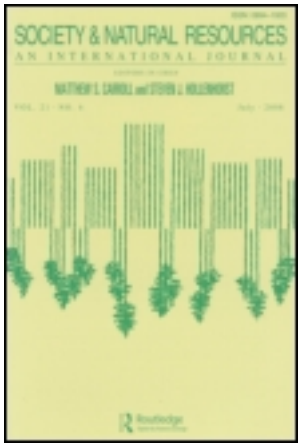

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Lakes and Community: The Importance of Natural Landscapes in Social Research

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Lakes and Community: The Importance of Natural Landscapes in Social Research

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> Your community is the lake you live on. Where you from? Well I live on Rabbit Lake. I live on Gull Lake. I live on Mille Lacs. [For a lot of people] their communities have now been formed more along the lakes [than as previously centered around small cities and villages]... The lakes become the communities. (Brainerd Lakes area resident)

Natural resource sociology emphasizes the importance of analyzing society–environment interactions through the lens of community. Social communities develop structure, character, and culture based in large part on the natural resources present in the proximate geographic area and how they are used. This way of thinking about the world dates back to the origins of natural resource sociology and Kolb's (1933) study demonstrating that hills and valleys (physical environmental features) affect social relationships (summarized by Field et al. 2002). Following this tradition, the focus of this essay is on the ways in which a biophysical feature (a lake) shapes social interaction.

The research in this essay draws much of its context and insight from research, mentorship, professional associations, and data collection initiated by Don Field. Two of the authors were Field's students and the third benefitted directly from the professional associations, relationships, and research traditions Field fostered. Field's scholarship focuses on relationships between social and ecological landscapes and how they play out in rural communities. Among his contributions, Field has

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examined the differences between seasonal residents and permanent residents in places that serve as natural amenity destinations, such as gateway communities to public lands (Machlis and Field 2000), lakeshores (Schewe et al. 2012; Clendenning and Field 2005), and mountain resorts (Krannich, Luloff, and Field 2011). Our essay extends Field's work by emphasizing the ways in which lakes shape community interaction between seasonal and permanent homeowners.

Drawing on quantitative and qualitative data from inland lakes destination areas in the Upper Midwestern United States, we suggest living on a lake is as important in shaping social interactions as any other social or economic variable, and a more distinguishing factor than being a seasonal or permanent resident alone. Our findings push natural resource sociology to think beyond commonly used seasonal versus permanent residence distinctions as a critical factor defining social relationships, and to reemphasize the role of the biophysical environment, as Kolb did. Moreover, we observe that living on a lake facilitates interaction among lake property owners through three primary processes. Lakes offer residents: (1) an open, boating-oriented transportation network with recreational space for interaction; (2) places to socialize away from alternative demands of a busy social world (third places); and (3) a nexus of common concern (a lake commons). Ultimately, the way a lake serves as a common "backyard" for lakefront residents brings people together and facilitates relationship building. These results have important implications for community development not only in lake recreation areas, but in any community where neighborhoods could be organized around the common backyard principle a lake represents.

Community in Natural Resource Sociology

Sociological theory is concerned with understanding the origins, persistence, alteration, or destruction of particular patterns of social relations (Field and Burch 1988). Such an understanding requires an examination of multiple dimensions surrounding social groups (e.g., economic, social, cultural, political, and physical). Particularly in the case of sociologists studying groups in rural areas, the natural environment is a critical component for understanding social organization, interaction, and change (Field and Burch 1988; Field et al. 2002).

The field of natural resource sociology emerged seeking to better understand the relationships between biophysical and social systems or, more specifically, the reciprocal influences between natural ecosystems and social systems. Firey (1990) noted that the roots of the discipline are traceable back to the mid-1920s in the work of sociologists including Radhakamal Mukerjee (1926; 1938a; 1938b), Rupert Vance (1929), John Kolb (1933), Howard Odum (1936), Carl Zimmerman (1936), Paul Landis (1938/1997), Harold Kaufman (1946; 1953), W. Anderson (1953), and Walter Goldschmidt (1978). More recently, the field has been strongly influenced by the work of Don Field. These studies sought to understand how "natural resource endowments condition social organization and how social well-being is linked to and affected by resource conditions and use patterns" (Field et al. 2002, 216). From this perspective, natural resources play a key role in shaping perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of people in activities that go beyond the usage and management of natural resources, but also extend to modifying the kind and extent of social relationships of a given social group (Field and Burch 1988). For instance, tracing the history of three Minnesota iron mining towns, Landis (1938/1997) showed that the social

fabric of those towns was inextricably bound to their natural environment. As the environment was transformed by human activity, the human community and associated institutions were themselves transformed.

