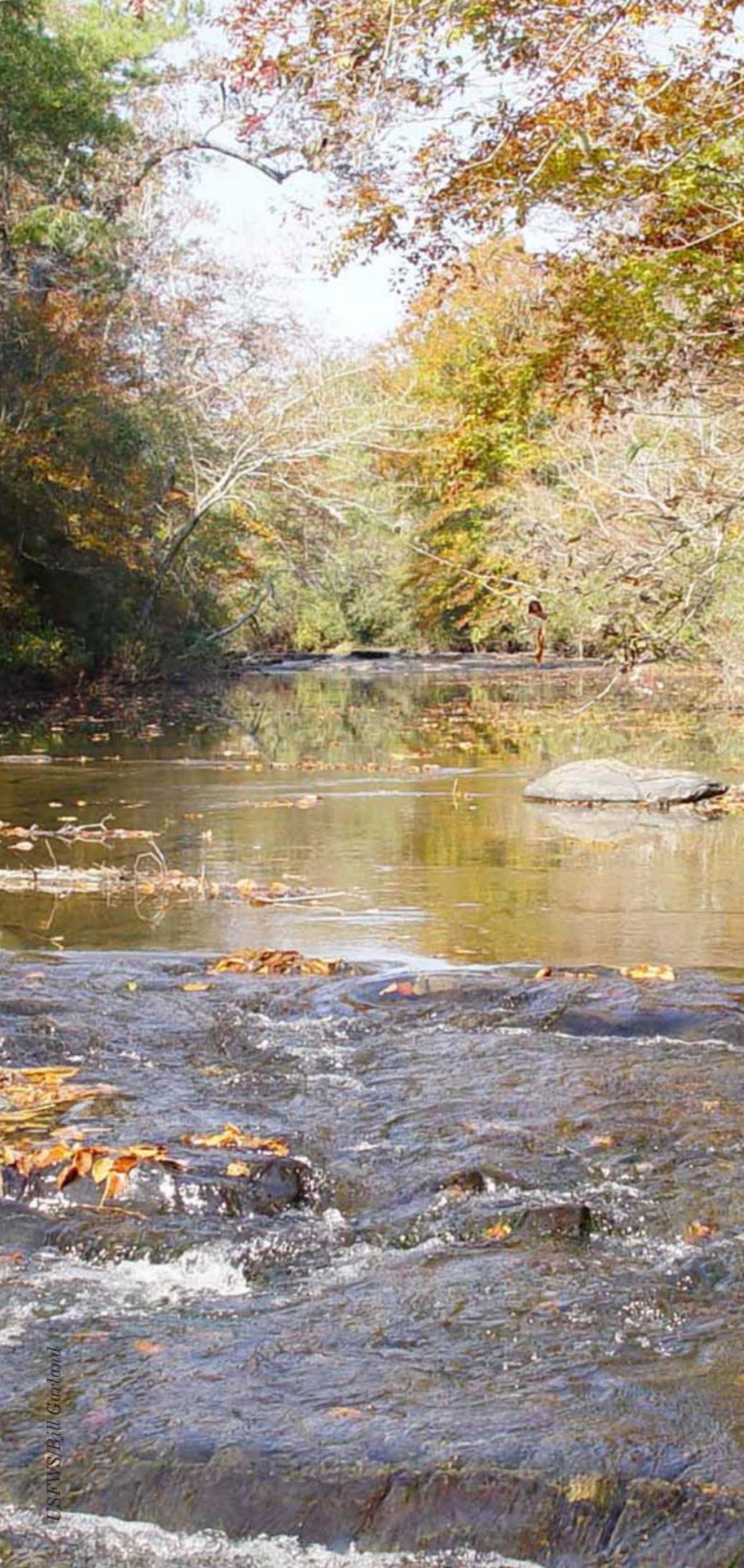


U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Cahaba River

*National Wildlife  
Refuge*





## Introduction

Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge was established September 25, 2002 to:



USFWS/Bill Garland

(1) conserve, enhance, and restore the native aquatic and terrestrial community characteristics of the Cahaba River (including associated fish, wildlife, and plant species);

(2) conserve, enhance, and restore habitat to maintain and assist in the



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recovery of animals and plants that are listed under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1331 et seq.);



Steve Maslowski

(3) provide opportunities for compatible fish- and wildlife-oriented recreation, ensure that hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation are the priority general public uses of the Refuge, in accordance with section 4(a)(3); and (4) of the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. 668ee(a)(3), (4)); and

*Photos: on left: Caffee Creek; this page, top to bottom: refuge longleaf pine forests; Georgia aster; scarlet tanager*

(4) encourage the use of volunteers and to facilitate partnerships among the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, local communities, conservation organizations, and other non-Federal entities to promote public awareness of the resources of Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge and the National Wildlife Refuge System and public participation in the conservation of those resources.



