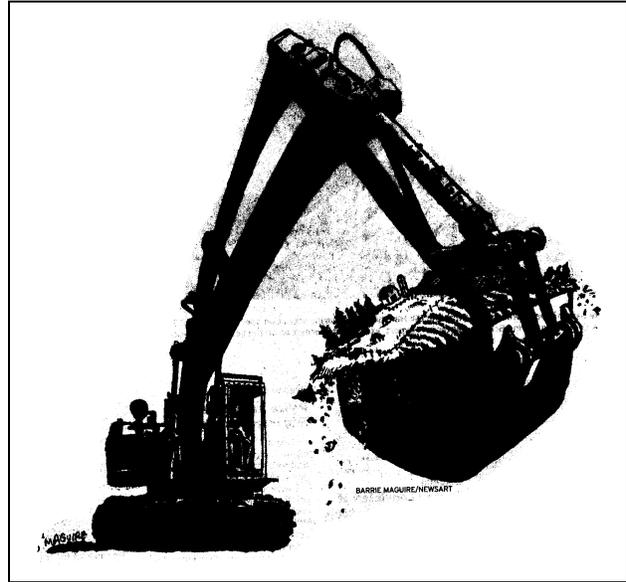


## Roll up the welcome mat

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There are plenty of Willamette Valley communities that would warmly greet the Klamath tribes if they came to town to develop manufacturing, retail shopping or a medical center to create jobs and care for tribal members.

But if the tribes insist on running over and around Oregon land-use restrictions and paving over 385 acres of rural farmland on what is known as French Prairie near Wilsonville, then the people of the Willamette Valley should roll up the welcome mat and challenge the development.



Barrie Maguire/Newsart

The Klamath tribes claim that they have no plans for a casino at the site, which fronts Interstate 5 about 15 miles south of Portland. But three years ago the tribes floated the idea of building a casino on the property. And whether or not a casino is in the tribes' initial plans, the willingness of the Klamaths to ignore local and state rules and restrictions on urban development raises a red flag.

So does a report in Monday's Wall Street Journal revealing that the Obama administration may decide to make it easier for tribes to build casinos on land far from their reservations. The Journal reported that the Interior Department is reconsidering a Bush administration rule requiring that off-reservation casinos be within commuting distance of reservations.

There are already more than 400 tribal casinos nationwide, and at least 50 more applications for new off-reservation casinos pending before the Bureau of Indian Affairs. We've argued in favor of only one of the off-reservation casinos, a proposal by the Warm Springs tribes to build in the Columbia River Gorge.

In our view the Warm Springs is a unique case. The Warm Springs own 40 acres of land near Hood River that they acquired long before the 1988 Indian Gaming Regulatory Act. After many legal experts, including advisors to Gov. Ted Kulongoski, concluded that the tribes had the legal power to build a casino on the Hood River property -- in an important stretch of the scenic gorge -- we

reluctantly supported allowing a casino in an alternative site, an industrial area inside the urban growth boundary of Cascade Locks.

The Klamath tribes have no such claim or history with the French Prairie property. They do, however, have a powerful legal tool that may allow them to purchase the land and move it into federal trust, which would take it off the tax rolls and give the tribes the right to develop it. The language in the original federal act that restored the Klamath tribes states that the interior secretary "shall" accept real property in trust for the benefit of the tribes.

It's hard to believe that the original act was meant to allow the Klamath tribes to buy land several hundred miles from their reservation, ignore local and state restrictions and shatter a metrowide planning process that has put areas south of the Willamette River off-limits to urban development. As a spokesperson for the Grand Ronde tribes put it, the Klamath tribes' plan is a "prime example of reservation shopping gone overboard."

The chairman of the Klamath tribes, Joseph Kirk, points out that tribes all over the country are trying to buy land closer to metropolitan areas, hoping to launch successful development ventures. Kirk said, "We want to look at something that will provide economic benefits for the tribe and help the greater community as well."

Again, there are plenty of places in the valley, inside of urban growth areas, where the tribes would be more than welcome to build retail shopping or a medical center. If all the tribes want is a place to do business, they can do that without destroying rural Willamette Valley farmland and triggering a rash of urbanization between Portland and Salem.