

Tribal Council approves response to federal agencies

By Danielle Harrison & Nicole Montesano

Smoke Signals staff

Tribal Council approved its response to agencies regarding the federal government’s proposals to reduce protections to Tribal resources, including water quality, at its Wednesday, May 14, meeting.

The response is essentially Tribal Council declaring a minimum standard for the federal government to uphold its treaty and trust responsibilities to the Tribe.

“This is a way of addressing the rollbacks that are coming,” Tribal Ceded Lands Manager Michael Karnosh said during a Tuesday, May 6, Legislative Action Committee meeting. “This is projected to affect the majority if not all of the resource protection laws that are in place and the system of protecting resources. This is important to the Tribe because the Tribe has treaty rights and the federal trust responsibility that the federal government owes to the Tribe. Those two things are going to remain intact despite whatever rollbacks they’re going to go...I don’t expect this to prevent all of the rollbacks, but I think it could be a good way for the Tribe to communicate the Tribe’s values and positions, not only to the person receiving the comments but our partners at the state and regional levels of national government, and our local partners and other folks.”

A staff memo sent to council went into further detail.

“The revised definition of ‘waters of the United States’ is just one of many rollbacks planned by the current administration on laws and regulations originally set up to protect resources important to the Tribe, according to news reports and corroborated by statements from the administration itself,” it stated. “In many cases, these laws and regulations contain requirements that Tribes be fully consulted before significant actions or changes are implemented, which is not happening here.”

The memo further explained that

a consultation session with federal agencies was more akin to a notification of the proposed changes.

“In March 2025, Tribal staff became aware of a notification from the agencies to the effect that the agencies plan to revise the definition of ‘waters of the United States’...On March 31, Michael Karnosh and Keri Handaly from Ceded Lands attended an online consultation session hosted by the agencies. The webinar was, in fact, not a consultation at all. Instead, it consisted of employees from the agencies reading from a script, notifying us that the agencies will be revising the definition, inviting Tribes to comment on it but hinting strongly that the comments are unlikely to have any practical effect on the outcome of the rulemaking.”

Written comments on the proposed changes were due Tuesday, May 20. Ceded Lands collaborated on Tribal comments with Natural Resources, Cultural Resources and the Tribal Attorney’s Office.

“The larger (nationwide) issue is that the agencies and indeed the federal government including the entire Departments of Interior, Agriculture, Commerce, Energy, Defense and others, are implementing a program of defunding/destaffing/deregulation on their own organizations,” the memo stated. “The intended outcome of this program, expressed by the administration and apparent from its recent actions, is to roll back the U.S. government structure to that existing in the 1920s or earlier. It probably does not need to be explained here that for most of the 1920s, private business interests ran rampant over Tribal natural and cultural resources, whether on public or private land, with no government ‘interference.’ Tribal consultation was never considered or practiced, Indigenous people were not guaranteed the right to vote anywhere, and in fact enrolled Tribal members were not considered U.S. citizens.”

In other action, Tribal Council:

- Approved modifying an easement for the Tillamook People’s Utility District on the Noble Sisters property;
- Approved a Tribal credit card for Tribal Court Administrator Shawn Branson with a \$5,000 limit;
- Approved increasing the Procurement Department’s credit card limit to \$50,000;
- Approved a per capita payment date of Friday, June 13;
- Approved reappointing Ralph Baker and Steve Nuttal to the Grand Ronde Gaming Commission with terms expiring June 30, 2028;
- Approved an amendment to the Tribal Transportation Program between the Tribe and the U.S. Department of the Interior;
- Approved reappointing Tracie Meyer and Perri McDaniel to the TERO Commission, with terms ending March 31, 2028;
- Approved acceptance of the Tribal Early Literacy Grant of \$282,222, to support the Education Department’s programs engaging in early literacy activities;

- Approved appointing Darlene Aaron, Shannon Lafferty, Jennifer VanAtta and Tammy Garrison, with terms ending March 31, 2027, and Kimberly Contreras, Pamela Warren-Chase and Melody Wright, with terms ending March 31, 2026, to the newly-reconstituted Elder Board. Several people made comments objecting to the appointments, saying that Elders should have been able to vote in the new board members, and that the new board members will need the institutional knowledge of previous members.
 - And approved the enrollment of two infants and two non-infant minors in an emergency declaration into the Tribe because they meet the requirements under the Tribal Constitution and Enrollment Ordinance.
- To watch the entire meeting, visit the Tribal government’s website at www.grandronde.org and click on the Videos tab. ■

Hotel room rates increase

As of January 2025, the Spirit Mountain Hotel at Spirit Mountain Casino has implemented a revised pricing structure for the Elders discount, which has remained unchanged since the hotel’s opening in 1997. The new discounted rates are \$99 for mid-week stays, \$109 for weekends and \$129 for holidays.

This adjustment is necessary to better align room rates with the actual cost of room upkeep, while still offering competitive pricing, according to Spirit Mountain Casino Chief Executive Officer Camille Mercier.

The Tribal member discount will reflect a 10% discount on standard room rates. The RV park will offer Elders and Tribal members a \$10 discount off the standard rate at the RV lot.

“The changes ensure that we continue to provide valuable services while maintaining financial sustainability,” Mercier said. ■

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