

# Rep. was a champion of outdoors

Crane Lake DFLer dies of cancer at 60.

By PAUL WALSH  
paul.walsh@startribune.com

State Rep. David Dill, who represented a large swath of northeastern Minnesota for more than a decade as a reliable defender of the outdoors, has died. Dill was 60 and had fought a series of ailments.

"David was deeply committed to Minnesota," Gov. Mark Dayton said early Sunday of his fellow DFLer, who was first elected to the House in 2002. "As a legislator, he advocated tirelessly for the best interests of his district and the general welfare of our state. I will miss him."

Dill, from Crane Lake, died late Saturday after battling cancer. He had been receiving treatment at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester. Dill is survived by his wife, Tucky, and their son, Drake.

Dill, re-elected in November with more than 65 percent of the vote in a safe DFL

district, was chairman of the Lands Subcommittee. He focused much of his legislative efforts in such areas as mining, outdoor recreation, agriculture finance, the environment, natural resources and economic development.

Dayton is likely to call a special election to replace Dill, whose district is the largest in the state by area. It covers most of Lake Superior's North Shore and extends along more than half the state's border with Canada. It includes International Falls, Ely and Grand Marais, and the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.

"There are few legislators who focused so intently on representing his constituents or who did so more effectively," said House DFL Leader Paul Thissen, of Minneapolis. "He wore his success lightly and when he spoke, people listened because they knew he said what he really believed, he didn't play partisan games, and most often had common sense on his side."



Dill

U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar said Dill "left his mark through an unwavering commitment to our great outdoors."

At about 6 feet, 6 inches tall, the red-haired Dill was a distinctive presence on the House floor. Though soft-spoken and generally low-profile, he was among the most conservative House Democrats, sometimes aligning with Republicans on social and environmental issues, and closely allying with the National Rifle Association on gun regulations.

On Sunday, House and Senate colleagues from both parties took to Twitter to praise Dill's commitment to his constituents and low-key, bipartisan approach to lawmaking.

Away from the Capitol, Dill was a consultant, commercial pilot and an aircraft and power plant mechanic. He and Drake operated Thunderhook Fly-ins, a fly-in fishing guide service in northwestern Ontario,

based 350 miles or so from Crane Lake.

Early this year, Dill was appointed to the state's Outdoor Heritage Council, a 12-member panel of legislators and private citizens who make key spending recommendations -- generally rubber-stamped by the Legislature -- on how to spend more than \$100 million in Legacy sales tax dollars to protect the state's treasured lakes, rivers, forests and prairies.

"An avid sportsman and small business owner, Representative Dill understood what was truly important to the people he represented," said DFL party chairman Ken Martin. "He worked to provide opportunity and improve the quality of life in northeastern Minnesota."

In 2010 at age 55, he received a new kidney. He suffered for years from diabetes and tackled that illness in 2008 by undergoing gastric-bypass surgery and losing more than 150 pounds. The diabetes led to his kidney problems.

He later had a pacemaker implanted to counter an irregular heartbeat.

In an interview with the Timberjay weekly newspaper in his district after his kidney transplant, Dill said his Type 2 diabetes was diagnosed in his early 20s, but acknowledged that he didn't look after his health and saw his weight soar past 300 pounds.

"My mistake was not taking responsibility for my disease," he told the newspaper, "and that started the onset of the kidney failure."

Dill was born July 7, 1955, and graduated from Southport High School in Indianapolis and attended Indiana University. He visited Crane Lake seasonally since birth and made it his home starting in 1980.

Before election to his first of seven terms in the House, Dill served as city administrator for the town of Orr for 11 years.

Star Tribune staff writer Patrick Condon contributed to this report. Paul Walsh • 612-673-4482

Reprinted by permission of the Star Tribune (Minneapolis, MN).