



1 Organic Matter Transformations are Disconnected Between 2 Surface Water and the Hyporheic Zone

3 James C. Stegen¹, Sarah J. Fansler¹, Malak M. Tfaily⁴, Vanessa A. Garayburu-Caruso¹, Amy E.
4 Goldman³, Robert E. Danczak¹, Rosalie K. Chu², Lupita Renteria¹, Jerry Tagestad³, Jason Toyoda²

5 ¹Earth and Biological Sciences Directorate, Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, Richland, WA, U.S.A.;
6 james.stegen@pnnl.gov (J.C.S.); sarah.fansler@pnnl.gov (S.J.F.); vanessa.garayburu-caruso@pnnl.gov (V.A.G.-C.);
7 robert.danczak@pnnl.gov (R.E.D.); lupita.renteria@pnnl.gov (L.R.);

8 ²Environmental Molecular Sciences Laboratory, Richland, WA 99352, USA; Rosalie.Chu@pnnl.gov (R.K.C.);
9 Jason.Toyoda@pnnl.gov (J.T.)

10 ³Energy and Environment Directorate, Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, Richland, WA, U.S.A.;
11 amy.goldman@pnnl.gov (A.E.G.); Jerry.Tagestad@pnnl.gov (J.T.)

12 ⁴Department of Environmental Science, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ, 85719, USA; tfaily@email.arizona.edu
13 (M.M.T.)

14 *Correspondence to:* James C. Stegen (James.Stegen@pnnl.gov)

15 Abstract

16 Biochemical transformations of organic matter (OM) are a primary driver of river corridor biogeochemistry, thereby
17 modulating ecosystem processes at local to global scales. OM transformations are driven by diverse biotic and
18 abiotic processes, but we lack knowledge of how the diversity of those processes varies across river corridors and
19 across surface and subsurface components of river corridors. To fill this gap we quantified the number of putative
20 biotic and abiotic transformations of organic molecules across diverse river corridors using ultra-high resolution
21 mass spectrometry. The number of unique transformations is used here as a proxy for the diversity of biochemical
22 processes underlying observed profiles of organic molecules. For this, we use public data spanning the contiguous
23 United States (ConUS) from the Worldwide Hydrobiogeochemical Observation Network for Dynamic River
24 Systems (WHONDORS) consortium. Our results show that surface water OM had more biotic and abiotic
25 transformations than OM from shallow hyporheic zone sediments (1-3cm depth). We observed substantially more
26 biotic than abiotic transformations, and the number of biotic and abiotic transformations were highly correlated with
27 each other. We found no relationship between the number of transformations in surface water and sediments, and no
28 meaningful relationships with latitude, longitude, or climate. We also found that the composition of transformations
29 in sediments was not linked with transformation composition in adjacent surface waters. We infer that OM
30 transformations represented in surface water are an integrated signal of diverse processes occurring throughout the
31 upstream catchment. In contrast, OM transformations in sediments likely reflect a narrower range of processes
32 within the sampled volume. This indicates decoupling between surface water and sediment OM, which is surprising
33 given the potential for hydrologic exchange to homogenize OM. We infer that the processes influencing OM
34 transformations and the scales at which they operate diverge between surface water and sediments.

35



36 **1 Introduction**

37 River corridors are an important component of the integrated Earth system that have large influences on the flux of
38 materials and energy across local to global scales (Harvey and Gooseff, 2015; Schlünz and Schneider, 2000;
39 Schlesinger and Melack, 1981). The biogeochemical function of river corridors (e.g., rates of contaminate
40 transformations) are the outcome of both biotic and abiotic processes (e.g., He et al., 2016; Bowen et al., 2020). On
41 the biological side, microbial communities in areas where groundwater and surface water mix (i.e., hyporheic zones)
42 can, for example, contribute substantially to river corridor respiration rates (Jones Jr, 1995; Naegeli and Uehlinger,
43 1997; Battin et al., 2003; Fischer et al., 2005; but see Ward et al., 2018). In these areas, microbial metabolism can be
44 heavily modified by hydrologic mixing (e.g., McClain et al., 2003; Stegen et al., 2016, 2018). On the abiotic side,
45 light-driven organic matter (OM) transformations, for example, can consume significant amounts of dissolved
46 organic carbon in river systems (e.g., Amon and Benner, 1996) and heavily modify OM profiles (e.g., Holt et al.,
47 2021). The integration of biotic and abiotic processes ultimately lead to variation in water quality and ecosystem
48 fluxes that are relevant to local communities and global fluxes.

