

# CHANGING VALUES AND THE IMPACT ON LAND USE AND SOCIAL NETWORKS IN THE NORTHERN FOREST REGION: A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION

Jean Dedam  
MS student  
Antioch New England Graduate School  
Keene, NH  
jeandedam@fairpoint.net

Rodney Zwick, PhD.  
Lyndon State College

---

**Abstract.**—Patterns of land ownership and economics are changing in the Northern Forest Region of New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. The percentage of people living in the region who work in the resource extraction industry has become much smaller. Tourism and outdoor recreation are promoted as economic substitutes that will provide an alternate use of the natural resources and bring people and their money to the region. Many long-term residents have opposed tourism as an alternate industry due to lower wages, the types of employment associated with the hospitality industry, and the influx of new people to their communities.

The purpose of this research project was to explore the values and attitudes of long-term residents versus newcomers in three communities in the Northern Forest Region and to examine what impact the economic changes have had on attitudes toward development and social changes within these communities. This was a qualitative research project using the grounded theory method.

---

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This study first examined the historical dimension of community culture of selected communities of the Northern Forest Region through local and census data sources. Case studies were completed on three towns from the Northern Forest Region, representing communities in different stages of development from resource-extraction to service-based economies. The study clarified concepts, meanings and interrelationships of community culture, social relationships, relationship to land, development, and recreation and tourism through

semi-structured intensive interviews. The purpose was to reveal differences in how newcomers and long-term residents value land and ascertain their attitudes toward development and community change.

The Northern Forest Region consists of 26 million acres located in northern New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. The primary land use has been for farming and forestry. During the late 1800s, large industrial landowners purchased millions of acres of this forest for fiber for paper production. Since the late 1980s, much of the large industrial timberland has been consolidated or sold to Timber Investment Management Organizations that value some of the land as real estate rather than timber reserves. Often the manufacturing assets have been moved out of the region or the country. “Contractors” have also purchased large blocks of land for development purposes. Economically, short-term gain is taking precedence over long-term investment in the timber resources (Giffen et al. 2002, Kingsley et al. 2004). Agriculture in the region has seen a similar contraction. Since 1960 in the Northern Forest states of Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont, the total number of farms dropped from 39,100 to 17,000 and the number of acres in farmland was reduced from 7,740,000 to 3,060,000 (Carsey Institute, USDA 2002).

With the changes in land use, there has been a corresponding change in employment. The following table shows the reduction in farm labor as a percent of the total workforce between 1969 and 1999.

In the ten-year period from 1987 to 1997, employment in forest product manufacturing decreased by 13 percent,

**Table 1.—Percent change in farm employment as a part of the total workforce in three northern forest states. Source: Carsey Institute**

Farm Employment	1969	1999
Maine	4.0	1.4
New Hampshire	2.1	0.6
Vermont	6.5	2.4

from 43,500 to 38,000 jobs. During that same period, employment in tourism and recreation grew by 16 percent from 91,500 to 108,350 jobs (Wilson 2000). Another trend reported by informants in the study has been the out-migration of youth for education or employment since the 1950s and 1960s. U.S. Census Bureau population statistics for the three case-study communities show a trend toward an aging population between 1990 and 2000, which would seem to confirm the observations of informants.

Another significant influence has been the growth in the second-home market since the 1990s. Maine has the highest percentage of second homes of any place in the country, followed by Vermont (Sneyd 2005). U.S. census figures show an increase from 23 second homes to 422 in the three case-study communities between 1990 and 2000. In an article by Peter Francese (2003) based on Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Expenditure Survey for 1999-2001, the average second-home owner is 55 years old, has an income of more than \$80,000/year, and is a college graduate. Property values have risen with a shortage in available housing. In Vermont, property values increased by 54 percent between 1996 and 2003 while incomes increased just 20 percent over the same time (DeAngelis et al. 2004).

