

Article Information

Received date : May 23, 2021

Published date: July 24, 2021

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Keywords

Host plants; Wildfire; Bacteria; Prolonged
drought

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Impact of Fire Incidences in Forest on Soil Microbes and Arbuscular Mycorrhizae

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Abstract

Both wildfire and prescribed burning results in imbalance in forest ecosystem by direct or indirect effects on soil, plants and microbes. The impact of fire varies with some factors-frequency and severity of fire, types of forest, plant species and edaphic properties. Most observations reported negative effect on soil micro-biota and increasing with fire severity, though bacteria are less affected than fungi, community alteration occurs for both. Reports on arbuscular mycorrhiza fungi are not enough; yet show alteration of species composition, abundance and colonization pattern, though help host plants to recover.

Introduction

Incidences of forest fire are reasoned for both wildfires, occurring mostly naturally, sometimes manmade and prescribed or controlled fire as part of forest management system. Wildfire occur worldwide in different ecosystems, seasons and for different causes, lightning, volcanic eruptions, dry season, prolonged drought etc. as dry shoot, leaf litter or resin increases flammability. Lightning induced fire increased highly after 2000 [1]. According to Catalanotti [2], biomass burning practice in and adjacent area of forest leading to wildfire is very common in some countries. Controlled or prescribed fire in forest floor in early spring is a common practice and part in forest management worldwide. Wade and Lunsford [3] defined prescribed burning as "fire applied in a knowledgeable manner to forest fuels on a specific land area under selected weather conditions to accomplish predetermined, well-defined management objectives". Prescribed burning is actually a burn plan that is a written procedure specific for the area including the objective, the restrictions, the desired fire effects, a map of the burning unit and the prescriptions [4]. The primary objective of prescribed burning is obviously for wildfire risk reduction. The objectives of prescribed burning are:- Reduce forest fire incidence by reducing inflammable materials in forest floor as- logs, litters; specially coniferous forest; Prepare sites for seed germination and establishment, especially for short time viable seeds; improve wildlife habitat; control plant disease; improve access of nutrients by adding ashes and fasten nutrient cycle [5]. The prescribed burning too sometimes become out of control for wind velocity, dry environment, lack of man power or negligence. Exhaustive analyses of effect of fire on forest animals, soil structure, microbial community, nutrient cycle, global increment of greenhouse gases, pathogen attack chances of fire injured plants, deformed timber; actually a study on ecosystem is needed to judge its necessity for all types of forest [6]. As heat, stress significantly affects plant growth and development by imparting

- 1) Loss of plant vigor and inhibition of seed germination,
- 2) Retarded growth rate,
- 3) Decreased biomass production,
- 4) Wilting and burning of leaves and reproductive organs,
- 5) Abscission and senescence of leaves,
- 6) Damage as well as discoloration of fruit,
- 7) Reduction in yield and cell death and
- 8) Enhanced oxidative stress [7].

Burning also affect soil physicochemical properties and soil biota. Fire had a strong negative effect on soil biota biomass, abundance, richness, evenness, and diversity. Fire reduced nematode abundance by 88% but had no significant effect on soil arthropods [8]. Negative effect on soil micro-biota, specially, mycorrhiza may affect the nutrient cycle in long run.

