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Hypothetical Flood Computation for a Stream System

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14. ABSTRACT One of the computer packages being developed in the Hydrologic engineering Center of the Corps of Engineers is the Flood hydrograph Package, which performs all common operations in deriving and using flood hydrographs entirely in core storage of computers as large as the IBM 7094. One of the problems managed by this program is flood computation throughout an entire stream system in one operation. Ordinarily, a design or hypothetical flood might be derived from a storm centered in the tributary area. After floods are computed in this manner for several subareas within a stream system, it is often necessary to compute floods for the combined areas at various locations. The originally computed floods cannot be routed and combined, since the storm cannot center over all subareas at once. It is ordinarily necessary to recompute each subarea flood for every combining point downstream, and to label each re-computation as the contribution to that particular location. In a complex system, such as a storm drain or major river basin, this procedure would lead to great amounts of computation and considerable confusion. Essential features of the computer package and the simplified stream system analysis are described.					
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25 April 1968

HYPOTHETICAL FLOOD COMPUTATION FOR A STREAM SYSTEM

Leo R. Beard⁽²⁾

INTRODUCTION

A design flood, defined as the flood for which a hydraulic structure is designed, can be selected in many ways, one of which consists of a detailed economic analysis of costs and benefits associated with protection against various magnitudes of floods. Regardless of the manner in which it is selected, certain general relationships exist between sizes of tributary area and size of flood, partly because average storm intensities decrease as area covered increases, and for various other reasons. Although there is not ordinarily a unique relationship between rainfall and runoff at a particular location, such that the probability of a flood would correspond with the probability of the causative rainfall, there are nevertheless reasons for computing design floods from rainfall (and snowmelt). These are usually to assess limiting flood magnitudes or to estimate floods where conditions in the tributary area change from historical conditions or where runoff records are not available.

A comprehensive computer program has been developed in The Hydrologic Engineering Center of the Corps of Engineers to manage the various problems associated with computation of runoff from rainfall and snowmelt quantities.

(1) Prepared for presentation at the International Association of Scientific Hydrology Symposium, Tucson, Arizona, 8-15 December 1968.

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The hydrologic features of this computer program, particularly regarding a new technique for decreasing flood magnitudes per unit area with size of drainage basin, are described herein.

SNOWPACK ACCUMULATION AND DEPLETION

Those basins where snow accumulation and snowmelt are significant factors in flood production are divided into elevation zones of 1000-foot range in order to account for marked changes of temperature with elevation. Temperatures specified for each interval correspond to the bottom elevation of the lowest zone and are decreased with elevation in accordance with a specified lapse rate. If desired, they are also modified for changes in latitude.

In each elevation zone, precipitation is considered to occur as snowfall if the temperature is below a specified value. Snowmelt within each elevation zone is computed in accordance with generalized relations used by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, with an option between a straight degree-day computation and a comprehensive energy-budget computation, using methods described in the Corps of Engineers manual.⁽³⁾ The former method usually gives more satisfactory results, because the detailed data required for energy-budget computations are usually not available during each interval of the storm. Snowfall is added to the snowpack in each elevation zone and snowmelt is subtracted during each storm interval. Rainfall is added to snowmelt to obtain the total water input for each interval.

⁽³⁾ Runoff from Snowmelt, EM 1110-2-1406, Corps of Engineers, 5 Jan 1960.

NON-LINEAR LOSS RELATION

A great many studies relating basin-average rainfall amounts for short intervals in a storm to observed runoff indicate a distinctly non-linear relationship between rainfall intensity and loss rate (infiltration). Considering the non-homogeneity of soils, vegetation and precipitation throughout a basin, this non-linearity between basin-average (lumped) amounts is logical. The following equation has been used in these studies, with a constraint that loss does not exceed water input (rainfall plus snowmelt) for each interval:

$$L = KP^E \tag{1}$$

in which

L = loss in inches per hour during interval

K = coefficient decreasing with increased ground wetness

P = rainfall plus snowmelt in inches per hour during interval

E = constant exponent between zero and 1.0

It will be noted that a value of zero for E would correspond to loss rates independent of rainfall intensity (the traditional assumption) and that an exponent of 1.0 would correspond to loss rates directly proportional to rainfall intensity. Hydrograph reconstitution studies have indicated the exponent to range ordinarily between 0.5 and 0.9, and frequently an average of 0.7 has been adopted for purposes of uniformity.

Loss rates during snowmelt floods are small in comparison with observed losses during rainfloods. Accordingly, separate loss functions are used in the computer program for snow-covered areas and for snow-free areas. In each case, the loss coefficient K in equation 1 decreases with ground wetness during a storm in accordance with the following equation:

$$K = K_0 C^{-(\Sigma L/10)} \quad (2)$$

where

K_0 = loss coefficient at start of storm (Different for snow-free and snow-covered areas)

C = coefficient controlling rate of decrease of K
(Different for snow-free and snow-covered areas)

ΣL = accumulated loss during storm (Different for each elevation zone)

Figure 1 illustrates the use of equations 1 and 2.

