

Diner reopening on reservation angers Yurok Tribe

May 3, 2020



Tribal Council issued the following statement Sunday on the Log Cabin Diner offering dine-in services:

At a special meeting last night, the Yurok Tribal Council engaged in a detailed dialogue about a local restaurant that opened its doors to sit-down customers. Operating a dine-in service is a violation of the orders the Tribe, county and state have put in place to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

Located on the Yurok Reservation, the Log Cabin Diner restarted its dine-in option yesterday. During the emergency meeting, each of the Tribal Council members voiced concerns about how this action might jeopardize a months-long effort to stop the coronavirus from reaching the reservation, where there are numerous Tribal elders and individuals with preexisting health issues.

“The Tribal Council is acutely aware of the tremendous strain this public health emergency is having on local businesses. We fully support the Log Cabin’s ability to offer to-go orders, but we do not support this affront to tribal sovereignty and the health of our people,” said Joseph L. James, the Chairman of the Yurok Tribe.

“Both tribal and non-tribal businesses have had to make significant sacrifices for the safety of our community.”

As part of a proactive effort to protect those most vulnerable to the illness, the Tribe closed the reservation to non-residents on April 6. According to the United Indian Health Services, approximately sixty percent of the tribal citizens living on the reservation are either elders or individuals who have underlying medical conditions. Those with preexisting health issues, such as diabetes, are more prone to experiencing the worst symptoms from the coronavirus, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

A sitting member of the Del Norte County Board of Supervisors promoted the apparent breach of the mandates that are in place to prevent new coronavirus transmissions. With a complete disregard for the Tribe’s sovereignty and the safety of local citizens, Del Norte County Supervisor Roger Gitlin used Facebook to encourage his followers to “drive down to Klamath” to join him in eating at the diner. Klamath is not in his district.

The Yurok Tribal Council closed the reservation “to protect the most vulnerable and prevent the health care system from being overwhelmed.” In addition to the closure order, the Tribe instituted a shelter-in-place order and a curfew. To help those at-risk stay in their homes and away from places where disease transmission is more likely, the Tribe is delivering emergency food and supply boxes on a weekly basis to nearly 500 tribal citizens in Del Norte, Humboldt and Trinity Counties.

The Tribe has temporarily ceased operations at the Redwood Hotel and Casino, the Klamath Jet Boat Tours as well as the other non-essential businesses. These enterprises will remain closed until the Tribal Council lifts the closure order. Reservation business owners and residents are required to follow all tribal, county and federal stay-at-home orders and physical distancing guidelines.

“We want to remind residents and business owners that the reservation will remain closed to visitors until the order is lifted,” Chairman James said.

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Under the Yurok Tribe’s Closure Order, the Yurok Reservation is closed to non-residents except for those performing essential activities. People on the reservation are directed to follow all tribal, state, and federal stay-home orders and physical distancing guidelines. Violation of the closure order is a tribal civil offense with a fine of up to \$2,500 in addition to other possible penalties or orders of the Yurok Tribal Court such as restitution or ejection from all tribal lands. Violations of the closure order may also lead to other charges. The Yurok Tribal Council may exercise its authority to exclude people from the reservation if they pose a health and safety risk. The Yurok Tribe will also continue to work closely with our county, state, and federal law enforcement partners on public safety matters.