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Tribe holds First Fish Ceremony on July 21

The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde held its first First Fish Ceremony since 2019 on Thursday, July 21, at the fish weir on Agency Creek in Grand Ronde.

Tribal Communications Director Sara Thompson said the ceremony was "private" and that photos and videos were prohibited.

"This is the first one since COVID and it's important that we reset, treating it with as much respect as possible," Thompson said.

Tribal First Fish ceremonies celebrate the return of salmon to either Willamette Falls or Reservation waters in Agency Creek.

Tribal fishermen and women caught 15 hatchery salmon at Willamette Falls this year from the rocks because it was too dangerous to erect the temporary platform because of water flows. It was only the second time that Tribal members have been able to catch the total number of ceremonial fish permitted by the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife since April 2016. ■

Some issues require confidentiality

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of the information discussed.

General Council meetings also are often held in executive session if they concern the Tribe's draft and approved budgets, Spirit Mountain Casino's financial performance or briefings on the Tribal endowments.

According to a *Smoke Signals* analysis of scheduled executive session items held on Tuesdays between 2016 and 2021, the current Tribal Council is dealing with more executive session items.

Smoke Signals reviewed the published agendas for each Tuesday in those six years and tallied every time an item was listed as executive session. The number of executive session items was 65 in 2016, 63 in 2017, 67 in 2018, 81 in 2019, 92 in 2020 and 85 in 2021.

In 2016, 65 executive sessions items were scheduled on Tuesdays, which are the traditional days to hold Legislative Action Committee hearings and work sessions. Of those 65 scheduled executive session items, 17 – or 26.2 percent – were dedicated to enrollment issues. In 2017, 63 executive session items were listed and 19 were enrollment related and in 2018 there were 67 executive session items and 32.9 percent – 22 – were enrollment issues.

Over the three-year period of 2016-18, Tribal Council handled an average of 19 enrollment-related items annually in executive session.

Other topics consistently held in executive session during those three years were meetings with Tribal lobbyist Justin Martin, Gaming Commission updates, informational sessions provided by the Polk County Sheriff's Office and Grand Ronde Tribal Police Department, financial briefings with Baird regarding the Tribal endowments and discussions about land acquisitions.

In 2020, Tribal Council had 92 executive session items listed on

Tuesday agendas, with 29 – 31.5 percent – involving enrollment and Restoration Roll correction issues. Restoration Roll corrections did not begin until February 2019 and some of the increases in executive session items can be attributed to those closed hearings, according to *Smoke Signals*' analysis. For instance, 40 percent of executive session items listed in 2019 were enrollment related and that year saw the largest number of Tribal members added to the Restoration Roll.

Between 2019-21, an average of 31 enrollment-related items were heard annually in executive session, 12 more than the previous three-year average.

Consistent topics held in executive sessions in 2020 included legal updates, briefings with the Tribe's Audit Services Department, meetings with lobbyist Martin and discussions about land acquisitions.

According to *Smoke Signals*' review of Tribal Council's Tuesday agendas, the spike in executive session items in 2019 is partially attributable to the Tribe purchasing the former Blue Heron Paper Mill site in Oregon City in August of that year.

The increase in 2020 was partially caused by COVID-19 issues, frequent check-ins with executive staff, especially during the first several months of the pandemic, and pandemic-related discussions that were often held in executive session.

During the June 29 Tribal Council meeting, former Tribal Council member Brenda Tuomi, who is also one of four candidates this year, raised the executive session topic during the Other Business portion of the meeting, citing discussions she had seen on Facebook.

Kennedy stressed that Tribal Council does not make final decisions in executive session, which is not permitted by ordinance.

"The reason for going into executive session is always noted," said Tribal Council Secretary Michael Langley. "If there is anything that

is money related, that's all going to show up in the budget, whether it be a supplemental budget or just a note of where things are moving from."

Langley added that Tribal Council is not trying to be secretive, but some issues require confidentiality, such as negotiating business deals with nonTribal entities or discussing possible land acquisitions and how much the Tribe might be willing to pay for the properties.

Tribal Council Chief of Staff Stacia Hernandez said that some executive sessions items can be discussed with individual Tribal mem-

bers if they contact her at stacia.martin@grandronde.org, but the Tribe does not want sensitive and confidential information broadcast over the Internet for all the world to know.

The current Tribal Council is handling more executive session items over the last three years that have been caused primarily by land acquisitions (Blue Heron), the COVID-19 pandemic and Restoration Roll corrections, which currently stand at 562 Tribal members being added to the historically important roll since early 2019. ■



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