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POARCH CREEK RESUMES DEVELOPMENT OF WETUMPKA PROPERTY

Poarch Creek Indian Nation, Alabama – October 31, 2012 - The Poarch Band of Creek Indians has resumed its development plans for a hotel and casino on land it owns in Wetumpka, Alabama. This decision comes after suspending construction of the project in a show of good faith so that leadership from Poarch Creek and the Muscogee Nation in Oklahoma could once again meet to discuss the concerns of both tribes. Poarch Creek made the decision to resume construction after meeting in Oklahoma this week with elected leaders of the Muscogee Creek Nation and traditional leaders of Hickory Ground Town (a traditional Indian town within the Muscogee Nation). After careful consideration of the Muscogee Nation's views, Poarch Creek believes the decision to move forward with its plans represents a fair and balanced approach to the development and preservation of the property.

Tribal Council Member Arthur Mothershed remarked, "We have been extremely careful to plan a development that is culturally sensitive while ensuring the economic well-being of our Tribal members, our community, and our State. It is a balanced, reasonable approach for using land that we own, which has been met with increased opposition from some in Oklahoma. Now, we are being faced with demands to remove ancestral remains that have already been reinterred. We can ensure that no more remains will be excavated. It has been almost eight years since any remains have been unearthed. We cannot change the fact that remains were found and removed. Those remains are now reinterred and we cannot support disturbing those remains again."

The Poarch Band of Creek Indians is the only federally recognized Indian tribe in Alabama. Its tribal members have lived continuously in the region for centuries, specifically near present day Atmore, Alabama, since the early 1800's. As a recognized sovereign nation, Poarch Creek is under no legal obligation to negotiate with any other government about the use of its own land. However, out of respect for their shared cultural and familial ties, Poarch Creek leadership began conversations with the Muscogee Nation about the development of the Wetumpka property in 2006. Discussions continued for several years, but opposition by some members of Hickory Ground and Muscogee Nation to Poarch Creek's plans to develop the Wetumpka site reached a crescendo when Poarch Creek announced its plans to build a hotel and casino on the property this summer.

"We are indeed saddened by the outcome of this recent trip to Oklahoma made by representatives of our Tribal Council," said Buford L. Rolin, Poarch Creek's Tribal Chairman. "Since 2006, we have reached out to the Muscogee Nation with the hope that they would be open to understanding the facts about the 21st century conditions of what was once Hickory Ground Town and would recognize that our development in Wetumpka does not alter that. Unfortunately we have reached an impasse."

Wetumpka is one of several Alabama communities that originated on the site of Hickory Ground Town, a historic Creek Indian community that, at one time, covered more than 1000 acres. While both the Poarch Creek and the Muscogee Nation have cultural ties to the land, it was the Poarch Creek that purchased approximately 34 acres of the original site in 1980.

At the time of the sale, the land had been used for agricultural purposes and was zoned for commercial use. The Poarch Creek had limited financial resources and had to apply for a grant to buy the property. Poarch Creek invited the Muscogee Nation to partner with it on the grant application, but the Muscogee Nation did not commit before the grant deadline.

“We have taken great effort to make sure the original Hickory Ground ceremonial site is preserved, and the remains that were removed in earlier years have been reinterred at Hickory Ground Town in a manner previously agreed to by traditional leaders in Oklahoma. The remaining acreage located on the northern part of Hickory Ground will be preserved in a pristine, natural state for posterity,” said Robert McGhee, who heads the Tribe’s Governmental Affairs Office and is a Poarch Tribal Council Member.

The Tribe is in compliance with applicable federal laws, including historic preservation laws, pertaining to the property. The expansion, in no way, compromises the site as construction plans do not call for any further excavation. Despite Muscogee claims to the contrary, there will be no expansion in other areas at the Hickory Ground site.

The development originally included a cultural center as well as a hotel and casino, but Poarch Creek modified the plans after Muscogee Nation and Hickory Ground representatives expressed concerns about the site on which the center would be located. Poarch Creek leadership is now reviewing those plans and has made a commitment to build a center on a nearby site as it moves forward with the hotel and casino development.

Poarch Creek’s Tribal Council will also set aside appropriate acreage of pristine land that has never been subject to agricultural use or development that can be used by Poarch Creek, as well as by other Tribes who may be facing sensitive issues of reinterment. The Tribal Council is establishing a historical and cultural preservation fund that will be made available to other tribes to support their preservation efforts.

Chairman Rolin said, “We respect the past, acknowledge the present, and recognize the challenges of the future. This development is a reasonable approach to land use; and no one cares more about the sanctity of our land and the well-being of our people and our neighbors than we do.”

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