

United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Pacific West Region
909 First Avenue, Fifth Floor
Seattle, Washington 98104-1060



IN REPLY REFER TO:
EC-PWRS

May 13, 2008

Stanley Speaks, Northwest Regional Director
Bureau of Indian Affairs
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Fax: 503-231-2275

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BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS
NORTHWEST REGIONAL OFFICE
OFFICE OF THE REGIONAL DIRECTOR

Dear Mr. Speaks:

The National Park Service ("NPS") has reviewed the Draft Environmental Impact Statement ("DEIS") for the proposed Cascade Locks Resort and Casino project in Hood River County, Oregon, and offers the following comments for your consideration:

Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail

The Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail ("the Lewis & Clark Trail") is located within the vicinity of the proposed project. The 1978 amendment to the National Trail System Act established the Lewis & Clark Trail along the outbound and return routes of the Lewis and Clark Expedition of 1804-1806. The Lewis & Clark Trail begins in the St. Louis, Missouri, area and follows the route of the Corps of Discovery Expedition to the mouth of the Columbia River. The NPS Organic Act of 1916 requires us to manage the Lewis & Clark Trail in such a way as to "conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations." 16 U.S.C. § 1 *et seq.* Therefore, NPS administers the visual, educational, natural, recreational and cultural resources, including the historic route and historic remnants, along the Lewis & Clark Trail in the conditions observed by the Corps of Discovery 200 years ago.

Three potential sites for casino development were analyzed in the DEIS. They are: Cascade Locks, Hood River, and Warm Springs. The DEIS states that the Warm Springs site is not a viable alternative since it would not meet the economic needs of the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon ("the Confederated Tribes"). Therefore, our comments do not specifically address the Warm Springs Alternative.

Each of the project alternatives will result in some degradation of cultural, recreational, and natural resources within the Columbia River Gorge area, including the No Action Alternative.

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Under the No Action Alternative, the Confederated Tribes has indicated that it will likely pursue other development on trust and fee land east of Hood River, which would result in environmental impacts, if none of the build alternatives for the casino is selected to move forward. Moreover, the Confederated Tribes will likely initiate development within urban areas of the Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area irrespective of the proposed Casino Project. *See* DEIS, Appendix E. NPS appreciates the Confederated Tribes' need for viable economic development and supports thoughtful economic development that also achieves protection of resources of concern to the NPS.

As an initial matter, NPS supports the preferred alternative of the Cascade Locks site identified in the DEIS, but believes more mitigation measures and analysis are needed. The Cascade Locks site, which is approximately 40 miles from the Portland metro area, offers the most business growth potential, and capitalizes on the existing metro area. It would also result in the least amount of impacts to cultural, natural, and recreational resources, compared to the alternate sites.

Cultural Resources

The DEIS states that the potential impact of the proposed Cascade Locks casino, resort, and parking lot on cultural resources at the Cascade Locks site is expected to be minimal, since this area is located within the Port of Cascade Locks Industrial Park and has already been impacted by mechanized ground disturbance. The DEIS states, "Most of the project site has been disturbed by fill and previous development." DEIS, xxii. NPS agrees that such development may have compromised any pre-existing archeological resources. However, isolated archeological resources may still be present, either partially or fully intact, underneath existing fill deposits and in undisturbed areas. We do not have enough information to be able to concur with the conclusion that potential cultural resource impacts at the Cascade Locks site will be minimal. We encourage more analysis and discussion in the Final Environmental Impact Statement ("FEIS") on this point.

Developing the Cascade Locks site would also include a new cloverleaf interchange—the Forest Lane I-84 cloverleaf interchange. The current design will impact the northern portion of Site 05/1201-3—the archeological remnants of the Young powerhouse—one of the first facilities built to provide hydroelectric power for Columbia River Gorge communities. The DEIS states that an eligibility determination under the National Register of Historic Places has not been made for the Young powerhouse. We recommend that a determination be made and included in the FEIS.

