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1 **Predicting the occurrence of large-diameter trees using airborne laser scanning**

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25 **Abstract**

26

27 Large-diameter trees are important for both ecological and economic reasons, but they have become
28 increasingly rare. Thus, there is an interest in easily locating such trees, and for this purpose the use of
29 airborne laser scanning (ALS) seems suitable. Our objective was to assess the accuracy of area-based ALS
30 estimation in predicting the number of large-diameter Scots pines (*Pinus sylvestris* L.). A sample of 856
31 trees with a diameter >35 cm were measured from 1109 sample plots located in eastern Norway. We
32 fitted negative binomial and zero-inflated negative binomial models for predicting large-diameter tree
33 counts. ALS-derived and external variables were used as predictors when fitting the models. The
34 accuracy was assessed based on the weighted kappa coefficient and cross validation. Our best model
35 was based on three ALS height distribution variables, one horizontal ALS variable, and plot elevation. Its
36 overall accuracy was 65.8% and the weighted kappa was 0.55. Although there was a clear relationship
37 between the response and the proposed predictor variables, fairly large errors in the predicted large-
38 diameter tree counts were common.

39

40 **Keywords:** Large trees; LiDAR; area-based method; negative binomial regression; old-growth

41

42 **Abbreviations**

43

44 AIC Akaike’s information criterion

45 ALS Airborne laser scanning

46 CHM Canopy height model

47 CV Cross validation

48 DBH Diameter at breast height

49 GLM Generalized linear model

50 GNSS Global navigation satellite system

51 ITD Individual tree detection

52 κ Kappa coefficient

53 LSO-CV Leave-strip-out cross validation

54 NB Negative binomial

55 OA Overall accuracy

56 PA Producer’s accuracy

57 UA User’s accuracy

58 wk Weighted kappa coefficient

59 ZINB Zero-inflated negative binomial

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61

62 **1 Introduction**

63

64 Large trees are rare in many forests and difficult to find. They are important for both economic and
65 ecological reasons. Large trees dominate the structure, dynamics and function of many temperate and
66 tropical forests (Lutz et al. 2012), and their occurrence controls a series of ecological processes. As
67 pointed out by Franklin et al. (1987), a falling large tree often kills other trees, thus controlling stand
68 mortality, influencing regeneration, and mixing forest soil by uprooting other trees. Large standing-dead
69 trees (i.e., snags) are a major resource for the ecosystem because of the large array of organisms
70 present in the decaying log, and in providing shelter for animal species (Franklin et al. 1987). Large trees
71 are key features of old-growth forests, and as an ecological rule, large older trees are less frequently
72 found than large younger trees (Oliver 1980).

73

74 Intensive management of commercial forests in the Nordic countries means that trees are usually cut
75 before the forest reaches the old-growth stage. Also, on a worldwide scale old-growth forests are rare
76 (Burrascano et al. 2013), and even then the number of large trees in them may be relatively small (e.g.
77 12-20 trees/ha: Salas et al. 2006). Therefore, finding large trees during an inventory can be
78 methodologically challenging, and from an economic perspective finding suitable timber is sometimes
79 cost prohibitive. For instance, carpenters working with the restoration of old wooden churches and
80 other buildings of great historical interest need saw logs with exceptionally large dimensions, and these
81 are not found in commercial short-rotation forests (e.g. Godal 1996).

82

83 Airborne laser scanning (ALS) has the potential to replace traditional inventories as a main data source
84 for forest management planning (Næsset 2014, Maltamo and Packalen 2014). The increasing availability
85 of ALS data opens new possibilities for ecological studies. In particular, ALS can provide wall-to-wall
86 measurements of the ecologically important properties of the canopy structure, which are otherwise

impossible to obtain using field-based methods. Müller and Vierling (2014) provide an extensive review of the application of ALS data for biodiversity studies, especially the assessment of animal and plant habitats. ALS has also been applied to detect snags (Martinuzzi et al. 2009, Wing et al. 2015), other types of dead wood (Maltamo et al. 2014), and cavity trees (Eskelson et al. 2009). However, we are not aware of any studies which consider the ALS-based inventory of living trees with large diameters, although some of the methods applied in snag inventories may also be applicable to the inventory of large-diameter trees.

ALS-based forest inventories are usually performed using the area-based method (Næsset 2002). The inventory area is covered wall-to-wall by ALS data. A sample of field plots is distributed across the area, often following commonly adapted sampling designs like systematic and stratified sampling. Volume and other stand variables are either measured or estimated at the plot level. The plots are positioned with GNSS (Global Navigation Satellite System) receivers, and laser echoes from within the plot borders are used to calculate the ALS variables that describe the height and density of the canopy. These ALS variables are used as predictors in statistical models that predict a response variable of interest, such as the timber volume. These models can then be used to predict forest variables over the whole inventory region.

