

Shell casings believed linked to girls' slayings

By Manny Gamallo
Tulsa World

OKEMAH — Authorities investigating the slayings of two girls near Weleetka said on Monday that shell casings found near the scene of the crime are believed to be related to the girls' killings.

Ben Rosser, special agent with the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation, said authorities believe the recovered shell casings are evidence in the shooting deaths of Skyla Jade Whitaker, 11, and Taylor Paschal-Placker, 13, whose bodies were found June 8 along County Line Road.

The OSBI, the Okfuskee County Sheriff's Office and other officers continue to conduct interviews and follow leads in the case.

Last week, authorities released a sketch of a person of interest in the case, described as an American Indian man, possibly Caucasian mixed, about 35 years old and about 6 feet tall, with dark brown hair down the middle of his back, possibly in a ponytail. He was wearing a blue or gray long-sleeve shirt and faded jeans with a black baseball cap.

OSBI spokeswoman Jessica Brown said the man was driving a white, single-cab Ford or Chevrolet pickup with a narrow chrome strip down the side and Oklahoma license plates and was seen near the site of the shootings.

Officials have said they want to speak with the man.

Rosser said on Monday authorities believe that the person of interest doesn't have anything to do with the killings, but that they want to speak with him to find out what he may have seen.

Also on Monday, Rosser said that a second, grid search of the crime scene and surrounding area late last week did not result in the recovery of any new evidence in the case.

The OSBI is offering a more than \$30,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the person or people responsible for the shootings. For more information, call the OSBI hot line at (800) 522-8017.

Also, donations are being accepted for both families under separate accounts at the Bank of Commerce in Weleetka. Donations can be made to the Skyla Whitaker Memorial Fund or the Taylor Paschal-Placker Memorial Fund and sent to the Bank of Commerce, P.O. Box 48, Weleetka, OK 74880. For more information, call (405) 786-2216.

MGM Grand spurs job growth

New London Day

LAS VEGAS. — State labor officials say the number of jobs in Connecticut increased by more than 2,900 in May, helped by the opening of Foxwoods Resort Casino's MGM Grand.

The Labor Department announced Thursday that employment in the state increased to 1.7 million.

State labor economist John Tirinzonie credits the employment growth in southeastern Connecticut following the opening of the MGM Grand hotel and entertainment complex as well as job expansion elsewhere.

He says federal rebate checks also may have helped revive the retail trade industry.

Tirinzonie cautions that high energy costs burdening the economy could produce bad news over the next several months. The unemployment rate in Connecticut was 5.4 percent in May, up from 4.7 percent in April - slightly lower than the national rate of 5.5 percent.

National Bison Range: CSKT, FWS sign pact

By Vince Devlin
The Missoulian

MONTANA — Calling it a "historic opportunity," James Steele Jr. pledged Thursday that the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes will make the most of a new funding agreement that will return some responsibilities at the National Bison Range to the tribes.

Steele, CSKT chairman, and H. Dale Hall, director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, signed the agreement at a late-morning ceremony in Washington, D.C.

Among those in attendance were Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne and Montana Sens. Max Baucus and Jon Tester.

"It is a day of great pride for my people," Steele said at the signing, "because we will now be able to demonstrate that we can be effective and innovative partners with the Fish and

Wildlife Service for the operation and management of the National Bison Range."

Said Hall: "The Bison Range occupies a special place in the hearts of tribal members. I know the passion that they have for the land of their ancestors, and for the wildlife that sustained them. Fish and Wildlife Service employees also care passionately about the future of the Bison Range, and I strongly believe this agreement will serve to bring everyone together to accomplish great things for the refuge."

The new agreement was signed 1 1/2 years after the FWS abruptly canceled a previous agreement and locked tribal employees out of the Bison Range as a bitter feud broke out between the two sides.

The Fish and Wildlife Service accused the tribes of failing to perform some of their duties properly and neglecting

others altogether, and said tribal employees created a hostile work environment - charges the tribes strongly denied.

Tribal employees, meantime, accused the agency of deliberately sabotaging their work in a turf war designed to return the tribal jobs to federal employees, while the FWS insisted it had gone the extra mile to help the tribes succeed.

