Vertical distribution and persistence of soil organic carbon in fire-adapted longleaf pine forests

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29 Abstract

30 Longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris* Miller) forests in the southern United States are being restored
31 and actively managed for a variety of goals including: forest products, biodiversity, C
32 sequestration and forest resilience in the face of repeated disturbances from hurricanes and
33 climate change. Managed southern pine forests can be sinks for atmospheric CO₂ in forest
34 biomass; however, the persistence of biomass in the environment or in forest products is
35 limited, thus making soil C the primary long-term pool. Little is known about the size of extant
36 soil C pools, residence time of soil C or the role that frequent burning plays in C stabilization in
37 longleaf pine ecosystems. We sampled soil from a chronosequence of longleaf pine stands
38 ranging in age from 5 to 87 years to quantify the vertical distribution of soil organic carbon
39 (SOC) stocks; both oxidizable (SOC_{ox}) and oxidation resistant (SOC_R) fractions, pyrogenic carbon
40 (PyC) and the mean residence time (MRT) of SOC and its associated fractions. SOC stocks (0-1
41 m) ranged from 44.1 to 98.1 ($\bar{x}$ = 77.0) Mg C ha⁻¹, and no effect of stand age or biomass
42 accumulation on SOC stocks was detected. Soil C accumulation was associated with elevated
43 clay and extractable Fe contents. While SOC concentration declined with soil depth, the
44 proportion of SOC_R in SOC increased with depth. PyC was a minor component of soil C,
45 representing 5-7% of SOC and the proportion was not depth dependent. The MRT of SOC was
46 hundreds of years near the surface and many thousands of years at depth. Though SOC_R was
47 less abundant than SOC_{ox}, SOC_R MRT was an order of magnitude greater than SOC_{ox} MRT and
48 had a strong influence on bulk SOC MRT. The majority of the PyC was in the less persistent
49 SOC_{ox} and not associated with long-term C storage in soil. Despite the flow of C from biomass in
50 the form of decay products, litter fall, root turnover and pulses of PyC, these soils preserve little

of recent inputs, which may be rapidly oxidized, lost to the atmosphere from periodic fires or, in the case of PyC, may be transported out of the system via erosion. Our results indicate that these soils were not strong sinks for atmospheric CO₂, especially when compared to C accumulation in biomass.

Keywords

C stocks, *Pinus palustris*, prescribed fire, pyrogenic C, radiocarbon, soil carbon

1. Introduction

A key component of sustainable forestry is the responsible management of soil carbon (C) to ensure that site quality is maintained (Johnsen *et al.*, 2001). Aggrading forests can rapidly accumulate atmospheric CO₂ in biomass during the early stages of a rotation, but the persistence of this biomass C is ephemeral, thus soil is the primary long-term C pool. Stabilization of organic matter in soil is dependent on chemical composition, climate, moisture retention, soil mineralogy, and pyrogenic transformation, as well as physical isolation from environmental fluctuations at depth (Oades, 1988; Batjes, 1996). These factors lead to

considerable variability in soil C quantity and residence time among and within sites and regions. In the southern United States, rapid turnover of soil C inputs from forests may be facilitated by coarse sands and low-activity clay mineralogy that limit long-term retention (Richter *et al.*, 1999).

Longleaf pine forests in the southern United States are being restored and actively managed to provide forest products and a variety of ecosystem services such as biodiversity and disturbance-resistant long term C storage (Churchill *et al.*, 2013). Longleaf pine occurs on a variety of soil types from coastal sands to eroded upland clay soils, but little is known about the quantity and persistence of soil C as well as the role of soil properties on the rate of soil C accumulation across its range. Longleaf pine ecosystems were a dominant forest type in the southeastern United States sustained by frequent low intensity fires (Frost, 1993; Schmidtling and Hipkins, 1998). As an example, in the Kisatchie National Forest in Southwest Louisiana, mean fire return from 1650-1905 was determined to be 2.2 years (Stambaugh *et al.*, 2011). In the 19th and early 20th centuries the majority (>95%) of the longleaf forest was logged and converted to agriculture (Frost, 2006), and subsequent management led to considerable loss of topsoil. Thus, most current longleaf pine sites experienced millennia of frequent, low intensity fire followed by removal of forest cover, interruption of fire cycles and soil degradation. The long history of frequent fire prior to European settlement and current use of fire in restored systems has resulted in pulses of pyrogenic C (PyC) also referred to as “black carbon” into the soil. PyC residence time is estimated to be on the centennial time scale (Singh *et al.*, 2012; Knicker *et al.*, 2013), thus it can be an important avenue of soil C sequestration in terrestrial systems (Jaffe *et al.*, 2013; Bird *et al.*, 2015).

PyC found in soil is the result of incomplete combustion of biomass under low oxygen conditions. PyC is composed of a variety of C compounds; being a class rather than a specific material (Schmidt and Noack, 2000; Masiello, 2004; Preston and Schmidt, 2006; Hammes *et al.*, 2008). In brief, fire transforms these organic compounds into a spectrum of amorphous materials dominated by fused aromatic rings. This material ranges from partially burned woody material to char. PyC becomes more recalcitrant along the spectrum associated with aromatic condensation, persisting from hundreds to thousands of years (Hammes *et al.*, 2008; Ascough *et al.*, 2009). There is a misconception that PyC formed from biomass under native environmental conditions is broadly inert and with long residence times in soil. Knicker *et al.* (2013) found that pyrogenic organic matter (PyOM) formed naturally in a severe forest fire and incorporated into the mineral soil had residence times 5 to 6 times longer than SOM in soils unaffected by fire. This increases the C sequestration potential of forest soils, but residence times were still modest, ranging from 500 to 600 years. The PyC products have a range of biochemical stability, though in general PyC formed at low temperature has higher O:C ratios and is more readily degraded than PyC formed at high temperatures (Inoue and Inoue, 2009; Spokas, 2010; Ascough *et al.*, 2011). The amount of biomass converted to PyC is dependent on feedstock chemistry, combustion temperature and oxygenation. Preston and Schmidt (2006) estimated a conversion rate, of combusted organic matter, of 1-6 % in boreal systems, while others contend that the mean conversion rate is substantially higher e.g. 5-15% (Santin *et al.*, 2016).

To better understand the composition of extant soil C pools and assess the soil C sequestration potential, quantitative data are needed on the vertical distribution of C within

the soil profile and persistence of C in soil. Key questions include: 1) How are SOC stocks partitioned between active and resistant fractions and how much is PyC contributing to them? 2) How long does SOC persist and does PyC contribute long-term persistence? 3) Which edaphic factors are associated with SOC stocks and persistence? To address these questions we analyzed the vertical distribution and persistence of SOC to a depth of 1 m in fire-adapted longleaf pine forests aged 5 to 87 years old at sites with contrasting soil edaphic properties. A total of 14 stands were studied across the range of the species in the southern United States. Bulk SOC was chemically fractionated into resistant and oxidizable pools, then radiocarbon abundance measurements were applied to calculate quantitative estimates of the relative persistence of those fractions. Benzene Polycarboxylic Acid (BPCA) markers were used to quantify and characterize PyC (Glaser *et al.*, 1998; Brodowski *et al.*, 2005). This allowed us to analyze the effect of forest stand development (age, stand characteristics, above and belowground biomass C) and soil properties (depth, bulk density, texture, extractable iron) on the vertical distribution and persistence of C in soil. Our overall goal was to assess SOC pools by resistance to oxidation, PyC content, and mean residence in longleaf pine stands to better understand the legacy of past land use, frequent forest fires and current forest management on soil C stocks. Such quantification of soil C stocks will contribute to regional and national efforts to model C storage in soil and guide long-term management efforts.

