

People and Communities in Transition: Recreation, Tourism and Resource Dependency in the Northern Forest Region

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<<http://www.uvm.edu/envnr/nsrc/>>

Project Summary

The Northern Forest Lands Region is characterized by resource dependant communities that have undergone many changes as a result of a succession of land uses and the abundant natural resources. While there have been histories of the evolution of the Northern Forest Region (Dobbs & Ober 1995), little is known about the changes to the communities and their residents. This project was designed as a pilot study to gather preliminary data about resource-dependent communities in the Northern Forest Region. There is no comprehensive inventory of the basic descriptive characteristics of resource-dependent communities in the region (their social, economic, and environmental conditions), and there is little understanding of how communities have changed historically, and the concomitant impacts on community residents.

- The first task of the project was directed toward gathering historic data supporting an analysis of community conditions and longitudinal changes, and to provide preliminary data to choose communities for case studies.
- A second stage of the revised project focused on case studies of a limited subset of towns. The intent of these case studies were to explore relationships among community culture, established and “newcomer” residents, and community recreation and tourism development. The case studies were conducted during the period of Fall 2004 - 2005. This stage of the pilot project allowed researchers to clarify concepts and measures, test the methodology, and pilot test interview questions as well as to garner a greater understanding of the relationships among residents, the land, and development.

Project Summary (cont.)

- Through the use of maps and an initial examination of census data we targeted three geo-political communities from each of the three states for further investigation of historical change:

Maine:	Fort Kent, Millinocket, and Rangeley
New Hampshire:	Berlin, Bethlehem, and Lancaster
Vermont:	Brighton, Canaan, and Guildhall

A graduate student then visited each community to gather secondary data and primary source materials to understand the historical changes in the communities and their respective socio-economic viability.

- Three communities were selected as representative case studies for the Northern Forest Region-Millinocket, ME, Bethlehem, NH, and Canaan, VT. Communities were selected based that represented the different states and a range in transition from resource extraction (Millinocket, ME) to a predominantly service based economy (Bethlehem, NH), with Canaan, VT representing a mixed economy. Intensive interviews were conducted with 26 residents across the three communities.
- The relationship of Great Northern Paper Company's mill to the community of Millinocket, Maine pervaded every aspect of life of the town residents, and with its closing, mass out-migration occurred resulting in cheap housing for an in-migration of recreational and low-income home buyers. Bethlehem, NH began as a farming community and transitioned to a summer resort community in the 1860's, a Jewish summer colony from the 1930's to the 1950's , and a winter ski resort area in the 60's. Canaan, VT had a more gradual growth that supported a stable forest, farm, and value added timber product economy for over two hundred years, but is faced with a decline in all these sectors. The resource extraction based economies have become primarily service based.

Project Summary (cont.)

