

Role of alternative stable states on the sugar maple, *Acer saccharum*, transition

Research proposal

Master in Wildlife management

By

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1 Introduction

Context. The boreal region is warming twice as fast as the global average and this will inevitably alter the species composition in boreal forests [15, 7]. Sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*) is one of the species expected to migrate northward towards the northern limit of the temperate forest [9, 3]. Predicting shifts in the range of sugar maple under climate change is an important challenge because this species is highly desirable by hardwood and maple syrup producers, two large economic sectors in Quebec. Indeed, sugar maple is a widespread and abundant tree in north-eastern North America and is one of the most representative species of northern temperate forests [5, 10, 8, 1]. The expected northward migration of sugar maple and its vegetal community during climate change will increase the ecotone between the boreal and temperate forest of Quebec. Nevertheless, the expansion of species distribution occurring in Nordic temperate forest could be difficult to predict because microclimatic conditions found in boreal forests are different from those present in temperate forest. Colder temperatures from shading and excess soil moisture due to snow melt cause litter to be more acidic and fibrous during the spring in boreal forests. Therefore, even if the regional climate conditions are favorable [8], the microbiota and microclimatic conditions found in the boreal forest could affect the establishment of sugar maple [8, 11, 2, 1]. In this case, the sugar maple could be unable to migrate in boreal forests as a result of negative soil feedback. This phenomenon could increase the tension between the boreal and temperate forest and generate abrupt changes in the community composition (H_0).

Objectives. This project aims to develop a state and transition model (STM) of the boreal and temperate forests in order to investigate shifts in the distribution of sugar maple into the boreal-temperate forest dynamical system. To assess this main objective, I will (1) create a model of the transition between the temperate and the boreal forest; (2) investigate the spatial structure and presence of alternative stable states in the transitional zone; and finally (3) run simulations based on different climate change scenarios. In order to define the context of this study, the first section of this project proposal is a review subdivided into two parts. The first part presents the theoretical context on alternative stable states and abrupt changes in ecosystems functioning. The second part of this review focuses on the sugar maple, its community and co-existing species in the temperate forest and thus explain why alternative stable states is a relevant framework to study the dynamic of the boreal-temperate forests ecotone. The second section of this document describes the model and the methodology employed to assess the objectives. To conclude, the last part presents the general timeline associated with this project.

2 Review

Theoretical framework. Many ecotone studies and modeling efforts on transition between forest to non-forests (e. g. Boreal - Tundra) [15, 14, 6] but little attention has been given to evaluate the transitional dynamics of forest- forest ecotones [4, 5]. At large scale, transition between the temperate and boreal forests can be approach as a dynamic system where each forest biomes is a stable state. The presence of different states at a location or a time depends on environmental conditions (e. g. soil, temperature) encountered by the system. When small environmental fluctuations occur, most dynamical system responds almost linearly with no threshold to drastic changes in the state of the ecosystem (Figure 1 .A) [14, 13]. In this case, only one equilibrium can be observed given a specific environmental condition [14, 13, 12]. When the soil moisture increase slowly, the new condition obtained might cause favorable conditions to a new species, but this

