

Broadband Alliance Public Outreach Meeting

Friday, November 3rd, 2017 10 am-11:45 am

Community Foundation of Mendocino County

Call in Number: 641-715-3341 Access code: 108 1131#

I. Call to Order

- A. Attendees: Georgeanne Croskey (3rd District Supervisor), Rick Ehler (Office of Emergency Services), Karen Horner (Library Director), Jim Moorehead (former Alliance chair), Mike Nicholls (Access Sonoma Broadband), Sarah Reith (KZYX news), Ruth Valenzuela (Assemblymember Wood's Field Rep), Emily Tecchio (Assemblymember Wood Field Rep), Trish Steel (Alliance chair)
- B. Call-in: Maryanne Petrillo (West Company CEO), Kathy Wylie (Community Foundation), Dave Smith (MCOE IT director), Ariel Carmona (Willits/UDJ News), Calvin Sandeen (Sonoma County Economic Development Board intern)
- C. Agenda - The priority for this meeting was Agenda item 2, the discussion of the fire-related telecommunications issues. Agenda items 3,4,5 and 7 were either not discussed at all, or in very little detail.

II. Telecommunications Outage Survey - <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/firestorm2017>

- A. Trish provided a background on why we believe it's important to document outages, as we did for the 2014 and 2015 outages. These surveys and the reports developed from the surveys provide data that can be used with the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and with elected officials to advocate for more reliable broadband infrastructure. The survey will hopefully provide outage information for every zip code in the county and provide a big picture view of what happened.
- B. Information on the scope and extent of the outage is otherwise not publicly available information, so it's important to document it ourselves while details are fresh in people's minds. Trish emphasized that these outages are serious because people lose the ability to call 9-1-1 and to receive important public safety information (such as reverse 9-1-1).
- C. As of Friday morning, there were 992 responses, including 303 from Mendocino. Almost all of the rest were from Sonoma, and most of those were from the Santa Rosa area.
- D. The survey takes on average about about 11 minutes.
- E. There was discussion on how the survey could be promoted, such as at Fire Recovery meetings and community organization newsletters. Supervisor Croskey will ask the county to send the link out to the internal list serve for county employees.

III. Mendocino Fire and Telecommunication impacts/implications/discussion (notes are slightly out of order from the discussion for clarification purposes)

- A. Mendocino County Office of Emergency Services (OES)
 - (1) Rick provided a perspective from the Emergency Operations Center that opened when this crisis started. Initially there was confusion on where the fires were

because both Potter Valley and Redwood Valley have roads named “East” and “West.” The fires were fast-moving in different directions, it was the middle of the night, and they snaked into drainages and valley. Adding to the extreme difficulty was the power outages and communications issues. Many cell phones were out and reverse 9-1-1 wasn’t working. There were only 2 dispatchers on duty when this crisis hit, and they handled 500 calls in one hour. If all the communications were actually working then the 2 dispatchers would not have been enough for a fire of this magnitude.

