

Advancing probabilistic prediction of high-impact weather using ensemble reforecasts and machine learning

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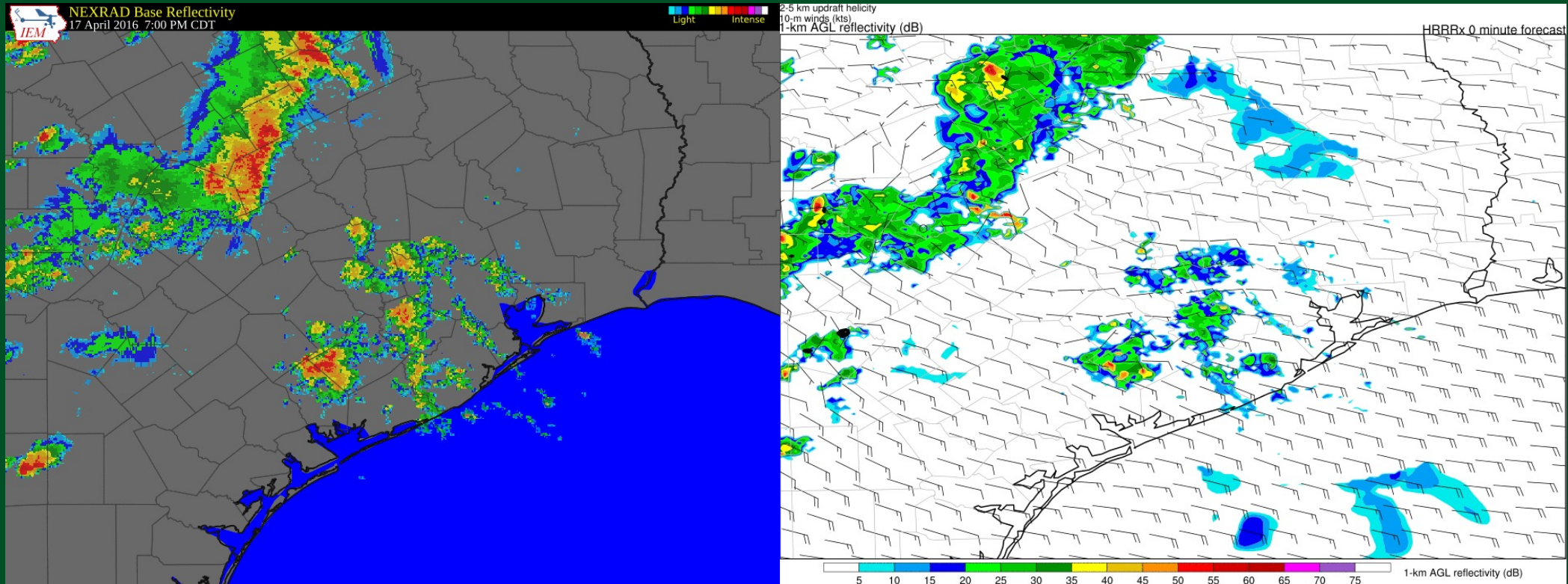


ATMOSPHERIC SCIENCE
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

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UFS Webinar Series
June 2021

Deterministic forecasts of convective storms are nearly impossible...this is one of the best forecasts of an extreme event I've seen, yet it still has notable errors in details



Radar mosaic

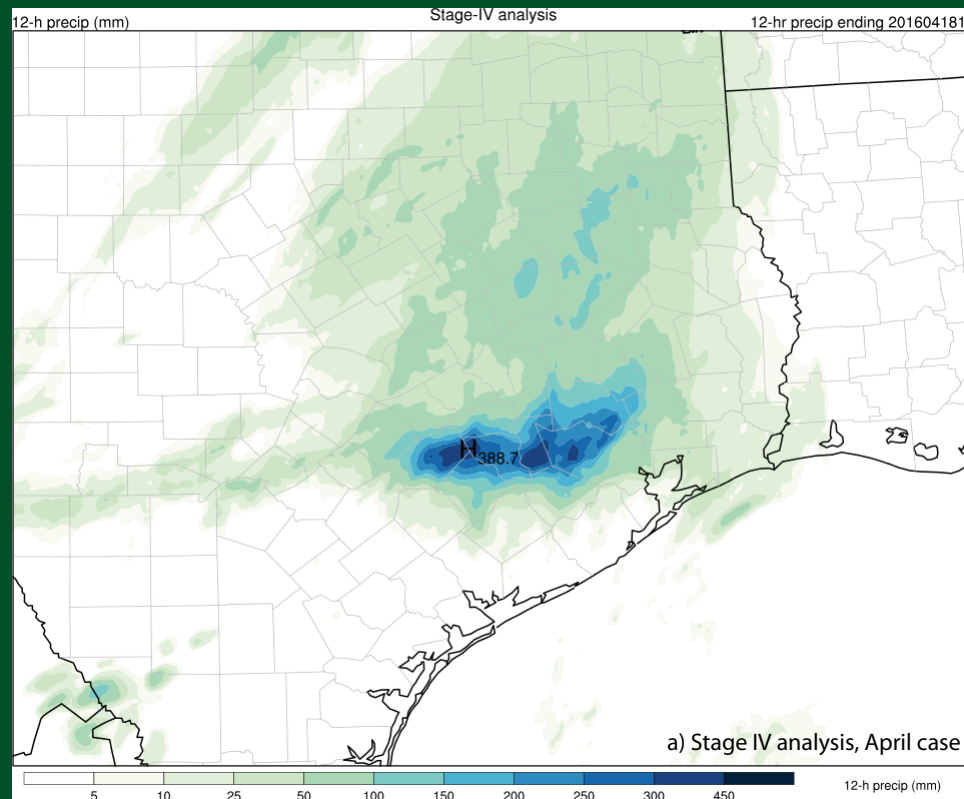
00Z HRRRx model forecast
(1-km AGL reflectivity and updraft helicity)

(see also Nielsen and Schumacher
2020, *Monthly Weather Review*)

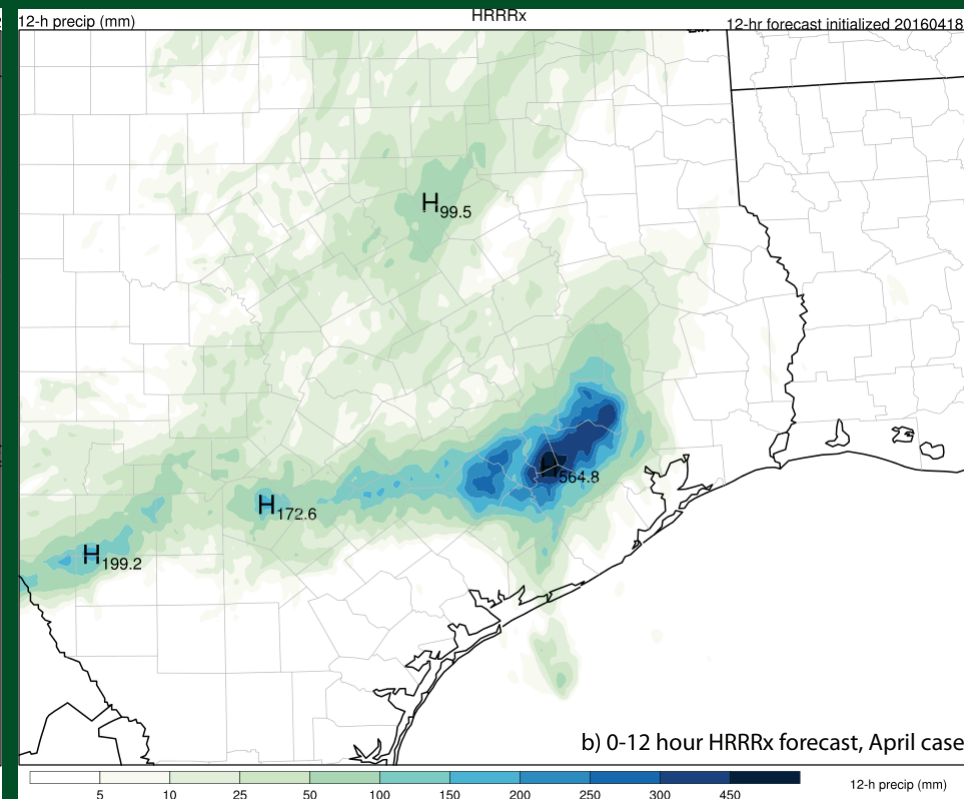
Houston, Texas, 18 April 2016

Schumacher: Extreme rainfall

But deterministic forecasts of convective storms are nearly impossible...this is one of the best forecasts of an extreme event I've seen, yet it still has notable errors in details



Stage-IV precipitation analysis
12-hour precip



00Z HRRRx model forecast
12-hour precip

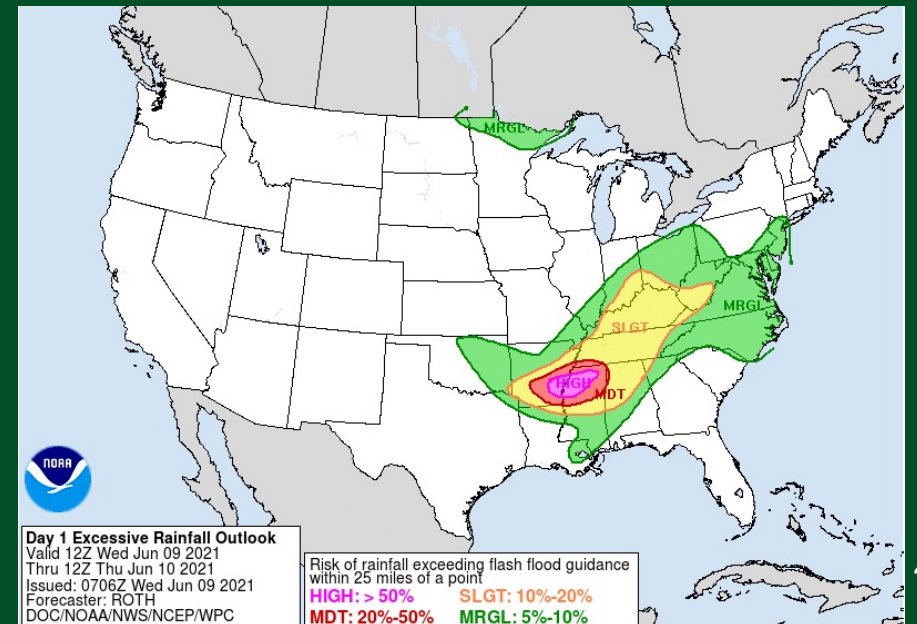
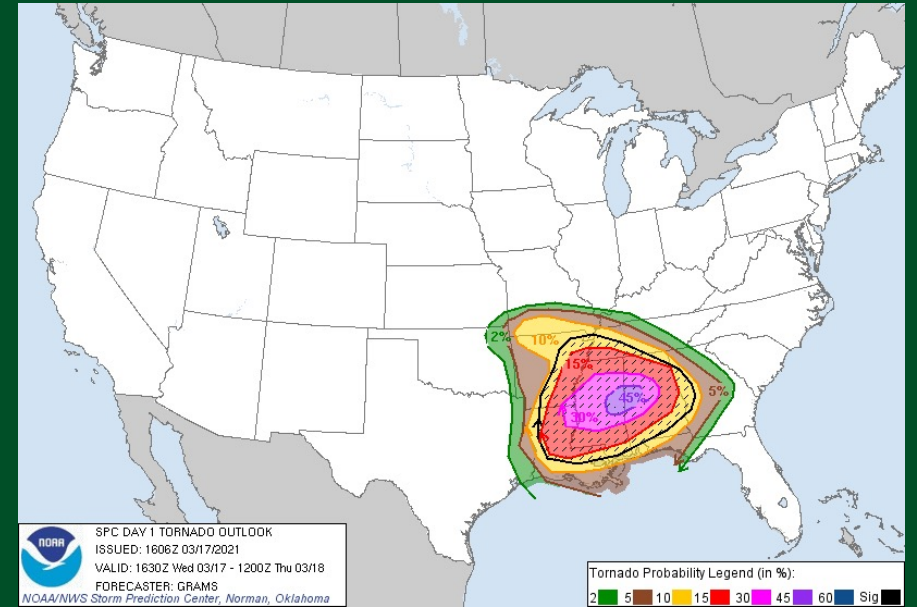
(see also Nielsen and Schumacher 2020, *Monthly Weather Review*)

Houston, Texas, 18 April 2016

Schumacher: Extreme rainfall

We need to think and forecast probabilistically for convective storms and precipitation!

- Unfortunately, this can be difficult for a number of reasons:
 - Probabilistic information can be challenging to understand, even for experts!
 - Ensembles are expensive to run (at least good ones are)
 - Ensembles can also be hard to interpret
 - And our ensembles aren't yet good enough to rely on – at least not at convection-allowing scales (But a lot of progress is being made!)
- People and forecasters are accustomed to “probability of precipitation” and probabilistic outlooks, even if they don't know their formal definitions



Why Machine Learning (ML)?

Do it better

- e.g. Models do not specifically forecast severe hazards, use ML to make explicit forecasts

Do it faster

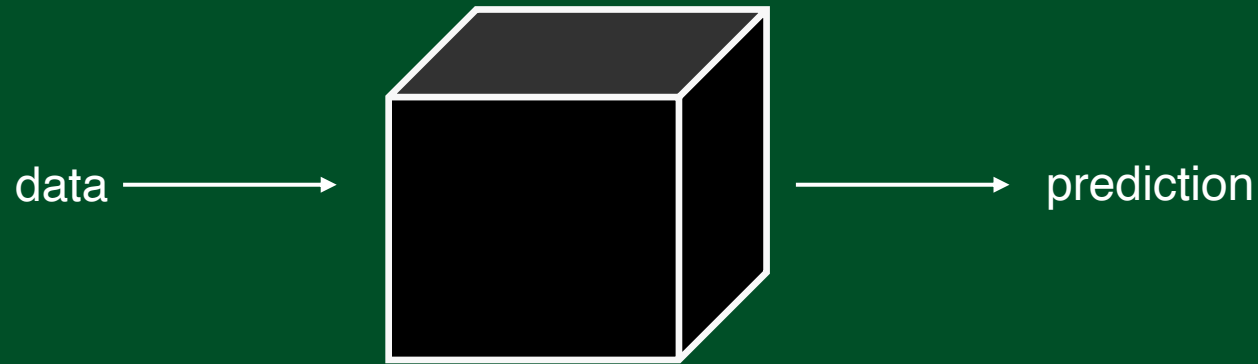
- e.g. Radiation code in models is very slow (but we know the right answer) - use ML methods to speed things up

Do something new

- e.g. Go looking for non-linear relationships you didn't know were there

The ML “Black Box”

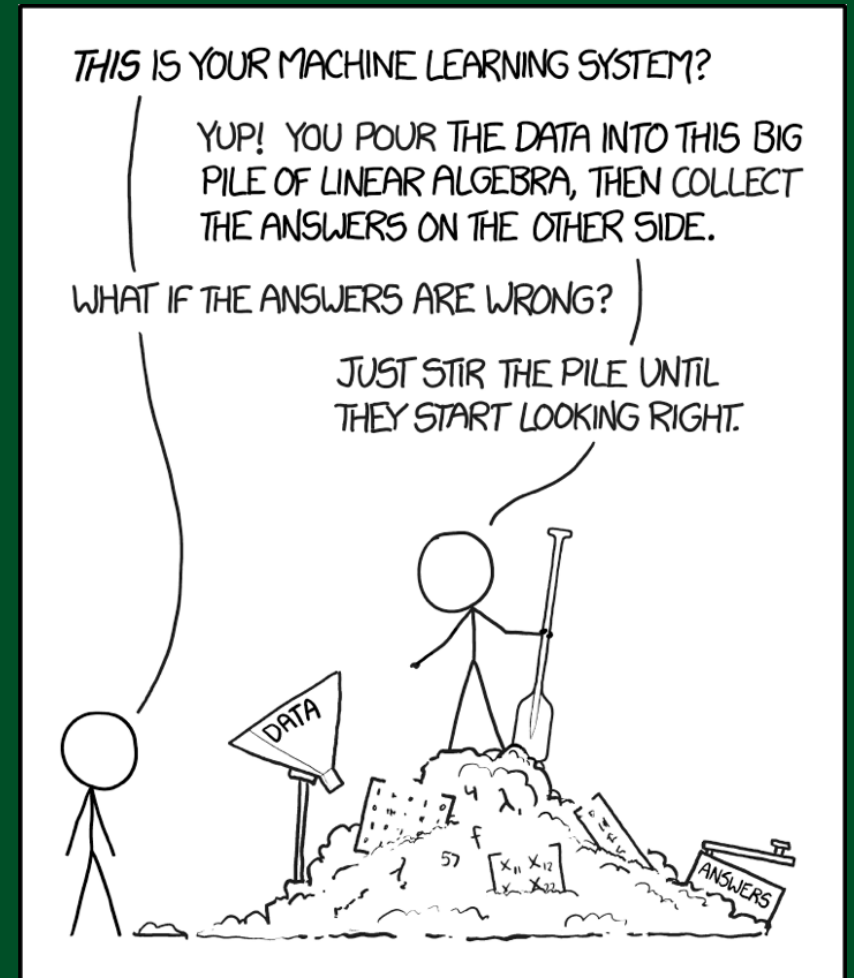
ML is not a futuristic, black-box idea anymore, specifically within geophysical applications...



The box is configurable and *interpretable*

MOS is a “primitive” example: Predict Y from records of $X(s)$

Recommended reading: McGovern et al. (2019), “Making the Black Box More Transparent: Understanding the Physical Implications of Machine Learning”, BAMS



Application to convection hazards

- Our focus to this point has been on excessive rainfall and severe weather (tornado, large hail, damaging winds)
- NWP models don't explicitly predict any of these
 - For excessive rainfall, we have QPF, but not much about whether it's "excessive" or likely to cause flash flooding
 - For severe hazards, need to use proxies like updraft helicity (e.g., Sobash et al. 2016)
- But we do now have the observations we need (mostly) and a long record of "reforecasts" that we can use
- Prime opportunity to ***do something better***

REFORECASTS

An Important Dataset for Improving Weather Predictions

BY THOMAS M. HAMILL, JEFFREY S. WHITAKER, AND STEVEN L. MULLEN

- To successfully post-process NWP forecasts, it helps to have a long record of previous forecasts from the NWP model or ensemble
- Enter “reforecasts”: retrospective forecasts with a consistent model version over a long time period (years or decades)
- This allows for identification of systemic errors and biases in the NWP output, which can be accounted for in post-processed forecasts

From Hamill et al. (2006)

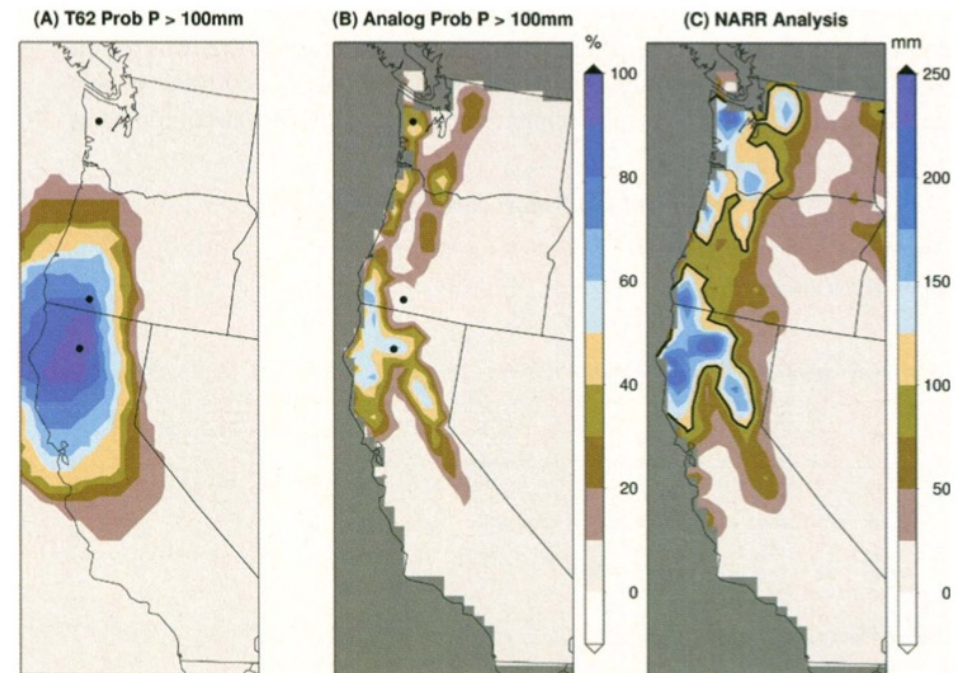


FIG. 3. (a) Raw ensemble-based probability of greater than 100 mm of precipitation accumulated during days 4–6 for a forecast initialized at 0000 UTC 26 Dec 1996 (from 0000 UTC 29 Dec 1996 to 0000 UTC 1 Jan 1997). Dots indicate locations used in Fig. 4. (b) As in (a), but where probabilities have been estimated from relative frequency of historical NARR analogs. (c) Observed precipitation from NARR (mm). The 100-mm threshold is highlighted.

We want to predict excessive rainfall...but what is excessive rainfall?

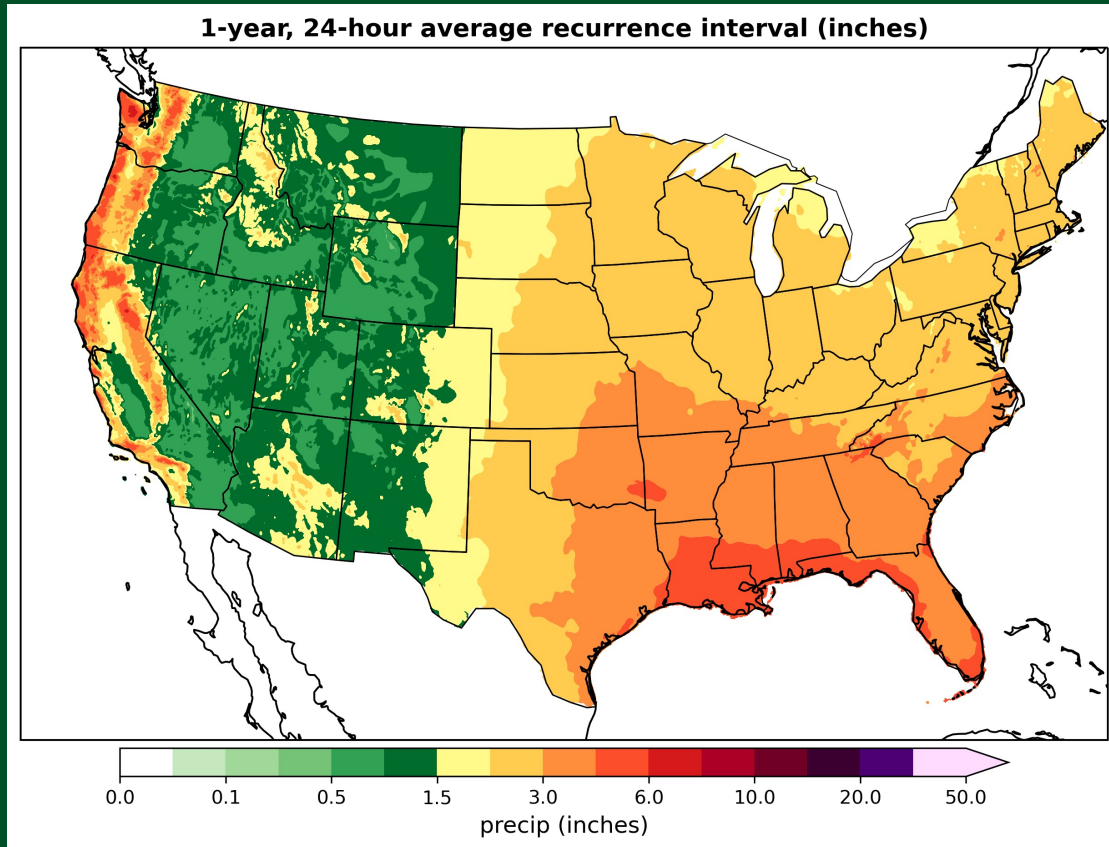
- A primary motivation for this approach is that forecasters need probabilistic information about the rarity of upcoming rainfall. But...
- We have accepted (if flawed) definitions of tornado, severe hail, severe winds – but nothing analogous for excessive rainfall
- Exceeding flash flood guidance?
- Produces a flash flood report?
- More than a certain threshold? (and if so, which one(s)?)
- What quantitative precipitation estimate to use?

What are we trying to predict?

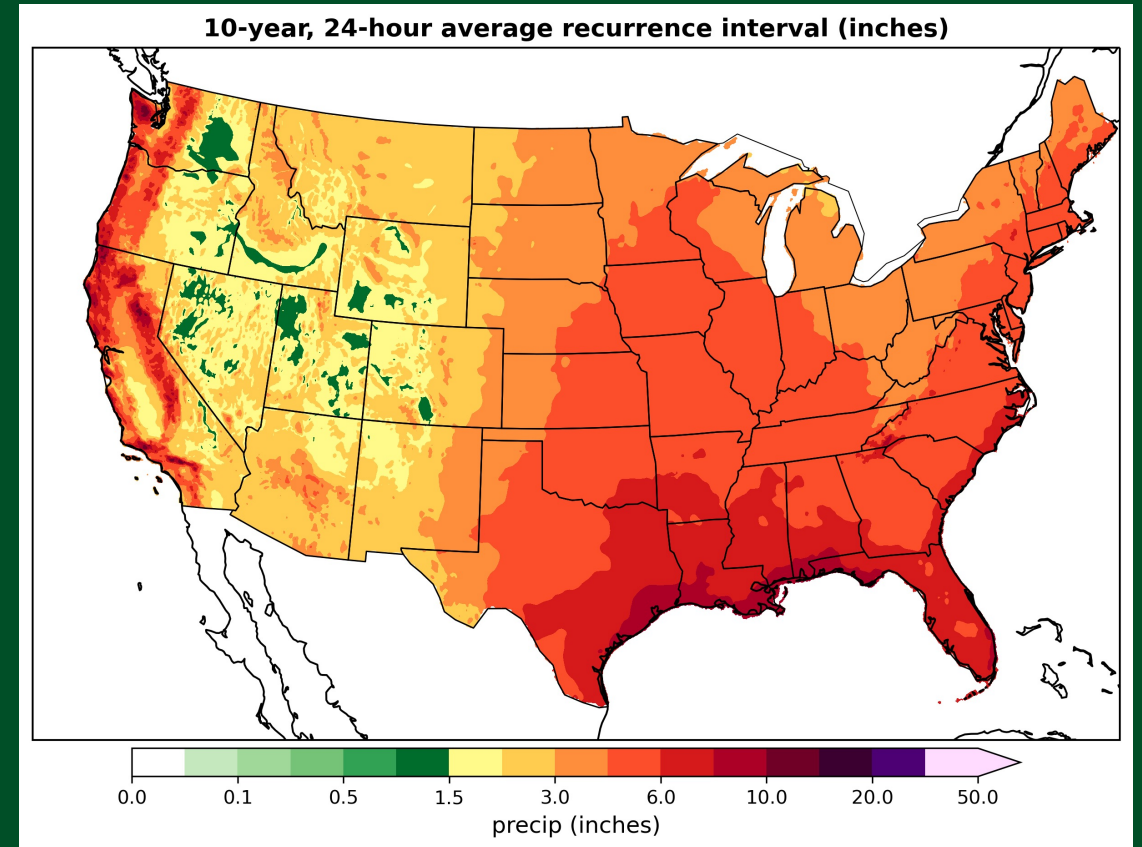
- We have chosen to use a “fixed frequency” framework – or in other words, we use climatological average recurrence intervals to define a heavy or extreme rain event
 - Better corresponds to actual impacts in a given region than a fixed threshold
 - Doesn't bias the verification statistics toward climatologically wet regions

Average recurrence intervals over the US

1-yea, 24-hour ARI



10-year, 24-hour ARI (10% probability of exceedance in any given year)



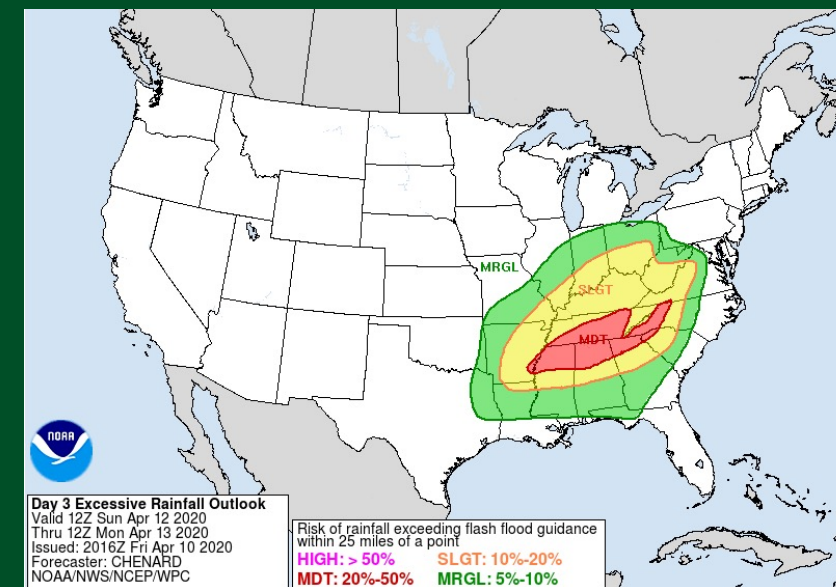
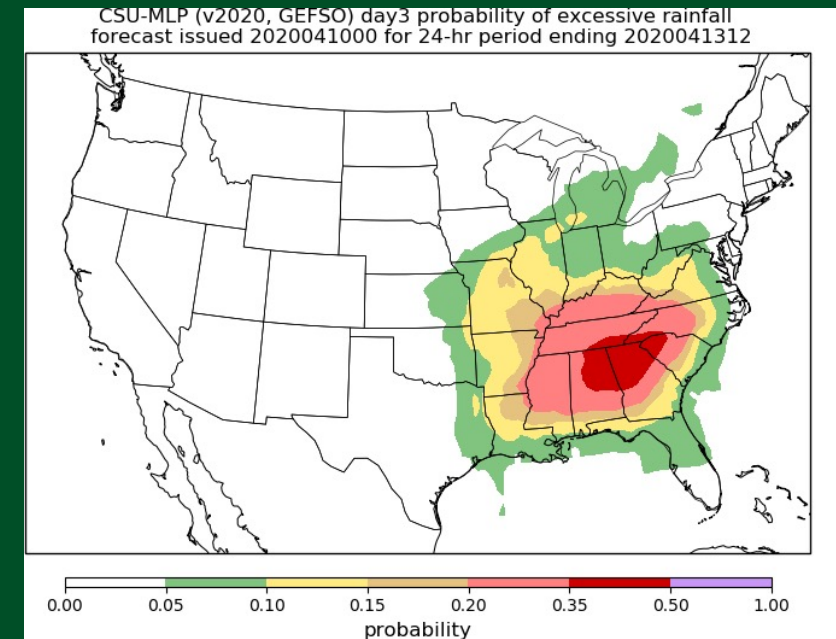
(From NOAA Atlas 14 where available, otherwise Atlas 2)

Our current approach

- NOAA Weather Prediction Center forecasters routinely issue Excessive Rainfall Outlooks (EROs), indicating regions with the potential for flooding rains across the continental US on days 1-3
- Since 2017, we have developed and tested probabilistic forecasts that apply machine-learning techniques to a reforecast ensemble to help give guidance to WPC forecasters -- a “first guess” when producing these outlooks
- Several versions of the forecast system are now running operationally at WPC

Real-time forecast graphics:

http://schumacher.atmos.colostate.edu/hilla/csu_mlp/



Background: Predictor data

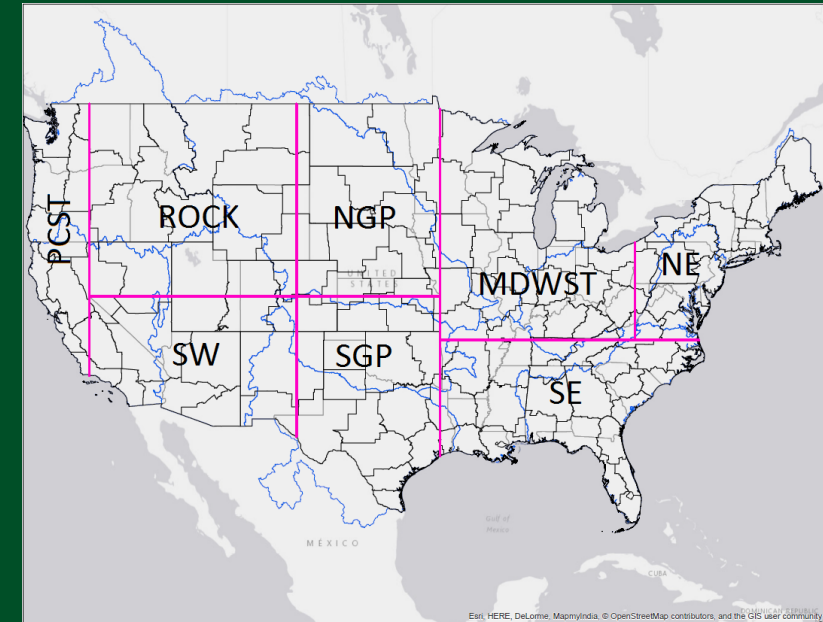
- NOAA's Second-Generation Global Medium-Range Ensemble Reforecast Dataset (GEFS/R; Hamill et al. 2013)
 - 00Z initialization; forecasts out to 384h
 - 11 ensemble members
 - Operational version of GEFS on 2/14/2012
 - T254L42 resolution (~40 km)
 - Data from Dec. 1984-Present
 - Same model configuration throughout
- Use the NCEP Climatology-Calibrated Precipitation Analysis (CCPA) to identify historical exceedances of the various average recurrence intervals for 24-hour rainfall accumulation

The approach

- We break the CONUS into 8 distinct regions which are reasonably hydrometeorologically homogenous
- Use many atmospheric fields as candidate predictors: model QPF; CAPE; CIN; PWAT; MSLP; 2-m T and mixing ratio; 10-m U and V
- We use January 2003 – August 2013 as the training period (almost 11 yrs)

Two papers in MWR with all the details!

- Herman, G.R. and R.S. Schumacher, 2018: Money Doesn't Grow on Trees, but Forecasts Do: Forecasting Extreme Precipitation with Random Forests. *Mon. Wea. Rev.*, **146**, 1571–1600, <https://doi.org/10.1175/MWR-D-17-0250.1>
- Herman, G.R. and R.S. Schumacher, 2018: “Dendrology” in Numerical Weather Prediction: What Random Forests and Logistic Regression Tell Us about Forecasting Extreme Precipitation. *Mon. Wea. Rev.*, **146**, 1785–1812, <https://doi.org/10.1175/MWR-D-17-0307.1>



Consider:

All days per year

Forecast values at all 9 3-hour times during meteorological day (1200-1200 UTC)

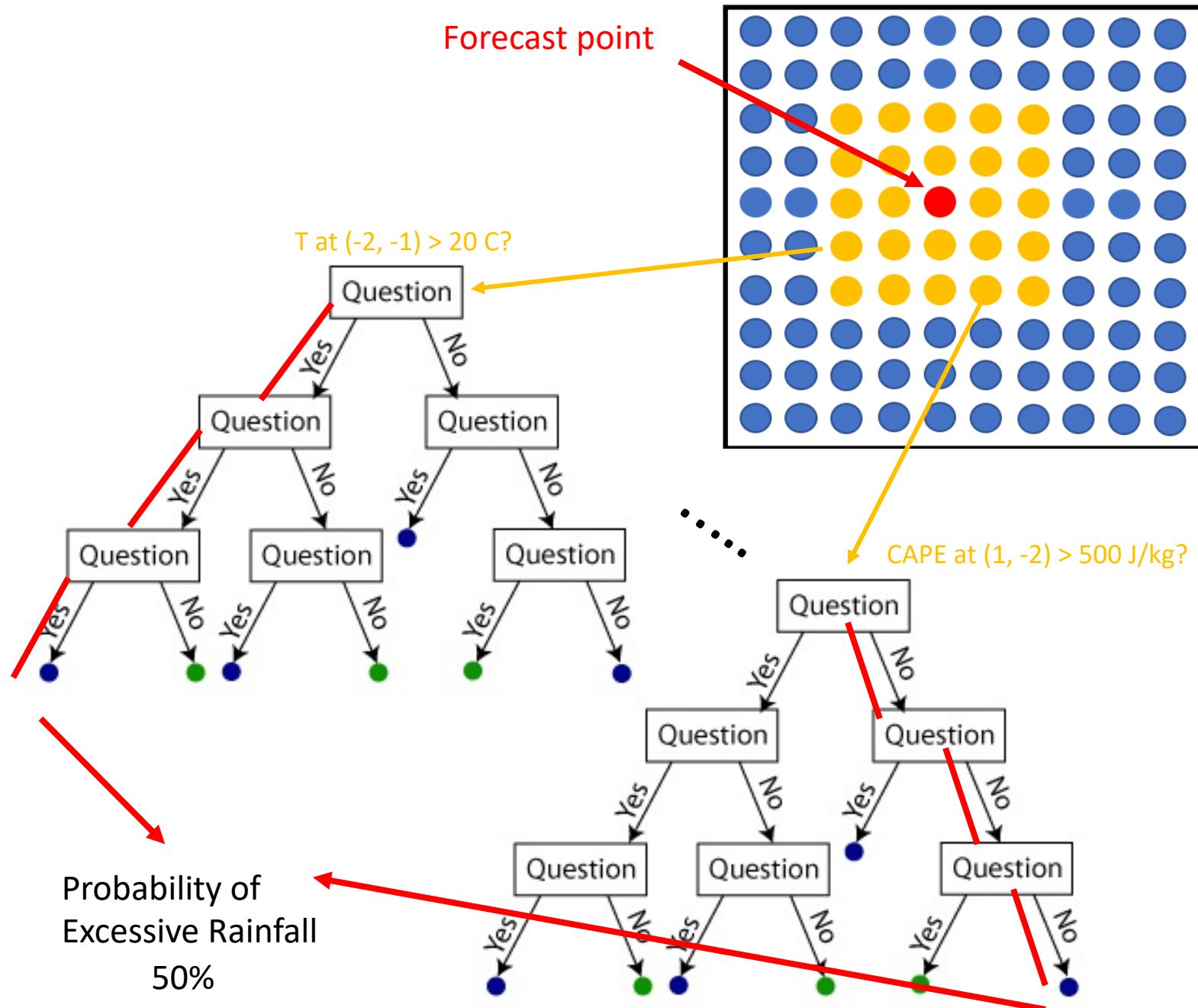
Forecast information up to 4 grid points (~2°) displaced relative to forecast location

