CPUC Commissioner Catherine J.K. Sandoval Visits Ukiah for Tour and Public Participation Hearing

By Trish Steel

The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) held their first-ever Public Participation Hearing in Ukiah on Friday July 15. The Board of Supervisors chambers was filled with government and public safety officials and residents, and we sent a strong message to the Commission that Mendocino County demands that our telecommunications networks, both legacy landline telephones and newer IP networks, be reliable and dependable. Commissioner Catherine Sandoval listened carefully to every speaker, often asking clarifying questions

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Telecommunications experts in Marin County are celebrating a milestone achievement in broadband service: The first state grant for a fiber-to-the-home broadband network in Marin. The residents of Nicasio, an unincorporated rural village in west-central Marin that has a frustrating history with web connections, will be the beneficiaries and should be eligible to register for the service by the end of 2017.

On July 14, the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) awarded a $1.491 million grant to Inyo Networks, Inc., of Vallejo, which will develop a fiber optic network in conjunction with the Nicasio Landowners Association. Inyo and the association plan to raise an additional $994,000 for a total network construction cost of $2,485,130. There will be no up-front installation costs for future service recipients, but internet connections for the new Nicasio Gigabit Network are expected to cost $89 per month, according to the CPUC.

“This is the important first step in bringing true digital equity to rural West Marin,” said Steve Kinsey, the County’s District 4 Supervisor representing West Marin. “We have a plan to aggressively move ahead to find financing and continued local support for other broadband underserved and unserved communities along the coast. With Nicasio now underway, we can move ahead.”

Supervisor Kinsey is Marin County’s member of the NBNCBC Oversight Committee. He championed the entrance of Marin into the CPUC regional broadband planning effort, and the subsequent formation of NBNCBC.

Nicasio, primarily a farming and ranching community, is about 15 miles northwest of downtown San Rafael and has about 250 residences spread out over a wide area. Nicasio School, the Nicasio Fire Department, a church, a Druids hall and other small businesses will have opportunities to benefit from the new broadband service as well. Nicasio is largely unserved by broadband providers, and the ad hoc Marin Broadband Task Force recognized that there was little prospect that existing carriers will bring competitive, high-speed broadband to Nicasio for the foreseeable future. In 2013, task force consultant and noted network expert Peter Pratt recommended to Kinsey that the County join the CPUC’s broadband planning program to better position West Marin communities for state funding.

The landowners have worked with Inyo since May 2015 on the planning and development of the CPUC grant application, filed in November 2015. The two parties were brought together and supported in the effort by the task force, which includes representatives from the Marin County Administrator’s Office, the Marin County Department of Information Services and Technology, Supervisor Kinsey’s office, and other countywide agencies. The task force specializes in public funding programs for rural areas.
Nicasio (continued)

The CPUC authorized Marin to join the regional broadband consortium with Mendocino, Napa, and Sonoma counties in July 2014. Before then, the task force registered seven West Marin communities – Bolinas, Dillon Beach, Inverness, Nicasio, Point Reyes Station, Muir Beach, and Stinson Beach – for priority funding by the state for broadband investment. Now that the CPUC’s first Marin grant is issued, the County is lobbying for continuation of the program to support the remaining West Marin communities standing in line for state network subsidies.

Brent Ainsworth is the Public Information Officer of Marin County.
While we celebrated the anniversary in February, a number of projects have helped us keep the momentum going and help propel us into the next 100 years.

Our library migrated from one online catalog to another on March 9. This was a huge undertaking and was the culmination of many years' work but the benefits will be just as long lasting, if not longer. Easier searching for patrons and staff, more local results and fine tuning and the ability to work directly with a vendor to further enhance the product are three very notable features.

On the heels of that, we reopened our Calistoga Branch Library after a 6 month remodel. Another multi-year project, this $1 million effort restores a library originally built in the early 1900s. Besides a spacious new interior that removes multiple alcoves, stage and other functional impediments, it brings new public access computers, 1gbps internet speeds and a whole host of additional amenities to the community.

We’re also just launching a remodel of our downtown Napa Library – bidding began in July. This 9 month project will completely refresh our children’s area plus modernize our circulation functions with automated materials handling (AMH) in both our front and rear book drops, help our Friends of the Library by building out our garage area to become a formal workspace for them and finally remodel of our administrative area to increase productivity through new workspaces and an additional meeting room. When this project is completed, all Napa County Libraries will be new or completely transformed in the last 7 years.

