REGIONAL BROADBAND & DIGITAL EQUITY ACTION PLAN

Rural Canyon & Owyhee Counties

Prepared by Public Solutions Northwest, LLC

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RECORD OF REVISION

Date	Revision Description	Owner
01/29/25	Adopted, City of Greenleaf	Lee C. Belt

All revisions of this plan will be recorded above to document the date of each revision, who made the revision, and a description of the revisions.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Greenleaf is excited to introduce the Rural Canyon and Owyhee Counties' Broadband & Digital Equity Action Plan, a community-guided roadmap aimed at addressing broadband connectivity gaps and promoting digital inclusion in rural Canyon and northwest Owyhee Counties. This collaborative effort brings together local governments, community leaders, internet service providers (ISPs), and state and federal agencies, to ensure every resident, business, and community institution has access to reliable, high-speed internet.

- ✓ **Infrastructure Expansion**: The plan prioritizes extending fiber-optic and fixed wireless infrastructure to unserved and underserved areas, addressing connectivity gaps for over 6,000 locations in rural Canyon County and nearly 3,000 in Owyhee County.
- ✓ **Economic & Agricultural Growth**: High-speed broadband will support precision agriculture, industrial growth along corridors such as Peckham Road, and small business development, fostering economic resilience and innovation.
- ✓ **Digital Equity & Literacy**: Programs will promote affordable broadband access, provide digital literacy training, and distribute low-cost devices to ensure all residents can benefit from the opportunities of a connected world.
- ✓ **Smart Growth Integration**: The plan aligns broadband expansion with land-use and zoning strategies, ensuring sustainable growth while preserving rural character and values.
- ✓ **Collaborative Efforts**: By leveraging partnerships with providers like Syringa Networks and programs such as the BEAD initiative, the plan secures funding and resources to accelerate deployment.

We extend our deepest gratitude to the many partners who made this plan possible, including the Idaho Office of Broadband, ISPs, Public Solutions Northwest, and countless community leaders and residents. Your vision, input, and collaboration have created a foundation for digital equity and long-term prosperity.

The City of Greenleaf is committed to making this vision a reality and invites everyone to join us in expanding high-speed connectivity and digital inclusion. For details or partnership, contact **Lee Belt, Greenleaf City Clerk**, at 208.454.0552 or clerk@greenleaf-idaho.us.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The City of Greenleaf embarked on a collaborative effort to address broadband connectivity gaps within the region. The initiative began with formal outreach and coordination with the City leadership, facilitated by Public Solutions Northwest (PSNW), a consulting team selected to support broadband planning efforts.

Greenleaf strategically expanded the project's scope to include neighboring communities such as **Homedale**, **Marsing**, **Notus**, **Parma**, and **Wilder**. This regional focus ensured that the broadband strategy would address both urban and rural connectivity challenges while fostering economic development across the area. Emphasis was placed on tackling broadband deserts, particularly in agricultural and industrial corridors such as Peckham Road.

RECRUITMENT OF THE BROADBAND ACTION TEAM (BAT)

The City formed a Broadband Action Team (BAT) comprising community leaders, government officials, and regional stakeholders. This group included representatives from public works, planning departments, local ISPs, and economic development experts. Participation from Greenleaf, Grandview, Homedale, Marsing, Melba, Notus, Parma, and Wilder enriched the BAT's discussions and created a truly regional approach.

The BAT's goals included

- Identifying unserved and underserved broadband areas.
- Prioritizing infrastructure needs in industrial and agricultural corridors.
- Assessing opportunities to leverage middle-mile fiber projects.

COMMUNITY RETREAT

A retreat was held to align objectives and strategies for broadband deployment. This session gathered input from stakeholders across Greenleaf, Grandview, Homedale, Marsing, Melba, Notus, Parma, and Wilder to create a shared vision for broadband expansion. Discussions emphasized the economic impact of broadband deserts, particularly in the Greenleaf-Wilder corridor, and the role of broadband in education, healthcare, and business development.

ISP ROUNDTABLES

To engage private-sector partners, Greenleaf hosted multiple roundtable discussions with Internet Service Providers (ISPs), including regional and local providers. These meetings allowed ISPs to share insights into infrastructure challenges, existing coverage, and opportunities to collaborate on funding

applications. Providers like Ziply Fiber and Syringa Networks were identified as critical partners for future infrastructure expansion.

COMMUNITY SURVEYS & INTERVIEWS

A community survey was launched to gather resident and business feedback on broadband needs. This included questions on:

- Current internet service quality and availability.
- Costs and affordability concerns.
- Desired broadband speeds for educational and professional use.

Community input highlighted significant gaps in service quality, particularly in industrial zones and agricultural areas. Targeted outreach in Greenleaf, Grandview, Homedale, Marsing, Melba, Notus, Parma, and Wilder ensured that diverse perspectives across the region were represented. Additionally, interviews with key community stakeholders provided qualitative insights into economic and social impacts due to limited connectivity.

RESEARCH & DATA ANALYSIS

The project team conducted extensive research on broadband feasibility, best practices, and funding opportunities:

- Middle-mile infrastructure plans such as the Syringa Networks NTIA-funded routes.
- Community anchor institution (CAI) connectivity gaps.
- Idaho BEAD funding priorities and regional grant opportunities.
- Models from successful municipal broadband deployments, such as Ammon, Idaho.

Mapping tools and technical assessments were utilized to identify opportunities for closing broadband loops to enhance resiliency in the network.

The engagement process culminated in a broadband action plan that reflects community priorities, technical feasibility, and funding alignment. Through collaboration with stakeholders from Greenleaf, Grandview, Homedale, Marsing, Melba, Notus, Parma, and Wilder, the region is now well-positioned to apply for BEAD construction grants and advance broadband deployment efforts in 2025.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS & FUTURE PARTNERS

The Rural Canyon & Owyhee Counties Broadband Advisory Team (BAT) recognizes that effective broadband planning requires a diverse group of engaged stakeholders and future partners who reflect the unique needs of Greenleaf and surrounding rural communities.

Recruiting members for the Broadband Advisory Team (BAT) in rural Canyon County came with unique challenges that highlighted the complexities of engaging smaller, close-knit communities. One of the primary hurdles was the limited availability of local representatives with experience in broadband infrastructure and digital equity. Communities like Greenleaf, Grandview, Homedale, Marsing, Melba, Notus, Parma, and Wilder often have smaller populations with fewer individuals equipped to navigate technical planning or policy discussions. This created difficulties in identifying participants who could effectively contribute to the goals of BEAD, which prioritizes data-driven planning and inclusive stakeholder representation. Additionally, many potential members were deeply involved in small business operations or agricultural work, leaving little time for additional commitments. These competing priorities, while understandable, emphasized the need for flexible and thoughtful approaches to recruiting and retaining valuable local voices.

Another challenge stemmed from potential members' reluctance to attend regular meetings during the summer months. Many shared that summer was a time they had set aside to avoid evening work and focus on personal or family priorities. Recognizing this, the BAT pivoted from the originally planned bi-monthly meetings to a one-day workshop held on September 28th from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM. This workshop format allowed for a more efficient and concentrated discussion, accommodating participants' schedules while preserving the collaborative nature of the planning process. Despite these adjustments, reaching underrepresented groups remained a challenge, as barriers

such as limited digital access, broadband literacy, and trust in government-led initiatives persisted. However, by leveraging existing relationships with local organizations and municipal leaders, the BAT created a welcoming and inclusive space for participants to engage meaningfully. This flexibility and responsiveness helped foster a sense of shared purpose and laid a strong foundation for the ongoing work of expanding broadband access in rural Canyon County.

CITY CLERKS AND MUNICIPAL STAFF

Municipal staff play a key role in facilitating local planning efforts and ensuring that infrastructure projects align with city development goals. Their involvement is essential for aligning local, regional, and federal initiatives.

Lee Belt	**Jolyn Thompson**	**Wendy L. Burrows-Severy**
City Clerk, Greenleaf	City Clerk & Treasurer, Marsing	City Clerk & Treasurer, Wilder
clerk@greenleaf-idaho.us	jthompson@marsingcity.com	wsevery@cityofwilder.org

These city leaders will facilitate the permitting and regulatory processes needed to accelerate broadband deployment.

EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Educational and community organizations are critical to expanding broadband adoption and addressing digital literacy. They also serve as Community Anchor Institutions (CAIs), a key focus in BEAD's planning framework:

Jeff Dillon	**Miren Lowry**
Superintendent, Wilder School District jdillon@wilderschools.org	Business Manager, Clerk/Treasurer, COSSA Regional Technical and Education Center

Serve over 1,100 students, including 550 special education students, 150 alternative students, and 250 career-technical students.

