

House OKs study of new reservoir for Tule River tribe

By Michael Doyle
McClatchy Newspapers

WASHINGTON — The House on Monday approved a \$3 million study of a potential new reservoir to serve the San Joaquin Valley’s parched Tule River Indian Tribe.

The vote is an important step for the Porterville-area tribe, which has long sought a more reliable water supply. Tribal leaders and their allies envision a dam that would collect water from the south fork of the Tule River flowing from the Sierra Nevada.

“We’re simply trying to secure for the tribe what the federal government should have done 100 years ago,” said Damon Nelson, legislative director for Rep. Devin Nunes, R-Visalia. “As far as we’re concerned, everyone in the Valley supports this.”

By itself, though, the House bill is no guarantee a Tule River dam will be built. The tribe still faces significant economic, environmental and political hurdles.

The potential dam under study would be relatively small, containing about 5,000 acre-feet of water. By contrast, the current Pine Flat Dam on the Kings River can contain upward of 1 million acre-feet.

The potential dam would be on the Tule River tribe’s reservation, south of Porterville. The tribe could use the new water supplies for its existing development and Eagle Mountain Casino, but not for any future casino that might be built on off-reservation land.

“It’s important to increase water storage for the San Joaquin Valley, and it’s especially important to increase storage for the tribe,” Nelson said.

Tribal officials could not be reached to comment Monday afternoon.

The bill was brought up under rules designed for non-controversial bills, such as another one honoring country singer Toby Keith. Instead of discussing the specific bills, Republicans on Monday focused on energy policy and the necessity of oil-and-gas drilling. In-depth debate over a new Tule River dam will come at another time.

Most seriously, Congress has not yet approved a water rights settlement that must precede any actual dam construction. This will require separate legislation, which has not even been introduced. Negotiations could drag on, over hard-core issues such as what additional land the tribe might want to acquire.

Negotiators representing the tribe and others, including farmers with the South Tule Independent Ditch Co., took nine years to reach a broad agreement-in-principle that still leaves some questions unanswered. Some Indian water rights settlements have taken decades to complete.

Even the study authorization itself is only a partial step. Next, the Senate must approve it as well; so far, California’s senators have not introduced a similar measure. Then, lawmakers in a future Congress will have to actually provide the \$3 million needed to conduct the study.

The tribe’s water problems date to the 19th century, following the 1856 creation of its original reservation. This Porterville-area land included access to water, but in 1873 the reservation was moved 15 miles to the east. The reservation now spans about 58,000 mostly arid acres.

“The groundwater sources have managed barely to serve the current needs of the tribal community on the reservation,” Alec Garfield, the tribe’s lead water negotiator, told a House panel last year, adding that “the injustices and inequities of the past are still present and are still affecting our people.”

Robbers trailed to Soboba Reservation

Palm Springs Desert Sun

PALM SPRINGS, Calif. — At a time of heightened tensions between the Riverside County Sheriff’s office and the Soboba Band of Luiseno Indians, deputies today sought two suspected gunmen from the reservation who are believed to have committed an armed home invasion robbery in nearby San Jacinto.

Deputies said no shots were fired and no one was injured in the latest incident, which was reported about 11 a.m. Saturday at a home in the 1100 block of East Main Street in downtown San Jacinto, according to San Jacinto police Sgt. Rick Garcia.

Witnesses trailed the suspects, who were armed with chrome-plated handguns, as the men drove past a tribal checkpoint and entered the Soboba Reservation. The suspect vehicle was located by a sheriff’s helicopter outside a home on the Soboba reservation and seized for evidence by Hemet-based deputies, Garcia said.

Investigators have identified the suspects as Soboba tribal members David Neil Morreo, 34, and Thomas Charles Durnin, 19, Garcia said. Both men remain at large and should be considered armed and dangerous, Garcia said.

The armed robbery comes after months of tensions between the Indians and the sheriff’s office, which have resulted in charges of racism by the tribal government and allegations from the sheriff that the tribal checkpoint is hindering the investigation of violent crimes. Five Soboba tribal members have been killed in shootouts with local law enforcement officers this year.

Federal officials have investigated the status of the tribe’s lucrative casino, and the sheriff’s deputies’ union has told people the casino is unsafe.

Last week, deputies arrested one man and sought another in connection with guns and ammunition found in a stolen vehicle on the reservation, according to sheriff’s Lt.

Patricia Knudson. Deputies seized two rifles and an illegally altered shotgun, and are seeking a Soboba resident named Whitecloud Trujillo in connection with that incident.

In Saturday’s robbery, a 23-year-old San Jacinto woman told police two males pushed their way inside her home, pulled shiny, chrome-plated handguns and demanded to know where her roommate was, Garcia said.

When they learned the roommate wasn’t there, they demanded anything of value and took the woman’s roommate’s wallet, Garcia said.

The suspects were leaving in a white, two-door Chrysler Sebring with tinted windows and 20-inch to 22-inch chrome rims, when the woman’s roommate and another man returned, Garcia said.

The suspects threatened the roommate at gunpoint when he tried to get their license plate number, Garcia said. Then they drove east on Main Street through San Jacinto.

The roommate and his

acquaintance got in a vehicle and followed the suspects on Main Street and east on Soboba Road, and turned around when the Sebring drove past the guard shack at the Soboba Indian Reservation, Garcia said.

Deputies said one suspect was described as “John,” a Native American man in his 20s, about 6 feet tall and 175 pounds, with black hair, green eyes and a “Soboba Rez” tattoo on his left forearm. He was wearing a black hooded sweatshirt, black baseball cap, dark blue jeans and tan shoes.

