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# Performance of normally off hydrogen-terminated diamond field-effect transistor with $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3/\text{CeB}_6$ gate materials <sup>EP</sup>

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# Performance of normally off hydrogen-terminated diamond field-effect transistor with $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3/\text{CeB}_6$ gate materials



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## ABSTRACT

In this work, we demonstrate a hydrogen-terminated diamond (H-diamond) field-effect transistor (FET) with  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3/\text{CeB}_6$  gate materials. The  $\text{CeB}_6$  and  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$  films have been deposited by electron beam evaporation technique, sequentially. For the 4/8/12/15  $\mu\text{m}$  gate length ( $L_G$ ) devices, the whole devices demonstrate distinct p-type normally off characteristics, and all the threshold voltage are negative; all the absolute values of leakage current density are  $10^{-4}$  A/cm<sup>2</sup> at a  $V_{GS}$  of  $-11$  V, exhibiting a relatively low leakage current density compared with  $\text{CeB}_6$  FETs, and this further demonstrates the feasibility of the introduction of  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$  to reduce the leakage current density; the maximum drain-source current density is  $-114.6$ ,  $-96.0$ ,  $-80.9$ , and  $-73.7$  mA/mm, which may be benefited from the well-protected channel. For the 12  $\mu\text{m}$   $L_G$  devices, the saturation carrier mobility is 593.6 cm<sup>2</sup>/V s, demonstrating a good channel transport characteristic. This work may provide a promising strategy for the application of normally off H-diamond FETs significantly.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

As an ultra-wide bandgap semiconductor, diamond exhibits the advantages of ultrahigh breakdown field strength, high carrier mobility, exceptionally high thermal conductivity, good corrosion and radiation resistance, etc.<sup>1-3</sup> These excellent characteristics enable diamond-based electronics devices to work safely and stably in the extreme environment, such as high frequency, high pressure, high temperature, and strong radiation. Nevertheless, the development of diamond-based electronic devices has been greatly hampered by the traditional doping technique due to the high activation energies of the dopants (boron of 370 meV and

phosphorus of 650 meV).<sup>4</sup> Fortunately, under the condition of C-H bond and negative adsorbates [such as  $\text{O}_2^-$ ,  $\text{O}_2^-(\text{H}_2\text{O})_n$ , etc.], hydrogen-terminated diamond (H-diamond) with two-dimensional hole gas (2DHG) accumulation layer comes into view, demonstrating a carrier density of  $10^{12}$ - $10^{14}$  cm<sup>-2</sup> and a carrier mobility of 10-300 cm<sup>2</sup>/V s.<sup>5-8</sup> To date, researchers have made significant progress on H-diamond field-effect transistors (FETs), such as carrier mobility of 680 cm<sup>2</sup>/V s,<sup>1</sup> current density of 1.3 A/mm,<sup>9</sup> power density of 4.2 W/mm,<sup>10</sup> maximum oscillation frequency of 120 GHz,<sup>11</sup> cut-off frequency of 70 GHz,<sup>12</sup> and breakdown voltage of V (Ref. 13).

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For the application of H-diamond FETs, energy saving and safety protection require the normally off operation. As presented in our previous article, a low work function material is considered to be an effective technique to realize normally off H-diamond FETs.<sup>14</sup> In addition, the preliminary work has fully verified the feasibility of normally off H-diamond FETs with CeB<sub>6</sub> material, which exhibits the advantages of low work function, good chemical stability, high melting point, etc.<sup>15</sup> The device demonstrates good electrical characteristics, yet the absolute value of the leakage current density ( $J$ ) is large. In order to reduce the  $J$ , Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> is a good candidate, which demonstrates a large valence band offset with H-diamond.<sup>16–19</sup> Thus, the Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>/CeB<sub>6</sub> gate material has been utilized in this work. To the best of the author’s knowledge, few reports have been made on H-diamond FET with Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>/CeB<sub>6</sub> gate material.

In this work, the fabrication of the Al/Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>/CeB<sub>6</sub> H-diamond FET has been performed, and its electrical characteristics have been evaluated.

## II. EXPERIMENTAL

The fabrication process, cross-sectional schematic, band diagram of gate voltage ( $V_{GS}$ ) = 0 V, band diagram of  $|V_{GS}| > |V_{TH}|$ , and device top view of the Al/Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>/CeB<sub>6</sub> H-diamond FET are demonstrated in Fig. 1. In this experiment, a (100) high pressure high temperature (HPHT) single crystal diamond with dimensions of  $3 \times 3 \times 0.5 \text{ mm}^3$  was utilized as the substrate. First, before the epitaxial layer growth, the substrate was cleaned with mixed acid solutions of H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>:HNO<sub>3</sub> = 1:1 at 250 °C for 1h to remove the non-diamond contaminants, and then, the substrate was immersed in acetone, alcohol, and de-ionized water sequentially for ultrasonic cleaning, which was dried by nitrogen flow. Second, a 200 nm undoped epitaxial layer was grown on the cleaned substrate by microwave plasma chemical vapor deposition (MPCVD) technique with a gas flow, CH<sub>4</sub>/H<sub>2</sub> ratio, temperature, pressure, and power of 500 SCCM, 1%, 900 °C, 100 Torr, and 1 kW, respectively. Furthermore, the CH<sub>4</sub> flow was set to zero, and the substrate was irradiated by hydrogen plasma for the formation of an H-diamond surface with 2DHG conduction channel for at least 20 min.<sup>15</sup> Third, 150 nm Au was adopted as the source/drain ohmic

