

LOCAL

Minnesota judge: Electronic pulltabs don't violate tribal gambling monopoly

The state's tribes argued that the single button on e-pulltabs made them similar to slot machines.

By Rochelle Olson (<https://www.startribune.com/rochelle-olson/10645556/>) Star Tribune

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Electronic pulltabs, the source of public funding for U.S. Bank Stadium, survived a legal challenge Thursday by the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community.

A state administrative law judge ruled that the pulltabs offered in bars by charitable organizations don't infringe on the exclusive rights of the state's Indian tribes to operate video slot machines.

The signature element of slot machines is the spinning wheel, Judge Barbara Case wrote, adding: "The mere push of a button is too far attenuated to constitute 'mimicking' of a slot machine."

The judge heard oral arguments in late February.

The Legislature legalized e-pulltabs in 2012 as part of the deal to build a new stadium for the Vikings. The video pulltabs were designed to provide the \$30 million needed annually to make payments on the state's share of the stadium debt and operating costs.

The games caught on slowly. In the first year, fiscal 2013, e-pulltabs brought in only \$16 million. But in the most recent fiscal year that ended last June, e-pulltabs brought in \$596 million.

Led by the Mdewakanton Sioux, several tribes filed a challenge to the Minnesota Gambling Control Board, saying the "open-all" feature of e-pulltabs threatened their business. With paper pulltabs, each window must be ripped open.

Under the compacts negotiated with the state three decades ago, Minnesota tribes have exclusive rights to operate slot machines on their reservations.

The Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community runs the Little Six casino and the Mystic Lake casino and hotel enterprise in Prior Lake. The operations have an annual payroll of about \$177 million and make up the largest employer in Scott County, according to the suit.

Rochelle Olson is a general assignment reporter for the Star Tribune. Olson has been on the quick strike team for three years, writing about a wide variety of topics. She specializes in the intersection of sports, business and culture.

raolson@startribune.com 612-673-1747 [rochelleolson](https://www.startribune.com/rochelle-olson/)



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E-pulltabs, used for public funding of U.S. Bank Stadium, raised \$596 million for the fiscal year that ended last June.