

Land and Natural Resources Research

Wildfire, Conservation, and Restoration Ecology Research

Dr. Scott Abella

Associate Professor

School of Life Sciences

Email: scott.abella@unlv.edu

Websites: <https://www.unlv.edu/people/scott-abella>

<https://abellaappliedecologylab.wordpress.com/home/>

Expertise

- Fire ecology
- Restoration ecology
- Ecological conservation practices
- Forest health

We perform fire ecology research that assists local and national wildland fire management efforts in changing environments



Before-after wildfire in Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area, just outside Las Vegas. We study fire effects, fuel management, and restoration strategies.



UNLV biology students implementing post-fire habitat restoration research



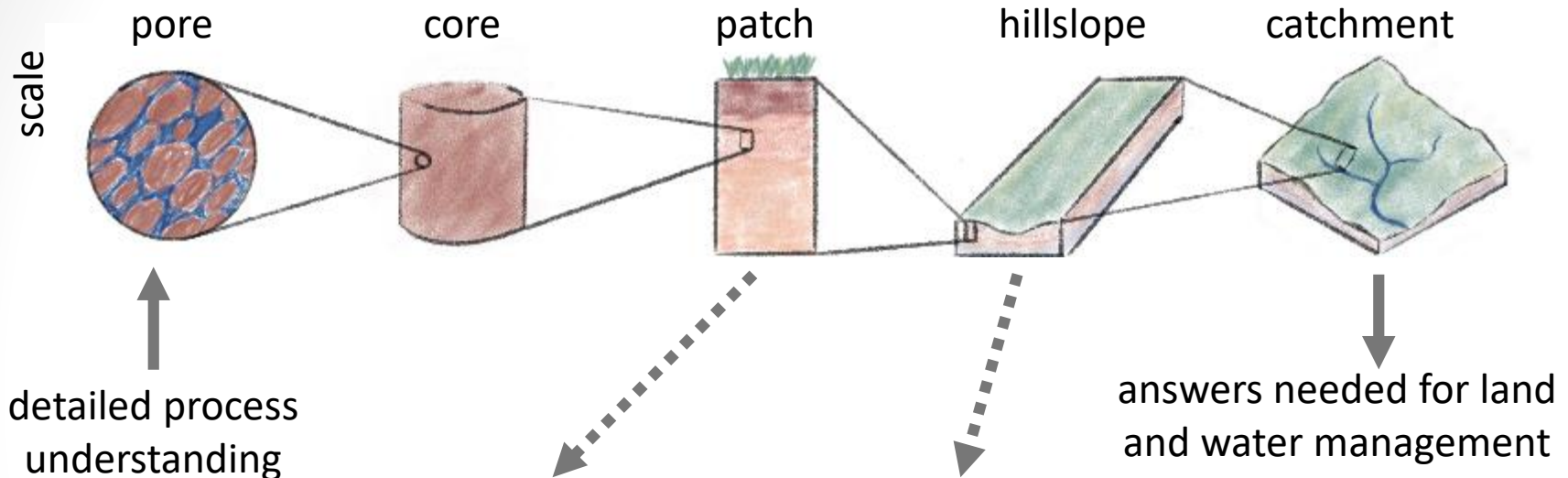
Critical Zone Hydrology

- **Dr. Hannes Bauser**
- Assistant Professor
- Department of Geoscience
- Email: hannes.bauser@unlv.edu
- Website: <https://geoscience.unlv.edu/people/departement-faculty/hannes-bauser/>

Expertise

- Vadose Zone Hydrology and Soil Physics
- Hydrologic Modeling
- Data Assimilation
- Machine Learning

Hydrologic Scaling Challenge



Collaboration with the Desert Research Institute for access to the [SEPHAS Lysimeters](#) in Boulder City.



Collaboration with the University of Arizona for access to the [Landscape Evolution Observatory](#) at Biosphere 2.

How can we use data science (e.g., data assimilation, machine learning) to combine process understanding and data to solve the hydrologic scaling challenge?

Forest Inventory and Analysis

- **Dr. Brenda J Buck**
- Professor
- Department of Geoscience
- Email: Brenda.Buck@unlv.edu
- Website: <https://unlv-fia.github.io/UNLV-FIA-Group/index.html>



Expertise

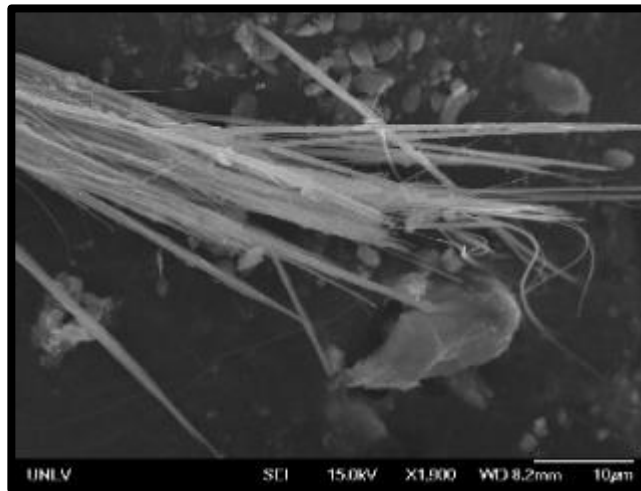
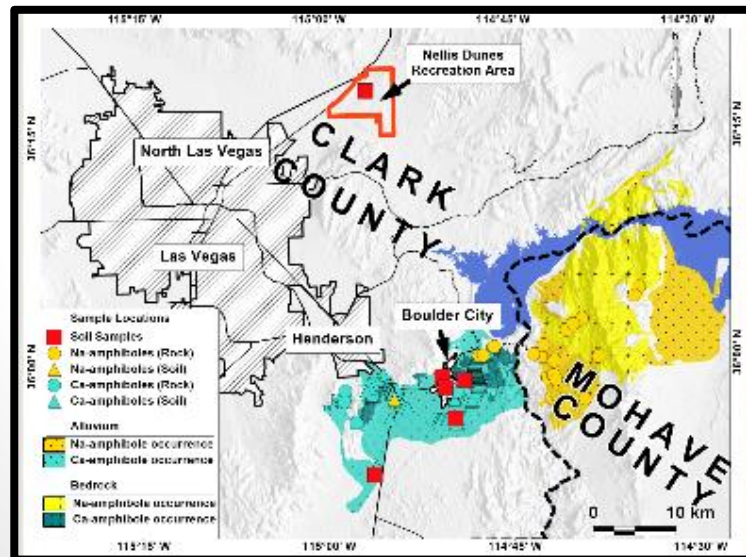
- University partner to USDA-FIA. Area of emphasis is information management research and development to optimize the storage, delivery, and display of forest inventory data.
- The support we provide helps policy makers, land stewards and non-governmental groups base decisions and assessments related to the health, diversity, and productivity of U.S. forests and grasslands on scientifically credible information.

Medical Geology

- **Dr. Brenda J Buck**
- Professor
- Department of Geoscience
- Email: Brenda.Buck@unlv.edu

Expertise

- Expertise: Health effects of mineral dust; Asbestos; Heavy Metals; Soil Science/Geology



Materials Deformation

Dr. Pamela Burnley

Department of Geoscience

Phone: (702) 895-5460

Email: pamela.burnley@unlv.edu

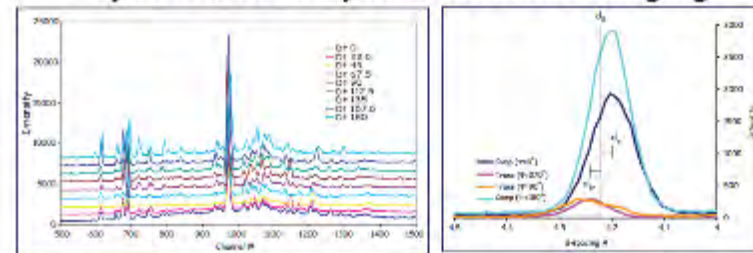
Expertise:

High Pressure Rock Deformation

High Pressure studies of Deformation and the Acoustoelastic effect



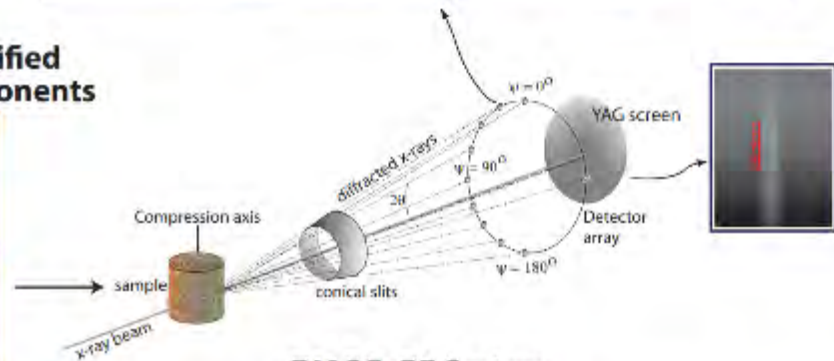
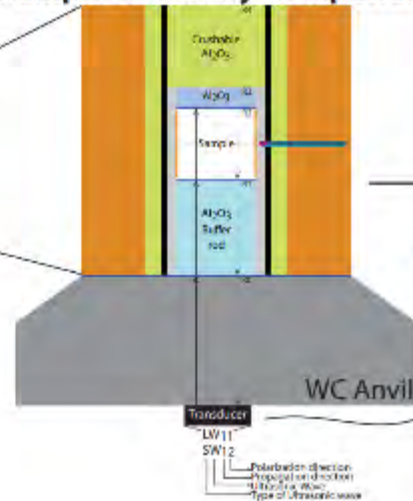
Synchrotron X-ray diffraction and imaging



