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Rural Coastal Landowner Attitudes and Implementation of Connecticut Coastal Area Management Act

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By Joseph Diamond and Richard Ledbetter
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*By Joseph Diamond and Richard Ledbetter**

INTRODUCTION

The Problem

Various socio-economic forces are causing many rural areas to undergo land use changes. Land use policies are being undertaken by government which can have a significant impact on how rural areas are developed and on the quality of life in these rural areas. The ownership of rural land, population distribution, location of businesses and homes, and other components of the land ownership structure are facing pressures from higher density areas as the trend to develop rural areas becomes stronger. Land use changes are occurring which cause discontent on the part of both long-time rural residents and newcomers to rural towns.

Passage of the Coastal Area Management Act in 1980 has compounded problems associated with rural land use changes for rural towns in the coastal area. The strong demand for the use of resources unique to the coastline creates additional pressure for these towns to grow and develop. The intent of the Coastal Area Management Act is to combine economic development with environmental protection.

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Conflicts of uses and rights are sure to occur and the resolution of these conflicts will be a major concern for rural coastal towns.

Private landowners of 5 acres or more in rural coastal towns¹ constitute an important group to consider regarding these land use changes and land use policies. The attitudes and expectations of these landowners can play an important role in how land use policies, specifically Coastal Area Management, will be implemented at the local level. This group owns a significant amount of potentially developable land near the coast. Therefore, how this group reacts to specific land use policies will help determine the extent of development and the manner of development in rural communities in the coastal area. Landowners' perceptions of government regulation constitute an area where research has been minimal (Alter). Effective implementation of the Coastal Area Management Act, like any public policy, requires public acceptance, and thus research into rural landowner characteristics, attitudes, and expectations is warranted.

The development of a northeast regional questionnaire under NE-125 facilitated an examination of the relationships between rural land use and ownership characteristics for the entire region. Expansion of this regional questionnaire to include specific questions concerning Coastal Area Management aided examination of landowner attitudes concerned with issues particular to Connecticut's rural coastal area.

A number of issues arise with the passage of a Coastal Area Management Act in Connecticut. Since municipal programs will take some time to develop, and these programs are optional for each town, public opinion may have a strong influence on whether or not individual towns administer a municipal coastal program. The influence that local landowners can have is an important consideration in the local implementation of land use policy. Research on this group can help provide information for local government in carrying out its coastal land policy implementation program.

Objectives

The main objective of this study was to examine private landowner attitudes in selected rural towns along Connecticut's coastline. The survey attempts to ascertain how coastal landowners view CAM and how they perceive the Act to affect them. Information obtained can be useful for local and regional policy planners.

¹This follows the guidelines that were specified under a regional project entitled "Socio-Economic Factors and Rural Land Use" and is hereafter referred to as Northeast Regional Project-125 (NE-125). There are twelve states in the Northeast Region including Connecticut.

Hypotheses

Given the problem and objectives of this study, the hypotheses to be evaluated are:

HYPOTHESIS 1: Rural coastal landowners feel coastal resource use should favor the preservation of the rural environment (i.e. recreation and existing land uses associate with municipal "rural character") as opposed to preserving private property rights to the detriment of the community and/or promoting unchecked economic development.

HYPOTHESIS 2: Rural coastal landowners prefer local control at the municipal level rather than control at the state level when managing coastal resources.

HYPOTHESIS 3: Given a CAM Program, rural coastal landowners prefer strong implementation and land use controls that foster an efficient and orderly use of land and compensate for private property rights that are restricted by a coastal program (CAM).

PROCEDURE AND METHODOLOGY

The first step in forming the sample was determining the towns to include in the coastal landowner survey. The towns under consideration were the thirty-six municipalities specified by the Coastal Area Management Act.

Population density was considered for each of the thirty-six communities. Any town with a population density, as of July 1, 1976 of over 500 persons per square mile was eliminated from consideration.² This left thirteen towns to be arranged in order by population density and population growth.

The thirteen towns that were to be considered were arranged in order for two characteristics: density as of July 1, 1976 and population growth from 1970-1976. Population density ranged from 61 persons per square mile (Lyme) to 474 persons per square mile (Essex). Population

²The procedure to choose rural towns for the survey was exactly the same that was used in the regional survey of NE-125 and is arbitrary.

growth ranged from 1.4 percent (Essex) to 32.6 (Madison). The towns were placed in a matrix according to the population growth and population density per square mile. This matrix appears in figure 1.

