

1 Sedimentation and soil carbon accumulation in 2 degraded mangrove forests of North Sumatra, Indonesia

3 Daniel Murdiyarso^{1,2*}, Bayu Budi Hanggara¹, and Ali Arman Lubis³

4 ¹ Center for International Forestry Research, Jl. CIFOR, Situ Gede, Bogor 16115, Indonesia

5 ² Department of Geophysics and Meteorology, Bogor Agricultural University, Bogor, 16680, Indonesia

6 ³ Center for Application of Isotope and Radiation, National Nuclear Energy Agency of Indonesia, Jakarta
7 12710, Indonesia

8

9 * d.murdiyarso@cgiar.org

10

11 Abstract

12 Mangrove ecosystems are often referred to as “land builders” because of their ability to trap
13 sediments transported from the uplands as well as from the oceans. The sedimentation process in
14 mangrove areas is influenced by hydro-geomorphic settings that represent the tidal range and coastal
15 geological formation. We estimated the sedimentation rate in North Sumatran mangrove forests using
16 the ²¹⁰Pb radionuclide technique, also known as the constant rate supply method, and found that
17 mudflats, fringes, and interior mangroves accreted 4.3 ± 0.2 mm yr⁻¹, 5.6 ± 0.3 mm yr⁻¹, and 3.7 ± 0.2 mm
18 yr⁻¹, respectively. Depending on the subsurface changes, these rates could potentially keep pace with
19 global sea level rise of 2.6–3.2 mm yr⁻¹, except the interior mangrove they would also be able to cope
20 with regional sea-level rise of 4.2 ± 0.4 mm yr⁻¹. The mean soil carbon accumulation rates in the
21 mudflats, fringes, and interior areas were 40.1 ± 6.9 g C m⁻²yr⁻¹, 50.1 ± 8.8 g C m⁻²yr⁻¹, and 47.7 ± 12.5 g C

22 $\text{m}^{-2}\text{yr}^{-1}$, respectively, much lower than the published global average of $226 \pm 39 \text{ g C m}^{-2}\text{yr}^{-1}$. We also
23 found that based on the excess of radioactive elements derived from atomic bomb fallout, the sediment
24 in the mudflat area was deposited since over 28 years ago, and is much younger than the sediment
25 deposited in the interior and fringe areas that are 43 years 54 years old, respectively.

26 Keywords: hydro-geomorphology, radionuclide, sea-level rise, land building, sediment age

27

28 Introduction

29 Mangrove ecosystems provide numerous invaluable services including supporting (nutrient
30 cycling, net primary production, and land formation), provisioning (food, fuel, and fiber), and regulating
31 (climate, flood, storm surges, and pollution) services [1-5]. Situated in a transition zone between
32 terrestrial and oceanic environments, mangrove forests play particularly important roles in moderating
33 fresh water flow from the upland, while buffering against tidal ranges of the sea and saline water [6].
34 The unique shape and form of the root systems of mangrove species enable them to trap and
35 accumulate sediments, which often contain large quantities of organic carbon [7-9]. This ability is
36 influenced by local hydrology, geography, and topography [9,10]. In some cases, sedimentation is
37 followed by colonization, expansion, and migration of pioneering mangrove species [11]. Therefore,
38 carbon sequestration and storage above and below ground in mangrove ecosystems are effective in
39 mitigating climate change [2,4].

40 The sustainability of the services that mangroves, including those in North Sumatra, provide is
41 facing increasing pressure from aquaculture and agricultural development [12]. In addition, climate
42 change and its impacts on sea-level rise have increased coastal vulnerability to erosion and inundation.
43 Sea level has risen more than 5 cm over the last 20 years or 3.2 mm yr^{-1} on average—a rate that has

44 nearly doubled since 1990 [13,14]—and is expected to continue to increase in the future [15]. Although
45 mangrove tree species are able to tolerate inundation by tides, they can die and their habitat formation
46 can be damaged if, as a result of sea-level rise, the frequency and duration of the inundation exceeds
47 their specific physiological thresholds [16,17]. Sedimentation in coastal areas that is facilitated by
48 mangrove forests demonstrates that mangroves are “land builders” [7] and can adapt to rising sea
49 levels. The rate of sedimentation can be an important factor to determine the sustainability of
50 mangrove management.

51 The ^{210}Pb radionuclide dating technique is employed to estimate sedimentation using a
52 geochronology approach. ^{210}Pb dating methods are an invaluable tool for recent (~100 years)
53 geochemical studies [18,19]. The natural ^{210}Pb radionuclide is measured from each sediment interval as
54 the ratio between ^{209}Po and ^{210}Pb , both radionuclides originate from the decay of uranium (^{238}U) [20,
55 21]. In the process of decaying ^{210}Pb , it is known that there are supported ^{210}Pb and unsupported ^{210}Pb .
56 Supported ^{210}Pb is formed by the decay of ^{226}Ra in eroded parent rock and accumulates in the
57 sediments. The level of supported ^{210}Pb in an ecosystem is generally differ very little because it comes
58 from the same parent rock. Unsupported ^{210}Pb accumulates in sediments that enter the ecosystem [21].
59 This technique has frequently been used to investigate study short-term sedimentation and carbon
60 accumulation rates [14,18,22,23]; however, it is not appropriate for long-term sediment accumulation (>
61 100 years) [24].

