

Proposal

Christophe Rouleau-Desrochers

March 20, 2025

Substantive Eligibility

In a context of rapid climate warming caused by increased anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, we need to take rapid and drastic actions to mitigate the future consequences that climate change will cause. Summers are hotter and extreme events such as heat domes and severe drought events are happening more often (REF). These phenomena and their consequences on urban environments and forest ecosystems are widely reported. Indeed, cities are forefront victims of climate change, but they are also important sources of greenhouse gases. People living in cities are already experiencing increased extreme weather events, heat waves and rising sea levels, which are expected to increase in frequency and severity over the next decades. (DAS2024). While decreasing greenhouse gas emissions is a worldwide objective, a local one we can pursue in cities such as Vancouver is by mitigating future impacts of climate change. For instance urban trees provide cooling effects which are especially important during summer heat waves. They also provide carbon sequestration, improve air quality, and increase human health and well-being. The latter is especially important because recent work has shown that human exposed to trees are showing considerable mental health benefits.

In regards to forest ecosystems, increasing evidence shows that the response of trees to climate change will vary a lot by species and location, enlightening the importance of understanding how increased temperature and length of the growing season will affect tree species. Additionally, a common attribution of climate change on forest ecosystem is increased wild fire risk and this is a critical consequence for which we are aware of the mitigation strategy to use. For example, indigenous nations have understood for centuries that prescribed burning can significantly reduce wild fire intensity and severity. This highlights the critical importance of considering indigenous knowledge in our climate change responses policies. In addition to this, recent work has also shown the critical importance of the tree species on fire intensity where forests with a higher proportion of broadleaf tree species usually have lower chances of burning.

EDI and Indigeneity

Bridging the gap between the western view of science and indigenous knowledge is not simple. BC indigenous communities have extremely valuable and deep understanding of the forest ecosystem functioning. They have lived in west-coast boreal forests for centuries and have mitigated the risks of wildfires in a way we have yet to implement in the ways we do forestry. For example, prescribed burning at specific periods and place can significantly reduce the severity of summer wild fires. However, wildfires are only one of the future consequences of climate change on forest ecosystem and the importance of conserving their ancestral lands is of critical importance. If pests infestation, summer drought keep on increasing, we could potentially face a significant decline in BC forests. Planning how climate change will reshape forest ecosystem is hard, but possible and we can act on it. Assisted migration, though controversial, is a popular and widely used technique where trees of certain genotypes are moved to other locations because we expect them to perform better at these places in a close future. Here, I argue that in order to preserve BC old growth

forests and ancestral lands, we should provide data and information to indigenous nations so we can face future environmental change better.

In addition to this, the increased green spaces in cities also have setbacks. Historically impoverished neighborhood in which trees are planted are showing increased gentrification leading. Consequently, urban areas that are usually poor in tree density are the poorest and with increased summer heat waves and the lethal toll that comes with it, impoverished city areas are likely to be significantly more affected than richer neighborhoods.

1 Research Statement

In temperate and boreal forests, temperature plays a crucial role in setting the boundaries for seasonal physiological activity. Thus, with rising temperatures from anthropogenic climate change, the climatically possible growing season has lengthened in many ecosystems worldwide by up to 11 days. Plants have tracked this through shifts in phenology—the study of recurring life history events—which are expected to continue with increasing temperatures. In particular, trees have shifted earlier in the spring and later in the fall. They may use these extra days to fix more carbon and increase growth during the current growing season.

