

Nevada tribal members try to preserve Hungry Valley

SPARKS, Nev. (AP)—When they look out over the barren land of Hungry Valley just northwest of Sparks, Scott Nebesky and Arlan Melendez see a dusty plain ridden with trails, gun shell casings and signs that have been knocked down and ignored.

On the other hand, they see an opportunity to help preserve a piece of northern Nevada's American Indian heritage.

"We've been environmentalists ourselves," said Melendez, tribal chairman of the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony. "We're really concerned about plant and animal life and the trees. ... We know through our ancestors it is the crossing of Indian tribes. There were many tribes crossing that area that went out to California and Susanville and Tahoe."

The colony's Hungry Valley land is about 1 mile wide by 3 miles long with about 400 residents. The parcel hosts a small subdivision of 150 homes, along with a gym, community center and Head Start program for children.

In 2002, it was the site of a battle over the Oil-Dri Corp.'s desire to mine clay from two open pits and process it into cat litter—a battle the Chicago-

based company lost when the tribe and others persuaded the Washoe County Commission to deny a special-use permit for the project.

Protecting and preserving the land in Hungry Valley is important for protecting his people's culture, Melendez said. Misusing the land could lead to destruction of artifacts such as tribal petroglyphs or undiscovered objects like arrowheads.

The Reno-Sparks Indian Colony is immediately interested in maintaining the sustainability of the land—specifically the land's ability to absorb water into aquifers.

However, with every dirt trail that off-highway vehicle riders use or create, dirt is displaced and fine clay is compacted, causing erosion and degenerating the earth's ability to absorb much-needed water.

"This place is absolutely inundated with trails," said Nebesky, colony planning director. He referred to a map that shows Hungry Valley's proximity to Sparks, Reno, Golden Valley, Sun Valley and Antelope Valley.

"We want to manage the basin for its natural resources: the water," he said, adding that water that can't seep into the

ground will evaporate.

The majority of trails follow the contours of the area, but some travel straight up hills, contributing to erosion.

Hungry Valley has attracted attention from various groups who want to keep it available for recreation, such as the Friends of Hungry Valley, which consists of local citizens, some of whom ride dirt bikes and off-road vehicles.

The Reno-Sparks Indian Colony is not opposed to the use of these vehicles, but wants a closer eye kept on designated areas.

The Carson City office of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management has responsibility for Hungry Valley as part of 5.3 million acres overseen by one ranger and one law enforcement officer.

Mark Struble, spokesman for the BLM Carson City office, said monitoring off-road vehicle use was nearly impossible.

"It's frustrating to the tribe, we know," Struble said.

Nebesky emphasized the colony and Friends of Hungry Valley have a similar interest in taking better care of the area. The colony, in its desire to preserve the natural terrain of the land, only wants limits on where

off-highway vehicles are used.

"We're not out to eliminate OHV use on public lands," he said. "That's a recreational use that many people, including tribal members, participate in. But our homes are fixed to the ground. OHVs have wheels; they can move to other locations. Why not work out a situation where OHV use is limited?"

The Reno-Sparks Indian Colony represents Paiute, Shoshone and Washoe tribe members with a formal government formed in 1935. The colony's downtown Reno property includes a smoke shop and other colony buildings on property the colony has owned since 1917.

Nebesky said Washoe County identified Hungry Valley in an area for potential development over the next 20 years.

Melendez said decisions on such growth should not be made without tribal council input.

"We have a real concern with any type of planning," he said. "We are trying to make sure that we protect what's really near us."

Melendez said the space in Reno was not sufficient to serve the American Indian population in Reno and Sparks, which is the reason the colony acquired the Hungry Valley property.

Many facing homelessness on reservations

DULUTH, Minn. (AP)—Homelessness is prevalent on American Indian reservations in northern Minnesota, but that doesn't mean you'll find people living under bridges or in shelters, according to researchers with the Wilder Foundation.

Using a broader definition of homelessness, researchers found that more than 1,200 people on northern Minnesota's reservations are homeless or doubled up in the homes of friends or family members.

