



Solution: NetCloud Service for Branch ■ **Industry:** Public Sector — Tourism ■ **Use Case:** Primary Routing

South Carolina State Park Department Upgrades to Cradlepoint to Achieve Financial Independence

“

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Marion Weaver,
SCPRT Network Engineer

Summary

The South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism (SCPRT) updated the state’s welcome centers and expanded its WiFi offerings in South Carolina state parks. One of the key aspects of this process was updating SCPRT’s technology infrastructure to both improve the tourist experience and leverage the campers and parks user market. SCPRT used Cradlepoint NetCloud Service for branch to replace its welcome center counters with interactive kiosks and digital touch screens, introduce digital signage inside and outside the centers, and significantly expand the availability of public WiFi in state parks across the state.

The service includes routing, WAN link termination and traffic management, firewall, and cloud configuration and troubleshooting, all delivered via a purpose-built router with embedded LTE, 24x7 support, and a limited lifetime warranty.

Customer Profile

SCPRT is a cabinet agency assigned to operate and manage South Carolina's 47 state parks, to market the state as a preferred vacation destination, and to provide assistance to communities for parks, recreation, and tourism development and promotion. The agency's mission is to raise the personal income of South Carolinians by creating a better environment for economic growth through delivering state government services more effectively, improving quality of life, and promoting economic development through tourism.

Business Needs

Late in 2013, South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley presented the SCPRT with a unique challenge: generate enough income to cover all of South Carolina state parks' operating expenses. Over the past decade SCPRT had made significant strides toward becoming more self-sufficient. With the governor's announcement, it now needed to attract enough visitors to state parks to cover their operating budget. Central to its plan was updating its technology to meet today's visitor demands for quick and efficient services.

Solution

Technology upgrades took place in two major areas: SCPRT's welcome centers and the state parks themselves. Previously, the state's welcome center design featured large counters, behind which stood SCPRT staff ready to help visitors. As part of the upgrade, the agency removed the counters and, through NetCloud Service for branch including a cloud-managed router with integrated LTE, installed Cradlepoint-connected kiosks where tourists could help themselves or be assisted by staff. It also added digital ceiling signage controlled by staff from tablet PCs, touch screens tourists can use to plan their visits, live statewide weather information, travel-mapping tools, and webcams pointing at specific park highlights — all connected with Cradlepoint. SCPRT also added exterior digital signage with welcome center hours and information on how to access each center's public WiFi. To improve or introduce public WiFi to the parks themselves, SCPRT replaced its T1 and DSL lines with Cradlepoint's wireless solutions, which gave SCPRT the flexibility to extend WiFi to any park areas that had power and a cellular connection; all at a lower pricepoint.



If you're staying in a state park and you have a 45-foot motorhome, you don't want to have to drive over to the office to check your email or watch a movie. You want to be at your campsite."

David elwart,
CIO, SCPRT

Benefits

Tourist-Friendly WiFi

SCPRT CIO David Elwart said that if the agency was going to reach full financial independence, it has to evolve with the consumer.

"People would come in to the state parks and ask if we had WiFi. If we said no, they would turn around and go to a private campground."

Flexibility

With its previous hardwired solution, park WiFi was available only adjacent to the wired park offices. By replacing a wired solution with a wireless solution, all SCPRT needed to install was the electrical power and WiFi access points at centrally-located restrooms.

"Before using Cradlepoint," says SCPRT Network Engineer Marion Weaver, "it was hard for us to provide WiFi where visitors wanted it. With Cradlepoint as the backhaul and using access points, we can provide WiFi anywhere we have power and signal to a cell tower."

Freedom of Choice

Elwart noted that park offices contain multiple computers, including those for POS transactions and the agency's centralized reservation system. SCPRT's use of Cradlepoint's NetCloud Service for branch enabled them to monitor cellular signal to keep these critical systems online.

Secure VPN Tunneling

With credit card transactions as part of its daily operations, SCPRT is very careful about security, which it manages centrally using a hub-and-spoke network.

"What we wanted," says Weaver, "was something that could bring the security function back into our network and then provide Internet access through our existing solutions – rather than having to create a separate security solution for each park. With the Cradlepoint, a modem, and full VPN we don't have to worry about each individual park being its own entity. Each location acts as a spoke off of our network. Now that we have the configuration set, it's fairly easy to add new routers to extend our network even further."

Speed-To-Deployment

In the past, SCPRT used MPLS to network its computers. Every time it wanted to add a new location, said Weaver, it had to wait as long as a month to provision a new MPLS circuit.

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Centralized Control

SCPRT uses Cradlepoint's cloud management service, NetCloud Manager, to configure, monitor, and manage its growing network. This enables them to see in great detail a wide range of information about each router on the network.



"I recently used the NetCloud web interface to get some data that I wanted to look at closely to diagnose the differences between sites," says SCPRT's CTO Kevin Benson. "It was great to have the whole network laid out in the NetCloud interface and then to be able to manage and control it. We're a small team, so having this sort of easy access and control allows us to get more done with fewer people."

Modem Flexibility

When choosing the technology for the agency's broad update plans, SCPRT's CIO David Elwart looked at the ability of each vendor to support different kinds of modems. He found that some vendors supported very few modems, in some cases enabling a particular modem to be used as backup but not as primary.

"Every now and then, I'll get a new wireless modem and wonder if it will work. But I have yet to plug one in that doesn't work. The support Cradlepoint has for different types of modems is really good. I'm very impressed with that."

Transparent Signal Quality

Weaver says that one of the biggest advantages of NetCloud Manager is the ability to instantly access signal quality within the web interface. The reason that's important, he says, is that it enables central IT to help park rangers diagnose local connectivity issues.

“We just tell the rangers to open a web browser and go to the address we give them. Without any administrator credentials, the rangers can just look on that first page of the interface and see the signal quality at their park. If they're not getting a good signal, maybe they moved off the LTE network down to a lower bandwidth network, their visitors will not have a good WiFi experience. This is a new tool for us and one that helps us keep our tourists happy and get closer to our goal of financial independence.”

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