

Assistant Secretary Sweeney Approves Fee-to-Trust for Gaming Applications for Two Chickasaw Nation Casino Resorts in Oklahoma

Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Tara Katuk Sweeney recently announced she has approved two fee-to-trust applications submitted by The Chickasaw Nation for casino resorts in and near the Oklahoma cities of Ardmore and Kingston, respectively.

“In reviewing The Chickasaw Nation’s applications, I determined that the transfer of these parcels into trust for gaming purposes would promote its long-term economic development and self-sufficiency, self-determination, and self-governance,” said Assistant Secretary Sweeney. “This action comports with our mission to support tribes in their efforts to utilize their lands and resources for the long-term benefit of their people.”

“We appreciate Secretary David Bernhardt of the United States Department of the Interior and Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Tara Katuk Mac Lean Sweeney of the Bureau of Indian Affairs for their leadership and thoughtful consideration of the Lake Murray and Lake Texoma projects,” said Chickasaw Nation Secretary of Commerce Bill Lance. “The Chickasaw Nation may now proceed to the next phase of development on these important regional tourism and entertainment projects, which are projected to create approximately 200 new jobs at the Lake Murray location and 175 jobs at the Lake Texoma location. Studies conducted on behalf of the Chickasaw Nation estimate a combined economic impact, including construction, of \$160 million in the first year, and a combined five-year economic impact of \$783 million. We look forward to the tremendous positive impacts these projects will have on our Chickasaw citizens and surrounding communities for many years to come.”

In 2016, The Chickasaw Nation submitted applications to the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to transfer into trust approximately 248.09 acres of land known as the Ardmore Tract in the City of Ardmore in Carter County, and two parcels totaling approximately 61.63 acres known as the Kingston Property near the City of Kingston in Marshall County, for gaming and other purposes. The Chickasaw Nation plans on constructing casino resorts at both sites.

Chickasaw Ardmore Project: The total estimated economic impact on the regional economy in year one from this project is estimated to be \$102,394,029. Economic output from initial construction of the development is expected to be \$44,214,375. This includes the direct impact of construction costs, the indirect impact of spending from the construction company suppliers, and the induced impact from spending from employees of all of these companies. The total impact on regional economic output from the Ardmore Project’s annual revenue is expected to be \$57,093,713. This includes the direct impact of revenue from the Ardmore Project, the indirect impact of spending from suppliers, and the induced impact from spending by employees of these companies. Construction and operation of the Ardmore

Project will generate substantial temporary and ongoing employment opportunities and wages that would be primarily filled by the available labor force in the city of Ardmore and surrounding communities in Carter County, OK. The Ardmore Project will create 213 jobs. Of those, 128 will be new jobs, and 85 will be filled by employees expected to transfer from other Chickasaw facilities. In addition, the Ardmore Project will create 78 indirect and induced positions at other businesses, resulting in the creation of 206 new direct and indirect jobs (128 direct and 78 indirect).

Chickasaw Kingston Project: The total construction costs for the Kingston Project are estimated to be \$19,420,000. After including direct impact of construction costs, the indirect impact of spending from the construction company suppliers, and the induced impact from spending from employees of these companies, the total impact on regional economic output from initial construction of the development is estimated to be \$34,345,727. Annual revenue from the operations of the Kingston Project is estimated to be \$15,862,427. By including the direct impact of revenue from the casino and hotel, the indirect impact of spending from the casino and hotel suppliers, and the induced impact from spending from employees of these companies, the total impact on regional economic output from the development’s annual revenue is estimated to be \$22,860,136. Operation of the Kingston Project would generate 174 new full-time employment positions. Of the 174 jobs generated, 108 would be a direct result of the proposed project, while the remaining 66 consist of indirect and induced employment opportunities.

Environmental Assessments (EAs) on both projects analyzed the potential impacts of the proposed casino resort projects and alternatives. The EAs evaluated the transfers of the sites into trust and the Nation’s subsequent development of the casino resorts. The BIA made the EAs available for public comment: The Ardmore site from February 15 through March 18, 2019, and the Kingston site from March 12 to April 13, 2020. It received no comments from the public on both.

The Assistant Secretary determined that the proposed projects would have no significant impact on the quality of the human environment and issued a Finding of No Significant Impact for each. This fulfills the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Since the Assistant Secretary also determined that the sites are eligible for gaming pursuant to the “Oklahoma Exception” of Section 2719 of Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, 25 U.S.C. § 2719 (a)(1)(A)(i)(i), the Chickasaw Nation may conduct gaming on them now. The Oklahoma Exception authorizes gaming on lands acquired by the Secretary in trust for the benefit of an Indian tribe after October 17, 1988. ♣