

NWX-DOC-NTIA-OTIA

Moderator: Karen Hanson
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Coordinator: Good afternoon and thank you all for holding. Your lines will remain on a listen-only mode for the duration of today's conference. And I would like to remind all parties the call is now being recorded. If you have any objections, please disconnect at this time. And now I would like to turn the call over to Karen Hanson. And thank you, you may begin.

Karen Hanson: Thank you so much. And thank you for joining us today for BroadbandUSA's monthly webinar on broadband topics of interest to policymakers, decision makers, practitioners and consumers. I'm Karen Hanson, Manager of Interagency Affairs for BroadbandUSA at the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, which serves as Executive Secretary for the American Broadband Initiative. I will be moderating the webinar.

Our webinar today is the American Broadband Initiative: One Year Update. In 2019, the Trump administration launched the American Broadband Initiative or ABI with the release of the Milestones report. A year later, federal agencies have made significant progress across government to improve broadband access across the country.

Today's event will begin with opening remarks from Greg Watson, who is a Policy Advisor in the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. OSTP is one of the members on the Executive Leadership team of the ABI. Next, the US Department of Agriculture's Rural Utility Service Administrator Chad Rupe, who also serves with NTIA on the ABI Executive Leadership team, will discuss USDA's work to advance the ABI mission through the ReConnect Program and additional actions taken by USDA to streamline broadband permitting.

Then my colleague Andy Spurgeon, BroadbandUSA Chief of Operations at NTIA will provide an update on the work to build the National Broadband Availability Map. Finally, the US Department of the Interior's Karen Montgomery, National Program Lead for the Bureau of Land Management at DOI, and Jason Frels, will cover important updates related to DOI's broadband permitting policies and efforts underway to promote awareness of federal lands and facilities that can be used for broadband deployment.

I'd like to point out a few housekeeping items before we begin. The panelists will answer questions after the end of all presentations. Please use the question box on the right-hand side of the screen to submit any questions or comments you may have. The presentation, along with a transcript and the recording, will be available on the BroadbandUSA website within seven days of this webinar under Events/BroadbandUSA webinar archives. Next slide please.

I'd like to welcome Greg Watson to share some opening remarks. Greg joined the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy in November of last year. Greg's primary policy focus is rural broadband and he's engaged in all American Broadband Initiative efforts. Before joining OSTP, Greg worked for Congressman Steve Scalise and the House Energy and Commerce

Committee, where he handled a range of technology and telecommunications issues. Greg, please go ahead.

Greg Watson: Well, thanks, Karen and thanks to NTIA's BroadbandUSA program for hosting this webinar today to share an update on the status of the American Broadband Initiative. As a member of the Executive Leadership team of this initiative, I'm pleased to participate and update you on the work done over the past year to advance broadband access in rural America.

As the president said during his State of the Union address, he is committed to ensuring that every citizen has access to high speed internet, including and especially in rural America. With that in mind, the administration has taken a number of actions intended to expand broadband to every corner of our great nation.

In January 2018, the President signed an Executive Order and Presidential Memorandum intended to streamline federal permitting and make federal assets more readily available for broadband deployment. These actions lead to a new common form that can be used by both wireline and wireless broadband providers to cite communications infrastructure on all types of federal assets and rights of way. We've also created a public inventory called the JOEL Map, with thousands of federal assets across the country that can be used to deploy broadband.

Since those Executive actions, the White House has been working closely with NTIA and USDA to coordinate the many individual efforts by agencies into a more collaborative and unified effort. The White House appreciates their efforts and will continue to support their work to remove barriers across agencies and advance this collective effort.

I'd like to offer some initial context for the work of ABI. As you may recall, when the initiative was announced last year, we released the Milestones Report with clearly defined tasks that more than 20 federal agencies will undertake to advance the state of broadband across our country. Most importantly, as we heard from stakeholders, these deliverables included target deadlines for federal agencies to meet.

Since that time OSTP has worked closely with NTIA, USDA and other members of the Executive Leadership team to monitor agency progress, advise agencies as they pursue their commitments and remove obstacles along the way. The entire Trump administration understands the importance of rural broadband access and by coordinating all of our individual efforts, we're making significant strides towards our goal.

ABI is organized into three work streams. First, the streamlining federal permitting work stream is focused on ways to make it easier for broadband providers to make use of government land and assets by reducing duplicative forms and making permitting process more transparent to the public. We've made significant progress on this front by adopting the new common form I mentioned earlier, as well as by updating NTIA's BroadbandUSA webpage to serve as a one-stop shop for all federal permitting information.

The second work stream is focused on leveraging federal assets for broadband deployment. The premise is by making federal rights of way including land, tower facilities and buildings more accessible, it will lower costs and encourage private sector investment. The Department of Interior will talk about their good work in this arena, but I want to call out another small but significant change that GSA made to support this work.

After consulting with industry stakeholders on data they would find useful, GSA added as a new data point in its database of all federal property the height of buildings or facilities. Broadband providers said this information would help them determine a structure suitability for siting communication facilities, so we're adding it to help facilitate their decision-making process.

