

Sites of 3 Osage Casinos now in full legal standing



The Osage Casino in Tulsa is one of three sites now placed in trust, ensuring the legality of the tribes gaming operation. TOM GILBERT/Tulsa World file

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Published: 8/24/2011 2:08 AM

Last Modified: 8/24/2011 7:32 AM

The Osage Nation's applications to put the sites of three casinos into trust status has been approved by the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Principal Chief John D. Red Eagle and Charles Head, regional director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, signed documents Tuesday afternoon that place the Osage casinos in Tulsa, Skiatook and Ponca City in full legal standing.



Trust approved:

- 1 Tulsa: 951 W. 36th St. North
- 2 Skiatook: 6455 West Rogers Blvd.
- 3 Ponca City: 73 North City View Road

Sits on land in trust or land with restricted status:

- 4 Sand Springs: 301 Blackjack Drive
- 5 Bartlesville: 222 Allen Road
- 6 Hominy: HC 66 Box 885
- 7 Pawhuska: 2017 E. 15th St

Red Eagle said he was pleased that the application process, which began in June 2010, was expedited because putting land into trust is a detailed process that can take years.

This time the process was expedited because of the impact closing the casinos could have had on the tribal operations and the state, he said. The casinos generate \$40 million to \$45 million for tribal operations and about \$6 million for the state and the Fair Meadows race track in Tulsa.

Neil Cornelius, CEO of Osage Casinos, said that the legality of the casinos had been looming over the tribe.

"At this moment, we have tremendous peace of mind," he said. "We've completely eliminated that fear."

Having the land in trust also ensures that the 600 employees at the three casinos can keep their jobs, Cornelius said.

Tribal casinos must operate on federally recognized reservations or lands that have been placed

in trust in states where gambling is illegal.

The three casinos had been operating since 2005 under the National Indian Gaming Commission's determination that the tribe's reservation still existed. But that was overturned in 2010 in a lawsuit the tribe filed in 2001 against the Oklahoma Tax Commission.

The 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver ruled that Osage County is not a federally recognized reservation and that tribal members could not be exempt from paying state taxes. The Supreme Court rejected the tribe's appeal in June.

Original Print Headline: Osage casino sites now in trust status