National Historic Landmarks

NPS manages the National Historic Landmark ("NHL") Program. Under Section 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the agency official for the project is required to minimize harm to the maximum extent possible. *See* 36 C.F.R. § 800.10(a). The proposed project will impact the Historic Columbia River Highway ("HCRH"), an NHL, by constructing the Forest Lane I-84 cloverleaf interchange.

Additionally, the proposed project includes roadway construction, repaving, widening, and altering a 1,400-foot segment of the HCRH. DEIS, xxii. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (“BIA”) considers these impacts to result in no adverse effect, because the “character defining features of the historic highway will be preserved.” DEIS, p. 4-66. The affected segment of the HCRH extending from Port Industrial Parkway to the intersection with the proposed loop road will be repaved and widened. However, we note that material not consistent with the HCRH’s original character will be used. Therefore, we disagree with BIA’s conclusion. Mitigation measures should be identified and implemented in order to support a “no adverse effect” finding. We recommend consultation with the following people at NPS to discuss possible mitigation measures:

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The NPS considers the HCRC to be an important NHL site as well as a significant asset to the Lewis & Clark Trail.

Land Use/Land Cover

As stated above, we support the Cascade Locks site, because it has the least amount of impact overall to resources of concern to the NPS. This site is in an industrial park within the urban growth boundary, and the proposed project is consistent with the municipality’s long-term plans, and with the Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area Management Plan’s guidelines for economic development.

Some areas within the existing industrial park were constructed as recently as 1989-1990, using excavated materials from the Columbia River during the Bonneville Navigation Lock Project. Current vegetation is limited through much of the existing area to exotic species of trees, shrubs, and understory plants. Only a small area of bigleaf maple represents native habitat. Any type of development would likely result in the reduction or loss of existing land cover. A thoughtfully-designed landscape, using native species and with an integrated rainwater runoff management system, would be preferable to conversion of this site for medium to heavy industrial purposes.

We are concerned with the impacts due to the Forest Lane I-84 cloverleaf interchange. In this case there would be an irretrievable loss of 17 acres of upland forest representative of native plant communities.) This loss should be mitigated by the restoration or construction of comparable communities of equal or greater size in the vicinity of Cascade Locks.

The Hood River alternate site is located outside the Hood River urban growth boundary. Development on this site is not managed under the Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area

Management Plan, because it is tribal trust land. This site is adjacent to National Forest Service lands, which, although previously logged, retain many of the native plant species associated with upland forest. The Hood River site is located near the transition zone between the moist forests of the western gorge and the arid grasslands on the east. The Hood River Alternative would result in the irretrievable loss of 17 to 18 acres of upland forest, and 2 to 3 acres of oak woods/grassland. This loss should be mitigated by the restoration or construction of comparable communities of equal or greater size in the vicinity of the Hood River site.

Aquatic Resources

Nearly 5 acres of riparian aquatic communities along the shores of Government and Herman Creek Coves, and along the stream course of Herman Creek, would be lost by construction at the Cascade Locks site. This loss should be mitigated by the restoration or construction of comparable communities of equal or greater size in the vicinity of Cascade Locks. Such work should also include suitable interpretive materials that demonstrate the ecological services such communities provide, such as buffering surface waters from runoff and providing habitat for wildlife requiring riparian areas.

The potential water quality impacts attributable to runoff from impervious surfaces is a concern at the proposed Cascade Locks site given its proximity to Government Cove, Herman Creek Cove, the Columbia River, and Herman Creek, even though the current site plans include a runoff management system to retain 100 percent of a 25-year storm event.

The Hood River site does not have riparian habitat, so none would be impacted by development. No permanent alteration would occur to wetland habitat or a seep on the Bryant Property under Option B of this alternative. A runoff management system has been designed for this site to reduce pollutants in runoff to predevelopment levels.

Visual Resources, Noise, and Cumulative Impacts

NPS's greatest resource concern regarding the proposed Cascade Locks site is the potential impact on the Lewis & Clark Trail visitor experience due to intrusion on scenic views. In addition to the NPS Organic Act of 1916, the enabling legislation for the Lewis & Clark Trail requires NPS to administer the area so as to preserve the natural scene as experienced by the Corps of Discovery, to the degree practical, and to promote educational and recreational uses of the Lewis & Clark Trail. We are especially concerned with visual resource and cumulative impacts of the Cascade Locks and Hood River sites, because they are within the Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area.

