



United States Department of the Interior
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Key Cave NWR
Wheeler NWR Complex
2700 Refuge Headquarters Road
Decatur, AL



Memorandum

To: Regional Chief, National Wildlife Refuge System

From: Project Leader, Refuge Manager, Wheeler NWR Complex, Key Cave NWR,
Lauderdale County, AL

Subject: Request for Minor Revision to 2007 Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge Complex
Comprehensive Conservation Plan

Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge (refuge) completed its Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) in 2007, as required by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act (Refuge Improvement Act).

The Service recently completed a Spatial Habitat and Species Management Plan (SHSP) / Environmental Assessment (EA) / Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for Key Cave National Wildlife Refuge (refuge, NWR) (USFWS 2025). The SHSP refines, updates, and replaces certain objectives or portions of objectives from the CCP for the Wheeler NWR Complex (USFWS 2007). Existing CCP goals remain unchanged.

All refuge management actions will be directed toward achieving the refuge's primary purpose, to properly administer, preserve, and develop the 1,060-acre area for protection of a unique cave ecosystem that provides essential habitat for the endangered gray bat and Alabama cavefish and other important cave dwelling fauna, while contributing to other national, regional and state goals to protect and restore karst habitats and species. Key Cave is designated critical habitat and is the only known location for the Alabama cavefish. Key Cave is also a Priority 1 Gray bat maternal colony.

Background/Need for Amendment:

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 and Service policy (Fish and Wildlife Service Manual chapters 602 FW 1 and 3) identify the need to periodically review and revise Comprehensive Conservation Plans. Specifically, the Service Manual chapter 602 FW 3, (Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process) Section 3.2 states "We will revise the CCP every 15 years ... or earlier if monitoring and evaluation determine that we need changes to achieve planning unit purpose(s), vision, goals, or objectives."

Stepping down from the 2007 CCP (USFWS 2007), the Service developed an SHSP/EA/FONSI to refine and update habitat management. The SHSP serves existing refuge management goals and objectives, updates certain objectives, provides new/refined objectives, and provides a sub-goal under existing goals 1 and 2 to provide needed refinement; a crosswalk is provided in Appendix B of the SHSP and is incorporated by reference herein. Serving NWRS mandates, Land Protection Plan intent (USFWS 1996), and refuge purposes, the proposed SHMP would support multiple refuge management goals and objectives articulated in the CCP (USFWS 2007).

Justification:

This is considered a minor CCP revision because it does not significantly change the management direction or overall intent of the CCP and it would support other refuge management goals and objectives in the CCP.

An Environmental Assessment (EA) and Finding of No Significant Impact for the refuge (USFWS 2025) was prepared to inform the public of the possible environmental consequences of implementing the SHSP for the Refuge. A description of the alternatives, the rationale for selecting the preferred alternative, the environmental effects of the preferred alternative, the potential adverse effects of the action, and a declaration concerning the factors determining the significance of effects, in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, are outlined in the SHSP.

This memorandum complies with the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, which states that the “Secretary shall ... revise the plan at any time if the Secretary determines that conditions that affect the refuge or planning unit have changed significantly.” Examples of new information or changed conditions include but are not limited to the following: 1) changes in the acreage of a specific habitat type; 2) changes in water management or availability; 3) changes in the status of a listed species; 4) the need for changes to wildlife management or public use programs; 5) changes to Service policy; 6) the need to construct new facilities, and/or 7) changes in sea level or other climate related changes.

Literature Cited:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1996. Final Environmental Assessment and Land Protection Plan, Proposed Establishment of Key Cave National Wildlife Refuge, Lauderdale County, Alabama. Southeast Region, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. April 1996. Atlanta, GA.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2007. Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge Complex Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment. Southeast Region, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. July 2007. Atlanta, GA.
<https://ecos.fws.gov/ServCat/Reference/Profile/1468>,
<https://ecos.fws.gov/ServCat/DownloadFile/1443>

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2025. Key Cave National Wildlife Refuge Spatial Habitat Management Plan. Key Cave National Wildlife Refuge, Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge Complex, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. October 2025. Decatur, AL.

Refuge Manager/
Project Leader: _____
(Signature & Date)

Concurrence:

Branch of Planning: _____
(Signature & Date)

Refuge Supervisor: _____
(Signature & Date)

Approval:

Regional Refuge Chief,
NWRS,
Southeast Region: _____
(Signature & Date)