

Comanche Nation sues over new Chickasaw casino near Texas border

Written by Administrator

Saturday, 19 August 2017 06:01 -

The Comanche Nation is suing the federal government over a rival casino the Chickasaw Nation is building two miles north of the Texas border in the Jefferson County town of Terral.

Richard Grellner, an attorney for the Comanche Nation, said larger, wealthier tribes including the Chickasaw Nation are dominating Oklahoma's gaming market after receiving preferential treatment from the federal government.

"The Comanche feel like they've played by the rules and their competition didn't," Grellner said.

The lawsuit claims the U.S. Department of the Interior and the Bureau of Indian Affairs allowed the Chickasaw Nation and other tribes to skirt requirements to place off-reservation land into trust for new casinos, depriving smaller tribes such as the Comanche Nation of their share of the gaming market.

"BIA officials moved the goal line so close to the Chickasaws and other privileged tribes in Oklahoma that they have needed only to fall into the end zone and open up shop, secure in the knowledge that the score was virtually certain to hold up without any replay," the lawsuit claims.

U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke and Jonodev Chaudhuri, chairman of the National Indian Gaming Commission, are among those named as defendants in the lawsuit.

The lawsuit was filed Thursday in U.S. Western District Court of Oklahoma.

The Comanche tribe also claims the U.S. government allowed the Chickasaw Nation to skirt federal law requiring a formal study of what effects any new large-scale development like the Jefferson County casino would have on the environment.

"The project has thus far required creation of several 'sewage lagoons' so large they are visible

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from space," the lawsuit states.

The Chickasaw Nation broke ground on the \$10 million casino in May after the federal government allowed the tribe to place land for the development into trust in January. The 36,000-square-foot casino is scheduled to open in 2018.

In a statement, Stephen Greetham, senior counsel for the Chickasaw Nation, said Friday the tribe has completed an initial review of the lawsuit. "Based on our review, the complaint does not raise any factual or legal point of merit," Greetham said.

The Comanche Nation already operates the Red River Hotel and Casino in Devol, about 50 miles from where the Chickasaws are building the casino in Terral. The Comanche Nation also has land on a tribal allotment where it plans to build a new casino less than 10 miles from Terral, according to the lawsuit.

The Comanches also seek to overturn the Department of Interior's decision to allow the Chickasaws to place the Jefferson County land into trust for its new casino.

The National Indian Gaming Commission declined to comment because of the pending lawsuit. The U.S. Department of the Interior did not respond to The Oklahoman's request for comment.

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