

Watercress Darter

National Wildlife Refuge



photo: USFWS



photo: USFWS

Tuck Stone, Refuge Manager
Watercress Darter NWR
2700 Refuge Headquarters Road
Decatur, AL 35603
Phone: 256/353 7243
Fax: 256/340 9728
E-mail: FW4RWWheeler@fws.gov

Photos (top to bottom)

Watercress darter.

Habitat.

Refuge Facts

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

Natural History

- Though the refuge only consists of seven acres of bushy 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 potential habitat. Currently there are four sites in the Birmingham area where the darter is known to occur or has been introduced. Two of these are part of the refuge. Various under water plant species provide ideal habitat for watercress darters to live and spawn in.

Financial Impact of Refuge

- Presently unstaffed.
- Administered by Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge, Decatur, AL.
- 3,000 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.
- Hiking.
- Photography.

Questions and Answers

Is Watercress Darter National Wildlife Refuge open to the public?
The seven-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 hiking, 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 seven 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 in the watercress zone 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.