To achieve its objectives, natural resource sociology historically emphasized the community as the primary unit of social life (Field et al. 2002), yet community may be understood in multiple ways. Wilkinson's interactional definition of community (1991) has been one of the most widely accepted ways of thinking about and researching community in natural resource sociology. Wilkinson posits that community is built around social interactions that occur on a regular basis in a place-based environment. Following this tradition, we borrow Wilkinson's conception of *community* as a place-oriented process of interrelated actions through which members of a local population interact. In other words, rather than using community as a unit of analysis, this is a "study *of* community" (Luloff et al. 2004) whereby the issues of interest are how local residents interact with one another and how this relates to the development of community itself in the context of inland lakes environments of the Upper Midwestern United States.

Natural Amenity Communities and Distinctions between Seasonal and Permanent Residents

Natural resource sociology has historically been interested in communities dependent on natural resource extraction, such as timber, mining, agriculture, fishing, and hunting. More recently, however, certain communities have increasingly been recognized for the scenic and recreational amenities they provide local residents and visitors. Throughout the world, communities rich in natural, unique, and picturesque beauty or with particular outdoor recreation opportunities (hereafter referred to as natural amenity-rich communities) have become popular destinations for tourists, retirees, and seasonal residents (Buller and Hoggart 1994; McGranahan 1999; Moss 2006).

As a result of the large number of people visiting or moving to such amenity-rich areas, local population compositions change (Winkler et al. 2007). The literature on amenity-driven growth places considerable emphasis on the distinctions that separate incoming populations from long-term established rural residents. Such distinctions depend on the type of population influx, ranging from temporal visits (tourism), to seasonal residence (second homeowners), to permanent migration (often retirees). Tourists, seasonal residents, and migrants each place different demands on a local community's economy and infrastructure and present different challenges and opportunities for local community development. This study focuses on seasonal residents, as we consider this group a midpoint between more mobile tourist visitors and permanent amenity-driven migrants (see also Aronsson 2004).

A large body of research emphasizes differences in the sociodemographic composition between permanent and seasonal residents (cf. Buller and Hoggart 1994; Clendenning 2004; Kohn 1997; Matarrita-Cascante et al. 2006; Wilmot 2009). Multiple studies including Kohn (1997), Hoogendoorn et al. (2005), Matarrita-Cascante et al., (2006), and Ventouri et al. (2005) have noted seasonal residents tend to be well-educated professionals earning a higher household income than permanent residents. For instance, Graber (1974) indicated seasonal residents averaged 14.8 years of education, compared to 12.9 years among permanent residents. Overall, with relatively few exceptions, researchers have found the typical

seasonal resident to be affluent, highly educated, and likely to hold or have once held a professional position (Gallent, Mace, and Tewdwr-Jones 2005; Matarrita et al. 2006; Moss 2006; Stedman 2006b).

Research has also compared cultural characteristics of permanent and seasonal residents, often reporting that their different backgrounds result in distinct perceptions and behaviors about various issues associated with their community (Krannich and Petrzelka 2003). For example, seasonal and permanent residents may have distinct religious and political beliefs that inhibit social relationships and introduce controversy in natural resource management decisions. Studies conducted in Utah have identified the high predominance of permanent residents as members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and have suggested how nonmembership affects seasonal residents' abilities to interact and/or share perspectives with permanent residents (Brehm et al. 2006; Hunter and Toney 2005; Matarrita-Cascante et al. 2006; Matarrita-Cascante and Luloff 2008; Toney, Stinner, and Byun 1997). Research in the Upper Midwest found permanent and seasonal residents divided on their attitudes toward hunting and managing public lands to support hunting opportunities. Hunting is a historically and culturally important activity for permanent residents in the region, while it is not a priority for most seasonal residents from urban areas (Clendenning, Field, and Kapp 2005).

Sociodemographic and cultural differences between seasonal and permanent residents have been associated with different ways of attaching to community, attitudes about community, social interactions, and community participation. For example, Stedman found differences between permanent and seasonal residents' attachment to place (2006b) and indicated the processes by which different types of residents became attached to community differed (2006a). He reported seasonal residents' attachment was associated with a higher level of interaction with the natural landscape, while permanent residents' attachment was associated with social networks of friends, neighbors, and family.

