

Indian casino revenue cools off

WASHINGTON (AP) — Revenue at the nation's Indian casinos grew 5 percent in 2007, significantly slower than in years past but still outpacing the growth rate at Nevada casinos amid a sluggish economy.

Figures from the National Indian Gaming Commission show that Indian casinos took in \$26 billion in gambling revenue in 2007, up from \$24.9 billion in 2006.

The region that includes Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, Nebraska, South Dakota, Wisconsin and Wyoming saw a 3.6 percent increase in revenue from 2006 to 2007.

Eleven tribes operated 25 casinos in Wisconsin in 2006 — including the Oneida Tribe of Indians, which operates the Oneida Casino and Bingo at the Radisson Hotel and Conference Center and the Mason Street Casino as well as a number of One-Stop convenience stores with slot machines.

Tribal gaming revenue in Wisconsin increased from \$1 billion in 2002 to \$1.3 billion in 2006 in aggregate — representing a 24.4 percent increase in a five-year period reviewed by the Legislative Audit Bureau in 2007. It's the latest state data available because the bureau only analyzes data every other year and is not scheduled to release another report until 2009.

Nevada casinos took in \$12.85 billion in gambling revenue last year, up 1.8 percent from the year before.

"The continued growth is significant considering recent economic struggles throughout the country," said commission Chairman Philip Hogen. "Indian gaming continues to be an important factor in local economies."

The 5 percent increase in 2007 marked the first time in more than a decade that tribal gambling did not enjoy double-digit growth from one year to the next.

The industry's growth has been explosive since Congress created the legal framework for it in 1988 with passage of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act. The law lets Indian tribes, with the consent of a state's governor, run slot machines and other profitable games on their reservations not allowed elsewhere in the state.

The year it passed the industry's revenue was just about \$200 million; it stood at \$11 billion by 2000.

The soft economy is one factor in the slower growth in 2007. Also, fewer big casinos came online than in years past, when huge casinos seemed to spring up overnight in California and elsewhere. Many of the tribes that have the ability to build casinos with Nevada-style games have already done so.

There are now 423 Indian gambling operations in the country, operated by 225 tribes in 28 states, according to the industry trade group, the National Indian Gaming Association. These include scores of smaller bingo halls in addition to big casinos with slot machines.

The report from the National Indian Gaming Commission, the small federal agency charged with regulating the industry, drew on audits of 382 casinos and other gambling operations. Some of the smaller ones had not reported but officials did not expect much if any change in the overall total.

The tribes aren't required to report their profits, and most don't disclose that information, so it's not possible to know the tribes' net income.

Foxwoods casino lays off 200

By Erica Jacobson
Norwich Bulletin

LEDYARD, Conn. — Almost 200 middle-manager and some hourly employees were laid off Thursday at Foxwoods Resort Casino as part of a "strategic organizational review" process begun in Jan-

uary, according to a spokesman for the Mashantucket Pequot tribe, the casino's owners.

"They're just looking for the wisest spending practices that can go the farthest financially for the tribe," Lori Potter said, adding she was unsure whether there would be

more cuts. "I've been told that this is it, but I can't really be quoted and say for sure."

All the layoffs were at Foxwoods, not at the new MGM Grand expansion, Potter said.

The cuts are believed to be the first of their kind in the casino's 16-year history. The review process began when

Barry Cregan took over as Foxwoods' interim president in mid-January after John O'Brien resigned, she said.

Cregan could not be reached Thursday night for comment.

Foxwoods employs about 10,000 people at its casinos. Workers let go Thursday will

get two weeks severance pay for each year they were employed up to 13 years, Potter said, as well as health benefits.

The economic downturn sent revenue into an eight-month slide at Connecticut's casinos. May's unveiling of the MGM Grand coincided with a 7.7 percent increase in slot revenues at Foxwoods from a year ago, but officials there and at Mohegan Sun have been cautious in saying the worst has passed.

In early May, executives at Mohegan Sun announced the casino would trim about 600 jobs through attrition. Mitchell Etes, president and chief officer at Mohegan Sun, said the casino is "constantly reviewing to make sure we have the proper staffing levels and looking for efficient ways to do things."

Layoffs are not in the casino's future, however, he said.

"When we go about reducing our work force, we do it by not replacing people who leave on their own or for other reasons," Etes said. "The tribe has never laid somebody off or put them out of a job involuntarily for this reason."

The Mashantucket tribe also has faced tough fiscal times lately.

In the past few months, it laid off roughly 170 tribal government workers, dropped out of the bidding process to build a resort casino in Kansas and pulled its funding from Norwich's fireworks display. A growing number of tribal members have called for transparency in the tribal council's budgeting process, information now only available to council members.



Associated Press

This Feb. 8, 2002, file photo shows the Mashantucket Pequot Foxwoods Resort & Casino in Ledyard, Conn. The tribe that owns Foxwoods Resort Casino in eastern Connecticut said, Friday, it has laid off some staff because of rising gas and food prices.

Health care system deemed inadequate by Kansas tribe

WIBW

KICKAPOO RESERVATION, Kan. — Native Americans are experiencing health disparities at an increasing rate, according to members of the Kickapoo Tribe of Indians, due to the lack of Federal assistance health care money available through the Indian Health Care System.

The Kickapoo Reservation in Kansas' Tribal Chair Steve Cadue issued a formal appeal to U.S. Senator Byron Dorgan, Chair of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, regarding lack of financial appropriations for the tribal Indian health care system.

"Rising health care costs, the increase of tribal members utilizing reservation health and dental clinics that obtain health care, diabetes and cancer are all contributing factors in the challenge to provide adequate medical care to Native Americans in the Kickapoo Tribe's contract health services delivery area," Cadue said.

