



Tribe calling for state compact on casino

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By Dave Murray

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WAYLAND -- Gun Lake Tribe leaders say a court victory they believe paves the way for a new casino should spark Gov. Jennifer Granholm to negotiate a gaming compact, or else the state risks being cut out of any proceeds.

A federal judge Friday rejected all four counts of a lawsuit opponents hoped would block the U.S. Interior Department from placing land into trust for the tribe, a key move toward a casino.

The ruling allows the government to place 146 acres near U.S. 131 in Wayland Township into the trust unless a group called Michigan Gambling Opposition wins a planned appeal.

John Helmholdt, spokesman for the group, said he expected attorneys to file a motion today asking a judge to prevent the land from being taken into trust while an appeal is pending.

Granholm spokeswoman Liz Boyd on Sunday said Granholm is aware of the court decision.

"We have been in regular communication with the Gun Lake Tribe," she said. "And we are carefully working on a course of action that will result in the best interests of the citizens of Michigan."

James Nye, a tribe spokesman, said Sunday those best interests would be served by a compact allowing the state to have some oversight and earn revenue from a casino.

The tribe is seeking a license allowing slot machines and gaming tables.

"That's really the only logical path for the state to follow," Nye said. "It's in everybody's best interests. We are confident that we will be able to reach agreement for a Class III license, and equally confident that the Michigan Legislature will approve it."

Nye said the state has 180 days to come to an agreement once the land goes into a trust, and that the tribe intends to move forward with construction regardless.

He pointed to a 2005 decision by the U.S. Interior Department giving the Northern Arapaho the go-ahead for casino plans over the objection of the Wyoming state government.

Because Wyoming refused to negotiate a compact, the tribe won't have to share any revenue from the casino with the state, nor will state regulators have oversight over operations.

Nye said the tribe is asking for "fair and equitable treatment," noting the state already allows several Indian-run casinos, horse racing and a statewide lottery.

State Rep. Michael Sak, D-Grand Rapids, said lawmakers want the opportunity to discuss any compact.

"My hope is that the governor will engage the Legislature in discussion," he said Sunday.

Plans call for the tribe to convert the former Ampro factory into a casino and entertainment complex with card games and thousands of slot machines.

The tribe intends to open a 193,424-square-foot complex as soon as 2008.

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