
IDAHO PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

For Immediate Release

Case No. GNR-T-01-12, Order No. 29466

April 14, 2004

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Website: www.puc.state.id.us

Commission denies petition for toll-free calling

Boise – The Idaho Public Utilities Commission today denied a petition by residents in the Pine-Featherville area and residents in the Bruneau-Grand View to have toll-free calling between the two areas.

About 107 residents of the two communities signed petitions asking the commission to grant toll-free extended area service (EAS) between the Bruneau/Grand View residents, served by CenturyTel of the Gem State, and the Pine/Featherville residents, served by Rural Telephone Company.

EAS creates toll-free calling among exchanges, but the costs are recovered by increasing the basic, local rates for all the customers within the exchanges. When considering a request for toll-free calling, the commission typically adheres a test of six community service standards. If the commission finds those standards are met and the benefits of EAS outweigh the costs, EAS is usually granted.

The community of interest standards include geographic proximity between the exchanges; the presence of geographic or other physical barriers such as mountains and rivers; a county-seat relationship; a school district relationship; proximity to medical facilities and services; and the willingness of customers to pay increased local rates.

An investigation by commission staff found the petition did not meet any of the standards. Customers did not indicate an interest in paying higher local rates to accommodate EAS. The areas between the exchanges are more than 50 miles apart, each is served by their own school districts and the vast majority of the residents reside in separate counties. The schools serving all the exchanges have toll-free access to the homes of all students and none of the residents have to make a toll call to reach their county seat. Customers from the exchanges primarily rely on medical facilities in the Mountain Home or Boise exchanges, which do not require toll calls.

The primary link, according to commission staff, is recreation. Staff indicated that some Bruneau-Grand View residents have summer cabins in the Pine-Featherville areas.

Further, the commission noted that the Rural Telephone Company, serving Pine and Featherville, receives universal service funding, a fund supported by all Idaho telephone customers to keep telephone rates in rural, high-cost areas comparable to rates in urban areas, where is it less

expensive to serve customers. Universal service funds would likely be used to implement EAS in Rural's territory, commission staff found.

"The commission is reluctant to use USF funds contributed by Idaho ratepayers generally to finance EAS between exchanges that have tenuous ties at best," said the commissioners in today's order.

Interested parties have until May 5 to petition the commission for reconsideration. Petitions must state specifically why the petitioner contends the order is unreasonable, unlawful or erroneous. Petitions should include a statement of the nature and quantity of evidence the petitioner will offer if reconsideration is granted. Petitions can be mailed to commission offices at 472 W. Washington St., Boise, 83720, or faxed to 208-334-3762.

A complete copy of the order and other documents related to this case are available for public inspection at the commission's offices or can be accessed from the commission's Web site at www.puc.state.id.us. Click on "Recent Orders and Notices" and scroll down to Case No. GNR-T-01-12.

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