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Aquinnah Wampanoag Tribe Secures Federal Approvals Needed To Proceed With Gaming Facility On Its Existing Indian Lands

November 12, 2013 (Aquinnah, Massachusetts). The Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) has secured the federal approvals necessary for it to open a Class II gaming facility on the Tribe's existing Indian lands on Martha's Vineyard. On August 29, 2013, the National Indian Gaming Commission ("NIGC") approved amendments to the Gaming Ordinance specifically identifying the Tribe's existing trust land on the Island. On October 25, 2013 the NIGC's General Counsel issued a legal opinion concluding that the existing trust lands qualify for gaming under the federal Indian Gaming Regulatory Act ("IGRA"). Finally, on October 22, 2013, the NIGC acknowledged the Tribe's Facility License for the Aquinnah site.

The Commission's actions confirm the Tribe's right to conduct gaming on its existing trust lands on Martha's Vineyard, and any new lands that may be taken into trust on the mainland. "The Tribe has consistently asserted that we have the right to game on our lands in Aquinnah," Chairwoman Andrews-Maltais said. "These approvals affirm our position. We are thrilled!"

Aquinnah now has all of the approvals required by law to proceed with opening a Class II gaming facility. Class II gaming is regulated solely by the Tribe and the NIGC and includes a variety of machine games, bingo

and poker.

The tribal membership voted last year in support of using the unfinished community center in Aquinnah as a temporary gaming facility. With the necessary approvals in hand, the Tribe will be moving forward with that conversion.

“As the People of the First Light, we are responsible for preserving the atmosphere and beauty of the Island,” says Andrews-Maltais. “Any gaming facility we operate will blend in with the rest of the Island, and the Tribe will work with local businesses to ensure the casino’s positive economic impact on our neighbors in the larger Island community.

The Tribe has renewed its request to negotiate a Class III gaming compact with the Patrick Administration which previously refused to negotiate with Aquinnah on the mistaken belief that the Tribe had given up any rights to game. Chairwoman Andrews-Maltais said, with the question of the eligibility of our lands qualifying under IGRA resolved, we hope that our two governments can now return to the negotiation table and work out a fair agreement under applicable federal law.”

Media inquiries can be directed to Chairwoman Cheryl Andrews-Maltais at chairwoman@wampanoagtribe.net.