



Judge rejects opponents of southwest Michigan casino

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GRAND RAPIDS — A federal judge has dismissed arguments by opponents of a proposed Indian casino in southwest Michigan, bringing the 304-member Gun Lake tribe a step closer to developing the project.

U.S. District Judge John Penn in Washington, D.C., ruled late Friday in favor of the Department of the Interior, which intends to take 146 acres in Allegan County's Wayland Township into trust for the casino.

Michigan Gambling Opposition sued in 2005 to block the government from taking the land into trust. Penn ruled Friday that the anti-casino group "has raised no genuine issues of material fact."

Gun Lake officials said they expected an appeal, but called Penn's ruling a significant step, the Grand Rapids Press reported Saturday. Once the land is in trust, the tribe can proceed with its plans to build the casino.

"This decision is a cause for great celebration, both for the tribe and the people of West Michigan who dream of economic opportunities and good paying jobs with great benefits," D.K. Sprague, tribal chairman, said in a statement.

A message seeking comment from Michigan Gambling Opposition was left Saturday night at the group's office in Moline.

The tribe has estimated the casino will create 1,800 direct jobs and 3,100 indirect jobs while providing it with millions of dollars for education, housing, elder care, cultural preservation and other services.

Michigan Gambling Opposition contends a casino would be an economic drain, unfairly competing with existing entertainment venues increasing crime and harming families.

The Gun Lake tribe announced an agreement with a Las Vegas-based Station Casinos in 2003 to develop and operate a casino at the site, about 20 miles south of Grand Rapids. It would feature up to 2,500 slot machines, 75 game tables, a buffet and specialty restaurants.

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