Snow Interception Relationships with Meteorology and Canopy Structure in a Subalpine Forest

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**Abstract:** Subcanopy snow accumulation models differ in how snow interception and ablation processes are represented and have uncertain applicability across diverse climates and forest types. Existing parameterizations of initial snow interception before unloading include inherently coupled accumulation and ablation processes. This leads to difficulty in diagnosing processes and adding uncertainty to simulations when incorporated as canopy accumulation routines in models that already account for canopy snow ablation. This study evaluates the theory underpinning these parameterizations using in-situ meteorological data, high-temporal resolution point-scale throughfall measurements, and fine-scale aerial lidar measurements of throughfall and canopy metrics collected from two subalpine forest plots in the Canadian Rockies. Contrary to existing theories, no association of canopy snow load or air temperature with interception efficiency was observed. Instead, forest structure emerged as the primary factor governing snow accumulation. A wind-driven snowfall event demonstrated that non-vertical hydrometeor trajectories can significantly reduce throughfall depths. Prediction of interception efficiency for this event improved dramatically when adjusted for hydrometeor trajectory angle based on a wind speed at one-third of the canopy height. Snow-leaf contact area showed a high sensitivity to wind speed, increasing by up to 95% with a 1 m s-1 wind speed. The study proposes a new parameterization which calculates snow interception efficiency as a function of snow-leaf contact area adjusted for hydrometeor trajectory angle. This new parameterization successfully estimated subcanopy snow accumulation for a snowfall event at two forest plots. By separating canopy snow ablation from snow interception processes, this new model should offer improved performance in prediction of sub-canopy snow accumulation when combined with canopy snow ablation parameterizations.

**Keywords:** snow interception, throughfall, ablation, forest, snowpack, lidar, process-based modelling

# 1. Introduction

Over half of North America’s snow-covered zone is covered by forests (Kim et al., 2017), significantly impacting the accumulation and redistribution of snowpacks and subsequent snowmelt runoff. Essery et al. (2003) estimated that 25–45% of annual snowfall may be lost to the atmosphere due to sublimation of snow intercepted in forest canopies globally. Snow intercepted in the canopy can sublimate and melt at much higher rates compared to the subcanopy snowpack (Floyd, 2012; Lundberg & Hallidin, 1994; Pomeroy et al., 1998), reducing the amount of snow available for runoff. Forest thinning efforts aimed at limiting sublimation losses to increase snowmelt runoff do not always lead to a corresponding increase in spring streamflow (Golding & Swanson, 1978; Harpold et al., 2020; Pomeroy et al., 2012; Troendle, 1983). This may be due to increased ablation rates when forest cover is reduced, desynchronization of snowmelt, and sub-surface hydrology interactions (Ellis et al., 2013; Musselman et al., 2015; Pomeroy et al., 1997; Safa et al., 2021; Varhola et al., 2010). Vegetation structure controls the partitioning of snowfall into throughfall and interception, and thus governs the quantity of snow subject to sublimation from the canopy (Hedstrom & Pomeroy, 1998; Storck et al., 2002). Due to the significant impact of forest cover on snow accumulation and ablation, and the absence of monitoring network of subcanopy snow accumulation (Rittger et al., 2020; Vionnet et al., 2021), land management, ecological conservation and water resource decisions rely on robust models of snow redistribution to estimate past, current and future subcanopy snowpacks.

Numerous field-based studies have developed methodologies to improve snow interception process understanding to better predict snow accumulation in forests. These methods, discussed in detail in Cebulski & Pomeroy (2024), include snow survey-based mass balance (Hedstrom & Pomeroy, 1998), tree weighing (Hedstrom & Pomeroy, 1998; Katsushima et al., 2023; Lundberg, 1993; Satterlund & Haupt, 1967; Schmidt & Gluns, 1991; Storck et al., 2002), gamma ray attenuation (Calder, 1990), subcanopy lysimeters (Storck et al., 2002) and time-lapse imagery analysis (Floyd & Weiler, 2008; Lumbrazo et al., 2022). Cebulski & Pomeroy (2024) note the care needed in using these methods to distinguish interception from ablation processes. As a result, existing parameterizations for snow interception are sometimes coupled to ablation processes (e.g., Hedstrom & Pomeroy, 1998; Katsushima et al., 2023) and may not be compatible when combined with additional canopy snow ablation process representations in uncalibrated models (Clark et al., 2020; Verseghy, 2017; Wheater et al., 2022).

Hedstrom & Pomeroy (1998), working in the continental boreal forest, proposed that initial snow interception efficiency was controlled by the maximum canopy load which itself was a function of leaf area index and air temperature. Unloading was found to be an exponential function of time and observed only well after the interception event. Storck et al. (2002), working in temperate coastal forests, emphasized the role of air temperature in controlling interception efficiency. Gelfan et al. (2004) demonstrated accurate subcanopy snowpack simulations at study sites in Russia by treating the Hedstrom & Pomeroy (1998) and Storck et al. (2002) parameterizations separately while using a step-based function to choose either parameterization based on temperature. Similar parameterization in the Cold Regions Hydrological Model (Pomeroy et al., 2022) has shown strong performance at sites across Canada, northern United States, Switzerland, and Spain. However, overestimation of subcanopy snow accumulation was reported by Lundquist et al. (2021) and Lumbrazo et al. (2022) when combining the Hedstrom & Pomeroy (1998) routine with ablation parameterizations from different studies (e.g., Roesch et al., 2001). The coupling of ablation processes within these existing snow interception models (Hedstrom & Pomeroy, 1998; Storck et al., 2002) may contribute to the over representation of ablation processes when combined with other canopy snow ablation parameterizations. Additional observations of snow interception that minimize the inclusion of ablation processes could help determine the applicability of the interception theories proposed by Hedstrom & Pomeroy (1998) and Storck et al. (2002).

Previous studies have found differing relationships between interception efficiency, maximum canopy snow load and air temperature (Hedstrom & Pomeroy, 1998; Storck et al., 2002). Lundquist et al. (2021) found improved subcanopy snowpack simulations when they omitted the maximum canopy snow load from Hedstrom & Pomeroy (1998), from a model otherwise linked to a complete representation of canopy snow ablation processes. This, combined with studies which have not found a maximum canopy snow load (Calder, 1990; Katsushima et al., 2023; Storck et al., 2002), and the attribution of decreased interception at higher canopy snow loads to ablation processes rather than reduced canopy structure due to branch bending alone by Schmidt & Gluns (1991), Hedstrom & Pomeroy (1998), Satterlund & Haupt (1967), Moeser et al. (2015), suggests the maximum canopy snow load may be much higher than existing interception models predict. This leads to uncertainty in the role of the maximum canopy snow load in snow interception and subsequent unloading. It may be beneficial to reformulate canopy snow ablation parameterizations as a function of canopy snow load rather than limiting initial interception for consistency with current rainfall interception theory for considering transitional rainfall-snowfall interception (e.g., Valante et al., 1997).

It remains uncertain how process understanding developed at the branch and tree scale such as bridging of gaps in canopy elements (Satterlund & Haupt, 1967; Schmidt & Gluns, 1991) and branch bending (Pomeroy & Gray, 1995; Schmidt & Pomeroy, 1990) influence snow accumulation at the forest plot scale. Fine-scale observations of throughfall have only recently become feasible at the plot scale (Harder et al., 2020; Staines & Pomeroy, 2023), presenting an opportunity to determine how interception processes vary across differing spatial scales. Existing theory proposed by Hedstrom & Pomeroy (1998) suggests that moderate wind speeds, which can result in horizontal hydrometeor trajectories, increasing snow-leaf contact area and interception efficiency at the plot scale. This association has also been shown in rainfall interception studies (i.e., Herwitz & Slye, 1995; Van Stan et al., 2011) to decrease throughfall of rain. Despite this importance for rainfall, the relationship proposed by Hedstrom & Pomeroy (1998), is typically not included in snow accumulation models (Clark et al., 2020; Mahat & Tarboton, 2014), as empirical support for this relationship is lacking. New methods developed by Staines & Pomeroy (2023) to characterize the canopy at a high angular and spatial resolution have improved understanding of the relationship between snow interception and forest structure spatially and across differing trajectory angles. However, these insights have yet to be confirmed for additional study sites with more diverse forest structure and need to be incorporated into a theoretical framework appropriate for modelling forest snow accumulation in hydrological models.

