



Project Impacts

NSRC-FUNDED RESEARCH FINAL REPORT

How Does Growth Impact Natural Resource Planning Processes in Northern Forest Towns?

PROJECT AWARD YEAR AND TITLE:

2006

*Discourses of Place among Seasonal and
Permanent Residents in Northern Forest
Amenity-Rich Towns: Implications for Natural
Resource Management*

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Population growth in rural areas can lead to changes in community attitudes, values, and politics. NSRC researchers explored the impact of growth on natural resource planning processes in four Northern Forest towns in Vermont (Cabot, Eden, Craftsbury, and Waitsfield). They conducted interviews with town residents knowledgeable about changes occurring and decisions made in the towns and used town public meeting records to identify the progression of natural resources and growth management ideas, actions, and actors.

Researchers concluded that influxes of new residents are driven not only by retirees and other groups seeking recreational opportunities, but also by young families drawn to local cultural and educational offerings and by affordable housing concerns. Eden, for example, appears to contain a large population of newcomers who were pushed out of housing markets in other towns. There is concern that more and more residents commute for work to other towns, leading many respondents to label their towns “bedroom communities.” Presence of a town center is emerging as a key factor in maintaining community cohesiveness.

Concern with population growth and its impact on local natural resource management varies widely among towns. Similarly, the towns demonstrate large differences in the number and nature of planning actions intended to deal with growth and resource management. Within towns, residents view the land and natural resources through different lenses but share key notions, such as land stewardship and opposition to large-scale residential development of open lands. These shared values can help in creating inclusive processes for addressing growth.