Indian nation's sovereignty has pluses, minuses for development

By HAL PHILLIPS

Realty group pulls the plug, investors cannot sue where U.S. laws don't apply.

"We're doing this huge project — planning, design and construction — with a fraction of the difficulty we would experience normally," said Curley.

The Mashantucket Pequot Pequots needn't worry about acquiring water rights. An adequate subsurface aquifer will supply all the necessary irrigation, said Harvey, at no cost to the tribe.

"We've seen the writing on the wall. Especially in California, water is a real issue. The water is always available, but it's an allocation issue, which gets very political. With your own water, you don't have to worry about things like the one..." Harvey noted.

"We have a lot of patience. We're going to stick around, but we're not going to be here forever," said Curley. "By 2000, we think 80 percent of the Navajos in New Mexico will have been relocated to an off-reservation site. After that, we may have to leave the reservation altogether."

Prime time on Indian land

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Mashantucket Pequot tribe — is planning a $142 million expansion in neighboring New Bedford, Mass. — Playland will include four finished courses, all of which will be designed by Pete Dye.

"I would bet, in years to come, a lot of these destination resorts will be built on Indian land," said Brian Curley, principal at Landmark Golf, Inc. "We've had contacts with other Native American groups. These types of deals will become more common.

"Any property owner with sovereign-nation rights is going to make things much easier, less political but not without risk — see related story. One of the main benefits to sovereign-status is that Indians are subject only to federal approvals. City, county or state approvals are not necessary," said Curley.

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