

2005
Seasonal Resident Survey
Report
Jefferson County, New York



**Northern New York
Travel & Tourism Research
Center**



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Introduction

In 2005, the Thousands Islands Regional Tourism Corporation received a grant as a member item initiative sponsored by Assemblyman Darrel Aubertine to outreach to Jefferson County out-of-county home owners. The outreach effort included the development of a newsletter and website.

In consultation with the Northern New York Travel and Tourism Research Center at SUNY Potsdam, the corporation developed a short survey that was mailed to a list of out-of-county residential property owners along with a newsletter.

The list included 5,950 addresses based on property tax records. These addresses were based on Jefferson County real property records for owners of residential real estate that received their tax statements at an out-of-county address. Thus, owners of vacation homes who were also Jefferson County residents (i.e. a Watertown resident with a summer cottage on Lake Ontario) did not receive the mailing.

A self addressed, postage paid envelope was included for survey returns and a web-based form was also available to those surveyed.

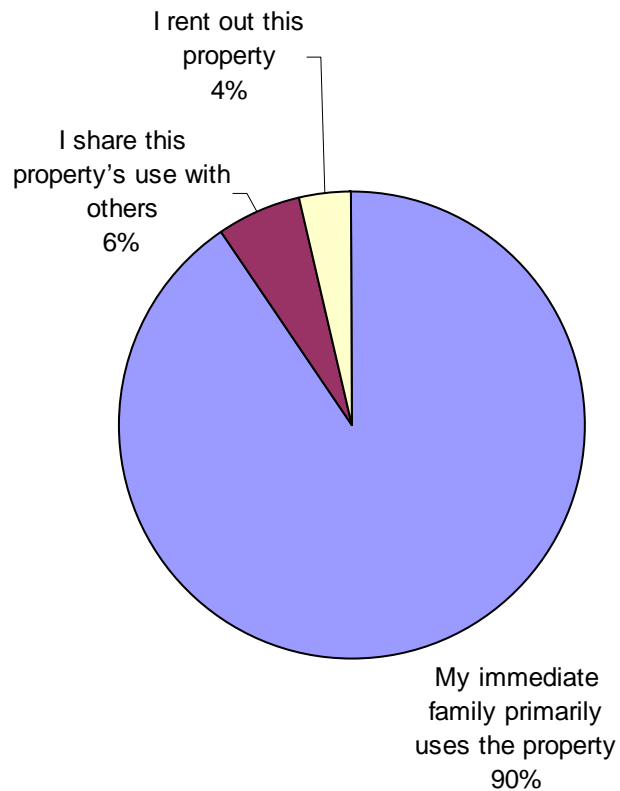
This document reports on the data tabulated from that survey. It has been the intent of the Tourism Corporation and Tourism Research Center that this survey simply be a starting point from which more research can be conducted regarding the impact of vacation homes in the 1000 Islands Region and North Country in general.

A total of 1,245 responses were tabulated from those who voluntarily returned the form or completed the survey on line. The survey was not designed to be a scientific sample, but the high percentage of response lends confidence to the validity of the information tabulated.

The 5,950 parcels represent about 17% of Jefferson County's total residential properties. Clearly, this is a significant portion of the population base that is generally outside of the County's demographic profiles of residents. To put this in perspective, the City of Watertown had 4,954 single-family year-round properties on the tax roles in 2004. Jefferson County actually has one thousand more out-of-county owned residences than all the single family homes in Watertown.

Use of Property

1. Although you were listed as the owner of this home for purposes of tax billing, we know that often river/lake residents share ownership and use of their properties with a number of family groups. What best describes your use of this property?

