

Two Vermont projects will receive a total of \$375,000 in federal funds to support jobs and economic development in the Northeast Kingdom through the Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC). Governor Jim Douglas joined Senator Patrick Leahy, Senator Bernie Sanders and Representative Peter Welch in announcing \$234,000 has been awarded for the Northern Vermont Fiber Optic Connection project and \$141,150 has been awarded to the Northern Forest Canoe Trail.

Vermont's federal delegation – Senator Leahy, Senator Sanders and Representative Welch – were instrumental in creating the NBRC, including authorization of the commission in the 2008 Farm Bill. They secured an initial round of funding for the NBRC in the fiscal year 2011 budget. This \$1.5 million appropriation supported the establishment of the commission and funded the grants announced today.

The two Vermont projects were recommended by the Douglas Administration and accepted, along with projects in New York, New Hampshire and Maine, during an NBRC meeting today. The Commission consists of the Governor Douglas, Governor John Lynch, Governor David Paterson, Governor John Baldacci and NBRC Chairman Sanford Blitz.

Douglas said, "Both projects will greatly benefit rural communities in northern Vermont, especially the Beecher Falls-Orleans region that experienced substantial job losses. Ensuring that the technological infrastructure is available in rural communities has been an important economic development priority of my administration and these funds will certainly help. Additionally, projects like the Northern Forest Canoe Trail will build critical infrastructure including signage and kiosks in communities that must leverage their distinct natural advantages by encouraging tourists to visit and spend money in the region."

Leahy said, "We created the commission as a means of responding in practical ways to the common economic challenges throughout the border regions of the Northeast. Building broadband infrastructure is one of the highest priorities in laying the groundwork for Vermont's economic future, and stimulating tourism builds upon one of our ongoing strengths. These grants are right on target. Both will foster economic growth in Northern Vermont." In 2003 and 2004 Leahy secured the initial federal funding in the Senate Appropriations Committee that led to the transformation of the Northern Forest Canoe Trail from a concept to a real network of paddling sites.

Sanders said, "Too often rural America has been left behind when it comes to economic development. These federal funds should go a long way in providing much-needed broadband access to Northeast Kingdom communities and offering greater opportunities for Vermonters and visitors alike to experience the natural beauty of our state."

Welch said, "These grants will provide a vital boost to parts of our state that need it most. By building out the Northeast Kingdom's broadband infrastructure and developing northern Vermont's tourism economy, this funding will create jobs and invest in our state's future. I'm hopeful these grants are just the tip of the iceberg, and that the Commission will become a permanent force for economic development and job creation throughout northern Vermont."

The Northern Community Investment Corp. of St. Johnsbury will receive \$234,000 for the Northern Vermont Fiber Optic Connection project. This project will help build out a fiber optic cable connection from Stanhope, Quebec to Norton, Vermont. This critical link will provide important technological infrastructure to the region to develop greater economic opportunities.

Mike Welch, NEK Director of Economic Development, said, "These funds will help fill a critical link in bringing fiber to the Northeast Kingdom. In doing so, they will strengthen the economy and help create jobs to our region."

The Northern Forest Canoe Trail, based in Waitsfield, will receive \$141,150 to develop infrastructure and tourism development, which includes signage, access infrastructure and online planning tools. The Northern Forest Canoe Trail is a 740 mile inland paddling trail tracing historic travel routes across New York, Vermont, Quebec, New Hampshire, and Maine.

Northern Forest Canoe Trail Executive Director Kate Williams said, "This project will not only create a tremendous opportunity for public recreation access, it will also help bring visitors to Northern New York and New England, which will strengthen the local economy."

The Northern Border Regional Commission was created to plan, address and directly invest federal resources for economic development and job creation in the northernmost counties of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont and New York. The intergovernmental partnership across the four states and between the federal and state governments funds economic development initiatives in the most economically distressed areas of the region.

