

Hearing date for spiritual site dispute

By S.E. Ruckman
Native American Times

LAWTON, Okla. — A hearing date has been set for Sept. 10 in the Oklahoma Western District Court to address the Comanche Nation’s conflict with the U.S. Army over the continued construction of a training site on nearby Ft. Sill.

The 12,000-member tribe filed for and won a temporary restraining order in August for the Medicine Bluffs site that sits on military land near the Wichita Mountains. Portions of the mountains are military property and the remaining portion is a state park.

The tribe has made a motion for a preliminary injunction.

At dispute is whether the tribe received adequate notice on the Army’s plans to complete the training facility at the southern base of Medicine Bluffs.

Comanche officials said the tribe was not properly notified of the furthered construction plans and that the failure to contact appropriate representatives violated federal statutes.

Tribal chairman, Wallace Coffey, has asserted that he “adamantly opposes” the Army’s construction plans.

Tribal officials contend that notification is not the same as consultation in matters of cultural and historical significance.

Attorneys for the tribe said they will push for a relocation of the project, according to a notice published in the tribes’ September Comanche Nation News. The attorneys maintain that after receiving notification in February, they asked commanding officers to move the training facility and were ignored.

Some tribal preservation members believe that Medicine Bluffs is a site of “spiritual and healing medicine to the Comanche and other tribes,” according to a letter from the tribes’ cultural preservation officer filed as part of court documents.

William Voelker of Cyril, said in a memo to Fort Still’s Major General Vangjel that the Army “cease and desist with any an all plans for destruction of the unmarred landscape...”

“I caution you not to misinterpret “notification” of the tribes as “consultation” with the tribes,” Voelker said in the memo.

Voelker said that as a sovereign entity, the Comanche nation retained right to obtain inter-governmental correspondence on the matter with tribal officials.

Tribal officials said that a July 25 meeting was not attended by Ft. Sill’s commanding officer. In that meeting, Army officials refused to allow archaeological or tribal oversight to the construction site.

The U.S. Army declared it would suffer harm if it relocated the project while the tribe maintains that they would sustain the same risk if the proposed warehouse project moved forward.

When handing out the temporary restraining order, federal judge Timothy DeGuisti, ruled that the public interest would not suffer if the project were temporary halted. The temporary order barred all project construction including earthwork, foundation preparation and related activities to the site.

Special program for ruins in ruins

BANDELIER NATIONAL MONUMENT, N.M. (AP) — Inside the dark, cliffside cave last occupied by the people of Frijoles Canyon some 500 years ago, the markings are clearly visible.

“2008,” the ancient wall reads. “I love you,” with a heart etched into the soft volcanic tuff.

“Oh, man,” art conservator Larry Humetewa muttered softly as he bent to inspect the damage.

This is the largest of the cave-like rooms — called “cavates” — accessible to the 300,000 people who troop through Bandelier National Monument each year.

It underwent graffiti removal work just recently; now it will need more.

Vandalism is just one of many threats to the fragile archaeological sites that are the heart of national parks and monuments in the arid West.

They’re hammered by sun and rain, by freezes and thaws, by wind and the abrasive sand it carries. They’re invaded by pests and loved to death by human visitors who can’t resist touching.

In short, the ruins are in ruins.

For the past decade, a special program within the National Park Service has been struggling to combat the deterioration.

At 45 parks in eight states stretching from Texas to California, the Vanishing Treasures program has assessed, documented, stabilized and conserved sites. In some

cases, it has undone damage from earlier preservation efforts.

“What we’re really doing is prolonging their survival as long as we can, so people can see and learn from them,” said Jerry Rogers, who helped launch the program when he was a Santa Fe-based regional director for the National Park Service. “They’re very precarious.”

Rogers, who was also the NPS’s associate director for cultural resources, says the ruins in the West are among the most evocative of the park system’s historical places.

“They instantly pull you into thinking about the past... They have a way of just grabbing the visitor,” Rogers said.

At the Grand Canyon this summer, archeologists stabilized a two-room ruin on the North Rim that was likely the seasonal home of a farming family about 900 years ago.

They backfilled the interior of the rooms to help hold in place what’s left of the masonry walls, removed stones visitors had stacked on the walls over the years, and reset stones that had fallen.

But it’s not just ancestral Puebloan dwellings that need help. The parks in the program have forts, missions, cabins, ancient trail systems, wooden fences, mines, and sweat lodges.

At the Fort Davis National Historic Site in Texas, Vanishing Treasures has helped restore an old adobe hospital and train people in historic

plaster conservation.

In California, the program has underwritten some of the excavation of the community garden at Manzanar National Historic Site, where Japanese Americans were detained during World War II.

While historic or prehistoric architectural sites are the reason the parks exist, the bulk of park budgets must be spent instead on infrastructure for visitors. So worried park staffers lobbied for a program aimed at preserving the sites themselves.

Since 1998, Vanishing Treasures has put about \$1 million a year into park projects — just a drop in the bucket when it comes to preservation needs. It also has funded positions in the parks — 66 at the program’s peak, down to about 50 now because of budget erosion.

“To people that are culturally related to the sites, they’re still very significant in terms of spiritual connection, the ancestral connection to those places,” said Vanishing Treasures program coordinator Virginia Salazar-Halfmoon. “Their relevance is more than just as an exhibit.”

