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Source: Mountain Research and Development, 24(4) : 327-335

Published By: International Mountain Society

URL: https://doi.org/10.1659/0276-4741(2004)024[0327:PFAMIC]2.0.CO;2

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Mountain Research and Development Vol 24 No 4 Nov 2004: 327–335

Raymond Chipeniuk

Planning for Amenity Migration in Canada

Current Capacities of Interior British Columbian Mountain Communities

Amenity migration, the movement of people for pleasure rather than economic reasons, has become a major phenomenon in mountainous regions of western North America. Research suggests that planning to promote and manage amenity migration can contribute to the sustainable development of mountain communities. The present article reports the results of a rapid reconnaissance of the capacities of hinterland mountain municipalities in British Columbia, Canada, to plan for amenity migration. Low capacity was found in awareness and technical understanding of the phenomenon.

Keywords: *Amenity migration; mountain communities; planning; British Columbia; Canada.*

Peer reviewed: *May 2004* ***Accepted:*** *July 2004*

Introduction

Particularly since about 1990, and now around the globe, many city dwellers who are under no serious economic constraints have been choosing to become permanent residents of rural places that offer outstanding natural, social, and built environmental qualities (Moss 1987; Rudzitis 1999; Rothwell et al 2002; Westlund 2002). The movement of such people to the countryside is often called "amenity migration" (Price et al 1997), although in some formulations of the "amenity migration paradigm" (Glorioso 2000) the term includes second home ownership by people whose principal residence is located outside the district of interest—that is, people who are not actually migrants. Tourism is believed to play a causative role in amenity migration (Stewart 2002) but casual observation suggests that amenity migration may occur quite independently of tourism, through word of mouth.

Commonly, the landscapes to which amenity migrants move are mountainous, and in the mountains of North America amenity migration has become a powerful economic force. In the US "Mountain West," for instance, economic analysis indicates that it is more important than the formerly dominant resource-extraction industries of logging, mining, and ranching (Power 1996; Vias 1999; Rudzitis and Johnson 2000) or tourism (Booth 2002). Increasingly, the academic literature recommends that communities should capitalize on amenity migration as a rural development strategy (Fagan and Longino 1993; Baden and Snow 1997; Judson et al 1999; Nelson 1999). Besides constituting a source of new jobs and businesses, amenity migration counteracts the current tendency of population decline in rural resource-based communities (Power 1996; Booth 2002), a tendency associated with loss of real estate values, waste of infrastructure, and the self-reinforcing tax increases consequent on fewer taxpayers supporting the same burden of municipal maintenance and borrowing. Another reason for encouraging amenity migration through planning is that amenity migrants, not including second property owners, are naturally predisposed to sustain the amenities that have led them to call some locality home in the first place (Rudzitis 1999; Hirschhorn 2002).

Ironically, of course, the migrants themselves often impose an additional burden on local amenities (Moss and Glorioso 1999). In certain regions such as the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and Oregon, amenity migration is driving explosive growth and there are concerns about its environmental impacts (Rasker and Hansen 2000). Although settlements having some history of amenity migration—for instance Aspen, Colorado—now address it through urban and regional planning measures such as tax concessions to preserve working ranches from being subdivided into "ranchettes," anecdotal evidence suggests that for many towns and villages the phenomenon is so recent and so poorly understood that community reaction is entirely passive. That is, communities do not plan to increase or decrease the rate of amenity migration and they do not plan to shape it.

Is this impression of bemused helplessness correct? The present paper reports the results of a rapid reconnaissance of the planning capacities of certain Canadian mountain communities as they confront the wave of amenity migration now washing across western North America.

Methodology

In the summer of 2003 the author visited planners and administrators employed on behalf of non-metropolitan mountain municipalities in British Columbia (BC). Via email, he then obtained their written responses to an open-ended questionnaire asking about municipal capacity to plan to promote and manage amenity migration. In like manner, though without first visiting them on site, he obtained completed questionnaires from planners responsible for the sophisticated "touchstone" resort towns of Whistler, BC; Banff and Canmore, Alberta; Aspen, Colorado; and Jackson Hole (via Teton County, Wyoming).

