

An Open Letter from Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation

To Our Neighbors, Friends and Community Partners,

In recent weeks, local media have reported on our Tribe's application to have land taken into federal trust. It has been a rigorous, federally controlled process that has taken more than two years and invited valuable public comment. But recent media coverage has been misleading, charged with innuendo and, too often, simply wrong.

It is important that you know the facts.

The 853 acres proposed for trust is part of our privately owned ancestral land in the Capay Valley—not "county land" as one newspaper carelessly stated. Bought on the open market, this land would become federally owned if trust is approved.

Trust applications are governed by a 1934 federal law. It was designed to reverse an unjust policy that seized 100 million acres of Indian land for settlers, leaving those Native people landless and impoverished. Trust acquisitions empower tribes to again govern their lands and people, and flourish as distinct cultures.

This process works. Today, Yocha Dehe is rebuilding our nation, reestablishing our culture and language, and creating a vibrant community on our land—the very land on which our people had lived for centuries before they were forcibly removed. We actively participate in our greater community as well –

from providing emergency services, to strengthening local agriculture through projects like our olive mill, to supporting needed health and social welfare programs.

But now, our families, like many, are growing and we need more land for housing and governmental, cultural and agricultural purposes. Our plans are clearly presented in our publicly available trust application.

Media reports have implied we're misrepresenting our plans, even suggesting we plan to add "new slot machines." This is simply wrong. What they neglected to mention is that it is a federal crime to misrepresent the purpose of a trust acquisition. And to have gaming on these new trust lands, an entirely different federal process is needed.

Media have also misstated why an agreement with Yolo County was not pursued. The fact is Yocha Dehe and County staff worked in good faith for two years on a promising land use agreement, only to have County Supervisors abruptly abandon the effort at the last minute.

We understand that Fee-to-Trust is a complex and often challenging issue, but as our neighbors, friends and community partners, we ask that you listen, ask questions and consider the facts so that we can maintain the good faith relationship we all value as residents who care about the future of the Capay Valley.

Yocha Dehe has more interest than perhaps anyone in preserving the Capay Valley's agricultural character. For thousands of years our people lived and died on these lands, which are sacred to us and central to our culture. These lands will be our home for many generations to come.