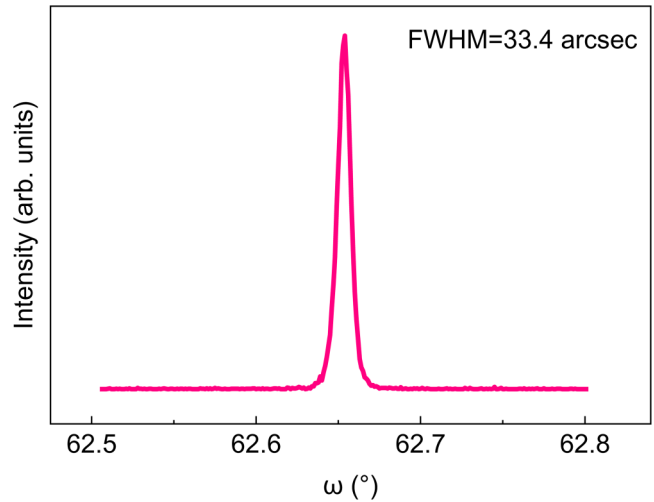


FIG. 2. XRD result of H-diamond.

contact electrodes fabricated by photo-lithography, electron beam evaporation (EB), and standard lift-off technique. Fourth, the nonactive region of the substrate was oxidized by 15 min ultraviolet ozone treatment with UV wavelengths of 254 and 185 nm. Finally, 150/30/30 nm Al/Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>/CeB<sub>6</sub> gate electrodes were fabricated by photo-lithography, EB, and lift-off techniques. The dimensions of the devices are the gate length ( $L_G$ ) of 4/8/12/15  $\mu\text{m}$ , gate width ( $W_G$ ) of 100  $\mu\text{m}$ , and source–drain length ( $L_{SD}$ ) of 20  $\mu\text{m}$ . The characteristics were characterized by a semiconductor analyzer Agilent B1505 A at room temperature.

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## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The H-diamond has been characterized by x-ray diffraction (XRD) technique, as demonstrated in Fig. 2. The full width at half

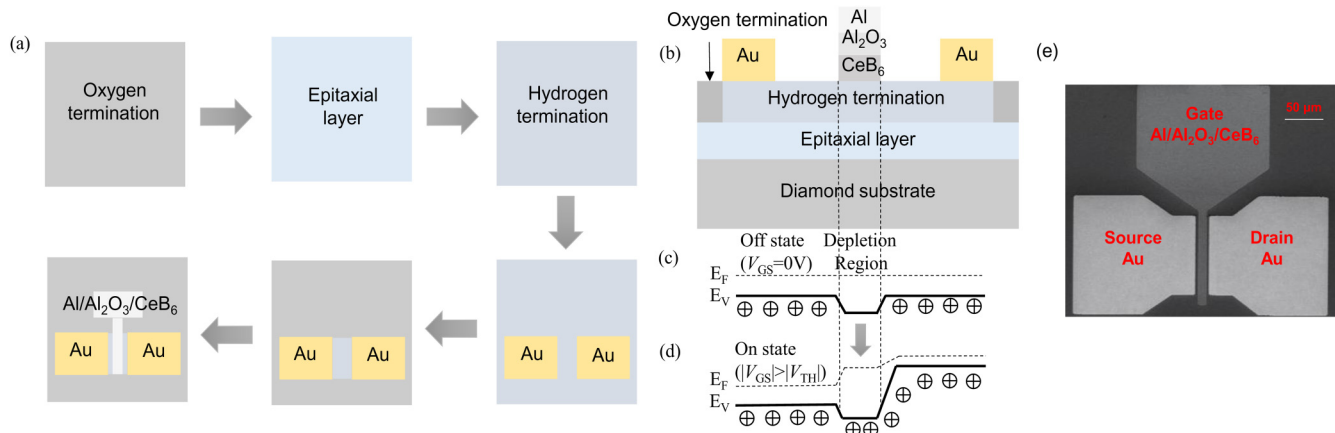


FIG. 1. Al/Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>/CeB<sub>6</sub> H-diamond FET: (a) fabrication process, (b) cross-sectional schematic, (c) band diagram of  $V_{GS} = 0 \text{ V}$ , (d) band diagram of  $|V_{GS}| > |V_{TH}|$ , (e) device top view.

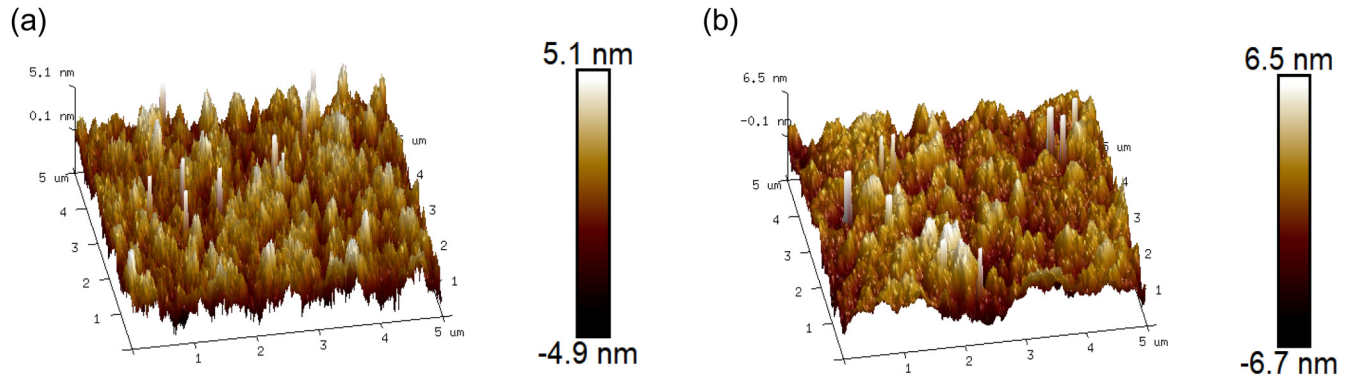


FIG. 3. AFM topography image with a scanning size of  $5 \times 5 \mu\text{m}^2$ : (a)  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$  and (b)  $\text{CeB}_6$ .

maximum (FWHM) is 33.4 arcsec, indicating a high quality of H-diamond.

