INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM GIESE, JR.
BY MARK MADISON

MR. GIESE: Actually, I am a local resident. I've lived about a mile from the refuge all of my life. I became familiar with the refuge in somewhat of a unique way because when I was about 16 years of age, I bought new outboard motor, which was a big event for me, and strapped it on a boat. One November, I come down the river and I wasn't really aware of where the refuge boundaries were. Even though I lived very close here, we didn't have a lot of contact with the refuge. I entered the refuge and promptly ran aground. I proceeded to turn around and head back up the river. I happened to notice a vehicle following me along. I got stopped at the bridge. It turned out to be Bill Julian. So actually, my first contact with the refuge was really a negative contact because I happened to have a .22 rifle in the boat, which he seized, even though I was a minor. I did get it back in time. I became real familiar with Bill over the next few years. I went to school with several of his sons. So in 1971 when I graduated he knew me pretty well, and knew my work ethic. I was able to start work here as a seasonal, for a couple of summers.

DR. MADISON: What type of work did you do as a seasonal?

MR. GIESE: Primarily maintenance work; lawn care, some work with the tractors mowing fields. I did some hand work, mostly hand labor clearing trails. It was mostly general maintenance type items. I worked two summers at that type of work. Then I was lucky enough to be able to pick up a job to assistant at our Visitor's Center. I worked as a Recreational Aide for about four years. I was doing public use type activities at the Center. I was taking groups on tours, meeting the public on a daily basis in the Visitors Center.

DR. MADISON: When was this?

MR. GIESE: It was 1971 when I started as a seasonal employee. Then in 1973 I switched over to the public use program.

DR. MADISON: Was this at full time?

MR. GIESE: No, it was actually seven years later when I became a full time employee. With a little persistence and luck and I guess the ability to do some other jobs on the side in the winter months when I wasn't here. I had a little farm income to carry us through during those periods when I wasn't working. It was something that I enjoyed. It was close to home. So I guess persistence paid off and I was eventually able to come on board full time.

DR. MADISON: What was your position when you came on at full time?

MR. GIESE: The full time position was as a Biological Aide. I worked here as a bio aide and biotech until about 1992 or '93 and then I was switched over to the Fire program. I worked full time in the fire program.

DR. MADISON: Somewhere along the line you picked up the Refuge Officer?

MR. GIESE: Yeah, I received a commission in 1978. I went to FWTC, which was the training center in 1979. I worked as a collateral duty officer for the rest of my career.

DR. MADISON: Well I just have to tell you Bill that I haven't talked to anybody who has been at the same refuge for 32 years. You got a record there, so we are going to pump you for information!

MR. GIESE: It's been a great place to work. And I've enjoyed it because I'm doing things that I like to do.

DR. MADISON: That's great. Let me ask you one of Michael's questions that is really interesting. Can you describe Blackwater when you first started and what the primary missions and programs were, and a little bit about the acreage?

MR. GIESE: The refuge was started in 1933 for the primary purpose of migratory waterfowl. Even to this day, that is one of the primary objectives. It was definitely more so when I started in 1971. I guess in those early years in the 1970's we were in some pretty tough budget years. We started to transition, and Guy will be able to tell you a lot more about that. We transitioned from a very active hands on management period throughout the 1960's to an almost more custodial type role in the 1970s. In the '60s they had a very active farming program here. The staff farmed the ground. In the 70's we had turned all of that over to cooperative farmers. The refuge staff mowed some fields as browse. Virtually, we really didn't have much money to do much of anything. The refuge at that time was about eleven thousand acres. It was approximately eight thousand when it was started. Over the course of the years we've added quite a bit of additional land. I guess our primary focus at that time was maintenance of our facilities around Wildlife Drive. We were also coming off of a very high public use period. We were kind of easing out of mainly recreational oriented activities and moving into more environmentally friendly activities. We had a picnic areas here and barbeques, we had a ball field. So we were kind of easing out of a lot of those type activities at that time. But the primary objective was waterfowl and it still is today. Endangered species were obviously a priority. This was right around the time that the Endangered Species Act was passed. So we had both Bald Eagles and Fox Squirrels here. The eagles received a lot of attention at that time because that was a crisis period from them. Their numbers were at an all time low. Blackwater had a fairly healthy population of eagles so we did a lot of work in those early years with the eagles. In general, again, we had virtually no money to

do much of anything. We had a few thousand dollars here and there. You kind of just patched through what you could.
DR. MADISON: You said you grew up near the refuge?

