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The effects of H₂SO₄ and (NH₄)₂SO₄ treatments on the chemistry of soil drainage water and pine seedlings in forest soil microcosms

M. I. Stutter^{1,3}, M. S. Alam^{2,3}, S. J. Langan¹, S. J. Woodin³, R. P. Smart⁴, and M. S. Cresser⁴

¹Macaulay Institute, Craigiebuckler, Aberdeen. AB15 8QH, UK

²Institute of Forestry and Environmental Sciences, University of Chittagong, Chittagong-4331, Bangladesh

³School of Biological Sciences, University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen. AB24 3UU, UK

⁴Environment Dept., University of York, Heslington. YO10 5DD, UK

Email for corresponding author: m.stutter@macaulay.ac.uk

Abstract. An experiment comparing effects of sulphuric acid and reduced N deposition on soil water quality and on chemical and physical growth indicators for forest ecosystems is described. Six H₂SO₄ and (NH₄)₂SO₄ treatment loads, from 0 – 44 and 0 – 25 kmol_c ha⁻¹ yr⁻¹, respectively, were applied to outdoor microcosms of *Pinus sylvestris* seedlings in 3 acid to intermediate upland soils (calc-silicate, quartzite and granite) for 2 years. Different soil types responded similarly to H₂SO₄ loads, resulting in decreased leachate pH, but differently to reduced N inputs. In microcosms of calc-silicate soil, nitrification of NH₄ resulted in lower pH and higher cation leaching than in acid treatments. By contrast, in quartzite and granite soils, (NH₄)₂SO₄ promoted direct cation leaching, although leachate pH increased. The results highlighted the importance of soil composition on the nature of the cations leached, the SO₄ adsorption capacities and microbial N transformations. Greater seedling growth on calc-silicate soils under both treatment types was related to sustained nutrient availability. Reductions in foliar P and Mg with higher N treatments were observed for seedlings in the calc-silicate soil. There were few treatment effects on quartzite and granite microcosm tree seedlings since P limitation precluded seedling growth responses to treatments. Hence, any benefits of N deposition to seedlings on quartzite and granite soils appeared limited by availability of co-nutrients, exacerbated by rapid depletion of soil exchangeable base cations.

Keywords: acidification, manipulation, nitrogen, ammonium, deposition, soil, drainage, pine, microcosms, forest

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