2. Methods

2.1. Study Areas

134 Sites selected for this study were part of a larger effort to quantify forest C density in longleaf
135 pine forests and were previously described in detail (Samuelson *et al.*, 2014; Samuelson *et al.*,
136 2016). A chronosequence of 14 managed longleaf pine stands were selected for intensive
137 sampling and characterization. They were located across the east-west range of the species
138 from the Atlantic Coast Flatwoods (ACF), to the Southern Piedmont (SP) extending to the
139 Western Coastal Plain (WCP) Major Land Resource Areas (MLRAs) in the southern United States
140 (NRCS, 2006). Stands varied in age and basal area within each MLRA and soil characteristics
141 varied between MLRAs (Table 1). Study sites were selected primarily on forest stand
142 characteristics typical for each MLRA and active management with cyclical prescribed burning.
143 Five SP stands located on Fort Benning Military Installation, Columbus, Georgia were sampled in
144 2012. Five WCP stands located on the Vernon District of the Kisatchie National Forest in Vernon
145 Parish, Louisiana were sampled in 2013. Four ACP stands located on Camp Lejeune Military
146 Installation, Jacksonville, North Carolina were sampled in 2014. Stands in ACP were typified by
147 deep sands while those in SP and WCP had greater clay and silt fractions.

148 Table 1. Location and characteristics of longleaf pine stands sampled for soil carbon.

MLRA	Annual rainfall ¹ (mm)	Annual Air Temp ¹ (C)	Stand Age (yrs)	Coordinates (Lat., Long.)	Soil Series	Soil Drainage Class	Basal Area (m ²)	SI (m)	Origin	Last three burns (yr)
ACF	1356	17.4	15	34.589, -77.271	Leon fine sand	PD	25.0	25	Planted	2005 2008 2010
			25	34.645, -77.450	Stallings loamy fine sand	PD	17.7	16	Planted	2008 2009 2010
			65	34.705, -77.252	Onslow loamy fine sand	MWD	11.6	15	Natural	2005 2009 2011
			79	34.702, -77.303	Malbis fine loamy sand	MWD	11.2	13	Natural	2007 2009 2012
SP	1180	18.7	5	32.400, -84.870	Nankin sandy clay loam	WD	0.5	19	Planted	2003 2007 2010
			12	32.373, -84.777	Nankin sandy clay loam	WD	11.5	19	Planted	2005 2008 2010
			21	32.391, -84.789	Troup sandy loam	ED	22.4	20	Planted	2005 2009 2010
			64	32.319, -85.008	Troup-Springhill-Luverne complex	WD	10.2	16	Natural	2003 2008 2010
			87	32.366, -84.785	Troup sandy loam	ED	14.5	19	Natural	2006 2008 2010
WCP	1447	18.9	8	30.944, -93.162	Troup sandy loam	MWD	5.2	21	Planted	2006 2008 2011
			18	30.943, -93.192	Beauregard-Malbis complex	MWD	8.0	21	Planted	2006 2007 2011
			34	30.991, -93.134	Briley loamy fine sand	WD	18.2	21	Planted	2007 2009 2012
			60	30.997, -93.019	Malbis fine loamy sand	MWD	20.0	19	Planted	2008 2009 2011
			83	31.024, -92.944	Malbis fine loamy sand	MWD	13.8	21	Planted	2001 2007 2011

149 MLRA=Major Land Resource Area (NRCS, 2006), ACF=Atlantic Coast Flatwoods, SP=Southern Piedmont, WCP=Western Coastal Plain, WD=well
 150 drained, MWD=moderately well drained, ED=excessively drained, PD=poorly drained, SI = site index at base age 50.

151 ¹ 30 yr mean (1982-2011) Jacksonville, NC, Columbus, GA, and Leesville, LA; NOAA, National Centers for Environmental Information
 152 (<http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/cdo-web>).

Detailed characterization of forest carbon stocks including overstory, understory, ground cover, taproots, coarse roots, fine roots, dead snags, woody debris, litter and duff were presented by Samuelson *et al.* (2014); Samuelson *et al.* (2016). All stands were even-aged with a minor component of volunteer *Pinus taeda* or hardwood recruitment and actively managed with an approximate three year fire return cycle. Four of the older stands were naturally regenerated and the others were planted.

2.2. Soil Collection

The approach for defining study plots and collecting soil samples was adapted from the Global Terrestrial Observing System (GTOS) protocol for soil and root sampling (Law *et al.*, 2008). Within each stand, a one ha circular main plot (56.4 m radius) with four 400 m² circular subplots (11.3 m radius) were installed. Within a main plot, one subplot was located at the center and three subplots were positioned 35 m from the center at 0°, 120°, and 240° from north. A 1.9 cm diameter push tube was used to collect soil samples for C and texture at 2 m, 5 m, and 11 m from subplot center at 0°, 90°, 180°, and 270° from north (12 locations total per subplot) at depths of 0-10 and 10-20 cm. A 10 cm diameter bucket auger was used to collect soil samples for C and texture at 20-50 and 50-100 cm from two of the soil sampling locations 2 m from the subplot center. Within each subplot, the subsamples were combined by depth resulting in 224 samples (14 sites x 4 subplots x 4 depths), that were further combined in equal portions into a composite sample by depth for each plot (14 sites x 4 depths) for a total of 56 samples. Soil samples for bulk density were collected at depths of 0-10, 10-20, 20-50 and 50-100 cm at one location 2 m north of subplot center using a 5.7 cm diameter soil core (0200 Soil Core Sampler, Soil Moisture Equipment Corp., Goleta, California).

2.3 Chemical Fractionation

Oxidation resistant soil organic C (SOC_R) was isolated from bulk soil organic C (SOC) via selective oxidation with 20% H₂O₂ and 0.33 M HNO₃ with a method originally used to isolate charcoal fractions from soil and litter, described by Kurth *et al.* (2006) and modified by Ball *et al.* (2010). In this approach, oxidizable SOC (SOC_{ox}) is digested and converted to CO₂, leaving the SOC_R fraction (e.g. Eusterhues *et al.* (2005)). It is important to note that this was a strong oxidization reaction intended to isolate the C fraction that was highly resistant to chemical degradation. One gram of soil was placed in a pre-weighed 240 ml canning jar and 20 mL of 30% (v/v) of reagent grade H₂O₂ in water and 10 ml of 1 M HNO₃ were added to the jar to achieve a concentration of 20% H₂O₂ and 0.33 M HNO₃. The mixture was left at room temperature for 30 minutes with occasional swirling, then covered with a watch glass and incubated in an oven at 80°C for 24 hrs. The watch glasses were then removed and the samples were left to dry uncovered at 80°C for another 24 hrs. After drying, the samples (jar plus soil) were weighed again, scraped free with a spatula and ground to a fine powder using a mortar and pestle. To avoid contamination, all glassware, mortars, pestles, and chemical spatulas were cleaned with a laboratory grade cleaner (Micro SD, International Products Corp, Burlington, NJ USA) and soaked overnight in a 1% hydrochloric acid bath (HCL), and then rinsed with deionized water. Total C concentration of soil and of the oxidant resistant fraction was determined by elemental analysis with a Costech ECS 4010 elemental analyzer (Costech Analytical Technologies Inc., Valencia, CA) coupled to a Thermo Delta V Advantage isotope ratio mass spectrometer (Thermo Fisher Scientific, Inc., Waltham, MA). Soils across the region have

negligible inorganic C contents (Soil Survey Staff, 2000), therefore SOC was presumed to be equal to total C concentration. SOC_{ox} was calculated as the difference between SOC and SOC_R.

