



CACHE RIVER WETLANDS

The Cache River wetlands include some of the best remaining wildlife habitat in Illinois, with swamp forests more suggestive of the Deep South than the Midwest.

The Cache River wetlands complex in southern Illinois constitutes only 1.5% of the land in the state but includes 91% of its high quality swamp and wetland communities. Known as “Illinois’ Bayou,” the area contains some of the best remaining hardwood forest stands in the Midwest, including 1,000 to 1,700 year-old cypress trees -- some of the oldest living trees east of the Mississippi. Bottomland forest, upland forest, and agricultural lands also make up the Cache basin.

The Cache River wetlands are also a crucial stopover site along the Mississippi Flyway. More than 128 native breeding bird species have been identified in the wetlands complex, and over 250 bird species are found in the overall Cache River basin. The area also supports eighty-seven fish species, fifty-four species of reptiles and amphibians, and forty-seven mammal species, including river otters, bobcats, and endangered gray and Indiana bats. Because of this diverse habitat, the area has been designated as a Wetland of International Importance by the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, and is also an Audubon Important Bird Area.

Throughout the twentieth century, wetlands in southern Illinois underwent large-scale drainage, land-

clearing, and waterway diversions that caused extensive deforestation, a major decline in water quality, and increased sedimentation. Protecting remaining high quality habitat like the Cache River wetlands is essential. Since 2006, ALC has conserved some 400 acres of this unique habitat, conveying a small portion to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) and adding the rest to the Cypress Creek National Wildlife Refuge.

ALC is now working to protect an additional forty acres of forested wetlands that will be included in IDNR’s Cache River State Natural Area. The result will be a larger, contiguous protected area that ensures that the parcel will not be fragmented, cleared, or converted to agricultural use in the future. Currently, there are nearly 35,000

acres of protected land within the 472,800-acre Cache River basin.

“Many people don’t realize there is such a unique ecosystem right here in Illinois,” commented Elisa Royce, ALC Mississippi River Program project coordinator. “It’s deeply gratifying to work with landowners and agencies who want to help conserve one of the world’s great ecological treasures.”



Waterfowl like this blue-winged teal depend on the Cache as a stop-over site during migration.