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A multi-scale comparison of modeled and observed seasonal methane emissions in northern wetlands

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Abstract. Wetlands are the largest global natural methane (CH₄) source, and emissions between 50 and 70° N latitude contribute 10–30% to this source. Predictive capability of land models for northern wetland CH₄ emissions is still low due to limited site measurements, strong spatial and temporal variability in emissions, and complex hydrological and biogeochemical dynamics. To explore this issue, we compare wetland CH₄ emission predictions from the Community Land Model 4.5 (CLM4.5-BGC) with site- to regional-scale observations. A comparison of the CH₄ fluxes with eddy flux data highlighted needed changes to the model’s estimate of aerenchyma area, which we implemented and tested. The model modification substantially reduced biases in CH₄ emissions when compared with CarbonTracker CH₄ predictions. CLM4.5 CH₄ emission predictions agree well with growing season (May–September) CarbonTracker Alaskan regional-level CH₄ predictions and site-level observations. However, CLM4.5 underestimated CH₄ emissions in the cold season (October–April). The monthly atmospheric CH₄ mole fraction enhancements due to wetland emissions are also assessed using the Weather Research and Forecasting-Stochastic Time-Inverted Lagrangian Transport (WRF-STILT) model coupled with daily emissions from CLM4.5 and compared with aircraft CH₄ mole fraction mea-
measurements from the Carbon in Arctic Reservoirs Vulnerability Experiment (CARVE) campaign. Both the tower and aircraft analyses confirm the underestimate of cold-season CH₄ emissions by CLM4.5. The greatest uncertainties in predicting the seasonal CH₄ cycle are from the wetland extent, cold-season CH₄ production and CH₄ transport processes. We recommend more cold-season experimental studies in high-latitude systems, which could improve the understanding and parameterization of ecosystem structure and function during this period. Predicted CH₄ emissions remain uncertain, but we show here that benchmarking against observations across spatial scales can inform model structural and parameter improvements.

1 Introduction

Natural wetlands are the largest natural methane (CH₄) source, contributing up to 34% of global CH₄ emissions (Kirschke et al., 2013). Between 1980 and 2009, estimated global annual CH₄ emissions from wetlands varied from 115 to 231 Tg CH₄ in top–down atmospheric inversion models and 169 to 284 Tg CH₄ in bottom–up process-based land models (Kirschke et al., 2013). Peat-rich bogs and fens lying between 50 and 70°N constitute about half of the global wetland area and release 10–30% of the total wetland CH₄ (Wania et al., 2010; Zhuang et al., 2004; Bergamaschi et al., 1998). When permafrost soils thaw, CH₄ is produced under anaerobic conditions by methanogenic archaea. Once CH₄ is produced, it can be oxidized by methanotrophic archaea. CH₄ surface emissions occur through several transport pathways: aqueous and gaseous diffusion, ebullition, and aerenchyma diffusion and advection. At any point in the soil, the CH₄ concentration is governed by the balance between CH₄ production in anoxic zones, CH₄ consumption in oxic zones, transport, and atmospheric CH₄ diffusion at the soil–atmosphere interface.

Many interacting factors (e.g., temperature, thaw depth, soil moisture, depth of the water table, vegetation type) affect CH₄ production and emission. CH₄ production has a positive response to temperature increase (Van Hulzen et al., 1999; van Winden et al., 2012; Hommeltenberg et al., 2014), and laboratory incubations of soil samples from the active layer show that large variability of Q₁₀ values for CH₄ production (1.5 to 28, Segers, 1998) is related to site-specific peatland type and organic matter quality (Lupascu et al., 2012). CH₄ emissions also show positive temperature dependence above freezing. The temperature dependence of surface CH₄ emission is much stronger than that of respiration and photosynthesis, which indicates increases in both CH₄ emissions and the ratio of CH₄ to CO₂ emissions with seasonal increases in temperature (Yvon-Durocher et al., 2014). The positive temperature dependence of CH₄ emissions may only be valid when CH₄ oxidation is less sensitive to temperature (van Winden et al., 2012). The Q₁₀ value for CH₄ oxidation was reported to be 1.4 to 2.1 in northern peat soils (Dunfield et al., 1993). Strong oxidation temperature sensitivity can lead to decreased CH₄ surface emissions with rising temperature (Wang et al., 2014). The positive dependence of CH₄ emissions on soil temperature can be most significant in areas with sufficient soil moisture or a shallow water table (Roulet et al., 1992; Moosavi et al., 1996; Wickland et al., 1999). The dependency of CH₄ emissions on temperature can vanish at a high temperature and low water table (Hommeltenberg et al., 2014). At low water table levels, large CH₄ oxidation can mask the CH₄ production temperature sensitivity in the net emissions. CH₄ production under sub-zero temperatures was reported in incubation experiments (Clain and Schimel, 1995; Brouchkov et al., 2003); however, the mechanisms that regulate CH₄ production under cold temperatures have not been clarified.

