

Yurok Tribe welcomes governor

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On June 30, Yurok Chairman Joseph L. James and Vice Chairman Frankie Myers treated California Governor Gavin Newsom to a trip down the Klamath River in a traditional redwood canoe. The tribal and state leaders paddled down a singularly beautiful stretch of the Klamath on the Yurok Reservation. After the canoe trip, the Yurok leadership discussed several timely topics, including the drought, juvenile fish kill, Yurok condor reintroduction initiative, traditional burning, environmental restoration, wildfire preparedness, Last Chance Grade, Chah-pek-w O' Ket'-toh "Stone Lagoon" Visitor Center and Klamath dam removal.

"We are working with the Governor Newsom on a number of issues related to natural resource management, environmentally sustainable economic development and cultural resource protection, all of which we discussed today," said Chairman James. "We invited Governor Newsom up for a canoe tour because we have much to celebrate. I would like to thank the governor for his continued support of our most important objectives."

"The Yurok Tribe and Governor Newsom are redefining the relationship between the state and sovereign tribal nations. For the first time, the Yurok Tribe has an equitable, government-to-government partnership

with the State of California,” added Myers. “Through strong leadership and mutually beneficial partnerships with tribal, state and federal governments as well as private entities, we have significantly accelerated the growth of the Yurok nation.”

Starting shortly after Governor Newsom was sworn into office in 2019, the Yurok Tribe has maintained a close, working relationship with the state leader. As a result of this formal partnership, the Tribe has achieved much progress in several key areas. The Tribe invited Governor Newsom to Yurok Country for an in-person update on the advancements that have made as a result of the joint effort. The Tribe also wanted to personally thank the governor for including tribal representatives in the state’s decision-making process.

The Yurok Tribe plays a significant role in shaping state policies that impact both tribal and non-tribal citizens. Yurok representatives serve on California’s historic Truth and Healing Council as well as the state Board of Education and Homeland Security Advisory Committee. Most recently, James was selected to serve on an advisory group that will establish guidelines for a new state program, which will annually invest \$20 million in tribal projects.

The Tribe and the state collaborate on a number of important initiatives. For example, the state is a partner in the condor reintroduction and Klamath dam removal projects. Earlier this year, Governor Newsom resolved a longstanding impediment to the decommissioning of the fish-killing dams, which are slated for removal in 2023. Last year, the Yurok Tribe and California representatives signed the first-ever joint powers of authority agreement between a tribal government and the state. The historic accord transferred the operations of the Stone Lagoon Visitor Center (now called the Chah-pek-w O’ Ket’-toh “Stone Lagoon” Visitor Center) to the Tribe. The Tribe also regularly coordinates with California agencies on river restoration projects between central and Northern California. Later this summer, the Tribe’s award-winning watershed restoration team will repair salmon habitat within a local state park. There are more examples of the coordination between the Yurok Tribe and the state, too.

The frequency and scale of these cooperative endeavors rapidly accelerated after Governor Newsom issued an apology, via the historic executive order N-15-19, for the state-sanctioned violence that was visited upon California’s indigenous population. Following the June 2019 order, Governor Newsom created the Truth and Healing Council and pledged to enhance the government-to-government relationship between the state and tribes. The Truth and Healing Council was established “to provide an avenue for California Native Americans to clarify the record – and provide their historical perspective – on the troubled relationship between tribes and the state.”

“Today, the relationship between the Yurok Tribe and the state of California is finally moving in a positive direction. I never thought I’d see the day when a sitting, California governor would accept an invitation to take a trip in a traditional canoe. There is more work to do, but we wouldn’t be in the positive position we find ourselves in today without the forward-looking leadership of Governor Newsom,” concluded Chairman James.