2.4. Pyrogenic Carbon (PyC) content

Benzene Polycarboxylic Acid (BPCA) marker quantification yields conservative, yet consistent estimates of PyC (Glaser *et al.*, 1998; Wiedemeier *et al.*, 2013; Cotrufo *et al.*, 2016a). BPCAs are formed from the cleaving of condensed aromatic structures with concentrated nitric acid into single aromatic rings distinguished by a range of carboxylic acid moieties. More highly condensed ring structures have a greater proportion of B6CAs while structures with fewer fused rings have proportionally more B3CAs, providing insight into to the degree of biochemical stability (Glaser *et al.*, 1998; Boot *et al.*, 2015; Wiedemeier *et al.*, 2015). Samples of SOC and SOC_R (14 stands X 4 depths) were treated with concentrated HNO₃ as described in Boot *et al.* (2015) to create BPCAs and analyzed using high performance liquid chromatography equipped with a photo diode array detector (Wiedemeier *et al.*, 2013). BPCA content of SOC_{ox} was calculated as the difference between SOC and SOC_R. Since the formation of BPCAs causes a net loss of C, there is not a 1:1 ratio between PyC and BPCA markers. Depending on the molecular structure of the PyC, BPCA contents are 2-5 times lower than actual PyC contents. A conservative correction factor of 2.27 was applied to bulk BPCA contents to estimate soil PyC stocks (Glaser *et al.*, 1998).

2.5. Radiocarbon analysis (¹⁴C)

Samples for radiocarbon measurement were prepared at the USDA Forest Service, Northern Research Station, Carbon, Water & Soils Laboratory in Houghton, MI USA. Samples of

SOC and SOC_R (14 stands X 4 depths) were combusted under vacuum in the presence of CuO and Ag to produce CO₂, which was then converted to graphite through heating at 570 °C in the presence of H₂ and a Fe catalyst according to Vogel *et al.* (1987). Radiocarbon content was analyzed by accelerator mass spectrometry at the Center for Accelerator Mass Spectrometry (CAMS), Lawrence Livermore National Lab (LLNL), Livermore, California, USA (Davis *et al.*, 1990). SOC_{OX} Δ¹⁴C values were calculated as the difference between SOC and SOC_R Δ¹⁴C values, taking into consideration C distribution between fractions. Radiocarbon data are reported as fraction modern (Fm) which is the ratio of ¹⁴C / ¹²C (or ¹⁴C/¹³C) of the sample to the atmospheric ¹⁴C / ¹²C (or ¹⁴C/¹³C) ratio in 1950, prior to extensive aboveground testing of nuclear weapons (Stuiver and Polach, 1977). Mean residence times (MRT) of SOC, SOC_{OX} and SOC_R were calculated using Δ¹⁴C values and a time-dependent steady-state model (Trumbore, 1993; Torn *et al.*, 2009).

2.6. Soil Texture, Extractable Fe Analysis and Bulk Density

Soil was air-dried for several weeks and passed through a 2 mm sieve to remove roots and rocks. Particle size (soil texture) analysis was performed by hydrometer method (Bouyoucos, 1962). Fe was extracted from soil using Mehlich-3 extractant (Mehlich, 1984) and analyzed with inductively coupled plasma spectrometry by Spectrum Analytic Inc. (Washington Court House, Ohio, USA). Bulk density samples were oven-dried at 105 °C for 96 h and then passed through a 2 mm sieve, and roots and rocks were extracted and weighed separately. Rock volume was determined by water displacement. The effect of root volume on bulk density was negligible. Soil bulk density was then calculated by soil mass (minus rocks and roots) / soil volume (minus rock volume) (Law *et al.*, 2008).

2.7. Statistical Analysis

The approach taken was to first consider if forest stand development and biomass C stocks affected accumulation of soil C among fractions, then analyze the vertical distribution, residence time and soil properties related to C retention. Stepwise multiple linear regression (SLE=0.25 for entry, SLS=0.05 retention in model) was used to determine whether soil C stocks to a depth of 1 m (SOC, SOC_R, SOC_{OX} and PyC) were dependent on stand parameters (biomass C stocks, stand age, basal area) with Proc Reg (SAS Institute Inc., 2013) using SAS/STAT 9.4 software (SAS Institute, Cary, NC, USA).

The effect of soil depth and MLRA on the vertical distribution of soil C fractions, physical properties, fraction modern and MRT of C was analyzed with Proc Mixed (SAS Institute Inc., 2013) using composite data from each forest stand. Soil depth was the repeated measures factor, where soil was collected from several depths at a given forest stand. The depth intervals were uneven (0-10, 10-20, 20-50, 50-100 cm), so based on theoretical grounds of unequal spacing and comparison of the AICC between several types of covariance matrices, we decided to use the spatial power covariance matrix. After testing for the main effects and interaction, mean separation analysis within MLRAs for depth was performed with the Bonferroni correction. This adjustment uses the pooled variance across MLRAs and depths from the overall analysis which may result in significances that are slightly different from those based on the individual standard errors alone. The Bonferroni method performed all six possible pairs of comparisons between the four depths and ensured an experiment-wise error rate of 0.05 for the set by using the $\alpha=0.05/6=0.0083$ level for testing each pair. Differences in stocks of

SOC, SOC_{OX}, SOC_R, and PyC in the upper 1 m of soil among MLRAs were analyzed with one-way analysis of variance Proc Mixed (SAS Institute Inc., 2013).

Stepwise linear multiple regression was applied to analyze the relationship between concentrations of C fractions in soil (SOC, SOC_{OX}, SOC_R, and PyC) and soil properties (texture, depth, bulk density, Fe concentration) across the 14 longleaf pine stands with Proc Reg (SAS Institute Inc., 2013). Mean residence time of SOC_{OX} and SOC_R was also analyzed with stepwise linear multiple regression using the above soil properties with the addition of variables related to BPCA speciation (%B6CA, %B5CA, %B4CA, %B3CA, %B4CA/B6CA, and %B5CA/B6CA). Mean residence time of bulk soil (SOC) was similarly analyzed using soil, BPCA variables, plus the percent of SOC comprised of SOC_R and PyC.

3. Results

3.1. Stand Age, Biomass and Soil C Stocks

To analyze potential effects of forest stand biomass accumulation on soil C, it was necessary to scale soil C concentration to same units as biomass C (Mg C ha⁻¹). Concentrations of SOC, SOC_R, SOC_{OX} and PyC were converted to Mg C ha⁻¹ using soil bulk density and summed across all sample depths to yield a C stock (0-1 m) for each (Table 2). The stepwise multiple regression analysis showed no significant relationships between SOC, SOC_R, SOC_{OX} and PyC and any biomass parameter (C stocks, stand age, basal area), despite wide ranges in biomass C stocks across the 14 stands (Table 2). Stand age and biomass were thus dropped from subsequent analyses.

Table 2. Minimum, maximum, and mean soil C stocks to a depth of 1 m and stand-level biomass C stocks (from Samuelson et al. 2016) for 14 longleaf pine forests.

C Stock	Minimum (Mg C ha ⁻¹)	Maximum (Mg C ha ⁻¹)	Mean (Mg C ha ⁻¹)
Soil			
SOC	41.5	98.1	77.0
SOC _{ox}	33.2	87.3	61.8
SOC _R	8.3	22.9	15.2
PyC	2.1	7.2	4.6
Biomass			
Live Aboveground C	1.4	82.5	41.6
Live Belowground C	2.7	24.8	17.1
Detritus C	0.8	7.4	4.2

3.2. Carbon Concentration and Soil Depth

SOC, SOC_{ox}, SOC_R and PyC contents of bulk soils were highest near the surface and declined with depth (Figure 1). While soil depth accounted for most of the variability in C concentration (SOC: F=54.3, $p<0.0001$; SOC_{ox}: F=55.6, $p<0.0001$; SOC_R: F=22.1, $p<0.0001$; PyC: F=20.2, $p<0.0001$), MLRA and the interaction between MLRA and soil depth were also significant for all variables. The stands within a MLRA shared similar soil properties, making comparison of soil C fractions by MLRA useful (Table 3). WCP and ACF soils had very similar mean C concentrations among the fractions (SOC, SOC_{ox}, SOC_R and PyC) by depth; with the exception of PyC, means were within the standard error at each depth (Table 3). All WCP and ACF soil C fraction concentrations were highest near the surface and declined with depth. The SP soils differed from WCP and ACF in several ways: SOC, SOC_{ox}, PyC concentrations were approximately half that of WCP and ACF in the upper 20 cm, and SOC_R and PyC did not significantly decline with

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Figure 1. Mean (SE) concentration of soil organic carbon (SOC), oxidizable SOC (SOC_{ox}), resistant SOC (SOC_R) and pyrogenic C (PyC) in soil from 14 longleaf pine stands by depth.

