

Watercress Darter

National Wildlife Refuge



photo: USFWS



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Refuge Facts

- Established: 1980.
- Acres: 24
- Complex headquarters: Wheeler NWR, Decatur, Alabama.
- Location: the refuge is located near the city of Bessemer in Jefferson County, Alabama.

Photos (top to bottom)

Watercress darter.

Habitat.

Natural History

- Though the refuge consists of only 24 acres of mature pine, hardwoods and dense understory vegetation, a 1/4-acre pond known as Thomas Spring lies within the boundary. This spring is vital habitat for the endangered watercress darter.
- In 1983, a second pond was constructed on the refuge to provide additional habitat. Currently there are five sites in the Birmingham area where the darter is known to occur or has been introduced.
- Various under water plant species provide ideal habitat for watercress darters to live and spawn.

Financial Impact of Refuge

- Presently unstaffed.
- Administered by: Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge, Anniston, AL.
- 150 visitors annually.

Refuge Objectives

- Protect the watercress darter and its habitat.
- Provide habitat for a natural diversity of wildlife and plants.
- Provide opportunity for compatible outdoor recreation, environmental education, and interpretation.

Management Tools

- Community partnerships.
- Law enforcement.
- Education/interpretation.
- Research.

Public Use Opportunities

- Wildlife observation.
- Photography.

Questions and Answers

Is Watercress Darter National Wildlife Refuge open to the public?

The 24-acre Watercress Darter National Wildlife Refuge is open to the public. However, public opportunities are limited due to the small size of the refuge and the presence of the federally endangered watercress darter.

What is there to see and do at Watercress Darter Refuge?

Limited wildlife observation and wildlife photography opportunities are available.

Is fishing allowed in the spring and pond located on the refuge?

Fishing is not permitted on the refuge due to the presence of the endangered watercress darter, the absence of most other fish species, and the small size of the refuge.

What is a watercress darter?

The watercress darter is a small, very colorful fish known only from five spots in the upper Black Warrior River drainage near Birmingham, Alabama. The largest specimen known is a female 2.5 inches in length. They are found only at mid-depths in areas with dense aquatic vegetation of springs and spring runs and are subject to predation from green sunfish, bluegills and sculpins. They feed on snails, crustaceans and insect larvae that inhabit springs and spring runs.