

ABoVE Water Maps: 30 meter spatial resolution surface water 1991 – 2011

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Introduction

Characterizing the continental surface of the Arctic and Boreal regions of the world is critical to understanding components of the ecosystem as well as the Arctic system as a whole. These landscapes are dominated by a heterogeneous land surface dotted with lakes, ponds and wetlands (Carroll et al. 2011; Downing et al. 2006; Smith et al. 2005). As a land cover type, water plays a significant role in surface energy balance, biogeochemical cycling, surface temperature, and soil moisture, among many others.

The Arctic and Boreal Vulnerability Experiment (ABoVE) <http://above.nasa.gov/> will conduct multi-disciplinary studies to explore and quantify the linkages between all of the individual components of the ecosystem. One common thread among the components of the ecosystem is the need for maps of the location, extent and dynamics of surface water (Kasischke et al. 2011). Water represents a transport vehicle for nutrients and other solutes, provides habitat for flora and fauna, and has a moderating effect on surface energy exchange, yet it remains one of the least characterized features of the study region.

Satellite remote sensing data have been used to create maps of the location of persistent water bodies at large spatial scales (Carroll et al. 2009; Lehner and Doll 2004). These maps represent a snapshot in time of water location and extent. Global and regional land cover maps usually have water as a land cover class but this is often applied as a post-processing step using a static water mask (Bartholome and Belward 2005; Friedl et al. 2010; Homer et al. 2007). Additional work has been done using multiple satellite images or time series to show changes in the extent of water, mostly on a local basis or at moderate to coarse resolution (Carroll et al. 2011; Karlsson et al. 2012; Pavelsky and Smith 2008; Pietroniro et al. 1999; Smith et al. 2005). All of these studies have been limited in spatial or temporal resolution (or both).

The current work uses a time series of Landsat data to produce maps of surface water extent covering the entire Boreal and Tundra regions of North America for three epochs 1991, 2001, and 2011 at 30m spatial resolution. Each map has been generated with at least 3 years of ice-free data and will enable future work for the ABoVE campaign in determining the dynamic changes in small water bodies that dominate the region. With continental scale maps of surface water extent at a decadal time step we can evaluate change in surface water in a consistent way across the region in the same way that previous land cover change phenomena have been examined (Hansen et al. 2010; Zhan et al. 2002).

Here we present the first results of this new dataset showing the methodology, evaluation of results, and initial examples of how the product can be used to detect and monitor change in lakes in the Arctic and Boreal regions of North America.

Region of interest and data inputs

The primary region of study for this project is the ABoVE study region shown in figure 1. During the course of the project additional compute resources became available that enabled the

expansion of the study region to include all of Canada and Alaska. This expansion allowed the inclusion of dynamic areas in the southeast Boreal region and completion of the continental map.

Data used for this project included Landsat 4 and 5 Thematic Mapper (TM) data and Landsat 7 Enhanced Thematic Mapper (ETM+). The data from 2000 to present for Landsat 5 and 7 is of good quality and relatively high repeat coverage with a minimum of 30 individual dates per scene for most scenes. The data for the 1990 – 1992 epoch is primarily from Landsat 5, supplemented with Landsat 4 in Alaska where data density is thinner. Data acquisition strategies in the early 1990's resulted in a limited archive of data over Alaska at this time (Goward et al. 2006). This presented a challenge to get enough observations to complete the map and will be discussed later.

Methods

The Landsat data were acquired from the US Geological Survey Eros Data Center through the ESPA <https://espa.cr.usgs.gov/> ordering interface. Data acquired here has been processed to convert the radiance to surface reflectance. Conversion to surface reflectance is essential to generating an automated classification process that can be applied across scenes.

Unlike most land cover processing efforts using Landsat data, we acquire and process all available Landsat scenes regardless of cloud coverage. This decision is based on experience with MODIS data where even a scene that is 80% - 90% cloudy can have clear observations of certain areas. By using all of the available observations we can increase the total density of the observations in any given area to get a consensus result. This method is enhanced in the Arctic due to the high degree of overlap between adjacent Landsat path/rows. By processing all of the available overlapping scenes it becomes possible to increase the total number of observations, which allows us to minimize the impacts of clouds and weather related phenomena such as drought and flood. Over 110,000 individual Landsat scenes have been processed to date.

High performance computing resources

The 110,000 Landsat scenes that comprise the raw data for this project result in total data volume in excess of 180 TB. Processing time averaged 7 – 8 minutes (wall clock) per scene. The total amount of processing time on a single machine would take approximately 18 months. Since this project was funded through the NASA Terrestrial Ecology program as a pre-ABOVE data set, resources that were being developed for the ABOVE field campaign were available for use in processing and storing the input data. The ABOVE Science Cloud (ASC) has been created as a computing resource for use by the ABOVE science team for the duration of the field campaign. This resource consists of a data storage capacity greater than 2 Petabytes surrounded by a large amount of compute capacity (over 960 CPU cores) in a fully virtualized environment. Much like commercially available cloud computing resources, users request access to the system, a system configuration and a specific number of individual processing nodes. The same system configuration is applied to each of the virtual processing nodes and the user is able to distribute their processing about the nodes. A full description of this system can be found online http://above.nasa.gov/science_cloud.html .

We used this system to store the raw data and to process through to final products. Using this system we were able to process all of the data in approximately 7 – 8 weeks instead of the

projected 18 months if we processed on one desktop workstation. The availability of this resource allowed us to expand the spatial coverage beyond the ABoVE study domain to include most of Canada. In addition, this system offers the possibility of reprocessing the entire dataset if necessary to improve the results or to correct any issues that are identified in post processing, or by users after release of the product. With current resources we anticipate that we could reprocess the entire data record in approximately 10 days.