Attitude differences regarding local development strategies have also been an important research topic. Green et al. (1996) reported that permanent residents were more supportive of local economic development activities and less likely to approve land use planning than newcomers. Similarly, Graber (1974) found permanent residents were often more concerned with promoting growth and increasing tax bases, whereas seasonal residents were interested in constraining growth and protecting the natural environment. Further illustrating complex yet distinct attitudes about growth, Jensen and Field (2005) found permanent residents in the Upper Midwest were more concerned about the potential for new development to lead to a loss of local character than seasonal residents, but were still less likely than seasonal residents to support government-led growth management policies.

Several studies have analyzed distinctions between permanent and seasonal residents in terms of levels of community participation. Matarrita-Cascante et al. (2006) and Matarrita-Cascante and Luloff (2008) found permanent residents were more likely to be actively involved in community activities than seasonal residents. At the same time, Kelly and Hosking (2008) indicated newcomers contributed to community through membership in voluntary organizations; McHugh and Mings (1996) noted seasonal residents were actively involved and had a strong sense of collective identity; and Lynch (2006) found amenity migrants to be engaged in the community and involved in civic activities. Others have suggested that despite being involved in local community activities, amenity migrants' social interactions with permanent

and longer term residents may be limited, forced, unequal, or even detrimental to the development of a cohesive and inclusive community (Flora and Flora 1996; Salamon 2003).

Overall, the existing literature has paid extensive attention to differences between seasonal and permanent residents, and these differences have been, directly or indirectly, associated with detriments in social interactional processes required to establish and sustain community development efforts. There is, however, a nascent literature questioning the often-assumed distance and conflict between seasonal and permanent residents. Previous work by Clendenning and Field (2005) and Schewe et al. (2012) indicated there may be more interaction between seasonal and permanent residents than much of the literature has suggested. Stedman (2006a) and Matarrita-Cascante et al. (2010) also found substantial (although unique) attachment to the local community among seasonal residents and indications that the biophysical environment may have played an important role in this attachment. We expand on such work by focusing on how the environmental context of living on a lake (the biophysical setting) may facilitate interactions between seasonal and permanent residents.

Here, we investigate the extent to which seasonal and permanent residents interact socially with one another in the context of lakes destination areas in the Upper Midwest. We seek to better understand the aspects of community that can reduce the divisiveness characteristic of the seasonal/permanent resident discourse by examining processes through which seasonal and permanent residents engage with one another. Understanding practices that bridge the gap between seasonal and permanent residents is critical for promoting positive change and inclusive community development in natural amenity destination communities and may also be applied to alternative community settings where distinct social groups come into contact.

Research Strategy

This project takes a case-study approach focusing on inland lakes destination areas in Wisconsin and Minnesota (the Upper Midwestern United States). The Upper Midwest is one of the most popular places in the United States for seasonal homeownership. This popularity reflects the presence of its large number of lakes and dense forests, history of affordable and abandoned land, and the existence of a culture of "cabin," "cottage," or "camp" owning.[1] Many of the seasonal homes in this region border inland lakes.[2] In this context, we asked two major research questions:

1. To what extent do seasonal residents interact socially with permanent residents, and are these relationships mediated by living on a lake versus off-lake?
2. Through what processes do lakes facilitate social interaction?

We addressed the first question through a survey administered to seasonal and permanent residents in the Pine Barrens region of northwestern Wisconsin. The survey measured levels of social interaction that bridged the divide between seasonal and permanent residents. This quantitative component of the study allowed us to measure the extent to which seasonal residents interacted with permanent residents and vice versa (t tests) while also comparing the relative importance of sociodemographic variables and living on a lake as determinants of social interactions (block regression analyses). Interaction and friendship ties between seasonal and permanent

residents were important indicators of social cohesion that supported community well-being in these recreation-led communities.

We addressed the second question with data collected through qualitative interviews and participant observation in the Brainerd Lakes area of central Minnesota. Here, we were interested in *how* living on a lake organized the processes through which community was developed. Analyzing semistructured interviews and field notes from participant observation as a result of living and working on a lake provided data to understand how processes of social interaction developed.

Utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methods added depth to our analysis of the role that lakes may play in shaping communities. Together, the two related parts of this study effectively triangulated data and yielded complementary results, deepening our understanding of how living on a lake can shape social interaction.

Both the Pine Barrens region of Wisconsin (Burnett and Washburn Counties) and the Brainerd Lakes area of Minnesota (Crow Wing County) have high concentrations of inland lakes and heavily forested land that attract seasonal residents, retiree in-migration, and recreation development. Minneapolis/St. Paul is the primary metropolitan area exerting influence on both areas. It is the place of origin of many of the region's seasonal residents, and also of large numbers of permanent in-migrants. The Brainerd Lakes area is located about 2–3 hours north/northwest of Minneapolis/St. Paul, while the Pine Barrens are located about 2 hours northeast. In Crow Wing County at Census 2010, 30% of all housing units were for seasonal or recreational use. In Burnett and Washburn counties, it was 51% and 42%, respectively.

