

Response to Referee #2

We wish to thank the Reviewer for his/her thorough review of our manuscript and for the useful comments that helped us improve the quality of the paper. The specific issues raised by this Referee are addressed in detail below:

The authors wrote about three objectives: -develop a "high-fidelity numerical model for inundation" - develop a surrogate model - apply this model for early warning. Apart from the quick calculation and the selection of the inputs of the surrogate model, the third part is not developed enough for the reader to understand how this early warning system can operate. Particularly what is the chain from obtaining the input parameters for the surrogate model till the peak water depth at one building in the town?

Response:

We apologize because we failed to clarify the objectives of the present manuscript, as it is part of a comprehensive investigation of the basin, for which we had recently developed a high-fidelity model that we reported in the companion paper by Contreras and Escauriaza (2020).

The main goal of the current investigation is to develop and test the performance of a surrogate model, which can replace the computationally expensive combination of the hydrological and hydrodynamic models for flood predictions. While we do not mean to design a forecasting model in this research, we see the fast response and low computational costs of the surrogate model as valuable features, which can be used in operative forecasting systems and early warning systems.

We modified the manuscript to make the objectives clear. Also, we have specified that the idea of surrogate models could be used on early warning systems in areas with limited hydrometeorological data such as the Andes mountains, although further improvements will be required on future research.

The first part that spreads over 7 pages is quite clear except the introduction of the sediment concentration and particularly, how is chosen the concentration for the 49 events of the database used later on. Note that concentration cannot be selected independently from the event because, for instance, high concentrations are specific from certain kinds of events (snow melting or intense rainfall).

Response:

We also believe that the sediment concentration is related to the characteristics of the events, however, there is a significant uncertainty in these mountain environments to predict their values associated with specific hydrometeorological events:

Sediment concentration can play a significant role in the flood propagation. Contreras and Escauriaza (2020) showed differences on the order of 25% for water depths calculated with clear water or 20% of sediment concentration. Additionally, differences of up to 0.5 m were observed in the urban area for hyperconcentrated flows. The main difficulty regarding the definition of this variable is the uncertainty of sediment concentration for each event, as

localized landslides, previous recent storms, or interannual changes on the vegetation covering have produced different concentrations, which are also difficult to measure in extreme flooding conditions. Therefore we selected this variable as independent to evaluate potential scenarios, and analyze a flood with the same rainfall event, but under different sediment concentrations.

Magnitudes of sediment concentration have been reported for the largest flood registered in the watershed, which was generated during an abnormally warm storm, with periods of intense precipitation over partially saturated soils. The sediment concentrations during the events could not be directly measured, but it was estimated to be around ~40% (Sepulveda et al., 2006; Sepulveda and Rebolledo, 2008).

In the present investigation, we chose values of sediment concentrations in a wide range between clearwater and 40%, through a Latin hypercube sampling. We selected this range based on previous the estimations, during the largest events in this watershed (Sepulveda et al., 2006). Additionally, our recent work in this river showed that the most significant differences in the hydrodynamics of the flow occur between 0 to 20% (Contreras and Escuariza, 2020). We are aware that this parameter might add an additional source of uncertainty, but one of the advantages of surrogate models is that they allow us to predict multiple possible scenarios, to deal with the uncertainty associated with the input values.

Because the grid is sometimes very fine, one can guess that obstacles created by buildings, walls, etc can be taken into account but no word is written about the representation of any building or civil engineering structure. So it is difficult to conclude if it is really a "high fidelity numerical model".

Response:

The representation of buildings is only included in the hydrodynamic model. Because we are using a digital surface model (DSM) to interpolate the topography with high resolution. The infrastructure is modeled with their higher elevation points in the computational grid.

Part 2 is the core of the paper and takes more than 10 pages. The reader discovers while reading the paper that they are two surrogate models but only the first one is detailed and I could not understand how works the second one, which is not so important because this second model does not provide reliable results (I (of course) cannot understand why) and the authors should completely change the presentation fo this model if they wish to present it.

