



Interception and  
transpiration – Part 2:  
Moisture recycling

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# Contrasting roles of interception and transpiration in the hydrological cycle – Part 2: Moisture recycling

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## Abstract

The contribution of land evaporation to local and remote precipitation (i.e., moisture recycling) is of significant importance to sustain water resources and ecosystems. But how important are different evaporation components in sustaining precipitation? This is the first paper to present moisture recycling metrics for partitioned evaporation. In the companion paper, Part 1, evaporation was partitioned into vegetation interception, floor interception, soil moisture evaporation and open water evaporation (constituting the direct, purely physical fluxes, largely dominated by interception), and transpiration (delayed, biophysical flux). Here, we track these components forward as well as backward in time. We also include age tracers to study the atmospheric residence times of these evaporation components. As the main result we present a new image of the global hydrological cycle that includes quantification of partitioned evaporation and moisture recycling as well as the atmospheric residence times of all fluxes. We demonstrate that evaporated interception is more likely to return as precipitation on land than transpired water. On average, direct evaporation (essentially interception) is found to have an atmospheric residence time of eight days, while transpiration typically resides nine days in the atmosphere. Interception recycling has a much shorter local length scale than transpiration recycling, thus interception generally precipitates closer to its evaporative source than transpiration, which is particularly pronounced outside the tropics. We conclude that interception mainly works as an intensifier of the local hydrological cycle during wet spells. On the other hand, transpiration remains active during dry spells and is transported over much larger distances downwind where it can act as a significant source of moisture. Thus, as various land-use types can differ considerably in their partitioning between interception and transpiration, our results stress that land-use changes (e.g., forest to cropland conversion) do not only affect the magnitude of moisture recycling, but could also influence the moisture recycling patterns and lead to a redistribution of water resources. As such, this research highlights that

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land-use changes can have complex effects on the atmospheric branch of the hydrological cycle.

## 1 Introduction

It is challenging to gain improved understanding of the different mechanisms that drive land-atmospheric interaction. One of these mechanisms is the contribution of terrestrial evaporation to local and remote precipitation (i.e., moisture recycling). Early studies have used analytical methods to estimate the amount of precipitation that recycles within a basin or area of interest (see e.g., Lettau et al., 1979; Brubaker et al., 1993; Eltahir and Bras, 1994; Savenije, 1995; Burde and Zangvil, 2001). However, this field of study has advanced much with the introduction of atmospheric moisture tracking methods to estimate moisture recycling (e.g., Koster et al., 1986; Dirmeyer and Brubaker, 1999; Bosilovich and Schubert, 2002).

Several studies have shown global maps of continental precipitation recycling, indicating that about 40 % of the continental precipitation is of continental origin, but this number is much higher in, e.g., China (Bosilovich et al., 2002; Yoshimura et al., 2004; van der Ent et al., 2010; Goessling and Reick, 2011, 2013). Numaguti (1999) included a wide variety of moisture tracers into a general circulation model (GCM) to track water and its age through the atmosphere as well as through the soil. It was found, for example, that, counting from the moment of evaporation from the ocean, the mean water age of precipitating water in north-eastern Asia could exceed half a year whereby a water particle had been recycled on average two times. A comprehensive overview and quantification of import and export of water vapour between countries was given by Dirmeyer et al. (2009).

While nearly all previous studies focused on the “recycled” part of precipitation, van der Ent et al. (2010) also focused on the “recycled” part of evaporation. They, for example, found that in evaporation recycling “hot spots” such as East Africa and the northern Amazon about 60 to 90 % of the evaporation returns as continental precipitation.

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When it comes to moisture recycling as a metric for local land–atmosphere coupling, the follow-up study of van der Ent and Savenije (2011) solved the problem of scale- and shape-dependency of the regional moisture recycling ratios by converting these to length scales of the recycling process. They showed that in the tropics and in mountainous terrain these length scales can be as low as 500 to 2000 km. Spatially distributed global maps of actual average travel distances to precipitation were given by Dirmeyer et al. (2013).

From the numbers above it is evident that moisture recycling is of significant importance for water resources, agriculture, and ecosystems. Some studies have looked specifically at these issues. For instance, Dominguez and Kumar (2008) studied the central United States plains and concluded that local evaporative fluxes ensure ecoclimatological stability through a continued moisture contribution when advective fluxes diminish. Another example of ecosystem importance is the study by Spracklen et al. (2012) who found that air passing over dense vegetation produces much more rain than air passing over sparse vegetation. Regarding agriculture, Bagley et al. (2012) reported that reduced moisture recycling due to land-cover change may lead to potential crop yield reductions of 1 to 17 % in the world’s breadbasket regions, while other studies looked at the positive effect of irrigation in increasing moisture recycling (e.g., Tuinenburg et al., 2012; Wei et al., 2012). Considering moisture recycling as something that could potentially be managed, Keys et al. (2012) proposed the concept of the precipitationshed as a tool to assess the vulnerability of a certain region to land-use changes in its moisture contributing regions.

Land-use changes not only change total evaporation, but also its partitioning into its direct and delayed components. It is therefore somewhat surprising that all moisture recycling studies have reported their results in terms of moisture recycling due to total evaporation only. It has been speculated, however, that interception (direct evaporation) and transpiration (delayed evaporation) are likely to play a different role in moisture recycling (Savenije, 2004). This has, however, never been quantified. A possible method would be to try to link stable water isotope measurements to moisture recycling (e.g.,

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Kurita et al., 2004; Tian et al., 2007; Risi et al., 2013). Gat and Matsui (1991) used the d-excess value of stable water isotopes to estimate that 20–40 % of the evaporative flux in the Amazon basin is fractionating the isotopic composition. Theoretically, d-excess values in precipitation from for example the Global Network of Isotopes in Precipitation (GNIP) database (Froehlich et al., 2001) could be combined with estimates of moisture recycling (e.g., van der Ent and Savenije, 2011) to infer the contributions of fractionating and non-fractionating evaporation. However, the spatial and temporal resolution of available isotopic data is rather limited. Another difficulty is the fact that while it is generally accepted that open water evaporation is fractionating and evaporation of transpired water is not, for vegetation interception and floor interception the extent of fractionation is less clear (e.g., Gat and Matsui, 1991; Henderson-Sellers et al., 2002).

Global land-surface models generally include a partitioning of terrestrial evaporation into several direct and delayed components. These components include evaporation from transpiration, vegetation interception, floor interception, soil moisture and open water, although the names and exact definitions of these terms can differ from model to model. In any case, information on these individual components is not often reported and data are generally not provided (e.g., Mueller et al., 2013). This is probably the reason that, to our knowledge, no studies applying numerical atmospheric moisture tracking (see Gimeno et al., 2012; van der Ent et al., 2013) have considered the different components of terrestrial evaporation separately. In order to obtain a tailor-made dataset of partitioned evaporation, Wang-Erlandsson et al. (2014), the companion paper, hereafter referred to as Part 1, developed STEAM (Simple Terrestrial Evaporation to Atmosphere Model). This is a global hydrological land-surface model, which is specifically focused on realistic estimations of partitioned evaporation and how this depends on vegetation and land use.

The goal of this paper is to investigate and quantify the importance of the different components of evaporation in the hydrological cycle over continents. We aim to present a new image of the global hydrological cycle which includes quantification of partitioned evaporation and moisture recycling as well as the atmospheric residence

times of the individual components. Furthermore, we aim to provide spatially distributed global maps of different moisture recycling metrics that describe the role of interception and transpiration for local and remote moisture recycling processes in time and space. This provides new information on the susceptibility of regions to land-use changes. For example, if region A receives precipitation from transpiration in region B's dry season, then region A may experience increased dryness if region B was to be desertified.

## 2 Methods

### 2.1 Data

The input data for our atmospheric moisture tracking model, WAM-2layers (Water Accounting Model-2layers) (see Appendix A) comes from STEAM (Simple Terrestrial Evaporation to Atmosphere Model) (Part 1) and the ERA-Interim reanalysis (ERA-I) (Dee et al., 2011). STEAM evaporation data is also based on ERA-I (see Part 1 for details). The output of STEAM is the terrestrial evaporation  $E$  partitioned into five components:

$$E = E_{\text{vegetation\_interception}} + E_{\text{floor\_interception}} + E_{\text{soil\_moisture}} + E_{\text{inland\_waters}} + E_{\text{transpiration}} \quad (1)$$

In this paper we combine the direct (purely physical) evaporative fluxes into one term  $E_i$ , containing evaporation from interception, soil moisture and inland waters:

$$E_i = E_{\text{vegetation\_interception}} + E_{\text{floor\_interception}} + E_{\text{soil\_moisture}} + E_{\text{inland\_waters}} \quad (2)$$

This term consists of the direct fluxes from vegetation interception, floor interception and soil moisture evaporation, which have a small storage reservoir and small residence time at the surface (Part 1, Figs. 4 and 5). As the relative global contribution from the soil moisture and inland waters is quite small (Part 1, Fig. 2), this term mainly represents interception. Transpiration, the delayed (biophysical) evaporative flux, on

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the other hand provides a slow feedback with a large storage reservoir, which is the other component that we track:

$$E_t = E_{\text{transpiration}} \quad (3)$$

From ERA-I we use precipitation and evaporation over the oceans. For the terrestrial evaporation we use the partitioned evaporation fluxes computed by STEAM (forced by ERA-I, see Part 1). Furthermore, we use specific humidity and zonal and meridional wind speed from ERA-I. We downloaded these data at model levels spanning the atmosphere from zero pressure to surface pressure. Surface fluxes were given at three-hourly input and the other data at six-hourly. The data we use are on a  $1.5^\circ$  latitude  $\times$   $1.5^\circ$  longitude grid and cover the period of 1998–2009, but the results are presented for 1999–2008, because we use 1 year as model spin-up for both the backward and forward tracking. In Appendix A we show annual average, as well as January and July figures for precipitation, direct evaporative fluxes (interception) and the delayed evaporative flux (transpiration). Appendix B contains further details about the moisture tracking in WAM-2layers.

