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## Study: 'Locals' are rare in Snowmass

Sopris Foundation says high number of second homes means energy is being wasted

BY [SCOTT CONDON](#)

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ASPEN, CO COLORADO,

SNOWMASS VILLAGE — The percentage of second homes sitting vacant and theoretically wasting energy is higher in Snowmass Village than in Aspen, a new study has determined.

Between 61 percent and 68 percent of all single-family residences and condominiums in Snowmass Village are second homes, the Sopris Foundation reported Friday. A 2007 study by the nonprofit organization showed that 58 percent of residences in Aspen are vacation homes.

"We wanted to follow up on a gut feeling that fewer local residents live in Snowmass," said Sopris Foundation director Piper Foster.

The latest study estimated a range for Snowmass Village second-home ownership because residency is tough to determine in some cases. Many vacation and investment homes are owned by trusts and limited liability companies that might or might not be local.

The finding is significant, Foster said, because the Aspen study determined that second homes use as much energy per square foot per year as fully occupied units, even though second homes are unoccupied an average of 277 days annually.

When information about energy usage learned in the earlier study is applied to Snowmass Village, it indicates that the town's total residential carbon emission output is 57,221 tons per year, Foster said. At least 35,000 tons and possibly as much as 39,000 tons comes from second homes, the study indicated.

Foster said the Sopris Foundation wants to see the information used by "community stewards" of Snowmass Village to promote responsible energy use. Specifically, she said, the foundation hopes to see "bold leadership" in regulating second home energy use. For example, the Town Council could "outlaw" heated driveways and sidewalks, she said, and be more strict on house sizes.

The Sopris Foundation was founded in 1993 by John McBride and his daughter Katie McBride Puckett. It undertakes programs designed to effectively deal with issues and challenges facing the West.

Foster said she attempted to share the results of the study on Aspen second homes and energy usage with the Snowmass Village Town Council about 10 months ago, but couldn't get on their agenda. So, the Sopris Foundation decided to take a gander at the village's mix of ownership.

"We thought it was necessary to get their attention another way," Foster said.

Town officials said they welcome additional information. They are already working on increasing energy efficiency. About 50 residents attended workshops July 1 to establish goals on community sustainability. The top priority that emerged at that meeting was energy conservation, according to Jason Haber, the town's economic resource director.

Additional workshops will be held Tuesday to develop an action plan to achieve those community goals, Haber said.

In addition, the town is exploring a Renewable Energy Mitigation Program, where incentives and fees could be used to encourage increased energy efficiency. Pitkin County and Aspen operate such a program through the Community Office for Resource Efficiency. In that program, builders of new homes have a certain "budget" for energy use. If they exceed that budget, they must pay a fee. Those revenues have been used on energy efficiency programs throughout the Roaring Fork Valley.

The Snowmass Village Town Council has discussed a similar program in several meetings and will take up debate again in August, said Mayor Doug "Merc" Mercatoris.

Mel Blumenthal, who splits time between Snowmass Village and California, is a member of the board of directors of the Second Homeowners Advisory Board. That board was created a few years ago to give second-home owners a voice in Snowmass Village issue.

Blumenthal said the board hasn't discussed the energy efficiency proposals in detail, but he couldn't imagine there would be opposition. "My guess is there's going to be support," he said.

He personally favors a REMP program that doesn't allow a wealthy homeowner to pay a fee to add something like a

heated driveway.

“I don’t want to see any more buy-outs,” Blumenthal said.

Rick Heede, owner of Climate Mitigation Services, said the studies commissioned by the Sopris Foundation highlight the opportunities area governments have in improving energy efficiency. Heede performed the Aspen study and peer-reviewed the Snowmass Village study, which was undertaken by Nate Heintzman of Charles Cunniffe Architects.

Heede said that second homes tend to use as much energy as homes occupied full time because owners may not be aware about the savings that are possible through some easy steps. For example, the temperature on hot water heaters can be drastically turned down when a vacation home won’t be used for a month. Also, many homes have systems that produce hot water on demand which can be better managed with little effort.

Heede said he was told there is a homeowner in Snowmass Village who leaves a snowmelt system on even during the summer. There must be ways of reaching such homeowners and promoting the benefits, to them and the environment, of better energy management, he said.

The Climate Mitigation Services web site, [www.climatemitigation.com](http://www.climatemitigation.com), offers free downloads on energy reduction for homeowners.

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