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### The Town of Lovell's Kezar Lake

On a cool July morning in Lovell, Maine, a person strolling down a long, winding dirt road will pass painted signs indicating the presence of side roads leading to wooden cottages along Kezar Lake. The town of Lovell sits in a thick forest, so an abundance of trees surround the cottages, rendering them almost invisible. The past economy in the area depended on lumber sales, and while forestry still exists, the current economy depends primarily on summer tourism. Despite the increase in the number of summer guests over the past century, the area is so peaceful and expansive that many times one would not encounter another individual on a morning walk. The lake is hidden and still largely unknown to people outside of the New England region, a reason the area has remained unspoiled. Kezar Lake rests near the border of New Hampshire at the edge of the White Mountain National Forest. The 2,600-acre lake contains three distinct bays, roughly correlating with the three villages that make up Lovell: Lovell, Central Lovell, and North Lovell.

Summer tourism has shaped Lovell's economy since the late 19th century, which in turn has changed the land so today cottages, inns, and restaurants line the shores of the lake. Despite the increases in development and the number of summer guests, the town has been successful in retaining the lake's clarity and ecosystems that support a diversity of wildlife through land use regulations and support of conservation programs. Other towns that depend on lakes for their economies around the country could benefit from following the model the people of Lovell have established in protecting their most valued resource.

Lovell, equipped with a library and a general store, retains a small town atmosphere even in the summer when the population expands to several times its normal size. The Maine Census data reports just under a thousand residents lived in Lovell in 2000, though this number swells to around four times that number during the summer.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, Lovell contained 1,218 housing units in the year 2000, but only 393 were occupied, attesting to how Lovell is primarily a summer destination as most people do not stay around for the entire year. The remaining 825 units were designated as vacant, almost all of which people specified as being for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use.<sup>2</sup> These data show the extent of how many people occupy the housing units in Lovell just in the summer.

The town's atmosphere in the summer versus the rest of the seasons is markedly different because of how many people Lovell gains in the summer. A year-round Lovell resident would recognize three groups of people living in the town: natives, summer folks, or tourists.<sup>3</sup> Locals generally live in one of the Lovell villages, while the transients or seasonal residents own the more expensive lakeside property. The nonresident property owners pay around two-thirds of the town's property taxes.<sup>4</sup> The year 1932 marks when non-resident property valuation exceeded the real estate value of resident property for the first time.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, a significant proportion of the town's economy comes from the summer residents who pay taxes on their lakefront property, but do not require the use of the town's services throughout the rest of the year. Permanent residents worry about the increasing number of summer visitors, but they know how summer tourism is crucial to the town's economic well-being.

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<sup>1</sup> Maine Census Data Population Totals, "Minor Civil Division Population: Lovell," <http://www.library.umaine.edu/census/townsearch.asp> (accessed November 4, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Profile of General Demographic Characteristics: Lovell Town, Oxford County, Maine, 2000," <http://factfinder.census.gov> (accessed November 4, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Edgar Beem, "A Kezar Lake Summer: The Ethical Culture of a Maine Lake," Gilmore Camps, <http://www.gilmorecamps.com/nicest.htm> (accessed October 17, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Pauline Moore, *Blueberries and Pusley Weed: The Story of Lovell, Maine* (Kennebunk: Starr Press, 1970), 64.

The economy of Lovell has always depended on the lake, as the early timber industry used the lake's water to power sawmills. Before the rise of summer tourism, the economy relied heavily on timber sales, the most abundant natural resource available for the first town folk in Lovell. The amount of wood available in the surrounding forests helped launch the shook industry and allowed for the growth of Maine shipping with the trade of wood products.<sup>6</sup> The forested land contains a diversity of trees, including oak, hemlock, elm, pine, and brown ash. The lumber industry did affect the land, as Pauline Moore states, "Among the types of wood once plentiful and now no longer found in Lovell are bass, balm of gilead and butternut; all used for making furniture."<sup>7</sup> Today, the lumber industry is still part of the town's economy, as trucks can be seen transporting piles of wood out of town, but summer tourism has taken over as the primary contributing factor to the economy since the turn of the twentieth century.

The construction of the Brown's Camps, located in Center Lovell on the eastern shore of Kezar Lake, represents the beginning of developing the area as a vacation spot for summer visitors. In 1896, Ben Brown built a three-story lodge and continued to enlarge the resort in the following years.<sup>8</sup> The Brown's Camps attracted wealthy sporting lodgers and was a successful business until the Great Depression; later it was replaced by another resort called the Severance Lodge.<sup>9</sup> Today, several resorts and private clubs dot the shoreline of Kezar Lake in addition to mostly family-owned cottages.

The lack of intrusion by outside businesses allows Lovell to retain its charm and reduces human effects on the land and water because the area cannot accommodate a massive number of

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>8</sup> Diane Barnes and Jack Barnes, *Upper Saco River Valley: Fryeburg, Lovell, Brownfield, Denmark, and Hiram* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2002), 59.

