Hydrologic Engineering Center

Hydrologic Modeling System
HEC-HMS

Validation Guide

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Hydrologic Modeling System HEC-HMS, Release Notes

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Introduction

The Hydrologic Modeling System (HEC-HMS) is designed to simulate the hydrologic cycle. This broad simulation capability requires many different components: precipitation, potential evapotranspiration, snowmelt, infiltration, surface runoff, baseflow, and channel routing. Water control structures such as reservoirs and diversions also contain a number of simulation components for spillways, pumps, and culverts, to name a few. These simulation components require an extensive array of time-series data, paired data, and gridded data. The interaction of these various data and simulation components leads to a software package that is very complex.

Hydrologic engineers in Corps of Engineers' offices nationwide support planning, design, operation, permitting, and regulating activities by providing information about current and future runoff from watersheds, with and without water control structures. HEC-HMS can support these activities by simulating the behavior of watersheds, and computing estimates of runoff volumes, of peak flow rates, and of timing of flows. It goes without saying that these estimates must be precise and accurate if they are to be useful. By precise we mean that every time the software computes a simulation, it must obtain the exact same numerical results for the same input data. By accurate we mean that the equations that are the foundation of each of the simulation components are solved correctly.

Code validation can be described as the process of determining that a complex software program such as HEC-HMS produces precise and accurate results. Code validation should not be confused with other types of testing. For example, model validation is the process of determining if a proposed model (often a mathematical model) accurately represents a physical process and provides predictive capability. In another example, verification is the process of determining if a set of model parameters estimated during calibration performs well under different though similar conditions. Code validation instead focuses on the very specific question of whether the software accurately solves the equations used to model or represent the physical process. Software should not be used for any of the tasks undertaken by a hydrologic engineer unless it first can demonstrate code validation of all its internal components.

The models and equations incorporated in HEC-HMS have been validated by the research community. The equations in each of the simulation components included in the program have been sourced from published hydrology textbooks and from papers published in peer-reviewed journals. The code validation process described here is designed to determine if the published models and equations have been incorporated correctly in the HEC-HMS software. However, code validation does not mean that a particular model can be applied in any and every watershed. A variety of simulation components are included in HEC-HMS because not every model is applicable in every watershed. The HEC-HMS user is responsible for selecting simulation components in the software appropriate to the selected watershed, and configuring them to appropriately represent the hydrological processes in the watershed. A calibration and verification process can be developed by the software user to determine if appropriate choices have been made in how the software is applied.

The Test Suite

The team responsible for the development of HEC-HMS has created an extensive set of code validation tests. The tests are designed to determine if input data including time-series, paired data, and gridded data are processed correctly. This includes tests of unit system conversion and interpolation. The code validation tests also determine if the simulation results are accurate. The accuracy of the results is determined by one of two
methods. In some cases it is possible, given the input data and parameters, to calculate
the correct result by hand. In these cases the equations are simple enough that hand
calculations with the aid of a calculator can determine that the results computed by HEC-
HMS are correct. Other cases require independent software such as Parametric
Technology Corporation Mathcad or Microsoft Excel. This second approach is required
when the equations used in a simulation component are differential equations, or some
other type of complex equation. Mathcad and Excel are developed independently by
teams of industry specialists. The results from these independent software tools can be
used to confirm that HEC-HMS is calculating accurate results.

The code validation test suite created for HEC-HMS includes 24 projects. Each of these
projects focuses on a separate simulation component, as shown in Table 1. Each of
these projects contains from several to many simulation runs. Each simulation run tests
one component of the software in isolation from all other components. These tests have
been carefully developed and have a known, accurate solution. The test suite also
includes 9 projects from actual watershed applications. These projects were selected
because they are complex and require the interaction of many of the different simulation
components included in HEC-HMS. These complex projects do not have rigorously
developed accurate solutions. They are still useful because they can be used to detect
any changes in simulated values that may arise from incremental changes in the
software. A change in the software that causes a computed result to change can be
detected with these 9 projects. If such a change occurs, then the source of the change
must be found, investigated, and resolved.

The projects used in the code validation test suite compute thousands of time-series. A
total of 955 of these time-series are compared against known standards. Each value of
the time-series is compared and a test is deemed to have failed if even a single value is
outside the allowable range. As a general rule, tests use an allowable error range of
0.02% of the correct value. This means that HEC-HMS is deemed to have failed a
validation test if it makes an error greater than 0.02% of the correct value. The
development team reviews the results from the entire test suite before certifying a new
software version for general release. The validation suite is used to find errors so they
can be repaired.