The objective of this paper is to evaluate the theory underlying existing snow interception models using high spatial and temporal resolution measurements of subcanopy snow accumulation for events with minimal canopy snow ablation. These new observations are investigated to address the following research questions:

1. Are the existing theories regarding the relationship between meteorology and forest structure with snow interception supported by in-situ observations?
2. How is snow interception influenced by non-vertical hydrometeor trajectory angles over a wind-driven snowfall event?
3. To what extent can these findings inform the development of a new parameterization for snow interception?

# 2. Theory

## 2.1 Snow Interception

During calm snowfall periods, where canopy snow wind redistribution processes and ablation processes such as sublimation and melt/drip can be assumed negligible, the canopy snow load, (kg m-2) can be estimated from the mass balance:

where is the snowfall rate (kg m-2 s-1) and is the throughfall rate (kg m-2 s-1).

Interception efficiency, (-), which is the fraction of snowfall intercepted over can then be calculated as:

and throughfall, can be calculated as:

## 2.2 Hydrometeor Trajectory Angle

The trajectory angle, of a hydrometeor as the departure in degrees (°) from a vertical plane (i.e., 0° for vertical snowfall), is shown in Herwitz & Slye (1995) to be calculated as:

where is the terminal fall velocity of the hydrometeor (m s-1), which is a function of the hydrometeor diameter, and is the horizontal velocity of the hydrometeor (m s-1) which is a function of the within canopy wind speed, at height above ground, , if the hydrometeors are assumed to be following fluid points in the atmosphere.

# 3. Data and Methods

## 3.1 Study Site

This study was conducted at Fortress Mountain Research Basin (FMRB), Alberta, Canada, -115° W, 51° N, a continental headwater basin in the Canadian Rockies ([Figure 1](#fig-site-map)). Data from this study was collected between October 2021 and July 2023 within and surrounding two forest plots adjacent to the FMRB Powerline Station (PWL) and Forest Tower Station (FT) at ~2100 m (above sea level) as shown in [Figure 1](#fig-site-map). The average annual precipitation at PWL Station from 2013 to 2023 was 1045 mm, with the peak annual snow water equivalent (SWE) reaching 465 kg m-2, typically occurring in late April. The PWL and FT forest plots include discontinuous stands of 70% subalpine fir (Abies lasiocarpa) and 30% Engelmann spruce (Picea engelmannii) (Langs et al., 2020). The PWL plot is located 120 m to the northwest of FT station and contains a forest clearing with a diameter of ~12 m, surrounded by a closed canopy. The canopy coverage of the two forest plots is 0.51 and 0.29 and the winter leaf area index is 2.07 and 1.66 for PWL and FT respectively. The average height of the canopy surrounding the plot to the east of the PWL station is 10.51 m and surrounding the forest plot around the FT Station is 7.12 m. The forest of the FT plot is characterized by discontinuous canopy without artificial clearings. In August of 1936, the majority of vegetation in FMRB burned during a large forest fire that affected most of the Kananaskis Valley (Fryer et al., 1988). Following the fire, the forest within the PWL and FT forest plots has naturally regenerated, though some trees have been removed for road clearing and creation of a snow study plot.

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| Figure 1: Map showing the location of forest plots, flux towers, SCL instruments and survey transects. The inset map on the lower right shows the regional location of Fortress Mountain Research basin. |

## 3.2 Meteorological Measurements

Measurements of air temperature and relative humidity (Vaisala model HMP155A), wind speed and direction (RM Young model 86000 2-D ultrasonic anemometer) were made 4.3 m above the ground at FT station ([Figure 1](#fig-site-map)). Wind speed measurements from a 3-cup anemometer (Met One model 014A), installed adjacent to the 2-D ultrasonic anemometer at 4.3 m, were used for gap filling wind speed. Additional wind speed measurements were collected by two 3-D sonic anemometers (Campbell Scientific CSAT3) installed at 2 m (raised to 3 m February 2022) and 13.5 m above the ground at FT station. Average wind speeds at these three heights at FT station were found to follow a logarithmic relationship and a wind profile was fitted using the Prandtl-von Kármán log-linear relationship:

where is average wind speed (m s-1) at height, (m) above the ground, is the friction velocity (m s-1), is the displacement height (m), is the roughness length of momentum (m), and is the dimensionless von Kármán Constant (0.4).

To determine the displacement height and roughness length parameters the function “optim” from the stats R package (R Core Team, 2024) was used. The parameters for the wind speed profile include a roughness length of 0.50 m, displacement height of 0.58 m. At PWL station, the snowfall rate was measured by an Alter-shielded OTT Pluvio weighing precipitation gauge 2.6 m above ground, corrected for undercatch following phase correction by Harder & Pomeroy (2013) and catch efficiency by Smith (2007). Wind speed for undercatch correction was measured by a 3-cup anemometer (Met One model 014A) at a height of 2.6 m at PWL station. An optical disdrometer (OTT Parsivel2) provided measurements of hydrometeor particle size and vertical velocity. All measurements were recorded at 15-min intervals using Campbell Scientific dataloggers, except the Parsivel2 which was recorded at 1-minute intervals by an onsite computer.

## 3.3 Lysimeter Data

Three subcanopy lysimeters (SCLs) were installed surrounding FT Station ([Figure 1](#fig-site-map)) to provide 15-minute interval measurements of sub-canopy snowfall and canopy snow load as in MacDonald (2010). [Figure 2](#fig-scl-imgs) shows the three SCLs which consisted of a plastic horse-watering trough with an opening of 0.9 m2 and depth of 20 cm suspended from a load cell (Intertechnology 9363-D3-75-20T1) attached to an aluminum pipe connected between two trees. For 26 distinct snowfall events, where canopy snow ablation rates were deemed negligible, the throughfall rate, , was calculated by dividing the load cell weight by the cross-sectional area of the SCL opening and calculating the rate of change at 15-minute intervals. Canopy snow load and interception efficiency was quantified at the same 15-minute intervals during these events using [Equation 1](#eq-dwdt-ode) and [Equation 2](#eq-ip), incorporating measurements of from the SCLs and from the PWL snowfall gauge. Timelapse imagery, mass change on a weighed tree lysimeter “hanging tree” (Pomeroy & Schmidt, 1993) and in-situ observations were used to ensure the ablation of snow intercepted in the canopy or snow on the ground was minimal over each of the selected snowfall events. The weighed tree lysimeter, a live subalpine fir (Abies lasiocarpa) tree suspended from a load cell (Artech S-Type 20210-100) measured the weight of canopy snow load, (kg). The weight of snow intercepted on the weighed tree was scaled to an areal estimate of canopy snow load (, kg m-2) using measurements of areal throughfall (kg m-2) from manual snow surveys and snowfall from the PWL Station snowfall gauge (see description of method in Pomeroy & Schmidt, 1993). The canopy structure surrounding three SCLs is shown in [Figure 2](#fig-scl-imgs) and was measured using hemispherical photography (Nikon Coolpix 4500 and EC-F8 hemispherical lens) and the hemispheR R package Chianucci & Macek (2023). The leaf area index and canopy coverage from hemispherical photo analysis is shown in [Table 1](#tbl-scl-lai-cc).

