



ULF Wave Modeling, Effects, and Applications: Accomplishments, Recent Advances, and Future

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Ultra Low Frequency (ULF) waves play important roles in magnetosphere-ionosphere coupling, ring current and radiation belt dynamics, and modulation of higher frequency wave modes and energetic particle precipitation. The “ULF wave modeling, effects, and applications” (UMEA) focus group - part of the Geospace Environment Modeling effort from 2016 to 2021 - sought to improve understanding of the physics of ULF waves and their specification in geospace models. Through a series of in person and virtual meetings the UMEA focus group brought modelers and experimentalists together to compare ULF wave outputs in different models, plan observation campaigns focused on ULF waves, discuss recent advances in ULF wave research, and identify unresolved ULF wave science questions. This article summarizes major discussion points and accomplishments in the UMEA focus group over the last 6 years, recent advances and their connection to Richard Thorne and Peter Gary’s significant contributions to ULF wave research, and the future of ULF wave research.

Keywords: ULF wave, pulsation, field line resonance, magnetosphere-ionosphere coupling, solar wind-magnetosphere coupling, EMIC wave, radiation belt, radial diffusion

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1 INTRODUCTION TO ULF WAVES

Ultra Low Frequency (ULF) waves are the lowest frequency plasma waves in the Earth’s magnetosphere, with frequencies from 0.001–5 Hz (Jacobs et al., 1964). At the lower end of the ULF band, waves are often well described using a magnetohydrodynamic (MHD) approximation and include eigenmodes with wavelengths comparable to the size of the magnetosphere. Higher frequency ULF waves include electromagnetic ion cyclotron (EMIC) waves, and these are better described with other mathematical approximations (e.g., local linear kinetic theory Gary et al., 1995). ULF waves play important roles in magnetosphere-ionosphere (MI) coupling (e.g., Keiling, 2009), ring current/radiation belt dynamics (e.g., Turner et al., 2012; Kress et al., 2013; Murphy et al., 2015), modulation of VLF waves/precipitation (e.g., Li et al., 2011; Brito et al., 2015; Jaynes et al., 2015), geomagnetically induced currents (GIC) (e.g., Heyns et al., 2021), substorms (e.g., Kepko and Kivelson, 1999; Liang et al., 2009; Keiling and Takahashi, 2011), and other areas relevant to space weather prediction. They are an important component of geospace environment models and thus relevant to the Geospace Environment Modeling (GEM) effort, a community

driven effort supported by the United States National Science Foundation that seeks to improve our understanding of the geospace environment, including solar wind-magnetosphere-ionosphere coupling via ULF waves.

The GEM “ULF wave modeling, effects, and applications” (UMEA) focus group (FG) formed in 2016 and ran through 2021. This focus group was motivated by (1) unprecedented availability of coordinated, multi-point space and ground-based observations (e.g., Hartinger et al., 2013; Takahashi et al., 2013), (2) high quality particle and field measurements of ULF wave-particle interactions (e.g., Claudepierre et al., 2013), (3) new and improved simulations better able to capture the excitation and dynamics of ULF waves (e.g., Claudepierre et al., 2010; Lysak et al., 2015) and (4) an ongoing effort in the GEM community to improve models of ULF waves. UMEA’s goal was to bring modelers and experimentalists together to address the following questions: What excites ULF waves? How do ULF waves couple to the plasmasphere, ring current, and radiation belt populations? What is the role of ULF waves in MI coupling? This mini-review describes the recent advances in ULF wave research discussed in the UMEA FG from 2016 to 2021, including improved abilities to simulate ULF waves. It also discusses future directions in ULF wave research needed to improve the specification of ULF waves in models. Finally, it connects current and future work to the many important contributions from Richard Thorne and Peter Gary to ULF wave research, including EMIC waves, ULF modulation of Very Low Frequency (VLF) waves, and radiation belt wave-particle interactions.

