Dear Editor,

We are happy to submit our manuscript (“*Survival, growth, and traits of tropical wet forest tree seedlings across an experimental soil moisture gradient in Puerto Rico*”) to be considered for publication in *Ecology and Evolution*.

We believe our study is ideally suited for *Ecology and Evolution* because we use an experimental approach to assess demographic responses across species under a plausible scenario of climate change. Our experiment provides an important foundation for understanding longer-term demographic responses to drought at our study area, the Luquillo Long-Term Ecological Research site. Specifically, we grew seedlings of eight species across an experimental gradient of soil moisture and quantified survival and growth over an eight-month period. We compared demographic responses with inter-specific variation in a suite of 11 functional traits commonly associated with resource strategies and drought tolerance. Species varied considerably in their average demographic rates and responses to variation in soil moisture, and some of these responses were related to species traits. For example, species with relatively conservative resource traits (e.g., high leaf mass per area), had higher survival at low soil moisture while species with more extensive root systems were more sensitive to soil moisture. Overall, our results suggest that increasing drought will favor species with more conservative traits that confer greater survival in low soil moisture conditions.

Thank you for considering our work for publication and please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions.

Sincerely,

Robert Muscarella, on behalf of co-authors

Plant Ecology and Evolution

Uppsala University