In addition,  $\text{CeB}_6$  and  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$  have been characterized by atomic force microscopy (AFM) and x-ray photoelectron

spectroscopy (XPS) techniques, respectively. In Fig. 3, the root mean square roughness is 1.10 and 1.36 nm for the  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$  and  $\text{CeB}_6$  materials with a scanning size of  $5 \times 5 \mu\text{m}^2$ , illustrating an adequate morphology for device fabrication. The XPS spectra of

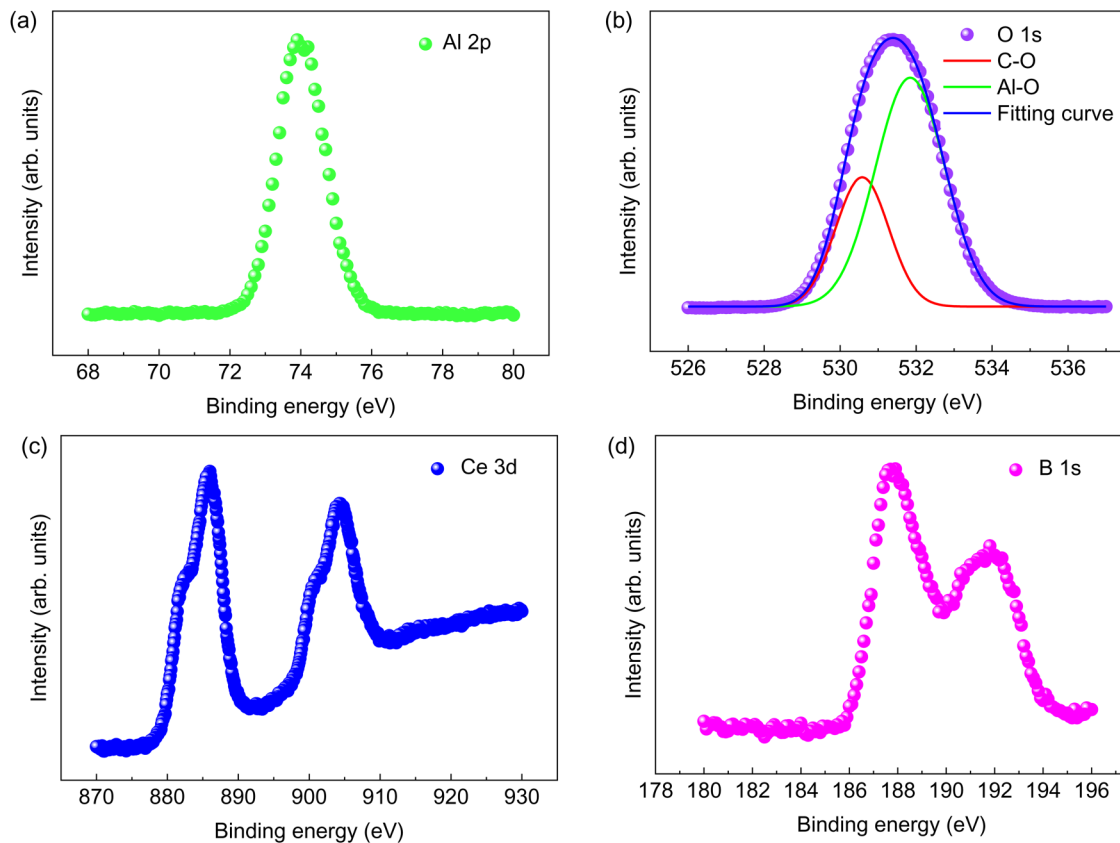


FIG. 4. High resolution XPS spectra of (a) Al 2p and (b) O 1s obtained from the  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$ , (c) Ce 3d, and (d) B 1s obtained from the  $\text{CeB}_6$ .

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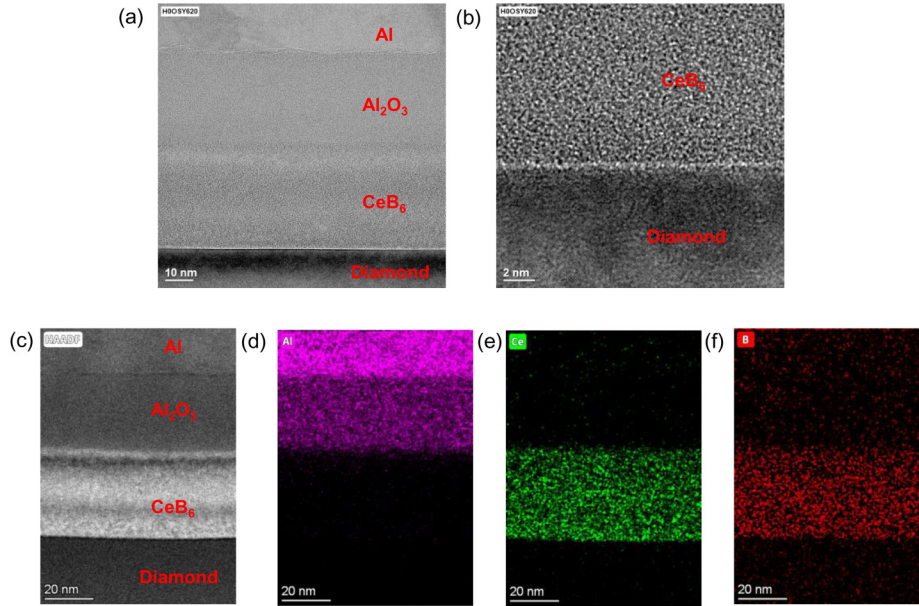