During long-duration snowmelt floods, rainfall and snowmelt losses from snow-covered areas decrease in this manner, but rainfall losses in snow-free areas are considered to increase gradually throughout the flood period, inasmuch as temperatures are gradually increasing and the ground surface becomes drier. This rate of increase in K is arbitrarily set at one percent of the initial value per day.

LINEAR RUNOFF TRANSFORM

The excess quantities of rainfall and snowmelt during each interval are added for all elevation zones and expressed as basin-mean excess in inches. These quantities are then transformed to runoff at the concentration point by use of the unit hydrograph technique developed by C. O. Clark.⁽⁴⁾ This method is selected because it provides a means of direct computation from only 2 coefficients and a time-area curve. The advantage of using the time-area curve is that changes in basin configuration, such as diversions, reservoir construction, etc., can be immediately reflected in the modified time-area curve. For use in studies where a time-area curve is not obtained from detailed maps, for any of various reasons, a typical time-area curve is provided in the computer program. This is usually satisfactory, since the shape of the time-area curve has little influence compared with time and storage coefficients. Also, a unit hydrograph with specified Snyder coefficients (T_p and C_p)⁽⁵⁾ can be obtained by automatic successive approximations of the Clark coefficients (TC and R).

The computation procedure used does not include separation of surface flows from sub-surface or ground-water return flows. All of these phases of flows are included in a single unit hydrograph. However, runoff from antecedent storms that would have occurred in the absence of the current storm (or snowmelt event) is added as a recession flow to runoff computed from the current storm.

⁽⁴⁾C. O. Clark, Storage and the Unit Hydrograph, Trans. ASCE, Vol. 110, 1945.

⁽⁵⁾Flood Hydrograph Analyses and Computations, EM 1110-2-1405, Corps of Engineers, 31 August 1959.

Also, after the total runoff recedes below a specified value, runoff computed by use of the unit hydrograph is constrained from receding below a specified maximum exponential rate of recession. This device precludes the necessity of treating sub-surface and return flows separately, which is otherwise necessary because of strong non-linearities in the relation of recession flow to rainfall and snowmelt amounts.

The linear unit-hydrograph transform or convolution process is ordinarily adequate, if the tendency for change in unit hydrograph characteristics with flood magnitude at a given location is recognized. Non-linearities of this convolution process within a flood, which are known to exist, are extremely difficult to determine accurately and have minor effect relative to uncertainties of precipitation and loss functions.

DERIVATION OF RUNOFF FUNCTIONS

A routine is included in this computer program to derive the unit-hydrograph and loss-rate coefficients that best reconstitute an observed flood hydrograph by a least-squares procedure. The gradient optimization procedure used is described in a previous publication⁽⁶⁾ by the writer. Provisions are included to fix any of the variables desired in order to simplify a regional correlation analysis of the resulting coefficients.

(6) Leo R. Beard, Optimization Techniques for Hydrologic Engineering, Water Resources Research, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1967.

For example, the exponent of precipitation in the loss rates function would ordinarily be fixed so that coefficients derived for different locations can be compared directly. There is also a provision for permitting the engineer to influence the exact nature of the hydrograph reconstitution to some extent by temporarily distorting the observed hydrograph and thus forcing a reconstitution that would be more acceptable than the one automatically derived in the least-squares operation.

DERIVATION OF ROUTING COEFFICIENTS

A provision is also included in the program to derive routing coefficients that best reconstitute downstream hydrographs from observed upstream hydrographs and estimates of intermediate runoff. In all cases, this is a process of successive approximations. In the case of continuous functions, such as Muskingum coefficients, the optimization routine used is that employed for reconstituting hydrographs from rainfall and snowmelt, discussed above. In the case of discrete functions, such as straddle or stagger, successive values of the parameters are examined until the standard error of reconstitution begins to increase. An optimum combination of a discrete parameter and any other parameter is determined by sub-optimizing the other parameter for each successive value of the discrete parameter until the sub-optimum standard error of reconstitution decreases.