2 WHAT EXCITES ULF WAVES?

Recent work is revealing new information about the manner in which upstream pressure disturbances with different spatial scales and orientations couple to magnetospheric ULF waves. Oliveira et al. (2020) showed how interplanetary shocks with different impact angles drive ULF waves with different properties. Multi-satellite investigations have yielded new insights into the large spatial scales over which upstream pressure disturbances can drive EMIC waves (Engebretson et al., 2018). Numerous studies have been conducted examining the role of ion foreshock disturbances (e.g., Wang et al., 2020a) and magnetosheath jets (e.g., Archer et al., 2019) in driving ULF waves with different properties. However, there remain few statistical studies that make one-to-one comparisons between ion foreshock or magnetosheath disturbances and ULF waves, limiting our understanding of the properties of such waves; more studies are needed that make use of multi-satellite/multi-constellation measurements. UMEA discussions also indicate that more modeling work is needed to determine how the spatial scale and speed of the upstream pressure disturbance affects ULF wave properties; most past modeling work has focused on two extremes—disturbances across the entire magnetopause or infinitesimal disturbances over a very small section of the magnetopause—whereas observations indicate a wide range of possible spatial scales and speeds on the magnetopause. Recently developed 3D ULF wave models indicate that the 3D properties

of Alfvén resonances depend on the external driver properties, and that standing Alfvén waves and field line resonances in 3D geometries have unique properties that can differ from 2D model predictions (Elsden and Wright, 2017; Elsden and Wright, 2018). Finally, north-south and east-west asymmetries in upstream pressure disturbances can profoundly impact ULF wave properties in the magnetosphere (e.g., Shen et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2019; Oliveira et al., 2020), and more models and globally distributed observations are needed to understand how these asymmetries ultimately affect global wave properties and in turn predict what types of wave-particle interactions may occur in the inner magnetosphere. Energetic particle measurements are increasingly being used as an additional tool to remote sense wave mode structure and local time variations in wave properties (e.g., Hao et al., 2020; Zhao et al., 2020).

ULF waves can also be excited by mechanisms internal to the magnetosphere, including the magnetotail where plasma bubbles convecting earthward produce Pi2-band oscillations (Wang C. P. et al., 2020), buoyancy waves are excited (Wolf et al., 2018), and the ring current where high-m poloidal waves (Shi et al., 2018b; Zhai et al., 2021) and compressional Pc5 waves (Soto-Chavez et al., 2019) are excited. Significant advances have been made in spacecraft measurements of the wave mode structure, particle resonances with the waves, and unstable ion phase space density. New information on the global extent and azimuthal wave number has become available using HF radar (e.g., Shi et al., 2018a) and GPS TEC techniques (e.g., Watson et al., 2015). On the theoretical side, models have been developed for poloidal wave mode structures incorporating finite ion pressure (Xia et al., 2017), and a gyrokinetic code has been developed to simulate excitation of poloidal waves in a dipole magnetosphere (Yamakawa et al., 2019). Numerical simulations that combine MHD background and kinetic particle effects might be a logical direction in future studies of internally excited ULF waves.

3 HOW DO ULF WAVES COUPLE TO THE PLASMASPHERE?

Cold plasmaspheric plasma can affect ULF wave generation and propagation. In relation to wave propagation, there has been an ongoing debate whether the plasmapause can serve as a barrier to ULF waves, controlling the radial extent of ULF wave power propagation, as previously suggested (e.g., Lee et al., 2002; Hartinger et al., 2010). However, a recent study by Sandhu et al. (2021) demonstrated no clear evidence for a sharp reduction in wave power across the plasmapause. Instead, it uncovered trapping of highly enhanced wave power in plasmaspheric plumes during disturbed geomagnetic conditions, giving a deeper insight into the storm-time ULF wave dynamics and contributing to modelling efforts of ULF wave driven radial diffusion during geomagnetically active periods.

In turn, ULF waves can have an effect on cold plasma. Plasmaspheric electrons and ions were found heated and their fluxes modulated by ULF waves. It was suggested that ~1 eV ions can be energized by 10–100 times by ULF wave electric fields

due to betatron acceleration (Yue et al., 2016) and $E \times B$ drift (Zhang S. et al., 2019). Zong et al. (2012) presented observations of simultaneous plasmaspheric O⁺ ion enhancements and ULF waves, suggesting ULF waves can interact with oxygen torus ions. In addition, more recent studies (e.g., Ren et al., 2019, and references therein) reported acceleration of cold plasmaspheric electrons by ULF waves through drift-bounce resonance. Overall, this intermediate energy population (a few eV to hundreds of eV) also known as warm plasma cloak (Chappell et al., 2008) has been actively investigated over the past few years (Borovsky and Valdivia, 2018; Delzanno et al., 2021).

