

The Cryosphere Discuss., referee comment RC2
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Comment on tc-2021-70

Anonymous Referee #2

Referee comment on "Brief communication: Evaluation of multiple density-dependent empirical snow conductivity relationships in East Antarctica" by Minghu Ding et al., The Cryosphere Discuss., <https://doi.org/10.5194/tc-2021-70-RC2>, 2021

This study presents the evaluation of 9 density-based relationships of thermal conductivity applied to the upper part of the ice sheet column (0 -10 m). Relationships are evaluated based on data of in-situ measurements, including temperature profiles in firn, at three Antarctic sites. This work is of great interest for the firn community. The paper is clearly presented and reads well.

I have two comments prior publication.

1) It seems that the wrong relationship was taken from Calonne et al. 2019. The formula Ca2 was used, that is only suited for deeply buried firn with densities from 550 to 917 kg/m³. Instead (or in addition), the evaluation of the relationship Equation (5) in Calonne et al. 2019 should be included, as it is a much-more suited formula to reach the goal of the present study. In Calonne et al. 2019, Equation (5) was suggested as a general formula to use for ice sheets, designed to work within the entire density range 0 – 917 kg/m³, from snow to firn to bubbly ice. It actually combines relationship Ca1 and relationship Ca2, both evaluated in the paper. In addition, and in contrast to the others evaluated relationships, Equation (5) allows to account for the temperature dependency on the thermal conductivity of firn through the choice of values for the thermal conductivities of pure ice k_i and of pure air k_a (for example, from Calonne et al. 2019: at -3°C, -20°C, and -60°C using $k_i = 2.107, 2.330, \text{ and } 2.900 \text{ W/m/K}$ and $k_a = 0.024, 1460.023, \text{ and } 0.019 \text{ W/m/K}$, respectively). The mean annual temperature of firn within 0 – 10 m depth at the site could be used. This study would be a great opportunity to study the benefit of including the temperature dependency in the thermal conductivity modeling, with the three sites showing different mean annual temperatures.

2) Thermal conductivity of firn depends largely on two parameters that are density and temperature. As the evaluated relationships were derived for different density and

temperatures, their performances depend on which range of density and temperature is targeted. Thus, density range and temperature range in the area of interest (0 – 10 m depth) should be provided in the paper for the three sites. It is difficult to guess that only from the supplementary figures. The density range seems to range from 300 to 500 kg/m³ roughly. Comments in the discussion could be improved to explain the relationships' performance and link it to their domain of validity in density and temperature, when possible.

***** Minor comments

Line 20: "transportation" should be "transport"

Line 23: Thermal conductivity of snow is anisotropic only for some snow types (depth hoar for example). Here I would suggest writing something like "Snow is a porous and inhomogeneous material with thermal conductivity that can be anisotropic and depends on the microstructure of snow: proportion of air and ice, grain shape, grain size, bonds size, etc."

Line 27: "bulk/effective" should be "bulk/apparent".

Line 27: " considering that the bulk/effective heat diffusivity can be more effectively described than the whole physical process of snow metamorphism" This sentence should be rewritten. Do you mean that this method assumes that all heat transport processes are represented through the bulk thermal diffusivity, rather than accounting for all the different heat transport processes individually (heat conduction, heat convection, latent heat, for example)? If so, please note that some direct measurement method (e.g., the needle probe) also do this hypothesis. Maybe this part of the sentence should be simply deleted.

Line 37: "For example, the land model CLM, ... ": this sentence should be rewritten.

Line 59 – 69: Figure S1 – S3 could be cited already in this paragraph, to illustrate temperature cycles at the three sites. Besides, that will allow citing Figure S1 to S5 in chronological order.

Line 61: "8.5 m/s annually" should be "8.5 m/s mean annual"? Same for "annual air

temperature" that should be "mean annual air temperature".

Line 105: "relationship was".

Table S1: first line of the table "-17 to -7" should be "-7 to -17".

Line 110: "A possible reason that the Ca2 relationship gives the most biased model results, compared to other density-empirical relationships, is because it is derived at a temperature level of around -3 °C and within a relatively high density range, whereas at the Dome A, LGB69 and Eagle Station, the snow density and temperature are both lower." The Ca1 formula, that performs best, was also derived for a temperature of -3°C, so temperature cannot be the reason (this is relate to the above general comment on discussing relationship's performance regarding density and temperature range).

Line 113: remove space before "."

Line 141: remove space before "."

Line 143: "Based on these two methods"