After Effect of Wild Fire on Plant and Soil

Post effects of fire vary with these factors:- season, weather, wind, precipitations, types of plant community composition, Phenology of trees, slope, topography, fuel load, soil moisture and soil organic matter content were also [9-11]. Phenologic status of the plant is directly related with the season. Depending on their growth stage, growing tissues are more sensitive to high temperatures than the dormant [12]. Types of vegetation is most important factor as some species are fire hardy, some adapted to fire for regeneration, others sensitive to fire [13,14]. In most cases, juveniles are adversely affected than mature trees. Spring fire was found to promote seedling emergence of shrub species in Australian grass-woodlands, and had little influence on seedling survival. In some cases, fire generates positive effects on plant communities, e.g. by rejuvenating, accelerating germination, by creating a mosaic of different vegetation types, resulting increasing biodiversity [12]. Reduced water availability can have important impacts on the competitive outcomes of neighbouring plants. These conditions favor invasion of non-mycorrhizal plants, mainly exotics and obnoxious weeds [15]. Fire may affect forest soil at different extents depending on its severity. Heat transfer to soil damages soil, therefore the most important factors is fire intensity [16] and duration [16, 17]. Soil heating mostly affects litter and humus layers AO or OO harbouring different beneficial microbes governing nutrient cycle. The temperature when rises to above 200 °C, organic matter in the upper layers vaporize leading formation of water-repellent soils [18]. During precipitations, the layer starts to disintegrate and soil structure breaks causing soil erosion [9]. The higher intensity fire results into complete loss of soil organic matter and volatilization of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium but very high temperature is required for complete burning of Mn, Mg, Cu and other micronutrients. The soil microorganisms are mostly affected by high temperature. Effect of prescribed fire on physical, chemical, and biological properties [19] has been studied in different



forest ecosystems showed different results. Responses to fire vary in forest ecosystem types [20], fire severity [21]; fire type and frequency [20] and on the type of soil and vegetation cover [22]. Over by et al. [23] found significantly higher concentrations of soil ammonia and nitrate in the burned canopy areas, while available phosphorus appeared greater but this was not statistically significant. De Bano et al. [24] found that fire acted as a rapid mineralizing agent and that removal of the tree canopy further stimulated the mineralization of both nitrogen and phosphorus. Availability of nutrients after burning is often a short-term phenomenon [25] and long-term alteration of soil structure [17]. The removal by fire of organic matter at the soil surface and in the top few centimetres of mineral soil can cause changes in soil structure. These changes may include decreases in soil pore size, which could lead to increased surface water runoff and erosion, and reduced water retention within the mineral soil. Increased burning frequency can reduce soil organic matter content and alter nitrogen availability [17].

Effect on Microbial Community

Burning can exert a positive, negative, or neutral effect on soil organisms that are often species specific [26]. Some microbes return to their original structure after some period of time [27]. Effects of prescribed burning on soil microorganisms in a Minnesota Jack pine forest showed to increase *Streptomyces* proliferation [28]. Relationship between microbial community structure and soil environmental conditions is variably correlated in a recently burned system [29]. It is observed that although there is a decrease in abundance of microbes following fire, the remaining microbes can have levels of activity that are greater than that of the microbial community prior to the fire [30]. These authors found that the increased rates of microbial processes, such as denitrification and production of methane and carbon dioxide, persisted for one year following fire. Sandra [31] observed in burned stands had a 52% and 56% reduction in soil microbial biomass and basal respiration respectively. Within burned stands, they found that microbial biomass and basal respiration was significantly declined with increasing fire severity, which in turn reduced the capacity of the soil microbial community to decompose soil cover for longer time scales. Fire severity can more strongly reduce microbial biomass [32, 33], and shift bacterial communities [33], compared to lower severity. The loss in microbial biomass during a fire depends upon the intensity and duration of the fire [34, 35]. Severe fire evidenced with reduced microorganism biomass and abundance up to 96%. Bacteria were more resistant to fire than fungi [8]. Microbial biomass nitrogen (Nmic) of pine forest was reduced by 22.2% to 37%, whereas in the oak forest its values were 8.8% to 16.3% in Uttarakhand, India. The overall change in soil microbial biomass carbon was 63% and 40% at the burnt oak forest and burnt pine forest, respectively. [36]. Shen et al. [37] reported long term repeated fire disturbance alters soil bacterial diversity but not the abundance in an Australian wet sclerophyll forest. *Arthrobacter* sp. and *Blastococcus* sp were found significantly increased in post-fire soils in a holm-oak forest in Spain [38]. *Arthrobacter* sp. was also found in a varied ecosystem of Canadian Boreal forest [39]. *Arthrobacter* may be able to survive fires due to its ability to resist starvation, desiccation and oxidative stress [40] drawing nutrition from fire-affected aromatic C sources [41] and may play a role in post-fire nitrogen cycling [42]. *Arthrobacter* may play an important role in the post-fire microbial ecosystem and increases in plant biomass. *Penicillium* is a common saprotrophic forest micro fungus [43], found growing in severely burned sites as first colonizer, and may be for the post-fire availability of nutrient and carbon source [44]. *Mucor* [45] too enhanced. Some other fire responsive bacteria found were *Neurospora* sp [46], *Geopyxis* sp [47] and *Massilia* sp [39] *Aeromicrobium*, *Burkholderia* *Paraburkholderia* [48]. *Fimetariella* *rabenhorstii* was significantly enriched with fire in boreal forest [49]. These most abundant fire-responsive bacterial taxa are genetically identical in the sequenced region to organisms that have been identified as aromatic C-degraders [50, 51] and most with significantly higher mean predicted 16S gene copy numbers for communities from more severely burned sites; and most fire responders favour a low acidic pH while negative fire responders prefer neutral to high pH soil [40]. Members of *Betaproteobacteria* and *Bacillus* were only detected from the DNA left in the burnt site three months after the fire in a *Pinus canariensis* forest. Wildfire had a very pronounced negative effect on the soil microbial community not only in terms of its resistance to fire, but in resilience too.

