

Former Interior Secretary opposes Gorge casino

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

The latest opposition to building an off-reservation casino at Cascade Locks has come from the environmental community.

Carter Administration Interior Secretary Cecil Andrus delivered on July 13 a letter to the new Bureau of Indian Affairs chief, Assistant Interior Secretary Larry EchoHawk, citing unacceptable environmental risks in the proposal.

Andrus, also a four-term governor of Idaho, led a group of 17 environmental organization signers, including the National Audubon Society, Greenpeace and the Garden Club of America, in opposing the proposed casino location.

"We believe that development of a 600,000-square foot casino resort and associated parking lots and retail structures in the heart of the Gorge National Scenic Area and within one-half mile of a wilderness boundary would significantly harm the natural environment and resources of this federally protected area," Andrus said in the letter.

Andrus is a longtime advocate of sound environmental practices. He was born in Hood River, next door to the proposed site.

"For me," Andrus said, "protecting the Gorge is a professional and personal passion. Approving the proposed casino resort and associated development ... would destroy one of America's most treasured landscapes."

The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs' 10-year-old effort to build a

600,000-square foot, off-reservation casino in the scenic but environmentally fragile Columbia River Gorge has run into one roadblock after another, most recently missing what might have been its best opportunity for approval from the Bush Administration.

"Like the Grand Canyon, Yosemite, Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks, the Gorge should be protected forever," Andrus said. "If the Bush Administration, no friend of the environment, couldn't bring itself to approve a casino in the Gorge, then the conservation-minded Obama Administration shouldn't either."

Andrus is registered as a lobbyist and is paid by the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde for his work on the issue.

Today, the Warm Springs proposal awaits a decision by Obama Interior Department Secretary Ken Salazar. In early 2008, five hearings were held by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Warm Springs, Cascade Locks, Portland, Hood River and Stevenson, Wash.

The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, operating Spirit Mountain Casino in Grand Ronde, and the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Indians, operating Seven Feathers Hotel and Casino Resort in Canyonville, have opposed the project.

Both Tribes oppose, in principle, the development of off-reservation casinos, as stipulated in the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act.

"We don't believe a change in policy is good for Oregon or the Tribes

"I'm glad people are finally realizing this is an environmental issue. Once you destroy the environment, you can't go backwards."

~ Tribal Vice Chair Reyn Leno

of Oregon," said Tribal Vice Chair Reyn Leno in 2005.

"We have always stated strongly and I have advised the other Tribes that the strongest protection that the Tribes have is to live within all of Section 20 (of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act), that provides for casinos just on reservation lands," said Sue Shaffer, Chairwoman of the Cow Creek Band of the Umpqua Tribe of Indians, also at the time of the signing of the state compact.

Andrus' letter urges federal officials to support an on-reservation casino outside of the Gorge that also could provide jobs and increased income for Warm Springs Tribal members.

In Grand Ronde, the environmental problems with the proposal have always rankled Tribal leaders.

"I'm glad people are finally realizing this is an environmental issue," Leno said. "Once you destroy the environment, you can't go backwards."

The timing of the letter, said Mi-

chael Lang, spokesman for Friends of the Columbia Gorge and co-signer of the Andrus letter, takes advantage of a new administration that "is much more interested in protecting the environment in general and national scenic treasures like the Gorge in particular."

Interior Department leaders are filling staff positions, he said, and getting ready to evaluate proposals left over from the previous administration.

Also, he said, the proposal's Environmental Impact Statement is now being evaluated by Interior. "We may see a final Environmental Impact Statement this year, maybe this summer," Lang said, though there is no timeline for that decision to be made.

A five-year lobbying campaign by Friends of the Columbia Gorge, Oregon Wild, the Grand Ronde Tribe and others culminated earlier this year in the Omnibus Public Lands Act. The bill expanded wilderness protection to another 26,000 acres in the Gorge. Those acres include the ancestral lands of the Grand Ronde Tribe.