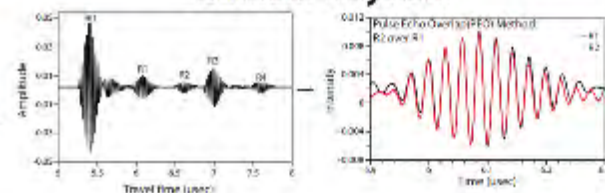
D-DIA module



Ultrasonic D-DIA Modified Sample Assembly Components



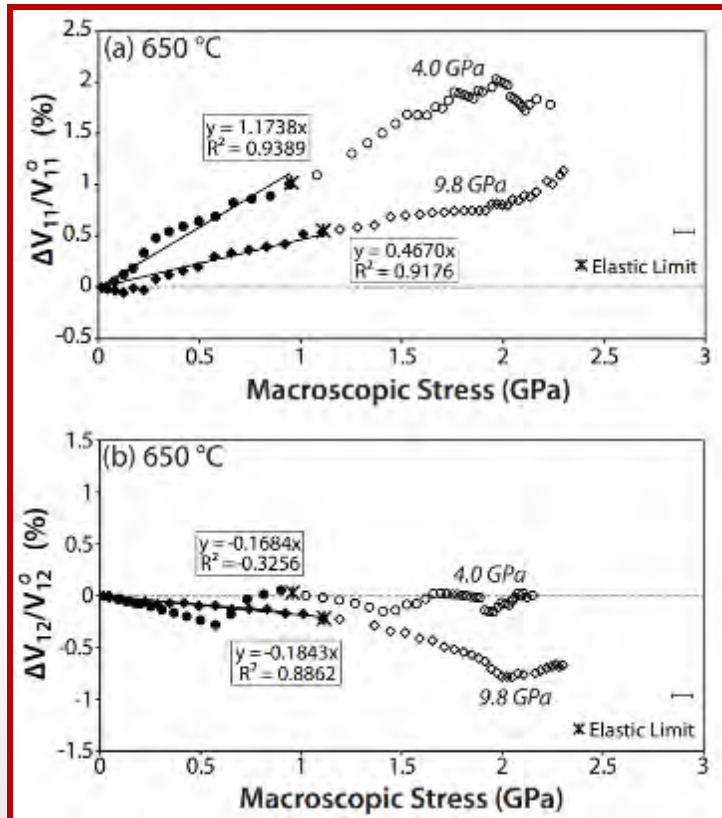
DIASCoPE System



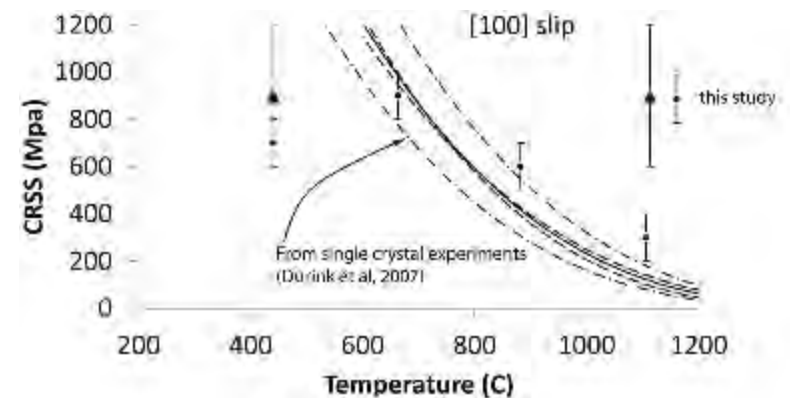
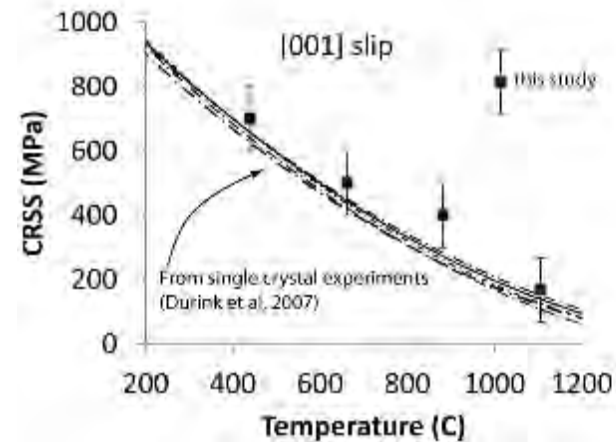
High Pressure studies of Deformation and the Acoustoelastic effect

Details of multiple slip systems derived from a single multi step experiment

Compression- and shear-wave velocities are a function of compressive stress

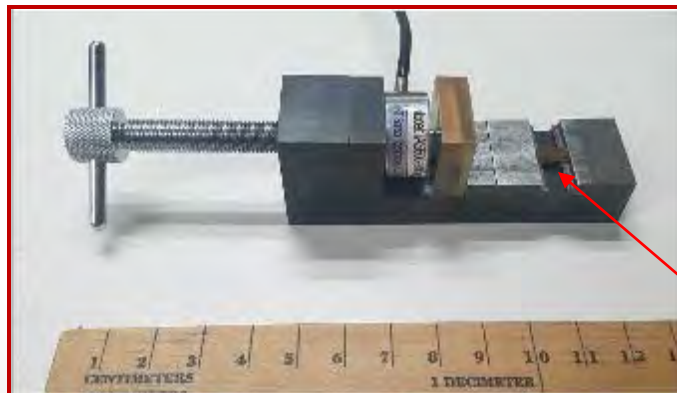
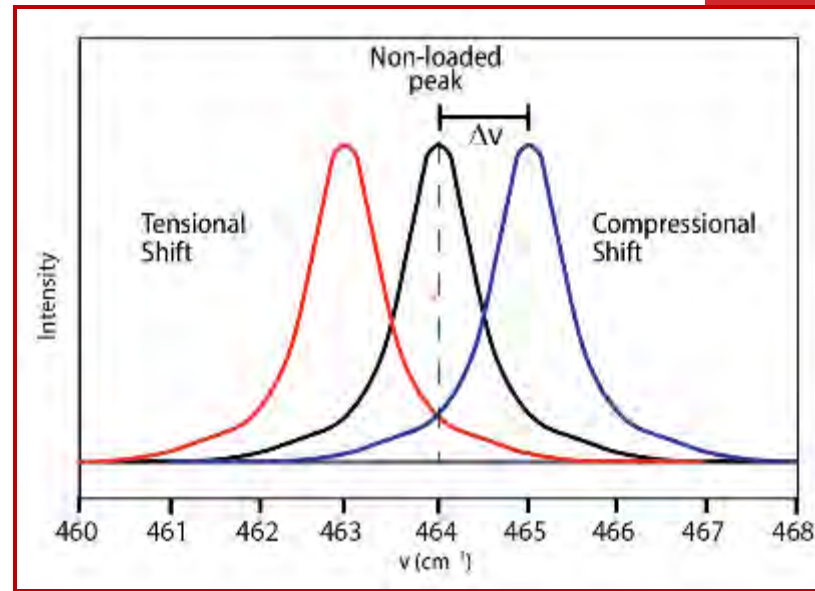
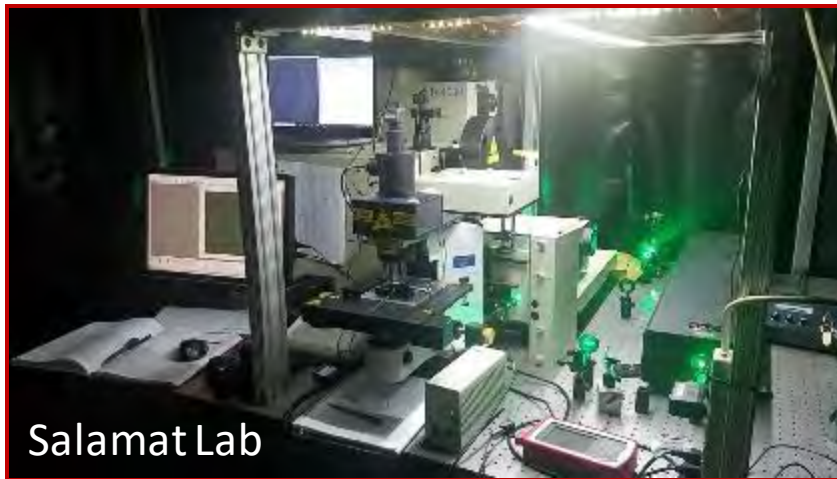
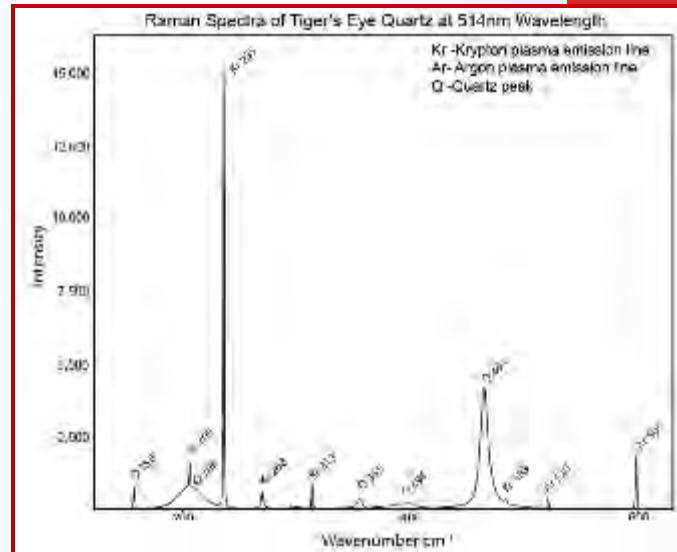


(Traylor, Whitaker & Burnley, in prep)



(Burnley & Kaboli, 2019)

