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High Frequency Concurrent Measurements in Watershed and Impaired Estuary Reveal Coupled DOC and Decoupled Nitrate Dynamics

Gopal K. Mulukutla

University of New Hampshire, Durham, gopal.mulukutla@unh.edu

Wilfred Wollheim

University of New Hampshire, Durham

Joseph Salisbury

University of New Hampshire, Durham

Richard O. Carey


Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection

Thomas Gregory

University of New Hampshire

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Authors

Gopal K. Mulukutla, Wilfred Wollheim, Joseph Salisbury, Richard O. Carey, Thomas Gregory, and William H. McDowell

1 **High Frequency Concurrent Measurements in Watershed and**
2 **Impaired Estuary Reveal Coupled DOC and Decoupled Nitrate**
3 **Dynamics.**

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8 **Gopal K. Mulukutla¹, Wilfred M. Wollheim^{1,2}, Joseph E. Salisbury³,**
9 **Richard O. Carey⁴, Thomas K. Gregory³ and William H. McDowell²**

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12
13 ¹Earth Systems Research Center, University of New Hampshire, Durham, New
14 Hampshire, USA.

15
16 ²Department of Natural Resources and the Environment, University of New Hampshire,
17 Durham, New Hampshire, USA

18
19 ³Ocean Processes Analysis Laboratory, University of New Hampshire, Durham, New
20 Hampshire, USA

21
22 ⁴Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, Worcester, Massachusetts, USA
23

24 **Key Points:**

- 25 • Simultaneous water quality measurements in watershed and N-impaired estuary
26 show strong watershed control for estuarine DOC but complex coupling for nitrate.
27 • DOC exhibited near-conservative behavior in the estuary.
28 • For nitrate, watershed spatial distribution of sources and interaction with estuarine
29 internal process to produce complex response.

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31 **Corresponding author:** Gopal Mulukutla (gopal.mulukutla@unh.edu)
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37 **Abstract**

38 Rapid changes in land use, pollution inputs, and climate are altering the quantity, timing and
39 form of materials delivered from watersheds to estuaries. To better characterize these alterations
40 simultaneous measurements of biogeochemical conditions in watersheds and estuaries over a
41 range of times scales are needed. We examined the strength of watershed-estuarine
42 biogeochemical coupling using data of *in situ* measurements of nitrate, terrestrial dissolved organic
43 carbon (DOC) and chloride collected over a seven-month period in a nitrogen impaired estuary in
44 the northeastern US. The watershed was observed exerting strong control over concentrations of
45 terrestrially derived DOC in the estuary, attributable to relative homogeneity of watershed sources
46 derived from forested land use combined with relatively conservative behavior in estuarine waters.
47 Estuarine nitrate patterns were more complex, suggesting the influence of heterogeneous
48 watershed distribution of non-point and point sources and high reactivity of nitrate in the estuary.
49 Understanding estuarine biogeochemical patterns will be advanced through greater use of
50 simultaneous sub-hourly measurements of inflows, salinity and water quality estuaries and their
51 upstream watersheds.

52

53 **1.0 Introduction**

54 Estuaries are strongly influenced by inputs of freshwater, nutrients, and carbon from coastal
55 watersheds. The degree of influence is determined by several factors that can vary over space and
56 time, including magnitude and frequency of storms, estuarine residence time relative to watershed
57 area, the degree of anthropogenic activity, and consequent changes in land use composition (Arndt
58 et al., 2007; Pinckney et al., 2001; Salisbury et al., 2008; Swaney et al., 2008). Eutrophication of
59 estuarine waters due to N enrichment is increasing, causing many problems such as loss of
60 biodiversity, increased algal blooms, anoxic water, acceleration of species invasions, and shifts in
61 dominant biogeochemical pathways (Barbier et al., 2011; McClelland & Valiela, 1998; Smyth et al.,
62 2013; Wetz & Yoskowitz, 2013). Watershed inputs of DOC to coastal areas are also occurring,
63 potentially impacting light regimes and foodwebs (Balch et al., 2016). As a result, the ability of
64 estuaries to provide important ecosystem services is continuing to decline (Deegan et al., 2012;
65 Grabowski & Peterson, 2007).

66 Human activities alter the amount and timing of nutrient and organic matter inputs delivered to
67 estuaries (Bowen & Valiela, 2008). Both watershed drivers and estuarine responses are further
68 influenced by factors such as climate change and associated changes in temperature, sea levels,
69 wind patterns, and the hydrologic cycle (Bricker et al., 2008; Salisbury et al., 2009; Statham, 2012).
70 Increases in anthropogenic N and changes to organic matter fluxes are occurring in the watershed
71 due to expanding agriculture, urbanization, and associated land use change. Although much
72 anthropogenic N is retained in watersheds (Boyer et al., 2002) increased loading leads to increased
73 export through rivers and streams (Seitzinger & Kroeze, 1998). Estuaries modulate exports of DOC
74 (and other forms of carbon) with high *in situ* production rates, and spatial and temporal
75 heterogeneity (Bauer et al., 2013). This has resulted in studies that report near-conservative
76 behavior of DOC in some estuaries (Mantoura & Woodward, 1983; Vallino et al., 2005), non-
77 conservative behavior in some (McKenna, 2004), while laboratory studies show terrestrial DOC to

78 be highly reactive due to “salting out” or microbial degradation (Battin et al., 2009; Moran et al.,
79 1999; Schlesinger & Bernhardt, 2013). Furthermore, hydrologic conditions can strongly influence
80 the mobilization, transport, and retention of nutrients and carbon within watersheds (Kaushal et
81 al., 2014; Morse & Wollheim, 2014). Thus, with climate change, the controlling mechanisms of
82 estuarine conditions will also likely change.

83 Watershed-estuary coupling can occur continuously during periods of baseflow or
84 episodically during stormflow. An estuary responds to watershed and environmental drivers over
85 multiple temporal scales (Cloern & Nichols, 1985) (a) short duration driven by daylight or tides, (b)
86 storm event scale, driven by freshwater inflows lasting hours to weeks, (c) seasonal, due to changes
87 in precipitation, temperature, and watershed function, and (d) annual, due to longer term climate
88 oscillations and trends. Previous estuarine studies focused on seasonal or annual time scales that
89 combined infrequent observations of biogeochemical characteristics (e.g., weekly or monthly) with
90 finer temporal scale observations of inflows (Clair et al., 2013; Valiela & Bowen, 2002). However, a
91 focus on broader time scales limits understanding of estuarine responses at finer time scales
92 (Bergamaschi, Fleck, et al., 2012; Bergamaschi, Krabbenhoft, et al., 2012; Robins et al., 2018). For
93 example, during storms, patterns in N concentration exported from watersheds may exhibit
94 increase, decrease or remain chemostatic with flow depending watershed or time period (Godsey et
95 al., 2009). Estuarine storm response may or may not reflect watershed patterns due to complicated
96 circulation, stratification, or strong biological activity. Knowledge of these patterns often requires
97 simultaneous sub-daily measurements in both watershed and estuary.

98 The emergence of *in situ* sensor technologies capable of continuous biogeochemical
99 measurements provide opportunities to improve the understanding of watershed-estuary linkages
100 (Bergamaschi, Krabbenhoft, et al., 2012). Sensors can perform autonomous high temporal
101 frequency (sub-hourly) and long term (>3 months) measurements of key biogeochemical variables

102 including nitrate, phosphate, and dissolved organic carbon (DOC) via an optical proxy (fluorescent
103 dissolved organic matter, fDOM)(Downing et al., 2012), as well as classic water quality parameters
104 in watersheds (Carey et al., 2014; Saraceno et al., 2009) and marine waters (O'Boyle et al., 2014).
105 However, only a few studies have implemented concurrent watershed-estuary systems to study
106 biogeochemical coupling and its implications for estuarine conditions (Gilbert et al., 2013).

107 The objective of this study was to examine seasonal and storm event dynamics of estuarine
108 nitrate and DOC using simultaneous measurements of river and estuarine chemistry. We
109 conducted this study in Great Bay, New Hampshire, USA, and in the watershed of its largest
110 tributary, Lamprey River. This estuary system faces long-term land-use change and increasing
111 climate variability. We hypothesized that: a) storm-event watershed nitrate and DOC fluxes will
112 provide greater control on corresponding estuarine concentrations and that the estuary will show
113 minimal coupling during baseflow, b) due to the spatial homogeneity of watershed sources,
114 estuarine DOC will respond more to storm-event watershed DOC fluxes than estuarine nitrate to
115 nitrate fluxes, and c) for both nitrate and DOC, monitoring in one sub-watershed will not be fully
116 representative of variability observed in estuarine conditions.

117 **2.0 Study Site and Methods**

118 The Great Bay estuary is located in Northeastern USA (Figure 1). The estuary system consists of
119 nine major sub-watersheds formed by seven major tributaries (Table 1). The watershed (2651
120 km²) has a population of 400,000 people living in 55 urbanizing municipalities (Mills, 2009; P
121 Trowbridge et al., 2014; Phil Trowbridge, 2007). The estuarine system is strongly tidal with
122 relatively shallow morphology marked by limited vertical stratification (Short, 1992), a large
123 volume relative to inputs, and long baseflow residence time (13-20 days, Text S1, supporting
124 information). Great Bay is showing signs of eutrophication attributed mainly to nitrogen over-
125 enrichment from both point (32%) and non-point sources (68%) (PREP, 2013). Increased N loads
126 (42%) in recent years (Bresler, 2012; P. Trowbridge, 2010) have contributed to greater prevalence

127 of phytoplankton and nuisance macroalgae, and leading the US-EPA to list it as N-impaired with
128 regulations proposed such as expensive upgrades to waste water treatment plants (WWTP).
129 Increased storm activity in the region (Douglas et al., 2011) has also increased inputs of terrestrial
130 DOC and turbidity to coastal waters (Balch et al., 2016). Together, these changes have led to
131 reduced water clarity and light penetration, possibly contributing to an observed drastic reduction
132 in the spread of eelgrass, the estuary's cornerstone vegetation (Beem & Short, 2009). Focus of this
133 study is Great Bay proper, the largest sub-estuary in the estuarine system, and the Lamprey River
134 sub-watershed (Figure 1).

135 **2.1 Measurements**

136 Continuous, high frequency (every 30 minutes) measurements of nitrate, fDOM and
137 conductance/salinity were made using *in situ* sensors deployed simultaneously in the estuary and
138 its tributary, the Lamprey River (Figure 2). Sensors were deployed for one growing season (May -
139 November 2011). River flow data were obtained from a co-located discharge gage operated by the
140 US Geological Survey (#01073500 Lamprey River near Newmarket, NH). A linear regression
141 between weekly grab measurements (DOC, NO₃, and, Cl) and corresponding sensor variable (fDOM,
142 NO₃, specific conductance) was used to correct sensor measurements. Instantaneous watershed
143 fluxes were estimated at a given instant of time, $f(t)$ as:

$$144 \quad f(t) = C(t) * Q(t) \quad (2)$$

145 Where $C(t)$ is the measured concentration of the constituent, and $Q(t)$ is the flow across the
146 river at time instant t .

147 **2.3 Data Analysis Methods**

148 **Data pre-processing**

149 Individual time series variables were first quality controlled by removing outliers and
150 replacing them initially with an "NaN" (not a number). Missing data points were also identified

151 using an “NaN”. Segments of data with “NaNs” were then linearly interpolated to remove any
152 missing data and make the time series temporally continuous allowing the application of time
153 series techniques described below. Tidal influences on the time series of estuarine variables were
154 removed using a low-pass filter (Johnson et al., 2006). According to this procedure, the Fourier
155 transform of the signal was first computed. The amplitude of spectral frequencies higher than
156 1.375 cycles per day were zeroed to remove the dominant semi-diurnal component. The signal was
157 then reconstructed through an inverse Fourier transform. The reconstructed signal developed by
158 applying this technique contains only the weaker tidal frequencies along with any variability caused
159 by diel biological processing.

160 **Time series methods**

161 We applied *frequency dependent coherence*, (C ; $0 < C < 1$) a time series analysis technique, to
162 evaluate how estuarine concentrations (NO_3 , fDOM and Cl) vary over time in conjunction with a
163 related watershed variable (freshwater inflows; NO_3 , DOC and Cl concentration and fluxes). Given
164 two time series $u(t)$ and $v(t)$ *frequency dependent coherence* within a narrow band of frequency
165 ($\Delta\omega$) with center at ω_0 is given as (Menke & Menke, 2012)

$$166 \quad C_{uv}^2(\omega_0, \Delta\omega) = \frac{|\tilde{u}^*(\omega_0)\tilde{v}(\omega_0)|^2}{|\tilde{u}(\omega_0)|^2|\tilde{v}(\omega_0)|^2} \quad (2)$$

167 Where $\tilde{u}(\omega_0)$ and $\tilde{v}(\omega_0)$ are the Fourier transforms of $u(t)$ and $v(t)$, at frequency ω_0 , respectively,
168 and $\tilde{u}^*(\omega_0)$ is the Fourier transform of time reversed $u(t)$, at frequency ω_0 . The coherence profile is
169 constructed by applying Eq. (2) over the entire frequency range of a signal. Coherence values
170 reported here are denoted by subscripted variable \overline{C}_{E-R} , where overbar represents an average
171 coherence over a given time period, and E and R represent (filtered) estuarine constituent
172 concentration and watershed variable respectively.

173 **Storm Event Delineation**

174 We examined individual storm event patterns between estuarine concentrations and
175 watershed nutrient fluxes (hysteresis) to determine intra-storm watershed-estuary coupling.

176 These patterns are analogous to the concentration-discharge relationships observed in watersheds
177 (Carey et al., 2014; Evans & Davies, 1998). We analyzed 13 freshwater storm events for the
178 influence of freshwater discharge, DOC, and NO₃ fluxes on estuarine concentration patterns. River
179 flow data was obtained from a discharge gage operated by the US Geological Survey (USGS
180 01073500 Lamprey River near Newmarket, NH).

181 Each storm was partitioned by 3 points: the start of the storm (beginning of rising limb),
182 peak flow (beginning of falling limb), and end of the storm (termination of falling limb). The
183 beginning of a storm event was identified based on a minimum flow increase of 1.5 m³/s (see
184 Figure 3). The end of storm was determined by identifying the earliest point since the beginning of
185 a storm that was within 0.5 m³/s of observed baseflow. Some storm events constituted two or
186 more high flow points; a consequence of a lull followed by more precipitation. For this study such
187 events were identified as a single storm event with highest among the multiple high flows identified
188 as peak storm flow. Also, the beginning of the increase in flow identified for the earliest peak and
189 the end of the flow identified for the latest peak were selected as the beginning and end of the
190 storm event respectively (Figure 3).

191 Storm characteristics examined include: overall estuarine concentration response
192 (increase/decrease), rotational pattern (clockwise/anti-clockwise/multi-loop), and degree of
193 coupling between watershed and estuary where degree of storm event-scale coupling is defined
194 using a power-law function, $P = b F^\alpha$, where P is estuarine constituent concentration, F is watershed
195 flux of a given constituent, b and α are fitted parameters (Basu et al., 2010; Godsey et al., 2009). We
196 applied this to individual rising and falling limbs of storm-event watershed inputs. An α (estuarine
197 responsiveness) that is positive indicates increased estuarine concentrations resulting from storm
198 inputs. A zero or non-significant exponent indicates no coupling, while a negative exponent
199 indicates declining concentrations resulting from storm inputs.

200 3 Results

201 3.1 Watershed and Estuarine Biogeochemical Patterns

202 Estuarine fDOM tracks well with watershed DOC fluxes (Figure 2a), with a pattern of high
203 concentrations observed during high runoff in spring and autumn (~60 quinine sulfate equivalent
204 parts per billion (QSE-ppb)) and lower concentrations during summer low flows (~30 QSE-ppb).
205 Terrestrial DOC is the major portion of observed fDOM response (4.04 QSE-ppb recorded at salinity
206 of 32 psu). Through the rest of this discussion fDOM will be used interchangeably with “terrestrial
207 DOC”. Each storm event peak in DOC flux is followed closely by a peak in fDOM. Watershed NO₃
208 fluxes and estuarine NO₃ concentrations (Figure 2b) also show high levels in late spring and fall
209 (0.1-0.2 mg NL⁻¹), and lows in the summer (<0.05 mg NL⁻¹). But in contrast to fDOM, estuarine NO₃
210 concentrations show less pronounced response to storm-event flows (Figure 2b).

