# **Biogenic Fluxes of Carbon Dioxide in the Old-Growth Spruce Forest** in the Middle Taiga: Results of Eddy Covariance Measurements

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Abstract—Fluxes of carbon dioxide in the old-growth bilberry spruce forest in the European Taiga are measured by the eddy covariance technique. A carbon dioxide sink to the ecosystem was observed from April until September; the maximum net-exchange rate of carbon dioxide was recorded in July. During the cold period of the year from October to March, the biogenic flux of CO<sub>2</sub> was directed from the forest canopy to the atmosphere. According to measurements at  $u^* > 0.2$ , the total annual NEE was 219 g C m<sup>-2</sup>; the annual values of the ecosystem respiration  $R_{eco}$  and the gross photosynthesis  $P_{gross}$  were 483 and 966 g C m<sup>-2</sup>, respectively. The conclusion is that the old-growth bilberry spruce forest in the middle taiga subzone was the sink of carbon from the atmosphere during the year of observation.

*Keywords:* bilberry spruce forest, carbon dioxide, eddy covariance technique, net-exchange, ecosystem respiration, gross photosynthesis

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The role of a forest ecosystem as a carbon sink or a carbon source is determined by the ratio between the rates of carbon dioxide absorption during the photosynthesis of plants and its emission as a result of biota life. The carbon reserves depend on the age of stand and reach their maximum in the old-growth forests that make up a considerable part of unmanaged firstgrowth forests of the northern hemisphere. In the opinion of a few authors, the old-growth stand from the different climate zones are characterized by a positive carbon balance and can bind about 1.3 Gt C/per  $vr^{-1}$ (Lyussaert et al., 2008). The old-growth forests function as a source of carbon dioxide when they are affected by natural and anthropogenic factors. In the last two decades, the carbon cycle of the land ecosystems has been actively studied by the eddy-covariance technique (Baldocchi et al., 1988). In the territory of Russia, Ukraine, Belorussia, and Kazakhstan, according to the measurements by this technique, the total sink of carbon from the atmosphere to the land ecosystems is estimated at 0.342 Gt C per vr<sup>-1</sup>, including 90% that belong to the forests, and the netexchange (*NEE*) is 1.033 Gt C per  $yr^{-1}$  (Dolman et al., 2012). The main climatic factors that determine the values of gross photosynthesis and respiration in forests of different climate zones is the duration of the warm period and the amount of precipitation (Fernandez-Martinaz et al., 2014). The interannual differences of the net CO<sub>2</sub> exchange in a value and a sign between the forest ecosystem and the atmosphere are caused by the variability of the air temperature, in the opinion of several authors (Ueyama et al., 2014).

The largest massifs of the old-growth dark coniferous taiga (Aksenov et al., 2003) in Europe are preserved in the Republic of Komi (Aksenov et al., 2003). The carbon reserves in the ecosystems of the old-growth spruce forests of the republic vary within the range of 133-205 t C ha<sup>-1</sup> (Manov et al., 2014). The net production of phytomass (NEP) in the bilberry spruce forest of the middle taiga calculated by the weight method amounted to 1.71 t C ha<sup>-1</sup> per yr<sup>-1</sup>, and the quantity of deposited carbon was 3.7 t C ha<sup>-1</sup> per yr<sup>-1</sup> (Tuzhilkina, Bobkova, 2001). In the bilberry sphagnum spruce forest of the middle taiga, the net sink of carbon is 0.36 t C ha<sup>-1</sup> per yr<sup>-1</sup> with respect to the production-destructive processes (Kuznetsov, 2010). The purpose of this work was to evaluate the annual dynamics of CO<sub>2</sub> gas exchange in the spruce biogeocenosis with the atmosphere in the middle taiga by the eddy covariance technique.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The measurements were carried out in 2013 in the old-growth bilberry spruce forest at the Lyalya Forest-Ecological Station of Institute of Biology of Komi Scientific Center of the Ural Branch, Russian Academy of Sciences ( $62^{\circ}17'$  N,  $50^{\circ}40'$  E). The spruce stand, where the measuring system is mounted, is characterized in (Robakidze et al., 2013). The forest

