Foster 1992 Discussion

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What did you like about this paper?

Foster et al. 1992 provides a compelling series of explanations for the restructuring of New England forest types and extent due to the interaction of environmental covariates and subsequent fluctuations in land ownership and use. While I have little experience with terrestrial systems, I found Foster's documentation of the dynamic vegetation and associated human activity to be accessible and well supported by accompanying interval maps and canonical correspondence analysis.

What advances do you think the paper made in regards to spatial ecology?

Foster appears to include several approaches that are new to his timeframe. For instance, in prior courses, we discussed CCA as being introduced in the late 1980s, so this was likely a new technique for forest ecologists. Likewise, the ability to quantify and deduce the impact of soil drainage, predominant vegetation type/transition state, and past human activity using GIS and township-level bins seems significant. I am not familiar with the literature in this area, however, I was impressed by Foster's ability to bin and capture predominant trends in160 years of interacting environmental, spatial, and land-use quality within two CCA axes.

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Did the paper change your thinking? What relevance, if any, might it have for your own research?

This paper surprised me ecologically because one of Foster's predominant points is that regardless of spatial scale, land use and responding vegetation type is constantly changing. This fact was unexpected because I expected New England to exhibit periods of stagnation followed by rapid change during shifts in lifestyle (such as industrialism, drought, emigration and immigration). While these patterns are far removed from my research on Bering Sea phytoplankton, Foster's methods provided several ideas for my research. I would like to conduct a similar style county-level separation but instead of vector-based spatial segments of Bering Sea regions (such as those naturally broken by the 70m isobath and 60 degree north shift where sea ice becomes more prevalent). It is unclear to me whether CCA would be conducive for handling species-level abundance differences in this type of scenario, but it may be worth trying.

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