

1 Using Community Science to Reveal the Global 2 Chemogeography of River Metabolomes

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19 **Abstract:** River corridor metabolomes reflect organic matter (OM) processing that drives aquatic
20 biogeochemical cycles. Recent work highlights the power of ultrahigh-resolution mass spectrometry
21 for understanding metabolome composition and river corridor metabolism. However, there have
22 been no studies on the global chemogeography of surface water and sediment metabolomes using
23 ultrahigh-resolution techniques. Here, we describe a community science effort from the Worldwide
24 Hydrobiogeochemistry Observation Network for Dynamic River Systems (WHONDRS) consortium
25 to characterize global metabolomes in surface water and sediment that span multiple stream orders
26 and biomes. We describe the distribution of key aspects of metabolomes including elemental
27 groups, chemical classes, indices, and inferred biochemical transformations. We show that
28 metabolomes significantly differ across surface water and sediment and that surface water
29 metabolomes are more rich and variable. We also use inferred biochemical transformations to
30 identify core metabolic processes shared among surface water and sediment. Finally, we observe
31 significant spatial variation in sediment metabolites between rivers in the eastern and western
32 portions of the contiguous United States. Our work not only provides a basis for understanding
33 global patterns in river corridor biogeochemical cycles but also demonstrates that community

34 science endeavors can enable global research projects that are unfeasible with traditional research
35 models.

36 **Keywords:** environmental metabolomics; river corridor; sediment organic matter; WHONDRS;
37 CONUS; carbon character; dissolved organic matter

38

39 1. Introduction

40 Organic matter (OM) transformations in aquatic ecosystems are a critical source of uncertainty
41 in global biogeochemical cycles [1–4]. More than half of OM inputs to freshwater ecosystems are
42 metabolized before reaching the oceans [1,2,4], yet while several studies have focused on quantifying
43 OM uptake and export rates [1,5,6], the processes driving river corridor OM transformations across
44 spatial scales remain poorly understood.

45 River corridor OM pools contain an extensive variety of molecules that are both produced and
46 metabolized by microorganisms, which are processes reflected in the composition of sediment and
47 surface water metabolomes [2,7,8]. Metabolic transformations of OM in freshwater ecosystems have
48 been traditionally estimated by a combination of laboratory incubations and in-stream tracer
49 additions [9–12]. However, results from incubation experiments are challenging to scale beyond
50 laboratory conditions [9,10], and in-stream tracer processing often does not reflect ambient
51 biogeochemical processes, as the naturally occurring metabolome is more chemically diverse than
52 the tracer added to the stream [11,12]. Several studies have shown that OM pool composition can
53 influence microbial activity, highlighting complexities in the metabolic processes that determine OM
54 transformations [13–18]. Consequently, determining mechanisms underlying river corridor
55 metabolome composition at a large scale remains challenging.

56 Environmental metabolomics uses the identification of small molecules in an organism
57 (metabolites) to characterize the interactions of organisms within their environment [19]. Over the
58 past several years, this definition has been extended to encompass all metabolites present in complex
59 environmental systems for which it is difficult to attribute specific metabolites to specific organisms
60 [20–24]. Different metabolomic techniques have been implemented across fields to enhance our
61 understanding of microbial communities [25,26], anthropogenic activities and pollution sources [27–
62 29], and potential bioremediation strategies [30]. Recently, environmental metabolomics, enabled by
63 ultrahigh-resolution mass spectrometry, has allowed us to reveal connections between OM character,
64 reactivity, and biochemical transformations within and across river ecosystems [15,17,18,31–35].
65 These advances have vastly improved our understanding of the mechanisms governing OM
66 bioavailability and biochemical transformations at a global scale. For instance, previous studies have

67 used ultrahigh-resolution metabolomics from river water across different climatic regions to find
68 common compositional features that would inform global carbon dynamics [36] and to investigate
69 environmental drivers affecting OM composition, bioavailability, and transport of OM [37]. In
70 addition, recent studies show that OM thermodynamics influence aerobic respiration under carbon-
71 limited scenarios [16], that biogeochemical hotspots are influenced by OM nitrogen content [17], and
72 that hyporheic zone mixing induces OM metabolism via a priming effect [15]. These detailed
73 metabolome characterizations have the potential to enable global-scale inferences about watershed
74 features (e.g., vegetation, lithology, hydrology, microbiology, climate) that govern the reactivity and
75 fate of OM across river corridors [35,38]. In turn, metabolomics can enhance our predictive
76 capabilities of global river corridor biogeochemical cycles by helping to improve the representation
77 of biochemical mechanisms in numerical models, such as reactive transport codes [39,40]. For
78 example, an emerging substrate-explicit model uses thermodynamic theory to explicitly account for
79 the chemical composition of all metabolites in OM pools to improve the predictive capacity of
80 biogeochemical models [40].

81 Characterizing metabolomes across global spatiotemporal scales requires a way to collect
82 multiple data types across diverse locations in such a way that they can be analyzed together. This
83 goal can be facilitated by a framework that requires studies to Integrate biological, physical, and
84 chemical processes across scales; Coordinate with consistent methods; be Open across the research
85 lifecycle; and Network with global collaborators to reduce the burden on a single team (ICON)
86 [41,42]. When ICON principles are applied, they allow for distributed sampling in ways that have
87 historically been difficult to achieve.

88 The Worldwide Hydrobiogeochemistry Observation Network for Dynamic River Systems
89 (WHONDRS) is a global consortium of researchers based out of Pacific Northwest National
90 Laboratory that uses an ICON-based approach to understand coupled hydrologic, biogeochemical,
91 and microbial functions in river corridors [35]. ICON principles allow WHONDRS to collect open,
92 globally distributed data through collaboration with the scientific community. The WHONDRS
93 consortium designs sampling campaigns that target specific spatial and temporal scales, modifies its
94 approach based on community input, and then sends free sampling kits to collaborators. All
95 WHONDRS data are openly accessible through Environmental Systems Science Data Infrastructure
96 for a Virtual Ecosystem (ESS-DIVE-<https://data.ess-dive.lbl.gov/>) and the National Center for
97 Biotechnology Information (NCBI), and the WHONDRS consortium ascribes to FAIR data principles
98 (findable, accessible, interoperable, reusable) [43]. This approach enables WHONDRS to collect,
99 analyze, and distribute ultrahigh-resolution metabolomic data to the global scientific community.

100 Here, we describe a community science effort conducted by the WHONDRS consortium during
101 July-August 2019 that used Fourier-transform ion cyclotron resonance mass spectrometry (FTICR-

102 MS) to characterize metabolomes in global surface water and sediment spanning a range of biomes
103 (e.g., desert-like in the Columbia Plateau, subtropical in southern Florida, temperate forests in the
104 Mid-Atlantic) and stream orders [44]. We describe key metabolome characteristics of surface water
105 and sediment and also explore spatial variation of these characteristics within the United States. We
106 focus on central aspects of metabolomes including assigned elemental groups, chemical classes,
107 descriptor indices, and biochemical transformations. This paper provides a benchmark for studying
108 integrated surface water and sediment river corridor metabolomes and highlights the need to engage
109 a wider scientific community in order to expand the reach and impact of scientific advancements.

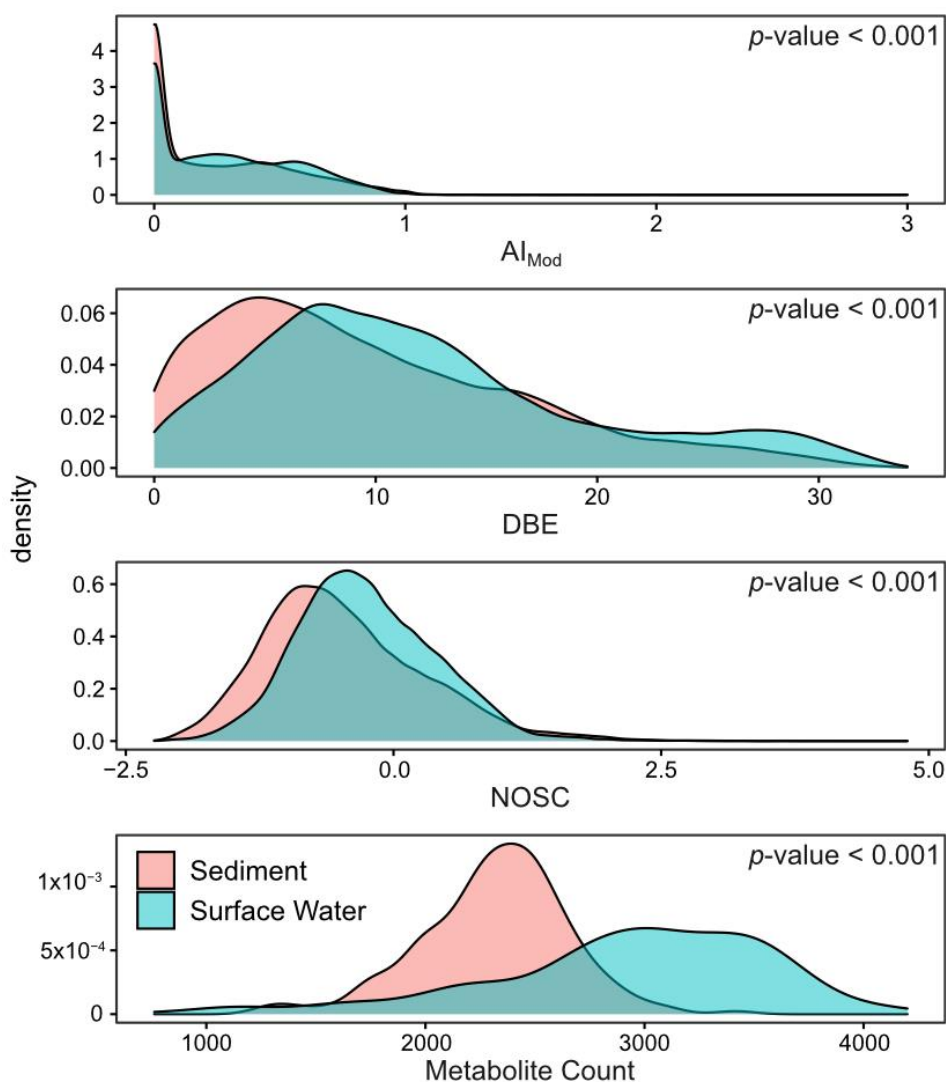
110 **2. Results and Discussion**

111 *2.1. Surface Water Metabolome is More Unsaturated, Aromatic, Oxidized, Rich, and Variable than Sediment* 112 *Metabolome*

113 In order to assess patterns in global metabolome composition, we derived a number of
114 descriptive metrics that summarize FTICR-MS metabolomic profiles. Specifically, we compared
115 double-bond equivalents (DBE), modified aromaticity index (AI_{Mod}), nominal oxidation state of
116 carbon (NOSC), inferred chemical classes (e.g., lignin-like, protein-like), and elemental groups (e.g.,
117 CHO, CHON, CHOSP) of surface water and sediment metabolomes. The double-bond equivalent
118 metric (DBE) describes the degree of chemical unsaturation of bonds in a particular metabolite [45,46],
119 AI_{Mod} quantifies the degree of aromaticity (i.e., ring-like shape) of a metabolite [45–47], and NOSC
120 indicates the energy required to oxidize different metabolomes [48]. High values of AI_{Mod} can denote
121 the existence of either aromatic ($AI_{Mod} > 0.5$) or condensed aromatic structures ($AI_{Mod} \geq 0.67$), and high
122 DBE indicates more saturated compounds. NOSC is inversely correlated with the Gibbs free energy
123 of carbon oxidation. Higher NOSC corresponds to metabolites that are more oxidized and
124 thermodynamically favorable [15–18,48,49]. Chemical class assignments for each metabolite were
125 predicted using oxygen-to-carbon and hydrogen-to-carbon ratios (i.e., Van Krevelen classes [50]).
126 Finally, we used the molecular formula assigned to each metabolite to describe the relative
127 abundance of different heteroatom combinations associated with CHO groups (i.e., differences in -
128 N, -S and/or -P). We then compared metrics across all metabolites found in any surface water sample
129 vs. all metabolites found in any sediment sample. All analyses in Section 2.1 were conducted only on
130 FTICR-MS peaks that were able to be assigned a molecular formula. Other metrics describing
131 metabolome composition are reported in the SI (Table S1).

