

Hilary "Sparky" Waukau

On a summer day in 1995, a group of people opposed to a proposed sulfide mine near the headwaters of the Wolf River marched up Spirit Mountain near Crandon.

The group wanted to draw attention to its cause, and a frail-looking Native American in a wheelchair led the marchers that day. It was the last march for Hilary Waukau, Menominee Nation tribal leader and respected elder, U.S. Marines World War II veteran and longtime environmental leader and conservationist.

Waukau would die two weeks later in a Shawano hospital of the effects of heart attack, stroke and other disease.

He and the others were opposed to the sulfide mine proposed by Exxon Corp. and other interests. His presence at the front of that group is the kind of publicity that money can't buy in this age of intense and costly marketing campaigns.

Waukau himself was anything but a figurehead. He had been involved in environmental and conservation causes most of his adult life and was an early and unyielding protector of the Wolf River.

He is credited with playing an important role in no fewer than six separate efforts to protect or enhance the Wolf River and the surrounding environment in northeast Wisconsin. Waukau received honors from state and national groups for these efforts.

Many times he and the Menominee formed coalitions with others interested in environmental protection. At the same time, Waukau considered it essential that the Menominee and other Native Americans protect their separate and distinct culture.

Still, as Department of Natural Resources Secretary George Meyer noted in 1996 correspondence, "Having Known Hilary personally, I can assure you he was a guardian of the natural resources for not only the Menominee Tribe, but for the entire state."

Born in Keshena on the Menominee Reservation, Waukau lived all of his life there, save for three years of military service as a U.S. Marine in World War II and a nine-month call-up during the Korean War. The impact of his work on environmental matters went well beyond the reservation, but his efforts were appreciated at home. The Menominee manage a forest on the reservation that is world-famous for its size and for the fact that the Menominee so effectively practice sustainable forestry. A year before he

died, the Menominee Nation renamed its forestry center the Hilary J. Waukau Senior Forestry and Environmental Resources Center.

Recognizing Waukau's contributions, Tribal Chairman Apesanahkwat said, "Hilary J. Waukau's dedication to Mother Earth inspired everyone to continue traditional teachings handed down by generation to generations to preserve and protect our beautiful country's environment and natural resources."

Former Tribal Chairman and one-time Assistant U.S. Secretary for Indian Affairs Ada Deer said this: "His legacy is a great compassion, love of the land and dedication and determination to work for the betterment of the tribe."

What did Waukau do? Newspaper reports, tribal records and testimonials by leaders of environmental groups, state and federal agencies and others document the following:

Waukau emerged as an environmental and tribal leader in the early 1960s, when he and other Menominee joined the effort to block development of a dam on the Upper Wolf River. Private interests had secured a permit to construct a dam. Opponents went to the state Legislature seeking a law prohibiting construction of a dam on the Upper Wolf. The law passed. Noting Waukau's role, Robert E. Schmitz, president of the Wolf River Watershed Alliance, said: "Sparky's prestige as representative of the Menominees and his friendship with many of our state legislators was a significant factor in passing of a law which still exists today, prohibiting damming of the upper Wolf River."

Waukau was also spokesman for the tribe in 1965 when Wisconsin turned down efforts of a group of investors seeking to construct a landfill in the Upper Wolf Watershed. The landfill would have served the city of Chicago. Wisconsin denied a permit.

He was an outspoken opponent of mining in Wisconsin. Waukau was official spokesman for the tribe when it joined with other groups in opposition to the granting of permits for an ore mine at the headwaters of the Upper Wolf in the mid-1980s. Exxon Corp. withdrew its requests for permits in 1986 after state and local hearings.

Events would put Waukau and Exxon at odds one more time. At the time of his death, Waukau was again battling Exxon and a partner, Rio Algom, which had renewed interest in a sulfide mine near the Wolf Watershed.