62 Rapid development in coastal areas due to anthropogenic activity is threatening vertical accretion
63 and horizontal expansion of sediment in mangrove forests. These impacts include altered hydrological
64 patterns, sedimentation, and nutrient loads that result from disturbances that restrict hydrological
65 connections [14,25,26]. It is therefore important to understand the process of sedimentation, especially
66 in degraded and threatened mangroves.

67 This study was designed to quantify the rates of sedimentation and carbon accumulation in
68 degraded mangrove forests in Deli Serdang regency, a low-lying coastal zone in North Sumatra,
69 Indonesia. The region is influenced by the effluent of the large city of Medan and the busy harbor port
70 of Belawan (see [Fig 1](#)). Surrounded by shrimp ponds and newly developed oil palm plantations, the
71 remaining mangroves in Sei Percut experience tremendous environmental pressure.

72

73 **Fig 1. Study area of mangrove forests in Deli Serdang regency, North Sumatra, Indonesia.**

74

75 The mangroves are dominated by *Avicennia* sp. and *Rhizophora* sp. Besides natural colonization of
76 *Avicennia* sp. in the mudflat area, restoration has also been attempted, in the mudflats and in the
77 abandoned and active ponds in the interior.

78

79 Methods

80 Site selection

81 The site selected is located at 3°46'15.56–3°42'53.32 N and 98°42'28.23–98°47'22.33b E. It is
82 characterized by a monsoonal tropical climate with a mean temperature of 30°C and annual rainfall of
83 1848 mm [[27](#)]. The sea tide ranges from 0.9 to 2.6 m with a diurnal pattern influenced by the Andaman
84 Sea. We selected three hydro-geomorphic settings representing mudflat, fringing mangrove and interior
85 mangrove areas as shown in [Fig 1](#). Three core soil samples were collected from these settings to capture
86 the sedimentation processes and carbon storage.

87 Sediment sampling and sample preparation

88 The sampling point in the mudflat was located approximately 15 m from the coastline (or fringe
89 zone) and the interior at around 375 m from the coastline. Soil cores at each hydro-geomorphic setting
90 were collected to a depth of 50 cm and sliced at 2 cm intervals for the first 10 cm and then 5 cm
91 intervals (see [Fig 2](#)).

92

93 **Fig 2. Soil core for sediment sampling in the first 50 cm below the surface.**

94

95 The samples were oven-dried at a temperature of 40°C (to avoid oxidation of carbon) until a
96 constant weight was reached. Each sample was homogenized using a mortar and pestle. Samples were
97 dried, crushed and sieved through 120 ($\phi = 0.125$ mm) mesh size (cohesive sediment). Roots and other
98 material containing calcareous sediments were removed. Bulk density was determined for each interval
99 by dividing the dry weight by the sample volume. The analysis of carbon content of the sediments was
100 carried out employing a combustion method using *TruSpec Analysis CHNS* for each layer.

101 Sediment accumulation rate

102 The sediment accumulation rates were calculated using a constant rate of supply (CRS) method
103 [\[21\]](#). Approximately 5 g dried sediment combined with 0.2 ml of radioactive tracer of ^{209}Po were
104 dissolved in a 10 ml of HCl (1:1), 10 ml of HNO_3 , 15 ml of H_2O and 5–6 drops of 30% H_2O_2 and dried over
105 a water bath at 80°C. A volume of 10 ml of HCl (1:1) and 40 ml of distilled water was added to the dry
106 residue, before reheating over the water bath for approximately 10 minutes. The solution was filtered
107 through filter paper No. 42 to remove sediment and rinsed with 30 ml of 0.3N HCl. The filtrate was then
108 dried over the water bath. Volumes of 4 ml of HCl (1:1) and 50 ml of 0.3N HCl were added to the dry

109 residue. Then 400 mg of ascorbic acid was added to complex out any dissolved iron present that might
110 interfere with the plating processing of the Po isotopes. The sediment solution was then plated onto a
111 2.2 cm diameter copper disk. Po isotopes were quantified using a Canberra Alpha Spectrometer, Model
112 7401 with Passivated Implanted Planar Silicon detector Type A450 20AM. Measurements were carried
113 out until a Gaussian spectrum was obtained (standard deviation was less than 10%).