Data and Methods

The quantitative Pine Barrens study employed *t*-tests and block regression analyses of survey data to analyze the extent of interactions between seasonal and permanent residents and the role that living on a lake played in mediating these relationships. We used data drawn from the Natural Resources and Community Survey (NRCS), administered by Don Field and his graduate students in Burnett and Washburn counties, Wisconsin, in the summer of 2003. The NRCS utilized property tax records as the sampling frame in order to include both seasonal and permanent residents and to differentiate permanent from seasonal residents. The survey was sent to a sample of 378 seasonal and 422 permanent residents. Responses were received from 323 seasonal (85.4% response rate) and 339 permanent residents (80.4% response rate; for further information see Clendenning et al. 2004). With the NRCS, Field helped generate a unique and valuable data set because of its extremely high response rate and its representation of the community, including both seasonal and permanent residents.

In our models, two dependent variables represented interaction between seasonal and permanent residents: the percentage of local friends who were "other" (seasonal residents if the respondent was a permanent resident and vice versa), and the frequency of socializing with these "other" residents (never = 1, rarely = 2, sometimes = 3, often = 4). Together, these dependent variables represented the extent and relative significance of social ties between seasonal and permanent residents.

Using block regression analysis, we analyzed the relative importance of three sets of independent variables. Model 1 included *sociodemographic* variables: age, income,[3] education,[4] gender, retirement status, and the interaction between age and retirement status. Model 2 adds residency variables: length of residency and

seasonal/permanent residency status. Model 3 adds the biophysical setting: lakeside property and the interaction between seasonal/permanent residency and lakeside property. We used linear regression to analyze the percentage of "other" friends and ordered logistic regression to analyze the frequency of interacting with "other" residents.

The Brainerd Lakes area study relied on a broad set of qualitative data collected between 2006 and 2009 in Crow Wing County, MN, to address the question of how lakes shaped processes of social interaction. The lead author conducted participant observation, semistructured interviews, and focus groups in the local area. She spent 16 weeks living on a lake during the summers of 2007 and 2008 and made several shorter visits to the community during the fall, winter, spring, and summer months from 2003 to 2009. There, she worked as a server in a popular lakefront restaurant and pub, which brought her into close contact with seasonal and permanent lake residents who frequented the establishment on a regular basis and with coworkers who tended to be off-lake young adults of lower socioeconomic status. In addition, she participated broadly in community life both on the lake and off. She joined the lake association and participated in its meetings, volunteered at a youth center once a week, volunteered at a clothing and household goods distribution center, participated in several community meetings and political forums, helped to build a community-built playground, and attended multiple community social events. These experiences offered insight into how different populations experienced the community and the ways in which social relationships formed. During this time, she made observations, engaged in conversations, developed friendships, and took careful field notes recording her experiences.

She also conducted semistructured interviews and focus groups with 117 local residents. People were identified for interviews and participation in focus groups by various means, including contacting local social service agencies, working with the Brainerd Lakes Area Community Foundation, relying on newspaper articles and announcements to identify and contact community groups and their leaders, recruiting participants who were members of lake associations, interviewing coworkers at the restaurant and other workers in the service industry, and snowball sampling. Broad and open-ended questions were asked about community well-being, concerns residents had about their community, positive aspects of community they experienced, community organizations and issues respondents got involved with, and social relationships within the community.

Field notes and interview and focus-group data were recorded, transcribed, and coded with specific attention to the development of community, community social relationships, and patterns of interaction among different social groups. Following an inductive analytical approach, the coded data were analyzed and organized to present hypotheses about how lakes shaped social interaction.

Results

In contrast to expectations raised by the literature emphasizing the social divide between seasonal and permanent residents, we found relatively high levels of interaction between seasonal and permanent residents. On average, seasonal survey respondents reported that almost half of their friends in the local area were permanent residents and that they "sometimes" socialized with permanent residents (see Table 1). While considerably smaller in proportion of overall friends in the local

Table 1. Comparison of means, seasonal and permanent residents

	Mean percent of friends who are "other"	Mean frequency of socializing with "others"[a]
Permanent Residents	13.31	2.68
Seasonal residents	45.80	2.93
t value	−14.05***	−3.28**
Df	581	618

Note. Significance indicated by $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .005$.
[a]1 = Never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often.

area, permanent residents still reported, on average, that 13% of their friends (about four friends) were seasonal residents.

