

Yakama Nation suspends casino board

TOPPENISH, Wash. (AP) - The Yakama Nation has suspended the board of directors for the tribal Legends Casino amid allegations the board spent money inappropriately and overstepped its authority.

The suspensions came at the recommendation of the National Indian Gaming Commission, which could have temporarily shut down the casino or levied stiff fines, said Yakama Tribal Council Secretary Davis Washines.

The Tribal Council voted 9-4 to suspend the five-member board, accusing the panel of buying new office furniture and hiring three attorneys without permission.

The council also contended

board members were encroaching on council authority by attempting to distribute casino profits directly to tribal programs and taking over hiring and firing duties at the casino.

Board members argued the move has more to do with an outside audit of the casino.

Under the tribe's gaming ordinance, much of its casino revenues are earmarked for social programs. Gaming profits go to the tribal government offices, where tribal officials allocate them to programs on the reservation.

But board members claim the revenues were not reaching the programs for which they were designated. The board's decision to skip the tribe and deal money

directly to the programs was an effort to assure the most needy programs received money, said casino board member Warren Spencer Sr.

"They were senior programs. They were youth programs. They were the people we were put in office to help," he said.

Tribal Councilwoman Stella Washines said the tribe pays roughly \$1 million annually for audits of all its enterprises.

Board members also questioned whether the Tribal Council can legally suspend them, but Davis Washines said gaming regulations spelled out by national and state compacts must be followed.

"Regardless of personal opinion, we have regulations," he

said. "If they choose to ignore that, that's a cause for great concern."

Randy Sitton, the Portland, Ore.-based regional director of the National Indian Gaming Commission, said the tribe was exercising its authority appropriately.

The Tribal Council's executive board will serve as the casino's interim directors until November, when the General Council convenes.

The General Council, which includes all voting tribal members, makes all major policy decisions for the Yakama Nation and elects the 14-member Tribal Council. The Tribal Council oversees daily operations for the tribe.

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Harsh criticism for latest dam proposal

The Columbia River treaty fishing tribes have harshly criticized a draft federal plan for operating Columbia River dams.

The Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission says the federal plan abandons salmon-recovery goals, while granting generous deference to the federal Columbia power system.

Tribal leaders, to help steer federal decision-makers back toward a science-based recovery plan, filed formal comments last week outlining inefficiencies in the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) proposed 2004 Biological Opinion.

"As co-managers of this significant resource, we want a plan that tackles long-understood problems and serves

longstanding recovery goals," said Olney Patt Jr., executive director of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission.

The commission (CRITFC) represents the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, and the Yakama, Umatilla and Nez Perce.

The NOAA Fisheries' draft plan bears three fundamental flaws, according to CRITFC:

A "no-jeopardy" conclusion; an abandonment of recovery as a goal; and a declaration of the federal system of Columbia Basin dams as a natural and benign presence.

All three developments represent dramatic departures from the body of science and interpretation reflecting 13 years of Endangered Species Act listings

in the federal Columbia River power system, said CRITFC.

The changes are political rather than scientific, according to tribal leaders and CRITFC.

The draft plan relies heavily on the historically failed salmon-barging scheme; and on nascent technology - removable spillway weirs - to achieve higher juvenile survival.

Tribal scientists view spillway weirs as promising but largely untested, particularly for fall chinook and sockeye.

"In its continuing jurisdiction over this issue, and of the collaborative process over the past year, the court has ordered the development of a plan that is scientifically and legally stronger than the 2000 version, with specific and aggressive measures,"

said Patt.

"Instead, this draft relies on the word 'no' - no jeopardy, no recovery, and no breaching or back-up plan."

The Commission's comments, delivered to the Bush administration, are available for viewing and downloading at www.critfc.org.

Tips on woodstove, fireplace safety

By Suzi Macy

W.S. Fire Management

Your woodstove or fireplace provides you with warmth, relaxation and enjoyment during the cold months ahead.

Please use the following guidelines to ensure the safe and efficient operation of your stove:

Inspect and clean your stove/fireplace yearly. You can do it yourself or hire a professional.

If your chimney has any loose mortar or brick have it repaired. Look for cracks in your chimney liner.

Use the proper fuel: seasoned woods with low moisture content burn cleaner than green fuel or woods with high moisture

content.

Don't overload your stove/fireplace by building a fire that is too large for the stove to handle it.

Make certain that your fire gets enough air.

During the holidays, avoid burning wrapping paper: it burns at too hot a temperature to be disposed of in this manner. Recycle your household papers instead.

Use a fireplace screen.

When you clean your stove/fireplace and remove excess ashes, put them in a metal container with a lid and keep them away from anything that may burn including your deck or house.

Please don't store them in

your garage. These ashes can smolder for hours and possibly days after they may appear to be out.

And in addition to the danger of an unintentional fire, they can emit deadly fumes.

Keep the area around your stove/fireplace and chimney clean and free of debris, and trim overhanging branches near the chimney.

Keep furnishings, clothing, papers, and anything that can burn at least four feet away from the stove/fireplace.

Now relax, have a cup of hot chocolate and enjoy your woodstove or fireplace. Stay safe and warm this winter season.

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