HYDROGRAPH ROUTING AND COMBINING

Hydrographs of runoff computed for various sub-basins can be routed and combined to form hydrographs at downstream locations. In order to account for changes in shape and time of the hydrographs as they travel downstream, a variety of commonly-used routing procedures are included in the computer program. These include the Muskingum (coefficient) method, the storage-lag method, the multiple-storage method, and the Straddle-stagger method.⁽⁷⁾ Also, a reservoir routing (modified Puls) routine is included. In order to compute hydrographs for a large number of points within a stream system, storage space within the computer core is released as soon as a hydrograph has been routed or combined with another hydrograph. It is, of course, printed out before removal from storage. In order to require the smallest number of hydrographs in storage at any one time, it is necessary to start the computation at the most remote upstream location. Proper combining of hydrographs requires that, once a hydrograph is computed upstream of a location, all operations upstream of that location must be performed before performing the operation for a location that is not above that combining point. This is because the latest computed, routed or combined hydrographs are those used in each new combining operation. Channel losses must be expressed as a linear function of flow in each routing reach (a constant loss plus a ratio of the remaining flow).

(7) Routing of Floods Through River Channels, EM 1110-2-1408, Corps of Engineers, 1 March 1960.

MULTIPLE-FLOOD COMPUTATION

In order to evaluate the effects of changes at any location within a river basin on flows at a downstream point, it is necessary to distribute precipitation throughout the tributary area in a balanced manner, if computation and management feasibility is to be obtained. Otherwise, a great many storm centerings must be used for each successive downstream evaluation, in order to reflect a reasonable range of potential events at that location. In computing a balanced flood, it is recognized that averaging techniques might obscure rare combinations that should possibly be considered in special analyses.

Since the average depth of precipitation over a tributary area generally decreases with the size of area, it would ordinarily be necessary to recompute a decreasing balanced-flood quantity contributed by each sub-area to successive downstream points. In order to avoid this proliferation of hydrographs, it is proposed that different floods corresponding to various depths of precipitation be computed for the entire river basin complex. The depths of precipitation selected should correspond to design quantities for specified drainage basin sizes covering the range of interest. Thus, by providing a table of drainage area vs. design precipitation depth, and a time distribution pattern, various floods can be computed. To minimize confusion, these can be called flood 1, flood 2, etc.

Each of these floods would correspond to a specified drainage basin size, and would be the design flood magnitude for any point in the basin

whose tributary area corresponds to that size. Above such points, there would be a balanced contribution from all parts of the sub-basin. In order to obtain design floods for locations whose tributary area does not exactly correspond to the selected precipitation amounts for a numbered flood, the design flood hydrograph is obtained by interpolating between the two numbered floods whose precipitation corresponds to area sizes nearest the tributary area size. An illustrative example is shown in Figure 2. The interpolation routine used is linear with respect to the logarithm of area size.

The average rates of precipitation for very large areas are small, and adopted loss functions might indicate very low runoff volumes for such precipitation intensities. However, it is recognized that some locations within the basin are experiencing much higher rates of precipitation, while other locations may be obtaining little or no precipitation. In order to account for this, stream system computations are made first for the large precipitation amounts (corresponding to small areas) and continued successively for floods 2, 3, etc., each representing successively larger design area sizes (lower precipitation depths). The excess amounts obtained for each flood are retained in the computer, and used as a proportional contribution for the next flood system computation. The proportion used is the ratio of drainage area sizes that precipitation amounts represent on the design depth-area curve. In effect, the incremental design-criterion precipitation volume for the second flood computation is considered to occur over the incremental design-criterion area

size that such precipitation represents. This combination is applied to all sub-basins, thus maintaining a balance of runoff within the entire basin. As an example, if design precipitation is 10 inches for 100 square miles (flood 1) and 9 inches for 500 square miles (flood 2), precipitation of flood 2 for a 10-square mile sub-area would consist of 10 inches over 2 square miles and $(90-20)/8$ or 8.75 inches over 8 square miles.

Where orographic effects appreciably influence precipitation amounts, the "depth-area" curve of design precipitation can represent ratios to some base precipitation pattern, such as normal annual precipitation, and these would be multiplied by normal precipitation amounts specified for each elevation zone of each sub-area.

It is possible that a storm centered over one tributary can produce a larger flood than would result from the storm spread over both tributary basins above a confluence, despite the additional area of precipitation. This occurs in the system computation occasionally. Although each base flood below a confluence is computed by direct addition of tributary hydrographs, the interpolation procedure used can produce a smaller design flood below the confluence than on the larger contributor of two tributaries. When this occurs, the program provides for an examination of the peaks and volumes of tributary floods, and assures that the flood below the confluence is interpolated such that quantities below the confluence are at least as large as for each tributary flood.

ASSESSMENT OF REGULATORY EFFECTS

One of the most difficult problems in the functional evaluation of a system of flood control reservoirs is determining the over-all effect that a reservoir located on a remote tributary has on floods at a downstream point. A storm might center mainly on this remote tributary, in which case the effect is large; or it might produce little precipitation in that tributary area, in which case the effect could be trivial.