Automated process

The processing scheme is completed in four steps: classification per scene, compilation of thematic layers per scene, compilation per tile, and post processing evaluation for error identification. The complete processing flow is shown in figure 2. All processing was performed using open source software (primarily gdal and python) and resources within a Linux Centos operating system.

Classification per scene

Each Landsat scene that was acquired was processed through a decision tree (Breiman et al. 1984; Kim and Loh 2001) image classification scheme to generate an output with 6 classes: Water, Vegetated Land, Bare Ground, Snow/Ice, Cloud, Cloud Shadow. Quality assurance flags in the surface reflectance files provide an indication of cloudy and cloud shadow pixels and were used in the classification process. This process was modeled after the approach taken to generate the Global 250m Water Map with Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectro-radiometer (MODIS) data (Carroll et al. 2009) and a host of other land cover mapping efforts. The algorithm is designed to be conservative in the labeling of water because we want to minimize the errors of commission (i.e. labeling land as water). The overall goal is to generate a map of the nominal extent of water for a given epoch, where nominal is neither the maximum nor the minimum but rather a representative extent for that time period.

Sum of observations per scene (path/row)

The classification results have 6 classes, as described above. From this we extract thematic layers (i.e. one of the classes, water or land for example) and create summary results for a particular path/row using all of the available dates within an epoch. This result is a value from 0 to “n” where “n” is the total number of dates that were available for that path/row for that particular theme. This process is repeated for each theme as necessary to produce the desired result.

Sum of observations per ABoVE tile

Ultimately the goal of the project is to generate a unified product for the entire study region. To do this the individual path/row results need to be combined into a common projection and grid. In coordination with the ABoVE project office and other pre-ABoVE projects, it was decided to generate a grid based on the Canada Albers Equal Area projection with equal sized “tiles” modeled after the MODIS labeling convention with horizontal and vertical offsets (figure 3). To take advantage of the significant overlap between path/rows it was necessary to mosaic with intermediate steps to map the individual scenes into a series of tiles with non-overlapping scenes and then sum the resulting tiles (see the third step in figure 2). In this way we retain all information from all Landsat observations which maximizes the chance for clear observations and raises confidence level in the final product.

Generation of final maps

At this point we have thematic data layers in large area tiles that represent sum of water, sum of land, etc. The desired final map is a binary representation of “water” and “not water”. The thematic layers are used to generate a probability of water as:

$$P_w = (W / (W + L))$$

where P_w is probability of water; W is sum of water observations; and L is sum of land observations. The final map is generated by labeling anything with 50% or greater probability of water as water and labeling anything else as land or no data. Anything else is labeled as land or no data. The valid range and explanation of values is:

Image Value (Dn)	Meaning
0	Land
1	Water
2	Probable water in Alaska 1991 tiles
255	No data or outside ABoVE study domain, fill applied

Generation of QA

To aid the use of the product a quality assurance (QA) layer has been generated for each map. This map provides additional information regarding the source of values in the map file or the confidence in the water value determined by the number of water observations in the probability of water. The valid range and explanation of values is:

Image Value (Dn)	Meaning
0	Land
1	High Confidence Water (probability $\geq 50\%$ and $n > 5$)
2	Lower Confidence Water (probability $\geq 50\%$ and $2 < n < 5$)
3	Ocean mask applied
4	Probable water in 1991 Alaska tiles
255	No data or outside ABoVE study domain, fill applied

Ocean mask

An ocean mask was created by combining the MODIS Collection 6 water map (Carroll et al. 2009) and a consensus coastline generated by combining the three ABoVE water maps (1991, 2001, and 2011). The goal was to create a mask to fill in the permanent ocean waters where the map would otherwise have been intermittent due to unavailable Landsat scenes, moving sea ice, or other so that the final map was more aesthetically pleasing. Below are the general steps used to make the mask:

- Map all three years of the ABoVE Water Maps (AWM) to single output allowing maximum extent of coastline
- Convert MODIS water map to ABoVE tile map outputs
- Identify ocean class from MODIS water map
- Select areas from AWM that intersect MODIS water map oceans
- Buffer the land in AWM by 10 Landsat pixels (300 m) to allow for shifting coastlines

The resulting map was applied to each of the ABoVE water maps to yield a more aesthetic result. The areas that have been mapped with the ocean mask are indicated in the QA layer so a user can understand how and where that was applied. The coastlines within 300 m of the consensus coastline were buffered and not masked to allow the user to see differences in the coastline through time.

Terrain shadow mask

Terrain shadow was found to be the primary source of false identification of water in the final water maps. A mask was generated using the Digital Elevation Model (DEM) from the Global Land Survey project where slope was greater than or equal to 5° and the elevation was over 450 m. The elevation threshold was used to minimize the impact of the slope threshold on rivers in lowlands. This mask was applied to all tiles to address the problem of terrain shadows and follows previous work addressing similar problems of terrain shadow being confused with water (Klein et al. 2015). Visual inspection of the outputs indicates the mask effectively removes most terrain shadow (figure 4). Other studies have used a geometric calculation of terrain shadow based on slope and sun/sensor geometry. We tested this method and found that the projections of shadows were overestimating the actual shadows creating artifacts in the data. To effectively deal with the shadows we would need a DEM at 10 m spatial resolution or finer, which is not currently available. The slope and elevation mask was found to be a reasonable compromise even though it does cause some loss of water bodies at high altitude and some abrupt edges in valley lakes.

