

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Rural Development

Unicom, Inc.: Notice of Availability of an Environmental Assessment

AGENCY: Rural Utilities Service, USDA

ACTION: Notice of Availability of an Environmental Assessment

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given that the Rural Utilities Service (RUS), as required by the National Environmental Policy Act, is issuing an Environmental Assessment (EA) in connection with possible impacts related to a project. The proposal is for construction of an approximately 793-mile-long submarine fiber to bring fast internet service to Larsen Bay, Chignik Bay, Sand Point, King Cove, Akutan, and Unalaska. Unicom, Inc. (Unicom) has submitted an application to RUS for funding of the proposal.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Peter Steinour, Environmental Protection Specialist, USDA, Rural Utilities Service, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Washington, DC 20250, Telephone: (202) 692-5346, Email: peter.steinour@usda.gov

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Unicom proposes to bring fast internet service to over 9,000 people in six remote Alaska Native villages. The project would begin in Mill Bay (Kodiak) and would connect Larsen Bay, Chignik Bay, Sand Point, King Cove, Akutan, and Unalaska to an existing company-owned middle-mile fiber network. Unicom proposes to build fiber-to-the-premises local access networks in each of these newly connected communities and villages. The project would install approximately 47 miles of trenched fiber optic cables, 268 vaults (9 square-feet), six beach manholes (12 square-feet), and six new shelter pads (625 square-feet). Prefabricated communications shelter (approximately 25 feet long, 15 feet wide, and 10 feet high) would be installed adjacent to existing facilities (comprised of a fenced, gravel pad and communication equipment) in all locations except Larsen Bay and Chignik Bay where new sites would be developed.

If implemented, the proposed project will convert approximately 0.096 acres of wetlands through placement of vaults, beach manholes and gravel pads in several areas of un-classified wetlands throughout the project area. In accordance with Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands, and USDA Departmental Regulation 9500-3, Land Use Policy, the purpose of this notice is to inform the public of this proposed conversion or effect and request comments concerning the proposal, alternative sites or actions that would avoid these impacts, and methods that could be used to minimize these impacts.

DOWL, an environmental consultant, prepared an EA for RUS that describes the project, assesses the proposed project's environmental impacts, and summarizes as applicable any mitigation measures used to minimize environmental effects.

RUS has conducted an independent evaluation of the environmental assessment and believes that it accurately assesses the impacts of the proposed project. No significant impacts are expected as a result of the construction of the project.

Copies of the Environmental Assessment and supporting documentation will be available for public review at:

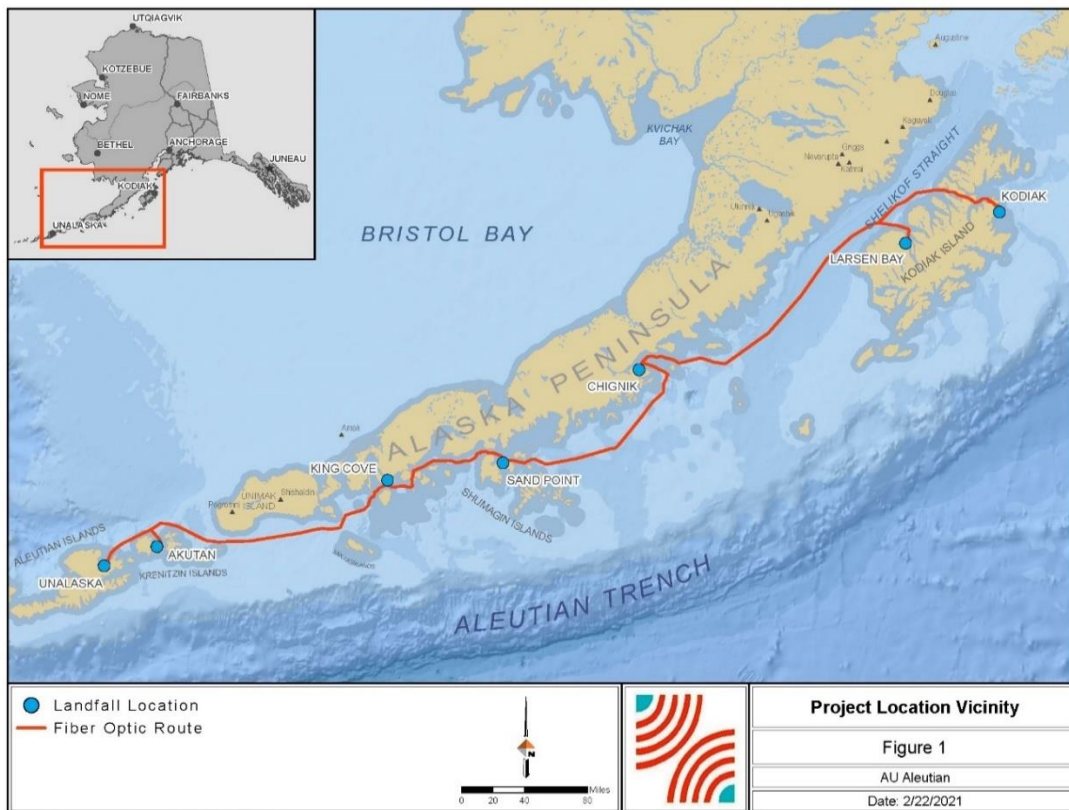
<https://www.rd.usda.gov/resources/environmental-studies/assessments>

Questions and comments should be sent to RUS at the address provided. RUS will accept questions and comments on the environmental assessment for 14 days from the date of publication of this notice.

Due to COVID-19, no hard copy comments will be accepted. All comments must be provided electronically.

Any final action by RUS related to the proposed project will be subject to, and contingent upon, compliance with all relevant Federal environmental laws and regulations and completion of environmental review procedures as prescribed by 7 CFR Part 1970, Environmental Policies and Procedures.

A general location map of the proposal is shown below:



Dated: July 23, 2021