211 Partitioning response time scales provided by coherence analysis allows insights into
212 watershed-estuary coupling. *Frequency dependent coherence* response of each estuarine
213 constituent (Cl, fDOM, NO₃ concentrations) was examined by pairing initially with watershed
214 discharge (Figure 4a) and then with respective watershed concentrations (Figure 4b) and flux
215 (Figure 4c). Given that river discharge varies over several orders of magnitude while
216 concentrations of most constituents are less variable (Godsey et al., 2009; Kirchner & Neal, 2013),
217 we would expect that coherence between estuarine concentrations and watershed fluxes would be
218 stronger than coherence between estuary and watershed concentrations

219 Over the study period using time scales greater than one day the average coherence of
220 estuarine constituent concentrations was highest when related to watershed discharge (Table 3)
221 with all three constituents exhibiting similar levels of coherence ($\bar{C}_{NO_3-Q} = 0.21$, $\bar{C}_{fDOM-Q} = 0.22$,
222 $\bar{C}_{Cl-Q} = 0.17$). Coherence was much lower when relating estuarine concentrations with watershed
223 concentrations ($\bar{C}_{NO_3-NO_3} = 0.05$, $\bar{C}_{fDOM-DOC} = 0.09$, $\bar{C}_{Cl-Cl} = 0.11$)(Figure 4b). Coherence

224 between estuarine DOC and Cl and corresponding watershed DOC and Cl fluxes were similar to
225 those when using discharge, while coherence between estuarine NO₃ and watershed NO₃ fluxes was
226 lower than when using discharge ($\bar{C}_{NO_3-NO_3flux} = 0.13$, $\bar{C}_{fDOM-DOCflux} = 0.21$, $\bar{C}_{Cl-Clflux} = 0.16$).

227 Over long time scales (>100 days) coherences were high between estuarine fDOM, NO₃, and
228 Cl and corresponding watershed constituent fluxes (Figure 4c, $\bar{C}_{NO_3-NO_3flux} = 0.99$,
229 $\bar{C}_{fDOM-DOCflux} = 0.95$, $\bar{C}_{Cl-Clflux} = 0.73$) indicating the predominant role of freshwater inputs over
230 seasonal time scales. Likewise, coherences between concentrations and fluxes over short time
231 scales (< 6 days) are very low ($\bar{C}_{NO_3-NO_3flux} = 0.07$, $\bar{C}_{fDOM-DOCflux} = 0.11$, $\bar{C}_{Cl-Clflux} = 0.07$)
232 suggesting the watershed has minimal influence over estuarine variability over these time scales.

233 At intermediate time scales (6 - 30 days), a time span that encompasses storm flows (Table
234 1), the response of estuarine concentrations to watershed fluxes for all three constituents was
235 observed to be intermediate in magnitude. Coherence between estuarine concentrations and
236 watershed flux was much greater than when using watershed concentration across all time scales
237 (Figure 4b) and were similar or lower than when using discharge (Figure 4a).

238 When using watershed fluxes, NO₃ coherence was lower than DOC or Cl across all time
239 scales, and especially during intermediate scales (Figure 4c). For both Cl and DOC, there is a broad
240 peak approached by around 7 days (Figure 4c) with declines occurring around 20 days. In contrast,
241 NO₃ coherence also peaks around 7-9 days but the decline occurs much earlier and rapidly at
242 around 15 days. Average coherence during this period is higher for DOC than for NO₃
243 ($\bar{C}_{fDOM-DOCflux} = 0.67$, $\bar{C}_{NO_3-NO_3flux} = 0.38$). The observed response at intermediate time scale is
244 a collective indication of watershed inputs from all storm events.

245 These results suggest that over the course of the year flows drive variability in estuarine
246 concentrations, while changes in watershed concentrations are secondary. Although coherence

247 with discharge was similar or better when using watershed fluxes, we chose constituent fluxes as
248 the basis for further study because in principle they should provide better coherence and because
249 time scales where this is not true may be informative.

250 **3.2 Storm Event Patterns**

251 In our examination of storm-event patterns in estuarine concentration Vs. watershed fluxes,
252 some hysteresis naturally occurs due to the spatial separation between watershed and estuarine
253 monitoring locations. Consequently, the peak/minimum in the estuarine variable occurs after the
254 peak/minimum in the watershed variable. We did not correct the data for such lags. However,
255 where it could be characterized lags were found to not affect our results (section S2, supporting
256 information).

257 The hysteresis response observed over the whole period of deployment (Figure 5) the
258 estuarine response is a superposition of loops organized by season and estuary responding
259 positively to increased watershed fluxes. In contrast, individual storm response is complex as
260 shown in hysteresis plots in the supporting information(Figures S1-S13). Storms generally modify
261 estuarine conditions from the pre-storm state for each constituent (Figure 2), but the strength of
262 response varies with constituent, storm size and time of year. Initial conditions, just prior to a
263 storm-event, for nitrate and DOC show a strong positive correlation with watershed fluxes, while Cl
264 shows a strong negative correlation (Figure 6)(DOC: $R^2=0.72$; NO_3 : $R^2=0.87$; Cl: $R^2=0.79$, all
265 $p<0.05$).

266 Storms generally tend to increase fDOM and NO_3 and reduce Cl (salinity), in the estuary.
267 fDOM and Cl hysteresis patterns (Table 2) show consistent, anti-clockwise and clockwise response,
268 respectively, with only two low intensity storms showing changes in rotational pattern. NO_3
269 hysteresis patterns are more complex, with 6 of 13 storms recording a multi-loop pattern (Figure
270 5c and Figures S1-S13, supporting information). Responsiveness (α) along the rising limb did not

271 show a significant relationship with storm runoff ($R^2 = 0.05$; $p > 0.05$), precipitation amount ($R^2 =$
272 0.12 ; $p > 0.05$) or rising limb duration ($R^2 = 0.07$; $p > 0.05$) (Figure 7a-c). However, all but two
273 storms show a net concentrating response on the rising limb ($\bar{\alpha}_{NO_3-RL}^+ = 0.254$, $p < 0.05$) and a weak
274 response on the falling limb. Relatively large storms during late summer elicited only a small
275 estuarine NO_3 response, despite the occurrence of two relatively intense events (e.g. storms 6 and 9
276 relative to storm 1 and 3, Table 2). Small storms of relatively short duration (6 - 7 days) elicited in
277 multi-loop patterns. Several storms (storms 2, 6, 7 and 13) showed a small initial pulse in estuarine
278 NO_3 concentration at the beginning of the rising limb.

279 For fDOM the responsiveness for rising limb (α_{DOC-RL}) showed an increase with duration
280 ($R^2 = 0.61$; $p < 0.05$), total storm event discharge ($R^2 = 0.50$; $p < 0.05$), and total precipitation
281 amounts ($R^2 = 0.37$; $p < 0.05$) (Figure 8a - c) with higher responsiveness for larger storms.
282 Corresponding results for falling limb of the storm-event were weaker. The hysteresis patterns of
283 Cl are nearly inverse those of fDOM, (Figure 5). Five storm events (storm 2, 6, 10, 12 and 13)
284 showed slightly increasing salinity along the rising limb ($\alpha_{Cl-RL} > 0$) (Figure S2, S6, S10, S12 and S13).
285 Estuarine fDOM for the same storms showed slight dilution with increasing DOC fluxes ($\alpha_{DOC-RL} < 0$).
286 The responsiveness patterns for Cl is weaker (Figure 9), but clearly the opposite of fDOM response.

287 **4 Discussion**

288 **4.1 Watershed Control of Estuarine DOC**

289 Past studies in watersheds have shown that constituent concentration vs. discharge
290 hysteresis occurs due to preferential delivery (source or transport limitation) of water and
291 nutrients (Camporese et al., 2014; Dusek & Vogel, 2016; Lloyd et al., 2016; Phillips, 2003).
292 Complicated multi-loop patterns have also been attributed to complex catchment response
293 (Williams, 1989). Strong fDOM responsiveness observed with duration of rising limb of storm
294 hydrograph, increased runoff, and precipitation, and combined with a weaker response on the
295 falling limb suggests that watershed-estuary connectivity is similar to hydrologic connectivity

296 observed between watershed, and a headwater stream or river (Kaller et al., 2015; Nippgen et al.,
297 2015). Counter to general patterns, some smaller storms resulted in increased Cl and dilution of
298 fDOM. Elevated influx of ocean water that counter increases in freshwater of terrestrial DOC inputs
299 can cause such a dynamic (Huang et al., 2014). Also, the changing quality of DOC exported from
300 watersheds can vary over storm events causing changes in the fDOM response (Larsen et al., 2015).
301 However these factors were not of sufficient magnitude to confound the overall coherence
302 response. Hysteresis analysis demonstrated the strong influence of watershed over estuarine DOC
303 conditions over storm-event time scales (Figure 5, Table 2).

304 DOC in both freshwaters and estuaries is derived mainly from forests and wetland (Buffam
305 et al., 2001; Creed et al., 2003). The Lamprey River sub-watershed (21% of total watershed area)
306 consists of 82% forest and wetlands, compared to 74% for the whole watershed (Table 1).
307 Although DOC concentrations in northeastern watersheds increase with discharge, their variability
308 is smaller than the orders of magnitude variation observed in discharge (Raymond & Saiers, 2010).
309 Indeed, the coherence between estuarine fDOM and discharge was just as strong as when using
310 DOC fluxes. Which leads us to conclude terrestrial DOC variability captured by monitoring one sub-
311 watershed was sufficient to explain the overall dynamics of DOC in the estuary, including inputs
312 from unmonitored areas. As a result, watershed DOC exports may be sufficiently well predicted by
313 commonly used, less intensive methods combining continuous flow and infrequent grab
314 measurements.

315 Factors that increase runoff from watersheds will also increase DOC exported to coastal zones.
316 This suggests that greater watershed-estuary coupling will occur in the future where more frequent
317 extreme events are predicted to occur (Hayhoe et al., 2007). More recently, reports indicate that
318 terrestrial DOC is already increasing in coastal oceans in response to changing storm patterns
319 (Balch et al., 2016). Impacts of higher fDOM in estuaries and coastal ocean include increased light

320 attenuation and altered food webs (Traving et al., 2017). In Great Bay, eel grass has been in decline
321 in recent years (Beem & Short, 2009). Among the hypotheses attributed to this decline is a greater
322 frequency of light limitation due to higher fDOM, similar to estuaries elsewhere (Ganju et al., 2014).
323 Which suggests the changing role of watershed DOC fluxes, along with other interacting factors (e.g.
324 suspended sediment flux and resulting turbidity) should be considered in coastal management.

325 **4.2.Conservative Behavior of Terrestrial DOC in the Estuary**

326 DOC and Cl coherence response is very similar in the time scale of 1-180 days Hysteresis data
327 provides more evidence of this similarity. Estuarine fDOM response is similar albeit nearly inverse
328 storm event chloride (Figures 5). The inverse pattern for Cl is expected when behavior is assumed
329 to be conservative because chloride in the estuary should decline during storms (since more
330 freshwater with less Cl than in the estuary), while fDOM in the estuary should increase (since more
331 freshwater with more DOC than in the estuary). The fact that chloride is conservative, and the
332 symmetrical and inverse behavior of fDOM over the 1-180 day time scale strongly suggests that
333 fDOM behaves in a (near-) conservative way. This behavior may be explained by the presence of
334 simultaneous sources and sinks leading to minimal turnover within the estuary (Mantoura &
335 Woodward, 1983) or by the removal of specific components of the DOC pool (Raymond & Spencer,
336 2014).

337 Conservative behavior of terrestrial DOC has been observed in a freshwater coastal river
338 network of New England (Wollheim et al., 2015) as well as in larger North American river
339 networks, unless there are long residence-time features in surface waters, such as large lakes or
340 reservoirs (Hanley et al., 2013). Because of relatively little transformation of terrestrial DOC in the
341 estuary, combined with the importance of transport limitation for riverine carbon transport (Bauer
342 et al., 2013) much of this DOC may eventually make its way to the coastal ocean, as observed in the
343 Gulf of Maine where its fate and consequence remain poorly understood (Balch et al., 2016).

344 **4.3 Complex Behavior of Estuarine NO₃**

345 In the Lamprey R. watershed, suburban and agricultural land-cover, a major non-point
346 source of nitrate (Wollheim et al., 2005) is 16% within this sub-watershed, and at 22 % in the
347 whole watershed. Further, anthropogenic land uses are concentrated in several of the sub-
348 watersheds (Table 1 and Figure 1) creating heterogeneity of inputs relative to the hydrodynamic
349 circulation within the estuary. As a result, non-point N sources dominate annual loads, of which a
350 substantial portion is exported during storm events, whereas baseflow is dominated by point N
351 sources (PREP, 2013). Over seasonal time scales, nitrate's coherence response is similar to that of
352 DOC and Cl. This may due to watershed (baseflow) influence on estuarine conditions and the
353 predominance of point-sources over these time scales. This could also be due to the simple
354 coincidence of the periods of high and low biological activity that leads to increased sources and
355 reduced uptake occurring simultaneously in terrestrial, freshwater, and estuarine ecosystems.
356 Monitoring multiple growing seasons will allow more insight into these patterns.

357 If estuarine nitrate were to behave like in river systems, point-source dominant baseflow
358 patterns would lead to dilution during storm events (Colombo et al., 2004; Jiang et al., 2014). If
359 non-point inputs dominate, then NO₃ concentrations would increase (Feinson et al., 2016). NO₃
360 concentrations generally increase during storms compared to pre-storm conditions, unlike Cl which
361 exhibits dilution. This is an important pattern as it suggests that watershed non-point sources
362 override any dilution effect of point-source (WWTP) and NO₃ uptake in watershed and estuary.
363 Further evidence to this effect can be observed in the small initial pulse of nitrate observed during
364 four events that has also been reported in the watershed (Carey et al., 2014), possibly a small
365 signature of non-point source inputs from developed areas downstream of the watershed
366 monitoring station. Thus, non-point sources are a significant control of estuarine nitrate, just as it
367 is for estuarine fDOM with watershed DOC.

368 Direct point-source inputs to the estuary likely do not vary considerably during storm
369 events because of the absence of major combined sewer overflows in this watershed (NHDES,
370 2009). However, hydrodynamics may change during freshwater pulses (Zorndt et al., 2012) so the
371 relative importance of point and non-point sources from different parts of the watershed may
372 confound the estuarine signal. This also is apparent in the coherence response, where storm-event
373 time scale coherence between watershed inputs and estuarine nitrate is greatly reduced, when
374 compared with fDOM and Cl. This rapid dissipation of (the monitored) watershed NO_3 compared to
375 terrestrial DOC signal in estuary, has been observed elsewhere (Mooney & McClelland, 2012).
376 Unraveling causes behind this divergence in NO_3 (compared to DOC and Cl) is centrally important
377 for management, as it would suggest a need to focus on reducing point or non-point sources, or
378 alternatively, develop a better understanding the internal fate of estuarine NO_3 .

379 Estuaries are thought to be important net transformers of nitrate along the continuum from
380 terrestrial uplands to the open ocean (Galloway et al., 2003; S. Seitzinger et al., 2006). Net NO_3
381 removal during individual storm events could occur because of assimilation by macrophytes or
382 algae, or via denitrification (Giblin et al., 2010; Kalnejais et al., 2007). The minimal response of NO_3
383 observed during intense late-summer storm events may be a result of internal estuarine processes
384 resulting from warmer water (Hou et al., 2012; Ogilvie et al., 1997) (Figure 5c). The effectiveness of
385 removal of watershed inputs will vary depending on distance traveled from location of watershed
386 input and estuarine measurement location. In addition, catchment characteristics that contribute
387 to the quantity and timing of storm flows exported from watersheds may also play a role in the
388 estuarine response. Geomorphology and basin geometry form a control on the shape and peak
389 timing of storm hydrographs (Sólyom, 2004). Whereas, storm-event constituent concentrations are
390 influenced by the spatial distribution of source material (Walling & Webb, 1980), leading to the
391 formation of hotspots of reactivity, that play an important role in processing of nitrogen in river
392 networks (Mineau et al., 2015). It is likely that similar modifications also occur in estuaries. These

393 observations, taken together with the coherence response suggest that nitrate is spatially complex
394 and its variability not well-predicted by the monitored watershed inputs, in contrast to terrestrial
395 DOC discussed previously.

396 **5.0 Conclusions**

397 The use of simultaneous watershed-estuary measurements is a potentially powerful way to
398 enhance understanding of estuarine conditions. It was exemplified here using continuous time
399 series data and application of unique analysis techniques to examine temporal signatures of
400 variability in estuarine nitrate and DOC and in the context of their watershed delivery mechanisms.
401 Watershed control of nitrate and DOC was found to be strong in the baseflow-dominant seasonal
402 and longer time scales. But strong differences were revealed in intermediate, storm-event time
403 scales, with DOC exhibiting stronger connectivity with the watershed, and nitrate showing complex
404 patterns.

