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## LISTE DES ABRÉVIATIONS, SIGLES ET ACRONYMES

AICc	Akaike Information Criterion corrected
Dbh	Diameter at breast height
N	Nitrogen
TNC	Total non-structural carbohydrates
$\delta^{13}\text{C}$	Carbon isotopic discrimination

## RÉSUMÉ

L'élagage est une opération sylvicole qui consiste à enlever les branches situées sur le tronc jusqu'à une certaine hauteur de la couronne verte. Le but est de produire des billes de bois sans nœuds. C'est une pratique ancienne qui a fait l'objet de nombreuses études, mais rares sont celles qui se sont intéressées au choix de la saison d'élagage et son incidence sur la physiologie et la croissance du peuplier. Comprendre ces effets permettrait de développer des scénarios sylvicoles plus adaptés selon les conditions actuelles ou futures. L'objectif de cette étude était de déterminer les effets de la saison et de l'intensité d'élagage sur l'activité physiologique de 4 clones de peuplier hybride. L'apparition de branches éplicormiques ou gourmands (rameaux qui poussent spontanément sur une partie du tronc exposé à la lumière) étant une réponse courante des peupliers à l'élagage, l'étude était dotée d'un second objectif : déterminer si ces branches constituent un puits ou une source d'énergie pour l'arbre. L'étude s'est déroulée dans une peupleraie localisée à New Liskeard, ON, dont les arbres ont été plantés au printemps 2007 à un espacement de 3,5 m (816 tiges.ha<sup>-1</sup>). Les élagages ont été effectués à l'automne 2009, au printemps 2010 et, à l'été 2010, à deux intensités différentes; 1/3 et 2/3 de la cime vivante, et un témoin non élagué. Les arbres élagués avaient une photosynthèse nette plus élevée que les témoins, mais l'effet était similaire pour les arbres élagués à 1/3 (+21.7%) et à 2/3 (+23.6%). L'élagage entraînait aussi une diminution des réserves de glucides dans les racines, qui était plus importante pour les arbres élagués à 2/3 (-29%) qu'à 1/3 (-22%). Ce résultat suggère que la réponse photosynthétique mise en place suite à l'élagage était insuffisante pour reconstituer l'ensemble des réserves. L'élagage a augmenté la concentration en azote foliaire et la discrimination du <sup>13</sup>Carbone ( $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ ), ce qui suggérait une meilleure résistance au stress hydrique. Deux ans après les traitements, élaguer 2/3 de la cime entraînait un ralentissement de la croissance peu importe la saison d'élagage, alors qu'élaguer à 1/3 en été n'affectait pas la croissance des arbres. De plus, élaguer en été entraînait une augmentation de la concentration d'azote dans les feuilles, de la conductance stomatique et de la discrimination du <sup>13</sup>Carbone, ce qui indiquait de meilleures dispositions pour récupérer comparativement aux arbres taillés en automne et au printemps. La saison d'élagage jouait aussi un rôle important dans la production de branches éplicormiques, puisque les arbres élagués en été ont produit significativement moins de gourmands que les arbres élagués en automne et au printemps, et ce indépendamment de l'intensité d'élagage. Les feuilles des branches éplicormiques contribuaient à la photosynthèse globale de l'arbre, sans pour autant restaurer les réserves de glucides. La présence de ces branches n'a pas influencé la croissance en diamètre. Ces branches semblaient donc être auto-suffisantes en énergie. Nous avons conclu qu'élaguer à 1/3 de la cime en été était la meilleure option pour produire du bois de qualité sans affecter la croissance et la physiologie des peupliers. De même, si des branches éplicormiques apparaissaient elles pouvaient être émondées sans perturber l'activité physiologique et la croissance subséquente des peupliers hybrides.

Mots clés : *Peuplier, saison d'élagage, intensité d'élagage, physiologie, croissance, Populus.*

## CHAPITRE I

### INTRODUCTION GÉNÉRALE

Au Canada l'aménagement forestier extensif est dominant, et les taux de croissance des forêts primaires sont faibles. Les longues révolutions qui en découlent sont un frein à la demande future de bois et de matière ligneuse à l'échelle mondiale. Les plantations d'essences à croissance rapide sont considérées comme la principale alternative pour produire plus de bois sur des surfaces plus petites tout en préservant les forêts primaires (Anderson et Luckert, 2007 ; Heilman, 1999). Au Canada, bien que la ligniculture soit récente, les plantations de peuplier hybride (*Populus spp.*) peuvent atteindre des accroissements de 6 à 29 m<sup>3</sup>/ha/an (Park et Wilson, 2007). Contrairement à il y a quelques décennies, le peuplier est maintenant une essence prisée par l'industrie. Son bois est utilisé dans la fabrication des panneaux de particules, des poutres lamellées, des contre-plaqués, de sciages destinés à des utilisations multiples et pour la production de pâte et de papier. De plus, la pratique de l'élagage permet d'augmenter la proportion de bois avec une plus forte valeur ajoutée et de valoriser des débouchés tels que le contre-plaqué et le déroulage.

La production de bois sans défauts est en effet accélérée dans les peuplements en plantation par des élagages. Bien que les réponses en termes de croissance à différentes intensités d'élagage aient été étudiées, les effets physiologiques de l'élagage sont encore largement inconnus. La connaissance de ces effets nous permettrait de développer divers scénarios sylvicoles pouvant s'adapter à des conditions de croissance variées, plutôt que d'y aller à tâtons, par essais et erreurs. Par exemple, l'enlèvement d'une partie du feuillage causé par l'élagage agit sûrement sur le régime hydrique des arbres, qui pourrait alors être utilisé en conditions de sécheresses temporaires. Les changements physiologiques qui s'opèrent chez les arbres élagués pourraient également varier en fonction de la saison d'élagage, de par les

différents stades physiologiques causés par les changements de saisons. De la sorte, le traitement pourrait être modifié en fonction des conditions climatiques. Enfin, une réponse fréquente des peupliers à l'élagage est la production de branches épicromiques ou gourmands. Bien que l'on sache que leur production est reliée à la mise en lumière soudaine du tronc, on ne sait pas si la production de ces gourmands constitue un coût énergétique pour l'arbre (au détriment de la croissance en diamètre), ou alors si cela constitue un bénéfice, par la production importante et rapide de feuillage qui contribuera à la photosynthèse de l'arbre.

### 1.1 L'élagage : définition et principe d'application

D'après les différents guides sur la populiculture disponibles au Canada (Boysen et Strobl, 1991 ; Fortier *et al.*, 2011 ; van Oosten, 2006), l'élagage est un terme générique qui englobe 3 opérations :

- la taille de formation; elle vise à donner rectitude et solidité à un arbre en éliminant les têtes doubles ou multiples ainsi que les branches qui par leur fort développement déséquilibrent le port de l'arbre.
- L'élagage; il a pour but de produire du bois sans nœuds en coupant des branches mortes ou vivantes de la partie inférieure du tronc.
- L'émondage; il complète l'élagage en supprimant les gourmands qui se développent sur le tronc à partir de bourgeons épicromiques.

Ces diverses opérations sylvicoles permettent d'améliorer la forme et la qualité des bois en contenant les défauts engendrés par la coupe des branches à un noyau central, augmentant ainsi la proportion de bois sans défaut (Kerr et Morgan, 2006 ; Montagu *et al.*, 2003 ; Polge, 1969 ; Takiya *et al.*, 2009). En effet, chaque branche produit un nœud sur le tronc et abaisse ainsi la valeur commerciale du bois (Nielsen et Pinkard, 2003). La résistance mécanique est altérée par la présence de nœuds, et le fil du bois est dévié au voisinage des nœuds ce qui peut occasionner des défauts dans les produits finis. De la sorte, en Europe le prix des feuillus précieux peut varier de 200 à 1000 € par m<sup>3</sup> selon la qualité (Oosterbaan *et al.*, 2009). Dans les premières années de la plantation on privilégie la taille de formation car la rectitude de la bille de pied est primordiale pour un bois de qualité (Hubert et Courraud, 1994). Pour l'élagage il est préférable d'intervenir quand les arbres sont âgés entre 3 et 5 ans, ou quand le diamètre à 1,30 m de l'arbre se situe entre 8 et 10 cm (Gagnon, 2006). Néanmoins, ces



chiffres peuvent varier en fonction de la vitesse de croissance des arbres. Si la plantation est vigoureuse il se peut qu'il faille intervenir avant. Généralement l'élagage doit être précoce et progressif (Hubert et Courraud, 1994). Précoce, il coûte moins cher et il est plus efficace car les branches sont de plus faible diamètre. De plus les défauts sont contenus dans un noyau de plus faible diamètre. Progressif, il traumatise moins les arbres. En effet l'élagage représente une forme d'agression pour l'arbre. De ce fait de nombreuses recommandations sont basées sur le diamètre des branches. Notamment, il est préférable d'élaguer dans le jeune âge des branches de faible diamètre pour diminuer la section où les pathogènes peuvent entrer et accélérer la cicatrisation (Montagu *et al.*, 2003 ; Polge, 1969). Pour faire face aux blessures et agressions l'arbre réagit de deux manières (Shigo, 1984) :

- en isolant la zone infestée, pour ce faire il oppose à la progression des agents pathogènes des barrières chimiques dans lesquelles on trouve des substances antifongiques et antibiotiques.
- en développant sur le pourtour de la blessure un bourrelet cicatriciel et des barrières internes qui à terme doivent refermer les plaies.

Dans les deux cas, les tissus infectés ou blessés ne se régénèrent pas, ils sont enkystés dans les tissus sains. Pour le clone *P. deltoïdes* x (*P. laurifolia* x *P. nigra*) var. Walker, Block *et al.* (2009) mentionnent que l'on peut intervenir une à deux années après l'établissement de la plantation. Rytter et Jansson (2009), recommandent d'élaguer quand la tige atteint un diamètre (dhp) de 15 cm, et de couper les branches dont le diamètre est compris entre 3 et 5 cm. L'important serait l'âge des tissus blessés par la coupe. En effet, les petites blessures n'affectent que les jeunes tissus, ceux contenant des cellules de parenchyme actives, donc le plus fort taux de réserves en énergie. Plus la plaie est petite, plus la cicatrisation est rapide. La coupe de grosses branches entraîne quant à elle une cicatrisation plus longue et augmente le risque d'une coloration du bois plus étendue (Soutrenon, 1995). Enfin, d'un point de vue économique, une branche de petit diamètre âgée de 1 ou 2 ans se coupe sans difficulté alors qu'après 3 ou 4 saisons de végétation, couper la même branche demande 3 ou 4 fois plus de temps et rend l'élagage plus coûteux (Hubert et Courraud, 1994).

L'intensité d'élagage correspond à la hauteur jusqu'à laquelle on enlève des branches. La hauteur de bois sans nœuds correspond généralement à la longueur utilisée par l'industrie

soit 6 à 8m. Bien entendu l'opération ne se fait pas d'un seul coup. On conseille d'atteindre cette hauteur à l'aide de 4 à 5 élagages répartis sur les 10 premières années de la plantation (Boysen et Strobl, 1991 ; Fortier *et al.*, 2011 ; van Oosten, 2006) soit en 2 ou 3 élagages (Hubert et Courraud, 1994).

Les plaies d'élagage représentent une porte d'entrée pour les agents pathogènes, et plus une blessure reste ouverte longtemps, plus elle a de chance de s'infecter. Polge (1969), considère que la période la plus propice pour l'élagage semble être celle qui précède le départ de la végétation *i.e.*, au printemps, car l'entrée en action de l'assise cambiale entraîne une cicatrisation plus rapide des plaies, qui sont à ce moment-là chez les conifères recouvertes d'une pellicule de résine. Cependant à la même période, les écoulements par les plaies de taille attirent les insectes et favorisent les pourritures (Hubert et Courraud, 1994). Chez *Pinus sylvestris*, élaguer à l'automne augmentait le risque d'infection des plaies par *Phacidium coniferarum* (Uotila et Mustonen, 1994). Montagu *et al.* (2003) précisent que même si en Tasmanie *Eucalyptus nittens* peut être élagué à n'importe qu'elle saison, la cicatrisation est bien plus rapide quand l'arbre est en pleine croissance et que le diamètre des branches est plus faible. En effet, les mécanismes de compartimentation dépendent de l'activité physiologique des cellules des parenchymes ainsi que de la disponibilité des réserves emmagasinées. Pour cette raison, la saison a une influence sur la réaction des arbres suite à des blessures (Dujesiefken et Stobbe, 2002). Il semble donc que la taille des branches ne devrait pas être faite durant la période hivernale et que les blessures faites pendant la période de végétation sont plus efficacement compartimentées (Dujesiefken *et al.*, 2005).

Lonsdale (1993), dans son étude sur la saison d'élagage a établi un calendrier des "bonnes" et des "mauvaises" saisons de l'élagage pour 9 espèces représentatives de la Grande Bretagne. Il préconise un élagage au milieu de l'été durant la saison de croissance car l'arbre est actif et ses réserves ont été restaurées par la photosynthèse. Les composants de la défense des arbres dépendent de la croissance des cellules, qui sont plus actives qu'en période de dormance. En été, la disponibilité en sucres pour la conversion en défenses chimiques, comme la production de phénols, n'est pas réduite par le débourrement ou la floraison (Lonsdale, 1993). De plus les blessures seraient moins susceptibles de s'infecter. En zone boréale au Canada, où la saison de végétation est plus courte qu'en Europe, les guides de

populiculture préconisent d'élaguer le peuplier au début de l'été (Boysen et Strobl, 1991 ; Fortier *et al.*, 2011 ; van Oosten, 2006). Cependant ces recommandations découlent d'avantage des pratiques courantes et ne sont pas basées sur des études scientifiques qui auraient testé l'effet de la saison d'élagage sur la croissance ou la vigueur des arbres.

## 1.2 Effets physiologiques de l'élagage

### 1.2.1 Photosynthèse

Le taux de photosynthèse de la feuille varie considérablement pendant la journée. Il est communément bas tôt le matin, et au fur et à mesure que l'intensité lumineuse augmente et que l'air se réchauffe, les stomates s'ouvrent et la photosynthèse nette commence à augmenter rapidement pour atteindre un maximum vers midi. Aux alentours de midi il y a une baisse du taux de photosynthèse qui serait due à la fermeture des stomates causée par une réponse à la tension importante subie par la colonne d'eau à cette heure de la journée. À nouveau, le maximum est atteint dans l'après-midi. Ensuite, une baisse de la photosynthèse est observée en début de soirée quand l'intensité lumineuse et la température diminuent (Kozłowski et Pallardy, 1997). Les réponses physiologiques à l'élagage s'opèrent sur deux plans; le premier, lié directement au processus photosynthétique, se traduit par une augmentation de la photosynthèse de la feuille. Le second se traduit par une accélération du développement de la feuille et une augmentation de la longévité des feuilles résiduelles (Beadle *et al.*, 2004). Hart *et al.* (2000) ont démontré qu'après une forte défoliation chez le peuplier faux-tremble (*Populus tremuloides* Michx.), on observait une augmentation de la conductance stomatique et une photosynthèse compensatoire des feuilles résiduelles au bout de huit jours. La photosynthèse compensatoire correspond donc à l'augmentation du taux de photosynthèse d'un arbre partiellement défolié, comparé à un arbre non défolié sur un feuillage du même âge (Nowak et Caldwell, 1984). Cependant, une défoliation plus sévère (98%) n'augmentait plus la photosynthèse compensatoire ce qui suggère qu'il y ait une limite à cette augmentation de la photosynthèse qui pourrait être due à une contrainte physique : à 50% de défoliation, les stomates étaient peut-être déjà ouverts au maximum. La plasticité des feuilles à augmenter leur photosynthèse serait donc limitée Hart *et al.* (2000). L'augmentation du taux de photosynthèse maximum (*A<sub>max</sub>*) suite à une défoliation partielle

(élagage) chez des Eucalyptus (*E. globulus*) âgés de 1 an variait dans le temps : une semaine après la défoliation les valeurs du *Amax* étaient respectivement 1,5 et 1,7 fois plus élevées pour des taux d'élagage de 50 et 70%, pour retrouver une valeur proche des arbres non élagués au bout de cinq semaines (Turnbull *et al.*, 2007). Bassman et Dickmann (1982), ont observé que le taux de photosynthèse des feuilles résiduelles de peupliers partiellement défoliés était plus élevé que dans des feuilles similaires de peupliers intacts. Cette différence était mesurable pendant cinq semaines. Cependant, défoliation et élagage sont deux stress différents, bien que ces deux stress entraînent un déséquilibre entre la surface foliaire et la masse racinaire (ratio tige/racines). Les observations faites chez des peupliers défoliés pourraient donc différer chez des peupliers élagués.