Tree size can be quantified based on diameter at breast height (DBH), height or volume. In this study, we specifically focus on trees with a large diameter, because it is the easiest dimension to be measured in the field, and it represents both commercial and ecological interests. The original initiative for this research came from a specialized sawmill that wanted to enhance the procurement of sawlogs with very large dimensions. From a remote sensing perspective, the quantification of tree size based on DBH is more difficult than a quantification based on height. ALS sensors can measure the tree height directly with only a slight underestimation (Gaveau and Hill 2003), and the tree height correlates with the DBH. However, tree height-diameter curves are often asymptotic, i.e. old, dominant trees tend to grow little

in height but continue to grow in diameter up to very great ages. Thus, if only the height is known, it is difficult to predict the DBH of a dominant tree. However, the DBH is also correlated with crown diameter (Ilvessalo 1950), and the crown diameters estimated from ALS data may improve the predictions of stem volume (Popescu et al. 2003).

The prediction of stand level variables such as mean diameter (Næsset 2002) and diameter distributions (Gobakken and Næsset 2004) are well known ALS applications. However, studies focusing on large trees are conducted mainly as long term experiments using field measurements (e.g. the study of snags by Ganey and Vojta 2005), but research on methods for predicting the occurrence or density of large trees using remote sensing is lacking. Indeed, the estimation of the occurrence of individual large trees is more difficult than the estimation of aggregated properties, such as the mean diameter of all trees. Aggregated properties may not be adequate for the purposes of large-diameter tree inventory, because stands may have only a few trees with very large diameters, and therefore their contribution to the estimate means may be small. Thus, to produce reliable information for large trees, direct modeling might be a viable alternative to the extraction of large-tree information from existing mean DBH or diameter distribution databases.

The area-based method can be applied using relatively low pulse densities ($<1 \text{ m}^{-2}$), which makes it cost-effective and applicable for large areas. With low pulse density, individual trees cannot be detected. It is possible however to interpolate canopy height models (CHM) that describe the height of the canopy surface above ground level using low pulse density ALS data. Using one meter resolution CHMs, tree groups can be distinguished, although their area may be overestimated due to the low resolution. Pippuri et al. (2012) applied ALS data with a nominal pulse density of 0.6 m^{-2} to calculate horizontal area-based variables based on a CHM. These included texture (Haralick 1973) and landscape (McGarigal and Marks 1995) variables such as the mean size of canopy patches, and the mean area of connected

canopy pixels above a specified height threshold. Such variables might also correlate with the presence of large trees.

Linear regression models commonly applied in area-based ALS estimation are not suitable for modeling count (i.e. non-negative integer) variables (Consul 1989). Examples of studies where the response variable is a count include tree mortality (Affleck 2006), and also the number of seedlings in a regeneration plot (Zhang et al. 2012). It is common that real-world count data have more zeroes than a statistical randomization would imply. Such data are commonly called zero-inflated. In order to fit models for zero-inflated data, a generalized linear model (GLM) framework must be used. GLMs extend linear statistical modeling to response distributions that belong to the exponential family (Schabenberger and Pierce 2002). A generalized linear model consists of three components: a probability density function, a linear predictor, and a link function (McCulloch & Searle 2001). Several models have been proposed to handle zero-inflated count data (Famoye and Singh 2006). Among the most used are the zero-inflated Poisson and the zero-inflated negative binomial (ZINB) models. For example, Zhang et al. (2012) compared different negative binomial (NB) models to predict tree recruitment, and obtained their best results with zero-inflated NB models. Further details on zero-inflated models can be found in Consul (1989) and Affleck (2006). As an alternative, nonparametric methods such as the k-nearest neighbor can be used, because they do not require assumptions concerning the distribution of the response variable (Eskelson et al. 2009). However, Eskelson et al. (2009) recommended NB models instead of nonparametric methods for the prediction of stand level cavity tree and snag abundance.

The objective of the present study was to estimate the number of large-diameter trees at plot level using an area-based ALS approach and generalized linear models applicable to the count data, and to evaluate the accuracy of the predictions using different types of predictor variables. In addition to the commonly used canopy height and density variables (Næsset 2002), we also tested variables that

describe the horizontal canopy structure (Pippuri et al. 2012). Additionally, we considered external plot-level variables such as elevation, because the occurrence of large trees may be affected by the previous harvest history, and with less focus on the utilization of more marginal and less accessible forests at higher elevations.

2 Materials and methods

2.1 Data

The study area is situated in the municipality of Tolga, located in Hedmark County, Eastern Norway (62°23' N, 11°02' E) (Figure 1). Boreal forests in Tolga were intensively harvested until the late 19th century to supply the nearby mines, but some areas remained untouched. Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris* L.) forests occur in the valleys between the treeless fells, with Norway spruce (*Picea abies* (L.) Karst.), downy birch (*Betula pubescens* Ehrh.) and goat willow (*Salix caprea* L.) occurring as minor species. In addition, pure birch forests are common, especially in the peatlands, close to water bodies, and at higher elevations near the alpine tree line.