With this new agreement, the CSKT will assume a substantive role in managing mission-critical programs at the Bison Range.

The Bison Range manager - currently Bill West, a 20-year employee at the range who assumed his present duties after the previous agreement fell apart - will remain a FWS employee and have final decision-making authority on management direction, approval of plans, refuge uses and priorities.

A refuge management team, made up of wildlife and

land management professionals from both governments, will inform those decisions.

Approximately three-quarters of the people working at the Bison Range are expected to be tribal employees after the new agreement takes effect next year.

Examples of responsibilities the tribes will undertake at the Bison Range include the annual bison roundup, migratory non-game bird surveys, waterfowl pair counts, bird banding, vegetation monitoring, geographic information system mapping, invasive plant control, wildfire suppression and prescribed burning, and dissemination of oral and written information to visitors.

U.S. Rep. Denny Rehberg, R-Mont., did not attend the signing but issued the following statement:

"I applaud the efforts of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and the Department of Interior in com-

ing to an agreement regarding future management of the National Bison Range. The Bison Range is a true Montana treasure and I'm glad both parties could find an agreement that protects the range's integrity and recognizes the role of the tribe(s). I look forward to working with my colleagues during the Congressional Review period to get the new deal approved as soon as possible."

The agreement now goes to Congress for a 90-day review.

For Steele, Thursday's signing marked the latest step in a 14-year journey begun by one of his predecessors.

"An aspect of this that makes me particularly proud is to know that our former tribal chairman, the late Mickey Pablo, is looking down on us from heaven and has a big smile on his face," Steele said. "Many of you never knew Mickey, but he was one of the great modern-day tribal leaders and before his untimely death he started the wheels in motion that led us to this day."

Both the previous and new agreements were negotiated pursuant to the 1994 Tribal Self-Governance Act. It provides that qualified self-governing tribes who can demonstrate a significant cultural, geographic or historical connection to facilities managed by the Department of the Interior, with the opportunity to assume certain programs, services, functions and activities at those facilities.

One of Pablo's dreams, Steele said, was to see the tribes play a major role in operation of the Bison Range.

"He wanted this not only because the range is in the middle of our reservation and because he knew we could play an important role in the next 100 years of the Bison Range," Steele said, "but also because of the critical role his great-grandfather, Michel Pablo, played in literally saving the bison from extinction."

Some of today's herd of 350 to 400 bison descend from bison brought to Dixon in the 1870s by an Indian worried the species was about to be hunted to extinction.



Associated Press

In this file photo taken June 25, 2003, bison wander along a hillside at the National Bison Range near Moiese, Mont. After months of negotiations, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes signed a three-year agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on Thursday, June 19, to share management of the National Bison Range in Montana.

Casino claims unfair odds

By Diana M. Alba
Las Cruces Sun-News reporter

LAS CRUCES — The Fort Sill Apache Tribe of Oklahoma is accusing the federal government of moving to block its access to electronic gaming machines for an unopened Akela casino by intimidating companies that can supply the devices.

But the National Indian Gaming Commission, a federal agency that authorizes gaming, said the allegation is untrue.

Tribal Chairman Jeff Houser said the tribe has been stonewalled by gaming machine supply companies in it attempts to lease both the devices and computer servers that are needed to operate the games. He said he has contacted "between six and eight" companies and received the same response from each.

"They've all turned us down because we don't have a letter (from the NIGC) authorizing gaming," he said. "They've all been intimidated by someone at the NIGC. ... They said they were concerned about their licenses."

Said Shawn Pensoneau, spokesman for the gaming commission, in response: "That's not something we did."

Among companies Houser listed were Rocket Gaming Systems of Las Vegas, Nev.; IGT Games of Las Vegas, Nev.; and Multimedia Games Inc. of Austin, Texas.

A representative from IGT declined to comment. Multimedia and Rocket Gaming did not reply to phone messages.

The tribe wants to conduct Class II gaming — high-stakes bingo and other games not banked by the house. The 30-acre site is located off Interstate 10 east of Deming.

Houser said he believes evidence that the gaming commission was in contact with at least one gaming company lies in circumstances surrounding a proposed opening of the casino earlier this year.

