

PUD Mobile Hotspots Offer Wi-Fi Access During COVID Shutdown

At a time when staying connected is more important than ever, the Grays Harbor PUD is teaming together with cities, schools and a large group of state and independent agencies to provide free access to the PUD fiber network. Using mobile hotspots, free Wi-Fi access will be provided at strategic points around Grays Harbor County. Users can simply drive-up or walk-up to the sites and immediately have online access for business, school and a host of other needs.

"Today more than ever, internet access is a critical part of our lives and a way to keep connected to family, schools and businesses. However not everyone has the same level of access, especially in rural Washington. Mobile sites like these will help to change that," said PUD Core Services Director Rob Hanny, whose office oversees the PUD Telecommunications Department.

In the middle of May three drive-up sites were activated in Grays Harbor: McCleary City Hall, the Wishkah Valley School, and the Satsop School. The PUD is working with other communities and organizations around the county to bring more sites online. Equipment for the sites has been provided to the utility free of charge by the Information Technology Disaster Resource Center, a private, industry funded disaster relief organization.

The local access is part of a larger, statewide effort to provide free Wi-Fi access to Washington residents during the COVID response. For complete information and a map of locations, visit www.driveinwifi.wa.gov. The map will be updated as more sites come online.



Technicians install mobile hot spots in Satsop and McCleary to provide free WiFi access.

Commission Meeting Dates

Meetings are held in the Nichols Building, 220 Myrtle Street, Hoquiam.

June 2020

Monday - June 8

(rescheduled from June 1)

Monday - June 22

(rescheduled from June 15)

July 2020

Monday - July 6

Monday - July 20

Utility workshops are held at 3:30 pm. Regular business meetings are scheduled to begin at 4:30 pm. Public comment periods are included at the open and close of every meeting.

Commission meetings may be cancelled and special meetings may be scheduled. Please visit our website (www.ghpud.org) for updated information.

ON-LINE BILL PAYMENT

Want to pay your bill on-line? Now you can pay your bill instantly without ever leaving home. Just go to ghpud.org, click the "Pay Bill/Smart Hub" button on the bottom left hand side of the screen and follow the instructions. If you have any difficulties using the online service, please call Customer Service at 1-800-562-7726 or you may email customerservice@ghpud.org.

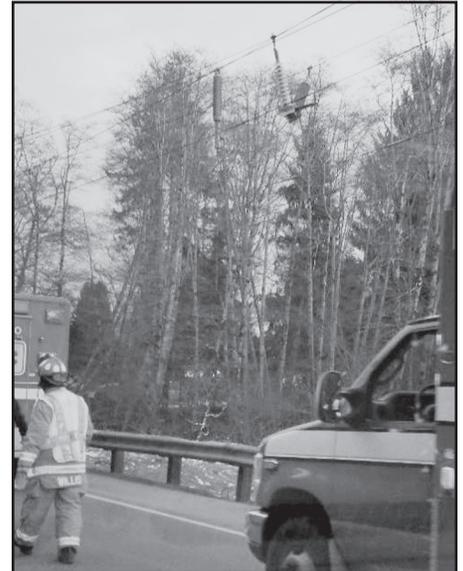


Power Outage Totals Fall in 2019

In a year marked by two significant events, 2019 saw the number of major power outages fall slightly and all measurable system reliability numbers came in well below five year averages. A system reliability report released by the Grays Harbor PUD revealed that the total number of major outages on the utility system (50 or more customers impacted) was down from 296 events in 2018 to 290 events in 2019. While the total number of customers impacted rose from 54,446 to 57,326, the total hours without service dropped from 198,483 to 181,474.

“Once again our system has performed well under tough conditions and our crews have shown themselves to be amongst the best in the business,” said General Manager Dave Ward. “For several years our emphasis has been on system strength and vegetation management and this report tells us that the work is paying off in the form of fewer outages and fewer hours in which our customers were without power.”

The 2019 numbers were significantly impacted by two events: a storm on January 6th that knocked out power to over 27,000 customers from the ocean beaches to East County, and a car versus pole accident in Central Park on February 5th that brought down a transmission pole, interrupting power to over 7,100 customers in Central Park and Montesano.



Insulators hanging from power lines mark the spot where a transmission pole once stood in Central Park.

Downed trees and storm events continued to be the main causes of outages, accounting for 76% of power interruptions in 2019. While the number of tree related outages came in below the five year average for the second straight year, Ward says it shows the importance of the utility’s tree trimming and mowing cycle.

“We’ve got to keep at it,” said Ward. “Washington is called the Evergreen State for a reason and without regular attention to tree trimming and undergrowth mowing, you can end up in a situation where blowdowns and falling trees can cause outage numbers to rise.”

	Totals 2019	Totals 2018	Previous 5 Yr Avg	Change
Outages	290	296	362	-20%
Interruptions	57,326	54,446	66,932	-14%
Customer Hours	181,474	198,483	224,147	-19%
SAIDI (Min / Cust)	257	283	328	-22%
*	117	141	142	-18%
SAIFI (Int / Cust)	1.4	1.3	1.6	-17%
*	0.7	1.0	1.0	-33%



PUD Project Help Funds Aid Struggling Customers

In a time of crisis, the willingness of a community to lend a hand has never been more important. As the Grays Harbor PUD helps customers in need cope with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is reminding its customers of an opportunity to help those struggling to pay their monthly power bill.

