



CENTRAL COUNCIL
tlingit and haida indian tribes of alaska
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TESTIMONY OF THE HONORABLE WILLIAM MARTIN
PRESIDENT
CENTRAL COUNCIL OF TLINGIT AND HAIDA INDIAN TRIBES OF ALASKA

BEFORE

MARLENE H. DORTCH, CHAIR
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

ON COMMISSION'S CONSULTATIVE ROLE IN THE BROADBAND PROVISIONS OF THE
RECOVERY ACT
(GN Docket No. 09-40)

APRIL 13, 2009

INTRODUCTION

Ms. Chair and Members of the Commission,

I thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony to the Commission on some ideas and experiences my Tribe has on the development of rural broadband.

My name is William Martin. I am the elected President of my Tribe, the Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, headquartered in Juneau, Alaska. We have over 27,000 tribal members, many of whom reside in isolated Native communities throughout Southeast Alaska devastated by the recession and high fuel costs.

***BRINGING HIGH-SPEED INTERNET, EDUCATION, AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO
REMOTE COMMUNITIES OF ALASKA***

Central Council Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska (CCTHITA) is a regional federally recognized Indian Tribe headquartered in Southeast Alaska. CCTHITA's mission is to enhance the economic and cultural resources of its citizens, and to promote their self-sufficiency. Most of its tribal population lives throughout 18 rural communities of Southeast Alaska. Only three communities in this

43,000 square mile territory are accessible by land; the rest are accessible only by boat or plane. CCTHITA represents nearly 27,000 tribal citizens worldwide; 14,000 of them live in Southeast Alaska (see the map below).

CCTHITA communities are experiencing some of the most severe unemployment rates in the U.S., ranging from 29% to 90% (see table). CCTHITA tribal members face high energy costs (of up to 61 cents per kilowatt hour); high school dropout rates (of up to 60%); and high costs of living. Forestry jobs have mostly disappeared in our region; commercial fishing is on the decline; and manufacturing in rural areas is not feasible due to high transportation and energy costs. Access to markets for fishing and hunting guides in rural and remote communities is limited. Native artists are forced to compete with foreign, mass-produced fake art because Native organizations have little control over art distribution channels.

| SOUTHEAST ALASKA NATIVE UNEMPLOYMENT RATES* | |
|---|--|
| RURAL SOUTHEAST ALASKA NATIVE UNEMPLOYMENT | URBAN SOUTHEAST ALASKA NATIVE UNEMPLOYMENT |
| Angoon..... 87% | Juneau.....43% (26% in '07) |
| Hoonah..... 70% | Ketchikan30% (23% in '07) |
| Hydaburg..... 90% | Sitka.....29% (25% in '07) |
| Kake..... 75% | |
| Kasaan..... 49% | |
| Klawock..... 59% | |
| Klukwan 88% | |
| Yakutat 49% | |

* Community percentages are calculated from the number of working age people in the population, 18 years or older.
 These December 31, 2008 unemployment figures are provided by the Tlingit-Haida Central Council's TANF program.

Reliable and affordable broadband access would be a powerful tool in CCTHITA's effort to enhance the lives of its tribal citizens. Broadband access would boost opportunities for tourism trade as well as connections to global markets. This is particularly true if rural Southeast Alaska residents had access to high-speed internet service and, of equal importance, to equipment, computer literacy and technical assistance necessary to take advantage of the high-speed connection. We know that things can be turned around because we have had some very successful experiences with high-speed Internet; we know, first-hand, what kind of opportunities this technology can bring to rural areas.



To help address the problem of economic stagnation in our rural areas, in 2008 Central Council began a technical assistance project to establish a series of business centers equipped with classrooms, computers, and high-speed Internet. The mission of the project was to support the development of small and emerging private business enterprises in rural low-income areas.

CCTHITA's first high-speed Internet Business Center was established in Angoon, a community of 450 residents with Native unemployment reaching 87%. The effect of ready access to broadband technology surprised us all. In the 1st year of operations, the Center offered a total of 60 trainings ranging from e-commerce to entrepreneurship to graphic design for business applications. Two hundred and twenty three individuals utilized high-speed Internet labs for job search and resume writing, online classes, research, and marketing of arts and crafts. An arts store and a community kitchen has been established. Seventeen entrepreneurs are currently participating in the startup of 9 businesses targeting local tourism market among others: a coat making company; an

ecotourism and fishing guide operator; a cab and summer tour company; a snack store; a broadband technical support service; an at-home business consultancy; a locally-produced beauty products company; and a traditional carvers workshop and sales operation. In January 2009, Inspired by the success in Angoon, we established our second Business Center in Hydaburg.

