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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

KTUNAXA KINBASKET TRIBAL COUNCIL ELIGIBLE TO RECEIVE OVER \$3.5 MILLION TO BUILD BROADBAND NETWORK

CRANBROOK – The Ktunaxa Kinbasket Tribal Council (KKTC) is eligible to receive approximately \$3.7 million from Industry Canada to help build a fibre optic ‘broadband’ network, which will serve approximately 58 communities in the East Kootenay region. The communities served by the KKTC broadband project include the Lower Kootenay Band (near Creston), the Tobacco Plains Band (near Grasmere), the St Mary's Band (near Cranbrook), the Columbia Lake Band (near Windermere), the Shuswap Band (near Invermere) and the Regional District of East Kootenay Areas B, C, E and F.

Seven submissions in BC including the KKTC project were chosen to receive support from the Industry Canada ‘Broadband for Rural and Northern Development’ (BRAND) funding program (<http://broadband.gc.ca/>) and help lead the construction of a high capacity **internet** highway. The KKTC have partnered with the Columbia Mountain Open Network (CMON), a regional not-for-profit organization, who will work as project leader to build the network.

CMON is currently working with an estimated 85% of local Basin communities to “*facilitate the creation of a sustainable, open-access, advanced telecommunications network and the electronic delivery of services and applications that enhance the quality of life in the Columbia Basin.*” (www.cmon.ca) Three of CMON’s other regional partners including the Regional District of East Kootenay Area A; the Regional District of Central Kootenay Area G along with the Villages of Fruitvale, Montrose and Salmo; and the Village of Valemount were also recipients of good news from Industry Canada; these groups are eligible to receive an additional \$2.35 million in broadband project funding. CMON’s mandate is to support the development of open access networks in the 140-plus Columbia Basin communities.

KKTC representative Chief Sophie Pierre notes “aboriginal people largely missed the industrial revolution, but this project funding helps us lead the digital revolution in our traditional territory”. Chief Pierre adds “comparing fibre optic networks with existing telephone exchanges is like comparing a gravel road with an eight lane superhighway that has no speed limits”.

“The KKTC are the ideal Community Champions for this project” said Jeff Roberts CEO of CMON. “Their vision goes beyond just the network, into the applications that will improve the quality of life for their people. Improving quality of life for all citizens of the Columbia Basin through the creation of an advanced telecommunications network is a key goal for CMON.”

The KKTC broadband project is part of an ambitious regional plan developed by Basin communities and CMON, to bring the benefits of broadband to the entire Columbia Basin region. As ‘Community Champion’ of the broadband application, the KKTC represents the five rural Ktunaxa and Kinbasket Indian bands. Mr. Don Maki, KKTC Director for Language Resources and the Community Champion for the project, explained “the KKTC is the sponsoring organization who submits the funding request to Industry Canada, and we’ve been working for the past two years with CMON and other organizations and communities who also want to see high speed Internet connections.” Mr. Maki noted “CMON is our project leader, and the organization will coordinate the various activities required to implement our **business** plan.”

Mr. Maki says "it will take us two to three months to finalize our contribution agreement with Industry Canada, and then we will know exactly how much funding we will receive. This will define the full program of work, and then we will begin to build the fibre optic network infrastructure."

Technology continues to change rapidly, and over the past year during the time of development of the **business** plan, there are new opportunities and challenges to consider in the final technical design and plan of construction. "We hope to have the basic infrastructure in place by fall of 2004, although we won't necessarily have connections to each home in the region in place at that time", Mr. Maki added.

Upon completion of the fibre optic network, new projects and opportunities will be able to take advantage of the availability of high-speed networks. "As one example, for some time we have been developing a Ktunaxa/Kinbasket learning network, which will exclusively require high speed broadband connectivity - when our network is built, we'll be able to launch this and undoubtedly many other projects in the dozens of communities in the Kootenays" Mr. Maki concluded.

BACKGROUNDER – Broadband opportunities

Broadband is defined as a high-capacity Internet connection, capable of supporting full-motion, real-time audio and video applications. It is a pipeline for delivering innovative applications, putting services in areas like **health**, education and **business** within easy reach of all Canadians. Having the technical infrastructure in place will attract new **business** and economic development. High-speed connections put the whole world at our doorstep, and conversely attracts new **businesses** that need the speed.

From a tribal perspective, many projects and systems can be fully utilized. We will be able to fully use our population **health** database, and build the proposed on-line virtual classroom and learning center. We have spent the past two years building leading-edge technology and tools to help support and save the critically endangered Ktunaxa language, and we also expect to see state-of-the-art **health** information systems in place because of the availability of broadband connections. Broadband will also benefit a major database project that's been in development for the past year. The KKTC has recently created a computerized cultural resource information system that integrates land based cultural information with other land-based information from Canada, British Columbia and other sources.

Our five communities, affiliated organizations, and tribal members will be able to use a web portal being built to increase their access to information and opportunity.

There will be gradual changes in **health** care information as broadband access is built too. While some advantages may seem to be obscure, consider no longer having to endure a 10-hour return trip from Cranbrook to Calgary for a five-minute consultation with a medical specialist; the appointment could be kept in cyberspace from the convenience of your community.

The financial contribution from Industry Canada is a component of a Broadband for Rural and Northern Development Pilot Program, which is helping to bring high-capacity **Internet** to unserved First Nations, northern, remote and rural communities. The initiative to investigate and develop advanced telecommunications solutions in the Columbia Basin began in 1997 when the Kootenay Association of Science and Technology hosted "Telecon '97 – Going Virtual in the Kootenays". The conference was a catalyst to a series of initiatives and studies in the Columbia Basin to examine the

challenges and opportunities of advanced telecommunications. In 2001, a number of residents and organizations recognized the value of working collaboratively towards any potential solutions and formed the Columbia Mountain Open Network. CMON was supported by the Columbia Basin Trust with a start-up grant of almost \$600,000 and to date has received further matching financial contributions from approximately 85% of its service area communities.

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