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Pend Oreille PUD and Port of Pend Oreille Collaborate to Explore Broadband Opportunities

Pend Oreille County, WA –Public Utility District No. 1 of Pend Oreille County (PUD) and the Port of Pend Oreille are partnering to evaluate potential opportunities for Federal and State grant funding aimed at improving cost-effective broadband access for county residents. This joint effort, which includes reviewing funding options from the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program, seeks to explore ways to expand affordable, reliable, high-speed internet, particularly in underserved areas.

Jim Cupples, currently working under a 2.5-year fellowship funded by the Economic Recovery Corp and previously hosted by the Port of Pend Oreille, will continue his work with the PUD. Cupples brings extensive experience in broadband policy and infrastructure to help explore these opportunities.

“Jim’s transition to the PUD supports our ongoing efforts to identify cost-effective options for expanding broadband. We appreciate the spirit of collaboration shown by Kelly Driver and the Port of Pend Oreille by providing this opportunity for Jim to work more closely with us on this important effort,” said John Janney, General Manager of Pend Oreille PUD. “Before pursuing any specific projects, we’ll conduct thorough evaluations to understand the financial and operational impacts. Jim will play a key role in seeking potential funding sources and exploring partnerships in the hopes of improving broadband access for the county’s residents without imposing any financial strain.”

The BEAD program, with Washington State allocated \$1.2 billion, is designed to extend broadband to underserved and unserved areas. Cupples will assist the PUD in evaluating these funding opportunities and collaborating with government agencies, Internet Service Providers, and local stakeholders to explore potential projects that could benefit the community.

“Jim’s experience is vital to our efforts to assess broadband opportunities and address connectivity challenges in the region,” said Kelly Driver, Executive Director of the Port of Pend Oreille. “This collaboration between the Port and the PUD reflects a shared commitment to exploring solutions that could enhance broadband access for Pend Oreille County residents.”

Cupples noted that while there are significant challenges due to the county’s landscape, there are also promising opportunities. “I’m excited to work with the PUD. With the national push for rural broadband expansion, we have a real opportunity to make a difference in Pend Oreille County,” Cupples said. “Despite the challenges posed by the county’s terrain, I’m confident that

collaboration with elected officials, staff, and other stakeholders will lead to significant improvements in internet access.”

The PUD is currently conducting a broadband survey to gather feedback from residents about their internet access needs. The survey, open until October 15, 2024, will help identify areas that could benefit from improved service. Residents are encouraged to participate by visiting the PUD’s website at popud.org.

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>.

About the Port of Pend Oreille

The Port of Pend Oreille was established by a vote of the citizens of Pend Oreille County in 1978 to own operate the Pend Oreille Valley Railroad. The Port does not collect property taxes from the citizens of the County. The Port recently was selected to be the Associate Development Organization (ADO) for Pend Oreille County and is actively pursuing business retention and business opportunities within the County. The Port is governed by three elected officials with the Executive Director and staff operating the railroad and economic development activities.

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