

Sams sworn in as National Park Service director, first Native to lead agency

WASHINGTON – Charles F. “Chuck” Sams III was ceremonially sworn in as director of the National Park Service (NPS) by Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland on Dec. 16. Sams is the first Tribal citizen to lead the agency, which has been without a Senate-confirmed leader for nearly five years.

“Everyone should have access to the outdoors no matter where they live, how much money they have or what their background is. Chuck Sams understands the importance of connecting people to nature and I am thrilled to work with him as the Interior Department works to make our national park system accessible to all Americans,” said Haaland. “Under his leadership, the National Park Service will continue to protect our public lands for generations to come and make critical investments in the vast infrastructure that sustains our public lands and national parks.”

“I am honored to serve as director of the National Park Service and thank President Biden and Secretary Haaland for entrusting in me the care of one of America’s greatest gifts – our National Park System. I am also incredibly proud to work with the dedicated employees of the National Park Service. I have no doubt that together, we’ll be able to expand access to the outdoors, protect America’s public lands and upgrade our nation’s infrastructure system through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law,” said Sams.

In his capacity overseeing NPS, Sams will help implement the Great American Outdoors Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. In addition to historic funding for climate resiliency initiatives and legacy pollution cleanup, the infrastructure law provides for a five-year reauthorization of the Federal Lands Transportation Program, which will help invest in repairing and upgrading NPS roads, bridges, trails and transit systems.

The law also invests in projects that will help fund bridge replacements and resiliency, repair ferry boats and terminal facilities, and maintain wildlife crossings that keep people and surrounding wildlife safe.

Sams has worked in state and Tribal governments and the nonprofit natural resource and conservation management fields for more than 25 years. He most recently served as a council member to the Northwest Power and Conservation Council, appointed by Gov. Kate Brown.

He has held a variety of roles with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, most recently as its executive director. He has also had roles as the president/CEO of the Indian Country Conservancy, executive director for the Umatilla Tribal Community Foundation, national director of the Tribal & Native Lands Program for the Trust for Public Land, executive director for the Columbia Slough Watershed Council, executive director for the Community Energy Project

and president/CEO for the Earth Conservation Corps.

Sams holds a Bachelor of Science degree in business administration from Concordia University-Portland and a Master of Legal Studies in Indigenous peoples

law from the University of Oklahoma. He is a veteran of the U.S. Navy.

Chuck is an enrolled member, Cayuse and Walla Walla, of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, where he lives with his wife and their four children.

Elders Council Meeting

The Elders Council will hold a virtual Zoom meeting on Saturday, Jan. 15, 2022, at 1 p.m.

If you are interested in participating in the virtual meeting from your phone, computer or smart phone, please contact the Elders Program at 541-444-8233 by Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022.

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Deadline for the February issue is Jan. 10.

Submission of articles and photos is encouraged.

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