Considering that all magnitudes of storms can occur and that a variety of centerings can also occur more-or-less independently, the expected (average) effect of a reservoir is ordinarily approximated closely by evaluating its effect on a balanced type of flood for each general range of magnitude at the downstream point. Thus, the expected (average usable for economic evaluations) relation between regulated flows and unregulated flows of the same exceedence probability, for any configuration of reservoirs, can be derived from the effects demonstrated in the set of balanced floods computed generally as discussed herein. This would require only two complete multiple-flood system computations: one for unregulated conditions and one for regulated conditions for a given plan of development.

EFFECTS OF URBANIZATION AND CHANNEL IMPROVEMENT

Some dramatic changes have occurred in certain stream systems where urbanization and channel improvement have greatly modified the surface and stream channel characteristics. These changes generally result in reduced losses (increased volumes of runoff) and more rapid concentration of streamflows. Both natural percolation and ponding can be greatly reduced by urbanization and channel improvement. To account for reduction in infiltration loss, a coefficient of imperviousness is used, which simply assumes 100% runoff for the impervious proportion of the drainage basin and usual losses for the remainder. In order to account for reduced storage effects and for more rapid concentration of flows, the unit hydrograph coefficients are reduced in proportion to the estimated increase in average velocity of travel through the stream system. An example is shown in Figure 3.

COMPUTER OPERATION

The flood hydrograph computer package is written in FORTRAN IV and requires about 32,000 words of memory. On an ultra-high-speed computer such as the CDC 6600, time requirement is nominal, since all operations are performed within core. The greatest time requirement is associated with reconstitution of snowmelt floods where 100 to 200 complete computations of snowmelt, losses, etc., in 10 elevation zones and 120 daily

ordinates requires about one minute of central processor time. For rainflood reconstitution, only a few seconds is required. A complete multiple-flood system computation of hydrographs involving snowmelt in a few dozen sub-areas requires about one minute.

A great variety of operations is performed by the program. Each of the general operations indicated above, such as derivation of unit hydrograph or loss rate or routing coefficients, computation of runoff, routing, etc., can be manipulated in many ways. For example, precipitation can be specified as basin-mean values or ratios or station values or can be computed according to some standard criteria. Unit hydrographs can be furnished or computed. Precipitation can be accompanied by snowmelt or not, and in the latter case it is automatically treated as rainfall. This great variety of operations can be tailored to each specific need by use of control numbers in the input data. While many of the operation sequences are intricate and require considerable thought, the controls are designed to simplify use of the program as much as possible.

An automatic plot routine for showing hydrographs and related data in graphic form on the printed output is included. Plotting for each operation is completely pre-programmed, including selection of items to be plotted, titling and selecting scales to be used, and arrangement on the paper. An example is shown in Figure 4.

A summary of pertinent system flows is provided for ease of review and appraisal. An example is shown in Table 1.

CONCLUSION

The comprehensive flood hydrograph computer package described performs virtually all types of flood hydrograph studies needed for the functional evaluation of flood control improvements. A large-memory, high-speed computer is required. Computations are rapid and easily controlled by simplified input data.

The program provides a unique procedure for computing design floods for a complex stream system, whether it be a major river basin such as the Ohio River basin or an urban storm drain system. Provisions are included for easily evaluating the effects of structural improvements and urbanization on flood runoff.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Development of the work described herein was accomplished in The Hydrologic Engineering Center of the Corps of Engineers, United States Army.

TABLE 1

EXAMPLE OF SUMMARY

RUNOFF SUMMARY, AVERAGE CFS

		PEAK	6-HOUR	24-HOUR	72-HOUR
HYDROGRAPH AT	12	59149	57215	42822	21117
HYDROGRAPH AT	11	79768	77522	60807	30858
2 COMBINED	11	112991	109755	85194	43360
ROUTED TO	10	104598	102586	83225	43276
HYDROGRAPH AT	10	127176	122450	85687	43782
2 COMBINED	10	143890	142718	128733	71639
ROUTED TO	9	138170	137369	124822	71468
HYDROGRAPH AT	9	195071	188544	136533	71479
2 COMBINED	9	196179	193194	170740	118018
ROUTED TO	7	185625	183919	169052	117602
HYDROGRAPH AT	8	72696	68376	43351	19400
ROUTED TO	7	54039	52808	40567	19373
HYDROGRAPH AT	7	86120	83385	63050	31023
3 COMBINED	7	202396	201870	195779	134849
ROUTED TO	2	199261	198873	191766	133756
HYDROGRAPH AT	6	80062	77468	55231	27000
HYDROGRAPH AT	4	193071	187515	146292	73788
ROUTED TO	3	173310	169998	141264	73580
HYDROGRAPH AT	3	227981	224112	190664	108347
2 COMBINED	3	288290	286461	261218	153019
ROUTED TO	2	280807	279240	255912	152654
HYDROGRAPH AT	5	177219	174568	151181	86251
HYDROGRAPH AT	2	167530	162671	119635	62599
4 COMBINED	2	378638	375645	341845	234443
ROUTED TO	1	354100	352570	333319	231980
HYDROGRAPH AT	1	195160	190571	150126	82832
2 COMBINED	1	354100	352820	336090	252032

