

**PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION
STATE OF NORTH DAKOTA**

NEWS RELEASE

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Commissioners Clark, Wefald, and Cramer

For Immediate Release*

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PSC looks to television frequencies to improve wireless service

The North Dakota Public Service Commission is hoping frequencies now used by television broadcasters can someday be part of the future of wireless phone and broadband service in rural areas.

The North Dakota PSC, together with rural state officials in Vermont, Nebraska and Maine, submitted comments to the Federal Communications Commission encouraging the use of the 700 MHz spectrum for wireless telecommunications service in rural areas.

The 700 MHz spectrum, a lower frequency than spectrums traditionally used by cell phones, could prove to be the future of rural wireless technology because its signals aren't as easily disrupted and they can carry farther.

Broadcasters who have used the 700MHz spectrum for television channels 52-69, will no longer need it once they make the change from analog to digital television. The FCC is taking comments on the proposed uses of the spectrum and how it should be allocated.

Commissioner Tony Clark, who holds the PSC's telecommunications portfolio, said it's important for North Dakota to make its concerns about wireless coverage known to the FCC before the remaining blocks of the spectrum are auctioned off.

"This part of the spectrum is 'beachfront property' for rural telecommunications," said Clark. "It is ideal for transmitting both voice and broadband technologies across sparsely populated areas. We need to speak loud and clear about the need for wireless service in rural America before the FCC determines how to handle the remaining blocks of the spectrum."

According to the Federal Communications Act, the FCC established February 17, 2009 as a new firm deadline for the end of the transition to digital television. Congress has required the FCC to begin auctioning the remaining 700 MHz spectrum that will be available no later than Jan. 28, 2008.

"North Dakota has a stake in the wireless spectrum policy debate because it has the potential to solve some major wireless challenges in rural areas," said Commissioner Susan Wefald.

The comments, endorsed by the PSC this week, ask the FCC to take steps to make sure some of the remaining 700 MHz spectrum gets used to improve rural wireless coverage.

According to the comments, the FCC could place a high priority on licensing the spectrum to those who will put it to use in rural areas and allow the spectrum to be licensed over smaller areas than what has traditionally been done.

The document also suggests ways to ensure companies are improving coverage in rural areas with the blocks of the spectrum they have purchased. One suggestion is requiring a very high population-based requirement as its basic coverage requirement, which could include requiring companies to provide coverage to 90 percent of the population within eight years in the license area if the licensee is offering mobile or fixed point-to-multipoint services. The report also suggests the FCC should adopt a keep-what-you-use policy that requires companies to give up parts of the spectrum they are not using.

“The FCC should not only take steps to make the spectrum available for rural areas, but also ensure that companies are aggressive in improving services once they get licenses to use frequencies in the 700 MHz spectrum,” said Commissioner Kevin Cramer.

The PSC has been aggressive in its efforts to improve cell phone service in North Dakota. In 2004 the commission launched “Zap the Gap,” an initiative to encourage increased cell phone coverage in rural North Dakota. The initiative also includes strategies to advocate for North Dakota’s interest in wireless issues on the national level.

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