

# Cache River

## Southern Illinois

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**Facts:** The Cache River meanders for approximately 110 miles through the Cache River Wetlands which contains over 60,000 acres of beautiful forests and wetlands. The Cache River basin spans 737 square miles.

Cypress Creek National Wildlife Refuge covers 16,000 acres of bottomland hardwood forest, riparian habitat and cypress-tupelo swamps. Cache River State Natural Area protects another 14,489 acres.

Yet there are only small sections that are navigable by small water craft.

The river is divided into the Upper and Lower Cache. In the Upper Cache River, increased stream velocity has deepened and broadened the riverbed causing severe bank erosion and many fallen trees and log jams make navigating this section of the river difficult or impossible.

On the other hand, the Lower Cache River offers an unforgettable experience through magnificent cypress-tupelo swamp for canoes, kayaks and small boats. Cache Bayou Outfitters in Ullin refers to the Cache as “where the beauty of the ancient wilderness comes to life.”

**Fish and Wildlife:** Thousands of migrating waterfowl have made this bioregion their permanent and/or winter home making this area a unique ecological treasure. In addition, the area shelters 113 state threatened or endangered species and seven federally threatened or endangered species.

Fish in the Cache River basin include the gar, smallmouth bass, bowfin, crappie, and catfish, and many more.

Wildlife in the area include otters, beavers, muskrats, bobcats, whitetail deer, wild turkey, double-crested cormorants, American bald eagles, great blue herons, great egrets, and pelicans. An occasional sandhill crane can be spotted mostly in winter, and even the anhinga (the snake bird or water turkey) are sighted along the Cache during the summer months.

**Landscape:** The half million-acre Cache River Watershed, with its wooded hills and cypress swamps, looks more like Louisiana than Illinois.

This incredibly distinct area with its diversity of landforms and biota results from the intersection of four major physiographic regions in southern Illinois including the Ozark Plateau, the Interior Low Plateau, the Coastal Plain, and Mississippi Alluvial Plain. The U.N. has it listed as a Ramsar “Wetland of International Importance” because of its rich diversity of plant and animal species.

The Cache River Wetlands are home to some of the oldest living trees east of the Mississippi River. 11 of the state record trees are in the Cache River wetlands including the more than 1,000 year-old State Champion Bald Cypress Tree.

**Information:** Paddling is recommended only in the Lower Cache River, which offers an unforgettable experience through magnificent cypress-tupelo swamp for canoes, kayaks, and jon boats (10-horsepower limit).

A public boat launch is located at the Lower Cache River Access off 1 3/4 miles west of IL Rt. 37 on Perks Road and then one mile south on the Access Road.

The three-to-six mile canoe trail is marked with international canoe symbols and arrows and/or yellow stripes on trees. A highlight of the trail is the State Champion Bald Cypress Tree, which, like a number of other trees in the Cache River Wetlands, is more than 1,000 years old.

Three additional public boat ramps are located on Cypress Creek National Wildlife Refuge:

- Cache Bend Access, on Morris Road, east of Sandusky, IL.
- Old Cache Channel Access, off Route 51 and Redmond Road
- Cache Levee Access, located off Route 3, south of Route 127

For more information on the above sites, see [http://www.fws.gov/refuge/cypress\\_creek/](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/cypress_creek/).

For canoe and kayak rentals and guided river trips for individuals and groups, visit Cache Bayou Outfitters in Ullin, IL, “your gateway to nature's wonders nestled within the serene landscapes of the Cache River Wetlands State Natural Area and Cypress Creek National Wildlife Refuge. We are dedicated to providing a unique and immersive experience for outdoor enthusiasts”

The Barkhausen-Cache River Wetlands Center is a high-quality destination point that fosters natural resources appreciation and education, while interpreting the unique natural and cultural history of the Cache River Wetlands. The Wetlands Center is located at 8885 State Route 37 South, Cypress, IL.

Free guided canoe tours are available to schools and other organized groups, courtesy of the Fish and Wildlife Service, Illinois Department of Natural Resources and Shawnee Community College. For more information visit Cypress Creeks Educators Page, or to make reservations, call Cypress Creek National Wildlife Refuge at 618-634-2231.

## References:

Friends of the Cache River has lots of good resources and information about the area:

<https://www.friendsofthecache.org/canoeing-and-kayaking>

Cache Bayou Outfitters - canoe and kayak rentals, tours, and special events including full moon paddles.

<https://www.cachebayououtfitters.com/about-the-river>

Explore the natural and cultural history of the Cache River at the Barkhausen-Cache River Wetlands Center located at 8885 State Route 37 South, Cypress, Illinois 62923

<https://dnr.illinois.gov/parks/visitorcenter/park.cacheriver.html>

Cypress Creek National Wildlife Refuge, with headquarters in Marion, IL, provides opportunities for the public to experience and learn about Cache River wetlands.

<https://www.fws.gov/refuge/cypress-creek>

