

Interactive comment on “Impacts of biological nitrogen fixation on N₂O emissions from global natural terrestrial ecosystem soils: An Analysis with a process-based biogeochemistry model” by Tong Yu and Qianlai Zhuang

Tong Yu and Qianlai Zhuang

yu401@purdue.edu

Received and published: 16 January 2020

Response letter-2 Response: Thank you for the overall positive feedback. We have thoroughly revised the paper following your comments and suggestions. We find that most problems focused on the relationship between natural N fixation and N₂O emissions. Because it is difficult to avoid the influence of anthropogenic fixed nitrogen on natural ecosystem N₂O emissions at this time. We decide, in the revision, to focus on the simulation of N fixation and eliminate the evaluation of fixation impacts on N₂O emissions.

1) The term 'natural' is frequently used throughout the text without attempting to define the context in which it is intended. 'Natural' has many implications, connotations, and hidden assumptions. An explicit definition of the term, as it is used on the paper, is needed. How well do the field sites selected relate to that definition? Indeed, since estimates are that humans have doubled the amount of fixed N applied to the terrestrial landscape of the planet (see the Galloway et al., 2004 reference), how does that relate to the 'natural' sites? More importantly, how can global extrapolation of BNF relate to global N₂O emissions given the substantial contribution that the anthropogenic fixed N (ANF) must have made? While the paper does not completely ignore the importance of ANF, it does not make clear distinctions between the two relative to N₂O emissions.

Response: - In this study, we only considered natural ecosystem emissions. Croplands emissions were not modeled. We will add a clear definition of natural in the introduction part. - We cannot guarantee there is absolutely no human effects on selected sites. But according to the cited paper, they are treated as natural environment. - Thank you for your suggestion on ANF's influence on N₂O emissions. We have eliminated N₂O results, and only present the N fixation results.

2) The paper only mentions the TEM and the N₂O emissions model in passing. Little information is provided as to how the BNF model is integrated into those pre-existing models to derive N₂O emissions. Where does the newly fixed N enter into those models? Was it considered to increase the soil organic-N pool size? Or was the assumption made that newly fixed N was all immediately taken up by plants, or both? Were other parameters, such as soil inorganic-N supply, in the previous TEM model modified when the BNF model was included?

Response: - We will only simulate the N fixation part with the assistance of TEM.

3) The general conclusion is that including BNF resulted in additional N that led to -5% to +20% changes in seasonal soil N₂O emissions. The main differences occurred in the winter months. That was the range, but what was the central tendency of the

[Printer-friendly version](#)[Discussion paper](#)

effect? Figure 5 suggests that there was generally little change in emissions overall. Indeed, one could easily conclude from Figure 5 that including BNF in the larger model did not have a substantial impact on N₂O emissions. Perhaps that is not too surprising when one considers that the total fixed N pool size (plant biomass + soil fixed N + atmospheric input) must be substantially larger than the annual amount of newly fixed N from BNF. The abstract states that: “This study highlights that there are relatively large effects of the biological nitrogen fixation on ecosystem nitrogen cycling and soil N₂O emissions.” The results shown in the paper and the discussion do not at all agree with that conclusion relative to N₂O emissions.

Response: - We will modify the content of Figure 5. - This study will not highlight the relation between N fixation and N₂O emissions.

4) Given the large overlap in tables and figures between this paper and Yu and Zhuang 2019, one wonders whether the incremental contribution of this paper relative to N₂O emissions represents a publishable, stand-alone contribution over and above Yu and Zhuang 2019. How does this differ from a laboratory experiment that adds little to no new insight into what is already known? In my opinion, the paper can be, and should be, strengthened, by including additional considerations, such as ANF or the differential effect(s) of N speciation on BNF. Or perhaps more radically by reducing or eliminating the focus on N₂O emissions all-together and refocusing on how the BNF inclusion changes the N cycle fluxes in the TEM model. In short, the paper has too much emphasis on N₂O emission given the Yu and Zhuang 2019, paper while more could be done overall concerning the BNF contribution to the model.

Response: Thank you for your suggestion. We decide to focus our discussion on BNF in the revised version.

5) Can N₂O emission data from 8 (line 170), or 6 (line 197), or 5 (Table 3) sites (which is it?) be reasonably extrapolated globally? Those sites were chosen because they were “affected by legumes.” What is the implication of that to the extrapolation? Yes, it was

[Printer-friendly version](#)[Discussion paper](#)

subsequently tested on 35 other (?) sites. But there was little N fixation measured for almost half of those sites

Response: We will carefully deal with the observational data for N fixation in revision. The N₂O emission data will be removed from the paper.

