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Complete List of Authors:	Yang, Donglai; University at Buffalo, Department of Geology; Georgia Institute of Technology, School of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences Poinar, Kristin; University at Buffalo, Geology; UB RENEW institute Crooks Nowicki, Sophie; University at Buffalo, Department of Geology; UB RENEW institute Csatho, Bea; University at Buffalo, Department of Geology
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Characteristics of dynamic thickness change across diverse outlet glacier geometries and basal conditions

Donglai YANG[1]*, Kristin POINAR[1,2], Sophie NOWICKI[1,2], Beata CSATHO[1]

[1] *University at Buffalo, Department of Geological Sciences, Buffalo, New York, USA*

[2] *University at Buffalo, RENEW Institute, Buffalo, New York, USA*

Correspondence: Donglai Yang <donglaiy@buffalo.edu>

ABSTRACT. Outlet glaciers in Greenland are undergoing retreat and diffusive thinning in response to external forcings, but the rates and magnitudes of these responses differ from glacier to glacier for unclear reasons. We test how changes in ice overburden pressure and basal lubrication affect diffusive thinning rates and their spatial patterns by conducting numerical experiments over various idealized Greenland-like glacier domains. We find that ∼10 km frontal retreat over a decade can produce sustained thinning rates as large as 16 m a^{-1} due to ice overburden pressure changes, at outlet glaciers with high basal drag (>60 kPa) and lateral resistive stress (>70 kPa). Localized basal lubrication perturbations induce upstream thinning and downstream thickening up to 12 m a^{-1}; the duration of the lubrication forcing generally has a greater effect than its intensity on induced thickness changes. Lastly, episodic grounding line retreats over a rough bed produce a stepped timeseries of thinning broadly consistent with observations of dynamic elevation change on multiple Greenland glaciers. Our findings highlight the importance of local stress state changes on the spatial variation of thinning, and the critical role of grounding line position – not ice front position – in the total thinning over a glacier domain.

*Present address: School of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, Georgia, USA.

1 INTRODUCTION

Observations of the Greenland Ice Sheet (GrIS) mass balance over the past four decades have revealed accelerating ice loss, contributing over 10 mm to global sea-level rise (Mouginot and others, 2019). This trend is projected to continue in the twenty-first century, with high-emission scenarios likely to induce a global sea level rise of 90 $\pm$ 50 mm (Goelzer and others, 2020). Mass loss is primarily driven by decreases in surface mass balance and increases in ice discharge, but precise partitioning is subject to large uncertainty in climate forcings (Fox-Kemper and others, 2023) and thus remains a target of active research. Lately, mass loss through discharge or glacier dynamics has been proposed as an important driver of mass loss in both historical observations and future projections (Mouginot and others, 2019; Choi and others, 2021). Thus, understanding the mass loss caused by the ice dynamic response to climatic forcing is critical to predicting the future evolution of the GrIS.

Dynamic mass change tracked via ice thickness change is primarily driven by glacier motion, via ice deformation and basal sliding in response to stress disequilibrium, particularly due to interannual to decadal-scale changes in ice frontal geometry from calving events (Nick and others, 2009; Christian and others, 2020). Over the past two decades, observations have revealed widespread retreat of outlet glaciers (Moon and others, 2020; Goliber and others, 2022) primarily caused by the intrusion of comparatively warming North Atlantic water into fjords and submarine melting at the termini (Slater and others, 2020; Wood and others, 2021). These retreats trigger ice flow accelerations and along-flow divergence, leading to thinning caused by ice dynamics that propagates upstream, in some cases penetrating dozens of kilometers inland (Pritchard and others, 2009; Wang and others, 2012; Csatho and others, 2014; Felikson and others, 2021).

Despite its widespread occurrence, the thinning caused by ice dynamics (hereafter referred to as dynamic thickness change) exhibits complex temporal and spatial patterns even among neighboring glaciers subject to similar oceanic forcing (McFadden and others, 2011; Csatho and others, 2014). This implies the influence of local factors, such as fjord geometries and boundary conditions. Recent studies have highlighted the role of fjord width and depth on glacier stability (Bassis and Jacobs, 2013; Enderlin and others, 2013; Carr and others, 2014; Haseloff and Sergienko, 2018; Steiger and others, 2018; Frank and others, 2022), which collectively govern the force balance structure and thus the terminus response to perturbations (Carnahan and others, 2022). Although the terminus exerts critical control over inland flow dynamics, other hydro-mechanical processes are also important, including basal hydrologic processes that regulate ice flow dynamics. Basal lubrication caused by surface meltwater drainage has been extensively documented across the GrIS, resulting in seasonal acceleration and deceleration of ice flow (van de Wal and others, 2008; Bartholomew and others, 2010; Chandler and others, 2013; Kehrl and others, 2017). While most studies focus on flow velocity, dynamic thickness change caused by basal lubrication has also been observed (Bevan and others, 2015), and yet the records are comparatively sparse. Moreover, how the dynamic thickness of glaciers at various dynamical states responds to these basal perturbations remains uncharacterized (Zheng, 2022). Aside from observational studies, numerical simulations generally represent basal processes via parameterization known as sliding laws. However, it remains unclear how individual terms in the sliding laws, such as the effective pressure dependence, affect the simulated dynamic thickness change and its rate of change in different geometric configurations (Joughin and others, 2019; Barnes and Gudmundsson, 2022; Felikson and others, 2022). This limitation hinders our progress in better initializing ice sheet models (Aschwanden and others, 2013) and therefore short-term projections of future ice loss (Goelzer and others, 2018).

In this study, we examine the interplay between basal processes and glacier geometries in controlling patterns of dynamic thickness change. Specifically, we investigate two distinct types of basal perturbations that produce differing spatio-temporal impacts on ice thickness change. The first type involves variations in basal drag due to changes in ice overburden pressure. Ice overburden pressure is directly determined by the ice thickness, yet its impact on dynamic elevation change is rarely explored systematically (Habermann and others, 2013; Joughin and others, 2019). Nonetheless, it has been identified as a critical component in the tidewater glacier cycle, where frontal retreat leads to ice thinning, reduced effective pressure and basal drag, flow acceleration, and further thinning of the glacier (Benn and others, 2007; Pfeffer, 2007). The second type is a localized perturbation of basal drag at the inland portion of the glacier, most commonly due to a change in effective pressure through a change in basal pore pressure. Observational studies have shown occurrences of localized dynamic elevation change far from the terminus, possibly caused by supraglacial lake drainages or changes in basal hydrologic system (Bevan and others, 2015; Stevens and others, 2022). At fast-flowing outlet glaciers where basal sliding dominates over vertical deformation, the localized basal variability can have non-local effects on flow velocity and dynamic elevation change where theoretical consideration may fall short (Gudmundsson, 2003; Sergienko and Hulbe, 2011; Sergienko, 2013), and therefore a numerical-model-based systematic characterization of dynamic thickness change throughout the glacier domain is much needed.

Here we investigate these two processes using numerical experiments on various idealized Greenland-like outlet glaciers. Using idealized glacier geometries that are broadly representative of multitudes of real-world glaciers allows a generalizable study of how different forcings affect the evolution of ice-surface elevation. It minimizes the tailoring of simulations to highly specific glacier characteristics, e.g., fjord size and shape, bed topography, or basal drag. Recent studies have used idealized glacier simulation to examine glacier mass loss bias from terminus forcing temporal frequency (Felikson and others, 2022), terminus response to topographic features (Frank and others, 2022), and the impact of melt water inputs on downstream ice velocity (Poinar and others, 2019). In this study, we similarly construct a suite of idealized synthetic glaciers with variations in glacier geometric parameters and basal boundary conditions, referring to each constructed glacier as a "synthetic glacier testbed" or simply "testbed." For each testbed, we test and characterize the impact of changes in ice overburden pressure and localized basal lubrication on dynamic thickness change.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Model Setup

We utilized the Ice-sheet and Sea-level System Model (ISSM) to conduct the numerical experiments. ISSM is a state-of-the-art finite element package that can simulate glacier and ice-sheet scale flow dynamics (Larour and others, 2012) and we refer readers to Larour and others (2012) for details of the modeling package and governing equations. To simulate the outlet glacier flow, we employed the 2D shallow shelf approximation of ice flow physics on both grounded and floating ice. A uniform triangular meshing with a spatial resolution of 200 meters was adopted throughout the model domain (12 km $\times$ 60 km). To account for the evolution of the grounding line position, we implemented a sub-element migration scheme where the sliding law coefficient at partially grounded elements scaled with the fraction of the grounded area (Gladstone and others, 2010). While the grounding line migrates dynamically according to hydrostatic criterion, we prescribed the calving front migration enabled by the level set method in ISSM (Bondzio and others, 2016).

We used a time-independent surface mass balance (SMB) across all the experiments and testbeds. This is because the impact of SMB variability on ice dynamic thickness occurs at timescales longer than our decadal-scale model runs (Christian and others, 2020), precluding an ability to test SMB effects. We used Glen's flow law with $n = 3$ for all simulations. We assumed a uniform ice temperature of $-3\,^{\circ}$C. Below we will provide a summary of forcings, model geometry, and experimental designs. For mathematical details, please refer to the Appendix B.1.

2.2 Synthetic glacier testbeds

We adapted and modified the idealized Greenland outlet glacier geometry from Felikson and others (2022), which itself was based on the Marine Ice Sheet Model Intercomparison Project geometry (Asay-Davis and others, 2016, MISMIP). The calving front was initially located at 56.5 km from the influx boundary. We prescribed an across-flow bed topography similar to Felikson and others (2022), but the differences are that in our model, the bed was flat in the along-flow direction and the width of the trough $w_c(x)$ narrowed quadratically along flow. Nonetheless, as an extended inquiry to findings we will discuss later, we also briefly investigated the influence of bed roughness on dynamic thickness change patterns (Fig. 2D), where we performed additional simulations using a bed with fractal roughness.

For model initialization, we adopted a Weertman sliding law (Weertman, 1957) describing sliding over a hard bed:

$$\tau_b(\mathbf{v}_b) = C_w^{-1/m}||\mathbf{v}_b||^{1/m-1}\mathbf{v}_b \tag{1}$$

Here $\boldsymbol{\tau_b}$ is basal shear stress, m is a prescribed constant assuming certain sliding mechanics, C_w is the prescribed Weertman law coefficient field defined in equation B.8, and $\mathbf{v}_b$ is the sliding velocity. We used the sliding law and assumed $m = 1$ for three primary reasons: first, its simplicity makes it the most commonly used sliding law and exponent in ice sheet modeling, and hence our findings will be relevant for modelers; second, the Weertman sliding law does not incorporate dependence on effective pressure and so it can help isolate the impact of overburden pressure on dynamic thinning; third, the Weertman sliding law is valid at the high effective pressure limit, as both the Schoof and Tsai sliding law formulations (Schoof, 2005; Tsai and others, 2015) asymptotically approach the Weertman formulation at higher effective pressure.

To construct a suite of testbeds, we varied the width W of the fjord at the narrower end, the grounding line depth B_{gl} (zero at sea level), and the sliding law coefficient C_w, producing in total 18 testbeds as illustrated in Fig. 1. To the first order, the prescribed sliding law coefficient magnitudes control mean basal drag levels near the termini (Table 3).

We relaxed the testbed glaciers for 500 simulation years to allow them to reach their steady state, which we defined as dh/dt $< 0.01 m\, a^{-1}$ everywhere in the flow domain. At steady state, testbed glaciers with shallower grounding line depths were grounded across the whole domain, whereas testbeds with deeper

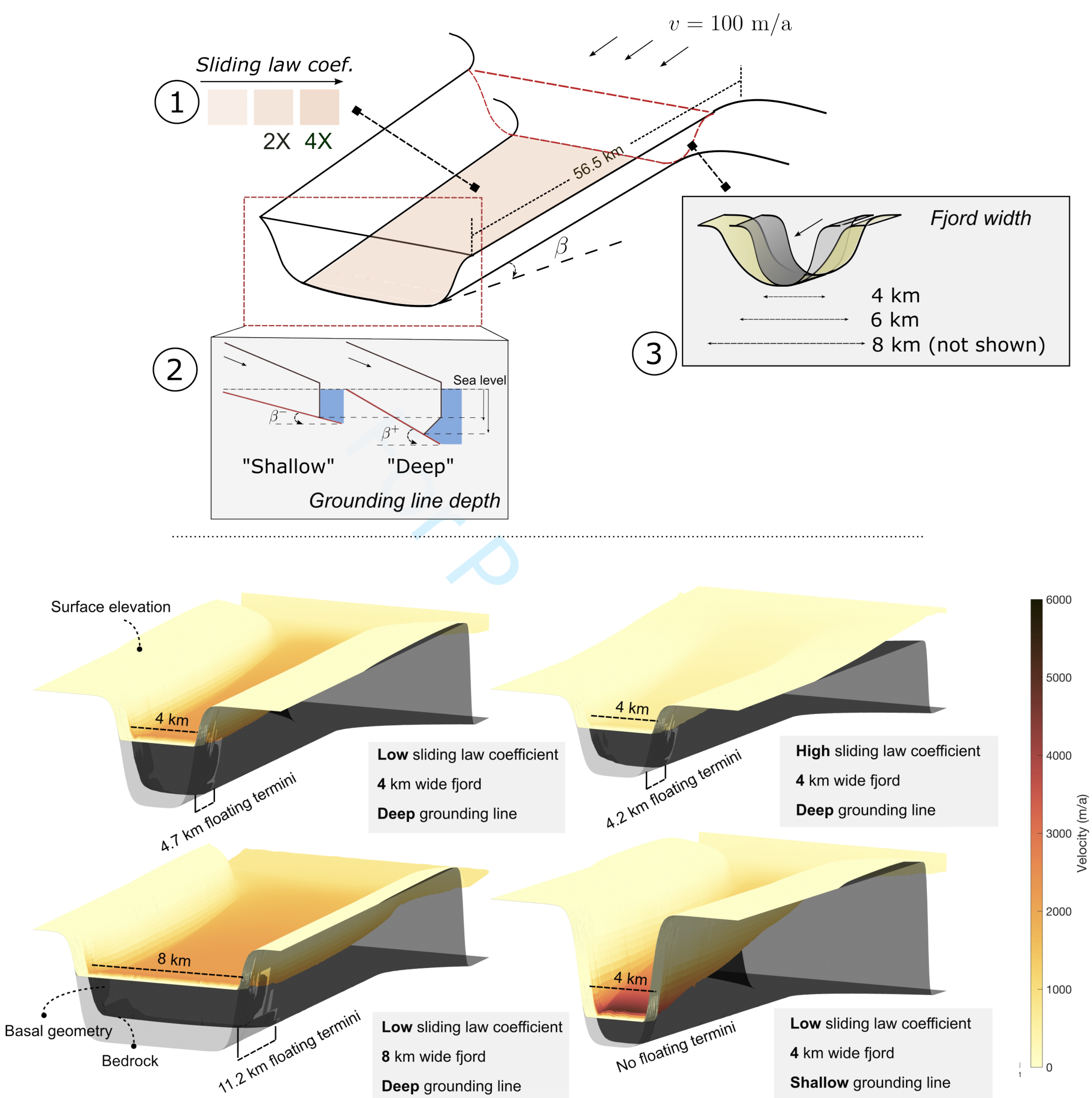

Fig. 1. Synthetic testbeds and examples. Top panel shows three variables of interests. 1 - Sliding law coefficient. 2 - Grounding line depth and frontal geometry. 3 - Fjord width. With the flow domain length fixed, the grounding line depth is adjusted via changing bedrock slope β, where testbeds with deep grounding line and floating termini ("Deep") have greater bed slope ($\beta^+ = -0.012$), and the ones with shallow grounding lines and fully grounded termini ("Shallow") have lesser bed slope ($\beta^- = -0.005$). Four examples of testbeds are shown in the bottom panel, with the steady-state ice speed colored and superimposed on the surface.

grounding lines depth developed floating sections up to 12 km long (Fig. 1 and Table 2). This is broadly consistent with Greenland outlet glaciers (Hill and others, 2018). For simplicity, we refer to glaciers with deep grounding lines and floating termini as "deep testbeds," and their fully grounded shallow counterparts with shallow grounding lines as "shallow testbeds." The 18 testbeds differ significantly in their average and maximum flow velocity near the terminus (Fig. 1 and Table 3).