Table 3. Mean (SE) SOC, SOC_{OX}, SOC_R and PyC concentrations by depth in longleaf pine forests. Within each MLRA, means followed by the same letter are not significantly different at the alpha = 0.05 level using the Bonferroni adjustment.

MLRA	Depth (cm)	n	SOC (%)		SOC _{OX}		SOC _R (%)		PyC (%)	
ACF	0 to 10	4	2.13 (0.39)	<i>a</i>	1.85 (0.33)	<i>a</i>	0.28 (0.07)	<i>a</i>	0.117 (0.034)	<i>a</i>
	10 to 20	4	0.99 (0.22)	<i>b</i>	0.84 (0.19)	<i>b</i>	0.15 (0.04)	<i>b</i>	0.064 (0.010)	<i>ab</i>
	20 to 50	4	0.45 (0.14)	<i>bc</i>	0.37 (0.13)	<i>bc</i>	0.08 (0.02)	<i>b</i>	0.022 (0.008)	<i>b</i>
	50 to 100	4	0.26 (0.02)	<i>c</i>	0.18 (0.02)	<i>c</i>	0.08 (0.01)	<i>b</i>	0.014 (0.006)	<i>b</i>
SP	0 to 10	5	1.05 (0.05)	<i>a</i>	0.87 (0.03)	<i>a</i>	0.18 (0.02)	<i>a</i>	0.057 (0.009)	<i>a</i>
	10 to 20	5	0.68 (0.04)	<i>ab</i>	0.53 (0.04)	<i>ab</i>	0.15 (0.02)	<i>a</i>	0.037 (0.004)	<i>a</i>
	20 to 50	5	0.51 (0.05)	<i>ab</i>	0.37 (0.05)	<i>ab</i>	0.15 (0.01)	<i>a</i>	0.027 (0.005)	<i>a</i>
	50 to 100	5	0.35 (0.03)	<i>b</i>	0.21 (0.02)	<i>b</i>	0.14 (0.01)	<i>a</i>	0.013 (0.002)	<i>a</i>
WCP	0 to 10	5	2.18 (0.33)	<i>a</i>	1.97 (0.30)	<i>a</i>	0.21 (0.03)	<i>a</i>	0.158 (0.019)	<i>a</i>
	10 to 20	5	1.05 (0.11)	<i>b</i>	0.95 (0.10)	<i>b</i>	0.10 (0.01)	<i>b</i>	0.095 (0.017)	<i>b</i>
	20 to 50	5	0.51 (0.04)	<i>bc</i>	0.44 (0.04)	<i>c</i>	0.07 (0.01)	<i>b</i>	0.038 (0.005)	<i>c</i>
	50 to 100	5	0.36 (0.12)	<i>c</i>	0.30 (0.11)	<i>c</i>	0.06 (0.01)	<i>b</i>	0.020 (0.011)	<i>c</i>

MLRA=Major Land Resource Area (NRCS, 2006), ACF=Atlantic Coast Flatwoods, SP=Southern Piedmont, WCP=Western Coastal Plain

depth. To explore these differences further, SOC_{OX}, SOC_R and PyC fractions were analyzed as a proportion of total SOC. As SOC declined with soil depth the proportion of SOC_R in SOC significantly increased at the SP and ACF stands, though there was no significant effect of depth on PyC/SOC (Table 4).

Table 4. Mean (SE) ratio of C fractions in SOC by depth in longleaf pine forests. Within each MLRA, means followed by the same letter are not significantly different at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level using the Bonferroni adjustment.

MLRA	Depth (cm)	n	SOC _{ox} /SOC* 100 (%)		SOC _r /SOC* 100 (%)		PyC/SOC* 100 (%)	
ACF	0 to 10	4	86.86 (1.77)	<i>a</i>	13.14 (1.77)	<i>a</i>	5.15 (1.10)	
	10 to 20	4	84.92 (2.11)	<i>a</i>	15.08 (2.11)	<i>a</i>	7.20 (1.34)	
	20 to 50	4	78.62 (3.68)	<i>a</i>	21.38 (3.68)	<i>a</i>	4.24 (0.77)	
	50 to 100	4	68.40 (3.58)	<i>b</i>	31.60 (3.58)	<i>b</i>	5.34 (1.80)	
SP	0 to 10	5	83.24 (1.38)	<i>a</i>	16.76 (1.38)	<i>a</i>	5.32 (0.68)	
	10 to 20	5	77.94 (2.54)	<i>ab</i>	22.06 (2.54)	<i>ab</i>	5.47 (0.39)	
	20 to 50	5	69.82 (4.50)	<i>b</i>	30.18 (4.50)	<i>b</i>	5.22 (0.48)	
	50 to 100	5	59.12 (2.69)	<i>c</i>	40.88 (2.69)	<i>c</i>	3.65 (0.30)	
WCP	0 to 10	5	90.24 (0.44)	<i>a</i>	9.76 (0.44)	<i>a</i>	7.46 (0.50)	
	10 to 20	5	90.71 (0.50)	<i>a</i>	9.29 (0.50)	<i>a</i>	8.97 (1.08)	
	20 to 50	5	85.72 (0.86)	<i>a</i>	14.28 (0.86)	<i>a</i>	7.62 (1.20)	
	50 to 100	5	80.82 (2.99)	<i>a</i>	19.18 (2.99)	<i>a</i>	4.53 (1.21)	

MLRA=Major Land Resource Area (NRCS, 2006), ACF=Atlantic Coast Flatwoods, SP=Southern Piedmont, WCP=Western Coastal Plain

Carbon concentrations were scaled to C stocks by incorporating soil bulk density and the length of the depth interval to calculate a sum total C stock in the upper 1 m of soil. There were no differences in total SOC stocks between the MLRAs ($F=1.55$, $p=0.2560$), though SOC_r stocks in SP were nearly double those in WCP and ACF ($F=22.24$, $p=0.0001$), while WCP had the highest SOC_{ox} ($F=4.77$, $p=0.0322$) and PyC stock ($F=11.57$, $p=0.0020$) (Table 5).

Table 5. Mean (SE) soil stocks of SOC, SOC_{OX}, SOC_R, and PyC in the upper 1 m of soil in longleaf pine forests. Across MLRAs, means followed by the same letter are not significantly different at the alpha = 0.05 level using the Bonferroni adjustment.

MLRA	n	SOC (Mg ha ⁻¹)		SOC _{OX} (Mg ha ⁻¹)		SOC _R (Mg ha ⁻¹)		PyC (Mg ha ⁻¹)	
ACF	4	71.48 (10.16)	<i>a</i>	57.93 (8.63)	<i>ab</i>	13.55 (1.92)	<i>b</i>	3.73 (0.37)	<i>a</i>
SP	5	72.12 (6.56)	<i>a</i>	51.22 (5.72)	<i>a</i>	20.90 (1.01)	<i>a</i>	3.54 (0.58)	<i>a</i>
WCP	5	86.16 (3.54)	<i>a</i>	75.42 (3.43)	<i>b</i>	10.73 (0.40)	<i>b</i>	6.39 (0.40)	<i>b</i>

MLRA=Major Land Resource Area (NRCS, 2006), ACF=Atlantic Coast Flatwoods, SP=Southern Piedmont, WCP=Western Coastal Plain

3.3. PyC Oxidative Degradation

PyC resistant to oxidation with H₂O₂ and HNO₃ (PyC_R) was a relatively small proportion of PyC ($\bar{x}$ across depths: SP 9.2%, WCP 7.8%, ACF 13.5%) and is included in both the SOC_R and PyC fractions (Figure 2). Using the differences between least square means (two-way ANOVA) PyC_R/PyC in the upper 10 cm of soil in ACF was significantly higher than any other MLRA/depth combination, though soil depth did not significantly affect PyC_R/PyC in SP or WCP (Figure 2). This could indicate different formation conditions for PyC resulting in more resistant PyC_R in ACF as the coarse sands may be less conducive to C retention. The key finding is that the majority of PyC across all MLRAs is included in SOC_{OX} fraction and PyC_R accounts for only 2-5% of the C in the SOC_R fraction. This has important implications for radiocarbon as it was only possible to analyze SOC, SOC_R and calculate SOC_{OX} from the difference between SOC and SOC_R. PyC radiocarbon was not analyzed in this study, though very recent advancements have made it possible to simultaneously analyze the quantity and isotopic composition of PyC with the BPCA method (Wiedemeier *et al.*, 2016).

