



ORS

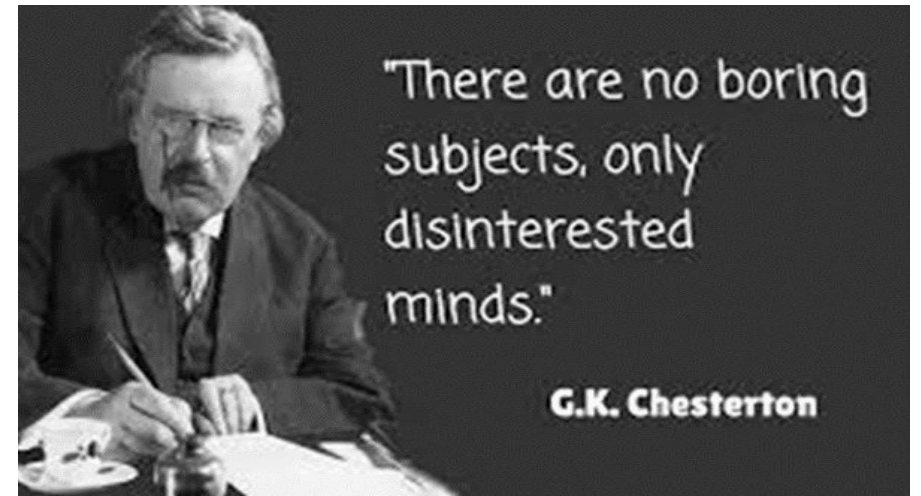
# Pandemic Response and Preparedness

*Carolinas Pandemic Preparedness Task Force | June 22, 2021*



# Purpose

- Provide an overview of ORS
- Identify issues that developed from the Pandemic
- Discuss ORS role in broadband projects



# ORS

**The South Carolina Office of Regulatory Staff (ORS) was created through Act 175 of 2004.**

**ORS is responsible for many of the non-adjudicative functions associated with utility regulation that formerly fell under the auspices of the Public Service Commission (PSC).**

**The staff is organized into the following divisions:**

- 1. Utilities Rates (electric, natural gas, water and wastewater)**
- 2. Utilities Services (consumer services, solar)**
- 3. Energy Office**
- 4. Broadband, Communications & Safety (Rail Safety, Pipeline Safety, Transportation, Telecom, Emergency Management)**
- 5. Legal**
- 6. Communications**
- 7. Auditing & Administration**

# Rail Safety

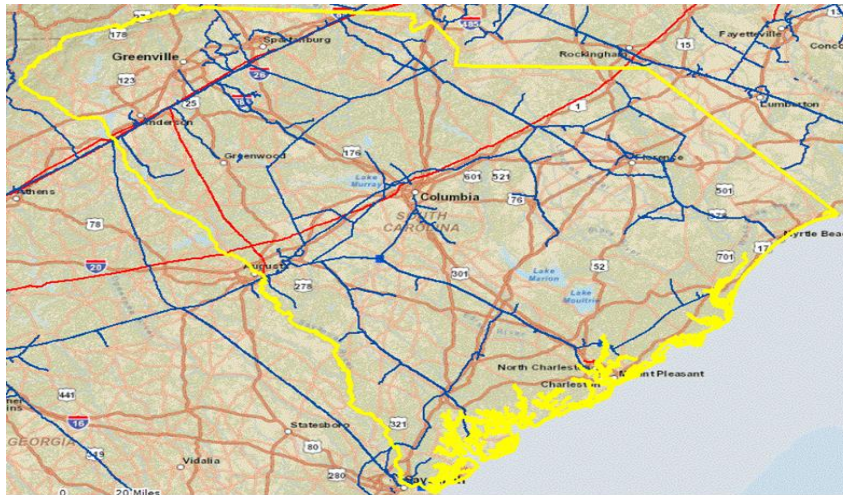
**Enforces Federal Rules and Regulations**

- 1 Track and 1 Operating Practices Inspector for 2600 miles of rail
- ORS investigated 119 rail related incidents in 2020
- Three major freight accidents in Martin, Trenton, and North Charleston
- Issue a Rail Safety Advisory to First Responders
- Provide blocked crossing advisory to local law enforcement
- Amtrak Incident in February 2018



**SAFETY FIRST!**

# Pipeline Safety



**Enforces Federal Rules and Regulations**







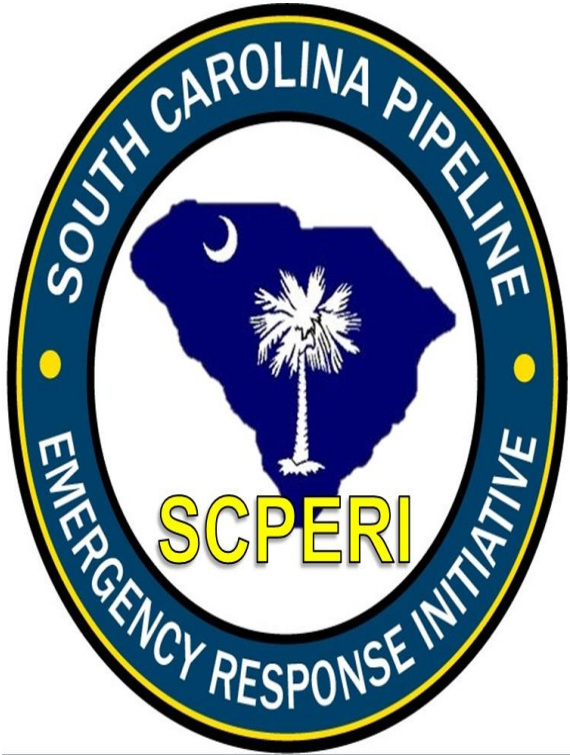
# Pipeline Safety Focus

- OQ Plans
- MAOP and Pressure Regulating
- Critical Valves
- Distribution Comps
- Inspector Training
- New PHMSA Requirements
- Cathodic Protection
- Drug and Alcohol
- Record-keeping



**Damage Prevention Initiative**

# South Carolina Pipeline Emergency Response Initiative



Advance the ability of emergency responders to manage pipeline emergencies through improved training, cooperation and communication with pipeline operators.