*Photos, top to bottom: Refuge entrance sign; Cahaba shiner; Southern pigtoe mussel; eastern wild turkey*

Welcome to Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge, the heart of biodiversity in the southeastern United States.

The 3,500-acre Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge became America's 540<sup>th</sup> National Wildlife Refuge on September 25, 2002. The refuge's primary purpose is to protect and manage a unique, three-mile stretch of the Cahaba River and surrounding upland habitats. Lands continue to be added to the refuge as willing sellers and funds are available.

## The River

The Cahaba River (earlier spelling of Cahawba) is believed to be of Choctaw origin meaning "water above" or "the river above".

The Cahaba River begins in St. Clair County, Alabama and flows 191 miles before joining the Alabama River in Dallas County southwest of Selma. With a length of almost 200 miles, the Cahaba River is the longest free-flowing river in Alabama. The Cahaba River provides water for an estimated one million people, or almost 1/4 of the population of Alabama.

The Cahaba River is home to 131 fish species which is greater, per mile, than any other river in North America.

## History

The Choctaw tribe and the Creek Nation were the first historical Native American groups to live in the area. By many accounts, the Cahaba River was the dividing line between the area claimed by both groups with the Choctaws to the west and the Creeks to the east.

Prior to 1861, the primary occupations in the area likely involved farming and timber. Industrial development in the area was limited to a few forges and cotton mills prior to 1861.





*Photos, top to bottom: old growth longleaf pine forest - 1906; cleared old growth longleaf pine forests - 1912; Bibb County Lumber Mill - 1949*

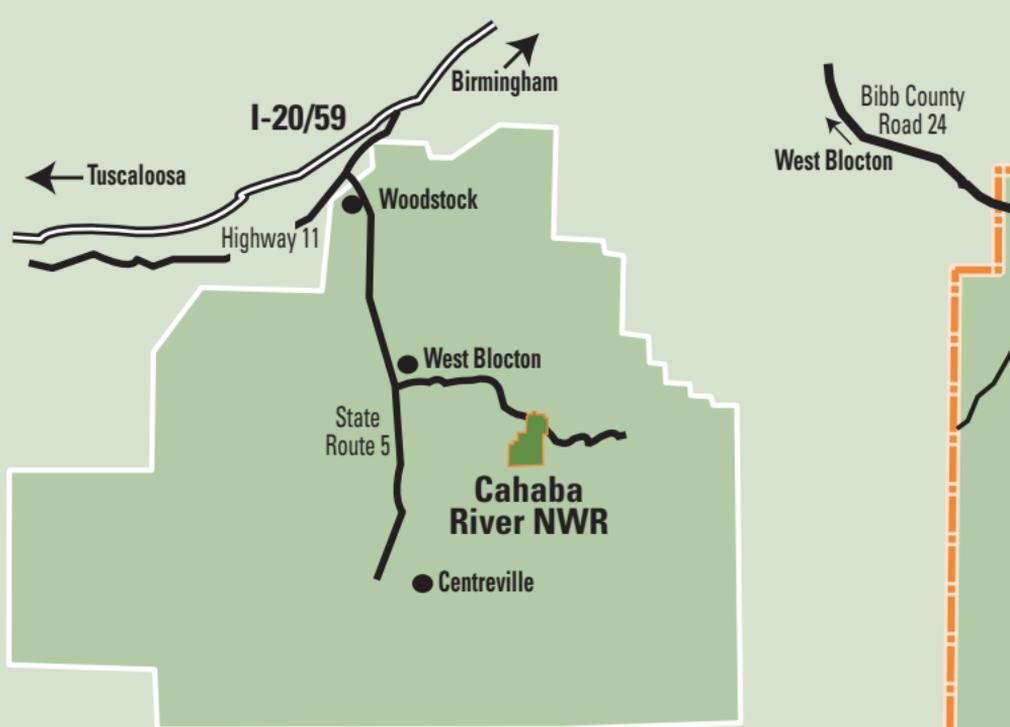
The area surrounding the refuge is rich in natural resources. Vast coal reserves, abundant longleaf pine forests, a constant water supply from the Cahaba River, and the close proximity to iron ore; led to intense mining development in the area. From the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the landscape that is now the refuge was altered significantly.

Coal from the mines in the area helped to fuel the iron furnaces during the Civil War. Entrances to the Piper and Hargrove Mines were located on what is now the refuge. A portion of the now-abandoned town

of Piper was located on the northeastern corner of the refuge.

The effects of coal mining are still evident today. Layers of coal “fines” are evident in sandbars along the river.

Strip mining through the mid-1900’s significantly changed the local landscape. A strip mine highwall and coal waste (gob) pile still remain on the refuge.



