



broadband association of north dakota

BAND Together Newsletter

Executive Director Report: Supreme Court Upholds USF

On June 27, 2025, [in a 6-3 decision in FCC v. Consumers' Research](#), the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed the constitutionality of the Universal Service Fund's (USF) contribution mechanism, overturning a lower court's challenge.

This ruling preserves the longstanding framework that ensures equitable funding for broadband deployment and maintenance across America, particularly in rural and high-cost areas.



For North Dakota, the USF is critical. Our state's vast rural landscapes and sparse populations make broadband infrastructure expensive to build and sustain without federal support. USF programs, including the High-Cost Fund and Connect America Fund, have enabled BAND members to extend high-speed networks to rural communities, homes and business across the state. These networks support telehealth for remote clinics, distance learning for schools, and economic growth for farms and businesses. Without USF, many networks would falter, widening the digital divide and hindering our state's progress. The Court's decision reinforces the importance of collaborative advocacy. BAND, alongside partners like [NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association](#), will continue monitoring USF reforms to ensure sustainable funding. We thank our congressional delegation for their ongoing support.

As always, please [reach out with any questions](#) regarding broadband in North Dakota.

BAND Member Spotlight: Polar Communications

Polar Communications is Bridging the Digital Divide in Rural North Dakota

Polar Communications is revolutionizing connectivity in eastern North Dakota by extending its fiber-to-the-home network to approximately 3,700 locations across Walsh, Grand Forks, Steele, and Traill counties. This ambitious expansion is set to deliver high-

speed, reliable broadband to homes, farms, businesses, and essential community facilities like healthcare centers, empowering rural residents to thrive in the modern digital economy.



Accelerating Access Through Strategic Funding

Polar secured \$26.6M grant funds through the USDA Reconnect Program and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to target underserved rural areas in Walsh, Grand Forks, Steele, and Traill counties. Combined with Polar's own investments of over \$14M, this funding facilitated the rapid deployment of fiber-optic infrastructure. Polar is on track to complete all construction this summer. As CEO Karl Blake emphasizes, "Rural North Dakotans shouldn't have to wait any longer for a real internet connection."

Polar's advanced fiber network is poised to replace the outdated, slow, and unreliable services currently provided in the project areas, finally allowing these rural communities to fully participate in the digital age.

Saving a Small Business

For Scott and Lori Monson, owners of Scott's Sporting Goods on their 1,600-acre farm near Grafton, ND, reliable internet had been a long-standing challenge. Operating on a mobile hotspot, the couple struggled to

maintain efficient operations, with poor connectivity directly affecting customer service and business viability. Simple yet critical tasks—such as processing credit card transactions and conducting background checks for gun sales—had been frustratingly slow and unreliable.

The Monsons were eagerly anticipating their transition to Polar's fiber service. "Due to our current internet, our credit cards and our background checks take a lot longer, and it's not the fast, tidy service that we need to provide for our customers," Scott shared at that time. "We're falling behind."

Karl Blake echoed this sentiment: "Scott and Lori are trying to run a small business on a mobile hotspot, and it's just not feasible in this day and age. Now we can provide broadband to Scott and all the other locations in these areas that desperately need broadband service to run their businesses."

Since the rollout, Scott is enjoying the transformative benefits. Beyond the sporting goods store, as a farmer, he has gained access to real-time weather updates and remote monitoring of grain bin conditions—capabilities that were impossible with their existing setup.

Exemplary Stewardship of Federal and State Support

Polar Communications has demonstrated exceptional responsibility in leveraging public funding to expand broadband access. Programs like ReConnect Rounds 1 and 2, the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF), and state ARPA grants have been instrumental in extending and maintaining Polar's fiber network to unserved and underserved regions of rural North Dakota.

"Being that we were done in our ILEC area, we looked at opportunities to expand and build out to these underserved areas," explained CEO Karl Blake. "We have employees who live in these areas. We drive through them every day. We had people on one side of the road who were customers of Polar and were getting high-speed fiber, and people on the opposite side of the gravel road who did not have any service. So we took action."

Through this proactive approach, Polar is not only closing the broadband gap but also fostering economic growth, supporting local businesses, and enhancing quality of life for North Dakota's rural communities. As a proud member of the Broadband Association of North Dakota (BAND), Polar exemplifies how targeted investments can create lasting change.

Upcoming Events

July 23

Co-Op Day @ ND State Fair (Minot, ND)

United & Turtle Mountain Comm. Annual Meeting
(Langdon, ND)

July 25

811 One Call Day @ ND State Fair (Minot, ND)

September 4

PAC-T Golf Event (Patented Woods Golf Course)

December 1-3

BAND Annual Meeting (Bismarck, ND)



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Carissa Swenson,
Executive Director

I am happy to provide information or speak at an event. If you aren't already subscribed to this newsletter, [please join our mailing list](#).

