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Seedling growth and water use of boreal conifers across different temperatures and near-flooded soil conditions

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Abstract: To test the hypothesis that seedling growth and water use increase with soil temperature and improved soil aeration and vary with species, we evaluated the above- and below-ground growth and water use of seedlings of four northern boreal conifer species: black spruce (*Picea mariana* (Mill.) B.S.P.), white spruce (*Picea glauca* (Moench) Voss), tamarack (*Larix laricina* (Du Roi) K. Koch), and lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta* Dougl. ex Loud.) grown under different temperature and near-flooded soil conditions. Seedlings were grown in specialized pots that maintained the water table level at either 15 cm (high water table treatment: very wet) or 30 cm (low water table treatment: moderately wet) below the soil surface, and whole-seedling transpiration was assessed. Soil temperature (5, 10, or 20 °C) was controlled with a water bath surrounding the pots. Although some species were sensitive to the high water table treatment, soil temperature was the driver of seedling growth and water use. We ranked the ability of the seedlings of the species to tolerate the cold soil conditions examined as black spruce > lodgepole pine > tamarack > white spruce. The ranking of the ability to tolerate near-flooded conditions was tamarack and lodgepole pine > black spruce > white spruce.

Résumé : Pour tester l'hypothèse que la croissance et l'utilisation de l'eau par les semis augmentent avec la température du sol et une meilleure aération du sol, nous avons évalué la croissance aérienne et souterraine et l'utilisation de l'eau par les semis de quatre espèces boréales de conifère : l'épinette noire (*Picea mariana* (Mill.) B.S.P.), l'épinette blanche (*Picea glauca* (Moench) Voss), le mélèze laricin (*Larix laricina* (Du Roi) K. Koch) et le pin tordu (*Pinus contorta* Dougl. ex Loud.) cultivés à différentes températures dans un sol quasi inondé. Les semis ont été cultivés dans des pots spéciaux qui maintenaient le niveau de la nappe phréatique soit à 15 cm (niveau de la nappe phréatique élevé : très humide, soit à 30 cm (niveau de la nappe phréatique bas : modérément humide) sous la surface du sol et la transpiration globale des semis a été mesurée. La température du sol (5, 10 ou 20 °C) était contrôlée par un bassin d'eau qui contenait les pots. Bien que certaines espèces fussent sensibles au traitement niveau de la nappe phréatique élevé, la température du sol était le facteur qui déterminait la croissance des semis et l'utilisation de l'eau. Nous avons classé les différentes espèces selon leur capacité à tolérer des conditions de température du sol plus froides. On retrouve dans l'ordre de l'espèce la plus tolérante à la moins tolérante : l'épinette noire, le pin tordu, le mélèze laricin et l'épinette blanche. De la même façon, selon leur capacité à tolérer des conditions de quasi-inondation, on retrouve sur le même pied, le mélèze laricin et le pin tordu suivis de l'épinette noire et de l'épinette blanche.

[Traduit par la Rédaction]

Introduction

In the boreal plain of North America, many forest sites are located on low-lying areas with flat topography and soils of poor internal drainage. In combination with the cold boreal climate and low decomposition and low evapotranspiration rates, anaerobic conditions may develop in the root zone, as microbial activity is decreased/inhibited (Prescott et al. 2000), resulting in the development of thick organic soils (Van Cleve et al. 1983; Bonan and Shugart 1989). Further, wet soils in northern latitudes tend to be cold. Wet soils have much higher thermal conductivity than dry soils (Oke 1987), which promotes deeper penetration of frost into the

soil profile during the long winters. Thus, warming of wet soils in the spring is significantly delayed. Forestry practices that remove leaf area and with that evapotranspiration from the forest canopy can result in greater soil moisture storage and elevated water tables (Dubé et al. 1995; Crawford et al. 2003).

Poorly aerated soil conditions resulting from high water tables are known to reduce tree growth (Levan and Riha 1986; Lieffers and Rothwell 1986; Grossnickle 1987) and low soil temperatures decrease root growth (Tryon and Chapin 1983), slow the rate of nutrient and water uptake (Running and Reid 1980; Grossnickle and Blake 1985), and reduce the rate of

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