

Harvest crop of contradictions

Scientists probe country migration

Migration from rural America toward the cities, a well-established pattern for most of our history, has shown a reversal in the past decade. Many nonmetropolitan areas are now growing faster than urban areas.

The relative peace and quiet, the wide-open spaces, and proximity to uncultivated recreational areas are among the more obvious attractions keeping rural and small town residents at home and enticing urbanites to get away from it all.

But the natural attractiveness of such areas is being threatened by hasty development and by the rapid influx of people who want to live there permanently or have a vacation retreat.

Scientists of The University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research (ISR) have completed an interdisciplinary study of growth and development in Emmet and Cheboygan Counties, at the tip of Michigan's Lower Peninsula.

Bordering on Lakes Michigan and Huron, these popular recreational areas are noted for their inland lakes and rivers, resources which are particularly susceptible to damage from excessive or improper use.

Between 1960 and 1970, population in Cheboygan County increased by 13 per cent and that in Emmet County by more than 15 per cent, more than double their increase for the 1950-60 period, the researchers found. But during the brief 1970-74 period, both counties experienced a population surge of 15.3 and 12.9 per cent, respectively.

The population of the two northern Michigan counties increases nearly 50 per cent during the summer months. The counties attract a large number of

people for "off-season" trips in winter, spring, and especially autumn.

Robert W. Marans, program director with ISR's Survey Research Center, and John D. Wellman, former SRC colleague now at Virginia Polytechnic Institute, report their findings in "The Quality of Nonmetropolitan Living: Evaluations, Behaviors and Expectations of Northern Michigan Residents" (ISR, \$12 paperback, \$17 hardcover).

They believe these findings will aid in the planning necessary to protect regional natural attractions. Incorporating the thoughts, expectations, and activities of permanent and seasonal residents gathered in 1974 and 1975 surveys in Emmet and Cheboygan Counties, their book illustrates the choices and trade-offs that residents are willing to make between environmental quality and new development.

For example, economic development and creation of new jobs were favored by the vast majority (80 per cent) of year-round and seasonal homeowners in the area. But when faced with a choice, Marans and Wellman report, the number of people willing to accept new economic opportunities at the expense of good water quality was reduced by one-half. Similarly, one-quarter of those opting for more jobs were willing to forego them if more jobs meant developing farmland or higher tax bills.

Young people gave the most negative evaluations of the efforts of local government to control growth. Half of all waterfront residents said they believed the region would benefit if local governments would exert a great deal more effort to deal with future growth.

There is certain to be continued growth and development in this already popular recreation area, Marans and Wellman conclude.

The researchers found in the attitudes of area residents a "new mood" concerned with limiting growth and planning more carefully for it. There is already some evidence that these attitudes are beginning to be converted into policies that can help preserve the natural values so many people are seeking. The challenge for the people of the region, they say, will be to articulate their disparate views and, in doing so, to better understand the qualitative aspects of nonmetropolitan living in northern Michigan and to work more effectively toward its preservation and enhancement.

Natural scientists from the U-M Biological Station and School of Natural Resources were involved in the study in assessing present and potential water quality in the two-county area.

Marans and Wellman report in "The Quality of Nonmetropolitan Living" that year-round residents of the two counties were slightly more likely than seasonal residents to favor extensive growth and development because of the economic advantages they would bring to the region.

However, most people (69 per cent) in the area said they favor policies for limited development. One quarter of those surveyed—including permanent residents, second-home owners, and vacationers—opposed any growth whatsoever.

Some conclusions drawn in the U-M study:

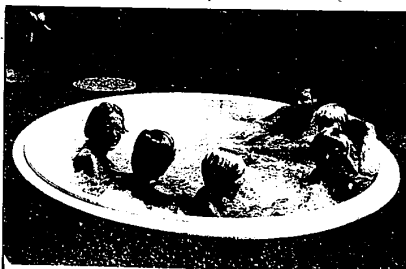
- People living in areas already heavily built-up differed little from those in sparsely-populated neighborhoods in attitudes toward growth and development; among waterfront residents, however, perceptions of lake or river conditions were strongly related to attitudes about regional growth.

- Awareness of environmental problems on waterways was likely to be associated with anti-growth sentiments.

- When offered the choice between a new state park and a privately developed ski resort, three out of four respondents who chose one of the alternatives selected the park.

- Only 18 per cent of Emmet and Cheboygan County residents said they favored a new freeway, under consideration for some time, that would pass through the two-county area. One-third opted for widening existing county roads. Half wanted the region's road systems to be left alone. Opponents to the freeway expressed the notion that it would bring too many visitors to the area.

- Single-family housing continues to be the most widely-favored type of residential development. Seven out of 10 respondents said they preferred the privacy of the traditional, single-family type of housing development to less costly cluster housing even though higher-density housing generally allows better land utilization and environmental preservation. Younger people, however, were somewhat more responsive than others to the environmental benefits of cluster housing.



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