

Thorsgard to capture park's history

THORSGARD continued from front page

trees, mountains and valleys. Landmarks include the world-famous Half Dome, Bridalveil Falls and El Capitan. In 2014, Yosemite was the third most-visited national park in the United States with almost 3.9 million visitors.

Carpenter said the park has a good working relationship with the area Tribes and that Thorsgard "is doing really well" in his time on the job so far.

"He (Thorsgard) hit the ground running and he has already attended several meetings with Tribes," said Carpenter.

Thorsgard will be working directly with the Bishop Paiute Tribe, the

American Indian Council of Mariposa County, the Northfork Rancheria of Mono Indians of California, the Picayune Rancheria of Chukchansi Indians, the Tuolumne Band of Me-Wuk Indians, the Bridgeport Indian Colony and the Mono Lake Indians known as the Kutzadika'a.

"Our job is to do all of the NAG-PRA (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act) compliance for the park and to take the lead in all of the consultation for the interaction with the Tribes," said Thorsgard. "I'm in a really interesting position where even though I'm a park employee, I'm still acting as an advocate for the Tribes. But, I'm also an advocate for the Park Service too."

Thorsgard said he works with

both sides so that the agreements reached between the parties are the type of understandings that serve everyone's needs.

Thorsgard said his experience working for his own Tribe in a variety of positions over the years has and will help in working with the Tribes he is assigned to now.

Before moving to Northern California to continue his career, Thorsgard worked for the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde as a cultural protection specialist, cultural protection program manager, Tribal historic preservation officer and Education Department manager. Thorsgard also served a seven-month stint with the Army Corps of Engineers as an anthropologist before accepting the position with Yosemite National Park.

He said the work that he does is rewarding and that he is looking forward to working closely with the Tribal communities he serves while also learning as much as he can about the park.

"It's a lot like working with our community (Grand Ronde)," said

Thorsgard. "There are some things that if you don't record them, they just get lost. Finding a way to be helpful as that knowledge transfers from generation to generation and finding ways to help these communities record what is important to them is super exciting."

Thorsgard said the Tribes he has worked with so far have been supportive and interested in the work he is doing with and for them.

Grand Ronde Tribal Historic Preservation Office Manager and Tribal member David Harrelson said he is not surprised that Thorsgard landed in a position to perform meaningful work on behalf of Indian people. He said he believes Thorsgard's experience working with his own Tribe will only help him help Tribal people.

"What I've seen is that Eirik brings his life as an Indian to archaeology and historic preservation," said Harrelson. "He also brings his experience as an archaeologist and cultural resource manager to creating value to people in Indian communities."

Harrelson gives credit to Thorsgard for creating the program he now manages for the Grand Ronde Tribe.

"Eirik was really the catalyst for our Tribal Historic Preservation Office department and when I heard that he got the job at the National Park Service it really excited me because while working here and helping to build and kick off our department and our program we developed a lot of tools and learned a lot of lessons from that work," said Harrelson. "I see Eirik being able to now apply that work at a much more increased scope, scale and visibility."

"Eirik is committed to solutions, relationship building and inspiring improvement in others. I see that across the board. That is the reason why he is able to work really well in Indian Country and the reason he was able to build such a strong program here."

Grand Ronde Education Department manager and Tribal member Leslie Riggs said he sees Thorsgard as a good representative of the Grand Ronde Tribe wherever he is working.

"If a Tribal member is out in the wider world and they are doing a high-profile job like that as a Grand Ronde Tribal member then that is significant," said Riggs. "When I first met Eirik I was still working for culture and this guy came in and you could just tell he was very ambitious and he really had a burning desire to make sure that we were doing things appropriately. He just had a way about himself; you could just tell he was going to rise up the ranks. You could see it in him. He was ambitious, but he was also willing to put in the work. I think he is going to do very well."

Thorsgard said he and his wife, Misty, who currently works in the Tribe's Culture Department as a compliance technician, just made an offer on a home in California and the family plans to join him after the deal closes in the next couple of months. ■

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