

Plankhouse, powwow grounds receiving updates

By Brent Merrill

Smoke Signals staff writer

The Tribe's Public Works Department has two big projects on tap and one has already begun.

Clearing the smoke that lingers near the top of the ceiling at achaf-hammi — the Tribe's plankhouse — has become a priority during recent events.

Tribal Council approved a plankhouse ventilation project in the 2016 budget that will allow for Public Works to modify the peak of the roof to allow for more movement of air and better ventilation of smoke that comes with traditional ceremonies.

"It's opening the roof because what's happening is currently there is just a small gap running down the peak of the north side of the building," said Engineering and Public Works Director Jesse White. "It has gotten plugged up and it's just not letting the smoke out of the building. So we're opening up 6 feet each side of the center ridge beam (12 feet wide total between the two new openings)."

The design modification calls for the opening to be created above each fire pit located inside the plankhouse.

The project calls for the existing roof peak to be removed and replaced with two cupolas over the fire pits and a ridge cap. The cupolas are each 24 feet long and 16 feet wide and the openings in the roof will be in total 20 feet long and 12 feet wide.

"It will really open that up and get the smoke out," said White. "The peak will have a ridge cap now rather than the overhang that it currently has. This will open it up a lot."

Tribal General Manager Dave Fullerton said there have been many attempts to remedy the



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Justin Stritzke, left, and Erin Case, working for Chris Scholten Construction, place a beam as they construct the new ventilation system for achaf-hammi, the Tribe's plankhouse, on Thursday, March 10.

smoke situation since achaf-hammi opened in 2010.

"At the end of the day you are dealing with a design that is thousands of years old," said Fullerton. "I think this is just part of a continued effort to make it more comfortable for people to be in there for longer periods of time. I think the venting will help out quite a bit."

Tribal Council Chairman Reyn Leno said although membership acknowledges that plankhouses were smoke-filled environments, there is a larger picture at play.

"I think Native Americans are known for their gatherings," said Leno. "It's a natural thing for Native people. It's natural for us to all come together as family and friends."

The cupolas were constructed by the Tribal crew at the Round Valley warehouse because of the weather. They were trucked over to the plankhouse where they will be placed on the roof by a crane and then bolted down into place.

White said workers started performing the roof modification on Friday, March 4.

"They just started working on the roof — opening it up," said White. "It was only a 12- to 14-inch gap and the ridge beam blocked most of that so smoke couldn't get around it hardly."

He said once the cupolas are placed by crane there will be at least another week's worth of work before the project is complete.

Stadium Seating at Powwow Arbor

White also said Tribal Council set aside funds in the 2016 budget to construct stadium-style bleacher seating at the arbor at Uyxat Powwow Grounds and that work will be his department's priority for the spring.

The proposed work includes the buildout of one-third to one-half the

arbor into raised seating.

White said the materials will match the existing construction and that space will be left in front for drummers and spectator chairs at the surface level.

"We're going to build some bleachers," said White. "It's not going to be the whole thing, but council does want some of those sections (in the arbor) to become bleachers. We will build them up high so they have a good view. The idea is to be able to get people watching the event up so they can see over the people in front of them."

"I think it's great," said Fullerton. "That will enhance that environment so much. It will give it more of an amphitheater type of atmosphere and it will maximize the seating. I think it's a great move. I think it's a great opportunity to get more people where they can see the event and feel part of the event."

Leno said the desire to build the seating at the arbor came after getting through last year's powwow season and then reassessing it.

"After we got through our two powwows (last year) we had a lot of conversation about it," said Leno. "It was a necessity to have the two powwows so we could see now how do we accommodate making people comfortable to come and watch our powwows and ceremonies."

White said it is his department's direction is to have the bleachers done by this year's powwow season that begins in July.

"We really have to get on that," said White. "We need to get a plan, have council approve a plan, get direction from council and then construct it. Those are the two main projects right now." ■

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