
Eugene couple files lawsuit over tree felled in Yosemite

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A Eugene couple has filed a lawsuit against Yosemite National Park over injuries they say they suffered when a park worker felled a tree onto a highway, crushing their car.

The suit says no warning signs were posted on Sept. 16, 2008, when Lisa Thorpe drove her Honda CRV along Tioga Pass Road with her partner, David Stone, in the passenger seat.

It alleges that park employee Jared Brown was felling trees nearby, cutting one in a way that caused another tree to fall “suddenly and unexpectedly into the roadway, smashing the car.”

Thorpe suffered serious and painful injuries, some of which are permanent, the suit alleges. Among them was a spinal cord fracture that required having a protective “halo” medical device implanted in her skull for a year.

She seeks compensation for past and future medical expenses, lost wages and diminished earning capacity, as well as noneconomic damages for severe pain, discomfort, permanent disability and interference with normal activities.

The suit says damage amounts will be proven at trial.

A Park Service spokesman did not return a phone call Tuesday seeking comment.

Stone suffered less serious physical injuries, including abrasions to his knee, but also

suffered mental and emotional trauma in the accident, the lawsuit alleges.

Reached at home Tuesday, Stone said he was repeatedly disappointed by the government's response to the incident.

He said U.S. Park Service officials arriving at the scene "demanded I fill out an accident report on the spot," even as medics were strapping Thorpe onto a stabilizing board to fly her by helicopter to a Modesto, Calif., hospital.

Stone praised a Yosemite Americorp volunteer for offering to drive him to Modesto, but said higher-level Park Service employees "showed no concern about how we're going to get home after Lisa got out of the hospital — her brother had to come down from Eugene to pick us up."

Stone, who has multiple sclerosis, said he received no offers of help dealing with doctors or insurance companies, or notifying family members.

"I didn't even get a call asking, 'How are you doing?'" he said.

The couple's suit alleges that the Park Service was negligent in failing to close Tioga Pass Road during the tree cutting; in failing to warn motorists of potential dangers; in failing to properly train and supervise the tree cutter; and for causing the logged tree to fall into the roadway.