Effect on Arbuscular Mycorrhizae

The incidence of forest fire decreases the actinomycetes, fungal population and arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi (AMF) [52]. Generally, AMF-inoculated plants show better growth under heat stress than do the non-AMF-inoculated ones [53]. Different results from individual studies in different ecosystems and forests have hindered to reach a general conclusion about correlation among fire, mycorrhizal fungi, and ecosystem function. For example, studies have shown that wildfire can have negative [7, 54], neutral [55], or positive [56] effects on fungal diversity. Similarly, many studies have found an overall decrease in mycorrhizal colonization in post fire [57], while other

studies have found no effect [58] or even increased colonization following fire [59]. Much of the published information appears contradictory, largely reflecting differences in experimental methodologies, fire intensities and timescales of the various studies [17]. Available information, however, suggests that soil fungal communities may be more sensitive to fire than bacterial community richness [51, 60]. In general, mycorrhizal taxa displayed particularly low tolerances for severe fire. Severe fires can yield greater mortality for host plants of symbiotic microbes as mycorrhizal fungi [56], reducing fungal abundance [61], and fungal diversity [56] density and alteration of species composition, which did not mediated by changed soil abiotic properties as before [62]. On the other hand, mycorrhizal fungi regulate C gains to the soil by facilitating the transfer of nutrients to plant roots [63]. Thus, the consequences of increased wildfire activity for soil C storage in boreal forests could depend on the sensitivities of each fungal group to fire severity. In moderate fire intensity, temperature not directly affect AM, but indirect affect by damage of host plant organ, in low severity they survive in host root and help to regenerate host by exploiting stored nutrients in cortical vesicles [58, 64]. Hewitt et al. [56] examined shifts in fungal community composition with fire severity in Alaskan tundra, and noted that relative abundance of dominant taxa tended to decline with fire severity. More severe burns tended to eliminate mycorrhizal fungi, lack of host plant is the another cause of resilience. Effect of fire frequency showed short intervals decreased overall root colonization, while long intervals arbuscular colonization, though presence of host plant is a factor [65] or availability of nutrients from slash in post fire period [66, 67]. Mycorrhizal colonization also decreases after fire when measured in situ [20]. Repeated burning overall may not affect fungal richness [20], but distinct fire-adapted fungal communities do develop in frequently burned forests (two- and three-year intervals [68]. Barraclough and Olsson [66] reported root colonization is known to both increase and decrease depending on the plant species and AM type, independently of changes in AM fungal abundance in post fire soil in dry tropical forest. Actually different AM species differ in degree of resilience. A recovery trend of microbial biomass was found in Boreal forests [69] and fungal richness in different sites [20], but these effects realized in long time after the fire.

Conclusion

Major research reports are done in temperate forest and effects on ectomycorrhizal, though fire incidents are very common in dry deciduous and tropical forests, information are not plenty. More works need to be done in these forests and affect microbial diversity and functions to assess the necessity of controlled burning or its interval.

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