2.3 Experiment Design

2.3.1 Control run

Previously studies have shown strong correlation between the evolution of terminus position and flow dynamics in certain glaciers (Nick and others, 2009; Cheng and others, 2022), but simulating terminus motion is known to be a challenging task due to a variety of under-constrained processes involved (Benn and others, 2007; Bassis and Jacobs, 2013; Robel, 2017; Slater and others, 2017; Choi and others, 2018; Slater and others, 2019; An and others, 2021). Therefore in this study, we did not aim to reproduce a sequence of terminus position comparable to observational records. Instead, we forced the terminus in all testbeds to retreat identically throughout all the experiments.

After a testbed glacier is initialized to its steady state, we forced the calving front to retreat at a time-variable rate described by a triangular function that spans 16 years (grey box in Fig. 2A). The calving front experiences an accelerating retreat for eight years, decelerates for eight years, and stabilizes. We designed this pattern to represent a smoothed-step decadal retreat of a calving front, broadly similar to the observed terminus retreats of many outlet glaciers around GrIS in the past twenty years, where the early 2000s marked the onset of widespread retreat, followed by a period of relative stability in the late 2000s through early 2010s (Khazendar and others, 2019).

2.3.2 Overburden pressure experiment

The basal drag of a glacier depends on the contact area between the ice and the bedrock. It is regulated by a competition between opening of cavities from sliding over bumps or melting and creep closure of ice (Cuffey and Paterson, 2010; Schoof, 2010), which manifests as varying effective pressure. To account for the dependence on the pressure, a sliding law alternative to Weertman's law, commonly known as Budd's

Constant parameters in synthetic testbeds and experiments		
Symbol	Definition and unit	Value
ϕ	Maximum reduction of sliding law coefficient in localized basal perturbation	0.8
κ	Ratio of Gaussian basal perturbation width to fjord width	0.08
B_0	Bed elevation at influx boundary (m)	100
t_d	Characteristic timescale of diffused pulse (a)	1.3
t_p	Characteristic timescale of transient pulse (a)	0.1
f_c	Characteristic width of channel side walls (m)	400
x_0	Distance of the localized Gaussian perturbation to influx boundary (m)	32,000
d_c	Depth of the trough relative to the top of side walls (m)	1000
x_f	Funnel-shape characteristic length (m)	15,000
ρ_i	Ice density (kg m^{-3})	917
v_m	Maximum frontal retreat rate (m a^{-1})	1000
L_x	Model domain length (m)	60,000
L_y	Model domain width (m)	12,000
t_s	Year to start calving front perturbation (a)	5
t_e	Year to end calving front perturbation (a)	21

Variable parameters in synthetic testbeds				
Symbol	Definition and unit	Low	Mid	High
B_{gl}	Grounding line elevation for model initialization (m).	-200	/	-600
C_{wo}	Weertman sliding law coefficient in the flow trunk for model initialization (kg m^{-2} s^{-1})	$30,000$	$60,000$	$120,000$
W	Width of the fjord (m)	4000	6000	8000

Table 1. Parameters in synthetic testbeds and experiments. "Variable parameters" refers to values of a variable that differs across synthetic testbeds. Readers can refer to Table 2 in the supplementary material for the parameters grouped by each testbed.

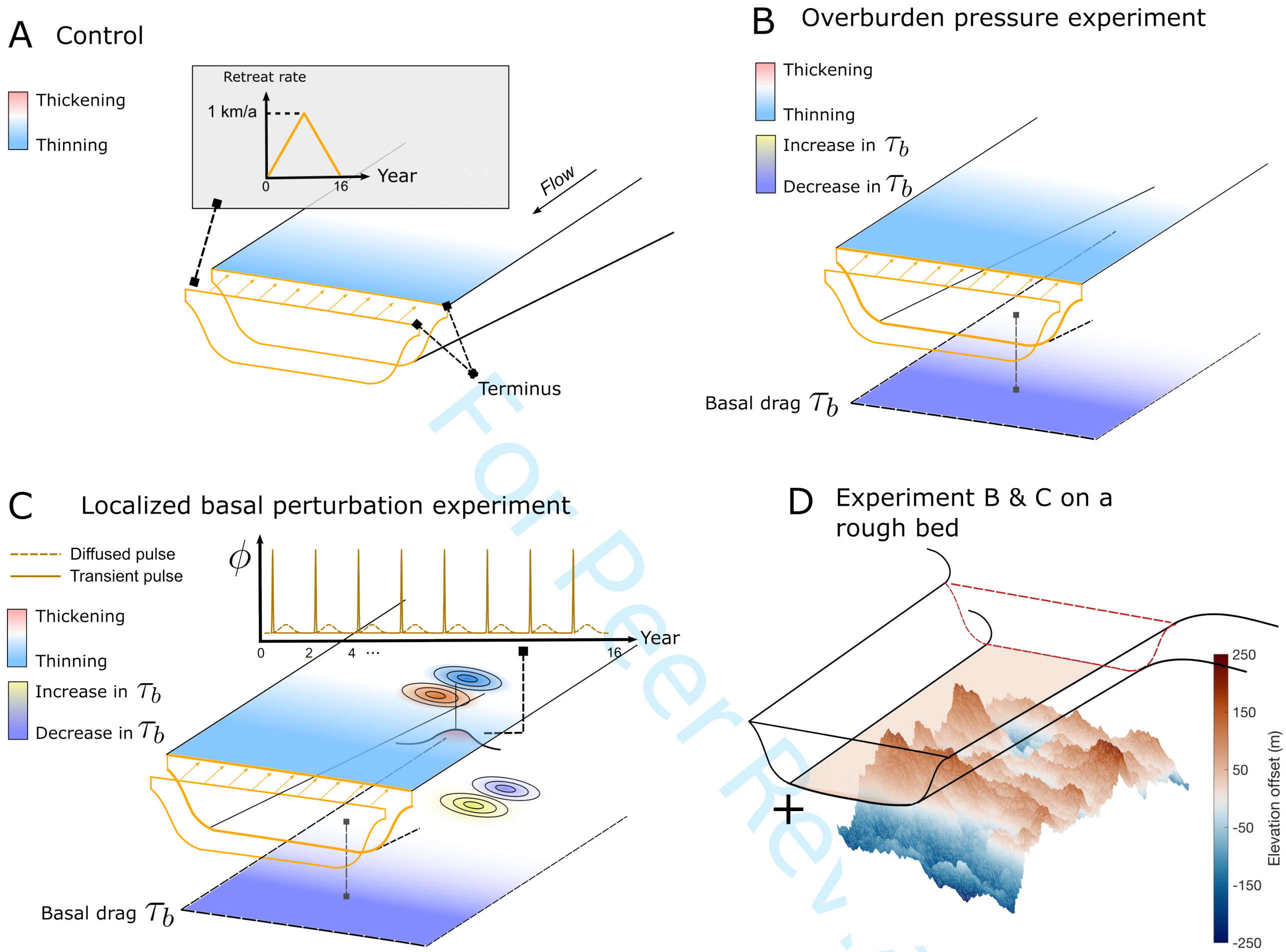

Fig. 2. Testbeds and experiment designs. A) Control run. The terminus is forced to retreat at a time-variable rate according to the triangular function (orange). B) Overburden pressure experiment. The basal drag τ_b decreases as a result of diffusive thinning from the retreating terminus. C) Localized basal perturbation experiment. In addition to changes in overburden pressure due to thinning, a Gaussian-shaped region of lower sliding law coefficient is applied transiently 24.5 km upstream of the terminus. The magnitudes ϕ of the two types of temporal variability ("Transient pulse" and "Diffused pulse") are shown in brown. The perturbation locally induces upstream thinning (blue) and downstream thickening (red). D) Experiment with a rough bed. Zero in the elevation offset means no change with respect to the original constant bed slope. Both the overburden pressure and localized basal perturbation experiment are repeated on a testbed glacier with a rough bed.

law (Budd and others, 1979), is used:

$$\tau_b = C_b^2 N^{q/m} ||\mathbf{v}_b||^{1/m-1} \mathbf{v}_b \tag{2}$$

where C_b is the coefficient for the Budd sliding law. In Budd's formulation, initial thinning near the glacier terminus will reduce the ice overburden pressure and hence the effective pressure N, reducing the basal drag and causing acceleration. The acceleration can lead to flux divergence that further reduces the effective pressure, potentially precipitating a positive feedback.

We investigated the impact of the varying overburden pressure on dynamic thinning and hence we refer to this experiment as the "overburden pressure experiment." This is effectively the same simulation as the control run but with Budd sliding law instead. After initializing the testbed glacier with Weertman sliding law, we forced the terminus to retreat in the same fashion as in the control run. To avoid explicitly switching the sliding law in the program, we modified the sliding law coefficient of Weertman sliding law to represent Budd sliding law. By equating equation 2 and equation 1, we iteratively adjusted the basal drag coefficient C_w to compensate for changes in ice overburden pressure:

$$C_w(x, y, t) = \sqrt{{C_{wo}}^2 + \hat{C_w}^2([\rho_i g H(x, y, t)]^{1/m} - [\rho_i g H(x, y, 0)]^{1/m})} \tag{3}$$

where ρ_i is the ice density, $t = 0$ in the parentheses represents field values at steady state, and $\hat{C_b}$ is the equivalent Weertman sliding law coefficient in Budd's formulation at steady state, i.e., $\hat{C_w} = C_{wo}/(\rho_i g H(x, y, 0))^{1/m}$. In all experiments outlined in Fig. 2 we assumed $m = q = 1$. Nonetheless we also explored a more plastic bed rheology (i.e., $m = 5$, Figure 10) and compared results to the linear viscous case in the discussion.

2.3.3 Localized basal perturbation experiment

In addition to overburden pressure change discussed above, we considered the impact due to local drainage of melt water to the bed. It was represented ideally by a localized basal drag reduction as a Gaussian-shaped patch of lower sliding law coefficient, centered 24.5 km behind the initial calving front. We used this location because it was immediately upstream of the most retreated grounding line in our control runs, so that the localized perturbation remained engaged throughout the simulations.

We considered two types of temporal variability, Transient Pulse and Diffused Pulse, to represent the temporal variation of perturbation magnitude (Fig. 2C). Transient Pulse is a short-lived perturbation lasting for 0.1 year, which we designed to loosely represent the response of an efficient subglacial drainage system to supraglacial lake drainage or a rain event. The Diffused Pulse spanned a 2-year period with a lower peak value and integrated to the same total slipperiness perturbation as the Transient Pulse (Equation B.12). We chose a 2-year period as a bounding case to provide a substantial contrast with the Transient Pulse signal. It was not designed based on observations of any specific glaciers, although we would discuss certain observations and model inferences that suggest a similarly prolonged period of reduced basal drag. There are a total of eight perturbation cycles and hence 16 years of perturbation.

2.4 Bed constructed with fractal roughness

Glacier beds around GrIS are wavy at a range of length scales. This waviness is well characterized by fractal roughness (Jordan and others, 2017), meaning the asperity height at various wavelengths can be described by a Hurst exponent in a power law. To investigate the impact of bed roughness on dynamic thickness change, we generated a randomly rough surface superimposed onto a sloped flat bed (Mona Mahboob Kanafi, 2023), with a Hurst exponent of 0.8 and a root-mean-square roughness of 70 meters (Fig. 2D). Similar values were used by Christian and others (2022) for the GrIS and are within the range of roughness estimates from radar observation (Jordan and others, 2017). The specified mean roughness stipulates the average height of bed bumps; in our glacier domain, the bumps that the grounding line retreats over are less than 100 meters in height. The results are discussed in Sect. 4.1.2.

2.5 Estimating frontal resistive stress loss

The diverse geometries and mean basal drag levels considered produce various stress balance regimes and changes in stress balance in response to the calving front and grounding line retreat. To quantitatively assess the changes, we follow the calculation outlined in van der Veen and Whillans (1989) and Carnahan and others (2022) to estimate the stress components. The stress balance states that the gravitational driving stress of a glacier is approximately in balance with the sum of the basal shear stress, the longitudinal, and lateral resistive stress gradients.

