# Constraining and Characterizing the size of Atmospheric Rivers: A perspective independent from the detection algorithm.

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#### Abstract

Atmospheric rivers (AR) are large and narrow filaments of poleward horizontal water vapor transport. Because of its direct relationship with horizontal vapor transport, extreme precipitation, and overall AR impacts over land, the AR size is an important characteristic that needs to be better understood. Current AR detection and tracking algorithms have resulted in large uncertainty in estimating AR sizes, with areas varying over several orders of magnitude among different detection methods. We develop and implement five independent size estimation methods to characterize the size of ARs that make landfall over the west coast of North America in the 1980-2017 period and reduce the range of size estimation from ARTMIP. ARs that originate in the Northwest Pacific (WP)  $(100\$\circ\$E-180\$\circ\$E)$  have larger sizes and are more zonally oriented than those from the Northeast Pacific (EP)  $(180\$\circ\$E-240\$\circ\$E)$ . ARs become smaller through their life cycle, mainly due to reductions in their width. They also become more meridionally oriented towards the end of their life cycle. Overall, the size estimation methods proposed in this work provide a range of AR areas (between  $7x10\$\11\\$m\$\2\$$  and  $10\$\13\\$m\$\2\$\2\$$ ) that is several orders of magnitude narrower than current methods estimation. This methodology can provide statistical constraints in size and geometry for the AR detection and tracking algorithms; and an objective insight for future studies about AR size changes under different climate scenarios.

# Constraining and Characterizing the size of Atmospheric Rivers: A perspective independent from the detection algorithm.

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## Key Points:

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9	•	Multiple independent estimates show atmospheric rivers areas are between $7x10^{11}$
10		and 10 <sup>13</sup> m <sup>2</sup> , with several orders of magnitude lower sizes range than ARTMIP
11		estimates
12	•	Landfalling atmospheric rivers originating in the Northwest Pacific are larger and
13		more zonally oriented than those from the Northeast Pacific
14	•	In general, atmospheric rivers tend to decrease in size and become more meridion-

ally oriented through their life cycles

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#### 16 Abstract

Atmospheric rivers (AR) are large and narrow filaments of poleward horizontal water va-17 por transport. Because of its direct relationship with horizontal vapor transport, extreme 18 precipitation, and overall AR impacts over land, the AR size is an important characteristic 19 that needs to be better understood. Current AR detection and tracking algorithms have re-20 sulted in large uncertainty in estimating AR sizes, with areas varying over several orders 21 of magnitude among different detection methods. We develop and implement five indepen-22 dent size estimation methods to characterize the size of ARs that make landfall over the 23 west coast of North America in the 1980-2017 period and reduce the range of size esti-24 mation from ARTMIP. ARs that originate in the Northwest Pacific (WP) (100°E-180°E) 25 have larger sizes and are more zonally oriented than those from the Northeast Pacific (EP) 26 (180°E-240°E). ARs become smaller through their life cycle, mainly due to reductions in 27 their width. They also become more meridionally oriented towards the end of their life 28 cycle. Overall, the size estimation methods proposed in this work provide a range of AR 29 areas (between  $7x10^{11}m^2$  and  $10^{13}m^2$ ) that is several orders of magnitude narrower than 30 current methods estimation. This methodology can provide statistical constraints in size 31 and geometry for the AR detection and tracking algorithms; and an objective insight for 32 future studies about AR size changes under different climate scenarios. 33

#### <sup>34</sup> Plain Language Summary

Atmospheric rivers (AR) are a meteorological phenomenon with strong poleward 35 water vapor transport. ARs have positive and negative impacts over the regions where 36 they make landfall, particularly for West Coast US water resources. AR size (length, width, 37 and area) is an important characteristic that needs to be studied, and could directly relate 38 to the impacts of AR over land. There are large differences in size estimation between 39 current detection methods, with areas varying over several orders of magnitude. Our work 40 focuses on characterizing AR size using five different methods independent of the AR de-41 tection algorithm. We find that North American landfalling ARs originated in the North 42 Pacific have areas between  $7x10^{11}m^2$  and  $10^{13}m^2$  (between 1 and 11 times the area of 43 California), and their lengths are on average four times their widths. ARs originating from 44 the Northwest Pacific (WP)(100E-180E) are bigger and more parallel to the equator than 45 those from the Northeast Pacific (EP)(180E-240E). Our methods provide a narrower range 46 of size estimation than the current methods and could be used to constrain current and fu-47 ture AR detection methods, and it could be used in future studies to understand how AR 48 size could vary under climate change scenarios. 49

#### 50 **1 Introduction**

Atmospheric rivers (ARs) are long and narrow filaments of poleward water vapor 51 transport from the tropics (Newell et al., 1992; Zhu & Newell, 1998; Ralph et al., 2018), 52 that carry over 90% of the meridional moisture transport from the tropics to higher lat-53 itudes but may occupy only about 10% of the total longitudinal length (Zhu & Newell, 54 1998). Mid-latitude continental regions around the world have large amounts of precipi-55 tation associated with ARs (Ramos et al., 2015; Neiman et al., 2008; Lavers & Villarini, 56 2013b; Waliser & Guan, 2017; Viale et al., 2018). ARs are associated with up to half of 57 the extreme events in the top 2% of the precipitation and wind distribution across most 58 mid-latitude regions (Waliser & Guan, 2017). Moreover, landfalling ARs are associated 59 with about 40-75% of extreme wind and precipitation events over 40% of the world's 60 coastlines (Waliser & Guan, 2017). ARs can have both positive and negative effects in 61 continental regions. Their absence can lead to droughts (M. D. Dettinger, 2013), whereas 62 numerous ARs can lead to flooding and other hydrological hazards (Ralph et al., 2006; 63 M. Dettinger, 2011; Ralph & Dettinger, 2011; Lavers & Villarini, 2013a). Ultimately, ARs 64 have important consequences in the hydrological cycle of regions like California. They 65

66 contribute to the accumulation of the snowpack and the reservoir level and water availabil-

- ity (Dirmeyer & Brubaker, 2007; Guan et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2013; Goldenson et al.,
- <sup>68</sup> 2018; Eldardiry et al., 2019).

Along with horizontal vapor transport, AR size (length and width) is an important 69 characteristic that needs to be better understood. Nevertheless, a robust connection be-70 tween AR size and their impacts over land and intensity scale still has to be studied and 71 determined. Ralph et al. (2019) introduced a scale to categorize AR strength based on 72 vapor transport intensity and landfall duration and show that there are beneficial and haz-73 ardous impacts associated with AR events. If ergodicity relates AR size and duration, AR size could be directly related to the benefits and hazards associated with them. Therefore, 75 in addition to integrated vapor transport (IVT) and AR duration, the question "how large 76 are atmospheric rivers?" represents a key aspect of research in the atmospheric river re-77 search community. 78

The Atmospheric River Tracking Method Intercomparison Project (ARTMIP) has 79 made an international effort to understand whether and how our scientific understanding of 80 ARs may depend on the detection algorithm. The different ARTMIP detection and track-81 ing algorithms are designed to answer different questions, and they produce differences in 82 AR climatology (Shields et al., 2018; Rutz et al., 2019; Lora et al., 2020); therefore, there 83 are differences in their detected shape and size. It has become clear that AR detection and 84 tracking are heavily influenced by how researchers have quantitatively defined this phe-85 nomenon, for example, the use of 250 kg m<sup>-1</sup>s<sup>-1</sup> minimum threshold for IVT, which does 86 not account for size but only for the concentration of flow and moisture levels. These dif-87 ferent rules and algorithm thresholds have resulted in large uncertainty in estimating the 88 AR size, with areas varying over several orders of magnitude among different detection 89 methods (see Figure 1). 90

The definition of the boundaries and size quantification of ARs are ongoing research questions, and therefore a great uncertainty among methods is expected. Some recommendations made after the formal AR definition in the Glossary of Meteorology in 2018 were "to keep the definition as short as possible and to leave specifications of how the boundaries of an AR are to be quantified open for future and specialized developments" (Ralph et al., 2018).