First, I aim to assess tree species' potential to prolong or stretch their activity schedule and if increased carbon pools translate into greater growth increments in the following growing season. I will also investigate potential variations in these responses across deciduous and evergreen species, to test whether different patterns emerge within these distinct groups. In my second chapter, I will investigate how tree growth relates to leaf phenology and across year climate. It will consist of two projects, both consisting of observational data. The first one is of a common garden study of trees grown from saplings (similar life stage to urban tree planting) of four different provenances. My second project consists of using citizen science phenological data and investigate how phenological stages relate to growth for deciduous mature tree species. To investigate the impact of manipulated spring and fall temperatures on phenological responses, I successfully conducted experiments in 2024 across seven different tree species under controlled conditions, including species that span both fast and short-life strategies (e.g., *Populus balsamifera*) and slow growth and longer lifespan species (e.g., *Quercus macrocarpa*) and including both deciduous and evergreen species.(?) I used a full factorial design of spring and fall warming with two levels each (control/warmed) resulting in four treatments plus an additional two treatments to test fall nutrient effects, using 15 replicates each for a total of 630 individual trees. Throughout the growing season of 2024, I tracked phenological events weekly from the start of the spring treatments through the end of the fall treatments. During the growing season of 2025, the same measurements will be performed. In fall 2025, after the trees have grown in ambient temperatures for the season, I will assess growth on the individual (total biomass) and the cellular level (number of cells and their characteristics), using dendrochronological methods. For the first project of my second chapter, leaf phenology was monitored for 5 years and tree cookies were collected in early 2023. Then I will analyse how tree ring width of each of these years relate to leaf phenology and how both of these traits relate to the climate and if trees from different latitude show differences in their capacity to grow. For my second project, I will use the phenological data collected for the past 10 years of a citizen science program called the Treepotters. Then next April, I will collect tree cores from 53 of the mature deciduous trees that were monitored by the Treepotters. Both of these projects will allow me to draw a more complete picture of the underlying mechanisms driving tree growth and its relation to growing season length and temperature. This is critical information as the proportion of trees that are planted in Metro Vancouver are from all of North America – Red maple (*Acer rubrum*), River birch (*Betula nigra*), Yellow birch (*Betula alleghaniensis*), Northern Red Oak), tree species that will be used in my chapters. Having a better understanding of their future growth response in their native habitat could provide better guidance for future tree planting policies in the cities of the greater Vancouver area. The first chapter investigating the impact of longer growing seasons on the following year's growth under experimental condition should be written and ready for publishing in mid-2026. I will

also present Fuelinex experiments at the annual international phenology conference in 2026. The second chapter, which consists of two projects, will be condensed in one scientific article consisting of studies aiming to answer the broad question of the relationship between the growing season length and growth for both juvenile and mature trees. Once this publication is set for revision, I will present my results to the 2025 edition of EcoEvo and of the conference of Ecological Society of America to share the importance of preserving and planning tree species in cities. All treatments for my first chapter have been conducted in 2024. During the growing season of 2025, the same measurements will be performed. In fall 2025, I will assess growth on the individual (total biomass) and the cellular level (number of cells and their characteristics), using dendrochronological methods. Phenological measurements have been cleaned and preliminary analyses have been conducted. For my second chapter, tree cookies have been prepared for dendrochronological measurements. Tree ring widths have been measured and model development is ongoing. Treepotters data have already been collected and tree cores will be collected in the end of April of 2025. Preliminary analyses of the phenological measurements indicate longer seasons when spring is early and fall is warmer. • Chapter 1 data collection and analyses will be completed in early 2026. The results and discussion will be written in February and March 2026. The introduction, methods and abstract will be written in April 2026 and the paper will be sent for peer-review revision in June 2026. • Chapter 2 data collection and analyses will be completed in August 2025. The paper will be written in September to November and will be sent for peer-review revision in December of 2025. Being 7 months into my Master's, I have already successfully completed all the treatments and half the data collection from my main chapter. The second chapter is also well underway. I currently building robust statistical models for the tree cookies which will be further applied to the data extracted from the tree cores that will be collected in April. I am confident that my thesis will be completed by August 2026. As a large proportion of my data collection has already been done and that my statistical analyses are underway, I believe that the chapter writing will feasibly be completed between September 2025 and March 2026. These chapters will then be sent to revision by my supervisor and my committee meeting in April 2026 and my defense will take place during that period. I am confident that the final submission should be done in July 2026.