

Little Shell Tribe Seeks Recognition

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — Members of the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians took their century-long campaign for recognition before Congress on Thursday, with what was called a last chance request for acknowledgement.

The landless tribe of about 4,300 people was recognized a decade ago by officials and other tribes in Montana, where most Little Shell live. But its petition for federal recognition was turned down by the Department of Interior in 2009 after a 31-year wait.

"For too long, we've been refugees in Montana, waiting for the United States to fulfill its promise," tribal president John Sinclair said during a Thursday legislative hearing before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs. "This is our last chance. Little Shell and Congress have been having this conversation for more than 100 years."

Members of the tribe said attempts to establish relations with the government began in the late 1800s.

In the 1930s, the government planned to buy 34,000 acres in part to settle Montana's Little Shell, known by some as the "landless Indians." The deal was never completed.

Legislation backed by

Montana's congressional delegation would mandate recognition and direct the Department of Interior to set aside 200 acres for the tribe. Recognition also would allow the Little Shell to receive assistance with housing and other needs.

Deputy Assistant Interior Secretary George Skibine told the Senate committee Thursday the agency would not object to the bill sponsored by Montana Sen. Jon Tester.

However, the committee's ranking Republican, Wyoming Sen. John Barrasso, said he would oppose the bill.

Barrasso questioned whether Congress should second-guess the Interior Department's decision in 2009.

Tester, a Democrat, countered that the administrative process isn't always perfect and said the agency's 2009 rejection had ignored the Little Shell's established presence in Montana.

"They've been part of Montana's history and culture for generations," Tester said. "Every political entity in the state of Montana, every tribe thinks this has to be the right thing to do."

The hearing was set against a backdrop of political discord among members of the tribe.

Two people are claiming to be

the tribe's rightful leader.

Sinclair rival John Gilbert was not invited to testify Thursday.

Both sides have accused the other of undermining the recognition bid. The tribe's lawyers have said the dispute has no bearing on federal recognition — and even underscores a commitment to civic participation by the tribe's scattered members.

The 2009 denial of recognition said the Little Shell had failed to show enough cohesion during the early 1900s, after many of its members had been uprooted and were wandering northern Montana and southern Canada.

Members of the group who ended up in Montana lived primarily in already existing, largely multiethnic settlements, the decision stated.

The Little Shell are candid about their mixed ancestry. Many also call themselves Metis, a Canadian people with European and Native-American roots.

Montana formally recognized the Little Shell in 2000, allowing its members to get grants for tobacco-use prevention and economic development.

The money was suspended two years ago because the tribe

was not properly accounting for it, stirring dissension among members who blamed Sinclair's poor oversight. That helped drive Gilbert's election in a campaign that was rejected by Sinclair and his allies as illegitimate.

"It's going to be an ongoing saga, where our tribe is just going to be constantly an embarrassment, but it's also not going to go away. We are committed to bringing democracy back to our tribal government and that's all we want," said former tribal president James Parker Shield, who backs Gilbert.

Gilbert has been pushing for an independent panel or Indian court to resolve the political split. Sinclair has said he agrees in principal to the idea, but it has been languishing for months.

Elected officials from Montana have steered clear of the tribe's internal struggle, saying it is up to the Little Shell to work it out.

Tester spokesman Aaron Murphy said the senator would not get involved out of respect for principals of tribal self-governance and self-determination.

"This dispute does not impact his push for federal recognition of the Little Shell tribe, which he believes is long overdue," Murphy said.

Fighting Sioux merchandise continues

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — The University of North Dakota is going to keep licensing Fighting Sioux merchandise next year.

North Dakota University System Chancellor Bill Goetz says UND will also be using its Fighting Sioux nickname and American Indian head logo during the 2011-12 school year.

UND had been planning to discontinue the nickname and logo in August. The NCAA considers the nick-

name and logo hostile and abusive, and it says UND will face sanctions if it keeps using them.

But the North Dakota Legislature approved a bill that says UND has to keep the nickname and logo. Goetz says because of that, UND asked to resume merchandise licensing.

UND had stopped approving new merchandise designs last October as part of the university's plans to quit using the logo and nickname.

Tribe pleads for halt on restroom project

VALLEJO, Calif. (AP) — A California tribe wants the state to halt construction of bathrooms atop an American Indian burial site in Vallejo.

The Ohlone tribe's civil rights complaint asks California Attorney General Kamala Harris to block creation of a park with public toilets at Glen Cove, a 3,500-year-old Ohlone settlement along Carquinez Strait.

Tribe member Corinna Gould tells the San Francisco

Chronicle that Ohlone ancestors deserve a place where they can rest forever. It's one of the last native village sites in the San Francisco Bay Area.

The Vallejo park district's \$1.5 million project, starting later this month, is aimed at sprucing a 15-acre shoreline property. It includes extensions of the Bay Trail, Ridge Trail and California Delta Trail, a parking lot and a two-stall restroom.

Oregon man sentenced for fraud

MEDFORD, Ore. (AP) — A southern Oregon man has been sentenced to nearly three years in prison for bilking friends and family members out of retirement savings in an illegal scheme to develop land belonging to American Indian tribes in Montana.