Raman spectroscopic measurements of stress distribution

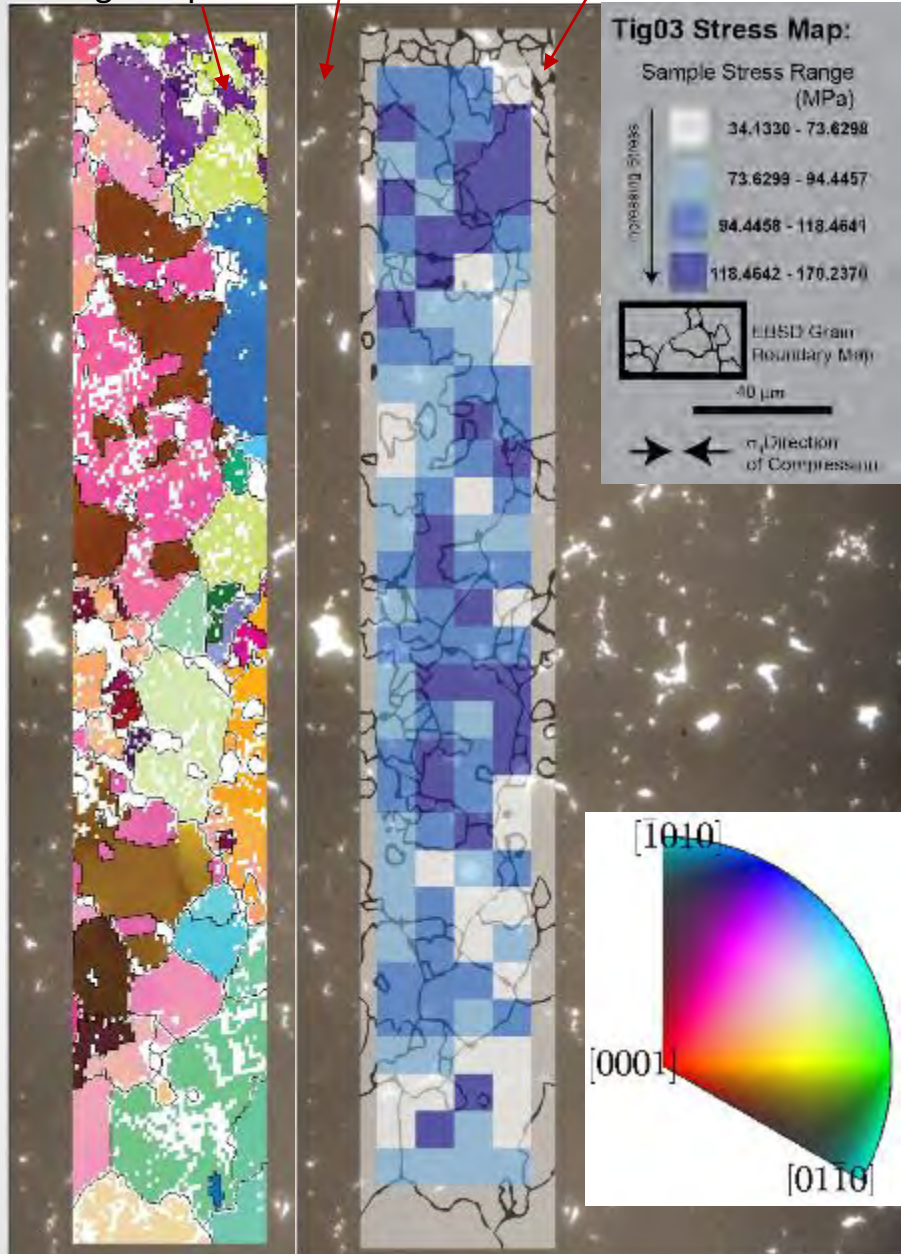


sample

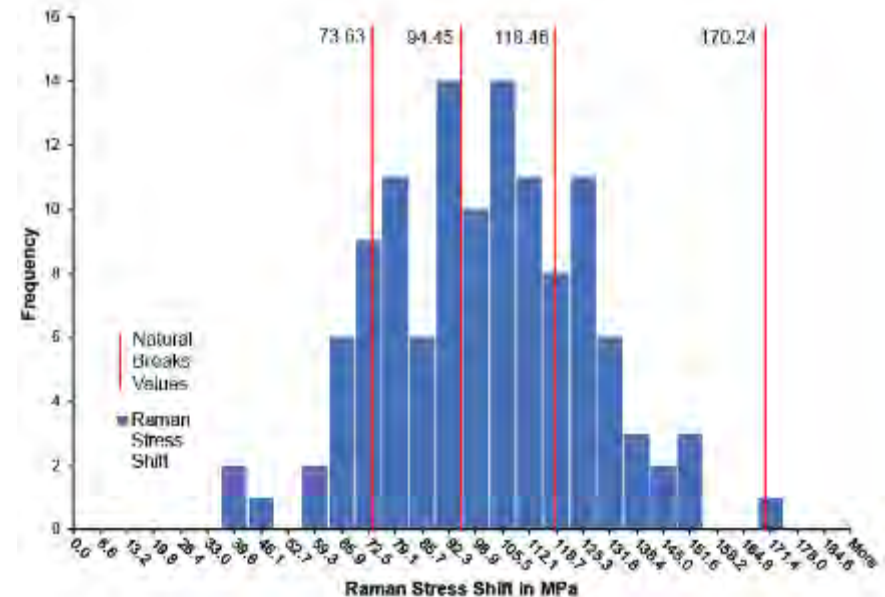
EBSD Orientation
Image Map

optical image

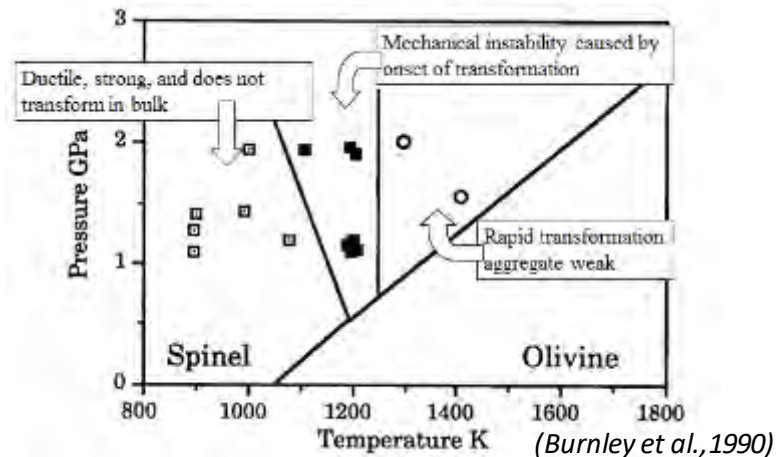
Stress map



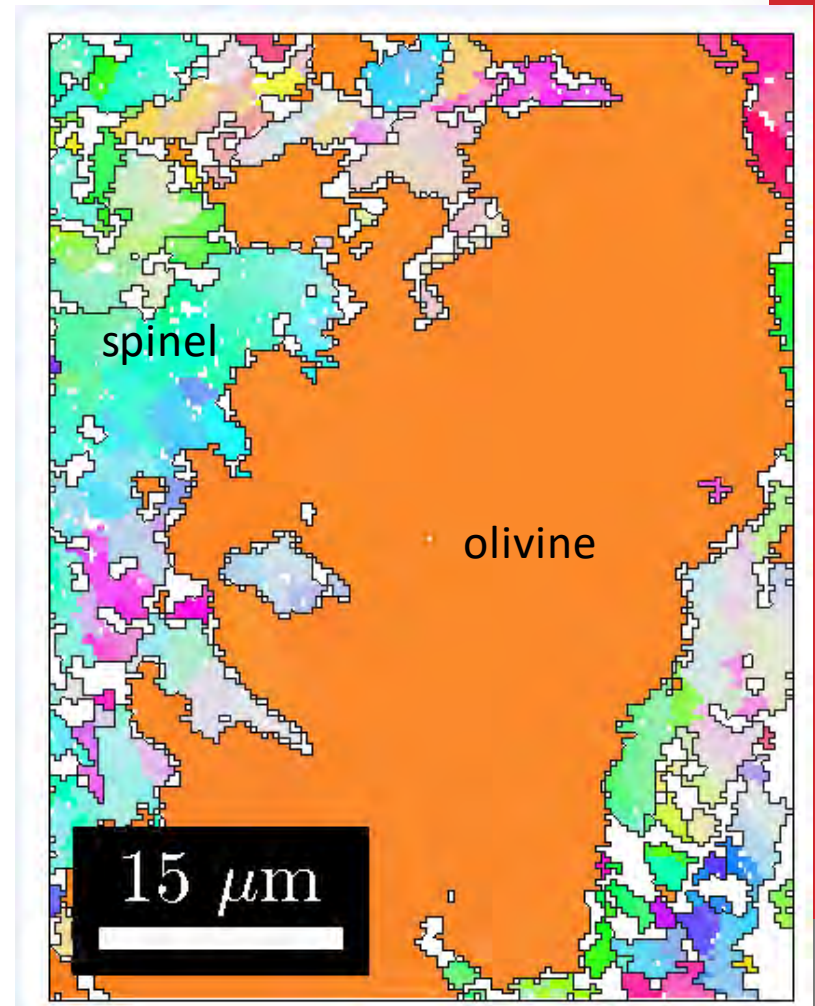
- Peak shifts converted to sample stress using single crystal measurements



Interaction of Phase Transformation and Deformation



- Growth of spinel in metastable olivine creates mechanical instability
- New microstructural analysis clarifies nature of instability



Electron Backscatter Diffraction
Orientation Image Map
(Burnley et al., in prep)

Radioactive Materials and Radiation

Dr. Pamela Burnley

Department of Geoscience

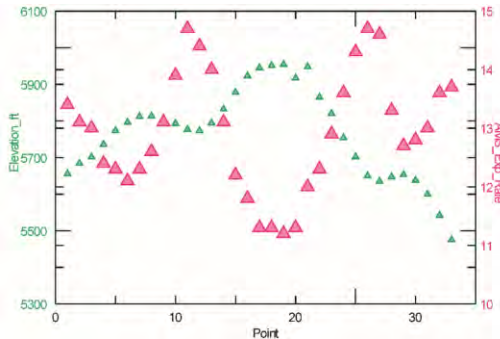
Phone: (702) 895-5460

Email: pamela.burnley@unlv.edu

Expertise:

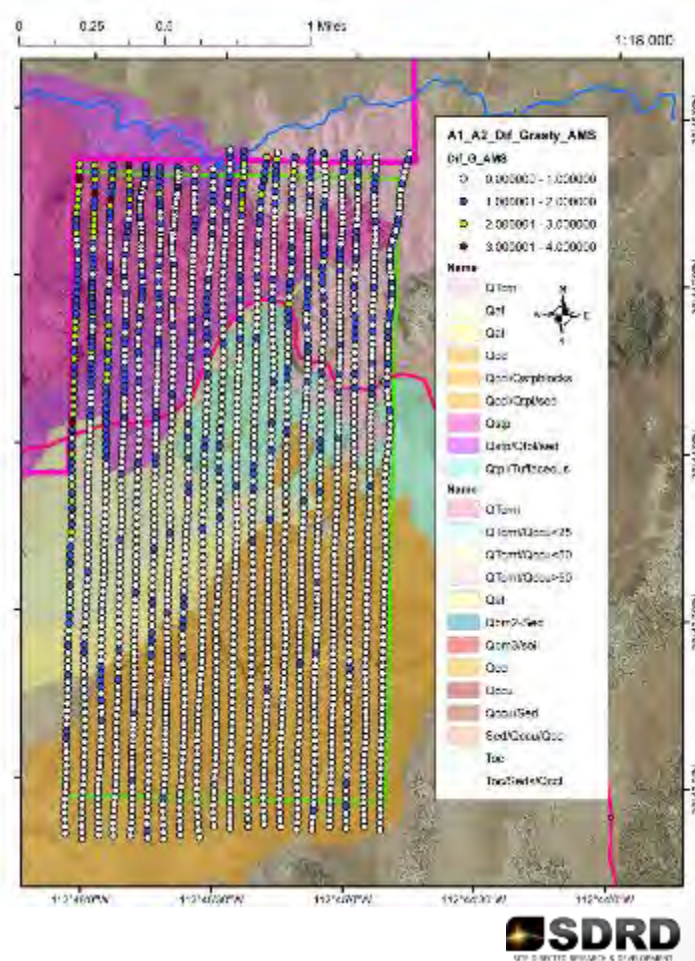
Gamma ray background radiation

γ -ray Background Radiation



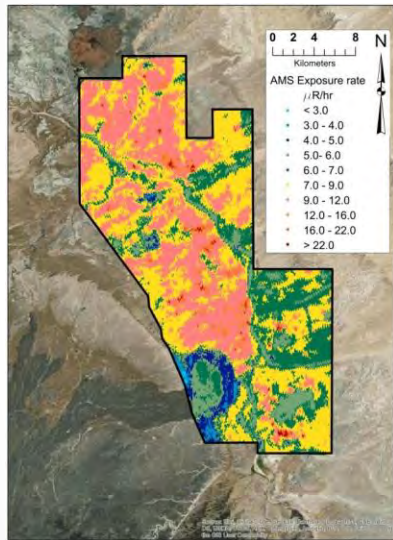
- Predictive model based on legacy NURE data & geologic map units
- Most points within $1\mu\text{R/hr}$
- Largest deviations associated with steep topography
- Led to D. Haber's PhD research on topographic corrections

