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## National wildlife hero to accept award on Oct. 22; *This year's winner is local*



**Vic Doig enjoys some time in a boat on the Suwannee River.**  
*Photo By Dan Frisk, USFWS*

**By Jeff M. Hardison © Sept. 17, 2020 at 4:10 p.m.**

**LEVY COUNTY** – Before choosing to be involved with the biology of wildlife and the environment where animals live, a man being honored with national recognition next month was on a track to serve in the dental profession.

Speaking from the office at the United States Fish and Wildlife Services' Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges headquarters in Levy County, a man scheduled to accept a national award shared insight about his life on Thursday morning (Sept. 17).

Victor Doig, who prefers to go by "Vic," is named and is scheduled to be recognized and awarded the country's **Outstanding 2020 Employee of the Year Award by the National Wildlife Refuge Association**, Elaine Meier noted in an email on Sept. 14. Meier helped *HardisonInk.com* arrange an interview with the man who earned the national recognition.

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**Vic Doig gives an educational presentation in Gainesville.**

*Photo by Larry Woodward, USFWS*

Doig is 56 years old, and he plans to celebrate his 57th birthday in October.

Meier, the owner of Elaine Meier Associates LLC, in Florida, was named to the Board of Directors of the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) based in Washington, D.C., in July.

The National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) is an independent non-profit 501c membership organization that works to conserve American wildlife by strengthening and expanding the 150-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System managed by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.



**A light moment at the Refuge is caught on film.**

*Photo by Daniel Barrand, USFWS*

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## **Active on the fireline**

*Photo by Anthony DiMaggio, USFWS*

In addition to his job as Fire Management Officer for the Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges, Doig is a Certified Wildlife Biologist and promotes the protection of critical coastal birds nesting and feeding habitats.

He will be presented his award at the NWRA's Virtual Wildlife Refuge Awards event on Oct. 22, Meier noted.

This award recognizes a current refuge employee whose accomplishments are judged to be the most outstanding of the candidates nominated, Meier noted.



## **Active on the fireline**

*Photo by Larry*

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Woodward, USFWS



**Vic Doig checks the fire after a long day.**

*Photo by Larry Woodward, USFWS*

A resident of Gainesville, Doig worked for the State of Florida in wildlife management for 15 years. Originally from Ormond Beach, Doig graduated from the University of Florida with an undergraduate degree in Wildlife Ecology. He earned a master's degree in Wildlife Management from North Carolina State University.

Prescribed burns at the national refuge are important for that habitat. In his role there, Doig made invaluable partnerships with organizations, sharing information, equipment, personnel and support. These relationships with outside organizations, have worked to promote the use of fire as an irreplaceable management tool to enhance the management of these critically important ecosystems.

“We have witnessed dramatic improvements in managed habitats and wildlife diversity,” Deputy Refuge Manager Larry Woodward said. “Many of these astounding improvements are directly attributed to Vic’s innovative efforts in the field.”

In his role as a Certified Wildlife Biologist, Doig promotes the protection of critical coastal birds nesting, feeding and loafing habitats. Loafing is when those birds are not actively feeding and they are free from human disturbance. As storm frequency and intensities increase in recent times, suitable nesting habitat for declining shorebird

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populations have been drastically impacted by flooding and erosion along the coast of Florida.

Doig has been instrumental in leading a conservation partnership with federal, state, academic and local community resources developing a strategy in providing artificial nesting structures, Meier noted.

“Vic consistently goes above and beyond what’s expected of his position for the Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges,” NWRA President Geoffrey Haskett said. “His ability to take on a heavy workload and leverage his skills as a wildlife biologist make him critical to the preservation of wildlife that depend upon these Refuges.”

Since 1994, the NWRA has helped to honor the outstanding accomplishments by refuge managers, refuge employees, volunteers, Friends groups, and refuge advocates through its Refuge System Awards program. The National Wildlife Refuge System depends on the dedication of its exceptional workforce and the devotion of its volunteers, Friends groups and advocates to manage the world’s largest network of lands and waters set aside for wildlife conservation, Meier noted.