Public-private partnership among emergency response organizations and pipeline operators to improve response to pipeline related incidents.



# Transportation

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- **Regulation of motor carriers of passengers, household goods, and hazardous waste for disposal**
- **Monitoring carriers' insurance, rates, charges, and practices**
- **Household Good Carriers**
- **Taxis**
- **Charter Buses**
- **Limousines**
- **Non-emergency Transportation (NET)**
- **Transportation Network Companies (TNCs)—Uber/Lyft**

# Telecommunications

- Telephone utilities must obtain a certificate from the South Carolina Public Service Commission (PSC) to operate in the state
- Regulate rates, charges, terms of service for most telecommunications carriers (no cellular or VOIP)
- ILECs, CLECs, IXCs, Inmate Service Providers



## Telecommunications



## *South Carolina Universal Service Fund*

- provides monetary support for telecommunications network and services provided by 24 Incumbent Local Exchange Companies (ILECs)

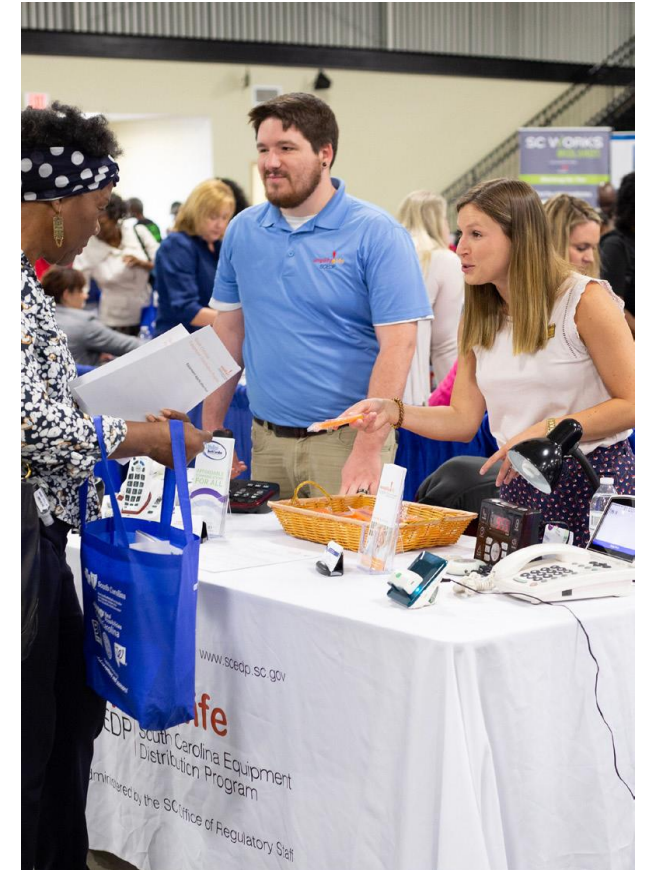
## *Lifeline*

- provides discounts to state residents that qualify for the Federal Lifeline (135% below poverty level)

# Telecommunications Services

## *South Carolina Dual Party Relay Fund*

- funded by the telephone users of the state through their telephone, wireless, VoIP service provider, or prepaid wireless retail outlet. The ORS uses the DPRF funds collected from consumers and businesses to finance the following programs primarily for individuals with hearing or speech disabilities:
1. Telecommunications Relay Service--allows persons with hearing or speech disabilities to place and receive telephone calls
  2. SC Equipment Distribution Program (SCEDP)--provides specialized equipment allowing persons with hearing or speech disabilities to place and receive telephone calls
  3. Real-Time Closed Captioning--sponsors local news broadcasts on five stations in four South Carolina markets.





# Emergency Management (ESF 12)

ORS carries out the responsibilities of Emergency Support Function 12 (ESF 12) in coordination with the SC Emergency Management Division (SCEMD). During a disaster in South Carolina, ESF 12 takes the lead on electric and natural gas issues while also providing support with issues concerning railroads and transportation.

ORS is responsible for coordinating with energy providers to establish priorities to repair damaged energy systems and to provide temporary, alternate, or interim sources of natural gas supply and electric power.

The ORS also maintains communications with electric and natural gas utilities in responding to and recovering from emergencies regarding;

- electric generating capacity shortages,
- electric generating fuel shortages,
- transmission and distribution line outages,
- electrical service outages affecting the public, and
- natural gas supply disruptions.

# Responsibilities of ESF 12

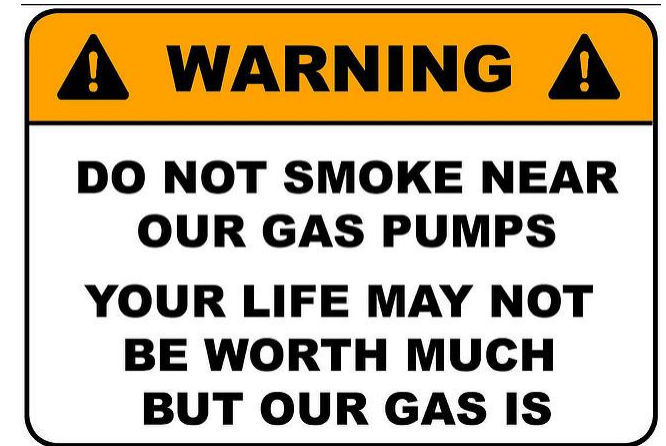
1. Provide information
2. Conduit for Waivers and Requests
3. Request for Resources and Equipment
4. Facilitator