The other suspect was described as a Native American man in his 20s, about 5 feet 10 inches tall, weighing 250 pounds, with a darker complexion. He had black hair, a goatee, and a large “Soboba” tattoo on his neck. He was last seen wearing a black hooded sweatshirt, a dark beanie, dark pants and tan boots.

The city of San Jacinto contracts with the Riverside County Sheriff’s Department for police services. San Jacin-

to police officers are therefore also employees of the Sheriff’s Department.

Tensions between the Sheriff’s Department and the Soboba Band of Luiseno Indians have reverberated recently across the Southland region and beyond.

In May, three Soboba tribal members were killed in shootouts with Riverside County deputies on the reservation. Local law enforcement officials said suspects with high-powered assault rifles have fired on deputies, patrol cars and helicopters during the past year. A total of five Soboba have been killed by deputies in shootouts since December.

In August, Riverside County Sheriff Stanley Sniff urged the National Indian Gaming Commission to suspend a license for the Soboba Casino, which is on the tribe’s reservation in the foothills of the San Jacinto Mountains, 35 miles southeast of Riverside.

Soboba tribal chairman Robert Salgado maintains his people are not above the law, but they have sovereign rights



Courtesy Photo

Justin “Vava J” Secakuku interviews Hopi High cross country runner Ronnie Laban during the Hopi High Teen Show on Thursday, Sept. 11.

Hopi Teen Show back on the air

By Independent Staff

POLACCA, Ariz. — The Hopi High Teen Show is back on the air after taking the summer off because school was not in session.

The Hopi High Teen Show is the only live remote Native American teen talk show in the nation. It is aired on KUYI, the Hopi community radio station, which is found at 88.1 on the FM dial. KUYI has the highest wattage, or largest listening area, of any Native American public radio station in the continental U.S.

The Hopi High Teen Show

airs from 1:30-2 p.m. each Thursday.

The Hopi High radio students interview other students, teachers, coaches, administrators and community members as well as state officials. There are three six-minute interviews during the program. There is also a community calendar, news, sports and an environmental report.

The Hopi High radio students won nine awards last year from the Arizona Interscholastic Press Association.

The advanced members leading the class are Paul Quamahongnewa, Natasha

Naha and Stephanie Wing. The students joining the interview team are Samantha Clah, Katie Honawa, Kamille Cane, Geraldine Numkena, Arissa Oso, Darian Poleyestewa, Trish Qa’Havi, Latoya Rucker, Justin “Vav J” Secakuku, Marcus Joseph and Gerri Sehongva.

The Hopi High radio students also go to KUYI once a week to learn studio work as they do some on air work and also learn radio production including how to use a radio editing machine.

The advanced radio class will be creating pieces for public radio exchange in Boston

and Youth Radio out of Berkley, Calif. These pieces may be picked up by National Public Radio.

The students in the advanced radio class include Faith Gonnie, Johnetta Honie, Deniceya Kootshongsie, Fawn Lomakema, Nicole Sockyma, Kyi David, Lenae Kuwanvama, Melsena Harris, Traci Talahytewa and Paul Quamahongnewa.

Those wanting to be interviewed or submit an environmental report can telephone 928-738-5111, extension 241 or email stanfred23@yahoo.com

BIA releases details of reservation shooting

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The Bureau of Indian Affairs has released the name of an officer who was shot while serving as part of a surge in law enforcement officers on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation, which straddles the North Dakota-South Dakota border.

Pat Ragsdale, the BIA’s director, said Sgt. Louis Troy Poitra, 27, was shot in the leg on Wednesday as he was responding to a domestic violence call in Little Eagle. Rifle fire hit Poitra’s vehicle and wounded him, Ragsdale said Friday in a release.

Poitra and the suspect, whom Ragsdale said also was

injured by a gunshot, were taken to a Bismarck, N.D., hospital.

Ragsdale said Poitra captured the assailant, confiscated a weapon and stayed on the scene until a National Park Service police officer and a Cherokee Nation marshal arrived. They also are part of the law enforcement surge, known as Operation Dakota Peacekeeper.

Poitra, who has been with the BIA for six years, was a squad leader with the mission and was serving his second 30-day detail, Ragsdale said. He is a member of the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe and is a police officer training instruc-

tor from the Indian Police Academy in Artesia, N.M.

The BIA and FBI are investigating.

The BIA brought in extra officers in June to help curb a high crime rate on Standing Rock. Authorities have said the surge has helped.

The effort is expected to continue at least until October.

“I am very proud of Sergeant Poitra and everyone associated with this mission. This reminds us all of the dedication, bravery and sacrifice of police officers that serve Indian country and our communities all over America,” Ragsdale said.

Oklahoma casinos’ proximity stymies plan for Kansas

Oklahoman

OKLAHOMA — Quapaw Chairman John Berrey said he was “very disappointed” to learn that the proposed casino in Kansas won’t be built.

Berrey said his tribe’s casino will explore ways “that can help soften this tremendous loss.” He didn’t elaborate.

Penn National Gaming Inc. said Thursday its plan is dead.

Penn., based in Wyomissing, Pa., blamed provisions of a Kansas law enacted last year to allow a single state-owned casino in four counties.

It said another factor

was its failure to win a contract for a second Kansas casino in another county.

The law requires a bidder for a Cherokee County contract to invest \$225 million and pay a \$25 million fee.

Last month, a state board approved a contract with Penn for Cherokee County.

The Kansas casino would have been near the Quapaw Tribe’s Downstream Casino, which opened in July.

The tribe’s casino, where Oklahoma meets Kansas and Missouri, has 2,000 gambling machines. An adjoining 12-story hotel will open this fall.