(Figure 1)

ALS data from five separate east-west oriented flight lines (strips) were obtained from the region (Figure 1). The strips were spaced 6 km apart. The ALS acquisition was performed on the 6th and 8th of August 2006 as a part of the Hedmark County ALS sample survey (Gobakken et al. 2012). Two different Optech ALTM3100 scanners were used, but only one strip was scanned with the second sensor. The ALS data were acquired with similar settings across all strips: altitude 800 m above ground level, flight speed 75 m s⁻¹, pulse repetition frequency 100 kHz, scan frequency 55 Hz, and half scan angle 17°. The resultant

pulse density was 2.8 m^{-2} and the footprint size was 0.68 m. The data was delivered by the contractor (Blom Geomatics AS), and contained the XYZ-coordinates of the echoes relative to ground level.

Field plots 32×32 meters in size were placed directly below the flight lines, and the plots on a given line always bordered the previous one. The field work was conducted from the 5th–21st October 2009 by walking along the lines with a GNSS navigator. The selection of the sections of the sample strips to be surveyed was subjective, and based on local knowledge so that the resultant data set would be as large and diverse as possible (Figure 1). A total of 1109 plots were sampled. Trees with a DBH > 35 cm ($n = 855$) were calipered and positioned using real-time differentially corrected GNSS. The positioning accuracy was typically better than one meter, but this could occasionally decrease if the real-time differential correction data was unavailable. One tree in a plot corresponds to 9.8 trees per hectare. Approximately every 5th tree ($n = 145$) was also measured for height. In our sample, 94% of the trees are pines, followed by spruce (5%), and deciduous species.

The distribution of the large-diameter trees (Figure 2) shows that the majority of the plots (66%) had no large trees. Only a small percentage of plots (6.1%) had more than 3 large-diameter trees. In addition, there was no clear relationship between the height and diameter of the large-diameter trees (Figure 3). It should be noted that we did not measure trees with a DBH < 35 cm.

(Figure 2, figure 3)

2.2 Predictor variables

Three types of predictor variables were used for modeling purposes: variables derived from the canopy height distributions, CHM variables, and external variables. A complete list of the predictors and their abbreviations is given in Table 1. Canopy height distribution variables were calculated at plot level using

only echoes above a 1.3 m height threshold. We computed several height percentiles ($h_0, h_{10}, \dots, h_{90}$) from this distribution. Furthermore, we derived several measures of canopy density. The calculation of point variables representing canopy density was carried out for 10 different vertical fractions of equal thickness (Næsset 2004). The thickness of each fraction was defined as one tenth of the distance between the 95 percentile and the lowest canopy height, i.e. 1.3 m (Gobakken and Næsset 2008). Canopy densities were then computed as the *proportions* of laser echoes above fraction 0, 1, ..., 9 to the total number of echoes, and denoted as $d_0, d_1, \dots, d_9$. In addition, the maximum, mean and coefficient of variation (cv) of the echo heights were calculated. Each of these variables was calculated twice using the first and last echoes as two separate data sets. We respectively use lowercase “*f*” and “*l*” to indicate the variables derived from the first and last echoes.

ALS variables that describe the horizontal canopy structure were calculated from the CHMs created with half meter resolution. The CHM was created by assigning each grid cell the value of the highest ALS echo within a one meter radius from the center of the cell. This method was selected because it also enables the creation of smooth CHMs from low density ($1 < \text{echoes m}^{-2}$) data (Mustonen et al. 2008, Pippuri et al. 2012), and is therefore commonly applied in practical inventories to create CHMs for stand delineation. As our initial ALS pulse density of 2.8 m^{-2} was slightly higher than that commonly used in practical inventories ($0.5\text{--}1.0 \text{ m}^{-2}$), we reduced it to 1 m^{-2} by randomly selecting one echo from each 1 m^2 cell, and then created an alternative low-resolution CHM using a 1m resolution and a 2m search radius (Mustonen et al. 2008). The ALS height distribution variables were not recalculated with the lower pulse density as density reduction does not significantly influence the estimation results (Maltamo et al. 2006).

The CHMs were used to calculate horizontal and texture variables for each plot. Horizontal variables were calculated similar to Pippuri et al. (2012). The image was first divided into canopy and ground patches (separate groups of 8-connected pixels) using a height threshold values of 10, 12.5, 15 and 17.5

m. The number of patches, mean area of patches, and the standard deviation of the area of patches were then calculated separately using canopy and ground-and-canopy patches as two separate data sets. In addition, for canopy patches we also calculated the total area, mean pixel height, standard deviation of the pixel heights, and the Euler number (the number of canopy patches minus the total number of holes in these patches). Haralick's texture metrics (Haralick 1973) of contrast, correlation, energy and homogeneity were also calculated from the CHMs. In the texture calculation, the CHM was reclassified into eight gray level classes, and the variables were calculated as the average of all the directions using three and six pixel offset values.

Finally, external variables were obtained from different sources. The terrain elevation, slope, aspect, and distance to the nearest road were extracted from topographic map data for every plot. In addition, a site productivity index was obtained from a forestry database. These variables helped us to quantify the effects of different growth conditions and management histories which occurred within the sample area.