# Fuel Plan

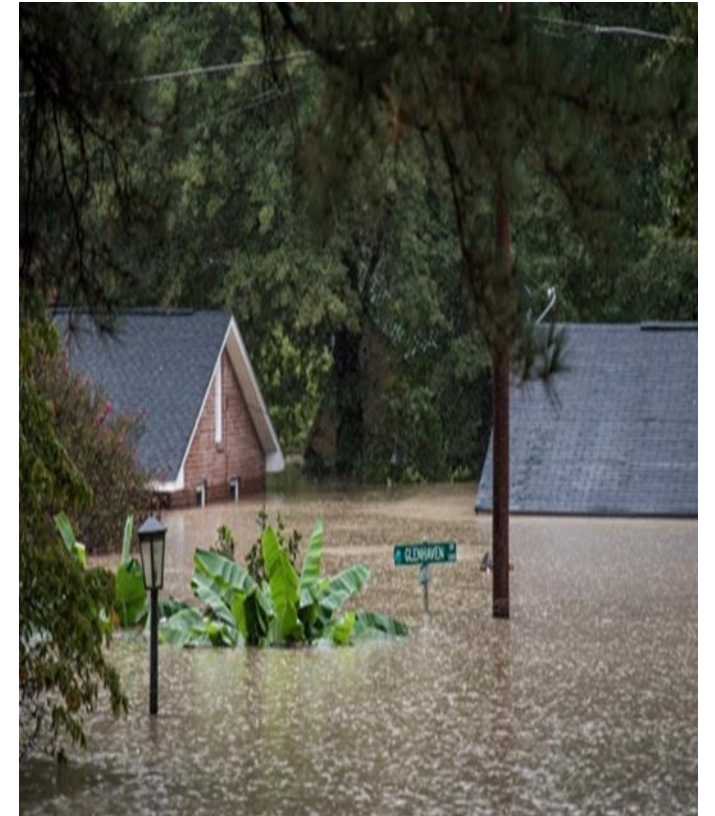


- Build relationships with pipeline operators, fuel stop owners, and distributors
- Identify evacuation and re-entry routes
- Work with industry to ensure that fuel stops along the routes maintain supply



# Working with State Emergency Response

## Hurricanes



October 2015 Flooding



# Hurricanes

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Pre-Storm:

**1. Provide NWS/NHC forecast and modeling**

**2. Government Information:**

- **State of emergency**
- **Evacuation Orders**
- **Request and disseminate waivers**
- **Business Re-entry information and Placarding**
- **Hotel Information**
- **Wheelchair and Stretcher Vans**

# Hurricanes

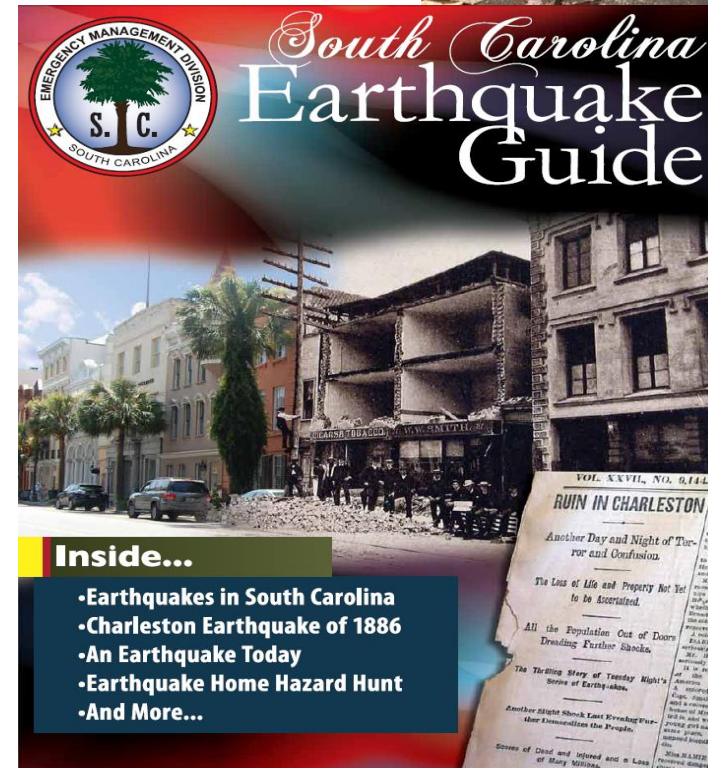
## **During and Post Storm:**

- **Lifting of evacuation orders**
- **Request and disseminate waivers**
- **Curfew information**
- **Coordination of airspace restrictions**
- **LNOs, Security for certain critical infrastructure**
- **Coordination with DOT—lines in road, traffic cameras**



# Not Just Hurricanes and Ice Storms!

- COVID-19 (Crimson Contagion)
- Terrorism (Phoenix Dawn)
- Solar Eclipse
- Nuclear Release (Southern Exposure)
- Cyber Attacks (Gridex)
- Earthquakes (Vigilant Guard)
- Heat Waves
- Geo-Magnetic Pulse
- Long Duration Power Outage
- Wildfires
- Severe Weather
- Governor's Annual Table-Top Exercise (TTX)



# Issues During Pandemic

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## **Safety—Pipeline, Railroad, Transportation**

- Conducted inspections with PPE
- Many business offices were closed
- Training was limited
- Number of inspections declined
- Services by the carrier declined
- SCPERI and DPI suspended

## **Telecommunications**

- Could not serve the def and hard-of-hearing population through outreach
- Halted installs for equipment
- Could not serve low-income through outreach (Lifeline)
- No visitors to the office



# Issues During Pandemic

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- Governor's Request to suspend disconnects
- Emergency Rental Assistance Program
- PPE for the utilities
- Priority Testing/Vaccinations for Utility Workers
- Waiver of Governor's Orders for Critical Infrastructure Employees
- Funding for Captioning at ETV for school children
- Severe Weather Outbreak—April 2020
- Grid Resiliency Study as a result of issues in Texas in February 2021

