



Name: **Sherfield Cave and the Headwaters of the Buffalo National River**

Location: **Newton County, Arkansas**

Grantee: **The Nature Conservancy, Arkansas Chapter**



Sherfield Cave, one of the largest caves in Arkansas, is a favorite of local and regional cavers and the site of the largest winter hibernation site for the endangered Indiana bat in the state. This area is also a favorite recreational destination for hikers and canoeists, and is under recreational development pressure. With funds from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and Wal-Mart, The Nature Conservancy will conserve an important 1,226-acre site in the Smith Creek watershed, in the headwaters of the Buffalo National River. The site contains at least 80 percent of the recharge area and several miles of passage of Sherfield Cave.

This project will help protect bat habitat and connect six forest conservation areas in Newton County, Arkansas, thus creating a 24,595 acre forested conservation area. The landscape features including waterfalls, cave, and the wildlife dependent on the area, especially the bats, make this land special. The site lies between the Buffalo River Wilderness Area and the Ozark National Forest. This property now serves as a connection between the two and creates a much larger, contiguous block of protected land.

Historically, this cave contained about 13,000 Indiana bats; however, due to the species' continued decline, the hibernating population is now around 750 to 1,000 bats. Long-term protection for this cave is a priority task in the Indiana bat recovery plan. Additionally, a population of endangered gray bats summers in Sherfield Cave. There are rare aquatic species in the cave stream including the Cave isopod and the Ozark cave amphipod. The property's mature stand of oak/hickory forest provides diverse forest habitat for summer maternity roosts and foraging areas for the federally listed bats using the caves. Other local species include the bald eagle, black bear, elk and turkey.



In the past, recreational caving during the winter has disturbed the Indiana bats during hibernation and has contributed to the colony's population decline. With cooperation and support from local caving groups, The Nature Conservancy is coordinating new management guidelines that will both protect the bats and allow appropriate recreational uses.

Permanent protection and specialized conservation management at this location will benefit the endangered bats, the rare aquatic animals, and a great diversity of other karst species.

Project partners include The Nature Conservancy, Arkansas Chapter, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, the National Park Service, Arkansas Natural Heritage, the U.S. Forest Service and private landowners.

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“The Sherfield Cave project is a model for how a non-profit and a private landowner can work together to conserve an ecologically significant and a beautiful place.”

“This is a very visible piece of property along a state route that passes through the Ozark Mountains and leads to popular, well visited areas in the Buffalo National River Wilderness Area and the Ozark National Forest. We feel it will help bring more people to conservation and illustrate that by working with our partners, we can make a difference.”

Scott Simon, Executive Director of The Nature Conservancy, Arkansas Chapter



ABOUT THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to preserve the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive.