

## For some, the proposed Cowlitz casino-resort would be devastating

### Not just a game

For most people, gambling is just another form of recreation. For others it is a problem.

A study of gambling and problem gambling in Washington state found:

- 5 percent of adult Washingtonians have had gambling problems
- 2.3 percent have had gambling problems during the previous year
- Problem gambling is 2 to 3.5 times more prevalent among people who play at casinos.

Note: This study was published in 1999, before many of today's casinos were built.\*

Within 50 miles of a gaming facility, the number of problem and pathological gamblers doubles, according to the National Gambling Impact Study Commission report, also released in 1999.\*

\*See the [Final Environmental Impact Statement \(EIS\)](#), beginning at 4.7-7.)

### Problem gaming at the proposed Cowlitz casino

Video slot machines, which in Washington are allowed only in tribal casinos, are known to be especially addictive and are referred to by some as "the crack cocaine of gambling." A study of pathological gamblers found that those gambling primarily on machines became addicted much more quickly (after one year) than those using more traditional means, such as cards, sports and instant lottery games (after 3.5 years), according to research published in the International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction. The proposed casino would have 3,000 slot machines at full buildout.

**Crime rates tend to begin rising 3 or 4 years after a casino begins doing business in a county.**

If the proposed casino were to attract 4 million visitors a year, that would be nearly 11,000 a day. Considering the Washington State Council on Problem Gambling statistics, using the most conservative calculation, at least 250 casino visitors a day would be suffering from gambling problems.

The Cowlitz Tribe's unilateral ordinance, written to replace the invalidated agreement with Clark County, states that the Tribe would offer "no less than \$50,000 per year" to assist with gambling problems.

Here is the justification offered by the Tribe's Final EIS: First, it estimates that bringing the casino-resort to the La Center junction could increase the number of problem gamblers by "approximately 1,716"—adding to the "approximately 7,893" adults in Clark and Cowlitz counties who currently experience gambling problems requiring treatment. Then, it cites a report that says only 3 percent of people with severe gambling problems will seek treatment in a given year—in the case of these new problem gamblers, that would be 52 people. One counselor, paid \$47,500, should be able to take care of those 52 people, according to the EIS.

But what about the other (at least) 1,664 people who would have developed gambling problems? They would cost the community in many other ways, which are listed in the EIS as secondary effects: "crime, bankruptcy, divorce, domestic violence, and mental or physical health problems. ..." And what about the many visitors from Oregon who also would develop gambling problems?

## Problem gaming: a community problem

Economists at the University of Illinois-Urbana-Champaign and University of Georgia examined research from across

the country for a 2001 study that concluded the economic benefits of casinos do not outweigh their costs. What follow are some of their findings:

Two-thirds to 80 percent of gambling revenues come from the 10 percent of the population that gambles most heavily.

- 62 percent of gamblers in treatment committed illegal acts as a result of their gambling.
- In a 1998 survey of nearly 400 members of Gamblers Anonymous, 57 percent said they had stolen to finance their gambling. The average amount stolen? \$135,000. The total stolen? More than \$30 million.
- "Problem and pathological gamblers often impose costs on their employers (in addition to theft or embezzlement ...) in the form of an unreliable presence on the job and reduced productivity when present. Between 21 and 36 percent of problem gamblers in treatment reported losing a job because of their gambling," according to a 1998 study.
- Gambling costs more than raising taxes, even for those who never gamble. Each compulsive gambler costs the economy between \$14,006 and \$22,077 per year.
- Crime rates tend to begin rising 3 or 4 years after a casino begins doing business in a county.
- Two-thirds to 80 percent of gambling revenues come from the 10 percent of the population that gambles most heavily.