



With a new Executive Director in place and continued support from the Board of Directors, Partners for Rural Washington expanded its impact substantially in 2024. It was a year of galvanizing the operations of the organization as well as expanding its network and reputation. The progress of the past year sets the stage to re-establish PRWA as the go-to organization for Washington State's rural communities for support with even the thorniest infrastructure and community issues.

STAFFING/BOARD MEMBERSHIP

- In January, PRWA contracted with Staci Nelson to work in Spokane, Ferry, Stevens and Pend Oreille counties as the organization's regional representative. At the PRWA June Board Meeting, Jody Opheim, PRWA's primary contractor, was named Executive Director to oversee operations, and Staci Nelson became PRWA's Director of Grant Services. PRWA also contracted with two new grant writers, Annalisa Noble and Amelia Alberts, and Kathy Barnard La Pointe, the new Director of Communications.
- At the October PRWA Board Meeting, the board voted to add Blanche Rhea, the Mayor of Farmington, and Mike Gaffney, Associate Director of WSU Extension, to the PRWA Board of Directors.

FUNDING

- In May, PRWA was awarded a \$250,000 REAP Technical Assistance Grant from USDA in cooperation with Zero Emissions Northwest (ZEN) to provide technical assistance to develop renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements for rural farmers, ranchers, and small businesses in three states.
- In November, PRWA received a \$5,000 donation from Banner Bank to help continue its work and was asked to submit a Letter of Interest to Resource Rural for support.

PARTNERSHIPS AND PROGRESS

- In late 2023, PRWA received a two-year, \$397,000 grant from the Ballmer Group to help counties apply for funds to expand broadband service in rural Eastern Washington. In January 2024, PRWA contracted with Petrichor Broadband to implement this work. Petrichor signed Memorandums of Understanding with eight of the ten counties in PRWA's target area in Eastern Washington. Petrichor Broadband staff will help these counties prepare applications to the Broadband Equity and Access and Deployment (BEAD) program.
- PRWA staff met and worked with several rural communities and organizations, including Starbuck, Pomeroy, Albion, Farmington, Oakesdale and the Dayton Park and Recreation District. In addition, PRWA contracted with Greater Spokane Inc., to assist economic development directors in Adams, Lincoln and Whitman counties to identify projects and research potential funding sources for infrastructure and community/economic development projects.
- PRWA became a member of the Northwest Rural Investment Strategy (NWRIS) Steering Committee in June. This group is responsible for planning and hosting the annual NWRIS Summit.
- PRWA signed a Cooperative Agreement with Washington State's USDA Rural Development Office to provide technical assistance to rural communities and support for NWRIS.
- PRWA assisted the Oakesdale Park and Recreation District #4 with a grant application to the state Recreation and Conservation Office for repairs and renovation to the community swimming pool complex. The funds were awarded in October and PRWA continues to assist the district with administering the grant as needed.
- PRWA and Oregon iSector will take the lead on coordinating the NWRIS 2025 Summit to be held at Skamania Lodge in Stevenson, WA, November 3 and 4.
- The NWRIS-WA core team (PRWA, WSU Extension, WA Department of Commerce, and WA USDA Rural Development, and assisted by staff from the Association of Washington Cities) started work in the fall to select six pilot communities from across the state to receive comprehensive, sustained assistance from the NWRIS-WA core team for infrastructure and community projects. This work will continue to develop the NWRIS 'hub' model for assisting rural communities.

PRESENTATIONS AND PUBLICITY

- In April, PRWA President Kim Herman spoke, at the invitation of PRWA board member Craig Muska, to a community infrastructure group from Santa Cruz County, AZ, about PRWA's work.
- In August, both Jody and Staci were featured in a *Spokesman Review* newspaper article about their work for PRWA in rural Eastern Washington.
- PRWA Executive Director Jody Opheim was a co-presenter at the Infrastructure Assistance Coordinating Council (IACC) conference in Wenatchee, the Washington Public Ports Association's Small Ports Seminar in Chelan, and the Iowa Rural Development Council. Staci Nelson, Annalisa Noble, and Amelia Alberts also presented at the IACC.
- PRWA was an exhibitor at the IACC annual conference in October, along with Zero Emissions Northwest, connecting communities from across the state about resources available to Washington's smallest towns.
- In December, PRWA Executive Director Jody Opheim started a weekly newsletter to keep stakeholders and other rural leaders up to date on PRWA activities.