### 1.2.2 Dynamique des glucides

La photosynthèse est un processus essentiel à la fabrication de l'énergie chez les végétaux, notamment les hydrates de carbone non structuraux totaux (TNC) ou glucides. Les TNC se retrouvent chez l'arbre sous différentes formes telles les sucres solubles (sucrose, fructose, glucose) et l'amidon. Les glucides s'accumulent dans les racines et les tissus vivants des tiges sous forme de réserves, qui fourniront l'énergie nécessaire à la croissance de la plante et au maintien des processus cellulaires. La concentration en glucides peut varier en fonction de l'espèce, du site, et de l'âge des peuplements (Kozłowski et Pallardy, 1997). Cette concentration connaît également des variations naturelles tout au long de la saison de croissance, régulée par les changements de saison et la respiration racinaire (DesRochers *et al.*, 2002). En forêt boréale chez le peuplier faux-tremble (*Populus tremuloides*), les concentrations racinaires en glucides à l'automne sont faibles. Elles augmentent au cours du printemps et de l'été jusqu'à l'arrêt de l'élongation de la partie aérienne et des feuilles (DesRochers *et al.*, 2002). La concentration en TNC diminue ensuite à cause de la croissance des racines en automne. L'amidon est alors converti en sucre, pour soutenir la croissance racinaire (Landhäusser et Lieffers, 2003). Chez le peuplier faux-tremble, la variation de la concentration en glucides selon les périodes de la saison de végétation diffère du schéma classique des espèces à feuilles caduques (DesRochers *et al.*, 2002), chez lesquelles la concentration est maximale en automne et minimale après l'éclosion des bourgeons (Larcher, 2003). Enfin chez de jeunes peupliers hybrides (*Populus maximowiczii* Henry x *P. nigra* L.

'MN9') âgés d'un an, Tschaplinski et Blake (1995), ont constaté que les racines des cultivars intacts contenaient 1,8 fois plus de glucides que les racines d'arbres décapités.

Chaque année la racine fabrique un cerne de croissance à partir de son assise subéro-phéllodermique. Cette couche qui renferme le xylème et le phloème produit annuellement une nouvelle pellicule d'écorce vers l'extérieur et une nouvelle couche de bois vers l'intérieur. Les glucides sont entreposés majoritairement dans les rayons de parenchyme du phloème. Plus la racine grandit, plus la proportion de bois par rapport à celle de l'écorce est importante. De ce fait, les concentrations en glucides sont plus faibles dans les grosses racines que dans les racines fines, car ces dernières sont composées d'une plus faible proportion de bois.

### 1.2.3 Concentration foliaire en azote

L'azote est important dans la croissance des tiges et des feuilles. Il contribue entre autre au développement de la chlorophylle nécessaire à la photosynthèse. La quantité d'azote varie selon les tissus, l'âge ou le stade de développement et la saison. Les plus fortes concentrations en N se trouvent dans les tissus composés principalement de cellules physiologiquement actives comme les tissus méristématiques et les feuilles, notamment dans l'enzyme Rubisco, impliquée dans la fixation du carbone durant la photosynthèse. Ces dernières pourraient contenir près de 40% de l'azote total de l'arbre. Pour la plupart des espèces feuillues, la concentration foliaire en azote a tendance à diminuer pendant la période d'élongation des feuilles. Il y a ensuite une augmentation à la fin de l'été, qui cesse quand la croissance stoppe et, qui est suivie d'une forte diminution jusqu'à ce que les feuilles tombent. Cette diminution s'explique par la translocation de l'azote contenu dans les feuilles vers les branches et le tronc (Kozlowski et Pallardy, 1997).

Après une défoliation partielle sur *E. globulus*, (Turnbull *et al.*, 2007), ont montré que la concentration foliaire en azote avait augmenté significativement une semaine après l'intervention, et que l'effet était persistant encore après quatre semaines. Malgré une forte relation entre  $A_{max}$  et l'azote foliaire, ce dernier ne s'était retrouvé ni sous forme de Rubisco ni de chlorophylle. L'augmentation de la capacité biochimique pour la photosynthèse en réponse à une défoliation partielle n'était donc pas fonction de la quantité de Rubisco ou de

chlorophylle, mais d'une augmentation de l'activité spécifique de la Rubisco (Turnbull *et al.*, 2007).

#### 1.2.4 Stress hydrique et isotopes du carbone

Les peupliers étant de grands consommateurs d'eau, leur implantation loin des cours d'eau peut poser problème, surtout en période de sécheresse estivale. L'élagage réduit inévitablement la surface foliaire d'un arbre, ce qui en cas de déficit hydrique, pourrait être un avantage en réduisant l'évapotranspiration et en minimisant la fermeture des stomates comparativement à des arbres non élagués (Polge, 1969). L'air contient naturellement deux isotopes stables  $^{12}\text{C}$  et  $^{13}\text{C}$ , respectivement présent à hauteur de 98,9% et 1,1% du  $\text{CO}_2$  atmosphérique (Kozłowski et Pallardy, 1997). L'acquisition de  $\text{CO}_2$  par les plantes commence quand le  $\text{CO}_2$  est diffusé à travers les stomates dans les espaces d'air internes de la feuille. La concentration interne en  $\text{CO}_2$  de la feuille est réduite par rapport à celle de l'atmosphère, ceci est dû à la fixation du  $\text{CO}_2$  par les enzymes photosynthétiques. Parmi ces deux isotopes, la Rubisco, principale enzyme carboxylase pour les plantes de type  $\text{C}_3$ , fixe préférentiellement le  $^{12}\text{CO}_2$ , car plus léger et donc plus facilement assimilable. C'est le phénomène de la discrimination isotopique du carbone ( $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ ) (Kozłowski et Pallardy, 1997). Chez les plantes  $\text{C}_3$ , il a été estimé que la discrimination isotopique pour le  $^{13}\text{C}$  est de l'ordre de -4‰ lors de l'étape de la diffusion du  $\text{CO}_2$  à travers les stomates et de -29‰ lors de l'étape de carboxylation (Farquhar *et al.*, 1989). En été, lorsque les températures s'élèvent et que la disponibilité en eau dans le sol diminue, les stomates se ferment pour limiter la transpiration. Par conséquent, la concentration en  $\text{CO}_2$  à l'intérieur de la feuille est réduite et comme la Rubisco préfère le  $^{12}\text{CO}_2$ , le résidu d'air à l'intérieur du mésophylle s'enrichit en  $^{13}\text{CO}_2$ . Dans ces conditions de stress hydrique, une plus grande quantité de  $^{13}\text{CO}_2$  est donc fixé par la Rubisco (Kozłowski et Pallardy, 1997). Les valeurs de  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  sont ainsi fréquemment utilisées pour estimer l'impact d'un manque d'eau pour les plantes. Ainsi, la mesure de la discrimination isotopique du carbone devrait nous permettre de savoir si les arbres élagués ont été moins sensibles aux périodes de sécheresse estivales compte tenu de leur surface foliaire réduite.

### 1.3 Effets de l'élagage sur la croissance

#### 1.3.1 Accroissement en diamètre et défilement

L'élagage de branches mortes n'aura aucun effet sur la croissance. Par contre, l'élagage de branches vivantes aura un effet sur la croissance et dépendra de la quantité de surface foliaire enlevée. Chez les Eucalyptus et Acacias, une diminution de la croissance est observée à des taux d'élagage de 40 à 50% de la surface foliaire enlevée, alors que pour les conifères le même effet est observé mais pour des intensités d'élagage plus faibles, de 25 à 40% (Pinkard et Beadle, 2000). Plus l'intensité de l'élagage augmente, plus le ralentissement de la croissance en diamètre est fort. Keller (1979) dans son expérience sur l'élagage de l'hybride de peuplier I214 (*Populus x canadensis* Mönch), a démontré un ralentissement de l'accroissement en diamètre dans la partie inférieure des troncs, mais au voisinage de la cime le ralentissement était moins marqué. L'élagage améliore donc la cylindricité des arbres (Funk, 1979 ; Keller, 1979 ; Neilsen et Pinkard, 2003) du fait d'une réduction du défilement (forme de l'arbre sur sa longueur). L'effet est d'autant plus marqué avec des intensités d'élagage plus sévères. Cependant seuls des élagages sévères (> 60% de la surface foliaire) avaient eu un effet dépressif marqué sur le tronc (Keller, 1979). En opposition, DeBell *et al.* (2002) n'avaient pas constaté d'effets significatifs de l'élagage (50% de la hauteur) sur l'accroissement moyen en diamètre chez le clone 47-174 (*Populus trichocarpa* Torr. & Gray x *Populus deltoides* Bartr. ex Marsh.).

#### 1.3.2 Accroissement en hauteur

Pour beaucoup d'espèces d'arbres, l'apex a la priorité pour la distribution du carbone comparé au reste de la tige, et ceci explique pourquoi la croissance en hauteur est moins affectée par l'élagage que la croissance en diamètre (Kerr et Morgan, 2006). Or, lors de ses travaux sur *Juglans nigra*, (Funk, 1979), a constaté que l'élagage avait favorisé la croissance en hauteur. Pour le clone I 214, la croissance en hauteur n'était ralentie dans aucun des cas par l'élagage (Keller, 1979). Dans une expérience menée sur le chêne (*Quercus robur* L.), le hêtre (*Fagus sylvatica* L.) et le merisier (*Prunus avium* L.), Kerr et Morgan (2006) n'observèrent à long terme aucun effet significatif de la taille de formation dans le jeune âge, sur la croissance en hauteur. Pour les eucalyptus, un taux d'élagage supérieur à 50% a été

nécessaire pour en affecter la croissance en hauteur (Montagu *et al.*, 2003 ; Pinkard *et al.*, 2004). Chez le jeune sapin baumier, il n'y avait pas d'effet de l'élagage sur la hauteur jusqu'à une amputation de 40% de la cime vivante. Au-delà de ce seuil une réduction de la croissance était observée (Margolis *et al.*, 1988). Sur *Pinus radiata*, Neilsen et Pinkard (2003) ont constaté un effet immédiat et persistant pour des taux d'élagage de 60 et 75%.

#### 1.4 Branches éplicormiques

Un gourmand ou pousse éplicormique, est une pousse qui apparaît sur la tige à partir d'un bourgeon latent (Fontaine *et al.*, 2002). Chez le chêne sessile (*Quercus petraea*), il a été montré que ces bourgeons étaient tous d'origine proventive (Fontaine *et al.*, 1999), *i.e.*, qu'ils étaient mis en place lors du développement d'un bourgeon préexistant. Ils sont donc localisés à l'aisselle d'un organe foliaire et demeurent même après la chute des feuilles. Leur localisation est directement liée à la phyllotaxie *i.e.*, à leur disposition sur le rameau. Ils sont qualifiés de primaires s'ils sont formés la même année que la pousse sur laquelle ils sont insérés, et de secondaires s'ils se sont développés ultérieurement sur une ramification de cette pousse (Fontaine *et al.*, 2002). Chez d'autres espèces comme *Acer pseudoplatanus* L. et *Salix alba* L. des bourgeons éplicormiques peuvent apparaître de façon spontanée suite à des blessures, ils sont alors appelés adventifs (Fink, 1983). Ils se développent à partir des tissus périphériques du tronc et leur localisation est indépendante de la phyllotaxie. Quelle que soit son origine, un bourgeon ne forme pas obligatoirement une pousse à l'année, il peut évoluer tardivement et rester au moins un an au stade de bourgeon (Fontaine *et al.*, 2002). L'apparition importante de branches éplicormiques dans un peuplement serait la conséquence d'un stress. Par exemple, la mise en lumière brutale des troncs suite à un épisode de chablis, une éclaircie ou un élagage de trop forte intensité. Chez le chêne pédonculé (*Quercus robur* L.), il a été montré que l'élagage avait un effet à court terme sur l'apparition des branches éplicormiques mais qui disparaissait sur une période de sept ans (Kerr et Harmer, 2001). Les auteurs n'ont trouvé aucune incidence de la saison d'élagage sur la production de gourmands. Cependant des observations apportées par Hubert et Courraud (1994) font part d'une repousse des gourmands nulle voire très faible lorsque les peupliers sont élagués en été durant la saison de végétation. Ceci indique que le choix approprié de la saison d'élagage pourrait aider à contrôler la production de branches éplicormiques. Takiya *et al.* (2009) ont



examiné l'influence de l'élagage sur l'intensité lumineuse dans des peuplements de mélèzes hybrides (*Larix gmelinii* var. *japonica* x *L. kaempferi*). Ils ont illustré que l'élagage augmentait la production de nouvelles branches épïcormiques. L'émergence de ces branches épïcormiques était attribuée à la rupture de la dominance apicale (Takiya *et al.*, 2009).

### 1.5 Expérimentation

Le chapitre 2 présente une expérience dont l'objectif principal était d'expliquer les réponses en croissance de 4 clones de peupliers hybrides par les modifications physiologiques causées par la saison et l'intensité d'élagage. La première hypothèse était que les feuilles résiduelles des arbres élagués feraient de la photosynthèse compensatoire, afin de compenser la perte de feuillage. Cette photosynthèse compensatoire devrait être plus élevée pour les arbres élagués en été, car le stress environnemental provoqué par l'élagage a lieu lorsque que les feuilles sont présentes et actives. La seconde hypothèse était que l'élagage ferait baisser les concentrations en glucides dans les racines, car les arbres puiseront dans leurs réserves pour la formation de nouvelles feuilles suite à l'élagage. D'autre part la concentration des glucides devrait être légèrement plus élevée pour les arbres élagués en été car la conservation de leur feuillage la première partie de l'été devrait leur permettre de constituer des réserves d'énergie plus importantes. De plus, le déséquilibre du ratio biomasse aérienne / biomasse racinaire causé par l'élagage devrait entraîner une augmentation de la concentration d'azote foliaire chez les arbres élagués. Enfin, les arbres élagués ayant une surface foliaire réduite, devraient avoir des feuilles moins stressées en eau et cela devrait se traduire par des valeurs de  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  plus faibles. Nous pensons également que la magnitude des réponses physiologiques devrait augmenter avec l'intensité d'élagage. L'étude s'est déroulée dans une peupleraie localisée à New Liskeard, ON, dont les arbres ont été plantés au printemps 2007 à un espacement de 3,5 m (816 tiges.ha<sup>-1</sup>). Les élagages ont été effectués à l'automne 2009, au printemps 2010 et, à l'été 2010, à deux intensités différentes; 1/3 et 2/3 de la cime vivante, et un témoin non élagué. La photosynthèse, la concentration foliaire en azote, la concentration en sucres dans les racines ainsi que la discrimination isotopique du carbone ont été mesurées. Les clones ont été choisis sur la base de leur origine parentale différente. Il s'agit des clones 1079 (*P. × jackii* (*P. balsamifera* x *P. deltoides*)), 747210 (*P. balsamifera* × *P. trichocarpa*), 915319 (*P. maximowiczii* × *P. balsamifera*) et

DN2 (*P. deltoides* × *P. nigra*) dont le suivi individuel de la croissance (hauteur et diamètre) a été effectué tout au long de l'expérience. Le chapitre 3 décrit la seconde expérience de l'étude dont l'objectif était de déterminer si les branches épicorniques représentaient un puits ou une source d'énergie pour l'arbre, mais aussi d'observer l'incidence de la saison et de l'intensité d'élagage sur leur production. Partant du principe que les branches épicorniques apparaissaient en réponse au stress infligé par l'élagage, leurs feuilles devraient avoir une photosynthèse équivalente à celle des feuilles résiduelles situées dans les deux tiers supérieurs de la tige, malgré leur position plus basse sur le tronc, ce qui pourrait expliquer la forte croissance de ces branches. Les branches épicorniques fournissant de la photosynthèse supplémentaire, la seconde hypothèse était que les arbres ayant des gourmands devraient avoir des réserves en TNC plus importantes. Enfin nous supposons que le nombre de branches épicorniques devrait être plus élevé chez les arbres élagués aux deux tiers, afin de compenser une perte du feuillage plus importante. Pour cette expérience une partie des arbres a été émondée (taille des branches épicorniques). La mesure de l'ensemble des paramètres physiologiques s'est fait de manière identique à la première expérience, de même pour le suivi de croissance. Enfin, les paramètres physiologiques et les caractéristiques morphologiques (surface foliaire spécifique et biomasse notamment) des branches épicorniques ont été mesurés. Le chapitre 4 présente quant à lui les conclusions générales de l'étude.