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| Table 1: Canopy structure of the three subcanopy lysimeters (SCL) located proximal to the FT Station. Leaf area index (LAI) and Canopy Coverage was measured using hemispherical photo analysis with the R package hemispheR.   | Name | LAI (-) | Canopy Coverage (-) | | --- | --- | --- | | Sparse | 1.59 | 0.73 | | Mixed | 1.86 | 0.78 | | Closed | 2.11 | 0.82 | |

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| Figure 2: Images of the three subcanopy lysimeters (SCL) and surrounding canopy located in sparse (A), mixed (B), and dense (C) canopy. The top row presents a side view of each SCL and the bottom row shows hemispherical photographs classified using the hemispheR R package. These hemispherical images are oriented with north at the top and have been flipped to provide a view from above (i.e., east is on the right side of each image). |

## 3.4 UAV-Lidar Data Collection Processing

Two uncrewed aerial vehicle (UAV) lidar surveys were conducted before and after a 24-hour snowfall event that occurred between March 13th and March 14th, 2023 to facilitate the measurement of snow accumulation and canopy structure metrics. The UAV (FreeFly Alta X) payload included a REIGL miniVUX-2 airborne laser scanner, an Applanix APX-20 inertial measurement unit (IMU) and global navigation satellite system (GNSS). The UAV was flown 90 m above the ground at a speed of 3 m s-1 following the path shown in [Figure 1](#fig-site-map). A detailed description of the UAV, payload, and flight settings is provided in the supporting information. The methods outlined by Harder et al. (2020) and Staines & Pomeroy (2023) were incorporated to reconcile survey lidar, IMU and GNSS data. A vertical offset of up to 6 cm between UAV-lidar flight lines was observed in the resulting point clouds on March 13th and 14th, 2024 and was attributed to IMU position drift. This offset between flight lines was corrected using the BayesStripAlign software v2.24 (BayesMap Solutions, 2024). After strip alignment, the mean elevation bias (lidar minus GCP) was 0.000 m and the RMS error declined from 0.055 m to 0.038 m March 13th and changed from 0.033 m to 0.029 m on March 14th. The point cloud density ranged from ~1200 returns m2 in open clearings to ~2200 m2 in sparse forest for both the March 13th and 14th surveys after all flight paths were combined. Quality control, ground classification and calculation of the change in between two UAV-lidar point clouds was conducted using the LAStools software package (LAStools, 2024). More details on the UAV-lidar processing workflow are provided in the supporting information.

## 3.5 Snow Surveys

### 3.5.1 In-situ Snow Depth and Density

In-situ fresh snow surveys provided measurements of subcanopy throughfall depth and density following the transects shown in [Figure 1](#fig-site-map). Twelve fresh snow surveys (six pre- and post-snowfall event pairs) which had minimal ablation and redistribution between pre and post surveys at 30 locations were selected to upscale the weighed tree snow load. When conditions allowed for a UAV-lidar flight, the in-situ snow surveys were conducted following the UAV-lidar flight to assess the accuracy of the throughfall measurements and provide a fresh snow density for the calculation of SWE (kg m-2). A 1000 cm3 Perla snow density wedge sampler (RIP Cutter, https://snowmetrics.com/shop/rip-1-cutter-1000-cc/) was used to measure the density of the fresh snow layer, (kg m-3) from snow pits. Throughfall depth measurements, were converted to SWE using the following equation:

Differential GNSS rover coordinates, with ± 2.5 cm 3D uncertainty, were taken at each snow sampling location so the locations could be queried later from the UAV-lidar rasters. If a pre-event crust layer was present, the depth of post event fresh snow accumulation above the crust layer was interpreted as throughfall over the event. In the absence of a defined crust layer, the difference in pre- and post-event snow depth to ground was interpreted as event throughfall.

### 3.5.2 UAV-Lidar Snow Depth

Two UAV-lidar surveys, one prior to a snowfall event on March 13, 2023 at 10:00 CST and another following snowfall on March 14, 2023 at 11:00 CST enabled fine-scale analysis of snow accumulation and canopy structure within the FT and PWL forest plots. This period was selected based on two criteria: 1) it provided sufficient cumulative snowfall to result in a low relative error in UAV-LiDAR measured throughfall, and (2) minimal redistribution and ablation was observed, as confirmed by the SCLs, weighed tree, and time-lapse imagery. The change in elevation between the two UAV-lidar surveys was interpreted as the increase in snow accumulation, over the snowfall event. Further details on the generation of 25 cm horizontal resolution rasters from the UAV-lidar point clouds are provided in the supporting information.

## 3.6 UAV-Lidar Canopy Metrics

To characterize the canopy structure, the voxel ray sampling (VoxRS) methodology for lidar data analysis was employed, as developed by Staines & Pomeroy (2023), for both UAV-lidar surveys. This method was chosen for its ability to provide canopy metrics that are less sensitive to the inherent non-uniform nature of lidar sampling data, which often results from beam occlusion in vegetation and leads to reduced points near the ground. The VoxRS algorithm is publicly available at https://github.com/jstaines/VoxRS. The canopy products produced from VoxRS here include canopy contact number, the mean theoretical number of canopy contacts for a given ray, and radiation transmittance (), all dimensionless. See supporting information in Staines & Pomeroy (2023) for details on how these metrics are computed. The fraction of snow-leaf contact area per unit area of ground proposed by Hedstrom & Pomeroy (1998), and hereafter called leaf contact area (), was calculated as:

where is a function of the canopy coverage , and . is approximately equal to canopy coverage () for vertical snowfall trajectories. However, for non-vertical snowfall .

## 3.7 Statistics and Regression Models

To determine how forest structure was associated with interception efficiency at different azimuth and zenith angles over the March 13-14 snowfall event, each portion of the hemisphere at each grid location was considered. The relationship between interception efficiency and canopy contact number was found to be linear and thus the Pearson Correlation Coefficient, was calculated using the ‘stats’ package in R (R Core Team, 2024) to quantify the association between a single raster of interception efficiency and the 32,760 rasters containing the canopy contact number hemisphere for each portion of the hemisphere (azimuth [0°, 1°, …, 359°], zenith angle [0°, 1°, …, 90°]) for each of the 25 cm grid cells across the FT and PWL forest plots.

Linear and non-linear regression models were developed to assess relationships in the observed data. Linear models were fitted using ordinary least squares regression via the ‘lm’ function from the R ‘stats’ package (R Core Team, 2024) to analyze two relationships: (1) between interception efficiency and meteorological variables and (2) between interception efficiency and leaf contact area. The latter was forced through the origin based on the theoretical justification that the dependent variable should be zero when the independent variable is zero. Kozak & Kozak (1995) noted, the default *R*2 value provided for least squares models forced through the origin by many statistical packages can be misleading. Therefore, these *R*2 values were adjusted using Equation 10 in Kozak & Kozak (1995). Non-linear models were fitted using non-linear least squares (nls) regression via the ‘nls’ function in ‘stats’ package in R.

# 4. Results

## 4.1 The influence of meteorology on snow interception

[Figure 3](#fig-scl-w-sf) displays the canopy snow load observed from the three SCLs plotted against cumulative snowfall over 26 snowfall events. The duration and meteorology of each snowfall event are summarized in [Table 2](#tbl-sf-event-met) and show air temperature over these periods ranged from a minimum of -24.5°C. to a maximum of 1°C. Wind speeds ranged from a minimum of 0 m s-1 to a maximum of 4.6 m s-1. [Figure 4](#fig-wind-rose) shows the wind direction was predominately from the southwest over these snowfall events. Canopy snow load was observed in [Figure 3](#fig-scl-w-sf) to increase linearly with increasing snowfall without evidence of reaching a maximum. Variation in the slope of each line in [Figure 3](#fig-scl-w-sf), is attributed to differences in the meteorology and antecedent canopy snow load within and between the individual events. Variations in the canopy structure surrounding the SCL instruments as shown in [Table 1](#tbl-scl-lai-cc), also contributed to the difference in slope. The absence of canopy snow load measurements in [Figure 3](#fig-scl-w-sf) for certain troughs during specific events was caused by damage to the subcanopy lysimeter wiring due to animals and heavy snow loads.

