

# Community Well-Being, Satisfaction, and Attachment in the Adirondacks

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<http://nsrcforest.org>

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<http://markkurtzphotography.com/>

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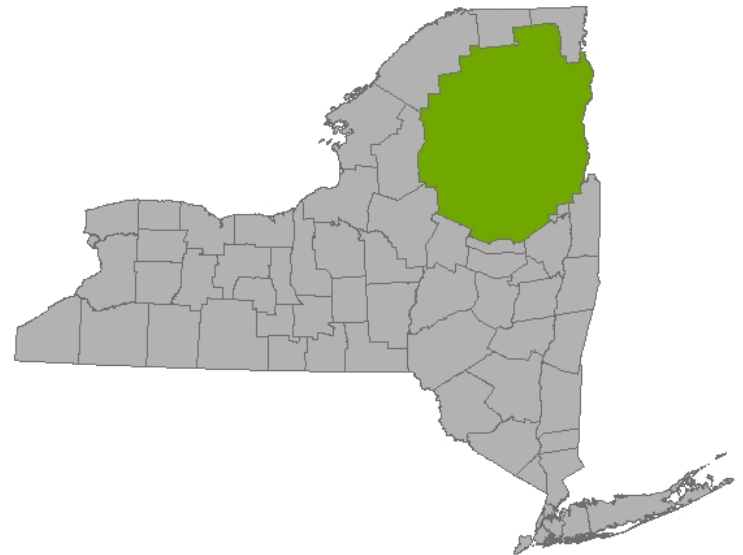
Barat Wolfe, SLU Psychology Department

# Project Summary

The Adirondack Park is a unique combination of public and private lands where people live among wilderness landscapes. Balancing the needs of park residents and conserving the surrounding landscape is a challenge to park managers, policy-makers, and residents. This study's main objective was to develop a typology of communities to help public policy-makers frame appropriate community development responses to the changing social landscape of the Adirondacks and New York's Northern Forest. Using Census data, five community types were identified as having relatively distinct social and economic relationships to the surrounding landscapes. Analysis suggests that communities that have capitalized on landscape amenities are more prosperous than communities that have more traditional rural economies. A household survey of permanent residents in five towns: Lake George, the Town of Webb, Harrietstown, Warrensburg, and Tupper Lake, was conducted to assess residents' perceptions of community satisfaction, attachment, and involvement, as well as their perceptions and attitudes about life in the park. Results show that community satisfaction, attitudes toward the Adirondack Park Agency (APA), and attitudes toward the DEC's Management of the Forest Preserve varied across the five communities. The amenity-based communities tended to have higher levels of community satisfaction, be more supportive of APA land use regulations, and less likely to support resource development and motorized recreation expansion. The more traditional communities showed less community satisfaction, were more likely to support resource development, the expansion of motorized recreation, and were unlikely to support further conservation and resource preservation activities. Community attachment and participation as well as support for tourism and economic development were relatively consistent across the towns. The study findings suggest that park communities unequally benefit from the Adirondacks' natural amenities. Policy and community development approaches should seek to pay closer attention to the dynamics and values within the different community types to best address the communities' needs.

# Background & Justification

New York's Adirondack Park is a mix of public and private land covering approximately six million acres. Within the park's boundary are all or a portion of 12 counties, 11 villages, 92 townships and 130,000 residents. Public lands are managed by the NY Department of Environmental Conservation and are afforded protection as "Forever Wild" under the state constitution. Private land is subject to intense regulation by the Adirondack Park Agency. Over the past century the economic base for communities within the park has undergone a transformation away from extractive and productive activities to economies based in tourism and second homes.





# Background & Justification

Although often discussed as a single region, rates of growth and development across the Adirondack Park have been uneven. Communities in the southeast of the Park have experienced the greatest population and property value gains (Bauer 2009). In the rest of the Park, residents have voiced concerns that there are no “good jobs” and that young people are leaving the region in search of better economic opportunities. These changes have become a major concern of regional officials and are often highlighted in local media.

