Seasonal shifts in depth to water uptake by young thinned and overstocked lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta*) forests under drought conditions in the Okanagan Valley, British Columbia, Canada

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Abstract:

As drought and prolonged water stress become more prevalent in dry regions under climate change, preserving water resources has become a focal point for maintaining forest health. Forest regeneration after forest loss or disturbance can lead to over-stocked juvenile stands with high water demands and low water-use efficiency. Forest thinning is a common practice with the goal of improving tree health, carbon storage, and water use while decreasing stand demands in arid and semi-arid regions. However, little is known about the impacts of stand density on seasonal variation in depth to water uptake nor the magnitude of the effect of growing season drought conditions on water availability. Existing reports are highly variable by climatic region, species, and thinning intensity. In this study, stable isotope ratios of deuterium (δ^2H) and oxygen (δ^{18}O) in water collected from soil varying depths and from branches of lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta*) under different degrees of thinning (control: 27,000 stems per ha; moderately thinned: 4,500 stems per ha; heavily thinned: 1,100 stems per ha) over the growing season were analyzed using the MixSIAR Bayesian mixing model to calculate the relative contributions of different water sources in the Okanagan Valley in the interior of British Columbia, Canada. We found that under drought conditions the lodgepole pine trees shifted their depth to water uptake through the growing season (June to October), to rely more heavily on older precipitation events that percolated through the soil profile when shallow soil water became less accessible. Decreased forest density subsequent to forest thinning did not cause a significant difference in isotopic composition of branch water, but did cause changes in the timing and relative proportion of water utilized from different depths. Thinned lodgepole pines stands were able to maintain water uptake from 35 cm below the soil profile whereas the overstocked stands relied on a larger proportion of deep soil water and groundwater towards the end of the growing season. Our results support other findings by indicating that although lodgepole pines are drought tolerant and have dimorphic root systems, they did not shift back from deep water sources to shallow soil water when soil water availability increased following precipitation events at the end of the growing season.

42   1. Introduction

43   As forests recover after harvesting, carbon and water demands change, and future climate
44   projections of increased drought severity will further complicate biogeochemical cycling and
45   carbon-water trade-offs (Giles-Hansen et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2019). Overpopulated
46   regenerating stands can add further stress on ecosystems; for example, light competition in dense
47   juvenile stands increases stand water demands by driving vertical growth and canopy cover (Liu
48   et al., 2011). To mitigate this stress, management strategies such as systemic thinning of high-
49   density juvenile stands have been shown to promote forest regeneration while decreasing
50   competition and providing remaining vegetation with increased light availability, rooting space,
51   nutrient access, and space for horizontal branch growth (Giuggiola et al., 2016). Over a variety
52   of forest ecosystems, reductions in stand density increase light availability, tree water use, carbon
53   storage, and water-use efficiency, an indication of improved tree health, and to decrease stand
54   water use, reducing the intensity of water stress under drought conditions (Belmonte et al., 2022;
55   Fernandes et al., 2016; Giuggiola et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2011; Manrique-Alba et al., 2020;
56   Molina & del Campo, 2012; Park et al., 2018; Sohn et al., 2012, 2016; Wang et al., 2019).
57   Because the primary goal of forest thinning is to decrease stand water use and increase
58   productivity, papers reporting the effects of this management strategy often focus on changes in
59   carbon storage, tree growth, transpiration, and water-use efficiency (Giuggiola et al., 2016;
60   Manrique-Alba et al., 2020; Park et al., 2018; Sohn et al., 2016). However, few studies have
61   reported sources of water use for vegetation water uptake and shifts in depth to water uptake in
62   association with thinning treatments in overstocked naturally regenerating forests, particularly
63   under drought conditions.

64   Quantifying stand water use is imperative to predicting the future of water availability in our
65   ecosystems. However, various studies indicate that trees do not always use the most recent
66   precipitation, and that vegetation can utilize different sources of water at different soil depths
67   depending on availability or stress (Dawson & Pate, 1996; Grossiord et al., 2017; Wang et al.,
68   2017). Many studies also report the depth of water uptake of various species and the relationship
69   between co-existing species and shared water sources (Andrews et al., 2012; Brinkmann et al.,
70   2019; Grossiord et al., 2017; Langs et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2015; Maier et al., 2019; Meinzer et
71   al., 2007; Sánchez-Pérez et al., 2008; Szymczak et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2017; Warren et al.,
72   2005). In water-limited regions such as arid and semi-arid landscapes, some species have
73   adapted to derive water from various depths over time depending on seasonal water variability,
74   indicating higher ecological plasticity and drought tolerance (Langs et al., 2020; Wang et al.,
75   2017). Understanding where in the soil profile plants obtain water, over prolonged dry periods
76   and at different stand densities, is essential in assessing the impact of forest thinning and the
77   relative importance of different seasonal water sources during shifts in water availability in arid
78   regions and under future climate conditions (Evaristo et al., 2015; Prieto et al., 2012; Sohn et al.,
79   2016). The implications of depth to water uptake and seasonal changes in water utilization, in
80   conjunction with water-use efficiency, can emphasize the importance of the timing and volume
81   of precipitation events and primary contributors to vegetation water use.

82   Stable isotope ratios can be used as powerful natural tracers to identify distinct water sources
83   such as rainfall, snow, and groundwater (Brinkmann et al., 2018; Lin & Sternberg, 1993;
84   Sprenger et al., 2017; Stumpp et al., 2018). The isotopic signature of precipitation events is
85   altered by elevation, temperature, and evaporative fractionation creating distinctive layers within

86 the soil profile (Kleine et al., 2020; Sprenger et al., 2017; Stumpp et al., 2018). More
87 specifically, soil water reflects precipitation events as they infiltrate through the soil layer with
88 the influence of evaporative fractionation until mixing with older soil water and groundwater and
89 creating individualized water isotopic signatures throughout the soil profile (Andrews & Science,
90 2009; Brinkmann et al., 2018; Dawson & Pate, 1996; Sprenger et al., 2017; Stumpp et al., 2018).
91 The isotopic composition of plant water can correspond to the water uptake depth in the soil
92 profile (Brinkmann et al., 2019; Langs et al., 2020; Meinzer et al., 2007; Stumpp et al., 2018;
93 Wang et al., 2017). Due to these unique characteristics, stable water isotopes have been used by
94 researchers to assess sources of water used by plants and their possible shifts under altered
95 environmental conditions (Evaristo et al., 2015; Flanagan & Ehleringer, 1991; Meinzer et al.,
96 2001; Stumpp et al., 2018).

97 Lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta* Douglas) is an early successional montane conifer with a deep
98 tap root, fine roots in shallow soil layers, and an adventitious rooting system which allow this
99 species to access water throughout the soil profile (Fahey & Knight, 1986; Halter & Chanway,
100 1993). Depending on the species, root structures have two main components; namely, lateral
101 roots to exploit soil near the surface, and, in species with dimorphic root systems, sinker roots or
102 a well-developed tap root to reach deeper soil water or groundwater when surface water is
103 limited. Species with dimorphic rooting systems can access water from different depths in the
104 soil profile depending on soil moisture content and water availability, making them more
105 resilient to water scarcity or prolonged drought conditions (Dawson & Pate, 1996; Meinzer et al.,
106 2013). Wang et al. (2019) studied the short-term effects of thinning overstocked juvenile (16-
107 year-old) lodgepole pine stands in the Upper Penticton Creek Watershed, British Columbia,
108 Canada, and found a significant positive relationship between growth and water use from
109 decreased stand density and that heavily thinned treatments showed the most drought resistance.
110 Andrews et al. (2012) compared water uptake strategies between Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga*
111 *menziesii* (Mirb.) Franco) and lodgepole pine in southern Alberta, and found that lodgepole pines
112 are able to minimize seasonal variations in stem water potential and that tap roots are deep
113 enough to access groundwater. These finding are consistent with other literature reporting that
114 decreased stem density can improve water-use efficiency and that conifer trees can access water
115 from different depths depending on moisture availability (Meinzer et al., 2007a; Warren et al.,
116 2005). The literature therefore indicates that lodgepole pines can access water from different soil
117 layers even under extreme or prolonged drought conditions, but little is known about the shifting
118 of water use under different stand densities as a result of thinning treatments and drought
119 conditions.