# Cahaba River

National Wildlife Refuge





-  Parking
-  Scenic view
-  Canoe launch
-  Information kiosk
-  Cliff
-  Public roads (maintained)
-  Public roads (not maintained)
-  Public trails/Maintenance road
-  Interpretive trail
-  Stream/river
-  Intermittent stream
-  Shoals



The original longleaf pine forests of the area were mostly depleted and have primarily been replaced with commercial loblolly pine. Past commercial harvesting, mining and other land uses have taken a toll on the refuge uplands. Restoring these lands will take many decades to re-establish the functioning systems that existed prior to settlement.

## Habitats

### *Aquatic*

One of the most visible and unique characteristics of the Cahaba River are the rock shoals. These shoals create a series of pools and riffles that provide the necessary habitat for many rare and unique plant and animal species.

For many people visiting the Cahaba River, it is the shoals (Cahaba) lily that leaves a lasting impression.

From mid-May to mid-June the Cahaba River shoals come alive with the beautiful white blooms of the Cahaba Lily.

Eighteen of the river's 131 fish species are found only in the Cahaba River or Mobile River Basin. Up to 48 species of mussels once occurred in the Cahaba River. Today, only about 27 mussel species remain. Within the stretch of the Cahaba River that flows through the refuge, 17 different mussels have been recorded.



*wood thrush*



*Cahaba lilies flower from mid-May through mid-June*

Steve Maslowski

USFWS/Steve Miller



*Photos, top to bottom: spring peeper; marbled salamander; red-cockaded woodpecker*

## **Endangered Species**

## **Invasive Species**

### *Riparian*

The forests, canebrakes and rock outcroppings along the rivers and streams provide habitat for many species of plants and animals.

Prothonotary warbler, Swainson's warbler, Louisiana waterthrush and Acadian flycatcher can all be heard and seen within the riparian habitats on the refuge. Less conspicuous year round residents of riparian habitats include numerous reptiles, amphibians, and plants.

### *Uplands*

Historically, most upland areas on the refuge were forested with longleaf pine. Hardwoods, such as oaks and sweetgum, were likely dominant within refuge drainages. Most longleaf pine forests and many hardwood forests were converted to loblolly pine plantations over the past 50 years. Efforts are under way to restore the longleaf and hardwood forests on the refuge.

Although upland habitats show obvious effects of past intensive use, upland habitats continue to provide habitat for many bird species of national concern. These species include the red-headed woodpecker, Kentucky warbler, wood thrush, and American woodcock.

The refuge provides habitat for at least 12 federally listed threatened or endangered species. Some species, such as the bald eagle, Indiana bat, and gray bat only use the refuge for a portion of the year. The remaining species (fish, mussels, snails, insects and plants) are permanent, albeit sometimes not too obvious, residents.

A by-product of past intensive land use is the prevalence of invasive and exotic species. Once disturbance occurs, invasive species rapidly colonize lands through accidental or intentional dispersal. Species, such as kudzu, Chinese privet, and Asiatic clam, can form dense colonies or

grow to large numbers that restrict or aggressively compete with native species. Other exotic species, such as princess tree and silk tree, are less aggressive but also displace native species.

## Management

Management goals for Cahaba River NWR are to maintain and improve the biological integrity of the Cahaba River and adjacent systems and, where possible, restore these systems to pre-settlement conditions. Considering the vast impacts that have occurred, this will be a broad and long-term endeavor.

We anticipate utilizing prescribed fire, timber harvesting, tree planting and other tools to restore altered lands. Over time, visitors will once again see the land as native Americans and early settlers did.



WS Berg



Ray Rauch

## Public Use

The refuge provides a wide variety of compatible, wildlife-dependent, public uses including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, outdoor education, and interpretation. Canoeing is permitted and jogging and bicycling are allowed on designated roads. No camping is allowed.

*Above: whitetail fawn; below: broad-banded copperhead snake*

Hunting on the refuge is allowed



ovenbird

in coordination with the adjacent State of Alabama's Cahaba River Wildlife Management Area (WMA). The WMA permit is the accepted refuge hunt permit. Refuge regulations that differ from the WMA are noted on the permit.

Jogging is allowed on all refuge roads and trails, except for those designated as interpretive trails. Bicycling is allowed on any road open to vehicle traffic.

Personal canoe launching is allowed. A special use permit must be issued for commercial canoe launching on the refuge.

## Visitor Information

Cahaba River NWR is currently unstaffed and relies heavily on local groups and volunteers to accomplish our mission. A refuge support group known as the Friends of Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge is currently being organized to further the goals of the refuge.

Visitor information can be found at the information kiosks on the refuge, by visiting the refuge website at: <http://www.fws.gov/southeast/cahabariver/> or by emailing the Central Alabama Refuge Complex headquarters that manages the refuge at: [cahabariver@fws.gov](mailto:cahabariver@fws.gov)

*Canoeing on the refuge*



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