

Tribes gather for winter conference

Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians tackle issues facing Native Americans throughout the region

By Shannon Keaveny
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Fifty-five tribes, including the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, flocked to Portland for the annual Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians (ATNI) Winter Conference last week.

For four days, various tribes discussed key issues in the Pacific Northwest affecting tribal self-determination and sovereignty. Attendees, many tribal leaders, broke into various committees throughout the day. Nearly 400 people attended.

ATNI President Ernie Stensgar, of the Coeur D'Alene Tribe, opened the conference by outlining the challenges Native Americans face. Many guest speakers followed him.

The United States government is not living up to our treaties, is not providing health services and more, Stensgar said. The national war crisis is felt on our reservations, he added.

"My heart goes out to the men and women involved," said Stensgar.

He paid tribute to the Indian warriors of the past.

"Past tribal warriors are the reason we are here today. We, too, have to step up and protect our homeland," he said.

"We need to carry out the aspirations of our last leaders."

Stensgar listed several components needed for a healthy social model. Some examples include housing resources, public schools that fulfill tribal needs, preservation of dwindling natural resources, and adequate healthcare. All of these factors are facing crisis situations in Native American communities. Bringing 55 tribes together to find solutions and protect our rights is the spirit of ATNI, he said.

ATNI has 14 committees tackling tribal issues in the Pacific Northwest.

The committees are Culture and Elders; Economic Development; Gaming; Telecommunications and Utilities; Tourism; Education; Health; Housing; Indian Child Welfare; Law and Justice; Natural Resources; Transportation; Veterans; and Youth. Each year the committees agree on resolutions as a focus for Pacific Northwest tribes.

ATNI was established in 1953. Participating states are Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, and California. The following were some key issues discussed.

Opening speakers

Dave Tovey, ATNI's Economic Development Corpora-



ABOVE: Olivia Wallulatum shares the success of Senate Bill 488. BELOW: Jody Calica speaks of BPA obligations to the tribes.

"Treaty and trust obligations cannot be minimized due to economic factors. My concern is that if tribal treaty projects are diminished, it will set a bad example."

Jody Calica



tion (EDC) president, gave a brief report.

ATNI EDC recognizes the need to build partnerships between federal, state, and tribal governments to have effective economic development. One example is EDC's program to provide loans for tribal members.

"We have lent out \$800,000 to tribal businesses," he said.

Tourism, he said, is the way of the future.

Mark Marchand, ATNI first vice-president and Colville Reservation tribal member, spoke of the outcomes of economic growth.

"We are almost getting what we want. We are going down roads we've never been down before. But with growth, come management problems and a lot of other issues."

W. Ron Allen, ATNI executive director and Jamestown S'Kallam tribal member, and Stan Speaks, Bureau of Indian Affairs Northwest Regional Director, updated the audience on BIA reorganization and trust reform. Speaks listed some staff changes.

Three deputy secretaries were created in the BIA, said

Speaks. There are now five positions for the secretary of the interior, which used to be two. Seventy-five trust officer positions are located nationally.

"Don't think of it as a reorganization but a restructuring," said Speaks of BIA changes.

Allen spoke of BIA efforts to minimize bureaucracy. President's Bush's recent BIA fund increases may be misleading, explained Allen. Specific line items, especially important to the Pacific Northwest, were cut to increase BIA trust reform.

"Basically, we're taking money from the left pocket and putting it in our right," said Allen.

Despite many tribal complaints, Ross Swimmer, who was recently nominated as Special Trustee for American Indians in the Department of the Interior, will likely be approved, said Allen.

Wrapping up the morning, John Dossett, National Congress of American Indians general counsel, spoke of the importance of positive media for Indians, especially regarding casinos.

He referred to the recent TIME magazine article on In-

that the ATNI tribes take action to put the land "in trust." Creating a land trust would protect the burial grounds at the Chemawa Indian School.

Olivia Wallulatum and Louie Pitt, Jr., of Warm Springs Governmental Affairs, shared the success of Senate Bill 488. The bill makes it illegal to use the word "squaw" in names of geographical locations in Oregon.

Two men, employed by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in Washington D.C., attended the Culture and Elders Committee meeting.

The FCC provides wireless licensing and tower facilities nationally.

They proposed an agreement that they said would further protect historical property on reservations and ceded lands. Historical property includes traditional, religious, and cultural sites.

Education

Tribal members in Washington, fluent in their native tongues, are now allowed to receive a teacher's certification from their tribe.

Last year Oregon tribal members were granted the same right.

Students from Portland State University shared the progress of the Native American Community and Student Center being built on campus.

PSU plans to open the center in September. Lillian Pitt, Warm Springs tribal member, will design the totem pole. The students successfully raised \$4 million to build the center.

The principal of the Chemawa Indian School shared the successes of its unique educational system.

