

1 **Plant mercury accumulation and litter input to a Northern Sedge-**  
2 **dominated Peatland**

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21 Abstract

22 Plant foliage plays an essential role in accumulating mercury (Hg) from the atmosphere and transferring it to soils in terrestrial  
23 ecosystems, ~~w~~While many studies have focused on forested ecosystems. Hg input from plants to northern peatland peat soils has  
24 not been nearly as well studied and is likely equally important from a mass balance perspective. In this study, we investigated the  
25 accumulation of atmospheric Hg by the dominant plant species, few-seeded sedge [*Carex oligosperma* Michx.], wire sedge  
26 [*Carex lasiocarpa* Ehrh], tussock sedge [*Carex stricta* Lamb.], and sweet gale [*Myrica gale* L.] in a boreal sedge-dominated  
27 peatland. Foliar Hg concentrations decreased early in the growing season due to growth dilution-, ~~and after that Foliar Hg~~  
28 ~~concentrations~~were subsequently positively correlated with leaf age (time). Hg concentrations were 1.4-1.7 times higher in  
29 sweet gale than in sedges. A leaching experiment showed that sweet gale leached less Hg but more bioaccessible dissolved  
30 organic matter (DOM) by mass than sedges. Leaching of Hg was positively related to the aromaticity of DOM in leachate,  
31 suggesting the importance of DOM with higher aromaticity in controlling Hg mobility. Annual inputs of Hg through senesced  
32 leaf material to peat soils were 9.88 mg/ha/yr, 1.62 mg/ha/yr, and 8.29 mg/ha/yr for sweet gale, tussock sedge, and few-seeded  
33 sedge/wire sedge, respectively. Future investigations into foliar Hg accumulation and input from other plant species to the sedge-  
34 dominated peatland are needed to estimate the annual Hg inputs precisely.

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42 **1 Introduction**

43 Mercury (Hg), especially methylmercury (MeHg), is a global concern due to its potential toxicity and ubiquitous presence in the  
44 environment (Morel et al., 1998). Hg is emitted to the atmosphere from both natural (e.g., volcanoes, wildfires, geothermal  
45 activity) and anthropogenic sources (e.g., coal combustion, artisanal gold mining, incineration) (Schroeder and Munthe, 1998;  
46 Streets et al., 2011). Atmospheric Hg exists as gaseous elemental mercury (GEM, Hg(0)), reactive gaseous mercury (RGM,  
47 Hg(II)), and particulate-bound mercury (PBM, Hg<sub>p</sub>) with GEM as the dominant species (> 95 %) (Schroeder and Munthe, 1998).  
48 RGM and PBM have shorter atmospheric residence time ranging from hours to days, whereas GEM has a longer atmospheric  
49 residence time of several months to a year and thus is transported globally (Schroeder and Munthe, 1998). These atmospheric Hg  
50 species are eventually deposited into aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems via wet deposition (precipitation, such as rain, snow, and  
51 fog) and dry deposition (particle settling or direct partitioning to vegetation, water, and soil surface, or direct absorption by  
52 vegetation foliage) (Lindberg et al., 2007). Hg dry deposition is a larger input than wet deposition to vegetated terrestrial  
53 landscapes, contributing 70 %~85 % of total Hg deposition (dry and wet deposition) in terrestrial ecosystems (Graydon et al.,  
54 2008; Risch et al., 2017; Risch et al., 2012; St. Louis et al., 2001; Wang et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2016), and more than 70 % of  
55 Hg dry deposition is by vegetation litterfall/incorporation into soil organic matter (SOM) (Obrist et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2016).

56 Vegetation is generally considered a sink for atmospheric Hg, with the majority of Hg in vegetation leaves accumulated from the  
57 atmosphere (Jiskra et al., 2018; Obrist et al., 2017). Plant leaves accumulate Hg from the atmosphere mainly through stomatal  
58 uptake (Lindberg et al., 1992). Stamenkovic and Gustin (2009) suggested that the non-stomatal pathway of Hg deposition to the  
59 leaf cuticle and subsequently retention and incorporation into leaf tissue also plays an important role in accumulating  
60 atmospheric Hg. Plant roots are thought to generally act as a barrier of Hg transport from soils to shoots (Wang et al., 2015), and  
61 it has been shown that less than 10% of Hg in roots is transported to the aboveground portion of plants (Ericksen et al., 2003;  
62 Mao et al., 2013). Some studies have found that a great proportion of foliar Hg in halophytes in salt marshes was translocated  
63 from the root (Canário et al., 2017; Cabrita et al., 2019; Weis and Weis 2004). The plausible reason is that plants in the  
64 hydroponic growth system have fewer apoplastic barriers (i.e. Casparian bands and suberin lamellae) in root architecture than  
65 plants grown in contaminated soils (Redjala et al., 2011).

66 Forest ecosystems are important sinks of atmospheric Hg and have received widespread attention from researchers (Risch et al.,  
67 2012; St. Louis et al., 2001; Wang et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2009); however, studies about foliar Hg accumulation in other plant

68 types ~~in or other ecosystems such as~~ boreal peatlands ~~ecosystems~~ are few (see Moore et al., 1995) despite their critical role in  
69 the carbon (Gorham, 1991) and Hg cycles (Grigal, 2003). Boreal peatlands ~~are a type of wetland that stores large amounts of Hg~~  
70 ~~store 500 ± 100 Gt of carbon as peat (partially decomposed vegetation matter) due to slow decomposition rates in their anaerobic~~  
71 ~~and acidic conditions and low temperatures (Rydin and Jeglum, 2013). In addition, boreal peatlands are sinks for inorganic Hg~~  
72 (Grigal 2003) ~~(St. Louis et al., 1994)~~, and can be major MeHg sources to downstream ecosystems (Branfireun et al., 1996;  
73 Mitchell et al., 2008; St. Louis et al., 1994), given their anaerobic conditions, non-limiting amounts of inorganic Hg, and often  
74 available but limited amounts of sulfate (Blodau et al., 2007; Schmalenberger et al., 2007) and bioaccessible carbon facilitating  
75 net MeHg production (Mitchell et al., 2008). Elucidation of foliar Hg input from the dominant plant types to boreal peatlands is  
76 important to further estimate the supply of bioavailable Hg(II) for net MeHg production.

77 ~~Little information is available about the amount of atmospheric Hg accumulated in leaves in peatlands. Moore et al. (1995)~~  
78 ~~reported that Hg levels in nonvascular plants (fungi, lichens, and mosses) are almost an order of magnitude higher than those in~~  
79 ~~vascular plants in wetlands, and the Hg concentrations follow the sequence: grassland herbs < trees and shrubs < aquatic~~  
80 ~~macrophytes < *Sphagnum* spp. mosses < lichens < fungi. However, the annual input of aboveground vegetation biomass to~~  
81 ~~peatland soils as senesced litter from vascular plants is greater than from bryophytes (Frolking et al., 2001) in fen-type peatlands~~  
82 ~~dominated by sedges and shrubs, so despite having lower Hg concentrations, the mass input may be significant. With more~~  
83 ~~bioaccessible litter and leachate than bryophytes, vascular plant inputs may also decompose at faster rates, releasing Hg to the~~  
84 ~~soil and/or facilitating net methylation (Hobbie, 1996; Lyons and Lindo, 2019).~~

85 Previous studies have found that the majority of Hg in plant leaves in wetlands was from the atmosphere (Brahmstedt et al.,  
86 2021; Enrico et al., 2016; Fay and Gustin 2007) and nonvascular plants (e.g., fungi, lichens, and mosses) had higher foliar Hg  
87 concentrations than vascular plants (Moore et al., 1995; Pech et al., 2022). Although foliar Hg concentration is lower in vascular  
88 plants than in nonvascular plants, Hg mass input to peatlands may be substantial, given the greater litter input from vascular  
89 plants than from nonvascular plants (Frolking et al., 2001). With more bioaccessible litter than bryophytes (Hobbie, 1996; Lyons  
90 and Lindo, 2019), vascular plants also have a faster initial decomposition rate ( $0.2 \text{ y}^{-1}$ ) than bryophytes ( $0.05\text{-}0.08 \text{ y}^{-1}$ ) (Frolking  
91 et al., 2001), leading to a rapid Hg release to the soil. Boreal peatlands are experiencing rising temperatures due to climate  
92 change (IPCC, 2018) which is likely to both increase aboveground biomass in vascular plant-dominated peatlands (Tian et al.,  
93 2020) and promote a shift from moss-dominated to more vascular plant-dominated plant communities (Buttler et al., 2015;