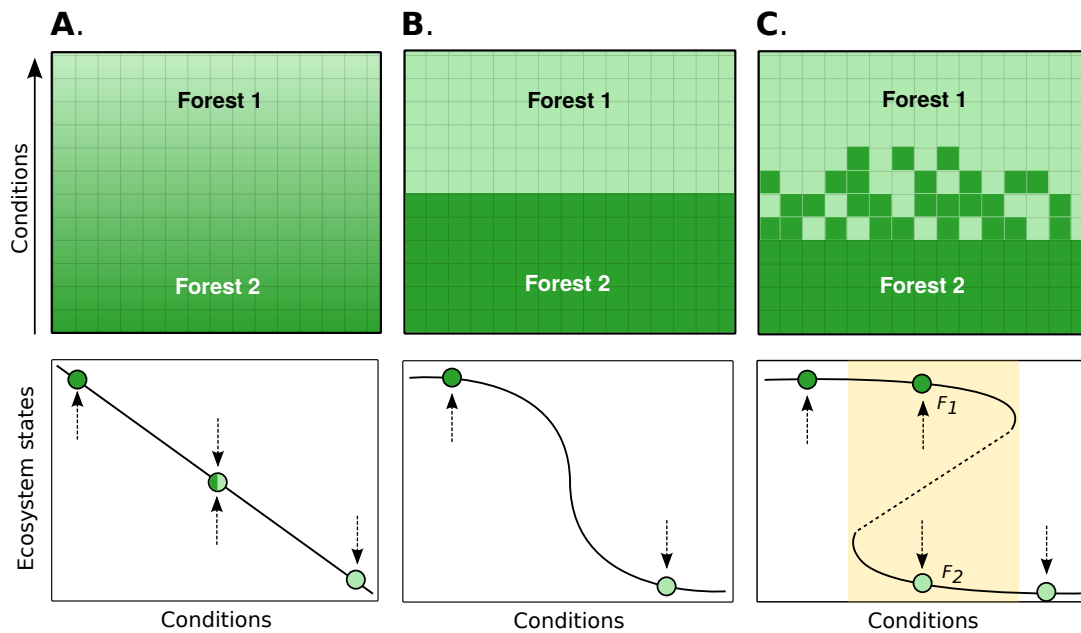


Figure 1: Schematic representation of different ways in which the equilibrium states from forest-forest system can vary with conditions such as temperature, precipitation or soil moisture. Three different kinds of response are presented, (A) gradual, (B) basic fold, (C) catastrophic fold. The first panels line is a conceptualization of a transitional landscape between the boreal (light green) and the nordic temperate forests (dark green). The second panels line presents the stable states rise by the forest given a specific environmental condition. Each arrows in graphs indicate the point toward the system moves if it's not at the equilibrium. Every point on the plain line could be a stable state encounter by the boreal-temperate forests system, excepted for the dashed line (in yellow highlight). This zone, called hysteresis, are particularly unstable and little fluctuations in environment conditions give rise to a contrasted state representing an alternative stable states. (F_1 or F_2).

species establishment doesn't change the entire community therefore the ecosystem functioning. Another kind of response occurs more frequently in nature. Natural systems are insensitive to environmental conditions over certain ranges but respond strongly when a threshold is reached (Figure 1 .B) [12]. For example, tree mortality can increase sharply when a toxin is added to the environment. [12]. In this case, the response curve of the natural system is not linear and lightly folded and a small change can drive the system to a threshold and lead to major changes. As an example, small changes in the initial conditions can transform abruptly the species community composition and lead to a strong spatial division as representing in figure 1 .C (Upper panel). In an other hand, response curve can be folded backwards and the same threshold can conduct the system into catastrophic changes (Figure 1 .C). When the system approach a tipping point on the folded upper branch, the system cannot pass smoothly to the lower branch. Small forcing on initial condition of the state F_1 transfer immediately the system into a contrasted state F_2 (Figure 1 .C). This point is called *Bifurcation point* and small forcing on those critical states can drive the system into backward or forward shifts, increasing catastrophic events. In this situation, the system present alternative stable states who certain range of environmental conditions. This range correspond to the hysteresis zone and can be seen as an intermixed patches in the forest-forest ecotone landscape like shown across the sub-figure 1 .C (upper part).

Natural system. In the boreal-temperate forest ecotone, there is no distinct boundary and a broad transition zone exists composed of mixed stands of coniferous-deciduous species [4]. In

this ecotone, a macromosaic landscape can be observed with pure stands of deciduous trees on favorable sites and pure coniferous stands on less favorable sites [4]. Knowing this, the alternative stable states is a relevant framework to study this ecotone dynamic because the soil seems to have a negative feedback on the temperate forest establishment. This phenomenon need to be investigate has a main attractor in alternative stable states [8, 11, 2, 1].