120 In this study, we build on the research from Wang et al. (2019) which looked at the effects of
121 thinning on water-use efficiency during a drought and non-drought year by analyzing the stable
122 isotope ratios (δ^2H and δ^{18}O) of soil and xylem water to evaluate at what depths overstocked and
123 thinned stands access water over a growing season to further our understanding of the
124 ecosystem-level impacts of thinning as a management strategy. We hypothesized that lodgepole
125 pine primarily relies on spring snowmelt, but reductions in shallow source water during the
126 growing season would drive trees to utilize deeper sources of water as the season progressed. We
127 also hypothesized that decreased stand density (thinning) would increase shallow soil
128 evaporation due to decreased canopy cover, but also decrease competitive limitations in tree
129 rooting zones so that at lower densities trees could better maintain mid-level soil water uptake.

Through a detailed partitioning of tree water sources, we can better understand how lodgepole
pine uses water, estimate proportional dependence of lodgepole pine on specific source waters,
and determine if thinning affects tree water use and uptake strategies under drought conditions.

2. Methods

2.1. Study site

The study was conducted in the Upper Penticton Creek experimental watershed (UPC) northeast
of Penticton in the interior of British Columbia, Canada (49˚39'34" N,119˚24',34" W). The site
elevation is approximately 1675 m a.s.l. with steep, rocky terrain and a southern aspect (Wang et
al., 2019). The luvisolic soils were formed from granite; the texture is coarse sandy-loam and is
well drained with a low water holding capacity (Hope, 2011; Winkler et al., 2021; Winkler &
Moore, 2006). The biogeoclimatic region is the Engelmann Spruce-Subalpine Fir zone with cold,
snowy conditions from November
to early June and seasonal drought
conditions during the summer
months, June to October (Coupe et
al., 1991; Wang et al., 2019). This
research site was initially
established as a paired watershed
experiment in the early 1980s to
quantify the impact of forest
harvesting on water resources
(Creed et al., 2014; Moore &
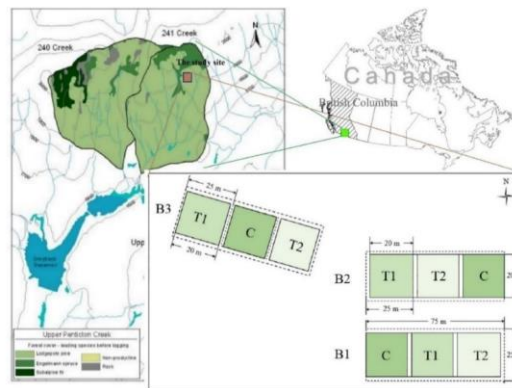Wondzell, 2005; Winkler et al.,
2021).

*Figure 1 Watershed location and treatment plots of moderately
thinned (T1), heavily thinned (T2), and the controlled (C) over-
populated stands across the three replicate blocks (Wang et al., 2019)*

The juvenile thinning experiment
began in 2016 when 16-year-old,
evenly aged, regenerating lodgepole
pine stands were thinned to different
densities than a control (Control - C:
27,000 stem ha^{-1}, T1: 4,500 stems ha^{-1}, and T2: 1,100 stems ha^{-1}) where C represents the control
stands, T1 represents the moderately thinned stands, and T2 represents the heavily thinned stands
(Figure 1). The three treatments were repeated across three replicate blocks. Each block was 75
m long and 25 m in width with three 20 m^2 plots and 5 m between treatment plots. After the
initial thinning, all debris was left on site.

2.2. Climate and soil moisture monitoring

Climate stations (HOBO weather station, Onset Computer, Bourne MA, USA) were deployed
across Block 1 treatments and have measured meteorological data since 2016 (ambient
temperature, relative humidity (rH), wind speed, precipitation, and solar radiation) in 10-minute
intervals. From these data, we calculated daily vapor pressure deficit (VPD) as well as daily and

171 monthly potential evapotranspiration (PET) (Flint & Childs, 1991; Russell, 1960; Streck, 2003).
172 Recorded historical precipitation (1997-2008) was acquired from a long-term climate station in a
173 lodgepole pine forest in the 241 experimental watershed (climate station P7) (Moore et al.,
174 2021).

175 Rainfall and temperature data from Block 1 were related to historical data to calculate the
176 monthly dryness (PET/P), standardized precipitation index (SPI), and standardized precipitation
177 evapotranspiration index (SPEI) (Table S1) (Beguería et al., 2014; Stagge et al., 2014; Wu et al.,
178 2005). In the middle of the growing season in 2021, four soil moisture probes (HOBO TEROS
179 11 Soil Moisture/Temp Probes) were deployed in each treatment in Block 1 to measure changes
180 in soil moisture and temperature at 5 cm and 35 cm at 15-minute increments (n=12).

181   2.3 Sample collection

182 We sampled three trees per treatment across the three blocks and three in an adjacent mature plot
183 south of the study site (n = 3333) four times over the 2021 growing season in approximately six-
184 week intervals (June 11-12, July 21-22, September 10-11, and October 7-8) around noon to
185 capture peak transpiration time (Table 1). We used a pole pruner to cut a mid-canopy branch in
186 the live crown. We peeled the bark off branch segments with no needle coverage to remove outer
187 bark and phloem, placed them into 10 mL glass tubes that were then with Parafilm® wrap,
188 covered in aluminum foil, and set in a cooler until the end of the day when they were transferred
189 to a freezer at -18˚C. During the last two sampling periods, some trees had red needles, likely an
190 indication of dryness or higher temperatures from an early growing season heat dome that began
191 in June.

192 *Table 1 Overview of the branch, soil, and precipitation samples collected over the four sampling periods during the*
193 *2021 growing season with an additional campaign to collect groundwater and stream water.*

Sample Type			Sampling Period	1	2	3	NA	4
			Sampling Date	June 11-12	July 21-22	September 10-11	October 1	October 9
			Branches	33	33	33	0	33
	Soils	5		9	9	9	0	9
		20		0	6	0	0	0
		35		9	9	9	0	9
		40		0	6	0	0	0
		60		0	6	0	0	0
		80		0	6	0	0	0
		100		0	6	0	0	0
	Precipitation	Rain		1	0	1	0	0
		Snow		1	0	0	0	1
		Stream		0	0	0	8	0
		Groundwater		0	0	0	6	0

195 Soil samples were collected horizontally from 40 cm soil pits randomly dug within each
196 treatment plot at 5 and 35 cm depths from the surface from June to October of 2021. Large rocks
197 were removed from the profile. We conducted soil ribbon field tests to ensure that clay

198 composition was less than 10% (soil ribbons were less than 20 mm in length). Soils were taken
199 directly from the pit, then sealed in freezer seal bags and frozen until cryogenic distillation for
200 water extraction. In July, 1 m pits were dug. From the vertical pit, samples were collected in 20
201 cm increments to determine the depth of tree water access. After samples were collected, the
202 larger rocks and soils were used to fill the pits. We assumed that the isotopic signature of soil
203 water below 40 cm would be similar throughout the growing season and would be representative
204 of deep soil water. Soil samples were stored in a freezer at -18˚C until cryogenically distilled.

