

THE DEMING HEADLIGHT

November 29, 2011 – DemingHeadlight.com - [Casino could be county's largest employer](#)

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During Gov. Bill Richardson's administration, a New Mexico State Police... (Headlight File Photo)

If developed to the full extent of planning with consideration to construction jobs, the Apache Homelands Casino would become Luna County's largest employer and with the new administration in Santa Fe, the Fort Sill Apache Tribe is confident to get the ball rolling again on plans for Akela, NM.

Adding to the process that has seen a number of roadblocks, the tribe learned in mid-Nov. that it had been granted 30 acres for a reservation in Akela from the U.S. Department of Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs. The approval came after a 125-year wait for the tribe.

Tribe chairman Jeff Houser, who is currently changing his last name to the traditional form, Haozous, has been making his rounds as part of a second effort to bring gaming to Luna County. The latest blitz includes a survey of local and state residents, an economic impact report and a focus on the projected 983 permanent jobs the tribe hopes to create by 2015.

For perspective, Deming Public Schools and Border Foods reign as the county's largest employers, with Border Foods employing about 700 during the peak of the chile harvest season.

"The place that's there is ready-to-go, wired and everything," Houser said of the tribe's currently facility that sits on about 30 acres off Interstate 10 in eastern Luna County. "We could hire 80 people and open a small facility in that building within 45 days."

That 45 day window would come after approval for gaming, which the tribe currently does not have at the current location. Within six months after that phase, Houser says the casino will expand to employ 300. By 2015, the tribe projects an annual economic impact of \$112 million and 983 permanent jobs for the area.

But the move toward gaming still faces hurdles. Earlier this year, Gov. Susana Martinez and the state gaming control board attorney signed a 30-page document in which it is said the tribe fails to meet all requirements set by the National Indian Gaming Act for gambling. The document also outline a two-part test the tribe can pursue under federal gaming laws.

Seeking approval for gaming has embroiled the tribe and its facility into a lengthy battle for permitting, some of which was waged against the previous administration of Governor Bill Richardson, who, in 2008, sent state police to blockade the route to the Homelands building.

Luna County Commission Chairman Javier Diaz says he "fully supports" development of the casino for the potential boost to property values in the area.

CUTLINE:

Headlight File Photo

During the Governor Bill Richardson Administration, a New Mexico State Police blockade kept the Apache Homelands Casino smoke shop and cafe from doing business at Akela, located 18 miles east of Deming on Interstate 10.