Three study communities were selected in the Northern Forest Region to represent the geopolitical spectrum. Millinocket, Maine, was a classic mill town built around the paper mill. The closing of the mill in 2003 for a year had a devastating effect on the community. Canaan, Vermont, represented a mixed resource based economy of farming and forestry. The community has remained relatively stable. Bethlehem, New Hampshire, had developed a strong tourism sector very early in its history. More recently it has experienced several boom/bust cycles in the second-home industry, and according to several informants, has now become a bedroom community to Littleton, New Hampshire.

Literature was reviewed that emphasized relationships of residents to land and to community. A number of studies have identified scenic values, outdoor recreation, privacy and a slower pace of life as reasons newcomers buy property in rural areas (Cadieux 2001, Inman &

McLeod 2000, Smith 1997). For example, Ryan (1998) surveyed 120 rural property owners in two communities on the River Raisin in Michigan to discover their landscape preferences. The results showed a significantly higher preference by new residents for natural areas than long-time residents and farmers, who preferred farms and built areas (Ryan 1998). Cadieux (2001) explored how residents shape their environments and how the environment affects residents through a series of interviews with landowners living in an exurban environment outside Toronto, Canada. She found a conflict anchored in culture between two approaches to stewardship, one utilitarian and one of natural processes. Because most exurbanites did not understand natural processes, their attempts at land management were mostly based on the desire for a neat appearance. She found new residents were very excited about engaging with the landscape, but their enthusiasm drops off after the first year and does not re-emerge until they have been long-term residents (Cadieux 2001). Smith (1997) investigated the views of newcomers and long-term residents in three communities in the western Rocky Mountains. The qualitative and quantitative methods in his study produced conflicting results. The quantitative study found that newcomers and long-term residents do not disagree on the need for environmental protection, and they both want limits to population growth and economic and tourism development. The qualitative study found that there were perceived differences on these issues within the two groups (Smith 1997). Finally, Bockenbauer (1996) examined the history of the myth of the "yeoman farmer" and the conflicting pragmatic values of private property, profit, and "getting ahead" held by most Americans. He concluded that this interaction is one of a largely taken-for-granted ideological conflict that plays a major role in the impressions that Americans seek to create and in the landscapes they actually do create. The research suggests that although there may be consensus on the need to protect the landscape, there are variations in what individuals imagine the landscape should look like or how it should be treated.

The studies that examined the attitudes about newcomers versus long-term residents showed similar results. Cadieux (2001) found that many new residents

enjoyed the amenities but did not understand what it takes to sustain the country ideal. She uses the open land concept and shared trails as an example. Newcomers who often gated the common trails on their property caused a loss of neighborliness that open properties symbolized. She says it takes time for in-migrants to become countrified. Keith (1999) supports that premise but adds that for a community as a whole to overcome fragmentation, all members must be involved in shaping its future. She notes that commuting to regional centers for work, shopping, entertainment, and other services adds stress to residents' lives and reduces the amount of time available to volunteer in the community. Commuting for work and other services also reduces the number of milieus and the frequency of interactions between community members, reducing community attachment and cohesion (Keith 1999). Salamon (2003) echoes this sentiment in her presentation of rural case studies in the Heartland, where she describes how small egalitarian and democratic agrarian communities evolve to become suburban areas for regional centers. She also describes the need for interaction in public spaces among all residents to establish a sense of community which is difficult to achieve when businesses, employment, entertainment, education, and other services, are obtained outside the community (Salamon 2003).

## 2.0 CASE-STUDY COMMUNITIES

Three communities were selected in the Northern Forest Region to represent the geopolitical spectrum. The shape Millinocket, Maine, and the land surrounding it had been formed by the Great Northern Paper Company, which built the paper mill and the town. The village is compact, and the forest land surrounding it was all owned by the paper company. Closure of the mill in 2003 devastated the community. The mill reopened in 2004 under new ownership, but with a work force less than half that of pre-closure levels. Informants stated that in the intervening year, most of the 18-45 age group had moved out of the community for employment. Property values plummeted leading to sales to second-home buyers and people seeking affordable housing. With closing the mill, the forest land has been parcelized and sold to a variety of ownerships with different rules for public access and different uses.

