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March 24, 2025

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California Tribes File Lawsuit Challenging Approval of Scotts Valley Casino Project

~Citing multiple violations of the bedrock federal laws protecting tribes from agency overreach, Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation and Kletsel Dehe Band of Wintun Indians sought relief in federal court to stop the desecration of their Ancestral homelands~

Vallejo, CA – Today, the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation and the Kletsel Dehe Band of Wintun Indians [filed a lawsuit](#) challenging a decision by the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) to give away their Patwin ancestral lands to an unrelated Pomo tribe, from another part of California.

The lawsuit would overturn a rushed decision, issued in the closing moments of the Biden Administration, to greenlight an [urban mega-casino](#) on a cultural site considered sacred to local Patwin people. The lawsuit identifies fundamental violations of multiple federal laws intended to protect tribal governments, their ancestral homelands, and their people: the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA), and the Administrative Procedure Act (APA). It also reveals that, in an effort to ensure the decision was issued during the change of Presidential administrations, DOI officials misled local tribes, refused to consult with them, and ignored their evidentiary submissions.

“It is heartbreaking that the Biden Administration chose to spend its final days approving a mega-project on our sacred Patwin homelands without ever consulting our Tribe. This has left us no choice but to pursue legal action to protect our people, our homelands, and our rights,” said Yocha Dehe Chairman Anthony Roberts. **“Our filing shows how former DOI officials acted recklessly and illegally in an effort to avoid federal laws which are in place to ensure transparency, fairness, and agency accountability.”**

The 2025 decision represents an unexplained change of position for the United States. DOI previously [determined](#) on three separate occasions, under Presidential administrations of both political parties, that Scotts Valley lacks a significant historical connection to the City of Vallejo and is therefore prohibited from acquiring so-called “restored” gaming lands there.

While the incoming Presidential Administration may reconsider the challenged approval—welcomed by Yocha Dehe and Kletsel Dehe—the imminent, acute harms to cultural resources on Patwin homelands, among other impacts, required the tribes to seek judicial relief in the meantime.

“This is about more than a casino, it’s about protecting the integrity of the land-into-trust process and ensuring decisions are made fairly, lawfully, and based on true historical ties,” said Charlie Wright, Chairman of the Kletsel Dehe Wintun Nation. “Our Tribe has always stood firm in defense of our lands and heritage, and this case is no different. Scotts Valley has no documented cultural connection to Vallejo, and allowing this approval to stand sets an ominous precedent that undermines Tribal sovereignty and weakens the foundation of federal-tribal land policy. We fully support tribes securing land within their rightful homelands, but no tribe should be allowed to bypass established legal and historical standards. When federal agencies fail to uphold these principles, we have a duty to hold them accountable.”

As the tribes detail in their [filing](#), DOI refused to comply with clear, mandatory legal requirements. Among other things, DOI refused to comply with National Historic Preservation Act Section 106, which protects historic and sacred sites – misleading tribal, state, and other federal agencies in the process. In addition, DOI cut short the environmental review process and ignored evidence of the significant environmental consequences on local tribes and the surrounding community.

The Federal Defendants will have 60 days to answer the Complaint.

More information on the project is available at www.protecttribalhomelands.com.

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