge-induced land surface disturbances such as slumps and mass wasting scars. Thus, summer dry seasons and multiyear droughts could lead to fine sediment that is less likely to be entrained, and once entrained more difficult to convey given increased roughness in vegetated channels, particularly in the case of early season flows that often must wet the channel and encounter vegetation not yet disturbed by flow. These possibilities remain to be tested in the field.

The flushing function of moderate discharges found for fine sediment in the lower Salinas is an understudied phenomenon, perhaps

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**Table 5**  
Hydraulic geometry of Salinas stations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Width (m)</th>
<th>Depth (m)</th>
<th>Velocity (m/s)</th>
<th>b/f ratio</th>
<th>m/f ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Slope coefficients of power functions relating width, depth, and velocity to discharge are b, f, and m, respectively.*

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**Fig. 12.** Lower Salinas average suspended sediment particle size distributions for stations S1 (A, C, E, G, I) and S2 (B, D, F, H, J, L) by discharge magnitude, and channel beds (K, L). Distributions were calculated from LOESS curves plotted for each particle size range, and by station when log-linear regressions indicated significant differences in behavior between stations (62.5–125 and 125–250 μm) (see Fig. 11). All data derived from USGS sources.
because of the focus on decadal to centennial scale sediment yield within the research community. Much of the work on hydrometeorological event preconditioning has focused on the effect of large, infrequent floods that generally transport large proportions of interdecadal sediment budgets and have been shown to have lasting geomorphic and sediment supply effects in steep, mountainous rivers on active margins (Brown and Ritter, 1971; Kelsey, 1980; Madej and Ozaki, 1996; Warrick et al., 2013), although there has been some interest in terms of dam-release functionality (e.g., Batalla and Vericat, 2009). Sand concentrations on the other hand seem to be stimulated by ever larger and more recent hydrologic events, which is consistent with the northern California coast range systems that have exhibited increases in sediment supply immediately following large precipitation/discharge events, such as the widespread flooding of the December 1964 event (Warrick et al., 2013). Thus, fine and sand-sized sediments in the lower Salinas respond differently to previous hydrologic events, with sand supplies enriched by more recent and larger flows and fine sediment decreased after moderate threshold events.

10.2. Event characteristics and routing

Why do fine sediment and sand respond differently to antecedent hydrologic events? Fine suspended sediment sources in most rivers—including moderately sized, steep coastal basins such as the Salinas—are generally known to be dominated by hillslope wash load, while sand supplies are often moderated to some degree by lower mainstem channel storage and transport competency (Walling and Moorehead, 1987). However, the Salinas River channel must moderate fine sediment transport to some extent, as suspended load must deposit when flows terminate in the channel with complete loss to recharge. Investigation into event characteristics, hysteresis, water provenance, and evolution of particle size distribution with discharge magnitude and downstream position provided evidence that the Salinas channel does indeed influence both sand and fine suspended sediment behavior.

The positive correlation between $Q_{mean}$ and fine suspended sediment concentration suggests that the conditions leading to rapid increases in discharge, namely increased wash load resulting from the erosivity of intense precipitation events, and/or the energy imparted to the channel by rapid increases in discharge are significant contributing factors to positive fine suspended sediment hysteresis in the lower Salinas. The $Q_{fl}$ variable employed in this study is similar to the Flashiness Index (FI) developed by Batalla and Vericat (2009), where $FI = Q_{fl}/Q_{t}$, which has been successfully used as an index for energy expenditure on the channel (e.g., Tena et al., 2011). Fine suspended sediment in the lower Salinas displayed positive and negative hysteretic behavior with discharge, but the positive correlation with $Q_{fl}$ indicated that positive hysteresis effects slightly dominated the record. The major mechanisms generally associated with positive hysteresis include hydrodynamic phenomena such as increased boundary shear stress/shear velocity on the rising limb of the hydrograph because of a greater water surface slope than on the falling limb (Garcia and Parker, 1991), a larger proportional contribution of base flow/interflow on the falling limb (Gao and Pasternack, 2007), and routing considerations such as higher fine particle sediment supply from areas proximal to the channel and/or lower in the basin (Williams, 1989). Negative hysteresis has primarily been associated with routing characteristics, including higher sediment supply from distal portions of the basin and sediment transport lag in larger ($>10^3$ km$^2$) basins, because suspended sediment downstream particle velocities are often lower than peak discharge wave celerity (Heidel, 1956; Williams, 1989). The provenance of storm waters above the lower Salinas was not a significant factor in determining $C_{dSS}$ for low to moderate flows, which indicates that upper basin wash load signals attenuate before reaching the lower Salinas stations. This is counterintuitive, as the Arroyo Seco and the upper Salinas are on average very different subbasins in terms of relief, area, vegetation and soil characteristics, and fire regimes (Farnsworth and Milliman, 2003; Warrick et al., 2012); and one would expect wash load signatures to differ, as more moderate differences in subbasin characteristics have been shown to cause significant differences in suspended sediment behavior (e.g., Ankers et al., 2003).

