Sediment Accumulation in the Floodplain of Lower Minnesota River Watershed

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Executive Summary

The main objective of this work is to provide a direct assessment of sediment accumulation in the floodplain of Lower Minnesota River Watershed to better document how sedimentation in this reach has changed as a result of changes in flow in the post-settlement period. The method selected was to core floodplain lakes and to interpret sediment and pollen spores archived in the mud on the floor of lake lake in the context of the known changes in the ecological history of the area. Then the major ecological shifts as indicated by pollen assemblages would be correlated to dated horizons in nearby lakes. Correlation was chosen over directly dating the sediment as a cost-saving measure.Indications of land disturbance, cultivation, erosion and flooding helped further constrain the interpretations of the ages of horizons.

If all of the interpreted horizons are correct, and linear sedimentation rates accurately reflect the lake history, sedimentation rates were 1 cm/y^{-1} from 1860 to 1910, peaked at 2.44cm/y^{-1} from 1950 to 1993 and have decreased to 1.4 cm/y^{-1} from 1993 to 2018. However, dated profiles for many Minnesota lakes (Engstrom, 2007) suggests that both over- and underestimates of sedimentation rates are possible with the linear interpolation method used here to estimate post-1850 accumulation rates in Rice lake. Comparison of the linear sedimentation rates to dated rates for two nearby lakes are up to 44% greater.

The cores taken for this project have been archived and could be dated at some future time to get more precise estimates of the change in sedimentation rate.

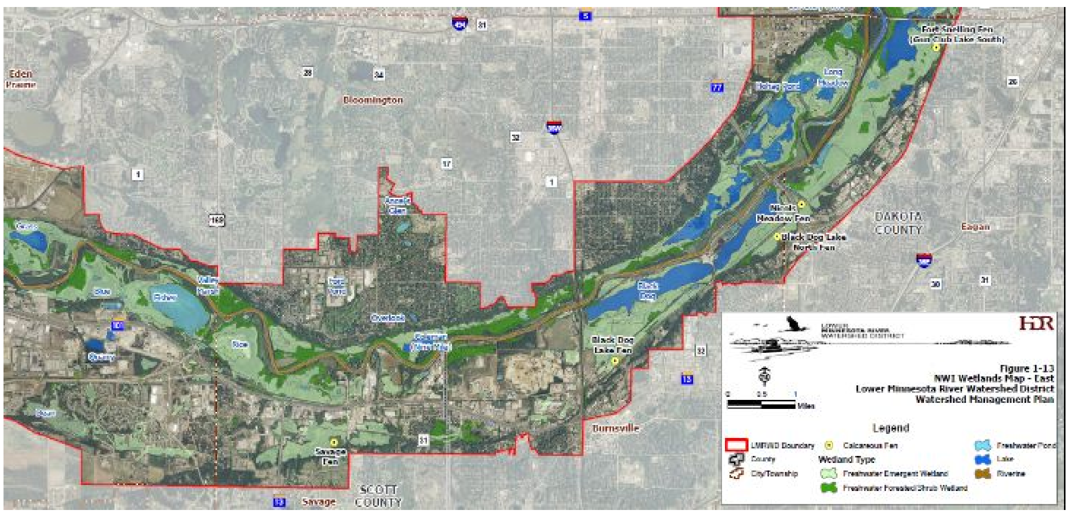
Introduction

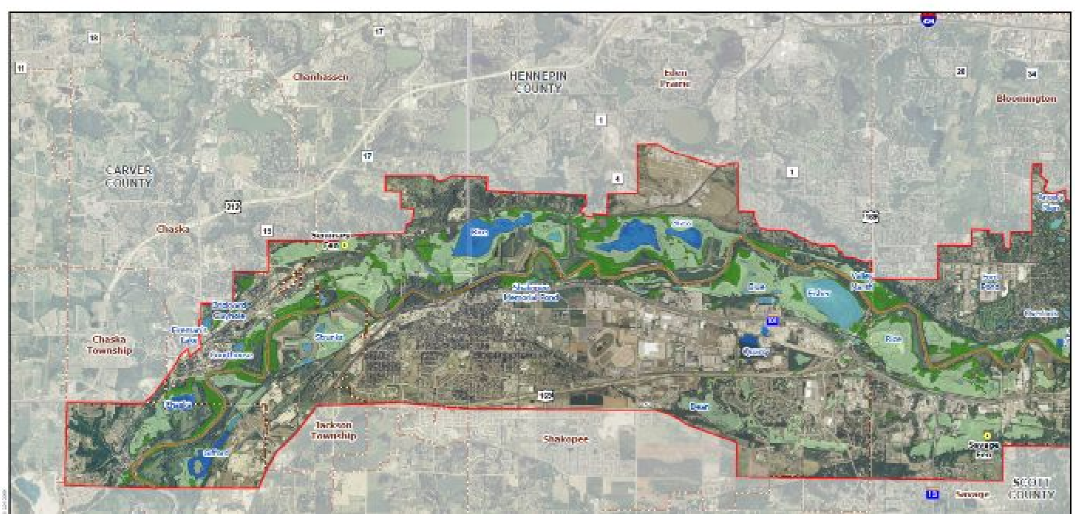
The Minnesota River occupies a deep and broad valley created by the drainage of a large lake at the end of the glacial period, approximately 13,400 years ago (Clayton and Moran, 1982; Matsch, 1983). The tributaries to the Minnesota are adjusting their gradients to this change and delivering sediment to the Minnesota River as they excavate their valleys (Gran et al., 2009). The Minnesota River does not have the capacity to carry away sediment delivered to it by its tributaries and therefore the valley has been filling in since shortly after it was created (Wright, 1990). The rate of sediment accumulation varies spatially, with climate, and with other factors that affect watershed hydrology and the hydrologic cycle—e.g. ground cover and artificial drainage.

Changes in river flow have been documented by gauging efforts (Wilcock et al., 2009; Groeten et al., 2016). The intensification of agriculture and agricultural drainage have increased peak flows in rivers at certain times of year and that changing rainfall patterns have also increased flows (Schottler et al., 2013). As a result, rivers have widened significantly, nick points on tributaries have retreated more rapidly, and meander migration rates have increased (Belmont et al., 2011). All of these changes have led to increased sediment delivery by the tributaries, erosion on the main-stem river, and greater in-channel sediment loads.

Lake Pepin, a riverine lake on the Mississippi River downstream of the confluence of the Minnesota, St. Croix and Mississippi rivers archives the combined record of changes in these three watersheds. It is filling in almost ten times faster than pre-settlement rates (Engstrom et al., 2009). High sediment-loading watersheds within the Minnesota River basin have been identified as the primary sources (e.g. Gran et al., 2009; Groeten et al., 2016) and estimates of the changes in run-off ratio in agricultural vs. non-agricultural watersheds modeled (Schottler et al., 2013).

The 14.7-mile-long reach of the Minnesota River between Chaska and Minneapolis is dredged for navigation through a collaborative arrangement between the Saint Paul District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Lower Minnesota River Watershed District. How has this reach been impacted by increases in flow and sediment load? That has not yet been fully quantified however, gauging data and dredging history begin to tell the story of this altered river system. The perception is that in-channel sediment loads are greater resulting in greater volumes of dredged material and increased expense and difficulty of disposing of the dredge spoils.





