

Written by Administrator  
Friday, 18 February 2011 17:49 -

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The U.S. Department of the Interior on Friday rejected the Stockbridge-Munsee Tribe's plan to take control of 330 acres of land in the Catskills and build the state's first full-fledged casino with slot machines and table games. The decision is seen as major setback for the Wisconsin-based tribe and a win for a half-dozen New York racino operators who have been aggressively lobbying

against the Indian tribe's efforts.

The decision did not come as a surprise, according to a statement released by Stockbridge-Munsee. Despite earlier indications that the DOI would approve the land claim, last month the department said the settlement would require Congressional approval. In the last month, the casino plan has been criticized by some legislative officials.

The tribe has been in contact with DOI since September 2009. It spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to update its Environmental Impact Statement and pay attorney fees to negotiate a settlement with local, state and federal officials. Earlier, the Secretary of the Interior had assured that it, "had the administrative authority to acquire—without an act of Congress—lands into trust for gaming purposes as long as the lands are acquired as part of a land claim settlement."

Earlier this year, state racino operators called on Gov. Andrew Cuomo to withdraw an agreement that would allow the tribe to build the casino. That deal was signed by David Paterson during the final hours of his governorship. Some racino groups claimed that if Stockbridge-Munsee was allowed to open a full-fledged casino, their businesses would falter. Racinos are restricted to armless slots or video lottery terminals.

The opposing groups also said the deal would cost the state roughly \$400 million annually in lost gaming revenue—money the state can't afford to lose with a \$10 billion budget deficit.

"By rejecting this ill-conceived compact, the Department of Interior has allowed New York state to go back to the drawing board and put together a gaming policy that makes sense," said The New York Gaming Association, which represents racetrack casinos in New York, in a Friday statement. "That new policy will hopefully capitalize on existing resources like our racetrack casinos, which already put more than \$1 billion per year in tax revenue toward state coffers and could help bolster our sagging economy even further if allowed to operate full-scale casinos."

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While the Stockbridge-Munsee Tribe admitted it doesn't know what the next steps will be, it vowed to keep pushing for what it says is its rightful, longstanding claim.

“We will continue to work toward final resolution of all issues with all of these parties with as much dedication and cooperation as we have in the past,” said Kimberly Vele, president of Stockbridge-Munsee. “Despite today's disappointing decision, I will always be hopeful and confident that soon the Stockbridge-Munsee Community Band of Mohicans will receive the justice that we have so patiently waited for the past two centuries.”

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