



## Open letter from Sheriff Winters

December 17, 2007

As the Sheriff of Jackson County, I am writing to alert your readers to a critical public safety issue affecting residents of Oregon — the lack of high-quality wireless coverage in rural areas. I can testify that the lack of high-quality wireless coverage in rural areas is a critical public safety concern — in Oregon and in states around the country. First responders, sheriffs, firefighters and police officers all depend on reliable coverage to handle emergency situations ranging from natural disasters, car accidents to reports of domestic violence. In many cases, and particularly with respect to homeland security, reliable wireless service can literally mean the difference between life and death.

Despite this, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) recently signaled its intent to cap the Universal Service Fund (USF) "very soon" — and could do so any day. Oregon's rural wireless carriers estimate that a cap would cost Oregon more than \$2.7 million per year in USF funding, jeopardizing the construction of many new sites, as well as wireless growth for the years the cap is in place.

In an effort to minimize public safety risks, Congress established the USF, a federal fund that provides critical support for telecommunications companies to build new cell towers in areas across the country where investment costs are particularly high. In remote parts of Oregon, there is a great need for reliable cell phone coverage so that public safety officials are able to respond quickly in emergency situations.

Unfortunately for the residents of these rural areas, like Wimer, Williams and Butte Falls, this much-needed USF support could soon be put into jeopardy.

As a Sheriff, it is my job to ensure the safety of the residents in my county. I believe it is critical that all Americans, regardless of geography, have equal access to reliable wireless networks.

A cap on federal support for the expansion and upgrading of rural wireless technology would unfairly jeopardize the safety and well-being of residents in rural Oregon and rural citizens around the country, and I urge you to please visit [www.connectingruralamerica.org](http://www.connectingruralamerica.org) to make your voice heard.

Michael Winters

Jackson County Sheriff