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Jack Spadaro receives conservation award

Posted: May 18, 2012 10:54 AM PDT

Updated: May 18, 2012 1:36 PM PDT

By Taylor Kuykendall, Reporter - [bio](#) | [email](#)

The National Wildlife Federation honored longtime West Virginia coalfield conservation and mine safety activist Jack Spadaro with a 2012 National Conservation Achievement Award.

"I say to you: The people and the living forests of my region of Appalachia have enormous worth and dignity, and I love them and will stand by them for as long as I live," Spadaro said in a prepared acceptance of the award.

According to a news release, Spadaro dedicated his professional and private life in the service of protecting wildlife, land, water, communities and mine workers from the effects of "irresponsible coal mining."

"Through his four decades in public service, Jack Spadaro has always put the health and safety of coal miners and their communities first," said Larry Schweiger, president and CEO of the National Wildlife Federation. "Jack showed incredible courage in refusing to back down to political pressure, taking a stand for safety, health and environmental standards in the coalfields."

Spadaro began his career investigating the Buffalo Creek coal waste dam failure that killed 125 people and destroyed seventeen communities in February 1972. A mining engineer by trade, Spadaro worked for 38 years in state and federal agencies charged with regulating the coal industry.

During his speech, Spadaro warned of the effects of the controversial mining practices.

"Unless the mining practices I have described are controlled far more strenuously or curtailed, by the year 2014 more than 3,000 square miles of Appalachian mountains, forests, and streams will have been utterly destroyed," he said. "At least 3,500 miles of stream will have been filled up and obliterated with highly toxic mine spoil."

Throughout his speech, Spadaro referenced a number of mountaintop removal projects and related effects.

In 2000, the release states, Spadaro "refused to sign a watered down account for a mountaintop removal mine that had dumped over 300 million tons of toxic sludge into neighboring streams and was forced from his job at the Mine Safety and Health Administration."

Spadaro opened a private consulting business on mine safety and mining environmental matters. He advocates alongside the National Wildlife Federation against mountaintop removal coal mining.

Spadaro was recently featured in "The Last Mountain," an environmentally focused documentary about mountaintop removal.

"Much more needs to be done, both to enforce laws to protect public health and mine workers and to mobilize those hurt by mountaintop removal and reckless mining practices," said Spadaro. "The people and the living forests of my region of Appalachia have enormous worth and dignity, and I love them and will stand by them for as long as I live."

The National Wildlife Federation Conservation Achievement Awards have been presented annually since 1965. Nominations are received from conservationists and the general public nationwide, with winners selected by NWF's board of directors.

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