Soil water content exerts a strong control on CH₄ emissions by affecting belowground carbon decomposition and root growth (Iversen et al., 2015). A lowered water table typically reduces CH₄ production and emission because of a higher aerobic-to-anaerobic respiration ratio in the soil column and CH₄ oxidation during diffusive transport through the oxygen-rich surface layer (Whalen and Reeburgh, 1990). If CH₄ produced in anoxic zones (e.g., below the water table) is transported to the atmosphere through aerenchyma, the impact of methanotrophy on net CH₄ emissions is diminished (Bartlett et al., 1992; Torn and Chapin, 1993; King et al., 1998; Juutinen et al., 2003; McEwing et al., 2015). The reduced methanotrophic impacts vary with vascular species cover and root density and are more common in tall vegetation because taller plants have more extensive root systems that enable more methanogenesis and pore water CH₄ to escape to the atmosphere (van Fischer et al., 2010). The correlation between water table depth and CH₄ emission can be very weak if the water table drops in an already oxic surface layer (Sturtevant et al., 2012).

The seasonal cycle of CH₄ emissions and their physical controls are strongly controlled by the freeze–thaw cycle in northern wetlands and regulation of wetland extent. The northern wetland area retrieved from the 19 and 37 GHz passive microwave Special Sensor Microwave/Imager (SSM/I) brightness temperature database shows that maximum inundation is usually observed during July, August and September in North America (48–68° N) and between June and September in northern Eurasia (Mialon et al., 2005). The inundation dynamics retrieved from the Special Sensor Microwave Imager (SSM/I) and the International Satellite Cloud Climatology Project (ISCCP) observations, European Remote Sensing (ERS) scatterometer responses, and Advanced Very High Resolution Radiometer (AVHRR) visible and near-infrared reflectance also show that maximum in-
undation occurs in July and August in northern boreal regions (55°–70° N; Prigent et al., 2007). The inferred wetland extent increases rapidly during the spring thaw period and shrinks again during the fall freeze period, though it is unclear on large scales how much of this seasonal cycle is due to changes in the areal fraction of land in which water ponds at the surface versus changes in the phase of that water. The interannual variability of high-latitude summer wetland extent is very small. Larger interannual variability during the intermediate seasons arises from the large variability of the timing and extent of snowmelt and accumulation (Mialon et al., 2005). For boreal bogs north of 50° N, the variation in wetland area contributed about 30% to the annual emissions and can explain the interannual variation in regional CH4 emissions (Ringeval et al., 2010).

Site measurements have shown great variability in seasonal CH4 emissions (Wilson et al., 1989; Mastepanov et al., 2008; 2013; Zona et al., 2016). In the late fall to winter, the surface water or shallow peat zone are frozen, and CH4 produced below the frozen layer can be trapped. Only a small portion of the trapped CH4 is oxidized because of low oxygen concentrations below the frozen layer (Mastepanov et al., 2008). Observed CH4 emissions during spring thaw are highly variable and contribute substantially to total annual emissions. CH4 fluxes during the spring thaw period contributed 11% to the annual budget over an aapa mire in Finnish Lapland (Hargreaves et al., 2001). The emission amounts can be 24% of the total annual emissions during the spring period after snowmelt next to an open pool in Caribou Bog, Maine, while the proportion can be as high as 77% in the adjacent upland area (Comas et al., 2008). In the non-inundated upland tundra, the cold-season (September to May) emissions account for more than 50% of the annual CH4 emissions (Zona et al., 2016). Although wetlands can contribute a large proportion of annual CH4 emissions during the cold season, the seasonal peak of CH4 emissions is usually observed in the summer (Pickett-Heaps et al., 2011; Zona et al., 2016). A transport model combined with flight measurements showed the peak CH4 emission to be in July–August in the Hudson Bay Lowlands (Pickett-Heaps et al., 2011). Although the recorded emission pulses during spring thaw and late fall (Song et al., 2012; Tokida et al., 2007; Rinne et al., 2007; Mastepanov et al., 2008, 2013) may be more localized and of minor importance to annual emissions (Chang et al., 2014; Rinne et al., 2007), the pulses indicates the complexity and heterogeneity in the seasonal CH4 cycle.

Many modeling studies have shown that there is large uncertainty in predictions of spatial patterns of CH4 emissions from natural wetlands on the regional and global scales (Melton et al., 2013; Bohn et al., 2015). This uncertainty can be roughly split into poor knowledge of water table and soil moisture dynamics versus poor knowledge of CH4 fluxes per unit area of land with a given water table depth or soil moisture state; both contribute substantially to the overall uncertainty. One approach to reducing this overall uncertainty is to focus on the seasonal cycles of CH4 emissions on the site scale (where inundation dynamics can be more easily constrained) versus on larger scales to ask whether model predictions and errors are consistent across these scales. The temporal dynamics of CH4 emissions over the season cannot be ignored when calculating long-term CH4 budgets (Morin et al., 2014). To investigate the seasonal cycle of CH4 emissions in northern wetlands and the underlying processes in a climate model context, we evaluated and modified the CH4 biogeochemistry module in the Community Land Model (CLM 4.5). Seasonal cycles of CH4 emissions in Alaskan wetlands are analyzed based on the modified model predictions, CH4 emission measurements at high-latitude sites, CarbonTracker CH4 emission estimates and atmospheric inversion estimates of surface CH4 emissions from data collected in the Carbon in Arctic Reservoirs Vulnerability Experiment (CARVE). The models and data are described in Sect. 2. Multi-scale comparison results and discussions are given in Sect. 3 and concluding remarks in Sect. 4.