10.3. Channel mediation

Thus upper basin provenance effects on fine sediment are overprinted by some combination of the following lower Salinas sediment sources: runoff, channel bed, and/or bank sediment. Routing analysis samples were identified by subbasin peak flow events and therefore, by definition, composed of very little lower Salinas storm water. This issue coupled with the fact that suspended sediment is deposited in the Salinas mainstem channel by early and late season flows, the evidence that $C_{dSS}$ values increase with increasing energy imparted to the channel, and the lack of effect of hydrologic mode (summer base, storm, or winter recessional flow) on low flow $C_{dSS}$ supports the notion that lower Salinas fine suspended sediment dynamics for flows up to ~50 · $Q_{mean}$ are significantly affected by in-channel processes such as bank erosion as well as deposition and resuspension of fine sediment. Furthermore, much of the flow range sampled for the paired subbasin dominance analysis was below bankfull for the lower Salinas, which generally has a wide, complex channel composed of bar forms in various states of vegetation and multiple low water channels, as evidenced by the fact that lower Salinas hydraulic geometry changes most rapidly in width with increasing discharge. Therefore channel bank sediment control is probably not the major mechanism at play, as the banks of the lower Salinas are not interacting with flow over much of this discharge range. Thus, the lower Salinas appears to significantly alter upper basin fine suspended sediment signals toward a uniform behavior based primarily on in-channel dynamics at low to moderate water discharges. However, differences in sand-sized sediment behavior did persist to the lower Salinas, which suggests that subbasin sand signals are stronger than the overprinting of lower Salinas in-channel processes.

Bed and suspended sediment particle sized distribution analyses showed that bed sands likely play an increasing role in lower Salinas suspended sediment with increasing discharge, which is unsurprising as coarser sands are often transport limited in sand-bedded rivers. Moderate flows (~100 m$^3$/s) found to cause a decrease in subsequent fine sediment concentration were accompanied by the highest proportion of bed-sized sediment at station S2 and especially S1 (Fig. 12). Increases in channel bed mobility exposing intermixed fines and the resuspension of surficial channel-deposited fines that otherwise slowly re-enter the water column over time may play a role in flushing associated with events of these magnitudes. The flushing effect may also operate on the hillslope by exhausting surficial, easily mobilized sediment, as the hillslope sediment pool is far larger than that of the channel (Inman and Jenkins, 1999). Determination of the proportional role of channel and hillslope sediment sources is beyond the scope of this study, but further evidence does support the significance of in-channel processes.

The lower Salinas appears to be insensitive to flow regime differences over low to moderate discharge magnitudes (Table 4). Previous studies have shown that precipitation-driven storm flows often display dramatically different suspended sediment behavior in comparison to flows attributed to interflow, ground water discharge, or recharge-oriented dam releases (winter recessional or summer base flow), due primarily to the increased contribution of hillslope and channel margin sediment from precipitation events (Lana-Reauelt et al., 2007; López-Tarazon et al., 2010; Oeung et al., 2010; Tena et al., 2011; Gao and Josephson, 2012). Lack of sensitivity in the lower Salinas further supports the idea that the channel plays a significant role in moderating suspended sediment concentration as water routed overland, through interflow or groundwater; and summer dam releases, which are almost devoid of sediment, are statistically coincident in suspended sediment rating curve behavior at low to moderate flow magnitudes. Previous
studies have found that fine sediment may penetrate deeply into the coarser channel matrix and that these fines re-enter suspension only by flows large enough to mobilize bed sediment, even in reaches where bed sediment was sandy (López-Tarazón et al., 2011). Therefore, if the channel bed is generally of low mobility, surficial and intermixed channel deposits of incipient and recessionary flows may contribute significantly to the fine sediment load of low flows.

In-channel storage has been found to play a significant role in fine sediment dynamics in other rivers, with fine sediment content of 0.04–8.0 g/cm² reported for a wide range of rivers using a method that involved the agitation of the top 5–10 cm of bed material (Lambert and Walling, 1988; Walling and Quine, 1993; Droppo and Stone, 1994; Walling et al., 1998; López-Tarazón et al., 2011). Most of these studies used a more expansive definition of fine sediment that included fine sand (<150 μm) and were conducted on reaches with coarser bed material than the mainstem of the lower Salinas River, although the limited amount of work on sandy reaches suggests that they could store a higher proportion of fines than gravel beds (Walling and Quine, 1993). Average annual sediment load estimates based on Inman and Jenkins (1999) and Farnsworth and Milliman (2003) are ~30–60 times the amount estimated to have been stored in the reach between S1 and S3, although both studies recognized that many years produced sediment fluxes of this magnitude or less. Thus, the fine sediment potentially stored in the lower Salinas main stem may only exert controls of a small scale relative to decadal- to centennial-scale suspended sediment yield, which is of a similar proportion to the channel storage effects found in another semi-arid catchment (López-Tarazón et al., 2011), but much less than has been found for more maritime climates (Walling et al., 1998).