(Table 1)

2.3 Modeling techniques

When using GLMs, the data are assumed to follow a pre-specified distribution, which must be defined in the model fitting. As our data consist of counts, the normal distribution is not a good option, but Poisson or negative binomial distribution models can be considered instead. Firstly, we tested Poisson regression as the simplest alternative, but the model diagnostics indicated an inadequate fit due to over-dispersion. NB regression performed better, as it extends the Poisson regression by adding a dispersion parameter that is independent of the mean (Affleck 2006). However, if the data are clearly

zero-inflated, then the NB model may not be flexible enough. In such cases, zero-inflated negative binomial (ZINB) models may be appropriate.

In order to specify a generalized linear model, we have to define both the probability density function of the random variable and the link function, which merge the regression coefficients and the covariates of the model. The NB distribution's probability density function can be written as,

$$P(Y = y) = \frac{\Gamma(y + \theta^{-1})}{\Gamma(y + 1)\Gamma(\theta^{-1})} \left(\frac{\theta^{-1}}{\theta^{-1} + \lambda} \right)^{\theta^{-1}} \left(\frac{\lambda}{\theta^{-1} + \lambda} \right)^y, \quad (1)$$

where λ is the mean parameter, θ is the dispersion parameter, and y is the random variable. The NB model can be seen as a generalization of the Poisson model in which the variance (characterized by the dispersion parameter θ) can differ from the expected value. Thus, the mean of the NB distribution is λ as in the Poisson model, but the variance is $\lambda + \theta\lambda^2$ (Zhang et al. 2012). When θ is zero, the NB distribution simplifies to the Poisson distribution. NB regression is based on fitting the NB distribution (Eq. 2) to the data, so that the mean parameter λ (equal to μ) is estimated as a function of the predictor variables. Furthermore, the dispersion parameter θ is estimated as a constant. To obtain λ from the regression equation, an inverse transformation of the selected link function must be applied. The default is the logarithmic link function, i.e. the λ is obtained as $\exp(X^T \theta)$.

ZINB regression extends the NB by introducing an additional binomial component that enables estimation that is even more flexible. ZINB models are appropriate when the data can be seen to be generated by two stochastic processes, one of which only contributes zeroes (Welsh et al. 1996). Our data can be seen to have such an interpretation, in that some of the plots are candidates for having large trees, while others could immediately be seen as not having large trees. The minimum field-measured height for a large tree was 7 m, and thus we hypothesized that the plots where all of the echo

heights were smaller than this limit would contribute only zeroes. The remaining plots either could or could not have large trees in them.

In accordance with Zhang et al. (2012), the probability mass function of the ZINB mixture model with binomial and negative binomial components is:

$$P(Y = y) = \begin{cases} \pi + (1 - \pi) \left(\frac{\theta^{-1}}{\theta^{-1} + \lambda} \right)^{1/\theta}, & y = 0 \\ (1 - \pi) \frac{\Gamma(y + \theta^{-1})}{\Gamma(y + 1) \Gamma(\theta^{-1})} \left(\frac{\theta^{-1}}{\theta^{-1} + \lambda} \right)^{1/\theta} \left(\frac{\lambda}{\theta^{-1} + \lambda} \right)^y, & y > 0 \end{cases} \quad (2)$$

where π is a parameter representing the probability that the observation is drawn from the zero-inflation component, λ is the mean parameter, θ is the dispersion parameter, and y is the random variable. When $\theta = 0$, the model is similar to a zero-inflated Poisson model. In a ZINB model, both λ and π are estimated as linear combinations of the covariates. If necessary, different covariates can be used for λ and π . For π , the logistic link function is typically used. In this case the expected value of the whole mixture distribution (i.e. the model prediction) is not directly one of the parameters, but depends on both π and λ : $E[Y] = \mu = (1 - \pi) \times \lambda$ (Affleck 2006).

We tested both the NB and ZINB models, but found that the ZINB models provided a slightly better prediction accuracy. Thus, we employed ZINB as the main model, but we also report the best NB model for comparison purposes because NB models are simpler. The ZINB models were fitted using the *pscI* package (Zeileis et al. 2008) in R statistical software (R core team 2013). The NB models were also fitted in R, using the *glm.nb* function from the external library MASS (Venables and Ripley 2002). The Akaike information criterion (AIC) (Akaike 1974) was calculated based on the estimated likelihoods and the number of model parameters, so that smaller values indicate a better model fit.

2.4 Variable selection and accuracy assessment

First, we created separate models based on each group of predictors reported in Table 1. An exhaustive search was performed to select the 2-3 best predictor variables from each group. These variables were candidates for the general model, and an exhaustive search was again made to find the 2-3 most influential variables for the general model. These variables were fixed into the model, and manual experimentation was finally applied to test different supplementary variables and their transformations for the final model.

The different models were evaluated based on a leave-strip-out cross validation (LSO-CV). In LSO-CV, the five original strips were split into nine sub-strips based on the terrain (52-204 plots per sub-strip). Each sub-strip was left out of the data one at a time, and predictions for that strip were produced using a model that was fitted using the remaining eight sub-strips. In this way, the predictions were not influenced by plots in the geographical vicinity. Error matrices were used to quantify the model accuracy. Each tree count from zero to eight trees had its own category, but all of the plots with >8 large trees were pooled so that the error matrix had ten categories.

