

# Memorandum

**REPORT TO:** Economic Vitality Board

**FROM:** Brit Fontenot, Economic Development Director

**SUBJECT:** Fiber as Economic Infrastructure: An Economic Impact Analysis of Yellowstone Fiber

**MEETING DATE:** May 6, 2026

**AGENDA ITEM TYPE:** Plan/Report/Study

**RECOMMENDATION:** None.

**STRATEGIC PLAN:** 1.1 Outreach: Continue to strengthen and innovate in how we deliver information to the community and our partners.

**BACKGROUND:** The Yellowstone Fiber (formerly Bozeman Fiber) economic impact analysis, conducted by the Northern Rocky Mountain Economic Development District (NRMEDD) in partnership with the City of Bozeman in 2025, was designed to evaluate both the direct and broader economic contributions of a community-based, open-access optical fiber network in Bozeman and Gallatin County. The study examines Yellowstone Fiber’s financial footprint across multiple time horizons, 2015, 2022–2024, and projected impacts for 2025–2027. It also captures the network’s evolution from initial construction to long-term operations. Importantly, the analysis framed broadband not simply as a utility service but as critical economic infrastructure underpinning modern regional development.

The report positions Yellowstone Fiber as a “fourth utility,” comparable to roads, water, and electricity, due to its essential role in enabling high-capacity connectivity for research institutions, businesses, and households. Using economic modeling techniques, NRMEDD quantified how the network supports job creation, income generation, and local business activity, with findings indicating approximately \$100 million in total economic activity and significant employment impacts across construction, engineering, and technical services. A key insight was that more than 80% of the value generated by the network is retained locally through wages, business earnings, and tax revenues, reinforcing its role in strengthening the regional economic base.

Beyond direct financial effects, the analysis emphasized Yellowstone Fiber’s broader structural impact on economic competitiveness and resilience. The network’s nonprofit, open-access model fosters competition among internet service providers, reduces costs for consumers, and ensures that revenues circulate within the local economy rather than leaving the region. The study also linked high-speed broadband availability to increased workforce participation, remote work growth, business formation, and innovation in sectors such as advanced manufacturing, photonics, and research. Overall, the NRMEDD analysis concluded that Yellowstone Fiber functions not only as infrastructure but as a long-term economic engine supporting sustainable growth and digital opportunity in Bozeman and the surrounding region.

**UNRESOLVED ISSUES:** None.

**ALTERNATIVES:** None.

**FISCAL EFFECTS:** None.

Attachments:

[Yellowstone Fiber 2\\_20 FINAL.pdf](#)

Report compiled on: April 21, 2026