2 Data and methods

2.1 Model descriptions

2.1.1 CH4 model in CLM4.5-BGC

The CH4 biogeochemistry model used here (CLM4Me; Riley et al., 2011) has been coupled to the revised land model CLM4.5, which includes numerous changes to vegetation, soil biogeochemistry and hydrology from the CLM4.0 in which CLM4Me was originally developed. CLM4Me includes the representation of CH4 production, oxidation and transport through the soil column. Transport includes multiple pathways: aerenchyma transport, ebullition, and aqueous and gaseous diffusion. Aerenchyma is the most efficient pathway for gas exchange between the soil and atmosphere in wetlands or aquatic environments, through which atmosphere O2 is supplied to roots and the rhizosphere while CH4 is removed from the soil to shoots and the atmosphere. In CLM4Me, aerenchyma transport (A) is parameterized as gaseous diffusion in response to a concentration gradient between the soil layer (z) and the atmosphere (α) as

$$A = \frac{C(z) - C_\alpha}{\frac{\partial z}{\partial t} r_\nu} + r_a,$$

where $D$ (m$^2$ s$^{-1}$) is the free-air gas diffusion coefficient, $C$ (z; mol m$^{-3}$) is the gaseous concentration at depth $z$, dimensionless $r_L$ is the ratio of total root length to root depth, $p$ (-) is tiller porosity, $T$ (m$^2$ m$^{-2}$) is specific aerenchyma area, $r_\nu$ (s$^{-1}$) is the aerodynamic resistance between the surface and the atmospheric reference height and $r_L$ (-) is the root mass fraction in the soil layer. The aerenchyma area $T$ is sea-
sonally varying with phenology \( S \) (described below):

\[
T = \frac{f_N N_a S}{0.22} \pi R^2,
\]  

(2)

where \( N_a \) (g C m\(^{-2}\)) is annual net primary production (NPP), \( R \) (2.9 \times 10^{-3} \text{ m}) is the aerenchyma radius, \( f_N \) is the belowground fraction of current NPP, and the factor 0.22 (g C) is the mass of C per tiller. The dimensionless term \( S \) is included in CLM4Me to capture seasonal cycles of aerenchymous tissues. In the absence of data on phenology of aerenchyma, \( S \) was originally taken as the leaf area index (LAI).

The default method for calculating inundation fraction \( \left( F_{\text{def}} \right) \) remains the same as described in Riley et al. (2011), which applied a simple inversion model to represent the spatial inundation:

\[
F_{\text{def}} = p_1 e^{-z_w/\bar{p}^2} + p_3 Q_t.
\]  

(3)

The three parameters \( (p_1, p_2, p_3) \) are optimized with the inundation map by Prigent et al. (2007). \( z_w \) is simulated water table depth (m) and \( Q_t \) is surface runoff (mm s\(^{-1}\)). We also applied an estimate of inundation fraction \( F_{S+G} \) derived from seasonal cycle of inundation fraction from the Surface Water Microwave Product Series Version 2.0 (SWAMPS; Schroeder et al., 2015) developed at the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory with the Global Lakes and Wetlands Dataset (GLWD; Lehner and Doll, 2004) to discuss the potential uncertainties in CH\(_4\) emissions caused by wetland area.

Our model is driven by half-degree CRUNCEP V5 6-Hourly Atmospheric Forcing dataset (1901–2013; http://esgf.extra.cea.fr/thredds/fileServer/store/p529viov/cruncep/readme.htm). Monthly wetland CH\(_4\) emissions are simulated between the year 2000 and 2012 during which \( F_{S+G} \) is available. The monthly CH\(_4\) emissions in half-degree resolution are regridded to 1° × 1° and averaged longitudinally to compare with CarbonTracker-predicted CH\(_4\) fluxes. Daily wetland CH\(_4\) emissions are simulated for the years 2012 and 2013 to calculate the atmospheric enhancements of CH\(_4\) due to modeled surface emissions.

### 2.1.2 WRF-STILT modeling of CH\(_4\) transport

We simulate the atmospheric CH\(_4\) mole fraction enhancements due to wetland emissions by combining the CLM4.5-predicted daily surface emissions with the land surface influences (“footprint”) calculated by the Weather Research and Forecasting-Stochastic Time-Inverted Lagrangian Transport (WRF-STILT) model (Henderson et al., 2015). WRF-STILT estimates the upwind surface influence along the flight track of the CARVE aircraft by releasing 500 particles at the point of flight measurement and allowing them to stochastically disperse in reverse time over 10 days (Henderson et al., 2015). The resolution of the resulting footprint sensitivity used in this study is 0.5° × 0.5°, covering 30–90° N, circumpolar. However, we assume that CH\(_4\) transported from areas outside of Alaska are most likely mixed thoroughly in the atmosphere before they reach Alaska and therefore only contribute to the background abundance of CH\(_4\).

### 2.2 Measurements of CH\(_4\)

#### 2.2.1 Site-scale observations

We compare CLM4.5 CH\(_4\) emission predictions with data obtained from published studies and recent measurements of Northern Hemisphere static-chamber (SC) measurements at 10 sites and eddy covariance (EC) measurements at 10 sites, of which 8 are in Alaska (Supplement Table S1). The eddy covariance measurements in Alaska (Fig. S2) are obtained at the Barrow Environmental Observatory (BEO1) tower operated by the Next Generation Ecosystem Experiment (NGEE)-Arctic group; the Barrow Environmental Observatory tower (BEO2), the Biocomplexity Experiment South (BES) tower, the Climate Monitoring and Diagnostics Laboratory (CMDL) tower, the Atqasuk (ATQ) tower and the Ivo-tuk (IVO) tower operated by Global Change Research Group at San Diego State University (Zona et al., 2016); the tower in Fairbanks (FAI; Iwata et al., 2015) operated by the International Arctic Research Center, the University of Alaska Fairbanks; and the tower at the Innnavait Creek watershed (IMN; Euskirchen et al., 2012). Monthly means are calculated across each observational record to compare to the predicted mean seasonal CH\(_4\) cycle. We discarded the monthly mean if the number of valid measurement days is less than half a month.