The research described in this manuscript works toward the development and im-97 plementation of five independent AR size estimation methods. Since we do not develop 98 a new AR detection algorithm, and the methods described here are not directly related to any existing AR detection or tracking algorithm, we argue that they collectively pro-100 vide a robust and objective way to estimate AR size with a lower range of AR sizes than 101 ARTMIP. The methods presented in this work does not preclude the possibility that the 102 parameter choices are made by the same group people. Nevertheless, we used statistical 103 quantities to estimate ARs size and objectively tested these methods' sensitivity to the 104 chosen parameters. For this work, we analyze the winter (November-April) North Amer-105 ican coast landfalling ARs and create a composite for the 1980-2018 period, to objectively 106 estimate the size of ARs using the IVT from ERA5 reanalysis data (European Centre for 107 Medium-Range Weather Forecasts, 2019). 108

#### 109 **2 Data**

In this work, we use the AR detection results from three different ARTMIP methods (Shields et al., 2018; Rutz et al., 2019): CASCADE\_BARD\_v1 (O'Brien, T. A. et al., 2020), Lora\_global (Lora et al., 2017), and Mundhenk\_v3 (Mundhenk et al., 2016). Employing these three different detection algorithms allows us to broadly sample ARs in the North Pacific Ocean. Each of these methods generates a binary flag: 1 for "AR conditions exist" and 0 for "AR conditions do not exist"; for each latitude-longitude grid point. AR binary



**Figure 1.** White background: AR area calculated from different methods in ARTMIP, ordered by median area (01-28). Colored background: AR area calculated in this work using the ClimateNet ARTMIP campaign (CN), Lagrangian Tracers method (LT), Principal Component Analysis of IVT (PC), KS-test between the IVT of AR and the background IVT field (BG), and the statistical overlapping of the conditional probability distribution of IVT given distance to the center of AR and the background IVT probability density function (SO): see Sections 3.1-3.4 for details. For BG and SO methods, triangles represent the composite of AR with Northeast Pacific origin (EP) and circles represent the composite of AR with Northwest Pacific origin (WP). Blue, orange, and green markers account for the 25, 50, and 75% of the AR life cycle, respectively. For the BG method, we show the results from the two-tailed and one-tailed KS-test. For the SO method, we show the results using IVT<sub>BG1</sub> and IVT<sub>BG2</sub>, that correspond to a  $p \ge \sigma^+$  at 179.5 and 193.9 kg m<sup>-1</sup>s<sup>-1</sup>s, respectively. (Algorithm names are included in the supporting information Table S1 for reference).

flags were calculated using thermodynamic and dynamical fields from the Modern-Era
Retrospective Analysis for Research and Applications Version 2 (MERRA-2) reanalysis
(Gelaro et al., 2017) as a part of the ARTMIP Tier 1 experiment (Shields et al., 2018). In
the methods section, we describe how we use these binary flags to create the AR compos-

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ite.

The column-integrated water vapor (IWV) and IVT, are the two main variables used to define and characterize ARs (Ralph et al., 2018). For this work, we focus on IVT and calculate it using the vertically integrated eastward and northward water vapor flux  $[\dot{q}_x, \dot{q}_y]$  (kg m<sup>-1</sup>s<sup>-1</sup>) provided by the ERA5 reanalysis. IVT is defined as

$$IVT = \sqrt{\dot{q}_x^2 + \dot{q}_y^2},\tag{1}$$

125 where

$$\dot{q}_x = -\frac{1}{g} \int_{p_b}^{p_t} q \, u \, dp, \tag{2}$$

$$\dot{q}_{y} = -\frac{1}{g} \int_{p_{b}}^{p_{t}} q \, v \, dp, \tag{3}$$

q is the specific humidity [kg kg<sup>-1</sup>], u and v the zonal and meridional wind velocity [m s<sup>-1</sup>] over the pressure surface p,  $P_b$  is 1000 hPa,  $P_t$  is 200 hPa, and g is the gravitational acceleration. We also use u and v for the Lagrangian in subsection 3.3. ERA5 data have a temporal resolution of 1 hour and a horizontal resolution of 0.25 degrees. We focus our work on the 1980-2017 period. Following O'Brien, T. A. et al. (2020), in order to avoid the large contiguous regions of high IVT near the tropics associated with the intertropical convergence zone (ITCZ), we spatially filter the IVT field as

$$IVT' = IVT \cdot (1 - e^{\frac{-y^2}{2\Delta y^2}}),$$
(4)

where IVT'(x, y) is the filtered IVT field, x and y are the longitude and latitude, respectively, and  $\Delta y$  is half-width at half-maximum of the filter. We use  $\Delta y = 15^{\circ}$ , which effectively damps the IVT to zero within the ITCZ. Hereon we refer to the filtered field as IVT for simplicity.

This analysis focuses on 37 wet seasons (November-April) in the 1980-2017 period over the North American coast. We focus on landfalling ARs and effectively restrain the study domain to the North Pacific Basin (0°N-90°N, 100°E-240°E).

Furthermore, since this work's primary focus is to study the size of ARs, we only utilize output from the three ARTMIP algorithms to obtain a broad and robust sample of AR occurrences (time and approximate location). With the exception of the areas shown in Figure 1, we explicitly avoid using the exact shape or size determined by any detection and tracking algorithm.

#### 146 **3 Methods**

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We apply the AR life cycle tracking algorithm from Zhou et al. (2018) to the AR 147 binary flag data (from the three detection methods used in this work) and record each de-148 tected AR position and timestamp. To ensure we sample over the highest possible number 149 of ARs and avoid double-sampling events, we start by taking all the ARs detected from 150 one tracking method. We add the AR events from the second tracking method that are 151 not detected by the first, and finally, we add the ones from the third method that are not 152 in the first or the second. It is essential to note that we only record the AR time stamp 153 and center coordinates of each object through its life cycle (calculated using Equations 7 154 and 8), and we do not infer the shape or size of ARs from these detection algorithms. Our 155 size-estimating methods later use the recorded AR center as a first guess on the time and 156 location of an AR. 157

In this fashion, we create a 1980-2017 wet season (November-April) dataset of North American coast landfalling AR objects. Each object corresponds to one instantaneous snapshot of an AR and contains its center's timestamp and location through its life cycle. The dataset is divided into two parts, based on AR origin location (Northwest Pacific "WP" 100°E-180°E vs. Northeast Pacific "EP" 180°E-240°E); and classified by its life cycle stage, at 25%, 50%, and 75% of the AR total life cycle. All subsequent analyses and methods in this work are applied separately for each of these six sub-datasets.

