



InternetforEveryone.org: Five Days on the Digital Dirt Road

InternetforEveryone.org is a Free Press initiative of public interest, civic and industry groups that are working to bring the benefits of a fast, affordable and open Internet connection to everyone in America.

As the Internet has become a critical part of our daily lives, it is clear that everyone in America must have access to play a part in our economy and democracy. High-speed Internet, or “broadband,” is no longer a luxury; it’s a lifeline to contemporary society. Our broad alliance is working together with citizens across the country and national leaders to create a plan to bring a high-speed Internet connection into every home and business, at a price all of us can afford.

To shed light on the millions of Americans who live without regular Internet access or lack the training or equipment to get online, a Free Press reporting team is traveling to communities across the country to tell their stories. In February, Free Press' Megan Tady spent one week interviewing residents of rural North Carolina. Follow our trek across the state and get an up-close view of America’s digital divide.

In North Carolina alone, nearly 5 million residents don’t have access to high-speed Internet. According to [a July 2007 study](#), 30 percent or more of the state's population in 21 rural counties did not have high-speed Internet connectivity. In many cases, telephone and cable companies have refused to provide service to people living in the remote and rural areas of the state, while some people are simply priced out of buying expensive broadband service.

It’s becoming increasingly clear, however, that Internet connectivity is key to a sound economy and could help revitalize local communities hit hard by the economic downturn. North Carolina is the second-largest [textile employer](#) and the third-largest apparel employer in the United States, and it has suffered numerous plant closures over the last decade. The state has continued to [hemorrhage jobs](#) in the face of our current economic recession, losing 34,900 jobs in December 2008 alone. Over the past year, 120,200 jobs have vanished, and the state’s unemployment rate is high at 8.7%.

Replacing these lost jobs with opportunities offered by the Internet – home-based businesses, telecommuting, and bringing current businesses into the digital age – could help save America’s economy, and stabilize the lives of people floundering in places like North Carolina.

[Free Press](#) traveled across the state in February to meet people trying to raise families, go to school, start and maintain businesses, and participate in the global economy using antiquated dial-up service and unreliable satellite Internet connections. Their stories are a testament to why high-speed Internet is vital for America’s future, and why our leaders in Washington should be approaching broadband expansion with the same urgency and commitment given to past projects like highway expansion, rural electrification and clean drinking water.

Click on the links below to read and watch the stories of seven North Carolinians and learn how high-speed Internet access could improve their communities and change their lives.



[Day One: Pembroke, N.C.](#)

Doug Locklear and Rhonda Locklear, members of the Lumbee Tribe, say people where they live in Robeson County simply can't afford the high-speed Internet connections that could lead to other opportunities. ([more...](#))



[Day Two: Person County](#)

One hour north of Durham in rural Person County, farmer Jay Foushee is stuck on dial-up, using a slow connection to check market prices and sell his crops. His teenage daughter Julie has to leave the house each night in search of a broadband connection to do her homework. ([more...](#))



[Day Three: Smoky Mountains](#)

Living in the Smoky Mountains outside of Asheville, writer Brooks Townes was forced to give up his freelance career because his dial-up service made him uncompetitive. And bed-and-breakfast owner Martha Abraham fears that her slow and unpredictable satellite connection hurts her small business. ([more...](#))



[Day Four: Spring Creek](#)

In remote Spring Creek, residents are trying to revive their town by building a community center that offers a computer lab and space for local businesses. But longtime resident Layten Davis says their attempts are futile without high-speed Internet. ([more...](#))



[Day Five: Rutherford County](#)

In Rutherford County, Sam Adams, a senior IBM researcher, spent thousands of dollars to erect his own broadband tower so he could continue working. But he knows not everyone has that luxury, and that widespread broadband access in the area could jumpstart a local economy that has been decimated by the disappearing textile industry. ([more...](#))