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## CHAPITRE II

### HYBRID POPLAR PHYSIOLOGICAL AND GROWTH RESPONSES TO PRUNING SEASON AND INTENSITY

#### 2.1 Abstract

Pruning is part of the silvicultural practices recommended for poplar plantations in order to produce clearwood. Common wisdom proposes pruning during the summer season, however little is known on trees' physiological responses to pruning season and intensity. This study aimed at determining the effects of pruning season and intensity on growth and physiology of 4 hybrid poplar clones. Using three year old trees, we compared 9 combinations of pruning season (fall, spring and summer) and intensity (unpruned, 1/3 and 2/3 of crown length pruned). We showed that pruning increased net photosynthesis of residual foliage, nitrogen foliar concentrations and reduced root total non-structural carbohydrates reserves. Leaf carbon isotopic ratios ( $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ ) values of pruned trees decreased compared to unpruned trees, reflecting their greater stomatal conductance and suggesting that pruned trees could have better drought stress resistance. Two growing seasons after pruning, 1/3 pruned trees had reduced height growth except for summer-pruned trees. Irrespective of the pruning season, pruning 2/3 of the live crown reduced both breast height diameter and height two years after treatments. Summer pruning increased foliar nitrogen concentrations, stomatal conductance and decreased leaf carbon isotopic ratios ( $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ ) more than for trees pruned in fall or spring, suggesting better capacities to recover from pruning. We concluded that removal of 1/3 of the lower crown in summer was the best option to produce clear wood without compromising growth rates and physiological processes in hybrid poplar.

## 2.2 Introduction

The area of primary forests has decreased by more than 40 million ha since 2000 (FAO, 2010). Establishment of fast growing plantations is considered as the main tool to produce more wood on reduced land areas by preserving the remainder of native forests while ensuring long-term timber supplies (Anderson and Luckert, 2007 ; Heilman, 1999). To maintain high growth rates, fast growing plantations require silvicultural interventions right from stand establishment to the final cut. The timing and intensity of silvicultural operations can significantly affect profitability, but more importantly the physiology and growth of trees. Pruning treatments to remove branches from the lower crown are usually done to improve the shape of trees during the establishment period and /or to create knot free wood and increase the value of boles (Hubert and Courraud, 1994).

Most pruning prescriptions are based on empirical data combining operational needs with tree growth responses (Keller, 1979 ; Neilsen and Pinkard, 2003 ; Shock *et al.*, 2003 ; Uotila and Mustonen, 1994). As a consequence, pruning prescriptions tend to be conservative and designed to ensure that growth is not affected by a particular level of pruning under most conditions (Pinkard and Beadle, 2000). Little is known, still, on the physiological responses to pruning which could help us recommend better silvicultural practices. Removal of foliage and branches should trigger gas exchange responses, modifications of carbohydrate and nitrogen (N) stocks, and a reduction in transpiration possibly enhancing trees' resistance to drought stress. Such responses are also likely to be affected by the season when trees are pruned, in turn affecting tree growth and vigour.

Pruning intensity (or height to which branches are removed) is usually determined by the desired length of saw logs and veneer log grades (Montagu *et al.*, 2003). Recommendations for hybrid poplars in Canada suggest reaching a 6-7 m clear bole, in 3 to 5 lifts depending on tree growth, only removing one-third of the live crown at each lift (Boysen and Strobl, 1991 ; Fortier *et al.*, 2011 ; van Oosten, 2006).

Trees develop physiological responses to compensate pruning or defoliation such as compensatory photosynthesis, which is defined as an increase in the photosynthetic rates of



foliage of partially defoliated plants relative to foliage of the same age on undefoliated plants (Nowak and Caldwell, 1984). This mechanism also triggers an increase in the rate of the leaf development and in the longevity of existing leaves (Pinkard and Beadle, 1998a). An increased utilisation of carbohydrates reserves is also a compensatory mechanism to support the production of new foliage (Tschaplinski and Blake, 1994), such as observed in the needles of pruned *Pinus sylvestris* (Långström *et al.*, 1990). It has also been observed that pruning increased nitrogen concentrations in the remaining leaves of pruned trees (Pinkard *et al.*, 1998 ; Turnbull *et al.*, 2007). Such improved nutrient status in residual tissue may result directly from modified root-shoot ratios (McNaughton, 1983). Moreover, pruning, by reducing leaf area and therefore transpiration, appeared to increase leaf water potential (Elfadl and Luukkanen, 2003). In situations of a water deficit, the reduction of foliage in pruned trees could avoid or delay stomata closure compared to unpruned trees by reducing the overall tree transpiration. These responses depend on species (Reich *et al.*, 1993) and generally increase with pruning intensity (Alcorn *et al.*, 2008 ; Medhurst *et al.*, 2006).

Physiological processes are subjected to seasonal variations (Kozlowski and Pallardy, 1997), and physiological responses to pruning could also vary according to the season when pruning is done. Many recommendations for pruning season are based on wound healing and insects or fungi damages at wound sites, and the extension of wood discoloration (Dujesiefken *et al.*, 2005 ; Dujesiefken and Stobbe, 2002 ; Lonsdale, 1993 ; Shigo, 1985 ; Shigo *et al.*, 1978 ; Soutrenon, 1995). However, prescriptions for pruning season in the literature are contradictory. It is commonly recommended not to prune during the dormant season, because wound closure is slower, tree defenses are less operational and wounds are less effectively compartmentalized (Dujesiefken *et al.*, 2005 ; Lonsdale, 1993). Hence, it has been suggested that the best time to prune is at the end of winter when the tree defence system is about to become active, but before carbohydrate reserves are depleted by leaf flushing (Shigo, 1989), resulting in quick wound healing without spread of potential diseases (Soutrenon, 1995). Then again, prescriptions for pruning season depend on species and climate. In Europe, literature suggests pruning poplars at the end of the summer (Bonduelle, 1971 ; Hubert and Courraud, 1994), while in Canada where the growing season is shorter, it is mostly recommended to prune poplars in late spring or early summer (Boysen and Strobl,

1991 ; Fortier *et al.*, 2011 ; van Oosten, 2006). These recommendations, however, do not seem to be based on any physiological rationale or experimental data, but rather on conventional wisdom and traditional practice.

The main objective of this study was to assess physiological and growth responses of pruning season and intensity in different hybrid poplar clones. Gas exchange, root total non-structural carbohydrates and foliar nitrogen concentrations, and water stress were evaluated following three seasonal pruning (fall, spring or summer) and three pruning intensities (unpruned, 1/3 or 2/3 of crown height pruned). Since summer-pruned trees keep the totality of their photosynthetic area during the first part of the growing season, we expected higher root carbohydrates reserves hence stronger physiological responses to compensate for the loss of foliage. We anticipated that the magnitude of the response would increase with pruning intensity.

## 2.3 Materials and methods

### 2.3.1 Study sites

The study was conducted in a plantation established in 2007, at the New Liskeard Agricultural Research Station of Guelph University in North-Eastern Ontario (47°52'N, 79°66'W). The area is part of Haileybury Clay forest section of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Forest Region (Rowe, 1972). From 1971 to 2000 annual precipitation for the region has averaged 819 mm (rainfall 625 mm, snowfall 195 cm) with an average daily temperature of 2.8 °C and an average of 2605 degree-days above 0 °C (Ville-Marie station (47°21'N, 79°26'W)), (Environment Canada, 2011). The regional surficial geology is characterized by lacustrine clays and sands from post-glacial Lake Barlow (Rowe, 1972), and soil type was a Humic Gleysol (Canada Soil Survey Committee, 1987).

The site was ploughed in October 2006 and cross-cultivated with disks followed by herbicide application in spring 2007 before planting at a 3.5 m x 3.5 m spacing (816 stems.ha<sup>-1</sup>). Four hybrid poplar clones were chosen based on their different parentage: 1079 (*Populus* × *jackii* (*P. balsamifera* × *P. deltoides*)), 747210 (*P. balsamifera* × *P. trichocarpa*), 915319 (*P. maximowiczii* × *P. balsamifera*) and DN2 (*P. deltoides* × *P. nigra*). The planting stock consisted of standardized dormant one year old bareroot trees. Plantation was followed by

local fertilization with 18-23-18 (N-P-K, 110 g.tree<sup>-1</sup>). Yearly weed control was done by cross cultivation with disks followed by herbicide application (Roundup™).

Trees were planted in a randomized block design with three blocks (replicates), each containing four plots of 100 trees (10 rows x 10 trees), one for each clone. Each plot was randomly divided into 3 pruning seasons (October 2009 = fall, March 2010 = spring or June 2010 = summer) and 3 intensities (unpruned, 1/3 or 2/3 of crown length removed). One row of trees was used for each treatment combination (9). Five trees of each row were randomly selected for the study (pseudo-replicates;  $n = 540$ ). If epicormic branches sprouted from the stem of pruned trees during the two growing seasons after pruning, they were removed with respect to the pruning treatment they were allocated.

### 2.3.2 Field sampling

Diameter at breast height (dbh) and height were measured in fall 2009 and at the end of the 2010 and 2011 growing seasons. Stem volume was calculated from the following equation developed by Boysen and Strobl (1991) then converted into volume per hectare:

$$V = (\exp(-1.064079 + 1.562891 * \ln(D) + 0.101423 * \ln(H)) * 1.013914) / 1000$$

where  $V$  is the stem volume in m<sup>3</sup>,  $D$  the dbh in cm and  $H$  the tree height in m.

Instantaneous net photosynthesis and stomatal conductance was measured at weekly intervals with a CIRAS-2 portable infra-red gas analyser (PP Systems, Amesbury, MA). Repeated measurements on the same tree were done weekly between the second and fifth week following the summer pruning. Measures were done on leaves located in the upper third of the canopy, using the youngest fully expanded leaf. Trees were selected randomly and one measure was made for each treatment *i.e.*,  $n = 108$  for each week, except at week 2 where only two blocks (replicates) were measured due to a battery problem. One root sample per treatment combination ( $n = 108$ ) was collected for determination of total non-structural carbohydrates (TNC) concentrations at the end of august 2010 by cutting a disk from one of the main roots. Root disks of similar size were collected 30 cm from the trunk from roots directly connected to the base of the tree.

Four to six leaves were collected from the upper third of the canopy of each tree in July (five weeks after the summer pruning) for nitrogen ( $n = 108$ ) and carbon isotopic discrimination ( $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ ) analyses. For the  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  analysis, two types of leaves were distinguished for the trees pruned in summer; leaves formed before or after the pruning ( $n = 132$ ).

### 2.3.3 Laboratory work

Roots samples for TNC analysis were oven-dried at 65 °C until constant weight, and ground to pass a 40 mesh screen of a Wiley mill (model 3383-L10; Thomas Scientific, Swedesboro, NJ). Soluble sugars were extracted by boiling three times in 80% ethanol at 95 °C. Phenol-sulfuric acid was used to analyze the ethanol extract for total sugar concentrations. Starch was digested using an enzyme mixture of  $\alpha$ -amylase and amyloglucosidase followed by the colorimetric measurement of the glucose hydrolysate using a peroxidase-glucose oxidase-*o*-dianisidine reagent (Chow and Landhäusser, 2004).

Leaf samples were oven-dried at 65 °C until constant weight then ground finely with a Mixer Mill MM301 ball grinder (Retsch Inc., Newtown, PA). Carbon isotopic composition ( $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ ) and total nitrogen concentration were determined using a Costech Elemental Analyzer 4010 CHNS (Costech Analytical Technologies Inc., Valencia, CA) at the Soil Biochemistry Laboratory, University of Alberta, Edmonton. Samples were flash combusted at 1800 °C. The resulting gas were separated on a 2 m x 6 mm OD stainless steel Porapak QS 80/100 mesh packed chromatographic column and detected quantitatively by a Thermal Conductivity Detector.

The isotopic composition of the samples was calculated from:

$$\delta^{13}\text{C} = ((R_{\text{sample}} / R_{\text{standard}}) - 1) \times 1000$$

where  $R_{\text{sample}}$  and  $R_{\text{standard}}$  are the ratios of  $^{13}\text{C}/^{12}\text{C}$  in the sample and standard, respectively. Spring wheat grain was used as the working standard, with a carbon isotope composition of -23.47‰ relative to Pee Dee Belemnite.

## 2.4 Statistical analyses

All statistical analyses were conducted with R software version 2.15.1 (R Development Core Team, 2012). Linear mixed-effects models were used to model treatment effects on each response variable. To reckon with the plantation design, all models included random effects that consisted of block, and clone nested in block. The `lme` function from the `nlme` package (Pinheiro *et al.*, 2012) was used to estimate the parameters of all models, whereas package `AICcmodavg` was used for model selection and multimodel inference (Mazerolle, 2012). For each response variable, a model set was built containing candidate models from which model selection was done using Akaike information criterion corrected (AICc) for small sample sizes (Burnham and Anderson, 2004). Differences in AICc values ( $\Delta\text{AICc}$ ) were calculated for the respective models relative to the “best” model, *i.e.*, the model with the lowest AICc (Table 2.1). Models with  $\Delta\text{AICc} < 2$  and high Akaike weights ( $\omega_i$  interpreted as probabilities) were deemed to have the greatest statistical support (Burnham and Anderson, 2004). If one model had an Akaike weight of more than 80%, it was considered as the most parsimonious model of all tested models. Predictions and SE associated were then calculated using the function `predictSE.lme` (Mazerolle, 2012). Otherwise, we calculated model-averaged estimates and unconditional 95% confidence intervals with multimodel inference (Mazerolle, 2006). Ninety-five percent (95%) confidence interval which did not include 0, indicated a strong effect.

The most biologically relevant models were built for our analyses with the following factors: pruning intensity, pruning season, clone, week (weekly measurement for gas exchange variables), year (year of measurement for growth variables) and leaf age and their interactions. Since a limited number of models should be compared (Anderson and Burnham, 2002) ten models were compared for physiological variables and 26 for growth analyses. For more clarity, Table 2.1 only presents models which had the greatest statistical support *i.e.*, with  $\Delta\text{AICc} < 4$  (Burnham and Anderson, 2004).

Model sets D, and H correspond to growth variables dbh and height, while model sets PN, N\_leaf, and DELTA\_1 correspond to the physiological variables net photosynthesis, leaf

nitrogen and leaf carbon isotopic ratio, respectively. Parameter tree was incorporated as a random effect in the model sets with repeated measures (model sets PN, D and H; Table 2.1).

To consider the influence of root diameter on TNC concentrations (DesRochers *et al.*, 2002), we recorded root diameter for each sample and included it in the models as a covariate (model set TNC). In parallel, growth data were analysed using initial size of trees as covariates (fall 2009). Stomatal conductance (model set GS) was log-transformed to normalize residuals and to improve homoscedasticity, results and predicted values are presented in back-transformed units.

For  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  analyses, a separate data set was created to account for the two types of leaves; those formed before (S\_1) or after (S\_2) pruning (old vs new leaves), these data being only available for summer pruning at intensities 1/3 and 2/3. Model set DELTA\_2 was built to analyse the effects of pruning treatment, age of leaves and clones, on the  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  relative to the summer pruning. We used multiple comparisons of means (Tuckey's tests) to analyse the interaction between leaf age and pruning intensity. A significance level of  $P = 0.05$  was used.

**Table 2.1**  
Selected models according to results of Akaike information criterion ( $\Delta\text{AICc}$ ) adjusted for small sample sizes.

Model set	Parameters tested	AICc	$\Delta\text{AICc}$	$\omega_i$
D	D09 + Year + Clone + Intensity + Season + Intensity:Season + Year:Intensity	9101.32	0	0.47
	D09 + Year + Clone + Intensity + Season + Year:Intensity	9102.69	1.38	0.24
H	H09 + Year + Clone + Intensity + Season + Intensity:Season + Year:Intensity	13129.30	0.00	0.95
PN	Week + Clone + Intensity	2085.05	0	0.77
	Week + Clone + Intensity + Season	2088.19	3.14	0.16
GS	Week + Clone + Intensity + Season + Intensity:Season	365.31	0	0.74
	Week + Clone + Intensity + Season + Week:Intensity	369.20	3.89	0.11
TNC	Root diameter + Clone + Intensity	626.25	0	0.82
	Root diameter + Clone + Intensity + Season	629.90	3.65	0.13
N_leaf	Clone + Intensity + Season + Clone:Intensity	-114.93	0	0.54
	Clone + Intensity + Season	-114.4	0.53	0.41
DELTA_1	Clone + Intensity + Season	241.66	0	0.47
	Clone + Intensity	241.84	0.17	0.43
DELTA_2	Clone + Intensity + Leaf age + Intensity:Leaf age	63.50	0	0.99

*Notes:*  $\Delta\text{AICc}$  corresponds to the differences in AICc values from the best model, with values  $<2$  having greatest support. Akaike weights ( $\omega_i$ ) indicate the percentage of chance for the given data of being the best explanatory model among those considered in the set of candidate models. Only models with  $\Delta\text{AICc} < 4$  are shown for clarity. D, H, PN, GS, TNC, N\_leaf, DELTA\_1, and DELTA\_2 are the model sets containing all the models built to explain dbh, height, photosynthesis, stomatal conductance, root total non-structural carbohydrates concentrations, leaf nitrogen concentrations and leaf carbon isotopic composition for old and new leaves, respectively. D09 and H09 are the initial growth measurement for dbh and height respectively; Year is year of measurement for growth variables ; Week is the weekly measurement for gas exchange variables; Intensity:Season corresponds to the interaction between pruning intensity and pruning season.