On Feb. 27, after a plan by the tribe to open the casino came to light, Gov. Bill Richardson sent state police to block access to the site. The next day, the gaming commission issued a preliminary opinion indicating it likely wouldn't approve the tribe's request for a gaming at Akela.

Houser said the day before the blockade, he'd informed the gaming commission that the tribe intended to open the casino. Later the same day, he said, a company — Rocket Gaming — that had been set to deliver a set of machines to the casino abruptly backed out of a leasing arrangement. The shipment, he said, was "just hours away" from reaching Akela. Also, Houser said, the tribe wasn't able to lease a computer server to operate a server for the 50 electronic gaming machines it already had on hand.

"Somebody told Rocket Games to delay the shipment," he said. "Somebody else has apparently been telling every other company not to provide a server."

Pensoneau said the gaming commission didn't contact the company.

"I would hesitate to com-

ment on what the company was up to and why they did what they did," he said. "I wouldn't want to comment on what their motives were."

Had the tribe been able to lease a server in February, Houser said, it might have gone forward with plans to open the casino.

"It wasn't the only reason, but I'd say it would have materially changed things," he said.

The 50 machines were on loan from the Citizen Potawatomi Nation of Oklahoma, but the Fort Sill Apache Tribe had to return them last week after time ran out on an agreement for deferred payments.

The tribe had been seeking permission for gaming from the National Indian Gaming Commission. An attorney for that agency wrote an opinion last month indicating the tribe didn't have legal grounds to open the casino, and the tribe withdrew its application.

The tribe contends it should be granted authorization because terms in a 2007 settlement agreement that involved the federal government. It recently filed an action in federal court in Oklahoma, asking that the terms be enforced.

Members of the Fort Sill tribe are descendants of the Chiricahua and Warm Springs Apaches, who once roamed southwestern New Mexico, southeastern Arizona and northern Mexico. According to the tribe's Web site, some 400 tribal members were removed from reservations in the 1880s and sent to Florida as prisoners. They were moved again in 1890 to the Fort Sill Military Base in Oklahoma.

Native groups not waiting for apology

By Kevin Abourezk
Reznet News

CANADA — In the Lakota way, the burning of sage is meant to clear away evil spirits.

Sometimes words can have the same effect.

On June 11, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper issued a formal apology in the House of Commons for his government's treatment of the First Nations peoples in residential schools.

"I stand before you today to offer an apology to former students of Indian residential schools," Harper said. "The treatment of children in Indian residential schools is a sad chapter in our history."

He recognized the traumatizing effects that efforts to assimilate students within the schools had on those students.

Here in the United States, efforts are underway to being a healing similar to that which began last week in Canada.

In February, the U.S. Senate passed the Indian Health Care Improvement Act that carried with it an amendment issuing a formal apology on behalf of the government for its mistreatment of Native people. Congress is now taking up consideration of the bill and the attached apology amendment.

And while some are hopeful the apology will get passed and lead to reconciliation between Native people and the U.S. government, others aren't waiting.

Starting in May 2009, Native riders will cross the country on bicycles to raise

awareness of the government's abuse of Native people in boarding schools. The two coast-to-coast bicycle relays will be part of a national education campaign called the 2009 Way Home Tour.

Two Colorado nonprofit groups — White Bison Inc. and the Ancient Ways of Knowing Foundation — are sponsoring the campaign, which will lead riders to Indian school sites in 17 states.

The groups hope the campaign will bring light to the intergenerational trauma inflicted on Indian people after the first boarding school was opened in Carlisle, Penn., in 1879.

"We are going to heal and we are going to take our voice back, never to have our voice taken away again," said Don Coyhis, founder and president of White Bison, in a news release. "We are taking our voice back so our children will have a voice and be able to stand tall."

Coyhis said the anger, guilt, shame and fear underlying many of the social problems facing Indian communities are legacies of the boarding schools.

Like the burning of sage, the Way Home Tour is meant to dispel the evils caused by boarding schools through workshops, talking circles and traditional Indian ceremonies at school sites along the routes.

The journey is intended to send the message that Indian people can heal from the boarding school era without waiting for a formal apology or monetary settlement.