3 Methods

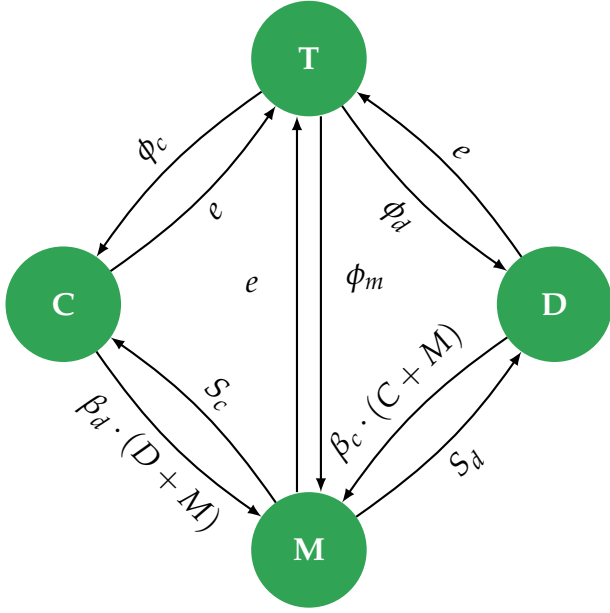


Figure 2: Conceptual transition model between forest stands deciduous (D), mixte (M) and coniferous (C). T corresponds to a transitionnal state where a perturbation are occurred with a frequency of e . Parameters β and S are referred as the colonisation and the succession rates respectively. We defined the recovery rates (ϕ_c et ϕ_d) as $\phi_c = \alpha_c \cdot (M + C) \cdot [1 - \alpha_d \cdot (D + M)]$ and $\phi_d = \alpha_d \cdot (D + M) \cdot [1 - \alpha_c \cdot (C + M)]$, to finally get this equation $\phi_m = \phi_c \cdot \phi_d$. The parameter α mean the recovery rate after a patch has been disturbe.

patch C is undisturbed, deciduous species ($D + M$) can spread over the patch with a colonisation rate β_d giving a new mixed patch. A mixed stand M might turn into a coniferous stand with a sucession rate S_c . We can also summarize the coniferous dynamic by this differential equation: $\frac{\delta C}{\delta t} = \phi_c \cdot T + S_c \cdot M - \alpha_d \cdot (D + M) \cdot C - e \cdot C$. At this stage of this project, the model is spatially implicit and assume that all space is occupied by one state, so that the proportions of land cover occupied by all types of patch sum to 1.

Models. This state and transition model will be based on three different forest states: (D) Deciduous and (M) Mixed patches characterizing temperate forests, then (C) Coniferous patch representing boreal forests (Figure 2). Disturbances regime is a main driver in those forest dynamics (e .g. Fire in boreal forest or frost in temperate forest). When gap event occur in deciduous patch, species presents will be replaced by shade intolerant species as aspen and white birch, well adapted to the new shading condition. Thus post-disturbance patches has been integrated within the model across the transitional patch (T) (Figure 2). On long term, late-succesional species from the understory will take up giving a new state (C, D or M). All states can change to another state except the direct transition between a deciduous and coniferous stands which doesn't occur in natural systems. Simulations of this model aims to assess the transition rate between each state in the overall landscape and identify if deciduous and coniferous patches are present as alternative stable states. When a coniferous patch C has been disturbed with a rate e , this can be recovered to another state following ϕ_c . This term is taking in account a specific patch recovery rate (α_c), the availability of coniferous species ($M + C$) and the proportion of paths unconverted into a deciduous state ($1 - \alpha_d \cdot (D + M)$). In making the assumption that perturbation rate is similar between states, dynamic of a patch T can be formally describe by these differential equations:

$$\frac{\delta T}{\delta t} = e \cdot (C + M + D) - T \cdot (\phi_d + \phi_c + \phi_m).$$

Parameterization. The parameterization of this model will be conducted on the QUICC-FOR database containing large permanent sample plots surveys. Those data are provided by several forest offices and cover multiple canadian provinces (± 16000 plots) and states (± 50000 plots). These inventories started since the 1970s and include all stems measurements and forest stand informations relative to a specific plot location and year. The basal area will be compute to provide a measure of relative growth by species present and plots. Each plot will be classified into the four different states following their percent of deciduous and coniferious cover.

To include the climate, each model parameters will be calibrate as a function of probability based on climatic conditions. Climate is a main driver in the distribution of those biomes, but their dynamics are also strongly related to their own disturbance regimes (i. e. Fire in boreal forest, frost in temperate forest) [4].

Simulation. This model will be incorporated in a spatially explicit cellular automaton or lattice in order to evaluate the velocity of the transition into differents patches and differents climate change scenario.

Validation.

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