**Northwest Public Power Association**

**Resolution 2023-16**

**In Support of Rural Broadband Deployment and Use**

**Background**

Approximately 72 percent of all native Americans, and 78 percent of those who live in rural areas do not have access to broadband at current federal minimum standards. This underserved population includes much of the rural, and in some cases urban areas where NWPPA members provide electric service.

The absence of high-speed broadband service limits economic development opportunities in rural areas of the United States for small businesses, or cottage industries. Learning and classwork is increasingly an online service, and unavailable for many rural students without access to sufficient broadband. In addition to the need for learning services, many rural residents also do not have access to telemedicine services leaving rural residents without emerging telemedicine access that can provide lifesaving medical consultations and diagnoses. The internet, especially at true broadband speeds can increase a sense of community connectivity and security for house-bound individuals.

Many public and consumer-owned utilities own or have access to high-capacity telecommunications networks that support their operations, monitoring and maintenance of their electric distribution systems. States have authorized various levels of authority regarding public broadband networks. Wholesale broadband authority, consumer-owned broadband networks, municipal broadband networks, and public-private partnerships help unserved or underserved rural areas gain access to internet speeds at, or greater than, current federal minimum standards.

Implementation of the broadband investment provisions in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) will help accelerate the deployment of broadband services. Further expansion of rural broadband services may be accelerated through a broader definition of qualifying entities for state and federal assistance, and through federal legislative and administrative rules that provide broadband subsidies for rural customers, increase public-private partnerships, provide technical support and guidance or grants.

Current limitations on broadband authority, financial and technical support are barriers for communities who could otherwise enjoy the economic and social benefits of adequate access to broadband services.

**NWPPA Position**

* NWPPA supports efforts to obtain local, state, regional and national support for policies and legislation which support public broadband deployment, funding opportunities, awareness, customer adoption, and digital literacy.
* NWPPA supports the efforts by local, state, and federal entities to remove barriers that prevent public utilities from providing broadband services to their consumers.
* NWPPA supports rural broadband deployment initiatives at the local, state, regional, and federal level in legislative proceedings that are coordinated such that they do not compromise the safety and integrity of the electric utility infrastructure.
* NWPPA supports broadband deployment, particularly in rural underserved areas provided that it does not create unintended cost shifts from the broadband deployment onto the electric utility.

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