Period of the year	Reason for exclusion		Used
	technical problems	low turbulence	in the statistical analysis
Jan.–Mar.	1260	441	1803
AprAug.	58	2027	5259
SeptDec.	749	1074	3211
Total	2067	3542	10273

Measurements of  $CO_2$  fluxes at 30-min intervals for January– December, 2013 excluded from analysis

stand is different-aged, for the V class capacity, with the dominant spruce, other species are also found (7sp2bir1p+asp, fir). No traces of fire or cutting were found in the phytocenosis studied. The height of the spruce and pine trees is 17 m and the aspen trees are 24 m. The age of the spruce trees is 80-180 years. There were 970 growing trees per ha<sup>-1</sup> and 303 m<sup>3</sup> was the stand of timber per ha<sup>-1</sup>. Blueberry, huckleberry, shamrock, and startlower are dominant in the grass– low-bush layer. In the moss cover, green mosses prevail. The spruce forest is developed on the podzolic sandy–loam soil overlain by clay loams.

There is also a mixed-herb bilberry spruce forest, a bilberry sphagnum forest, and coniferous—broad-leaved phytocenosis (a bilberry spruce forest, genetically). They are characterized in the monographs (Tuzhilina and Bobkova, 2001; *Korennye...*, 2006). The aspen association occupies a small segment of the spruce forest; we have not found its description in the published literature. These associations could fall into the footprint boundaries, depending on the wind direction and velocity. However, isolating the effect of each association on the calculation of the value of carbon dioxide flux is impossible due to the absence of information on their area and georeference.

The parameters of microclimate (air temperature and humidity, intensity of photosynthetically active radiation (PAR), incident and reflected solar radiation, and radiation balance) were recorded by the automatic meteostation with the use of CR3000 (Campbell Scientific, United States). The system of studying the  $CO_2$  gas exchange between the ecosystem and the atmosphere by the eddy covariance technique, which is mounted at a height of 30 m, is equipped with an ultrasound anemometer to measure the wind velocity in three projections and the acoustic air temperature (CSAT, Campbell Scientific Inc., United States) and an infrared open-type gas analyzer (EC-150, Campbell Scientific Inc., United States), which makes it possible to obtain the data on the velocity and direction of a vertical flux of  $CO_2$  and  $H_2O$  and the thermalexchange parameters. The data were recorded at a frequency of 20 Hz and were processed by the LoggerNet software (Campbell Scientific, United States).

The software analysis included mathematical and statistical processing of the initial data for 30 min. To continue the work, we selected data with "0" quality index from the array that indicated the stable operation of the gasometric system. The errors in  $CO_2$  exchange measurements could occur due to the following reasons: (1) unstable operation of the system, calibration, replacement of filters and details; (2) insufficient mixing of air at low turbulence; and (3) variation in the environment factors (Foken and Wichura, 1996). In 2013, the technical problems occurred in the system most frequently from September to March (table).

At the next stage, the quality of the selected data was estimated with respect to the dependence of the indices of stability in the atmospheric boundary layer  $(z L^{-1})$  and footprint  $(d_{fetch 70})$  on the dynamic wind velocity  $(u^*)$  at the moment of measuring (Fig. 1), as is accepted in measuring by the eddy covariance technique. The analysis of the footprint showed that, in 76% of cases, 90% of the total air flow volume, which was used by the system to calculate the  $CO_2$  flux, was formed at a distance of less than 200 m from the watch tower; in 90% of the cases, the maximum air flow came from a distance of less than 100 m. According to our analysis, the threshold value  $u^*$  amounts to 0.2 m s<sup>-1</sup> for the data selection; therefore, the values of the CO<sub>2</sub> gas exchange at a lower value of atmospheric turbulence  $(u^* < 0.2 \text{ m s}^{-1})$  were not taken into account later. At the last stage, we removed the emissions that did not conform to reality but were not recorded during the preceding selection of the data. In total, we used 10273 values out of 15882 values recorded for 302 days from January 1 until December 31, 2013. The total diurnal and annual value of the CO<sub>2</sub> gas exchange indices was measured as an integral of the data at a 30-min interval.

An important parameter of measurement quality is closing of the thermal balance equation  $(H + L_e = R_n + G)$  (Lafleur, 1999). In our studies, the closing of the equation was  $(H + L_e) = 1.0969*(R_n + G) + 5.732$  $(r^2 = 0.88)$ , which indicates that the quality of the data obtained is quite satisfactory.

The calculated flux of  $F_{CO_2}$  carbon dioxide is an equivalent to the net CO<sub>2</sub> exchange (*NEE*), which is the sum of the gross-photosynthesis ( $P_{\text{gross}}$ ) and the respiration of the ecosystem ( $R_{eco}$ ). The ecosystem respiration was modeled by the air temperature at the night time according to the regressive equation presented in Fig. 2. The modeling results were extrapolated to estimate  $R_{eco}$  in the day time as was done in studying the CO<sub>2</sub> gas exchange in the tundra ecosystems (Zamolodchikov et al., 2003; Kutzbach et al., 2007).  $P_{\text{gross}}$  was calculated as the difference between the measured *NEE* value and the modeled ecosystem respiration  $R_{eco}$ .



Fig. 1. Dependence of the indices of atmospheric stability in the atmospheric boundary layer ( $z L^{-1}$ ) and footprint (or the range of influence) ( $d_{fetch70}$ ) on the dynamic wind velocity ( $u^*$ ). The vertical line shows the critical value of  $u^*$  for the selection of CO<sub>2</sub> gas-exchange data.



Fig. 2. Air temperature dependence of the average rates of the ecosystem respiration at night time.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Weather conditions. In 2013, January was the coldest winter month in the area under study, when the average diurnal air temperature decreased to  $-20^{\circ}$ C. The cold weather was maintained until the middle of March. On the first ten days of winter, the average air temperature was  $-15^{\circ}$ C. The precipitation amount did not exceed 23 mm in the winter months. In the spring, the positive average diurnal temperatures of the atmospheric air were settled after April 13 (Fig. 3). May was relatively warm, the average monthly temperature was  $7.3^{\circ}$ C, and in June it

reached 14.9°C, which is higher than the average long-term normal value by 1°C. July was hot, especially its first 10 days, with an average monthly air temperature of 17.0°C. In August, the warm weather continued, the average temperature being 14.6°C; in September it decreased to 8.0°C. The first night frosts were recorded at the end of September, and in the second half of October, the steady cold weather was settled in there. The vegetation period when the average diurnal air temperature was above 5°C lasted for 146 days in 2013. The warm period was noted for a deficit of precipitation; the average monthly pre-

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**Fig. 3.** Meteorological characteristics: (a) is air temperature, (b) is temperature of the litter at a depth of 8 cm, (c) is horizontal wind velocity, and (d) is atmosphere pressure for the bilberry spruce forest in 2013. In Figs. 3-6, dots correspond to the average values at a 30-min measurement interval.

cipitation amount did not exceed 77% of the average long-term normal value in April–August.

The air temperature dynamics is determined by the changes in the temperature regime of the soil during the year. In the spring until the middle of April, the temperature of the litter at a depth of 8 cm in the spruce forest under study was close to zero; it sharply increased starting from May 14, when the air was heated to 15°C during the day. The temperature of the organogenic soil layer had reached 14°C by the end of July and did not go below 10°C in August. It noticeably decreased in September, but remained positive until the end of November.

In the cold period of the year, the horizontal wind velocity increased. During the period of observations its maximum value amounted to  $6.7 \text{ m s}^{-1}$ . In the warm period of the year, the winds blew from the west (northern, northeastern, and northwestern) and from the south in 56 and 44% of the cases, respectively. The annual atmosphere pressure varied from 99 to 102 kPa (Fig. 3).

**Carbon dioxide fluxes.** The velocity of the net  $CO_2$ exchange measured by the eddy covariance technique was characterized by the annual dynamics (Fig. 4). In the winter months, during the day *NEE* was positive; i.e., CO<sub>2</sub> was emitted. In the second half of March and the beginning of April, when snow still covered the forest and the air temperature did not rise above 0°C during the day, the average velocity of the CO<sub>2</sub> gas exchange between the forest and the atmosphere reached  $-0.13 \text{ mg CO}_2 \text{ m}^{-2} \text{ s}^{-1}$  (i.e., there was a light sink of  $CO_2$ ); the total *NEE* value during the day was also negative. In the second half of April, as the netexchange rate and the duration of a light period increased, the total diurnal NEE was  $-4.68 \text{ g CO}_2 \text{ m}^{-2}$ . The  $CO_2$  gas exchange between the spruce forest and the atmosphere noticeably intensified in May–June, reaching the maximum in July when the period of light and temperature regime was the most favorable for the photosynthesis of woody plants (Fig. 5). In April, the PAR value reached 1000  $\mu$ mol m<sup>-2</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> in the day time on cloudless days, but in July it rose to 1600  $\mu$ mol m<sup>-2</sup> s<sup>-1</sup>. The average diurnal intensity of the PAR moving to the upper boundary of the spruce phytocenosis decreased by 20% at the end of August, by 32% in September, and amounted to 45% of the July value in October. The average diurnal temperature decreased almost by 3 times from July to September. The noticeable decrease in the diurnal sink of  $CO_2$  in the spruce forest ecosystem and its return to the emission as early as the beginning of October are likely to have been caused by the changes in these two factors. The data we obtained are consistent with the results of studies that show a close dependence of the spruce photosynthesis rate on the air temperature during the vegetation period (Yuzbekov et al., 2014).

The ecosystem respiration velocity equaled 0.03  $\mu$ mol CO<sub>2</sub> m<sup>-2</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> at the end of March and in early April and grew in May, gradually reaching the maximum (0.74  $\mu$ mol CO<sub>2</sub> m<sup>-2</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> in late June—in July (Fig. 5). There were days when the total value of  $R_{eco}$  was 30.7 g CO<sub>2</sub> m<sup>-2</sup> per day<sup>-1</sup>. In August–September, the ecosystem respiration decreased gradually and in October it did not exceed 3 g CO<sub>2</sub> m<sup>-2</sup> per day<sup>-1</sup>.

The gross photosynthesis value changed in accordance with the dynamics of the net  $CO_2$  exchange, increasing from April until July and gradually decreasing in the cold period of the year (Fig. 5). The maximum total diurnal  $P_{\text{gross}}$  value reached 45 g  $CO_2$  m<sup>-2</sup> in July and decreased by 40% at the end of August, by 55% in September, and amounted to 20% of the July value in October.

Thus, from October until March the bilberry spruce forest was a source of carbon to the atmosphere, and from early April until the end of September it acted as a sink. Despite the negative air temperature at the end of March and early April, there were several days when the net  $CO_2$  exchange rate was close to zero, but with a negative sign. This early return from the emission to the sink of carbon dioxide in the spruce forest could result from the increase in the elevation of the Sun above the horizon, which caused the radiation balance to increase in March by almost four times when compared to February (Fig. 6). Here, the sensible heat flux consumed over 50% of the net radiation, which is likely to have caused the increase in the temperature of aboveground organs, including fir needles. As a result, the temperature became sufficient for the photosynthesis processes in the coniferous plants. According to the available data, photosynthesis can occur in spruce at negative air temperatures, and for its visible photosynthesis the optimal temperature range is  $< 0-18^{\circ}$ C (Drozdov and Kurets, 2003).