49
50 Within river corridors, OM serves as a primary energy source fueling aerobic and anaerobic heterotrophic
51 respiration (Fisher and Likens, 1973; Wetzel, 1995; Cole et al., 2007; Creed et al., 2015). The chemistry of OM in
52 river corridors is particularly important, with a multitude of influences over biogeochemical rates and ecosystem
53 fluxes. For example, through field, lab, and mechanistic modeling, thermodynamic properties of OM have been
54 shown to influence microbial respiration in both aerobic and anaerobic river corridor settings (Boye et al., 2017;
55 Stegen et al., 2018; Graham et al., 2018; Garayburu-Caruso et al., 2020a; Song et al., 2020; Sengupta et al., 2021).
56 This has also recently been shown in soil systems as well (Hough et al., 2021). Other attributes of OM chemistry,
57 such as the carbon to nitrogen ratio, also have strong influences over river corridor rates/fluxes (Bauer et al., 2013;
58 Liu et al., 2020). As is the case for nearly all attributes of river corridors, the spatial variation in and temporal
59 dynamics of OM chemistry emerge through the integration of biotic and abiotic processes.

60
61 Biotic and abiotic processes influence river corridor OM chemistry by modifying rates of production,
62 transformation, sorption/desorption, and/or spatial movement (Danczak et al., 2020). All these factors have been
63 studied to some degree in river corridors, and advances in cheminformatics techniques can provide further insights
64 specifically into the biotic and abiotic components of OM transformations. More specifically, Fudyma et al. (2021)
65 used the ultra-high mass resolution of Fourier transform ion cyclotron resonance mass spectrometry (FTICR-MS)
66 data (Marshall et al., 1998; Bahureksa et al., 2021) to infer putative abiotic and abiotic transformations of OM in a
67 river corridor system. This extended previously-developed cheminformatics techniques (e.g., Breitling et al., 2006;
68 Stegen et al., 2018; Danczak et al., 2020, 2021) to include abiotic transformations. Fudyma et al. (2021) found that
69 abiotic OM transformations, such as those driven by sunlight and photooxidation, may alter bioavailability of OM in
70 groundwater and surface water. These observations were collected across different subsurface hydrologic mixing
71 conditions and suggest that changes in the bioavailability of OM lead to enhanced microbial activity in subsurface
72 domains like the hyporheic zone. This emphasizes the need to consider abiotic OM transformations as a key



73 complement to biotic OM transformations in river corridors (Amon and Benner, 1996; Bowen et al., 2020; Holt et
74 al., 2021; Hu et al., 2021).

75

76 While both biotic and abiotic OM transformations are important in river corridors, we lack broad cross-system
77 understanding of how these two classes of transformations relate to each other and how they vary between hyporheic
78 zone sediments and surface water. Resolving these knowledge gaps is useful from a number of perspectives; for
79 example, it was recently proposed that surface water chemistry can be used as a mirror to understand subsurface
80 chemistry and associated processes (Stewart et al., 2021). With that idea in mind, if transformation numbers or
81 profiles in surface water are statistically associated with transformation numbers or profiles in sediments, we could
82 use surface water data (easier to generate) to infer properties/processes in the subsurface (much harder to study). In
83 addition, such correspondence would indicate that surface-subsurface hydrologic exchange in river corridors is
84 sufficient to overcome localized processes, thereby at least partially homogenizing OM across river corridor
85 compartments. On the other hand, lack of correspondence between surface water and sediment OM transformations
86 would indicate that deterministic processes (sensu Danczak et al., 2020) in the subsurface overwhelm transport
87 mechanisms in governing OM chemistry. Either outcome is highly informative for fundamental understanding and
88 for mechanistic modeling efforts that couple surface-subsurface hydrology and biogeochemistry (e.g.,
89 hyporheicFoam Li et al., 2020).

90

91 Here we aim to help fill knowledge gaps associated with OM transformation counts and composition across surface
92 and subsurface components of river corridors distributed across the contiguous United States (ConUS). We
93 specifically compare the numbers of biotic and abiotic OM transformations in sediments and surface waters, and
94 evaluate the potential for continental-scale spatial patterns in biochemical transformation counts and composition.
95 To do so, we use publicly available FTICR-MS data provided by the Worldwide Hydrobiogeochemistry Observation
96 Network for Dynamic River Systems (WHONDORS) consortium (Stegen and Goldman, 2018). One key outcome of
97 our analyses is that OM transformations in sediments are not related to OM transformations in adjacent surface
98 water, which suggests divergent governing processes despite hydrologic connectivity between these river corridor
99 sub-systems.