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94 [Dieleman et al., 2015; Weltzin et al., 2000](#) further affecting Hg deposition ([Zhang et al., 2016](#)). To date, the amount of  
95 [atmospheric Hg accumulated in dominant plants in the vascular plant-dominated \(i.e., graminoid plants and shrubs\) peatlands, an](#)  
96 [important type of boreal wetlands \(Rydin and Jeglum, 2013\), is unknown.](#)

97 Boreal peatlands are experiencing rising temperatures due to climate change (IPCC, 2018) that is likely to either increase  
98 aboveground biomass and leaf area in already vascular plant dominated peatlands or potentially shift moss dominated peatlands  
99 to more vascular plant dominated. Changes in plant abundance and community composition may further affect Hg deposition  
100 ([Zhang et al., 2016](#)) and input through litterfall, given that foliar Hg concentrations ([Moore et al., 1995](#)) and annual vegetation  
101 biomass input ([Frolking et al., 2001](#)) are different among plant species. [Weltzin et al. \(2000\)](#) found that the productivity of  
102 vascular plants in peatlands increased under higher temperatures. A full factorial greenhouse laboratory experiment of increased  
103 temperature and elevated atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> resulted in increased peatland graminoid productivity (both above and belowground)  
104 ([Tian et al., 2020](#)). Several studies have also shown that experimental warming of northern peatlands mesocosms altered plant  
105 community composition, increasing vascular plant abundance and biomass, and decreasing *Sphagnum* spp. cover ([Buttler et al.,](#)  
106 [2015; Dieleman et al., 2015; Weltzin et al., 2000](#)). Changes in plant abundance and biomass in northern peatlands are  
107 ecologically significant, given their role as a source of net MeHg production.

108  
109 Foliar Hg eventually enters peat soils via litterfall and is expected to follow the sequence: (1) wash-off of aerosols, particles, and  
110 gases from leaf surfaces, (2) leaching of water-soluble components, and (3) incorporation into SOM after the microbial  
111 decomposition of litter. Leaching is the initial phase of litter breakdown in aquatic environments and can rapidly release up to  
112 30 % dissolved matter, primarily dissolved organic matter (DOM) within 24 h after immersion of litter ([Gessner et al., 1999](#)). [It](#)  
113 [has been established that dissolved organic matter \(DOM\) is closely related to Hg mobility in terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems](#)  
114 [\(Haitzer et al., 2002; Ravichandran, 2004; Kneer et al., 2020\), given the strong affinity between Hg and reduced sulfur groups](#)  
115 [\(i.e., thiols\) in DOM \(Xia et al., 1999\). DOM with higher aromaticity has more thiols ligands and has a stronger correlation with](#)  
116 [Hg \(Dittman et al., 2009\). The rapid and abundant leaching of DOM, especially those with higher aromaticity from litterfall may](#)  
117 [lead to large amounts of Hg leaching.](#) The amount of rapidly released Hg during litter leaching is unknown and needs to be  
118 elucidated because more recently deposited Hg appears to be more readily methylated than “old” Hg in peat soils ([Branfireun et](#)  
119 [al., 2005; Feng et al., 2014; Hintelmann et al., 2002](#)). [Despite previous studies showing that Hg mass in live leaf leachate is](#)

20 [insignificant compared to that on leaf surfaces and in SOM \(Rea et al., 2001; Rea et al., 2000\), litterfall generally lacks structural](#)  
21 [integrity and likely leaches more Hg compared to live leaves.](#)

122 The overall objective of this study is to link the vascular plant community (i.e., sedges and shrubs) to the peatland Hg cycle in a  
123 vascular plant-dominated fen-type peatland. We use “sedge-dominated fen” instead of “vascular plant-dominated fen-type  
124 peatland” hereafter, given that sedges are the primarily dominant plants in this study site (Webster and McLaughlin, 2010). The  
125 specific objectives of this study are to:

- 126 (1) quantify the mass accumulation of atmospherically-derived Hg in leaves of dominant plant species in a sedge-dominated fen  
127 over a growing season;
- 128 (2) estimate the Hg input from the litter of different plant species and through litter leaching to peat soils;
- 129 (3) clarify the role of DOM characteristics in controlling Hg leaching;
- 130 (4) estimate the annual areal loading of foliar Hg of different plant species to peat soils.

## 131 **2 Materials and methods**

### 132 **2.1 Study site**

133 Samples were collected from a sedge-dominated fen (10.2 ha) located in an 817 ha sub-watershed of the Lake Superior basin  
134 near White River Ontario, Canada (48°21' N, 85°21' W). The growing season is roughly from June to September. The sedge-  
135 dominated fen is mostly open and the vegetation community is dominated by three sedge species: few-seeded sedge [*Carex*  
136 *oligosperma* Michx.]; wire sedge [*Carex lasiocarpa* Ehrh]; and tussock sedge [*Carex stricta* Lamb.] (Lyons and Lindo, 2019).

137 Sweet gale [*Myrica gale* L.] is the dominant shrub at this site (Lyons and Lindo, 2019; Palozzi and Lindo, 2017). [The mean](#)  
138 [species percent cover of few-seeded sedge, wire sedge, tussock sedge, and sweet gale from the sedge-dominated fen is 35.0 ±](#)  
139 [21.79%, 0.3 ± 0.12%, 73.0 ± 18.81%, 44.8 ± 10.63% \(average ± standard error \(SE\)\), respectively \(Palozzi and Lindo 2017\).](#)

140 Details of the study site and the characteristics of these plants are provided in the Supporting Information (SI). In this study, few-  
141 seeded sedges and wire sedges were mixed during plant sample collection as they are indistinguishable in size and form from one  
142 another when not in flower/seed, and frequently co-occur.

143 **2.2 Sample collection and analysis**

144 Five locations several hundred meters apart were selected in the sedge-dominated fen to serve as within-site replicates to account  
145 for potential local-scale variability. These five locations were roughly evenly distributed over this study area. Approximately  
146 fifty whole leaves of each few-seeded sedge/wire sedge, tussock sedge, and sweet gale were collected from each location using a  
147 clean blade in the middle of June, July, August, and after senescence at the beginning of October 2018 in each location, totaling  
148 60 samples. For the October sampling event, the sedge leaves were still standing with the lower sections green, and although  
149 senesced, shrub leaves were sampled from the branch to ensure that there was no mixing with previous years' fallen leaves.  
150 Disposable nitrile gloves were worn during the sample collection. All samples were double bagged with two polyethylene bags  
151 and transported to the lab using a clean cooler. Leaves of each species that were collected from each plot-location in October  
152 2018 were divided for foliar total Hg (THg) analyses and a foliar Hg leaching experiment. Leaves were stored frozen until they  
153 were returned to the university laboratory.

154 For estimation of annual biomass of senesced leaf, seven 0.25 m<sup>2</sup> (0.5 m × 0.5 m) plots several hundred meters apart were  
155 selected at the end of August 2019 during senescence and before leaf off. All aboveground biomass of few-seeded sedge/wire  
156 sedge and tussock sedge and all aboveground leaf biomass of sweet gale were collected separately using a clean blade from each  
157 0.25 m<sup>2</sup> plot. All vegetation samples were stored by species in paper bags, transported to the lab, and then oven-dried at 60 °C  
158 for a minimum of 48 h. Dried leaves of each species in each plot were sorted and weighed to estimate senesced leaf biomass of  
159 each species for each plot. The senesced leaf biomass of each species per hectare per year was calculated and expressed as  
160 mg/ha/yr.