114 To account for variability in sedimentation throughout time, the CRS model, developed by
115 Appleby [21], was employed to calculate sediment age.

$$116 \quad A(x) = A(o)e^{-kt} \quad (1)$$

117 where $A(x)$ is the unsupported ^{210}Pb activity below the individual segment being dated (Bq kg^{-1}), $A(o)$ is
118 the total unsupported ^{210}Pb activity in the soil column (Bq kg^{-1}), k is the ^{210}Pb decay constant (0.0311 yr^{-1}), and t is the age of sediments (yr) at each segment. This can be obtained from:

$$120 \quad t = \frac{1}{k} \ln \frac{A(o)}{A(x)} \quad (2)$$

121 The constant supply of unsupported ^{210}Pb (Bq m^{-2}), C , was used to estimate sediment
122 accumulation rate, r ($\text{kg m}^{-2}\text{yr}^{-1}$) at a certain segment and calculated as:

$$123 \quad r = \frac{kA}{C} \quad (3)$$

124 To obtain the sediment accretion rate (mm yr^{-1}), the sediment accumulation ($\text{g m}^{-2} \text{ yr}^{-1}$) was divided by
125 soil the bulk density, BD (g cm^{-3}).

126 Following Marchio et al. [22], the soil carbon accumulation rate, C_{acc} ($\text{g C m}^{-2} \text{ yr}^{-1}$) was calculated
127 for each hydro-geomorphic setting as:

$$128 \quad C_{\text{acc}} = A_d \times BD \times C_{\text{conc}} \quad (4)$$

129 Where A_d is the sediment accretion rate at a certain layer (cm yr^{-1}), and C_{conc} (g C g-soil^{-1}) is the
130 average soil carbon concentrations of the same layer.

131 Results

132 Bulk density and soil carbon content

133 Bulk density (BD) and soil carbon content are shown in [Fig 3](#). Their variation with depth in all
134 hydro-geomorphic locations showed opposing trends, with BD increasing with depth, while carbon
135 content decreased. BD ranged between 0.36 g cm^{-3} and 0.77 g cm^{-3} with the widest range found in the
136 interior ($0.36\text{--}0.74 \text{ g cm}^{-3}$), followed by the mudflat ($0.43\text{--}0.77 \text{ g cm}^{-3}$). The narrowest range was found
137 in the fringing mangrove ($0.40\text{--}0.55 \text{ g cm}^{-3}$). In general, the variation of BD is within the range of most
138 mangrove forests found across Indonesia [\[4\]](#).

139 On average, mudflat and interior mangroves had similar BD s of $0.60 \pm 0.11 \text{ g cm}^{-3}$ and 0.60 ± 0.12
140 g cm^{-3} , respectively, with much lower BD in the fringing mangrove of $0.46 \pm 0.05 \text{ g cm}^{-3}$. These values
141 suggest that the hydro-geomorphic setting dictates how sediments settle, are compacted and disturbed
142 (or protected) by the hydrodynamics of the sea and fluvial water.

143

144 **Fig 3. Bulk density (g cm^{-3}) and soil carbon content (%C) at different hydro-geomorphic settings in**
145 **mangrove forests in Deli Serdang, North Sumatra.**

146

147 The average soil carbon content of Deli Serdang mangroves across the hydro-geomorphic setting
148 ranged between 1.5% (mudflat) and 3.0% (interior), with fringe mangroves having an intermediate
149 carbon content of 2.0%. This distribution signifies the role of mangrove vegetation as the primary source
150 of carbon. Deposited and decomposed litter and decayed fine roots contribute to the *in-situ* organic

151 carbon. These figures are far lower than the figures found in undisturbed mangroves in Sumatra (9.4%),
152 Kalimantan (9.7%), and Sulawesi (15.6%). Moreover, they are even lower than degraded mangroves on
153 Java of 5.6% [4].

154 ^{210}Pb radionuclide activity and sediment age

155 The unsupported ^{210}Pb activity in Deli Serdang mangroves is shown in Fig 4. The mudflat area
156 values ranged between $44.0 \pm 1.8 \text{ Bq kg}^{-1}$ and $66.9 \pm 3.7 \text{ Bq kg}^{-1}$. In the fringe mangroves, they ranged
157 between $35.1 \pm 1.8 \text{ Bq kg}^{-1}$ and $75.7 \pm 4.2 \text{ Bq kg}^{-1}$, while the interior mangroves ranged from 39.9 ± 2.2
158 Bq kg^{-1} to $78.7 \pm 4.3 \text{ Bq kg}^{-1}$.

159
160 **Fig 4. ^{210}Pb activity in the sediment across hydro-geomorphic setting of mangrove forests in Deli**

161 **Serdang, North Sumatra: (a) mudflat, (b) fringe, (c) interior.** The grey bars represent total
162 activity of ^{210}Pb (supported + unsupported), whereas the black bars represent supported ^{210}Pb
163 activity derived from the lowest activity found in the sample. The supported ^{210}Pb was formed
164 from decayed ^{226}Ra in eroded parent rock and accumulated in the sediments, and the
165 unsupported ^{210}Pb was formed from decayed ^{222}Rn in nature and accumulated in the sediment.

