

# Public Utility District No. 1 of Pend Oreille County

## Fiber to the Premise Project



*The Next Generation of  
Light and Power*

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# ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

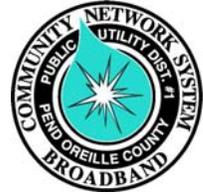
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December 2010

*(printed Jan. 4, 2011)*

Prepared for:  
National Telecommunications and Information Administration  
Broadband Technologies Opportunities Program



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**PACE Engineers, Inc.**



**CHR Solutions**



**Tierra Right-of-Way Services**

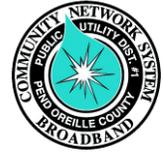
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# ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

# FIBER TO THE PREMISE PROJECT



Public Utility District No. 1 of Pend Oreille County, Washington

November 2010

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary .....	1
<b>1. Purpose and Need .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2. Proposed Action .....</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 Project Description .....	7
2.2 Construction Techniques .....	11
2.2.1 Aerial Construction .....	11
2.2.2 Underground Construction .....	13
2.2.3 Service Drops .....	13
2.2.4 Service Area Hubs .....	14
2.3 Project Alternatives .....	14
2.3.1 Preferred Alternative .....	15
2.3.2 No Action Alternative .....	15
2.3.3 Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Further Discussion .....	15
3.1 Noise .....	17
3.2 Air Quality .....	17
3.3 Geology and Soils .....	18
3.4 Water Resources .....	20
3.4.1 Surface Water Resources .....	20
3.4.2 Groundwater Resources .....	28
3.4.3 Coastal Zones .....	28
3.4.4 Floodplains .....	28
3.4.5 Wild and Scenic Rivers .....	28
3.5 Biological Resources .....	28
3.5.1 Wildlife and Plant life .....	28
3.5.2 Ecoregions .....	30
3.6 Historic and Cultural Resources .....	31
3.6.1 Kalispel Tribe of Indians .....	32
3.7 Aesthetic and Visual Resources .....	32
3.8 Land Use .....	33
3.9 Infrastructure .....	34
3.10 Socioeconomic Resources .....	34
3.11 Human Health and Safety .....	36
3.12 Climate, Greenhouse Gases, and Global Warming .....	37
<b>4. Environmental Consequences .....</b>	<b>39</b>
4.1 Noise .....	39
4.2 Air Quality .....	39



4.3	<b>Geology and Soils</b> .....	40
4.4	<b>Water Resources</b> .....	40
4.4.1	Surface Water Resources .....	41
4.4.2	Groundwater Resources .....	44
4.4.3	Coastal Zone .....	44
4.4.4	Floodplains .....	44
4.4.5	Wild and Scenic Rivers .....	45
4.5	<b>Biological Resources</b> .....	45
4.5.1	Wildlife and Plant life .....	46
4.5.2	Threatened and Endangered Species .....	46
4.5.3	Ecoregions .....	47
4.6	<b>Historic and Cultural Resources</b> .....	50
4.6.1	Kalispel Tribe of Indians .....	53
4.7	<b>Aesthetic and Visual Resources</b> .....	53
4.8	<b>Land Use</b> .....	54
4.9	<b>Infrastructure</b> .....	54
4.10	<b>Socioeconomic Resources</b> .....	54
4.11	<b>Human Health and Safety</b> .....	55
4.12	<b>Climate, Greenhouse Gases, and Global Warming</b> .....	57
4.13	<b>Cumulative Summary of Impacts</b> .....	57
5.	<b>Permits and Regulatory Requirements</b> .....	59
6.	<b>List of Preparers</b> .....	61
7.	<b>References</b> .....	63



## LIST OF TABLES

2-1	Proposed Cable Installation Type .....	8
3-1	Soils Within 200 feet of Cable Routing .....	19
3-2	Water Bodies Within 200 feet of Fiber to the Premise Project Fiber Lines .....	20
3-3	Endangered Wildlife and Plant Life .....	29
3-4	Historic and Cultural Sites.....	31
3-5	Land Use .....	33
3-6	Socioeconomic Resources .....	35
3-7	Hazardous Waste Sites .....	36
4-1	Best Management Practices (BMPs for Cable Installation .....	42
4-2	Summary of Effects on Endangered and Threatened Species.....	48
4-3	Potentially Impacted Archaeological Sites, Historic Properties, and Cemeteries .....	51
5-1	Summary of Federal, State, and Local Known Permits .....	54
7-1	Summary of References .....	59

## LIST OF FIGURES

2-1	Project Overview Map .....	9
2-2	Aerial Cable .....	11
2-3	Plowing Method of Installation .....	13
2-4	Directional Bore Machine .....	13
2-5	Service Area Hub.....	14
3-1	Looking North at Herbs Drive.....	24
3-2	Looking East from Westshore Drive.....	24
3-3	Looking East from Westshore Drive.....	25
3-4	Indian Creek Fish Passage Culvert .....	25
3-5	Wetlands near Indian Creek and Pend Oreille River confluence .....	26
3-6	Diamond Lake.....	27
3-7	Bull Trout .....	30
3-8	Canadian Rocky Mountains Ecoregion .....	30
3-9	Typical Roadway with Aerial Power Lines .....	34

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## ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

# FIBER TO THE PREMISE PROJECT

Public Utility District No. 1 of Pend Oreille County, Washington

November 2010

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Environmental Assessment (EA) provides an evaluation of environmental, cultural and socio-economic resources for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) as specifically outlined in the *Environmental Assessment Guidance for BTOP Award Recipients Version 1.4* (August, 2010) produced by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) for the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP). This document has been authorized and developed for BTOP Grant #NT10BIX5570059 recipient the Public Utility District No. 1 of Pend Oreille County, Washington (District) by a team of consultants that include PACE Engineers, Inc., CHR Solutions, Inc., and Tierra Right of Way Services, Ltd.