The main criterion for the prediction accuracy was the weighted kappa coefficient (w_k) (Cohen 1968). The original kappa coefficient was developed for nominal variables, and hence it is not ideal for ordinal variables such as counts because it assigns equal weight to small and large errors (Næsset 1996). The weighted kappa assigns observations on the diagonal of the error matrix - weight one, one step away from the diagonal - weight two and so on, so that large distances from the diagonal also have large weights. Apart from this change, the interpretation is similar to the ordinary kappa, i.e. a value of zero indicates a random classification and a value of one a perfect classification. Ordinary kappa (κ), overall accuracy (OA: the percent of all observations classified correctly), producer's accuracy (PA: the percent

of correct classifications in each class observed in the field), and user's accuracy (UA: the percent of correct classifications in each predicted class) were also computed.

3 Results

Visual inspection indicated that it was possible to detect many large crowns directly from the point cloud (Fig 4) because the echo density was larger than seen in most area-based applications. However, it was common that even though there was a large crown visible in the data, no large trees were measured in the same field location. An obvious reason could be that the diameter of the tree was less than 35 cm, and therefore it was not included in our field data. Secondly, there was a three-year difference in time between the ALS data acquisition (2006) and the field inventory (2009). Thus, harvests and wind throw could have removed some trees after the ALS acquisition, although we saw no evidence that any such large-scale events had taken place when we undertook the field work. Sometimes there were offsets in the field-measured tree positions and the crown echoes which related to them, which might have been caused either by errors in the GNSS positioning or by tilted stems. Because of these differences, high echoes could sometimes be located outside the plot on which a large tree was positioned in the field, or vice versa. Some of these obvious errors were corrected manually, but some may still have remained undetected even though all plots were visually inspected. These inconsistencies between the data sets contributed to the somewhat low accuracy in the prediction of the plot-wise tree counts.

(Figure 4)

The best ZINB models obtained using variables from each group (Table 1) are shown separately in Table 2. The results show that the standard height distribution variables provided better accuracy ($w_k = 0.46$) than any of the other variable groups. Horizontal variables such as the number of CHM regions above a

specific height threshold and their mean area had a good correspondence with the visual impression of the point cloud (Figure 5), but did not reach as good an accuracy as height distribution variables ($wk = 0.37$ for both resolutions). The texture variables only reached $wk = 0.31$. Of the external variables, plot elevation and slope were slightly correlated with the presence of large trees. The prediction accuracy using only these variables remained poor ($wk = 0.14$), but this is reasonable since these variables are not directly related to tree size.

(Table 2, Figure 5)

The accuracy assessment of the final ZINB model including all variables is shown in Table 2, and its parameter estimates are shown in Table 3. The importance of the height distribution variables was also reflected in the final model, which contained five predictor variables: two density variables (d_{6f} and d_{1l}), one height percentile (h_{90l}), the logarithm of the plot elevation ($elev$), and the mean area of all horizontal patches obtained using a 12.5 meter height threshold ($Amean_{ap12.5h}$). The summary information about these variables is given in Table 4. This model reached $wk = 0.55$, which is clearly larger than the values obtained with any of the single variable groups. Notably, the height distribution variables selected in the final model were different from the variables selected in the model that had only height distribution variables, i.e. they functioned better with $elev$ and $Amean_{ap12.5h}$ than when alone. Some of the ZINB model's count model variables were not significant in the zero-inflation part of the model, where only d_{6f} , h_{90l} , and $\log(elev)$ were retained.

(Tables 3 and 4)

The best NB model is also reported in Tables 2 and 3. Based on the same variables as used in the ZINB count model, it reached a $wk = 0.52$. Thus, it can be seen that using the ZINB model with an additional zero-inflation component improved the wk by 3 percentage points. Furthermore, three variables were

needed in the zero-inflation part to gain an improvement over the NB model, indicating that the zero-inflation was not directly related to tree height as we assumed. If only one height variable was included in the zero-inflation model, the wk decreased to 0.51, i.e. there was no improvement over the simpler NB model.

There were many alternative models that provided nearly the same accuracy, but two variables were present in all of them: the h_{90l} height percentile and plot elevation. Large-diameter trees are obviously more common in stands with large heights, so the inclusion of a height quantile was expected. The marginal distribution of $\log(elev)$ was nonlinear and peaked at the elevation of 760 m, which is slightly above the mean of all plots. The reason for this could be that the lower elevations have been harvested more frequently, and that trees at high elevations seldom reach the lower limit of 35 cm diameter. Leaving the elevation out of the final model decreased the wk to 0.43, which is smaller than what was obtained using only height distribution variables. Thus, the influence of elevation on the overall variable selection was considerable.