6) Minor revision - Line 63. The EPA reference is missing. Added

- Line 104: “and for spatial limitation”. How does that relate to C demand? Deleted “and for spatial limitation”

- Eqn 1: Nfix is not defined in the text. Added the definition in the text above Eqn 1.

- Line 143: use the same terminology throughout the paper. Upper threshold is given here. In the table it listed as ‘upper bond’ (sic). We have changed the “upper bond” to “upper threshold” in the table.

- Line 155: change to read “every unit of nitrogen fixed...” Added “fixed”.

- Line 161: the units for Cr in the text do not match the units given in Table 1. Changed the unit in Table 1.

- Line 170: 8 sites are indicated, but only 5 are listed in table 3. Table 3 will be deleted.

- Line 186 and throughout: use past tense. Done.

- Line 186: Table 2 lists 7 ecosystem types, not 11. Changed to “7 ecosystem types among 11”.

- Line 197: Table 3 lists 5 field sites, not 6. Table 3 will be deleted.

- Line 201: should be “sensitivity testing.” Done.

- Line 205: Figure 2 is a result, not a method. Deleted the citation of Figure 2.

- Line 214: no standard deviation is given. Added.

- Line 214: What is the rationale for “removing these data?” Because they can be

Printer-friendly version

Discussion paper



viewed as outliers of observation data.

- Lines 216-217: “simulations are closer : : :in temperate forests: : :” Close to what? Closer to observation.
- Line 228: There is no N₂O data in Figure 3. We will delete the N₂O part.
- Line 244-247: Sentence starting with “Here” is unclear. Is that referring to the previously cited study or this study? Usually that term refers to the current study, but it appears to be referring to Bruijnzeel et al. Changed “Here” to “In this study”.
- Lines 229-231: “The comparison between measured and simulated data further shows the influence of BNF for different ecosystem types: : :” This is unclear and need further explanation. This sentence will be deleted.
- Line 248: 32.5 Tg N does not match the number in Table 4 Changed the value in the text. . - Line 248-249: give the numbers in text and refer to Table 4. Done.
- Line 279-281: This sentence should include some mention of the high nitrate concentrations typically found in desert soils. We will add a sentence discussing the nitrate concentration in desert.
- Lines 297-298: What was the overall mean and standard deviation of the model results when BNF was and was not included in the N₂O emission simulations? We will delete the discussion on N₂O emissions.
- Line 374: change slightly to slight. Changed.
- Lines 381-384: Not all agree with this statement. See Heden et al., 2009, Ann. Rev. Ecol. Evol. Syst. 40:613. Alternate explanations should be included here. Thank you for providing reference. We will refer to the reference to include other statements.
- Table 1: Change bond to bound throughout. Provide units for all parameters and ranges for coefficients. The description for the Michaelis-Menton constant is incomplete. What process is that a constant for? We have changed “bond” to “bound” in the

description. Some of coefficients have no unit, but we have added units for those who have. The Michaelis-Menton constant is for Eqn.5, the consideration of soil carbon.

- Table 2: Column headers should be “measured N fixation rate” and “simulated N fixation rate.” Changed.

- Table 3: Wagga Wagga is in Australia. Table 3 will be deleted.

- Table 5: N_pot parameter format and units do not match Table 1. What are units for fNup? Units for Kc do not match Table 1. We have unified the format and units between Table 1, 5 and in the text.

- Figure 1: The grey to blue colors are hard to distinguish against the green and blue background shading. Use the same units for N₂O emissions and N fixation rate here and throughout the paper. We have unified the units between Figure 1 and text.

- Figure 3: What do the lines represent? Regression lines forced through zero? If so, what is the rationale for doing that? Yes, the lines are regression lines forced through zero. The inner rationale is explained in the text.

- Figure 5: Point out the y-axis scale differences. The scales chosen for the two tropical forests is rather misleading and are based on what appear to be outlier observations. Suggest using the same scale with a y axis break to include the outliers so that these two panels can be more easily compared. What ecosystem is panel e? Figure 5 will be removed in revision.

Please also note the supplement to this comment:

<https://www.biogeosciences-discuss.net/bg-2019-278/bg-2019-278-AC2-supplement.pdf>

Interactive comment on Biogeosciences Discuss., <https://doi.org/10.5194/bg-2019-278>, 2019.

Printer-friendly version

Discussion paper