Difference between AMS flight data and predictive model



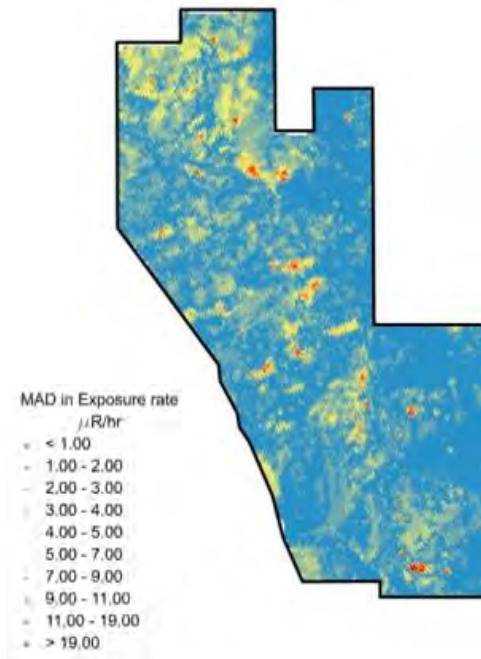
γ -ray Background Radiation

AMS flight data
Cameron, AZ



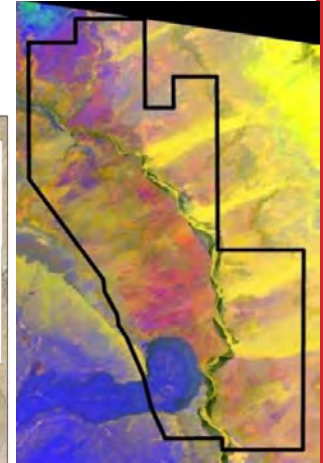
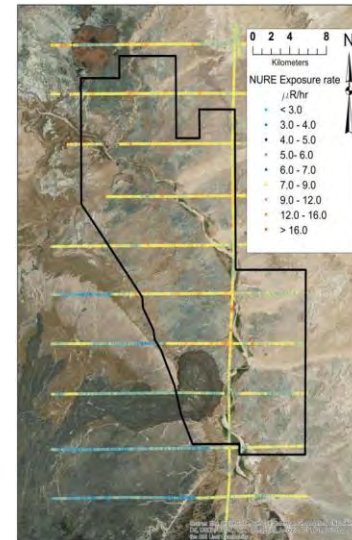
(Adcock et al. 2019)

Difference between
AMS data and model



Highlights Uranium
mines

Model based on ASTER data,
NURE survey & geologic map



Dr. Dale Devitt

Professor

Director - Center for Urban Water Conservation

School of Life Sciences

Phone 702-895-4699

Expertise

Soil Plant Water Relations

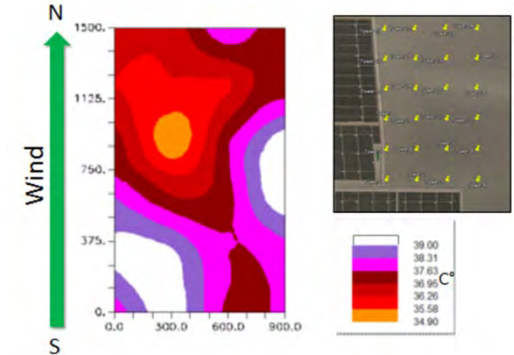
Water Management

Evapotranspiration

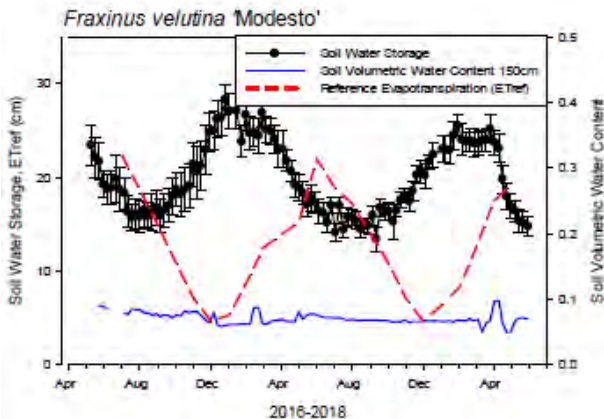
Salinity

Current Research

- Assessing the impact of large scale solar development on desert ecosystems.



- Tree grass water use tradeoffs in urban landscapes



10 acre research facility in North Las Vegas dedicated to conducting applied and basic water related research.



Response (growth, flower and seed production) of desert perennial shrubs to altered precipitation



Basin Analysis and Tectonics

- **Dr. Erin Donaghy**
- Assistant Professor
- Department of Geoscience
- Email: erin.donaghy@unlv.edu

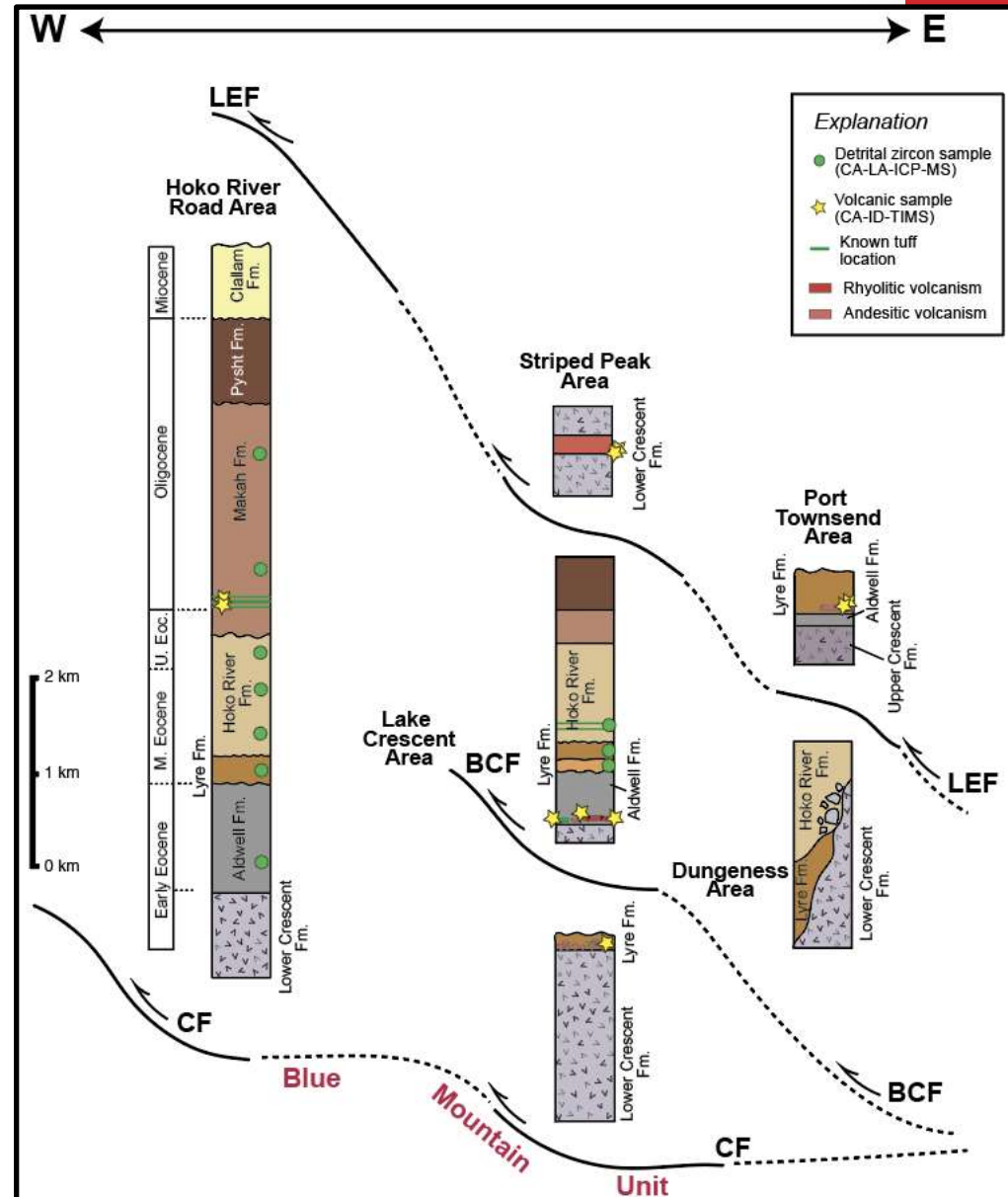
Expertise

- Forearc basin processes
- North America Cordilleran tectonics
- Strike-slip basin evolution
- U-Pb zircon geochronology
- Oceanic plateau collision



My group uses the sedimentary record to tackle large-scale tectonic questions by integrating both field and analytical methods

- Measured stratigraphic sections and lithofacies mapping are used to reconstruct depositional environments
- U-Pb detrital zircon geochronology to determine sediment provenance
- Establish a high-precision chronostratigraphy for regional stratigraphic correlations



