



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: March 10, 2025

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North Slope Leaders Thank BLM for Swift Action, Urge FEMA to Follow Suit to Resolve Regional Broadband Telecommunications Crisis

Anchorage, AK – Elected leadership across the North Slope thanks the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for its swift response to the region’s second broadband outage in two years and appeals to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to advance approvals in order to build a permanent, terrestrial fiber optic redundancy solution during this summer’s construction season.

On January 18, 2025, an ice scouring event severed a subsea fiber optic cable north of Oliktok Point in the Beaufort Sea, creating widespread telecommunications and connectivity disruptions across the North Slope region. This incident—impacting landlines, cellular service, internet access, and more—mirrors the then-unprecedented broadband crisis that isolated our region and beyond for months in 2023.

“We are thankful to BLM for their rapid response and to our congressional delegation for their persistent advocacy on this issue,” said **Doreen Leavitt, Iñupiat Community of the Arctic Slope (ICAS) Director of Natural Resources and Tribal Secretary**. “We now look forward to the green light from FEMA to put in place a long-term solution that prevents future telecommunications outages from disrupting our communities.”

Work is advancing to prevent future disruptions, with BLM expediting the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review process for a terrestrial fiber optic line running from Deadhorse to Utqiagvik. The permitting process for this terrestrial redundancy is nearly complete thanks to efforts by VOICE, its members, and federal stakeholders.

“The severed fiber optic line is impacting our communities and the essential services they rely on,” said **North Slope Borough Mayor Josiah Aullaqsruaq Patkotak**. “It affects our health clinics, hospitals, schools, and emergency response capabilities. We must ensure this does not happen again. FEMA must follow the expedited examples set by the Borough and BLM by acting swiftly to support the redundancy plan and protect North Slope communities from future emergencies.”

Timely approval of grant funding from FEMA is critical to advancing a fiber optic line connecting Deadhorse to Utqiagvik, creating a much-needed redundancy to avoid future widespread outages. The winter construction season is closing rapidly, which underscores the need for decisive action by the agency to support installation during the spring and summer construction seasons.

“Our communities cannot afford another prolonged telecommunications outage, which is why we need swift collaboration between federal agencies and the North Slope—to quickly resolve this crisis and ensure redundancies against future incidents,” said **Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat (VOICE) President Nagruk Harcharek**. “VOICE is reprising its role from the 2023 telecommunications outage by convening local, state, and national stakeholders to organize a response, ensure a robust information pipeline, and seek long-term solutions to our region’s challenges.”

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About Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat (VOICE)

VOICE is a nonprofit organization established in 2015 by the region's collective elected Iñupiat leadership and is dedicated to preserving and advancing North Slope Iñupiat cultural and economic self-determination. Its members include local governments, Alaska Native Corporations, federally recognized tribes, and tribal non-profits across the North Slope of Alaska.