161 **Foliar total mercury, C content and N content.** In the laboratory, leaf samples for chemical analyses were rinsed three times  
162 with deionized water (18.2 MΩ cm), freeze-dried for 48 h, ground and homogenized, and then analyzed using a Milestone™  
163 DMA-80 (EPA method 7473). Leaf C content (%C; w/w) and N content (%N; w/w) before and after the foliar Hg leaching  
164 experiment was analyzed using a CNSH analyzer (Vario Isotope Cube; Elementar). The ratio of leaf C content and N content  
165 (C:N) were calculated. Detailed information concerning analytical methods are described in the SI, including analysis of foliar  
166 total Hg, %C, and %N.

167 **Foliar mercury leaching experiment.** The foliar leaching experimental procedure followed the design of Rea et al. (2000) and  
168 Del Giudice and Lindo (2017). Senesced leaves of sedges and sweet gale collected in October 2018 were rinsed twice with 100

169 mL of deionized water (18.2 MΩ cm) to quantify particulate or loosely-bound Hg and DOM that can be easily removed/leached  
170 from the leaf surface. This water was reserved for subsequent analysis. After rinsing, the leaves were oven-dried at a low  
171 temperature (40 °C) for 48 h, and then the leaves of each species from each location were relatively evenly separated into three  
172 groups and weighed, totaling 45 groups. These oven-dried senesced leaf samples were immersed in 150 mL of deionized water  
173 in clean 250 mL PETG bottles. All PETG bottles were capped, double bagged, and incubated in the dark at room temperature  
174 (~21 °C) for 48 h. Senesced leaf materials were gently swirled at the beginning of the leaching experiment to ensure complete  
175 wetting. Following the leaching, the leachate was vacuum filtered through a 0.45 μm glass fiber filter into clean 250 mL PETG  
176 bottles. Leachate from each sample was split into two aliquots. One was preserved by acidifying to 0.5 % (vol/vol) with high-  
177 purity HCl for dissolved total Hg (THg<sub>aq</sub>) analysis and stored in 250 mL PETG bottles; the other was stored in the clean 60 mL  
178 Amber glass bottles and analyzed within 2 d for the quantity and characteristics of DOM. All samples were stored in the dark at  
179 4 °C for further analysis. Method blanks of the leaching experiment were performed at the same time following the same  
180 procedure.

181 Senesced leaf material was taken out of each PETG bottle, oven-dried at 40 °C for 48 h, and re-weighed after leaching. The dry  
182 leaf weight before and after the leaching process was used to calculate the mass loss. These re-dried senesced leaf samples after  
183 leaching were ground and homogenized before the measurement for %C and %N as described above.

184 The dissolved total Hg (THg<sub>aq</sub>) concentrations in the rinse water and leachate were analyzed using Environmental Protection  
185 Agency (EPA) method 1631. Dissolved organic matter is quantified analytically as dissolved organic carbon (DOC). DOC  
186 concentrations in rinse water and leachate were measured using an iTOC Aurora 1030 (OI Analytical, College Station, TX,  
187 USA) using the persulfate wet oxidation method. Details on the analytical procedures and QA/QC data for concentrations of  
188 THg<sub>aq</sub> and DOC are provided in the SI.

189 DOM in leachate was characterized as specific ultraviolet absorbance at a wavelength of 254 nm (SUVA<sub>254</sub>), an indicator of the  
190 molecular weight (or size) and aromaticity (the content of aromatic molecules) of DOM (Weishaar et al., 2003). Higher SUVA<sub>254</sub>  
191 values suggest that DOM contains more high-molecular-weight and aromatic molecules (Weishaar et al., 2003). Fluorescence  
192 excitation-emission matrices (EEMs) were also collected for calculating informative optical indices that reflect differences in  
193 DOM characteristics in leachate. The reported EEMs were then converted to optical indices using R Software (R Core Team  
194 2012). Three common indices were chosen in this study: the fluorescence index (FI), the humification index (HIX<sub>EM</sub>), and the  
195 biological index or 'freshness' index (BIX). Lower FI values (< 1.2) indicate that DOM is terrestrially derived (resulting from



196 decomposition and leaching of plant and soil organic matter) and has higher aromaticity, while higher FI values (> 1.8) indicate  
197 that DOM is microbially derived (originating from processes as extracellular release and leachate of algae and bacteria) and has  
198 lower aromaticity (Fellman et al., 2010; McKnight et al., 2001). High HIX<sub>EM</sub> (> 1.0) values reflect the high humification of  
199 DOM and DOM is composed of more highly condensed and higher molecular weight molecules (Fellman et al., 2010; Hansen et  
200 al., 2016; Huguet et al., 2009; Ohno, 2002). Higher BIX values (> 1.0) reflect that more low-molecular-weight DOM was  
201 recently produced by microbes (Fellman et al., 2010; Huguet et al., 2009). Details on the analytical procedures and QA/QC data  
202 for SUVA<sub>254</sub>, FI, HIX<sub>EM</sub>, and BIX are provided in the SI.

### 203 3 Statistical analysis

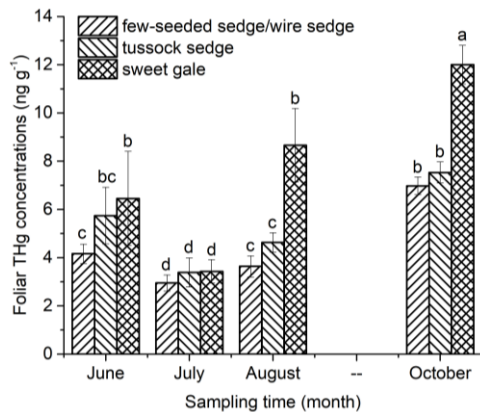
204 Results were analyzed using IBM SPSS statistics software (IBM SPSS Inc. 24.0). The repeated-measures ANOVA was  
205 performed to compare the difference in foliar THg concentrations among different plant species over the growing season and to  
206 analyze the effect of leaf age on foliar Hg concentrations. Linear regressions were analyzed to examine the relationship between  
207 foliar THg accumulation and leaf age. Differences in the foliage quality (%C, %N, and C:N) were analyzed using a multivariate  
208 ANOVA. One-way ANOVA was used to determine the effects of plant species on concentrations of THg<sub>aq</sub> and DOM quantity  
209 and characteristics in leachate. The repeated-measures ANOVA, multivariate ANOVA, and one-way ANOVA were followed by  
210 a *post hoc* test (Bonferroni's significant difference; honestly significant difference at the 95 % confidence interval). Weighed  
211 least squares regression was used to examine the nature of the relationship between THg<sub>aq</sub> concentrations and SUVA<sub>254</sub> in  
212 leachate. Data are presented as the mean ± standard deviation (SD). Coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>) and significance p-values  
213 (p) are presented for linear regression fits, and p < 0.05 was considered significant.