Sedimentary Geology

Dr. Ganqing Jiang

Professor

Department of Geoscience

Phone: (702) 895-2708

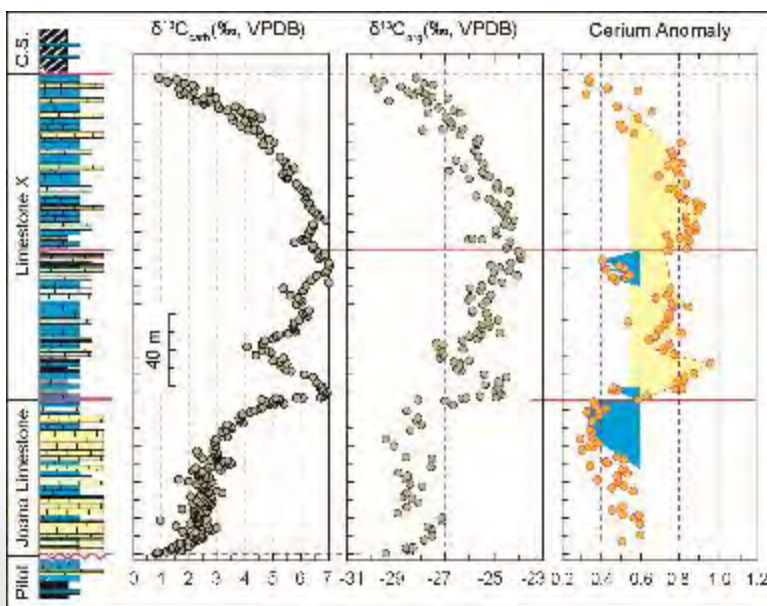
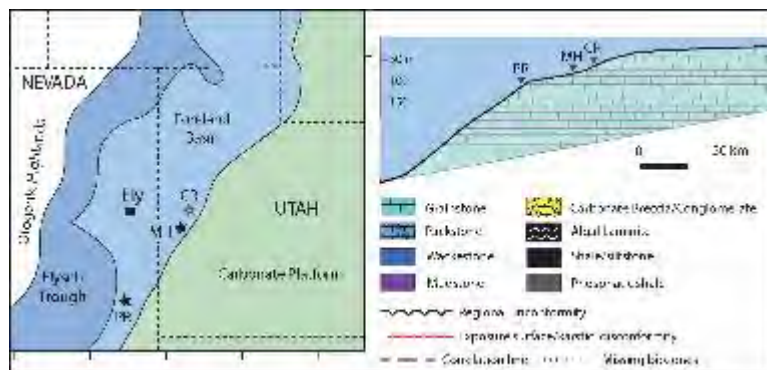
Email: Ganqing.Jiang@unlv.edu

Expertise:

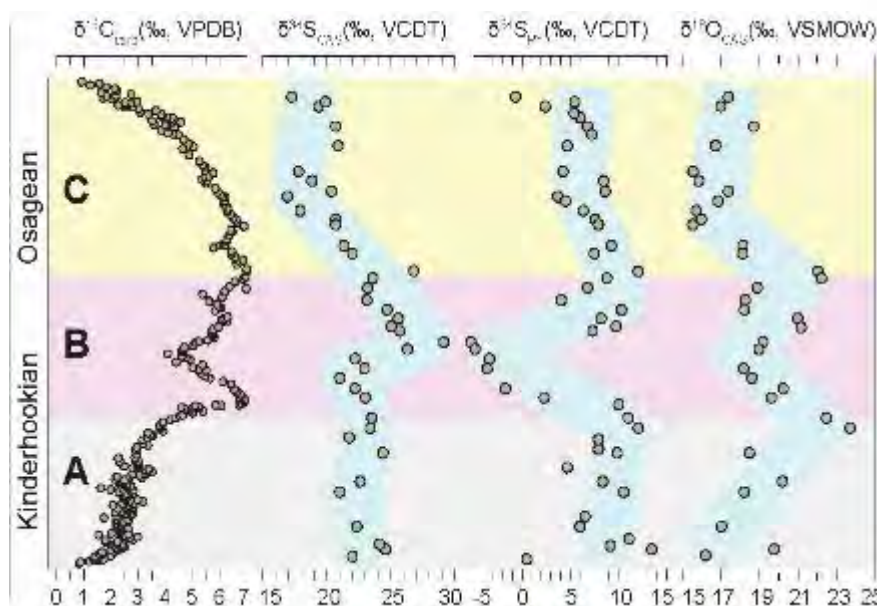
Sequence and chemostratigraphy

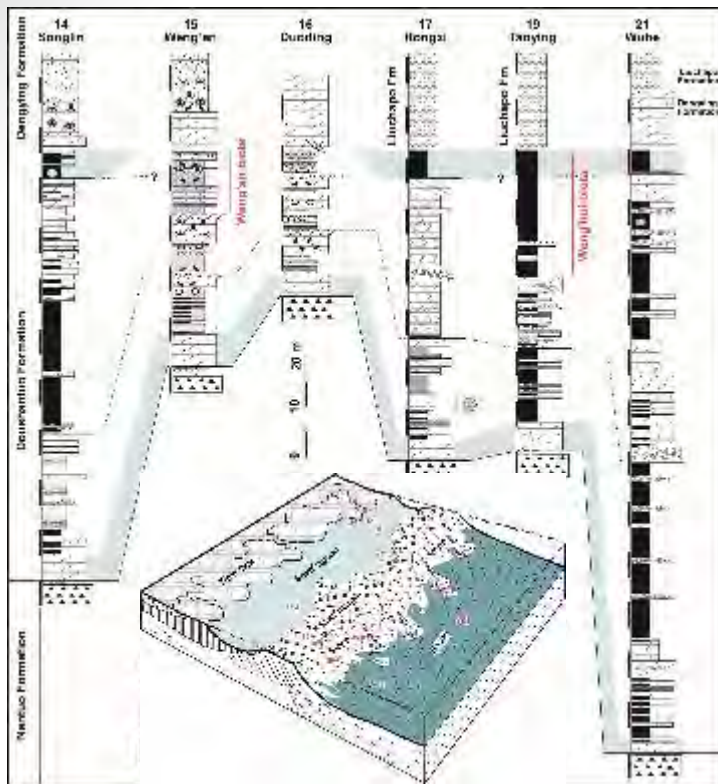
sedimentology

Carbonate diagenesis

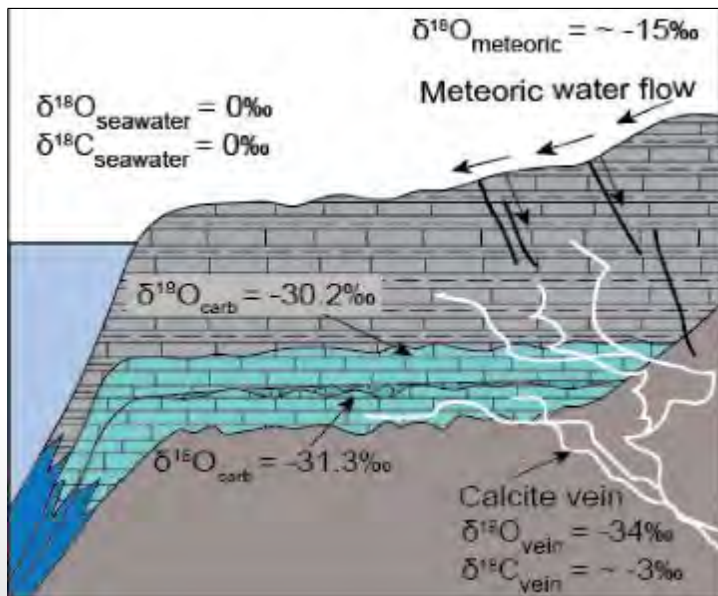


- Sequence and chemostratigraphy
- Paleogeographic reconstruction
- Applications of stable isotopes and rare earth elements
- Paleoenvironmental change across major perturbations of the carbon cycle and mass extinctions





- Basin analyses and paleoceanography
- Fluid migration and carbonate diagenesis
- Tracing fluid migration in sedimentary basins using stable isotopes and trace elements
- Carbonate aquifer



Climate Science and Paleoclimatology

Matthew S. Lachniet

Professor

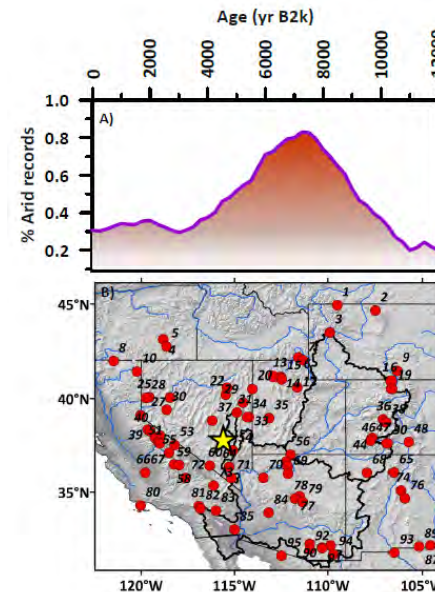
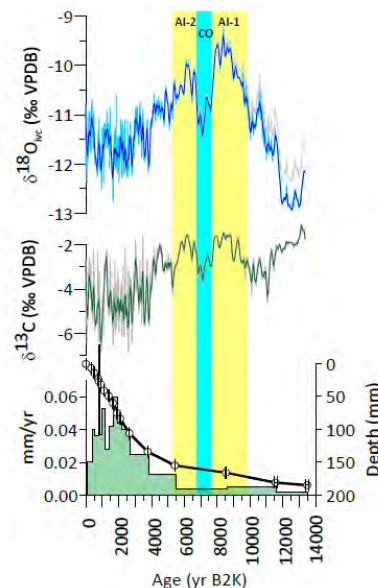
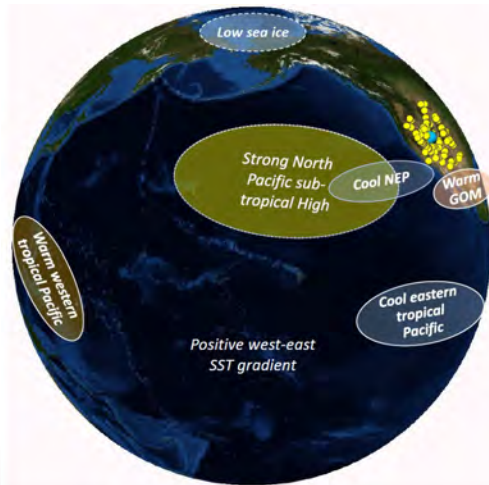
Department of Geoscience

Phone 702-895-4388

Matthew.Lachniet@unlv.edu

Paleoclimatology

- Study of the causes, timing, and consequences of climate change on timescales ranging from decades to millennia
- Cause of aridity in the Great Basin and Western United States
- Influence of ocean temperatures on precipitation in Nevada
- Cave archives of past climate with sites in Nevada, Mexico, Central America, and elsewhere



Economic Geology Research Group



- **Dr. Andrew Martin**
- Assistant Professor
- School of Geoscience
- Email: andrew.martin@unlv.edu