FIG. 5. TEM result of Al/Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>/CeB<sub>6</sub> H-diamond: (a)–(c) cross-sectional image with sizes of 10, 2, and 20 nm, (d)–(f) EDX elemental mapping of Al, Ce, and B, respectively.

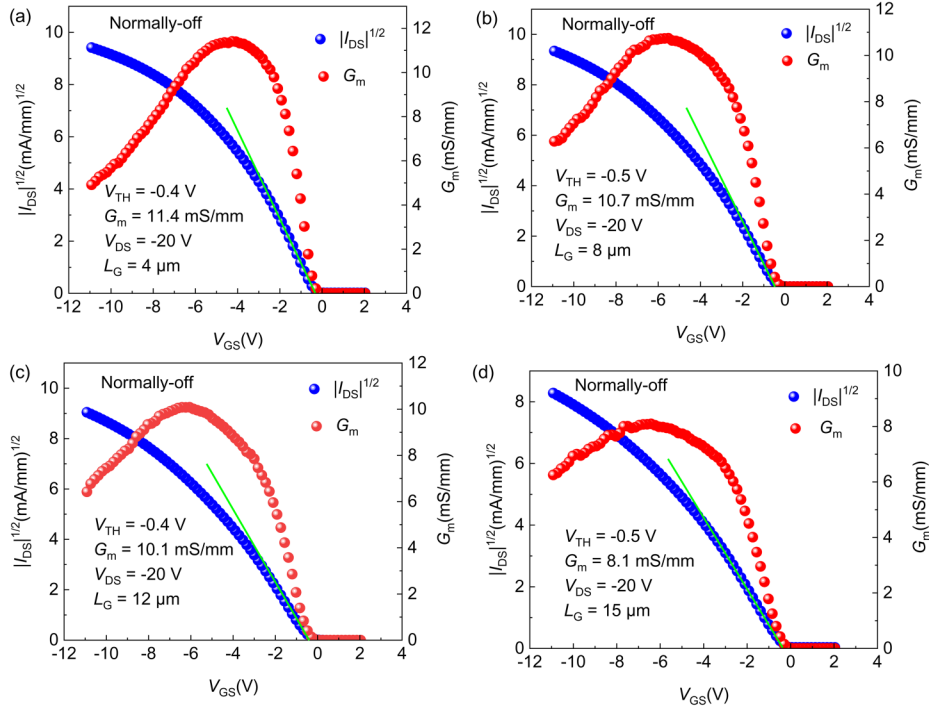


FIG. 6. Transfer characteristics ( $|I_{DS}|^{1/2}/G_m - V_{GS}$ ) of the Al/Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>/CeB<sub>6</sub> H-diamond FET (a)–(d) with  $L_G$  of 4, 8, 12, and 15  $\mu\text{m}$ , respectively.

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$\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$  are demonstrated in Figs. 4(a) and 4(b). The Al 2p spectrum located at 73.9 eV corresponds to Al–O. And, the O 1s spectrum has been fitted with the Gauss function. The peak located at 530.59 eV belongs to C–O, and the peak located at 531.86 eV corresponds to Al–O. The XPS spectra of  $\text{CeB}_6$  are demonstrated in Figs. 4(c) and 4(d). There are two peaks located at 886.0 and 904.3 eV for the Ce 3d spectrum and also two peaks of 187.9 and 191.8 eV for B 1s spectrum.

Furthermore, as shown in Fig. 5, the interface property has been characterized by transmission electron microscopy (TEM) technique, and the composition of the cross section of the Al/ $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$ /CeB<sub>6</sub>/H-diamond has also been characterized by energy dispersive x-ray analysis (EDX) technique. The TEM result demonstrates a good interface and a uniform distribution of Al, Ce, and B.

The  $V_{\text{TH}}$  and transconductance ( $G_m$ ) characteristics of Al/ $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$ /CeB<sub>6</sub> H-diamond FET are demonstrated in Fig. 6. For the 4/8/12/15  $\mu\text{m}$   $L_G$  devices, the  $V_{\text{TH}}$  are  $-0.4$ ,  $-0.5$ ,  $-0.4$ , and  $-0.5$  V extracted from the curve of drain–source current ( $I_{\text{DS}}$ ) and  $V_{\text{GS}}$ ,<sup>18</sup> demonstrating normally off characteristics for the whole devices. The experimental results further verify the effectiveness of the low work function material to realize normally off H-diamond FETs. In

addition,  $G_m$  are slightly higher than our previous work with values of 11.4, 10.7, 10.1, and 8.1 mS/mm,<sup>4,14</sup> indicating a comparatively good control of  $V_{\text{GS}}$  on the  $I_{\text{DS}}$ .