## 214 4 Results and discussion

### 215 4.1 Foliar mercury accumulation in peatland plants

216 Foliar THg concentrations were related to time/leaf age ( $F_{(4,733,34,2636)} = 42.75108.86$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and plant species ( $F_{(4,232,1234,38)} =$   
217  $29.3851.85$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) (Fig. 1). Based on *post hoc* tests, foliar THg concentrations were significantly different between plant  
218 species and between the sampling months, except that there was no significant difference in foliar THg concentrations between  
219 June and August. The mean foliar THg concentrations (n = 5) in June followed the sequence: few-seeded sedge/wire sedge <  
220 tussock sedge < sweet gale. In July foliar THg concentrations decreased by 30 % (few-seeded sedge/wire sedge), 40 % (tussock  
221 sedge), and 47 % (sweet gale), respectively. The decrease in THg concentrations is likely because of leaf growth dilution,

222 although changes in leaf biomass were not quantified as part of this study. Foliar THg concentrations were positively related to  
 223 time after July (few-seeded sedge/wire sedge:  $F_{(1,13)} = 185.79$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $R^2 = 0.93$ ; tussock sedge:  $F_{(1,13)} = 200.87$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  
 224  $R^2 = 0.94$ ; sweet gale:  $F_{(1,13)} = 70.72$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $R^2 = 0.84$ ). The mean foliar THg concentrations in October few-seeded sedge/wire  
 225 sedge, tussock sedge, and sweet gale were 1.7, 1.3, and 2.0 times higher than the initial concentrations in June. This result  
 226 showed a clear pattern of continuous THg accumulation in foliage in boreal peatland plant species from the atmosphere over  
 227 time as has been shown for forests (Laacouri et al., 2013; Millhollen et al., 2006b; Rea et al., 2002), which can be attributed to  
 228 foliar Hg accumulation from the air, given that plant roots act as a barrier of Hg transport from soils to shoots (Wang et al.,  
 229 2015). Further studies are needed to quantify the contribution of atmospheric and soil Hg to foliar Hg.



230  
 231 **Figure 1** The intraseasonal trend in foliar total mercury (THg) concentrations ( $\text{ng g}^{-1}$ ) of few-seeded sedge/wire sedge, tussock sedge,  
 232 and sweet gale ( $\text{ng g}^{-1}$ ). All concentrations are expressed in dry weight. Error bars are  $\pm$ SD ( $n = 5$  for each species for each time  
 233 interval). The same letters above bars denote that values of foliar THg concentrations are not significantly different at the 0.05 levels.

234 Mercury accumulation in leaves is affected by many factors, such as atmospheric Hg concentration, environmental conditions  
 235 (e.g., solar radiation and temperature), and biological factors (e.g., leaf age, plant species, leaf area, and leaf placement)  
 236 (Blackwell and Driscoll, 2015; Ericksen et al., 2003; Ericksen and Gustin, 2004; Laacouri et al., 2013; Millhollen et al., 2006a).  
 237 Since all samples were collected in the same location, factors such as atmospheric Hg concentration and environmental  
 238 conditions were deemed the same, leaving only biological factors as an explanation for differences.

239 **Leaf age.** Leaf age is an important biological factor in controlling foliar concentrations (Ericksen et al., 2003; Laacouri et al.,  
 240 2013). The positive relationship between foliar THg concentrations and time after July suggests that leaves of all species here

241 continued to assimilate atmospheric Hg over the growing season right up to senescence. Some studies have found that the rate of  
242 foliar Hg uptake decreased toward the end of the growing season (Ericksen et al., 2003; Laacouri et al., 2013; Poissant et al.,  
243 2008), which appears to be because of the decrease ~~in~~of photosynthetic activity at the end of the growing season (Koike et al.,  
244 2003). ~~Despite the decline of foliar Hg uptake during the late growing season~~In this study, foliar Hg concentrations continue to  
245 increase right up to senescence. ~~Although foliar Hg can transport to other plant organs, such as tree rings (Arnold et al., 2018;~~  
246 ~~McLagan et al., 2022), and/or can be re-emitted into the atmosphere (Zheng et al., 2016; Yu et al., 2016; Yuan et al., 2019),~~  
247 ~~because of the immobilization of~~the majority of foliar Hg ~~by mass is generally incorporated into leaf tissue~~ (Laacouri et al.,  
248 2013; Lodenius et al., 2003; Stamenkovic and Gustin, 2009). ~~In addition, it is likely that less than 10% of Hg in roots was~~  
249 ~~transported to the leaves (Ericksen et al., 2003; Mao et al., 2013).~~

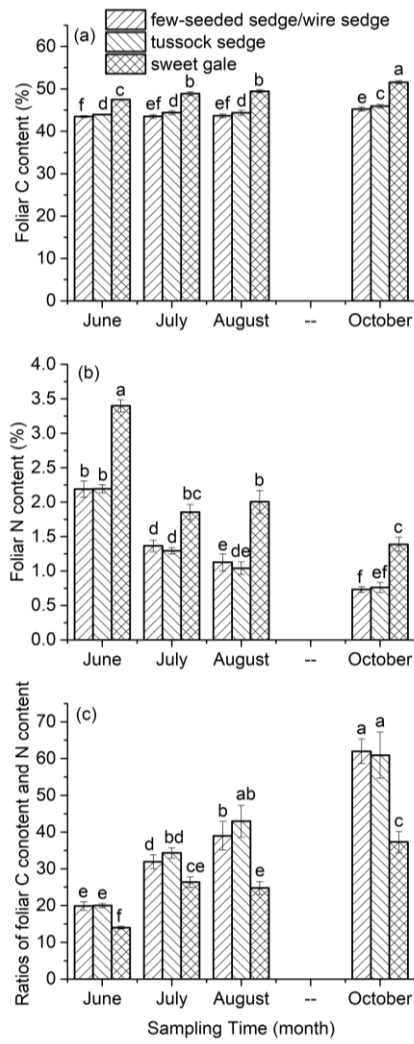
250 **Plant species.** Plant photosynthesis, transpiration, growth rates, and leaf area are different among plant species (Antúnez et al.,  
251 2001; Laacouri et al., 2013; Millhollen et al., 2006b), and given that these are important controls on Hg accumulation, the  
252 differences among species found in this study are not surprising. The mean foliar THg concentrations in tussock sedge were 1.2  
253 times higher than that in few-seeded sedge/wire sedge, and although not measured as part of this study, tussock sedge has a  
254 larger leaf area than few-seeded sedge/wire sedge (Newmaster et al., 1997). A larger leaf has ~~more a~~ higher density of stomates  
255 and thus more leaf accumulation of atmospheric Hg (Laacouri et al., 2013; Millhollen et al., 2006; Stamenkovic and Gustin,  
256 2009). ~~A larger leaf area may also provide more adsorption sites for non-stomatal Hg uptake. Increased biomass corresponding~~  
257 ~~with a bigger leaf area can offset the effects of stomate number on atmospheric Hg accumulation by leaves to a certain degree. A~~  
258 ~~plausible explanation is that leaf biomass does not proportionally increase with leaf area and stomata, leading to a higher~~  
259 ~~absolute Hg concentration in tussock sedge leaves than in few-seeded sedge/wire sedge leaves. The higher relative Hg~~  
260 ~~concentrations in sweet gale (mean 1.7 and 1.4 times higher than few-seeded/wire, and tussock sedge, respectively) is likely due~~  
261 ~~in part to the same leaf area relationship. In addition,~~Kozłowski and Pallardy (1997) reported that leaves near the top of the  
262 canopy generally have higher rates of photosynthesis and stomatal conductance than those near the bottom of the canopy due to  
263 light saturation. Sweet gale had potentially higher stomatal conductance due to higher incident radiation and vapor pressure  
264 deficits than sedges that are lower to the saturated ground with tightly packed vertical leaves.

