

**National Telecommunications and Information Administration
Broadband Technology Opportunities Program
Finding of No Significant Impact
Enventis Telecom, Inc. Greater Minnesota Broadband Cooperative Project**

Summary

Enventis Telecom, Inc. (Enventis) applied to the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) for a grant to install 426 miles of new fiber optic cable (middle mile and laterals) in Minnesota and northwestern Wisconsin. Two new middle mile routes will be constructed – one from Minneapolis to Duluth covering 182 miles, and one from Brainerd to Moorhead spanning 139 miles. In addition, Enventis will install approximately 105 miles of fiber laterals to extend off the existing network and the new middle mile routes. This construction will expand and leverage Enventis' existing, statewide 2,400 mile fiber network. The fiber network expansion will be constructed primarily underground within existing rights-of-way (ROWs) along state highways, county roads, and municipal streets. Fiber will be placed within existing and new ducts. However, at several major river crossings, fiber optic cable and duct will be attached to existing road bridges. Four new points-of-presence (POPs) will be installed to provide access points and house regeneration and other telecommunications equipment. The expanded network will provide high-speed broadband services to up to 129 new community anchor institutions (CAIs) in greater Minnesota and Wisconsin, including healthcare and medical facilities, public safety organizations, municipal and county offices, libraries, elementary and high schools, community colleges, and the Minnesota State College and University system. This network expansion is referred to as the Greater Minnesota Broadband Collaborative Project (Project).

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) awarded a grant for the Project to Enventis through BTOP, as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). The funding must be obligated and the Project completed within three years. This timeline will comply with the laws and regulations governing the use of this ARRA grant funding.

BTOP supports the deployment of broadband infrastructure in unserved and underserved areas of the United States and its Territories. As a condition of receiving BTOP grant funding, recipients must comply with all relevant Federal legislation, including the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). Specifically, NEPA limits the types of actions that the grantee can initiate prior to completing required environmental reviews. Some actions may be categorically excluded from further NEPA analyses based on the specific types and scope of work to be conducted. For projects that are not categorically excluded from further environmental review, the grant recipient must prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA) that meets the requirements of NEPA. After a sufficiency review, NTIA may adopt the EA, use it as the basis for finding that the project will not have a significant impact on the environment, and issue a finding of no significant impact (FONSI). Following such a finding, the BTOP grant recipient may then begin construction or other activities identified in the EA as the preferred alternative, in accordance with any special protocols or identified environmental protection measures.

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Eventis completed an EA for this Project in May 2011. NTIA reviewed the EA, determined it is sufficient, and adopted it as part of the development of this FONSI.

The Project includes:

- Installing 426 miles of fiber optic cable in Minnesota and northwestern Wisconsin, including 321 miles of middle mile fiber and approximately 105 miles of fiber laterals;
- Installing new fiber infrastructure underground in new and existing duct along roadway ROWs, and through new duct attached to existing bridges;
- Installing handholes along the new middle mile routes and outside each identified CAI to allow for splicing;
- Establishing two new POP sites within existing telecommunications offices in Detroit Lakes and Wadena;
- Erecting two new concrete prefabricated huts to serve as POP sites in Sandstone and North Branch;
- Installing electronics and related equipment at the new POP locations and at existing partner telecommunications sites; and
- Penetrating building exteriors and installing fiber into as many as 129 CAIs in Minnesota and northwestern Wisconsin.

Based on a review of the analysis in the EA, NTIA has determined that the Project, implemented in accordance with the preferred alternative, and incorporating best management practices (BMPs) and protective measures identified in the EA, will not result in any significant environmental impacts. Therefore, the preparation of an EIS is not required. The basis for this determination is described in this FONSI.

Additional information and copies of the Executive Summary of the EA and FONSI are available to all interested persons and the public through the BTOP website (www2.ntia.doc.gov/) and the following contact:

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Purpose and Need

The purpose of this Project is to provide affordable high-capacity broadband services to rural communities in Minnesota and northwestern Wisconsin. Many rural communities in these areas are currently unable to obtain high-capacity broadband service and, consequently, operate at a competitive disadvantage to their more well-connected neighbors. The network will connect CAIs in up to 53 Minnesota communities in 32 counties, including nine counties rated as “economically distressed.” The new infrastructure will also enhance healthcare, public safety, governmental operations, library and school capabilities, and long-distance learning and training opportunities throughout the state.

