

Eastern Washington Partnership
WorkSource System Update
September 24, 2015

Wildfires Impact

As everyone is aware, the wildfires in eastern Washington have had a serious impact on many different levels. In addition to the tragic loss of three firefighters' lives in the Twisp region, hundreds of square miles of forest land, and both residential and commercial properties have been totally destroyed. Fire conditions were so bad that logging operations were completely prohibited for over two weeks throughout the entire region. Hundreds of loggers had to cease their operations during this time. Some either had a "blue card" or took the training to get one. This card is a certification that a person has met the training requirements to work on a wildland incident. Having a card has allowed some of the affected loggers to continue working during this time by using their heavy equipment to dig containment lines. The logging restrictions were partially lifted as of September 10th so some logging operations are back in business.

In the Colville area, In early September, Vaagen Brothers Lumber: reduced hours for approximately 20+ regular sawmill employees, to 12 hours per week, for about a 4-week period. The company spokesperson stated the reason is due to level 4 industrial restrictions on commercial activities on public land – which is causing a reduction in logs for production.

Boise Cascade Wood Products: closed the Upper Sawmill in Kettle Falls from September 8th through September 14th, due to the Level 4 industrial restrictions. They also laid off the Arden mill staff only on Friday the 4th, for the same reason. In early September, a Boise Cascade spokesperson reported that the plywood plant in Kettle Falls was not immediately impacted. The company had enough logs for regular production to continue for at least 40 working days.

WorkSource Technology Systems Nearing "Go-Live" Date

The project to replace the aging WorkSource Technology systems has progressed on schedule and is rapidly approaching the "live" implementation date set for mid-December. A team from **Monster Government Solutions** has worked diligently with WorkSource Washington to design and build the new integrated systems.

The public facing system that will provide self-service access for job seekers and employers, has been named **WorkSourceWA.com** to maintain brand identity with the current Go2WorkSource website. Beyond its name, the new website will provide greater usability, service access and resources for customers, and will fully integrate the flow of self-entered customer information into the new customer management system utilized by staff in day to day business.

Notable changes and improvements that will be implemented in the new design include:

- Reduced impact on staff to enter and maintain customer profile information

- Full capacity for job seekers to create, upload and manage critical job search materials or other records relevant to their employment goals
- Improved job listing, resume search and candidate screening functions for employers
- Full compatibility with a wide range of technologies utilized by job seekers and employers (smartphones, tablets, etc.) without the need to download an application
- Internal communication tools that will allow staff to contact employers and job seekers utilizing text messaging, e-mail, and prerecorded “robo” calls

Initial training activities for regional partner staff are presently underway, and will be concluded prior to the Thanksgiving holiday. Following completion of formal training, partner staff will continue to have access to a training environment to support ongoing learning and improve their proficiency prior to the launch of the production systems.

Community Council Chooses Issue for Annual Study: How can we strategically invest in education as a way to drive economic growth in the region?

What everyone needs to know to choose this topic:

In a report issued by Walla Walla 2020, the organization recommends “support for general education, management skills, and worker training programs” as one of five key components in achieving regional economic development and sustainability. The education component falls under Walla Walla 2020’s goal of “support[ing] the founding, survival, and expansion of local small businesses” as a crucial step toward ensuring economic growth and sustainability.

Why is this THE topic the Community Council should study?

According to the Brookings Institute (2006), “A more educated labor force is more mobile and adaptable, can learn new tasks and new skills more easily, can use a wider range of technologies and sophisticated equipment (including newly emerging ones), and is more creative in thinking about how to improve the management of work. All these attributes not only make a more highly skilled worker more productive than a less skilled one but also enable employers to organize work places differently and adjust better to changes necessitated by competition.”

Anticipating economic growth opportunities and aligning the abilities of the population to meet those opportunities by giving them the skills they need is a win-win relationship. Viewing educational opportunities as a path to successful, innovative approaches to employment, as well as to overall community resiliency carries multiple ripple-out benefits.

Community Council was organized in 2008 to inspire a citizen-driven, consensus-based, problem-solving process to prepare the region for future growth, change, and challenges and to enhance the quality of life in the region between Burbank and Dayton, from the Snake River to Milton-Freewater.