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HEATHER DAWN THOMPSON

EDUCATION

HARVARD LAW SCHOOL
Juris Doctorate
cum laude

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA
M.A., Public Policy
honors

CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY
B.A., International Studies
Honors

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

WORLD WILDLIFE FUND • *Native Nations*

Vice President, Food Systems & Conservation

2024–present

Washington, DC

Lead WWF tribal team. Conservation work focuses on both lifting up Tribal partnerships and indigenous led conservation initiatives with a special emphasis on buffalo. Food Systems focuses on building our Tribal food sovereignty infrastructure, particularly with regard to Tribal buffalo mobile processing and local supply chains. Team lead on historic Tribal buffalo partnership with The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Native Americans in Philanthropy (NAP), and InterTribal Buffalo Council (ITBC), called the [Tribal Buffalo Lifeways Collations \(TBLC\)](#).

US DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE • *Office of Tribal Relations*

Director

2021–2024

Washington, DC

Lead for the USDA Secretary's Indian Country policies – which includes tribal conservation, farming and ranching, forests, federal food programs, meat inspection, economic development, research, education, and tribal colleges. Responsible for overseeing the Department's trust and treaty responsibilities and nation-to-nation tribal relationships. Advocated for and received a 5x increase in budget and staff. Designed and lead the Indigenous Food Sovereignty Initiative, Tribal Self-Determination Initiative, Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge Initiative, Joint USDA-DOI Initiative on Tribal Co-Stewardship, and the USDA-DOI Bison Initiative. Lead conservation initiatives and conversations on bison, indigenous medicinal plants, prairie dogs, and salmon and their habitat. Systematically removed barriers to access including issues surrounding land tenure eligibility, indigenous animals and agricultural techniques eligibility, tribal corporate structure eligibility, and tribal consent.

US DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR • *Office of Indian Affairs*

Deputy Assistant Secretary, Acting

Summer 2023

Washington, DC

Focused on keystone conservation initiatives centered on indigenous conservation practices including prairie grasslands conservation, bison conservation, monarch and milkweed proliferation. DOI Bison Working Group on increased bison quarantine and tribal large landscape conservation through proliferation of large wild bison herd development. Stewarded the long overdue updating of BIA tribal agricultural leasing and grazing regulations, including navigating USDA's Indian land tenure, conservation, and "control" requirements.

GREENBERG TRAURIG • *American Indian Law Practice Group*

Indian Law & Agribusiness Practice Group Attorney

2014–2021

Washington, DC/ Rapid City, SD

Focused on Federal Indian law, tribal conservation, economic development, policy, and advocacy – always with a focus on balancing indigenous values and sustainability. Tribal economic development work included a specialization in rural economic development, tribal agriculture, bison herd development, tribal hemp, Farm Bill, finance, tribal corporate structuring (tribal corporations and Section 17s), tribal and federal tax and finance policy, tribal business codes, and deal structuring. Staffed the Tribal Ecommerce Coalition and the National Tribal Hemp Working Group and active team members of the Native Farm Bill Coalition. Tribal nation building work included language revitalization, constitutions, codes, and courts. Worked with tribes, tribal corporations, intertribal associations, and non-native corporations seeking to do business with tribal nations.

US ATTORNEY'S OFFICE SOUTH DAKOTA • *Indian Country Section*

Assistant United States Attorney

2011–2014

Pine Ridge/Rapid City, SD

Federal and tribal jurisdictional expertise. Indian Country Federal Prosecutor on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. Covered felony crimes emanating from Pine Ridge, with a special focus on violent crimes and violence against women and children. First ever Indian Country Community Prosecution Pilot Program, working directly with the Oglala Sioux Tribe and the community on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. Focus on practical implementation of a variety of federal policies.

DENTONS (SONNENSCHNEIN, NATH & ROSENTHAL LLP)

Partner

2009-2011

Washington, DC

One of approximately five Native American partners at the time at an “AmLaw 100” law firm. Lead of Sonnenschein’s Indian law public policy team. Scope included state and federal advocacy, rural economic development, tribal agriculture, finance, and homeland security/law enforcement. Clients included Tribal governments and Tribal corporations.

NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS (NCAI)

Director of Government Affairs

2006-2009

Washington, DC

The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) is the oldest body representing American Indian Tribal governments. Managed the entire legislative staff and budget coordinated education and outreach to Congress and the Executive Branch. Special focus on tribal tax, finance, tribal agriculture, tribal conservation, rural economic development, tribal sovereignty and jurisdiction, state-tribal relations, law enforcement, tribal courts, and homeland security. Ran NCAI’s team to reauthorize the Farm Bill, Indian Health Care bill, the Tribal Law and Order Act, ARRA, and Native Vote Election Protection.

SAMPLE LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

RAPID CITY INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOL PROJECT

Founder/Lead Legal Research Volunteer (www.RememberingTheChildren.org)

2014-present

Rapid City, SD

Identified lands where unmarked graves of the children who passed away at the RC Indian Boarding School passed away. Obtained lands and got placed into trust for Lakota tribal nations to protect the graves.

