

## Strangford Cave

Strangford Cave is a **limestone solutional cave**, created by groundwater flowing through the Loyalhanna limestone, a thick layer of limestone that reaches its northernmost extent here, where it is exposed along the Conemaugh Gorge. The cave entrance is within an abandoned quarry, and was exposed by quarrying operations. The cave's 1400 feet (430 meters) of passages were formed by a subterranean stream (Christenson, 1998), and the clear, cold water continues to shape the cavern, which can be seen in the sculpted pothole formations in the stream bed. This stream supports several aquatic invertebrate species of concern, including the globally rare **Franz's cave isopod** (*Caecidotea franzi*) and **Kenk's isopod** (*Caecidotea kenki*), as well as the state-imperiled **Allegheny cave amphipod** (*Stygobromus allegheniensis*). The extent of these populations is unknown, and these species could potentially exist in other nearby undocumented subterranean streams within the Loyalhanna limestone of Chestnut Ridge.

The entrance of the cave supports the **Allegheny woodrat** (*Neotoma magister*), a species which also occurs in the adjacent Chestnut Ridge / PennView Mountain site and further south on Chestnut Ridge.

### Threats and Stresses

Formerly this cave was known as a party spot, and the resulting vandalism and litter marred the aesthetics of the cave and may have impacted the fragile subterranean ecosystem. The cave is now gated to protect the species living in the cave, and access is controlled by the Game Commission.

The aquatic species of concern could be impacted by any change in groundwater quality. The recharge area of the cave may be mostly protected within SGL #276.



an Allegheny woodrat (*Neotoma magister*)

The Allegheny woodrat faces numerous threats, including raccoon roundworm, reduced food supply as a result of the loss of American chestnut from chestnut blight and the loss of many mature oaks from gypsy moth damage, and fragmentation of the forest leading to increased predation and isolation from nearby populations.

### Conservation Recommendations

Maintaining groundwater quality is of critical importance to the aquatic species of concern. Any chemical use or intensive land use within the recharge area of the cave should be carefully considered.

Further fragmentation of the forest on this part of Chestnut Ridge should be avoided to maintain the viability of the Allegheny woodrat populations.