Study Area

The reach of the Minnesota River within the Lower Minnesota River Watershed District is wider than upstream reaches and has a lower gradient. This change in valley slope and geometry leads to a slowing of the river and accumulation of sediment under natural conditions. For each of the four years analyzed in a recent USGS report, there is more sediment coming into this reach than leaving it (see last two columns on the right for each year in the bar chart, Groeten et al., 2016). On average, 200 tons of sediment per mile has to be stored in the channel, levee and floodplain. (Groeten et al., 2016).

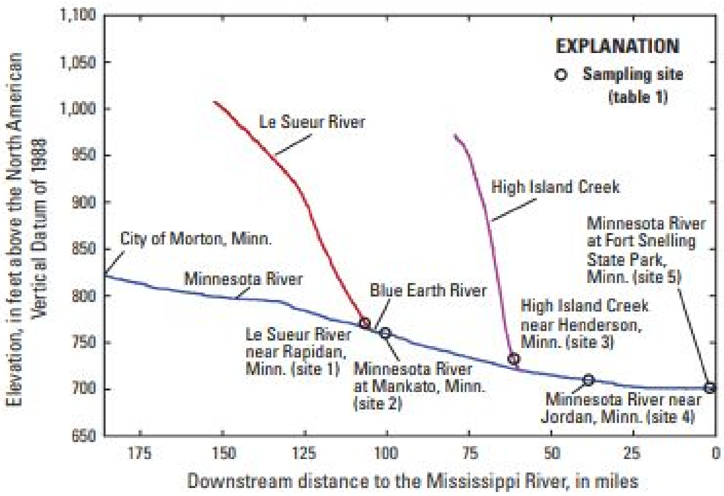


Figure 2. Stream gradients along the Minnesota River (from Morton to Fort Snelling State Park, Minnesota) and three tributaries (Le Sueur River, Blue Earth River, and High Island Creek).

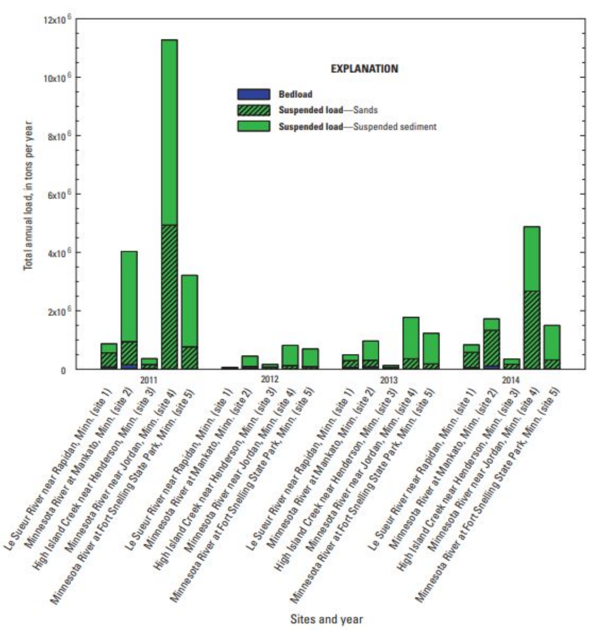


Figure 12. R-LOADEST loads at five sites in the lower Minnesota River Basin, calendar years 2011 through 2014.

The volume of material in such a truck are distributed in each mile of the Lower Minnesota River on average each year. [*https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:200_Ton_Truck.JPG*](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:200_Ton_Truck.JPG)

Exactly how the sediment is distributed across the width of the valley is not known. However, stable floodplain lakes that exist behind the natural levee are natural places for the record of sedimentation events to be archived. Lakes also archive airborne and river-transported pollen and plant macrofossils that can be linked to landscape and climate changes both locally and distally and used to date changes in sediment accumulation.

Vegetation

At the time of the Public Land Survey (1853-1856) Scott and Hennepin county's vegetation included upland deciduous forest, wetland, prairie, and oak openings and barrens (Biological Report No. 89, MN DNR 2007). According to the Public Land Survey data, the majority of the Hennepin County was heavily forested except for large swaths of prairie and oak openings or barrens mostly along the Minnesota River valley. There is a high probability that fire-dependent plant communities such as prairie and oak openings and barrens were managed locally with the use of fire by Native Americans. Early topographic maps show the distribution of wetlands and forest in 1901.

FIGURE 2
Presettlement Vegetation Map

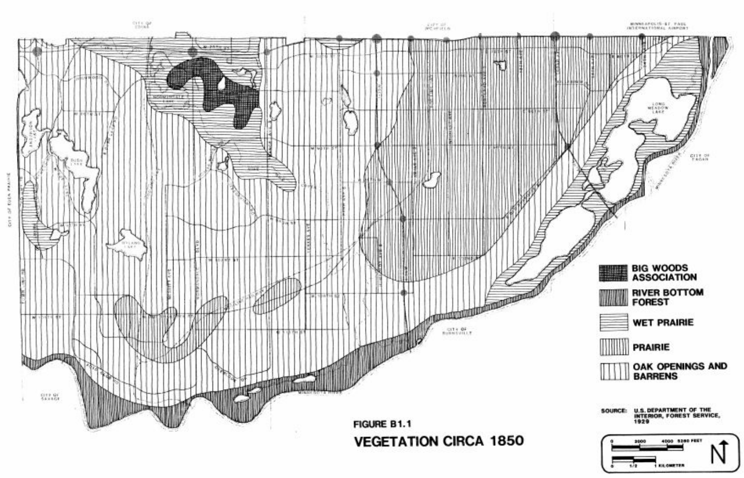


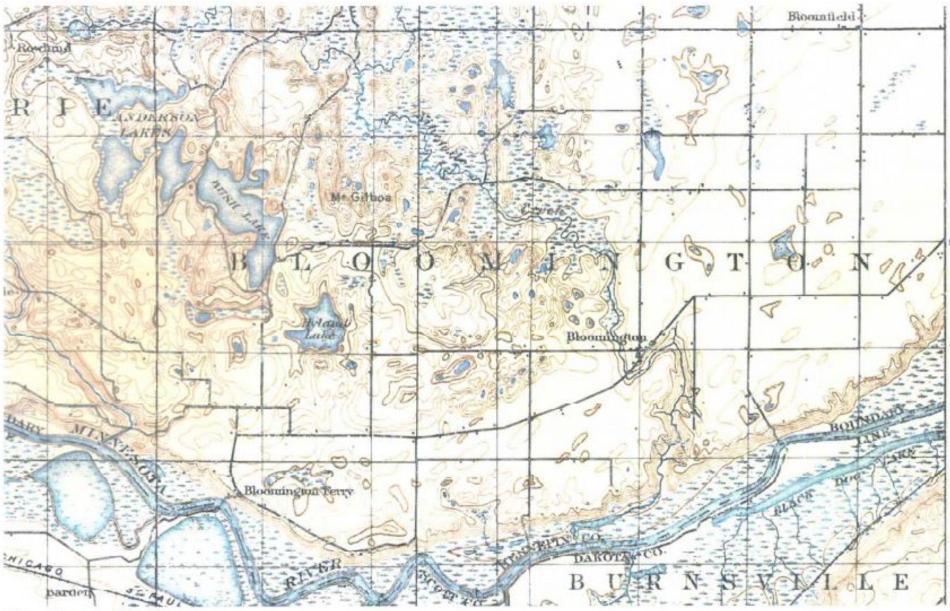
FIGURE B1.1
VEGETATION CIRCA 1850

City of Bloomington, Minnesota
Department of Community Development
October 1982

(https://www.bloomingtonmn.gov/sites/default/files/media/WetlandProtectionProgramMgmtPlan.pdf)

FIGURE 3

USGS Minneapolis 15 Minute Quadrangle Map (Circa 1901)



Department of the Interior
U.S. Geological Survey
Edition of October 1901, reprinted 1928

Very little of the original vegetation remains. Modern floodplain lakes are surrounded by forests of silver maple subtype with a tall, open super-canopy of cottonwood above a continuous canopy of silver maple. Other trees that are found within the canopy include basswood, American elm, green ash, and peach-leaved willow. The flooded wetlands around the lakes are dominated by river bulrush, cattails, lake sedge, wild rice, burr reed, bluejoint grass, and rice cutgrass. Other common plants are broad-leaved arrowhead, water plantain, sweet flag, water parsnip, wild mint, and American water-horehound. Corn fields appear on the south side of the lake along the Minnesota River including a much beloved sweet corn maze that operated as a tourist attraction.

