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MONDAY JUNE 4, 2007 Last modified: Thursday, May 31, 2007 4:06 PM PDT

June 1, 2007- Road to casino a rocky one

By Roger Phelps, Democrat staff writer

With much said already about the rocky road toward a Foothill Oaks Casino near Shingle Springs, tribal members are still saying it even after earth-moving has begun on the sizable project expected to finish late next year.

The tribe fought an anti-casino lawsuit filed by El Dorado County and last year reached a settlement agreement. Current work is laying a construction-access track from U.S. Highway 50 into the Shingle Springs Rancheria.

With about 30 pieces of heavy equipment on the ground Wednesday at the rancheria road site, many were engaged in unearthing, breaking and moving rock. Uh, make that about 29 pieces.

“(A rock) pulled the hooks off the D10,” a construction foreman called to Nicholas Fonseca, tribal chairman of the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok as their vehicles passed one another.

The foreman was speaking of a large Caterpillar tractor disabled when its stone-dragging “hooks” failed to handle a particularly bad boulder lying in the path of the new construction-access road. The boulder that bothered the Cat was tiny compared to a behemoth already pulled from the earth by some Herculean mechanical effort. Fonseca gestured at a truck-sized shard he said was only about a two-thirds remainder, the rest having been chopped off just so the giant could be moved.

“I’d like to get that down to the community - the kids would love to play on it,” Fonseca said. “We’d probably have to bring in a flatbed truck, and then cranes to lift it off. It’d be a lot of work.”

Along with road work, crews are laying a 12-inch-diameter water main through the stony soil. The C.C. Myers Construction Co., on the job, frequently turns in exceptionally quick project results, Fonseca said, and a finish to work preceding casino-building itself is only about two weeks away.

Although surrounding lowlands in Shingle Springs feature numerous artesian wells, the highland on which the rancheria sits does not.

“This whole tract was called ‘the rock,’ because there wasn’t any water on it,” Fonseca said. “It was what was left after everybody picked and chose. That’s why they put the Indians here.”

The Foothill Oaks Casino will stand high on a north-facing slope of an unnamed 1,600-foot hill. Its current design, largely windowless - as is customary for gambling establishments - effectively would sacrifice a long view that is one



ORIGINALLY BOXCAR-SIZED when it taxed crews trying to unearth it at Shingle Springs Rancheria, a boulder now truck-sized after crews chopped on it is part of the construction site terrain where a Foothill Oaks Casino will stand. See story “Road ...”

Democrat photo by Dan Burkhart

of the finer to be had in El Dorado County, Fonseca acknowledged.

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