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# INTERNET FOR ALL

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## Finding of No Significant Impact

*Native Village of Port Lions  
(NT22TBC0290091)*



U.S. Department of Commerce  
National Telecommunications and Information Administration

# Finding of No Significant Impact

## *National Telecommunications and Information Administration*

### Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program

#### AU ALEUTIANS II

## Overview

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This document serves as the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the following project awarded by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). NTIA has completed the sufficiency review of the recipient's Environmental Assessment (EA) and has determined that the project will not have a significant impact on the environment. The FONSI contains information related to the review.

Recipient Name:	Native Village of Port Lions
Grant Project Name:	AU-Aleutians Fiber Extension Project (AU-A2)
Grant Award No.	NT22TBC0290091
Program Location:	Alaska

## Program Summary

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The NTIA awarded a grant to the Native Village of Port Lions, through the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program (TBCP), as authorized by the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, Division N, Title IX, Section 905(c), Public Law 116-260, 134 Stat. 1182 (Dec. 27, 2020) (Act). TBCP provides new federal funding for grants to eligible entities to expand access to and adoption of: (i) broadband service on Tribal Land; or (ii) for programs that promote the use of broadband to access remote learning, telework, or telehealth resources during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Native Village of Port Lions project is called AU-Aleutians Fiber Extension Project and proposed activities are scheduled to occur in Alaska. The Native Village of Port Lions completed an EA for this Project in April 2024. NTIA reviewed the EA, determined it is sufficient, and adopted it as part of the development of this FONSI.

The Project includes:

- **Project Activity 1 (Preferred Alternative):** The project would bring broadband infrastructure to the Alaska communities of Ouzinkie, Port Lions, Chignik Lagoon, Chignik Lake, Cold Bay, and False Pass. Laying new subsea fiber optic cable (FOC) between an existing "backbone" subsea cable and each community. At each community, subsea FOC would be connected to beach manholes (BMH) just above the high tide line (HTL) and then trenched to prefabricated communications shelters, located at cable landing stations on small gravel pads. In each community, FOC would be trenched to end users throughout the community. At each community, subsea FOC would be connected to the BMH just above the HTL.

Based on a review of the analysis in the EA, NTIA has determined that the project, implemented in accordance with the preferred alternative, and incorporating best management practices (BMPs) and protective measures identified in the EA, will not result in any significant

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environmental impacts. Therefore, the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required. The basis for this determination is described in this FONSI. Additional information and copies of the Executive Summary of the EA and FONSI are available to all interested persons and the public through the NTIA website ([www2.ntia.doc.gov/](http://www2.ntia.doc.gov/)) and the following contact:

Amanda Pereira

Environmental Program Officer  
Office of Internet Connectivity and Growth (OICG)  
National Telecommunications and Information Administration  
U.S. Department of Commerce Room 4874  
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW Washington, DC 20230



## Project Purpose and Need

The purpose of the project is to bring fast, 2,500 megabits per second (approximately 2.4 gigs) internet speeds and affordable, unlimited data plans to approximately 800 people in six remote Alaska Native villages for the first time, closing the digital divide and bringing digital equity to the region. The project will support economic development and expansion of social services. The proposed project's six isolated communities are neither connected by road nor an intertidal electrical grid. The lack of broadband access limits economic development and efficiency of services delivered by healthcare providers, schools, and tribal entities.

## Project Description

The Proposed Action will construct new install approximately 100 miles of predominantly subsea middle mile FOC and 27 miles of fiber to the premises and provide local access networks in Port Lions, Ouzinkie, Chignik Lagoon, Chignik Lake, Cold Bay, and False Pass. Terrestrial trenching would measure 3 feet (ft) or less below ground surface (bgs) and 3 ft wide. Sidecast width would not exceed 8 ft. Placement would generally occur within existing road rights-of-way (ROW) and/or existing disturbance when feasible. Intertidal trenching would measure 3 ft or less below mudline and 3 ft wide. Sidecast width would not exceed 8 ft. More than 90% of the subsea cable would be installed through direct laying on seabed. Limited areas of subsea burial could occur within no more than 980 ft from mean low water (MLW) in the surf zone and in the Chignik River. Burial would be no deeper than 3 ft below existing substrate with no resulting sidecast. At each community, the landing of the subsea FOC would be connected to BMH just above the HTL no more than 5 ft. On average, vaults will be installed every 800 ft of FOC, placed at a depth of no more than 5 ft bgs. Placement of six prefabricated shelters (approximately 24 ft long, 12 ft wide, and 10 ft high) would be housed on 2,500-square foot (ft<sup>2</sup>) gravel pads.