The study, released last week, showed that many people didn't meet the federal definition of homeless but were living in overcrowded homes with multiple families.

"Even though people might be staying for a long period of time in that status, it isn't necessarily a stable way to live because they are bouncing back and forth among so many different settings," said Ellen Shelton, a researcher who analyzed data for the study.

Researchers conducted 674 interviews in fall 2006, focusing on the Red Lake, Leech Lake, White Earth, Mille Lacs, Bois Forte and Fond du Lac reservations. Only Red Lake has a homeless shelter.

Lester Drift, a mental health supervisor for the Bois Forte Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, said it's not hard to find homeless people in Nett Lake when using Wilder researchers' definition of homelessness.

"You could see it if you ride around the village here;

see how many cars are parked in one driveway," said Drift, who grew up on the reservation and remembers seeing multiple families living in one home. "I just thought of it as relatives taking care of relatives."

The study also showed that 98 percent of people doubled or tripled up with extended family would prefer to have their own housing.

Almost half of those considered homeless or near homeless by the researchers are children, and less than a third of the adults in those categories were employed, according to the study.

Drift said 42 families are on the Bois Forte housing waiting list out of about 600 members on the reservation. At Fond du Lac, about 250 families are on a similar waiting list out of 1,800 members on the reservation, chairwoman Karen Diver said.

The Fond du Lac reservation hopes to build 24 units of multifamily housing and has applied for 30 Federal Emergency Management Agency trailers left over from Hurricane Katrina. Officials are waiting to see if the trailers can withstand Minnesota winters.

But Diver said providing housing is only a first step in reducing the number of homeless.

"Just providing them a house isn't going to solve the problem," Diver said. "It's the stability and maintenance of being able to stay in housing that becomes the long-term key."

Indian artifacts found at Camp Shelby

HATTIESBURG, Miss. (AP)—Long before tanks rumbled along dusty roads and field artillery zeroed in on distant targets in the vast piney woods of Mississippi's Camp Shelby military training site, the bow and arrow was the weapon of choice for the area's ancient inhabitants.

Native American tribes, probably the ancestors of today's Mississippi Band of Choctaws, hunted the forests and fished the creeks within the 136,000 acres that now encompass the nation's largest reserve component training site about 12 miles south of Hattiesburg.

Carved out of the De Soto National Forest in portions of Perry and Forrest counties and activated as a World War I training camp in 1917, the site was named in honor of Issac Shelby—Indian fighter, Revolutionary War hero and the first governor of Kentucky. An estimated 100,000 military personnel train annually at the site today.

Archaeological excavations now under way at sites north of Shelby's modern-day cantonment area, however, have unearthed arrow heads, shards,

stone tools, baked clay cooking pits, sandstone clusters, and other artifacts and organic deposits that provide evidence of Native American activity there many centuries ago.

"We think some of the roasting pits with burned clay are pre-ceramic, before the invention of pottery, dating the sites to somewhere between 2000 to 1500 years B.C.," said Rita Fields, cultural resource manager for the Mississippi Military Department.

Responsible for the identification and protection of historic structures and archaeological sites on Mississippi National Guard property around the state, Fields discovered four Camp Shelby sites during timber-clearing operations following Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Loggers were shooed away from the historic sites, located along a creek that snakes through the area.

Fields, a Collins native and 2001 graduate of the master's degree program in anthropology at the University of Southern Mississippi, called upon her former mentor in the university's anthropology and

sociology department, Ed Jackson, for help in investigating the Camp Shelby sites. Jackson quickly responded.

Under a student internship program and partnership agreement with Camp Shelby, Jackson organized a team of USM anthropology students to handle the field excavations and provide laboratory analysis of the findings. Jackson and Fields co-direct the ongoing work.

"My students are getting valuable field experience, as well as a paycheck," said Jackson.

One of the students, Nikki Leist of Bolton, said, "It's one of the great learning experiences we get studying under Dr. Jackson, and I love playing in the dirt all day."

