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## Gun Lake asks court to dismiss lawsuit

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by: **Gale Courey Toensing** / Indian Country Today

BRADLEY, MI. - The Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomini Indians joined the Justice Department Jan. 6 in asking a federal court to dismiss a lawsuit that seeks to block the Interior Department from taking land into trust for the tribe's proposed casino in southwestern Michigan.

The lawsuit was filed by MichGo, one of the dozens of anti-casino groups that have sprouted up around the country over the past several years. MichGo, which stands for Michigan Gambling Opposition, filed a lawsuit last year challenging Interior's final approval of the tribe's land-into-trust application.

The 300-member Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band, known as the Gun Lake Tribe, was federally acknowledged in 1999. The tribe plans to develop a casino and entertainment complex in Wayland Township on 147 acres of trust land.

"We are very hopeful the court will concur with our position that MichGo's claims have no merit. We appreciate the help from the Department of Justice in defense of the tribe's federal rights. Gun Lake is trying to restore our reservation less than three miles from our homelands in Bradley," said Tribal Chairman D.K. Sprague.

On the same day Gun Lake filed for a summary dismissal of MichGo's lawsuit, the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi - Gun Lake's cousins and neighbors - learned that the federal Court of Appeals in Washington, D.C., had tossed out an identical lawsuit that sought to delay its efforts to develop Four Winds Casino Resort on 675 acres in New Buffalo Township in southwestern Michigan.

The appeals court decision to dismiss the Pokagon case sets a precedent for Gun Lake, Sprague said.

"We congratulate the Pokagon Band on this well-deserved victory. The court of appeal's decision confirms what we've been saying all along - MichGo's lawsuit is frivolous and does nothing more than cost taxpayers millions of dollars while delaying thousands of good-paying jobs for the citizens of west Michigan. These lawsuits have only one goal: to fight competition," Sprague said.

According to legal documents and reports, both Taxpayers of Michigan Against Casinos and MichGo were helped by the anti-competition efforts of Boyd Gaming Corp., a multi-billion-dollar Las Vegas company that operates the Blue Chip Casino in nearby Indiana, nine miles from the Pokagons' proposed project.

A few weeks after Gun Lake filed for dismissal of MichGo's lawsuit, the tribe had reason to congratulate its own management company - Station Casinos Inc. of Nevada - for being named among Fortune Magazine's "100 Best Companies to Work For in 2006."

"We applaud the company's commitment to its team members and the contributions it has made to the community. The tribe is very pleased with the high level of quality our management team had established. West Michigan will be a better place to live and work with the arrival of an exceptional job provider like Station Casinos," Sprague said in a press release Jan. 23.

The Fortune magazine announcement marked the second consecutive year that Station Casinos has received the prestigious recognition. The company ranked 55th overall, placing it above such companies as Yahoo, Federal Express and Nike. Fortune also recognized Station Casinos as one of the most diverse companies to work for, with minorities making up 48 percent of its U.S. work force.

The Gun Lake Tribe hired Station Casinos in November 2003 to manage its tribal casino proposal. Last June, the tribe and Station Casinos held a career fair that attracted 4,000 participants over a two-day period, Sprague said.

The tribe and Station Casinos also hosted a "vendor interest" fair in conjunction with the Kalamazoo Regional Chamber of Commerce and the chambers of Barry and Allegan counties last June that drew more than 400 west Michigan companies that submitted consideration forms for vendor contracts with the proposed casino, Sprague said.

The tribe estimates that the proposed casino will create 1,800 direct jobs with an average annual compensation package of \$40,000, 3,100 indirect jobs, and more than \$20 million per year in purchases of goods and services from area businesses.

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