

What's Up

Ho-Chunk businesses to include movies, water

Tomah, Wisconsin (AP)

The Ho-Chunk Nation, which operates casinos and bingo halls in Wisconsin, is moving into the movie theater and bottled water businesses. The tribe broke ground March 25 for its Ho-Chunk Cinema movie theater in Tomah. The \$3 million movie theater will be built on land owned by the Ho-Chunk Nation and is expected to open next fall. The 20,000-square-foot theater will have six screens and stadium seating for 700 people. The Ho-Chunk Nation is also introducing its own brand of bottled water, called Ni Sini – which means “cold water” in the Ho-Chunk language.

Tohono O'odham chairman keeps his job

Sells, Arizona (AP)

A legislative council has dismissed a request to remove the chairman of the Tohono O'odham Nation from office. The move comes after Edward Manuel, 56, was found innocent of charges that he tried to solicit sex from an undercover Tucson police officer. At the March 17 tribal hearing, defense attorney Bruce Burke urged the council to dismiss a petition to remove Manuel from office, saying the City Court trial had already cleared his name.

Ruling revives tribes' hopes of taxing railroad

Billings, Montana (AP)

The Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes think a ruling by a federal appeals court in March may let them resume taxing Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway trains that cross 80 miles of the tribes' Fort Peck Reservation. The tribes levied a 4 percent tax until 2000, when the railroad challenged it and stopped paying it. U.S. District Judge Jack Shanstrom of Billings ruled in 2001 that the tribes had no authority to impose the tax. A three-judge panel of the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals recently affirmed most of that decision, but said Shanstrom's summary judgment in favor of the railroad was premature. The tribes should have been given time for discovery – to gather information from the railroad and other sources to back their assertion that the railroad presents a health and safety threat. The judges vacated Shanstrom's summary judgment and sent the case back to Billings for further proceedings.

Navajo vote against selling water for coal & power plants

Window Rock, Arizona (AP)

Two Navajo Nation committees rejected a plan to sell surplus water to a coal company and two power plants in the San Juan Basin in a drought, saying the proposal didn't compensate Navajo farmers. The resolution would not have paid more than 800 Navajo farmers for taking cuts in irrigation water although the tribe would profit from the sales, said Upper Fruitland Council Delegate LoRenzo Bates, a former Navajo Agricultural Products Industry general manager. The Navajo Council's intergovernmental relations committee voted down the resolution March 18. The resolution would have let the tribe broker a deal to sell surplus Navajo water to the San Juan Generating Station and the Four Corners Power Plant, both partially owned by PNM, and BHP Billiton Coal near Farmington.

More

What's Up

More firefighting crews on shuttle debris mission

Sioux Falls, South Dakota (AP)

Five more South Dakota firefighting crews area headed to Texas on a mission to search for debris from the space shuttle Columbia. The crews left for Palestine, Texas, during mid-March. From there they will be sent to other locations to help look for shuttle parts, said Melody Rothleutener, a dispatcher for the U.S. Forest Service. The 100 firefighters are from the Lower Brule, Pine Ridge, Standing Rock and Rosebud reservations. They are scheduled to be gone about a month.

Navajo sue U.S. over water from the Colorado River

Phoenix, Arizona (AP)

The Navajo Nation has asked a federal judge to block the Interior Department from allocating any uncommitted water from the Colorado River, a move that could unravel dozens of agreements between Arizona, Nevada, California and other tribes. Chief among those impacted if the tribe prevails: Arizona's interstate water banking program and a fragile deal that would allow Nevada and California to take more than their legal share of the river while they develop alternate sources. More broadly, the tribe wants its claims on the river quantified, even if that means taking water from Arizona's allotment.

Cherokee chief deemed eligible for election run

Tulsa, Oklahoma (AP)

Cherokee Chief Chad Smith says a political opponent was just trying to get attention in challenging his eligibility to seek re-election. The Cherokee Nation's high court ruled March 19 that Smith meets the residency requirements to run for a second term. The 3-0 ruling by the Judicial Appeals Tribunal confirmed an earlier decision by the tribe's Election Commission on Smith's eligibility. “My opponents know that I have a solid record of accomplishments to stand on as chief and challenging my residency was nothing more than baseless accusations,” Smith said.

Upper Peninsula asked to fund local governments

Marquette, Michigan (AP)

Two local tribes will be asked to turn over a portion of their gaming proceeds to the county. The Marquette County Board decided March 19 to ask for 2 percent gaming payments from the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community and the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians. The tribes are required under an agreement with the state to give local governments 2 percent of the proceeds from electronic games in their casinos. The county will request \$20,000 for the Upper Peninsula Children's Museum, \$30,000 for the Marquette County Dental Clinic, \$121,000 for the Sheriff's Department DARE program and \$20,000 for the Liberty Arts Children's Project in Negaunee, *The Mining Journal* of Marquette reported.

In Brief

Tribes ask judge to halt sturgis shooting range

Rapid City, South Dakota (AP)

A lawyer for five tribes asked a federal judge on March 24 to stop construction of a shooting range north of Sturgis near Bear Butte. At a hearing, U.S. District Judge Karen Schreier said she will issue a written opinion on whether to dismiss the case. Otherwise, it will go to trial June 30. The Northern Cheyenne, Rosebud Sioux, Yankton Sioux, Crow Creek Sioux and Standing Rock Sioux want the project stopped. They say noise from the complex would interfere with religious ceremonies at Bear Butte.

Water system fails on Crow Reservation

Crow Agency, Montana (AP)

Water service has been restored to this south-central Montana town after the system failed over the weekend of March 22, leaving taps and toilets dry. But the solution is makeshift while officials try to address the intake problem that has resulted in water not being drawn from the Little Bighorn River, said Gordon Jackson, the Bureau of Indian Affairs superintendent at Crow Agency. An engineering firm was expected in the area after March 24, he said.

Water was being pumped from the river and into two large storage tanks. Officials cautioned that tap water should be boiled before drinking. Jackson said this order was a precaution because of sediment kicked up while draining the tanks.

Ex-novitiate, site of 1975 occupation, sold to group

Gresham, Wisconsin (AP)

A former novitiate that was the scene of a takeover by Menominee tribal members almost three decades ago has been purchased by a local group of investors. Dan DeCaster, one of the partners, said a housing development is a possibility, but it could be some time before any firm plans are decided for the former Alexian Brothers novitiate. “We knew it had some potential so we decided to buy it and see what we could do with it.” The property was used as a traditional novitiate until 1968. A resident caretaker maintained the property while the order tried to sell it for about \$3.5 million. But the armed group of Menominee took it over in January 1975, resulting in a 34-day standoff. The takeover ended on Feb. 5, 1975, when negotiators reached an agreement calling for the Alexian Brothers to turn the property over to the Menominee for \$1 and other considerations, for use as a medical facility. The tribe, however, never took possession.