The media discourse has tended to focus on questions of land use and the land use controls implemented by the Adirondack Park Agency (APA). Commentators often suggest that the environmental protections afforded by the public ownership of land and the land-use controls are at the root of the region’s problems. Past research seeking to link land-use controls to economic development in the Park has shown no evidence to suggest that this is the case (Anderson & Dover 1980, Keal & Wilkie 2003). Alternatively, others interpret issues in the Park as a reflection of changes being experienced broadly in rural America (Strike & Duvall 2010). The discourse on land use tends to obscure the impact of global and national economic changes on Park communities because it is complex and not a directly visible part of residents’ experience.

Missing from the discussion is a theoretically informed empirical analysis of the park’s social landscape and its relationship to biophysical landscape. The sources of variability that might explain differences in park community are not well understood nor have they been the focus of research (Strike 2011). This study seeks to inform policy discussions about sustainable community development in the Adirondack Park by seeking to identify the factors associated with socio-economic well-being and community satisfaction for park residents.

# Goals & Supporting Objectives

The purpose of this study is to analyze and describe factors contributing to the variation in socio-economic well-being and community satisfaction in the Adirondack Park. The overall project goal is to develop a better understanding of the effects of natural amenities and related development on socio-economic well-being at the community level and residents' perceptions of community satisfaction and attachment. The four project objectives are:

- 1) To develop a typology of communities within or adjoining the Adirondack Park based on indicators of population change, human capital, economic dependence and housing;
- 2) To evaluate the degree to which differences in community types are related to social and natural amenities as well as indicators of community prosperity and well-being;
- 3) To analyze the degree to which perceptions of individual well-being, community satisfaction, community attachment, and local social bonds vary across community types and resident characteristics; and
- 4) To analyze differences in attitudes toward tourism, resource development, and the Adirondack Park Agency (APA) across a continuum of community types and resident characteristics.

# Census Data Analysis

## Primary Research Questions:

- 1) Can community types associated with tourism and amenity economies be identified across the Adirondack Park?
- 2) Are there significant differences in terms of socio-economic well-being and prosperity across the typology?

## Approach & Procedure

Mapped Data from 2000 Census, 2010 Census, and 2010 American Communities Survey 5-year estimates for all towns and cities in the 12 Counties that contain the Adirondacks.

Cluster analyzed towns fully or partially in the Adirondack Park based on population change, seasonal homes, employment in tourism, educational attainment, median home value and % of home values more than \$500,000

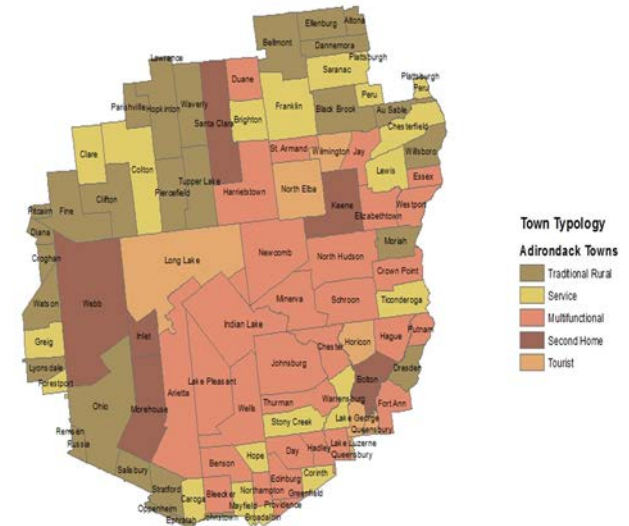
Analyzed differences across the typology in four dimensions of prosperity: poverty, employment, high school graduation rates, quality of the housing stock.

# Town Typology

Cluster analysis revealed five town types suggesting a continuum of amenity related socio-economic structures.

Cluster variable characteristics by town type.

Amenity Indicator Means	Traditional Rural N = 30	Service N = 19	Multifunctional N = 30	Second Home N = 6	Tourist N = 7
% Second Homes	30%	32%	44%	71%	38%
Median Value (2010 \$)	\$84,623	\$121,210	\$161,193	\$300,733	\$225,485
>\$500K	3%	3%	6%	27%	12%
% with College Ed.	14%	20%	24%	31%	33%
% Pop. Change	0%	-1%	-2%	-11%	1%
% Employed in Tourism	7%	10%	11%	20%	17%





# Town Type Social Characteristics

Amenity related communities tend to be older, have fewer children, and have more public lands.