Finally, the last workstream is focused on maximizing the impact of federal funding for broadband. The Administration is committed to improving coordination between programs at the FCC and USDA, and making sure federal funds are going to areas where they're needed most. One of the biggest ticket items in this regard is USDA's ReConnect program, which we'll hear about soon.

An important part of our strategy is ensuring federal funding is targeting to areas that are currently unserved. That work will be aided by NTIA National Broadband Availability Map, which we will discuss later in this webinar, as well as legislation to improve the broadband maps at the FCC that was recently passed by Congress. I would like to thank all the agencies for their hard work on this initiative.

Extending broadband to all parts of America as a major Administration priority, and the ABI is an important part of our overall strategy. I'm excited by how much progress we've made. But we're not stopping here and I welcome your input and support as we continue this work in the months to come. Thank you.

Karen Hanson: Thank you so much, Greg, and thanks for your support. Our next presenter is Chad Rupe. Chad has served as Administrator for the Rural Utility Service since June of 2019. Previously, he served as USDA's Wyoming Rural Development State Director from 2017 to 2019. He has been a leader for rural

broadband, serving on the Rural Development State Directors Broadband Working Group and assisting state government with efforts to deploy broadband in rural Wyoming.

He also serves as the agency's principle for USDA on the American Broadband Initiative. Mr. Rupe is a graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point and earned his MBA from the University of Phoenix. Take it away, Chad.

Chad Rupe: Good afternoon, thank you, Karen. USDA is pleased to be a strong partner for the American Broadband Initiative. Most of you are probably already aware of USDA's funding programs to accelerate broadband deployment. But we also help to leverage federal assets for deployment and assistance streamlining the federal permitting process. I'll lead you through each of these efforts and provide you with an update on the next phase of ReConnect. Next slide, please.

We recently submitted a joint report to Congress that discusses many of our efforts over the last year, and since we're limited in time today, I'm providing the link at the bottom of this slide which will allow you to read in detail about them. Next slide, please.

The US Forest Service recently released a new website that allows anyone to view potential locations that are on national forest property, where a provider may lease space for propagating broadband. This can be of great assistance in leveraging fixed wireless technology to reach deeper into rural America. Using this site, the provider can look at all of the possible sites as reflected in the top map and then zoom in to review the details on the individual locations.

The dropdown box will provide necessary information to contact the local US Forest Service office that is responsible to that site. The links are also listed at the bottom of this slide. Next slide please.

Like Greg mentioned, the US Forest Service worked with GSA to ensure that the new common permitting application allows you to clearly identify telecommunications usage throughout the form. Again, access to this form is listed on the link at the bottom of this slide. Next slide, please.

USDA has a leading role in deploying broadband to millions of unserved Americans. We finance new broadband construction in rural America through very low interest rate loans and federal grants. Our loans and grants allow providers to reach beyond what they normally could finance through their own means or conventional banking. ReConnect is a very popular program due to its reach with grant dollars into unserved areas of the United States.

This effort is similar to USDA's impact in the 1930s to build electric lines to the 90% of farmers, ranchers and small towns who lacked power and telephone service. The link to our ReConnect site is located at the bottom of the slide, where you can gain the latest public information specific to the ReConnect program, which is only one of several programs that we use to build broadband in rural America.

As a result of our most recent round of awards, we estimate that over 431,000 Americans will now have access to the Internet for the first time. As part of this effort, our awardees will install over 21,000 miles of fiber optics lines. When matched with the 9,000 miles of fiber optic lines that will be installed through our electric infrastructure loans from last year, that will drive state of the art broadband capacity deep into rural America.

However, despite the first round of awards we're delivering, there are millions of Americans who are still unserved. We recognize the need to expedite delivery so we developed an online application system, which expedites decisions and ensures we have accurate information from the beginning. This new system improves our awards' timeliness by month. Next slide, please.

Congress started the ReConnect pilot program in 2018 with \$600 million and a paragraph of guidance to build this transformative program. In 2019, they provided an additional \$550 million, as we implemented our funding opportunity announcement for the first round of applications. Late last year, due to the success of round one, Congress appropriated an additional \$555 million to continue to expedite construction of broadband for the millions who are unserved throughout rural America.

We know that at least half of the unserved don't have any service over 10/1. So we focused this program on the ones who lacked any service. We understand that there are many who have service between 10/1 and 25/3. We have other very low interest loan programs to improve and increase service in those areas. However, ReConnect is focused on the unserved. We want – next slide, please. Sorry about that.

We want solid partners as we extend taxpayer dollars to reach unserved areas. So in ReConnect, we want to ensure that there is a long-term commitment by providers who receive this funding. We divided ReConnect into three categories. The 100% loan program is a 2% fixed rate loan that can pay for up to 100% of the buildout. It is limited to \$50 million toward a single project. The 100% grant program is limited to \$25 million in federal grant funding and will pay up to 75% of a project.