Dave Lincoln	**Mary Huff, AICP**
Executive Director, Western Alliance for Economic Development (WAED) david@westernallianceed.org	Director, Owyhee County Community Planning MHuff@co.owyhee.id.us

Support rural cities and communities in Canyon, Gem, and Owyhee Counties.

These organizations will help drive the integration of broadband access into education and workforce training initiatives, ensuring that investments create meaningful economic and social opportunities.

COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND BUSINESS OWNERS

Community members and local business owners provide critical insight into the economic and social impacts of broadband access. These stakeholders represent grassroots perspectives and can influence adoption strategies and equitable implementation:

Alicia Wages
Wilder Community Member
awages.wilder@gmail.com

Jason Crosby
Greenleaf Business Community Member
jason.crosby@zoho.com

Mark Perini
Business Owner & Subject Matter Expert
greenleaf@eperini.com

Mike Zimmerman
Business Owner & Subject Matter Expert
mike@versoindustries.com

These individuals contribute to the identification of underserved areas, affordability challenges, and community engagement needs.

PLANNING AND SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS

Subject matter experts provide specialized knowledge critical to broadband planning, including zoning, healthcare, and community development:

Ken Hibbs
KDH Consulting
kennh@threefingers.net

Mike Engles
Notus Planning & Zoning
engle53@outlook.com

JD Phipps
EMS Chief, Marsing Ambulance
jdphipps@marsingambulance.com

These individuals will assist in creating zoning frameworks and emergency service strategies that integrate broadband expansion efforts.

FUTURE BAT PARTNERS

Strategic partnerships with health services, libraries, and education centers will enhance broadband deployment and adoption, particularly for underserved populations. These partners include:

Southwest District Health
208.455.5300

Terry Reilly Health Services
Homedale: 208.337.3189
Marsing: 208.896.4159
Melba:208.495.1011

Vallivue School District #139 208.454.0445	**Patricia Romanko** Parma Public Library 208.722.6605	**Wilder Public Library District** 208.482.7880

These institutions can serve as CAIs, aligning with BEAD's goals to leverage broadband for improved health, education, and community services.

FUNDING OVERVIEW

Expanding high-speed broadband access and achieving digital equity are critical priorities for Idaho, particularly as the state seeks to bridge the digital divide for its residents and businesses. The Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program and the Digital Equity Act (DEA) provide foundational resources to address both infrastructure gaps and digital inclusion challenges. These federal programs are further supplemented by regional funding opportunities such as the USDA ReConnect Program, Canyon County's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), and Idaho's Gem Grant which together create a powerful funding ecosystem to ensure connectivity reaches even the most remote and underserved areas of the state. Through a coordinated, strategic approach, Idaho can leverage these resources to provide reliable, affordable broadband and empower residents with the tools and skills needed to thrive in a connected world.

The **BEAD Program**, a cornerstone of the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), allocates $583 million to Idaho to expand high-speed broadband infrastructure. Administered by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) in partnership with the Idaho Commerce Office of Broadband, this funding prioritizes projects that connect 85,902 unserved and 52,094 underserved locations, including essential Community Anchor Institutions (CAIs) like schools, libraries, and healthcare facilities. In Canyon County, home to a population of 231,105, approximately 6,391 unserved and underserved locations (8%) highlight significant opportunities for broadband investment to support urban and industrial growth. Conversely, Owyhee County, with its smaller population of 11,913, faces a more pressing challenge—51% of residents live in 2,685 unserved and underserved locations, spread across 19,934 square kilometers of largely rural, agriculture-based communities. These counties underscore Idaho's need for targeted investments to address both urban density challenges and vast rural connectivity gaps.

The **Digital Equity Act (DEA)** complements BEAD funding by addressing barriers beyond infrastructure alone, ensuring Idahoans can take full advantage of broadband access. Idaho has received an initial $567,000 to establish the Digital Access for All Idahoans (DAAI) planning process. Managed by the Idaho Commission for Libraries (ICfL), this initiative focuses on enhancing digital skills, expanding access to devices, and ensuring broadband affordability. By prioritizing underserved and disadvantaged populations, the DEA promotes digital inclusion, empowering individuals to fully participate in education, the workforce, and essential services. Aligned with BEAD infrastructure investments, DEA initiatives create a holistic approach to overcoming digital equity challenges statewide.

Additional state and regional funding sources, such as the **USDA ReConnect Program**, **Community Development Block Grants** (CDBG), and the **Idaho Gem Grant**, provide crucial support for Idaho's broadband strategy. Canyon County has successfully utilized CDBG funds to advance infrastructure improvements that benefit underserved areas, public institutions, and local businesses. Meanwhile, the USDA ReConnect Program offers grants and loans to support broadband deployment in rural communities, making it an important resource for counties like Owyhee and Canyon, where geographic and economic challenges complicate broadband expansion. The Idaho Gem Grant further enhances economic development opportunities by funding critical infrastructure projects, like extending fiber to business districts and installing park WiFi locations to support community access. Together, these programs supplement BEAD and DEA funding, offering targeted solutions for both urban and rural areas of Idaho.

Public-private partnerships (P3s) remain a key driver of broadband success in Idaho, bringing together public agencies, private Internet Service Providers (ISPs), and local governments to accelerate deployment. Regional providers like Syringa Networks and Ziply Fiber have already demonstrated success in leveraging federal grants to build middle-mile infrastructure that supports future last-mile connections. Syringa Networks' NTIA-funded fiber routes are a critical asset in Western Idaho, enabling connectivity for unserved and underserved communities in Canyon and Owyhee Counties. Similarly, Ziply Fiber is expanding high-speed services in nearby cities such as Parma and Wilder, creating pathways to extend

fiber connectivity into rural and agricultural zones. By fostering collaboration across public and private sectors, Idaho can optimize funding, expand service coverage, and ensure residents and businesses receive affordable, high-quality broadband access.

To fully capitalize on these funding opportunities, it is essential for Idaho's local governments, community organizations, and private-sector partners to actively pursue BEAD, DEA, USDA ReConnect, and CDBG resources. By identifying and prioritizing infrastructure projects, streamlining local permitting processes, and aligning regional plans with state broadband goals, communities can accelerate deployment and address the unique connectivity challenges faced by both urban centers and rural areas. A strategic, collaborative approach will ensure Idaho achieves universal broadband access, fosters long-term digital inclusion, and unlocks significant economic and social benefits for all residents, particularly in historically underserved regions.

VISION, VALUES, & PRIORITIES

VISION

By 2027, rural Canyon County will achieve equitable access to affordable, reliable, and high-speed broadband for all residents, businesses, and community institutions. This strategic plan envisions a future where digital connectivity bridges geographic divides, promotes economic development, enhances public safety, and improves quality of life while preserving the region's rural character and values

This Broadband Strategic Plan outlines a roadmap to expand broadband infrastructure, address barriers to access, and empower community-led initiatives. Rooted in collaboration and data-driven decision-making, this plan prioritizes connecting underserved and unserved areas while fostering sustainable growth and innovation in alignment with rural Canyon County's needs and goals.

VALUES

The following values guide the implementation of this strategic plan and ensure alignment with rural Canyon County's goals:

- **Access**: Barriers to broadband access will be removed, ensuring those most in need, whether residents, businesses, or community institutions—receive affordable, reliable services.
- **Alignment**: All stakeholders, including local governments, service providers, and community organizations, are committed to the vision and long-term goals of this plan, ensuring cohesive decision-making and progress.
- **Data-Driven**: Decisions and actions will be informed by continuous data collection, analysis, and measurable outcomes to ensure transparency, accountability, and fidelity to community needs.
- **Responsive**: The plan will remain agile and adaptable, responding to changing technologies, funding opportunities, and the evolving broadband needs of residents and businesses.

These values ensure that broadband investments and strategies are inclusive, forward-thinking, and effective, creating a sustainable foundation for digital equity, economic growth, and enhanced quality of life across rural Canyon County.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Rural Canyon and Owyhee Counties face unique broadband challenges that require targeted solutions to address connectivity gaps, support economic drivers, and empower local communities. With significant portions of these counties unserved or underserved—8% of Canyon County's population and a staggering 51% in Owyhee County—investments must prioritize delivering reliable, high-speed internet to homes, businesses, and agricultural operations. By focusing on last-mile connectivity, supporting critical agricultural and industrial corridors, and investing in workforce development and digital equity, these strategic priorities will ensure that broadband expansion meets the specific needs of these rural communities. These efforts will not only close the digital divide but also drive economic opportunity, strengthen local industries, and enhance the quality of life for residents across the region.