205 Precipitation samples were collected cumulatively over individual field collection days where
206 precipitation was present (Table 1). Snow from a late spring event was collected on June 11th to
207 represent snow water isotopic composition during the sublimation and melt period of early 2021.
208 Another snow event was collected on October 11th during an active snowfall. A rain event was
209 collected on September 10th. Groundwater and stream samples were collected from the creek 241
210 watershed in early October 2021 at the beginning of the seasonal hydraulic recovery period
211 (Table 1). Groundwater was collected using a hand pump. Groundwater and stream samples
212 were collected at the end of the growing season as stream beds were dry and groundwater was
213 inaccessible during the dry period. Once the well had been pumped and cleared, 10 mL glass test
214 tubes were rinsed with ground water three times before being filled. Precipitation, groundwater
215 and stream samples were collected into 10 mL glass test tubes, sealed with Parafilm® and foil,
216 and stored in a fridge at 4ºC.

217   2.4 Cryogenic extraction and isotopic analysis

218 Before extraction, branch samples remained sealed and were weighed in the glass test tubes used
219 for field collection. Branches remained in the test tubes until cryogenic distillation was complete
220 to ensure that any liquid water lost from the branch to the test tube was contained in the extract.
221 Soils samples were mixed in the Ziploc® bag, weighed, and transferred to a glass round bottom
222 flask. For stable isotope analysis, water was extracted from stem and soil samples using
223 cryogenic distillation (Orlowski et al., 2013; Pearcy et al., 2012). The test tube and branch
224 sample segment of the line was immersed in liquid nitrogen for 10 minutes until frozen
225 (Chillakuru, 2009). Soil sample size for extraction was roughly determined based on the
226 expected moisture of the frozen sample and soil moisture readings from continuous
227 measurements in the field. Soils were frozen for 45 minutes in a 500 mL round-bottom flask
228 using a dry-ice and 95% ethanol mixture before pumping out the air. Frozen samples were
229 pumped down to 60 mTorr, not disturbing the sample (Tsuruta et al., 2019). The vacuum-sealed
230 extraction unit was detached from the pump and transferred to a boiling water bath; the
231 extraction tube was submerged in liquid nitrogen. Branch samples were set to distill for 1 hour
232 and soil samples for 2 hours or until the tubing was clear to ensure all mobile and bound source
233 water was extracted (Orlowski et al., 2013; Tsuruta et al., 2019; Vargas et al., 2017; West et al.,
234 2006). As reviewed by Allen & Kirchner (2022), the cryogenic vacuum distillation of water from
235 plant tissues and soils can cause systematic biases in the measurements of δ^2H. the The amount
236 degree of extraction bias varies depending on species and soil type (Allen & Kirchner, 2022). In
237 contrast, bias in δ^{18}O values is close to zero (Allen & Kirchner, 2022). Reported biases in δ^2H
238 average about -6.1‰ for xylem water and -4‰ for water extracted from sandy soils, such as the
239 soils sampled here, which are of similar magnitude (Allen & Kirchner, 2022). Therefore,
240 although we used cryogenic vacuum distillation to extract water from xylem and soil media,
241 potential systematic bias introduced during the extraction process was treated as negligible as

242 ~~Furthermore,~~ all sources we identified had a difference in δ^2H greater than 4‰ (with the
243 minimum distance being 14‰ between groundwater samples and deep soil water), minimizing
244 any major effects on partitioning calculations.

245 The volume of branch water extracted ranged from 1 to 3 mL depending on the size of the
246 branch sample. Total extracted water varied dependent on the mass of the initial sample. The
247 volume of soil water extract ranged from 1mL to 7 mL depending on the size of the sample
248 prepared for extraction. Samples were also weighed after extraction and compared to oven dried
249 samples to ensure distillation was complete. Water extracted from branch and soil samples
250 accounted for 47.9±3.2% and 9±6% of mean sample weight ± standard deviation.

251 All samples were pipetted and sealed into glass vials with screw tops and shipped to the
252 University of California Davis Stable Isotope Facility (Davis, CA, USA) for ^{18}O and ^2H analysis
253 using headspace gas equilibration on a GasBench-II interfaced to a Delta Plus XL isotope-ratio
254 mass spectrometer (Thermo-Finnigan, Bremen, Germany) normalized to a range of secondary
255 reference waters calibrated against three IAEA standard waters. Precision was less than or equal
256 to 2.0‰ for δ^2H and 0.2‰ for $\delta^{18}O$. Results were returned in the "delta" notation expressing the
257 isotopic composition of each sample as a ratio in parts per thousand, relative to VSMOW
258 (Vienna-Standard Mean Ocean Water) where:

259
$$\delta(‰) = \left(\frac{R_{Sample}}{R_{Standard}} - 1 \right)$$

260 Sample extract was situated in an isotope biplot and compared to the global meteoric water line
261 (GMWL) along with a local meteoric water line for the Okanagan Valley (OMWL) ($\delta^2H = 6.6$
262 ($\delta^{18}O$) - 22.7) and local evaporative line (LEL) ($\delta^2H = 5$ ($\delta^{18}O$) - 48.4) calculated for the
263 Okanagan Valley by Wassenaar et al. (2011). The LEL is a linear regression that indicates the
264 departure of water sources from the OMWL to indicate the degree of evaporative processes
265 fractionating the isotopic composition of water sources or variance in the isotopic composition of
266 seasonal precipitation events.

267 One extreme outlier of B1C at the 20 cm depth was removed before analysis; the high δ^2H and
268 $\delta^{18}O$ values were likely due to contamination or incomplete cryogenic distillation. To test the
269 variance between thinning treatments, block replicates, dates collected, and soil depth, we first
270 tested the normality of the subsets using the Shapiro-Wilk test and found that all subgroups were
271 approximately normally distributed. Repeated measures ANOVAs were used to compare effects
272 of date and treatment on δ^2H and $\delta^{18}O$ in branches, soils and groundwater to determine if
273 changes in lodgepole pine uptake patterns occurred over time, if soil signatures varied between
274 different depths (0-100 cm and groundwater) and densities, and if thinning juvenile stands
275 changed seasonal shifts. All statistical analysis was conducted in R Studio (version 1.3.1073)
276 using the appropriate tests to determine site distinctions and seasonal variability in depth to
277 uptake (RStudio Team, 2020).