Response:

We are sorry that we could not clarify this point in the original version of the manuscript. There is only one surrogate model, which is employed in two cases. First, we implemented a series of surrogate models by using multiple combinations of regressions and correlation functions. We evaluated the errors of the predictions and selected the combination of a first-order regression function and linear correlation function as the most accurate surrogate model for this watershed. Then we extended the same approach for the entire urban area by assuming that first-order

regression functions and linear correlation functions perform the best in all the cells of the domain.

For the first surrogate model, I understood that they use 48 sets of parameters (different for each event) to obtain a mean forecast and a standard deviation. Because the procedure is not a standard one, I am not sure results can be trusted and I expect a comparison with a more standard procedure with, for instance, calibration on 25 events and evaluating results on the 24 other ones. Of course, it requires more time if you wish to test various sets of 25 events.

Response:

As we discussed in the companion paper recently published in NHESS (Contreras and Escauriaza, 2020), the main difficulty for predicting the flood propagation in the Andes is the very limited historical data and remarkably complex terrain. The Quebrada de Ramon watershed has only one water depth gauge with discontinuous 40 years of measurements and no rain gauges. Additionally, the magnitude of the floods makes measuring discharge even more difficult during storms.

In this case, we only have a record of 48 events with only one validation point in the entire region. With this limitation, we implemented a surrogate model that requires 4 inputs and predicts approximately 88% of the storms with a mean error of 2.22% at the validation point. Previous applications of surrogate models using similar methodologies for storm surge predictions have been built with 350 storms and 150 validation points, for 4 inputs. Their results have been validated with 20 storms with average errors of 4% and 3% for the significant wave height and water level respectively (see Taflanidis et al., 2013, for details).

While the order of magnitude of the average errors is similar, it is expected that a larger database to build our surrogate model would improve its accuracy, mainly because a wider variety of storms would be represented in the historical series.

In this case, the synthetic series obtained from the hydrological model are based on the limited data of the only discharge gauge available in the entire basin. Additional simulations do not add statistically meaningful information that can improve the predictions, since they are based on the same set of data. To the best of our knowledge there are no previous studies that have developed surrogate models in almost ungauged mountain regions, and this is the first step to implement these tools in the future.

Because I could not understand how concentration was determined for the 49 events, I could not judge the meaning of the results that concentration has no effect on the quality of the results. If the prediction is wrong (4 events out of 49), the authors do not provide what to do (if their model is used for early warning).

Response:

As we explained in previous comments the sediment concentration is randomly selected in a range of values that have been estimated for large floods in the region. While we tried to find a relationship between the values of the inputs and the wrong predictions of the surrogate model, the model does not perform particularly badly for specific types of storm. However, we recommend considering large standard deviations of the predictions as a filter for incorrect predictions, as we mention in the new version of the paper.

For early warning systems, it would be desirable to use a larger database that includes a wider variety of storms and more densely sampled, which is not available in this case. Literature shows that increasing the number of high fidelity simulations to the order of thousands should improve the performance of the model, but the limitation in this case is the hydrometeorological information to create the scenarios. In the real implementation of an early warning system, the inputs have uncertainty that the surrogate model can help to deal with, by assessing multiple scenarios for a single storm. This also allows discriminating the rare scenarios when the surrogate model is not able to correctly predict the flooding area.

§4.3 is an extension of the first surrogate model to other points and by this way to the flooded area but if the authors filter by a depth of 10 cm, I am wondering what means the flooded area (area with water depth higher than 10 cm?) and to which area of the finer model it is compared.

Response:

Since we applied the 10 cm minimum water depth for the results of the surrogate model, we compared the results with the high-fidelity simulation after the same filter.

The discussion (§5) is not structured and some new ideas are not clear (for instance sentence lines 7-8 of page 19 that is found again line 25 of page 21).

Response:

We have reformulated the discussion to improve the text and clarify the main ideas developed in the manuscript. We thank the Referee for the thorough review of our work.