LAST-MILE CONNECTIVITY FOR UNSERVED AND UNDERSERVED AREAS

The most critical priority is delivering last-mile broadband connections to households, businesses, and agricultural operations that currently lack sufficient service.

- **Rural Canyon County**: While more developed than Owyhee, there remain 6,391 underserved and unserved locations (8% of the population) that need infrastructure investments in industrial and residential corridors, such as those along Peckham Road.
- **Owyhee County**: With 51% of the population unserved or underserved and vast rural areas, funding should prioritize targeted last-mile projects that connect hard-to-reach agricultural zones and remote households.
- Strategies include leveraging existing middle-mile infrastructure from providers like Syringa Networks to enable cost-effective last-mile expansion.

SUPPORTING CRITICAL AGRICULTURAL AND INDUSTRIAL CORRIDORS

Reliable, high-speed broadband is essential for modern agriculture and business operations. In areas like rural Canyon and Owyhee Counties, broadband expansion must prioritize:

- **Agricultural Connectivity**: Supporting precision agriculture technologies, automated irrigation, and real-time data management for farms in Owyhee County, where agriculture drives the local economy.
- **Industrial Corridors**: Expanding connectivity along Peckham Road and other rural industrial zones in Canyon County to attract businesses, increase competitiveness, and support economic growth.
- Funding partnerships with providers like Ziply Fiber and programs like USDA ReConnect will be key to ensuring infrastructure reaches these vital economic areas.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT & DIGITAL EQUITY INITIATIVES

Expanding broadband infrastructure must be paired with investments in workforce training and digital inclusion to ensure rural residents can benefit from new connectivity. Priorities include:

- **Workforce Training**: Developing local programs to train technicians and construction workers to install and maintain broadband infrastructure. This creates jobs and builds local capacity.

- **Digital Skills and Affordability**: Leveraging Digital Equity Act (DEA) funding to offer digital literacy programs, affordable devices, and broadband subsidies for low-income households, particularly in rural communities.
- Programs like the **Digital Access** for All Idahoans (DAAI) initiative can focus on underserved populations in remote regions.

For rural Canyon and Owyhee Counties, funding priorities must focus on delivering last-mile connectivity, supporting agricultural and industrial corridors, and building digital skills and workforce capacity. By addressing these key areas, broadband investments will drive economic growth, support rural livelihoods, and ensure long-term digital inclusion.

COMMUNITY NEEDS & GAPS ASSESSMENT

CURRENT BROADBAND LANDSCAPE

The northwest rural region of Canyon County (excluding Nampa and Caldwell) and the northwest triangular portion of Owyhee County up to the Idaho-Oregon state line represent a critical area of focus for broadband expansion. This region is defined by its low population density, expansive agricultural economy, and persistent gaps in broadband infrastructure. Home to communities like Greenleaf, Grandview, Homedale, Marsing, Melba, Notus, Parma, and Wilder, the area encompasses large rural and agricultural zones where broadband access remains limited or entirely unavailable for thousands of residents, farms, and businesses.

Canyon County

Owyhee County

DEMOGRAPHICS AND ECONOMIC FACTORS

Population: While rural Canyon County has larger clusters of population near its smaller towns, Owyhee County remains sparsely populated, with much of its northwest triangular region consisting of large agricultural plots and ranches. The population in these areas often depends on local industries, with agriculture serving as the primary economic driver.

Economic Activity: This region plays a significant role in Idaho's agricultural economy, producing crops, livestock, and dairy. Access to broadband is critical for adopting precision agriculture tools, increasing productivity, and maintaining economic competitiveness.

Income and Affordability: Many residents in these rural areas experience income constraints, which limit their ability to subscribe to existing broadband services. Affordability, therefore, remains a significant barrier to adoption. Schools, healthcare providers, and businesses also face limitations in delivering digital services due to inconsistent connectivity.

PROJECT AREAS & BROADBAND GAPS

Area	Un	Under	Served	Total BSLs	Total Eligible	Land Area*	County	City
1010	561	712	791	2064	1273	69	Canyon	Greenleaf, Wilder
1087	149	5	1	155	154	254	Owyhee	Central
1125	66	0	50	116	66	276	Owyhee	Grandview
1126	75	95	139	309	170	231	Canyon	Melba
1151	1035	331	1164	2530	1366	100	Canyon	Homedale, Marsing
1156	169	151	306	626	320	31	Canyon	Notus

AREAS WITH SIGNIFICANT UNSERVED POPULATIONS

- **Area 1151**: Covering Homedale and Marsing in rural Canyon County, this area has the largest gap with 1,035 unserved and 331 underserved locations. Given the compact size of 100 square miles, targeted last-mile investments here could yield substantial connectivity improvements.
- **Area 1010**: Serving Greenleaf and Wilder, this area has 561 unserved and 712 underserved locations, highlighting the need for scalable solutions to address persistent infrastructure challenges.

MODERATE CONNECTIVITY GAPS

- **Area 1087**: Despite its larger land area (254 sq mi) in Central Owyhee County, this region has 149 unserved locations, reflecting ongoing challenges in sparsely populated zones.
- **Area 1126**: Melba in Canyon County has 75 unserved and 95 underserved locations, indicating moderate gaps that could be addressed through targeted partnerships with ISPs.

SMALLER, TARGETED GAPS

Area 1156 (Notus) and **Area 1125** (Grandview) are smaller in population and land area but remain underserved, with a combined 235 unserved locations. These areas present opportunities for cost-effective solutions that can quickly connect remaining unserved residents.

CURRENT BROADBAND EFFORTS

Efforts to address broadband gaps in northwest rural Canyon County and Owyhee County's northwest triangular region have begun to take shape through public-private partnerships, regional infrastructure investments, and local initiatives. Existing middle-mile infrastructure, such as routes developed by Syringa Networks, provides a strong foundation for expanding connectivity into unserved areas. However, significant gaps remain in extending this infrastructure to reach homes, farms, and businesses across the region. Internet Service Providers (ISPs) like Ziply Fiber have made progress in areas near Greenleaf, Wilder, and Homedale, focusing on deploying high-speed broadband to residential and small business customers. Additionally, regional providers, including Sparklight and emerging wireless ISPs, have demonstrated interest in serving rural communities but face challenges due to deployment costs and low population density.

Local initiatives and leadership have also played a key role in advancing broadband planning. Cities like Homedale, Marsing, and Melba have prioritized broadband expansion in their community development strategies, engaging with ISPs to explore opportunities for infrastructure investments. In rural Canyon County, targeted projects have been supported through programs like Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), which have funded infrastructure improvements, though broadband-specific projects remain limited. While these efforts have laid important groundwork, additional collaboration and funding will be required to extend reliable, affordable broadband to the remaining unserved

and underserved areas, particularly in large agricultural zones and sparsely populated regions.

The rural areas of Canyon County and the northwest triangular region of Owyhee County face significant broadband connectivity challenges that impact residents, businesses, and community institutions. Despite ongoing efforts to leverage existing middle-mile infrastructure and public-private partnerships, unserved and underserved areas persist due to geographic, economic, and demographic barriers. Expanding reliable, affordable broadband access in this region is essential to supporting economic growth, particularly in agriculture, improving educational opportunities, enhancing public safety, and ensuring digital inclusion for all residents.

Addressing these challenges will require a coordinated approach that includes targeted infrastructure investments, strengthened collaboration with Internet Service Providers (ISPs), and innovative funding solutions. By prioritizing the needs of rural communities and aligning resources with strategic broadband goals, this plan sets the stage for a connected, resilient future where digital access drives opportunity, innovation, and quality of life across the region.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The broadband needs assessment for northwest rural Canyon County and Owyhee County's northwest triangular region is grounded in findings from community surveys, stakeholder consultations, ISP meetings, and data gathered during the broadband planning retreat. This assessment identifies specific broadband requirements, adoption trends, infrastructure gaps, and digital access disparities that must be addressed to meet the region's connectivity goals.

BROADBAND SPEEDS NEEDED

Community feedback and consultations emphasized the need for broadband speeds that align with modern demands for education, telehealth, remote work, and agricultural technology:

- **Households**: Residents expressed a need for download speeds of 100 Mbps and upload speeds of 20 Mbps to meet the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) standard for broadband, particularly for multi-device households. Respondents cited issues with remote learning, streaming, and work-from-home capabilities under current conditions.

