

Debate over off-reservation Oregon casino continues

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

Federal and state governments considering radical change in policy to allow the state's first off-reservation casino in the Columbia River Gorge - opening the door to even more casinos and threatening the scenic beauty and natural environment of the Gorge

PORTLAND, Ore. - Leaders of a diverse coalition opposed to changing government policy to allow a Gorge casino off-reservation lands said they look forward to the opportunity for the majority of Oregonians who oppose a massive new casino in the Gorge to speak-out during the upcoming public comment period that will occur with the release of the federal government's draft environmental impact statement.

"The policy of one-casino, per tribe, on reservation lands is fair, treats all Oregon tribes equally and limits casinos. Allowing a Gorge casino unravels this balanced policy and threatens the Gorge environment. We support an on-reservation casino alternative for the Warm Springs people," said Dan Lavey, a spokesman for a coalition of environmental, small business, pro- family and tribal interests who oppose the Gorge casino proposal.

In addition to concerns about the precedent of allowing Oregon's first off-reservation casino and threats to the Gorge environment, new guidelines recently released from the Department of Interior giving greater scrutiny to new casinos located outside of reasonable commuting distances for tribal members also raise doubts for the future of the Gorge casino proposal.

"A 218 mile round-trip commute from where most tribal members live is neither reasonable nor safe. The border of the Warm Springs Reservation may be 40 miles 'as the crow flies' to the proposed new casino, but most tribal members live much further away and would have a 2-3 hour daily commute depending on weather and road conditions," said Lavey. "A new on-reservation casino doesn't require a change in policy and would improve the economic livelihood of tribe."

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