265 Concentrations of Hg in senesced leaves of few-seeded sedge/wire sedge, tussock sedge, and sweet gale (6.58 ng g<sup>-1</sup> to 12.77 ng  
266 g<sup>-1</sup>) were lower than that reported in tree litter (47-21 ng g<sup>-1</sup> – 238-78 ng g<sup>-1</sup>) in North-America and Europe (Laacouri et al., 2013;  
267 Obrist et al., 2021; Poissant et al., 2008; Rea et al., 2002; Wang et al., 2016; ~~Zhang et al., 2009~~) but similar to that previously

268 reported for ~~sedges-grasses and herbaceous plants and shrubs in Canada~~ (10.2 ~~±~~ 6.8~10 ng g<sup>-1</sup>) (Moore et al., 1995; Olson et al.,  
269 2019). The foliar Hg concentrations for plant species in this study increased 1.3-2.0 times over the growing season, which was  
270 smaller than that (3-11 fold) reported for trees (Laacouri et al., 2013; Poissant et al., 2008; Rea et al., 2002). The above results  
271 further confirm that foliar Hg concentrations differ among vegetation types (Demers et al., 2007; Moore et al., 1995; Obrist et al.,  
272 2012; Richardson and Friedland, 2015). It has been suggested that Hg previously retained in leaves can be photo reduced to Hg<sup>0</sup>  
273 that is re-emitted to the atmosphere, and consistent Hg<sup>0</sup> re-emission from the foliage is positively related to photosynthetically  
274 active radiation (PAR) (Yuan et al., 2019). The plants in open boreal peatlands lacking a tree overstorey like that in this study  
275 would receive very high exposure to ultraviolet (UV), which may result in a greater photoreduction of Hg previously retained in  
276 leaves and then Hg loss than tree leaves that are more often shaded. Moreover, despite angiosperms having higher stomatal  
277 conductance due to fewer stomata but more numbers (de Boer et al., 2016; Jordan et al., 2015), stomatal opening in dark-adapted  
278 leaves after light exposure was generally faster in gymnosperms than in angiosperms but stomatal closing upon the darkness of  
279 light-adapted leaves was faster in angiosperms than in gymnosperms (Xiong et al., 2018). This phenomenon may lead to a higher  
280 Hg concentration in trees (a type of gymnosperms) than in sedges and sweet gales (two types of angiosperms). More studies are  
281 needed to elucidate this mechanism of foliar Hg accumulation by different plant types. ~~The foliar Hg concentrations for plant~~  
282 ~~species in this study increased 1.3-2.0 times over the growing season, which was smaller than that (3-11 fold) reported for trees~~  
283 ~~(Laacouri et al., 2013; Poissant et al., 2008; Rea et al., 2002). The above results suggested that foliar Hg concentrations differ~~  
284 ~~among vegetation types (Demers et al., 2007; Moore et al., 1995; Obrist et al., 2012; Richardson and Friedland, 2015)~~  
285 ~~, which might be attributed to the larger leaf and higher stomatal density/ leaf placement in trees than sedges and shrubs.~~

286 **Leaf carbon, nitrogen and mercury.** Leaf %C, %N, and C:N were significantly different among plant species ( $F_{(6,104)} = 59.64$ ,  $p$   
287  $< 0.001$ ) over the growing season ( $F_{(9,124)} = 45.42$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) (Fig. 2). Based on *post hoc* tests, foliar %C, %N, and C:N was  
288 significantly different between sweet gale and sedges (few-seeded sedge/wire sedge and tussock sedge) but not between few-  
289 seeded sedge/wire sedge and tussock sedge. Foliar %C and %N were much lower in these sedges than sweet gale, which agrees  
290 well with a previous study that deciduous shrubs (i.e., sweet gale) generally have a higher foliar %C and %N than grasses  
291 (Wright et al., 2004). The fixation of nitrogen in sweet gale is in part attributed to sweet gale root nodules containing symbiotic  
292 nitrogen-fixing (Newmaster et al., 1997; Vitousek et al., 2002) with this greater amount of available N leading to higher  
293 photosynthetic capacity (Wright et al., 2004), thus, species containing a higher foliar %N are usually accompanied with a  
294 higher %C.

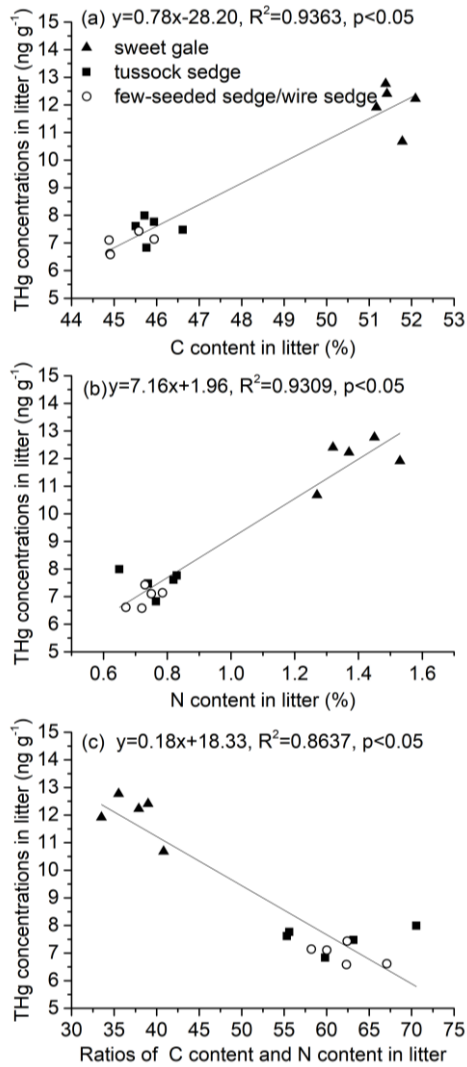
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297 **Figure 2** The carbon content (%C) (a), nitrogen content (%N) (b), and the ratio of carbon content to nitrogen content (C:N) (c) over  
298 the 2018 growing season. Vertical bars are mean  $\pm$  SD (n = 5). The same letters above bars denote that values of foliar THg  
299 concentrations are not significantly different at the 0.05 levels.

300 There were significant increases in foliar %C (few-seeded sedge/wire sedge:  $F_{(3,9)} = 25.98$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; tussock sedge:  $F_{(3,9)} =$   
301  $20.56$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; sweet gale:  $F_{(3,9)} = 115.90$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) but sharp decreases ~~of~~in foliar %N (few-seeded sedge/wire sedge:  
302  $F_{(1.34,4.03)} = 354.20$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; tussock sedge:  $F_{(3,9)} = 252.36$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; sweet gale:  $F_{(3,9)} = 170.43$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) over the growing  
303 season (Fig. 2). The strong decreases in foliar %N with leaf age can be attributed to the translocation of N from senescing leaves  
304 to new leaves (Wang et al., 2003). A study found that approximately 77 % N, 57 % phosphorus (P), and 44 % potassium (K)  
305 were translocated out of senescing leaves during mangrove leaf senescence (Wang et al., 2003). Foliar C is sequestering  
306 continuously over the growing season (Kueh et al., 2013). The element re-translocation and C sequestration in leaves may lead to  
307 the foliar %C increase with time. The values of foliar C:N increased with time, which is a function of the decreases of foliar %N  
308 and the increases of foliar %C.

309 Senesced leaf tissue with higher foliar %C and %N had higher foliar THg concentrations (%C and Hg:  $F_{(1,13)} = 191.09$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  
310  $y = 0.78x - 28.20$ ,  $R^2 = 0.94$ ; %N and Hg:  $F_{(1,13)} = 82.38$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $y = 7.16x - 1.96$ ,  $R^2 = 0.93$ ) (Fig. 3a and 3b). THg  
311 concentrations were negatively related to foliar C:N during senescence ( $F_{(1,13)} = 175.10$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $y = 0.18x - 18.33$ ,  $R^2 = 0.86$ ;  
312 Fig. 3c). A previous study found soil Hg concentrations were positively related to soil organic C and N, and then given a possible  
313 explanation that high C and N levels in soil reflect high vegetation productivity corresponding with high atmospheric Hg  
314 deposition via litterfall (Obrist et al., 2009). Although the mechanism of these relationships between Hg concentrations and  
315 contents of C and N in senesced leaves materials is still unclear, this study shows that Hg input via litterfall to soils can be  
316 affected by higher C and N content in senesced leaves, indirectly indicates a higher input of Hg via litterfall to soils. More  
317 studies and data are needed to draw predictive conclusions.



