



## YUROK TRIBE

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### ***Tribal families receive high-speed internet for the first time***

*Tribe celebrates major milestone in internet infrastructure project*

The Yurok Tribe recently celebrated a major milestone in the Yurok Connect Broadband Project.

Yesterday afternoon, the Yurok Connect team finished the installation of a new 150-foot tower in Wautec and linked the first customers to the high-speed internet service. Located in the most remote part of the Yurok Reservation, the tower is providing first-time internet access to dozens of families and several tribal elders.

“Access to high-speed internet will significantly improve the everyday lives of Yurok citizens and non-Indian reservation residents,” said Joseph L. James, the Chairman of the Yurok Tribe. “This project will facilitate progress in several key areas, including, education, healthcare and economic development. When it comes to developing a prosperous community, internet access is just as important as the basic utilities.”

“This project is a long time coming,” said Mindy Natt, the Pecwan District Representative on the Yurok Tribal Council. “The Yurok Connect service will improve the quality of life on the reservation. It will benefit our youth, our elders and everyone in between.”

Launched in 2013 and administered by the Yurok IT Department, Yurok Connect is a Yurok Tribe-owned, wireless internet service provider. The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act-funded Yurok Connect Broadband Project will generate numerous positive outcomes. For example, it will greatly improve emergency communications on the reservation during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The Tribe will be able to spread out its workforce to keep its staff safe. Yurok Connect customers will be able to schedule telehealth appointments, instead of driving for two hours to the nearest doctor's office. Students will be able to participate in online learning at home because of the high-speed service. Yurok business owners, entrepreneurs and artists will be able to engage in the global market. Parents of young children will be able to work from home. Extended families and close friends will be able to communicate over any number of platforms. These are just a few of many examples of how high-speed internet will strengthen the community.

The Yurok Reservation, located in far Northern California, is in one of the most technologically underserved parts of the state. The lack of reliable internet is a major disadvantage with respect to public health, education and economic development. That is why the Tribe decided to become one of only a few wireless internet service providers in Indian Country.

Over the last eight months, the Yurok Information Technology Department and Yurok Connect Team, in partnership with EnerTribe, a Native American and woman-owned firm, have been working on re-engineering and building up existing Yurok tower sites and adding new towers to accommodate better broadband speeds. Facilitating a 200% increase in backhaul speeds, the towers were equipped with cutting-edge, superior quality hardware, which will support the fast service over the long term. In April, work will be done to beautify the communications hut and the area surrounding the base of the Wautec tower.

"We are extremely excited to participate in the monumental project. High speed and reliable internet are an essential component of all successful communities. Like water, the value can be truly seen in the way we use the resource, broadband is no different. The Wautec tower is but one piece of a much larger infrastructure project being carried out by the tribe. We are proud to play a role in bringing this essential service to Yurok Country," said EnerTribe CEO Forest James (no relation to Chairman James).

The paradigm-shifting Yurok Connect Broadband Project is now 75 percent complete and is expected to conclude in the next few months. When it's done, nearly all of the reservation will have access to dependably fast internet.

"We are quickly moving to the right side of the digital divide. I would like to thank the Yurok Team and EnerTribe for working so hard to make this project a reality," said Chairman James.

**The construction of the Wautec tower was funded by the CARES Act and the Amateur Radio Digital Communications. In addition to the CARES funds, three separate organizations contributed to the rest of the project, including the Tribal Nations Grant Fund, US Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration and the California Public Utilities Commission.**

***Launched in 2013, Yurok Connect offers inexpensive broadband internet to individuals, Tribal offices as well as Tribally owned and private businesses. The Yurok IT Department built the whole, wireless internet system from the ground up. The wireless internet service provider is a self-sustaining business administered entirely by Yurok citizens.***