# Utility Response Issues During Pandemic

- Availability of hotels and the ability to properly social distance in hotels and other living facilities (tent cities, rec centers etc.) limited the amount of crews  
Solution: Coordinated with PRT to utilize different parks, facilities or even open-up hotels that are closed.
- Ability to social distance during crew meals at crew quarters and camps required crews to eat in shifts, pulling them off the line.  
Solution: “drive through” boxed lunches or setting up more food camps with less capacity
- Large lay-down yards are typically used to stage supplies. These yards did not promote social distancing.  
Solution: Delivery of materials to individual crews but this takes longer.
- Mutual assistance came, but it came in waves versus all at once.  
Solution: Utilities worked outside of their normal mutual assistance sources and obtained crews from further west/north. Mutual Assistance Crews took longer to arrive

# Utility Response Issues During Pandemic

- Obtaining adequate PPE for a long-lasting event.  
Solution: Secured PPE before event occurred. But because this was new to the energy providers, they could not gauge their burn rate
- Concerns for employees who must stay at plant during a storm (Social distancing in ECC- Energy Control Center and DCC- Distribution Central Center). Employees that work remotely due to COVID may lose power and cannot contribute. Loss of workforce due to testing positive/becoming ill.  
Solution: Set up alternate work locations and mobile health facilities near to generation plants
- Staffing and meeting in large groups for updates and safety briefings was not possible.  
Solution: hosted safety briefings by conference calls. This method was not as efficient and did not give opportunities for appropriate demonstrations or time to ask questions to maintain a safe work environment
- Challenges increased storm response costs that will eventually be passed on to the consumer.

# THE NEXT GREATEST THING



50 Years of Rural Electrification  
In America

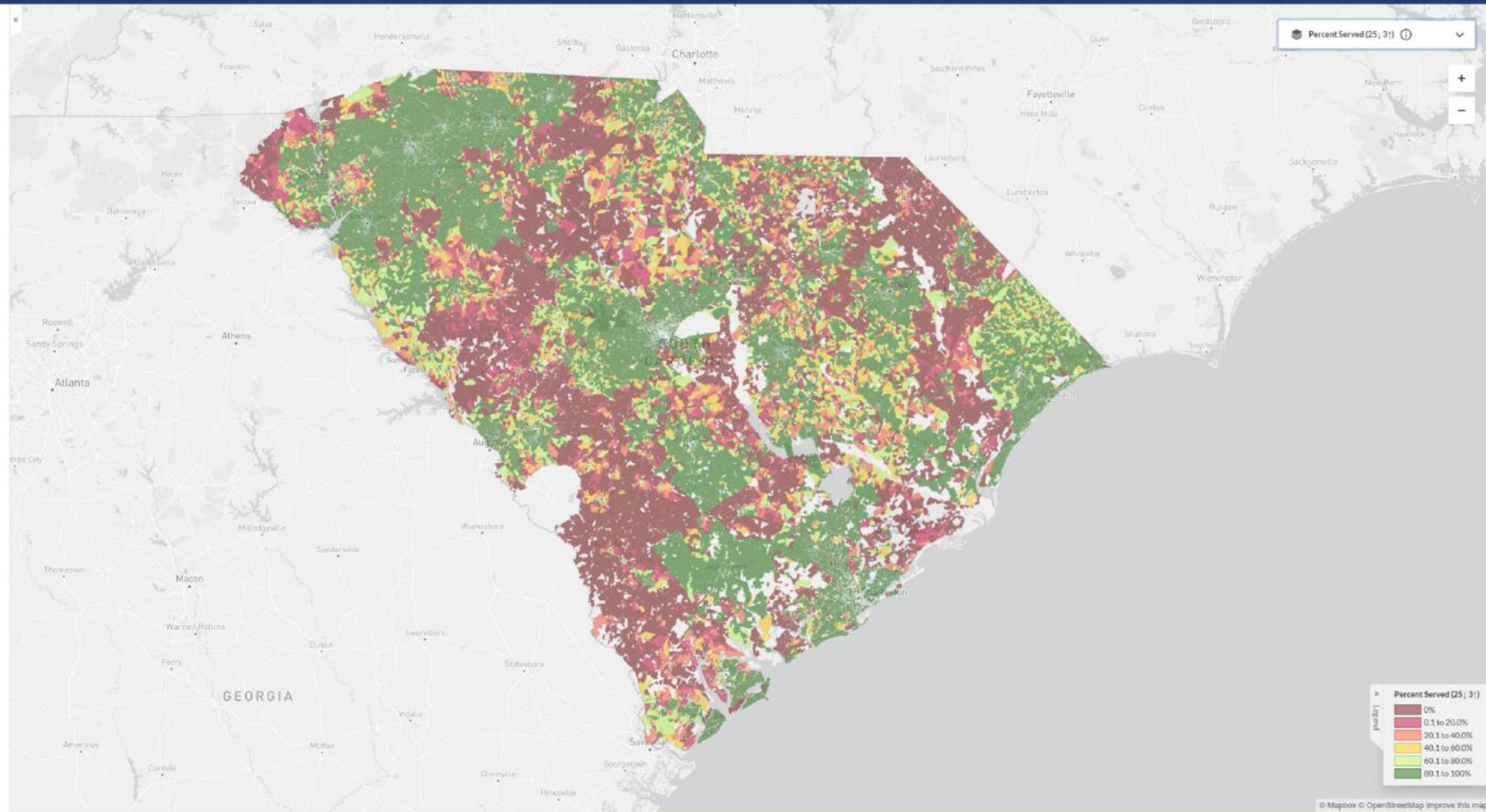
*“Brothers and sisters,  
I want to tell you this.  
The greatest thing on earth  
is to have the love of God in your  
heart, and the next greatest thing  
is to have electricity  
in your house.”*

Farmer giving witness in a rural  
Tennessee church in the early 1940s





Search for an address to find its broadband availability information.



# Act 142

Act 142 allocated \$50 million of the Coronavirus Relief Fund for South Carolina included in the CARES Act to the South Carolina Office of Regulatory Staff for broadband initiatives related to COVID-19.