Human history

The area has been home to Native Americans for over 12,000 years (Gibbon, 2012). Burial mounds in Memorial Park in Shakopee date back approximately 2,000 years. Locations of encampments and farming villages of Native Americans were documented and visited by early European explorers (e.g. Featherstonhaugh, 1847) and the archaeological record supports the utilization of freshwater resources and the relative stability of the lakeshores of floodplain lakes.

Shakopee, the closest town to Rice Lake was designated as Scott County seat in 1853. In 1860 a railroad was built and the population reached 1,138, and then almost doubled between 1910 and 1912 reaching a population of 2,302. Other events in the settlement history of the region that might impact the sediment accumulating in the Minnesota River floodplain include a great fire in the Minnesota River valley in 1879; expansion of Minneapolis and suburban development throughout the early to mid 1900's; a major flood in 1965; the completion of Highway 169 in 1996; and protection of the Minnesota River Valley National Wildlife Refuge and associated restoration efforts.

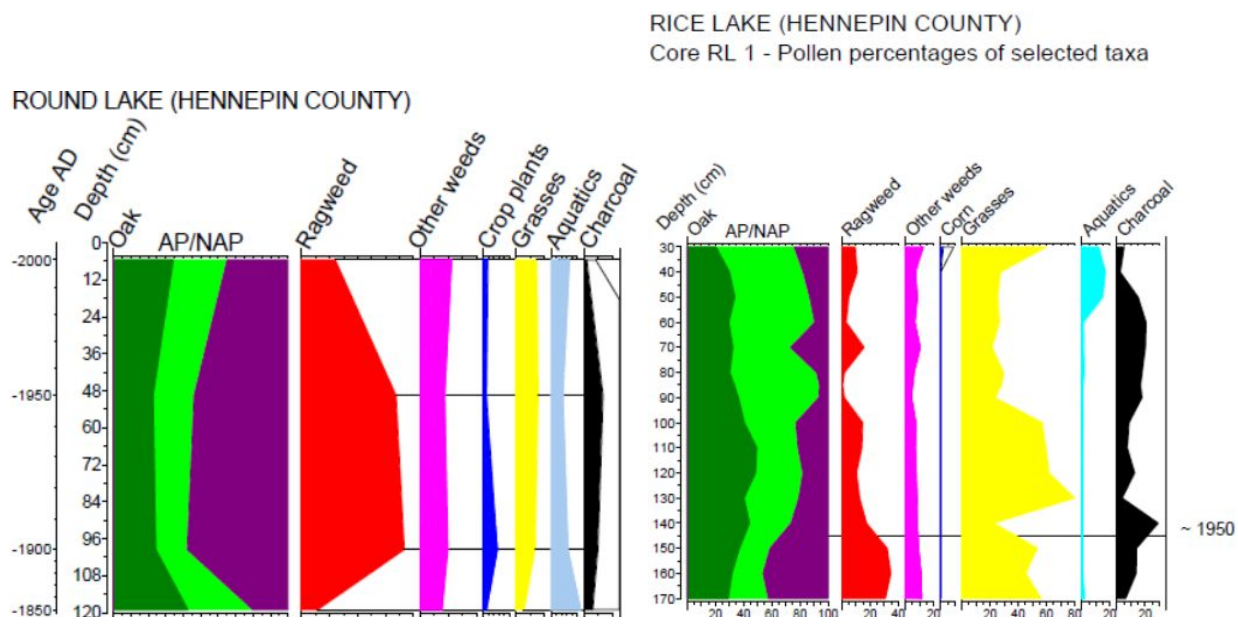
Methods

The inorganic and organic sediment that is archived in a floodplain lake enters through its tributaries and during flood events on the Minnesota. It can also be airborne. Changes in mineral properties are interpreted as a change in sediment source; changes in the amount of sediment can be interpreted as erosion and flood events in the watershed. The duration of flooding may also impact sediment accumulation.

Wind-blown pollen can be far-traveled or in immediate proximity to the lake; this is in part dependent on the type of pollen. For example, pine can be very far-traveled. Organics can also originate within the lake by the growth and death of organisms that inhabit it. Therefore, lakes store histories of both local and distal land-use and climate change and combine a history of erosion, sedimentation, vegetation, fire (charcoal) as well as development in the area.

To get an absolute chronology of events would require a way to date the material that accumulated in the lake. However, it is also possible to use marker horizons of known age to date intervals in a lake core. To avoid the expense of procuring dates on the material in our cores, we proposed to compare the sediment and vegetation records of these lakes to well-dated records from 3 lakes in Hennepin and Carver counties. This approach provides a comparative chronological scale to assess changes in the sedimentation rates in the floodplain lakes.

Location of Rice and Coleman lakes, and nearby, dated lakes, Mitchel and Round used for reference.

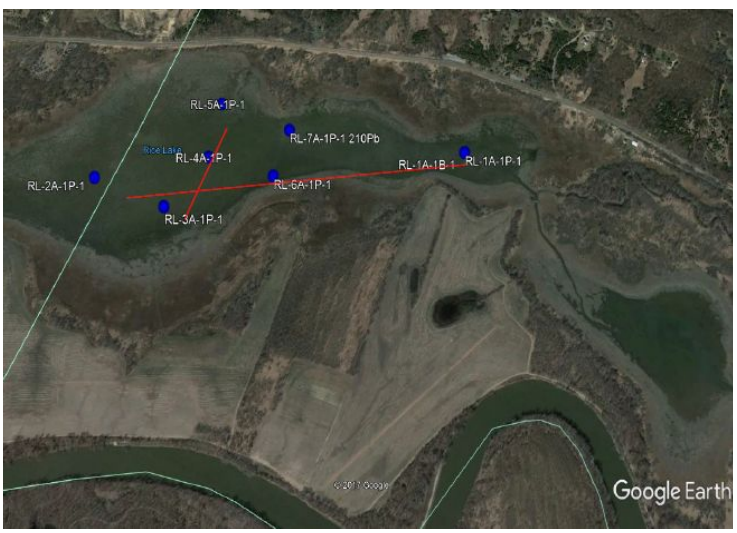


Dated pollen accumulation records from lakes to be used for comparison. *Lotus, Mitchell and Round have dated pollen stratigraphy and are close enough to Rice and Coleman lakes in the floodplain for correlation.*

