

## ***PRESS RELEASE***

### ***E-connectivity listening session Sept. 20 in Denver***

**DENVER, COLO Sept. 13, 2018:** Improving broadband services to enhance educational and economic activity is a high priority of state and county leaders across rural America, including Randy Wheelock and Brian Shepherd.

Wheelock, a commissioner in Clear Creek County, Colorado, and Brian Shepherd, COO of the Colorado Broadband Office, will discuss the challenges rural communities face without quality broadband services at the E-Connectivity Listening session in Denver, Colorado, on Thursday, Sept. 20, 2018.

This listening session—part of the project, *What’s on the Horizon for E-Connectivity in Rural America*—will be at 1:30 p.m. to 4 p.m. MDT at the Northwest Club Room in the Hall of Education on the National Western Complex, 4655 Humboldt St., Denver. For those unable to attend the listening session in person, [a live webcast](#) will be available.

The Sept. 20 event is the fourth in a series of listening sessions to gather insights into the tools that are needed to improve e-connectivity in rural America. This specific session will focus on the needs and options for building quality broadband service to enhance educational opportunities, as well as the quality of life in rural America. The project is organized by Farm Foundation, in collaboration with CoBank, NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

“The listening session is to understand the impediments generated when broadband services are low-quality or don’t exist, the challenges these impediments present to individuals and communities, and how broadband providers are partnering or using innovative approaches to improve services,” explains Farm Foundation President Constance Cullman. “We will hear from regional experts, but an important element of the session will be hearing from the people who live and work with limited broadband access every day.”

The session will open with a discussion by Wheelock and Shepherd on the impact that broadband services—or the lack thereof—can have on the educational and economic activities of one county or an entire state. The tools providers are using to enhance broadband services today will be the topic of a second panel that will include Brian Tagaban, Director of Governmental Policy at Sacred Wind Communications, Yatahey, N.M., Jon Saunders, Chief Operating Officer of SECOM, a division of the Southeast Colorado Power Association, and David Shipley, General Manager of Rye and South Park Telephone Company.

After each panel there will be an open mic session during which individuals are invited to present brief perspectives on the availability and quality of broadband services in their rural communities. The listening session will conclude with a Washington update by Jannine Miller, Senior Advisor for Rural Infrastructure at USDA.

There is no charge for this event, but reservations are requested by close of business Tuesday, Sept. 18. Reservations can be made by sending an e-mail to [Michelle@farmfoundation.org](mailto:Michelle@farmfoundation.org).

Highlights from all the listening sessions will be compiled in a report to be provided to federal and state public and private leaders to better inform their decisions regarding improvements to, and expansion of, broadband services in rural America.

Other sessions were Aug. 16 in Birmingham, Ala. and June 19 in Faribault, Minn. U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue and Federal Communications Commission Chairman Ajit Pai joined executives from the five partner organizations in Washington, D.C., to kick off the listening sessions in April. Perdue and Pai both highlighted the importance of e-connectivity to all sectors of rural America. Discussions from previous sessions are available on the Farm Foundation [website](#).

#### **FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

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*Farm Foundation is an agricultural policy institute cultivating dynamic non-partisan collaboration to meet society's needs for food, fiber, feed and energy. Since 1933, the Farm Foundation has connected leaders in farming, business, academia, organizations and government through proactive, rigorous debate and objective issue analysis.*



*CoBank is a national cooperative bank serving vital industries across rural America. The bank provides loans, leases, export financing and other financial services to agribusinesses and rural power, water and communications providers in all 50 states. CoBank is a member of the Farm Credit System, a nationwide network of banks and retail lending associations chartered to support the borrowing needs of U.S. agriculture and the nation's rural economy. In addition to serving its direct retail borrowers, the bank also provides wholesale loans and other financial services to affiliated Farm Credit associations serving approximately 70,000 farmers, ranchers and other rural borrowers in 23 states around the country.*



*NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association (NTCA) represents nearly 850 independent, community-based telecommunications companies that are leading innovation in rural and small-town America. NTCA advocates on behalf of its members in the legislative and regulatory arenas, and it provides training and development; publications and industry events; and an array of employee benefit programs. In an era of transformative technological advancements, regulatory challenges and marketplace competition, NTCA members are leading the technological evolution for rural consumers, delivering robust and high-quality services over future-proof networks that make rural communities vibrant places in which to live and do business.*



*The National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) is the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives. From growing suburbs to remote farming communities, electric co-ops serve as engines of economic development for 42 million Americans across 56 percent of the nation's landscape. As local businesses built by the consumers they serve, electric cooperatives have meaningful ties to rural America and invest \$12 billion annually in their communities.*



*National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation (CFC) is the nonprofit finance cooperative created and owned by America's Electric Cooperative Network. CFC provides financing to members in 48 states, the District of Columbia and two U.S. territories. CFC also provides services to telecommunications systems that are members of the Rural Telephone Finance Cooperative (RTFC).*



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