

WASHINGTON, Monday, July 10 — The House today approved legislation introduced by U.S. Rep. Spencer Bachus (R-AL) that protects a 3½-mile stretch along the Cahaba River in Bibb County as a National Wildlife Refuge.

"This action will promote long-term conservation of the Cahaba and protect its unique combination of beauty and biodiversity for generations to come," said Bachus. "It comes not a moment too soon as misuse and abuse by a few thoughtless individuals threatens Alabama's heartland river."

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 3½-mile site 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 shoals 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 danger to the Cahaba Lilies, other plants and wildlife. By designating this area a National Wildlife Refuge, we can manage public access and 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 the property owners, including U.S. Alliance Coosa Pines, a forestry company, have agreed to sell their land 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.

"We're lucky to have this special place. It's something Alabamians should be very, very proud of. But if we want to keep it, we must set it aside, preserve it and work to make it last," said Bachus.