

Faster net for rural areas

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Stuttgart, Ark. — Hope for faster Internet service is on the horizon for rural residents after Connect Arkansas received a \$149,563 grant to fund a study that will help develop a plan to further the range of broadband technology to communities in Arkansas, Phillips and Desha counties.

Sen. Blanche Lincoln, Senate Agriculture Committee chair, awarded the funds to Connect Arkansas on behalf of the Delta Regional Authority in Helena earlier this month.

Connect Arkansas was established in 2007 when Arkansas Governor Mike Beebe signed into law the Connect Arkansas Broadband Act. As a private, non-profit corporation, they partner with stakeholders throughout Arkansas in developing and implementing a plan for statewide broadband deployment. This will not only ensure creation of a competitive broadband infrastructure that will not only improve personal lives, but also the economic capabilities of all Arkansans.

The grant money will now allow Connect Arkansas to continue working toward its goal of bringing high-speed Internet to Arkansas residents, Connect Arkansas president Sam Walls said. “Connect Arkansas looks forward to working with community leaders to expand broadband awareness and availability in Phillips, Arkansas and Desha Counties,” Walls said.

The grant funds will be used to launch the e-Community program, which is an initiative that will direct a community outreach effort to create local commitment and participation that will increase awareness, use and deployment of broadband resources in Arkansas and the other two counties.

“Connect Arkansas has a great track record of developing e-Community leadership groups that can promote and foster participation in helping Delta counties upgrade their Internet awareness and access,” Federal Co-Chair Pete Johnson said.

Johnson said he looks forward to Connect’s work in the counties.

“It is clear that broadband will be the interstate highway system of the 21st century,” Tiffany Rogers, State Representative, said. “The work of Connect Arkansas will help to ensure that the citizens of Phillips and Arkansas counties are not bypassed.”