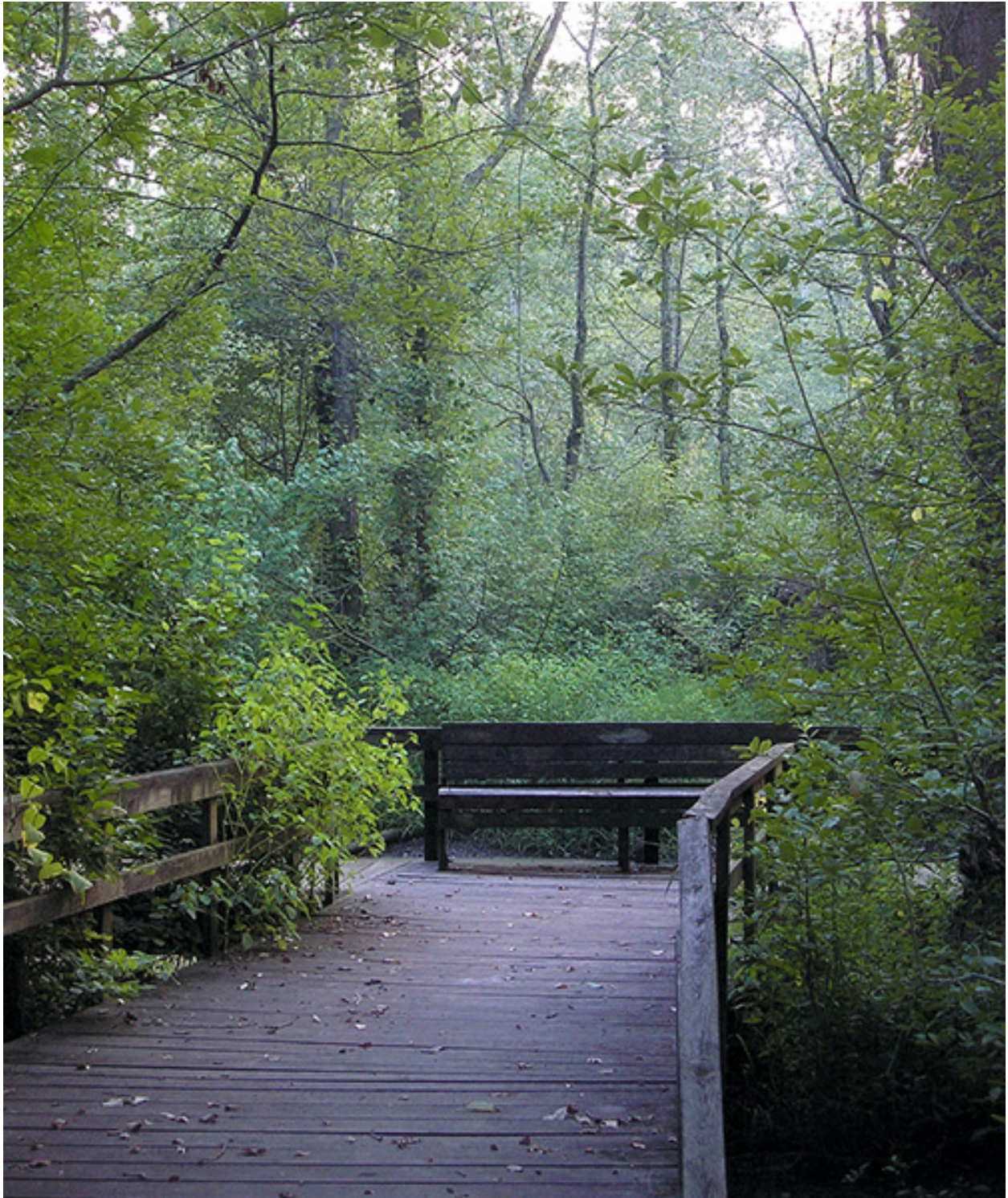


National Wildlife Refuges

Thomas V. Ress, Athens, Alabama



Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge

Alabama is home to 11 national wildlife refuges (NWR) that, when taken in total, represent a cross-section of [Alabama's](#) diverse natural environment. Two of these refuges are shared with Georgia and Mississippi. Alabama's protected federal lands encompass the [beaches](#) of the Gulf Coast, the [waters](#) of the Tennessee River, the mountains of northeast Alabama, the Cahaba River, the swamps and wetlands along the Tombigbee River, and the bat-filled [caves](#) in the Tennessee Valley.

The National Wildlife Refuge System was established in 1903 by Pres. Theodore Roosevelt when he designated the first national wildlife refuge at Florida's Pelican Island. The refuge system has grown steadily and today encompasses more than 150 million acres within 550 wildlife refuges and similar units.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages this network of lands and waters for conservation, management, and restoration of [fish](#), wildlife, and [plant](#) resources and their habitat. In addition to protecting wildlife, national wildlife refuges provide opportunities for outdoor recreation; [hunting](#), fishing, biking, hiking, and other outdoor activities are permitted within the refuges. All 50 states as well as the U.S. territories of Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands have refuges. The history of each refuge invariably involves the preservation of a unique habitat or a specific plant or wildlife species. Alabama's NWR lands protect a variety of rare and [endangered plants](#) and [animals](#), including bats, mice, and fish.