



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

THURSDAY,
DECEMBER 17, 2009

The Madera Tribune

Native American tribes face many obstacles in overcoming centuries of poverty, political disenfranchisement, and loss of traditional lands.

But perhaps the most unfair barrier we face comes from wealthy gaming tribes using their political and financial powers to crush the economic aspirations of tribes such as ours in order to protect their own narrow economic interests.

Why are some wealthy tribes doing this? They don't want competition. Recent attacks and backhanded tactics by the Chukchansi Economic Development Authority against the proposed North Fork Rancheria destination hotel and casino resort continue this trend. These inaccurate attacks jeopardize desperately needed local jobs, business opportunity, and community investment and perpetuate misinformation about tribes and tribal projects.

Chukchansi ads and direct mailers have twisted the history of the North Fork project beyond recognition.

For instance, Chukchansi claims that our developer bought land in Madera and then "recruited" our tribe. In fact, our Tribe selected our developer—not the

Attacks on tribal plans called unfair

other way around—and then authorized them to secure an option for our proposed site.

Chukchansi would have you think we're ignoring an opportunity to build a casino on our own land or elsewhere in North Fork. This ignores the fact that our reservation is small, remote and owned by individuals and not by our Tribe. The Governor, the County, and the local community all agree that the tiny town of North Fork is not suited for commercial development of a casino and we therefore cannot acquire new land for gaming there.

Chukchansi also claims that our Tribe is somehow skirting the law. We aren't. Instead, we are following the precise process that Congress established in 1988 to provide tribes without a land base, such as North Fork, the same opportunity to engage in tribal governmental gaming that Chukchansi was afforded. This process is the only way left to us to develop economically so that we, like Chukchansi, can take care of our members and community at large.

Chukchansi's claim that allowing our project to proceed will open the floodgates to off-reservation gaming does not square with the facts. Over the past two decades, only 4 of the roughly 325 tribes who operate casinos nationwide have qualified under the same process that we are following. Ours is only one of two such

projects pending nationwide where the Governor has allowed the project to move forward by entering into a compact with the Tribe.

As we near final approval, you will hear other attacks by Chukchansi who is desperate to maintain its economic advantage at any cost. Such tactics undermine the economic prospects our Tribe, Madera County, and consumers who fare better with more competition. They also tend to drown out more legitimate issues that may exist.

For these reasons, we're confident that the people of Madera County will understand the source and motive behind such self-serving attacks and continue their unprecedented support of our project.

The North Fork tribe has been and will remain good neighbors and citizens of Madera County. Our project is a result of careful planning with the local community, the County, and the State and will result in a project that will benefit us all without serious harm to Chukchansi or any other tribe's economic interest. If you look at the facts and beyond the distortions, we think you will agree with us.

Elaine Bethel-Fink
Tribal Chairperson
North Fork Rancheria of Mono Indians