100

101 **2 Methods**

102 *Data Generation*

103 The samples used for data generation were collected and processed in 2019 as part of the WHONDORS consortium
104 (Stegen and Goldman, 2018), and the data were retrieved from publicly available data packages (Toyoda et al.,
105 2020; Goldman et al., 2020). Full details on sample and metadata collection are provided in Garayburu-Caruso et al.
106 (2020b); some additional sample data are used here that were not used in Garayburu-Caruso et al. (2020b), but all
107 methods are consistent. In short, at each site (Fig. 1) three depositional zones within ~10 m of each other were
108 sampled for shallow sediments (~1-3cm into the riverbed). Prior to sediment collection, surface water was collected
109 at the most downstream sediment sampling location. The samples were shipped to the Pacific Northwest National



110 Laboratory (PNNL) campus in Richland, WA (USA) on blue ice within 24 hours of collection. Untargeted
111 characterization of OM was done using ultrahigh resolution FTICR-MS. In preparation for FTICR-MS analysis,
112 sediments were extracted with Milli-Q deionized (DI) water and the resulting supernatant was filtered prior to
113 measurement of non-purgeable organic carbon (NPOC). NPOC concentrations were normalized to 1.5 mg C L^{-1} by
114 adding Milli-Q DI water. Samples were then passed through PPL cartridges (Bond Elut) to remove salts and
115 minerals. FTICR-MS analyses were performed at the Environmental Molecular Science Laboratory (EMSL) in
116 Richland, WA using a 12 Tesla (12T) Bruker Solarix FTICR mass spectrometer (Bruker, Solarix, Billerica, MA,
117 USA) in negative ionization mode. FTICR-MS spectra were processed to assign molecular formulae as described in
118 Garayburu-Caruso et al. (2020b). FTICR-MS data were used as presence-absence due to peak intensities providing
119 unreliable estimates of absolute or relative concentrations, which is a limitation inherent to FTICR-MS analysis.
120 While FTICR-MS provides the most comprehensive OM chemistry characterization currently available, it has
121 constraints such as not being quantitative and missing low molecular weight compounds ($\sim <200 \text{ Da}$) that need to
122 be taken into consideration. FTICR-MS nonetheless provides a robust approach for conducting untargeted
123 characterization of environmental OM.

124

125 In addition to the FTICR-MS data, we used a suite of environmental variables in an attempt to explain variation in
126 OM transformation counts. These variables included actual evapotranspiration, mean annual precipitation, mean
127 annual temperature, and potential evapotranspiration. Global datasets for these variables were acquired from two
128 sources as geospatial raster datasets: The historical mean annual temperature and mean annual precipitation were
129 downloaded from worldclim.org (Fick and Hijmans, 2017) and the evapotranspiration and potential
130 evapotranspiration were available as geospatial rasters from the MOD16 Global Evapotranspiration Product
131 database (Running et al., 2017). The environmental variable values were associated with each sample location using
132 ArcGIS function *Extract Values to Points*. The output was a table of climate and evapotranspiration values for each
133 sample location.

134

135 *Biochemical transformation analyses and statistics*

136 Biochemical transformations of OM were inferred as in Fudyma et al. (2021), and full details of the method can be
137 found in that publication. In brief, we used a list of common biochemical transformations (see the associated data
138 package) to putatively infer the identity (e.g., hydrogenation, loss/gain of an alanine, etc.) and number of
139 occurrences of each transformation in each sample. A given transformation was inferred each time we observed the
140 corresponding mass shift between a pair of peaks, within each sample. In each sample, we counted the number of
141 times each transformation was inferred to have occurred. We then designated each transformation as biotic, abiotic,
142 or both reflecting the potential chemical reaction sources as in Fudyma et al. (2021). Next, the samples were parsed
143 into sediment or surface water categories. Then we compared the total number of transformations, the number of
144 abiotic transformations, the number of biotic transformations, and the ratio of abiotic to biotic transformation
145 numbers for each sample. Distributions based on the number of transformations or their ratio were compared
146 between surface water and sediments using Wilcoxon signed rank tests. Transformation numbers and their ratio were



147 related to each other and to spatial and environmental variables using ordinary least squares regression. Spatial and
148 environmental variables included latitude, longitude, and the environmental variables listed above.