We define the frontal resistive stress as the sum of the lateral, longitudinal, and basal resistive stress from the current grounding line to the ice front. Hence, we define the frontal loss of resistive stress as the total change in the resistive stress over the duration of the model runs. Mathematical details are presented in the Appendix B.4. The results are discussed in Sect. 4.2.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Overburden pressure experiment

As the terminus retreats, in all testbeds, dynamic thinning originated near the terminus and diffused upstream, and the largest degree of thinning was found behind the grounding line. If we isolate the thinning induced by overburden pressure feedback, for fully grounded testbed glaciers with shallower grounding lines, the sliding law correction for ice overburden pressure added a maximum of 97 meters over 16 years, or $6\,\mathrm{m\ a^{-1}}$ (Fig. 3) and all grounding lines remained grounded throughout (e.g., Fig. 3A). Model testbeds with deep grounding lines (Fig. 3B-D) showed a substantially larger degree of thinning accompanied by continued grounding line retreat. The deep narrow testbed with high basal drag (Fig. 3D) showed the most thinning, 250 meters over the 16 year model run, or an average thinning rate of $16\,\mathrm{m\ a^{-1}}$.

The colored circles in Fig. 3 illustrate how the maximum dh/dt and attenuation distance vary across fjord widths, mean basal drag levels, and frontal geometries. Attenuation distance is defined as distance from ice front where the cumulative thickness change has dropped to 36.8% (e-folding length $1/e$) of total thickness change. At all testbed glaciers, attenuation distance was primarily controlled by the mean basal drag: high basal drag corresponded to larger thickness change attenuation, and vice versa. Maximum thinning rate, however, exhibited a more nuanced relationship with geometry and basal condition. At testbed glaciers with high mean basal drag (e.g., mean basal drag near the terminus > 60 kPa in Table 3), the effect of fjord width was more pronounced, with narrow testbed experiencing greater maximum thinning rate up to $16\,\mathrm{m\ a^{-1}}$ despite less grounding line retreat, and wide testbed experiencing $< 10\,\mathrm{m\ a^{-1}}$ thinning. Conversely, at testbeds with lower mean basal drag (e.g., mean basal drag < 30 kPa in Table 3), differences in fjord width did not result in variances in max thinning rate ($10.4 - 10.5\,\mathrm{m\ a^{-1}}$).

3.2 Localized basal perturbation experiment

We present the results of the localized basal perturbation experiment as their difference in dynamic thickness change from the control run. In other words, we isolate the thinning caused by the localized basal perturbation alone. Immediately after it is introduced, the perturbation caused transient thickening on the downstream glacier and transient thinning on the upstream portion, regardless of the magnitude or duration of the forcing (Fig. 4 and Fig. 5). This dipole pattern is consistent with the results of previous

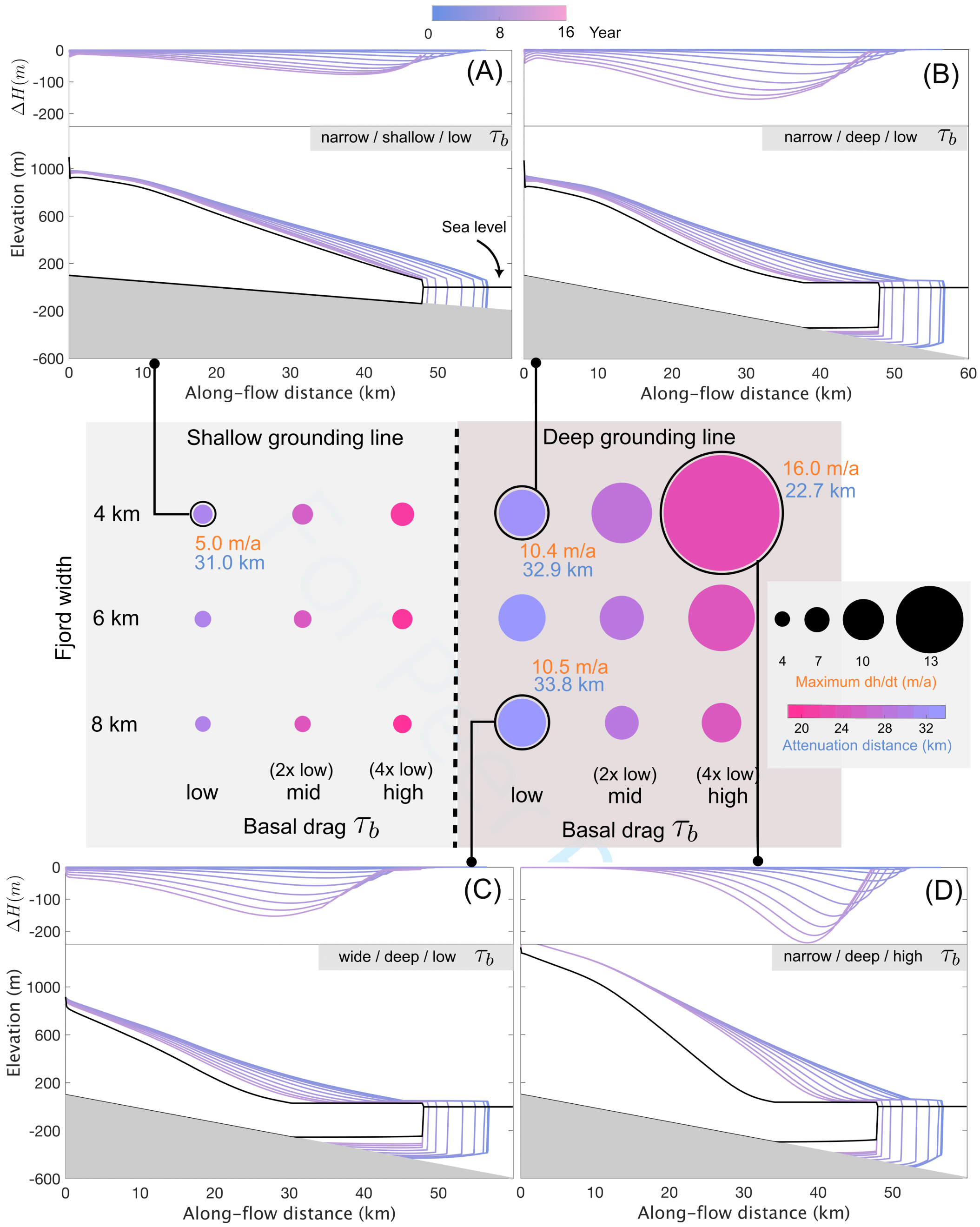

Fig. 3. Dynamic thickness change due to changes in ice overburden pressure. All 18 testbeds are represented as colored circles in a 3 × 6 grid separated by the grounding line depths. The circular marker represents both the maximum dh/dt observed along the center flow line (marker size) and the attenuation distance of diffusive thinning (color). Shorter attenuation distance suggests stronger thinning attenuation. All values can be found in Table 5 and Table 6. Four selected testbed glaciers are shown in greater details. The lateral profiles show total thinning from the overburden pressure experiment, whereas the line plot at the top of each subplot shows the thickness change isolated (ΔH) from the effect of ice overburden pressure (i.e., overburden pressure experiment minus control in Fig. 2). Black lines show the lateral profiles at the new steady states.

theoretical studies (Gudmundsson, 2003; Sergienko and Hulbe, 2011; Sergienko, 2013).

Over multiple perturbation cycles, the amplitude of the transient response increased as ice flow sped up and the glacier thinned. The maximum observed thinning or thickening did not exceed 20 meters with respect to the state before the perturbation engaged. Within each perturbation cycle, thickening and thinning at the site relaxed more quickly in testbed glaciers with lower mean basal drag and, consequently, higher flow speeds. Between testbeds, the dipole amplitudes showed amplitude differences less than 12 meters near the perturbation site (Table 4). At both deep and shallow testbed glaciers, we observed generally similar patterns in the dipole amplitude and its temporal variation. Therefore, for simplicity of presentation, we show results of the localized basal perturbation experiment for only the deep testbeds, and all the ensuing qualitative discussions apply to shallow testbed glaciers as well unless indicated otherwise. Results from selected shallow testbeds can be found in the Appendix (Fig. 12 and Fig. 13).

Over time, trends in dynamic thickness change emerged both near and far from the perturbation site. Persistent thinning occured 5–15 km upstream of the perturbation, while downstream, variable patterns of thickening and thinning occurred at different testbeds. At testbeds with lower mean basal drag, thinning propagated farther outward from the perturbation site, whereas at testbeds with higher mean basal drag, these attenuated closer. The total degree of far-field thinning over the long term depends on the type of perturbation pulse used, with the diffused pulse resulting in generally twice as much thinning or thickening as the transient pulse.

More substantial differences in spatio-temporal patterns can be observed in the downstream trunk, particularly after several perturbation cycles. We present a few examples here. For the narrow testbed with a low mean basal drag level (Fig. 4A), the basal perturbation incited initial thickening in the downstream trunk that was, within ∼10 years, overridden by the diffusive thinning from the trunk upstream. Similarly, in the first five years of the experiment, the grounding line advanced slightly before retreating by about 40 m, relative to the control run. A qualitatively similar pattern can be observed in the narrow testbed with a high mean basal drag level (Fig. 4B), but in this case, net thinning (relative to the control run) emerged near the grounding line after the third perturbation cycle. This thinning reached ∼3 m and diffused upstream; unlike in the low-basal-drag testbed, the thinning continued after the perturbations ceased, spreading throughout the domain.

When forced with the diffused pulse, these two testbeds exhibited similar spatial and temporal patterns (Fig. 4C and D). However, there was more thickening and less thinning and the grounding lines advanced

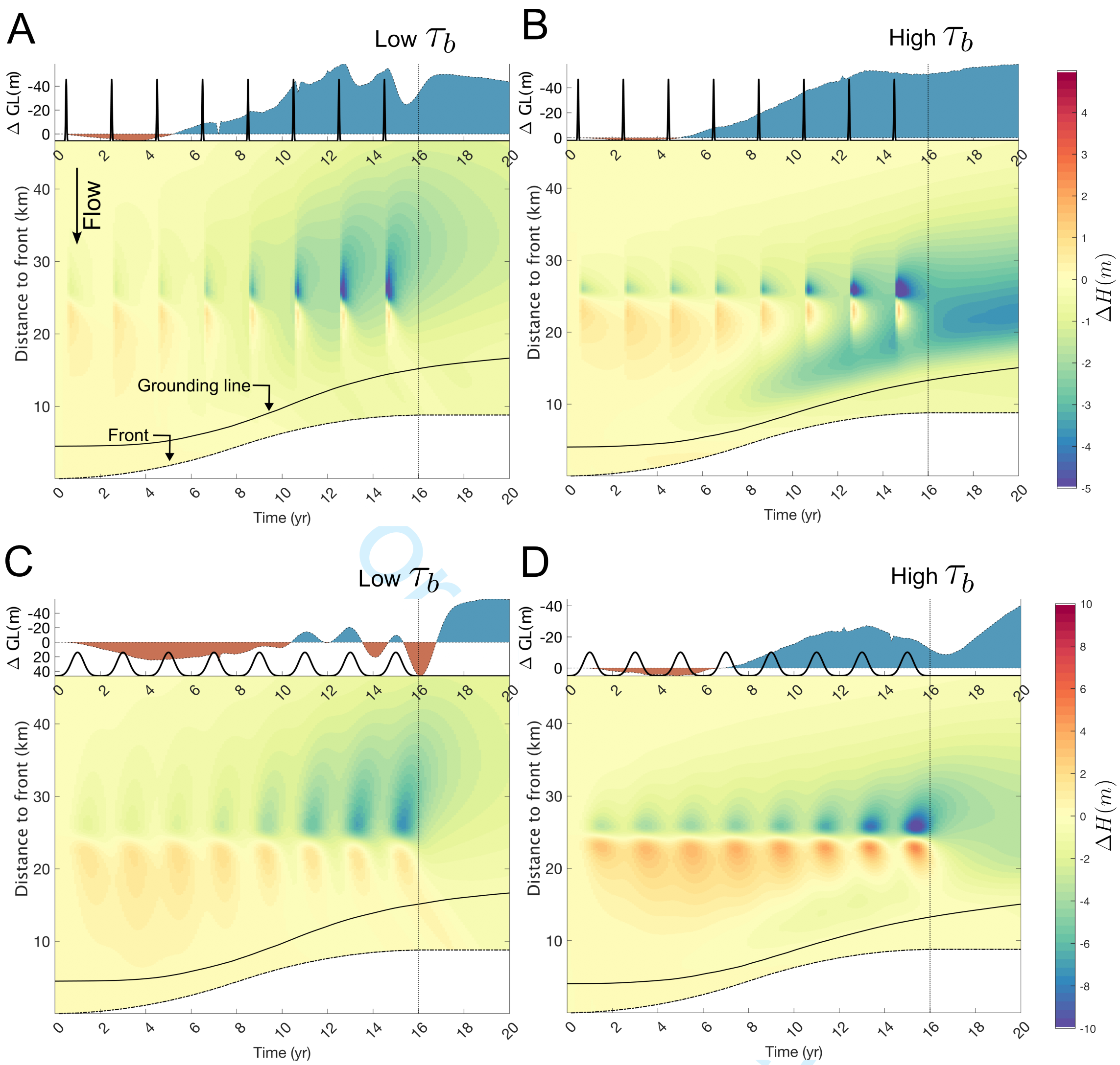

Fig. 4. Spatio-temporal patterns of dynamic thickness change at **deep and narrow** testbed glaciers in response to the two types of localized basal perturbation pulses. The space-time plots (essentially a Hovmöller diagram) are created by plotting the thickness change (colors) along the center flow line (y-axis) over time (x-axis). All the results presented here account for the changes in ice overburden pressure on the basal drag. The relative grounding line position on the top plots (labeled "Δ GL(m)") is the difference in grounding line position between the control run and the experiment run. The Y-axis label "Distance to front" refers to the ice front location at $t = 0$. The thin vertical dotted line marks the end of frontal retreat. The two types of pulse forcings are shown at the top in each panel. The amplitudes of the pulses are illustrative and thus not to scale. A) A testbed glacier with low mean basal drag (τ_b) forced with Transient Pulse. B) A testbed glacier with high τ_b forced with Transient Pulse. C) A testbed glacier with low τ_b forced with Diffused Pulse. D) A testbed glacier with high τ_b forced with the Diffused Pulse.

