



BAND Together Newsletter

Executive Director Report: Safeguarding Connectivity Through the Universal Service Fund

The Universal Service Fund (USF) is the backbone of affordable broadband in North Dakota, ensuring rural communities, schools, libraries, and healthcare facilities stay connected. Without USF support, consumer costs would rise significantly, exacerbating the digital divide in North Dakota's high-cost, low-density regions. Programs like the High Cost Fund, Schools and Libraries program (E-Rate), Lifeline, and Rural Health Care are vital for rural providers who deliver reliable internet to underserved areas.



In April, BAND met with North Dakota's congressional delegation to underscore these stakes. We engaged Senator Kevin Cramer's staff, discussed directly with Senator John Hoeven and his team, and met Congresswoman Julie Fedorchak alongside her staff. We also observed Congresswoman Fedorchak's great work on the Energy and Commerce Committee, where she champions policies to bolster connectivity and energy reliability. These meetings, attended by representatives from our member companies, including Polar, RTC, SRT, Consolidated, United, WRT, and Red River, reinforced the USF's role in sustaining rural broadband and the need for swift action to address funding.

The USF's future hangs in the balance as the Supreme Court reviews *FCC v. Consumers' Research*, following the Fifth Circuit's July 2024 ruling that deemed the USF's funding mechanism unconstitutional. A decision, expected by June 2025, could uphold the fund, prompt congressional reform, or disrupt subsidies, threatening rural broadband access. BAND is actively advocating for USF preservation, as its loss would force providers to raise prices or scale back services, impacting North Dakotans' access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities.

BAND remains committed to protecting the USF and ensuring North Dakota's voice shapes its future. We continue to engage with policymakers and share how USF supports our rural communities.

BAND Member Spotlight: Red River Communications

Powering Wahpeton's Economic and Educational Future

Red River Communications (RRC) is transforming Wahpeton, North Dakota, the state's manufacturing hub, by delivering cutting-edge cloud-based telecom services. Wahpeton is home to global giants like Visteon and Bobcat and relies on RRC's innovative solutions, such as hosted voice and seamless telecom connectivity, to slash infrastructure costs. This enables manufacturers to redirect savings into research and development, fueling innovation and sustaining a thriving rural economy.



RRC's expansion into Wahpeton has doubled its service area. This bold growth has empowered dozens of agriculture-focused manufacturers with reliable, cost-effective telecom solutions, strengthening North Dakota's economic backbone.

Beyond industry, residents now have access to the same state-of-the-art connectivity as the rest of North Dakota. The fiber network empowers students and teachers with unprecedented access to digital learning resources, allowing farmers in rural Wahpeton to expand the adoption of precision agriculture technologies and residents to stream, work, and game at home simultaneously and reliably.

Fiber Internet Advantages

It's the fastest. It uses fiber-optic cables to send data and from your connected devices. Light is ridiculously faster than electricity at doing this which means fiber internet is lightyears... faster than cable or DSL. Even the most cutting-edge wireless networks depend upon the presence of fiber to enable higher speed services.

It's symmetrical. Fiber enables symmetrical upload and download speeds. Upload speeds enable better experiences when it comes to video conferencing, streaming and gaming. File uploads and VPNs also perform far better on symmetrical networks. Satellite technologies have significantly slower upload speeds.

It's future-proof and sustainable. Fiber is the best choice for ensuring that a network being built now will be capable of satisfying user demand over its useful life. Fiber has at least 500 times higher capacity than any other technology. Fiber anticipates future demands and allows for services that will remain affordable and efficient for years to come. It is durable, scalable, easier to update and less costly to maintain.

It's a better investment. Not only do Fiber to the Premises (FTTP) networks have a lower 30-year cost of ownership but they also have a greater revenue potential when compared to the other technologies because of their greater broadband capacity.

It's reliable. Fiber is the most reliable internet technology, delivering a signal less susceptible than cable, copper, or spectrum-based services to interference or deterioration of performance due to distance or climate conditions.

It amplifies economic development. Fiber benefits community economic development and vitality through elevated housing prices and creating more desirable conditions for relocation.



Upcoming Events

June 5
Polar Communications Annual Meeting
(Park River, ND)

June 6
WRT Annual Meeting (Hazen, ND)

June 10
RTC Annual Meeting (New Town, ND)

June 11
Dakota Central Annual Meeting (Carrington, ND)

June 12
BEK Annual Meeting (Steile, ND)

June 17
NCC Annual Meeting (Ray, ND)

June 18
Hastad Annual Meeting (Hastad, ND)
Consolidated Annual Meeting (Dickinson, ND)

June 19
SRT Annual Meeting (Mott, ND)



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Carissa Swenson,
Executive Director

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