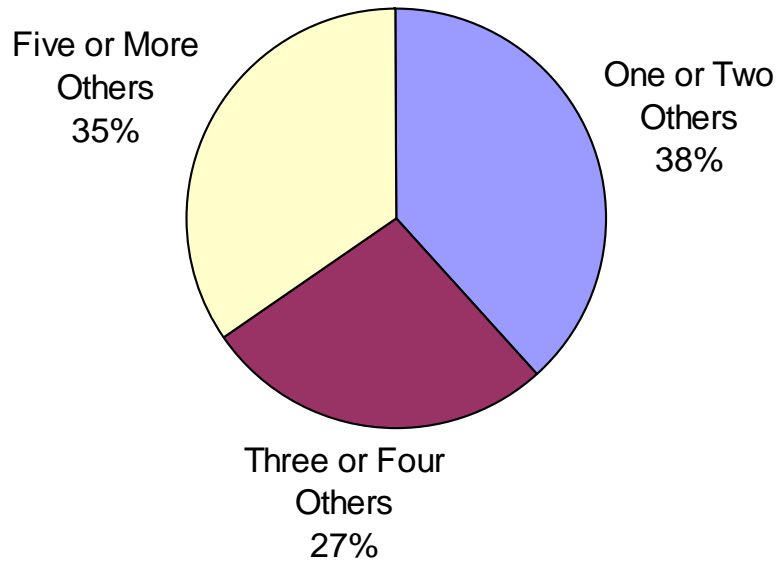


Jefferson County seasonal residences are family homes. The huge majority (90%) of owners use their property for themselves and immediate family. Only 4% indicated that their property was a rental.

Some properties (6%) are shared with others, such as members of extended families.

Sharing

2. If you share this property with others (see previous question), how many?

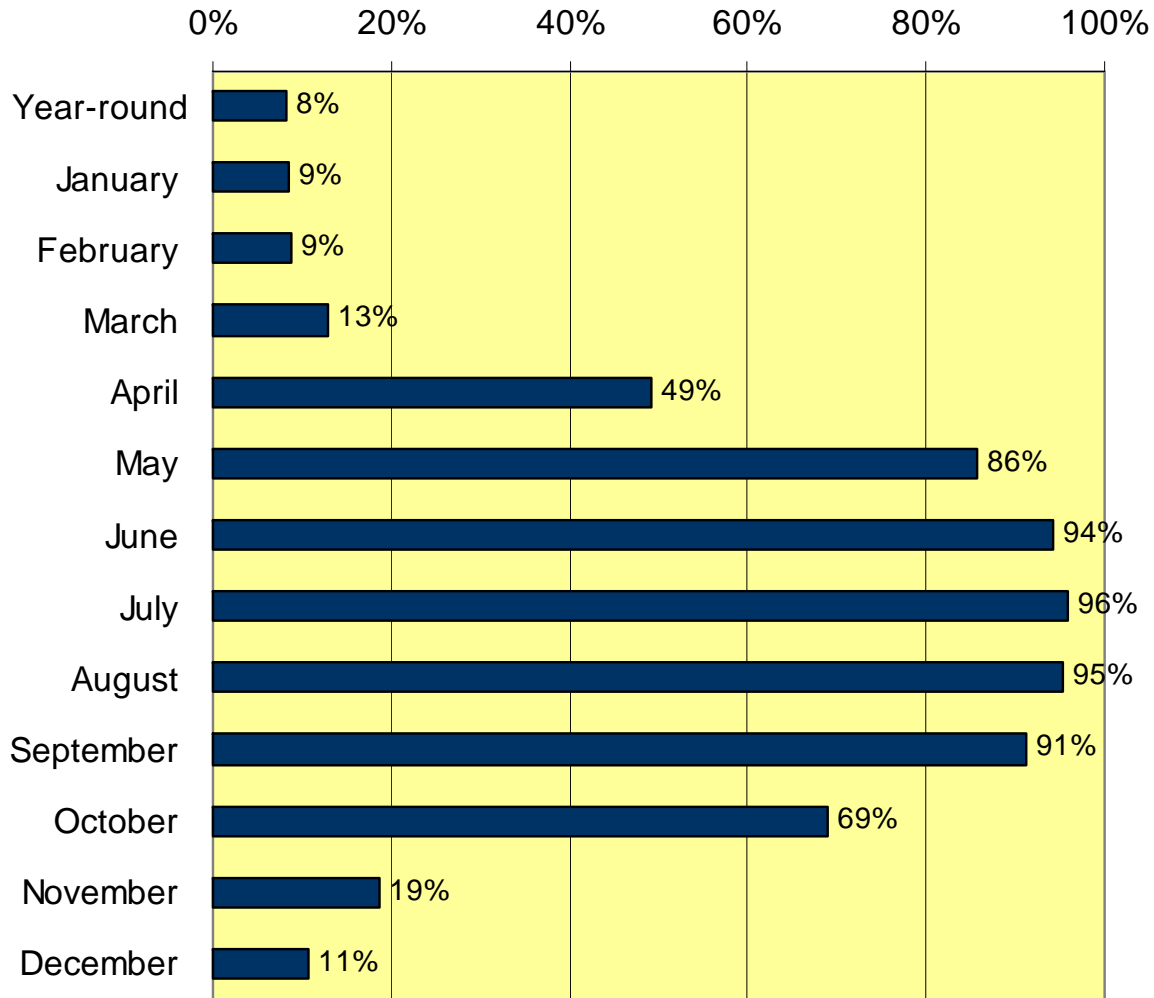


As noted in question number one, only 6% of the respondents indicated they shared their property with others. Most who made a comment on this question indicated that they shared with families, either immediate or extended.