Selection of the sample was based on commonsense judgments that communities might become, or already were, targets of amenity migration because of their mountain scenery, adjacency to parks or de facto

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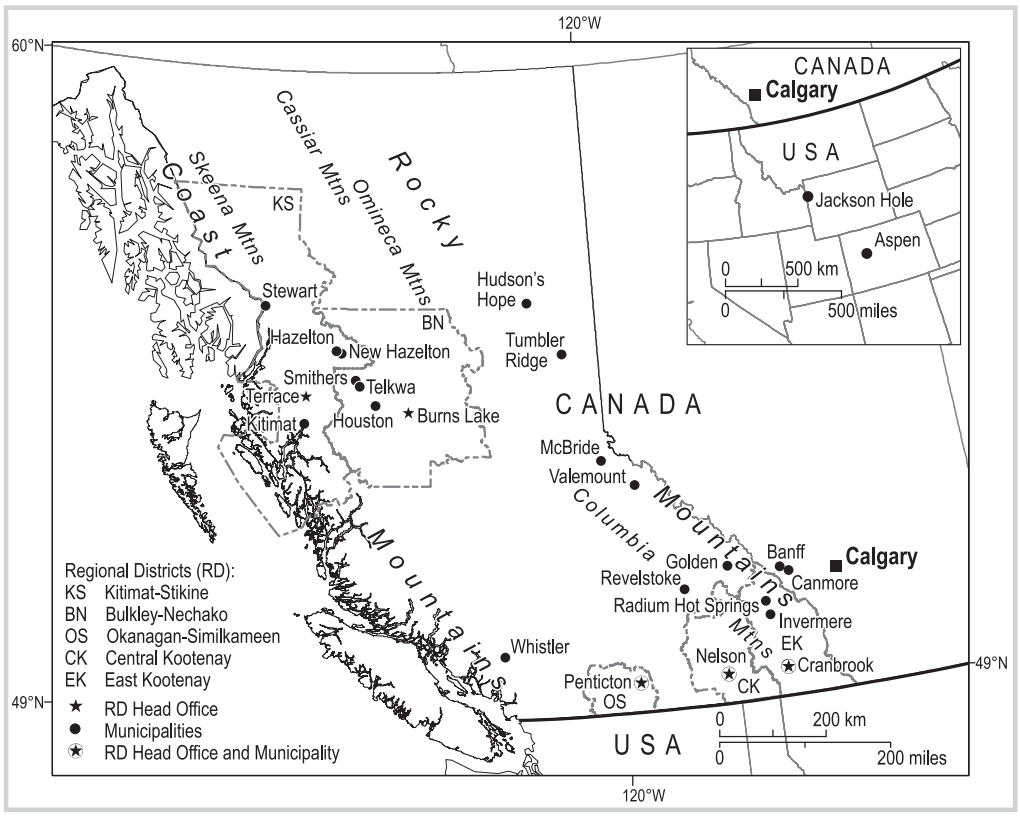


FIGURE 1 Location of study area and cooperating municipalities and regional districts, British Columbia and adjacent Alberta. The insert situates two US "touchstone" communities, Jackson Hole and Aspen. (Map by Nancy Alexander)

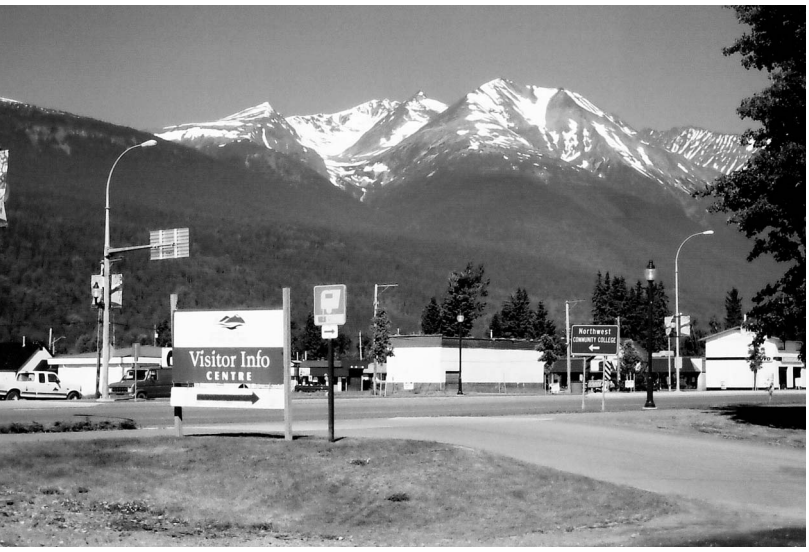


FIGURE 2 Smithers, one of the British Columbian study communities. (Photo by Raymond Chipeniuk)