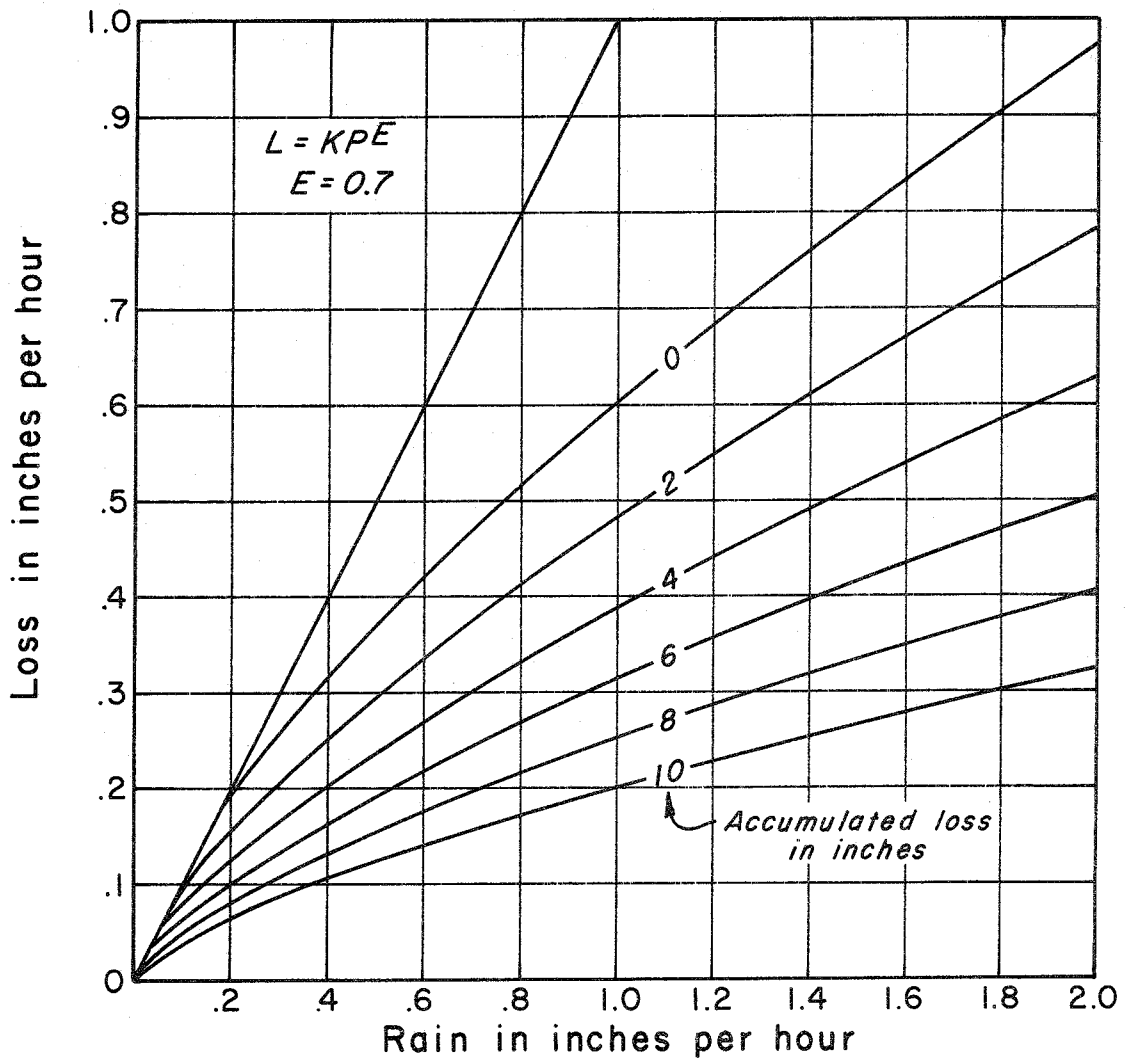
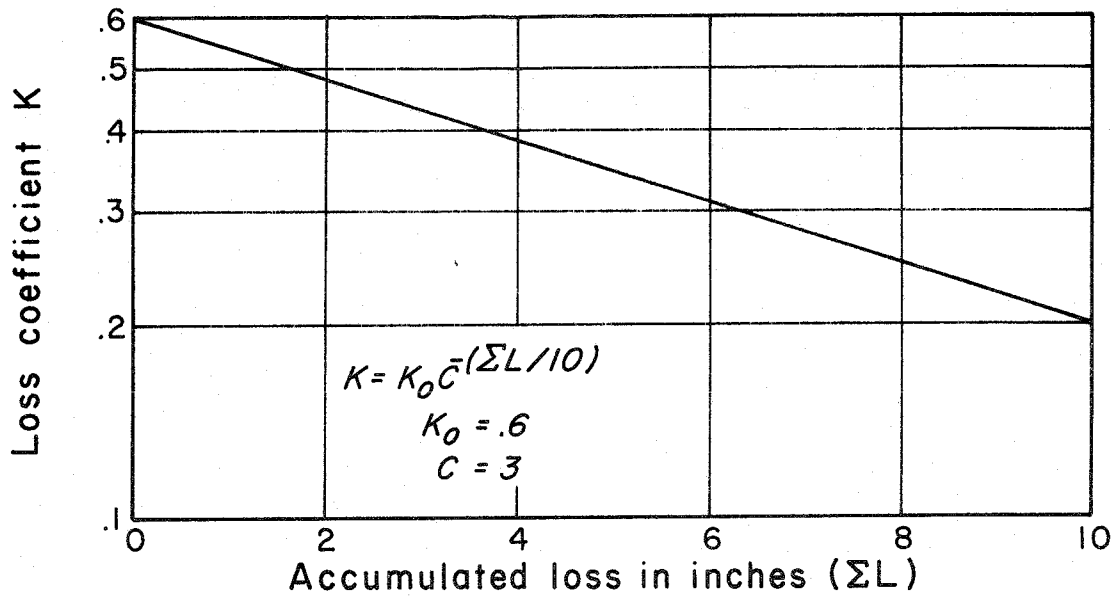


