

High speed telecom service for Navajo Nation approved by PRC

Written by Staff Reports

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Commissioner Lovejoy said tech to benefit rural areas

SANTA FE – During a public meeting Sept. 27, Dist. 4 Public Regulation Commissioner Lynda Lovejoy motioned to approve Sacred Wind’s petition for a variance to use the New Mexico Universal Service Fund for solar powered units to provide voice and Internet service to homes without electricity on Navajo Lands.

“The new technology Sacred Wind proposes will provide enough solar energy to power up a fixed wireless subscriber antenna, a voice/broadband modem, a computer and at least one desk lamp,” Lovejoy said. No less than 150 homes of residents who live in the most rural Navajo areas in New Mexico will benefit tremendously from this technology.

The New Mexico Universal Service Fund will cover one-half of all associated costs and Sacred Wind will cover the other half – a 100 percent match, which increases the value of the state fund for consumers.

NMPRC Staff supported the proposal, stating that the proposal is within the parameters of the Universal Service Fund’s intended use and is compliant with the Rural Telecom Act and the Public Utility Act.

The Commission had instructed agency staff to research the laws governing these regulatory principals. Furthermore, no telecommunications or other companies in the state voiced

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opposition to the order authorizing Sacred Wind to use the Universal Service Fund in support of its solar project.

Sacred Wind conducted an eight-month trial of the new solar equipment connected to its basic telephone and high speed Internet equipment to not only test the service itself, but to test customers' acceptance of the service.

After declaring its trial a significant success, Sacred Wind applied for approval to the NMPRC to expand the program to many more customers.

Customers without electricity targeted for the solar-powered telephone and Internet service will be limited to those residing in Sacred Wind's service territory.

Customers using the solar devices will not pay for the solar power to provide the services and will be charged the same amount for Sacred Wind's services as any other customer.

The Internet speeds that will be available to these customers are among the highest available on Navajo Lands – starting at 6 Megabits per second and up to 20 Megabits per second.