

Federal government rejects Scotts Valley Indian casino in North Richmond

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The Scotts Valley Band of Pomo Indians lack significant historical connections to the land in North Richmond where the tribe seeks to build a Las Vegas-style casino, the U.S. Department of the Interior announced Friday.

The decision means that both Indian casinos proposed for the Richmond area are now dead.

Interior officials ruled in August against the Guidiville Band of Pomo Indians, who hoped to build a casino and resort at the former Point Molate Naval Fuel Depot just north of the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge. Richmond voters subsequently doubled down on the decision and nixed the project in an advisory vote.

The two tribes had applied for federal lands designations for their Contra Costa properties, which would have allowed them to pursue lucrative gaming operations.

Neither site was sufficiently tied to the tribe's historical territory, regulators concluded. Under federal law, tribes must demonstrate modern, continuous and historical connections to prospective reservation lands.

The Scotts Valley Band is "extremely disappointed in today's decision," said tribal Chairman Don Arnold, of Hayward. The tribe is "currently reviewing the decision and considering its options."

The Scotts Valley Band wanted to build a 2,000-slot casino -- the size of typical large Nevada casino -- on 30 acres of unincorporated, industrial and privately owned property at Parr Boulevard on the Richmond Parkway.

Contra Costa County, which has spent in excess of \$1 million fighting the casinos, is pleased.

"The decision confirms what we have been arguing since 2005," said Contra Costa County Supervisor John Gioia.

Shopping for off-reservation land for the purposes of opening casinos in urban areas is not what voters statewide envisioned when they approved Indian gaming in 1998, Gioia said.

In addition, the casinos would bring social problems such as smoking, gambling and alcohol addictions that would cost the community more than what the casino would bring in new tax dollars or jobs, he said.

The 230-member tribe has vehemently rejected the county's characterizations for years.

A casino would help the struggling landless tribe and provide jobs and tax revenue to the community, tribal officials have said.

The tribe also has argued that it has deep ties to the Bay Area, noting that the federal government in 1911 relocated some of their predecessors 80 miles north into Lake County. Today, the tribe has offices in Lakeport, Concord and Richmond.

In the federal report released Friday, however, officials concluded the Richmond site is outside the tribe's former reservation and beyond the limits of territory ceded in unratified treaties by its ancestors.

The tribe's historical documentation also failed to demonstrate that its members and its predecessors made continuous use of or occupied lands near the site, according to the report.

The Scotts Valley Band is one of four landless California tribes restored to federal recognition after a successful 1991 court battle.

But in all these years, only one tribe has successfully secured the federal lands designation required to open a casino.

The 750-member Ione Band of Miwok Indians in Amador County won approval for 228 acres near Ione where it plans to build a casino. The announcement was made Friday.

The fourth tribe, the Cloverdale Rancheria in Sonoma County, awaits a decision on roughly 60 acres south of its hometown where it wants to build a 2,000-slot casino and hotel-convention center.

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