

BLACKHAWK HILLS



Resource Conservation and Development
Jo Daviess • Stephenson • Carroll • Ogle • Whiteside • Lee

FOR RELEASE, September 2009

Contact Person: Dr. William J. Tonne, President, Blackhawk Hills RC & D, 815-273-2212

In August, Blackhawk Hills Resource Conservation and Development applied for a \$72M grant from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act for rural broadband construction. Blackhawk Hills is a not-for-profit corporation in Rock Falls, Illinois serving the six counties in northwest Illinois with local leadership and the framework for natural resource conservation and economic development in the region.

Partnering with Northern Illinois University Regional Development Institute and TriRivers Health Partners, Blackhawk Hills has been designated by the State of Illinois to receive \$5M in matching funds contingent on the ARRA grant award.

If awarded the ARRA grant, Blackhawk Hills intends to construct 700 hundred miles of buried fiber optic cable connecting virtually all the anchor institutions in Stephenson, Jo Daviess, Carroll, Lee, Ogle and Whiteside counties. This 2-3 year project would bring high speed data transmission capability and equipment equal to any in the world. This long term fiber optic technology is a 40+ year affect on the economic development and delivery of services to the region as it would connect hospitals, schools, law enforcement, courthouses, village halls, libraries, and health clinics with the capability for continued, affordable growth to support our future needs.

The ARRA has set aside \$7.2B for rural broadband in unserved and underserved areas not unlike the Rural Electrification Program of the 1930's and for almost the same reasons, namely economic development and national security. Lacking bandwidth, some businesses have already hired workers in distant locations that have the bandwidth. With the decline of local heavy industry, such as the Savanna Army Depot, high tech firms have evaluated moving into the area. This fails based on the lack of fiber optic resources available in the area that can reach out to the bandwidth centers in Chicago and the Quad Cities. Bringing high speed fiber optic transmission speed to an area makes that area just as capable as any area to incubate economic development and compete globally. It is estimated that 600 jobs are created in the construction phase and more than that as high speed internet becomes a reality in the communities of Northwestern Illinois. Several businesses are now ready to utilize such service and would add jobs in the six county region.