

PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE AND PERCEPTIONS OF WETLANDS AND WETLANDS  
MITIGATION POLICY: A STUDY OF FOUR ILLINOIS COUNTIES

An Abstract of

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of Geography

Western Illinois University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Darrel Barker

May, 2005

## ABSTRACT

It is estimated that 90 percent of the original wetland areas in Illinois have been destroyed through agricultural activities, development, and other human impacts. Having once covered 23 percent of the state's land, wetland coverage today has been reduced to approximately 3.2 percent of Illinois' total surface area. These remaining wetland areas are mainly concentrated in the southern portion of the state. In recent decades, the federal government has introduced legislation intended to reverse this trend of wetlands devastation. The success of these wetland mitigation programs, however, depends greatly upon the support and involvement of the public. It is therefore the purpose of this research to measure the current perceptions and knowledge of Illinois residents with regard to wetland functions and values, and with regard to wetland mitigation policy. Data will be acquired by questionnaire, which will be mailed to a random sample of residents and county government officials in four different Illinois counties. These counties represent the areas with the highest and lowest wetland concentrations in the state. The proximity of residential location to wetland areas will also be considered as a variable which might influence perceptions. By better understanding public viewpoints and knowledge on these issues throughout the state, it may be possible to increase the success of future wetlands education and mitigation efforts.