

Warm Springs study weighs pros and cons of Hood River casino

HOOD RIVER, Ore. (AP) — Hood River County stands to gain 463 full-time jobs, more than 1.5 million visitors a year and \$21.4 million more in personal income from a casino proposed by the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs, according to a new economic impact study.

But the study also says "the net impact of a casino on the economy, however, is composed of both winners and losers." Prepared for the tribe by ECONorthwest of Portland, the study paints a picture of a Hood River County economy that has not kept pace with the state or national average in terms of personal income. Casino workers would earn an average weekly wage of about \$335, a figure that is midrange in the average salaries by the county's 20 largest employers. The casino also would spend about \$1.1 million locally for supplies, and casino visitors would rent an estimated 77,720 additional room nights in a year.

The study presumes that the proposed 75,000-square-foot casino would be built on 12.5 acres of land the tribe has optioned just west of Hood River and adjacent to Interstate 84. The \$15 million facility would provide parking for 1,000 cars and 200 recreational vehicles, buses or trucks, and would open Jan. 1, 2000.

The casino would have 900 video slot machines, 24 gaming tables and a poker room with six tables, as well as a 22,000-square-foot buffet and lounge area, an arcade, a gift shop and a child care center.

But the new casino is expected to increase traffic in the area by almost 2,900 trips a day. State lottery sales, including state-sanctioned video poker gambling, could be expected to decline, perhaps considerably.

"Like most new service businesses, a casino takes some portion of customers away from some competing businesses while others flourish under new

demand created by casino employees, new visitors to the community attracted by the casino and casino purchases in the community," the study says.

Analysts could find no link in Oregon between casinos and increased crime rates, larger numbers of welfare and food stamp recipients and growing unemployment rates. The study also predicts only a negligible increase in gambling addiction.

Since 1995, the tribe has operated the Indian Head Casino at Kah-Nee-Ta, the resort on their central Oregon reservation. But that casino is considerably smaller and unlikely to generate the \$50 million in annual revenues projected for the Hood River casino, which would be about 60 miles from Portland.

Tribal officials view the second, larger casino as a means to earn more money to replace dwindling income from natural resources, including the timber industry and hydroelectric generation.

Both the Hood River County Commission and the Hood River City Council have adopted resolutions opposing the casino's construction, which will be forwarded to Gov. John Kitzhaber and Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt.

Newly elected U.S. Rep. Greg Walden, plus U.S. Rep. Bob Smith, U.S. Sen. Gordon Smith and state Rep. Bob Montgomery, whose district includes Hood River County, have said they oppose the casino.

Rudy Clements, head of the tribal board that oversees Warm Springs gaming operations, said last week that the release of the economic study would be followed by a tribal referendum that asks voters whether the tribe should continue to be involved in gaming.

"At this point there is nothing clear about which is the best way to go as far as the public is concerned," said Rickert. "If you go by sheer numbers of people (all the proposed ideas are) equally difficult. It's kind of like they want to solve the problem by moving it somewhere else."

However, regardless of whose backyard bears the brunt of pending road changes, Rickert points out that it is likely to affect everyone in the area.

"If you do something in Grand Ronde," he said, "then it will affect what happens somewhere else."

Rickert said the most challenging question that local residents will have to answer is not what to build or expand along the Willamina-Grand Ronde corridor but where to make the improvements.

Spirit Mountain Lodge

continued from front page

Lodge has many one-of-a-kind features.

"The lobby and the rooms will have furniture in the stripped wood look," she

said. "It will be rustic, but so-

phisticated." The beds will have the

Casino logo carved into the wood, and all the light fixtures are leaded glass, in the Tiffany-style shapes and colors.

The bedding will include coverlets manufactured by Pendleton Woolen Mills, specifically for Spirit Mountain Lodge.

