



Plumas-Sierra Telecommunications

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Plumas-Sierra Addresses Broadband Challenges in Sierra County

Portola, CA (February 1, 2018) – Access to affordable broadband is a crucial component to arresting the loss of jobs and population in Sierra and Plumas counties, and promoting rural economic development. Plumas-Sierra Telecommunications is addressing the issue, and actively exploring solutions to expand last-mile coverage in the region, as well as exploring new technologies and avenues to further advance broadband deployment.

PST is a subsidiary of Plumas-Sierra Rural Electric Cooperative. Bob Marshall, chief executive officer, explains, "Part of electric and telecommunications cooperatives' mission is to bring key services to Rural America.

"We understand, where the internet was once an amenity, it has become a must-have—much like electricity in the 1930's. We are devoted to resolving the issue of poor internet connectivity in the region."

PST began building a mid-mile, fiber-optic network backbone from Reno, Nevada, north to Susanville and west to Portola, Quincy, and Loyaltown, California in 2012, with the help of grants through the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act, the California Advanced Services Fund, and a commitment from several local anchor institutions.

To date, PST has constructed more than 200-miles of fiber optic network, purchased abandoned TV coaxial cable systems and added wireless technologies to help address costs and a variety of challenges created by different topographical elements in the region.

One of PST's major goals in expanding broadband in the region is to create jobs and boost the economy by allowing existing businesses to expand, while attracting new businesses to the region.

While the company has been able to construct fiber connections to many businesses, fiber construction to rural homes is generally not economically feasible, because of lack of home density and other challenges.

“It is a great option where it is physically possible and where neighbors can band together to help bring costs down—but it isn’t PST’s only option,” says Marshall.

PST employs other solutions where a direct connection to PST’s fiber network is prohibitive—like making use of a fiber-to-coaxial hybrid or a fiber-to-wireless hybrid. It is currently serving homes in Sierra Brooks via fiber-to-wireless. Recently, PST made equipment changes that improved the performance of many of the customers in Sierra Brooks.

In June 2017, PST worked with the Sierra County Sheriff’s Office to enforce a judgment against New Day Broadband that let PST acquire the poles, wires, and equipment of New Day in the Loyalton and Sierra Brooks areas. PST had previously acquired the Plumas County assets and was able to use those portions of the system to provide high-speed internet to east Quincy, Portola, and Whitehawk. The New Day system is being converted to a data-only system; TV will only be available via streaming services.

Graeagle customers are being connected now, and west Quincy will follow. PST’s goal is to convert the Loyalton/Sierra Brooks portion of the New Day system to provide broadband services in late-spring or early-summer. Wired service, like fiber or coax, is generally more reliable than wireless service, but new coax areas activated by PST generally take a few weeks to fine tune for optimal service.

Meanwhile, PST is working with American Renewable Power to bring a direct fiber connection to Loyalton’s business park.

PST also is working on ways to serve other portions of eastern Sierra County. PST changed out its older 900 MHz wireless system and improved the service from several hundred kilobits per second to a service offering approximately 5 Mbps. PST is working with its parent company, PSREC, to study ways to improve electric reliability and offer faster internet service.

One promising technology is TV Whitespace (TVWS). This is a cutting edge technology made feasible by the FCC allowing the use of UHF TV channels that are not used in our area to broadcast broadband data services. TV channels are broadcast at a frequency that allows them to penetrate trees better than most signals, while also bending somewhat around curves and hills. This makes TVWS technology promising for areas like Calpine, Sattley, up the Yuba pass, and Old Truckee Road. PST is currently testing TVWS technology in Calpine where there is high tree-density and uneven topography.

Unfortunately, there will always be a few places where wired or hybrid services are not cost-effective, but the good news is that the Via-Sat satellite system is coming out with faster service and much greater data capacity with download speeds four to ten times the amount currently offered.

PST is in the process of applying for California Advanced Services Fund Grants, which will allow the company to continue to expand broadband services in the harder to reach areas.

For ongoing PST broadband updates, visit www.pst.coop.

About Plumas-Sierra Telecommunications:

PST is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Plumas-Sierra Rural Electric Cooperative, providing high-quality telecommunications services to Lassen, Plumas, Sierra and Nevada counties in California, and Washoe County, Nevada since 1987.

Founded in 1937, PSREC is a member-owned electric distribution, transmission and generation utility providing electrical power and related services to more than 7,500 member/owners in Plumas, Lassen, and Sierra counties in California, and parts of Washoe County, Nevada. The cooperative is controlled by the membership through an elected seven-person board of directors.

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