The provider needs to provide 25% as a cash match to this federal grant, through either its own funds or other cash gained from state or local investment. The combination program, or 50/50, is a 50% loan and 50% grant for a total award of up to \$50 million towards a single project. The loan portion is based on US Treasury rates. Each category was initially allotted \$200 million. However, USDA reserves the right to move funding as necessary between categories to maximize impact based on demand and need. Next slide, please.

Late last year, we published the second funding opportunity announcement for \$550 million in ReConnect funds. In January, we opened our second window for ReConnect applications. That deadline was recently extended to March 31. Meanwhile, we are finishing award announcements for round one and preparing to receive round two applications. We have seen high demand in every round so far. We look forward to another highly successful round.

We plan to begin offering awards as soon as practicable and estimate all awards to be completed this fall through the second round. We're also diligently working to take lessons learned from the first two rounds, as well as feedback from applicants and interested parties to develop a set of regulations for the future and the ReConnect program. Next slide, please.

In 2019, USDA received 146 applications for \$1.4 billion to extend broadband to 41 states with the \$600 million we had available. A few key points to this round was that although we saw high demand in the grant and combination categories, scoring in that round is not necessarily the deciding factor in an applicant receiving the award. Now we'll discuss more in a few slides. Next slide, please.

We've announced 70 awards for \$620 million so far in 31 states. Since we offered loans, we were able to extend the \$600 million in Congressional authority to reach more projects. We have several projects remaining to be announced in round one, and we plan to have those complete in the near future. Next slide, please.

As I stated before, the deciding factor in round one was not the competitive scoring. It was a more simple reason. We conduct service area validations, including a boots on the ground site visit of any application to determine if fixed terrestrial based broadband service at 10/1 is already present in the proposed area. Our method for this is listed on our website under the Forms and Resources. Many of our applicants who did not receive awards failed to pass this threshold in their proposed service areas. This was the deciding factor in the highly competitive grant section of the awards.

Service area validations may not be the single dominant factor in generating which applications receive awards for future rounds. But it is a clear indication that we're focused on reaching unserved areas for this program. Next slide, please.

We made several changes between round one and round two of ReConnect as we work to improve this pilot program. We're expediting our application window and our decision timeline. We are also allowing for a minimum amount of overlap with service so that whole communities are not ignored while only a very small portion of the community is cherry picked for service. We are also working to make it easier for applicants to submit their financial statements and still be in line with federal grant statutes. Again, we want solid partners at the table to deliver service to these communities. Next slide please.

For applicants who did not receive an award in round one and seek to submit an application for round two, once they make changes based on the lessons learned from round one, we welcome that decision and are allowing for them to use some of those expenses as eligible costs for round two. We're also working to make it less burdensome on collecting pre-subscription information from farmers and ranchers in round two, and for tribal areas to capture more of their facility information that may not have been included in previous mapping efforts.

This new method will be a better gauge of the long-term impact from broadband in these areas. We're also increasing the time for incumbent providers to challenge any proposed service area to 45 days, which matches the intent of Congress in the Farm bill. Next slide please.

Additionally, as noted on the bottom of this slide, we're allowing applicants who are subsidiaries of larger corporations to use the financial statements and strengths of their parent organization, as long as the parent corporation fully guarantees the grant or loan. Next slide please.

In the scoring criteria for round two, we added Opportunity Zones to the scoring criteria, which is a Presidential initiative and priority. Many Opportunity Zones also overlap with unserved and tribal areas. We also allowed for any proposed service area that is over 100 miles from the nearest metropolitan service area to maximize the rural points for that category. Again, many tribal areas are well served with this scoring criteria. Next slide, please.

As we expedite our decisions, we cannot and will not overlook our environmental responsibilities. We're required by law to follow NEPA and others similar federal statutes as such we're allowing for decisions to be made

subject to any construction activity beginning. However, no construction or expenditure of federal funds may begin until USDA approves in writing that all conditions have been met. Next slide please.

We will continuously offer workshops in various areas of the nation and you can access many of our webinars on our ReConnect website. I highly encourage interested parties to subscribe to updates on this site and to periodically review the site for updates to forums and resources and the many other points of interest it contains. Next slide, please.

We are offering an online virtual workshop for all round one awardees who registered in order to review many of the requirements that they now have as recipients of ReConnect grants and loans. This will assist many of our awardees with this new process if they're not familiar with federal awards. We started this yesterday and had over 200 individuals online. And we have two workshops scheduled for today. So we know it's up and running, functional and working, despite the current operating environment.

We also have 47 State Directors and General Field Representatives located throughout the United States who are happy to assist in answering your questions. Thank you.

Karen Hanson: Thank you so much, Chad. Our next presenter is Andy Spurgeon, Chief of Operations for BroadbandUSA at NTIA, and his primary responsibilities include overseeing the Broadband Technical Assistance programs, and implementing the National Broadband Availability Map.

Prior to joining NTIA, Andy was a senior executive at several startup companies in the telecommunications and cloud computing industries. He

earned his Bachelor of Science in Geological Engineering from Missouri University of Science and Technology. Please go ahead, Andy.