Two other projects on the near horizon are a DVD dispenser that will be available 24/7 from the exterior of our Napa Library and Link+, a resource sharing service in partnership with 50 other libraries in the Bay Area and Nevada. Both are expected to launch in late summer.

Public Libraries consistently among the most well respected institutions in America and the Napa County Library is always seeking out ways to improve and adapt to our community’s needs.
Thanks to generous donations, a selected group of young students are borrowing Wi-Fi hotspots from the Marin City branch of the Marin County Free Library (MCFL) so they can receive free Internet access.

The MCFL was a thankful recipient of a grant from the Bank of Marin and an anonymous private donor to start the new Wi-Fi program. The hotspots give the students Internet access anywhere where they can receive cellular reception.

“Many people take Internet access for granted, but there are lots of inhabitants of Marin City for whom that is not the norm,” said MCFL Director Sara Jones. “This will allow students to combat the summer slide and take advantage of educational opportunities we offer at the library.”

The Marin City Library staff members set up the mobile hotspots and tested the devices with the assistance of the WebStars, local kids who work at the library to gain technology skills. In coordination with nearby Bayside Martin Luther King Jr. Academy, library staffers started offering the hotspots to a dozen students who lacked Internet access at home. Many of them also do not have computers at home and are using notebook laptops loaned by the library branch.

The hotspot devices are on extended loan to the initial group of students through the summer and the first three months of the school year. The mobile hotspots will be offered on a rotating basis for the life of the one-year grant.

“This is a pilot program and only certain kids qualify to take part in it,” said Etienne Douglas, a library employee who runs the WebStars program. “The principal identified kids who were in a certain academic range, didn’t have Internet at home and had a library card with no fines on it.”

All summer, MCFL offers a summer learning program called “Read for the Win” and promotes Marin City Reads, a community effort to encourage literacy.

Making the Wi-Fi devices available to students is one way the library can connect the community with knowledge.

“That’s a major part of the MCFL mission,” Jones said. “We’re constantly striving to create connections for the community to explore, imagine and innovate, and that includes enhancing mobile and digital literacy. Those are critical skills for success in the 21st century.”

“Commitment to our communities, and in particular to the children in those communities, is one of our key guiding principles,” said Russell A. Colombo, President and CEO of Bank of Marin. “We are proud to support the work of the Marin County Free Library as it strives to give young people equal access to the online tools they need to learn and succeed.”
Sonoma County’s Access Broadband group has been active in meeting with WISP’s, ILAC’s and CLAC’s over the past several months. Specific areas of interest revolved around the acceptance of CAFII funding, specific fiber assets and their location, routes and capacity. We were also able to define whether incumbent wireline companies had short term interest in extending plant into our priority areas. Regrettably, the incumbent companies had no interest in the short term to extend coverage into our defined priority areas.

Cities within Sonoma County along the SMART alignment are actively determining how best to utilize the fiber strands SMART/Sonic are providing at no charge. Cities at the present time include San Rafael and Novato in Marin County; and Petaluma, Cotati, Rohnert Park and Santa Rosa in Sonoma County. Each county will also have dedicated strands of fiber in addition to fiber dedicated to the cities. The County of Marin has already convened an inclusive meeting with cities, the county and Sonic. Sonoma cities and the county will follow in the near future and build on the discussions initiated by Marin.

ASB Co-Chair Nicholls has participated in the Assembly Select Committee on Broadband hearings, sponsored by Assembly Wood. Frequent trips have also been made to the Capitol in order to testify in other Assembly and Senate legislative hearings. Trips also included specific meetings with Assembly members and/or staff members in Stone, Wood, Levine, and Dodd’s offices. Co-Chair Sharpe has energetically communicated with our County lobbyist’s at the State and Federal level, carefully shepherding the county’s position on various pieces of legislation working its way through the process.

ASB Committee members continuously are on the lookout for obvious wireline issues, are taking photos and submitting same to incumbent companies for corrective action. Should corrective action not be taken within a reasonable time by the incumbent, the photos are forwarded to CPUC for their action (see photos).

