

Adirondack Perceptions of the Forest Products Industry

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PEER REVIEW

The Adirondack Park, located in northern New York, combines private (60 %) and public (40 %) lands in a unique six-million-acre preserve approximately the size of the state of Vermont or Massachusetts—an area which is one million acres larger than Yellowstone, Yosemite, Grand Canyon, and Everglades National Parks combined. Within the Park's boundaries are 2,300 lakes and ponds, 1,200 miles of river, 30,000 miles of brooks and streams, 43 state camp grounds, 2,000 miles of hiking trails, 42 peaks over 4,000 feet in elevation, numerous theme parks, "up-scale" shopping districts and other "tourist attractions," and, often overlooked amidst this physical inventory, nearly a quarter-million permanent and seasonal residents. Several million visitors each year make the park one of the premier recreation areas in the nation (Liroff and Davis, 1981).

The nearly 2.5 million acres of Forest Preserve (public) lands are protected by one of the strongest pieces of wilderness legislation ever passed (1894) in the United States, and lie side by side with the approximately 1.1 million acres privately owned by the forest products industry (Smith, 1990).

In recent years, timberland land holdings in the Adirondacks have been the target of corporate speculators. The full value of such land has not been reflected in the price of a forest products company's stock.

Thus, a buyer with little interest in forest products can pur-

chase a company for the price of the company's stock, break it into its various components such as processing plants and timberlands, and sell them separately for short-term gain (Kunstler, 1989). Under these circumstances, forest products lands in the Adirondacks could be for sale with increasing frequency in the near future (Empire State Forest Products Association, 1990). "The financial pressures on timberland-owning firms force them to view their forest lands as 'profit centers.' They must reap maximum value from their lands or become targets for hostile takeovers by raiders who will. But fragmentation of the forests and the forest industry would alter permanently the landscape, the delicate Park environment, and the lifestyle of the Park's residents and their communities. It is a fate that must be prevented" (Commission on the Adirondacks in the 21st Century, 1990).

Much of the recent sale of forest products lands has been targeted for new second homes, tourism, and commercial recreation development. New York State Governor Mario Cuomo has stated: "Recent developments suggest that we may be entering a new period in the history of the Adirondacks, an era of unbridled land speculation and unwarranted development that may threaten the unique open space and wilderness character of the region" (Commission on the Adirondacks in the 21st Century, 1990).

The continued development of the Park's private forests may result in a permanent alteration of

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the Park's natural resources, residents' lifestyle, and traditional recreation use (Governor's Task Force on Northern Forest Lands, 1990).

Consequently, understanding the Park's nearly quarter-million permanent and seasonal residents' perceptions of the changing forest products industry may provide park managers with a source of critical information useful in planning for the future of the Adirondack Park.

In 1989, the Governor's Task Force on the Forest Products Industry in New York State came to this conclusion: that "Many publics have an unfavorable perception of forestry and forest industry. Increased public support is essential to the continued existence of forest industry in New York and its successful expansion and further development."

In an era when foresters and environmentalists are increasingly at odds with each other in many parts of the country, the fate of the forest products industry in the Adirondacks may serve as a "bellwether" for the industry in the twenty-first century.

RESEARCH QUESTION

To better understand how Park residents perceive the forest products industry and changing land use in the Adirondack Park, the following research question was developed to direct this study:

What are the perceptions of Adirondack Park residents towards the forest products industry located within the Adirondack Park?

METHODS

With the help of the Adirondack Park Agency, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, the Northeast Forest Lands Study, and Cornell University's School of Rural Sociology (Geisler et al., 1985), a survey instrument was designed to measure the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of Park residents in five general dimensions: demographics, recreation, development and the environment, Park management, and the forest products industry.

A probability sample of households (year-round and seasonal) residing within Park boundaries was drawn by Survey Sample Inc. of Norwalk, Connecticut, from its comprehensive data base of 78 million homes and addresses comprising an estimated 88% of all U.S. households.