The District is a consumer-owned and locally controlled municipality that brings electric, water, and wholesale broadband telecommunications services to the residents and businesses of Pend Oreille County, including those residents and businesses defined in the Proposed Funded Service Area (PFSA) of Pend Oreille County, Washington. The Fiber to the Premise Project will expand upon an existing open access network and will bring affordable, high-speed broadband services for county residents and critical healthcare, education, employment, and government centers. It will supplement the District's existing fiber systems, add desired redundancy to the District's existing open access high-speed network, and serve primarily rural communities that are currently un-served or underserved. The project includes an estimated 556 miles of last-mile fiber optic broadband service, slightly greater than the length listed in the BTOP Grant Application #1854 submitted by the District due to approximations of line lengths. In accordance with the stated objectives associated with the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and specifically the BTOP grant program, the project will improve access to education and healthcare services, and boost economic development for communities held back by limited or no access to broadband. The investments made in broadband infrastructure will:

- Provide job training to the unemployed or under-employed,
- Help schools access the materials they need to educate students,
- Allow rural doctors to connect to more specialized medical centers, and
- Give small businesses the opportunity to offer their services to national and international markets.

This EA details the overall project development, alternatives and implementation and mitigation strategies anticipated to avoid impacts associated with construction of the FTTP network. Accompanying the analysis performed in this EA, is a set of grid maps at the back of this document that display various environmental resources located near the fiber network to be constructed. This information includes critical habitat areas, surface water features, wetlands and delineation of park and forest boundaries as well as protected wildlife areas. This information was gathered primarily from the most currently published Geographical Information Services (GIS) data available from national, state, and county sources. Section 7 of this EA puts forth a detailed listing of data sources used. In addition, field reconnaissance and visual surveys were conducted to verify published data and help delineate the alignment of the fiber network.

Because it is federally funded, this project is considered an undertaking under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) as defined in 36 CFR Part 800. Compliance with the Section 106 process is an important element of the environmental assessment process to ensure that no cultural resources are adversely impacted during the course of this project. In accordance with direction from NTIA (as the lead agency) and as part of the overall EA process, a comprehensive records check of known archaeological and historic cultural properties within the project area has been accomplished. An overview of the potential archaeological, cultural and historic resources associated with each route is presented in Section 3. A summary of the procedures to be followed in the event that such resources are confirmed and/or encountered in the field is provided for in Section 4 of this Environmental Assessment Documentation of the SHPO concurrence with the Finding of No Adverse Effect is provided in Appendix B pertaining to the Section 106 compliance.

This Environmental Assessment provides a summary of the existing environment, anticipated potential impacts, avoidance and mitigation measures to be employed during project design and construction. Several alternatives were considered but as discussed in Section 2, were not pursued because they either did not meet the project objectives or could not do so in the most environmentally sensitive or cost effective means available. Alternatives considered include:

- Wireless Technology;
- All Aerial Installation;
- All Underground Placement of Fiber;
- A mixture of Aerial and Underground construction; and,
- The No Action Alternative.

The Preferred Alternative was identified as a mixture of aerial and underground fiber installation in existing easements and rights of way. In accordance with NEPA requirements and BTOP guidance documents, this assessment provides a complete evaluation of the Preferred Alternative and the No Action Alternative. Adverse impacts are improbable with the Preferred Alternative.



Avoidance and mitigation strategies have been identified to allow for a determination of No Effect, as demonstrated and confirmed in Section 4. In defining the Preferred Alternative, the District has completed a thorough process of fiber network routing. Aerial fiber installations represent approximately 70% of the total project and the cable will be installed by attaching it to existing power poles. Underground installations make up the remaining 30% of the project and that cable will be installed within existing rights of way/easement of the power cable. All installed facilities will be placed in existing (primarily) or procured (rarely) easements. While the project generally follows the configuration of the existing power system, modifications will be made to ensure that construction activities will avoid contact with environmentally sensitive areas or other areas of concern. Development of this EA required coordination and/or consultation with multiple agencies to ensure that all aspects of regulatory compliance and best management practices have been identified and considered. A summary of the communications plan, including requisite consultations with various federal, state and local agencies, together with all relevant communication records, is provided in Appendix A. Section 5 provides an overview and listing of permits required for the project and Section 7 contains a list of agency contacts and reference data and materials used.

The District recognizes that additional best management practices and requirements may be identified in the permitting process. This EA, however, confirms that this FTTP Project, as put forth in the BTOP Grant for the project and described herein, can be completed in accordance with all regulatory requirements by using minimally invasive construction techniques and following existing utility corridors. The District will satisfy appropriate mitigation measures by following all relevant permitting and regulatory requirements. The project is in compliance with the National Environmental Protection Act and the National Historic and Preservation Act and will result in no additional Section 7 Consultations associated with federally listed species. No long term adverse impacts are associated with any of the other elements analyzed in this EA.

In summary, the FTTP Project will meet the overall objective of the BTOP program administered by the NTIA. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) provided NTIA and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Utilities Service (RUS) with funding to expand access to broadband services in the United States. Those funds were allocated to support the deployment of broadband infrastructure, enhance and expand public computer centers, encourage sustainable adoption of broadband service, and develop and maintain a nationwide public map of broadband service capability and availability. As a grant recipient, and through implementation of the project outlined herein, the District meets the stated objectives of the ARRA and the BTOP grant program for rural Washington State.