

## Tribe given preliminary recognition

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Mashpee Wampanoag tribe, whose ancestors greeted the Pilgrims at the Atlantic shore, was given preliminary approval last week of the federal recognition it had been seeking for three decades.

"It's a tremendous day for the Mashpee," Glenn Marshall, chairman of the tribe's council, said. "It's the most compelling story anybody has heard ... The culture is alive in our young kids and our elders."

The Massachusetts tribe is expected to receive a final determination by March 31, 2007. Such a designation would make it the 564th recognized tribe in the nation, the tribe said.

The ruling caps a sometimes bitter struggle for the 1,468-member Cape Cod tribe that stretches back to 1975.

Pete Fermino, a tribal elder, said he felt "real joy, and yet sorrow," since the news came too late for many. "The meaning is for so many who have passed," he said in Mashpee, Mass.

In hopes of speeding up its quest for federal recognition, the Mashpee Wampanoag tribe sued the U.S. Department of Interior in 2001. The government agreed to give its preliminary ruling by the end of March 2006.

The tribe met all seven of the U.S. Department of Interior's Office of Federal Acknowledgment's criteria for recognition, including proving it has maintained a political and cultural identity throughout its history.

"The evidence demonstrates that the current group and its ancestors maintained a community distinct from that

of other populations near the town of Mashpee, Mass., since the 1600s," the government's statement announcing the ruling said.

A 210-day public comment period will begin once the government's preliminary ruling is printed in the Federal Register next week, according to Scott Ferson, a tribal spokesman. The government would have to discover major problems in the tribe's petition to overturn its preliminary decision, he said.

Considerable power comes with federal recognition, which would make the tribe a sovereign entity within a town that would share its name but have little authority over it.

The Wampanoag have acknowledged an interest in casino gambling and acquiring undeveloped land, a reminder of their failed and divisive 1970s land claim that had residents worried the tribe would seize private homes.

But tribal leaders speak of federal recognition primarily as a way to gain needed government health, education and housing benefits and preserve their distinct place in history.

A separate group, the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head-Aquinnah on Martha's Vineyard, has been the only federally recognized Massachusetts tribe.

The town of Mashpee's name is derived from an aboriginal word meaning "Land of the Great Cove." The Wampanoag once claimed all its 27 square miles of woodland and freshwater ponds, and those who remain still hunt and fish on its undeveloped areas.

The Mashpee tribe's early history, during which it was part of the broader Wampanoag Nation, included conflict with the encroaching colonists, such as the bloody war led by Wampanoag warrior King Philip after the English murdered his brother. But there was also an openness toward the settlers.

The year after the Pilgrims landed, in 1620, King Philip's father Massasoit struck a treaty with the Plymouth colonists and the tribe hosted the first Thanksgiving.

The Wampanoag adopted the English style of dress, and in the 1660s the first Wampanoag Christian Bible was printed. In 1683, the tribe built the Old Indian Meeting House in Mashpee, the oldest Indian church in the country. By the mid 18th century, the English and Wampanoag were jointly running Mashpee, and non-Indians couldn't buy land without the tribe's consent.

The land sale restriction was removed by the 1870s, when Mashpee became a town. But Mashpee's population was primarily Wampanoag until the 1960s and the tribe was in firm political control of town boards.

Since then, however, residential development has transformed the town and pushed the Wampanoag to the political margins. The land suit the Mashpee Wampanoag filed in 1976 opened a rift that hasn't fully healed.

The suit targeted hundreds of local land owners, claiming that land in Mashpee and three neighboring towns was illegally taken from the tribe.

## Tribe amends lawsuit seeking sovereignty in Isabella County

MOUNT PLEASANT, Mich. (AP) — The Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe has revised a lawsuit against the state that sought sovereignty over about 200 square miles of central Michigan's Isabella County, based on treaties from 1855 and 1864.

The tribe had asked a federal judge to declare that all or part of seven Isabella County townships are Indian country as defined by federal law. The attorney general's office had said that if the tribe's suit was successful, thousands of Michigan residents would find themselves living in a sovereign Indian nation.

But in a new filing in U.S. District Court in Bay City, the tribe now asks for an injunction to prevent the governor, attorney general and state treasurer from exerting criminal or civil jurisdiction over the tribe or its members "in a manner not allowed in Indian country."

In the state's answer to the revised suit, Assistant Attorney General Todd B. Adams dropped his claim that the tribe is trying to exert authority over people who aren't tribal members but live in, work in or travel through the territory claimed by the tribe.

The tribe filed its amended complaint March 21, and the state filed its answer three days later. The original suit filed in November claimed that treaties with the U.S. government gave the tribe sovereignty over the part of Isabella County that made up the "historic Isabella Reservation," which it said includes Deerfield, Denver, Isabella, Nottawa and Wise townships, as well as half of Chippewa and Union townships.