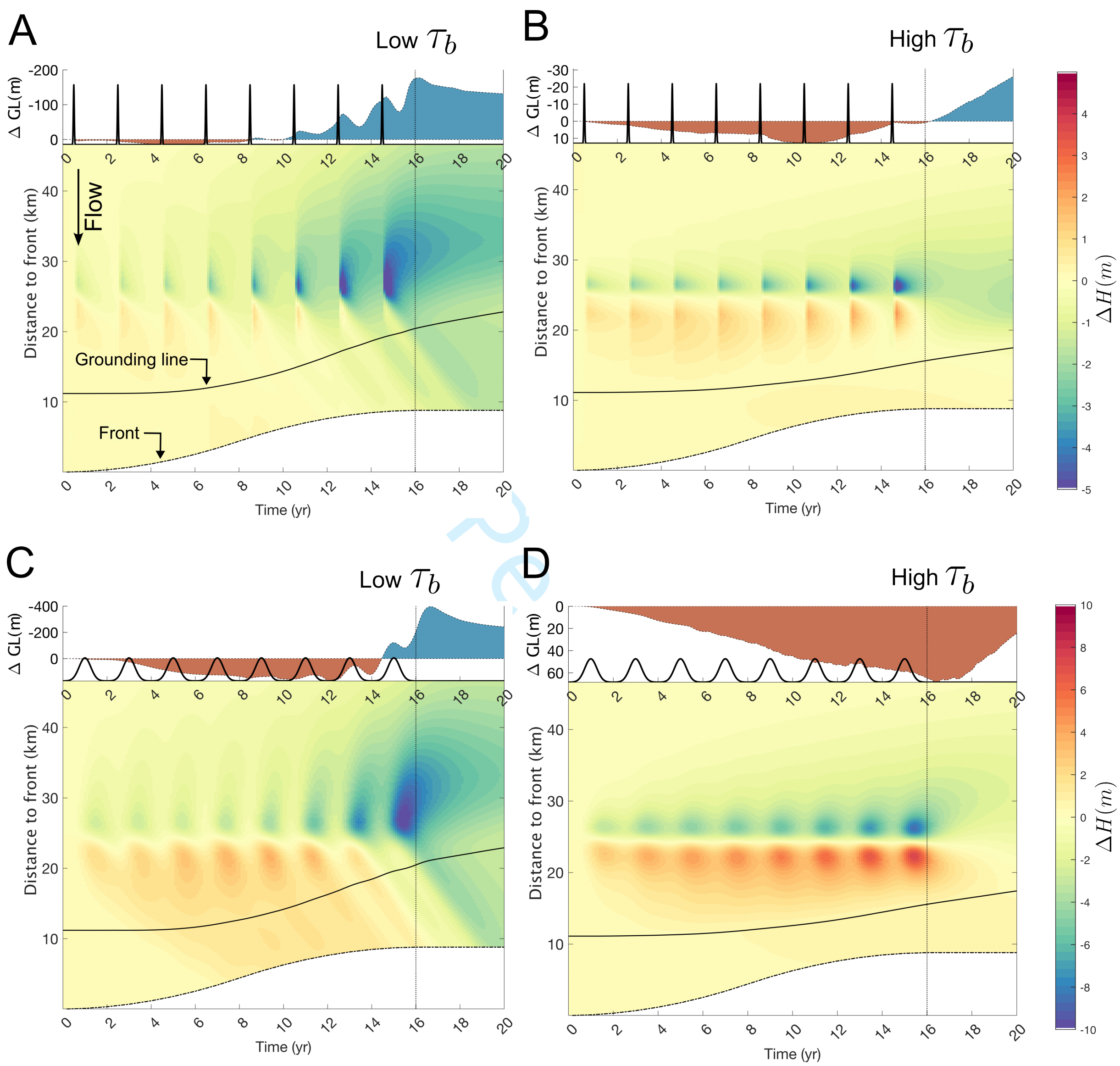

Fig. 5. Spatio-temporal patterns of dynamic thickness change at **deep and wide** testbed glaciers in response to the two types of localized basal perturbation pulses. Graphic features are identical to Fig. 4. A) A testbed glacier with low mean basal drag (τ_b) forced with Transient Pulse. B) A testbed glacier with high τ_b forced with Transient Pulse. C) A testbed glacier with low τ_b forced with Diffused Pulse. D) A testbed glacier with high τ_b forced with Diffused Pulse.

farther.

Figure 5 shows results on wide testbeds. Here, the spatio-temporal patterns were generally similar to those observed in narrow testbeds, except that the upstream and downstream thickness changes were more polarized, with the upstream dominantly thinning and the downstream dominantly thickening throughout the perturbation cycles (with the minor exception of the low-basal-drag testbed in Fig. 5A). An extreme example is the testbed glacier with a high mean basal drag level forced with the diffused pulse (Fig. 5D), where the downstream thickening was not overtaken by upstream thinning years after the perturbation had stopped (in contrast to Fig. 5C, for example). It is noteworthy that the grounding lines in testbed glaciers with a low basal drag level (Fig. 5A and C) moved much more rapidly and extensively, with advance and retreat ranging from approximately 200 to 400 meters – an order of magnitude greater than in high-basal-drag testbeds. In all experiments, regardless of patterns, the maximum thickness change caused by the localized basal perturbation did not exceed 12 meters over the 26 years of simulation run (see Table 4).

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Grounding line position correlates with dynamic thinning

4.1.1 Experiments on a flat bed

Our experiments show that the grounding line positions correlate well with dynamic thinning rates. This is in contrast to ice front position, a commonly used observable in both modeling and observational studies (Bondzio and others, 2017; Kehrl and others, 2017). We ran all testbed simulations with the same ice front position forcing, but obtained a wide range of thinning degrees and variabilities (Fig. 3, 4, 5), suggesting the limited predictive power of ice front position alone. Most thinning is observed behind the grounding line, as model results for Pine Island Glacier also showed (Joughin and others, 2019).

We observed continued grounding line retreat even after the calving front stopped retreating. This continued retreat is associated with the large thinning difference between the shallow and deep glaciers when the basal drag coefficient is adjusted to compensate for changes in ice overburden pressure (Fig. 3). Similar dynamics were observed at Kangerlussuag Glacier (Kehrl and others, 2017) where the termini stabilized but the glacier continued to thin dynamically as the grounding line retreated, even as the glacier rested on a prograde bed.

The movement of the grounding line is highly dependent on the choice of sliding law (Brondex and

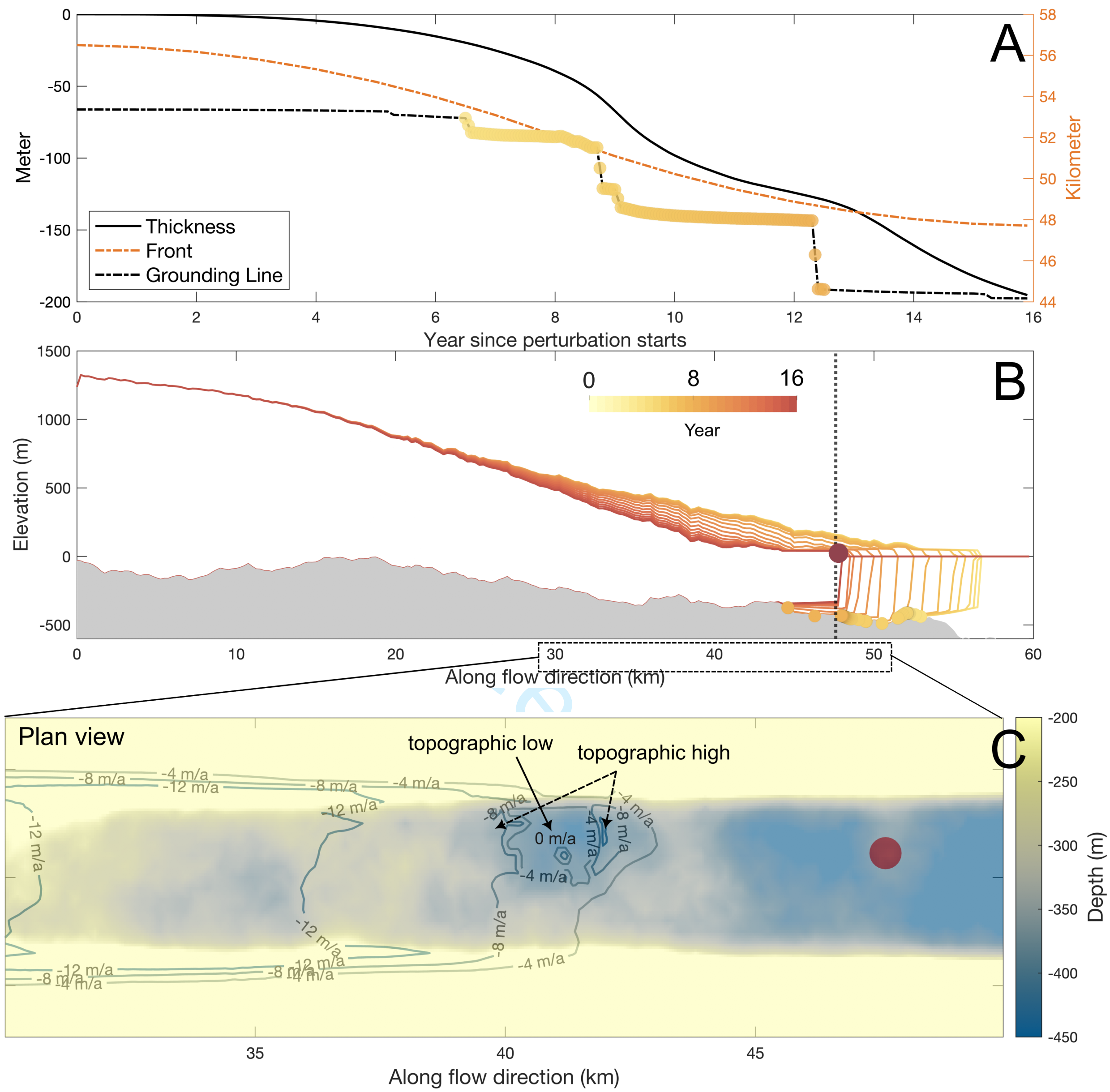

Fig. 6. Dynamic thickness change over an undulating bed. A) Ice thickness, grounding line, and calving front change over time. Smooth multi-year front retreat causes step changes in grounding line, temporally matching the periods of faster and slower dynamic thinning. Timeseries are extracted at the location marked as a red circle in B and C. Colored dots over the grounding line reference the same color bar in B. B) Lateral profiles of basal topography and ice surface elevation. C) Dynamic thickness change rate (contours) at the last time step superimposed onto the basal topography (colors) near the ice front and grounding line. Ice at the central topographic low becomes ungrounded and experiences low thinning rate; ice at the topographic high nearby undergoes a much higher thinning rate, illustrating spatially heterogeneous thinning rates controlled by topographic variability.

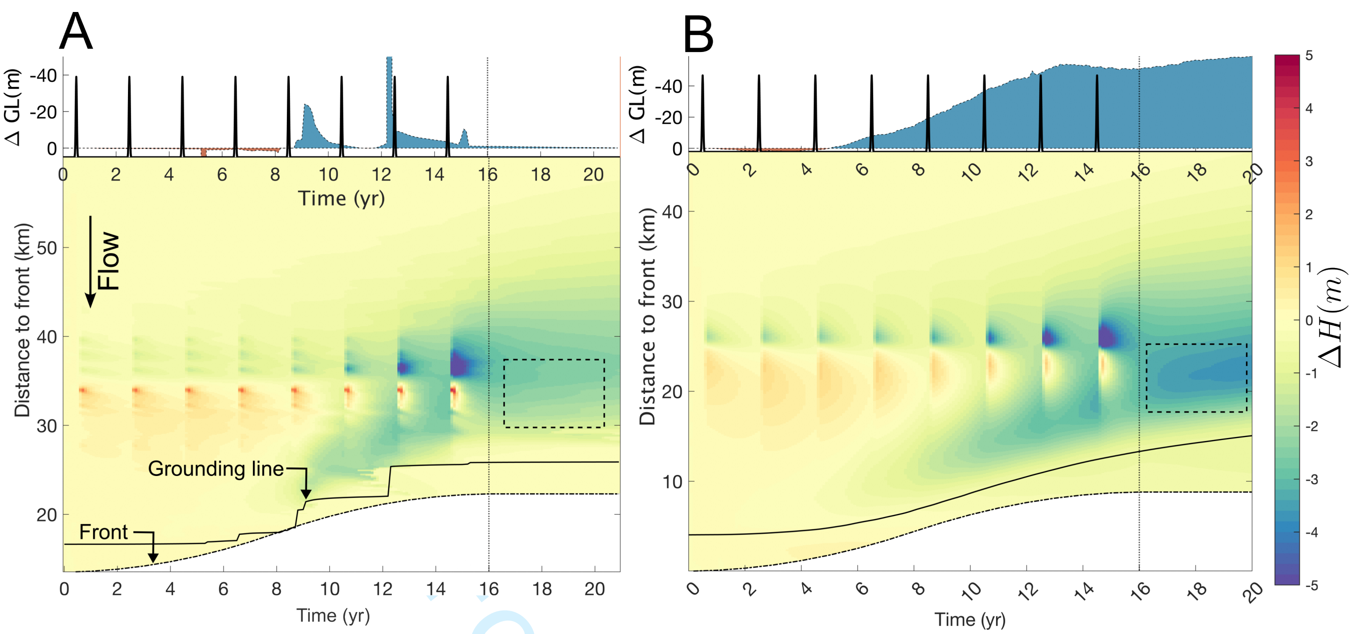

Fig. 7. Comparing dynamic thickness change over a flat and an undulating bed forced by localized basal perturbation. Dotted line box outline the time and space where thinning diverges after perturbation stops. A) Isolated thickness change due to the localized basal perturbation at a rough bed. B) Same but at a flat bed (Fig. 4B repeated).

others, 2017). Therefore, knowledge of the specific bed rheology and sliding mechanics is crucial to accurately reproduce grounding line movements from observations. Our experiments with the Weertman and Budd sliding laws are two bounding cases for the magnitude of grounding line retreat (Brondex and others, 2017). In that study, greater retreat distance of the grounding line was found to correlate with greater thinning; our results reproduce this finding for multiple glacier geometries and mean basal drag levels.