In a letter to Senator Dorgan, Kansas Senators Sam Brownback and Pat

Roberts; and Congresswoman Nancy Boyda, Chairman Cadue expressed concerns with the budget shortfall for the U.S. Public Health Service Indian Health Contract Health Services (CHS).

"Native Americans continue to experience health disparities at a far greater rate than other Americans," said Cadue. "The lack of Federal assistance health care monies is becoming a matter of life and death."

"We have the highest number of Native Americans living in our CHS delivery area in Northeast Kansas and have already exhausted our CHS funds for the fiscal year," Cadue continued. "The financial costs for outside health providers continue to rise, yet our Indian Health Service budget remains the same."

"It is important that the federal government, through the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, increased funding for Native American Tribes to meet our health care needs," said Cadue. "The health needs of Native Americans are at stake."

Tribal marshal kills fugitive

MUSKOGEE, Okla. (AP) — The Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation is looking into a tribal marshal's fatal shooting of a fugitive in eastern Oklahoma earlier this week.

Stilwell police had requested assistance from the Cherokee Nation's Special Operations Team after Marty Workman barricaded himself in a residence on Tuesday.

A failure-to-appear warrant was issued for Workman, 30, after he didn't show up at a June 2 court hearing in Arkansas, where he was supposed to enter a plea in a drug case, Mark Booher, a Washington County, Ark., assistant district attorney, said from

Fayetteville.

As police and tribal marshals were outside, Workman left the house and got into a vehicle in the garage, OSBI spokeswoman Jessica Brown said. Once inside the vehicle, he put a gun to his head.

"He said he didn't want to live and wanted them to kill him," she said, referring to the marshal, whose name wasn't released.

After ramming the vehicle against the garage, he then set the vehicle on fire and ran toward the officers with a gun in hand, Brown said.

The marshal shot Workman, Sammie Rusco, director of communications for the Cherokee Nation, said. Work-

Whalers' proposed sentence: 60 days in federal prison

By Jim Casey
Peninsula Daily News

TACOMA, Wash. — Federal prosecutors will seek 60-day prison sentences for two Makah men convicted of plotting to kill and killing a whale when they appear Monday in U.S. District Court.

Wayne Johnson and Andy Noel, both of Neah Bay, also would receive a year's probation, including 100 hours of community service, if the court follows the prosecutors' recommendation.

Three other Neah Bay defendants — Frankie Gonzales, Theron Parker and William Secor — pleaded guilty to killing the whale on Sept. 8.

They would receive two years of probation, including 100 hours of community service in the first 12 months.

Each of the charges on which the men face sentencing carries a maximum one-year jail term and \$100,000 fine.

U.S. Attorney Jeffrey Sullivan and Assistant U.S. Attorney James Oesterle concurred with the federal Probation Office that no fines be levied "due to each defendant having demonstrated an inability to pay," said Sullivan's sentencing memorandum.

The document singled out Johnson and Noel as the leaders of the botched hunt, in which a whale died several hours after it was shot and harpooned in the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

No ordinary incident
"This was not an ordinary poaching incident in which fish or wildlife were taken out of season or harvested from restricted areas," the document said.

"Rather, this was a carefully planned effort, deliberately calculated to violate the Marine Mammal Protection Act moratorium on taking a gray whale without authorization."

All five men will appear at 3 p.m. Monday in U.S. Magistrate Judge J. Kelley Arnold's courtroom in Tacoma.

Longtime anti-whaling activist Will Anderson of Seattle on Thursday called the proposed sentences "a wink and a handshake, not justice."

"These men illegally tortured and killed a gray whale to the horror of millions of people," Anderson told the Peninsula Daily News.

"Punishment should be a deterrent, and in proportion to the crime," he added.

"The federal prosecuting attorney's recommended sentencing encourages disrespect for the law."

Made to watch whales?

Chuck Owens of Joyce, who with his wife, Margaret, heads Peninsula Citizens for the Protection of Whales, noted that the Makah tribe has asked that the men perform their community service conducting marine mammal surveys.

Prosecutors called that "a clear nexus with the offense."

Owens saw it differently.

"So the proposed punishment for assisting in the torturous death of a gray whale is: no jail, no fine and 100 hours of whale watching?" he said.

"We hope the judge will reconsider this proposed slap on the wrist, and hand down a sentence that will be a real deterrent."

Arnold, the magistrate, needn't, by law, follow the prosecutors' recommendation.

But departures from suggested sentences are rare.

Tribe promised prosecution

The sentencing stems from last summer's incident when the five repeatedly harpooned and shot a gray whale, which floated wounded for 97 hours before dying and sinking.

The men were arrested by the Coast Guard, and subsequently charged with conspiring to kill, and killing, the whale.

Casino powwow celebrates 21 years

Norman Transcript

NORMAN, Okla. — Thunderbird Casino, an enterprise of the Absentee Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma, will celebrate 21 years Friday and Saturday with a powwow when Native American dancers in Oklahoma and surrounding states will compete for their share of \$30,000 in prize money.

"This event is truly a learning experience for people of all ages and cultures, because everyone is invited to participate in this incredible event," said Al Bronaugh,

pow wow coordinator. "The Annual Anniversary Celebration Pow Wow is a family event for all to enjoy."

The pow wow attracts Native American dancers, singers and drummers from the southern region of the country. Dancers ranging in age from toddlers to elders compete in several styles of dance wearing traditional and contemporary regalia. Drum groups provide vocal and rhythmic accompaniment to the dancers. Cash prizes are presented to winners in all the competitions.