149

150 In addition to studying transformation numbers, we examined the composition of transformations and related these
151 compositional profiles between surface water and sediments. The purpose of this analysis was to evaluate the degree
152 to which hydrologic exchange homogenizes OM between sediments and physically adjacent surface water. The
153 compositional profile for each sample was characterized by the number of times each transformation was inferred.

154 For each site, the three surface water samples were combined by adding together the number of observations for
155 each transformation and then computing the relative abundance of each transformation. The same process was done
156 for the three sediment samples within each site. Doing this across all sites provided the equivalent of an ecological
157 'species-by-site' matrix, but with transformations as 'species' and samples as 'sites' and the entries as the site-level
158 relative abundance of each transformation in each sample. In turn, we calculated Bray-Curtis dissimilarity among all
159 sediment samples and, separately, among all surface water samples. The relationship between surface water and
160 sediment Bray-Curtis dissimilarities was then evaluated using distance-matrix regression and a Mantel test to
161 account for non-independence of the pairwise comparisons. For this, the Bray-Curtis values from surface water from
162 a given site were linked with the Bray-Curtis values for the sediment data from the same site. Each data point used
163 in the regression is therefore based on surface water and sediment from the same site compared to data from a
164 different, but common, site. For example, in the case of three sites (A, B, and C), a single data point in the regression
165 would be based on water from A compared to water from B and sediments from A compared to sediments from B.
166 Another data point would be water from A compared to water from C and sediments from A compared to sediments
167 from C, and so on. If hydrologic transport between surface water and sediments homogenizes organic molecules
168 between water and sediments, water Bray-Curtis should increase with sediment Bray-Curtis. The stronger the
169 homogenization, the stronger the Bray-Curtis relationship should be. If hydrologic transport does not homogenize
170 OM between sediments and the physically adjacent surface water, no relationship will be observed between surface
171 water and sediment Bray-Curtis values.

172

173 **3 Results and Discussion**

174 Examining ConUS-scale distributions for the number of biotic and abiotic transformations showed that surface
175 water OM had significantly more biotic ($W = 12360$, $p \ll 0.0001$, Fig. 2A) and abiotic ($W = 12978$, $p \ll 0.0001$,
176 Fig. 2B) transformations than sediment OM. In addition, there were many fewer abiotic transformations (~50-800
177 per sample) than biotic transformations (~5000 to 80000) within the ConUS-scale distributions (cf., Fig. 2A,B). On
178 a per-sample basis the abiotic to biotic ratio ranged from ~0.01 to 0.02, and sediments had a significantly higher
179 ratio than surface water ($W = 46627$, $p \ll 0.0001$, Fig. 2C). As a key methodological detail--as described in the
180 Methods section--we note that all samples were normalized to a constant organic carbon concentration prior to
181 FTICR-MS analysis such that comparisons can be made directly among all samples, including between surface
182 water and sediments.

183



184 The larger number of biotic and abiotic transformations in surface water is, at first, surprising given that hyporheic
185 zone sediments are very biogeochemically active (Naegeli and Uehlinger, 1997; McClain et al., 2003), and are often
186 considered as ecosystem control points within river corridors (Bernhardt et al., 2017). We might therefore expect
187 there to be more OM transformations in hyporheic zone sediments. It is important to consider, however, that the
188 number of transformations (as quantified here) is a reflection of transformation diversity, not the rate of OM
189 transformations. For example, a system may experience a very high rate of OM transformation, but have a low
190 number of unique types of transformations. Such a situation would result in a low transformation count due to the
191 FTICR-MS data being used to indicate the presence or absence of organic molecules (i.e., there is no information on
192 abundance).