These data indicate seasonal and permanent residents are not necessarily socially isolated from each other—but what role did lakes play in mediating these social interactions? In our sample, 29% of permanent residents ($n = 98$) and 71% of seasonal residents ($n = 224$) lived on the lakefront. Our analyses of survey data clearly demonstrated the importance of lakes as a physical feature structuring Pine Barrens residents' social interactions. Living on the lakefront had a consistently strong and significant effect increasing interactions between seasonal and permanent residents.

Table 2 compares the mean percentage of "other" friends and mean levels of cross-group socializing between lake and non-lake residents. On average, lake residents reported 12% more "other" friendships than non-lake residents and lake residents socialized with "others" more frequently. *T* tests revealed both of these differences were statistically significant.

Block regression analyses provided more detail on the importance of the lake in structuring cross-group friendships, controlling for and relative to other potentially important sociodemographic and residency variables. For both dependent variables, adding the biophysical features of the lake into the models significantly improved their explanatory power. More than either the sociodemographic or residency variables alone, having lakefront property significantly affected friendships and socializing that crossed the boundary between seasonal and permanent residents. Table 3 presents the full set of linear regressions estimating the percentage of "other"

Table 2. Comparison of means, lake and non-lake residents

	Mean percent of friends who are "other"	Mean frequency of socializing with "others"[a]
Living off lake	22.37	2.65
Living on lake	34.61	2.96
t value	–4.67***	–4.27***
Df	581	618

Note. Significance indicated by $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .005$.
[a]1 = Never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often.

friends and ordered logistic regressions estimating the frequency of socializing with "others."

We first examine the models using the percentage of "other" friends as the dependent variable. In model 1 (which includes only the sociodemographic controls as independent variables) only income and gender significantly affected the percentage of "other" friends. Moving up one income bracket increased the percentage of "other" friends by 3.4%, and women had 7.9% more "other" friends than men. When residency variables were introduced (model 2), the effect of income dropped out while gender remained significant. Seasonal residence was also significant, indicating that the income effect seen in model 1 was actually a reflection of a seasonal residency effect and the fact that seasonal residents had higher incomes, on average. In model 2, women reported 8.2% more "other" friends than men and seasonal residents report 34.9% more "other" friends than permanent residents. The beta (standardized) coefficients showed that the effect size of seasonal residency was five times the effect size of gender. In other words, seasonal residents were considerably more likely to have permanent resident friends than permanent residents were to be friends with seasonal residents.

Model 3 introduced the effect of owning lakeside property and the interaction between seasonal residency and lakeside property, both of which were highly statistically significant and significantly improved the fit of the model. Controlling for other variables, women still reported 7.7% more "other" friends than men, seasonal residents reported 86.2% more "other" friends than permanent residents, lakeside residents reported 47.1% more "other" friends than non-lake residents, and seasonal residents who lived on the lake reported 33.4% less "other" friends than seasonal residents who lived off-lake. This indicated that living on the lake had different effects for seasonal and permanent residents: For permanent residents, lakeside living encouraged friendships with seasonal residents, while for seasonal residents, lakeside living had an isolating effect and encouraged them to have fewer friendships with permanent residents.

Next, we examined the models using frequency of socializing with "others" as the dependent variable. None of the sociodemographic variables in model 1 were significant predictors. In model 2, only seasonal residency significantly affected the frequency of socializing with "others." While the ordinal dependent variable makes interpreting effect size less straightforward, seasonal residents reported more frequent socializing with "others" than permanent residents. In model 3, seasonal residency remained significant while lakefront property and the interaction between seasonal residency and lakefront property again proved to be important predictors of cross-group social interaction and increased the fit of the model considerably. Seasonal residents socialized with "others" more often than permanent residents and lakeside residents socialized with "others" more often than non-lake residents, but seasonal residents who lived on the lake socialized with permanent residents less often than seasonal residents who lived off-lake. Again, living on the lake had different effects for seasonal and permanent residents. While lakeside living encouraged cross-group socializing overall and for permanent residents, seasonal residents who lived on the lake socialized with permanent residents less often than if they lived away from the lake.