Threshold criteria for return period exceedances and forecast point information

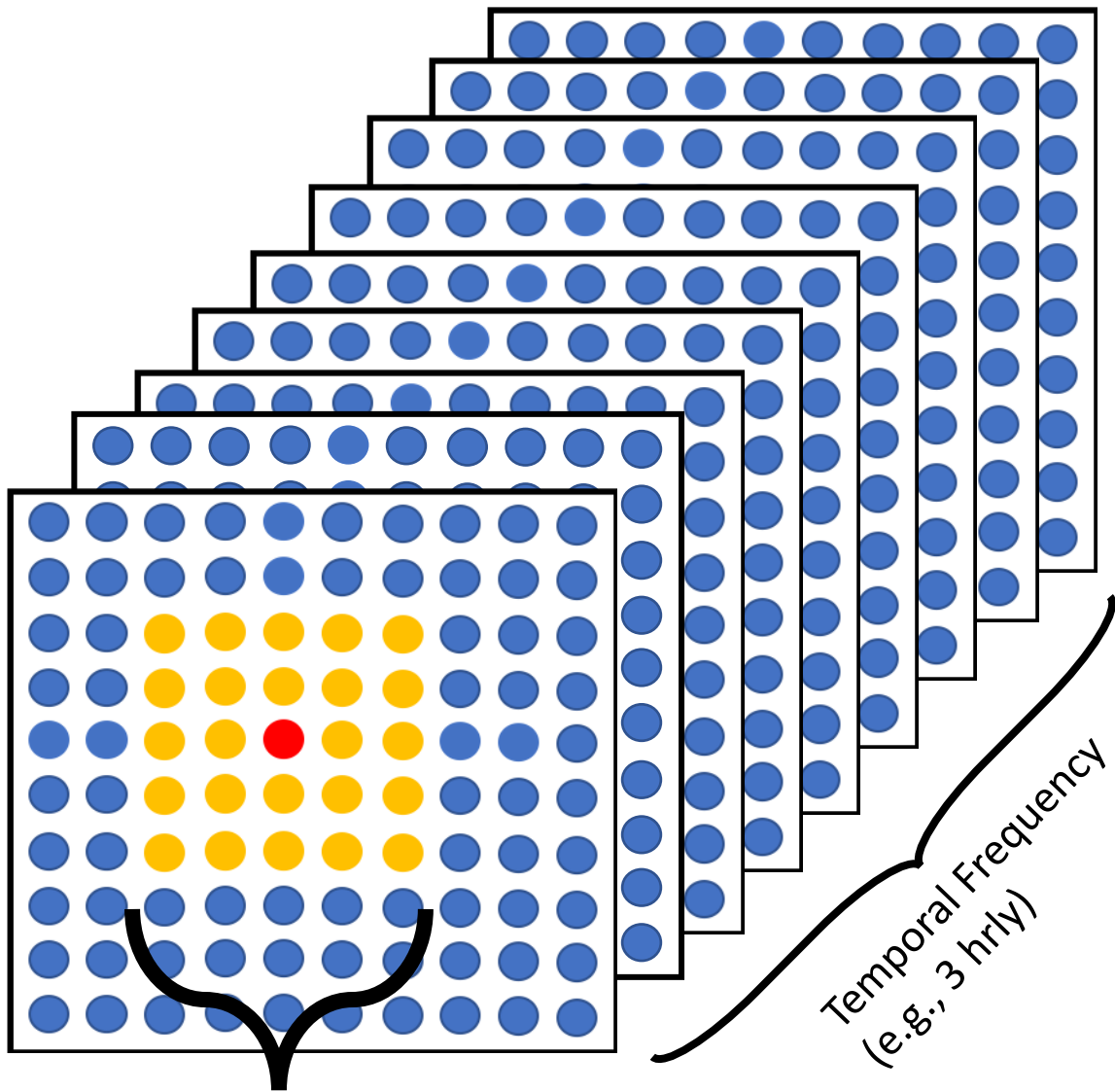
Total: ~16.0M forecasts, 6575 predictors

Random Forests

- A set of decision trees that contain a series of yes/no questions (branches) based on input predictors that allow traversal of the tree
- Corresponding events of excessive rainfall are assigned to the “leaf” nodes
- Relative frequency of events in the forest is the forecast probability

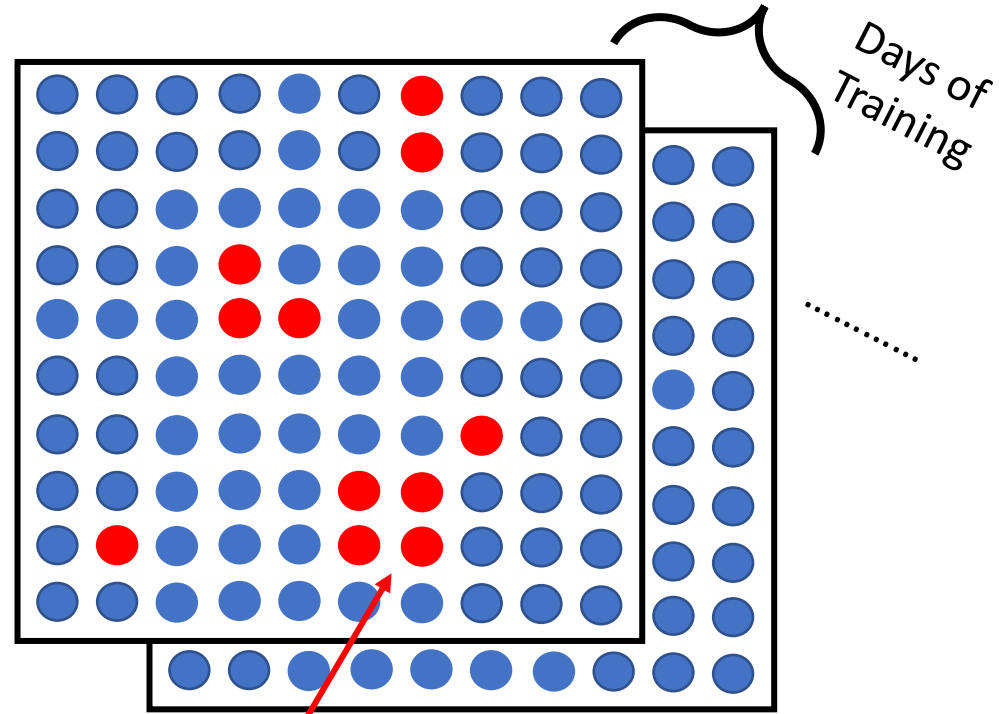


Probability of Excessive Rainfall
50%



Predictor
APCP
CAPE
CIN
MSLP
PWAT
Q2M
T2M
UPHL
U10
U6000
V10
V6000
W3000
Z500

Variable Type



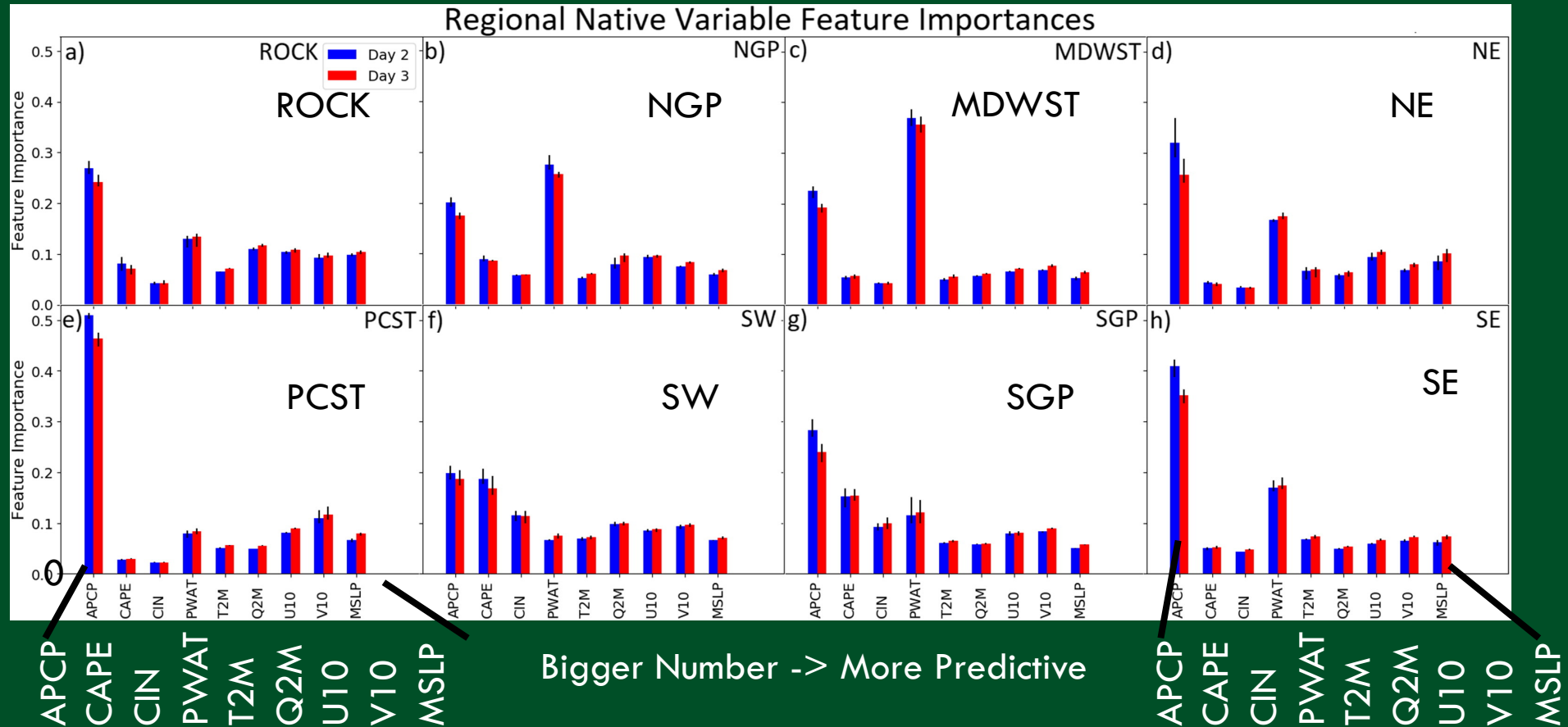
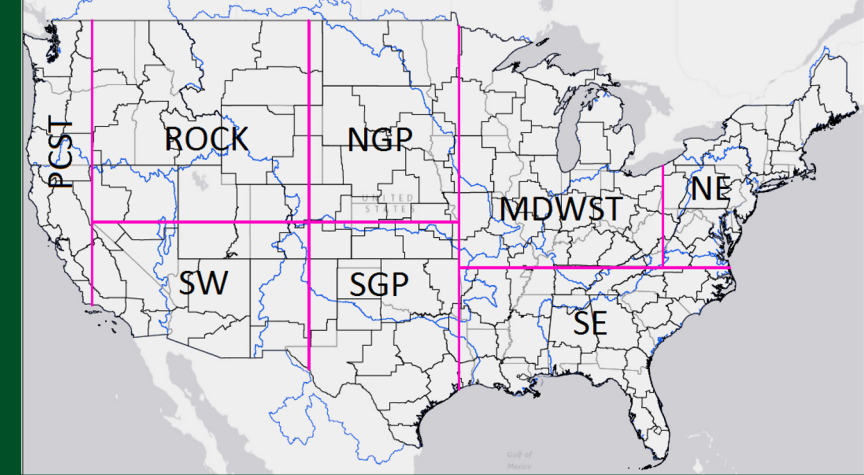
FFR or ARI
exceedance

Real-time model output

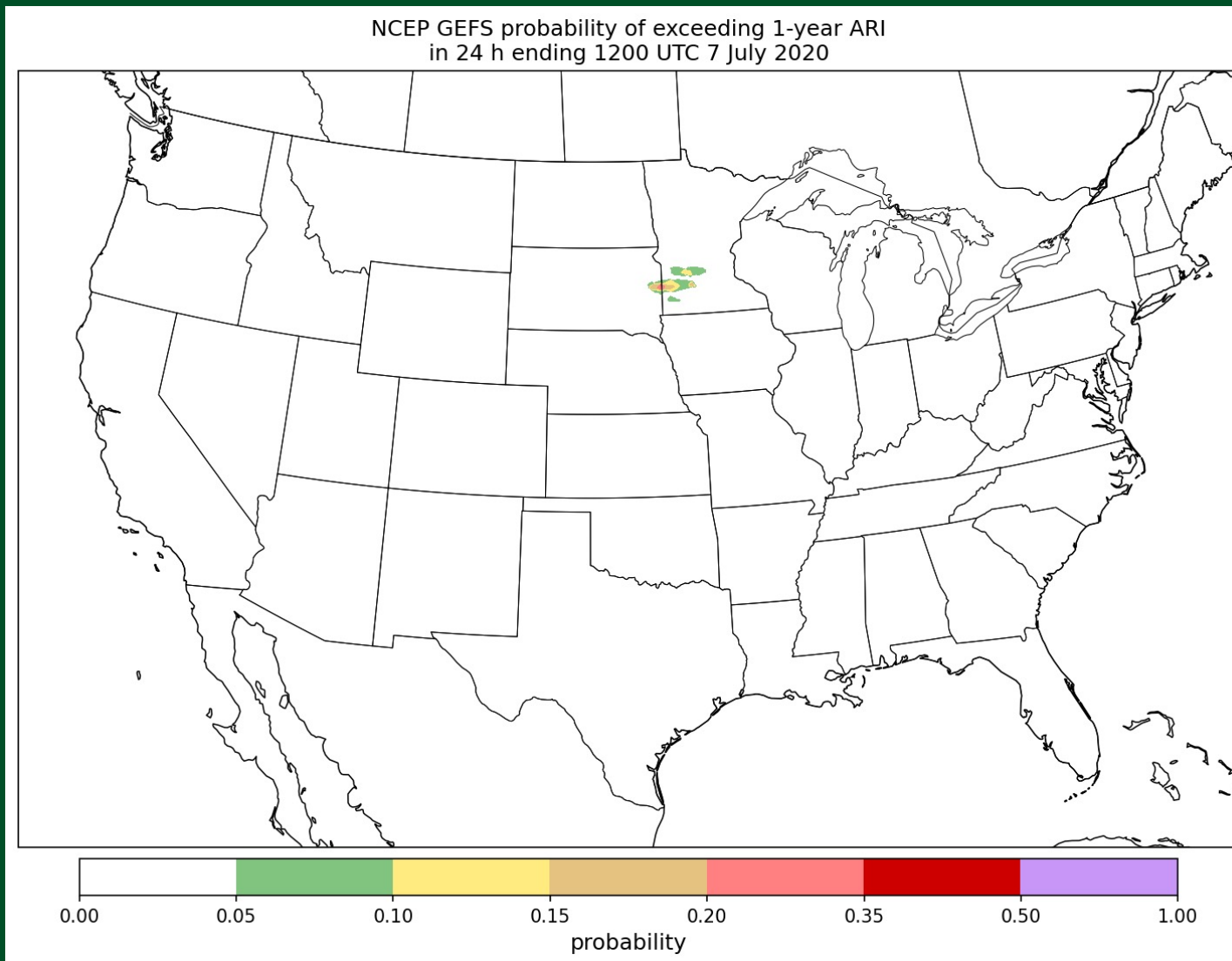
MODEL

Variable Importances

- Model QPF (APCP) most predictive region of ARI exceedances in most CONUS regions
- In regions where extreme precipitation driven by large-scale processes, identified as even more predictive
- In highly convectively active regions (e.g. NGP, MDWST), model PWAT identified more predictive than APCP
- CAPE very predictive in SW region; not as much elsewhere