193

194 Given that the number of transformations does not indicate the rate of transformation, the larger number in surface
195 water may result from surface water OM being an integrated signature of processes occurring across upstream
196 catchments (Vannote et al., 1980; Xenopoulos et al., 2017). In comparison, sediment OM may reflect processes
197 occurring principally within the sampled volume. That is, a larger diversity of transformations may accumulate as
198 surface water OM integrates processes and sources from across the stream network, which is conceptually consistent
199 with previous work using the same data that found higher molecular richness in surface water than in sediment OM
200 (Garayburu-Caruso et al., 2020b). This interpretation sets up the emergent (i.e., *post-hoc*) hypothesis that the number
201 of transformations may increase with catchment area. This hypothesis could be evaluated by combining the dataset
202 analyzed here with quantification of upstream catchment areas. Furthermore, this points to a need to compare drivers
203 of transformation counts with drivers of OM functional diversity. For example, Kida et al. (2021) recently found
204 OM functional diversity to increase, decrease, or stay steady moving down a stream network (i.e., as upstream
205 catchment area increased). Those authors tied variability in the patterns to context dependencies in environmental
206 characteristics. ConUS-scale consistency in the patterns observed here for OM transformation contrasts with the
207 context dependencies observed for OM functional diversity in Kida et al. (2021). We therefore encourage future
208 studies to elucidate relationships between OM transformations and functional diversity.

209

210 While the number of abiotic transformations was far less than biotic transformations both locally (i.e., within each
211 site) and at the ConUS-scale (Fig. 2), abiotic transformations nonetheless play an important role in river corridors
212 (Judd et al., 2007; Ward et al., 2017). For example, Fudyma et al. (2021) examined biochemical transformations in
213 the river corridor and found that abiotic transformations in surface water modified the chemistry of OM entering the
214 hyporheic zone, with subsequent impacts to respiration rates. Soares et al. (2019) also recently found that abiotic
215 transformations of OM can lead to increases in bioavailable OM as residence time of surface water increases. These
216 demonstrations of the importance of abiotic transformations further emphasize that the number of transformations
217 observed here is a quantification of transformation diversity, not functional importance. That is, small sets of
218 transformations can serve vital functional roles and can connect sets or ‘modules’ of transformations together
219 (Fudyma et al., 2021).

220



221 As noted above, our results suggest that OM transformations in surface water may reflect processes occurring across
222 the upstream catchment while OM transformations in sediment may reflect processes within the sampled volume.
223 This inference was further supported by non-significant relationships between surface water and sediments in terms
224 of transformation counts (Fig. 3). That is, the number of abiotic transformations in surface water was not related to
225 the number of abiotic transformations in sediments. This analysis was done on paired samples, with data for surface
226 water coming from the same stream reach as data for sediments. This allowed for regression-based analyses. The
227 number of biotic transformations and the abiotic-to-biotic ratio were also uncorrelated between surface water and
228 sediments. Extending the analyses to transformation composition further supports a disconnect between surface
229 water and sediment OM transformation profiles. That is, we observed no meaningful relationship between surface
230 water and sediment OM transformation compositional dissimilarity (Figs. 4, S1). As discussed in the Methods
231 section, if hydrologic transport was overwhelming localized processes, we would have observed a clear positive
232 relationship. Instead, a very weak relationship was observed ($R^2 = 0.04$), indicating that influences of transport are
233 very small relative to localized processes. This may be conceptualized similarly to the Damköhler number whereby
234 the ratio of the reaction-influence to the transport-influence is very large.

235

236 The lack of correlation between transformation counts and composition between surface water and sediment OM
237 indicate at least a partial decoupling of the processes governing OM transformations in surface water and sediments.
238 In this case, bi-directional exchanges (i.e., hyporheic exchange) (Harvey and Gooseff, 2015) of water and OM
239 between surface water and the sediments are not strong enough to overwhelm processes occurring within each
240 subsystem. It was recently proposed that OM assemblages can be thought of in terms of ecological community
241 assembly processes including stochastic dispersal and deterministic selection (Danczak et al., 2020, 2021). From this
242 ecological perspective, our results indicate that the rate of dispersal (i.e., transport) of OM from surface water into
243 sediments is not sufficient to overcome the influences of localized, deterministic processes that cause systematic
244 differences (among molecules) in the rates of production and transformation. Here, OM production and
245 transformation are analogous to organismal birth and death, respectively (Danczak et al., 2020). It is unclear,
246 however, what factors and processes within the sediments impose deterministic selection over molecular production
247 and transformation. We hypothesize that a suite of factors are at work, such as redox conditions and sediment
248 mineralogy. If so, changes in these factors should explain variation across sediments in the number of observed
249 transformations.