## Indian policy conference set

VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — A conference on national Indian policy has been scheduled for the University of South Dakota campus April 18-21.

National American Indian leaders and scholars plan to present papers and participate in panel presentations.

The symposium's title is "From Termination to Sovereignty: A 50-Year Retrospective Symposium on National Indian Policy."

"It is hard to appreciate what In-

dian Country has struggled through to get to the present stage where tribes are confident of their sovereignty, have developed a solid corps of Indian legal resources, and have gained in political sophistication to defend their governmental rights and trust protection guaranteed them by treaties," said Mark Daniels, director of USD's Department of American Indian Studies.

## Regulators okay casino management

NEW BUFFALO TOWNSHIP, Mich. (AP) — The National Indian Gaming Commission has approved an agreement between Lakes Entertainment Inc. and the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians for Lakes Entertainment to develop and manage the tribe's Four Winds Casino Resort project.

The Minneapolis-based company, which has development and management agreements with five American Indian tribes in Michigan, California and Oklahoma involving eight separate casino sites, made the announcement Monday.

The Pokagon Band earlier said it expected construction on the \$160 million resort to begin in June and take 14 months to complete.

The casino and hotel will stand on a 675-acre site in Berrien County's New Buffalo Township, in far southwestern Michigan near the Indiana border.

The commission is the U.S. regulatory agency that oversees Indian gaming.



Sequoia Poafpybitty digs roots during the recent outing with the Oregon State University 4-H program.

## Florida officials agree to buy and preserve site of Indian battle

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — State officials announced plans to spend \$3.2 million to buy and preserve the battlefield where Seminole and Miccosukee Indians and escaped slaves fought hand-to-hand with the U.S. Army in 1837.

The 145 acres where the Battle of Lake Okeechobee took place on Christmas Day will be turned into a state park, with living history events, such as re-enactments of the battle.

Preservationists have been afraid rapid growth in the city of Okeechobee would turn the site into a subdivision or shopping area. It is wedged between a commercial area and a 300-home development.

Gov. Jeb Bush and the Florida

Cabinet unanimously approved the purchase of the site from the Rowland Foundation, created to benefit orphanages and religious organizations.

W.S. Steele, historic preservation officer for the Seminole Tribe of Florida, which has a reservation nearby, said he has been fighting to protect the site for 21 years.

"It was the terminating and decisive battle of a 200-year conflict that began in the 1680s and did not really end until 1858," Steele told the Cabinet. "The significance of this battlefield cannot be overstated."

The battle was part of a government effort to remove Indians from Florida, which was then just a U.S. territory.

About 1,100 soldiers and militia troops led by Col. Zachary Taylor fought with around 400 Indians and

escaped slaves.

The Army suffered heavier casualties, 26 dead and 112 wounded versus 11 dead and 14 wounded on the Indian side, according to historians. But the battle was declared a victory in Washington because the Indians were driven from the battlefield. Taylor won a promotion and fame that helped catapult him to the presidency in 1848.

The Seminoles and their allies, however, avoided capture and removal from Florida, found sanctuary in the Everglades and never surrendered.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation joined the effort in 2000 by listing the battlefield as one of the country's 11 most endangered historic sites.

## Narragansett Indians oust Champlain family from tribe

SOUTH KINGSTOWN, R.I. (AP) — The Narragansett Indian tribe has ousted the family of a former tribal council member for failing to produce documents that prove their ancestry. Narragansett Chief Sachem Matthew Thomas told the Providence Journal that the Champlain family did not meet their 120-day deadline for producing the records.

The Champlains were told in early December that certain documents — their birth, death and marriage certificates linking them to the 1880 tribal roll — were missing. The family asserts their tribal ties became an issue just weeks after one of their members, Yvette Champlain, raised questions about how the tribe had spent \$1 million it obtained from Harrah's Entertainment.

Harrah's wants to build a casino in West Warwick with the Narragansetts. Yvette Champlain was on the tribal council at that time. "For the best interest of the people, I questioned, I asked for accountability," she said. "If the Narragansett tribal members do not stand up, are they going to let this happen?"

Thomas said the timing of Yvette's inquiry and her family's membership review is coincidental. The Champlains have used land deeds, wills and names in the Bible to justify their ancestry. Yvette and others have argued that using birth, death and marriage certificates to tie their lineage to the 1880 roll is almost impossible because Indian mothers often did not give birth in hospitals or keep typical records. They doubt that other tribe members, including Thomas, can produce such records.

Thomas said all members had the required certificates.