A Rural Call Completion/Dial Tone Access Public Participation hearing was recently held by CPUC in Ukiah; three Sonoma County residents in the Frontier service area participated in the hearing, providing testimony regarding their frequent loss of dial tone and inability to dial 911 in the event of emergency. Their testimony has provided for a collaborative working relationship with Frontier’s Management team who dispatched crews through a recent weekend to rectify plant issues within the CO and with remote terminals. Our goal, of course, will continue to lobby for fiber connecting remotes to the CO, thereby allowing for expansion of ASDL service to our more remote areas.

The management team at NBNCBC has been outstanding to work with and has allowed for each of the four counties to advance their work plan to achieve deliverables once thought extremely challenging. Sonoma County and the Sonoma County Water Agency has committed limited funding to allow for our work to continue as CPUC Consortium funding expired on June 30th. Hopefully our consortium application for an additional two year funding will allow for completion of our overarching goals.
Examples of AT&T’s cabling issue between Monte Rio and Jenner. A black garbage bag has been placed over splice box to “protect” from water intrusion, cabling is in disrepair. Once submitted to ATT a crew was dispatched the next day and the cabling has been repaired per photos below. (note fiber tags on new cable)

Photo taken on July 27th, 2016 by Mike Nicholls
A MIDDLE MILE FIBER-BASED BACKBONE IS NEEDED:
BAY AREA TO THE OREGON BORDER

As part of its efforts these past two years NBNCBC identified a major need for a fiber-based middle mile infrastructure along the Route 101 Corridor from the Bay Area to the Oregon and from Novato (Marin County) to Suisun City along the Route 37 corridor to:

1) facilitate economic development in the region;
2) create a more competitive and cost-effective environment for broadband services to this region; and, 3) to put into place a comprehensive capability that would provide the resiliency and redundancy currently lacking.

NBNCBC developed a high-level conceptual design that consisted of five segments: Segment #1-200 Paul Street in San Francisco to San Rafael; Segment #2-San Rafael to Santa Rosa; Segment #3-Novato to Suisun City on Route 80; Segment #4-Santa Rosa to Route 36 in Humboldt County; and, Segment #5-Route 36 to the Oregon Border.

NBNCBC recently had a consultant complete a feasibility analysis with a very preliminary design and “budget” cost estimate to deploy a fiber-based middle mile infrastructure on two segments—Segment #4- the Route 101 corridor between Santa Rosa in Sonoma County and the Route 36 intersection in Humboldt; and Segment #3 along Route 37 corridor between Novato in Marin County through Napa County to Suisun City on Route 80. Segment #4 will not only serve as the regional backbone but it will be an integral part of the Mendocino and Sonoma countywide backbone plans. Likewise, Segment #3 will be a vital link for Napa County both east and west.

The planning consultant estimated a rough cost of $68 million to deploy these two segments--$55 million for Segment #4 and $13 million for Segment #3. The consultant’s summary report is posted on the web site. (http://www.mendocinobroadband.org/wp-content/uploads/Exhibit-1-Ray-Anderson-Report.pdf)

We have been asked several times over the past year “Why is this new middle mile backbone needed?” As best as we can determine, AT&T is the only carrier with fiber installed along the Route 101 Corridor, creating a monopoly for backhaul transport available to other local providers. Furthermore, AT&T will only sell services on its fiber, not enter into Indefeasible Rights of Use (IRUs) whereby other carriers could light their own fiber to compete for the backhaul business.

To date, we have seen no evidence that any provider is willing to step up to meet this need. So, as part of our Action Plan for Years 3 and 4, we hope to have find a vehicle to complete the detailed engineering and costing and to find an entity to take on the project.
On 7/13/16 Frontier executives left their offices in Redding and Sacramento to visit and talk with the folks in Rural Mendocino County. Gary Tavis, General Manager for No. California and Terri Jentz, Frontier Community Engagement/Tribal liaison wanted to see, meet and get to know the communities/tribes in northern Mendocino which were formerly Verizon territories, and are now served by Frontier. This includes Covelo, Laytonville, Branscomb, and Leggett and surrounding areas. We had one day and a lot to see, so I planned a full day with them which would I hoped would give them a better understanding of the county and the challenges we face.