Figure 2. Mean (SE) percent of pyrogenic C resistant to oxidation with H_2O_2 and HNO_3 (PyC_R) by depth in longleaf pine stands in the Atlantic Coast Flatwoods (ACF; n=4), Southern Piedmont (SP; n=5) and Western Coastal Plain (WCP; n=5).

3.4. PyC BPCA Characterization

In addition to total BPCA contents that were scaled to estimate PyC in soil, the approach also characterized the ring structure of PyC. Benzenhexacarboxylic acid (B6CA; i.e. originating from 6 rings) relative abundance in SOC increased at deeper soil depths indicating a higher degree of aromatic condensation and biochemical stability at depth, but this was statistically significant only for SP and WCP, and not ACF (Figure 3). The low concentration of BPCA in SOC_R precluded further analysis of that fraction (data not shown).

Figure 3. Relationship between benzenhexacarboxylic acid (B6CA) relative abundance and soil depth in longleaf pine stands located in the Southern Piedmont (SP) and Western Coastal Plain (WCP). No significant relationship was observed at the Atlantic Coast Flatwoods (ACF) sites.

3.5. Radiocarbon

Soil was most ^{14}C depleted at depth; Fm declined with depth for all of the SOC pools (Table 6). Soil depth and MLRA explained most of the variation in Fm for SOC, SOC_{OX} , and SOC_{R} , and there were no significant MLRA by depth interactions. Both soil depth (SOC: $F=43.1$, $p<0.0001$; SOC_{OX} : $F=67.1$, $p<0.0001$; and SOC_{R} : $F=35.6$, $p<0.0001$) and MLRA (SOC: $F=17.9$, $p=0.0055$; SOC_{OX} : $F=12.0$, $p<0.0001$; and SOC_{R} : $F=46.1$, $p<0.0001$) affected Fm. Fm predicted the continuum of stability as expected where the least resistant fraction had the greatest proportion of modern C, the oxidation resistant fraction had the least proportion of modern C, indicating increased persistence in the environment, and the combination of the two was intermediate i.e: $\text{Fm: SOC}_{\text{OX}} > \text{SOC} > \text{SOC}_{\text{R}}$ (Table 6). Fm values of SOC_{OX} were similar between the MLRAs, though Fm of SOC_{R} in SP was much lower than WCP or ACF (Table 6).

Table 6. Mean (SE) fraction modern (Fm) and modeled mean residence time of SOC, SOC_{ox} and SOC_R in soil by depth in longleaf pine forests. Within each MLRA, means followed by the same letter are not significantly different at the alpha = 0.05 level using the Bonferroni adjustment.

MLRA	Depth (cm)	n	SOC Fm		SOC _{ox} Fm		SOC _R Fm		SOC [*] MRT (years)		SOC _{ox} [*] MRT (years)		SOC _R [*] MRT (years)	
ACF	0 to 10	4	1.07 (<0.01)	<i>a</i>	1.12 (0.02)	<i>a</i>	0.87 (0.03)	<i>a</i>	123 (7)	<i>a</i>	63 (13)	<i>a</i>	1345 (338)	<i>a</i>
	10 to 20	4	1.01 (0.01)	<i>ab</i>	1.06 (0.01)	<i>ab</i>	0.75 (0.05)	<i>ab</i>	290 (66)	<i>a</i>	142 (12)	<i>ab</i>	2870 (681)	<i>ab</i>
	20 to 50	4	0.88 (0.06)	<i>bc</i>	0.97 (0.03)	<i>bc</i>	0.58 (0.09)	<i>bc</i>	1473 (731)	<i>b</i>	530 (208)	<i>bc</i>	7289 (2998)	<i>bc</i>
	50 to 100	4	0.75 (0.04)	<i>c</i>	0.89 (0.02)	<i>c</i>	0.54 (0.07)	<i>c</i>	2891 (725)	<i>b</i>	1102(165)	<i>c</i>	7691 (2228)	<i>c</i>
SP	0 to 10	5	0.97 (0.03)	<i>a</i>	1.03 (0.03)	<i>a</i>	0.66 (0.03)	<i>a</i>	541 (189)	<i>a</i>	274 (144)	<i>a</i>	4344 (581)	<i>a</i>
	10 to 20	5	0.90 (0.03)	<i>a</i>	1.01 (0.03)	<i>ab</i>	0.48 (0.03)	<i>ab</i>	1112 (209)	<i>a</i>	322 (90)	<i>a</i>	8882 (1016)	<i>ab</i>
	20 to 50	5	0.76 (0.06)	<i>b</i>	0.94 (0.02)	<i>b</i>	0.41 (0.05)	<i>bc</i>	2927 (1001)	<i>b</i>	743 (149)	<i>b</i>	12917 (2790)	<i>bc</i>
	50 to 100	5	0.58 (0.05)	<i>c</i>	0.86 (0.04)	<i>b</i>	0.28 (0.04)	<i>c</i>	6226 (1203)	<i>c</i>	1521 (417)	<i>b</i>	22626 (3973)	<i>c</i>
WCP	0 to 10	5	1.03 (0.01)	<i>a</i>	1.06 (0.01)	<i>a</i>	0.88 (0.03)	<i>a</i>	200 (20)	<i>a</i>	144 (16)	<i>a</i>	1223 (243)	<i>a</i>
	10 to 20	5	0.98 (0.01)	<i>a</i>	0.99 (0.01)	<i>ab</i>	0.81 (0.02)	<i>ab</i>	452 (38)	<i>a</i>	360 (32)	<i>b</i>	1990 (272)	<i>a</i>
	20 to 50	5	0.89 (0.01)	<i>a</i>	0.94 (0.01)	<i>b</i>	0.63 (0.03)	<i>bc</i>	1090 (120)	<i>b</i>	687 (71)	<i>b</i>	4836 (610)	<i>b</i>
	50 to 100	5	0.67 (0.04)	<i>b</i>	0.75 (0.02)	<i>c</i>	0.51 (0.05)	<i>c</i>	4266 (702)	<i>c</i>	2802 (342)	<i>c</i>	8345 (1421)	<i>b</i>

*To meet assumption of homoscedasticity, variables were log transformed for statistical analysis. Non-transformed means and standard errors are presented.

MLRA=Major Land Resource Area (NRCS, 2006), ACF=Atlantic Coast Flatwoods, SP=Southern Piedmont, WCP=Western Coastal Plain

SOC is in a state of equilibrium where C is continually entering and leaving the soil, therefore a discrete “radiocarbon age” is not as appropriate as it would be with an object of a specific age such as a tree ring, bone, char fragment etc. The $\Delta^{14}\text{C}$ value was used to model MRT to give greater context to the radiocarbon data. SOC MRT ranged from 123 to 6226 years depending on depth (Table 6). With our approach it was not possible to separate PyC from SOC and obtain discrete estimate of PyC MRT. As previously noted, the majority of PyC (SP 90.8 %, WCP 92.2 %, ACP 86.5 %) was in the SOC_{ox} fraction, which is the least stable fraction with similar MRT’s across MLRAs (Table 6). SOC_{R} is the most stable fraction, MRT values were similar for WCP and ACF; MRTs were much longer for the stands in SP averaging 22,626 years at the 50 to 100 cm depth interval (Table 6). These results illustrate the longevity of C that is retained in forest soil and though SOC_{R} is a minority component of SOC, its MRT is a magnitude higher than the oxidizable fraction. Mean residence time of C may also be considered as a measure of annual turnover (Figure 4). The most rapid annual turnover rates (% C oxidized per year) were in the upper 10 cm of soil (SP 0.26 %, WCP 0.52%, ACF, 0.82 %), where rates from each MLRA were significantly different from each other.