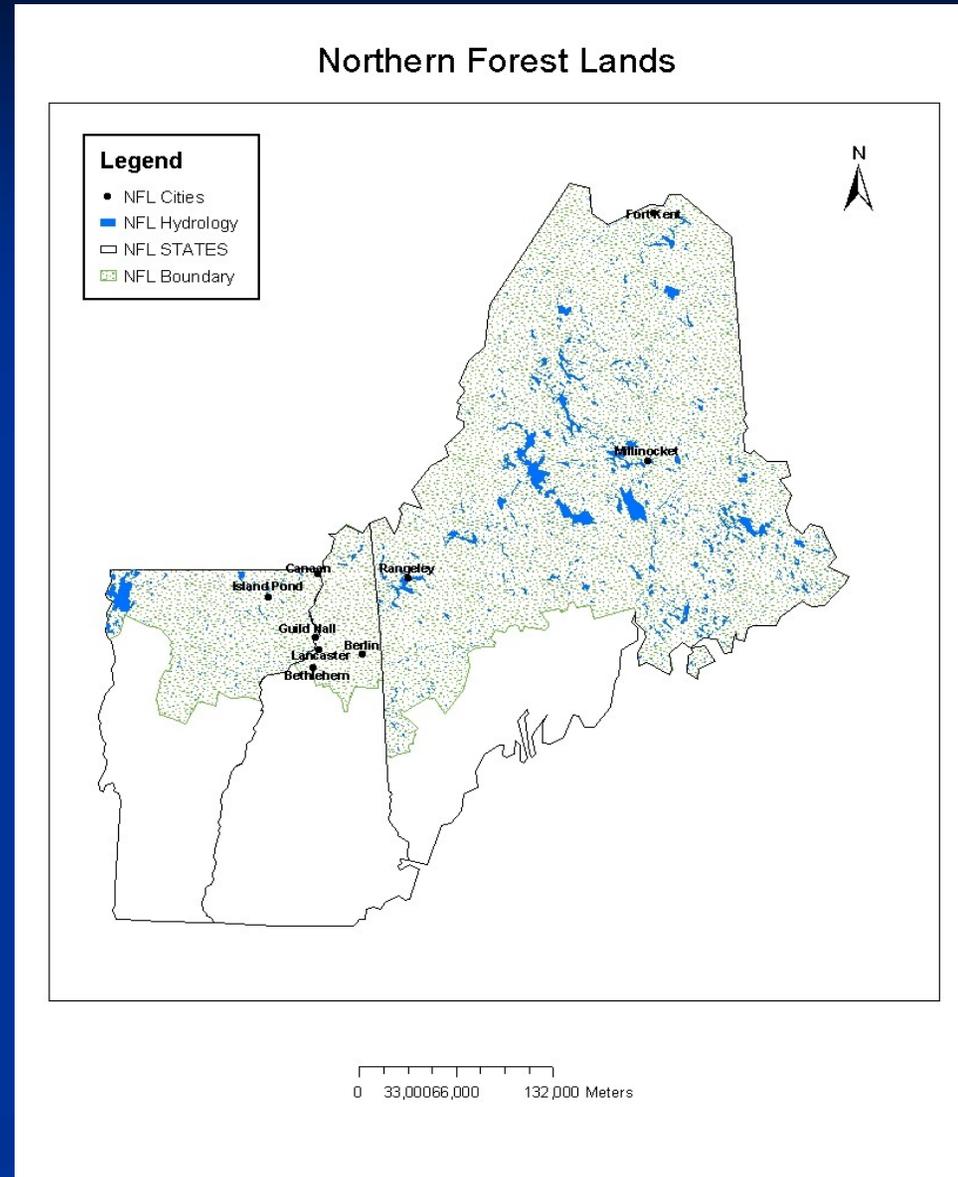
- Out-migration of local young adults for work or advanced education left a vacuum in properties that was filled by out-of-staters who used those properties to take advantage of outdoor recreation opportunities or to escape the more urban environment; this often resulted in subdivision, fragmentation, and rising property values during economic boom periods.
- Values and attitudes of both “newcomers” and long term residents were not consistent across either category. For newcomers, the type of environment (rural vs urban/suburban) in which they were raised and whether they developed relationships in the community influenced their values and attitudes. These residents tended to share some of the values, attitudes, and symbols of culture of long term residents. Long term residents varied in attitudes and beliefs due to significant life experiences outside the community.
- Economics and costs of owning property influenced land use patterns, out-migration of young people, and an increase in recreational home development
- Negative impacts of recreational home development included its cyclical nature and effects on the tax base, lack of owner contribution to the local retail economy, and lack of integration of second home owners into basic community institutions.
- Most residents (long term and newcomers) were opposed to further second home development because of the pressure put on land values , loss of open land, and lack of integration of “new newcomers.”

Project Summary (cont.)

- Social capital has declined for long term residents as a result of erosion of interpersonal relationships and less participation in civic organizations.
- There is a perception in all three communities that newcomers were in favor of regulation to protect the environment and long term residents were not, but both opposed regulation of private property, as long as the property was not abused.
- Long term residents see themselves as traditional stewards of the land and see newcomers as hypocritical environmentalists who neither have a long term view of land nor know how to manage the resources.
- Better paying jobs and more stability in employment continue to be critical factors in preventing the out-migration of young; there must be a mix of employment opportunities, as the young and long term residents do not perceive a service based economy as good paying or stable.
- While conflict between newcomers and long term residents may be the result of different values, this study has demonstrated that there are commonalities, such as respect for private property rights, which may allow dialog for discussing land and stewardship issues.
- Civic engagement on the part of newcomers could partially fill the “brain drain” of the young out-migration and provide more integration into the community