278   2.4 MixSIAR model scenarios

279 Process-based models (PBM) with a Bayesian approach include integrating other processes or
280 existing information as priors allowing for a more informed approach than a simple linear model
281 (Ogle et al., 2014). To accurately partition potential lodgepole pine water sources, we used the

MixSIAR modeling package, a Bayesian mixing model (BMM) based on the Markov Chain Monte Carlo method (MCMC) (Langs et al., 2020; Stock, 2013/2022, p. 201; Stock et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2019). The MixSIAR modeling package was selected over previous iterations of the dual-isotope BMM (SIAR and Simmr) and other partitioning models because of the accuracy in the analysis of covariates and the ability of the model to include source-specific uncertainties and discrimination factors (Stock et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2017). We partitioned potential water sources for five different scenarios using a combination of single and dual isotope approaches and different potential sources: scenario 1 – single isotope $\delta^{18}O$ two sources 5 cm and 35 cm depth; scenario 2 – single-isotope δ^2H two sources 5 cm and 35 cm depth; scenario 3 – dual-isotope two sources 5 cm and 35 cm depth; scenario 4 – dual isotope three sources 5 cm, 35 cm and 45-100 cm depth; scenario 5 – dual isotope three sources 5 cm, 35-100 cm and groundwater; and scenario 6 – dual isotope four sources 5 cm, 35 cm, 45-100 cm and groundwater. In scenarios using deep soil water (35-100 cm depths), the isotopic composition was calculated as a weighted average between seasonally collected soil water from depth 35 and average soil water at depths collected in 202 cm intervals during the early growing season (n=38 per season). There were no source concentration

Figure 2 15-minute measurements of A. atmospheric temperature (°C), B. Relative humidity (%), and C. vapor pressure deficit (VDP) (kPa).

Figure 3 Rainfall (mm/d) from July 22 to October 8, 2021.

dependencies, and the discrimination was set to zero for both isotopes in the analysis. The run length of the Markov chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) was set to 'normal' (chain length = 100,000; burn =50,000; thin = 50; chains = 3). The Gelman-Rubin and Geweke diagnostic tests included in the model package were used to determine convergence (Gelman-Rubin score < 1.01). Scenarios that did not converge were run again with a longer runtime (chain length: 300,000; burn: 200,000; thin: 100; chains = 3). No priors were used, so each water source was considered equally ($\alpha = 1$).

3. Results

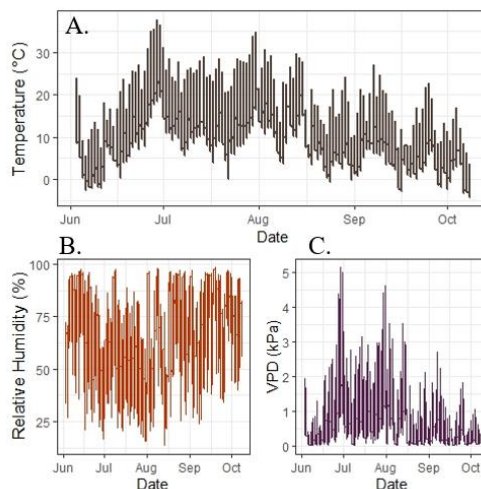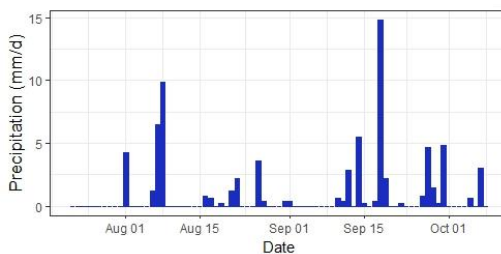## 3.1. Climate and soil water content

The ambient temperature peaked in the moderately thinned plot (T1) on June 29th with a maximum temperature of 36.3°C in an abnormally hot and dry summer (Figure 2). Relative humidity and VPD recorded in T1 showed the most variability and highest evaporative capacity during July. Atmospheric water vapor was higher in late September and October when precipitation was more frequent, and the watershed began to exhibit traits of hydrologic recovery (Figure 3). One indication of increased water availability was increased soil moisture at 5 cm and 35 cm depths and more groundwater recharge in October (Figure 4). There was 17.5 mm of precipitation from September 16th to 18th that infiltrated to at least 35 cm below the soil surface along with subsequent rainfall events that likely infiltrated past the 35 cm sample depth changing the isotopic composition of deep soil water from what was measured during the deep pit sampling in July.
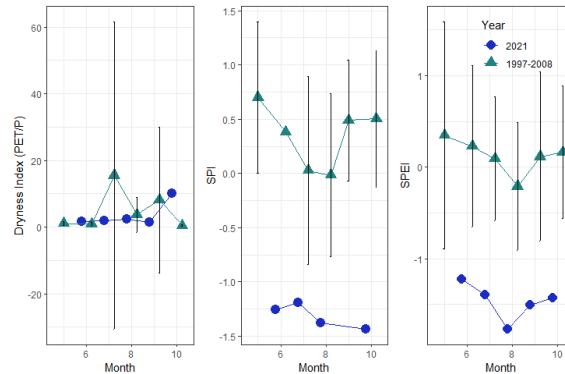

Figure 4 Average in-situ continuous measurements (15-minute interval) of soil water content (m³/m³) from the control, moderately thinned, and heavily thinned stands in Block 1.

Rainfall events recorded at a nearby long-term research station between June to October from 1997-2008 represented approximately 30.1% of annual precipitation (Winkler et al., 2021). Over the 2021 study period, there was 147.8 mm of rainfall, while the mean summer rainfall from 1997 to 2008 was 232.5 mm, and most of the rainfall occurred in the early growing season. SPI and SPEI were significantly lower in

Figure 5 From left to right: dryness index (monthly PET using the Thornthwaite method divided by mean monthly precipitation) from June to October, 2021 and historic climate data from 1997 to 2008 including the including standard error for the historic climate data, standard precipitation index (SPI) with a 3-month period from June to October of 2021 and historic (1997-2008) climate data including standard error for the historic climate data, and standardized precipitation evapotranspiration index (SPEI) with a 3-month period from June to October of 2021 and historic (1997-2008) climate data including standard error for the historic climate data.

2021 than the mean historical range (Figure 5). Although there was precipitation and the beginning of hydraulic recovery in October, drought conditions persisted. Drought conditions of the study site reflected the drought conditions of the region as reported by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada from June to August 2021 in moving from severe (level 2 drought) to exceptional (level 4) before recovering in September (Canada, 2014: https://agriculture.canada.ca/en/agricultural-production/weather/canadian-drought-monitor/drought-analysis).
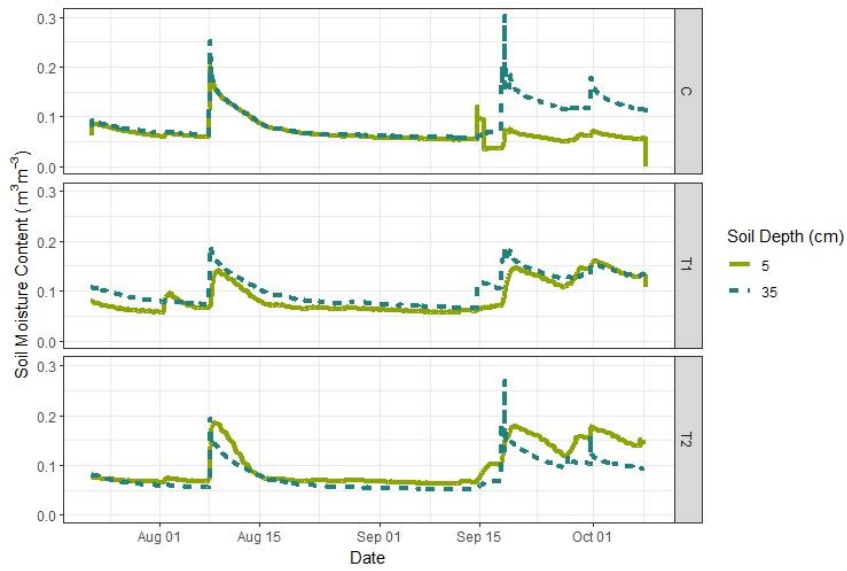
Figure 5 Average in-situ continuous measurements (15-minute interval) of soil water content (m³/m³) from the control, moderately thinned, and heavily thinned stands in Block 1.