Together, these models demonstrate the consistently important effect of the lakefront on social ties and interactions between seasonal and permanent residents. While living on the lakefront had an isolating effect for seasonal residents, the reverse was

Table 3. Block model regression analyses

	Percent of friends who are "other"							Frequency of socializing with "others"					
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3			Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Coeff.	Beta	Coeff.	Beta	Coeff.	Beta		Coeff.	Beta	Coeff.	Beta	Coeff.	Beta
Age	0.17	0.07	−0.03	−0.01	−0.02	−0.01		0.02	0.13	0.02	0.12	0.01	0.08
Income	3.38***	0.21***	−0.86	−0.05	−0.79	−0.05		0.06	.06	0.00	0.00	−0.01	−0.01
Education	−0.22	−0.01	−0.63	−0.03	−0.68	−0.03		0.03	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.00	0.00
Gender	7.85*	0.11*	8.19***	0.11***	7.70***	0.11***		0.23	0.06	0.21	0.05	0.20	0.05
Retired	3.68	0.06	9.15	0.14	8.65	0.13		0.30	0.08	0.35	0.09	0.14	0.03
Age × Retired	0.00	0.00	−0.04	−0.04	−0.05	−0.05		−0.01	−0.13	−0.01	−0.14	−0.01	−0.10
Length of residence			0.13	0.07	0.20*	0.10*				0.00	0.00	0.01	0.06
Seasonal			34.90***	0.54***	86.19***	1.34***				0.46*	0.13*	2.93***	0.78***
Lake					47.12***	0.73***						3.01***	0.80***
Lake × Type					33.39***	1.32***						1.72***	1.16***
n	526		522		522		*n*	549		544		544	
F	5.68***		24.30***		25.11***		LR chi-squared	8.94		14.86		43.64***	
Adj. R^2	0.0508		0.2635		0.3164		Psuedo R^2	0.0064		0.0107		0.0315	

Note. Coeff., coefficient. Adj., adjusted. Beta coefficients are standardized and effect sizes can be directly compared. Significance indicated by $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .005$.

true for permanent residents. Living on a lake, more than being a seasonal or permanent resident, was a key factor in shaping the social ties and interactions of Pine Barrens communities.

Lakes Become the Communities

Our qualitative findings from the Brainerd Lakes area also support the conclusion that living on a lake structures social interactions between seasonal and permanent residents. Moreover, they lead us to hypothesize the processes through which such relationships develop. We suggest that lakes facilitate the development of social relationships and essentially define communities in three ways:

1. Lakes offer a transportation network with recreational space for interaction.
2. Lakes provide places to socialize away from alternative demands of a busy social world (third places).
3. Lakes create a nexus of common concern (a commons).

The quote at the beginning of this article from a Brainerd Lakes area resident indicated that over time people's sense of community had shifted from the small cities that long served as regional centers of social and economic life to the lakes themselves.

> Your community is the lake you live on. Where you from? Well I live on Rabbit Lake. I live on Gull Lake. I live on Mille Lacs. [For a lot of people] their communities have now been formed more along the lakes. . . . The lakes become the communities.

This feeling was widespread. Several participants referred to an intense feeling of community surrounding the lake without feeling much (if any) attachment to the broader area or the small city centers.

One resident of Bay Lake explained that lake residents formed close bonds with one another and developed a strong sense of internal community:

> [Most of the Bay Lake residents] don't have any real sense of community other than the Bay Lake community. Bay Lake has a very close and friendly community. It's a great community on Bay Lake. . . . So, *this* is our community.

At the same time, this quote referenced the division between the lake community and the broader local area beyond the lake itself. This response was given when a question about the extent to which the respondent felt a sense of community with local people in the nearby small cities was asked. It was clear that the sense of community was focused around the lake and that the lake was distinct and separate from surrounding towns and cities in this regard.

Among lake residents, however, the distinction between seasonal and permanent residents was blurred and of little consequence. Seasonal residents varied in the amount of time they spent at their cabins. Many visited regularly during the winter months, visited during the week (not just weekends), and/or visited more weekends than not. Others spent several months at a time in the area, but vacated during the winter months (following the "snowbird" pattern). The variation among seasonal

residents was as distinctive as differences between seasonal and permanent lake residents. This was especially true because many permanent residents were, at one time, seasonal residents themselves who decided to make a permanent move to the lake home.