Andy Spurgeon: Thanks, Karen. Next slide, please. So I'm going to talk today about NTIA's National Broadband Availability Map, which we've been deploying over the last 18 months, and we launched in September of 2019. Although it's called a map, it's really a platform for making maps that allows us to analyze and compare various geospatial datasets that support broadband planning, funding or implementation.

And just a couple of the examples that you see on this slide, we're able to look at state data, federal data, we have some speed-test data that we're looking at. There's a lot of information, and it's really important to think about this as a platform for analysis rather than a static map. And we'll talk a little bit more of that in a minute. Next slide, please.

So one of the most important things to remember about this project is that we're acquiring data from a variety of different sources under a variety of different licensing models. So we're using widely available, you know, publicly available federal data. We're using data contributed to the program by a number of state governments, most of which is public, but some of which is not.

We have licensed some data such as commercial speed-test data under contract, which allows us to share the data in the platform with a limited number of users, but does not allow us to publish everything in a fully public or widely available manner. In addition to that, because we have so much different data and forms of analysis going on, it's actually technically complex to use the tool.

And so for a combination of those reasons, it is not a public tool right now, it's limited to representatives of state and federal government agencies that have signed up to an agreement with NTIA and are going to use the product for broadband planning, policymaking and investment decision-making. This is something that we're constantly looking at looking at to see how we can do more and how we can share more information out of it. But for the moment, use of the tool is limited to state and federal government representatives. Next slide, please.

When the map - so the funding for this map originated in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2018, which set aside \$7.5 million specifically to NTIA to deploy the map and work on a number of specific objectives, such as improving the nation's understanding of broadband availability, working with states and industry to collect as much data as possible, focus on the collection and utilization of existing datasets, rather than sourcing new data.

So this is not the same as the State Broadband Initiative from 2010 to '14 or so where we actually funded the collection of new data, NTIA funded the collection of new data under a grant program. The intent of this program is to leverage data that exists already and look at it in new and different ways.

We were specifically asked not to duplicate the efforts of the FCC. So that is not simply redo the Form 477 process in some other way, but instead to look for ways to augment that dataset with additional information and analysis from other places. A major purpose of this is to inform decision making and policymaking. And really, that last bullet is important to serve as a model for cooperative policymaking.

You know, our real objective here is to really, you know, create insight into broadband availability, understand where datasets align or do not align, use a

combination of mapping visualizations and analysis to dig into what those differences may be and why they may be, and then to use that information for a combination of broadband planning, funding and implementation, you know, decision making to help us move forward. Next slide, please.

One of the first things we did when this program was announced was we reached out with what the government calls a request for comment, which is a process by which we get formal comments from state, municipal government. We get them from industry, academia, nonprofits, and try and get as much information as we could, you know, about how should we analyze broadband. What types of datasets and analysis do people believe would be helpful from a comparative standpoint?

What has been tried and failed? What has been tried and succeeded? You know, the government had not looked at this problem this way previously, and so we wanted a lot of information, as much information as we collect from others on their experience and insights. In addition to that, we've done interviews with a number of state representatives.

So through NTIA State Broadband Leaders Network, which is a convening that we host a couple of in-person events per year plus monthly conference calls, and a lot of offline discussion, you know, we work with the broadband representatives, you know, generally a Governor's Office or a public utility commission representative, something of that nature, in nearly every state and territory. And so that's a very rich resource that we reached out to to get input for this project.

We've also done some public comment requests to get information. And the states that are listed in green on this slide have provided one of or a combination of those inputs to NTIA on this program. And it's roughly 30

states that have provided input to date. And that's really helped us craft a program that we believe can support their needs, that we believe it will be effective. And it also has given us a pretty long to-do list. Because there's a lot of really good ideas that we've been able to source from the state folks that are working on broadband planning and not just from the federal side. Next slide, please.

We were given a target launch date of September of 2019. You know, when this program was funded, and so we knew that, you know, that gave us roughly 12 months before launch, there was a government shutdown there in the middle. You know, just because of conditions we knew we couldn't try and tackle the entire country at once, particularly from the concept of sourcing data from the states.

And so based on some of that input that I described in the last slide, excuse me, we reached out to a group of pilot states that are in the light blue on this map here to really say, okay, these are states that have been active in broadband mapping for a while. They have both state data collection and mapping programs, they've collected a combination of fixed and wireless broadband data, they've collected at a bunch of different levels, from address levels through census blocks to compare and contrast with the FCC's Form 477 data.

And so we initiated this as a pilot with those states to - so that we could look at their data, we could incorporate it into the platform, we could start to work on the right tools that can compare and analyze those datasets. And one of the reasons that it has taken awhile to roll this out is, across those eight states in blue we have somewhere between - around 80 data sets in the map that are just from those states.

You know, for example, you know, a regional address to door-to-door survey of broadband availability in part of a state. Speed testing that provides results from some portions of a state. A state department of transportation survey of routes that have fiber and routes that don't. So there's a lot of different resources available at the state level. They're in a variety of different geospatial formats. So polylines, address points and coordinates, shapes and census blocks and county level data.

