

Geophysical Research Abstracts,
Vol. 10, EGU2008-A-01671, 2008
SRef-ID: 1607-7962/gra/EGU2008-A-01671
EGU General Assembly 2008
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Boreal forest fire and climate change: do we know the net impacts?

B. Amiro

Dept. Soil Science, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada
(brian_amiro@umanitoba.ca/Fax:+1-204-474-7642)

Wildfire is currently an important driver of boreal forest dynamics and is projected to have an even greater impact with a changing climate. In many regions, future weather is projected to be more conducive to an increase in area burned. This will increase the importance of fire in plans for forest management and protection of valued infrastructure. Fire has also been identified as an example of climate change feedback, whereby increased fire can increase atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases, enhancing global warming. Alternatively, fire in the boreal forest has the potential for global cooling because of its change to the surface albedo. We review some of the evidence of the potential net impacts of fire, and the recent developments to attempt to decrease our uncertainty.