The crucial role of grounding lines in dynamic thickness change is also highlighted in our localized basal perturbation experiments. We found that, across testbed glaciers of varying widths and sliding laws, downstream elevation change patterns strongly correlate with relative grounding line movement. One striking example is the pronounced thinning near the grounding line as the grounding line retreats relative to its initial position (e.g., Fig. 4B). This thinning nearly overtakes the local thickening signal immediately downstream of the perturbation near the end of the experiment. Similarly, continued relative grounding line advance causes downstream thickening (e.g., Fig. 5D). Despite repeated forcing, the diversity of grounding line movements and dynamic thickness change patterns suggests that one must consider both grounding line movement and glacier geometry when interpreting thickness change records, with all else assumed equal. We note that, although the magnitude of dynamic thickness change from the localized basal perturbation experiment is much smaller than other experiments (e.g., maximum thinning summarized in

Table 4), the critical role of grounding line movement we identified implies that more dramatic elevation change triggered by localized basal perturbation near the grounding line is possible with different basal topographic variability (Thomas and others, 2009). At a minimum, we stress the role of the grounding line in initiating dynamic thickness change, even if the perturbation is localized tens of kilometers upstream of the calving front.

4.1.2 Effect of basal topography variability

The corollary of our finding is that dynamic thickness change must correlate more strongly with the grounding line motion than with terminus motion (Fig. 9). Due to the asymmetry of grounding line flux dynamics at prograde and retrograde sections of the bed (Schoof, 2007), an idealistic smooth terminus retreat can translate into episodes of fast and slow grounding line movement as it retreats over bed asperities, potentially giving rise to a different timescale of variability in dynamic thickness change timeseries observed across GrIS (Csatho and others, 2014). We explored this possibility with two additional simulations of the overburden pressure experiment and localized basal perturbation experiment, using a testbed with high mean basal drag in a narrow fjord with fractal roughness throughout the bed (Fig. 2D). The resulting grounding line movement is characterized by step-wise retreats, corresponding to faster and slower periods of thickness change (Fig. 6A and Fig. 7). We also observe that grounding line retreat stabilizes on the lee side of the bed bump (Fig. 6A and B) that stops further thinning after calving front perturbation ceases, in contrast to the original flat bed simulation (Fig. 7B).

For the rough bed, dynamic thickness change rates also exhibit spatial heterogeneity. Here we observe the topographic low behind grounding line attains flotation near the end of simulation (Fig. 6C) and the thinning rate dwindles, at $0 - 4\,\mathrm{m\ a^{-1}}$, while its neighboring topographic high experiences $8 - 12\,\mathrm{m\ a^{-1}}$ of thinning. The variation in thickness change rates across space, as revealed by simulations, presents an intriguing opportunity for utilizing consistent and precise ice surface elevation reconstructions (e.g., altimetry data fusion engine SERAC as described in Schenk and Csathó (2012)) to gain insights into fundamental geophysical phenomena like glacier ungrounding and subglacial lake dynamics.

4.2 Controls of resistive stress on the spatial variation of dynamic thinning

In most cases, grounding line position can be readily extracted from elevation observations on glaciers with well-known bed topography and fjord bathymetry. Our results show that while the grounding line position

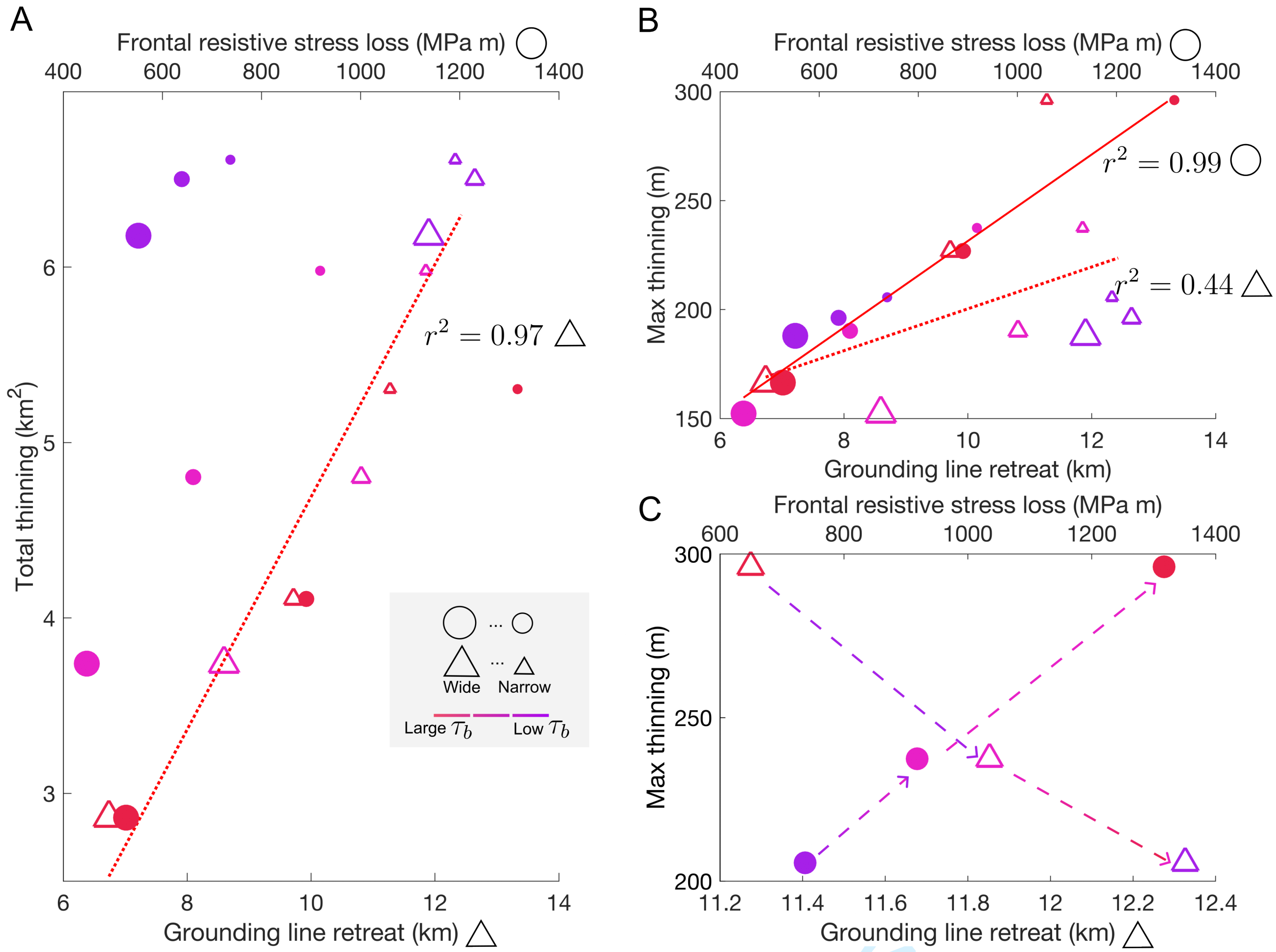

Fig. 8. Relationships between total thinning, maximum thinning, grounding line retreat, and frontal resistive stress loss at the end of perturbations (simulation year = 16) for deep testbeds in the overburden pressure experiment. Each marker represents a distinct testbed. R-squared values report the goodness of fit of selected data by a linear regression model. A) Relationship between total thinning versus grounding line retreat distance (triangles), and total thinning versus frontal resistive stress loss (circles). B) Relationship between the spatial maximum thinning rate and grounding line retreat distance (triangles) and frontal resistive stress loss (circles). C) Detail of (B) with only the three testbeds with narrow fjords. The dashed lines with arrows point to testbeds of increasing mean basal drag. Sizes of markers are enlarged with respect to B) for better presentation.

is strongly correlated with centerline-integrated total thinning and average thinning rate (Fig. 8A), it gives far less insight into the spatial pattern of thinning, here represented by spatial maximum in thinning (Fig. 8B). We hypothesize that resistive stress state is the more important variable for spatial variations in thinning.

The spatial maximum in thinning should be a function of the magnitude of resistive stress change near the ice front. Our results (Fig. 8B) indeed show a positive correlation between these quantities ($r^2 = 0.99$); in contrast, grounding line retreat does not correlate strongly with maximum thinning ($r^2 = 0.44$). Fig. 8C shows that specifically at testbeds with narrow fjords, lower mean basal drag testbed produces greater grounding line retreat, yet lower spatial maxima in thinning. In fact, at narrow fjords, grounding line retreat anti-correlates with the spatial maxima in thinning; this is not the case in moderate-width and wide testbeds, as shown in the trends across sets of the larger-sized triangles in Figure 8B. Although this may seem counter-intuitive, the force balance response differs across different frontal and grounding line retreat outcomes. Specifically, calving of fully grounded testbed glaciers removes basal resistive stress, whereas at a floating terminus, the loss of the longitudinal stress gradient associated with calving is typically orders of magnitude less. Therefore, for the same prescribed terminus retreat, fully grounded testbed glaciers should experience more thinning. Indeed, observations of grounded outlet glaciers in West Greenland suggest that fully grounded glaciers undergo higher-magnitude dynamical changes than those with floating termini (McFadden and others, 2011). Furthermore, most GrIS outlet glacier fjord widths observed by Wood and others (2021) are similar to our 4 km narrow testbed (Fig. 14). Thus, knowledge of the glacier stress state is likely necessary to explain locally observed high-magnitude thinning.

Further evidence of the sensitivity of basally supported glaciers to grounding line retreat can be observed in the localized basal perturbation experiment. At testbed glaciers with high mean basal drag, pervasive thinning originating near the grounding line (as seen near year 10 in Fig. 4B) highlights this sensitivity. In contrast, testbeds with low basal stress (e.g., Fig. 4A) undergo the same magnitude of grounding line retreat yet lack this diffusive thinning. The potential for higher-stressed glaciers to undergo dramatic thinning echoes the modeled high sensitivity of the ice loss at East Antarctic Ice Sheet to a basal thermal state transition, where inversions identify large basal areas with high basal drag (Dawson and others, 2022).

4.3 Longer-duration basal perturbations incite greater thickness changes

The localized basal perturbation experiment emulates two types of drainage efficiency (Moon and others, 2014), which produce contrasting examples of dynamical thickness changes both near and far downstream of the perturbation. The diffused pulse, which is a basal drag reduction whose peak value is 10 times less than its transient counterpart, actually induces a larger magnitude of thickening/thinning immediately downstream/upstream of the perturbation. Furthermore, it prolongs the initial grounding line advance period, resulting in continued downstream thickening, which is particularly visible in wide testbeds (Fig. 5). These results emphasize the disproportionately larger impact of extended basal drag reduction on the glacier state.

The reasons for a long-lasting lower basal drag can be diverse. For instance, modeling of Helheim hydrology shows elevated pore pressure and low effective pressure during winter from frictional dissipation from high sliding speed (Sommers and others, 2023). A subglacial drainage system may fail to channelize due to insufficient meltwater discharge or lack of meltwater forcing variability (Schoof, 2010), or high ice-overburden pressure limits sizes of cavity (Doyle and others, 2014; de Fleurian and others, 2016), although the latter is more likely to occur in the accumulation zone where ice thickness is over 1 km. Additionally, multi-year inversions on surge glaciers experiencing thermal state switches triggered by surface meltwater have inferred basal drag changes on inter-annual timescales (Dunse and others, 2015; Gong and others, 2018). The synthetic pulses spanning 0.1 and 2 years used in this study can also be interpreted as lower and upper bounds of timescale, and efficient drainage can develop over a variety of timescales (Vijay and others, 2021). Generally, the disproportionately larger impact from a long-lasting perturbation should not be overlooked. Additionally, previous investigations into the drainage system efficiency on flow dynamics have focused primarily on ice velocity patterns. We complement this knowledge by suggesting that, when interpreting the dynamic elevation change records, future studies should also consider the possible impact of prolonged basal lubrication even if the total magnitude of basal lubrication is relatively small.

4.4 Propagation of diffusive thinning

In our testbeds, mean basal drag level primarily and fjord width, to a lesser extent, control ice velocity (Table 3). For example, the narrow testbed with a high mean basal drag has a maximum flow speed of less than 1 km per year, which is only 30% of the speed of its low-mean-basal-drag counterpart. The speed at which the diffusive thinning propagates from the terminus roughly scales with how quickly diffusive thinning can propagate, which is typically 5-8 times the ice flow velocity (van de Wal and Oerlemans, 1995; van der Veen, 2001). With high ice velocity due to low mean basal drag, longitudinal stretching rapidly transmits upstream and leads to widespread thinning. A similar mechanism has been proposed to explain far-reaching inland acceleration at Jakobshavn Isbræ due to low basal drag (Bondzio and others, 2017).

Previous studies (Felikson and others, 2017, 2021) have used Peclet numbers to identify large undulations in basal topography, known as "knickpoints" as limits to upstream thinning propagation. While this offers a valuable static map view of where diffusive thinning diminishes, our simulations show that glacier dynamics conditioned by geometry and basal conditions determines the spatial extent of thinning on a decadal timescale, which may occur far downstream of major knickpoints in real-world glaciers (e.g., near the grounding line). Our results complement previous studies by suggesting that glacier dynamic state and its evolution can also play a considerable role in mapping upstream thinning extent. Furthermore, our simulations show that while glaciers with low mean basal drag can propagate diffusive thinning far inland, similar to gentle bed topography discussed in Felikson and others (2021), glaciers with narrow fjords and higher mean basal drag levels can lose almost the same amount of mass during the same period (the smallest magenta dot in Fig. 8A), despite its strong thinning attenuation which concentrates behind the grounding line. The more delayed recovery of grounding line retreat after the front stops retreating suggests that these glaciers may have even higher mass loss potential (e.g., the black profile of Fig. 3D testbed at its new steady state).

4.5 Implications for ice sheet modeling

Our work has useful implications for future modeling studies. We have shown in Fig. 3 that thinning magnitude depends sensitively on the sliding law, where an addition of ice overburden pressure feedback causes large variability in thinning. The choice of exponent in the sliding law may also add uncertainty to projected ice loss. To explore the effect of the exponent, we perform one additional overburden pressure experiment where we set $m = 5$, corresponding to a more plastic bed where increase in sliding velocity has more limited impact on the basal drag strengthening. Simulation results (Fig. 10) show that the thinning pattern and magnitude resemble more the Weertman case (without overburden pressure dependence), and difference in grounding line migration from the control run in Fig. 3 is negligible. This can also be seen from equation 3 where in the limit of perfect plasticity, i.e., $m \to \infty$, the sliding law coefficient C remains constant and thus is effectively Weertman sliding law. This suggests substantial differences in ice mass loss projection due to the choice of the exponent alone in the same sliding law. Since Weertman and Budd sliding law remain the most commonly employed sliding laws in glacier and ice sheet scale modeling (e.g. Bondzio and others, 2017; Goelzer and others, 2020; Dawson and others, 2022) our results echo previous finding that sliding laws can critically influence ice mass loss projections (Brondex and others, 2017). Our work contributes to the knowledge by showing that in a wide range of glacier geometries and basal boundary conditions, grounding line is a decent proxy for total dynamic thinning (Fig. 8A), and therefore grounding line movement can potentially be used as a constraint to calibrate the choices of sliding law when initializing large-scale ice sheet models.

