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# Warm Springs considers casino

■ The tribes want to build a casino in the Hood River area, and if constructed it would be the closest such operation to the Portland area

By JEANIE SENIOR  
Correspondent, The Oregonian

HOOD RIVER — The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs are considering building a casino in the Hood River area, tribal leaders told local officials in a series of meetings Monday.

If constructed, it would be the closest casino to the Portland area, with the potential to attract significant numbers of people to the Columbia River Gorge.

As envisioned, the operation would be a 75,000-square-foot, two-story building that could accommodate 2,200 to 2,500 patrons, with 1,000 auto parking spaces

and 200 spaces for recreational vehicles and trucks.

Preliminary studies indicate that a casino near a large population center, such as Portland, could generate about \$50 million a year in gross revenues and employ 290 to 375 people, said Dennis Karnopp, tribal legal counsel.

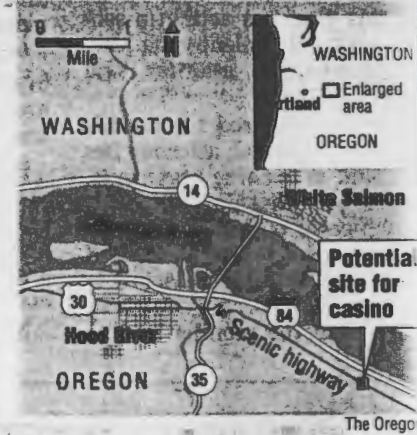
In a news release Monday, Warm Springs Tribal Council Chairman Olney Patt Jr. said a parcel of the tribes' trust land about two miles east of Hood River adjacent to the Historic Columbia River Highway is among several possible locations being explored. Other lands in Hood River County not held in trust or

tribal ownership also are being considered, Patt said in the news release.

The facility would be considerably larger than the tribes' Indian Head Casino at Kah-Nee-Ta Resort, which opened in May 1995. But that casino, 12 miles off U.S. 26, has a limited earning potential.

The decline of other natural resources-based tribal moneymakers, including the timber industry and hydroelectric generation, caused tribal leaders to look for more ways to earn

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## Casino: Expansion requires new compact

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money.

Patt promised, however, that any proposal would proceed "in a deliberate and cautious manner . . . with the utmost consideration of the best interests of our tribal members and any affected community.

"As we explore our options we ask that our tribal members be patient and support our efforts and that our non-Indian neighbors hear us out and give any proposal a fair evaluation."

Hood River Mayor Paul Cummings and City Manager Lynn Guenther cautioned the tribe that the idea could face some opposition in Hood River.

"We pointed out that other people

have gone before them and had problems. They were aware of that and respected that, and said if they decide to locate here they want to be part of the community."

With Hood River's changing economy, the mayor said, "we've been able to watch people and how they react to new things, i.e. windsurfing and tourism. Sometimes it's not accepted real gracefully, but as time heals, windsurfing has become a real viable part of our community."

Warm Springs tribal members approved gaming in a 1994 referendum that authorized a five-year trial period. Another referendum would be required next year to continue or expand gaming on the reservation, Patt said. Expansion to off-

reservation gambling could mean another referendum, Karnopp said.

The trust lands east of Hood River, which have been held by the tribe since 1978, initially were an individual allotment granted to a Native American in 1923. The parcel is inside the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, but because it is in tribal ownership, the property is exempted from the regulatory requirements of the federal act that created the scenic area and from the scenic area's management plan.

The federal Indian Gaming Regulatory Act calls for casino-style gaming to be conducted by Native American tribes under the terms of a compact between the tribe and the state. Expansion of gaming by the

Warm Springs tribes would require negotiation for a new compact with the state of Oregon.

Federal law requires that a tribal casino must be operated on reservation lands or on trust lands held in trust by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior. The interior secretary has a limited authority to take newly acquired lands into trust for gaming purposes, after consultation with the Native American tribe and local officials, and a determination that the gaming establishment would be in the best interests of the tribe and its members and not be detrimental to the surrounding community.

Even then, the tribe can proceed only if the state's governor concurs with the Interior secretary's decision.

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