



**United States Department of Agriculture
Rural Development**

November 7, 2018

TO: Elke Hodson Marten
Senior Desk Officer
Office of Management and Budget

FROM: Christopher A. McLean
Acting Administrator
Rural Utilities Service

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christopher A. McLean". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned to the right of the "FROM:" field.

SUBJECT: Request for Emergency Approval of a New Information Collection Request for Rural eConnectivity Pilot Program (ReConnect Program) Funding Opportunity Announcement

Rural Development (RD) is requesting emergency review and approval of a new information collection. The Funding Opportunities Announcement (FOA) will be issued in accordance with the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018 (the FY 2018 appropriations), which authorizes RUS to expand upon its existing authority to provide loans and grants for the deployment and construction of broadband systems. This new information collection addresses the Rural eConnectivity Pilot Program (herein referred to as the ReConnect Program) and will provide interested parties information on the application windows, program requirements, evaluation criteria, and award administration, application and reporting requirements for ReConnect Program.

An emergency approval is being requested because RD will not be able to implement this new grant and loan program including the associated notice of solicitation of applications in Fiscal Year (FY) 2019, as the use of normal clearance procedures is likely to prevent or disrupt the collection of information from applicants. The Agency anticipates accepting applications under the Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) for the ReConnect Program on or about March 1, 2019 and will finalized this window by notice in the *Federal Register* and Grants.gov on February 22, 2019.

RD considers it imperative to begin processing applications this fiscal year for projects that support national broadband service development that will facilitate rural economic development by improving access to broadband service in rural areas without service or that lack sufficient access to broadband service. Secretary Purdue has indicated that the Pilot Program is a priority. The Secretary offered a challenge to the USDA Rural Development team on Thursday, October 18th, when speaking at a US Telecom event, the "2018 Broadband Investment Forum: The Path to Connecting Communities." Secretary Perdue indicated during his remarks that he had

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1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (800) 795-3272 (Voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD).

challenged the USDA team to have the broadband pilot program available to the public by the end of the year.

The 60-day notice for comments is embedded in the FOA. Due to the need to consider comments received and then issue another notice for the *Federal Register* for an additional thirty days of comment, RD would not be able to complete the information collection process before the deadline for applicants to participate in the new grant and loan program in FY 2019.

In compliance with OMB regulations (5 CFR Part 1320), which implements the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (Pub. L. 104-13), the information collection and recordkeeping requirements that may be imposed by this section are submitted to OMB for emergency review and approval. Attached are the supporting statement and spreadsheet for the ReConnect Program

In lieu of the time sensitive application window commencing when the Application Intake System is ready, and, to effectively implement the ReConnect Program in FY 2019, RD is requesting OMB approve this information collection by November 21, 2018. Please note that after the 60-day comment period closes, RD will submit the collection package for a 3-year approval addressing any comments received.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Michele Brooks, Team Lead, Rural Development Innovation Center by telephone at (202) 720-7853 or by email at Michele.Brooks@usda.gov.

Thank you in advance for your quick review and response to us.

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