The number of families (or other groups) sharing the property fell into three major groups with 38% sharing with one or two other families; 27% sharing with a little larger group of three or four and 35% sharing with five or more families.

Months of Use

3. What months is your seasonal residence open and used?



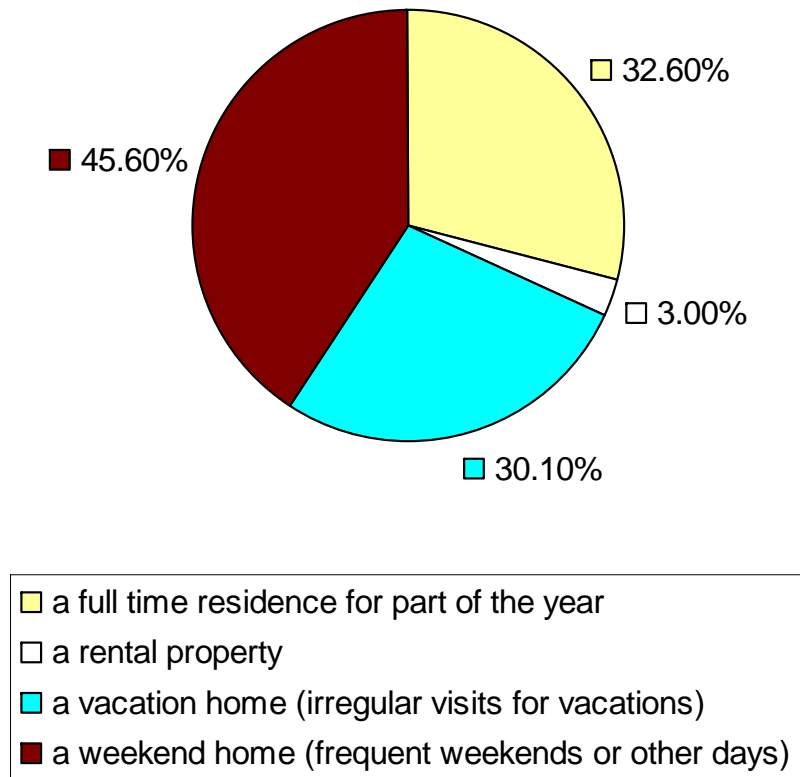
Use of “seasonal residences” is truly seasonal with just 8% of those surveyed saying they keep their properties open year-round.

May through September is the core season with the large majority of homes in use.

Fall season use is stronger than spring. This is consistent with data revealed in surveys of tourists and tourism businesses.

How Property is Used

4. Is your seasonal home used primarily as:



As noted earlier in this report, the huge majority of seasonal residences are used personally.

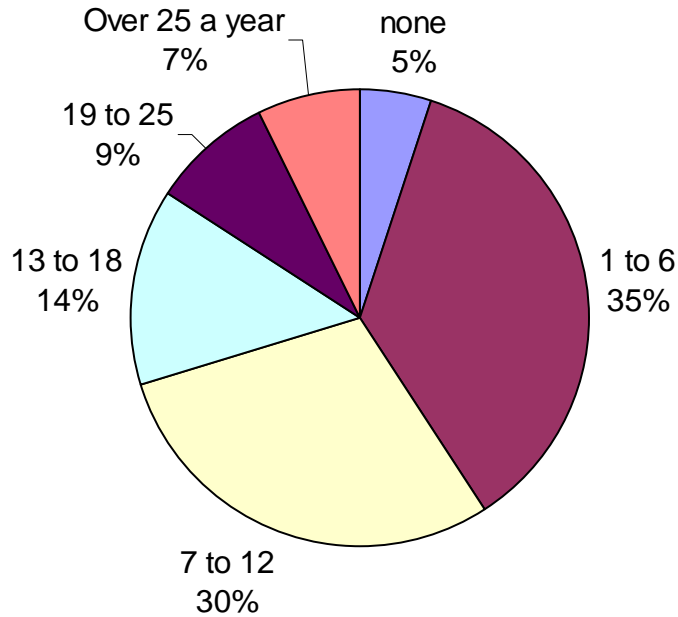
About a third of the properties are full time residences for part of the year. The other two thirds are used as vacation homes for either weekend visits or longer.

