
NEWS RELEASE

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Office of the Premier
Osoyoos Indian Band
Ministry of Tourism, Sport and the Arts

RESORT DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENT TO BOOST OKANAGAN TOURISM

OSOYOOS – A landmark agreement between the Province and the Osoyoos Indian Band will help bring a huge lift to South Okanagan tourism, Premier Gordon Campbell and Osoyoos Indian Band Chief Clarence Louie announced today at the grand opening of the Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre.

“The Osoyoos Indian Band is truly leading the way in ensuring that its members share fully in the economic opportunities growing across the South Okanagan, and this marks another important step in their continued success,” said Campbell. “Like the Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre and their other successful projects in the region, the band's willingness to work with the Province and the Mt. Baldy Ski Resort shows how the spirit of partnership can allow the entire community – Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal – to benefit from new tourism opportunities.”

The agreement signed between the Province and the Osoyoos Indian Band sets out a revenue sharing framework for the development of Crown lands within Osoyoos Indian Band traditional territory that are slated for development as part of the expansion of the Mt. Baldy ski area near Nk'Mip Resort. Expansion of the ski area is a key part of a long-term strategy to develop Nk'Mip Resort and the South Okanagan's appeal as a four-season tourism destination. This agreement is the first of its kind to be signed in B.C.

“The Premier and his government are to be commended for their vision,” said Chief Louie. “This unique agreement helps create meaningful partnerships between the band, all levels of government and the private sector so everyone can share in the economic benefits of developing traditional territories for tourism resorts and other business activities.”

The Osoyoos Indian Band and the Mt. Baldy Ski Resort have also reached an innovative partnership. The band has purchased an interest in the resort, which will provide many benefits to the band, including a share of revenues from real estate development, job opportunities for band members at the resort, as well as an agreement that archaeological sites and traditional land use will be respected in all future expansion activities.

According to the recently-approved Resort Master Plan for the Mt. Baldy resort, the all-season resort will feature a 7,800-bed village to be built in four phases, representing over \$100 million in planned capital investments. At completion, the resort will have 13 chairlifts, more than 2,000 acres of ski terrain, with more than 2,000 feet of skiable vertical drop, as well as an 18-hole golf course. The development is expected to attract 150,000 skiers each year at full build out, which is almost eight times the current number.

“We have over \$2.5 million in planned activity on the mountain this summer, including the development of a new water system, completion of the Wapiti Subdivision and development of the Sugarlump ski terrain expansion,” said Brett Sweezy, president of Mount Baldy Ski Corporation.

The Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre, which celebrated its grand opening in conjunction with the agreement signing ceremony, is the first of three new Aboriginal cultural tourism attractions set to open in B.C. in the lead up to the 2010 Olympic Winter Games. The Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre is the anchoring component in the band's ongoing development of its Nk'Mip Resort in Osoyoos. The centre will play an important role in both preserving the Okanagan culture and in enhancing tourism opportunities within the South Okanagan. The centre features state-of-the-art indoor and outdoor exhibit galleries with interactive stations and hands-on displays, a multimedia Pithouse Theatre and self-guided trails through 50 acres of the Great Basin Desert.

The band's award-winning rattlesnake research project will also be housed in the new centre, with expanded public viewing areas and research facilities. Visitors can observe while researchers capture, measure and tag endangered western rattlesnakes with tiny microchips so that they can be studied – and better protected – in their natural environment.

“Our new desert cultural centre and the ongoing development of our Nk'Mip Resort resonates the aspirations of a community wishing to share with visitors its rich heritage and the lands upon which it has lived for thousands of years,” said Chief Louie. “The spirit of collaboration between the Town of Osoyoos and the band will make this centre a success for all.”

The development of the Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre was made possible through the support of its funding partners, including Aboriginal Business Canada, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, the Province of B.C., Western Economic Diversification Canada and Canada Heritage.

Premier Campbell noted the Province has made a series of previous investments to open up tourism opportunities in the South Okanagan, including funding for a new Gateway Visitor Centre in Osoyoos, additional funding for the Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association, improvements to Highway 97, the new William R. Bennett Bridge at Kelowna and the \$50-million Southern Interior Development Initiative.

For more information on the Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre, please visit www.nkmipdesert.com or call 1-888-495-8555.

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1 backgrounder(s) attached.

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