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## Looking for Broadband Stories from the Coast

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On August 20, 2013, staff members from the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) visited coastal Sonoma and Mendocino Counties to see for themselves the deplorable state of broadband in this beautiful area. Three meetings were held, one on Joy Road, in Sonoma County, one at Coast Community Library, in Point Arena, and one at the grammar school in the Village of Mendocino.

The following are the stories submitted by the Point Arena participants describing their problems with substandard broadband.

**Maria Elena Biagqi - La Luna Farm, Owner**

The lack of broadband availability in our area has negatively impacted our farming business, my translation business, and our children's studies. We have tried out available providers over the years, all of whom set low monthly usage limits, due to their poor capabilities. We pay a high monthly fee for a very limited access. When these limits are exceeded, the providers penalize us by slowing our internet down to a very slow speed. In a household of four, all of whom rely heavily on the Internet, this has been a major obstacle to overcome.

Because of our location, our only Internet access is via satellite dishes. These dishes are greatly affected by cloud cover and fog, both of which are common occurrences in our area. This only helps to slow down our Internet further. When my children need to do research, my husband needs to watch instructional farming videos, and I need to send and receive emails for my translating business, all at the same time, our current providers just don't cut it.

The Internet provides several services to agriculture: ability to keep up with cutting edge technology; ideas, concepts in the management of livestock, land, water, and ecological impacts.; allows us to market our products outside of the area; participate and communicate with fellow farmers of similar mindset throughout the world.; take on-line classes; and join and participate in agricultural roundtables and forums.

**Chris Jorgensen - Point Arena Pharmacy, Owner**

I can attest to the fact that broadband is not available in this area. Everyone I do business with (insurance companies, wholesalers, etc.) assume that broadband is available everywhere. Consequently, I am at a disadvantage when trying to communicate (billing, ordering, etc.). Many wasted hours weekly due to dropped electronic billings and waiting for slow responses while attempting to use the Internet to re-order prescription drugs.

**Lindsay Jones - Redwood Credit Union, Branch Manager**

Redwood Credit Union depends upon dependable broadband service to conduct its business, and business on the Mendonoma Coast depends on Redwood Credit Union. Even though we are located next door to a fiber-fed AT&T central office, we depend on an antiquated T1 line at exorbitant cost. To stay competitive, we need significantly faster, more reliable service, at much lower cost. We'd like to provide our patrons with complementary Wifi access, but can't due to our substandard broadband service.

**Colleen Cross - Point Arena Schools , Superintendent**

Broadband to the Point Arena Schools is woefully inadequate for what we need and want to do. It has become even more of a concern considering standardized testing will be all online beginning in 2014-15. Currently both Point Arena High School and Arena Union Elementary School each have three 4.7 Mbit lines that connect the schools to the Internet. This currently is not enough connectivity since on many school days the bandwidth at both school is maxed out. This causes websites, which are needed for daily operation of the school, to slow down to a crawl or not load at all.

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**Frank Bell - The Sea Ranch, General Manager**

The Sea Ranch would like to consider developing a last mile broadband service, but despite Verizon's new fiber, Sea Ranch can't get middle-mile bandwidth. Levels like 500MBS or 1GBS just aren't available from their fiber and OCS3, 150 Mbps, is priced at \$30k/month way too high for backhaul. We believe that Golden Bear Broadband's Route 1 Corridor Project would make this available. The Sea Ranch is very concerned about Verizon's lack of investment in our telephone service. Verizon's in-ground copper plant is in need both of repair and of additional capacity. Sea Ranchers requesting additional lines have been told that there are no more lines available. Verizon's CASF grant approved in Jan 2010 specified 7MBS service. The service was finally initiated in Jan 2013 but the offering is only 3MBS maximum, half the threshold for under-served.

**Jeff Watts - Gualala Municipal Advisory Council, Chair**

Broadband is a birthright as was the Rural Electrification Act of 1937. Our nation's rural and urban youth are the very foundation of our nation's future and broadband is the bedrock on upon which it shall stand. It is gross hypocrisy that the AT&Ts of our nation shall have the political power to discriminate who shall have access and where and who shall not.

**Brian Churm - Pacnet, Director Engineering & Operations, Americas & Europe**

Our company constructs and operates trans-oceanic cables which drive communications long the west coast. For example, we recently finished the Unity cable to Japan which lands terabits of capacity in Los Angeles and contributes to the overall business growth in the SoCal region. The industry is already looking forward to the next cable construction project. A northern California cable landing station exists right here in Mendocino County - just outside of Point Arena.

However, because of the lack of fiber along the northern California coast and the near-monopolistic lock on what few strands do exist, construction engineers are avoiding this region and are instead looking north towards Oregon and Washington. The CPUC needs to broaden their scope when considering the impact of not having accessible fiber along the northern California coast. It is not just a rural problem of connecting a few farm towns to the internet as some may frame it.

Fiber infrastructure - and the lack thereof - impacts the whole State; from Silicon Valley to Sacramento. Where a cable lands, data centers follow and so do jobs; and right now those jobs and companies - along with their tax revenues - are headed out of State.

**Katrina Kirkham – Mother, Silverado Trail – Napa County CA**

For people with disabilities, Internet access is especially important. In our rural area there are few “in-person” services, no public transportation one can take to the library, and limited library resources. Even though we live on Silverado Trail, a major roadway, the bus is a 1.5 mile walk along a busy road, which is not acceptable for a child. Because of his diagnosis, my son receives his textbooks in both a digital format so that he can increase the font size, and in an audio format so he can listen to the book while he reads. He also receives supplementary math and language instruction from Stanford University’s Educational Program for Gifted Youth. Both of these programs require broadband access. We do spend quite a lot of time in the library, but expecting that all of a child’s classwork be done in a public library is not a viable solution. And, since he is not able to drive, schoolwork at the library means that I cannot work a normal work schedule, which places an additional burden on our family. My son’s name is Liam. He is 13 years old.

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**Mike Nicholls – Access Sonoma Broadband, Co-Chair Sonoma County Manager – North Bay / North Coast Broadband Consortium**

Although I am considered served and have broadband supplied by Comcast, those less than 1/8 of a mile from me in the community of Cazadero are on dial up or satellite (if they have an unobstructed view of the SW sky) due to lack of expansion by either Comcast or DSL offerings by our local telePOTS provider, Verizon. This is troubling as Verizon was granted \$1.8 million in CASF funding three years ago to provide DSL service within the Cazadero in its service area in Western Sonoma County, construction was completed in 2011 and still there is no indication of when (or if) service will be implemented in all wire-centers or when speed levels will meet CASF

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minimums to be considered as served communities. Verizon fiber is within 70 feet of my residence and is a closed network without public access.

I've personally been involved in working closely with the Broadband Alliance of Mendocino County, a co-founder of Access Sonoma Broadband and testifying in Sacramento for the rural expansion of affordable, high speed broadband.

**Jim Moorehead - Broadband Alliance of Mendocino County, Executive Committee Chair**

Since 2007 I have been involved in attempting to bring broadband to Mendocino County, starting first with the Mendocino Coast Broadband Alliance (MCBA), which tried to bring FTTP in to neighborhoods east and south of Mendocino Village. The project was too small to be economically feasible, and lacked the capability to get grant funding.



Today, these neighborhoods are still unserved, even though it is shown served on the California Broadband Map. In 2010, as a board member of the Community Foundation of Mendocino County, I helped identify broadband deployment as an economic development priority, and helped found the Broadband Alliance of Mendocino County.

Since then, the Alliance has helped forge a strong working relationship with Sonoma County that has resulted in the Route 1 Corridor Project, which is part of the Golden Bear Broadband Project for all of Northern California. Construction of the Route 1 Corridor Project is a crucial building block necessary for the two counties to close the persistent digital divide. The incumbents have clearly demonstrated their unwillingness to solve the problem; the CASF legislation was enacted precisely to solve these rural broadband deployment challenges. Logic suggests that the CPUC should approve the Golden Bear project so that the R1CP can be built.

**Greg Jirak - Mendocino Broadband Associates, President**

My wife and I have real estate investments in and around Point Arena - some commercial, some residential, and some undeveloped. The property values of these parcels are imperiled due to substandard broadband service. Realtors throughout the south coast report drastic disparity between parcel property values, depending on quality of broadband. Service to all of our parcels is unserved or radically underserved. Without remedy we will suffer significant economic damage.

Personal experience shows emergency services delayed due to lack of broadband - a family member's injury on Schooner Gulch State Beach, a few hundred yards west of State Highway 1 was airlifted a few hundred yards east of the highway to a private airfield. The ambulance couldn't get a cellular connection at the airfield and had to waste 20 minutes going to Point Arena, and back, to determine the appropriate hospital.

**Walt Wells - South Coast Seniors, Treasurer**

South Coast Seniors is currently under contract with AT&T MiFi for Internet service. We signed up for this service when we learned we were unable to get CVC or Wildblue in the building our offices are in. MiFi Internet has been very frustrating and time consuming to work with. When the weather is foggy, windy, or rainy (which is 80% of the time in PA) the connection fails and we sometimes spend a few hours a day trying to get back on-line.

This is a big problem for our organization. We work on a lot of deadlines because we have various reports due throughout the month for funding. If we were unable to email a report on time we would not only lose funding for that month but it could put our annual contract in jeopardy. It also becomes a problem when we have to do research for a grant or respond to important emails from our seniors clients, donors or Board of Directors.

Having more reliable Internet in our area would save a lot of hours of frustration that can be used more effectively on office work and making sure we meet all of our deadlines, without the extra pressure of not knowing whether we can turn our work in on time.

**Steve McLaughlin - Independent Coast Observer, Owner**

**Peggy Berryhill - KGUA Community Radio, President**

**Diane Agee - Redwood Coast Medical Services, Chief Executive Officer**

**Steve Sharpe - Sonoma County Economic Development Board, Department Analyst**