

Resiliency of MSE Wall to Surge and Wave Loading (BED30 977-15)

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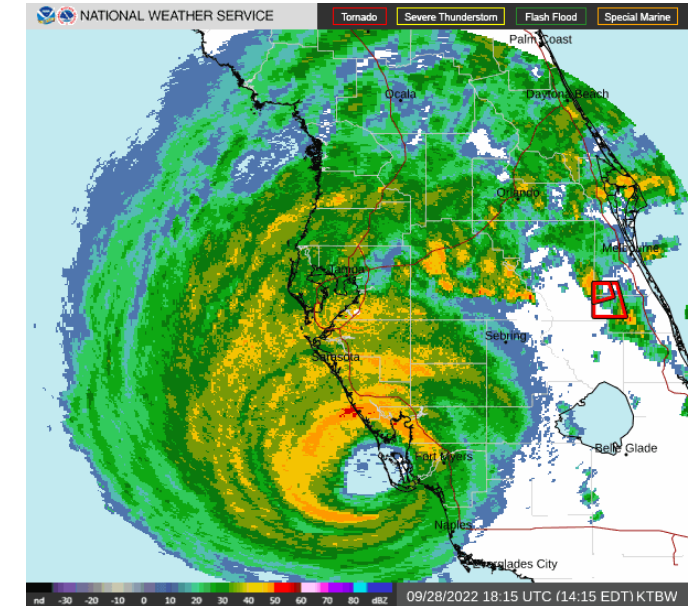
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GRIP Meeting
August 13th, 2026

Introduction and Motivation

Hurricane Ian Impact on Florida (2022)

- **Wind Speed:** 150 mph sustained winds.
- **Storm Surge:** 12 – 18 ft near the coast, 8 ft recorded in downtown Fort Myers (NOAA).
- **Wave Heights:** 6 – 13 ft (USGS).
- **Timing:** Struck shortly after high tide (+2.5 ft).
- **Rainfall:** 15 inches of rain.



Project Objectives

- Review of literature, reports, AASHTO and USACE design guidelines.
- Collect hydrodynamic data and shoreline bathymetry.
- Collect MSE wall information for those that failed during Hurricane Ian.
- Identify mode(s) of failure with numerical and centrifuge model experiments of representative MSE wall cases subjected to storm wave and surge loading.
- In centrifuge experiments, measure: hydrodynamics (wave heights and currents), hydrodynamic loading on the model MSE walls, wall displacements and pore pressure in soil.
- Test remediation measures that include larger mean particle size of the backfill and test external porous protection elements.
- Based on experimental findings make recommendations for design revisions and remediation measures of existing MSE walls.

Project Tasks

- Task 1: Review of Prototype MSE Wall Design, Hydrodynamic Data, and Literature
- Task 2: Experimental Design and Numerical Model Predictions
- Task 3: Centrifuge Tests of Model MSE Walls Exposed to Hydrodynamics
- Task 4: Comparison Analysis Between Experiments and Predictions with Recommendations for Mitigation and Design
- Task 5: Draft Final Report and Closeout Teleconference
- Task 6: Final Report

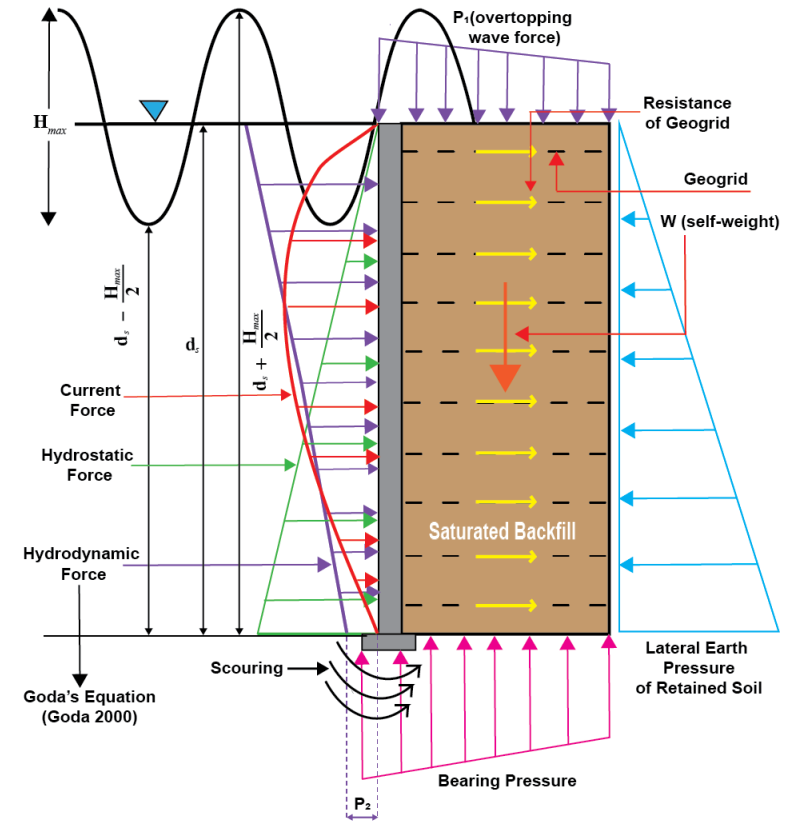
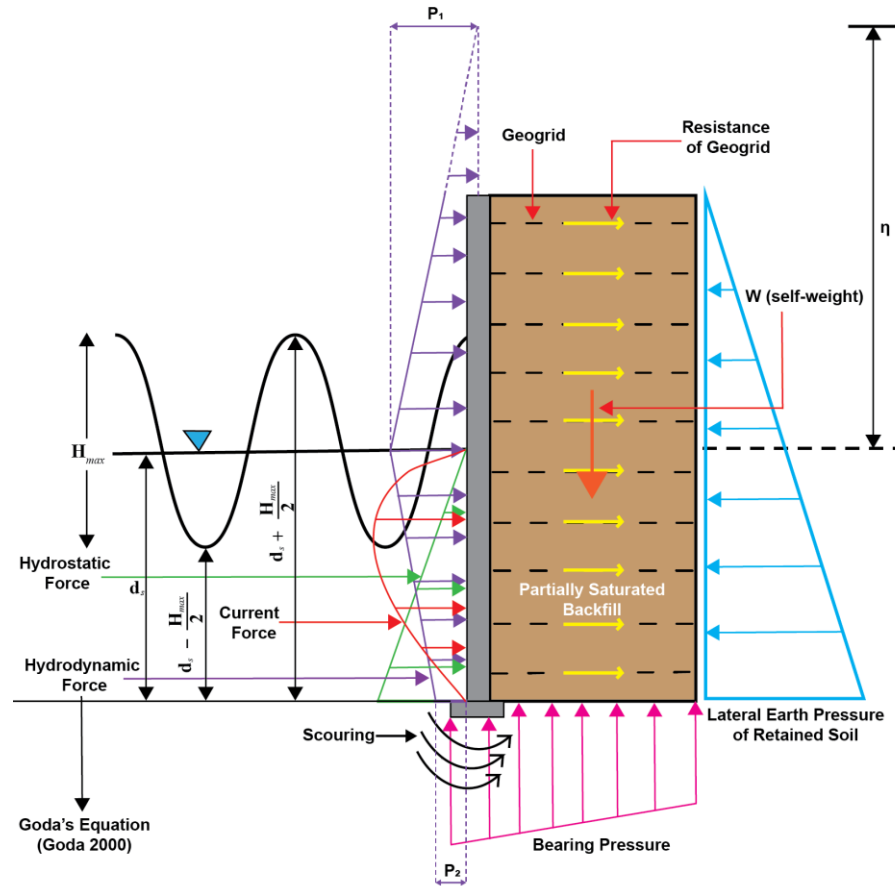
Task 1: Review of Prototype MSE Wall Design, Hydrodynamic Data, and Literature

- Collect design and forensic data on coastal MSE wall failures from tropical storms
 - Elevations, wall dimensions, reinforcement and connection type, panel dimensions, backfill properties, roadway structural layer info, bearing soil properties, revetment dimensions
- Collect bathymetry for the Gulf of Mexico and San Carlos Bay
- Collect available pre, during, and post storm hydrodynamic data
 - Data for storms other than Ian also
 - NOAA-NDBC and IOOS HF Radar wave data
 - FL agencies and universities

Task 1: Review of Prototype MSE Wall Design, Hydrodynamic Data, and Literature

- Review AASHTO and USACE design guidelines
 - AASHTO specifications for bridges vulnerable to coastal storms includes recommendations for estimating horizontal and vertical wave forces associated with intact and breaking waves and direct currents
 - USACE Coastal Structures manual includes methods and approaches for estimating non-linear hydrodynamics and scour
- Prototype MSE wall and hydrodynamic parameters will be identified based on the review findings and in consultation with FDOT engineers

Kinematics of MSE Wall Under Loading



Pressure and Force Equations

Wave: Goda's equation (AASHTO 2008; Goda 2000)

$$p_1 = \frac{1}{2}(1 + \cos \theta)(\alpha_1)\gamma_w H_{\max} \quad (6.1.3.3-1)$$

$$p_2 = \frac{p_1}{\cosh(2\pi d_s / \lambda)} \quad (6.1.3.3-2)$$

in which:

$$\alpha_1 = 0.6 + \frac{1}{2} \left[\frac{4\pi d_s / \lambda}{\sinh(4\pi d_s / \lambda)} \right]^2 \quad (6.1.3.3-3)$$

$$\eta^* = 0.75(1 + \cos \theta)H_{\max} \quad (6.1.3.3-4)$$

where:

p_1 = pressure at storm water level (kip/ft²)
 p_2 = pressure at mudline (kip/ft²)
 α_1 = coefficient
 θ = angle between direction of wave approach and a line normal to the structure (deg)

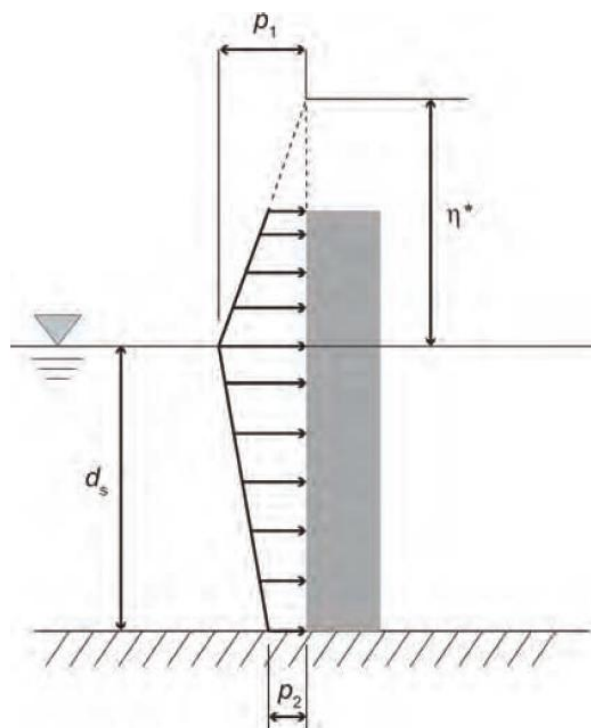
$H_{\max}$ = maximum probable wave height (ft), which may be determined as specified in Article 6.2.2.4 for a Level I analysis, and by storm modeling for Levels II and III

d_s = water depth at or near the bridge including surge, astronomical tide, and local wind set-up (ft)

λ = wave length (ft)

γ_w = unit weight of water taken as 0.064 kip/ft³

η^* = potential height above the storm water level to which wave pressure could be exerted (ft)



Wave Force on Large Element

Current: Force equation (AASHTO 2008)

$$F_{HC} = C_d A \left(\frac{\rho_w}{2} \right) \frac{U_c^2}{1000} \quad (6.1.2.4-1)$$

where:

ρ_w = mass density of water taken as 2.0 slugs/ft³

U_c = current velocity (ft/sec) taken as specified in Article 6.2.2.6

A = projected area per unit length of superstructure subjected to current at the storm water level (ft²/ft)

C_d = drag coefficient taken as 2.5

Estimate Wave Height and Period

Empirical equations (USACE Coastal Engineering Manual)