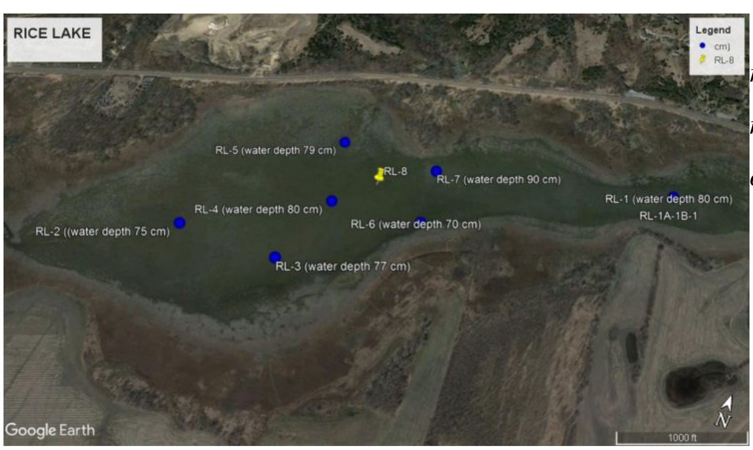
Fieldwork

Two lakes, Rice and Coleman lakes located in the floodplain of the Lower Minnesota were selected to assess historic changes in sediment accumulation rates based on pollen-correlated core intervals. The lakes were selected after reviewing available information on depth, ownership and access to the floodplain lakes in the lower Minnesota River valley and following site visits during late summer 2017.

Location of Coleman Lake behind a levee on the Minnesota River. *Flood water enters the lake primarily from the west.*



Rice Lake core locations. *These were the initial cores collected in the fall of 2017*



Additional core in Rice Lake. *After review of the initial cores, we took one more of a deeper interval during January of 2018.*

During the visits vegetation samples were also collected to assist with identification of plant micro-remains remains found in the core. Lake properties are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. *Information about lake area (ac), maximum lake depth (cm), water and core depth, and source water for lake.*

Lake	**Area (ac)**	**Max lake depth (ft)**	**Core**	**Water depth (cm)**	**Core depth (cm)**	**Water supply**
Coleman	114	185?				Nine Mile Creek, seepage and springs
			CL-1	160	151.5	
			CL-2	165	117	
			CL-3	184	114.5	
			CL-4	174	113	
			CL-5	159	110	
			CL-6	170	82	
			CL-7	185	102.5	
Rice lake		91				Bluff Creek, springs and intermittent surface drainage
			RL-1	80	170	
			RL-2	75	118	
			RL-3	77	120	
			RL-4	80	114.5	
			RL-5	79	119	
			RL-6	70	93.5	
			RL-8B	ice	377.5	

Forteen sediment cores were recovered along two transects in the studied lakes (Figures x and x) in the fall of 2017 and February 2018. Cores were named and numbered in a way consistent with Lac Core, University of Minnesota methods and archived there.

Laboratory work

All cores were scanned every 5 mm for their physical properties (p-wave velocity, gamma-ray-density and magnetic susceptibility) using a GEOTEK™ multi-sensor core logger. The cores were subsequently split, photographed and described by macroscopic structure and texture and by microscopic composition. Weighed subsamples were taken from regular intervals throughout the cores for loss-on-ignition (LOI) analysis to determine bulk density and dry weight percent of organic, carbonate, and noncarbonate mineral matter. Sediment subsamples were heated at 105°C to determine dry density, then sequentially heated at 550°C and 1000°C to determine organic matter and carbonate mineral content from post-ignition weight loss, respectively. LOI analysis was performed by LacCore staff. The bulk sediment measurements of magnetic susceptibility (MS) reflect the concentration of magnetizable mineral phases in the sediment, often viewed as reflecting the concentration of clastic mineral material and interpreted as a signal of erosional intensity on the sediment-contributing landscape.

In both lakes a reference core was chosen for detailed pollen analysis and for establishing a pollen stratigraphy. For these cores sediment samples for pollen analysis were taken every 10 cm whereas for the rest of the cores only two samples from near-basal material were taken for correlation with the main core.

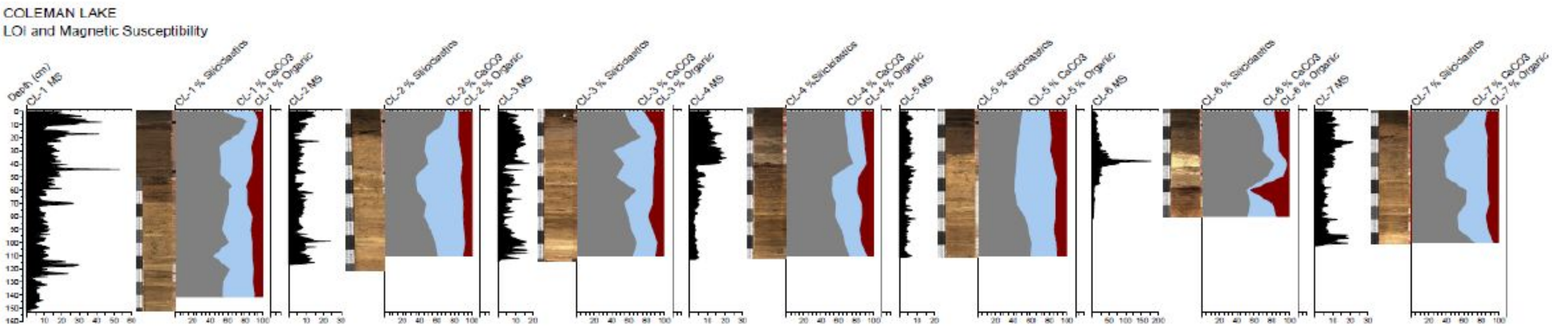
Pollen preparation follows the classical chemical method, including acetolysis (Faegri and Iversen, 1989). Pollen percentages are based on the pollen sum of arboreal pollen, including trees and shrubs (AP,) and non-arboreal pollen (NAP), excluding spores of *Bryophyta* and *Pteridophyta* and pollen of aquatic plants, and excluding grass pollen because of overrepresentation (over 100 pollen grains per sample). At least 200 to 300 terrestrial pollen grains were identified to the lowest possible taxonomic level with keys of Reille (1992; 1998), Beug (2004), and the pollen reference collection at the University of Minnesota. Charcoal particles larger than 20 µm interpreted as an indicator of regional fires (Tinner and Hu, 2003) were also counted. Non-pollen palynomorphs were identified according to van Geel and others (1989). Both charcoal and non-pollen palynomorphs are presented as percentages of the main pollen sum. Analysis of the pollen data was done using a program called *Tilia* 1.5.11 (Grimm 2011) that calculated percentages and created graphics.

Results

Organic sedimentary material in cores collected in this setting may include algal matter produced within the lake itself, local vegetation from lake margins and the surrounding floodplain, and the organic component of sediment transported down the Minnesota River. Carbonate mineral sediment includes both a carbonate component of the Minnesota River sediment load derived from carbonate-bearing sedimentary rocks, and carbonate sediment produced through biochemical precipitation within the lakes. Non-carbonate mineral matter may include locally eroded silt and sand from the immediate watershed, but in this setting will be primarily derived from upstream erosion in the watershed of the Minnesota River and its tributaries.

