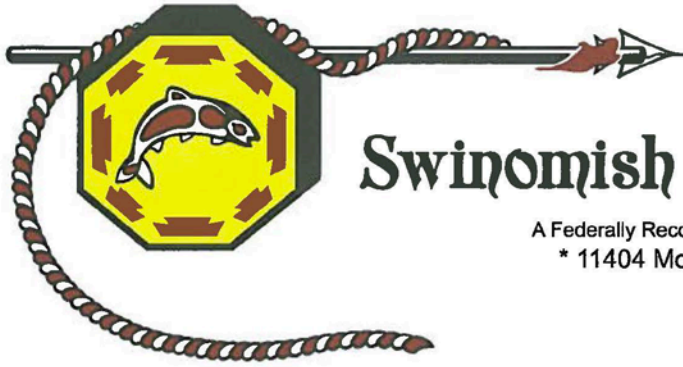


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Swinomish Indian Tribal Community

A Federally Recognized Indian Tribe Organized Pursuant to 25 U.S.C. § 476
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FOR IMMEDIATE PRESS RELEASE

BY THE SWINOMISH INDIAN TRIBAL COMMUNITY,
LA CONNER REGIONAL LIBRARY, FIRE DISTRICT #13

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The Swinomish Indian Senate, the governing body of the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community, has approved contributions of services and funds in 2015 to several local districts from new Tribal tax revenues.

The Senate plans to adopt a Trust Improvement Use and Occupancy Tax Code to take effect January 1, 2015, complementing the existing interim 2011 – 2014 tax. But local districts must submit their 2015 budgets to Skagit County by November 30. So the Senate decided to approve and announce its 2015 contributions to provide certainty to the La Conner School District, Medic 1, Fire District 13 and the La Conner Library.

“Just like the Swinomish Tribe’s own government, each of these districts provides valuable services to the Swinomish Reservation,” said Swinomish Chairman Brian Cladoosby. “But each one is in a different situation, so we have negotiated separate arrangements with each.”

For years, the Tribe has provided educational paraprofessionals – employed by the Tribe itself – who are assigned to work off-Reservation in the La Conner School District. Currently, eleven Tribal parapro employees work in the La Conner Schools, seven in the middle and high schools and four in the elementary school.

“The Tribe expects to spend about \$550,000 this year employing these parapro who work in the School District,” said Chairman Cladoosby. “In addition to that, the Tribe’s Education Director spends much of her workday in La Conner at the public schools with the parapro.

“The Tribe is under absolutely no legal obligation to provide this support to the schools. As we all know from the *McCleary* decision, it is the State of Washington’s Constitutional duty to fully fund education. But since the State of Washington has been unwilling to carry out its duty, the Tribe has stepped forward to help because we value education and we see the need,” said Chairman Cladoosby.

In addition to continuing to provide eleven Tribal parapro to the La Conner School District, the Senate has authorized a financial contribution of \$400,000 in 2015. “Together with the Tribe’s employment of the parapro, the Tribe’s support of the School District for 2015 will be \$1 million,” said Chairman Cladoosby. “This is an enormous amount of money to anyone. And when I look around at our Tribal Community, I see so many other unmet needs. We still cannot provide the level

of medical and other services that we want our Tribal members to receive. We see opportunities for salmon habitat restoration that we cannot fund. We see Reservation land for sale that we cannot purchase to restore to Tribal ownership,” continued Chairman Cladoosby.

In the wake of the Federal Court of Appeals’ *Great Wolf Lodge* decision, the State and County will no longer tax the value of houses and other improvements on leased trust land within the Swinomish Reservation. Skagit County estimates that those improvements would have generated just under \$800,000 in School District taxes.

“The Tribe’s contribution in services and funds is about \$200,000 more than the taxes that the School District would have received from tax-exempt trust properties before *Great Wolf Lodge*,” said Chairman Cladoosby. Under Washington law, the various taxes on exempt properties will be shifted accordingly to non-exempt properties unless the State, County or local districts decide instead to cut their services and budgets. “Of course, the School District’s board is responsible for preparing its own budget, and the Tribe isn’t involved in that process. But we have provided the Schools District with services and funds that will allow it to continue to operate just as it did before the *Great Wolf Lodge* decision, and that would greatly mitigate the tax shifting that is provided by Washington law.”

However, there are legal limits on increases in taxes of some local districts. Medic 1 is unable to raise taxes at all to compensate for tax revenues that will no longer be received from exempt trust improvements. “The County estimates that Medic 1 will be unable to raise \$52,957 from other properties that would have been received from exempt trust properties, and that is the amount that the Tribe will contribute in 2015 to Medic 1,” said Chairman Cladoosby. “We recognize the value of the emergency services that Medic 1 provides to the Reservation.”

Similarly, the La Conner Library is unable to shift taxes fully to compensate for exempt trust improvement tax revenues. The Senate authorized a 2015 contribution of \$25,734 to the Library, the amount of funds that, according to a County estimate, cannot be shifted.

The Board of Trustees of the La Conner Regional Library said they “appreciate the tribal donation of \$25,736 to support the library for the 2015 fiscal year. Coupled with the library’s county tax levy, library services for 2015 will be at a normal level. We realize that this is a difficult year of transition and we look forward to working with the tribe on the goal of full funding in 2016 and beyond.”

Just as the Tribe has provided on-going parapro staff support of the La Conner School District, for the past several years the Tribe has provided Fire District 13 with a financial contribution of \$120,000 per year. “This year, the Fire District requested that the Tribe increase its contribution to \$150,000, and the Senate has authorized that increase,” said Chairman Cladoosby. “The Fire District station is just down the road from Swinomish Village. The Fire District is there when it is needed by Reservation residents and visitors. We value our relationship with the District and we value the services that it provides,” added Cladoosby.

Fire District 13 Chief Roy Horn said that Fire District representatives had met several times with Swinomish leaders and staff over the past few months. “The Tribe’s contribution is larger than last year, and is larger than the amount of County taxes raised in the past from trust properties which

are now exempt. The Fire District appreciates the Tribe's contribution and cooperation, and we support the Tribe's exercise of its taxing authority to fund government services."

The Tribe intends to negotiate intergovernmental agreements for the contributions with each of the districts, which will build upon agreements signed for the 2011 – 2014 taxes.

"I have said before that we were not a part of *the Great Wolf Lodge* case, but for decades we have seen a flood of tax monies leave the Reservation and flow to other governments. Those are funds that we desperately needed when we had so few other sources of government revenue. So we are thankful that we now have the opportunity to receive tax revenues to help pay for the essential governmental services the Tribe provides throughout the Reservation," explained Chairman Cladoosby. "At the same time, the Senate recognizes that value of services that our partners in education and emergency services deliver to the Reservation, and so the Tribe is doing its part to help ensure that those services can continue, and to ease the transition from State to Tribal taxation."

The Swinomish Indian Tribal Community is a federally recognized Indian Tribe with more than 900 members. Swinomish is a signatory to the 1855 Treaty of Point Elliott and is the legal successor in interest to the Samish, Kikialus, Lower Skagit and Swinomish aboriginal bands. Its 10,000 acre reservation is located 65 miles North of Seattle, Washington on Fidalgo Island and includes approximately 3000 acres of tidelands.

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