Expertise

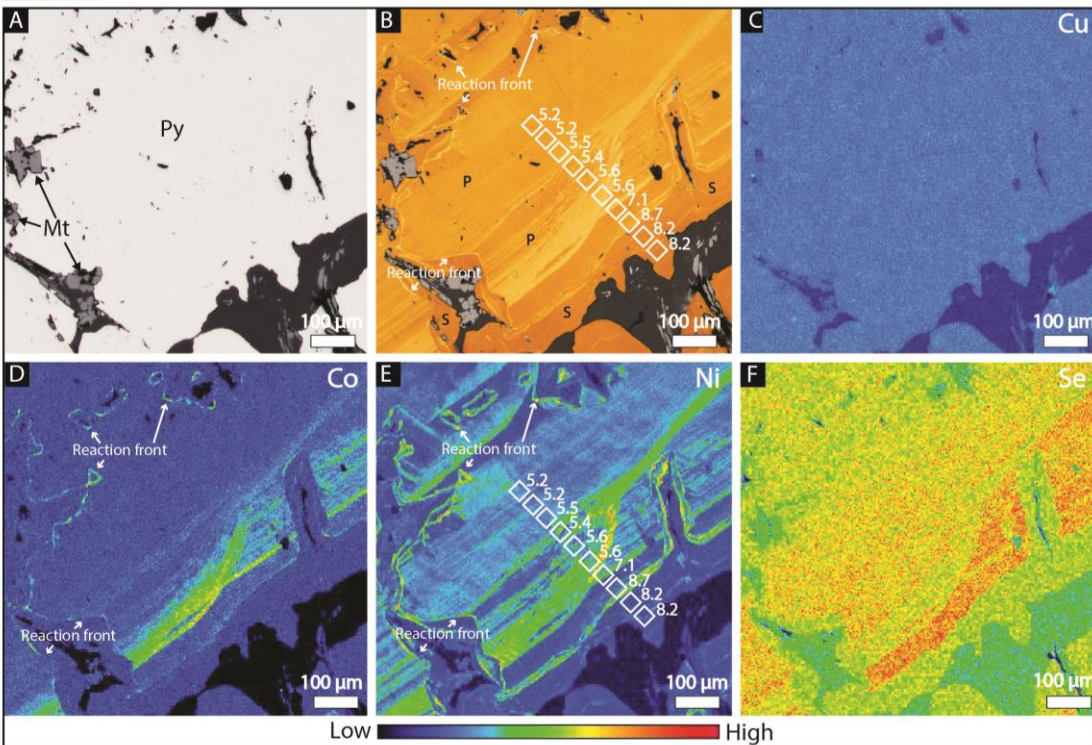
Geochemical Research: Studying hydrothermal mineral deposits using mineralogy, geochemistry and stable isotopes.

Temporal Tracking: Expertise in in situ microanalysis of sulfide minerals.

Integrated Methods: Combining mineral-scale observations with bulk-rock geochemistry, mineralogy and field mapping.

Specialization: Expertise in critical metals, volcanogenic massive sulfide (VMS), seafloor massive sulfide (SMS) deposits and Carlin-type Au mineralization.

Understanding evolving metal and sulfur sources in mineral deposits



- As minerals grow they record changes - just like rings on a tree.
- My research group combines mineralogy with geochemical and isotopic studies to understand how these changes relate to the formation of an ore deposit.
- Above is an example from deep below the ocean, this sample was collected from the Semenov vent field on the Mid-Atlantic Ridge.

Hydrology

Dr. Michael Nicholl

Department of Geoscience

Phone: (702) 895-4616

Email: michael.nicholl@unlv.edu

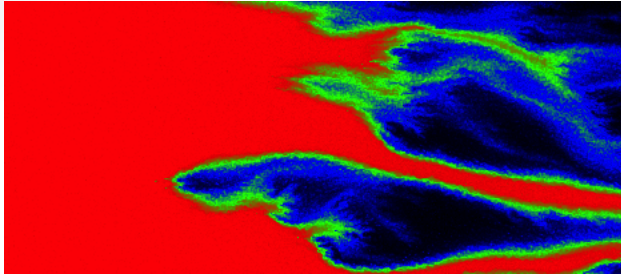
Expertise:

Unsaturated zone hydrology

Fractured rock hydrology

Environmental fluid mechanics

Fractured Rock Hydrology



False color image of a miscible displacement experiment in a single fracture



Water (blue) pooled above a fracture intersection



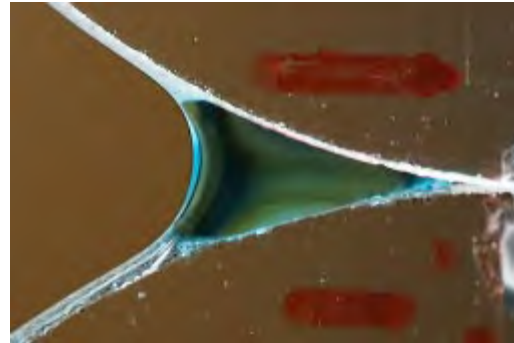
Field mapping of fracture networks
blue dye (right foreground) is from an infiltration test



Isothermal flow across a single rock fracture (matrix-to-matrix flow)

- ❑ Two-phase flow and transport in fractured rock
- ❑ Laboratory experimentation, field mapping, numerical simulations
- ❑ Contaminant transport, geothermal energy, enhanced petroleum recovery

Unsaturated Porous Media



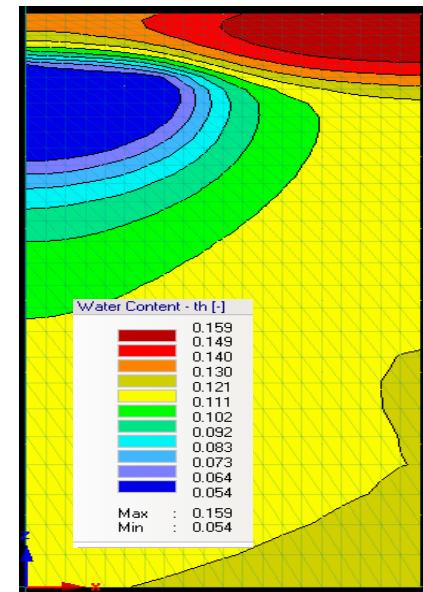
Millimeter-scale transport experiment



Hydraulic conductivity of a rock slab



Sampling Chloride as a proxy for root-driven horizontal flow



2D simulation of root-driven transport

- ❑ Challenging existing conceptual models for unsaturated and two-phase flow
- ❑ Design and execution of critical laboratory/field/numerical experiments

Environmental Geochemistry

Dr. Zach Perzan

- Assistant Professor
- Department of Geoscience
- Email: zach.perzan@unlv.edu
- Website: <https://zperzan.github.io/>

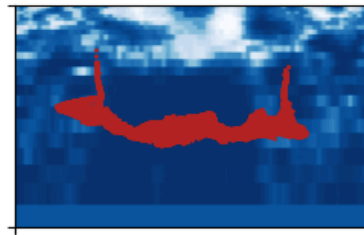
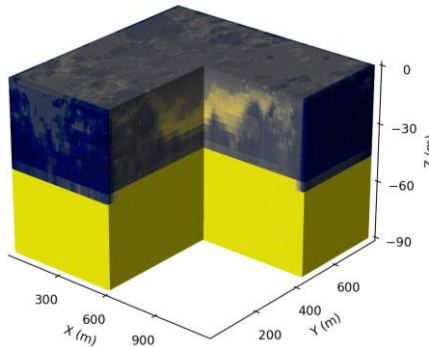
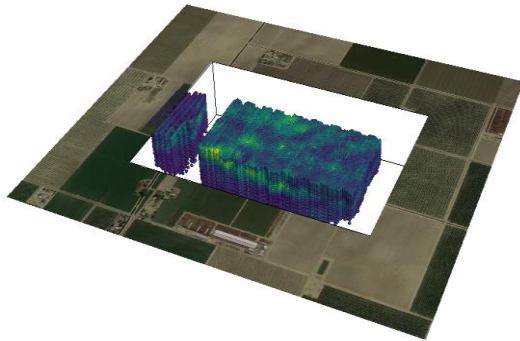
Expertise

- Environmental geochemistry
- Surface water-groundwater hydrology
- Machine learning
- Uncertainty quantification
- Managed aquifer recharge



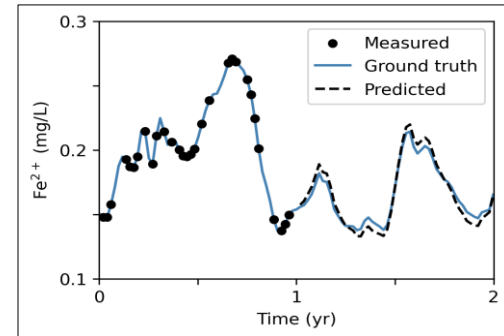
Understanding how hydrologic extremes (droughts and floods) impact water quality

Managed aquifer recharge



Geophysical surveys (top left) give us a 3D image of the distribution of sand, silt and clay within the subsurface (top right). We can then use hydrologic and geochemical models to understand how water (bottom left) and contaminants (bottom right) move through these sediments during a flood.

Floodplain biogeochemistry



Sensor arrays deployed in Colorado (top left) and Wyoming (top right) allow us to monitor sudden changes in water quality during floods. By pairing these with field experiments – such as tracer tests (bottom left) – we can develop data-driven water quality forecasts (bottom right).

Dryland ecology, hydrology and climate dynamics

Dr. Matthew Petrie

Assistant Professor

School of Life Sciences

ph: 702-895-5844

e: matthew.petrie@unlv.edu

Expertise:

