



MESCALERO APACHE TELECOM & UTILITY

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January 26, 1999

William E. Kennard
Chairman of the FCC
Room 644
1919 M Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

Reference: Statement of the Mescalero Apache Tribe for the record.
DA 99-201
BO Docket No. 99-11

Dear Mr. Kennard,

The 3800 member Mescalero Apache Tribe resides on the 460,000-acre Mescalero Apache Reservation of South Central New Mexico (see map in Exhibit A). The 12,003-foot Sierra Blanca Peak dominates the Reservation. Tribal families reside in 890 housing units located in the valley bottoms between curvilinear mountain ridges.

GTE Southwest, Inc is currently providing communication services to the Mescalero Apache Reservation. Facilities on the reservation are antiquated and are in poor condition. Telephone service is only available in the higher density subscriber regions of the Reservation, which includes the community of Mescalero. Many tribal members currently have no access to the existing communication services.

The existing plant provides service to specific portions of the present exchange area. Service is not available to many areas on the reservation due to the absence of facilities. According to GTE records, the existing inter-office facilities are operating at 100% capacity. Most feeder and distribution cable are at 85% capacity or better.

There are approximately 500 residents that are served by basic telephone service. For new subscribers, the average waiting time to have services installed is 2 to 4 weeks in homes with previous services and 1 to 3 months for those that have never had service. There are certain areas where a new customer, who had previous service, has to wait for a neighbor to move in order to be able to have their service turned on.

Pricing for the telephone services to residents on the Reservation are the same as those charged to GTE customers in neighboring towns. Initial connection fees average about \$65.00. Residential local one party access line and EAS service are \$12.27 per month. All emergency services; doctor, hospital, police and fire department, are located within the Mescalero exchange. The Tribe does not offer any source of support for tribal members to pay for residential telephone services. The primary reason why tribal customers lose service to their residence is because of excessive long distance charges.

The Tribal government needs to communicate growing activities to a numerically and geographically expanding community. Mescalero Tribal members would like to have better services including access to customer and repair service, and additional enhanced

services. Presently, trying to get through to customer and repair service requires going

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through an automated answering/routing service, then talking to a non-Apache representative that does not know the area you are calling from. If the customer is an elderly Apache person, the problem is compounded. The present GTE central office in Mescalero cannot offer the enhanced services that are available in other areas, for example: Caller ID, ISDN, T1 services, etc.

Mescalero residents are not aware of any lifeline and linkup programs that may be available. GTE's tariff does include The New Mexico Low Income Telephone Assistance Program (LITAP) which provides assistance to low income customers who meet eligibility requirements established by the Medicaid program and the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program as recognized by the United States Department of Health and Human Services. The utility has the option to utilize this program. Information concerning availability for this program is not found in the 1998 GTE

phonebook. No application has been made to the FCC's universal service program to obtain support for schools and libraries on the Mescalero Reservation.

The Mescalero Apache Tribe is currently in the process of applying for a Rural Utility Service (RUS) loan for the purpose of starting our own telecommunications company.

RUS representatives have been very helpful and have provided -

process. We plan to utilize the FCC's universal service program to obtain support for schools and libraries on the Reservation.

