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## WASHINGTON RURAL ACCESS PROJECT Round II - Environmental Assessment Executive Summary

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### Executive Summary

The Environmental Assessment (EA) provides an evaluation of environmental, cultural and socio-economic resources for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) as specifically outlined in the *Environmental Assessment Guidance for BTOP Award Recipients Version 1.4* (August, 2010) produced by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) for the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP). This document has been authorized and developed for BTOP Grant recipient Northwest Open Access networks (NoaNet) by a team of consultants that include PACE Engineers, Inc., CHR Solutions, Inc., and Tierra Right of Way Services, Ltd.

Northwest Open Access Network (NoaNet) is a not for profit wholesale telecommunications company formed by several Public Utility Districts (PUDs) in Washington to bring high-speed telecommunication services into underserved communities for utility uses and use by their constituents.

The Washington Rural Access Project Round II (WRAP Round II) addressed herein includes the second of a two-phase project for extending broadband service to rural areas of Washington State. WRAP Round I is underway, being completed under a BTOP Round I grant and includes over 900 miles of new fiber optic cable installation and microwave facilities across Washington State.

The project area is located in 15 counties across the state and is extremely diverse in terms of the terrain covered and areas served. The overall project, including project regions and route information is shown on the Project Overview Map at the end of Section 2. Individual route maps at a granular level are provided in Appendix A. More detailed route information and tabulations of the environmental resources associated with the project are contained in Appendices A, B, and C. Appendix D provides documentation of the environmental consultation process used to solicit comment and engage agency involvement in the project. For compliance with the National Environmental Protection Act and the National Historic and Preservation Act, SHPO documentation of concurrence is provided in Appendix E and detailed in Section 4.6.

### ***Preferred Alternative (Proposed Action)***

The Preferred Alternative for the WRAP Round II Project consist of 489 miles of underground and aerial fiber broadband construction, along with installation of approximately 65 wireless antennae and communications facilities. Of the 489 miles of fiber, 162 (33%) will be constructed underground using a combination of plowing, trenching, and directional boring construction techniques. Plowing, then directional boring, followed by trenching are the preferred methods for underground construction, and this order of preference is based on the invasiveness of each method. The plowing method is the least invasive method and the trenching method, although also minimally invasive, has slightly greater impacts resulting from construction. The remaining 327 miles of fiber will be installed aurally on utility poles already in place, and will be installed mainly by using a bucket truck. In instances where

access is restricted, installation will be completed by workers physically climbing poles not accessible by bucket trucks.

The 65 wireless locations contain existing structures to which wireless facilities will be attached. All wireless collocation sites are subject to Section 106 (National Historic Preservation Act) review for visual and aesthetic impacts.

With installation of the underground and aerial fiber, along with the wireless facilities in this Preferred Alternative, 285 Anchor Institutions that include schools, hospitals, medical clinics, emergency response agencies, libraries, and tribal centers will be served with high speed broadband.

**No Action Alternative**

The No Action Alternative was also evaluated under this assessment, and there are no negative impacts associated with this alternative. However, the numerous potential positive impacts on the local economy, socioeconomic conditions, and existing fiber broadband network in rural areas of the State would not be realized under this alternative.

**Environmental Assessment of Impacts**

This Environmental Assessment provides a summary of the existing environment, anticipated potential impacts, and avoidance and mitigation measures to be employed during project design and construction. This project will utilize minimally invasive construction techniques and as planned, will not result in any long-term adverse impacts to the environment. NoaNet will satisfy appropriate mitigation measures by following the permitting and regulatory requirements to minimize the impact to the environment.

The Summary of Environmental Impacts Table shows the potential impacts on various environmental resources and includes the routes that may be impacted.