And because there's so much data and organized in such different ways, putting meaningful tools together that allow you to visualize and compare can be pretty challenging. And so this pilot phrase has been - pilot phase excuse me has been really instructive in terms of how we apply this. Our overall approach to the program has been - even though we started with a single year of funding, take a multi-year strategy, right?

So assume that this program is here to stay in the long run, work to develop tools that will be available to federal and state policymakers in the long run. We've collected a lot of different data, as I mentioned at the beginning of the presentation. So we have data from the FCC and other federal agencies, including USDA, who you heard from a moment ago, the eight states that are in blue here, as well as the five states that we recently announced that are listed in green.

Those are states where we have just negotiated agreements that are in the process now of doing data inventory and collection so we can get information from the state to incorporate in the tool. We have four other agreements pending with other states. And then we're about to start outreach to nine or 10 others in the next month or so.

So there's a lot going on on the data collection-side simply to get as much information as possible into the platform. And then those states that are not yet colored on this map, you know, those don't represent areas that we're not interested in. They're just the places we haven't gotten to yet. We suspect we'll have roughly half the states by the end of this year, calendar year, if not fiscal 2020. And then we'll look to expand from there.

One of the challenges with some states is that they don't have broadband data mapping or collection programs today. And in a few cases, there isn't even really someone at the state level who owns that problem. And so we want to make sure that we do is - we have a robust platform, a federal data that is relatively easy to use and straightforward for some of those folks that aren't quite as advanced and haven't been doing so long.

We also want to make sure that we have best practices and other you know, more support available to ensure that if a state is going to use this tool or develop a program around it to work with us, we can give them some guidance and suggestions. And those are all still in the works, just based on the maturity of the program. Next slide, please.

We're off to a good start. I mentioned some of our federal and state partners. You know, we've seen great, tremendous interest from the states in having access to new tools. We've seen a lot of interest from federal agencies whom we're excited to work with. We've actually been, you know, a little bit slow in our deployment for a variety of reasons, many of which have to do with the fact that, you know, the government, federal government hasn't looked at all this data this way before.

So we're excited to work with our federal agencies, but we're not, you know, we're not there yet. And we appreciate their patience and working with us.

We've delivered on time to date. So one of the things that we did with this platform is it's entirely a cloud deployment. So we're using ESRI suite of ARC-GIS products deployed in the Amazon cloud, which allows us to scale up resources as we need to do things like geoprocessing or increase the size of our user base. That requires us to go through a variety of federal security requirements, the FedRAMP process as well as getting something called an authority to operate a cloud based system.

We've been able to do that successfully so far, although that's introduced some, you know, getting through that process, every time we do a release of data or functionality has affected our timeline as well. We've also seen a tremendous amount of support. You know, we've gotten three years of funding now from fiscal '18 to fiscal '20. We've got really strong support from the White House and folks like Greg Watson, whom you heard from earlier, and we've also had great bipartisan support from the Hill. And bicameral support as well.

I've spent a fair amount of time briefing House and Senate staff on what we're doing here, how it can be useful, and also how it will benefit their states in the long run. And so that support manifests itself in the form of funding, but it also manifests itself in the form of interest in state programs, efforts to connect this program with what states are doing and really try to see us converge our resources. Next slide, please.

I'll wrap up by noting that we have a lot more work to do, and a lot more to come. You know, I mentioned our efforts to work with our federal and state partners. We really want to get this tool integrated with what I call the investment-value chain. And that's really every step in the public-funding lifecycle, from diagnosing gaps in broadband availability or differences in, for

example state and federal data that may tell us there's more nuance than just a census block being completely served or unserved.

And really targeting those investments, using that data to work with funding programs to ensure that investments can be targeted, the data is part of a, you know, data-centric, decision-making process. And then after the fact doing continuous measurement as we collect additional broadband data to make sure that, you know, we don't miss areas that we're seeing the results that we expect and the outcomes that we expect and really being part of that entire chain in that lifecycle.

We have a lot of work to do comparing and evaluating data sets and making that easier for our users to do. You know, specifically we want to be able to do some automations that take the user to the problem, instead of making them hunt up. We're doing a good job right now with collecting data and mapping it. But we know we can do more to make it easier to use, and that's a big focus for us this year.

We want to integrate business-intelligence capabilities, so that we can provide both a geospatial visualization, you know, the mapping side of this, but also offer some analytic insight into data at the census block or county or other other level that can support broadband planning, funding and analysis.

We have to be responsive to external factors. You know, we know that the FCC is working to modernize the Form 477 process and the data collection, you know the data active out there. All of those are going to create new sources of data that we can use, but also change how things are done today, particularly with the Form 477 data potentially going from the census block level to, you know, an address or address range or something like that.

That's going to create tremendous opportunities for analytics and automation, you know, particularly with machine learning as we can use addressable data over time or bend that data to do automated analysis. That's going to let us do a lot more and be a lot more granular than we can be with census blocks. But it's also going to create a lot of work that we have to consider in terms of the techniques and tools that we're going to have to build to do that handling, you know, new volumes of data and things like that.