166
167 The total ^{210}Pb activity in the mudflat and fringe in the upper layer fluctuated because there was
168 no vegetation binding the sediment on the mudflat area, so they are subject to the influence of currents
169 and waves producing fluctuations in the suspended sediment in the area. In the fringe area, the
170 variation was due to the influence of watersheds and less well-established root systems of colonizing
171 mangrove seedlings.

172 The supported ^{210}Pb activity values were obtained from the lowest unsupported values [28]. Their
173 variation across hydro-geomorphic settings was relatively small. The values in the mudflat, fringe, and
174 interior were $44.0 \pm 3.7 \text{ Bq kg}^{-1}$, $35.1 \pm 2.3 \text{ Bq kg}^{-1}$, and $42.1 \pm 1.9 \text{ Bq kg}^{-1}$, respectively. However, due to
175 the limitations of CRS analysis the depth of the core that could be analysed was up to 8 cm, 25 cm and
176 10 cm for the mudflat, fringe and interior settings. Nevertheless, the CSR is the least arguable method
177 compared with mass balance method, as it measures the vertical decline of ^{210}Pb concentration and
178 provides a chronology of sedimentation for up to the past century [29].

179 The estimates of sediment age in each layer and at all hydro-geomorphic settings are shown in Fig
180 5. The oldest sediment was found in the fringing mangroves, which was formed 54.7 ± 3.2 yrs ago
181 (around 1961) at 25 cm deep, followed by the interior mangroves of 43.1 ± 2.3 yrs (around 1973) at a
182 depth of 10 cm. The youngest sediment was formed 28.4 ± 1.6 yrs ago (around 1988) found in the
183 mudflat area at 8 cm deep. These ages of sedimentation in North Sumatra are much younger than those
184 found in Everglades National Park in the Gulf of Mexico, where the sedimentation processes began in
185 1926 [23]. Since the region was very much affected by high storm surges, the sediment deposits and
186 carbon burial were relatively higher.

187
188 **Fig 5. Sediment accumulation rate and the age of sediment in each hydro-geomorphic setting of**
189 **mangrove forests in Deli Serdang, North Sumatra: (a) mudflat, (b) fringe, (c) interior.** The
190 oldest sediment was found in the fringe mangroves of about 55 years.

191
192 Sediment accretion and soil carbon accumulation rates

193 The constant supply of unsupported ^{210}Pb is used to estimate sediment accumulation rate (mass
194 per unit area) or sediment accretion rate (thickness). This is a good indicator of growth capacity,

195 horizontal expansion of mangrove ecosystems, and, to some extent, effectiveness as carbon sinks nd
196 disturbance regimes [23]. Fig 6a shows sediment accretion and soil carbon accumulation rates in all
197 hydro-geomorphic settings with fringing mangroves being the largest ($5.6 \pm 0.3 \text{ mm yr}^{-1}$), followed by
198 mudflats at $4.3 \pm 0.2 \text{ mm yr}^{-1}$, and interior mangroves at $3.7 \pm 0.2 \text{ mm yr}^{-1}$. This pattern is associated
199 with the size, shape, and spatial distribution of trees. The rate increases with increasing density of trees
200 especially those of *Rhizophora sp.* and their complex root systems, which not only trap the mud but
201 most likely also allows them to withstand greater sedimentation. This was particularly the case for
202 fringing mangroves as the interior mangroves were isolated from receiving sediments. The
203 sedimentation in the mangroves of Deli Serdang, North Sumatra was generally due to marine and river
204 sedimentary deposits. These results are in line with previous work, which generally found that
205 sedimentation rate was the highest along the coastline and decreased in the area near the mainland
206 [11].

207
208 **Fig 6. Sediment accretion rate (a) and soil carbon accumulation rate (b) in each hydro-geomorphic**
209 **setting of mangrove forests in Deli Serdang, North Sumatra: mudflat, fringe, and interior.** It is
210 shown in (a) that sedimentation rate in all settings can cope with global sea level rise (SLR) but
211 only interior mangroves cannot cope with regional SLR.

212
213 The accumulation rate of soil carbon depends on sedimentation rate, BD , and the carbon
214 concentration of sediment. As shown in Fig 6b the average value of soil carbon accumulation in the
215 mudflat area was $40.1 \pm 6.9 \text{ g C m}^{-2}\text{yr}^{-1}$. In the fringe mangroves, it was $50.1 \pm 88.4 \text{ g C m}^{-2}\text{yr}^{-1}$, and in the
216 interior mangroves was $47.7 \pm 12.5 \text{ g C m}^{-2}\text{yr}^{-1}$. Although mudflat zone demonstrates higher
217 sedimentation rate than interior mangroves, the accumulation of carbon is lower. This is because the
218 presence of mangrove forest is an important source of autochthonous carbon. However, the rate of

219 carbon burial across the hydro-geomorphic shown in Deli Serdang mangroves are very low compared
220 with the global average of around $226 \pm 39 \text{ g C m}^{-2}\text{yr}^{-1}$ [30].