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| Figure 3: Plot showing the cumulative event snowfall versus the corresponding state of canopy snow load calculated using the SCLs for each of the 26 snowfall events. The SCLs are denoted by a distinct colour (grey, yellow, and green), correspond to varying canopy coverage (0.73, 0.78, and 0.82, respectively). |

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| Table 2: Meteorological statistics of 15-minute interval measurements for the 26 snowfall events. Air temperature and wind speed were measured at FT station. Snowfall is measured at PWL station. Interception efficiency presents statistics of the average of all three SCLs located within the FT forest plot. |

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| Figure 4: Wind rose showing the frequency of wind speed and direction over the 26 snowfall periods for the ultrasonic anemometer 4.3 m above ground at FT station. |

[Figure 5](#fig-scl-ip-avg-event) shows mean event air temperature had a weak negative association (*p* < 0.05) with mean event interception efficiency measured at the mixed canopy SCL, while the other two troughs displayed insignificant relationships (*p* > 0.05). Cumulative event snowfall had a consistent negative association with mean event interception efficiency for all three troughs; however, the relationships were insignificant (*p* > 0.05). Event mean wind speed exhibited a relatively strong positive association with interception efficiency for the sparse (*R*2 = 0.1, *p* > 0.05) and closed (*R*2 = 0.2, *p* < 0.05) SCLs. A negative insignificant association was observed for the mixed SCL (*p* > 0.05). The opposing relationship of wind speed and interception efficiency between the SCLs can be explained as the mixed SCL had an opening in the canopy ([Figure 2](#fig-scl-imgs), B), that matches the prevailing wind direction shown in [Figure 4](#fig-wind-rose), thus increasing the amount of snowfall entering the sub-canopy during increased winds. For the closed and sparse SCLs this increase in interception efficiency is hypothesized to be due to an associated increase in canopy contact area as hydrometeor trajectory becomes more horizontal with increasing wind speed.

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| Figure 5: Scatter plots showing the mean air temperature and wind speed and total cumulative snowfall versus the mean interception efficiency measured by the SCLs for each of the 26 snowfall events. The SCLs are denoted by a distinct colour (grey, yellow, and green), correspond to varying canopy coverage (0.73, 0.78, and 0.82, respectively). A linear regression line fit to the data is shown by the solid coloured lines and the corresponding adjusted r squared value. Significant relationships (p < 0.05) are marked by an asterisk beside the *R*2 value. |

[Figure 6](#fig-lai-met-ip) shows the association between interception efficiency measured by the three SCLs and the corresponding air temperature, wind speed, canopy snow load for the same 15-minute time interval. Panel A in [Figure 6](#fig-lai-met-ip) shows that average air temperature is weakly correlated (*R*2 < 0.03) with interception efficiency for all three SCLs with significant relationships (*p* < 0.05) only for the sparse and mixed troughs. A significantly greater median interception efficiency (*p* < 0.05) was found for air temperatures below -6 °C compared to colder air temperatures using non-parametric Wilcoxon signed rank test.

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| Figure 6: Scatter plots of discrete observations (blue dots) and binned data (black dots with error bars) of meteorology, canopy load, and hydrometeor characteristics versus snow interception efficiency. Panels show (A) air temperature, (B) relative humidity, (C) wind speed, (D) initial canopy snow load (the snow load observed at the beginning of the timestep), (E) hydrometeor diameter, (F) hydrometeor velocity. The black open circles show the mean of each bin and the error bars represent the standard deviations. The data were filtered to include observations with a snowfall rate > 0 kg m-2 hr-1, throughfall rate > 0.05 kg m-2 hr-1 to minimize noise and a snowfall rate > the subcanopy lysimeter throughfall rate to minimize observations with unloading. Periods of unloading and melt were also removed through careful analysis of the weighed tree, subcanopy lysimeters, and timelapse imagery. Significant linear relationships (p < 0.05) are marked by an asterisk beside the *R*2 value. |

Panel B in [Figure 6](#fig-lai-met-ip) shows a weak linear relationship (*R*2 < 0.09, *p* < 0.05 for all three SCLs) between wind speed measured at the FT Station and interception efficiency. Although the relationship of interception efficiency with wind speed is slightly stronger than that with air temperature, it remains weak overall. The association between wind speed and interception efficiency was observed to be positive for the sparse and closed SCLs, while the mixed SCL exhibited a negative association. The opposing trend observed for the closed and sparse SCLs compared to the mixed SCL is consistent with the trend observed in [Figure 5](#fig-scl-ip-avg-event) for the event means and is also attributed to a change in snow-leaf contact area with shifting hydrometeor trajectories as a result of changing wind speed. A comparison of interception efficiencies between low (< 1 m s-1) and high (> 1 m s-1) wind speeds by the Wilcoxon signed rank test showed that high wind speeds had significantly higher (*p* < 0.05) median interception efficiency compared to the low wind speed group for the closed and sparse SCL. Conversely, the Wilcoxon test showed the mixed SCL had significantly higher (*p* < 0.05) median interception efficiencies for the low wind speed group.

Panel C in [Figure 6](#fig-lai-met-ip) shows the canopy snow load, measured at the beginning of each timestep, exhibits a non-linear relationship with interception efficiency resulting. The binned data show a small increase in interception efficiency was observed between canopy snow loads of 0 kg m-2 to 7 kg m-2 for all three troughs. This was followed by a gradual decline in interception efficiency for snow loads greater than 7 kg m-2 with the closed and sparse SCL ([Figure 6](#fig-lai-met-ip), C). The interception efficiency measured by the mixed SCL also declined above 7 kg m-2 before increasing again around 16 kg m-2 and then declined again to a minimum interception efficiency of 0.39. A comparison of low (< 10 kg m-2) and high (> 10 kg m-2) canopy snow loads using the Wilcoxon rank-test showed the low canopy snow loads had significantly greater (*p* < 0.05) median interception efficiency compared to the high canopy snow load group. The location of the SCLs within gaps in the canopy may have contributed to these instruments registering a slight increase in interception efficiency as small branch gaps are covered by snow followed by a decline in interception efficiency as branches bend due to the weight of snow intercepted on the branch compressing it downwards and thus reducing the canopy coverage above the SCLs. Although some relationships depicted in [Figure 5](#fig-scl-ip-avg-event) and [Figure 6](#fig-lai-met-ip) are statistically significant, all exhibit relatively low *R*2 values, indicating that they capture little variance in interception efficiency.

## 4.2 The influence of forest structure on snow interception

UAV-lidar measurements of throughfall and canopy structure metrics provide insights on how the forest canopy influenced subcanopy snow accumulation during a wind-driven snowfall event between March 13th and 14th. This event totaled 28.7 kg m-2 of snowfall at PWL station and was characterized by a transition from low rates of snowfall and air temperature near 0°C to higher rates of snowfall late afternoon on March 13th coinciding with air temperatures around -2.5 °C. An average wind speed of 1.3 m s-1 and direction of 188° was observed 4.3 m above the ground at FT Station. The log-linear wind speed profile shown in [Figure 7](#fig-wind-profiles) provided a good fit to observed wind speeds at 2, 3, 4.3 and 13.5 m above the ground and shows Cionco’s (1965) exponential function was not appropriate for this sparse canopy. The friction velocity observed over the event was estimated to be 0.37 m s-1 by rearranging [Equation 5](#eq-log-wind-profile) to solve for friction velocity using the site derived roughness length and displacement height values and incorporating the mean wind speed observed at FT Station at 4.3 m. The heavy snowfall over this event covered the two eddy covariance systems at FT station with snow, limiting the wind speed measurements available to test this profile at different heights or provide a measurement of friction velocity. [Figure 7](#fig-wind-profiles) shows predicted hydrometeor trajectory angles at varying heights, calculated using [Equation 4](#eq-ta) and the mean observed hydrometeor terminal velocity observed over the event of 0.9 m s-1. An average wind speed of 1.6 m s-1 and direction of 188° was calculated by integrating the wind speed from the surface to the mean canopy height of FT plot. The corresponding trajectory angle calculated using [Equation 4](#eq-ta) from this integrated wind speed was 61.5°.

