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Title: Linking water governance and community resilience: A case study of the Cache River watershed of southern Illinois

Abstract:

In recent decades, the field of water resource governance has been transitioning from the command-and-control paradigm toward adaptive multi-level institutions, such as adaptive co-management and adaptive governance. These transitions offer potential opportunities for enhancing the resilience of resource-dependent communities, i.e. the ability of communities to adapt to various drivers of change while maintaining or enhancing their well-being. However, the relationship between these emerging governance approaches and community resilience has not received enough research attention. The Cache River Watershed in southern Illinois, which has been designated as a Wetland of International Importance, offers an opportunity for further exploring these relationships. In 1991, the Cache River Wetlands Joint Venture Partnership (CRWJVP) was formed to address various ecological crises in the watershed. The purpose of this study was to assess the impacts of the CRWJVP's management efforts on the resilience of communities in the watershed. Based on a qualitative research approach, data for the study were generated through key informant interviews, participant observation, and the review of documents. The analysis of data on community participation in the governance of the watershed revealed moderate to minimal levels of involvement. Barriers that were identified in the participation process comprised the lack of awareness and interest among some community members, as well as the lack of resources and opportunities for participation. The impacts of the CRWJVP management actions on community resilience were also analyzed. Although most key informants reported positive impacts of the program on the communities' natural capital, the impacts of the program on other dimensions of community resilience, such as physical capital, social capital, human capital, and economic capital were largely perceived as negative. These results highlight the complexity of resource-dependent communities and the urgent need for a transition toward adaptive and integrated water governance approaches for enhancing social and ecological resilience.