Interactions between cold plasma and EMIC waves were also actively discussed in the UMEA FG, with much of the work motivated by the many significant contributions of Peter Gary and Richard Thorne to EMIC wave research, including the factors controlling their generation (plasma temperature, temperature anisotropy, ion composition), storm time evolution, and effect on a wide range of ion and electron populations (Gary, 1992; Gary et al., 1994, 1995; Thorne and Horne, 1992, 1997). EMIC waves can resonantly interact with multiple particle species, being an important loss process for both ring current ions and radiation belt electrons, as well as a cold plasma heating mechanism. They can couple energy and momentum between magnetospheric plasma in a wide energy range, from a few eV to several MeV. Similarly to ULF waves, there is a two-way relationship between EMIC waves and cold plasma. Plasmaspheric plasma density and ion composition controls EMIC wave growth and propagation, as well as the energy of energetic particles in resonance with EMIC waves (e.g., Usanova et al., 2016; Usanova and Mann, 2016; Blum and Breneman, 2020). Nosé et al. (2020) found a close relationship between EMIC wave occurrence and the structure of the oxygen torus. EMIC waves can heat plasmaspheric ions, as predicted earlier by theory and simulations and confirmed by state-of-the-art MMS satellite measurements (Kitamura et al., 2018; Abid et al., 2021). These new findings point to the importance of cold ion composition measurements for new satellite missions (Lee et al., 2021). Recent studies have also emphasized the role of nonlinear processes in EMIC wave-particle interactions and the potential to include those in global magnetospheric models which will be a next crucial step towards predictive modeling (Usanova, 2021, and references therein).

4 HOW DO ULF WAVES COUPLE TO THE RING CURRENT?

ULF waves also play an important role in the dynamics of higher energy ring current particles. This includes storm time intervals through interaction with ring current ions via drift-bounce resonance. However, the energy transfer between magnetospheric particles and ULF waves through wave-particle interactions has been mostly excluded from models of ring current dynamics. Based on drift-kinetic simulations, Yamakawa et al. (2019) and Yamakawa et al. (2020) showed that high-m Pc3-5 ULF waves can be excited through the drift-bounce resonance by ring current ions associated with the

injection from the magnetotail. Oimatsu et al. (2018) showed in a Van Allen Probes case study that energy transfer from the ring current protons to the poloidal Pc4 wave via the drift-bounce resonance contributes up to 85% of the increase in the Dst^* index, where Dst^* is the solar wind pressure-corrected Dst index. Recent studies have shown that ULF waves can interact with relativistic electrons and ring current ions at the same time (e.g., Yang et al., 2010; Ren et al., 2016). Multiple drift and/or drift-bounce resonances can occur with different plasma species or the same species at different energies simultaneously (Rankin et al., 2020). Since ULF waves can interact with various magnetospheric particle populations (sometimes simultaneously), including the plasmaspheric electrons, ring current ions, and radiation belt energetic electrons, it is still a question if and how ULF waves mediate coupling between different particle populations (Zong, 2021). The incorporation of ULF wave-particle interactions into ring current models is therefore an important target for future studies, and improved energy budgets are needed to quantify the impact of these waves on the ring current.

Higher frequency EMIC waves are also related to ring current dynamics. Anisotropic ring current proton distributions with $T_{\text{perp}} > T_{\text{para}}$ (with respect to the background magnetic field) provide the source of free energy for EMIC instability (Cornwall, 1965; Horne and Thorne, 1993). Energetic He⁺ and O⁺ ring current species, abundant in the magnetosphere during geomagnetically active times, can absorb the wave energy and split the EMIC wave spectrum into multiple sub-bands. The wave growth rates and cut-off frequencies of each sub-band are determined by the hot ion temperature anisotropy, ion composition, and cold plasma density (Kozyra et al., 1984). As the EMIC wave instability evolves, the initially unstable proton distribution isotropizes due to pitch-angle scattering and loss of protons into the atmosphere (e.g., Usanova et al., 2010; Søråas et al., 2013; Yahnin et al., 2021). This process is incorporated in global ring current models (Jordanova et al., 2012) which showed its contribution to a gradual recovery of magnetic storms. The relationship between EMIC waves and the ring current is an ongoing and active area of research.