405 While, the DOC behavior was attributable to the relatively homogenous distribution of
406 sources, leading to near conservative behavior over the 6-180-day time scale, a combination of
407 factors led to the complex behavior of nitrate. Among them, sporadic distribution of sources, point-
408 source dominant baseflow, non-point source dominant rapid depletion during storm events, and
409 the spatially-variable highly reactive NO_3 interacting with estuarine assimilatory and dissimilatory
410 processes. Due to this homogenous nature of DOC sources, spatially limited but representative
411 monitoring of DOC would be sufficient to capture its dynamics in the estuary. However, for nitrate,
412 automated, appropriately scaled, sensor-based monitoring would be essential to meet the spatial
413 resolution necessary in this watershed, and other impaired watersheds, where human activities
414 have resulted in the formation of a heterogenous patches of sources and sinks. Such monitoring
415 programs would need to be integrated with estuarine hydrodynamic models (Ganju et al., 2016)
416 with input of high resolution data of multiple elements (here DOC, Cl, and NO_3) to understand the
417 spatially and temporally complex patterns (e.g. Testa et al., 2014). With human and climate driven

418 alterations of coastal ecosystems continuing to occur automated, simultaneous watershed-estuary
419 biogeochemical measurements are essential, not only to develop targeted and effective, nutrient-
420 management activities but also to understand and predict climate-driven changes to exports of
421 nutrients and carbon to the coastal waters.

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429

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Figure and Table Captions

Figure 1 Map of Great Bay watershed showing land use, wastewater treatment plants (WWTP), sub-watersheds, sub-estuaries and water quality monitoring stations. Refer to Table 1 for summary land-use statistics.

Figure 2. (a) Time series of estuarine fDOM and watershed DOC fluxes from the Lamprey River in 2011. fDOM is reported in quinine sulfate equivalents parts per billion units (QSE ppb). **(b)** Time series of estuarine nitrate concentrations and watershed nitrate fluxes. Filtered signal refers to removal of tide dominant frequencies.

Figure 3: Discharge hydrograph for the Lamprey River, with points identifying storms. Red markers are beginning or end of storm, and green markers represent the peak flow during a storm event. Additional variations in flow observed during summer dry periods were attributed to water releases done in an upstream reservoir as part of a construction and maintenance project.

Figure 4 *Frequency dependent coherence* between estuarine NO₃, fDOM and chloride with, (a) watershed discharge, (b) respective watershed concentrations (NO₃, fDOM and chloride), and (c) respective watershed fluxes (NO₃, DOC and chloride). Increasing time scales are from right to left with some highlighted.

Figure 5 Hysteresis patterns between estuarine concentrations and watershed fluxes for storm events between April and November 2011 **(a)** DOC, **(b)** Cl, **(c)** NO₃. and **(d)** inset plot showing NO₃ response to less intense storms. Storm events are indicated at the beginning of each storm as per their description in Table 2.

Figure 6 Relationship between baseflow watershed fluxes just prior to beginning of a storm event and corresponding estuarine concentration (a) NO₃ (b) estuarine fDOM and watershed DOC, and (c) Chloride.

Figure 7. Relationship between estuarine responsiveness (α) for NO₃ with (a) storm event duration (b) total storm runoff (c) total storm precipitation.

Figure 8. Relationship between estuarine responsiveness (α) for fDOM with (a) storm event duration (b) total storm runoff (c) total storm precipitation.

Figure 9. Relationship between estuarine responsiveness (α) for Cl with (a) storm event duration (b) total storm runoff (c) total storm precipitation.

Table 1: Land use statistics for the Great Bay watershed and its major sub-watersheds

Table 2. Storm characteristics and patterns between estuarine and watershed NO₃, terrestrial DOC and Cl for 13 storm events monitored.

Table 3: Average coherence values over time scales larger than a day .

Table 1: Land use statistics for the Great Bay watershed and its major sub-watersheds

Watershed	Total Area km²	Developed Land (km²) (%)	Agricultural Land (km²) (%)	Forests and Wetlands (km²) (%)	Water (km²) (%)	Remarks
Great Bay	2652.5	369.9(14.0)	202.5(7.6)	1976.6 (74.5)	103.4 (3.9)	Whole watershed
Bellamy River	87.9	16.7 (19.0)	8.7 (9.8)	58.2 (66.2)	4.4 (5.0)	
Cocheco River	479.8	74.4 (15.5)	34.5 (7.2)	359 (74.8)	12 (2.5)	
Lamprey River	555.0	55.8 (10.1)	32.7 (5.9)	456.3 (82.2)	10.3 (1.9)	Sub-watershed monitored in this study
Oyster River	79.1	17.7(22.4)	9.1 (11.5)	50.5 (63.9)	1.8 (2.3)	
Salmon Falls River	852.6	84.5 (9.9)	57.8 (6.8)	686.1 (80.5)	24.2 (2.8)	
Squamscott/Exeter River	330.6	47.7 (14.4)	40.1 (12.1)	239 (72.3)	3.9 (1.2)	
Winnicut River	48.1	14.0 (29.2)	5.2 (10.8)	28.3 (58.7)	0.7 (1.4)	
Great Bay Drainage	70.6	10.6 (15.0)	6.7 (9.5)	30.3 (43.0)	23 (32.5)	Direct drainage to Great Bay proper
Lower Piscataqua Drainage	147.4	48.5 (32.9)	7.7 (5.2)	67.9 (46.0)	23.3 (15.8)	Direct drainage to Piscataqua River

Table 2. Storm characteristics and patterns between estuarine and watershed NO₃, terrestrial DOC and Cl for 13 storm events monitored..

						Estuary-fDOM Vs Watershed DOC fluxes					Estuary NO ₃ Vs. Watershed NO ₃ fluxes					Estuary Cl Vs. Watershed Cl Fluxes
Storm No	Begin Date (mm-dd)	Storm Duration (days)	Mean Flow (m ³ /s)	Total Storm Vol. (m ³ /10 ³)	Total Precip. ^c (mm)	Rising Limb fit, α ^z	p-value	Falling Limb fit, α ^z	p-value	Hyst. Pattern ^a	Rising Limb fit, α ^z	p-value	Falling Limb fit, α ^z	p-value	Hyst. Pattern ^a	Hyst. Pattern ^a
1	05-14	21	16.2	12614	95	0.13	0.000	0.15	0.000	AC	0.51	0.000	-0.01	0.357	AC	C
2	06-09	12	4.5	621	56	-0.01	0.087	0.15	0.000	AC	0.55	0.000	1.23	0.000	AC	C
3	06-22	14	6.6	3183	57	0.09	0.000	0.14	0.000	AC	0.34	0.000	0.06	0.000	ML	C
4	08-08	7	0.8	186	23	-0.02	0.051	-0.04	0.000	ML	-0.08	0.000	0.64	0.000	ML	ML
5	08-15	9	1.8	769	54	0.00	0.267	-0.07	0.000	AC	0.22	0.000	0.01	0.000	AC	C
6	08-24	13	5.7	3911	92	0.06	0.000	0.07	0.000	AC	0.13	0.000	-0.15	0.000	AC	C
7	09-06	11	4.0	1303	47	0.11	0.000	0.09	0.000	AC	0.03	0.083	0.25	0.000	ML	C
8	09-23	6	3.1	545	38	-0.04	0.000	0.21	0.000	C ^b	-0.12	0.000	-0.11	0.000	AC	AC
9	09-29	13	10.6	7232	95	0.40	0.000	0.00	0.294	AC	0.13	0.000	0.17	0.000	ML	C
10	10-13	6	11.5	2778	56	-0.02	0.000	-0.28	0.000	AC	0.41	0.000	0.01	0.231	ML	C
11	10-19	8	13.1	3507	67	0.01	0.057	0.05	0.000	AC	0.01	0.108	-0.13	0.000	AC	C
12	10-27	14	15.1	7011	58	-0.02	0.000	0.22	0.000	AC	0.11	0.000	0.29	0.000	ML	C
13	11-09	13	15.9	5751	69	-0.03	0.004	NA	0.000	NA ^c	0.10	0.000	NA	0.000	NA	NA

Notes Hysteresis Patterns (Hyst.Pattern) : AC- Anti-Clockwise , C-Clockwise, ML-Multi-Loop.

z- fit parameter for equation $P = b * F^{\alpha}$

NA-Not Available, ^cprecipitation recorded at nearby National Weather Service Station in Durham,NH

Table 3: Average coherence values over time scales larger than a day .

Estuarine Constituent	Watershed Variable							
	Q	NO ₃	DOC	Cl	NO ₃ flux	DOC flux	Cl flux	
	NO ₃	0.21	0.049			0.133		
	fDOM	0.217		0.087			0.208	
	Cl	0.171			0.107			0.157

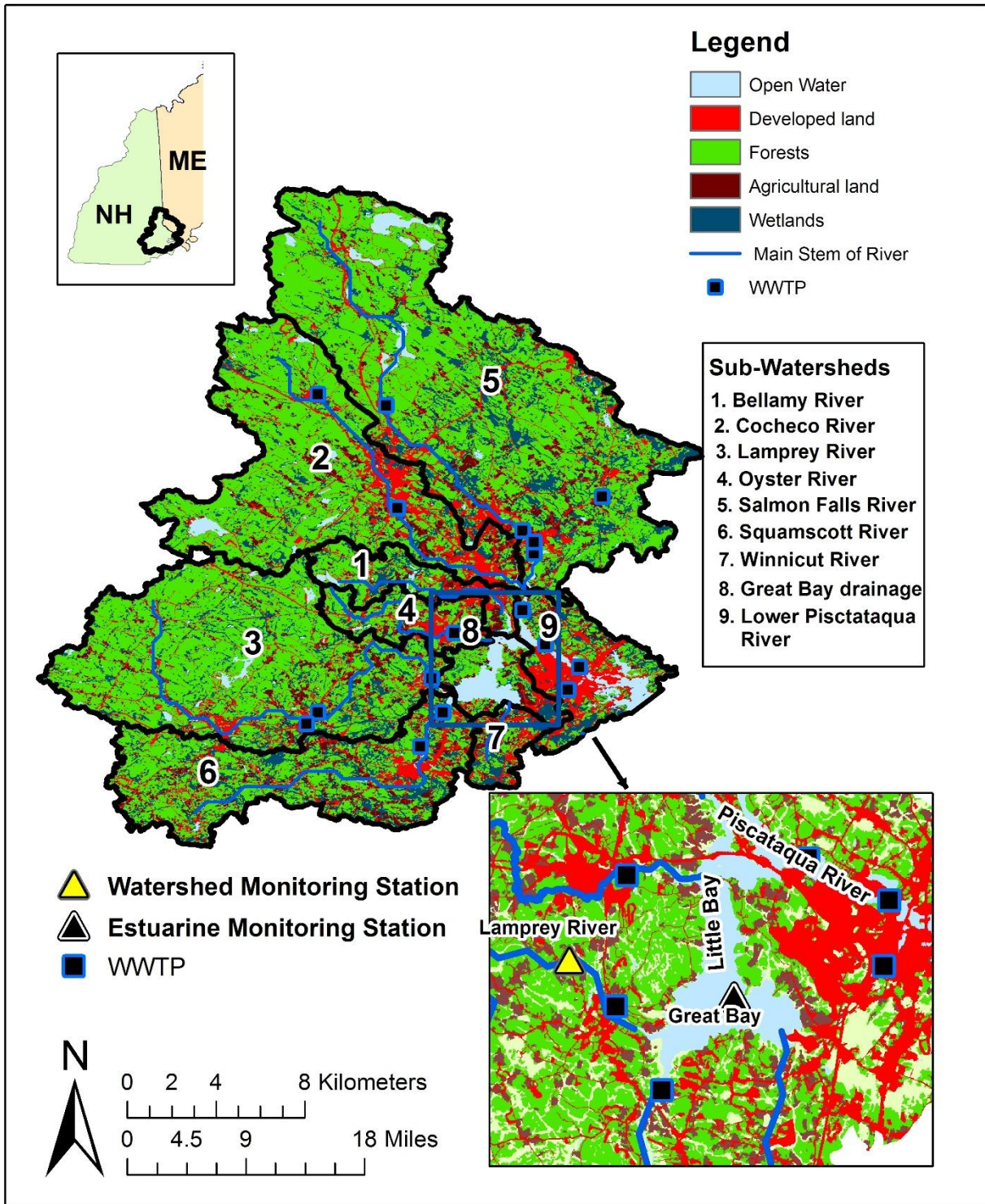


Figure 1: Map of Great Bay watershed showing land use, wastewater treatment plants (WWTP), sub-watersheds, sub-estuaries and water quality monitoring stations. Refer to Table 1 for summary land-use statistics.

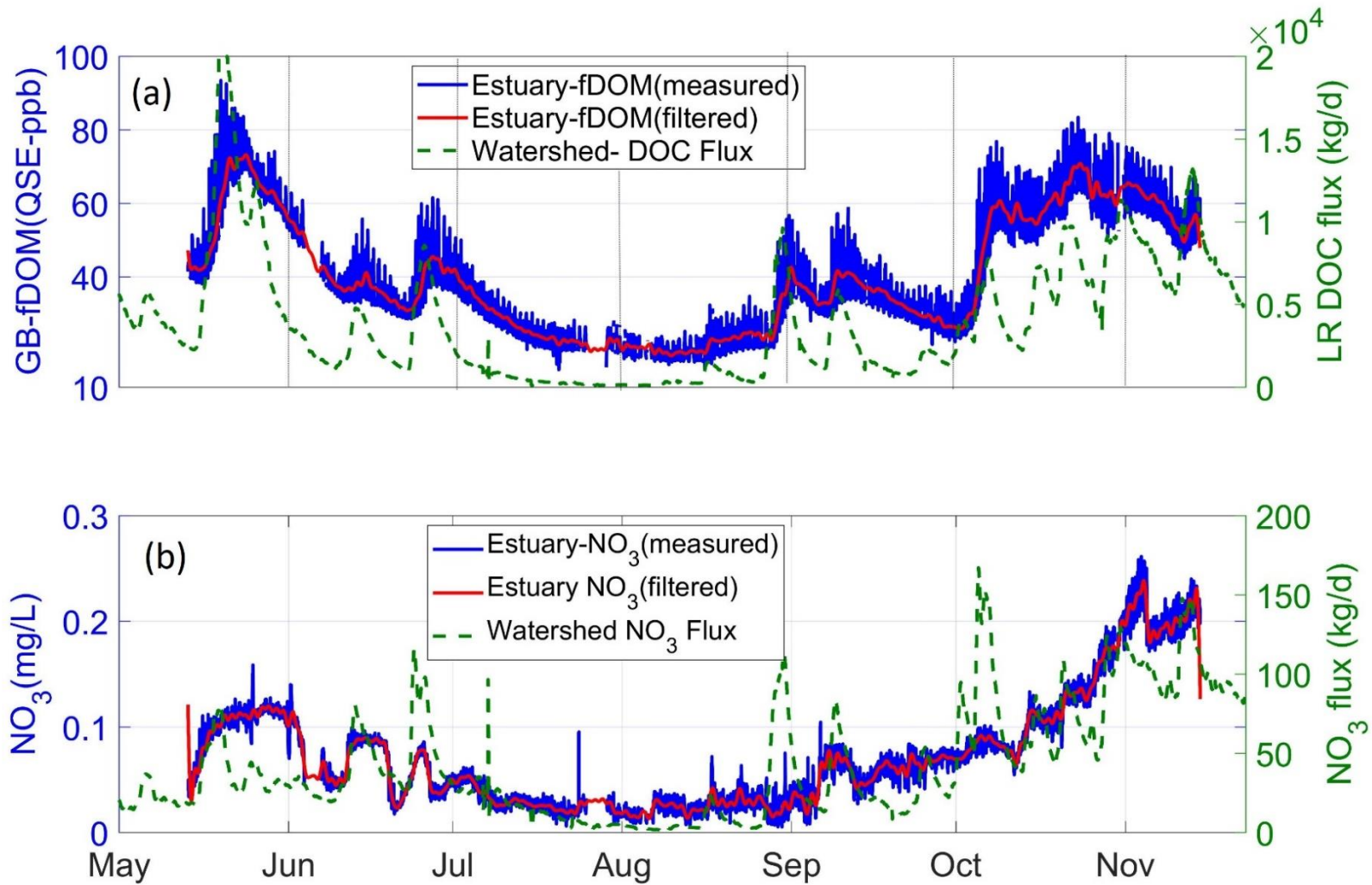


Figure 2: (a) Time series of estuarine fDOM and watershed DOC fluxes from the Lamprey River in 2011. fDOM is reported in quinine sulfate equivalents parts per billion units (QSE ppb). (b) Time series of estuarine nitrate concentrations and watershed nitrate fluxes. Filtered signal refers to removal of tide dominant frequencies.