#### 2.2.2 Comparisons to airborne measurements

The regionally integrated CH\(_4\) mole fraction enhancements over Alaska were calculated from the CH\(_4\) mole fractions measured by NOAA and Harvard Picarro spectrometers aboard a NASA C-23B aircraft (N430NA) during CARVE aircraft flights (Chang et al., 2014). The Harvard CH\(_4\) measurements were gap filled with the NOAA CH\(_4\) measurements to create a continuous 5 s time series. The flight measurements were conducted on selected days from May to September in 2012 and April to October in 2013 during the Carbon in Arctic Reservoirs Vulnerability Experiment (CARVE) campaign for a total of 31 flight days in 2012 and 43 flight days in 2013 (Supplement Fig. S1 and Table S2). The measurements of CH\(_4\) with concurrent CO mole fractions above 150 ppb are excluded to remove possible CH\(_4\) production from biomass burning. In Alaska, atmospheric boundary layer depth is in the range of 1100–1600 m above ground level (a.g.l.) during April and October according to COSMIC satellite and Radiosonde data (Chan and Wood, 2013). We assume that the observed concentration fluctuations below 500 m a.g.l. can be used to infer the variation of surface CH\(_4\) fluxes; the measurements above 1600 m a.g.l. are used to infer the background mole fraction of CH\(_4\).
The monthly mean enhancements in observed atmospheric CH$_4$ mole fraction are compared to that estimated from the CLM4.5 CH$_4$ enhancements.

### 2.2.3 Comparisons to global-scale inversions

To compare our methane emissions with global- and regional-scale inversions, we use monthly regional CH$_4$ emissions predicted by CarbonTracker (Peters et al., 2007; Bruhwiler et al., 2014) at 1° × 1° resolution. In CarbonTracker estimates, the natural CH$_4$ emissions correspond to wetlands, soils, oceans, insects and wild animals. To examine the land CH$_4$ emissions only, we apply the CLM land mask to exclude the inferred CarbonTracker CH$_4$ emission from the ocean surface. CarbonTracker CH$_4$ estimates are available from January 2000 through December 2010; we therefore limit comparisons against the CLM4.5 predictions to this period.

### 3 Results and discussion

#### 3.1 Model constraints and comparison with observations

We performed sensitivity analyses of all the parameters affecting seasonal CH$_4$ production, oxidation and emission pathways and found that the parameterization of aerenchyma transport has the greatest impact on the seasonal CH$_4$ emissions in saturated areas. The CH$_4$ surface flux sensitivity to aerenchyma is most sensitive to aerenchyma area in saturated conditions and decreases with increasing aerenchyma area because increased O$_2$ fluxes through aerenchyma cause more CH$_4$ oxidation in the rhizosphere (Riley et al., 2011). Meng et al. (2012) tested plant-functional-type (pft)-specific fine-root carbon (C$_{FR}$) as a proxy of aerenchyma area and found that aerenchyma area dependence on C$_{FR}$ leads to about 39% increases in global annual CH$_4$ emissions. In that study, an early spring spike in CH$_4$ emission through aerenchyma transport was shown at a Michigan site in both LAI and C$_{FR}$-based aerenchyma area. Our analysis shows that the simulated CH$_4$ burst through aerenchyma transport during spring thaw is very common in areas experiencing winter dormancy. In CLM4.5, CH$_4$ production in a given volume of soil is proportional to heterotrophic respiration (HR) in that soil volume, adjusted by soil temperature, pH, redox potential and variation of seasonal inundation fraction. In the model, CH$_4$ production starts when the soil temperature is above the freezing point. However, CLM4.5 LAI lags behind the primary thaw day, which, because the original representation of aerenchyma in CLM4.5 is tied directly to LAI, results in a very low aerenchyma area and thus low aerenchyma transport of O$_2$ into the soil during the spring thaw period. Only a very small portion of the CH$_4$ produced in the soil column is oxidized, allowing a large fraction of CH$_4$ to be transported to the surface by aerenchyma. The low oxidation rate also occurs when aerenchyma area is calculated with C$_{FR}$.

The uncertainty in representing the seasonality of aerenchyma area is due to (1) a poor current understanding of root dynamics and their control on aerenchyma area and (2) scant relevant observations. In tundra, the aboveground production is often not a good proxy for belowground production because the soil temperature peaks later in the growing season than solar irradiance (Sullivan and Welker, 2005; Sloan, 2011). Further, root dynamics are strongly species dependent. Root growth of Eriophorum angustifolium may not be delayed when soil temperature is near 0°C (Chapin, 1974; Billing et al., 1977), while Dupontia fischeri produces many fewer root tips at these low temperatures. In Eriophorum vaginatum, fine-root growth lags significantly behind the aboveground spring growth flush (Kummerow and Russell, 1980).