As presented in Fig. 7, distinct saturation and pinch-off characteristics are observed, and  $|I_{\text{DS}}|$  increases with the increased  $|V_{\text{GS}}|$ , indicating a p-type channel with hole carriers under the Al/ $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$ /CeB<sub>6</sub> materials. The maximum  $I_{\text{DS}}$  ( $I_{\text{DSmax}}$ ) are  $-114.6$ ,  $-96.0$ ,  $-80.9$ , and  $-73.7$  mA/mm at a drain–source voltage ( $V_{\text{DS}}$ ) of  $-20$  V and  $V_{\text{GS}}$  of  $-11$  V for the 4/8/12/15  $\mu\text{m}$   $L_G$  devices. Obviously,  $|I_{\text{DSmax}}|$  decreases with an increase in  $L_G$ . In addition, the relatively high  $I_{\text{DSmax}}$  can be attributed to the well-protected conduction channel, which is not degraded remarkably by EB technique.

Figure 8 presents the  $J$  of the Al/ $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$ /CeB<sub>6</sub> H-diamond FET with  $L_G$  of 4, 8, 12, and 15  $\mu\text{m}$ , respectively. At the  $V_{\text{GS}}$  of 0 V, all the  $J$  values are as low as  $10^{-7}$  A/cm<sup>2</sup>. The  $J$  demonstrates a relatively low value of  $1.2 \times 10^{-4}$ ,  $2.0 \times 10^{-4}$ ,  $2.2 \times 10^{-4}$ , and  $4.6 \times 10^{-4}$  A/cm<sup>2</sup> at a  $V_{\text{GS}}$  of  $-11$  V, and this result shows that the leakage current density increases with the increased gate length, yet all the values are around  $10^{-4}$  A/cm<sup>2</sup>. Accordingly, the  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$ /CeB<sub>6</sub> gate dielectric is not excellent, but it seems to be ok. In addition, the reason behind the increased leakage current density may be ascribed to the uneven

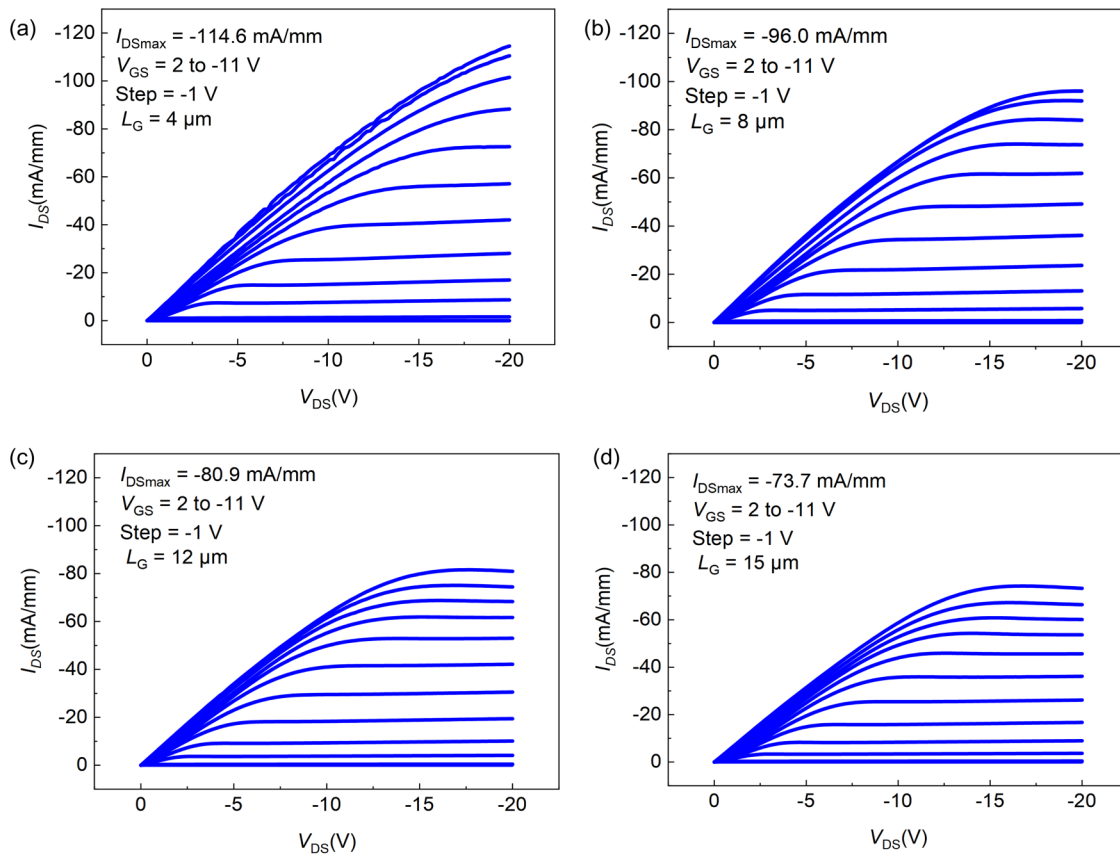


FIG. 7. Output characteristics ( $I_{\text{DS}}-V_{\text{DS}}$ ) of the Al/ $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$ /CeB<sub>6</sub> H-diamond FET (a)–(d) with  $L_G$  of 4, 8, 12, and 15  $\mu\text{m}$ , respectively.