A new software version is not released for general use until it can successfully pass all of
the code validation tests in the suite. We make the test suite available through the HEC
website (www.hec.usace.army.mil) so that users may, if desired, review the data sets
included in the suite, and optionally simulate them and compare the results to the
benchmark values. The projects do not need to be evaluated after downloading the
software to know that the software is working correctly. The software is fully tested
before it is released for use and therefore will pass all of the tests successfully after it is
installed. The digital certificate included in the installation package guarantees that the
software has not changed since it was certified as passing all validation tests. Any
change that might occur in the software between the time it leaves the HEC server, and
the time it is actually installed, could cause errors during validation. Because a digital
certificate is included in the installation package, the user would be alerted to any such
changes during the installation process. Nevertheless, users have the option of
independently confirming the results already achieved by HEC staff preparing the
software for release.

The following sections serve as documentation of the procedures used by HEC staff
during testing. All of these steps are followed by HEC staff during the testing required
before a new version of HEC-HMS is released for use. A user could follow these same
steps if they wished to independently validate the software.
Table 1. Listing of the projects for testing each of the HEC-HMS simulation components in isolation from other components.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Simulation Component</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bench1</td>
<td>Sources, Junctions, and Sinks</td>
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<td>Bench2</td>
<td>Diversions</td>
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<td>Bench3</td>
<td>Lag Reach Routing</td>
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<td>Kinematic Wave Reach Routing</td>
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<td>Bench5</td>
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<td>Bench6</td>
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<td>Bench8</td>
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<td>Bench9</td>
<td>Reservoir Routing and Outlets</td>
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<td>Bench9A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bench9B</td>
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<td>Bench10</td>
<td>Subbasin Loss Rate</td>
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<td>Bench11</td>
<td>Subbasin Transform</td>
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<td>Bench12</td>
<td>Subbasin Baseflow</td>
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<td>Bench13</td>
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<td>Bench14</td>
<td>Specified Hyetograph Precipitation</td>
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<td>Bench15</td>
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<td>Bench16</td>
<td>Gage Weights Precipitation</td>
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<td>Bench17</td>
<td>SCS Storm Precipitation</td>
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<td>Bench18</td>
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<td>Bench21</td>
<td>Monthly and Priestley-Taylor Evapotranspiration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bench22</td>
<td>Temperature Index Snowmelt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Project Data**

The code validation test suite includes 24 projects for individual components plus an additional 9 projects for testing complex interactions. All of the files in each project directory are set with "read-only" file permission. The permission must be changed to "read-write" file permission before the files can be used with HEC-HMS. Additionally, the project DSS file in each project does not contain any simulation results. If the user plans to compute the simulation runs included in these projects, a backup copy of these projects should be kept. Each time the benchmark validation tests will be computed, a fresh copy of the backup projects should be used. Any changes to the data in the validation projects will cause the tests to fail.

**Established Accurate Results**

Hand calculations and independent software have been used to establish known accurate results for each code validation test. These known results are stored in a DSS file. There is a separate DSS file for each of the corresponding projects used in validation testing. The simulation results in each DSS file have been checked very
carefully. Some of the methods used to check the results include HEC-RAS for culvert calculations, Mathcad®, Excel®, and hand calculations by calculator. These files should never be modified.

**Automated Comparison**

It would be onerous to compare all of the 955 time-series manually. The development team has created a small utility program to automate this task. The utility program reads the time-series of computed results from the project DSS file. It also reads the time-series from the known result. The utility program then compares value by value the two time-series. If two values do not agree within the error range, the error is recorded in a log file. A successful passage of the test is recorded in the log file if all values match within the necessary error range. The log file is the only place to determine the success or failure of each test.

The configuration information for the comparison utility is stored in text files that have "in" as a prefix. These files contain the configuration data necessary for the automated comparison of the simulated results with the established standard results. These files are designed to be used by the "Compare" utility. The utility reads the configuration file and according to the instructions, compares simulated results against the established standard results. A CMD script file is provided for each validation project. The script file can be executed by double-clicking on it in Windows Explorer. The script file will cause the Compare program to start, read a configuration file, and then perform certain comparisons. The results of the comparisons will be written to an output report file.

**Application Steps**

The following steps should be used to execute the validation tests:

1) Place a fresh copy of the benchmark projects in the directories and make sure the file permission is set to "read-write."

2) Start HEC-HMS and open the first project.

3) Compute all of the simulation runs in the project.

4) Open each of the additional projects and also compute all of the simulation runs.

5) Close HEC-HMS.

6) Using Windows Explorer, double-click on each of the CMD script files except for the one called "compare.cmd".

7) Open each of the output report files and examine the results.