## 2.5 Results

### 2.5.1 Growth responses

Mean tree height and dbh of the plantation after five growing seasons was 7.64 m and 9.1 cm, respectively (Table 2.2). Trees of clone DN2 were the largest with a mean height of 9.09 m and a mean dbh of 11.54 cm. Conversely, trees of clone 747210 were the smallest with a mean height of 6.07 m a mean dbh of 6.5 cm (Table 2.2).

**Table 2.2**

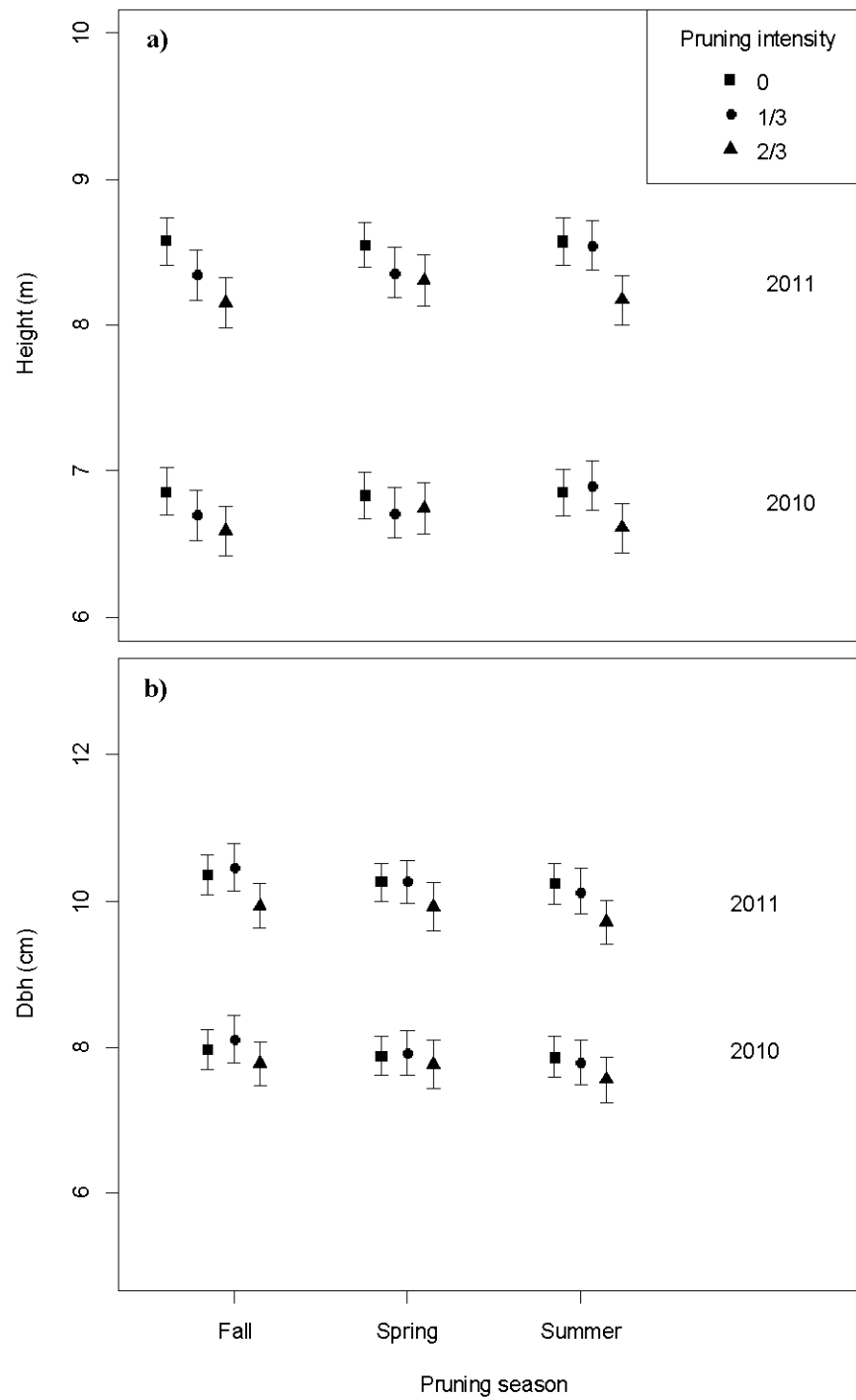
Mean tree height, diameter at breast height (dbh) and estimated volume per hectare for each clone, over all treatments combinations.

Clone	Mean height (m)			Mean DBH (cm)			Volume (m <sup>3</sup> .ha <sup>-1</sup> )		
	2009	2010	2011	2009	2010	2011	2009	2010	2011
1079	4.47	5.82	7.46	4.28	6.41	8.55	3.3	6.3	10.3
747210	3.78	4.72	6.07	3.07	4.81	6.5	2.0	4.0	6.5
915319	5.20	6.33	7.92	5.47	7.51	9.71	5.0	8.3	12.5
DN2	5.07	7.00	9.09	5.41	8.33	11.54	4.9	9.7	16.6

A significant interaction between pruning intensity and season indicated that height growth decreased with pruning intensity except when trees were pruned at intensity 1/3 in summer ( $\beta$  = model average estimate, CI = 95% confidence interval), ( $\beta_{1/3:\text{summer}} = 0.20$ , CI = [0.06, 0.35]; (Fig. 2.1). The year:intensity interaction showed a larger reduction in height growth for trees pruned at intensity 2/3, two growing seasons after treatment ( $\beta_{2011:2/3} = -0.15$ , CI = [-0.24, -0.07]; Fig. 2.1a).

At pruning intensity 1/3, summer pruning reduced dbh of trees compared to fall pruning ( $\beta_{1/3:\text{summer}} = -3.83$ , CI = [-6.87, -0.79]; Fig. 2.1b). At pruning intensity 2/3, however, there was no difference in dbh for trees pruned at the different seasons. The differences in dbh observed at the end of the first growing season following treatment (2010) persisted for the next growing season (2011), except for trees pruned at intensity 2/3 for which a greater decrease in dbh was observed after the second growing season ( $\beta_{2011:2/3} = -2.57$ , CI = [-4.31, -0.83]; Fig. 2.1b).

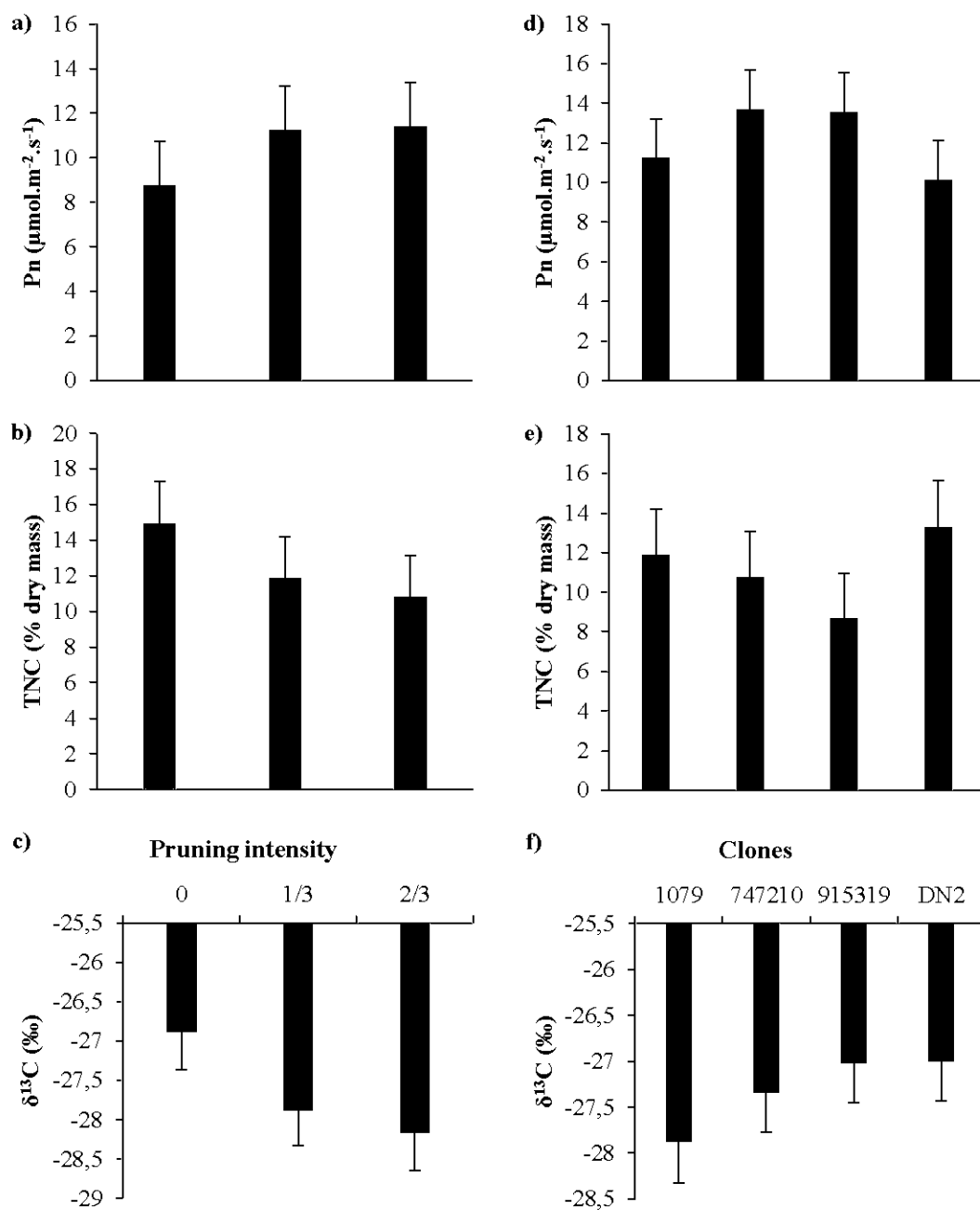




**Figure 2.1** Model-averaged predictions for height (a) and dbh (b) in 2010 and 2011, for all pruning seasons and intensities. Error bars are unconditional 95% confidence intervals. Note that values were computed for clone DN2.

### 2.5.2 Net photosynthesis

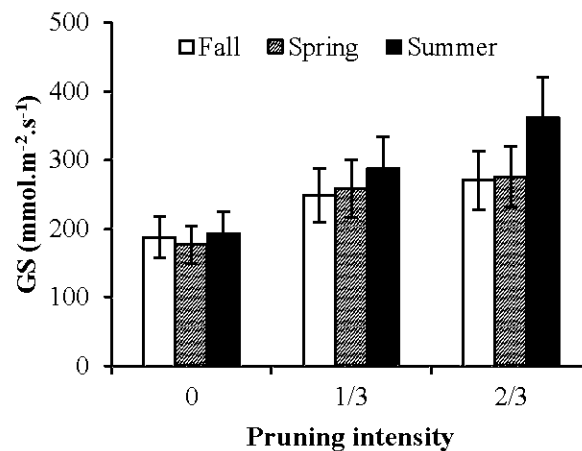
Net photosynthesis (Pn) was greater for trees pruned at intensity 1/3 ( $\beta_{1/3} = 2.49$ , CI = [1.49, 3.49]) and 2/3 ( $\beta_{2/3} = 2.66$ , CI = [1.66, 3.66]) compared to unpruned trees (Fig. 2.2a), while pruning season did not affect net photosynthesis ( $\beta_{\text{spring}} = 0.39$ , CI = [-0.59, 1.37];  $\beta_{\text{summer}} = 0.51$ , CI = [-0.43, 1.45]). Clones 747210 and 915319 had greater photosynthetic rates compared to clone 1079 ( $\beta_{747210} = 2.43$ , CI = [0.55, 4.31];  $\beta_{915319} = 2.31$ , CI = [0.43, 4.19]), which had similar rates to clone DN2 ( $\beta_{\text{DN2}} = -1.08$ , CI = [-2.96, 0.80]) (Fig. 2.2d). Photosynthetic rates were similar for the first 4 weeks after summer pruning, while they strongly increased over all treatments at week five ( $\beta_{\text{w5}} = 5.41$ , CI = [4.51, 6.31]; not shown).



**Figure 2.2** Model-averaged predictions for net photosynthesis (Pn; a,d), Total non-structural carbohydrates (TNC; b,e) and leaf carbon isotope ratios ( $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ ; c,d) for all pruning intensities and clones. Error bars are unconditional 95% confidence intervals. Note that values were computed for summer season, clone 1079 (a,b,c), intensity 1/3 (d,e,f) mean root diameter (b,e) and week 2 (second week of gas exchange measurements; a,d).

### 2.5.3 Stomatal conductance

There was a strong increase in stomatal conductance ( $G_s$ ) five weeks after summer pruning ( $\beta_5 = 138.28$ , CI = [76.88, 238.33]) as it increased by 79%, 108% and 114% compared to weeks 2, 3 and 4 respectively. Stomatal conductance of pruned trees was greater than that of unpruned trees, and the increase was greater for summer-pruned trees at intensity 2/3 ( $\beta_{2/3:\text{summer}} = 76.23$ , CI = [19.78, 184.79]; Fig. 2.3), giving a significant interaction between pruning season and intensity.



**Figure 2.3** Model-averaged predictions for stomatal conductance across pruning intensities and seasons. Error bars are unconditional 95% confidence intervals. Note that values were computed for clone1079 and week 2 (second week of gas exchange measurements).

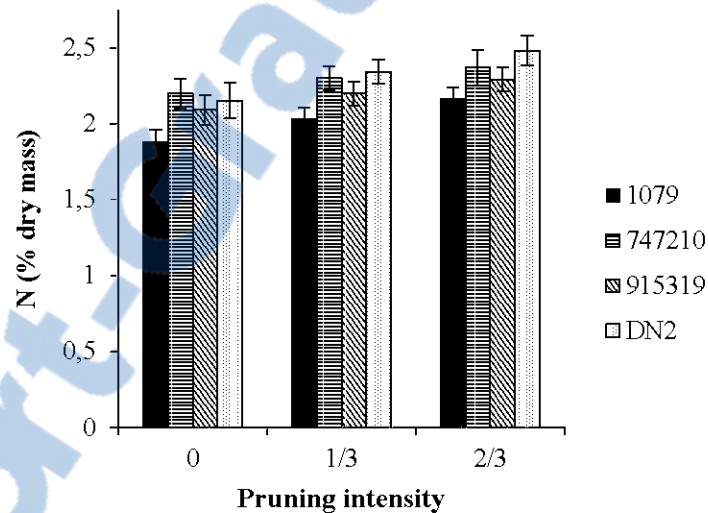
### 2.5.4 Total non-structural carbohydrates (TNC)

Root TNC concentrations were lower at pruning intensity 1/3 ( $\beta_{1/3} = -3.06$ , CI = [-4.95, -1.26]) and 2/3 ( $\beta_{2/3} = -4.14$ , CI = [-6.03, -2.24]) compared to unpruned trees (Fig. 2.2b). Pruning season did not appear in the most parsimonious model during the statistical analyses of the data, hence had no effect on root TNC concentrations measured at the end of the first growing season after pruning. Clones 1079, 747210 and DN2 had similar TNC

concentrations, while clone 915319 has the lowest TNC concentrations ( $\beta_{915319} = -3.22$ , CI = [-6.25, -0.19]; Fig. 2.2e).

### 2.5.5 Leaf nitrogen concentrations

Summer-pruned trees had greater leaf nitrogen concentrations ( $\beta_{\text{summer}} = 0.08$ , CI = [0.02, 0.14]), compared to trees pruned in fall and spring. Leaf nitrogen concentrations increased with pruning intensity for all clones except for clone 747210 ( $\beta_{747210:2/3} = -0.21$ , CI = [-0.37, -0.05]) for which N concentrations were the same for pruning intensities 1/3 and 2/3, giving a significant interaction between clone and intensity (Fig. 2.4).

