

**From:** Heidi Schoppenhorst [mailto:boreallodge@gmail.com]

**Sent:** Thursday, November 06, 2014 6:11 AM

**To:** Helen Shaw

**Subject:** Regarding NOI comments related to Arctic Alaska

Hello Ms. Shaw,

Today I was passed your name & contact information from Christine O'Connor with the Alaska Telephone Assn. She encouraged me to write you and pass on my comments & requests for improved communications sent to her and James Perry with Summit Telephone Co. just yesterday. James had sent me a link to the arctic region implementation plan & information relating to your recent inquiry for comment regarding communications in arctic Alaska also just yesterday.

My husband & I own/operate a small Lodge here in Wiseman, AK, we also both work for DOI/NPS/GAAR, as we both have for many years. I am an Interpretive Ranger with NPS, working primarily in the interagency visitor center in Coldfoot seasonally with limited duties through the winter months, and my husband is in charge of maintaining the Ranger stations supporting Gates of the Arctic NP&P. We live here in Wiseman year-round, as we have for the last 25 years together. (I grew up here & have been in the area for 40 years.) Wiseman is a small historical mining community founded in the early 1900's. I am also acting chair of our small Community Assn. here.

I have been communicating with our local telephone company (Summit Telephone Co.) off & on for a few years regarding possibilities for upgrades to our current primitive communications systems here in Wiseman / Coldfoot. Primarily we have been seeking cell service / broadband internet coverage for this area. We are on the road system, in the Dalton Highway Utility Corridor with many strategic operations taking place from this area related to a variety of research & oil industry operations, as well as several thousands of visitors annually. There are many more remote villages scattered across northern Alaska with more limited populations that currently have cell / broadband connection currently in place.

Wiseman is located approximately 1/2 way between Fairbanks & Prudhoe Bay - 275 miles north of Fairbanks and 75 miles north of the arctic circle - Coldfoot is 13 miles south of Wiseman and these are basically the only community / public service areas along the 414 mile highway route with year round occupancy & services south of Prudhoe Bay.

After reading some of the implementation plan, it seems like this plan could very well be the answer for help we have been seeking related to communications in this area for many years. I think this area meets a lot of the criteria addressed in that plan. I am copying to you below my comments & shared documentation sent to Christine & James yesterday:

One good point I can see right away for qualifying criteria is the local infrastructure support here related to climate change research & energy production;

the 2 lodges here in Wiseman, and 1 in Coldfoot are essential for housing continued research, maintenance, and future planning. We actually accommodate several researchers that are directly involved in front line studies directly related to hazards & impacts related to climate change (researchers from all over the world stage here to study a variety of aspects of climate change, including research joint with State agencies to figure out how to mitigate the impacts of debris slides threatening the Dalton Highway, the main route to the oilfields.). We also house crews that are directly involved in current & future energy production (ie; gas line preliminary planning & development, maintenance/repair & oversight of existing oil transport.) All of these folks would greatly benefit from improved communications such as cell service & reliable broadband connection while conducting their work in this area.

Additionally when the Dalton Highway was designated as a State Scenic Byway a few years back, there was a very diverse group of stakeholders that collaborated to identify the issues related to the Byway designation, and generally the issues related to travel on this still remote Dalton Highway. This group consisted of both State & Federal agencies, Alyeska Pipeline Service Company, native corporations, travel industry representatives, and local residents & business owners. This was a very intense process with over a year of work from volunteering stakeholders that went into defining those issues most essentially in need of address in the future. The Dalton Highway Corridor Partnership Plan was created as a template or outline identifying issues, and what was considered at the time for possible solutions. I am attaching a copy of the plan here for your review. (*see attached file; DaltonHighwayScenicBywayCorridorPartnershipPlan\_Final.pdf*) This document essentially gives official documentation & record for future efforts of those who may be able to address solutions to ongoing issues. (Please see section 5 beginning on page 9 for identification of issues, and page 12 for possible solutions.)

One of the major concerns on this highway is lack of emergency services / communications that present ongoing safety issues. In addition to the oil / gas industry workers/traffic & researchers that travel & use the Dalton, there are approx. 20,000 (documented) visitors from around the world that travel the highway through the summer seasons. (That is a conservative number as documentation comes only from 2 Federal visitor contact sites on the highway, many others travel the highway that do not stop at visitor facilities.)

One recommendation as possible solution to alleviate many safety issues is to improve communications by installing cell towers. At the time of document we were thinking that possibly cell towers could be accommodated at the AT&T microwave repeater tower sites, and potentially cover the length of the highway providing the best form of communication for travelers & workers. I have in the past tried to approach a few of the AT&T technicians with this idea, but obviously have not made any progress. I have talked with other passing AT&T & GCI techs, and local telephone company requesting cell coverage for even just the Coldfoot/Wiseman area as this is a halfway point along the highway & most populated service area which includes year round community residents.

Currently our only communications in this area are limited to the local exchange company (Summit Telephone) in association with the AT&T microwave repeater towers that span the length of the Dalton. For internet the only option for all but one government only access (BLM/NPS/USF&W) T-1 hub (at the Arctic Interagency Visitor Center in Coldfoot) is privately owned individual HughesNet satellite internet dish connections. HughesNet is overloaded in AK in recent years, and has degraded significantly in the last 4 to 5 years - connections are slow & unreliable. There is no other option for internet connection in this area.

James Perry with Summit Telephone Co. has been the most hopeful contact I have talked with for the possibility of making cell coverage happen here; it sounds like Summit Telephone Co has the potential & knowledge to make this happen in association with connection to GCI's already installed fiber optic line. What has prevented this from happening so far I am told is strictly the high costs associated with this connection - in short, they can't afford it. If there are any subsidies they can recruit to help offset the associated high costs for this small company, they assure me they can make it happen. AT&T is also in the process of laying fiber optic the length of the Dalton, which will also pass right through Coldfoot; I haven't talked with any project managers, but in talking with on site contractors & technicians that have been through this area, am told that this line is going to the arctic coast & strictly limited to oilfield production...(?)

If you know of any way to help acquire funding to make cell / broadband coverage in this strategically significant area happen it would be greatly appreciated by many residents, transient workers, researchers, and general travelers & visitors!

Thanks for your time & any help or suggestions you can offer to help make this happen!

Sincerely,  
Heidi Schoppenhorst

Scott & Heidi Schoppenhorst  
Boreal Lodging  
Wiseman Village  
Wiseman, AK 99790  
Ph/Fax: 907-678-4566  
[boreallodge@gmail.com](mailto:boreallodge@gmail.com)  
[www.boreallodge.com](http://www.boreallodge.com)