	Traditional Rural N = 30	Service N = 19	Multifunctional N = 30	Second Home N = 6	Tourist N = 7
Average Population	2174	3335	1622	1000	7357
Median Age	43	43	47	50	45
% Over 65	15%	17%	20%	23%	18%
% Under 18	21%	20%	18%	17%	18%
% Private Land	85%	80%	57%	34%	65%

# Town Type Income & Employment Characteristics

Income, employment and occupation vary across the town typology consistent with association to amenity-based economies.

Income, Employment, & Occupation Class Means	Traditional Rural N = 30	Service N = 19	Multifunctional N = 30	Second Home N = 6	Tourist N = 7
Median Household Income	\$42,406	\$46,438	\$48,814	\$49,727	\$53,402
<b>Employment Industry</b>					
% Ag, Forestry, Mining	4%	3%	3%	1%	.8%
% Manufacturing	11%	8%	7%	2%	5%
% F.I.R.E.	4%	2%	4%	7%	5%
<b>Occupation Class</b>					
% M.B.S.A.	26%	30%	31%	34%	36%
% Sale & Office	18%	20%	18%	19%	18%
% P.T.M.M	14%	11%	14%	8%	9%

# Amenities and Community Prosperity

Amenity related communities tend to have less poverty, more employment, and better high school graduation rates.

Prosperity/ Well Being Indicator Means	Traditional Rural N = 30	Service N = 19	Multifunctional N = 30	Second Home N = 6	Tourist N = 7
% All Families Below Poverty	10%	9%	7%	3%	6%
% Families with Related Children Below Poverty	18%	14%	11%	7%	11%
% Unemployed	9%	7%	7%	2%	3%
% High School Drop Out	4%	5%	2%	0%	2%
% Housing Problems	28%	28%	27%	27%	28%

# Household Survey

## Primary Research Questions:

- 1) Does residents' community satisfaction and attachment vary across the town typology?
- 2) Do residents vary in their community participation across the town typology ?
- 3) Do attitudes toward the Adirondack Park Agency, Forest Preserve Management, and economic development vary across the town typology?