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368

369   3.2. Water stable isotopes

370 The biplot of sample isotopic composition shows the distribution and effect of isotopic
371 fractionation on source water isotope ratios of samples collected during the 2021 field season.
372 Field collected samples were compared to the Okanagan Meteoric Water Line (OMWL)
373 (Wassenaar et al., 2011). The slopes for branch and soil water were less steep than the OMWL,
374 and the intercepts more negative, indicating that evaporative fractionation contributed to the
375 isotopic composition of these pools at the UPC (Figure 6). Soil samples seemed to follow the
376 LEL produced by Wassenaar et al. (2011) for the region indicating similar evaporative
377 fractionation effects. Branch water more closely following the OMWL than soils, suggesting that
378 most samples consisted of water that was accessed from deeper in the soil profile and had
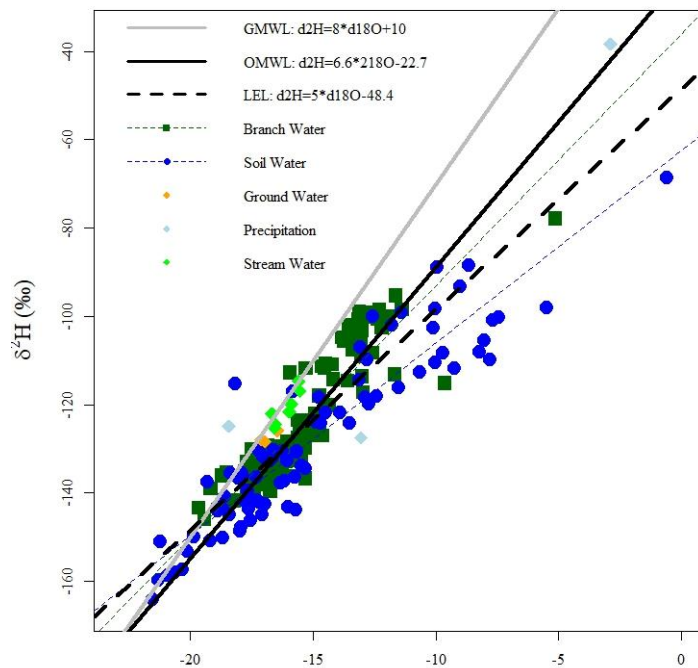

Figure 6 Biplot of $\delta^{18}O$ and δ^2H including all <u>branch, soil, stream, groundwater, and precipitation</u> samples collected over the <u>2021</u> study period ~~from branches, soils, streams, groundwater, and precipitation events~~ outlined in Table 1 along with the global meteoric water line (GMWL) <u>as well as a meteoric waterline for the</u>~~,~~ Okanagan ~~Meteoric Water line~~<u>Valley</u> (OMWL) ~~and~~<u>and</u> the Local Evaporative Line (LEL) developed by Wassnaar et al. (2011)~~.~~<u>.</u> <u>Linear regressions are also plotted for branch water and soil water to indicate deviations in the slope and intercept from OMWL and LEL</u>~~and linear regressions for branch water and soil water.~~<u>.</u>

379 infiltrated past the evaporative front. Precipitation samples collected during the field season fell
380 along the OMWL (Wassenaar et al., 2011). The δ^2H and $\delta^{18}O$ of the June 11th rainfall event were
381 -127.5‰ and -13.03‰, respectively. The September rainfall event was much more enriched with
382 a δ^2H of -38.4‰ and $\delta^{18}O$ of -2.89 (Figure 6). The snowfall collected on October 7th more
383 closely resembled the lighter, colder, June precipitation event.

384   3.2.1. Soil moisture and seasonal water composition

385   Soil moisture probes and percent soil water
386   content from samples collected for isotopic
387   analysis were compared between treatments
388   and deployment depths. Water content of soil
389   samples was highest in June (21.5% at 5 cm
390   and 21.6% at 35 cm) because of high snow
391   melt and early spring precipitation, while
392   soils were driest in September (6.32% at 5
393   cm and 6.19% at 35 cm). Continuous soil
394   moisture measurements showed that soil
395   water began to increase in mid-September as
396   precipitation became more frequent, daily
397   solar radiation decreased, and water
398   percolated into deeper soil layers. There were
399   significant differences in the continuously
400   measured soil moisture by depths,
401   treatments, and month, respectively (5-35
402   cm) (Depth: F =3545.9, p<2e-16***)
403   (Treatment: F=1883.3, p<2e-16***) (Month:
404   F=3359.8, p<2e-16***) (Figure 7), but soil
405   water content of samples for isotopic
406   analysis only varied significantly by month
407   (August – October) (F=22, p<5.4e-9***).

408   Soil isotopic results were broken into two
409   datasets to analyze the variation in isotopic
410   composition over time and between
411   treatments, and then a profile of isotopic
412   variance with depth was constructed. Soil
413   water δ^2H and δ^{18}O varied significantly by
414   depth (δ^2H: p=2.57e-6***; δ^{18}O: p =2.45e-
415   7***), being higher in the shallow soils than

Figure 7 Boxplots of the ~~Soil~~ soil water δ^2H (top) and δ^{18}O (bottom) at 5 (left) and 35 cm (right) depths collected repeatedly over the growing season from each treatment and block. ~~indicating the mean, interquartile range, and one standard deviation~~ Mean, interquartile ranges, and standard deviation are indicated for each treatment in each month. There was a significant difference in the isotopic composition of water for each month by treatment and depth.

416   deeper in the profile (Figure 7.A. and 7.C.). δ^2H varied significantly across months (p=2.72e-
417   5**), but not between July and September and September and October. δ^{18}O also varied
418   significantly across months (p=1.5e-5**) except when directly comparing July to October and
419   September to October. Despite treatment differences in soil moisture (Figure 4), there were no
420   statistically significant treatment differences in the isotopic composition of soil water at either
421   depth. In June, the mean soil water δ^{18}O at 5 cm was -16.8±2.57‰ while the δ^2H was -
422   136.7±13.6‰; at 35 cm, the δ^{18}O was -19.2±1.52‰ and δ^2H was -149.2±9.6‰. Both δ^{18}O and
423   δ^2H increased more during the growing season at 5 cm than at 35 cm, and with more variability
424   (Figure 7). In September, δ^{18}O and δ^2H at 5 cm were -8.75‰ and -106.23 and at 35 cm were -
425   14.71‰ and -127.64 respectively suggesting that soil isotopic composition nearer the soil surface
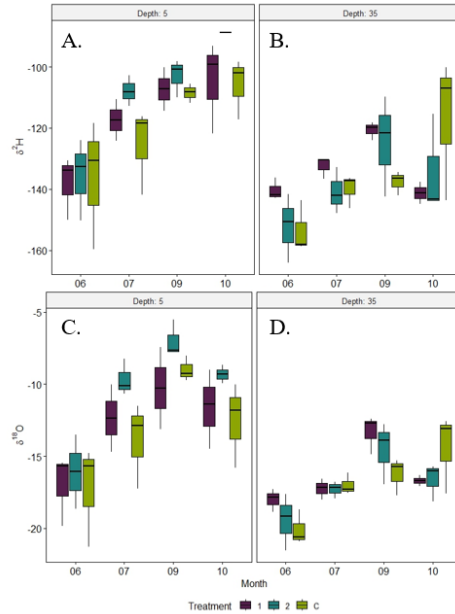426   follows trends in precipitation samples, being most enriched with O^{18}. By October, δ^{18}O and δ^2H

at 5 cm reflected more recent precipitation events indicating that water availability in shallow
soils began to increase.