Vegetation ecology and near-surface hydrology

Forest regeneration

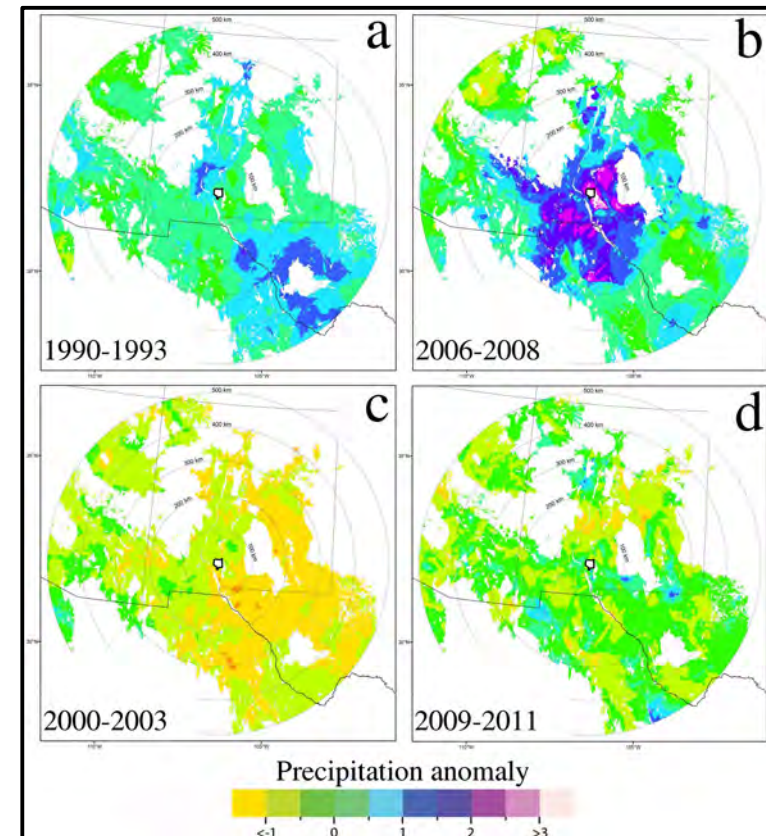
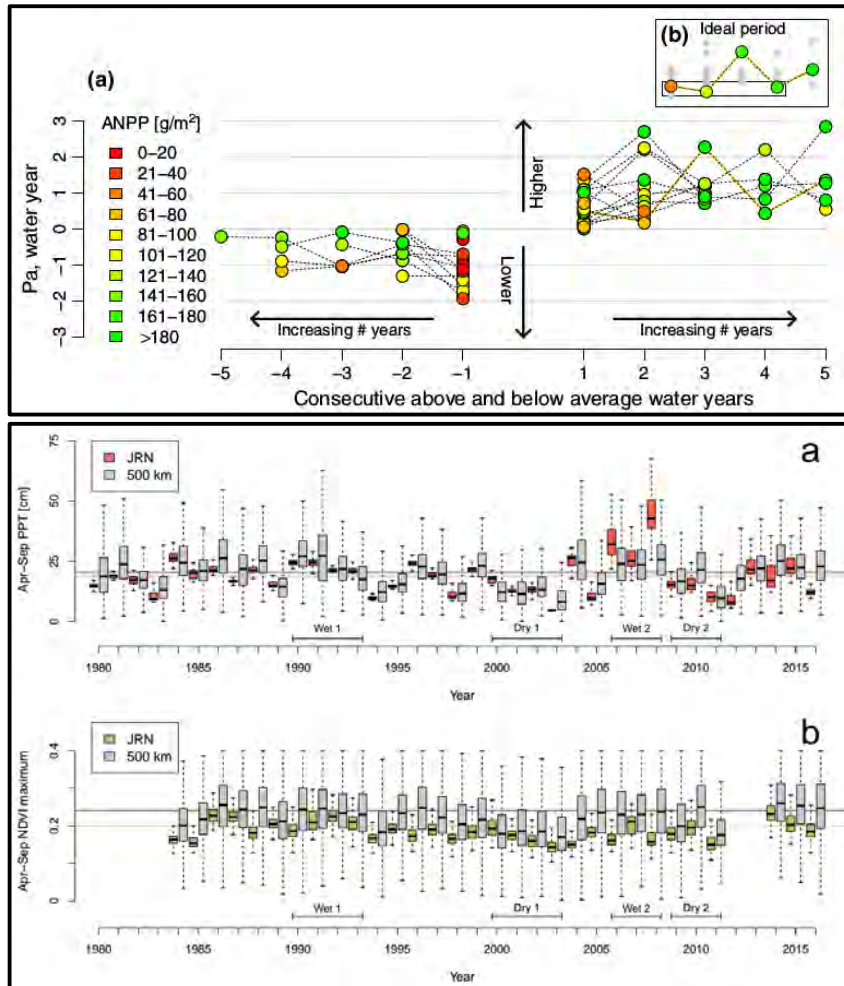
Climate dynamics and climate change forecasting

Extreme events

Landscape ecology

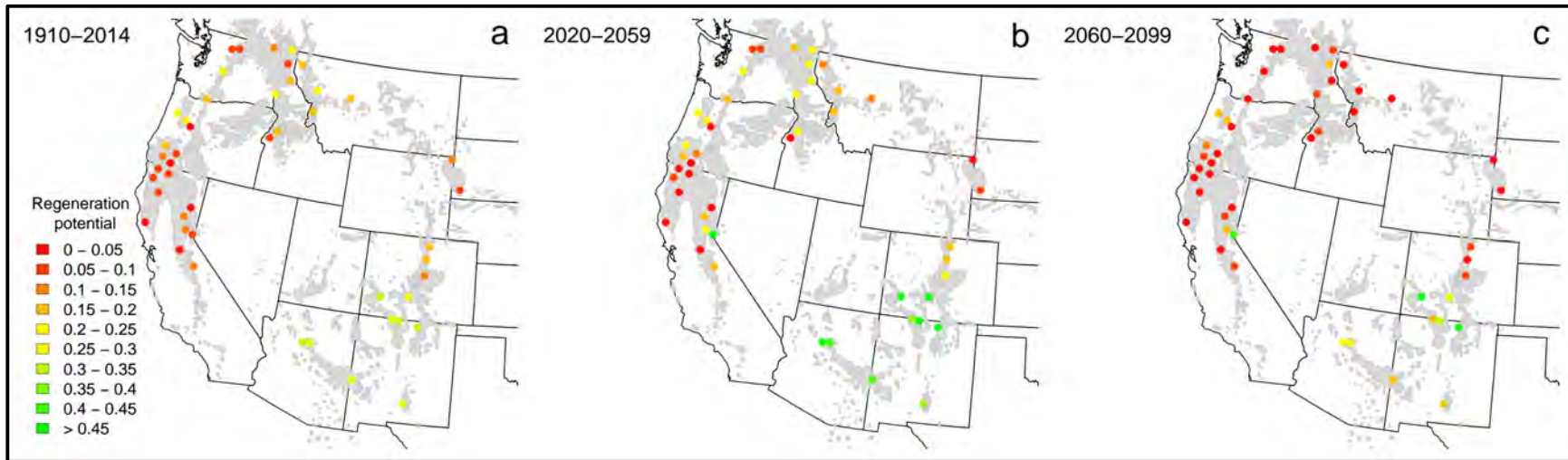
Manipulative field experimentation

Linking extreme climate events and ecological dynamics across space and time



Above: Disentangling locally- and regionally-observed ecological responses to multiyear high and low rainfall periods. Multiyear periods are a key component of understanding climate impacts to arid and semiarid regions. Our research focuses on the physical mechanisms that shape ecological responses, providing a foundation for understanding the effects of local and regional extreme events in a changing climate.

Forecasting climate change impacts



Above: Natural forest regeneration may declinest substantially throughout the western US in the 21st century. We study how climate, landscape properties, and the stress tolerance of tree populations will shape the future of western forests.

Left: Forecasts for increasing belowground extreme temperature events in a changing climate. We use downscaled climate model projections to forecast the increasing occurrence of moderate (0-σ) and very high (2-σ) extreme temperature events throughout multiple depths in the soil profile for ecosystems of the central and western US.

Dryland microbes and soil ecology

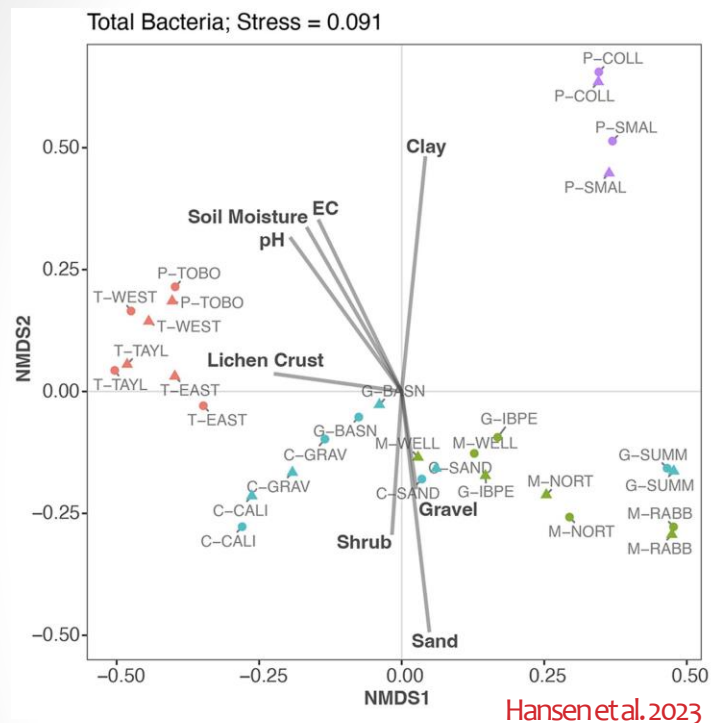
Dr. Nicole Pietrasiak

- Associate Professor of Sustainability in Arid Lands
- School of Life Sciences
- Email: nicole.pietrasiak@unlv.edu

Expertise

- Soil Microbiology and Ecology
- Biological Soil Crusts
- Phycology and Cyanobacteria/Algae Culture Collection
- Soil Science
- Dryland Ecology
- Biogeomorphology

In our lab we investigate what shapes the diversity, abundance, and distribution of desert microbes



Landscape and soil properties select for unique microbiomes



WHEN IS A LINEAGE A SPECIES? A CASE STUDY IN *MYXOCORYS* GEN. NOV. (SYNECHOCOCCALES: CYANOBACTERIA) WITH THE DESCRIPTION OF TWO NEW SPECIES FROM THE AMERICAS¹

Nicole Piatkowski²

Plant and Environmental Sciences Department, New Mexico State University, 945 College Drive, Las Cruces, New Mexico 88003, USA

Karina Osorio-Santol

Department of Comparative Biology, Faculty of Science, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Coyoacán, Distrito Federal 04510, México

Sergei Shalygin

Plant and Environmental Sciences Department, New Mexico State University, 945 College Drive, Las Cruces, New Mexico 88003, USA

Michael P. Martin

Department of Biology, John Carroll University, University Heights, Ohio 44118, USA

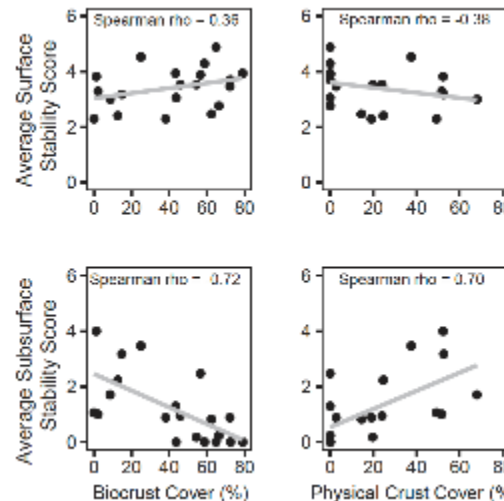
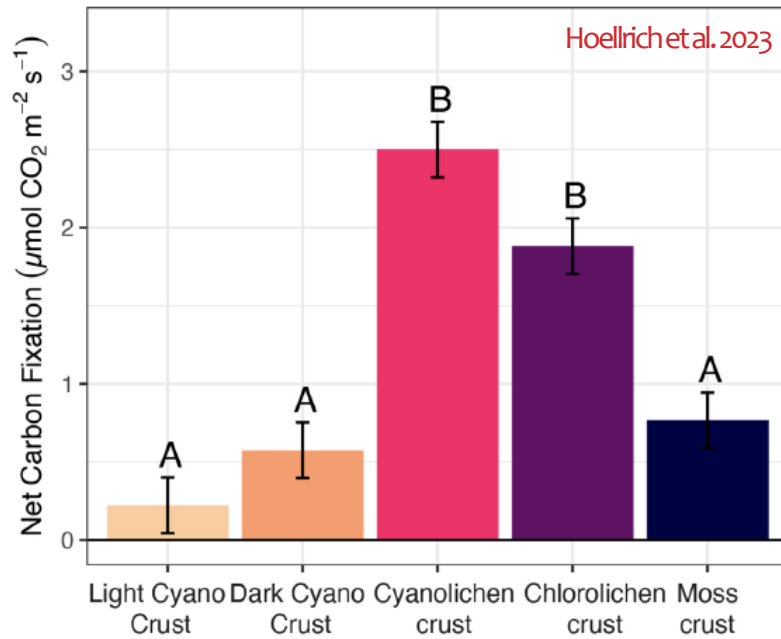
and Jeffrey R. Johansen

Department of Biology, John Carroll University, University Heights, Ohio 44118, USA
Department of Botany, Faculty of Sciences, University of South Bohemia, Branišovská 31, České Budějovice 370 05, Czech Republic



We also describe species and genera new to science and society.

