

Frank Moe Environmental activist, ex-legislator

If snow was on the ground, he was on a sled, mushing dogs

By PAUL WALSH • paul.walsh@startribune.com



Frank Moe, a two-term DFL state legislator from Bemidji whose passion for environmental protections inspired him to drive a dog sled team on a lobbying trek from the North Shore to the State Capitol, has died.

Moe died Wednesday of brain cancer with his wife, Sherri, by his side. They were in the Twin Cities, where he had been receiving treatment for the past several months, according to his family and friends. He was 56.

During his two terms in the Minnesota House from 2005 to 2009, Moe became assistant DFL House majority leader while establishing himself as a tireless advocate for preserving the environment and gaining a reputation as a straight shooter.

In his post-legislative life, Moe moved with his wife to the North Shore, where he was a wilderness guide and tended to dozens of dogs at his kennels in Hovland. He also was a longtime official and participant in the annual John Beargrease sled dog races.

Over more than a week in March 2012, Moe left Grand Marais with a team of dogs and mushed 360 miles to protest what he saw as a looming threat to northeast Minnesota from mining interests. Tucked among his provisions were petitions signed by northeast Minnesotans who opposed nonferrous mining adjacent to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.

"The BWCA, Lake Superior, the lakes and rivers of the northeast, these are Minnesotans' crown jewels," Moe said at the time. "The mining industry says this is about jobs. But about 30,000 of us in the northeast depend on clean water for our livings, and we have to protect it."

John Beargrease president Kirk Weber said that race officials are "talking about some way to honor Frank at the start" of this year's races, which begin Jan. 30.

Moe was a longtime Beargrease board member who served as vice president until just after the 2021 races and who competed in last year's 120-mile run, Weber said.

"Frank was very instrumental in making sure we could

safely have the races" in light of concerns over the COVID-19 pandemic, Weber said. "He was just a great champion of mushing. He helped mentor younger mushers, and he had dogs people could train with and dogs that other mushers could run with."

DFL Party Chair Ken Martin said in a statement that Moe "was a champion for our environment, a terrific legislator who delivered for northern Minnesota and a tremendously warm and caring person. I was fortunate to work closely with Frank to pass the Clean Water, Land, and Legacy Amendment and am still grateful to this day for his pivotal advocacy."

"The impact of Frank's hard work, leadership and activism will be felt for generations to come, and I have no doubt that his legacy will continue to inspire environmentalists across Minnesota," Martin said.

Friend Jack Stone could barely remain composed as he expressed how important Moe was to his Stone Harbor Wilderness Supply business in Grand Marais as one of his first employees in 2010.

Moe led groups kayaking in the Boundary Waters wilderness and climbing in Tettegouche State Park near Silver Bay in the summertime, when he wasn't off mushing during the snowy months, Stone said.

Stone traveled to the Twin Cities last year to be near Moe when he went in the hospital. "I've been in touch with him and Sherri through all of this," Stone said. "He kept talking about what trips he wanted to do this summer."

"Frank can't be replaced up here," Stone said. "I just don't see him being replaced."

Moe was born in the Twin Cities in 1965 and graduated from Bloomington Jefferson High School. He received his undergraduate degree in history from Carleton College in Northfield and his master's in physical education from the University of North Carolina before doing doctoral studies in education at the University of Minnesota.

Moe is preceded in death by his father, Paul Moe, and brother Paul Moe. Along with his wife, he is survived by his mother, Vonda Moe Bezat, stepfather James Bezat and half-brother John Moe.

A celebration of Frank Moe's life is planned at the Hovland Town Hall on Feb. 5. Further details are pending.

Paul Walsh • 612-673-4482

"The impact of Frank's hard work ... will be felt for generations to come."

DFL Party Chair Ken Martin