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| Figure 7: Wind speed profile fitted to roughness length and displacement height parameters derived from anemometers at 2, 3, 4.3, and 13.5 m above ground at FT station and friction velocity observed over the March 13-14th snowfall event. The red triangle shows the mean observed wind speed at 4.3 m measured at FT station over the March 13-14 snowfall event. |

UAV-lidar measurements of throughfall shown in [Figure 8](#fig-lidar-tf-ip) aligned well with 28 in-situ manual throughfall measurements with a mean bias of -0.001 m and RMSE of 0.024 m. The mean bias between these two measurements were observed to be similar within canopy gaps and within tree wells, while tree wells resulted in a larger percent bias. [Figure 8](#fig-lidar-tf-ip) shows the spatial distribution of throughfall and interception efficiency at the PWL and FT forest plots. Reduced throughfall and greater interception efficiency is observed on the north (lee) side of individual trees, which is interpreted to be a result of non-vertical hydrometeor trajectories caused by the steady southerly winds observed over this event. In-situ visual observations on March 13th and 14th confirmed non-vertical hydrometeor trajectories and increased canopy snow loads were observed on the windward side of individual trees. This effect is shown in [Figure 8](#fig-lidar-tf-ip) to be more apparent within the PWL forest plot, compared to the FT forest plot. This may be attributed to the taller trees and higher canopy coverage within the PWL forest plot compared to the FT forest plot, where given the same trajectory angle a taller tree will produce a larger footprint.

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| Figure 8: UAV-lidar measurements of the change in SWE (kg m-2) and interception efficiency over the March 13, 2023 24 hour snowfall event for the FT and PWL forest plots at a 25 cm resolution. Transparent areas represent grids that did not have any lidar ground returns (i.e., under dense canopy proximal to tree trunks) or have been masked due to disturbance. See the location of the two forest plots in [Figure 1](#fig-site-map). |

[Figure 9](#fig-hemi-ip-cc) presents two hemisphere plots which illustrate the correlation between and interception efficiency at a 0.25 m grid cell resolution over differing azimuth and zenith angles for both the FT and PWL forest plots. These plots demonstrate a strong linear correlation between and interception efficiency towards the southern portion of the hemisphere, aligning with the average event wind direction. For the PWL forest plot, the upper 97.5th percentile of the values shown in [Figure 9](#fig-hemi-ip-cc), were found between azimuth angles of 167° – 217°. Similarly, for the FT forest plot, the upper 97.5th percentile of was found between azimuth angles of 171° – 223°. The zenith angle found to have the highest correlation over this azimuth range was 22° ( = 0.7) and 21° ( = 0.83) for PWL and FT respectively. The high correlation coefficients found for non-vertical zenith angles for both PWL and FT are hypothesized to result from non-vertical hydrometeor trajectories.

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| Figure 9: The Pearson Correlation Coefficient between rasters (25 cm resolution) of interception efficiency and leaf contact area for each grid cell across the study site for each azimuth angles (0°, 1°, …, 359°) and zenith angles (0°, 1°, …, 90°) for the FT (left) and PWL (right) forest plots. |

[Figure 10](#fig-lca-vs-ip) shows that the correlation between and interception efficiency, resampled to a 5 m grid resolution, is stronger when is adjusted for the observed shift in hydrometeor trajectory (Vector Based), compared to the leaf contact angle measured at a zenith angle of 0° (Nadir). The strong association for the vector-based model suggests that adjusted is a useful predictor of interception efficiency before ablation. For the vector-based model, adjusted was calculated using the VoxRS dataset corresponding to the azimuth range and zenith angle with the highest for each plot as mentioned in the previous paragraph. An ordinary least squares linear regression forced through the origin was fit to the observed data points using the following equation:

where is an efficiency constant which determines the fraction of snowflakes that contact the elements and are stored in the canopy (i.e., intercepted) before canopy snow unloading or ablation processes begin.

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| Figure 10: Scatter plots showing the relationship between leaf contact area and interception efficiency rasters resampled to a 5 m grid cell resolution. The left plot (Nadir) shows leaf contact area measured from a zenith angle of 0°. The right plot (Vector Based) shows the leaf contact area averaged over rasters with zenith angles (PWL = 22°, FT = 21°) and azimuth angles (PWL = 167°, 178°, … 217°; FT = 171°, 172°, … 223°). The solid lines (Model fit) show the ordinary least squares linear regression forced through the origin and fitted to the PWL (red) and FT (black) data and the light grey dotted line shows a 1:1 line. The *R*2 values for the four different models are shown in the upper right of each panel calculated following the methods outlined in Kozak & Kozak (1995). |

The Nadir linear regression model provides a good overall fit to the observed data and closely follows the 1:1 line in [Figure 10](#fig-lca-vs-ip), with a value of 0.95 and 0.99 for the PWL and FT plot respectively. For the PWL plot, the observed points follow a linear relationship up to a value of around 0.50, above which the increase in interception efficiency levels out. After the Kozak & Kozak (1995) adjustment, a negative *R*2 value was determined for the PWL plot. Some of the scatter observed in the Nadir model shown in [Figure 10](#fig-lca-vs-ip) may be explained by grid cells which observed a greater interception efficiency compared to the corresponding value and can be attributed to the inability of to represent the increase in interception observed within canopy gaps in [Figure 8](#fig-lidar-tf-ip). Conversely, for grid cells where interception efficiency is less than , may be attributed to non-vertical trajectory hydrometeors making their way underneath the canopy as observed by the reduced interception efficiency on the windward edges of individual trees in [Figure 8](#fig-lidar-tf-ip). The latter explanation explains the non-linear relationship observed for the PWL Nadir model in [Figure 8](#fig-lidar-tf-ip).

For the vector-based model, the relationship between interception efficiency and results in *R*2 values of 0.47 and 0.8 for PWL and FT respectively. The increase in interception efficiency with follows a reduced slope compared to the Nadir models with values of 0.71 and 0.68 for the PWL and FT plots respectively. The reduced slope for the vector-based models may be attributed to snowflakes that weaved through and/or bounced off branch elements in addition to some of the UAV-lidar measurement uncertainty which was slightly affected by unloading and redistribution. These processes would have reduced the fraction of snowfall that contacted the canopy, that was intercepted. Model error statistics are presented in [Table 3](#tbl-ip-mod-err) for the Nadir and vector-based models and show the vector-based model provides a better prediction of interception efficiency. However, the detailed point clouds required to derive the values used in this analysis are rarely available and thus more accessible methods to estimate must be obtained to use [Equation 9](#eq-lca-ip).

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| Table 3: Model error statistics provided for predictions of interception efficiency using [Equation 9](#eq-lca-ip) and for different values, as shown in the Model Slope column. Statistics are provided for the PWL and FT forest plots, using leaf contact area canopy metrics adjusted to zenith angles of (0°, 1°, … 30°) and azimuth angles (170°, 171°, … 220°) and nadir zenith angle of 0°. The Mean bias is the difference in the model and observed values, MAE is the mean of the absolute error, RMS Error is the root mean squared error, *R*2 is the coefficient of determination adjusted using Equation 10 in Kozak & Kozak (1995).   | Plot Name | Canopy Metrics | Model Slope | Mean Bias (-) | MAE (-) | RMS Error (-) | R^2 | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | FT | Nadir | 0.993 | 0.022 | 0.071 | 0.099 | 0.507 | | FT | Vector Based | 0.676 | 0.001 | 0.047 | 0.062 | 0.804 | | PWL | Nadir | 0.949 | 0.048 | 0.113 | 0.146 | NA | | PWL | Vector Based | 0.707 | 0.019 | 0.078 | 0.095 | 0.469 | |

## 4.3 The combined influence of trajectory angle and forest structure on interception

[Figure 11](#fig-lca-ht-ws) shows that , measured from VoxRS prior to snowfall on March 13th, increases substantially with simulated hydrometeor trajectory angle and corresponding simulated wind speed. The standard deviation in VoxRS measured , illustrated by the shaded area in [Figure 11](#fig-lca-ht-ws), exhibits the broad range in values for individual grid cells across each forest plot. Despite this large scatter, a systematic increase in the mean across both forest plots results from a rise in the number of canopy elements for more horizontal portions of the hemisphere, when averaged across each forest plot, over all azimuth angles as shown by the solid lines in the top row of [Figure 11](#fig-lca-ht-ws). This results in a large rise in VoxRS measured over relatively common estimated wind speeds. For example, with a wind speed of 1 m s-1 and estimated trajectory angle of 48°, would increase by 0.31 and 0.28 for the PWL and FT forest plots respectively ([Figure 11](#fig-lca-ht-ws)). This is a percentage increase in the plot from nadir of 61 and 95 for PWL and FT respectively. The increase in from , with increasing trajectory angle is shown on the bottom row of [Figure 11](#fig-lca-ht-ws) and exhibits a similar relationship for both forest plots FT and PWL until trajectory angles reach approximately 60°. Beyond 60°, the PWL rate of increase slows as the approaches 1.0, while the FT plot, which has lower , continues to rise until around 75° as a of 1.0 is approached.