To eliminate the possible bias in the seasonal variation of roots and the extremely low oxidation rate which caused CLM4.5 to predict a large CH$_4$ burst from inundated areas during the spring thaw, we modified the model parameter $S$ to be constant, which is used in the aerenchyma area estimation. We constrained $S$ using global total CH$_4$ emissions estimated by top–down and bottom–up simulations during...
2000–2009 (Kirschke et al., 2013) and site-level measurements. We exclude the CH₄ emission from non-inundated areas for the analysis of seasonal dynamics because the model shows a very small seasonal contribution of CH₄ emissions from non-inundated areas globally (Fig. 1). This CH₄ emission pulse from non-inundated areas, which may be related to soil moisture anomalies during spring thaw, has not been experimentally validated but can lead to large biases in simulated CH₄ emissions from northern high latitudes (> 50° N) in May and June (Fig. 1a and b). This simplification of the model-produced seasonal cycles that did not contain the large springtime CH₄ emission bursts, and we therefore used this modified version for all experiments here.

We assessed the sensitivity of the modeled CH₄ fluxes to parametric uncertainty in the constant dimensionless factor $S$, as described above. $S$ has a direct effect on the magnitude of modeled CH₄ emissions via its control of oxygen diffusion through the soil column and thus CH₄ oxidation. When $S = \text{LAI}$, the very low LAI in the spring thaw period leads to low oxidation and consequently overestimated CH₄ net emissions compared to CarbonTracker predictions. During the growing season, the model overestimates LAI at high latitude (Tian et al., 2004) leading to high oxidation and consequently underestimated net CH₄ emissions (Fig. 1e and f). However, few observations of aerenchymous tissue biomass are available to provide an a priori constraint to this value. Our goal here is to use a reasonable value of this parameter, not to fully characterize the uncertainty of the parameter choice on CH₄ emissions.

Based on a comparison of the globally integrated CH₄ flux with other global estimates, we choose $S = 4$, which resulted in an estimated annual total CH₄ emission of 228 (interannual variability (IAV): 221–239) Tg CH₄ yr⁻¹ with $F_{\text{def}}$ and 206 (IAV: 200–217) Tg CH₄ yr⁻¹ with $F_{S+G}$ dur-
X. Xu et al.: Seasonal methane emissions in northern wetlands

The 2000–2010 zonal mean annual cycle of CH$_4$ emissions (mg CH$_4$ m$^{-2}$ day$^{-1}$) across Alaska predicted by CarbonTracker (a) and biases of CLM4.5 with CLM4.5-predicted inundation fraction ($F_{\text{def}}$) (b) and SWAMPS-GLWD inundation fraction ($F_{S+G}$). The 0.5° × 0.5° CLM4.5 is regridded to 1° × 1° to be consistent with CarbonTracker.

The top-down and bottom-up models provide estimates of CH$_4$ emissions from natural wetlands of 175 (IAV: 142–208) Tg CH$_4$ yr$^{-1}$ and 217 (IAV: 177–284) Tg CH$_4$ yr$^{-1}$, respectively, during the same period (Kirschke et al., 2013). The mean CH$_4$ emission predicted by CLM4.5 is about 42 Tg CH$_4$ yr$^{-1}$ lower than the original CLM4Me prediction (annual mean of 270 Tg CH$_4$ yr$^{-1}$ from 1948 to 1972) but slightly larger than the mean value from other bottom-up and top-down models. The disagreement between studies with different models is as large as 66% (Kirschke et al., 2013); hence, our estimate is well within the range of values from top-down constraints and underscores the uncertainty involved in using such a constraint in inferring model parameters.

Compared with CarbonTracker predictions, CLM’s biases of underestimated growing season CH$_4$ emissions from natural wetlands of 175 (IAV: 142–208) Tg CH$_4$ yr$^{-1}$ and 217 (IAV: 177–284) Tg CH$_4$ yr$^{-1}$, respectively, during the same period (Kirschke et al., 2013). The mean CH$_4$ emission predicted by CLM4.5 is about 42 Tg CH$_4$ yr$^{-1}$ lower than the original CLM4Me prediction (annual mean of 270 Tg CH$_4$ yr$^{-1}$ from 1948 to 1972) but slightly larger than the mean value from other bottom-up and top-down models. The disagreement between studies with different models is as large as 66% (Kirschke et al., 2013); hence, our estimate is well within the range of values from top-down constraints and underscores the uncertainty involved in using such a constraint in inferring model parameters.

The mean seasonal cycle of predicted CH$_4$ emissions is calculated from the 2000–2012 monthly mean in a 0.5° × 0.5° grid cell where site measurements exist, while the seasonal cycle of site measurements is calculated for the measurement years. If multiple measurement sites and multiple measurement years with the same measurement method (SC or EC) exist within a given grid cell, the observations are averaged to create a grid cell mean value that can be directly compared with the modeled value for that grid cell. In the 10 site-level static-chamber measurements at saturated sites (Fig. 2a–l), the seasonality is well predicted by the revised CLM4.5 CH$_4$ model at most sites. Measurements and predictions show the peak emission month to be July or August at most sites, except the site in Michigan, USA (Fig. 2f), where the model successfully predicted the peak emissions in May. However, the model misrepresents the seasonality at the Stordalen (Sweden; Fig. 2a and k) and the Boreas NSA...
(northern study area) (Canada; Fig. 2i) site. At the Ruoergai site (China; Fig. 2j), the model does not show a strong seasonal variation from April to September and notably underestimates the growing season CH$_4$ emissions. The underestimation of growing season emissions is also found at the Minnesota (USA), Michigan (USA) and Boreas NSA (Canada) sites (Fig. 2d, e, f and h). The sites experiencing soil frost with valid measurements in the cold season demonstrate the CLM4.5 underestimation of CH$_4$ emissions during this period (Fig. 2a, d, e and i).