Boating—Transportation and Recreation

One of the ways the physical lake feature facilitated social interaction among residents was by offering a boating-based transportation network that combined the functionality of getting from one place to another with an enjoyable scenic and recreational experience. Off-lake, most people travel in automobiles, which have been criticized for the multiple ways in which they deter community building and social interaction (Graves-Brown 1997; Urry 2004). When at the lake, however, many "lakers" gave up their automobiles and traveled by boat whenever possible to visit friends, frequent a bar or restaurant on the lake, shop in a lakefront boutique or at a marina, or play golf at a lakeside resort. Boats are not enclosed, like cars, but instead make it easy to see and talk with other boaters or people along the shoreline who are encountered during the trip. They do not follow road networks, traffic signals, or rules of the road that keep cars moving in a particular direction and inhibit drivers from stopping to chat along their way. Instead, boating offers a more open travel experience that allows boaters to explore, to stop and chat, and even to tie up their boat to a neighbor's boat.

Furthermore, boating is a means of recreation in addition to a means of transportation. People boat for the fun of it, and it gets them out and into a space where they are likely to run into other lakefront residents. Many boaters slowly motor (or paddle) near the shore, saying hello to friends and neighbors along the way. They are not restricted to interactions with neighbors who might live on the same street, as is the case in a more traditional neighborhood, but instead the lake opens transportation access by boat to all residents of the lake. Going for a "boat ride" is similar to the teenage activity of cruising up and down the main strip—it is an enjoyable ride in itself and it involves a nonchalant means of looking for neighbors who may also be "out on the lake" with whom to socialize. The lake provides the transportation surface across which boaters can visit with friends and neighbors while at the same time enjoying the recreation of driving the boat and the scenic atmosphere of the open water. It is as if all lake residents share a common backyard for recreation and social space, and it is in this context that many social relationships are formed and maintained between lakefront property owners.

Third Places

Oldenburg (1991), Putnam (2000), and others suggest community building requires "third places" separate from our usual places of home (the so-called "first place") and work ("second place") where people can socially interact and build and maintain relationships. According to Oldenburg, third places (such as coffeehouses, pubs, community centers, cafés, and other hangouts) are vitally important to a community's well-being. They provide a setting for grass-roots politics, provide opportunities for public association and relationship building, promote individual psychological well-being, and foster the development of widespread social capital. Following Oldenburg (1991), third places should be free or inexpensive to enter;

offer food and drink; be highly accessible; involve regulars (people who habitually congregate there); be welcoming and comfortable; and allow people to meet both new and old friends. Such places allow people to put aside the pressures and worries that often accompany work and home life so they can simply enjoy the company of others.

We believe lakes themselves, as well as certain lakefront establishments like restaurants and bars, meet these demands and provide important third places where relationships are developed and maintained. In the Brainerd Lakes area it became clear that lakes offered a retreat from the demands of a busy social world. They were a quiet place of escape where one could recreate, enjoy scenic views, and spend leisurely time interacting with friends and neighbors. While lakes covered a wide area, specific places on the lake became social gathering places, including shallow sandbar areas where boaters gathered to play Frisbee and water volleyball or to wade; swimming areas that may have a rope swing or particularly deep and clear water for diving; and especially lakefront restaurants and bars that provided year-round gathering places. Lake residents congregated in these "third places" that were highly accessible through boating, as discussed earlier, but largely not accessible to people living off the lake. In this way, lakes (as third places) strengthened relationships among lake residents, but limited interaction with off-lake locals.

Common Concerns

The environmental and recreational quality of the shared lake environment created a nexus of generalized common concern (a commons) for lake residents. While water resources are (in the United States) held as a public good owned in common by the general public, for functional purposes lakefront property owners have a much higher stake in "their" commons than does the general public. Lakefront property owners share an interest in water quality, lake levels, intrusion of invasive species, limiting erosion, and generally maintaining a pleasant lake environment. These concerns affect property owners directly in that they correspond to property values (Leggett and Bockstael 2000) and also in that they affect use values and the degree of enjoyment individuals gain from "their" lake.

Lakes function as a commons as well. Degradation at any specific location can affect the entire lake. For this reason, residents appreciate the importance of working together to clean up sources of pollution, to combat invasive species, and to educate (and sometimes pressure) property owners to manage their shoreline in a more ecologically friendly manner.

In response, lake residents have formed thousands of lake associations across the United States. In Minnesota there were at least 430 lake organizations (Minnesota Waters 2011), and about 700 official lake associations and lake districts in Wisconsin (Lyden et al. 2006), during the first decade of the 21st century. Lake associations have primarily formed since the 1970s (in conjunction with the rise of the environmental movement and an overall increase in public environmental concern) with the purpose to preserve the environmental quality of the lake. An additional (and often unintended) consequence of the formation of these associations has been the formation of institutions that promote the development of community around the lake. For example, the Bay Lake Improvement Association began as an environmental protection group and has continued to promote the environmental quality of the lake as a key goal, but the association now also focuses explicitly on community

building and cultural history of the lake area. In sum, lake associations serve as an institutional reminder that residents share common values and need to work together to promote their individual and shared interests.

