



Ryan, E. M., Ogle, K., Peltier, D., Walker, A. P., De Kauwe, M. G., Medlyn, B. E., Williams, D. G., Parton, W., Asao, S., Guenet, B., Harper, A. B., Lu, X., Luus, K. A., Zaehle, S., Shu, S., Werner, C., Xia, J., & Pendall, E. (2017). Gross primary production responses to warming, elevated CO<sub>2</sub>, and irrigation: quantifying the drivers of ecosystem physiology in a semiarid grassland. *Global Change Biology*, 23(8), 3092-3106. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gcb.13602>

Peer reviewed version

Link to published version (if available):  
[10.1111/gcb.13602](https://doi.org/10.1111/gcb.13602)

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**Gross primary production responses to warming, elevated CO<sub>2</sub>, and irrigation:  
quantifying the drivers of ecosystem physiology in a semiarid grassland**

Edmund M. Ryan<sup>1\*</sup>, Kiona Ogle<sup>2,3</sup>, Drew Peltier<sup>3</sup>, Anthony P. Walker<sup>4</sup>, Martin G. De Kauwe<sup>5</sup>,  
Belinda E. Medlyn<sup>6</sup>, David G Williams<sup>7</sup>, William Parton<sup>8</sup>, Shinichi Asao<sup>8</sup>, Bertrand Guenet<sup>9</sup>,  
Anna Harper<sup>10</sup>, Xingjie Lu<sup>11</sup>, Kristina A. Luus<sup>12,13</sup>, Sönke Zaehle<sup>12</sup>, Shijie Shu<sup>14</sup>, Christian  
Werner<sup>15</sup>, Jianyang Xia<sup>16,17</sup>, Elise Pendall<sup>6,7</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Lancaster Environment Centre, Lancaster, UK.

<sup>2</sup>School of Informatics, Computing, and Cyber Systems, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff,  
Arizona, USA

<sup>3</sup>Department of Biological Sciences, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, Arizona, USA

<sup>4</sup>Environmental Sciences Division and Climate Change Science Institute, Oak Ridge National  
Laboratory, Oak Ridge, Tennessee, USA.

<sup>5</sup>Macquarie University, Department of Biological Sciences, New South Wales 2109, Australia

<sup>6</sup>Hawkesbury Institute for the Environment, Western Sydney University, Penrith, NSW,  
Australia.

<sup>7</sup>University of Wyoming, Department of Botany, Laramie, WY, USA

<sup>8</sup>Natural Resource Ecology Laboratory, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80523-1499  
USA.

<sup>9</sup>Laboratoire des Sciences du Climat et de l'Environnement, LSCE/IPSL, CEA-CNRS-UVSQ,  
Université Paris-Saclay, F-91191 Gif-sur-Yvette, France.

<sup>10</sup>College of Engineering, Mathematics, and Physical Sciences, University of Exeter, Exeter, UK

<sup>11</sup>CSIRO Ocean and Atmosphere, PBM #1, Aspendale, Victoria 3195, Australia.

<sup>12</sup>Biogeochemical Integration Department, Max Planck Institute for Biogeochemistry, Hans-  
Knöll-Str. 10, 07745 Jena, Germany.

<sup>13</sup>Now at: Dublin Institute of Technology, Dublin, Ireland.

<sup>14</sup>Department of Atmospheric Sciences, University of Illinois, 105 South Gregory Street, Urbana, Illinois 61801-3070, USA.

<sup>15</sup>Senckenberg Biodiversity and Climate Research Centre (BiKF), Senckenberganlage 25, 60325 Frankfurt, Germany.

<sup>16</sup>Department of Microbiology & Plant Biology, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK 73019 USA

<sup>17</sup>Research Center for Global Change and Ecological Forecasting, East China Normal University, Shanghai 200062, China.

\*Corresponding author:

Lancaster Environment Centre,

Bailrigg, Lancaster.

LA1 4YW

UK

Tel: 00 44 (0) 1524 662206

Email: [edmund.ryan@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:edmund.ryan@lancaster.ac.uk)

*Keywords:* gross primary production, elevated CO<sub>2</sub>, warming, multi-factor global change experiment, Bayesian modelling, carbon cycle, grasslands

For submission to: *Global Change Biology*

1 **Abstract**

2 Determining whether the terrestrial biosphere will be a source or sink of carbon (C) under a  
3 future climate of elevated CO<sub>2</sub> (eCO<sub>2</sub>) and warming requires accurate quantification of gross  
4 primary production (GPP), the largest flux of C in the global C cycle. We evaluated six years  
5 (2007-2012) of flux-derived GPP data (~2500 values) from the Prairie Heating and CO<sub>2</sub>  
6 Enrichment (PHACE) experiment, situated in a mixed prairie grassland in Wyoming, USA. The  
7 GPP data were used to calibrate a light response model whose basic formulation has been  
8 successfully used in a variety of ecosystems. The model, however, was extended to allow for  
9 variable maximum photosynthetic rate ( $A_{\max}$ ) and light-use efficiency (Q) by modeling these  
10 terms as functions of time varying driving variables (soil water content, air temperature, vapor  
11 pressure deficit, vegetation greenness, nitrogen) at current and antecedent (past) time scales. The  
12 model fit the observed GPP well ( $R^2 = 0.79$ ), which was confirmed by other model performance  
13 checks (deviance information criterion and posterior predictive loss) that compared different  
14 variants of the model (e.g., with and without antecedent effects). Stimulation of cumulative six-  
15 year GPP by warming (29%,  $P=0.02$ ) and eCO<sub>2</sub> (26%,  $P=0.07$ ) was primarily driven by  
16 enhanced C uptake during spring (129%,  $P=0.001$ ) and fall (124%,  $P=0.001$ ), respectively, which  
17 were consistent across each year. Antecedent air temperature ( $T_{\text{air,ant}}$ ) and vapor pressure deficit  
18 ( $\text{VPD}_{\text{ant}}$ ) effects on  $A_{\max}$  (over the past 3-4 days and 1-3 days, respectively) were the most  
19 significant predictors of temporal variability in GPP among most treatments. The importance of  
20  $\text{VPD}_{\text{ant}}$  suggests that atmospheric drought plays an important role for predicting GPP under  
21 current and future climate. Given the limited research supporting the role of  $\text{VPD}_{\text{ant}}$  in this  
22 context, we highlight the need for experimental studies to identify the mechanisms underlying  
23 such antecedent effects. The small uncertainty on the six-year GPP estimates under the control

**Commented [ER1]:** I've removed the speculative comment about 'mechanisms for extending the growing season', based on the first reviewer's comments. I've merged the two sentences that were here into one.

1 and eCO<sub>2</sub> treatments suggest that they could be used as valuable (semi-)independent data streams  
2 that terrestrial biosphere (TBMs) can be compared against. We demonstrate this with 12 TBMs.

**Commented [ER2]:** New text, in response to the first reviewer who wanted something mentioned in the abstract about the TBMs. However, this means that the current word count for abstract is 333. The limit is 300 words. To reduce this, I could delete the previous sentence ("Given the limited research ...") which we only included in response to the review from NP. Thoughts?

#### 4 **Introduction**

5 Gross primary production (GPP) is the largest flux in the global carbon (C) cycle, representing  
6 the gross amount of C removed from the atmosphere by plants via photosynthesis at the  
7 ecosystem scale (Chapin III et al., 2006). GPP represents the input of C into the terrestrial  
8 biosphere, which plays an important role in determining the magnitudes of the flows and stores  
9 of C within plants and soil (Beer et al., 2010, Williams et al., 2005). Despite its importance,  
10 there remains large uncertainty in global model projections of future GPP – both globally and  
11 regionally – under anticipated future levels of CO<sub>2</sub> and warming (Richardson et al., 2013, Arora  
12 et al., 2013), and there is an urgent need to determine the causes of these uncertainties  
13 (Friedlingstein et al., 2014). Improved accuracy of these model predictions is critical in  
14 determining whether the terrestrial biosphere is likely to be a future sink or source of C.

