

Fact Sheet: Rural Telco Investment Examples in Montana

Montana's rural telecom providers deploy middle mile and last mile broadband connectivity throughout Montana. Following are examples of their broadband investment in Montana, including in and between Montana's Reservations.

Montana's Rural Telecom Providers Investing in Montana

Montana's rural local exchange carriers (RLECs) invest over \$70 million annually in Montana's telecom infrastructure. They have over \$500 million of total plant in place. They offer outstanding salaries and benefits to over 1,000 hard working Montanans dedicated to their jobs and the communities in which they live and work. They have deployed over 9,000 miles of fiber optics in the state, and are deploying more every year—without stimulus funds. They have pushed broadband capabilities to the edges of their networks, often reaching nearly 100 percent of their business and residential consumers. This broadband deployment substantially exceeds national average deployment.

These substantial investments in advanced telecommunications infrastructure are being made by companies whose average customer density is less than three access lines per mile. These RLECs, in other words, do not have the luxury of picking and choosing low-cost, high-density populations to serve. As eligible telecommunications carriers, they provide lifeline and link up support for low income consumers and extend service to all consumers in their areas.

Montana's RLECs offer state-of-the-art distance learning, telemedicine, and other videoconference capabilities to government, commercial, educational and health care providers. Vision Net, owned by a consortium of rural telecom providers, provides middle-mile backbone capacity throughout the state, as well as Internet access, network management, videoconference and other advanced services for telecommunications service providers in Montana and around the country. Other middle-mile providers include Qwest, 360networks, Sprint, AT&T—among others—deploying hundreds of miles of broadband facilities. In cooperation with CenturyLink, Montana's RLECs operate one of the most advanced emergency 911 networks in the nation. Nearly every one of these companies is, or has been, a Rural Utilities Service (RUS) borrower in good standing.

(See map of Montana's rural telecommunications infrastructure which depicts the extent to which Montana's RLECs have invested in Montana.)

Montana RLECs Investing in Broadband Access in Indian Country

Montana's RLECs are active investors in both human resources and physical infrastructure in Montana Indian Country. They aggressively market low income availability and support E-Rate funding on Reservations. They employ dozens of

Montana Tribal members, and include Tribal members in their governance structures, such as Boards of Directors and senior management teams.

Examples of specific RLEC investment on Montana's Tribal Reservations:

Crow Reservation (Project service area)

- Miles of fiber: 82
- Communities with access to 10-20 Mbps broadband capacity: Crow Agency, Lodge Grass, Willow Creek, Wyola, Ft. Smith
- Anchor institutions with access to 9-20 Mbps (among others): Indian Health Service; Little Big Horn Community College; Lodge Grass High School; Lodge Grass Middle School; Crow Agency Middle School; Ft. Smith Middle School; Crow Administration Building; Tribal Court; Water Treatment Plant; Boys & Girls Club; Head Start; Diabetes Clinic; New Day Care; BIA Law Enforcement; Senior Citizens; Roads Dept.; Tourism Building
- ITV/Distance Learning Sites: Lodge Grass

Ft. Peck Reservation (Nemont service area)

- Miles of fiber: 524. Fiber to the Premise (FTTP) in Reserve, Larslan.
- Communities with access up to 20 Mbps: Frazer, Oswego, Larslan, North Nashua, Poplar, Reserve, Brockton, Poplar North, Wolf Point, North Wolf Point
- Anchor institutions with access to 20 Mbps (among others): Ft. Peck Community College, Poplar; Ft. Peck Community College, Wolf Point Branch; Lustre School and dorm; Frazer Schools; Nashua Schools; Poplar Schools (E-Rate funding pending); Brockton Schools; Wolf Point Schools; Frontier School, Wolf Point; Indian Health Service; Poplar Community Hospital; Wolf Point Trinity Hospital; Ft. Peck Administration; BIA offices, Faith Lutheran Home.
- ITV and/or Distance Learning Sites: Ft. Peck Community College; Ft. Peck Community College, Wolf Point; Lustre Academy; Frazer; Poplar; Brockton; Wolf Point

Flathead Reservation-Confederated Salish & Kootenai (CenturyLink area)

- Miles of fiber: 125+. Redundant fiber rings; fiber to the premise or curb available to every business on the reservation; multiple fiber to the home (FTTP) projects on the Reservation
- Communities with access to 10 Mbps and up: Polson, Elmo, Dayton, Lake Mary, Ronan, Yellow Bay
- Anchor institutions with access to 20 Mbps and up (FTTP): Polson Hospital; Ronan Hospital; S & K Community College; City and County Government Buildings, Tribal Government and Administration buildings

Rural Telecom Investment in Montana
November 6, 2009

- 98.4% broadband access penetration; over 70% with access to 10 Mbps+

Flathead Reservation-Confederated Salish & Kootenai (Ronan/Hot Springs areas)

- Miles of fiber: 100 (12 more miles under construction). Fiber-based wide area network connects major sites with 10 Mbps backbone, scalable to 100 Mbps without equipment upgrade. Fiber backbone currently operates at 1 Gbps, upgradeable to 10 Gbps.
- Communities with access to 10 Mbps and up: Charlo, Ronan, Pablo, Polson, Hot Springs.
- Anchor institutions with fiber access: Charlo Schools; Ronan Schools, Polson Schools, Ronan community hospital; Confederated S&K Tribe administrative buildings at 6 locations.
- DSL 2+ (3 – 20 Mbps) available to 95% of all customers in service area.