wilderness, and outdoor recreational possibilities. Bedroom settlements, where people build homes for amenity reasons but work in nearby cities, were excluded from the survey. Cooperation was about 85%, providing information on 21 interior or hinterland BC municipalities: Stewart, Hazelton, New Hazelton, Moricetown, Smithers, Telkwa, Houston, Vanderhoof, McBride, Golden, Revelstoke, Nelson, Radium Hot Springs, Tumbler Ridge, Hudson's Hope, Valemount, Kitimat, and the regional districts of Bulkley-Nechako, Okanagan-Similkameen, East Kootenay, and Central Kootenay (Figures 1 and 2; Table 1).

In British Columbia, rural municipal planners and administrators are employed by towns, villages, districts (which include both a village or town and surrounding countryside), and regional districts (with planning responsibilities for several to many towns, villages, and the countryside in which they are set). Administrators often perform planning duties and vice versa; there is no clear distinction between them, except that planners have usually been trained as planners.

In the questionnaire "amenity migrants" were described as "people who are retired or independently wealthy, or able to live where they like while working elsewhere, or young and well educated, and who move to a place that has some or all of the following amenities…," namely rural landscapes, beautiful and dramatic scenery, good access to parks or wilderness, easy access to outdoor recreation, an attractive built environment or a history that can be seen and felt, good conditions for raising children, good conditions for practicing and enjoying art, and warm human relations. Amenity

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TABLE 1 Principal municipalities and regional districts that responded to the survey, and some of their characteristics.

Selection of municipalities responding	Population in 2001	Type of municipality or settlement	Distance to nearest center (km)	Type of respondent	Selection of local amenities listed by respondents
Moricetown	N/A	First Nation	1190	Administrator	Canyon
Stewart	690	District	1505	Administrator	Nearness to Alaska; mountains, ocean
Houston	3733	District	1100	Administrator	Low cost, outdoor recreation opportunities, slow pace
New Hazelton	782	District	1230	Administrator	Scenery, outdoor recreation
Nelson	9703	City	665	Planners	Small scale, built environment, arts, safety, etc
Vanderhoof	4592	District	870	Administrator, planner	Rural lifestyle, doctors, hospital
McBride	742	Village	530	Administrator	Low real estate costs, accessible wilderness, scenery, built environment
Hazelton	360	Village	1235	Administrator	Inexpensive housing, scenery, outdoor activities, hospital, etc
Smithers	5651	Town	1160	Planner	Built environment, setting, community, etc
Golden	4195	Town	713	Planner	Mountains, nearness to big cities, safety of roads
Revelstoke	7826	City	565	Planner	Snow, spectacular surroundings, heritage restoration
Kitimat	10,733	District	1425	Planner	
Radium Hot Springs	583	Village	820	Administrator	Glacier drinking water, golf/ski resorts, national parks, flora/fauna, etc
Okanagan-Similkameen	79,983	Regional district	400–500	Planner	
East Kootenay	58,744	Regional district	800–900	Planner	
Central Kootenay	59,503	Regional district	600–700	Planner	
Bulkley-Nechako	42,636	Regional district	1000–1200	Planner	
Whistler BC	9284	Resort district	120	Planners	Resort town, amenities of a large city, recreation, scenery, access, etc
Canmore AB	100	Town	100	Planners	Recreation, nature and scenery, smallness, lack of traffic, relatively low cost
Banff AB	7135	Town (national park)	130	Planner	Outdoor pursuits, festivals, world-renowned cultural institution, international airport, etc
Aspen CO	5914	City	260	Planners	Natural beauty, smallness, child amenities, recreation
Jackson Hole WY	8647	City	440	Planners	

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migrants were explicitly contrasted with economic migrants, and economic migrants were said to be people who move to a place because that place offers jobs or business opportunities. Second home owners were excluded from the definition because from a planning perspective their effects on a community are so drastically different from the effects of new permanent residents. Cultural and institutional amenities were omitted mainly to simplify the definition, to emphasize the mountain aspect of the study, and to avoid testing the patience of the respondents.

The questionnaire is too long to reproduce here, but oblique renderings of the more important questions are used as headings in the Results section below.

Results

Findings in this section sometimes compress results from 2 or more questions in the questionnaire.