15 While the responses of net primary production (NPP) to elevated CO<sub>2</sub> (eCO<sub>2</sub>) are well-  
16 studied, less work has directly evaluated GPP, partly because it is not directly measurable. The  
17 few studies that exist on the singular effect of eCO<sub>2</sub> on GPP report a positive effect. For  
18 example, Wittig *et al.* (2005) found a ~80% stimulation of GPP for *Populus* trees growing under  
19 eCO<sub>2</sub> over a three year period. Likewise, using three years of leaf-level photosynthesis data, Luo  
20 et al. (2001) found a ~40% increase in modelled GPP under eCO<sub>2</sub>. A stimulation of NPP under  
21 eCO<sub>2</sub> suggests a stimulation of GPP if it is assumed that NPP is proportional to GPP (Williams et  
22 al., 2005, Waring et al., 1998). A ~20% increase in NPP under eCO<sub>2</sub> would be expected in mid-  
23 latitudes (Luo et al., 2006). The expected responses, however, are highly uncertain in semi-arid

1 grasslands, which exhibit large variation in NPP responses to eCO<sub>2</sub> (0-100%); this variation is  
2 primarily driven by spatial and temporal precipitation variability (Polley et al., 2013). The  
3 stimulation of NPP by eCO<sub>2</sub> has been shown to be suppressed if the ecosystem is nitrogen  
4 limited (Norby and Zak, 2011). GPP should also be affected by responses of leaf-level  
5 photosynthesis at light saturation ( $A_{sat}$ ), which increases with eCO<sub>2</sub> in trees (~45%), grasses  
6 (~35%), shrubs (~20%) and crops (~35%) (Ainsworth and Long, 2005), but scaling from leaf-  
7 level  $A_{sat}$  to ecosystem-level GPP is fraught with uncertainties (Arp, 1991, McLeod and Long,  
8 1999, Morgan et al., 2001).

9 Warming affects GPP directly through the effect of temperature on leaf photosynthesis,  
10 and indirectly via alterations in nitrogen mineralization and water availability (Ciais et al., 2014,  
11 Cox et al., 2000). As with eCO<sub>2</sub>, a stimulation of NPP under warming suggests a stimulation of  
12 GPP if it is assumed that NPP is proportional to GPP (Williams et al., 2005, Waring et al., 1998).  
13 Terrestrial biosphere models (TBMs) predict a reduction in NPP with long-term warming; if  
14 warming reaches 3-5 °C by 2100 under a high CO<sub>2</sub> emissions scenario (Collins et al., 2013),  
15 global terrestrial NPP may decrease by 15-100% (10–60 PgC/year) (Sitch et al., 2008,  
16 Friedlingstein et al., 2006, Roy et al., 2001). Retrospective analyses also show a negative effect  
17 of warming on NPP, such as a ~9% decrease in global NPP between 1980 and 2002, which offset  
18 the CO<sub>2</sub> fertilization effect (Magnani et al., 2007). However, the magnitude of the GPP and NPP  
19 responses to warming varies among biomes, with northern latitudes expected to exhibit the  
20 largest increases (Piao et al., 2008, Rustad, 2008, Landsberg and Waring, 1997). At the site  
21 level, a meta-analysis of 32 separate warming experiments found a positive effect of warming on  
22 NPP for tundra sites, but no effect for temperate forest and grassland sites (Rustad et al., 2001).  
23 At the regional level, a surface temperature increase of 2 °C between 1988 and 2008 in northern

1 latitudes stimulated GPP during the spring and fall (Piao et al., 2008, Rustad, 2008, Landsberg  
2 and Waring, 1997).

3 TBM s assume that the interactive effect of eCO<sub>2</sub> and warming is positive (Luo et al.,  
4 2008, Norby and Luo, 2004). Field data from climate change experiments support this for  
5 certain years (Dukes et al., 2005), but over multiple years there is growing evidence that the  
6 positive interactive response does not exist or is not as strong as models suggest (Dieleman et al.,  
7 2012, Shaw et al., 2002). The effects of eCO<sub>2</sub> and warming – whether singular or combined –  
8 may be dependent upon precipitation inputs in water-limited ecosystems (Fay et al., 2003,  
9 Huxman et al., 2004, Knapp and Smith, 2001, Schwinning et al., 2004). For example, an  
10 experiment in a mixed C3/C4 semi-arid grassland found that aboveground NPP was increased by  
11 ~80% when annual precipitation was delivered in a few, large rain events compared to more  
12 frequent, smaller events (Heisler-White et al., 2008). Recent work has generalized this by  
13 considering the effect of past or antecedent conditions on primary production. For example,  
14 Ogle et al. (2015) found that event size and antecedent precipitation explained 75% of the  
15 variation in aboveground NPP (ANPP) in the same semi-arid grassland. Likewise, antecedent  
16 soil water content was a significant predictor of ANPP in a tall grass prairie (Sherry et al., 2008).

17 We identified three major knowledge gaps with regard to the response of GPP to climate  
18 change. First, few climate change experiments have investigated the combined effects of eCO<sub>2</sub>  
19 and warming on primary production (Luo et al., 2008). Second, most of the literature on the  
20 ecosystem responses of primary productivity to eCO<sub>2</sub> and warming are based on measurements  
21 of NPP (as highlighted above); very few evaluate GPP, yet this is critical for constraining  
22 predictions of C cycle responses to climate change (Norby and Luo, 2004). Third, while  
23 analyses of climate change experiments often report that treatment effects are contingent upon

1 background climate conditions (e.g., Morgan et al. 2011), the effects of antecedent climate  
2 conditions are often not evaluated.

3 To address these knowledge gaps, we measured and analyzed GPP for six years as part of  
4 the Prairie Heating and CO<sub>2</sub> Enrichment Experiment (PHACE). The experiment consisted of six  
5 treatments, four of which were applied in a full factorial design with CO<sub>2</sub> (ambient vs. elevated)  
6 and temperature (ambient vs. warming), and two others involved deep and shallow irrigation  
7 applied under ambient CO<sub>2</sub> and temperature. We drew upon this six-year dataset to address three  
8 questions: (1) How does GPP respond to the main and interactive effects of eCO<sub>2</sub> and warming  
9 in the context of variable precipitation? (2) What environmental and meteorological factors (e.g.,  
10 soil water content, antecedent conditions) govern potential responses of GPP to climate change?  
11 Finally, we illustrate how our modeling approach can be applied to generate more realistic data  
12 products for informing TBMs, and we ask: (3) How does the inclusion of antecedent conditions  
13 affect the magnitude and uncertainty in such GPP data products? Accurate estimation of  
14 uncertainty is essential in model evaluation exercises, and we provide a full accounting of  
15 uncertainty in our analyses.

16

## 17 **Materials and methods**

### 18 *Site description*

19 The PHACE site is situated near Cheyenne, Wyoming at an elevation of 1930 m, with a semi-  
20 arid, temperate climate. Thirty-year mean annual temperature is 8.3°C and precipitation is 378  
21 mm, with ~75% falling during the growing season (Zelikova et al., 2015). The vegetation is a  
22 mixed grass prairie, dominated by two C<sub>3</sub> grasses, western wheatgrass (*Pascopyrum smithii*  
23 (*Rydb.*) *A. Löve*) and needle-and-thread grass (*Hesperostipa comata Trin and Rupr.*), and the C<sub>4</sub>



1 perennial grass blue grama (*Bouteloua gracilis* (H.B.K.) Lag). Live plant cover ranges up to 70%  
2 of ground area (Zelikova et al., 2015), and roots extend to 40 cm with 75% of root biomass  
3 occurring above 15-cm depth (Carrillo et al., 2014). The soil is a fine-loamy, mixed, mesic  
4 Aridic Argiustoll, and biological crusts are not present (Bachman et al., 2010).

