

Tribes to receive funds from relief bill

Native American Tribes will receive \$8 billion in “stabilization funds” to support Tribal governments dealing with the coronavirus pandemic as part of a \$2 trillion coronavirus relief bill approved by Congress in late March.

The \$8 billion fund is at the core of more than \$10 billion in benefits available to Tribes and Tribal organizations under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act, which was signed into law by President Donald Trump on March 27.

The fund will pay for “emergency relief to Tribal governments and offset costs incurred by Indian Tribes during to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Indian Health Services will receive more than \$1 billion to help Tribes pay for COVID-19 treatment and containment of the virus, with another \$305 million going to Indian Housing programs in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, \$100 million to the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations

and \$453 million to the Bureau of Indian Affairs for public safety and law enforcement.

The bill also makes Tribes and Tribal businesses eligible to receive \$454 billion in loan guarantee funding as well as \$349 billion through the U.S. Small Business Administration.

Grand Ronde Tribal representatives participating in a Thursday, April 9, consultation call with the U.S. Department of the Interior and Treasury Department regarding the relief fund.

During the Tuesday, April 7, Legislative Action Committee hearing, Tribal Council Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy said the Grand Ronde Tribe has received approximately \$100,000 in reimbursement from the federal government and that Tribal employees continue to monitor information coming out of Washington, D.C. “It’s a moving target for funding,” she said.

There are currently more than 570 federally recognized Tribes in the United States. ■

Purchase of Salem property on Commercial Street OK’d

COUNCIL MEETING
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entrance to the Governance Center. Tribal Council is scheduled to approve the supplemental budget at 10 a.m. Thursday, April 23, after the 15-day comment period ends.

Tribal Council also made a decision that will still be binding in 2105.

During its second consecutive 10 a.m. meeting and with six members attending on the phone, Tribal Council approved an amendment to the Chemawa Station property master ground lease that will allow the combined business venture between the Grand Ronde and Siletz Tribes – Chemawa Station LLC – to offer 99-year leases to potential businesses wanting to locate at the Keizer location.

Currently, the master ground lease for Chemawa Station LCC is only for 25 years.

During the Tuesday, March 31, Legislative Action Committee hearing, Mercier asked Tribal Senior Staff Attorney Deneen Aubertin Keller if this is the first action taken by the Tribe that will be binding into the next century. She said she thought it was.

In other action, Tribal Council:

- Approved applying for a Tribal Homeland Security Grant that would provide approximately \$324,000 over three years and fund Emergency Services staff as well as allow the Tribe to obtain a

medical isolation tent with heating and air conditioning valued at approximately \$100,000;

- Approved Tribal Lands Manager Jan Reibach to proceed with a purchase and sale agreement for a property on Commercial Street in Salem. The purchase was discussed in executive session during the Legislative Action Committee hearing and more details about the property purchase were not disclosed during the Tribal Council meeting;
- Approved the Natural Resources Department submitting an application to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife’s Willamette Wildlife Mitigation Program expressing the Tribe’s interest in being the long-term owner of the 467-acre Enchanted Oaks conservation property. Enchanted Oaks is located in Marion County and includes oak savannah/upland prairie, wetland prairie, oak woodland and riparian forest;
- And approved a resolution requesting the Tribe’s partner governments extend more time for participation in all projects and actions potentially affecting Tribally important resources during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

To watch the entire meeting, visit the Tribal government’s website at www.grandronde.org and click on the Government tab and then Videos. ■

Group was meeting every week to assess the situation

CASINO continued
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would receive another 120 hours to compensate for the continued closure of the casino and partial closure of the Tribal government.

“By making this decision, we are hoping to help our employees through the month of April,” General Manager David Fullerton said. “We are hoping we will be able to return to normal work schedules in May. The modeling and forecasts indicate that if people comply with the ‘stay at home and stay safe’ philosophy, there is a possibility that we can begin to return to normal in early May.”

The Grand Ronde Tribal Council and Spirit Mountain Gaming Inc. Board of Directors were meeting every Wednesday afternoon to assess the pandemic situation in Oregon and discuss when to re-open the casino.

In an unprecedented move, the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde announced an initial two-week closure of its primary economic engine, Spirit Mountain Casino, beginning at 11:59 p.m. Wednesday, March 18, to help combat spread of the coronavirus in Oregon.

Preliminary estimates projected having the casino and its approximately 1,100 employees being idle beginning at midnight Thursday, March 19, through Wednesday, April 1.

After a meeting between the Grand Ronde Tribal Council and Spirit Mountain Gaming Inc. Board of Directors on Wednesday, March 25, it was decided to keep the casino closed until at least Thursday, April 9.

“This closure is a precautionary measure to help protect the Tribal community, staff and guests as the COVID-19 outbreak escalates throughout the state, region and country,” said a press release jointly issued by Tribal Council Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy and Spirit Mountain Casino General Manager Stan Dillon on Thursday, March 26. “The Tribe’s and casino’s first priority is the health and safety of everyone that comes to Spirit Mountain Casino. The casino management and Grand Ronde Tribal Council will continue to monitor the situation and will revisit this decision on regular basis.”

However, the number of coronavirus cases in Oregon and the United States continues to increase

unabated and suggested national social distancing guidelines were extended through the end of April by the federal government. Government estimates say that hundreds of thousands of Americans could die from the virus if stay-at-home and social distancing recommendations are not followed.

The closing of Spirit Mountain Casino followed a Monday, March 16, announcement by the Cowlitz Tribe that it was closing Ilani, its Ridgefield, Wash., casino. The Cowlitz announced that they would comply with Washington Gov. Jay Inslee’s order shutting down restaurants, bars and entertainment venues.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown announced similar restaurant and bar restrictions during a press conference held Monday, March 16, in Portland. When asked about the state’s Tribal casinos, she said that she did not have the authority to close them because they are operated by sovereign nations.

“I would ask that our Tribal leadership of our nine federally recognized Tribes be working with their local health authorities in making the appropriate decisions to protect the health and safety of Oregonians,” Brown said.

Brown indefinitely extended her restaurant and bar restrictions on Tuesday, April 7.

“We pride ourselves as being a caring community that views every individual that walks through our doors as a member of the Grand Ronde family,” Dillon said. “The casino staff has done an outstanding job protecting everyone through preventive measures, but the continued growth of COVID-19 in Oregon has made this closure necessary.”

“These unprecedented times call for unprecedented measures and we all have to do our part to stop the spread of COVID-19,” Kennedy said.

Spirit Mountain Casino opened in October 1995 and has been the primary funding source for Tribal governmental operations and myriad benefits to Tribal members, including health care, Elders’ pensions, per capita payments and educational funding. It also was Oregon’s No. 1 tourist destination for a time and became one of the largest employers in Yamhill and Polk counties.

The Siletz Tribe, which operates Chinook Winds Casino in Lincoln City, also closed its gaming facility indefinitely. ■

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