Alaska 1991 epoch

In most areas there were at least twenty observations for any given pixel. However for Alaska in the 1991 epoch there are fewer than seven observations for most of the state, and in some cases there were only one or two observations. This is caused by the lack of a receiving station that could collect the data at the time of overpass and is well documented (Goward et al. 2006). The map that was generated for the 1991 epoch for Alaska is significantly impacted by the lack of input data. Consequently, a procedure was developed to fill in the holes in order to make a complete map for this epoch:

1. Generate a mask of location of water in both 2001 epoch and 2011 epoch
2. Select any water observation from 1991 that falls under this mask disregarding probability of water and minimum number of water observations rules
3. Set value in water mask for these new values as water, and set QA to “2” for these values to indicate they are low confidence and should be used with significant caution
4. Where 2001 and 2011 still show water and there are no observations from 1991, set the water map value to “2” indicating probable water and set QA code to “4” indicating “fill based on 2001 and 2011”

This procedure improved the appearance of the map but the quality of the data is still significantly lower than it is for other epochs and elsewhere in the 1991 epoch. The affected tiles are h00v00, h00v01, and h01v00 with the most affected areas located in the far west and south west in Alaska. Under no circumstances should the water map with QA value “4” be used to indicate change; these values are included simply for aesthetic purposes. Water values with a QA value of “2” should be used with caution when performing change analysis and should be indicated in the results as “possible” change.

Evaluation

The results were evaluated by visual inspection and by quantitative comparison with other available water maps for the region. We found a variety of issues, as expected, ranging from geolocation shifts of up to 3 km in individual scenes (typically occurred in scenes that were mostly cloudy so the ortho-rectification was not as good), as well as false identification of water caused by terrain shadow. The geolocation shifted individual dates were identified and removed from the results and the tile recompiled. The final maps showed little impact from cloud shadows and random pixels identified as water, as expected from the method which requires multiple observations of water at any given location.

Verification of method

Data from World View 2 (WV2) were acquired for July 3, 2013 for an area north west of Lake Claire in central Canada (figure 5). This was outside of the study period but was used because it represented the earliest date for which useful multi-spectral data could be found. Data from Landsat 7 ETM+ were acquired for the nearest cloud free period covering this region: Landsat path 44 row 18 June 27, 2013. Matching the timing of acquisition is essential because the lakes represented in the product are small and susceptible to seasonal variation. The Landsat data were processed through the standard classification process described earlier in this text. The WV2 were evaluated through visual interpretation and water was determined using a simple threshold on the near infra-red band. The results of the WV2 data were averaged up from their native 1.84 m resolution to 30 m spatial resolution resulting in a fraction of water cover at 30 m resolution. A threshold of 50% water was used to generate a map of water/not water. This WV2 water map was used to compare against the AWM to evaluate the classification method.

The AWM and WV2 water maps were added to a GIS environment and clipped to the same extent. The AWM identified 450 water bodies (defined as lakes and rivers) while the WV2 water maps identified 565 water bodies, confusion matrix shown in table 1. There were 427 of 450 (or 95%) AWM water bodies that overlaid with a water body in the WV2 water map. There were 382 of 565 (or 68%) of the WV2 water bodies that fell within an AWM water body. Of the 183 WV2 water bodies that did not have a corresponding AWM water body, 117 (or 64%) were 1 Landsat pixel in size. This suggests that there are many water bodies in this region that are at or below the minimum detectable size for 30 m Landsat pixels.

Comparison with static water maps

The ABoVE Water Maps were compared to two global maps that include water as a class and are generated from Landsat data at 30 m spatial resolution, namely Globe Land 30 (GL30) (Zheng 2014) and the GLCF Inland Surface Water (GIW) (Feng et al. 2015). These maps were generated with Landsat data primarily from the Geocover or Global Land Survey (GLS) data

collections and were essentially calculated with a single Landsat observation representing a single point in time, ~2001 for GIW and ~2010 for GL30. Moreover adjacent water bodies in each of these maps could have been produced with data from a different season within the same or a different year. This differs significantly from the method used to generate the AWM as described above.

A per pixel analysis was performed with the ABoVE Water Maps to the water class from the GL30 land cover map and the GIW map. The GL30 and GIW products were mosaicked into the ABoVE projection and tile grid to facilitate comparison. A mask of ocean pixels was generated from the QA layer in the AWM and applied to all data to remove ocean pixels for this analysis to ensure that any differences are associated with inland waters. A simple difference was then calculated for each of the 13 tiles that cover the ABoVE study region for each product. The ABoVE tile grid is in an equal area projection with each pixel covering 30 m by 30 m. The total area was calculated by the equation:

$$(\text{pixel count} * \text{area per pixel}) / 1,000,000 \text{ (m}^2/\text{km}^2)$$

This produces results in area units of km² for each tile and for overall.

The results for the comparison of AWM to GL30 (Table 2) and AWM to GIW (Table 3) show that there are large differences between the products and that this difference varies from tile to tile. Overall the majority of the differences come in the extent of water bodies where the GL30 over-estimates the size of the water bodies because it only uses a single input observation. This effect is pronounced on rivers where normal fluvial processes cause the river channel to meander (figure 6). There are specific instances where entire water bodies are present in AWM and not in GL30 and vice versa but these are limited in number.

The GL30 and AWM products for tile h02v02 were converted from raster to vector to determine how the representation of water bodies, as objects as opposed to pixels, varies between the two products. A confusion matrix showing the comparison between the two products is shown in table 2. There were 516,547 water bodies identified by the AWM, of these 385,493 had a corresponding water body in the GLC30 water map. There were 359,470 water bodies identified in GLC30 of which 339,239 had a corresponding water body in the AWM. Overall the AWM identified 131,054 more total water bodies that ranged in size from 0.0009 km² to 8.1297 km². Over half of the water bodies missed by the GLC30 were 30 m (or 1 Landsat pixel) but there were 50 that were >0.5 km² and 90 that were >0.25 km².

Change detection with multiple epochs from AWM

The utility of having multiple maps from the same locations through time is to be able to detect changes during this time. Some preliminary work has been done comparing different epochs of AWM (figure 7). Hay Lake in Alberta, Canada has experienced significant expansion between 2000 and 2012. Beaver Hill Lake and smaller surrounding lakes near Edmonton, Alberta have nearly dried completely during the same period.

In figure 8, we see changes in and around Lake Claire, west of Lake Athabasca, during the period between 1990 and 2012. This region has been well studied and is highly dynamic with wetlands that fill and drain based on weather and other environmental conditions. These change results are preliminary and are presented here as an example of what is possible with the AWM

data. Additional work will be done to verify the extent of surface water change during the ABoVE field campaign.

Remaining known issues

The lakes that are not present in the AWM that are present in GL30 or GIW are characterized by shallow lakes with bright substrate or with highly reflective suspended matter that are not captured by the classification scheme for AWM. During the evaluation this occurred rarely and when these occurred outside the ABoVE study domain no attempt was made to fix the issue. There are still some burn scars that trigger false positive water detection in all products but this effect is minimized in the AWM. Currently these issues are being addressed and may be improved in a future release of AWM.

Conclusions

The ABoVE water maps have been generated to support the NASA ABoVE field campaign which began in Fall 2015. These maps have been created using a time series of Landsat data from three satellites (Landsat 4, 5, and 7) and are made to represent the location and nominal extent of water during the epoch. Method verification with 1.84 m WorldView 2 data shows 95% accuracy in water bodies that are shown in the AWM and a 36% omission rate, primarily among lakes smaller than 1 Landsat pixel. The AWM shows 25% more water bodies than the Global Land Cover 30 (30 m Landsat based land cover product) from the same time period. The main advantage of the ABoVE Water Maps is the use of a time series of inputs rather than a single date to generate the maps. Water is a highly dynamic land cover type that can vary on scales from hours to years based on weather, natural and anthropogenic causes.

The processing of all of the Landsat data was facilitated by a new computing resource at NASA Goddard Space Flight Center called the ABoVE Science Cloud which enabled faster and more efficient storage and processing of the data. Future work will involve generating additional maps showing current conditions and exploring the full dataset for changes in water extent through time.

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Tables and Figures

Table 1 Confusion matrix for ABoVE Water Maps to World View 2 water map evaluation showing number of water bodies for each map.

	AWM	WV2
AWM	450	427
WV2	382	565

Table 2 Comparison of the ABoVE Water Maps to the water class of the Globe Land 30 land cover classification. Values are in pixels except as noted in the last row which have been converted to area.

Tile	Water	GL30 Not AWM	AWM Not GL30
h00v00	28,715,200	2,840,353	3,669,932
h00v01	13,679,936	1,161,805	2,936,206
h01v00	30,621,632	2,474,886	3,367,483
h01v01	31,674,732	3,882,487	3,728,926
h01v02	19,105,744	2,662,062	2,280,197
h02v00	10,980,352	1,426,272	1,794,341
h02v01	226,037,200	18,688,948	7,063,912
h02v02	159,888,160	9,340,703	5,501,885
h02v03	17,389,016	1,495,240	2,212,889
h03v00	3,304,320	1,338,858	2,477,785
h03v01	88,054,208	9,063,256	8,196,884
h03v02	82,315,584	5,812,790	5,149,978
h03v03	103,831,632	4,316,162	2,195,342
Total pixels	815,597,716	64,503,822	50,575,760
Area (km²)	73,404	5,805	4,552

Table 3 Comparison of the ABoVE Water Maps to the water class of the Global Inland Water product. Values are in pixels except as noted in the last row which have been converted to area.

Tile	Water	GIW Not AWM	AWM Not GIW
h00v00	29,093,952	3,055,335	5,170,435

h00v01	13,690,688	3,735,708	1,692,901
h01v00	31,223,808	2,323,099	4,138,614
h01v01	31,921,132	7,202,585	5,670,877
h01v02	19,179,424	2,466,222	2,762,860
h02v00	11,286,464	1,834,180	2,511,584
h02v01	227,120,272	9,969,709	17,039,214
h02v02	159,228,848	3,814,340	10,901,279
h02v03	15,236,587	883,602	588,260
h03v00	3,308,992	7,222,035	2,714,762
h03v01	89,894,080	12,132,175	15,925,103
h03v02	82,652,288	2,871,739	6,155,946
h03v03	104,079,904	1,129,743	4,999,390
Total pixels	713,836,535	57,510,729	75,271,835
Area (km²)	64,245	5,176	6,774

Table 4 Confusion matrix for ABoVE Water Maps to water layer of GLC30 showing number of distinct water bodies identified by each map.

	AWM	GLC30
AWM	516,547	385,493
GLC30	339,239	359,470

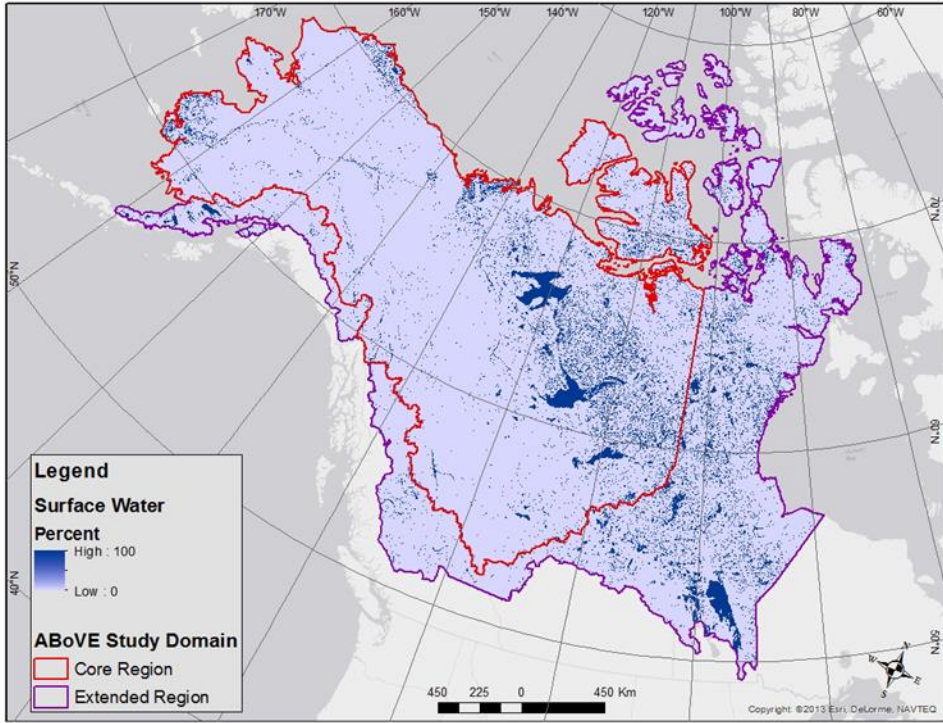


Figure 1 ABoVE study area in northern North America overlain with a subset of the Global 250m Water Map.

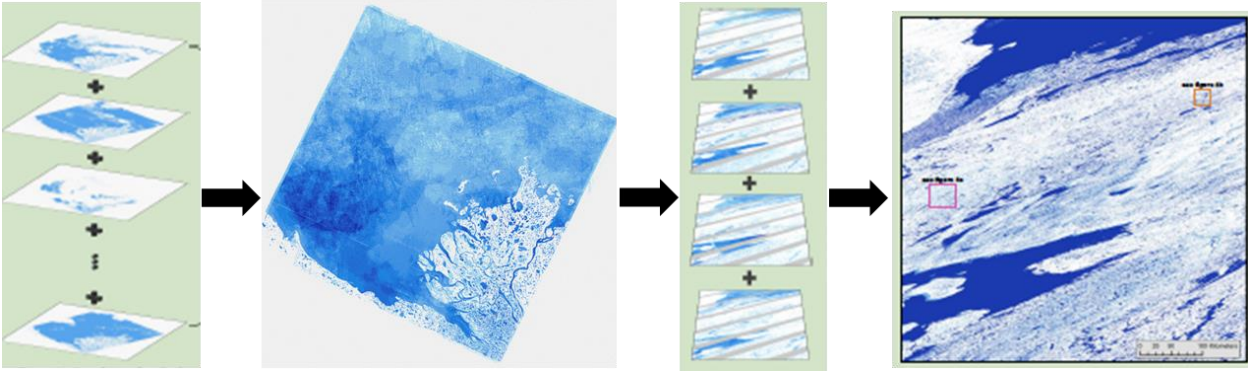


Figure 2 Processing work flow for the generation of the ABoVE water maps from Landsat scenes to ABoVE tiles.