3.1 Principal Component Analysis of IVT (PC Method)

Recognizing that ARs are associated with ridge-like structures in the IVT field, the principal components (PC) method is designed to estimate AR size by modeling AR shapes as Gaussian. For each object, we apply principal component analysis (PCA) to the high IVT cluster closest to the AR object's center (or first guess) and compute the weighted covariance matrix  $C_w$  (Price, 1972) of latitude and longitude

$$C_{w} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{nx} \sum_{j=1}^{ny} IVT_{ij} (x_{ij} - \bar{x})^{T} (y_{ij} - \bar{y})}{\sum_{i=1}^{nx} \sum_{j=1}^{ny} IVT_{ij}},$$
(5)

where  $x_{ij}$  and  $y_{ij}$  are the longitude and latitude of the ERA5 grid,  $\overline{x}$ ,  $\overline{y}$  are the spatial zonal and meridional mean, and the weight is given by the IVT<sub>ij</sub> at each grid point.  $C_w$ 

#### is a 2x2 matrix, such that

$$C_w \begin{pmatrix} \vec{s}_0 \\ \vec{s}_1 \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} \lambda_0 \, \vec{s}_0 \\ \lambda_1 \, \vec{s}_1 \end{pmatrix},\tag{6}$$

where the eigenvectors  $\vec{s}_0, \vec{s}_1$  are the principal components of the IVT field, and  $\lambda_0, \lambda_1$  are the eigenvalues. The principal components represent the directions of maximum variance of the IVT field near the AR. The largest eigenvalue represents the direction that explains the largest IVT variance, hence the longest AR axis (along the AR,  $\vec{s}_0$ ), while the smallest would represent the shortest AR axis (across the AR,  $\vec{s}_1$ ).

To filter the IVT field that is far from one AR object, we use a 2-step iterative method. 179 First, we find the IVT cluster closest to the first guess location and define the AR "core" 180 as the points where IVT is greater than 0.5 times the local maximum IVT. We apply PCA 181 to the AR core and use the eigenvalues and eigenvectors to create a 2D Gaussian func-182 tion using Equation (11). Then, we filter all the points from the original ERA5 IVT field 183 where the core Gaussian function is less than  $10^{-3}$  (we found this value worked well for 184 the ARs objects analyzed in this work). We then apply PCA to the filtered IVT field and 185 use the results to estimate the size of the AR object. 186

We define the length (width) of the AR as twice the magnitude of  $\vec{s}_0$  ( $\vec{s}_1$ ), and its 187 area as the ellipse whose axes are the principal components  $\vec{s}_0$  and  $\vec{s}_1$  (white solid lines 188 and ellipse in Figure 2). The AR orientation  $\theta$  is defined as the angle between  $\vec{s}_1$  and the 189 equator. Estimating the area of an AR as an ellipse is an idealization that allows us to 190 simplify the problem and avoid the introduction of more rules and thresholds that would 191 essentially result in a new detection algorithm. We realize that this will affect the calcu-192 lation of areas with more highly irregular AR shapes. However, in a case-by-case inspec-193 tion, we find that this is a good approximation for the average AR in this work. Moreover, 194 an overlap plot of all the AR events (Figure 8) shows that, on average, this is an adequate 195 idealized model representation of ARs, which becomes particularly relevant for the statisti-196 cal methods described in section 3.2. We utilize fastKDE (O'Brien et al., 2014, 2016) to 197 calculate probability density functions (PDF) of length, width, area, and orientation, using 198 all the AR objects in our six sub-datasets (https://github.com/LBL-EESA/fastkde/ 199 releases/tag/v1.0.18). The method described in this section –applying PCA to the 200 IVT field and define length and width- is labeled PC throughout this work.



**Figure 2.** Principal component analysis method. White lines represent the PC of the AR, and the white contour is the area estimated from the ellipse whose axes are the PC. The red lines represent directions along and across AR used to sample IVT for SO and BG methods (dashed/solid represent the first/second PC).

# 3.2 Estimating AR Size from Composites and Background IVT Field (BG and SO Methods)

To estimate the AR length and width, we use two different statistical methods for determining the distance at which the AR composite becomes indistinguishable from the background IVT field (from now on referred only as background for simplicity). We create an AR composite from a total of 1,150 (980) AR objects for the WP (EP) in the 1980-2017 wet seasons. We randomly sub-sample 300 AR objects (from each region) to ensure independence between each AR object used to create the composite and increase the statistical robustness of these methods.

The statistical overlapping method (SO) looks at the overlapping between the background PDF and the composite as a function of the distance to the AR center. On the other hand, the background method (BG) uses a Kolmogorov–Smirnov test (KS-test) to look at the difference between the background cumulative distribution function (CDF) and the conditional probability distribution (CPD) of the composite IVT given the distance to the AR center. We describe both methods in §3.2.2 and §3.2.3. For the SO and BG methods, we calculate the AR composite area by modeling the shape of ARs as ellipses, whose axes are the length and width calculated by each method.

We define the AR center coordinates  $(\bar{x}, \bar{y})$  for every AR object within the composite as the IVT-weighted center of mass:

$$\overline{x} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{nx} \sum_{j=1}^{ny} \text{IVT}_{ij} x_{ij}}{\sum_{i=1}^{nx} \sum_{j=1}^{ny} \text{IVT}_{ij}},$$
(7)

$$\overline{y} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{nx} \sum_{j=1}^{ny} \text{IVT}_{ij} y_{ij}}{\sum_{i=1}^{nx} \sum_{j=1}^{ny} \text{IVT}_{ij}}.$$
(8)

We then sample IVT along the direction of the principal components (see Section 3.1) through all the domain (represented by the red lines in Figure 2), and calculate the distance d of each point along this line to the AR center

$$d = ||(x', y') - (\overline{x}, \overline{y})||, \tag{9}$$

where (x', y') represent the coordinates of the points along each of the principal components' direction. In this fashion, we create a joint distribution of IVT and *d* for the AR composite, and utilize fastKDE to calculate the CPD of IVT given *d*: P(IVT | d).

#### 3.2.1 Estimation of the Background

We estimate the PDF and CDF of the background by randomly sampling IVT from 228 ERA5 reanalysis data through the North Pacific Ocean in the period of study. Since the 229 definition of 'background' is somewhat ambiguous, we calculate two separate backgrounds: 230  $IVT_{bk_1}$ , where the grid cells inside an AR are masked at the time of sampling (AR grid 231 cells not used to calculate the background); and  $IVT_{bk_2}$ , where ARs are not masked at the 232 time of IVT sampling. Despite the fact that  $IVT_{bk_2}$  includes high-IVT points inside some 233 ARs, we remark that both backgrounds are statistically indistinguishable with a confidence 234 level of 95% according to a two-sample KS-test. The CDF of the background is higher 235 than 0.84 ( $p \ge \sigma^+$ , where  $\sigma^+$  is the value of CDF at +1 standard deviation) at 179.5 kg 236  $m^{-1}s^{-1}s$  and 193.9 kg  $m^{-1}s^{-1}s$  for IVT<sub>bk1</sub> and IVT<sub>bk2</sub> respectively, which are later used 237 for the SO and BG methods (§3.2.2 and §3.2.3) and referred to in the text label in Fig-238 ure 1. 239

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#### 3.2.2 Statistical Overlapping of IVT With the Background Field PDF (SO)

One way to estimate the AR composite's length and width is by looking at the overlap of the background PDF and the composite IVT conditional probability distribution given the distance to the center of AR (CPD(d)). We define the statistical boundary of the AR composite as the distance where the CPD(d)=0.16 contour is greater or equal to background IVT value at CDF=0.16. In other words, where CPD(d) at -1 standard deviation ( $\sigma^1$ ) intersects with the background PDF at +1 standard deviation ( $\sigma^+$ ) (where the lower boundary of the shading contour intersects the dotted line in Figure 3). With this method, we determine the AR extent by determining the distance *d* where the overlap between the composite PDF and the background PDF is less than two standard deviations. This method is referred to as SO throughout this work.