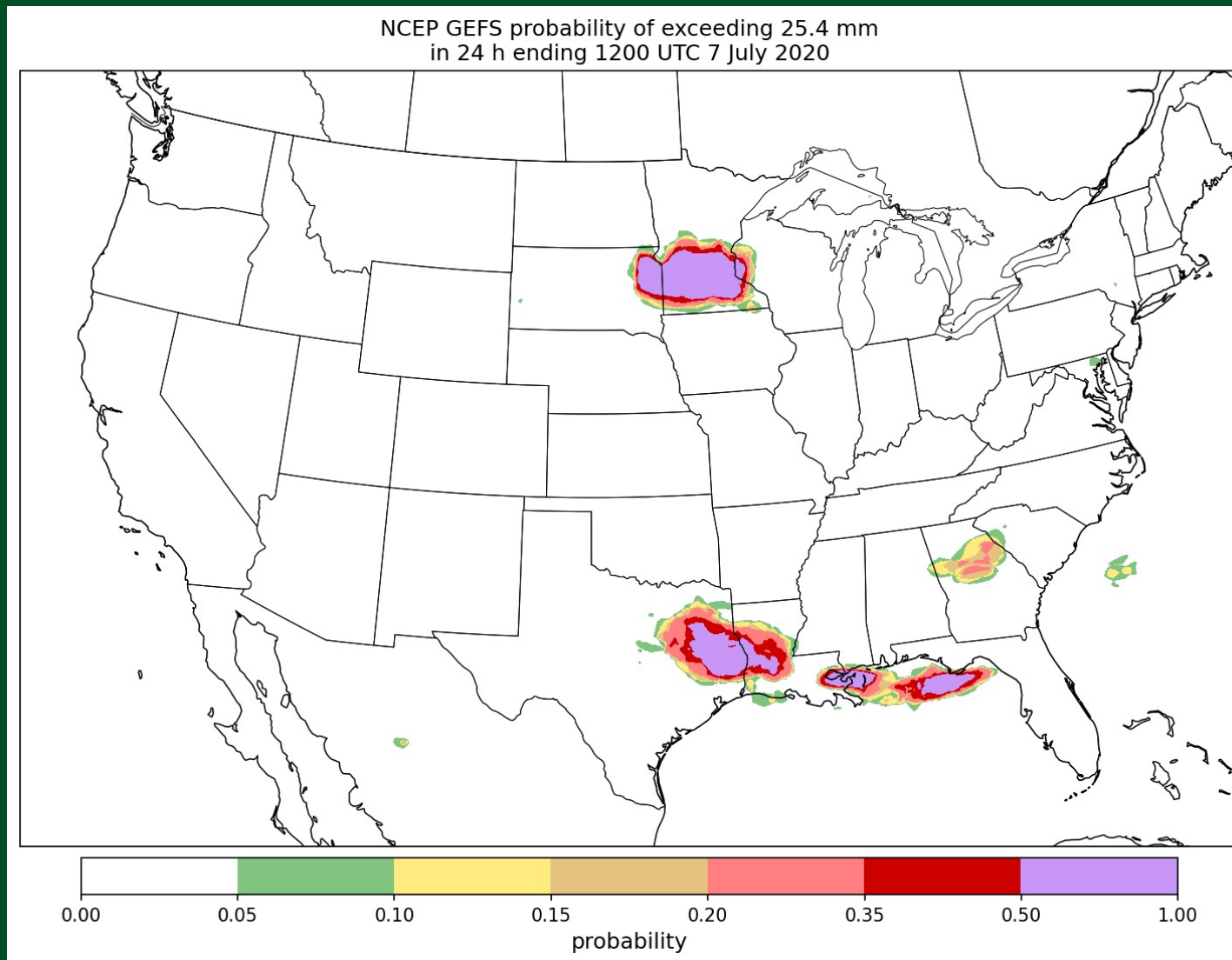
Example forecast from July 2020



Raw GEFS probability of
exceeding 1-year ARI

0000 UTC 6 July 2020,
12—36-h forecast valid
1200 UTC 8 July 2020

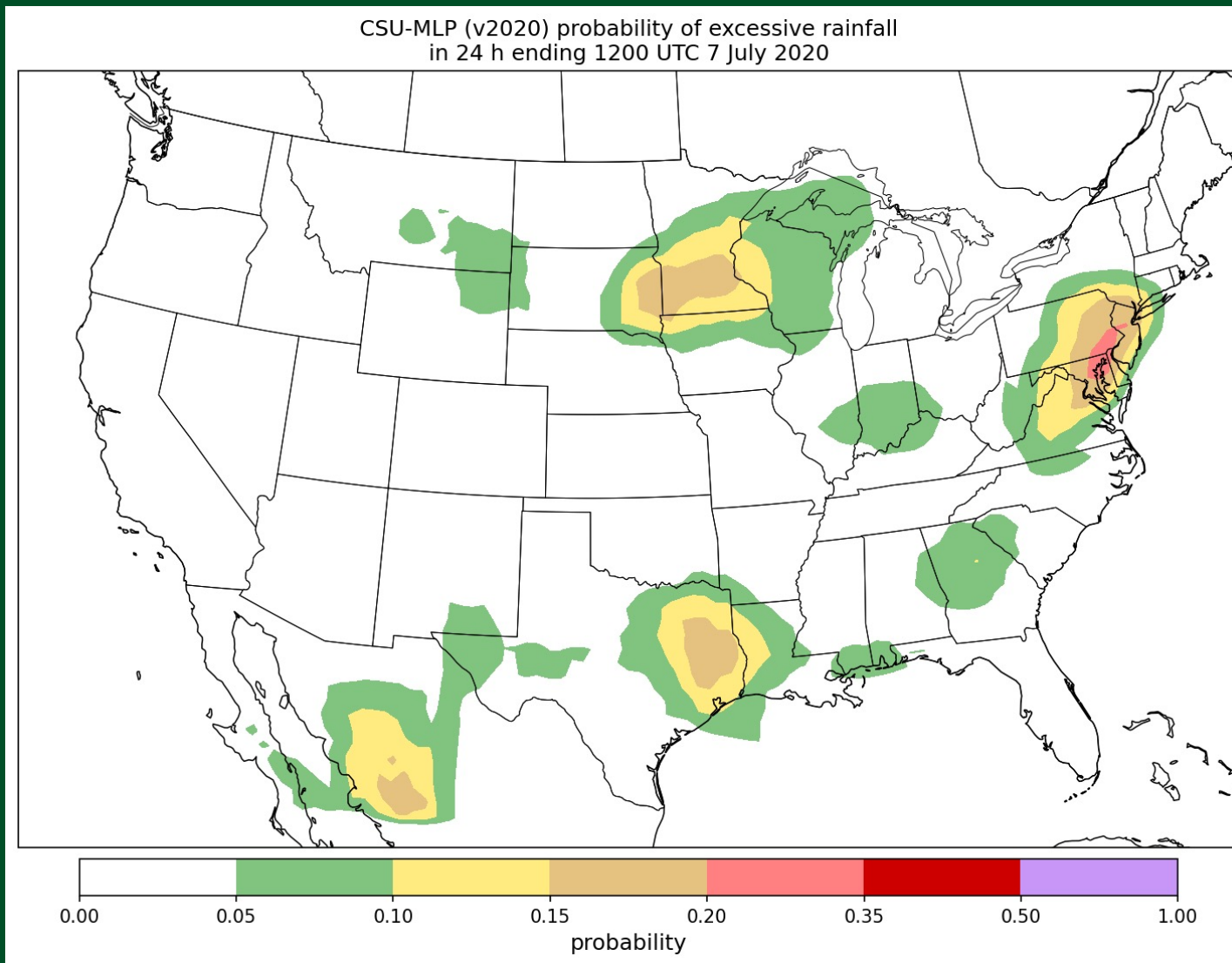
Example forecast from July 2020



Raw GEFS probability of
1" in 24 h

0000 UTC 6 July 2020,
12–36-h forecast valid
1200 UTC 7 July 2020

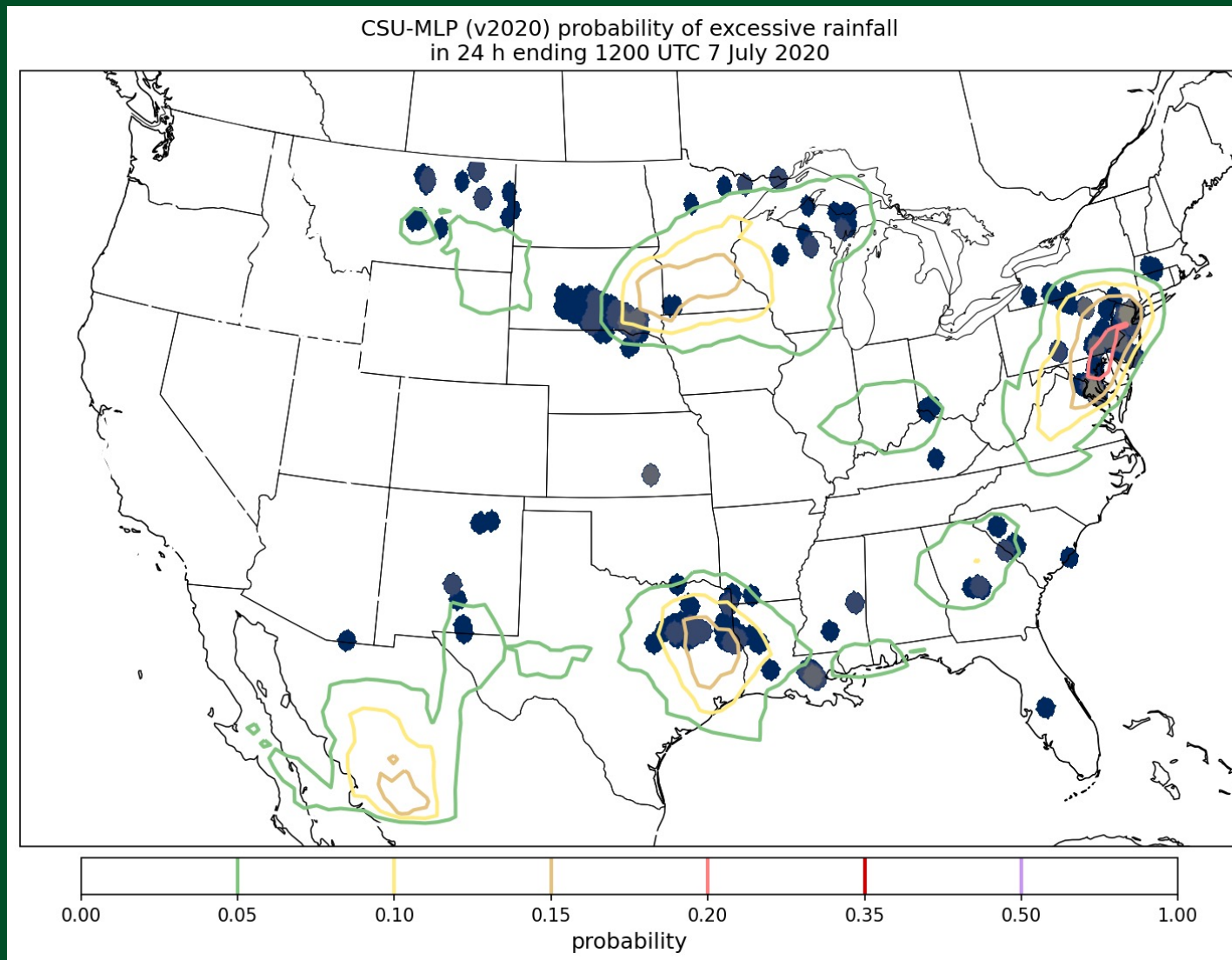
Example forecast from July 2020



CSU-MLP day-1
forecast, probability of
excessive rainfall

0000 UTC 6 July 2020,
12–36-h forecast valid
1200 UTC 7 July 2020

Example forecast from July 2020



CSU-MLP day-1
forecast, probability of
excessive rainfall

0000 UTC 6 July 2020,
12–36-h forecast valid
1200 UTC 7 July 2020

Dots: observations of
excessive rainfall from
Unified Flood
Verification System



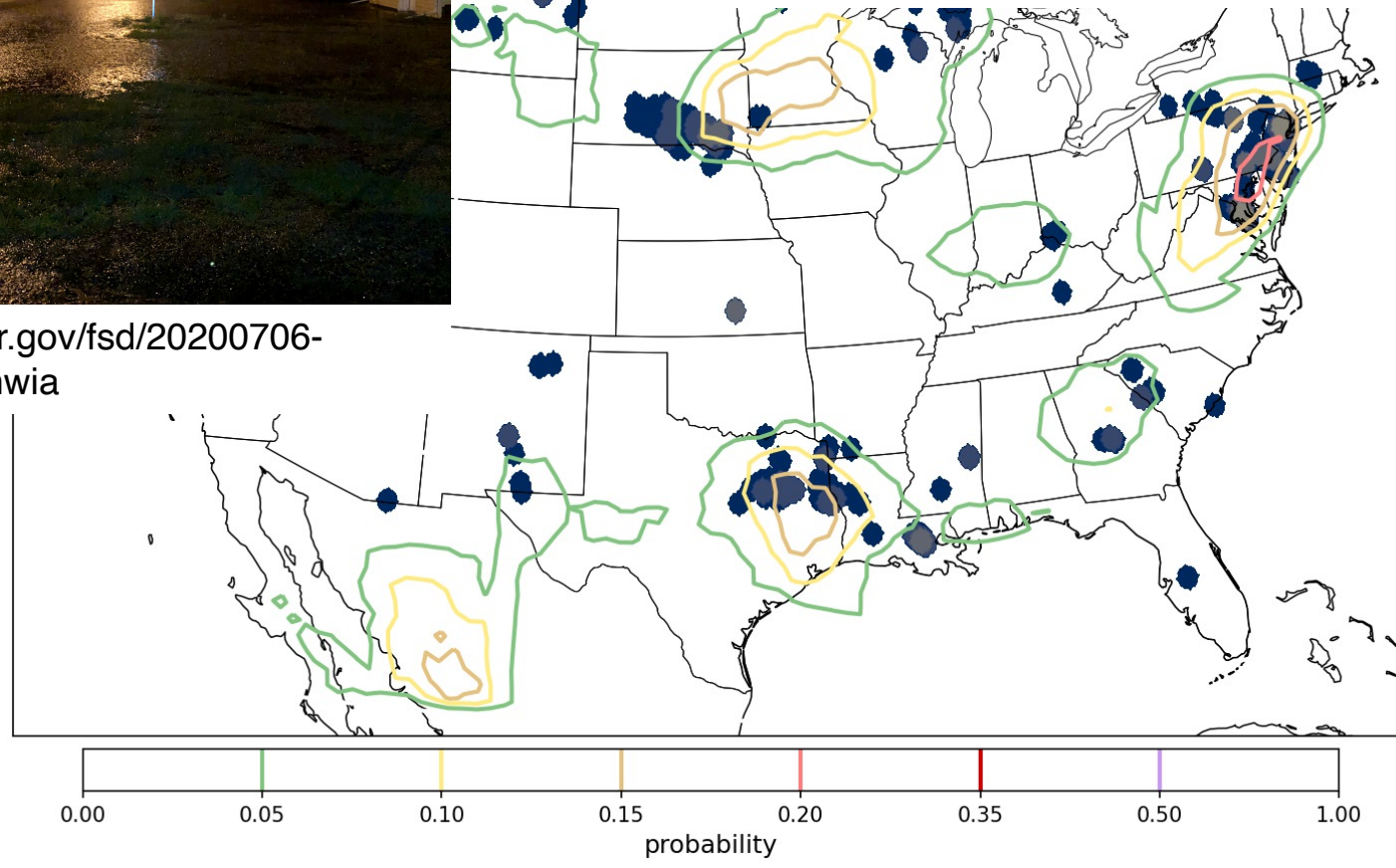
<https://www.weather.gov/fsd/20200706-hailwind-sesdnenenwia>

-MLP (v202
in 24 h e

Capital Weather Gang

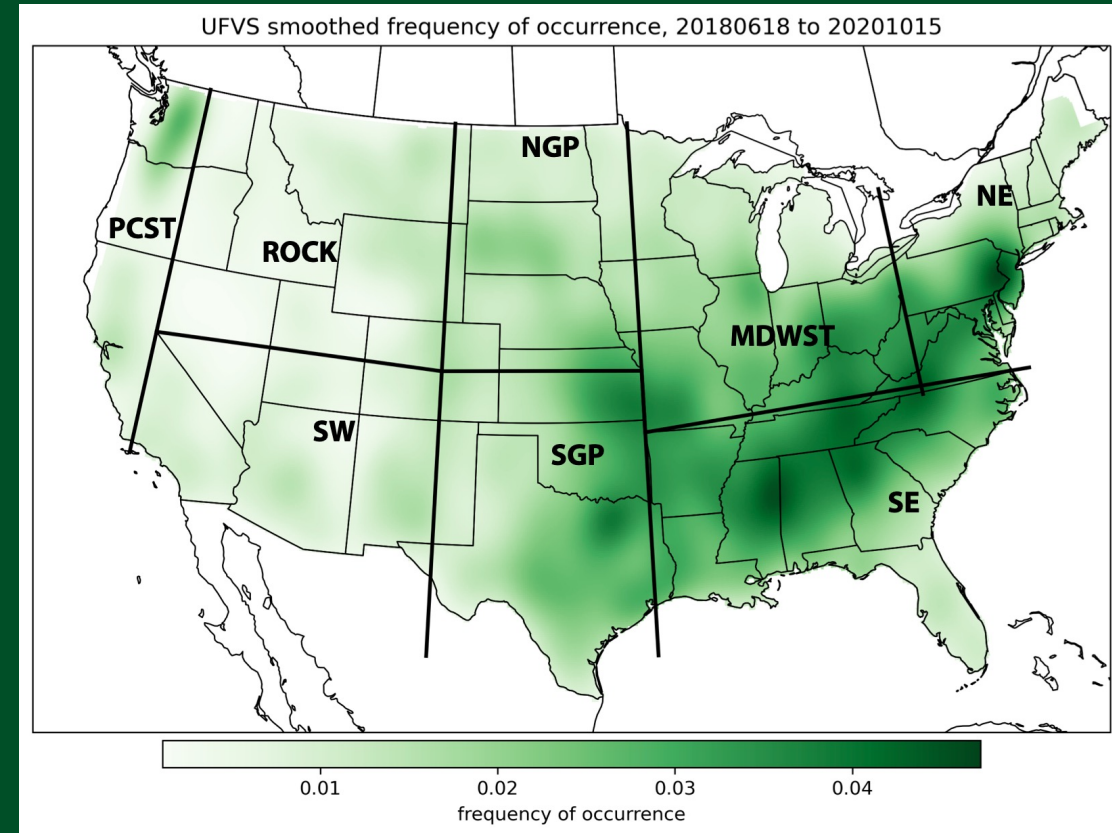
Flash flood emergency in Philadelphia as storms dump half a foot of rain in two hours

The flow rate of Frankford Creek increased 35,000 percent



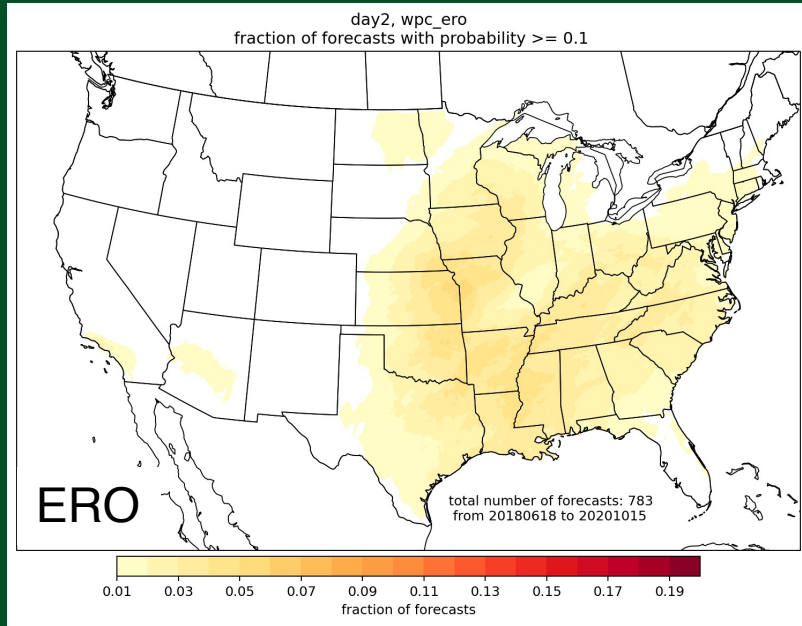
Verification of CSU-MLP forecasts

- Methods similar to those used in WPC's in-house verification
- Includes percent of area covered by observations within a contour, Brier Skill Score, area under the ROC curve
- Observation dataset is WPC's Unified database, includes flash flood guidance exceedances, 5-yr ARI exceedances, flash flood LSRs, USGS and MPING flood reports
- Verification from 18 June 2018 through 15 October 2020 for days 2-3
 - 3 March 2019 to 15 October 2020 for day 1
- Verification is done CONUS-wide as well as for each CSU-MLP region
- Comparison is to 09Z WPC operational EROs