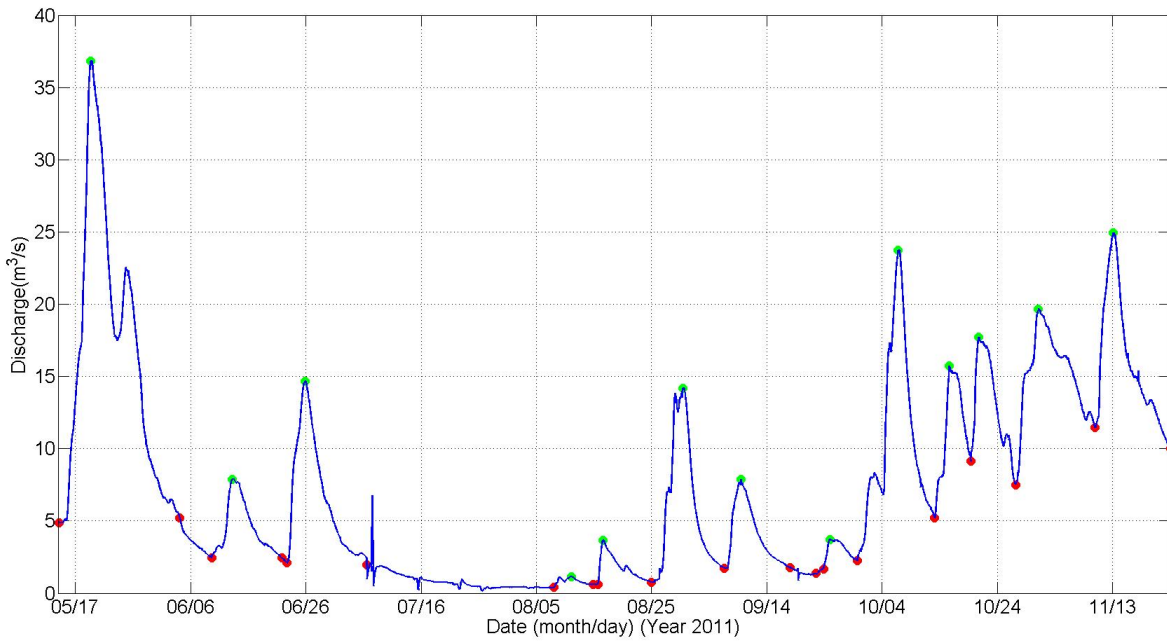


Figure 3: Discharge hydrograph for the Lamprey River, with points identifying storms. Red markers are beginning or end of storm, and green markers represent the peak flow during a storm event. Additional variations in flow observed during summer dry periods were attributed to water releases done in an upstream reservoir as part of a construction and maintenance project.

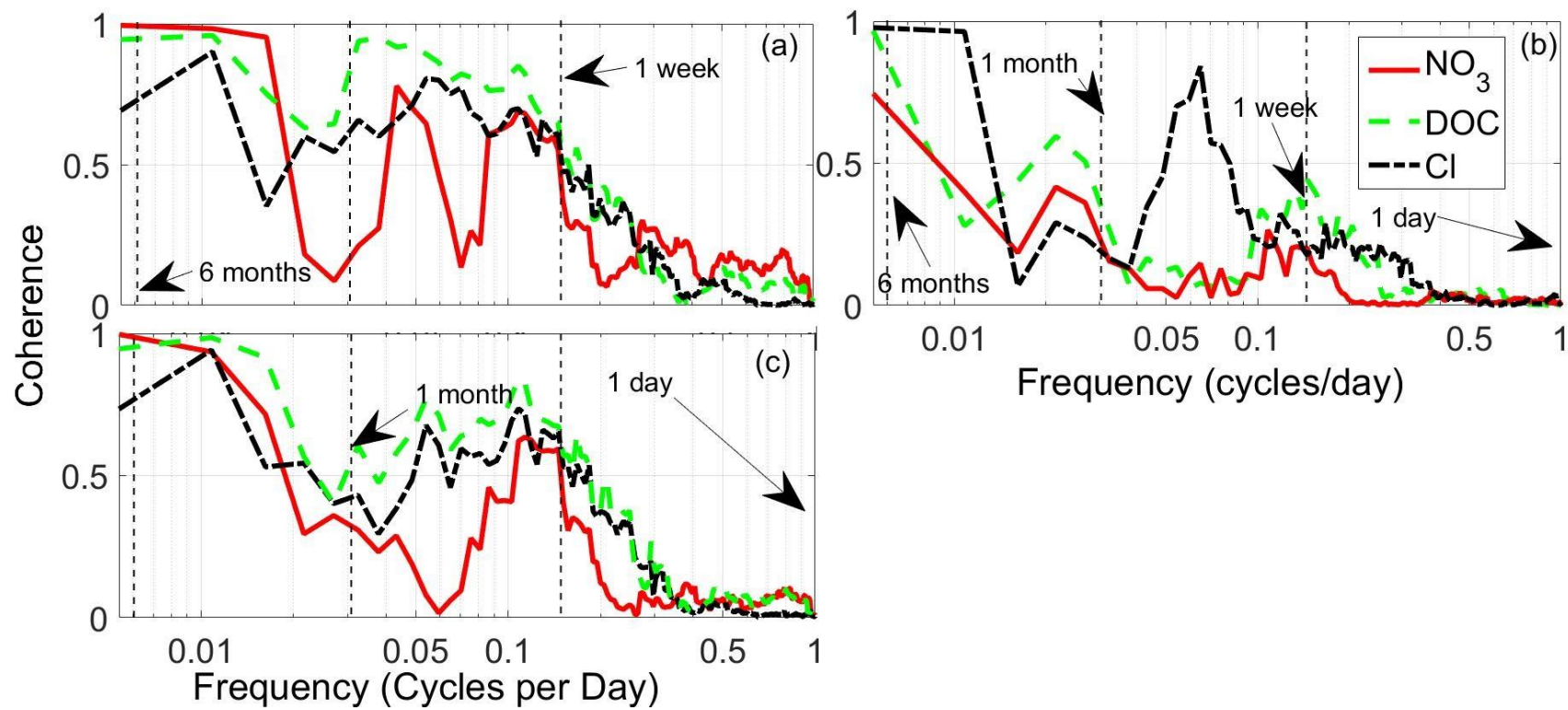


Figure 4: Frequency dependent coherence between estuarine NO_3 , fDOM and chloride with, (a) watershed discharge, (b) respective watershed concentrations (NO_3 , fDOM and chloride), and (c) respective watershed fluxes (NO_3 , DOC and chloride). Increasing time scales are from right to left with some highlighted.

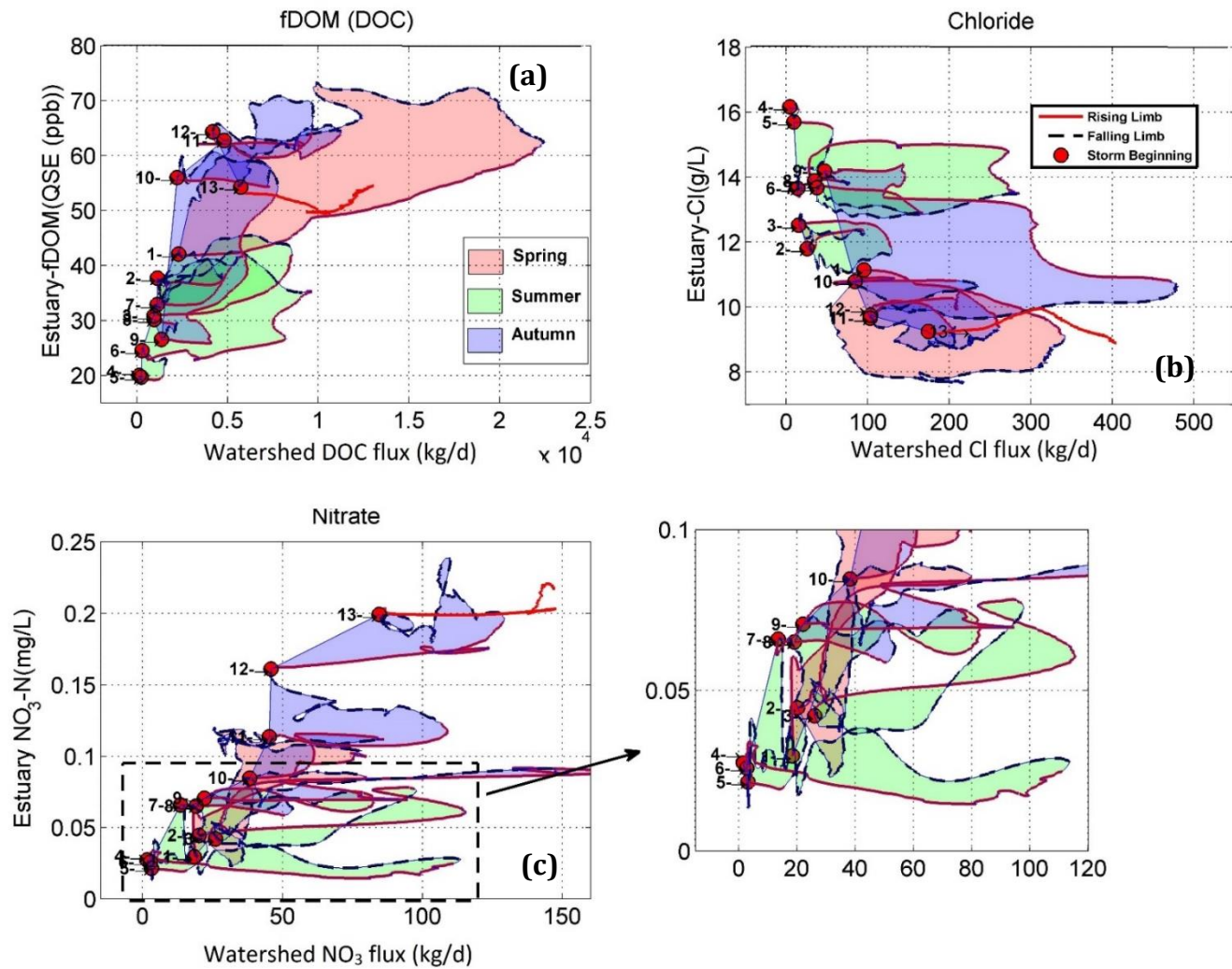


Figure 5: Hysteresis patterns between estuarine concentrations and watershed fluxes for storm events between April and November 2011 **(a)** DOC, **(b)** Cl, **(c)** NO_3 , and **(d)** inset plot showing NO_3 response to less intense storms. Storm events are indicated at the beginning of each storm as per their description in Table 2.

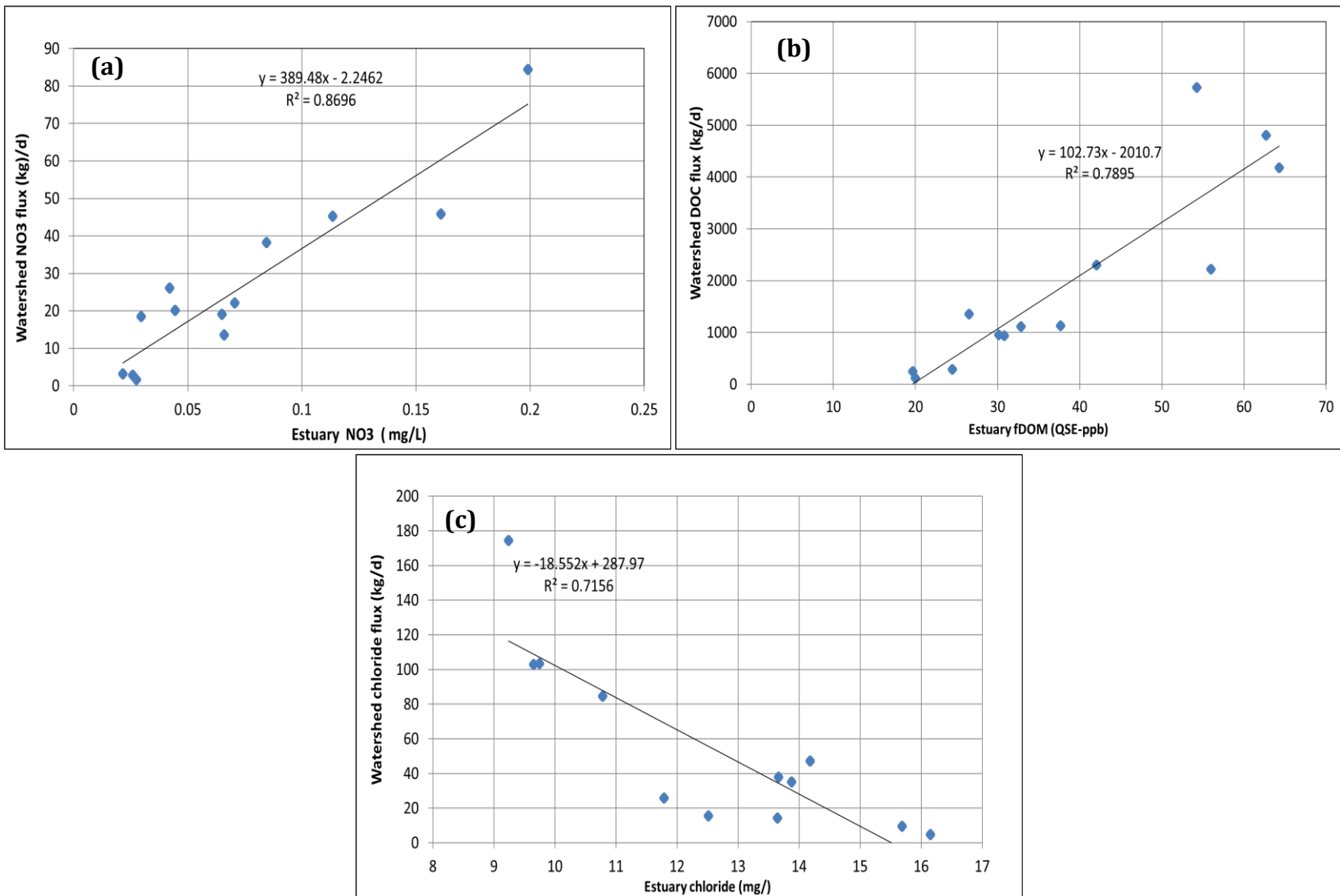


Figure 6 Relationship between baseflow watershed fluxes just prior to beginning of a storm event and corresponding estuarine concentration (a) NO₃ (b) estuarine fDOM and watershed DOC, and (c) chloride.