MR. GIESE: Yeah, about a mile and a half away.

DR. MADISON: You were born there?

MR. GIESE: Yes.

DR. MADISON: When were you born?

MR. GIESE: I was born December 4, 1953.

DR. MADISON: So how did the locals feel about the refuge when you were growing up?

MR. GIESE: Like I said, in the early part of my childhood, I mean, I knew the refuge was here, but I didn't know a lot about it. The refuge was pretty much a closed shop at that time. The manager "Key" Wallace, while I didn't know him really personally, I knew who he was. It was a kind of "closed gate policy". The drive never open even though is somewhat of a wildlife drive. It really wasn't until Bill Julian came here, probably in 1968-69 [that things changed]. Bill was under a mandate to kind of open the refuge up. Key was too but he kind of ignored it. At least the stories were that when the Washington Office or Regional Office folks would leave and go home, he'd close the gate and lock it.

DR. MADISON: So the picnic areas and ball field came under Julian?

MR. GIESE: Yeah, that came primarily under Bill Julian.

DR. MADISON: We hear these stories again and again. The Refuge Manager saw his job as locking up the gates in the 1940's and 50's. That's not surprising.

MIKE: How long this that ball field and the picnic areas last?

MR. GIESE: A lot of that was starting during the Kennedy administration. That was when the pavilion went up. And it wasn't truly a ball field, but you had a lot of softball games and family picnics and that type of thing here. I guess from the Kennedy administration in the early '60s it was close to ten years. It started to phase out in the early 70's. When I started we were slowly trying to slow that down and get out of it.

MIKE: How did you go about that process of slowing it down?

MR. GIESE: In some cases such as the barbeques, we just removed them. I think in those early years they were actually scheduling events, so they stopped doing that officially. It just kind of started to die on it's own because we weren't pushing it. We let a few of the areas kind of revert. We didn't mow the lawns regularly. We actually planted the field where ball had been played. We planted trees. Again, it was a slow process because when you let the public in, it's hard for those folks to let go of that opportunity. There really wasn't a lot of opportunities in the County, for places like that. I think there was some resistance to it. People actually enjoyed that aspect of it. We were benefited somewhat by just the nature of this area. We have a lot of mosquitoes and flies. We were spraying at the time. The County would come in and spray. We let that effort go. Obviously, it became a little more inhospitable.

DR. MADISON: You must have pulled back on the spraying when the Bald Eagles became more important. What about the Wildlife Drive, what's the history of that?

MR. GIESE: The Wildlife Drive, or a portion of it was actually started when the CCC Camp was here in the 1930's. There's a section of one of the impoundments here, Pool #5 which is just behind us that was part of the dike work of that pool. The section through the woods was done during the Kennedy administration, or at least started then. It was finished up in the late 60's. It was dirt and gravels roads. We received literally thousands of visitors here on the weekends and we'd contract with the Fire Company to come through and sprinkle the road because there would be so much dust from all of the cars going around Wildlife Drive. When Bill Julian was here we ended up putting the first asphalt on it.

DR. MADISON: Did that dramatically change the type and quantity of visitors you had out here?