**Summary of Environmental Impacts Table**

Resource Area	Preferred Alternative		No Action Alternative	
	Summary of Impacts	Route	Summary of Impacts	Route
Noise	No long term impacts. Short term, insignificant impacts during construction.	All Routes	No long term or short term impacts.	All Routes
Air Quality	No long term impacts. Short term impacts mitigated by BMPs for reducing fugitive dust and limited machinery idling. GHG emissions are insignificant.	All Routes	No long term or short term impacts.	All Routes
Soils and Geology	No long term impacts. Short term impacts during construction mitigated through BMPs for erosion control and plowing.	All Routes except NE-3 and NW-1A	No long term or short term impacts.	All Routes
Prime Farmlands	No impacts.	All Routes	No impacts.	All Routes
Surface Water	No long term impacts. Short term impacts for underground construction mitigated through BMPs for erosion control, permitting with US Fish and Wildlife and ACE, and directional boring to avoid streams. No impacts for aerial construction.	All Routes except NE-3 and NW-1A	No long term or short term impacts.	All Routes
Wetlands	No long term impacts. Short term impacts for underground construction mitigated through BMPs for erosion control, coordination with ACE, and directional boring to avoid wetlands.	All Routes except NE-3 and NW-1A	No long term or short term impacts.	All Routes

## Summary of Environmental Impacts Table

Resource Area	Preferred Alternative		No Action Alternative	
	Summary of Impacts	Route	Summary of Impacts	Route
Coastal Zone	Coordinating and permitting with local coastal zone management programs, no impacts.	All NW and NC Routes	No long term or short term impacts.	All Routes
Floodplains	No impacts.	All Routes	No impacts.	All Routes
Wild & Scenic Rivers	No impacts.	All Routes	No impacts.	All Routes
Wildlife	No effect. Impacts avoided through BMPs and ongoing coordination with USFS agencies for protecting surface water resources and other habitats.	All Routes	No effect.	All Routes
Vegetation	No long term impacts. Minimal short term impacts with use of plowing and directional boring construction technique, along with BMPs for erosion control and re-vegetation.	All Routes	No long term or short term impacts.	All Routes
Threatened/Endangered Species	No effect expected. Impacts avoided through permitting and coordination with US FWS and USFS. Permits will be granted based on current BMPs that will avoid impacts. USFS will not invoke Section 7 for plantlife in Colville NF.	All Routes	No long term or short term impacts.	All Routes
Ecoregions	No impacts.	All Routes	No impacts.	All Routes
Historic and Cultural Resources	No Adverse Effects with approved treatment plans adopted by NTIA, SHPO, tribes, and any other involved parties.	All Routes	No adverse effects.	All Routes
Aesthetic and Visual Resources	Short and long term impacts avoided with BMP guidance from Migratory Bird Treaty Act and adopted Historic/Cultural treatment plan.	All Routes	No long term or short term impacts.	All Routes
Land Use	No impacts.	All Routes	No impacts.	All Routes
Infrastructure	No adverse impacts with traffic control plan adopted by WSDOT and local cities. Positive impacts result from improved broadband infrastructure in rural areas.	All Routes	No positive impacts realized.	All Routes
Socio Economic Conditions	No adverse impacts. Positive impacts include over 660 job created.	All Routes	No impacts.	All Routes
Brown fields & Hazardous Waste	No significant long term or short term impacts.	All Routes	No impacts.	All Routes
Health & Human Safety	No impacts with traffic safety plans for construction workers, vehicles, and pedestrians required by state and local permits.	All Routes	No impacts.	All Routes
Climate and GHG Emissions	No significant impacts.	All Routes	No impacts.	All Routes
Cumulative Impacts	Insignificant long term impacts on aesthetic and visual resources with two-foot antennae extensions on existing structures. Aesthetic and noise resources for pedestrians, businesses, residents, wildlife, and traffic will be impacted during short periods of construction. No effect is reasonably expected on endangered species. Positive socioeconomic impacts by improving access to education, job training, and health services in underserved counties.	All Routes	No impacts on the environment. No positive impacts on socioeconomic conditions.	All Routes