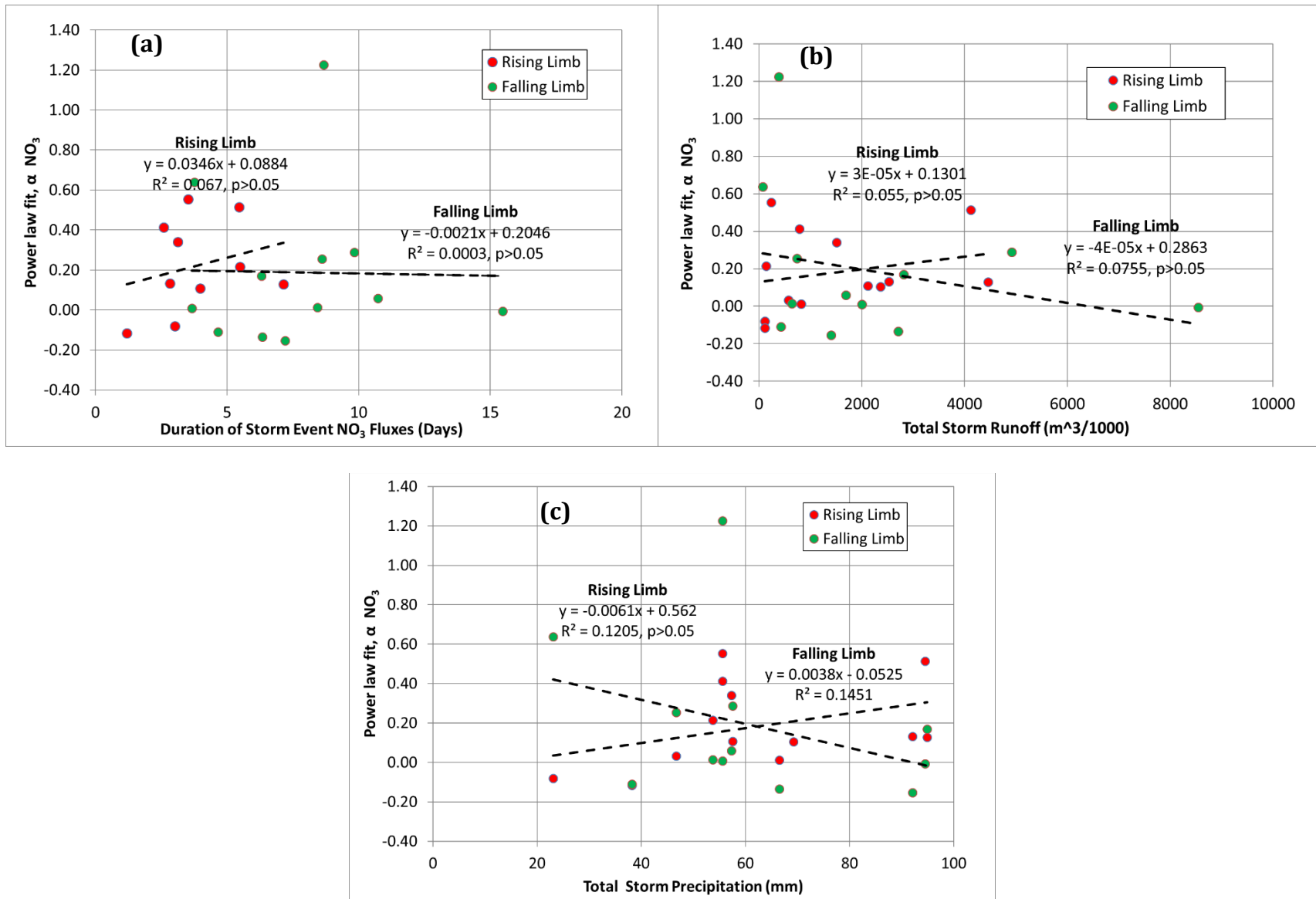


Figure 7. Relationship between estuarine responsiveness (α) for NO_3 with (a) storm event duration (b) total storm runoff (c) total storm precipitation.

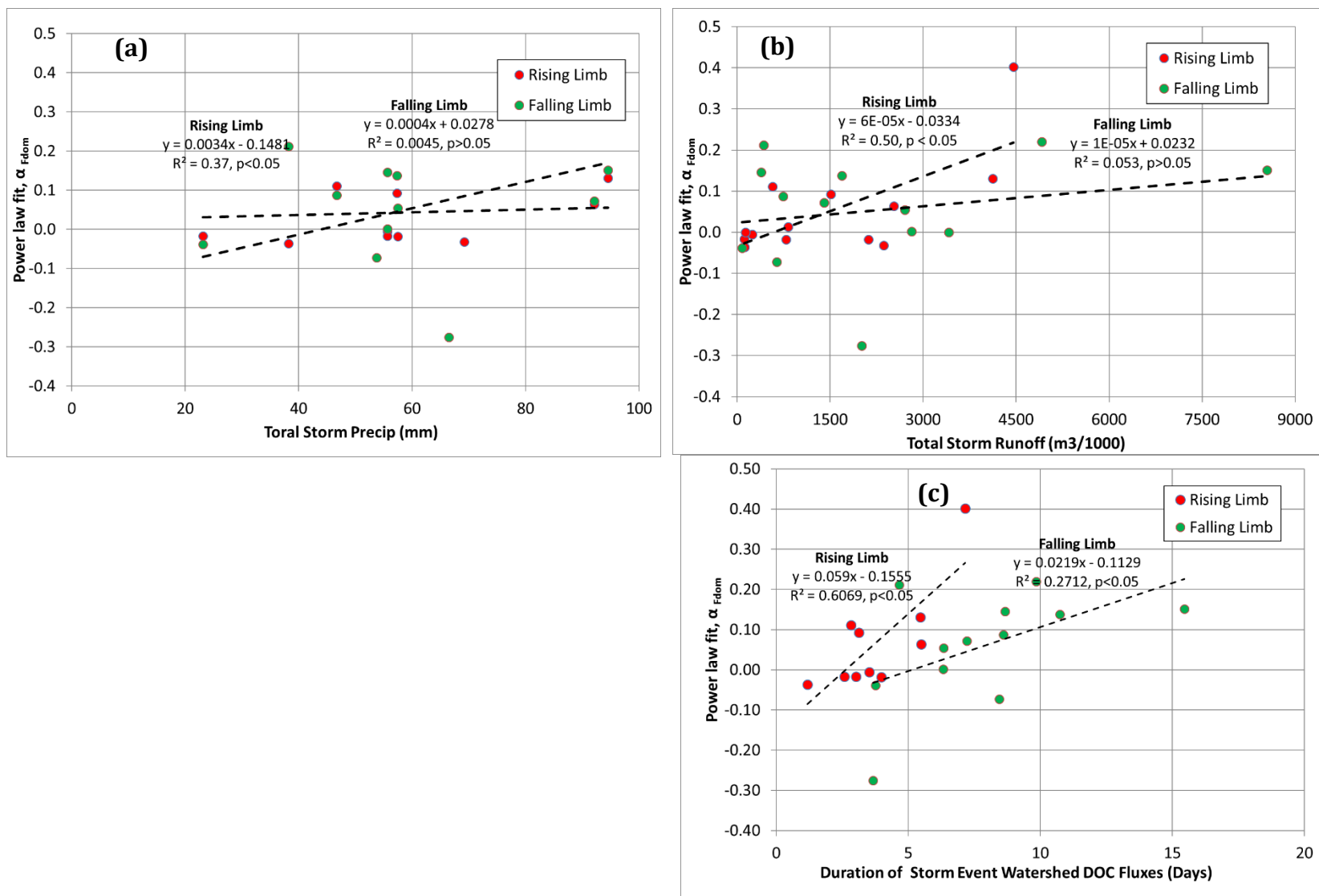


Figure 8. Relationship between estuarine responsiveness (α) for fDOM with (a) storm event duration (b) total storm runoff (c) total storm precipitation

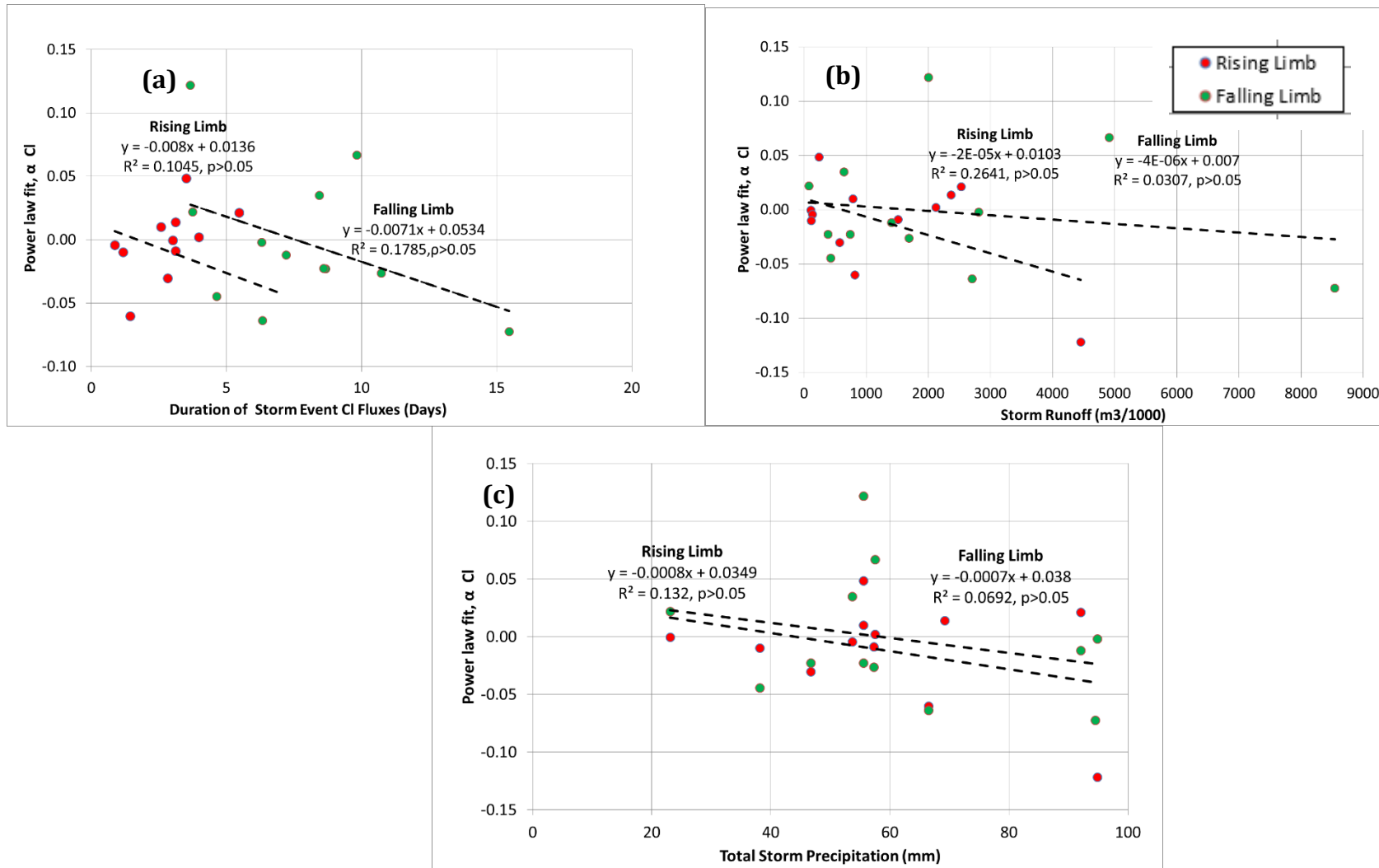


Figure 9. Relationship between estuarine responsiveness (α) for Cl with (a) storm event duration (b) total storm runoff (c) total storm precipitation.

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Supporting Information for

High frequency concurrent measurements in watershed and impaired estuary reveal coupled DOC and decoupled nitrate dynamics.

Gopal K. Mulukutla¹, Wilfred M.Wollheim^{1,2}, Joseph E. Salisbury³, Richard O. Carey^{1,2}, Thomas K .Gregory³ and William H. McDowell²

¹Earth Systems Research Center, University of New Hampshire, Durham, New Hampshire, USA.

²Department of Natural Resources and the Environment, University of New Hampshire, Durham, New Hampshire, USA

³Ocean Processes Analysis Laboratory, University of New Hampshire, Durham, New Hampshire, USA

Supporting Information Content

- Text S1 to S2
- Table S1
- Figures S1 to S13

- Dataset file (csv file)
- Dataset Metadata file (text file)

31 **Introduction**

32 This document describes residence time estimates of the Great Bay estuary, data pre-processing
33 performed to determine lag in time series.

34
35

36 Table1 provides information on

- 37 • Lag measured between storm event watershed DOC fluxes and estuarine fDOM

38

39 Figures S1-S13 provide information on

- 40 • Individual storm event hysteresis response of estuarine fDOM, Cl and NO₃ to respective
41 watershed fluxes

42

43 Supporting Dataset and Metadata

- 44 • A comma separated (csv) file containing the underlying data
- 45 • A text file containing the description of variables, and related information about the datafile

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56 **Text S1 Residence Times in the Great Bay Estuarine System**

57 There are various ways to characterize the tide driven removal of water and constituents from an
58 estuary.

59 (a) **Flushing time** is the time taken to remove a constituent by a pre-determined factor from a
60 region of the estuary (Aikman & Lanerolle, 2005; Bilgili et al., 2005) used a numerical
61 circulation model to determine the time taken for a 63 % reduction in a conservative tracer
62 from each sub-estuary in the system. They found that with river inputs at average annual
63 rates the flushing time was 9.2 days for the Great Bay sub-estuary, as opposed to 29.1 days
64 for the estuarine system as a whole.

65 (b) **Residence time** is the time taken by a parcel of water to be removed from the boundaries
66 of a specific region (Aikman & Lanerolle, 2005; Bilgili et al., 2005) estimated that it took 19.6
67 days for a water parcel to exit the Great Bay sub-estuary with rivers inputs at average
68 annual conditions.

69 **Text S2 Lag in time series**

70 The application of a commonly used method to determine lag (cross correlation) (Menke &
71 Menke, 2012)) did not yield consistent results for nine of the thirteen storm events (see e.g. Table
72 S1). We attribute this to be largely due to “noisiness” in estuarine time series data, an artifact of the
73 filtering procedure applied in removing tidal frequencies. Thus, we did not correct our data for lag.
74 However, this does not affect the results of coherence analysis, as all the frequencies within the
75 signal are considered in the analysis, and results are in frequency domain.

76 The lack of lag correction may affect the “power-law” analysis of storm event time series
77 (results of watershed-estuary coupling in storm event time scales). We determined two areas
78 where this could affect the results – (a) lag in storm event time series may result in incorrect input of
79 rising limb or falling limb data., and (b) lack of alignment in peaks (e.g. between watershed fluxes
80 and estuarine concentrations) may result in increased uncertainty in determination of estuarine

81 responsiveness (α). Based on data from four of the thirteen storm event, the length of lag as a
82 fraction of the total duration of the storm event was small (Table S1). This suggests that error
83 associated with (a) will be minimal and for (b) it will not affect the overall weight of the results.
84 Characterization of the uncertainty related to the lack of lag correction will require the collection of
85 data for more storm events.

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87
88 **Table S1:** Lag measured between storm event watershed DOC fluxes and estuarine fDOM

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Storm Duration (days)	Lag (days)	Lag as a fraction of storm duration (%)
20.9	1.3	6.3
12.2	-	-
13.9	0.9	6.3
6.8	-	-
9.3	-	-
12.7	1.4	11.5
11.4	-	-
5.8	-	-
13.5	1.0	7.4
6.3	-	-
7.8	-	-
13.8	-	-
13.1	-	-

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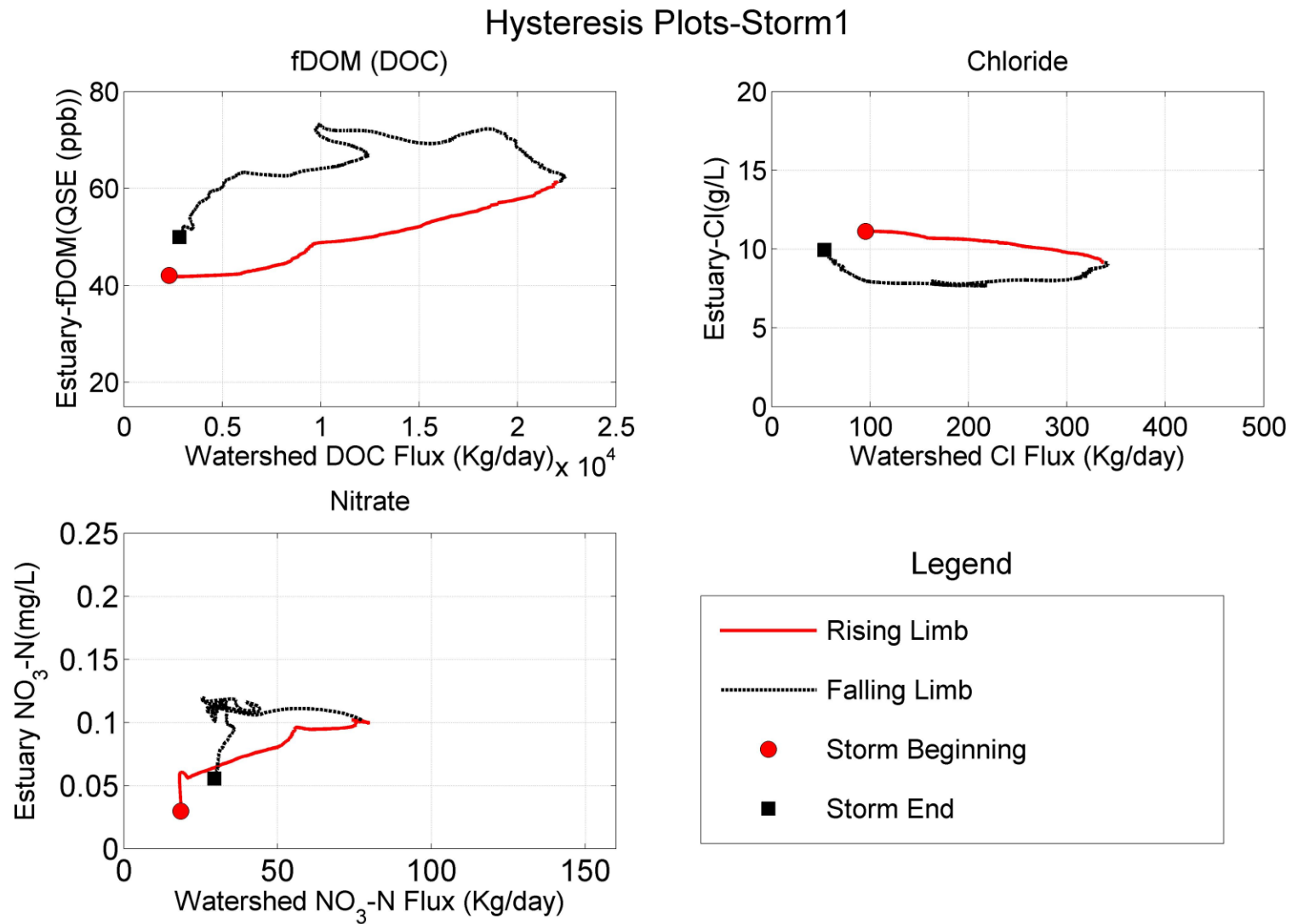


