

Willamette Falls receives state heritage designation

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

The Oregon Heritage Commission officially approved state heritage area status for the Willamette Falls Heritage Area, which includes historical and culturally significant areas near the falls, during a Thursday, April 23, meeting held in Coos Bay as part of the Oregon Heritage Conference.

The vote was not surprising since the Heritage Commission approved state heritage area status in early February on a preliminary basis. The Willamette Falls Heritage Area is the first to ever receive a state heritage area designation.

The Willamette Falls Heritage Area encompasses 26 square miles and is home to the second largest waterfall by volume in the United States. The area remains a culturally and historically significant site for the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. Tribal members continue to harvest lamprey at the site as their ancestors have done since time immemorial.

The Heritage Area also includes potential economic development projects, such as the redevelopment of the former Blue Heron Paper Co. site and the area near the falls.

"What it does is really legitimizes the direction in which we are heading with this entire area," said Alice Norris, president of the Willamette Falls Heritage Area Coalition, a nonprofit partnership focused on

revitalizing the area, in February when the preliminary approval was granted.

The Grand Ronde Tribe is a member of the nonprofit coalition and is represented by Tribal Council member Cheryle A. Kennedy.

"I am thrilled that the Willamette Falls State Heritage Area was approved," Kennedy said. "To achieve becoming the first state heritage designation is awesome and another step in becoming a national heritage area.

"My purpose in serving on the Willamette Falls Heritage Area Coalition is to ensure that all people who visit and those who reside in the area know our people lived and continue to live in this powerful area. As the Willamette Falls Heritage Area Coalition pulled together the history of the area, evidence of our thousands of years of residence were witnessed in the rocks, drawn by our ancestors thousands of years ago.

"The coalition learned that our people used this great river as our highway. We conducted wealthy commerce through fishing and trade, and we were the keepers of the falls and the river.

"As history unfolded, immigrants learned of the great resources the river and Willamette Falls had for the first seat of Oregon government began here, as well as establishment of the first hydro power, shipping business and historic industrial district in Oregon.

"There have been issues I took the lead on when others wanted to dispute the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde was the resident Tribe. Some wanted to be more inclusive of other Tribes, but armed with historical references and sources I presented, the coalition agreed that the Grand Ronde Tribe represents the Native people who occupied the area.

"So, that was a great day for the Grand Ronde Tribe and I am greatly pleased to be part of establishing our presence in modern-day times."

The new state program, developed two years ago, was created to promote both heritage conservation and economic development in specific geographic areas.

Kyle Jansson, executive director of the Oregon Heritage Commission, said the coalition found the right combination of economic development and conservation in its application.

The state heritage area designation does not provide direct funding

for any projects, but it does make available technical assistance and advice from the Oregon Heritage Commission and possibly grant funding for projects.

Norris said the state status will help with marketing and branding efforts, as well as bringing people to the region for tourism and economic development.

The Grand Ronde Tribe has been involved in the Willamette Falls Festival, put on by the coalition, and has been supportive of coalition goals. Tribal Council recently approved a resolution supporting re-opening of the Willamette Falls Locks.

The Willamette Falls Heritage Area Coalition was formed in 2006 to begin a community process that supports the preservation and enhancement of the cultural and heritage sites in and around the Willamette Falls area. ■

Includes information from the Portland Business Journal.

April 15 meeting materials available

Tribal members who were unable to attend the April 15 special Tribal Council meeting regarding MicroGREEN Polymers held in executive session can request a copy of the meeting materials by contacting Tribal Council Chief of Staff Stacia Martin at 503-879-2304 or stacia.martin@grandronde.org.

The materials will be provided free of charge.

Memorial Day
Observance
MONDAY, MAY 25

Meal served at noon
Program begins at 1 P.M.

9615 Grand Ronde Road
Grand Ronde, OR 97347

For more information about the Memorial Day event,
call: Steve Bobb 503-876-3118 or e-mail: chelsea.clark@grandronde.org