

Additional \$8 million in tribal funds may be restored locally

Governor could sign bill giving \$20 million in gambling funds to cities, counties

THE SPECIAL DISTRIBUTION FUND

Examples of projects getting SDF funds in Riverside County in fiscal year 2004/2005:

- Palm Springs Police Department: Officers for downtown experience office, \$309,040 requested; \$61,808 granted in second year of five-year commitment
- County Sheriff's Department: Five deputies and equipment, \$2.5 million sought; \$121,951 granted in second year of five-year commitment.
- Palm Springs Police Department: Casino officers crime prevention and equipment: \$950,000 sought; \$190,000 granted in second year of five-year commitment.
- Palm Springs Fire Department: Partial funding for six firefighter positions: \$1.5 million sought; \$317,540 granted in second year of five-year funding commitment.
- County District Attorney: Investigation and prosecution of crimes affecting casinos: \$1.5 million sought; \$42,597 granted in second year of five-year funding commitment.
- Cathedral City Police Department: Interns, mentors, marketing and recruitment: \$43,776 sought; \$42,822 awarded.
- Desert Hot Springs Police Department: Enhancement of police K-9 unit: \$30,000 sought; \$29,346 granted.
- City of Indio: Staffing, maintenance and operation of aerial ladder: \$1 million sought; \$209,167 awarded.
- City of Rancho Mirage: Sand fencing on Dinah Shore Drive: \$188,800 sought; \$48,911 granted.
- County Transportation Department: Sand fencing on Dinah Shore: \$188,800 sought; \$59,788 granted.
- County Fire Department: EMS delivery system enhancement project: \$294,533 sought; \$59,788 granted.

[Debra Gruszecki and Jake Henshaw](#)

The Desert Sun

March 17, 2006 March 17, 2006

It's up to the governor to decide whether the Coachella Valley and Riverside County should get another \$8 million from tribal gambling funds to help fund public safety and traffic services near casinos.

The Senate late Wednesday sent Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger a bill by Sens. Jim Battin, R-La Quinta, and Denise Ducheny, D-San Diego, to restore \$20 million to cities and counties - \$8 million that would go to Riverside County - to offset the effect tribal casinos have on nearby communities.

The money, coming from the Indian Gaming Special Distribution Fund, may be used to hire police and firefighters, buy equipment, improve roads and make other improvements to mitigate the effects of casino operations.

"I'm thrilled," Battin said.

Last year, the Legislature authorized sending \$50 million from the Special Distribution Fund to support local governments impacted by tribal government gaming.

But the Schwarzenegger administration cut the appropriation to \$30 million, saying he didn't have adequate data on how local officials were spending the money.

SB 288 restores the funding to local government.

No one in the governor's office could be reached immediately for comment Thursday.

"I'm hopeful the governor will sign the legislation," Battin said, as local officials, tribal leaders, sponsors of the bill and lawmakers that included Assemblywoman Bonnie Garcia, R-Cathedral City, have provided the governor's staff with information on use of the money.

"These funds are important to Riverside County," Battin said. "This legislation puts that money back" to spend it on police and fire services, ambulances, other public safety equipment and a district attorney specifically assigned to gaming issues.

Local tribal officials reacted positively to the news.

"It's a great thing," said Alva Johnson, director of government affairs and public relations for the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, which operates Spa Resort Casino in Palm Springs and Agua Caliente Casino in Rancho Mirage.

"We believe that communities benefit much from the Special Distribution Fund, and it's part of the commitment by tribes to address impacts of gaming in the community," Johnson said.

Johnson said the tribe strongly supported SB 288, and made that clear to the Legislature and the governor. He said he expects the tribal council will send another letter to Schwarzenegger seeking his signature to officially adopt the legislation.

California Nations Indian Gaming Association, which has 64 federally recognized tribes as members, commended the Legislature for approving the allocation, said Anthony Miranda, chairman of the group.

"It's certainly a good thing," Palm Springs City Manager David Ready said. "We will have to get more details, but from a general perspective, it's a much more beneficial outcome than it would have been, if it had not passed."

Palm Springs has several multi-year grants pending, Ready said. Adoption of SB 288, for instance, might guarantee some \$200,000 in funds the city has sought for officers downtown as part of a three-year grant.

The Special Distribution Fund was created through the Sept. 10, 1999, tribal-state compacts, and is fully funded by the 26 tribal governments that were operating more than 200 slot machines as of September 1999.

Battin said millions of dollars have returned to local communities as a result of this funding formula.

Tribal governments that are members of the Tribal Alliance of Sovereign Nations alone will contribute more than \$1 billion into the Special Distribution Fund over the 20-year term of their compacts, said Patrick Murphy, secretary of the Tribal Alliance.

"Helping our local communities has always been important to us," he said Thursday.

The legislation passed by a vote of 29 to 1.

Schwarzenegger has 12 days from the time he gets the bill to act on it.