**Figure 3.** Conditional probability distribution of IVT given the distance to the center of the AR. Red colors represent the transverse direction (across AR), black colors represent the longitudinal direction (along AR). The 0.5 conditional probability *C* is represented in solid thick lines. The shading corresponds to probabilities between 0.16 and 0.84. According to the statistical overlapping method, the AR is delimited by those distances where the dashed line (background IVT  $p \ge 0.84$ ) intersects the 0.16 CPD contour (marked in red and black dots). For example, for the Northwest Pacific composite (WP) in panel (a), these intersections occur at approximately from -1,500 and 1,200 km along the AR, and -600 and 400 km across the AR. The triangles mark these distances of overlapping with the background.

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#### 3.2.3 K-S Statistics Between AR Composite and the Background CDF (BG)

The KS-test is used to determine at which distance the CDF of the composite IVT is indistinguishable from the background CDF. This method assumes that the IVT distribution within ARs differs from the background.

From the CPD(d), we calculate the CDF of the composite IVT at different distances 255 along and across the AR composite (CDF(d)). We compare the CDF(d) against the back-256 ground CDF (4) and apply two-tailed and one-tailed KS-tests (KS1 and KS2, respec-257 tively). For the KS1, we define the AR boundaries at the distance where the background 258 CDF is significantly lower than the background at the 95% confidence level. For the KS2, 259 the AR boundaries are delimited by those distances at which the KS-statistic reaches a 260 minimum value, *i.e.* where the CDF(d) and the background CDF are most similar. Fig-261 ure 4 shows how the CDF(d) (colored dashed lines) converges to the background CDF 262 (solid black line) far from the center of the AR composite (d = 0 km, represented by 263 the most transparent dashed lines). Both BG and SO methods provide a robust statisti-264 cal estimation of the AR composite size. In the supporting information, we show a test 265 of the sensitivity of the SO method to changes in the background PDF and to changes in 266 the CPD(d) overlapping values; we also test the sensitivity of the BG method to changes 267 in the statistical level of significance for the one-tailed BG method (Text S1 and Figures 268 S1(a-b)). 269



**Figure 4.** Colored lines show the CDF of IVT for the AR composite, at different distances from the AR center (CDF(d)); less transparent dashed lines represent a farther distance to the AR center. The black solid line shows the CDF of the background. The KS-test evaluates where the composite IVT and the background are statistically indistinguishable (for the two-tailed test) or where the composite IVT CDF is statistically lower than the background CDF (for the one-tailed test).

#### **3.3 Lagrangian Tracers for Area Estimation (LT)**

Previous work by Garaboa-Paz et al. (2015) suggests that ARs relate to attracting 271 Lagrangian Coherent Structures (LCS) in the 2D and 3D flow fields. With this in mind, 272 we hypothesize that Lagrangian tracers can be used to estimate AR area from a fluid dy-273 namics point of view. The association of ARs with LCS implies that tracers inside the AR 274 are more likely to preserve spatial coherence through backward and forward trajectory in-275 tegration. Furthermore, tracers near the boundaries and outside of the AR, compared with 276 those inside the AR, would be more likely to disperse and end up at a final location far-277 ther from its initial location. 278

To do so, we use a 2D passive Lagrangian tracer advection model. Tracers are advected over pressure surfaces using 2D velocity fields from ERA5 reanalysis following a stochastic advection equation

$$dx_i = (u_i + \sqrt{2\overline{u}_i} w_i)dt, \tag{10}$$

where i represents the zonal or meridional directions, u the 2D velocity over pressure 282 surfaces,  $\overline{u}_i$  is the root mean square of the local velocity near the tracer (Sawford, 1991; 283 Griffa et al., 1995; Rodean, 1996; LaCasce, 2008), and  $w_i$  is a random perturbation with 284 zero mean and unit variance (i.e., a Wiener process). This random nudging in the tracer 285 position at each step helps represent diffusion, turbulence, and other processes not resolved 286 by the model. In the supporting information Text S2 and Figure S2, we show a test of the 287 sensitivity of AR area to changes of the scaling velocity  $\sqrt{2\overline{u_i}}$ . We solve Equation (10) 288 using the Euler method with a time-step of 1 hour (same as the ERA5 resolution, thus 289 avoiding the need for time interpolation). The model uses bilinear interpolation in space 290 to estimate the velocity at the tracer location. 291

We select the tracers' initial positions in the vicinity of a given AR by randomly selecting 2000 points from the entire study domain (-80S to 80N, 180W to 180E), with a probability given by a 2D Gaussian function centered in the AR

$$g(x, y) = \exp(-(a(x - \bar{x})^2 + 2b(x - \bar{x})(y - \bar{y}) + c(y - \bar{y})^2)),$$
(11)

295 where

$$a = \frac{\cos^2(\theta)}{2\lambda_0^2} + \frac{\sin^2(\theta)}{2\lambda_1^2},\tag{12}$$

$$b = \frac{\sin(2\theta)}{4\lambda_0^2} - \frac{\sin(2\theta)}{4\lambda_1^2},\tag{13}$$

$$c = \frac{\sin^2(\theta)}{2\lambda_0^2} + \frac{\cos^2(\theta)}{2\lambda_1^2},$$
 (14)

 $\lambda_0$  and  $\lambda_1$  are the eigenvalues of the covariance matrix in Equation (5),  $\overline{x}$  and  $\overline{y}$  are the 296 longitude and latitude of the AR center, and  $\theta$  is the angle between the along the AR axis 297  $(\vec{s}_1 \text{ from Equation (5)})$  and the equator. We observe that for fewer than 500 tracers, the 298 AR area might not be correctly resolved since, for larger ARs, there might be regions in-299 side the AR without initial tracers. We find that, in general, 2,000 is a sufficient number of initial tracers and allows a spatial distribution that concentrates in the vicinity of the 301 IVT blob and extends further from it. Our results do not vary for larger number of trac-302 ers. In this fashion, we ensure that the initial position of tracers is distributed inside and 303 outside of the AR, but no tracers (or a negligible number) are far from the AR (the tracers 304 initial position distribution is represented by the black dots in Figure 5 (a)). Additionally, 305 we simulate 50 tracers for each initial position, resulting in 50 different trajectories due 306 to the random term in Equation (10). This is equivalent to repeating the experiment 50 307 times, thus increasing the statistical robustness of the results. We find similar results using 308 a higher number of repetitions. 309

