

Grand Ronde now watching Maletis land

Spirit Mountain owners say Langdon Farms property is part of their homeland

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By Patrick Johnson

Ridiculous.

That's what representatives of the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde are calling a plan to put 385-acres south of the Willamette River in trust to the Klamath Tribes.

"It's ridiculous," said Siobhan Taylor, public affairs director for the confederation. "It's not their homeland, and it is ours."

What prompted the response was a recently released draft confidential term sheet between the Maletis brothers and the Klamath Tribes that outlines how the property around Langdon Farms Golf Course will be put into trust. Once in trust the land will be leased back to a joint corporation between the Maletis family and the tribe for development.

It will allow Chris and Tom Maletis, who own the property, to circumvent local land use laws to develop the property without having it in the urban growth boundary.

Recently, Clackamas County's Policy Advisory Committee recommended the land be studied for a rural reserve area, meaning it wouldn't be allowed to be developed for at least the next 40 years. The agreement with the tribe, if the Klamath Tribes and Maletis family can get it into a trust, means development could happen much sooner.

Historical claim

The Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde are made up of several different tribes, including Molalla Tribes from the western slopes of the Cascade Mountains and the Kalapuya Tribes from the Willamette Valley.

In 1954 Congress officially severed the trust relationship between the Federal government and many of the tribes of western Oregon. The Act terminated more than 100 years of history on the Grand Ronde Reservation.

"At one time the reservation was more than 65,000 acres," Taylor said. "There was farming, timber and a lot of economic development. At the time of termination all that was left was two and a half acres that was our cemetery."

In 1983, Congress passed a bill restoring federal status to the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde and, in 1988, 9,811 acres of their reservation was restored.

Taylor said the tribes want to see other tribes succeed, but also want other tribes to be respectful of ancestral lands.

The Willamette Valley is at the heart of Kalapuya tribal land, she said, and there is even a display at Champoeg State Park about the tribe and its claims to the area. She said the Klamath have no historical claim on the land in this area.

Reaction

“Up to this point we have heard rumors about this property being put into trust for the Klamath Tribes and the negotiations with the land owners,” Taylor said. “This is the first time we have seen confirmation of those rumors.”

She said tribal leaders were curious as to why no one had approached the Grand Ronde tribes about the proposed agreement, since it involves part of their tribal lands.

Joe Kirk, chairman of the Klamath Tribes Tribal Council, said his organization is simply looking at a “business opportunity.”

“We want to provide jobs and opportunities for tribal members, but there would be significantly more opportunities for other people too,” Kirk said. “People kind of forget about that.”

Regardless of the economic impact for the area, however, Taylor said, land remains an important issue for the Grand Ronde.

“This is a policy issue for us,” she said. “It looks like they are claiming this as some sort of economic development opportunity for their tribe. If that’s the case, we have people who moved to other states, should we be allowed to put tribal lands there?”

It’s a sentiment Clackamas County Commissioner Charlotte Lehan agreed with.

“Clearly the land is in the Grand Ronde – specifically the Kalapuya Tribe’s land,” Lehan said. “If they can do it here why not claim lands in the Metolius basin and develop there, or downtown Portland? I have a hard time believing this ploy will work. If it could be done, it would have been done before.”

Taylor said the only other example she can think of involving a tribe taking property into trust outside of its own tribal lands involves the Warm Springs Tribes and their attempts at putting a casino in Cascade Locks.

“In this case, we are going to trust (the Bureau of Indian Affairs) to keep us informed on what is going on,” Taylor said. “At this point, there is a policy by the governor about only allowing one casino per tribe, so we are acting in good faith on that. If this goes into the trust process, we will definitely become involved.”