If 32.6% of 5,950 seasonal homes are in use by full time summer residents with an average occupancy of two, that adds 3,879 residents to the County's population base in the summer.

The visitor capacity in the other two-thirds of the homes used as vacation or weekend residences exceeds the total hotel capacity of Jefferson County.

Visiting Friends & Family

5. Often seasonal home owners have guests (friends or family) that visit for a few days while they are in residence. Not including those family members who are regular residents, how many other friends and family would you estimate make overnight visits each season?



Seasonal home owners commonly entertain guests at their homes.

The two most common answers were in the “1- 6” or “7- 12” overnight guests per year range. A group of 16% welcome 19 or more overnight visitors a year.

Extrapolation of these numbers would indicate that over 55,000 people visit Jefferson County annually as guests of seasonal home owners.

This survey did not attempt to gauge the behavior or spending of these guests.

Note: Anecdotal experience in conducting interviews for other tourism economic impact surveys revealed that many tourists in the 1000 Islands Region were classified as “VFR” or visiting friends and relatives, but were actually guests at seasonal homes rather than traditional VFR guests.

Activities

6. How often do you engage in the following activities when you are at your seasonal residence?

	Often	Occasionally	Hardly Ever	Never	Response Average
Boating	72% (870)	21% (251)	4% (54)	2% (27)	1.37
Fishing	47% (568)	34% (410)	10% (124)	8% (96)	1.79
Visiting Attractions	24% (283)	61% (729)	14% (163)	1% (15)	1.92
Attending Events	22% (259)	58% (690)	18% (208)	2% (25)	2
Dining Out	49% (594)	43% (522)	8% (98)	1% (8)	1.61
Shopping	47% (567)	44% (536)	8% (95)	1% (11)	1.63
Total Respondents					1229
(skipped this question)					16

Boating is the single most popular activity with 72% of respondents saying they engaged in boating often.

Attending events and visiting attractions was less popular with those responding. Less than a quarter said they did either activity "often."

A cross-tabulation revealed that full time seasonal residents were more likely to engage in activities "often" than other vacation home users.

Quality of Life

7. Please rate your satisfaction with the following Jefferson County quality of life components:

	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor	Response Average
Cultural/Entertainment Opportunities	15% (172)	55% (638)	28% (323)	3% (33)	2.19
Recreational Opportunities	55% (663)	38% (450)	7% (82)	0% (5)	1.52
Shopping Opportunities	20% (237)	50% (602)	26% (313)	4% (51)	2.15
Appearance of the Local Communities	17% (202)	52% (621)	27% (317)	4% (50)	2.18
Quality of the Environment	43% (511)	51% (615)	6% (72)	0% (4)	1.64
Overall Quality of Life in the Area	36% (425)	55% (654)	9% (111)	1% (6)	1.75
Total Respondents					1222
(skipped this question)					23

Seasonal home owners generally expressed a good level of satisfaction with various quality of life issues in Jefferson County.

The highest level of satisfaction is with recreational opportunities, where more than half of those responding rated the County as “very good” and less than one percent offered a “poor” response.

However, over 30% of respondents rated the County as “fair” or “poor” for shopping opportunities, cultural opportunities and appearance of local communities.

Note: The season residents in this survey consistently indicated higher levels of satisfaction with issues when compared to resident responses to a similar question in The Sixth Annual Survey of the Community conducted by the The Center for Community Studies at Jefferson Community College. (LaLone, page 15)

Spending

8. We know that seasonal residents have a significant impact on the local economy. Not including taxes or mortgages, please estimate the amount of money that your family spends in Jefferson County each year while your seasonal residence is open. (Groceries, home repair, home furnishings, gifts, dining out, etc.)

