

Newsom appoints first Native woman to key state board

September 25, 2022



On Tuesday evening, California Governor Gavin Newsom appointed Yurok Tribe's Forestry Department Director Dawn Blake to the State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection.

"It is an honor to be appointed by Governor Newsom to serve on the State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection. My traditional upbringing, university education and professional career have prepared me for the opportunity to manage the state's natural resources on behalf of all state residents," Blake said.

"Placing a Native American land manager on the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection is a win for California and the many tribal nations within the state," added Yurok Chairman Joseph L. James. "We strongly encourage the Senate to approve the appointment."

"With her background in western science and indigenous traditional ecological knowledge, Dawn has a comprehensive understanding of California's natural landscape," said Yurok Vice Chairman Frankie Myers,

who submitted a letter of support for Blake's nomination on behalf of the Yurok Tribal Council. "She is preeminently qualified to manage and protect California's incredibly diverse natural environment."

Dawn is an enrolled Hoopa Tribal member and Yurok descendant with a Master of Science degree in natural resources. If confirmed, she will bring to the State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection 20 years of real-world experience in land administration, fire prevention and many other relevant fields. Ranging from wildlife research to prescribed burning, Dawn is well-versed in all aspects of modern forest management. As the Yurok Forestry Director, she manages more than 70,000 acres of Yurok-owned forest for the benefit of current and future generations of Yurok people. She oversees the Tribe's 15,000-acre Old-Growth Forest and Salmon Sanctuary on Blue Creek, a critically important tributary of the Klamath River. She also administers sustainable and selective timber harvest and thinning operations. She is well-acquainted with the threats facing California's natural resources and rural communities, such as the recent record-breaking wildfires. More importantly, she is passionate about resolving these risks to California's residents and resources

The State Board of Forestry is "responsible for developing the general forest policy of the state, determining the guidance policies of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFire), and representing the state's interest in federal forestland in California." Additionally, the board is responsible for continuously reviewing and revising forest practice rules. The board is also intimately involved in the state's wildfire planning. Within the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, the board has much influence over tribal natural resource issues, especially in the northern part of the state where fires increasingly threaten tribal and state forests and residents.

Tribes, including the Yurok Tribe, have much to offer the state when it comes to fire prevention. Over the course of millennia, tribes have developed efficient and cost-effective strategies to address excessive fuel loads and reduce fire risks, while also improving conditions for fish and wildlife. Dawn, the Governor's choice to fill the vacant position on the State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection, is well-acquainted with this traditional approach to ecosystem stewardship.

Dawn's appointment to the state board is consistent with the California Governor's Executive Order N-15-19, which created the California Truth and Healing Council.

Following the historic June 2019 order, Governor Newsom pledged to enhance the government-to-government relationship between the state and tribes and promised to include tribal voices at the highest level of the state policy-making process.