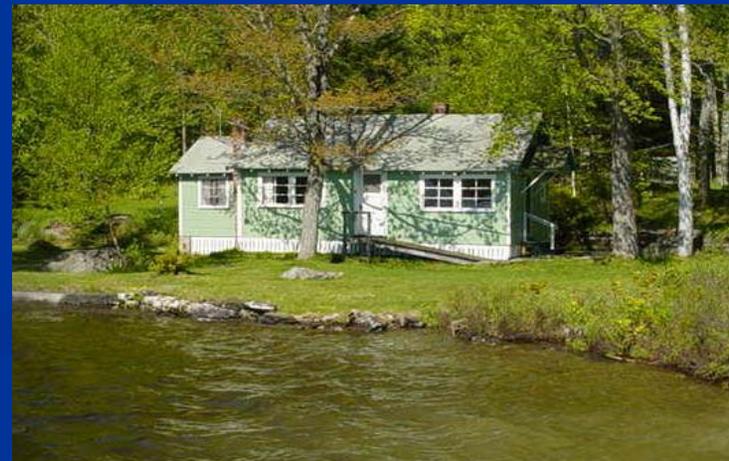
Background and Justification

- The 26 million acre Northern Forest Lands Region has historically passed through a series of land uses with repeated cycles of heavy cutting and re-growth, each time new technology was developed to facilitate harvesting or processing (Dobbs & Ober 1995). The four state area is relatively sparsely populated due to a historic pattern of large industrial tracts of forest lands, many of which have been consolidated in the last decade and sold to Timber Investment Management Organizations (Phillips & Ingerson 2000; Kingsley, Levesque et al. 2004).
- The practice of many of these organizations in investing in the acreage, liquidating the timber assets and then subdividing and selling lots has had an impact on local communities as well as the forest itself. The most recent Champion International Paper Company put approximately 132,000 acres on the market, resulting in a collaborative effort of private organizational and public agency efforts to conserve the land. The required public hearings, however, highlighted the growing division among groups with different values related to the use of the Northern Forest (Phillips & Ingerson 2000; Giffin, Huffman et al. 2002).



Background and Justification

- There seemed to be two broad views of the Northern Forest land use: 1) a utilitarian view based on traditional forestry and farming — extractive activities that views land as a commodity; and 2) an amenity based view for those who see land as resource for recreation or scenic values. It is the latter view that is associated with “newcomers”, many who come to the north country for snowmobiling, canoeing, fishing, hunting, and for the serenity that provides a reprieve from more urbanized areas; and many have established recreational homes and camps for their private “get-away” for weekends and vacations
- The literature indicated that although there was some statistical analysis of social, economic and environmental indicators (Wilson, 2000), there was little understanding of how community stability and relationships have changed over time
- The purpose of this research project was to examine the historical changes of a limited set of communities of the Northern Forest Region, and then explore the values and attitudes of long term residents versus newcomers in three communities in the Northern Forest Region to examine what impact the economic changes have had on development, attitudes about development and change, and social networks within these communities



Objectives

- To examine the historical dimensions of community culture of selected communities of the Northern Forest Region through local and census data sources
- To develop case studies of three towns from the Northern Forest Region, representing communities from Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont, through interviews of town residents
- Clarify concepts, meanings and interrelationships of community culture, social relationships, relationship to land, development, and recreation and tourism through semi-structured intensive interviews
- Reveal any differences in how newcomers and long term residents value land and ascertain their attitudes toward development and community change
- Pilot test interview questions and methodology for an expanded proposal and future surveys of a broader set of communities in the region



Millinocket, Maine



Bethlehem, New Hampshire



Canaan, Vermont

Methods

- The four states of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and New York encompass the Northern Forest Region; for purposes of this pilot study, three were selected for further examination of three geo-political communities in each of the states:

Maine:

Fort Kent, Millinocket, and Rangeley

- New Hampshire:

