



U.S. Department of Agriculture  
87 State St., Ste. 324  
Montpelier, VT 05601  
[www.rd.usda.gov/vt](http://www.rd.usda.gov/vt)  
[www.rd.usda.gov/nh](http://www.rd.usda.gov/nh)

# News Release

Contact:  
Kevin.Lambert@usda.gov

## NEK Broadband Receives More than \$17 Million for Infrastructure through USDA ReConnect Program

*Funding will increase access to high-speed internet for rural residents in Vermont's Caledonia, Orleans and Essex Counties*

**MONTPELIER, VT, May 18, 2023** – Today, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced a **\$17,463,911 grant** award to **NEK Community Broadband** (NEK Broadband) through the [USDA ReConnect Loan & Grant Program](#).

The investment, along with a **\$5,821,304** contribution from NEK Broadband, will be used to deploy a high-speed internet network to benefit 3,295 people, 94 businesses, 183 farms and 11 educational facilities across 22 towns in Caledonia, Essex and Orleans counties. NEK Broadband will make access more affordable for low-income residents by participating in the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) [Affordable Connectivity](#) Program.

“For families in Caledonia, Essex and Orleans counties, today is a significant moment,” said **Sarah Waring, USDA Rural Development State Director for Vermont and New Hampshire**. “We are thrilled to help this monumental effort by NEK Broadband to impact the lives of rural residents. With this landmark investment in Vermont’s broadband infrastructure, the people, businesses and organizations in areas of the Northeast Kingdom are one step closer to unprecedented access and speed, resulting in more opportunities to find work, find help, stay healthy and stay in touch. With the resilient leadership of the Biden-Harris Administration, support from our congressional partners, and organizations like NEK Broadband, the ReConnect Program now has a firm foothold in our jurisdiction, and we are confident it will continue to create high-speed connections—and a higher quality of life—within other areas of Vermont and New Hampshire.”

In March of this year, State Director Waring hosted a roundtable discussion with the Vermont Community Broadband Board, Communications Union Districts (CUDs) including NEK Broadband, and special guests, Under Secretary for Rural Development, Xochitl Torres Small, and Senator Peter Welch. Earlier this month, New Hampshire Representative Annie Kuster invited Rural Development to sit on a broadband panel that included representatives from the AARP, NH Electric Co-Op and the NH Department of Business and Economic Affairs. Among the many topics discussed in both sessions were the challenges and opportunities to fund equitable infrastructure investments for high-speed internet access in low-income areas.

### Background

Today's announcement marks the first ReConnect grant awarded in Vermont or New Hampshire. In 2021, NEK Broadband received \$190,380 through USDA's [Rural Business Development Grant Program](#) to extend broadband to the western part of Concord, Vermont, and the town of Waterford. The grant funded 6.7 miles of fiber for advanced telecom capabilities to benefit businesses and public institutions along the Connecticut River Byway, creating or maintaining roughly 20 jobs.

Vermont's [Northeast Kingdom](#) is one of five Rural Economic Area Partnership Zones in the U.S.—known as [REAP Zones](#). In 1995, USDA designated two areas in North Dakota as the first REAP Zones. In 1999, two regions in New York received the same recognition, as did Vermont's Northeast Kingdom in 2000. USDA established the Partnership to address critical issues related to constraints in economic activity and growth, low density settlement patterns, stagnant or declining employment, and isolation that has led to disconnection from markets, suppliers, and centers of information and finance.

### **About the USDA**

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. Under the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate-smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov).

#

*USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender.*