We consider STEAM and ERA-I as adequate data sources to perform realistic moisture tracking and their global estimates of evaporation and precipitation fall well within the range of estimates given by other studies. It was shown that ERA-I performs better in reproducing the hydrological cycle than ERA-40 (Trenberth et al., 2011) and even performs better in terms of water balance closure than the other reanalysis products MERRA and CSFR (Lorenz and Kunstmann, 2012). Keys et al. (2014) used both ERA-I and MERRA as input for WAM-2layers and showed that global moisture recycling patterns are not very different.

## 2.2 Definitions of moisture recycling metrics

Here, we define moisture recycling metrics, each of which contains different information about the moisture recycling process. First, we start with the metrics related to continental moisture recycling, which are measures for land–atmosphere coupling at

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continental scale. Second, we define metrics related to the time scale of the moisture recycling process. Finally, we define metrics that act as measure for local moisture feedback.

## 2.2.1 Continental moisture recycling

5 In the context of continental moisture recycling (see also van der Ent et al., 2010) precipitation on land  $P$  can be separated as follows:

$$P = P_o + P_c = P_o + P_{c,i} + P_{c,t}, \quad (4)$$

where  $P_o$  is the part that is of oceanic origin and  $P_c$  is the continentally recycled part of the precipitation (i.e., most recently evaporated from a continental area).  $P_c$  can be split further into  $P_{c,i}$  (i.e., the recycled precipitation that originates from vegetation interception, floor interception, soil moisture and inland waters) and  $P_{c,t}$  (i.e., the recycled precipitation that originates from transpiration). The “continental precipitation recycling ratio for interception” is defined as:

$$15 \quad \rho_{c,i} = P_{c,i}/P \quad (5)$$

and the “continental precipitation recycling ratio for transpiration” as:

$$\rho_{c,t} = P_{c,t}/P. \quad (6)$$

20 Also in the context of continental moisture recycling, we split land evaporation  $E$ :

$$E = E_o + E_c = E_{o,i} + E_{o,t} + E_{c,i} + E_{c,t}, \quad (7)$$

where  $E_o$  is the part of the evaporation that precipitates on the ocean and  $E_c$  is the continental recycling part (i.e., returns as continental precipitation). Subscripts  $i$  and  $t$  denote the interception (Eq. 2) and transpiration (Eq. 3) respectively. This also allows us to define the “continental evaporation recycling ratio for interception”:

$$25 \quad \varepsilon_{c,i} = E_{c,i}/E \quad (8)$$

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and the “continental evaporation recycling ratio for transpiration”:

$$\varepsilon_{c,t} = E_{c,t}/E. \quad (9)$$

The two metrics in Eqs. (8) and (9) both carry information about their relative contribution to moisture recycling as well as their relative contribution to total evaporation. To study the recycling efficiency of the individual partitioned fluxes we define the “continental evaporation recycling efficiency for interception”:

$$\varepsilon_{c,ii} = E_{c,i}/E_i \quad (10)$$

and the “continental evaporation recycling efficiency for transpiration”:

$$\varepsilon_{c,tt} = E_{c,t}/E_t. \quad (11)$$

### 2.2.2 Lifetime of continental moisture recycling

Previous studies by Trenberth (1998) and by van der Ent and Savenije (2011) calculated the local depletion and restoration time scales of atmospheric moisture, defined as the atmospheric moisture storage over precipitation and evaporation respectively. Trenberth (1998) estimated the average time scale over land to be around nine days. However meaningful, these time scales only provided local information, but did not indicate the actual time spent in the atmosphere by a recycled water particle. Therefore, we propose new metrics that describe the actual time spent in the atmospheric. We define the “lifetime of continental precipitation recycling”:

$$\tau_{\rho,c} = N(P_c \leftarrow E_c), \quad (12)$$

where  $N$  stands for the time spent in the atmosphere, or in other words, the age of the water particle. The lifetime of continental precipitation recycling  $\tau_{\rho,c}$  is a measure at the point where a water particle precipitates and stands for the average time spent between continental evaporation and continental precipitation, or in other words, the

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average age at the point where a water particle precipitates. Note that  $\tau_{\rho,c}$  only provides information on the recycled part of the precipitation and not on the total precipitation (see Eq. 4). Likewise we define the “lifetime of continental evaporation recycling for interception”:

$$5 \quad \tau_{\varepsilon,c,i} = N(E_{c,i} \rightarrow P_{c,i}) \quad (13)$$

and the “lifetime of continental evaporation recycling for transpiration”:

$$10 \quad \tau_{\varepsilon,c,t} = N(E_{c,t} \rightarrow P_{c,t}). \quad (14)$$

Both metrics in Eqs. (13) and (14) are defined at the place where evaporation occurs at the land surface ( $E_c$  in Eq. 7) and determine the average time an evaporated particle that recycles over land will spend in the atmosphere. For the calculation of these lifetimes we included water age tracers in our model (Appendix B3).

### 2.2.3 Local recycling and the length scales of evaporated water

15 Besides the continental recycling metrics, we are also interested in the feedback between evaporation and precipitation locally. For a certain predefined region (e.g., a grid cell) we can split precipitation and evaporation as follows:

$$20 \quad P = P_a + P_r = P_{a,i} + P_{a,t} + P_{r,i} + P_{r,t} \quad (15)$$

and

$$E = E_a + E_r = E_{a,i} + E_{a,t} + E_{r,i} + E_{r,t}, \quad (16)$$

where  $P_a$  is the part of the precipitation that comes from moisture advected into the region,  $E_a$  is the part of the evaporation that is advected away from the grid cell and  $P_r$  and  $E_r$  are the regional recycling parts (i.e., recycle within the same region). Subscripts

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$i$  and  $t$  again denote interception (Eq. 2) and transpiration (Eq. 3) respectively. This also allows us to define the “regional precipitation recycling ratio”:

$$\rho_r = P_r/P \quad (17)$$

5 and the “regional evaporation recycling ratio”:

$$\varepsilon_r = E_r/E. \quad (18)$$

We should realise that these ratios are scale- and shape-dependent, which is problematic as grid cells generally differ in scale and shape. Some studies have tried to overcome this problem by scaling such ratios to a common reference area (e.g., Trenberth, 1999; Dominguez et al., 2006; Dirmeyer and Brubaker, 2007). However, such an approach fails to properly take into account the shape of the region and the orientation of the prevailing winds.

As an alternative, van der Ent and Savenije (2011) developed a method that yields scale- and shape-independent measures for local evaporation-precipitation interaction. Suppose we are following an atmospheric water particle along a streamline in the same direction as the wind direction. The streamline starts in point  $X_0$ , ends in point  $X_1$  and the distance between  $X_0$  and  $X_1$  is  $\Delta x$ . Based on Dominguez et al. (2006) and van der Ent and Savenije (2011), we can write:

$$20 \rho_{X_1}(\Delta x) = 1 - (\exp(-\Delta x/\lambda_p)) \quad (19)$$

and

$$\varepsilon_{X_0}(\Delta x) = 1 - (\exp(-\Delta x/\lambda_\varepsilon)) \quad (20)$$

25 where,  $\rho_{X_1}$  is the precipitation recycling ratio in  $X_1$  and  $\varepsilon_{X_0}$  is the evaporation recycling ratio in  $X_0$  (i.e., the fraction of evaporation in  $X_0$  that returns as precipitation to the land