Flathead Reservation-Confederated Salish & Kootenai (Blackfoot Telephone Cooperative area)

- Miles of fiber: 136+. Redundant fiber rings; fiber to the premise or curb available to every business on the reservation; gigabit Ethernet fiber distribution system to broadband nodes. Upgrading to 10 gigabit in 2010.
- Communities with access to speeds of up to 15 Mbps: Charlo, St. Ignatius, Dixon, Ravalli, Arlee, Evaro
- Anchor institutions with access to 20 Mbps and up (FTTP): Tribal Health Services Arlee; Kicking Horse Job Corp; S&K Technologies; City and County Government Buildings, Tribal Government and Administration buildings; National Bison Range Moiese
- 98.5 % broadband access penetration; over 80% with access to 12 Mbps and above
- ITV/Distance Learning Sites: Arlee Schools

Rocky Boy's Reservation (Triangle Communications service area)

- Miles of fiber: 16. Fiber to the Premise (FTTP) in South Havre in 2011
- Anchor institutions with access to 3 Mbps (among others): Rocky Boy School District; Boys and Girls Club of the Bear Paws; Rocky Boy Health Board; Chippewa Cree Housing; Chippewa Cree Tribe; Chippewa Cree Development; Chippewa Cree Social Services; Chippewa Cree TANF; Stone Child College; Rocky Boy Senior Center; Rocky Boy Tourism
- ITV/Distance Learning Sites: Rocky Boy Schools, Rocky Boy Head Start

Fort Belknap Reservation (Triangle Communications service area)

- Miles of fiber: 30. Fiber to the Premise (FTTP) Harlem in 2012.

Rural Telecom Investment in Montana
November 6, 2009

- Anchor institutions with access to 3 Mbps (among others): Fort Belknap College; Fort Belknap Housing Authority; Fort Belknap TANF; Fort Belknap Agency; Fort Belknap Small Business; Fort Belknap Library; Fort Belknap Indian Health Service; Fort Belknap Tribal Court; Fort Belknap Employment and Training Program; Lodgepole Senior Center; Hays Recreation Center; Fort Belknap Police Department
- ITV/Distance Learning Sites: Fort Belknap College; Harlem Schools (pending)

Northern Cheyenne Reservation (Range Telephone Co-op Service area)

- Miles of fiber: 72
- Lame Deer Community has access to 45 Mbps and the Busby Community has access to 9 Mbps
- Anchor institutions with access up to 7 Mbps (among others): Northern Cheyenne Tribal Schools, Northern Cheyenne Tribe, Boys and Girls Club, Utilities Commission, Healing Hearts Family Violence, NC Housing Authority, Native Action, Career Development, OMBO Work Program, Public Health Services, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Courtesy Cash Store, Home Care Services, NC Employment, Elderly Program, NC Chamber of Commerce, Lame Deer Trading
- The Lame Deer School has a 100 Mbps for school purposes and the Hardware Hank has a 2 Mbps SDSL service

Blackfeet Reservation (3 Rivers service area)

- Miles of fiber: 81. Fiber to the node and FTTP in Browning South, connecting current fiber network in Browning. Last mile, FTTH to the Heart Butte area, 2010.
- Communities with access to 10 Mps and up: Browning, Heart Butte
- Anchor Institutions with access to 10 Mbps and up: Browning Schools, Heart Butte School, Heart Butte Hospital, Blackfeet Community Hospital, BIA Law Enforcement, Blackfoot Tribal EMS and Tribal Health Programs
- ITV/Distance Learning Sites: Browning Schools; Heart Butte Schools; Blackfeet Community College

Letters to Governor Schweitzer

A number of RLECs and their representative associations sent letters and emails to the Governor and his staff prior to his October 14, 2009 letter to NTIA. For example,

Blackfoot Telecommunications Group (Missoula, MT) noted that it has

Rural Telecom Investment in Montana
November 6, 2009

deployed the most robust IP-based advanced network in our area including extensive use of fiber rings. [Blackfoot also provides] broadband services to over 96% of our customer base.

InterBel Telephone Cooperative (Eureka, MT)

We are in the middle of a 5-year modernization plan utilizing a new RUS loan...We have been offering broadband to all of our customers since 2001 and in the last 2 years we began offering fiber to the home...

Mid-Rivers Telephone Cooperative (Circle, MT)

provides broadband services at speeds meeting – and in many cases exceeding – the BIP/BTOP definition to residents, businesses, schools, libraries, healthcare providers, emergency services and many others.

Nemont Telephone Cooperative (Scobey, MT)

Bresnan...incorrectly identifies the Fort Peck Reservation as wholly unserved or underserved. Not only are communities such as Larslan and Reserve served, they are served by Fiber to the Premise facilities

Range Telephone Cooperative (Forsyth, MT)—like other Eastern Montana RLECs serving one of the least densely populated areas in the nation--stated, We provide broadband services to over 85% of our customers with the majority of them getting speeds well above the unserved definition. We do serve the entire Northern Cheyenne Reservation and a small part of the Crow Reservation. These customers have access to broadband speeds in excess of the 768K in most places.

Triangle Communications (Havre, MT) and 3 Rivers Communications (Fairfield, MT), *among others*, for years have been upgrading copper plant with fiber to the premise (FTTP).

Contacts:

Geoff Feiss, General Manager
MT Telecommunications Assn.
406-442-4316
gfeiss@telecomassn.org

Bonnie Lorang, General Manager
MT Independent Telecommunications Systems
406-443-1940
blorang@mitstel.com