We are confident that high-speed Internet can bring significant and tangible benefits to rural economies of America. However, high-speed connection alone is not sufficient. Our experience shows that technical assistance and free access to high-speed internet, as well as equipment and training, is important if we are really serious about making an impact in rural communities. Before rural population can take advantage of the broadband technology, several impediments have to be overcome:

Initial investment into a personal computer;
Broadband internet connection fees (monthly); and,
Knowledge and skills have to be acquired to learn how to use Internet and computers for job seeking, e-commerce, education.

All of this can be accomplished with the formation of rural training centers with computer labs and professional staff. This does not necessarily require a significant investment. In our case, we used contributed, used equipment and used equipment is available at significant cost savings. Office space can be contributed by municipal and tribal governments. And broadband fees and staff can be supported in each community for as little as \$200,000 per community for 2 years.

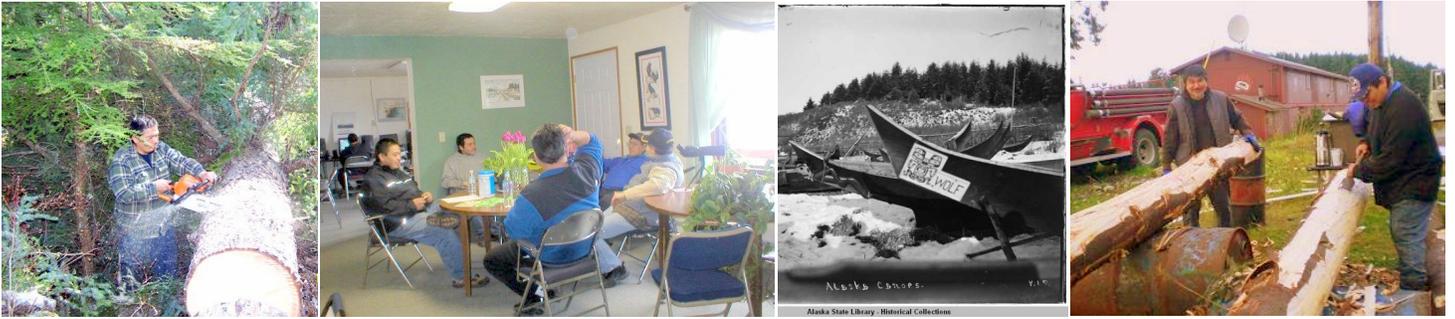
CCTHITA discovered that establishing broadband computer labs and technical assistance centers, accessible to rural residents free of charge, sparks business and economic development; it excites people about learning, personal growth, and starting their own businesses. Additionally, such centers become portals to numerous government agencies and non-profits for training delivery. And finally, it provides rural residents with a place where they can learn how to use computers to take online college classes.

CCTHITA recommends that funding for such technical assistance centers and computer labs be allocated directly to tribal governments like CCTHITA. Simply providing broadband service won't be sufficient to ensure meaningful use and productive access.

CCTHITA is well-prepared to become an internet services provider and a training resource for our region. As a regional tribe, CCTHITA has years of experience offering training and technical assistance to our communities through Southeast Alaska. We are ready to operate the broadband service, train users in web-based applications and equipment, and support educational and entrepreneurial development that is built upon the backbone of the internet.

Funding should be in the form of consolidated grants directly to CCTHITA, on a government-to-government basis, similar to the streamlined authority used in the Tribal Self-Governance program under Public Law 93-638. Our proposal should be favored as a pilot expansion of an existing ongoing and successful program limited thus far only by the constraints of available funding. We have perfected a model that works in our region and with our people. We have overwhelming need. What we lack is the money.

At the Angoon's High-Speed Internet and Business Center....



Cultural projects – the “Canoe Project”



Community kitchen, arts store, women's coat making cooperative



Computer literacy, MS Office, e-commerce, graphic design, business startup, online college degrees, and workshops for mentally challenged children, etc.



Culture classes and internships