MR. GIESE: No, we've been really luck here. Our visitors who come to this refuge; over the years, and even today, come primarily because they want to see wildlife. We're not a Chincoteague where you've got the thrill of going to the beach where you look at the wildlife for maybe a second on your exit or entry through the refuge. These people come here to see wildlife. I think that generally, the character of our visitors has stayed the same. It's probably mellowed a little bit. During the 70's when Julian was here and when I first started working in the Visitor's Center the biggest problem we had was trying to keep people away from the wildlife. It was constant. He'd be in the fields constantly. The geese would be in the fields and people would be walking into the fields to get a closer look or a camera shot of it. You were constantly running out, trying to get the people out of the fields so that the birds would still be there for everybody to see. That was so much of a problem that we actually dug deep ditches is some places just to keep the people from being able to enter the fields! But we really don't have that problem now. I think people have mellowed out and become better educated in that regard. We've never really had major problems with people; vandalism, people destroying the property.

Many refuges do have this problem. We've been super lucky in that regard. Like I said, people evidently come here to see the wildlife and have that appreciation. They are not here just to damage it. This is not to say we haven't had a few situations, but it's certainly not a general rule by any means.

DR. MADISON: How about on the Service end? You said that in the 70's you were working on some public programs. How are they different now from when you first started?

MR. GIESE: Certainly the focus of the FWS programs has changed a lot. I'll just kind of go through them. Our public user programs while it's had some little peaks, I guess I should say, it's kind of disappointing really. My background was is that, so I guess I can't say I really ever super enjoyed doing it I definitely appreciated it and the value of it. I think it's really unfortunate that we haven't been able to spend more time, money and effort promoting that program. Ultimately it helps solve a lot of the problems that we still have today. When people are educated about something, they'll make the right decision. I haven't seen a lot of change in this. There have been some attempts. Our staffing now is lower than it's ever been here in my whole career and it's really a struggle for us to continue to operate. If it weren't for our volunteer organization and friends group there would be a lot of weekends that our Visitor's Center would be closed. That's really kind of unfortunate. There is certainly a lot of emphasis on Endangered Species and those programs. Those have stayed right at the top of the list. I guess as I am a true waterfowl person at heart and with those issues close to my heart, we've certainly seen the slipping of our waterfowl resources, kind of slide from the top particularly here is recent years. This is not to say that other migratory bird programs are not important, because they are, but I think we are kind of getting away from the basics; why the refuge was established. We loose sight of the fact that these refuges are because of hunters and other wildlife enthusiasts that really appreciate the game birds. I think we have to be really careful not to loose that identity or it's going to hurt us in the long run. Again, I think there is room for other folks and for that other type of management but sometimes I think now that's kind of being overshadowed and we forget that that was the basis for us being here.

DR. MADISON: Were you a duck hunter?

MR. GIESE: Yeah, I am a duck hunter.

DR. MADISON: Did that make you more interested in working out here?

MR. GIESE: I hunt ducks and geese, but I appreciate it too and I think that if I had to pick a favorite bird it would be the Canada goose. That's just a bird that I think highly of. I appreciate being able to eat it, but I also just appreciate the bird and what it's done for this area. It's actually been a tremendous economic factor in this area.

DR. MADISON: Is there hunting on the refuge?

MR. GIESE: We have no waterfowl hunting. We only have deer hunting. Basically it's just a recreational hunt that keeps the herd in check. There was a lot of interest primarily because we had Sika deer here, which is an oriental import. There was a lot of interest in that in the County. There was quite a lot of interest in the community to open that up particularly as we purchased more land and took it out of the hunting base. Our hunting program here has been extremely successful as far as building good public relations as well as providing us with some income for other projects. We operate it through our friends group and they are able to funnel that money back to us.

MIKE: You mentioned the Canada geese as an economic resource for the area. Could you expand on that a little bit more? How do the refuge, adjacent landowners and the county interact on the issues of geese?