132 Surface water metabolomes were composed of comparatively more unsaturated and aromatic
133 compounds with a higher nominal oxidation state than sediment. This was denoted by significantly
134 higher AI_{Mod} , DBE, and NOSC than sediment metabolomes (Figure 1, p -value < 0.001). In addition, we
135 observed higher relative abundances of lignin-like, tannin-like, and condensed-hydrocarbon-like

136 metabolites in surface water versus sediment (Figure 2, all p -values < 0.001). These classes of
137 metabolites are characteristic of terrestrial OM [51], and their prevalence in surface water
138 metabolomes indicates a larger contribution of terrestrial OM in surface water relative to sediment.
139 This may also indicate greater contributions of microbially processed OM in sediment, as has been
140 observed previously in comparisons between surface water and hyporheic zone porewater [15, 52].
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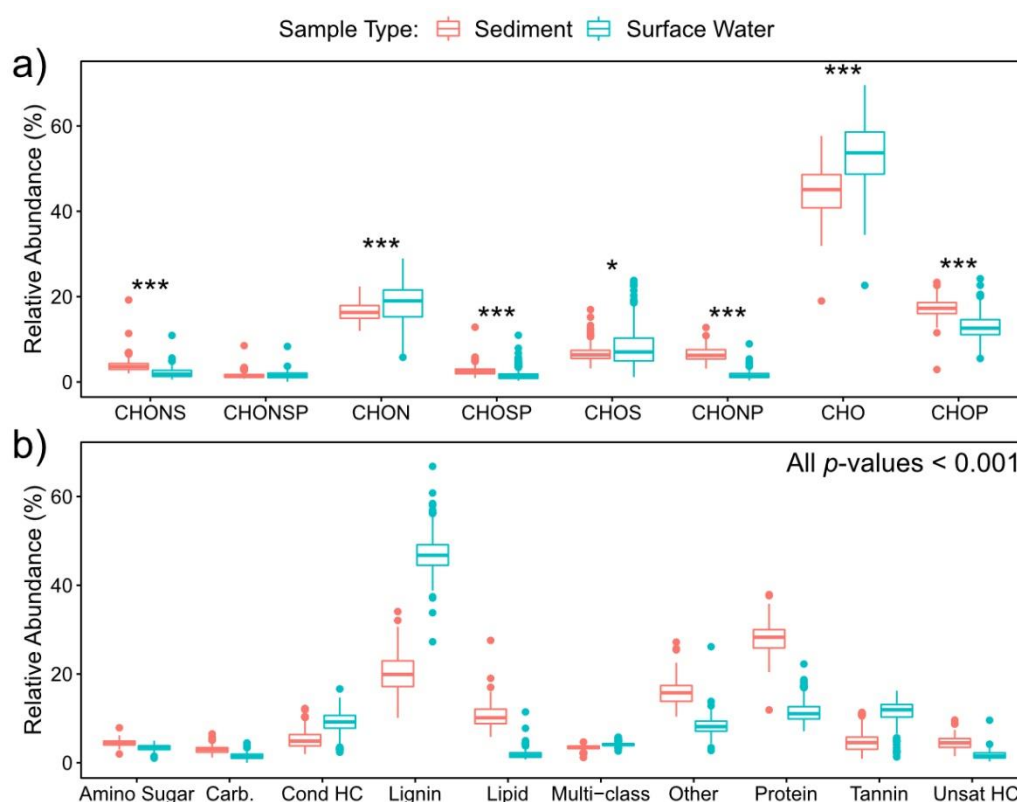


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143 **Figure 1.** Density plots comparing the properties of all molecular formulas found in surface water
144 and sediment samples. AI_{Mod} (modified aromaticity index) is a measure of the potential ring-like
145 structure in a given molecular formula. DBE (double-bond equivalents) is an approximation of
146 potential unsaturation. NOSC (nominal oxidation state of carbon) represents the degree of
147 oxidation/reduction of a given molecular formula. Significance values obtained via a two-sided
148 Mann–Whitney U test to compare sample type distributions are denoted in the upper right corner of
149 each panel.

150 The higher relative abundance of unsaturated and aromatic metabolites in surface water
151 contrasts with previous studies that have observed that these compounds are more common in
152 sediment porewater than in lake surface water or aquifer recharge water [53,54]. These studies
153 inferred low physical, chemical, and/or biological transformation of sediment porewater associated
154 OM. This deviation might be connected to the systems studied. For example, Pracht et al. [53]
155 examined a system where sediment OM was protected due to physical and/or chemical constraints
156 such as mineral sorption and hydrophobic encapsulation [53]. We studied rivers where the shallow
157 benthic layer and the hyporheic zone are known to enhance biogeochemical reactions [55–59]. In turn,
158 we hypothesize that very high rates of biological activity in riverbed sediment [60,61] could be
159 responsible for lower AI_{Mod} , DBE, and NOSC values of sediment metabolomes relative to surface
160 water, in contrast to previous work in potentially less active lake and aquifer systems.

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163 **Figure 2.** Box plots comparing the relative abundances of metabolites belonging to specific elemental
164 groups (a) and chemical classes (b) between sediment and surface water. As in Figure 1, these values
165 were obtained from all metabolites assigned molecular formulas in sediment and surface water.
166 Significance values were obtained via a two-sided Mann–Whitney U test ($0.05 > * > 0.01 > ** > 0.001 >$
167 ***).

168 In addition, the relative abundances of lipid-like and protein-like metabolites were significantly
169 higher in sediment than in surface water (p -value < 0.001). More lipid-like compounds in sediment
170 could reflect higher microbial biomass [62] and further supports our inference that sediment
171 metabolomes were influenced by microbial processes to a greater extent than surface water
172 metabolomes. This highlights the key role played by riverbed sediment and associated hyporheic
173 zones in river corridor biogeochemistry that likely influences global elemental cycles but is not
174 captured in current Earth system models.

175 Conversely, elemental groups of metabolites were similar across surface water and sediment.
176 The median abundance of each elemental group did not vary more than 5% between the two
177 environments, except for CHO (~9%) and CHONSP (~0.2%, not statistically significant) groups. Bulk
178 similarities in elemental groups, in contrast to chemical classes, could indicate that the presence or
179 absence of heteroatoms alone is insufficient to distinguish metabolomes and that elemental
180 stoichiometry of the entire metabolite (the basis for chemical class assignment) may be more
181 important for distinguishing metabolomes. This is important because the elemental stoichiometry of
182 metabolites can mechanistically connect OM thermodynamics to biogeochemical reactions and rates
183 [40].

184 Metabolites found in surface water were distinct from and showed more among-sample
185 variation than those in sediment. To evaluate compositional differences, we conducted a principal
186 component analysis (PCA) and a beta-dispersion analysis (Figure 3). For consistency with prior
187 analyses in this section, we present a PCA on only peaks assigned a molecular formula in Figure 3.
188 When performed on all peaks, regardless of formula assignment, PCA results were consistent with
189 Figure 3 (Figure S1, Table S2). The PCA, in conjunction with a PERMANOVA comparison, indicated
190 that surface water and sediment metabolomes significantly diverged in composition (p -value < 0.001).
191 Loadings for PC1 and PC2 are presented in Table S3. In general, the loadings suggest that many
192 metabolites contributed to the separation between surface water and sediment metabolomes (PC1),
193 while CHON-containing metabolites primarily drove variability in surface water metabolomes
194 (PC2). The beta-dispersion analysis further indicated that surface water metabolomes were more
195 dispersed in multivariate space than sediment metabolomes (Figure 3; p -value < 0.001). Additionally,
196 surface water metabolomes had higher richness (i.e., more peaks with assigned formulas detected on
197 average) than sediment metabolomes (Figure 1). These patterns indicate that metabolomes in surface
198 water and sediment may be shaped by distinct processes that likely span differences in inputs, rates
199 of microbial activity, and abiotic constraints.

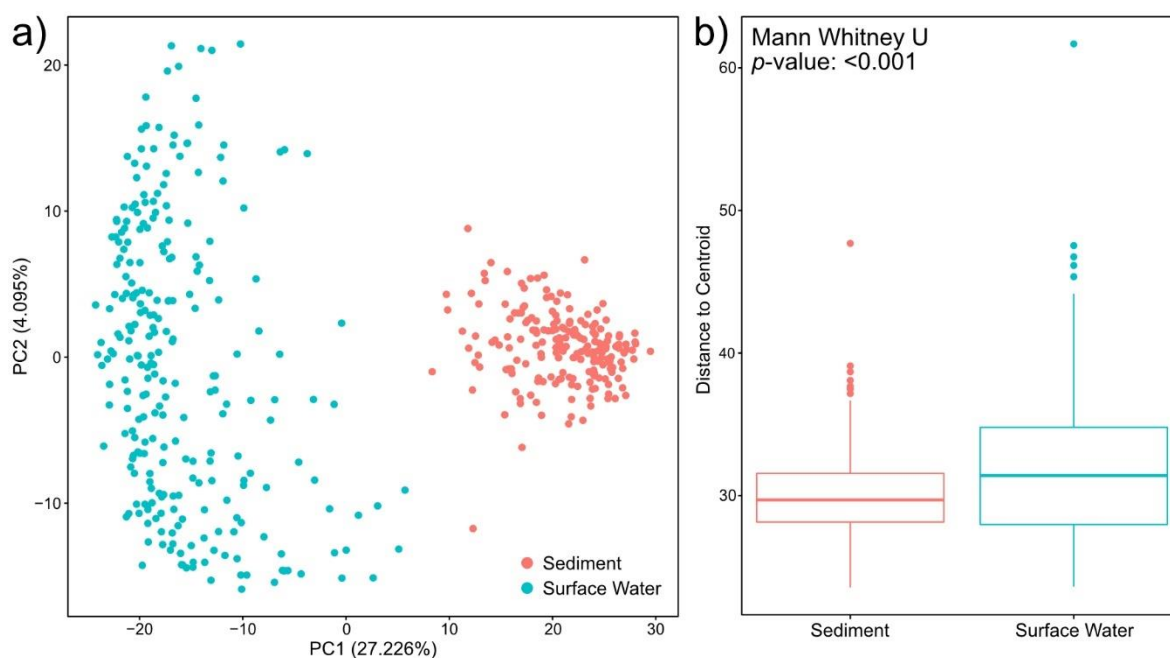
200 We hypothesize that higher richness and greater among-sample variation in surface water
201 metabolomes could reflect more heterogeneous environmental pressures. For example, we sampled
202 across a broad range of latitudes and stream orders that likely led to among-site variation in light

203 exposure (Table S4 [44]). This may, in turn, have led to variation in surface water temperatures and
204 surface water metabolite photodegradation, thereby increasing metabolome variability and richness
205 [63]. Hydrology could also contribute to metabolome richness in surface water as precipitation events
206 and associated runoff transport large amounts of terrestrial OM into rivers [64]. For example,
207 precipitation has been shown to increase aromatic OM and decrease more labile OM in surface water
208 [65–67]. We hypothesize that more immediate connectivity between surface water and terrestrial
209 systems, relative to connectivity between sediment and terrestrial systems, is at least partially
210 responsible for greater variation and higher richness in surface water metabolomes.