After two mailings (1989), 330 households with deliverable addresses had responded to the questionnaire (40%). To control for non-response bias, a follow-up phone survey of 100 non-respondents was conducted during the summer of 1990 (79 agreed to answer the survey questions).

RESULTS

Demographics

Respondents averaged 55 years of age, 14.2 years of schooling, and 10 months of residence in the Park each year. The median household income was \$30,000. Most of the respondents were males, and most had lived in the Park for all

or most of their adult life. Only 8% of the respondents rented their homes, and 33% were retired or semi-retired.

The demographic results from the non-response telephone survey were not markedly different from the original survey.

Forest Products Industry

The results from the Adirondack Park questionnaire present an interesting insight into residents' perceptions of the forest products industry as it relates to changing land use within the Park. The forest products industry has historically been a major component of the Adirondack regional economy (Dunne, 1990).

The question of perceived importance of such an industry in a period of economic growth (specifically in the tourism and commercial recreation sector) would seem important in understanding changing land use within the Adirondack Park. Residents questioned about the forest products industry located within the Park responded positively concerning both the impact of the industry and its level of activity within the Park.

When asked about the effect the forest products industry has on the Adirondack Park, 42.2% of those sampled believed the forest products industry has a positive effect on the Park.

In comparison, only 28.9% of respondents viewed the effect to be negative (see Table 1 for complete results for this question). Similarly, residents felt the forest prod-

ucts industry should “keep production levels the same” (55.2 percent) or increase production levels (15.5 percent). Only 23.6 percent of those who responded believed the production level should be decreased.(see Table 2 for complete

results for this question). Park resident respondents felt so strongly about the valuable role that the forest products industry plays in the Adirondack Park that 73.6% believed New York State should provide the forest products industry with

incentives (tax incentives, technical assistance, subsidies, etc.) to keep their land in production.

Only 11.8% of the sample disagreed with the idea of incentives (see Table 3 for complete results for this question).

Table 1. Adirondack Park Residents' Perception of the Effect of the Forest Products Industry on the Adirondack Park (n=325)

<u>Residents' Perceptions</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Negative Effect	94	28.9
Positive Effect	137	42.2
No Effect	36	11.1
No Opinion	<u>58</u>	<u>17.8</u>
Total	325	100.0

Table 2. Adirondack Park Residents' Perception of the Forest Products Industry Production Level in the Adirondack Park (n = 330)

<u>Residents' Perceptions</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Increase Production	51	15.5
Decrease Production	78	23.6
Keep Production Same	182	55.2
No Opinion	<u>19</u>	<u>5.7</u>
Total	330	100.0

Table 3. Adirondack Park Residents' Perceptions on Whether New York State Should Provide the Forest Products Industry with Incentives to Keep Their Land in Production (n = 330)

<u>Should Provide Incentives</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Agree	243	73.6
Neutral	35	10.6
Disagree	39	11.8
Don't Know	<u>13</u>	<u>4.0</u>
Total	330	100.0

Table 4 Adirondack Park Residents Perception Toward Whether or Not New York State Should Be Given First Opportunity to Purchase Forest Products Industry Land When They Are Put Up for Sale (n=333)

<u>Should Be Given First Opportunity</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Agree	204	61.2
Neutral	24	7.2
Disagree	98	29.4
Don't Know	<u>7</u>	<u>2.1</u>
Total	333	100.0

Finally, the sample group believed (61.2%) that if forest products lands were going to be put up for sale, New York State should be given the first opportunity to purchase these lands (see Table 4 for complete results for this question).

DISCUSSION

As a result of the questions asked of Adirondack residents, it seems apparent that those sampled perceive the forest products industry as important in the protection of both the quality of life and the environmental quality of the Park. Of those responding, only 5.5% have jobs in the forest products industry while 12.8% have jobs in the recreation/tourism industry during some part of the year. Consequently, employment bias would not seem to be a factor in subject responses.

