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Climate change impacts on nutrient loads in the Yorkshire Ouse catchment (UK)

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Abstract. This study assessed the impact of potential climate change on the nutrient loads to surface and sub-surface waters from agricultural areas and was conducted using the Soil and Water Assessment Tool (SWAT) model. The study focused on a 3500 km² catchment located in northern England, the Yorkshire Ouse. The SWAT model was calibrated and validated using sets of five years' measurements of nitrate and orthophosphorus concentrations and water flow. To increase the reliability of the hydrological model predictions, an uncertainty analysis was conducted by perturbing input parameters using a Monte-Carlo technique. The SWAT model was then run using a baseline scenario corresponding to an actual measured time series of daily temperature and precipitation, and six climate change scenarios. Because of the increase in temperature, all climate scenarios introduced an increase of actual evapotranspiration. Faster crop growth and an increased nutrient uptake resulted, as did an increase of annual losses of total nitrogen and phosphorus, however, with strong seasonal differences.

Keywords: SWAT model, climate change, nutrient loads

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