



# POARCH BAND OF CREEK INDIANS

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Dear Tribal Leader,

As the leader of one sovereign nation to another, I am writing to make sure that you have accurate information concerning the development of the Poarch Band of Creek Indians' Wetumpka, Alabama trust land. Poarch Creek has taken the utmost care to preserve our tribal history and culture while undertaking projects that assure the financial stability of our Tribal government and jobs for our people.

Development of Poarch Creek trust lands near Wetumpka is the subject of an increasingly belligerent misinformation campaign run by a handful of individuals from Hickory Ground town and the Muskogee Nation in Oklahoma. These men have made violent threats toward our tribal members, employees, customers and property. They have also attempted to intimidate, threaten, and humiliate our Tribal leadership at national gatherings in Indian Country.

One of the leaders of this group was arrested on Poarch Creek trust property last year after he threatened to burn down our casino. He was subsequently convicted of disorderly conduct and trespassing in an Alabama state court. Even after this incident, this individual and other members of his group have harassed and accosted Poarch Creek tribal leaders at multiple national Indian gatherings. Clearly, these are threats to our reputation and our safety that we take very seriously.

Attached is a Fact Sheet to help clarify this issue. If you would like to discuss any of these issues or have additional questions, I and other Members of the Poarch Creek Council would be happy to talk more with you.

We think it is important to remember that, first and foremost, no one is more aware of the importance of preserving Poarch's history and culture than we are. We remain committed to the integrity of our Tribe and are actively involved in ensuring the future of Indian Country. We are proud that Chief Calvin McGhee helped craft the Declaration of Indigenous Purpose and that he had the honor of presenting this document to President Kennedy. Former Chairmen Buford L. Rolin and Eddie Tullis continue to provide leadership roles throughout Indian Country in their work on Healthcare, Aging, and Sovereignty. Our Tribal Council Vice Chairman Robbie McGhee serves on the boards of the Native American Rights Fund, the Center for Native American Youth, the National Indian Child Welfare Association and our entire Tribal Council continuously advocates to strengthen national tribal Indian policy on issues related to education, VAWA, health care, child welfare, taxation, trust lands protection and other areas of importance to all Tribes.

In closing, we remain hopeful that these individuals who are now involved in unproductive and divisive activities will come to understand that our strength, as sovereign Indian nations, depends on our ability to work together on solving the problems and meeting the challenges that affect us all while maintaining the crucial tenets of sovereignty and self-determination. It's a dangerous road for all of Indian country to take when one sovereign seeks to enforce its will on the trust lands of another.

Sincerely,

Stephanie A. Bryan, Tribal Chair  
Poarch Band of Creek Indians

*Seeking Prosperity and Self Determination*

## **Fact Sheet: Poarch Band of Creek Indians' Wind Creek Development In Wetumpka, Alabama**

- Many years ago the Poarch and Muscogee Creek Tribes were separated by historical events. Today, we are separate sovereign nations with completely separate lands.
- We, the Poarch Band of Creek Indians, have continually lived on our Alabama Tribal lands and survived years of poverty.
- The Poarch Band's Wetumpka trust property (approximately 34 acres) is a small portion of what had been a large Indian town called Hickory Grounds. The land had been farmed and developed by others for decades.
- When the property came up for sale, we had no gaming operation and few resources. However, we believed that we should make every effort to purchase the property because it was an opportunity to regain some of our historical lands, protect our ancestors and history, and provide for our people and our communities.
  - We asked the Muscogee Nation to jointly apply for a grant to purchase the property. They did not respond.
  - The land was in a part of the country that had been farmed and developed for well over a century.
  - In fact, the current town of Wetumpka, Alabama is built on what was once the Indian town of Hickory Ground.
  - We still believed that the site was historically significant as a center of Creek Indian trade, government, and economic development.
- Unbeknownst to us, a small part of the property we acquired was the site of Creek Ceremonial Grounds. The Ceremonial Grounds have never been disturbed, remain protected, and we have memorialized and preserved the site to this day.
  - Northern 17 acres of our trust property is preserved in perpetuity as a memorial to the historical significance of the site.
  - Remains found within the Ceremonial Grounds were never removed.
  - In accordance with Poarch Creek Tribal Law and consistent with the Muscogee Tribe's Constitution, remains found outside the Ceremonial Grounds were interred adjacent to the Ceremonial Grounds with prayer and ceremony.
  - The previously disturbed and fragmented remains found scattered across the other 17 acres have been reinterred with dignity and honor.

- In the 1990's, Alabama archeologists asked to study the site and we agreed. At the time:
  - There was no visible evidence of a burial ground.
  - The site was eroding because of farming and lack of maintenance.
  - We had limited finances and limited technology.
  - When evidence was discovered, the archeologists' work stopped and their discoveries were stored for several years. The remains and funerary objects were reinterred according to Indian tradition in April of 2013.
  
- The Tribe is in compliance with all applicable federal historic and cultural preservation laws pertaining to the property.
  
- Poarch Creek is, and was, under no legal obligation to negotiate with any other sovereign Indian nation about the use of our own land. However, out of respect for our shared cultural and familial ties, Poarch began discussions with the Muscogee about planned development of the Wetumpka property in 2006.
  
- Since 2006, Poarch regularly reached out to the Muscogee Nation in the hopes that its leadership would be open to understanding the 21st century conditions of the Poarch land in Wetumpka. Negotiations continued for several years, but the Muscogee Nation's opposition to Poarch Creek's plans to develop the land reached a crescendo when plans were announced to expand the existing gaming facility into a resort on the property in the summer of 2012.
  
- We have continued to be open to dialogue with the Muscogee elected leadership and have expressed our desire for a good relationship between the two nations.
  
- We are encouraged that these efforts are making a difference as evidenced by the visit of over 150 Muscogee tribal members to our Wind Creek Wetumpka resort. They visited the memorial site, were served refreshments, and shared pleasant conversation with Poarch tribal members.
  
- The Wind Creek Wetumpka development protects our past and helps provide for the future of our tribal members.