

Supporting and Growing the Next Generation of Women in Natural Resources

By Tia Beavert as told to Andrea Watts

When I share my story of becoming the Tribal Forest Manager with Yakama Tribal Forestry, I begin by saying, “I am a first-generation college graduate, the second youngest of five siblings, and how I ended up in forestry was completely by accident.” Despite growing up and always going to the mountains with my late grandparents and late parents, I did not envision myself being a forester. I failed to recognize that my passion for the outdoors was a gateway to a career.

Education wise, I have an associate of arts degree from Yakima Valley College, and in 2005, I graduated with a bachelor’s degree from Heritage University in combined science. [Heritage University is located on the Yakama Reservation. See “Communication and Collaboration to Grow the Tribal Forestry Workforce” in the July/August/September 2020 *Western Forester* to learn more about Heritage



University.] My coursework focused on biology and environmental science because I had every intention of working in the plant sciences sector. Since part of my education was funded by the Tribe; after graduation I worked for the forestry department with the intention to stay until I paid back my scholarship.

My first attempt at graduate school was at Central Washington University in 2006 in the Resource Management program because of my undergraduate mentor Pat Falco. She pushed me into the science field as an undergraduate and introduced me to the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship that provided internships in plant sciences. She recommended me to this program after I started working in the Branch of Forestry. However, during my first attempt, I was a full-time employee and became a foster parent to three amazing children. My focus shifted from finishing the degree to just working. Although I failed to finish this degree, I succeeded in making an impact on their lives.

In my first year in the forestry program, I cross-trained within the Inventory Department, and the second year, I worked with the Archeology

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My Allies

Throughout my career I have had three major mentors in my professional career who helped me get to where I am today. The first one is Jon Sampson, a forest technician under the BIA Branch of Forestry, who did most of my field training and had the patience with all my questions. In every moment of uncertainty on whether I wanted to be a forester, he would always have the right thing to say. That encouragement gave me the confidence for me to stay in the field of forestry. Not only did he play a strong support role throughout my career, along with my late Father, he was an individual who pushed me to enroll at Oregon State.

My second mentor was the first professional person to highlight my capabilities and recognize me as an actual professional. Wyeth ‘Chad’ Wallace is currently the superintendent who oversees the BIA at the Yakama Agency and when I met him, he served as our acting forest manager. He provided a great support system when I was a pre-sale planner and during the transition into my new position as a manager.

Around this same time, I met my third mentor whom I still currently work with, Everett Isaac. He is currently the Yakama Nation’s Department of Natural Resources Assistant Superintendent. He was the individual who made me believe I can excel in my current position after accepting the position. To this day, he is very supportive of myself and our students excelling in forestry. He pushes people to step outside their comfort zone because that offers the most growth.

Being a woman in forestry is challenging, it is great to have a mentor and support system. I appreciate everything each of these individuals have done to assist in me becoming who I am today.



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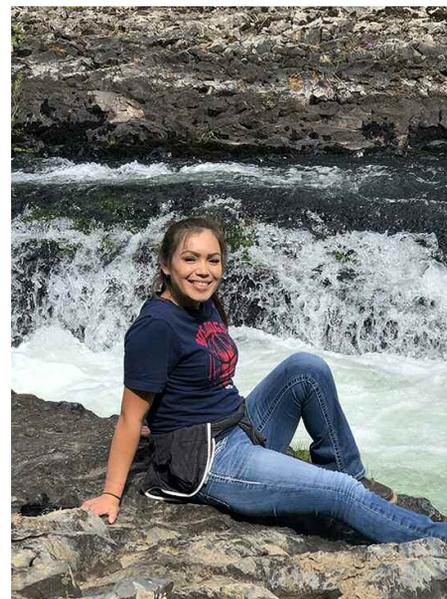
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Department which gave me an insight of the different aspects in forestry. In 2007, I transferred to the PreSales Department where I cross trained to learn how to do timber cruises. Out of all the moments in my career, I credit this as the start of my forestry career. Four years later, I was asked if I wanted to be cross trained to be a presale planner and said yes.

Most of my forestry career has been as a Tribal employee working under the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Branch of Forestry who oversees timber sales for the Yakama Agency. In contrast, the Tribal Forestry side, is a 638 Contract program that oversees Fire Management, Fuels Management, Forest Development, Mount Adams Tract-D Recreation area, and Fee Land Forestry, which includes the off-reservation collaborative department to manage lands not only on the reservation but cross boundary in our ceded lands—essentially all the lands that have been important to our people since the beginning.

From 2011 to early 2019, I worked as a presale planner. During this time, I was presented an opportunity to apply for a BIA position on the Reservation. Unfortunately, because I didn't have the forestry credits despite the on-the-job experience, I wasn't hired. As a result of that experience, I decided to return to school, enrolling at Oregon State University where I gained the forestry credits and am currently earning a master's degree in



PHOTOS COURTESY OF TIA BEAVERT

The Yakama's Tribal Forestry Program is staffed by number of women professionals across a diversity of disciplines (GIS, firefighting, and forestry technicians), and two of these women are attending school to earn a forestry degree: Amberlie Jones and Gladys Sampson.

Natural Resources. And in hindsight, not being hired allowed me to apply for the position I am in today, Tribal Forest Manager for the Yakama Nation.

It was very intimidating accepting this position for two reasons. One, being a woman in the position, and two, I didn't start my career saying, "I'm going into forestry." Instead, I started as an outsider who did not have lengthy forestry or wildland fire experience. Early on in my career, I was constantly reminded that I wasn't a forester and that I didn't earn a forestry degree. My lack of experience was and continues to be more highlighted than any of my successes. At my first Interdisciplinary Team meeting during the planning of one of the timber sales I was the lead on, one of the loggers whom I worked with early on would remind me that they've been in the field for a long time, and I haven't.