In addition, Waukau was among the leaders of an effort to oppose construction of a Nuclear Waste Repository in the Wolf River Batholith granite bedrock in north central Wisconsin. The Department of Energy had proposed this site as a possible location for a repository. Waukau was chief spokesman for the tribe as it joined a broad coalition of groups opposed to the repository. DOE officials took the site off the list for consideration.

Waukau was also active in efforts to require the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to grant the Wolf River Outstanding Resource Waters (ORW) status, protecting it from future pollution. The Wolf was not included in the DNR's first list, but Waukau led efforts to have the Wolf added. Within the borders of the Menominee Reservation, the Wolf is now also listed as a National Wild and Scenic River. The lasting impact of Waukau's actions to protect the Wolf River Watershed can be measured in these accomplishments.

But Waukau had seen a lot in life. Born on a reservation, he went away to serve his country and ended up being among the first American soldiers to witness the devastation caused by the dropping of the atomic bomb on Nagasaki. Returning home after the war, he wore his Marines uniform as he stopped for a drink in a bar south of the reservation. He was denied service because he was an Indian.

Near his death, Waukau spoke these words at a public gathering of mining opponents, "As long as those valuable metals are in the ground, we as humans can never rest because the beat of greed and exploitation will be over our heads and over generations who inhabit this part of the country to the end of eternity."

HILARY J. 'SPARKY' WAUKAU
1922-1995

- BIRTH:** Oct. 13, 1922, in Neopit, Menominee Reservation, son of Mitchell Waukau and Susan Wilber.
- DEATH:** Aug. 2, 1995, Shawano.
- EDUCATION:** Graduate, St. Joseph's High School, Keshena, 1940.
Graduate, North Central Technical College, Wausau, 1961,
degree in electronics.
- MILITARY SERVICE:** U.S. Marine Corps, 1942-45. Landed with comrades on shores of Okinawa, Saipan, Tinnian, Terawa. Among first American troops to witness aftermath of atomic bombing of Nagasaki, Japan. Returned home in 1945 with rank of Marine sergeant. Served 90-day recall during Korean War. Honorably discharged, 1950.
- HONORS:** Menominee Forestry Center named Hilary J. Waukau Sr. Forestry and Environmental Resources Center by act of Menominee Tribal Legislature, Oct. 28, 1994.
- Received Daughters of American Revolution National Conservation Medal, March 15, 1996.
- Received Memorial Commendation from Wisconsin Conservation Congress May 11, 1996.
- Received Memorial Resolution from Wisconsin Natural Resources Board, Aug. 2, 1995.

BIOGRAPHICAL HISTORY

Lifelong resident of the Menominee Indian reservation. Tribal leader and environmentalist.

Active on environmental causes from early 1950s until his death in 1995.

Member, Old Advisory Council of Chiefs, early 1950s.

Member, Menominee Enterprises Inc. Voting Trust Board, 1961-71.

Member, Menominee County Board of Supervisors, 1965-72.

Judge, Supreme Court of Menominee Nation, 1979-81.

Menominee County/Town Administrator, 1973-1986.

Member and Officer, Menominee Tribal Legislature, 1987-1995.

Chair, Menominee Tribal Legislature Environmental Impact Committee.

Member and vice chair (1987), Wisconsin Radioactive Waste Review Board Policy Advisory Council. Served two four-year terms.

Area Vice President, National Congress of American Indians, 1987. Served two terms on Congress.

Keeper of the Eleven Tribes of Wisconsin Environmental Feather Flag, 1984.
Chair.

Founding member, Wolf River Watershed Alliance.

Electrician, telephone supervisor, Menominee Tribal Enterprises, 11 years.

Emergency government coordinator and highway safety coordinator, Menominee Nation.

Representative to East-Central Wisconsin Planning Committee.

Volunteer, Kids for Clean Water, led sessions with inner city youth allowed to camp at Woodland Bowl sacred grounds on Menominee Reservation.

Ardent hunter and fisher.