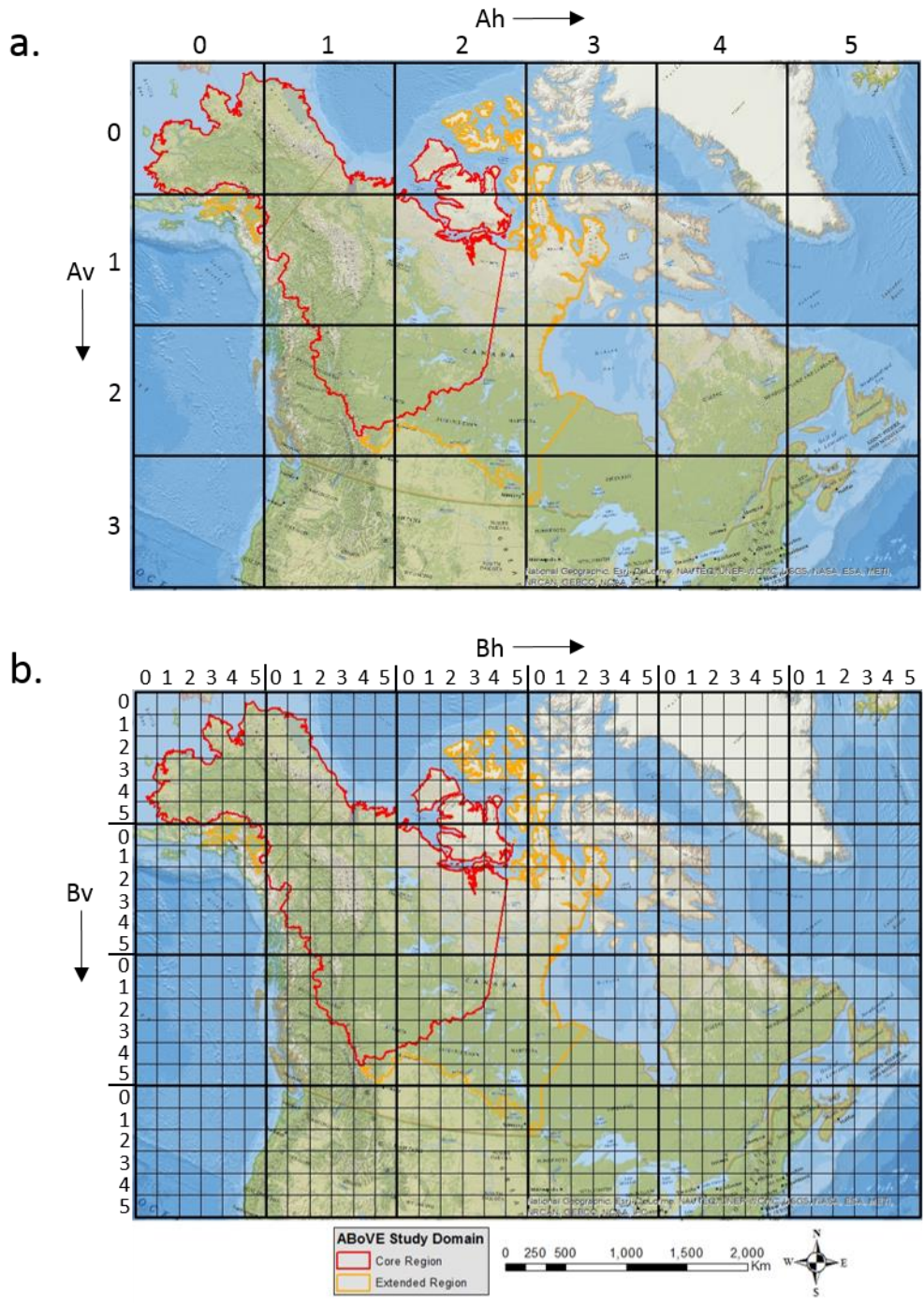


Figure 3 Proposed ABoVE standard reference grid for use with large area products. Based conceptually on the MODIS tiling scheme but utilizing Canada Albers Equal Area projection.

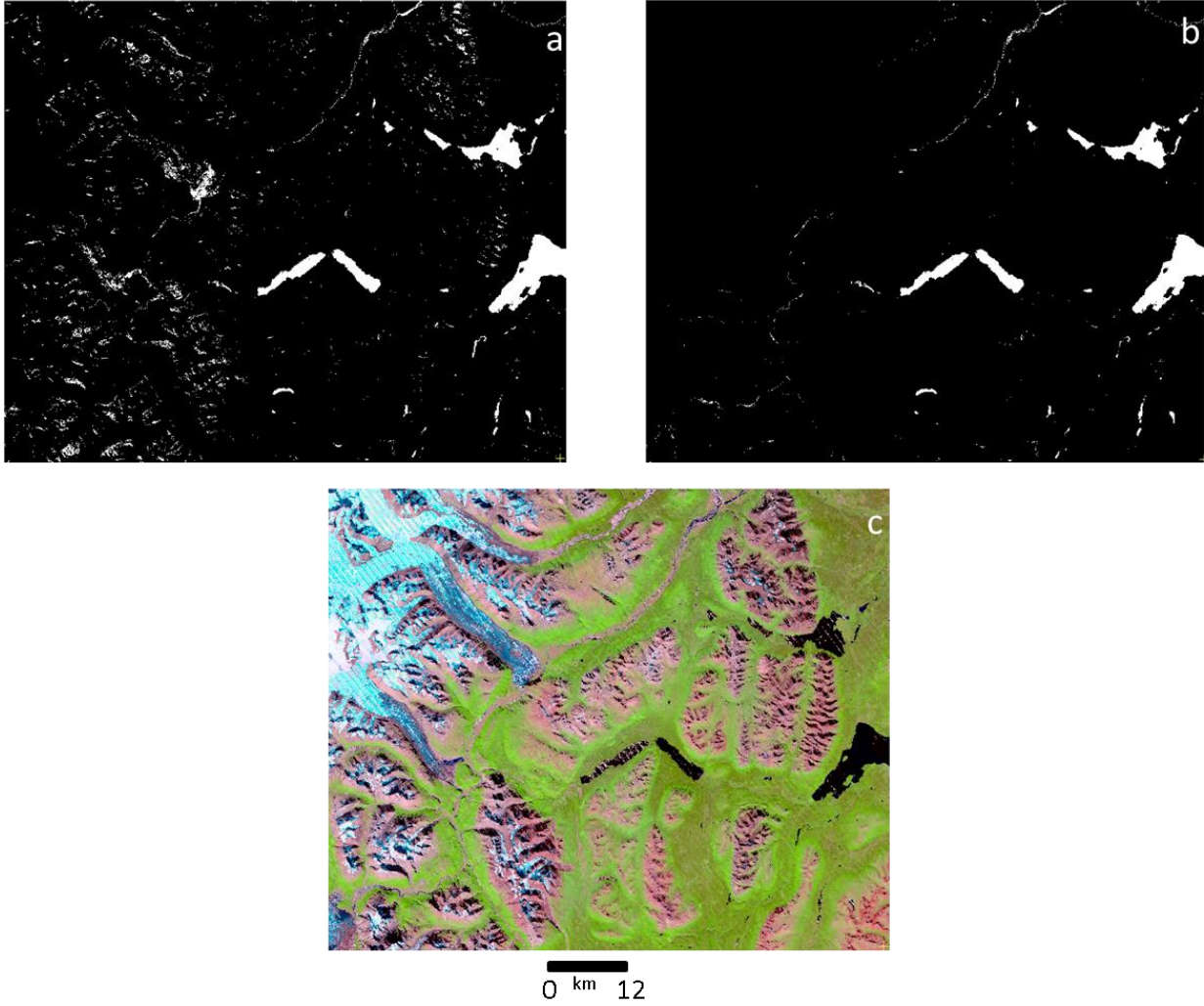


Figure 4 Images are from the eastern side of the coastal mountains in British Columbia, Canada. Figure "a" shows water mask prior to application of terrain shadow mask, "b" shows the same map after the terrain shadow mask, and "c" shows false color composite from Landsat of the region with terrain shadows clearly visible.