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$\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3/\text{CeB}_6$  gate dielectric. Compared with our previous work, the  $J$  of the  $8\ \mu\text{m}$   $L_G$   $\text{CeB}_6$  FET is  $2.4 \times 10^{-3}\ \text{A}/\text{cm}^2$  @  $V_{\text{GS}} = -8\ \text{V}$ ,<sup>15</sup> and the  $J$  of the  $8\ \mu\text{m}$   $L_G$   $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3/\text{CeB}_6$  FET is  $3.3 \times 10^{-5}\ \text{A}/\text{cm}^2$  @  $V_{\text{GS}} = -8\ \text{V}$ . Even when the  $V_{\text{GS}}$  increases to  $-11\ \text{V}$ , the  $J$  of the  $8\ \mu\text{m}$   $L_G$   $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3/\text{CeB}_6$  FET is  $2.0 \times 10^{-4}\ \text{A}/\text{cm}^2$ . All this demonstrates that the introduction of  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$ , indeed, have an effect on reducing the leakage current density.<sup>15</sup>

As shown in Fig. 9, the on/off ratio, subthreshold swing (SS), the capacitance ( $C_{\text{GS}}$ ), the flatband voltage ( $V_{\text{FB}}$ ), the carrier density ( $\rho$ ) and the saturation carrier mobility ( $\mu_{\text{sat}}$ ) characteristics of the  $12\ \mu\text{m}$   $L_G$  devices are evaluated. The on/off ratio reaches up to around  $10^9$ , which is high enough for practical applications. The SS is extracted to be  $120\ \text{mV}/\text{dec}$ , demonstrating a relatively fast transition rate between on and off states. The  $C_{\text{GS}}$  is  $0.06\ \mu\text{F}/\text{cm}^2$ , indicating that the quality of the  $\text{CeB}_6/\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$  material is not excellent, which may be improved in our future work. The  $V_{\text{FB}}$  is calculated to be  $-1.69\ \text{V}$  based on the relationship of  $d^2C_{\text{GS}}/d^2V_{\text{GS}} = 0$ .<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the  $C_{\text{GS}}-V_{\text{GS}}$  curve shifts to the negative direction corresponding to the position of  $V_{\text{GS}} = 0\ \text{V}$ , indicating the existence of a fixed positive charge ( $Q_f$ ) in the  $\text{CeB}_6/\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$  film.<sup>21</sup> In addition, it is calculated to be  $4.0 \times 10^{11}\ \text{cm}^{-2}$  based on formula (1).<sup>21</sup> Here,

$\Delta W$  means the work function difference between H-diamond ( $4.9\ \text{eV}$ ) and Al ( $4.28\ \text{eV}$ ), and  $q$  is the electronic charge of  $1.6 \times 10^{-19}\ \text{C}$ . Furthermore, the  $\rho$  is deduced to be  $4.1 \times 10^{12}\ \text{cm}^{-2}$  obtained at a  $V_{\text{GS}}$  of  $-10\ \text{V}$  based on  $JCdV_{\text{GS}}$ .<sup>20</sup> Moreover,  $\mu_{\text{sat}}$  is also investigated to evaluate the channel transport characteristics based on expression (2).<sup>3</sup> The  $\mu_{\text{sat}}$  of the  $\text{CeB}_6/\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$  H-diamond FET is  $593.6\ \text{cm}^2/\text{V s}$  at a  $V_{\text{GS}}$  of  $-3\ \text{V}$ ,

$$I_{\text{Dmax}} = \frac{W_G}{2L_G} C_{\text{GS}} \mu_{\text{sat}} (V_{\text{GS}} - V_{\text{TH}})^2, \quad (1)$$

$$Q_f = \frac{V_{\text{FB}} - \Delta W/q}{q} C_{\text{GS}}. \quad (2)$$

In addition, to evaluate the interface characteristics of the device, the interface state density ( $D_{\text{it}}$ ) is calculated to be  $5.9 \times 10^{12}\ \text{cm}^{-2}\ \text{eV}^{-1}$  based on the following expression:<sup>22</sup>

$$\text{SS} = (\ln 10) \frac{kT}{q} \frac{C_{\text{GS}} + C_D + qD_{\text{it}}}{C_{\text{GS}}}, \quad (3)$$

