

Fire chief says Spirit Mountain Casino is too big for department

(AP) — The fire chief whose department is responsible for protecting the Spirit Mountain Casino says his mostly volunteer crew is ill-equipped to protect a five-story casino-motel complex.

Chuck Eddings said the West Valley Fire District lacks a ladder that can reach above two floors, and the closest trucks that have them are more than 30 minutes away.

"I personally wouldn't stay on the upper floors," Eddings said.

The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, which operates the casino, maintains that Spirit Mountain is safe. A consultant the tribes hired praised the casino's design and fire safety programs. "We are absolutely confident, as outside studies

have shown, that we are providing a safe environment," said tribal spokeswoman Siobhan Taylor.

State fire officials say the casino, Oregon's busiest tourist attraction with 3 million visitors a year, is designed for maximum fire safety.

But they also side with Eddings, saying mechanical systems can fail and casino employees have been reluctant to order evacuations during alarms.

"The (Spirit Mountain) building is built as good as you're going to get," said Stacy Warner, assistant chief deputy state fire marshal. "But that building also holds a whole lot of people."

As sovereign nations, the tribes are exempt from property taxes that would normally cover fire service. Among the nine

"The fire district cannot provide adequate fire protection to prevent an incident that may incur catastrophic loss of life."

Chuck Eddings, fire chief

Oregon tribes with gaming operations, the Grand Ronde is alone in not regularly supporting local fire service. The others either pay local departments or run their own fire agencies.

Eddings' concern about his department's ability to fight a fire at Spirit Mountain surfaced several years ago. In a March 4, 2004, letter to the Grand Ronde tribal council, he wrote: "The

fire district cannot provide adequate fire protection to prevent an incident that may incur catastrophic loss of life."

Eddings' letter didn't find its way to the tribal executive responsible for the casino until nine months later. Lynn Hillman, a former Oregon State Police commander who is now executive director of the Grand Ronde Gaming Commission, retained HYT Corp., a California engineering firm, to assess fire risk at Spirit Mountain.

The June 2005 report praised the tribe for an exemplary building and a strong safety program. Still, the firm issued three pages worth of recommendations deemed "necessary," such as quickening the replacement of fire sprinkler heads that had been recalled.

Cascade Locks says tribes planning well for fire protection

Fire safety is an issue that the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs are taking seriously with the Bridge of the Gods casino at Cascade Locks.

"The tribes are being very safety conscious," said Jeff Pricher, Cascade Locks fire chief and fire marshal.

The tribes have negotiated a memorandum of agreement with the Cascade Locks Fire Department, and are working on a municipal services agreement, which will cover the variety of municipal services that the casino will require.

The Cascade Locks Fire Department would need more equipment and man-

power to provide fire protection service to the casino, said Pricher.

To accommodate this need, the tribes would provide funding to cover fire-safety costs associated with the casino. Such agreements are common: Among the nine Oregon tribes with gaming operations, only the Grand Ronde does not regularly support local fire service, according to the AP (article at left).

Details of an agreement between the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs and Cascade Locks are not yet available, as the agreement is being negotiated.

Scientists hope mussel research will yield salmon answers

(AP) — Most people know that tree rings tell stories about the age of the tree, the history of rainfall, or drought in an area.

But growth increments on Pacific Northwest river mussels, some of which are as old as 50 years, can also tell the tales of the water quality of the streams and creeks where they live.

"There is a ton of information in here," researcher Jason Dunham said about the mussel shells. "It is basically a stream of data. We just have to figure out what it is telling us."

Scientists are hoping to unlock a decades-long, accurate record of the health of aquatic areas.

Consistent information about temperature, for example, is only known for about a handful of sites in Oregon and only for as long as 20 years.

Researchers are hoping that freshwater mussels can fill in the

gaps, providing historical data from periods before any water sampling was done.

