

Giant step toward prosperity

Tribes, state agree on gaming at the Columbia

By Dave McMechan
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CASCADE LOCKS – The Confederated Tribes last week signed an agreement with the state that quite possibly could lead to the most important economic development program in the tribes' history.

The agreement, or gaming compact, provides the necessary state approval for development of a tribal casino at Cascade Locks on the Columbia River.

The approval process now moves to the federal level. State approval is vital, and very influential during the federal process. So in reaching agreement with the governor last week, the tribes had much to celebrate.

Gathering at the river

It is always an interesting experience being at the Columbia River with people of the Confederated Tribes. Last week the experience was more interesting, and historic than usual.

In many ways tribal members seem at home on the Columbia, even more so than on the reservation. There are landmarks along the river that for non-Indians may be historic and interesting. But for Indians these same landmarks are family traditions. Old fishing sites along the bank, where the people caught salmon from scaffolds, are those of family members from years past. In some instances these sites are still used by their descendants.

So moving the tribal gaming enterprise from the reservation to the Columbia is not really a return to the river, because the tribes have always been there.

Instead, a casino at the Columbia is



Tribal Council Chairman Ron Suppah signs agreements on behalf of the tribes.

Dave McMechan/Spilyay

a return of the tribal economy to the river, where it had been since time immemorial, until the tribes were removed to the reservation.

The coincidental timing of the Cascade Locks casino compact is interesting to think about: In the year of the 150th anniversary of the Treaty of

1855, the tribes have signed another agreement, one that should lead to the first major tribal presence at the Columbia since the creation of the reser-

vation, and especially since the flooding of the mighty Celilo Falls.

The hardship of the people who went before can never be amended. But the present generation, relying on sovereignty and the traditional lands of the tribes, can try its best to provide for the generations to come. It is a lofty sentiment, one that last week took a large step closer to reality.

"The signing of this compact is a great and historic moment for the Confederated Tribes," said Warren Rudy Clements, chairman of the tribes' gaming expansion commission. The negotiation process toward the compact "has been an exercise of our tribal sovereignty," he said.

The process has taken years, he said, and the tribal membership is to be commended for their patience. The agreement is the culmination of negotiations that began between the tribes and the state as early as 1997 and grew more involved over the past couple of years, especially since Gov. Ted Kulongoski took office in 2002.

Along the way, said Clements, "We've kept the Tribal Council updated continually but, because of the sensitivity of the negotiations, some information could not be released to the general public. The membership has been patient. I'm very proud of our community, and proud of the Tribal Council in moving forward with the negotiations."

The next step in the process is at the federal level, to the Secretary of the Interior.

"We've crossed one major hurdle," said Clements. "But we're not out of the woods yet."

As stated by Tribal Council Chairman Ron Suppah, the recent compact with the state of Oregon is "one step in many. We still have a long way to go."

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Tribal members gather for signing

The scene of the signing of the tribal-state gaming compact was the Marine Pavilion at the Port of Cascade Locks. On hand for the event were the Tribal Council, the gaming commissioners, the secretary-treasurer and the chief operations officer, and many other tribal members. A bus carrying elders arrived from Warm Springs, while some came by car.

The governor was also on hand, as were other state officials, along with the Cascade Locks City Council and mayor and former mayor, the board of the Port of Cascade Locks, and a commissioner of Hood River County.

The people of Cascade Locks, population 1,000, seemed by and large to be genuinely happy about the tribes' plans, and were welcoming. A large sign – welcoming the governor and the Confederated Tribes – hung at the back of the pavilion. The Cascade Locks High School pep band opened the morning's activities with a song.

Hood River County Commissioner Carol York, a key advocate of the Cascade Locks casino proposal, was the co-master of ceremonies, along with tribal gaming representative Warren Rudy Clements.

Representing the tribes in the signing of the gaming compact with Gov. Ted Kulongoski was Tribal Council Chairman Ron Suppah. Suppah said he was glad to see that former Council chairmen Garland Brunoe and Olney Patt Jr. had made it to the ceremony. Brunoe and Patt, he said, had worked for years during their tenure on Council toward the new gaming compact.



Among those in attendance at the signing ceremony were Ken Smith, former secretary-treasurer of the tribes, who is still consulted regarding gaming expansion; Olney Patt Jr., former Council chairman now working at the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission; and Warm Springs Chief Delvis Heath, among many others.

Toward the start of the signing ceremony, Wasco Chief Nelson Wallutatam gave an opening blessing and prayer. Former Oregon governor Vic Atiyeh was present for the signing. Atiyeh has been a long-time supporter of the tribes in their pursuit of economic development.

Before the signing, Gov. Kulongoski said the compact represents the best effort on everyone's part to meet the economic needs of the tribes, as well

as the interests of the state of Oregon, and the people of Hood River County.

Oregon students will benefit, he said, because a percentage of revenue from the casino will go toward helping students achieve higher education. A share of the revenue also will go toward protection of the Columbia Gorge environment. "The way I see it," he said, "Cascade Locks will benefit, Oregon will benefit, and the tribes will benefit."

More on the signing ceremony on 8 and 9

Compact contains unique revenue sharing provisions

The state-tribal compact for gaming at Cascade Locks includes provisions that are unique among Indian gaming compacts. The revenue sharing provision is in particular unique.

Through this provision, the tribes agree to share with the state a portion of its revenues from the Cascade Locks facility.

Revenue sharing is based on a percentage of the "net win" from Class III gaming, to be paid to the state on an annual basis.

During the first seven years of operation of the new casino, the percentage shared with the state varies, from 6 to 17 percent. The lower percent in the early years of operation gives the tribes a better position from which to negotiate with financing companies, and allows the tribes to pay off the construction loan sooner.

After the seventh year of operation, the percentage shared with the state will be 17 percent of the net win. It is projected in the first 10 years of casino operation, the state will receive \$270 million in shared revenue. The following is the executive summary of key provisions of Cascade Locks Class III Gaming Compact.

Financial benefits to tribe

During the first 10 years of operation, the Cascade Locks casino is

expected to generate cash flow to the tribes of approximately \$580 million after payment of construction loans of approximately \$300 million.

After the loans have been paid off, beginning in year eight, the cash flow to the tribes increases significantly.

For example, projections show that in year eight the Casino is expected to generate \$123 million for the tribes.

Non-financial benefits to tribes

Four-hundred temporary jobs will be created during the construction phase.

A tribal member preference applies to hiring of construction workers, eligibility for construction union apprenticeship programs, and for hiring of subcontractors.

There will also be 1,300 permanent jobs when the casino and resort open. Tribal member preference applies in employment at the casino and resort. If a union is established at the resort, tribal members are not required to join or to pay dues.

Recitals

Extensive recitals at the beginning of the compact provide the justification for the tribes and state agreeing on a compact for off-reservation gaming at Cascade Locks, and for revenue sharing.

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