

YVONNE MORALES



Grace Under Fire

BY DONNA FAURE

Yvonne Morales and I have bonded over a few topics over the years... food, reporting deadlines, and birds most recently. We both believe in the power of bringing treats to meetings to make the work a bit easier (cupcakes with sprinkles bring people together!). As a contract lead for 10 national park units and a member of Point Reyes National Seashore's leadership team, we regularly attend meetings together. Yvonne is widely known as a steady lead during hard times and there have been plenty of those. She has become an expert in managing through government shutdowns, fires, and now a pandemic.

Yvonne and I recently "zoomed" together to understand how she arrived at her current position and hear a little more about how administrative staff make the complex work of the National Park Service possible. I got the backstory of how a young woman from an urban community found her way to "Her Park, Her Place" here at Point Reyes National Seashore.

Yvonne was my guide several years ago as I learned about the unique way Point Reyes National Seashore Association (PRNSA) works with the National Park Service to hire and support conservation interns when I began supervising these early career conservation staff. Her passion for supporting young people is rooted in the mentors who took an interest in her early in her career.

In 1999 Yvonne was a busy student enrolled in a business administration program at night school at Oxnard College, while also working several jobs. At that time, the National Park Service was trying to recruit more local candidates with an aim at diversifying their staff and one of Yvonne's professors



recommended her for an administrative assistant position for the Natural and Cultural Resources Division at the Channel Islands. "Ironically, I'd gone to Channel Islands High School [on the mainland], but didn't know it was a national park," she said.

Thanks to the support of Kate Faulkner, who was the Chief of

Natural Resources at the Channel Islands, Yvonne not only supported the administrative work in the office, but was sent into the field to observe and help out on various projects to really understand the "why" of her work. These experiences included helping with the re-introduction of bald eagles to the islands. "Seeing a baby eagle is one of the coolest things I've experienced over my career." Her mentor wanted her to deeply understand the importance of administrative roles in caring for the park's resources.

This same mentor saw Yvonne's potential and recommended converting her temporary position to a student career pathway program. Working through the complex system of government hiring is daunting, she shared. Yvonne credits the National Park Service

staff who believed in her and saw her potential for helping her launch a satisfying career where she really gets to make a difference in support of places she loves. “When I first started, I thought it would be a temporary job while I went to college, and it’s turned into an amazing career that changed my life for the good,” she reflected this month as she celebrates 22 years with the National Park Service.

In 2010 Yvonne came to Point Reyes National Seashore on a temporary assignment to set up a big change in contracting to a more centralized system. She eventually was promoted to lead the new Major Acquisition Buying Office (MABO) and now supports 10 different park units from the Channel Islands to the south up to the southern Oregon border. The move not only heralded a change in her work scope, but also a big personal change as she left her big, loving, traditional family and an urban setting. It was a hard adjustment at the start to live in remote park housing. “It was also culture shock living somewhere with so few People of Color,” she remembered.

What made the transition possible was people. In addition to the park service staff who welcomed her warmly, Yvonne found a new community through volunteering. She served on the West Marin Community Services board, a local safety net organization.

Yvonne loves the challenge of working with such a wide range of parks with their different needs. One of her favorite projects has been supporting the telling of lesser-known stories, including projects like the restoration of writing on the walls of buildings at the Tule Lake Japanese internment site. This relatively new park unit was created to tell the fuller picture of a difficult time in our history. Other favorite



“Yvonne can be as tough as she needs to be, but every action is underscored with great compassion. And, she knows how to bring the fun!”

– Former Point Reyes National Seashore Superintendent Cicely Muldoon

accomplishments include supporting historic preservation projects at Point Reyes, contracts and agreements to help the once endangered island foxes and bald eagles to the Channel Islands, and the post-fire recovery of the Point Reyes National Seashore and Whiskeytown National Recreation Area.

“I see contracting as essential to ensuring good stewardship of taxpayer dollars. Staff work to be fair, transparent, consistent, and supporters of small business.” Through the pandemic she’s worked with staff to manage new situations for contractors to do business in the park. The Woodward Fire brought another crisis. With so many fires burning across the state there were

limited supplies. “I led a buying team for the first time for two months as we negotiated to get the supplies and services needed to support the fire suppression.” She’s had a lot of opportunities to connect with new businesses and feels more prepared for possible future fires and other emergencies.

Acting Superintendent Carey Feierabend during the Woodward Fire that burned in the park from August to October 2020 commended Yvonne for her service. According to Carey, “Yvonne’s role providing support during the Woodward Fire (and on other incidents throughout the Service) as a Critical Incident Stress Management counselor was invaluable. She’s always one step ahead in thinking and planning for what the park’s needs might be, especially during the fire.”

Partnerships are how Yvonne gets so much of her work done and she reflected “I’m proud of our work with PRNSA and supporting the administration behind the NPS/PRNSA partnership to coordinate internships for young people to gain career experience while protecting and preserving the park.”