318

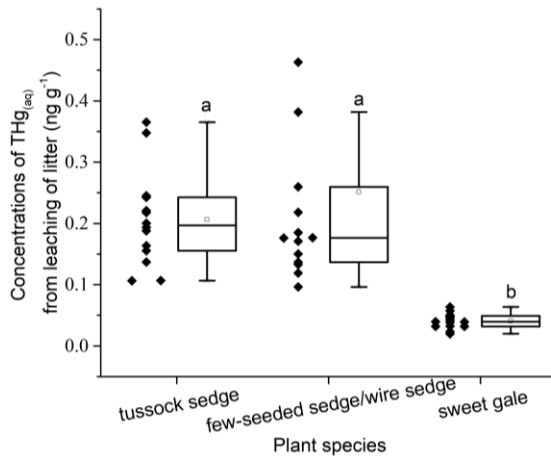
319 **Figure 3** Correlations between (a) THg concentrations and C contents, (b) THg concentrations and N contents, and (c) THg  
 320 concentrations and ratios of C content and N content (C:N) in litter. All linear correlations are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ).

321 **4.2 Mercury leaching from senesced leaves**

322 **Surface-rinsable mercury.** The mean mass of Hg from the surface rinse of senesced leaf material (expressed per gram of dry  
 323 senesced leaf) was  $0.02 \pm 0.01 \text{ ng g}^{-1}$  and  $0.01 \pm 0.00 \text{ ng g}^{-1}$  (or  $3.27 \pm 1.68 \text{ ng L}^{-1}$  and  $1.39 \pm 0.83 \text{ ng L}^{-1}$ , expressed per liter of

324 rinse water (18.2 MΩ cm)), respectively, indicating that mass of Hg that was loosely bound on the leaf surface was small relative  
 325 to the total senesced leaf tissue Hg concentration ( $8.83 \pm 2.38 \text{ ng g}^{-1}$ ) representing on average only 0.4 % Hg (tussock sedge:  
 326 0.6 %; few-seeded sedge/wire sedge: 0.3 %; sweet gale: 0.3 %) of total THg mass.

327 **Leachable mercury.** The mean  $\text{THg}_{\text{aq}}$  mass per gram of senesced leaf had significant differences between plant species ( $F_{(2,41)} =$   
 328 11.55,  $p < 0.001$ ; Fig. 4). Based on *post hoc* tests, there were significant differences in  $\text{THg}_{\text{aq}}$  mass per gram of senesced leaf  
 329 between sweet gale and sedges (few-seeded sedge/wire sedge and tussock sedge) but not between few-seeded sedge/wire sedge  
 330 and tussock sedge. The senesced leaf of sweet gale leached the least Hg among these plant species, which is likely due to their  
 331 hydrophobic waxy cuticle that may both retain Hg, as well as protect the inner leaf material from leaching. Another plausible  
 332 explanation is that N was more easily released from sedges than C and it was the opposite for sweet gale, based on changes in  
 333 foliar %C and %N between before and after leaching (Table 1), whereas N groups in litter hinder the leaching of foliar Hg  
 334 (Obrist et al., 2009). Foliar %N of sweet gale increased after leaching, which is likely attributed to a large amount of loss of other  
 335 elements, such as K, Mg, and P, although they were not part of this experiment. Bessaad and Korboulewsky (2020) found that  
 336 60–79 % of K, 19–50 % of Mg, 22–30 % of P, and < 16 % of Ca and N were leached out from fully developed broadleaves  
 337 (collected in summer) during rainfall.



338  
 339 **Figure 4** Mass of mercury leached per gram of senesced leaf material ( $\text{ng g}^{-1}$ ). Boxplot displays median (50th percentile; the inside line  
 340 of the box), first quartile (25th percentile; lower bound of the box), third quartile (75th percentile; upper bound of the box), whiskers  
 341 (all measures between 5th percentile and 25th percentile and between 75th percentile and 95th percentile; the straight line below and  
 342 above the box), and outliers (individual points outside of the percentile of 5th and 95th).  $n = 15$ .



343 **Table 1 Changes of foliar carbon content (%C) and nitrogen content (%N) during leaching of litterfall. n = 15**

	foliar %C			foliar %N		
	before leaching	after leaching	<u>change percentage (%)</u>	before leaching	after leaching	<u>change percentage (%)</u>
sweet gale	51.57 ± 0.36	51.03 ± 0.34	<u>-1.05</u>	1.39 ± 0.10	1.50 ± 0.07	<u>-7.91</u>
tussock sedge	45.91 ± 0.42	44.97 ± 0.54	<u>-2.05</u>	0.76 ± 0.07	0.68 ± 0.10	<u>-10.53</u>
few-seeded sedge/wire sedge	45.24 ± 0.49	43.83 ± 0.49	<u>-3.12</u>	0.73 ± 0.04	0.64 ± 0.02	<u>-12.33</u>

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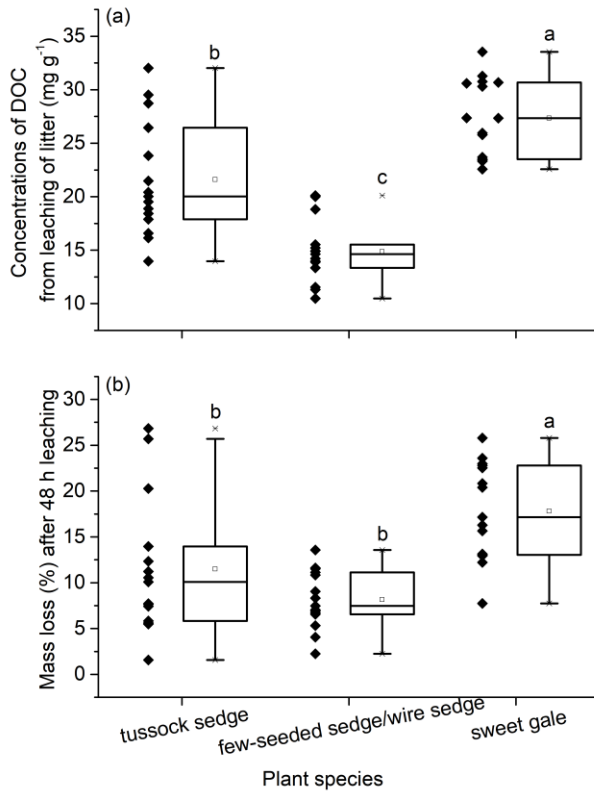
344

345 During experimental leaching, 3.0 %, 2.9 %, and 0.3 % of the total THg mass present in tussock sedge, few-seeded sedge/wire  
 346 sedge, and sweet gale senesced leaf was leached, respectively. The percentages of Hg that leached from tussock sedge, few-  
 347 seeded sedge/wire sedge leaves were 5.5 and 10.6 times higher than that from rinses, while the percentage of Hg that leached  
 348 from sweet gale senesced leaf was similar to that from rinse water (0.3 %). Rea et al. (2000) reported that surface washoff of  
 349 loosely bound and particulate Hg was a rapid and larger source of Hg in forest throughfall compared to continuously foliar Hg  
 350 leaching from live leaves. It is likely because dry leaves lack structural integrity compared to live leaves in Rea et al.'s (2000)  
 351 study, leading to more rapid leaching of soluble constituents (Gessner et al., 1999), including Hg, so the results of these prior  
 352 studies are not directly comparable to this one. Further, although Hg leached from senesced leaf material was a small (< 5 % of  
 353 foliar tissue Hg) but a measurable contributor to the mass balance, it is one that would be completely missed if material had been  
 354 collected from a litter trap that had been exposed to rainfall for any period.