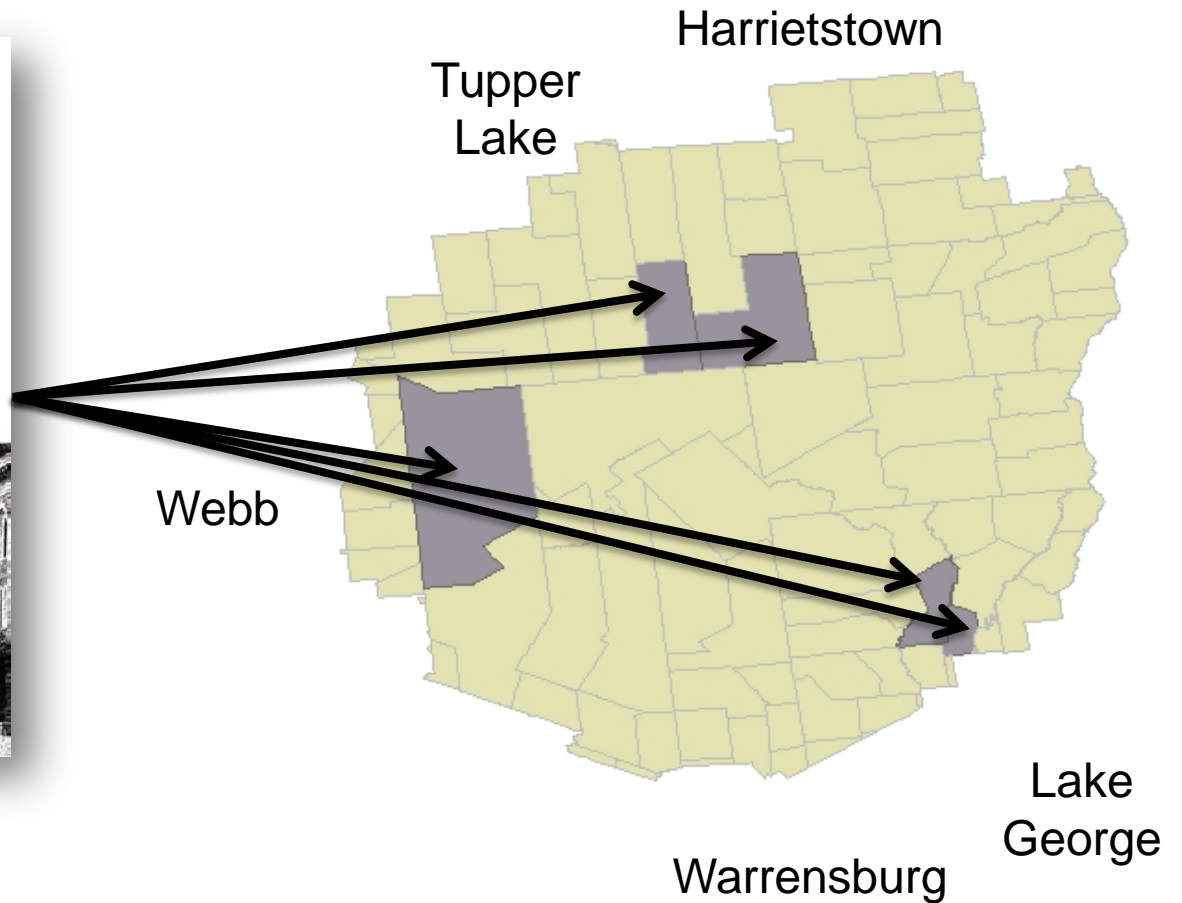
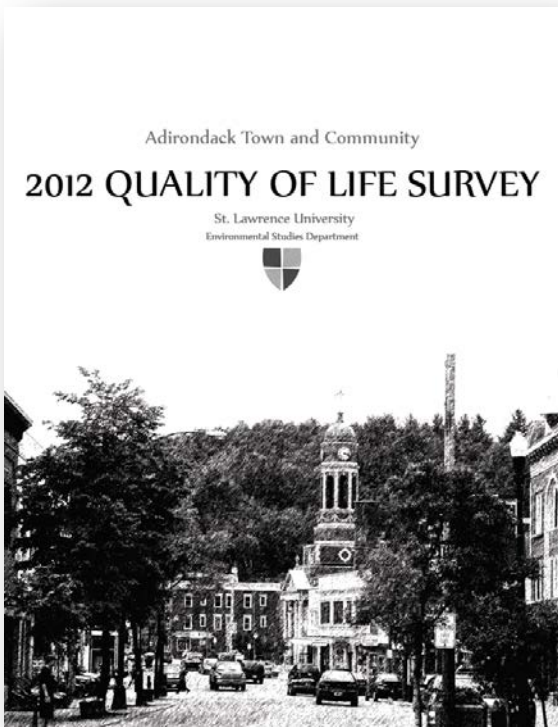
## Approach and Procedures

Five towns representing each of the types and some geographic diversity were chosen: Tupper Lake = Traditional Rural, Warrensburg = Service, Harriestown = Multifunctional, Town of Webb = Second Home, Lake George = Tourist.

Simple random sample of *households* in each town n=1389.(Sample provided by Survey Sampling International)

Combined adjusted response rate of 38.8%, n = 539.