BUSH FELLOWSHIP

Fellow

2017-2019

Rapid City, SD

Recipient of competitive two-year Bush Fellowship. Fellowship focused on tribal self-sufficiency, particularly through integration of modern economic tribal development with traditional values, such as indigenous agriculture, renewable energy, etc.

CITY OF RAPID CITY PARKS & RECREATION BOARD

Board Member

2012-2014

Rapid City, SD

Appointed by Mayor of Rapid City to the Parks & Recreation Board during a time of significant racial tension in the City to assist in bridging the gap between the urban Native community and the many important city issues of relevance.

SOUTH DAKOTA INDIAN COUNTRY BAR ASSOCIATION

Co-Founder/President

2011-present

Rapid City, SD

The SDICBA provides a forum for all lawyers who work in Indian Country in South Dakota, supporting tribal sovereignty and promoting education about tribal courts, and tribal and federal Indian law.

NATIONAL NATIVE AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION (NNABA)

President/Board Member

2007-2009

Washington, DC

NNABA is the national association for Native American attorneys and attorneys who practice Indian law. NNABA works actively on legal and policy issues affecting Native communities, both nationally and within the international indigenous legal community. Responsibilities included speaking engagements, bar ethics, coordination of nominations for judicial appointments.

LAKOTA LANGUAGE IMMERSION PRESCHOOL CLASSROOM (AT THE BANANA BUNCH)

Founder

2013-2016

Rapid City, SD

Founded a Lakota language preschool classroom in Rapid City. Many immersion programs are struggling with funding, and none of the existing programs are easily accessible to Lakota families living in Rapid City. This program is designed to be self-sustaining. It is a Lakota language speaking preschool classroom within a pre-existing, well-established day care center.

CHEYENNE RIVER YOUTH PROJECT (CRYP)

Advisory Board Member

2001-2011

Eagle Butte, SD

CRYP is a youth center that provides after school education, art, and physical programming for children on the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation. Raised funds to build the new teen center.

SAMPLE PUBLICATIONS

- “An Inconvenient Truth: The History Behind the Rapid City Indian Boarding School and West Rapid City Lands.”**
By Heather Dawn Thompson (May 2017)
- “Doing Business with Tribal Owned Corporations: Competitive Advantages,”** by Heather Dawn Thompson,
Tribal Business Journal, (March 2016)
- “Modern Realities of the ‘Jurisdictional Maze’ in Indian Country,”** by Heather Dawn Thompson and Elizabeth Kronk,
The Federal Lawyer, 54 *Federal Lawyer* 48 (March/April 2007)

SAMPLE PUBLIC SPEAKING

- “Federal Policy Impacts on Tribal Food, Agriculture and Land,”** Heather Dawn Thompson, USDA Presentation to state
SNAP agencies on tribal consultation (2022)
- “Surviving an Invasion & Understanding Your Neighbors,”** Heather Dawn Thompson, TEDx Talk (July 2018)
- “Enabling Investments in Indian Country,”** Heather Dawn Thompson, SoCap Conference, (October 2018)
- “An Inconvenient Truth: The History Behind the Rapid City Indian Boarding School and West Rapid City Lands,”**
Oyate Today Interview, (January 2019)
- “Hidden America: Children of the Plains,”** Narrator, *20/20 ABC Special with Diane Sawyer*, (October 2011)

SAMPLE COVERAGE

- “A Man of Healing, A Saga of Suffering: Allegations of Child Sex Abuse are Complicated by Legal Maze in Indian
County,”** by Sari Horowitz, *The Washington Post* (December 28, 2014)
- “Federal Panel Reviewing Native American Sentencing,”** By Dan Frosch, *The Wall Street Journal* (April 21, 2015)

SAMPLE TEACHING & LECTURES

- Guest lectures include: Harvard Kennedy School of Government, UCLA School of Law,
George Washington University, American University, Black Hills State University, University of South Dakota.
- *Federal Indian Law*, Professor, United Tribes Technical College •
 - *Rural Tribal Economic Development*, Presenter, Greenberg Traurig •
 - *Crime Scene Investigations*, Professor, United Tribes Technical College •
 - *Separation of Politics & Economic Development*, Reservation Economic Summit (RES) •
 - *Intensive Tribal Court Trial Advocacy Training*, Instructor, BIA Tribal Courts Program •
 - *Advanced Federal Advocacy Training for Tribal Leaders*, National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) •
 - *Criminal Jurisdiction in Indian Country*, Society of American Indian Government Employees (SAIGE) •
 - *How Governments Can Promote Tribal Economies*, Reservation Economic Summit (RES) •
 - *Ethics for Indian Law Practitioners*, Federal Bar Association •

RELEVANT INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

- Saudi Arabia • The Philippines • The Netherlands • United Arab Emirates • Ecuador •

BAR MEMBERSHIPS

- Alaska • Colorado • South Dakota • North Dakota (special/expired) • Virginia • District of Columbia •
• Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe (SD) • Oglala Sioux Tribe (SD) • Puyallup Tribe of Indians (WA) •

CITIZENSHIPS

- United States • Cheyenne River Sioux (Mnicoujou) •