- (2) CalFire sent every engine that they had available. Local resources were stretched and at some point there were just no more resources to send. Distances meant that a fire truck from the south coast took 2 hours to get to Ukiah. Meanwhile Santa Rosa called in mutual aid and asked us to send resources to them as well.
- (3) The question was asked about how many reverse 9-1-1 calls went out (these can be either landlines or cell phones. Landlines are automatically registered but unfortunately these are not updated very often due to data conflicts. Cell phone owners are responsible for registering their phones themselves through the sheriff’s office). OES will be preparing a report and timeline on the first 12 hours of the fire, and there will be numbers included in that report.
- (4) Supervisor Croskey noted that many people received their mandatory evacuation notice 2 days late (after the cell towers restored their service), and so that also caused some confusion for people.
- (5) The county is also having discussions with both AT&T and Frontier on how many simultaneous calls that their exchange can handle. AT&T has not yet provided this information. Frontier has provided some numbers and they are much lower than the county was expecting.
- (6) Rick was asked how the the county-wide public safety communications microwave network fared during the fires. The system went partially down when the fire hit Laughlin Peak (the radio building, back-up batteries, and generator burned), and Rick gave credit to Greg Glavich’s hard work to keep it going. Equipment on towers typically does not burn, and the loss of power and fiber to the site is often the main problem. The majority of the county microwave equipment could be salvaged, but the repair cost estimate for the county network at this site is about \$400,000. The public safety radio-to-radio network still worked but it does not have a county-wide reach.
- (7) Cellular communications and other agency communications were affected when Laughlin burned (including NOAA and CalFire) and power to the site was out. KZYX however was able to stay up and running using back-up batteries for their antennae. The federal Emergency Alert system also went down when the National Weather Service (Eureka) transmitter connection was disrupted even though their equipment was undamaged. There is an Emergency Alert System in Point Arena, but it does not reach inland.
- (8) Verizon was able to restore cell connections via mobile tower that connected via Satellite. They also installed a 3K mini-cell extender at the Emergency Ops Center and a COLT (temporary cell tower) in Potter Valley.
- (9) Satellite phones were also discussed as emergency communication method. There are some challenges though - they are expensive (~\$700) and require a per minute plan on a yearly basis (about another \$700 for 500 minutes), can only be used outdoors (they don’t work indoors), and service may have been affected by the

smoke (not confirmed though). They also have their own international dialing code which makes their calls to be treated like a foreign county call. This is a problem because county cell phones will not dial to an international phone, but county employees have developed a “work-around” by a call through Phoenix to get through.

- (10) Rick was asked about the Long Range Acoustic Device (LRAC) that was purchased by the Sheriff’s office for beach warnings in case of a tsunami. This is a focused beam of sound that you can actually speak over (unlike a siren for example). When purchased, there was public concern that it could be used for crowd control, and so it was not yet authorized because a use policy is still being developed which needs to be approved by the Executive Office.
- (11) Mendocino county is part of a coastal mutual aid region that incorporates 16 coastal California counties stretching from Crescent City to San Diego.
- (12) The question was asked if communications are getting worse, or if the public just has a higher expectation of notification and service in emergency situations because of a higher level of communications availability during normal day-to-day interactions.
- (13) Trish mentioned that we are in the midst of the “tech transitions.” Landlines formed the core of a very reliable public safety network which was developed over decades. This network reached into each home via copper wires and worked during a power outage. Now landlines are disappearing and leaving many homes without access to reliable communication, while other “landlines” are not copper anymore but VoIP and will not work in an outage. Cell coverage has gaps, especially in our county’s rough topography and so not every home can get service, and in a power outage situation the battery will discharge quickly. Our former public safety network is unraveling and has not yet been replaced with a reliable connectivity for every house.

B. Mendocino County Office of Education (MCOE)

- (1) Dave Smith provided an update on impacts to county schools. Three schools in the north part of the county lost connectivity for 3 days- Leggett, Willits, and Laytonville. They will be submitting a report to the superintendent.
- (2) Mike said that in Sonoma the schools are helping to push out the survey (see below). Dave said that he will help share the outage survey through MCOE and their Facebook page and that maybe Superintendent Galletti can push the survey through the superintendents council (meeting on Nov. 17th).
- (3) Dave also spoke about the outages from a personal perspective. He lives in Brooktrails, and they had no communication nor TV for days, and he called it horrific to be without communications in such an emergency situation. He was under the impression that there was redundancy, and he would like to see things change as we move forward. The Nov. 14th Board of Supervisor meeting will include a discussion on the Brooktrails issues.
- (4) Supervisor Croskey asked if there was any discussion at MCOE on providing permanent satellite radios or ham radios for superintendents.
- (5) For ham radios, the issue seems to be a need for more trained operators in the county. During the fires, all of the Ham radio operators were sent to the hospitals and they didn’t have enough to deploy to the schools. There was a discussion on how to get more operators trained in the ham system for times of crisis. The Mendo Fire group offers training, and so there are resources to help train people.