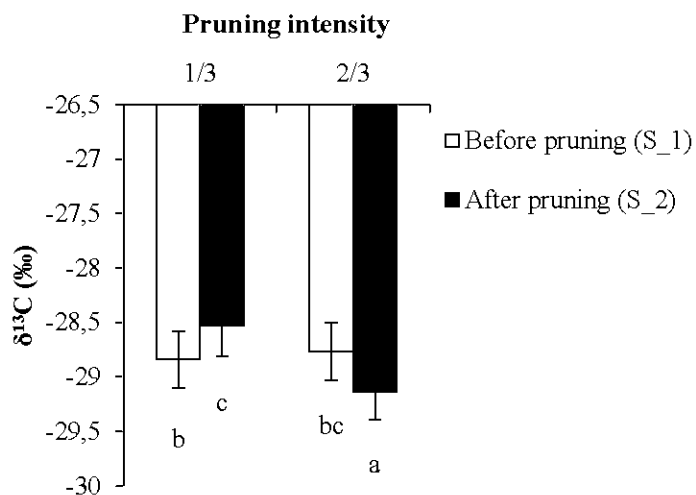


**Figure 2.4** Model-averaged predictions for foliar nitrogen concentration across pruning intensities for each clone. Error bars are unconditional 95% confidence intervals. Note that values were computed for trees pruned in summer.

### 2.5.6 Carbon isotope discrimination

As pruning intensity increased,  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  values decreased ( $\beta_{1/3} = -0.98$ , CI = [-1.29, -0.67];  $\beta_{2/3} = -1.22$ , CI = [-1.53, -0.91]; Fig. 2.2c). Carbon isotopic discrimination values were comparable for leaves of trees pruned in fall (-26.72‰, CI = [-27.13, -26.31]) and spring (-26.85‰, CI = [-27.16, -26.54]), while leaves of summer-pruned trees had more negative

values ( $-27.07\text{‰}$ , CI =  $[-27.36, -26.78]$ ). Leaves of clones 747210 ( $\beta_{1079} = 0.54$ , CI =  $[0.09, 0.99]$ ), 915319 ( $\beta_{915319} = 0.87$ , CI =  $[0.42, 1.32]$ ) and DN2 ( $\beta_{DN2} = 0.87$ , CI =  $[0.42, 1.32]$ ) had greater  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  values compared to 1079 (Fig. 2.2f). For trees pruned in summer, there was no difference between the  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  values of old leaves (S\_1) at pruning intensity 1/3 and 2/3 ( $p = 0.749$ ), while values of new leaves (S\_2) were significantly lower at intensity 2/3 compared to 1/3 pruning treatment ( $p < 0.001$ ) (Fig. 2.5).



**Figure 2.5** Model-averaged predictions for  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  values across pruning intensities for leaves of summer-pruned trees. Error bars are unconditional 95% confidence intervals. Note that values were computed for clone 1079.

## 2.6 Discussion

Pruning at intensity 2/3 reduced height and dbh by 3.91% and 3.97%, respectively, while growth of trees pruned at intensity 1/3 was not affected after two growing seasons (Fig. 2.1a, b). A decline in the stem growth of severely pruned trees has been reported previously (Funk, 1979 ; Margolis *et al.*, 1988 ; Neilsen and Pinkard, 2003 ; Uotila and Mustonen, 1994). The lack of growth decreases at intensity 1/3 is probably due to an increase in photosynthesis in the remaining leaves of pruned trees, illustrating the phenomenon known as compensatory photosynthesis (Nowak and Caldwell, 1984). An increase in net photosynthesis is commonly

observed after pruning or defoliation (Heichel and Turner, 1983 ; Medhurst *et al.*, 2006 ; Nowak and Caldwell, 1984 ; Pinkard and Beadle, 1998b). This increase in net photosynthesis was similar for trees pruned at 1/3 and 2/3 (+21.7% and +23.6%, respectively; Fig. 2.2a). Although compensatory photosynthesis should be proportional to the amount of foliage removed (Medhurst *et al.*, 2006 ; Pinkard *et al.*, 1998), there is a limit to the increase in stomatal conductance allowing for increased photosynthetic capacity. Indeed, Hart *et al.* (2000) showed that stomatal conductance of residual leaves increased with defoliation up to a certain point, after which it was similar in 50% and 98% defoliated aspen (*Populus tremuloides*). In our study, even if the increase in net photosynthesis was similar at both pruning intensities, the amount of residual foliage at intensity 2/3 was half the foliage of intensity 1/3, resulting in an overall lower photosynthetic capacity and reduced growth. This increase in net photosynthesis of pruned trees could also be driven by the observed increase in leaf N concentrations of the remaining foliage (Fig. 2.4) (Trumble *et al.*, 1993). The same amount of N is accumulated in a lesser number of leaves, resulting in higher concentrations in the remaining foliage, allowing increased CO<sub>2</sub> fixation rates since N is an essential component of chlorophyll, proteins and amino acids required for photosynthesis (Kozlowski and Pallardy, 1997). However, numerous studies have concluded that the increase in leaf N concentrations was not responsible for increased net photosynthesis of pruned trees (Medhurst *et al.*, 2006 ; Pinkard *et al.*, 1998 ; Reich *et al.*, 1993) but rather that it directly resulted from modified root-shoot ratios (McNaughton, 1983). (Turnbull *et al.*, 2007) observed that the N loaded into leaves in response to pruning was not recovered in either Rubisco or chlorophyll and could be retained in a form requiring little maintenance, suggesting that the increase in photosynthetic rates created by pruning was not a result of an increase in foliar N concentrations, but rather due to the observed increase in stomatal conductance. This is in accordance with our results that showed an increase in stomatal conductance of the residual leaves of pruned trees (Fig. 2.3). Indeed, photosynthesis rates are largely controlled by stomata limitations (Farquhar and Sharkey, 1982). Moreover, greater stomatal conductance indicate that stomata remained more open, allowing trees to discriminate more against <sup>13</sup>CO<sub>2</sub>, which is in agreement with the decrease in δ<sup>13</sup>C values that we found for pruned trees (Fig. 2.2c). A similar observation was reported by Larchevêque *et al.* (2011) who observed that *Populus balsamifera* trees which had more negative δ<sup>13</sup>C values

maintained high stomatal conductance. Carbon isotopic composition of leaves can be used as a drought stress indicator since trees under moderate water deficit will close their stomata, resulting in intercellular spaces beneath closed stomata enriched in  $^{13}\text{CO}_2$ , which is then reflected by greater fixation and concentrations in tissues (Farquhar *et al.*, 1989). Plants growing under chronic drought conditions thus tend to have higher  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  values than those that are well watered (Kozlowski and Pallardy, 1997). Our  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  measurements suggest that leaves from unpruned trees were more water-stressed than those of pruned trees, which is reflected by less negative  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  values (Fig. 2.2c; 2.5). We thus suggest that pruning improved trees' water status, likely because of a reduced transpiration surface.

Pruning reduced root TNC concentrations, either by reducing the photosynthetic apparatus and/or by triggering new foliage growth (Tschaplinski and Blake, 1995). We collected root samples in late summer, when TNC concentrations should have reached their maximum levels (DesRochers *et al.*, 2002 ; Landhäusser and Lieffers, 2003). TNC are allocated in priority to maintenance respiration, then to growth respiration in order to provide the energy needed to keep existing tissues healthy and synthesize new tissues (Kozlowski and Pallardy, 1997). This means that the compensatory photosynthesis we observed was not enough to restore root TNC reserves of pruned trees, especially at intensity 2/3. Those trees will have fewer resources for leaf flushing on the next growing season, which may explain why growth of 2/3 pruned trees was even more reduced after the second growing season.

The effect of pruning season was more moderate than that of pruning intensity, and generally trees' responses were similar for those pruned in fall and spring, while summer pruning increased foliar nitrogen concentrations and reduced leaf carbon isotopic ratios. This is probably due to the dormancy state of trees pruned in fall and spring. Greater foliar nitrogen concentrations for summer-pruned trees were unexpected since summer pruning removes a lot of green foliage compared to fall and spring pruning, which were done on leafless trees. We suppose that trees were able to reallocate more nitrogen from other tree parts to the remaining leaves probably because trees were physiologically active during the summer pruning, which may induce a stronger and more rapid response. The foliage produced in spring 2010 by fall and spring pruned trees developed under their new pruned shoot/root ratios, while the residual foliage from summer pruned trees did not. This is



probably why leaves of summer pruned trees had lower  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  values compared to trees pruned in fall and spring. The slight decrease in dbh following summer pruning should not be too taxing in terms of volume per tree at the time of harvest, since the main objective for the forester in the first years of the plantation is to favour height growth which should benefit the development of the crown in order to later enhance dbh growth.

The leaf carbon isotopic ratios of newly-formed leaves from summer pruned trees (S\_2) decreased as pruning intensity increased, also indicating a reduction in water stress with pruning. Interestingly, leaves formed before the summer pruning (S\_1) had similar  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  values for both pruning intensities (Fig. 2.5), but still lower than that of unpruned trees (Figs. 2.2a; 2.5). This indicates that old leaves (S\_1) were still fixing carbon in their tissues after leaf expansion was completed, probably to maintain metabolic functions. Thus a good example of how  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  can be used as a water-use efficiency indicator integrated over the whole growing season (DesRochers *et al.*, 2007).

We measured time-related changes in photosynthetic rates up to five weeks after the summer pruning treatment, and observed a large increase at week five ( $+5.41\mu\text{mol.m}^{-2}.\text{s}^{-1}$ ). In parallel we observed a similar increase in stomatal conductance at week five ( $+138.28\text{mmol.m}^{-2}.\text{s}^{-1}$ ). Since this increase was also observed in unpruned trees, we associated it to climatic factors rather than to a time-since-treatment effect. The magnitude and duration of the photosynthetic response to pruning is species specific (Pinkard and Beadle, 2000). Compensatory photosynthesis was observed for 5 weeks after defoliation in poplars (Bassman and Dickmann, 1982), approximately 3 months in *Acer rubrum* and *Quercus rubra* (Heichel and Turner, 1983) and in some cases, 16 months for *Eucalyptus nitens* (Pinkard *et al.*, 1998).

Tree physiological processes are strongly regulated by genetic makeup (Dickmann *et al.*, 2001), it is why poplar clones often differ in their physiological responses to various silvicultural treatments (Bassman and Zwier, 1991 ; Marron *et al.*, 2002). Although there were some clonal variations in our study such as a larger net photosynthesis but little change in  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  for clone 915319 (Fig. 2.2), the four clones responded similarly to pruning intensity and season.

## 2.7 Management implications

For planning purposes, foresters need to know how much of a growth reduction to expect, if any, following pruning. We showed that there was compensatory photosynthesis following light pruning which allowed pruned trees to maintain growth rates of unpruned trees. Pruned trees also had better drought resistance, which could be used as a tool against periodic drought. However, pruning decreased root TNC concentrations, which could render trees less vigorous in stressful conditions. Regarding the season during which pruning is done, we observed that summer pruned trees had increased leaf nitrogen, stomatal conductance and decreased leaf carbon isotopic ratios. Such conditions could allow trees to recover from pruning more rapidly than trees pruned in fall or spring. Hence our recommendation would be to prune 1/3 crown length during summer, to produce clear wood while maintaining growth rates in young hybrid poplar plantations.

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## CHAPITRE III

### PRODUCTION AND ROLE OF EPICORMIC SHOOT FORMATION IN HYBRID POPLARS: EFFECTS OF PRUNING SEASON AND INTENSITY

#### 3.1 Abstract

The formation of epicormic shoots is often observed following pruning treatments, but their role in the overall tree physiology is unknown. We examined the effects of epicormic shoots on growth and physiology of four hybrid poplar clones. Trees were pruned in fall, summer and spring at two intensities  $1/3$  and  $2/3$  of the crown length, and an unpruned control. Our results showed that hybrid poplars responded to pruning treatments with the production of numerous epicormic branches. Pruning intensity and season were the most important factors affecting the number of epicormic shoots, while clone was not. Tree growth decreased with pruning intensity. Pruning in summer considerably reduced the emergence of epicormic shoots. Two years after pruning treatments, the presence (or absence) of epicormic shoots did not affect trees height and diameter at breast height. Epicormic shoots thus seem to be self-sufficient since they increased tree photosynthetic capacity, but not enough to restore root total non-structural carbohydrates concentrations. An additional pruning to remove the epicormic shoots following their emergence, reduced biomass and number of newly formed epicormic shoots two years after pruning. We concluded that pruning should be done in summer to reduce epicormic shoot formation and should not exceed  $1/3$  of the crown length to avoid a large decrease in stem growth. If epicormic shoots appear they can be removed without compromising tree physiology.

### 3.2 Introduction

Pruning treatments are used to add value to crop trees in managed stands by increasing the amount of clear, knot-free wood (Hubert and Courraud, 1994 ; Waring and O'Hara, 2005). However, pruning might also promote the production of epicormic shoots, branches that form along the trunk of trees (Auchmoody, 1972) after they have been pruned. Epicormic branching is common in intensively managed hybrid poplar plantations (Shock *et al.*, 2003 ; Smith and Blom, 1966 ; Tabbush and Beaton, 1998), most often following pruning treatments (DeBell *et al.*, 2002 ; Hubert and Courraud, 1994 ; Isebrands *et al.*, 2007 ; van Oosten, 2006). These epicormic branches arise from buds found on or under the bark that are usually called “dormant buds” (Kozlowski and Pallardy, 1997), and can be of proventitious or adventitious origin (Fink, 1983 ; Stone and Stone, 1943). Proventitious buds develop from existing buds and are located at the axil of leaves (Stone and Stone, 1943), whereas adventitious buds arise outside the normal phyllotaxy after wounding of surrounding tissues (Fink, 1983). Epicormic shoots are thus an impediment to the success of pruning operations to produce high-quality timber, because their apparition produce additional knots that reduce timber quality and value (Fontaine *et al.*, 1999 ; Remphrey and Davidson, 1992).

Epicormic shoot formation is generally thought to be a response to a sudden light increase (Gordon *et al.*, 2006 ; Wignall and Browning, 1988) or stress (Stone and Stone, 1943). They can also be considered as a mechanism for re-establishment or maintenance of a functional crown (Deal *et al.*, 2003). However significant knowledge gaps remain, especially for their role in the overall tree physiology: Are they a sink or a source of energy for the tree? A source is an organ which supplies carbon (net exporter), while a sink is considered as an organ which uses carbon (net importer) (Kozlowski, 1992). Since epicormic shoots are usually produced rapidly after pruning and can have very fast growth rates and large biomasses, they might be very strong sinks and cause growth reductions in the main stem. On the other hand, since they rapidly produce new leaf area on heavily pruned stems (Deal *et al.*, 2003 ; Takiya *et al.*, 2009), they might rapidly compensate the loss of photosynthetic area of the crown and become an important energy source for the tree. The intensity of pruning may affect the response of trees in terms of epicormic branching. The occurrence of epicormic branches increases with pruning intensity (O'Hara and Valappil, 2000), but this response

could diverge according to the season when pruning is done, since season may also affect epicormic shoot formation (Bachelard, 1969).

The objective of this study was to understand the role of epicormic shoots after pruning hybrid poplars at three intensities (unpruned, 1/3 and 2/3 of crown length) and three seasons (spring, summer and fall). We examined how the pruning treatments affected their production, and how their presence (or removal) affected tree growth and total non-structural carbohydrate reserves in the roots. The decision to remove them brings supplementary costs to foresters wanting to produce knot-free timber. It is thus necessary to better understand the factors promoting their apparition after pruning and their role in the overall tree physiology.

### 3.3 Materials and methods

#### 3.3.1 Study site

The studied plantation was established in 2007 at the New Liskeard Agricultural Research Station of Guelph University in North-Eastern Ontario (47°52'N, 79°66'W). The regional surficial geology is characterized by lacustrine clays and sands from the post-glacial Lake Barlow (Rowe, 1972) and the soil type was a Humic Gleysol (Canada Soil Survey Committee, 1987). Between 1971 and 2000, annual precipitations for the region averaged 819 mm (rainfall 625 mm, snowfall 195 cm) with an average daily temperature of 2.8 °C and 2605 degree-days above 0 °C (Environment Canada, 2011).

In October 2006 the site was ploughed and cross-cultivated with disks followed by herbicide application in spring 2007 before planting trees at a 3.5 m x 3.5 m spacing (816 stems.ha<sup>-1</sup>). The planting stock consisted of dormant one year old bareroot trees. Plantation was followed by fertilization with 18-23-18 (N-P-K, 110 g.tree<sup>-1</sup>). Annual weed control consisted in cross-cultivation with disks followed by herbicide application (Roundup™). Four hybrid poplar clones were chosen based on their different parentage: 1079 (*Populus* × *jackii* (*P. balsamifera* × *P. deltoides*)), 747210 (*P. balsamifera* × *P. trichocarpa*), 915319 (*P. maximowiczii* × *P. balsamifera*) and DN2 (*P. deltoides* × *P. nigra*).