MR. GIESE: When the refuge was first started in the 1930's Canada geese basically did not stop here. Canadas migrated through the area here and wintered in North Carolina, South Carolina and into Georgia and even Florida. Just as it was in other sections of the country there was quite a bit of effort to, I guess somewhere behind it was to kind of spread the resource or promote the resource. There were large wooded areas that were cleared here around the Wildlife Drive and converted into agricultural fields. As I said earlier we had a pretty active farming program. It was for waterfowl, not just Canada geese but we did put a lot focus on Canadas. They brought birds in here and kept a captive flock. And over the course of time, this coincided with the change over to the mechanical corn harvester, which started leaving a lot of waste grain on the field here on the Eastern Shore. We saw a tremendous change in the food habits of the birds. All of a sudden the birds that migrated south short stopped here. So we ended up putting 100,000 Canada geese on an area that previously had no geese. Now, that has caused some problems on itself because in my opinion that is some of the early caused of our marsh loss problems that we've experienced here at Blackwater. Nonetheless, the birds came here. We were one of three areas in this county that was a sanctuary for those flocks of birds. There was Blackwater, which was the largest. There was Eastern Shore State Hospital up at Cambridge, which is now the new Hyatt property. They didn't allow hunting there and they had farm crops there. The Horn Point facility down in the Neck district that was owned by the University of Maryland; they had a lot of open fields there. That was another sanctuary. These three places supported our goose flocks through the winter. At one time in the 1970's the Canada goose hunting industry was the number two industry on the Eastern Shore. Only the raising of broiler chickens surpassed it. Cornfields and farm fields were rented for literally thousands of dollars for hunters. Farm were bought and paid for just for the hunting opportunities on them. It was big business. Even to this day, I think that Blackwater is recognized as being extremely important in that, even though the numbers have dropped. That's why we've never even

entertained the idea of waterfowl hunting on this refuge. I think we would come under tremendous criticism if we ever did do that. Eventually, in the future as we acquire more lands there may be some waterfowl hunting possibilities on that, but no on the base refuge. I think it's too important. Does that cover what you wanted to know?
DR. MADISON: Yeah, that's really interesting. I didn't realize that.

MIKE: You mentioned Bill Julian and Guy Willey. Can you talk about some of the other personnel when you started here? What was the make up of the staff and what were their roles?

MR. GIESE: When I started we had a Manager, an Assistant Manager who both lived on the refuge at that time. We had a bio Tech. There wasn't a Biologist. The Tech was Guy Willey. We had a Mechanic and a Maintenance man, and a laborer. There was one person in the Visitor Center and we would pick up a "seasonal" now and then. That staff never changed a lot. That was our base staff. We also had at least one clerical person. We were pretty stagnant at the level for a lot of years. We'd change a little bit as far as occasionally we might pick up a season person for the Visitors Center or there might be a Manager Trainee who would come in. I guess the unique thing that has change from then to now is that no matter what job we did, whether it'd be going out and building a shed, or banding geese or doing a proscribed burn program or working on a trail; if people were needed all of those individuals worked on those projects. We'd close down the office and everybody would go out and help. So therefore, that interaction between the various fields on the refuge was good. You did what had to get done. I think it worked pretty smoothly. Today we are so segmented into specialties in a lot of cases we still never have enough people to do the job and it's always not really conflicts, but it's problems coordinating the work. An exception to that today is probably the fire program. There's been enough people available to do the job. In any other fields; like Biological, if we have to go out and band fox squirrels, we have to scrounge up somebody to help. I guess that's one of the reasons over the years that I've kept my hand in a lot of that stuff. Even though I went full time with the Fire, I've also worked with the fox squirrels and that waterfowl. I enjoy that stuff so it was never really a problem to go out and do that.

DR. MADISON: Where those people locals or did they transfer in from other refuges?

MR. GIESE: The maintenance and administrative people were local folks. I guess Blackwater because of its reputation and location we always had a steady movement of deputies or assistants coming through from all over the country. I think the FWS at that time was promoting those cross-region changes. It's still somewhat like that today, except that now you have to figure out how you're going to pay the moving bill. It's not unusual to somebody from California or from out of the south. When I started with FWS in 1971 we were still in Region 4, and stayed like that for a couple more years. We probably had more focus during those years and before I came on Region 4 people. The

Region kind of looked out for it's own I guess; more so than some of the other regions. At least that was my perspective on it.