- (6) Several people expressed frustration that they wanted to help but did not know how, especially without communications. Even to be a Red Cross volunteer you needed to be certified ahead of time.
- (7) Mendocino College Willits campus lost connectivity and was down for several days, likely due to the fact that their CENIC connection goes through Santa Rosa.
- (8) It was also noted that there was a community college in Napa that was down of their internet connection for 19 days after the fire.

C. Library System

- (1) Mendocino County Library Director Karen Horner provided an update about the important role the Willits Library and Round Valley Community Library played during the fires.
- (2) While other telecommunication services went down in these communities, the libraries stay up and running as the only internet connection on Monday evening and Tuesday morning, a critical time for the fires. They had over 700 people at the libraries using their services (500 logged in at Willits, 300 at Covelo). "It was crazy." All library branches changed their wireless access to be 24/7 for two weeks (instead of shutting it down at 10 pm), and extended branch hours the first week of the fires. Willits and Covelo libraries were open 9 am - 8 pm for all seven days.
- (3) Everyone wanted to know why the library stayed up and didn't lose any services, when most of Willits went down. Even some Sonoma library branches went down (Guernville, Occidental).
- (4) The Willits library receives its connectivity through the county micro-wave system, which stayed mostly up, and backhaul through Sonic, which also stayed up. Additionally, the county was able to re-route more bandwidth through the system to the library to accommodate increased usage. The inner-library system for book check-outs, etc is part of linked system with Sonoma and Lake counties, but everything was switched over to the cloud in August, and so it worked even though Sonoma went down.
- (5) Karen estimated that the primary news source for the Mendocino Fires at this time was on Facebook.

D. Other discussions

- (1) Maryanne Petrillo (West Co CEO) is collaborating with KZYX on their Mendocino Works program, and would like to devote an hour's discussion on telecommunications in light of the disaster on their November 15th program. She also mentioned that they have a new office location on Church and Main Street in Ukiah, and that they can keep their office open and have public computers for use during an emergency.

IV. Broadband Alliance, Broadband Working Group Updates - not discussed

V. Rural Call Completion - Phase 2 - not discussed

- A. There are requirements from the Decision in the Rural Call Completion that need follow-up to see if they have been completed.

VI. Legislation - not discussed

VII. Access Sonoma Broadband/Magellan Update - Mike Nicholls

- A. Mike and Calvin provided an update for activities in Sonoma County. They have hired The Magellan Group to develop a Strategic Broadband Plan for Sonoma county, and that process is well underway.

- B. An Advisory Committee was established, and recently focus group meetings were conducted to get input from various groups (agriculture, residents, health care, education, etc) on their broadband needs. Pre-fire, this was the method to determine priorities/primary need and the consensus was that the priority for services was west county. However, the fires changed that perspective. Post-fire, there is more focus on urban areas to address recovery in the Strategic Plan. The Magellan Advisors will also analyze data for public safety upgrade priorities based on Sonoma's survey responses and re-structure the Strategic Plan.
- C. Cal shared the shocking statistics from the Foothills Homeowners Association that they were working with. They had collected info in order to apply for a CASF broadband infrastructure grant. Of the 450 houses in the community, only 9 are still standing. There are similar statistics from the Shiloh HOA. They are ready to rebuild and but they have not yet had responses from the telcos on their rebuilding plans

VIII. Other updates - not discussed in any detail

- A. Caltrans reversed decision on conduit installation in the Willits Main Street project because the city didn't have a "comprehensive fiber optic plan." Assemblyman Wood's field rep Ruth Valenzuela expressed disappointment that this was not in the spirit of AB 1564 and she would see what she could do (those are my words, because I can't quite remember her words from the meeting.)

IX. Future Agenda items and Final Comments -

- A. Someone mentioned that we didn't discuss whether we should request a hearing about the outages from the California Public Utilities Commission. Mike thought that once we gather the data, that it would be beneficial to have them come back for a hearing.

X. Next meeting: TBD