The highest value of the carbon dioxide sink in the spruce forest was recorded in the first half of July. The total average diurnal value of NEE was 28% in the second half of April, 62% in May, 79% in June, and 31% of the July value in August and September. The active net CO2 exchange between the ecosystem of the spruce forest and the atmosphere in May-June is likely to be determined by the fact that, in the first half of the summer, the sensible heat flux consumed 70%of the net radiation (our data unpublished), which contributed to the heating of the vegetation layer and the maintenance of the active photosynthesis in coniferous plants. A few authors believe that the maximum value of the net CO<sub>2</sub> exchange in the coniferous forests in May is caused by soil humidity, which is favorable for photosynthesis (Malhi et al., 1999). In the spruce forests of the southern taiga, the high rate of gross photosynthesis was maintained from the middle of May until the middle of July (Olychev et al., 2009).





 $NEE = -13.179 \text{ g m}^{-2} \text{ per day}$ 

 $NEE = -16.684 \text{ g m}^{-2} \text{ per day}$ 

**Fig. 4.** Average diurnal trends of the net  $CO_2$  gas exchange between the spruce forest ecosystem and the atmosphere in 2013. Bars correspond to the standard deviations. (a) Feb. 1–14, (b) Mar. 16–31, (c) Apr. 15–28, (d) May 1–14, (e) Jun. 1–14, (f) Jul. 1–14, (g) Aug. 1–14, (i) Oct. 1–16, and (j) Nov. 9–22.

The values of the total values of *NEE*,  $R_{eco}$ , and  $P_{gross}$  in the bilberry spruce forest we studied were -730, 1611, and 3221 g CO<sub>2</sub> m<sup>-2</sup> per yr<sup>-1</sup> (or -219, 483, and 966 g C m<sup>-2</sup> per yr<sup>-1</sup>), respectively, taking into account the data at  $u^* > 0.2$  (Fig. 7). The preceding studies showed that the soil respiration, including the respiration of plant roots, corresponded to 240–250 g C m<sup>-2</sup> in the bilberry-sphagnum spruce forest of

the middle taiga (Kuznetsov and Babkova, 2014). In this case, the annual share of a  $CO_2$  flux emitted from the soil amounts to approximately 57% in the total respiration of the spruce forest respiration. In the southern taiga, the share of soil respiration reaches 70 and 48% of the ecosystem respiration in the spruce– sphagnum forest and in the composite spruce forest, respectively (Olychev et al., 2009).



Fig. 4. (Contd.)

The analysis of the available database on the carbon exchange in the forests of different climate zones showed that, in the boreal coniferous forests, 6% of carbon absorbed by the plants (GPP) is stored in NPP leaves, 10% in stems, and 15% in the roots (Fernandez-Martinaz et al., 2014), totaling 31%. Taking this distribution into account, the phytomass NPP should be 300 g C  $m^{-2}$  per yr<sup>-1</sup> in the spruce forest studied, which is quite comparable with the value of the primary production obtained by the weight method  $(371 \text{ g C m}^{-2} \text{ per yr}^{-1})$  in the bilberry spruce forest in the middle taiga (Tuzhilkina and Bobkova, 2001). The net production of phytomass obtained by the same authors (NEP) for the spruce phytocenosis amounted to 171 g C m<sup>-2</sup>, which corresponds to 78% of the carbon sink value (NEE) we estimated by the eddy covariance technique. The rest of absorbed carbon is likely to pass to the soil pools of spruce biogeocenocis. In the bilberry-sphagnum spruce forest, the NEE value calculated with respect to the indices of the productiondestructive process amounted to 36 g C m<sup>-2</sup> per yr<sup>-1</sup> (Kuznetsov, 2010), which is noticeably lower than the value we obtained for the net CO<sub>2</sub> exchange between the ecosystem and the atmosphere by the eddy covariance technique.