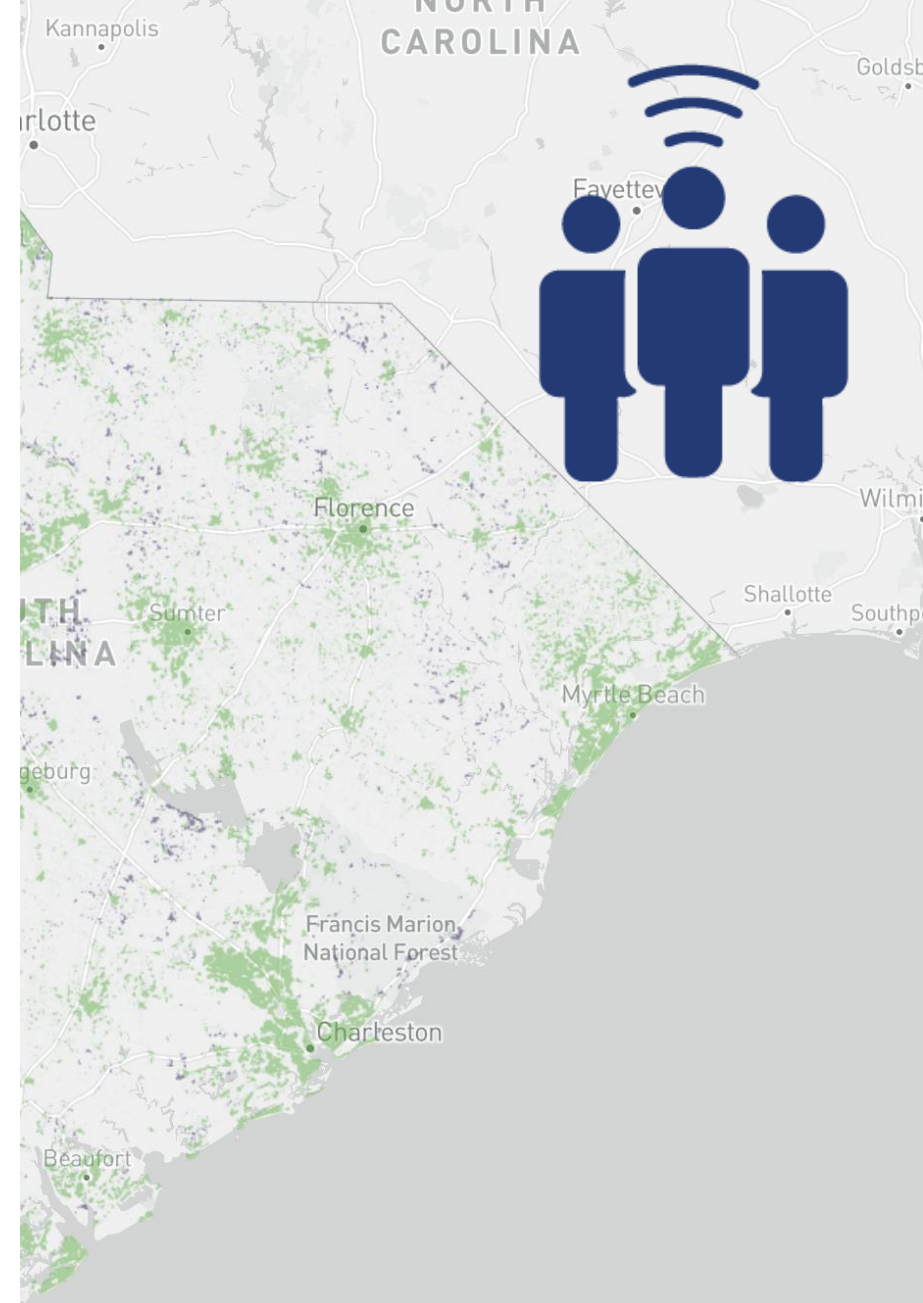
# C.A.R.E.S. Act Funding Authorization

Hotspots and Monthly Service for Student Households	\$20,000,000
Mapping	\$300,000
Infrastructure	\$29,700,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 50,000,000</b>

# Mapping

Secured a vendor for the development of a broadband statewide county-by-county mapping plan and statewide broadband infrastructure plan

<https://south-carolina.vetro.io/>





# Online Learning Initiative

- Procured 100,000 mobile hotspots and monthly internet service for qualifying student households through December 30, 2020
- Program transferred to SC Department of Education on December 30, 2020



# Online Learning Initiative

- Annual income of two hundred fifty percent or less of federal poverty guidelines
- Individual attending a public or private K-12 school or a public or private college, university, or technical college
- Schools responsible for distributing hotspots and ensuring that appropriate security measures are installed
- *Priority schools:* counties that contain a school district that has been defined by Department of Education as having a poverty rate greater than or equal to eighty-six percent



# Online Learning Initiative

## *Statistics*

### Number of Participants

Public K-12	82
Private K-12	4
Charter	3
Higher Ed Institutions	26
	<hr/> 115

### Number of Hotspots / Wired Services Ordered

Verizon	60,059
AT&T	24,477
T-Mobile	1,377
Service Only	390
Wired	6,181
	<hr/> 92,484



