

LETTER 11 (LOG # A014)

Cowlitz Indian Tribe

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THE COWLITZ INDIAN TRIBE

ORAL COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

PUBLIC HEARING JUNE 14, 2006

Good evening. My name is Phil Harju. I am a member of the Cowlitz Tribal Council. On behalf of the over 3500 members of the Cowlitz Tribe of Indians, I am here to offer some brief comments about the Tribe's fee-to-trust request and the draft Environmental Impact Statement that analyzes the potential impacts of taking that land into trust. The Tribe has more detailed technical comments on the draft EIS that we will be submitting in writing. But tonight we think it is important to provide the public with accurate information about the Tribe's history and about the Tribe's plans and vision for the future.

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The land near ^{Exit 16} ~~the La Center I-5 junction~~ is extremely important to the Cowlitz Tribe and its members. For more than 150 years, the Tribe has had to survive without the benefit of any reservation or trust land – no land to provide housing, health or governmental services, or to develop tribally-based economic opportunities that will generate tribal employment opportunities for Cowlitz members and much-needed revenue for the tribal government. The Cowlitz Tribe is landless today because the United States issued an Executive Order in 1863 that opened our lands to white settlement even though we had never agreed to give up our lands, and even though the United States had not set aside a reservation for us.

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As our traditional lands were transferred to non-Indians, our people became scattered throughout southwestern Washington and northern Oregon. Over the course of time, the federal government used our landlessness as an excuse to refuse to provide federal Indian services to our

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~~Gunpoint, force - killed~~

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people and to withdraw its recognition of our tribal government. It was precisely because of our landlessness that we were forced to reapply for federal recognition in the twentieth century, a process that took us ^{25 YEARS} ~~fully-quarter century~~ to complete. Once we finally ~~we~~ overcame that hurdle, we had no choice but to use our own resources to locate (and find a way to pay for) a parcel of land that could meet the very real needs of our Tribe. We found that parcel in Clark County, and we have asked the Bureau of Indian Affairs to take that land into trust and make it our reservation. Only when that land is taken into trust and made our reservation will the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, after nearly a century and a half of landlessness, be able to begin to rebuild its future.

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The Cowlitz Tribe has a very strong historical connection to Clark County. Despite what some people like to say in the press, in fact our historical connections to this area are clear and unambiguous. As just one example, in 1854 William Tappan, the federal Indian agent responsible for Indian tribes in southwestern Washington, specifically recommended to Governor Stevens that the Cowlitz be given a reservation at Chelatchie Prairie here in Clark County. As you all know, the Chelatchie prairie lies just a few miles from the parcel of land we have asked be taken into trust for our reservation. Mr. Tappan specifically cited the Cowlitz Tribe's attachment to this area when he made that recommendation. Unfortunately, Mr. Tappan's recommendation was ignored by ^{territorial Isaac} Governor Stevens, who refused to give the Cowlitz any reservation unless the Tribe agreed to relocate to live with other tribes at a reservation on the Olympic Peninsula, far from our traditional lands. When we refused to move from our traditional lands, Governor Stevens broke off treaty negotiations and left us with no reservation at all.

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Our long history of landlessness has had devastating effects on our Tribe – economically, socially and culturally. The acquisition of the parcel in trust for the casino-resort project will help to address those effects by providing the Tribe with a much-needed source of revenue for its tribal government, funding for social programs and employment opportunities for its members, tribal

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elder housing, and an opportunity to reestablish the Tribe's cultural identity through the opening of a tribal cultural center.

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But our proposed project will not just help the Cowlitz Tribe. Equally important, it will provide the surrounding ~~non-tribal~~ community with a wide range of economic benefits, including 3,000 new jobs with full benefits and healthcare coverage, 4,000 construction jobs while the facility is being built, increased spending and economic opportunities for surrounding businesses and communities, including revenue from the sales tax on construction purchases totaling an estimated \$39 million, as well as a beautiful new venue for entertainment and fine dining. The DEIS describes these and other economic benefits that will accrue to both the Tribe and the surrounding community.

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Just as important, the DEIS describes the Tribe's efforts to mitigate potential impacts to the environment by agreeing:

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- To fund traffic mitigation including road improvements and improvement of the I-5 interchange;
- To make payments to the County to offset tax revenues lost when the land is taken in trust;
- To collect state sales tax on non-tribal purchases at the casino and resort;
- To make payments equivalent to the County hotel occupancy tax;
- To establish a charitable fund for arts and education;
- To contribute at least \$50,000 a year to address problem gaming;
- To compensate the County law enforcement, prosecuting attorney's office, courts, schools and fire districts that will provide public services on the Tribe's trust lands;
- To develop the project in a manner that is consistent with County development codes; and
- To comply with State and County health requirements.

The Tribe also has offered in writing to enter into an agreement with the City of La Center in an effort to mitigate economic impacts to the City's tax revenue generated by the ~~non-Indian~~ card

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rooms located there, and to support capital facility projects for the City, although those negotiations have made limited progress to date. The Cowlitz Tribe has undertaken these multiple initiatives because it is committed to being a good neighbor and to working with the local communities to make this project a success for everyone affected.

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Cont.

Conclusion SW WA + the Cowlitz Tribe

Clark County is important to us. We have been living in this area for many centuries, long before newcomers drew State and county boundary lines on a map. We believe that we all -- the Cowlitz Tribe and the local community -- want the same thing: economic development that will provide significant benefits and a financially secure future for our communities and for our people, without destroying the character of the place that we consider our home. We fully believe that the Cowlitz project as described in the DEIS meets these objectives.

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We hope that everyone will take the opportunity to carefully review the DEIS and raise any questions or concerns that they may have, either in these public hearings or during the remainder of the comment period. We are confident that the more accurate information people have, the more they will recognize that this project will benefit all of us.

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments, and thank you for listening.

From the
Hearings

For the Cowlitz
people.

Missing pg's
call AES
note - they refused
the 12/10/06
fill/13