

Gaming restrictions could hurt tribes

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — A proposed new federal restriction on the types of slot machines tribes can offer at casinos could cost Oklahoma tribes millions of dollars each year, but would boost funding for the state's education system.

The National Indian Gaming Commission wants to create a greater distinction between Class II games based on bingo and Class III, or Las Vegas-style, slot machines.

The distinction is important because states can only collect a portion of tribes' profits from Class III games.

Indian gaming experts have said the vast majority of existing Class II machines would become illegal in 2013 if the new regulations, as proposed,

take effect.

Tribes have almost universally denounced the plan as an unfair imposition on their sovereignty.

Two Oklahoma congressmen seem to agree, according to their recent letters to the commission.

"I remain deeply concerned that there has not been sufficient consideration of the economic impacts of these proposed regulations," Rep. Dan Boren, D-Okla., wrote in a Dec. 20 letter. Boren joined Rep. Tom Cole, R-Okla., in a second letter asking that the comment period on the proposed changes be extended until June.

However, a letter signed by 10 other congressmen urges "prompt adoption" of the proposed rules.

Both Boren and Cole are on the House Natural Resources Committee, which oversees Indian gaming.

The 30,044 Class II machines in Oklahoma at the end of 2006 represented 59 percent of all such machines in the country, economist Alan Meister reported in a study prepared for the Indian gaming commission.

In 2004, Oklahoma voters approved compacts allowing tribes to offer modified Class III slot machines.

In return, tribes must pay the state 4 percent to 6 percent of the revenue.

That money goes to fund teacher pay raises and other education programs. Tribes paid the state \$54.5 million from Class III machine revenue in 2007,

according to the Office of State Finance.

Most state tribal casinos have incorporated Class III games, and a few have moved solely to compacted machines. However, Class II machines still comprise a large majority of the games available in Oklahoma, Meister reported.

Meister said the proposed Class II restrictions would force tribes to use only compacted machines by 2013.

If that happens, Oklahoma tribes would have to pay the state an estimated \$122.3 million a year in revenue-sharing costs, Meister reported.

Oklahoma's current tribal gaming compacts expire in 2020.

Bill allows Indians to start charter schools

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — Indian tribes could start charter schools in Oklahoma and Tulsa counties under a bill that won approval by a Senate committee.

The bill passed through committee Monday and now goes to the Senate floor for consideration.

State law currently allows only the state's largest school districts and public universities to establish charter schools.

Senate Co-President Pro Tem Glenn Coffee says expanding the number of groups that can set up charter schools will give parents more educational choices for their children.

Charter schools are public schools established by contract with sponsors. They are less regulated than other public schools and often promote a specific curriculum or learning method.

Archaeologist dig may have found Chumash home foundation

SANTA BARBARA, Calif. (AP) — Archaeologists digging in a garden at the Santa Barbara Mission may have unearthed the complete stone foundation of a Chumash house.

The dig is expected to be completed Wednesday under the watchful eyes of American Indian representatives.

The foundation of the home

is believed to be part of what's left of a Chumash village at the site, which is at the northeastern edge of an Indian pueblo at the mission.

Much of the village remains were destroyed over the years. In one instance, portions were graded to make way for a parking lot in the 1950s and 1960s.

Agents accuse smuggler of stealing N.M. artifacts

SANTA FE (AP) — A ceramic pot and a 1,000-year-old ladle looted from New Mexico's El Malpais National Monument are among the stolen artifacts identified in a five-year federal investigation into the smuggling of Asian and American Indian antiquities.

Dozens of federal agents raided a Los Angeles gallery and four museums in Southern California, including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, searching for artifacts taken from protected archaeological sites in Thailand, Myanmar, China and New Mexico.

"There's no question there is a problem," said Eric Blinman, head of the Museum of New Mexico's Office of Archaeological Studies. "There is so much public land, and there are so few enforcement officials in any of the federal agencies. People can get away with looting, at least for the short term."

Robert E. Olson, a 79-year-old dealer from Cerritos, Calif., was targeted in the latest raid, according to a search warrant. He allegedly told an undercover National Park Service agent in 2003 that he had removed archaeological resources from National Park Service and U.S. Bureau of Land Management lands, the search warrant for his home showed.

Olson allegedly said he had arranged for buyers to contribute some of these artifacts to museums to claim fraudulent tax deductions, the warrant showed.

Olson reportedly told the agent he had the largest collection of Native American ladles in the world — seven of which were from Chaco Culture National Historical Park in northwestern New Mexico, the warrant showed.

Olson also reportedly told the agent a museum owner who regularly looted Anasazi sites took him to El Malpais National Monument near Grants, where they found a ceramic storage jar,

the warrant said.

The next day, Olson reportedly said he returned to the site and noticed something white in a crack in the cliff, reached in and pulled out a ladle that was 1,200 years old, according to the warrant.

Removing archaeological resources from public lands without a permit is a violation of the 1979 Archaeological Resources Protection Act.

