Social, Economic, and Ecological Effects of Second Home Development in the Northern Forest Region

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http://www.nsrfcoforest.org
Project Summary

In an era of economic and ecological uncertainty, Northern Forest communities face an increasing need to effectively manage resources and make adaptive decisions. For many regions of the Northern Forest, seasonal homeownership is a key aspect of the local community economy and character. The purposes of this study were to describe the distribution and growth of second homes in the Northern Forest over space and time; to identify the causes of growth and predict future growth; identify the impacts of second homes and how these impacts vary throughout the region; and help policymakers develop programs to enhance community well-being. We used in-depth interviews, mail surveys, and secondary data analyses to understand the impacts of second home ownership at community and regional scales. We focused on four areas within each Northern Forest state for case study analyses: the Central Adirondacks of New York, Northeast Kingdom of Vermont, Northern New Hampshire, and Bar Harbor, Maine. We found that both seasonal and year-round residents who frequently interacted with seasonal residents perceived lesser tensions between the resident groups. This suggests that, to promote social cohesion and adaptive capacities within these communities, community development efforts should focus on activities that integrate seasonal residents with one another and permanent residents. We found that women are particularly active in community-oriented events and may be appropriate targets for building relationships among community residents. Many counties in the Northern Forest experienced losses in seasonal homes between 2000 and 2010; however, we believe that this is in part due to the conversion of seasonal to permanent housing units. As communities transition to seasonal recreation and residence economies, they will also experience changes in social dynamics, necessitating community development efforts.
Background and Justification

• Second homes are becoming increasingly prevalent in natural resource-rich areas in the Northern Forest Region.
  – The retirement of the baby boom generation is likely to result in future second home growth, while recent trends demonstrate growth is already occurring in many rural regions.

• This growth is coupled with increasing economic and ecological uncertainties, which may necessitate adaptive decision-making within amenity-rich communities in the Northern Forest.

• In addition to economic and ecological uncertainties, the potential impacts of second home development remain poorly understood, leaving many rural communities ill-equipped to deal with changes associated with second home development.
Background and Justification

Our research examined community and regional implications of seasonal home ownership on community well-being and local decision-making.

This project:

(1) described the distribution and growth trends of second homes in the Northern Forest Region over space and time;
(2) explored causes of second home growth and predict future growth;
(3) identified the impacts of second homes and how these impacts vary throughout the region; and
(4) helped Northern Forest decision-makers enhance well-being.
Methods

I. Semi-structured interviews:

- **Purposes:** to assess how the impacts of second home developments are experienced locally; to inform mail survey

- **Interview samples:** started with key informants and “snowball” to suggested participants

- **People interviewed:** Seasonal and permanent residents, local public officials and business owners, regional decision-makers
  - Total interviews conducted: 71
  - New York = 23; Vermont = 20; New Hampshire = 23; Maine = 8
Methods

II. Mail Survey

Purpose: to systematically assess differences between permanent and second home owners

- randomly sampled landowners from 2009 tax records (n = 500 each location; n = 2000 total)
- Sample included seasonal and permanent residents
  - Adjusted response rates (for undeliverables):
    • New York (n= 263; 55%),
    • Vermont (n = 209; 44%),
    • New Hampshire (n = 205; 42%),
    • Maine (n = 224; 45%)
    • Total: n = 901; overall response rate = 45%
Methods

III. Secondary data analysis

Purpose: to describe and understand the spatial and temporal trends in second home growth, create typologies of second home places

- Examined 1990, 2000, and 2010 U.S. Census Data for Northern Forest Counties
- Mapped U.S. Census data at the county level to examine spatial relationships among seasonal homeownership, population, and well-being
- Cluster analysis of counties based upon population, seasonal home ownership, distance to urban centers, and natural amenities
- Further analysis ongoing: cluster analysis of counties high in the seasonal proportions, i.e. outside of the “city belt” along the coast
Results - 1

Second homeowners are often longstanding residents of Northern Forest Communities

- Average years of ownership:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Seasonal</th>
<th>Permanent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>21.29</td>
<td>24.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>26.79</td>
<td>28.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>21.55</td>
<td>23.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>16.66</td>
<td>27.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>14.85</td>
<td>22.42</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- Permanent residents have owned their homes significantly longer than seasonal residents in the New Hampshire and Maine case study communities.
Results - 2

Interviews revealed that permanent and seasonal residents don’t experience regular conflicts, but that the potential for disagreement is present

- Residents are easily identified or distinguished as ‘newcomers’ or ‘seasonal’
- Often, both types of residents detected some problems between year-round and seasonal residents but these differences couldn’t be pinpointed, suggesting underlying tensions
- Residents spoke of instances in which community-level decisions brought about cleavages between permanent and seasonal residents
- Year-round residents view seasonal residents as an economic opportunity, but resent the community’s increasing economic dependence upon seasonal residents
- Women may be particularly effective targets for community-building efforts, as they are more active in local events and developing social networks.
Results - 3

The potential for ‘culture clash’ or intra-community tensions between seasonal and permanent residents is based upon the following:

- Resident type (permanent residents perceive more culture clash)
- Frequency of interactions with seasonal residents (more interaction discourages culture clash)
- The percentage of seasonal homes in the community (higher percentage means less tension)
- Percent change of local population in last 10 years (population loss encourages culture clash)
Results - 4

Many counties in the Northern Forest had fewer seasonal residences in 2010 than 2000. This is due to a combination of the following:

– 2008 global recession
– Conversion of seasonal to permanent residences
– Changes in US Census data collection methods
Project outreach

• Sustainability, Second Homes, and the Northern Forest; an undergraduate course in seasonal home ownership, Plymouth State University
  – Instructors: Dr. Brian Eisenhauer and Christen Weber (graduate student)
  – Course objectives: to become familiar with the Northern Forest region and important ecological and social issues in relation to the sustainability of second homes
  – Key lessons: knowledge, concepts, and tools to understand major environmental impacts of residences; use social science knowledge to design effective environmental communications; to apply environmental skills and knowledge in everyday life

• Course featured in *Plymouth Magazine*, March 2011
Project outreach

• Adirondack Research Consortium annual conference, 2012
  – Oral presentation: “Second homeownership in the Central Adirondacks” by A. Armstrong and R.C. Stedman
  – Discussed community tensions between seasonal and year-round residents; identified strategies for community development and reduction of “culture clash”

• Cornell University Human Dimensions Research Unit report: Second Homes in the Northern Forest
  – To be disseminated to decision makers in NF study communities and HDRU partners
Implications and applications in the Northern Forest region

• As communities transition from resource dependent to tourism or seasonal home dependent communities, they will experience tensions between seasonal and year-round residents; however, these tensions will lessen as seasonal homes become more prevalent and if permanent resident populations decrease.

• Women, particularly mothers, may be appropriate targets for community events and outreach, as women are likely to participate in activities that connect them to residents within the community.
Future directions

• Future analyses of social and community dynamics related to seasonal home ownership should consider community resilience, or how these communities may persist vis-à-vis economic, environmental, and social challenges.

• Research surrounding housing stock in the Northern Forest should aim to understand key mechanisms for the transition of permanent to seasonal homes.
List of products

Peer-review
• Armstrong, A. and R.C. Stedman. Culture clash and seasonal residence in the northeastern United States. Under review at *Rural Sociology*

Other publications
List of products, cont.

Conference Presentations