Many women say they suffer from imposter syndrome no matter how educated they are or how many connections they have. And I can relate—there is still that voice in the back of your head that says I don't belong here. I did toggle between accepting the manager position, yet I'm glad to have taken the position because I really love where I'm at right now.

The evolving role of women in natural resources

Traditionally, Yakama women, as with women in other tribes, were gatherers of the foods that fed our people. Then and now, they also tend to be caretakers. In this caretaking role, it creates a strong connection to the land—to make sure that what we gather today is available for our future generations to gather.

In my opinion, there is becoming a shift in gender roles, where many of our women are taking on roles that were once dominated by the male gender. There are women, in both Yakama and other tribes, who have become the hunters and fisherman. There are more women I know who like to hunt and fish for their families. There are more and more women forestry and natural resource professionals.

Here on the Yakama, there are enrolled women members who have a strong role and have great leadership in managing our natural resources. Such examples for our Tribe not only include me, but a woman Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, a woman acting BIA Forest Manager, and other women in professional natural resource leadership roles. It is exciting seeing so many other successful women who are role models to our younger generations both male and female alike.



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Recruiting the next generation of women

Through a Sustainable Forestry Initiative grant in partnership with the Pacific Education Institute, the Tribal Forestry program has initiated its first major outreach project: a two-part outreach program. For the first part, the Pacific Education Institute provided materials and exercises to teach our forestry staff how to teach forestry to kids, such as how to do experiments or little tasks out in the forest with the kids to get them interested in forestry. Then in August of this year, they will train our educators in schools within and near our Reservation the same tasks. During this portion of the project, our program will present on how to incorporate our culture values into forestry lessons. With our large forest base to manage, we want to encourage our youth to go to school to study forestry or natural resources.

Our program's outreach group is comprised of younger employees from each of the five programs under the Tribal Forestry program who have either field experience, college education, or a combination of both. Since we wanted to highlight that both education and experience are important tools in managing our forest. This group visits local high schools to recruit tribal members into our program. We emphasize the importance of our forest resources to the Tribe and its membership while recruiting younger tribal members to work for our program.

Within this outreach group are several women because it's important to show young women that they can work in forestry too. Amberlie Jones, who has a great deal of wildland fire experience and is a Tribal Forestry Fee Land forest technician, is one of these women. She does an amazing job assisting in the development of the outreach activities and has experience reaching kids because she also coaches basketball. Her enthusiasm helps our outreach program a lot because she just jumps right in. In one of the first outreach events she attended at a local high school, they were discussing wildland firefighting. Amberlie later mentioned there was a young girl who said, "Women can be firefighters too?" Amberlie got excited to hear that and

said, "Yeah, we can." For me, this reinforces why it's important to have that mixture of both male and females in the outreach program; it shows that we're not just looking for the next male forester, we are looking for the next forester.

Supporting and building up women colleagues

In addition to my work as Tribal Forest Manager, I am a member of the Women's Forest Congress Advisory Council. One of the reasons why I joined is that these women are so open to creating a support system for women to share experiences and connect with other women forestry professionals. Since becoming a part of this group, I have been able to see countless women support each other which is a really great thing. [See page 14 to learn more about the Women's Forest Congress.]

At one of the first meetings I attended, there was a discussion about the mentorship aspect of being a woman in forestry. There was a shared experience of having fellow women colleagues show you who you don't want to be as a leader. This resonated with me because I had such an experience. When I first started working in forestry, I was heavily scrutinized and treated poorly by a woman in the department who I thought would be very supportive of me as a fellow woman. This made me feel unwelcomed and created an environment where I did not want to go to work every day. Then I met the right people who made staying worthwhile. Because of this experience, I vowed I wouldn't be like that, and this approach has helped me grow to where I am now.

In our Tribal Forestry Program, we have a mixture of women professionals (GIS specialist, wildland firefighters, and technicians) and all our support staff are women. Yet there is not as many as we could have. Our forestry program has seven employees who are currently enrolled in Salish Kootenai College to earn degrees in forestry by attending the Yakama Branch on the Reservation. Two of these employees are women: Amberlie and Gladys Sampson. Gladys is currently our program's bookkeeper who

wanted to pursue her education and choose the field of forestry after a fieldtrip in my first year in the program. At the end of her program, she will have a great deal of knowledge—from the administrative process to the forest aspect.

I am excited to see more women and younger tribal members pursuing education in forestry. I cannot wait to see what the future holds for both Amberlie and Gladys, as well as the others, and see them grow professionally to be our future foresters. The dedication and determination I witness from all our students who work in our program provides an example of the future of the program.

For me as a leader, the number one thing I strive to do is be supportive and secondly, influence others; I want it to be different than how I was treated. I want other women to feel that we can create an amazing team rather than compete against each other. A topic I am ecstatic about in any situation is the upcoming generation of foresters and land managers. I want to be a leader who is developing our future as a program. I want that future to be just as great as the present, if not better. *WF*

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WSSAF Volunteers Needed at Puyallup Fair

The WSSAF "Working Forests in Washington" display will be back in the Expo Hall of the Western Washington Fair this September! The display and fair dates are September 3-26, excluding Tuesdays and September 8. Although we will have a static display, the strolling public is likely to stop and ask questions when SAF members are present to answer questions. Free fair admission and parking will be provided to those who volunteer!

If you have time to volunteer, contact Bill Horn at hornbill66@msn.com.