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## **For Immediate Release: Grant Awards for Broadband Expansion Announced for Bath and Rockbridge Counties**

*The multi-jurisdictional project will connect unserved residences and businesses in Rural Virginia*

**Staunton, VA** – Virginia Governor Ralph Northam announced Wednesday more than \$18.3 million in grants through the Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI) to support 12 projects across Virginia, including the “BARC Connects Rockbridge and Bath Counties” project submitted by the Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission (CSPDC). The multi-jurisdictional project is a collaborative effort between Bath County, Rockbridge County, the CSPDC and BARC Electric Cooperative (BARC) to help bridge the digital divide in this part of rural Virginia. BARC is the private sector co-applicant and will provide fiber infrastructure to the unserved units identified in the project submission. The grant request was fully funded by VATI in the amount of \$2.2 million.

The overall project will have a total cost of \$17.8 million dollars including grant funds from VATI, funding from BARC and other funding from both Bath County and Rockbridge County. The fiber network will be expanded into a defined project area in both localities deploying a total of 314 miles of gigabit last mile fiber infrastructure serving about 1,100 businesses and residences. The project area includes identified unserved units in BARC’s electric service territory in Bath County and Rockbridge County. In constructing Fiber-To-The-Premise (FTTP) to reach these identified unserved areas in Bath and Rockbridge, BARC will also make FTTP available to an additional 1,165 units outside the submitted project route funded by VATI.

“When we started our fiber project, we committed to one day serving every BARC member with world-class Internet,” said BARC CEO Mike Keyser. “As a result of the collaborative effort with the counties and CSPDC, we take one big step forward toward that goal. We appreciate the assistance of our partners and are very thankful that our project was chosen for funding.”

“This project is a game changer for Bath County,” says Bath County Administrator Ashton Harrison. “Broadband development is economic development and we thank Governor Northam and his administration for continuing to support economic development in rural Virginia. We believe this project will greatly benefit our businesses, schools, first responders, and government agencies and will positively impact the quality of life for Bath County residents.”

Rockbridge County Administrator Spencer Suter also expressed gratitude for all those who worked on the grant, saying “This award is the result of a tremendous amount of coordinated effort by the staffs of Rockbridge and Bath Counties, the CSPDC and BARC. Continuing to

expand broadband into our rural areas remains a central focus, in support of business, education and quality of life.”

The CSPDC will serve as the grant administrator for the project and work with both localities and BARC from construction to completion. Additional information about the project and consumer eligibility will be made available closer to the beginning of construction.