211 In addition, lower sediment metabolome variation and richness could be due to comparatively
212 higher rates of microbial activity in sediment that degrade polymeric OM into a limited set of less
213 chemically complex metabolites. This would result in a reduction in the number of distinct
214 metabolites present by collapsing a diverse pool of OM into microbial exudates. Sediment
215 metabolomes may also be constrained by interactions with sediment mineral surfaces, especially
216 considering that we studied only the water-extractable metabolome. This subset of the full sediment
217 metabolome may inherently be composed of a restricted suite of metabolites [68], leading to lower
218 among-sample variation and lower richness. We nonetheless hypothesize that among-site variation
219 in mineralogy could contribute to some of the observed sediment metabolome variation. The
220 WHONDRS consortium is currently generating mineralogy data to test this hypothesis.

221 Together, the observations presented in this section indicate that there are significant differences
222 across global surface water and sediment metabolomes, where surface water metabolomes are more
223 unsaturated, aromatic, oxidized, rich, and variable. These characteristics suggest that surface water
224 metabolomes are more dynamic due to a variety of watershed and river corridor processes (discussed
225 above), while sediment metabolomes may be more stable integrators of localized processes (e.g.,
226 mineral interactions and microbial processing of OM).

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Figure 3. Principal component analysis (PCA) of the molecular formula data (a). Differences between surface water and sediment metabolomes were significant per a Euclidean distance-based PERMANOVA (p -value < 0.001). The degree of among-sample variation was evaluated by quantifying beta-dispersion. Surface water had higher beta-dispersion per a two-sided Mann-Whitney U test (p -value < 0.001) (b).

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2.2. Nitrogen-, Sulfur- and Phosphorous-Containing Transformations Vary Across Surface Water and

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Sediment Metabolomes

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We evaluated how potential reactions in metabolomes varied across the globe by inferring biochemical transformations as per Bailey et al. [62], Kaling et al. [69], Moritz et al. [70], Graham et al. [17,18], Garayburu-Caruso et al. [16], Danczak et al. [38], and Stegen et al. [15]. This method leverages the ultrahigh-resolution of FTICR-MS to compare mass differences between detected peaks to a database of common biochemical transformations. Identified biochemical transformations provide information regarding the frequency at which a specific molecule could have been gained or lost during metabolism. Resulting transformation counts can then be separated based upon their chemical properties to study the potential role of the molecule gained or lost in metabolome composition. Unlike the analyses described in the previous section, where formula assignments of metabolites are necessary, this method allows for the incorporation of all detected metabolites into downstream analyses.

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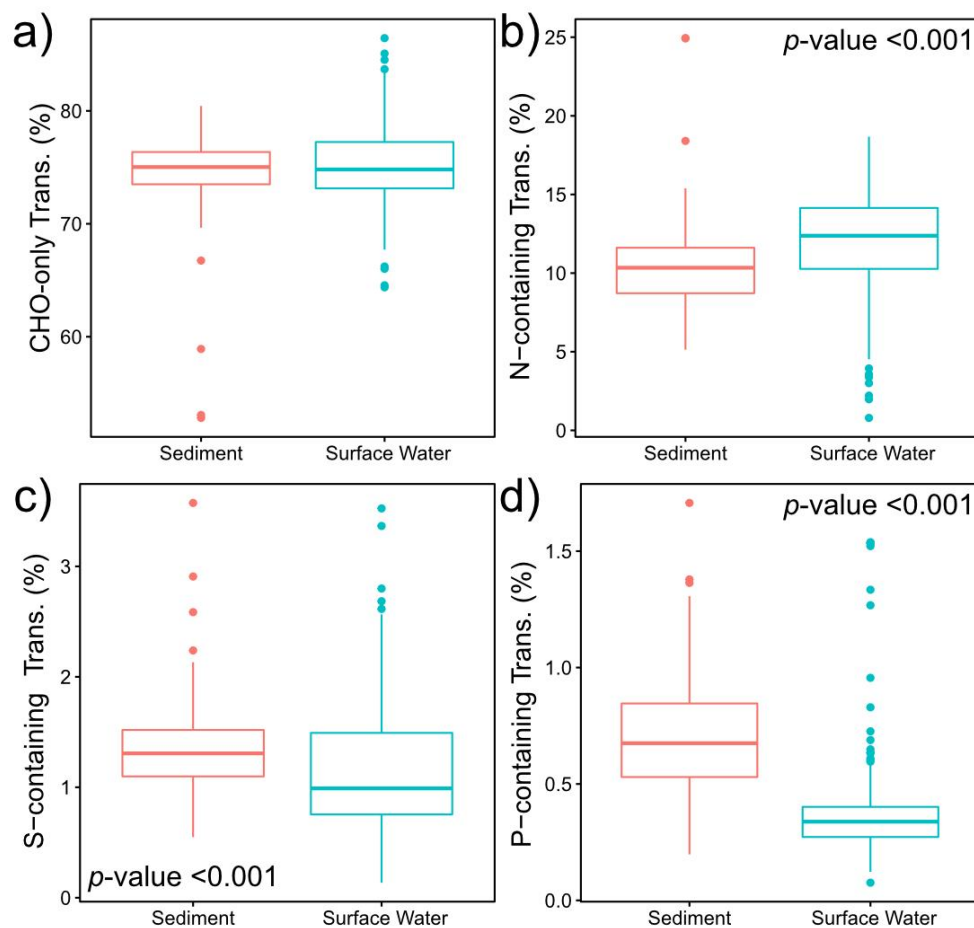
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We observed that biochemical transformations involving molecules containing nitrogen (N), sulfur (S), or phosphorous (P) exhibited divergent patterns between surface water and sediment metabolomes (Figure 4). Specifically, surface water had a significantly higher relative abundance of N-containing transformations, while sediment metabolomes had more S- and P-containing

251 transformations (p -value < 0.001 in all cases). This contrast between surface water and sediment may
252 occur due to variation in nutrient requirements within the water column and sediment, as
253 biochemical transformations have been inferred to reflect nutrient limitations in other systems. For
254 example, Garayburu-Caruso et al. [16] found an increase in N-containing transformations under
255 nutrient-limited conditions, but only when N-containing OM was introduced. More N-containing
256 transformations in surface water as compared to sediment could therefore reflect microbial N mining
257 in surface water through the preferential decomposition of N-containing OM [71,72]. In addition, a
258 higher abundance of P- and S-containing biochemical transformations in sediment further suggest
259 that microbial metabolism is limited by different factors between surface water and sediment
260 environments, which are potentially associated with nutrient assimilation processes [73,74].

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263 **Figure 4.** Boxplots displaying the patterns of CHO-only transformations (a); N-containing
264 transformations (b); S-containing transformations (c); and P-containing transformations (d). False
265 discovery rate (FDR)-corrected two-sided Mann-Whitney U test p -values are provided in either the
266 top right or the bottom left corner of panels with significant comparisons.

267 Interestingly, the higher abundance of N-containing transformations in surface water observed
268 in this study is contrary to past work, where porewater had a higher relative abundance of N-
269 containing transformations than surface water [15,38]. Given that these studies were collected from
270 the Pacific Northwest region of the United States (e.g., eastern Washington and Oregon), this
271 highlights the necessity to expand research beyond individual test systems or geographic regions and
272 emphasizes the utility of global studies through efforts like WHONDRS.

273 In contrast, biochemical transformations that did not involve N-, S-, or P-containing molecules
274 were not significantly different between surface water and sediment metabolomes. Similar patterns
275 have been observed in other studies [38]. These results indicate the presence of ubiquitous
276 biochemical transformations that occur in both surface water and sediment (Figure 4). Based on these
277 results, we hypothesize that N-, S-, and P-containing transformations may have a stronger
278 dependency than CHO-only transformations on nutrient status. That is, changes in nutrient
279 availability across surface water and sediment environments may drive shifts in N-, S-, and/or P-
280 containing transformations but not influence transformations that do not involve these nutrients.
281 Additional data on variation in nutrient limitation and availability will be required to test this
282 hypothesis.

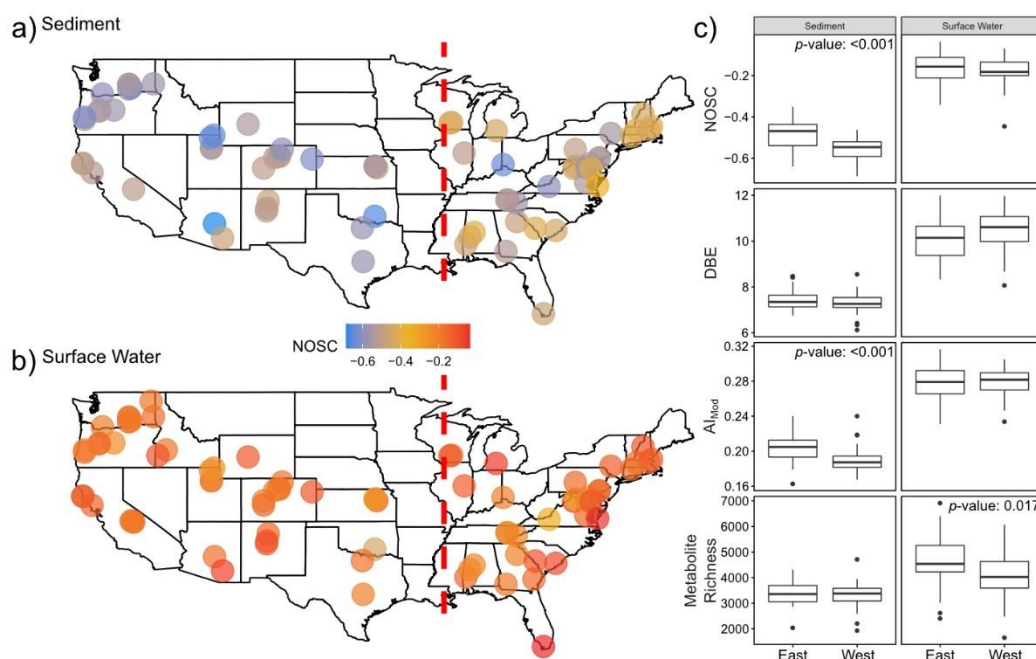
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284 2.3. Sediment Metabolomes are More Spatially Variable Than Surface Water Metabolomes

285 Because most of our sampling locations were in the contiguous United States (CONUS), we used
286 CONUS data to resolve potential spatial patterns in metabolomes (Figures 5 and 6). In order to
287 uncover site-by-site metabolomic variation, we calculated the mean value for each derived metric
288 (e.g., AI_{Mod} , NOSC, DBE) and calculated the relative abundance of elemental groups and chemical
289 classes (e.g., CHO and lignin-like) for each sample.

290 Overall, differences between the mean properties of CONUS surface water and sediment
291 metabolomes were generally consistent with differences between global surface water and sediment
292 metabolomes reported in Figure 1. For instance, surface water metabolomes displayed higher AI_{Mod} ,
293 DBE, and NOSC than sediment metabolomes (Figure 5, p -value < 0.001 for all, Table S5). We also
294 observed similar patterns in both the relative abundances of specific elemental groups (Figure 6, p -
295 value < 0.001 for all, Table S5) and chemical classes (p -value < 0.001 for all, Table S5 and File S1). In
296 order to expand our analyses, we investigated spatial patterns in individual metabolomic features
297 across the CONUS by comparing sites that were east (hereafter “East”, surface water $n = 34$, sediment
298 $n = 33$) vs. west (hereafter “West”, surface water $n = 45$, sediment $n = 38$) of the Mississippi River.