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| Figure 11: Plots showing the relationship between hydrometeor trajectory angle (left) and wind speed (right) with mean plot-wide snow-leaf contact area, (top row) and the increase in mean plot-wide , i.e., (bottom row). The hydrometeor trajectory angle is simulated through VoxRS and is measured as degrees from zenith. Simulated wind speed was calculated as a function of hydrometeor trajectory angle by rearranging [Equation 4](#eq-ta) and an observed event hydrometeor velocity of 0.9 m s-1. The solid lines (VoxRS) represent the mean (top row) or increase in mean (bottom row) for a single zenith angle observed from VoxRS across all grid cells for each forest plot and across all azimuth angles. The shaded area represents 1 standard deviation above and below the observed VoxRS mean. The dashed lines (Fitted) represent predictions from [Equation 10](#eq-lca-ac) (top) and [Equation 11](#eq-lca-inc) (bottom). The dotted lines (HP98) represent the predictions from Equation 10 in Hedstrom & Pomeroy (1998). A forested downwind distance of 100 m was used for the HP98 calculation. |

At the stand scale, increasing the hydrometeor trajectory angle A similar rate of increase in was observed between both the FT and PWL forest plots up to around 60° or 1.5 m s-1. was also quantified across trajectory angles for both PWL and FT on March 14th, post snowfall, and showed a negligible effect from canopy snow load.

A function is proposed here to calculate plot scale leaf contact area, (-):

where, is the increase in leaf contact area from which is a function of . To estimate a non-linear least squares regression using a logistic function forced through the origin was fit to the VoxRS measurements at FT and PWL for simulated hydrometeor trajectory angles (see dashed lines in bottom row of [Figure 11](#fig-lca-ht-ws)). The logistic function used to predict as a function of is:

where is the maximum value of , is the x-value of the sigmoid midpoint and is the logistic growth rate or steepness of the curve.

The resulting coefficients for , and after the nls was fit to the VoxRS dataset were 0.66, 34.6 and 22.1 respectively for PWL. For FT the resulting coefficients for , and from nls were 0.66, 34.6 and 22.1 respectively. A logistic function was selected to model this relationship, as its shape was deemed most appropriate to represent the change in with trajectory angle. This choice reflects the observed slow increase in at near vertical trajectory angles, followed by a rapid increase as snowflakes encounter more canopy area in the middle and lower section of individual trees, and the gradual leveling off of as it approaches full coverage (value of 1.0).

Simulated using [Equation 10](#eq-lca-ac) is shown in the dashed lines in the top row of [Figure 11](#fig-lca-ht-ws) and follows closely to the VoxRS measured mean . Model error statistics shown in [Table 4](#tbl-lca-mod-err) demonstrate that [Equation 10](#eq-lca-ac) performed well, with a mean bias and RMSE of 0.001 (-) and 0.0054 (-) respectively for PWL, and -0.0004 (-) and 0.0079 (-) for FT. In contrast, [Table 4](#tbl-lca-mod-err) reveals that the Hedstrom & Pomeroy (1998) method produced significantly less accurate estimates of , with a mean bias and RMSE of -0.201 (-) and 0.233 (-) respectively for PWL, and -0.260 (-) and 0.324 (-) for FT.

The use of [Equation 11](#eq-lca-inc) requires estimates of for a snowfall event. The estimated trajectory angle of 61.5° resulting from the mean wind speed integrated over the canopy height was much higher than the trajectory angles reported in [Figure 9](#fig-hemi-ip-cc). A trajectory angle of 21° and 22° would have resulted from a mean wind speed of 0.36 m s-1 and 0.34 s-1 and a height above the snowpack of 1.32 m and 1.3 m for PWL and FT respectively. Based on the event average snowpack depth at FT station of 1.47 m, this corresponds to 2.79 m and 2.77 m above the ground and fraction of the mean canopy height of 0.27 m and 0.39 for PWL and FT respectively. This corresponds to roughly one-third the canopy height, based on an average of the two forest plots.

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| Table 4: Model error statistics calculated for the prediction of leaf contact area from trajectory angle using [Equation 11](#eq-lca-inc) (nls) and Equation 10 from Hedstrom & Pomeroy (1998) for the PWL and FT forest plots. Mean bias is the difference in the model and observed values, MAE is the mean of the absolute error, RMS Error is the root mean squared error and *R*2 is the coefficient of determination. The units for all metrics are dimensionless. A forested downwind distance of 100 m was used for the HP98 calculation.   | Model | Plot | Mean Bias (-) | MAE (-) | RMS Error (-) | R^2 | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | HP98 | FT | -0.2598 | 0.2598 | 0.3240 | 0.7196 | | HP98 | PWL | -0.2008 | 0.2010 | 0.2326 | 0.4446 | | nls | FT | -0.0004 | 0.0067 | 0.0079 | 0.9987 | | nls | PWL | 0.0010 | 0.0040 | 0.0054 | 0.9990 | |

## 4.4 Throughfall Model Performance

The performance of [Equation 9](#eq-lca-ip) in estimating event throughfall was assessed against UAV-lidar measurements of throughfall for the March 13–14th snowfall event at the plot scale for both FT and PWL. Required values for the model included the mean hydrometeor terminal velocity and total event snowfall was measured at PWL station, and wind speed was determined at height of one-third the mean canopy height using the wind speed profile in [Figure 7](#fig-wind-profiles). Additional model inputs include the mean for each plot which was measured from the VoxRS dataset. An value of 0.836 (-) was found through calibration which provided the best fit between observed and simulated interception efficiency at the plot scale for both FT and PWL.

[Figure 12](#fig-event-tf) shows the vector-based model, computed using [Equation 9](#eq-lca-ip) with adjusted for estimated hydrometeor trajectory angle, closely matches UAV-lidar measurements of throughfall. Observed and modelled values of interception efficiency and are presented in [Table 5](#tbl-vb-plot-err) along with corresponding error statistics. Modelled throughfall from the vector-based model was 16.95 kg m-2 compared to the measured throughfall of 16.6 kg m-2 for PWL. For FT, the modelled throughfall was 21.8 kg m-2, while the measured values where 22.1 kg m-2. The vector-based model shows a lower mean bias of -0.3 kg m-2 for PWL and a negative bias of 0.3 kg m-2 for FT, compared to the larger mean bias of -1.6 kg m-2 for PWL and -0.8 kg m-2 for FT with the nadir-model (calculated using in place of ). Additionally, the vector-based significantly reduces the percent error in predicted throughfall, from -9.4% with the nadir-model to -1.8% with the VB-model for PWL. A smaller improvement is observed for FT, with percent error in predicted throughfall reducing from -3.6% with the nadir-model to -1.4% with the VB-model.

