ONCE AROUND THE NORTHWEST:
THE EFFECT OF THE INDIAN CASINOS
by Steve Goodrich R-306

A great change is currently taking place in Pacific Northwest gaming. The effects of the numerous Indian casinos are being felt across the entire country, and Washington and Oregon are proving to be no exception to this phenomenon. Since the Supreme Court ruled that Indian reservations have certain immunities from state gaming regulations, gambling has proliferated in many areas of the Pacific Northwest. The states of Montana and Idaho have yet to allow Indian casinos (a complicated set of state regulation has prevented it thus far) but there are now several casinos in both Washington and Oregon. With the opening of Indian casinos, gaming in the states of Washington and Oregon is being changed dramatically. This very controlled, regulated industry has gone through a substantial transformation over the past five years. Let's take a look at each of these two states in depth.

Washington was the first state in the Northwest to allow casinos to operate on tribal lands. Various tribes across the state petitioned to enter into "compacts" with the state government once it became apparent that Indian gaming was going to pass the Supreme Court. This process began about five years ago and the first casino was opened by the Lummi Tribe in late 1992. Since then, thirteen other tribes (as of last count) have opened casinos. The state of Washington took a novel approach when it came to regulating Indian gaming. With tribes that were willing to negotiate in "good faith", compacts were arranged that set limitations on the number of tables in each casino, table limits, and opening times. The tribes that submitted to this process (which became similar to arbitration) were the first ones allowed to open. There are also tribes which have just recently been permitted to open casinos due to more lengthy court proceedings and legal rulings. In any case, many tribal casinos are now operating around the state, and it is having quite an effect on the card rooms that once dominated the industry. There were over 125 card rooms operating across the state five years ago but that number has dropped well below 100 and places continue to close as they cannot compete with the more lavish Indian casinos.

The tribes in Oregon took a little longer to develop their casinos. In addition, there are fewer federal Indian reservations overall in this state, so there probably will not be as many casinos opened in Oregon as compared to Washington. These casinos tend to be a bit smaller thus far, but they do offer the same "standard" games, including poker in many locales. Casinos are now found in Coos Bay (The Mill), Lincoln City (Chinook Winds), Umatilla (Wild Horse), Grande Ronde (Spirit Mountain), and Canyonville (Seven Feathers/Cow Creek). Plans to open additional casinos are also in the works, especially along the coast. Previously, gaming in Oregon had been limited to "social gaming" which included some poker rooms and a few blackjack games across the state. As in Washington, these have also suffered with the expansion of the Indian casinos. Illustrations of some of the chips found in these Indian casinos follow.

As usual, you can contact "Mr. Pacific Northwest" with any questions or comments at P.O. Box 3162, Moscow, Idaho 83843