10.4. The power of antecedent conditions

Unlike bed sediment alone, the hydrologic factors found in this study, though seemingly weak in terms of monotonic correlation coefficients, could have large effects on decadal- to centennial-scale sediment discharge, particularly if influencing the infrequent years responsible for most of the suspended sediment flux through the lower Salinas River. For example, monotonic trends in rating curve residuals against some hydrologic variables show up to 0.5 log unit or greater differences over the domain of variable values, which translates to approximately three times the difference in C90 magnitude (see Fig. 6). As most sediment is transported through the lower Salinas River during a few high discharge days per year, and a few exceptional discharge years over the period of record (Farnsworth and Milliman, 2003), coincidence of discharge events with highly positive or negative hydrologic preconditions could result in large errors in sediment flux estimations that do not take these factors into account. This is particularly true for estimates applying suspended sediment data collected over only one decade to much longer discharge records, such as those of Farnsworth and Milliman (2003) and Inman and Jenkins (1999) for the Salinas River. Moreover, both channel and hydrologic factors could have significant proportional effects on sediment yields during years of lower suspended sediment production and over the range of low to moderate discharge magnitudes commonly found in the lower Salinas, which are of importance in terms of water quality.

11. Conclusions

Suspended sediment rating curves often leave large residual variability in suspended sediment concentration unexplained. Such was the case for the well-studied Salinas River located in a dry summer subtropical climate. Historical and event based hydrological characteristics were found to play a significant role in determining suspended sediment behavior in the lower Salinas. Prolonged drought was found to decrease both sand and fine sediment concentrations. Increased elapsed time since moderate hydrologic events with magnitudes of ~10–20 Qmean resulted in increased fine sediment concentration. These moderate flows in the lower Salinas seem to flush the system, depressing subsequent concentrations of fines by exhausting some level of channel and hillslope storage. The importance of channel storage of sediment in the lower Salinas is highlighted by the positive effects of ΔQp on fine concentrations, the prevalence of positive hysteresis, the preponderance of incipient flows in the early season and during droughts, and the insensitivity of the system to the dominance of upper Salinas or Arroyo Seco subbasin contributions and hydrologic regime (storm, winter recessional or summer base, and dam release flows) for moderate to low discharge magnitudes. Sand concentrations were found to increase as a result of wet conditions and more recent and larger hydrologic events and to decrease after seasonal scale dry conditions. Recent hydrologic activity also increased sand concentrations, with concentrations increasing when events over a broad range of discharges, from small (0.1 Qmean) to massive (~100 Qmean), are more recent. Upper basin and Arroyo Seco sand signatures were also found to persist in the lower Salinas sand suspensions, which also display some evidence of distal basin lag effects relative to the more positive hysteresis domination of fine sediment. Thus, in-channel contributions to fine suspended sediment behavior is probably not a major control on decadal- to centennial-scale suspended sediment yield from the lower Salinas but may be significant in terms of water quality and annual scale sediment flux. Hydrologic preconditions identified in this study may also significantly influence long-term sediment flux dynamics in the lower Salinas, as they can effect changes in sediment concentration on the order of three times or greater.

The next step in this work is to identify the time dependent pattern of suspended sediment behavior in the lower Salinas and determine if these patterns are influenced by the time dependent behavior of hydrologic conditions and/or land surface change. Further field-based studies of hillslope, channel bed, and bank activity in the lower Salinas and upper basin are also required to directly address the mechanisms behind the antecedent hydrologic effects on suspended sediment behavior found here. Extension of the approach employed here to other systems would benefit greatly from higher resolution water discharge and suspended sediment concentration time series available over longer temporal domains, which are expected to have limited this study from identification of further complexities in the interaction between antecedent conditions and sediment behavior.

Acknowledgements

This research was funded largely by the National Science Foundation under award No. 0628385 and secondarily by the Hydrologic Sciences Graduate Group at the University of California at Davis. This project was also supported by the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture, Hatch project number #CA-D-LAW-7034-H. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the funding institutions. We thank Peter Barnes, Sarah Greve, Duyen Ho, Olivia Osegueda, Larissa Salaki, and the Elkhorn Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve for laboratory and field assistance, and Rocko Brown for fruitful discussion. This manuscript was significantly improved on the basis of suggestions by Michael Church, one anonymous reviewer, and Editor Richard Marston.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary material related to bias calculations and the ANCOVA method for comparing linear regressions can be found in the online version of this article. Supplementary data to this article can be found online at http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.geomorph.2014.03.009.
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