# Household Survey



# Town Census Demographics

	Lake George	Webb	Harrietstown	Warrensburg	Tupper Lake
2010 Pop.	3,515	1,807	5,709	4,094	5,971
2000-2010 % Pop. Δ	-1.7	-5.4	2.4	-3.8	-2.7
Median Age	46	52	41	44	42
% Female	49.5	49.7	49.0	51.1	47.3
Median Household Income	\$53,452	\$50,083	\$41,834	\$38,146	\$46,301
% with BA+	38.3	35.0	36.9	11.6	13.9
% Seasonal Homes	36.5	75.1	17.0	15.6	18.3
Median Home Value (2010 \$)	\$236,300	\$309,500	\$147,900	\$125,700	\$104,600
% Tourism Employment	21.5	21.5	13.9	16.1	4.7
% Unemployment	6.8	1.6	5.6	11.8	7.1
% Families Below Poverty	2.7	4.4	4.5	14.2	4.8



# Survey Demographics

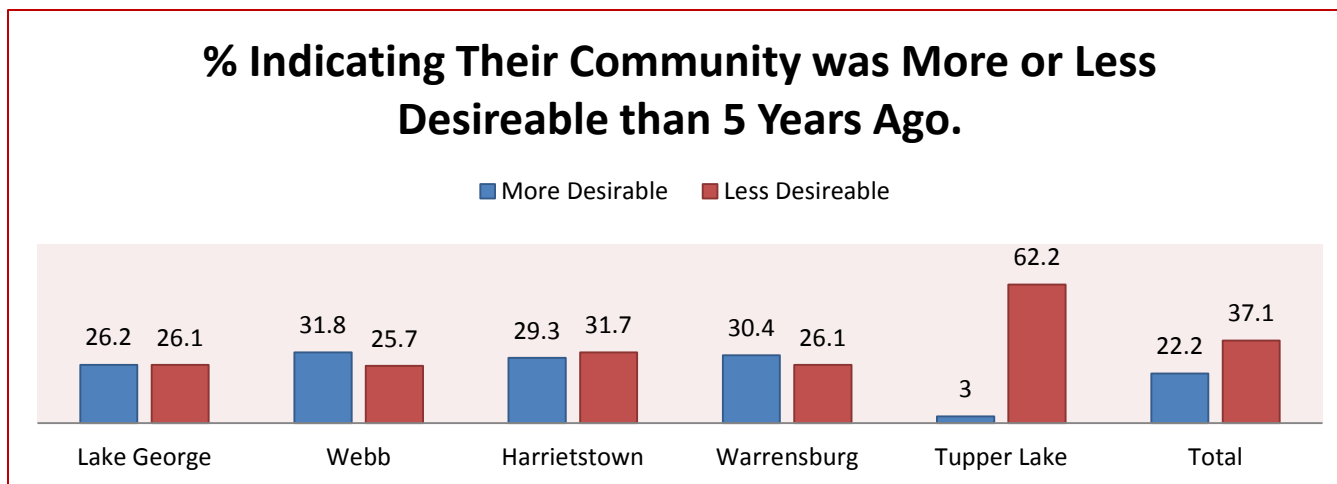
	Lake George	Webb	Harrietstown	Warrensburg	Tupper Lake
n	99	73	131	100	136
Adjusted Response Rate (%)	33	37	47	34	42
Mean Age	57	63	52	61	59
Mean Residence Length (yrs)	29	30	33	38	42
% Female	34.9	39.7	39.2	44.2	34.8
% Household income \$55,000 +	66.7	36.8	50.0	34.4	39.5
% BA+	43.2	26.5	56.0	25.3	17.6
% Own Residence	84.3	89.9	78.9	92.6	85.9

Survey respondents tended to be older, more educated and more likely to be male than the population.

# General Community Attitudes

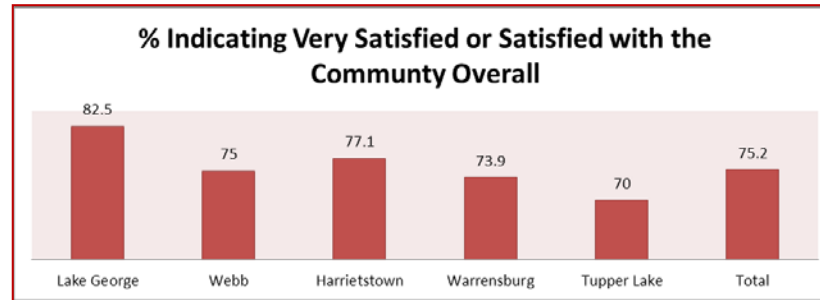
79.4 % of respondents indicated that they were Very Interested or Interested in knowing what goes on in their community.

