

Buena Vista casino workshop brings comments

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By Liz MacLeod

The Buena Vista Band of Me-Wuk Indians continues to seek comments from the public regarding its proposed casino project south of Ione.

The approximately 260,000 square-foot casino and entertainment facility would be located on the 67.5-acre Buena Vista Rancheria off Coal Mine Road. The tribe submitted a Draft Tribal Environmental Impact Report Jan. 26, the 45-day comment period for which will close March 12.

As part of that public comment process, the tribe hosted a public workshop at Evalynn Bishop Hall in Ione Feb. 16 and 17. Thirty-one people attended Friday night's workshop, including County Administrative Officer Pat Blacklock, Ione councilmen Lee Ard and Jeff Barnhart, and Ione Mayor Jerry Sherman.

Twenty-seven individuals attended the Saturday workshop, many of whom also attended the day before. Among the first-timers was District 2 Supervisor Richard Forster.

The tribe had received 12 written comments prior to the workshop. Nineteen such comments were received during the workshop, 15 of which were written on comment cards and four of which were dictated to a stenographer provided by the tribe.

"If the public doesn't comment, it is difficult for the tribe to respond to the community's questions and concerns," said Ryan Rauzon, public information officer for the tribe.

A number of experts were on hand at the workshop to answer questions about specific aspects of the project, including wastewater, traffic and aesthetic impacts. "We heard good feedback," Rauzon said. "I think people were pleased they could go to the area they were most interested about and ask an expert."

A video presentation narrated by Buena Vista Chairwoman Rhonda Morningstar Pope was also available for viewing at the workshop. The video traces the history of the Buena Vista tribe, which dates back to 1817, as well as outlines the current environmental review process.

She said the public comments received during the 45-day period will be addressed in the final TEIR. "After that step, we negotiate with Amador County," she said. "Those negotiations will result in an intergovernmental services agreement."

If an ISA is not reached within 55 days, the tribe and county will have to present their best versions of an agreement to an independent arbitrator. "That arbitrator has roughly 30 days to make a choice," Morningstar Pope said. The arbitrator would have to choose either the tribe's or county's ISA in its entirety. "That form of arbitration forces both sides to present moderate, thoughtful agreements."

Several project alternatives are listed in the draft TEIR, including a smaller casino project as well as a phased project alternative.

The tribe's phased project alternative would allow the tribe to build the casino and entertainment complex more gradually, in three phases. Phase One would consist of a 32,900 square-foot gaming floor with 1,150 slot machines and 40 gaming tables. Phase Two would consist of an expansion to 1,650 slots and 60 table games. The third and final phase would consist of a 71,525 square-foot gaming floor with 2,000 slots and 80 table games.

The goal of the draft TEIR is to mitigate the off-reservation impacts created by the proposed gaming facility.

The following issues are discussed in the Draft TEIR: aesthetic/visual; agricultural land; air quality; archeological/ historical; cumulative effects; drainage/absorption; economic/jobs; flood plain/ flooding; forest land/fire hazard; geologic/seismic; growth inducing; land use; minerals; noise; population/ housing balance; public services/ facilities; recreation/ parks; schools/ universities; septic systems; sewer capacity; soil erosion/ compaction/ grading; solid waste; toxic/hazardous; traffic/circulation; vegetation; water quality; water supply/groundwater; wetland/riparian; and wildlife.

According to a Jan. 26 news release from the Buena Vista tribe, the project will create nearly 2,000 new jobs once opened and bring an estimated \$10 million a month in payroll to the region. During the approximately 14-month construction period, about \$140 million in labor and building expenses would contribute to the local economy. The tribe anticipates that the facility could open by the end of 2008.

"We want to give all the information we can," Morningstar Pope said at the workshop. "I hope to get a lot of people's comments."

Comments should be addressed to the Buena Vista Rancheria of Me-Wuk Indians, P.O. Box 162283, Sacramento, 95816.

To view a copy of the Buena Vista Band's Draft TEIR, visit http://buenavistatribe.com/tribal_gaming.htm or view the document at the Amador County Library branch in Ione at 25 E. Main St.



Rhonda Morningstar Pope, far left, spoke with a resident at Friday's workshop as members of the Ione City Council stand nearby.



An overview of the proposed Buena Vista casino shows the gaming and entertainment facility, orange; parking garage, green; and water and wastewater treatment facility, red. Coal Mine Road is depicted in the lower left-hand corner.

Photo by: [Courtesy to the Ledger Dispatch](#)

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