Figure S1 Hysteresis Pattern for one storm event, watershed variable (fluxes of DOC, NO₃, and Cl) Vs. Estuarine variable (fDOM, NO₃, Cl)

Hysteresis Plots-Storm2

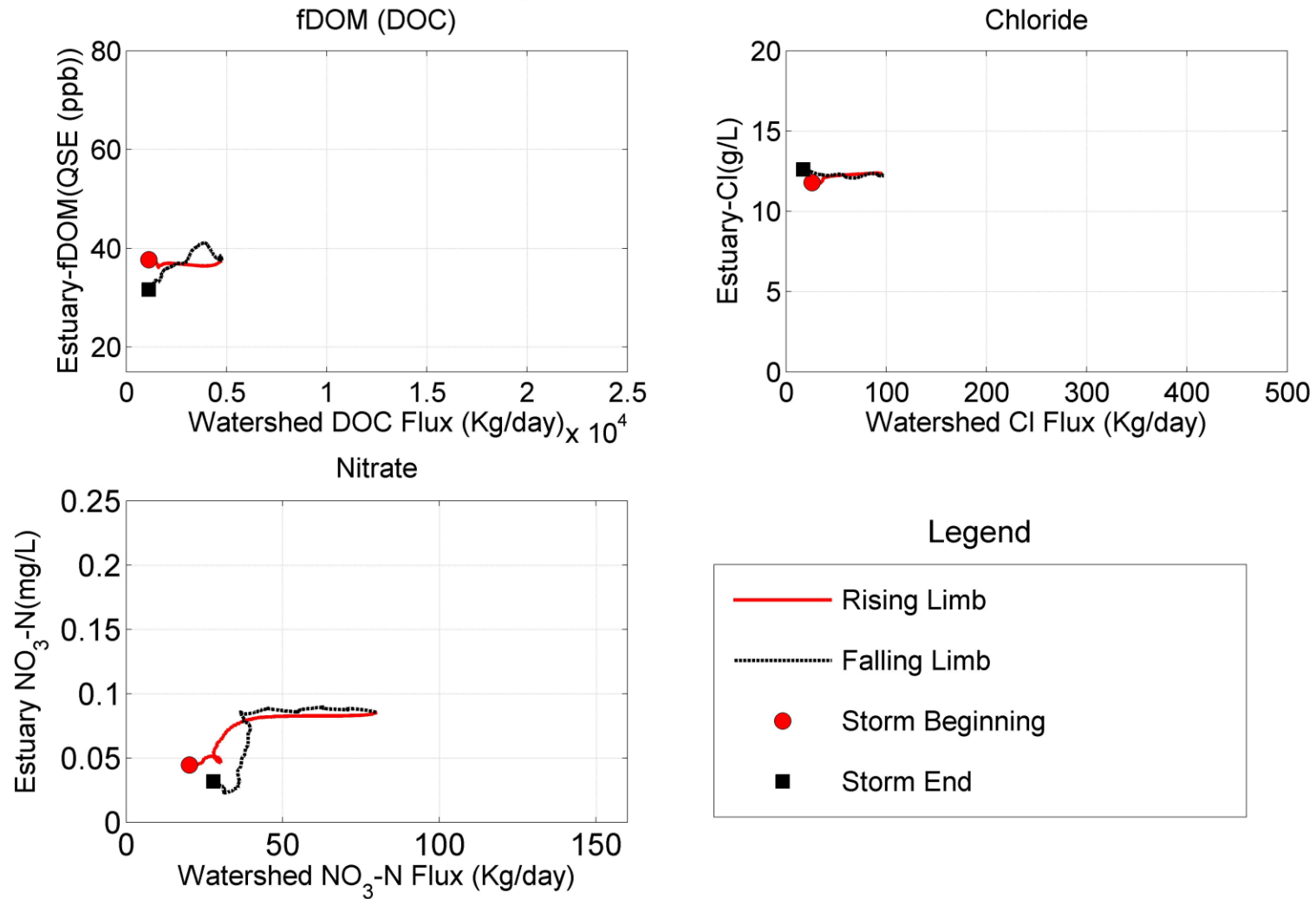


Figure S2 Hysteresis Pattern for one storm event, watershed variable (fluxes of DOC, NO₃-N, and Cl) Vs. Estuarine variable (fDOM, NO₃, Cl)

Hysteresis Plots-Storm3

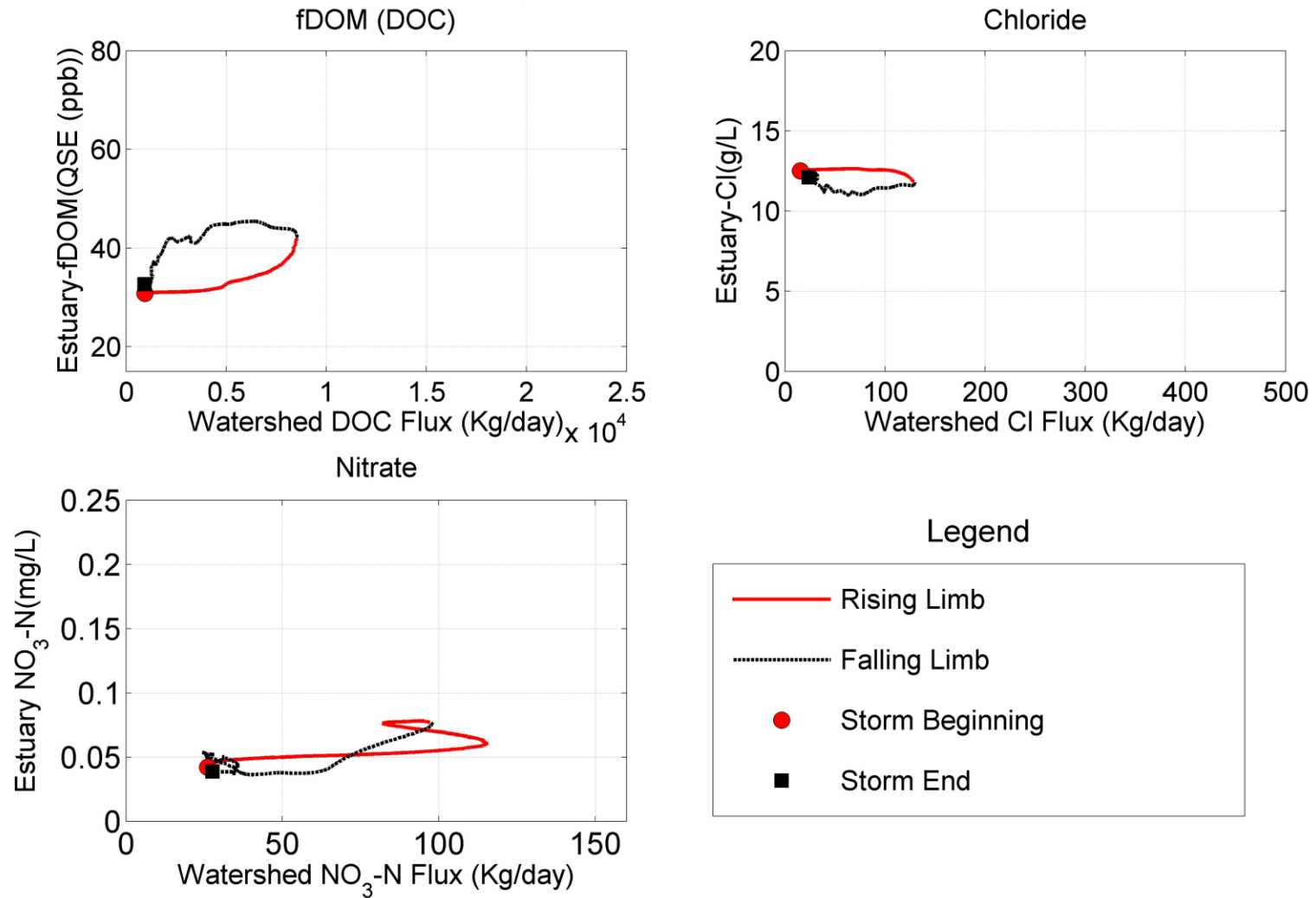


Figure S3 Hysteresis Pattern for one storm event, watershed variable (fluxes of DOC, NO_3 , and Cl) Vs. Estuarine variable (fDOM, NO_3 , Cl)

Hysteresis Plots-Storm4

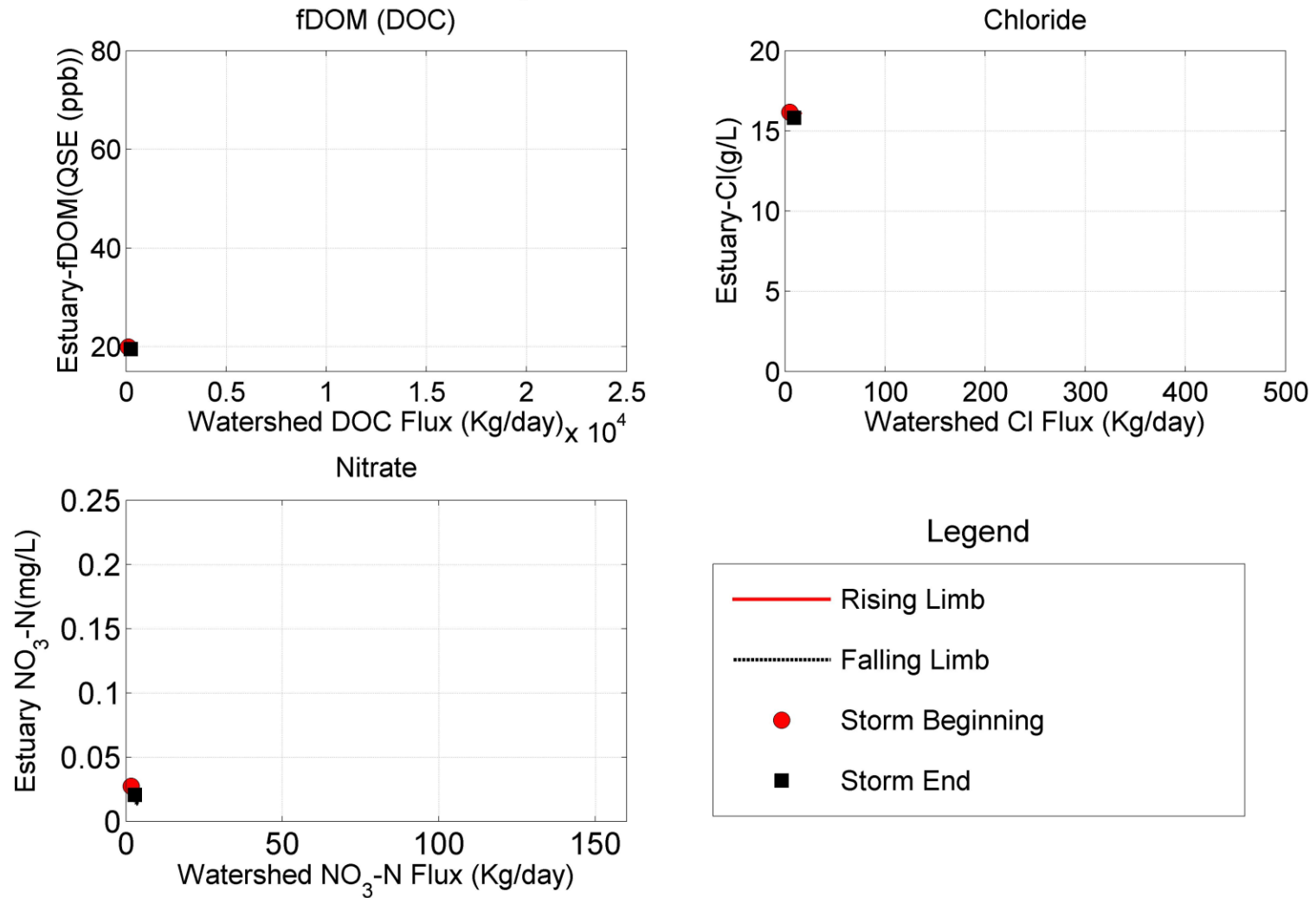


Figure S4 Hysteresis Pattern for one storm event, watershed variable (fluxes of DOC, NO_3 , and Cl) Vs. Estuarine variable (fDOM, NO_3 , Cl)

Hysteresis Plots-Storm5

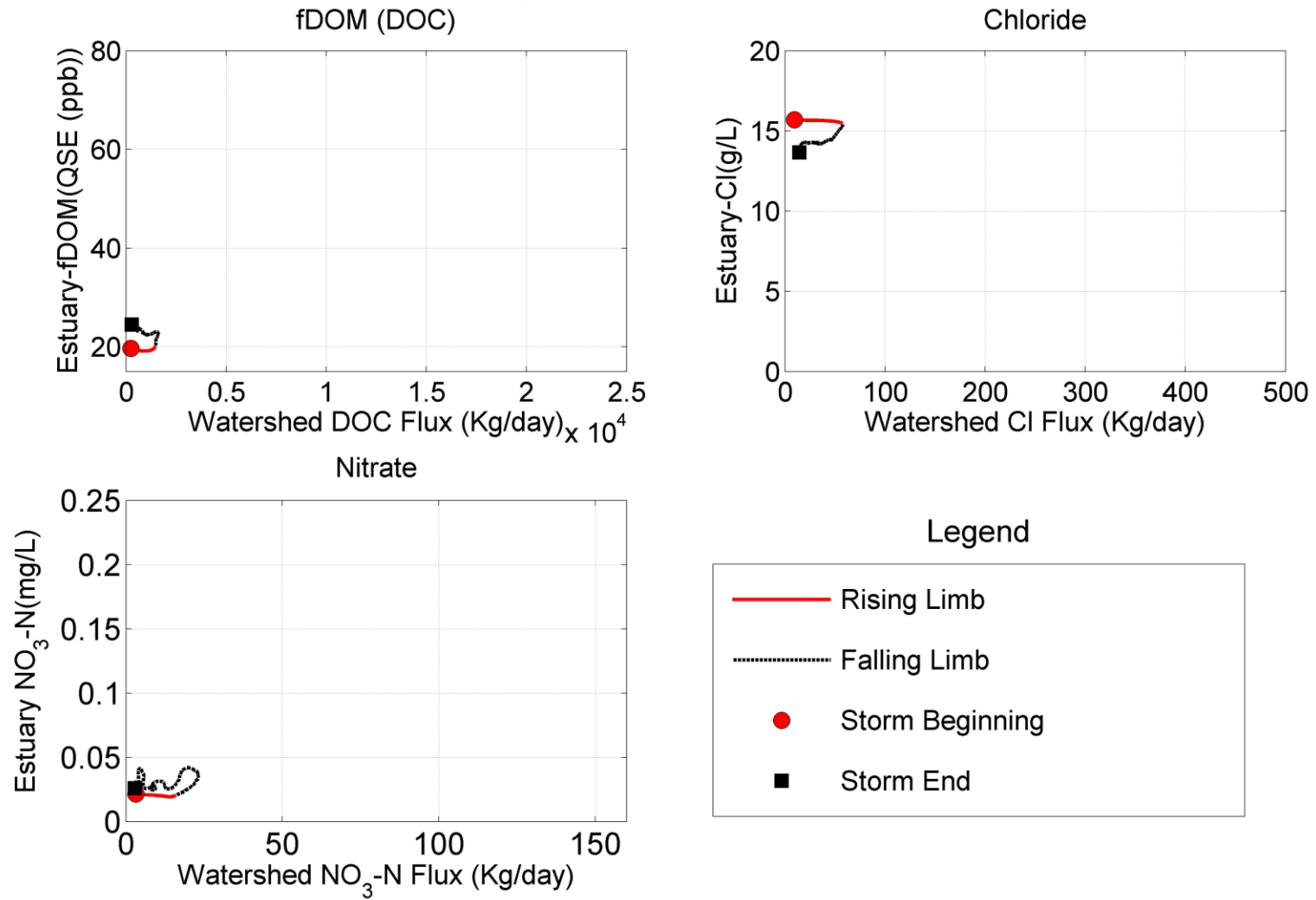


Figure S5 Hysteresis Pattern for one storm event, watershed variable (fluxes of DOC, NO₃, and Cl) Vs. Estuarine variable (fDOM, NO₃, Cl)