#### 5 *Experimental design*

6 The PHACE experiment was set up as an incomplete factorial design consisting of six treatments  
7 and five replicate plots (3.4 m in diameter) per treatments (Morgan et al., 2011). Four of the six  
8 treatments – abbreviated as ct, cT, Ct, CT – are a full factorial design of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>  
9 (ambient at 380-400 ppm [abbreviated as ‘c’] versus elevated at 600 ppm [‘C’]) and warming (no  
10 warming [‘t’] versus heated by 1.5 °C in the daytime and 3.0 °C in the nighttime [‘T’]). The  
11 increase in atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> (600 ppm) for the elevated CO<sub>2</sub> plots (Ct and CT) was achieved  
12 using Free Air CO<sub>2</sub> Enrichment (FACE) technology (Miglietta et al., 2001). Warming was  
13 simulated (cT and CT) by applying a ceramic heater system using a proportional-integral  
14 derivative (PID) feed-back loop (Kimball, 2005).

15 The final two treatments (cts and ctd) involve irrigation applied to ambient CO<sub>2</sub> and no  
16 warming plots (shallow [‘s’] or deep [‘d’] irrigation). In the context of the PHACE study, the  
17 main aim of the irrigation treatments was to test the hypothesis that responses to eCO<sub>2</sub> are  
18 indirectly due to increases in soil water. As such, water was applied to the cts and ctd plots in an  
19 effort to increase their soil water contents to match that of the Ct treatment. In the cts treatment,  
20 irrigation was applied when soil moisture fell below 85% of Ct at the 5-25 cm depth: in 2007,  
21 five, 18-mm precipitation events were applied (totaling 90 mm); during 2008-2011, three 21-mm  
22 events per year (totaling 63 mm each year), and 2012, four 65-mm events (totaling 260 mm)

1 were applied. The total amount of water applied to the ctd plots was the same as the cts plots,  
2 but water was only added twice per year (spring and fall), in approximately equal amounts.

### 3 *Data description*

4 All data were measured in the field from 2007-2012, and consisted of GPP ( $\mu\text{mol C m}^{-2} \text{ s}^{-1}$ ),  
5 associated air temperature ( $T_{\text{air}}$ ;  $^{\circ}\text{C}$ ), volumetric soil water content (SWC;  $\text{m}^3/\text{m}^3$ ), ecosystem  
6 phenology (“greenness”; %), photosynthetically active radiation (PAR;  $\mu\text{mol quanta m}^{-2} \text{ s}^{-1}$ ),  
7 aboveground plant nitrogen content (N;  $\text{g m}^{-2}$ ), and relative humidity (RH; %); vapor pressure  
8 deficit (VPD; kPa) was computed from  $T_{\text{air}}$  and RH. GPP data were obtained indirectly as the  
9 difference between measurements of net ecosystem exchange (NEE;  $\mu\text{mol C m}^{-2} \text{ s}^{-1}$ ) and  
10 ecosystem respiration ( $R_{\text{eco}}$ ;  $\mu\text{mol C m}^{-2} \text{ s}^{-1}$ ) that were made within two minutes of each other.  
11 NEE was measured using a  $0.1 \text{ m}^3$  canopy gas exchange chamber by measuring the rate of  
12 change of  $\text{CO}_2$  concentration for 1 minute (Bachman et al., 2010, Jasoni et al., 2005).  $R_{\text{eco}}$  was  
13 measured immediately afterwards and in exactly the same way as the NEE one, except that an  
14 opaque cover was placed over the chamber to eliminate light. Midday measurements were made  
15 on a total of 88 days over six growing seasons (May through September), and measurement days  
16 were typically separated by 2 to 4 weeks. Additional measurements of NEE and  $R_{\text{eco}}$ , and thus  
17 GPP, were made every 6 weeks at five measurement times per day in each plot (nominal times =  
18 04:00, 09:00, 12:00, 16:00 and 21:00). More details on the methods can be found in Bachman *et*  
19 *al.* (2010) and Pendall et al. (2013). See Ryan et al. (2015) for descriptions of the environmental  
20 data and the gap-filling employed to estimate missing covariate data on certain days and hours.

21

22

### 23 *Data synthesis and modeling*

1 We fit a non-linear mixed effects model to the GPP data to quantify how GPP varied among the  
 2 experimental treatments at the season, annual, and multi-annual scales. The goal of this analysis  
 3 is two-fold: (1) to quantify the combined effects of the categorical treatment effects and the time-  
 4 varying concurrent and antecedent environmental effects (addressing questions 1 and 2), and (2)  
 5 to estimate GPP on non-measurements times, while accounting for different sources of  
 6 uncertainty, thus allowing us to gap-fill the GPP dataset and produce estimates of cumulative  
 7 GPP fluxes (addressing question 3).

8 Given the distributional properties of the observed GPP data ( $GPP^{obs}$ ), we assumed that  
 9  $GPP^{obs}$  followed a normal distribution. Thus, observation  $i$  ( $i = 1, \dots, 2456$ ):

$$GPP_i^{obs} \sim Normal(\mu_i, \sigma_{t(i)}^2) \quad (1)$$

10  $\mu$  is the mean or predicted GPP value,  $\sigma^2$  represents the observation variance, and  $t(i)$  indicates  
 11 treatment  $t$  ( $t = 1, 2, \dots, 6$  treatment levels) associated with observation  $i$ . We employ a semi-  
 12 empirical model for the mean GPP,  $\mu$ , based on the rectangular hyperbola light-response model  
 13 (Desai et al., 2008, Falge et al., 2001, Thornley, 1976, Landsberg and Waring, 1997), which we  
 14 adapted to include the effect of atmospheric  $CO_2$  concentration (Acock et al., 1976). We lack  
 15 sufficient data to parameterize more complex or mechanistic models (E.g. Farquhar et al., 1980).  
 16 However, the light-response or radiation-use efficiency type model has been frequently applied,  
 17 in various formulations, to ecosystem level GPP and NPP flux data (see above references), and  
 18 thus there is good precedence for using it here. The model for  $\mu$  is:

$$\mu_i = \frac{Q_i PAR_i A_{max_i} C_i}{Q_i PAR_i + A_{max_i} C_i} \quad (2)$$

19  $PAR_i$  is the measured PAR ( $\mu mol m^{-2} s^{-1}$ );  $Q_i$  ( $\mu mol CO_2 \mu mol^{-1}$  quanta) is the quantum yield or  
 20 canopy light-use efficiency (i.e., the slope of the light response curve at  $PAR=0$ );  $A_{max_i}$  ( $\mu mol C$

1  $\text{m}^2 \text{s}^{-1}$ ) is the maximum  $\text{CO}_2$  uptake rate of the canopy (maximum GPP) at light saturation.  $C_i =$   
2  $c_j \exp\left(\text{CO}_{2i} - \overline{\text{CO}}_{2j}\right)$  accounts for variation in atmospheric  $\text{CO}_2$  relative to the mean observed  
3 atmospheric  $[\text{CO}_2]$  ( $\overline{\text{CO}}_{2j}$ ) in the ambient ( $j = 1$ ; ct, cT, ctd, cts) and elevated ( $j = 2$ ; Ct, CT)  $\text{CO}_2$   
4 plots, where  $\text{CO}_{2i}$  is the measured atmospheric  $[\text{CO}_2]$ , and the parameter  $c_j$  describes the effect of  
5 deviations from the mean concentration ( $\overline{\text{CO}}_{2j} = 376$  ppm and 572 ppm for  $j = 1$  and  $j = 2$ ,  
6 respectively). An exponential function is applied to the deviations to ensure  $C_i > 0$ .