And then lastly, I mentioned earlier, right now, this is a non-public tool that's closed to federal and state government that are in the program. But we know that we're going to want to have derivative works and publications that are based on the information and analysis that we are collecting. So because of that, you know, we're looking for the right ways to expose this, to share maps and to share data and to share analysis over time.

And I don't have all the answers on how we're going to do that yet. But it's a problem that we know we have to solve and one that we're looking forward to. And so with that, thanks for your attention, and I'll turn it back over to Karen.

Karen Hanson: Thank you so much, Andy. Our final speaker for today is Karen Montgomery, who began her career in land surveys in 1986 working for the Bureau of Land Management in cadastral surveys in Colorado, and in California as a Field Surveyor. Karen then moved to Sacramento, California, where she became the BLM state program lead for lands and realty. In October of 2017, she became the Program Lead for hydropower and communication sites for the BLM Washington, DC office.

She also serves as the co-chair of the American Broadband Initiative's Streamlining Federal Permitting work stream. Karen holds a bachelor's degree

in Civil Engineering from University of Southern Colorado. Please begin
Karen. Karen, are you on mute?

Karen Montgomery: Yes, I am. Thank you.

Karen Hanson: Okay, great.

Karen Montgomery: Sorry about that. Yeah, I've been with BLM, working on broadband issues and coordinating with the Department of Interior for the last two and a half years. And I've been working directly with the Deputy Secretary. And this is a presentation that will give you a quick overview of the efforts that the department has been and continues to undertake. Next slide.

One of the first things that we did when we - when I started this is that we looked at what are the speeds that are needed to function into today's society and more specifically in rural communities where broadband is generally lacking. And this is some of the data that we pulled together from the NTIA website to kind of initiate where we needed to begin. Next slide.

Then we looked at coverage maps to see how those speeds that are needed line up across the United States. We immediately noticed that the areas where there is the least coverage happen to be the areas where most of the public lands that are managed by the Department are located. And those are the same areas where broadband coverage is needed the most. Next slide.

This is a map of the lands managed by the different Department of Interior agencies and also includes the Forest Service lands. And next slide. We put those two side by side it clearly illustrates that the Department of Interior would have a very instrumental role and providing broadband coverage into rural America, especially in our western states. Next slide.

We also looked at Alaska, which is practically non-existent and where BLM with the Department of Interior, at least, manages most of the state and has a huge role in the state of Alaska. Next slide.

This is where the BLM turned to our GIS mapping individuals to see how they could help us. And this is where I have a colleague of mine helping. His name is Jason Frels. He is with our National Operations Center in Denver, Colorado. And he will be walking through this part of the presentation. But we asked GIS staff if they could develop a mapping tool that can be built using the data from all the Department of Interior agencies, and that would show the public and ourselves where we already have existing broadband facilities, where we've already permitted activity.

By using the existing infrastructure, permitting times contract dramatically reduced, as there's already existing facilities on the ground and a NEPA analysis would have already been completed. So from that we developed what we're calling the JOEL map, next slide, and I will let (Jason) take over from here.

Jason Frels: Great. Thank you, Karen. The JOEL map is a government-wide effort to provide accurate and accessible information to foster broadband deployment to rural America. Currently, to promote the best available information from DOI agencies on telecommunication sites and areas in the US. Public engagement is really important to us and also for the future of the JOEL map. Development is continuous and based on what the users communicate to us, or what we think the users might find valuable.

For example, we recently added GSA federal real property datasets so the public has the opportunity to search all federal property assets as potential

broadband sites. Our next enhancement includes providing availability to USDA telecommunication data within the JOEL map. Next slide, please.

In the JOEL map, we've added filters to help you narrow down to your state of interest or your site type of interest. This information is available for both the existing telecommunication sites and the existing BLM telecommunication areas, which are the legal land descriptions for the rights of way. Next slide.

Underneath the filters, land use designations are displayed, and next to them is displayed the number of sites or areas that intersect them. These designations may affect the areas available for permitting. We wanted to raise awareness in how to best resolve this issue based on the feedback of several stakeholders and all of these issues that were raised during the engagement process. So we promoted this information within the JOEL map to help minimize roadblocks further down the road. Next slide please.

There are also several ways of interacting with the JOEL map to facilitate the end-user experience. You can change background imagery, or add your own geospatial data using the Add Data widget shown on the left. You can turn on and off several layers that may not be of particular interest, shown on the right. Next slide.

The JOEL map also provides details on the location or site, including managing agency information. This information is included for the telecommunications sites, telecommunications areas and for the federal real property data sets. Thank you. Back to you, Karen.

Karen Montgomery: Thanks, Jason. I will say on this slide too, we'll be able to identify areas that have some special agency designations such as a national monument or wilderness area, where they have certain restrictions on the availability of

those lands. So we think that this is providing a lot of useful information as well. Next slide.