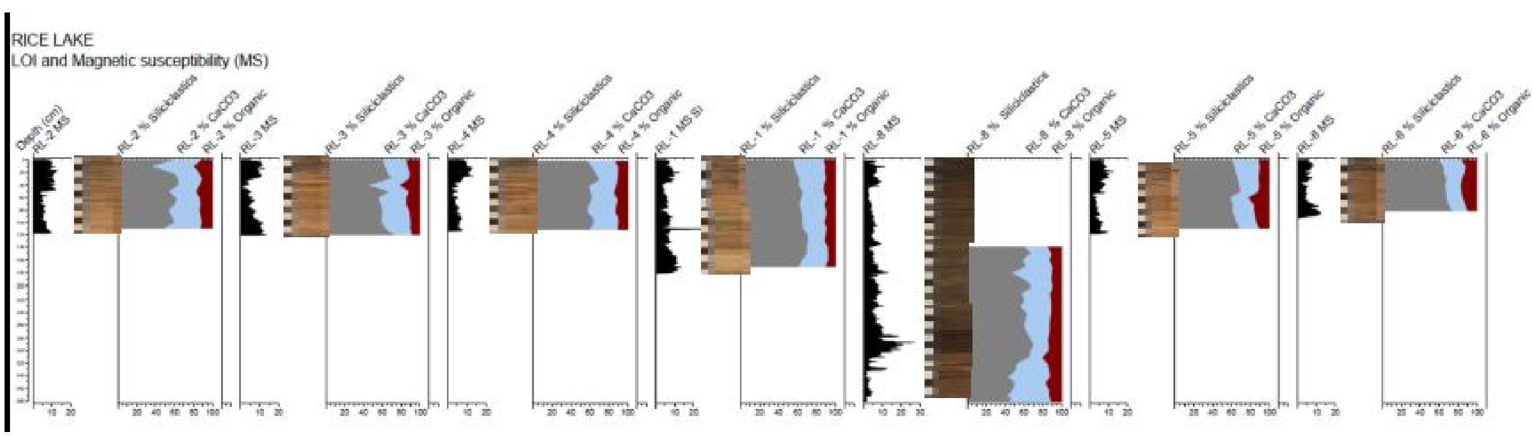
Sediment in Coleman Lake

Silty carbonate mud and diatomaceous carbonate mud are the dominant sediment types. The changes in sediment composition are more pronounced in the upper 30-40 cm of the cores. There the siliciclastic fraction increases from 40-60% to up to 85% and the magnetic susceptibility (MS) shows a distinct increase. The amount of carbonate increases to up to 40% between 30 and 60 cm. The organic component remains low (10-15%) with the exception of core CL-6 where it has a maximum 50% at 75 cm. Well defined maxima in magnetic susceptibility are observed between 100 and 120-130 cm in core CL-1,CL-2, CL-3 and CL-7. (FigureX).



Sediment in Rice Lake

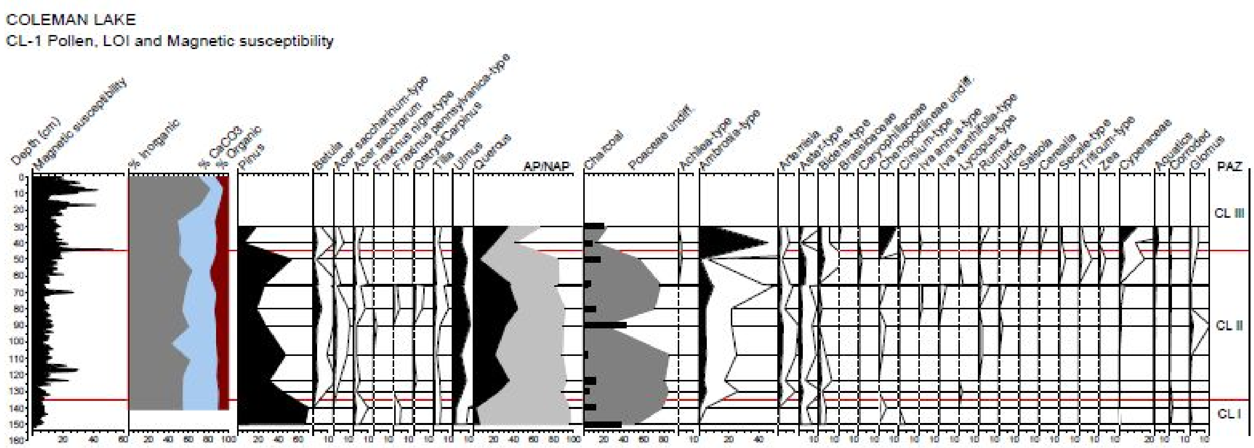
All sediment cores comprise alternating silty carbonate mud and diatomaceous carbonate mud with some silt. The siliciclastic material (50-80%) dominates the sediments from Rice Lake. The lowest siliciclastic percentages (up to 50%) are between 390 and 340 cm in core RL-8, where the highest carbonate percentages of up to 40% appear. The inorganic component increase up to 80 % between 340 and 300 cm in core RL-8 accompanied by an increase in magnetic susceptibility values. Except for core RL-2, the inorganic fraction decreases in the top 20-40 cm. This decrease is accompanied by an increase in the carbonates and for cores RL -2 and RL-3 an increase in the organic fraction. All cores show high MS in top 30-35 cm (Figure 5).



Pollen

Representative cores from each lake are discussed in detail. Pollen zones that are statistically determined help frame the ecological history of the lake and region. Key pollen events can then be linked to dated pollen stratigraphy in nearby lakes.