Hysteresis Plots-Storm6

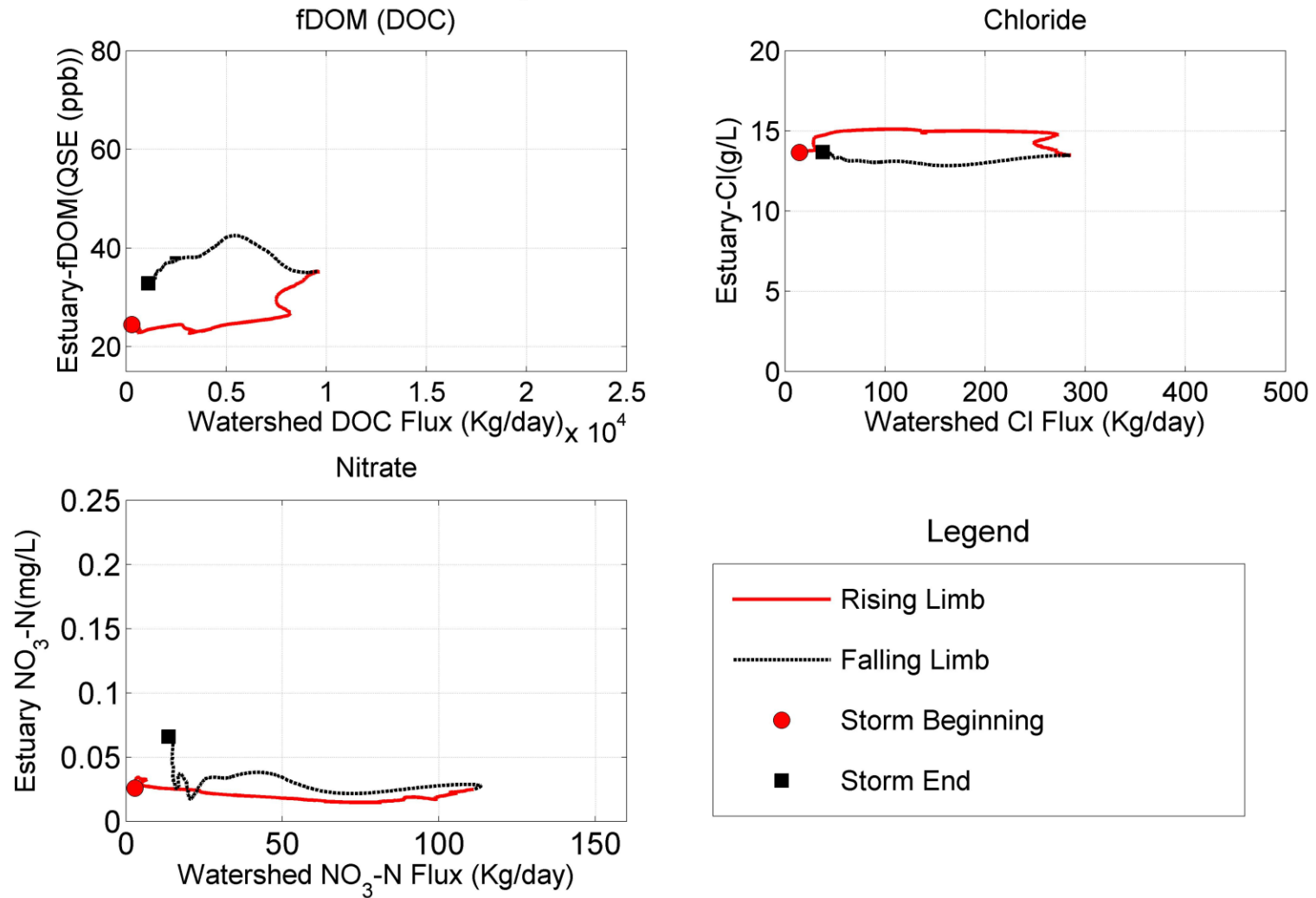


Figure S6 Hysteresis Pattern for one storm event, watershed variable (fluxes of DOC, NO_3 , and Cl) Vs. Estuarine variable (fDOM, NO_3 , Cl)

Hysteresis Plots-Storm7

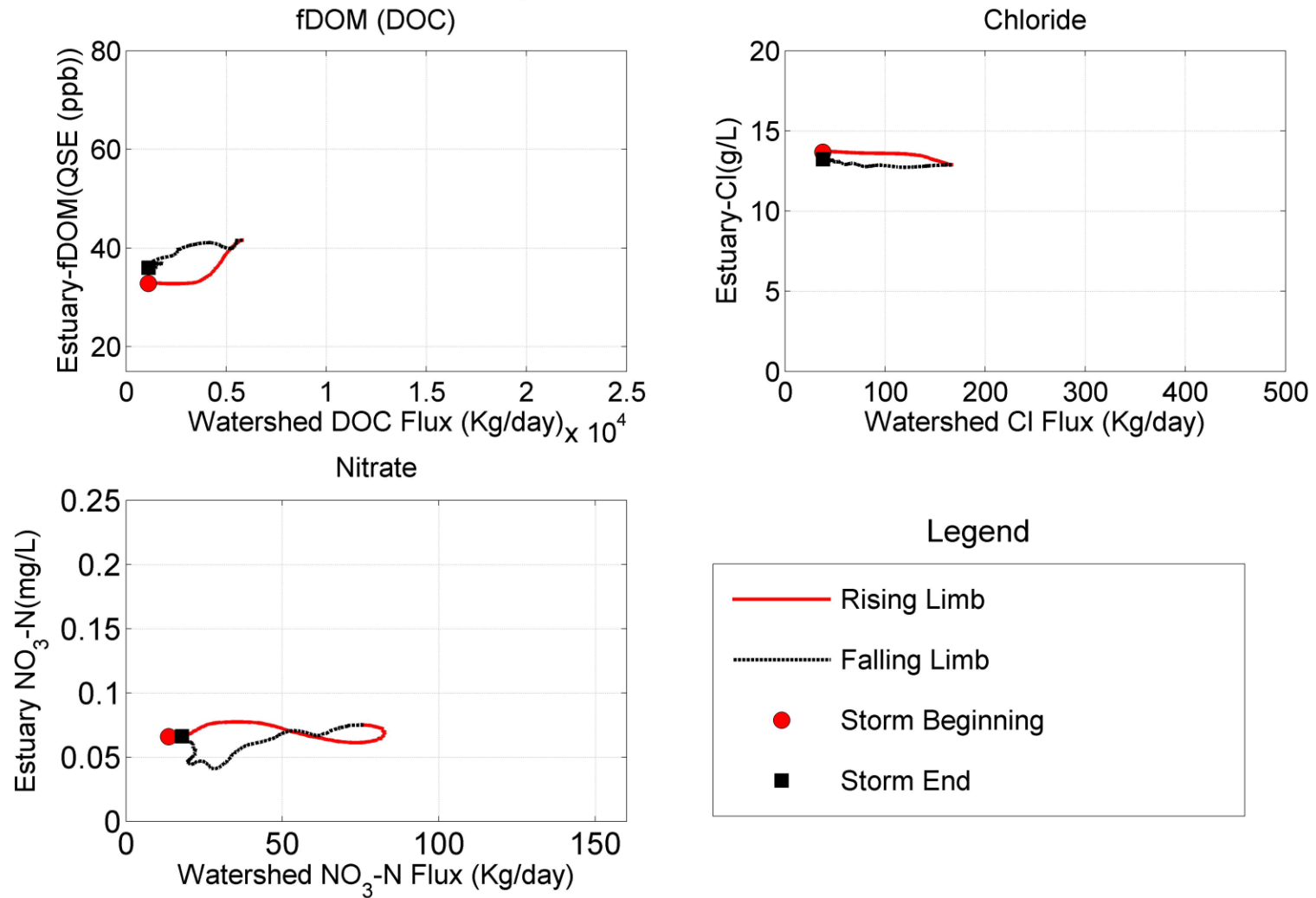


Figure S7 Hysteresis Pattern for one storm event, watershed variable (fluxes of DOC, NO₃, and Cl) Vs. Estuarine variable (fDOM, NO₃, Cl)

Hysteresis Plots-Storm8

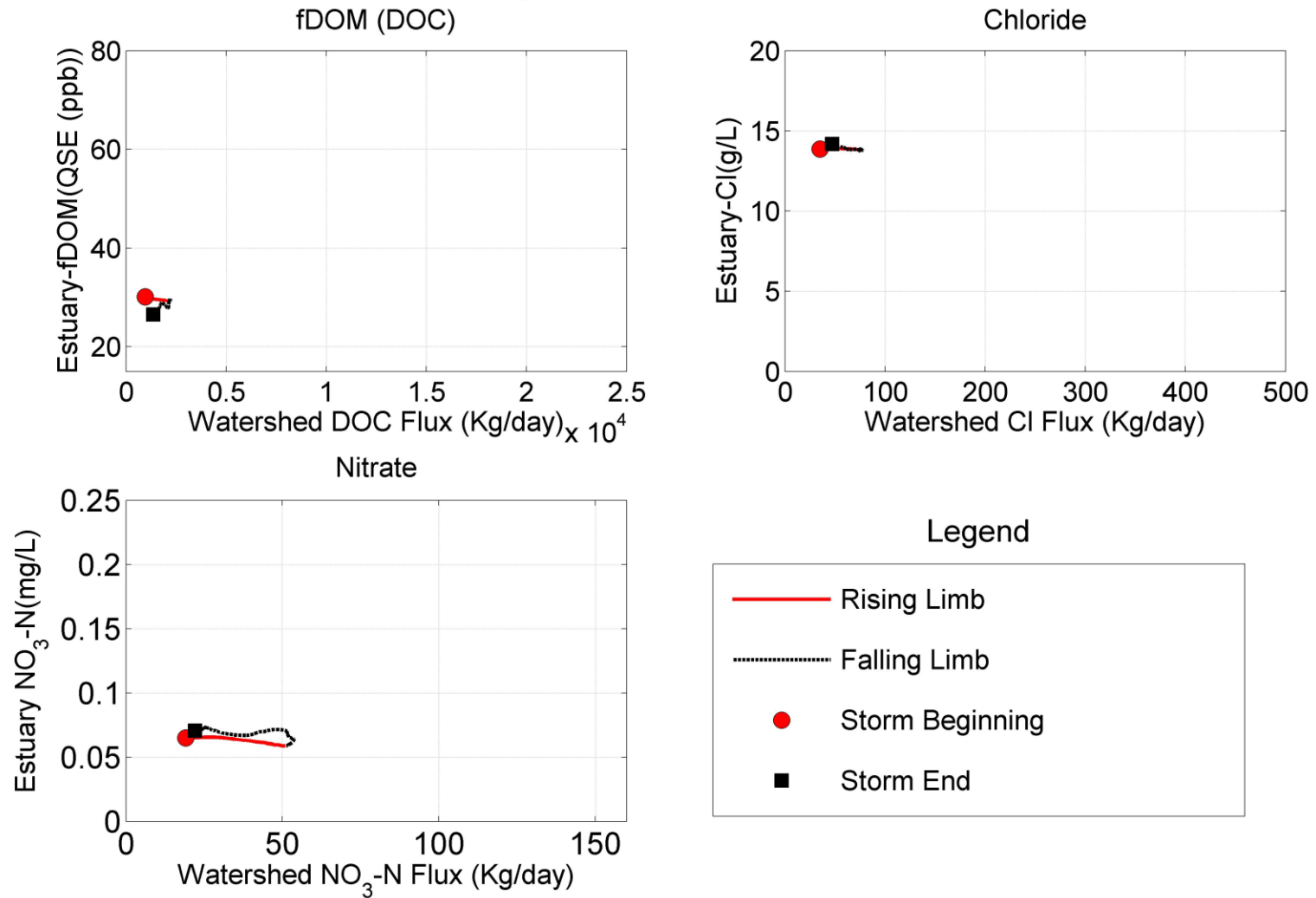


Figure S8 Hysteresis Pattern for one storm event, watershed variable (fluxes of DOC, NO₃, and Cl) Vs. Estuarine variable (fDOM, NO3, Cl)

Hysteresis Plots-Storm9

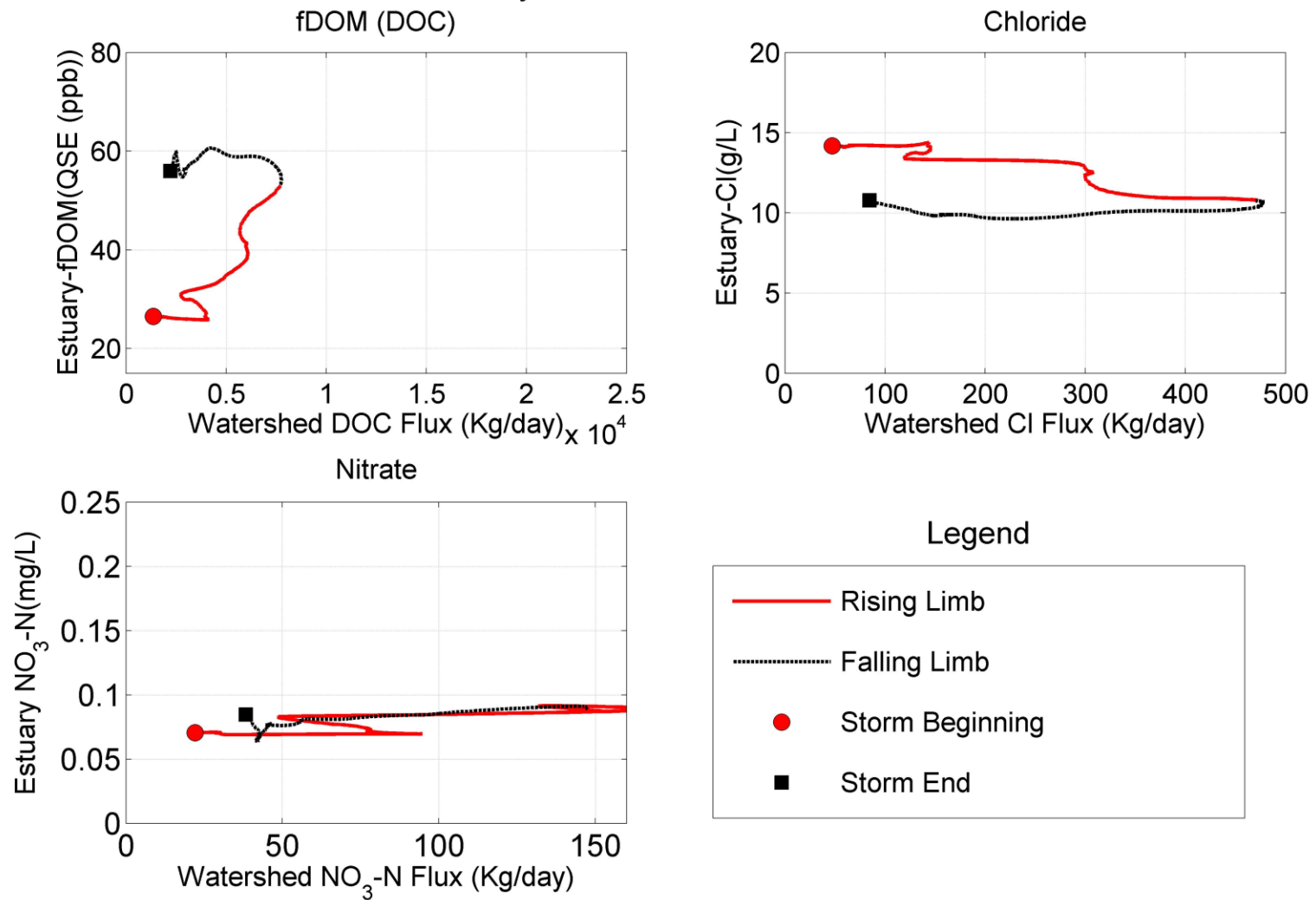


Figure S9 Hysteresis Pattern for one storm event, watershed variable (fluxes of DOC, NO₃, and Cl) Vs. Estuarine variable (fDOM, NO₃, Cl)

