

INDIGENIZING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Our Story

After having experienced our own “Digital Divide” while growing up on our respective reservations, this subject has become one in which we are personally invested. However, the research discussing the subject of the digital divide doesn’t always answer the questions we ask about wireless connectivity on American Indian Reservations.

Thus, our group has created its own definition for the digital divide through an American Indian lens: “a lack of internet connectivity via wireless carriers that creates a perpetual divide with long-lasting effects.” In short, we are “Indigenizing the Digital Divide.”

Our Goal

The goal of this study wasn’t to “solve” the issue. Instead, we planned to gather enough data in order to create a greater sense of awareness regarding the technological gap between American Indian and Alaska Native communities and quality network connectivity.

Findings

According to a Native Public Media and New America Foundation article, across the 566 federally-recognized tribes in this country, the broadband penetration rate is less than 10%.

We chose to conduct our research on the Yakama Indian Reservation, specifically around and in the town of White Swan. According to the Washington State Report Card, operated by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, this school district is 97.5% free and reduced lunch. As a comparison, the state average is 45.9%, clearly demonstrating that this is a very low-income community.

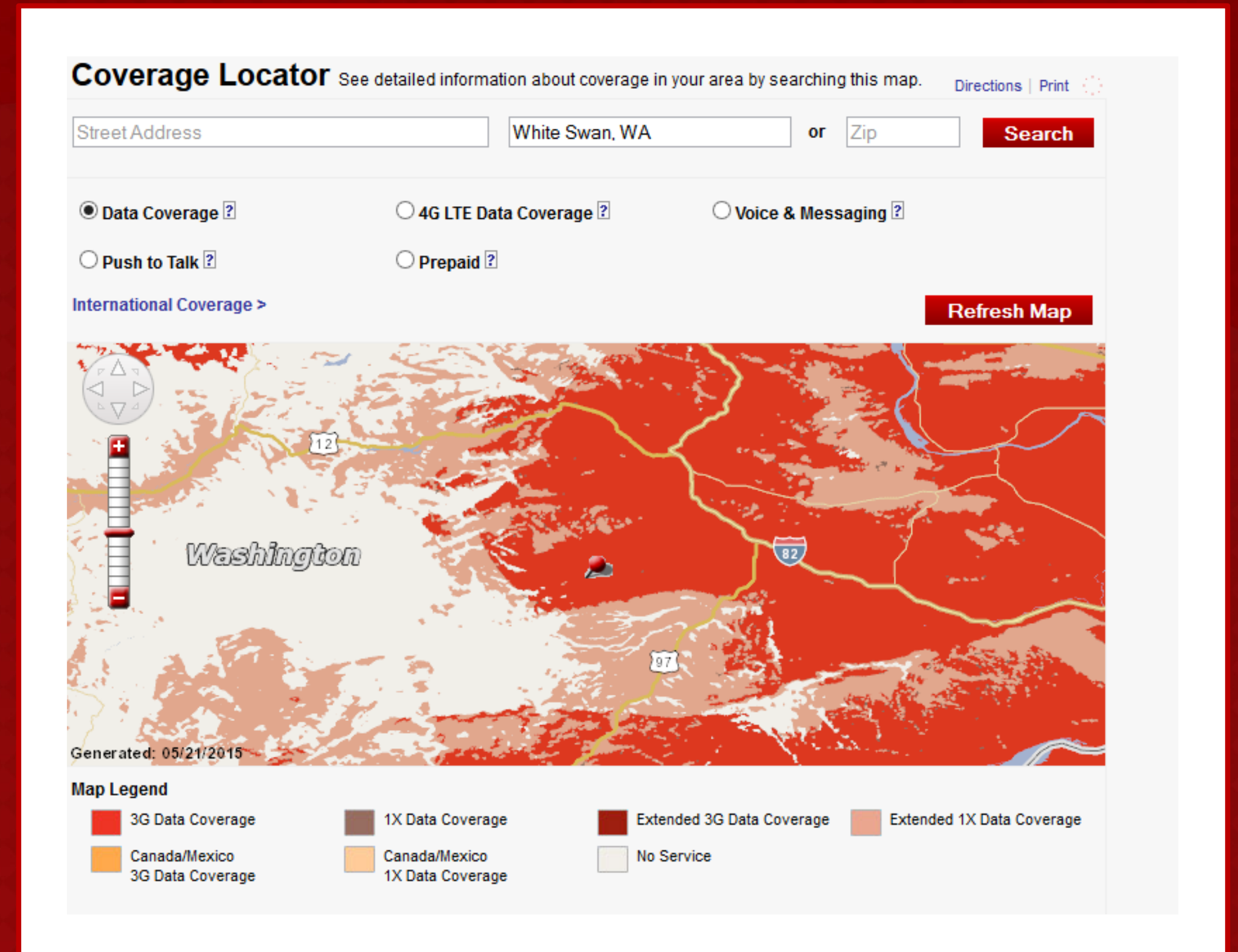
During our site visit, we took random connectivity measures throughout our survey space and compared our results to the coverage that Verizon advertises.

