

# Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge

## Photo Scavenger Hunt Challenge

Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge is one of 567 national wildlife refuges managed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Wheeler NWR was established in 1938 as a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife. The refuge manages 35,000 acres along the Tennessee River between Decatur and Huntsville and in addition to its habitat and wildlife conservation work, provides wildlife-based recreational opportunities to the public.

The visitor center area comprises just a small part of the larger refuge. We want to help families get out and explore the rest of the refuge and discover areas that they may not be familiar with! We've picked 12 different locations across the refuge and have taken photos (or selfies) of something at each location.

### Here's the challenge:

- 1) Visit as many of the listed locations as you can.
- 2) Learn a cool fact about the refuge at each location.
- 3) Recreate our photo (or take your own nature-related photo).
- 4) Optional: On social media tag: @WheelerNWRComplex
- 5) Optional: Pick up a few pieces of litter, many hands make light work.
- 6) Enjoy exploring your National Wildlife Refuge!



NATIONAL  
**WILDLIFE**  
REFUGE SYSTEM

## Limestone Bay

- **Driving Directions:** From I-565 take Exit 2 ( Mooresville Rd) and travel south 0.1 mile to Old AL Hwy 20. Turn right and go 0.7 miles. Turn left (south) on a gravel road when you see the small brown boat launch sign. Take this gravel road for 2 miles, keep left at the Wheeler NWR entrance sign. Park when you see the boat ramp.
- **Destination Point:** Limestone Bay
- **GPS Coordinates:** 34.602048, -86.891877
- **Cool Fact:** Limestone Bay is used by fishermen and paddlers, and is a popular location to view wintering migratory birds, specifically white pelicans and snow geese.



## White Springs Dike

- **Driving Directions:** From I-565 take Exit 2 ( Mooresville Rd) and travel south 0.1 mile to Old AL Hwy 20. Turn right and go 0.7 miles. Turn left (south) on a gravel road when you see the small brown boat launch sign. Take this gravel road for 2 miles, keep left at the Wheeler NWR entrance sign, continue past the boat launch for another 0.5 mile, look for the silver gate off to your left. Park off to the side of the gate/road.
- **Walking Directions:** From the gate, walk or bicycle the gravel road for 2.3 miles to the I-65 bridge over the Tennessee River. This road parallels Limestone Bay and the Tennessee River.
- **Destination Point:** I-65 bridge over the Tennessee River
- **GPS Coordinates:** 34.582585, -86.906177
- **Cool Fact:** Construction of the I-65 bridge was completed through the refuge in 1973. Further down the levee road are impoundments that the refuge manages and floods as feeding grounds for overwintering waterfowl (ducks).



Advice from a Ranger: Bring your insect repellent!

## Beaverdam Peninsula Observation Tower

- **Driving Directions:** From I-565 take Exit 2 (Greenbrier Rd) and drive south 1.8 miles on Swancott Road/Greenbrier Road. After a small bridge/guard rail take a slight right onto Pryor Road and continue 0.6 mile. At this point the road curves sharply to the right, but you'll want to continue straight onto the gravel road and take an immediate left turn. You'll see the tower a few hundred yards further.
- **Destination Point:** Beaverdam Peninsula Observation Tower
- **GPS Coordinates:** 34.610091, -86.854046
- **Cool Fact:** During the winter you might find Snow Geese, Greater White-Fronted Geese, or Ross's Geese feeding on the seeds from the past season's crops.



