



Nez Perce

TRIBAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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Nez Perce Tribe Disappointed in Wallowa County's Decision and Pledges to Appeal Decision

LAPWAI, IDAHO – Today, the Wallowa County Board of Commissioners in Enterprise, Oregon approved the development of a subdivision adjacent to the Old Chief Joseph cemetery site near Wallowa Lake in northeastern Oregon. This approval authorizes the development of 11 homes on 5-acre lots on 60-acres of land that is known to contain archaeological sites and that is of significant cultural and historic importance to Nez Perce people.

“We are extremely disappointed with the County’s decision,” said Anthony D. Johnson, Chairman of the Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee, the Tribe’s governing body. “This decision ignores both local and state land use law, as well as the enormous public interest in protecting the site. The Tribe has received hundreds of inquiries from people across the Nation expressing their concern regarding the development of this site. This is not only an issue of Nez Perce concern. This is an issue of truly national concern.”

Old Chief Joseph’s grave is on a 5-acre site that serves as the trailhead for the Nez Perce National Historic Trail that follows the route taken by the Nez Perce who were expelled from the Wallowa Valley of Oregon in 1877, when General Howard and his cavalry pursued them 1,500 miles to their surrender in Montana, just short of the Canadian border. The land where the proposed subdivision is located is tied closely to Nez Perce history and the Tribe has aggressively opposed the proposal calling for measures such as a full archaeological survey and the development of a cultural resource management plan for the site prior to any subdivision approval.

Five appeals were filed with the County Commissioners by the Nez Perce Tribe, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville, the City of Joseph, and a group of local citizens. All appeals raised the issue of cultural resource protection.

“We believe the County’s decision is a dishonor to our history and a discredit to themselves,” said Johnson. “We fully intend to appeal this decision, as well as take any other action necessary

to protect this site. We have worked closely with our partners, including many local residents, the City of Joseph, and others in our struggle and we intend to continue to pursue whatever means is necessary to protect this site.”

The Nez Perce Tribe continues to be an active presence in Wallowa County. During the past several years, the Tribe has reacquired 14,000 acres of land in the County which is managed as wildlife habitat, the Tribe is active in cooperative efforts to improve and protect water quality and fish habitat, and the Tribe is an active supporter of federal legislation to upgrade the Wallowa Lake Dam, at the mouth of Wallowa Lake.

“We appreciate the partnerships we have had with Wallowa County in the past. We would have liked to help the County defend a good decision rather than have to appeal a bad decision, but the County has left us with no other option,” said Johnson.

The County’s decision will be appealed to Oregon’s Land Use Board of Appeals, whose decision may then be appealed to the Oregon State Court of Appeals.

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