

South Dakota

Rural Utilities Service • Telecommunications Program • Telecommunications Loan Program

Nation's First Tribally-Owned Telco Keeps Connections Strong

When Ione Lee was 13 years old, there were two telephones in LaPlant, South Dakota. Telephones were a big deal, she said, recalling the 1930s state of technology on the Cheyenne River Indian Reservation, which is the home of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe (CRST). In the early years of Lee's youth, smoke signals were the dominant method of the communication for the Sioux. But as time passed, new technologies became available on the reservation. From the railroad telegraph, Morse code, telephones, and now broadband, Lee was a user of modern technology in each of its iterations. Thanks to the Tribally-owned CRST Telephone Authority, a significant portion of the reservation has not missed a signal or a switch when it comes to advances in telecommunications.



The first tribally-owned telephone company in the United States, CRST Telephone Authority continues advancing its nearly 60 year telecommunications history by investing in fiber optic upgrades.

In 1958, the CRST Tribal Council saw the telephone as the way to connect the entire reservation. To realize this vision, the Tribe purchased an existing telephone company, becoming the first Tribally-owned telephone company in the United States. Subsequently, the company was the first Tribally-owned company to partner with the USDA's Rural Electrification Administration, now known as the Rural Utilities Service. As testament to its commitment to keeping its customers connected, the CRST Telephone Authority recently utilized a \$27.5 million USDA Telecommunications Loan to upgrade the aging copper cable network with fiber optic technology.

With over 1,500 miles of fiber optic cable, the CRST Telephone Authority now provides leading edge telecommunications services to over 3,400 customers across 4,600 square miles. The winters may be harsh on the South Dakota plains, but through CRST Telephone Authority's commitment to investing in its network, the communication lines on the reservation stay strong, relevant, and resilient.

Obligation Amount:	\$27,542,576 Telecommunications Loan (Final Obligation)
Date of Obligation:	9/28/2010
Congressional District:	Representative Noem; Senators Thune and Rounds
Partners:	Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe
Demographics:	Corson, Dewey, and Ziebach counties
Impact:	With the construction of over 1,500 miles of fiber optic cable, Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe Telephone Authority offers reliable service to 20 communities throughout the state of South Dakota.