ONLINE LEARNING  
**Initiative**

# Broadband Infrastructure Program

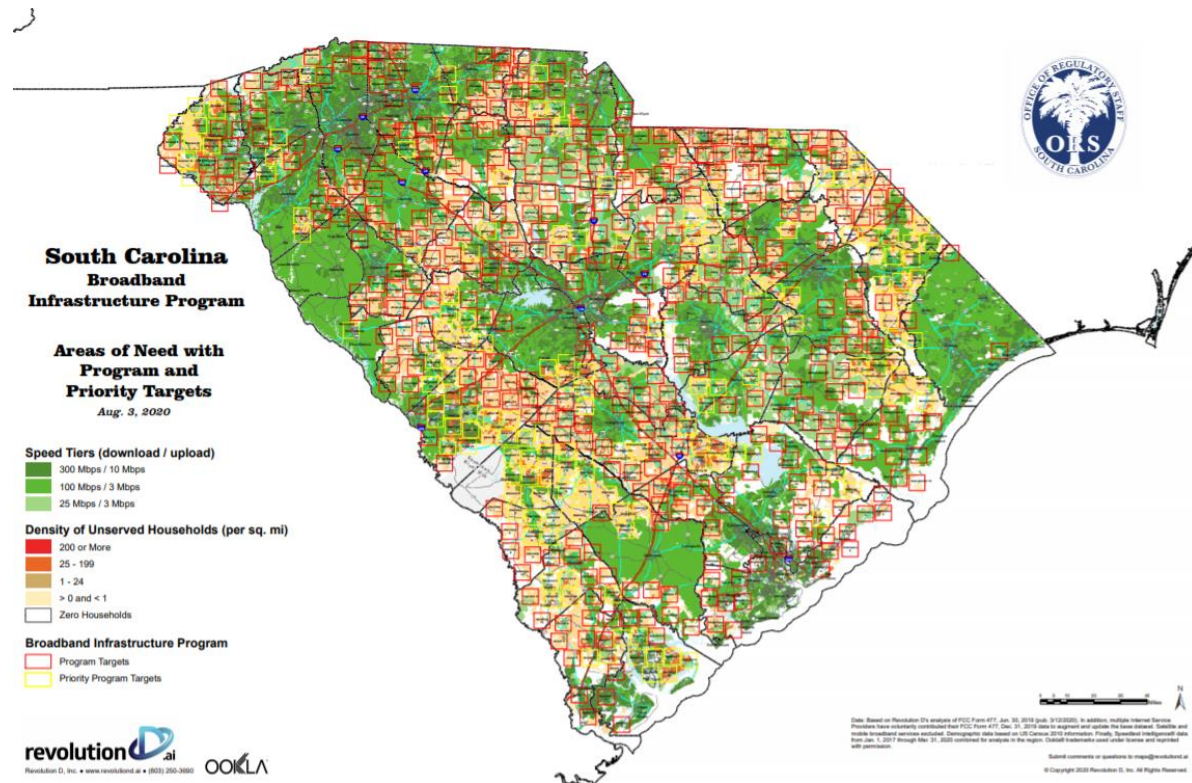
Expansion of broadband infrastructure with emphasized services to rural communities and communities with a high prevalence of COVID-19 or with demographic characteristics consistent with risk factors for COVID-19





# Broadband Infrastructure Program

*RevolutionD mapping identified unserved areas for infrastructure deployment*

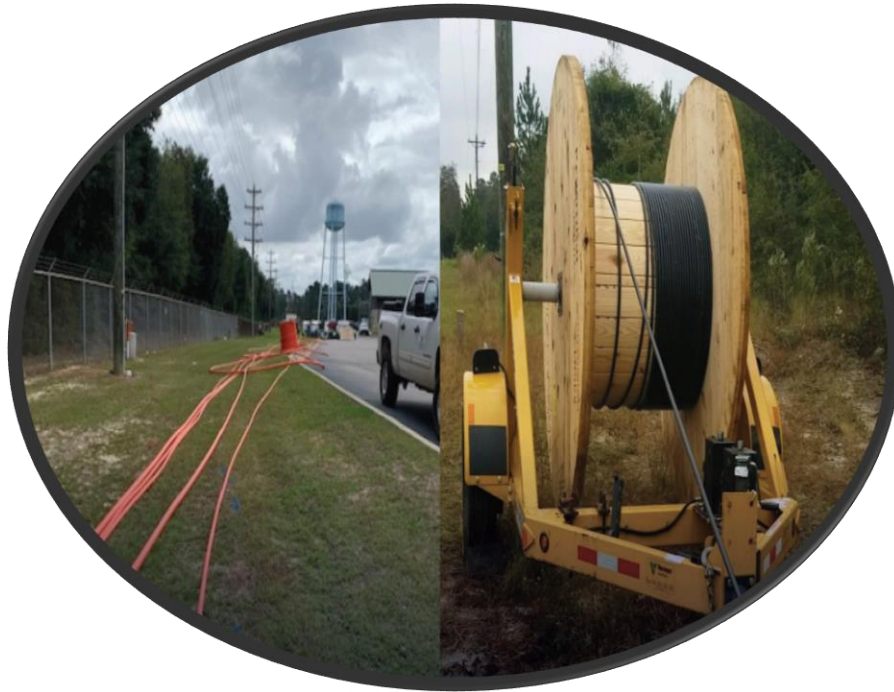


# Broadband Infrastructure Program

<b>Applications Funded</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>Companies</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Counties Served</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Program Targets</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Priority Targets</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Homes and Businesses Passed</b>	<b>19,574</b>
<b>Total Funds Expended</b>	<b>\$17,157,488</b>

