Connect Arkansas

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History

2005   Lawmakers, state agency leaders, and others create the Arkansas Broadband Initiative to formalize discussions on connectivity and advocate for high-speed Internet access for every home and business.

2007   Act 604 is signed by Governor Beebe authorizing the Arkansas Capital Corporation to create Connect Arkansas as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

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Mission

Act 604 states that Connect Arkansas's mission is to "prepare the people and businesses of Arkansas to secure the economic, educational, health, social, and other benefits available via broadband use; and facilitate the availability of broadband service to every home and business in Arkansas."

*Connect is provider- and technology-neutral.*

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3

Connect Arkansas
Current and Proposed Initiatives

Connect-Arkansas
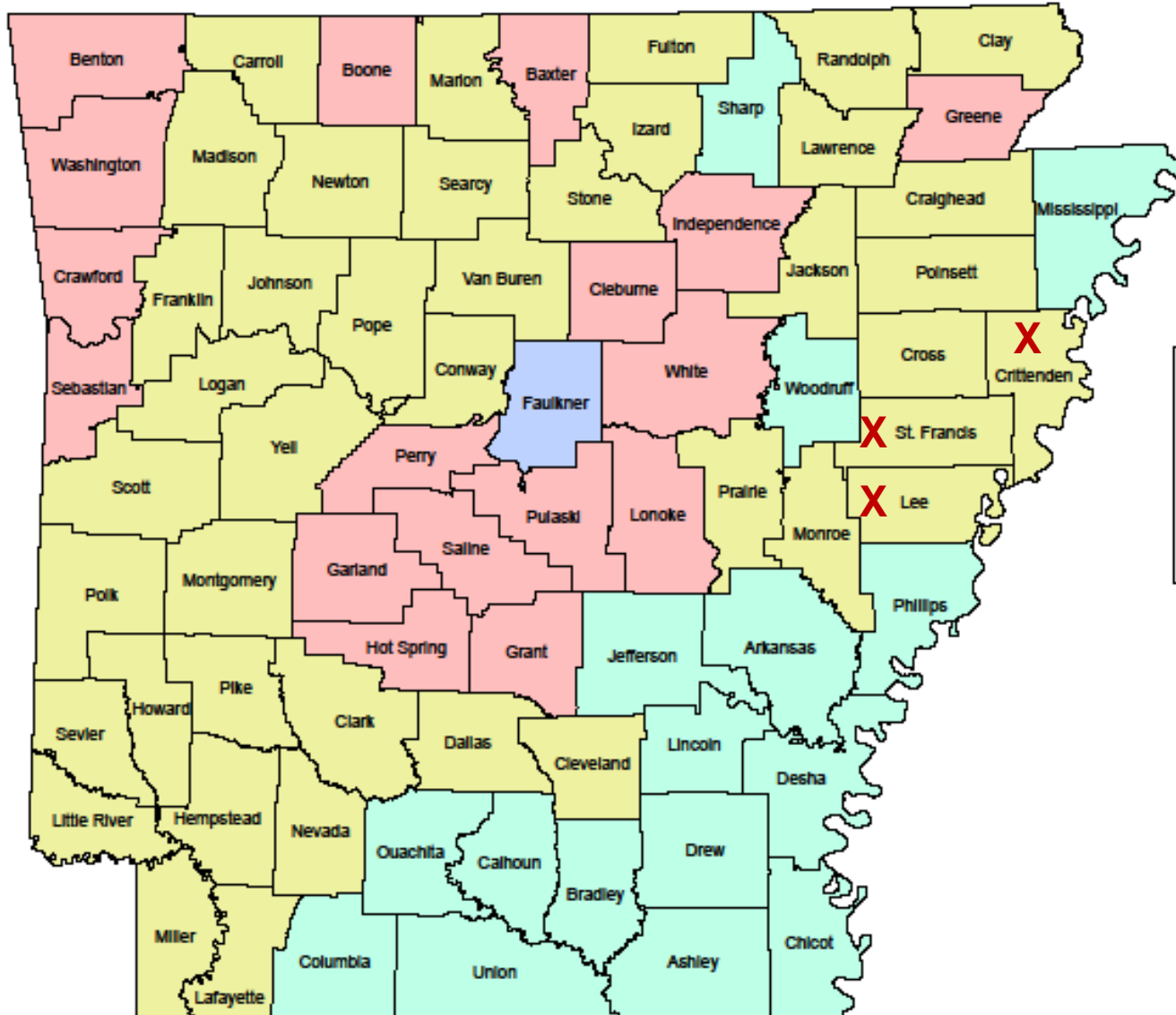
County Initiatives

- A B C D E F G H I J K
- C F G H J K
- A B C J
- C J

Initiative Key
A - E-Communities
B - County Survey
C - Broadband Mapping
D - Engineering Assessment
E - County Website
F - Computers for Kids Program
G - Computer Training
H - UAMS Telemedicine
I - Fundraising Assistance
J - Arkansas SourceLink
K - Youth Entrepreneurship Training
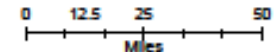
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Program Highlights

- Each county has received six broadband mapping updates in all four broadband delivery technologies; the latest update being April 1.

- Data for these updates is collected in partnership with nearly 80 broadband providers serving Arkansas.

- Over 1,100 students and parents from low-income families in 57 counties have received free computers and digital literacy training. Follow up surveys revealed 62 percent of these families are subscribing to high-speed Internet.

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Program Highlights

- Fifty-five 9th – 12th grades submitted entries for the 2013 Youth Entrepreneurship Showcase 2.0 online business plan competition.

- Stakeholders in 17 counties have been engaged in e-Community broadband planning and education.

- Over 1,600 8th through 12th graders in 57 counties have built online business websites on iPads through entrepreneurial training.

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6

Program Highlights

- Arkansas SourceLink connects current and prospective entrepreneurs to Arkansas resources needed to start or run their businesses.