The area estimation is done as follows. Starting from the initial position (black 310 dots), we compute trace trajectories five days backward in time (resulting in the orange 311 dots in Figure 5 (a)). We then use these new locations to calculate the forward in time 312 five days trajectory (resulting in the blue dots in Figure 5 (a)). We compute this process 313 for all pressure levels between the surface and 500 hPa and record the tracers' final po-314 sition at each level. We choose five days because we need a timescale longer than the 315 boundary layer and convective timescales, and we want a timescale as long as possible 316 without exceeding the Rossby timescale by too much. Moreover, other works have found 317 that few ARs have a longer duration than five days (Payne & Magnusdottir, 2016; Zhou et 318 al., 2018). 319

We gather the final tracers from all levels and calculate the bivariate PDF of the final tracer latitudes and longitudes. We estimate the AR area as the size of the largest contiguous contour of PDF=0.68 (the PDF of the final position within two standard deviations), corresponding to the thicker green contour if Figure 5 (b). Supporting information Text S2 and Figure S3 show a sensitivity test of AR area relative to PDF value changes.

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#### **3.4 ClimateNet Method (CN)**

We use *ClimateNet* Climate Contours (https://www.nersc.gov/research-and -development/data-analytics/big-data-center/climatenet/, http://labelmegold .services.nersc.gov/climatecontours\\_gold/tool.html), which is a guided user interface for annotating climate events, facilitating the collection of hand-labeled weather datasets (Kashinath et al., 2020).

We use the data generated using the ClimateNet labeling tool during the 3rd ART-331 MIP workshop (http://www.cgd.ucar.edu/projects/artmip/meetings.html) in 332 October 2019. Half a day out of a 2.5-day workshop was devoted to this task, includ-333 ing over 15 workshop participants who labeled 660 time slices of data during the session 334 (O'Brien et al., 2020). A total of 1822 AR detections were made over the whole globe, 335 and 378 were made in the North Pacific Ocean region (which will be referred to as global 336 and NP, respectively) using an Atmospheric Model Intercomparison Project (AMIP) sim-337 ulation performed with the Community Atmosphere Model (version 5) running at 25-km 338



**Figure 5.** (a) Initial position (black), after five days backward advection (orange), and five days forward advection from the orange tracer locations (blue). The cyan contour shows the region with most (68%) of the tracers after the the five-day forward advection. (b) IVT (filled contours) and PDF of the tracers' final position (contours). Thicker cyan contour at p = 0.68 area is used to estimate the AR size in the Lagrangian tracers method (LT).

resolution (Wehner et al., 2014). We calculate the area and orientation of each of these
 hand-labeled ARs. Unlike the methods described in Sections 3.1-3.3, this method does not
 distinguish between the AR-genesis location or life cycle.

#### 342 **3.5 AR Size Calculation Methods Summary**

To help the reader keep track of the various methods used in this work, Table 1 summarizes a description for each method and the short names used throughout this work.

Acronym	Description	Section
PC	Principal components analysis of atmospheric river inte- grated vapor transport field.	§3.1
SO	Statistical overlapping of AR composite conditional proba- bility distribution of IVT given the distance to the AR center and the PDF of the background IVT field.	§3.2.2
BG	Comparison of the IVT CDF of AR composite with the CDF of the background IVT field.	§3.2.3
LT	PDF of Lagrangian tracers final position near an AR after backward and forward 5 days advection.	§3.3
CN	Hand-labeled ARs using CLIMANET contours labeling tool by a group of experts at the 2019 ARTMIP workshop.	§3.4

Table 1. Methods for AR size estimation used in this work.

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#### 346 4 Results

We focus on the size of North American landfalling ARs. Our results are consistent among methods: with AR areas within the 10<sup>11</sup> to 10<sup>12</sup> m<sup>2</sup> range in four of the five methods: PC, LT, BG, and SO; and between 10<sup>11</sup> to 10<sup>13</sup> m<sup>2</sup> for CN. Our results have a narrower range of AR area than the ARTMIP ensemble (Figure 1), with order-of-magnitude consistency with the majority of the algorithms used in ARTMIP. The novel statistical methods in this study (PC, SO, BG, and LT) are in good agreement with the manually labeled AR sizes from the ClimateNet method. Table 2 contains a summary of the length, width, and area for all four methods, depending on the AR genesis location and life cycle.
 Figure 8 shows a visual representation of the size results for PC, LT, BG, and SO methods for WP and WP at 50% life cycle.

#### 4.1 AR Length and Width

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Figure 6 (a-c) shows the PDF of length and width calculated by PC. The PDF exhibits the typical "long and narrow" AR shape, from 2.3 to 4.5 times longer than the width (Table 3). According to PC, ARs have a median width of 844 km (90% of the cases were between 520 and 1386 km), and length of 3842 km (90% between 2495 and 5816 km) for the AR with WP origin; and median width of 814 km (90% of the cases were between 6477 and 1476 km), and length of 3413 km (90% between 2321 and 5400 km) for the ARs with EP Origin.

According to PC, WP has larger and wider ARs than EP. The differences in length are statistically significant at a 99% confidence level, however differences in width are not. Concerning the life cycle, the WP composite has the smallest AR size at 25% and the largest at 50% of its life cycle, nevertheless only the differences in length are statistically significant. The EP composite length does not change much through the life cycle. However, the width decreases monotonically through its life cycle, with differences statistically significant at a 99% confidence level.

Consistently with PC, BG, and SO methods show larger ARs originated in the WP. According to BG, the ARs composite length (width) at 50% life cycle is 4019 (1121) km for the WP and 3275 (501) km for the EP. The SO's composite length (width) at 50% life cycle is 2751 (916) km for the WP and 2107 (646) km for the EP. It is possible that the EP and WP ARs' size differences might come from the landfall condition and that focusing on landfall means that we are preferentially looking at that type of AR, since this work is focused specifically on landfalling ARs. The difference in size between WP and EP ARs and of non-land-falling ARs could be explored in future work.

The lengths determined by the BG and SO methods exhibit little variation throughout the life cycle. In contrast, AR width decreased by a factor of 0.67 (WP) and 0.60 (WP) for BG, and 0.85 (WP) 0.69 (EP) for SO. These results suggest that the AR area difference through the life cycle is mainly due to changes in width.

#### 4.2 AR Area

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Figure 6 (d-e) show the PDFs of the AR area, calculated by PC method (solid lines) and LT (dashed lines). For the WP ARs, the area has a median of  $2.47 \times 10^{12} \text{m}^2$  and  $2.75 \times 10^{12} \text{m}^2$ for PC and LT, respectively. For the EP ARs, the area has a median of  $2.23 \times 10^{12} \text{m}^2$  and  $2.33 \times 10^{12} \text{m}^2$  for PC and LT, respectively. The WP composite has larger areas than the EP at a 99% confidence level. EP ARs do not show a significant difference in the area through the life cycle, while WP ARs attain maximum area at their mid-life cycle for both the PC and LT methods.

