



FRIENDS OF THE COLUMBIA GORGE

Press Release

www.gorgefriends.org

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Long-delayed casino study released for public review

The public now has the opportunity to weigh in against this off-reservation casino resort and in favor of protecting the Columbia River Gorge

The Bureau of Indian Affairs released the long-delayed draft environmental impact statement (EIS) for the proposed casino and resort within the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area in Cascade Locks, Oregon. The draft EIS, written by casino developers, was issued following the adoption of new federal guidelines that make it more difficult for Tribes to establish casinos outside their reservation boundaries or near environmentally sensitive areas. The new guidelines, found at www.gorgefriends.org, raise even greater doubts about the off-reservation casino proposal in the Columbia River Gorge and favor on-reservation alternatives.

“After years of delays, the public finally has the opportunity to speak out against a 600,000 square-foot casino along the Columbia River within the heart of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area,” said Michael Lang, Conservation Director for Friends of the Columbia Gorge. “It’s our responsibility to protect this national treasure for future generations and not allow it to be overrun by casinos and resorts.”

The new federal guidelines adopted in January discourage off-reservation casinos that are not a “reasonable commuting distance from a Tribe’s population center. Cascade Locks is a 220 mile round trip commute, around Mt. Hood, from Warm Springs. The new guidelines also require avoidance of “federally designated conservation areas” such as the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, in order to avoid conflicts with fish and wildlife and natural scenic landscapes.

Federal fish and wildlife officials are concerned that placing a huge casino resort in the Gorge would harm endangered salmon in the Columbia River. The National Marine Fisheries Service issued a letter in August 2006 finding that construction of a huge casino

resort and other related construction would destroy habitat and cause adverse effects to salmon and steelhead, listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (the letter may be found at www.gorgefriends.org).

“The best solution is a casino along Highway 26 near the town of Warm Springs,” said Kevin Gorman, Executive Director of Friends of the Columbia Gorge. “This alternative would protect the Columbia Gorge, provide revenue for the Tribe and more jobs for Tribal members and preserve Oregon’s policy against off-reservation casinos.”

The casino EIS is the second major development proposal in a week to threaten the protection of the Columbia Gorge. Earlier this week, over 200 people packed a meeting room in Hood River to strenuously oppose a proposed housing development at a world-renowned windsurfing site. “While 99% of the individual Gorge landowners are working to follow the rules and protect Gorge landscapes, major developers are using their influence to change the rules and destroy a national treasure,” said Lang.