DR. MADISON: They are a tight region.

MR. GIESE: Region 4 was based in Atlanta, covering the southeast. Now we are in Region 5 that covers the northeast.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: You mentioned the regional offices. What was the contact with the regional office and the D. C. office like during your early career?

MR. GIESE: I guess at the level I was at then I didn't have a tremendous amount of contact with any of those folks. In general I think that we had virtually zero contact with Washington. I just don't remember too many Washington people coming here at all except for maybe on a tour or something. We did have a steady flow of people from the regional office in Boston at the time. They would come here periodically. The Manager was the primary contact person. They'd come for an inspection now and then. But there was really very little contact. I think that there is much more interaction today, but that's probably because of the electronic age, rather than people actually visiting. We still don't see a lot of those folks, but we certainly interact more.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Did you see some kind of gradual pick up during the 1980's? What was that era like?

MR. GIESE: There was somewhat of an increase. Again, it may just be my ability, or chances to interact with those folks because I became a little more entrenched in the programs. If people visited the refuge, a lot of times I was in charge of operating the boat or taking people on tours and providing some perspective of what was going on. I don't know. I can't say that there was a major change. But just the fact of the distances and the tremendous amount of information these people have to deal with; it's hard for them to be able to stay in too close contact. If there was a crisis, you'd see something of them, but that's typical and expected.

DR. MADISON: What about some management changes? How did management practices change from when you were primarily focusing on migratory waterfowl to more endangered species work?

MR. GEISE: I came in right at the tail end of that. In all fairness to him; although those folks that were here probably grumbled a lot during those early years, they kind of gave Bill Julian a little bit of an axe. But when you are directed to do something, which I think it was national and regional policy; we kind of took a laizze fare attitude to caretaker status for a lot of years. We let a lot of our roads grow up. We maintained just a few of the agricultural fields. We let the cooperative farmer farm them. I mean in reality there

was no money to do any of that stuff. You make those changes in order to survive. Looking at it now from the perspective of time passed, that wasn't so much of a personal decision as it was a management decision of survival. I think we are faced with some decisions today. We're kind of making some of those same decisions right now. We just went back to a cooperative farmer because we can't get funding to plant our fields for waterfowl food. Again, a lot of times it just came back to funding. When I worked in the Visitors Center; one summer our air conditioner broke down. There was nothing we could do about it. We called the regional office hoping that we could get some money. The answer we got was, 'plant some trees to shade the center'. It was extremely hot in there, but we operated. For almost a year, we closed down for parts of the summer if I remember right. In the following year we got a little money and were able to fix it. If you don't have the dollars to do some of the stuff you want, you just can't very well do it! I think budgets in a lot of cases dictate policy. We just do any better. It wasn't necessarily because managers didn't want to do things better. There wasn't the money to it.

DR. MADISON: Did things change when the fox squirrel was listed out here?

MR. GIESE: Yeah, believe it or not, it changed some of our focus. But again, we managed on little. For many years we got an endangered species budget of $3000.00 to manage Delmarva fox squirrels, bald eagles and peregrine falcons. We don't have a lot of falcons here but we did eventually have population down at Martin Refuge and some do move through here. But what do you do with $3000.00? We'd buy a few squirrel traps to carry out some of our trapping programs. We'd buy some boundary signs to post closed areas for eagle's nests. That was it. Those management efforts that took place on this refuge; and I will give these guys a lot of credit, all of the managers that I've worked under, they felt like the needs to really interact with these species and try to learn something and get new programs or take actions to protect a species; they did that on their own initiative. We basically scrounged up money from wherever we could in order to make those programs work. I think that's really surprising to a lot of people. Over the years, when I've talked to people on the fox squirrel recovery team, they express surprise. I don't think that anything really changed when the squirrel was listed. We begged for dollars to do anything. Until just a few years ago when we were under a lawsuit with the Defenders of Wildlife, did we ever see any real initiative to get started on the fox squirrel. For a few years it became sort of number one on the list, at least in this area. We were scrambling around trying to react to that lawsuit. Otherwise, it was 'do what you could do'.