7 To capture potential temporal changes in the GPP response, we modeled  $Q$  and  $A_{\max}$  as  
8 functions of various biotic (greenness and  $N$ ) and abiotic (SWC,  $T_{\text{air}}$ , and VPD) factors at both  
9 current and antecedent (described in detail in the section below) time-scales. It is well known  
10 that plant photosynthesis is partly governed by leaf  $N$  content (Williams et al., 1996, Landsberg  
11 and Waring, 1997, Magnani et al., 2007) and temperature (Farquhar et al., 1980, Bernacchi et al.,  
12 2001) via their effects on enzyme-mediated reactions. VPD also plays an important role via its  
13 effect on stomatal conductance, which in turn controls photosynthetic rates (Collatz et al., 1991,  
14 Medlyn et al., 2011). Furthermore, vegetation greenness is expected to correspond to GPP; for  
15 example, satellite estimates of GPP are inferred from the light reflectance of the vegetation,  
16 which describes greenness of the vegetation. To ensure that  $A_{\max}$  is positive, we modeled  $A_{\max}$   
17 on the log scale, and to constrain  $Q$  between 0 and 1, we modeled  $Q$  on the logit scale. For  
18 example, we modeled  $\log(A_{\max})$  as a linear function of the aforementioned current and  
19 antecedent (subscript = ant) biotic and abiotic drivers, with parameters that vary by treatment  $t$  ( $t$   
20 = 1, 2, ..., 6) associated with observation  $i$ :

$$21 \log(A_{\max,i}) = \alpha_{0,t(i)} + \alpha_{1,t(i)} \text{SWC}_i + \alpha_{2,t(i)} \text{VPD}_i + \alpha_{3,t(i)} T_{\text{air}_i} + \alpha_{4,t(i)} \text{SWC}_{\text{ant},i} + \alpha_{5,t(i)} \text{VPD}_{\text{ant},i} \quad (3)$$

$$+ \alpha_{6,t(i)} T_{\text{air}_{\text{ant},i}} + \alpha_{7,t(i)} N_i + \alpha_{8,t(i)} \text{Greenness}_i + \alpha_{9,t(i)} \Delta \text{Greenness}_{\text{ant},i} + \text{interactions} + \varepsilon_{t(i),p(t(i))}$$

1  $\varepsilon_{t,p}$  represents a plot (nested in treatment) random effect, and  $p(t(i))$  indicates plot  $p$  associated  
2 with treatment  $t$  and observation  $i$  ( $p = 1, 2, 3, 4, 5$  for each treatment).  $\Delta\text{Greenness}_{\text{Sant}}$  represents  
3 the antecedent rate of change of greenness; when greenness is increasing,  $\Delta\text{Greenness}_{\text{Sant}} > 0$ , and  
4 when leaves are senescing  $\Delta\text{Greenness}_{\text{Sant}} < 0$ . We define ‘interactions’ in Eqn (3) to potentially  
5 include all 2-way interactions between the covariates indicated in Eqn (3). Preliminary analysis  
6 identified five two-way interactions (of 36 possible) that were most important for understanding  
7 GPP (see appendix S1 for details of preliminary analysis), including  $\text{Tair} \times \text{Tair}$ ,  $\text{SWC}_{\text{ant}} \times \text{Tair}_{\text{ant}}$ ,  
8  $\text{SWC}_{\text{ant}} \times \text{VPD}_{\text{ant}}$ ,  $\text{SWC} \times \text{SWC}_{\text{ant}}$   $\text{Tair} \times \text{Tair}_{\text{ant}}$  and  $\text{VPD} \times \text{Tair}$ ; these five interactions represent the  
9 “interactions” term and are assigned interaction effects parameters  $\alpha_{10,t} - \alpha_{15,t}$ , respectively.  
10 Including these interactions is further justified because: (1)  $\text{Tair} \times \text{Tair}$  accounts for a potential  
11 peaked temperature response; (2)  $\text{SWC}_{\text{ant}} \times \text{Tair}_{\text{ant}}$  indicates the seasonality of moisture  
12 availability; (3)  $\text{SWC}_{\text{ant}} \times \text{VPD}_{\text{ant}}$  indicates differential below- versus aboveground water stress  
13 effects; and, (4) previous studies have reported important interactions between current and  
14 antecedent factors. Regarding the last point, C fluxes are likely to respond differently to a rain  
15 event (increase in current SWC) that occurs during a dry period (low  $\text{SWC}_{\text{ant}}$ ) compared to  
16 during a wet period (high  $\text{SWC}_{\text{ant}}$ ) (Arp, 1991, Barron-Gafford et al., 2014, Cable et al., 2013,  
17 Ryan et al., 2015), thus reflecting potential hysteresis patterns (Oikawa et al., 2014, Barron-  
18 Gafford et al., 2011).

19 The function for  $\text{logit}(Q)$  is the same as for  $\text{log}(A_{\text{max}})$  except that: (1) there is no N term  
20 because N is primarily expected to affect the amount of RuBisCO in the photosynthetic tissues,  
21 which in turn primarily limits  $A_{\text{max}}$  (Reich et al., 2009); and (2) it has its own nested plot random  
22 effects and treatment-specific effects parameters ( $\beta_0, \dots, \beta_{13}$ ) (see Table 3 for a summary of model  
23 parameters).

1 *Quantification of antecedent drivers*

2 We characterized and quantified antecedent covariates following the stochastic antecedent  
3 modeling (SAM) framework described by Ogle *et al.* (2015); examples of practical  
4 implementation are given by Ryan *et al.* (2015), Cable *et al.* (2013), and Barron-Gafford *et al.*  
5 (2014). Traditional methods of defining antecedent variables often compute a deterministic  
6 average of the variable over a fixed past time period. SAM is different in that it allocates  
7 parameters (“importance weights”) to specific periods in the past, thus enabling quantification of  
8 the relative importance of the variable at those different past times. Following Cable *et al.* (2013)  
9 and Ryan *et al.* (2015), we allowed GPP to be influenced by Tair and VPD over daily time-  
10 scales, and by SWC and greenness over weekly time-scales. In general, we describe the  
11 antecedent variable ( $X_{ant}$ ) associated with observation  $i$  as:

$$X_{ant,i} = \sum_{k=1}^{Nperiods} W_{X_{k,t(i)}} \bar{X}_{tp(i)-k+1,p(t(i))} \quad (4)$$

12 where  $X = \text{VPD}$  or  $\text{Tair}$ ,  $\bar{X}$  is the 24-hour mean for a particular day or time period,  $k$  is the time  
13 lag into the past (for  $Nperiod = 7$  time steps) such that when  $k = 1$ ,  $\bar{X}$  is the observed 24-hour  
14 mean that occurred during  $tp(i)$ , the time period associated with observation  $i$ ; again,  $t(i)$  and  
15  $p(t(i))$  are the treatment ( $t = 1, \dots, 6$ ) and plot ( $p = 1, \dots, 5$  per treatment) associated with observation  
16  $i$ .  $W_X$  are the weight parameters to be estimated. The expression for  $\text{SWC}_{ant}$  is similar to equation  
17 (4) except that  $\bar{X}$  is the 7-day mean for a particular week such that  $tp$  denote the week associated  
18 with each observation and  $k$  denotes the time (week scale) lag ( $Nperiods = 6$ ); as done in Ryan *et*  
19 *al.* (2015), we allocated a separate weight for each of the first few weeks in the past ( $k = 1, 2, 3,$   
20 4), the fifth ( $k = 5$ ) weight to past weeks 5-6, and the sixth ( $k = 6$ ) weight to past weeks 7-10. We  
21 made a slight modification to calculate  $\Delta\text{Greenness}_{ant}$ :

$$\Delta Greenness_{ant,i} = \sum_{k=1}^{Nperiods} W_{X_k,t(i)} \left( \bar{X}_{tp(i)-k+1,p(t(i))} - \bar{X}_{tp(i)-k,p(t(i))} \right) \quad (5)$$

1 where  $\bar{X}$ ,  $i$ ,  $k$ ,  $t$ ,  $tp$ , and  $p$  are as defined previously for the weekly scale covariates. Like  $SWC_{ant}$ ,  
 2 the time periods are on a weekly scale, but  $k = 1, 2, 3$ , and  $4$  correspond to the past week, two  
 3 weeks ago, three weeks ago, and four weeks ago ( $Nperiods = 4$ ), respectively.