## Rockhouse Road

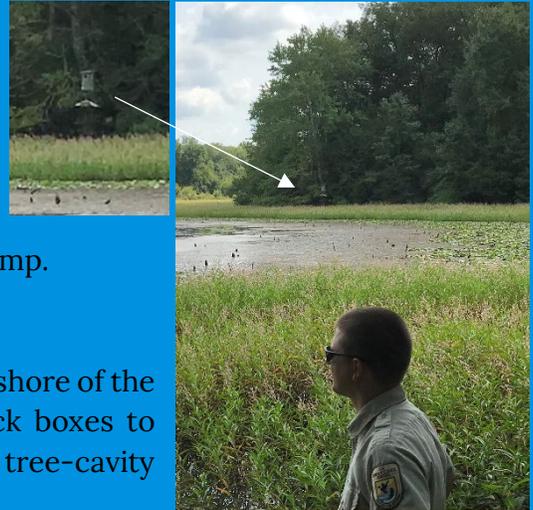
- **Driving Directions:** From I-565 take Exit 5 (Greenbrier Rd) and drive south 1.8 miles on Swancott Road/Greenbrier Road. After the road curves to the left be ready to turn right onto Rockhouse Road. Follow Rockhouse road 2.8 miles until you reach the refuge entrance sign and the gravel road. Continue straight and follow the gravel road for another 1 mile until you reach the pumphouse. If the gate is open you can continue to drive, if the gate is closed you'll need to bike or walk the remaining 3 miles to the pecan tree on the side of the road.
- **Destination Point:** Large pecan tree on Rockhouse Road
- **GPS Coordinates:** 34.553092, -86.790445
- **Cool (nutty ☺) Fact:** This pecan tree marks the line between Limestone and Madison counties. Local farmers work with refuge biologists to leave a portion of their crop for overwintering waterfowl and other wildlife.



Advice from a Ranger: Some refuge road gates close seasonally, but you can still walk or bicycle most of these roads. The gate schedule is available on the refuge website.

## Blackwell Swamp

- **Driving Directions:** From I-565 take Exit 7 (County Line Rd). Drive south on County Line Road for 5.5 miles. Look for the white picket fence on your left, then turn left on Jolly B Road. Continue on this narrow paved road for 0.5 mile before taking a slight left onto the gravel refuge road. Continue for 1 mile to the clearing on the left overlooking Blackwell Swamp.
- **Destination Point:** View of Blackwell Swamp
- **GPS Coordinates:** 34.564061, -86.778380
- **Cool Fact:** Can you see the wood duck box on the far shore of the swamp? The refuge maintains over 150 wood duck boxes to provide artificial nesting cavities for these small tree-cavity nesting ducks.



## Beaverdam Swamp Boardwalk

- **Driving Directions:** From I-565 take exit 7 (County Line Rd). Drive south on County Line Road crossing over the interstate, turn right onto Old Hwy 20. This road will dead end at the trailhead parking lot for the Beaverdam Swamp Boardwalk.
- **Destination Point:** View of water tupelo trees from the Beaverdam Swamp Boardwalk
- **GPS Coordinates:** 34.648563, -86.819152
- **Cool Fact:** Beaverdam Swamp is designated a National Natural Landmark, it is unique to have such a large stand of water tupelo located this far inland from the coast.



## Cotaco Creek Boat Ramp

- **Driving Directions:** From I-65 take exit 334 (Hwy 67). Turn toward Decatur, drive 1.4 miles to the blinking yellow light at Upper River Road. Turn sharply right onto Upper River Road and drive 11 miles. When you see Center Point Methodist Church, turn left onto Sharp Ford Road, continue for 2.2 miles. At the stop sign continue on Sharp Ford Road by turning right. Continue for 0.8 miles and the boat ramp will be on your left before the bridge.
- **Destination Point:** Cotaco Creek Boat Ramp
- **GPS Coordinates:** 34.543549, -86.726981
- **Cool Fact:** This boat ramp is a popular place for fishermen and paddlers to put in. This site is an example of how Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge, Alabama Department of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries, and the Tennessee Valley Authority work together to provide outdoor recreational opportunities such as paddling, fishing, hunting, and wildlife viewing.



## Cave Springs Cave

- **Driving Directions:** From I-65 take exit 334 (Hwy 67). Turn toward Decatur, drive 1.4 miles to the blinking yellow light at Upper River Road. Turn sharply right onto Upper River Road and drive 4.5 miles. When you see the white and red checkered water tower and a sharp curve in the road, prepare to safely turn left on Mussel Camp Road. Drive down the hill and at the gravel crossroads, park in the pull-off.
- **Walking Directions:** on the corner of the pull-off look for a faint trace of a footpath leading up the hill, when you reach the top of the hill you'll see the cave. Follow the path.
- **Destination Point:** Cave Springs Cave
- **GPS Coordinates:** 34.546280, -86.851022
- **Cool Fact:** The cave is a major maternity cave for the endangered gray bats that reside inside, and while their numbers decrease as fall sets in, you'll likely still see bats emerging from the cave if you visit around sunset!