Figure 1
 EXAMPLE OF LOSS FUNCTION

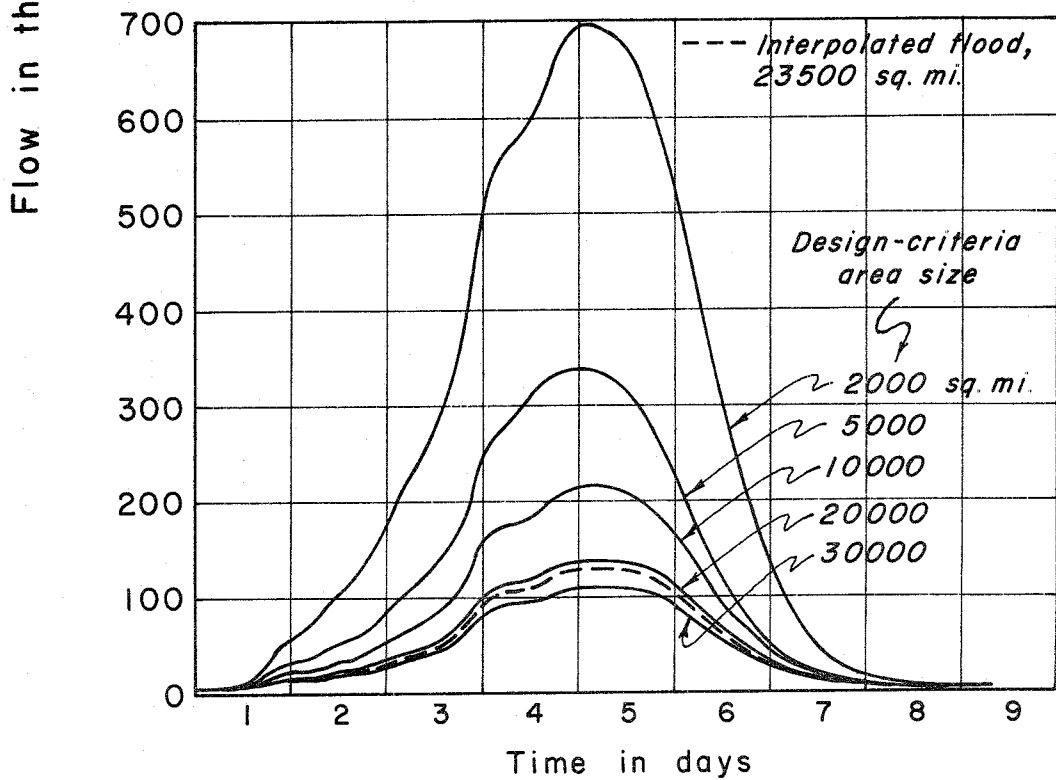
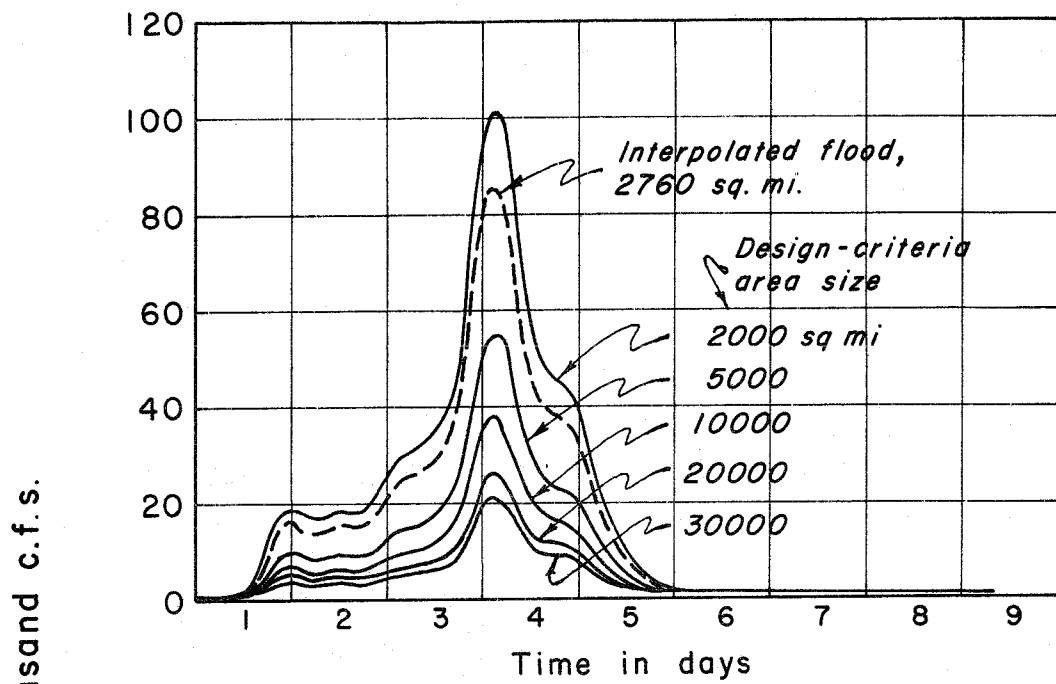