The one-tailed KS-test (one-tailed BG) estimates the AR composite area as  $3.67 \times 10^{12} \text{m}^2$ and  $1.40 \times 10^{12} \text{m}^2$  for WP and EP, respectively (at 50% life cycle). SO estimates a composite area of  $1.75 \times 10^{12} \text{m}^2$  and  $8.74 \times 10^{11} \text{m}^2$  for WP and EP, respectively (at 50% life cycle), with more extensive (both width and length) AR from WP when compared with the EP AR.

BG results show a decrease the AR composite area decreases through the life cycle by a factor of 0.68 and 0.54 for the WP and EP, respectively (decrease of ~0.83 and ~0.62 according to SO). These changes come mainly from differences in width.



**Figure 6.** (a-c) PDF of AR length (dashed lines) and width (solid lines) using the principal components method (PC), at 25, 50, and 75% of the AR life cycle. WP composite in blue lines, EP composite in orange lines. (d-f) PDF of AR area for the PC method in solid lines, and the LT method in dashed lines. Lines colors are the same as in (a-c).

CN results show a median area of  $3.34 \times 10^{12} \text{m}^2$  (90% of data between  $6.15 \times 10^{11}$ 400 and 7.70x10<sup>12</sup>m<sup>2</sup>) in the North Pacific region. Figure 7(a) shows larger AR areas for the 401 global analysis  $4.29 \times 10^{12} \text{m}^2$  (90% of data between  $9.43 \times 10^{11}$  and  $1.09 \times 10^{13} \text{m}^2$ ). All the 402 other methods (PC, LT, BG, and SO) are consistent with the CN area result, which are in 403 fact hand-labeled AR by experts, demonstrating that these methods give reasonable es-404 timates for AR size. If so, our results using ClimateNet might be on the larger side in 405 terms of AR area, which could be related to the specific shapes the user can determine, 406 or where the user exactly locates the AR "boundary" polygon at the time of labeling, how-407 ever, these details are outside of the scope of this study. 408

The sensitivity tests (supporting information Text S1 and S2, and Figures S1 to S3) show that for the SO method, variations in the overlapping background PDF and composite CPD values from (PDF, CPD)=(0.05,0.95) (minimum overlapping) to (PDF, CPD)=(0.5,0.5) (large overlapping) result in area changes from 2.84x10<sup>11</sup> to 9.97<sup>12</sup> m<sup>2</sup>. The one-tailed BG sensitivity test to the significance level (p = 0.8 to p = 0.99) shows a change in AR area from 2.26<sup>12</sup> to 1.48<sup>12</sup> m<sup>2</sup>. For BG and SO, AR length shows more sensitivity to variations in the parameters than width.

The LT sensitivity test shows that using 0.68 as the PDF contour to define AR size, variations in the scaling velocity (from 0.125 times to 4 times  $\sqrt{u}$ ) result in an area changes from  $1.53^{12}$  to  $4.16^{12}$  m<sup>2</sup>. Variations in the PDF value used (ranging from 0.4 to 0.93) re-

sult in area changes between one and two orders of magnitude (Supporting information

Text S2 and Figure S2). All the sensitivity analysis described here are computed for the
 WP at 50% life cycle. We find similar results for different stages of the life cycle and for EP.



**Figure 7.** (a) PDFs of AR area (PDFs are not normalized for visualization). PDFs from the PC and LT methods are calculated using data from WP and EP at 50% life cycle. The lowest to highest obtained values from the BG (SO) methods are represented in the shaded grey area (between solid grey lines) for comparison. (b) PDF of AR orientation with respect to the equator from the PC method at 50% of the AR life cycle for the WP (blue line), EP (orange line), and the North Pacific ClimateNet (green line) composites.

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#### 4.3 AR Orientation

Figure 7(b) shows the PDF of the AR orientation with respect to the equator  $\theta$ , calculated using PC and CN methods. PC method results show that ARs originating in the WP are more zonally orientated than those originating in the EP. WP ARs have a median  $\theta$  of 13.7° (with 90% of the data between 7.7° and 99.8°). EP ARs have a median  $\theta$  of 428 49.1° (with 90% of the data between 10.4° and 142.6°). CN results show a median  $\theta$  of 429 26.5° (with 90% of the data between 6.9° and 157.2°) for the North Pacific AR.

With respect to the AR life cycle, both WP and EP show an increase in the median  $\theta$ : 28° to 37° for the WP, and 46° to 53° for the EP. Table 2 summarizes the results of length, width, and area of the AR composite from all the methods in this work. AR geometrical characteristics (aspect ratio and orientation) are summarized in Table 3.

#### **5** Discussion and Conclusions

Figure 8 color contours show the superimposition of IVT from all the AR objects 435 in this study for WP and EP at 50% AR life cycle. We present Figure 8 as a summary of 436 the PC, SO, BG, and LT methods. We aim to illustrate the methods together and make 437 them more clear to the reader. To generate this plot, we rotated all the AR objects to the 438 same frame of reference. The angle of orientation  $\theta$  of each AR represents the median 439 angle with respect to the equator, and the dotted angle is the -1 and +1 standard deviations 440 of  $\theta$ . EP ARs are not only more zonally oriented, but they also have greater variance in 441  $\theta$  than WP ARs. The break grey lines represent the 5th, 50th, and 95th percentile of the 442 PC method. The golden and red bars represent the SO and BG length and width. The 443 solid cyan line represents the LT method and was created by rotating the final position 444 of tracers to the same system of reference of the plot and then calculating the bivariate 445 PDF (cyan contour corresponds to p=0.68). We can see that BG, SO, PC and LT are very 446

consistent in estimating the AR width. On the other hand, AR length seems to have more
variability among methods (in the supporting information, we show that AR length shows
to be more sensitive than width to parameter variations). The results from LT show an
asymmetric contour with an elongated tail to the southwest end of the AR. They suggest
that an AR detection algorithm based on "fluid dynamics" could be helpful to determine
the AR boundaries independently of thresholds or parameter choices and other variables
such as IVT. This is worthy of exploring in future works.

	Northwest Pacific			Northeast Pacific		
	0.25	0.5	0.75	0.25	0.5	0.75
Method		Length [km]				
PC 5-95%	3553 2168-5984	3842 2495-5816	3757 2608-5562	3366 2239-5596	3413 2321-5454	3425 2315-5400
BG	2783	2932	2813	2431	1640	1764
SO	2422	2650	2532	1986	1944	1580
Method			Widtl	<b>ı</b> [km]		
PC 5-95%	823 520-1386	844 530-1405	838 510-1366	845 513-1550	814 477-1476	809 454-1516
BG	664	912	769	465	882	355
SO	850	812	771	625	582	394
Method			Area [1	0 <sup>12</sup> m <sup>2</sup> ]		
PC 5-95%	2.32 1.02-5.29	2.60 1.23-5.22	2.49 1.26-4.98	2.26 1.03-5.30	2.24 1.03-5.09	2.19 0.97-5.22
LT 5-95%	2.55 1.52-4.54	2.91 1.49-4.47	2.74 1.59-3.88	2.35 1.26-4.32	2.34 1.25-3.97	2.32 1.09-4.01
BG	1.45	2.10	1.70	0.88	1.13	0.49
SO	1.61	1.69	1.53	0.97	0.89	0.48
CN 5-95%		1	3. 0.61	-7.70	I	I