- **Businesses and Agriculture**: Agricultural producers and small businesses require scalable, symmetrical speeds of 100/100 Mbps or higher, particularly in areas where precision agriculture tools, automated irrigation systems, and cloud-based platforms are used to improve efficiency.
- **Community Anchor Institutions (CAIs)**: Schools, healthcare centers, and public safety organizations reported the need for 1 Gbps+ connections to support high-bandwidth activities like virtual learning, telehealth consultations, and emergency response coordination.

These needs reflect a significant gap between current service availability and community expectations for reliable, high-speed internet access.

CURRENT ADOPTION RATE

Adoption rates across the region are inconsistent, with affordability and service quality emerging as key barriers:

- **Adoption Trends**: Surveys indicate that while adoption rates approach 60-70% in communities with available service, rates drop to below 40% in rural areas where broadband infrastructure is either absent or unreliable.
- **Barriers to Adoption**
    - **Affordability**: Many low-income households reported that broadband costs are prohibitive, particularly where higher speeds are available only through premium-priced plans.
    - **Awareness**: Participation in federal affordability programs like the **Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)** remains low, with residents unaware of eligibility or how to apply.
    - **Reliability**: Areas served only by legacy DSL or fixed wireless solutions reported adoption challenges due to frequent service interruptions and slow speeds.

The data underscores the need for not only improved infrastructure but also targeted affordability programs and digital literacy initiatives to boost broadband adoption.

INFRASTRUCTURE GAPS

Gaps in broadband infrastructure remain a significant challenge across the region, particularly in rural and agricultural areas:

- **Unserved and Underserved Areas**: Data analysis highlights extensive infrastructure gaps, with thousands of unserved and underserved locations concentrated in agricultural corridors, sparsely populated zones, and small

rural towns. Areas like Homedale, Wilder, Marsing, Melba, and Grandview are notable for having clusters of unserved homes, farms, and businesses.

- **Reliance on Outdated Technologies**: Many households and businesses still rely on legacy DSL and satellite services, which do not meet modern broadband standards. Fixed wireless networks provide limited coverage but often lack capacity for reliable, high-speed service.
- **Last-Mile Challenges**: While middle-mile infrastructure exists in some areas, such as through Syringa Networks, there is a significant lack of investment in last-mile connections to extend service to end users.

Stakeholder feedback from ISP meetings emphasized the high cost of deployment in these rural areas due to low population density, difficult terrain, and limited return on investment for providers.

DIGITAL ACCESS DISPARITIES

The assessment identified notable disparities in digital access, particularly among low-income households, farm workers, and elderly residents:

- **Low-Income Households**: Families in small towns like Notus, Wilder, and Grandview struggle with affordability and rely on outdated internet plans. Students from these households face challenges accessing digital learning platforms.
- **Agricultural Communities**: Farmers and ranchers in northwest Owyhee County and rural Canyon County lack access to broadband infrastructure that could support precision agriculture, reducing competitiveness and operational efficiency.
- **Elderly Residents**: Digital literacy remains a barrier for seniors, particularly in remote areas where outreach programs are limited. Many residents reported difficulty accessing telehealth services and online public resources.

These disparities highlight the need for targeted interventions, including:

- Expanding participation in affordability programs like the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP).
- Developing digital literacy training programs for disadvantaged populations, including seniors and non-English-speaking residents.
- Prioritizing broadband deployment to underserved agricultural and low-income communities to close equity gaps.

The needs assessment for northwest rural Canyon County and Owyhee County's northwest triangular region demonstrates a clear demand for reliable, high-speed broadband to support residents, businesses, and agricultural operations. While broadband speeds of 100 Mbps/20 Mbps are needed for households, scalable solutions for businesses and anchor institutions must go beyond current offerings. Existing adoption barriers, infrastructure gaps, and digital access disparities, particularly among disadvantaged groups, require targeted infrastructure investments, affordability programs, and community-driven digital literacy initiatives. Closing these gaps will be essential to achieving equitable connectivity and unlocking the region's full economic and social potential.

STRATEGIC PARTNERS & COLLABORATION

Expanding broadband access in northwest rural Canyon County and the northwest triangular region of Owyhee County requires a coordinated approach with strategic partners across local governments, community anchor institutions, Internet Service Providers (ISPs), and state and federal agencies. These partnerships bring together expertise, resources, and commitments to address infrastructure gaps, adoption barriers, and the specific needs of the region's rural communities.

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Local governments play a critical role in facilitating broadband expansion by supporting planning, streamlining processes, and promoting community engagement. Cities such as Greenleaf, Grandview, Homedale, Marsing, Melba, Notus, Parma, and Wilder, along with leadership at the county level, are key partners in this effort.

- **Roles and Contributions**
  - Facilitate expedited permitting and access to public rights-of-way to reduce deployment timelines and costs.
  - Coordinate with ISPs to prioritize underserved areas and align projects with local economic development goals, particularly in agricultural and industrial corridors.
  - Engage community stakeholders to raise awareness, encourage broadband adoption, and promote participation in affordability programs like the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP).

- **Coordination Needs**
  - Continued collaboration between local governments and ISPs to address gaps in infrastructure deployment.
  - Regional planning efforts to ensure alignment across jurisdictions, especially in border communities like Wilder and Homedale that are near the Idaho-Oregon state line.

COMMUNITY ANCHOR INSTITUTIONS (CAIS)

Community Anchor Institutions—such as schools, libraries, healthcare facilities, and public safety organizations—are central to the region's broadband strategy. These institutions serve as connectivity hubs for residents and businesses while driving digital equity efforts.

- **Roles and Contributions**
  - Identify priority areas where improved broadband connectivity is critical, including underserved schools, libraries, and healthcare centers in Homedale, Marsing, Grandview, and Notus.
  - Support digital literacy programs to improve skills and broadband adoption, particularly for low-income households and seniors.
  - Serve as launch points for high-capacity broadband connections that can extend service into surrounding rural areas.
- **Coordination Needs**
  - Partnerships with ISPs to secure affordable, high-speed connections for CAIs to meet the growing demand for telehealth, virtual education, and public safety coordination.
  - Integration of CAIs into state-level digital inclusion efforts, such as those overseen by the Idaho Commission for Libraries (ICfL).

INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDERS (ISPS)

ISPs are essential partners for broadband deployment, leveraging their technical expertise and infrastructure to close connectivity gaps. Regional providers like Syringa Networks, Ziply Fiber, and wireless operators have demonstrated a commitment to serving rural areas but face challenges in extending last-mile infrastructure.

- **Roles and Contributions**
  - Lead planning, deployment, and maintenance of broadband infrastructure, including middle-mile and last-mile networks.

    - Provide reliable, high-speed service to households, businesses, and agricultural operations in priority areas like Wilder, Homedale, and Melba.
    - Collaborate with local governments to identify cost-sharing opportunities and streamline permitting processes.
- **Coordination Needs**
    - Continued partnership with local governments and CAIs to expand service coverage and improve affordability for residents.
    - Leveraging existing middle-mile infrastructure (e.g., Syringa Networks) to accelerate last-mile deployment to unserved and underserved areas.

STATE AND FEDERAL AGENCIES

State and federal agencies provide critical oversight, funding, and technical support to ensure broadband initiatives align with broader connectivity goals and standards. Programs like the Idaho Office of Broadband (IOB) and federal initiatives such as the BEAD Program play a key role in guiding and supporting deployment.

- **Roles and Contributions**
    - Oversee program compliance, funding allocations, and reporting to ensure broadband projects align with state and federal objectives.
    - Support local planning efforts through technical expertise, mapping data, and funding mechanisms.
- **Coordination Needs**
    - Continued alignment with Idaho's statewide broadband strategy to prioritize high-need areas.
    - Collaboration with ISPs and local governments to ensure projects meet funding requirements and leverage existing resources efficiently.

Effective collaboration among local governments, community anchor institutions, ISPs, and state and federal agencies is essential to achieving broadband expansion goals in northwest rural Canyon County and Owyhee County's northwest triangular region. By aligning resources, streamlining processes, and fostering partnerships, these stakeholders will address infrastructure gaps, support broadband adoption, and ensure that rural residents, businesses, and institutions have equitable access to reliable, high-speed internet.

INFRASTRUCTURE DEPLOYMENT PLAN

TECHNOLOGY SELECTION

The deployment strategy prioritizes fiber-optic infrastructure for its reliability, scalability, and ability to support high-speed, symmetrical broadband services. Fiber is ideal for addressing the current and future needs of residential, commercial, and agricultural users across the region.

- Key Advantages of Fiber:
  - **Scalability**: Meets both immediate requirements for 100 Mbps/20 Mbps and anticipated demand for gigabit or higher speeds.
  - **Resilience**: Provides consistent performance regardless of terrain or weather conditions, particularly important in rural and agricultural zones.
  - **Economic Impact**: Supports high-bandwidth applications like precision agriculture, telehealth, and remote learning.