355 **4.3 The roles of Quantity and characteristics of leachate dissolved organic matter properties in Hg mobility during litter**  
 356 **leaching phase**

357 **The quantity and characteristics of DOM in leachate.** The mean mass of DOC leached per gram of senesced leaf material and  
 358 the mass loss during senesced leaf material leaching was significantly different between plant species (leached DOC mass:  $F_{(2,42)}$   
 359  $= 34.95$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; mass loss:  $F_{(2,42)} = 11.62$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) with a same sequence following: few-seeded sedge/wire sedge < tussock  
 360 sedge < sweet gale (Fig. 5). The same sequence is in part because the loss of soluble carbons accounted for the majority of the  
 361 mass loss during litter leaching (Del Giudice and Lindo, 2017). Mass loss of sweet gale (17.7%) was significantly larger than  
 362 sedges (few-seeded sedge/wire sedge (8.1%) and tussock sedge (11.5%)). The released DOC accounted for  $22.96 \pm 14.85\%$ ,  
 363  $23.73 \pm 12.95\%$ , and  $17.03 \pm 6.68\%$  of mass loss during senesced leaf material leaching for few-seeded sedge/wire sedge, tussock

364 sedge, and sweet gale, respectively. Loss of other nutrients, such as dissolved organic nitrogen (DON) and dissolved organic  
 365 phosphorus (DOP) (Ong et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2018; Hensgens et al., 2020) and the inorganic components and other elemental  
 366 organic matter (Lavery et al., 2013; Jiménez et al., 2017) also contribute to the mass loss, despite these nutrients not being  
 367 measured.



368  
 369 **Figure 5** Mass of dissolved organic carbon (DOC) leached per gram of senesced leaf material (mg g<sup>-1</sup>) (a), and mass loss after 48 h  
 370 leaching (b). Boxplot displays median (50th percentile; the inside line of the box), first quartile (25th percentile; lower bound of the  
 371 box), third quartile (75th percentile; upper bound of the box), whiskers (all measures between 5th percentile and 25th percentile and  
 372 between 75th percentile and 95th percentile; the straight line below and above the box), and outliers (individual points outside of the  
 373 percentile of 5th and 95th). n = 15.

374 Characteristics of DOM also varied among plant species (SUVA<sub>254</sub>:  $F_{(2,42)} = 24.02$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; HIX<sub>EM</sub>:  $F_{(2,42)} = 3.82$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ; FI:  
 375  $F_{(2,42)} = 11.24$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; BIX:  $F_{(2,42)} = 125.48$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) (Fig. 6 and Table 2). Based on *post hoc* tests, there were significant

376 differences in SUVA<sub>254</sub> and FI between sweet gale and sedges (few-seeded sedge/wire sedge) only and in BIX among all plant  
377 species; there were no significant differences in HIX<sub>254</sub> among plant species. FI (1.2-1.8) and BIX (<1.0) reflected that DOM in  
378 leachate was generally of plant origin, suggesting that the microbially-derived OM was a smaller component. The mean value of  
379 SUVA<sub>254</sub> in leachate followed the sequence: tussock sedge ≈ few-seeded sedge/wire sedge > sweet gale leaves, respectively,  
380 indicating that leached DOM from tussock sedge and few-seeded sedge/wire sedge leaves had higher aromaticity and higher  
381 molecular weights than that from the sweet gale leaves. SUVA<sub>254</sub> was negatively related to DOM concentrations ( $F_{(1,43)} = 48.37$ ,  
382  $p < 0.001$ ,  $y = -0.69x + 3.93$ ,  $R^2 = 0.53$ ) when all plant species were considered, suggesting that sweet gale prefers to release  
383 more amount of lower aromatic DOM.

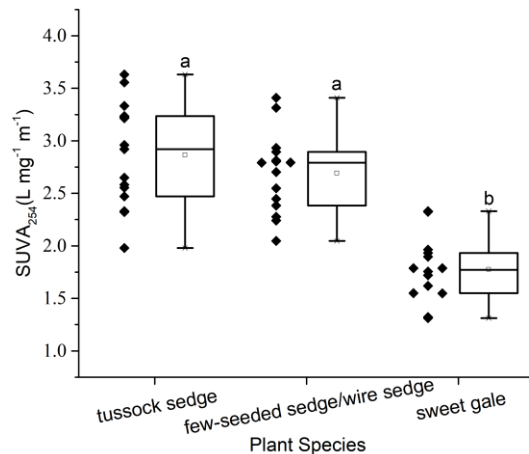
384 Previous studies have found that characteristics of DOM controlled Hg mobility and methylation (Cui et al., 2022; Jiang et al.,  
385 2018; Ravichandran 2004; Xin et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022). Hg is tightly and readily bound to reduced sulfur groups (i.e.,  
386 thiols) in DOM (Ravichandran, 2004; Xia et al., 1999). Mercury weakly binds to carboxyl and phenol functional groups in DOM  
387 after all thiol groups are occupied at relatively high Hg concentrations (Drexel et al., 2002; Graham et al., 2012), which is  
388 atypical in most natural environments in which Hg concentrations are relatively low. Higher terrestrial (plant-derived) DOM had  
389 a greater DOM-Hg affinity (Wang et al., 2022). Additionally, DOM with higher aromaticity and molecular weight strongly  
390 bonded with Hg<sup>2+</sup>, potentially because these DOM provide more sulfidic groups such as thiols (Dittman et al., 2009; Wang et  
391 al., 2022). Therefore, terrestrial DOM and/or DOM with higher aromaticity and molecular weight may transport more Hg into  
392 peat soils during the litter leaching phase.

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394 **Figure 6** Dissolved organic matter characteristics as measured by specific ultraviolet absorbance at the wavelength 254 nm (SUVA<sub>254</sub>),  
 395 n = 15. Boxplot displays median (50th percentile; the inside line of the box), first quartile (25th percentile; lower bound of the box),  
 396 third quartile (75th percentile; upper bound of the box), whiskers (all measures between 5th percentile and 25th percentile and  
 397 between 75th percentile and 95th percentile; the straight line below and above the box), and outliers (individual points outside of the  
 398 percentile of 5th and 95th).

399 **Table 2** The mean fluorescence indices of dissolved organic matter characteristics<sup>a</sup>

Index	Tussock sedge	Few-seeded sedge/wire sedge	Sweet gale
FI	1.19 ± 0.10	1.31 ± 0.09	1.49 ± 0.27
HIX <sub>EM</sub>	0.16 ± 0.03	0.16 ± 0.02	0.19 ± 0.03
BIX	0.53 ± 0.05	0.63 ± 0.06	0.35 ± 0.04

400 <sup>a</sup>Lower values of the FI (< 1.2) suggest dissolved organic matter (DOM) has higher aromaticity and is primarily composed of  
 401 high-molecular-weight DOM, while high FI values (> 1.8) indicate that DOM has lower aromaticity and is mainly composed of  
 402 low-molecular-weight DOM. DOM with high HIX<sub>EM</sub> (> 1) values is composed of more highly condensed and higher molecular  
 403 weight molecules. In contrast, higher BIX (> 1.0) values reflect that more low-molecular-weight DOM is recently produced,  
 404 generally, by microbes. All indices are unitless, n = 15.

405 The mean value of SUVA<sub>254</sub> in leachate followed the sequence: tussock sedge > few-seeded sedge/wire sedge > sweet gale  
 406 leaves, respectively, indicating that leached DOM from tussock sedge and few-seeded sedge/wire sedge leaves had higher  
 407 aromaticity and less bioaccessible than that from the sweet gale leaves. These results are supported by indexes of FI and HIX<sub>EM</sub>.  
 408 DOM in senesced leaf material leachate of tussock sedge and few-seeded sedge/wire sedge had lower values of FI and HIX<sub>EM</sub>.

409 than that of sweet gale leaves, indicative of the presence of less bioaccessible and more aromatic DOM contents in sedges than in  
410 sweet gale. All BIX values (0.26–0.73) measured in this study were lower than 1.0, reflecting that DOM is mainly terrestrially  
411 derived (leaching from litterfall) in this study.

412 Although DOM leached from different litters has different characteristics, DOM leaching from litters is a substantial source to  
413 surrounding ecosystems (Davis et al., 2003; Davis et al., 2006; DeI Giudice and Lindo, 2017). Importantly, the leached DOM  
414 (e.g., organic acids, sugars, amino acids) can provide energy and nutrients for microbes (Davis et al., 2003), which will  
415 subsequently stimulate biological degradation and Hg methylation.

