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(Original Signature of Member)

117TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

# H. R.

To allow certain State and Tribal permitting authority to encourage expansion of broadband service to rural and Tribal communities, and for other purposes.

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## IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. CURTIS introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on \_\_\_\_\_

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# A BILL

To allow certain State and Tribal permitting authority to encourage expansion of broadband service to rural and Tribal communities, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*  
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Rural Broadband Per-  
5 mitting Efficiency Act of 2021”.

6 **SEC. 2. DEFINITIONS.**

7 In this Act:

1           (1) BROADBAND PROJECT.—The term “broad-  
2           band project” means an installation by a broadband  
3           provider of wireless or broadband infrastructure, in-  
4           cluding but not limited to, copper lines, fiber optic  
5           lines, communications towers, buildings, or other im-  
6           provements on Federal land.

7           (2) BROADBAND PROVIDER.—The term “broad-  
8           band provider” means a provider of wireless or  
9           broadband infrastructure that enables a user to  
10          originate and receive high-quality voice, data, graph-  
11          ics, and video telecommunications.

12          (3) INDIAN LANDS.—The term “Indian Lands”  
13          means—

14                (A) any land owned by an Indian Tribe, lo-  
15                cated within the boundaries of an Indian res-  
16                ervation, pueblo, or rancheria; or

17                (B) any land located within the boundaries  
18                of an Indian reservation, pueblo, or rancheria,  
19                the title to which is held—

20                    (i) in trust by the United States for  
21                    the benefit of an Indian Tribe or an indi-  
22                    vidual Indian;

23                    (ii) by an Indian Tribe or an indi-  
24                    vidual Indian, subject to restriction against

1 alienation under laws of the United States;  
2 or  
3 (iii) by a dependent Indian commu-  
4 nity.

5 (4) INDIAN TRIBE.—The term “Indian Tribe”  
6 means a federally recognized Indian Tribe.

7 (5) OPERATIONAL RIGHT-OF-WAY.—The term  
8 “operational right-of-way” means all real property  
9 interests (including easements) acquired for the con-  
10 struction or operation of a project, including the lo-  
11 cations of the roadway, bridges, interchanges, cul-  
12 verts, drainage, clear zone, traffic control signage,  
13 landscaping, copper and fiber optic lines, utility shel-  
14 ters, and broadband infrastructure as installed by  
15 broadband providers, and any rest areas with direct  
16 access to a controlled access highway or the National  
17 Highway System.

18 (6) SECRETARY CONCERNED.—The term “Sec-  
19 retary concerned” means—

20 (A) the Secretary of Agriculture (acting  
21 through the Chief of the Forest Service), with  
22 respect to National Forest System land; and

23 (B) the Secretary of the Interior, with re-  
24 spect to land managed by the Department of

1           the Interior (including land held in trust for an  
2           Indian Tribe).

3 **SEC. 3. STATE OR TRIBAL PERMITTING AUTHORITY.**

4           (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary concerned shall es-  
5           tablish (or in the case where both Department of the Inte-  
6           rior and National Forest System land would be affected,  
7           shall jointly establish) a voluntary program under which  
8           any State or Indian Tribe may offer, and the Secretary  
9           concerned may agree, to enter into a memorandum of un-  
10          derstanding to allow for the State or Indian Tribe to pre-  
11          pare environmental analyses required under the National  
12          Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 et  
13          seq.) for the permitting of broadband projects within an  
14          operational right-of-way on National Forest System land,  
15          land managed by the Department of the Interior, and In-  
16          dian Lands. Under such a memorandum of understanding,  
17          an Indian Tribe or State may volunteer to cooperate with  
18          the signatories to the memorandum in the preparation of  
19          the analyses required under the National Environmental  
20          Policy Act of 1969.

21          (b) ASSUMPTION OF RESPONSIBILITIES.—

22                 (1) IN GENERAL.—In entering into a memo-  
23                 randum of understanding under this section, the  
24                 Secretary concerned may assign to the State or In-  
25                 dian Tribe, and the State or Indian Tribe may agree

1 to assume, all or part of the responsibilities of the  
2 Secretary concerned for environmental analyses  
3 under the National Environmental Policy Act of  
4 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.).

5 (2) STATE OR INDIAN TRIBE RESPONSIBILITY.—  
6

7 (A) IN GENERAL.—A State or Indian  
8 Tribe that assumes any responsibility under  
9 paragraph (1) shall be subject to the same pro-  
10 cedural and substantive requirements as would  
11 apply if the responsibility were carried out by  
12 the Secretary concerned.