Project Description

Under this Project, Enventis will expand its existing statewide network by constructing an additional 321 route miles of fiber network and approximately 105 route miles of fiber optic laterals to provide high-capacity broadband services to up to 129 CAIs. The planned fiber network will consist of two new middle mile routes – one from Minneapolis to Duluth (182 miles) and one from Brainerd to Moorhead (139 miles). The new fiber infrastructure will be installed primarily underground within existing roadway ROWs along state highways, county roads, and municipal streets; the fiber will be routed through both existing and new ducts. Depending on site conditions and surface features to be avoided, vibratory plowing and horizontal directional drilling (HDD) methods will be used for this Project. Along limited portions of the route, where bedrock is present at the ground surface, a rock saw will be used to cut a trench to install conduit. Although most of the fiber will be placed below ground, new fiber will be placed in new ducts attached to existing bridges in two locations: across the Kettle River in Pine County, and across Interstate 35 along Garfield Avenue in Duluth.

The vibratory plow method will be used to install fiber duct in upland areas and unsaturated wetlands that can support the plow equipment. If woody vegetation is present along the planned fiber route, it will be cleared and grubbed prior to initiating plowing activities. A vibratory plow will then be used to create a narrow slit trench, and high density polyethylene (HDPE) duct and fiber will be inserted at least 42 inches below the ground surface. No significant soil excavation is required, and any disturbance to the ground surface (e.g., localized residual mounding or grooves) will be restored to pre-construction contours by grading, compaction, and revegetation.

Enventis will use the HDD method to install fiber duct beneath roads, driveways, sidewalks, water bodies, saturated wetlands, utilities, and other features that need to be avoided. A directional drill machine will be used to create an angled borehole beneath the surface feature being protected. The new infrastructure will typically be placed approximately 10 feet below the bottom of water bodies. Once the borehole is completed along the entire drill path, the duct and fiber will be pulled through the hole. Entry and exit pits will be installed on both sides of the sensitive feature to provide space for the drilling equipment and connecting the duct. Multiple HDD bores may be necessary to cross wide wetland areas. In these situations, equipment mats

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will be used to access the entry and exit sites within the wetland and to dig in to connect the ducts. Disturbed areas will be restored and revegetated upon completion of fiber installation.

In St. Paul and Minneapolis, Eventis will install new cable in an existing carriers' duct along Interstate 94 to avoid construction in a congested metropolitan area. Eventis will also participate in a joint build with another BTOP award recipient (University of Wisconsin) to construct a 1.57-mile segment of the Minneapolis to Duluth route in Superior, Wisconsin.

To house network telecommunications equipment, Eventis will construct POPs at four locations in Minnesota, including Detroit Lakes, Wadena, Sandstone, and North Branch. The POPs in Detroit Lakes and Wadena will be collocated in existing telecommunication offices. Accordingly, other than the addition of rack-mounted equipment, no building modifications will be required. The POPs in Sandstone and North Branch will consist of new prefabricated concrete huts approximately 12 feet by 18 feet. Both buildings will be constructed in previously developed areas within the municipalities.

Handholes will be installed at intervals ranging from 10,000 to 20,000 feet along the new middle mile fiber route to facilitate installation of lateral fiber extensions and potential future network expansions. Using the plowing and HDD methods detailed above, Eventis will also provide service to up to 129 CAIs utilizing both existing and new middle mile routes. Each lateral route will start at the nearest handhole (i.e., splice and pull box) on the new or existing middle mile route, follow along municipal streets, and terminate at an access handhole outside the property of each CAI. Eventis will penetrate the building exterior and extend fiber from the handhole into the building at up to 129 CAI locations.

Alternatives

The EA includes an analysis of the alternatives for implementing the Project to meet the purpose and need. NTIA also requires that an EA include a discussion of the no action alternative. The following summarizes the alternatives analyzed in the EA.