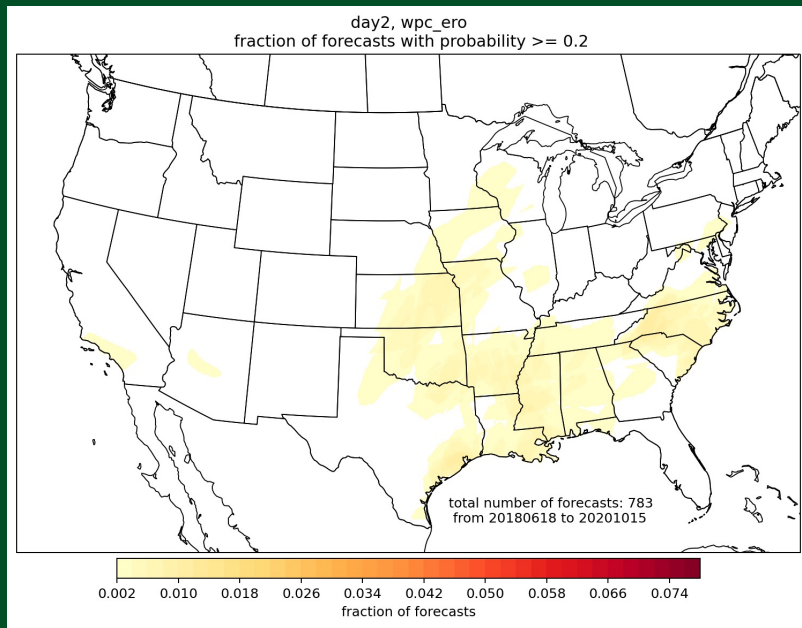
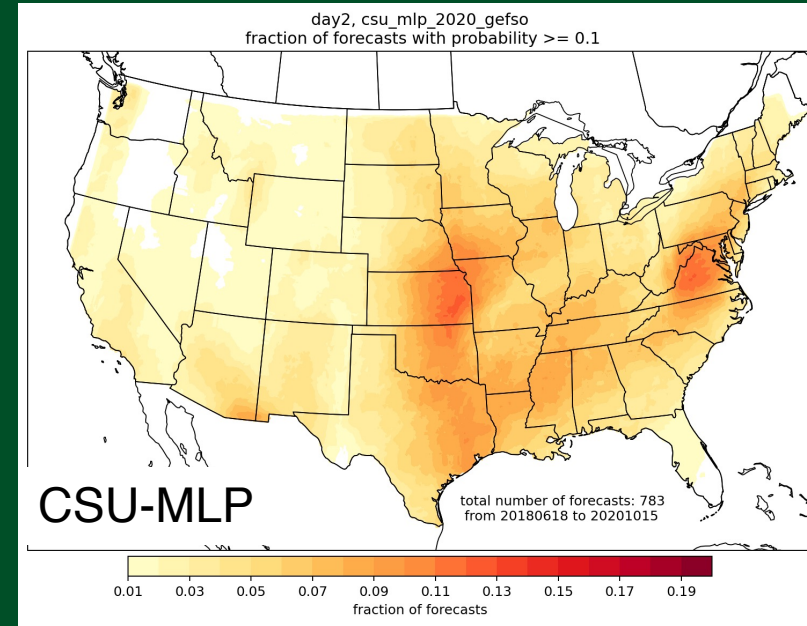


More details in
Schumacher et al. (2021, *BAMS*, in press)

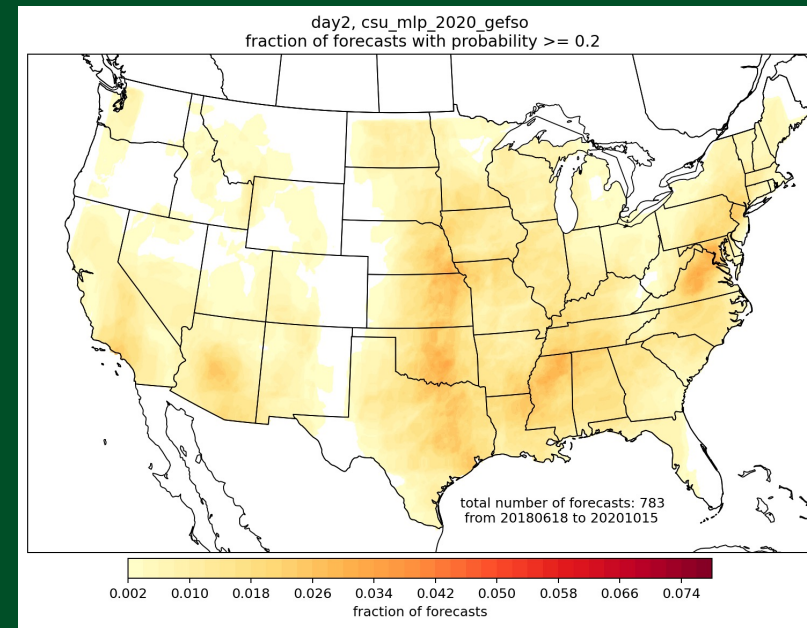
Frequency of forecast probabilities



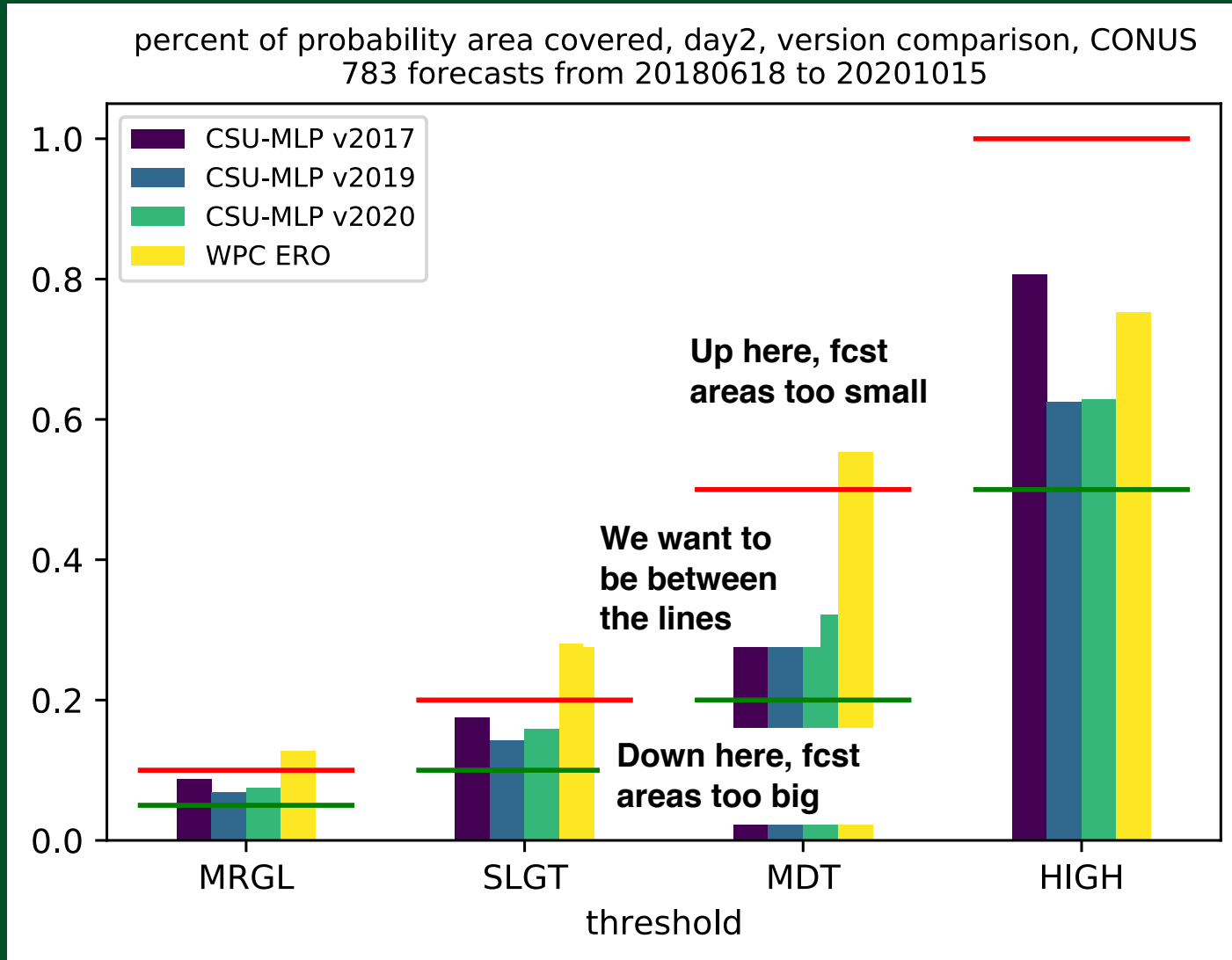
SLGT



MDT



Day-2 outlooks: full CONUS



- At least with this “truth”, WPC day-2 ERO contours (except for high risk) are too small/infrequent in coverage
- CSU-MLP versions are reasonably well calibrated for MRGL through MDT categories (sample size is very small for HIGH)
- The 2020 version improves slightly on the 2019 version, especially in problematic regions

Brier skill score comparison: day 2

CSU-MLP (v2020)

WPC ERO

csu_mlp_2020_gefso, day2, Brier Skill Score

wpc_ero, day2, Brier Skill Score

CONUS BSS (aggregate) = 0.0773
CONUS BSS (average of regions) = 0.0775
ROC area = 0.8172

CONUS BSS (aggregate) = 0.0621
CONUS BSS (average of regions) = 0.0621
ROC area = 0.7527

total number of forecasts: 783
from 20180618 to 20201015

total number of forecasts: 783
from 20180618 to 20201015

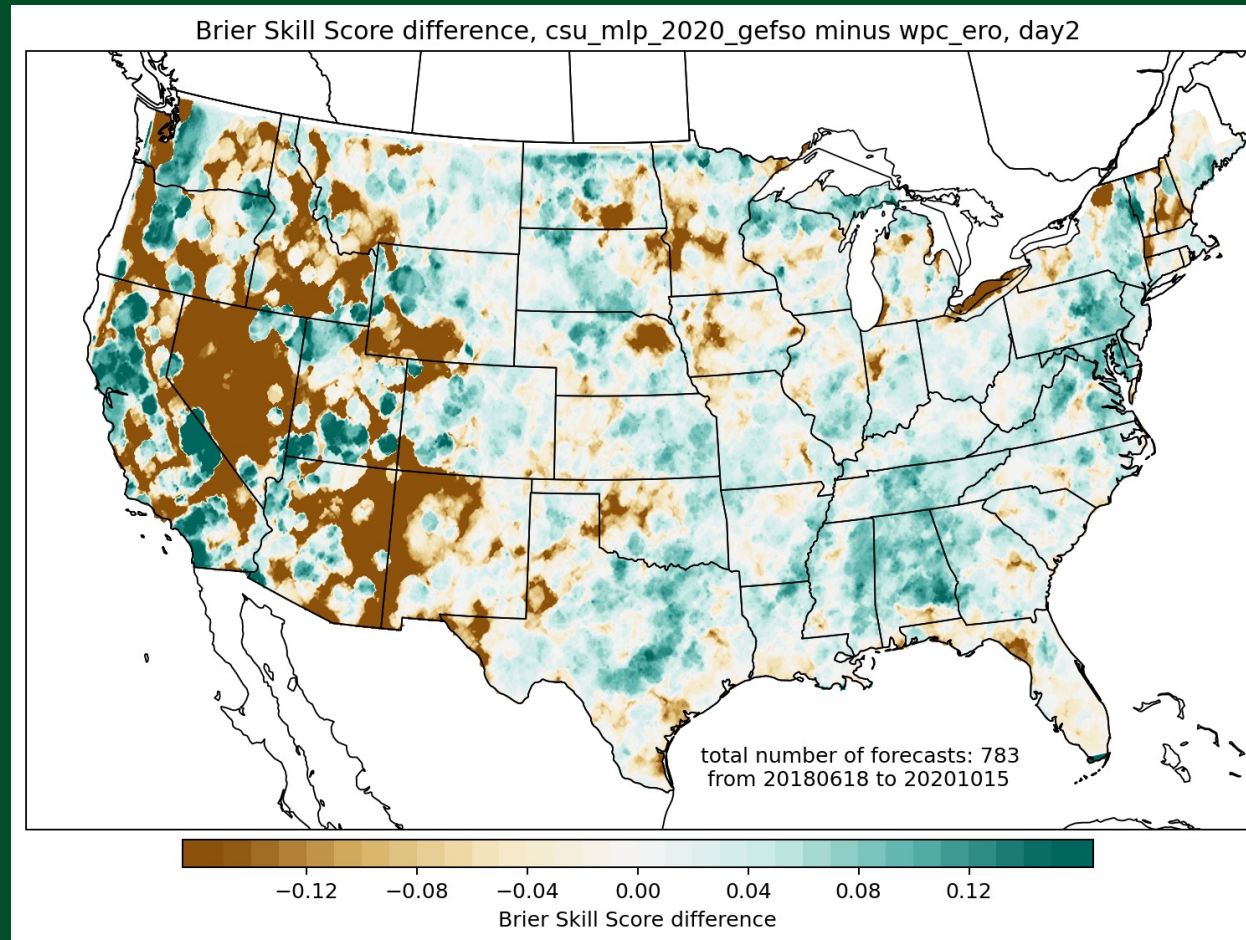
-0.28 -0.21 -0.14 -0.07 0.00 0.07 0.14 0.21 0.28
Brier Skill Score

-0.28 -0.21 -0.14 -0.07 0.00 0.07 0.14 0.21 0.28
Brier Skill Score

- Spatial patterns very similar: BSS is highest east of the Rockies, low in the west (where observed events are rare)

Brier skill score comparison: day 2

CSU-MLP minus WPC ERO

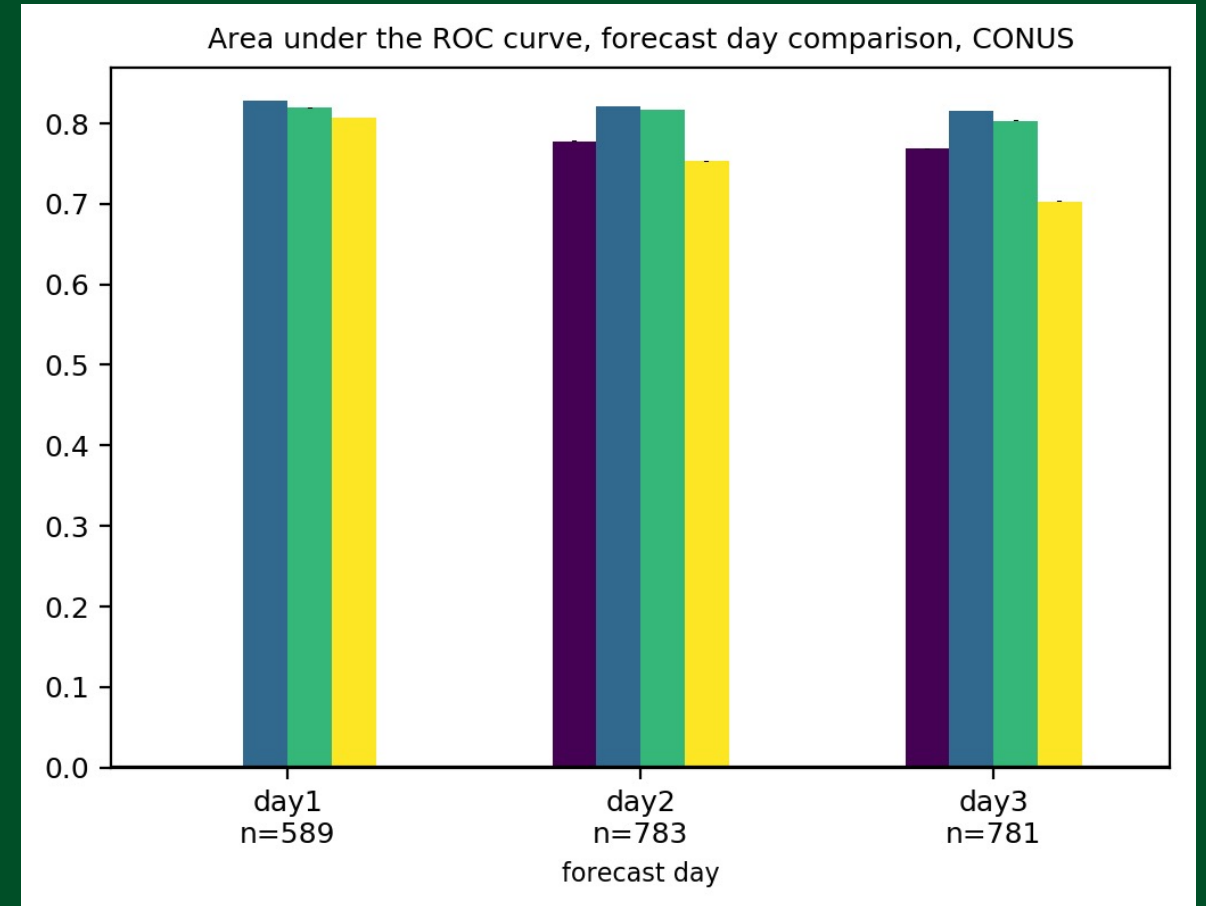
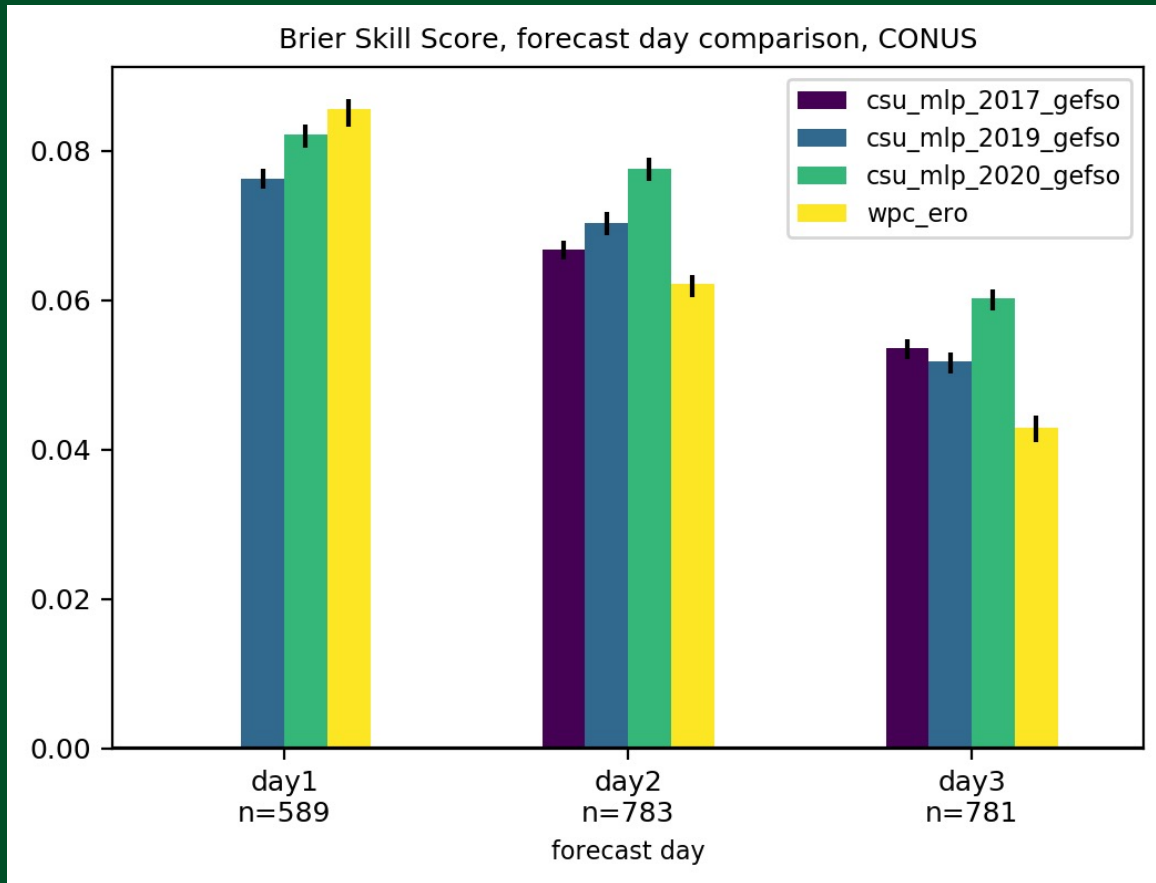


