

Fern Cave

National Wildlife Refuge



photo: USFWS



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Dwight Cooley, Refuge Manager
Fern Cave NWR
2700 Refuge Headquarters Road
Decatur, AL 35603
Phone: 256/353 7243
Fax: 256/340 9728
E-mail: FW4RWWheeler@fws.gov
Website: <http://ferncave.fws.gov>

Refuge Facts

- Established: 1981.
- Acres: 199.
- Complex headquarters: Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge Decatur, AL.
- Location: the refuge is located 20 miles west of Scottsboro and 2 miles north of Paint Rock in Jackson County, AL.

Natural History

- Fern Cave Refuge consists of 199 acres of upland hardwoods and limestone outcroppings.
- The hillside contains five hidden entrances to the massive cave which has numerous stalactite and stalagmite filled rooms.
- Fern Cave provides protection and habitat for three federally listed threatened or endangered species: gray bat, Indiana bat, and American Hart's-tongue fern. More than one million gray bats hibernate in Fern Cave as do several hundred Indiana bats.
- Contains significant paleontological and archaeological sites.

Financial Impact of Refuge

- Presently unstaffed.
- Administered by Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge, Decatur, AL.
- 1,200 visitors annually.

Refuge Objectives

- Protect Indiana bats, gray bats, American Hart's-tongue fern 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

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

Public Use Opportunities

- Wildlife observation.
- Hiking.
- Photography.
- Limited entry into cave for research allowed by permit.

Questions and Answers

Where is Fern Cave National Wildlife Refuge?

Fern Cave Refuge is located 20 miles west of Scottsboro, 30 miles east of Huntsville and 2 miles north of Paint Rock in Jackson County, Alabama.

Is Fern Cave NWR open to the public?

The 199-acre refuge is open to the public. Access to Fern Cave itself is by special use permit only, due to the potential for disturbance of federally endangered Indiana and gray bats and threatened American Hart's-tongue fern.

What is there to see and do at Fern Cave Refuge?

Hiking, wildlife observation, and wildlife photography are all activities that are available to the public.

What endangered or threatened species are found at Fern Cave Refuge?

Fern Cave is home to the endangered Indiana and gray bat and the threatened American Hart's-tongue fern. More than one million gray bats hibernate in the cave, as well as several hundred Indiana bats.