Supplementary fixed wireless solutions will be deployed in areas where fiber installation is cost-prohibitive due to low population density or challenging terrain. Fixed wireless technology offers a viable alternative for smaller clusters of homes, farms, and ranches, ensuring comprehensive coverage.

The use of conduit infrastructure is also emphasized, with plans to include flexible plastic conduit in road and utility projects using micro trenching strategies. This ensures the region is ready for future expansion, minimizing disruption and reducing costs for subsequent deployments.

The deployment strategy also considers the unique needs of agricultural operations by integrating innovative solutions like whole-farm mesh networks. These systems extend broadband fiber connections to cover expansive fields and enable precision agriculture applications.

Whole-farm mesh networks provide seamless Wi-Fi connectivity across large agricultural properties, supporting real-time data collection, automated irrigation systems, and remote equipment monitoring. This approach complements fiber-optic infrastructure and fixed wireless solutions, ensuring that farms in the region can fully leverage high-speed broadband for enhanced productivity and efficiency. By including this technology in the deployment strategy, the plan addresses the critical role of broadband in modern agriculture while fostering economic growth in rural communities.

PROJECT AREA

The deployment plan targets the following areas for broadband expansion based on identified needs and gaps in service:

Area	County	Cities	Un	Under	Eligible Locations	Land Area
1010	Canyon	Greenleaf, Wilder	561	712	1273	69
1087	Owyhee	Central	149	5	154	254
1125	Owyhee	Grandview	66	0	66	276
1126	Canyon	Melba	75	95	170	231
1151	Canyon	Homedale, Marsing	1035	331	1366	100
1156	Canyon	Notus	169	151	320	31

These project areas prioritize regions with high numbers of unserved and underserved locations, particularly along Peckham Road and within agricultural corridors. The plan also targets Community Anchor Institutions (CAIs), including schools, libraries, and healthcare facilities, to ensure essential services benefit from expanded connectivity.

DEPLOYMENT TIMELINE

The deployment timeline reflects a phased approach to ensure efficient planning, permitting, construction, and service rollout.

Phase	Timeline	Key Activities
Planning	Q1 2025 – Q2 2025	Finalize project area maps and detailed engineering designs.
		Confirm ISP partnerships and secure funding through BEAD and USDA ReConnect.
Permitting	Q3 2025 – Q4 2025	Complete local and state permitting processes.
		Secure right-of-way agreements with local governments and utility providers.
Construction	Q1 2026 – Q4 2026	Deploy fiber and fixed wireless infrastructure in targeted areas.
		Install conduit infrastructure in conjunction with road and utility projects.
		Conduct ongoing quality assurance during construction.

Testing	Q1 2027	Verify broadband infrastructure for reliability, speed, and coverage.
Rollout	Q2 2027	Launch broadband services and promote adoption through outreach programs.

INCORPORATING TECHNICAL & COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

This deployment plan integrates insights and priorities from technical experts, ISPs, and community stakeholders:

- **Closing the Loop**: Extensions of Syringa Networks' middle-mile fiber will connect Greenleaf, Wilder, Notus, and Marsing, ensuring resiliency and redundancy for broadband services.
- **Economic Corridors**: Fiber deployment along key routes like Peckham Road will support industrial and agricultural growth, including connectivity for fertilizer plants, seed granaries, and expanding residential areas.
- **Conduit Integration**: Recommendations from technical advisors emphasize including multiple conduits in construction projects to future-proof the network and reduce costs.

The Infrastructure Deployment Plan for northwest rural Canyon County and the northwest triangular region of Owyhee County leverages fiber-optic technology as the backbone for scalable, reliable broadband expansion. Supplementary fixed wireless solutions and conduit infrastructure provide flexibility to meet the region's diverse needs. Through targeted investments in underserved areas, alignment with middle-mile assets, and robust planning, this plan sets the stage for a digitally connected future that supports economic growth, education, and public safety.

DIGITAL EQUITY & INCLUSION

Ensuring digital equity and inclusion is critical for the success of broadband expansion in northwest rural Canyon County and the northwest triangular region of Owyhee County. This strategy emphasizes overcoming barriers to adoption through digital literacy, affordability programs, and proactive community outreach.

DIGITAL LITERACY PROGRAMS

Digital literacy is foundational to enabling residents to fully utilize broadband services for education, healthcare, and economic opportunities.

- **Community-Based Training**: Partner with local libraries, schools, and community centers to deliver hands-on digital skills training tailored to the needs of different groups. Training topics include navigating telehealth platforms, managing online banking, applying for jobs, and accessing government services.
- **Targeted Programs for Seniors**: Offer one-on-one training and group workshops through senior centers, healthcare providers, and churches to help older residents build confidence with digital tools. Focus on essential skills such as telemedicine access and safe online communication.
- **Device Access Initiatives**: Collaborate with nonprofits, schools, and local governments to provide low-cost or refurbished devices, such as tablets, laptops, or hotspots, to underserved families and individuals. Combine device distribution with training programs to ensure users can operate the technology effectively.

AFFORDABILITY PROGRAMS

With the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) no longer funded, affordability remains a significant challenge for many rural residents. However, several ISPs have launched replacement programs to offer low-cost broadband options:

- **ISP-Led Affordability Programs**:
  - Major providers such as AT&T, Comcast, Charter, Cox, and Verizon now offer plans at $30/month or less for low-income households, ensuring continuity of affordable internet access.
  - Smaller regional ISPs, such as TDS and US cellular, provide similar offerings in rural areas, helping to bridge affordability gaps.
- **Lifeline Program Integration**: Encourage residents to participate in the **FCC's Lifeline program**, which offers a $10 monthly discount on broadband services. Combine outreach with ISP programs to maximize savings for eligible households.
- **Community Partnerships for Subsidies**: Collaborate with schools, libraries, and local nonprofits to provide interim subsidies for resident's ineligible for existing ISP programs.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Broad and inclusive outreach is essential to ensure residents and organizations are aware of broadband expansion efforts and available resources.

- **Awareness Campaigns**: Develop multilingual marketing materials about broadband availability, affordability programs, and digital literacy opportunities. Disseminate these materials through local newspapers, radio stations, and social media channels. Host information sessions at schools, libraries, and community centers to answer questions and assist with enrollment in ISP programs.
- **Engagement with Schools and Health Facilities**: Collaborate with schools to integrate broadband education into community events, parent-teacher meetings, and school newsletters. Partner with healthcare facilities to educate patients about using broadband for telehealth services, particularly in underserved rural areas.
- **Listening Sessions and Community Feedback**: Conduct town hall meetings and workshops in towns like Greenleaf, Wilder, Homedale, and Marsing to gather resident input on broadband needs. Use feedback to adapt digital equity initiatives, ensuring they align with the evolving needs of residents and businesses.
- **Local Organizations and Faith Groups**: Work with churches, civic groups, and nonprofits to engage hard-to-reach populations and ensure equitable access to new services.

The Digital Equity and Inclusion strategy is designed to address systemic barriers to broadband adoption, focusing on building digital literacy, ensuring affordability, and engaging communities effectively. By leveraging ISP-led affordability programs, device access initiatives, and robust outreach efforts, this plan creates the foundation for widespread digital inclusion, empowering residents to fully participate in the economic, educational, and social opportunities provided by expanded broadband connectivity.

FINANCIAL PLAN

A robust financial plan ensures that broadband deployment in northwest rural Canyon County and the northwest triangular region of Owyhee County is feasible, sustainable, and scalable. This plan highlights key cost categories, funding strategies, long-term maintenance considerations, and risk management, while also identifying opportunities to leverage private sector partnerships to meet funding requirements, such as the 25% match requirement for BEAD funding.

BUDGET OVERVIEW

The financial strategy accounts for the essential components of broadband deployment and associated initiatives:

- **Infrastructure Costs**: Deployment of fiber-optic and fixed wireless solutions, including equipment, construction, and materials for middle-mile and last-mile connections.
- **Permitting and Right-of-Way**: Fees and approvals for construction projects in collaboration with local governments and utility providers.
- **Labor and Construction**: Engineering design, installation, and quality assurance testing for network deployment.
- **Digital Equity and Outreach**: Programs for digital literacy, affordable device distribution, and community engagement to increase adoption.
- **Contingency Fund**: A reserve to address unforeseen challenges such as price escalations or environmental permitting delays.