Jackson said "prehistoric features" were found during small-shovel digs at two of the sites in 2006, including some arrow heads buried deep in the sandy soil. It wasn't until earlier this year, however, that Jackson and Fields utilized remote sensing, or "ground radar," at the other two sites to see if that technology could speed the hunt for evidence of past civilizations.

Bryan Haley of the Center

for Archaeological Research at the University of Mississippi conducted the remote sensing tests in September, producing maps that could better target spots for digging, which earlier this fall and is wrapping up this weekend.

"If remote sensing methods prove to be applicable to the prehistoric site settings such as those found at Camp Shelby," Jackson said, "the technology has the potential to provide an important new tool for evaluating site significance, augmenting presently employed standard archaeological survey and testing methods."

"What readings from the remote sensing survey might be revealing will not be known until they are 'ground-truthed' through archaeological excavation," he said.

Once archaeological materials are recovered, Jackson said they will be cleaned, appropriately labeled and analyzed at Sum's Prehistoric Archaeology Laboratory. Materials then will be conserved and curated according to procedures employed by the Mississippi Military Department.

Indians protest use of treated sewage on sacred peaks

PASADENA, Calif. (AP)—Chanting and beating drums, American Indians marched to a federal appeals court to oppose the use of treated sewage to make snow in Arizona mountains they hold sacred.

About 150 activists marched Tuesday to the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for a hearing in the case.

A three-judge panel of the court ruled in March that using the treated wastewater to allow expansion of the Arizona Snowbowl resort would violate the religious freedom of Navajos, Hopis and 11 other tribes who had sued to block the expansion.

However, the full appellate court decided to rehear the case. Snowbowl's owners and the federal government had urged the court to reconsider, arguing that the earlier ruling broke federal precedent and incorrectly applied provisions of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

The 777-acre resort rests on the western flank of the San Francisco Peaks north of Flagstaff. Resort owners also want to remove about 100 acres of forest and add a fifth lift to attract more skiers on manmade snow.

"The peaks are central to the practice of the Hopi religion," said protester Leigh

Kuwanwisiwma, director for the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office in Arizona. "The mountains and the kachina spirits ... represent the heart and soul of our community."

The U.S. Forest Service leases the land to the Arizona Snowbowl Resort. At the hearing, the 11-judge court was told the agency had the right to permit snowmaking on its own land.

Lane McFadden, an attorney representing the Forest Service, also said he considered the treated wastewater to be safe.

"I would let my kids play in that water," he said.

As for imposing on Indian

religious beliefs, McFadden said: "I believe their prayers will not be devastated."

But Howard Shanker, an attorney representing several tribes, said the government "will contaminate their religious freedom" if snowmaking is allowed. The appellate panel did not immediately rule in the case.

Arizona Snowbowl opened late in three of the last four years because of lack of snow, but is set to open Thursday, which would match its average opening date. The resort brings an estimated \$10 million annually to Flagstaff's economy.

Prenatal care improves for Oklahoma Indians

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP)—A new study has found improvements in prenatal care patterns among American Indian women in Oklahoma.

In 1994, Oklahoma State Department of Health officials reported a large disparity between American Indian and white pregnant women in terms of access to and usage of early prenatal care.

Now, a new study indicates those differences have been essentially eliminated for Oklahoma's American Indian maternal population, the health department said Wednesday.

"Finding ways to reduce health disparities can save lives and improve the overall health of Oklahoma's mothers and babies," Secretary of Health and Commis-

sioner of Health Dr. Mike Crutcher said. "The work done by tribal leaders in this area is commendable."

He said prenatal care identifies and treats risks that can lead to problems such as pre-term labor, low birth weight and infant or maternal mortality.

Crutcher said woman should have their first prenatal care visit within the first three months of pregnancy.

The new study found disparities still exist in other areas of pregnancy and infant health for Oklahoma's American Indian women.

These women were more likely to have their first baby before the age of 18 compared to white women (24.5 percent vs. 14.3 percent).

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