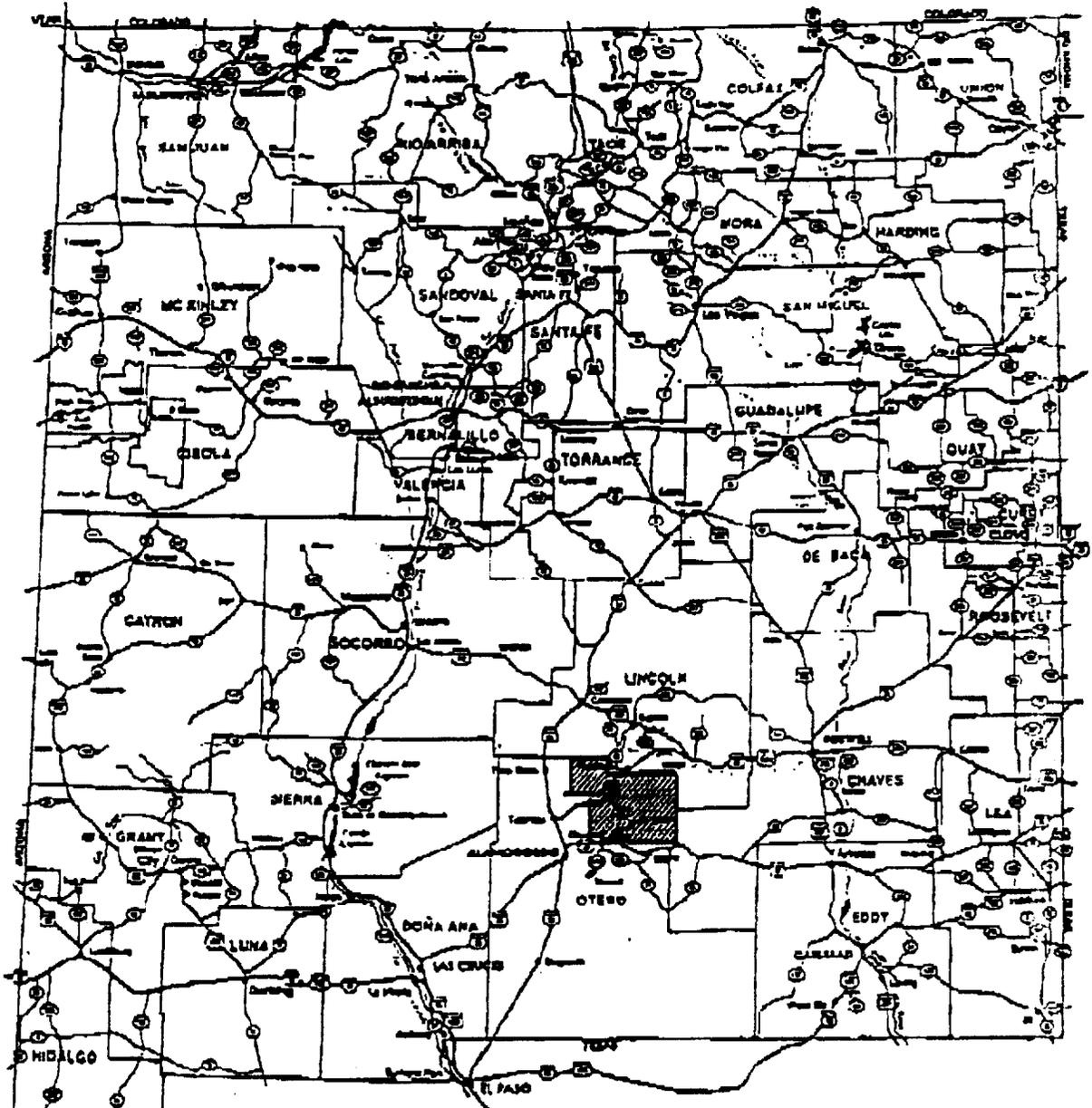
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The two biggest concerns for the Mescalero Apache Tribe are the potential sale of the incumbent Local Exchange Company (ILEC) and the State of New Mexico. Provisions should be made to facilitate the acquisition of a local phone company by a tribe from a hostile ILEC. The Universal Service Fund (USF), NECA, and other financial support mechanisms for rural tribal phone companies should stay in place. And finally, find a way to direct these funds directly to the Tribes instead of through the State.

The biggest obstacle to improving access to telephone service on the Mescalero Reservation is that Mescalero takes a low position in the big world of GTE. Reservations homes are widely scattered through mountainous terrain and therefore require high capital expenditures to serve.

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GENERAL REFERENCE MAP
NEW MEXICO

-  INTERSTATE HIGHWAY
-  UNITED STATES HIGHWAY
-  NEW MEXICO HIGHWAY
-  COUNTY BOUNDARY

EXHIBIT A
LOCATION MAP
Mescalero Reservation