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USDA Announces Funds to Provide Broadband in Unserved Rural Communities

WASHINGTON, October 24, 2013 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced 14 awards for projects to bring broadband to unserved rural communities. U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Utilities Service Administrator John Padalino made the announcement on the Secretary's behalf while addressing a regional meeting of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association in San Antonio.

"Access to broadband is one of the most important investments in rural communities today," Vilsack said. "These awards will help create jobs, and give rural residents greater access to educational, health care and social services."

USDA is providing \$20.3 million in grants through the Community Connect Grant program.

For example, in Tennessee, Scott County Telephone Cooperative has been selected to receive a \$2.6 million grant to build a network that will provide free broadband service to essential community facilities such as schools and libraries. The Cooperative also will establish a center where local residents will have access to free internet service for two years.

These are the first awards made under the Community Connect program's new guidelines that now allow applicants to fund broadband infrastructure for more than one community, and raise the minimum required speed. Projects funded must deliver broadband at five megabits per second (Mbps).

The following is a list of awardees that will receive USDA funding contingent upon the recipient meeting the terms of the grant agreement:

Alaska

- Matanuska Telephone Association, Inc. – \$2,941,246 grant. To construct fiber optic cables to expand broadband service at speeds ranging from 5 Mbps to 10 Mbps. The Association is working closely with the Matanuska Susitna Borough School District to provide enhanced broadband service to the Glacier View School and construct a community center where all residents will have access to free 5 Mbps service for at least two years.

Kentucky

- Crystal Broadband Networks – \$480,420 grant. To deploy high-speed broadband in and around the community of Idamay. This project will allow access to real time weather radar and national weather updates to address severe weather conditions.
- Crystal Broadband Networks – \$704,600. To provide broadband, video and voice services to Lambric and Rousseau. This project also will enable these communities to have access to real time weather radar and national weather updates to address severe weather conditions. The project will give residents free broadband service at a community center for at least two years.

Nevada

- Arizona Nevada Tower Corporation – \$442,468. To provide broadband service to increase educational opportunities and strengthen economic development. The project will focus on educational, economic and entertainment opportunities by offering 5 Mbps broadband service at a reasonable cost.

North Dakota

- BEK Communications Cooperative – \$3 million. To connect the Northern Rural Barnes County service area to the Cooperative's existing network and bring high-speed broadband capabilities to customers in unserved areas. The proposed fiber network will introduce new capabilities, including voice and video, for educational, health care and public safety institutions.
- BEK Communications Cooperative – \$3 million. To serve a rural and sparsely populated area in the southern portion of Barnes County that has suffered from out-migration. The project will bring high-speed broadband, including voice and video, to unserved areas. The proposed fiber network will benefit the community's educational, health care and public safety institutions.

Oklahoma

- Medicine Park Telephone Company – \$933,000. To deploy broadband to the Acme area, located in the Rush Springs Sandstone Mountains in southwestern Oklahoma. The service will offer residential customers speeds of up to 100 Mbps and business customers speeds up to 1 gigabyte. The project will also deploy voice and video service to the entire service area and will offer discounted service to eligible low-income subscribers. The project will provide free service to critical community facilities, including a fire station, sheriff's office and school.
- Medicine Park Telephone Company – \$833,000. To deploy wireless broadband service to the Agawam area. This service will offer residential customers speeds of up to 20 Mbps and business customers speeds up to 100 Mbps. The project will also deploy voice service to the entire area. Medicine Park Telephone will also offer discounted broadband service to eligible low-income subscribers.
- Medicine Park Telephone Company – \$867,000. To deploy advanced Fiber-to-the-Home service to the Cookietown area, located in the southern portion of the Wichita Mountains in Southwestern Oklahoma. Residential customers will receive service with speeds up to 100 Mbps, and businesses speeds up to 1 gigabyte. The project will also provide voice and cable TV service and discounted service to eligible low-income subscribers. The project will provide free broadband for two years to critical community facilities.
- Medicine Park Telephone Company – \$1.6 million. To deploy advanced Fiber-to-the-Home service. Residential customers will be able to receive service with speeds up to 100 Mbps, while business customers will have speeds up to 1 gigabyte. The project will also provide voice service and cable TV service. The grantee will also offer discounted broadband service to eligible low-income subscribers.

South Carolina

- County of Orangeburg – \$1,009,565. To provide a broadband system to residents and businesses in the Pleasant Branch community. The project will offer 5 Mbps to residents and businesses and provide free service to critical community facilities for at least two years.

Tennessee

- Scott County Telephone Cooperative – \$2,607,000. To construct a broadband network throughout Stanley Valley. The project includes the establishment of a community center that will offer free broadband service to residents for two years. Critical community facilities will also receive free service for two years.

Texas

- Texhoma Fiber, LLC – \$863,000. To provide broadband service to Sunset in southern Montague County and to serve homes around the Lyndon B. Johnson National Grassland area. Residential customers will have access to service with speeds of up to 20 Mbps, and businesses will have service with speeds up to 100 Mbps. The project will also provide a community center with free service for at least two years. Free service will also be provided to critical community facilities for at least two years.
- Texhoma Fiber, LLC – \$978,000. To provide broadband service to the community of Ringgold. Customers will be able to receive broadband, voice and cable television service. Residential customers will have access to speeds up to 100 Mbps, while speeds up to 1 gigabyte will be available for business customers. Discounted broadband service will be offered to eligible low-income subscribers. The project will provide free broadband service to critical community facilities and a community center for residents for at least two years.

President Obama's plan for rural America has brought about historic investment and resulted in stronger rural communities. Under the President's leadership, these investments in housing, community facilities, businesses and infrastructure have empowered rural America to continue leading the way – strengthening America's economy, small towns and rural communities. USDA's investments in rural communities support the rural way of life that stands as the backbone of our American values.

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