Underground Fiber Network Expansion (Preferred Alternative). This alternative will involve installing 426 miles of new fiber optic cable, including 321 miles of middle mile infrastructure and 105 miles of fiber laterals. All new fiber will be installed in existing roadway ROWs or through new duct attached to existing bridges. Handholes will be installed, as necessary, to accommodate the network expansion and connection of up to 129 new CAIs to the system. Four new POP sites will be created to house network equipment; two will be collocated in existing buildings, and two will require construction of prefabricated concrete huts in previously developed areas. Electronics and related equipment will be installed in the new POP locations and at existing partner sites.

No Action Alternative. No action was also considered. This alternative represents conditions as they currently exist in the Project area. Under the no action alternative, there would be no

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change to the existing fiber optic cable network. Enventis would not install the two new middle mile routes and laterals in rural Minnesota and Wisconsin. As a result, the Project would not meet its intended purposes, including provision of enhanced broadband access to rural communities in the region. The EA examined this alternative as the baseline for evaluating impacts relative to other alternatives being considered.

Alternatives Considered But Not Carried Forward. In addition to the preferred alternative, Enventis considered non-fiber based technology for this Project. Wireless broadband service is currently available in Minnesota and Wisconsin, including in some of the areas to be served by the Project. However, wireless transmission signals can be blocked by objects such as buildings and trees, as well as atmospheric conditions. Other disadvantages of wireless networks include significantly slower transmission speeds and lower bandwidth as compared to fiber optic networks. After evaluating wireless technologies, Enventis determined that a wireless broadband network would not meet the reliable, high-capacity demands and needs of the end users. Accordingly, this option was eliminated from further consideration for this Project.

Enventis also evaluated the option of installing an aerial fiber network. However, because aerial cable is susceptible to outages during storm events due to falling trees and limbs, excessive ice buildup, and high winds, this option would not provide the necessary network reliability. Accordingly, aerial installation of the fiber network system was eliminated from further consideration except for a few site-specific areas, such as bridge crossings. Enventis evaluated the feasibility of installing the cable aerially on existing bridges at certain water body and road crossings to span these features and minimize impacts on adjacent areas. However, this option also was eliminated from consideration in most cases because of the increased administrative requirements and agency coordination involved in securing permission to use the bridges, and because another option for spanning the waterway (i.e., HDD) was available. Nevertheless, it was determined that bridge attachments are the most suitable alternative for crossing the Kettle River in Pine County, Minnesota and Interstate 35 along Garfield Avenue in Duluth, Minnesota.

Enventis also investigated the availability of using existing duct in the Project area rather than new construction. This option is feasible in some areas, as discussed in the Project description, but Enventis determined that adequate infrastructure is not available along the entire route. In particular, Enventis determined that there is no available space for an additional cable in the existing duct under the St. Louis River Bay between Superior and Duluth. Accordingly, this alternative was eliminated from further consideration in the EA, and this waterway will be traversed using HDD methods.

Findings and Conclusions

The EA analyzed existing conditions and environmental consequences of the preferred alternative and the no action alternative in 11 major resource areas, including Noise, Air Quality, Geology and Soils, Water Resources, Biological Resources, Historic and Cultural Resources,

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Aesthetic and Visual Resources, Land Use, Infrastructure, Socioeconomic Resources, and Human Health and Safety. Cumulative impacts were also evaluated.

Noise

This Project will have short-term impacts on noise. These impacts are associated with the short-term use of vibratory plows, directional drills, backhoes, and other general construction equipment. Overall noise levels will be similar to those generated by passing vehicles on the adjacent roadways. Increased noise will be transitory as construction moves along the Project route, with slightly longer durations associated with HDD where the drilling equipment operates at fixed entry and exit locations. Accordingly, no particular receptor along the route will experience long-term noise impacts from construction. Moreover, no noise is associated with operation of the expanded network for data transmission. Based on these assessments, no significant noise impacts are expected to occur as a result of this Project.

Air Quality

During the construction phase of the Project, emissions will be generated by construction equipment including vibratory plows, directional drilling equipment, and rock saws. Emissions from this construction equipment will be temporary, minor, and transitory as construction activities move along the fiber routes. The Project will also result in short-term, minor increases in the use of fossil fuel and associated greenhouse (GHG) emissions during construction. Considering the nature and scope of the planned network expansion, GHG emissions are expected to be well under the Council on Environmental Quality's presumptive effects threshold of 25,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions from an action. Operation of the fiber optic cable for data transmission will not create any new, long-term air quality concerns. Based on these assessments, no significant impacts to air quality are expected.

Geology and Soils

The majority of fiber optic cable and handholes will be installed within existing, previously disturbed roadway ROWs. Installing fiber within existing ducts or on bridges should have negligible impacts on geology and soil. The two new POP huts will also be placed in developed areas. None of these activities will significantly alter the geologic profile or soil properties, and there will be no conversion of prime or unique farmland to nonagricultural uses. Erosion and sedimentation control BMPs (e.g., seeding, hydroseeding, mulching, and installing erosion control logs) will be implemented where appropriate. Based on these assessments, the Project is not expected to result in significant impacts on the geology or soil in the area.

Water Resources

Construction of the fiber optic cable for the planned network expansion will involve crossing approximately 34 miles of wetlands. The majority of these wetlands have been previously disturbed by road construction and ongoing ROW maintenance activities. The particular construction methods to be used in these wetlands will vary depending on the conditions of the wetland at the time of construction. In unsaturated wetlands that are relatively dry, fiber and conduit will be installed using a vibratory plow, with only minor impacts on the area. In

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saturated wetlands, such as shallow water marshes, Enventis will use HDD to drill beneath the wetlands. For longer wetlands that are crossed using HDD, multiple bores may be needed to install the cable across the entire length of wetland and trenching may be required to connect lengths of conduit. When trenching in wetlands, Enventis will minimize potential impacts by using BMPs, such as using timber mats, to access construction areas. Enventis will also avoid crossing forested and shrub wetlands to the extent practicable. If crossing forested or shrub wetlands is unavoidable, Enventis will evaluate the use of HDD or realigning the route, to minimize clearing of woody vegetation in these areas. Disturbed wetlands will be restored to preconstruction elevations and conditions.

The fiber optic cable route will cross 210 rivers and streams, including 14 crossings of trout streams, 3 crossings of state-designated Wild and Scenic Rivers, and 9 crossings of Section 10 waters. Many of these water bodies have associated floodplains that will also be crossed by the Project. However, no aboveground structures, including the new POP buildings, will be constructed in these floodplains. Enventis will avoid impacts on these water bodies and floodplains by either drilling under them using HDD, or attaching duct and cable to an existing road bridge. HDD entry and exit sites will be located in upland areas, to the extent practicable. If drill sites are needed in riparian areas adjacent to a water body, timber mats and erosion control BMPs will be used to minimize impacts. Special care will be taken in the vicinity of the trout streams and the Wild and Scenic Rivers to protect the water quality and riparian habitat in these streams and rivers. On February 1, 2011, Enventis submitted an application to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) for Section 10 and Section 404 permitting. The application delineated plans for wetlands and surface water crossings using HDD installation methods. This application included specific discussion of the HDD crossing of the St. Louis River, also referred to as the St. Louis River Bay and the Duluth/Superior Harbor. In a letter dated May 20, 2011, the USACE reviewed this information and authorized the work, as planned, under Nationwide Permit 12. However, the USACE also placed several stipulations on the Project, including prohibitions on clearing of forested wetlands; requirements that HDD boring place fiber at least 10 feet beneath non-wetland waters encountered along the Project route; and limiting activity associated with the Duluth/Superior Harbor to fiber placement via HDD. No other work waterward of the harbor shore is authorized.

The Minneapolis to Duluth middle mile route will be constructed within the Great Lakes Coastal Zone located in Douglas County, Wisconsin and St. Louis County, Minnesota. In accordance with the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA), this Project must be conducted in compliance with the relevant states' federally approved Coastal Management Program (CMP). In Wisconsin, compliance with the CMP is ensured through permits issued by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR). Enventis will seek appropriate permits from WDNR prior to conducting any construction activity in Wisconsin's Great Lakes Coastal Zone. In Minnesota, the CMP is managed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MDNR). In a letter dated February 28, 2011, the MDNR determined that the Project is consistent with Minnesota's Lake Superior CMP.

