

WASHINGTON, Friday, October 6 - With Senate approval last night of legislation introduced by U.S. Rep. Spencer Bachus (R-AL) to create a 3,500-acre wildlife refuge along part of the Cahaba River in Bibb County, the bill heads to the White House to be signed into law. The House passed the bill on July 20.

" This is a tremendous victory that is the first step in promoting the long-term conservation of the Cahaba. We must work to protect its unique combination of beauty and biodiversity for generations to come," said Bachus, who introduced the legislation in April.

The area to be designated a wildlife refuge contains the greatest concentration of fish diversity of any river of its size in North America. The 3 1/2 -mile stretch of the Cahaba boasts more freshwater fish than the entire state of California and has been identified by Nature Conservancy scientists as the place with the highest concentration of biological diversity in the Cahaba River.

In addition, the area is home to the largest stand of the shoal lily, known locally as the Cahaba Lily, which inspired the annual Cahaba Lily Festival.

" Because the area is not currently protected, trespassers have left litter and even graffiti, spoiling this beautiful scene and presenting a real danger to the Cahaba Lilies, other plants and wildlife. By designating this area a National Wildlife Refuge, we can manage public access, allow people to enjoy its natural beauty and, at the same time, preserve it for the future," said Bachus.

The refuge will create public access for hiking, canoeing and nature education to areas that are currently supposed to be closed to the public because they are on private land. All property owners have agreed to sell their land specifically for the creation of the wildlife refuge.

When completed, the refuge designation will also provide an education center where students and the general public can learn about the Cahaba's unique environmental diversity, said Bachus.

The refuge will be located in what is locally known as the Piper Bridge area, close to where the Cahaba River and Little Cahaba River meet in Bibb County. It includes the Hargrove Shoals area, which is popular among local canoe enthusiasts and is the most widely photographed stretch of the river.