

Seasonal and Permanent Residents in Northern Forest Amenity Resource Communities: Community Well-being in the Context of Social Change

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Permanent and seasonal residents vary in their levels of participation and attachment to Vermont's rural communities, and their characteristics have implications for community well-being and capacity to deal with change.

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Project Summary

- The goal of this project was to study permanent and seasonal residents in a sample of Vermont's Northern Forest communities, to better understand:
 - Demographic, social, cultural and economic transformations affecting rural communities in amenity rich regions
 - Similarities and differences among permanent and seasonal residents regarding community involvement, sense of place, and recreation and natural resources use
 - Similarities and differences across towns at different stages of development and at different levels of community capacity
- Community case studies, interviews with leaders, and a mail survey of property owners were conducted in four study towns

- Major findings:
 - Across all four towns, the top reasons for property ownership was a property's natural beauty, and the rural atmosphere of the area
 - People who had vacationed in the area or had rented a recreational home in the area were more likely to purchase a seasonal home in the area
 - Only about half of all respondents had heard of “the Northern Forest”
 - Permanent residents were more active in their communities, attending meetings and events, but seasonal residents tended to be more satisfied with the level of local services provided and with local policies overall
 - Communities with moderate growth rates had a smaller percentage of seasonal homes and higher per capita incomes compared to the other towns; faster-growing communities had more mixed indicators
 - Permanent and seasonal residents of slower-growing communities were more favorable to local management of local growth
- Implications for the Northern Forest region
 - Studying permanent and seasonal residents can help communities better understand on-going processes of economic, social, and cultural change. Results of the study suggest a need for planning processes that include the voices of all types of residents in protecting valued local places, and regional consideration of growth options.

Background and Justification

- A 2000 Northern Forest Center report discussed “the core assets and values that contribute to the region’s overall ... well-being” (2000: 3).
- Among nearly two dozen assets and indicators identified were: social capital (a community asset), maintenance of cultural identity and traditions (a cultural asset), and several economic assets (e.g., local control of wealth, and recreation and tourism development).
- This study assessed community well-being in four Vermont towns in the Northern Forest region, evaluating permanent and seasonal residents’ involvement, identity and participation in local activities and environment affairs
- Four towns characterized by different histories, types of resource-based amenities, and economic circumstances were studied

Methods

- Using US census data, we compared statistical characteristics of Vermont's Northern Forest counties /places to choose study towns
- Four communities with different community characteristics and growth patterns in Vermont's Northern Forest were studied:
 - Cabot (Washington County)
 - Eden (Lamoille County)
 - Craftsbury (Orleans County)
 - Waitsfield (Washington County)

Vermont Study Towns: Community Profiles

	2008 Est. Pop.	Median Age	% Pop Change, 1990-2000	% Owner Occupied Housing	% Seasonal, Recreation Housing	Median Family Income, 1999	Per Capita Income, 1999	% Per Capita Income Change, 1989-1999	Unemployment Rate, 2008	Amenity Resources
Cabot	1,334	37.9	16.30%	60.0%	24.9%	\$49,205	\$18,585	76.8%	4.00	Agricultural landscape; creamery
Craftsbury	1,096	41.4	14.29%	62.2%	20.1%	\$41,000	\$17,185	58.3%	4.70	Historic village; nordic sports area
Eden	1,120	33.7	37.14%	57.7%	25.9%	\$35,380	\$13,391	30.9%	10.00	Small village; lakes & camping
Waitsfield	1,683	40.3	16.67%	57.6%	17.5%	\$54,868	\$24,209	51.0%	4.70	Mountain setting; alpine ski areas

University of Vermont Center for Rural Studies: Vermont Indicators On-line, <http://maps.vcgi.org/indicators/>

- We conducted interviews with community leaders in each town to understand patterns of community change over time
- We conducted survey research: mail out/return mail questionnaires were sent to a random sample of permanent and seasonal residents who owned property in each community
 - Questionnaires mailed in Summer/Fall 2010
 - Mailing procedures followed Dillman's Total Design Method
 - 548 completed questionnaires returned; response rate of 58.5%
 - Data analysis using SPSS