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surface along the streamline).  $\lambda_\rho$  represents the “local length scale of precipitation recycling”:

$$\lambda_\rho = \frac{Su_h}{E} \quad (21)$$

5 and  $\lambda_\epsilon$  is the “local length scale of evaporation recycling”:

$$\lambda_\epsilon = \frac{Su_h}{P}, \quad (22)$$

10 where,  $S$  is atmospheric moisture storage (i.e., precipitable water) and  $u_h$  is horizontal wind speed. These length scales  $\lambda$  have dimension length [L] and can be physically interpreted as the average travel distances before precipitation if  $\frac{Su_h}{E}$  is constant upwind, or the average travel distance after evaporation if  $\frac{Su_h}{P}$  remains equal downwind. However, it is generally unlikely for these quantities to remain equal over a large distance, so  $\lambda$  must be interpreted as the local process scale of recycling. When we consider the distance  $\Delta x$  to be sufficiently small we can also obtain the areal average regional precipitation recycling ratio (Eq. 17) by integrating Eq. (19), dividing by the distance and substituting Eq. (21):

$$\rho_r = \frac{\Delta x + \lambda_\rho \exp\left(-\frac{\Delta x}{\lambda_\rho}\right) - \lambda_\rho}{\Delta x}. \quad (23)$$

The exact solution for  $\lambda_\rho$  is:

$$20 \lambda_\rho = \frac{\Delta x}{W\left(\frac{\exp\left(\frac{1}{\rho_r-1}\right)}{\rho_r-1}\right) + \frac{1}{1-\rho_r}}, \quad (24)$$

where  $W(a)$  is the Lambert  $W$ -Function (e.g., Corless et al., 1996). In this research, however, we are interested in the local length scale for interception and transpiration

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recycling. Using the fluxes in Eq. (16), we first define the “regional evaporation recycling efficiency for interception”:

$$\varepsilon_{r,ii} = E_{r,i}/E_i \quad (25)$$

5 and the “regional evaporation recycling efficiency for transpiration”:

$$\varepsilon_{r,tt} = E_{r,t}/E_t. \quad (26)$$

Analogous to Eqs. (23) and (24), the “local length scale of evaporation recycling for interception” can be found by:

$$10 \lambda_{\varepsilon, i} = \frac{\Delta x}{W \left( \frac{\exp\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon_{r,ii}-1}\right)}{\varepsilon_{r,ii}-1}\right) + \frac{1}{1-\varepsilon_{r,ii}}} \quad (27)$$

and the “local length scale of evaporation recycling for transpiration” can be found by:

$$\lambda_{\varepsilon, t} = \frac{\Delta x}{W \left( \frac{\exp\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon_{r,tt}-1}\right)}{\varepsilon_{r,tt}-1}\right) + \frac{1}{1-\varepsilon_{r,tt}}}. \quad (28)$$

15 Note that both  $\lambda_{\varepsilon,i}$  and  $\lambda_{\varepsilon,t}$  are defined by  $\frac{Su_h}{P}$  (Eq. 22), so they are only equal if evaporation from interception and transpiration occur simultaneously. However, in many cases they will occur at different times when the quantity  $\frac{Su_h}{P}$  is different. As a result,  $\lambda_{\varepsilon,i}$  and  $\lambda_{\varepsilon,t}$  are likely to have different values and can be effectively used in revealing their relative importance for local moisture feedback. In Appendix B4 it is explained how the

20 variable inputs in Eqs. (24), (27), and (28) were obtained in this study.

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### 3 Results and discussion

#### 3.1 New image of the hydrological cycle over land

Figure 1 presents an image of the global hydrological cycle over land. In contrast to traditional images of the hydrological cycle (e.g., Chahine, 1992) we include a quantification of moisture recycling, partitioned evaporation and the lifetime of all these processes separately. Before precipitation falls on land, its average atmospheric residence time is about 10 days. We estimate that about 38% of continental precipitation  $P$  is transformed into runoff  $Q$  and the remaining part evaporates by direct (purely physical) fluxes  $E_i$  and by the delayed (biophysical) flux  $E_t$  (see Part 1). A portion of this land evaporation is advected to the oceans and precipitates there  $E_o$ . The remaining part recycles over land, but interestingly, interception  $E_{c,i}$  and transpiration  $E_{c,t}$  do so in different relative magnitudes. Of interception, 60% ( $E_{c,i}/E_i$ ) recycles, while transpiration recycles slightly less at 56% ( $E_{c,t}/E_t$ ). The lifetime in the atmosphere of evaporated water is on average more than a week, which is similar to a previous estimate of 9.2 days (Bosilovich et al., 2002). The recycled part of evaporation, however, spends on average less than a week in the atmosphere on average. We can also observe that (the recycled part of) interception has a shorter lifetime in the atmosphere. Finally, global continental precipitation recycling  $P_c$  is estimated at 36%, slightly less than the 40% estimated in a previous study using WAM-1layer and ERA-I evaporation (van der Ent et al., 2010). Globally averaged, the recycling efficiencies and atmospheric lifetimes are not very different for interception and transpiration, but locally these differences can be large, which we show in Sects. 3.2 to 3.6, where we discuss the spatial patterns of the magnitudes and time scales of the recycling fluxes in the hydrological cycle.

#### 3.2 Continental moisture recycling

Figure 2 shows the annual average continental precipitation recycling ratios for total evaporation (Fig. 2a), for interception (Eq. 5 and Fig. 2b), and transpiration (Eq. 6 and

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Fig. 2c). While interpreting the figure it should be remembered that “interception” includes evaporation from the vegetation, floor, soil and inland waters (Eq. 2). The areas that depend heavily on continental precipitation recycling are potentially susceptible to (upwind) changes in land use. Animations 1 to 3 (Supplement) illustrate how we obtained Fig. 2 with forward tracking runs of tagged terrestrial evaporation, interception and transpiration. They show the fraction of atmospheric moisture originating from terrestrial evaporation, interception and transpiration respectively, averaged for each day (actual model time step is 15 min).

Precipitation recycling due to transpiration shows higher values (Fig. 2c) and is in the absolute sense more important than interception (Fig. 2b). Although the patterns of Fig. 2b and c are very similar, there are a few noteworthy differences, for which we can think of two reasons. First, dominance of one type of evaporative flux in a certain area. Second, dominance of one type of evaporative flux during a certain part of the year with different prevailing winds. For example, in South America, the “hot spot” of interception recycling is situated more to the north compared to the “hot spot” of transpiration recycling. This is explained by high interception in the Amazonian rainforest (Fig. A1b), compared to transpiration being high throughout the continent (Fig. A1c), and by transpiration being more dominant during winter when the atmospheric flow is more directed to the south (Fig. A2).

The complementary process of precipitation recycling is evaporation recycling. The different metrics corresponding to evaporation recycling (Eqs. 7 to 11) are shown in Fig. 3. Regions with high evaporation recycling are important source regions for sustaining downwind precipitation. Figure 3a and c contain information about where the respective evaporative fluxes are important as well as to which regions they supply the moisture. The sum of Fig. 3a and c leads to Fig. 3e. The evaporation recycling efficiencies (Fig. 3b and d) just contain information about the likelihood of a particle to recycle after continental evaporation. From Fig. 3f it can be seen that in most regions of the world interception evaporation (Figs. 3b and A1b) is more likely to return as precipitation over land than transpiration (Figs. 3d and A1c). This is especially the

case in regions with a relatively small continental mass (in relation the prevalent winds) and distinct wet and dry seasons, such as southern Africa, India and Australia, where transpiration in the dry season is relatively likely to return to the ocean.

In the Congo and northern Amazon regions, the continental evaporation recycling efficiencies are high (Fig. 3b and d) and the differences between relative interception and transpiration recycling are practically zero (Fig. 3f), which indicates that whatever evaporates is equally likely to return to the continent. This indicates strong local recycling, or at least evaporative fluxes that contribute to precipitation elsewhere on the continent, throughout the year. However, Fig. 3f also indicates some regions in Eurasia where transpiration is more likely to return to the continent (in blue). This can probably be explained by the fact that in these areas almost all evaporation in winter comes from interception (Fig. A2c), which, for a large part, is subsequently advected over and away from the relatively dry continent (Fig. A2a). In other words, the moisture coming from interception has less opportunity to recycle, whereas transpiration is present only in the wetter summer season and has more opportunity to recycle.

### 3.3 Atmospheric lifetime

Figure 4 shows the time spent in the atmosphere by the moisture that recycles over land. Figure 4a indicates the time that continentally evaporated moisture has spent in the atmosphere until it precipitates (Eq. 12). In other words, it is the time component of Fig. 2a. Note that in places where  $\rho_c$  (Fig. 2a) is low, the corresponding regions in Fig. 4a contain little information. Figure 4b (Eq. 13) and c (Eq. 14) indicate the time it takes before direct (interception, soil moisture and inland waters) and delayed (transpiration) evaporative fluxes return to the terrestrial land surface.