The corner cells in the matrix show the towns which experienced the most extreme population changes. Arranging the matrix so that the towns were evenly distributed throughout the cells was difficult, due to the distribution of population growth. As can be seen, growth was either minimal or very large, with moderate growth being recorded in only Old Lyme and Ledyard. While it was impossible to evenly distribute the towns by population growth, density ranged more evenly among the towns. Three distinct classes were observed and the matrix was arranged to reflect this. The towns in the extreme corners were included in the survey to provide greater representativeness and add variability. Thus the towns considered were: *Chester, Preston, Essex, Stonington, Lyme, and East Lyme*.

Figure 1
A Matrix of Rural Connecticut Coastal Towns

% change in population	Population Density (people per square mile)		
	less than 250	250-400	greater than 400
1970-1976			
1.4-10.0	Chester	Deep River	Essex
	Preston	Montville	Stonington
10.1-20.0	Old Lyme		Ledyard
greater than 20.0		Westbrook	
	Lyme	Guilford Madison	East Lyme

A mail sample was conducted during summer 1980. The response rate was 40% which is much higher than usual for this type of survey (e.e. typically it is 25% or less for a mail survey)³ This was an indication of the interest in the Coastal Area Management Act of 1980 and the problems of implementation.

³Two hundred and eighty-eight questionnaires were processed. There were seventy-three questionnaires from Chester and Preston, sixty-six from Essex and Stonington, eighty-four from Lyme and sixty-five from East Lyme.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Conflicts of resource use under a Coastal Area Management Program were viewed by rural coastal landowners as favoring preservation of the rural environment (i.e. recreation and preservation of existing land uses associated with the "rural character") as opposed to preserving private property to the detriment of the community and/or promoting unchecked economic development. Thus table 1 justifies accepting hypothesis 1 as true.

Table 1

**Rural Coastal Landowner Attitudes
Towards Conflicts of Coastal
Resource Use**

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
In an effort to allow greater access to the shoreline, the state should acquire and develop additional shoreline recreational areas.	54.5%	17.9%	27.6%
Improving existing coastal transportation facilities (roads, railroad lines, etc.) is preferable to construction of new highways near the coast.	78.7%	13.7%	7.6%
Coastal communities with rural characteristics should make a concerted effort to preserve those unique qualities.	78.7%	13.8%	7.5%

Table 2 (question 1) shows that if a municipal coastal program is required by state law (as is the case) then 68.7% of the sampled rural coastal landowners would prefer to have their town agency administer the program as opposed to the State DEP. Question 2 (in table 2) indicates that a large number of sampled rural coastal landowners do feel comfortable with the Inland Wetlands Act which is similar in administrative design to the Coastal Area Management Act (Tondro, pp. 145-146). That is, there is local control with State guidelines for municipalities that choose to implement the Inland Wetlands Act but State control (under the State's residual powers) even for municipalities that do not choose to enter the program. Again, the implication is a strong preference for local control. Thus, hypothesis 2 is true.

Table 2

Rural Coastal Landowner Attitudes Toward Local Control	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Since some form of a municipal coastal program is required by law, it would be more beneficial to have a town agency administer the program as opposed to the Department of Environmental Protection.	68.7%	20.4%	10.9%
The Inland-Wetlands Act has been effectively administered in this town.	42.6%	37.1%	20.3%

And finally, table 3 validates hypothesis 3. Given the scope of a CAM Program, sample rural coastal landowners want strong incentives to comply with conditions of a site plan review (question 1). However, 80.0% of all sampled rural coastal landowners felt that just compensation should be awarded to landowners whose property rights are restricted by a Coastal program.

Table 3

Rural Coastal Landowner Attitudes Towards Greater Use of Land Control Techniques Under a CAM Program	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Those parties undergoing a coastal site plan review (an assessment of the development's impact on coastal resources) should be required to post a bond in order to assure compliance with the conditions specified for a site plan approval.	45.8%	36.0%	18.2%
Compensation should be awarded to landowners in the coastal zone whose property rights are restricted by a coastal program.	80.0%	13.6%	6.4%

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Connecticut Coastal Area Management Act of 1980 seeks to efficiently resolve some of the inevitable conflicts of coastal resource use and property rights. A rural coastal land use questionnaire was administered in the summer of 1980 in 6 towns to private landowners holding 5 acres or more. Rural coastal landowner attitudes can play an important role in how CAM will be implemented at the local level.

