



## [Akela Flats Casino Looking More Like Possibility](#)

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**DEMING, N.M.** -- A 30,000-square-foot casino is a possibility that's moving towards reality just outside of Deming, as the Fort Sill Apache Tribe takes steps to finally get the project approved.



On Wednesday evening, the tribe held a public meeting in Deming to discuss the proposed casino and gauge the locals' reactions. It's also the first step in getting the project approved in a two-part determination process.

Tribal Chairman Jeff Haozous said the project could provide a huge boom to the local economy. With Luna County holding the state's highest unemployment rate at 20.7 percent, residents agree it could be a good idea.

"I'd go use it. I even put my application in out there, too," Akela Flats resident Eddie Stauffer told ABC-7.

Haozous said the casino could employ about 250 people in the construction phase and hundreds more when it's up and running.

"I think it's going to really help the area. It'll help unemployment. It'll provide jobs for people. It'll really give a shot in the arm to the economy here and really help Luna County," Haozous said.

At the meeting, officials presented preliminary reports that show the casino would have a minimal impact on the surrounding area as far as traffic and water usage go.

Then, the floor was opened for public comment. Several residents spoke up with mixed messages, including concerns about the environmental and economic impact.

"I just don't want it to be on the backs of the local citizens who think they're going to strike it rich and lose all their rent money, food money, etc.," Deming resident Art Dery said.

After hearing the comments, Haozous said the majority of public reaction has been positive.

"I think our folks here have really gotten a lot of response from the local people who really support our return and really support this project because they know how much it'll help the community," Haozous said.

More importantly for Haozous and members of the Fort Sill Apache Tribe, the casino would provide a way for tribe members to return to their homelands. The Tribe descends from the Warm Springs and Chiricahua Apaches who originally lived in New Mexico before they were removed as prisoners of war in the 1800s.

"This project will give us an opportunity to give our people jobs and a way to provide for themselves and live in their homelands. This will help us fulfill a long-term goal, a goal that's generations old, of returning to our homeland," Haozous said.