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Meeting Indian Country's Communications Needs
Native Public Media and Colorado Law School Address
Spectrum Issues in Indian Country

Native Public Media and the University of Colorado School of Law's Samuelson-Glushko Technology Law & Policy Clinic propose changes in federal spectrum policy to address the needs of Native Americans in a new Paper entitled **Spectrum Access in Indian Country**.

"Spectrum, like land and water, is a finite resource that is vital and critical to the nation-building efforts of Indian Tribes," says Loris Taylor (Hopi), Executive Director of Native Public Media. "Ubiquitous broadband access is essential to communications, health care, education, political engagement and economic stimulation on tribal homelands. In an increasingly digitalized world, we cannot afford to live without it."

While over two-thirds of U.S. households now subscribe to broadband, the U.S. Government Accountability Office estimated in 2006 that broadband penetration on Indian lands is less than 10%. Native Public Media and the University of Colorado analyze spectrum policy tools which would help address this dramatic broadband gap. Proposed policy recommendations include relaxed power limitations in unlicensed bands for rural areas as well as certain spectrum exemptions involving the 3650 band in Indian Country.

The research updates issues previously addressed in the **Native Networking: Telecommunications and Information Technology in Indian Country**, a report published by the Benton Foundation in 1999.

“We are proud to have supported this effort,” said Charles Benton, Chairman and CEO of the Benton Foundation. “Ten years ago we put together a resource for decision makers in tribal communities and policy makers on the state of telecommunications and information technologies in Indian Country. As policymakers plot a course for ensuring that all American have affordable access to high-speed Internet connections, this research should inform a National Broadband Plan that includes Indian Country.”

Colorado Law Associate Clinical Professor Brad Bernthal supervised the project. “It is imperative to extend broadband access and improve broadband penetration in Indian Country. The question is how to do it. This research tackles a critical policy challenge and makes progress on how spectrum policy can be part of the solution to an important problem.” Bernthal added, “Loris and the team of Native Public Media advisors are terrific. We look forward to continuing the relationship in the future.” The work for Native Public Media was spearheaded by University of Colorado graduate students Julie Penner, JD/MBA candidate 2010, and Bhavin Parekh, MS in Telecommunications candidate 2009.

The Samuelson-Glushko Technology Law and Policy Clinic is an academic program supervised by instructors from the University of Colorado School of Law. Student practitioners provide assistance “in the public interest” in order to conduct thoughtful policy analysis and provide unbiased assistance concerning technology issues to regulatory entities, courts, legislatures and standard setting bodies.

Native Public Media’s mission is to expand Native access, ownership and control of media. Enhanced communication capabilities in Indian Country are a critical part of supporting Native nations’ ability to secure their homelands, educate and inform their citizens, and maintain growing economies. This research is part of a larger policy initiative spearheaded by Native Public Media concerning ways to improve broadband availability and penetration in Indian Country.

Native Public Media policy advisors to the project included Geoffrey Blackwell of Chickasaw Nations Industries, John Crigler of Garvey, Shubert and Barer, Sascha Meinrath of the New America Foundation and Carol Pierson of the National Federation of Community Broadcasters.

The Paper “**Spectrum Access in Indian Country**” is available on Native Public Media’s website at www.nativepublicmedia.org.

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