4 We refer to the model described above as the ‘main’ model. We also implemented an  
 5 ‘alternative’ model that excludes all antecedent covariates from the  $Q$  and  $A_{max}$  functions, as  
 6 defined in Eqn (3), to evaluate the importance of including antecedent effects. The alternative  
 7 model (no antecedent effects) is more similar to the types of models that are often applied for  
 8 partitioning eddy-covariance NEE data into its GPP and ecosystem respiration components, such  
 9 as those described in the review paper by Desai et al. (2008).

#### 10 *Model implementation and assessment*

11 We implemented the model within a hierarchical Bayesian framework (see Appendix S2 for  
 12 details) using the software package JAGS (Plummer, 2003), which uses Markov chain Monte  
 13 Carlo (MCMC) to sample from the joint posterior of the model parameters. Depending on the  
 14 model (main or alternative model), we ran three parallel chains for 100,000-200,000 iterations  
 15 each. After discarding the first 50% of iterations as ‘burn in’, we thinned the chains by 100 to  
 16 reduce within-chain autocorrelation and to reduce storage requirements; convergence was  
 17 assessed using the Brooks-Gelman-Rubin diagnostic tool (Gelman et al., 2013). This produced  
 18 roughly 3000 independent samples from the posterior distribution for each parameter, which  
 19 were summarized by their posterior means, central 95% credible intervals (CIs) defined by the  
 20 2.5<sup>th</sup> and 97.5<sup>th</sup> percentiles, and Bayesian p-values (Gelman et al., 2013).

1           We assessed the performance of the model by comparing predicted GPP versus observed  
2 GPP. We used the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) as an informal measure of model accuracy.  
3 A limitation with solely using  $R^2$  is that it does not detect when over-fitting occurs, the  
4 phenomenon by which  $R^2$  can increase with greater model complexity (more parameters). To  
5 overcome this, we also calculated two other commonly used model assessment diagnostics: the  
6 deviance information criterion (DIC) and the posterior predictive loss (PPL). Each of these  
7 statistics are the sum of a goodness of fit term and a model complexity (penalty) term that  
8 describes the effective number of parameters (Spiegelhalter et al., 2002, Gelfand and Ghosh,  
9 1998). One model is more desirable over another if it has a lower DIC and lower PPL. Using  
10 these two indices, we compared our main model with the alternative model.

#### 11 *Estimates of seasonal, annual and six-year GPP*

12 Our Bayesian approach to analyzing the GPP data also provides a framework for predicting GPP  
13 for time periods for which it was not measured. Each of the fitted models (main and alternative)  
14 was subsequently applied on an hourly time-step during the March-October period (we assumed  
15  $GPP = 0$  during other months due to the lack of vegetation during these winter months) for 2007-  
16 2012, and for every plot using each of the 3000 parameter sets sampled from the posterior  
17 distribution. The model simulations were implemented using equations (2)-(5) as well as all  
18 measurements of plot-level data (daily SWC, daily greenness, hourly  $T_{air}$ , hourly VPD, and  
19 annual N). The resulting hourly GPP predictions were summed within each season, each year,  
20 and across all years for each of the 3000 model executions, yielding posterior predictive  
21 distributions of seasonal (spring [March-May], summer [June-August], fall [Sept-Oct]), annual  
22 (March-October), and six-year GPP estimates. These distributions account for both model  
23 uncertainty (e.g., lack of fit) and parameter uncertainty.



1 *Comparisons to GPP simulated from 12 terrestrial biosphere models*

2 The data-driven predicted GPP values could serve as important ‘data-products’ for informing and  
3 evaluating terrestrial biosphere models (TBMs). Importantly, the Bayesian procedure explicitly  
4 quantifies uncertainty in such data products. To exemplify the importance of quantification of  
5 data product uncertainty, we considered two different types of data products: (1) six-year  
6 cumulative GPP from the main and alternative models as described in the previous subsection,  
7 and (2) the percent change in the six-year GPP under warming (cT) and eCO<sub>2</sub> (Ct) relative to the  
8 control (ct). As with the first, the second data product was computed using Monte Carlo  
9 simulations based on the 3000 posterior estimates of the six-year GPP (see Appendix S3 for  
10 description of how both data products were computed). The six-year GPP and GPP responses  
11 predicted from 12 TBMs were compared against the corresponding data products. The TBMs  
12 included: six land surface models (CABLE, CLM4.0, CLM4.5, ISAM, OCN, and ORCHIDEE);  
13 three global dynamic vegetation models (JULES, LPJ-GUESS and SDGVM); and three  
14 ecosystem models (DAYCENT, GDAY, and TECO); see Table S1 in the supplementary material  
15 for a description of the TBMs. The TBMs were not calibrated to the site using response data, but  
16 they were provided optional data or parameter values (e.g., V<sub>cmax</sub>, specific leaf area, rooting  
17 depth, soil texture) representative of the site. Models were also forced with site meteorological  
18 data covering the six years of the experiment (see Appendix S4 for details).

19 As a result of the TBMs not being rigorously calibrated against the PHACE data, there  
20 was no expectation that the TBM responses would match or be close to the expected PHACE  
21 responses. The purpose of comparing our “GPP data product” against the TBM output was to  
22 illustrate how our data product could be used to inform the TBMs. Our analysis represents a  
23 more flexible and potentially more rigorous method for “gap-filling” missing data – compared to

1 algorithms that are currently used to gap fill, for example, fill eddy flux data – and we show how  
2 it can be used to generate GPP estimates (data products) over the course of the experiment.

### 3 **Results**

#### 4 *Assessment of model performance*

5 Our main model was able to explain a large portion of the variation in the hourly GPP  
6 observations (overall  $R^2$  of 0.79). However, the accuracy of the GPP predictions varied among  
7 the treatments (Fig. 1), with treatment-specific fits: cT ( $R^2=0.86$ ), ctd ( $R^2=0.81$ ), ct ( $R^2=0.80$ ), cts  
8 ( $R^2=0.77$ ), CT ( $R^2=0.77$ ), and Ct ( $R^2=0.67$ ). The alternative model, which excluded all of the  
9 antecedent covariates, resulted in a poorer fit (Fig. S1,  $R^2 = 0.58$  overall,  $R^2$  ranged from 0.40 to  
10 0.67 among treatments). The more robust DIC and PPL measures also strongly indicated much  
11 better model performance for the main model compared to the alternative model (DIC=12,690  
12 and PPL=45,852 for the main model, with DIC=13,903 and PPL=80,067 for the alternative  
13 model).

14 The deviation away from the 1:1 line of the points (i.e. the bias) in figure 1 is minimal,  
15 except for the Ct treatment which is slightly more pronounced. However, we note that amongst a  
16 number of treatments there are a handful of measurements which are significantly higher than the  
17 modelled values. These seem to mainly be concentrated on one or two days during fall (Fig. S5).

#### 18 *Phenology of grassland carbon uptake and its relation to precipitation*

19 The time series of predicted GPP revealed high interannual variability (Fig. 2). For example, for  
20 the control treatment (ct), predicted daily GPP reached a maximum around  $10 \text{ g C m}^{-2} \text{ day}^{-1}$  for  
21 2009 and 2010, which was double the predicted maximum in 2012 ( $\sim 5 \text{ g C m}^{-2} \text{ day}^{-1}$ ; Fig. 2a).