Trees were planted in a randomized block design with three blocks (replicates), each containing four plots of 100 trees (10 rows x 10 trees), one for each clone. Each plot was randomly divided into 3 pruning seasons (October 2009 = fall, March 2010 = spring or June 2010 = summer) and 3 intensities (unpruned, 1/3 or 2/3 of the crown length). One row of trees was used for each treatment combination (9). To compare trees with and without epicormic shoots, each row was divided in two; epicormic shoots that sprouted after pruning were periodically removed from the first five trees, while they were left to grow on the other five trees. For the study we considered unpruned trees as trees without epicormic shoots.

### 3.3.2 Field sampling

Height and diameter at breast height (dbh) of all the trees were measured at the end of each growing seasons from 2009 to 2011. One month after the summer pruning, instantaneous photosynthesis was measured with a CIRAS-2 portable infra-red gas analyser (PP Systems, Amesbury, MA). Two measurements (pseudoreplicates) on the same tree were done within one week interval. Two types of leaves were measured for pruned trees; a leaf located in the upper third of the canopy (*top*) and a leaf from an epicormic shoot (*epi*), using for each type the youngest fully expanded leaf. For unpruned trees, only the leaf from the canopy was sampled. To make all the measurements in the same day, gas exchange was only measured for two clones (747210 and DN2). We chose those two clones after observing that they produced little (747210) vs lots (DN2) of epicormic branches following pruning. One tree per row was randomly selected for the gas exchange measurement (*i.e.*,  $n = 90$  considering the two types of leaves).

At the end of August 2010, root samples were collected for determination of total non-structural carbohydrates (TNC) by cutting a disk from one of the main roots. To compare TNC concentrations between trees with and without epicormic shoots, we randomly selected one tree per row to collect a root sample per pruning treatment in pruned trees with and without epicormic shoots and unpruned trees from each of the four clones ( $n = 180$ , since unpruned trees were considered to have no epicormic branches).

In September 2010, we selected one tree with epicormic shoots per pruning treatment for each clone ( $n = 72$ ). For those selected trees, we collected with their leaves all epicormic

shoots formed in 2010 (*epi2010*) between the ground level and pruning height. We repeated the same operation in September 2011 on the same trees to collect the newly formed epicormic shoots (*epi2011\_new*) if any ( $n = 72$ ). At the same date, we also selected 72 new trees to collect two year old epicormic shoots (*epi2011\_old*). In addition, for each sampled tree, we collected a one year old branch located in the upper third of the canopy. Since unpruned trees were considered as trees without epicormic shoots, we only sampled a one year old branch from the upper third of the canopy. For canopy shoots, an average size branch was randomly selected in the upper third of the tree. We measured branch biomass, leaf biomass, branch length and branch basal diameter on each sample. Since some biomass data went missing into the lab, we calculated branch volume from its basal diameter and length values and used a linear regression between branch biomass and volume ( $R^2 = 0.985$ ) to estimate branch biomass on missing samples. Branch volume was calculated from the following equation, considering the branch as a geometrical cone:

$$V = 1/3 (H \times \pi \times D^2)/4$$

where V is the branch volume in  $\text{cm}^3$ , D the basal diameter of the branch in cm and H the branch length in cm then converted to biomass.

### 3.3.3 Laboratory work

Shoots were oven-dried at 65 °C until constant mass was obtained. Total leaf area of shoots was measured on fresh leaves by using a LI-COR LI-3100 area meter (LI-COR Biosciences, Lincoln, Nebr., USA). Leaves were then oven-dried at 65 °C until a constant mass was obtained. Specific leaf area (SLA) was calculated by dividing total leaf area by dry mass of leaves for each tree. Branch biomass consisted in dry mass of shoots and leaves.

Root samples for carbohydrate analysis were oven-dried at 65 °C until constant mass was obtained, and ground to pass a 40 mesh screen of a Wiley mill (model 3383-L10; Thomas Scientific, Swedesboro, NJ). Soluble sugars were extracted by boiling three times in 80% ethanol at 95 °C. Phenol-sulfuric acid was used to analyze the ethanol extract for total sugar concentration. Starch was digested using an enzyme mixture of  $\alpha$ -amylase and

amyloglucosidase followed by the colorimetric measurement of the glucose hydrolysate using a peroxidase-glucose oxidase-*o*-dianisidine reagent (Chow and Landhäusser, 2004).

#### 3.3.4 Statistical analyses

Statistical analyses were done with R software version 2.15.1 (R Development Core Team, 2012). Linear mixed-effects models were used to model treatment effects on each response variable. To reckon with the plantation design, all models included random effects that consisted of block, and clone nested in block. We used multiple comparisons of means (Tukey's tests) to find differences among treatments with the multcomp package (Hothorn *et al.*, 2008). The fit of the global model was assessed for each analysis. The global model was composed of all the factors tested and their interactions.

The number of epicormic shoots in 2010 and 2011 was analysed using generalized linear mixed-effects models (glmer). We assumed that the response variable followed a Poisson distribution. Using an information-theoretic approach, we built a set of candidate models based on known information of factors influencing epicormic shoots (Table 3.1). The package lme4 (Bates *et al.*, 2012) was used to estimate the parameters of all models whereas the package AICcmodavg (Mazerolle, 2012) was used for the model selection. Models were ranked based on the Akaike information criterion corrected for small sample sizes (AICc) (Table 3.1). We considered models with  $\Delta\text{AICc} < 2$  to have the greatest statistical support (Burnham and Anderson, 2004), and we calculated model weights ( $\omega_i$ ) from the AICc values to indicate the level of support for each of the models considered (Burnham and Anderson, 2004). Predictions and standard errors associated were then calculated for the variables of interest. Initial height measurements and the ratio height/dbh were considered correlated with the intercept of the global model since the associated  $R^2$  values were greater than 0.5. For this reason they were not included in any candidate models.

To analyse the effects of epicormic shoots on tree height and dbh growth in 2010 and 2011, we built four models (D10, H10, D11, and H11) using the lme function from the nlme package (Pinheiro *et al.*, 2012). We included initial growth measurements (2009) as covariates. As all the trees (with and without epicormic shoots) were used for this analysis, parameter "treatment" in the models corresponds to the pruning intensity associated with the

presence (*1/3\_epi* or *2/3\_epi*) or absence (*1/3* or *2/3*) of epicormic shoots, including also the unpruned trees. Parameter tree was added as a random effect for this analysis.

We used stepwise model selection to determine the most suitable models for net photosynthesis (PN model), total non-structural carbohydrates (TNC model), specific leaf area (SLA model), and biomass (MASS models) analyses. The two gas exchange measurements made on the same tree within a one week interval were pooled for the analysis. For the total non-structural carbohydrates analysis, we recorded root diameter for each sample and included it as a covariate in order to consider the influence of root diameter on TNC concentrations. In specific leaf area and biomass analyses we incorporated parameter “tree” as a random effect. We compared the two types of epicormic shoots sampled in 2011 (new and old) with epicormic shoots sampled in 2010, for the biomass analysis (MASS\_new and MASS\_old models respectively) and specific leaf area analysis (SLA\_new and SLA\_old models respectively). Biomass data were log-transformed to normalize residuals and improve homoscedasticity, but results and predicted values are presented in back-transformed units.

**Table 3.1**

Comparison of the candidate models considered to explain the number of epicormic shoots produced after one (*epi\_2010*) and two (*epi2011\_new* and *epi2011\_old*) growing seasons.

Parameters tested	<i>epi_2010</i>			<i>epi2011_new</i>			<i>epi2011_old</i>		
	AICc	$\Delta$ AICc	$\omega_i$	AICc	$\Delta$ AICc	$\omega_i$	AICc	$\Delta$ AICc	$\omega_i$
Clone	746.64	354.47	0.00	557.28	108.04	0.00	287.34	46.18	0.00
D2009	735.17	342.99	0.00	485.39	36.16	0.00	262.73	21.58	0.00
Intensity	708.25	316.08	0.00	484.80	35.57	0.00	275.43	34.27	0.00
Season	491.00	98.83	0.00	565.54	116.30	0.00	255.80	14.65	0.00
Intensity + Season	446.35	54.17	0.00	486.33	37.09	0.00	243.27	2.11	0.26
Intensity + Season + Intensity:Season	<b>392.17</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>449.24</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>241.16</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.74</b>

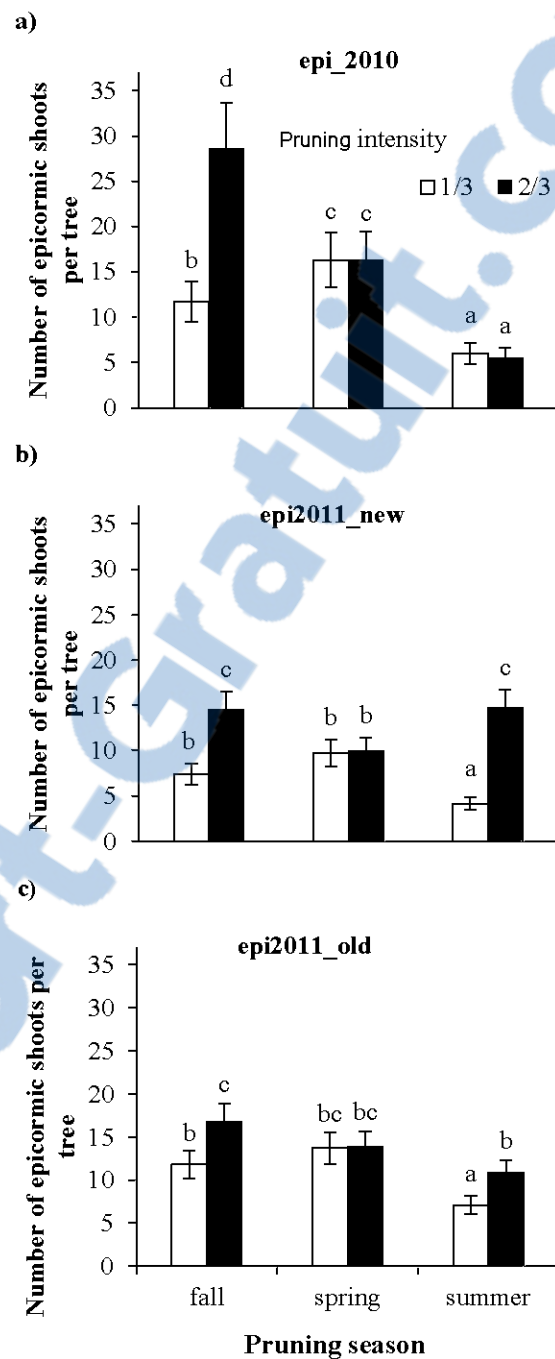
Notes: Clone are 1079, 747210, 915319, DN2; D2009 is the initial growth measurement for dbh; Intensity is the pruning intensity (1/3, 2/3); Season is the pruning season (fall, spring, summer); Intensity:Season corresponds to the interaction between pruning intensity and pruning season. Parameters in bold refer to the best suitable model.

### 3.4 Results

#### 3.4.1 Number of epicormic shoots

All pruned trees but one produced epicormic shoots. The number of epicormic shoots produced after one growing season (epi2010) ranged from zero to 97. Only the model including the interaction between pruning intensity and season explained the number of epicormic shoots produced after pruning for *i*) one year old epicormic shoots (epi2010), *ii*) two year old epicormic shoots (epi2011\_old), and *iii*) one year old epicormic shoots removed collected two years after pruning (epi2011\_new). The four clones had similar responses in epicormic branching after pruning, and tree size (dbh) did not affect the number of shoots produced (Table 3.1). Trees pruned in spring produced the same amount of epicormic shoots at both pruning intensity (Fig. 3.1). For trees pruned in summer, the number of epicormic shoots was the same for both pruning intensities in 2010 ( $p > 0.05$ ; Fig. 3.1a), while in 2011, the two year old epicormic shoots (epi2011\_old) and the newly formed one year old shoots (epi2011\_new) were more important for trees pruned at intensity 2/3 ( $p < 0.05$ ; Fig. 3.1c and d). Fall-pruned trees produced more epicormic shoots when they were pruned at intensity 2/3 ( $p < 0.05$ ; Fig. 3.1).

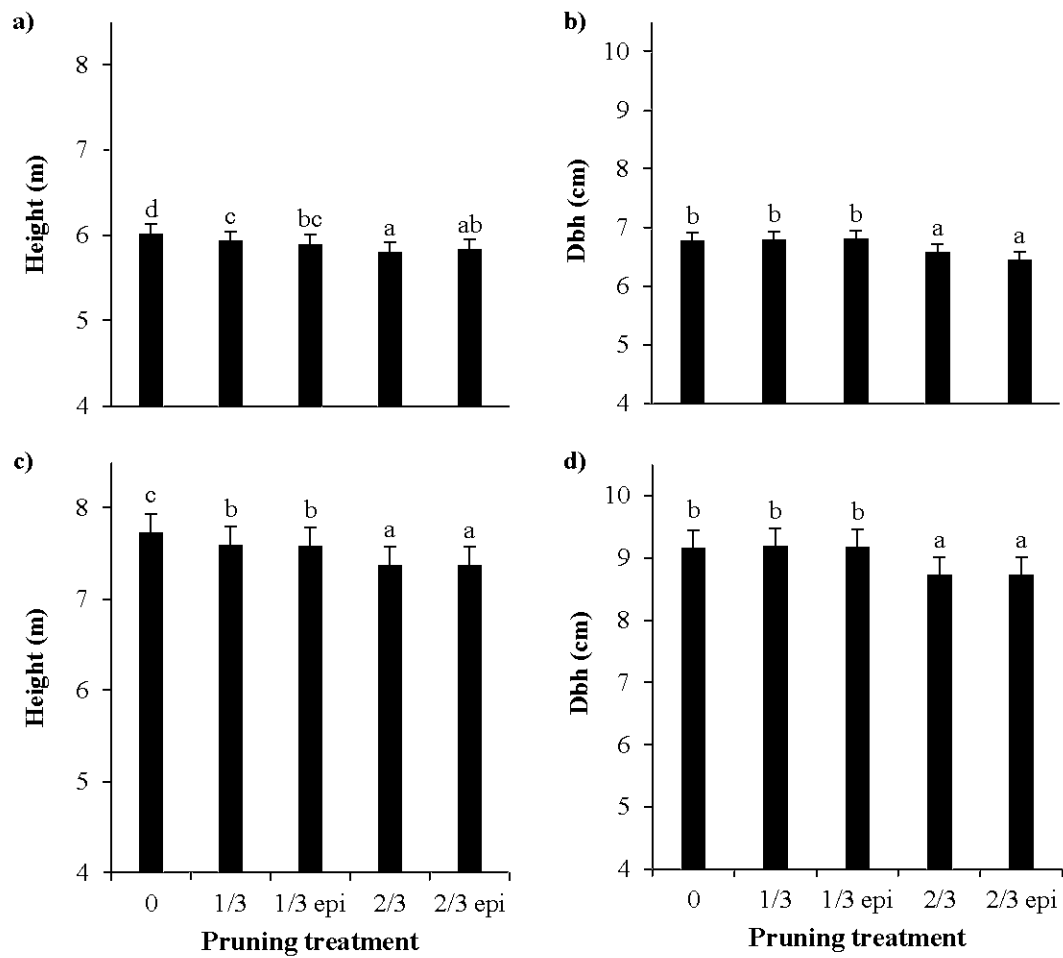




**Figure 3.1** Predictions for the number of epicormic shoots produced (a) after one growing season (epi2010), (b) during the second growing season (epi2011\_new) and (c) after two growing seasons (epi2011\_old) for all pruning intensities and seasons. Error bars are standard errors of the mean. Bars labeled with the same letter within a graph are not significantly different (Tuckey's test at  $p < 0.05$ ).