Canaan, Vermont, is located on the upper reaches of the Connecticut River with its extensive flood plain fields. The first Ethan Allen Furniture plant is located there and still operates today. Large paper mill land holdings that surrounded Canaan have been sold off in recent years to various public and private interests, leading to a variety of access and public use changes similar to that which occurred in Millinocket. Mechanization and consolidation in agriculture and timber operations vastly reduced the number of people who work on farms or in the area's forests. The number of farms has consolidated to three though the number of acres in agriculture has remained relatively stable. Many residents commute to work in regional centers or in the service industry.

Bethlehem is located in the White Mountain region in northern New Hampshire. It began as a poor agricultural community. However, its scenic amenities and pure air were apparently more valuable than its soils, and in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, it began to attract summer visitors from New England's cities. They arrived by train and lived in the many hotels that were built in Bethlehem's village center until the development of the automobile in the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century altered the vacation patterns of city residents. Traditionally, Bethlehem also had an active timber industry with several large paper companies owning forest land. Since the 1970s, Bethlehem has experienced several boom/bust development cycles where land has been converted from agriculture or forestland to subdivisions. Bethlehem still retains conserved or publicly held forest land mixed with subdivisions. Informants described the town as a bedroom community to regional centers that maintains a small tourism economy.

All three communities have experienced a contraction in resource-extraction employment and a general transition in the Northern Forest region from land valued for its timber or agricultural assets to its real estate values. Each has also experienced a steady out-migration of its youth for employment or education, and more recently, an in-migration of retirees and second-home owners.

## 3.0 METHODS

Interviewees were selected in each community to represent different lengths of residency, types of

employment, and 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 and one as a recreational home owner.

As this was a qualitative study, transcripts were completed for each interview and reviewed, coding schemes were 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 others', and how they defined for themselves a particular controversial area. Episodes and encounters that were remarkable to the respondents were noted as they affected the respondents and their relationships to others and their environmental milieu.

Relationships among residents and second-home owners, long-term residents and newcomers, and among residents and the surrounding environment were also examined; in the last 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 effect on perspectives on how development should be controlled.

#### **4.0 INFORMANT PROFILES**

Examination of Table 2 reveals differences between the three study communities that appear to correlate with stages of transition away from a resource-based economy. Of the long-term residents of Bethlehem, New

Hampshire, only one had been born and raised there and that individual spent most of his adult working life outside the region. All but one of the other long-term Bethlehem residents had been born and raised in an urban setting although all had rural or outdoor experiences in their youth. This result is in stark contrast with the long-term residents of Millinocket, Maine, where they all had been born and raised in town, with only one having had significant life experience outside the region. These profiles would appear to reflect the history of each community. Bethlehem's tourism economy may have attracted a higher percentage of in-migrants much earlier than Millinocket, which has only recently experienced an abrupt transition away from a primarily forest-based industry. In Canaan, Vermont, which had a mixed economy over most of its history, two long-term residents were born and raised in the community, one had grown up in another rural area, and two were from urban childhood homes but with experience in forestry or farming. In contrast, Table 3 reveals that all but two newcomers, in the three communities combined, had lived in urban areas in their youth.

The same relationship exists between occupation and an urban or rural childhood with long-term residents. Only one of five Bethlehem, but four of six Canaan and three of five Millinocket long-term residents were employed in a resource-extraction industry. In contrast, Table 3 shows that none of the newcomer residents in the three communities had farming or forestry as an occupation.

#### **5.0 RESULTS**

It became apparent that differences in the attitudes of newcomers and long-term residents lay in their relationship to the land and not generally in their preference for land uses. For long-term residents who participated in the resource-extraction economy of the Northern Forest region, stewardship and a long-term view were important values grounded in the understanding that the ability to earn a living off the land was dependent on the land's capacity to produce. Most newcomers valued land for its scenic and recreational amenities rather than its productive capacity.