The United States is one of few countries in the world where antiquities can be privately owned, Blinman said.

"People have a finders-keepers attitude toward any neat stuff. Archaeological stuff qualifies," he said.

Phil Young, a former federal enforcement agent, said the location of "ruins" are marked on old U.S. Geological Survey maps.

"The word gets out as far as where archaeological resources and artifacts can be found. And it only takes one bad actor to destroy the contextual and scientific information for everyone

else," he said.

Tim Maxwell, an archaeologist who formerly headed the Museum of New Mexico's archaeology office, said, "people see Mimbres pots in art catalogs. They see the prices. That certainly gets people motivated economically."

Kayci Cook Collins, the superintendent at El Malpais, said the 115,000-acre monument has thousands of archaeological sites ranging from the archaic period to Spanish colonial contact.

The monument staff gets some help from volunteers with the state Historic Preservation Division's site watch program, but "it's hard to be everywhere at once," she said.

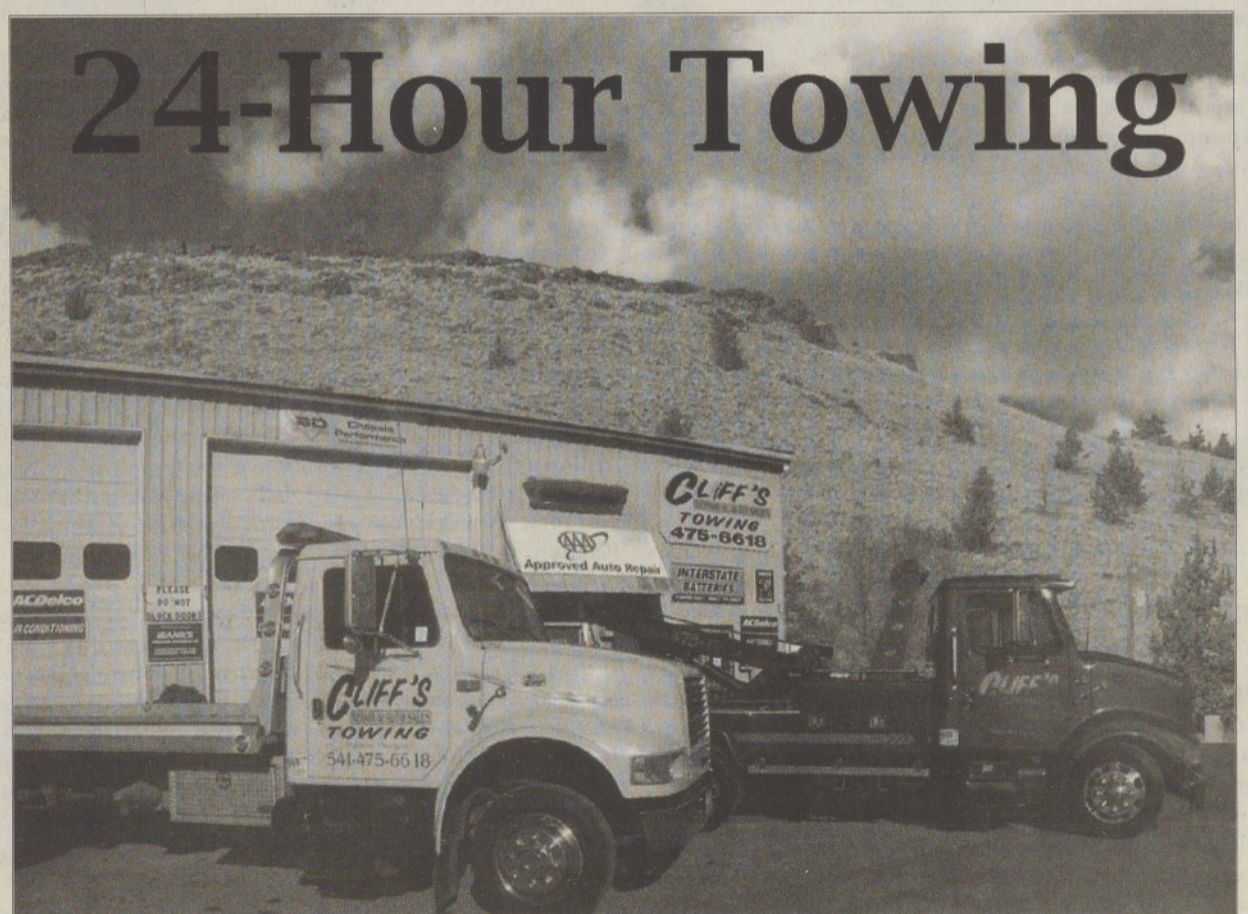
She said it's important to not remove antiquities from their context. "There's nothing wrong with being delighted at seeing a potsherd on the ground. But how much better it is to put it down so the next person will be delighted in the same way," she said.

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