Results/Project outcomes

- Of 548 respondents, 367 (76%) were permanent residents of the four study towns, while 181 (24%) owned property that was used seasonally
- About 53% of all respondents were male; 47% were female
- The average age of respondents was 57 years; 142 (29%) were retired
- People owned residential property in the four towns for several reasons. The top two reasons were the same across all four towns: the property's natural beauty, and the rural atmosphere of the area
- People who had vacationed in the area or rented a recreational home in the area were more likely to purchase a seasonal home in the area

- Top activities for outdoor recreation participation were: walking & day hiking (71%); sightseeing by car (57%); wildlife / bird watching (53%); picking berries, nuts, or wild foods (53%); swimming (53%); collecting firewood (44%); bicycling (31%); fishing (31%); downhill skiing (25%); x-country skiing (25%); hunting (22%); snowmobiling (11%)
- Among all respondents:
 - 24% are members of national or state environmental organizations
 - Only 49% had heard of the phrase, “the Northern Forest”
 - 62.5% were somewhat/ very interested in knowing about what goes on in their town
- In the past year, respondents participated in their VT communities by:
 - Shopping locally for food and other products (95%)
 - Visiting a local farm or farmers market to purchase local produce (81%)
 - Attending a local community event such as a concert, parade, craft fair (73%)
 - Contributing money to local service groups or organizations (64%)
 - Attending community public meetings (49%)

- Seasonal residents visited their VT properties mostly in summer and fall, and stayed, on average, for 30 days in summer and 17 days in fall.
- Permanent residents were more active in their communities, attending meetings and events, but seasonal residents tended to be more satisfied with the level of local services provided and with local policies overall
- Counter-intuitively, seasonal residents exhibited stronger levels of place identity than did permanent residents
- Overall, permanent and seasonal residents had similar levels of place dependence, though permanent residents were more willing to invest time and energy on local issues

- The responses of seasonal and permanent residents differed within each town and across the four study towns.
 - Permanent residents of Waitsfield were significantly different from those in other towns in their support for improving local shopping, housing, and tourism opportunities
 - Seasonal residents in Eden were less supportive than those in other towns towards increasing tourism opportunities
 - Permanent residents in all four communities spent more time with friends and neighbors than did seasonal residents
 - Permanent residents of Waitsfield felt more positively about new year-round residents moving into the community than did permanent residents in other towns
 - In comparison to seasonal residents, permanent residents of all towns tended to more strongly feel that local development was negatively affecting local character
 - In comparison to seasonal residents, permanent residents in all communities felt more negatively about the development of new seasonal homes, and the influx of new seasonal residents, in their communities
 - Seasonal residents in all study communities tended to be more highly educated than permanent residents

Implications and Applications in the Northern Forest Region

- Different kinds of communities attract different kinds of seasonal residents, who are similar to and different from permanent residents
- Studying permanent and seasonal residents can help communities better understand on-going processes of economic, social, and cultural change
- This research can help local leaders evaluate their community capacity to build strong, productive, and resilient places
- Community leaders might wish to revise local planning practices to take into account the input of all types of residents
- Comparing communities along a continuum of faster / slower growth may also help leaders understand the timing and magnitude of local development opportunities and impacts that affect perceived citizen well-being



Future directions

- Further analysis of these data will aim to:
 - More fully compare permanent and seasonal residents with respect to communities at different levels of social change
 - Understand the role of local social bonds in community well-being
 - Evaluate indicators of community capacity across different levels of community growth
- This study extends research about rural community capacity and comparisons of permanent / seasonal residents in several other regions of the US (Clendenning, Field and Jensen 2004; Smith and Krannich 2000), and also contributes to on-going research about rural community well-being in Vermont (Geczi 2005; Kuentzel and Stokowski 2008).

List of products

- **Conference Abstracts / Presentations**

- “A comparison of seasonal and permanent residents in four Vermont amenity resource communities”
 - M. Park, P.A. Stokowski, and M. Derrien
 - For presentation at the International Symposium on Society and Resource Management, Madison, WI, June 2011

- **Peer-Reviewed Publications**

- “Comparing seasonal and permanent residents in four Vermont amenity resource communities”
 - P.A. Stokowski, M. Park, and M. Derrien
 - In preparation for journal submission, expected Summer 2011