In the forest ecosystems of different Russian regions, the *NEE* value measured by the eddy covariance technique varies from 0 to  $-300 \text{ g C m}^{-2}$  per yr<sup>-1</sup>

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(Dolman et al., 2012). In the southern taiga of the European part of Russia, the composite old-growth spruce forest was served as a sink for 166.5 g C m<sup>-2</sup> per yr<sup>-1</sup> (Olychev et al., 2009). However, the total annual values of  $P_{eco}$  and  $P_{gross}$  calculated by these authors exceeded the values we obtained for the bilberry spruce forest in the middle taiga. In Siberia in the dark coniferous phytocenosis formed by the fir and spruce trees aged 250 years, the carbon sink measured by the same technique amounted to 270 g C  $m^{-2}$  during the vegetation period (Röer et al., 2002), and it was 156 g of C  $m^{-2}$  in the pine phytocenosis (Tchebakova et al., 2015). The lower values of NEE were obtained in the boreal forests of North America. For example, according to the data of measuring a CO<sub>2</sub> gas exchange by the eddy covariance technique in Canada, the carbon sink amounted to  $21-70 \text{ g C m}^{-2}$  per yr<sup>-1</sup> in the old-growth spruce forests affected by a fire more than 100 years ago (Malhi et al., 1999; Amiro et al., 2006) and increased by several times in the mixed 74-year-old coniferous-broad leaved forest, where the total annual values of NEE,  $R_{eco}$ , and  $P_{gross}$  corresponded to  $-156,\ 919,\ and\ 1075\ g\ C\ m^{-2}$  (McGaughey et al., 2006). In total,  $R_{eco}$  amounts approximately to 750 g C m<sup>-2</sup> per year and  $P_{\text{gross}}$  to 1000 g C m<sup>-2</sup> per year in the coniferous forests of the boreal zone, and they are noticeably surpassed by the forests in the temperate zone and the tropics (Fernandez-Martinaz et al., 2014).



**Fig. 5.** Annual dynamics of the CO<sub>2</sub> gas exchange and PAR indices in the bilberry spruce forest. (a) CO<sub>2</sub> exchange (*NEE*), (b) modeled ecosystem respiration ( $R_{eco}$ ), (c) gross photosynthesis ( $P_{gross}$ ), and (d) PAR.



Fig. 6. Diurnal trends of radiation balance  $(R_n)$  in the bilberry spruce forest. (1) Feb. 6–20, (2) Mar. 16–31, and (3) Apr. 15–30.



Fig. 7. Daily integrated and cumulative curves CO<sub>2</sub> budget components in the bilberry spruce forest in 2013. (1) NEE, (2)  $R_{eco}$ , and (3)  $P_{gross}$ .

In the opinion of several authors, the positive balance of the carbon dioxide exchange with the atmosphere is maintained in the forest biogeocenoses aged 200 years or older; its value is approximately 240 g C m<sup>-2</sup> per yr<sup>-1</sup> (Lyussaert et al., 2008). However, the total net  $CO_2$  exchange between the forest and the atmosphere in the different years can significantly differ in the value and the sign due to the vari-

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ability of the air temperature, primarily in the fall season, as was shown during the long-term measurements at the same spruce forest in Alaska (Ueyama et al., 2014). We note that an increase in the fall temperature leads to the intensification of  $R_{eco}$ , which in turn significantly influences the annual CO<sub>2</sub> gas-exchange balance in the ecosystem. In response to the fall increase in the temperature and the intensification of the respiration, the carbon losses can amount to 0.2 pg C deg<sup>-1</sup> in the land ecosystems of the northern hemisphere (Piao et al., 2008).

#### CONCLUSIONS

As a result of measuring the  $CO_2$  gas exchange by the eddy covariance technique, it was established that, in the old-growth bilberry spruce forest of the middle taiga, carbon dioxide is emitted into the atmosphere from October until March; the return from the emission to the sink occurs at the end of March despite the air temperatures still being negative. Photoassimilation of carbon dioxide by coniferous forests is possible in early spring, since the net radiation increases and the large amount of its heat is spent on the sensible heat flux in the spruce forest ecosystem. The net carbon dioxide exchange showed the maximum rate in July, when the temperature and light conditions are the most favorable in the bilberry spruce forest. In general, the value of the carbon sink from the atmosphere to the ecosystem of the bilberry spruce forest obtained during 1 year of observations is comparable with the data obtained using the eddy covariance technique by other authors for the old-growth dark coniferous forests in the boreal zone.

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