Greens: CSU-MLP has more skill
Browns: WPC ERO has more skill

CSU-MLP has:

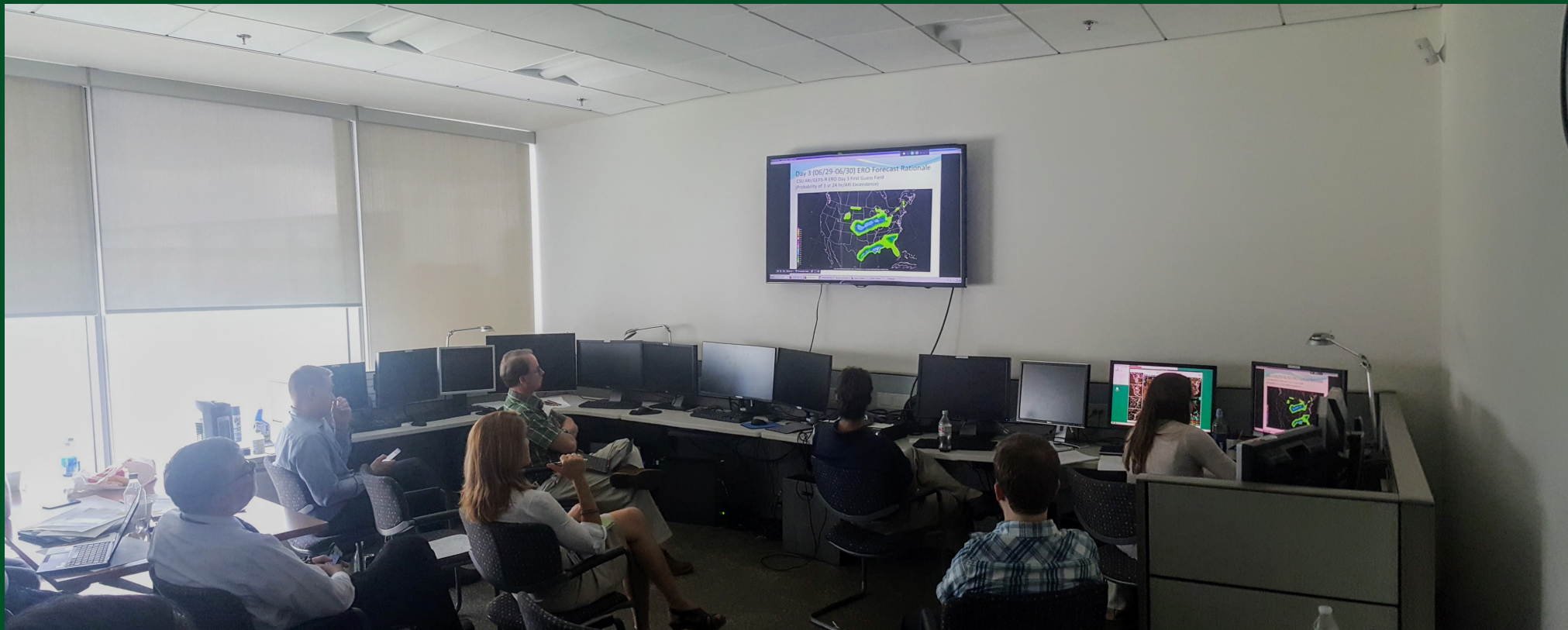
- more skill in much of the south, southeast, and northeast
- much less skill in the interior west, but the sample size is extremely small here
- mixed performance in the rainy areas of the west coast

Brier skill score and ROC area, CONUS, by day



- For BSS, the WPC ERO is best on day 1, but 2020 version of CSU-MLP is best on days 2 and 3
- Big improvements from 2019 to 2020 versions on all days
- CSU-MLP generally has higher ROC area, mainly because fewer events fall outside the 5% contour (again, this is partly a function of the definitions used for 'excessive rainfall' here)

Collaborative improvements to the system through the Flash Flood and Intense Rainfall (FFaIR) testbed experiments, 2017-2020



See also Erickson et al. (2019, JAMC)

2017: “participants overwhelmingly agreed that the CSU-MLP First Guess Field is an excellent step in providing an initial starting point for WPC ERO forecasts, which has been a long-requested tool.”

2018: “The WPC-HMT recommends the Day 2 and Day 3 ERO CSU-MLP First Guess Field for operations as it showed great potential and was scored well by participants. It is recommended that the CSU developers work to refine some of the high probabilities in the High Plains and low probabilities in the Southeast. . . .”

2019: day 2-3 models transitioned to operations

2020: day 1 model transitioned to operations

Use in WPC operations

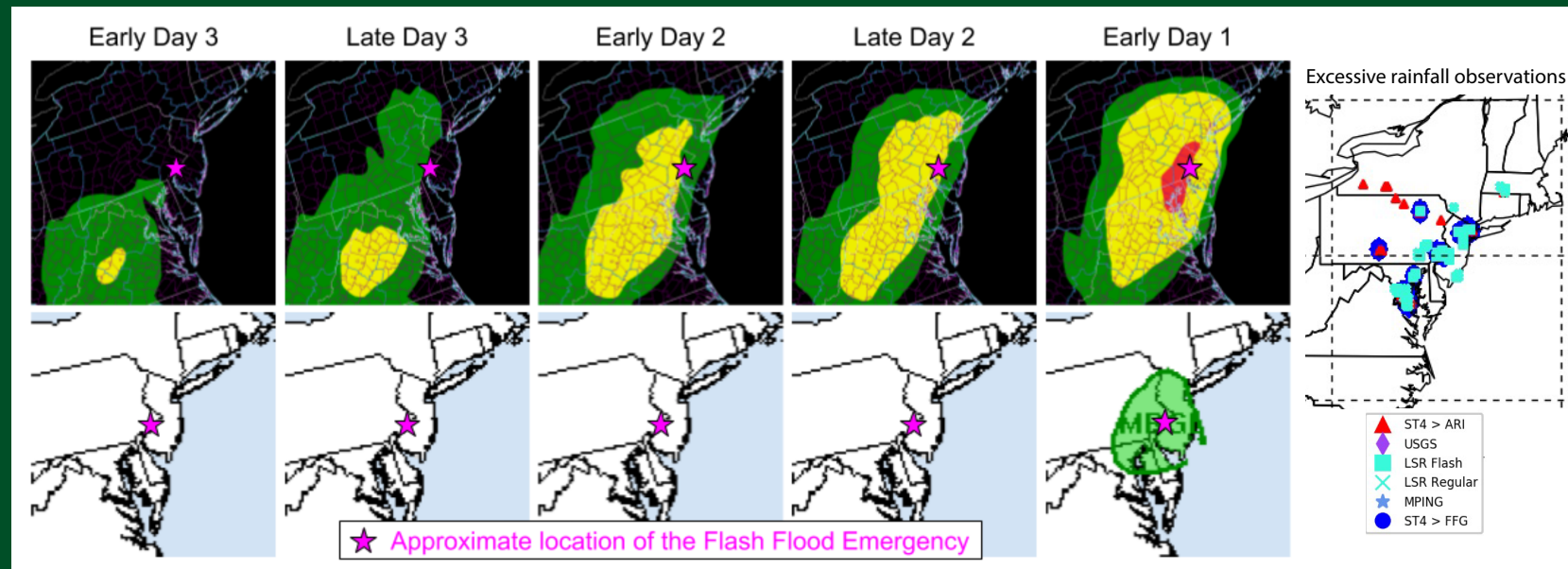
Prior to the CSU-MLP's availability, WPC forecasters examined an abundance of numerical model and observational data to create the product, which was often challenging given tight product deadlines. Consequently, the CSU-MLP has resulted in notable time savings to forecasters.

Forecaster feedback has been positive, and while there is still a perception of a high bias, objective evidence that the CSU-MLP is well-calibrated with respect to fractional coverage has resulted in a general trend of forecasters to increase the areal extent of their risk areas. In addition, there have been several cases where the CSU-MLP has correctly highlighted a high impact event where WPC had relatively low risk potential.

CSU-MLP

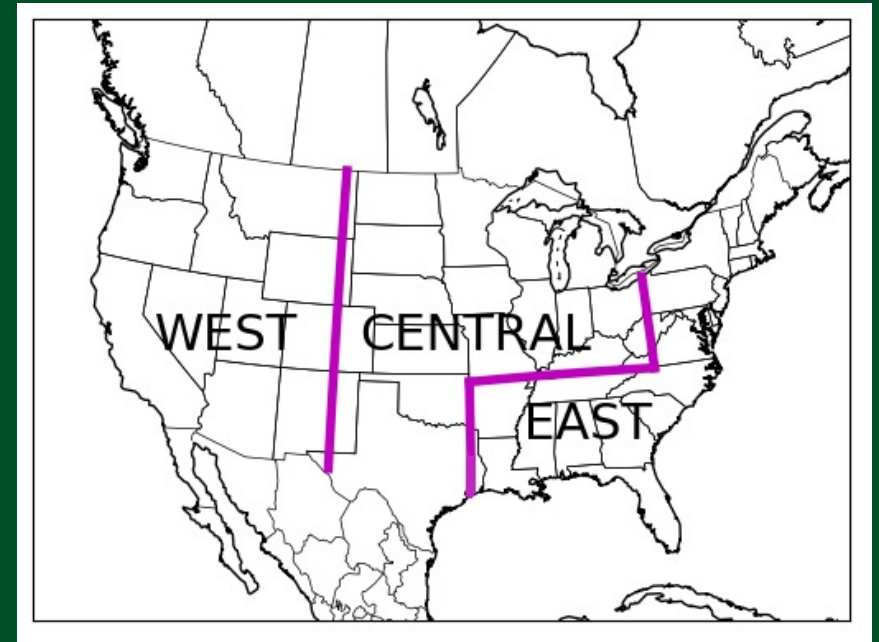
6-7 July 2020 event

WPC ERO



Severe weather CSU-MLP guidance

- Same general approach as the excessive rainfall forecasts, except:
 - Only 3 regions
 - Slightly different set of environmental variables (here we also include SRH and LCL height)
- Tornado, hail, and wind reports are labels/predictands
 - Predict individual hazards on Days 1 and 2, aggregate hazards on Day 3; sig severe too at Days 1 and 2
 - Forecasts analogous to SPC outlooks
- Compare to best operational forecasts: SPC outlooks
- Where does the statistical guidance benefit forecasters?
 - Blend RF forecasts with SPC outlooks based on relative skill



Hill, Herman, and Schumacher, 2020: Forecasting severe weather with random forests. *Monthly Weather Review*, 148, 2135--2161

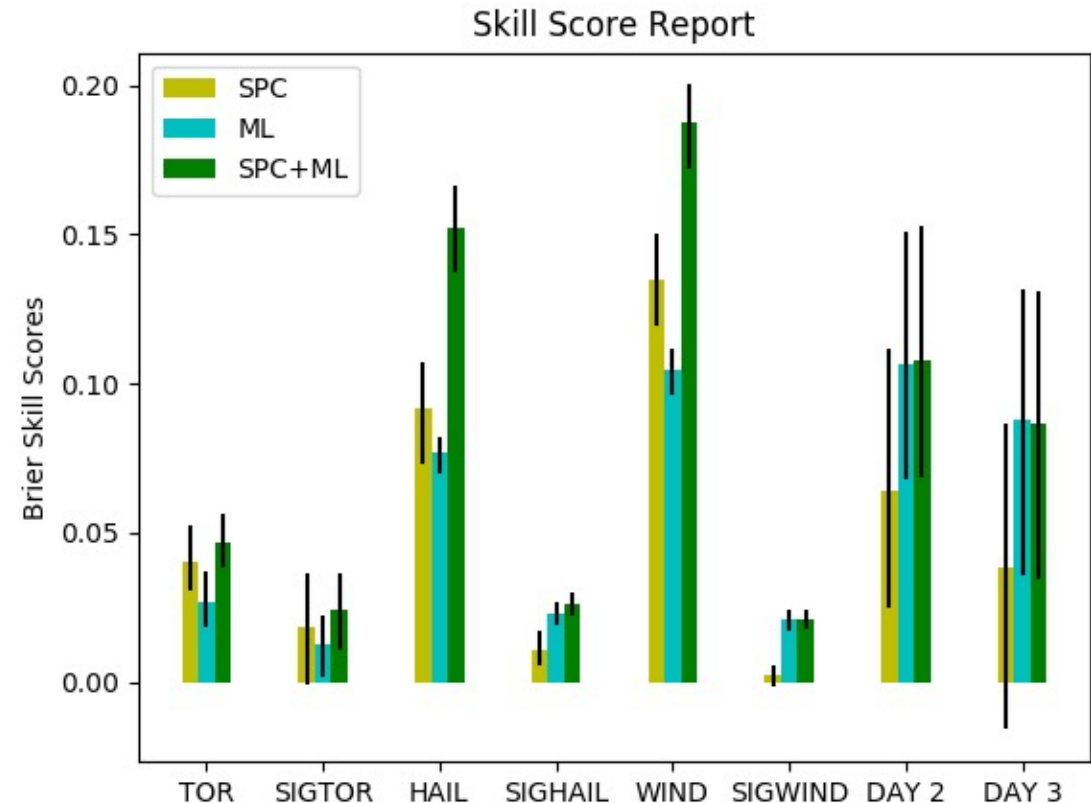
Aggregated Forecast Skill

- Compared to RFs, SPC generally cannot be beat at Day 1
- RFs generate more skillful Day 2 and 3 forecasts
- Blended model produces best forecasts across all predictands, but is generally equal in skill to RF forecasts at Days 2 and 3

Blend Weights:

