

Two tribes plan casinos in Mtn Home, Idaho

Written by Administrator

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Treasure Valley residents who hope to visit a casino currently have to drive to destinations like Jackpot, Nevada, or Pendleton, Oregon. But that could change.

Two different Native American tribes are pitching proposals to build a casino in Mountain Home near Interstate 84, one closer to the Treasure Valley and the other from Eastern Idaho. In the case of the Shoshone-Bannock of Eastern Idaho, this would be the tribe's fourth casino, but its first off of tribal lands. The other proposal comes from the Shoshone-Paiute Tribe based on the Duck Valley reservation on the border between Idaho and Nevada. The Shoshone-Paiute do not currently operate any casinos.

Each tribe is in a different place with their application process to construct the casino. While the Shoshone-Bannock purchased a plot of 157 acres for its project and have renderings of the proposal, they appear to be awaiting a referendum vote from their tribe to move ahead with an application process through the Department of the Interior.

The Shoshone-Paiute Tribe has identified a different plot of land they'd like to purchase in Mountain Home, but they have not bought it. However, leaders did submit a letter of intent to the Bureau of Indian Affairs to establish a gaming operation off of their reservation earlier this month.

The process for approving an off-reservation casino involves approval from several groups and officials at multiple levels of government, including a thumbs up from Governor Brad Little. Depending on how the process moves forward for each tribe, he may be in a position where he has to select between the two tribes which application to approve, both could move ahead or some other scenario in between.

Governor Brad Little's Press Secretary Madison Hardy could not be reached for comment by press time.

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Possible Shoshone-Bannock Mountain Home casino



A rendering of the proposed casino in Mountain Home under consideration by the Shoshone-Bannock tribe. Courtesy of JCJ Architecture

The Shoshone-Bannock Tribe is considering building a \$311 million, 500,000 square-foot casino on a 157-acre plot of land near Mountain Home purchased in early 2020, according to reports from the tribe's in-house news operation and the tribe's Facebook page. The [proposal envisions](#)

a casino with 2,000 electronic gaming machines, a 250-room hotel, six restaurants, a 15,000 square-foot event center, an 8-lane bowling alley, two movie theaters, and an arcade. It also includes a horse racing track with a grandstand.

The tribe will hold a referendum vote on the concept on September 23, according to the tribe's Facebook page. Eligible voters must be Shoshone-Bannock tribal members older than 21 who have lived on the reservation for the last year.

Tribe spokesperson Randy'L Teton told BoiseDev the tribe is not ready to go public with their plans.

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“We appreciate your interest, but we are not ready for a public article on the project as we have some internal matters that are currently being addressed,” she wrote to BoiseDev. “We won’t have a public update until the last week of September. Feel free to contact me at that time.”

The City of Mountain Home is aware of the idea, but doesn’t have an official stance one way or the other yet due to the tentative nature of the project.

“We don’t have an official comment on the project,” Mountain Home Communications Specialist Betsy Hiddleston said. “We do know they have purchased land here in Mountain Home and have included us in a lot of conversations, but they have not released an official statement on what their plan is on their end.”

The [largest Shoshone-Bannock Casino](#) , located north of Pocatello, opened in 2019. It features a 72,984 square foot gaming floor, as well as an 8,000 square foot bingo hall. The Pocatello area casino includes 900 slot machines, virtual blackjack, video craps, and bingo seating for more than 250.

Five restaurants are on the property, including a buffet, sports grill, a deli, and a lounge. The onsite hotel includes 150 rooms. It also has a spa, event center, and meeting space.

In recent months, the Shoshone Bannock Casino Hotel has placed advertisements on billboards in the Treasure Valley advertising the Eastern Idaho casino and its entertainment lineup, which has featured Larry the Cable Guy, Stone Temple Pilots, Brad Paisley, Nelly, and others.

Tribe hosts open houses on Mountain Home casino proposal

If it moves ahead, the project would be located just east of Mountain Home city limits near exit 95 off of Interstate 84. The tribe purchased the parcel in January 2020 for \$1.57 million from fuel tax revenue, [the Sho-Ban news outlet said](#) . BoiseDev confirmed the transaction with the Elmore County Assessor.

[The Shoshone-Bannock Tribe](#) held outreach events to educate members on the possibility of

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the casino in recent months. The tribe's Facebook page advertised open houses for the public to learn about the project in May. The project was repeatedly referred to as "an economic development project" in Mountain Home, but [photos from one of the events](#) reveal more details about the proposal.

