

Designing Sustainable Landscapes: Total annual precipitation and growing season precipitation settings variables

A project of the University of Massachusetts Landscape Ecology Lab

Principals:

- Kevin McGarigal, Professor
- Brad Compton, Research Associate
- Ethan Plunkett, Research Associate
- Bill DeLuca, Research Associate
- Joanna Grand, Research Associate

With support from:

- North Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative (US Fish and Wildlife Service, Northeast Region)
- Northeast Climate Science Center (USGS)
- University of Massachusetts, Amherst



Reference:

McGarigal K, Compton BW, Plunkett EB, DeLuca WV, and Grand J. 2018. Designing sustainable landscapes: precipitation settings variables. Report to the North Atlantic Conservation Cooperative, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Northeast Region.

General description

These two precipitation variables are among several ecological settings variables that collectively characterize the biophysical setting of each 30 m cell at a given point in time (McGarigal et al 2017). The amount of rainfall and depth of snowpack affects species composition, as well as ecological processes such as nutrient cycling. We've chosen two variables to represent precipitation. Both variables have future versions that incorporate climate change via General Circulation Models (GCMs) (as described in the technical document on climate, McGarigal et al 2017).

Total annual precipitation (Fig. 1a) measures the mean precipitation in a year. In the northeast, where there is little seasonal variation in precipitation, it is a good indicator of how moist an area is likely to be.

Growing season precipitation (Fig. 1b) gives the summed precipitation to the growing season, May through September.

Use and interpretation of these layers

These ecological settings variables are used for some of the representative species models. These layers carry the following assumptions:

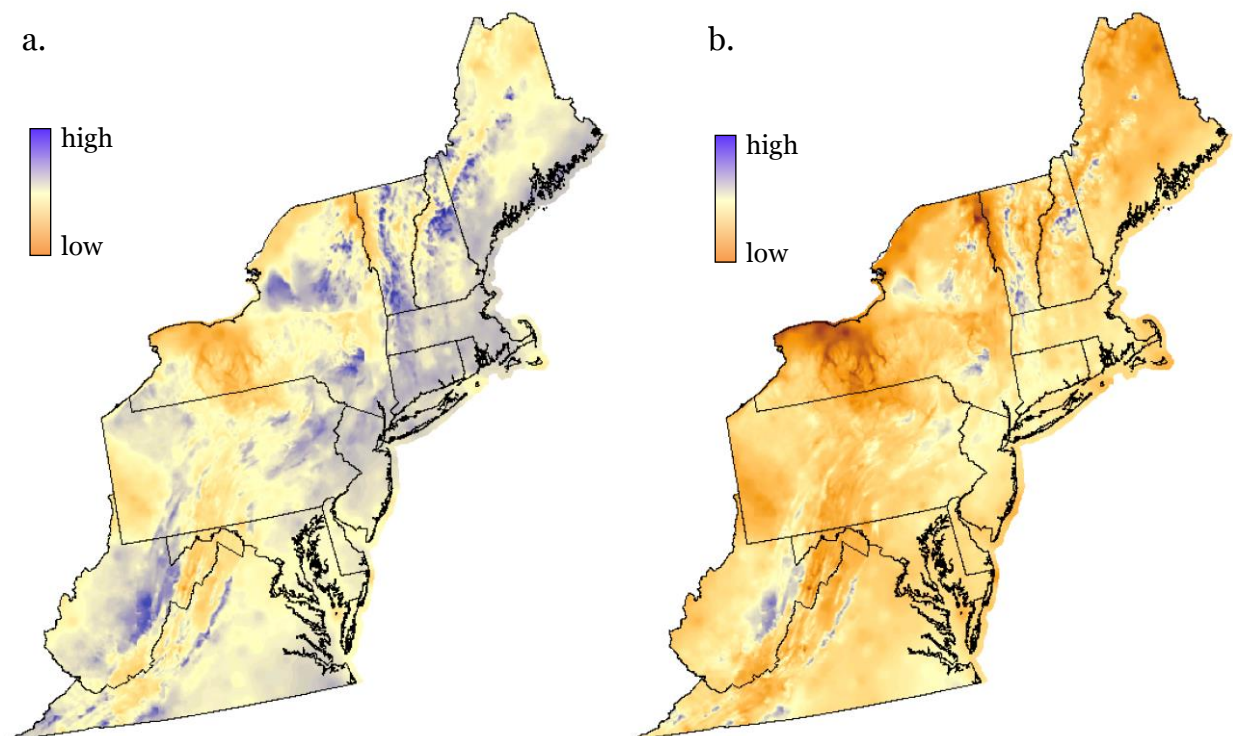


Figure 1. Precipitation settings variables for the northeast: (a) Total annual precipitation, and (b) Growing season precipitation.

DSL Data Products: Precipitation

- PRISM precipitation data (used for downscaling the GCM data) are accurate.
- GCM predictions for 2080 are correct.
- Geographical downscaling (from 800 m for PRISM data, and from 12 km for GCM data) don't introduce errors.
- Source data are monthly means, and thus give coarse estimates of these variables.
- Data are based on 30-year normals, and thus remove annual variation in precipitation.

See the DSL climate document referenced above for a more complete list of assumptions and limitations of these data.

Derivation of these layers

Data source

- DSL climate grids, based on 800 m PRISM data, as modified by an ensemble of GCMs for future timesteps under two Representative Concentration Pathways, RCP 4.5 and RCP 8.5.

Algorithm

Both variables are based on a 30-year normal centered on the date of interest (2010 or 2080). For 2010, precipitation is from downscaled PRISM data. For 2080, precipitation is based on an ensemble of 14 GCMs downscaled to 800 m PRISM data using the delta method (in the case of precipitation, the delta is actually a ratio), calculated separately for RCP 4.5 and RCP 8.5. These variables are calculated as follows:

Total annual precipitation: Total precipitation for the year. The sum of the daily values across all days.

Growing season precipitation: Sum of daily precipitation for days in May through September.

For details on how these data were derived, see the DSL climate document referenced above.

GIS metadata

These data products are distributed as geoTIFF rasters (30 m cells) and can be found at McGarigal et al (2017). Each raster is distributed in three versions: (1) 2010, (2) 2080 under RCP 4.5, and (3) 2080 under RCP 8.5.

Total annual precipitation (PRECIP; units: mm/year × 100).

Growing season precipitation (PRECIPGS; units: mm/year × 100).

Literature Cited

McGarigal K, Compton BW, Plunkett EB, DeLuca WV, and Grand J. 2017. Designing sustainable landscapes products, including technical documentation and data products. https://scholarworks.umass.edu/designing_sustainable_landscapes