250

251 In contrast to the decoupling between OM transformations in surface water and sediments, we observed strong
252 correlations between the number of biotic and abiotic transformations within surface water and within sediment
253 (Figure 5). As discussed above, the number of transformations is best interpreted as a measure of transformation
254 richness, as opposed to an indication of rates. The strong correlation between biotic and abiotic transformation
255 counts therefore indicates that the diversity of biotic transformations tracks closely with the diversity of abiotic
256 transformations. This suggests that systems in which a larger range of biochemical mechanisms contribute to OM
257 production and transformation are also characterized by a larger range of abiotic mechanisms contributing to OM



258 transformations. In considering this inference, it is important to recognize that the correlation between biotic and
259 abiotic transformation counts may be influenced by among-sample variation in the number of observed molecules.
260 However, among-sample variation in the number of observed molecules is not an artefact. This is because higher
261 OM transformation richness should lead to a larger number of unique organic molecules. That is, the number of
262 observed molecules and the level of OM transformation richness are mechanistically linked to each other whereby
263 richness can beget more richness. This lends credence to our inferences above, but also emphasizes that additional
264 insights can be gleaned by controlling for among-sample variation in the number of observed molecules.

265
266 To control for among-sample variation in the number of observed molecules we quantified the within-site abiotic-to-
267 biotic ratio. This ratio was significantly higher in sediments than in surface water. The close spatial proximity
268 between OM and mineral surfaces in sediments may contribute to relatively higher frequency of abiotic
269 transformations in sediments. In addition, a larger diversity of redox conditions and thus more diverse redox species
270 (Briggs et al., 2013; Boano et al., 2014; Lewandowski et al., 2019) in sediments could also contribute to the larger
271 relative contribution of abiotic transformations in sediments. This does not discount the important role of abiotic
272 transformations in surface water, such as those associated with photooxidation. Indeed, it is well known that abiotic
273 transformations in surface water can strongly influence watershed carbon cycling fluxes (Ward et al., 2017; Bowen
274 et al., 2020; Hu et al., 2021).

275
276 In addition to comparing transformations across river corridor subsystems, we conducted a preliminary investigation
277 of spatial and climate correlates (e.g., mean annual temperature) of transformation numbers. This revealed non-
278 significant ($p > 0.05$) or very weak ($R^2 < 0.1$) relationships in all cases (see Supplementary Figures). We also
279 performed multiple regression analyses and even models with 5 spatial and climate variables showed very low
280 explanatory power (e.g., $R^2 < 0.08$ for the model explaining variation in total transformations). Low explanatory
281 power of space and climate is surprising given continental-scale variation in OM chemistry revealed in the same
282 dataset used here. That is, Garayburu-Caruso et al. (2020b) found a significant increase in sediment mean nominal
283 oxidation state of organic carbon (NOSC) in the eastern US, relative to the western US. The lack of relationships
284 shown here indicates that large-scale drivers of OM chemistry are not the same factors that drive variation in the
285 number of transformations or the abiotic-to-biotic transformation ratio. A major remaining challenge is, therefore, to
286 elucidate what drives variation in the absolute and relative numbers of abiotic and biotic OM transformations, and
287 understand relationships between transformations and functional diversity of attributes such as NOSC.

288 289 **5 Conclusions**

290 While it is unclear what drives variation in transformation numbers across river corridors, our ConUS-scale analyses
291 provided insights that are likely applicable across all river corridors. In particular, processes governing OM
292 transformations appear to be distinct between surface water and hyporheic zone sediments. This is unexpected given
293 the bidirectional exchange of materials between surface water and sediments (Boano et al., 2014; Harvey and
294 Gooseff, 2015). It also highlights that while hydrologically-driven mixing can stimulate biogeochemical processes in



295 hyporheic zones (McClain et al., 2003; Stegen et al., 2016), it generally does not homogenize OM between surface
296 water and sediments (Stegen et al., 2018; Fudyma et al., 2021). Instead, we propose that OM observed in each
297 subsystem is the result of biochemical transformations mediated by distinct processes. Surface OM transformation
298 counts are likely influenced by upstream catchment processes while sediment OM is likely influenced by processes
299 local to the sample volume. These observations further highlight the need to study and model river corridors through
300 a multi-scale perspective.

301

302 **6 Code availability:** Scripts to reproduce the primary results of this manuscript are available at [https://data.ess-
303 dive.lbl.gov/view/doi:10.15485/1839188](https://data.ess-
303 dive.lbl.gov/view/doi:10.15485/1839188).