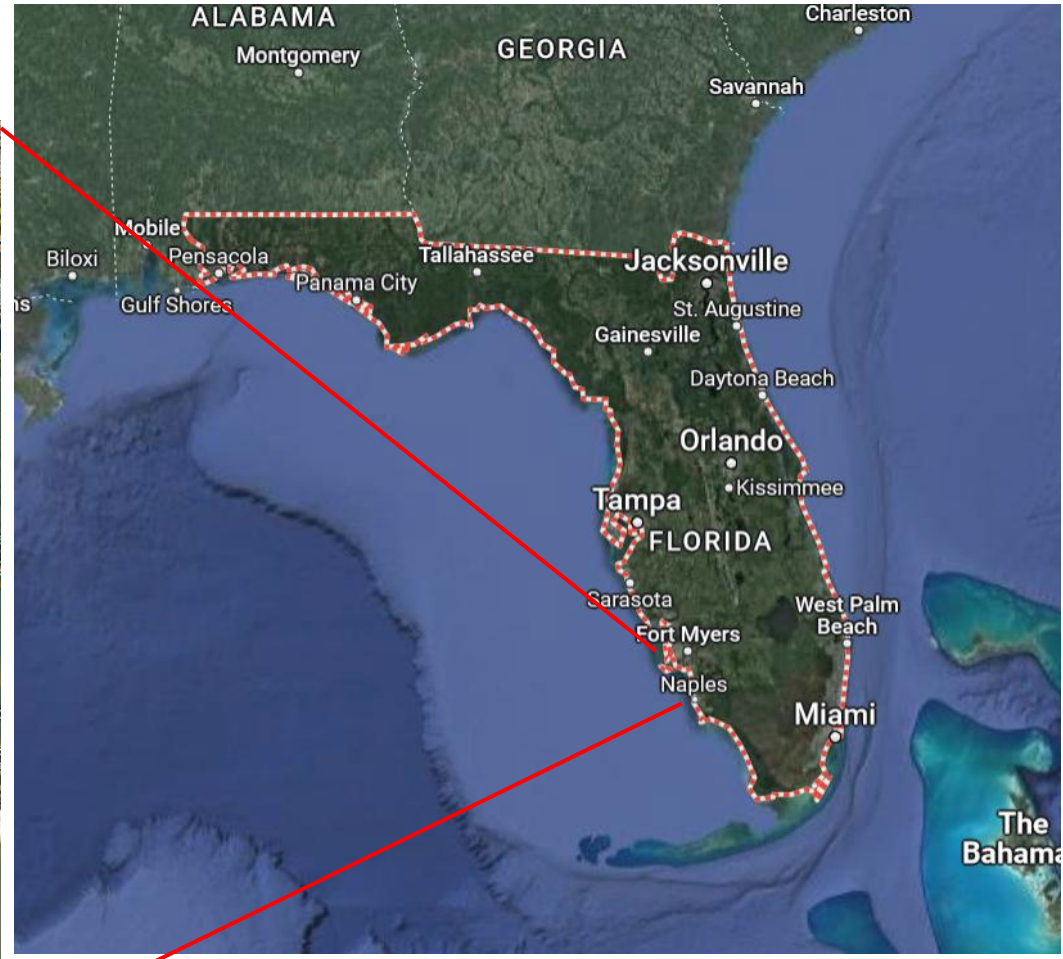
shallow water corrections (constant depth, d):

$$\frac{gH}{U_A^2} = 0.283 \tanh \left[0.530 \left(\frac{gd}{U_A^2} \right)^{3/4} \right] \tanh \left\{ \frac{0.00565 \left(\frac{gF}{U_A^2} \right)^{1/2}}{0.530 \left(\frac{gd}{U_A^2} \right)^{3/4}} \right\}$$

$$\frac{gT}{U_A} = 7.54 \tanh \left[0.833 \left(\frac{gd}{U_A^2} \right)^{3/8} \right] \tanh \left\{ \frac{0.0379 \left(\frac{gf}{U_A^2} \right)^{1/3}}{0.833 \left(\frac{gd}{U_A^2} \right)^{3/8}} \right\}$$

for sloped bottom → use "equivalent water depth"

Prototype MSE Wall



Prototype MSE Wall

Dimensions of MSEWs

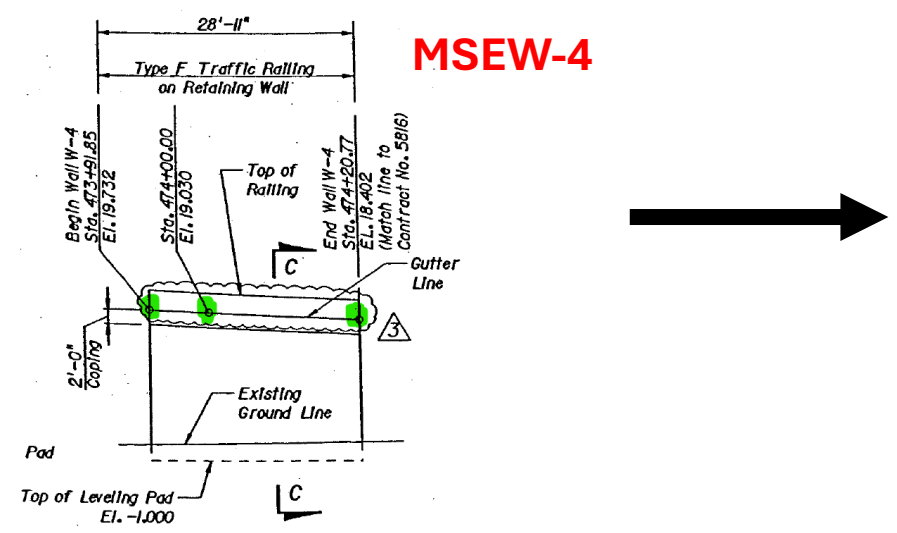
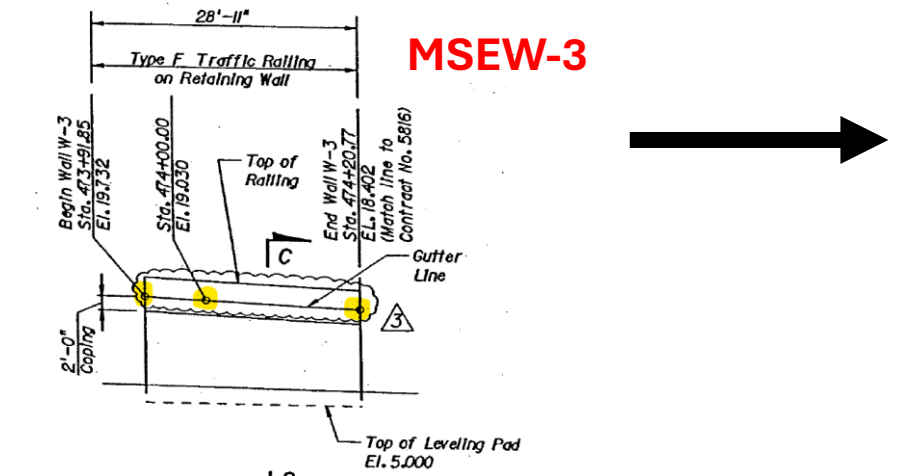


Table 2. Elevations and Heights of Wall W-4 at Key Points for MSEW-3

Location	Station Point	Top of Retaining Wall Elevation (ft)	Leveling Pad Elevation (ft)	Height (ft)
Begin Wall W-3	Sta. 473+91.85	19.732	5	14.732
Midpoint	Sta. 474+00.00	19.03	5	14.03
End Wall W-3	Sta. 474+20.77	18.402	5	13.402

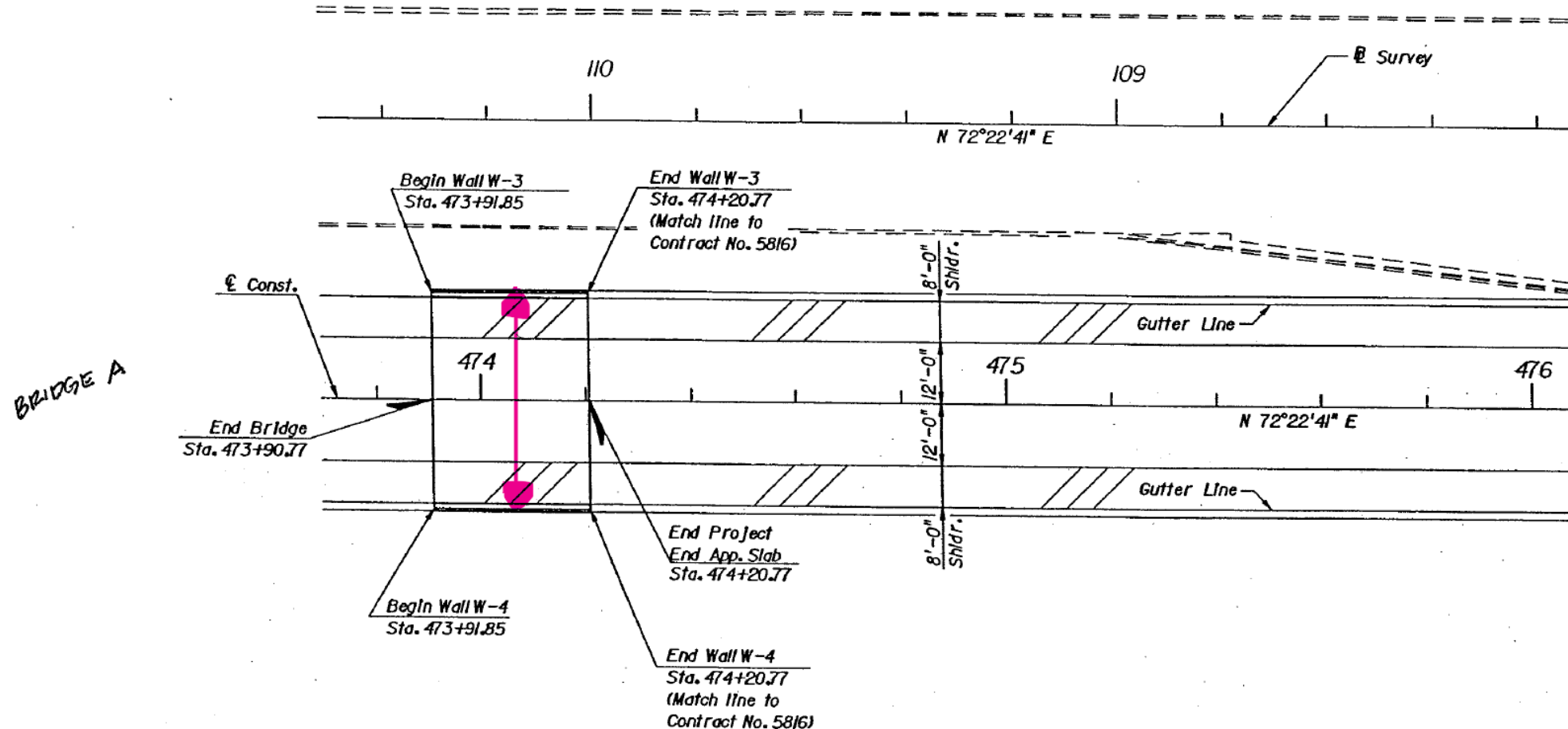
Table 3. Elevations and Heights of Wall W-4 at Key Points for MSEW-4

Location	Station Point	Top of Retaining Wall Elevation (ft)	Leveling Pad Elevation (ft)	Height (ft)
Begin Wall W-4	Sta. 473+91.85	19.732	-1	20.732
Middle Point	Sta. 474+00.00	19.03	-1	20.03
End Wall W-4	Sta. 474+20.77	18.402	-1	19.402

The length of the MSE wall is 28'-11" (28.92 feet).

