



Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge Past, Present and Future, William (Bill) Giese and Michael Giese , 2 Nov 2005

BLACKWATER REFUGE - the First 30 Years and Before – The Annual Dinner meeting of the South Dorchester Folk Museum on November 2nd featured a talk and program by Michael Giese and his father William (Bill) Giese, both life-long residents of Dorchester County. Bill lives on a 3 generation family farm one from the Blackwater Refuge. He has worked in many different areas at Blackwater over the years, beginning in 1971. Since 1995, he has been Fire Control Officer. His community services include Chairman of the Dorchester Soil Conservation District, 8 years on the MD Chesapeake Bay Critical Areas Commission, and he is currently serving as a member of the Dorchester County Planning and Zoning Commission. His son Michael Giese is a PhD student at American University in Washington DC. His dissertation research is on the history of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and its wildlife-centered predecessor agency, the Bureau of Biological Survey. He spent considerable time volunteering at Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge while growing-up.

The father and son speakers spoke from a lifetime of experience in and near the Blackwater Refuge. They described the history of the land and area now covered by the Refuge over the last 350 years. Maps were displayed showing the tracts of land covered by the first patents in the 1600s, granted to colonists from Calvert County, across the Chesapeake. Those earliest Dorchester land patents were for land tracts which cover what today are parts of the Refuge. After hundreds of years of cultivation and changes in the economy, the land was turned-over to fur-farming and trapping.

The talk moved into the 1900s and the fur industry. Then transition from fur-farming to Federal wildlife refuge was described. He recalled as a child, the time when the public was discouraged from visiting. This is very different from today with an active program of events for visitors and many dedicated volunteers. Mike spoke about the early history of Blackwater as a Federal Refuge as well as the development and changes in wildlife conservation efforts. Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge (BNWR) was established in 1933 as a refuge for migratory birds. Blackwater is also a haven for several threatened species including the American bald eagle and the endangered Delmarva fox squirrel. He describes how in the early 1930's nutria and other forbearing animals were studied for possible economic use in Dorchester. It was found too late that these the early 1930's nutria and other forbearing animals were studied for possible economic use in Dorchester invasive, semi-aquatic rodents native to South America. Nutria destroy marshlands with their feeding pattern, digging underneath and overturning the plants to feed on the root mat. invasive, semi-aquatic rodents native to South America. Nutria destroy marshlands with their feeding pattern, digging underneath and overturning the plants to feed on the root mat. nutria, The resulting losses of marsh vegetation totaled thousands of acres loss each year. Efforts are currently underway to eradicate the nutria.