Figure 4. Annual turnover of soil organic C (SOC) in relation to soil depth in longleaf pine stands in located in the Atlantic Coast Flatwoods (ACF), Southern Piedmont (SP) and Western Coastal Plain (WCP).

3.6. Soil Properties Associated with C Stabilization and Retention

Soil physical properties of bulk density and texture are summarized by MLRA and depth in Table 7. A wide range of soil texture combinations were observed: ACF soils were typified by deep sandy soil, SP soils had gradual increase in clay with depth, and WCP soils had a clay profile similar to SP but with a 20-26% silt fraction throughout the profile. WCP had the highest bulk density, while ACF soils were the least dense. Fe has been shown to form stable associations with C, therefore extractable Fe (Mehlich-3) was included in the analysis (Table 7). Extractable Fe declined significantly with depth at SP and WCP, but remained stable throughout the profile in ACF. Soils were acidic ranging from pH 4.28 to 5.04 (Table 7).

460 Table 7. Mean (SE) soil physical properties plus pH and extractable Fe content by depth in longleaf pine forests. Within each MLRA, means
 461 followed by the same letter are not significantly different at the alpha = 0.05 level using the Bonferroni adjustment.

MLRA	Depth (cm)	n	Bulk Density (g cm ²)		Sand (%)		Silt (%)		Clay (%)		pH		Fe (ppm)	
ACF	0 to 10	4	1.09 (0.09)	<i>a</i>	91.2 (3.3)	<i>a</i>	5.8 (1.9)	<i>a</i>	3.0 (1.4)	<i>a</i>	4.28 (0.06)	<i>a</i>	96.7 (35.3)	<i>a</i>
	10 to 20	4	1.30 (0.04)	<i>b</i>	91.2 (3.5)	<i>a</i>	5.2 (1.9)	<i>a</i>	3.7 (1.7)	<i>a</i>	4.46 (0.08)	<i>b</i>	97.5 (37.5)	<i>a</i>
	20 to 50	4	1.36 (0.05)	<i>b</i>	88.8 (4.1)	<i>a</i>	5.3 (1.7)	<i>a</i>	5.8 (2.4)	<i>a</i>	4.80 (0.06)	<i>c</i>	74.9 (18.5)	<i>a</i>
	50 to 100	4	1.49 (0.04)	<i>b</i>	86.3 (4.2)	<i>a</i>	4.5 (1.3)	<i>a</i>	9.2 (2.9)	<i>a</i>	4.83(0.05)	<i>c</i>	93.9 (20.6)	<i>a</i>
SP	0 to 10	5	1.30 (0.10)	<i>a</i>	83.0 (0.6)	<i>a</i>	8.1 (0.4)	<i>a</i>	8.9 (0.4)	<i>a</i>	4.98 (0.09)	<i>a</i>	122.2 (11.5)	<i>a</i>
	10 to 20	5	1.55 (0.07)	<i>b</i>	79.5 (1.9)	<i>b</i>	8.0 (0.3)	<i>a</i>	12.5 (1.9)	<i>b</i>	4.97 (0.06)	<i>a</i>	94.3 (7.9)	<i>b</i>
	20 to 50	5	1.58 (0.05)	<i>b</i>	73.3 (1.8)	<i>c</i>	8.7 (0.6)	<i>a</i>	18.0 (2.2)	<i>c</i>	4.96 (0.09)	<i>a</i>	69.7 (7.3)	<i>bc</i>
	50 to 100	5	1.53 (0.03)	<i>b</i>	63.1 (4.5)	<i>d</i>	7.9 (0.4)	<i>a</i>	29.0 (4.8)	<i>d</i>	4.90 (0.08)	<i>a</i>	40.1 (2.4)	<i>c</i>
WCP	0 to 10	5	1.44 (0.06)	<i>a</i>	67.0 (2.5)	<i>a</i>	25.9 (2.2)	<i>a</i>	7.1 (1.1)	<i>a</i>	5.01 (0.08)	<i>a</i>	152.4 (16.2)	<i>a</i>
	10 to 20	5	1.69 (0.06)	<i>b</i>	64.4 (2.8)	<i>b</i>	24.8 (2.4)	<i>a</i>	10.8 (1.9)	<i>b</i>	5.02 (0.06)	<i>a</i>	114.2 (15.8)	<i>b</i>
	20 to 50	5	1.64 (0.03)	<i>ab</i>	58.7 (3.8)	<i>c</i>	23.4 (2.2)	<i>ab</i>	17.9 (4.0)	<i>c</i>	5.04 (0.04)	<i>a</i>	65.0 (16.9)	<i>c</i>
	50 to 100	5	1.77 (0.05)	<i>b</i>	54.3 (3.3)	<i>c</i>	20.5 (2.6)	<i>b</i>	25.2 (3.7)	<i>d</i>	4.94 (0.03)	<i>a</i>	34.9 (4.5)	<i>c</i>

462 MLRA=Major Land Resource Area (NRCS, 2006), ACF=Atlantic Coast Flatwoods, SP=Southern Piedmont, WCP=Western Coastal Plain

The dependence of SOC, SOC_{OX}, SOC_R and PyC concentrations on soil depth, texture, bulk density and extractable Fe was analyzed with stepwise linear multiple regression (Table 8). After examination of the residual vs predicted values, it was deemed necessary to log transform the soil C variables. Bias from log transformation was corrected using a method described by Snowden (1991). Soil depth was the primary driver of the models as soil C across fractions was highest near the surface and declined with depth. Since soil texture, BD and Fe concentrations are all influenced by depth (Table 7), it was important to retain depth in the model to avoid causality with soil parameters that are themselves affected by depth. All of the model parameters had low variance inflation factors (<5) indicating that the parameters had minimal collinearity. Both Fe and clay can stabilize C in soil and are representative of absorptive capacity of the soil for C. Fe was positively associated with concentration of all soil C fractions, accounting for 10% of the variation in SOC_R and 7% of the variation in PyC (Table 8). Clay content was positively associated with C concentration (or conversely negative association with sand) and accounted for 15% of the variation in SOC_R. Bulk density was also negatively associated with SOC_{OX}, and SOC_R (Table 8).

3.7. Soil properties and soil C fractions associated with residence time of soil C

The dependence of SOC_{OX} MRT and SOC_R MRT concentrations on soil depth, texture, bulk density and extractable Fe was analyzed with stepwise linear multiple regression similar to the approach with C concentrations (Table 8). In addition to the aforementioned parameters, SOC_R/SOC *100 (%) and PyC/SOC *100 (%) were included in stepwise selection process for SOC MRT to include the contribution of SOC_R and PyC content to the overall model for SOC. To meet the assumption of homoscedasticity it was necessary to log transform all MRT values.

485 Table 8. Linear regression model parameters and fit statistics for soil C fraction concentration and C
 486 mean residence time of soil samples collected at four depths from 14 longleaf pine stands (n=56). All
 487 dependent variables were modeled with soil depth, bulk density (BD), % sand, % silt, % clay, extractable
 488 Fe (ppm). All models were highly significant ($p < 0.0001$).