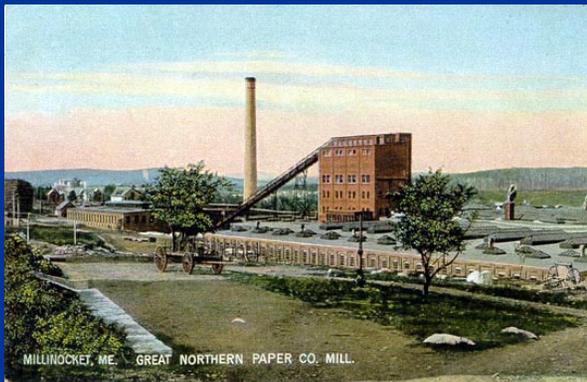
Berlin, Bethlehem, and Lancaster

Vermont:

Brighton, Canaan, and Guildhall

A graduate student then visited each community to gather secondary data and primary source materials to understand the historical changes in the communities and their respective socio-economic viability. Example of source materials ranged from *Fort Kent Centennial 1869-1969* in Maine to *The Vermont Historical Gazetteer* in Vermont.

- Historical vignettes created for the nine communities were used to select three communities for case study interviews; two different resource extraction communities (logging and agricultural) and a tourism dependent community were represented



Millinocket, ME



Bethlehem, NH



Canaan, VT

Methods (cont.)

- Interviewees were selected in each community to represent different lengths of residency, types of employment, various levels of tax-assessed values, and various types of ownership; twenty-six resident interviews were recorded and ranged from one and a half to two hours in length. Fifteen of the respondents were classified as long term residents, nine were classified as newcomers or short term residents (< 10 years in the community), and two were recreational home owners.
- As this was a qualitative study, transcripts were completed for each interview, reviewed, coding schemes developed for responses, and then compared across communities to ascertain common themes and contrasts
- Transcriptions of interviews were then examined and coded for commonalities regarding: demographic change, in-migrant relationships, community social networks, newcomer expectations, resident values, economic/infrastructure concerns, relation to land and perspectives on development, and views of recreation and tourism impacts
- Interview responses were examined for meanings, focusing on views of reality (articulated or inferred) by which interviewees defined their behavior and other's, and how they defined for themselves a particular problematic area

Methods (cont.)

- Similar to Lofland & Lofland (1984) episodes and encounters were also examined; episodes (e.g., closing of a mill) that were remarkable to the respondents were noted as they affected the respondents and their relationships to others and their environmental milieu; bounded social relation encounters (e.g., second home owner vs. resident) were compared across communities to establish commonalities
- Values were also examined in relation to the “types” of interviewees selected for study (long term residents and newcomers); of particular interest were bundles of “values” related to land, environment, and social relations
- Relationships among residents and second home owners, long term residents and newcomers, and among residents and the surrounding environment were also examined; in this latter category we were particularly interested in changes in the relationship to the land, changes in economic structures, and recreation and tourism impacts on interrelationships
- We were also interested in the economic, civic and cultural values related to the use of land and their affect on perspectives on how development should be controlled

Results

- All of these communities are in different stages of transition from resource extraction, and one has already transitioned from a previous service based economy to a new service base (Bethlehem, NH).
- The history of Millinocket is synonymous with the history of the Great Northern Paper Company established in 1899; Great Northern Paper owned the mills in Millinocket, 2.1 million acres of forest land in northern Maine, and essentially provided the physical infrastructure of the “company town.” The relationship of the mill pervaded every aspect of life in Millinocket, and the needs of the workers were taken care of so the relatively isolated mill could retain a skilled and stable workforce. During leisure hours, residents had free access to the company lands for hunting, fishing, trapping, hiking and other outdoor recreation, and in-turn, residents acted as stewards for the company. The mill was self-sufficient through the early 1990’s. With the end of the “river drives” of logs and the concomitant increase in the road network within the surrounding forest, there was a boom in recreational homes (camps) in the late 1960’s and early 70’s. The mills began to decline in the 1970’s, and as a result, youth began to leave the community for work elsewhere; a two month strike in 1978 disrupted production and forced the company’s customers to locate other suppliers (Woodbury 2005). Beginning in 1980, the company began to lay off employees and the workforce was reduced to 2,800 from the 4,200 at its zenith. The decline continued until 2003, when the mill, under different ownership, declared bankruptcy, closed its doors and laid off the remaining 1200 employees. While the mill reopened, and rehired 550 employees, the future remains uncertain. As a result, of the closure, there was a mass exodus of people between the ages of 18 and 45, property values plummeted and people with low incomes and those who sought a second home filled the vacuum left by out-migration.