- *Are planners able to monitor numbers of arriving in-migrants, reasons for coming, origins?*

Except for Moricetown and Nelson, all British Columbian communities in the sample indicated they do not or cannot monitor numbers of arriving in-migrants, their reasons for coming, or their origins. Moricetown is an aboriginal village in which the Wet'-suwet'en administration must document people's backgrounds and origins in order to allocate housing and other entitlements. Nelson cited the "Welcome Wagon," a volunteer organization for welcoming new residents; but this device appears to be informal and unsystematic.

Neither Aspen nor Jackson Hole track new arrivals. Banff and Canmore do. For Banff the reason is that it is situated within world-famous Banff National Park. The Canadian government has placed a cap on the town population and forbids residence in the town unless a person needs to live there for work or business purposes. Canmore, at the eastern gates to Banff National Park and set in a Rocky Mountain valley of extraordinary beauty, is contending with barely manageable development pressures. It is important to note, however, that in its monitoring Canmore does not distinguish between amenity migration in the sense of change of residence, on the one hand, and second home ownership on the other.

Why is it that mountain settlements generally do not collect information about in-migrants? The two reasons most often cited by planners and administrators are insufficient resources and the fact that a need for this kind of information has never hitherto been identified. Also mentioned in questionnaire responses are lack of a mandate and lack of a serviceable data collection method. Again, not even Aspen has felt it necessary to gather this kind of information.

- *Could hinterland communities use amenity migration to replace economic out-migrants?*

For the past decade hinterland BC has been undergoing a serious deterioration in local economies. Logging and mining, ranching, government, and tourism have all been hard hit by recent trends and events. In these circumstances, it might be expected that British Columbian mountain towns would be sensitive to amenity migration as a replacement for population lost as industrial and government employment seeps away. Are they?

Six of the BC communities surveyed commented that they are losing population. Three of these reported that although they are losing population, amenity migration has kept the losses from being as drastic as they might otherwise have been. Eight of the BC communities with stable or growing populations consider that amenity migration is a factor in their demographic sustainability.

- *Are communities aware of the problems amenity migration can cause?*

Communities with long or intense experience of amenity migration become acutely aware of the problems it can impose. Jackson Hole, Canmore, and Whistler refer to soaring housing prices, generally high cost of living, conversion of agricultural land to residential purposes, and out-movement of employees. Yet of the hinterland BC municipalities, only East Kootenay recognizes several problems: increasing property assessments and taxes without a concomitant increase in the levels of local government services; services not matching taxpayers' expectations; conflict between the values of long-term residents and recent amenity migrants; and changing attitudes about land use and development on both Crown and public lands.

- *Are communities conscious of change occurring on account of amenity migration?*

Communities are not likely to conduct planning to control amenity migration if they are unaware that amenity migration is changing them. In this survey, over half the BC respondents report that they detect little or no change owing to amenity migration. Several report incipient or modest change, and a few report rapid and extensive change. Until now the effects of amenity migration may have been invisible to planners and administrators because amenity migration itself has been invisible. During informal interviews, many planners and administrators acknowledged that they were unacquainted with the term "amenity migration" and they said they had never had their attention directed to the phenomenon. From their perspective, amenity migrants arrive as unrelated individuals, not in groups as, for example, new sawmill workers might. Some plan-

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ners and administrators may not appreciate that an annual influx of amenity migrants of 1 or 2% can quickly compound to the point where amenity migration is a community's principal economic sector.

- *Are communities currently planning to attract or manage amenity migration?*

Planning to attract amenity migration is very unevenly distributed among the BC mountain communities included in the study. About half the BC respondents report that their communities are doing nothing at all. The remainder name significant planning measures, although there tends to be little overlap among the measures, and survey respondents may have recognized their pertinence to amenity migrants only in hindsight. A selection of efforts to attract is presented in Table 2. Some communities listed 3 or more kinds of effort.

One question in the survey asked whether the respondent's official community plan had something to say about amenity migration. For BC mountain communities, the answer across the board is no, although some respondents report what they interpret as oblique references. Several respondents express regret at missed opportunities or offer the opinion that the subject should be entertained in the next round of planning.

TABLE 2 Measures cited by respondents as intended to attract amenity migrants or manage amenity migration, or as having that effect, intended or not.

