State Agency to Lease Tribally Owned Broadband Infrastructure

_Yurok Tribe, CDT Partner to Increase Internet Access in Rural Northern California_

_Yurok Reservation_ – Yurok Telecoms, a telecommunications company owned by the Yurok Tribe, recently signed a Letter of Intent with the California Department of Technology (CDT) outlining key terms of a historic deal that has been developed over the past year.

The collaboration will allow the CDT to lease Yurok Telecoms’ fiber optic strands (used for high-speed internet) for its Middle-Mile Broadband Initiative (MMBI) which aims to improve broadband across California by 2026. Yurok Telecoms is currently building the fiber network through its $61 million Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program grant from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA Project).

The final agreement will result in a significant new revenue stream for the Yurok Telecoms for the lease and expected maintenance of the fiber. Yurok Telecoms will also maintain full ownership of the fiber; gain CDT support for the project permitting; gain access to CDT’s lower rates for project materials, and CDT workforce development opportunities for Yurok Telecoms which will benefit Yurok tribal members and local community members.

“I am happy to see that Yurok Telecoms and the CDT were able to reach terms that will benefit the Yurok people and all Californians while maintaining Yurok Telecoms’ ownership and respecting our tribal sovereignty. Yurok tribal members are already working on the project and more jobs are coming in the spring. This deal will also ensure that Yurok environmental and cultural resource protection laws will be respected during construction, operations, and maintenance,” said Yurok Tribe Chairman, Joseph L. James.

“CDT has been a fantastic, collaborative partner and I’m very grateful for their thoughtful approach throughout the process. The full, formal agreement should be complete soon and I know this will be a wonderful partnership for years to come,” said Yurok Telecoms CEO, Kori Cordero.
Yurok Telecos’ NTIA Project plans include approximately 60 miles of fiber optic cable; middle-mile fiber from the Yurok village of Orick to Crescent City, CA and last-mile fiber spurs extending from the main line to Requa and Klamath Glenn on the Yurok Reservation. Representing one of the largest ever technological advancements in the region, the project will bring high speed broadband to nearly 1,000 homes, 110 businesses and 18 anchor institutions. Under the new agreement Yurok Telecom’s will include the CDT on the middle-mile fiber portion of the project, leasing some of the planned conduit and fibers to CDT for its use. Yurok Telecoms will still have enough fiber for its own needs serving the Yurok Ancestral Territory.

The NTIA Project will also provide professional development opportunities to local individuals interested in pursuing broadband-related jobs. Yurok Telecoms plans to conduct trainings to teach community members how to install, maintain and operate broadband equipment in the Spring of 2024. Administered in partnership with the Yurok Tribal Employment Rights Office and tribally-owned, Grey Snow Communications, the trainings will offer tribal citizens and community members the skills, certifications, and experience they need to take advantage of well-paying jobs with Yurok Telecoms and other telecommunications companies.

Yurok Telecoms Board Vice President, Frankie Myers said, “While we hope this is the first of many deals that strengthen Yurok Telecoms’ sustainability; we’re not the only company that will benefit. The effects of this deal will ripple across the region and result in real economic growth for entrepreneurs and businesses that have been hamstrung by lack of reliable, affordable, high-speed internet.”