

Gov. Nixon:

67-61

3 firms to share \$49.1 million to expand broadband in rural Mo.

Mo. Gov. Jay Nixon reports \$49.1 million from the U.S. Department of Agriculture will be used for projects to expand broadband and spur economic development in central, southeast and southwest Missouri.

The MoBroadbandNow partner projects include Finally Broadband, which will use \$1 million (\$500,000 in grants and \$500,000 in loans) to help provide broadband service in Texas and Wright Counties, and portions of Howell, Ozark and Shannon, Christian, Dallas, Douglas, Greene, Laclede, Phelps, Pulaski, Taney and Webster Counties, Nixon said in a news release.

The services reportedly will provide access to 45,782 households, 7,484 businesses and 404 community anchor points over 4,563 square miles of area and serve 24 communities and a population of 118,569.

Big River will \$24.4 million (\$12.2 million in grants and \$12.2 million in loans) to create a broadband net-

work reaching 90 percent of the homes in its service area, which includes Bollinger, Cape Girardeau, Madison, Perry, St. Francois, Ste. Genevieve and Washington Counties.

Socket Telecom will use \$23.7 million (\$16.6 million in grants and \$7.1 million in loans) to provide a fiber-to-home project to portions of eastern Boone County and western Callaway County; the project will include Millersburg and portions of Fulton.

Timetables for completion of each project are not given.

Nixon said federal Recovery Act funds will fuel portions of each project, with a goal of bringing broadband access to schools, businesses, health care providers and consumers.

MoBroadbandNow is an initiative created by Nixon last year to expand the reach of broadband across Missouri. He announced

awarding of the \$49.1 million while visiting the Cape Girardeau office of Big River Telephone Co. on Thursday.

"Just as the railroads and interstates transformed Missouri communities in decades past, these projects will help connect many more areas of Missouri with the information superhighway of the future," Nixon said. "They have the potential to connect doctors and patients at the speed of light; open the doors of our colleges and universities to more students; and expand markets for small businesses to not only the rest of the state, but to markets across the globe."

Nixon said the three companies submitted applications to enter the competition for round two funding from USDA's Rural Utilities Service. He had taken a number of steps to underscore the scope and potential of the applications, including personal conversations with U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and U.S. Commerce

Secretary Gary Locke, he said.

SPECIFICS

As part of the Big River application, Missouri pledged \$150,000 in matching funds. Nixon said the money will come from the federal budget stabilization fund, approved by the Missouri Legislature for broadband enhancement projects. Big River reportedly will create a network that will reach 90 percent of the homes in its seven-county service area and provide access to 44,697 households and 7,511 businesses, at a total project cost of \$33.9 million. High-speed Internet access (both fixed and mobile) reportedly will have download speeds up to 14.4 Mbps and upload speeds of 5.8 Mbps.

Socket Telecom will provide a fiber-to-the-home

project with access to 2,866 homes and 17 critical com-

munity facilities, Nixon said.

Socket will provide high-speed Internet access as well as voice and video services. By providing broadband Internet service over a fiber network, Socket users will receive bandwidth speeds capable of delivering telemedicine, telecommuting, distance learning, and other advanced applications, Nixon said.

OTHER PROJECTS

Nixon said the USDA also has awarded \$32.5 million for other Missouri broadband projects. They include:

- A grant of \$12.3 million to Grand River Mutual Telephone Corp. for serving Linn and Sullivan Counties;

- A grant of \$8.9 million to Grand River Mutual Telephone Corp. for serving Gentry, Harrison and Worth Counties;

- A grant of \$604,000 to the Orchard Farm Telephone Co. for serving St. Charles County;

- A total of \$249,000 (\$187,000 grant, \$62,000 loan) to Utopian Wireless for serving the area in and around Benton, in Scott County;

- A grant of \$10.3 million to Windstream Corp. for serving portions of Barry, Benton, Butler, Daviess, Greene, Lawrence, Maries, McDonald, Miller, Morgan, Newton, Oregon, Phelps, Polk, Pulaski, Putnam, Ripley and Wayne Counties.

In the first round of grants announced by the federal government in January, Ralls County Electric Cooperative, a MoBroadbandNow partner based in New London, received a \$19.1 million competitive award to expand broadband Internet to residential and commercial customers in northeast Missouri.

West Plains
Daily Quill
West Plains, MO
Circ. 9200
From Page:
9
8/6/2010
18296