### 3.4.2 Growth responses

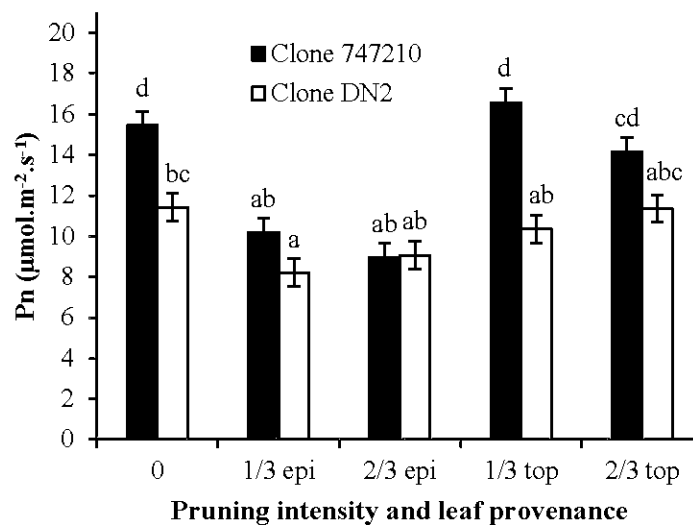
Production of epicormic shoots did not affect tree growth since pruned trees with or without epicormic shoots had similar dbh and height within a pruning intensity (Fig. 3.2). Differences observed at the end of the first growing season after pruning (2010; Fig. 3.2a and b) remained the same at the end of the second growing season (2011; Fig. 3.2c and d).



**Figure 3.2** Predictions for height and dbh, one (a; b) and two (c; d) years after pruning on trees with or without epicormic shoots. Errors bars are standard errors of the mean. Bars labeled with the same letter within a graph are not significantly different (Tuckey's test at  $p < 0.05$ ).

### 3.4.3 Net photosynthesis

Net photosynthesis of leaves from epicormic shoots was lower than for leaves of unpruned trees, while net photosynthesis of leaves from the canopy of pruned trees (not from epicormic shoots) was similar to leaves from unpruned trees (Fig. 3.3). The gap between net photosynthesis of the clones varied with the treatment, giving a significant interaction between clone and intensity (Estimate  $\pm$  SE;  $4.15 \pm 1.461$ ; Table 3.2).



**Figure 3.3** Predictions for mean net photosynthesis (Pn) of leaves from (0) unpruned trees, (1/3 epi) epicormic shoots of 1/3 pruned trees, (2/3 epi) epicormic shoots of 2/3 pruned trees, (1/3 top) canopy of 1/3 pruned trees and (2/3 top) canopy of 2/3 pruned trees, for hybrid poplar clones 747210 and DN2. Errors bars are standard errors of the mean. Bars labeled with the same letter within a graph are not significantly different (Tuckey's test at  $p < 0.05$ ).

**Table 3.2**

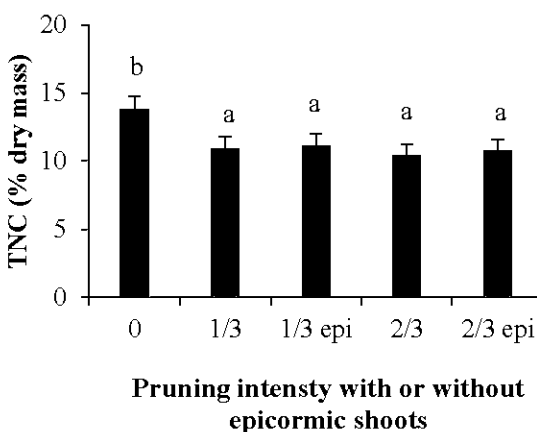
Best fit models chosen with stepwise selection testing the effect of pruning intensity and epicormic branching on net photosynthesis (PN) and root total non-structural carbohydrate concentrations (TNC).

Model	Variable	Estimate (SE)
PN	(Intercept)	15.45 (0.73)
	Treatment (E1)	-5.27 (1.03)
	Treatment (E2)	-6.51 (1.03)
	Treatment (T1)	1.12 (1.03)
	Treatment (T2)	-1.30 (1.03)
	Clone (DN2)	-4.04 (1.03)
	Treatment (E1) : Clone (DN2)	2.06 (1.46)
	Treatment (E2) : Clone (DN2)	4.15 (1.46)
	Treatment (T1) : Clone (DN2)	-2.18 (1.46)
	Treatment (T2) : Clone (DN2)	1.24 (1.46)
TNC	(Intercept)	16.68 (1.25)
	Root diameter	-0.10 (0.02)
	Treatment (1)	-2.85 (0.96)
	Treatment (2)	-3.38 (0.94)
	Treatment (E1)	-2.67 (0.97)
	Treatment (E2)	-3.04 (0.95)

Note: For the PN model, Treatment corresponds to the type of leaf (E1 and E2 = leaf from an epicormic shoot from a tree pruned at 1/3 and 2/3, respectively, and, T1 and T2 = canopy leaves from the same trees as E1 and E2, respectively). For the TNC model, Treatment corresponds to the type of tree (1 = 1/3 pruned tree without epicormic shoots, 2 = 2/3 pruned tree without epicormic shoots, E1 = 1/3 pruned tree with epicormic shoots, E2 = 2/3 pruned tree with epicormic shoots). Clone is the type of clone (DN2 or 747210).

### 3.4.4 Total non-structural carbohydrates (TNC)

Stepwise selection showed that only pruning intensity affected root TNC concentrations (Table 3.2), which were lower for all pruning treatments compared to unpruned trees (Fig. 3.4). For a given pruning intensity, root TNC concentrations were similar between trees with or without epicormic shoots ( $p > 0.05$ ).



**Figure 3.4** Predictions for mean total non-structural root carbohydrates for unpruned trees (0), 1/3 pruned trees without epicormic shoots (1/3), 1/3 pruned trees with epicormic shoots (1/3 epi), 2/3 pruned trees without epicormic shoots (2/3) and 2/3 pruned trees with epicormic shoots (2/3 epi). Errors bars are standard errors of the mean. Bars labeled with the same letter within a graph are not significantly different (Tuckey's test at  $p < 0.05$ ).

### 3.4.5. Epicormic shoots morphological responses

Stepwise selection indicated that only the pruning intensity affected the biomass of epicormic shoots (Table 3.3). In 2010, mean biomass of sampled canopy shoots was similar for pruned and unpruned trees, while mean biomass of epicormic shoots was significantly greater than biomass of canopy shoots ( $p < 0.05$ ; Fig. 3.5c). In 2011, mean biomass of canopy shoots and of newly formed epicormic shoots (epi2011\_new) of 1/3 pruned trees were similar, while mean biomass of newly formed epicormic shoots from 2/3 pruned trees was greater ( $p < 0.05$ ; Fig. 3.5c). Mean biomass of the newly formed epicormic shoots in 2011 (epi2011\_new) was significantly lower than the biomass of epicormic shoots produced in

2010 (*epi2010*;  $p < 0.05$ ; Fig. 3.5c), while mean biomass of two year old epicormic shoots in 2011 (*epi2011\_old*) was greater ( $p < 0.05$ ; Fig. 3.5a).

**Table 3.3**

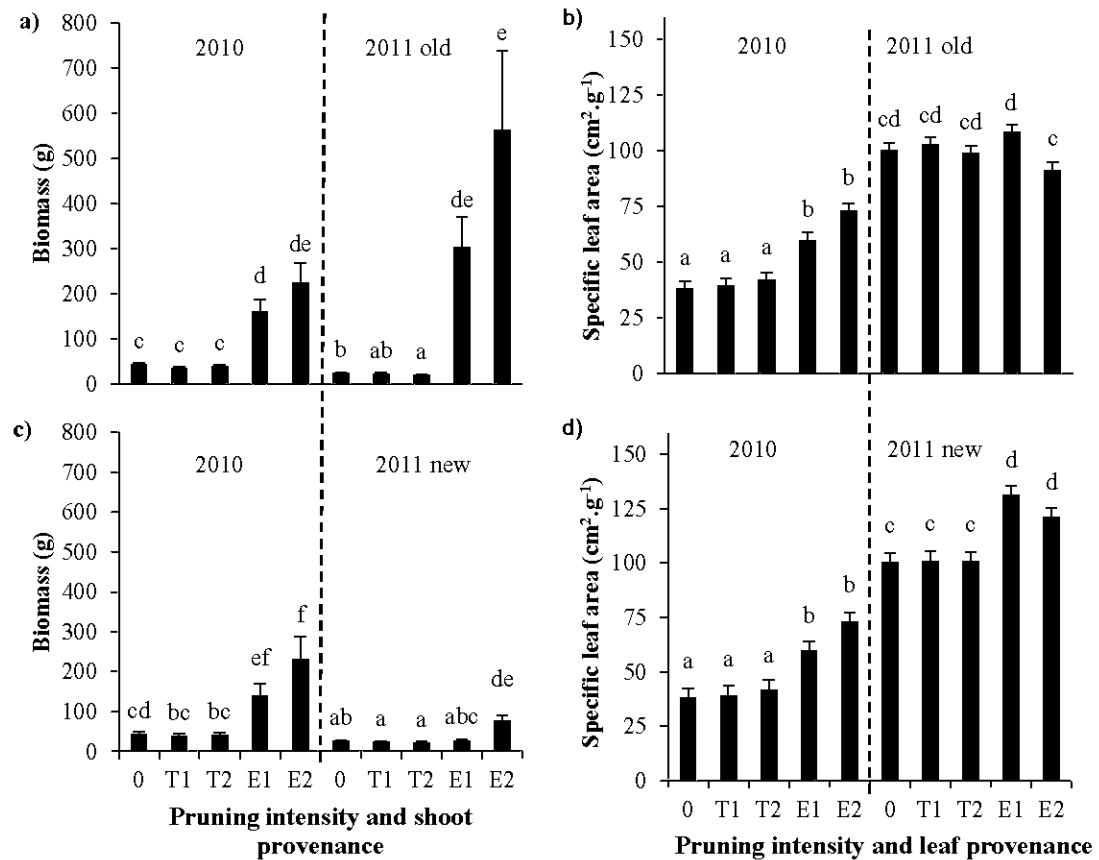
Best fitted model chosen with stepwise selection testing the effect of pruning intensity and epicormic branching on specific leaf area (SLA) and shoot biomass (MASS). *MASS\_new* and *SLA\_new*, are the models comparing mean biomass and SLA of shoots collected in 2010 (*epi2010*), and shoots collected in 2011 on trees with one year old newly formed epicormic shoots (*epi2011\_new*). *MASS\_old* and *SLA\_old* are the models comparing mean biomass and SLA of shoots collected in 2010 (*epi2010*), and shoots collected in 2011 on trees with two year old epicormic shoots (*epi2011\_old*).

Variable	SLA_new	SLA_old	MASS_new	MASS_old
	Estimate (SE)	Estimate (SE)	Estimate (SE)	Estimate (SE)
(Intercept)	38.07 (4.46)	38.17 (3.37)	3.78 (0.16)	3.78 (0.07)
Treatment (E1)	21.61 (5.53)	21.61 (4.06)	1.15 (0.21)	1.31 (0.15)
Treatment (E2)	34.84 (5.53)	34.84 (4.06)	1.66 (0.23)	1.64 (0.2)
Treatment (T1)	1.10 (5.53)	1.10 (4.06)	-0.15 (0.16)	-0.18 (0.09)
Treatment (T2)	3.83 (5.53)	3.83 (4.06)	-0.06 (0.17)	-0.09 (0.09)
Treatment (2011-0)	62.16 (5.52)	62.16 (4.06)	-0.52 (0.15)	-0.57 (0.07)
Treatment (2011-E1)	93.15 (5.53)	70.15 (4.06)	-0.47 (0.15)	1.93 (0.21)
Treatment (2011-E2)	82.88 (5.53)	53.24 (4.06)	0.55 (0.19)	2.55 (0.27)
Treatment (2011-T1)	62.88 (5.53)	64.57 (4.06)	-0.62 (0.15)	-0.61 (0.07)
Treatment (2011-T2)	62.63 (5.53)	60.91 (4.06)	-0.69 (0.15)	-0.74 (0.07)
Clone (747210)	-5.76 (3.51)	-1.97 (2.57)		
Clone (915319)	0.10 (3.51)	-0.47 (2.57)		
Clone (DN2)	21.87 (3.51)	18.19 (2.57)		

Note: Treatment corresponds to the type of shoots (E1 and E2 are epicormic shoots from trees pruned at 1/3 and 2/3, respectively, T1 and T2 are canopy shoots from the same trees as E1 and E2, respectively, 2011-0 is a canopy shoot from an unpruned tree collected in 2011, 2011-E1 and 2011-E2 are epicormic shoots collected from trees pruned at 1/3 and 2/3, respectively, 2011-T1 and 2011-T2 are canopy shoots from the same trees as 2011-E1 and 2011-E2, respectively). Clone is the type of clone (109, 747210, 915319 and DN2).

In 2010, leaves from epicormic shoots had specific leaf area (SLA) values generally 1.5 times that of canopy shoot leaves ( $p < 0.05$ ; Fig. 3.5b and d). All the leaves produced in 2011 had greater SLA values than leaves produced in 2010 ( $p < 0.05$ ; Fig. 3.5b and d). In 2011, leaves produced by the newly formed epicormic shoots (*epi2011\_new*) had greater specific leaf area values than the leaves from canopy shoots and the leaves from unpruned trees ( $p <$

0.05; Fig. 3.5d), whereas leaves from two year old epicormic shoots (epi2011\_old) and leaves from canopy shoots had similar values ( $p > 0.05$ ; Fig. 3.5b).



**Figure 3.5** Predictions for mean shoot biomass (a, c) and specific leaf area (SLA; b, d) of canopy shoots from unpruned trees (0), 1/3 pruned trees (T1), 2/3 pruned trees (T2) and of epicormic shoots from 1/3 pruned trees (E1), 2/3 pruned trees, after one growing season (E2) after one growing season (2010), during the second growing season (2011\_new) and after two growing seasons (epi2011\_old). Note that SLA values were computed for clone1079. Errors bars are standard errors of the mean. Bars labeled with the same letter within a graph are not significantly different (Tuckey's test at  $p < 0.05$ ).

### 3.5 Discussion

The four hybrid poplar clones responded to pruning by the production of epicormic shoots, which, however, did not affect dbh or height growth of pruned trees, since there was no difference in size between trees with or without epicormic shoots. Although pruned trees produced large amounts of epicormic shoots with large leaf area, it seems these branches photosynthesize enough to rapidly self-sustain their construction costs. We observed that leaves from epicormic shoots had lower net photosynthesis rates than leaves of unpruned trees (Fig. 3.3), and that they also had greater SLA values. Since plants can allocate energy to construct leaves by having a different leaf structure, *i.e.*, changing ratio leaf area/leaf dry mass (Villar and Merino, 2001), epicormic shoots might produce leaves with high SLA to reduce their construction cost and allow their fast growth. Greater SLA values for epicormic shoots could also be a result of a better water status in pruned trees (cf. Chapter II).

Surprisingly we found that net photosynthesis of the remaining foliage of pruned trees was similar to leaves from unpruned trees (Fig. 3.3). This was unexpected since a common response to pruning is an increase in net photosynthesis of the remaining foliage (Pinkard and Beadle, 2000), phenomenon known as compensatory photosynthesis (Nowak and Caldwell, 1984). In a previous pruning experiment involving the same clones (cf. Chapter II) we observed compensatory photosynthesis in the remaining leaves of pruned trees when sprouting epicormic shoots were removed after pruning. Perhaps epicormic shoots allow trees to rapidly re-establish a balanced tree crown (Nicolini *et al.*, 2001). Since we allocated compensatory photosynthesis to an increase in stomatal conductance of the remaining foliage (c.f. Chapter II), it is possible that epicormic shoots, with their greater SLA (thinner and/or less dense leaves), hinder stomatal conductance to increase because of greater transpiration rates. Zhang *et al.* (2004) detected a positive correlation between SLA and transpiration for leaves of *Populus davidiana*, which indicated that leaves with higher SLA transpire more than leaves with smaller SLA. Other studies where compensatory photosynthesis was observed did not deal with the presence (or absence) of epicormic branching (Medhurst *et al.*, 2006 ; Pinkard and Beadle, 1998 ; Reich *et al.*, 1993 ; Troeng and Langström, 1991 ; Tschaplinski and Blake, 1995).



The removal of foliage during pruning caused decreases in root TNC concentrations compared to unpruned trees (Fig. 3.4). This drop in TNC is either due to the production of new foliage and/or the reduction of photosynthates production by the remaining leaves of pruned trees (Lovett and Tobiessen, 1993). The fact that root TNC concentrations were similar for trees with or without epicormic branches (Fig. 3.4), indicates that the photosynthates produced by epicormic branches was not exported to the roots, and probably stored in the twigs or the trunk (Landhäusser and Lieffers, 2003) or rapidly used to support the growth and maintenance of their large biomass (Fig. 3.5a). It thus appears that production of epicormic shoots following pruning is neither a source nor a sink of energy for the tree, since the TNC reserves did not decrease even further for trees which had their epicormic branches removed.

