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*A Pennsylvania Local Development District*

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**For Immediate Release**

### **Study Finds Collaboration and Education the Keys to Broadband Deployment in Rural PA**

**Oil City, PA**--The Northwest Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission recently released the findings and recommendations from their latest regional broadband study and action plan called **Creating Optimum Networks 'n Expanding Connectivity To NW PA (CONNECT NW PA)**. A public meeting was held on January 14, 2004 at Cross Creek, where over 60 individuals from both the public and private sector gathered to discuss the report's results.

Our region's ability to compete efficiently in a global marketplace is putting broadband in the spotlight as a key element in getting residents, businesses, hospitals, and government and educational institutions to transmit data and communication with much higher effectiveness.

The study represents the eight county northwest Pennsylvania region that includes: Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Forest, Lawrence, Mercer, Venango, and Warren Counties. "An estimated 87% of the region's population has access to affordable broadband service," according to Chris Beichner, Technology Development Coordinator for the Northwest Commission. "That's good, but not good enough."

"This fact meets many of our current business needs, but now we need to focus on the other 13% and meeting our region's future needs. Let's figure out how to get much higher speeds like T3 and OC 12 ubiquitously in the region."

How does a region with so many rural areas increase their broadband service and maintain a presence in these technological times? Spotts, Stevens, and McCoy of Reading, PA, the consultant firm hired to gather the data and develop the report, suggest:

- Creating a regional task force to handle the continued development of broadband initiatives and infrastructure
- Educating the region on the importance and benefits of broadband applications
- Extending fixed access or wireless technologies to areas not served with affordable broadband Internet
- Partnering with telecom providers and local governments to discover local barriers to broadband deployment and ways of eliminating those barriers
- Research possibilities of creating a regional authority to facilitate development of infrastructure to the NW PA area

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## CONNECT NWPA 2/2

"The bottom line is return on investment. We need to collaboratively figure out how to earn profits for these service providers in rural areas. Education is key." Beichner commends companies like Armstrong Cable, USA Choice Internet, and Venus Telephone for their aggressive build-outs and attention to rural customers. "These are the types of companies the Northwest Commission wants to work with in creating lasting partnerships for future deployment."

This report will guide the Northwest Commission and its Technology Advisory Group (TAG) in determining broadband activities and developing initiatives to further enhance business development in the region. Anyone with questions regarding this study, or for a copy, please contact Chris Beichner of the Northwest Commission at (814) 677-4800. The full report can be viewed at <http://www.nwcommission.org/tag.html>.

Established in 1967, the Northwest Commission is an Oil City based, non-profit ARC, EDA and PA DCED certified economic development agency composed of a team of skilled professionals dedicated to sustaining economic vitality and growth in the Northwest Pennsylvania region by fostering local, state, and federal partnerships across public and private sector lines. The Northwest Commission provides economic development, government contracting, transportation, business marketing and financing, and technology assistance to eight counties in Northwest Pennsylvania including: Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Forest, Lawrence, Mercer, Venango, and Warren.

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