

# 1 **Negligible structural development and edge influence on the** 2 **understorey at 16-17 year old clearcut edges in black spruce** 3 **forest**

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## 16 17 **Abstract**

18 **Questions:** What is the distance of edge influence on the structure and understorey composition  
19 at 16-17 year old cut edges in black spruce boreal forest? How do these edges compare with  
20 more recent 2-5 year old cut edges in the same region?

21 **Location:** Northwestern Quebec, Canada

22 **Methods:** Forest structure and understorey composition were sampled along transects  
23 perpendicular to ten 16-17 year old clearcut edges, and compared to published results from 2-5  
24 year old cut edges. We used randomization tests to assess the magnitude and distance of edge  
25 influence, and to compare edge influence between different edge ages.

26 **Results:** Black spruce forest next to the 16-17 year old cut edges was structurally and  
27 compositionally very similar to interior forest with little edge influence from harvesting beyond  
28 5 m into the forest. Edge influence on the understorey was weak (low magnitude) and not very  
29 extensive (short distance) at these edges with no significant edge influence on the abundance of

1 individual species. Logs peaked in abundance on the forest side of the edge with values higher  
2 than in either adjacent ecosystem.

3 **Conclusions:** Overall, 16-17 year old cut edges in black spruce forest showed little evidence of  
4 further structural change compared to the 2-5 year old cut edges. Structural development of these  
5 edges as well as regeneration of the disturbed areas also resulted in reduced edge influence on  
6 the understorey. Instead, clearcut edges in black spruce forest may experience more forest  
7 influence on the regenerating disturbed area.

8

9 **Keywords**

10 Cut edges; Deadwood; Edge development; Edge influence; Structural development

11

12 **Nomenclature**

13 Marie-Victorin (1995)

14

## 1 **Introduction**

2

3 An increased amount of edge habitat has long been recognized as an important consequence of  
4 fragmentation from forest harvesting (e.g., Wales 1972, Ranney et al. 1981, Chen et al. 1992).  
5 However, there have been few studies on the edges of regenerating harvested areas beyond the  
6 first decade after harvesting, which are needed for a comprehensive perspective on the  
7 spatiotemporal dynamics of forest edges (but see recent studies Chabrierie et al. 2013; Dupuch &  
8 Fortin 2013). Edge structure changes over time, resulting in dynamic boundaries and subsequent  
9 effects on the adjacent plant communities. Successional processes on the forest side of created  
10 edges are driven by microclimatic effects, changes in resource availability and population  
11 dynamics of individual species in the absence of vegetation removal or soil disturbance. Tree  
12 mortality and regeneration are key processes in the development of created edges. Resulting  
13 effects on understorey species may differ, such as between shade tolerant and shade intolerant  
14 understorey species (e.g., Avon et al. 2013).

15 At edges of regenerating clearcuts, edge influence on the adjacent forest may decrease over  
16 time as the contrast between adjacent communities is reduced (Matlack 1994; Harper &  
17 Macdonald 2002), resulting in ‘edge softening’ (Harper et al. 2005). Alternatively, structural  
18 changes may continue at the edge due to wind effects on tree mortality and structural damage,  
19 particularly in forests with slow regeneration. At these edges, changes in the understorey may  
20 persist due to long-term exposure to greater light and wind before the regenerating forest has  
21 reached the same height as the undisturbed forest. Evidence of progressive edge influence on  
22 understorey plant species composition as a result of structural deterioration at created edges has  
23 been found such as an increase in the proportion of understorey species influenced by the edge  
24 after 16 years (Harper & Macdonald 2002) and persistence and even expansion of edge influence  
25 (increasing distance of edge influence) on understorey vegetation for 60 years (Dupuch & Fortin  
26 2013).

27 Boreal forests provide a simplified ecosystem for studying the progression of edge influence  
28 over time; in these mostly monospecific forest stands, effects of structural development at edges  
29 can be studied in isolation of effects from changes in tree species composition. We investigated  
30 forest structure and composition across 16-17 year old cut edges in black spruce boreal forest  
31 and compared our results with those of more recent 2-5 year old cut edges in forests with similar

1 structure and composition (Harper et al. 2004). Previous studies have found that edge influence  
2 on vegetation does not extend very far at recent cut edges in boreal forests (Harper et al. 2004,  
3 2015). The short canopy height and open canopy structure could maintain conditions for weaker  
4 and even less extensive edge influence on the forest over time as the adjacent harvested stand  
5 regenerates, blocking out edge influence on light and wind. An alternative hypothesis is that  
6 further structural damage could occur resulting in the persistence and possible expansion of edge  
7 influence over time. We assessed edge development and change in edge influence over time in  
8 black spruce forest, focusing on edge creation after ample time for the manifestation of initial  
9 edge effects. We characterized edge structure and assessed the effects of edge development on  
10 understorey composition and diversity. Our objectives were: 1) to determine edge influence on  
11 structure and understorey plant composition at 16-17 year old cut edges in black spruce boreal  
12 forest and 2) to compare these patterns of structure and composition with those across more  
13 recent 2-5 year old cut edges in the same region.

14

## 15 **Methods**

16

### 17 **Study site**

18

19 Our study site was in black spruce boreal forest in the Abitibi region in northwestern Québec  
20 (49°40' 24" N, 79°18' 54" W, Fig. 1). The area is part of the Lake Matagami Lowland ecoregion  
21 (Saucier et al. 1998) in the northern Clay Belt, a broad physiographic unit characterized by  
22 lacustrine deposits from the proglacial lakes Barlow and Objibway (Vincent & Hardy 1977). The  
23 topography is relatively flat at an elevation of approximately 300 m asl. Soils are predominantly  
24 organic, with clay deposits and some till (Gauthier et al. 2000). According to a nearby weather  
25 station in La Sarre, Quebec (48°46' N; 79°06' W; Environment Canada 1993), mean annual  
26 temperature is 0.8°C, annual precipitation is 856 mm, and there are 64 frost-free days. Mean  
27 annual wind speed was not available at the La Sarre station but ranged from 3.3 to 3.5 m/s at  
28 other stations in the region (Amos, Matagami and Rouyn-Noranda, Ilinca et al. 2003).

29 The forest mosaic in our study area is part of the *Picea mariana*-moss bioclimatic domain  
30 (Saucier et al. 1998). *Picea mariana* was dominant in all sampled forest stands; other tree species  
31 included *Pinus banksiana*, *Betula papyrifera*, *Populus tremuloides*, *Populus balsamifera* and

1 *Larix laricina*. The average canopy cover was 40% and the average stand height was 13 m  
2 (Table 1). The region is characterized by large crown fires that kill most of the trees and  
3 aboveground vegetation (Bergeron et al. 2002). Most unharvested forest stands in our study  
4 originated from fire around 1725 or 1825 with relatively little natural or anthropogenic  
5 disturbance since then. Stands next to our studied cut edges were clearcut in 1984 or 1985. No  
6 herbicides were used before or after harvesting. Harvested stands were not replanted; in most  
7 areas, natural regeneration had not yet become trees (> 5 cm dbh) at the time of sampling.  
8 Canopy height ranged from 3 to 7 m for the few sites where trees had regenerated. The study site  
9 for the 2-5 year old cut edges was located 20 km to the east; these forest stands dominated by  
10 *Picea mariana* also originated from fire mostly in the 1700s and had 45% canopy cover and an  
11 average height of 12 m (Harper et al. 2004). Clearcut harvesting is the only prominent land use  
12 in this forested landscape, which is otherwise dominated by a natural fire disturbance regime.