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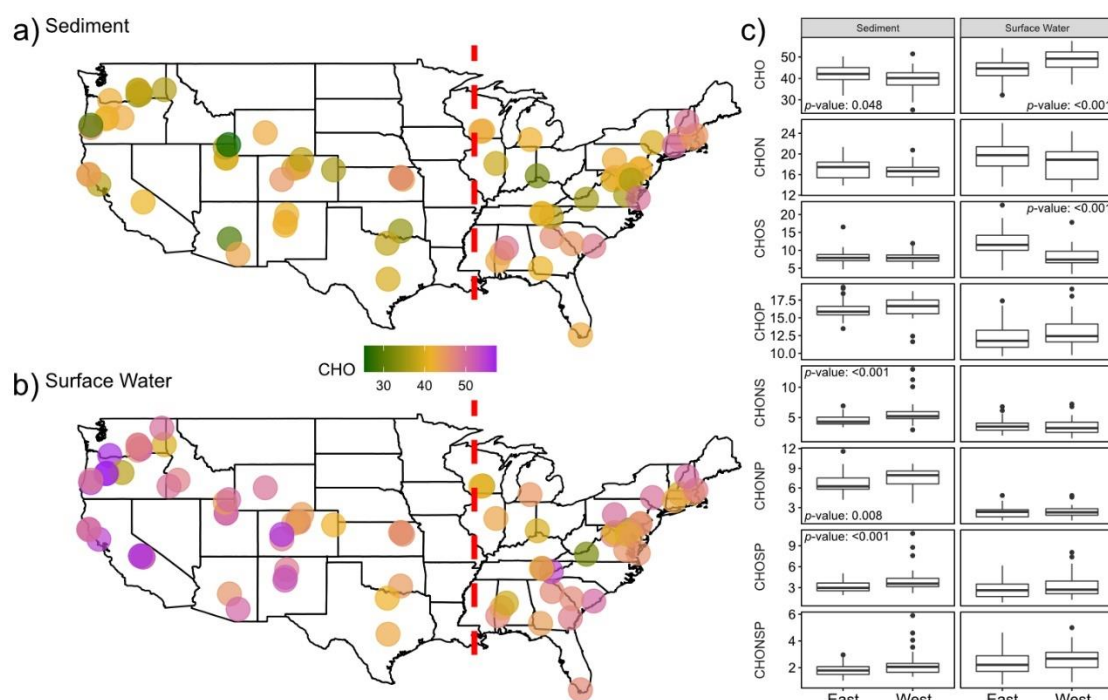
301 **Figure 5.** Maps of the United States revealing the spatial variability of average NOSC in sediment (a)
302 and surface water (b) metabolomes. East vs. West spatial patterns for various derived metrics are
303 displayed in panel (c). Statistically significant differences identified via a two-sided Mann–Whitney
304 U test are indicated by p -values listed in each comparison. The red dashed line represents the

305 longitude of the Mississippi River at St. Louis, MO, USA—the dividing line between East and West
306 samples.

307 In general, we observed greater spatial patterning in sediment metabolomes than in surface
308 water metabolomes. Average NOSC and AI_{Mod} values of sediment metabolomes were higher in the
309 East than in the West (p -value < 0.001 for both). Metabolites containing CHONP, CHONS, or CHOSP
310 constituted a significantly lower relative abundance of metabolomes in the East sediment, relative to
311 the West (p -value < 0.001 for all). Lastly, lignin- and tannin-like metabolites constituted a higher
312 relative abundance of sediment metabolomes in the East, while protein-, condensed-hydrocarbon-,
313 and unsaturated-hydrocarbon-like metabolites were more abundant in the West (p -value < 0.001 for
314 all, Table S5 and File S1).

315 In contrast to spatial patterns in sediment metabolomes, surface water showed less spatial
316 structure with only CHO and CHOS metabolites showing significant shifts between East and West
317 (p -value < 0.001 for both). CHO and CHOS metabolites comprised higher and lower relative
318 abundances in the West than in the East, respectively (Figure 6). No spatial patterns were observed
319 in NOSC (p -value = 0.4, Table S5), DBE (p -value = 0.07, Table S5), or AI_{Mod} (p -value = 0.93, Table S5) in
320 surface water (Figure 5). Results from the remainder of molecular indices, elemental groups, and
321 chemical class comparisons are shown in Table S5 and File S1.

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324 **Figure 6.** Maps of the United States revealing the spatial variability of the relative abundance of
325 metabolites containing only CHO with sediment (a) and surface water (b); East vs. West spatial

326 patterns for different elemental groups' relative abundances are displayed in panel (c). Statistically
327 significant differences identified via a two-sided Mann–Whitney U test are indicated by *p*-values
328 listed in each comparison. The red dashed line represents the longitude of the Mississippi River at St.
329 Louis, MO, USA—the dividing line between East and West samples.

330 Together, these patterns suggest that spatial differences in the metabolic processes driving OM
331 cycling in the East versus the West have a stronger influence on sediment metabolomes than surface
332 water metabolomes. While our non-spatial analyses showed greater among-sample and among-site
333 variability in surface water metabolomes (Figure 3), the lack of spatial structure across the CONUS
334 suggests that this variability is not driven by factors that are spatially structured at the continental
335 scale. Instead, we hypothesize that surface water metabolomes are more temporally variable due to
336 fluctuating inputs from precipitation events. To more directly evaluate spatial structure in surface
337 water metabolomes, it is likely necessary to control for precipitation history and hydrologic
338 connectivity to terrestrial systems. These inferences are supported by previous studies addressing
339 spatial dissolved OM chemography dynamics showing that longitudinal patterns of dissolved OM
340 in surface water are sensitive to hydrologic events [75–77]. However, there is a complex interaction
341 between hydrology and space, as the sources and quality of OM from different regions may respond
342 differently to hydrological variation [78].

343 The contrasting patterns in surface water and sediment metabolome characteristics across the
344 East-West gradient could be the result of many factors, including vegetation cover [79], underlying
345 lithology [80], photoreactivity [63], climate and precipitation regime [80], and/or microbial
346 metabolism [81]. Additional data and analyses will be required to disentangle the relative
347 contributions of these potential drivers. Pursuing this knowledge is important for explaining and
348 ultimately predicting OM transformations. In turn, representing these processes and their impacts on
349 biogeochemical cycles in process-based models has the potential to improve the accuracy of
350 biogeochemical predictions across the globe.

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352 3. Materials and Methods

353 3.1. WHONDRS Summer 2019 Sampling Campaign

354 In July and August 2019, the WHONDRS consortium initiated a study of global river corridors
355 to evaluate interactions between ecosystem features, microbial communities, and metabolomes in
356 surface water and shallow sediments. To design the study, the WHONDRS consortium held multiple
357 webinars with collaborators who volunteered to collect samples. The webinars allowed for
358 community input on sampling protocol and data collected. More details are available at
359 <https://whondrs.pnnl.gov>.

360 Briefly, WHONDRS developed sampling protocols and videos in coordination with the scientific
361 community that were made openly available via YouTube, sent free sampling kits to collaborators,
362 and conducted a suite of biogeochemical analyses on surface water and sediment. All data will be
363 made open access following QA/QC at <https://data.ess-dive.lbl.gov/>. Preliminary data are available
364 on a Google Drive linked via <https://whondrs.pnnl.gov> as they become available.

365 The 2019 study collected samples and metadata associated with stream order, climate,
366 vegetation, and geomorphological features from 97 river corridors in 8 countries within a 6-week
367 period, from 29 July to 19 September (Table S4, [44]). Stream order information (Table S4) was
368 acquired for sites within the continental United States through the EPA National National
369 Hydrography Dataset Plus ([https://www.epa.gov/waterdata/nhdplus-national-hydrography-](https://www.epa.gov/waterdata/nhdplus-national-hydrography-dataset-plus)
370 [dataset-plus](https://www.epa.gov/waterdata/nhdplus-national-hydrography-dataset-plus)), and stream orders for a couple of Canada sites were acquired through British Columbia
371 Data Catalogue (<https://catalogue.data.gov.bc.ca/dataset/75299593-3222-40f9-879f-29e9824fc978>).
372 Stream orders indicate the relative size of a stream [82]. The data provided in the SI were calculated
373 following Strahler's definition of stream order [83]. This is estimated based on the size of its
374 tributaries; for example, if two 1st order streams come together, they will form a 2nd order stream.
375 Lower stream orders tend to be small tributaries or headwaters, while large stream orders are often
376 major rivers [82,83].

377 This paper focuses on surface water (95 sites) and sediment (78 sites) collected across biomes
378 (i.e., desert, tropical, temperate forests), from which a total of 504 samples were analyzed. Toyoda et
379 al. [44] provide additional metadata associated with specific site characteristics (e.g.,
380 hydrogeomorphology, vegetation, temperature, discharge).

381 3.2. Sample Collection and Laboratory Pre-Processing

382 At each location, collaborators selected sampling sites within 100 m of a station that measured
383 river discharge, height, or pressure. Within each site, 3 depositional zones were identified for
384 sediment collection following NEON's protocol (NEON.DOC.001193; [84]) and labeled as upstream,

385 midstream, or downstream. The depositional zones were situated within 10 m of each other. Surface
386 water was sampled in triplicate prior to sediment sampling. Surface water was collected only at the
387 downstream site before collecting the sediments to make sure the water collected was not affected by
388 sediment debris mobilized during water or sediment sampling at upstream locations. Sediments
389 were collected from all three zones, where each zone provided a biological replicate of a sediment
390 sample.

391 Surface water was collected using a 60 mL syringe and was filtered through a 0.22 μm sterivex
392 filter (EMD Millipore) into a 40 mL glass vial (I-Chem amber VOA glass vials; ThermoFisher, pre-
393 acidified with 10 μL of 85% phosphoric acid). Subsequently, 125 mL of surface sediments (1–3 cm
394 depth) were sampled from a $\sim 1\text{m}^2$ area at each depositional zone with a stainless steel scoop, making
395 sure the sediments were saturated upon collection. All samples were shipped to Pacific Northwest
396 National Laboratory on blue ice within 24 h of collection.

397 Surface water samples were immediately frozen at $-20\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ upon receiving. Sediments from each
398 depositional zone were individually sieved to $<2\text{ mm}$, subsampled into proteomic friendly tubes
399 (Genesee Scientific), and stored at $-20\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ for FTICR-MS analysis.

400

401 3.3. *Fourier Transform Ion Cyclotron Resonance Mass Spectrometry (FTICR-MS)*

402 Surface water samples were thawed in the dark at 4 °C for 72 h. Non-purgeable organic carbon
403 (NPOC) was determined using a 5 mL aliquot of the acidified water sample by a Shimadzu
404 combustion carbon analyzer TOC-L CSH/CSN E100V with ASI-L autosampler. NPOC concentrations
405 (Table S6) were normalized to 1.5 mg C L⁻¹ across all samples to allow for data comparison across
406 sites within this study and other WHONDERS sampling campaigns. Diluted samples were acidified
407 to pH 2 with 85% phosphoric acid and extracted with PPL cartridges (Bond Elut), following Dittmar
408 et al. [85].

409 Sediment samples were thawed overnight in the dark at 4 °C. Then, sediment organic matter
410 was extracted in proteomic friendly tubes (Genesee Scientific) with a 1:2 ratio of sediment to water (5
411 g of sediment to 10 mL of milli-Q water). During the extraction, tubes were continuously shaken in
412 the dark at 375 rpm and 21 °C for 2 h, after which the tubes were centrifuged at 6000 rcf and 21 °C for
413 5 min. The supernatant was collected and filtered through 0.22 µm polyethersulfone membrane filter
414 (Millipore Sterivex, USA) into borosilicate glass vials. NPOC (Shimadzu combustion carbon analyzer
415 TOC-Vcsh with ASI-V autosampler) was determined using a 5 mL aliquot from the filtered
416 supernatant. As with the water samples, this supernatant was normalized to a standard NPOC
417 concentration (Table S4) of 1.5 mg C L⁻¹, acidified to pH 2 with 85% phosphoric acid, and extracted
418 with PPL cartridges following the same methods described above.