We took three devices with us: A Samsung Galaxy with 4G coverage, an iPhone 5 with 4G coverage, and an older model iPhone with 3G coverage. In the end, the coverage for the 4G phones was spotty, while the coverage for the 3G phone was almost nonexistent.



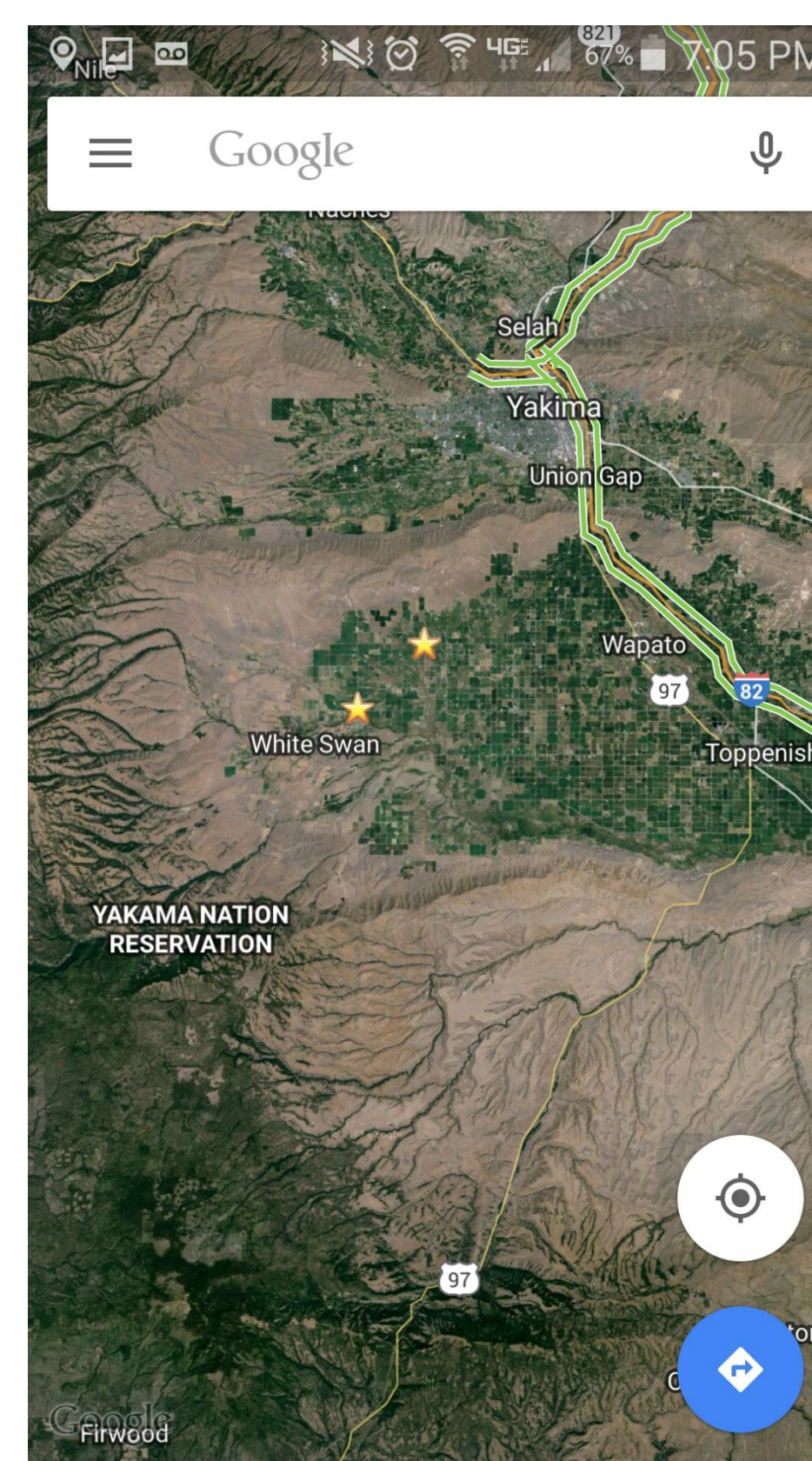
Next Steps

This project was created in order to inform the Yakama Nation of their lack of quality data connectivity for their own use. Thus, we plan to do two things: 1) return the data we have gathered to the Yakama community as we view them as the owners; and 2) maintain the community relationships we have formed.

