

General Council briefed on salmon ruling, food access

By Brent Merrill

Smoke Signals staff writer

General Council was briefed on several food-related topics on Sunday, May 1, during the meeting held in the Tribal Community Center, including the recent awarding of fishing rights for salmon at Willamette Falls and work being performed by the ad hoc Food Access Community Team, which includes Tribal Council member Chris Mercier.

Tribal Council member Jon A. George opened the meeting with an invocation and Culture Department employees Bobby Mercier and Travis Stewart performed the cultural drumming and singing.

Tribal Council Chairman Reyn Leno talked about the Tribe's reaching of an agreement with the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission in April that will allow Tribal members to fish traditionally for as many as 15 salmon annually at Willamette Falls.

The agreement allows the Tribe to operate a traditional scaffold to be constructed at the Falls for ceremonial purposes.

"Hunting and fishing for Native people is a way of life," said Leno. "It was a great day for us. I want to thank Mike (Wilson, Natural Resources Department manager) and Rob (Greene, Tribal Attorney) and Legal and all the people that worked on this. We just have to keep working."

Tribal Council member Denise Harvey echoed Leno's comments.

"Thanks to our Natural Resources Department and our Legal Department," said Harvey. "I know you guys have been working hard



Photo by Brent Merrill

Tribal Council member Chris Mercier gave a presentation to the general membership regarding food access in Grand Ronde during the General Council meeting held Sunday, May 1, at the Tribal Community Center. Mercier talked about his participation with the Food Access Community Team and its efforts to raise awareness of food access issues.

on this. I really appreciate the work that you have done building a positive relationship with the Fish and Wildlife Department."

Wilson showed a video presentation that was prepared by Fish and Wildlife Program Manager Kelly Dirksen and shown to the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission during its meeting in Bandon. The video used images of Natives fishing at Willamette Falls on traditional scaffolds as far back as 1841.

"That was a great day and I'm happy to be here to talk to you about it," said Wilson. "During the restoration process for the Tribe, we lost a good deal of our hunting and fishing rights and we are continually working on that with

Tribal Council, the Legal Department and with the membership on getting those rights back."

Mercier followed with a presentation concerning food access awareness in the Grand Ronde area.

Mercier said he has been participating in meetings about food access as part of the Food Access Community Team since March 2015.

"Our goal is always to raise awareness of food issues in Grand Ronde and the surrounding communities," said Mercier. "We need to assess what those issues are. Food access is becoming a national issue."

Mercier presented survey results that he and other members of FACT conducted in regard to food access.

He said 222 people filled out surveys and that 37 percent of respondents were Tribal members. Sixty-two percent of the respondents were female and 90 percent of respondents said they get their food from a large grocery store.

Fifty-five percent of respondents said they accessed a food bank and 83 percent said they rely on their personal vehicle to obtain food. As many as 79 percent said they had to regularly travel as far as 20 miles to obtain food.

Mercier said about 40 people attended the group's community conversation on Thursday, Jan. 28, in

the Tribal Education Building. He also thanked those who have been working on FACT, including Lexi Stickel-Tool and Ian Dixon-MacDonald of Marion-Polk Food Share, Nutrition Program Manager Kristy DeLoe and Food Bank Coordinator Francene Ambrose.

Mercier said the main idea to come from the community outreach portion of the group's work has been the idea of the community getting a large, retail grocery store.

Mercier said his group is looking to organize a food access fair on an upcoming weekend.

"We will try to get as many people there as we can," said Mercier. "We are looking at that as a chance to expand awareness of the issues."

Mercier turned over the presentation to Community Garden leader and Tribal Elder Patricia LeClaire.

LeClaire, who also is the Tribe's Food Sustainability administrative assistant, showed before and after pictures of the garden and said she was sad to learn that some people did not know about the Community Garden plot.

"It was really heartbreaking when I found out there were a lot of people in our community that weren't aware of the Community Garden," said LeClaire. "I try to get the word out on Facebook and I'm going to be putting up a sign at the end of the road so people know it's down there. It was a very big undertaking."

In other action, it was announced that the next General Council meeting will be held 11 a.m. Sunday, June 26, at the Tribal Community Center for accepting nominations for Tribal Council. The June 26 meeting will be the last General Council meeting for the summer and meetings will resume again on Sunday, Sept. 11, following the Saturday, Sept. 10, election.

Heather Petite, Penny DeLoe and Michael Langley won the \$100 door prizes and Linda LaChance, Sally Petite, Cindy Larsen, Kathy Provost and Peter Grout won the \$50 door prizes.

Veronica Gaston and Bob Duncan won the beaded necklaces created by George.

The meeting, in its entirety, can be viewed on the Tribal website at www.grandronde.org, click on the News tab and then Video. ■

Child Care Development Fund Plan available for comment

Come to the Tribal Community Input meeting on Wednesday, June 8, or contact our office to review our draft Child Care Development Fund Plan and provide comments. For more information, contact Early Childhood Education Program Manager Angie Blackwell at 503-879-2287. ■

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