13

#### 14 Data collection

15

16 We established a single transect perpendicular to each of ten 16-17 year old abrupt clearcut  
17 edges (Fig. 1, Table 1). Sampling was conducted between June and August, 2001. Transects  
18 were at least 100 m away from other transects, corners of clearcuts and major forest openings in  
19 the forest stands or forest remnants in the cutblocks. Edges spanned a range of aspects in this  
20 study and in the study of 2-5 year old cut edges (Harper et al. 2004). Stand age, canopy cover  
21 and height varied among forest stands next to cut edges (Table 1).

22 For each transect, 20 x 5 m rectangular plots, length parallel to the forest edge, were centred  
23 at the following distances along each transect: -50, -15, -5, 0, 5, 15, 25, 40, 60, 100, 150 and 200  
24 m from the edge into the adjacent forest (negative distances indicate the clearcut side of the  
25 edge). The plot at 0 m straddled the forest edge, which was located at the edge of the continuous  
26 forest canopy. Plots were included on the disturbance side of the edge to encompass the entire  
27 transition zone. We used data collected at 100, 150 and 200 m to characterize interior forest. A  
28 synthesis of studies on edges in boreal forests across Canada and in Finland and Sweden found  
29 that edge influence on several vegetation responses rarely extended more than 20 m into the  
30 forest (Harper et al. 2015). Two 2 x 2 m shrub subplots and four 0.5 x 0.5 m herb subplots were

1 established systematically along the major axis of every plot (shrub and herb subplots at either  
2 end of the 20 x 5 m plot, and two extra herb subplots 3 m from either side of the centre).

3 Trees (> 5 cm dbh) and snags (standing dead trees > 5 cm dbh and > 50 cm tall) were tallied  
4 in the 20 x 5 m plots; the relative height of all trees and snags was estimated as dominant, co-  
5 dominant, intermediate or suppressed (Côté 2000). Although we identified tree species and  
6 calculated tree species diversity, we do not report the results, which were similar to tree density,  
7 because 93% of trees were *P. mariana*. We tallied the number of logs (downed coarse woody  
8 material) intersecting the major axis of the plot (> 5 cm diameter at the intersection point). Decay  
9 stage was evaluated for all snags (classes 1-5, Thomas et al. 1979) and logs (classes 1-5, Maser  
10 et al. 1979); deadwood in decay class 1 is the least decomposed. Canopy cover was measured at  
11 the centre of each plot using a convex spherical densitometer facing both directions of the  
12 transect. Height of the tallest tree was measured in the 60 m plots using a clinometer as a proxy  
13 for canopy height; because of the uneven structure of the canopy, average tree height would not  
14 adequately characterize canopy height.

15 Within the shrub subplots, we visually estimated the cover for each shrub species (> 50 cm  
16 tall) and for all shrub species combined, and we counted the number of seedlings (< 1 m tall),  
17 saplings established from layering (< 1 m tall) and taller saplings (> 1 m tall, < 5 cm dbh). Cover  
18 of litter and of each species of herbs, ground layer common mosses and macrolichens and dwarf  
19 woody plants (< 50 cm height) was visually estimated within the herb subplots to the nearest 1%  
20 up to 5% and to the nearest 10% thereafter.

## 21 22 Data analysis

23  
24 We assessed edge influence for the following categories of response variables: overstorey  
25 structure (canopy cover, and tree, snag and log densities), understorey structure (total cover of  
26 shrubs, herbs, moss and lichens), regeneration (densities of *Picea mariana* layers, seedlings,  
27 saplings and suppressed trees) and cover of individual species (shrubs, herbs, moss and lichens).  
28 Data from subplots were averaged for each plot. Diversity was calculated separately for shrubs,  
29 herbs, mosses and lichens using the Shannon Index; calculations were made using cover values  
30 at the subplot level and then averaged for each plot. We defined structural diversity as the  
31 number and abundance of different combinations of height, dbh and decay stages of trees, snags

1 and logs (cf. Spies & Franklin 1988). We calculated structural diversity for each plot using the  
2 Shannon index,  $H = \sum(p_i \ln(p_i))$ , where  $p_i$  = the proportion of trees, snags or logs within specific  
3 categories of height, dbh and decay.

4 For each response variable, we calculated both the magnitude of edge influence (MEI) and the  
5 distance of edge influence (DEI). The MEI is a measure of the strength of edge influence, which  
6 varies between -1 and 1. We calculated MEI as  $(\bar{x}_d - \bar{x}_i) / (\bar{x}_d + \bar{x}_i)$ ; where  $\bar{x}_d$  = average of a  
7 variable at distance  $d$  from the edge and  $\bar{x}_i$  = average of a variable in interior forest (distances  
8 100, 150 and 200 m from the edge) (Harper et al. 2005).

9 To quantify DEI, we used the randomization test of edge influence (RTEI, Harper &  
10 Macdonald 2011), which tests the significance of values of response variables for each distance  
11 from the edge separately using randomization tests of the data at a given distance from the edge  
12 and in the interior forest. When compared to other methods for determining DEI, RTEI was the  
13 only method that was generally invariable to sampling design while being sensitive to variation  
14 in the reference ecosystem but not at the edge (Harper & Macdonald 2011). We used RTEI with  
15 blocking using the RTEI Add-In (Harper & Macdonald 2011) in Microsoft Excel 2007  
16 (Microsoft Corporation 2007). The RTEI analysis was done separately for each response variable  
17 and for each distance from the edge using the following steps (Harper & Macdonald 2011). (1)  
18 For each transect, we randomly selected an 'edge' value from the data set consisting of the value  
19 at a given distance from the edge and all interior forest values for that transect. (2) Randomized  
20 differences were calculated between the average of the randomly selected 'edge' values and the  
21 average of all the remaining 'interior' values. (3) These first two steps were repeated for a total  
22 of 5000 permutations to create a distribution of randomized differences. (4) The percentile of the  
23 observed difference between the average of the observed edge values and the average of the  
24 observed interior values within the distribution of the randomized differences was compared to  
25 the p-value, for which we used  $p = 0.05$ . DEI was then estimated as the set of two or more  
26 consecutive distances (or separated by one distance) over which the average response was  
27 significant. We used this definition of DEI in order to counteract effects of multiple testing.

28 We directly compared forest structure and composition between 16-17 year old and 2-5 year  
29 old cut edges using data from Harper et al. (2004), which were supplemented by two additional  
30 transects with data collected following the same methods in 2001 such that sample size was ten  
31 for both ages of cut edges. We did these comparisons regardless of whether edge influence was

1 significant for the older cut edges because we wanted to test for differences in edge influence  
2 between edge ages, which could include edge influence at the younger but not older edges. For  
3 the analysis, we introduce the RTEI for unpaired edge comparisons, which determines the DEI  
4 over which there was a significant difference in response variables between the two time periods.  
5 It is a modification of the critical values approach for edge comparisons used in Harper et al.  
6 (2004) and we have now added it to the RTEI Add-In in Excel written using VisualBasic (Harper  
7 & Macdonald 2011). For each variable, we determined whether the difference in values between  
8 the two edge ages at different distances from the edge was significant by randomizing the values  
9 at a given distance from the edge and interior values using the following steps. (1) For each edge  
10 age, we randomly selected an 'edge' value for each transect from a data set of the value at a  
11 given distance from the edge and all interior values for that transect. (2) We randomly assigned  
12 these 'edge' values as ten young and ten older 'edge' values. (2) We calculated a randomized  $t$ -  
13 value between the two sets of values (randomly selected 'edge' values for each edge age from  
14 Step 2). (3) These first two steps were repeated for a total of 5000 permutations. (4) The  
15 percentile of the observed  $t$ -value within the distribution of the randomized  $t$ -values was  
16 compared to half the  $p$ -value for a two-tailed test. We used the same  $p$ -value and procedure for  
17 estimating DEI as above. By including the interior forest conditions near each edge age, this  
18 approach controls for regional variation that is not due to edge influence, and thus is more  
19 appropriate than a standard  $t$ -test.