“For several years, the PUD’s customers have made donations to the Project Help program to help their neighbors and community members during difficult financial times. It is times like these that this assistance can really make a difference in our customer’s lives” said Customer Service Director Katy Moore. “We want our customers to know how they may make donations so we can continue to help those in need.”

Customers who wish to donate to Project Help may do so by filling out the donation section found on the left side of their monthly return invoice, offering a donation of \$1.00, \$5.00 or “other” where customers may write in the amount they wish to donate. Donations may also be made by contacting PUD Customer Service at (360) 532-4220.

In response to the Stay Home, Stay Healthy order, the PUD has embraced social distancing by setting up remote work stations for employees, both at home and throughout PUD facilities. By doing so the PUD is able to maintain the critical services they provide to the Grays Harbor community while ensuring a safe and healthy working environment for utility staff.

Externally, the utility has closed its public lobbies and encouraged customers to use online (www.ghpud.org) or mobile apps (SmartHub) to pay utility bills. Those who wish to pay in person may use the Customer Service drive thru. The Customer Service staff is also available to answer questions over the phone.

“I can’t emphasize enough that if you fear that you may have trouble making a power payment, you should contact our office. Our staff is ready to help in this time of uncertainty,” said Customer Service Director Katy Moore.

Scammers Use PUD Numbers to Mask Calls



Scammers are renewing their calls to Grays Harbor PUD customers, again using PUD numbers to make the calls appear legitimate. The PUD has been notified by customers that they had been contacted by phone and that the incoming call appeared to be coming from a PUD phone numbers. Once on the line, the callers demand immediate payment on an account they claim to be overdue and threaten to shutoff power unless a payment is made.

“This scam is very similar to ones attempted in the past, but given the current climate caused by the COVID-19 response, tensions are running higher than normal and scammers are pushing people to make a rash decision. Given that fact, it’s even more important that you do not volunteer your personal information,” says Communications Director Ian Cope. “If you get an email or phone call threatening to shut off your power or containing account information you think is suspicious, call the PUD Customer Service office to report the scams and to check on your account status.”

Recipients of such fraudulent phone calls should under no circumstances agree to send money or give bank account, credit card or other personal information. Rather, customers are advised to immediately contact PUD Customer Service at 360-532-4220 to verify the claim.



Narrowing the Digital Divide

By Russ Skolrood, District Three

Problems with equal access to programs and services is nothing new to me. As a school teacher, I've seen it for years. In a classroom of 25 students, you'll find 25 different sets of challenges faced by each student, everything from access to programs, school supplies and even everyday needs like food and clothing. The same lack of equity can be found in PUD customers when it comes to access to the internet, something that has become a critical part of life for home school and business. However, at the height of the COVID response, utilities across that state have found a way to narrow that gap.

The installation of mobile hotspots at strategic points throughout the county allows users within range of the device the chance to access the PUD broadband network free of charge. Accordingly, the PUD telecommunications staff has worked with local leaders to choose central locations like schools and city buildings in underserved areas with enough space and parking so users can drive up, maintain social distancing, log on and carry out whatever business they need; everything from checking an account balance or email to sending in schoolwork or job assignments. At a time like this with so much uncertainty, that little bit of normalcy can go a long way and I am very happy that our PUD has found partners like the Washington State Broadband Office, the Northwest Open Access Network (NoaNet) and the Information Technology Disaster Resource Center which has made that service possible.

Looking forward to our "new normal" I think this crisis has laid bare the issues that come from a lack of access to broadband services. I don't know that we will ever arrive at a time when everyone has the same coverage, but certainly we can agree that the ease with which a customer can access that service needs to be addressed. There is a huge divide between rural and urban services that needs to be bridged, especially when you consider that online meetings, classrooms and conferences are likely to play a more prominent role in our future. I don't see how we can ask employees and students to work in that way and produce results without making sure they have some form of affordable and reliable access to broadband services.

In closing, I would like to mention briefly my appreciation of patience and my abundance of pride. Those are two of the feelings that the response to the COVID-19 pandemic by your PUD has left me with. In the last two months, the PUD has had to reinvent the way it offers its services to you, our customers. The patience that you have shown as our staff adjusts to the new practices is much appreciated. At the same time I am so proud of our staff and the way they have risen to the challenges posed by these new practices. They haven't skipped a beat and have shown themselves to be the true professionals I have always known them to be.

Take care of yourselves and each other and we will get through this.



ENERGY, an informational newsletter, is published monthly for families and businesses energized by Grays Harbor PUD.

2720 Sumner Avenue
Aberdeen WA 98520

Customer Service 360-532-4220
Toll Free 800-562-7726
Fax 360-532-6085

Outage Numbers 360-537-3721
Toll Free 888-541-5923

Visit us at: www.ghpud.org

General Manager: Dave Ward
Editor: Ian Cope

Commissioners:
Arie Callaghan • 360-538-6514 • acallaghan@ghpud.org
Russ Skolrood • 360-538-6289 • rskolrood@ghpud.org
Dave Timmons • 360-538-6267 • dtimmons@ghpud.org