Spending Range	Count	Percent
Under \$1,000	50	4%
\$1,000 - \$1,999	93	8%
\$2,000 - \$2,999	139	12%
\$3,000 - \$3,999	112	10%
\$4,000 - \$4,999	87	8%
\$5,000 - \$5,999	167	15%
\$6,000 - \$6,999	66	6%
\$7,000 - \$7,999	37	3%
\$8,000 - \$8,999	42	4%
\$9,000 - \$9,999	7	1%
\$10,000 - \$14,999	166	15%
\$15,000 - \$19,999	50	4%
\$20,000 - \$24,999	50	4%
\$25,000 - \$29,999	27	2%
\$30,000 +	39	3%
Under \$5000	481	42%
\$5000 to \$9999	319	28%
\$10000 or more	332	29%

A wide range of spending patterns was revealed among seasonal home owners. 42% quoted figures of less than \$5,000 annually. Another 28% quoted figures between \$5,000 and \$10,000 and the balance of 29% spent over \$10,000 annually.

Full time seasonal residents (see question #4) tended to spend more than the general group: 27% spent less than \$5,000; 30% between \$5,000 and \$10,000 and 43% over \$10,000.

An application of the quoted spending patterns to the overall number of seasonal residences in the county produces a total spending estimate in excess of \$48,000,000.

This survey did not attempt to identify areas of spending.

Note: A number of comments noted that spending varies from year-to-year based on spending for remodeling projects or large purchases, such as a boat or furniture.

Comments:

The survey included an open-ended invitation to offer additional comments; about 25% of all responses included additional comments. The percentages after each topic reflect the number who touched on a subject out of the 25% that provided comments. The comments often included both negative and positive observations and concerns.

The comments will be helpful in follow-up research. For instance, it is clear that spending estimates can't be based on a simple annual average. Many respondents indicated that special home improvement projects had been undertaken or periodic large purchases (i.e. boats) are made.

Neutral comments from the survey:

Suggestions for services or businesses: 16%

Respondents offered suggestions for services and businesses they'd like to have in the area.. Further study of this topic would likely be helpful and could reveal needs and interest specific to localities. Among the suggestions were:

Private business:

- Specialty shops
- Grocery stores
- Basic shops in underserved areas
- Restaurants
- Cable and Internet connections
- Weekday and shoulder season events

Public services:

- Easy access to trash collection
- Water and sewer service
- Recreational Trails
- Public beach/waterfront access

Other spending: 5%

As a follow-up to the spending question on the survey, respondents offered information on areas of spending - these included:

- Boats and marina services
- Fuel and utilities
- Property maintenance services
- Home furnishings

Positive issues reflected in comments:

General positive comments: 23%

Positive responses included thanks for the newsletter effort and comments about their general pleasure with having a property in the region and spending time here. Others mentioned specific projects and services which they found laudable. Topics of positive comments included:

- Beauty of environment
- Personal relationships
- Business relationships and services
- Events and attractions enjoyed
- Fire, police, ambulance services
- Recent improvements in downtowns of some villages
- Sense of connectedness and personal history
- Recreational opportunities – parks
- Access to Canada

Comments, continued:

Historical references: 12%

Many respondents have long-standing ties to the region and shared brief histories of how long they've owned property; when they began visiting; their experiences; or how properties have changed hands within families.

Plans to retire or relocate: 3%

Several respondents noted that they plan to retire or relocate to their property.

Building & remodeling plans: 7%

Respondents noted recent or planned renovation and building as follow-up to the spending question, mostly to illustrate recent capital investment in their property.

Negative issues reflected in comments:

Tax complaints & concerns: 23%

Concerns were commonly expressed regarding rising property taxes. The nature of concerns varies and includes:

- Fairness of valuation; rapidly rising valuations
- Feeling a lack of value received in services for taxes paid
- Feeling school tax burdensome when not using school system
- Concerns with ability to pay based on retirement income
- Feeling contributions to local tax base is unappreciated by locals

Blight: 13%

Concerns were expressed in relationship to the survey's question regarding the appearance of local communities and lack of adherence to zoning or maintenance codes.

- Downtowns in need of face-lifts
- Junk in rural lots
- Poor maintenance of buildings

Water levels: 3%

Concerns over the water level of the St. Lawrence River and Lake Ontario were expressed, mostly in relationship to drops in water in the fall affecting the ability to enjoy property.

Environmental: 7%

Concerns were expressed regarding threats to the quality of the environment; among the specifics mentioned were:

- Fishing quality – cormorant control
- Noise pollution on water bodies
- Uncontrolled or over-development
- Water quality
- Winter navigation