20 Additional comparisons of species composition between forest stands across young and  
21 older cut edges was done using ordination analysis on the combined species composition data  
22 from this study and from Harper et al. (2004). Understorey composition was assessed using the  
23 ordination scores on the first and second axes from a non-metric multidimensional scaling  
24 (NMDS) with a Bray-Curtis similarity measure with two predefined axes on the cover values of  
25 common species (overall frequency > 5%, total of 31 species) of shrubs, herbs, mosses and  
26 lichens from all plots across these two sets of edges using PAST (Hammer et al. 2001). Separate  
27 analyses for DEI were performed using RTEI for the two edge ages to assess edge influence on  
28 species composition as indicated by the ordination scores (n=10 transects). MEI could not be  
29 determined because of negative ordination scores.

30

## 31 **Results**



1  
2 Overall, edge influence rarely extended beyond 5 m into the forest, which resulted in a narrow  
3 transition zone at 16-17 year old cut edges in black spruce boreal forest that was only slightly  
4 different from interior forest (Table 2). Estimates of MEI were also low ( $< 0.2$ ) for most  
5 variables except for canopy cover, tree and log density, litter cover, moss diversity and *Cladonia*  
6 spp. Although lower canopy cover extended 5 m into the forest, tree and snag density was only  
7 significantly lower in the clearcut or right at the edge compared to interior forest. The only  
8 evidence of extensive structural change beyond 5 m into the forest was greater log density up to  
9 60 m into the forest compared to interior forest. There was no significant edge influence on  
10 shrub, herb or lichen cover. Lower moss cover and greater litter cover in the disturbed area and  
11 at the edge both had a DEI of -50 to 5 m. Structural diversity on the forest side of the edge but  
12 not on the disturbed side was generally similar to interior forest with negative edge influence on  
13 tree and snag structural diversity extending only to 0 and -5 m. Edge influence on log structural  
14 diversity was positive (greater values at the edge compared to the interior) and extended well  
15 into the forest. For species diversity, only lichen diversity had significant edge influence on the  
16 disturbed side of cut edges.

17 Edge influence on species composition and individual species did not extend into the forest  
18 side of the edge. Species composition as measured by the site scores along the first and second  
19 ordination axes (stress = 0.34, R-square = 0.43 and 0.31 for axes 1 and 2, respectively) was not  
20 significantly different at the edge nor in the disturbed area compared to the interior forest (RTEI  
21 analysis, results not shown). Only two species each had greater or lower cover in the disturbed  
22 area compared to interior forest with DEIs that were limited to the disturbed side of the edge  
23 (Table 2). The species with positive EI were *Cladonia* spp. and *Vaccinium myrtilloides*, and  
24 those with negative EI were *Ledum groenlandicum* and *Rubus chamaemorus*.

25 Overall, edge influence was more extensive (greater DEI) for a greater proportion of variables  
26 for overstorey structure and structural diversity as compared to understorey structure and species  
27 diversity (Fig. 2A, B). This comparison is particularly noteworthy within the cut area but also  
28 extends across the edge and into the forest. Edge influence on individual species was very  
29 uncommon even in the cut area and absent from the edge and the forest (Fig. 2C).

30 Patterns across the edge-to-interior gradient differed among different decay stages of  
31 deadwood and different sizes of regenerating trees (Fig. 3). Snags were scarce in the harvested

1 area with greater amounts in the forest. However, different patterns were noted for logs with a  
2 peak at the forest side of the edge for less decayed logs and a decrease towards the forest for  
3 well-decayed logs. There was a slight peak in seedling density at the edge but layering increased  
4 towards the forest. For taller saplings, there was a trough in density and there were few  
5 suppressed trees within the disturbed area, indicating that regenerating saplings had not yet  
6 reached the size of trees (dbh > 5 cm).

7 Differences between 16-17 and 2-5 year old cut edges were often significant; DEI for these  
8 differences extended up to 60 m (Figs. 4-5). Compared to the younger cut edges, tree density was  
9 lower at the older edges despite greater canopy cover 15-25 m from the edge (Fig. 4A, B). The  
10 16-17 year old cut edges had more logs on the forest side of the edge but fewer logs within the  
11 harvested area than at younger cut edges (Fig. 4C). Compared to the 2-5 year old cut edges, the  
12 16-17 year old cut edges had greater shrub and moss cover, and less litter in the disturbed area,  
13 but lower moss cover 15-25 m into the forest (Fig. 4D-F). Tree diversity was lower at or near the  
14 16-17 year old cut edges compared to the 2-5 year old ones, whereas log diversity was greater on  
15 the forest side of the older cut edges (Fig. 5A, B). At 16-17 year old cut edges, there was greater  
16 shrub and herb diversity at 0 m, but lower herb diversity at 15-25 m compared to the younger  
17 edges (Fig. 5C, D). The cover of five (*Gaultheria hispidula*, *Ledum groenlandicum*, *Pleurozium*  
18 *schreberi*, *Smilacina trifolia*, *Sphagnum* spp.) out of the seventeen common species was greater  
19 (DEI up to -15, 0, -5, -5 and 60 m, respectively) at 16-17 year old cut edges compared to 2-5 year  
20 old ones, whereas no species had lower cover at the older cut edges.

21

## 22 **Discussion**

23

24 After 16-17 years, edges of black spruce forest stands in our study region remained relatively  
25 unaffected from forest harvesting beyond 5 m into the forest. We provide further evidence that  
26 edge influence on many aspects of forest structure and composition is substantially less in the  
27 boreal forest than in other forest ecosystems (Harper et al. 2015), particularly compared to DEIs  
28 of more than 50 m at regenerating cut edges in other ecosystems (e.g., Chen et al. 1992; Burton  
29 2002). Reasons for the smaller DEI at edges in the boreal forest include shorter canopy height,  
30 heterogeneous forest and frequent natural disturbance (Harper et al. 2015). Greater DEI has been  
31 found in other shorter open-canopied forests such as in Brazilian cerrado (Dodonov et al. 2013),

1 but this may be due more to the invasion of non-native grasses rather than microclimate  
2 (Mendonça et al. 2015). The extremely small DEI at the older edges we studied is likely a  
3 combination of widely-spaced black spruce trees with a short canopy height and very low canopy  
4 cover. Instead of edge influence, forest characteristics often extended into the disturbed area  
5 resulting in negative DEI estimates that were restricted to harvested areas away from the edge.  
6 This phenomenon known as ‘forest influence’ has important implications for silviculture and  
7 biodiversity conservation (Baker et al. 2013). Baker et al. (2014) found that forest influence on  
8 microclimate in Tasmania peaked at 27 years following harvest. The influence of edges at  
9 clearcuts in black spruce forest may have more effects on regeneration in the disturbance rather  
10 than on the adjacent undisturbed forest. Sampling multiple distances at both sides of the edge and  
11 in both reference ecosystems would allow for an assessment of the magnitude and distance of  
12 both forest influence and edge influence (e.g., Franklin et al. 2015).

