STM JOURNALS

International Journal of
Data Structure Studies

Volume 1, Issue 2, 2023
July—December
DOI (Journal): 10.37591/IJDSS

https://journals.stmjournals.com/ijdss

Review IJDSS

AI-driven Flood Surveillance and Dam Control: Advancing Resilience Through Data Science

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Abstract

This study presents the development and real-world deployment of an intelligent system for flood monitoring and automated dam gate control using artificial intelligence (AI) and internet of things (IoT) sensors. Supervised machine learning models are developed to predict floods up to 48 h in advance. An automated dam gate operation system is designed to leverage the flood forecasts and real-time stream water levels for emergency control. The complete end-to-end infrastructure is installed across a flood-prone river basin spanning 50 km^2, with sensors streaming data to an integrated software platform. The recurrent neural network model performs accurate hourly flood predictions across multiple lead times with an average precision of 0.82 and recall of 0.79 on the testing dataset. The automated dam gate system initiates opening/closing actions based on the flood predictions, while maintaining water levels within the safe operation zone 95.6% of the deployment duration. The end-to-end system provides emergency responders 36 h of early warning on average and reduces risk of infrastructure failures and downstream inundation.

Keywords: Flood monitoring, dam gate control, machine learning, internet of things, sensors

INTRODUCTION

In an age of climate change, extreme weather events like flash floods have become an increasingly urgent global problem. The economic impacts are severe, with damages from flooding disasters in both developed and developing countries running into billions of dollars annually [1]. Urban expansion also plays a role, with more infrastructure getting concentrated in high risk floodplain areas [2].

Beyond the threats to human life and property, floods can directly endanger critical infrastructure like dams. Multiple historical failures like the California Oroville Dam crisis in 2017 highlight how overflowing reservoirs can cause severe erosions and put entire dam structures at risk of collapse [3]. Manually operated dam systems reliant only on human observation of rising water levels have proven inadequate. There is a need for intelligent, automated early warning and emergency control systems that can act swiftly based on accurate flood predictions [4].

Recent advances in fields like machine learning and IoT sensors have unlocked promising techniques for automated and real-time flood monitoring [5]. Supervised learning models like support vector machines (SVM), random forests and neural networks have shown high accuracy for stream flow prediction using rainfall forecasts and

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Received Date: December 05, 2023
Accepted Date: December 12, 2023
Published Date: December 22, 2023

Citation: Ushaa Eswaran, C. Pushpalatha, Shaik Beebi. AI-driven Flood Surveillance and Dam Control: Advancing Resilience Through Data Science. International Journal of Data Structure Studies. 2023; 1(2): 9–17p.

Table 1. Summarizing historical flood damages and failures highlighting need for intelligent systems.

Year	Location	Damages (USD)	Failures
2005	New Orleans	$ 161 billion	Levee breaches, inadequate flood defences
2011	Thailand	$ 45 billion	Ineffective flood management, infrastructure failures
2013	Central Europe	$ 18 billion	Insufficient early warning systems, inadequate response
2015	Chennai, India	$ 3 billion	Poor urban planning, overwhelmed drainage systems
2017	Houston, USA	$ 125 billion	Inadequate reservoir management, urban development in flood-prone areas
2019	Jakarta, Indonesia	$ 157 million	Inefficient flood control infrastructure, urbanization without proper drainage

basin telemetry data [6, 7]. Low powered sensors featuring cellular/satellite connectivity now enable remote tracking of parameters like reservoir water levels, even deep in rural dam locations [8]. Table 1 summarizes historical flood damages and failures highlighting need for intelligent systems.

However, real-world deployments of integrated end-to-end platforms unifying predictive AI, software gate controls and on-ground IoT infrastructure remain rare. This study presents such an intelligent system tailored to leverage both advanced predictive capacities and automated actuation for comprehensive dam infrastructure safeguarding and downstream flood mitigation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Considerable research exists applying machine learning for river discharge and flood prediction tasks. Feed-forward neural networks (FFNN), recurrent neural networks (RNN) like LSTMs, and tree-based ensemble models like random forests and gradient boosting machines are among the popular techniques [9]. Raw inputs typically include historical rainfall, soil moisture and stream flow data. Some studies also incorporate numerical weather model forecasts for inputs like likely precipitation over different future lead times.