Prototype MSE Wall

Dimensions of MSEWs



The width of the MSE wall both for 3 and 4 is = $(12+12+8+8) \text{ ft} = 40 \text{ ft}$

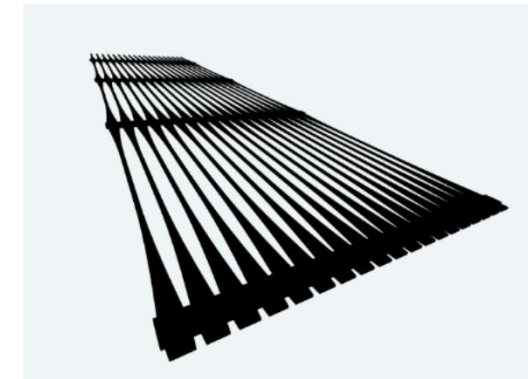
Prototype MSE Wall

Geogrid properties of Target MSEWs

Table 4. Tensar UX1600 Manufacturer's Technical Datasheet

Property	Value
Material Type	Extruded High-Density Polyethylene (HDPE)
Applications	MSE walls, Panel walls
Tensile Strength (5% Strain)	58 kN/m (3,980 lbs/ft)
Ultimate Tensile Strength	144 kN/m (9,870 lbs/ft)
Junction Strength	135 kN/m (9,250 lbs/ft)
Flexural Stiffness	6,000,000 mg-cm
UV Degradation Resistance	95%
Durability	100% resistance to long-term degradation
Max Design Life Strength	52.7 kN/m (3,620 lbs/ft) over 120 years
Roll Dimensions	Width: 4.36 ft, Length: 61 ft
Roll Weight	~216 lbs

Tensar UX1600 Geogrid



Prototype MSE Wall

Properties for Soil for MSEW

Table 5. Properties of soil for MSE wall.

Soil Type	Depth Below Existing Ground Line (ft)	Unit Weight (pcf)	Cohesion (psf)	Internal Friction Angle (°)
Reinforced Soil and Random Backfill		105	0	30°
Medium Dense to Loose Fine Sand with Shell	0 - 5 ft and 10 - 20 ft	110	0	30°
Loose to Very Loose Silty and Clayey Fine Sand with Shell	9 - 24 ft	105	0	24°
Medium Dense to Dense Cemented Sand	Not specified	110	0	34°

Prototype MSE Wall

Laboratory Testing of Soil from Failed MSE Wall at Sanibel Island Bridge

Table 6. Soil gradation and classification

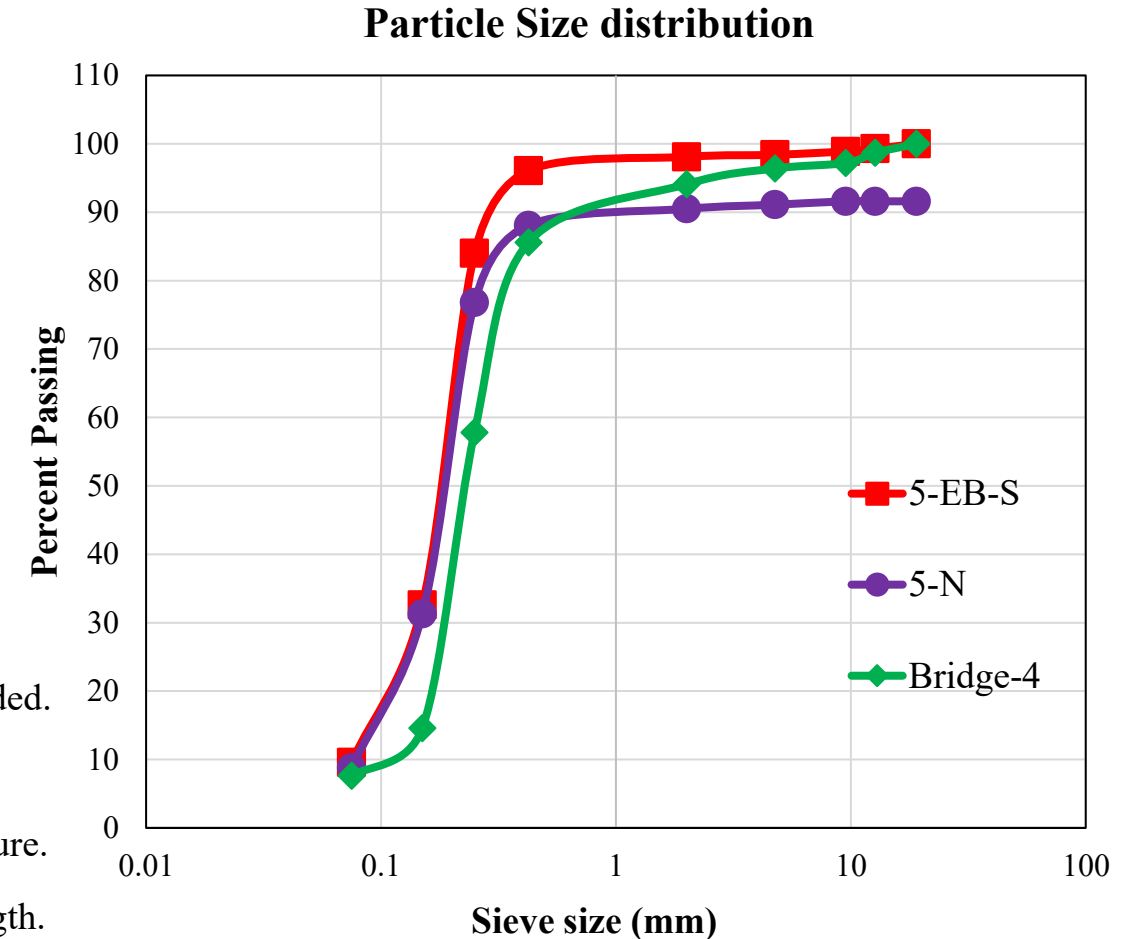
Sample	Sand (%)	Silt (%)	Clay (%)	C_u	C_c	pH	USCS	AASHTO	% Passing #200 Sieve
5-EB-S	90.4	3	6.6	1.625	1.3846	8.11	SP-SM	A-3	9.6
5-N	91.2	3.6	5.2	1.625	1.3846	8.02	SP-SM	A-3	8.8
Bridge-4	98.6	-	-	1.1667	1.006	-	SP	A-3	7.6

Table 7. Direct Shear and Permeability Tests (Lab tests of Soil from Failed MSE Wall)

Sample ID	$\gamma_{\max}$ (pcf)	OMC (%)	$\phi_{\max}$	ϕ'_r	k (cm/sec)	k (ft/day)
Bridge-4	110.2	11.2	32.5	30.2	9.96×10^{-4}	2.82

Observations

- ❑ The soils are predominantly sand (classified as A-3 under AASHTO) and poorly graded.
- ❑ The pH levels are slightly alkaline, supporting stability.
- ❑ The permeability of Sample Bridge-4 is relatively high, consistent with its sandy nature.
- ❑ The friction angles are typical for sandy soils, ensuring moderate to high shear strength.

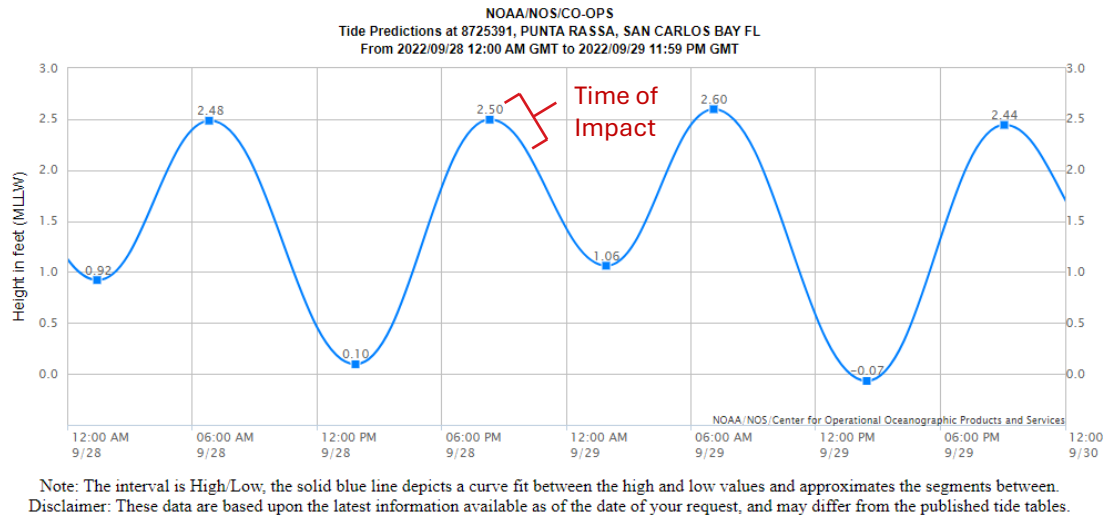


GSD for backfill soil

Prototype MSE Wall

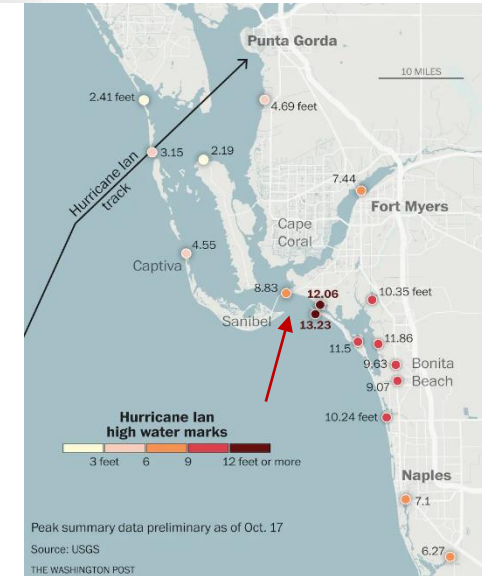
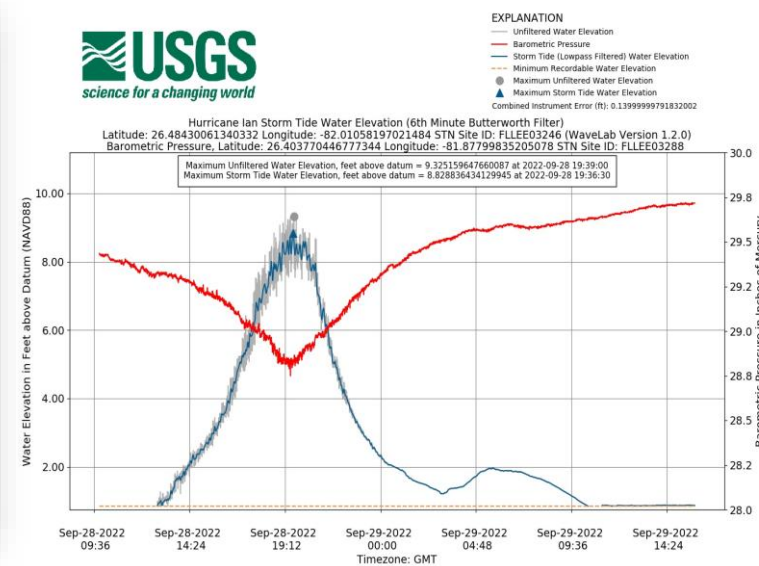
Hydrodynamic Data

Hurricane Ian – Predicted Tide



By: Kisan Patel, P.E. and Andrew Newman, P.E.
FDOT Districts 1 and 7 Materials Office

Hurricane Ian – Measured Storm Surge



By: Kisan Patel, P.E. and Andrew Newman, P.E.
FDOT Districts 1 and 7 Materials Office

Prototype MSE Wall

Hydrodynamic Data

Impacted Area - Sanibel Causeway Bridges and Islands



Wall	Velocity (ft/s)	Significant Wave Height (ft)	Peak Period (sec)
1	12.0	6.1	4.1
2	14.2	6.5	4.8
3	9.9	7.2	4.7
4	9.6	7.9	5.1
5	14.5	6.9	5.1

Prototype MSE Wall

Hydrodynamic Data

Impacted Area - Sanibel Causeway Bridges and Islands



Task 2: Experimental Design and Numerical Model Predictions

- Numerical models will help to inform the centrifuge container and model designs
- Use models to study hydrodynamic loading (WAVEWATCH/FUNWAVE or SCHISM) and MSE wall system response (FLAC3D)
- Hydrodynamic loading per model and AASHTO guidelines (Level I and III)
- Constitutive model accounts for oscillatory and residual pore pressure effects on backfill and bearing soil contact stress
- Scaled wave and currents will be generated in a strong centrifuge container with viewing windows
- Centrifuge models will be fitted with sensing for displacements, pressures, wave heights, and water velocities

Centrifuge Testing

ERDC Centrifuge Configuration

Centrifuge Specifications:

- **Capacity:** 1,200 g-ton.
- **Radius:** 6.5 meters.
- **Adjustable Counterweight:** For fine adjustments.
- **Aerodynamic Shroud:** For stability during testing.
- **Auto-Counterbalance:** To adjust for payload changes during in-flight operations.