- Six counties (Chicot, Lincoln, Monroe, Prairie, Sharp, and Woodruff) are realizing the efficiencies of e-Government with new county websites, funded by Connect. Ten more county websites are underway.

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What We've Learned

- Many Arkansans, businesses, and governments are subscribing to and using high-speed Internet, but there are still gaps.

- One is basic education about high-speed Internet – a vehicle for rapidly transmitting voice, video, and other data files worldwide.

High-Speed Internet Technologies

Wireline – DSL, Cable, Fiber

Fixed Wireless

Mobile Wireless

Satellite

Maps:

http://connect-arkansas.org

What We've Learned via E-Communities

- An ongoing, focused effort to identify and promote public access computer / broadband centers in every community is needed. Promotion should include hours of operation and whether or not they are wi-fi only.

- Connect Arkansas Interactive Map

- "Digital literacy training" – getting online through new websites and social media (ASBTDC training – "Website in a Day and Social Media/Getlisted.com)

What We've Learned via E-Communities

- All Arkansas county and city governments need to transition to e-Gov (about 35% of counties do not yet have transactional county websites).

- Online information on potential business and industrial sites needs to include all broadband options and contact information in addition to other infrastructure.

Closing*

Counties play a critical role in making informed decisions on investments in economic development, public safety, and delivering government services that keep communities strong and vital.

High-speed Internet can greatly influence all of these areas – if communities choose to adopt and use it.

Closing*

It is incumbent on community leaders to understand that high-speed Internet is a vital and necessary infrastructure that has the potential to improve the tax base, increase jobs, and improve public services while cutting costs.

Communities that do not fully embrace the technologies of high-speed Internet will likely be excluded from many economic opportunities and not be considered as a desirable place to live by much of the workforce.

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Closing*

Leaders can help others become educated by utilizing the technology, learning what the challenges are for local broadband providers, acting as catalysts for increasing and improving broadband for businesses, community institutions (education, health care, libraries, tourism), and residents.

*Mark O'Connell, executive director, Wisconsin Counties Association, *Unraveling Broadband in Wisconsin*, January 2013