From the isotopic soil profile, there were three significant groupings of isotopic composition (p<0.05): shallow soil water (5-20 cm), deep soil water (35-100 cm), and groundwater. Mean groundwater collected at the end of the growing season most closely resembled spring and fall snowfall events. The mean $\delta^{18}O$ of groundwater was -16.82±0.34‰, which resembles that in the soil profile, but mean $\delta^{2}H$ was slightly higher than soil water (n=4). This isotope fractionation may be due to interactions with bound soil water and soils as the water infiltrates through the vadose zone, but the spread of values as potential uptake sources was greater than any predicted bias from cryogenic vacuum extraction therefor groundwater was included in the model as a isotopically distinct potential source for lodgepole pine water use (Allen & Kirchner, 2022; Vargas et al., 2017).

Figure 8 Vertical isotopic profiles and soil water content from treatments in Block 2 and samples collected in mid-July where A. shows the vertical changes in $\delta^{18}O$ for each treatment, B. shows the vertical changes in $\delta^{2}H$ for ach treatment, and C. shows the change in gravimetric water content as a percent of total soil weight.

The more negative values for both $\delta^{18}O$ and $\delta^{2}H$ with soil depth indicate that snow melt is the main source of water to the deep unsaturated zone and that enriched summer precipitation is not infiltrating deeper soil layers (Figure 8).

3.2.2. Isotopic variability in branch xylem water

Branch xylem for each treatment across the three blocks and the adjacent mature stand were compared for each sampling period. All treatments closely resembled the mature stand in both $\delta^{18}O$ and $\delta^{2}H$. There were no statistically significant differences in both $\delta^{18}O$ and $\delta^{2}H$ of xylem water across thinning treatments; there was, however, significant variation over time ($\delta^{18}O$: F=24.8*; $\delta^{2}H$: F=146.6*). More specifically, $\delta^{18}O$ and $\delta^{2}H$ of xylem water varied by month for all months collected except for between June and September and July and September (Figure 9). Because the isotopic composition of xylem water showed significant change over the growing season but did not follow the same seasonal trends as soil water, the trees were likely changing their primary water source within the soil profile.
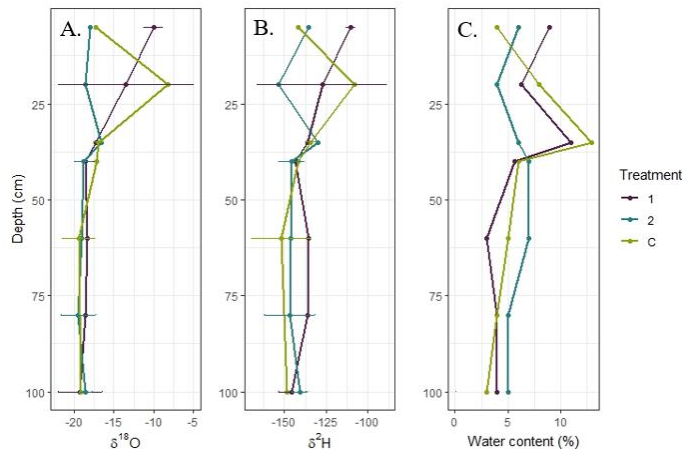
Figure 9 A boxplot showing ~~Branch~~ branch mean, interquartile range, and standard deviation for A. δ¹⁸O and B. δ²H by month and treatments (for the control (C), lightly thinned (T1), heavily thinned (T2), and mature (M) stands). Branch water was highest in October despite treatment effects. Mature trees were used as a reference for the isotopic composition of lodgepole pines over time, but were not considered in the model of changes depth to water uptake over time. There was not statistically significant difference in δ¹⁸O and δ²H between treatments, but each treatment varied significantly by month with the highest concentration of heavy isotopes in October.

3.3. Partitioning xylem source water and seasonal fluxes using MixSIAR

Of the six scenarios considered, ~~With a "normal" runtime (chain length: 100,000; burn: 50,000; thin: 50; chains: 3)~~, scenarios 1, 2 and 6 approached the Gelman-Rubin diagnostic (less than 1.05) with a runtime set to "normal" (chain length: 100,000; burn: 50,000; thin: 50; chains: 3), which indicates that they were the closest of all scenarios to reach convergence ~~when the variable is less than 1.05~~ (Table S2). Out of the 6 potential scenarios, ~~s~~Scenarios 4 (dual-isotope and 5 cm, 35 cm, and 45-100 cm soil water as sources) and 6 (duel-isotope 5 cm, 35 cm, 45-100 cm, and groundwater soil water as sources) were rerun with the run time set to "long" (chain length: 300,000; burn: 200,000; thin: 100; chains: 3) as they were hypothesized to provide the most representative results of water uptake partition from various depths. The Gelman-Rubin diagnostic ~~variable~~ for scenario 4 was 120, and for scenario 6 was 17, when run for the "long" runtime, meaning scenario 6 was closer to convergence, but still greater than the convergence threshold ~~(>1.05)~~.

Results of scenario 6 indicate that, in June, trees in each treatment acquired the most water from the 5 cm depth (C: 76%; T1: 77%; T2: 79%) (Figure 10). In July, shallow soil water was still the primary source for T1 and T2 at 47% and 61%, but C had 55% water from 45-100 cm deep and only 33% from 5 cm below the surface. By September, all treatments acquired less than 15% of tree water from shallow soil. Lodgepole pine water use in treatments 1 and 2 was composed of approximately 48% and 54% from around 35 cm, while 72% of water in control stand trees was from 35-100 cm. By October, although SPEI results indicate more moisture and less evaporative demand, scenario six indicated that all three treatments had most water uptake from below 45 cm in the soil profile (Figure 10). Results of the MixSIAR model support findings of branch water