In July of 2018, the Department of Interior delivered to the White House a report describing any difficulties or challenges that each of the agencies were faced with, with regard to permitting of broadband uses. Each of the agencies provided recommended actions that each of the agencies could take to address each of the challenges described. You can find this report on the Department of Interior website and also on the BLM website. Next slide.

The next couple of slides are going to be issues or actions that each of the agencies has been taking or has already taken to address the Broadband Initiative. For BLM, we're proposing a proposed rule, which will include several subjects. It will have broadband in there but also include cost recovery, and the amendment to FLPMA 512, which is the provisions for vegetation management as it relates to power transmission.

We plan to have the proposed rule published this spring in the Federal Register with a 60-day comment period for the proposed rule. During the proposed rule comment period, BLM plans to host three public meetings, one in Yuma, Arizona; one in Grand Junction, Colorado; and one in Washington DC.

DOI is also working with the Appraisal Valuation Services or AVSO, which is a DOI agency, and the Forest Service to develop new communication site rental schedules. Additionally, the CXs are their categorical exclusions that the BLM uses, that we found were a little bit limiting when it comes to broadband. So we developed a new CX, which mirrored a CX that the Forest Service uses, and it's basically for areas that have prior disturbance under five acres.

Finally, the BLM is just weeks away from introducing a new electronic filing system for the SF 299. The application - that's the application form that's used for requesting the use of public lands and was described as the common forum earlier in this presentation. The BLM will be the first agency to have an electronic online filing system. And the BLM will host this application filing system and we're calling it the EF-299. And you'll be able to find that on our website in the next couple of weeks. Next slide.

The Fish and Wildlife Service is also doing some things. They're streamlining their right-of-way regulations, and revising the regulations to provide applicants with clear guidance about the information that the Fish and Wildlife Service requires in order to process their applications. They're also requesting a no-cost, pre-application meeting with the Fish and Wildlife staff so that we can get all of the information transmitted between the two parties early in the process.

This policy will help with providing that first level of communication and help to complete appropriate NEPA analysis ensuring that there's no unnecessary delays. Next slide.

The Park Service is also doing some things. They are updating their internal policies. They're maintaining their website and training their staff on the permitting process so they can provide consistency in streamlining other broadband applications. Next slide.

Bureau of Reclamation plans to have a release of their new manual scheduled for July of 2020. They plan to hold some stakeholder meetings and external public meetings as appropriate with that new manual released. They're also updating the reclamation lands use website. They're coordinating with their

NEPA staff to utilize the lowest level of NEPA documentation appropriate for the proposed action, starting with the consideration of categorical exclusions.

They're also - their staffs are receiving training. Their planned training is in April of 2020. And it will provide consistent training on an ongoing basis so that they can streamline their permitting processes as well. Next slide.

A large portion of tribal areas are located on rough terrain and rural locations. Like most rural locations, populations are sparser than in urban areas. And these factors drive up the cost for business to serve tribal areas, creating a barrier to broadband deployment on tribal lands.

Rural broadband deployment is achievable, 73% of rural non-tribal locations have at least one broadband provider. However, only 46% of rural tribal locations have coverage. In September of 2019, the BIA hosted a national tribal broadband summit, and it showcased new technologies and innovative partnership solutions that are critical to bridging the connectivity divide in Indian country.

As part of their larger effort to close the digital divide in Indian country, the National Tribal Broadband Summit connected community leaders with information and resources to identify opportunities for public and private sector solutions so that they could close the gap in schools and libraries on tribal lands. The BIA will also be hosting another summit this September.

Thank you to the NTIA and the American Broadband Initiative for giving us this opportunity to brief you on the Department's broadband activities. Back to you, Karen.

Karen Hanson: Thank you so much. And thank you to everyone for your presentations. We have time for questions. So we will now open it up for some Q and A with our participants. We've gotten some great questions so far. But if you have not yet gotten your question in, please do type them into the question box on the right of the screen.

I'm going to start from the top with a question for Greg. And Greg, in light of the current situation with COVID-19, can you share what the Administration is doing to currently enhance broadband capacity and access?

Greg Watson: Sure, thanks, Karen. This is a really important question and appreciate that. The President is committed to helping all Americans as a part of the coronavirus response and connectivity is obviously critical during these times. Last week, the FCC announced the Keep Americans Connected pledge to ensure Americans have access to communication services which - this would include both telephone and broadband services.

So far as of last night - seen over 185 companies have signed on to the pledge and some of those companies have even gone a step further by lifting data caps and expanding programs that they have already for low income populations. The FCC has also announced waivers for some of its programs, including its Rural Health Care program E-Rate Lifeline, which will help ensure Americans have access to vital services like telemedicine, telemedicine and remote education.

This is a really important issue that we'll continue to work with all interested public and private sector partners on, so I look forward to any feedback or recommendations that anyone might have on that particular issue.

Karen Hanson: Thank you so much, Greg. Next, we have a quick question for Chad. Can you talk a little bit about how the public and private sectors can work together to solicit USDA funding? Chad, are you on mute? All right, let me go on to Andy. Andy, can you address how NTIA is partnering with other federal agencies like USDA and the FCC?