## Mussel Camp

- **Driving Directions:** From I-65 take exit 334 (Hwy 67). Turn toward Decatur, drive 1.4 miles to the blinking yellow light at Upper River Road. Turn sharply right onto Upper River Road and drive 4.5 miles. When you see the white and red checkered water tower and a sharp curve in the road, prepare to safely turn left on Mussel Camp Road. Drive down the hill, at the crossroads keep straight, the road will end at the Tennessee River.
- **Destination Point:** The end of Mussel Camp Road at the Tennessee River
- **GPS Coordinates:** 34.558147, -86.848428
- **Cool Fact:** Alabama has the largest number of freshwater mussel species out of all the US states.



## Dancy Bottoms Trail

- **Driving Directions:** From I-65 take exit 334 (Hwy 67). Turn toward Decatur, drive 0.7 mile to Indian Hills Road and turn left. Continue south on Indian Hills Road for 3.1 miles. At Red Bank Road, turn right and continue for another 1.8 miles. Just before you cross the Flint Creek bridge, turn right. This gravel road dead ends at the Dancy Bottoms Trailhead.
- **Destination Point:** View of heron nest
- **GPS Coordinates:** 34.51418, -86.95577
- **Cool Fact:** The trail actually continues all the way to Bean Place Road. But, beavers are really good at damming streams! Refuge staff have tried hard in recent years to keep this trail dry, but the beavers have obviously won. The refuge hopes to rehab and restore this trail in the future. Can you find the heron/egret nest?



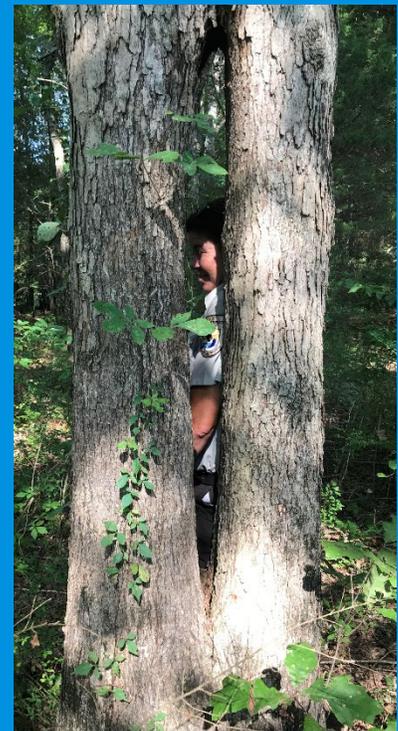
## Flint Creek Trail

- **Driving Directions:** From I-65 take exit 334 (Hwy 67). Turn toward Decatur, drive approximately 2.5 miles on Highway 67. After crossing the Flint Creek bridge, be watching for a clearing on your right. Turn right into the Flint Creek Day Use Area. You'll see the Flint Creek Trail and boardwalk from the parking lot.
- **Destination Point:** Yellow Poplar Tree
- **GPS Coordinates:** 34.55329, -86.94146
- **Cool Fact:** Isn't nature amazing, look how resilient this tree was after being blown down by the wind. You can take a tree identification quiz while you hike this trail! Access the quiz on our website or by using the QR code on the trail sign.



## Atkeson Trail

- **Driving Directions:** From I-65 take exit 334 (Hwy 67). Turn toward Decatur, drive approximately 2.5 miles on Highway 67. After crossing the Flint Creek bridge, be watching for the left hand turn lane. Turn left onto the Visitor Center entrance road. The Atkeson trail begins from the rear of the Visitor Center parking lot.
- **Destination Point:** Oak tree with split trunk
- **GPS Coordinates:** 34.544918, -86.952002
- **Cool Fact:** This nature trail is named in honor of former refuge manager Tom Atkeson. The grove of cypress trees along the boardwalk along with trees in many other areas of the refuge were planted by Tom and the Civilian Conservation Corps around 1940.



# Helpful Resources

**The following resources are on our website**

**[www.fws.gov/wheeler](http://www.fws.gov/wheeler):**

- Refuge map
- Gate schedule
- Closure maps
- Trail guides
- Bird list

**If you have a specific question, you can call the refuge Visitor Center.**

3121 Visitor Center Road

Decatur, AL 35603

(256) 350-6639

[www.fws.gov/wheeler](http://www.fws.gov/wheeler)

[www.facebook.com/WheelerNWRComplex](https://www.facebook.com/WheelerNWRComplex)