LEVERAGING PRIVATE SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

To meet the 25% match requirement for BEAD funding and reduce the financial burden on local governments, the plan emphasizes leveraging private partnerships with Internet Service Providers (ISPs), developers, and regional stakeholders:

- **ISPs as Match Contributors**
  - ISPs such as Syringa Networks, Ziply Fiber, and other regional providers can contribute funding, in-kind services, or infrastructure (e.g., middle-mile assets) to fulfill the match requirement.
  - ISP investments in last-mile deployment ensure alignment with their long-term business interests while reducing costs for public funding.
- **Developers and Economic Stakeholders**
  - Collaborations with housing and commercial developers can integrate broadband-ready infrastructure (e.g., conduit and fiber pathways) into new developments, reducing construction costs and meeting match contributions.
  - Targeted deployment along growth corridors, such as Peckham Road, supports economic development while creating opportunities for public-private cost-sharing.

- **Innovative Financing Models**
  - Explore public-private partnership (P3) models where private entities provide upfront investments in exchange for long-term operational agreements or revenue-sharing structures.
  - Seek ISP commitments for matching investments in underserved areas where federal funds can be maximized to improve return on investment.

By leveraging private sector contributions, local governments and regional partners can efficiently meet BEAD match requirements, accelerate deployment timelines, and reduce dependency on limited public resources.

SUSTAINABILITY AND LONG-TERM MAINTENANCE

Ensuring the long-term success of the broadband network requires clear operational and funding strategies:

- **Ongoing Network Maintenance**:
  - ISPs will assume responsibility for maintaining network infrastructure, ensuring high reliability and consistent service delivery.
  - Long-term agreements with ISPs will outline maintenance roles, operational costs, and service quality standards.
- **Revenue from Service Subscriptions**: Service fees paid by households, businesses, and institutions will provide a revenue stream to support operational costs, upgrades, and future expansions.
- **Scalability**: The network infrastructure will be built to accommodate future demand for higher speeds and new technology without requiring costly retrofits.
- **State and Federal Support**: Local governments can leverage ongoing opportunities through programs like the Idaho Office of Broadband and future USDA grants for system maintenance and upgrades.

RISK MANAGEMENT

Proactive risk management ensures project success by addressing potential challenges and implementing mitigation strategies:

Risk	Impact	Mitigation Strategy
Supply Chain Disruptions	Delays in obtaining equipment.	Diversify suppliers and order materials early to avoid delays.

Labor Shortages	Lack of skilled technicians.	Partner with workforce development programs to train local workers.
Permitting Delays	Regulatory approval delays.	Work closely with local governments to streamline processes.
Insufficient Match Funding	Inability to meet BEAD requirements.	Leverage private partners, ISPs, and developers to provide contributions.
Affordability Challenges	Low adoption due to cost barriers.	Promote ISP affordability programs and outreach initiatives.

By aligning public funding opportunities with private sector investments, the project can effectively manage risks, meet federal requirements, and ensure efficient deployment.

The Financial Plan provides a clear framework for funding broadband expansion, ensuring sustainability and long-term success. By leveraging partnerships with ISPs, developers, and regional stakeholders, the plan meets the 25% match requirement for BEAD funding while creating opportunities for cost-sharing and public-private collaboration. This approach ensures efficient deployment, ongoing maintenance, and reliable broadband access that supports the economic, educational, and social needs of the region for years to come.

STRATEGIC IMPACT

The implementation of this broadband action plan for northwest rural Canyon County and the northwest triangular region of Owyhee County will deliver transformative and lasting benefits to residents, businesses, and institutions. By addressing critical connectivity gaps, this project will:

- **Improve Broadband Access**: Thousands of unserved and underserved locations will gain reliable, high-speed internet, enabling homes, businesses, and community anchor institutions like schools and healthcare facilities to fully participate in the digital economy.
- **Drive Economic Development**: Expanded broadband will empower agricultural operations with precision technologies, support small businesses, and attract new investments, creating jobs and stimulating local economies.
- **Enhance Quality of Life**: Residents will enjoy improved access to telehealth, remote education, and essential services. Digital equity programs will ensure seniors, low-income households, and underserved groups have the skills and tools needed to thrive.
- **Foster Smart, Resilient Development**: Broadband infrastructure will be integrated with smart growth initiatives, aligning expansion efforts with local land use and zoning plans to preserve rural values, support balanced development, and protect open spaces.
- **Increase Competition and Redundancy**: Encouraging multiple ISPs to serve the region will improve service affordability, reliability, and overall market competitiveness while reducing dependence on single-service providers.

This comprehensive approach ensures that broadband access becomes a tool for long-term economic resilience, social equity, and sustainable rural development.

NEXT STEPS

Following approval of this action plan, the project will immediately focus on building momentum through targeted activities that address technical, community, and funding needs.

1. **Develop and Maintain Technical Plans**
    - Create detailed, goal-driven technical plans that align community priorities with state and federal broadband objectives.

- Identify deployment milestones, leveraging existing infrastructure like Syringa Networks' middle-mile routes to expand last-mile connections efficiently.

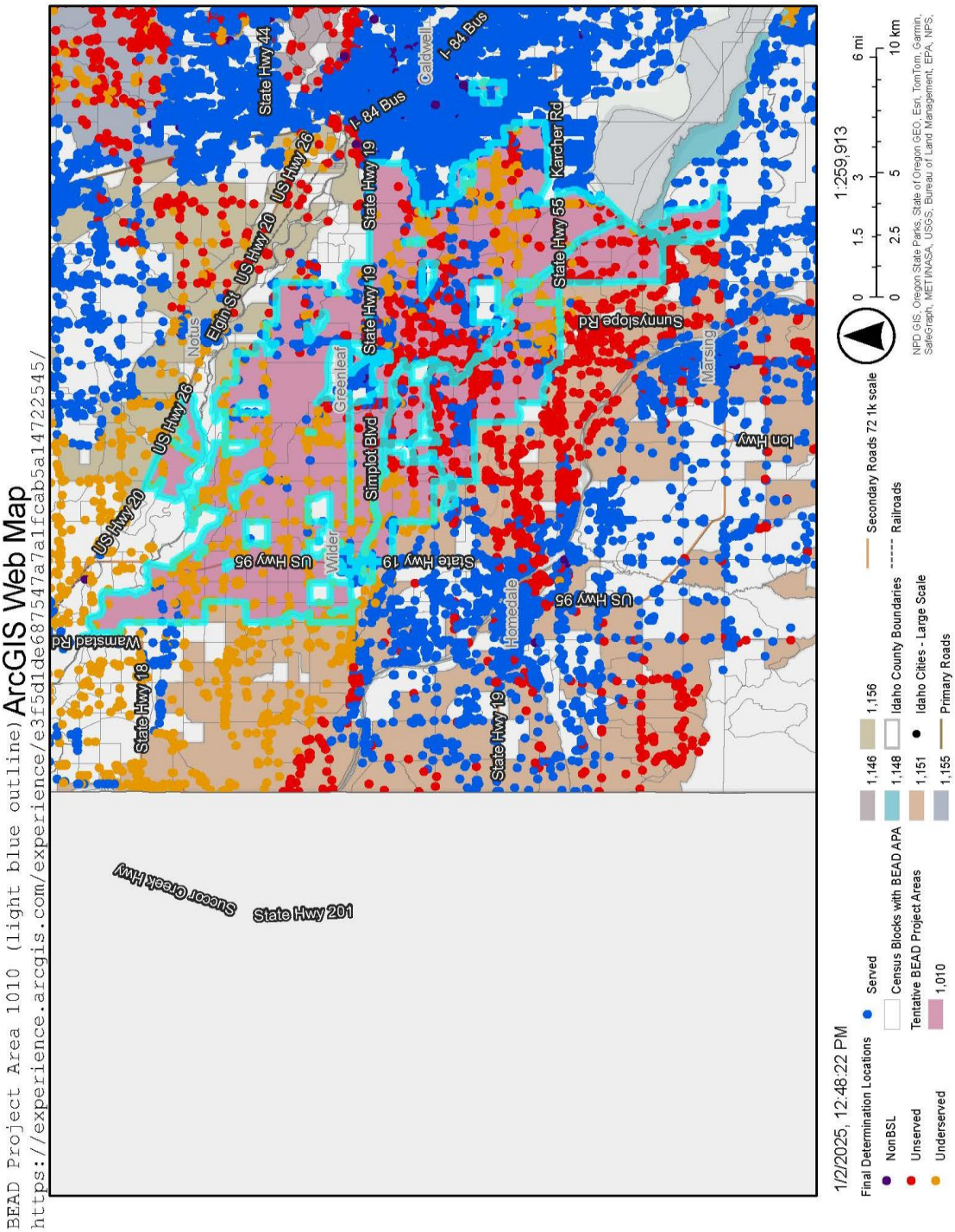
2. **Engage Stakeholders Continuously**
   - Host workshops, surveys, and public meetings to maintain transparency, refine priorities, and address evolving community needs.
   - Collaborate with local governments, ISPs, and community organizations to ensure alignment on project goals and timelines.
3. **Encourage Competition and Redundancy**
   - Facilitate partnerships with multiple ISPs to improve affordability and service quality, ensuring the region has access to reliable and competitive broadband options.
   - Prioritize infrastructure design that supports open-access networks, fostering market competition and reducing service disruptions.
4. **Integrate Broadband into Smart Growth Strategies**
   - Align broadband expansion with land use and zoning plans to support balanced development in rural areas, particularly along economic corridors such as Peckham Road and within agricultural zones.
   - Work with developers to include broadband-ready infrastructure (e.g., conduit) in new projects to minimize future costs.
5. **Launch Digital Equity Programs**
   - Roll out digital literacy training programs and device distribution initiatives in collaboration with schools, libraries, and senior centers.
   - Promote ISP-led affordability programs to ensure all residents, particularly low-income households, have access to affordable internet.
6. **Secure Funding and Permits**
   - Finalize funding applications for BEAD, USDA ReConnect, and state broadband grants, ensuring compliance with match requirements through private partnerships.
   - Begin permitting processes with local governments and coordinate right-of-way access to accelerate preconstruction activities.