Results (cont.)

- **Bethlehem, NH** began as a poor agricultural community, but began to develop a summer resort business in the 1860's, promoting the area to wealthy urbanites as a summer destination for its scenic beauty and pure air. Eventually, 30 grand hotels and many Victorian cottages lined the village streets. Summer seasonal business provided work for locals who survived the winters by logging or working at mills in the area. The farms began dying out after WWII, and with the advent of mobility by auto, Bethlehem began to erode as a destination resort community for the wealthy and as a Jewish summer colony. The summer hospitality business declined through the 1950's but went through a revival as a community of Hasidic Jews began buying properties. One by one the old hotels either were burned or fell into disrepair and were razed. Another revival occurred in the 1960's as local ski areas developed and as the town became a bedroom community for the short-lived Franconia College; during this period land values escalated as land was subdivided for second homes, rentals, and condominiums. Again, another bust in the economy occurred in the late 70's and 80's followed by another boom/bust cycle in the 1990's. With the loss of the hospitality and agricultural business, the tax base now must be met with residential and recreational home taxes.
- **Canaan, Vermont** was settled in the late 1700's as a frontier town on the Canadian border, and by the turn of the century had a population of 934 people (Holmes, n.d.). Canaan was blessed with rich bottomlands and forested areas which provided the town residents with a stable resource based economy for over 200 years. For the first 100 years, the community was primarily a farming community; a business directory from 1887 shows 101 farmers and only 4 workers in lumber (Holmes, n.d.). A sawmill was built in 1895, and furniture manufacturing began at Beecher Falls; this at one time became the biggest manufacturer of furniture east of Michigan, and later in the 20th century became part of Ethan Allen, Inc. With the instability of the furniture manufacturing business in Vermont, Canaan is looking more toward service industries and tourism for its economy¹³

Results (cont.)

- There is some evidence that newcomers and long term residents have different attitudes toward the land (Smith & Krannich 2000, Ryan, 1998, Beyers & Nelson, 2000); and a number of informants in this study have noted the influx of new people from southern New England who have been purchasing land since the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center
- There appear to be two broad perspectives of land use in the Northern Forest Region—utilitarian and amenity based. The former is based on traditional farming and forestry related activities which Bockenbauer (1996) calls a pragmatic conception of land as a commodity that is no different from other investments; long term residents are most likely to hold this view of land. The latter perspective see the land as a resource for outdoor recreation and/or scenic values and it is often associated with newcomers and tourists.
- Analysis of the informant data indicates that values and attitudes of the newcomers or long term residents was not consistent for either category. For newcomers, the type of environment (rural vs urban/suburban) in which they were raised and whether they developed relationships in the community influenced their values and attitudes. Newcomers who had grown up in a rural area or had fished and hunted in their youth generally expressed values that were similar to those of long term residents. These residents tended to share some of the values, attitudes, and symbols of culture of long term residents. Long term residents varied in attitudes and beliefs due to significant life experiences outside the community (e.g., having lived in a urban area for a period of time or been in the military)

Results (cont.)