And we identify and quantify the roles microbes play in dryland ecosystem functioning and soil health



Microbes are part of our dryland biodiversity. They prevent soil loss, increase soil fertility, control nutrient cycling, and contribute to carbon sequestration.

Dryland microbes are crucial for maintaining sustainable arid lands.

Stovall et al. 2023

Dr. Alison Sloat

Professor-in-Residence

College of Sciences

Email: alison.sloat@unlv.edu

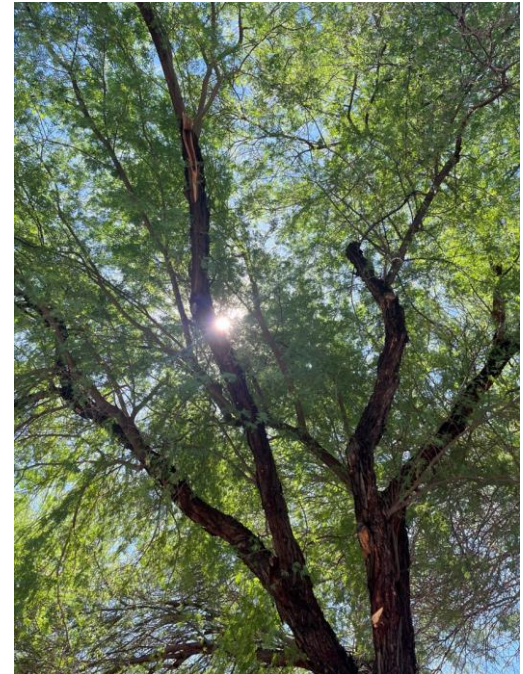


STEM Outreach Programs

- Las Vegas Urban Forest Center
- STEM Teacher Development Academy and Resident Scientists-in-Schools Program
- Rebel Science Camp
- Rebel STEM Explorers Summer Camp
- Science & Nature Discovery Summer Camp

Las Vegas Urban Forest Center

- Plant 3,000 trees in underserved areas of Clark County
- Educate 45 Arborists-in-Training
- Community tree planting education and workshops
- 5-years, \$5 million from USDA Forest Service



Want to help? Contact:

Dr. Alison Sloat

Professor-in-Residence

College of Sciences

Email: alison.sloat@unlv.edu



Aridland Population Biology and Evolution

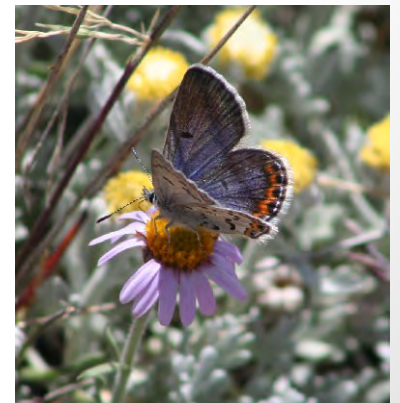
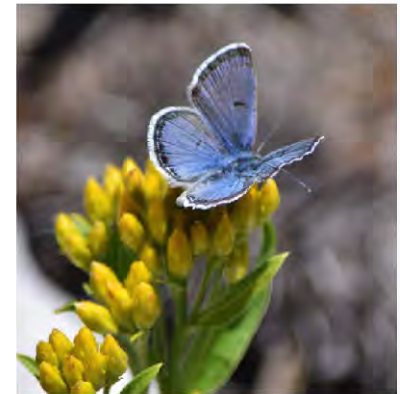
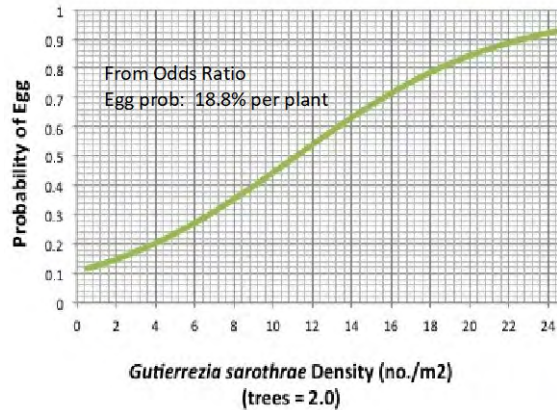
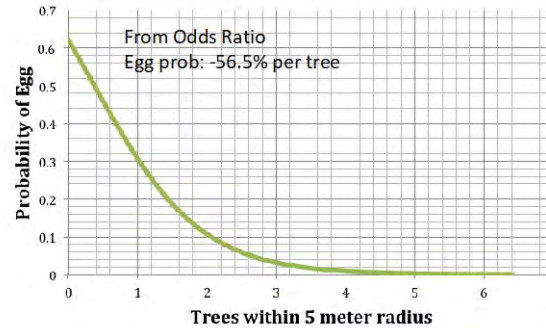
Dr. Daniel Thompson
Associate Professor
School of Life Sciences
Phone: 702-895-3269
Email: daniel.thompson@unlv.edu

Expertise

- Evolutionary genetics
- Population and evolutionary ecology
- Insect – plant interactions
- Conservation ecology - endemic insects
- Quantitative genetics, Phenotypic plasticity, and Developmental Reaction Norms
- Multivariate Statistical Analysis
- Animal movement, Habitat Selection, and Spatial ecology

Research on Larval Host Plant Selection of the Endangered Endemic Mt Charleston Blue Butterfly (*Icaricia shasta charlestonensis*) Informs Habitat Conservation and Restoration in Spring Mountains National Recreation Area

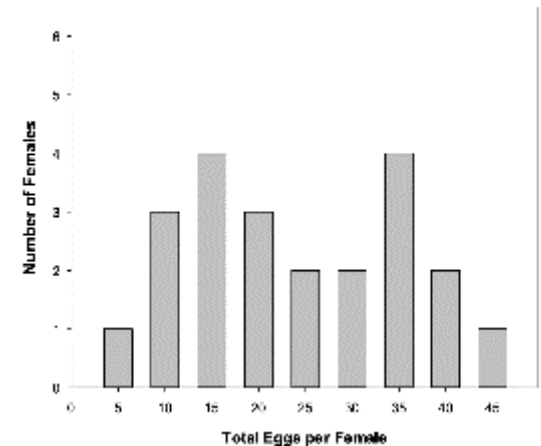
- Tree Density has a strong negative effect on female butterfly host plant selection and egg-laying (Logistic regression of egg occurrence versus density of bristlecone .pines).
- Tree encroachment on open slopes and ridges constricts butterfly reproduction– particularly on ridgelines with high quality butterfly habitat.
- Nectar plants such as *Gutierrezia sarothrae* have a positive effect on the likelihood of a female's selection of a larval host plant for egg deposition.
- Avoidance of trees and attraction to nectar determine a female butterfly's placement of eggs on larval host plants.
- Ongoing fieldwork investigates caterpillar (larva) growth, foodplant requirements, and interactions with mutualistic ants to further understand the essential characteristics of butterfly habitat. This new information is being used by the US Forest Service and the US Fish and Wildlife Service to guide conservation and management decisions in the Spring Mountains, Clark County, Nevada.



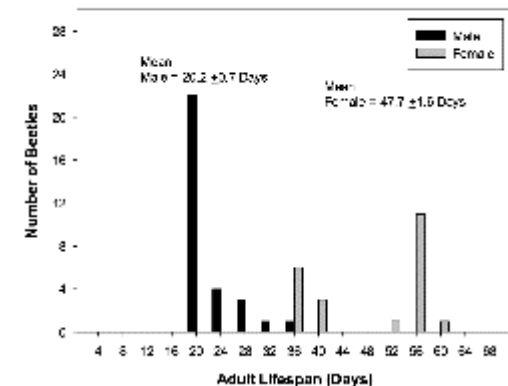
Ecological research on Giuliani's Dune Scarab Beetle (*Pseudocotalpa giulianii*), Big Dune, Nevada, --guiding management decisions of the B.L.M.

Giuliani's Dune Scarab Beetle (*Pseudocotalpa giulianii*) is a rare beetle endemic (known to occur only at) Big Dune and Lava Dune, Nye County, Nevada. Little is known about the beetle's life history, egg to adult stage development, larval food, and habitat requirements. Research conducted with Dr. Leslie DeFalco (USGS) in 2019 and 2020 has established:

- Adults do not feed, dwell in the sand, and emerge at sundown each evening for 3 weeks, late April – May
- Male beetles emerge from sand and fly every night for an average of 52.2 min to mate, while female beetles remain buried in sand after initial emergence and mating.
- Female beetles, on average, deposit one egg per day after mating.
- Female beetles have an average lifespan of 47.7 ± 1.6 days.
- Male beetles have an average lifespan of $20.2 \pm .7$ days.
- The longer female lifespan, their apparent cessation of emergence following mating, and their deposition of single eggs scattered through sand has important implications for the conservation of this rare species.
- Laboratory experiments have revealed that beetle larvae hatch within 2 – 3 weeks from eggs and develop at a slow rate with an estimated 2 to 3 years of growth prior to pupation and adult emergence. To date, feeding experiments indicate that dry plant debris scattered in the sand is an essential food source. Further experiments are being conducted to determine whether larvae feed on roots of desert plants and to measure energy storage in fat tissue that apparently fuels adult activity and mating.
- Research findings are informing Bureau of Land Management (BLM) decisions about managing recreational activity at Big Dune and restoring beetle habitat following disturbance by recreational off-road vehicles..



Total eggs per female beetle obtained in the laboratory, April 29 to June 12



Average lifespan for 30 male beetles and 22 female beetles, observed from April 19 to June 12 in the laboratory