

'We never want to be in a reactive slugfest with Ilani'

GENERAL COUNCIL
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Tribal land holdings are located in Oregon, from Kilchis Point on Tillamook Bay to the Portland area office in Multnomah County to Rattlesnake Butte near Junction City north of Eugene.

Another map detailed the Tribe's land holdings in the immediate Grand Ronde vicinity.

Reibach said the five-member Lands Department will provide a review of Tribal lands annually from now on.

Reibach said the Tribe's approach to acquiring land are to either build the community, purchase forest lands for economic development, recover and protect significant cultural sites, and to buy commercial real estate.

Reibach said one of the most important jobs for his Lands Department is transferring Tribal land holdings from fee status, where the Tribe must pay taxes and follow local zoning laws, to trust status, which transfers the land title to the federal government in trust for the Tribe.

Reibach said the Tribe broke a national record for fastest fee-to-trust conversion in 2012 with three properties simultaneously being processed in slightly more than three months.

He concluded the Lands presentation by explaining that he works with the General Manager's Office and Tribal Council to research, recommend and administer special projects, such highest and best-use



Photos by Dean Rhodes

Tribal Lands Manager Jan Looking Wolf Reibach, left, and Spirit Mountain Casino General Manager Stan Dillon were two of the speakers who briefed the membership on numerous topics during the Sunday, May 7, General Council meeting held in the Tribal Community Center.

studies on Tribal properties.

Reibach fielded three questions and comments from Tribal members after his presentation.

Hernandez delivered a brief status update on the 31-acre Multnomah Greyhound Park site in Wood Village purchased by the Tribe in December 2015.

"We just recently completed our highest and best-use study on the property," Hernandez said. "We're now looking to go into a more detailed study that will detail out some financial options should we look to develop that property at some point.

"We're also still continuing to work with the city of Wood Village on the master planning process. They were going through



that process when we purchased the property and we're hoping that process will be completed in June."

Hernandez was followed by Spirit Mountain Casino General Manager Stan Dillon, Marketing Director Shawna Ridgebear and Gaming Director Lon O'Donnell, who gave the membership an in-depth look at how Spirit Mountain management started preparing for the opening of the Cowlitz casino two years ago.

Dillon said that despite the Cowlitz casino being much closer to the Portland metropolitan area, Spirit Mountain still has many positive characteristics in its favor, including the "horrible" drive Portland-area residents must endure to cross the Columbia River and the recent 82,000-square-foot renovation, as well as Vegas-style random number generator slot machines and wide-area progressive games.

"We actually cannot stop them," Dillon said. "It's a very large area with 3.8 million people that we are competing for. One advantage that we have so far is we have been here for over 20 years and a lot of guests who have been here are used to Spirit Mountain. I think we have done a good job throughout the years taking care of those guests and I think they know that."

Dillon said many Spirit Mountain regulars are older and some of those people do not like driving on crowded and often stalled freeways.

"Unfortunately, the casino doesn't have a magic wand or special weapons," Dillon said. "But what we do have is a newly remodeled casino; we have the hotel, which will be very important because they don't have a hotel yet ... large-name entertainment will be very important to us. So we do have some tools and our marketing and our marketing dollars."

Ridgebear said her department's goal is to always get players who might try the Cowlitz casino to eventually return to Spirit Mountain. She also cited positives about Spirit Mountain that are absent from Ilani, such as a poker room, free valet parking, dedicated parking for recreational vehicles with no time limit and, of course, the Cedar Plank Buffet that can feed up to 1,600 customers in a shift.

Ridgebear also touted the casino's proactive marketing and the previous experience management personnel have from being in a competitive market in Reno, Nev.

"Our goal is never, never to be reactive, what you call knee-jerk marketing, where we look like our brand is desperate or weak, because that is never the case. Spirit Mountain is a leader in our market and we will continue to be so," she said.

Ridgebear and Dillon also said the casino has thoroughly examined its database to determine who regular Spirit Mountain customers are since approximately 80 percent of revenue derives from 20 percent of guests.

O'Donnell concluded the casino presentation by talking about internal research analysis tools used to determine which slot machines guests play, as well as future trends in gaming technology, such as electronic table and skilled-based games, to attract younger customers and are not currently legal in Washington state.

"We never want to be in a reactive slugfest with Ilani," Ridgebear said. "What we can do is in a very respectful and tasteful, professional manner highlight the differences between the two properties."

Dillon fielded seven comments and questions from Tribal members following the presentation.

Tribal Council Secretary Jon A. George joined Cultural Resources Department employees Brian Krehbiel and Jordan Mercier in performing the cultural drumming and singing to open the meeting and Tribal Council Vice Chair Cheryle A. Kennedy gave the invocation.

Steve Rife, Tracie Meyer and Garry Williams won the \$100 door prizes while Ron Tuomi, Robert Wiggs, Debi Anderson, Jeannette Varay and Starr Nitehawk won the \$50 door prizes. Tuomi donated his door prize to the Grand Ronde Food Bank.

Beaded necklaces, a gas card donated by Tribal Council member Brenda Tuomi and her husband, Ron, and other donated items also were raffled off.

The next General Council meeting will be held at 11 a.m. Sunday, June 25, in the Tribal Community Center for Tribal Council nominations only.

The entire meeting can be viewed on the Tribal website, www.grandronde.org, by clicking on the News tab and then Video. ■

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