

**The case for an alternative site**  
**Citizens Against Reservation Shopping**  
**January 2007**

**The Cowlitz Tribe's purpose and need**

The Purpose and Need section of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Cowlitz Tribe's proposed trust acquisition and casino project states:

The Cowlitz Indian Tribe, which is currently landless, wishes to create a Tribal land base for its members and establish a Tribal Headquarters from which its Tribal Government can operate to provide housing, health care and other governmental services, and from which it can conduct the economic development necessary to fund these Tribal Government services and provide employment opportunities for its members.<sup>1</sup>

**An alternative site and its benefits to the tribe**

What if the tribe considered locating its reservation and casino project in Lewis County, 50 miles north of the casino developer's current preferred site? A casino in Lewis County:

- would be in the heart of the tribe's true aboriginal homeland, and the tribe would have no trouble proving its historical connection for a restored lands or initial reservation designation.<sup>2</sup>
- would be near the greatest concentration of Cowlitz Tribe members. An independent analysis found that Lewis County is the most accessible location for the most Cowlitz Tribe members.<sup>3</sup>
- would have the potential to benefit the most tribe members with employment, services and cultural opportunities.
- would eliminate the need for relocation of many tribe members. For example, elder housing is part of the casino project proposal, but tribal elders are already being housed at St. Mary's Center near Toledo in Lewis County.<sup>4</sup>
- would make three times the revenue of the average Washington tribal casino, and "would generate earnings well above what are necessary to compensate the Cowlitz Indian Tribe for needs unmet by federal sources,"<sup>5</sup> according to an independent economic analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> Analytical Environmental Services, *Cowlitz Indian Tribe Trust Acquisition and Casino Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement*, 1-6. April 2006.

<sup>2</sup> See the findings of the Indian Claims Commission and the Office of Federal Acknowledgment, and the Cowlitz Tribe's Petition for federal acknowledgment.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Whelan, *Alternative Site Analysis for Trust Land: The Financial & Economic Development Feasibility of a Cowlitz Tribal Casino Near Vader, Washington*, 9 March 2006, 33.

<sup>4</sup> "Cowlitz Indian Tribe Begins Renovation," *Venture Bank Community Connections*, December 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Whelan, 34.

### **Other benefits of a Lewis County casino proposal**

Local officials are interested in working with the Cowlitz Tribe on a casino as an economic development opportunity.<sup>6</sup> Lewis County, which has a labor force of 32,540,<sup>7</sup> lost 600 jobs overnight when the TransAlta coal mine closed in November.<sup>8</sup> There is open land available with easy access to Interstate 5.

This alternate site would help the EIS meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The DEIS identifies six alternatives at only two sites, 2 miles apart and both in Clark County, where there is considerable controversy. This does not provide a true alternative site as required by NEPA.

### **What about the current preferred site?**

If the site for the proposed project were moved to Lewis County, the landowners of the current proposed site would find ready buyers, if they wished to sell. The La Center junction is part of an area designated by the local economic development council as “The Discovery Corridor,” a potentially lucrative growth area.

In evaluating the Draft EIS, the Greater Vancouver Chamber of Commerce rejected the tribe’s preferred alternative and instead threw its support behind Alternative D, a business park at the La Center junction site, calling it “a great solution where business is concerned.”

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<sup>6</sup> See Dec. 4, 2006, letter from Winlock, Wash., Mayor Cy Meyers to DOI Associate Deputy Secretary James Cason.

<sup>7</sup> Workforce Explorer, “Lewis County Profile,” *Washington Labor Market*, <[www.workforceexplorer.com](http://www.workforceexplorer.com)>, 24 January 2007.

<sup>8</sup> In Don Jenkins, “Group seeks horse arena near Winlock,” *The Daily News*, 25 January 2007, Lewis County Commissioner Ron Averill says, “We are desperately seeking new jobs and new opportunities to help our people.”