Conclusions and Implications

The focus of this research has been on the role the natural environment plays in shaping interactional social relationships that constitute community. We were particularly interested in relationships between seasonal and permanent residents because prior literature has questioned the extent to which these two groups interact with one another to promote joint community development efforts. Both our quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrate the importance of lakes as a natural feature that organizes social interactions and encourages relationships across the divide between seasonal and permanent residents. Lakes appear to facilitate community building through combining transportation and recreation, providing third places, and creating common concerns. These findings hold lessons for the field of natural resource sociology and practical implications for community development.

Within natural resource sociology it is important to recognize how biophysical features and the natural environment organize social life and that these natural features are intertwined with social relationships. The lessons of early natural resource sociology continue to hold true even in new contexts of amenity and recreation based communities: Social relationships and structures cannot be separated from the context and influence of natural resources and the biophysical environment. The biophysical setting continues to be just as important as sociodemographic characteristics and seasonal residency in shaping social interactions and structuring communities.

The processes through which lakes encourage community well-being in the sense of social interaction and relationships also hold potential for other settings and environments. Lakes are a unique feature of these Upper Midwest communities and they certainly have distinct impacts on social structures in the area. However, the processes through which lakes encourage social interaction across significant social boundaries—offering a more social transportation option, providing third places away from the pressures of home and work responsibilities, and creating a shared set of concerns and priorities among residents—are generalizable to a number of other settings. Urban green belts, for example, may offer similar opportunities for non-car-based transportation such as walking or biking that combines recreation and transportation, third places for individuals and families to relax and recreate, and a commonly managed space that generates shared concerns and priorities. The positive impact of lakes encouraging social ties that cross boundaries and bridge social gaps offers reason for optimism about the potential for fostering community building in other settings. Our lessons from natural resource sociology and community studies compliment a growing interest in and literature on new urbanism (Oldenburg 1991; Banerjee 2001) and the importance of livable communities (Bullard 2007).

While the lake does support social interactions and friendships that cross important boundaries, such as those between seasonal and permanent residents, our evidence also demonstrates that the "community" developed in these study areas was significantly limited. Our quantitative findings indicated there was little interaction between lakefront seasonal residents and non-lakefront permanent residents; the cross-boundary relationships were only supported with other lakefront residents. The qualitative data also suggested important distinctions between lake and

non-lake "communities" that divided the local area. While lakes might encourage community and social relationships that bridge social gaps, this "community" may only include those residents who live on the lake. People living off-lake may be isolated and excluded, particularly in terms of their relationships with seasonal residents.

In a related study of the Brainerd Lakes area, Winkler (2013) demonstrated that lake residents were a selective and relatively homogenous group with economic, environmental, and social privilege. Elevated housing values associated with the environmental amenity of the lake gentrified the area and segregated communities by class and age. In the context of the current study, social interactions associated with the development of lake-oriented communities may amplify divisions between "haves" on the lake and "have-nots" off the lake. This introduces challenges to integrating broader communities (beyond the lake itself) across social divides that may be more important than seasonal/permanent distinctions and poses challenges for community development activities aimed at municipal, county, or regional jurisdictions.

In closing, we want to acknowledge that the research reported here would not have been possible without the scholarly work and mentorship of Don Field. Throughout his career, Don pushed the field of natural resource sociology forward and created new spaces for the field to develop, while still emphasizing the importance of the foundational theories. Thank you, Don, for your work as a researcher, author, editor, teacher, mentor, founder of the association, journal, press, and symposium, and, most importantly, friend.

Notes

1. In Minnesota, second homes are commonly referred to as "cabins," in Wisconsin they are known as "cottages," and in Michigan they are most commonly known as "camps." This use of language generally holds regardless of the degree of infrastructure, size of home, or whether or not the structure is winterized.
2. Throughout the article we use the term "lake" to refer to inland lakes, rather than to "coastal" properties on the shores of the Great Lakes.
3. 1 = Less than $15,000, 2 = $15,000 to $24,999, 3 = $25,000 to $34,999, 4 = $35,000 to $49,999, 5 = $50,000 to $74,999, 6 = $75,000 to $99,999, 7 = $100,000 to $149,000, 8 = $150,000 or more.
4. 1 = Less than a high school degree, 2 = high school degree or GED (general equivalency diploma), 3 = some college, 4 = two-year technical or associate's degree, 5 = four-year college degree, 6 = advanced degree.

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