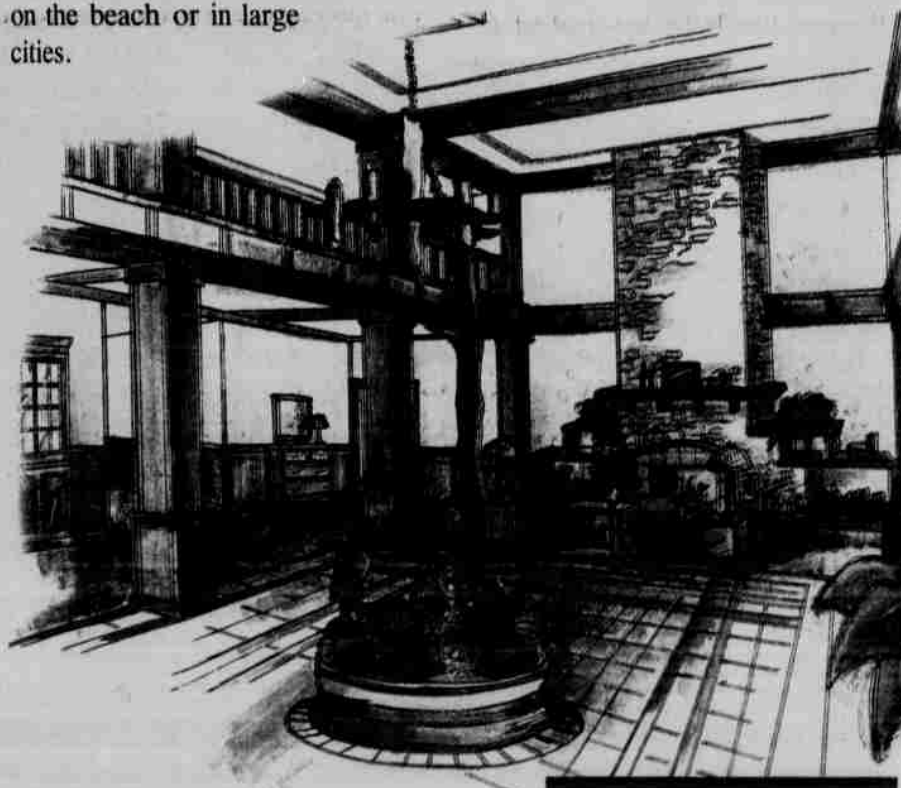
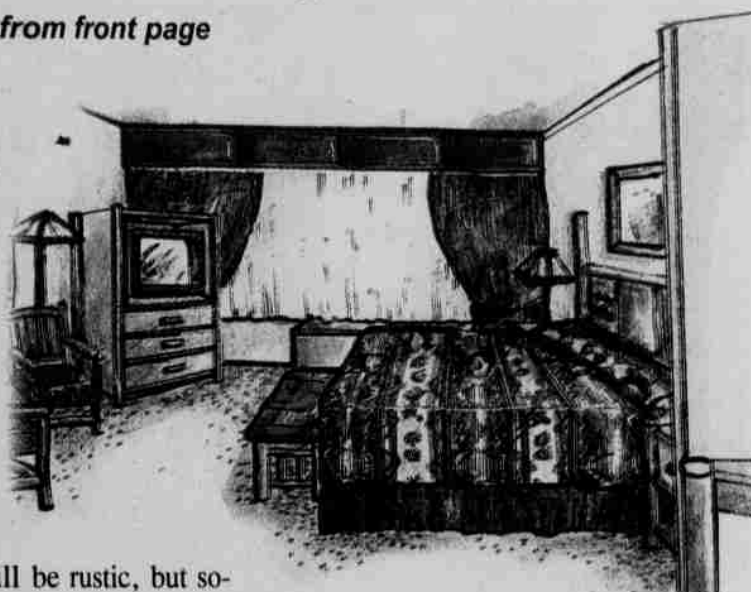
The coverlets have a design which includes the Grand Ronde tribal logo, coyotes, a basket design, and mountain figures. They are 100% wool.

Other amenities include bell service, room service, deluxe suites with adjoining rooms, access to safe deposit boxes, and a 25-inch television in each room with pay-per-view of first-run movies.

Companies using Spirit Mountain Lodge for seminars will have access to the banquet rooms in the Casino as well.

"Spirit Mountain Lodge is another symbol of the Tribe's turnaround," said Chuck Galford, Marketing Director for the Casino. "It will accommodate more groups, more overnight tourists. People will come to the Casino because they know they have a place to stay the night. I think it's one more thing that tribal members will be proud of."

Holland said that room rates will be reasonable, probably somewhat less expensive than the cost of rooms on the beach or in large cities.



Tammy Cook and Mark Holland are key figures in helping make Spirit Mountain Lodge something special.

Room rates begin at \$83 (double occupancy) for a standard king or double queen room.

If you would like to reserve a room at Spirit Mountain Lodge, please call 1-888-668-7366.

Changes to Highway 18

continued from front page

Valley Junction or A.R. Ford Road. An access road connecting highways 18 and 22 just east of Grand Ronde Road has also been suggested.

Rickert said whatever alternative is chosen probably will not be constructed for at least another 10 to 15 years. He said more immediate projects such as right turn lanes for side roads, an acceleration lane near Spirit Mountain Casino or consolidation of local driveways could come from the public forums.

Rickert said the most challenging question that local residents will have to answer is not what to build or expand along the Willamina-Grand Ronde corridor but where to make the improvements.