Dep. variable	Significant parameters	Estimate	SE	VIF	p	Part. R^2	Model R^2	CF	RMSE
lnSOC	y0	-0.39876	0.22810	0	0.0865				
	Depth	-0.02126	0.00315	1.97560	<0.0001	0.6034	0.6784	1.1109	0.4391
	Fe	0.00485	0.00159	1.61999	0.0037	0.0412			
	Clay	0.01895	0.00820	1.79777	0.0249	0.0337			
lnSOC _{OX}	y0	2.41289	0.93447	0	0.00128				
	Depth	-0.02174	0.00320	1.80391	<0.0001	0.6280	0.7225	1.1104	0.4664
	Fe	0.00424	0.00164	1.52243	0.0126	0.0364			
	Sand	-0.01921	0.00601	1.76704	0.0024	0.0304			
	BD	-0.87857	0.39406	1.84134	0.0303	0.0276			
lnSOC _R	y0	-2.62703	0.89226	0	0.0049				
	Depth	-0.01067	0.00258	2.14226	0.0001	0.2641	0.6307	1.0546	0.3455
	Clay	0.05224	0.01005	4.36933	<0.0001	0.1492			
	Fe	0.00543	0.00130	1.75791	0.0001	0.1047			
	BD	-0.91864	0.29581	1.89001	0.0032	0.0771			
	Sand	0.01415	0.00651	3.77281	0.0346	0.0356			
lnPyC	y0	-2.12723	0.61669	0	0.0011				
	Depth	-0.02423	0.00423	1.71270	<0.0001	0.5456	0.6506	1.1332	0.6333
	Fe	0.00728	0.00222	1.52223	0.0019	0.0734			
	Sand	-0.01438	0.00670	1.19041	0.0366	0.0316			
lnSOC _{OX} MRT	y0	2.29411	0.51102	0	<0.0001				
	Depth	0.02914	0.00289	1.22217	<0.0001	0.6981	0.7987	1.0866	0.5252
	BD	1.85970	0.36150	1.22217	<0.0001	0.1005			
lnSOC _R MRT	y0	9.46139	1.47316	0	<0.0001				
	Depth	0.01101	0.00426	1.83984	0.0127	0.4178	0.6068	1.1523	0.6307
	Sand	-0.02934	0.01177	3.78014	0.0160	0.0806			
	Silt	-0.07884	0.01691	3.15899	<0.0001	0.0690			
	BD	1.22079	0.53933	1.88617	0.0279	0.0395			
LnSOC* MRT	y0	2.40683	0.48026	0	<0.0001				
	Depth	0.01962	0.00335	2.10366	<0.0001	0.7115	0.8792	0.9869	0.4526
	SOC _R /SOC%	0.05624	0.00762	1.72441	<0.0001	0.0960			
	BD	1.76659	0.32110	1.29820	<0.0001	0.0717			

489 * SOC_R/SOC % and PyC/SOC % included in the stepwise selection process

490 VIF=variance inflation factor, CF=correction factor per Snowdon (1991), RSME=root square mean error

Soil depth and bulk density were associated with increased residence time for both SOC_{OX} MRT and SOC_R MRT. SOC_R MRT was negatively associated with sand and silt, inferring a positive relationship with clay content (Table 8). As SOC MRT is the sum total of the contributions of SOC_{OX} MRT and SOC_R MRT, it was positively associated with depth and BD. SOC_R/SOC (%) contributed an additional 10% to the SOC MRT regression model ($R^2 = 0.88$) though PyC/SOC (%) was not retained in the model at the $p < 0.05$ level. Pooling data from all depths from the 14 longleaf pine stands, SOC_R/SOC increased with SOC MRT, while PyC/SOC declined with SOC MRT (Figure 5). These results indicate that SOC_R and not PyC is driving long term stabilization of C in these forests.

Figure 5. Relationship between the proportion of oxidation resistant soil organic C (SOC_R) and pyrogenic C (PyC) in soil organic C (SOC) with mean residence time (MRT) of C in soil, SOC_R: $y = 13.2875 + 0.0038x$, $p < 0.0001$, $R^2 = 0.63$; PyC: $y = 6.892 - 0.0006x$, $p < 0.0001$, $R^2 = 0.27$

4. Discussion

4.1. Chemical Fractionation

We employed a pure chemical fractionation which had been shown to isolate charcoal in organic soils (Kurth *et al.*, 2006; Ball *et al.*, 2010) as well as mineral protected C in both organic and mineral soils (Eusterhues *et al.*, 2005). This chemical-only approach simplifies the analysis and yields a highly resistant fraction, but there remains the possibility that the digest may have oxidized some C that was otherwise stable, or conversely may have retained some hydrophobic C forms or aliphatic organic matter which resists H₂O₂ degradation (Eusterhues *et al.*, 2005). Other approaches that employ both physical and chemical fraction with milder digests, i.e. NaOCl are more time consuming, but further characterize fractions by C activity e.g. active, intermediate, passive (Zimmermann *et al.*, 2007). For example, Wiesmeier *et al.* (2014) surveyed major soil areas in Bavaria to 1 m using this approach and was able to further characterize the nature of functional soil pools across several land uses (grass, crop, forest, etc.). Removal of dissolved and particulate organic C (active pool) lowered the intermediate activity pool in forests to 53% of SOC, which is lower than we report for our SOC_{ox} fraction.

4.2. SOC and stand age

The present study found no effect of stand age or biomass accumulation on any soil C parameter using a chronosequence approach. These results are similar to reports from other southern pine plantations where little (Richter *et al.*, 1999) or no increase in soil C was detectable over time (Markewitz *et al.*, 2002; Johnson *et al.*, 2003; Johnsen *et al.*, 2013). Though seldom available, the use of archived soils e.g. (Richter *et al.*, 1999; Hammes *et al.*,

2008) provides a more powerful means of detecting change over time than chronosequence, which are often point-in-time collections across diverse soil types with differing mineralogy (Richter *et al.*, 2007). Across a variety of forest types, even large ecosystem disturbances from harvesting and replanting generally have little to no long-term effect on soil C (Johnson *et al.*, 2002). In the time scale of a longleaf pine rotation (~50 to 100 yrs) sequestration of atmospheric C is driven by biomass accumulation rather than storage in soil (Samuelson *et al.*, 2016). Concentrations of SOC and all of the representative fractions (SOC_{OX}, SOC_R and PyC) were greatest near the surface and declined with soil depth. Although subsoils have relatively low C concentrations, they account for the majority of soil C stocks when the total depth and density of soil are considered (Rumpel and Kogel-Knabner, 2011).

4.3. Residence time of soil C

C turnover was more rapid at shallow depths and C that remained at deeper depths was slower cycling and more resistant to oxidation. It is widely observed that the MRT of soil C typically increases with soil depth, though the specific mechanisms of C persistence may be complex and difficult to identify (Rumpel and Kogel-Knabner, 2011). Long-term persistence may result from the formation of highly stabilized C compounds via biochemical processes or association with clay minerals and Fe (Scharpenseel and Becker-Heidmann, 1992; Eusterhues *et al.*, 2003; Dick *et al.*, 2005; Eusterhues *et al.*, 2005; Rumpel *et al.*, 2008). It is also possible that microbes in deep soils function in a relatively closed system, where old C is recycled and reincorporated until disturbance allows entry of new, younger labile C forms (Gleixner *et al.*,

2002). Additionally, persistent SOC fractions have been shown to be highly hydrophobic (von Lutzow *et al.*, 2006), a property which would limit enzymatic/microbial access.

In the present study, SOC, SOC_{ox}, and SOC_R MRTs ranged from hundreds of years in the near surface to several thousand years at depths of 1 m. The efficiency of oxidation declined with depth, and MRT values were similar to those reported by Eusterhues *et al.* (2005). Isolating the contribution of the mechanisms that control soil C persistence is confounded by interactions with soil depth, though we were able to identify associations between bulk density, clay content and SOC_R ratio with MRT. Once C is stabilized into a clay complex it is not readily exchanged with younger organic matter moving through the soil profile (Scharpenseel and Becker-Heidmann, 1992). Maximum ¹⁴C MRT of the soil profile and clay content was compared to values reported for six Alfisols by Scharpenseel and Becker-Heidmann (1992) (Figure 6). The slopes of the regression lines were similar, though the Y-intercept of the Ultisols in the present study was more than double that of Alfisols (Figure 6). In general, Ultisols are highly acidic and have reduced cation exchange capacity compared to well-buffered Alfisols, which have greater plant available nutrients and productivity that may affect C turnover. Values of SOC_R MRT were similar to those reported by Eusterhues *et al.* (2005), with the exception of the SP sites which were 3 to 4 times longer than either study. Based on clay content and extractable Fe, there does not appear to be a difference between sites commensurate to very long SOC_R MRT's at the

Figure 6. Relationship between maximum ¹⁴C MRT and clay content observed in the present study (solid line) from sites in the Atlantic Coast Flatwoods (ACF), Southern Piedmont (SP) and Western Coastal Plain (WCP) and six Alfisol profiles presented by Scharpenseel and Becker-Heidmann (1992) (dashed line).

