

**Over the river and through the woods to the cypress swamp we go!**

## **Cache River Wetlands – Illinois's Hidden Bayou**



Hidden away in [Southern Illinois](#) is one of nature's masterpieces. Stroll the boardwalks, hike or take a canoe or kayak through the mysterious [Cache River Wetlands](#), designated as a "[Wetlands of International Importance](#)."

Come learn about our tupelo-cypress swamps, hardwood forests, limestone glades and sandstone bluff.

Featuring ancient cypress-tupelo swamps, bottomland hardwood forests, sandstone bluffs and limestone glades, the Cache River Wetlands is a rich and diverse area that provides habitat for many unique and fascinating plants and animals. It is a place to [enjoy hiking, birding, kayaking](#) and canoeing, hunting, fishing, [photography](#) and learning about the natural world. With its wooded hills and cypress swamps, it would be easy to mistake this magical place for Louisiana rather than Illinois.

The diversity of landforms, animals and plant life here is a result of the intersection of four distinct ecological regions in southern Illinois. Home to a complex web of organisms, including some of the oldest trees east of the Mississippi, the Cache River Watershed contains three National Natural Landmarks and has been designated a "Wetland of International Importance." It harbors over 90 percent of the state's high-quality swamp and wetland communities and provides habitat for more than 100 of Illinois' threatened and endangered species.



**The Cache River Wetlands Center** open Wednesday through Sunday from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM.

A great first stop on your visit is the [Cache River Wetlands Center](#). The 7,000 square-foot facility, owned and operated by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, offers a variety of interpretive exhibits and information about the natural and cultural history of the Cache River Wetlands. The center hosts a variety of educational programs throughout the year, and includes a wildlife viewing area and walking trails featuring both wetland and prairie communities.

Get acquainted with the unique biodiversity of the flora and fauna that live here before you set out to see it in person. Explore the interactive diorama of a wetland. Learn more about the ever changing Cache landscape, migratory birds, state champion trees through touch screen displays. And be sure to catch the award winning 12-minute orientation film, “The Enduring Cache,” which provides an excellent introduction to the region’s landscape as well as its fascinating human history.

## **[Heron Pond Trail](#)**

This [1.5 mile easy trail](#) is a must-do destination at the Cache. It features a truss bridge overlooking the river and a floating boardwalk that leads you to the middle of Heron Pond’s cypress grove. Even better, there are 10 interpretive panels located along the trail to guide your way.



This floating boardwalk especially should not be missed. It takes you out into the cypress/tupelo swamp so that you can experience the breathtaking other-worldly feel of this beautiful wetland.

You can retrace your steps, or for a longer hike, follow the trail as it skirts the swamp and eventually leads to the [State Champion Cherrybark Oak](#). This gentle giant has over a 22-foot circumference and is more than 100 feet tall.

Wondering why 12 of the state record trees are in the Cache River wetlands? It's because the climate in Southern Illinois is less harsh than the rest of the state, so the growing season is longer. Also, less people means less development and more timber in the southern half of the

state. See how many giants you can visit!

## **Section 8 Boardwalk**

This accessible boardwalk transports you to a primeval flooded forest of cypress and water tupelo.

This 450-foot easy trail follows an accessible boardwalk that transports you through a primeval flooded forest of water tupelo and bald cypress. Depending on the season, pileated woodpeckers, prothonotary warblers or winter wrens may serenade your stroll, which provides a great view big Water Tupelo and bald cypress trees. This majestic aquatic tree has an impressive circumference of 22.5 feet, and is known for its wide base that tapers into a long narrow trunk and then spreads out at the top like a crown.

Also known as the Blackgum, Sourgum, Cotton Gum, Water Gum or Swamp tupelo, it's species name, *Nyssa Aquatica*, was inspired by Nyssa the Greek water nymph. The word 'tupelo' means swamp tree in the Creek Indian language. The wood from the base of the tree has been used as a replacement for cork in local fishing nets, and the tree itself is beneficial to honey bees.