**Table 2.**Summary of AR size statistics by method.

In previous works, two main areas of AR-genesis have been identified: over the 454 subtropical Northwest Pacific and the Northeast Pacific (Sellars et al., 2017; Zhou et al., 455 2018). Here, we find robust evidence of a statistically significant difference in size of 456 landfalling ARs, depending on their region of genesis, with longer and broader ARs from 457 the Northwest Pacific relative to those originating over the Northeast Pacific. This result 458 may be related to the dynamical process driving the AR formation. It has previously been 459 suggested that WP ARs have a stronger association with a thermally driven jet over the 460 North Pacific Ocean; while EP ARs are thought to be more associated with extratropi-461 cal cyclone activity and to the commonly known phenomenon "Pineapple Express" (Li & 462 Wettstein, 2012; Cordeira et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2019; Zhou & Kim, 2019; Zhang & 463 Ralph, 2021). We also found evidence WP ARs tend to have more zonal orientation than 464 those originating in the EP, which we believe could also relate to the dynamical feature 465 driving the AR. This difference in AR size and orientation between the EP and WP may 466 have implications for where moisture transport occurs. 467

<sup>468</sup> PC, BG, and SO methods agree on the typical "long and narrow" shape from the <sup>469</sup> AR literature, with a median aspect ratio of approximately 4 (length/width). Other de-<sup>470</sup> tection algorithms could use these findings as geometrical constraints in the future. The



**Figure 8.** Summary of results and graphical comparison for the different size estimation methods. In color contours we superimpose (with transparency of 0.1%) the IVT field of all the AR objects available at 50% life cycle for (a) Western Pacific and (b) Eastern Pacific. Each AR object is rotated to the median angle of orientation, and the distance to the center is calculated to make this plot. The dotted "fan" represents two standard deviations for the AR orientation with respect to the equator. The red and gold lines represent the length and width estimated using the SO and BG methods respectively. Grey dashed lines, represent the results of the PC method for the 5th, 50th and 95th percentile. The cyan solid line represents the results of the LT method. It is the 0.68 probability contour of the final position for all the AR cases gathered and rotated to the same frame of reference.

	No	Northwest Pacific			Northeast Pacific			
	0.25	0.5	0.75	0.25	0.5	0.75		
Method			Aspect rat	io [width/len	gth]			
PC 5-95%	4.2 2.3-7.6	4.5 2.3-7.7	4.4 2.6-7.3	3.9 2.3-7.1	4.2 2.3-7.4	4.3 2.4-7.5		
BG	4.1	3.2	3.6	5.2	1.8	4.9		
SO	2.8	3.2	3.2	3.1	3.3	4.0		
Method			Orien	tation [deg]				
PC 5-95%	28.9 8.1-80.2	29.5 7.3-89.2	35.7 8.5-111.8	49.9 9.5-136.5	53.1 12.3-130.1	53.6 12.1-149.6		
CN 5-95%		I	6.	26.5 9-157.2	1	1		

 Table 3.
 Summary of AR geometry statistics by method.

AR orientation difference between WP and EP could also directly affect the precipitation 471 associated with landfalling AR, depending on the relative angle to the coastal mountain 472 range, and hence the orographic lifting (Hu et al., 2017). More meridionally oriented AR 473 towards the end of the life cycle might modify the effects of orographic lifting and AR 474 impacts over the coast. Furthermore, the steepening of the AR orientation with life cy-475 cle supports the hypothesis that most-if not all-ARs are intrinsically related to midlati-476 tude cyclones. During the growth phase of the AR, the AR would form along the south-477 ern portion of a midlatitude cyclone, in the location of the dominant moisture source; the 478 predominantly westerly flow would cause developing ARs to have a more zonal orienta-479 tion. As the AR matures and its moisture is entrained into the cyclone, more of the va-480 por transport would occur along the eastern flank of the cyclone, giving the AR a steeper, 481 more meridional orientation. If there is a relationship between size, duration, propagation 482

speeds, and orientation, this could influence the AR landfalling conditions and its impacts,
 which is a question worthy of further investigation.

It is worth noting that the AR width at the end of life cycle (75%) obtained from SO and BG, (355 and 394 km respectively) is in good agreement with airborne and satellite observations from the 1997/1998 winter ARs, where they find an average width scale based in IWV of 417.3 km (Ralph et al., 2004). Moreover, our result on orientation of EP ARs at the end of the life cycle (53.6°) agrees with the 17-case composite observation from dropsondes, where Ralph et al. (2004) find an average wind direction of the lowlevel jet of 216.7° (corresponding to 53.3° from our methodology's frame of reference).

We also observe a monotonic decrease in AR width through the life cycle, which could be associated with a systematic loss of moisture, or it could be associated with frontogenesis and sharpening of the frontal zone. These results could be explored in future studies, especially ones using a tracer technique.

The sensitivity tests suggest that for the statistical size estimation methods (SO and 496 BG), length is more sensitive to the choice of parameters than width. We hypothesize that 497 this is related to the difficulty of statistically distinguishing the AR "tail" (or southwest 498 end or AR) from the high water vapor and IVT in the vicinity of the ITCZ. We observe 499 (in a case by case exploration) that sometimes the IVT field does not have a clear bound-500 ary with respect to the ITCZ, resulting in a noisier CPD in the left side of the AR com-501 posite for large probability contours (C > 0.9). It is possible that this would also have an 502 impact in the detection and tracking algorithms and their ability to objectively determine 503 the AR boundary. 504

Furthermore, this raises the question about a possible link between AR size and duration, and how the size of AR might be directly related to hydrological impacts over landfalling regions. Do we need to explicitly include size in addition to IVT intensity and duration in the categorization scale for AR (Ralph et al., 2019) and their impacts? We often assume ergodicity, but if larger ARs have systematically slower/faster propagation speeds, then the AR size-life cycle (and possibly landfalling duration) relationship would not be ergodic. Our future research will work toward answering these questions.

In Figure 1, we can observe a high spread in the size of AR among AR detection 512 methods (white background part). Our results show values with much less spread (colored 513 background part) relative to the current methods. It is important to notice that some of 514 these conclusions could be reached by analysis of existing ARTMIP data, with the caveat 515 that such conclusions would depend on the heuristic AR detection algorithms employed in 516 ARTMIP. The novel analytical contributions introduced in this manuscript -use of PCA 517 of the IVT field, statistical estimation of AR composite size (BG and SO methods), and 518 the use of Lagrangian tracers to determine AR size- allow us to reach these conclusions 519 and can provide a statistical constraint on AR size for other detection methods. This could 520 also allow us to incorporate size into the ARs categorization in coastal regions and their 521 impacts. 522

We speculate that different algorithms within ARTMIP detect different parts of the 523 AR since each algorithm defines different rules and relatively-unconstrained thresholds, as 524 it has been shown before by Lora et al. (2020). For example, since algorithms 01 to 04 525 are outside the range of areas estimated in this study, we can confidently argue that these 526 algorithms are not detecting the same part of ARs as our methods or as algorithms 11-28. 527 The AR research community may need to define more than one term, with different definitions depending on what particular meteorological feature of AR is being studied. We 529 acknowledge that different algorithms are created with different objectives and study goals 530 in mind. However, future studies could benefit from the definition of three potential new 531 terms: "AR core" (algorithms 1-4), "dynamical envelope" (LT method and maybe 9-17 532 methods), and "thermodynamic envelope" (PC, BG, SO, CN and algorithms 18-28). Al-533

though the dynamical and thermodynamical envelopes are indistinguishable here, they may 534 not be in studies of future AR size. This could help understanding what is the extent of 535 the consistency in AR detection among different algorithms, particularly with respect to 536 size. The importance of changes in AR statistics in the future has been demonstrated before. Previous studies have shown that AR frequency will increase by  $\sim 50\%$  globally, AR 538 intensity will increase by  $\sim 25\%$ , and that the ARs will be  $\sim 25\%$  longer and  $\sim 25\%$  wider 539 (Espinoza et al., 2018; Massoud et al., 2019). In future simulations using CMIP5/CMIP6 540 models, AR detection algorithms project a global increase in AR frequency and sizes, 541 specially along the western coastlines of the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, and it has been 542 demonstrated that the choice of the detection algorithm can have a major impact on the 543 results of the climate change AR studies (O'Brien et al., 2021). 544

We will continue to examine the relation between AR size and duration. Moreover, the direct relationship we found between AR origin location and size, the life cycle and size, motivates us to apply our methodology to understand how the AR size would change under global warming scenarios. Current detection methods may require adjusting the parameters and thresholds when studying different climate scenarios, making the objective study of change in AR size a challenging problem for future projections. Our approach could provide an objective insight for future works into the possible changes and hydrological impacts due to AR size and climate change.

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# Supporting information for "Constraining and Characterizing the size of Atmospheric Rivers: A perspective independent from the detection algorithm".

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- 1. Text S1 to S2  $\,$
- 2. Figures S1 to S2
- 3. Tables S1

# Introduction

In Text S1 to S2 and Figures S1 to S3, we present the sensitivity analysis of three of our AR size estimation methods: Statistical Overlapping of IVT With the Background Field PDF (SO), K-S Statistics Between AR Composite and the Background CDF (KS), and Lagrangian tracers method (LT).

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For reference, Table S1 shows the labels in Figure 1 from the main text to the respective ARTMIP detection and tracking algorithm used to calculate the AR areas.

#### Text S1. Sensitivity analysis: BG and SO methods.

We calculate a sensitivity test for the Statistical overlapping of AR composite conditional probability distribution of IVT given the distance to the AR center and the PDF of the background IVT field (SO), and the comparison of the IVT cumulative distribution function (CDF) of AR composite with the CDF of the background IVT field (BG) method.

For the SO method, we vary the overlapping PDF intersection value to define the AR composite size: the background IVT PDF value  $\sigma^-$  from 0.05 to 0.5, and the conditional probability distribution (CPD) value of the AR IVT composite  $\sigma^+$  from 0.95 to 0.5. The values used to calculate the results shown in the main text are  $\sigma^-=0.16$  and  $\sigma^+=0.84$ .

For the BG method, we test the sensitivity of the one-tailed Kolmogorov–Smirnov test by varying the *p*-value used to estimate the size of the AR composite, from p = 0.80 to p = 0.99.

Figures S1(a-b) and S1(c-d) show the results of these sensitivity tests for the Northwest (WP) and Northeast Pacific (EP) ARs at 50% life cycle. Similar results 25% and 75% of the AR life cycle.

It is important to notice that the dependence on the free parameters for the SO and BG methods is as expected. SO dimensions and areas should increase as  $\sigma^-$  decreases and  $\sigma^+$  increases (so the AR becomes "indistinguishable" from the background). This is shown in Figure S1(a-b). Moreover, in the BG method areas should decrease as p increases (a more stringent condition), as Figure S1(c-d) shows.

## Text S2. Lagrangian tracers method (LT) sensitivity analysis

We explore the sensitivity the LT method to the stochastic component and the scaling of the horizontal-velocity used for the velocity used for tracer advection. We calculate the trajectory of the tracers using a modification of Equation (10) from the main text of this work

$$dx_i = (u_i + \alpha \sqrt{2\overline{u}_i} \, w_i) \, dt, \tag{1}$$

where we use the parameter  $\alpha$  to modify the magnitude of the scaling velocity, from 1/8 times  $\sqrt{2}\overline{u}_i$  to 4 times  $\sqrt{2}\overline{u}_i$  ( $\alpha = 1$  represents the value used to calculate the results shown in the main text of this work).

Additionally, we vary the PDF threshold value used to define the AR area from p = 0.4to p = 0.93, where p = 0.68 represents the value used to estimate the AR area for the results of this work.

Figure S2 shows the sensitivity test results for WP and EP AR composites at 50% life cycle. Similar results 25% and 75% of the AR life cycle.

Results for the LT sensitivity test are as expected. Increasing p should decrease the area for a given value of alpha, as shown in Figure S2. The increase in area for a given p value is certainly plausible – in the limit of  $\alpha \to \infty$ , the sample points from the AR should insteadly spread over the whole globe after the first time step, thereby maximizing the area.



Figure S1. WP (a) and EP (b) sensitivity background for the one-tailed KS-test method (BG). AR area is shown in blue (left vertical axis). AR length and width are shown in orange and green, respectively (right vertical axis). p is the statistical significance level for the one-tailed KS-test. The results presented in the main text of this work are generated using p = 0.95. WP (c) and EP (d) sensitivity test for the statistical overlapping method (SO).  $\sigma^-$  and  $\sigma^+$ , are the PDF value of the IVT background and the CPD value of the IVT composite with distance, respectively. AR area is shown in blue (left vertical axis). AR length and width are shown in orange and green, respectively (right vertical axis). The results presented in the main text of this work are generated using  $\sigma^- = 0.16$  and  $\sigma^+ = 0.84$ .



Figure S2. Sensitivity test for the Lagrangian tracers method (LT). Colored contours show AR area,  $\alpha$  is the multiplication factor of the scaling velocity  $\sqrt{2\overline{u}_i}$  from equation (1), and *p*-value is the final tracer position PDF value at which we define the AR size. Black contours represent -2, -1, 1, and 2 standard deviations of the AR area calculated using the LT method (from main text Figure 1). The black star represents  $\alpha = 1.0$  and p = 0.68, which are the values used to calculate the main work results.

## **Table S1.** List of ARTMIP algorithms used to generate Figure 1.

Label Algorithm name

01 Lavers

- 02 PNNL\_AR\_detection\_ALG $\#2_v1$
- 03 wille\_IWV
- 04 Brands\_v3
- 05 Tempest\_T2CNTL
- 06 CASCADE\_IVT
- 07 tempest\_ivt250
- 08 tempest\_ivt700
- 09 tempest\_ivt500
- 10 CASCADE\_IWV
- 11 Payne\_Magnusdottir
- 12 wille\_vIVT
- 13 Gershunovetal2017\_v1
- 14 PNNL\_AR\_detection\_ALG#1\_v1
- 15 Reid500
- 16 Mundhenk\_v3
- 17 Guan\_Waliser\_v2
- 18 TDA\_ML
- 19 Walton\_v1
- 20 SAIL\_v1
- 21 Rutz
- 22 Lora\_v2
- 23 Reid250
- 24 PanLu
- 25 Viale\_SAmerica
- 26 Goldenson\_v1-1
- 27 cascade\_bard\_v1
- 28 ARCONNECT