Pruning intensity and season both affected the number of epicormic shoots produced after pruning. Trees pruned in summer produced the least epicormic shoots after one growing season (Fig. 3.1a), consistent with previous studies such as Wignall *et al.* (1987) in oak (*Quercus robur* L.) or Bachelard (1969) in *Eucalyptus polyanthemos*. Date of pruning was also identified to be the most important factor affecting shoot initiation and growth in *Prunus persica* (Gordon *et al.*, 2006). The fewer epicormic shoots produced by the summer-pruned trees could be explained by the fact that development of epicormic shoots depends on bud break, which occurs at the beginning of the leafy period (Harmer, 1988), on light availability in early spring and on light availability throughout the growing season (Colin *et al.*, 2008); Trees pruned in fall or spring had more available light at the time of bud break, and also had more time to develop epicormic buds. Moreover, epicormic buds could be entering dormancy early in the growing season (Wignall *et al.*, 1987). Trees pruned in fall had significantly greater numbers of epicormic shoots when they were pruned at intensity 2/3 compared to those pruned at intensity 1/3 (Fig. 3.1). Heavy pruning has been shown to be a significant promoter of epicormic sprouting (Gordon *et al.*, 2006 ; Waring and O'Hara, 2005) which probably explains this difference. However pruning intensity had no effect on the number of epicormic shoots produced by spring-pruned trees (Fig. 3.1). Because spring pruning occurred between dormancy stage and bud break, perhaps hormonal signals are first directed towards canopy buds to reassert dominance, causing epicormic to enter a paradormant state

(Meier *et al.*, 2012). However, others (Kerr and Harmer, 2001) found that varying the time of pruning had no effect on epicormic shoots sprouting. Production of epicormic shoots could also be modulated by inter and intra species genetic variations (O'Hara and Valappil, 2000) and modifications in stem cambial activity (Nicolini *et al.*, 2001).

The removal of epicormic shoots following their apparition reduced their number after the second growing season except for the 2/3 summer pruning which produced more epicormic shoots (Fig. 3.1b). This additional pruning also considerably reduced the biomass of the newly formed sprouts (those produced in the 2011 growing season; Fig. 3.5c). Canopy shoots from pruned trees produced in 2011 had higher SLA values than those from 2010 (Fig. 3.5b). This finding is similar to Bassman and Dickmann (1982) who reported enhanced leaf size and weight on defoliated *Populus x euramericana* hybrid. Moreover we also observed an increase in SLA for unpruned canopy shoots between 2010 and 2011 and could indicate an acclimation of the whole plantation due to pruning of a large number of trees, thus increasing light availability. Epicormic shoots which were left to growth in the 2011 growing season had very large masses (Fig. 3.5a) indicating fast growth rates. They also produced larger leaves resulting in high SLA values (Fig. 3.5b). The mean number of epicormic shoots per tree decreased between 2010 and 2011, due to mortality. This is consistent with previous observations, which noted that the number of epicormic shoots usually decreases after two years (Takiya *et al.*, 2009 ; Waring and O'Hara, 2005). In *Quercus robur*, epicormic branches produced after pruning almost all disappeared after a seven year period (Kerr and Harmer, 2001).

In our study, tree size did not affect the number of epicormic shoots (Table 3.1) and neither did growth rates, since clone DN2 (*P. deltoides* × *P. nigra*), which had the best growth rates, produced similar numbers of epicormic shoots than clone 747210 (*P. balsamifera* × *P. trichocarpa*), which had the lowest growth rates. However, others had found that small sized and slower growing trees produced more epicormic shoots (Nicolini *et al.*, 2003 ; O'Hara and Valappil, 2000).

### 3.6 Management implications

In summary, pruning hybrid poplars at any intensity or season resulted in the production of epicormic shoots. Pruning 1/3 of the crown in summer was the treatment that produced the least epicormic shoots. An additional pruning at the end of the growing season (removal of the epicormic branches) also reduced the number and the size of epicormic shoots produced the next year. Epicormic shoots production did not restore root carbohydrates one growing season following pruning and did not affect tree growth two years after treatment. Hence, we conclude that epicormic branches produced and supplied carbon to support their own growth, and thus can be removed without compromising tree physiology.

### 3.7 Acknowledgements

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## CHAPITRE IV

### CONCLUSION GÉNÉRALE

L'élagage est une pratique ancienne, mais le choix de la saison d'élagage est un thème qui a reçu peu d'attention de la part des scientifiques. La plupart des prescriptions concernant l'élagage sont de natures empiriques et combinent besoins opérationnels et réponses de l'arbre en termes de croissance à différents traitements (Pinkard et Beadle, 2000). L'importance de comprendre les effets physiologiques reliés à l'élagage a commencé à être abordé dans les dernières années (Beadle *et al.*, 2004 ; Medhurst *et al.*, 2006 ; Mediene *et al.*, 2002 ; Montagu *et al.*, 2003 ; Pinkard, 2003 ; Pinkard *et al.*, 1999 ; Pinkard *et al.*, 1998). Les réponses physiologiques associées à l'élagage sont propres à chaque essence (Heichel et Turner, 1983). De plus, des changements dans l'activité physiologique pourraient aussi intervenir en fonction de la saison d'élagage, ce qui permettrait d'adapter les traitements d'élagage en fonction des conditions climatiques. Le premier chapitre de cette étude visait donc à déterminer comment la saison et l'intensité d'élagage pouvaient affecter les réponses physiologiques et la croissance de 4 clones de peuplier hybride. Une réponse fréquente à l'élagage est la production de gourmands ou branches épicromiques, et l'émondage de ces gourmands est pratique courante. Cependant, puisque ces branches participeraient à l'activité photosynthétique de l'arbre et seraient coûteuses à produire dû à leur très fort taux de croissance, leur taille pourrait se traduire par un ralentissement de la croissance diamétrale de l'arbre. Dans cet ordre d'idée le deuxième chapitre de cette étude visait à déterminer le rôle de ces branches épicromiques dans l'activité physiologique de l'arbre ainsi que l'effet des traitements d'élagage sur leur production.

À la suite de l'élagage, nous avons observé un phénomène de photosynthèse compensatoire pour les feuilles résiduelles des arbres élagués, ce qui a fait que les arbres élagués au 1/3 ont subi un ralentissement de la croissance beaucoup moins marqué. Pour ceux élagués au 2/3, la perte de feuillage était trop importante pour que le feuillage résiduel ne

puisse être compensé par de la photosynthèse compensatoire, et ils ont subi des baisses de croissance plus importantes. Ce phénomène de photosynthèse compensatoire est donc très important pour permettre à l'arbre de continuer à croître normalement malgré un élagage modéré de ses branches. D'un autre côté, nous avons également observé que pour les arbres sur lesquels nous avons laissé les branches épicromiques, ce phénomène de photosynthèse compensatoire n'était pas observé. Puisque nous attribuons l'augmentation de la photosynthèse nette à une augmentation de la conductance stomatique qui serait due à une réduction de la transpiration totale de l'arbre (moins de feuillage), l'absence de photosynthèse compensatoire dans ce cas-ci s'expliquerait par la production de branches épicromiques avec de très larges feuilles minces (surface foliaire spécifique élevée) ayant une transpiration associée plus élevée (Zhang *et al.*, 2004), qui limiterait l'augmentation de la conductance stomatique. D'autre part, nous avons observé que la perte de feuillage due à l'élagage entraînait une réduction de la quantité de glucides dans les réserves racinaires et ce, malgré le phénomène de photosynthèse compensatoire ce qui pourrait rendre les arbres moins vigoureux lors du prochain débournement. Cette baisse en glucides dans les réserves racinaires était plus importante pour les arbres élagués au 2/3, concomitant avec un ralentissement plus grand de la croissance deux ans après l'élagage.

L'augmentation de conductance stomatique observée chez les arbres élagués sans branches épicromiques a permis d'expliquer la diminution des valeurs de  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ . En réduisant la surface de transpiration de l'arbre, ces derniers étaient capables de maintenir leurs stomates ouverts plus longtemps et donc de discriminer davantage de  $^{13}\text{C}$ , ce qui se traduisait par une diminution du rapport  $^{13}\text{C}/^{12}\text{C}$ . Ce résultat est très intéressant puisqu'il suggère que les feuilles des arbres élagués seraient plus résistantes au stress hydrique et donc que l'élagage pourrait être utilisé comme un outil de lutte contre les périodes de sécheresse temporaire en saison estivale. De plus, La fermeture des stomates due à la transpiration peut engendrer des pertes de croissance, des arbres faiblement élagués auraient donc le potentiel de maintenir leur stomates ouverts plus longtemps et ainsi maintenir des taux de croissance soutenus. Bien que nous ayons enregistré une activité photosynthétique chez les feuilles des branches épicromiques, leur photosynthèse nette était plus faible que celle des feuilles du houppier des témoins, ce qui est probablement dû à la fabrication de feuilles plus larges et plus fines, ce

qui diminuerait le coût de construction de la feuille. Ce résultat est un bon exemple pour soutenir l'hypothèse qui considère que la présence des branches épïcormiques serait une réponse à un déséquilibre physiologique du houppier nécessitant une expansion de la surface foliaire (Nicolini *et al.*, 2003). La production rapide de feuilles avec une forte SLA optimiserait l'expansion de la surface foliaire. En revanche, les réserves glucidiques produites par la photosynthèse des branches épïcormiques n'étaient pas restituées, puisque la concentration en glucides contenue dans les racines était similaire entre les arbres avec ou sans branches épïcormiques. Ceci suggère qu'une partie des glucides produits par les branches épïcormiques a été directement utilisée pour soutenir la croissance et maintenir les fonctions métaboliques de ces branches, et qu'une autre partie a été conservée au niveau de leurs tiges pour une utilisation plus rapide lors du prochain printemps. Ceci correspondrait à la stratégie utilisée par les peupliers qui entreposent dans le tronc et dans les tiges la majeure partie de leur ressource en glucides nécessaire au débourrement le printemps suivant (Landhäusser et Lieffers, 2003). Cette stratégie a pour but une utilisation plus rapide des ressources et expliquerait la vigueur observée pour ces branches un an puis deux ans après l'élagage. Cependant ce résultat ne nous permet pas de qualifier les branches épïcormiques comme étant une source d'énergie pour l'arbre puisque les glucides produits n'ont pas été restitués à l'échelle de l'arbre et que leur présence n'a pas produit d'augmentation de croissance. Néanmoins, nous ne pouvons pas non plus les qualifier de puits, puisque la production de ces branches n'a pas réduit ni la croissance en diamètre ou en hauteur, ni les réserves glucidiques dans les racines de l'arbre. En effet, pour une intensité d'élagage donnée les croissances en hauteur et en diamètre étaient similaires pour les arbres élagués avec ou sans branches épïcormiques. Il semble donc que ces branches soient auto-suffisantes étant donné qu'elles n'interviennent pas dans l'utilisation des glucides et la croissance de l'arbre. Là encore ce résultat est très intéressant puisqu'il amène l'argument que ces branches peuvent être enlevées sans affecter la croissance et l'apport énergétique de l'arbre. Comme le but premier de l'élagage est de produire du bois de qualité et donc sans défaut, la présence de ces branches augmente la quantité de nœuds, et il est nécessaire de les enlever. Notre étude a montré que ces branches étaient très vigoureuses et qu'attendre deux ans avant de les émonder entraînait la formation de grosses branches ce qui engendre de plus gros défauts et plus de temps alloué à l'émondage. Au contraire, émonder dès l'apparition de ces branches

entraînait une diminution du nombre de gourmands nouvellement formés l'année suivante ainsi qu'une baisse de leur biomasse. De plus, ces branches nouvellement formées devraient être amenées à disparaître avec la fermeture du couvert. La présence des branches épïcormiques étant indésirable pour les forestiers, il est important de trouver des itinéraires sylvicoles limitant leur production. Dans cette optique, notre étude a clairement démontré qu'élaguer les peupliers en été diminuait fortement la formation de gourmands. En élaguant les arbres durant l'été, l'apport de lumière directe sur le tronc favorable à l'émergence des branches épïcormiques, est réduit compte tenu de la présence des feuilles par rapport aux arbres élagués en automne et au printemps. De plus l'élagage d'été réduit aussi le temps dans la saison de croissance disponible à leur formation.

D'autre part nous avons observé que les arbres élagués en été avaient une plus grande concentration en azote foliaire, qui serait due à une modification du ratio surface foliaire/surface racinaire. L'azote étant un élément important pour la croissance des tiges, cette réponse participe à la bonne vigueur des arbres élagués à 1/3 en été. Ces derniers présentaient aussi des valeurs de  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  plus négatives que les arbres élagués en automne et au printemps ce qui s'explique là encore par une augmentation de la conductance stomatique chez les arbres élagués en été. Plus surprenant nous avons aussi constaté que les valeurs  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  des feuilles présentes avant l'élagage de ces arbres étaient plus faibles que les valeurs de  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  des feuilles des arbres non-élagués, alors qu'on se serait attendus à des valeurs similaires puisque ces deux types de feuilles ont été produits dans les mêmes conditions (avant l'élagage d'été). Ceci suggère que ces feuilles continuent à fixer du carbone dans leurs structures même après qu'elles soient complètement formées, probablement pour maintenir leurs fonctions métaboliques. À l'inverse nous n'avons pas observé de différence au niveau physiologique entre les arbres élagués à l'automne et au printemps. C'est probablement à cause de leur état de dormance respectif. L'élagage d'automne a eu lieu après la chute des feuilles en octobre 2009, l'élagage du printemps quant à lui a eu lieu en fin mars 2010 avant le débourrement. Il serait intéressant de reculer la date d'élagage du printemps à l'éclosion des feuilles, moment auquel la demande en glucides est élevée. Il y aurait alors possiblement plus de glucides alloués aux branches restantes, ce qui pourrait favoriser la croissance en

hauteur de l'arbre, ou bien être redistribués aux bourgeons épicorniques, pour soutenir la production de nouvelles branches.

L'augmentation de photosynthèse, la diminution modérée des réserves de glucides, l'augmentation de la concentration en azote dans le feuillage résiduel et une plus grande discrimination du  $^{13}\text{C}$  sont autant d'éléments qui permettent d'un point de vue physiologique de recommander d'élaguer les peupliers en été à une intensité de 1/3 de la couronne verte. De plus, l'absence de perte de croissance en hauteur et la faible production de branches épicorniques sont des arguments supplémentaires sur le plan sylvicole pour l'élagage durant l'été. Les forestiers hésitent à élaguer les peupliers compte tenu du coût de l'opération, surtout en forêt boréale où la saison de végétation est courte. Une perte de croissance liée à un mauvais élagage ou l'apparition de défauts supplémentaires est alors très pénalisante. De ce fait, notre choix d'élaguer un tiers des branches en été est légitimement discutable puisqu'il a entraîné une légère réduction du diamètre à hauteur de poitrine. Cependant, dans les plantations à croissance rapide visant à produire du bois de qualité, le gestionnaire doit dans un premier temps favoriser la croissance en hauteur. Une fois la hauteur d'élagage atteinte, le gestionnaire se concentrera alors sur le développement du houppier par des éclaircies si c'est nécessaire, afin de favoriser la croissance en diamètre de l'arbre. En effet, les élagages successifs empêchent la formation d'un houppier développé dès le jeune âge. De plus, les peupliers ayant une croissance très soutenue dans les premières années de la plantation, atteindre une hauteur totale suffisante pour une bille de bois de 6 à 8 m sans défauts le plus rapidement possible, s'inscrit dans une logique visant à baisser l'âge d'exploitabilité et donc augmenter la rentabilité de ces plantations.

Nous amorçons aussi l'idée que l'élagage pourrait être un outil de lutte contre le stress hydrique, ce qui pourrait limiter les pertes de croissance en cas de sécheresse temporaire par la réduction de la surface de transpiration. Cependant, le lien entre meilleure résistance au stress hydrique et élagage n'a pas été démontré, une étude supplémentaire contrôlant l'alimentation en eau des arbres permettrait de confirmer ce lien. Nous mettons en évidence que l'élagage d'été réduit sensiblement la production de branches épicorniques chez les peupliers, ce qui laisse penser que leur initiation serait sous contrôle hormonal (Bachelard, 1969 ; Wignall *et al.*, 1987). Les mécanismes qui pourraient intervenir dans l'initiation des

bourgeons épïcormiques, mériteraient plus d'attention. D'après nos observations sur le terrain, les branches épïcormiques proviendraient de bourgeons proventifs à proximités des plaies d'élagage. Une étude sur l'ontogénie des bourgeons épïcormiques du peuplier permettrait de comprendre leur formation et déterminer précisément leur origine. Il se serait donc possible que la taille de branches de plus faible diamètre puisse aussi limiter la production de ces branches.

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