Measure	Jurisdictions employing measure
Monitoring new amenity migrants	Moricetown (required for purposes of Indian band administration)
	Telkwa (numbers of new residents monitored through BC Assessment)
	Nelson (all new residents welcomed by Welcome Wagon)
	Canmore (monitoring of mailing addresses of new property owners)
Improving quality of life	Houston (pursuing 24/7 health care)
	Telkwa (maintaining quaintness, holding festivals, planting)
	Vanderhoof (creating atmosphere attractive to professionals)
	Bulkley-Nechako (doing same things for all in-migrants; focus on recreational opportunities)
	Smithers (maintaining vitality of downtown, ensuring clean, well-maintained infrastructure, supporting arts and culture)
	Golden (taking economic development initiatives that encourage lifestyle attributes)
	Radium Hot Springs (providing high-quality infrastructure, currently high-speed Internet; providing efficient approvals process; controlling signage and facades to encourage specific themes within village)
	Whistler (offering affordable resident housing; developing and upgrading community facilities and amenities)
Promotion	New Hazelton (developing web site)
	Revelstoke (active promotion, means not specified)
	Kitimat (Economic Development Office runs advertisements aimed at attracting "active" or "outdoorsy" retirees)
	Houston, Revelstoke, Kitimat (visions state objectives with "amenity migration flavor")
	Revelstoke (vision identifies that growth by 2000–6000 is desirable and indicates that amenity migration, with tourism, is means to achieve it)
Management	Banff (utilization of official community plan as vehicle for "need to reside" policy; Banff was the one respondent to indicate it mentions a policy concerning new residents in its official community plan)
	Jackson Hole (Teton County) (vision states desire to balance new development with retention of amenities)

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TABLE 3 Examples of collaborative planning between communities in the study and other planning bodies.

Type of collaborative planning	Collaborative planning cases
Planning to ensure environment in Crown, provincial or national park lands, or Indian reserve lands surrounding town or within district, is attractive to amenity migrants	Telkwa (joint planning with provincial agencies about Crown lands and parks)
	Okanagan-Similkameen (joint preparation of a regional growth strategy with provincial agencies)
	Whistler (environmental planning shared with regional, provincial, and federal governments, First Nations, and local interest groups)
	Kitimat (participation in provincial strategic planning for Crown lands in vicinity, and in forestry on nearby lands)
	Radium Hot Springs (attempts to influence provincial agency management of Crown backcountry, cooperation with Parks Canada and local environmental groups)
Planning to facilitate or manage amenity migration	Houston (discussion with other municipalities and with aboriginal governments about regional marketing generally)
	Revelstoke (cooperation with the provincial land agency on possible development of a nearby 4-seasons resort; consulting with First Nations and land owners)
	Banff (cooperation with Parks Canada to educate public about "need to reside" policy, which restricts residence within Banff National Park)

Another question in the survey asked about community visioning for amenity migration. Again, planners answered overwhelmingly in the negative, with a few qualifications to the effect that the local community vision touches on matters related to amenity migration without actually using the term. A few of the respondents suggested that visioning about amenity migration might be useful, even "extremely important."

Overall, the pattern seems to be one of no conscious amenity migration planning efforts in smaller and remoter communities. Furthermore, even in the case of communities able to identify planning steps that could serve to increase amenity migration, the logic linking planning steps and amenity migration looks suspiciously post-hoc or coincidental.

As for planning efforts to manage amenity migration, just one BC municipality, the regional district of Okanagan-Similkameen, claims to do something along these lines. It protects farmland through its official community plan and zoning bylaws. In the US, burgeoning Aspen states that it attempts to restrict amenity migration, but equally burgeoning Jackson Hole does not.

None of the study communities have formal techniques for measuring the success or failure of planning efforts to increase or manage amenity migration. One respondent speaks of word of mouth and monitoring of news articles.

- *Are communities engaging in amenity migration-related planning collaboratively with other planning bodies?*

Amenity migrants are rarely attracted to a town or rural area for the sake of what that town or rural area can offer on its own. They choose their destination community partly or mainly as a base that gives them convenient access to a set of amenities, many of which lie on lands within Crown (or in the US, federal or state) jurisdiction or within other municipal jurisdictions. In BC, First Nations jurisdictions are also becoming important for recreational and other purposes. Are BC mountain municipalities engaging in collaborative amenity migration-related planning with these other jurisdictions?