## Analysis of Alternatives

The recipient's EA includes an analysis of the alternatives for implementing the project to meet the purpose and need. NTIA conducted a review of the recipient's analysis of alternatives for implementing the project to meet the purpose and need, including a review of the "no action" alternative, where applicable. Each alternative was evaluated for impacts against the "no action" alternative and impacts from other alternatives, as a component of selecting the preferred alternative. The following summarizes the alternatives analyzed in the EA.

**Alternative 1 (Preferred Alternative):** Project elements that would occur above the HTL are defined herein as terrestrial and project elements that would occur between MLW and HTL are defined as intertidal. Work below MLW is considered subsea. Work in the Chignik River is riverine.

### Terrestrial Project Elements

The shore route would consist of a buried conduit system and FOC to the BMH. The conduit system would contain up to 3 conduits (each 2 inches in diameter) buried 3-ft bgs. The BMH would measure 4 ft x 5 ft with 5-ft x 6-ft (30 ft<sup>2</sup>) excavation.

In all communities except Chignik Lake, the FOC would be routed from the BMH to new Cable Landing Station (CLS) facilities, wherein new prefabricated communications shelters would be placed on piles or be co-located with existing facilities. Gravel pads would have an area of approximately 2,500 ft<sup>2</sup> and be 2-ft deep. Each CLS would have a self-contained, outdoor-rated, and diesel-fuel powered generators installed adjacent to it on the gravel pad and be fenced.

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From the CLS, FOC will then be used to create a main line, from which end users would be connected. FOC between the BMH and CLS would be terrestrial cable placed in a trench, approximately 3 ft wide x 3 ft deep. Trench width would be less if a cable plow or chain trencher is available. The fiber extension to end users will be a standard terrestrial cable placed in a 3-ft-deep trench. If existing suitable utility poles are available, the FOC local distribution may use overhead construction as well.

Vaults would be similar to BMHs but measure 3 ft x 4 ft, only 3 ft deep, would require no more than a 5-ft x 5-ft (25 ft<sup>2</sup>) excavation and would be used to provide slack loops and splicing points along the main line route and at the CLS.

All terrestrial FOC would be trenched adjacent to existing roads and remain within existing utility ROW and easements to the extent possible; this may include trenching in areas near the toe of slope. FOC trenching would generally follow the utility distribution system in each community.

Installation crews would use backhoes and standard trenching techniques to set BMHs and vaults flush with the original ground grade.

All areas would be returned to pre-construction elevations; all trenched areas would be re-graded to original conditions.

Unicom does not intend to re-enter BMHs for 25 years, unless required to address a service or maintenance issue.

Excavated material would be sidecast next to trenches during excavation and the spoils would be used as backfill to bury the cable and BMH.

FOC would be installed into a BMH, setback from the adjacent waterbody with a conduit stub. The BMH would measure 4 ft x 5 ft (20 ft<sup>2</sup>) and 4 ft deep with excavation not exceeding 5 ft x 6 ft (30 ft<sup>2</sup>) and 5 ft deep; each BMH excavation would vary based on shoreline/bank contours and substrate. The conduit stub would be placed above MLW.

### Intertidal Project Elements

In intertidal areas, trenching would have a maximum 3 ft width and 4 ft depth.

For each landfall location, the following construction methods would apply:

- Any work below mean high water would occur during low tide.
- Heavy equipment needing to operate in intertidal areas and wetlands would be placed on mats, with the exception of beaches with firm sediments, such as large cobbles or boulders (e.g., Ouzinkie, False Pass).
- No excess material requiring disposal is anticipated to be produced.
- Alterations to shorelines would be temporary and trenches would be constructed and backfilled to prevent them from acting as a drain (i.e., not backfilled).