Figure 4b and c are the time components of Fig. 3b and d. We can see that in general the direct evaporative fluxes (Fig. 4b) remain in the atmosphere for a shorter period of time compared to transpiration (Fig. 4c). We can explain this by the fact that the terrestrial time scales of the direct evaporative fluxes are much shorter than those of transpiration (Part 1, Figs. 4 and 5). The differences between Fig. 4b and c are less strong in

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the very wet tropical regions around the equator, as well as in the Andes and Himalaya mountains. This is probably caused by the absence of distinctively different precipitation triggering mechanisms throughout the year. On the other hand, we see several regions where the atmospheric lifetime of interception recycling (Fig. 4b) is much lower than that of transpiration recycling (Fig. 4c). Many of these regions correspond with those identified in Fig. 3f (e.g., southern Africa, India and Australia). However, in contrast to Fig. 3f, the lifetime of interception recycling is also shorter in northern Eurasia, which is probably due to the fact that Fig. 4 just considers the recycled part of the precipitation.

Not surprisingly, Fig. 4 shows that the recycling process in the tropics is faster ( $\sim 3\text{--}6$  days) than in the more temperate zones ( $\sim 4\text{--}12$  days). Interestingly, however, recycled precipitation (Fig. 4a) in North America has spent less time in the atmosphere than in Eurasia. We think that this could be explained by a fraction of evaporation in North America that passes over the Atlantic Ocean in summer and precipitates in Europe, which obviously increases the average atmospheric residence time. This phenomenon can also be observed from Animations 2 and 3 (Supplement). It seems that transpiration (Animation 3 and Fig. 4c) is a slightly larger contributor to this cross-continental transport than the direct evaporative fluxes (Animation 2 and Fig. 4b).

### 3.4 Local length scales

We assess local moisture recycling strength using local length scales of moisture recycling (Eqs. 19 to 28), which are a scale- and shape-independent alternative to the often used regional recycling ratios (Eqs. 17 and 18) (see also van der Ent and Savenije, 2011, Fig. 2). Figure 5a shows the local length scale of precipitation recycling, where the importance of local evaporation for precipitation is indicated by a lower value. Note that the arrows in the graph now indicate the moisture fluxes in the bottom part of the atmosphere only (Eq. B5) as this is where the fast recycling takes place. If the values are similar over a large area, the local length scale is also a proxy for travel distance (e.g.,  $\sim 2000$  km in sub-Saharan Africa), despite a possible underestimation

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due to local moisture not reaching the fast moving, upper layers of the atmosphere. The precipitation recycling length scale is generally low in the wet tropical regions, but increases with strong winds, such as is the case in the northern Amazon and East Africa (Fig. 5a). Low length scales are also present in mountainous regions (e.g., Rocky Mountains, Andes, Alps, Caucasus and Tibetan Plateau) and areas of weak winds (e.g., throughout Russia).

Figure 5b and c shows the length scales of evaporation recycling for interception and transpiration respectively. They provide a proxy for the distance an evaporated water particle travels, before returning to the land surface. In the world's deserts there is obviously very little precipitation, and the probability of an evaporated particle returning locally is very low given the high local length scales. Ignoring the deserts, Fig. 5b indicates that direct evaporation on most of the globe has a length scale of less than 2500 km (this corresponds to  $\sim 2\%$  recycling within 100 km).

We have already seen that interception in general has a higher probability to recycle over land (Figs. 1 and 3) and returns to the land surface more quickly (Figs. 1 and 4). Consistent with this, the length scale of interception recycling (Fig. 5b) is much shorter compared to that of transpiration recycling (Fig. 5c). The difference in length scales between interception and transpiration is quite striking, especially in the temperate zones. This is similar to the finding in Fig. 4, but seems more pronounced. The typical time scale of a wet spell is 1–5 days (Zolina et al., 2013), while evaporation from interception has a time scale at the surface in the order of hours (Part 1, Figs. 4c and d and 5c and d) and transpiration has a time scale in the order of weeks to months (Part 1, Figs. 4a and 5a). Since interception takes place only during wet spells and transpiration takes place regardless, it follows that interception recycling is much more local than transpiration recycling.

### 3.5 Seasonality of moisture recycling metrics

A selection of moisture recycling metrics for the months of January and July is shown in Fig. 6. In summer, the land is warmer than the ocean and continental precipitation

recycling ratios are higher, whereas in winter this is the opposite (Fig. 6a–d). Looking at the Northern Hemisphere’s temperate and polar climate zones, the lifetimes and length scales in winter (Fig. 6e, g, i and k) are in most places shorter than in summer (Fig. 6f, h, j and l). This means that evaporation in winter generally returns to the land surface more quickly than in summer. However, evaporation in winter is much lower (Fig. A2) and is thus a less important contributor to precipitation than in summer (Fig. 6a–d). In the tropics and subtropics, the moisture recycling metrics are driven more by monsoonal periods, with stronger feedback, i.e., shorter atmospheric lifetimes (Fig. 6e–h) and shorter length scales (Fig. 6i–l) during the monsoon season.

The different roles of interception and transpiration in the hydrological cycle become evident when we compare January and July (Fig. 6), relative to the annual averages (Figs. 2 to 5). For example, it is clear that in the Northern Hemisphere’s temperate and polar zones in January, evaporation from interception is the principal moisture recycling mechanism (Fig. 6a vs. c, and Fig. 6i vs. k). This is explained by the near absence of transpiration (Fig. A2e). However, near absence of transpiration is not a necessity for interception to be the principal recycling mechanism, which we can see from Australia and South Africa in January (summer). This is probably explained by the relatively small dimensions of these land masses which cause transpiration outside of a wet spell to get advected to the oceanic atmosphere more often than evaporated interception.

Whereas transpiration can compensate for a reduction of interception in the wet season, the opposite is not true, making transpiration dependent regions more vulnerable. For example, coastal West Africa in January and the La Plata basin in July are predominantly dependent on recycled moisture from transpiration. For both these regions, this transpiration recycling dependence is in a period with little rainfall (Fig. A2a and b). However, this rainfall could be important for dry season farming and drinking water supply, making these regions susceptible to local and remote land-use changes. These regions are particularly threatened by upwind deforestation, which could therefore lead to reduced precipitation in West Africa and the La Plata basin in general, but particularly during their respective dry seasons.

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Observations already show a general decrease (with some edge effects) in precipitation over forest-to-non-forest transitions due to deforestation in the Amazon basin (Knox et al., 2011). Our results suggest that reduced moisture recycling could propagate the decline in precipitation further downwind. Bagley et al. (2014), showed how the northern part of the Amazon, which is wet all year round, depends on recycled moisture and as such is vulnerable to deforestation as well. Our results suggest that deforestation in this northern part would mainly lead to reduced interception recycling. Potentially, other evaporative fluxes may compensate for the reduction in interception evaporation (Part 1, Figs. 6 and 7), and other well-managed vegetation would not necessarily lead to dramatic rainfall reductions. For the southern part of the Amazon and the link with the La Plata basin, however, deforestation could be a much bigger problem, as reduced transpiration recycling could lead to a drier dry season. It must be noted, however, that the magnitude of the reduced moisture recycling effect depends on the land use that replaces the forest. Irrigated agriculture or open water could theoretically maintain high evaporation rates as well, but most other land-use types will not be able to produce high evaporation rates during the dry season.

### 3.6 West Africa

We choose to investigate the sources for precipitation in West Africa in more detail as we, based on Figs. 2 to 6, suspected to see clear seasonal differences in local and remote as well as interception and transpiration sources. Figure 7a depicts the spatial distribution of the yearly average evaporative sources for precipitation in West Africa, which is termed the precipitationshed (see Keys et al., 2012). The strongest source of precipitation comes from within the region, especially the south of West Africa. Oceanic contributions come from different directions: Atlantic Ocean, Mediterranean, Red Sea and Indian Ocean. However, a significant moisture contribution comes from terrestrial sources, with the African continent itself being the most important. We should note that these African sources for a large part depend on recycled moisture as well (Fig. 2a), thus a considerable part of the terrestrial sources have been recycled more than once.

Some of southern Europe's evaporation ends up in West Africa as well. This also provides an explanation for the long lifetimes of evaporated moisture in southern Europe (Fig. 4b and c). The source regions found in Fig. 7a are in line with previous research in this region (Druyan and Koster, 1989; Gong and Eltahir, 1996; Nieto et al., 2006; Dirmeyer et al., 2009; Goessling and Reick, 2013), but it is hard to be specific as all these studies used slightly different sink regions. The moisture tracking model used here, WAM-2layers, assigns a relatively more important role to the Atlantic compared to our previously used WAM-1layer (van der Ent et al., 2010; Keys et al., 2012). With the use of WAM-2layers our results are more in line with those found by Goessling and Reick (2013), who employed an online 3-D moisture tracking method.