#### 416 4.4—Correlation between THg<sub>aq</sub> concentrations and SUVA<sub>254</sub> values in leachate.

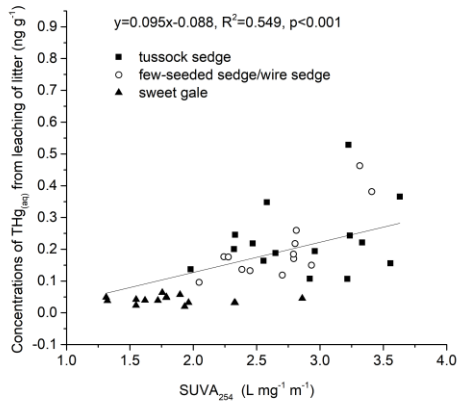
417 The concentrations of soluble THg<sub>aq</sub> were significantly related to SUVA<sub>254</sub> values ( $F_{(1,41)} = 52.06$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $y = 0.09x - 0.09$ ,  $R^2$   
418  $= 0.55$ ; Fig. 7). Hg is tightly and readily bound to reduced sulfur groups (i.e., thiols) in DOM (Ravichandran, 2004; Xia et al.,  
419 1999), especially those with higher aromaticity that have more reduced sulfur groups (Dittman et al., 2009). Mercury weakly  
420 binds to carboxyl and phenol functional groups in DOM after all thiol groups are occupied at relatively high Hg concentrations  
421 (Drexel et al., 2002; Graham et al., 2012), which is atypical in most natural environments in which Hg concentrations are  
422 relatively low. This result suggested that agreed well with the literature indicating that DOM with higher aromaticity plays an  
423 important role in controlling Hg mobility, given that the number of reduced sulfur groups far exceeds the amount of Hg in  
424 natural environments (Ravichandran, 2004). The value of  $R^2$  was only 0.55, which can be attributed that the number of reduced  
425 sulfur groups in DOM far exceeds the amount of Hg in natural environments and other factors, such as pH and sulfide may affect  
426 the binding between DOM and Hg (Ravichandran, 2004). In this study, DOM with higher aromaticity may transport more Hg  
427 from litter to soils, and senesced leaves of sedges had a higher potential in leaching Hg into peatland soils than the senesced  
428 leaves of sweet gales in this study.

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430 **Figure 7 Correlations between the mass of mercury leached per gram of senesced leaf material (THg<sub>leq</sub>) and the specific ultraviolet**  
 431 **absorbance at the wavelength 254 nm (SUVA<sub>254</sub>) in leachate.**

432 **4.5 Estimation of annual input of Hg via senesced leaves and rapid Leaching to peat soils**

433 The annual input of leaf biomass (mg/ha/yr) of few-seeded sedge/wire sedge into peat soils was 5.55 and 1.41 fold higher than  
 434 tussock sedge and sweet gale, while the annual inputs of Hg (mg/ha/yr) via sweet gale leaves were 6.29 and 1.22 fold higher than  
 435 via tussock sedge and few-seeded/wire sedge leaves in the sedge-dominated fen (Table 3). Annual total Hg input through  
 436 senesced leaves to peat soils were 1.56, 8.03, and 9.82 mg/ha/yr for tussock sedge, few-seeded sedge/wire sedge, and sweet gale,  
 437 respectively. The input of surficial Hg and leachable Hg accounted for 0.64 % and 0.37 %, 0.31 % and 3.20 %, and 2.86 % and  
 438 0.30 % of total foliar Hg input to peat soils annually for tussock sedge, few-seeded sedge/wire sedge, and sweet gale,  
 439 respectively. The majority of Hg in senesced leaves (> 96 %) was from the deposition of solid plant tissues in litter.

440

441

442 **Table 3 Annual input of senesced leaves, and senesced leaf Hg, surficial Hg, and leached Hg during leaching into peat**  
 443 **soils per hectare and per year in the sedge-dominated fen (mg/ha/yr).**

Species	Senesced leaf biomass (mg/ha/yr)	Litter total Hg input (mg/ha/yr)	Washoff Hg input (mg/ha/yr)	Leachate Hg input (mg/ha/yr)
Tussock sedge	2.07 ×10 <sup>8</sup>	1.56	0.01	0.05
Few-seeded sedge/wire sedge	1.15 ×10 <sup>9</sup>	8.03	0.03	0.23
Sweet gale	8.18 ×10 <sup>8</sup>	9.82	0.03	0.03
<b>Total</b>	2.17 ×10 <sup>9</sup>	19.41	0.07	0.31

444

445 Based on the data from the study growing season, the annual input of Hg in total via senesced leaves (19.40 mg/ha/yr) was 5-  
 446 22 % of litterfall in forest ecosystems (e.g., jack pine/black spruce/balsam fir forest, red maple/birch forest, Norway spruce  
 447 forest; 86-372 mg/ha/yr) (St Louis et al., 2001; Graydon et al., 2008; Shanley and Bishop, 2012), which can be attributed to those  
 448 forest ecosystems having both higher mean foliar Hg concentrations (21-51 ng g<sup>-1</sup>) (Zhou and Obrist, 2021) and much greater  
 449 aboveground biomass and litterfall inputs (2000-3488 kg/ha/yr) (Graydon et al., 2008) than plants in this study. The overall  
 450 annual Hg inputs via these senesced leaves to peat soils in this sedge-dominated fen were 59 % of that via wet deposition using  
 451 the mean precipitation Hg input estimates from the Experimental Lakes Area (33 mg/ha/yr) for the years 2001-2010, which is in  
 452 the same general geographic region of Ontario (St Louis et al., 2019).

453 **5 Conclusions**

454 This study shows that the widely-observed pattern of foliar Hg age accumulation of Hg from the atmosphere and changes in  
 455 foliar Hg concentrations over time are the same in peatland vascular plants as they are for forest trees and that the patterns are  
 456 related to time/leaf age and plant species. ~~Although The THg concentrations in litterfall senesced leaves in this study are~~  
 457 ~~relatively lower than that in the forest litterfall, in this study are relatively lower than that in the forest litterfall, Hg input through~~  
 458 ~~litterfall to peatland soils cannot be neglected, given that peatlands are “hotspots” of MeHg production (Mitchell et al., 2008).~~  
 459 ~~Foliar leaching of lower molecular weight DOM from peatland shrubs such as sweet gale provides energy for bacteria (including~~

460 ~~Hg methylators) and can enhance microbial metabolism.~~ Hg released from ubiquitous sedge litter during leaching is relatively  
461 more quickly than the much slower release of tissue-associated Hg through the decomposition of plant tissues. Thus, the supply  
462 of inorganic Hg to sites of methylation in peatlands has both fast and slow pathways that may shift under climate change, given  
463 that peatland plant species composition and biomass will certainly change under climate change.

#### 465 ■DATA AVAILABILITY

466 All data generated or analysed during this study are included in this published article and its supplementary information files.

#### 467 ■SUPPLEMENT

468 The supplement related to this article is available online.

#### 469 ■AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

470 Ting Sun carried the project out, collected all samples, performed the leaching experiment, analyzed samples and data, and wrote  
471 the manuscript. Brian A. Branfireun designed the experiments, provided supervision, and edited the manuscript.

#### 472 ■COMPETING INTERESTS

473 The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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480 the field.



481 ■ ABBREVIATIONS

482 Hg, mercury; MeHg, methylmercury; GEM, gaseous elemental mercury; RGM, reactive gaseous mercury; PBM, particulate-  
483 bound mercury; THg, total mercury; THg<sub>aq</sub>, dissolved total mercury; SRB, sulfate-reducing bacteria; %C, carbon content; %N,  
484 nitrogen content; C:N, the ratio of leaf C content and N content; dissolved organic matter (DOM); DOC, dissolved organic  
485 carbon; SUVA<sub>254</sub>, specific ultraviolet absorbance at a wavelength of 254 nm; EEMs, fluorescence excitation-emission matrices;  
486 FI, fluorescence index; HIX<sub>EM</sub>, humification index; BIX, biological index; soil organic matter (SOM); CRM, certified reference  
487 material; RSD, relative standard deviation.

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