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Review of *Wetlands of the American Midwest: A Historical Geography of Changing Attitudes* by Hugh Prince

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Wetlands of the American Midwest: A Historical Geography of Changing Attitudes. Hugh Prince. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998. vii+395 pp. Figures, tables, bibliography, index. \$16.75 paper (ISBN 0-226-68283-8).

I wish I could recommend this book as a "must read" for anyone interested in the history and development of the Great Plains region; however, I cannot. For one thing, the Great Plains per se are rarely discussed in it, and the subject is certainly not a topic of universal interest. I *can* recommend the book, however, as a highly readable and well-documented study of the change in our perceptions of the wetlands of the Midwest over time. Hugh Prince has done a magnificent job of gathering a great deal of scattered information and using it to illustrate his idea that our perceptions of wetlands figure significantly in how we dispose of them on an environmental basis.

In Chapter 1, Prince fixes his focus on the seven state region of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, pointing out how the term "Middle West" was first applied to the High Plains area of Nebraska and Kansas, but expropriated by residents in the upper Mississippi River basin in hopes of identifying "with the good image gained by Kansas and Nebraska." Current usage places the Dakotas, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and easternmost Colorado and Wyoming in the "Great Plains" or "High Plains," and thus most of Prince's book focuses on the wetlands of the real "Midwest."

Following his introduction, Prince examines the history of wetlands in the Midwest starting with the "Native American occupation" and ending with the present day. Some of the data he has gathered in both map and tabular form are arresting. For example, his map (Fig. 3.6) depicting the

extent of Indian land cessions over time shows in a dramatic way how the infusion of Euro-American settlers into the Midwest drove Native Americans off lands they had occupied for generations. Similarly, his table illustrating the percent of land owned by the largest 5 percent of private owners and the land held by the Federal Government is an eye-opener.

Prince's book discusses the extensive impact of the 1993 flooding on the western portion of the Midwest, including affected portions of the High Plains. His narrative incorporates an arresting account of the economic hardships faced by farmers during the 1980s and presents considerable evidence on how our mismanagement of our wetland assets indirectly played a part in both the flooding and economic crises faced by farmers between 1980 and the present.

The most important theme Prince develops is how our perceptions of wetlands have changed over time and what impact these changes have had on wetlands themselves. Increasingly, wetlands have come to be seen not as wastelands to be drained for better agricultural purposes, but as invaluable resources in their own right. Although many papers and reports document the importance of wetlands to our ecosystem, few books discuss their true significance in so cogent a manner as Prince's. Whatever the future holds for the wetlands of the United States, books such as this one will heighten our appreciation and knowledge of this essential ecological resource. **Sanford S. Kaplan**, *Department of Geosciences, University of Nebraska-Lincoln*.