We started off meeting at the Sherwood Tribal Office in Willits, for a “meet and greet” with the new Tribal Chairman. Although the Tribal office is in AT&T territory, the tribe has reservation land out Sherwood Road which is in the Frontier territory. We arranged to meet tribal staff to show us around the Sherwood Rancheria later that morning. We proceeded to drive out the Sherwood Road, past Brooktrails to the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Gate communities, and met with a local broadband advocate Brian Corzilius who showed us around. Brian is a wealth of information, and we had good discussions of telecom challenges in that area, and he was able to show us troubling facility issues as well. We then met Rocky James from the Sherwood Tribe, who gave a tour of the tribal properties and the challenges they face, including lack of electricity and the fact that most (maybe none?) of the houses are even connected to the network. The tribe could potentially build more housing in this area, and so this information was very good for Frontier to know.

To my great relief we didn't get lost on the dirt roads west of Laytonville, and we even made our next appointment on time. Gary took the rough roads and dirt in good humor as well (“It’s okay…this is my wife’s car…) They wanted a “feel” for these communities, so I thought what better way than to introduce them to our unique and world-famous Camp Winnarainbow and the Black Oak Ranch, where several large music events are held during the festival season. In addition, I knew that this area desperately needs broadband, and is a potential staging area in the event of large wildfires as well. Terry stated that this was the highlight of her trip, and loved seeing all the kids learning circus skills such as trapeze, stilt-walking and juggling. I was happy to see this part of the (continued on next page)
Frontier Tour (continued from page 7)

trip end well, because it got off to a bit of a rough start for the Frontier folks, who upon meeting the Camp Director were initially confronted with understandable pent-up frustration at the lack of working phones and customer service issues for 3 weeks, and the extreme difficulty that situation posed in trying to run a camp and for public safety. Gary and Terry were apologetic and promised to look into the situation, and when Gary handed out his business card I could tell it was greatly appreciated by the camp director.

We next had a quick bite to eat in Laytonville and then proceeded to meet the Cahto Tribal Administrator at the Laytonville Rancheria for a good visit and discussion of their needs. We then had a drive past the Frontier Central Office in Laytonville (which still had a Version sign on it) as we headed south towards highway 162 and east towards the remote community of Covelo. As we enjoyed the beautiful scenic views of the river on the drive, I told Gary to also watch for rocks on this road, as they regularly create a very dangerous hazard for drivers.

I had arranged for Jim Russ to meet us at the monument overlooking Covelo for a short history of the valley. Jim is the Tribal Chairman of the Round Valley Tribes and also the ED of the Round Valley Health Center. This overlook provides a beautiful view of the valley, and the monument honors the native peoples who were there originally and those who were forced to relocate there from other areas. The day was quite hot by now, and so next stop at the Health Center provided welcome cooling. We met staff, saw their telehealth capabilities, and discussed their extensive broadband and phone issues, which Frontier will be looking into. We managed to catch the Round Valley School District Superintendent Mike Gorman just as the workday was ending, and again met with staff and discussed their phone/internet needs and issues.

I believe this full day of meeting with local agencies provided an eye-opening look at life in rural Mendocino County for Gary and Terri. They got a feel for our communities, including the real geographic isolation that places like Covelo must contend with and why reliable telecommunications are so very important. They heard first-hand the frustration people feel when their phones don’t work, and they handled that frustration well and went on to make good connections with folks. They were able to see the state of their facilities in our county and know that we need improvements. Our communities are now a real place for them, much more than just a name on a map. I am extremely appreciative of Frontier representatives for the successful tour, and look forward to working with Frontier as a partner in improving service in Mendocino County.
Broadband Alliance hosts Computers For Classrooms Presentation

The Alliance hosted a presentation by Computers For Classrooms, a Chico organization to provide computers to people who otherwise could not afford them, on May 20th at the Community Foundation in Ukiah. Alliance Chair Trish Steel noted that “Computers have become a requirement for nearly all to function in today's society, and we don't want anyone not to have a computer because they can't afford it.”

Available computers include laptop and desktop models that have been upgraded to include Windows 7 Pro, Microsoft Office 2010, antivirus and anti-malware programs and a one-year warranty.

Although its title is “Computers for Classrooms, the group reaches out to more than students and schools. Seniors over 65, those on Social Security disability, EBT food stamp and MediCal recipients, veterans, fire victims and more can qualify.