Operational Features:

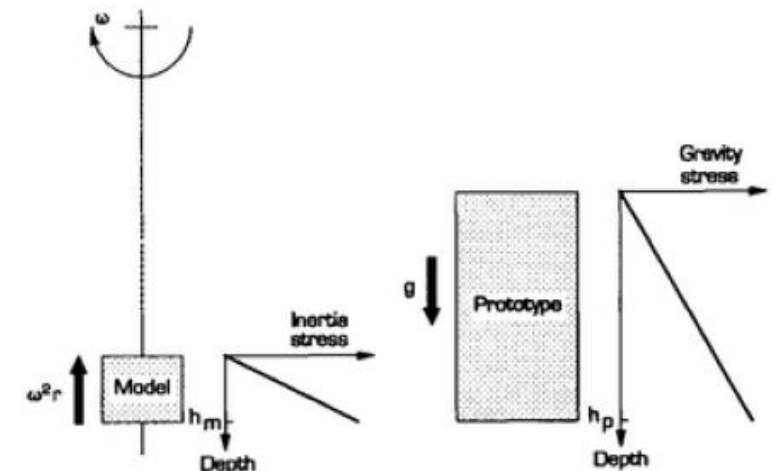
- **Payloads Capacity:** 8,000 kg.
- **Accelerations:** 10 to 350g
- **Payload Size:** 1.3 m × 1.3 m × 2 m



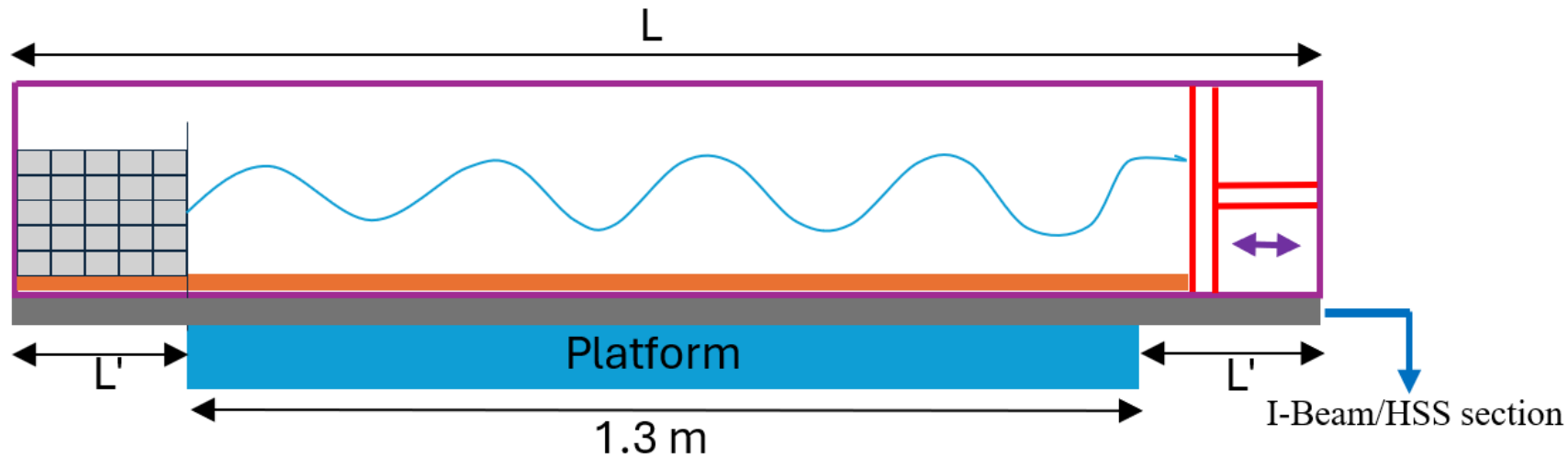
Centrifuge at the US ERDC

Why Centrifuge, not Wave Flume?

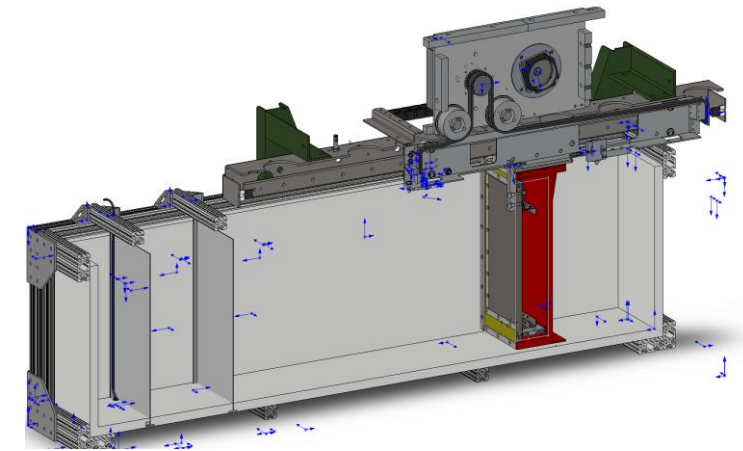
- ✓ Centrifuge testing replicates prototype stress conditions in model scale, enabling realistic soil behavior under gravitational loading.
- ✗ Wave flume tests good for hydrodynamics but cannot replicate full scale prototype stresses.



Centrifuge Testing



Schematic of centrifuge model setup with a wave tank, including platform dimensions and wave generation system.



Centrifuge flume container (6 ft (L) x 1.5 ft (W) x 1.5 ft (H)) with piston wave maker (red/gray and DC actuator) – Edinburgh Designs

Centrifuge Testing

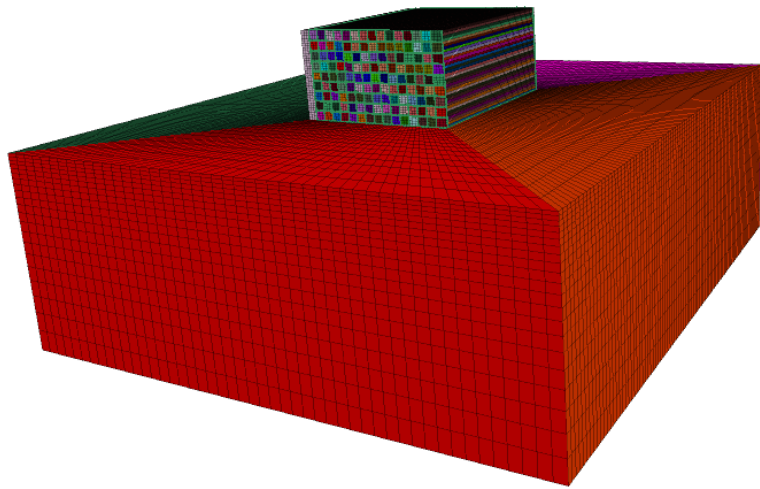
Model MSE Wall for 35g Centrifuge Test

Table 8. Model MSE Wall Dimensions (Scaled by 1/N)

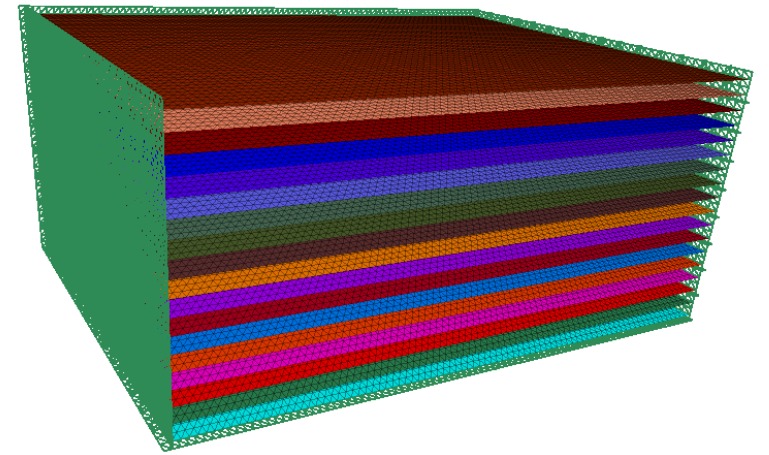
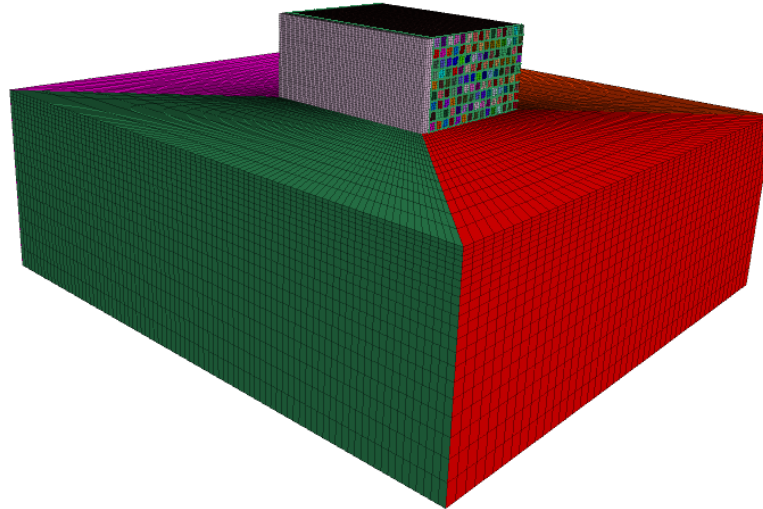
Location	Prototype MSE Wall		Model MSE Wall		Prototype MSE Wall		Model MSE Wall		Prototype MSE Wall		Model MSE Wall		Prototype MSE Wall		Model MSE Wall	
	Height (ft)		Height (ft)		Length (ft)		Length (ft)		Width (ft)		Width (ft)		Reinforcement Length (ft)		Reinforcement Length (ft)	
	W-3	W-4	W-3	W-4	W-3	W-4	W-3	W-4	W-3	W-4	W-3	W-4	W-3	W-4	W-3	W-4
Begin Wall	14.73	20.73	0.49	0.69	28.92	28.92	0.96	0.96	40	40	1	1	26	26	0.4	0.4
Midpoint	14.03	20.03	0.46	0.66												
End Wall	13.40	19.40	0.44	0.64												

- **Woven Pellon fabric will be cut into a geogrid-like pattern and used as reinforcement in the model MSE wall.**
- **The same soil material as used in the prototype MSE wall will be adopted as the backfill soil in the model. Fuglsang and Ovesen, 1988; Yamaguchi et al., 1976; Kimura et al., 1985; and Ovesen, 1985 showed that effect of grain size is negligible if model size to mean grain size is > 30 .**

3-D Numerical Model



Full 3D model with foundation soil, cheek wall and MSE wall



Interfaces and geogrids

Properties of Model

Table 1. Material models and properties used in the numerical analysis

Component	Constitutive Model	Density (kg/m ³)	Strength Parameters	Elastic Properties (Pa)	Additional Parameters
Foundation Soil	Mohr–Coulomb	1762	$\phi = 30^\circ$, $c = 0$, tension = 0	$K = 4.1667 \times 10^7$ $G = 1.9231 \times 10^7$	—
MSE Backfill Soil	Mohr–Coulomb	1683	$\phi = 30^\circ$, $c = 0$, dilation = 1°	$K = 2.5 \times 10^8$ $G = 1.15 \times 10^8$	—
Concrete Panel	Linear Elastic	2400	—	$E = E = 2.5 \times 10^{10}$ $\nu = 0.15$	—
Cheek Wall	Linear Elastic	2800	—	$E = 4.5 \times 10^{10}$ $\nu = 0.25$	Fully restrained boundary condition
Geogrid (Reinforcement)	Linear Elastic Membrane	—	—	$E = 5.39 \times 10^8$ $\nu = 0.33$	Thickness = 0.005 m Coupling stiffness = 1.0×10^6 N/m ³ Coupling cohesion = 0 Coupling friction = 30°