419 A 12 Tesla (12 T) Bruker Solarix Fourier transform ion cyclotron mass spectrometer (FTICR-MS;
420 Bruker, Solarix, Billerica, MA, USA) located at the Environmental Molecular Sciences Laboratory in
421 Richland, WA, was used to collect ultrahigh-resolution mass spectra of surface water and sediment
422 OM pools. Resolution was 220 K at 481.185 *m/z*. The FTICR-MS was outfitted with a standard
423 electrospray ionization (ESI) source, and data were acquired in negative mode with the voltage set to
424 +4.2 kV. The instrument was externally calibrated weekly to a mass accuracy of <0.1 ppm; in addition,
425 the instrument settings were optimized by tuning on a Suwannee River Fulvic Acid (SRFA) standard.
426 Data were collected with an ion accumulation of 0.05 sec for surface water and 0.1 or 0.2 sec for
427 sediment from 100–900 *m/z* at 4 M. One hundred forty-four scans were co-added for each sample and
428 internally calibrated using an OM homologous series separated by 14 Da (–CH₂ groups). The mass
429 measurement accuracy was typically within 1 ppm for singly charged ions across a broad *m/z* range
430 (100 *m/z*–900 *m/z*). BrukerDaltonik Data Analysis (version 4.2) was used to convert raw spectra to a
431 list of *m/z* values by applying the FTMS peak picker module with a signal-to-noise ratio (S/N)
432 threshold set to 7 and absolute intensity threshold to the default value of 100. We aligned peaks (0.5
433 ppm threshold) and assigned chemical formulas using Formularity [86]. The Compound
434 Identification Algorithm in Formularity was used with the following criteria: S/N > 7 and mass

435 measurement error <0.5 ppm. This algorithm takes into consideration the presence of C, H, O, N, S,
436 and P and excludes other elements.

437 It is important to note that FTICR-MS is not quantitative and does not provide information about
438 the structure of the molecular formulas identified. This method provides a non-targeted approach to
439 reliably identify molecular formulas of organic metabolites with masses between 200–900 *m/z*. The
440 power of FTICR-MS is that it can capture thousands of metabolites simultaneously in contrast to other
441 global environmental metabolomics techniques that yield less information. A key consideration with
442 FTICR-MS-derived information is that it captures all ionizable organic molecules and thus is source-
443 agnostic (e.g., not all detected compounds are guaranteed to be biologically derived). Hence there is
444 a tradeoff of depth vs. specificity in metabolomics methods, and FTICR-MS sacrifices some specificity
445 for depth. In addition, the sediment-water extractions performed in this study provide chemical
446 selectivity towards water-extractable OM. Although water-soluble OM in the sediments is the
447 primary interest of this study, the extraction method has the potential to bias towards the most labile
448 pool of the sediment OM and can also extract a higher abundance of carbohydrates when compared
449 to other solvents [68].

450

451 3.4. FTICR-MS Data Analysis

452 All FTICR-MS analyses were performed using R v4.0.0 [87], and all plots were generated using
453 the ggplot2 package (v3.2.2) [88]. The R package “ftmsRanalysis” [89] was used to (1) remove peaks
454 outside of a high confidence m/z range (200 m/z –900 m/z) and/or with a ^{13}C isotopic signature; (2)
455 calculate molecular formula properties (i.e., Kendrick defect, double-bond equivalent, modified
456 aromaticity index, nominal oxidation state of carbon, standard Gibbs Free Energy of carbon
457 oxidation); and (3) to determine to which chemical class a given metabolite belonged [45,46,48,50].
458 Using “ftmsRanalysis” [75] data outputs, we can obtain the central aspects of metabolomes
459 investigated in this study, where elemental groups are categorized by the combination of elemental
460 atoms present in each metabolite with molecular formula identified (e.g., CHO, CHON, CHOSP). The
461 double-bond equivalent metric (DBE) describes the degree of chemical unsaturation of bonds in a
462 particular metabolite [45,46], the modified aromaticity index (AI_{Mod}) quantifies the degree of
463 aromaticity (i.e., ring-like shape) of a metabolite [45–47], and NOSC indicates the energy required to
464 oxidize different metabolomes [48]. High values of AI_{Mod} can denote the existence of either aromatic
465 ($\text{AI}_{\text{Mod}} > 0.5$) or condensed aromatic structures ($\text{AI}_{\text{Mod}} \geq 0.67$), and high DBE indicates more saturated
466 compounds. NOSC is inversely correlated with the Gibbs free energy of carbon oxidation. Higher
467 NOSC corresponds to metabolites that are more oxidized and thermodynamically favorable [15–
468 18,48,49]. Chemical class assignments for each metabolite were predicted using oxygen-to-carbon and
469 hydrogen-to-carbon ratios (i.e., Van Krevelen classes [50]).

470 In order to evaluate bulk variation across sample types, a Mann–Whitney U test (*wilcox.test*) with
471 a false discovery rate (FDR) p -value adjustment (*p.adjust*) was used to evaluate the divergence in
472 molecular properties of all metabolites with molecular formulas assigned (46.08% of the total 95,681
473 peaks) present in either surface water or sediment. Differences in elemental group and chemical class
474 relative abundances within samples between surface water and sediment were evaluated using the
475 same approach. A principal component analysis (PCA; *prcomp*) was used to visualize differences
476 between surface water and sediment metabolomes after a presence/absence transformation. A
477 Euclidean distance matrix was obtained (*vegdist*, *vegan* package v2.5-6) and evaluated using a
478 PERMANOVA (*adonis*, *vegan* package v2.5-6) in order to assess multivariate differences between
479 sample types [90]. Inter-sample type variability was evaluated using the same Euclidean distance
480 matrix in a beta-dispersion analysis (*betadisper*, *vegan* package v2.5-6); divergence in distance to
481 centroid values was then evaluated using a Mann–Whitney U test [90].

482 To determine CONUS-scale patterns, sites were divided into eastern and western US based on
483 their position relative to the location of the Mississippi River at St. Louis, Missouri. Replicates at each
484 site were merged such that if a metabolite was observed in one replicate, it was considered present
485 at the site. Given that FTICR-MS samples typically have less than 100% reproducibility [91,92], we

486 considered a metabolite to be present in a sample if it was detected in any of the three replicates. This
487 allowed us to maximize our detection of metabolites and has been previously employed [38]. Average
488 molecular properties were then calculated, and elemental group/chemical class relative abundances
489 were determined for each site/sample type combination based upon the metabolites present. This
490 resulted in a single value for any given variable in surface water or sediment at a given site.
491 Differences between these values across the East vs. West CONUS were then assessed using a Mann-
492 Whitney U test with FDR correction. Maps were generated using ggplot to visualize spatial variance.
493 All maps can be found in File S1.

494 *3.5. Biochemical Transformation Analysis*

495 We inferred biochemical transformations in sediment and surface water metabolomes as per
496 Bailey et al. [62], Kaling et al. [69], Moritz et al. [70], Graham et al. [17,18], Garayburu-Caruso et al.
497 [16], Danczak et al. [38], and Stegen et al. [15] to estimate the gain or loss of specific molecules (e.g.,
498 glucose, valine, glutamine). Briefly, pairwise mass differences were calculated between every peak
499 in a sample and compared to a reference list of 1255 masses associated with commonly observed
500 biochemical transformations (i.e., reactions of organic matter, Table S7). It is important to note that a
501 molecular formula assignment is not necessary for this method as it allows for the incorporation of
502 all detected metabolites. For mass differences matching to compounds in the reference list (within 1
503 ppm), we inferred the gain or loss of that compound via a biochemical transformation. For example,
504 if a mass difference between two peaks corresponded to 71.0371, that would correlate to the loss or
505 gain of the amino acid alanine, while a mass difference of 79.9662 would correspond to a loss or gain
506 of a phosphate. Transformations were separated into 4 different groups based upon their labels:
507 CHO-only, N-containing, S-containing, and P-containing. Differences in the relative abundance of
508 transformations across samples were identified using a Mann-Whitney U test with FDR correction.

509 *3.6. Data Availability*

510 Original and expanded metadata, as well as surface water and sediment data used in this study,
511 are publicly available on the Department of Energy data archive site ESS-DIVE [44,93]. All scripts
512 used in this study are available on GitHub at
513 <https://github.com/danczakre/GlobalRiverMetabolomes>.

514 **4. Conclusions**

515 We leveraged community science facilitated by the WHONDRS consortium to present the first
516 ultrahigh-resolution analysis of global river corridor metabolomes of both surface water and
517 sediment. Our data showed a strong divergence between surface water and sediment metabolomes,

518 consistent with previous work within local systems. Surface water metabolomes were more rich and
519 variable and contained more unsaturated and aromatic metabolites than sediment, possibly
520 suggesting higher influence from terrestrial inputs or lower microbial processing. Further, surface
521 water and sediment metabolomes had a consistent set of core biochemical transformations (CHO-
522 only) but differed in N-, S-, and P-containing transformations that may be more influenced by
523 nutrient limitations. Finally, we hypothesize the presence of systematic, spatially structured drivers
524 influencing sediment metabolomes more strongly than surface water, as sediment changed along
525 longitudinal patterns within the contiguous United States.

526 While there are many potential explanations for these patterns, the publicly available datasets
527 being actively compiled by WHONDORS are well-suited for follow-on analyses to identify factors
528 underlying metabolome variability. Given that the WHONDORS sampling campaign spanned 1st to 9th
529 stream orders across multiple biomes (e.g., desert-like in the Columbia Plateau, subtropical in
530 southern Florida, temperate forests in the Mid-Atlantic), outcomes of current and future data
531 analyses and modeling efforts will enable transferable knowledge that can be applied throughout the
532 world. To expand the breadth of questions that can be pursued with the data, WHONDORS is currently
533 collecting information pertaining to mineralogy, geochemistry (e.g., anion and total N
534 concentrations), microbiology (e.g., metagenomics, metatranscriptomics, flow cytometric cell
535 counts), and various remote sensing data types (e.g., vegetation cover). Future questions might, for
536 example, involve exploring spatial patterns of metabolomes across stream orders; correlating N-, S-,
537 and P-containing transformations with land use, mineralogy, and vegetation; or investigating
538 relationships between microbial activity and metabolome composition. We encourage the scientific
539 community to explore WHONDORS datasets and combine them with additional data products to
540 pursue novel scientific questions at local to global scales and to further engage with and pursue
541 science that embodies the ICON principles.

542 **Supplementary Materials:** The following are available online at www.mdpi.com/xxx/s1. Table S1: This table
543 contains by-sample mean, median, and standard deviation for molecular characteristics (i.e., aromaticity index,
544 H:C ratios, etc.; Sheet (1), the number of metabolites belonging to a given elemental group (i.e., CHON, CHO;
545 Sheet (2), and the number of metabolites belonging to some compound class (i.e., %lignin-like, %protein-like,
546 etc.; Sheet (3); Sheet (4), information about how each of the different measurements was calculated. Figure S1:
547 Principal component analysis (PCA) performed on all peaks, regardless of formula assignment. Table S2:
548 Loadings for PCA performed on all peaks. PC1 loadings on the x-axis are presented in Column A, while PC2
549 loadings on the y-axis are presented in Column B. Table S3: Loadings for PCA performed peaks with molecular
550 formula assigned. PC1 loadings on the x-axis are presented in Column A, while PC2 loadings on the y-axis are
551 presented in Column B. Table S4: This spreadsheet contains meta-data for each site from which samples were
552 collected, including (but not limited to) latitude, longitude, stream order, and sampling date. Table S5: This table
553 contains the results of the FDR-corrected, two-sided Mann–Whitney statistics performed to evaluate spatial

554 variability across the contiguous United States of America. Table S6: Table of non-purgeable organic carbon
555 (NPOC) concentrations for surface water and sediment-water extractions. Table S7: The file is the database of
556 transformations used in the transformation analysis. The first column represents the transformation label, while
557 the second column is the corresponding mass difference. There are two types of transformations listed in this
558 file: (1) the gain or loss of the listed molecular formula (e.g., C₁H₁O₁N₁), with numeric values indicating the
559 number of atoms associated with the element that precedes the numeric value; and (2) a substitution reaction
560 denoted by an underscore (e.g., C₁H₁N₁O₋₁). In the case of a substitution reaction, the underscore connects the
561 element lost to the number of atoms lost. For example, C₁H₁N₁O₋₁ indicates that a molecule gained C₁H₁N₁
562 and lost one O atom. Some substitution reactions include multiple elements that are lost such that there are
563 multiple underscores. In all cases, an underscore connects the element lost to the number of atoms lost. In all
564 cases, atoms are gained if they are not followed immediately by an underscore. For example, C₋₁H₄O₂
565 indicates loss of one C, loss of four H, and gain of two O. If no numeric value follows an element, it indicates
566 that there is a gain of a single atom of that element (e.g., CH₂ indicates one atom of C). File S1: A compressed
567 file containing all of the maps generated during the spatial analysis of the contiguous United States of America.