The bill protects the Oregon side of the river, including the cliffs and canyons. It also protects Herman Creek in the Cascade Locks area, a spawning ground for salmon and steelhead.

"The construction of the proposed parking lots would harm that spawning ground," Lang said. "It's one of many reasons that environmental groups want to protect the Gorge." ■

'Grand Ronde is a Columbia River Tribe'

GORGE ACT continued
from front page

there is no reason to deny the Tribe an equal voice with the other Tribes under the Scenic Area Act. This is an issue of fundamental justice. How can it be right for the other Columbia River Tribes to have a voice on matters affecting the historic lands of Grand Ronde and Grand Ronde not have a voice?"

"Kurt is a new representative and to see him step up to the plate this quickly means that we have a representative who is not afraid to get involved," Tribal Council member Wink Soderberg said. "To the Tribe, this is a very serious matter."

Congress designated the Columbia River Gorge the nation's first national scenic area in 1986. President Ronald Reagan signed the Scenic Area Act, which created an 83-mile-long scenic area, encompassing about 295,000 acres, stretching from Washougal to east of Wishram in Washington to east of the Sandy River to the Deschutes River in Oregon.

The U.S. Forest Service manages the scenic area, with the help of the Columbia River Gorge Commission, a 13-member group representing federal, state, Tribal and county interests.

The act states that the Secretary of the Interior and the Gorge Commission "shall exercise their responsibilities ... in consultation with federal, state and local governments having jurisdiction within the scenic area ... and with Indian Tribes."

Grand Ronde representatives cite



that the Tribe should be considered a Columbia River Tribe based on the inclusion of the Columbia River Indians in the Grand Ronde confederation.

The Walala and Clackamas Indians, Chinookan-speaking Native Americans, lived on the river since time immemorial and signed the 1855 Willamette Valley Treaty, one of Grand Ronde's treaties. They ceded their lands, which include parts of the current-day scenic area of the Columbia River from Cascade Locks to the Sandy River, to the federal government and Tribal members moved to the Grand Ronde Reservation.

An eight-minute video, "Grand Ronde: Our People in the Gorge," posted on the Grand Ronde Tribal Web site features Tribal members

Greg Archuleta, Marilyn Portwood, Chuck Williams, Val Alexander and Eirik Thorsgard discussing their ancestral ties to the Columbia River.

Archuleta talks about how the Walala and Clackamas Indians did not consider the river a boundary between states, but a roadway on which they could trade, as well as visit relatives.

Thorsgard recalls his grandfather fishing for smelt in the Sandy River delta and for salmon at Cascade Locks and Celilo Falls.

Portwood outlines her direct lineage from Chief Tumult, who signed the 1855 treaty.

Today, the descendants of those Indians are enrolled members of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde and continue to live in the Gorge and

use the area. Many of their ancestors are buried in the scenic area.

Because the Tribe was terminated between 1954 to 1983, the Grand Ronde Tribe was not invited to "sit at the table" when many federal decisions were made regarding Northwest Indian Tribes, including which Tribes would be consulted regarding management of the scenic area.

The Grand Ronde Tribe was restored only three years before the act was adopted and, at the time, was still struggling with the political disenfranchisement of Termination.

"Unlike the other Columbia River Tribes, Grand Ronde's federal status was terminated by the United States, and while the Scenic Act was being developed Grand Ronde was working to regain federal recognition and a part of its former reservation," Greene said.

"Termination is why Grand Ronde was left out of the act. This amendment helps restore Grand Ronde to where it would have been had it not been terminated."

Tribal member and Cultural Resources Department Manager David Lewis said he thinks the Grand Ronde Tribe would have retained its fishing rights on the Columbia River had it not been terminated in the 1950s.

Schrader's proposal has been referred to the House Committee on Natural Resources, which includes Oregon Rep. Peter DeFazio.

According to the committee's Web site, no hearings on the proposal are scheduled yet. ■