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Biological Resources

Construction of the Project in existing ROWs is not expected to have significant adverse impacts on federally listed threatened or endangered species. On October 21, 2010, after review of the Project description, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) indicated that there are no federally listed species or designated critical habitat in the Project area. On April 27, 2011, Enventis informed the USFWS of minor route changes and requested further evaluation of potential Project impacts. On May 25, 2011, the USFWS indicated that the minor route changes did not require further Section 7 consultation.

In a letter dated March 2, 2011, MDNR concurred with Enventis' assessment that state-listed species are unlikely to be adversely affected. MDNR provided guidance on minimizing the potential for impacts on Minnesota protected species. In accordance with this guidance, Blanding's turtles (*Emys blandingii*) and wood turtles (*Glyptemys insculpta*) in the ROW will be avoided during construction of the Project and any encounters are to be reported to the MDNR. In addition, if the peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) nests are active at the time of fiber installation on bridges over the Mississippi River, Enventis will consult with the MDNR to avoid impacts to the nesting falcons. MDNR also provided several recommendations for minimizing impacts to Sites of Biodiversity Significance that are adjacent to middle mile and lateral routes, including minimizing vehicular disturbances, inspecting and cleaning construction equipment, avoiding parking equipment on site, if possible, working in autumn or winter to avoid damaging plants during the growing season, using erosion control measures in disturbed areas, revegetating with native species, and using only invasive-free mulches, topsoil, and seed mixes.

In an Endangered Resources Review (ERR) dated May 31, 2011, WDNR indicated no concerns with regard to the Project, provided that Enventis implements ERR recommendations for protecting three of Wisconsin's state-listed species of concern: the Greater Redhorse (*Moxostoma valenciennesi*), American marten (*Martes americana*), and wood turtle. The ERR also includes provisions for protecting rare species and high-quality native communities. Among other recommendations, Enventis will incorporate the following provisions into the Project: implementation of strict erosion and siltation controls to protect surface water quality; avoiding removal of trees greater than 15 inches in diameter at breast height; assessment of the work space within 1,000 feet of the Black River near Pattison State Park and crossings of the Black and Nemadji Rivers for the presence of wood turtles; avoiding construction from April 1 to October 30 in suitable wood turtle foraging or nesting habitat; and providing for turtle exclusion fencing and turtle removal as needed.

Based on these assessments, no significant impacts on biological resources are anticipated to result from Project implementation.

Historic and Cultural Resources

NTIA initiated consultation with the Minnesota and Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) on September 24, 2010, and November 16, 2010, respectively. On October 21, 2010, the Minnesota SHPO requested that Enventis complete a Phase IA archaeological

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assessment. On December 22, 2010, the Wisconsin SHPO requested additional information on cultural resources along the proposed routes. On December 29, 2010, Enventis submitted a cultural resources literature review report to the Minnesota and Wisconsin SHPOs for their review. The Minnesota SHPO responded on January 27, 2011 indicating their concurrence that the Project will have no adverse effect on historic properties. The Minnesota SHPO also concluded that the two new POP buildings will have no adverse effect on any aboveground historic properties, provided they are not placed within, adjacent to, or in view of any historic property or district that is listed on or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NHRP). The Wisconsin SHPO responded on March 22, 2011 indicating their concurrence that no historic properties will be affected by the Project. However, the planned Project route traverses the boundary of an uncataloged human burial site (BDG0044). Pursuant to Wisconsin State Statute 157.70 and Wisconsin Administrative Code Sections HS 2.02(15) and 2.04(2), Enventis was required to conduct a limited subsurface investigation in this area to determine the presence of and potential impacts on human remains at this site. On May 18, 2011, Enventis received authorization from the Wisconsin Historical Society to conduct limited appropriate subsurface exploration and to test the recorded burial site for the presence of human remains. Enventis contracted Commonwealth Cultural Resources Group, Inc. (CCRG), to conduct archaeological investigations at the burial site. On June 1, 2011, CCRG conducted a Phase I archaeological survey of project site BDG0044 that revealed the project area has been extensively altered by urban expansion and infrastructure development and found no evidence of human burial remains associated with the site. On June 14, 2011, Enventis submitted a letter to the Wisconsin SHPO documenting these findings and recommending no additional archeological investigations or monitoring be required at the site. Additionally, as requested in correspondence dated May 31, 2011 from the Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin, Enventis will also share the results of the Phase I archaeological survey with the tribe.

Subsequent to the identification of Site 47DG0006, Enventis made several revisions to the planned Project route in Minnesota. On March 7, 2011, Enventis submitted an addendum to the cultural resources literature review report (Addendum I) to the Minnesota SHPO, summarizing analysis of these revisions. On April 6, 2011, the Minnesota SHPO indicated that they concur that the proposed route revisions detailed in the Addendum I report will have no adverse effect on historic properties. Enventis later made additional modifications to the Project route near North Branch. These revisions were analyzed in a second addendum to the cultural resources literature review report (Addendum II) which was submitted to the Minnesota SHPO on May 19, 2011. In a letter dated June 2, 2011, the Minnesota SHPO again concluded that no historic properties will be affected by the planned route changes.

On October 1, 2010, NTIA notified 29 Native American tribes of the Project through the Tower Construction Notification System (TCNS). Of these organizations, three responded to the TCNS notification with no interest or concerns, and ten requested additional information. This information was provided to the tribes on March 8, 2011. Of the ten tribes that requested and received additional information, nine determined that they had no issues with the Project or did not respond after receipt of the additional information. The Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux

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Tribes (FPT), however, requested that Eventis conduct an archaeological literature review and ethnohistorical study of the Project's area of potential effect (APE). Eventis completed and provided the requested study to the FPT on May 9, 2011. On May 31, 2011, the FPT indicated that they have no further objections to the Project as planned.

Subsequent to the initial TCNS notification, minor revisions were made to the planned fiber optic route alignment near North Branch. On May 17 and 19, 2011, Eventis directly notified the 13 Tribes that responded to the initial TCNS notification about this minor route change. Of the seven tribes who responded to the updated Project notification, six expressed no objection to planned activities. In correspondence dated May 31, 2011, the Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin requested that Eventis share results of the planned investigation of burial site 47DG0006. Several tribes also requested notification in the event that cultural resources are inadvertently discovered during Project implementation. Consequently, if construction-related ground-disturbing activities uncover cultural materials (i.e., structural remains, historic artifacts, or prehistoric artifacts), Eventis will stop all work in the area and immediately notify interested Tribes, the SHPOs, and NTIA. If ground-disturbing activities uncover human remains, Eventis will immediately stop all work in the area, secure the area around the discovery, and notify the relevant law enforcement personnel (e.g., local police or county coroner) and NTIA.

Based on completed cultural resources reviews and consultations, the Project is not expected to have significant impacts on historic or cultural resources.

Aesthetic and Visual Resources

The Project will involve construction in suburban and urban ROWs adjacent to developed areas, and rural ROWs adjacent to forested areas, agricultural fields, and natural areas. Aesthetic disruptions associated with the fiber itself will be temporary, limited to the construction period, and related to the short-term presence of construction equipment along the ROW. Permanent aesthetic impacts will be minor as the conduit, fiber, and hand holes will be installed below grade and within previously disturbed areas. The two new POP huts in Sandstone and North Branch will be built in existing commercial areas and will not have adverse visual impacts on the surrounding developed areas. Fiber will be installed using minimally invasive technologies to limit impacts to vegetation and other landscape features. Following construction, disturbed areas will be cleaned up and restored. In areas such as the northern portion of the Minneapolis to Duluth middle mile route, it may be necessary to temporarily clear woody vegetation to facilitate construction. This clearing may result in temporary visual impacts until the vegetation regenerates. In addition, the Project will cross three state-designated Wild and Scenic Rivers, including the Kettle, Mississippi, and Cannon Rivers. Attaching cable to existing bridges or boring beneath the waterways will not result in new adverse effects on the scenic qualities of the rivers at the crossings. Based on these assessments, this Project will not significantly affect aesthetic or visual qualities in the region.

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Land Use

This Project will be constructed within existing roadway ROWs bordered by properties used for residential, business, agricultural, medical, and educational purposes. Installation of the cable, the presence of heavy equipment, equipment staging, and worksite activity in these ROWs may result in temporary impacts on use of immediately adjacent land. The permanent presence of buried cable will permanently restrict ground-disturbing activities in the vicinity and encumber future uses of the ROW. The counties and municipalities through which the middle mile and lateral routes will be constructed require permits or approvals for installing the cable in the ROW. Enventis will work with all appropriate local agencies to ensure that the Project is compatible with local land use plans. The planned improvements are consistent with normal uses of ROWs, and no significant adverse impacts on land use are expected.