492   stable isotope trends over the growing season where the branch water started with mean $\delta^{18}O$ and
493   δ^2H values of -16.9±0.89‰ and -134.37±3.8‰ in June, becoming slightly more enriched in July.
494   There was a shift to a source with a higher concentration of lighter isotopes in September.
495   Branch water was most enriched with heavy isotopes in October, like shallow soil water, with
496   mean $\delta^{18}O$ and δ^2H of -12.9±1.76‰ and -103.8±7.0‰, respectively. However, the MixSIAR
497   model does not account for potential changes in the isotopic composition of water from
498   precipitation events from mid-September to mid-October. Additionally, we did not consider
499   extraction bias of the soil water sources nor branch water in the MixSIAR model because the
500   previously mentioned range between distinct sources is larger than the potential change in
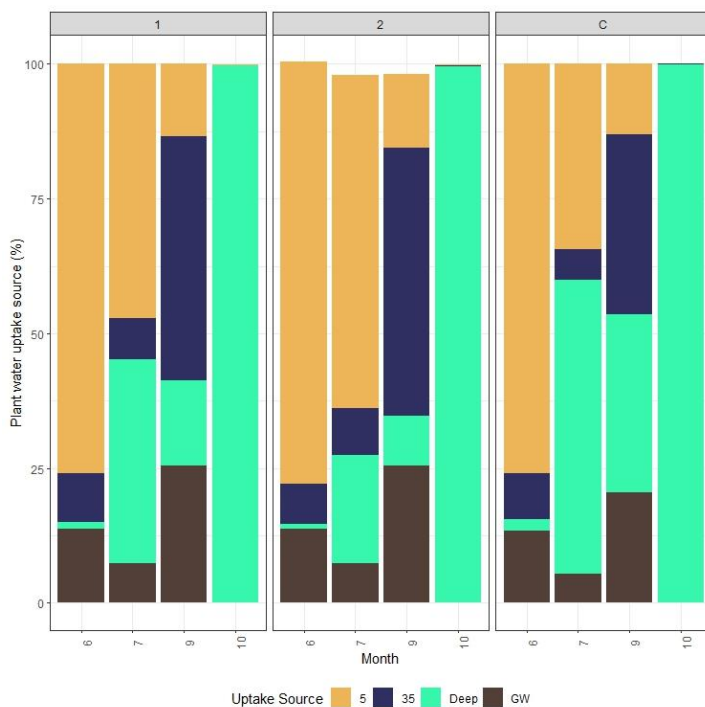
Figure 10 Partitioned relative contribution of different sources of water in the soil profile by the MixSIAR model of scenario 6 with long(chain length: 300,000; burn: 200,000; thin: 100; chains: 3) runtime. Scenario 6 considers both $\delta^{18}O$ and δ^2H as tracers and 5 cm, 35 cm, 45-100 cm, and groundwater as potential sources. Soil water isotopic composition at 5 cm and 35 cm changes monthly where as the concentrations of $\delta^{18}O$ and δ^2H are held constant for the 45-100 cm and groundwater sources. Results of this model indicate that there are significant changes in the depth to water uptake of lodgepole pines between June and October of 2021 and that thinned trees are able to maintain a larger percentage of water uptake from shallow soil water longer than trees in the control stand.

501   isotopic signature during cryogenic distillation.

502

503 The branch water in October was more enriched in heavy oxygen isotopes for each treatment
504 than soil water at a depth of 35 cm and was more isotopically similar to soil water at 5 cm.
505 Deuterium also followed a similar trend.

506

507 4. Discussion

508 4.1. Seasonal variability in soil water

509 Deep soil water showed mixed gradient of older, more depleted, water molecules deeper in the
510 profile indicating that deep soil water mainly originates from spring snowmelt during the
511 summer months. Low intensity and less frequent summer precipitation events are evaporated out
512 of the shallow soil layers and do not infiltrate past the evaporative front to recharge the
513 unsaturated zone or groundwater. Although there was not a statistically significant difference in
514 the depth to water uptake by thinning treatments, the results of our isotopic analysis indicate that
515 there was increased evaporative enrichment, or a higher concentration of oxygen-18, in the
516 shallow soils of the heavily thinned stand compared to the oxygen-18 concentrations in the
517 moderately thinned and control stands (Figure 47.C.). The muted enrichment of in δ^{18}O around
518 35 cm depth in the soil indicates a mixing of the left-over summer precipitation with older and
519 lighter water. Our results do not indicate that differences in soil exposure canopy coverage were
520 effective enough to significantly affect the isotopic composition of soil water below 5 cm in
521 depth.

522 4.2. Seasonal lodgepole pine water use

523 Literature utilizing stable water isotopic analysis to determine plant preferential water uptake in
524 arid regions indicates that vegetation can utilize precipitation despite the temporal origin
525 (Andrews et al., 2012; Brinkmann et al., 2019; Ehleringer et al., 1991). Seasonal water
526 availability depends on precipitation, soil water holding capacity and drainage, and evaporative
527 loss (Gibson & Edwards, 2002; Kleine et al., 2020; Stumpp et al., 2018). Based on the seasonal
528 shift in the isotopic composition, soil water at a depth of 5 cm was more enriched with heavier
529 isotopes over the growing season than at 35 cm due to more evaporative isotopic fractionation
530 near the soil surface and a lack of rainfall intense enough to drive precipitation deeper into the
531 soil profile before September 16, 2021 (Figure 3). The effect of evaporative enrichment of the
532 near surface soil water was most obvious in July and September in the heavily thinned stand
533 (T2). However, variability in branch isotopic composition did not follow the same trends. Our
534 results indicate that lodgepole pines access water from multiple depths in the soil profile.
535 Regardless of depth and forest density, spring snowmelt is the main source for lodgepole pines as
536 it infiltrates through the vadose zone.

537 The MixSIAR isotopic partitioning model results from each of the six scenarios indicated a
538 seasonal shift in the depth to water uptake of lodgepole pine, regardless of changes in stem
539 density, over the growing season. At the beginning of the growing season, when snow meltwater
540 is more available at shallow depths and beginning to infiltrate through the soils, lodgepole pines
541 obtain most of their water from snow melt in shallow soils with small contributions from other
542 potential sources ($< 25\%$ of June water uptake in all treatments). Then, in July, the trees in the

543   control treatment were using less shallow soil water (34.3% of plant water uptake from 5 cm
544   below the soil profile) whereas the moderately thinned and heavily thinned plots maintained a
545   greater proportion of shallow water uptake (47.1% and 61.5% respectively). The mean $\delta^{18}O$ and
546   δ^2H of branch water from each treatment in September had a higher concentration of lighter
547   stable water isotopes than in July and a larger proportion of tree water was from 35-100 cm deep
548   in the soil profile as shallow soils were dry from a lack of rainfall and surface soil evaporation.
549   By September, the control stand was more dependent on deeper soil water and groundwater with
550   only 33.4% of plant water uptake originating from 35 cm in the soil profile, whereas both
551   thinning treatments maintained more than 45% of water uptake from 35 cm in the soil profile. In
552   October, all treatments were completely dependent on deep soil water, but it is likely that the
553   isotopic profile of deep soil water sampled in July skewed the results. It is plausible that the trees
554   began to rely on shallow soil water towards the end of the growing season when soil water
555   content increased. Further research is needed with more intensive sampling of deep soil water
556   during the hydrological recharge period at the end of the growing season and beginning of
557   senescence.

558   Local monitoring close to the study site indicated that the depth to groundwater stayed at least
559   6.5 m below the surface from August through the end of the study period. The continued use of
560   deep soil water even during rewetting in late September and October suggests that the drought
561   conditions suppressed top soil water uptake, but that deeper soil was sufficiently saturated to
562   sustain root water uptake and tree function enough to limit groundwater uptake to less than 30%
563   for all treatments until the beginning of fall precipitation events recharging the saturated zone.

564   Our results indicate that lodgepole pine, like other pine species in arid regions, is flexible in its
565   ability to access deep soil water and can change its depth to water uptake over time depending on
566   water availability (Brinkmann et al., 2018; Grossiord et al., 2017; Kerhoulas et al., 2013; Kleine
567   et al., 2020; Moreno-Gutiérrez et al., 2011; Simonin et al., 2006; Sohn et al., 2014; Wang et al.,
568   2021). Our results of seasonal changes in depth to water uptake by lodgepole pine support the
569   findings of Andrews et al. (2012) on changes in lodgepole pine depth to water uptake in Alberta.
570   Tree species native to arid regions exhibit a variety of adaptations to long-term drought stress
571   and decreased water availability in the soil profile such as deep tap roots, access to the water
572   table, utilizing bound and mobile soil water, fine root mortality, and hydraulic redistribution in
573   ecosystems with low water holding capacity (Amin et al., 2020; Brinkmann et al., 2018;
574   Grossiord et al., 2017; Kerhoulas et al., 2013; Kleine et al., 2020; Langs et al., 2020; Meinzer et
575   al., 2007b; Prieto et al., 2012; Sohn et al., 2016; J. Wang et al., 2017, p. 201).

