



Madera Tribune Article

**TUESDAY
APRIL 29, 2008**

By Charles Doud

The North Fork Tribe's plans for a resort and casino at the junction of Avenue 17 and State Route 99 took a major step Monday when Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed two related gaming compacts between the state and the North Fork Rancheria of Mono Indians and the Wiyot Tribe of Humboldt County.

The surprise arrangement, which had not been publicly discussed before, calls for the North Fork Rancheria to pay the Wiyots a percentage of the profits on their Madera casino - as much as \$5 million each year - in return for an agreement by the Wiyots to forego their right to open a casino on Wiyot tribal lands.

The Wiyot Tribe, which numbers 550 enrolled members, owns ancestral land on a bluff bordered by Humboldt Bay, the state's second-largest coastal estuary. Portions of the bay are managed as a national wildlife refuge.

Governor ties North Fork compact to a 2nd tribe

The deal could make the 2,000-slot-machine North Fork Rancheria casino more palatable to the legislature, which has been leery of off-reservation casino locations. Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, who opposes the compact, even introduced a bill recently that would require tribes to own the land where they wish to build a casino before the governor can begin negotiations with them.

The off-reservation issue has been hard for other tribes to get around, but these compacts represent a new option, said Andrea Hoch, the governor's legal affairs secretary.

"Basically, these compacts are novel approaches to providing what is best for the state of California," Hoch said. She said they reflect good public policy, which is a requirement the governor set down in 2005 for negotiating with tribes. "We are protecting two environmentally sensitive areas, one near the California coast and the other near (the) Sierra National Forest."

She said the arrangement didn't violate previous assertions by the

governor that land-poor tribes would not be able to shop for casino sites.

She said the governor had agreed to negotiate with any federally recognized tribe that had eligible land for a casino, which she said was true of both the North Fork and Wiyot rancherias.

"That doesn't necessarily mean the casino will be located on the land that presently is eligible," she said.

The Wiyot lands, near the town of Loleta, run a few miles along the coast south of Eureka. The tribe had been seeking a gaming compact for that area for nine years

North Fork Rancheria lands are in Madera County, in the foothills east of Madera, but tribal officials say they would be inadequate for a viable casino project. The proposed site of the casino and resort is 35 miles from the tribe's original reservation, but North Fork officials say their ancestors once regularly hunted and traversed the valley.

The North Fork Rancheria already has purchased the 305-acre parcel north of Madera for the casino, and has entered into memoranda of understanding with Madera County, the City of

Madera and the Madera Irrigation District to mitigate potential impacts associated with the project, and has agreed to establish charitable foundations for the community.

According to tribal Chair Elaine Bethel-Fink, the resort casino and hotel would generate approximately 1,500 permanent jobs, 750 temporary construction jobs, 2,000 ancillary jobs and \$45-\$50 million in annual purchases of goods and services each year.

Looking ahead

The casino has one more hurdle to clear - the U.S. secretary of the interior must approve placing the Madera County casino site into trust.

To read the rest of the story... you'll have to have an online subscription to The Madera Tribune. See below for details.