Computers for Classrooms is a nonprofit organization that began in 1991 as a volunteer program to refurbish donated computers for schools. It has since expanded to provide computers for a variety of people and organizations that qualify.

Attendees at the May 20th Computers for Classrooms presentation, including presenter Ozzie Serrano (blue), Founder Pat Furr, (standing far left) seniors, and a local Willits high school class.
and making sure that the information was recorded correctly for follow-up.

The Hearing opened with comments by Senator Mike McGuire and Assemblymember Jim Wood, and then CPUC Commissioner Catherine J.K. Sandoval spoke eloquently as to the background and reason for the proceeding. She thanked the county for the warm welcome, and for organizing a tour before the hearing to the site of the 2014 fiber break on the Comptche-Ukiah Road that led to large parts of the county losing telecommunication service for two days. She also noted that they observed conditions of the repaired line that were not in compliance with the commission General Order 95 which requires the lines to be in kept in good working order. She noted that under California law, Section 451 of PUC Code, the utilities have “an obligation to provide safe and reliable service, at just and reasonable rates with adequate facilities.” She stated that they are here to listen and learn from us, and to create a record that their team can consider. She stressed the importance of getting out of their office in San Francisco to understand the conditions throughout the State, and that they have been inspired to do so by hearing stories about the conditions in Mendocino County and people losing dial tone and the ability to access 911.

The public comment portion opened with county “heavy-hitters”, such as Fifth District Supervisor Dan Hamburg, Sheriff Tom Allman and public safety officials providing strong testimony for the need for reliable networks. Chair of the Mendocino Fire Chiefs Association Communications Committee, Randy MacDonald, ended his testimony by asking several questions, including: “Is the policy of the state of California that rural lives are not as important as urban or suburban lives? How and when will state agencies ensure that telecommunications companies provide geographical equity in essential services?” Sheriff Allman opened his testimony thanking the commissioner for being here, and stated, “We’re glad that we’re not forgotten as a part of California …sometimes rural counties often feel like the step-child where resources are expended.”

A common theme in much of the testimony was that reliable communications are essential, as otherwise rural lives are put at risk. Another speaker reminded the commission that “Life-alerts do not work over VoIP and need a copper line…and that IP phones do not work in a power outage while right outside the house is a copper line that would.” Mendocino Coast District Hospital IT Director, Jeff Fox, testified that even though going to a cloud-based system for their Electronic Medical Records and other medical tools could save them probably over a million dollars, they are unwilling do so due to the lack of network reliability that poses an unacceptable life-safety risk should they not be able to access those medical records and tools. Instead, they host and use local servers at a much higher cost than the cloud-based services. Fox concluded his testimony by saying that although the “vandals damaged the infrastructure; the outage itself was caused by AT&T because of their lack of willingness to get rid of their single points of failure.”
A representative for the Luce Avenue Residents Alliance (Ukiah) spoke about the problems with their telephone and that they feel the AT&T advertising is false and should be addressed, along with the need for redundant and reliable networks. She told of how when her husband needed emergency care, she didn’t even bother with trying to use the phone (“I knew it would be out”) but instead put him in the car to drive to the hospital. The last speaker of the hearing told how his family was unable to get landline service for his home, although by law the telephone companies are required to provide this service.

Every speaker was articulate and shared their story and concerns; I encourage everyone to listen to the testimony for an understanding of what was conveyed to the commission. You can find a link to the hearing video on the Broadband Alliance website, along with a pdf with the list of speakers and the time, so that you can scroll through to a specific speaker if you wish. http://www.mendocinobroadband.org/topics/special-sessions/

If you were not able to attend this hearing, or didn’t know about it, please note that this proceeding is STILL OPEN, which means that written comments are still being accepted and can be submitted as part of the record. If you have a story to tell about your phone not being reliable or losing dial tone, then I encourage you to submit written comments. Include the Reference Proceeding Number I.14-05-012 and send to:

Public Advisors Office
California Public Utilities Commission
505 Van Ness Ave
San Francisco, CA 94102

Thanks again to everyone who helped plan and organize this hearing.

“Broadband is the great infrastructure challenge of the early 21st century.”