In general, equipment used at each landfall location (with the exception of work in the Chignik River) may include:

- Rubber-wheeled backhoe
- Tracked excavator or backhoe
- Utility truck and trailer to deliver materials
- Chain trencher or cable plow (optional)



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- Hand tools (e.g., shovels, rakes, pry bars, wrenches)
- Survey equipment
- Winch or turning sheave
- Splicing equipment, small genset, and splicing tent

### Subsea and Riverine Project Elements

The following describes project elements that would occur in the subsea (marine) and riverine environments, outside of intertidal areas. Over 99 percent of the FOC would be surface laid directly on the seafloor. In waters within approximately 980 ft from MLW, the FOC would be buried via diver-held water jet (maximum 3 ft depth).

For work in the Chignik River, installation would not occur when water is not present in the channel and instead would occur in high-water to the extent possible.

No post-lay inspection and burial would be conducted. In general, equipment in the nearshore marine and riverine environment may include:

- Small utility boats (both an 80- and 40-ft landing craft) to run pull line to beach (each less than 3,000 horsepower engine)
- Dive boat with hand jetting tools
- Hand jetting would take 1 day (12 hours) per landing

### Installation Timeframes

With the exception of Chignik River and Chignik Lake, marine and intertidal installation of FOC and placement of BMHs for the project is estimated to be completed in three months. Marine and intertidal installation of FOC and placement of BMHs in Chignik River and Chignik Lake is estimated to be completed in less than two weeks.

Terrestrial FOC installation for Ouzinkie and Port Lions is estimated to be completed in three months. Terrestrial FOC installation for Chignik Lagoon, Chignik Lake, Cold Bay and False Pass is estimated to be completed in three months.

### Community-Specific Operations

Table 1 summarizes the project elements within each community (Table 1).

**Table 1: Project Elements by Community**

Community	Number of Vaults	Number of BMHs	CLS	Fiber placed between BMH end users (linear feet) <sup>a</sup>
Ouzinkie	96	1	yes	18,277
Port Lions	113	1	yes	32,751
Chignik Lagoon	70	2	yes	16,354
Chignik Lake	55	1	no	27,202
Cold Bay	82	1	yes	28,253
False Pass	55	1	yes	18,741
<b>Total</b>	<b>518</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>141,579</b>

Notes: BMH (beach manhole); current/approximate estimate and final linear feet may vary





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**Project Activity 2 (No Action Alternative):** No action was also considered. This alternative represents conditions as they currently exist. Under the no action alternative, new middle mile infrastructure would not be constructed. Six rural communities would continue to be unserved or underserved with respect to broadband internet access. The EA examined this alternative as the baseline for evaluating impacts relative to other alternatives being considered.

**Project Activity 3 (Alternatives Considered but Not Carried Forward):** The Native Village of Port Lions also considered evaluated five alternatives to using FOC to meet the project purpose and need as described below:

Alternative	Reason Alternative Was Dismissed
Terrestrial-Only Routed FOC	The burial of terrestrial FOC would meet the project's purpose, but it would be logistically infeasible and economically prohibitive to develop. Many of the communities are located on islands, which requires a substantial portion of the cable to be undersea.
Microwave Link Service	Would not meet the project's purpose to provide fast, reliable, economically viable broadband service to the identified Aleutian Islands communities. Constructability and operations and maintenance including prime power remote sites requiring fueling by helicopter make microwave a poor choice for this reason. Sites would need to be located in National Parks and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service lands and reliability in high latitude marine mountain environments is highly questionable.
Upgrade Satellite Service	Would not meet the project's purpose to provide fast, reliable broadband service to the identified Aleutian Islands communities. Latency issues prohibit many uses of the latest technologies.
Fixed-Wireless Distribution Network	Would not meet the project's purpose to provide fast, reliable broadband service to all subscribers in the identified Aleutian Islands communities, due to variable bandwidth delivery, potential interference, and system reliability due to the high winds and severe icing weather conditions in the region.
Utility Pole Distribution	Would not meet the project's purpose to provide fast, reliable broadband service to the identified Aleutian Islands communities due to increased maintenance issues that would cause frequent outages. Several communities will not allow utility pole construction due to safety issues caused by the harsh environmental conditions in the area (e.g., falling poles and lines).

