Massachusetts Broadband Initiative
Western Massachusetts CALL FOR SOLUTIONS
December 19, 2008

Response Prepared by W.D. Cowls, Inc.

INTRODUCTION

W.D. Cowls, Inc (Cowls) is a family-owned and operated timber company that has significant land resources in western Massachusetts. Having witnessed the frustration of the rural communities to access high-speed internet, Cowls would welcome the construction of wireless towers and/or infrastructure on our land that would help to improve this situation. As one of the largest landowners in the western portion of the Commonwealth, we are uniquely poised to provide a significant level of opportunities for broadband solutions on our land.

Our response to the Massachusetts Broadband Initiative's (MBI) Call for Solutions is primarily the identification of our physical assets and the potential that they represent. The scope of our land with the addition of towers would provide service for much of the un-served and under-served areas identified by the MBI. In addition to a conceptual description of our physical assets, our response indicates a possible model for deployment as well as thoughts on future partnerships, financing and potential issues that we see affecting implementation down the road.

RESPONSE

Physical Assets

Cowls owns land in 28 communities in western Massachusetts predominantly in Hampshire and Franklin counties. Other than in Amherst, the land is primarily forested and includes several high points throughout the region. Although much of this land is considered backland, almost all of it has some road frontage and/or deeded physical access. The majority of this land is currently enrolled in the State Chapter 61 program for forestry.

Technical Approach

Through a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) analysis we determined a potential deployment of wireless communication towers on Cowls land in western Massachusetts. The analysis assumed a tower height from the ground of 14 meters with one main tower in Leverett which links to 4 additional 14 meter high towers in Wendell, Belchertown, Buckland and Ashfield. The analysis then assumes a 32 kilometer radius from each tower which indicates the potential coverage area of this type of deployment (Figure A).

No assumptions were made regarding the type or variations of equipment or infrastructure that might be utilized but only attempts to illustrate the breadth of coverage that Cowls land has. Figure A depicts optimum coverage with a minimum of towers and infrastructure. However, Cowls has sufficient land holdings for alternate forms of deployment and we are happy to consider all options.

Service Area

The GIS analysis is overlaid onto the MBI's map that identifies areas in the region that are un-served and under-served (Figure A). According to the mapping and with the above parameters, this potential deployment indicates potential coverage of 23 un-served communities and 29 underserved communities. This coverage includes towns in portions of 5 western MA counties and full coverage for all of the communities in Hampshire, Franklin and Worcester Counties that were identified as un-served or under-served.

Partnerships

Cowls is proposing to provide only the physical land assets and would therefore plan to partner with one or more wireless communication providers. It is our assumption that the providers would then be responsible for the construction, maintenance and ownership of any broadband infrastructure located on Cowls land.

Although Cowls has been approached by several providers as potential partners, we would prefer to wait until a detailed RFP has been released before we solidify any relationships. As Cowls is not, nor plans to be, in the broadband business, any assistance that they MBI could provide in facilitating potential partnerships would be welcome.

Financing

Cowls does not propose to sell any of its land resources outright. It is our intent to enter into a long-term lease arrangement with any communication company and/or the Commonwealth. Any such arrangement would have to include the right to continue to operate sustainable forestry practices around any broadband facilities.

ISSUES/CONCERNS

Local Zoning

Many communities in western, MA and the broader New England region do not zone favorably for tower construction. This will be a particular stumbling block to tower deployment in the region. With advanced technology, the visual intrusion of towers on the landscape has significantly diminished. An educational program for local planning boards regarding these advances and the overall benefits of broadband deployment will be beneficial to the program.

It is our understanding that the Franklin Regional Council of Governments if currently working on this issue.