Most are not, but some are, and what they are doing is both varied and interesting (Table 3). Houston, a district municipality taking in some rural areas, is discussing regional marketing with local sister municipalities and aboriginal governments. Telkwa works with the Ministry of Forests and B.C. Parks, Tumbler Ridge with B.C. Assets and Lands, the agency that sells government-owned land. The Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen reviews its proposed bylaws with provincial agencies and other local governments and it contributes to work on a regional growth strategy. Golden has recently entered into a dialogue with the adjacent regional district on land use planning for an area near a town not hitherto subject to such planning. Revelstoke participated in the provincial strategic land use planning program of a decade ago. Kitimat, another municipality extending over rural areas, is participating in the current provincial strategic land use planning process (LRMP – Land and Resources Management Plan) and it plays a role in approving forest industry activity on Crown lands lying within its boundaries. Valemount is currently collaborating with both the provincial government and the regional district on a special nature-based residential project. Whistler works in partnership with federal, provincial, and regional governments and with local interest groups such as mountain bikers and naturalists to protect and

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enhance the environment around the town. It expects its partnerships will expand and intensify with the 2010 Olympics.

Radium Hot Springs is outstanding for the energy it displays in relation to its size. It has strongly influenced the strategic planning process for the regional municipality surrounding it. It has lobbied the provincial government to reinstate stewardship and policing of backcountry resources. (The present Government of British Columbia has largely abdicated responsibility for recreation on Crown lands.) Finally, it has cooperated with the Province, Parks Canada, and local environmental groups to implement bighorn sheep habitat restoration on provincial Crown lands and federal park lands surrounding the village.

Most of the non-aboriginal BC communities participating in the study report little planning interaction with First Nations governments. This omission may turn out to be a serious one, inasmuch as settlement of land claims in BC may soon eventuate in First Nations becoming major landholders around these communities.

- *Do municipal officials see their communities as being well endowed with amenities that might attract migrants?*

One of the capabilities mountain municipality planners and administrators must have if their communities are to engage in planning for amenity migration is an ability to see their towns and districts as being well endowed with amenities. To judge by respondents' ability or willingness to name community assets that might attract amenity migrants, BC administrations have an appreciable yet limited capacity in this regard. Most BC respondents listed 3 or more assets (mean 5.4, maximum 13; Albertan boom towns Banff and Canmore, for comparison, 6 and 10, respectively). However, most of the towns and districts included in the survey have far more migrant-attracting amenities than their representatives set down. (For a partial list of amenities, see Table 1.)

- *Do BC mountain towns have the fiscal and political resources to plan for amenity migration?*

Planning for amenity migration would require fiscal and political resources. Do BC mountain communities

TABLE 4 Advice offered by touchstone community planners to planners and administrators in mountain communities as yet not greatly affected by amenity migration.

Touchstone community	Advice
Jackson Hole (Teton County)	Set in place a comprehensive community input-based community plan and implementation tools that demonstrably protect core values
	Learn from the experience of other amenity-based growth communities
	Develop and implement an agency-supported and -led plan to mitigate or redevelop problem areas, systems, and properties within the context of a cohesive community plan
	Plan for services and infrastructure, and particularly for affordable service worker housing/services that must be in place concurrently with growth and construction activity
Canmore	Have a strong community vision. Decide what your future will be
	Have the amenity migrant sector pay for the impacts that it creates
	Have the developers of large, amenity migrant housing also build and subsidize construction of affordable housing to house those displaced and those economic migrants that follow the amenity migrants
	Consider real estate transfer taxes on expensive houses. Again, they pay for the impacts
Whistler	Be sure everyone understands the potential benefits and implications (eg land use and potential for sprawl)
	Establish a vision and a plan to ensure growth is controlled and planned and acceptable to the community
	A good overall plan so you don't undermine what you already have in terms of desirable amenities
Aspen	These residents are high maintenance. They expect and demand a high level of service whenever interacting with government
Banff	Be careful what you wish for…. Have a very clear vision of where you want to go and how you are going to get there

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have such resources? Several responding planners and administrators stated that their town, district, or agency would need additional funds if it were to conduct amenity migration planning, eg funds drawn from tax increases, budget diversions, or elsewhere. Several also remarked that political support would have to be forthcoming, presumably from mayors and councils or regional district boards. Two respondents mentioned additional staff; one, volunteers. Central Kootenay recommended a regional approach in order to pool resources and avoid pointless competition.