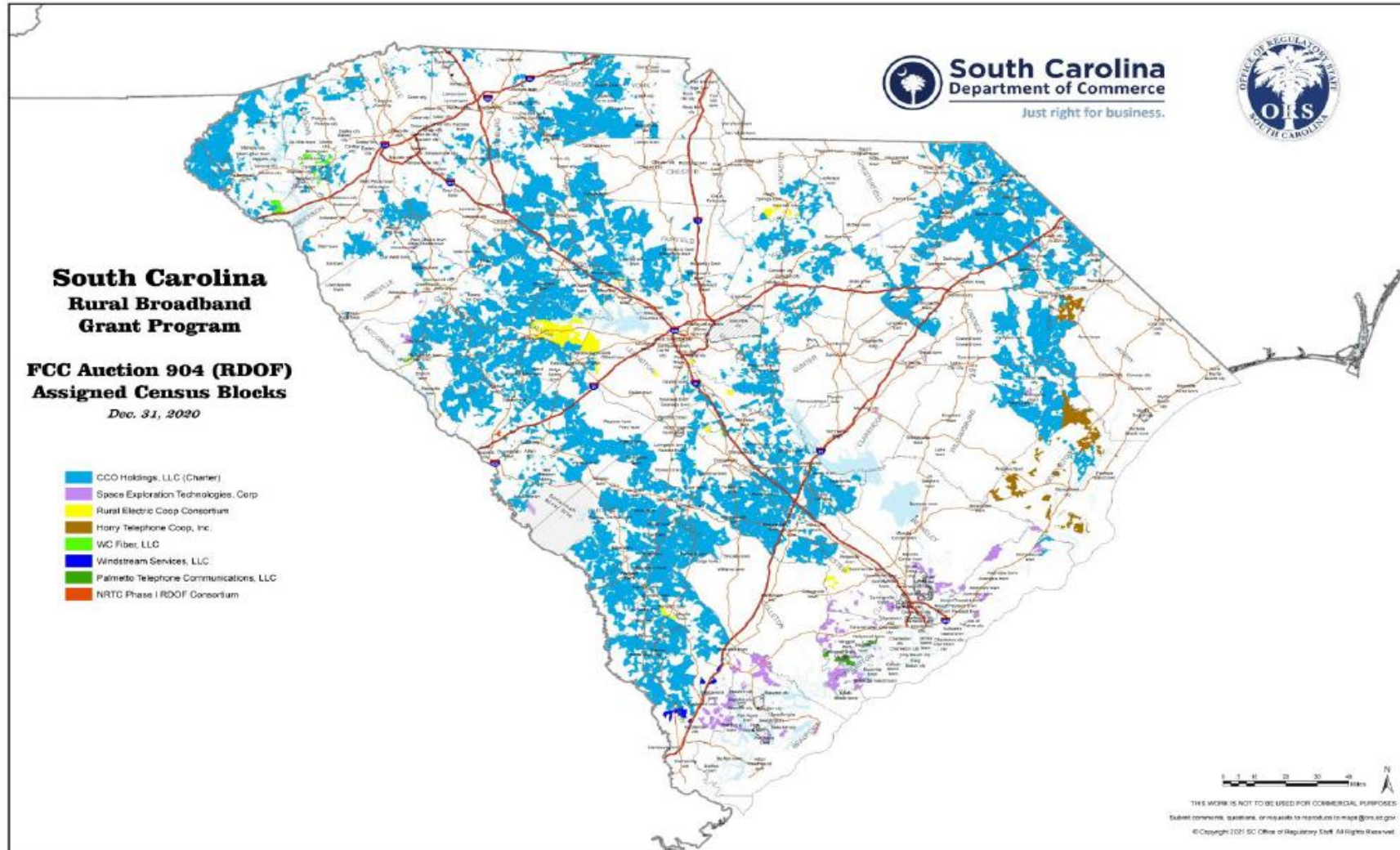
*Funding of these applications is subject to the completion of a funding agreement with the ORS and the evaluation of any duplication of infrastructure. More information can be found on the ORS website at [ORS.SC.GOV/Broadband](https://ORS.SC.GOV/Broadband).*

# Future Broadband Projects





# FCC Rural Digital Opportunity Fund





# USDA ReConnect



**\$36.4M USDA Investment**  
**\$52.7M Overall Investment**

**21,794 Households**  
**56,445 Residents**

## SC Round 1 Funding Commitments (\$600M nationally):

- Orangeburg County (10/22/19)  
[USDA Invests \\$9.75 Million in Rural Broadband for South Carolina Families](#)
- Berkeley/Charleston Counties (12/9/19)  
[USDA Invests \\$8.1 Million in Rural Broadband for South Carolina Families](#)
- Kershaw County (2/25/20)  
[USDA Invests \\$9.1 Million in Rural Broadband for South Carolina Families](#)

## SC Round 2 Funding Commitments (\$550M nationally):

- Oconee County (9/17/20)  
[USDA Invests \\$7.5M in Rural Broadband for South Carolina Families](#)
- Lancaster/Chester Counties (1/8/21)  
[USDA Invests \\$16M in High-Speed Broadband in Rural Illinois, Oregon and South Carolina \(\\$1.6M\)](#)

## Round 2 Announcement (Grants submitted in April 2020, 5 remaining SC applicants under review):

[USDA to Make \\$550 Million in Funding Available in 2020 to Deploy High-Speed Broadband Internet Infrastructure in Rural America](#)



# Future Federal Funding

**Accessible, Affordable Internet for All Act introduced on March 11. (\$94 Billion)**

**National Telecommunications Information Administration (NTIA) Grant (\$121 million)**

**LIFT Act--Leading Infrastructure for Tomorrow's America Act (\$312 billion)**

**American Rescue Plan Act Money (ARPA)--\$500 million?**

## SC Rep. Jim Clyburn reintroduces bill that funds broadband internet in rural communities

BY THOMAS NOVELLY TNOVELLY@POSTANDCOURIER.COM

MAR 11, 2021 UPDATED MAR 11, 2021



*Courtesy of Post & Courier*

# Rural Broadband Grant Program 2021

- Allocation of \$30,000,000 for a competitive grant program to expand broadband availability and access in South Carolina.
- The ORS and South Carolina Department of Commerce jointly developed guidelines
- Only certain counties are eligible
- Applicant will be required to provide a 1:1 match of nonpublic funds