Humetewa, the art conservator, is from Santo Domingo Pueblo, down the Rio Grande from Frijoles Canyon.

“My ancestors were here,” said Humetewa, who grew up hearing about the canyon where his people had once lived.

He was angry when he first saw the graffiti some years ago, and he’s still bothered by it.

“It’s a national park,” he said. “But it was a place where people lived, and I’m pretty sure the spirits of the people are still roaming, you know. And I’m pretty sure they don’t like it either.”

Volcanic eruptions more than a million years ago left deposits of soft tuff that cover much of northern New Mexico’s Pajarito Plateau. The residents of Frijoles Canyon — an estimated 800 people by the late 15th century — excavated into the tuff to create rooms, many of them fronted by big masonry pueblos.

There are nearly 1,100 such cavates in the canyon, and Vanishing Treasures has funded their first-ever extensive documentation, in addition to the graffiti mitigation.

Humetewa and his fellow conservator Conor McMahon, who work for the state museum system but spend a day at week at Bandelier through the Vanishing Treasures program, use a variety of methods to get rid of graffiti.

In Cave Kiva, accessible by ladder and the largest of the cavates on the public loop trail, they re-soot the ceiling about twice a year to obscure the vandalism. They close the cavate, don respirators, and light small pieces of wood to create the smoke and soot that blackens the ceilings.

The earliest residents of Frijoles Canyon used this technique as well, lighting large fires once cavates had been excavated.

“That was done because the sooting sort of consolidates the tuff. It makes it a little bit

stronger and a little less crumbly,” McMahon said.

After sooting, the lower walls of cavates typically were rubbed to remove the soot, and mud plaster was applied.

Humetewa and McMahon work painstakingly to fill in incised graffiti on the mud-plastered lower walls of cavates, using natural materials — tuff, silt, clay-like soils — they dig from the washes and creek beds and mix together to match the color and texture of the various plasters.

Getting rid of graffiti not only helps stabilize the walls and enhances the visitors’ experience, but deters other would-be vandals.

“People are much more likely to graffiti an area where they already see it,” McMahon said.

Roger Kennedy, who was director of the National Park Service from 1993-97, views the Vanishing Treasures program as a rebirth of the spirit of the programs of the New Deal, such as the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Progress Administration.

“It says, as those programs did, it’s time to pay attention — and more than pay attention — to help sustain our common heritage,” said Kennedy, a Washington, D.C. resident who also is a former director of the Smithsonian National Museum of American History.

“This is a program that says we care about each other and we respect each other,” Kennedy said.

Cesar Chavez Monument



Associated Press

Members of the Calpulli Tonalehqueh tribe perform during a dedication of the Cesar Chavez Monument on the San Jose State University campus in San Jose, Calif., Thursday. Chavez founded the National Farm Workers Association, later to become the United Farm Workers Union.

Standoff between Apache tribe and recalled tribal officials

KWSO

ANADARKO, Okla. — The doors of the Apache Tribal Building in Anadarko are boarded up. The tribal chair and vice chair - who say the recall was not legal - took over the building by force on Tuesday morning, after hiring a private firm that smashed out the windows of the administration building. One side of the conflict says that they recalled the tribe’s chair and vice chair on Saturday because of alleged corruption and misuse of tribal funds. However, the two leaders deny any corruption.

The recall group says that by a vote of 74-0 in a week-

end general election, the chair and vice chair were voted out of their positions. The group claims according to their constitution that vote is all that was needed to remove an elected official. Vice Chair Mary Rivera says there is more to it than that. She says the group must circulate a petition, and hold a hearing, among other things. Both the chair and vice chair refused to appear on camera.

On Tuesday, members of the Apache tribe’s recall group sat and waited for other members of the tribe, the Anadarko Police Department, the Caddo County Sheriff’s Department, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Recall

group member Austin Klinekole says they ousted the two leaders on Saturday. “That’s why we had took over the building and had our own security - unarmed security - there guarding the building day and night since Saturday,” he said.

Tuesday morning, a private armed security force firm from Oklahoma City arrived. “They had cuffed our security guards, here at the tribe, and held them at gunpoint,” said Security Manager Lyndrih Satepehtaw. Jonathan Scott, one of the security guards, was inside the building when it happened. “They ‘bum-rushed’ us through the door, and we turned around and ran

out the door,” he said. “We were hiding, and they just threw us down out the van, and they just held us at gunpoint and handcuffed us.” Scott and another security guards have the marks to prove the violence.

Rivera says that the reason they took over the building by force was that they hadn’t been legally recalled, and the recall group had shut down the office. She says that if the building is closed, the tribe isn’t doing its job - serving tribal members - which gives the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) the authorization to take tribal programs away. She says the reason they broke windows is because the

other side had chained the doors shut.

Currently, no agreement has been reached, and local law enforcement does not have the authorization to act on tribal land - they have no jurisdiction because of internal tribal politics. Only federal authorities can intervene. Some members of the tribe are attempting to file charges of breaking and entering, but the Caddo County District Attorney’s Office says charges have yet to be filed.

The tribal members who voted for recalling the chair and vice chair intend to continue with steps to remove them.