Table 2. Interface properties used in the model

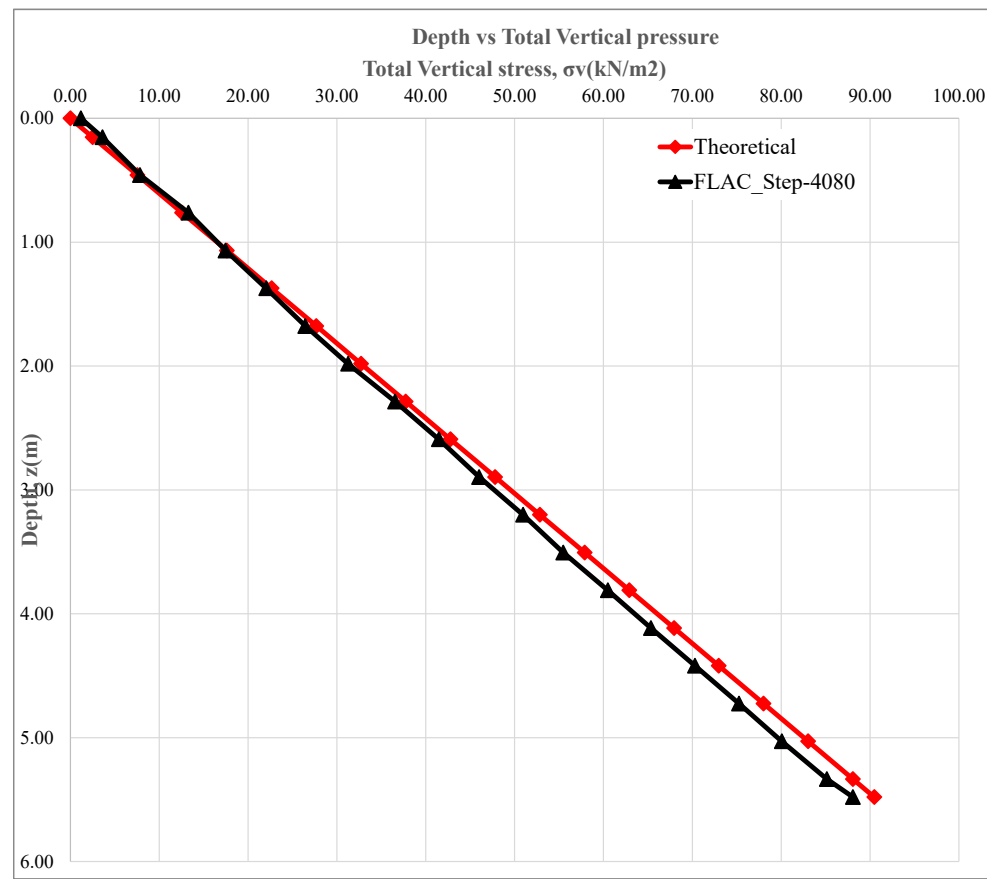
Interface Type	k_n (Pa/m)	k_s (Pa/m)	Friction ($^\circ$)	Cohesion (Pa)
Panel – Foundation	5.0×10^7	5.0×10^7	20	6.6×10^4
Panel – Backfill	5.0×10^7	5.0×10^7	20	6.6×10^4
Panel – Panel	1.0×10^9	5.0×10^7	57	4.6×10^4
Cheek Wall – Backfill	5.0×10^7	5.0×10^7	20	6.6×10^4

Vertical Stress

Vertical Stress: $\sigma_v(z) = \gamma z$

At-Rest Earth Pressure Coefficient: $K_o = (1 - \sin \phi)OCR^{\sin \phi}$

Horizontal Stress: $P(z) = K_o \sigma_v(z)$



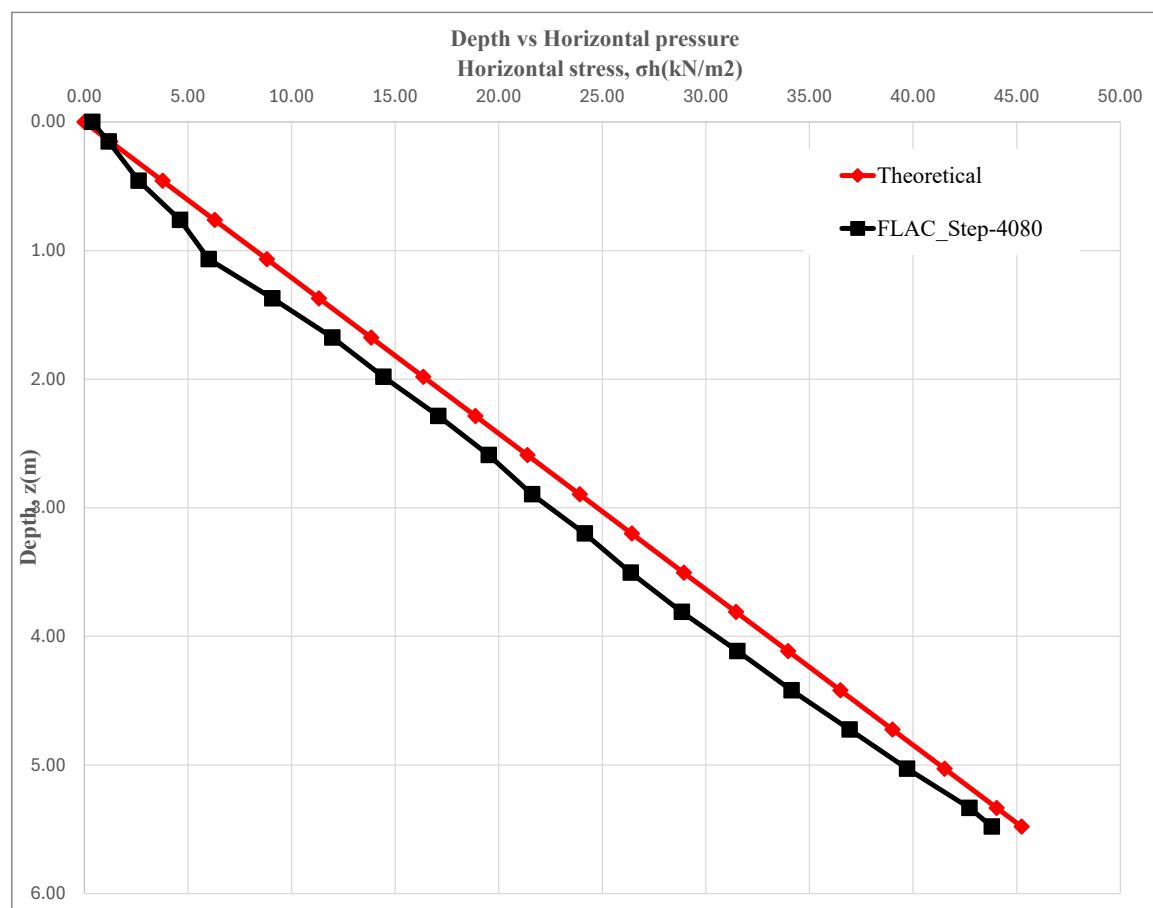
Calculated		
Depth z (m)	Vertical Stress, σ_v (kN/m ²)	% Diff
0	$16.51 \times 0.00 = 0.00$	
0.15	$16.51 \times 0.15 = 2.52$	-35.8
0.46	$16.51 \times 0.46 = 7.55$	-3.7
0.76	$16.51 \times 0.76 = 12.58$	-5.5
1.07	$16.51 \times 1.07 = 17.61$	0.8
1.37	$16.51 \times 1.37 = 22.65$	2.7
1.68	$16.51 \times 1.68 = 27.68$	4.6
1.98	$16.51 \times 1.98 = 32.71$	4.6
2.29	$16.51 \times 2.29 = 37.74$	3.2
2.59	$16.51 \times 2.59 = 42.77$	3.1
2.9	$16.51 \times 2.90 = 47.81$	3.9
3.2	$16.51 \times 3.20 = 52.84$	3.7
3.51	$16.51 \times 3.51 = 57.87$	4.2
3.81	$16.51 \times 3.81 = 62.90$	3.9
4.11	$16.51 \times 4.11 = 67.94$	3.9
4.42	$16.51 \times 4.42 = 72.97$	3.7
4.72	$16.51 \times 4.72 = 78.00$	3.6
5.03	$16.51 \times 5.03 = 83.03$	3.6
5.33	$16.51 \times 5.33 = 88.06$	3.4
5.48	$16.51 \times 5.48 = 90.47$	2.7

Horizontal Stress

Vertical Stress: $\sigma_v(z) = \gamma z$

At-Rest Earth Pressure Coefficient: $K_o = 1 - \sin \phi$

Horizontal Stress: $P(z) = K_o \sigma_v(z)$



Calculated		
Depth z (m)	Horizontal Stress, σ_h (kN/m ²)	% Diff
0	$0.00 \times 0.333 = 0.00$	
0.15	$2.52 \times 0.333 = 1.26$	6.7
0.46	$7.55 \times 0.333 = 3.77$	35.9
0.76	$12.58 \times 0.333 = 6.29$	30.6
1.07	$17.61 \times 0.333 = 8.81$	37.8
1.37	$22.65 \times 0.333 = 11.32$	22.0
1.68	$27.68 \times 0.333 = 13.84$	14.5
1.98	$32.71 \times 0.333 = 16.35$	12.5
2.29	$37.74 \times 0.333 = 18.87$	9.9
2.59	$42.77 \times 0.333 = 21.39$	9.1
2.9	$47.81 \times 0.333 = 23.90$	10.1
3.2	$52.84 \times 0.333 = 26.42$	9.0
3.51	$57.87 \times 0.333 = 28.94$	9.3
3.81	$62.90 \times 0.333 = 31.45$	8.7
4.11	$67.94 \times 0.333 = 33.97$	7.5
4.42	$72.97 \times 0.333 = 36.48$	6.7
4.72	$78.00 \times 0.333 = 39.00$	5.4
5.03	$83.03 \times 0.333 = 41.52$	4.4
5.33	$88.06 \times 0.333 = 44.03$	3.0
5.48	$90.47 \times 0.333 = 45.24$	3.2

Hydrodynamic Model Process

Level 1: Global WW3 Model

At the outermost scale, a global WAVEWATCH III (WW3) model provides large-scale wave conditions during Hurricane Ian. The wind forcing comes from the ERA5 reanalysis and the bathymetry comes from the IFREMER Integrated Ocean Waves for Geophysical and other Applications (IOWAGA) global WW3 dataset. This level covers from July to September 2022 and supplies spectral wave boundary information to the nested regional model.

Level 2: Northwest Atlantic WW3 Model

A Northwest Atlantic WW3 model is nested within the global system to refine storm-wave propagation across the western North Atlantic covering also from July to September 2022. The bathymetry comes from the IFREMER IOWAGA northwest Atlantic WW3 dataset. Boundary forcing for this level is provided by Level 1 (global WW3) and uses the same wind forcing, and Level 2 outputs are used to force the local coastal model.

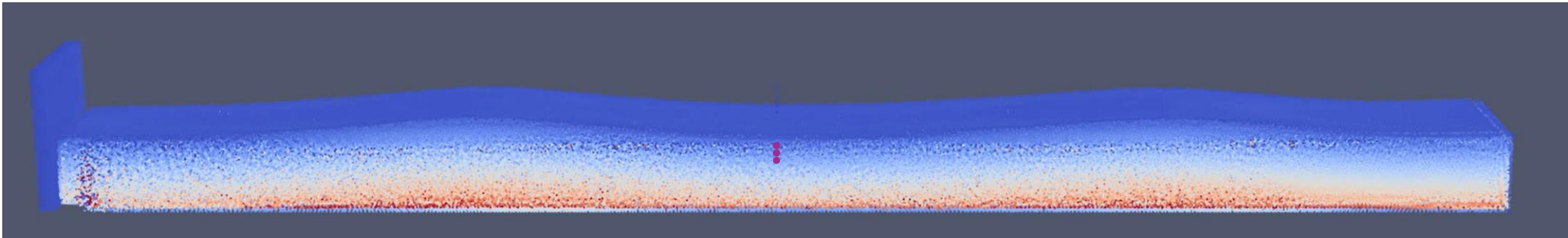
Level 3: Coupled ROMS-WW3 Model

This level of the model consists of a coupled Regional Ocean Modeling System (ROMS) and WAVEWATCH III (WW3) framework covering from September 26th to 30th of 2022. This model is designed to capture large-scale oceanographic and wave conditions during Hurricane Ian. Bathymetric data is sourced from the CUDEM dataset, atmospheric forcing is provided by the Global Forecast System (GFS), ocean boundary conditions are obtained from the HYCOM model, and wave boundary conditions are derived by the level 2 WW3 model. This level provides the essential hydrodynamic and wave climate context over a broad coastal domain.

