



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF **NATURAL RESOURCES**

Connecting Rural Washington to Broadband Internet

Many of Washington state's rural communities have needed improved access to broadband internet for more than a decade – and the significance of that gap in coverage has only been made more clear during the current COVID-19 pandemic. These residents face an uphill battle to make a living while working from home, completing online schooling, accessing social programs, and staying connected to their family and friends.

State lands provide many ideal locations for communications towers — hilltops and mountaintops throughout many parts of Washington state. These sites include television towers, AM/FM radio, cell towers, communications systems for first responders, and more.

Better fiber optic cables and more communication towers are part of the solution. But “last-mile” connections in rural areas are lacking in many areas of the state. As the state's largest land manager, DNR is uniquely positioned to provide sites for these connections.

[DNR has developed an online mapping tool](#), using our robust GIS data along with data from the State Broadband Office and Department of Health, to identify areas where DNR-managed lands coincide with underserved populations.

There are currently more than 100 wireless telecom sites on DNR-managed lands across Washington state, including prime locations that serve the Puget Sound lowlands, Spokane, and the Tri-Cities. There are additional locations on trust lands that would provide ideal coverage for both rural and urban populations across the state, as well. Leases for the existing sites generate nearly \$5 million each year for school construction and critical state and local services throughout Washington.

DNR is requesting \$2 million in capital funding to expand our ability to provide sites for leasing to broadband providers. This funding will allow us to improve existing sites, ready new sites for development, acquire easements to DNR land, and grant easements across DNR land for fiber-optic and other connectivity.

This funding will create up to 30 direct jobs in construction and associated work, as well as providing two layers of public benefit – both increasing the economic competitiveness of small-town Washington and generating nontax revenue to support public services.



Broadband internet provides communities with access to global information, healthcare services, distance education, marketplace visibility, communication tools, and countless other resources they need to thrive.

For more information about this proposal contact:

Kristine Reeves
Legislative Director
(360) 764-0013
kristine.reeves@dnr.wa.gov