304

305 **7 Data availability:** Data to reproduce the primary results of this manuscript are available at [https://data.ess-
306 dive.lbl.gov/view/doi:10.15485/1839188](https://data.ess-
306 dive.lbl.gov/view/doi:10.15485/1839188). The data were retrieved from published data packages (Toyoda et al.,
307 2020; Goldman et al., 2020).

308

309 **8 Author contributions:** JCS (Conceptualization, Formal Analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation,
310 Methodology, Project administration, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft
311 Writing – review & editing), SJF (Conceptualization, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Software,
312 Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing), MMT (Conceptualization,
313 Investigation, Methodology, Writing – review & editing), VAG-C (Data curation, Investigation, Writing – review &
314 editing), AEG (Data curation, Investigation, Writing – review & editing), RED (Data curation, Investigation,
315 Software, Writing – review & editing), RKC (Data curation, Investigation, Writing – review & editing), LR (Data
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318

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320

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331

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495 **Figures**
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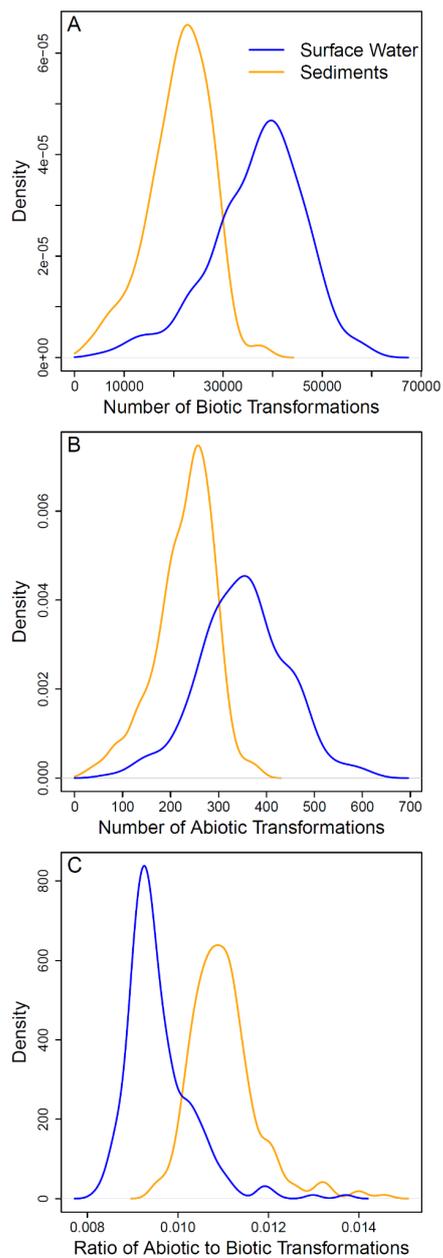


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500 **Figure 1.** Map of sampling locations distributed across the contiguous United States (ConUS). Surface water and
501 sediments were collected at each site using a crowdsourced approach via the WHONDERS consortium. Physical
502 factors such as stream order were not constrained. Figure generated by Sophia McKeever using QGIS. The base map
503 is copyrighted: © OpenStreetMap contributors 2022. Distributed under the Open Data Commons Open Database
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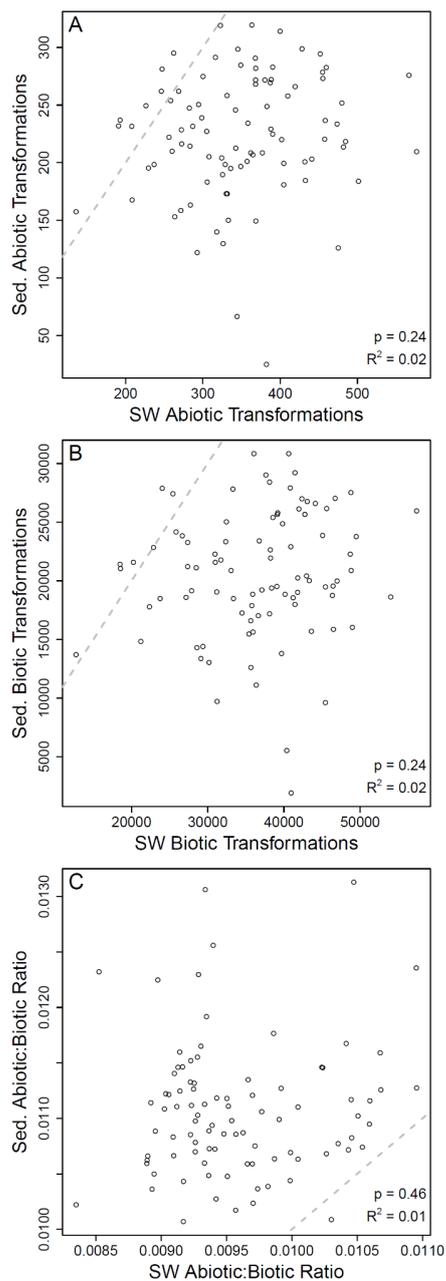
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Figure 2. Examining the ConUS-scale distributions of biotic and abiotic transformation numbers reveals more transformations in surface water than sediment organic matter. Kernel density functions for ConUS-scale biotic (A) and abiotic (B) transformations, and their ratio (C) in sediment (orange lines) and surface water (blue lines) organic matter. The median values of the distributions significantly diverge within each panel (see text for statistics).