Previous research (Buerger and Pasquarello, 1992) has shown that residents believe they do not have control over what is happening in the Park from a developmental perspective, and that potential economic gains associated with development do not appear to overcome residents' desire to protect the environmental quality in the Park and their associated present quality of life.

These findings are seemingly contrary to popular belief about Adirondack Park residents. Media articles (Kuntsler, 1989; Barth, 1989; Bauer, 1988; and Gallagher, 1987) and the results of a public hearing (October 1989) for park residents concerning future development, would suggest those living within Park boundaries place a higher priority on personal economic gains than on protection of environmental quality.

This idea, in light of the fact that Park residents per capita income in 1985 was only 72% of the state average (Dunne, 1990) makes sense. However, the results of this

study support the idea that there is at least a large subgroup of Adirondack residents who believe protection of the Park's environmental quality (e.g. maintaining forest products lands) is more important than economic benefits gained at the expense of the natural resources of the Park.

Since the media (Barth, 1989; Kunster, 1989; Bauer, 1988; and Gallagher, 1987) has portrayed most of the new development within the Park as tourism and commercial recreation related, it can be speculated that much of residents' concern over development is related to changes in the visual and social environment as opposed to actual degradation of the physical environment (air pollution, water contamination, etc.). Much of the change in

industry lands go out of production, these lands would then be sold for commercial development.

As previous research (Buerger and Pasquarello, 1992) has shown, residents believe increased development is changing the character of the Adirondack Park. Consequently, Park residents may equate the protection of the forest products industry through state incentives as a way of protecting the Adirondack Park by reducing the opportunity for new development. Logically, Park residents believe that if forest products lands are going out of production, the State of New York should buy them so these lands could be added to the Forest Preserve, which would also protect them from development.

These findings are some-

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character of the Park, as viewed by residents, may be associated with increased crowding, changing landscapes (from natural to vacation homes, tourism supported businesses, etc.), and changing community composition (rural/traditional to seasonal/recreational).

The forest products industry controls over one million acres, nearly one-third of all private lands within the Adirondack Park. From the data collected, it seems that Park residents view the forest products industry as important to protect the character of the Park. Residents may believe that if forest products

what surprising, considering that Adirondack Park residents have been characterized as being opposed to greater expansion of state government's influence in the region.

CONCLUSIONS

The present societal concern for environmental protection has led to the public's simplistic view regarding management of natural resources. That view assumes industries that consume natural resources are negative and need to be curtailed. On the other hand, those industries that focus on non-consumptive enjoyment of natural re-

source are positive, and the associated growth of such industries should be promoted.

The results of this study of changing land use in the Adirondack Park would indicate that the reverse would be true. Specifically, the forest products industry is viewed positively by the sampled residents, even though in the short-term it is consumptive in nature. Conversely, based on earlier work by Buerger and Pasquerello (1992), sampled residents perceived the growth of the commercial recreation and tourism industry as having a negative impact on both quality of life and the Park's natural environment. The historical familiarity with the impact of the forest products industry would seem much more acceptable to Park residents than the uncertainty and type change associated with tourism and commercial recreation development.

This is remarkable considering that the creation of the Adirondack Park was a direct result of the "rape and run" forest harvest practices of the mid to late 1800s. Today's view by Park residents (sampled) of the important role the forest products industry plays in maintaining the environmental and social quality of the region is indicative of the responsible management practiced by the forest products industry in the Adirondack Park.

This public perception is illustrated in the strong support for maintaining the forest products industry even when this would require public expenditures to continue present levels of activity.

As this study suggests, those charged with management of forest resources both in the public and private sectors need to be aware of public sentiment regarding their management policies. Lack of understanding of public perception may well result in misdirected educa-

tional efforts, public confusion, and, at the extreme, conflict between resource managers and the public.

Perhaps the worst mistake from a management perspective when working with the public is to accept the notion that public response to management action is uniform and predictable.

In the case of the Adirondack Park, understanding Park residents' perceptions concerning changing land use is an important step in the process of planning and managing for the Adirondack Park of the future.

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