SP sites. Differences in clay mineralogy between MLRAs could contribute to the enhanced SOC_R residence time observed at SP, though our study did not examine mineralogy, nor was it designed to capture the diversity of clay mineralogy across the range of longleaf pine. There is also the possibility that geogenic C, which is >50,000 years old and has no ¹⁴C activity, was present in small quantities and affected the MRT (Helfrich *et al.*, 2007).

4.4. Role of PyC

PyC can play important roles in soil C sequestration and stabilization, as well as in enhancing fertility by improving nutrient retention and cation exchange capacity in soil (Glaser *et al.*, 2001; Liang *et al.*, 2006). Considering the importance of frequent low intensity fires in

580 longleaf pine ecosystems, we expected PyC to contribute to long-term sequestration, however
581 the results did not support this hypothesis. PyC represented 5-7% of SOC and the majority of
582 PyC was in the least persistent SOC_{ox} fraction with residence times one tenth that of SOC_R.
583 Possible explanations for this observation include rapid degradation of PyC under
584 environmental conditions and offsite transport of PyC. We used a conservative multiplier (2.27)
585 to account for the loss of PyC during the formation of BPCAs (Glaser *et al.*, 1998). A recent study
586 by Cotrufo *et al.* (2016a) reports a correction factor of approximately 4 for mineral soil from 0
587 to 5 and 5 to 15 cm depths, based on comparisons of BPCA, hydrogen pyrolysis and mid
588 infrared spectroscopy. As soils in the present study were from warm, humid environments
589 conducive to oxidation and collected from depths to 1 m where remaining PyC may exhibit
590 increases in aromatic condensation, we chose to present the conservative estimates.

591 While pyrogenic transformation of C can lead to biochemical stability for millennia, PyC
592 is not immune to decomposition. A synthesis by Singh *et al.* (2012) concluded that PyC MRT
593 ranged on the order of centuries, similar to the MRT of slow cycling PyOM (500 to 600 years)
594 described by Knicker *et al.* (2013) and the MRT of SOC_{ox} in the present study. Hammes *et al.*
595 (2008) demonstrated after the cessation of grassland fires in a Russia Steppe in 1900, the stocks
596 of PyC in soil declined by 25% over the next century and the turnover time was 293 years. In a
597 subsequent study of the forest fire southern Spain reported by Knicker *et al.* (2013), repeated
598 forest fire events had little impact on soil C contents and physical properties, though significant,
599 albeit small increases in aromaticity were observed (Lopez-Martin *et al.*, 2016). Based on the
600 loss of charcoal content over time, Lopez-Martin *et al.* (2016) concluded that the impact of the
601 fires on SOM is limited to the decadal time scale. Several studies have documented factors

affecting PyC decomposition rates under laboratory and field conditions e.g. Cheng *et al.* (2006); Liang *et al.* (2008); Nguyen and Lehmann (2009); Zimmerman (2010); Foereid *et al.* (2011). The potential recalcitrance of PyC that does remain on site in forest soil is highly dependent on feedstock, temperature and aeration during formation, environmental conditions favoring decomposition, binding with soil minerals as well as physical protection after formation, i.e. charcoal left on the surface is susceptible to re-ignition in subsequent fires or erosion. In general, low temperature combustion yields PyC with less aromatic condensation e.g. Soucemarianadin *et al.* (2013) and Schneider *et al.* (2010), that is more susceptible to decomposition than PyC formed at higher combustion temperatures (Nguyen and Lehmann, 2009; Zimmerman, 2010). Soucemarianadin *et al.* (2015) found that early-season fires in boreal black spruce forests produce PyC with low intrinsic recalcitrance and this phenomenon may be occurring in longleaf pine forests. The majority of fires in longleaf pine stands are not stand replacing events and result in very different combustion conditions and pyrogenic products than wildfires in the western United States (Campbell *et al.*, 2007).

Most newly formed PyC is concentrated in the lightest fraction on the soil surface and is susceptible to rapid offsite transport via surface flow and leaching (Velasco-Molina *et al.*, 2016) following precipitation unless it mixed with mineral soil (Cotrufo *et al.*, 2016b). The material may be biochemically stable and sequestered from the atmosphere, but much of it may be removed and ultimately deposited in marine systems instead of the point of production in forests (Masiello and Druffel, 1998; Jaffe *et al.*, 2013; Bird *et al.*, 2015). In the longleaf pine stands sampled, there was little mixing of PyC with mineral soil and when combined with 1000 to 1500 mm annual precipitation typical of the region, PyC would receive minimal protection.

Decomposition and offsite transport are both reasonable mechanisms to explain why less PyC is retained in forest soils than would be expected from PyC production estimates. Little to no research has been conducted to distill the contribution of the two. To better assess the contribution of each mechanism, new research where high frequency sampling of soil surfaces, soil, surface flow and ground water is required.

4.5. Edaphic factors associated with SOC stocks

While depth explained most of the variation in each C fraction, clay and extractable Fe were positively associated with C retention. Mehlich-3 extractable Fe (M-3) comprised the collective pool of exchangeable Fe (from cation exchange sites) as well as Fe readily soluble at low pH. This easily soluble pool is most likely sourced from poorly crystalline Fe hydroxide phases as evidenced by weak correlations of M-3 extractable Fe with oxalate extractable Fe (Marcos *et al.*, 1998). Together clay and Fe (M-3) give some measure of potential mineral association related to C stabilization. Poorly crystalline Fe hydroxides have been specifically linked to the retention of microbial sugars in subsoil horizons (Schoening *et al.*, 2005; Spielvogel *et al.*, 2008). Fe and clay stabilize C via mineral association in forms that may persist for thousands of years (Scharpenseel and Becker-Heidmann, 1992; Eusterhues *et al.*, 2005). C is moving from biomass pools to soil, but the capacity to stabilize and retain that C is limited. Richter *et al.* (1999) described a similar situation in a loblolly pine plantation at the Calhoun Experimental Forest where C retention in soil was not source limited, but rather storage limited in coarse soils with little absorptive capacity for C.

Conclusions

Total soil C stocks (0-1m) in longleaf pine stands ranged from 44.1 to 98.1 ($\bar{x}$ = 77.0) Mg C ha⁻¹, and variation in soil C concentration was largely dependent on depth, though positive association with clay and extractable Fe content were found. PyC was a minor component of bulk SOC, comprising 5-7% of the total SOC stock. The majority of PyC was in the oxidizable fraction, which was found to have an estimated MRT almost a magnitude lower than the resistant fraction. This indicates that PyC is not contributing substantially to long-term C accumulation in soil within the forest stand where it was produced. There was no enhanced accumulation or deposits of PyC with depth (to 1 m), PyC declined in proportion with SOC, conversely the proportion of SOC_R in SOC increased with depth. The estimated MRT of SOC in surface soils was hundreds of years, and at depths > 50 cm estimated MRT increased to thousands of years. Despite the flow of C from biomass in the form of decay products, litter fall, root turnover and pulses of PyC, soils retained little of the new C, which may be rapidly oxidized, lost to the atmosphere from periodic fires or in the case of PyC may be transported out of the system. Our results indicate that soils are not strong sinks for atmospheric CO₂ compared to C accumulation in biomass in longleaf pine forests.

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