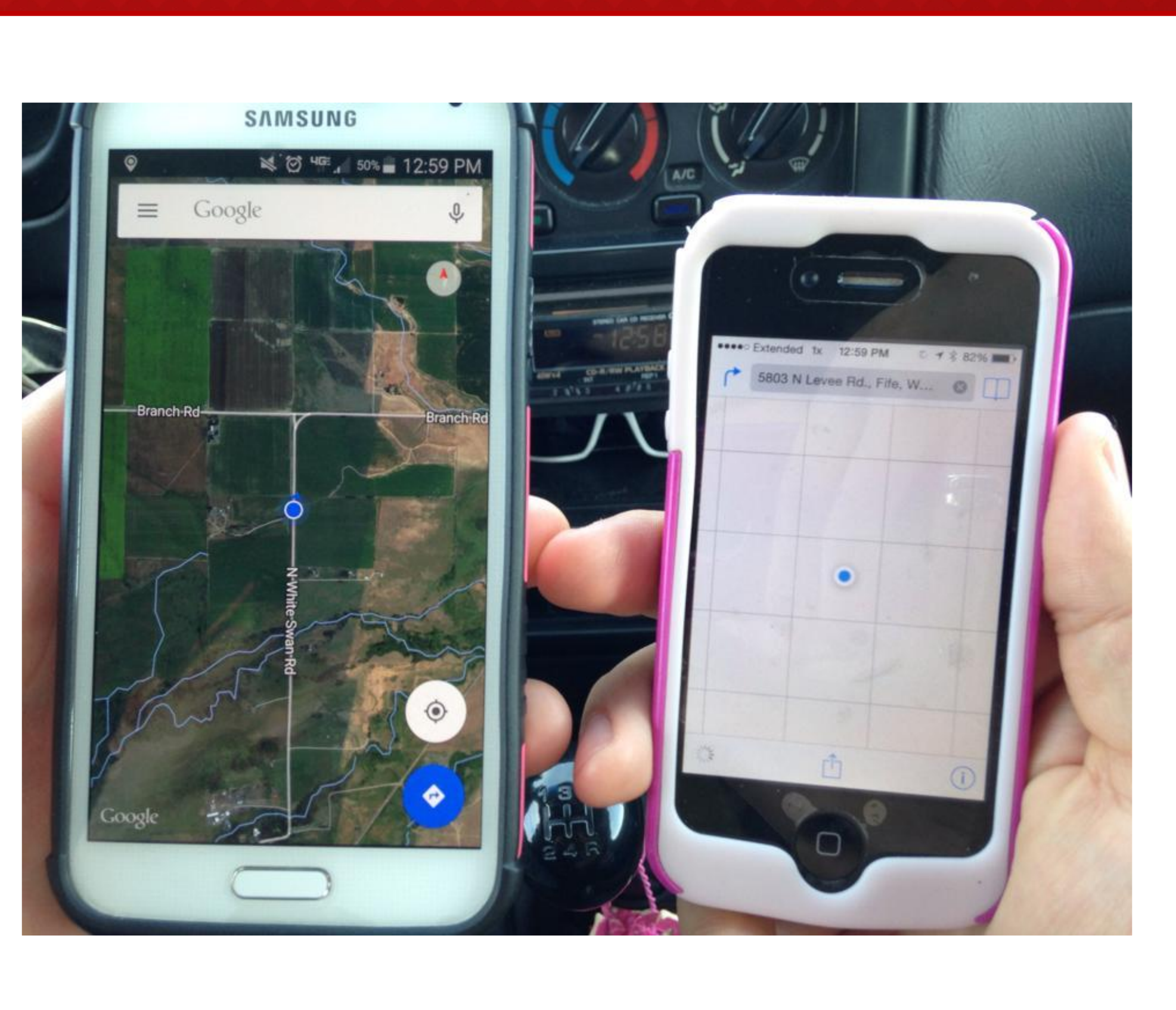
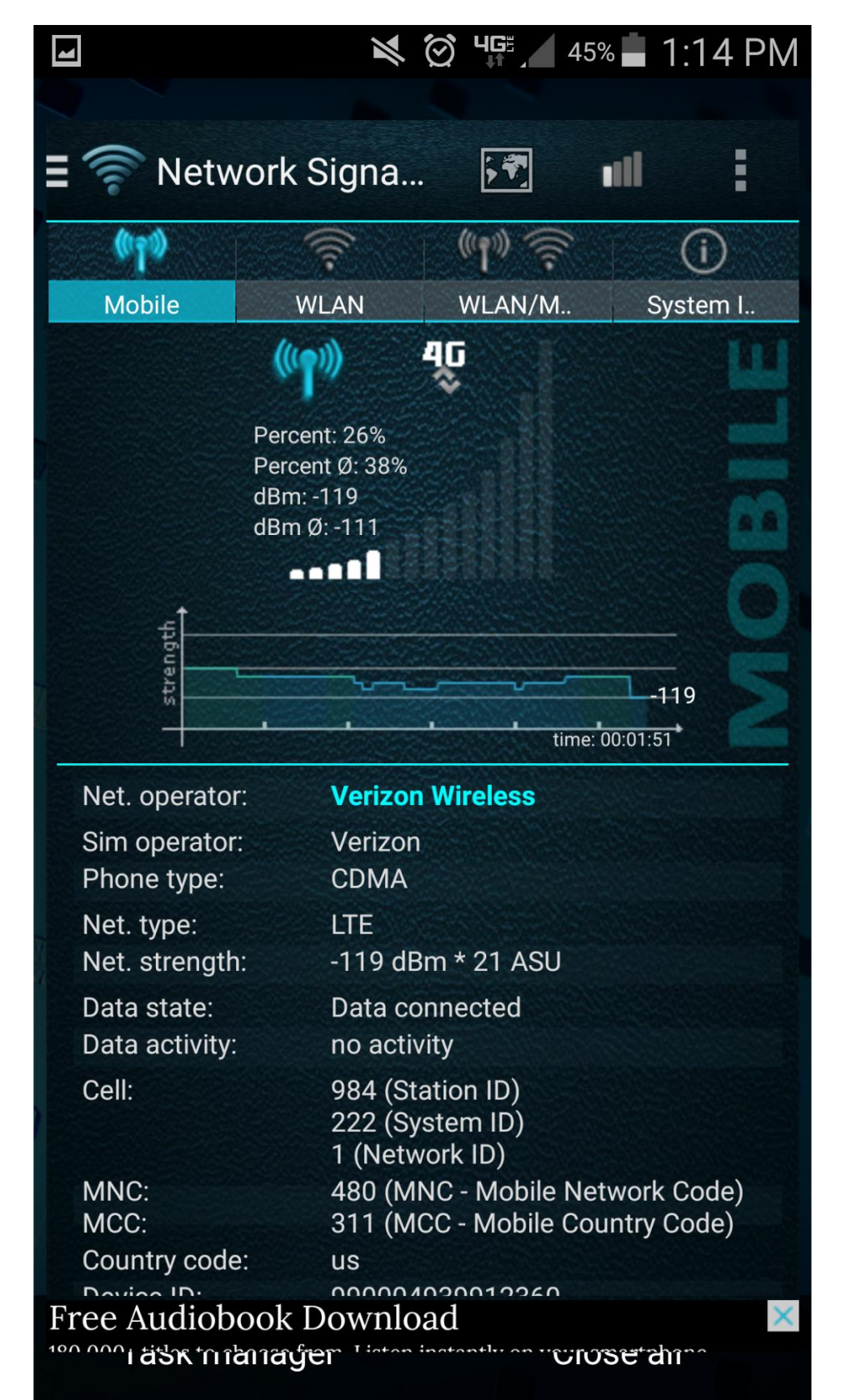


Verizon coverage map shows White Swan supposedly receives full 3G coverage.

Coverage Hole



Weak Signal



Side-by-side screenshot of actual 4G coverage vs. 3G coverage in White Swan.