13

14 Structural development of edges of clearcuts in black spruce forest

15

16 We did not find any evidence for our hypothesis of further structural damage after 16-17 years of  
17 edge development compared to 2-5 years. The general lack of increased structural change at the  
18 cut edges we studied was similar to other cut edges in black spruce forest (Dupuch & Fortin  
19 2103) and fire edges (Harper et al. 2014). The abrupt gradient in overstorey structure at these 16-  
20 17 year old black spruce edges continues to be sustained and even enhanced with an increase in  
21 canopy cover at older compared to younger cut edges. Our findings are similar to aspen-  
22 dominated boreal forest in Alberta (DEI = 0-10 m for lower canopy cover, Harper & Macdonald  
23 2002). However, windthrow or increased mortality due to edge influence has been observed in  
24 temperate, tropical and even sub-boreal forests (e.g., Chen et al. 1992; Laurance et al. 1998;  
25 Burton 2002), which suggests that structural damage may continue well into the first two  
26 decades following edge creation only in taller, denser forests. In our study, the resistance to  
27 increased windthrow at their edges may be due to the uneven and relatively open canopy  
28 structure of old stands; old uneven-aged black spruce forests are less susceptible to windthrow  
29 than even-aged younger forests (Lavoie et al. 2012). However, there was some evidence of  
30 structural change over time. Fewer trees, more logs and greater log diversity on the forest side of  
31 the edge, despite greater canopy cover, suggests that there may have been some earlier mortality.

1 A peak in abundance of recently decayed logs at the edges we studied provides additional  
2 evidence for a phenomenon of greater amounts of less decayed deadwood at older edges as was  
3 found at 13 and 25 year old fire edges in black spruce forest (Harper et al. 2014). There was also  
4 a greater abundance of logs at edges of 16 year old (but not 5 year old) harvested areas compared  
5 to interior forest (Harper & Macdonald 2002). Greater abundance of less decayed logs at edges  
6 compared to both adjacent ecosystems may be due to either slower decomposition at edges  
7 compared to disturbed areas or a delay in mortality and windthrow of trees as compared to the  
8 disturbed area, as hypothesized for fire edges by Harper et al. (2014). However, Hope et al.  
9 (2003) found that post-harvest litter decomposition was not affected by distance from the edge in  
10 Douglas fir forests and decomposition was higher for lower fire severity in black spruce forests  
11 (Boulanger et al. 2011). Redding et al. (2004) suggests that nitrification within clearcuts may be  
12 more affected by substrate than by soil temperature and moisture. Therefore, decomposition rate  
13 may not be a factor in explaining the pattern of logs that we observed. Delayed tree mortality in  
14 forest fragments and at forest edges has been observed in many ecosystems (e.g., Esseen 1994;  
15 Laurance et al. 1998; Burton 2002). We also found evidence of earlier tree mortality following  
16 edge creation at cut edges from significantly greater amounts of recent snags at older compared  
17 to younger cut edges (results not shown), similar to Ferguson & Elkie (2003) and Jönsson et al.  
18 (2007). Even anthropogenically created edges appear to provide a different habitat in terms of  
19 deadwood than the adjacent ecosystems, and may not be simply an intermediate transition zone.

20

#### 21 Impact of edge structural development on understorey composition

22

23 Because we found no evidence of further structural damage at cut edges in black spruce forest, it  
24 is no surprise that we also reject our second hypothesis that this would have resulted in the  
25 persistence or even possible expansion of edge influence on the understorey. Indeed, we  
26 observed a marked decrease in edge influence on understorey structure and composition. Overall,  
27 edge influence on the understorey was much less than on the overstorey at these 16-17 year old  
28 edges. The understorey of the older cut areas was more developed than that of the younger  
29 clearcuts with greater cover of shrubs and moss, and less litter; but changes at the cut edges were  
30 more modest. Without any further structural damage to the canopy, the overall effect on  
31 understorey structure was a relaxation of patterns across the cut edges, which Matlack (1994)

1 also found for edge-related patterns of plant species composition. Dupuch & Fortin (2013) found  
2 similar results to ours at 15-46 year old cut edges (DEI = 10 m) but persistent and expanding  
3 edge influence at very old cut edges (> 46 years after logging) in black spruce boreal forest  
4 stands. Our combined results suggest that in black spruce forest, edge influence may remain  
5 minimal for a couple of decades following edge creation and expand after a time lag; but more  
6 research is needed to fully understand edge development over time in these forests.

7 We found greater regeneration only in terms of seedling density on the disturbed side of the  
8 edge, but greater recruitment in terms of understorey tree density has been found at other edges  
9 (e.g., Chen et al. 1992; Baker & Dillon 2000; Burton 2002; Harper & Macdonald 2002). More  
10 seedlings at the edge may be due to better seedbed conditions from windthrow that causes  
11 increased soil disturbance (e.g., Esseen 1994), more favourable microclimatic conditions such as  
12 greater light and temperature (e.g., Chen et al. 1995) or the seed rain from black spruce semi-  
13 serotinous cones on the trees at the edge of the adjacent intact forest (cf. Greene & Johnson  
14 1996). Combined with results from Dupuch & Fortin (2013) of lower regeneration at 10 year old  
15 edges, but greater at older edges, our finding suggest that seedling densities on the disturbed side  
16 of edges in black spruce forest start to increase at around 15 years following edge creation.  
17 Although relatively minor at cut edges, a peak in seedling density was also found at fire edges  
18 (Harper et al. 2014), suggesting that this may be a widespread phenomenon at created edges  
19 whether anthropogenic or natural.

20 There was no edge influence on individual understorey plant species or overall species  
21 composition on the forest side of 16-17 year old clearcut edges in black spruce forest. Although  
22 vegetation responses to edges can be variable (Alignier & Deconchat 2011), all plant species  
23 exhibited the same lack of edge influence in our study. Species either had no initial response or  
24 had recovered with time since harvesting even in the disturbed area as indicated by greater cover  
25 at older cut edges, and significant edge influence at younger (Harper et al. 2004) but not older  
26 cut edges. Overall, it appears that in black spruce forest, responses of understorey plant species  
27 to edge creation are generally immediate and then decrease in the second decade. The absence of  
28 a lag or an increase in edge influence after 17 years may be related to the lack of further  
29 structural change at these same edges, as predicted by Harper et al. (2005). Although Harper et  
30 al. (2005) also predicted that edge influence will not persist for long at regenerating edges,  
31 Dupuch & Fortin (2013) found the reverse, which suggests there may be a longer initial time lag

1 than expected. We would be surprised to see greater edge influence on understorey composition  
2 at edges older than 16-17 years old, as we expect that further structural development at the edge  
3 would result in changes in light and temperature towards interior conditions.

4 Edge influence on structural diversity, but not species diversity, still extended into the  
5 forest. The general lack of edge influence for understorey species diversity right at the edge was  
6 similar to younger cut edges (Harper et al. 2004), although 16-17 year old cut edges were more  
7 diverse than younger ones. However, at 16 year old cut edges in aspen stands, there was  
8 significant edge influence for herb cover and richness but not shrub richness, which was apparent  
9 at 5 year old cut edges (Harper & Macdonald 2002). Chabrierie et al. (2013) found an increase in  
10 species richness with edge age at maintained edges in an agricultural landscape; our contrasting  
11 results support their finding that greater edge maintenance or management intensity leads to  
12 sharper gradients at the edge.

