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NEWS RELEASE

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Commission for Libraries Addresses Issue of Slow Internet Speeds in Idaho

BOISE, Idaho — When it comes to Internet speeds among residential users, Idaho has lots of room for improvement, but the Idaho Commission for Libraries points to a statewide broadband deployment initiative that is increasing the availability of high-speed Internet sources among many of the state’s public libraries.

Despite recent media coverage that singled out Idaho for the slowest Internet speeds among residential customers, the ICfL says many Gem State libraries are a viable option for Idahoans who seek high-speed access.

According to an article in the *New York Times* earlier this week, Idaho has the slowest Internet speeds in the country “for residential customers who were downloading things like games — a ‘dismal’ average of 318 kilobytes per second.” The article, which was reprinted in Thursday’s *Idaho Statesman*, also said “the federal government’s National Broadband Map put Idaho at 47th for [residential] download speeds of 3 megabits or greater.”

However, the article also noted that at least a dozen “federally funded projects are under way in Idaho, at a cost of \$25 million, to establish high-speed broadband.”

Among those projects is an ICfL-administered initiative to increase broadband Internet connectivity in the least connected public libraries throughout the state. Through grants from the Federal Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the project enhances and expands public-access computer centers within the libraries that participate in the BTOP “online @ your library” project and expands online resources available to all library users in the state.

“Not every home needs broadband Internet for everyone to connect to Web resources,” says Gens Johnson, BTOP project director for the ICfL. “Free public access computing at the library has the potential to efficiently provide the connection.”

Coming from a previous average of about 1.5 megabits per second in both directions, BTOP “online @ your library” libraries in Idaho now have an average of 11 Mbps download speed and 8 Mbps upload speed.

As part of the project, participating libraries are also eligible for new computers for patrons to access the expanded online services offered through the BTOP grant project. Earlier this year, for example, the public library in Preston received 11 Mbps of broadband Internet connectivity and 12 new computers, and the library in Sandpoint received 45 Mbps and 22 new computers through BTOP. Currently, 56 public libraries — primarily in the state’s rural areas — participate in BTOP. In addition to increased broadband access and additional computers provided through the grants, most of the BTOP libraries receive wi-fi equipment that will enable patrons who bring their own computers to the library to access the Internet.

While Johnson acknowledges that the *Times* article underscores Idaho’s need to improve residential download speeds, she notes that access to high-speed Internet sources is still within many Idahoans’ reach throughout the state at public libraries.

“Online resources that focus on job skills, education and health help economic development,” she says. “I’m excited about how a rural community might be revitalized as people come to their local public library to get online.”

See more about “online @ your library” at <http://libraries.idaho.gov/online>.

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