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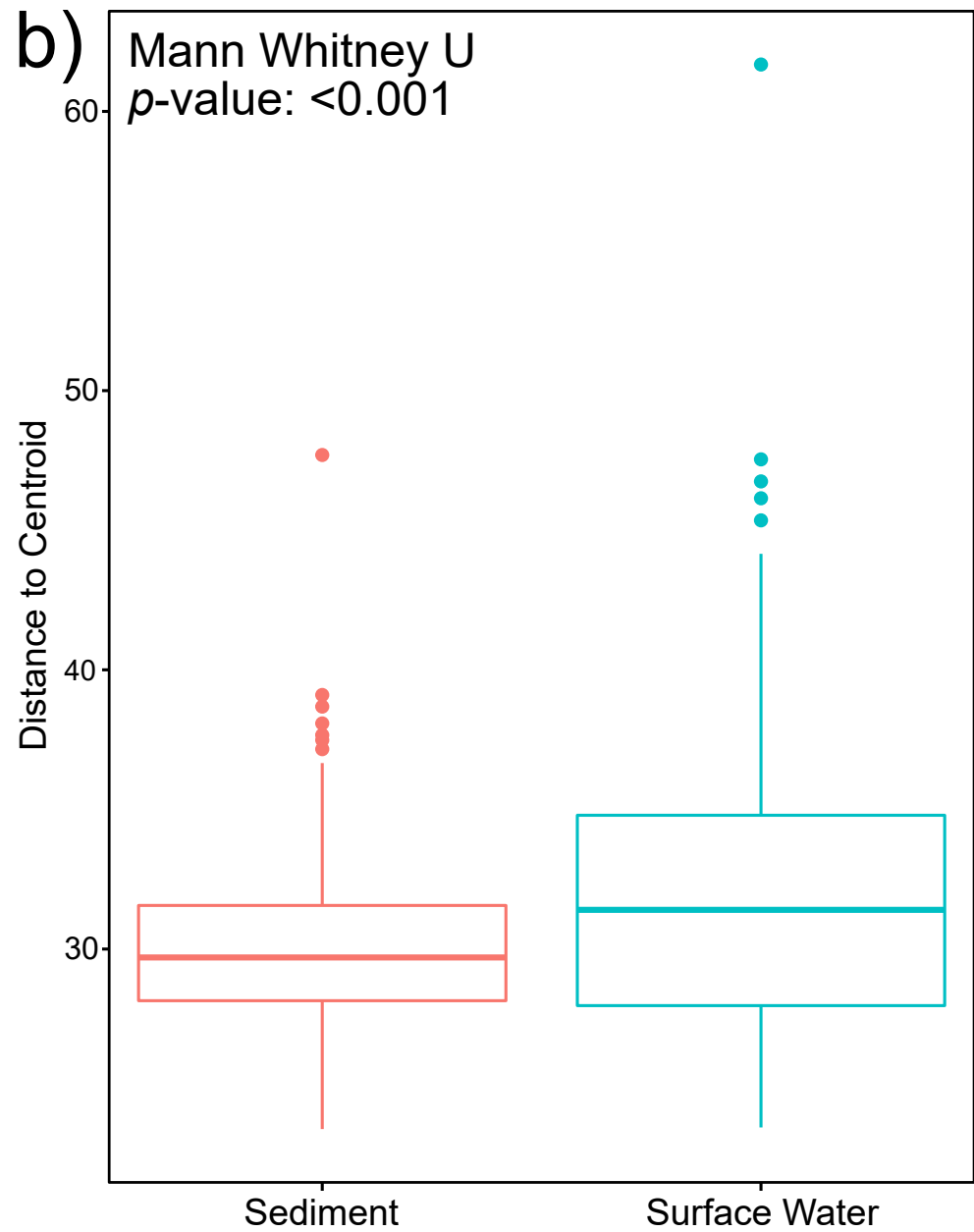
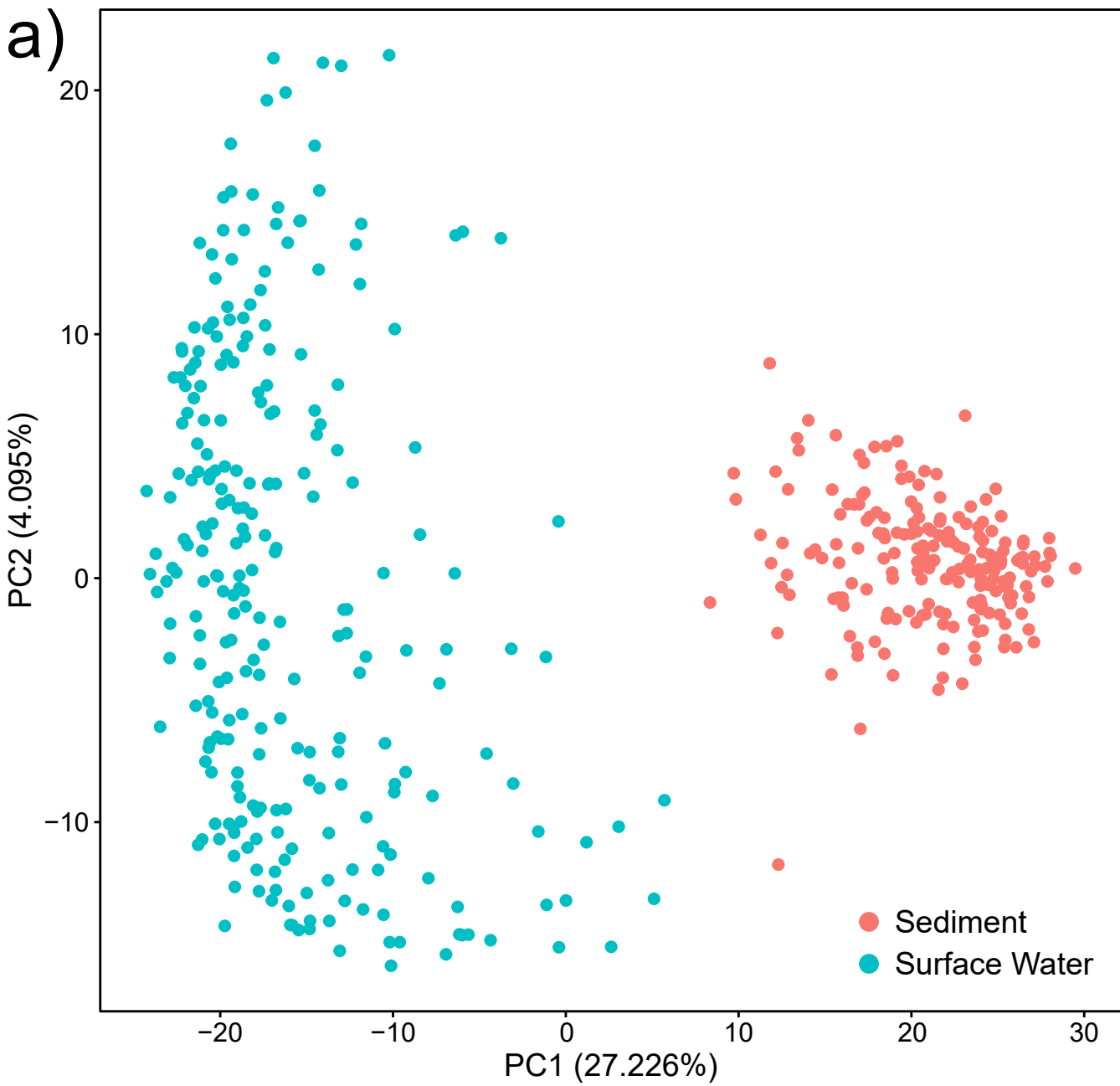
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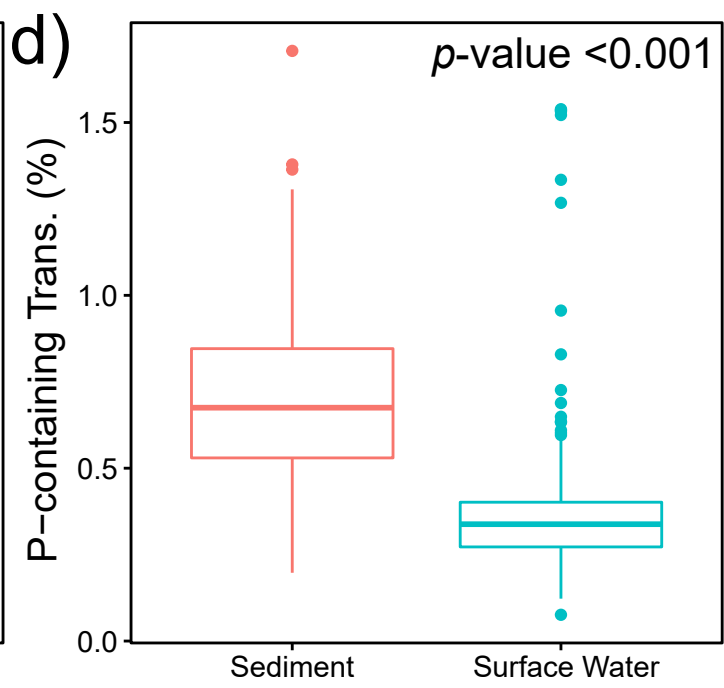
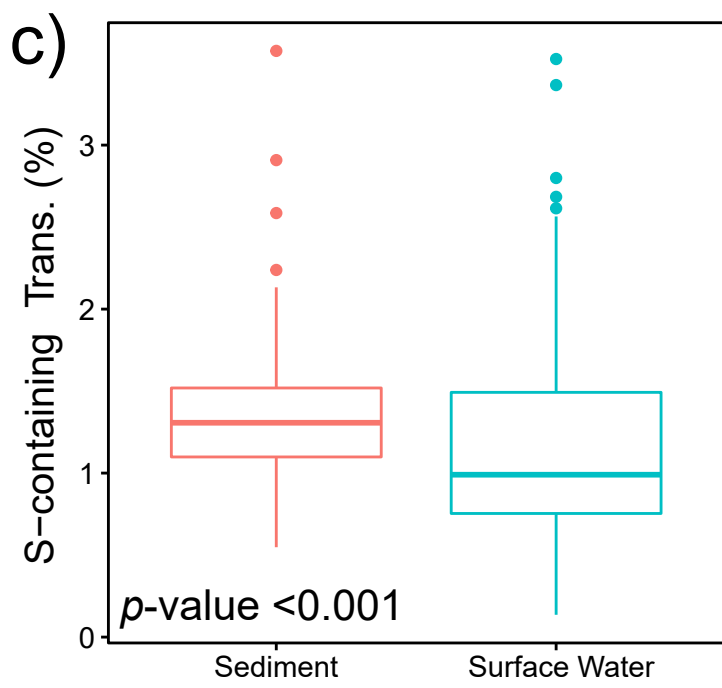
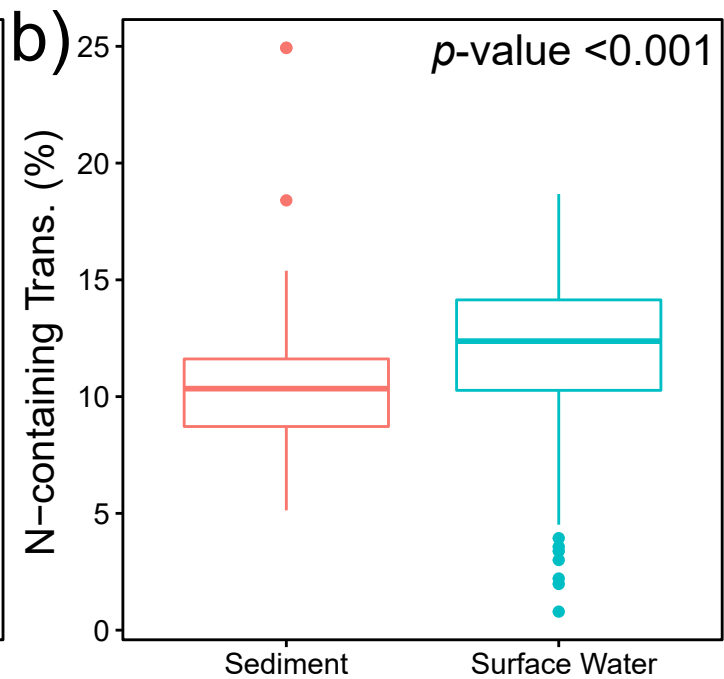
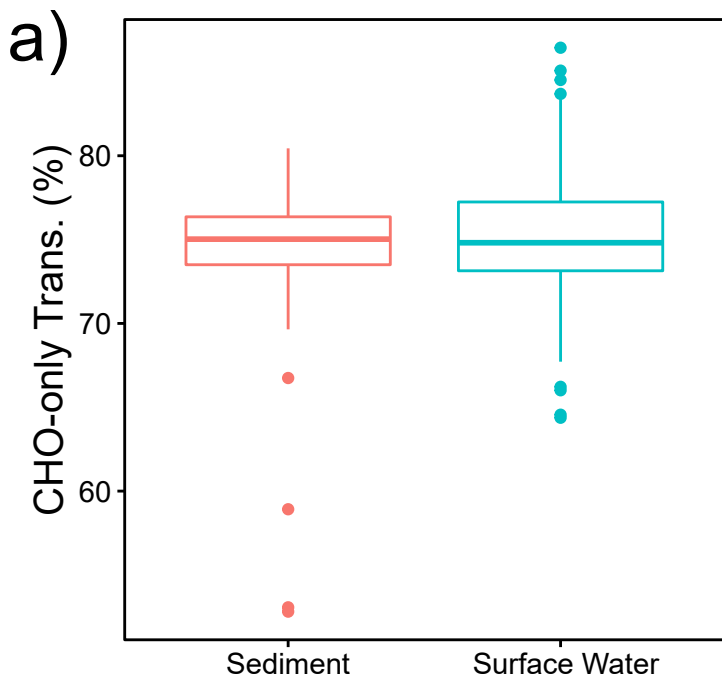
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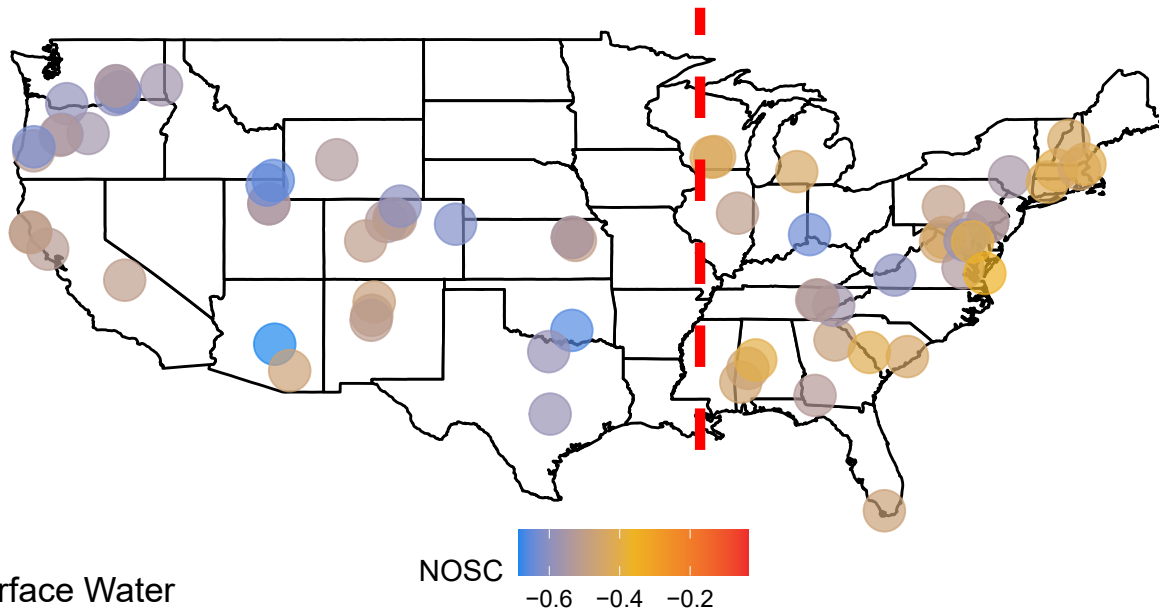
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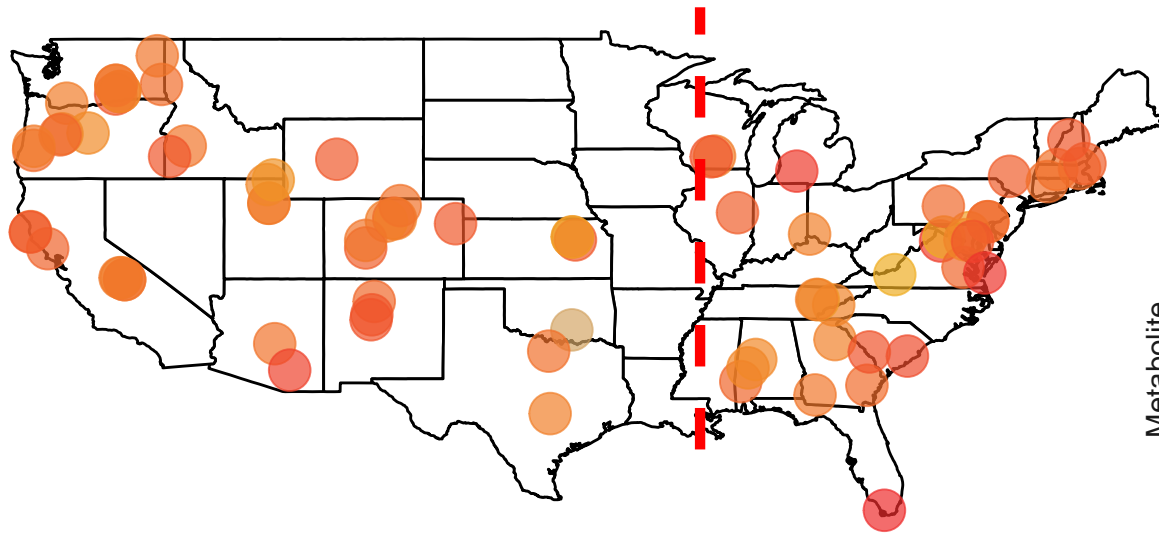