Figure 7b shows the seasonal variation in precipitation and its terrestrial evaporative sources split up into internal vs. external and interception vs. transpiration. In the beginning of the year, when there is little precipitation in the region, transpiration from within West Africa as well as more remote sources of transpiration are most important contributors. However, during the onset of the monsoon (April–June), remote sources, and in specific transpiration sources become increasingly important. This is also the period where southern Europe's transpiration contribution to West African precipitation is largest (peaking at 5% in June, not shown). From March until the peak of the monsoon in August, the contribution to rainfall from regional interception is about equal to that from regional transpiration. In the decline of the monsoon both internal and external transpiration recycling become more important again, whereas the share of interception recycling reduces. These results shown in Fig. 7 fit well into the picture that monsoonal rainfall in West Africa is associated with a strong linkage to soil moisture anomalies (Koster et al., 2004; van den Hurk and van Meijgaard, 2009; Taylor et al., 2011), but that precipitation in the northern part of the region has a strong correlation to sea surface temperature in the Mediterranean as well (Rowell, 2003; van der Ent and Savenije, 2013).

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## 4 Summary, conclusions and outlook

The objective of this paper was to assess the role of the different components of evaporation in the hydrological cycle over continents. We have used the atmospheric moisture tracking model WAM-2layers to track direct (purely physical) and delayed (biophysical) evaporative fluxes, as computed by STEAM (Part 1). By direct evaporative fluxes we mean the water evaporated from vegetation interception, floor interception, soil moisture, and inland waters. Interception is what largely dominates direct evaporation (Part 1, Fig. 2). By delayed evaporative flux we mean transpiration.

We can summarise our findings about the different roles of interception and transpiration in the hydrological cycle as follows: (1) 60 % of direct evaporation returns to the land surface, whereas this is 56 %, and thus slightly less, for transpiration, (2) the residence time of direct evaporation in the atmosphere is 8 days (6 for the recycling part only) and 9 days for transpiration, and (3) the local length scale of interception recycling is on average much shorter than the length scale of transpiration recycling. We attribute these results to the fact that interception has a small storage reservoir and therefore occurs mostly during wet spells. Transpiration on the other hand draws from a large storage reservoir and can occur during dry periods, when evaporated moisture is more likely to be advected over large distances, as well.

These results found are particularly useful from a landscape resilience perspective. Regions that receive precipitation from continentally recycled evaporation are vulnerable to upwind land-use changes (e.g., Dekker et al., 2007). However, a region that receives precipitation originating from interception is more resilient to land-use changes in their source region than a region that depends on transpiration. A land-use change could for example reduce interception capacity, but during a wet period this is likely to be compensated by other evaporative fluxes. Regions that receive precipitation from continentally recycled transpiration are less resilient to land-use changes in their source region, especially if a region's precipitation depends on transpiration in the dry season.

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Because when vegetation is removed, the mechanism to retain and draw moisture from the root zone is lost as well, and total evaporation will be significantly reduced.

Our results suggest that the effect of land-use change on moisture recycling is very different during wet and dry seasons, and also during summer and winter, indicating that seasonality is important to consider when analysing effects of land-use change. During the wet season, increased or decreased interception could amplify or attenuate the local moisture recycling signal. Still, we conclude that land-use change needs to be drastic to influence the evaporative fluxes in a way that this signal would have continental scale influence. During the dry season, land-use change (in particular deforestation), could lead to reduced transpiration, which reduces moisture recycling, and as such could have a domino effect on precipitation downwind. Such potential effects of forest to agriculture conversion make the already challenging task of sustainably producing enough food for a growing population (Rockström et al., 2012) even more challenging. On the other hand, our detailed analysis for West Africa, suggest that large-scale water harvesting, small reservoirs and agroforestry (Reij and Smaling, 2008; van de Giesen et al., 2010) in West Africa itself, but also in central Africa (upwind) could have positive effects on the rainfall in West Africa.

For future studies, we expect that coupled land-biosphere-atmosphere models will be increasingly used for predicting climate impacts due to land-use changes. However, we must not forget the tremendous uncertainty in the process understanding and parameterization underlying these models (e.g., Pielke Sr et al., 2011). It is not uncommon for different models to predict different outputs for temperature (e.g., Brovkin et al., 2013), but especially precipitation (e.g., Pitman et al., 2012), and fundamental issues are still debated, such as the partitioning of evaporation (Jasechko et al., 2013; Coenders-Gerrits et al., 2014). Another issue requiring attention is that recent studies have shown that increased atmospheric carbon dioxide reduces transpiration (de Boer et al., 2011; Keenan et al., 2013). Our paper shows that this will likely reduce moisture recycling and precipitation in some regions (see Figs. 1c, 2c and d and 6c and d), making them more vulnerable to droughts, but this clearly needs more quantification.

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This paper stresses the fact that the land surface has a large potential to influence the hydrological cycle. Quantification of exact regional and planetary boundaries (Rockström et al., 2009) of tolerable land-use changes before drastic precipitation changes are expected are, however, difficult to provide. This is because our results only allow for a first order estimate of land-use change impacts, whereas very drastic land-use change affects the energy balance and wind patterns as well (e.g., Kleidon et al., 2000; Roy and Avissar, 2002; Dallmeyer and Claussen, 2011; Goessling and Reick, 2011; Bowring et al., 2014). Nonetheless, we anticipate that our results may help future coupled land–atmosphere research to interpret whether the findings are the result of moisture recycling or other climatic processes. As such, we hope that this paper is useful for providing a larger context to future regional studies examining the impact of land-use changes on the hydrological cycle.

## Appendix A

### Precipitation and partitioned evaporation

In this appendix we present figures of global precipitation (ERA-I) and partitioned evaporation (STEAM) (Eqs. 1 to 3). Figure A1 presents the annual averages, which are relevant for interpreting Figs. 2 to 5, while Fig. A2 present the January and July figures, relevant for interpreting Fig. 6.

## Appendix B

### Atmospheric moisture tracking (WAM-2layers)

Here, we present our atmospheric moisture tracking model WAM-2layers (Water Accounting Model-2layers) V2.3.01. This is an update to the previously used WAM-1layer (van der Ent et al., 2010; Keys et al., 2012; van der Ent and Savenije, 2013). Recently,

it was shown that WAM-2layers arrived at very similar results as a highly detailed complex moisture tracking scheme in a regional climate model (Knoche and Kunstmann, 2013), but with much smaller computational cost (van der Ent et al., 2013). In this paper we extend WAM-2layers to track tagged moisture on the global scale forward and backward in time.

## B1 Water balance

The underlying principle of WAM-2layers is the water balance:

$$\frac{\partial S_k}{\partial t} = \frac{\partial(S_k u)}{\partial x} + \frac{\partial(S_k v)}{\partial y} + E_{i,k} + E_{t,k} - P_k + \xi_k \pm F_v \left[ \text{L}^3 \text{T}^{-1} \right], \quad (\text{B1})$$

where  $S_k$  is the atmospheric moisture storage (i.e., precipitable water) in layer  $k$  (either the top or the bottom layer),  $t$  is time,  $u$  and  $v$  stand for the wind components in  $x$  (zonal) and  $y$  (meridional) direction,  $\xi$  is a residual and  $F_v$  is the vertical moisture transport. We calculate moisture transport over the boundaries of the grid cells. Change in atmospheric moisture due to horizontal transport is described by

$$\frac{\Delta(Su)}{\Delta x} = F_{k,x}^- - F_{k,x}^+ \quad (\text{B2})$$

and

$$\frac{\Delta(Sv)}{\Delta y} = F_{k,y}^- - F_{k,y}^+ \quad (\text{B3})$$

where  $F_k$  is the moisture flux over the boundary of a grid cell in the bottom or top layer. Superscript “-” stands for the western and southern boundaries of the grid cell and “+” stands for the eastern and northern boundaries. The moisture flux can be calculated as follows:

$$F_k = \frac{L}{g\rho_w} \int_{\rho_{\text{top}}}^{\rho_{\text{bottom}}} q u_h d\rho, \quad (\text{B4})$$

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where  $L$  is the length of the grid cell perpendicular to the direction of the moisture flux,  $g$  is the gravitational acceleration,  $\rho_w$  the density of liquid water ( $1000 \text{ kg m}^{-3}$ ),  $p$  stands for pressure,  $q$  for specific humidity and  $u_h$  is the horizontal component in either  $x$  or  $y$  direction. For the top layer applies:  $p_{\text{top}} = 0$  and  $p_{\text{bottom}} = p_{\text{divide}}$ . For the bottom layer applies:  $p_{\text{top}} = p_{\text{divide}}$  and  $p_{\text{bottom}} = p_{\text{surface}}$ . Here,  $p_{\text{divide}}$  is the pressure at the division between the bottom and top layer. Given the ERA-I data in this paper, we calculated  $p_{\text{divide}}$  by:

$$p_{\text{divide}} = 7438.803 + 0.728786 \times p_{\text{surface}} \quad (\text{Pa}), \quad (\text{B5})$$

which corresponds to 81 283 Pa at a standard surface pressure of 101 325 Pa. By trial and error investigation, this division appeared to best capture the division between sheared wind systems, where wind in the bottom layer goes in another direction than wind in the top layer. Over land, the bottom layer roughly accounts for 40–80 % of the total column moisture storage and for 30–70 % of the total horizontal moisture flux.

