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Cultural Landmark Unaffected by Poarch Band of Creek Indians Economic Development Initiative

Poarch Creek Indian Nation, Alabama – August 16, 2012 - Hickory Ceremonial Ground, a site that is culturally and spiritually important to both the Poarch Band of Creek Indians and the Muscogee Nation in Oklahoma, is not affected by the new business development at Wetumpka. Despite statements made by representatives of the Muscogee Nation, the Hickory Ceremonial Ground is protected land that is not part of a casino expansion designed to ensure Poarch's economic stability and create hundreds of jobs.

Robbie McGhee, Poarch's Tribal Treasurer and head of its government affairs office noted, "As an Indian nation with close cultural, if not familial ties to the Muscogee Nation, we are disappointed by recent statements that do not accurately reflect Poarch's efforts to maintain the site and preserve a relationship with the Muscogee Nation, we have honored our agreement to preserve the Ceremonial Ground, just as we honor the history and cultural significance of our shared heritage."

For the past 30 years, the Poarch Band has offered the Muscogee Nation multiple opportunities to partner with them to reclaim land that, centuries ago, was part of Hickory Ground Indian Town; one of America's largest Indian settlements covering more than 1000 acres. Today, only about 20 acres of this once prosperous Indian community are owned by the Poarch Band of Creek Indians.

In 1980, before the Poarch Band had any gaming operations and its economic resources were extremely limited, the Tribe invited the Muscogee Nation's leadership to partner with them in submitting an application for an historic preservation grant to purchase Hickory Ground. Unfortunately, the Muscogee Nation did not respond to the Poarch Band's leaders by the grant submission deadline. As a result, the Poarch Band received the historic preservation grant and purchased the property, which later became part of the Poarch Band's reservation lands in 1984.

As Poarch's gaming revenues afforded new opportunities to preserve its tribal land and culture, tribal leadership took additional measures to preserve the Hickory Ground's history. In 2000, Poarch hired nationally-recognized archaeologists from Auburn University to perform an archaeological survey of the site. During that survey, the archaeologists found evidence of several historic Creek houses in the area. Creeks Indians who lived in the massive Hickory Ground settlement during that period traditionally buried their ancestors underneath these houses. Auburn University archeologists excavated approximately 52 remains and funerary objects which were kept on-site in a secure location.

In 2005, Auburn University archeologists discovered the Ceremonial Ground on the Hickory Ground Town site. Once that discovery was made, construction was halted immediately and plans were undertaken to begin historic preservation of the area.

In 2007, Poarch and the Muscogee Nation signed a memorandum of agreement stipulating that the Hickory Ceremonial Ground would be preserved as a secure and spiritual place for perpetuity. At Poarch's invitation, the Muscogee Nation participated in the joint covering and preservation of the Ceremonial Ground that same year. The site continues to be maintained and preserved today.

Poarch Tribal Chairman Buford L. Rolin noted, "While the Muscogee Nation was forcibly moved from Alabama many years before the land in and around the city of Wetumpka was developed to its current level, we understand and respect the importance that members of the Muscogee Nation place on the land. For that reason, the Poarch Band repeatedly endeavored, for more than six years after the archeological discovery, to reach a harmonious resolution with the Muscogee Nation to address both sides' interests in the proper reinterment of the remains and funerary objects found there."

Finally, in 2012, after trying unsuccessfully for six years to get the Muscogee Nation to agree on a location for the reinterment, the Poarch Band as owners of the property, believed it to be legally, morally, and culturally responsible for reintering the remains and funerary objects.

In April, the Poarch Band of Creek Indians once again reached out to the Muscogee Nation and invited them to participate in the reinterment near the sacred Hickory Ceremonial Ground. The reinterment was conducted according to specific Indian traditions that the Muscogee Nation had requested. No representative from Muscogee attended the reinterment ceremony.

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