Additionally, it is important for studies using idealized glacier setups to be cautious when initializing glaciers with steady-state frontal geometries, such as fully grounded or floating termini. Our simulations reveal substantial thinning differences between glaciers with deep or shallow grounding lines (Fig. 11), which can bias the identification of primary controls suggested in Felikson and others (2022), for instance.

5 CONCLUSION

Our study explores the effect of ice overburden pressure and local basal slipperiness perturbations on dynamic thickness change of Greenland-like testbed glaciers, in an effort to constrain potential factors that may be driving dynamic thickness changes across Greenland glaciers.

We find that changes in both overburden pressure and basal slipperiness can induce dynamic thickness change which correlates well with grounding line migration. We find relationships between grounding line position and domain-wide thinning, and between front-to-grounding-line resistive stress loss and maximum thinning rate, but we find great variability from testbed to testbed in dynamic thinning rates despite consistent ice-front position histories. Thus, although ice-front position is readily observable, it should be used with caution for prediction or diagnosis of glacier dynamic thinning patterns.

We find changes in ice overburden pressure alone can be responsible for over 100 meters of dynamic thinning as terminus continuously retreats over a decade, particularly at glaciers with narrow fjords and high basal drag levels. Basal lubrication perturbations have a diagnostic dipole shape that could be identified in maps of dh/dt. The time duration of a basal forcing has greater efficacy on surface elevation than its magnitude.

Finally, we find that on wavy-bedded glaciers, a uniform retreat of a calving front can produce episodic grounding line retreats, which manifest as short-duration undulations in dynamic elevation. In light of all these findings, we stress the importance of incorporating knowledge of bed topography, grounding line locations, and stress estimates in any interpretation of observed dynamic thickness changes.

6 DATA AVAILABILITY

The scripts to run ISSM simulations and recreate the figures can be found on GitHub (`https://github.com/alastairyang/ThinningTestbedPublic.git`). The simulation output data is available on Zenodo (`https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10564805`). ISSM is publicly available at `https://issm.jpl.nasa.gov/`.

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A APPENDIX A: SUPPLEMENTARY TABLES

Synthetic testbeds geometry at steady state			
Name	Width (m)	Depth (effective depth) (m)	Floating termini length (km)
W1GL0FC1	4000	-100 (-142)	0
W1GL1FC1	4000	-500 (-474)	4.717
W1GL0FC2	4000	-100 (-142)	0
W1GL1FC2	4000	-500 (-487)	3.985
W1GL0FC3	4000	-100 (-139)	0
W1GL1FC3	4000	-500 (-488)	4.159
W2GL0FC1	6000	-100 (-157)	0
W2GL1FC1	6000	-500 (-458)	8.446
W2GL0FC2	6000	-100 (-158)	0
W2GL1FC2	6000	-500 (-464)	7.878
W2GL0FC3	6000	-100 (-156)	0
W2GL1FC3	6000	-500 (-467)	7.749
W3GL0FC1	8000	-100 (-162)	0
W3GL1FC1	8000	-500 (-425)	11.543
W3GL0FC2	8000	-100 (-164)	0
W3GL1FC2	8000	-500 (-426)	11.421
W3GL0FC3	8000	-100 (-162)	0
W3GL1FC3	8000	-500 (-428)	11.256

Table 2. Characteristics of the synthetic testbeds at their steady state. The nomenclature of the testbed names: "W" stands for fjord width, "GL" stands for grounding line depth, and "FC" stands for the sliding law coefficient. Numbers that follow: 1 to 3 represents low to high values; 0 and 1 respectively represents the testbed glaciers with shallow and with deep grounding lines. "Depth" is the grounding line depth at the start of the model run, and "effective depth" means grounding line depth after the model relaxation.

Kinematic characteristics of synthetic testbeds at steady state									
Name	Velocity (m a^{-1})			Thickness (m)			Basal drag (kPa)		
	min	mean	max	min	mean	max	min	mean	max
W1GL0FC1	2585	3470	4898	111	303	389	16	27	57
W1GL1FC1	1530	2168	2333	342	545	572	8	18	42
W1GL0FC2	1164	1684	2702	117	340	451	35	49	84
W1GL1FC2	814	1087	1246	327	555	599	16	33	63
W1GL0FC3	571	865	1619	125	402	544	82	94	127
W1GL1FC3	526	653	806	302	554	633	41	74	101
W2GL0FC1	2448	3306	4162	131	279	331	13	23	30
W2GL1FC1	1478	2184	2357	294	503	519	8	15	25
W2GL0FC2	1050	1418	1963	133	303	374	25	38	45
W2GL1FC2	674	942	1096	272	496	528	14	26	38
W2GL0FC3	481	689	1098	138	356	458	51	73	85
W2GL1FC3	399	521	650	241	476	542	33	57	71
W3GL0FC1	2102	3131	3765	134	265	306	10	21	26
W3GL1FC1	1352	2180	2349	253	461	480	7	15	21
W3GL0FC2	872	1228	1588	133	281	337	17	33	39
W3GL1FC2	568	867	1004	224	437	479	11	24	31
W3GL0FC3	416	575	844	135	326	412	36	61	68
W3GL1FC3	332	485	587	194	398	471	26	52	65

Table 3. Kinematic characteristics of the synthetic testbeds at their steady state. Testbed nomenclature is the same as in Table 2. The statistics of velocity, thickness, and basal drag are calculated based on the data from the first 10 km behind the grounding line.

Maximum ΔH and dH/dt in the localized basal perturbation experiment				
	Diffused pulse		Transient pulse	
Name	max ΔH(m)	max dH/dt (m a^{-1})	max ΔH(m)	max dH/dt (m a^{-1})
W1GL0FC1	4.87	4.91	3.63	21.81
W1GL1FC1	7.48	6.79	5.93	30.81
W1GL0FC2	5.31	5.38	3.67	20.34
W1GL1FC2	9.35	9.06	7.58	41.39
W1GL0FC3	5.58	5.02	3.47	18.46
W1GL1FC3	10.76	10.57	8.56	45.88
W2GL0FC1	5.69	5.48	3.86	22.08
W2GL1FC1	9.29	8.48	6.78	32.32
W2GL0FC2	5.82	5.24	3.56	18.67
W2GL1FC2	9.91	9.89	7.73	40.16
W2GL0FC3	5.88	4.44	3.26	15.78
W2GL1FC3	10.73	10.48	8.05	41.86
W3GL0FC1	6.29	5.93	4.05	22.59
W3GL1FC1	10.29	11.24	7.00	32.43
W3GL0FC2	5.98	4.93	3.44	17.39
W3GL1FC2	7.91	8.60	5.89	31.61
W3GL0FC3	5.86	3.96	3.10	13.49
W3GL1FC3	8.68	8.17	6.11	32.44

Table 4. Max elevation change and change rate in localized basal perturbation experiments. Testbed nomenclature is the same as shown in table 2.

Max thinning rate (m a^{-1})		Shallow testbeds			Deep testbeds		
		Mean basal shear stress					
		Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High
Fjord width	Narrow	5.0	5.5	6.2	10.4	12.0	16.0
	Medium	4.1	4.5	5.3	10.4	10.1	12.5
	Wide	3.7	4.0	4.7	10.5	8.4	9.4

Table 5. Max thinning rate from overburden pressure experiment, accompanying Fig. 3

Attenuation distance (m)		Shallow testbeds			Deep testbeds		
		Mean basal shear stress					
		Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High
Fjord width	Narrow	30987.9	25321.2	19832.0	32815.4	28199.6	22736.5
	Medium	30640.2	24510.5	19270.5	33632.2	28881.5	23824.0
	Wide	30397.2	23798.9	18680.9	33829.0	29011.3	24358.1

Table 6. Attenuation distance of diffusive thinning from overburden pressure experiment.

B APPENDIX B: SUPPLEMENTARY METHOD

B.1 Ice dynamics simulation

We use the MATLAB version of Ice-sheet and Sea-level System Model (ISSM version 4.21) to simulate ice flow dynamics. In the following sections, the definitions of variables can be found in Table 1 in the main text.

B.2 Synthetic testbed

For all testbeds, we applied a linear surface mass balance relationship:

$$\mathrm{SMB}(x) = 0.5(1 - \frac{2}{L_x}x) \tag{B.4}$$

where x is the distance from the influx boundary and L_x is the along-flow domain length. This fixes the equilibrium line altitude at $x = L_x/2$.

The across-flow bed topography was prescribed similarly to Felikson and others (2022)

$$B_y(y) = \frac{d_c}{1 + e^{-2/f_c(y - L_y/2 - w_c(x))}} + \frac{d_c}{1 + e^{-2/f_c(y - L_y/2 + w_c(x))}} \tag{B.5}$$

where y is across-flow direction, L_y is model domain width, f_c is the characteristic width of channel side walls, and d_c defines the depth of the trough compared to the top of side walls.

In our base experiments, we did not allow bed topography undulation for our base experiments and therefore prescribed the along-flow bedrock depth as a linear function:

$$B_x(x) = B_0 + \left(\frac{B_{gl} - B_0}{L_x}\right)x \tag{B.6}$$

where B_0 is the bed depth at the influx boundary and B_{gl} is the grounding line depth, and the bed slopes toward the ocean (prograde) to mitigate any potential run-away retreat. The width of the trough $w_c(x)$ narrows along the flow. It has a funnel shape that starts with a fixed width (across all testbeds) at the inflow boundary and narrows for the first $x_f = 15$ km and reaches a constant width throughout the rest of the flow trunk. We parameterized the narrowing stage as with a parabolic function:

$$w_c(x) = \begin{cases} \left[\left(\frac{L_y/W-1}{{x_f}^2}\right)(x - x_f)^2 + 1\right]W & 0 \leqslant x \leqslant x_f \\ W & x \geqslant x_f \end{cases} \tag{B.7}$$

The prescribed Weertman sliding law coefficient C_w for model initialization is spatially variable. Its lateral variability is prescribed to be similar to the bed topography while its along-flow variation is conditioned to decay exponentially toward the calving front:

$$C_w(x, y) = \frac{C_{wo}(3-e)e^{-2(x/L_x)}}{1 + e^{-2/f_c(y - L_y/2 - w_c(x))}} + \frac{C_{wo}(3-e)e^{-2(x/L_x)}}{1 + e^{2/f_c(y - L_y/2 + w_c(x))}} \tag{B.8}$$

The numerator helps define the e-folding length over which the sliding law coefficient decreases toward the terminus. This serves to regulate the ice velocity near the influx boundary and alleviate solver convergence issue when the prescribed sliding law coefficient law is low.

To initialize the model, we used the plastic ice sheet profile as an initial guess of glacier thickness, assuming an ice tensile strength of 1 MPa. At the influx boundary, we fixed the ice thickness as defined by the initial profile and imposed a constant 100 meter per year along-flow ice velocity. Since the flow domain length remains constant across all testbeds, the ice thickness at the inflow boundary and hence the flux are also identical across all testbeds.

During the initialization, the transient simulations have an adaptive time step based on Courant–Friedrichs–Lewy condition. During subsequent "control" and "overburden pressure experiment" runs, the time steps are fixed at 0.1 year. During the localized basal perturbation runs, the time steps are fixed at 0.01 year, although we only record the simulation output every 0.1 year.

B.3 Experiment design

B.3.1 Control

After the testbed was initialized to its steady state, we forced the calving front to retreat at a rate characterized by a triangular function:

$$\nu(t) = \begin{cases} \frac{\nu_m t_s}{t_s - t_e} + \frac{\nu_m}{t_e - t_s} t & t_s < t \leqslant (t_s + t_e)/2 \\ \frac{\nu_m t_e}{t_e - t_s} - \frac{\nu_m}{t_e - t_s} t & (t_s + t_e)/2 < t \leqslant t_e \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases} \tag{B.9}$$

where we defined ν_m as the maximum retreat rate, and t_s and t_e the start and end year of calving front perturbation.

B.3.2 Localized basal perturbation

While the overburden pressure experiment accounts for changes in ice overburden pressure from ice thickness change, a localized reduction of basal drag represents basal lubrication due to melt water. Mathematically, we wrote the sliding law coefficients as

$$C_{bp} = C_b + \Delta C(x, y, t; \hat{w}) \tag{B.10}$$

where C_{bp} is the sliding law coefficient for localized basal perturbation, C_b the sliding law coefficient for overburden pressure experiment (Budd sliding), and $\Delta C(x, y, t; w)$ is determined by either of the two pulses:

$$\Delta C(x, y, t; \hat{w})_{\mathrm{TP}} = \hat{C} \exp\left[-3\left(\frac{t}{t_p}\right)^2\right] \exp\left[-\frac{(x - x_0)^2}{2\hat{w}^2} - \frac{(y - W/2)^2}{2\hat{w}^2}\right] \tag{B.11}$$

$$\Delta C(x, y, t; \hat{w})_{\mathrm{DP}} = \hat{C}\left(\frac{t_p}{t_d}\right) \exp\left[-3\left(\frac{t}{t_d}\right)^2\right] \exp\left[-\frac{(x - x_0)^2}{2\hat{w}^2} - \frac{(y - W/2)^2}{2\hat{w}^2}\right] \tag{B.12}$$

Here $\hat{C}$ and $\hat{w}$ are scaled sliding law coefficient and localized basal perturbation patch width (one standard deviation), defined as

$$\hat{C} = \phi C_w \tag{B.13}$$

$$\hat{w} = \kappa W \sqrt{\frac{W}{\max(\mathrm{W})}} \tag{B.14}$$

where t_p and t_d are respectively the characteristic timescale of Transient Pulse and Diffused Pulse, and max(W) is the largest fjord width we construct. In other words, $\hat{C}$ denotes a proportional reduction of sliding law coefficient at the initial state defined in equation B.8, $\hat{w}$ denotes a quadratic scaling relation between the fjord with and the perturbation patch width, which is a consequence of the requirement that the fractional area being perturbed in each glacier remains identical across the testbeds, i.e., $\left(\int \Delta C(x, y; W_1)\, dx\, dy\right) / \left(\int_A dx\, dy\right) = \left(\int \Delta C(x, y; W_2)\, dx\, dy\right) / \left(\int_A dx\, dy\right)$ in which W_1 and W_2 represent two different fjord widths, and A is an arbitrarily chosen flow area that fully encloses the perturbation.

