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## *Rural community leaders find the information superhighway on-ramp next week*

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### **Bonneville Power Administration**

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**Spokane, Wash.** - More than 100 mayors and community leaders from the Northwest will gather in Spokane on Sept. 22 and 23 at the Spokane Center to discuss how they can bring the information superhighway to their rural areas.

The media are invited to attend the "Communication is at Hand" conference. The event is co-sponsored by the Bonneville Power Administration and the Washington PUD Association. It will begin at 9 a.m. on Wednesday and 8:30 a.m. on Thursday.

Fiber optics - with its bounty of the Internet, high-speed computers and e-commerce - is becoming a fact of life for cities where it is replacing telephone wires and co-axial cable as the main source of data and information. That's not so for rural areas where the low number of users per mile makes the cost of installing fiber optics cable too expensive.

"The information superhighway has become as critical to the economic health of towns across the Northwest as electricity was 60 years ago," says Jack Robertson, BPA deputy administrator. "Deregulation of the telecommunication industry and population shifts are changing the rules. Businesses concerned about the quality of life for employees, as well as low overhead and labor rates, look to rural areas when siting new facilities. But they won't go there if they don't have a link to the world of information."

Speakers include State Senator Lisa Brown of Washington, Montana Public Utility Commissioner Bob Rowe, General Manager William Ray from the Glasgow, Ky., Energy Plant Board, Dr. William Melody of the Delft University of Technology in the Netherlands,

Dr. Edwin Parker, technology expert and author and Executive Director Steve Johnson of the Washington PUD Association. Other speakers include utility and telecommunications managers from Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Montana and across the U.S.

Supporting sponsors are Alcoa Fujikura, Ltd., Nortel Networks, and Lucent Technologies. Connect directly to the conference Web site at <http://www.bpa.gov/Corporate/KCC/conferences/fiber/conference.htm>

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