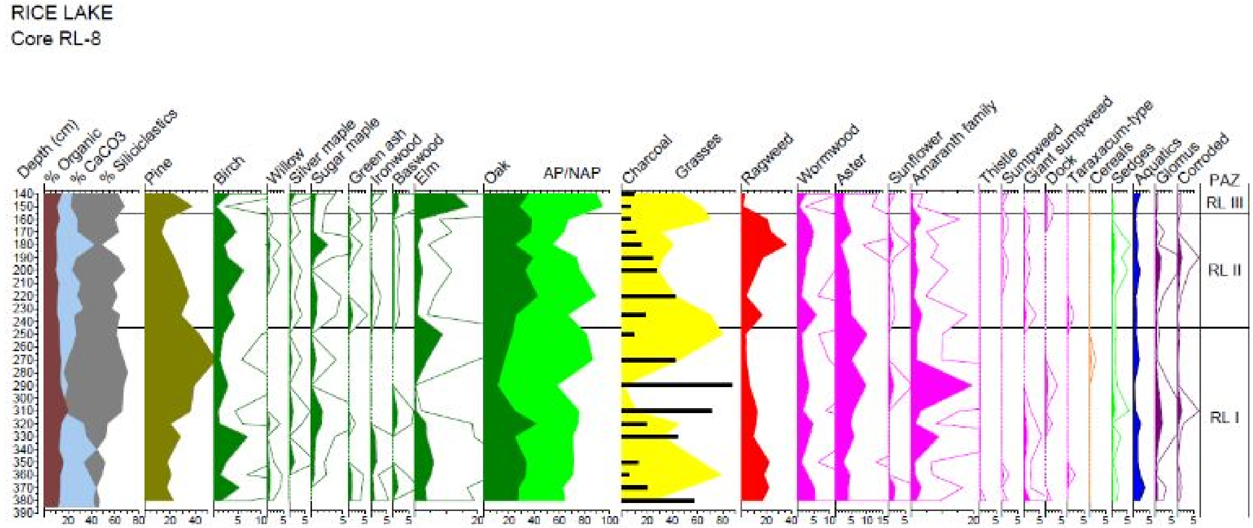
Pollen stratigraphy of Coleman Lake

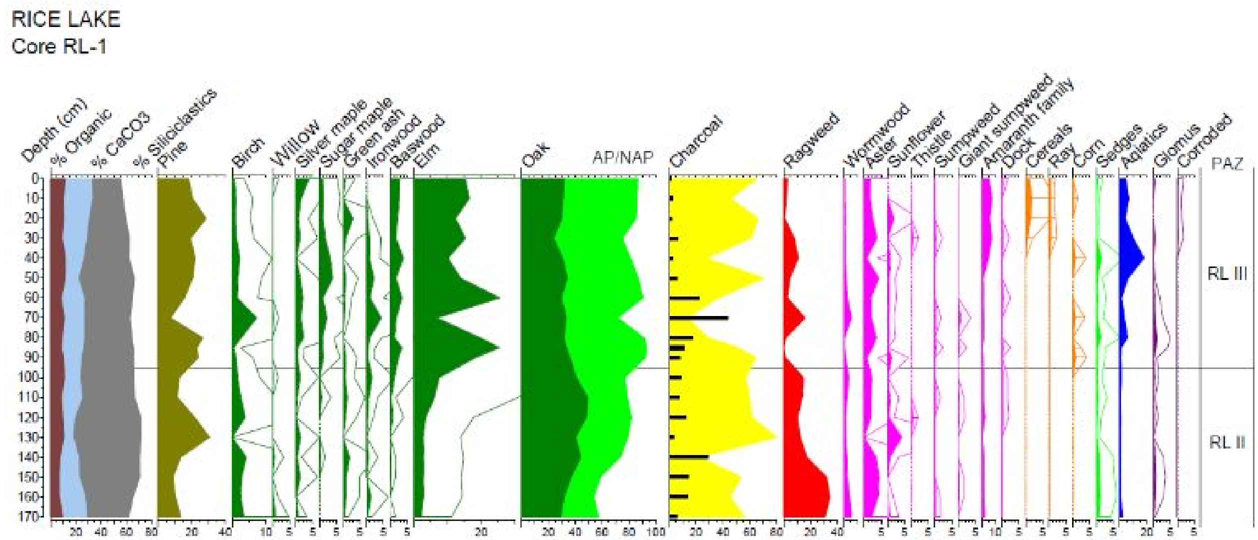


The pollen stratigraphy of core CL-1 is represented with three pollen zones recognized by stratigraphically constrained cluster analysis in CONNISS (Grimm, 1987).

Zone CL I is characterized by low taxonomic diversity as few pollen types were founded: pine (*Pinus*) pollen up to 80%, grass (Poaceae) pollen (excluded from the pollen sum) up to 80%, and small amount of oak (*Quercus*), elm (*Ulmus*), *Ambrosia* (ragweed), *Artemisia* (wormwood) and *Aster*-type (aster). Microscopic charcoal, up to 40% in the most bottom pollen spectrum indicates fire activity in near the lake and involving wetland vegetation dominated by grasses or more likely nearby prairie fires. The high amount of pine pollen likely has a long-distance origin facilitated by the treeless vegetation around the lake. In Zone CL II oak and elm are dominant among the tree species. The most distinct feature of Zone CL III is the high peak of *Ambrosia* pollen percentages, up 40% following a sharp decrease in *Quercus* (oak) values (from 40 to 10%).

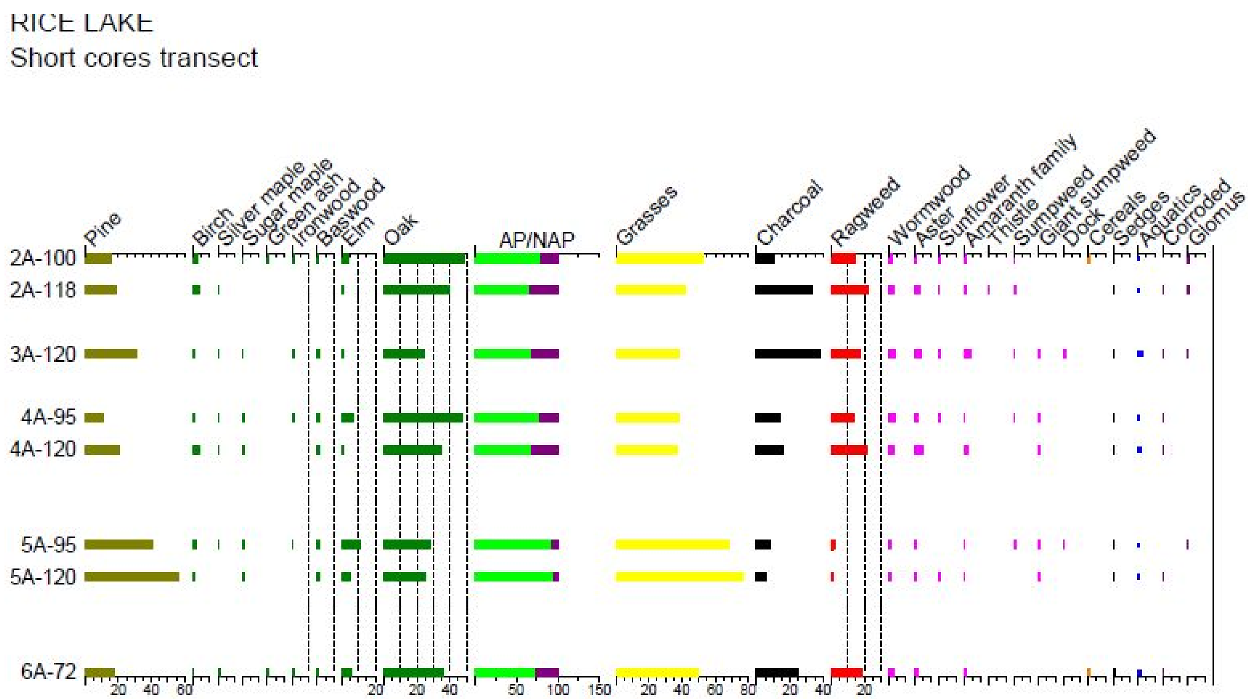
Pollen Stratigraphy of Rice Lake





Three pollen zones are also recognized in Rice Lake by stratigraphically constrained cluster analysis in CONNISS (Grimm, 1991). Zone RL I (RL-8), dominated by grasses (up to 80%) and prairie herb types (wormwood, aster species, sunflower and ragweed) reflects the regional pre-settlement wetland and prairie vegetation along with some oak openings registered with oak pollen (25-40%,), elm (up to 10%), sugar, silver maple, and birch. The high amount of charcoal between 270 and 330 cm most probably indicates independent fires near the lake in the wetland

and upland forests as shown in the decreased pollen percentages of the grasses, oak and fire-sensitive elm and sugar maple. Corroded pollen grains and fungal spores of *Glomus* in the same interval point to increase erosion in the lake catchment. Amaranth species are pioneers and their spread on the burned wetland areas is interpreted in the zone with a maximum in their percentage values. An increase in the amount of pine pollen above the charcoal interval indicate openings in the forest canopy facilitating pollen transport. The most characteristic feature for zone RL II (RL-8 and RL-1) is the rise in *Ambrosia* percentages by up to 40%, followed by an increase in the oak pollen from 30 to 50%. In zone RL III (RL-8 and RL-1) the most significant change is the increase in the elm pollen percentages up to 30%.



The pollen spectra of the analyzed sediment samples at selected depths in the short cores show analogues with dominant pollen types similar to those at the same depths in core RL-1. This indicates a similar sedimentation process and rate in the different parts of the lakes.