## Findings and Conclusions

The recipient's EA analyzed existing conditions and environmental consequences of the preferred alternative, other alternatives, and the no action alternative for potential impacts in major resource areas. The results of the analysis are summarized in the table below:

Resource Area	Preferred Alternative	No Action Alternative
Land Use	No Impact	No Impact
Soils and Geology	No Impact	No Impact
Floodplains	No Impact	No Impact
Wetlands and Waters of the U.S.	No Significant Impact	No Impact
Water Resources	No Impact	No Impact
Coastal Resources	No Impact	No Impact
Farmland	No Impact	No Impact
Biological Resources	No Significant Impact, Likely to Adversely Affect	No Impact
Historic and Cultural Properties	No Significant Impact, No Adverse Effect	No Impact
Aesthetics	No Impact	No Impact



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<b>Air Quality</b>	No Impact	No Impact
<b>Socioeconomic Issues/ Environmental Justice</b>	Beneficial Impact	Negative Impact
<b>Noise</b>	No Significant Impact	No Impact
<b>Transportation</b>	No Significant Impact	No Impact
<b>Human Health and Safety</b>	Beneficial Impact	No Impact

The sections that follow provide a brief narrative for those resource areas where there has been a potential impact indicated in the table above or provide a summary of the results of required consultation with the appropriate agency or agencies.

### *Wetlands and Waters of the U.S.*

The project would involve work in aquatic resources and impact Waters of the U.S. (WOTUS) under USACE jurisdiction per Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act and Section 404 of the CWA. WOTUS potentially impacted by the proposed project would include tidelands, wetlands, and navigable waters. Any trenching work conducted would result in temporary impacts to jurisdictional resources because trenches would be covered over. All permanent fill (e.g., BMH, CLS, vaults) would result in minor permanent impacts to jurisdictional resources, as described in greater detail below. Complete avoidance of impacts to WOTUS is not feasible due to the extensive presence of such resources in the project area; however, potential impacts have been minimized by siting project features in developed/disturbed areas to the greatest extent practicable. The project is being constructed to meet Nationwide Permit (NWP) conditions and would have minimal impacts to wetlands and aquatic environments as total permanent impacts would not exceed one half an acre per community. Additionally, wetlands will be avoided to the extent practicable through substitution trenching with placing FOC between existing poles when possible. Although CLS will not exceed 2,500 square feet of fill, the size of pad required for each site will vary depending on topography, existing disturbance, and may only require minor amounts of fill.

### *Biological Resources*

Installation of FOC within anadromous habitat would occur using a small vessel and during consultation with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), it was determined that most impacts on spawning activity would be avoided by placing FOC only in June and by following an alignment that avoids the most sensitive habitat. A Title 16 Fish Habitat permit was obtained from ADF&G on January 19, 2024.

An assessment of Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) determined direct laying cable would result in habitat alteration for fish (minor and temporary increase in turbidity, and disturbance of benthic sediments) and would have the potential for mortality and injury associated with entrainment of small benthic species. Trenching would also displace sediment leading to increased turbidity. Potential effects on EFH as a result of activities associated with the Project are expected to be no more than negligible and temporary. Temporary alteration of habitat could affect EFH for all species that inhabit nearshore and intertidal areas. The Project will not impact EFH to the point of causing adverse impacts to fish populations. All effects would be temporary during construction and conservation measures would be used to avoid and minimize impacts to the extent possible. NMFS completed consultation on January 29, 2024

The project would temporarily increase vessel traffic and associated noise by a small amount during FOC installation; however, the direct loss of habitat available to ESA-listed marine mammals due to vessel noise is expected to be minimal and not have a significant impact on





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marine mammals. For the Proposed Action, NMFS and USFWS determined takes of marine mammals are not likely to occur as a result of project activities; therefore, no takes of marine mammals will be authorized under the ESA. Similarly, no takes of marine mammals was requested under the MMPA.

DOWL, acting as a NTIA's non-federal representative to the USFWS, initiated informal Section 7 consultation under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) with USFWS and formal ESA Section 7 consultation with NMFS. Biological Assessments (BAs) were prepared and submitted to USFWS and NMFS on December 21, 2023. Concurrence that the project may affect but is not likely to adversely affect or result in adverse modification of critical habitat for any federally listed marine mammal species was requested from both agencies. USFWS concurred on February 15, 2024 and NMFS concurred on June 7, 2024.

However, ESA Section 7 consultation with NMFS resulted in a conference opinion that the Proposed Action will likely adversely affect but is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the sunflower sea star. The sunflower sea star has been proposed to be listed under ESA, and no critical habitat has been designated or proposed. The expected number of sunflower sea star take as a result of intertidal cable laying is 32, and 139 for offshore cable laying. NMFS provided mitigation measures in the conference opinion dated June 7, 2024 to minimize the impact of the amount or extent of incidental take.