13 (B) EFFECT OF ASSUMPTION OF RESPON-  
14 SIBILITY.—A State or Indian Tribe that as-  
15 sumes any responsibility, including financial re-  
16 sponsibility, under paragraph (1) shall be solely  
17 responsible and solely liable for carrying out, in  
18 lieu of the Secretary concerned, the responsibil-  
19 ities assumed under that paragraph until the  
20 date on which the program is terminated under  
21 subsection (g).

22 (C) ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW.—A State  
23 or Indian Tribe that assumes any responsibility  
24 under paragraph (1) shall comply with the envi-  
25 ronmental review procedures under parts 1500–

1           1508 of title 40, Code of Federal Regulations  
2           (or successor regulations), and the regulations  
3           of the Secretary concerned.

4           (3) FEDERAL RESPONSIBILITY.—Any responsi-  
5           bility of the Secretary concerned described in para-  
6           graph (1) that is not explicitly assumed by the State  
7           or Indian Tribe in the memorandum of under-  
8           standing shall remain the responsibility of the Sec-  
9           retary concerned.

10          (c) OFFER AND NOTIFICATION.—A State or Indian  
11          Tribe that intends to offer to enter into a memorandum  
12          of understanding under this section shall provide to the  
13          Secretary concerned notice of the intent of the State or  
14          Indian Tribe not later than 90 days before the date on  
15          which the State or Indian Tribe submits a formal written  
16          offer to the Secretary concerned.

17          (d) TRIBAL CONSULTATION.—Within 90 days of en-  
18          tering into any memorandum of understanding with a  
19          State, the Secretary concerned shall initiate consultation  
20          with relevant Indian Tribes.

21          (e) MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING.—A memo-  
22          randum of understanding entered into under this section  
23          shall—

24                 (1) be executed by the Governor or the Gov-  
25                 ernor's designee, or in the case of an Indian Tribe,

1 by an officer designated by the governing body of  
2 the Indian Tribe;

3 (2) be for a term not to exceed 10 years;

4 (3) be in such form as the Secretary concerned  
5 may prescribe;

6 (4) provide that the State or Indian Tribe—

7 (A) agrees to assume all or part of the re-  
8 sponsibilities of the Secretary concerned de-  
9 scribed in subsection (b)(1);

10 (B) expressly consents, including through  
11 the adoption of express waivers of sovereign im-  
12 munity, on behalf of the State or Indian Tribe,  
13 to accept the jurisdiction of the Federal courts  
14 for the compliance, discharge, and enforcement  
15 of any responsibility of the Secretary concerned  
16 assumed by the State or Indian Tribe;

17 (C) certify that State laws and regulations,  
18 with respect to States, or Tribal laws and regu-  
19 lations, with respect to Indian Tribes, are in ef-  
20 fect that—

21 (i) authorize the State or Indian Tribe  
22 to take the actions necessary to carry out  
23 the responsibilities being assumed; and

24 (ii) are comparable to section 552 of  
25 title 5, United States Code, including pro-

1           viding that any decision regarding the pub-  
2           lic availability of a document under the  
3           State laws is reviewable by a court of com-  
4           petent jurisdiction;

5           (D) agrees to maintain the financial re-  
6           sources necessary to carry out the responsibil-  
7           ities being assumed;

8           (E) agrees to provide to the Secretary con-  
9           cerned any information the Secretary concerned  
10          considers necessary to ensure that the State or  
11          Indian Tribe is adequately carrying out the re-  
12          sponsibilities assigned to and assumed by the  
13          State or Indian Tribe;

14          (F) agrees to return revenues generated  
15          from the use of public lands authorized under  
16          this section to the United States annually, in  
17          accordance with the Federal Land Policy Man-  
18          agement Act of 1976 (43 U.S.C. 1701 et seq.);  
19          and

20          (G) agrees to send a copy of all author-  
21          izing documents to the United States for proper  
22          notation and recordkeeping;

23          (5) prioritize and expedite any analyses under  
24          the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42

1 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.) under the memorandum of un-  
2 derstanding;

3 (6) not be granted to a State on Indian Lands  
4 without the consent of the relevant Indian Tribe;  
5 and

6 (7) not be granted to an Indian Tribe on State  
7 lands without the consent of the relevant State.

8 (f) LIMITATION.—Nothing in this section permits a  
9 State or Indian Tribe to assume—

10 (1) any rulemaking authority of the Secretary  
11 concerned under any Federal law; and

12 (2) Federal Government responsibilities for gov-  
13 ernment-to-government consultation with Indian  
14 Tribes.