221 Discussion

222 Reduction of land-based emissions, such as reducing emissions from deforestation and forest
223 degradation, known as REDD+ is often promoted as climate mitigation measures. Mangrove forest is a
224 unique example by which climate change mitigation can be simultaneously implemented with adaption
225 strategies. Combining the two roles could even be more attractive for stakeholders at national level to
226 demonstrate the nationally determined contributions (NDCs) as stipulated in the Paris Agreement,
227 where climate change adaptation and mitigation are implemented in a balanced manner. Moreover, sub
228 national and local agenda could even be built around adaptation strategies that usually gain less
229 attention in both programming and budgeting processes.

230 Mangroves promote adaption to rising sea level

231 The global average sedimentation rate in mangrove forests ranges between 0.1 and 10.0 mm yr^{-1} ,
232 with a median value of 5 mm yr^{-1} [31, 32]. Based on ^{210}Pb radionuclide analysis using the CRS method we
233 found an average rate of sediment accretion rate in the mudflat area of $4.3 \pm 0.2 \text{ mm yr}^{-1}$, while in the
234 fringe mangroves the rate was $5.6 \pm 0.3 \text{ mm yr}^{-1}$, and the lowest rate was found in the interior
235 mangroves of $3.7 \pm 0.2 \text{ mm yr}^{-1}$. Assuming that no sub surface changes took place, sedimentation in Deli
236 Serdang mangrove forests can keep pace with global sea-level rise of $2.6\text{--}3.2 \text{ mm yr}^{-1}$ [33] and regional
237 sea-level rise of $4.2 \pm 0.4 \text{ mm yr}^{-1}$ [15], except for the interior mangroves, which would not withstand
238 the regional sea-level rise.

239 However, various processes can cause changes in mangrove sediment, including surface and
240 subsurface processes. Previous studies [34, 35] describe processes occurring on or above the surface of

241 mangrove soils, including sedimentation (deposition of material to the soil surface), accretion (binding
242 of this material in place), and erosion (loss of surface material). We did not monitor the sub surface
243 processes, such as growth and decomposition of roots, soil swelling and shrinking associated with
244 moisture content, and compaction, compression, and rebound of soils due to changes in the weight of
245 the overlying material. In addition, at a larger scale, subsidence or geological movement may affect the
246 sediment [36]. These mean that sediment accretion alone is not the best predictor of mangrove forests'
247 resilience or capacity to adapt to sea-level rise. Measurement using the rod surface elevation table
248 combined with a marker horizon may give further information [37].

249 Up to 80% of the sediments delivered by the tides are retained in mangrove forests [32, 38],
250 enhancing mangrove colonization and expansion. The morphology and root systems of mangrove
251 vegetation with their strong and complex shapes facilitates the trapping of sediment particles along the
252 tidal ranges in the coastal area [38]. Natural regeneration, therefore, should be promoted.

253 Effectiveness of mangroves in mitigating climate change

254 Globally, organic carbon burial in coastal wetlands, including mangrove ecosystems, varies hugely
255 depending on carbon content of the sediment deposited, net primary production, root and microbial
256 activities, tidal waves and hydrodynamics, and hydro-geomorphic settings. It is generally accepted that
257 the burial rate of soil sediments in mangrove ecosystems accumulates carbon between 163 and 265 g C
258 m⁻²yr⁻¹ [22,31,39-42]. These are the largest among any terrestrial ecosystems after saltmarsh [39].

259 Although carbon accumulation from sediment in mangrove forests in Deli Serdang, North Sumatra
260 was very low (40-50 g C m⁻²yr⁻¹), seem to have significantly low carbon burial rates, it was reported that
261 mangroves in Hinchinbrook Channel, Australia has an even lower average rate of 26 g C m⁻²yr⁻¹ [43]. In
262 contrast, an extremely high rate of 949 g C m⁻²yr⁻¹ was found in Tamandare, Brazil [44].

263 The colonization, recruitment, and expansion of mangrove species vegetation in newly reclaimed
264 land could gradually increase carbon sequestration through photosynthesis by the mangroves and litter
265 deposition. Rehabilitation or restoration of mangrove to recover the carbon storage capacity of the
266 ecosystem will take long time; therefore conserving intact mangroves is crucial and more effective to
267 mitigate climate change.

268 These observations suggest that in terms of management, there is no one single solution for
269 restoring degraded mangroves. A combination of methods and objectives could be explored to answer
270 particular site-specific challenges. To some extent ecosystem services capable of accommodating a
271 number of objectives and interests of multiple stakeholders. Ecosystem services provided by mangroves
272 are among the candidates that attract local governments and community, including fishing community
273 (nursery ground, coastal protection and pollution filtering), urban community (regulating micro-climate,
274 cultural and education objects).