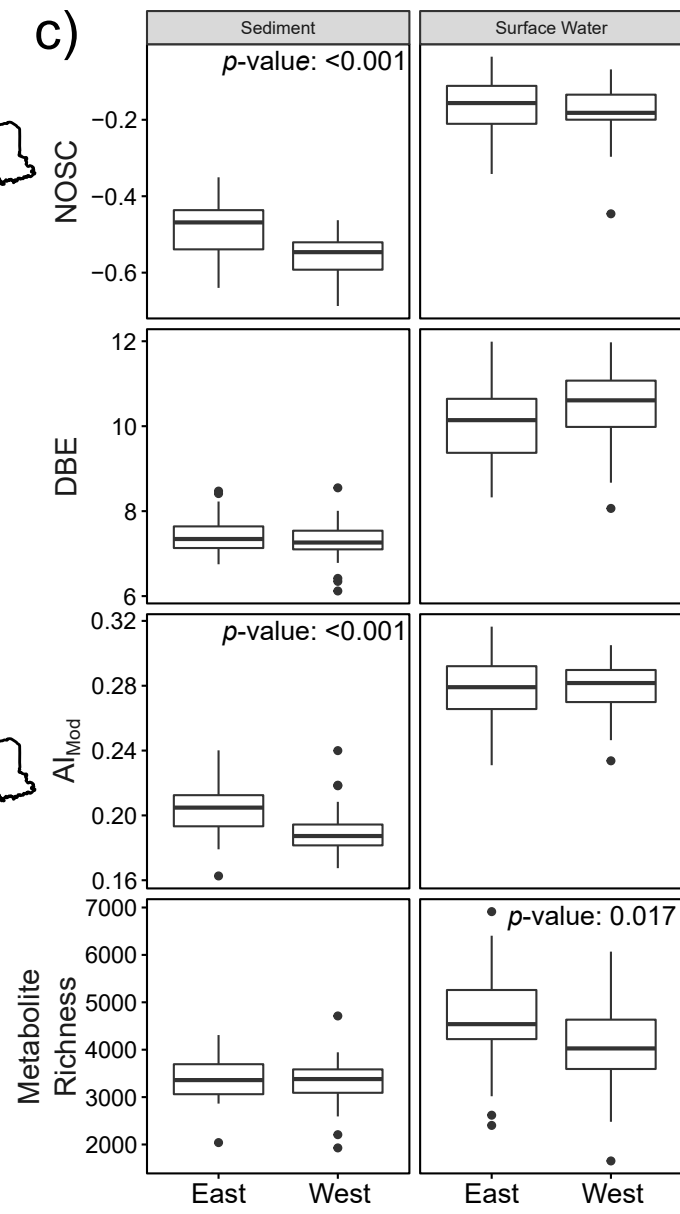
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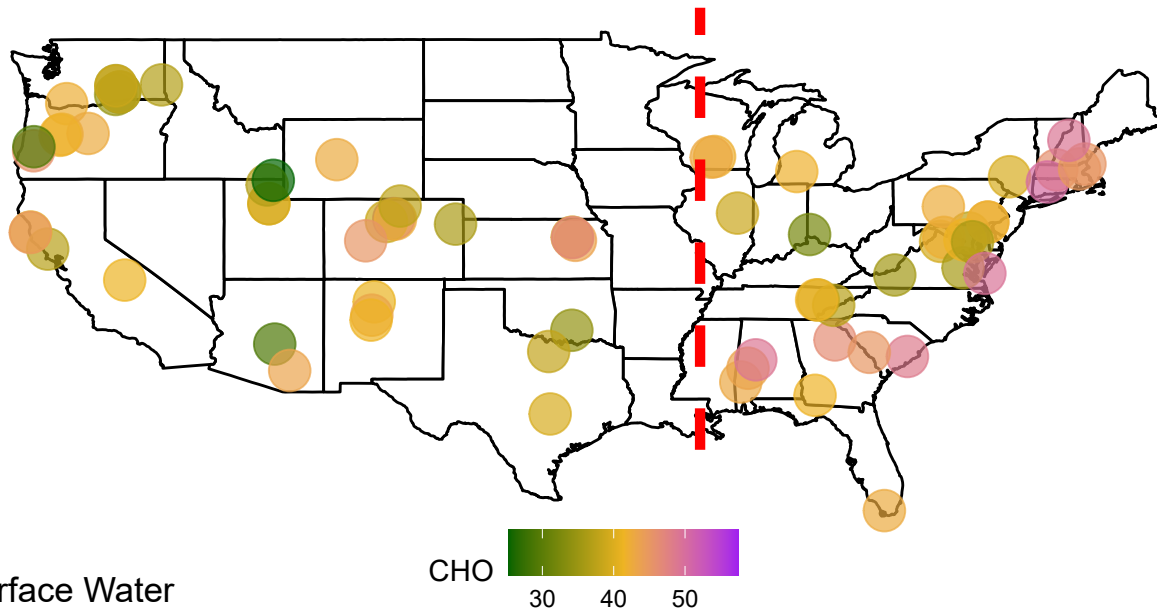
b) Surface Water



