

Park Service names new Smokies superintendent

BY: Morgan Simmons

POSTED: 5:29 PM, Dec 4, 2014

UPDATED: 8:15 PM, Dec 4, 2014

TAG: local news (/topic/local+news)

The National Park Service has named a Memphis native as the new superintendent of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

When Cassius Cash assumes his new post in February, he'll become the park's 22nd superintendent and the first black to hold the position.

Cash currently is the superintendent for Boston National Park and Boston African American National Historic Site. He began his federal career in 1991 as a wildlife biologist for the U.S. Forest Service, and went on to work with that agency for 18 years in various leadership positions before joining the National Park Service in 2010.

He and his wife, Vonda, and their youngest daughter plan to live in the Gatlinburg area. Their oldest daughter is attending school in Colorado.

"This will be a new reality for me and my family," Cash said. "It's a dream come true."

Cash holds a bachelor of science degree in biology from the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, and later studied wildlife management at Oregon State University.

While with the U.S. Forest Service, he was an administrative officer in Nebraska, a district ranger in Georgia, and a civil-rights officer in Mississippi. Before transferring to Boston, he served as the deputy forest supervisor at the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest in southern Oregon.

His experiences range from working with spotted owls in the Pacific Northwest to preserving some of Boston's most iconic cultural resources. An avid hiker, Cash said he sees his new post at the Smokies as an opportunity to come back home.

"Here in Boston I've learned what it means to work with neighborhoods and preserve iconic cultural resources," Cash said. "When the position at the Smokies became available, I saw that as a chance to return to my first love of protecting natural resources for the next generation."

Cash will replace acting superintendent Clay Jordan, who will return to his previous position as chief ranger for the Smokies. The park's last permanent superintendent was Dale Ditmanson, who retired on Jan. 3, 2014, after a 36-year career with the National Park Service.

"My predecessor did an excellent job leaving the park a better place than he found it," Cash said. "I intend to do the same. I can only do that by working with the local communities and park staff."

Cash said he looks forward to being at the Smokies in 2016 when the National Park Service holds its centennial celebration to recognize its achievements over the past 100 years.

"The main thing I plan to do when I arrive is listen and learn," Cash said. "The folks in the community and the park have been around a long time. We won't be reinventing anything; we'll be moving forward."

Copyright 2014 Scripps Media, Inc. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed.