

— News —

Chairman's Report: Tribe will negotiate for timberland

By Mark Mercier

On the week of March 18 through the 21st, Tribal Council member Leon Tom, Tribal Attorney Mike Mason, Executive Officer Francis Somday and I travelled to Washington D.C.

The purpose of the trip was to meet with Oregon's Congressional Delegation and Officials from the Department of the Interior to discuss the Tribe's efforts to obtain 7,600 acres of timberland, close to the Tribe's existing reservation. These lands are scattered parcels, ranging from 700 acres to 20 acre plots, owned and managed by the Bureau of Land Management. Our tribal delegation met personally with Senator Ron Wyden and Representatives Elizabeth Furse, Jim Bunn, Peter DeFazio, and Wes Cooley.

To obtain these lands will require an act of Congress, just as was required when the Tribe received its current reservation. It is difficult to know what the outcome of this effort will be, or when this effort will become final. The Tribe will need support from the local area. Also, these

lands are managed under the Oregon & California (O&C) Railroad Land Grants status. The Tribe will need to mitigate any financial impacts, since all counties in Western Oregon depend on these O&C lands for funding. Fifty percent of all revenues generated from timber sales go to these western counties. The Tribe is also working with the Governor to address any concerns which his office may have regarding our efforts to secure these lands.

Since 1996 is a re-election year, it's possible that little progress may be made, since Congressional candidates will be campaigning for the November 5th election. Either way, the Tribe will continue to pursue these lands, and may wait until 1997 to finalize this effort if necessary.

The Tribe also met with Officials of the Departments of Justice and the Interior to discuss a pending United States 8th Circuit Court Decision, which stems from the Bureau of Indian Affairs taking a parcel of land into trust for a Tribe in South Dakota, who wish to do gaming there. In short, the 8th Circuit Court ruled that the Secretary of the Interior who

has jurisdiction over the Bureau of Indian Affairs, does not have the authority to do fee to trust transfers under the Indian Reorganization Act. Already, there are other states who are petitioning their respective U.S. Courts to rule the same way.

If other U.S. Circuit Courts throughout the nation follow suit, it is very possible that the Bureau of Indian Affairs will impose a moratorium on fee to trust transfers for Tribes. How could this affect us? Currently, the Grand Ronde Tribe has fee to trust transfers pending, and it is the hopes of the Tribal Council to do more. If the BIA does stop taking land in trust for Tribes, it will diminish the possibility of the Housing and Urban Development providing funding for housing, since HUD requires that Tribal owned lands need to be held in trust for funding eligibility. Also, it will be difficult to provide tax incentives to businesses which the Tribe hopes to attract to Grand Ronde. If the BIA does stop taking lands into trust for our Tribe, it will have devastating effects.

Serbian journalist visits Tribe

A journalist from Serbia was a special visitor at the Tribe on March 19.

Ismail Dupljak is a participant in the International Visitor Program sponsored by the United States Information Agency (USIA). His visit to America lasted a month, and he requested to visit the Tribe as part of his interest in Native American history and culture.

Every year, American embassies all over the world are asked to identify potential leaders in their respective countries in government, education, science, business, and the arts to spend a month in the United States with the aim of getting a realistic picture of the country and meeting Americans who share common interests and professions.

Mr. Dupljak shared many of his experiences as a Serbian with Tribal Council. Kathryn Harrison gave a brief history of the Tribe, restoration and termination, and an overview of the tribal programs. They also had lunch at the Casino. Ms. Dubravks Trklja also visited as Mr. Dupljak's interpreter.

AT RIGHT: Standing, Gene LaBonte and Bob Haller. Sitting from left, Ms. Dubravks Trklja, Ismail Dupljak, and Kathryn Harrison.



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