Discussion

The pre-settlement regional vegetation in the study area, reflected in zone RL I in the pollen diagram for core RL-8 from Rice Lake consisted of wetlands, prairies and oak openings. The high charcoal amount in pollen spectra in this zone indicates intensive fires. This is an expected result given the literature documenting the extent of prairies and their fire dependence (Umbanhower, 2004). It is possible that some of the fires had anthropogenic origins because the area was occupied by native Americans. The charcoal layer in the sediments shows high magnetic properties and an increase in inorganic component of the sediment as result of soil erosion after the fires. The sediment of the post-settlement horizon has higher carbonate amounts that is correlated to a greater percentage of cultivated acres in the surrounded lake catchment (Umbanhower et. al. 2011).

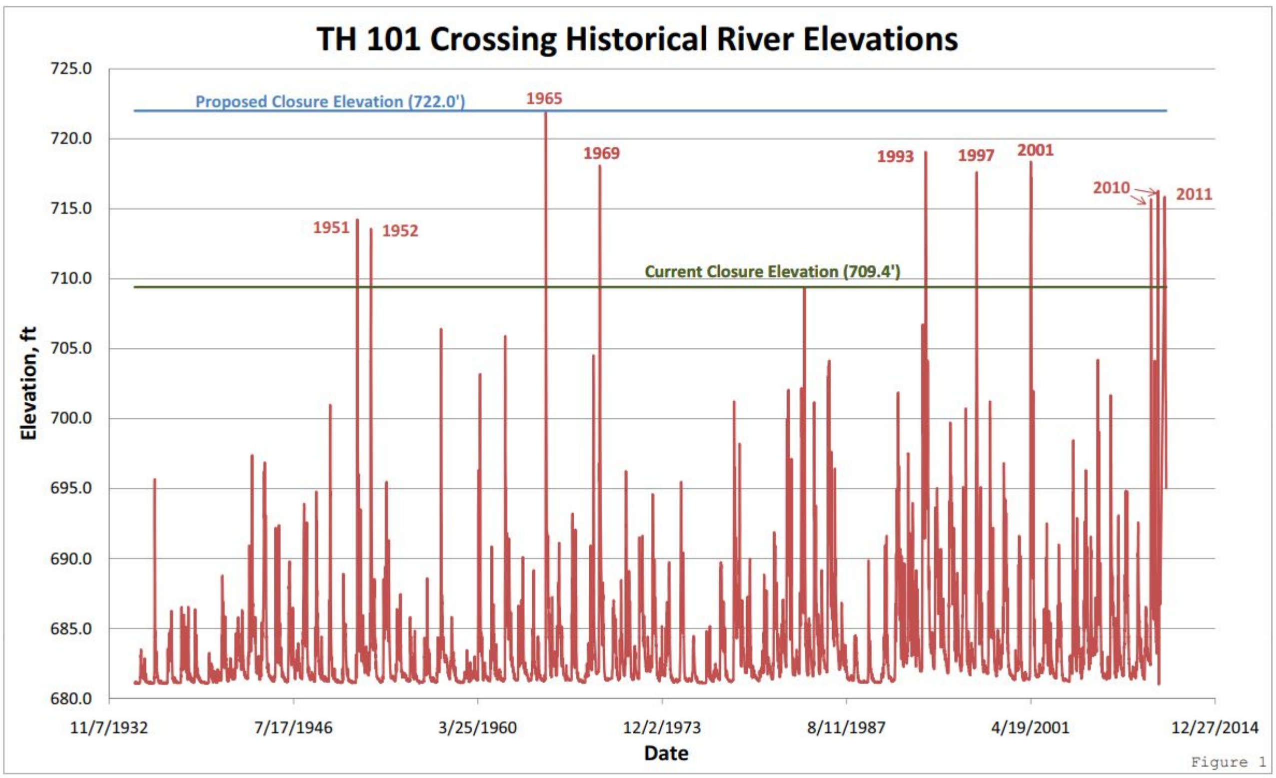
Almost all cores from Race and Coleman lakes have distinct magnetic peaks in the top 30-40 cm that could reflecting larger and more frequent flooding in the valley since 1993. The changes in the magnetic properties in the cores from Coleman Lake are more pronounced than those in Rice Lake but because of the unclear pollen stratigraphy of the main core CL-1 it is difficult to correlate them to particular flood events.The pollen stratigraphy for Coleman Lake most probably reflects the vegetation changes reflected in the upper part of Zone RL II and the entire Zone RL III.

There is a river gauge located upstream of the bridge near Jordan. Those records and the record of Highway 101 bridge closing due to flooding help constrain when sediment-laden floodwaters might have inundated Rice Lake. The bridge was closed six times between 1993 and 2011 with closure times varying from several days to several weeks when water elevations exceeded 709.4' (SEH, 2011, http://www.dot.state.mn.us/floodmitigation/docs/mn-river-study.pdf). Typically, the lakes in the floodplain are flooded during 10-year recurrence flood events.

Table 1 – Days Highway 101 Crossing Closed During Flood Events 1965 - 2011

Flooding Event	[(1)] Highway 101 Days Closed
Spring 2011	43
Fall 2010	16
Spring 2010	27
Spring 2001	29
Spring 1997	18
Summer 1993	27
Spring 1969	17
Spring 1965	15

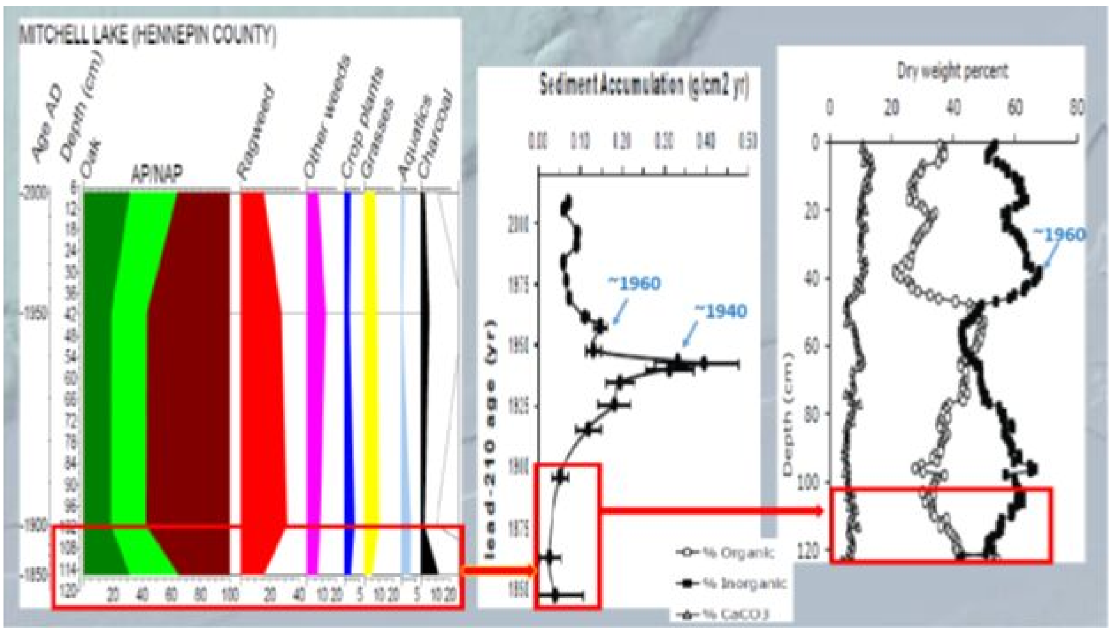
[(1)] Data for 2010 and 2011 were obtained from MnDOT. Data for 1993, 1997 and 2001 were obtained from the *Trunk Highway 41 Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS)*. Data for 1965-1969 were estimated from historic hydrograph plots and assuming the road is closed for three days beyond the date when the water level dropped below the closure elevation to conduct maintenance and restoration work.