Gilbert Birdinground Pugliano of Medford planned to buy and develop tribal land in Montana and return the profits to his investors, but he later found out his plan was illegal, the Mail Tribune reported.

Instead of returning the money he collected from clients, he used it to buy expensive cars and vacations.

Medford police said Pugliano, 32, has roots in an

American Indian community in Montana, and it may have helped him convince victims that what he was doing was legitimate.

Pugliano was indicted last fall on various counts of racketeering, aggravated theft, securities fraud and selling unlicensed securities.

He apologized during his sentencing Monday in Jackson County Circuit Court in Medford, saying "I got caught up in a cycle of immense greed and bad decisions."

But some victims in the courtroom called out "liar" as Pugliano spoke.

His attorney, Shaun McCrea, blamed alcohol and what she called a desire for a "lavish

lifestyle" by Pugliano's wife, Shelley Pugliano.

"She is by trade an accountant. She is the one who did the Puglianos' taxes," McCrea said, adding her client was "in the throes of alcoholism" and "trying to satisfy a spouse."

Shelley Pugliano was the last to comment during the victim statement portion of the sentencing hearing. She claimed her former husband beat her down mentally and emotionally while stealing the life savings of people who trusted him.

"I felt guilty for bringing this monster into our family," said Shelley Pugliano, adding her own 80-year-old grandmother was bilked out of \$86,000.

"He could care less," she said.

Meadows Ski Day



Ethan Brunoe, Annalise Whipple and Cajun Scott (from left) participate in a ski lesson provided by Mount Hood Meadows during the recent Tribal Ski Day.

Yvonne Iverson/Spilyay

Burford resigns as Umatilla AG

PENDLETON (AP) — Christopher Burford has resigned as the attorney general for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

Burford's resignation was

effective Friday. He has held the job since November 2004 and had been on leave since last Friday. Burford posted a message on his Facebook page earlier this month that said the tribes were trying to force him out of his

job.

Burford declined requests for a news interview and Tribal Deputy Executive Director Debra Croswell declined to discuss the departure.

Coastal tribe seeking higher ground

LA PUSH, Wash. (AP) — The Quileute Tribal School is perched just a stone's throw from a rugged ocean beach framed by sea stacks and islands and splashed by powerful waves at this remote northwest corner of the United States.

At recess, the children burn off energy on a playground that's occasionally assaulted by logs tossed ashore during winter storms.

A log on the playground is an ominous sign, but nothing like the specter of a tsunami that could come crashing down on the school and surrounding village from a mega-earthquake off the Washington coast or in Japan or somewhere else in the earthquake-ridden Pacific Ocean rim where oceanic and continental tectonic plates collide.

"If they're not paying atten-

tion and there's a tsunami, the children are in grave danger," said school principal Al Zantua.

Moving the school to higher ground is a top priority of the tribe, said Quileute tribal chairwoman Bonita Cleveland. It's one of the main reasons the tribe has been trying for decades to reclaim some of its ancestral land from the federal government so it can relocate the lower village to higher ground.

KU hosting tribal law conference

LAWRENCE, Kan. (AP) — The University of Kansas School of Law is hosting an upcoming conference on tribal law.

The 15th annual Tribal Law and Government Conference in Lawrence is scheduled for April

21. Participants will discuss environmental sovereignty, the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and social justice issues, as well as other topics.

The university said in a release Friday that federal Indian

law scholars and practitioners from universities, organizations and tribes across the country will make presentations at the meeting. The conference was originally scheduled for February but was postponed because of bad weather.

2 tribes want to participate in megaloads lawsuit

MISSOULA, Mont. (AP) — Two Indian tribes are asking to take part in a lawsuit aimed at preventing the hauling of oversized equipment through Montana to the oil sand fields in Alberta, Canada.

The Missoulian reports that Western Montana's Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes,

as well as the Nez Perce of Idaho, filed a motion in District Court in Missoula on Wednesday asking to have their say in the lawsuit against the state Department of Transportation.

Missoula County and three environmental groups say the department failed to analyze or disclose potential adverse effects

in its environmental assessment of Imperial Oil/ExxonMobil's transportation plan. The MDT denies the claims.

The tribes say they share many of the concerns of the plaintiffs, but have some of their own that might not otherwise be addressed in court.

More birthday wishes...

Happy birthday to love, Quinton. Evaline Patt (4/20) from the staff at the Museum @ Warm Springs.

Happy belated birthday to Natalie Moody. Thank you for all of the wonderful cheer you bring all through the year. Much love and respect, Roberta and Merle.

Happy birthday Juanita Majel (4/23). Love, Brad.

Happy birthday, Demus Martinez! From the River Crew.

Happy birthday Jaime Scott (4/25), who is an inspiration and a great dad. Much

Happy birthday, Erica. Love, Annette and Family. Happy birthday, Erica from Myrna Frank and Family.

Happy birthday, Darlene Highfill. Love, Gerald. Happy birthday to Darlene Highfill, from Freddie and Ron.

Happy birthday, Julia Heath (4/27). From your wonderful and amazing family.

Happy birthday, Julia! With much love and respect, from your Best Buds.

Happy birthday, Erica Parra (4/29). Love, Mom and Dad.

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Submit your birthday wishes to Spilyay by April 29, for the May 4th edition. Email - spilyay@wstribes.org. Or call 541-553-2307