Dunham, a scientist with the U.S. Geological Survey in Corvallis, has collected about 450 mussels from streams across Oregon, including the Willamette Valley, and into central Idaho.

Researcher Bryan Black now is examining cross-sections of those mussel shells at Oregon State University's Hatfield Marine Science Center in Newport.

"Tree rings are one of the leading indicators for global change and climate history," Black said.

"We are hoping that clams and mussels and long-lived fish will give us comparable records for aquatic systems."

The first step for scientists is to ensure that the growth increments on shells directly relates to the temperature data in

streams. After that, they can use the shells to determine the water temperature for areas and time periods where that information wasn't collected.

A historical look at Oregon's streams could also help scientists understand more about salmon. Freshwater mussel populations would not survive long without salmon, which nourish mussel larvae for several weeks.

For Ray Kinney, the decline of mussels along Deadwood Creek, which feeds into the Siuslaw River, is directly related to fewer salmon and other marine species returning to the area.

Kinney, a director for the local soil and water conservation district, guesses that mussels are suffering because fewer salmon and maybe even lamprey are bringing marine nutrients, especially calcium, back to the

creek.

He now is documenting the rate at which they are dying in Deadwood Creek and comparing that to healthy populations in Steamboat Creek on the North Umpqua River.

"There used to be tons and tons of salmon here," Kinney said.

"Marine-derived nutrients like calcium was brought up with the salmon. But now with the salmon decline, that is not happening."

Important meeting for Johnson-O'Malley

Those interested in the Johnson O'Malley education program are invited to a meeting at noon on Tuesday, Jan. 9 in the Education Training Room on the second floor of the Education Building.

The meeting will be to organize and formalize the

Johnson O'Malley committee, and to elect committee officers.

For more information contact JoAnn Smith, Tribal Education Committee member, at 480-8016; or Muriel Suppah, Education Committee secretary, at Tribal Council, 553-3257.

The Second Annual Northwest Indian Storytelling Festival will be Thursday through Saturday evenings, January 4-6. The festival will be followed by the Northwest Indian Storytelling apprenticeship workshop and tellers gathering Jan. 6-7 at Portland State University in downtown Portland. The festival will celebrate tribal storytelling season in the Pacific Northwest, featuring some of the region's finest

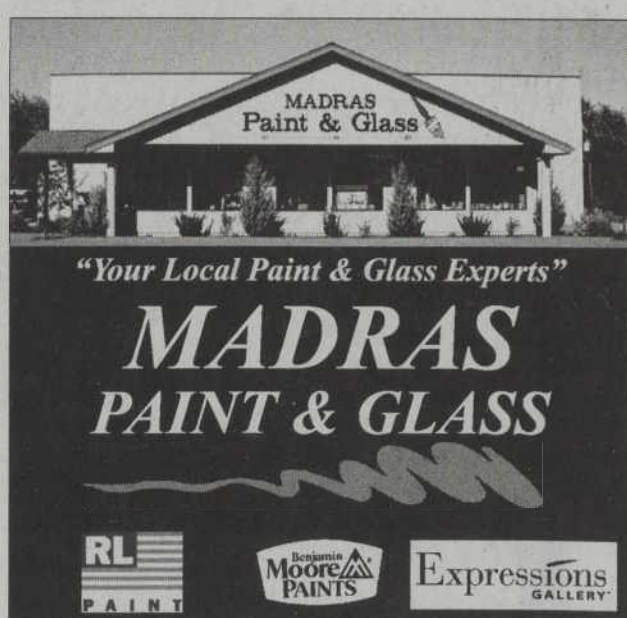
traditional and contemporary tribal storytellers, along with tribal drumming, singing and dancing. Those interested in the tribal storytellers events must register in advance, as seating is limited to 150. Registration paperwork is available through NISA. Festival tickets must be reserved at PSU Box Office (503) 725-3307, or contact Ticketmaster at www.ticketmaster.com. (key word: storytellers festival).

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