The eddy covariance measurements from four sites – the BEO1, BEO2, BES and CMDL sites – are in the same model grid cell; therefore, the measurements in these four sites are aggregated to the same grid cell as that of Alaska (Fig. 2m). As the footprints of the measurement towers were not estimated, all the modeled CH$_4$ emissions at eddy covariance sites are weighted with an observationally estimated seasonally invariant range of inundation faction: Stordalen – 80–100%; Boreas SSA (southern study area) – 50–90%; Barrow – 60–100%; Atqasuk – 10–30%; Ivotuk – 5–25%; Fairbanks – 0.5–2.5%; and IMN – 5–25%. Measurements at the Stordalen site (Fig. 2a and k) show very different CH$_4$ emission patterns in seasonality and magnitude for different years and measurement methods. The model significantly underestimates CH$_4$ emissions even with the maximum fraction of inundation in Stordalen (Fig. 2k). In comparison with the static-chamber measurements at Alaska (Fig. 2h), the model predicts a much shorter CH$_4$ emission season at the non-inundated sites (Fig. 2m–q). The estimated CH$_4$ emissions begin in April at Ivotuk, Fairbanks and Imnavait. At the northern sites, Barrow and Atqasuk, the estimated CH$_4$ emissions begin in May. In the short emission season, the model underestimates CH$_4$ emissions in June and July at Barrow and Atqasuk and in July at Imnavait, even with the maximum inundation estimation. While the cold-season measurements at Barrow, Atqasuk and Ivotuk show large CH$_4$ emissions from October to April in agreement with the static-chamber measurements at the sites with cold-season soil frost, predicted CH$_4$ emissions end in October at all the Alaskan sites. The largest monthly mean emissions in Alaska cold season are 24.8 ± 9.0 mg CH$_4$ m$^{-2}$ day$^{-1}$ measured in October at Ivotuk.

A number of factors affect the correspondence between site-level CH$_4$ emission observations and CLM4.5 predictions (Fig. 2), including (1) that we used reanalysis climate forcing data which may lead to some of the differences with the site observations; (2) that we used the model’s default surface characterization, which is unlikely to exactly match the actual vegetation and soil properties; (3) that the spatial and temporal coverage of the site data are sparse; (4) that the interannual variation of wetland CH$_4$ emission can be significant; (5) that the method of measuring CH$_4$ fluxes varied from site to site and (6) that the seasonal fraction of inundation in the eddy covariance tower footprint is unknown. We also expect differences between our CLM4.5 predictions and those reported in Riley et al. (2011) at the site-level comparison because (1) simulations in this study were done at a higher resolution (0.5° × 0.5°) than those in Riley et al. (2011; 1.9° × 2.5°); (2) the current simulations are forced by CRUNCEP climate, while Riley et al. (2011) simulations were forced with Qian et al. (2006) climate; (3) the S parameter is changed, as discussed above; and (4) the overall water and carbon cycles of CLM changed substantially between CLM4.0 and CLM4.5 (Koven et al., 2013). The site-level discrepancies occur because of the uncertainties discussed above and those arising from other parameters (Riley et al., 2011), including $Q_{10}$ of CH$_4$ production and oxidation, the CH$_4$ half-saturation oxidation coefficient, the O$_2$ half-saturation oxidation coefficient, maximum oxidation rate of CH$_4$ oxidation and the impact of pH and redox potential on CH$_4$ production.

### 3.2.2 Regional CH$_4$ emissions comparison

The biases between CLM4.5 and CarbonTracker CH$_4$ emissions vary with latitude (Fig. 3). The aggregated $F_{S+G}$ led to larger CH$_4$ emission biases in Alaska (RMSE = 4 mg CH$_4$ m$^{-2}$ day$^{-1}$) compared to the CH$_4$ prediction with $F_{def}$ (RMSE = 3 mg CH$_4$ m$^{-2}$ day$^{-1}$), although it led to smaller global CH$_4$ emission biases. In Alaska between 58 and 66°N during the growing season, CLM4.5 using $F_{def}$ has good agreement with CarbonTracker predictions. In this region, CH$_4$ emissions begin in May, peak in July and August, and end in October (Fig. 4). In May and June, CarbonTracker shows a weak CH$_4$ sink ($\sim$O[10$^{-2}$–10$^{-1}$] mg CH$_4$ m$^{-2}$ day$^{-1}$) in contrast to a CLM4.5-predicted weak CH$_4$ source ($\sim$O[10$^{-1}$] mg CH$_4$ m$^{-2}$ day$^{-1}$) with $F_{def}$ and stronger CH$_4$ source ($\sim$O[10]$^{2}$ mg CH$_4$ m$^{-2}$ day$^{-1}$) with $F_{S+G}$ in the interior region of Alaska (Interior Alaska) between 63 and 66°N. We hypothesize that this discrep-
ancy occurs because of the difference in the two wetland datasets and the accounting of CH$_4$ emissions from the non-inundated areas in CarbonTracker. Net CH$_4$ consumption occurs at dry sites where oxygen is available in the topsoil layers (Wickland et al., 1999); however, CH$_4$ fluxes from the non-inundated, areas which could be substantial (Zona et al., 2016), are excluded in CLM4.5 predictions shown in Fig. 3, as described in the “Methods” section. Interior Alaska has a highly continental climate with warm and relatively dry summers and extremely cold winters. The weak CH$_4$ source in the dry summer is thus caused by a reduced wetland extent in Interior Alaska. Interior Alaska experiences the most rain events in autumn, mainly in August and September (Hinzman et al., 2006), which restores some of the extent of wetlands and leads to increases in CH$_4$ emissions in August and early September. CarbonTracker successfully represented the restored wetland in August and September but not CLM4.5 (Figs. 3 and 4). The autumn emission period is very short and ends with the onset of winter, resulting in a strong drop in CH$_4$ emissions in October.