Doig’s award will be presented to him at the National Wildlife Refuge Association’s Virtual Wildlife Refuge Awards event on Oct. 22, from 7 to 8 p.m. Eastern Standard Time. To register visit <https://www.refugeassociation.org/awards> or call 202-577-3200.

He spoke about several aspects of his life in relation to this first-ever virtual award scheduled for presentation.

“It’s truly humbling and a bit embarrassing,” Doig said about this national honor to be bestowed upon him. “It’s absolutely a tremendous honor. I’m blown away by it. It was totally unexpected, and undeserved.”

Doig said that rather than seeing this as an award for him, it is instead a reflection of the whole team effort from the labor put forth by all of his coworkers, the partners in other organizations, the volunteers at the refuge and others.

It is the individuals in leadership posts, too, who make wildlife and habitat management possible, Doig added, and they are deserving of recognition.

“They support a job I absolutely love and am passionate about,” Doig said of the leaders. “I’m just blessed to work with such awesome folks.”

Among those leaders, Doig said, are Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges Deputy Refuge Manager Woodward and Manager Andrew Gude.

Under the leadership of Gude and Woodward, this has made it possible for the employees at the Refuge to thrive in their various fields of service, Doig said. Doig has been at the Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges for 17 years and these two gentlemen have been in the leadership roles for the past nine of those years there.

Those leaders give Refuge employees what is needed to plan, produce and excel in the performance of their duties for the wildlife, habitat and for the visitors to this national Refuge. The leadership at the Refuge always has been good, Doig said, but these past nine years has provided leadership there that goes far above the bar. It is great.

As for Doig’s current coworkers at the Refuge, which is in southeastern Dixie and northwestern Levy counties, there are seven to nine now. They, too, he said, are the best in their profession.

“They are wonderful people,” Doig said of his colleagues.

There was a time when the staff at this Refuge numbered 15, Doig said, however

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budget cuts in the last five years led to about a 50 percent reduction in force.

“It’s a challenge when you lose so many folks,” Doig said. “Everybody has to wear more hats and do more stuff, because the work doesn’t go away” just because employees are removed from the workforce.

Doig was slated to retire this year, he said, but instead he now plans to retire in December of 2021. His wife Jane recently retired from State Farm Insurance after 32 years, where she served as a senior insurance adjuster.

When he retires, too, the couple plan to spend more time with grandchildren as well as to travel. His wife is a highly active volunteer now, and he intends to volunteer as well. They are bound for their home in Flagler Beach (Duval County).

They both grew up on the East Coast of Florida. Doig said in addition to travel and seeing grandchildren more with his wife, he intends to volunteer at the state park there, and in the Turtle Patrol’s efforts to watch and help nesting sea turtles to be safer from human interaction on the beach.

Beyond all that, Doig said he will continue to perform fire-oriented work. Not only does he plan to help in the prescribed burn activity at the Refuge in Levy and Dixie counties, but he will remain active in the wildfire fighting action, where he serves now.

He will travel, as he does now, as needed across the United States to help fight fires.

“I just got back from northern California,” Doig said, “and I’m waiting on orders to go out again – unknown where. I’m on an Incident Management Team (IMT).”

This IMT is a “Blue Team” and it is a “Type One” set of firefighters.

“My job on the team is as a field supervisor for fire crews,” Doig said.

In that post, he must be out in the fray with the firefighters. While he is on the same ground as “the young guys,” his job is more in a supervisory capacity now than when he was one of those in that younger age range.

“I’ve done for the last 31 years all of the jobs they are doing now,” he said. “So, I know how it is. My job now, first and foremost, is to keep the folks that are assigned to me – safe and productive.”

Doig is happy to serve in this duty because he is dedicated and passionate about the profession.

He admitted, nevertheless, that he is “a little long in the tooth to be scampering up and down the mountains.”