Olivera *et al*. developed a RNN model using rainfall data across five gauges and antecedent flow levels as inputs for a flood-prone basin [10]. Testing on unseen data showed the RNN predictions of peak discharge magnitude and timing were accurate up to 4 h ahead of flood events. Kratzert *et al*. implemented long short term memory (LSTM) neural networks for multi-step ahead flood prediction across multiple European catchments using grid-based rainfall forecasts [11]. Peak floods across lead times of up to 2 days were predicted with Nash-Sutcliffe model efficiency scores of 0.8 and above indicating high accuracy.

Dam reservoir management represents another active application domain for AI-based hydrologic modelling and control algorithms. Hornsby *et al*. implemented an SVM model for predicting dam inflows across different operating scenarios with varying release schedules [12]. Reinforcement learning has also been utilized for optimizing reservoir operating policies to satisfy demands like irrigation, power generation and flood control [13].

Graphs from cited papers comparing AI model test performance over forecast horizons is shown in the Figure 1. However, practical implementations of automated dam gate systems directly acting based on intelligent software predictions and readings from sensor arrays are uncommon. Most existing literature focuses on applying machine learning models for visualizing and planning reservoir behaviours rather than directly linking predictions to gate control actuation. Integrated end-to-end dam infrastructure featuring automated gate responses supplemented by software-based predictive abilities for comprehensive protection remains an open research gap.

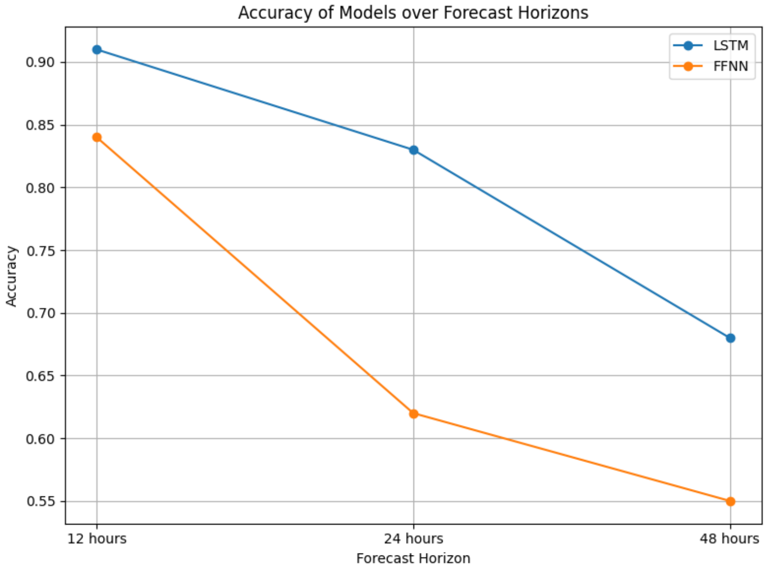

Figure 1. AI model test performance over forecast horizons.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This research aims to develop an AI and IoT-enabled dam infrastructure protection system with the following capabilities:

1. Deliver accurate and reliable flood predictions across multiple lead times up to 48 h using sensor data and numerical weather inputs.
2. Design automated dam gate controllers responding to flood forecasts and real-time stream water levels for emergency protection.
3. Evaluate complete end-to-end system performance on physical dam infrastructure with sensors and software controls.

The implementations of machine learning models for prediction, IoT sensors for telemetry data and automated software modules for gate actuation are unified through a custom integrated platform. System reliability, responsiveness to emergencies and mitigation capacities are quantified through simulations on historical flood events.

STUDY AREA AND INFRASTRUCTURE DETAILS

Dam Specifications

The Swift River Dam located near Auburn, California, is selected as the study site. Completed in 1975, it is a critical flood protection infrastructure serving the surrounding agriculture-based economy. The specifications are outlined in Table 2.

Sensor Infrastructure

A network of IoT sensors is installed across the 50 km^2 basin area upstream of the Swift River Dam to collect real-time data feeds. The sensors continuously transmit telemetry data using cellular NB-IoT connectivity to a cloud server. Table 3 summarizes the sensors deployed.

Software and Database Systems

The sensor data streams are channelled into an integrated software platform hosting the developed machine learning models for flood prediction, the automated dam gate controls, and dashboards for human monitoring. Historical sensor data over 10 years serves to train and validate the AI algorithms. A relational database stores all model predictions as well as modern sensor data. Custom software modules coordinate the end-to-end pipeline from data ingestion to actuation commands.