Infrastructure

Construction of fiber optic cable along the two middle mile routes and laterals is not expected to adversely affect existing infrastructure. Enventis will contact the "Gopher State One Call" excavation notice system 48 hours prior to intrusive activities to locate and mark existing utilities within the affected ROWs. Existing utilities in the ROW will be avoided by HDD installation. During construction, heavy equipment and associated support vehicles may periodically disrupt traffic flow when entering and exiting the roadway. Delays to motorists are expected to be minimal, as the construction will be conducted in the ROW and off the roadway surface. Any delays will be temporary. No significant conflicts with existing utility or transportation infrastructure are anticipated. Conversely, implementation of this Project will increase available broadband infrastructure, provide enhanced connectivity, and offer more reliable opportunities to access internet services. Overall, this Project is expected to have a positive impact on infrastructure in Minnesota and northwestern Wisconsin, and will not result in significant impacts on existing infrastructure.

Socioeconomic Resources

The Project will provide enhanced broadband access to users in Minnesota and northwestern Wisconsin, particularly within rural areas of the region. The expanded network is expected to result in enhanced employment and educational opportunities. Communities along the new middle mile and lateral routes include significant populations of minorities and people living below the poverty level. The Project will have a positive impact on these minority and low income populations by improving education, healthcare, employment, and public safety in the area. Overall, this Project is expected to have a positive impact on socioeconomics in the planned service area, and will not result in significant impacts on socioeconomic resources.

Human Health and Safety

The Project is not expected to have any direct impacts on human health and safety during normal operation. However, human health and safety concerns may arise during construction when such activities occur in close proximity to traffic along roadways or contaminated sites. Enventis has developed and will implement a health and safety plan during construction of this Project. Enventis will follow procedures identified by the Minnesota and Wisconsin Departments of

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Transportation to minimize health and safety risks to workers and the traveling public. These procedures will include safety measures for work within the roadway "clear zone" and temporary traffic control. The fiber optic cable will be installed within previously disturbed ROWs and is not likely to encounter unidentified contaminated areas. If such contamination is encountered, Enventis will manage the area to prevent the spread of contamination and follow applicable Occupational Safety and Health Administration requirements to ensure worker safety. Based on these considerations, significant adverse impacts on human health and safety are not expected.

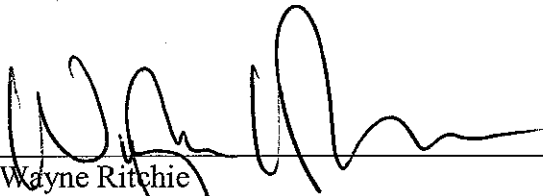
Cumulative Impacts

Because the Project will be constructed within existing roadway ROWs, the primary cumulative impact involves the potential for additional traffic congestion and delays during the construction phase. Traffic congestion and delays are typically experienced during most road construction projects. Enventis has identified 11 roadway projects that may occur concurrently with the Enventis Project. These projects include installation of street lights; roadway and intersection realignments; mill and overlay repaving; overpass construction; sewer and water line replacement; and MDNR's extension of the Heartland Trail from Park Rapids to Moorhead. Enventis will coordinate with state, county, and local transportation departments along the planned routes to develop plans and procedures for minimizing disruption of traffic on adjacent roadways. No significant adverse cumulative impacts will result from concurrent implementation of these projects.

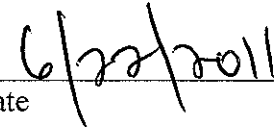
Decision

Based on the above analysis, NTIA concludes that constructing and operating the Project as defined by the preferred alternative, identified BMPs, and protective measures, will not require additional mitigation. A separate mitigation plan is not required for the Project. The analyses indicate that the proposed action is not a major Federal action that will significantly affect the quality of the human environment. NTIA has determined that preparation of an EIS is not required.

Issued:



Wayne Ritchie
Chief Administrative Officer
Office of Telecommunications and Information Applications
National Telecommunications and Information Administration



Date