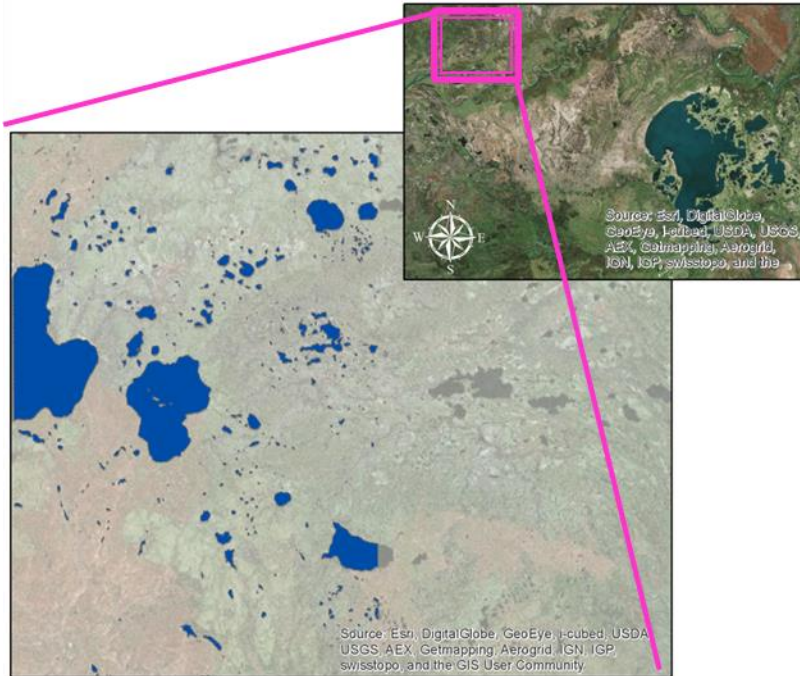


Figure 5 This region, west of Lake Claire in Canada, is where the World View 2 (WV2) imagery was collected. A simple threshold on the NIR band from WV2 was used to generate a mask of water at 2 m spatial resolution. This mask was aggregated to 30 m spatial resolution and compared to the nearest single date classification of Landsat data for method verification.

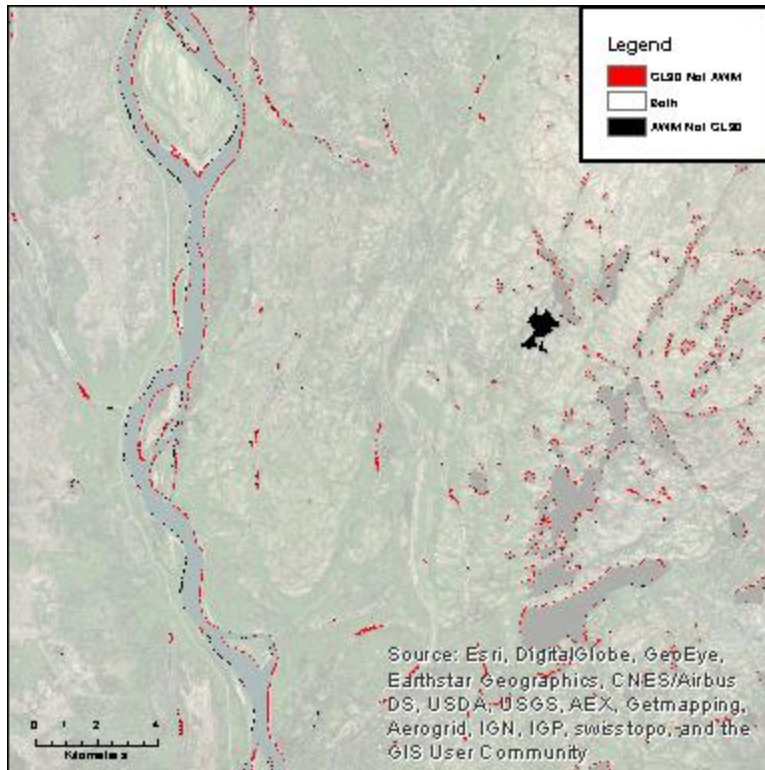


Figure 6 Image from central Canada shows differences between AWM and GL30 water coverage. Red shows areas where GL30 shows water and AWM does not, while black shows areas where AWM shows water and GL30 does not. Note this primarily occurs on the margins of water bodies but some instances of complete water bodies do occur, i.e. the large lake in the center of the image.