Because the coefficients shown in Table 3 were normalized by subtracting the mean and dividing by the standard deviation of the original variables, the larger coefficients indicate a larger weight in the final prediction. It can be seen that the only the height variable present in the models had the largest normalized coefficient in both NB and ZINB count models, i.e. the presence of large-diameter trees was related to tree height. The two density percentiles d_{6f} and d_{1l} had opposite signs in both models. These variables were correlated ($R=0.75$), but the d_{1f} was calculated using first-and-only and the d_{6l} using last-and-only echoes. First echo variables typically represent the canopy surface and last echo variables represent the canopy somewhat below its surface. Both variables increase with the canopy density, but if the pulse penetration depth is small, then d_{1l} will have a large value in relation to d_{6f} . Thus, the interpretation of these opposite signs could be that large-diameter trees occurred in places where the

penetration into the canopy was small. This corresponds well with typical old-growth pine stands where the trees have rounded tops with dense needle layers.

The final variable in the model was mean area of all ground and canopy patches using a 12.5 m threshold value and 0.5 m CHMs ($A_{mean_{ap12.5h}}$). It had a negative sign in both count models, i.e. a small mean patch area indicated more large trees. This variable had its maximum value in plots that had no tree tops reaching this height (12.5 m), and a smaller value if there were many of them. Omitting $A_{mean_{ap12.5h}}$ from the model only decreased the w_k to 0.52, meaning that the estimation could also be done without the horizontal variables.

The error matrices for the ZINB and NB models are shown in Tables 5 and 6 respectively. It is easy to observe that although there is a clear correlation between the observed and predicted values, the individual estimates frequently had fairly large errors. For example, there was a plot that was predicted to have at least eight large-diameter trees, but in reality there was only one. Similarly, two plots that had at least nine large-diameter trees were predicted as having only one or two. The standard errors of the model coefficients were also fairly large (Table 3).

(Table 5, table 6)

4 Discussion

The results of the area-based estimation indicated that it is possible to predict the occurrence of large trees in a plot, but the individual predictions were often inaccurate. Landis and Koch (1977) characterized κ values ranging from 0.4 to 0.6 as a moderately successful classification, and our observed $w_k = 0.55$ falls within this range.

442

443 It is likely that the inaccuracy of individual predictions is mainly due to the problems mentioned above.
444 We consider that the trees that were just below the 35 cm diameter limit were the main source of error,
445 because they could not be separated from the trees that were just above the limit. On the other hand,
446 measuring and positioning all trees above, for example, a 30 cm limit would have increased the amount
447 of field work, and thus decreased the size of the modeling data. A later check of any uncertain trees
448 would have helped, but this was not possible in our case. A better alternative might have been an
449 interpretation of possible large trees based on the CHM before the field campaign, and then
450 measurement of these trees during the campaign. Especially on higher elevations, there were some
451 trees that had very small heights in relation to their DBH (Fig. 3). It is therefore likely that introducing a
452 height criterion into the definition of large trees would have improved the prediction accuracy, because
453 such outliers would have been excluded. However, we only measured height for every 5th tree, so we
454 were unable to test a height criterion in practice. Other possible error sources included the occasional
455 inaccuracy of tree positioning, and also the three-year time difference between the ALS data acquisition
456 and the field work.

457

458 Standard ALS-based canopy height distribution variables seem to suffice as predictor variables, as only
459 one CHM-based variable was selected into the final model and its influence on the predictions was fairly
460 small. The 0.5 and 1 m resolution CHM variables provided equally good results (Table 2). External
461 topographic variables may provide useful additional information. In our case, the plot elevation was a
462 crucial variable in the model, and leaving it out resulted in a major decrease in accuracy. Other external
463 variables did not improve the model.

464

465 Although the overall accuracy obtained with regressions was not very high, the models were capable of
466 taking into account the large amount of zeroes and uncovering the relationships between the variables,
467 despite the noisy nature of the data. It is likely that the low degree of accuracy is related to the data

itself and not the modeling technique. ZINB models performed slightly better than simpler NB models, but based on the available data, we cannot be certain if this difference is real or only a result of over-fitting the model. The results above were derived from a leave-strip-out cross validation, and the wk values were typically a few percent smaller than in the training data. This decrease was considerably smaller than what we observed while testing the K- nearest neighbor method with random forest distance metrics in an initial phase of the analyses.

Affleck (2006) recommended the use of NB models without a separate zero-inflation component, as they are simpler to interpret and less prone to over-fitting. However, Eskelson et al. (2009) assumed that ZINB models might be better in cases where the data showed evidence of two separate distributions, which was not the case in their data of snag abundance. Zhang et al. (2012) confirmed this assumption in their study on tree recruitment prediction. Our results indicated that the ZINB regression was better than the other parametric or nonparametric methods that were initially tested, but the differences were fairly small. It would also have been possible to convert the tree counts into trees per hectare and use linear regression analysis, but we consider count modeling methods better justified as any such transformations would not change the discrete nature of the data.