**Commented [E3]:** New comment addressing the final comment from the first reviewer.

1 Within years, bimodal peaks in GPP were predicted in 2007, 2008, 2011, and 2012 in response to  
2 spring and late-summer precipitation inputs.

### 3 *Treatment effects on GPP*

4 Over the entire experimental period (2007-2012), the largest and most statistically significant  
5 increases in GPP relative to the control treatment (ct) occurred under warming (29% increase;  
6 Table 1 and Fig. 3b;  $P=0.02$  for ct vs cT), eCO<sub>2</sub> (26%; Table 1 and Fig. 3b;  $P=0.07$  for ct vs Ct),  
7 and deep irrigation (28%; Table 1 and Fig. 3b;  $P<0.01$  for ct vs ctd).

8 At the annual time scale, relative to ct, annual GPP increased under eCO<sub>2</sub> (Ct) in 2007,  
9 2008, 2011, and 2012 (Fig. 3a and Table 1; ct vs Ct,  $P=0.007$ , 0.09, 0.02 and 0.009, respectively).  
10 Warming (cT) also stimulated annual GPP in 2007, 2008, 2010, and 2011 (Fig. 3a and Table 1; ct  
11 vs cT,  $P=0.006$ , 0.04, 0.09, and 0.005 respectively). There is some evidence that the combination  
12 of eCO<sub>2</sub> and warming (CT) enhanced GPP in 2007 and 2011 (Fig. 3a and Table 1; ct vs CT,  
13  $P=0.09$  and 0.08, respectively). The large increase in GPP under deep irrigation (ctd) was  
14 reflected across individual years, with four showing statistically significant increases of 28-61%.  
15 In the absence of warming, annual GPP under eCO<sub>2</sub> (Ct) was similar to annual GPP under  
16 shallow irrigation (cts) for all years (Table 1; Ct vs cts,  $P>0.18$  for any individual year).

17 Seasonal differences in the treatment effects emerged. The 29% overall increase in GPP  
18 under warming (cT) relative to the control (ct) during all six years was primarily driven by  
19 enhanced spring productivity (Fig. 3b, black-filled portion of cT bars; Table 1, ct vs cT: 129%  
20 increase,  $P=0.001$ ). During the summer, there was on average an 11% decline in GPP under cT  
21 (Table 1, ct vs cT,  $P=0.15$ ), which is consistent with Pendall *et al.* (2013) who used linear  
22 regression and linear interpolation to estimate April-September GPP sums from data. Although  
23 the CO<sub>2</sub> effect was only statistically significant ( $P<0.09$ ) for four out of the six years, GPP

1 increased by 124% under eCO<sub>2</sub> (Ct) during fall. The spring cT and fall Ct GPP estimates were  
2 the only treatment by season combinations that were always significantly different (P<0.03) from  
3 the corresponding season-level ct estimates, for all years (Table 2, rows 1 and 3). Compared to  
4 spring and summer, GPP also increased the most during fall under eCO<sub>2</sub> and warming (ct vs CT:  
5 42% increase, P=0.03), deep irrigation (ct vs ctd: 68% increase, P=0.002), and shallow irrigation  
6 (ct vs cts: 66% increase, P=0.008) (Table 1).

#### 7 *Importance of current and antecedent conditions for understanding treatment effects on GPP*

8 Including antecedent terms in the submodels for A<sub>max</sub> and Q (see Eqn (3)) resulted in decreases  
9 in the predicted six-year GPP relative to the alternative model, with the greatest reductions  
10 occurring for the control treatment (by 12%, P=0.14), the eCO<sub>2</sub> × warming treatment (by 20%,  
11 P=0.04), and the deep irrigation treatment (by 14%, P=0.05). Furthermore, 34 out of the 36  
12 treatment × year combinations corresponded to a decrease in annual GPP of between 1% and  
13 42% for the main model versus the alternative model (Tables S3a, S3b, S3c). Both A<sub>max</sub> and Q  
14 were not significantly affected by concurrent covariates (SWC, VPD, Tair, greenness, and N), for  
15 most or all treatments, depending on the covariate (Table 3). Conversely, the main effect of two  
16 of the three antecedent covariates (VPD<sub>ant</sub> and Tair<sub>ant</sub>) on A<sub>max</sub> was significant for the majority of  
17 treatments (Fig. 4a,b; Table 3). The most important predictors for Q involved the SWC<sub>ant</sub>×Tair<sub>ant</sub>  
18 and SWC<sub>ant</sub>×VPD<sub>ant</sub> interactions, which were significant for four and three of the treatments,  
19 respectively (Fig. 4c,d; Table 3). Although the direction of the VPD<sub>ant</sub> (for A<sub>max</sub>), Tair<sub>ant</sub> (A<sub>max</sub>),  
20 SWC<sub>ant</sub>×Tair<sub>ant</sub> (Q), and SWC<sub>ant</sub>×VPD<sub>ant</sub> (Q) effects were consistent for the vast majority of  
21 treatments (Table 3), the magnitude of the antecedent effects differed among certain pairs of  
22 treatments (Fig. 4a,c,d).

1           Given that antecedent conditions are important for understanding GPP, we can evaluate  
2 the time-scales over which each variable influences GPP. For SWC<sub>ant</sub>, the first two weeks prior  
3 to the GPP measurement were generally the most important for predicting GPP (Fig. S2a). For  
4 the majority of treatments, Tair experienced 3-4 days prior and VPD from 1-3 days prior tended  
5 to be the most important for predicting GPP (Fig. S2b,c).

#### 6 *Comparison of predicted six-year GPP with TBMs*

7 When comparing the GPP predictions from our data-driven analysis with those of 12 terrestrial  
8 biosphere models (TBMs), the 95% credible intervals (CIs) of our six-year GPP "data product"  
9 (whether generated from the main or alternative model) under the control (ct) and eCO<sub>2</sub> (Ct)  
10 treatments are fairly narrow compared to the range of TBM predictions (Fig. 5a,b). Under the  
11 control treatment, only one of the twelve TBM predictions fell within the 95% CI of the data  
12 product if antecedent conditions were included in the calculation of the data product (Fig. 5a,  
13 black cross and error bar). The number of TBM predictions consistent, or almost so, with the  
14 data product increased to five if antecedent conditions were not included when computing the  
15 data product (Fig. 5a, grey cross and error bar). Under the eCO<sub>2</sub> scenario, there was greater  
16 similarity in the number of TBM predictions agreeing with the data product if antecedent versus  
17 no antecedent conditions were included for determining the data product (Fig. 5b).

18           The TBMs also need to accurately predict the relative change in GPP under scenarios of  
19 environmental change (e.g., eCO<sub>2</sub>, warming, or some combination). We used our GPP analysis  
20 framework to produce a data product of the percent difference in GPP under treatment conditions  
21 relative to control conditions. In contrast to the cumulative GPP estimates, these percent  
22 differences were associated with high uncertainty, sometimes spanning both decreases and  
23 increases (e.g., Fig. 5c,d). This resulted in the majority of TBM simulations are consistent with

1 this data product (i.e., the TBM predictions lie within the CIs; Fig. 5c,d), despite the wide range  
2 of TBM predictions. Thus, the data product associated with GPP on the absolute scale (Figs.  
3 3a,b) is more useful for evaluating and informing TBMs than the data product on the percent  
4 change scale (e.g. Figs. 3c,d).