## 13 14 **Conclusion and applications**

15  
16 We conclude that 16-17 year old cut edges in black spruce forest showed little evidence of  
17 further structural change with time; instead, edges developed through further recruitment of  
18 seedlings and decomposition of deadwood. Structural development of these edges and  
19 regeneration of the disturbed areas resulted in much lower edge influence on the understorey in  
20 the second decade following edge creation. Our results support the hypothesis that edge  
21 influence diminishes over time as patch contrast decreases with regeneration of the adjacent  
22 forest (Harper et al. 2005), although Dupuch & Fortin (2013) suggest that there may be edge  
23 expansion for the understorey at very old cut edges (> 46 years old) in black spruce forests from  
24 eastern Québec. While long-term edge expansion could affect biodiversity and ecological  
25 processes of forest ecosystems, further study of permanent plots across edges is needed to  
26 determine the prevalence of expansion or regression of edges in different regions of the slow-  
27 growing black spruce boreal forest. Our results show that forest influence at the edges of  
28 clearcuts may have more impact on regeneration in the disturbed area than edge influence has on  
29 the adjacent undisturbed forest in black spruce forests. This would mean that the increased  
30 amount of edges in managed landscapes may ultimately be a driver in shaping patterns of  
31 regeneration.

1       An increase in the abundance of harvested edges may also accentuate persistent differences  
2 between human and naturally disturbed boreal forests. We found evidence for a non-monotonic  
3 pattern (peak at or near the edge) compared to both adjacent ecosystems (rather than simply an  
4 intermediate stage) for recent logs at 16-17 year old cut edges. Cut edges have a reservoir of  
5 recently decayed logs; however, they differ from fire edges by the lack of snags. Lower snag  
6 abundance at cut edges suggests that this important landscape feature would be lost if harvesting  
7 replaces fire on the landscape. This highlights the importance of maintaining unharvested burned  
8 areas and their edges in boreal forest landscapes.

9

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11

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16 Sustainable Forest Management Network.

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- 25

1 **Table 1.** Site and edge characteristics of forest stands, edges and adjacent areas disturbed by  
 2 forest harvesting in black spruce boreal forest in northwestern Quebec. Canopy cover and height  
 3 of the tallest trees were measured 60 m from the edge.

4

| Transect            | Year<br>of cut | Size (ha) of<br>cutblock | Edge aspect (°) <sup>a</sup> | Approx. year<br>of origin <sup>b</sup> | Canopy cover<br>(%) | Height of the<br>tallest tree (m) |
|---------------------|----------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|--|---------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Cut 1               | 1984           | 39                       | 170                          | 1725                                   | 69                  | 12                                |
| Cut 2               | 1984           | 39                       | 165                          | 1725                                   | 34                  | 10                                |
| Cut 3               | 1984           | 24                       | 50                           | 1725                                   | 15                  | 11                                |
| Cut 4               | 1984           | 24                       | 180                          | 1725                                   | 33                  | 13                                |
| Cut 5 <sup>c</sup>  | 1984           | 10                       | 110                          | 1725                                   | 39                  | 10                                |
| Cut 6               | 1985           | 45                       | 210                          | 1775                                   | 44                  | 14                                |
| Cut 7               | 1985           | 56                       | 278                          | 1825                                   | 72                  | 18                                |
| Cut 8               | 1985           | 56                       | 118                          | 1825                                   | 21                  | 18                                |
| Cut 9               | 1985           | 54                       | 287                          | 1825                                   | 31                  | 10                                |
| Cut 10 <sup>d</sup> | 1985           | 54                       | 102                          | 1825                                   | 47                  | 10                                |

5 <sup>a</sup> Facing from the forest towards the disturbed area.

6 <sup>b</sup> Data from a fire reconstruction map (Bergeron et al. 2004).

7 <sup>c</sup> Shrub and herb data were not collected in the 60 m plot.

8 <sup>d</sup> The -50 m plot was placed at -40 m

1 **Table 2.** Average values (+/- standard deviation) in the cut (-50 m), at the edge (0 m), and in  
 2 interior forest (100-200 m); magnitude of edge influence (MEI<sup>a</sup> at 0 m) and distance of edge  
 3 influence (DEI) at 16-17 year old cut edges. Negative and positive MEI indicate lower and  
 4 greater values at the edge compared to the interior, respectively, within the DEI. DEI was  
 5 estimated as the set of two or more consecutive distances (or separated by one distance) over  
 6 which MEI is significant; negative distance values refer to distances within the disturbed area.  
 7 Only common species (> 10 % frequency) with significant DEI are included. Sample size is  
 8 n=10 transects.

|                                    | Average values |               |                    | MEI   | DEI (m)          |
|------------------------------------|----------------|---------------|--------------------|-------|------------------|
|                                    | cut (-50 m)    | edge (0 m)    | forest (100-200 m) |       |                  |
| <b>Overstorey structure</b>        |                |               |                    |       |                  |
| Canopy cover (%)                   | 2 +/- 4        | 29 +/- 10     | 43 +/- 19          | -0.20 | -50 to 5         |
| Tree density (#/ha)                | 1.7 +/- 3.8    | 8.0 +/- 2.7   | 17.0 +/- 6.1       | -0.36 | -50 to 0         |
| Snag density (#/ha)                | 1.1 +/- 1.2    | 3.5 +/- 1.7   | 4.1 +/- 2.6        | -0.08 | -50 to -5        |
| Log density (#/20 m)               | 6.3 +/- 3.2    | 7.0 +/- 2.7   | 3.0 +/- 2.1        | 0.40  | -50 to 25,60     |
| <b>Understorey</b>                 |                |               |                    |       |                  |
| Shrub cover (%)                    | 30.5 +/- 19.5  | 27.5 +/- 6.8  | 29.3 +/- 11.0      | -0.03 | ns               |
| Herb cover (%)                     | 10.0 +/- 6.3   | 7.4 +/- 5.1   | 8.2 +/- 4.4        | -0.04 | ns               |
| Moss cover (%)                     | 60.7 +/- 14.2  | 75.8 +/- 16.0 | 91.4 +/- 10.2      | -0.08 | -50 to 0         |
| Lichen cover (%)                   | 12.0 +/- 12.9  | 5.1 +/- 8.1   | 3.2 +/- 7.6        | -0.05 | ns               |
| Litter cover (%)                   | 19.6 +/- 12.1  | 11.5 +/- 11.1 | 3.1 +/- 3.6        | 0.57  | -50 to 0         |
| <b>Diversity (Shannon index)</b>   |                |               |                    |       |                  |
| Tree structure                     | 0.06 +/- 0.18  | 0.96 +/- 0.22 | 1.32 +/- 0.32      | -0.08 | -50 to 0         |
| Snag structure                     | 0.18 +/- 0.39  | 1.04 +/- 0.53 | 1.04 +/- 0.64      | -0.02 | -50 to -5        |
| Log structure                      | 1.22 +/- 0.32  | 1.40 +/- 0.32 | 0.76 +/- 0.54      | 0.10  | -50 to 5, 25, 60 |
| Shrub species                      | 0.93 +/- 0.26  | 1.04 +/- 0.22 | 0.93 +/- 0.25      | 0.02  | ns               |
| Herb species                       | 0.68 +/- 0.35  | 1.04 +/- 0.45 | 0.98 +/- 0.28      | -0.08 | ns               |
| Moss species                       | 0.44 +/- 0.18  | 0.39 +/- 0.20 | 0.32 +/- 0.19      | 0.31  | ns               |
| Lichen species                     | 0.26 +/- 0.17  | 0.17 +/- 0.17 | 0.09 +/- 0.12      | 0.11  | -50 to -5        |
| <b>Cover (%) of common species</b> |                |               |                    |       |                  |
| <i>Cladonia</i> spp.               | 2.0 +/- 3.3    | 0.5 +/- 0.5   | 0.2 +/- 0.3        | 0.40  | -50 to -5        |

