

4.2: Computer Model for Constant Fluxes Worksheet

In the Tiny Pool and Flux Game you could investigate some important patterns in how fluxes change the size of pools. But the Tiny Pool and Flux Game didn't have a very realistic ecosystem. Instead of 10 carbon atoms, real ecosystems normally have thousands of kilograms of carbon (and 1 kg of carbon has more than 50,000,000,000,000,000 carbon atoms).

A. Collect and record results for Model 1

In this activity, you will investigate patterns in a computer model of a larger ecosystem, with 1000 kg of carbon (though this model is still different from real ecosystems in some important ways. Click the **one-turtle model**: <http://media.bsos.org/carbontime/simulations/pool-flux-simulation/index.html>

- Two pools:
 - Inorganic carbon (CO₂) in the atmosphere (lavender color)
 - Organic carbon in producers, consumers, decomposers, and soil organic carbon (green color)

The size of the pools is measured in kilograms (kg). There is always a total 1000 kg in the ecosystem. You can use the sliders to say how much carbon is in each pool. (The graph shows just the organic carbon pool, since the CO₂ pool is always just the difference between the organic carbon pool and 1000 kg.)

- Two fluxes:
 - Photosynthesis changes CO₂ into organic carbon (light blue color in the model, Phs. flux in the table)
 - Cellular respiration by producers, consumers, and decomposers changes organic carbon back into CO₂ (dark blue color, CR flux in the table)

Fluxes describe how fast carbon moves from one pool to the other, so fluxes are measured in kilograms per year (kg/yr). You can use the sliders to set each flux at any value from 0 kg/yr to 100 kg/yr.

When you run the simulation, you can see both graphs and tables showing how the fluxes and the organic carbon pool change over time. Notice that you can slide the line on the graph to any time, and the table will show the pools and fluxes at that time.

1. Try the first two runs. Use the table below to show the results of different runs. Start with the settings suggested for runs 1 and 2, then try your own settings! Click on the graph to see a sliding line that you can use to get the exact pool sizes for a specific time.

#	Initial setting (0 years)				1 year		5 years		20 years	
	CO ₂ pool	Organic pool	Phs. flux	CR flux	CO ₂ pool	Org. pool	CO ₂ pool	Org. pool	CO ₂ pool	Org. pool
1	500 kg	500 kg	50 kg/yr	50 kg/yr						
2	500 kg	500 kg	50 kg/yr	70 kg/yr						
3										
4										
5										

#	Initial setting (0 years)				1 year		5 years		20 years	
	CO ₂ pool	Organic pool	Phs. flux	CR flux	CO ₂ pool	Org. pool	CO ₂ pool	Org. pool	CO ₂ pool	Org. pool
6										
7										
8										

- For Row 3 try any combination of pools and fluxes that you would like, and record what happens.
- A challenge for Row 4: Can you come up with different settings for the Phs. and CR fluxes that will produce the same results as Row 2? Record what you tried and the results.
- Something else to try: Can you leave the starting pool size the same, but change the fluxes so that:
 - The org. (organic carbon) pool reaches 1000 kg in 10 years?
 - The CO₂ pool reaches 1000 kg in 20 years?

Record the results of your tries on the table.

- Use the remaining rows of the table to record the results of other runs that you try.

B. Questions about Patterns

- What happens if you change the initial settings for pool size, but leave the fluxes the same? Why?

- What patterns did you notice as you ran the model. Use the space below to explain the patterns you saw in how fluxes can change the sizes of pools (or keep them the same).
