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519 SW PARK
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Coyote News, est. 1976

November 11, 2004 Vol. 29, No. 23

NOV 22 2004
Portland, Oregon
ATIYEH

Tribes and governor close to casino agreement, reports say

News sources in The Dalles and Portland indicate that negotiations to place a tribal casino in the Columbia Gorge may be nearing a positive conclusion.

According to the Portland *Tribune*, the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs and Gov. Ted Kulongoski are nearing agreement on a deal that would allow construction of a resort and casino at Cascade Locks.

In late October, Kulongoski told an audience made up of local officials in The Dalles that negotiations are "coming closer to fruition."

Details of the ongoing negotiations are confidential, but Marian Hammond, a spokesperson for the governor, assured reporters the discussions are going well.

On October 29, The Dalles *Chronicle* quoted Kulongoski as saying, "The tribes need another revenue source, this casino is a major revenue source that they desperately need."

The Confederated Tribes have been talking with representatives from the governor's office as part of an ongoing effort to build a casino in the Columbia Gorge.

The tribes own property in Cascade Locks and Hood River, and experts say the most lucrative site would be the one closest to Portland. Unfortunately, tribal lands in Cascade Locks suitable for a casino are not in trust status, requiring approval from the governor in order to build.

The tribes and the city of Cascade

"His main concern in the negotiations is that the casino would be in the best interest of the public. He has said that he does not believe a casino in Hood River would be in the best interests of the community."

Len Bergstein
Tribal consultant

Locks both stand to make a considerable amount of money if a casino is built in Cascade Locks.

And both parties are anxious for a settlement, because both entities have been hard hit by the state and the region's ailing economies.

Terms are confidential

Tribal consultant Len Bergstein says Kulongoski has assigned several of his top staff members to work on the agreement, indicating a great deal of importance has been placed on this issue.

Bergstein also believes there are efforts being made to conclude the negotiations in the foreseeable future.

"I think everybody has an interest in getting this done before the end of the year," said Bergstein.

State officials have acknowledged the importance of a Gorge casino in rebuilding the tribal economy, but they also recognize the need to locate any

significant new structures in such a way as to lessen visual and environmental impacts.

Cascade Locks is located in the heart of a nationally designated scenic area.

The governor "recognizes the economic benefit that the casino would have to the tribes," said spokesperson Hammond.

"His main concern in the negotiations is that the casino would be in the best interest of the public. He has said that he does not believe a casino in Hood River would be in the best interests of the community."

Residents in Hood River have been vocal in their opposition to a casino there, but Cascade Locks has welcomed the tribes with open arms.

Specific terms of the negotiations remain confidential, but sources from both parties agree the process is moving forward.

When a final agreement is reached, the two parties will make a joint announcement.

The Kah-Nee-Ta Resort casino's earnings are small compared to the business that a casino in Cascade Locks would do.

The Warm Springs tribes opened the casino at Kah-Nee-Ta in 1995.

In 1998, the casino earned \$2.9 million and provided 70 jobs.

With a casino at the Gorge, Kah-Nee-Ta would no longer operate a full casino, but would instead have bingo and class 2 games.