Respondents were more likely to indicate that their community was less desirable than five years ago. This was especially true for Tupper Lake.

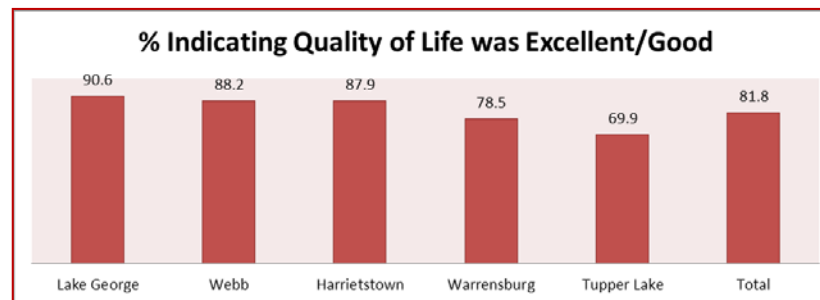


# Community Satisfaction

Overall there were high levels of community satisfaction across the survey town. When asked to rate how satisfied they were with their community, 75.2% of the respondents indicated they were Very Satisfied or Satisfied. Only 5.8% said they were Dissatisfied or Very Dissatisfied. Residents of Lake George were the most satisfied while residents of Tupper Lake were the least satisfied.



When asked to rate overall quality of life, 81.2% of the respondents indicated that it was “Excellent” or “Good.” The largest proportion was Lake George residents (90.3%) while the smallest proportion was in Tupper Lake (69.9%)



# Community Attachment

Community attachment did not vary across towns.

When asked “Given the opportunity, I would move out of this community,” 18 % indicated that they agreed.

When asked how sorry they would be to leave 81% indicated that they would be “Sorry” or “Very Sorry”

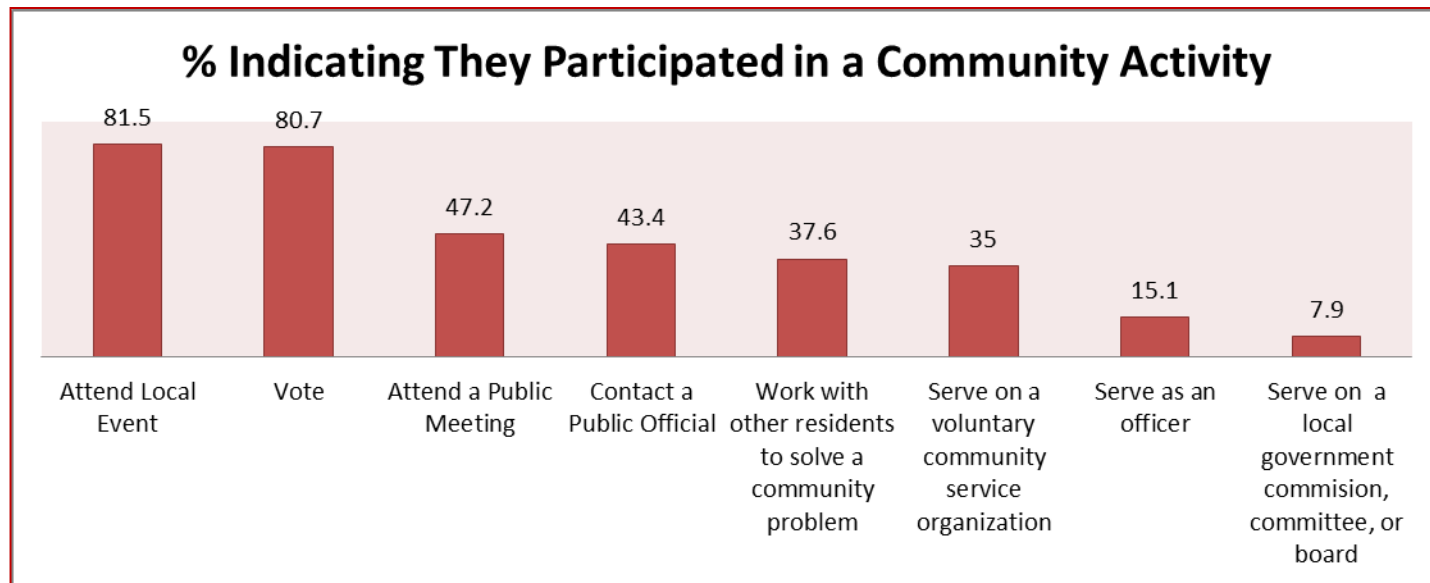
# Community Involvement

Warrensburg respondents reported the least involvement.

31.9 % indicate they were somewhat or very active.

Across all towns, 50.9% indicated spending more than an hour a month attending community organization meetings or activities.

Majorities vote or attend local events.



# Attitudes Toward the Adirondack Park Agency and Land Use Regulations

20 % of the respondents reported directly interacting with the APA.

64% indicated that they believed that the APA regulations constrained growth.

15% believed the APA fairly administered its regulations

Attitudes toward the APA varied across the towns.

The Lake George and Webb were less likely to believe that the APA was the source of the Park's problems than Tupper Lake.

Lake George and Webb were more likely to agree that the APA regulations protected property values.



# Attitudes Toward Forest Preserve Management

There were no differences across communities regarding respondents' self reported knowledge about DEC practices.

Satisfaction with DEC management varied across towns. Residents of Harrietstown were most likely to agree that they were satisfied (42%). Residents of Tupper Lake were most likely to disagree (29%). For the other three towns, a plurality said they neither agreed nor disagreed (44-46%)

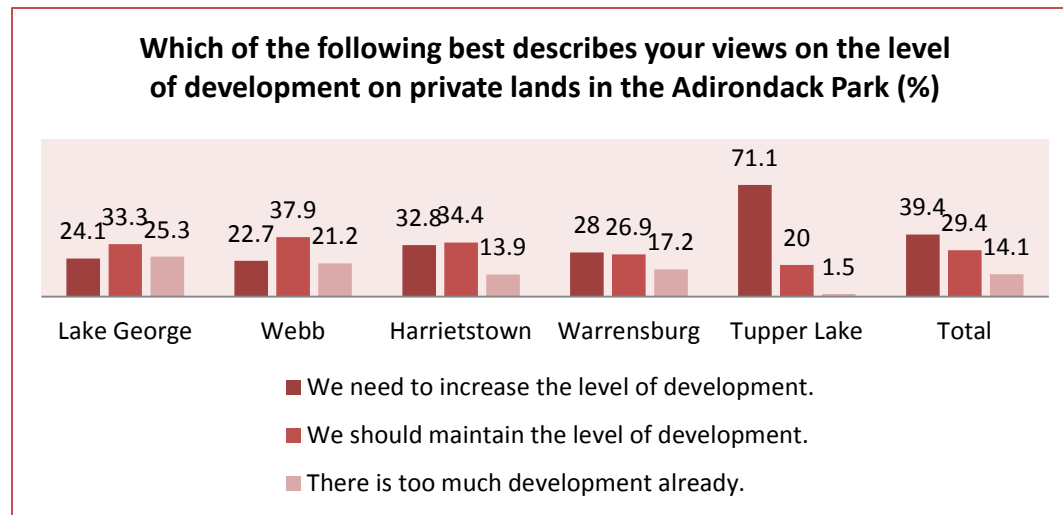
Residents of Tupper Lake and Warrensburg were more likely to support resource development and increased motorized recreation than residents of Lake George, Webb, and Harrietstown.

Support for further wilderness designation, additions to the Forest Preserve, and the purchase of conservations easements were not widespread. Residents of Lake George, Webb, and Harrietstown were more likely to support these policies than residents of Tupper Lake or Warrensburg.

# Attitudes toward Tourism and Economic Development

50% of respondents believed that the park reduced opportunities for economic development while 25% thought it benefited park communities.

Residents of Tupper Lake are more likely than the rest of the respondents to say that more private lands need to be developed.



Residents across towns agreed about

90% say their community need more good jobs.

86% believe tourism is important to the local economy.