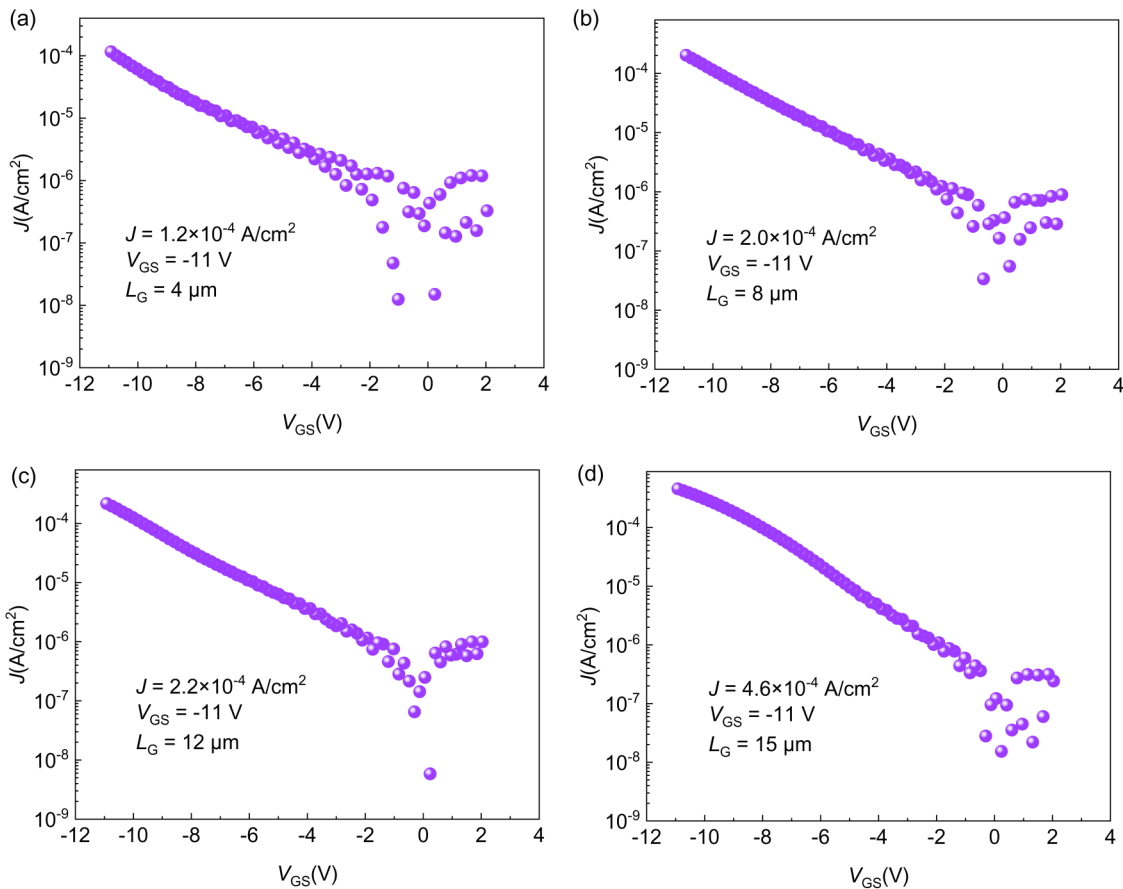


FIG. 8.  $J$  characteristics ( $J-V_{\text{GS}}$ ) of the  $\text{Al}/\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3/\text{CeB}_6$  H-diamond FET (a)–(d) with  $L_G$  of 4, 8, 12, and  $15\ \mu\text{m}$ , respectively.

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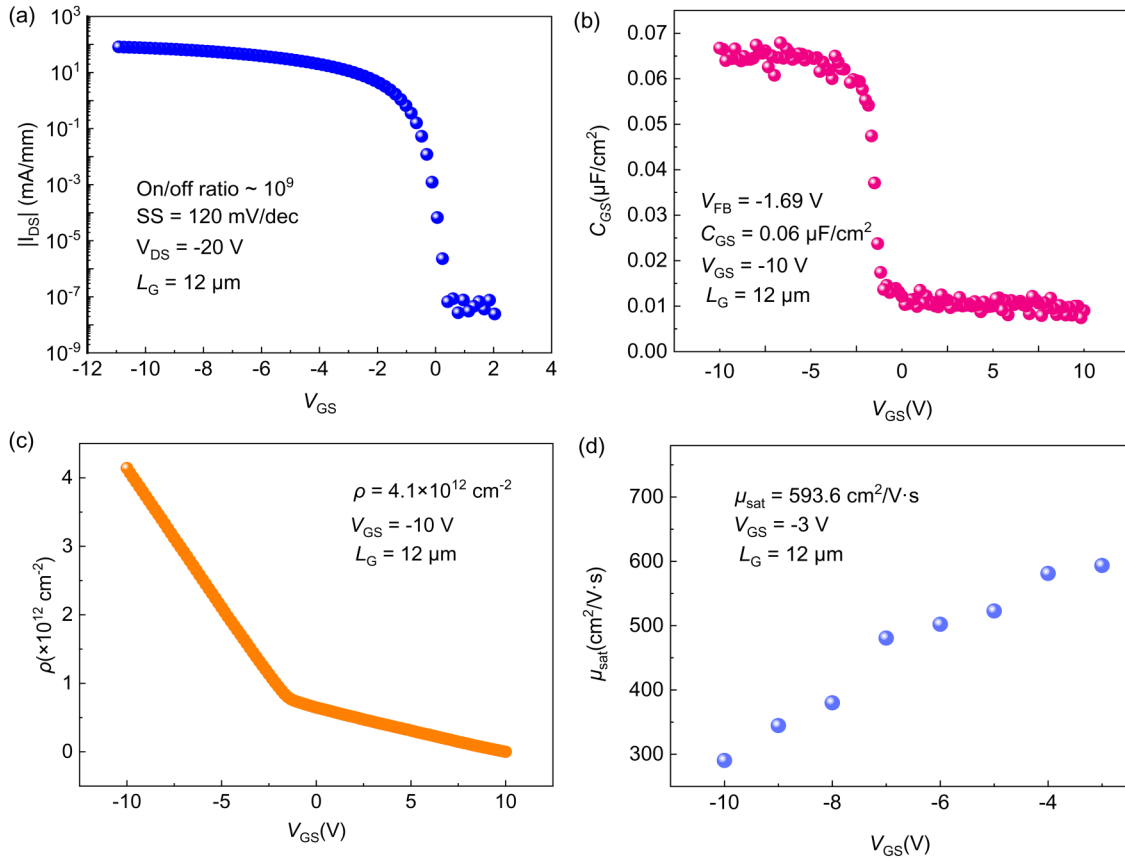


FIG. 9. Electrical properties of the Al/Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>/CeB<sub>6</sub> H-diamond FET with a  $L_G$  of 12  $\mu\text{m}$  (a)  $|I_{DS}| - V_{GS}$ , (b)  $C_{GS} - V_{GS}$ , (c)  $\rho - V_{GS}$ , (d)  $\mu_{\text{sat}} - V_{GS}$ .

