

Environmental Assessment (EA)

Colorado Community Anchors Broadband Consortium Project

EAGLE-Net Alliance

Grant Award No. NT11BIX5570001

Various Locations, Colorado and Wyoming

July 6, 2011

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ARRA	American Recovery and Reinvestment Act
APE	Area of Potential Effect
BGEPA	Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act
BLM	Bureau of Land Management
BMP	Best Management Practice
BTOP	Broadband Technology Opportunities Program
CAI	Community Anchor Institution
CBOCES	Centennial Board of Cooperative Educational Services
CCABC	Colorado Community Anchors Broadband Consortium
CDOT	Colorado Department of Transportation
CDW	Colorado Division of Wildlife
EA	Environmental Assessment
EAGLE-Net	Educational Access Gateway Learning Environment Network
EIA	Electronic Industries Alliance
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
FCC	Federal Communications Commission
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
FS	Forest Service
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
MBTA	Migratory Bird Treaty Act
NAGPRA	Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990
NPDES	National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System
NRCS	Natural Resource Conservation Service
NRHP	National Register of Historic Places
NWI	National Wetland Inventory
NTIA	National Telecommunications and Information Administration
OSHA	Occupational Safety and Health Administration
RUS	Rural Utilities Service
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Office
SWPPP	Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan
T&E	Threatened and Endangered
TCNS	Tower Construction Notification System
TIA	Telecommunications Industry Association
USACE	US Army Corps of Engineers
USDA	US Department of Agriculture
USFWS	US Fish and Wildlife Service
USGS	US Geological Survey
UST	Underground Storage Tank

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WYGF	Wyoming Game and Fish
WYCRIS	Wyoming Cultural Resource Information System
WYDOT	Wyoming Department of Transportation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared to fulfill requirements of Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) Grant Award No. NT11BIX5570001, "Colorado Community Anchors Broadband Consortium - Connecting Colorado's Middle Mile." The project was awarded by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) during Round 2 of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) Broadband Stimulus Funding.

The proposed Colorado Community Anchors Broadband Consortium (CCABC) project was initially conceived by Colorado's Centennial Board of Cooperative Educational Services (CBOCES). The CBOCES created the Educational Access Gateway Learning Environment Network (EAGLE-Net), with a goal of addressing deficiencies in broadband availability by providing high-speed internet access to its school districts. The ARRA provided the opportunity for CBOCES to expand the EAGLE-Net network statewide, and bring broadband service at speeds of 20 Mbps to 1 Gbps to school districts, libraries, and community anchor institutions across Colorado through the CCABC project. In accordance with the grant application, CBOCES was the leader in creating the EAGLE-Net Alliance, an intergovernmental entity created pursuant to Colorado statute, with school district and other Community Anchor Institution representation on its Board of Directors. The BTOP grant award was officially transferred from CBOCES to the EAGLE-Net Alliance on February 16, 2011. The project will also provide broadband access to a small portion of Wyoming, with approximately 11 miles of fiber optic cable extending into this state. In addition, the project will facilitate more broadband accessibility and affordability for an estimated 1,623,852 households and 50,077 businesses.

The proposed EAGLE-Net network would consist of more than 1,600 miles of terrestrial fiber and 3,000 miles of microwave wireless broadband. The CCABC project will minimize costs by utilizing existing fiber optic infrastructure and wireless tower infrastructure where available. Vibratory plowing, directional boring, and trenching will be utilized to install proposed fiber optic lines in existing, previously disturbed rights-of-way along roadways and railroads. Vibratory plowing will serve as the primary method of installation. Directional boring will be utilized to minimize surface disturbance in select locations such as urban areas, streams, and wetlands to minimize disturbance to sensitive features.

Broadband access has traditionally been limited to major urban areas of Colorado. The diverse, rugged physical geography of Colorado has previously precluded fiber build-out due to increased costs, as one linear mile of distance may equate to three to six miles of fiber optic cable placement. Colorado is currently ranked 42nd in the nation in broadband connectivity. Rural areas that have access to broadband service often pay up to 10 times the cost of comparable urban areas, with lower available connectivity speeds.

The proposed project aims to provide access to unserved and underserved areas, educational and public institutions (e.g. schools, universities, libraries), and provide the opportunity for

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economic growth and job creation by providing new opportunities for rural communities. The CCABC project will also provide the ability for increased broadband growth in the future for additional unserved and underserved portions of Colorado and adjacent states.

Several alternatives were initially considered in the Environmental Assessment, including:

Preferred Alternative

A hybrid solution that utilizes existing infrastructure where available to reduce costs, and construction of additional fiber optic cable within existing, previously disturbed rights-of-way along roadways and railroads within needed locations. Wireless technology may be utilized where cable placement is not feasible.

Wireless Technology Only

Utilize towers only to provide broadband connectivity to needed areas. This alternative would not meet the goals of the project due to inability to support bandwidths and internet speeds available with fiber optic cable. In addition, the potential impacts to visual and biological resources would be higher utilizing this alternative.

Underground Installation Only of Fiber Optic Cable

Utilize new and existing fiber optic cable only to provide broadband connectivity to needed areas. This alternative is unfeasible as it is cost prohibitive. Impacts to evaluated resources may be higher due to the greater potential to disturb sensitive habitats.

Aerial Installation Only of Fiber Optic Cable

Install cable aboveground, rather than under existing rights-of-way. This alternative would lead to increased susceptibility to outages resulting from weather and weather related incidents such as icing, high winds, and falling tree limbs. Aerial installation could also possibly increase risks for volant wildlife species.

No Action Alternative

Do not implement the proposed CCABC project (do nothing).

This EA analyzes the Preferred and No Action alternatives, as other alternatives were eliminated for various reasons discussed above and considered further in this EA.

Based on analysis completed as part of this EA, the CCABC project would not result in significant negative impacts to environmental resources examined in this EA. In fact, the CCABC project is anticipated to provide several positive benefits to socioeconomics, human health and safety, and land use within the area served by the project. In addition, the proposed project will provide unserved and underserved communities with lower cost broadband access when implemented.