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Editor, Journal of Sustainable Forestry

Dear Dr. Goodale,

You served as the editor for our article published in 2018 in *Journal of Sustainable Forestry* (<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10549811.2017.138611>). Since then we have studied pitch pine, fire and other disturbances and the fate of imperiled (S2) pitch pine refugia on a somewhat remote island in Maine. Most authorities conclude fire is a requisite for pitch pine persistence in Maine and other States, with the expectation a conflagration occurs every seven to twenty-five years; this trope is reinforced where controlled burns are used, in lieu of forest fire, to promote the well-being of this species. Yet, at Mt Desert Island, fire is not in evidence for over seventy years; thus our interest in exploring the stimulus for persistence beyond fire. Given a lack of fire history, and a recent trend in warmer and wetter summers and winters, evergreen competitors are likely to gain the upper hand over pitch pine. Given plasticity issues, we seek to examine other factors which shape persistence, such as topography, for which we obtained a variety of metrics related to or independent of fire history. We identified flat, cliff and ledge systems spanning a 400 m elevation gradient. Four groups of trees at Mt Desert Island (“MDI”), each with15 replicates, were selected based on a combination of systematic and cluster sampling methods with non-fixed intervals between trees (1m to 4m) and non-fixed directionality (employing nine compass points). Groups were divided evenly into low and high elevation categories and according to fire exposures in 1920 and 1947. Single-point-in-time leaf and soil data were captured during a high stress time (end of July) over two years; data are reported in eight figures and seven tables. We found aspect and slope orientation accounted for differences in adaptivity (growth, expansion into greater stand density) with little evidence to suggest recent fire history (since 1947) was as consequential as topography with regard to numerous biological outcomes. Results of intrinsic water use efficiency (δ13C) pointed to a selective preference for either growth at low elevations or stress tolerance at high elevations coupled. Soil water retention coupled with persistent colonization at low elevations is, for the present at least, moderating increasing pressure from uneven moisture patterns and winter warming. We intend for our research to serve the needs of those engaged in pitch pine conservation in the eastern U.S.