Looking further at Eq. (B1), the evaporation from interception and transpiration  $E_i$  and  $E_t$  (together  $E$ ) enter only in the bottom layer, thus  $E_k = E$  in the bottom layer and  $E_k = 0$  in the top layer. Precipitation is assumed to be immediately removed from the moisture storage (i.e., no exchange of falling precipitation between the top and bottom layer) and we assume “well-mixed” conditions for precipitation:

$$P_k = P \frac{S_k}{S}, \quad (\text{B6})$$

where  $P$  is total precipitation and  $S$  is total atmospheric storage in the vertical. The residual  $\xi$  is the result of data-assimilation in the ERA-I data and the fact that our offline tracking scheme calculates the water balance on a coarser spatial and temporal resolution.

The vertical transport of moisture  $F_v$  in Eq. (B1) is difficult to calculate, because besides transport by average vertical wind speed, there is dispersive moisture exchange due to the convective scheme in ERA-I. Therefore, we assume the vertical exchange

to be the closure term of our water balance. However, as a result of the residual  $\xi$ , we cannot always fully close the water balance. Hence, closure here is defined by the ratio of residuals in the top and bottom layer being proportional to the moisture content of the layers:

$$5 \quad \frac{\xi_{\text{top}}}{S_{\text{top}}} = \frac{\xi_{\text{bottom}}}{S_{\text{bottom}}}. \quad (\text{B7})$$

Using Eq. (B7) vertical moisture transport can be calculated as follows:

$$F_v = \frac{S_{\text{bottom}}}{S} (\xi_{\text{bottom}}^* + \xi_{\text{top}}^*) - \xi_{\text{bottom}}^*, \quad (\text{B8})$$

10 where  $\xi_{\text{bottom}}^*$  and  $\xi_{\text{top}}^*$  are the residuals before vertical transport was taken into account. Note that including  $F_v$  (positive downward), as calculated by Eq. (B8), in Eq. (B1) will lead to Eq. (B7) being satisfied.

## B2 Water tagging experiments

In WAM-2layers we apply the same water balance on moisture of a certain origin. For example, the water balance of tagged interception (denoted by subscript  $i$ ) in the bottom layer of the atmosphere for forward tracking is described by:

$$15 \quad \frac{\partial S_{i,\text{bottom}}}{\partial t} = \frac{\partial(S_{i,\text{bottom}}u)}{\partial x} + \frac{\partial(S_{i,\text{bottom}}v)}{\partial y} + E_i - P_i \pm F_{v,i}. \quad (\text{B9})$$

20 Equations that are similar to Eq. (B9) apply to tagged transpiration, the top layer and backward tracking. These equations are solved using an explicit numerical scheme on Eulerian coordinates (the same as the input data). The time step of the calculation is, however, reduced to 0.25 h for reasons of numerical stability. By trial and error we found that the vertical flux as calculated by Eq. (B8) was too small to adequately take care of the vertical transport of tagged water (bottom/top bucket completely filled with

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the other bucket being nearly empty). We attribute this to turbulent moisture exchange (especially during rain events) between the top and bottom layer. To solve this we have retained  $F_v$  as the net vertical moisture flux, but during the tagging experiments we have used a vertical flux of  $4F_v$  in the direction of the net flux and  $3F_v$  in opposite direction. We acknowledge that this is a simplification of the turbulent moisture exchange, but we consider this is an adequate parameterization for our purposes. Moreover, our results were not found to be very sensitive to the turbulent moisture exchange. Different forward and backward tagging runs with WAM-2layers allowed for the computation of the continental moisture recycling metrics presented in Sect. 2.2.1.

### B3 Water age tagging experiments

We are also interested in the time that evaporated moisture from interception and transpiration spends in the atmosphere. Therefore, we have introduced a tracer that keeps track of the age of the atmospheric moisture in the forward tagging runs. This age increases linearly with time and at each time step  $t$  the model calculates the age  $N_g$  of the tagged moisture present at that location according to the following formula:

$$N_g(t) = \left( \begin{array}{l} S_g(t-1) (N_g(t-1) + \Delta t) \\ + \sum F_g^{\text{in}} \Delta t (N_g^{\text{in}}(t-1) + \Delta t) \\ - \sum F_g^{\text{out}} \Delta t (N_g(t-1) + \Delta t) \\ - P_g \Delta t (N_g(t-1) + \Delta t) + E_g \Delta t \frac{\Delta t}{2} \end{array} \right) / S_g(t), \quad (\text{B10})$$

where the subscript g stands for tagged water, which is in the experiments of this paper either interception or transpiration. These age tagging experiments allowed for the computation of the atmospheric residence times of precipitated and evaporated moisture (Sect. 2.2.2).

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## B4 Recycling length scale calculations

To be able to calculate the length scales of evaporation  $\lambda_{\varepsilon,i}$  and  $\lambda_{\varepsilon,t}$  (Eq. 27 and 28) we need the regional evaporation recycling ratios  $\varepsilon_{r,i}$  and  $\varepsilon_{r,t}$ . We have derived these ratios for each  $1.5^\circ$  latitude  $\times$   $1.5^\circ$  longitude grid cell by performing a special water tagging run. In this run we compute for all grid cells at once the moisture that originated from the “home” grid cell. Horizontal moisture transport of tagged water out of a grid cell is assumed not to return anymore to this grid cell. This also means that these runs can be performed with larger time steps, which was indeed confirmed by several tests in which the results were found to be insensitive to the chosen time step. The tagged precipitation originating from and returning to the same grid cell  $P_r$  is assumed to be equal to the tagged regional evaporation  $E_r$  (see Eqs. 15 and 16). However, this is not really the same due to the residence time of water in the atmosphere, but it is not likely to be dramatically different. Furthermore, we need a representative value for the distance  $\Delta x$  the water travels in a grid cell. Following van der Ent and Savenije (2011), we approximate this as follows:

$$\Delta x = L_x \frac{\bar{F}_{\text{bottom},x}}{\bar{F}_{\text{bottom},x} + \bar{F}_{\text{bottom},y}} + L_y \frac{\bar{F}_{\text{bottom},y}}{\bar{F}_{\text{bottom},x} + \bar{F}_{\text{bottom},y}}, \quad (\text{B11})$$

where,  $L_x$  and  $L_y$  are the lengths of a grid cell in zonal and meridional direction respectively. Note that the moisture fluxes in the bottom layer are used because this is where virtually all of the regional (grid cell) scale recycling takes place.

**Supplementary material related to this article is available online at <http://www.earth-syst-dynam-discuss.net/5/281/2014/esdd-5-281-2014-supplement.zip>.**

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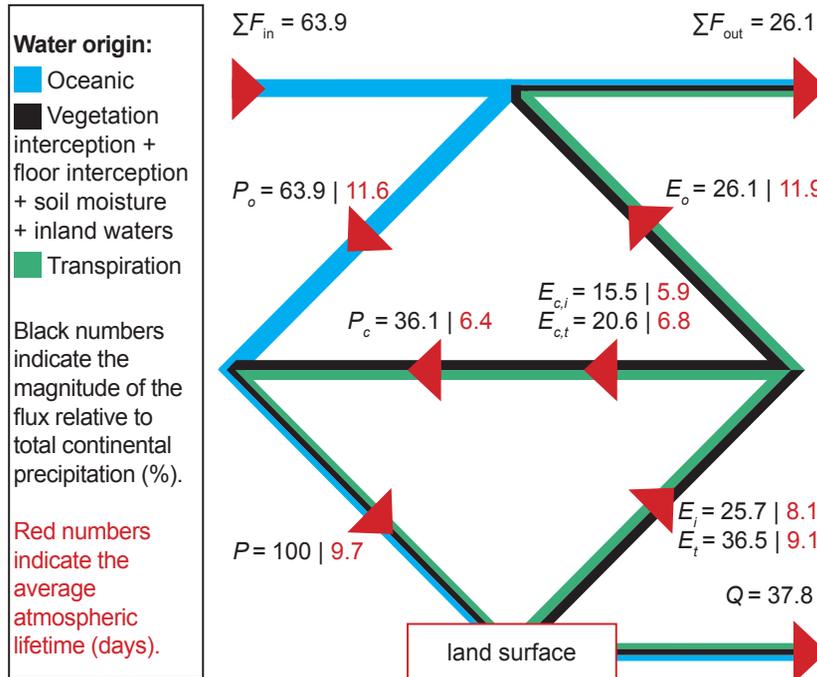
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**Fig. 1.** Global hydrological cycle over land (1999–2008). Symbols are explained in Sects. 2.2.1 and 3.1.

