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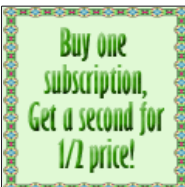
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Michigan and Gun Lake Tribe sign gaming compact

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Posted: March 19, 2007

by: [Gale Courey Toensing](#) / Indian Country Today

LANSING, Mich. - The Gun Lake Tribe and Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm signed a tribal/state Class III gaming compact on March 9 that could bring millions of dollars in revenue to the state and local governments.

Gun Lake - the Match-E-Be-Nash-E-Wish Band of Pottawatomi Indians - plans a \$200 million, 190,000-square-foot casino and entertainment facility with 2,500 slots and 80 gaming tables on 146 acres of tribal land in Bradley in southwestern Michigan.

The facility would directly employ 1,800 people with a total average annual compensation package of \$40,000, and provide an additional 3,100 indirect jobs and more than \$20 million per year in direct purchases of goods and services from the area's businesses.

D.K. Sprague, tribal chairman, urged the Legislature to move forward quickly with its approval of the compact.

"I applaud Gov. Granholm for signing the compact and respectfully request that the Michigan Legislature take the final step to put us on equal footing with all other federally recognized tribes in Michigan. After years of playing by the rules, we're still asking for the same things - treat us like all the other tribes," Sprague said.

Following the compact signing, Granholm also urged the lawmakers to act in a letter to the Legislature.

"The Gun Lake Tribe has won a decisive victory in the federal courts and it appears that placement of the tribe's Michigan land into federal trust is imminent," Granholm wrote. "Once the tribe's land goes into trust, the tribe will almost certainly have the right under federal law to open a commercial gaming facility - with or without a compact with the state. Given these circumstances, it is in the best interest of the state to enter into a gaming compact with the tribe to ensure that the state has both some say in the operation of the facility and an opportunity to share in its revenues," Granholm wrote.

The compact improves on the state's agreements with the 11 other Michigan tribes that operate Class III gaming facilities and provides for "larger and more stable revenue sharing payments," Granholm said.

The tribe will pay the state 8 to 12 percent of net slot revenues, depending on gross revenue. The compact also provides a more limited exclusivity area of nine counties.

"Past compacts have required gaming exclusivity on a statewide basis as a condition of tribal payments to the state. As a consequence, the approval by the voters for casinos in Detroit had the effect of eliminating the revenue sharing obligations of tribal casinos, even those located at the distant corners of the state," Granholm said.

The tribe will also share 2 percent of its slot machines revenues with local governments. The funds will be distributed by a local board comprised of three tribal representatives and three local government representatives.

The compact mandates a high level of regulations, including:

- * Employees and patrons in the gaming areas must be over 21 years of age.
- * The casino will comply with the Michigan Employment Security Act and Worker's Disability Compensation Act.
- * The tribe will comply with state laws regulating the sale of alcohol and tobacco including collecting tobaccos taxes on sales to non-tribal members.
- * State regulatory oversight of the tribe's gaming records and other records related to enforcement of the compact.

"It's a very fair deal for all respective governments. There are substantive improvements compared to other tribal compacts. It's really in the Legislature's hand at this point to do what's in the best interest of the public and local governments and support the compact that's in place," said James Nye, tribal spokesman.

Although the tribe and its partner, Stations Casino, are ready to move forward with a gaming facility with or without a state compact, the preference is to have a state compact even though the tribe would reap more of the profits without one, Nye said.

"The tribe, through years of consistent outreach with all governments that would be impacted, has maintained an effort to be a good friend and a good neighbor to what's in the best interest of not only its own government and members, but the local communities, local schools and other civic organizations that would receive local revenue sharing dollars from the project," Nye said.

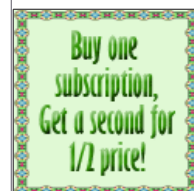
Local governments and businesses were quick to praise the compact.

"The local revenue sharing dollars will offset needed infrastructure costs and enhance civic projects like it's done in other tribal areas of the state," Wayland Township Supervisor Roger VanVolkinburg said.

"We congratulate the Gun Lake Tribe and thank Gov. Granholm. We enthusiastically welcome thousands of good paying jobs and millions of dollars in construction and purchasing from the casinos," said Steward Sandstrom, president and CEO of the Kalamazoo Regional Chamber of Commerce.

Eric Bush, head of the tribal gaming division of the Michigan Gaming Control Board, lauded the compact.

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"It's a good thing. I always thought Gun Lake should get their casino as quickly as possible, but there are these groups that have blocked several of the tribe's paths to gaining self-sufficiency, because they don't want competition or whatever. It'll bring jobs and money that certainly will be welcome at a time when revenues are hard to find and we've got deficits we're trying to work our way through. And for the tribe it's going to be immediately helpful in promoting their self-sufficiency, taking care of their elders, health care, children's education. I see it as a very positive thing for the entire," Bush said.

The compact comes on the heels of a federal court decision to dismiss a lawsuit filed by Michigan Gambling Opposition, an anti-Indian casino group, to stop the Interior Department from taking Gun Lake's property into trust.

MichGO President Todd Boorsma could not be reached for comment. The group plans to continue its opposition, according to a report in the Detroit Free Press.

"Granholm has laid out the red carpet for the tribe. She has totally shut us out," Boorsma said.

After dismissing MichGO's lawsuit, the judge issued a ruling blocking Interior from moving forward with its land into trust plans until MichGO's appeal is heard. In a precedent-setting case last year, however, the appeals court tossed out an identical appeal filed by one of MichGO's collaborating groups against the Pokagon Tribe of Potawatomi Indians - Gun Lake's cousins and neighbors. The Pokagons expect to open their casino in the summer.

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