Confidentiality

This proposal conceptually identifies Cowls land that can be used for the implementation of a western, MA regional broadband network. We have chosen to graphically illustrate potential areas within one specific scenario. Specific details regarding location and land area can be provided as necessary as the MBI Request for Proposals process moves forward. Cowls has extensive land holdings in the region and alternate scenarios can easily be accommodated.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Cowls is happy to answer questions and provide clarification to any of the above.
Please contact:

Sarah la Cour
Director of Conservation and Planning
W. D. Cowls, Inc. Land Company
PO Box 9677, 134 Montague Road
North Amherst, MA 01059
413-549-1403 x337 (work)
413-575-8730 (cell)

Cinda Jones
President
The Cowls Companies
PO Box 9677, 134 Montague Road
North Amherst, MA 01059
413-549-1403 x350 (work)
413-575-2900 (cell)
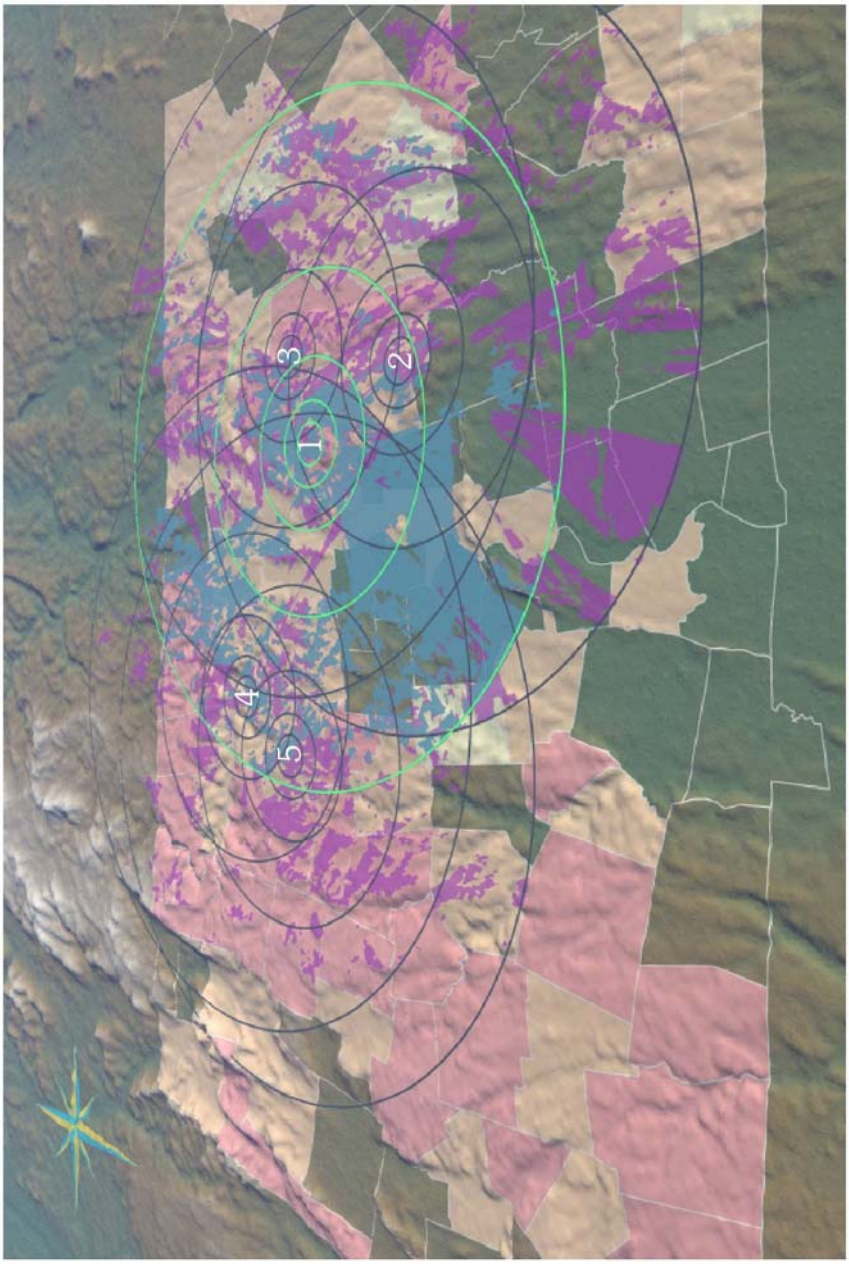
Figure A: Breadth of Coverage Potentially Available Through Use of W.D. Cowls, Inc. Landholdings.