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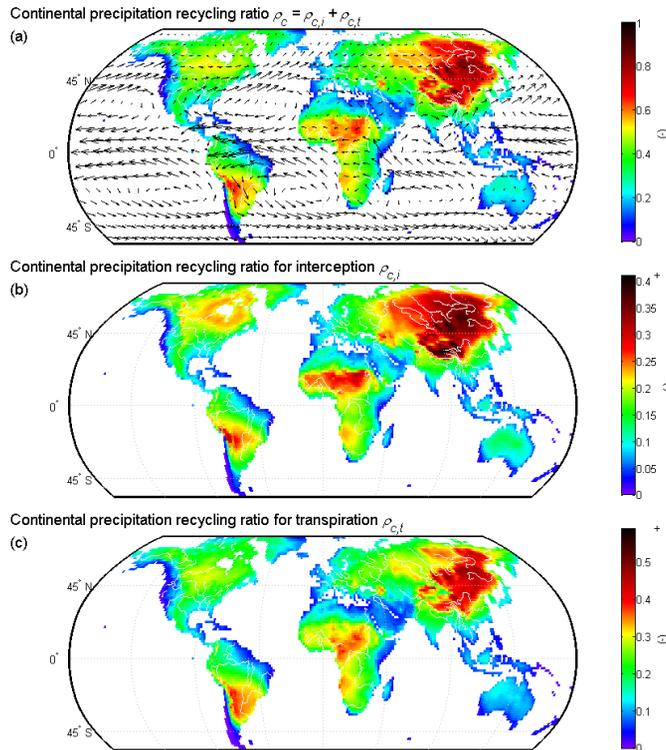
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**Fig. 2.** Continental precipitation recycling (1999–2008). **(a)** continental precipitation recycling ratio  $\rho_c$ , **(b)** continental precipitation recycling ratio for interception  $\rho_{c,i}$ , and **(c)** continental precipitation recycling ratio for transpiration  $\rho_{c,t}$ . The colour scale of **(b)** ends at 0.41, which is the global average fraction of direct evaporative fluxes (interception) and the colour scale of **(c)** ends at 0.59, which is the global average fraction of delayed evaporative flux (transpiration). The arrows in **(a)** indicate the vertically integrated moisture fluxes.

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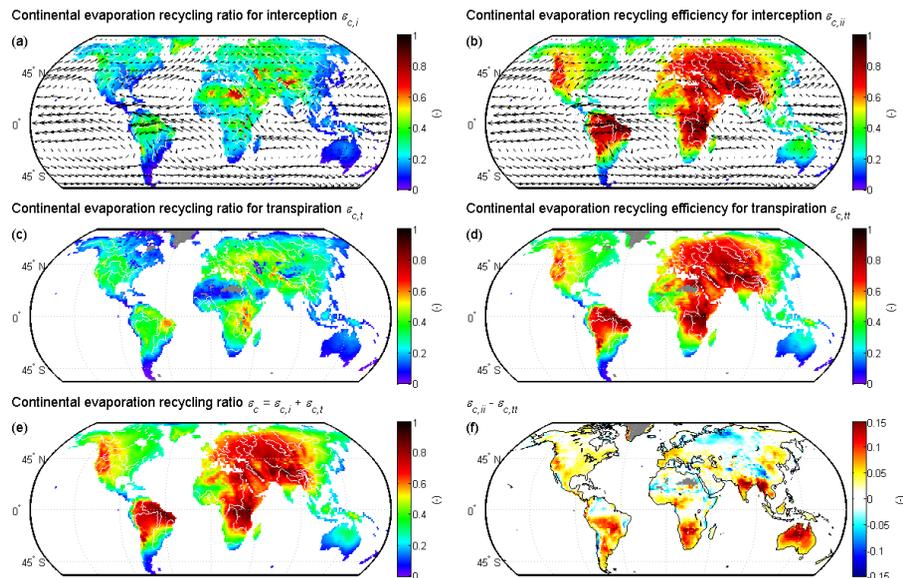
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**Fig. 3.** Continental evaporation recycling (1999–2008). **(a)** continental evaporation recycling ratio for interception  $\varepsilon_{c,i}$ , **(b)** continental evaporation recycling efficiency for interception  $\varepsilon_{c,ii}$ , **(c)** continental evaporation recycling ratio for transpiration  $\varepsilon_{c,t}$ , **(d)** continental evaporation recycling efficiency for transpiration  $\varepsilon_{c,tt}$ , **(e)** continental evaporation recycling ratio  $\varepsilon_c = \varepsilon_{c,i} + \varepsilon_{c,t}$ , and **(f)**  $\varepsilon_{c,ii} - \varepsilon_{c,tt}$ . Grey values on land indicate no data, due to the fact that the evaporative flux in question is zero. The arrows in **(a)** and **(b)** indicate the vertically integrated moisture fluxes.

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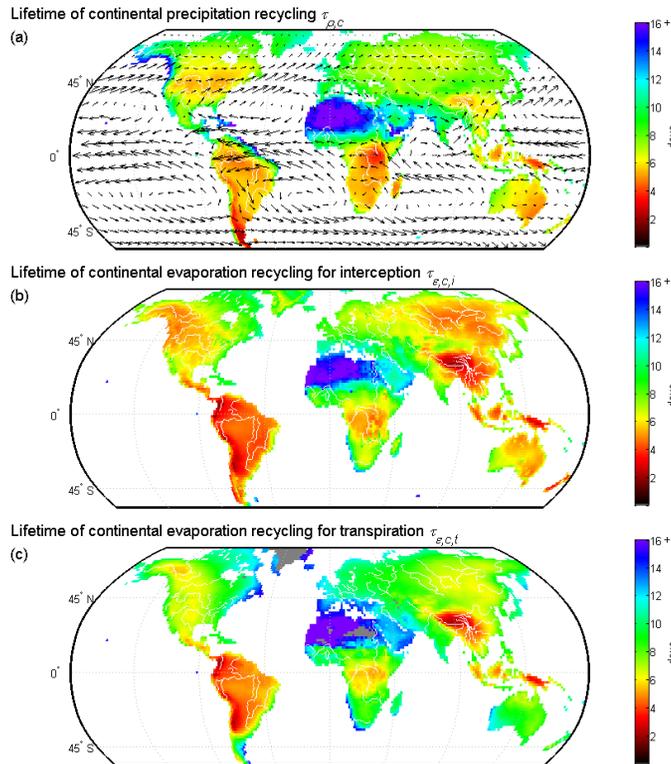
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## Interception and transpiration – Part 2: Moisture recycling

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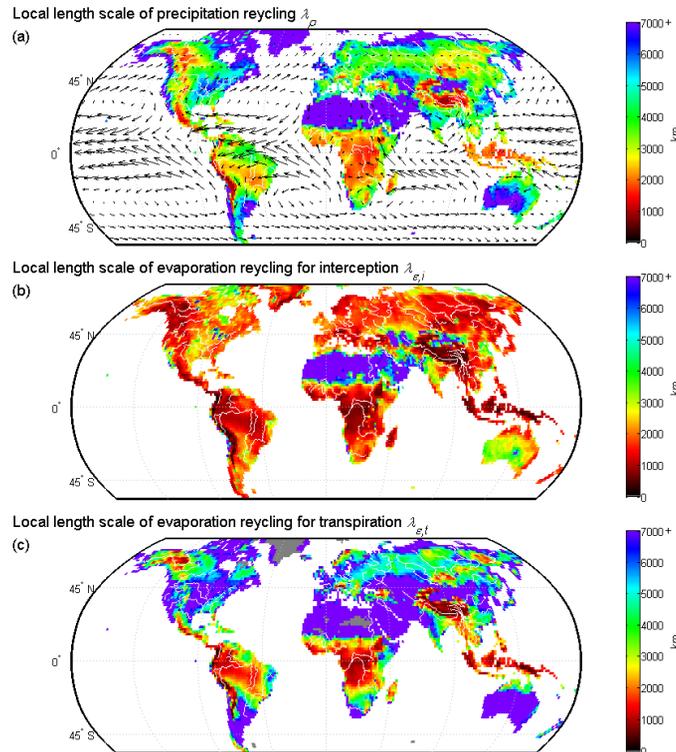


**Fig. 4.** Atmospheric lifetimes of continental moisture recycling (1999–2008). **(a)** lifetime of continental precipitation recycling  $\tau_{\rho,c}$  (defined at the point of precipitation), **(b)** lifetime of continental evaporation recycling for interception  $\tau_{e,c,i}$  (defined at the point of evaporation), and **(c)** lifetime of continental evaporation recycling for transpiration  $\tau_{e,c,t}$  (defined at the point of evaporation). Grey values on land indicate no data, due to the fact that the evaporative flux in question is zero. The arrows in **(a)** indicate the vertically integrated moisture fluxes.