Along the boardwalk, a total of 10 tree species are identified. There is a kiosk with interpretive panels providing further information about each. Stop here for the perfect quick introduction to the swamp.

Paddle or hike among ancient trees, abundant aquatic life, magnificent mammals and [flying friends](#).





Imagine paddling through six miles of tupelo-cypress swamp while being serenaded by tree frogs at dusk. Or hiking waterside to the more than 1,000 year-old State Champion Bald Cypress Tree. Sound great? You'll find all this and more at the Lower Cache River Swamp Trail.

Whether traveling by canoe or on foot, the marked trail is flanked by some of the oldest trees east of the Mississippi. Spy eagles, owls, hawk, osprey and other flying friends soaring overhead. Encounter abundant aquatic life during your visit, including numerous species of water snakes and ghost shrimp. On shore, catch a glimpse of mink, possum, beaver, deer, and other mammals.

### **[Winnie the Pooh tree at the Big Cypress Access](#)**

Perhaps the shortest hike in the Cache, this trail leads to a monumental reward—thousand year-old bald cypress trees, the largest of which, dubbed the “Winnie-the-Pooh Tree,” is forty-three feet around! These giants occupy the ancestral bed of Cypress Creek, and the gargoyle-like knees that surround them are often not much younger than the trees they support. Rubber boots are recommended during wet periods, when the end of the short trail could be submerged. When the weather has been dry, you can see [how many people will fit inside the tree!](#)

### **By Water**

If you decide to [paddle through paradise](#), you'll enjoy easy, flat water on a marked canoe route with no canoe shuttling necessary. Canoes or kayaks rentals are available from [Cache River Bayou Outfitter](#) & Guide Service. Call ahead to arrange for a guided tour, where they're trained naturalist/wilderness guides that reveal the many hidden secrets of this magical place.

If you happen to be in the area during a full moon, you'll want to take advantage of their full moon evening tour, with a different theme each month from March through November.

### **On Foot**

The Lower Cache River Swamp Trail parallels the Cache River and Cypress Creek, letting you enjoy views of the cypress and tupelo swamp by foot. This 2.5-mile easy trail is accessible and ends in a viewing platform that offers the best view of the [State Champion Bald Cypress tree](#). It stands 73 feet tall, has a



trunk circumference of over 34 feet, and boasts a crown spread of 35 feet. It also has many "knees," also called pneumatophores. These are cone-like extensions of the root system that help to stabilize the tree and promote aeration.

Access to the [Lower Cache River Hiking Trail](#) is found between Route 37 and Perks by following signs off the Perks Blacktop. Keep in mind, there may be times during rainy periods where this trail may be flooded, muddy and impassable. Be sure to visit on a dry day to fully enjoy the spectacular views and wildlife.

After you're done exploring the wetlands, hop on over to refuel and relax at this intimate winery and restaurant.

In 2001, Jack Dunker opened the [Cache River Basin Vineyard & Winery](#). His vision included not only a vineyard, but also a restaurant where his guests could enjoy food, wine and views of the countryside, and cabins where they could extend their stay in the area. Today his vision is a reality. You can experience his wines and his sense of humor at his aptly named Wineaux's restaurant and Boondocks cabins.

[Wineaux's](#) serves American cuisine, including Angus Beef steaks and burgers, ribs, and seafood, and specializes in food cooked with wine! Take home a bottle of Southern Illinois fine wine, produced on site, with names like Cache River Swamp Water, Copperhead Red, and Hummingbird Nectar.

Relax with refreshments on the deck overlooking the vineyards and the wine bottle-shaped pond.



Tucked up in the woods behind the winery is a pet-friendly [cabin](#). These remote and peaceful getaways feature two bedrooms, queen size beds, and Sealy Posturepedic mattresses with Eurotop for your sleeping comfort. Renters enjoy hot tubs and an infrared sauna on the enclosed back decks.

Learn more at [www.southernmostillinois.com](http://www.southernmostillinois.com) or call 1-800-C-IT-Here.