Andy Spurgeon: Yeah, sure. You know, we're really excited about the opportunity for other agencies to leverage the data that we've collected and the platform that we're building, you know, in order that they can consider it when they're going to do broadband loans, broadband, you know, grants or any other type of funding or financing for both infrastructure, as well as digital inclusion and meaningful use.

Part of our issue and it's - again, a lot of agencies have asked us for access and we've said no. So the reason for that is on us, not those other agencies, and it has to do with the maturity of the platform and this being a relatively new program. It's really important to us that before anybody uses this information to make a fiduciary decision that we know that the data that we've put into it is bulletproof and that the presentation and visualization are accurate, because we don't want to see any financing or funding decisions made based on either incomplete or poor data or because we made a mistake in how we presented something.

So that's a huge part of our work right now is just sort of that data integrity and accuracy assurance and making sure that we've got that that nailed down. Another issue for us is that a lot of agencies, you know, they do their grants and loans and so forth out of their own GIS systems. And the way that this map is set up, it's not a web map server or, you know, an API or another mapping system you can subscribe to because of the mix of private and public data. It's pretty locked down.

And so for that reason, we're asking folks to come into our platform instead of using our data in their platform, and that's obviously disruptive to their current business processes. And the work that they do today, they're going to have to use a different application, they're going to have to be trained on it. As I mentioned earlier, because we have so much data, and it's a GIS tool, there's some complexity there as well. And so training and things of that nature are very important.

So we're actually hoping to work with Chad and the team at USDA here just in the next couple of months to get that effort off the ground. And then we're going to use that as an opportunity - kind of another pilot, but with our federal partners this time to make sure that, you know, we have the views that they need right, we have the data that they need right, and then we're giving them a usable tool that they can support their decision-making process. I hope that answers the question.

Karen Hanson: Thank you so much. I think it's a good one. So I think we're still hoping that Chad will get back into the line. But I have a question now for Karen and DOI which is, what kind of response have you had to the JOEL map so far? And what kind of outreach are you doing?

Karen Montgomery: Well, I'll let Jason take the response to the JOEL map, because he's tracking that.

Jason: Sure, thanks. So, you know, we've had a pretty positive response to the JOEL map. There's a lot of demand for it and a lot of demand for improvement on it. And the use and growth of this tool is pretty impressive about - when it was launched about a year ago, we were only seeing about one to two users a day

and now we're tracking anywhere between 10 and 12. And that's going up month by month.

We also have a lot of interested parties on helping us, you know, improve the usability and add data beyond just telecommunications-specific data like viewsheds has come up and just a lot of supplemental information to help people pick the best spots for new broadband sites. So it's been a pretty positive response.

Karen Hanson: Thank you so much, and I think we have Chad back. So Chad, can you address how the public and private sectors can work together to solicit USDA funding? Looks like we still don't have Chad back. I'm so sorry about that. We will try to get those questions answered and distributed afterwards. So bear with us.

I think we are actually getting close to the end. But I think we have time for another question. Let's see, Andy, has NTIA developed any recommendations or best practices for states that are starting their broadband data collection or mapping programs?

Andy Spurgeon: Yeah, it's a really important subject. We haven't released anything today. And the reason is that we've been working with some of those states that are - that have been working on this problem the longest. We actually wanted to start by learning from them. So that is states that have existing broadband mapping programs that have been collecting data, either as part of their regulatory work like in a Public Utilities Commission, excuse me, or Public Service Commission, or as part of a grant or loan program that is required, you know, data, you know, data from a provider community to support either an application or a challenge to an application.

So we've been working with some of the states that are leading - have been leading the charge in those efforts, and we have not yet worked as much with some of the states that aren't. And so one of the things that we want to do is distill, you know, those experiences and some of the best data analysis that we've got before we make those recommendations. And so I suspect that's something that will come out before the end of the year from us, but we haven't done it today, because we just don't feel like we're in a knowledgeable enough position yet to give the best recommendations. But that's definitely something we're working on.

Karen Hanson: Thank you so much, Andy. So I think we are actually getting close to the top of the hour and we are running out of time for more questions, but please do feel free to contact us at broadbandusa@ntia.gov if you have other questions or if we were unable to get to your question, thank you again to the presenters and to all the participants on the webinar today.

As a reminder, the presentation and the slides and the recording will all be available on the BroadbandUSA website within seven days. BroadbandUSA webinars are scheduled for the third Wednesday of every month at 2 p.m. Eastern time. Thanks so much for joining us today. And please join us again on April 15, for a webinar on Rural Broadband: Business Models and Solutions from Three Service Providers.

I would also like to remind everyone that Broadband USA is available to provide technical assistance to help expand broadband capacity and promote digital inclusion and broadband adoption. For more information please email us at BroadbandUSA@NTIA.gov, or visit our website for more information and to access our toolkits and publications. Thanks again and have a wonderful afternoon.

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