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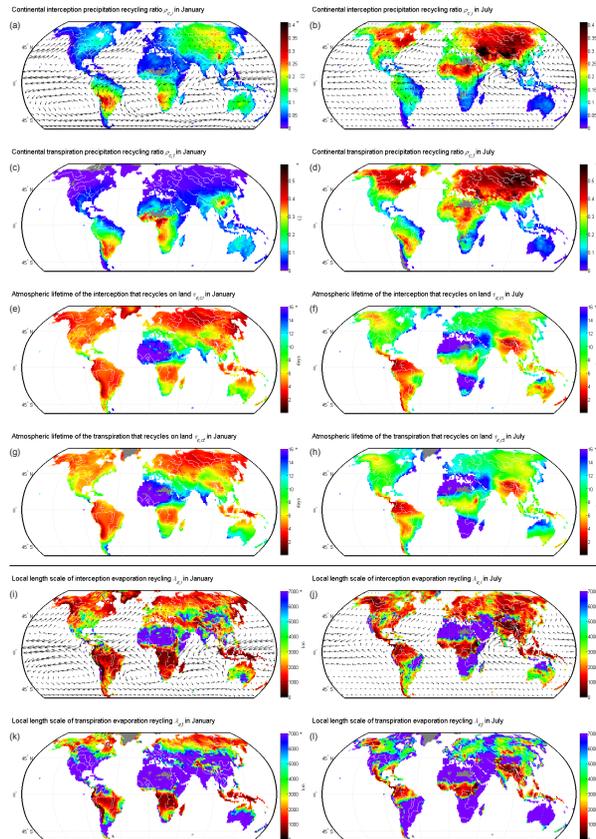
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**Fig. 5.** Local length scales of the moisture recycling process (1999–2008). **(a)** length scale of precipitation recycling  $\lambda_{\rho}$ , **(b)** length scale of evaporation recycling for interception  $\lambda_{\varepsilon,i}$ , and **(c)** length scale of evaporation recycling for transpiration  $\lambda_{\varepsilon,t}$ . Grey values on land indicate no data, due to the fact that the evaporative flux in question is zero. Note that lower values indicate higher moisture feedback strength. The arrows in **(a)** indicate the moisture fluxes in the lowest part of the atmosphere (approximately the lowest 2 km of the atmosphere at standard pressure, Eq. (B5)).

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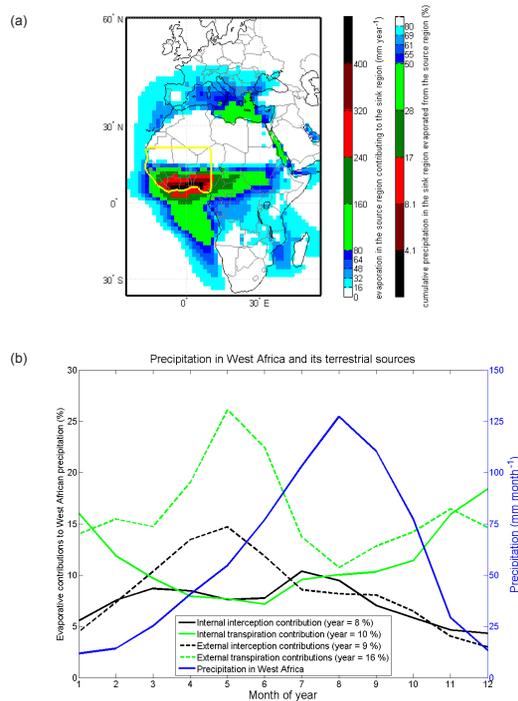
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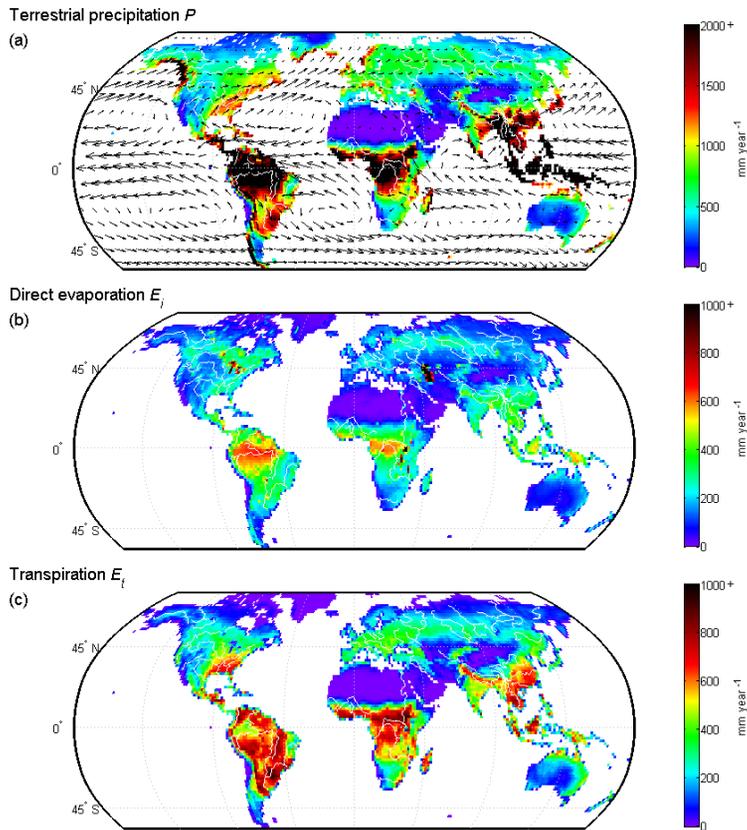
**Fig. 6.** Moisture recycling metrics for January (left column) and July (right column). The arrows in **(a)** and **(b)** indicate the vertically integrated moisture fluxes, which are most relevant for panels **(a–h)**. The arrows in **(i)** and **(j)** indicate the moisture flux only in approximately the lowest 2 km of the atmosphere, which is most relevant for panels **(i–l)**.

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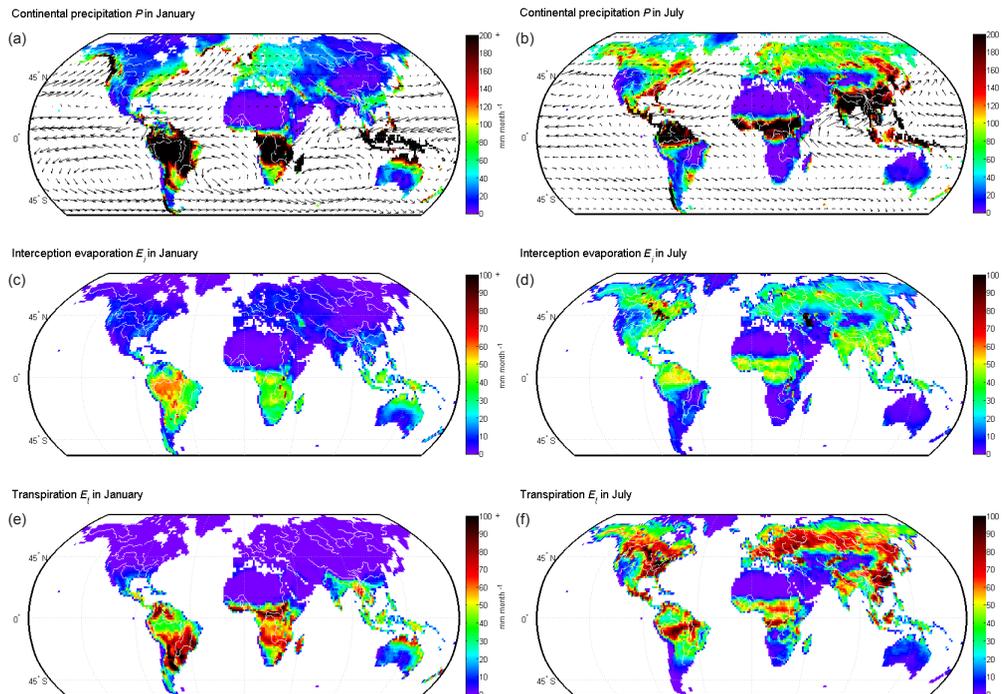
**Fig. 7.** Evaporative sources for precipitation in West Africa. **(a)** Yearly average precipitation shed of West Africa. The left colour scale indicates the evaporative contribution each grid cell has to the sink region (yellow box) The right colour scale indicates which percentage of the precipitation in the yellow box is cumulatively contributed by the corresponding colours (e.g., the light green grid cells generate  $50 - 28 = 22\%$  of the precipitation in the yellow box). **(b)** Seasonal precipitation in the sink region (yellow box) and its evaporative contributions split out by internal vs. external and interception vs. transpiration. The oceanic contributions are not shown, but contribute the remaining percentages.



**Fig. A1.** Average precipitation and evaporative fluxes on the continent (1999–2008). **(a)** Precipitation **(b)** Direct evaporative flux, dominated by interception (Eq. 2), and **(c)** Delayed evaporative flux, i.e., transpiration (Eq. 3). The arrows in **(a)** indicate the vertically integrated moisture fluxes.

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**Fig. A2.** Precipitation and evaporative fluxes for January (left column) and July (right column).

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