

BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION
OF OREGON

Docket No. UM 2040

In the Matter of
PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION OF
OREGON

Approve the Calculation of
Disbursements from the Oregon
Universal Service Fund for 2023

WARM SPRINGS
TELECOMMUNICATIONS
COMPANY'S REPLY COMMENTS

Warm Springs Telecommunications Company (WST) hereby provides these reply comments in response to the Scheduling Memorandum adopted by Public Utility Commission of Oregon (PUC) on December 27, 2022.

I. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

The PUC requests comment on any outstanding legal and policy issues related to the calculating the disbursement of Oregon Universal Service Fund (OUSF) support for 2024. In October 2022, the PUC adopted Staff's recommendation for disbursement of OUSF support during 2023 according to which WST is to receive approximately the same level of support it has received in recent years.

WST is 100% owned and operated by the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs (CTWS) and was formed for the sole purpose of serving the historically unserved and underserved CTWS reservation. Through federal grants, WST was able to begin investment in and construction of a combination fiber/microwave backbone and fiber to the premises and fixed wireless last mile network on the Reservation. Most recently, the CTWS received a Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program (TBCP) grant, the purpose of which is to install last mile fiber to directly connect

unserved Tribal households, businesses, and community anchor institutions with qualifying broadband service with speeds from 25/3 Mbps to 1000/50 Mbps. WST now serves approximately 1,300 lines across the 1,000 square mile CTWS Reservation.

WST receives approximately \$1.3 million in annual OUSF that it uses to support the high cost of operations and maintenance of services on the CTWS Reservation. OUSF is WST's only source of high-cost universal service support as it is not eligible for federal high-cost support.

II. WST'S REPLY COMMENTS

Two parties filed initial comments in response to the PUC's Scheduling Memorandum – the Oregon Telecommunications Association (OTA) and the Oregon Cable Telecommunications Association (OCTA). WST provides the following brief reply comments.

WST in general supports OTA's positions on the allocation of the network, and the support offsets. On the Staff benchmark, WST remains supportive of the Tribal specific benchmark adopted in the most recent revisions to the OUSF rules. For 2023, this benchmark was 75% of the Incumbent Local Exchange Carrier (ILEC) benchmark, or \$71.06. The support resulting from the 2023 disbursement calculation is approximately \$1.3 million annually, an amount that will allow WST to continue operating and maintaining its broadband network on the CTWS reservation.

WST urges the PUC to continue its current level of OUSF support (\$1.3 million) for 2024. As WST has stated in the past, this support will help ensure the continued operations and maintenance of the current network it has deployed on the CWTS reservation. Without this OUSF support, WST would find it difficult, if not impossible, to continue serving those who for so many years had to do without.

CONCLUSION

WST appreciates the thought and effort that have gone into determining the distribution of its OUSF support. This support is vital to WST's ability to continue providing services to the historically unserved CTWS reservation and must continue to be sufficient and predictable for 2024 and beyond.

Respectfully submitted this 27th day of January 2023.

_____/s/_____
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