

## **ABSTRACT**

**THESIS:** Managing Wetlands: A Community Perspective

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Increased residential and commercial development threatens wetland functions, particularly near urban centers. This research explores the values and attitudes of residents concerning wetlands, wetland restoration, and development near Fort Wayne and Huntington, Indiana, the location of a large wetland restoration project. Key Informant interviews were conducted to contextualize issues on wetlands, stormwater management, development, and community involvement. Interviews results were used to generate a random sample, multi-county mail survey. Results show that residents find protecting groundwater, green space, and access to clean drinking water very important. Environmental concern is high regarding flooding, development, and water quality. KI's underestimate resident's awareness of water quality issues. A proposed model of significant factors in explaining resident's attitudes towards wetlands includes whether or not they are a farmer, wetland knowledge, well-being, and positive attitudes towards green space and development. This research is unique because the respondents have exposure to wetland areas on a regular basis. Wetlands are highly appreciated and are an important part of the community. There is a fine balance of property rights and pro-conservation attitudes among residents. Future research can explore what

conservation specifically means to people and how their views on property rights shape that meaning. Results from this research can aid management decisions that can be either beneficial or detrimental to the wetland and those who depend on it for a variety of needs.