

**Public Notice of Availability for Comment – Draft Compatibility Determination and
Environmental Assessment for Hunt Plan Expansion
Key Cave National Wildlife Refuge**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is expanding hunt opportunities on Key Cave National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) to include an additional ten species. The Service has prepared a draft Compatibility Determination (CD) and Environmental Assessment (EA) that provide the assessment and guidelines for hunting on the refuge. The CD and EA are currently available for your review at <http://wheeler.fws.gov> or at the refuge office and visitor center. Comments will be received until June 11, 2019.

Hunting of six species was initially evaluated and approved in the Comprehensive Conservation Plan for the refuge and currently takes place on the entire acreage (1,060 acres) of Key Cave NWR. Prior to allowing a use on a national wildlife refuge, Federal law requires that the Service first determine that the proposed activity is appropriate and compatible and, if allowed, must be re-evaluated every ten years. Your review and comment are an important part of the evaluation.

A compatible use is a proposed or existing wildlife-dependent recreational use or any other use of a National Wildlife Refuge that, based on sound professional judgment, will not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the purposes for which the refuge was established and the National Wildlife Refuge System mission. The Service developed a compatibility determination and an environmental assessment to facilitate evaluation of proposed uses, including anticipated impacts and stipulations necessary to ensure compatibility.

The National Wildlife Refuge System mission is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans. The purposes for establishing the refuges are provided on the first page of the draft compatibility determination.

The Service would like to know what you think of this proposed refuge use. All comments received within 21 days following the date of this notice will be considered in finalizing this compatibility determination. We hope to make a final decision on this proposed use within 15 days following closure of the public comment period.

All comments should be in writing and should be received no later than June 11, 2019. Comments should specifically articulate how the proposed project would, or would not, materially interfere with or detract from the Refuge purposes or Refuge System mission. Comments should be addressed to:

Ricky Ingram, Refuge Manager
Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge
2700 Refuge Headquarters Road, Decatur, AL 35603

Comments may also be sent via email to wheeler@fws.gov. If commenting via email, please place the words “Key Cave NWR Hunt Plan” in the subject line and your comments in the body of the text. Please do not include attachments because they will not be opened due to the potential for computer viruses.

To request a copy of the compatibility determination and environmental assessment, learn the final decision regarding this proposed use, or for more information, contact the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge office at 256-353-7243, or find it on our website at <http://wheeler.fws.gov>. Copies of the draft compatibility determination and environmental assessment may also be obtained at the refuge office at 2700 Refuge Headquarters Road Decatur, AL, and at the refuge visitor center located at 3121 Visitor Center Road Decatur, AL.

Key Cave NWR is located south and west of the intersection of CR 204 and CR 223 in Lauderdale County, Alabama. Key Cave NWR is part of the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge Complex, which also includes Wheeler, Sauta Cave, Fern Cave, Mountain Longleaf, Cahaba River, and Watercress Darter NWRs.