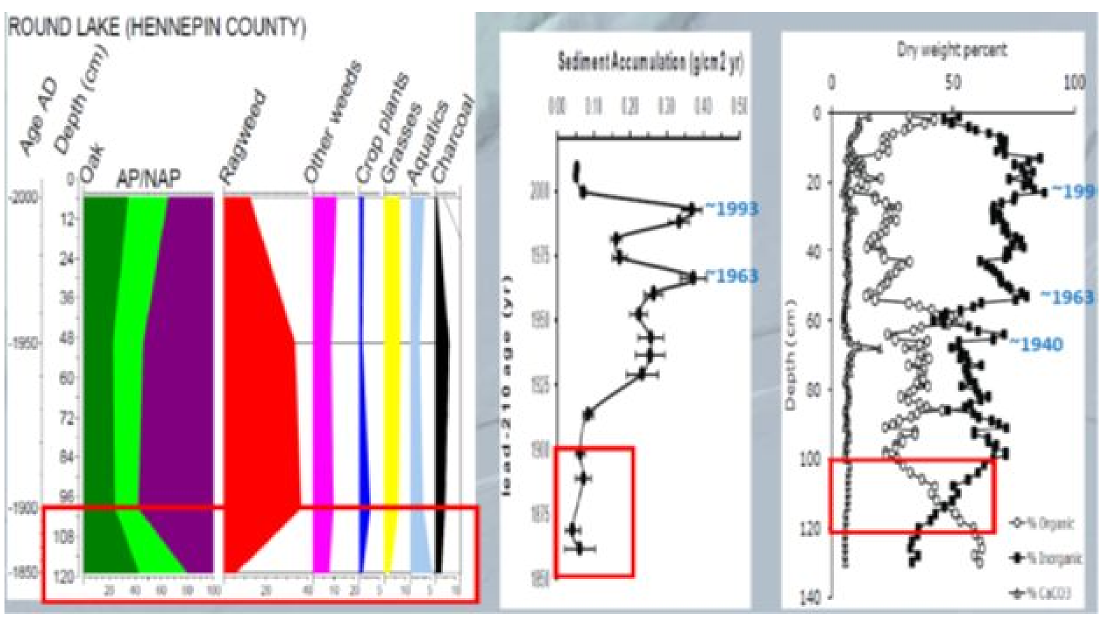


The variability in magnetic susceptibility in the upper portion of Core RLHC17-1A-1P-1 could be related to influx of magnetic grains carried in the river during these flood events.

Ambrosia rise and sedimentation rates

The rise in *Ambrosia* pollen associated with the Euro-American settlement was dated at 1900 AD in Mitchell (102 cm) and 1910 in Round Lake (98 cm). These lakes, located 3-4 miles away from Rice Lake are the closest palynologically studied and dated lakes, used for biostratigraphical comparison.





The rise in *Ambrosia* in both lakes is preceded by an increase in the inorganic content of sediment, as well as a higher charcoal amount (Mitchell Lake) that appears up to 20 cm below the and it is dated at 1850 when the city of Eden Prairie, the closest populated place was established. The increase in the inorganic component of sediment most probably marks the settlement horizon whereas the *Ambrosia* rise reflects the time of intensified agriculture in the area about 50 years later after the arrival of the first European settlers.

Similar increases in the inorganic component of the sediment that occurs one to several centimeters below the *Ambrosia* rise was observed in cores from Crystal Bay, Lake Minnetonka. However, because of the uncertainty in the measurements of the ^{210}Pb activity, the increased inorganic sediment component was accepted as a pre-settlement event (Murtchie, 1985).
There are no other studies in the area where the pollen analysis is performed on ^{210}Pb and ^{137}Cs dated cores and *Ambrosia* rise is independently dated.

In Rice lake the *Ambrosia* rise which is accompanied by a peak in the magnetic susceptibility and carbonate component at 180 cm (core RL-8), is above an interval between 230 and 190 cm with higher charcoal amounts and additional indicators of erosion (fungal spores of *Glomus*, corroded pollen grains and very large individual carbonate grains and carbonate aggregates formed in soils). This points to intensification of anthropogenic activity in the area. It is very possible that the settlement horizon in the lake starts at 230 cm and that this horizon correlates to 1850-1860 when the nearby town of Shakopee was established and the first railroad in the region was built. Whereas the *Ambrosia* at 180 cm might reflect the farming development facilitated by improved transportation around 1910-1912 when the population in Shakopee almost doubled compared to 1860.

The decrease in *Ambrosia* pollen in Mitchell and Round lakes is dated at 1950 and in the Rice lake pollen diagrams it appears at 140 cm. The pronounced magnetic susceptibility picks in the top 30-40 cm in all cores from Rice and Coleman lakes might be related to the floods events since 1993.

Taking all of these age interpretations at face value, a linear rate of modern sedimentation was calculated. If the correlations are correct, sediment accumulation rates were:

- 1 cm/y^{-1} from 1860 to 1910
- 1.0 cm/y^{-1} from 1910 to 1950
- 2.44cm/y^{-1} from 1950 to 1993
- 1.4 cm/y^{-1} from 1993 to 2018

However, ^{210} Pb profiles for many lakes (Engstrom, 2007) suggests that both over- and underestimates of sedimentation rates are possible with this linear interpolation method used here to estimate post-1850 accumulation rates in Rice lake. Comparison of the linear sedimentation rates estimated for Mitchell (0.9cm/y) and Round (0.9cm/y) lakes with ^{210}Pb-corrected sedimentation rates shows that the maximum dated sedimentation rates were 0.95cm/y around 1940 in Mitchell Lake and up to 1.3 cm/y in Round L around 1966.

Summary and Future Work

If all of the interpreted horizons are correct sedimentation rates peaked at 2.44cm/y^{-1} from 1950 to 1993 and have decreased to 1.4 cm/y^{-1} from 1993 to 2018.

Dating key intervals in the core would firm up these interpretations. That magnetic susceptibility peaks indicate recent flood events, while logical, is a hypothesis that should and could be easily tested. The settlement and other anthropogenic disturbances that are interpreted from pollen, sediment and other aspects of the sediment stratigraphy could be dated to firm up the dates of those change and refine the assumed linear interpolation method. Comparison of the linear sedimentation rates to dated rates for two nearby lakes are up to 44% greater. The cores taken for this project have been archived and could be dated at some future time to get more precise estimates of the change in sedimentation rate.

A project funded by DNR Fisheries concerning carp barriers will have relevant information when it is completed. That 3-year project was conducted by the Water Resource Center, Minnesota State University, Mankato who were enlisted by Peter Sorenson to perform repeat bathymetric surveys of the Minnesota River channel from Mankato to the Mississippi confluence. Those surveys would better reflect change in the channel itself.

Acknowledgements

Sediment cores were collected and loss-on-ignition analysis were completed by LacCore (National Lacustrine Core Repository), Department of Earth Sciences, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis (http://lrc.geo.umn.edu/corefac.htm). Christa Drake (LacCore) made the pollen preparation

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