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SALMON DEFENSE AND THE LEGACY OF BILLY FRANK JR.

Salmon Defense Looks Ahead as They Appoint New Chairman

The recent passing of Billy Frank Jr., one of the most recognizable advocates of Native American fishing rights, has placed a spotlight on his legacy and the non-profit organization Salmon Defense.

“Salmon Defense was a piece of Billy's vision, it is part of his legacy and today we are strong and committed to aggressively advancing and continuing the work of protecting the salmon that sustain us, and the eco-systems that sustain them. Our time is now, we are Billy's salmon warriors, join us,” stated Fran Wilshusen, Executive Director of Salmon Defense.

As chairman of the Board of Directors, Frank was instrumental in the mission to “protect and defend Pacific Northwest salmon and salmon habitat.” Salmon Defense works to advocate, educate and litigate for the salmon.

“I hear Billy say that we have to fight for the salmon. The salmon can't get out of the river, we have to be their voice. I look forward to the leadership of Bobby, so we can fine tune that effort and be more engaged. It is time to step up and be this voice,” commented Fawn Sharp, President of Quinault Nation.

Robert Whitener of Squaxin Island will take over the position as chairman of the board. He will continue the efforts to protect the salmon and carry on Frank's vision through Salmon Defense.

“I am both excited and saddened to become the Chair of Salmon Defense. I am saddened that our former Chair, Billy Frank Jr. left us too soon and that his wisdom and presence will be greatly missed. I am excited that I will be able to continue to work for Salmon Defense. I believe the work we have done in the past has been effective and see much more work in the future to protect our salmon. I look forward to being part of the future successes for Salmon Defense,” explained Whitener when he was asked about his transition to chairman.

Created in 2003, Salmon Defense was established by the 20 treaty tribes in Western Washington. The purpose of this non-profit is to solely focus on the livelihood of salmon and their habitat. This is done through the education of young people and increased awareness amongst the public. In order to honor Frank, Salmon Defense has built the Billy Frank Jr. Salmon Forever Fund.

The Salmon Forever Fund was created to honor and preserve the vision and work of Frank to protect the salmon. This trust will provide scholarships for native students, fund restoration projects and participate in litigation involving salmon.

Frank was a fierce advocate for the salmon and native fishing rights since 1945 when he was 14, the age he was first arrested for fishing. Frank continued to fight for the salmon through protests, “fish- ins” and support of lawsuits.

In 1974, the Boldt Decision ruled that most Native American Tribes in the Northwest had the right to catch up to half of the harvestable salmon. Previously, fishing had been confined to the tribal reservations. Even after this ruling, Frank never stopped his fight for the salmon.

Although Frank has passed, his legacy still lives on, and Salmon Defense will continue to ensure his efforts to protect the salmon are never forgotten and his legacy advanced through the Salmon Forever Fund.

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