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Figure 3. Sediment (Sed.) and surface water (SW) transformation counts and are not related to each other.

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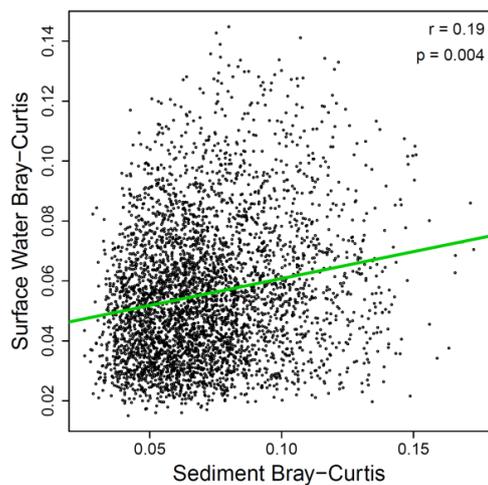
Regression analysis of the number of abiotic (A) and biotic (B) transformations and their ratio (C). Each open circle

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is from one sampling site in which surface water and sediments were both collected. Regression statistics are

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provided on each panel and the dashed line is the 1-to-1 line; no regressions were significant.



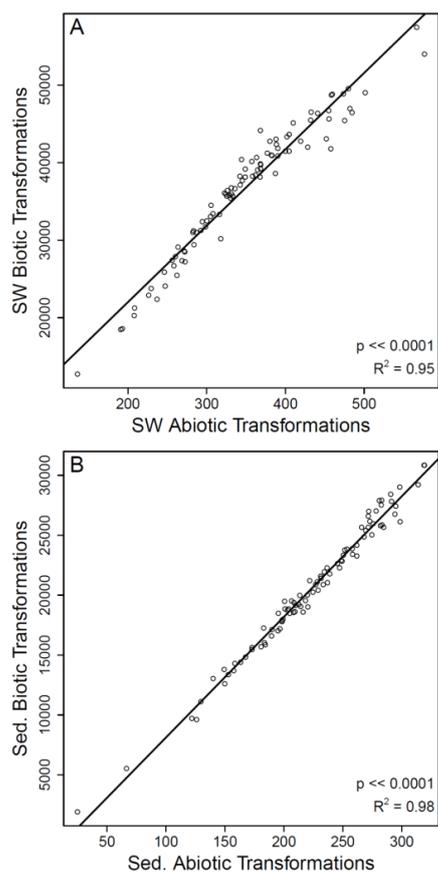
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520 **Figure 4.** Transformation profiles of OM in sediments and surface water were weakly related to each other. Bray-
521 Curtis dissimilarities in surface water and sediments are plotted against each other, with their relationship evaluated
522 via Mantel test to control for non-independence among data points (see Methods). The Pearson correlation
523 coefficient and the Mantel-based p-value are provided on the panel. While significant, the relationship is extremely
524 weak, suggesting lack of a meaningful relationship. One outlier sample was discovered and excluded from this
525 analysis. Figure S1 includes the outlier, which does not change the interpretation, it only makes it harder to see the
526 data.

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530 **Figure 5.** Strong correlations were observed between the number of biotic and abiotic organic matter
531 transformations within surface water (SW) and within sediment (Sed.). Each circle represents one sampled site for
532 surface water (A) and sediments (B). The solid black line is the regression model and statistics are provided on each
533 panel.