

Adirondack Almanack  
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BLOG ENTRY

## Commentary: Surprising Adirondack Economy Numbers

On Sunday an interesting op-ed by John Sheehan appeared in The Times-Union in which the Adirondack Council Director of Communications argues that the Adirondack Park "is one of the most robust rural areas in the Northeastern United States."

This may not be a surprising contention coming from the head of a green group. But Sheehan noted that "a survey published last year by local officials -- the Adirondack Park Regional Assessment Project -- reinforces this. Their own data shows that the economy and quality of life are better inside the Adirondack Park than in any other rural area of the state..."

"What the report did find was that the average household income in the Adirondacks had risen 28 percent faster than the rate of inflation between 1980 and 2000. That means increased buying power that far outpaced inflation and far outpaced other rural areas of the state."

Sheehan does try to address the elephant in the room.

"Still, most Adirondackers (33 percent) work for local and state government. That includes towns, villages, counties, school districts and state agencies. While such jobs don't lead to riches, they do have their perks. The jobs rarely go away. Towns and counties don't stop providing services, regardless of economic conditions."

As someone with backgrounds in both math and language, I find 'most' a strange adjective to describe 'one-third', but Sheehan's contention that these public sector jobs 'rarely go away' seems more than a bit out of touch in the midst of this state budget crisis. Perhaps he missed headlines of the governor proposing to shut down three of the Park's major prisons as well as slashing aid to education, to health care and to counties and municipalities.

Still, when you visit other rural areas of New York and New England, areas which lack the outdoor tourism revenue Adirondack residents and businesses depend on, it's hard to argue with Sheehan's contention that the "being a park is helping, not harming, the Adirondacks."

A NCPR blog post has some hard numbers about the Park as compared to other non-metropolitan areas of the state. Some of the conclusions may surprise readers.

Among the observations:

-The North Country is very diverse.

-The North Country's least-urban counties may have a higher standard of living, based on select indicators, when compared to the more urbanized areas [of the state].

-Poverty is no higher in the North Country than elsewhere in non-metropolitan New York State.

-With the exception of Lewis County, the North Country does not have particularly high civilian employment in agriculture and/or manufacturing. The North Country's level of dependence on these industries is similar to the level elsewhere in rural New York.

I've said before that for all the complaining about the Adirondack Park Agency's existence (not necessarily its sometimes opaque and unaccountable workings, which can deserve scorn), the fact remains that a pristine natural environment is the single biggest economic advantage the Park has. Threaten that and you lose the outdoor tourism revenue so central to the region's economy.

Posted by Brian Farenell