One of the advantages of the area-based method (which in statistical sampling terminology is a small-area estimation technique based on model predictions) compared to sample-based inventories that do not use auxiliary data with complete geographical coverage is the ability to create maps. Maps depicting the frequency of large-diameter trees should be valuable to guide e.g. timber procurement efforts, because they would guide the user to locations with large trees, although the exact number of trees would be uncertain. If the objective is to establish a reliable inventory of large-diameter trees, then the model predictions could be used as prior information to guide the placement of a limited number of sample plots into locations where large-diameter trees are likely to be found (Pesonen et al. 2009).

It can be argued that predicting the mean diameter of each stand and selecting the sites where predictions indicate trees larger than 35 cm in diameter could be used to find stands with large-diameter trees. However, individual large-diameter trees can also exist in stands in which the mean diameter is smaller than this limit. If the whole diameter distribution could be precisely predicted, then separate models for large trees would not be needed. The diameter distributions derived from remotely sensed data tend to be rough approximations, and not very accurate for extreme values (for example large-diameter trees). Therefore, to directly model the variable of interest is a suitable and reliable alternative.

Finally, the use of individual tree detection (ITD) methods (e.g. Vauhkonen et al. 2012) would probably enable a better estimation of the dominant tree layer features than an area-based approach. Thus far, high pulse density ($>5 \text{ m}^{-2}$) ALS data acquisitions needed for the reliable detection of individual tree crowns have usually been viewed as too expensive for most practical applications. The use of ALS sensors that utilize multiple-pulses-in-air technology enables the acquisition of denser point clouds at reasonable costs, so making ITD applications more feasible. Nevertheless, in most cases managers will probably choose to minimize the cost, which means that low-density ALS data sets will be more commonly available than data which is suitable for single-tree segmentation. In such cases, these methods can be applied in the mapping of, for example, large-diameter trees, snags, or other count parameters of interest. Maps of sites with large-diameter trees should prove valuable for managers that need to locate large trees either for protection or harvesting.

In conclusion, our results show that GLM methods are suitable for the area-based estimation of large-diameter tree counts. However the predictions achieved were approximate and could have fairly large errors, which were mostly related to problems in the field data. ZINB models showed a better fit than NB models, but the difference was fairly small. ALS height quantiles together with plot elevation sufficed for prediction, but horizontal canopy variables may also improve the models.

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684 **Table 1.** List of all predictor variables and their abbreviations.

Height distribution variables	
<i>max, mean, cv</i>	Maximum, mean and coefficient of variation of echo heights above 1.3 meters, m
<i>h₀, h₁₀, ..., h₉₀</i>	Height percentiles for echoes above 1.3 m, m
<i>d₀, d₁, ..., d₉</i>	Density variables for echoes above 1.3 m, %
Subscripts <i>f</i> and <i>l</i> indicate if the variable was calculated using first-and-only or last-and-only echoes, respectively.	
Horizontal CHM variables	
<i>N_{cp}, A_{cp}</i>	The number of canopy patches and their total area*
<i>Amean_{cp}, Asd_{cp}</i>	Mean and standard deviation of the area of the canopy patches*
<i>Hmean_{cp}, Hsd_{cp}</i>	Mean and standard deviation of the height of the canopy patches*
<i>N_{ap}</i>	Number of all (ground and canopy) patches*
<i>Amean_{ap}, Asd_{ap}</i>	Mean and standard deviation of the area of all patches*
<i>euler</i>	Euler number of the canopy patches*
Numeric subscript indicates the height that was used to divide the patches into ground and canopy.	
CHM texture variables	
<i>con, cor, ene, hom</i>	Contrast, correlation, energy, homogeneity*
Numeric subscript indicates the offset distance.	
External variables	
<i>slope, aspect, elev</i>	Slope, aspect, and elevation of the plot
<i>rdist, sindex</i>	Distance to road, site index

685 * Subscripts *h* and *l* indicate if the variable was calculated using high (0.5 m) or low (1 m) resolution

686 CHM.

Table 2. Best models by variable group. Variable abbreviations are explained in Table 1. AIC = Akaike information criterion, OA = overall accuracy, κ = kappa coefficient, $\omega\kappa$ = weighted kappa coefficient.

Variable group	Predictors	AIC	OA	κ	$\omega\kappa$
Height distribution	max_{lv} , d_{10lv} , d_{80lv}	1924	61.8	0.33	0.46
Horizontal (0.5 m)	$Amean_{ap12.5lv}$, $Hmean_{cp17.5lv}$, $Amean_{ap17.5lv}$	2081	57.4	0.29	0.37
Horizontal (1 m)	$Amean_{ap12.5lv}$, $Hmean_{cp12.5lv}$, $euler_{10lv}$	2088	58.5	0.29	0.37
Texture	cor_{3lv} , hom_{3lv} , hom_{6lv}	2207	54.7	0.24	0.31
External	$elev$, $slope$	2414	35.6	0.11	0.14
All variables (ZINB)	d_{6lv} , d_{1lv} , h_{90lv} , $\log(elev)$, $Amean_{ap12.5lv}$	1845	65.8	0.37	0.55
All variables (NB)	d_{6lv} , d_{1lv} , h_{90lv} , $\log(elev)$, $Amean_{ap12.5lv}$	1907	63.6	0.33	0.52

Table 3. Parameter estimates of the final negative binomial and zero-inflated negative binomial models. The ZINB model has two components: the count model that uses the negative binomial pdf and logarithmic link, and the zero-inflation model that uses the binomial pdf with a logit link. θ is the model dispersion parameter. The response variables were normalized to follow the N(0,1) distribution. All variables were statistically significant at $p<0.05$.

