

Key Cave

National Wildlife Refuge



photo: USFWS



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Photos (top to bottom)

Habitat.

Alabama cavefish.

Refuge Facts

- Established: 1997.
- Acres: 1,060, including a 38-acre sinkhole lake.
- Complex headquarters: Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge, Decatur, AL.
- Location: the refuge is located approximately 5 miles southwest of Florence in Lauderdale County, AL.

Natural History

- The refuge consists of hardwood forests and croplands. In 2001, about 350 acres were in corn and soybean production.
- Along with Key Cave, adjacent Collier Cave provides potential habitat for Alabama cavefish and gray bats. Both caves are on the northern shore of Pickwick Lake in a limestone karst area that contains several sinkholes and underground cave systems.
- Past farming practices in the area have led to severe erosion problems. Much of the crop land will eventually be planted to native warm season grasses and reforested with mixed hardwoods to protect the cave recharge area.

Financial Impact of Refuge

- Presently unstaffed.
- Administered by Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge, Decatur, AL.
- 6,000 visitors annually.

Refuge Objectives

- Protect endangered Alabama cavefish, gray bats, and their critical habitat.
- Provide habitat for a natural diversity of wildlife and plants, especially species associated with cave systems.

- Provide opportunity for compatible outdoor recreation, environmental education, and interpretation.

Management Tools

- A Key Cave planning committee composed of several Federal, state, and local entities has been formed to guide management of the new refuge.
- Community partnerships.
- Law enforcement.
- Education/interpretation.
- Cooperative farming.
- Research.

Public Use Opportunities

- Wildlife observation.
- Hiking.
- Photography.
- Hunting.
- Entry into cave for research by permit only.

Questions and Answers

Is Key Cave National Wildlife Refuge open to the public?

The 1,060-acre refuge is open to the public. Key Cave itself is not open to the public due to potential for disturbance of federally endangered Alabama cavefish and gray bats.

What is there to see and do at Key Cave NWR?

Hiking, hunting, wildlife observation, and wildlife photography are all activities that are available to the public at Key Cave Refuge.

What endangered species are found at Key Cave NWR?

The Alabama cavefish and gray bat and their critical habitats are protected by Key Cave Refuge.

Along with Key Cave, Collier Cave provides potential habitat for these two endangered species as well.

Why was there a need to purchase 1,060 acres to protect the cave?

Prior to purchase of Key Cave Refuge, land use practices in the area included cotton, soybean, corn, and wheat production, requiring the use of many farm chemicals. The cave's stream system is recharged through surface water run-off by numerous seeps and sink holes in the area. Purchase of the 1,060 acres and establishment of the refuge has resulted in the control of chemical use, thereby protecting the cave's primary recharge area and providing the mechanism to increase water quality and habitat quality for the only known population of the Alabama cavefish.