### *Historical and Cultural Resources*

A previously developed Programmatic Agreement (PA) was amended on June 18, 2024 to allow for a phased process to identify, evaluate, assess, and avoid, minimize, and/or mitigate project effects on historic properties. The PA stipulates cultural resource monitoring must occur in all areas of ground disturbance associated with the Project. The PA outlines the processes and protocols by which the potential for adverse impacts to cultural resources and historic properties would be avoided and minimized. These include analysis of subsea sonar data by a marine archaeologist, archaeological monitoring of terrestrial construction activities, implementing contractor awareness training, and establishing inadvertent discovery protocols in the event that archaeological, historic, or human remains are encountered during construction.

### *Socioeconomic Issues/ Environmental Justice*

The proposed action would improve the function of the services provided to residents and would not have a disproportionate impact on minority or low-income populations. The proposed telecommunications service would increase the Project's six communities' access to reliable and fast broadband service, which will positively affect many socioeconomic aspects of each community, including the efficacy of health and educational services.

Residential plans would be offered that parallel the speeds and data usage allowances broadband packages available in GCI's largest market, Anchorage. Anticipated residential data plans that would be offered in the project's six communities that provide relatively inexpensive, high-speed connectivity.

The no action alternative would continue to delay economic development as use of the existing system would continue to operate with high latency and low bandwidth and the limited capacity of satellite systems. In addition, satellite systems remain the highest cost alternative over time

### *Noise*

The proximity of FOC installation activities and operations to other land uses could create minor and temporary noise impacts from use of heavy equipment for proximal sound receptors (e.g.,



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schools, hospitals, residences). These impacts would be isolated to construction areas and would be limited to the duration of active Project construction within each community. Generators sited at the CLS would only be used during power outages and once installed, would only generate noise occasionally. The proposed action would have no significant effect because the duration of increased noise associated with installation and construction activities would be within normal limits for such activities and would be of short duration. Therefore, it would not have a substantial or long-term impact on sensitive sound receptors.

### *Transportation*

The Project would result in minor and temporary traffic as construction crews complete terrestrial FOC installation within each of the Project communities. Although no state or local government requirements stipulate the use of an official Traffic Control Plan, the construction crew receives site-specific requests from the tribal authorities on how best to avoid impacting local transportation patterns. A spotter and cones are used to ensure safety by temporarily diverting vehicle or foot traffic around construction areas.

### *Human Health and Safety*

A Contaminated Sites Management Plan (CSMP) was developed for the Proposed Action focused on activities in Ouzinkie, Chignik Lake, and Cold Bay with strategies for handling potentially contaminated media during the project. The CSMP was approved by the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation on April 8, 2024. Proposed mitigation measures will effectively bypass any encountered groundwater issues and negate the need for any active dewatering processes. Dewatering is not anticipated to occur either during installation of fiber or vaults as fiber can be laid in wet conditions and vaults can be moved to avoid wet conditions. All trenches will be backfilled with original soils.

The Cold Bay Formerly Used Defense Sites (FUDS) site has the potential of unexploded ordinance on historical military sites and work under FUDS has not completed cleanup work in the project area. Mitigation of potential encounters is achieved by incorporation of the “Recognize, Retreat, and Report” (3R) program into daily safety briefings.

### *Cumulative Impacts*

As described throughout this FONSI, the project will not have significant adverse impacts on any of the environmental resource areas evaluated in the EA. As such, no cumulative impacts on the environment are anticipated.



## Decision

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NTIA concludes that constructing and operating the project as defined by the preferred alternative, identified BMPs, and protective measures, will not require additional mitigation. A separate mitigation plan is not required for the project. The analyses indicate that the Proposed Action is not a major federal action that will significantly affect the quality of the human environment. NTIA has determined that preparation of an EIS is not required.

Issued on June 28, 2024 by:

**AMANDA PEREIRA**  
Digitally signed by  
AMANDA PEREIRA  
Date: 2024.06.28  
01:29:41 -04'00'  
Amanda Pereira

Environmental Program Officer  
Office of Internet Connectivity and Growth (OICG)  
National Telecommunications and Information Administration  
U.S. Department of Commerce Room 4874  
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW Washington, DC 20230