



Pend Oreille County Public Utility District

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An Operations Update from Pend Oreille PUD Workforce re-entry & additional WiFi hotspot installs

Newport, WA – Public Utility District No. 1 of Pend Oreille County (PUD) is slowly bringing field crews, operations personnel, and other staff members back to work. The novel coronavirus (or COVID-19) has required the PUD to operate with a significantly smaller workforce, a restricted supply chain, and limited customer support services since March 18, 2020. These measures were implemented to protect the health and safety of employees and customers, while also ensuring critical services are properly maintained throughout the health emergency. To date, the efforts have helped to slow the spread of the deadly virus according to federal, state, and local health professionals.

Until now, virtually all of the PUDs 80+ employees have been teleworking or working staggered shifts to promote appropriate social distancing and keep employees and customers healthy and safe. This week, the PUD is utilizing a modified operations plan that brings some employees back under strict social distancing guidelines and modified work practices. At this time, several employees will continue to telework to keep the number of employees in District facilities at any given time to a minimum. The PUDs common areas that are typically accessible to the public, will remain closed for the safety of everyone. The Newport drive-through window has been open utilizing reduced hours and is now fully operational Monday through Friday 8am-5pm.

“Our employees are excited to be returning to work to better serve our community and customers,” said Colin Willenbrock, the PUD’s General Manager. “There is still uncertainty ahead, but rest assured, we stand committed to preserving the health and safety of our customers, employees, contractors and communities while delivering the services you depend on. Our hearts go out to all those that have been affected by this crisis.”

The PUD has continued efforts to bring internet access to help those in the community that do not otherwise have access during this difficult time. Given that schools, restaurants, and many businesses in the area remain closed, the four (4) temporary community WiFi hotspots that were installed by the PUD in March will remain active and available to customers for the near future. Two (2) additional hotspots were installed recently in collaboration with the Washington State Broadband Office and NoaNet. Numerous hotspots have been deployed throughout the state and they are being coined “Drive-By WiFi” or “Drive-In WiFi” and are helping to bridge the digital divide. The new hotspots that are now active in our county can be accessed at the following locations under the WiFi name “HomeworkHub”:

- **Usk** at the Crossroads where Hwy 20 meets Hwy 211 – 421341 Hwy 20
- **Tiger** at the Tiger Historical Center Parking Lot - corner of Hwy 20 & Hwy 31

A special thanks from the PUD goes out to the Washington State Broadband Office for the equipment and labor to install both new locations, NoaNet for coordination of the project, as well as the labor to install the Tiger location and internet connections for both Crossroads and Tiger locations, as well as both the Kalispel Tribe and the Tiger Historical Center & Museum for allowing the use of their property for parking to access the hotspots.

The PUD hopes that these hotspots help serve community members and keep everyone connected. Visit the PUDs website for a complete listing of all currently available WiFi hotspot locations.

About Pend Oreille County Public Utility District

Pend Oreille PUD was established in 1936 and began operations in 1948. The PUD is governed by three locally elected Commissioners. A General Manager and staff operate the utility within policies set by the Board of Commissioners. The PUD has four operating systems: The electric system distributes electricity to the county, the production system produces power from the Box Canyon Hydroelectric Project, the water system consists of nine individual water distribution subdivisions, and the community network system provides wholesale broadband communication services. For more information visit: <http://popud.org>.

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