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British Columbia News

Connectivity investments support northern economic recovery

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Victoria - Faster, more reliable internet is coming to people in 19 northern communities as record investments in connectivity help to position B.C. for a strong recovery from the economic impacts of the pandemic.

“It’s hard to imagine running a business today without high-speed internet, and yet that’s exactly what many people in northern B.C. deal with every day. These investments will unlock new opportunities to do business, recruit talent and create jobs that support families,” said Lisa Beare, Minister of Citizens’ Services. “B.C.’s northern communities are essential to the province’s economic future. Ensuring people have the internet access they need will help them be successful whether it’s at home, work or school.”

Telus will receive up to \$3.6 million from the Connecting British Columbia program to upgrade the performance of internet access in northern communities, including Buffalo Creek, Gateway, Forest Grove, Eagle Creek, Canim Lake, Blue River, Salmon Valley, Willow River, Rolla and Westlake. The upgrades are expected to be completed by Oct. 31, 2021.

These upgrades will help business owners in northern communities take advantage of other government supports. Coupled with the B.C. government’s Launch Online Grant and the Digital Marketing Bootcamp, improved internet services will help businesses access the resources and gain the skills they need to grow their online business.

“Establishing better connectivity in northern B.C. supports our work to build an innovative, sustainable and inclusive economy for all British Columbians,” said Ravi Kahlon, Minister of Jobs, Economic Recovery and Innovation. “With enhanced connectivity, business owners in northern B.C. will have more opportunities to grow locally and expand into new markets, helping to drive economic recovery as we emerge from the pandemic together.”

Vincent Communications has completed a project enabling high-speed internet access for people in Attachie, Bear Flat, Buick, Cecil Lake, Kobes, Mile 62 ½, Montney, Pink Mountain and Wonowon. The service provider received more than \$500,000 from Connecting British Columbia for the project that also lays the groundwork for connecting more nearby communities in the future.

“As owners of a resort on Canim Lake, we are thrilled to welcome improved internet in the area. Our guests are always looking for reliable service while they are vacationing or working remotely,” said Leanne Sallenback, owner, South Point Resort. “This is definitely a step in the right direction. We will be able to offer our guests faster and more reliable internet services during their stay with us.”

As part of the StrongerBC Economic Recovery Plan, people in rural and Indigenous communities throughout the province are benefiting from record investments to improve high-speed internet and expand cellular access along provincial highways.

“As a business in a rural area, upgrading internet service in the area will not only provide opportunities for growth, but will help us recover from the impacts the pandemic has had on our company,” said Rhonda Brown, owner, Orville’s Backhoe & Septic Service. “High-speed, reliable internet will help us to not only reach out to our clients to set up appointments and bill for jobs, but help us to train employees virtually.”

In September 2020, the Province made its largest-ever contribution to the Connecting British Columbia program, with \$90 million of new funding under the StrongerBC Economic Recovery Plan.

Northern Development Initiative Trust has been the fund administrator for Connecting British Columbia since its start in 2015. Northern Development is a regionally operated economic development funding corporation for central and northern British Columbia and operates independently from government.

This announcement is part of B.C.'s \$10-billion COVID-19 response, which includes StrongerBC: BC's Economic Recovery Plan – a commitment to protect people's health and livelihoods while supporting businesses and communities.

Quotes:

Roly Russell, Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Development –

"We continue to hear from communities all over British Columbia about how high-speed internet access is vital for nurturing resilient rural communities both economically and socially. These investments are increasing accessibility to health care, they are helping unlock new levels of prosperity in rural and Indigenous communities and doing even more to help ensure everyone in B.C. has the opportunities they deserve as we bounce back from this pandemic."

Joel McKay, CEO, Northern Development Initiative Trust –

"Investments in connectivity infrastructure are one of the most effective steps we can take to drive economic growth in northern British Columbia. Reliable internet access brings the world to the doorsteps of rural and Indigenous communities. The completion of these projects will instantly unlock new business opportunities and support the growth of numerous industries."

Tony Geheran, executive vice president and chief customer officer, Telus –

"This partnership with government will deliver upon our collective commitment to bridge digital divides and ensure more Indigenous and rural communities in British Columbia have the technology they need to fully participate in the digital economy. Our PureFibre network has supported millions of British Columbians as we adapted to new ways of living through the pandemic, enabling people to work with large files at home while other family members could simultaneously be doing virtual school, virtually connecting with health-care practitioners or staying socially connected."

Scott Vincent, CEO, Vincent Communications –

"After opening an office in Fort St. John in 2015, it became apparent that reliable, rural high-speed internet service had been lacking in the area. A grant from the Connecting British Columbia program afforded us the opportunity to build infrastructure to help fill some of the service gaps in the Peace River Regional District. We plan to further invest in the region by continuing our expansion further north to enable high-speed access to even more communities."

Quick Facts:

- Vincent Communications received up to \$509,256 from the Connecting British Columbia program toward the estimated \$1.06-million cost of its northern expansion project.
- Telus will receive up to \$1.9 million from the program toward the estimated \$3.21-million cost of upgrading services for people in Blue River, Willow River, Salmon Valley, Rolla and Westlake.
- Telus will also receive up to \$1.72 million toward the estimated \$3.07-million cost of making similar upgrades for people in Buffalo Creek, Gateway, Forest Grove, Eagle Creek and Canim Lake.

Learn More:

Connectivity in B.C.: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/connectivity-in-bc>
(<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/connectivity-in-bc>)

StrongerBC: BC's Economic Recovery Plan: <https://strongerbc.gov.bc.ca/> (<https://strongerbc.gov.bc.ca/>)

Northern Development Initiative Trust: <https://www.northerndevelopment.bc.ca/funding-programs/partner-programs/connecting-british-columbia/> (<https://www.northerndevelopment.bc.ca/funding-programs/partner-programs/connecting-british-columbia/>)

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