		ZINB		NB	
		Estimate	Std. Error	Estimate	Std. Error
Count model	(Intercept)	-0.8201	0.089	-1.2084	0.070
	d_{6f}	-0.4666	0.076	-0.6745	0.071
	d_{1l}	0.5973	0.060	0.6123	0.062
	h_{90l}	1.2210	0.093	1.2755	0.092
	$\log(elev)$	0.8997	0.074	0.7402	0.069
	$Amean_{ap12.5}$	-0.4215	0.103	-0.6915	0.095
	$\log(\theta)$	1.9536	0.344	1.5385	0.215
Zero-inflation model	(Intercept)	-5.4574	1.218		
	d_{6f}	1.9011	0.366		
	h_{90l}	-2.5997	1.024		
	$\log(elev)$	5.6865	1.503		

700

701 **Table 4.** Minimum, mean, maximum and standard deviation values for the variables that appear in the
702 models.

	Min	Mean	Max	Sd
d_{6f} (%)	0.0	18.5	65.9	14.9
d_{1f} (%)	0.0	22.9	65.8	14.0
h_{90f} (m)	1.4	9.8	21.6	4.2
$elev$ (m)	492	725	989	95.4
$A_{mean_{ap12.5}}$ (m ²)	41.3	709	1156	473

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Table 5. Error matrix of the final ZINB model (Table 3) derived from leave-strip-out cross validation. The weighted kappa coefficient for the model was 0.55. OA, UA, PA = overall, user’s, and producer’s accuracy.

		Observed										Sum	UA (%)
		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9+		
Predicted	0	609	62	10	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	684	89.0
	1	109	80	44	10	7	4	0	0	0	1	255	31.4
	2	13	18	25	12	7	6	3	1	0	1	86	29.1
	3	5	5	11	10	7	4	3	1	0	0	46	21.7
	4	1	2	1	2	2	1	3	1	0	0	13	15.4
	5	0	0	3	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	5	0.0
	6	0	0	1	2	0	2	0	0	0	1	6	0.0
	7	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	2	1	1	7	28.6
	8	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0.0
	9+	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	2	6	33.3
Sum		737	168	95	41	26	18	9	7	2	6	1109	OA
PA (%)		82.6	47.6	26.3	24.4	7.7	0.0	0.0	28.6	0.0	33.3		65.8

Table 6. Error matrix of the final NB model (Table 3) derived from leave-strip-out cross validation. Weighted kappa coefficient for the model was 0.52. OA, UA, PA = overall, user's, and producer's accuracy.

		Observed										Sum	UA (%)
		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9+		
Predicted	0	601	70	12	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	685	87.7
	1	112	71	43	11	9	3	1	0	0	2	252	28.2
	2	16	19	20	14	7	8	2	1	0	0	87	23.0
	3	5	5	14	8	4	3	3	1	0	0	43	18.6
	4	2	2	3	2	2	1	3	0	0	0	15	13.3
	5	1	0	3	1	3	0	0	2	1	0	11	0.0
	6	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	2	6	0.0
	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100.0
	8	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	4	0.0
	9+	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	4	25.0
Sum		737	168	95	41	26	18	9	7	2	6	1109	OA
PA (%)		81.5	42.3	21.1	19.5	7.7	0.0	0.0	28.6	0.0	16.7		63.6

FIGURE CAPTIONS

Figure 1. Location of the study area and the placement of survey strips within it. The black dots indicate field plots within the scanned strips.

Figure 2. Observed tree counts per plot within the 1109 plots.

Figure 3. Height-diameter scatterplot for sample large-diameter trees ($n=145$).

Figure 4. Two examples from the ALS strips with some large trees (white triangles) located in field. Darker points indicate high laser echoes.

Figure 5. An example of horizontal CHM variables. White color represents a CHM area above a 12.5 m height threshold. A large crown with maximum ALS height = 15.1 m is clearly visible with both 0.5 m and 1.0 m resolutions, but no tree with a DBH > 35 cm was recorded in the field for this location.

Figure 2. Observed tree counts per plot within the 1109 plots.
177x177mm (300 x 300 DPI)

Figure 3. Height-diameter scatterplot for sample large-diameter trees (n=145).
177x138mm (300 x 300 DPI)

Figure 4. Two examples from the ALS strips with some large trees (white triangles) located in field. Darker points indicate high laser echoes.
230x168mm (300 x 300 DPI)

Figure 5. An example of horizontal CHM variables. White color represents a CHM area above a 12.5 m height threshold. A large crown with maximum ALS height = 15.1 m is clearly visible with both 0.5 m and 1.0 m resolutions, but no tree with a DBH > 35 cm was recorded in the field for this location.
139x64mm (300 x 300 DPI)