Hysteresis Plots-Storm10

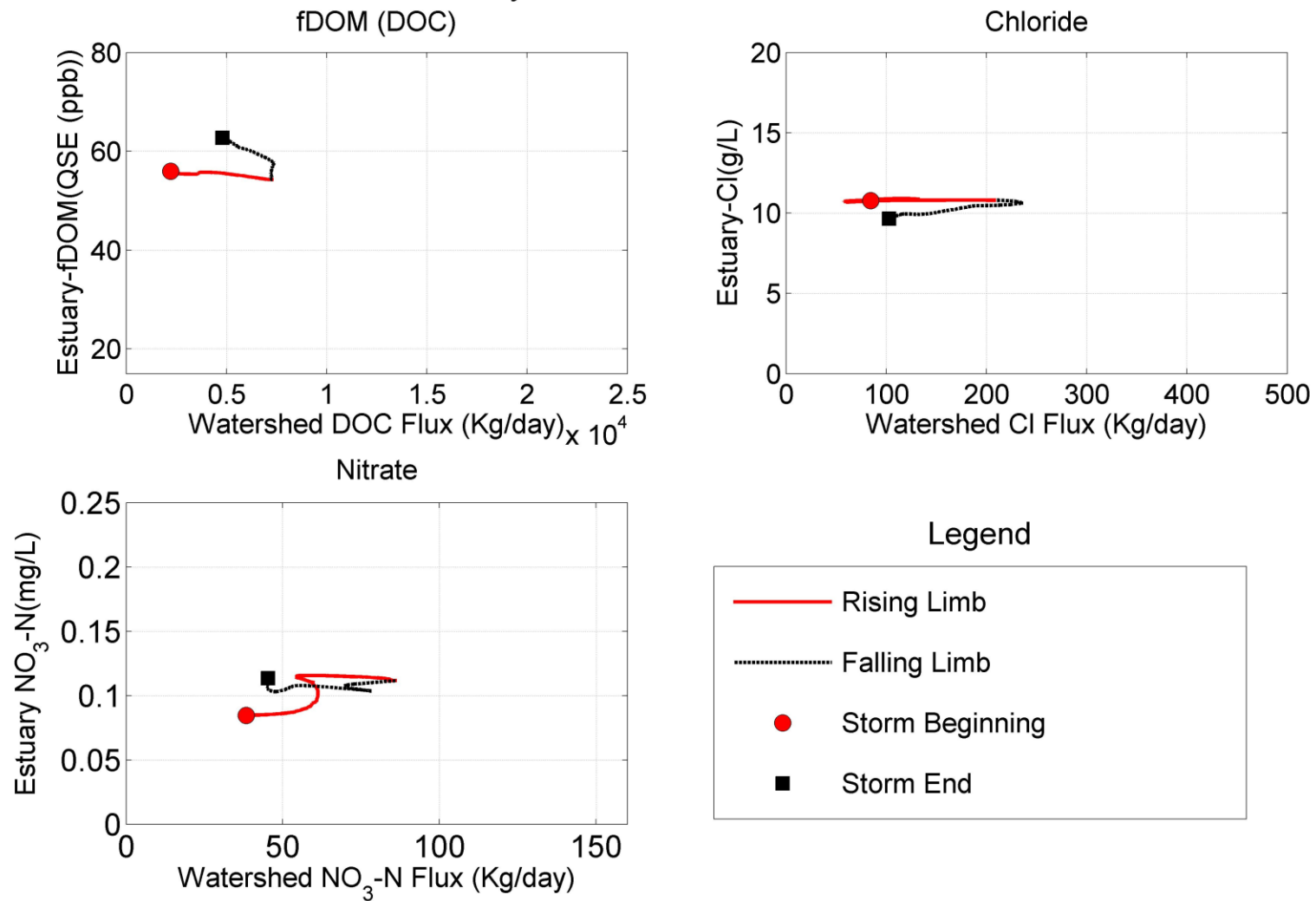


Figure S10 Hysteresis Pattern for one storm event, watershed variable (fluxes of DOC, NO₃, and Cl) Vs. Estuarine variable (fDOM, NO3, Cl

Hysteresis Plots-Storm11

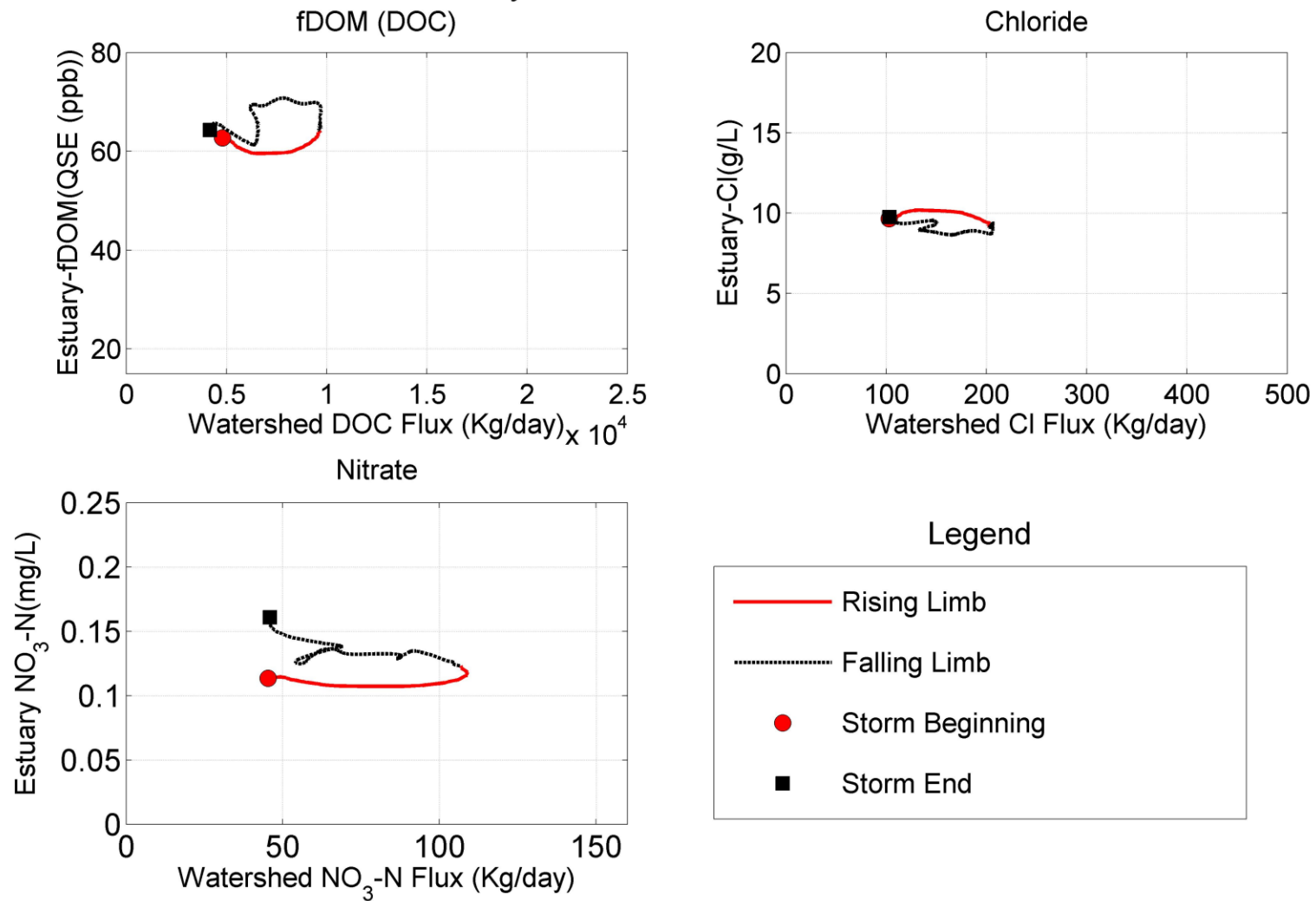


Figure S11 Hysteresis Pattern for one storm event, watershed variable (fluxes of DOC, NO₃, and Cl) Vs. Estuarine variable (fDOM, NO₃, Cl)

Hysteresis Plots-Storm12

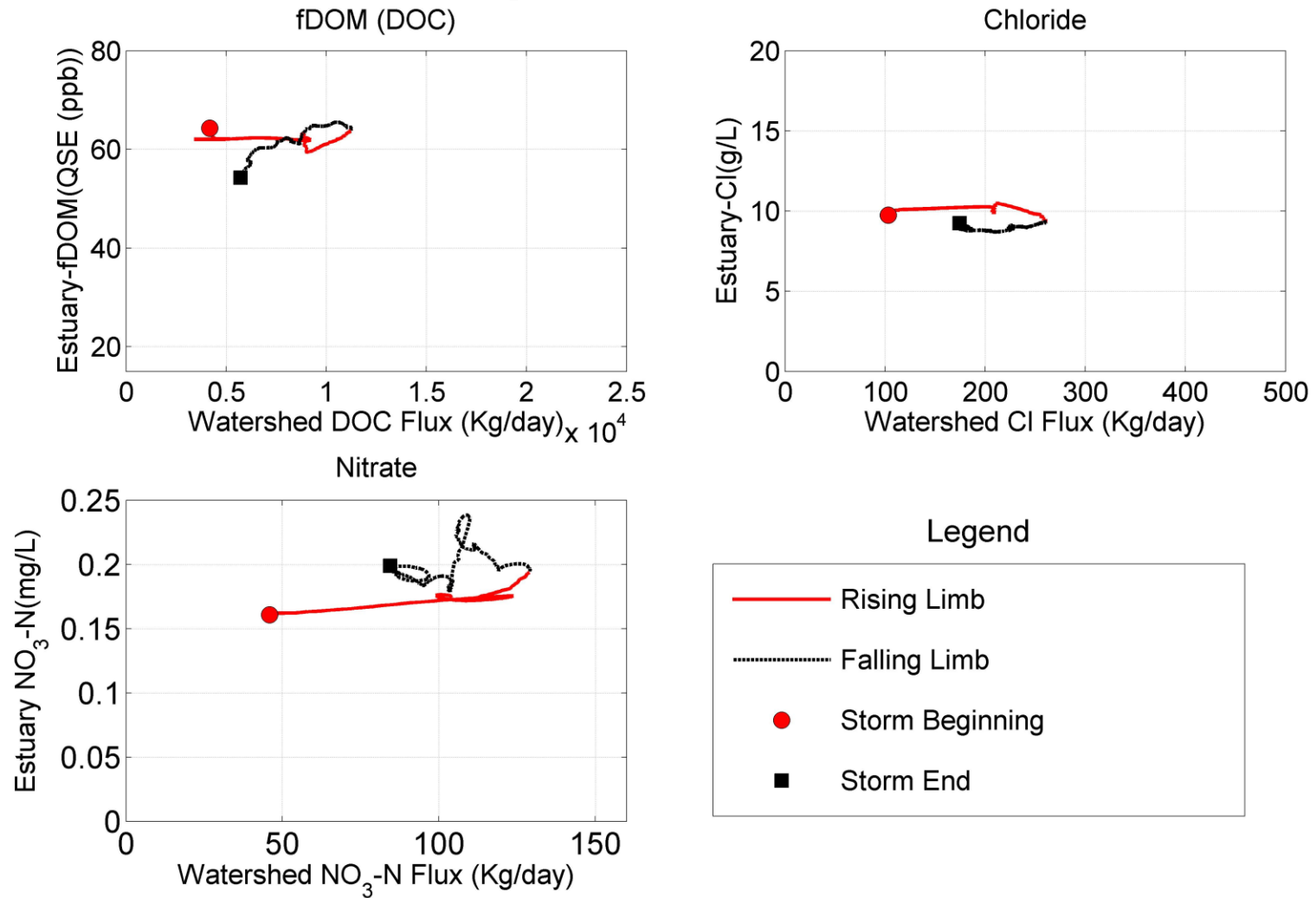


Figure S12 Hysteresis Pattern for one storm event, watershed variable (fluxes of DOC, NO₃, and Cl) Vs. Estuarine variable (fDOM, NO₃, Cl). Only rising limb data is shown here.

Hysteresis Plots-Storm13

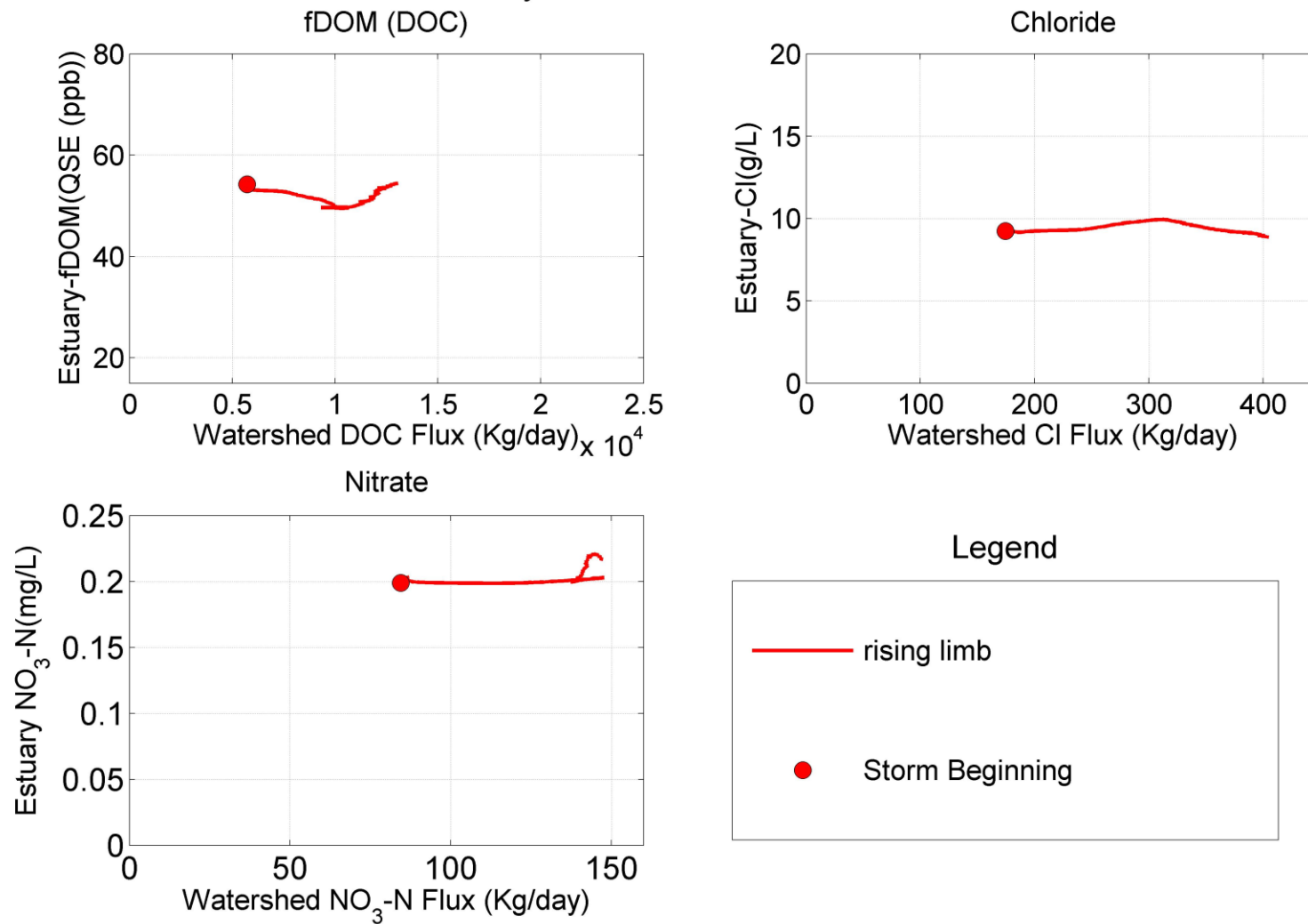


Figure S13 Hysteresis Pattern for one storm event, watershed variable (fluxes of DOC, NO_3 , and Cl) Vs. Estuarine variable (fDOM, NO_3 , Cl). Only rising limb data is shown here.

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