The sample results validate three general hypotheses: (1) coastal resource use should favor the preservation of the rural environment (i.e. recreation and existing land uses associated with municipal "rural character") as opposed to preserving private property rights to the detriment of the community and/or promoting unchecked economic development (2) a clear preference for local control at the municipal level rather than state control when managing coastal resources (3) given a CAM program, it should encourage strong implementation and land use controls along with compensation for private property rights that are restricted by the program.⁴

⁴These results are only representative of 40% of the rural coastal landowners over 5 acres in six Connecticut municipalities.

LITERATURE CITED

- Alter, Theodore Roberts. *Land Policy Implementation*. Ph.D. Thesis, Michigan State University, 1976.
- Tondro, Terry. *Connecticut Land Use Regulation*. The University of Connecticut School of Law Press, 1979.

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June 1980

Dear Coastal Landowner:

Land use changes and accompanying problems are currently affecting many coastal towns. The pressure to develop and grow is being felt along the Long Island Sound, especially in towns which are of a rural character.

Connecticut has passed a bill, Coastal Area Management, which will attempt to reconcile the concerns of economic growth with environmental quality. Each town under the Act has the option of whether or not to implement a local coastal program.

The attitudes and expectations of landowners in towns affected by Coastal Area Management can play an important role in how the Act is administered in the various towns. Research is needed to identify these attitudes and expectations along with various characteristics of coastal landowners.

A study is underway at the University of Connecticut to see what landowner attitudes are along the coast. You have been selected to be part of the sample upon which our study is to be based. We would appreciate it very much if you would take the time to answer the enclosed questionnaire. All information will be strictly confidential.

The grand list in the town of () indicates you own a () acre parcel. Please answer questions one (1) through twelve (12) with respect to that parcel. Please be sure to answer all the questions. Most important is question number twenty-four (24), which deals with Coastal Area Management. Please return the fully completed questionnaire as soon as possible in the enclosed envelope.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Sincerely,

Joseph Diamond

Joseph Diamond
Assistant Professor

Richard Ledbetter

Richard Ledbetter
Graduate Assistant

JD/RL/dl
enclosure

The Supplemental Connecticut Rural Coastal Landowner Questionnaire^{5/}

Q. 24. Finally, here are a number of statements that concern themselves with coastal land use policy. As a landowner in a coastal town, state whether you agree, disagree, or are neutral towards each of these statements.

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1) In an effort to allow greater access to the shoreline, the state should acquire and develop additional shoreline recreational areas.			
2) The municipal coastal boundary, formed by the Coastal Management Act, should be as far inland as is possible.			
3) A municipal coastal program is needed in this town to effectively manage the coastal area.			
4) Compensation should be awarded to landowners in the coastal zone whose property rights are restricted by a coastal program.			
5) A specially formed board or commission would be more effective than the planning and zoning commission in administering a municipal coastal program.			
6) Improving existing coastal transportation facilities (roads, railroad lines, etc.) is preferable to construction of new highways near the coast.			
7) Those parties undergoing a coastal site plan review (an assessment of the development's impact on coastal resources) should be required to post a bond in order to assure compliance with the conditions specified for a site plan approval.			
8) Minor additions to or modifications of existing buildings in the coastal zone should be exempt from coastal site plan review requirements.			
9) An important reason for this town to initiate a municipal coastal program is the federal funding that the town will receive in order to administer the program.			
10) Regulating the conversion of summer homes to year round use is a problem that the municipal coastal program should deal with.			
11) Coastal communities with rural characteristics should make a concerted effort to preserve those unique qualities.			
12) Since some form of a municipal coastal program is required by law, it would be more beneficial to have a town agency administer the program as opposed to the Department of Environmental Protection.			
13) The implementation of a municipal coastal program will encourage private landowners to sell property in a coastal town.			
14) The Inland Wetlands Act has been effectively administered in this town.			

Thank you for completing the questionnaire.

^{5/} This is the last page of the Connecticut Rural Coastal Landowner Questionnaire.