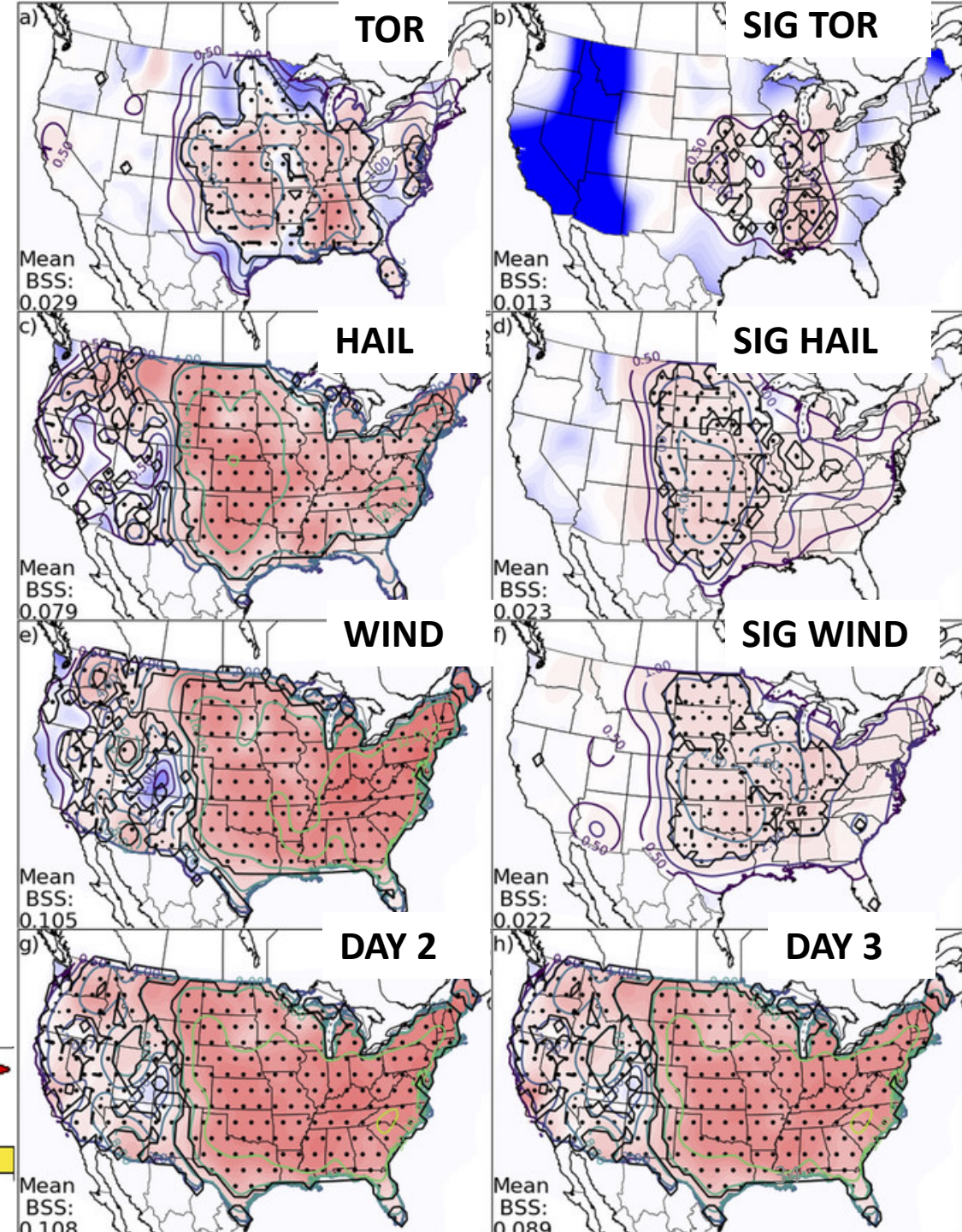
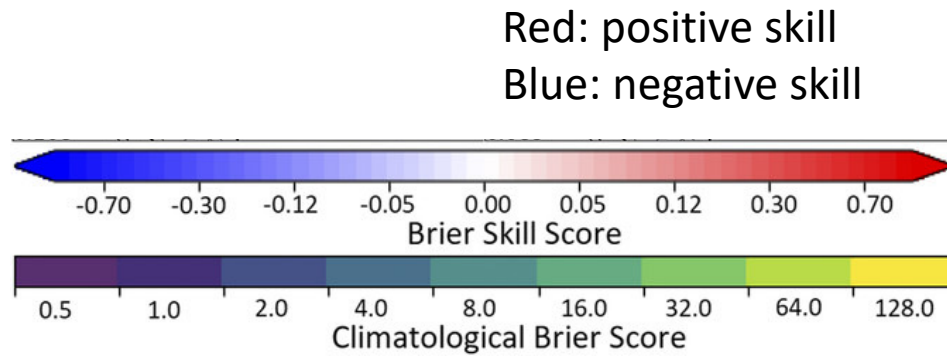
$$W_{\text{SPC}} = \frac{1}{\frac{1}{1 - \text{BSS}_{\text{SPC}}} + \frac{1}{1 - \text{BSS}_{\text{RF}}}}; \quad W_{\text{RF}} = 1 - W_{\text{SPC}}.$$

(1)

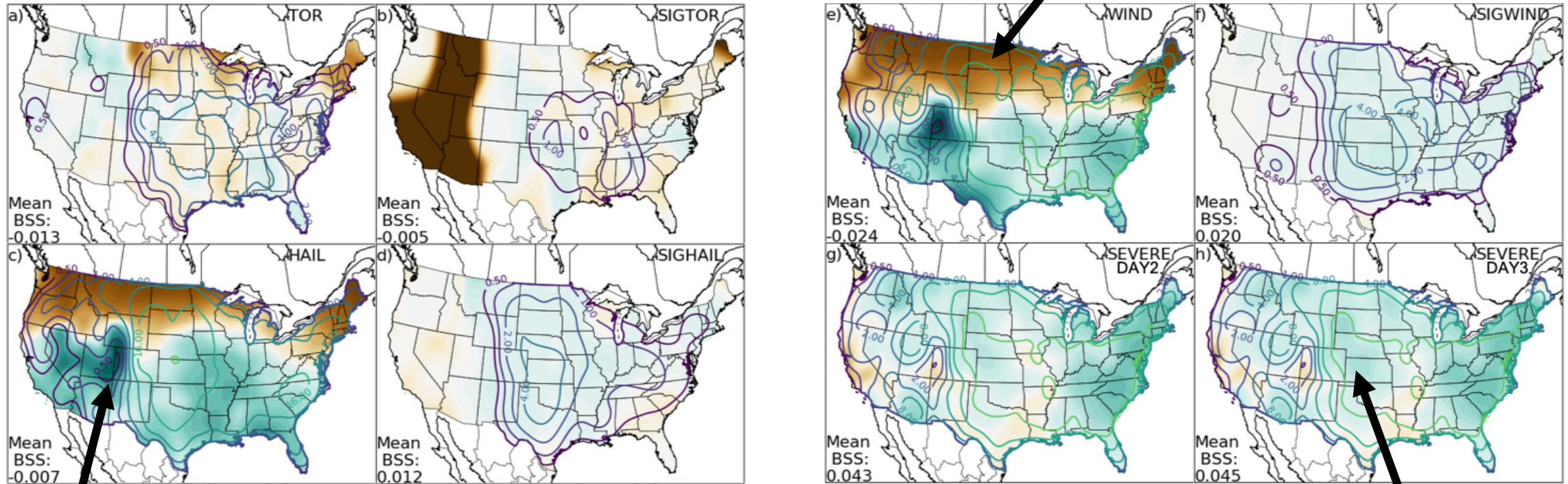


Are the forecasts skillful?

- For almost all hazards and lead times, yes!
- The significant severe forecasts are less skillful than their "regular severe" counterparts



CSU-MLP BSS minus SPC BSS

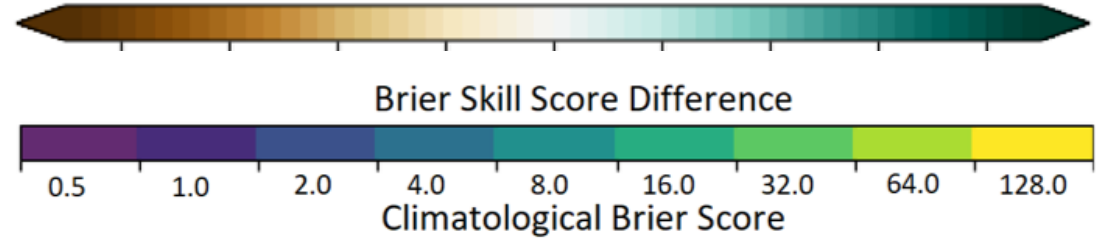


SPC much better...

RF better...

SPC Better

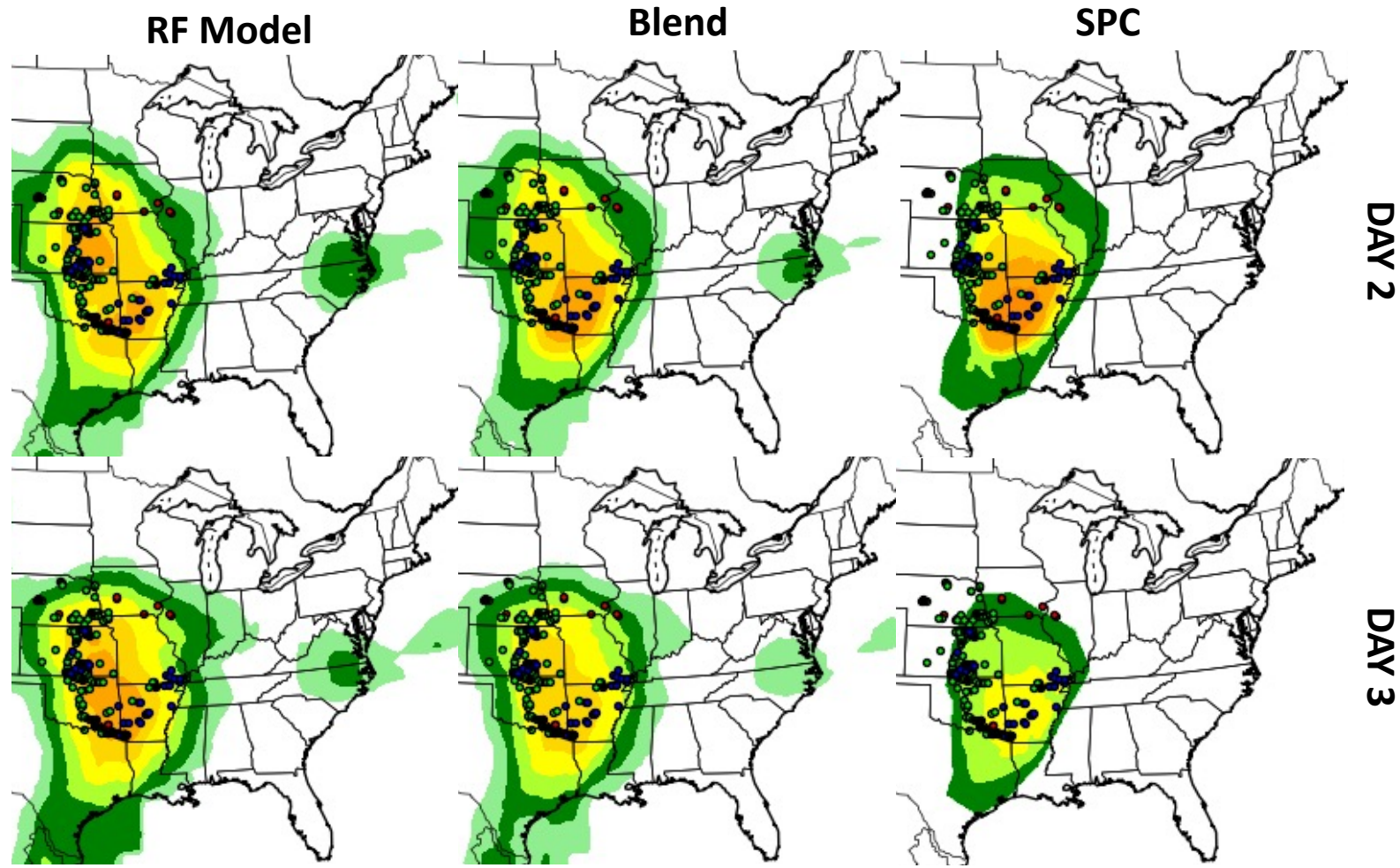
RF Better



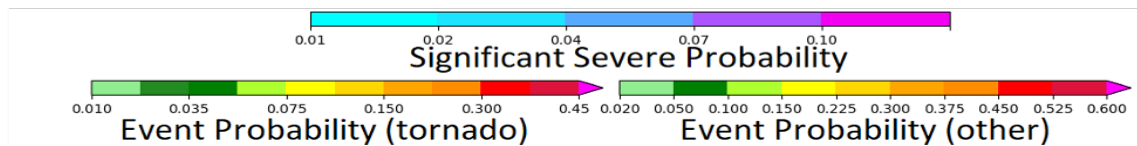
Not statistically better...

Stippling is stat. significance

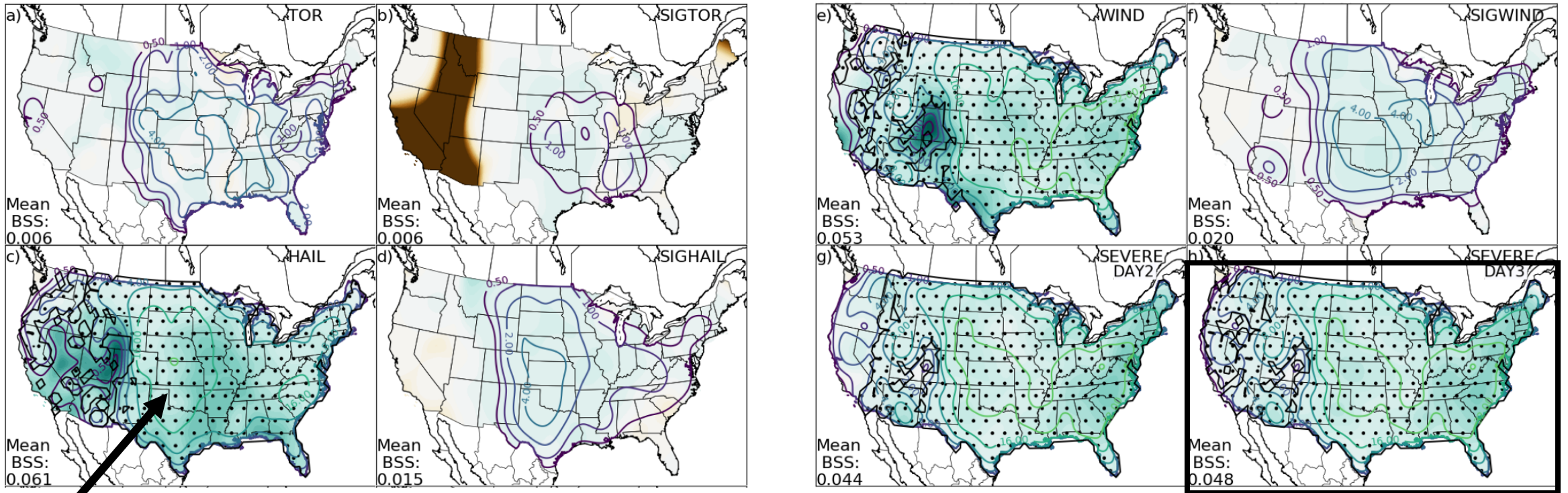
Example Day 2 and 3 Forecasts



24-hr period ending
1200 UTC 10 May 2016



Blended Model BSS Differences



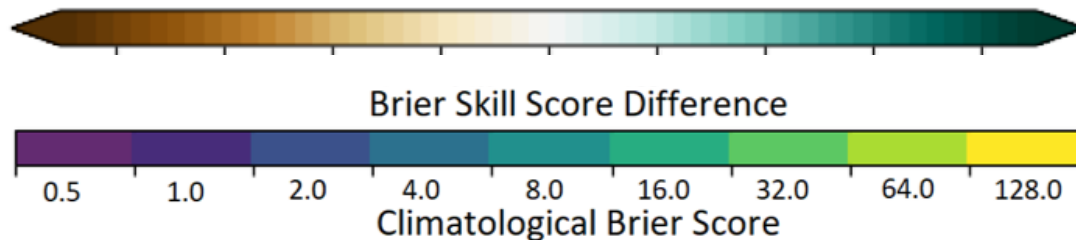
Blend much better...

SPC Better

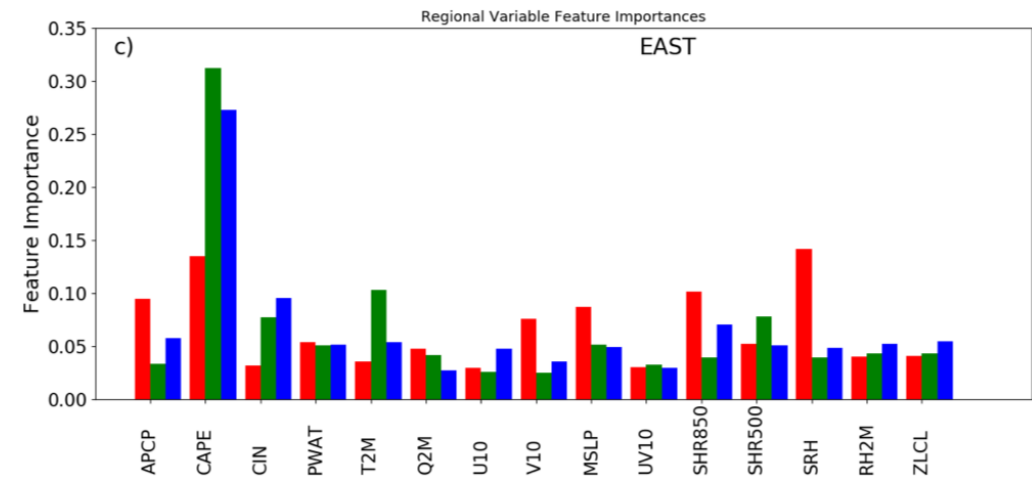
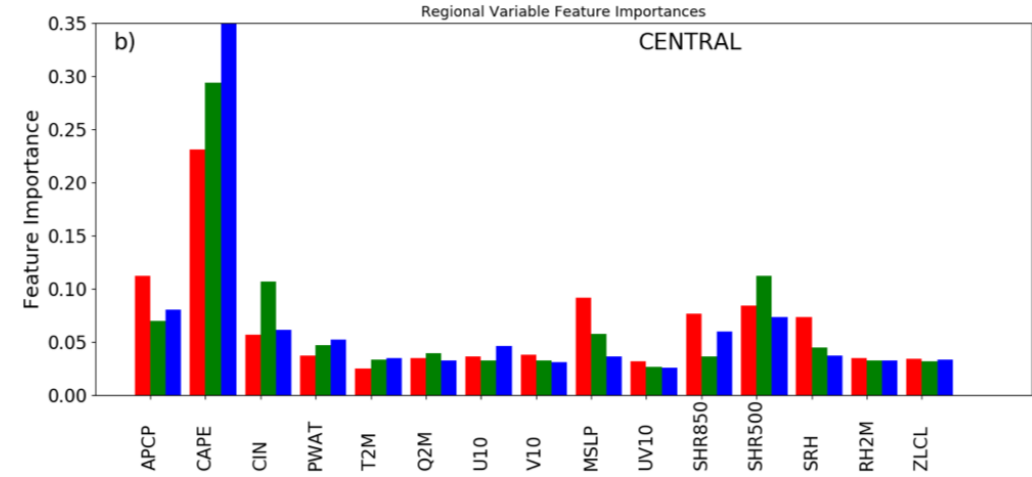
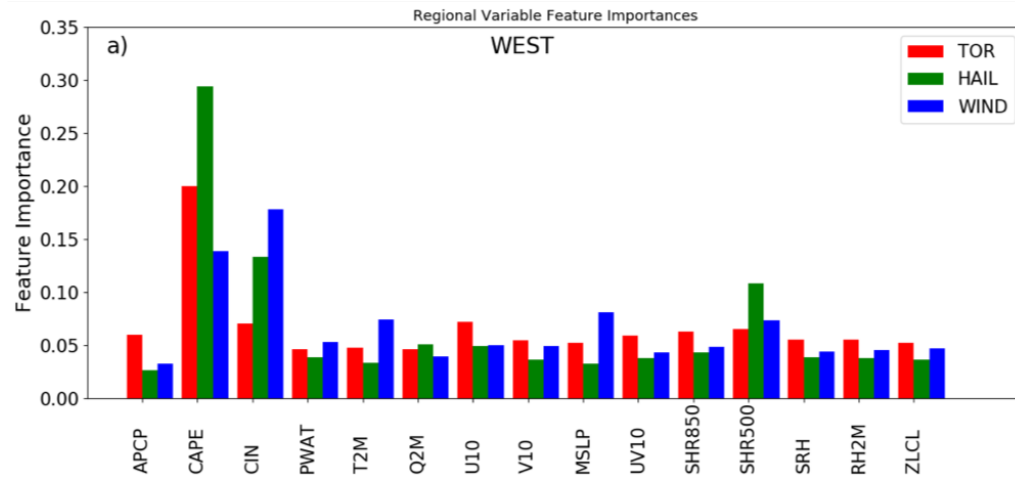
Blend Better

Stat. significant everywhere!

