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Office of Broadband Access & Expansion

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 22, 2026

State broadband grants to lead to first connections for Fort Sill Apache

SANTA FE – Tribal land in southwestern New Mexico could soon get its first broadband connections.

The Fort Sill Chiricahua-Warm Springs-Apache Tribe near Akela in Luna County is in line for fiber broadband infrastructure following two $100,000 state broadband planning grants awarded by the state's broadband office through its Grant Writing, Engineering, and Planning Program (GWEP). The Office of Broadband Access and Expansion (OBAE) awarded the latest grant to Fort Sill last week.

Fort Sill, headquartered in Apache, Oklahoma, currently operates a convenience store and owns about 1,910 acres of an expanded area in Luna County. There are no homes there yet, and leaders hope to return to their homeland to develop a community, including fiber broadband infrastructure.

"Getting broadband to the property is critical. It is the backbone of what the Tribe needs for communication and development," said Mountain Management **Vice President of Design and Development Brady Jones**, who is working on the Fort Sill Tribal development in Luna County.

Tribal members currently live outside the Tribal land in Luna County. Once broadband and homes are constructed, members will live there.

"Getting broadband to Tribal areas is a vital part of OBAE's mission," said **OBAE State Grants Program Manager Neala Krueger**. "We look forward to helping Fort Sill develop their community and bring broadband access."

Fort Sill will use the latest GWEP planning grant to finalize preparations to complete a design package for high-speed broadband infrastructure across the back half of the Tribe's expanded area in the county. The proposed project will deliver engineering blueprints needed to deploy reliable internet to the unserved land.

Specific deliverables include:

- Detailed plans for optimal fiber placement
- Capacity modeling to support industrial-scale data needs
- Rights-of-way crossing
- Railroad-related permits
- Integration around ponds to protect wastewater systems while controlling erosion

OBAE had allocated $5 million to the GWEP program to help cooperatives, Tribal communities and local governments get grants to help them provide broadband to unserved locations. All GWEP grants are specifically used for broadband deployment planning. Funding expires June 30, 2027.

OBAE has now awarded 43 GWEP grants, including to 21 Tribal communities, 17 local governments and five rural electric and telephone cooperatives.

There is still $655,000 available in GWEP grants, and OBAE encourages Tribal communities, local governments and rural cooperatives to apply. The maximum amount allowed for each award under this state program is $100,000. No matching funds are required.

GWEP awards must be used in the planning of infrastructure projects — internet service providers are not eligible. Furthermore, the grants are not competitive; they are considered assistance grants aimed at spurring broadband infrastructure projects.

For more information and to apply for a GWEP grant, visit here.

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The Office of Broadband Access and Expansion is dedicated to serving New Mexico with a commitment to make high-speed broadband accessible to all New Mexicans. OBAE's mission is to expand and improve high-speed internet service with passionate leadership that drives bold, equitable, affordable and inclusive broadband solutions. OBAE seeks results that honor the state's rich heritage and elevate quality of life for all.

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