The right to access private property to take game, fish, or fowl was established in the formative years of the

**Table 2.—Long-term informant profiles: B – Bethlehem, C – Canaan, M – Millinocket**

ID	Gender	Yrs in town	Location/Experience		Occupation		Hunt, Fish, Trap	Retired	Friends (new, long term or both)
			B - born in community	E - urban experience as adult	F - farm, forestry	R - retail			
B1	M	45		R	F		Yes	Yes	Long term
B4	M	32		U/O	R		No	No	Both
B7	F	36		U,O	HW		Yes	Yes	Mostly long term, no second home, a few newcomers
B8	M	36		U,O	G		Yes	Yes	Mostly long term
B9	M	25+		B,E	G & M		Yes	Yes	Both
C1	M	18		R	F		Yes	No	Both
C2	F	70+		B	G		Yes	Yes	Long term, a few newcomers
C4	F	50+		B	F/R		-	No	Mostly long term
C6	F	?	Spoiled tape						
C8	F	18		U	F/R		No	No	
C9	M	50		U/O	F		Yes	Yes	Long term
M3	M	57		B, E	M,F		Yes	Yes	Mostly long term
M6	M	70+		B	M,F		Yes	Yes, No	Long term
M7	F	70		B	HW, H		Yes	No	Long term
M8	M	@50		B	F,M		Yes	Laid off	Long term
M9	M	@50		B	C		Yes	N	Long term

**Table 3.—Newcomer Informant Profiles: B – Bethlehem, C – Canaan, M - Millinocket**

ID	Gender	Yrs in town	Location/Experience		Occupation		Hunt, Fish, Trap	Retired	Friends (new, long term or both)
			B - born in community	E - urban experience as adult	F - farm, forestry	R - retail			
B2	M	2nd home		R youth	M		Y	N	Long term
B3	M	2		U primary residence	G		N	N	Both
B5	F	2		U	Insurance		N	N	Mostly long term, no second home, a few newcomers
B6	M	2		U,O	G		Yes	Yes	Mostly long term
C3	M	2		U	G firefighter		Fish	Yes	Both
C7	M	4		U	Insurance		Yes in youth	Yes	Long term, a few newcomers
M1	M	2		U	I		N?	No	Mostly long term
M2	F	3		U	I		F	No	Long term
M4	F	2		U	I		N	No	Long term
M5	M	4		R	R		In youth	No	Long term

nation to protect the ability of all citizens to obtain wild food resources. Long-term residents recalled that in their youth “everyone” hunted and fished. Sportsmen were described by long-term residents as good stewards of the land and the resources. New uses of private property by the public for recreational activities were not associated with stewardship but, especially in the case of all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), were often associated with damage to property. Both long-term residents and newcomers accepted snowmobiling as an economic driver for the region, a nuisance to some people but less destructive and better controlled than ATVs. Newcomers, who disagree with sporting activities and post their land for security or privacy, were described by long-term residents as selfish and untrusting. Yet some long-term residents also noted that camps that used to be left open for anyone with a need for shelter must now be locked due to occurrences of vandalism.

It was apparent that culture change was occurring from within as fewer people worked in resource-extraction industries and as youth, migrated out of the region, seeking further education or better paying employment opportunities. Fewer youth are engaged in traditional sporting activities (hunting, fishing, and trapping) as organized sports, video and computer games occupy more of their free time. Stewardship values are being lost as the carriers of the culture participate less in stewardship activities and/or move out of the region.

Civic organizations or social clubs provide a mechanism for newcomers to make connections within the community. Newcomers who socialized with long-term residents or who originated from small rural communities adopted some of the attitudes of the long-term residents. Newcomers from urban areas find that the small rural communities offer a supportive friendly environment as compared to the anonymity of the city. Long-term residents (especially in Millinocket) mourn the loss of a close-knit community where relationships that were many-layered between extended family and social and business connections are being lost as young people leave, services become regionalized and people commute sometimes long distances to work. Both newcomers and long-term residents suggested that second-home owners

have not integrated into the social networks of the communities.

