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Increased tourism seen as key by Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe

U. Earl Dunn, 11/22/2010

When Apple's Steve Jobs unveiled the company's much-talked-about iPad last January, the screensaver photo depicted there brought instant global recognition to a Nevada tribe, even making the front page of the New York Times.

The photo, taken by San Francisco area photographer Richard Misrach, was of Pyramid Lake, shimmering in the light of a full moon.

For many Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe members, such recognition is welcomed because it could help beckon more tourists to visit the historic lake, flanked by high desert mountains some 35 miles north of Reno.

Scott Carey, a tribal planner, says the 10 tribal council members who govern all activities on the 475,000 acres of the reservation seek to step up efforts to promote economic development while, at the same time, minimizing the disturbance of tribal land and artifacts.

For the Paiute tribe, the primary sources of revenue are derived from sales of fishing, boating and camping permits in and around the lake.

"Last year, we had about 75,000 people come to the lake to buy permits and we think we will do as well this year," Carey says. Fishing tournaments appear to be the biggest draw as anglers seek to hook a trophy Lahontan cutthroat trout. This year, the tribe promoted a \$50,000 fishing tournament and tagged 25 fish—five of them worth \$10,000 each. One was caught on the initial day of the tournament.

While fishing the lake is still the biggest tourist draw, Carey says the tribe has received grant money from the Nevada Commission on Tourism to develop a new Web site providing information on other assets within the reservation. Carey notes, for instance, that Anaho Island on the eastern shoreline of the lake was set aside in 1913 as a national wildlife refuge.

"Anaho Island is the largest habitat in America for the American white pelican and for other nesting birds," says Carey.

The wildlife refuge is closed to the public and boaters are not allowed within 500 feet of the island. But visitors can view these large waterfowl from a bird-watching site at the Sutcliffe marina. Other species of birds include California seagulls, double-crested cormorants and great blue herons. Occasionally, birdwatchers spot one of the peregrine falcons who share the island with the pelicans. The tribe has been doing more outreach to the national media, and Carey says the new Web site, www.pyramidlake.us, will open more opportunities. In addition to fishing, boating and camping, the tribe encourages motorists to travel the Pyramid Lake Scenic Byway. At the south end of the 15-mile long lake, Carey says the tribe will develop a new birding area that will include signage with information on the collection of birds on Anaho Island.

"We just learned we are receiving funding from the Nevada Commission on Tourism," he says. "This new birding area will be near the mouth of the Truckee River in the Lone Tree area. We've also been developing bike trails and already have 26 miles of trails in place. It's a nice, low-impact recreational opportunity for everyone."

Carey says the tribe has been reaching out in recent years to develop new partnerships and is also using many social networking sites such as YouTube, Flickr, Twitter and Facebook. Since the new Web site went operational earlier this year, it has drawn hits from all over the world. "Burning Man drives a lot of international traffic to us," says Carey, "because the only way to get to Gerlach is on Highway 447, which runs right through the reservation. We have also seen more people visiting our museum and visitor's center, and we will be developing more cultural programs in order to create more revenue opportunities."

Carey says the tribe is focusing on the "geotourist, the adventure seeker, and that includes a triathlon which has been very successful. We have gotten a lot of marketing support from the RSCVA (Reno Sparks Convention and

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Visitors Authority) and the non-profit Reno Area Triathletes, which puts on the event. We think we are moving in the right direction.”

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