



Eureka Times - Gaming compact expected to bring millions to Wiyot Tribe

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After nine years, the Wiyot Tribe finally has its gaming compact.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed compacts between the Wiyot Tribe and the believes will allow it to provide for its citizens without compromising its environmental principles. The compacts had been in negotiations for nine years.

"The tribe is extremely excited about it," said Executive Director Maura Eastman. "This is a very big step for us."

Under the compact, the Wiyot Tribe would forego its right to game on its lands along Humboldt Bay in exchange for a slice of the economic pie from a gaming facility to be built and operated by the North Fork Rancheria. Because the North Fork Rancheria is located south of Yosemite National Park in the remote Sierra foothills, the compact states the new casino would be located on a 300-acre parcel just north of the city of Madera, which sits in the rancheria's historic area.

By entering into the compact, the North Fork Rancheria also forfeits rights to game on its other lands.

"These compacts are a model for protecting the environment and balancing the needs of the tribes and local communities," Schwarzenegger said in a statement. "The compacts avoid construction of a casino along California's coast and in the Sierra Foothills, while respecting both tribes' sovereign right to pursue economic development through gaming Advertisement and other means."

In a statement e-mailed to the Times-Standard Monday, State Sen. Patricia Wiggins complimented all parties involved for arriving at the compact.

"I commend the Wiyot Tribe and the Schwarzenegger Administration for crafting an agreement which protects the natural resources and environment resources and environment in and around Humboldt Bay, while expanding the Wiyot's opportunities for economic development to better the lives of their people," Wiggins said. "By foregoing its right to build a casino at Table Bluff, the Wiyot Tribe is helping to protect important and endangered species that live on or nearby tribal lands."

Over the Assembly, Patty Berg said, at first blush, the compacts sound good.

"I'm looking forward to meeting with the Wiyot Tribe to discuss the details," she said. "But, at first glance I think it's great if this deal can improve the lives of tribal members while protecting their environmentally sensitive lands."

Eastman said she believes the deal will do both.

"This compact, I think, is the best possible compact for us," Eastman said. "Our county is getting close to the saturation point of casinos -- it's a marvelous resolution, I think."

The North Fork Rancheria is to deposit into a trust for the Wiyot Tribe 2.5 percent of the casino's first \$100 million of net win, 3 percent of amounts between \$100 and \$200 million in net win and 3.5 percent of net win over \$200 million. According to a release from Schwarzenegger's office, the amount allocated to the Wiyot Tribe is expected to be between \$3 and \$5 million a year, nearly four times as much as the tribe currently receives in gaming allotments under state law.

Under the compacts, the Wiyot Tribe agrees not to distribute more than 50 percent of its net revenues from the casino to its tribal members in any given year, and to reserve at least 50 percent of its revenues to fund tribal government

operations or programs and to promote tribal economic development.

"We will be able to increase programs and, eventually, it will provide us with a more stable funding source," Eastman said.

The state also expects to profit from the new gaming facility, which is expected to generate more than \$25 million annually for the state general fund during each of its first seven years, according to a release from the governors' office.

The North Fork Rancheria has already entered into a Memoranda of Understanding with the County of Madera and the Madera Irrigation District to mitigate potential impacts associated with the project and the main hurdles remaining seem to be transferring the Madera property into federal trust, approval by the Secretary of the Interior and ratification of the compact by the Legislature.

For her part, Eastman said she doesn't foresee any problems.

"I would expect it to go smoothly," she said. "There is enormous support for this project in Madera. It stands to benefit the county greatly and, of course, the whole state."