Students are tested for their level of proficiency in each subject. They are then assigned a class level, rather than grade. Using this new system, 68 students graduated in 2002 compared to 37 students in 1997.

"We built our system on what the students need," he said.

Natural Resource

Therese Lamb, Bonneville Power Administration vice president, held a forum to explain motives for the dramatic cuts to their fish and wildlife program in 2003.

The BPA plans to trim nearly half of its expenditures for its fish and wildlife program in efforts to balance their budget. The planned budget is \$139 million, reduced from \$244 million.

"There is a \$1.2 billion gap we need to fill," she said. "Our costs have been higher than anticipated."

The BPA gap was created by the recent drought and inaccu-

rate assumptions of secondary revenues.

BPA plans to increase rates on Oct. 1. Cuts, claimed Lamb, have also been made inside the company.

The cuts will reduce river restoration projects by nearly one-third. Many employees will lose their jobs.

"You are a public agency that needs to assess secondary effects on the economy when you make cuts," said an audience member to Lamb.

Many attendees felt the BPA didn't understand obligations to their treaties to fund restoration projects.

"Treaty and trust obligations cannot be minimized due to economic factors," said Jody Calica, BIA superintendent for the Nez Perce Tribe.

A brief presentation on the Hanford Reach Contamination site in Idaho was also given. Hanford is a plutonium waste site created by the federal government during the Cold War. It is the most contaminated site in North America.

The ground water in the surrounding area is already contaminated. Eventually the water will flow to the Columbia River. Radiation levels will be 100 times the allowable level in 2020.

"Let's tell the feds it's unacceptable to not clean it up," urged Greg DeBruler of Columbia Riverkeepers.

Gaming

Ernie Stevens, Jr., chairman of National Indian Gaming Association (NIGA), attended the conference in Portland. He spoke on two occasions.

Despite growing media criticism of casinos, tribes across the country are using revenues to build communities.

A few examples of casino money put to good use are new healthcare centers; reservation schools; recreation centers; police stations; and the institution of many governmental services. All improvements, due to casino money, are keeping NIGA busy, he said.

One success in the last year was NIGA efforts to maintain tribal interests in campaigns. U.S. tribes' freedom to make campaign donations was being threatened in Congress.

NIGA's efforts to educate Congress about finance laws prevented the Campaign Finance Reform amendment from being offered.

Last week NIGA hosted a Winter Legislative Summit in Washington D.C. Over 30 members of Congress attended and spoke about issues important this year. In turn, NIGA addressed several issues important to the tribes with the Congressional members.

Kulongoski: tribes won't be forgot in hard times

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"I am fully committed to the executive order and the law. It's good for all people in Oregon not just the tribes," he said.

The governor stated that he would collaborate on tribal issues, such as natural burial grounds, gaming issues, and water rights. He cited the recent water rights agreement with Warm Springs as proof of his commitment. Kulongoski expressed further collaboration on law enforcement with the tribes, especially in the courts.

"Oregon will stand with tribal government to say that tribal law stands," he said.

More federal money for salmon restoration to ensure

conservation of tribal resources was also listed.

This would be a pivotal move in light of Bonneville Power Administration's planned cuts in funding to Fish and Wildlife programs.

"The history between the feds and the tribes is shameful," he said.

Kulongoski wrapped up his speech with a few words about the economy in Oregon, tying it in with reservation hardships. He specifically cited high rates of poverty, unemployment, and child hunger as offshoots of a troubled economy.

Measure 28 not passing will cut an additional \$100 to \$200



Gov. Kulongoski chats with an ATNI attendee after his speech.

million, he said. Umatilla Reservation faces unemployment rates of 17 percent, he said.

"I will not forget the unem-

ployed and I mean it," he vowed. Economic recovery includes the nine tribes of Oregon too, he added. He recognized

the dual citizenship of tribal members. He expressed his dedication to opportunities for tribal children on and off reservations. "You are sovereigns but also citizens in Oregon," he said.

Faithful stewardship of resources, he said, is directly connected to a strong economy. He envisioned sustainable development, tourism and reliable partnerships for small businesses in Oregon as a means for tribes to achieve self-sufficiency.

Both Oregon and reservations need each other to achieve a healthy economy. An example of this symbiotic relationship is Grand Ronde's Spirit Mountain Casino, the biggest tourist attraction in Oregon. Spirit Moun-

tain Casino, he said, "gives to the economy." As a result, many off reservation businesses flourish. He closed his speech with a few words about Oregon treaties.

"We're all better off if we fulfill our commitments [to the treaties]," he said.

Afterwards Pitt told the crowd, "As you can see we have a communicator here. We have a governor with ears."

Gov. Kulongoski, who wore a shirt from an Oregon tribe, was presented with a Pendleton jacket and three blankets.

ATNI is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting tribal self-determination and sovereignty.