DR. MADISON: What did you do in reaction to the lawsuit?

MR. GIESE: FWS was sued because we weren't enforcing the Endangered Species Act, as far as protecting the habitat in regard to development. It was true because we certainly weren't following the letter of the law. The Act was pretty specific on that. I was part

of panel that was put together to look at all of the take issues. That effort lasted a little over a year. There was much more emphasis by our ES office to try and work with the counties as far as zoning and mapping and really trying to find out where we had squirrels and where we didn't. We were just simply missing some very basic biological information. How can you regulate if you don't know what you've got? There was a mad scramble in that regard. There was a potential for a strong arm effort getting ready to take place where we really locked down activities that were taking place in this county and actually all over the Shore. It could have drastically effect everything we did on the Shore if you really applied the Endangered Species Act very strictly. I think that cooler, calm thinking head prevailed on that. We've kind of backed off on that a little bit. We can manage the squirrel without alienating the whole local population and shutting down everything that they do. The squirrel has managed pretty well on it's own the past several years despite our lack of efforts. With a little nurturing and with manipulating some programs I think the squirrel is an animal that we can pretty easily get off of the endangered list. It just takes a little effort to do it. And again, I've seen it over the years; these hot and cold efforts. Something like this comes along, like this lawsuit and after about a year and a half it kind of dies off and there are new crisis and it levels off to where it was before. We're kind of in that down phase right now.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: You mentioned a panel related to that lawsuit. Was that related to, or distinct from that recovery team that you mentioned?

MR. GIESE: It was totally different from the recovery team. I went on the fox squirrel recovery team in 1987. Guy Willey preceded me on that team. They actually dismantled that team and then because of some concern about what was happening in the squirrels area; they reformulated the team and I was lucky enough to get on it. This was an effort to just address these take issues. I guess I was selected to be put on it because of my field involvement and my knowledge of the life history of the squirrel. One of the law enforcement special agents was on this panel and then several people in the ES office who were related to the regulatory board aspect of it. It was a panel of four who looked at all of these issues. We also had some guidance out of the Solicitor's office.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Where those other three people with FWS too?

MR: GIESE: Yes, they were all FWS.

DR. MADISON: I'd like to ask you about another management program you've observed for a while; the fire management program. Has that changed at all?

MR: GIESE: The fire management program has changed tremendously. When I first started it was a collateral duty job just like everything else. For the early years the refuge practiced a prescribed burn program mainly of marshes and maybe a field here and there. In a few cases we actually let our trappers…we have a trapping program where we lease

out areas every year, and we actually let our trappers do the burning. Then as liability concerns popped up, we kind of pulled back from that and had the staff to the burning. And there again, we were adding a program where you've got to fit in. I think we were somewhat successful in getting a lot of the marshes burnt. At that time the annual burning for three-square bull rush was our objective. We did have some wildfires and human set fires where people got tired of waiting for us and they'd set it on fire. Then, our fire equipment consisted of a jeep with a 50-gallon tank and a pumper unit on it. There was a bucket and a couple of pond bushes; that's what we controlled fires with! It really wasn't until Glenn Carowin came in the late 1980's… he came out of the south and was pretty familiar with fire control. Region 5 had not really promoted its fire program. The region is generally made of smaller refuges with more custodial type refuges, with the exception of the ones here in Maryland, Delaware and Virginia. Maybe it's not fair, but in the early years I don't think there was a lot of active, hands on management. When Glenn came, he was knowledgeable about the fire program. He knew that there were resources out there to be tapped. Our program has really built accordingly. We've been pretty aggressive about going out and promoting our program and entering into cooperative programs with the state and the counties fire departments. I think it's been a tremendous plus for the refuge because the community sees it as the refuge contributing something back to them. Right now we're in something of a spot, not really a controversy, but the volunteer fire companies want us to be more responsive. We try to be and are very aware with our relationship with the state. We don't really want to over shadow them. We want to work in a partnership, so right now we're not really wanting to take two giant steps forward. We want to maybe just move forward slowly. Again, it's a big asset to us. That's one of the reasons this refuge it thought of pretty highly in the community because people in the community see that they are getting benefits from the refuge. It's not just land taken out of the tax base. They are getting positive things from it. It's more than just simply a tourist place for visitors to come. We're playing much more of a role in the community itself. The fire program is just an excellent way to be able to do that. Our program has kind of grown by leaps and bounds. When our seasonals are on, we employ a staff of ten to twelve individuals. Of course, having those people here on days when you can't burn also promotes the refuge because we can help out with other refuge activities. In a lot of cases we're kind of looked at as a manpower source. The fire program has changed a lot and been a tremendous plus.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Can you describe how that changed your own work here on the refuge?

