

## **Morphodynamic stage threshold for confined mountain rivers can be identified using geomorphic covariance structure analysis**

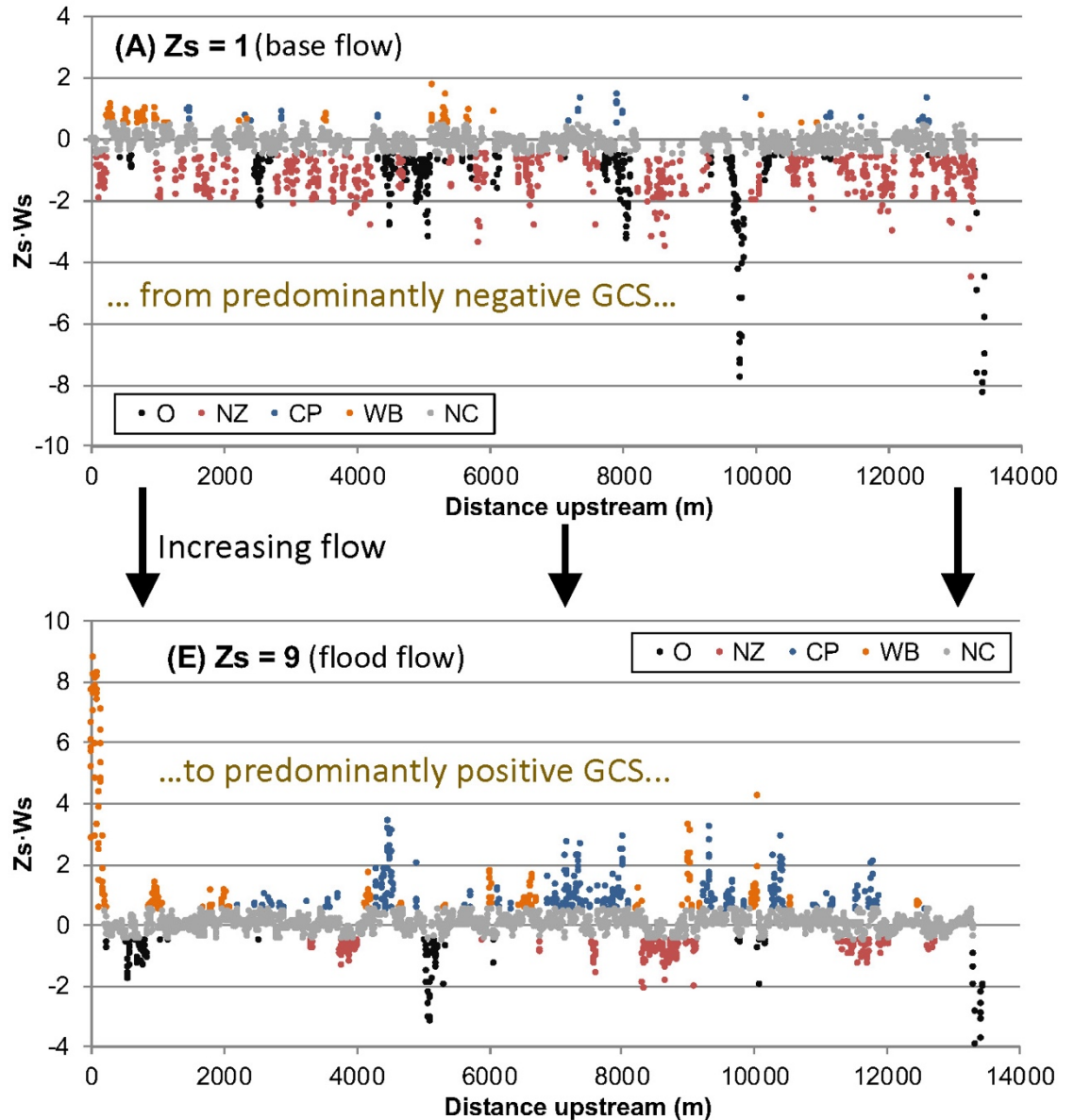
Authors: Gregory B. Pasternack\*, Joni Gore, Jason Wiener

Affiliation: University of California, Davis, One Shields Avenue, Davis, CA 95616, USA

Does river topography have stage thresholds for maintaining fluvial landforms, and if so how can they be quantified? Geomorphic covariance structure analysis offers a novel, systematic framework for evaluating nested topographic patterns in river corridors. In this study, a threshold in mountain river stage was hypothesized to exist; above this stage landform structure is organized to be freely self-maintaining via flow convergence routing morphodynamics. A 13.2 km segment of the canyon-confined Yuba River, California, was studied using 2944 cross-sections. Geomorphic covariance structure analysis was carried out on a meter-resolution topographic model to test the hypothesis. A critical stage threshold governing flow convergence routing morphodynamics was evident in several metrics. Below this threshold, narrow/high “nozzle” and wide/low “oversized” landforms that are out-of-phase with flow convergence routing morphodynamics dominated (excluding “normal channel”), while above it wide/high “wide bar” and narrow/low “constricted pool” landforms consistent with the flow convergence mechanism were dominant. Three-level nesting of co-located base-bankfull-flood stage landforms was dictated by canyon confinement, with nozzle-nozzle-nozzle nesting as the top permutation, excluding normal channel. In conclusion, this study demonstrates a significantly different and highly effective approach to finding process-based fluvial thresholds that can complement pre-existing methods, such as estimating incipient sediment motion, to get at more powerful dynamics controlling fluvial landforms structure.

Plain-Language summary: Rivers have organized landforms. At low flows, landforms control how water moves around in the river. At a threshold flow that changes. Above the threshold, high flows push the sediment around that makes up the landforms. This results in a characteristic structure that we can detect using a novel framework called “geomorphic covariance structure analysis”.

From low water stage to high water stage a mountain river's geomorphic covariance structure (GCS) shifts...



...with the threshold stage indicating the transition to flow convergence routing morphodynamics