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News Release

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USDA Invests in Broadband Infrastructure in Unserved and Underserved Rural Areas

Residents and Businesses in North-Central West Virginia to Get Internet Access with USDA Assistance

Buckhannon, W.Va., Nov. 6, 2017 – Assistant to the Secretary for Rural Development Anne Hazlett today announced that USDA is [investing more than \\$200 million in infrastructure](#) projects to bring broadband to hundreds of unserved and underserved rural communities.

“Broadband infrastructure is vital to our economy and quality of life in rural America. Yet, today nearly 40 percent of rural residents and businesses lack access to the same quality service available in urban centers,” Hazlett said. “Under Secretary Perdue’s leadership, USDA is working hard to bridge this gap. From access to health care to workforce training and connection to global markets, broadband is truly a lifeline to prosperity in rural communities.”

Hazlett discussed USDA’s work to expand broadband access in rural areas during a visit today to Upshur County, W.Va. She announced that USDA is awarding a grant to the Central West Virginia Development Association to provide broadband to more than 3,600 households, businesses and community facilities in Barbour, Randolph and Upshur counties.

Hazlett and Sen. Shelley Moore Capito (W.Va.) met with local officials at Buckhannon-Upshur High School and discussed how the grant will help students with educational and career opportunities. They also met with business officials who welcomed USDA’s assistance as a great partnership to expand broadband infrastructure to underserved areas.

“The availability of high-speed internet is an absolute necessity for West Virginia students and businesses to be able to compete in a global digital economy,” Sen. Capito said at Monday’s event. “This investment by USDA is a critical step in connecting West Virginia, and I can’t wait to see the opportunities that will result from this project. I will continue working to provide similar opportunities across the state because if given the tools, West Virginians can compete with anyone.”

The Buckhannon project is expected to increase economic opportunities for rural West Virginians. Area officials say the USDA grant will build on recent transportation infrastructure

improvements that are providing growth opportunities to local and regional businesses. Also, three area colleges will be able to provide expanded educational and career opportunities to their students.

While in West Virginia, Hazlett announced that USDA is awarding eight additional grants in Minnesota, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Virginia and Washington, as well as 10 loans to expand broadband in rural areas. The loans will provide new or improved broadband access for more than 71,000 residents and businesses in 74 counties in rural parts of Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia and Wisconsin.

These awards are being financed through USDA's [Telecommunications Program](#), which has provided financial assistance to more than 500 telecommunications providers nationwide. USDA is announcing \$207 million in loans and grants today.

Previous awardees, such as the Moultrie Independent Telephone Company in Illinois, have used USDA funding to expand broadband availability and make dramatic service improvements. Moultrie is using a USDA loan to increase network speed by almost tenfold in Lovington, Ill. Faster speeds can mean a significant increase in profits for area businesses that need real-time access to futures and options exchanges such as the Chicago Board of Trade.

USDA Rural Development provides loans and grants to help expand economic opportunities and create jobs in rural areas. This assistance supports infrastructure improvements; business development; homeownership; community services such as schools, public safety and health care; and high-speed internet access in rural areas. For more information, visit www.rd.usda.gov.

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