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Broadband Connectivity Initiative Continues for Rural Areas in Region Five

STAPLES, MN – Broadband expansion and exploration into the rural areas of Todd and Wadena counties continues this year with a multi-year, multi-million dollar project aimed at bringing high-speed internet access to all residents in Region 5. The project is a cooperative effort involving regional telecommunications companies Consolidated Telephone Company (CTC) and West Central Telephone Association (WCTA), with assistance from the Region Five Development Commission (R5DC) and Sourcewell.

Since 2015, Sourcewell has made a combined total of \$500,000.00 of investments to complete feasibility and engineering for regional broadband projects. In partnership with our local telecommunication companies; Consolidated Telephone Company and West Central Telephone Association, these substantial outlays have leveraged funding through the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) Office of Broadband. R5DC's Executive Director Cheryal Lee Hills states, "Our region is extremely fortunate to have a partner like Sourcewell who offers unparalleled contract purchasing solutions, services to our schools; local units of government and communities, then continues above and beyond to invest in critical issues that make a difference in our quality of life."

The benefits of bringing broadband to unserved and under-served regions are many: economic development, education, healthcare and telemedicine, workforce development, and more. "Broadband expansion in Region 5 is important for educational and economic growth, and we also believe there are great opportunities for much needed telehealth services. Sourcewell's contributions for broadband deployment is a smart investment that will bring prosperity to the region for years to come. West Central Telephone is excited to be a partner in this project," said WCTA's Chief Executive Officer Chad Bullock.

Sourcewell's Director of Regional Programs Paul Drange says the organization views its support of the project as a strategic reinvestment in the region. "Broadband access for Region 5 is vitally important to our students and families. This access also drives economic development that is essential for the prosperity of our region. Through collective regional efforts, we've been able to leverage state dollars to improve internet access in underserved areas in our region. We are excited to see what the future holds as internet access expands across Region 5."

Consolidated Telephone Company is a full service telecommunications company based in Brainerd, MN. Formed in 1950, CTC has grown into a complete communications provider offering telephone, high-speed Internet, long distance, and digital television services to businesses and individuals throughout the Brainerd Lakes Area, Aitkin, Crosby, Little Falls and Long Prairie. In addition, the company also offers business IP phone solutions and business computer networking.

Enhancing the vitality and quality of life in Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd and Wadena counties is the mission of Region Five Development Commission. Resiliency, inclusion and collaboration are guiding concepts in achieving mutually shared goals that continue to evolve with local municipalities, state, federal agencies, philanthropic, non-profit and social advocacy agencies. Visit www.regionfive.org to learn more.

Sourcewell (formerly National Joint Powers Alliance) is a self-supporting government organization, partnering with education, government, and nonprofits to boost student and community success. Created in 1978 as one of Minnesota's nine service cooperatives, we offer training and shared services to our central-Minnesota members. Throughout North America, we offer a cooperative purchasing program with over 300 awarded vendors on contract. Sourcewell is driven by service and the ability to strategically reinvest in member communities.

West Central Telephone Association (WCTA) is a full-service telecom cooperative transforming rural communications with advanced fiber-to-the-premise technologies. Services to members include telephone, local and long distance, broadband Internet, TV, security and surveillance, personal emergency response systems, and smart home automation.