|                               |              |              |               |       |            |
|-------------------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|-------|------------|
| <i>Ledum groenlandicum</i>    | 10.3 +/- 6.7 | 16.7 +/- 9.2 | 20.4 +/- 11.4 | -0.10 | -50,-5     |
| <i>Rubus chamaemorus</i>      | 0.2 +/- 0.3  | 1.1 +/- 1.86 | 1.1 +/- 1.1   | -0.04 | -50 to -15 |
| <i>Vaccinium myrtilloides</i> | 8.5 +/- 6.1  | 4.5 +/- 2.3  | 4.1 +/- 4.1   | 0.05  | -50,-5     |

1 <sup>a</sup> MEI =  $(\bar{x}_d - \bar{x}_i) / (\bar{x}_d + \bar{x}_i)$ ; where  $\bar{x}_d$  = average of a variable at distance d from the edge, and

2  $\bar{x}_i$  = average of a variable in interior forest (distances 100, 150 and 200 m from the edge)

3 ns = no significant DEI

4

## 1 **Figure captions**

2

3 **Fig. 1.** Map showing the location of the transects in relation to the 1984-1985 cut blocks.

4

5 **Fig. 2.** Proportion of response variables with significant distance of edge influence for A) overstorey and understorey structure, B) structural and species diversity and C) understorey species with positive and negative edge influence (average values greater and less than in interior forest, respectively) at cut edges. Variables for A and B are listed in Table 2 (n = 4 and 5 for overstorey structure and understorey, n= 3 and 4 for structural and species diversity). For C, significance of edge influence for species is reported in Table 2 and was tested for all species with a frequency of 10 % or greater; n= 27 species. Significant distance of edge influence was considered as the set of two or more consecutive distances (or separated by one distance) with values significantly different from interior forest.

14

15 **Fig. 3.** Patterns of A) deadwood and B) regeneration at different distances across the cut forest edge. In A, snags and logs in consecutive decay stages with similar trends were grouped together for clarity (numbers for the decay stages in the legend). Edge influence was significant at distances -50 to -5 m for decay stage 1 and 2 snags, 5 to 15 m for decay stage 1 logs, -50 to -5, 5 and 25 m for decay stage 4 logs and -50 to 0 m for decay stage 5 logs. In B, average densities are presented for seedlings (<1 m tall), saplings (<1 m tall) established from layering (layers), taller saplings (>1 m tall, <5 cm dbh) and suppressed trees (>5 cm dbh, height well below the canopy). Edge influence was significant at distances -50 to 5 m for seedlings, -50 to -5 m for layers and suppressed trees and 5 to 15 m for taller saplings. Sample size is n=10 transects.

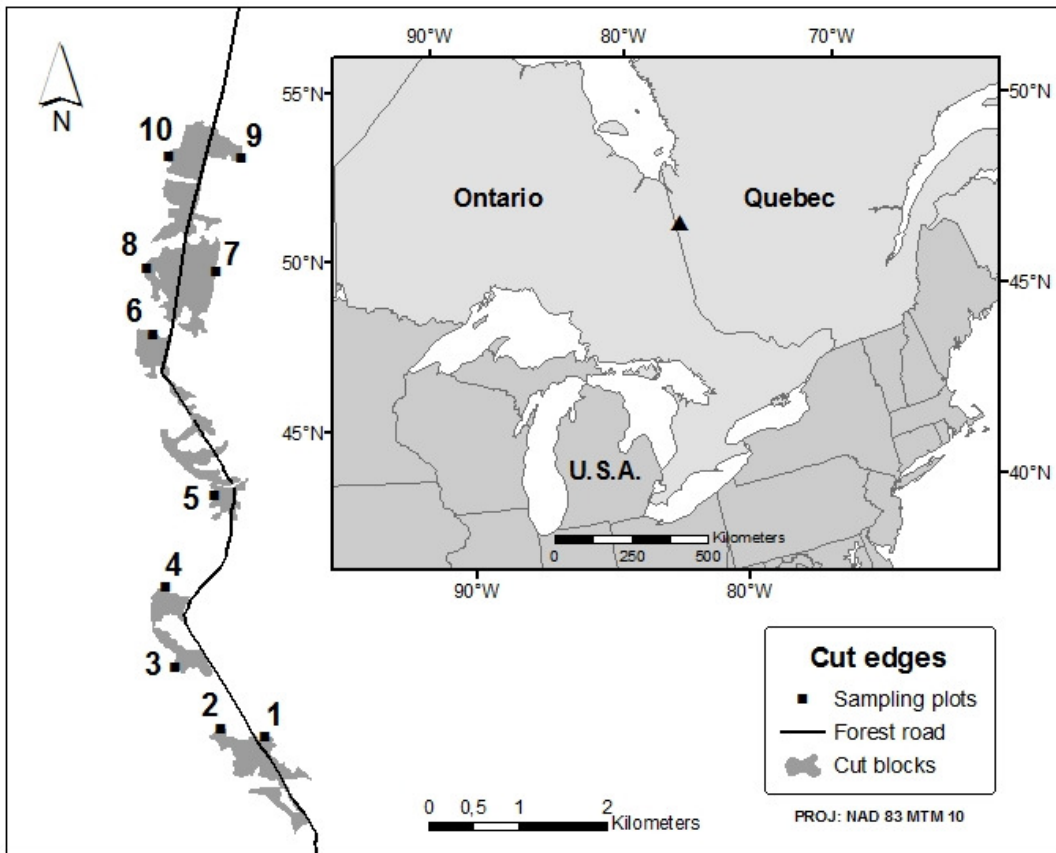
24

25 **Fig. 4.** Patterns of A) canopy cover, B) tree density, C) log density, D) shrub cover, E) moss cover and F) litter cover at different distances across 16-17 and 2-5 year old forest edges. The solid lines at the top of the graph indicate distances where there were significant differences between the two ages of forest edge. Edge influence for snag density, herb cover and lichen cover was not significant for the difference in edge age; therefore these variables are not included. Sample size is n=10 transects for each edge age.