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| Figure 12: Bar chart comparing the observed and modelled mean change in throughfall (𝚫 SWE, kg m⁻²) over the March 13-14 snowfall event averaged over forest plots FT and PWL. The ‘Nadir-model’ used [Equation 9](#eq-lca-ip) not adjusted for trajectory angle (i.e., ) and ‘VB-model’ is from the vector-based (VB) model which uses [Equation 9](#eq-lca-ip) with adjusted for trajectory angle. ‘UAV-lidar’ corresponds to throughfall calculated using [Equation 6](#eq-swe-tf) incorporating UAV-lidar snow depth and snow density from in-situ snow pits. The black horizontal dashed line shows the accumulated SWE (kg m⁻²) over the snowfall event to the PWL station open clearing. |

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| Table 5: Model error statistics for model estimates of snow interception efficiency (ip) and throughfall (tf) compared to measurements of ip and tf using UAV-lidar averaged over the FT and PWL forest plots. Units for ip and tf are (-) and (kg m⁻²) respectively. The vector-based (VB) model utilized [Equation 9](#eq-lca-ip) with adjusted for trajectory angle. The nadir model also utilized [Equation 9](#eq-lca-ip) but was not adjusted for trajectory angle and thus was used instead of . The ‘Obs. Value’ column contains measurements from UAV-lidar while the ‘Mod. Value’ column contains the modelled values. The mean bias was calculated as observed minus modelled and percent error is the percent error between predicted and observed values.   | Plot | Model Type | Value Name | Units | Obs. Value | Mod. Value | Mean Bias | Perc. Error | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | FT | VB-model | ip | - | 0.23 | 0.24 | -0.01 | -4.67 | | FT | Nadir-model | ip | - | 0.23 | 0.20 | 0.03 | 12.10 | | FT | VB-model | tf | kg m⁻² | 22.12 | 21.82 | 0.31 | 1.38 | | FT | Nadir-model | tf | kg m⁻² | 22.12 | 22.91 | -0.79 | -3.58 | | PWL | VB-model | ip | - | 0.42 | 0.41 | 0.01 | 2.54 | | PWL | Nadir-model | ip | - | 0.42 | 0.37 | 0.05 | 12.95 | | PWL | VB-model | tf | kg m⁻² | 16.64 | 16.95 | -0.31 | -1.84 | | PWL | Nadir-model | tf | kg m⁻² | 16.64 | 18.20 | -1.56 | -9.35 | |

# 5. Discussion

The point scale observations presented in [Figure 6](#fig-lai-met-ip) show air temperature had little influence on interception efficiency. This differs from existing studies which suggested either a strong positive (Storck et al., 2002) or negative (Hedstrom & Pomeroy, 1998) relationship. An increase in initial interception efficiency before unloading was observed with increasing wind speed at two locations which were sheltered from the predominant wind direction ([Figure 6](#fig-lai-met-ip), B). This is attributed to an associated increase in with wind speed. These results are consistent with observations by Schmidt & Troendle (1989) who observed a slight increase in snowfall interception with increasing wind speeds up to 6 m s-1 and studies of rainfall interception by Herwitz & Slye (1995) and Van Stan et al. (2011).

Compared to the influence of wind speed, interception efficiency showed a smaller sensitivity to canopy snow load at the point scale ([Figure 5](#fig-scl-ip-avg-event)). The slight increase in interception efficiency for smaller canopy snow loads and decline for larger canopy snow loads is attributed to the influence of canopy snow load on ([Figure 6](#fig-lai-met-ip), C). While small, this effect is consistent with the theory proposed by Satterlund & Haupt (1967) that interception efficiency increases as the canopy fills with snow bridging gaps in the canopy increasing, while later declining due to branch bending and decreased canopy coverage. The observations presented in [Figure 6](#fig-lai-met-ip) and [Figure 3](#fig-scl-w-sf), differ from the Satterlund & Haupt (1967), Hedstrom & Pomeroy (1998), Storck et al. (2002) and Moeser et al. (2015) theories, as canopy snow load increased linearly with snowfalls up to 45 kg m-2 with no evidence of approaching a maximum canopy snow load. The strong exponential decline in interception efficiency observed with increasing event snowfall in Satterlund & Haupt (1967), Hedstrom & Pomeroy (1998), Storck et al. (2002) and Moeser et al. (2015) may have been a result of increased unloading rates as bent bend under heavy snow loads and hence mixed ablation and interception processes to varying degrees. The low sensitivity of interception efficiency with canopy snow load found in this study may be attributed to several factors: a reduced inclusion of ablation processes in the interception efficiency measurements, limited influence of canopy snow load on at this study site, and/or the compensatory effects outlined by Satterlund & Haupt (1967).

Staines & Pomeroy (2023) showed a slight increase in VoxRS between snow-off and snow-on conditions. However, the increase in resulting from snow load in Staines & Pomeroy (2023) was small compared to the substantial rise in due to trajectory angle presented in their study and as shown in [Figure 11](#fig-lca-ht-ws). Both findings from Staines & Pomeroy (2023) corroborate the results reported in this study. Further evidence in support of the relatively small influence of canopy snow load on , contrary to existing maximum canopy snow load theory, is provided by Lundquist et al. (2021). They reported improved simulation of subcanopy snow accumulation without the use of a maximum canopy snow load, when combined with ablation process representations for canopy snow melt, sublimation, wind-induced unloading and temperature induced unloading. Lehtonen et al. (2016) noted that in northern Finland heavy canopy snow loads have been observed to continue increasing until stem breakage, under conditions favourable for the formation of significant rime-ice accretion and limited ablation. Models are available to predict the accretion of ice on tree canopies (e.g., Nock et al., 2016) however, further research is required to understand the canopy snow load required to cause stem breakage across different tree species and canopy loads.

These findings on the limited influence of air temperature and canopy snow load on initial interception challenge the theoretical basis of many existing snow interception parameterizations (Hedstrom & Pomeroy, 1998; Moeser et al., 2015; Satterlund & Haupt, 1967; Storck et al., 2002). To address this a new snow interception parameterization, [Equation 9](#eq-lca-ip), is presented which calculates interception efficiency as a function of and . This new parameterization allows for canopy snow loading processes to be isolated from canopy snow ablation processes and is consistent with current rainfall interception theory (Valante et al., 1997). [Equation 9](#eq-lca-ip) differs only slightly from the original Hedstrom & Pomeroy (1998) parameterization (see Equation 6 in Hedstrom & Pomeroy (1998)), in that it does not calculate interception efficiency as a function of canopy snow load and from the Storck et al. (2002) parameterization who proposed interception efficiency to be constant over time and space. The theoretical basis of the parameter in [Equation 9](#eq-lca-ip) is that the association between and interception efficiency, as shown in [Figure 10](#fig-lca-vs-ip), does not follow a 1:1 line as falling snow hydrometeors may bounce off the canopy elements. Further research is needed to explore how processes such as the increased cohesion and adhesion of snowfall to the canopy at warm temperatures, as observed by Kobayashi (1987), Pfister & Schneebeli (1999), Storck et al. (2002), as well as hydrometeor velocity, particle size, and shape suggested by (Katsushima et al., 2023), may influence the parameter, although these effects were not observed in this study.

Measurements of interception efficiency and canopy structure, as shown in [Figure 8](#fig-lidar-tf-ip), align with the theory proposed by Hedstrom & Pomeroy (1998) which suggests reduced throughfall on the lee side of individual trees. However, an existing method proposed in Hedstrom & Pomeroy (1998) to scale canopy coverage with wind speed failed to reproduce the observations presented in [Figure 11](#fig-lca-ht-ws). A new method is proposed which uses a logistic function to calculate plot-wide as a function of and . Significant scatter in VoxRS measured across the two forest plots, illustrated by the high standard deviation in [Figure 11](#fig-lca-ht-ws), resulted from directional (azimuth) and spatial differences in canopy structure. This large scatter suggests the observed relationships in [Figure 11](#fig-lca-ht-ws) are only applicable at the forest stand scale where the sub metre variability averages out. At this scale, [Equation 11](#eq-lca-inc), which uses trajectory angle alone, could be sufficient to determine and thus . However, [Equation 11](#eq-lca-inc) would not be applicable to areas that have large continuous gap fractions (e.g., forested clear cuts) and should be limited to continuous canopies. Further work is required to refine the relationship proposed in [Equation 11](#eq-lca-inc) across a range of tree species and densities.