<sup>9</sup> Carol Taylor, "The History of the Severance Lodge," *Lovell Historical Society: Yesterday's News* 15, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 1.

tourists. The town is unique from other summer destinations because the small town atmosphere with its locally-owned inns, camps, and cottages to accommodate visitors remains intact. Large corporations have not penetrated Lovell, so no national hotel, restaurant, or retail chains are situated within the town.

Despite the construction of summer cottages, inns, and camps around the lake since the 1880s, the town has not become overcrowded because of development regulations. Around 40% of the properties in Lovell were built before 1940.<sup>10</sup> The changes on the land brought by the increased presence of summer residents over the past century were gradual.<sup>11</sup> Comparing an 1880 map, which shows a few mills and a limited number of residences situated near the lake, to a recent map of the area would provide an inaccurate picture about the environmental history of Lovell and Kezar Lake.<sup>12</sup> The cottages and resorts were built over the course of the century, so Lovell did not undergo a sudden boom in construction to alter the land in a matter of a couple of recent decades. Natural disasters like floods and fires have destroyed many of the historic wooden homes or mills in the town, but the lake remains the best way to connect Lovell's past to the present, as people in each decade have relied on Kezar Lake for recreational opportunities or economic benefits. The town and lake have not been mismanaged or destroyed because both Lovell residents and summer vacationers have grown to value the place and therefore are motivated to protect the environment they love.

Residents of Lovell support strict land use regulations to protect the area, and such measures have been successful. The town created a land use plan in 1992, which divided the town into seven categories of appropriate land use. The community designated Lovell Village,

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<sup>10</sup> Lovell, Maine, <http://lovellmaine.net> (accessed November 4, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> Moore, 234.

<sup>12</sup> "Lovell Town, Lovell Village," Historic Map Works, <http://www.historicmapworks.com/Map/US/260/Lovell+Town++Lovell+Village/Oxford+County+1880/Maine> (accessed November 4, 2008).

for example, as an area for mixed uses and the primary location where development can occur at a relatively high density.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, no development in the resource protection area, which contains wetlands, is permitted without special permission.<sup>14</sup> The environmental consciousness of the people has limited development around Kezar Lake, preserving both the land and their community.

Kezar Lake is the heart of Lovell, so residents are very concerned about retaining the lake's water quality. The lake is recognized for its clarity, as it is about six feet clearer than any other lake in Maine and has been getting clearer since 2001.<sup>15</sup> The lake is classified as B-1 water, which means it can be used for recreational activity and swimming. Moreover, the lake water is safe for fish and wildlife and can even be used for drinking water after treatment.<sup>16</sup> The Kezar Lake Watershed Association, founded in 1969, advocates lake protection by employing scientists to research and monitor the lake's water quality.<sup>17</sup> The Greater Lovell Land Trust, established in 1985, works to protect the ecosystems of Kezar Lake by balancing land protection with reasonable development.<sup>18</sup> As a result of such environmental organizations promoting stewardship of the land in combination with the community's initiatives, Kezar Lake has consequently remained in a condition that allows wildlife to flourish.

The land around Kezar Lake has profoundly changed since the late nineteenth century because of the addition of so many summer cottages and visitor accommodations. The lake, however, has remained largely the same over the years. For example, the lake remains full of a

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<sup>13</sup> Town of Lovell, *Lovell Comprehensive Plan-1992*, Town of Lovell, <http://www.lovellmaine.us/docs/23.Lovell1992CompPlan.PDF> (accessed October 22, 2008), 66.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>15</sup> Ray Senecal, "Water Quality," *Watershed Views: Newsletter of the Kezar Lake Watershed Association*, Spring 2008.

<sup>16</sup> Kezar Lake Association, *Kezar Lake: A Resource to Enjoy and Protect* (Lovell: Kezar Lake Association, 1990).

<sup>17</sup> Kezar Lake Watershed Association, "About Us," Kezar Lake Watershed Association, <http://www.kezarlake.org/about.php> (accessed November 4, 2008).

<sup>18</sup> Greater Lovell Land Trust, "Who We Are," Greater Lovell Land Trust, [http://www.gllt.org/about\\_us/index.html](http://www.gllt.org/about_us/index.html) (accessed November 4, 2008).

diversity of fish, including salmon, trout, bass, perch, and pickerel, much to the delight of fishermen.<sup>19</sup> As stakeholders in the land, the people of Lovell possess a quality that Aldo Leopold would call a “land ethic,” meaning they have broadened their idea of a community to include Kezar Lake and its species.

On the same hypothetical July day that started this story—this time after sunset—the cry of a loon echoes into the night. A few seconds later, another loon cries in response. The lake’s ecosystems have remained in excellent condition as a result of the residents’ conservation initiatives, thus ensuring the well-being of wildlife. Larger animals like moose have been spotted on the shores, a sight many visitors hope to witness. The protection of Kezar Lake should be used as a model for other communities around lakes currently at the risk of destruction from too many visitors. As a result of the people’s safeguarding of Kezar Lake’s beauty and water quality, the lake continues to play an important role in the town’s attraction and economy as it has since the founding of Lovell more than two centuries ago.

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<sup>19</sup> Kezar Lake Association, *Kezar Lake: A Resource to Enjoy and Protect*.

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