- Economics and costs of owning property were pervasive issues in all three communities, with three interrelated forces serving as roots of change: 1) consolidation of extractive industries of agricultural and timber, 2) the out-migration of young people, and 3) an increase in recreational home development as a response to the growth in demand for outdoor recreation.
- Consolidation and mechanization in agriculture and forestry has resulted in fewer people working on the land, which in turn has influenced how individuals think about the land and land use. One informant (C-5) described the relationship of farmers to the land this way “but they were excellent stewards of the land because it was their livelihood and it paid them very well to make sure the fields were taken care of, that the forests were taken care of, and that’s something we don’t have today because there’s not a whole lot of people in the states in the northeast anymore that are (farming).” Others lamented that the stewardship values were not being passed on to youth as fewer youth spend time hunting or fishing, and are leaving the community for college or better paying jobs elsewhere
- Out-migration of the youth corresponds to an in-migration of newcomers who are attracted to the beauty, slower pace of life, and outdoor recreation amenities of the region. Long term residents described a shift toward an aging population and more transient population due to the lack of employment opportunities and the increase in seasonal home development.

Results (cont.)

- A concern in all three communities was the growth in second home ownership; long term residents and newcomers cited the lack of integration and support of community institutions by recreation home owners, their lack of support for the local economy by buying goods or services the way full-time residents do, and the cyclical boom/bust of second home activity based on general economic conditions.
- In all three communities, environmentalists were often an issue for long term residents, several said they had been environmentalists until it was taken over by the “left” or “the liberals”; In Bethlehem, the dissension over the expansion of a landfill was characterized as a division between newcomer environmentalists and long term resident support for good paying jobs and a larger tax base. However, across all three communities, all long term residents indicated a need for regulation to protect water quality, and both long term and newcomer residents expressed a dislike for ATV’s because of their destruction of the land.
- Both long term and newcomer residents did not favor development, but believed that persons who owned property and paid taxes should have a right to decide what it would be used for as long as they did not “trash” it or adversely affect their neighbors. One long term resident gave as an example that an inappropriate activity was clear cutting a hillside that lead to extensive water damage downstream due to runoff.

Results (cont.)

- Long term residents also indicated in many ways that a landowner should be responsible for proper management of the land, which included supervision of timber harvests, maintaining open land, protecting water quality, and managing with a long term view.
- Many newcomers stated that landowners do not have a right to abuse the land but then some indicated they did not know much about how to manage it.
- Long term residents were generally opposed to posting of land, except in one case where the informant (B-3), firmly stated that it was a landowner's "right to ensure privacy." Keeping access to property open to traditional activities was seen as an exchange for formal or informal services received from the community, and often as a community tradition. Hunters, fishermen and traditional camp owners were repeatedly described by long term residents as good stewards of the land.
- Posting of land by newcomers against hunting, fishing and trapping was identified by both long term and newcomer residents as a result of concerns about security, killing of animals, selfishness, and property damage; an example of some of the comments include "New people are not trusting. Come up and hunt on everyone else's land for years then buy and post theirs," "Newcomers from communities where killing is frowned on would do all they could to prevent it on their land." One long term resident, (B-9) who lived outside the region for many years stated that his wife did not believe in hunting but he would not want to see it stopped because deer and rabbits eat his garden.

Results (cont.)

- Right of access has become an issue in all three of the communities as more property is purchased by people outside the region, many of whom then post their land. For example, outside Millinocket, much of the land is still accessible but only if you pay a fee at the gates that have been installed on the access roads by the large landowners.
- While there was a unique history for each community, there were shared attributes and cultural values across the three communities including a loss of manufacturing and resource extraction jobs, changing demographics to an older population, increase in second or recreational homes, loss of close community relationships, and less involvement in civic organizations. Tourism has had an indirect impact on all three communities because of its relationship to growth in second homes; Bethlehem has been the most dependent on tourism for much of its history, and Canaan has been the least affected but is developing as an alternative as the furniture and agricultural sectors erode.
- All three communities and their respective informants described the trend toward the out-migration of young people due to education and employment opportunities elsewhere.
- Long term residents described all three communities as “close knit” in their youth and bemoan the loss of civic engagement by newcomers, little integration into the community by recreational home owners, and a lack of trust by newcomers or second home owners. In addition these changes have made long term residents feel less safe and secure “because of so many different people.” Newcomers are faced with a lack of knowledge about community norms and culture; one Millinocket informant said they didn’t know how to tell the school was closed for snow days until someone related that the mill whistle signaled the closing.

Results (cont.)