It was found that the mean hydrometeor trajectory angle over a snowfall event, required for [Equation 11](#eq-lca-inc), could be predicted by using the observed hydrometeor fall velocity and a mean horizontal wind speed selected at one-third of the canopy height above the ground. A wind speed at one-third the mean canopy height is hypothesized to be important for canopy snow accumulation as a large fraction of the horizontal cross-sectional area is at this height for most needleleaf canopies. Katsushima et al. (2023), also proposed the wind speed at one-third the canopy height for modelling unloading of canopy snow as it corresponds to the centre of gravity when the horizontal projection of the canopy is assumed to be a triangle. However, there is uncertainty in the transferability of one-third canopy height observed here to other environments due to differing tree structures and tree species such as those with a larger trunk space or have more of their canopy contact area at higher heights above the ground (i.e., some deciduous canopies). Moreover, [Equation 4](#eq-ta) assumes a linear hydrometeor trajectory, and does not consider non-linear patterns such as wind flow directions around tree elements, turbulent flow, or differences in wind speed with height.

Although the improvement in performance of the vector-based model over the Nadir model was relatively small, the vector-based model is preferred due to its overall lower error and better representation of physical processes. While the vector-based model acts to increase interception efficiency with wind speed, several studies have shown that canopy snow ablation increases as a result of wind induced unloading (Bartlett & Verseghy, 2015; Betts & Ball, 1997; Lumbrazo et al., 2022; Roesch et al., 2001; Wheeler, 1987). While these studies have been used to develop parameterizations for wind induced unloading, they were not based on direct measurements of canopy snow unloading. Further research and direct in-situ observations of canopy snow ablation are required to refine ablation parameterization.

# 6. Conclusions

New observations of initial snow interception, collected over a wide range of meteorological conditions and canopy structures suggest forest structure is the primary factor governing subcanopy snow accumulation. These findings challenge the theoretical foundation of most existing snow interception parameterizations, which rely on canopy snow load and air temperature as key predictors. At the point scale, high-temporal resolution measurements revealed no evidence of a maximum canopy snow load, even for snowfalls up to 45 kg m-2, nor was there any indication of air temperature influencing the cohesion and adhesion of snowfall to the canopy or branch bending reducing canopy coverage. Instead, wind speed was found to influence interception efficiency by changing the hydrometeor trajectory angle, which can lead to a substantial increase in apparent forest structure or snow-leaf contact area.

At the forest plot scale, UAV-lidar measurements of throughfall collected over a wind-driven snowfall event confirmed the results observed at the point-scale and showed leaf contact area was the main factor governing the interception efficiency at a particular site. The leaf contact area, which accounts for the change in canopy structure with trajectory angle, provided an improved predictor of interception efficiency compared to nadir canopy coverage. Plot-wide canopy structure was shown to be extremely sensitive to simulated hydrometeor trajectory angles. For example, using VoxRS measurements snow-leaf contact area was observed to increase by 95% for simulated hydrometeor trajectories associated with wind speeds of 1 m s-1 compared to vertical hydrometeor trajectories. An existing theoretical relationship did not adequately represent the VoxRS-measured increase in leaf contact area with simulated trajectory angles. Consequently, a new relationship is proposed, which demonstrated good performance at this study site.

The weak association between air temperature and canopy snow load with interception efficiency, coupled with the considerable influence of wind speed, highlights the need for a new snow interception parameterization. A new parameterization is proposed that calculates initial interception, prior to canopy snow ablation, as a function of snowfall and leaf contact area. This parameterization is consistent with many rainfall interception studies, which also separate canopy loading and ablation processes and calculate interception as a function of canopy coverage. Additionally, a second equation is proposed to estimate the increase in leaf contact area from nadir canopy coverage as a function of hydrometeor trajectory angle. This updated snow interception parameterization showed good performance in the subalpine forest in this study, but further validation should be conducted in a range of climates, forest species, and canopy structures. Caution is advised when applying this updated routine with some existing canopy snow ablation parameterizations which may have been calibrated with snow interception routines that also incorporated ablation processes.

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# 8. Data Availability

The data that support the findings in this study will be made publicly available upon publication.

# 9. References

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# 10. Supporting Information

## 10.1 Detailed Description of UAV-Lidar Methodology

The REIGL miniVUX-2 laser operates at a near infrared wavelength with a laser beam footprint of 0.160 m x 0.05 mm (at 100 m above ground). The accuracy and precision of the miniVUX-2 is described by REIGL for a lab environment of 0.015 m and 0.01 m respectively (at 50 m above ground). The miniVUX-2 was configured with a laser pulse repetition rate of 200 kHz, field of view of 360°, scan speed of 31.09 revolutions s-1 and an angular step width of 0.0558°, resulting in an expected an average point cloud density of 107 returns m-2 for each flight path.

Georeferenced point clouds with x, y, and z coordinates for each laser return were generated following methods outlined by Harder et al. (2020) and Staines & Pomeroy (2023) to reconcile survey lidar, IMU and GNSS data. A ground-based GNSS system was positioned on a permanent monument during each survey and underwent precise point positioning (PPP) correction by Natural Resources Canada (2024). Differential GNSS correction of the UAV trajectory was conducted using the ground-based PPP GNSS observations and the POSPac UAV software. The UAV-lidar point clouds were then transformed from a sensor referenced coordinate system to a georeferenced coordinate system (EPSG:32611 - WGS 84 / UTM zone 11N) using the RIEGL Riprocess Software. A vertical offset of up to 6 cm between UAV-lidar flight lines was observed in the resulting point clouds on March 13th and 14th, 2024 and was attributed to IMU position drift. This offset between flight lines was corrected using the BayesStripAlign software v2.24 (BayesMap Solutions, 2024), which reduces relative and absolute uncertainties in the vertical elevation of the point cloud using the ground control points (GCP) collected across the study site using a differential GNSS rover.

Quality control, ground classification and calculation of the change in between two UAV-lidar point clouds was conducted using the LAStools software package (LAStools, 2024). The ground classification was conducted using the “lasground\_new” function (LAStools, 2024) for both the pre and post snowfall event point clouds, with a step size set to 2 m and 8 substeps (ultra\_fine setting). The offset and spike options were set to remove points that are more than 0.1 m above or below the initial ground surface estimate surface which “lasground\_new” fits to the last returns. This function is based on an algorithm outlined by Axelsson (2000), describing the process of making the initial ground surface element.

The change in elevation between the two UAV-lidar surveys was interpreted as the increase in snow accumulation, over the snowfall event. This change was calculated using a point-to-grid subtraction method, using the “lasheight” function from the LAStools (2024) software, as in Deems et al. (2013) and Staines & Pomeroy (2023). The pre snowfall event point cloud from “lasground\_new” by “lasheight” to construct a “ground” TIN. Subsequently, the height of each post snowfall event point above the ground TIN, resulting in a point cloud representing . This point cloud was then converted into a raster of with a grid cell resolution of 5 x 5 cm using the “las2dem” function. Further quality control and resampling of the 5 cm raster of was conducted using the ‘Terra’ R package (Hijmans, 2024). Areas that were disturbed over the snowfall event during the in-situ snow survey and values that exceeded the .999th quantile were removed. To help remove any remaining noise a 25 cm raster was generated by computing the median of the 5 cm values within each 25 cm grid cell.

## 10.2 Linear Regression Models Through the Origin

Kozak & Kozak (1995) noted, the default *R*2 value provided for least squares models forced through the origin by many statistical packages can be misleading. Therefore, these *R*2 values were adjusted using Equation 10 in Kozak & Kozak (1995) and two statistical tests as described by Kozak & Kozak (1995) were used to verify whether a no-intercept model (forced through the origin) was appropriate for this data compared to a with-intercept model. The first test evaluated if the intercept of the with-intercept was significantly different from zero using p-value provided by the ‘summary’ function from the ‘stats’ package in R (R Core Team, 2024). The second test examined if there was a significant difference between the no-intercept and with-intercept models by testing if the residual sum of squares was different between the no-intercept and full model, assessed via Equation 15 in Kozak & Kozak (1995). If the first test indicated a significant difference, and the second did not, the no-intercept model could be deemed statistically justified (Kozak & Kozak, 1995).