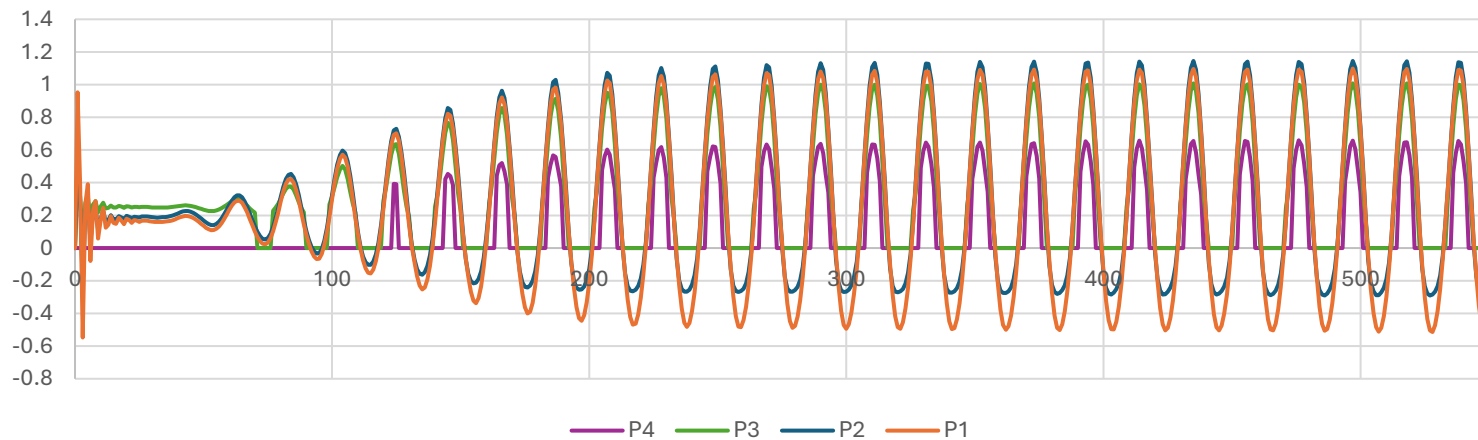
Level 4: DualSPHysics Model for Wave-Structure Interaction

The fourth level employs the DualSPHysics smoothed particle hydrodynamics (SPH) model to simulate wave-structure interactions. It takes wave and water level input from the Level 3 ROMS-WW3 model, simulating the irregular wave propagation for 400 seconds with the highest wave during the hurricane to analyze localized hydrodynamic loads on the MSE wall. This model resolves detailed pressure fields and free surface dynamics to accurately assess the impact forces exerted by hurricane-driven waves on coastal infrastructure.

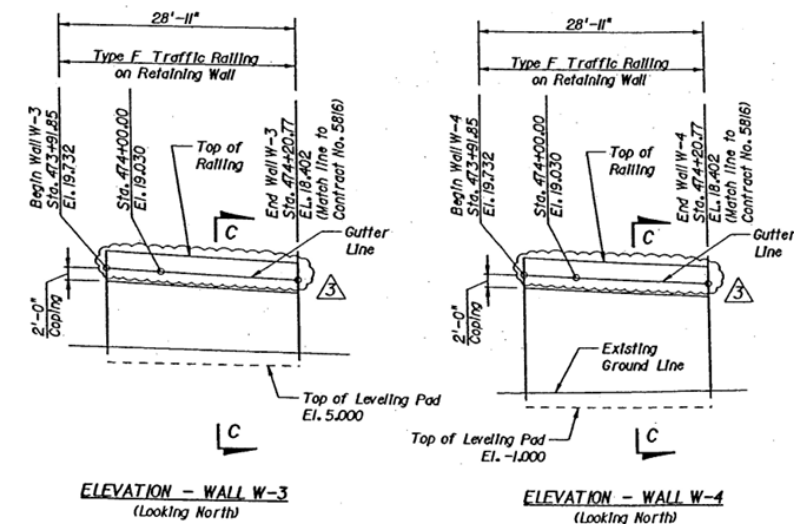
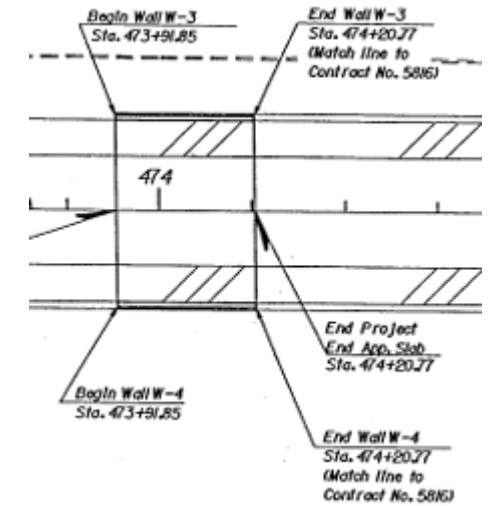
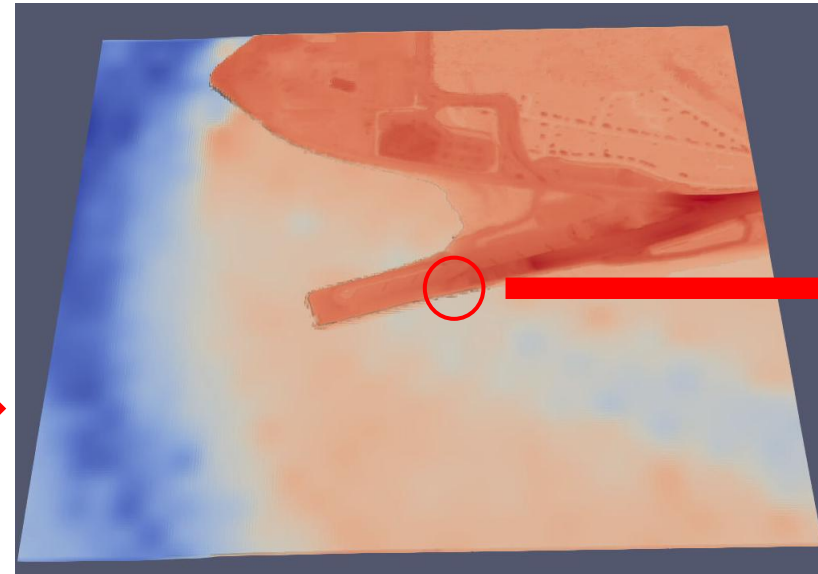
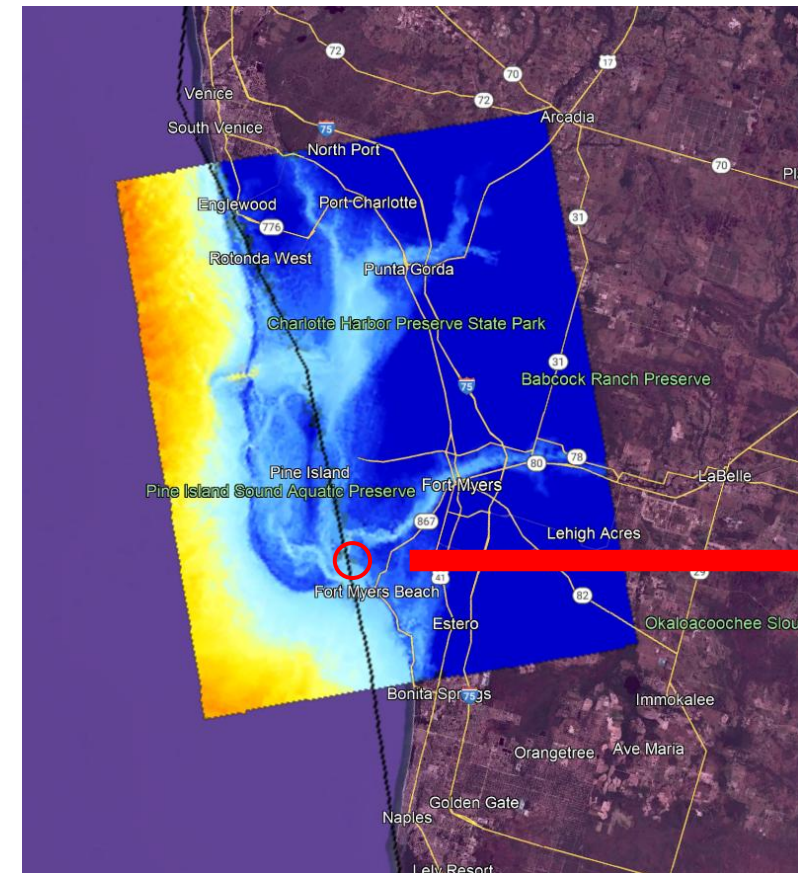
Validating Smoothed Particle Hydrodynamic model



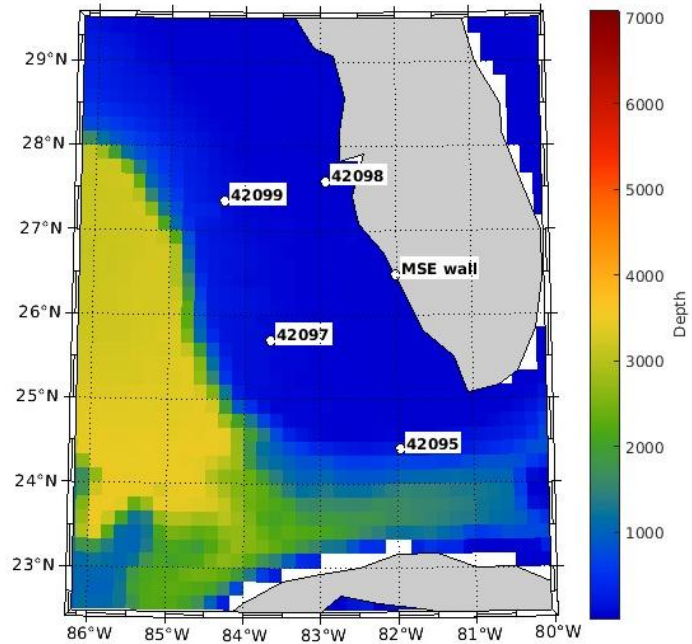
Standardized pressure with time (s)



