



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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**THE TOLOWA DEE-NI' NATION ISSUES EMERGENCY
DECLARATION, ACTIVATES RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

Smith River, CA – Today, the Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation Tribal Council declared a state of emergency as part of a coordinated effort to proactively address the predicted local impacts of the global Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

"We are working diligently to protect the safety of our citizens, our staff and the greater community," said Denise Richards-Padgette, the Chairperson of the Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation. "We are taking every precaution to limit the spread of the pathogen when it arrives in our corner of the world. It is critical to err on the side of caution as we live in a rural area with very limited resources."

The declaration enables the Nation to expeditiously mobilize staff and resources toward ensuring the Tribal government functions effectively during this unprecedented human health emergency. In addition to issuing the emergency proclamation, the Tribal Council approved a plan to continuously provide Tribal citizens with essential services, such social welfare and housing services, during the crisis.

Declaring a state of emergency is required to activate the Nation's Emergency Operations Plan, which contains a roadmap for navigating the complexities of large-scale crises, such as the coronavirus outbreak. The Tribal Council is regularly meeting with the Nation's emergency manager and executive team to preemptively identify and develop solutions for any short and long-term challenges that may arise as a consequence of the pandemic. Tribal leaders are also coordinating with the Del Norte County Office of Emergency Services as well as state and federal agencies involved in the response effort. All Tribal departments are working together with a collective goal of successfully minimizing the impact of the virus to the community. Additionally, Tribal staff are already employing a suite of digital tools, including web and teleconferencing, to adhere to social distancing recommendations and to be ready for the implementation of more rigorous mandates to reduce disease transmission rates.

To date, there have been no confirmed COVID-19 cases in proximity to where the Nation is headquartered in Del Norte County. Last week, the Tribal government postponed all large meetings and social events, based on recommendations from the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Additionally, the Nation temporarily suspended the in-classroom component of the Howonquet Head Start and Early Learning Center from March 16 to April 10, 2020. However, the Tribally operated Head Start is offering meals for students Monday through Friday. All Head Start students are also receiving individualized homework packets so that they may continue their educational development for the duration of the crisis.

"We are doing everything we can to maintain the high level of service our community deserves," Chairperson Richards-Padgette said.

COVID-19 is an infectious, respiratory disease caused by the novel coronavirus. First observed in Wuhan City, China, at the end of 2019, the coronavirus quickly spread to 159 countries and caused 7,529 fatalities as of March 17, 2020, according to the World Health Organization. The pathogen is primarily transmitted between people in close contact. It can also be contracted by touching a surface contaminated with the virus and then touching the nose or mouth. People with compromised immune systems, including the elderly and individuals with underlying health conditions, are particularly susceptible to the virus.

In addition to taking actions to limit person-to-person interactions, the Nation is implementing the following measures to lessen the possibility of a calamitous COVID-19 outbreak in Del Norte County:

- Work travel is prohibited for all Tribal employees
- All social gatherings are postponed until further notice
- Increased cleaning and disinfection is occurring at all Tribal facilities
- All Tribal Committee meetings are postponed until further notice

To curtail the spread of the virus, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is asking the community to take the following precautions:

- Frequently wash hands with soap and water for a minimum of 20 seconds
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands
- Stay home if you are sick
- Disinfect commonly used surfaces, such as doorknobs, countertops and light switches
- Avoid contact with people who appear ill
- Limit in-person contact with particularly vulnerable individuals, such as the elderly or those with immune system issues.

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