576   The literature is inconsistent across different biogeoclimatic regions and species with regards to
577   the effects of thinning on stand dynamics that influence inter-tree competition for water
578   resources or changes in depth to water uptake. (Kerhoulas et al., 2013; Moreno-Gutiérrez et al.,
579   2011; Sohn et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2021). We found no significant impact of forest thinning on
580   depth to water uptake. However, our observation of seasonal shifts in depth to water uptake
581   support results of a study on the impacts of thinning intensity on 60-year-old *Pinus halepensis*
582   Mill. in a semi-arid region of Spain which concluded that forest thinning reduced competition for
583   water resources but did not alter water uptake patterns (Moreno-Gutiérrez et al., 2011). Another
584   study on the impact of thinning *Pinus ponderosa* Dougl. on depth to water uptake concluded that
585   water was consistently more isotopically enriched in low-density stands potentially due to
586   prolonged evaporative fractionation in the soil profile, or that understory vegetation utilized

587 more shallow water sources (Kerhoulas et al., 2013). The impact of forest thinning on stand and
588 understory water use is highly variable and dependent on understory growth, canopy structure,
589 water availability, when forest thinning is implemented, and the time since stem removal
590 (Kerhoulas et al., 2013; Moreno-Gutiérrez et al., 2011; Sohn et al., 2016). More research is
591 needed to decern if lodgepole pine relies more on mobile or bound soil water, the extent of
592 lodgepole pine rooting zones, what biogeochemical factors cause seasonal shifts in water uptake,
593 and if severe seasonal drought has a lasting effect on water uptake strategies during hydrologic
594 recovery (Simonin et al., 2007; Vargas et al., 2017).

595 4.3. Impacts of the drought and implications for future climate conditions

596 The 2021 growing season was an abnormally hot and dry period for the interior of British
597 Columbia with severe to exceptional drought conditions. Wang et al. (2019) found that thinning
598 improved water-use efficiency, drought tolerance, and drought recovery by decreasing stand
599 density and improving carbon storage. Our results support the finding that lodgepole pine trees
600 can adjust to prolonged water scarcity, and over-populated stands may be more resilient than the
601 literature has initially indicated. In fact, drought conditions over the study period likely
602 intensified the change in xylem water isotopic composition over the growing season. However,
603 the scope of this study did not include pre-drought seasonal water use patterns nor the impact of
604 forest density on depth to water uptake during drought recovery. Because lodgepole pine depth
605 to water uptake changes during prolonged dry growing season conditions, the trees are more
606 reliant on winter snowpack and spring infiltration to recharge deeper source water below the
607 evaporative front. One experiment on juniper (*Juniperus monosperma* (Engelm.) Sarg.) and
608 pinion pine (*Pinus edulis* Engelm.) investigated the simultaneous stress of increased heat and
609 decreased precipitation on depth to water uptake and found that extreme temperatures and
610 decreased precipitation lead to less reversable embolism and more root death in surface soil
611 levels preventing trees from accessing shallow water sources if precipitation becomes more
612 available late in the growing season (Grossiord et al., 2017). It is becoming more imperative to
613 understand the climatic drivers of lodgepole pine water use and access as mean annual
614 temperatures continue to rise, the seasonal frequency and intensity of precipitation change, and
615 drought conditions become more severe. This study indicates that severe seasonal dryness pushes
616 lodgepole pines to rely more on snowmelt while losing function in shallow roots. Our results are
617 inconclusive in determining the depth to water uptake in September and October because of
618 limited deep soil water measurements. However, increased annual temperatures and more
619 variable precipitation patterns as a part of climate change projections are predicted to drive
620 decreases in winter snowpack and could drive lodgepole pine stands, regardless of stem density,
621 to rely on groundwater influencing water availability and depth to groundwater. These
622 projections could lead to prolonged inter-annual water scarcity along with seasonal water
623 scarcity during the late growing season.

624

625   5.1 Conclusions

626 Lodgepole pine, across all treatments, was able to shift access from shallow soil water at the
627 beginning of the growing season to deeper soil water as drought conditions intensified. The
628 quick-draining and sun-exposed soils of the UPC do not retain small summer precipitation
629 events, and these patterns are intensified in the shallow soil layer of the heavily thinned stand

630 because decreased canopy cover can be directly related to increased soil evaporation. As a result,
631 due to changes in water availability, lodgepole pines shift to a more readily available source in
632 the soil profile (Aranda et al., 2012; Prieto et al., 2012). Our findings support the literature that
633 lodgepole pines are a drought-tolerant species with dimorphic rooting systems allowing them to
634 access water from varying depths in the soil depending on water availability (Andrews et al.,
635 2012; Liu et al., 2011). Despite the ecological plasticity under extreme heat and low summer
636 precipitation conditions, there was no statistically significant variance in depth to water use
637 between the over-populated plots and thinned ones. Both thinned and unthinned lodgepole pine
638 stands were able to access shallow soil water during the early months (June and July), then
639 switched to deeper soil water and a larger proportion of groundwater during September.
640 Although there was not a statistically significant difference in isotopic composition of branch
641 water for the different treatments, our results indicate that decreased stem density may lead to the
642 prolonged use of soil water 35 cm below the surface during prolonged dry periods which would
643 decrease the dependency of lodgepole pine on shallow soil water and summer precipitation
644 events and rather increase the dependency on deep soil water or ground water fed by winter snow
645 accumulation and spring snowmelt.

646 Future climate projections indicate hotter growing seasons and less precipitation (Allen et al.,
647 2010). Further investigation is needed to discern how lodgepole pines, under different stand
648 densities, use water during prolonged drought and drought recovery periods (Grossiord et al.,
649 2017; Navarro-Cerrillo et al., 2019; Simonin et al., 2007; Sohn et al., 2016). From our findings,
650 stand density did not prevent lodgepole pines from accessing soil water from various depths, but
651 decreased stem density did result in lodgepole pines using soil water higher in the soil profile for
652 longer under extremely dry conditions. Lodgepole pines indicate a strong level of drought
653 tolerance and ability to access water under extreme heat conditions. If summer precipitation
654 decreases, lodgepole pine in the interior of British Columbia can access deeper soil water from
655 spring snowmelt. However, if snowpack and spring snowmelt begin to decrease, lodgepole pine
656 may need to acclimate to these hydrological shifts.

657

658 *Code and Data Availability:*

659 The codes of the data analysis and plotting are available at https://github.com/emory-
660 ce/LodgepolePineWaterUseStrategies2021 and are available upon request (ece58@nau.edu)

661

662 *Author Contributions:*

663 EE conceived the idea as a part of their Master's research with AW, and performed the
664 extractions with RG. Analysis was primarily conducted by EE with guidance from AW and RG.
665 All authors contributed to the manuscript.

666

667 *Competing Interests:*

668 None of the authors have competing interests.

669

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