

NEW BUFFALO — Is the bloom off the rose of the Four Winds Casino?

Although that's open to conjecture, figures filed recently with the Michigan Gaming Control Board have

revealed that the three-year-old gaming facility, for the first time, has seen a drop in net slot-machine revenue.

For the 12-month reporting period of Aug. 1, 2009, to July 31, 2010, figures filed with the state by the Dowagiac-based Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians, the casino's owner, revealed that the 2 percent payment of slot-machine revenue that will be turned over to local governmental units amounted to \$5,727,151. That's nearly \$500,000 less than the roughly \$6.22 million that was distributed by the casino's Local Revenue Control Board during the casino's second year of operation.

Multiplying the 2 percent payment by 50 shows that the casino took in \$286,357,550 in net slot-machine revenue during its third year. The figure for the previous year was \$311,432,600, showing a decline of just more than \$25 million.

In its first year, the casino generated \$309,246,850 in net slot machine revenue. It opened in August 2007.

The figures don't include revenue generated by table games, which is not subject to tribal payments made to state and local governments. Generally, however, money collected from table games provide casinos with about 10 percent of total revenue.

The tribe's gaming compact with the state calls for a 6 percent share of net slot-machine revenue to be paid to the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. However, David Hicks, the audit manager for tribal casinos overseen by the state Gaming Control Board, said an amendment to the compact approved two years ago allows that figure to be reduced somewhat. It still wasn't clear Friday how much that payment would be, he said.

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"If it (slot-machine revenue) goes down (from the previous year), it can be reduced by a certain percentage," he said.

As for why slot-machine revenue has declined, Hicks said it likely was tied to the opening of the Nottawaseppi Huron Band of Potawatomi Indians' \$300 million FireKeepers Casino in Battle Creek. Berrien County Coordinator Bill Wolf also mentioned the impact of FireKeepers on Friday when he was informed of the 2 percent payment that will be distributed to local governments.

The country's continuing economic problems and remodeling carried out at the nearby Blue Chip Casino in Michigan City also may have been factors, he said.

"I'm very pleased the (Four Winds) numbers are staying up in the face of all the competition this last year," he said.

Paige Risser, the Pokagon Band's communications director, said the tribe would have no comment on the revenue figures. That's been the tribe's stance since the casino opened.

Further broken down, the figures show the tribe averaged about \$23.86 million a month in slot-machine revenue during its third year, compared to \$25.95 million a month during its second year and \$25.77 million in its first year. The average daily slot-machine take for the just completed year was a little less than \$800,000.

The Pokagon Band earlier this year announced plans to open a satellite casino on Interstate 94, just outside the east Berrien County line. The tribe's gaming compact with the state limits that facility, however, to 1,000 slot machines.

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