Delmarva Commonwealth Rural Broadband Executive Summary

Overview: This Project will create a rural broadband wireless network to deliver high-speed wireless broadband connectivity to all households in Accomack and Northampton Counties in Virginia (the "Virginia Eastern Shore"). In general, the Project will advance the process of significantly expanding the reach and quality of broadband services, will spur job creation, will stimulate long-term economic growth and opportunity, and will narrow gaps in broadband deployment and adoption. It will meet the objectives of RUS to make the extension of broadband infrastructure into difficult-to-serve areas affordable, and provide and improve broadband service to the highest proportion of rural residents who do not have adequate access to broadband service for rural development.

Area Served and Need: The Virginia Eastern Shore is rural and economically depressed. More than 75 percent of the proposed service area in this funding request falls within rural areas that are unserved or underserved. The two counties comprising the Virginia Eastern Shore are among the poorest political subdivisions in Virginia, ranking 94th (Accomack) and 72nd (Northampton) out of 105 in the most recent statistics available on the Dept. of Commerce BEA website. In 2008 median household income was 61% and 57%, respectively, of the state average. Approximately 75% of elementary and middle school children in the two counties are eligible for subsidized school lunches. High school graduation rates for the two counties are among the lowest in the State. Of those who did manage to graduate in 2007, only 16% of Northampton graduates and 35% of Accomack graduates entered four-year colleges, compared to a state average of 49%.

Additionally, the Virginia Eastern Shore is very low-lying in its entirety and is highly vulnerable to natural disasters, such as hurricanes. The Project will enhance the area's emergency notification capabilities by providing a redundant communications backbone that will benefit the entire population.

There were 20,620 households and 3998 businesses in 2000.

Project Cost: Total Project cost will be approximately $13.5M. These will be funded with 51% RUS Loan and 49% RUS-BIP grants.

Project Sustainability: The Project's sponsor currently operates a broadband wireless network and has a proven ability to quickly and successfully implement community wireless networks and operate them over the long term.

Jobs: The Project will stimulate both immediate construction jobs and long-term jobs. The Project will employ approximately 10 people during the construction phase and an estimated 20 people after the construction phase is completed.