MR: GIESE: Sure. When the program really started to come into it's own, and you could see that it was building a life of it's own, the manager felt like we needed to start to devote people to just that task. We sort of floated that position around. I had always sort of considered my strength and survival on this refuge was dependent on diversity. The more things I could be involved with, the safer I felt in my job. Programs can come and go. Other things kind of hit peaks and valleys. If you get dependent on one area you

never know what could happen. Over the course of my career I tried to get involved in as many things as I could. When there was an opportunity for me to switch over full time to the fire program it was a big step for me. I spent a lot of time thinking about the consequences of that. I didn't think anything would ever happen to the fire program. It was just contrary to everything I'd built my career on. With some reassurance from some of the project leaders that I had in the past, I made the change. In reality it wasn't much of a change. Because of the length of my career on this refuge, you just don't walk away from those other programs. I'm really entrenched in the fox squirrel work and I enjoy doing it. I'm entrenched in some of the waterfowl work. I enjoy doing that. While it's not my primary job, I get looked to a lot to assist in those programs. In some cases, I even take the lead; like the law enforcement. I stayed involved in that because it's something that I like to do and I've enjoyed it over the years. On paper it changed by job but in reality it probably hasn't changed, not that much. I certainly devote a lot more of my time to the fire management than anything else.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Let's talk about law enforcement. We haven't gone into that topic too much. You mentioned in 1978 you went to school?

MR. GIESE: Yes. I received my commission in 1978 because the Training Center in Georgia was just getting started. There was an opportunity to go that year. I think I received my commission in the summer. Bill Julian was the manager at the time and he recognized that some of the earlier practices were not good. The old way was basically to hand somebody a badge and a gun and maybe a rulebook. I think Julian recognized that really wasn't the good way to do business. In order to better prepare me, he worked with our special agents that we had here in the area. There was an office right here in Cambridge. I worked with Special Agent Larry Thurman. They set me up on a detail to work a couple months doing waterfowl enforcement with our special agents. The two months really turned into the whole waterfowl season. We worked Maryland, Delaware and Virginia very actively. That was a very active time of waterfowl enforcement so I just really gave me a real perspective of that aspect of my job. It was kind of on the job training. Then the following year I went to FLETC. At that time it was only 3 weeks long. Over the years as some of the new mandates have come out, I've had to go and do some special details like pursuit driving to stay current. Other than helping the agents a lot around the area, we didn't really have a need to do a lot here on the refuge. There we some problems around our boundaries. There was some illegal hunting over on the state area where you could go and make cases. But law enforcement was not a top program on this station ever. Not for any of the managers really, until a little later on in my career. We played a role, but I guess we didn't get too pushy. I guess it was because the managers were again, trying to keep good relations with the community. We weren't really going outside of the refuge at that time at all, unless we went with an Agent. That started changing in the late 1980's. There was a new focus on trying to get refuge folks involved. Agents were starting to get out of waterfowl enforcement and getting more into investigative things like endangered species and the illegal trade and that type of activity.

