



Press Release – June 17th, 2021

Contact: Jason Custer, Vice President – Business Development

C: 907-617-3773 E: jason.c@aptalaska.com

Alaska Power & Telephone Initiates Marine Route Survey for SEALink Submarine Cable Project

Higher broadband speeds in progress for rural Southeast Alaska communities

AP&T Wireless (APTW), a subsidiary of Alaska Power & Telephone, has initiated a marine route survey for the SEALink submarine fiber optic cable project. TerraSond – an Alaska-based company with an Alaskan crew – will be using a 105’ vessel outfitted with advanced geophysical and hydrographic survey equipment to study the seafloor in advance of developing a final submarine cable route and design. The vessel, named the Qualifier 105, will spend approximately 20 days surveying seafloor areas between Coffman Cove and south Mitkof Island, and Petersburg and Juneau. APTW will use data resulting from the survey, expected in August 2021, to select a submarine cable route that minimizes impacts and conflicts, and avoids features that could pose future risks to the cable.

The SEALink project will create a 214-mile submarine fiber optic cable from Prince of Wales Island to Juneau, with an overland crossing on Mitkof Island through the community of Petersburg. The project also involves terrestrial network build-outs in the communities of Coffman Cove and Kasaan, which currently lack broadband service. To minimize project impacts, APTW is constructing terrestrial features on existing utility poles and within existing ROW wherever feasible.

“In a remote state like Alaska, the need for broadband is far reaching. It is critical to connect communities, supporting telemedicine and tele-education, and so much more,” said Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski. “The SEALink project is an exciting venture that will bring a much needed boost to communities in Southeast Alaska. I’m happy to see the broad support for this project—made possible through public and private partnerships—and look forward to following its progress to ultimate completion.”

The SEALink project will help fortify long-term economic and community stability on Prince of Wales Island, where legacy industries such as timber and mining have been in decline.

“Gaining access to high-speed internet connectivity can be life-changing, especially for residents in rural Alaska where communication resources and infrastructure are most scarce,” said Alaska Senator Dan Sullivan. “The initiation of this marine route survey is welcome news and a great step forward to this critical project, which will result in installing fiber-optic cable, connecting Southeast communities, and meeting the urgent need for accessible high-speed internet throughout the region.”

Richard Petersen, President of the Central Council Tlingit Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, stated: “Tlingit & Haida is excited to support the SEALink fiber project as it will work to close the digital divide that so many rural Alaskans are far too familiar with. For tribes, high speed connectivity for our citizens is truly the latest way to express our sovereignty and move us to the forefront of the digital age.”

Ronald Leighton, President of the Organized Village of Kasaan tribal council, remarked: "For the Organized Village of Kasaan, access to broadband connectivity is a step toward equity in our rural community." Additional supporters include the city governments of Coffman Cove and Kasaan, and other organizations such as the Sustainable Southeast Partnership.

The SEALink project is funded through a combination of private investment supplied by AP&T Wireless and USDA Rural Utility Service ReConnect grant funds. APTW is on track to construct new terrestrial networks in Coffman Cove and Kasaan in 2022, after which time improved service will begin to become available. Installation of the submarine cable is scheduled to occur in 2023, and will enable significantly higher broadband speeds in communities across Prince of Wales Island. To help keep to this timeline and make broadband available as soon as possible, APTW has proactively placed orders for long lead-time materials, and is developing documents and specifications required for the submarine cable supply/install procurement processes. However, the schedule will ultimately depend upon the timing of permitting processes, and environmental approval processes managed by USDA.

Congressman Don Young remarked: "Alaska's vast size and unique geography can present many challenges for broadband deployment in our state. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of reliable broadband access, particularly for young people who spent a good deal of time learning remotely. Now more than ever, we must work to solve connectivity challenges that have become all too common in remote areas of our state. I am very pleased that Alaska Power & Telephone will be using funds made available through USDA's ReConnect Grant Program to study the seafloor ahead of designing and deploying cables between Prince of Wales Island and Juneau. This is a crucially important task, and I am grateful to Alaska Power & Telephone's efforts on behalf of Alaskans. It is my great hope that all of our rural communities in Southeast will soon have reliable broadband access for education, telehealth, remote employment, and other critical necessities of daily life."

Alaska Power & Telephone President and CEO Mike Garrett remarked “the marine route survey is a significant milestone for the SEALink project. We are honored to be in a position to apply USDA funds for the benefit of rural southeast Alaska, and thankful for all of the tribal and community support for this project. Rural broadband access creates tremendous stakeholder value - opportunity that helps all businesses and families succeed in reaching their goals, together.”

As TerraSond mobilizes to southeast Alaska, the Qualifier 105 will make a slight detour to support the Fallen American Veterans Foundation (FAVF) by searching for a US Air Force charter flight which disappeared in 1951 while en route to the Korean War theater. FAVF hopes location of the aircraft can bring closure to family members of the 38 US air force, UN, and Canadian crew members who were lost. Combining this mobilization with AP&T’s schedule will help save significantly on costs and make the search possible.

Alaska Power & Telephone Company (OTC: APTL) is an investor-owned utility providing diverse utility services in over 40 communities in rural Alaska. Additional information on AP&T can be found at: www.aptalaska.com