

Native American Fishing Activist Billy Frank Jr. Dead at 83

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[U.S. States](#)

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Billy Frank Jr. poses for a photo near Frank's Landing on the Nisqually River in Nisqually, Wash. Ted S.



Warren—AP

Renowned campaigner who fought to secure fishing rights for Native American tribes in the Northwest and led civil-disobedience campaigns during the Fish Wars of the 1960s and '70s passed away Monday at age 83

After fighting for decades to persevere the fishing rights of Native American tribes in the Pacific Northwest, activist Billy Frank Jr. died this week. He was 83 years old.

“Billy dedicated his life to protecting our traditional way of life and our salmon. For more than 60 years,” read a [statement](#) by the Nisqually tribe Monday.

“Billy was in the center of action on behalf of the Nisqually people and of Native Americans throughout our country.”

Washington Governor Jay Inslee remarked that the state had “lost a true legend.”

“Billy was a champion of tribal rights, of the salmon, and the environment,” Inslee wrote [online](#). “He did that even when it meant putting himself in physical danger or facing jail.”

After being arrested in 1945 at the age of 14 while trying to catch salmon, Frank would go on to be taken into custody more than 50 times over the course of his life for illegally fishing in waters his ancestors had relied on for centuries.

“We ceded all this land to the United States for a contract to protect our salmon, our way of life, our culture,” Frank told the [Associated Press](#) during an interview in 2012.

“We’re gatherers and we’re harvesters. And they forgot about us. They built their cities, they built their university. They built everything, and they forgot about us tribes.”

Frank’s resistance to state-imposed limits on fishing led to a historic civil rights struggle, known as the Fish Wars, from the dozens of Northwest tribes who demanded that the treaties their ancestors first signed with white settlers be honored and their way of life persevered.

The movement was vindicated in the mid-1970s when a district court declared that 20 tribes in the Pacific Northwest were privy to half of the region’s annual fish harvest.