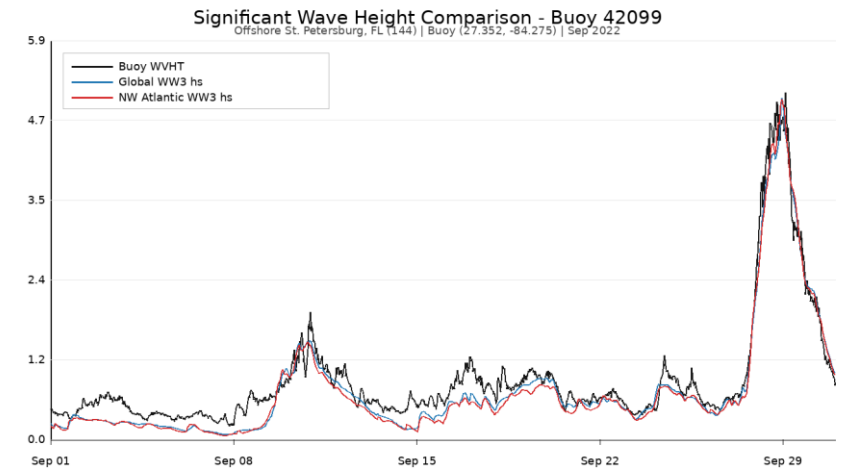
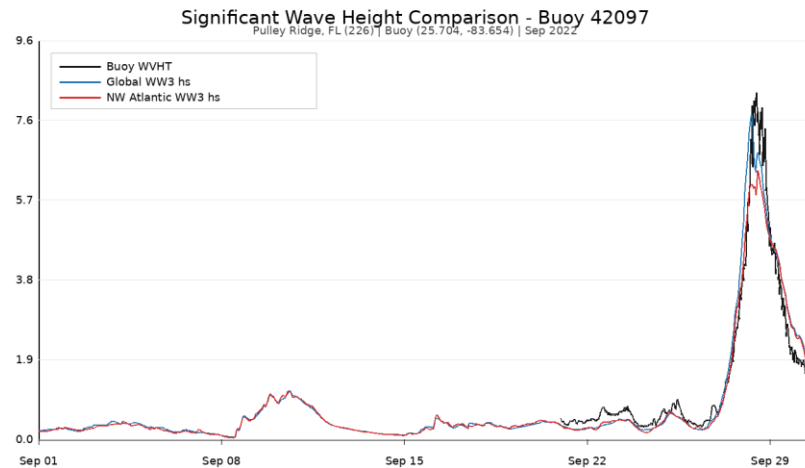
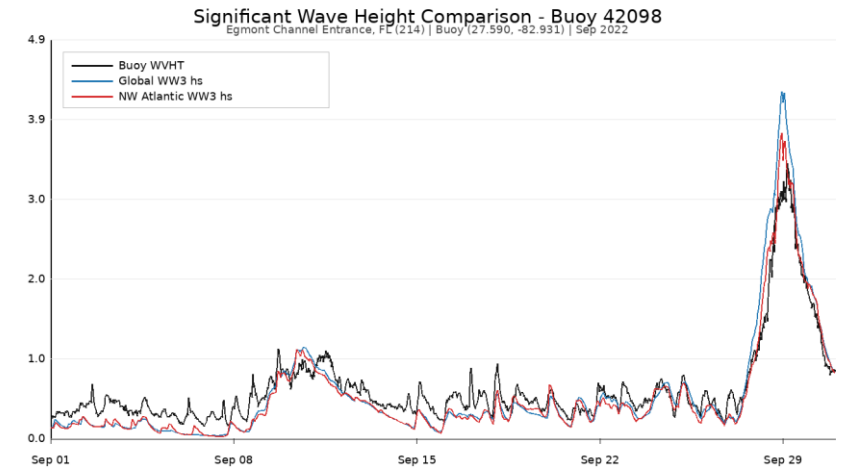
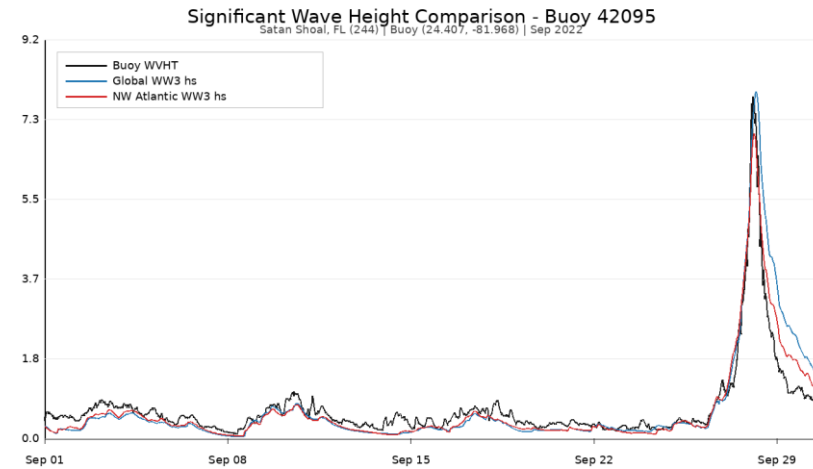
Smoothed Particle Hydrodynamic Model Bathymetry



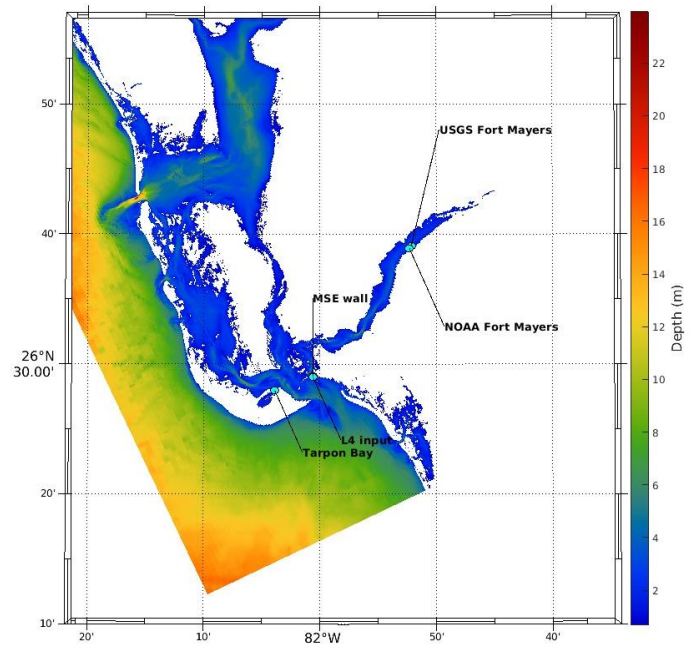
Level 1 and Level 2 Model Results



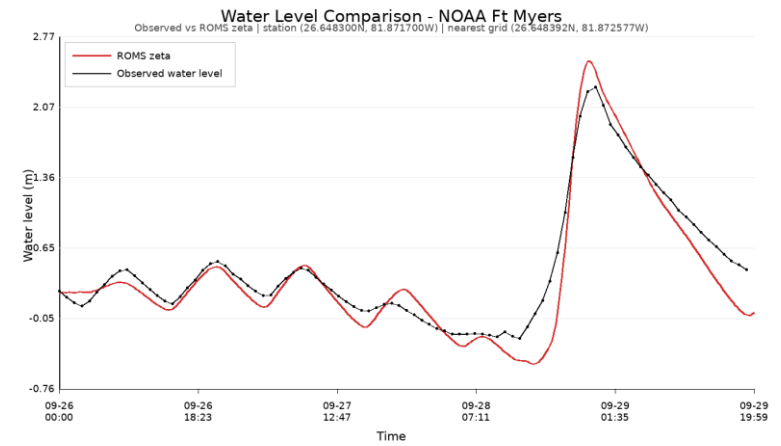
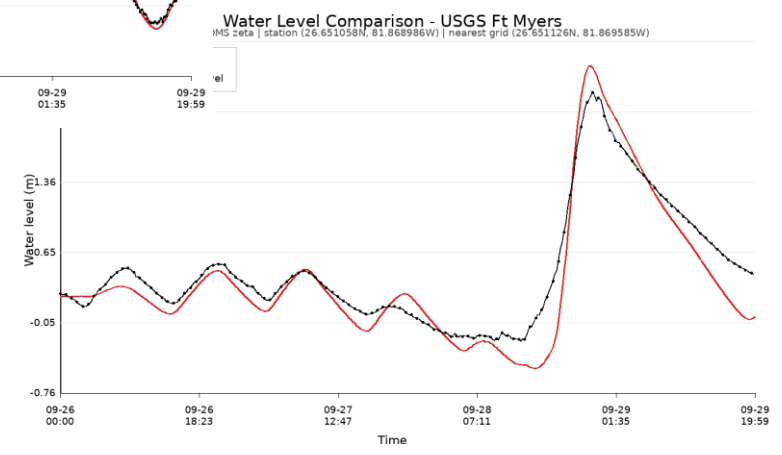
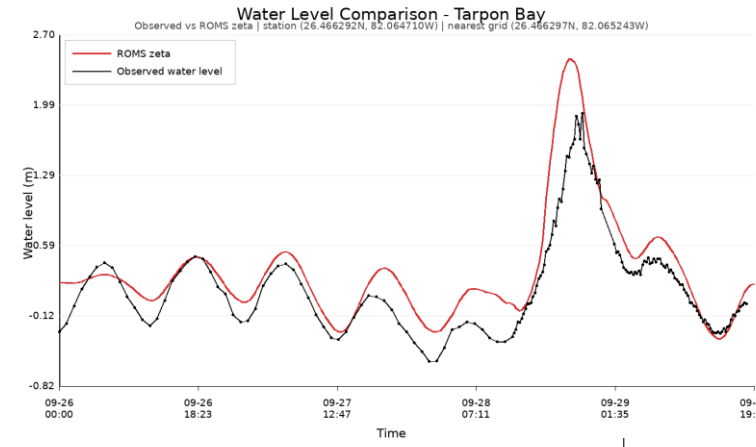
Location of buoy stations and the MSE wall of interest



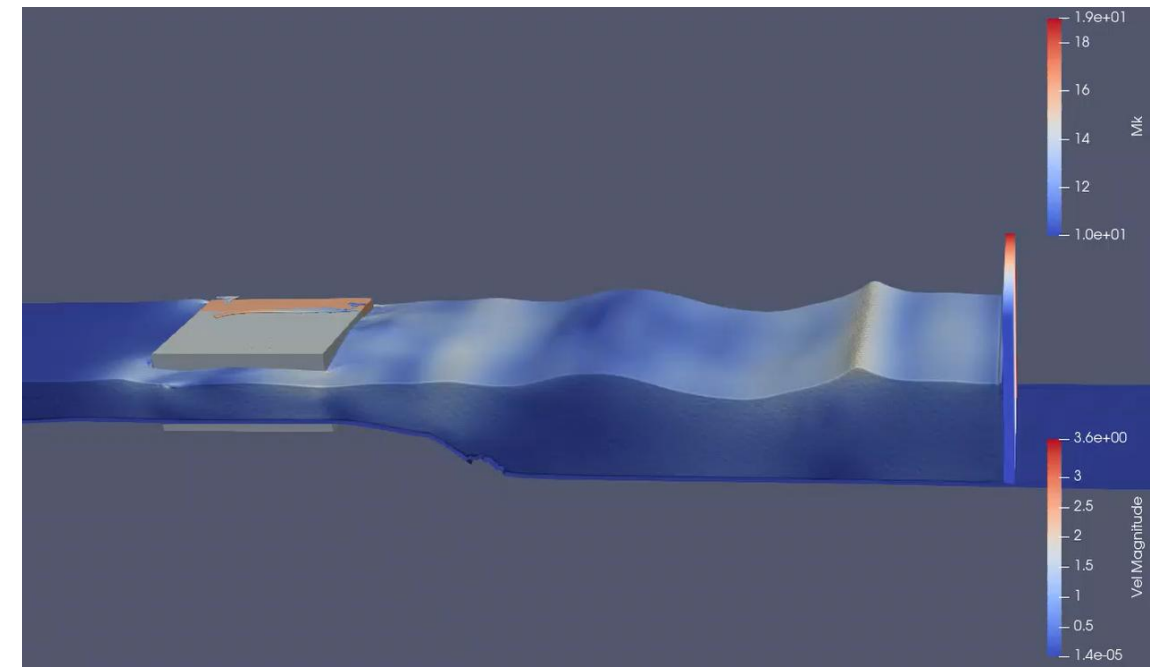
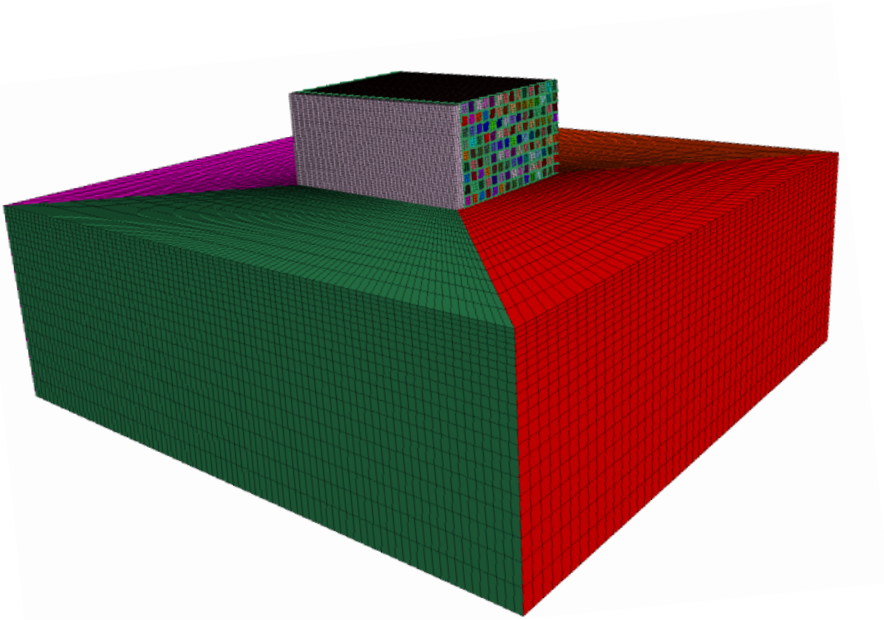
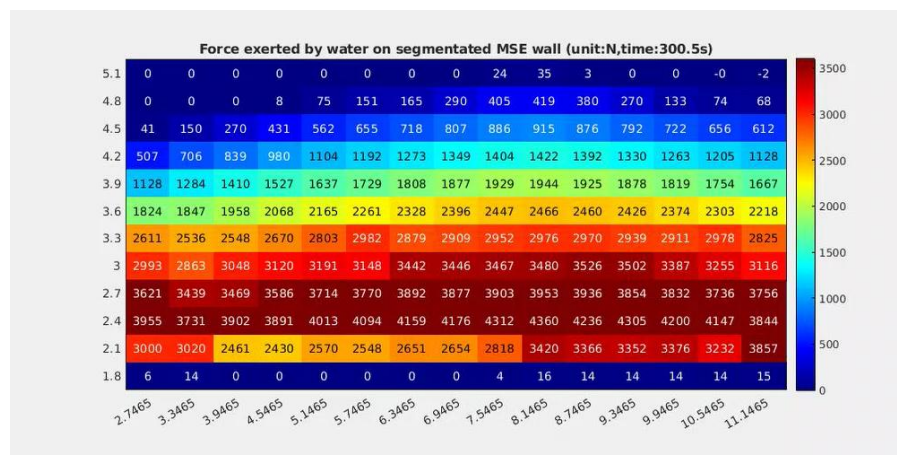
Level 3 ROMS-WW3



