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Casino Land Planned To Be Put Into Trust

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November 2, 2006

ALLEGAN COUNTY — A casino in Allegan County is one step closer. The Federal Government has announced plans to put land into trust for the Gun Lake Tribe early next year.

Last year the Federal Government announced that 146 acres in Wayland Township would be put into trust.

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Good news for the Gun Lake Tribe, but bad for casino opponents like Todd Boorsma. The Michigan Gambling Opposition or Michgo sued the Department of Interior arguing that the government ignored the concerns of businesses and individuals and didn't look at a second economic study, one that suggested a casino would be bad for the area.

"With the increased traffic, there's no way you can put that many cars on those veins of roads and not improve those roads," said Boorsma.

It's been in court for more than a year, so the federal government put an end to it, saying the tribe has been harmed by the lawsuit. So now the government set a date to put the land in trust.

"We're sitting down with the Federal Government to try and resolve this lawsuit as soon as possible," said tribe representative John Shagonaby.

Michgo says it's far from a done deal. They can file an injunction against the trust if the court allows it. Meantime, the state still is not on board. The Governor hasn't signed a compact to allow slot machines or card tables. Without it only bingo and some related games are allowed.

"What we want to do is work with the State and negotiate in good faith on a compact and take that compact to the federal government for approval," said Shagonaby.

If that doesn't work, the Tribe thinks the feds can still give permission for a full-fledged casino once the land is in trust, since it's happened in other states.

"There's so many roadblocks in Lansing that they have to go to Washington to get their goals accomplished," said Boorsma. "And all we're asking is they do that they play by the rules."

We also spoke with representatives for Governor Granholm and Dick DeVos.

Granholm's camp says if the land comes into trust, she would continue to negotiate a compact with the Tribe.

DeVos' rep thinks the state will eventually be forced into a deal by the courts. If so, he says as governor he would comply.

Without a compact, the State does not get any share of casino money.

The land is set to be put into trust January 5th.

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