5 HOW DO ULF WAVES COUPLE TO THE RADIATION BELTS?

ULF waves play a major role in the dynamics of higher energy radiation belt particles through radial transport. ULF wave-particle interactions can lead to rapid dropouts (e.g., Turner et al., 2012; Zou et al., 2020; Olifer et al., 2021) as well as significant energization of electrons (e.g., Kanekal et al., 2016; Jaynes et al., 2018). Thorne et al. (2007) discussed how both ULF waves and local wave-particle interaction can contribute to the acceleration of relativistic electrons. ULF waves can accelerate electrons up to relativistic energies (e.g., Elkington et al., 2003), and plasma density depletions can create preferential conditions for local diffusive acceleration of electrons from ~hundreds of keV to several MeV (Thorne et al., 2013; Allison et al., 2021).

While significant progress has been achieved and many derived parameterizations have been applied in the simulations (e.g., Ozeke et al., 2014; Drozdov et al., 2021), the role of ULF waves in the electron dynamics remains an open question. For example, with sparse measurements it is challenging to determine the azimuthal mode number of ULF waves (Barani et al., 2019), which necessitates assumptions in the estimation of radial diffusion coefficients. Other challenges arise from the sparse distribution of ULF wave measurements. One approach to supplement sparse measurements is the use of realistic, validated global MHD simulations (Elkington et al., 2012); this is one motivation for the UMEA objective of improving such simulations. The effect of ULF waves can be included in simulations via radial diffusion parameterizations (Lejosne and Kollmann, 2020).

ULF waves can also modulate higher-frequency, EMIC and VLF wave growth (e.g., Li et al., 2011; Gamayunov and Engebretson, 2021; Shang et al., 2021), transferring energy from large to small scales. Concerning EMIC waves, the pioneering work by Lyons and Thorne (1972) demonstrated that these waves can play a critical role in the dynamics of multi-MeV electrons. They are highly effective in scattering electrons in the vicinity of the loss cone, can produce localized precipitation (e.g., Blum et al., 2015) and lead to the formation of bite-outs in electron pitch-angle distributions (Usanova et al., 2014) and minima in phase space density profiles (Shprits et al., 2017). A few examples of recent advances in EMIC wave research include significantly improved data coverage and statistics (e.g., Allen et al., 2016; Sigsbee et al., 2016, 2020; Wang et al., 2017; Engebretson et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2019; Vines et al., 2019, 2021; Grison et al., 2021; Jun et al., 2021), investigation of the association of the EMIC waves with injections (e.g., Remya et al., 2018; Jun et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2021), improved understanding of EMIC wave generation (e.g., Lee et al., 2021), exploration of the possibility of sub-MeV electron scattering (e.g., Zhang X. J. et al., 2019; Capannolo et al., 2019; Denton et al., 2019) and quantifying their effect in modeling (e.g., Ma et al., 2016; Drozdov et al., 2017; Cervantes et al., 2020; Wang D. et al., 2020; Drozdov et al., 2020).

6 WHAT IS THE ROLE OF ULF WAVES IN MAGNETOSPHERE-IONOSPHERE COUPLING?

ULF waves can carry significant energy to the ionosphere and play important roles in M-I coupling. They can cause modulation and enhancement of several ionospheric parameters (e.g., electron density and ionospheric conductance) and provide ion frictional heating in the ionosphere-thermosphere (I-T) system. When propagating to the ground, ULF waves can couple to geomagnetic/geoelectric field perturbations (e.g., Hartinger et al., 2020) and potentially drive GICs that may damage technological infrastructures (Heyns et al., 2021; Yagova et al., 2021). Recent studies have shown that ULF wave-related precipitation of energetic electrons can affect ionospheric conductivities and modulate Hall and Pedersen

conductances by a factor of 7–10 (e.g., Wang et al., 2020d). These large conductivity modulations in turn affect M-I coupling processes and I-T heating rates (Verkhoglyadova et al., 2018). Watson et al. (2015, 2016) reported TEC variations related to Pc4 and Pc5-6 ULF waves, with the Pc5-6 waves showing peak-to-peak amplitudes as large as 7 TECU.