There were opportunities for refuges officers to take a little more of that role on. When Don Perckuchin came here in the late 1980's he was very pro law enforcement. For the several years that he was here, we performed a very aggressive law enforcement program. It was very active. A result of that was that we did see some negative feedback from that activity. Being this close to Washington, we have folks here who are very familiar with some of the Congressional folks. Lobbyists and high rollers that came over here and hunted, sooner or later I guess it was destined that our paths would cross. Ultimately we got into some pretty major controversies that led to Don being reassigned to Okefenokee. Our program was not officially scaled back, but in reality it was. While it was pretty stressful at the time, I guess we survived it and moved on. That's part of it. Those things happen. I just felt that it was unfortunate that the manager at the time was kind of on a drop. They kind of let him down quite frankly. He wasn't doing it on his own. He was working under policy. That's probably one of the biggest disappointments of my career with FWS or our Region. The Region really folded on us on that issue.

DR. MADISON: That was a low point. What was one of the highlights of your career?

MR. GIESE: I guess the highlight of my career quite frankly is some of the things we've gotten accomplished. Not necessarily me, but just being a part of it. Seeing the eagle population recover. We've done some pretty interesting work here with eagles. There were some poisoning problems that we worked with law enforcement on. But we helped a lot of research here. It was good to be involved in that. We've done a lot of fox squirrel work is good. I think we are finally getting a little recognition on that and are moving forward. That can be pretty frustrating. I was just recognized as being one of the Recovery Champions from across the country. I was pretty proud of that. Somebody recognized the efforts that we've done. I wasn't out there leading groundbreaking research or anything like that. It was more like working behind the scenes and playing a role in a lot of that stuff. That would certainly be a highlight. And I just…I guess my biggest accomplishment is being able to look back to when I was involved in any of the programs I was working in and being able to see what's been accomplished with it. It's more personal satisfaction. I've often told my wife, when she fussed about the long hours, or the hours that I've donated here. I really wasn't doing it for the FWS, or for the manager. I was doing it for my own personal satisfaction and for the wildlife. When I was in charge of the farming program and worked literally hundreds of extra hours trying to get our crops in; and when I saw the ducks and the geese come in and utilizing those crops, I knew I had accomplished my goal. That's a real highlight. And with the fire program today; as I manage it and see the positive things that have come out of it, that's a major accomplishment. So it's probably not any one huge thing. It's a lot of little personal satisfactions on the things I've worked on. If I had to start all over again, I'd do the same job. You couldn't have a better job. And you can't knock what you enjoy doing.

DR. MADISON: Let me ask you one more question before we run out of time. How have FWS personnel changed over the last thirty years?

MR. GIESE: I think there has been a big change in FWS personnel. I think that some of the people who were here in the early years, and some of them are still here, that are very dedicated because of just the situation I just described. I think they work at it for a sense of personal satisfaction and concern for the environment. Today unfortunately, I think we…I don't think the FWS has done a good job of promoting itself. We're trying to speed things along too fast with our personnel. I don't think we give our personnel a chance to really develop with experience based knowledge before we kick them up the line into decision making positions that quite frankly in a lot of cases they are really not prepared for. I just don't think they have that knowledge base to do it. If you have good people under you and you're willing to ask them for input it can work. But I think that more often than not, that's not the case. Personally, I think that's one problem we've got today. The other problem is that I think we've started to get a lot of 8am to 4pm folks. The FWS as I've known it, especially here at this refuge, the job don't stop and four o'clock. There's too much stuff going on here. If you start worrying about overtime…and this is not to say that people shouldn't get it, but it shouldn't be the overriding factor of whether or not you're going to work and if the station can pay you overtime. I think we've lost a lot in that regard. That's easy for me to say, and I'm not sure I have any solutions for fixing it. But that's the biggest change I've seen. The clock stops and people roll out of the door and come back the next day. Sometimes the programs just don't allow you to do that.

DR. MADISON: Bill, thank you so much! This was a great oral history. I really appreciate your time.