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### THE TODAY FILE

Your guide to the latest news from around the Northwest

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May 5, 2014 at 11:24 AM

## Billy Frank Jr.,

# Nisqually elder who fought for treaty rights, dies

Posted by [Craig Welch](#)

Billy Frank Jr., a Nisqually elder who for more than half a century was the charismatic voice of Northwest tribes fighting to hold on to their treaty rights, died early this morning, Nisqually tribal officials confirmed today.

"We are all stunned and not prepared for this," said W. Ron Allen, Jamestown S'Klallam Tribal Chairman who has worked with Frank since the early 1980s. "He was bigger than life. It's a very sad day for all of us."

Gov. Jay Inslee called Frank a "true legend" and said he was thankful that Frank was around to remind people the importance of what he fought for.

"He was a selfless leader who dedicated his life to the long fight for the rights of our state's native people," Inslee said in a statement. "Billy was a champion of tribal rights, of the salmon, and the environment. He did that even when it meant putting himself in physical danger or facing jail."

Frank was first arrested for salmon fishing as a boy in 1945 — an event that led him on a long campaign for tribal rights, according to The Associated Press. He and others were repeatedly arrested as they staged "fish ins" demanding the right to fish in their historical waters, as they were guaranteed in treaties when they ceded land to white settlers in the 19th century, the AP said.

In 1974, U.S. District Judge George Boldt affirmed the tribes' right to half of the fish harvest — and the nation's obligation to honor the old treaties, according to The AP.

Frank continued to be an environmental leader and activist for salmon recovery.

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The Today File is a general news blog featuring real-time coverage of Seattle and the Northwest. It is reported by the news staff of The Seattle Times and includes stories from The Associated Press and McClatchy-Tribune Information Services. It is edited by Seattle Times Assistant Metro editor Nick Provenza.

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