We formulate the parameterization ensuring that total changes in the two sliding law coefficient are the same in each perturbation cycle: $\int \Delta C_{\mathrm{TP}}(t)dt = \int \Delta C_{\mathrm{DP}}(t)dt$, as stated in the method section. At the end of each perturbation cycle, the perturbation in the sliding law coefficient ΔC returns to near-zero level ($\Delta C < 10^{-4}$ kg m^{-2} s^{-1}). Moreover, we previously mentioned that we scaled the magnitude of the sliding law coefficient reduction linearly with respect to the coefficient at the initial state, denoted by ϕC_w. This decision was made due to a lack of knowledge regarding any general relationship between basal lubrication and various hydrological and glacier geometric factors.

It should be noted that since ΔC_{TP} and ΔC_{DP} depend on the initial sliding law coefficient C_w, combining the reductions in the sliding law coefficient from both localized basal perturbation and overburden pressure may result in C_{bp} dropping below zero as the simulation progresses. In such case, we force the local sliding law coefficient to a minimum of 0 until it rebounds as the localized basal perturbation recovers.

B.4 Stress balance

The stress balance states that the gravitational driving stress of a glacier is approximately in balance with the sum of the basal shear stress and the longitudinal and lateral resistive stress gradients:

$$\tau_d \approx \tau_b + \frac{\partial}{\partial x}(HR_{xx}) + \frac{\partial}{\partial y}(HR_{xy}) \tag{B.15}$$

The longitudinal resistive stress R_{xx} and the lateral resistive stress R_{xy} can be calculated respectively as

$$R_{xx} = B\ \dot{\epsilon}_e^{1/n-1}(2\dot{\epsilon}_{xx} + \dot{\epsilon}_{yy}) \tag{B.16}$$

$$R_{xy} = B\ \dot{\epsilon}_e^{1/n-1}\dot{\epsilon}_{xy} \tag{B.17}$$

where B is ice rigidity; $\dot{\epsilon}_{xx}$, $\dot{\epsilon}_{xy}$, and $\dot{\epsilon}_{yy}$ are strain rates in the subscripted directions, and $\dot{\epsilon}_e$ is the effective strain rate, defined here as its second tensor invariant, as is commonly done:

$$\dot{\epsilon}_e = (\dot{\epsilon}_{xx}^2 + \dot{\epsilon}_{xy}^2 + \dot{\epsilon}_{yy}^2 + \dot{\epsilon}_{xx}\dot{\epsilon}_{yy})^{1/2} \tag{B.18}$$

We applied a five-point finite difference stencil to calculate spatial derivatives and then smoothed the derived stress components using a Gaussian filter with a 2 km standard deviation, which we chose to be approximately 5–7 times the ice thickness, following Frank and others (2022). The smoothing has a dual purpose: to reduce noise resulting from computing the numerical derivative, and to account for the coupling length of the longitudinal stress gradient (Kamb and Echelmeyer, 1986; Enderlin and others, 2016).

To calculate the frontal resistive stress loss ΔR (Sect. 2.5), we differenced the frontal resistive stress summed along the glacier from the calving front to the grounding line, between the first and last time steps:

$$\Delta R = \int_0^{t_e} \frac{d}{dt}\left[\int_{X_g(t)}^{X_c(t)} \Big(\tau_b + \frac{\partial}{\partial x}(HR_{xx}) + \frac{\partial}{\partial y}(HR_{xy})\Big)dx\right]dt \tag{B.19}$$

where X_g denotes the location of the grounding line, X_c the location of the calving front, and t_e the final year of the perturbation. We evaluate the integral numerically with the trapezoidal rule.

C APPENDIX C: SUPPLEMENTARY FIGURES

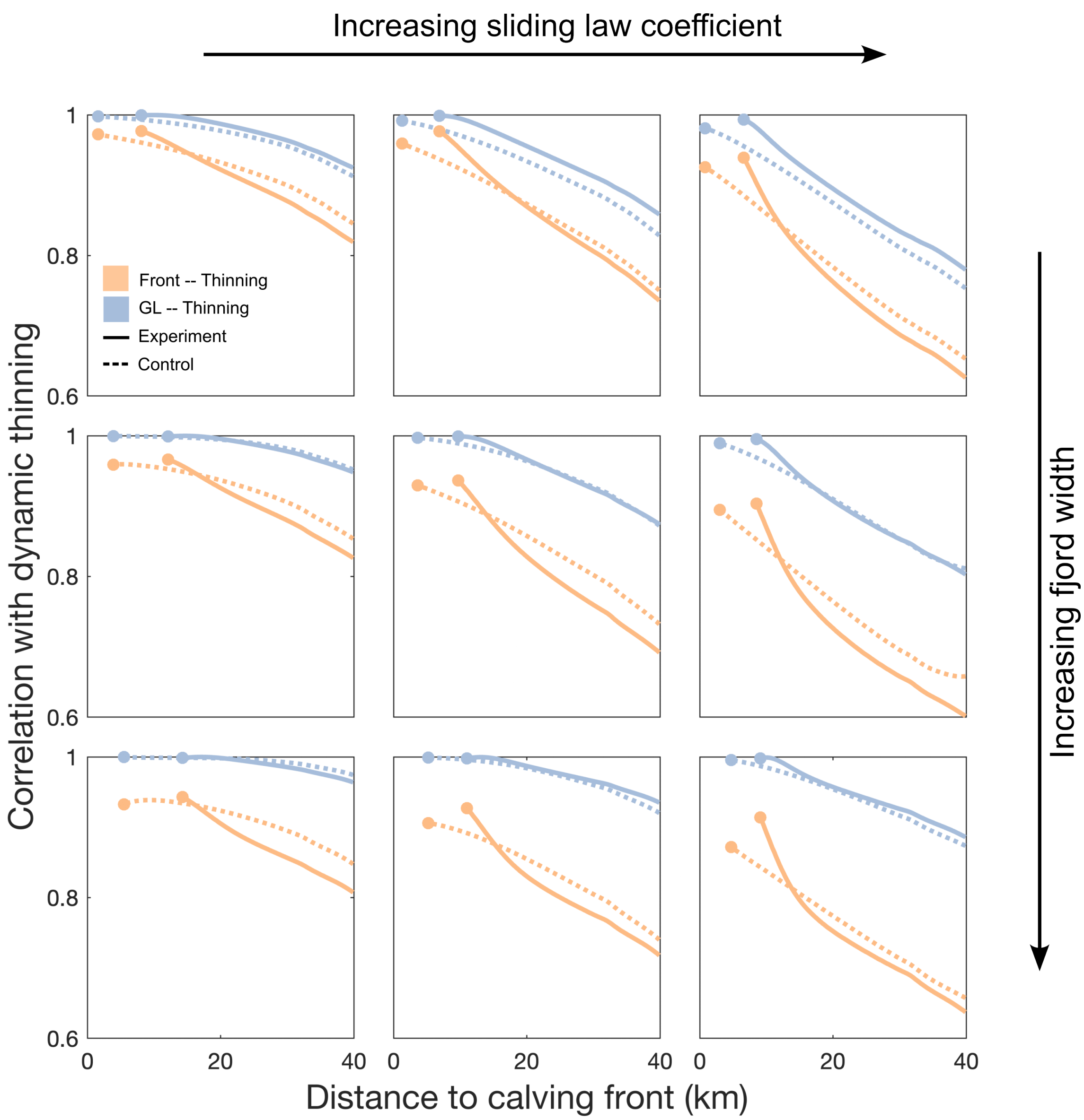

Fig. 9. Timeseries correlation between dynamic thinning, grounding line, and frontal retreat. Correlation over the 16-year perturbation between dynamic thinning and the grounding line position (blue), and dynamic thinning and frontal retreat (orange). For a given model run, thinning rates are sampled at every 0.1 year at every 100 meters along the central flowline, plotted here along the x-axis. "GL" denotes grounding line retreat. "Experiment" represents the overburden pressure experiment and "Control" represents the control run. Round markers represent the last position of either the ice front or the grounding line.

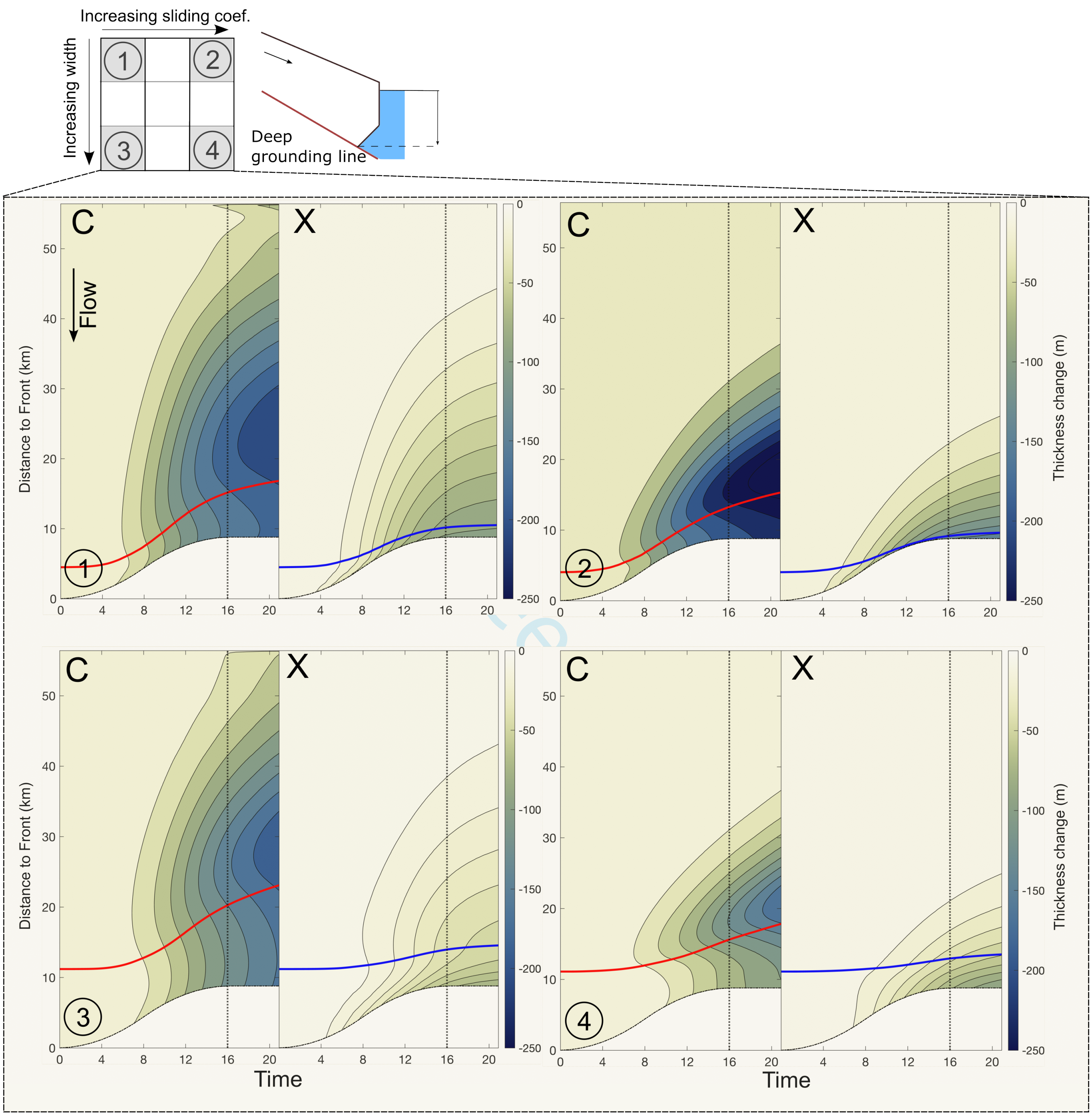

Fig. 10. Dynamic thickness change in **deep** testbed glaciers along the center flow line over time, using $m = 5$ in Budd sliding law, in comparison to $m = 1$ in the main text (Figure 3). Different from the main text, here we are comparing two simulations both using Budd law but different exponents m on the sliding velocity. "C" and "X" represent the linear viscous case $m = 1$ and the more plastic $m = 5$ case respectively, and the red and blue lines represent the grounding lines in respective cases.