Locations of Water level stations for comparison, the MSE wall of interest, and where the water level and wave parameters were extracted for input of Level 4 model

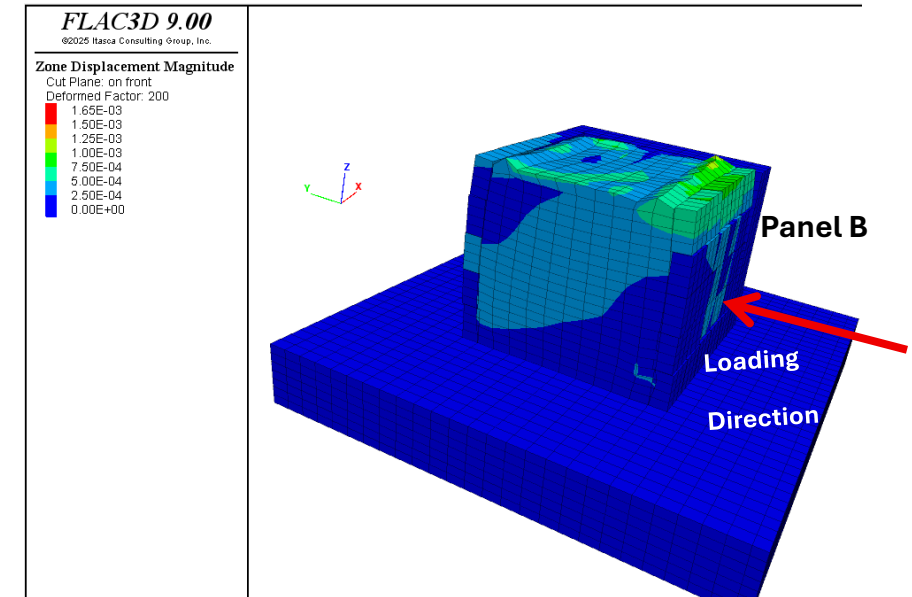
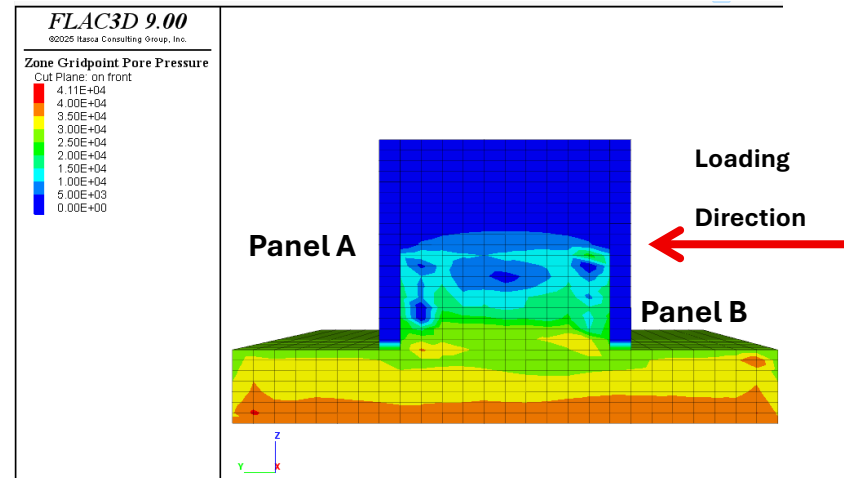
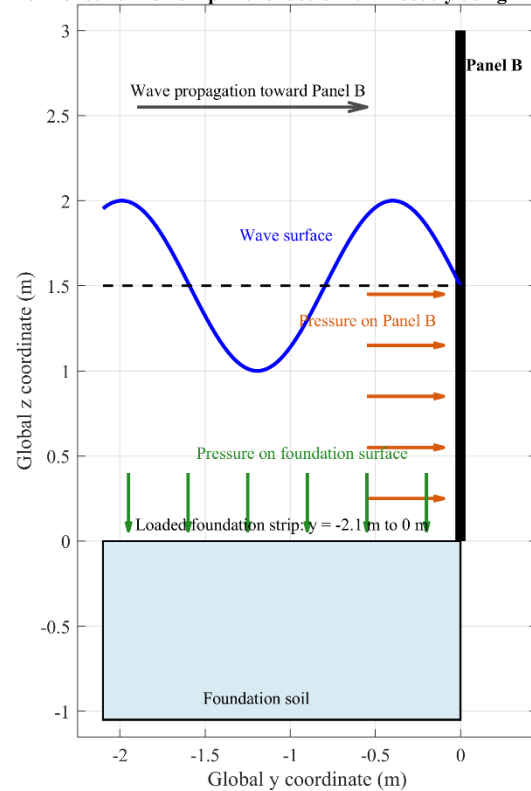


Level 4 SPHysics: 3-D Wave on MSE Wall Model

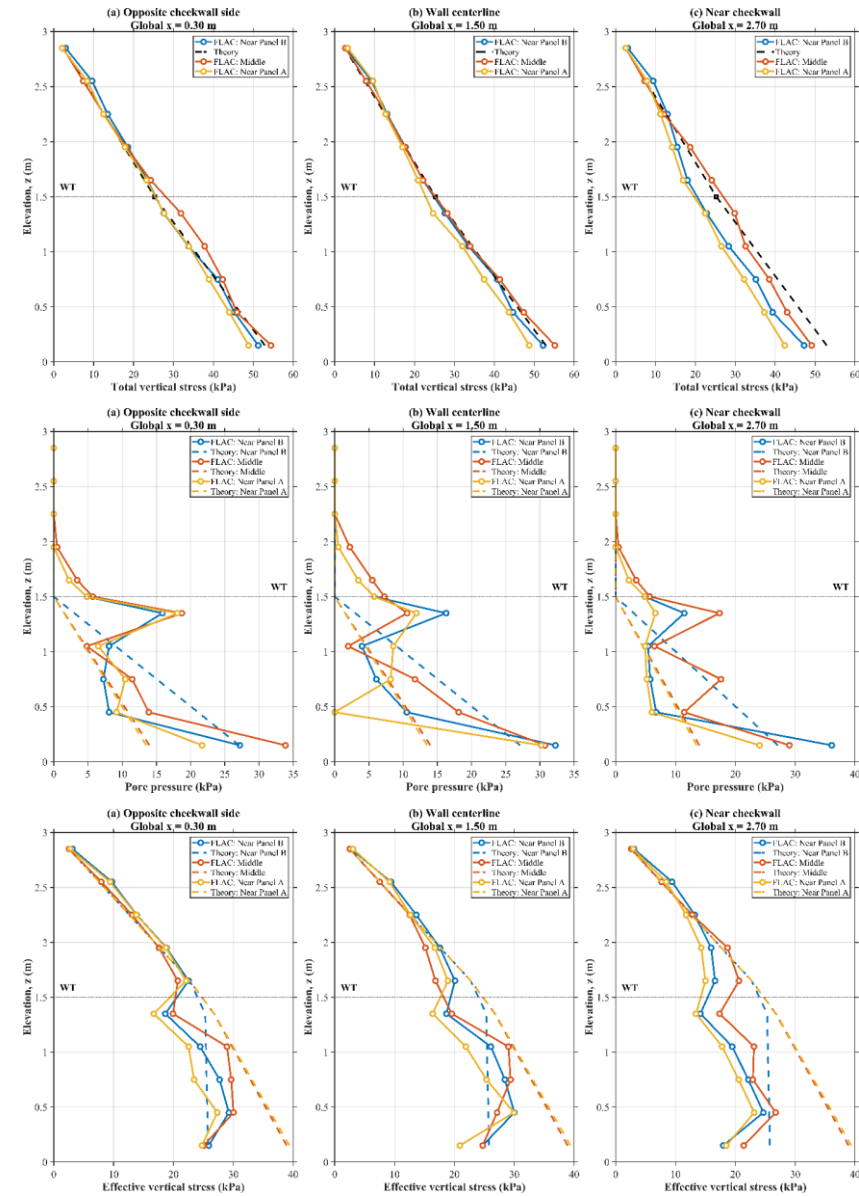
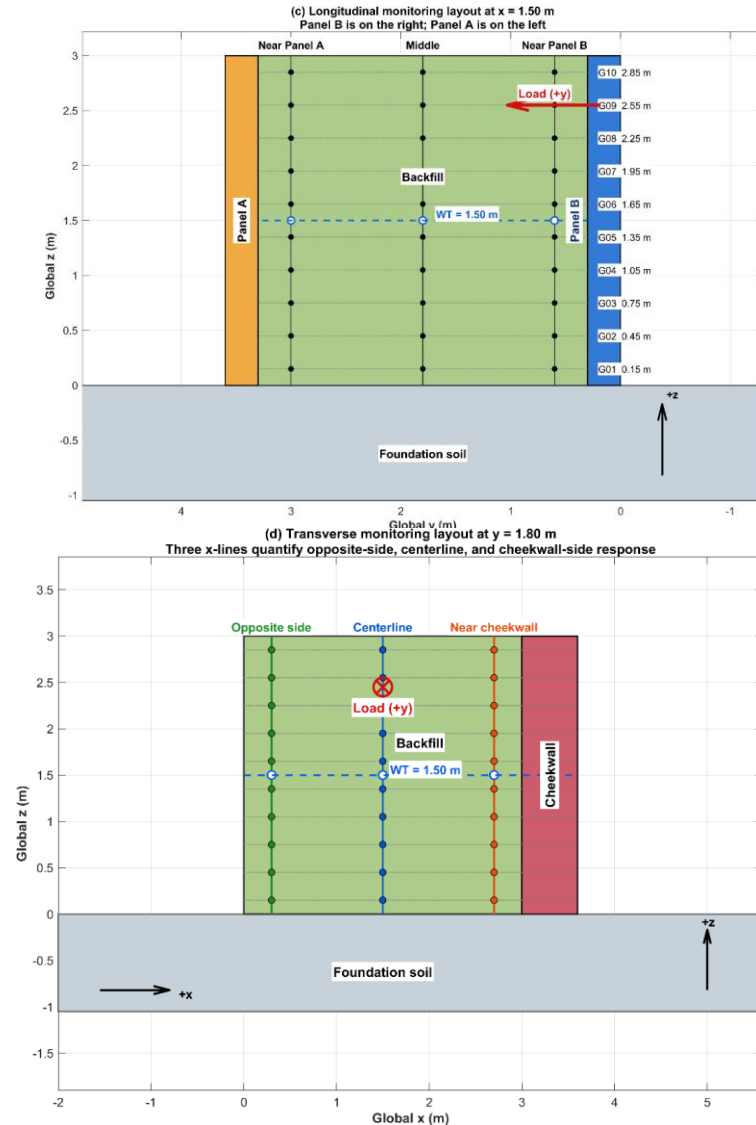


3-D Wave and MSE Wall Model

Figure 1. Conceptual Wave Loading on Panel B and the Adjacent Foundation Surface
The wall and the foundation strip are loaded simultaneously using the same wave clock



3-D Wave and MSE Wall Model



Thank You