

# Our Flagship Broadband Project: Little Pend Oreille Lakes Pre-positioned Fire Camp



A **Pre-positioned Fire Camp (PPFC)** is a pre-identified site located in a remote area that is spatially adequate for emergency response, and ultimately has permanent broadband infrastructure. Sites are chosen and prioritized in partnership with the Department of Natural Resources and local fire districts. Once installed and operational, broadband will provide communications during disaster events for responders. The permanent build-out will result in broadband access for the at-large community for public safety, education, telehealth and economic development. The focus of the project is solving the communications component of a fire camp, not the full requirements, staffing and design of the emergency camp or incident command post.

## Why this location?

The Little Pend Oreille (LPO) Complex Pre-positioned Fire Camp is located in Stevens County Fire District #9 and would also serve northern Pend Oreille County. It is 25 miles from Colville on Highway 20; the area is rugged, mountainous and has winding roads. The area currently has no cell service or county/state radio coverage and satellite internet is the only current option for residents. The main tower will provide space for cell providers and public safety radio antennas in addition to the internet access; it's being explored as a site for FirstNet, the nation-wide emergency communications system, in an area that was not originally slated for coverage.

## Highlights:

- This project was the **first** Tech Team broadband infrastructure project for the Washington State Infrastructure Assistance Coordinating Council (IACC) Conference. The project concept pulled 15 agency and private resource people into the room including representatives from DNR, WSDOT, and USDA-RD, WA State Patrol, Microsoft, AT&T, NoaNet and others who shared their opinions, advice and expertise about the project.
- Washington State DNR has allocated an initial \$100,000 toward this partnership for physical work and specialized technical support, with more requests in motion through the state legislature as well as other funding sources.
- Governor Inslee's office and Hilary Franz, Commissioner of Lands, have both supported this project in presentations.



*"We have no cell service or broadband access which impacts our ability to reach residents in a timely manner. Our inadequate communications infrastructure negatively affects our response to any type of disaster or emergency so it is imperative that we find a long-term solution that includes permanent broadband. Our rural first responders are volunteers so giving immediate access to emergency assistance and advice will improve their service to people in need."*

Jeff Pitts  
Commissioner, Fire District #9  
Stevens County, Washington



*"Wildfires are fast-moving emergencies that often break out in some of Washington's most remote, least connected areas," said Commissioner of Public Lands Hilary Franz. "For the safety of our firefighters and our neighbors, we desperately need pre-positioned fire camps and communications infrastructure that gives our firefighters real-time information and provides alerts, as well as many other benefits, to surrounding residents."*

DNR is a critical, supporting partner by providing funds, technical assistance, and inclusion in the Rural Communities Partnership Initiative; projects that leverage their resources to spark economic development across Washington State.

## Work-to-date:

- **Evaluation of lease needs on private land:** Stevens County, Fire District 9, and the Kiwanis are drafting a long-term lease to construct a communications room and erect a tower at the Fire District 9 Station House. We are exploring options for additional training and community emergency shelter capacity.
- **Inclusion in emergency planning:** In 2018, the Stevens County Emergency Management Department updated the County Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan which includes a needs and risk assessment.
- **Technical assessment for pilot projects and overall NE WA projects:** Stevens County is required to release a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) to design a public facility communication tower at the Fire District 9 Station. This will include a site analysis, tower loading and height requirements, construction documents, communication spectrum analysis and FCC licensing.
- **Technology:** Stevens County will utilize the same wireless microwave technology that they have deployed throughout the rest of the county to extend their public safety network from Scoop Mountain to the Fruitland Bible camp (via Wellpinit and Miller Mountains).
- **Spectrum analysis needs and opportunities:** Stevens County and the Spokane Tribe have support contracts with Day Wireless and Industrial Communications for wireless communication throughout Stevens County. This includes maintaining frequency licenses and spectrum analysis for towers within the County.

## Regional work supporting the project:

- **Mapping overlay evaluation of existing sites, power, fiber connection and municipality/housing cluster locations.** GIS Departments in all four counties have ESRI map layers showing all existing towers, GPS location of all power lines and electrical transformers, fiber and telecommunication routes, and home/census data.
- **Access to additional communications infrastructure.** Stevens County is working with a vendor that is in the process of purchasing or leasing towers/space from another vendor that is going out of business and has a large number of towers built in Stevens County.
- **Identification of co-location towers.** The counties have local development regulations on Wireless Telecommunication Facilities which encourages co-location of new and existing antennas, support structures and related equipment in order to reduce the total number of towers throughout the county. Applications for all wireless communication facilities must be submitted and approved by the County Land Services/Community Development Offices.
- **Long-term sustainability.** Stevens County is developing an Operations and Maintenance budget for post construction of the pilot projects in order to sustain the sites over the expected lifetime of the equipment.
- **Vendor identification and budget.** Stevens County is soliciting vendors for quotes for the two pilot projects and will be releasing an RFQ for the selection of a qualified vendor to design the communication tower and estimate the construction budget.

DRAFT Rev. 3.13.19

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