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Editor, Journal of Sustainable Forestry

Dear Dr. Goodale,

We are writing in hopes that you will consider our manuscript “*Pinus rigida* (Pinaceae) Response to Fire Absence and Topographic Factors at Mt Desert Island” for publication in *Journal of Sustainable Forestry*. This study builds on a previous paper of our that you edited in 2018 (<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10549811.2017.138611>). Since 2014 we have studied the fate of imperiled ~~(S2)~~ pitch pine refugia on this somewhat remote island in Maine in light of changing fire and disturbance dynamics on the island. Most authorities conclude fire is a requisite for pitch pine persistence in Maine and other States. Yet, at Mt Desert Island, fire has been absent for many years. 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. In our study, we sought to examine factors other than fire that have shaped the persistence of this species. Specifically, we quantified environmental and tree characteristics along a topography by fire history gradient. ~~Individual trees 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 that aspect and slope orientation were correlated with differences in growth with little evidence to suggest that recent fire history (since 1947) was as consequential as topography on pitch pine biology. Our data pointed to a selective preference for either growth at low elevations or stress tolerance at high elevations~~coupled~~. Our data also suggests that 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 and hope that you will consider our manuscript for publication.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding our submission, please don’t hesitate to contact me at the address below.

Sincerely,  
  
Jeff Licht, on behalf of Nick Smith and Risa Mcnellis

[ADD PREFERRED CONTACT INFO HERE?]