**MWR-D-24-0102, Biernat et al., Cover Letter**

Dear Dr. Russ S. Schumacher, Editor:

We request approval of a word overage for the revised version of manuscript MWR-D-24-0102. The total number of words in the body text and acknowledgments of the revised manuscript is 8912 words, which exceeds the 7500-word limit. The word overage is necessary to address the comments from the reviewers. We added discussion based on the recommendations from the reviewers, which we feel strengthens the quality of the manuscript. Additional discussion based on the recommendations from the reviewers is found on L76–86, L101–105, L109–112, L120–151, L661–668, L680–686, L716–723, L747–767, L805–807, L821–824, L827–832, and L861–868 of the revised manuscript. The additional discussion amounts to a total of 1543 words, which largely contributes to the word overage. The document containing our responses to the reviewers provides details on the additional discussion. Other changes to the manuscript that were made in response to comments from the reviewers contribute to the remaining word overage.

We also respond to the following comment in the editorial decision: “All three reviewers provided thoughtful and constructive suggestions to further improve the manuscript. In particular, reviewer 2 offered a suggestion to more clearly distinguish the findings of this study from previous work in the literature.”

Reviewer 2 offered a suggestion on better distinguishing the novelty of the manuscript on L484–499 of reviewer responses document. The suggestion entails comparing composites of strong low-skill ACs to composites of low-skill ACs in general and strong ACs in general. We deliberated whether to conduct the additional analysis suggested by Reviewer 2. As discussed on L557–563 of the reviewer responses document, we feel that the suggestion has considerable merit, but that the scope of the changes required to implement the suggestion would excessively lengthen the manuscript to the extent of requiring essentially a new manuscript. Section 1 would need to be expanded to motivate the comparison between the three categories of ACs; section 2 would need to be expanded to explain a new methodology for determining low-skill ACs in general and strong ACs in general, since these categories do not exist; section 3a would need to be expanded to explain the results of the comparison between the three categories of ACs; and the abstract and section 4 would need to be altered and expanded to account for the additional analysis. Our response to Reviewer 2 on L509–555 addresses the originality of the manuscript and the adequacy of the analysis presented in the manuscript, the objective of which is to increase understanding of features and processes influencing the evolution and forecast skill of the intensity of strong low-skill ACs.

Thank you,

Kevin A. Biernat, Lance F. Bosart, and Daniel Keyser