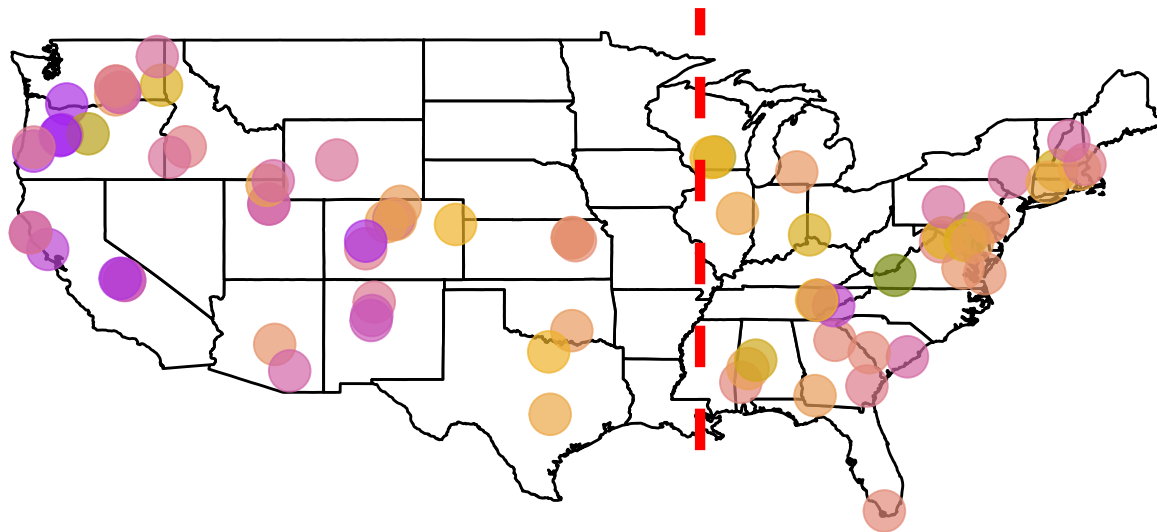
c)



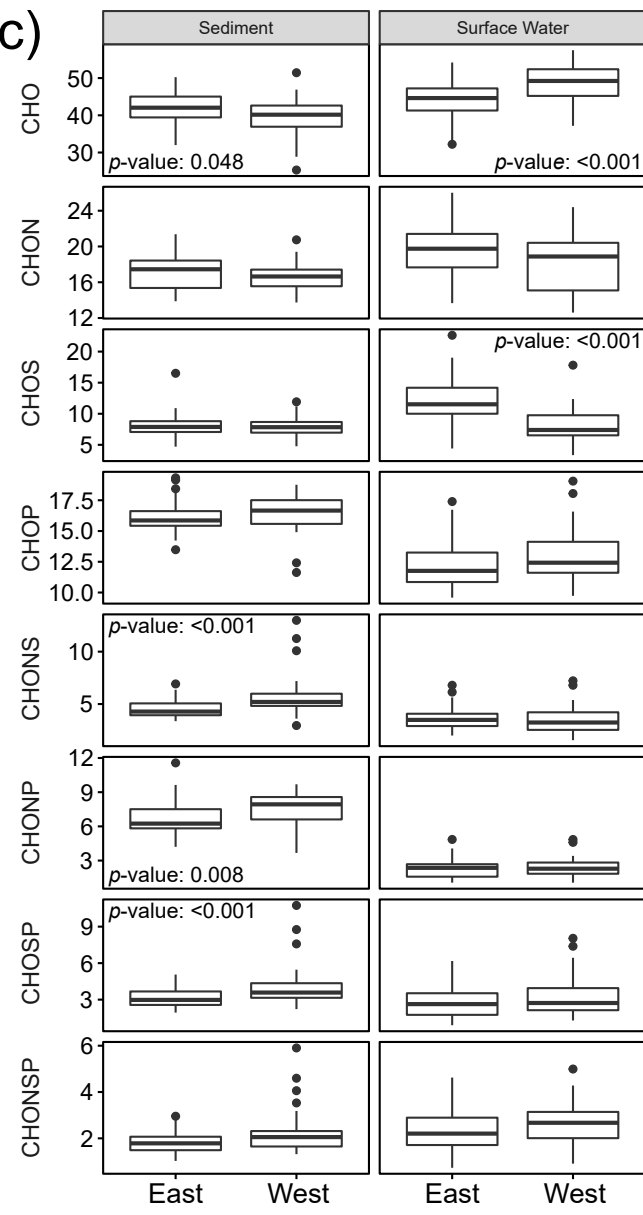
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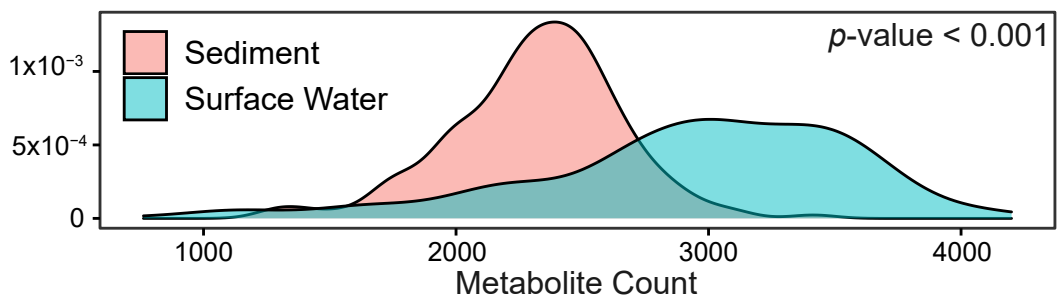
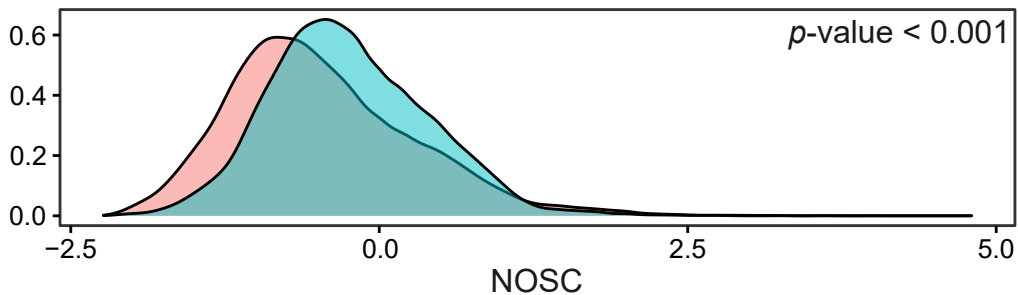
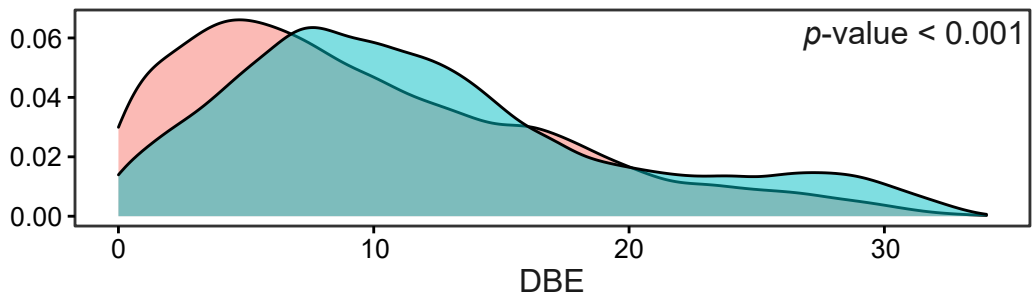
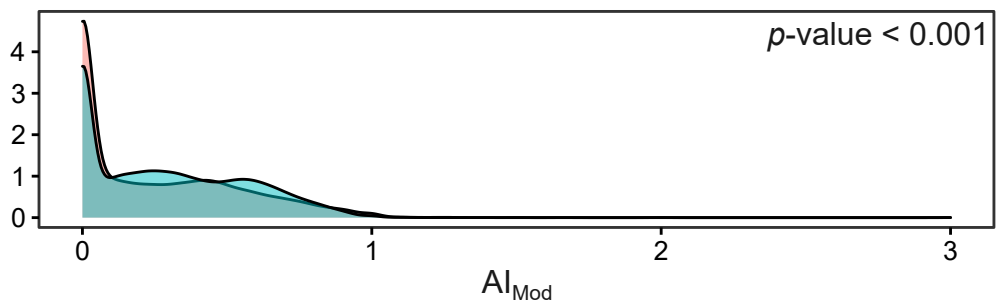


b) Surface Water



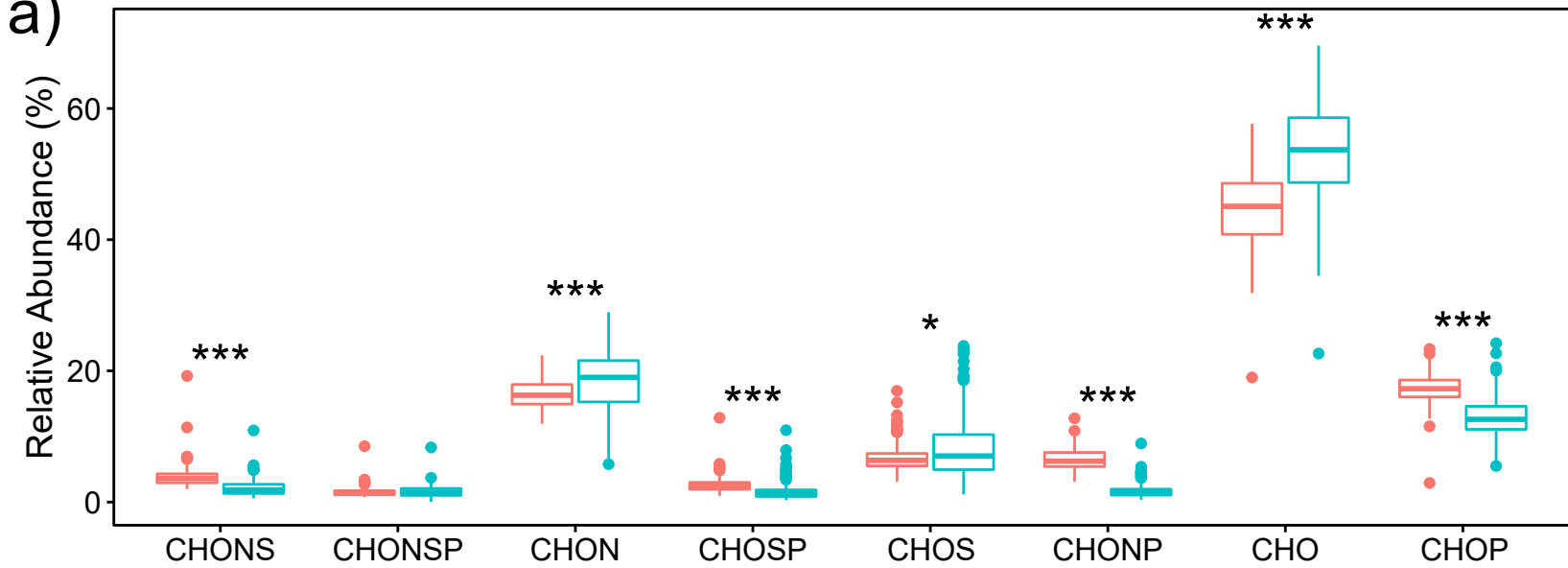
c)





Sample Type: ▭ Sediment ▭ Surface Water

a)



b)