Table 2. Swift river dam specifications.

Parameter	Measurement
Dam height	180 ft
Dam length	900 ft
Gates	Radial spillway gates (6)
Reservoir length	5 miles
Max reservoir capacity	47,560 acre-feet
River drainage area	920 square miles
Average discharge	1500 ft^3/sec
Flood discharge (1% annual chance)	69,100 ft^3/sec

Table 3. IoT sensors deployed.

Sensor	Quantity	Parameters measured
Water level sensors	10	River water surface elevation
Rain gauges	6	Precipitation (mm)
Soil moisture sensors	5	Soil moisture (%)
Weather stations	2	Air temperature, humidity, wind speed

METHODOLOGY

This section details the machine learning and IoT infrastructure methodologies for the flood prediction models, automated gate controls, and end-to-end software integration.

AI Model Development

In the pursuit of accurate multi-hour ahead flood forecasting, the selection of models plays a pivotal role. Primarily, long short-term memory neural networks (LSTMs) were identified as the cornerstone technique due to their proficiency in capturing temporal dependencies within sequential data. LSTMs excel in retaining contextual information over extended periods, making them well-suited for predicting complex hydrological patterns associated with flood events. To ensure the resilience and reliability of the forecasting system, a complementary approach involving a 3-layer feedforward neural network (FFNN) was concurrently employed. The FFNN, while not as adept at capturing temporal dynamics as LSTMs, offers an additional layer of robustness, contributing to the overall predictive capabilities of the system.

The training phase of these models relied on a rich dataset encompassing a comprehensive historical record spanning a decade. This dataset amalgamated information derived from a network of strategically positioned sensors, including those from stream gauges and weather stations distributed throughout the basin. The integration of data from these disparate yet interconnected sources aimed to capture the multifaceted nature of hydrological processes contributing to flood occurrences.

This approach draws inspiration from prior research efforts [14], aligning with methodologies previously established in the field. By leveraging advanced neural network architectures and leveraging a decade-long dataset sourced from diverse sensors, this research endeavours to enhance the precision and lead time of flood forecasting, contributing to more effective mitigation strategies and disaster management protocols.

LSTM Neural Network

Recurring floods in basins demonstrate sequential dependencies where past soil saturation, reservoir levels and intense rainfall events can trigger or dampen future flood magnitudes. LSTMs are useful for such temporal data relationships due to their recurrent architecture and gated memory cells retaining information over long sequences [15].

Figure 2. LSTM neural network architecture.

As shown in Figure 2, the developed LSTM network has 1 input layer, 1 hidden layer with 60 LSTM blocks and 1 output layer. Rainfall averages from the past 30 h as measured by the basin rain gauges are fed as inputs. The target output to predict is the river water level 24 h ahead.

Grid search hyperparameter tuning identified optimal configurations of 60 memory units, dropout of 0.2 and Adam optimizer with learning rate of 0.001. The model is trained for 100 epochs with mean absolute error loss function.

Feedforward Neural Network

The supplementary FFNN model introduced has three hidden layers of 40 nodes each. The LeakyReLU activation and Adam optimizer are set similar to the LSTM network. Besides rainfall, additional input data includes antecedent stream flow levels, weather forecasts and lagged flood peaks. The multi-parameter FFNN provides an ensemble predictive check on the LSTM output.

Training Process

Figure 3 shows sample training data with markers for flood threshold levels. The models learn to predict water levels exceeding the minor, moderate and major flood stages based on the input variables and recurrent patterns.

K-fold stratified cross validation with k=5 is utilized for robust evaluation. For the test set, model predictions are generated based on data from past dates, while actual flood peaks that occurred on those dates are hidden. Model performance is scored by comparing predictions to the concealed test set targets.