The event was structured where members of the tribe could wander past different tables with informational placards and ask questions to those staffing the event. Some of the signs on display were titled "Feasibility Study," "Financial Returns," "Proposed Site" and "Tribal Application to be Submitted to the Department of the Interior" along with a [code section that links](#) to part of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act of 1988. A [flier on a table](#) outlined the top-level details of the proposal.

Enrolled members of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribe currently receive direct payments, known as "per capita" from the operation of the tribe's three casinos on the Fort Hall reservation near Pocatello in East Idaho, according to Sho-Ban News. If the new casino is built in Mountain Home, the Fort Hall Business Council overseeing the project would use the gaming revenue to pay off the debt building the project first before paying out more per capita to tribal members.

Sho-Ban News reported this may take "a number of years."

The tribe has also hired an environmental firm to study the Mountain Home property ahead of potential construction, as is required with major development projects, [Sho-Ban News said.](#)

Shoshone-Paiute cry foul over Shoshone-Bannock casino pitch

Unlike Idaho's other federally recognized tribes, the Shoshone-Paiute do not have a casino of their own to fund the tribe or resources for their community members on their isolated reservation.

Brian Mason, Chairman of the Shoshone-Paiute Tribe, told BoiseDev his tribe has been trying to pursue a casino in Mountain Home since the 1990s. Residents of the Duck Valley

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Reservation currently do most of their shopping in Mountain Home and use the medical services there, which he says points to a closer relationship between the tribe and the community than the East Idaho Shoshone-Bannock.

“The ties and the partnerships between Duck Valley and Mountain Home are much greater between our reservation than theirs,” Mason said in an interview. “...To the tribe, it seems like an overstep by a larger Indian tribe that already has gaming to come into our backyard and try to bully us.”

He said the Shoshone-Paiute have been eyeing a parcel on the other side of Exit 95 on Interstate 84 for a casino, next to Wingers. But, they have not moved to purchase the property yet. According to a letter the tribe sent to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Shoshone-Paiute have partnered with Oreana-based developer JTC Gaming LLC on the project. Mason said JTC has been “involved in gaming operations in many states for many years” and has a full staff of gaming attorneys.

The letter did not describe a specific room count, a list of amenities for a casino, or how many electronic machines it would have, but the Shoshone-Paiute plans to build on-site housing for tribal members who work at the casino and provide shuttle service to and from Duck Valley so employees can “keep connected with their culture and their families and other tribal members.”

Partnership offer declined

Last year, Sho-Ban News said that the Fort Hall Business Council proposed the Mountain Home casino to [Shoshone-Paiute tribal members](#) as a joint venture. This would include a possible 50/50 split on the total interest in the casino. If the tribe doesn't have cash to invest, the Shoshone-Bannock will provide an interest-free loan, which can be repaid from the profits from the casino.

The agreement would allow the Shoshone-Paiute to purchase up to 40% interest in the casino when it is built with the option for another 10% interest purchase later to reach a half stake in the venture. This agreement would allow “equal opportunity and treatment” among both tribes for employment at the casino.

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Mason said his tribe flatly declined the Shoshone-Bannock's offer to be a partner on the casino multiple times and is instead wanting to establish its own casino, which would give tribal members more economic opportunities than a partnership. He said the project would be a big boost to the Shoshone-Paiute tribal community, which currently has high poverty rates.

"We're not trying to push weight around because we don't really have any," Mason said. "We're just trying to get something for the people."

How does off-reservation gaming work?

A casino opening up off of indigenous land would be a new venture for either tribe.

According to an article from the [Nevada Law Journal](#), tribes are permitted to run casinos off of their reservation lands if they receive special permission through a process called "land-into-trust." This means in order for the casino to be legal, the tribe must get the land put into a trust held by the United States government for the benefit of a tribe.

To meet these qualifications, the Shoshone-Bannock Tribe must get the stamp of approval from the Secretary of the Interior saying the casino, after consultation with state, local and officials from nearby tribes, would be "in the best interest of the Indian tribe and its members" and "would not be detrimental to the surrounding community."

But, only if the Governor of the state approves.

Read more <https://boisedev.com/news/2022/08/25/mountain-home-casino/>