More work is needed in ULF wave models to incorporate more realistic, event-specific conductivity. Though several mechanisms linking ULF waves to TEC perturbations have been proposed by Pilipenko et al. (2014), most work has focused on event studies. Comprehensive statistical studies are thus needed to identify the favored conditions and mechanisms for significant TEC perturbations related to ULF waves. While many previous statistical studies used 1-min resolution data to characterize geomagnetic perturbations for GIC hazard analysis, it has been shown by recent studies that higher sampling rate data (<1 min) are needed to capture more transient and shorter-period wave events such as those associated with SSCs (e.g., Trichtchenko, 2021).

7 ULF WAVE MODELING AND THE GEM ULF WAVE MODELING CHALLENGE

ULF waves in the magnetosphere are studied using coupled global magnetospheric models (e.g., Claudepierre et al., 2008; Hartinger et al., 2014; Claudepierre et al., 2016; Komar et al., 2017) and in simplified field geometries to isolate and better understand underlying physics (Xia et al., 2017; Denton, 2018; Elsdén and Wright, 2020; Lysak et al., 2020). Examples of simulations of ULF waves in the magnetosphere presented at GEM UMEA sessions include studies of: global magnetospheric ULF wave modes (Claudepierre et al., 2010; Elsdén et al., 2016; Elsdén and Wright, 2017, 2020; Xia et al., 2017; Lysak et al., 2020), magnetospheric ULF wave propagation (Degeling et al., 2018), growth and propagation of EMIC waves (Denton et al., 2014), magnetopause surface waves (Lin et al., 2017; Archer et al., 2021), and interaction of ULF waves with ring current and radiation belt particle populations (Komar et al., 2017; Denton et al., 2019; Patel et al., 2019).

In a previous GEM challenge, the Metrics and Validation Focus Group compared ULF wave output of several global MHD simulation codes using idealized driving conditions, finding substantial differences. A few global MHD simulation studies have shown how, for example, grid resolution can profoundly affect wave properties using grid convergence tests and other calculations (e.g., Claudepierre et al., 2010; Hartinger et al., 2014). More model-model (different grid, different simulation code, different boundary condition) and model-data (event specific or idealized simulations compared to statistical results) comparisons are needed to improve the specification of ULF waves in global MHD simulations, and this approach needs to be extended beyond global MHD simulations. The earlier GEM ULF wave modeling challenge was continued by UMEA in order to better understand potential sources of model-model and model-data discrepancies—in particular, to discriminate between numerical effects and missing physics.

Over a series of sessions, the UMEA FG discussed data-model and model-model comparisons during idealized and realistic driving conditions. A project webpage describing this effort is at <https://ccmc.gsfc.nasa.gov/challenges/ULF/>, including a project summary, links to publications and simulation runs at the NASA GSFC Community Coordinated Modeling Center (CCMC).

8 SUMMARY

The 2016–2021 UMEA effort brought together researchers in different research areas that shared common interests related to ULF waves. This led to fruitful discussions that connected different research areas and GEM focus groups. Many of these discussions, such as the generation mechanisms of EMIC waves and the relative importance of radial transport and local acceleration, were motivated by the pioneering work of Richard Thorne and Peter Gary. Work related to these FG discussions has yielded new insights on the current state of the field and prospects for future research directions. A recurring theme across all 6 years of the FG: ULF waves are discussed in various contexts in virtually every area of geospace research (and every GEM FG) due to the wide variety of ways they can affect geospace system dynamics. In the future, continued coordination across research areas is needed to improve models of ULF waves and better capture their effect on solar wind-magnetosphere-ionosphere coupling and inner magnetosphere dynamics.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

MH led the manuscript effort and provided text for **Sections 1, 8**, and other sections. KT provided text for **Section 2**. MU provided text for **Section 3, 4**. XS provided text for **Sections 4, 6**. AD provided text for **Section 5**. BK provided text for **Section 7**.

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