-From the FCC National Broadband Plan, February 2011
While NBNCBC has made significant progress in the first two years of its existence, much remains to be accomplished. To that end the four counties that form NBNCBC have each committed human and financial resources complemented by volunteers to continue the work of the consortium. NBNCBC has developed an overall Action Plan for Years 3 and 4 and has submitted a grant application for $250,000 ($125,000 per year) to the California Advanced Service Fund (CASF) Regional Consortia Planning Program. We are awaiting a decision by the CPUC.

For the next two years, NBNCBC’s Action Plan will involve four foci. The first focus will involve each county team working with communities and providers to facilitate the development and implementation of “last mile” projects. The second focus will involve each county team, working with all the stakeholders, facilitating the development, adoption and launching of a countywide backbone plan. The third focus will involve the NBNCBC team, working with all the stakeholders, facilitating the development, adoption and launching of a the Route 101 Corridor Middle-Mile Infrastructure linking the countywide backbones together to enhance the growth and economic development in this part of California. The fourth focus will be on having the four counties, individually and collectively, take ownership for future policy and development of broadband for this region of California.

Within the NBNCBC Action Plan each county has developed its own annual work plans that focus on county specific goals, within the overall NBNCBC goals, and executes on its own unique set of activities and tasks to achieve these county goals. In addition, NBNCBC, as a consortium, will execute specific annual work plans that concentrate on specific activities and tasks that cut across all four counties. The NBNCBC Action Plan and the county annual work plans will be posted on the web site (Trish- PLEASE ADD THE SITE) once the CPUC makes its decision about our grant application.

Here is a brief synopsis of the activities in the various annual work plans that will involve the use of CASF grant funds.

MARIN
The Marin annual work plan activities involving CASF grant funds include:

- Aggregating the demand for broadband amongst a wide range of entities in the county and organize collaborative efforts/projects
- Working with Community Anchor Institutions (CAIs) on middle mile network needs including developing cost estimates for build projects and pursuing funding
- Facilitating and Supporting CASF Infrastructure grants for projects in remaining priority areas in West Marin.
**Upcoming Events**

**2016 NBNCBC Oversight Committee Meeting**

Thursday **October 13, 2016** @ 1:30 PM – In-Person Santa Rosa

Contact the county supervisor for specific location information:

**Marin:** Supervisor Steve Kinsey, skinsey@marincounty.org (415) 473-7331

**Mendocino:** Supervisor Dan Hamburg, hamburgd@co.mendocino.ca.us, (707) 463-4221

**Napa:** Supervisor Diane Dillon, Diane.DILLON@countyofnapa.org (707) 944-8280,

**Sonoma:** Supervisor Efren Carillo, ecarrillo@sonoma-county.org, (707) 565-2241

**Broadband Alliance of Mendocino County Public Outreach Meetings**

Please check the website for details
www.mendocinobroadband.org

**Access Sonoma Broadband Meetings**

Please check the website for details
http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/EDB/Access-Sonoma-Broadband/

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**MENDOCINO**

The Mendocino annual work plans activities involving CASF grant funds include:

- Developing Last Mile projects by working with target communities and local “last mile” providers
- Developing a Mendocino County Broadband Plan that includes goals, strategies, infrastructure design and cost estimates. Involves providers and stakeholders in this process
- Fostering the implementation of adoption and training plans and programs by community groups

**NAPA**

The Napa annual work plans activities involving CASF grant funds include:

- Conducting Ground Truth Testing-Fixed and Wireless—in the nine (9) priority communities and work with the providers to verify results and determine willingness to work with the communities
- Selecting and working with unserved/underserved communities and willing providers to conduct engineering and cost estimates for eligible projects
- Pursuing funding to launch projects

**SONOMA**

The Sonoma annual work plans activities involving CASF grant funds include:

- Developing the Sonoma Countywide Broadband strategic Plan by engaging a professional broadband planning consultant and involving the stakeholders across the county

**NBNCBC**

The NBNCBC annual work plans activities involving CASF grant funds include:

- Manage the relationships with CASF including reporting and financial administration of the CASF grant
- Provide the county teams support in data collection, mapping and data analysis

These activities do not reflect all the activities in the annual work plans. NBNCBC and county work plans encompass other activities covered by county and volunteer resources. View the work plans on the web site.