The CLM4.5 underestimation of northern (> 68° N) Alaska site-level CH$_4$ emissions during the growing season at some sites is confirmed with comparison to CarbonTracker inversions (Fig. 3b). In southern and northern coastal Alaska, CLM4.5 predicts a much shorter CH$_4$ emission season and a smaller magnitude of CH$_4$ emissions than CarbonTracker. The period of the largest underestimation by CLM4.5 is from May to July, with the maximum underestimation of about 9.2 mg CH$_4$ m$^{-2}$ day$^{-1}$ in June. The underestimated CH$_4$ emissions occur with both $F_{S+G}$ and $F_{def}$ in the north of 68° N. During the cold season from October to April, CLM4.5 predictions with $F_{S+G}$ or $F_{def}$ are consistently smaller than CarbonTracker estimates across all the latitudes. The mean underestimation of cold-season CH$_4$ emission is less than 1 mg CH$_4$ m$^{-2}$ day$^{-1}$, which is much smaller than the underestimation we found compared to site-level measurements. In comparison with CarbonTracker, CLM4.5 predicted 0.46 ± 0.07 and 0.39 ± 0.08 Tg less Alaska-wide CH$_4$ emissions in the cold season (October to April) with $F_{S+G}$ and $F_{def}$, respectively.

The CarbonTracker inversions suggest that 21.9 ± 3.2 % of the annual Alaska CH$_4$ emissions occur during the cold season, while CLM4.5 predicts that only 3.5 ± 1.3 and 8.3 ± 3.0 % (with $F_{def}$ and $F_{S+G}$, respectively) occur during the cold season. When September and April are included in the “cold season”, the contribution is increased to 45.3 ± 4.5 % by CarbonTracker, which is slightly smaller than the cold-season contribution (50 ± 9 %) inferred from site-level (BEO2, BES, CMDL, ATQ and IVO) measurements (Zona et al., 2016). The September–April contributions to annual emissions predicted by CLM4.5 are 32.1 ± 8.1 and 40.1 ± 14.7 % of the predicted annual emissions with $F_{S+G}$ and $F_{def}$, respectively. Although CH$_4$ fluxes from the ocean surface are excluded, we cannot exclude some influence of coastal grid cells on the CarbonTracker estimates.
emissions from agricultural waste does not show strong seasonal variation according to CarbonTracker estimates. The large standard deviation of CARVE-observed CH₄ mole fraction enhancements implies that the CH₄ emissions have large spatial and temporal variability. The CLM4.5 predictions are generally within the observed range of variation except in April and May in 2013.

The very low cold-season CH₄ emission predictions on site and regional scales occur because of the assumed temperature sensitivity for CH₄ production when the soil temperature of a given layer is at or below freezing (i.e., no CH₄ production occurs in that soil layer). The multilayer structure of CLM4.5 can in principle generate CH₄ emissions deeper in the soil after the surface has frozen, though even then, modeled diffusion rates through frozen surface layers are low. Although the measurements show winter CH₄ emissions, it remains uncertain whether these emissions are from production at low temperature or residual CH₄ from the end of the growing season. Understanding which of these is occurring is important for diagnosing how to improve model representation of the processes responsible for the wintertime fluxes.

The cold-season underestimation by CLM4.5 is also partly attributed to the low wetland area during this period at high latitudes (currently, F_{def} is set to zero when snow is present). Given the current observations of CH₄ emissions during the cold season, we believe these two factors need to be reevaluated in CLM4.5.

### 3.3 Interannual variation of CH₄ cycle

The CLM4.5 simulated Alaska CH₄ emissions using F_{def} are in very good agreement with CarbonTracker-CH₄ emission in the growing season but biased in the cold season (Fig. 6). The largest growing season discrepancies occur in 2006 and 2007. Bruhwiler et al. (2014) attributed the CarbonTracker 2007 CH₄ emission anomaly to warmer temperatures and higher than normal precipitation. However, the CRUNCEP reanalysis data we used to force CLM4.5 do not have a positive precipitation anomaly in either 2006 or 2007 (Fig. 7a). In contrast, there is a strong negative precipitation anomaly in 2007. The obvious wet years (2000, 2005, 2008, 2011 and 2012) in the CRUNCEP reanalysis data are not directly related to the predicted and measured wetland area anomaly or CH₄ emission anomaly. The mean air temperature in 2007 is only slightly higher than 2000–2012 mean air temperature (Fig. 7b). The correlation analysis implies that the model-predicted interannual CH₄ variation is mainly explained by temperature variation (Fig. 8a; \(r = 0.86, P = 0.0007\)), followed by the default wetland extent \(F_{def}\) variation (Fig. 8b; \(r = 0.65, P = 0.03\)), but weakly explained by SWAMPS-GLWD wetland extent \(F_{S+G}\) variation \((r = 0.44, P = 0.17)\) and precipitation variation \((r = 0.18, P = 0.58)\). When the CH₄ predictions are calculated with \(F_{S+G}\), correlation between the interannual variation of CH₄ and variation in \(F_{S+G}\) \((r = 0.18, \ldots\)
\( P = 0.59 \), precipitation \( (r = 0.36, \ P = 0.29) \) and temperature \( (r = 0.32, \ P = 0.33) \) are substantially reduced. Interannual variation of \( \text{CH}_4 \) emissions by CarbonTracker are not well correlated to SWAMPS-GLWD wetland extent variation \( (r=0.33, \ P=0.32) \), variations in CRUNCEP temperature \( (r = -0.23, \ P = 0.49) \) or precipitation \( (r = -0.06, \ P = 0.86) \).

4 Concluding remarks

We implemented and tested needed changes to the estimate of aerenchyma area in CLM4.5. The modeled and measured \( \text{CH}_4 \) emissions and enhancements in atmospheric mole fractions of \( \text{CH}_4 \) are used to analyze the seasonal wetland \( \text{CH}_4 \) emission cycle in Alaska. Both the measurements and model predictions show large latitudinal variability of \( \text{CH}_4 \) seasonal cycles. At the site level, CLM4.5 generally captures the seasonal cycle in Alaska. However, comparing eddy covariance \( \text{CH}_4 \) observations with the model predictions is complicated by the unknown fraction of inundation in the footprint of the measurement tower, which may cause large variations in \( \text{CH}_4 \) emission predictions. Measurements from the sites experiencing wintertime soil frost imply that \( \text{CH}_4 \) emissions continue in the cold season (October to April). The likely incorrect treatment of \( \text{CH}_4 \) production under soil frost in CLM4.5 leads to underestimates of the wintertime emissions. This conclusion is confirmed by the discrepancies between CLM4.5 and CarbonTracker predictions, although the cold-season discrepancies between CLM4.5 and CarbonTracker are much smaller than the discrepancies between CLM4.5 and site-level measurements. The differences between the seasonality predicted by CLM4.5 and CarbonTracker vary with time and latitude, although the Alaska area-integrated \( \text{CH}_4 \) emissions agree well. Besides the strength of wintertime \( \text{CH}_4 \) emissions, the main discrepancies between CLM4.5 and CarbonTracker estimates are northern and southern coastal area \( \text{CH}_4 \) emissions. The inundation area leads to uncertainties in predictions of seasonal and interannual variability of \( \text{CH}_4 \) emissions. Compared with the CLM4.5-predicted inundation area, the aggregated \( F_{S+G} \) inundation led to smaller global \( \text{CH}_4 \) emission biases than \( F_{\text{def}} \) (RMSE dropped from 3.1 to 2.5 mg \( \text{CH}_4 \) m\(^{-2}\) day\(^{-1}\)) between CLM4.5 and CarbonTracker. In contrast, the \( F_{S+G} \) inundation area increased seasonal emission biases in Alaska by increasing RMSE from 3 to 4 mg \( \text{CH}_4 \) m\(^{-2}\) day\(^{-1}\) compared with the CLM4.5-predicted inundation. The larger SWAMPS-GLWD inundation area leads to much stronger Alaska-wide annual \( \text{CH}_4 \) emissions compared to those calculated from the default predicted inundation area. CLM4.5 predictions show that the interannual variations of \( \text{CH}_4 \) emissions are correlated with the reanalysis air temperature and wetland extent variation. In contrast, interannual variation in CarbonTracker \( \text{CH}_4 \) emissions is weakly related to interannual variation in SWAMPS-GLWD wetland area and reanalysis precipitation and temperature.

The CLM4.5 \( \text{CH}_4 \) module constrained from global total annual \( \text{CH}_4 \) emissions does not accurately represent the seasonal cycles in the regional- and site-scale seasonal cycles due to large temporal and spatial heterogeneity in surface \( \text{CH}_4 \) emissions and wetland extent. Further improving the \( \text{CH}_4 \) biogeochemical model on the seasonal and annual timescales requires further extensive experiments to better understand climate controls on above- and belowground physiological processes and how vegetation controls gaseous transport (e.g., \( \text{CH}_4 \) production under low temperatures). Although cold-season site-level measurements are rare, the large discrepancies in winter emissions between CLM4.5 and CarbonTracker predictions and site measurements indicate that studies on winter ecosystem activities and wetland evolution at high latitude would be valuable.

5 Data availability

The CLM4.5 model is released in CESM1.2.2 package available at http://www.cesm.ucar.edu/models/cesm1.2/tags/index.html#CESM1_2_2. The model outputs of \( \text{CH}_4 \) emission and the fraction of inundation during 2000–2012 are available upon request to the corresponding author.

The site measurement data are available from the publications or the principle investigators provided in the Supplement.

The NOAA CarbonTracker-CH4 data assimilation product is available at http://www.esrl.noaa.gov/gmd/ccgg/carbontracker-ch4/.

The CARVE flight data of \( \text{CH}_4 \) measurements in 2012 and 2013 are available at https://filma.jpl.nasa.gov/portal/.


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