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Gov. Nixon announces \$49.1 million in federal awards for partner projects to expand broadband, spur economic development in central, southeast and southwest Missouri

Recovery Act funds will help projects by Socket Telecom, Big River Telephone Co. and Finally Broadband; all three are partners in MoBroadbandNow initiative

COLUMBIA, Mo. – Gov. Jay Nixon today visited Socket Telecom in Columbia to provide details about \$49.1 million in federal funding from the U.S Department of Agriculture awarded on Wednesday (Aug. 4) to three Missouri businesses to bring broadband access to schools, businesses, health care providers and consumers in parts of central, southeast and southwest Missouri.

The State of Missouri is partnering with the three businesses – Socket Telecom, Finally Broadband and Big River Telephone Co. – in MoBroadbandNow, an initiative created by Gov. Nixon last year to dramatically expand the reach of broadband across Missouri. The Governor announced the awards at the Columbia office of Socket Telecom.

“Just as the railroads and interstates transformed Missouri communities in decades past, these projects will help connect many more areas of Missouri with the information superhighway of the future,” **Gov. Nixon** said. “They have the potential to connect doctors and patients at the speed of light; open the doors of our colleges and universities to more students; and expand markets for small businesses to not only the rest of the state, but to markets across the globe.”

The MoBroadbandNow partner projects detailed by Gov. Nixon today include:

- Socket Telecom will use \$23.7 million (\$16.6 million in grants and \$7.1 million in loans) to provide a fiber-to-home project to portions of eastern Boone County and western Callaway County; the project will include Millersburg and portions of Fulton.

- Big River will use \$24.4 million (\$12.2 million in grants and \$12.2 million in loans) to create a broadband network reaching 90 percent of the homes in their service area, which includes Bollinger, Cape Girardeau, Madison, Perry, St. Francois, Ste. Genevieve and Washington counties.
- Finally Broadband will use \$1 million (\$500,000 in grants and \$500,000 in loans) to help provide broadband service in Texas and Wright counties, and portions of Ozark and Shannon counties.

The three companies submitted applications to enter the competition for Round 2 funding from USDA's Rural Utilities Service (RUS). Gov. Nixon has taken a number of steps to underscore the scope and potential of the MoBroadbandNow applications, including personal conversations with **U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack** and **U.S. Commerce Secretary Gary Locke**.

“Without the vision and commitment of these partners with the state of Missouri, broadband service would not be brought to these parts of the state for many years, if ever,” **Gov. Nixon** said. “These partnerships will serve as models for delivering this high-speed connection directly to Missourians in areas that have little or no broadband access. These awards are helping us make MoBroadbandNow a reality and close the divide between communities with broadband access and those without.”

The MoBroadbandNow initiative was created by the Governor to coordinate the state's efforts to expand broadband in Missouri in response to the federal recovery act passed last year. Its primary goal was to dramatically expand the reach of high-speed Internet throughout Missouri with a focus of ensuring that the state of Missouri competed aggressively for every broadband dollar included in the federal recovery legislation.

MoBroadbandNow has supported both middle-mile and last-mile projects to bring a high-speed broadband connection into currently underserved or unserved communities. As part of the successful Big River Telephone application, Missouri pledged \$150,000 in matching funds to help bring broadband to the region. The state matching funds for this project will come from the federal budget stabilization fund, approved by the Missouri legislature for broadband enhancement projects.

Socket Telecom will provide a fiber-to-the-home project in portions of eastern Boone County and western Callaway County, including Millersburg and portions of Fulton. The project will provide access to 3,033 homes and 36 critical community facilities.

Socket will provide high-speed Internet access as well as voice and video services. By providing broadband Internet service over a fiber network, Socket users will receive bandwidth speeds capable of delivering telemedicine, telecommuting, distance learning, and other advanced applications.

“We are excited to be a part of Governor Nixon's mission to close the divide between communities with broadband Internet access and those without,” said **Carson Coffman**, co-owner and vice president of sales and marketing of Socket Telecom, LLC. “This partnership is a great fit. Since Socket's inception, we have been focused on bringing state-of-the-art technology with fiber Internet

to smaller and more rural Missouri markets. It's vital to get today's technology out to these underserved communities so they can compete and grow. We're thrilled to receive support that will enable Socket to directly meet their needs.”

Big River Telephone will create a broadband network that will reach 90 percent of the homes in its seven-county service area, which includes Bollinger, Cape Girardeau, Madison, Perry, St. Francois, Ste. Genevieve and Washington counties. The network will provide access to 44,697 households and 7,511 businesses, at a total project cost of \$33.9 million. The company has worked extensively with community leaders in the 39 census-defined communities and the 311 anchor institutions located in the Proposed Funded Service Area (PFSA).

Big River will be providing high-speed Internet access (both fixed and mobile) at download speeds up to 14.4 Mbps and upload speeds of 5.8 Mbps. The company also will be deploying a wireless broadband network that will support high-speed connectivity to the Internet for data, voice and video applications, for both mobile and fixed locations.

Finally Broadband will serve Texas and Wright counties and portions of Christian, Dallas, Douglas, Greene, Howell, Laclede, Ozark, Phelps, Pulaski, Shannon, Taney and Webster counties. The broadband services will provide access to 45,782 households, 7,484 businesses and 404 community anchor points over 4,563 square miles of area and serve 24 communities and a population of 118,569.

For more information about MoBroadbandNow and the state's efforts and partners, please go to <http://transform.mo.gov/broadband>.

In addition to the \$49.1 million for the three MoBroadbandNow initiative projects, the USDA on Wednesday also announced \$32.5 million in awards for other Missouri broadband projects. Those included:

- A grant award of \$12.3 million to **Grand River Mutual Telephone Corp.** for serving Linn and Sullivan counties;
- A grant award of \$8.9 million to Grand River Mutual Telephone Corp. for serving Gentry, Harrison and Worth counties;
- A grant award of \$604,000 to **Orchard Farm Telephone Co.** for serving St. Charles County;
- An award of \$249,000 (\$187,000 grant, \$62,000 loan) to **Utopian Wireless** for serving the area in and around Benton, in Scott County; and
- A grant award of \$10.3 million to **Windstream Corp.** for serving portions of Barry, Benton, Butler, Daviess, Greene, Lawrence, Maries, McDonald, Miller, Morgan, Newton, Oregon, Phelps, Polk, Pulaski, Putnam, Ripley and Wayne counties.

In the first round of grants announced by the federal government in January, Ralls County Electric Cooperative, a MoBroadbandNow partner based in New London, received a \$19.1 million competitive award to expand broadband Internet to residential and commercial customers in northeast Missouri.

Additional broadband awards are expected to be announced by the end of September.

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