15 (g) TERMINATION.—

16 (1) TERMINATION BY THE SECRETARY.—The  
17 Secretary concerned may terminate the participation  
18 of any State or Indian Tribe in the program estab-  
19 lished under this section if—

20 (A) the Secretary concerned determines  
21 that the State or Indian Tribe is not adequately  
22 carrying out the responsibilities assigned to and  
23 assumed by the State or Indian Tribe;

24 (B) the Secretary concerned provides to  
25 the State or Indian Tribe—

1 (i) notification of the determination of  
2 noncompliance; and

3 (ii) a period of at least 30 days during  
4 which to take such corrective action as the  
5 Secretary concerned determines is nec-  
6 essary to comply with the applicable agree-  
7 ment; and

8 (C) the State or Indian Tribe, after the no-  
9 tification and period provided under subpara-  
10 graph (B), fails to take satisfactory corrective  
11 action, as determined by the Secretary con-  
12 cerned.

13 (2) TERMINATION BY THE STATE OR INDIAN  
14 TRIBE.—A State or Indian Tribe may terminate the  
15 participation of the State or Indian Tribe in the pro-  
16 gram established under this section at any time by  
17 providing to the Secretary concerned a notice of in-  
18 tent to terminate by not later than the date that is  
19 90 days before the date of termination.

20 (3) TERMINATION OF MEMORANDUM OF UN-  
21 DERSTANDING WITH STATE OR INDIAN TRIBE.—A  
22 State or an Indian Tribe may terminate a joint  
23 memorandum of understanding under this section at  
24 any time by providing to the Secretary concerned a

1 notice of intent to terminate by no later than the  
2 date that is 90 days before the date of termination.

3 **SEC. 4. FEDERAL BROADBAND PERMIT COORDINATION.**

4 (a) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Secretary concerned  
5 shall establish a broadband permit streamlining team com-  
6 prised of qualified staff under subsection (b)(4) in each  
7 State or regional office that has been delegated responsi-  
8 bility for issuing permits for broadband projects.

9 (b) MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING.—

10 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 90 days after  
11 the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary con-  
12 cerned, in consultation with the National Conference  
13 of State Historic Preservation Officers and the Na-  
14 tional Tribal Historic Preservation Officers Associa-  
15 tion, shall enter into a memorandum of under-  
16 standing to carry out this section with—

17 (A) the Secretary of Agriculture or of the  
18 Interior, as appropriate;

19 (B) the Director of the Bureau of Indian  
20 Affairs; and

21 (C) the Director of the United States Fish  
22 and Wildlife Service.

23 (2) PURPOSE.—The purpose of the memo-  
24 randum of understanding under paragraph (1) is to

1 coordinate and expedite permitting decisions for  
2 broadband projects.

3 (3) STATE OR TRIBAL PARTICIPATION.—The  
4 Secretary concerned may request that the Governor  
5 of any State or the officer designated by the gov-  
6 erning body of the Indian Tribe with one or more  
7 broadband projects be a party to the memorandum  
8 of understanding under paragraph (1).

9 (4) DESIGNATION OF QUALIFIED STAFF.—

10 (A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 30 days  
11 after the date of entrance into the memo-  
12 randum of understanding under paragraph (1),  
13 the head of each Federal agency that is a party  
14 to the memorandum of understanding (other  
15 than the Secretary concerned) may, if the head  
16 of the Federal agency determines it to be ap-  
17 propriate, designate to each State or regional  
18 office an employee of that Federal agency with  
19 expertise in regulatory issues relating to that  
20 Federal agency, including, as applicable, par-  
21 ticular expertise in—

22 (i) planning under the Forest and  
23 Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning  
24 Act of 1974 (16 U.S.C. 1600 et seq.) and  
25 planning under the Federal Land Policy

1 and Management Act of 1976 (43 U.S.C.  
2 1701 et seq.);

3 (ii) the preparation of analyses under  
4 the National Environmental Policy Act of  
5 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.); or

6 (iii) consultation and the preparation  
7 of biological opinions under section 7 of  
8 the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16  
9 U.S.C. 1536).

10 (B) DUTIES.—Each employee designated  
11 under subparagraph (A) shall—

12 (i) be responsible for any issue relat-  
13 ing to any broadband project within the ju-  
14 risdiction of the State or regional office  
15 under the authority of the Federal agency  
16 from which the employee is assigned;

17 (ii) participate as part of the team of  
18 personnel working on one or more pro-  
19 posed broadband projects, including plan-  
20 ning and environmental analyses; and

21 (iii) serve as the designated point of  
22 contact with any applicable State or Indian  
23 Tribe that assumes any responsibility  
24 under section 3(b)(1) relating to any issue  
25 described in clause (i).