275

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283

284

285 Author Contributions

286

287 **Conceptualization:** Daniel Murdiyarso.

288 **Data curation:** Daniel Murdiyarso.

289 **Formal analysis:** Daniel Murdiyarso and Bayu Budi Hanggara.

290 **Funding acquisition:** Daniel Murdiyarso.

291 **Investigation:** Daniel Murdiyarso and Bayu Budi Hanggara.

292 **Methodology:** Daniel Murdiyarso, Bayu Budi Hanggara, and Ali Arman Lubis.

293 **Project administration:** Daniel Murdiyarso.

294 **Supervision:** Daniel Murdiyarso and Ali Arman Lubis.

295 **Validation:** Daniel Murdiyarso and Ali Arman Lubis.

296 **Visualization:** Daniel Murdiyarso and Bayu Budi Hanggara.

297 **Writing ± original draft:** Daniel Murdiyarso, Bayu Budi Hanggara, and Ali Arman Lubis.

298 **Writing ± review & editing:** Daniel Murdiyarso

299

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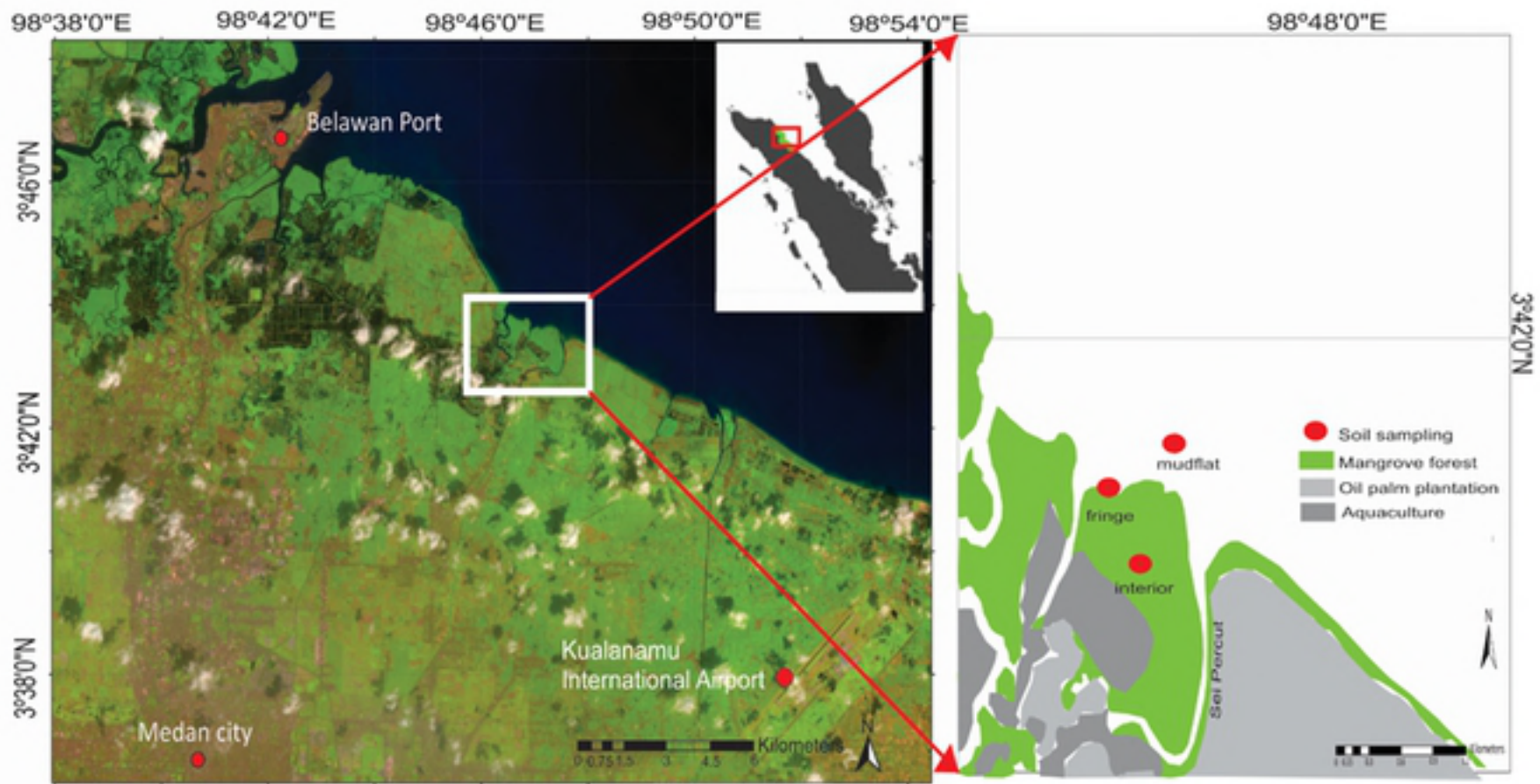
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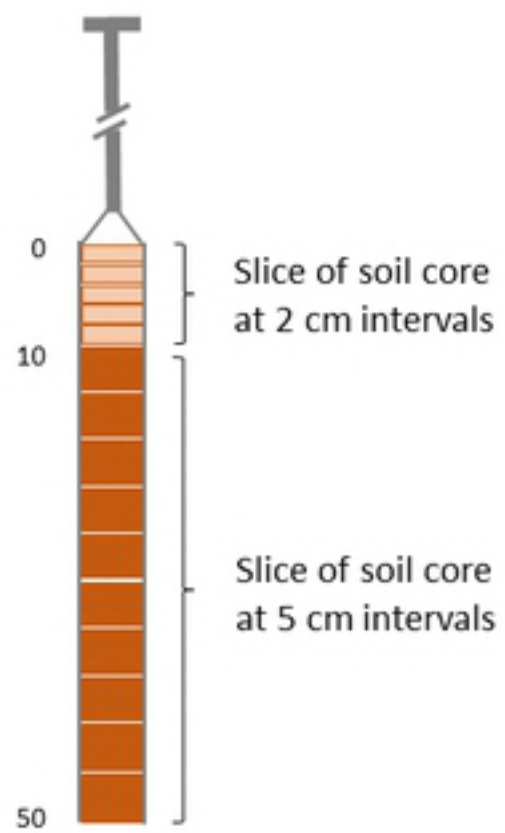
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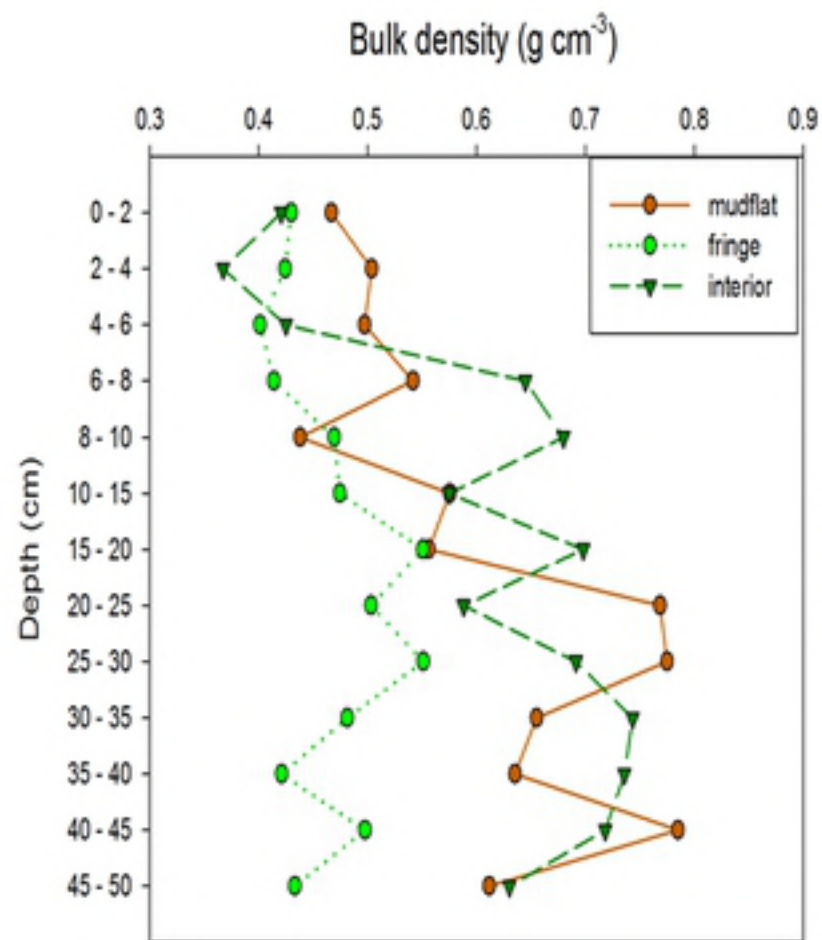
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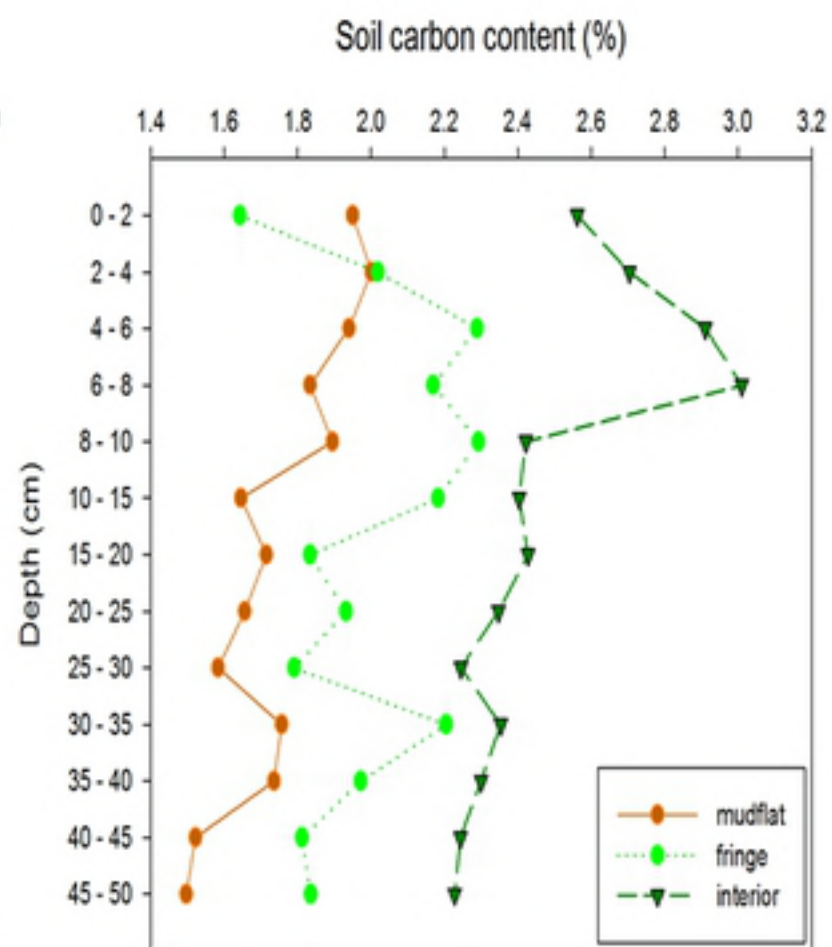
(a)

