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Coeur d'Alene Tribe starts \$4 million housing project

Gathering Place complex near Plummer will feature straw-bale construction

By Mike McLean

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The Coeur d'Alene Tribal Housing Authority, acting as its own contractor, has started work on a \$4 million, 18-unit multifamily housing project in North Idaho that will include the use of straw bales in its construction.

The project is the first housing phase in the Gathering Place development, at the site of the former tribal headquarters on the southwest outskirts of Plummer, Idaho, says Cielo Gibson, executive director of the housing authority.

The project is being funded with a \$2 million federal stimulus grant, three other U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development grants totaling \$1.4 million, and \$600,000 from housing authority revenue, Gibson says. It has been expanded to 18 apartment units from original plans for 12 units due to expected cost savings from original estimates, she says.

The project will include three six-unit buildings, and each unit will have about 1,500 square feet of floor space Gibson says. Six of the living units will have two bedrooms, and the other 12 units will have three bedrooms she says.

Pura Vida Homes LLC, of Spokane, and Sustainable Structures, of Spokane Valley, will install straw-bale infill during the construction, Gibson says. Once the straw bales are placed in position, interior and exterior walls will be covered with specialized netting, which then will be coated with smooth plaster finish that will have the appearance of walls finished in conventional construction methods, she says.

Straw bales are environmentally friendly and provide highly efficient insulation, Gibson says.

MDM Construction Inc., of Hayden, Idaho, is completing the site work for the project, which was designed by Thomas W. Angell Architect AIA, of Spokane. MDM also earlier constructed a sewer lagoon for the Gathering Place that was funded through a separate \$500,000 grant.

Taylor Engineering Inc., of Spokane, engineered the infrastructure for the project.

The development will target low- to moderate-income families, and rent will be based on 25 percent of their income.

Gibson says the units are expected to be ready for tenants by the end of March. She says 70 people are on a waiting list for tribal housing.

The housing authority hopes to build more housing in the Gathering Place development in future phases, she says. The authority has developed 100 rental units, and 60 lease-to-own homes, all of which it also manages, she says.

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