



Reported by [Bart Winkler](#)

## Rural Areas Struggle to Find Cell Phone Service



In emergency situations, cell phones have become a vital tool. But getting good cell phone service in rural areas can be difficult because of the lack of towers. A program that helps improve cell phone service in rural areas could now be in danger of going away. When the Village of La Farge realized they needed cell phone service in their community, petitions were signed and calls were made to build a tower nearby. Thanks to help from a federal program, a tower was

built three months ago. But now, other rural communities may not get that same kind of help.

La Farge Village President Steve Donovan has seen plenty of people try to find cell phone service in his town. But he says not being able to find help in case of emergency was their biggest problem. "People that were injured, either on horseback or hiking or camping. We had one lady that crawled the top of a hill a half of a mile to get 911 service," he says.

"The absence of cell phones make it very tough for people involved to seek help," says U.S. Cellular President and CEO Jack Rooney. With help from the FCC's Universal Service Fund, U.S. Cellular was able to build a tower nearby. But the FCC is looking to limit their funding for wireless services, funding Rooney says is essential if rural areas want to become connected. "The Midwest is loaded with these kinds of towns. Our ability to help them is important, it is important to us, but I cant just go out and spend 30,000 dollars a pop in an area where I wont get enough revenue to support that service," he says.

And citizens of La Farge say that support was a big step for their community. "What we had was outdated, what we have now is wonderful," Donovan says. He also says cell phone service is needed if rural communities want to attract businesses from the larger cities. But he does say the biggest benefit of cell phone service is that people can find help easier during emergencies.

The proposal could be passed as early as November 1st. If you are concerned about the proposal, or would like to learn more about it, you can go to the website [www.connectingruralamerica.org](http://www.connectingruralamerica.org)

However, according to Adam Segal of the Coalition to Keep America Connected, "US Cellular is on a mission to block a critical reform to the Universal Service Fund." He says " (a) dozen or more telephone companies in Wisconsin... want the wireless fund to be brought under control, and more than 800 companies across the nation that also support the proposed FCC measure. To learn more about this side of the story, you can go to this website: [www.keepamericaconnected.org](http://www.keepamericaconnected.org)