After retirement, Doig sees his participating in another role in regard to the IMT – as a safety officer.

Looking back in time, this national wildlife hero was on a different path before learning at the University of Florida.

When he started UF, he was going to be a dentist. Taking classes with wildlife ecology as a major seemed good because of the science involved there, Doig said.

During his freshman year at UF, Doig volunteered at the University of Florida College of Dentistry -- the dental school at UF.

“I immediately decided I hated it,” he said. “At the same time, I just loved my wildlife biology classes – my techniques, my field classes. That’s when I knew that’s what I wanted to do for the rest of my life.”

As noted, after graduating UF he was a wildlife biologist with the state of Florida.

“The single most effective, efficient and beneficial tool for wildlife management in the Southeast United States,” Doig said, “is prescribed fire (burns).”

Over the next many years, he became an expert in this aspect of wildlife and habitat

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management.

While his career migrated to put him in this post the most, his background and education, including his earning a master's degree in Wildlife Management from North Carolina State University, makes him useful as a wildlife biologist at the Refuge.

And his firefighting profession is not the limit in that regard either.

Beyond the federal IMT responding to huge wildfire disasters, those teams have helped people when there have been hurricanes and floods as well. They can be called during any sort of incident that requires an emergency organized response.

They even answered the call to Texas to help collect debris from the space shuttle Columbia disaster. The space shuttle Columbia was destroyed during reentry to Earth in 2003.

"It's not just fire," Doig said, "although that is 80 percent of the workload or more."

As for advice to national refuge visitors, Doig said he wants people to enjoy them. These areas are little sections of what the landscape used to be.

"But they are so important," he said, "because they provide pristine natural habitat for all of the critters, that unfortunately, most private lands can't provide – because of other management objectives."

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service tries to provide a place for habitat conservation, for any number of species – with a focus on the endangered and threatened, or species of special concern, he said.

These Refuges are small examples of what the Earth used to look like, Doig said, before the wholesale manipulation by modern man. And so, these areas are to be enjoyed by visitors.

On the broader view of life on Earth, Doig shared insight about the science of climate change.

There is no question that the planet's climate changes over time, he said. The changes over eons, or over geological time are documented. Now, though, over the last few decades, Doig said, scientists see more immediate results.

For instance, the frequency, size and intensity of wildfires – particularly in the western United States – show a perfect example of climate change. California is showing the highest annual temperature, he said.

"With that, comes bone-scorching drought," Doig said. "With high temperatures and drought, you have an ignition source – be it humans or lightning, whatever, you get these tremendous fires."

Doig said that as recently as 20 years ago, a 100,000-acre fire would be absolutely unheard of.

Nowadays, he continued, a 100,000-acre wildfire is common. He just left a 700,000-acre wildfire in California that as of now is only 30 percent contained.

"It is unimaginable how big and fast, and ferocious and devastating this wildfire is," Doig said. "And it's only one of many that are burning."

This fire affects people, domestic animals, wildlife, homes, businesses and the smoke reaches even farther – even around the globe. The air quality is terrible because of the intensity of smoke.

"Yeah, I think climate change is real." Doig said. "And it's having effects. Our hurricanes are more intense. I don't know if it makes them more numerous, but I know it makes them intensify quicker because the average sea temperature is much warmer, and that heat is the gasoline – the fuel source for these hurricanes."

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To deny climate change, Doig said, is avoiding the obviously clear truth by pretending that it does not exist. He said humans need to do something about it.

Another piece of science has dampened this honor to be presented on Oct. 22.

Rather than going to Washington, D.C., Doig and his wife are staying home. In the virtual presentation, he will receive the award while interacting via a computer either at the office for the United States Fish and Wildlife Service's Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges headquarters in Levy County, or from a computer at his home in Gainesville.

Hence, a tour of the nation's center for federal government must be considered at some point in the future by Doig and his wife. This future tour will happen after the act of visiting places like that are more normalized, in contrast with the situation during the COVID-19 global pandemic.