46% of respondents from Tupper lake agreed with the statement “Economic growth and creating jobs should be a top priority even if it comes at the expense of the natural environment.”

# Implications & Applications in the Northern Forest

Developing typologies of Northern Forest communities could help regional policy-makers better understand the diversity and the similarities of communities across the Northern Forest region in ways that can help frame community development efforts and policies.

Community and Economic development efforts should consider resident quality of life and community satisfaction as an animating principal.

The high levels of community attachment and participation found across the Adirondacks can be a source of capacity and resilience that can be leveraged to improve community life. The same attachment and participation may, ironically, help fuel disagreements within and between communities.

# Future Directions

Future research should seek to include smaller towns with less population density.

Longitudinal data collection and analysis should seek to track changes in community characteristics and residents' perceptions of satisfaction and attachment as communities change. This could be particularly interesting for the Town of Tupper Lake where the APA recently approved a resort development.

Community satisfaction in relation to compensating wage differential holds promise as direction for interdisciplinary analysis of rural population change.

Closer investigation of phenomena like rational underinvestment in education may shed light on community prosperity as communities transition away from traditional rural activities and toward tourism and amenities.

# Project Outreach

## Public Outreach Presentations:

“Tourism and community well-being in the Adirondack Park.” St. Lawrence University Center for Teaching and Learning Faculty Café Series. March 23, 2012.

“Community well-being, satisfaction, and attachment in the Adirondack Park.” SUNY Plattsburgh, Adirondack Research Symposium. January 17, 2013.

## Private Consultations:

Adirondack Futures Project – [www.adkfutures.org](http://www.adkfutures.org)  
The Nature Conservancy/ Adirondack Land Trust  
Adirondack Park Agency planners

## Data Sharing :

Dr. Stacy Rosenberg, Department of Environmental Studies, SUNY Potsdam  
Dr. Stephan Brown, Adirondack Community Prosperity Modeling Project

<http://blogs.stlawu.edu/adkresearch>  
Twitter: [@sluidkresearch](https://twitter.com/sluidkresearch)

# List of Products

## Conference Presentations

Backlund, E.A. (2014). Recreation Participation, Community, and Adirondack Park Management Policy Preferences. *2014 Northeastern Recreation Research Symposium*. Cooperstown, NY.

Backlund, E.A. (2013). Attitudes toward land use regulation and private land development in five Adirondack Park communities. *19<sup>th</sup> International Symposium on Society and Research Management* Estes Park, CO.

Backlund, E.A. (2013). The effects of community participation and satisfaction on evaluating out migration among Adirondack residents.

Backlund, E.A., Streeter, S., & Cady, C. (2012) Five community types in New York's Adirondack Park. *2012 International Symposium on Society and Natural Resources*, Edmonton AB.

Backlund, E.A. (2012). Tourism, amenities, and community prosperity in the Adirondacks. *2012 Adirondack Research Consortium*. Lake Placid, NY.

Shrope, C. & Pynchon, D. (2013). Resident evaluations of community satisfaction in five Adirondack towns. *2013 Adirondack Research Consortium Student Symposium*. Paul Smith's, NY.

Shrope, C. & Pynchon, D. (2013). Resident evaluations of community satisfaction in five Adirondack towns. *2013 Adirondack Research Consortium*. Lake Placid, NY.



# List of Products

## Working Papers

Backlund, E.A. (Working). Amenity economies and community prosperity in the Adirondack Park. *Journal of Rural Social Sciences*.

Pynchon, D., Shrope, C., & Backlund, E.A. (Working). Community satisfaction across the Adirondacks. *Adirondack Journal of Environmental Studies*.

Backlund, E.A. (Working). Recreation Participation, Community, and Adirondack Park Management Policy Preferences. *2014 Northeastern Recreation Research Symposium Proceedings*.

Backlund, E.A. (Working). Resident perceptions of the Adirondack Park Agency. *Environmental Management*.

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Strike, K. (2011). The 2010 Census and the health of Adirondack communities: An update. Protect the Adirondacks! <http://www.protectadks.org/2011/04/the-2010-census-and-the-health-of-adirondack-communities-an-update/>