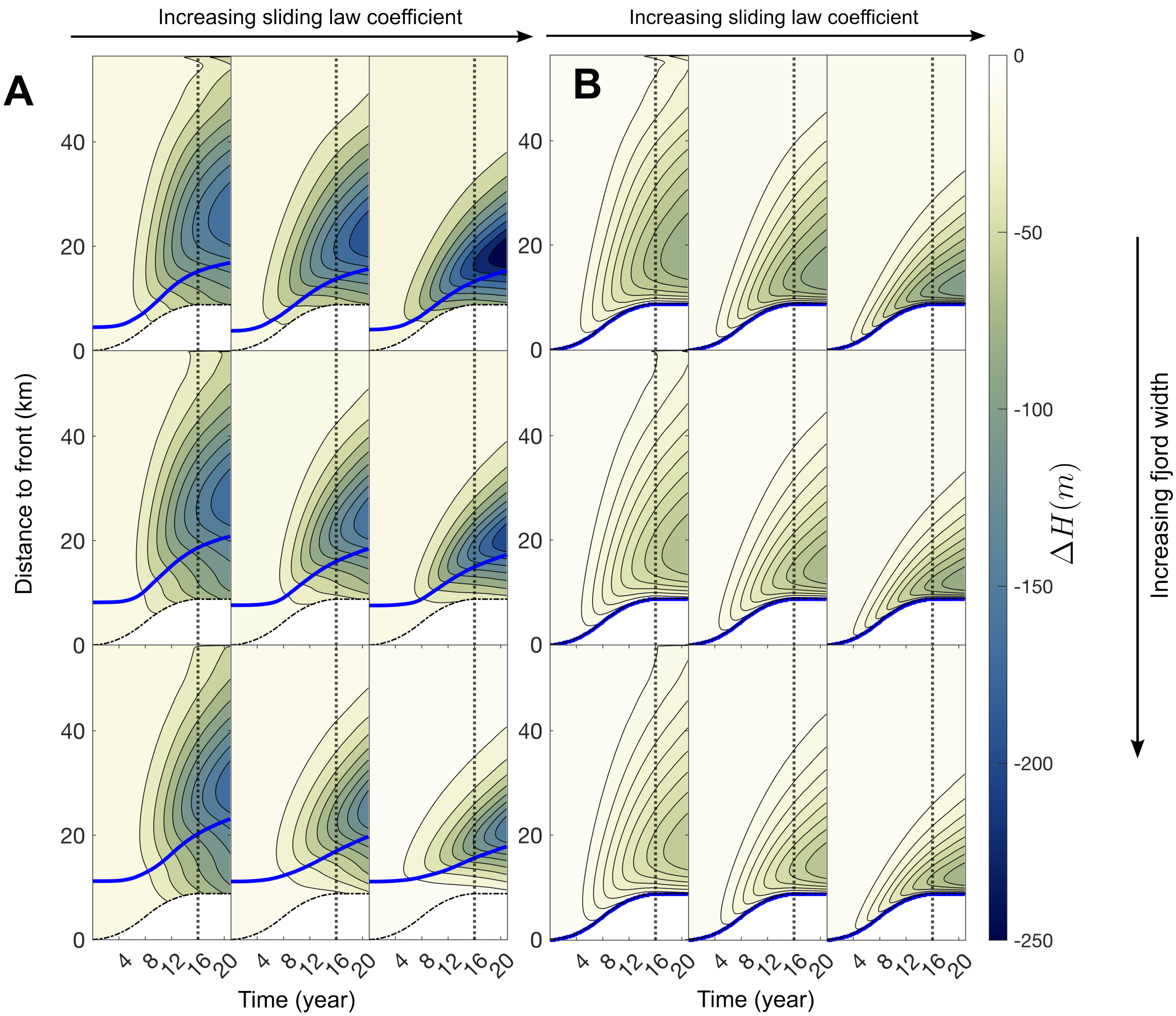

Fig. 11. Dynamic thickness change at **deep** and **shallow** testbed glaciers attributed to overburden pressure change in the sliding law, using $m = 1$. Blue lines represent the grounding lines. A) deep testbed glaciers. B) shallow testbed glaciers.

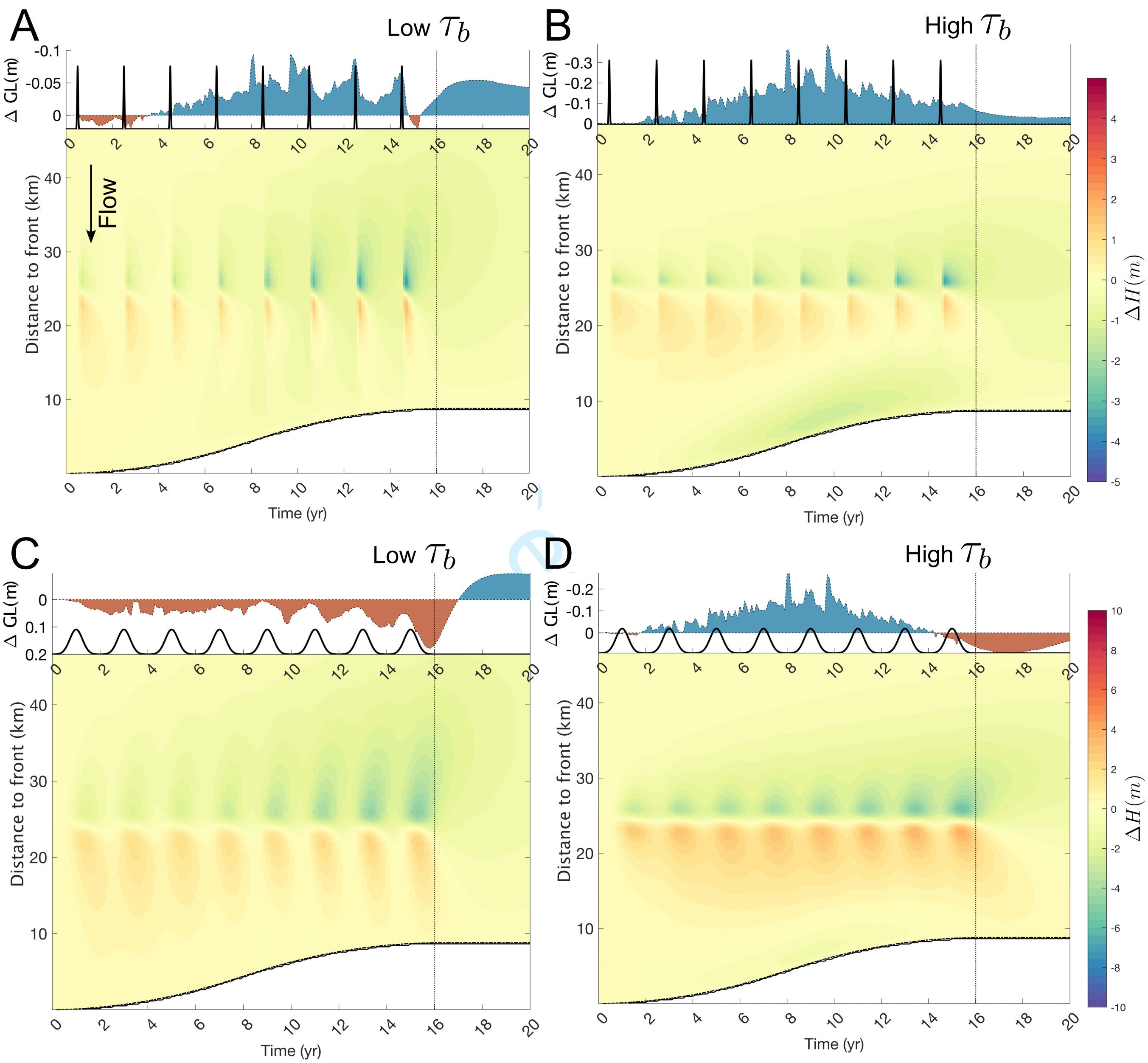

Fig. 12. Spatio-temporal pattern of dynamic thickness change along the center flow line at **narrow** and **shallow** testbed glaciers in response to the two types of localized basal perturbation pulses. All testbed glaciers remain almost fully grounded and hence the fronts and grounding lines overlap on the plots. Graphic features and subplot arrangements are the same as Fig. 4.

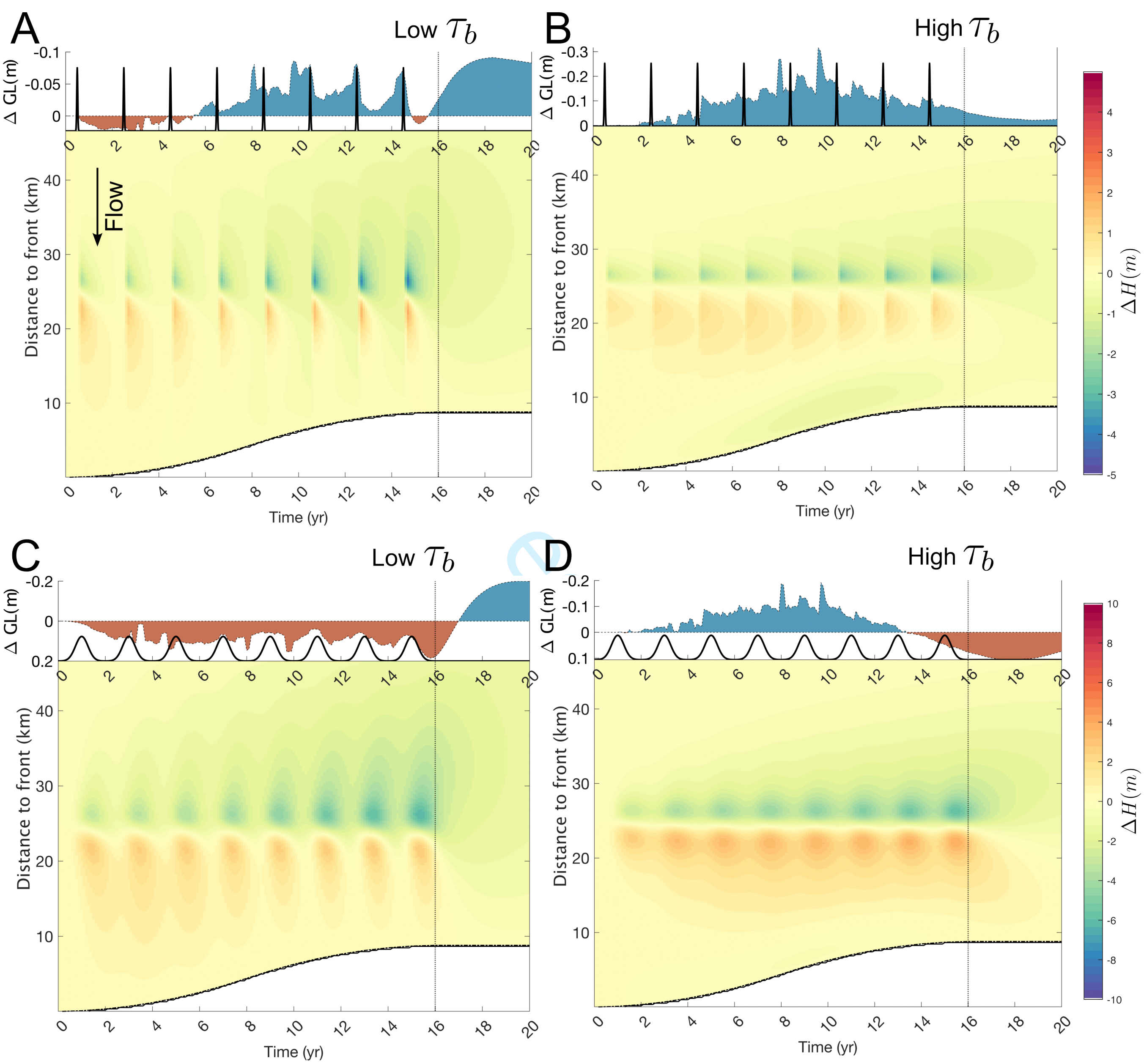

Fig. 13. Spatio-temporal pattern of dynamic thickness change along the center flow line at **wide** and **shallow** testbed glaciers in response to the two types of localized basal perturbation pulses. All testbed glaciers remain almost fully grounded and hence the fronts and grounding lines overlap on the plots. Graphic features and subplot arrangements are the same as Fig. 5.

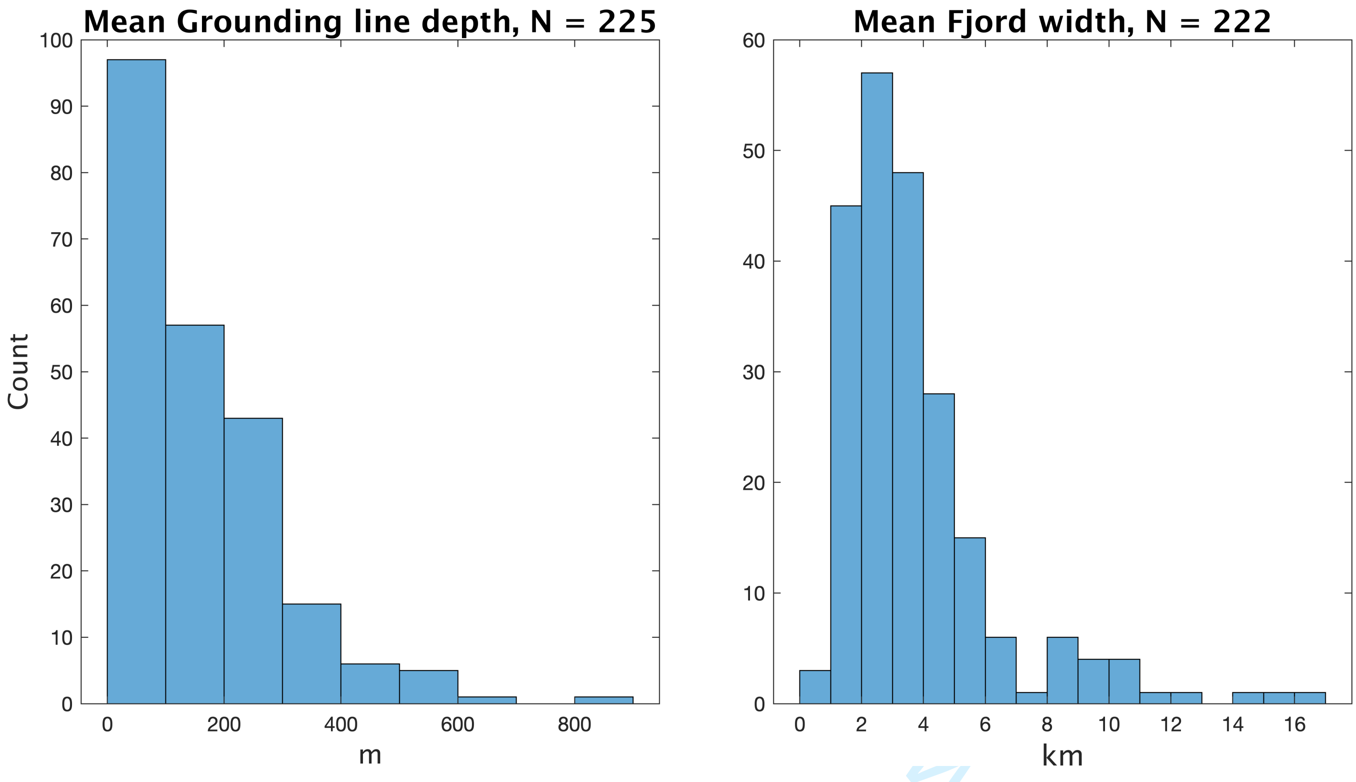

Fig. 14. Distributions of mean fjord width and grounding line depth in observational data around most of the Greenland outlet glaciers, plotted from Wood and others (2021). N is the total number of available glacier data in the original study.