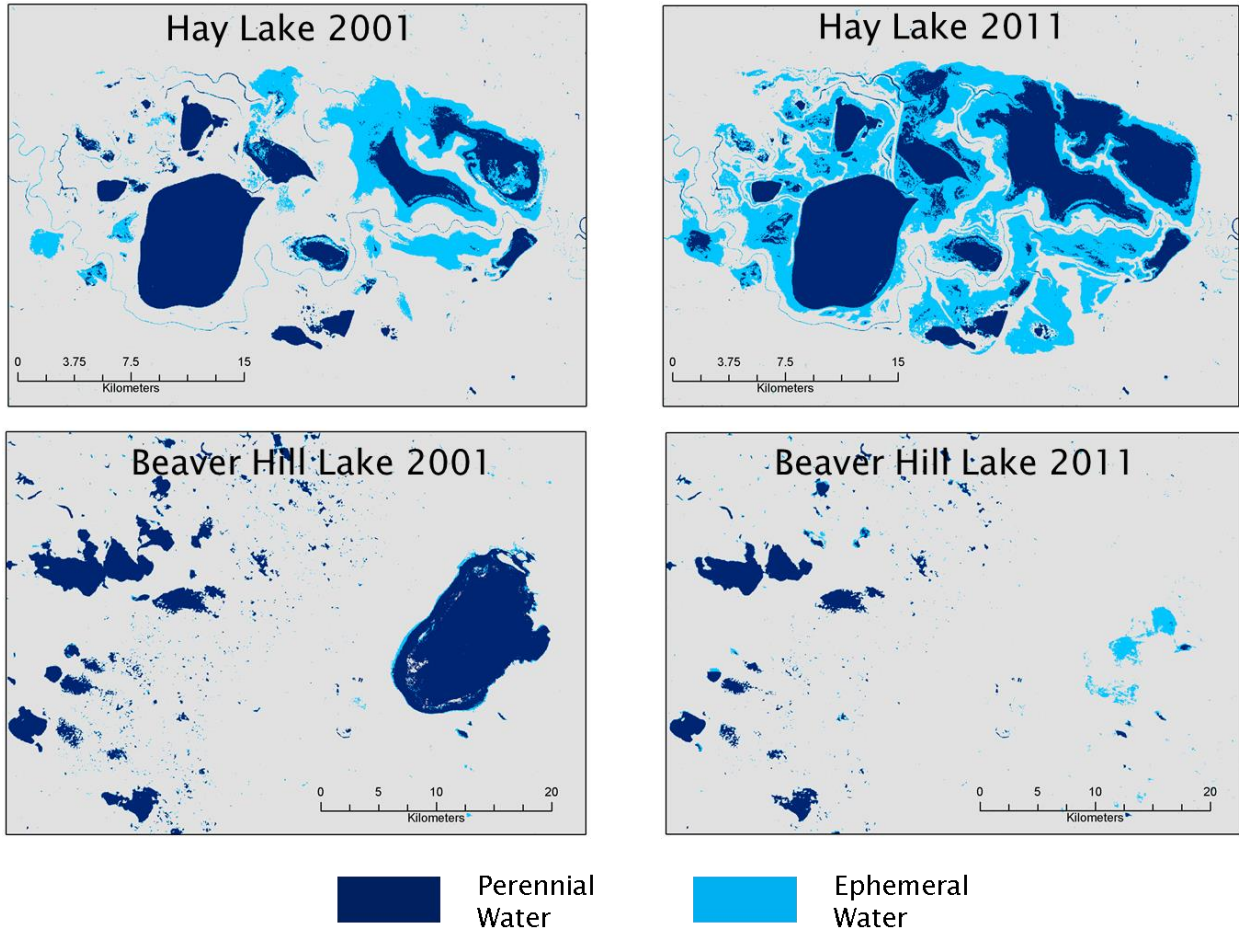


Figure 7 AWM for 2001 and 2011 for Hay Lake and Beaver Hill Lake in Canada. Hay Lake has clearly expanded over this time frame while Beaver Hill Lake has diminished.

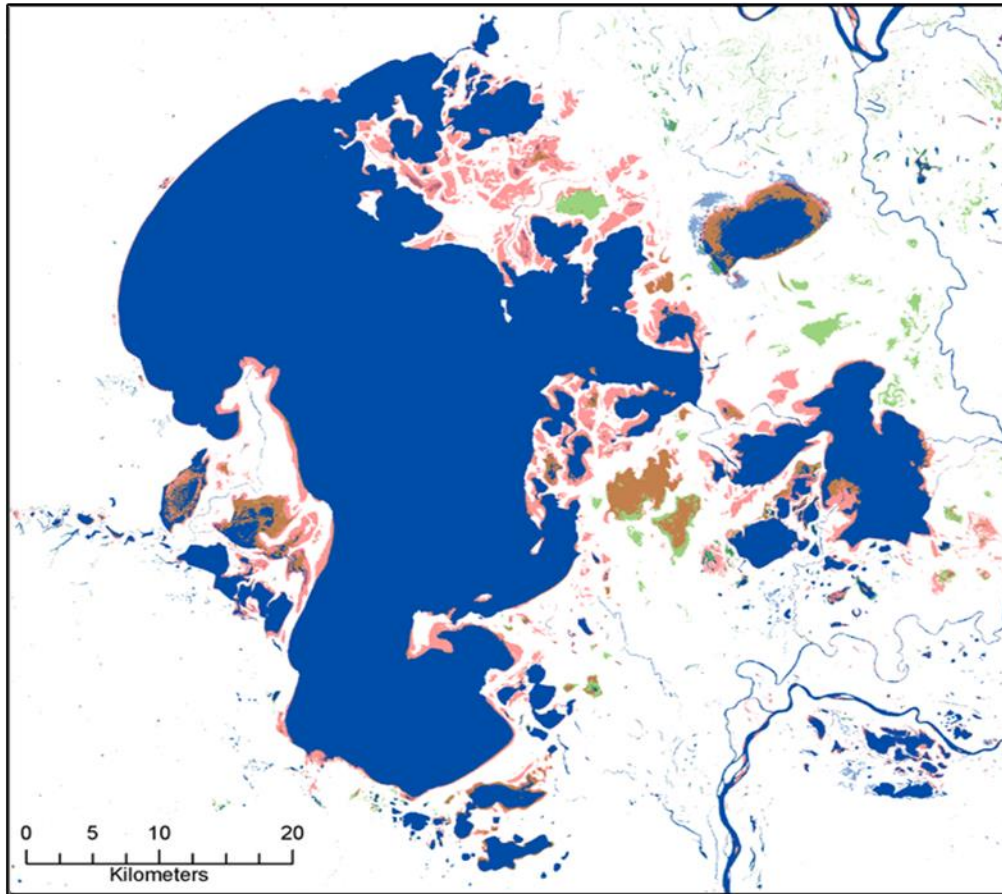


Figure 8 Lake Claire in central Canada shown as a difference map from 1991 to 2011. Water in all time periods is shown in blue, green is water only in 2011, brown is water only in 2001, and red is water only in 1991.