

Letter from the Editor



Harry Vereecken

## New *Vadose Zone Journal* Initiatives for 2016

In 2016, *Vadose Zone Journal* (VZJ) will roll out two new features: Focus Topics and a new type of manuscript called Updates. The ideas for these two new features were proposed at the VZJ editorial board meeting in Minneapolis, in 2015, and the concepts were further developed with the editorial board and accepted by the journal co-editors in January 2016.

### Focus Topics

Focus Topics collect recently published VZJ content (original research papers, special section papers, reviews, technical notes, etc.), dating back up to 3 years, to highlight the important gains in scientific understanding in a specific field of vadose zone research. The goal of Focus Topics is to increase the visibility of key scientific concepts of importance to VZJ readers, thus providing continuity and follow-through on essential research topics.

The content of Focus Topics should be either broader than the topic of a special section, it should present new topics not yet addressed by special sections, or it should be a topic suitable beyond a special section, which no longer accepts new contributions once the section is complete.

The Focus Topics will better promote and reinforce VZJ as a go-to journal for these scientific areas. Focus topics will be actively promoted to the science community by various means, including emails targeting communities interested in these topics, social media, and other Society promotional outlets.

Focus topics will typically be initiated by the editorial board. Assembly of papers into a Focus topic will be done by the co-editor and associate editor(s). A Focus Topic should consist of at least 10 papers. Proposed Focus Topics with less than 10 papers will be discussed within the editorial board and a decision will be taken whether to continue (boosting the topic) or to postpone the Focus Topic. Newly accepted papers will be added to a Focus Topic based on the recommendation made by the co-editor handling the paper. Evaluation of success will be measured in terms of the number of papers collected as well as bibliometric indicators (e.g., usage and evolution of citations). A VZJ paper can be listed under several Focus Topics. Including a paper in a Focus Topic will not change how an article is cited; the journal will maintain the same DOI number and manner in which the article was published.

New Focus Topics can be proposed by editors and associate editors after submitting a short proposal to the editorial board for approval. This proposal includes a short narrative of ~100 words, which describes the scope of the Focus Topic, and a list of papers that were published 3 years prior to the submission date of the Focus Topic. The proposers are informed about the decision by the editor. A Focus Topic is always assigned to a member of the editorial board (editor, co-editor, invited review coordinator, book review editor, science communication editor, consulting editor), who will be responsible for that topic.

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The Focus Topics will be added to the main VZJ webpage, along with a link to the list the papers for this topic. The Editorial Board already approved the following Focus Topics to be developed:

- Critical zone research and observatories
- Hydrogeophysics
- Remote sensing of the vadose zone
- Soil–plant and rhizosphere processes
- Soil moisture sensor development and calibration
- Spatial–temporal dynamics of soil moisture
- Vadose zone models
- Permafrost and cold vadose zone
- Preferential flow
- Soil hydraulic properties
- Evapotranspiration

## Updates

The second new feature that VZJ will establish is a new paper type called Updates, and it is closely related to the concept of Focus Topics outlined above. Updates are solicited short reviews of recent progress in a particular area. They are meant to be resources for research and advanced teaching tools. They are written in a manner making them easily accessible to a broader audience and of interest to readers seeking an introduction to the particular topic. Updates should not exceed 5000 words, with references, but excluding supplemental material. Updates should include a title that attracts the attention of non-specialists and should be accompanied by an abstract of not more than 150 words. Updates are primarily associated with Focus Topics, and can be added to the Focus Topic at the request of the organizers. Updates will be subject to the regular review process, but AEs will be informed that they belong to a specific Focus Topic.

**Harry Vereecken**

Vadose Zone Journal Editor