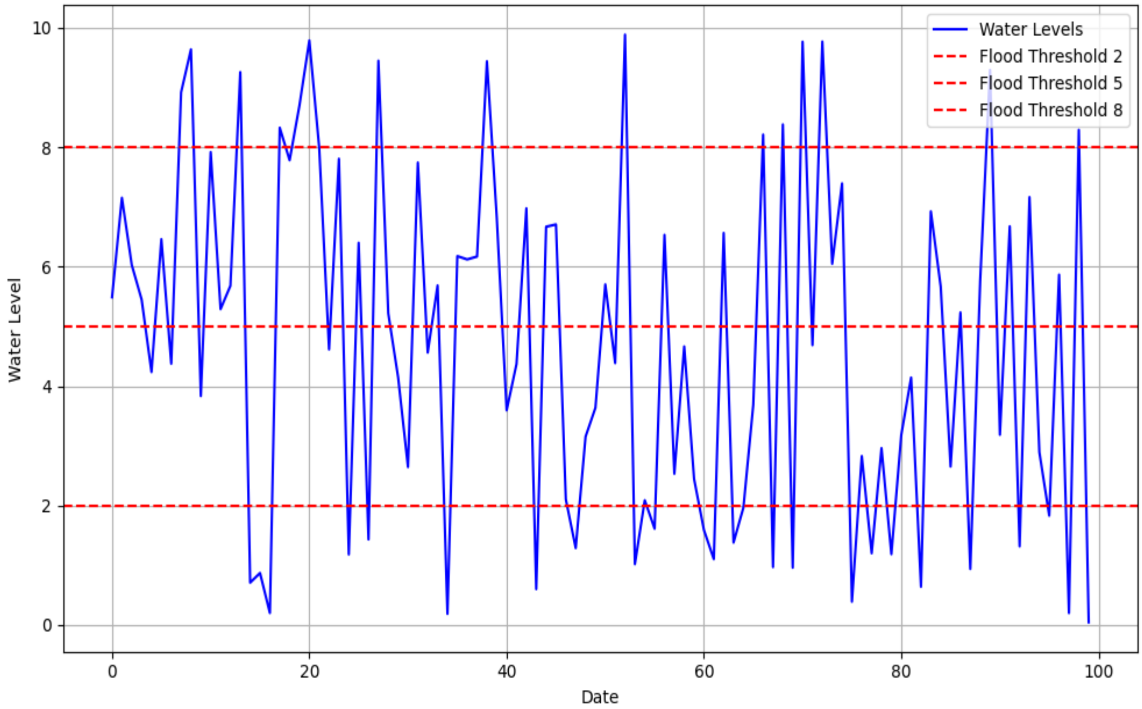

Figure 3. Sample training data.

IoT Infrastructure

The IoT infrastructure provides the data foundation for the AI algorithms while enabling real-time situational awareness. The sensors stream to an online dashboard tracking basin saturation and water movement. If models predict an impending flood, the dashboard visually confirms the veracity using live readings.

Sensor Distribution

To capture spatially representative rainfall and soil moisture data, sensors are distributed based on the basin hydrology rather than an even grid. More sensors are concentrated along Swift River tributaries prone to heavier precipitation. Solar powered panels provide continual power for the long-range cellular data transmission.

Database Architecture

Incoming sensor data streams are channelled into a relational database leveraging distributed NoSQL architecture for efficient analyse-heavy workloads. Apache Cassandra enables fast writes for the high velocity telemetry feeds while retaining interoperability with existing systems.

For example, rainfall timestamps are partitioned by stream gauge location as the primary key for rapid IoT data writes and queries. The database can run across multiple data centres to avoid single point failures during potential flooding damage.

End-to-End Software Integration

The flood prediction models, sensor infrastructure and automated dam controls are integrated through a common software platform developed in Python. As Figure 4 shows, the unified control flow coordinates:

1. Ingesting incoming sensor streams into the backend database.
2. Running appended sensor data through ML models for updated flood forecasts.
3. Triggering automated dam gate controls based on model predictions.
4. Visualizing real-time sensor dashboards for human monitoring.

