

IDAHO PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

Case No. GNR-T-01-3, Order No. 29631

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Toll-free calling in Shoup, Salmon exchanges granted

Boise – The Idaho Public Utilities Commission today approved a request by Shoup residents for toll-free calling into the Salmon and North Fork exchanges. Currently, calls from Shoup into Salmon and North Fork, and vice versa, are long-distance, toll calls.

Because of the costs associated with extending toll-free areas, local rates for customers in the exchanges will increase. For Shoup-area residents, their Rural Telephone Co. rate will increase from \$21.63 per month to \$24.10. Business customers will pay \$42, up from \$40.68. The new rate is the same that is paid by all Idaho customers who have toll-free calling into adjoining exchanges.

Rates will also go up by 9 cents per month for CenturyTel business customers in Salmon and North Fork, who will also be able to call toll-free into Shoup. For residential customers, the new rate will be \$21.84 per month and for business customers, \$39.86.

The toll-free calling is expected to begin in about two months.

The commission uses a set of criteria to evaluate whether toll-free calling should be implemented and if it merits an increase in rates for local service. Those criteria include call volume into the exchanges where toll-free calling is sought, the geographic proximity between the exchanges, and proximity to school districts and medical services. The commission also evaluates the willingness of customers to pay increased rates to recover the costs for converting to toll-free routes.

A commission staff survey found that during July of this year, 21 out of 61 Shoup customers averaged three calls to Salmon. Eighteen Shoup customers averaged more than 40 calls during the month to Salmon. The commission received 10 comments from Shoup customers, all of whom favored an increase in their basic rates to allow toll-free calling to Salmon and North Fork. It also received a petition in favor from 31 homeowner members of a subdivision 13.5 miles from North Fork.

“We conclude that customers in these relatively isolated exchanges rely heavily on Salmon schools, businesses and medical facilities to provide most the basic services customers use on a day-to-day basis, but are not currently available without a toll call,” the commission said. The commission gave particular weight to the fact that emergency calls from Shoup customers to 911 would be toll-free.

A full text of the commission's order, along with other documents related to this case, are available on the commission's Web site. Click on "File Room" and then on "Telephone Cases" and scroll down to Case Number GNR-T-01-3.