



CONTINENTAL DIVIDE

AN ENERGY & TELECOMMUNICATIONS COOPERATIVE

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Pueblo of Zuni and CDEC partner to provide internet on tribal land

All residents will have access to affordable, reliable high-speed broadband

Grants, N.M. – Approximately 2,200 households and businesses on the Zuni Reservation will soon have high speed (1 gig) fiber-optic internet service starting this summer, thanks to a partnership between the Zuni Tribe and Continental Divide Electric Cooperative (CDEC).

This week, Zuni and co-op officials formalized an agreement for CDEC to build the \$4.4 million in communication infrastructure necessary to provide internet service to Zuni’s residents. In turn, the tribal government will pay a discounted bulk price for providing high speed internet to Zuni’s residents for the next three years.

“Effectively, today’s digital divide will be permanently bridged with modern fiber-optic technology to virtually every Zuni residence,” CDEC Chief Executive Officer Robert E. Castillo said.

Zuni Governor Val Panteah, Sr. called today’s announcement of the Tribe’s partnership with Red Bolt a “game-changer” for the Zuni community. “Soon virtually our entire community will have state-of-the-art connectivity to the internet,” he said.

With a population of about 7,800, the Zuni Reservation, located roughly 40 miles south of Gallup, has had to rely on much slower, less reliable satellite services and copper-based DSL connections for internet access, resulting in slow, unreliable, internet service and at a cost that was unaffordable to many.

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According to Governor Panteah, he and the Tribal Council looked at various options for bringing high speed internet to Zuni members, and ultimately found that the partnership with Red Bolt was the speediest and most cost-effective way for the Tribe to accomplish this long-held objective.

CDEC's Red Bolt Broadband will deliver 1 gigabit of symmetrical speed – upload and download – to every household on the network. By comparison, satellite and DSL are typically asymmetrical and deliver uneven upload and download speeds with upload speeds being a mere fraction of the download speeds.

Zuni's financial contribution to this effort was made possible by funding it received under the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), which was signed into law by President Biden in March 2021. The Act provided direct financial relief to states, local governments and tribal governments to help replace revenue lost during the COVID-19 pandemic. Funding provided by this Act can be used for a variety of purposes, specifically including water, sewer and broadband infrastructure.

Zuni's partnership with CDEC will allow its residents to receive high-speed internet service in a short period of time and at a reasonable cost to the Tribe – and at *no* cost to Tribal members. "We believe it is exactly the kind of project and use of federal funds contemplated by ARPA," Panteah said. "Despite our remote location, the rural community of Zuni will soon have broadband infrastructure and service on par with the best in the nation."

CDEC brought the first fiber optic connection to Zuni in mid-2020 when the co-op built a communication trunk line that enabled Zuni Public School District facilities to increase, by tenfold, the internet speed they had been receiving from a different service provider.

This new partnership allows CDEC to significantly expand its Red Bolt footprint in northwestern New Mexico, which currently consists of broadband internet and VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) phone service to Grants, Milan, San Rafael and Bluewater, N.M. The Zuni expansion is being funded, in part, by a \$3.23 million grant awarded to CDEC in October 2020 by the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission. The co-op is funding the balance of the \$4.4 million network buildout.

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Continental Divide is a not-for-profit energy and telecommunications cooperative founded in 1945, initially to distribute electricity throughout Cibola and parts of McKinley, Sandoval, Bernalillo and Valencia counties. In 2017, CDEC started upgrading its headquarters and substations with fiber-optic communication technology to enable the co-op to monitor its electrical distribution grid remotely and gather system data in near real-time. The technology allows CDEC to voluntarily provide its members retail internet service. More recently, CDEC announced that its application for a \$37.8 million dollar award is pending final authorization with the Federal Communications Commission's Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) Phase 1 competitive-bid auction. The money would fund operational expenses and infrastructure of the continued buildout of the communication network to the majority of its electrical service members.

In addition to its telecommunication services, CDEC owns about 4,000 miles of primary and secondary energy distribution and transmission lines and has invested \$123.3 million over the years to serve its members and consumers.

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