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where  $k$  is the Boltzmann constant and  $C_D$  is the depletion capacitance that may be negligible since its value is much smaller than  $C_{GS}$ .<sup>22</sup>

Table I demonstrates the electrical properties' comparison with the reported H-diamond FETs. The hBN FET demonstrates excellent performances with a  $\mu_{\text{sat}}$  of 680  $\text{cm}^2/\text{V s}$ , yet the fabrication process is complicated.<sup>1</sup> The  $J$  of the Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> FET is  $4.46 \times 10^{-6}$  A/cm<sup>2</sup>

@  $V_{GS} = -4$  V,<sup>23</sup> and for the Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>/CeB<sub>6</sub> FET in this work,  $J$  is  $3.6 \times 10^{-6}$  A/cm<sup>2</sup> @  $V_{GS} = -4$  V. So, the two devices demonstrate similar  $J$  at the same  $V_{GS}$ . Compared with the CeB<sub>6</sub> FET, the  $J$  of the Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>/CeB<sub>6</sub> FET demonstrates competitive  $J$ .  $D_{\text{it}}$  for the hBN, CeB<sub>6</sub>, and CeB<sub>6</sub>/Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> gate H-diamond FET are  $6.8 \times 10^{11}$ ,  $1.93 \times 10^{12}$ , and  $5.9 \times 10^{12}$   $\text{cm}^{-2} \text{eV}^{-1}$ , respectively. The  $D_{\text{it}}$  of hBN is low compared

TABLE I Electrical properties' comparison with the reported H-diamond FETs.

Gate materials	hBN	Al <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub>	CeB <sub>6</sub>	Al <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub> /CeB <sub>6</sub>
$L_G$ ( $\mu\text{m}$ )	8.09	40	8	12
$V_{\text{TH}}$ (V)	-0.99	...	-0.46	-0.4
$I_{\text{DSmax}}$ (mA/mm)	-200	...	-83.8	-80.9
$J$ (A/cm <sup>2</sup> )	$3 \times 10^{-7}$	$4.46 \times 10^{-6}$	$2.4 \times 10^{-3}$	$2.2 \times 10^{-4}$
$\rho$ (cm <sup>-2</sup> )	$6.6 \times 10^{12}$	@ $V_{GS} = -4$ V $9.4 \times 10^{12}$	@ $V_{GS} = -8$ V $1.19 \times 10^{13}$	@ $V_{GS} = -11$ V $4.1 \times 10^{12}$
$\mu_{\text{sat}}$ (cm <sup>2</sup> /V s)	680	94.2	260.5	593.6
$D_{\text{it}}$ (cm <sup>-2</sup> eV <sup>-1</sup> )	$6.8 \times 10^{11}$	...	$1.93 \times 10^{12}$	$5.9 \times 10^{12}$
Ref.	1	23	15	This work



with other FETs, and this is a key factor for the high performance with a  $\mu_{\text{sat}}$  of  $680 \text{ cm}^2/\text{V s}$ .  $D_{\text{it}}$  for the  $\text{CeB}_6$  and  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3/\text{CeB}_6$  FETs are all orders of magnitude  $10^{12}$ .

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the H-diamond FET with  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3/\text{CeB}_6$  gate materials has been fabricated and characterized. For the  $4/8/12/15 \mu\text{m}$   $L_G$  devices, all the devices demonstrate good electrical characteristics with  $I_{\text{DSmax}}$  of  $-114.6$ ,  $-96.0$ ,  $-80.9$ , and  $-73.7 \text{ mA/mm}$  at a  $V_{\text{DS}}$  of  $-20 \text{ V}$  and a  $V_{\text{GS}}$  of  $-11 \text{ V}$ .  $V_{\text{TH}}$  are extracted to be  $-0.4$ ,  $-0.5$ ,  $-0.4$ , and  $-0.5 \text{ V}$ , and this further verifies the effectiveness of the low work function material to realize normally off H-diamond FETs. All the  $J$  values are as low as  $10^{-7} \text{ A/cm}^2$  at a  $V_{\text{GS}}$  of  $0 \text{ V}$  and  $10^{-4} \text{ A/cm}^2$  at a  $V_{\text{GS}}$  of  $-11 \text{ V}$ . For the  $12 \mu\text{m}$   $L_G$  devices, it exhibits a high on/off ratio of  $10^9$  and a large  $\mu_{\text{sat}}$  of  $593.6 \text{ cm}^2/\text{V s}$ . In future work, the electrical properties will be further enhanced by optimizing the fabrication process, and this may significantly promote the application of normally off H-diamond FETs.

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#### AUTHOR DECLARATIONS

##### Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflicts to disclose.

##### Author Contributions

**Zhang Minghui:** Conceptualization (lead); Data curation (lead); Methodology (lead); Software (lead); Validation (lead); Writing – original draft (lead). **Wang Wei:** Supervision (equal); Writing – review & editing (equal). **Chen Genqiang:** Formal analysis (lead); Methodology (supporting). **Wen Feng:** Resources (lead). **Lin Fang:** Investigation (lead). **Wang Yanfeng:** Software (supporting). **Zhang Pengfei:** Data curation (supporting). **Wang Fei:** Validation (supporting). **He Shi:** Formal analysis (supporting). **Liang Yuesong:** Formal analysis (equal). **Fan Shuwei:** Supervision (supporting). **Wang Kaiyue:** Investigation (supporting). **Yu Cui:** Project administration (equal). **Min Tai:** Project administration (equal). **Wang Hongxing:** Funding acquisition (lead); Supervision (supporting); Writing – review & editing (supporting).

#### DATA AVAILABILITY

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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