5

## 6 **Discussion**

### 7 *Implications of treatment effects on annual GPP*

8 Annual GPP was predicted to be most stimulated by elevated CO<sub>2</sub> (eCO<sub>2</sub>, Ct treatment) during  
9 the three driest years of our study (2007, 2011, and 2012), suggesting that increased GPP under  
10 eCO<sub>2</sub> could have resulted from enhanced water-use efficiency (Kelly et al., 2015). The shallow  
11 irrigation (cts) treatment confirmed the role of SWC in mediating the GPP responses to eCO<sub>2</sub>,  
12 consistent with findings in a similar grassland system (Parton et al., 2012). Moreover, deep  
13 irrigation led to a greater percentage increase in GPP compared with eCO<sub>2</sub> or surface irrigation  
14 (Table 1; Fig. 3). This may reflect the frequency and magnitude in which irrigation was applied  
15 under ctd (twice, large events) compared to cts (three-five smaller events). Larger, less frequent  
16 precipitation events are expected to stimulate GPP to a greater extent than smaller, more frequent  
17 events, especially early in the growing season (Heisler-White et al., 2008, Lauenroth and Sala,  
18 1992, Ogle et al., 2015). A prior, linear interpolation estimate of annual GPP for this same site,  
19 but not including 2011-2012 data, suggested a reduction in GPP by eCO<sub>2</sub> in 2009 (Pendall et al.,  
20 2013), but our analysis revealed that a significant difference existed only during summer of that  
21 year (P=0.06). We also found that 2009 had the highest annual GPP under the control treatment  
22 compared to all other study years, and 2009 was also the wettest year (Fig. 3, Table S2, Table

1 S3a). Other grassland studies have found no response or a reduction in primary production under  
2 eCO<sub>2</sub> during wet years (Hovenden et al., 2014, Polley et al., 2013)

3 Climate change treatments altered the seasonality of GPP, particularly in spring and fall,  
4 as observed for species and community-level measurements at the same site (Reyes-Fox et al.,  
5 2014, Zelikova et al., 2015). Across all years, warming (cT) consistently increased annual GPP  
6 by 12-50%, and this was predominantly driven by enhanced production during the spring (Fig.  
7 3a; Tables 1,2), when temperature limits constrained productivity in this high elevation system.  
8 Increased annual GPP for all treatments, except cT, relative to the control (ct) was dominated by  
9 increases in GPP during the fall (Table 1, furthest right column). The consistency of the  
10 statistical significance of this fall enhancement across all or most years, as well as the spring  
11 warming enhancement in spring (Table 2), may be due to two potential co-occurring

12 mechanisms: (i) Spring warming directly stimulates snow melt, photosynthesis, and plant growth  
13 (Figs. S4, Luo, 2007, Richardson et al., 2010, Sherry et al., 2008); and/or (ii) the SWC in fall is

14 sustained for longer as a result of the water-saving effects of eCO<sub>2</sub> but only in water limited  
15 systems like at PHACE (Webb et al., 2012, Morgan et al., 2004, Morgan et al., 2011, Nowak et  
16 al., 2004). Our results indicate that these GPP enhancements in spring and fall may extend the

17 growing season, for example for 2008 (an average year in terms of meteorology) GPP increases  
18 under warming consistently between DOY 80-100 from ~0.01 gCm<sup>-2</sup> to ~0.05 gCm<sup>-2</sup> and  
19 separately between DOY 100-120 (Fig S5a,b). Similarly in fall, modelled GPP drops to ~0.01  
20 gCm<sup>-2</sup> around DOY 280, but under warming GPP levels off at ~ 0.05 gCm<sup>-2</sup> (Fig S5c,d). Hourly  
21 observations for this year and other years are consistent with the modelled GPP during spring  
22 and fall, with the exception of observations made around DOY 270 which are significantly  
23 higher than what the model predicts.

**Commented [ER4]:** This used to say 'suggests an extension of the growing season by two potential co-occurring mechanisms:', but I changed this because based on fig. S5 in the supplemental I couldn't see any good evidence for this. All that I can see is that there is an overall consistent enhancement across most days in the spring and fall.

**Commented [ER5]:** Replaced 'the growing season begins earlier because' with this.

**Commented [ER6]:** Replaced 'the growing season ends later because SWC' with this.

**Commented [ER7]:** Deleted: "and/or the direct effects of adding water via irrigation (ctd and cts)" because we're just talking about eCO<sub>2</sub> here so want to keep it focused.

**Commented [ER8]:** New text. Please amend / expand if required.

1 *Importance of antecedent conditions for predicting GPP and evaluating treatment differences*  
2 An increasing number of studies recognize the importance of antecedent conditions in  
3 understanding the terrestrial C cycle (Barron-Gafford et al., 2014, Cable et al., 2013, Ryan et al.,  
4 2015, Gamnitzer et al., 2011). Our main model (with antecedent effects) explained 67-86% of  
5 the variation in the GPP data, but the alternative model (without antecedent effects) only  
6 explained 40-67% of the variation. This difference in the explanatory power of models that  
7 include antecedent conditions has also been demonstrated for other C flux components, including  
8 soil respiration (Ogle et al., 2015, Barron-Gafford et al., 2014), annual aboveground NPP, and  
9 annual tree growth (Ogle et al., 2015). The increased explanatory power of the “antecedent  
10 models” cannot not be solely explained by the additional parameters that they introduce given  
11 the support conveyed by model selection indices that penalize for the number of parameters or  
12 model complexity. In particular, our results suggest that antecedent vapor pressure deficit  
13 ( $VPD_{ant}$ ) and antecedent air temperature ( $T_{air_{ant}}$ ) were the most important predictors of GPP,  
14 primarily via their effects on maximum potential GPP ( $A_{max}$ ). Antecedent SWC ( $SWC_{ant}$ )  
15 interacted with these two factors to affect light-use efficiency ( $Q$ ).

16 The importance of  $T_{air_{ant}}$  suggests that accounting for seasonal changes in air temperature  
17 is critical for obtaining good estimations of  $A_{max}$  in this temperate grassland, especially in spring  
18 when moisture is less limiting (Lauenroth and Sala, 1992). The importance of antecedent  
19 temperature has been implicated as depicting a temperature acclimation response (Ogle et al.,  
20 2015). However, the general positive effect of  $T_{air_{ant}}$  on  $A_{max}$  actually indicates that warmer past  
21 temperatures tend to enhance  $A_{max}$  and GPP, regardless of the current air temperature which  
22 appears to have little impact on GPP once antecedent temperature is accounted for (see Table 3).  
23 It appears that GPP is more likely to respond to concurrent changes in soil water (SWC), and to



1 some extent VPD, compared to temperature. The importance of concurrent SWC and VPD on  
2 GPP likely reflects stomatal regulation of plant water status, which in turn is expected to affect  
3 photosynthesis, and thus GPP.

4 While we would expect GPP to be partly regulated by short-term (sub-daily) changes in  
5 VPD (e.g., via stomatal control; Oren et al. 1999), we also found that VPD experienced over the  
6 past few days ( $VPD_{ant}$ ) affects GPP, especially through its influence on  $A_{max}$ . In particular, high  
7 VPD for about 1-3 days prior, is predicted to reduce  $A_{max}$ , across all treatments (Fig. 4a). While  
8 the effect of VPD on stomatal closure and photosynthesis is usually treated as being  
9 instantaneous due to tight coupling of stomatal conductance to VPD (Collatz et al., 1991), this  
10 study suggests that plants may adjust to VPD over longer time scales. VPD conditions occurring  
11 over the past 1-7 days represent a proxy for past atmospheric drought conditions (Haddad et al.,  
12 2002), and GPP is likely to be negatively impacted by cumulative atmospheric drought.  
13 Furthermore, the  $VPD_{ant}$  effect was more negative under  $eCO_2$  (Fig. 4a), indicating greater  
14 sensitivity of stomata (and hence, photosynthesis) to atmospheric drought, potentially leading to  
15 higher integrated water-use efficiency under  $eCO_2$ .

