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Ribbon cutting marks milestone for broadband recovery in Lincoln County

RUIDOSO, NM – A new era has been ushered in when it comes to broadband recovery efforts in Lincoln County.

The Office of Broadband Access and Expansion (OBAE) hosted a ribbon cutting ceremony at Ruidoso Community College yesterday to celebrate the awarding of two disaster relief grants.

The funding will provide resilience and support broadband infrastructure impacted by wildfires and flooding in Lincoln County.

OBAE awarded Penasco Valley Telephone Cooperative (PVT) and TDS Telecom more than \$1.25 million through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). The Connectivity to Declared Disaster Area Grants are designed for broadband recovery. The providers will rebuild and reinforce high-speed internet networks in the region and fund fiber redundancy to ensure communities like Capitan and Fort Stanton stay connected in future emergencies.

PVT is receiving \$1 million, and TDS Telecom is getting \$251,300 for broadband recovery.

Local, county and state officials joined leaders from PVT and TDS to mark the landmark occasion for Lincoln County, where wildfires and floods have severely damaged broadband infrastructure.

“This funding is lifesaving as communication and broadband are critical in times of emergency,” said **Jeff Lopez**, director of OBAE. “We feel it’s imperative to award these grants to help families and communities harmed by disasters like wildfires and flooding.”

PVT will use its grant to provide fiber redundancy to ensure the Capitan community is not cut off during a disaster. The route will also connect Fort Stanton with fiber broadband access.

“PVT is honored to have been entrusted with this opportunity by OBAE,” said **Mitch Hibbard**, PVT chief operating officer. “We’re grateful for the continued support from the Lincoln County Commission and our state legislators. This fiber route is a critical step in ensuring our communities stay connected, especially when it matters most.”

PVT says the resilient fiber connection will protect critical communications and broadband access.

TDS will use its grant to help restore the final, hardest-to-reach areas in Ruidoso, with fiber-optic infrastructure.

“Rebuilding after a disaster is always challenging, but moments like this show what can be achieved when public and private partners unite behind a common goal,” said TDS senior vice president of network operations **Joe Read**. “This grant gives us vital support to not only restore the remaining lost connections, but also to make them stronger than ever with new fiber infrastructure.”

During last year’s wildfires and flooding, some connected areas of TDS’s network were a total loss. TDS will leverage the funding to build a fiber-to-the-home network that will deliver multi-gig service speeds along with TV and voice services.

“We would not be here today without the support and leadership of the New Mexico Office of Broadband Access and Expansion and Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham,” said Read. “We are honored to carry this work forward and help ensure that Ruidoso not only recovers but thrives.”

Projects funded by these disaster relief grants must be completed by December 31, 2026.

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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.