Tribe, ITD to build rest stop on Winchester Grade

By KATHY HEDBERG of the Tribune | Posted: Tuesday, February 28, 2012 12:00 am

NEZPERCE - The Nez Perce Tribe and the Idaho Transportation Department will partner to build a rest stop at the top of the Winchester Grade at the Camas Express convenience store.

Anthony Johnson of the tribe's research and development department said Monday no start date has been set for the project because of winter weather.

"I can't confirm a start date, but we are committed to the project and we're just waiting for the weather to get right," Johnson said.

The tribe is also working on an expansion of the Clearwater Casino that will begin with a groundbreaking ceremony Friday, he added. The project will replace the "white bubble" with a permanent "bricks and mortar" building and will also improve the ventilation system at the casino, he said.

The remodel of the former Cadillac Ranch at the top of Winchester Hill will include an expansion of the convenience store and a 24-hour rest stop with bathrooms and showers. The Lewis County commissioners met with representatives of the Idaho Division of Building Safety Monday and ITD to hear an update of the project.

Pat Lightfield of ITD, said plans to build a $1.5 million rest stop between Lewiston and Sheep Creek south of Riggins had been put on hold for economic reasons. But when the tribe proposed its expansion, the transportation board gave it $300,000 for a project that will include widening the turn lanes on both sides of U.S. Highway 95.

Terry Blessing of the building safety division said the tribe's expansion is estimated to cost about $2.5 million, but it has not yet been advertised for bids. The state has been working with the tribe to do all of the building inspections involved in the expansion of the rest stop and the casino remodel.

Johnson said the rest stop provided a good opportunity for the tribe to work with the state and local governments to develop something that will benefit the entire area.

"It is a good statement toward cooperation with the tribe and the state coming together on the project and even having the support of our local government in the development," Johnson said. "You see the relationship-building potential. Even though it's just a small project there are opportunities to collaborate and do things that benefit the region and that the tribe is very proud of."

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