

GREAT LAKES INDIAN FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION

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• MEMBER TRIBES •

MICHIGAN

Bay Mills Community
Keweenaw Bay Community
Lac Vieux Desert Band

WISCONSIN

Bad River Band
Lac Courte Oreilles Band
Lac du Flambeau Band
Red Cliff Band
St. Croix Chippewa
Sokaogon Chippewa

MINNESOTA

Fond du Lac Band
Mille Lacs Band



February 6, 2026

Long-time Minnesota Environmental Leader and Treaty Rights Advocate Changes Worlds

GLIFWC sends condolences to family and friends of Ningokwad Binesi- Reginald Defoe Sr.

Reginald “Reggie” Defoe of Cloquet, MN started his journey on Wednesday, February 4th, 2026. Reginald was a long-standing member of the Fond du Lac Resource Management team, an active member of the GLIFWC Voigt Intertribal Task Force, Board of Commissioners, and a proud Fond du Lac tribal member. He began as a Natural Resources Technician in 1993 and eventually became the Resource Management Director in 2006 where he held this post for nearly 20 years.

Executive Administrator of the Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Commission Jason Schlender recalls the many years of working alongside Director Defoe.

“Ningokwad Binesi was a stronghold for both Fond du Lac’s treaty rights and for broad environmental protection. He always held his community in high regard and represented the Fond du Lac band in a good way. He was always thinking about the future generations and saw youth engagement as a mechanism for the preservation of our way of life.”

Reginald was a key part of manoomin (wild rice) restoration and management work, especially on the Fond du Lac reservation. He often recognized the importance of utilizing survey methods, hydrologic modeling, vegetation management and TEK (Traditional Ecological knowledge) to enhance ecosystems.

In 2017, Reginald played a big role in the finalization of the Fond du Lac Band’s 1854 Treaty case along with the negotiation of an MOU with the State of MN. These agreements and negotiations ultimately reaffirmed the ability of the Fond du Lac Band to legally net lake trout on Lake Superior for the first time in over 100 years.

The Fond du Lac Band’s Natural Resources Manager, Thomas Howes, reflected on Defoe’s passing: “Ningokwad led in a quiet and thoughtful manner. He continuously sought out information on any particular topic in order to make a sound decision. He believed in his team and actively encouraged them to develop their gifts, passions and skills in order to care for our environment and our way of life as Anishinaabeg. We are grateful to have spent time under his guidance and wish his family strength.”

GLIFWC would like to extend our sincere condolences to the Defoe family, friends, and all those impacted by his passing.