

## ***Interactive comment on “<sup>17</sup>O-excess traces atmospheric nitrate in paleo groundwater of the Saharan desert” by M. Dietzel et al.***

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This is a well written and interesting development to quantify excessive nitrate concentrations in arid aquifers. The use of O-17 is novel and the work should be published. One area I would like the authors to consider is their model for infiltration of nitrate (and other soluble salts) during “flood” events. The manuscript presents a conceptual model of increased runoff, with overland flow of both water and solutes. While this certainly occurs in many hyper-arid regions and will move solutes to low lying areas, this would also tend to produce much more heterogeneous distribution of groundwater salinity and nitrate, as groundwater flow in the region appears quite slow. Rather, I would suggest the authors consider periodic infiltration events during wetter climates, in which nitrate and chloride are leached from below the near surface and rooting zone if it exists, and

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migrated downward through the vadose zone to the water table. This will result in a much more uniform distribution of salinity and nitrate in groundwater similar to what the authors see. This type of climate controlled recharge is well documented in arid regions, both for the chloride as well as nitrate, and has been seen by Edmunds and Gaye (1997), Tyler et al. (1997), Hartsough et al. (2001) and Walvoord et al. (2003). It clearly shows that migration of stored salinity and nitrogen in arid vadose zones is episodic, but responds to longer periods of moisture, rather than the occasional flash flood.

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Hartsough, P., S.W. Tyler, J. Sterling and M. Walvoord. 2001. A 14.6 kyr record of nitrogen flux from desert soil profiles as inferred from vadose zone pore waters. *Geophysical Research Letters*. Vol. 28(15):2955-2958.

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