



Bethel Search & Rescue
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November 4, 2004

Ms. Kate Giard
Program Administrator
Rural Alaska Broadband Internet Access Grant Program
Regulatory Commission of Alaska
701 West 8th Avenue, Suite 300
Anchorage, AK 99501

RE: Support for United Utilities, Inc. (UUI) request for DeltaNet funds

Dear Ms. Giard,

It has just come to my attention that UUI is building a wireless telecommunications network to cover the entire Y-K Delta, called DeltaNet, and hopes to complete it in the near future.

I represent a group of Bethel citizens who volunteer to serve in search and rescue (SAR) missions in the immediate area of Bethel, or when needed in other parts of the Y-K Delta. As you might know, the delta is a sprawling, continuous landmass covering some 75,000 square miles, comparable in size to the state of Oregon.

The Bethel SAR team also provides, in the best way it can, support for other SAR teams in Y-K Delta communities, whether they are being newly organized, activated for a SAR effort, or doing downtime inventory of their supplies and equipment.

But it is the need for instant communications that comes into play when we are activated for SAR, whether in Bethel or somewhere else in the Y-K Delta. Unlike the Alaska State Troopers, which have to wait a minimum of 24 hours to be activated for SAR work, Bethel or other YK Delta SAR teams activate immediately ~~when~~, as we know that every minute of time delayed means a life or death situation for missing persons.

Most often, more than one SAR team is activated in the search for missing persons. Several villages are usually involved. When we activate for SAR, our searches sometimes take us deep into the Y-K Delta wilderness, especially in winter. The distances involved – a hundred miles or more is not out of the ordinary – between our communities or SAR teams make it very difficult to communicate with each other when we are in the field, as we are separated from phones and other means of instant or uncluttered communications that we so desperately need then.

We truly believe that SAR work is greatly needed in the Y-K Delta and that it is here to stay. Many fine men and women have joined our ranks despite working for no pay in SAR work and it underscores the care and concern people show for each other in this unforgiving environment. But we also see that SAR teams in the Y-K Delta need to be organized in a way so that SAR groups are communicating better. Communicating better will lead to better SAR organization and faster results, in my opinion.

When we heard of DeltaNet, we began to believe that our need for a fast, region-wide communications system might begin to be met. We in the SAR groups in the Y-K Delta hope to be involved in using DeltaNet when it is completed. Therefore, we ask that you support DeltaNet and UII in their supplemental funding request.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,



Peter Atchak
President
Bethel Search and Rescue