

U.S. Senate holds hearing on Reservation Act amendments

By Dean Rhodes
Smoke Signals editor

The Grand Ronde Tribe’s continuing efforts to get amendments to its Reservation Act that would streamline how land is taken into trust through Congress received a legislative hearing on Wednesday, Oct. 7, before the Senate’s Committee on Indian Affairs.

Senate Bill 818, introduced by Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden on March 1, would amend the Reservation Act to create a one-step process that would allow the Grand Ronde Tribe to take land within its original Reservation of more than 60,000 acres into trust as on-reservation land and once the land is taken into trust it would automatically become part of the Tribe’s Reservation.

Currently, the Grand Ronde Tribe must apply to the Bureau of Indian Affairs for a fee-to-trust application when it purchases land. After the land is accepted into trust by the BIA, the Tribe then must amend its Reservation Act through congressional action for the land to be considered part of the Reservation.

“S. 818 would not only save Grand Ronde time and money which could

be better utilized serving its membership, but would also streamline the Interior Department’s land-in-trust responsibilities to Grand Ronde, thus saving taxpayer money,” said Tribal Council Chairman Reyn Leno in written testimony submitted to the committee. “At a time when federal financial support for Indian Country is dramatically decreasing, Grand Ronde should be afforded the tools necessary to reduce its costs and maximize savings.”

The Grand Ronde Tribe has been working for more than six years to amend the Reservation Act. During the last Congress, Reservation Act amendments were passed by the House of Representatives, but did not get through the Senate before Congress adjourned.

Leno said the Grand Ronde Tribe has support from Polk and Yamhill county commissioners, as well as the entire Oregon congressional delegation and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

“No opposition or concerns have been raised by other Tribes or affected interests,” Leno said.

Michael Smith, deputy director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, testified during the Oct. 7 hearing, stating that the bureau supports

the amendments to the Grand Ronde Reservation Act.

“Taking land into trust is one of the most important functions that the department undertakes on behalf of Indian Tribes,” Smith said. “Homelands are essential to the health, safety and welfare of Tribal governments. Thus, the department has made the restoration of Tribal homelands a priority.”

“S. 818 is a consensus-based legislative proposal to assist the Tribe in re-acquiring lands within its original reservation,” Leno said. “Based on the universal support and the importance of the legislation to the Tribe, I request passage of the legislation be a top priority of the committee and the Senate.”

Regarding another bill that would expand the area where the Siletz Indian Tribe could take land into trust, Leno said the bill is opposed by three of the six counties affected by the legislation, two Tribes and U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici, who represents Grand Ronde and Yamhill County.

“Unlike Grand Ronde’s bill – which seeks to improve the process of acquiring lands in trust and return to reservation status those lands the Tribe re-acquires within its original reservation – we believe the purpose of the Siletz legislation is to eliminate the historic claims of other Tribes to the former Coast Reservation, which was set aside for all Tribes in western Oregon, by equating the boundaries of the

Siletz Reservation (established 1875) with the boundaries of the Coast Reservation (established 1855),” Leno said.

“The Coast Reservation, as described in the executive order dated Nov. 9, 1855, was never designated exclusively for the Siletz. It was set aside for Indians throughout western Oregon, including the antecedent Tribes and bands of the Grand Ronde ... The Siletz are aware that Grand Ronde has made its own historic claims to the Coast Reservation. Their proposed legislation is nothing more than a veiled attempt to eradicate the claims of Grand Ronde and other western Oregon Tribes to the Coast Reservation.”

Leno said the Siletz legislation is inconsistent with the Siletz Indian Tribe Restoration Act and infringes on the sovereign interests of the Grand Ronde Tribe by allowing land to be taken into trust in Tillamook and Yamhill counties.

Leno added that Grand Ronde would support the Siletz bill if it were limited in scope to Lincoln County, which is consistent with the Siletz Tribe’s Restoration Act.

The Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians also oppose the proposed Siletz legislation.

The legislative hearing was chaired by Sen. John Barrasso (R-Wyo.) and attended by Vice Chair Jon Tester, a Democrat from Montana. ■

Storytelling Festival set for Oct. 15-17

The 10th annual Northwest Indian Storytelling Festival will be held from 7 to 9 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 15, at First Unitarian Church, 1011 S.W. 12th Ave., Portland; 7 to 9 p.m. Friday, Oct. 16, at the Portland Community College Cascade Moriarty Auditorium, 705 N. Killingsworth St., Portland; and 7 to 9 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 17, at the Portland Art Museum’s Mark Building, 1119 S.W. Park Ave.

For more information and details, visit wisdomoftheelders.org/nisa or send an e-mail to nisa@wisdomoftheelders.org or call D’Ana Soto at 503-775-4014.

The festival is presented by the Northwest Indian Storytellers Association and Wisdom of the Elders Inc. and sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts and Regional Arts and Culture Council. ■

Phone numbers wanted for Elders

The Tribal Elders Committee is compiling a volunteer phone list of Elders. If you would like to submit your phone number and address to be available to other Elders, send it to elders.committee@grandronde.org or leave a message at 503-879-2231. ■

Parenting A Second Time Around..

A group for grandparents and other relative caregivers who are raising their grandchildren or other relative's children.

Come share with other grandparents and relative caregivers and learn more about:

- Your changing roles & responsibilities
- Effective discipline tools
- Rebuilding a family
- Advocating for yourself & your relative children
- Communication skills
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When: October 6th, 10:00 to noon & the following 7 Tuesdays (ending November 24th)
Where: Grand Ronde Adult Education Bldg., Room 126

Cost: FREE with child care** & meal provided**for children 18 months - 8 years

prizes Parent Educator: Carmen Mercier

Register: Online: www.midvalleyparenting.org
By phone: Heather 503-623-9664 ext.2368 OR Audra 503-879-2069 OR Amanda 503-879-2039

*Thank you for respecting Grand Ronde's Community & Culture by not displaying Gang Affiliation and by not bringing Drugs, Alcohol or Weapons to this event. Anyone under the influence of drugs or alcohol will be asked to leave and to not participate in future events.
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Wednesday, October 21st
2 pm to 6 pm

- Give to 3 organizations in one location!
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- **The Clothes Closet** is seeking Halloween Costumes! Consider recycling gently used costumes for local youth.
- Clean out your food pantry, we'll figure out the expiration dates!
- **A Cause for Paws** is seeking pet costumes, food, pet toys, and beds.
- We will take books for our lending library.
- If you are not sure if we can take it, bring it or give us a call.



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