

Event to honor Tribal presence

Five western Oregon Tribes unite in effort to educate public on sovereignty, history on Jan. 31

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

The state of Oregon will celebrate its sesquicentennial — 150th — anniversary of statehood on Feb. 14.

But, as any member of the state's nine federally recognized Tribes can tell you, putting a number on how long their ancestors have lived on the land that today is called the state of Oregon is almost impossible.

And if they could arrive at a definitive number, it would dwarf 150 by more than 10,000 years.

To commemorate the fact that Native Americans were in Oregon long before statehood occurred, and that Oregon's history did not start on Feb. 14, 1859, the Gathering of Oregon's First Nations will be held beginning at 10 a.m. Saturday, Jan. 31, at the Oregon State Fair & Expo Center's Salem Pavilion, 2330 17th

St. N.E., Salem.

The gathering will begin with exhibits and demonstrations by members of western Oregon's five federally-recognized Tribes — the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw, Coquille Indian Tribe, Cow Creek Band of Umpqua, Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde and Confederated Tribes of Siletz. In addition, Tribal members of two eastern Oregon Tribes — the Klamath and Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs — will participate.

A Powwow Grand Entry is slated for 1 p.m. with another Grand Entry set for 5 p.m. Grand Ronde Tribal Elder Bob Tom is coordinating the powwow and can be reached at 503-393-3566 or rptom60@hotmail.com.

The gathering will feature Tribal information booths, exhibits, ven-

dors and cultural demonstrations. Vendor contact is Mona Fisher at 541-444-8230.

Another important element of the gathering will be educating Oregonians about the sovereignty of the state's Tribes, said Cow Creek Tribal Chairwoman Sue Shaffer.

Planning for the Gathering of Oregon's First Nations began in early 2008 and has involved representatives from the five western Oregon Tribes.

Jan. 31 was symbolically chosen as the date for the gathering to remind residents that there were Tribes with their own unique cultures living in what is now Oregon before the arrival of European explorers and settlers in the early 19th century.

On Friday, Jan. 30, Gov. Ted Kulongoski will read a proclamation at the State Capitol, proclaiming

Saturday, Jan. 31, as Oregon Tribal Nations Honor Day for the State of Oregon's Sesquicentennial. The proclamation acknowledges Tribal governments and their sovereign relationship as viable governments in Oregon.

At 1:30 p.m. Friday, a video, produced by Cow Creek's Creative Images, telling the combined stories of the five western Tribes will be previewed at the Salem Pavilion and a media interview/information session will begin at 3:30 p.m. The video also will be shown during the Jan. 31 gathering.

The Gathering of Oregon's First Nations, which is free and open to the public, is sponsored by the sovereign governments of the five western Oregon Tribes and the state of Oregon donated use of the Salem Pavilion. ■

Oregon Congressman opposes Gorge casino

By Dean Rhodes

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David Wu, Oregon's First District representative in the U.S. House of Representatives, hasn't wasted any time on educating Secretary of the Interior nominee Ken Salazar on the Warm Springs Tribe's proposed casino in the Columbia River Gorge.

On Jan. 5, Wu sent a letter to Salazar expressing his opposition to a proposal that land within the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area be taken into trust for the Warm Springs Tribe for a proposed 603,000-square-foot riverfront resort and casino in Cascade Locks.

Wu's letter lays out his opposition to the gambling casino and asks Salazar, a Colorado senator nominated by President-elect Barack Obama to head the Interior Department, to consider the numerous



David Wu

environmental and transportation issues surrounding the proposal.

"Sen. Salazar is poised to take on responsibility for the Columbia River Gorge and our many other national treasures once he is confirmed," Wu said.

"I am committed to working

with him and other members of President-elect Obama's incoming administration, briefing them on issues of importance to me and my constituents, and joining together to preserve Oregon's distinctive heritage for future generations."

Friends of the Columbia Gorge, Gorge residents and many area elected officials also have opposed permitting a gambling casino within the Columbia River Gorge.

In March 2008, five hearings were held in Washington and Oregon on the proposal's draft Environmental Impact Statement. The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde was part of a coalition of groups opposing the casino.

The Tribe opposed the Warm Springs proposal because it breaks Oregon's long-standing policy of one casino per Tribe on reservation land and encroaches into Grand Ronde's historical and ancestral lands.

Other groups, however, keyed in on the environmental effect of a large casino in the Gorge.

"The Columbia River Gorge is a natural scenic treasure that is designated by Congress as a National Scenic Area," said Michael Lang, conservation director of Friends of the Columbia River Gorge. "It is our sincere hope that Interior Secretary-nominee Ken Salazar protects this treasure for our children and future generations to experience."

"There are many alternative sites in Oregon, outside of the Columbia River Gorge, that would be more appropriate for large-scale casino development."

Recent developments have further complicated plans to build the proposed gambling casino within the Gorge. In November, the state Department of Transportation rejected a request that would have allowed existing Interstate 84 highway interchanges to remain open after a new, casino-focused interchange is built. The new interchange would be located closer to existing interchanges than the

current spacing standard allows.

"The closure of an existing interchange would force local traffic to divert to the new casino-designed interchange, inconveniencing area residents and increasing congestion," Wu said.

"I am glad ODOT continued to adhere to spacing standards that have been established for the safety of all highway drivers. The inconvenience that longtime residents would face to ease the flow of casino traffic is just one of the many reasons that this gambling casino should not be located in the heart of the Gorge."

Wu also cited the 218-mile commute Warm Springs Tribal members would have to drive to work at the new casino.

"A commute of 218 miles would keep Tribal casino workers away from home for long periods each day, possibly causing undue harm to their families and community, even before the economic cost associated with traveling such a great distance is calculated," Wu said.

"The (Warm Springs) community could suffer further if a significant number of Tribal members make this long daily trip on already unsafe and congested roads that frequently experience inclement weather."

Wu suggested that the Warm Springs Tribe consider alternative non-Gorge sites for a new casino.

"Oregon is a big state, and the Warm Springs Tribe resides on its biggest reservation, which spans 640,000 acres," Wu said. "The long-standing policy of one casino per Tribe, on reservation, still gives the Warm Springs a number of sensible and profitable options."

In closing, Wu asked rhetorically, "Would we permit construction of a gambling casino in the Grand Canyon or Yosemite Valley?"

The Obama administration takes office on Jan. 20 and Salazar will have to be confirmed by the U.S. Senate before succeeding current Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne. ■

DEQ meeting



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

On Monday, Jan. 5, a group of Tribal employees and Oregon Department of Environmental Quality representatives held a government-to-government meeting. In attendance were, front row from left, Ceded Lands Coordinator Mike Karnosh, DEQ's Liaison to Tribal Nations Mikell O'Mealy, Director of Development Pete Wakeland and Staff Attorney Lisa Bluelake. Back row, from left, Director of the DEQ Dick Pedersen, Tribal Council member Val Sheker, Natural Resources Manager Mike Wilson and Interim DEQ Western Region Division Administrator Keith Anderson.