



WASHINGTON STATE  
UNIVERSITY  
EXTENSION



## BROADBAND DEPLOYMENT IN THE COLUMBIA GORGE

### BY THE NUMBERS

- Received a \$3.7 million in ARRA infrastructure funds, \$1.2 million from the state of Oregon, and \$154,600 in grants.
- More than 100 miles of fiber-optic cable deployed through the Columbia River Gorge.
- 140 local, regional, state, and federal KSLTPT stakeholders.
- 426 community and 80 business broadband survey responses.
- 16 community broadband forums with 208 attendees.
- 13 community digital skills training sessions with 60 attendees.
- 9 business broadband-related workshops with 55 attendees.
- More than 80 publicly available WiFi hotspots.
- 1 mobile training lab with 6 laptop computers.
- 5 "Webworks: Anywhere!" forums held throughout the region with more than 60 attendees.

### 2016

#### ISSUE

Poverty levels in Skamania and Klickitat Counties remain relatively high, at 12.6% in Skamania County and 14.6% in Klickitat County. Additionally, in Skamania County 26.3% of residents make less than \$25,000 per year and in Klickitat the percentage is 23%. Both counties have seen a significant trend away from resource extraction industries to service economies. This incorporates significant lower-wage job growth as well as some supplemented higher-income technology-sector jobs. The potential for growth in the high-tech industry that is heavily reliant on strong broadband connections, and the need for additional workforce training and educational access to support moving lower-wage workers to higher paying jobs, both indicate that investment in a robust broadband network is essential to meet key community needs.

While participating in a 2007 survey, Klickitat and Skamania County residents identified increased broadband telecommunication (Internet) availability, affordability, and use as critical to address employment and education needs in the region. Local leaders and residents learned that bringing broadband and high-speed Internet to rural communities in the Columbia Gorge region of Washington and Oregon would cost millions. Private telecommunications providers said that there wasn't a business case for bringing broadband to most of the smaller communities in the area.

#### RESPONSE

Glenwood (pop: 500), located in a scenic but remote area of Klickitat County, understood the challenge of securing high-speed Internet, but decided it was necessary. In November 2007, a telecommunications committee spearheaded by WSU Extension formed to assist Glenwood. Over the next few years, the committee expanded partnerships throughout Klickitat and Skamania Counties.

In 2010, SawNet, a local Internet Service Provider received \$3.7 million in federal funds to construct a fiber-optic "middle-mile" network in the region, meaning essential infrastructure would be built. To capitalize on this and other telecommunications investments in the region, the committee expanded its efforts, forming the Klickitat-Skamania Local Technology Planning Team (KSLTPT). Led by the Mid-Columbia Economic Development District, WSU Extension, and Community Enrichment for Klickitat County, the KSLTPT secured approximately \$170,000.

Between September 2012 and June 2014, KSLTPT led planning team and stakeholder meetings, completed surveys, mapped telecommunications services, developed a framework for addressing broadband gaps, established a mobile training lab, held workshops, created a WiFi hotspot inventory, and published news releases, reports, and a broadband resource website.



## QUOTES

*“Affordable, reliable broadband in rural areas is as important as water and electricity.”* —Brian Wanless, Klickitat-Skamania Local Technology Planning Team and Community Enrichment for Klickitat County

*“The Columbia Gorge economy is diverse, ranging from home-based businesses and family farms to high-tech firms and hospitals—and all rely on high-speed Internet to succeed.”* —Carrie Pipinich, Project Manager, Mid-Columbia Economic Development District

*“Washington is a diverse state geographically and digitally, and it’s often the pragmatic, local focus of a group like the Klickitat-Skamania Local Technology Planning Team that bridges gaps in the most effective and cost-efficient way.”* —Will Saunders, Washington State Department of Commerce

## AWARDS

KSLTPT received the 2013 Innovation Award from the National Association of Development Organizations and was a finalist for the 2013 Gorge Technology Alliance Technology Organization of the Year.

The KSLTPT grants were leveraged to move toward a regional coordination model through the creation of the Columbia Gorge Broadband Consortium. The transition to a regional approach was supported by a \$25,000 Google Community Grant, and continued staffing is supported by strong commitments from local entities.

## IMPACTS

The original goal was to provide affordable and reliable high-speed Internet to all local residents and businesses who desired it. With the help of almost \$4 million in cash and in-kind investments, as well as 140 stakeholders, WSU Extension and our partners have made significant progress.

- All major telecommunications providers serving the Columbia Gorge report new infrastructure investments, expanded broadband options, and additional customers;
- More than 80 publicly available WiFi hotspots;
- High-speed Internet service available through 3 providers in Glenwood;
- Growing awareness of broadband as critical, with public officials, chambers of commerce, and other entities supporting business, community, and economic development in the region;
- The KSLTPT model for broadband planning and engagement, as well as resources such as a broadband funding resource list and “Making the Broadband Business Case for Your Community” guide, have been used successfully in other communities, and both were featured at the “Making Communities Better with Broadband” workshop hosted by the Oregon Rural Development Council (February 2016);
- Approximately \$4 million in direct support for increasing broadband access, awareness, and adoption reported for the region between March 2010 and June 2014; and
- More than \$687,000 in local matching funds received from Klickitat County, Klickitat PUD, Skamania County, City of Stevenson, Port of Skamania County, Washougal School District, NoaNet, and SawNet.
- Support Regional Broadband meetings attended by approximately 30 stakeholders bi-annually that discuss broadband best practices and approaches to improving broadband access and adoption in Columbia Gorge communities in Washington and Oregon.