

Salinas, Merkley reintroduce bill to remove consent decree

WASHINGTON — U.S. Rep. Andrea Salinas and U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley introduced legislation to restore traditional hunting and fishing rights for the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, they announced on Friday, Feb. 21.

The House version of the bill is cosponsored by Suzanne Bonamici, Val Hoyle, and Janelle Bynum. The Senate version is cosponsored by Ron Wyden.

Grand Ronde is the only federally recognized Tribe in the country bound by a consent decree, which limits where, when and how much Tribal members are allowed to hunt and fish on their traditional lands.

If passed, this legislation would allow the Tribe to return to federal court to request the termination or modification of their current consent decree with the state of Oregon, Tribal Council Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy said.

“The Tribe was forced to sign the decree in 1985, when its federal status was restored,” she said.

“For nearly 40 years, the consent decree has placed unfair and unjust conditions on the Grand Ronde Tribe’s sovereignty. At this point the Grand Ronde Tribe is the only Tribe in the nation with these restrictions. The introduction of this legislation brings this issue to light and presents us with the first step in righting this historic wrong. We’re grateful to congresswoman Salinas and our delegation for bringing this issue forward.”

Salinas agreed.

“For decades, members of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde have been unable to freely hunt and fish on their ancestral lands – all because of an unfair consent decree they were forced to sign,” she said. “My legislation would rectify this injustice by allowing the Tribe to renegotiate and come to a new agreement. I’m grateful for the partnership of the Grand Ronde Tribal Council and my Oregon colleagues as we continue to right the wrongs of the past.”

Merkley introduced a similar bill in 2020 that passed the Senate but not the House.

“The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde were forced to give up their traditional ability to hunt, fish and gather on Tribal land as the price of restoring their homelands,” he said. “This historic injustice has stood for far too long. Our legislation is critical to remove federal restrictions on the Grand Ronde and allow them to fully engage in these traditional activities once more.”

Wyden agreed.

“The historic injustices inflicted by the federal government on the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde are long overdue for reversal and repair,” he said. “This bill would help to achieve those objectives by restoring their abilities to hunt, fish and gather food on their ancestral lands without government overreach and intervention. I will keep partnering with the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde and the other eight federally recog-

nized Tribes in Oregon for justice that protects Tribal sovereignty.”

Bonamici called the consent decree a shameful remnant of past U.S. government efforts to undermine Tribal sovereignty.

“I’m grateful to join my Oregon colleagues on this effort to correct this historic injustice,” she said.

Hoyle and Bynum also expressed their strong support.

In December 2023, Salinas and Merkley’s legislation restoring Grand Ronde’s right to pursue land claims and compensation was signed into law. The Grand Ronde Reservation Act Amendment was the first piece of legislation introduced by Rep. Salinas as a member of Congress, as well as her first bill to become law. It corrected an error introduced into the Grand Ronde Reservation Act in 1994, when the Tribe accepted a 240-acre parcel of land in exchange for an 84-acre parcel that was mistakenly left out of a 1904 sale of lands to the Tribe on the eastern edge of the Reservation. ■

‘The stay is as long as it takes’

OPENING continued
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it’s more of a wellness philosophy. We don’t know anyone else who has that philosophy.”

Inpatient treatment beds are in short supply in Oregon.

“This is really such a culmination of so many dreams for us,” Rowe said. “We have fought so many times for a bed for our members. This gives us the ability to know we have a placement and it’s local, and it’s our own programming.”

Phase two of the project, she said, includes building a sports court for games like basketball and pickleball, and constructing a sweat lodge.

Acquisition and renovation of the building took more than a year. The work included opening up rooms and repainting to make the space light, airy and welcoming. During the renovation, Rowe said, workers discovered that an arched doorway separating what is now a large living room from a smaller parlor



Tribal Health Services Executive Director Kelly Rowe speaks during the Main Street Recovery House open house in Sheridan Monday, Feb. 24.

had been covered over. “It was all blocked off, and they had, like, flowery wallpaper over it,” she said. “So, our first thing was, ‘Let’s open this up, to make it lighter, and wel-

coming.’ Our whole thing has been, make it lighter. ... it was very dark, and just not welcoming. We wanted to make it so when somebody walks in, they feel good. When somebody says ‘Ok, I’m ready for help,’ you don’t want them to walk into a place that’s doom and gloom. You’re already not feeling good.”

The doorway now features a graceful set of French doors that can be left open to provide a larger gathering area, or closed to allow more privacy.

A formal dining room holds a long table for family-style dining, while a cozy breakfast nook in

the kitchen allows for smaller gatherings.

The house will serve both men and women. Visiting hours will be by appointment, Great Circle Recovery Operations Director Jennifer Worth said.

Once members move from the treatment center into the transitional apartments, the next step is having intensive outpatient services, including mental health services.

During inpatient care, services are intended to help people get stabilized. Once that has been accomplished, Rowe said, it’s time to delve into “why somebody has fallen into that use of illicit substances.”

The Tribe has previously opened Great Circle Recovery programs in Salem and Portland, with a mobile van that delivers services to the Tribal campus, as well as transitional houses for people in recovery from drug and alcohol addiction. The new center is intended to fill in some of the gaps between those services.

“This whole continuum of care that we’re building, it makes my heart full,” Rowe said. “It’s an amazing thing to have the support of Tribal Council, have them support this whole program for our membership. They will be saving lives for our membership.”

Joey Nicolas, a Great Circle employee who will work as primary nurse for the new center, said he’s excited to be part of the new program.

“I’ve worked in long-term care and Tribal nursing, and just the idea of helping people get off the drugs and on their feet is very rewarding,” he said. ■



The Main Street Recovery House is located on West Main Street in Sheridan.