

Statement of  
Charles F. Sams III  
Nominee for the Position of  
Director of the National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
Before the  
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
United States Senate

October 19, 2021

Good morning Chairman Manchin, Ranking Member Barrasso and Committee Members. And thank you to Senator Wyden for that kind introduction. I am joined today by my wife, Lori Sams and my oldest daughter, Rosevelie Sams. Our son Chauncey and daughters Clara and Ruby are home in Oregon.

I am honored and deeply appreciative to be President Biden's nominee to be the 19<sup>th</sup> director of the National Park Service, and I am grateful for the invitation to appear before this distinguished Committee.

I am an enrolled Tribal member of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. I am Cayuse and Walla Walla with blood ties to the Yankton Sioux and Cocopah Peoples. On my American Indian side of the family, we have lived here since time immemorial or for at least 15,000 years.

I am also of Dutch and French descent. Two of my Great Grandfathers came West to Oregon in the 1800s. Hendrick Sams immigrated to the American colonies in the mid-1700s and his descendants came West on the Oregon Trail in the 1850s. My Great Grandfather Joseph Larocque came to the Oregon Territory in 1812 and worked for the Pacific Fur (Astor) Company. My Great Grandmother, Mary, was a Walla Walla and Cayuse Tribal Member and the daughter of Chief Peo Peo Mox Mox, headman of the Walla Walla People.

My personal history is deeply interwoven with the fabric of our shared American history.

After serving in the United States Navy as an intelligence specialist, I worked in natural resource and conservation management across the nation, in urban and rural areas, for nearly 30 years. I have served in local, regional, and national organizations that have conserved fish, wildlife, and our common spaces of land. My record is one of engagement and collaboration. Some of my closest friends and colleagues in Oregon are non-Indian farmers and ranchers.

Most recently, I served as the Umatilla Tribe's executive director and deputy executive director managing over 190,000 acres of land and resources with over \$700 million in assets while also co-managing with local, state, and federal agencies, 6 million acres of land that was granted to the United States under the Treaty of 1855.

I currently serve as a council member of the Pacific Northwest Power and Conservation Council with a jurisdictional area covering Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Montana, working to ensure we can meet the power needs of our people and economy and protect fish and wildlife.

The National Park Service is a very special agency with a timeless mission: to preserve resources and to inspire current and future generations. I am excited to lead that mission. Although I have not worn the National Park Service's uniform, I have worn the uniform of the United States Navy during wartime. And I wear the regalia of my tribe to honor my ancestors and elders. These uniforms are reminders of the sacrifices made to protect our Homelands and the responsibility to pass down those lands in a stronger state than they are now.

I have tremendous respect for the people and places of the National Park Service. While hiking recently in John Day Fossil Bed National Monument with my family, I was struck by the professionalism and expertise of the rangers and realized that I have visited over 100 national park areas and monuments over the past 50 years. This time with our national treasures taught me the importance of being an American and being part of something bigger in life.

The National Park Service cannot achieve its mission without a well-supported workforce, and I am committed to focusing on the caretakers of this mission. Staffing, housing, and other issues are impacting morale and deserve our active attention. I am also very aware of concerns about harassment of National Park Service employees, particularly women. I have always had a zero-tolerance approach to harassment and will bring that to this position if confirmed.

As for the sites themselves, our treasured National Park System is not just lakes and mountains. The agency safeguards some of our country's most solemn and hallowed places. The bed where Abraham Lincoln died. The steps of the Lincoln Memorial – upon which Martin Luther King, Jr. professed his vision for a better America. The graves of our service members and our Presidents.

Despite the clarity of the National Park Service's mission, there are differences in opinion about how to accomplish it. In Indian Country, we expect an open discussion with the federal government prior to making a decision, not after the fact. If confirmed, I will bring this spirit of consultation to my service as Director. I look forward to consulting with neighboring communities, stakeholders, local, state and Tribal governments, and Members of Congress, even when the conversations and topics are challenging.

I can assure you I take this responsibility seriously. I hope to earn your support to be the 19<sup>th</sup> director of the National Park Service. I have appreciated speaking with many of you and learning from your insights. If confirmed, I am committed to provide for the protection, stewardship, and public use and enjoyment of our national parks.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.