By developing **technical plans** tailored to community needs, engaging stakeholders transparently, encouraging market competition, and integrating broadband with smart growth strategies, this plan establishes a clear roadmap for success. These next steps will ensure that broadband expansion enhances

economic opportunity, digital inclusion, and quality of life, while preserving the region's rural character and values. Through strategic collaboration and focused execution, northwest rural Canyon County and Owyhee County will be positioned to thrive in an increasingly connected world.

APPENDIX ONE – APPROVED PROJECT AREAS

Project Area 1010



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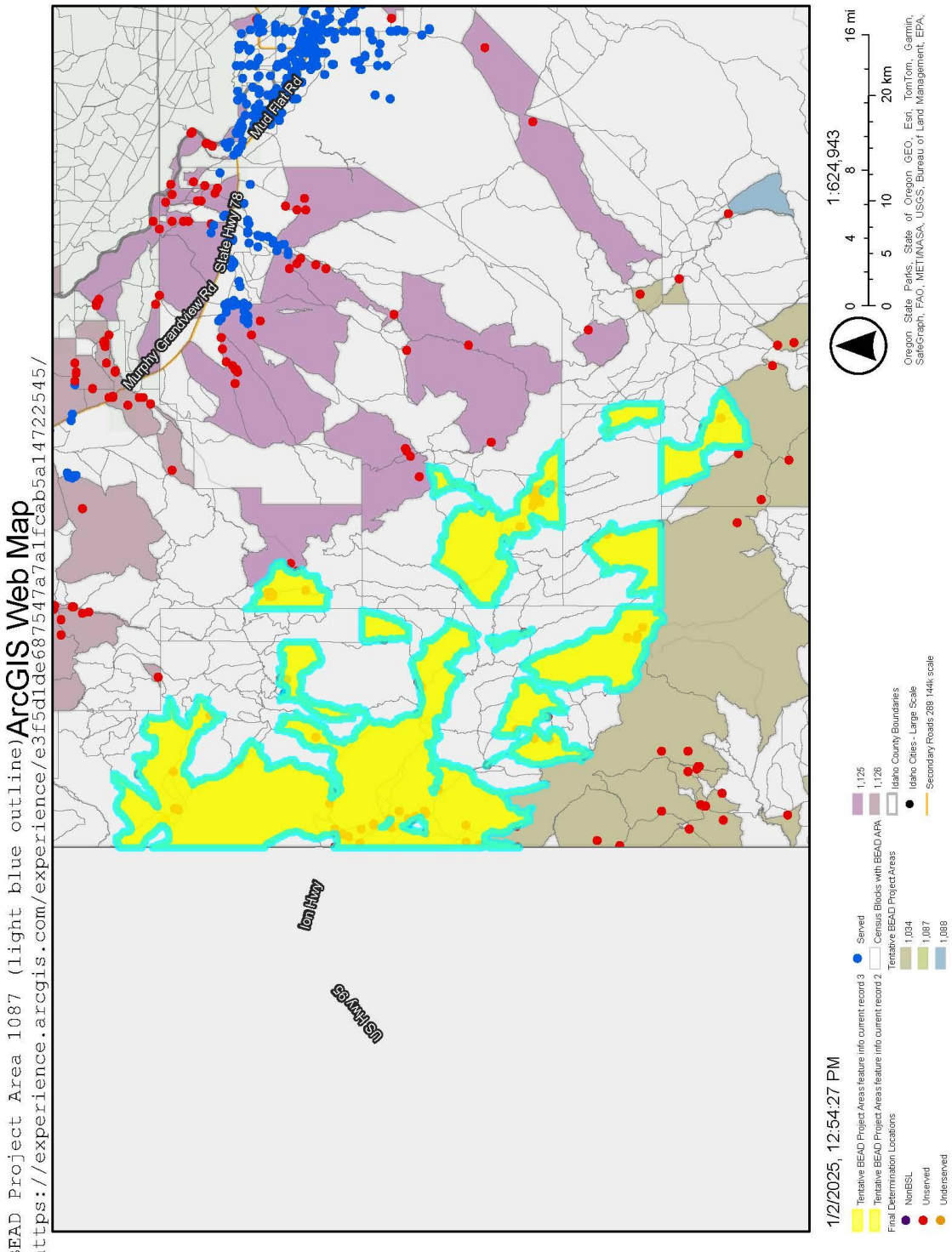

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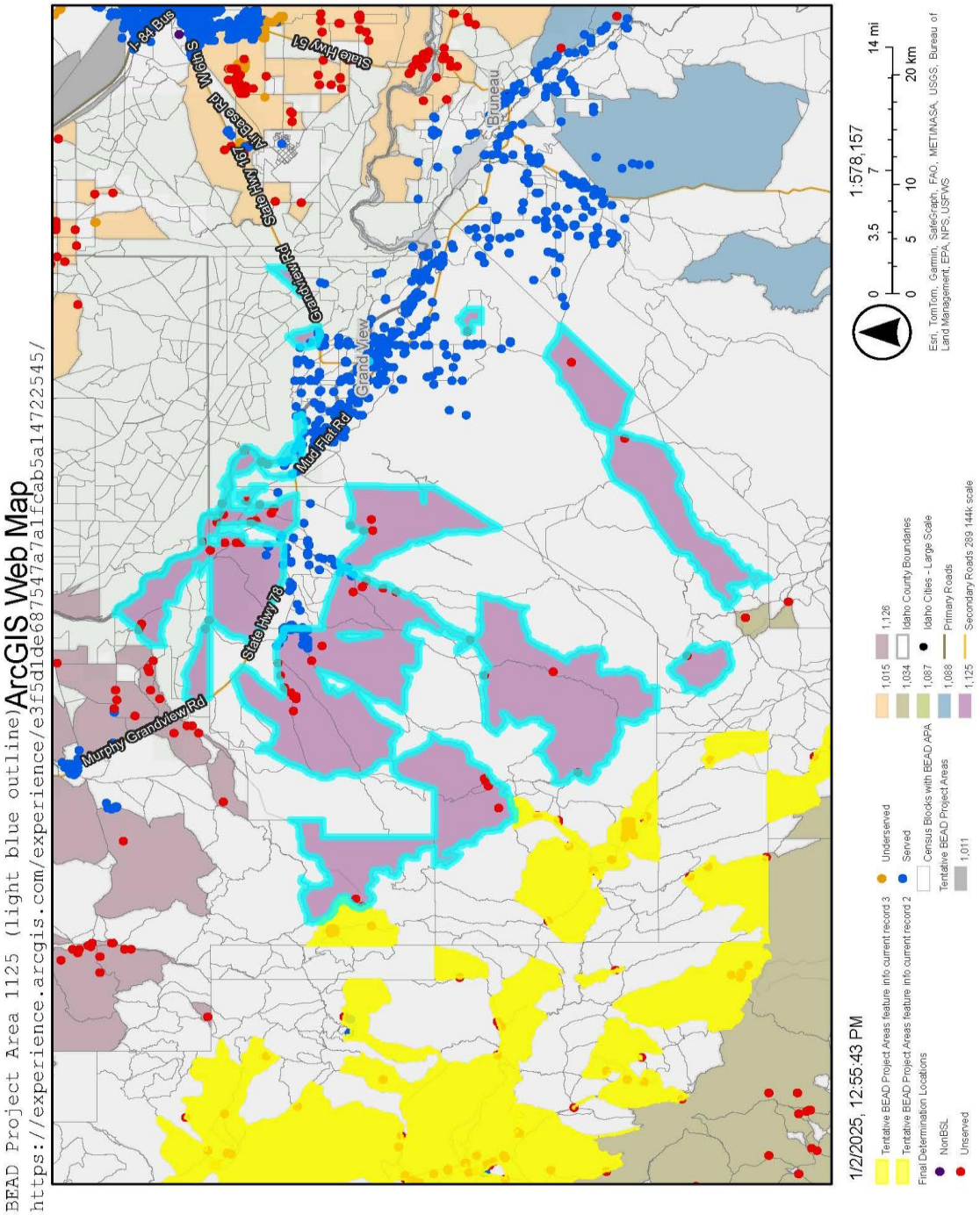