- A striking anomaly between perceptions of long term residents and newcomers across all three communities was social cohesion. Long term residents frequently stated that the community had been “close knit” but now they didn’t know their neighbors. In contrast, newcomers spoke of how they knew so many people in the community and that when people meet on the sidewalk “everyone speaks to you.” Two newcomers made statements about the way people watched out for each other, that they felt secure in leaving on a trip knowing neighbors would keep an eye on their place.
- There is a difference in newcomers and recreational home owners and their interaction with the community. Most newcomers were, in their opinion, integrated into the community, but they had to work to become accepted by joining church, civic, or social organizations. Recreational home owners were not seen as integrated in the community by either residents or by themselves, one second homeowner mentioned that they brought friends with them to the north country and did not develop relationships with many full-time residents. While long term and newcomer residents believed the development of second homes broadened the tax base, they believed the overall impact of second home development was negative, driving up property values and increased demands for services.
- Long term residents in Canaan and Millinocket repeatedly noted the lack of participation in local clubs and organizations; newcomers in both Canaan and Bethlehem stated that residents in southern New England expected to get paid for service to their communities.

Results (cont.)

- Long term residents came from a stewardship tradition where responsibility for care of the natural resources was a given and they often referred to newcomers as not having a long term view of managing the natural resource base. In essence they saw the land, whether in private or public hands, as an extension of the principle of the commons, maintaining the land for those that come after them.
- Community relationships have broken down for the long term residents, a cultural tradition that has resulted in an erosion in social capital, newcomers, on the other hand, feel more integrated in their new communities than in the more urbanized environment from which they relocated.

Implications and Applications

- A mix of ages would be preferred for maintaining vibrant communities in the Northern Forest Region. Better paying jobs and more stability in employment continue to be a critical factor in preventing the out-migration of young; communities need to develop a mix of employment opportunities, as the young and long term residents do not perceive a service based economy as good paying or stable.
- While conflict between newcomers and long term residents is evident and may reflect different values related to environmental issues, posting of land, and resource harvesting traditions, this study has demonstrated that there are commonalities, such as respect for private property rights, protection of water quality, and control over second home development which may allow dialog for discussing land and stewardship issues.
- Civic engagement on the part of newcomers could partially fill the “brain drain” of the young out-migration and provide more integration into the community and its organizations.
- Most informants associated tourism with second home development, and several informants perceived tourism as lacking stability for viable jobs because of the “dead spots” between seasons. Other informants believed that tourists did not contribute significantly to the local economy; and more specifically some long term residents in Millinocket believed promotional moneys were being spent on tourism that would be better spent on attracting light manufacturing. Community leaders may have a difficult task in changing attitudes as long as service wages remain relatively low, but inclusion of different voices in planning for tourism and second home development may temper conflict.

Future Directions

- As this was a pilot study, there should be an expansion of the qualitative aspects of this study to additional communities in the Northern Forest region, including northern New York, and specifically expand the interview process to younger informants regarding their values, relationship to land, environment and recreation, and views of community viability.
- A representative resident and recreation homeowner survey should be implemented to gather quantitative data on values, attitudes, and beliefs regarding community issues, economic opportunities, viability of tourism, recreation participation, development of social capital, and cultural change. While there have been individual community needs surveys in different states, and studies on recreational homeowners in northeastern Vermont, there has been no comprehensive survey effort on a regional basis for the four state area, nor an attempt to examine differences among residents and second homeowners.
- Additional communities should be profiled regarding changes in community wealth over the past 35 years, using an index similar to that developed by the Northern Forest Center, and more importantly to collect common baseline data that may be monitored on a regional basis
- Additional qualitative research on the basis of different attitudes about environmental protection between long term residents with land management experience and newcomers.

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- Photo: Photo of Bethlehem House (slide 9) from *Bethlehem New Hampshire 1999: Bicentennial Edition*. Bondcliff Books, Publisher: 43.

List of Products

- Dedam, J., Zwick, R. & P. Stokowski. (2006). Changing values and the impact on land use and social networks in the Northern Forest Region: A qualitative examination. Presentation at the Northeast Recreation Research Symposium. Sagamore, Bolton Landing, New York, April 2006. Published Proceedings Fall 2006.
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