

Tribal sovereignty and The Bridge of the Gods

By Floyd Calica
Bridge of the Gods project team

The aboriginal people of Oregon, Washington and Idaho have lived along the Columbia River since the beginning of time. We have used the river for transportation, trade, recreation and finally fishing. Today the lands along the river remain an integral part of the daily life for the members of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon.

In My View

If you take a careful slow look at the river, you will see the many scaffolds (used for dip net fishing) along both sides of the Columbia River and the Longhouse at Celilo Village.

Oral history has taught our people our tribes occupied the Columbia Plateau territory since time immemorial, and our inherent sovereignty predates the Treaty of 1855. In the treaty, the tribes ceded more than 10 million acres to the government, but retained a 600,000 plus acre reservation now called Warm Springs. Our tribe also retained the rights to fish, hunt and gather in our usual and accustomed areas and ceded land to provide sustenance to our people. The ceded area includes territory and land along the Columbia River. This includes the City of Cascade Locks, which was originally a Wasco fishing village.

It is our tribe's inherent sovereign right to determine our own destiny and we must take advantage of business opportunities to take care of our members. We have occupied this area thousands of years prior to Lewis and Clark and arrival of European settlers. In fact, the United States Indian Claims Commission Docket No. 198 clearly outlines the Cascade Locks area as aboriginal land of Warm Springs, exclusive of claims of any other tribe.

In looking at the current depleting economic condition of the federal and tribal governments, we are compelled to explore other revenue opportunities. This includes our tribes' proposal to build a casino at Cascade Locks.

There seems to be much discussion and confusion about our proposal to build at Cascade Locks. To understand, it would be logical to have a sense of history of the tribe and sequence of events that led to Cascade Locks.

In 1995 the tribe's general membership overwhelmingly voted to enter into gaming (a casino) as a revenue source for the tribe. We started conservatively at our Kah-Nee-Ta Resort. Currently, the casino at Kah-Nee-Ta produces net income of about \$3 to \$3.5 million per year, as opposed to casino at Cascade Locks, which would eventually produce a signifi-

cantly larger net income to meet yearly annual tribal needs such as jobs, housing, public safety and education.

The projected revenue will make up the revenue our tribe earned through timber sales, which have dramatically declined within the last five years.

Considering the distinct contrasting difference, it makes logical sense to build at Cascade Locks. This location would produce adequate revenue for our tribe's needs for years to come. This location would also make more sense on the investment and the amount of return the tribe would receive. This is common business sense - ask any business owners.

In 2002 the tribe's general membership again overwhelmingly voted to pursue gaming (a casino) in the Columbia River Gorge, rather than on a reservation site. Studies have indicated that no site on the reservation can produce needed revenue to sustain the tribe's governmental operations and economy. On the other hand, the Cascade Locks site for a casino would produce the needed revenue to allow the tribe to survive. Since that time, we have been diligently making progress towards that goal along with a consistent, respectful dialogue with the State of Oregon and surrounding county and city entities and communities around Cascade Locks.

Additionally our tribe has the support of Gov. Ted Kulongoski, the Confederated Tribes of Siletz, the Coquille Tribe, the Nez Perce Tribe, Hood River County and City of Hood River and of Cascade Locks. In addition, numerous state and federal legislators have supported the project, such as State Rep. Patti Smith, state Sen. Rick Metzger and U.S. Congressman Greg Walden.

Our tribe made sincere and diligent efforts to negotiate with the State of Oregon a gaming compact in accordance to the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act. Rather than exercising our ability to build and establish a casino on gaming-eligible land in Hood River, the tribe, state and local governments collectively worked together for a mutually benefiting location at Cascade Locks - a site within the city limits and excluded from the Gorge Scenic Area.

As such, we submitted an application to the Department of Interior Bureau of Indian Affairs to take the Cascade Locks land into trust for the purposes of gaming.

The signing of the compact agreement on April 6, 2005 was a testimony of respect for tribal sovereignty and pursuit of economic development. This event was a victory and win-win situ-

ation to everyone. The compact was for the Cascade Locks site, a more favorable location than Hood River, and one that has the overwhelming support of the state and local surrounding communities and residences.

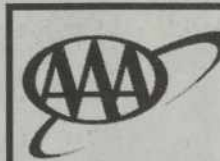
As the federal approval process moves forward, our tribe remains optimistic about our endeavor at Cascade Locks. We have been following the process set forth under the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA) Section 20. We have the overwhelming support of our tribal membership, Gov. Kulongoski, Hood River and Cascade Locks governments, and various surrounding tribes. We have decided to pursue Cascade Locks as opposed to the legal right and ability to build a casino on trust land at Hood River. We wish to continue to be good neighbors to the surrounding community and strive for working relationships with such.

I encourage anyone who has questions, concerns or comments to visit the following websites: www.gorgecasino.eis, www.turninglivesaround.com and www.kahneeta.com/cascadelockscasino/pressroom.htm.

Each of these websites contains contact information to reach federal, state and tribal officials working on the casino project. There also is information about the gaming compact signed last year.

It is our inherent right and sovereign authority to continue to occupy and enhance our aboriginal territory. Let's put this project and tribal sovereignty into perspective, Cascade Locks is our ancestral land and our people simply wish to continue to occupy and live along our home - the Columbia River.

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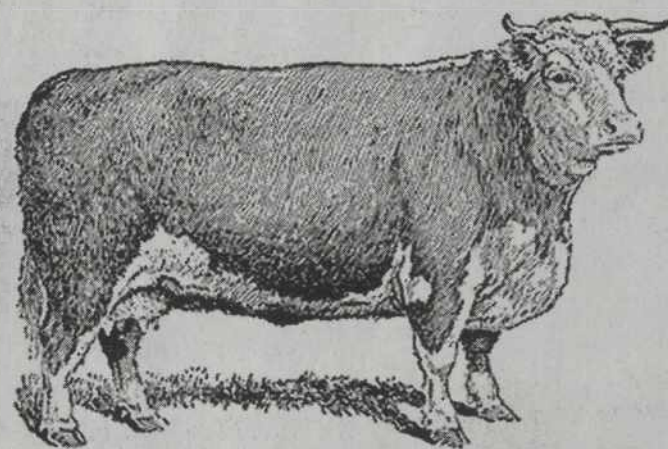
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