31

1 **Fig. 5.** Patterns of diversity of A) tree structure, B) log structure, C) shrub species and D) herb  
2 species at different distances across 16-17 and 2-5 year old forest edges. The solid lines at the top  
3 of the graph indicate distances where there were significant differences between the two ages of  
4 forest edge. Edge influence for snag structural diversity, moss species diversity and lichen  
5 species diversity was not significant for the difference in edge age; therefore these variables are  
6 not included. Sample size is n=10 transects.  
7

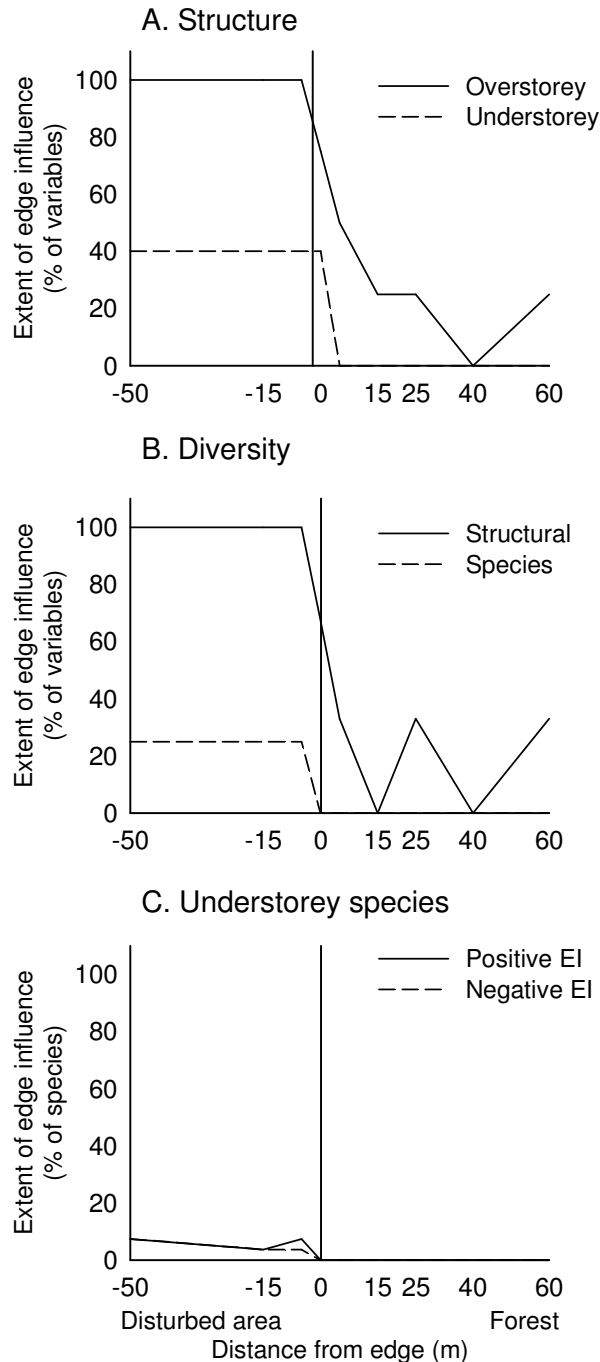




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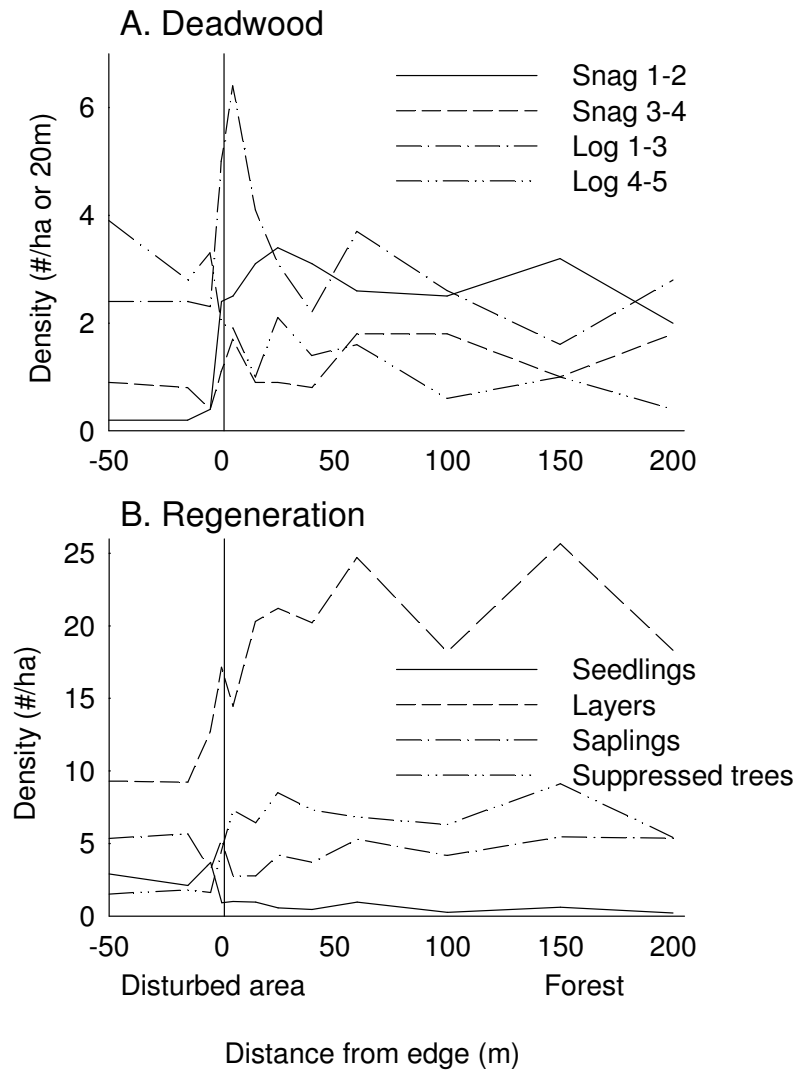
2 **Fig. 1.** Map showing the location of the transects in relation to the 1984-1985 cut blocks.

3



1  
 2 **Fig. 2.** Proportion of response variables with significant distance of edge influence for A)  
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 6 overstorey structure and understorey, n= 3 and 4 for structural and species diversity). For C,  
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 8 with a frequency of 10 % or greater; n= 27 species. Significant distance of edge influence was  
 9 considered as the set of two or more consecutive distances (or separated by one distance) with  
 10 values significantly different from interior forest.

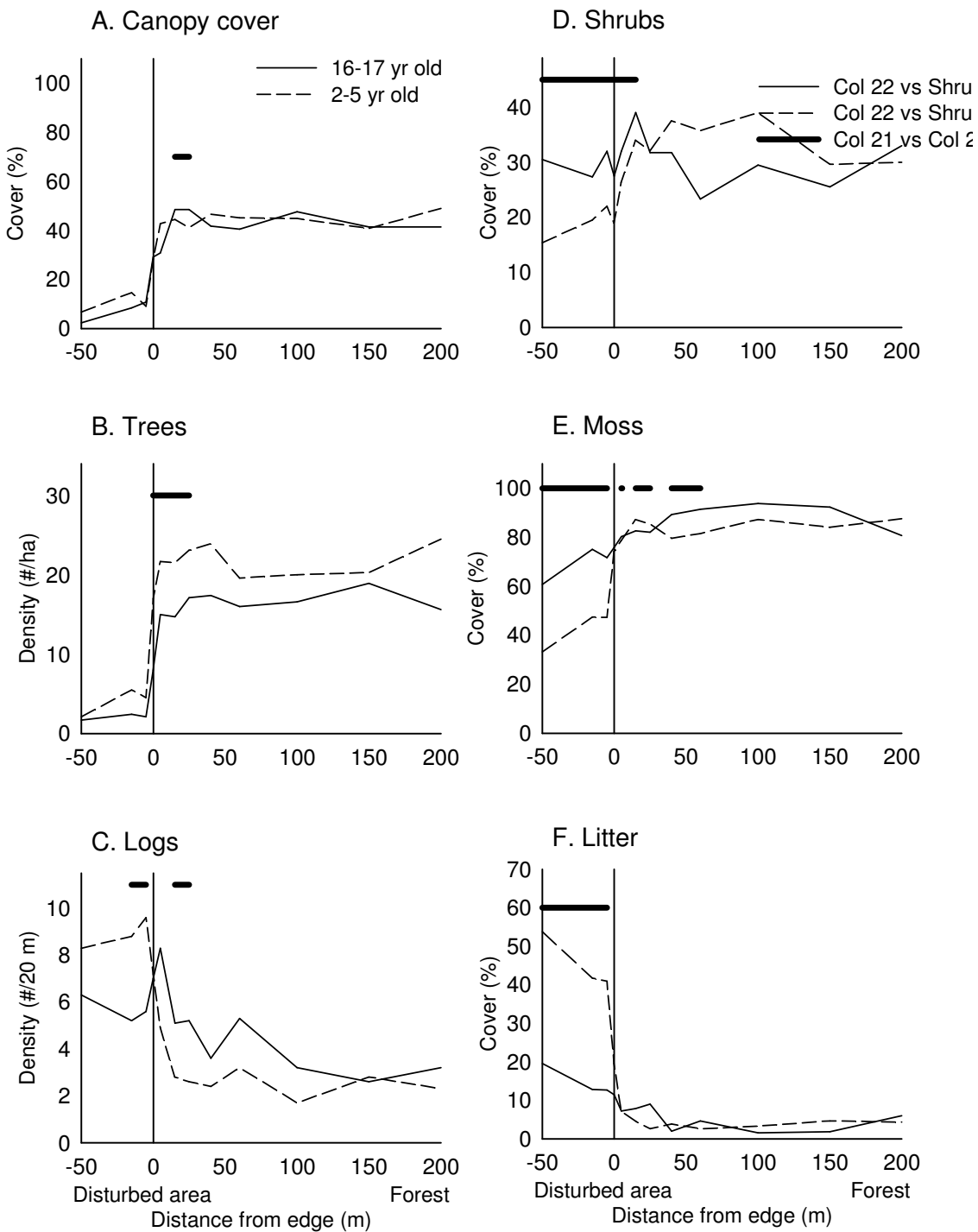
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2

3 **Fig. 3.** Patterns of A) deadwood and B) regeneration at different distances across the cut forest  
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 7 and 25 m for decay stage 4 logs and -50 to 0 m for decay stage 5 logs. In B, average densities are  
 8 presented for seedlings (<1 m tall), saplings (<1 m tall) established from layering (layers), taller  
 9 saplings (>1 m tall, <5 cm dbh) and suppressed trees (>5 cm dbh, height well below the canopy).  
 10 Edge influence was significant at distances -50 to 5 m for seedlings, -50 to -5 m for layers and  
 11 suppressed trees and 5 to 15 m for taller saplings. Sample size is n=10 transects.

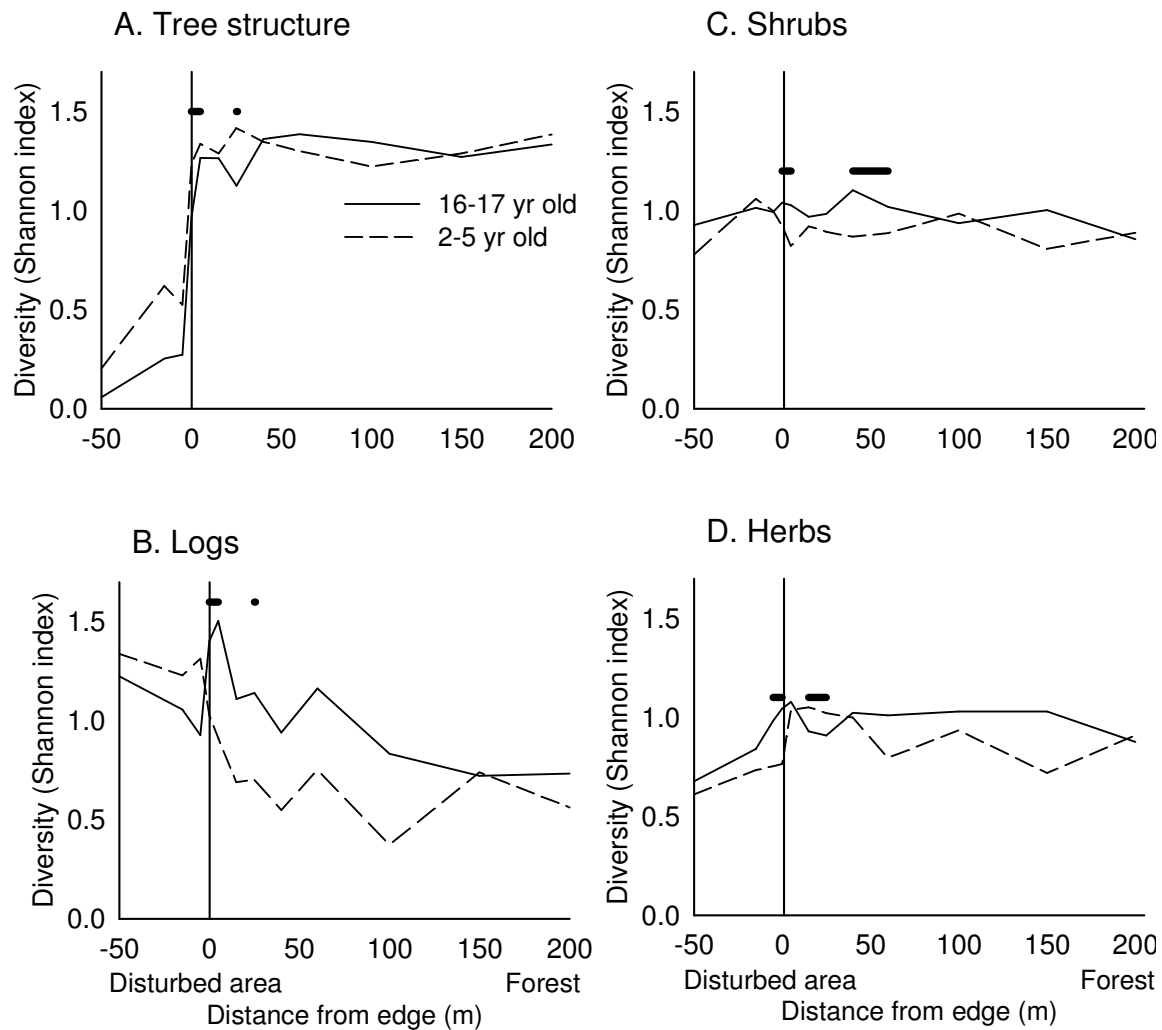
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2

3 **Fig. 4.** Patterns of A) canopy cover, B) tree density, C) log density, D) shrub cover, E) moss  
 4 cover and F) litter cover at different distances across 16-17 and 2-5 year old forest edges. The  
 5 solid lines at the top of the graph indicate distances where there were significant differences  
 6 between the two ages of forest edge. Edge influence for snag density, herb cover and lichen  
 7 cover was not significant for the difference in edge age; therefore these variables are not  
 8 included. Sample size is n=10 transects for each edge age.

1



2

3

4 **Fig. 5.** Patterns of diversity of A) tree structure, B) log structure, C) shrub species and D) herb  
 5 species at different distances across 16-17 and 2-5 year old forest edges. The solid lines at the top  
 6 of the graph indicate distances where there were significant differences between the two ages of  
 7 forest edge. Edge influence for snag structural diversity, moss species diversity and lichen  
 8 species diversity was not significant for the difference in edge age; therefore these variables are  
 9 not included. Sample size is n=10 transects.