(b)

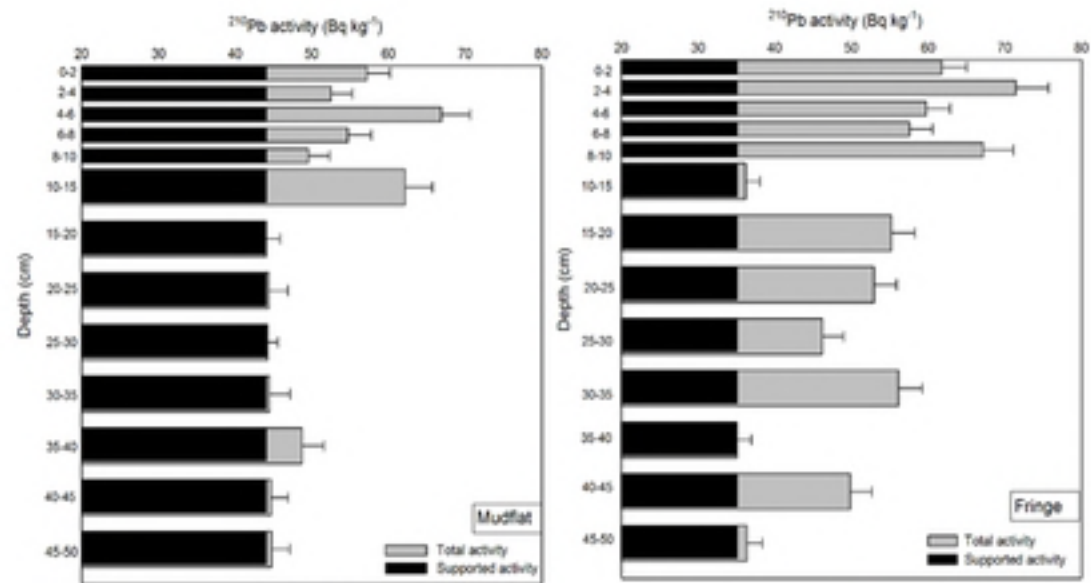




(a)

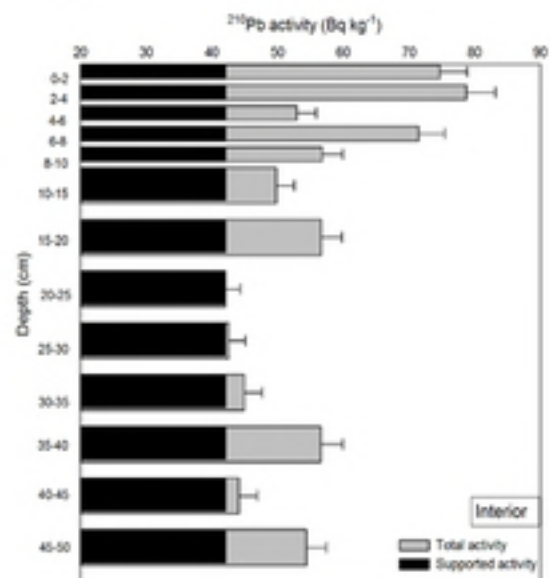


(b)



(a)

(b)



(c)