Stippling is stat. significance



Interpretability



- CAPE is the most important predictor for all hazards, and particularly for hail
- SRH eclipses CAPE for tornado prediction in the east region
- CAPE and CIN are most important for wind prediction
- Shear, CIN, MSLP, and accumulated precipitation (APCP) tend to “pop out” as important



The GEFS v12 reanalyses and reforecasts

Jeff Whitaker, Anna Shlyueva, Gary Bates, Sherrie Fredrick, **Tom Hamill**

NOAA Physical Sciences Laboratory, Boulder CO

Vijay Tallapragada, Yuejian Zhu, Dingchen Hou, Kate Zhou, Eric Sinsky, Jack Woollen, and others

NCEP Environmental Modeling Center, College Park, MD (+CPC colleagues)

18 June 2020

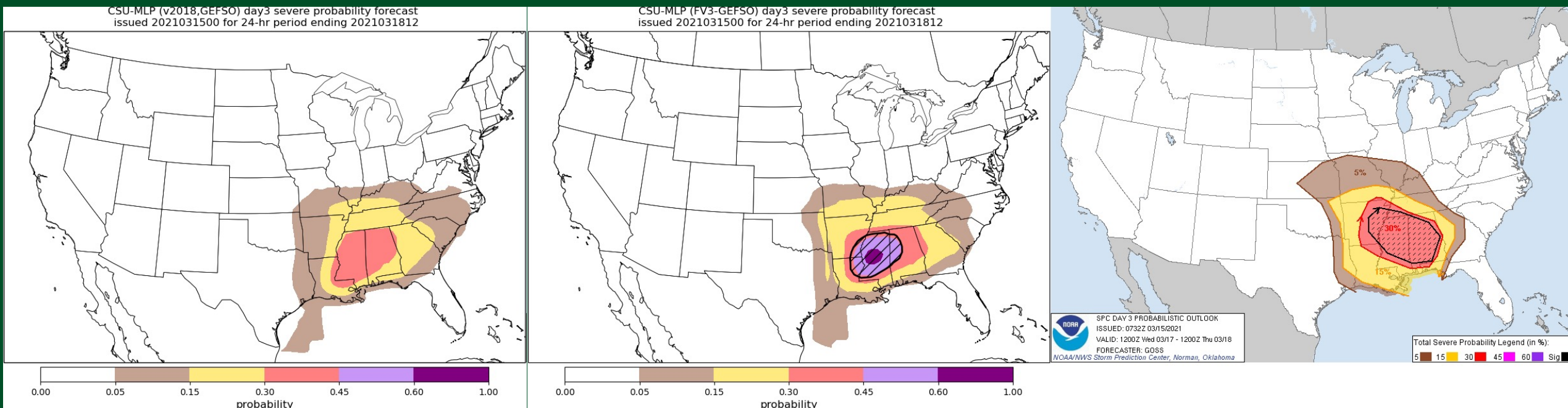
- The upgraded GEFS has a reforecast dataset that's consistent with the current operational ensemble – **hugely important for post-processing/machine learning applications!**
- Reforecast has 5 ensemble members daily from 2000-2019 (11 members once per week)

Our first project: re-train the severe weather models using the GEFS v12 reforecast dataset

“old” day-3 forecast: trained on reforecast v2, driven by GEFS v12

new day-3 forecast: trained on & driven by GEFS v12

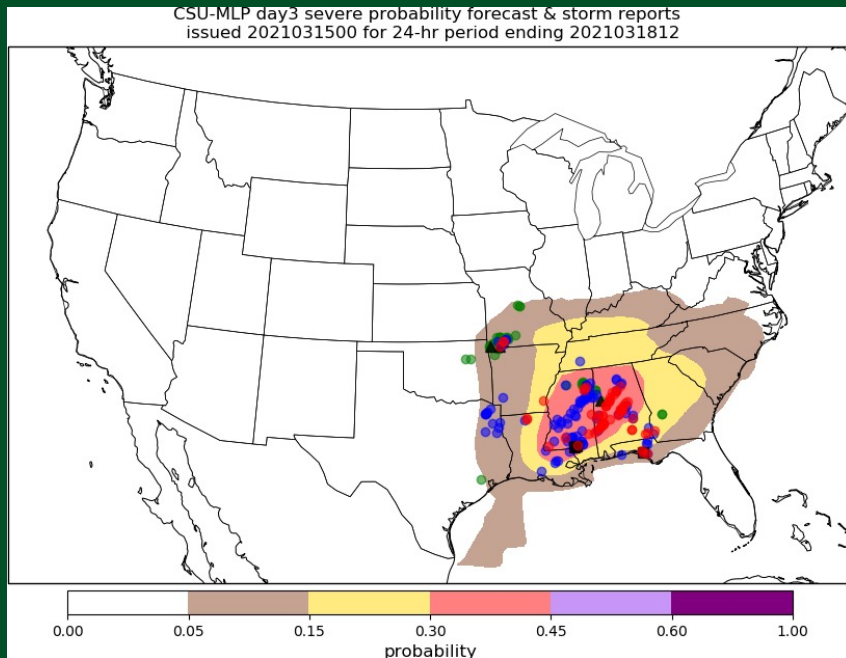
SPC day-3 outlook



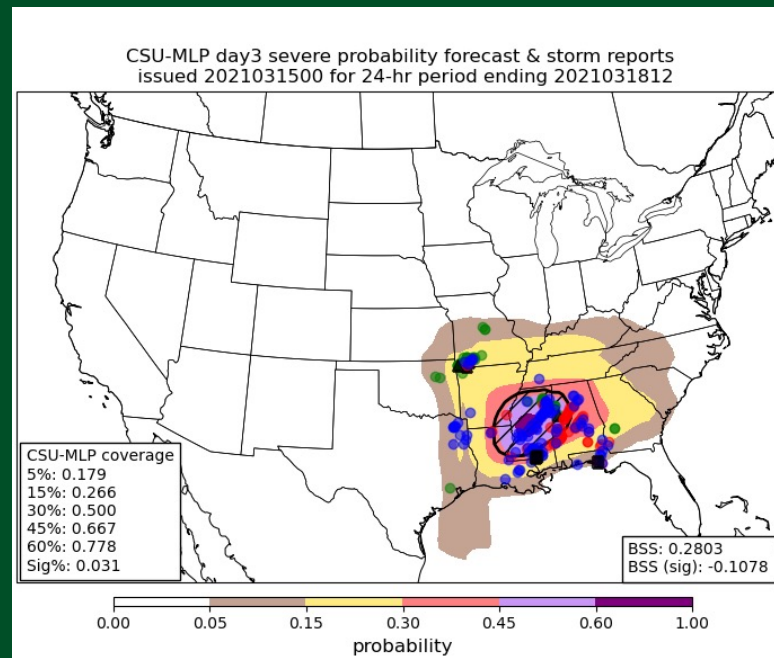
Day-3 forecasts made on 15 March 2021, for 24-h period ending 18 March 2021

Our first project: re-train the severe weather models using the GEFS v12 reforecast dataset

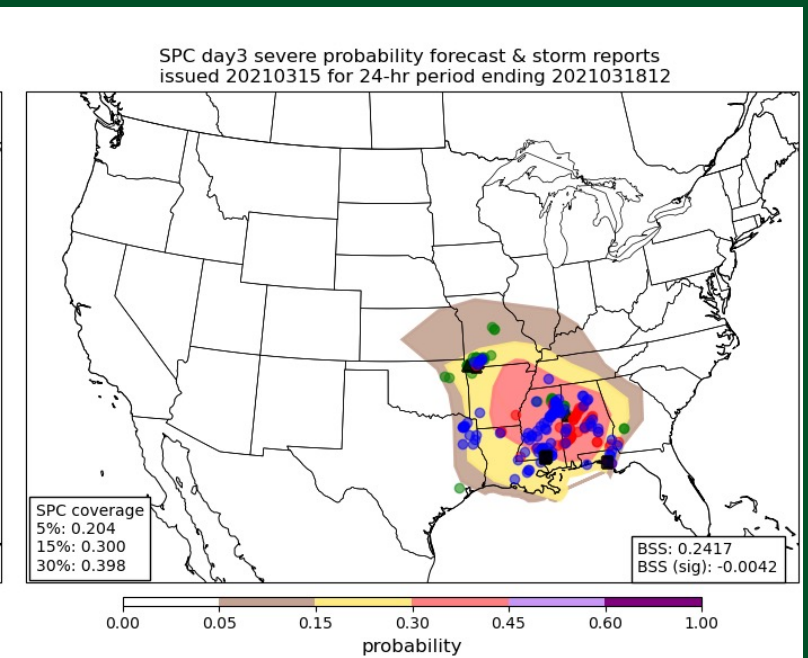
“old” day-3 forecast: trained on reforecast v2, driven by GEFS v12



new day-3 forecast: trained on & driven by GEFS v12

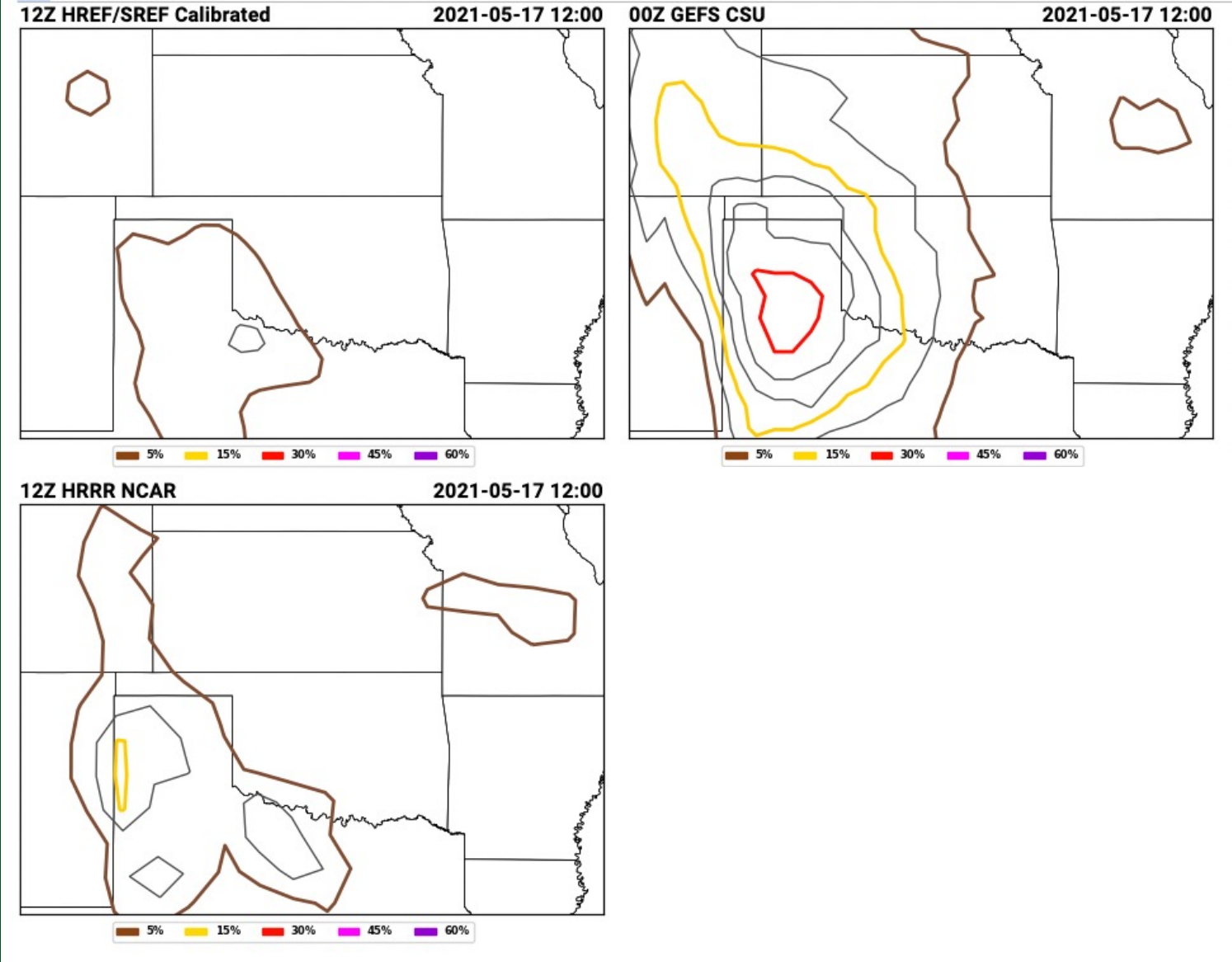


SPC day-3 outlook



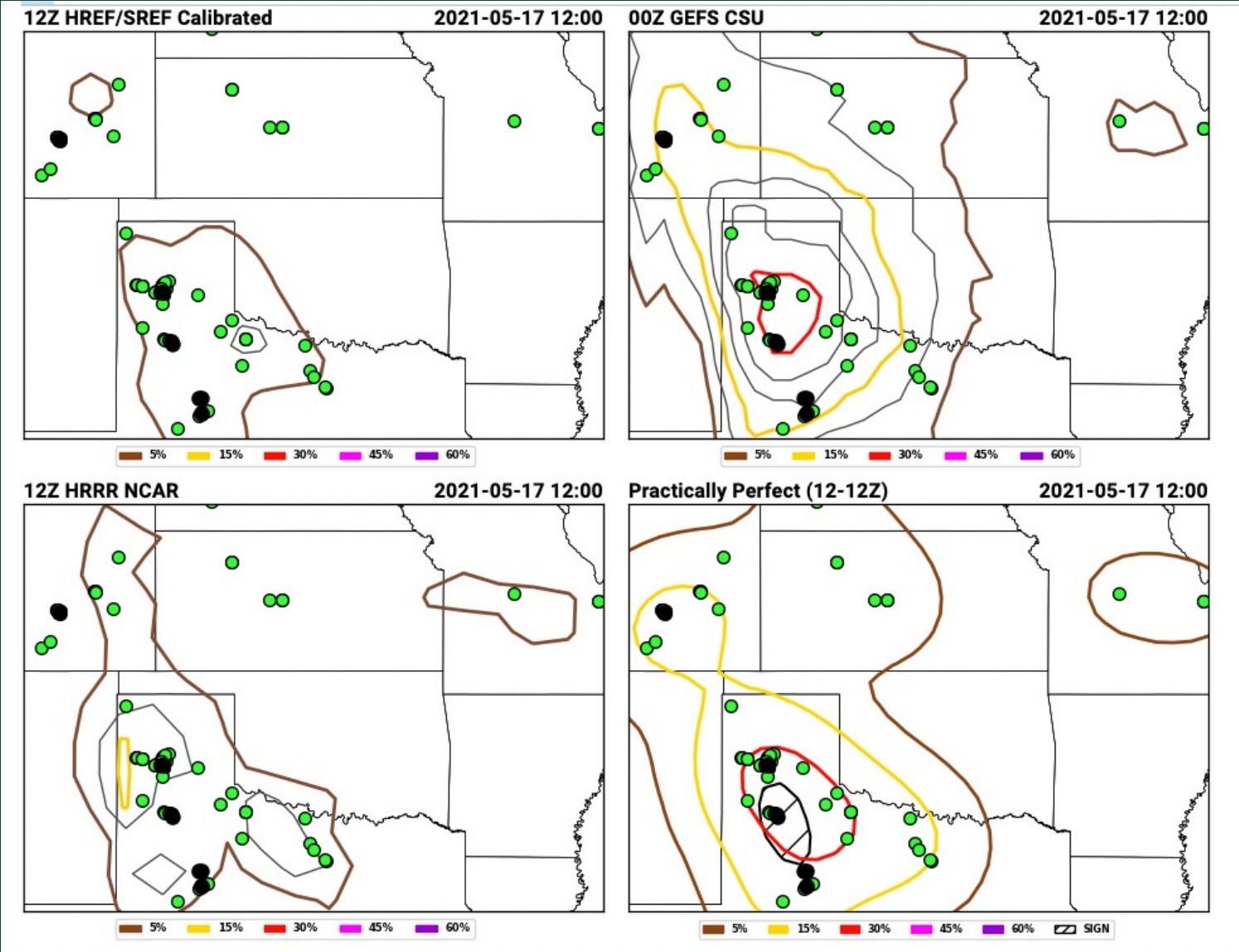
Day-3 forecasts made on 15 March 2021, for 24-h period ending 18 March 2021

These forecasts were demonstrated and evaluated during the Hazardous Weather Testbed Spring Forecasting Experiment



Day-2 hail forecasts issued 15 May 2021, valid 16-17 May 2021

These forecasts were demonstrated and evaluated during the Hazardous Weather Testbed Spring Forecasting Experiment



Day-2 hail forecasts issued 15 May 2021, valid 16-17 May 2021

Can we push skillful guidance beyond day 3?

- We have a current project with the Storm Prediction Center, and a new project starting soon with the Weather Prediction Center (thanks to the JTTI program for continued support!)
- Objectives of both projects include developing seamless CSU-MLP guidance for days 1-8 for both severe weather and excessive rainfall
- How do machine learning forecasts perform at these longer lead times? Do we need to configure the models in a different way? (For example, to include more information about the evolution of the NWP output?)
- How could this medium-range guidance be most helpfully incorporated into SPC/WPC operations?

Other ongoing work

- Does incorporating convection-allowing models into a similar ML system offer benefits for shorter term forecasts?
 - A big limitation is that we don't have a 'reforecast' dataset for any CAMs, and they change configurations routinely
 - Results have been mixed thus far, but with some promising avenues for further exploration
 - At the Flash Flood and Intense Rainfall (FFaIR) experiment this summer, we will evaluate a blend of CSU-MLP models that include output from both the GEFS and CAMs
- Understanding synoptic patterns associated with successful and failed forecasts (graduate student Jacob Escobedo)
- Exploring other "flavors" of machine learning (convolutional neural networks, etc.) for these types of applications

Summary

- Machine learning techniques can help in post-processing NWP output to yield useful “first guess” guidance for operations
- ML models for severe weather and excessive rainfall are skillful, and competitive with operational outlooks – especially beyond day 1
- Plenty of opportunities for further advances, both in the forecasts themselves, and how they can be applied: what’s the best way to make them useful and trustworthy for forecasters?

Thank you for the opportunity to be here!
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Real-time forecast graphics:

http://schumacher.atmos.colostate.edu/hilla/csu_mlp/

Contact us if interested in gridded output!

Backup slides