It is difficult to minimize the visual effects of large buildings that tower over the adjacent landscape. The simulated views of the proposed structures contained in the DEIS suggest that the river-level Cascade Locks site would be visually less intrusive than the more elevated Hood River site, even though the proposed structures at Cascade Locks would be considerably larger.

Notably, the DEIS did not include analysis of cumulative effects that would occur from surrounding development, such as hotels, resorts, restaurants, convenience stores, shops, etc. This type of development, which is reasonably foreseeable, was not included in Appendix E, Reasonably Foreseeable Projects. Cumulative impacts due to further development, such as hotels, resorts, convenience stores, shops, restaurants, and any other likely development, and proposed mitigation measures, should be discussed in the FEIS.

Cumulative impact analysis in the FEIS should also include light pollution resulting from the casino and reasonably foreseeable development. Viewsheds and nightscapes should be analyzed from different, multiple vantage points. One clear example of a location where light changes may affect the value of a scenic and recreational resource is Vista House on Crown Point, just 21 miles downriver from the Cascade Locks site. Because the Columbia River Gorge is generally straight in this area, the presence of a casino and surrounding development may significantly alter the nightscapes and recreational experience enjoyed at this popular overlook. The analysis should discuss specific mitigation measures for cumulative impacts.

We note that approval for lighting is required by the International Dark Sky Association at both the Cascade Locks and Hood River sites.

The construction and operations of a casino at Cascade Locks or Hood River will increase noise levels, which may impact both wildlife and humans. Noise may alter important wildlife patterns and habits, such as feeding, nursing, and breeding, and other behaviors. Wildlife watching, a well-known and documented activity of the Corps of Discovery, is important to the Lewis & Clark Trail visitor experience. The DEIS states that, although mitigation measures were considered, none were deemed reasonable for either proposed site. DEIS, Tables 5-1 and 5-2. NPS is concerned with this lack of resolution for the increased noise from development, particularly for the Cascade Locks site, where one-third of sensitive receptors already experience noise levels in excess of Noise Abatement Criteria, and where wildlife, already more sensitive to noise than humans generally, can be expected to have strong, likely adverse, reactions. *See* DEIS, p. 3-122.

We recommend that a smaller casino structure be considered, since it would have a lower level of impact and may still provide sufficient income for the Confederated Tribes.

Recreation

There are striking differences in the sections of the Historic Columbia River Highway proximate to the proposed Cascade Locks and Hood River sites. The short section of the HCRH at the Cascade Locks site runs concurrent with an existing street and has been altered by past actions. Changes proposed for casino development would further alter the character of the HCRH but would improve functional and safety features of the 1,400-foot section. In contrast, the portion of the HCRH that abuts and parallels trust lands at the proposed Hood River site has been developed for hiking and biking. The Mark O. Hatfield Trailhead and Visitor Center are also located in this area. Casino development at the Hood River site would introduce visitor uses and traffic that would potentially conflict with recreational use of this section of the HCRH, which is

reserved for non-motorized use. Although a road overpass is proposed to separate casino visitors and HCRH users, other impacts of casino operation at Hood River (e.g., noise, light, visual intrusion, etc.) may diminish the experience of recreational trail users.

Public Safety

It is not clear, based on the DEIS discussion and diagrams of the proposed I-84 interchange for the Cascade Locks project, whether the intersection between Port Industrial Parkway and the Union Pacific Railroad tracks will be at-grade or an elevated overpass. The anticipated number of casino visitors suggests that an at-grade crossing might be a safety issue. Specific safety measures to address this concern should be included in the FEIS.

Please coordinate with the following NPS persons for natural and recreational resources and public safety:

Mr. Dan Wiley, Chief of Resources
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Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments.

Sincerely,

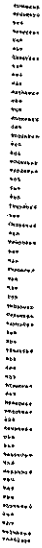


for Rory D. Westberg
Deputy Regional Director

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