

General Council receives
Natural Resources update
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Smoke Signals

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UMPQUA ■ MOLALLA ■ ROGUE RIVER ■ KALAPUYA ■ CHASTA

Tribal Council approves lodge, store investments

By Dean Rhodes
Smoke Signals editor

Tribal Council approved on Wednesday, Feb. 5, almost \$16 million in loans and equity investments that combined will remodel Spirit Mountain Lodge and the Grand Ronde convenience store located just east of Spirit Mountain Casino on Salmon River Highway.

Tribal Council OK'd a \$15.5 million loan from the Tribe's line of credit to Spirit Mountain Gaming Inc. that will fund construction for the first phase of lodge interior remodeling.

The lodge's interior remodel will include adding more high-demand suites, updating older lodge rooms, and redesigning and updating the entrance way and Hall of Legends connecting the lodge to Spirit Mountain Casino. Tribal Council approved \$1.1 million to fund the remodel's design phase in March 2018.

During the Tuesday, Feb. 5, Legislative Action Committee meeting, Tribal Council members Jack Giffen Jr., Kathleen George and Steve Bobb Sr. supported the lodge remodel, pointing out that with gaming and hotel competition now in Clark County, Wash., that Spirit Mountain Casino and Lodge must remain fresh and up-to-date to continue attracting guests.

"This is a necessary, strategic investment," George said.

The revamping of the 254-room

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Photo by Timothy J. Gonzalez

How BIG can Grand Ronde become?

A water storage tank on a hillside across Highway 18 from Spirit Mountain Casino on Thursday, Jan. 17, holds 500,000 gallons of water and was built by the Tribe to ensure fire protection for Spirit Mountain Casino and water supply for the community.

Community water supply is plentiful for future growth

(Editor's note: This is the first in a series of Smoke Signals stories in 2019 that will examine the infrastructure of Grand Ronde and how many Tribal members could conceivably return to live in the community safely and comfortably.)

By Dean Rhodes
Smoke Signals editor

Regarding the Grand Ronde Tribe's Strategic Plan-stated goal to "attract new Tribal members, diversify and grow the population, and promote a healthier, sustainable community," one thing it doesn't need to fret about

is the most elemental commodity – water.

Tribal lands are located within the boundaries of the Grand Ronde Community Water Association, where there's plenty of water, and water rights, to fulfill the needs of current and future population growth into the fore-

seeable future.

The association, incorporated in 1973, has water rights to more than 691 gallons per minute – approximately 363 million gallons a year – and is currently using 225 to 500 gallons per minute depending on seasonable demand.

Water Association Manager Karl Ekstrom shrugs his shoulders during a recent interview in response to the Tribe's plans

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Bryan Mercier takes reins as BIA's regional director



Photo by Dean Rhodes

Grand Ronde Tribal member works way up from Summer Youth Crew

By Danielle Frost
Smoke Signals staff writer

PORTLAND — Grand Ronde Tribal member Bryan Mercier didn't travel far when he left his job at the Bonneville Power Administration for one at the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

He merely walked across the courtyard from the BPA offices to the BIA offices.

Although Mercier still drives to the same

building he has for the past 10 years, the job he does now is very different. While at the BPA, he served as division director of Fish and Wildlife. Now, Mercier is the Bureau of Indian Affairs' regional director, the senior most official overseeing all Northwest BIA functions ranging from staffing to transportation.

"We're a microcosm of federal government services," he said. "I was happy with my former job, but this has been a great opportunity to help Indian Country."

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Tribal member Bryan Mercier received a Pendleton blanket from Tribal Council Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy during the Sunday, Feb. 3, General Council meeting in honor of his being hired as the new regional director for the Bureau of Indian Affairs.