# Rural Broadband Grant Program 2021

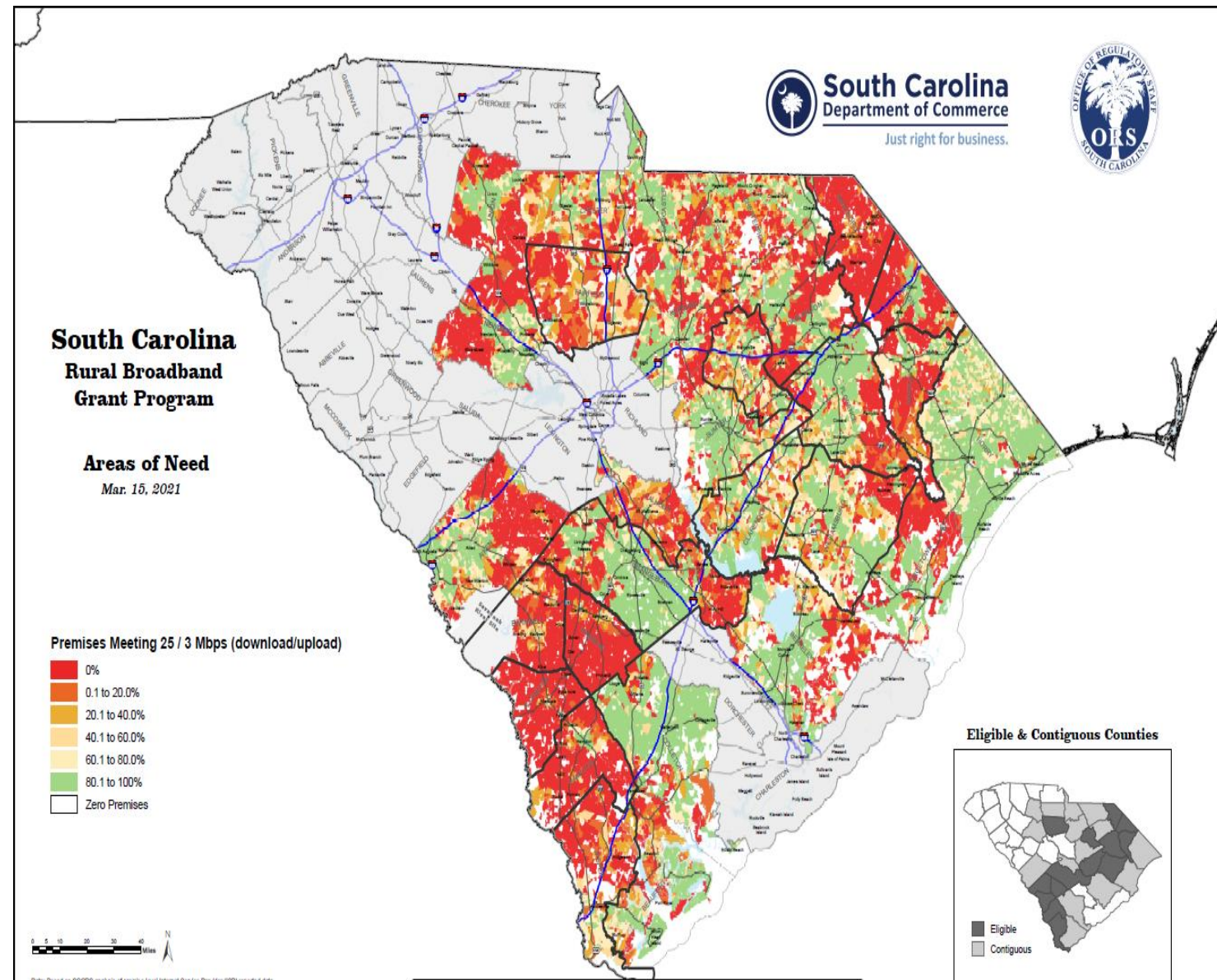
## Eligible Counties

Allendale, Bamberg, Barnwell, Clarendon, Dillon, Florence, Hampton, Jasper, Orangeburg, Marion, Marlboro, Fairfield, Lee, Williamsburg

Up to \$7 million in total combined funding may be granted to the following counties:

Aiken, Beaufort, Colleton, Berkeley, Georgetown, Horry, Calhoun, Sumter, Newberry, Union, Chester, Lancaster, Kershaw, Chesterfield, Darlington

<https://ors.sc.gov/broadband/funding/rural-broadband-grant-program>



**ORS.SC.GOV/Broadband**



# Rural Broadband Grant Program 2021

Event	Date/Deadline
Areas of Need Published on the ORS Website	3/15/21
Application Period Opens	4/1/21
Challenge Period Opens	4/15/21
Challenge Period Closes	5/14/21
Application Period Closes	5/14/21
Submitted Applications Posted on the ORS Website	5/18/21
Comments Due on Submitted Applications	6/1/21
Funding Agreements Sent to the Companies	6/18/21
Funding Agreements Returned to the ORS	6/30/21
Notices to Proceed Issued	7/15/21
3rd Q 2021 Financial and Construction Progress Report Due	10/15/21
4th Q 2021 Financial and Construction Progress Report Due	1/14/22
1st Q 2022 Financial and Construction Progress Report Due	4/15/22
2nd Q 2022 Financial and Construction Progress Report Due	7/15/22
3rd Q 2022 Financial and Construction Progress Report Due	10/14/22
Project Completion	10/31/22
Final Reporting Due	1/15/23





## Session 1

Understanding Internet Infrastructure

## Session 2

Eliminating Gaps in K-12 Education

## Session 3

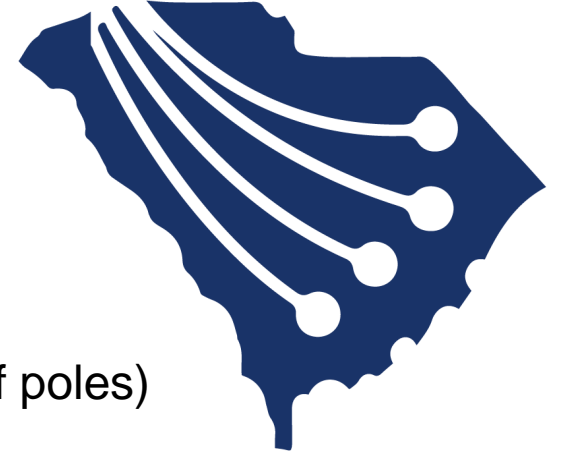
Identifying Healthcare Opportunities



# Broadband Community Champion Training Program



# Issues from Broadband Construction



- “Dig Once Policy”
- Pole attachment emergencies (slips, falls, shock, damage to poles, replacement of poles)
- Pipeline Strikes (natural gas, water, sewer, propane, petroleum)
- Electric Line “Dig-ins”
- Rights of Way Disputes
- Permitting Issues—Permit Working Group
- Traffic Control
- 811—Where is your locate ticket?





**Tom Allen**

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South Carolina Office of Regulatory Staff

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