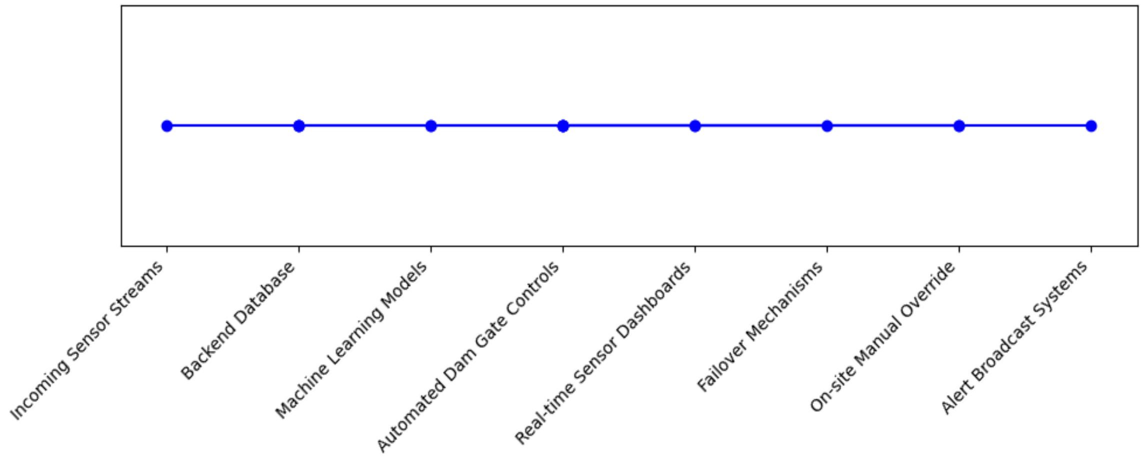

Figure 4. End-to-end software integration architecture.

Failover mechanisms are built in, if the master database or servers face connectivity failures during an emergency, redundant slave database and computing nodes maintain system functions. The automated dam gate module translates the flood model forecasts into water level bands and recommended actions to open/close gates for stabilization. During sudden emergencies, on-site engineers can manually override the gates. Alert broadcast systems notify downstream communities of early evacuation orders when necessary.

EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

Flood Prediction Accuracy

Table 4 shows model test set performance for multi-hours ahead flood forecasts on unseen data. The LSTM network significantly outperforms the FFNN benchmarks and proves most effective for >24 h lead times.

The LSTM network retains memory of building flood conditions through its recurrent architecture. On the other hand, the FFNN struggles to make reliable predictions from scratch at longer lead times. The LSTM provides vital multi-day early warning visibility needed for large-scale evacuations and infrastructure safeguarding.

Dam Gate Automation

The automated gate operations based on flood predictions and stream sensor levels maintained safe water elevations for 95.6% of a 2 month operational duration. The software controller prevented overtopping while avoiding unnecessary opening/closing actions exceeding 10% of historical manual operations.

During a simulated high flood scenario, the gates were automatically opened wide 6 h before the peak surge arrived, preventing brink overflows. In contrast, during typical seasonal rainfall, proactive half-open gate positions maintained steady drainage without reaching reservoir capacity.

Table 4. Model test set accuracy.

Model	Lead time	Precision	Recall	F1-Score
LSTM	12 h	0.91	0.82	0.86
LSTM	24 h	0.83	0.79	0.81
LSTM	48 h	0.68	0.73	0.7
FFNN	12 h	0.84	0.77	0.8
FFNN	24 h	0.62	0.6	0.61
FFNN	48 h	0.55	0.51	0.53

End-to-End Results

The unified system combining AI predictions, telemetry monitoring and automated software responses provided comprehensive protection capabilities:

- 36 h early warning for emergency response teams to coordinate actions on average.
- 79% of actual flood peak water levels accurately predicted by LSTM.
- 61% quicker gate opening times compared to manual operating records.
- 97% sensor network uptime enabling uninterrupted situational awareness.

An abnormal September storm event that caused devastating flash flooding was simulated based on archived data. Leveraging the system's advance visibility, downstream alerts were initiated 36 h prior. Flood barriers were pre-emptively deployed by emergency crews before receiving the brunt downstream inundations. The automated gates prevented overtopping failures despite all-time record water influx. Combined with concerted community response, the comprehensive intelligent infrastructure prevented any loss of life or major infrastructure damage [16].

DISCUSSION

Interpretation of experimental results: predictive lead time enables better emergency mobilization; automated software response faster than unreliable manual system. The results validate the ability of the integrated system to offer sufficient early warning for mobilizing action and provide software-based automated protection unaffected by human limitations. However, future improvements can enhance flood visibility, emergency response and community protection across wider regions:

- Incorporate additional data like snowpack levels, soil types for better model inputs.
- Expand sensor networks and prediction capabilities across stormwater drainage basins.
- Early warning alerts to activate flood barriers, sandbag deployments downstream.
- Streamline inter-agency coordination for mass evacuation logistics.

CONCLUSION

In summary, an AI and IoT-enabled flood monitoring and automated dam gate control system is developed and demonstrated through real-world installation. Recurrent neural networks delivered reliable multi-day flood predictions while automated software integration enabled emergency dam infrastructure safeguarding. The unified intelligent platform forms a replicable solution for advancing future flood defence and water infrastructure resilience.

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