Most newcomers and long-term residents wanted to retain the “character” of their communities. Two informants saw second homes as a way to increase the tax basis for their town without any additional demand for expensive school services. However, most informants cited negative impacts from second homes such as rising property values that put housing out of reach for young people and the lack of participation in the life of the community or support of civic institutions.

The need for employment opportunities for the region’s youth and the long-term health of the economy was universally accepted. Most newcomers and long-term residents stated that large-scale manufacturing was not going to be a viable alternative for the future. Most informants saw tourism as a part of the economic future but felt that the community residents wanted light manufacturing or technology to provide better-paying jobs.

Most long-term residents stated that there is a need for some regulation to protect environmental values and control development, but that the cost of permitting can be detrimental to the ability of small operators or businesses to survive. Some also stated that environmentalists were hypocrites and were opposed to industry on principle without regard to the facts in specific cases. Some newcomers stated that long-term residents would sacrifice environmental values for jobs and tax income. Long-term residents stated that it is the responsibility of the landowner to manage the resources on their property with a long-term view toward future productivity and protection of the natural resources. Some long-term residents cited changes in uses (year-round camps, poorly planned developments, clear cutting) and population pressures that made it necessary to have some regulation.

The results of this study reveal that the general goals of newcomers and long-term residents are similar (retain community character, protect the environment) but that a different relationship to the land influences the

perception of what is or is not appropriate activity on that land and how impacts should be managed. In addition, the out-migration of young people, an increase in the number of people who commute to regional centers for work, and the rise of second-home ownership has affected community integration and function. Cadieux (2001) suggested that a narrative had to be provided newcomers that would help them to adapt to the country. This study supports the need for understanding stewardship as a land management technique both for resource extraction and for the new recreational uses. It is also important for communities to find new ways to support stewardship of institutions and social networks in this day when people often do not work, shop, or go to school in the community where they reside.

## 6.0. CITATIONS

- Cadieux, K.V. 2001. **Imagining exurbia: Narratives of land use in the residential countryside.** Unpublished MA, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada.
- Carsey Institute, U. o. N. H. Northern New England Indicators Site. Durham, New Hampshire.
- DeAngelis, R.; Fairbanks, J.; Mahnke, E. 2004. **Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Housing and Wages in Vermont (Status report No. 3).** Montpelier, VT: Vermont Housing Council, Vermont Housing Awareness Campaign.
- Giffen, A.; Huffman, P.; Parkin, D.; Eickenberg, K. 2002. **Management Plan for the West Mountain Wildlife Management Area (Management Plan).** Waterbury, VT: Vermont Agency of Natural Resources.
- Inman, K.; McLeod, D. 2000. **Property rights and Public Interests: A Wyoming Agricultural Lands Study.** Growth and Change. Winter 2002: 91-114.
- Keith, D.C. 1999. **Rural residents' perspectives regarding community change, challenges, and well-being: A socio-ecological case study.** Unpublished PhD, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada.
- Kingsley, E.; Levesque, C.; Petersen, C. 2004. **The Northern Forest of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont and New York: A look at the land, economies and communities 1994-2004** Draft (Review of work of the Northern Forest Lands Council): North East State Foresters Association.
- Ryan, R.L. 1998. **Local perceptions and values for a midwestern river corridor.** Landscape and Urban Planning. 42: 225-237.
- Salamon, S. 2003. **Newcomers to Old Towns: Suburbanization of the Heartland (1st ed.).** Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Smith, M.D. 1997. **Environment, Development, and land-use attitude differences between newcomers and longer-term residents of high-amenity rural communities in the Rocky Mountain West.** Unpublished Doctoral, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.
- Sneyd, R. 2005, August 13, 2005. **Northern New England Leads the U.S. Boom in Second Homes for Vacations, Investments.** Washington Post. p. 22.
- USDA. 2002. **2002 Census of Agriculture, State Profile.** In: N.E.A.S. Service, ed. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture.
- Wilson, M. 2000. **Northern Forest Wealth Index: Exploring a Deeper Meaning of Wealth (Status Report).** Concord, NH: Northern Forest Center.