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'Bad River' documentary about

## Wisconsin tribe's struggle for rights premieres Friday Frank Vaisvilas Milwaukee Journal Sentinel



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Leoso, the tribal historic preservation officer for the Bad River Ojibwe Tribe in northern Wisconsin, is one of several Bad River elders and professionals featured

will improve for Indigenous peoples when an eagle lands on the moon.

in the "Bad River" documentary opening this weekend in Wisconsin.

sovereignty in Wisconsin for nearly the last 200 years.

The film — narrated by actor Edward Norton and Indigenous model and actress Quannah Chasinghorse — focuses on the tribe's fight for treaty rights and

It opens Friday at the AMC in Wauwatosa, as well as in select theater across the country, with half of all profits being donated to the Bad River Tribe.

The Bad River Tribe, like all six Ojibwe tribes in what is now Wisconsin, resisted removal to the west in the mid-1800s by ceding millions of acres to the U.S.

government. But it retained certain treaty rights, especially those concerning hunting, fishing and gathering. In the late 1800s, the Dawes General Allotment  $\mathop{\mathrm{Act}}\nolimits$  threatened reservation land by

allowing its property to be bought by non-tribal people and organizations

to tribal historians. Also, around that time and for decades later, tribes had to contend with forced

In the film, Myron "Burnsie" Burns talked about how a black car would drive around the reservation, looking for children to grab to force them into boarding school. Their hair was cut and

they were punished for speaking their Indigenous language or practicing

assimilation through boarding schools

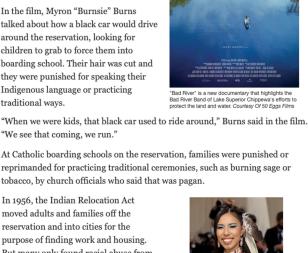
for children.

traditional ways.

Many Indigenous people lost their property by being defrauded, according

"We see that coming, we run. At Catholic boarding schools on the reservation, families were punished or reprimanded for practicing traditional ceremonies, such as burning sage or tobacco, by church officials who said that was pagan. In 1956, the Indian Relocation Act moved adults and families off the reservation and into cities for the purpose of finding work and housing. But many only found racial abuse from

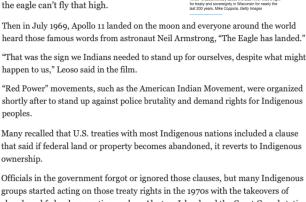
residents and police, poverty, loss of culture and drug and alcohol addiction.



Indigenous people were long past fed up and recalled that prophesy about the eagle landing on the moon. But Leoso said many started to lose hope because the eagle can't fly that high.

happen to us," Leoso said in the film. "Red Power" movements, such as the American Indian Movement, were organized shortly after to stand up against police brutality and demand rights for Indigenous peoples. Many recalled that U.S. treaties with most Indigenous nations included a clause that said if federal land or property becomes abandoned, it reverts to Indigenous ownership.

out of season.



Officials in the government forgot or ignored those clauses, but many Indigenous groups started acting on those treaty rights in the 1970s with the takeovers of

abandoned federal properties, such as Alcatraz Island and the Coast Guard station in Milwaukee.

The Ojibwe tribes in northern Wisconsin also started practicing their treaty rights to hunt and fish for their families in the Ceded Territory, even outside statemandated hunting and fishing seasons. In the film, Bad River tribal member David O'Connor discusses how his father was

arrested and fined by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources for fishing

His father took his case to federal court, armed with the knowledge of the treaty between the tribe and U.S. government, and won against the state. A series of other federal cases upheld those treaty rights. Tribal members started openly practicing their rights, to the ire of many who didn't understand and

accused tribal members of receiving special treatment.

reservation due to the opposition.

against tribal members in an era known as the "Walleye Wars" in 1980s Wisconsin. All of these events are discussed in the documentary. Much of the second half focuses on the Bad River Tribe's current fight with Canadian-based Enbridge about

This led to massive protests at boat landings that often turned violent and racist

its Line 5 oil pipeline that cuts through the reservation. Tribal officials fear an oil spill. The company has had a history of them, such as in Michigan in 2010.

More: Controversy, legal fights over Line 5 pipeline keep it in the news. We break the issues down.

Enbridge representatives said they're working to reroute the pipeline around the

"The proposed relocation project will reroute a segment of the Line 5 pipeline around the Bad River Reservation, send millions of dollars in construction spending into local communities, create over 700 family supporting union jobs and

keep affordable and reliable energy flowing that millions of consumers in the

region rely on every day," said Enbridge spokeswoman Juli Kellner. Mike Wiggins, former Bad River chairman, said the planned reroute is still within the reservation's watershed and a spill there would pollute tribal members'

drinking water. "I think the reroute is a treaty reservation water rights issue for our nation," he

The film says Enbridge representatives had been trying to influence tribal elections

to remove Wiggins, who has fought against the company.

He said Enbridge tried to paint him as the lone voice against them, but he said it's not just him. A majority of the tribe and tribal council want Enbridge's pipeline gone and sovereignty over their own reservation.

He said he was aware of Enbridge's meddling in tribal politics, but doesn't dispute

Wiggins lost his reelection bid for chairman last year after serving for 12 years.

"At the end of the day, elections are about the will of the people," Wiggins told the Journal Sentinel. "We had a good, fair election and I lost."

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