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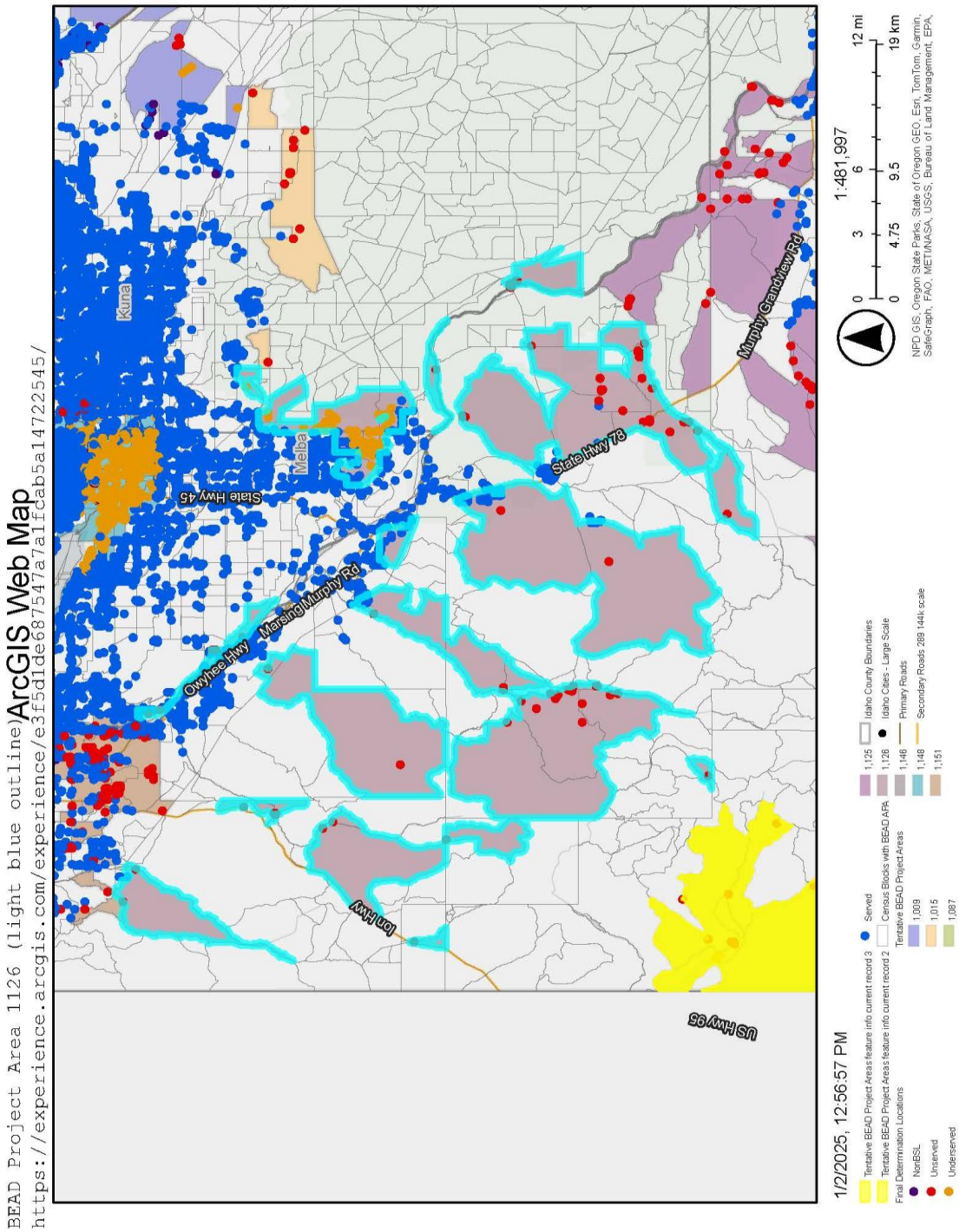

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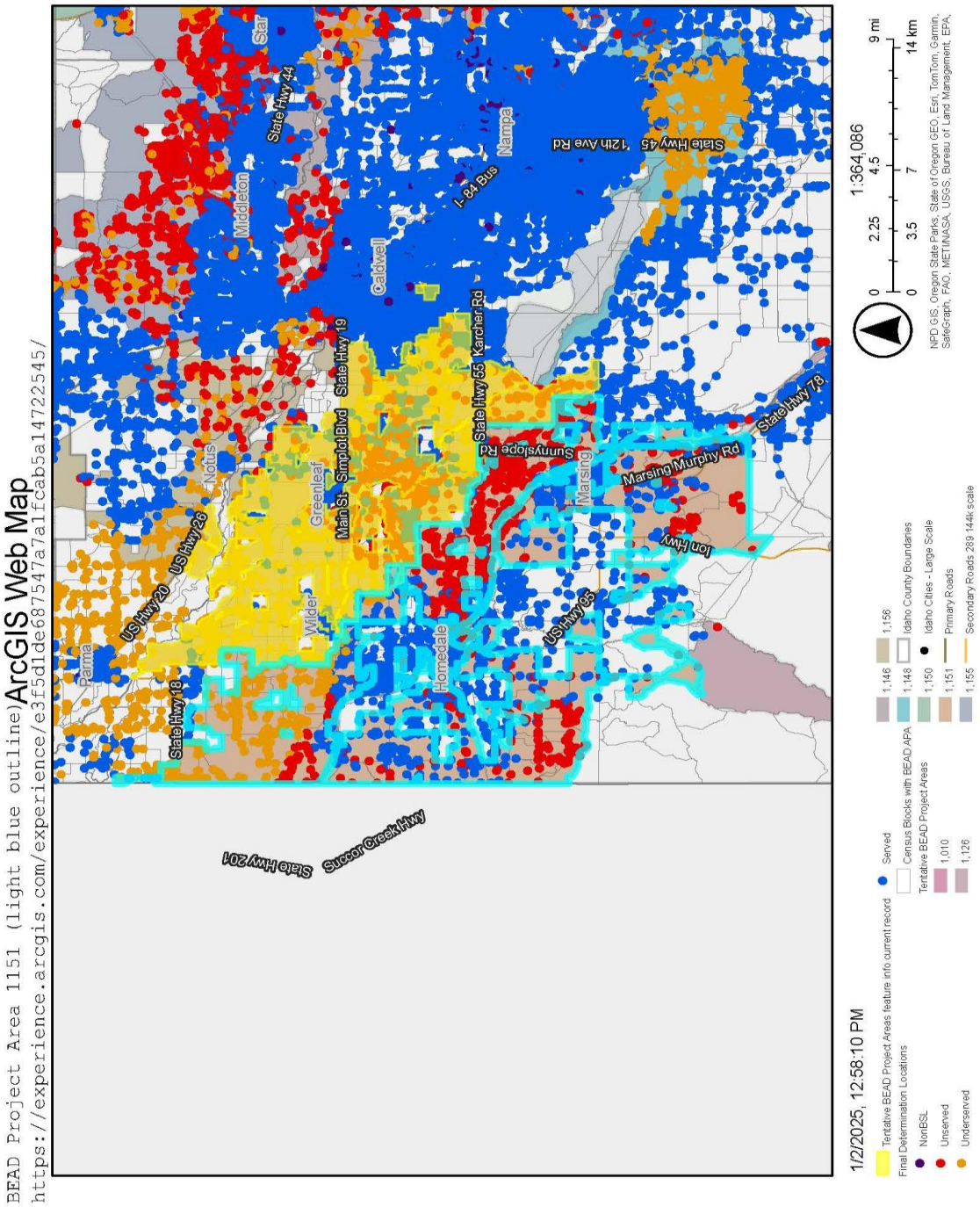

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