16 The use of VPD as a predictor of GPP is not new (Groenendijk et al., 2011), but the  
17 proposition that antecedent VPD is an important driver of GPP has not been previously  
18 considered. One possibility is that this effect is just an artifact of our model because VPD  
19 depends upon  $T_{air}$ , and the  $VPD_{ant}$  effect could reflect a non-linear  $T_{air,ant}$  effect. However, this is  
20 unlikely because although current VPD is highly correlated with current  $T_{air}$  ( $r = 0.85$ ), the  
21 correlation between the antecedent covariates ( $VPD_{ant}$  versus  $T_{air,ant}$ ) is weaker ( $r = 0.68$ ).  
22 Furthermore, our model contains quadratic  $T_{air}$  ( $T_{air}^2$ ) terms in both the  $A_{max}$  and Q functions,  
23 thus the shape of the expected response of GPP to  $T_{air}$  (peaked) should already be accounted for.

1 A more plausible explanation for the  $VPD_{ant}$  effect is that stomatal conductance or  
2 photosynthesis acclimate to VPD. For example, Kutsch et al. (2001) found that a decrease in  
3 stomatal aperture in beech trees – implying a decrease in GPP – was negatively correlated with  
4 the previous month’s mean VPD. The importance of past VPD, rather than past SWC, prompted  
5 the authors to suggest that plants possess a biochemical memory of past climatic. Buckley  
6 (2005) also suggests that when VPD exceeds some threshold, water potential can reach a  
7 cavitation threshold, leading to cavitation and reducing transpiration at any given VPD. If VPD  
8 is further reduced, then there is a lag between the recovery of water potential and embolism  
9 repair; the time scale of this recovering is not well understood but could contribute to a GPP  
10 versus VPD lag. Various mechanisms have been proposed to explain the stomatal behavior  
11 versus VPD lag including the hydroactive feedback hypothesis (Buckley 2016) or delays  
12 associated with abscisic-acid (ABA) signaling (Aliniaieifard and van Meeteren, 2014). Clearly,  
13 additional research is required to establish the generality of a GPP versus VPD lag (antecedent  
14 effect) and to identify underlying mechanisms related to stomatal behavior, biochemical  
15 acclimation, or other explanations.

16 Terrestrial biosphere models (TBMs) indirectly incorporate the effect of past  
17 meteorological conditions (e.g., VPD) when simulating photosynthesis through the evolving  
18 state of the soil water pool. Nevertheless, models commonly do not account for the potential  
19 direct effects of antecedent VPD on the physiological components, for example, through  
20 acclimation of photosynthesis (Kattge and Knorr, 2007, Smith et al., 2015). Our results highlight  
21 accounting for such an acclimation process, which directly considers the effect of antecedent  
22 conditions, could improve modelled estimates of photosynthesis.

23 *Implications for the terrestrial carbon cycle*

1 Estimates of global GPP used in the last IPCC report were calculated from site-level GPP  
2 estimates that were derived by fitting a light response curve to flux tower NEE data (Beer et al.,  
3 2010, Lasslop et al., 2010). The site-level  $A_{\max}$  terms in these analyses were also represented as  
4 exponential functions of environmental covariates, but only current conditions (Lasslop et al.,  
5 2010). If antecedent conditions (such as  $VPD_{\text{ant}}$ ,  $SWC_{\text{ant}}$ , and  $T_{\text{air}_{\text{ant}}}$ ) had been included, our  
6 analysis suggests that annual estimates of GPP at semi-arid grasslands could have been improved  
7 (Fig. 1 vs. Fig. S1). For other ecosystems or plant functional types that are less sensitive to  
8 drought, the effect of antecedent meteorological conditions may be less pronounced. Moreover,  
9 our results show that including antecedent conditions could result in lower estimates of  
10 cumulative GPP in temperate grasslands under current climate (by 12%), and especially under a  
11 future, warmer climate and  $eCO_2$  (by 20%; see Table S3c).

12 Since the early 1990s, global change experiments, such as Free Air  $CO_2$  Enrichment  
13 (FACE) studies, have generated data on responses of key biogeochemical processes to future  
14 environmental conditions. Such experiments have become invaluable for informing model  
15 forecasts (Piao et al., 2013, Zaehle et al., 2014, De Kauwe et al., 2014, Walker et al., 2014). One  
16 of the challenges associated with applying terrestrial biosphere models (TBMs) to understand  
17 climate change impacts on GPP and the C cycle is limited access to accurate data products for  
18 informing and evaluating the models. Since many data products are derived from simpler models  
19 that are fit to observational data, it is prudent to account for uncertainty in such data products  
20 since they are not perfect representations of the real system. Our hierarchical Bayesian approach  
21 to analyzing the GPP data in the context of a fairly simple light-response model provides a  
22 mechanism for predicting GPP at non-measurement time-periods, while accounting for  
23 uncertainty in these predictions. However, we wish to emphasize that the purpose of the TBM

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1 versus our “data product” comparison (Fig. 5) was not to validate the TBMs in any way; rather,  
2 we wish to evaluate the utility of the data products.

3 We are confident in our seasonal, annual, and six-year cumulative GPP predictions given  
4 their relatively narrow 95% CIs (e.g., Fig. 5a and 3b). The width of the intervals, however, did  
5 vary among global change treatments, with the widest intervals (and weakest model fits [lowest  
6  $R^2$ s]) occurring for treatments involving  $eCO_2$  (Ct and CT). This suggests that additional  
7 information or improved model structure is required to obtain more accurate GPP estimates  
8 under  $eCO_2$ . In general, the tight estimates for cumulative GPP at different time scales suggest  
9 that this would be a valuable (semi-)independent data stream that TBMs can be compared  
10 against.

11 The importance of antecedent environmental conditions on grassland GPP has been  
12 highlighted by the Bayesian model selection procedure used in this study. Antecedent conditions  
13 were key predictors of GPP, in particular air temperature and vapor pressure deficit of the past  
14 week, and research into the mechanism by which antecedent  $T_{air}$  and VPD affect GPP would be  
15 an interesting and useful contribution to understanding the carbon cycle in these grassland  
16 ecosystems. Including antecedent conditions substantially improved the fit of the Bayesian  
17 model and led to a consistent reduction in the computed multi-year GPP in this grassland  
18 ecosystem, across the vast majority of treatments and years. Given the global coverage of  
19 grassland ecosystems, understanding the effect of antecedent environmental conditions more  
20 broadly is likely to have implications for our understanding of the global carbon cycle.

21

## 22 **Data availability**

23 Ryan EM Data from: Gross primary production responses to warming, elevated  $CO_2$ , and  
24 irrigation: quantifying the drivers of ecosystem physiology in a semiarid grassland. *Global*  
25 *Change Biology* <http://dx.doi.org/10.5061/dryad.71h30>

## 1 **Acknowledgements**

This material is based upon work supported by the US Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service Climate Change, Soils & Emissions Program, USDA-CSREES Soil Processes Program (#2008-35107-18655), US Department of Energy Office of Science (BER), through the Terrestrial Ecosystem Science program (#DE-SC0006973) and the Western Regional Center of the National Institute for Climatic Change Research, and by the National Science Foundation (DEB#1021559). Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation. We thank D. LeCain, J.A. Morgan, J. Heisler-White, A. Brennan, S. Bachman, Y. Sorokin, T.J. Zelikova, D. Blumenthal, K. Mueller and numerous others for assistance in data collection and operation of PHACE facilities, and B. Yang for use of his gap-filled meteorological data at the site. We also thank D. Kinsman for his helpful comments on the discussion section.

## 2 **Author contributions**

ER, KO, and EP designed the study; ER conducted the analysis and wrote the paper, with contributions from KO, EP, AW, MDK, and BM. The Bayesian analysis was directed by KO; DP assisted with implements. The remaining authors provided GPP model output from eight of the TBMs in order to construct Figure 5.

3

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