- *Do planners and administrators have the imaginative capacity to plan for amenity migration?*

The survey invited participating planners and administrators to offer suggestions for how a community could increase the flow of amenity migration to itself. Nearly all BC participants made at least one or two recommendations—in the aggregate, too many and too varied to summarize here. Respondents for the smaller communities tended to propose broad or conventional tactics. Planners for the "touchstone" communities, with their intense experience of amenity migration and second home development, seem to have an appreciation of amenity migrant desires and preferences, which is closer to what economic and sociological research has found to be the case (Maynard et al 1997; Carlson et al 1998).

Planners and administrators also found it easy to formulate advice they would give to other communities as they plan to increase or control amenity migration. Again, their comments were too varied, numerous, and lengthy to summarize here. Advice from the touchstone communities is provided in Table 4.

Finally, planners and administrators for larger but not smaller towns readily identified possible or known problems with amenity migration. Most frequently mentioned were impacts on rural land uses, impacts on preexisting local cultures, and conflicts involving such uses and cultures. Taken as a whole, the list of problems reveals a high level of capacity to view amenity migration as a mixed blessing.

Discussion and conclusions

This study is based on self-reports by planners and administrators who often, before meeting the researcher, had little or no awareness of amenity migration as a phenomenon, or if they did, had given little thought to it. The reliability of their responses to the questionnaire is completely untested.

That caution kept in mind, it is probably accurate to say that BC mountain communities are well equipped to confront the problems and opportunities of amenity migration in some respects but perhaps ill prepared in others. They are ill prepared in that until now planners and administrators, and no doubt political leaders and citizens, too, have had little awareness of how important a demographic and economic force amenity migration is becoming. Until recently municipal officials have barely taken notice of it, and even now they may know less than they should about its expression on a continental or global scale. In their own communities they lack adequate means of tracking it and they anticipate difficulties in obtaining the fiscal, staff, and political resources they need to influence it.

On the other hand, planning and administration in these communities, even the small ones, appears to be performed by individuals who have no difficulty grasping the problems and opportunities which continental trends in amenity migration pose for local communities. Survey responses reveal no evidence of parochial attitudes in the planners and administrators—though local politicians and publics may be another matter.

Possibly the main limitation in amenity migration planning capacity in hinterland British Columbia is the lack of government mobilization at regional and provincial scales. As reported in the results section of this paper, many mountain villages and towns are too small to conduct effective amenity migration planning on their own except via the Official Community Plan process conducted at intervals of 5 years or longer. Mechanisms that might serve as tools in an overall municipal strategy to address amenity migration, for instance growth management or affordable housing bylaws, are inadequate unless they function in the context of a complete set of amenity migration strategies, including especially the means to measure rates and economic consequences of amenity migration on an annual basis. Regional districts may or may not be large enough; but rural distrust of planning, associated with insufficient funding of the planning function, tends to render the question moot in the remotest of them. On the whole, the remoter the regional district, the less its planners had to say about amenity migration in their responses to this survey, if indeed they could find the time to respond at all.

Ultimately it is the provincial government that should be paying for, facilitating, and to some extent performing amenity migration planning. In British Columbia, however, successive provincial governments have shown little interest in shouldering this responsibility. Perhaps they are reticent to some extent because the bulk of amenity migration only rearranges residents within the province, generating no net benefit for the province as a whole, no matter how much it may benefit individual communities. Be that as it may, the principal reason is more likely to be an insufficiency of planning resources in the provincial civil service. Anecdotal evidence suggests that staff at the Ministry of Community,

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Aboriginal and Women's Services and the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management has been reduced to levels so low as to be incapable of handling new trends of the amenity migration kind.

If present trends continue (and they may: see Bennett 1993), amenity migration will soon have profound effects on mountain communities throughout temperate North America. It remains to be seen whether a pattern of adequate planning potential combined with inadequate planning resources, as detected in this study, will produce harmless results, lost opportunities, or bitter regret when the crest of Baby Boom-generated amenity migration sweeps over the remoter communities of the BC hinterland.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to thank Nancy Alexander for preparing the maps in Figure 1; the University of Northern British Columbia for the seed grant under which the work reported in this article was performed; 2 anonymous reviewers for their excellent comments; the 30 or more planners and administrators who contributed their time and intellectual energy to the survey; and the friendly and helpful editorial staff of *MRD*.

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