Figure 2
 EXAMPLE OF
 MULTIPLE FLOOD INTERPOLATION

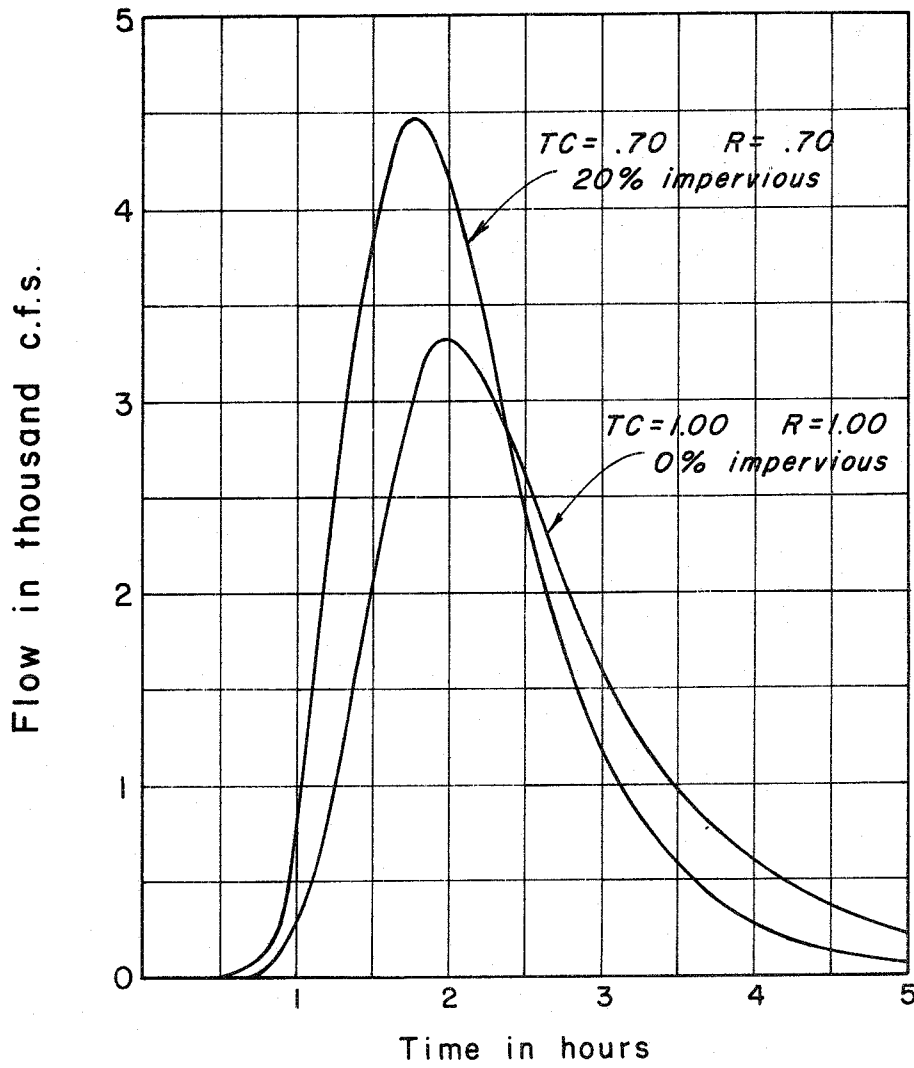
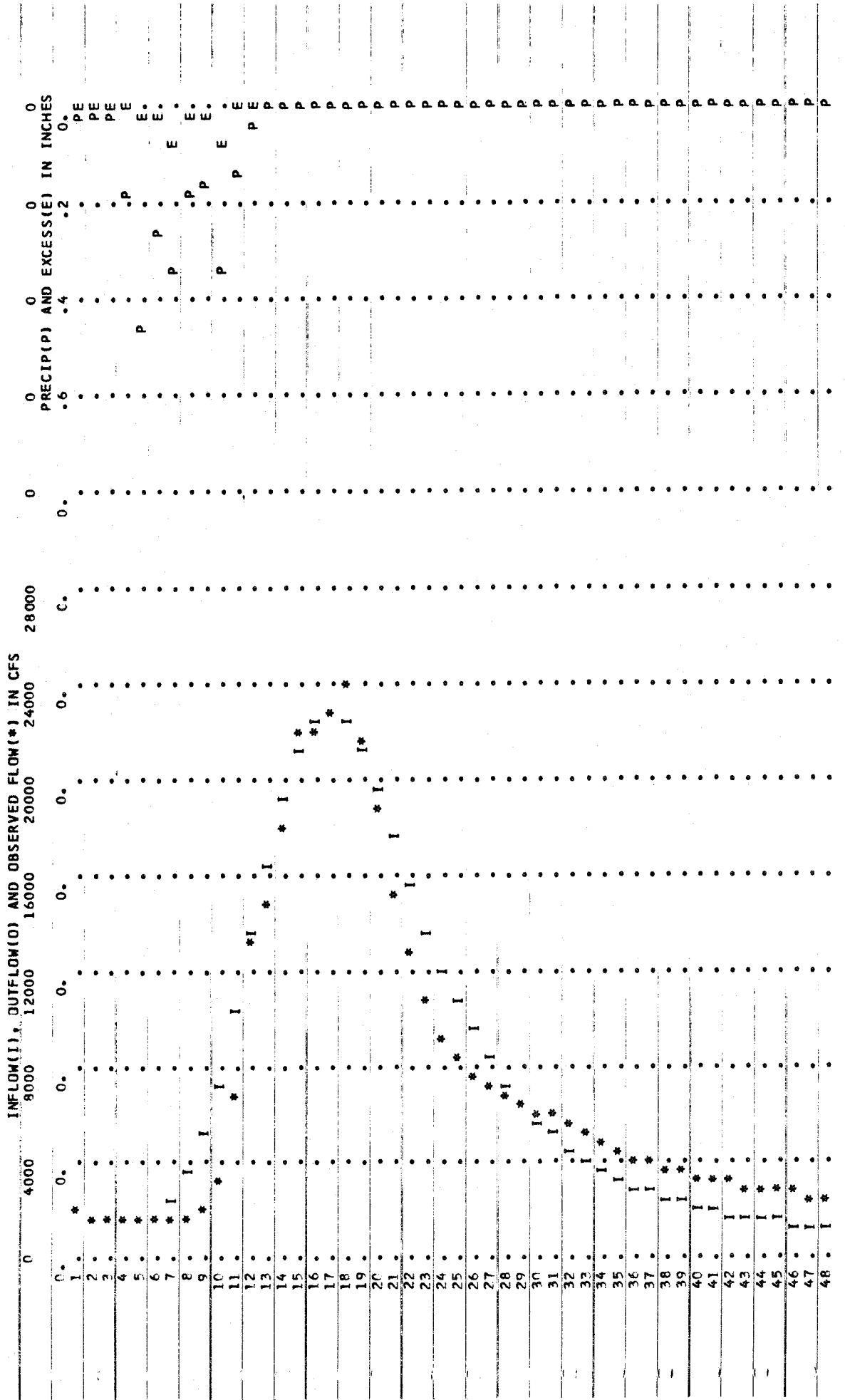


Figure 3
EXAMPLE OF
URBANIZATION EFFECT

Figure 4
EXAMPLE OF PLOTTING

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