

EDITORIAL

Wintun tribe is attempting 21st century land grab

A plan by the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation to add 850 acres to its rancheria is not only outrageous but foolishness incarnate.

We urge the Yolo County Supervisors to oppose with all the power available to it the application now before the Bureau of Indian Affairs to take into trust additional county land, that would in effect provide the 63 members of the tribe with the equivalent of 16.6 acres per person for new homes, a community center, school and other projects.

How big are these homes anyway? How big is the community center? How big is the school? Is the tribe expecting to build its own city accessible via a two-lane road? Perhaps the Wintun International Airport is next on the wish list?

All joking aside, the proposal to expand the casino is no laughing matter. We recognize the tribe as being the county's largest private employer. We also recognize that in the past the tribe has done its best to act as good neighbors, promoting environmental awareness, land-use and generally trying to accommodate the demands of operating a major hotel, large gaming establishment, golf course and more.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs — which acts as the lead agency

when it comes to tribal development — has stated that the tribe's land-use plans will have no significant environmental impact. No way! But the result of the BIA's assessment is that tribe will not have to prepare an environmental impact study.

Yolo County supervisors are absolutely correct in objecting to that decision.

Once land is taken into trust, the state and local governments lose all control. They have no say over land-use, taxing or regulatory authority.

While tribal representatives claim they have no plans for major development or further changes to the rural area, we don't buy it in the least. Who is to say what the tribe will do a year, five years, or 10 years from now?

Four years ago, over the objections of the county, the tribe sought to triple the size of its casino, to add 467 hotel rooms, 20,000 square feet of retail, 23,000 square feet of gambling space and 2,410 parking spaces. We didn't oppose that move because we thought the area could handle the load. And ultimately, the bad economy stopped expansion.

However, the economy is improving. Already the tribe has started an olive oil operation, and a vineyard; and these are important ag-related activities which benefit not only the tribe but the Capay Valley and all of Yolo County. Agriculture is also a traditional Native American activity, which contributes and perpetuates historic tribal culture and beliefs.

Adding new slot machines, poker tables is hardly ancestral culture. A new community center and school simply are not needed for a tribe of 63 members.

The county has been meeting with tribal leaders for two years about the issue and so far there is no sign of any compromise.

The county has offered to support the tribe's bid to place 100 acres into trust, and that's enough as far as we're concerned. Anything more than 100 acres is inappropriate and detrimental to the Capay Valley.

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