Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name:  COCHETOPA TOWERS, LLC

Project Title:  Cochetopa Towers

Project Type:  Comprehensive Community Infrastructure

_________________________  Executive Summary  _______________________

This predominantly middle mile infrastructure proposal offers to enhance emergency communication in rural Gunnison and Saguache counties in the State of Colorado, in an area currently without emergency communication facilities. It also opens the door to the last-mile provision of terrestrial telephone communication services and capable broadband Internet services in a cost-effective manner for the residents of these same areas. The proposed communications infrastructure will provide communications services in the community of Parlin, and in unincorporated areas of Gunnison and Saguache counties. The proposal will benefit the Gunnison County Office of Emergency Management, the Saguache County Government, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the Gunnison County Electric Association. The Colorado Department of Public Safety have also expressed tentative interest in the project, which would enable them to extend their emergency communications network into the proposed coverage area. The proposal would also enable a private Internet service provider to offer high speed broadband connectivity and Voice-over-IP phone service to the approximately 20 residences and ranching operations in the proposed coverage areas. Cochetopa Towers, LLC proposes to build two 100-ft steel-and-concrete towers in rural Gunnison and Saguache counties in the State of Colorado. We designate the planned towers as the Flat Top Tower in Gunnison County and the Los Ocho Tower in Saguache County. Initially, the towers will enable the extension of emergency communications, broadband Internet service, and affordable telephone service to an area that includes approximately four (4) miles of Highway 50 and fifteen (15) miles of Highway 114. Currently, this area has no terrestrial telecommunications facilities (including cellular phone coverage). The Gunnison County Office of Emergency Management characterizes this area (in terms of communications facilities) as the largest unserved area Gunnison County and one of the largest communications "black holes" in the State of Colorado. Highway 114 is a primary route between the City of Gunnison and the states of New Mexico and Texas. Trucking companies use this route heavily year-round. Gunnison and Saguache counties do not conduct winter maintenance on this portion of Highway 114 between 7:00 PM and 5:00 AM daily. As a result, overnight snow and ice accumulate on the roadway, making winter travel in this area treacherous. Compounding this problem is the lack of communications facilities. Highway 114 is a mountainous road, which curves and switches back on itself with the terrain. When a serious accident occurs, activating the appropriate EMS response is difficult because of the lack of communications facilities in this area. The Gunnison County Office of Emergency Management, the Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners and the Saguache County Government have all provided letters of support for our project. We propose to construct our towers on land that the United States Bureau of Land Management (BLM) currently owns and manages. The BLM recently granted Cochetopa Towers,
LLC a 30-year land lease to construct and operate the Flat Top and Los Ocho towers and their associated buildings. The approved BLM permit and lease have been included with this application. The Bureau of Land Management has also stated that it has no communications capabilities to offer its field agents who work in the area. Typical responsibilities of BLM field agents in Gunnison and Saguache counties include investigating mountain lion activity and illegal human occupation of BLM land. BLM field agents often work alone while conducting these investigations. The construction of the towers will permit the BLM, Colorado Department of Public Safety, Gunnison County Emergency Medical Services and a private Internet-and Voice-over-IP provider to deliver both emergency and non-emergency communications services throughout the area, including approximately 20 private residences and ranch operations in the proposed coverage area. Currently, private residences in this area may elect to receive satellite phone and Internet service. The Internet service is provided at a speed of 14 Kb/s. Satellite communications services cost thousands of dollars per year, and many of the permanent residents and workers involved in ranch operations opt not to purchase these services. Under our proposal, Internet Colorado, a private Internet and Voice-over-IP service provider, will use the towers to construct a capable wireless last-mile network to serve the residences and ranches in the covered areas. For about $150 per month, Internet Colorado will offer a minimum connection speed for Internet services of 1 Mb/s (bidirectional). Internet Colorado will also provide reliable Voice-over-IP telephone services in the coverage area for an additional $25 per month if the VoIP service is combined with Internet. These services would operate as a cost-effective alternative to the non-competitive satellite services described in the preceding paragraph. In addition to providing cost-effective emergency and residential communications, and broadband Internet services, the proposed towers would support the wind-power research and development efforts of the Gunnison County Electric Association (GCEA), the local electric utility in Gunnison and Saguache counties. The GCEA has applied for Recovery Act funding under a different USDA program to fund the construction of an experimental wind turbine. Cochetopa Towers, LLC will construct the Los Ocho tower in close proximity to the GCEA wind turbine. The Los Ocho tower will enable the GCEA to collect real-time data from the wind turbine by relaying operational information to the GCEA offices in Gunnison. The GCEA has provided a letter of support for our project. Its letter provides additional details about its own Recovery Act grant application. The presence of the towers will also enable cellular carriers to extend their coverage to the area. At this time, no cellular providers have committed to offering service, but the availability of tower space in this area will permit cellular service providers to operate according to the demand for such services. Cochetopa Towers, LLC will continue to work with cellular phone service providers to promote the use of the towers. The towers would provide enough space to accommodate additional private Internet service providers, terrestrial communications providers and cellular carriers, as well as provide support to additional public safety and governmental agencies that require communications support. This proposal fills a genuine need for emergency communications facilities for local, state and federal agencies in two of the most highly rural counties in the State of Colorado and has the demonstrated support of these agencies. It also provides the infrastructure needed to extend capable terrestrial facilities-based broadband and telecommunications services to residents of this unserved area. Mark Jiganti is the principal owner of Cochetopa Towers, LLC. Mr. Jiganti also operates six other for-profit limited-liability corporations and has extensive experience in business. Internet Colorado will provide the last-mile broadband and telecommunications services and will be responsible for its operation. The overall cost of the project is anticipated to be
approximately $255,000. The towers themselves will initially have 5-10 attachments from public service agencies, government agencies and private service providers. The private Internet service provider expects to have about 10 subscribers initially, however, the availability of communications services will encourage additional residential development in areas like Green Mountain. Employment projections for the proposal include the initial construction of the concrete footings, buildings and the towers themselves. An additional 1-2 jobs related to the operation and maintenance of the towers and the provision of last mile service are also expected.