



THE COWLITZ TRIBE'S PATTERN OF DECEPTION

On March 2, 2004, the very day Clark County Commissioners signed an agreement with the Cowlitz Tribe in an effort to mitigate issues that would result if land at La Center were taken into trust, a representative of the tribe attended a La Center City Council meeting and read a statement by Cowlitz tribal chairman John Barnett. It read, in part, "We have always lived up to our word and treated our neighbors with the same respect and integrity we would expect to be shown in return."¹

They must not have expected much of their neighbors. What follows is a timeline showing the evolution of the Cowlitz Tribe's casino project. It demonstrates an unwillingness to be forthcoming with area communities.

April 2001—David Barnett purchases land just west of the La Center-Interstate 5 interchange.

Jan. 4, 2002—The Cowlitz Tribe is granted federal acknowledgement.

March 12, 2002—The Cowlitz Tribe applies to place 150 acres at the La Center-Interstate 5 interchange in trust. (The Department of the Interior later returns this application and requires the tribe state a specific land use and declare whether the land will ever be used for gaming.²)

At the time, David Barnett, son of tribal chairman John Barnett, is quoted in *The Oregonian* saying, "We are not doing a casino. We have no plans to do a casino. We are recently recognized, and we want to make sure that everyone knows, including our neighbors, that we are good people and that we are good stewards of the land." He adds that the tribe might use the land for a cultural enterprise like Tillicum Village near Seattle.³

October 2003—A draft environmental assessment being prepared by the Cowlitz Tribe for the U.S. Department of the Interior includes a 41,800-square-foot casino enterprise. The facility description has 12,500 square feet of gaming floor plus a restaurant and a gift shop, and parking for 350 cars. An introduction to the EA says that the tribe did not want

¹ *The (Longview) Daily News*, 4 March 2004.

² *The Oregonian*, 16 October 2003.

³ *The Oregonian*, 13 March 2002.

to rule out gaming because “the tribe did not wish to exclude any potentially lawful use of the subject lands.”⁴

March 2, 2004—Not knowing the Cowlitz Tribe’s exact intentions for the site, Clark County Commissioners sign a memorandum of understanding that requires the Cowlitz Tribe to compensate the county for property and sales taxes that the tribe, as a sovereign entity, would otherwise not have to pay and to comply with local ordinances concerning building and health codes.

March 12, 2004—Clark County is notified by the Bureau of Indian Affairs that the tribe has requested the La Center parcel be named its initial reservation for gaming purposes.

April 2, 2004—Clark County commissioners send a letter to the BIA making clear their surprise and disappointment in the Cowlitz Tribe’s application for initial reservation status—and their concern about casino-driven development at a junction that had been intended for commercial and industrial uses that would bring family-wage jobs to the northern part of the county.

July 26, 2004—The Cowlitz Tribe announces its partnership with the Mohegan Tribe of Connecticut.

Nov. 12, 2004—The Federal Register publishes notice of the BIA’s intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed Cowlitz casino project. It spells out the tribe’s proposal “for approximately 160,000 square feet of gaming floor, 210,000 square feet of restaurant and retail facilities, 150,000 square feet of convention and entertainment facilities, an approximately 250 room hotel, tribal governmental offices, a tribal cultural center and approximately 10 to 25 housing units. The proposed development would also include parking facilities for approximately 8,500 vehicles for patrons and employees, and an RV park with approximately 200 RV spaces.”

March 15, 2005—The Cowlitz Tribe quietly applies for restored lands status with the National Indian Gaming Commission.

⁴ *The Oregonian*, 16 October 2003.