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McNees Assists Tri-Co Connections LLC in Clearing Major Regulatory Hurdle to Bring Broadband to Rural PA

HARRISBURG, Pa. – (April 16, 2019) McNees Wallace & Nurick LLC assisted its client Tri-Co Connections LLC, a subsidiary of Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative (TCREC), in obtaining its Eligible Telecommunications Carrier (ETC) designation from the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (PUC). This approval was the PUC's first-ever ETC designation for a company that is accessing funds under the federal broadband deployment auctions conducted by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). This designation will promote efforts to provide voice and broadband services in underserved parts of rural Pennsylvania.

"We at Tri-County REC are excited to begin to provide high speed broadband to our rural membership and region," said Craig Eccher, President & CEO of Tri-County REC and Tri-Co Connections LLC. "I am pleased McNees Wallace & Nurick has once again been a valuable legal partner in assisting us achieve our goal."

On April 11, 2019, the PUC voted 5-0 to approve the ETC designation, which is required under federal law before a company can receive federal universal service fund support as part of the FCC's Connect America Fund (CAF) Phase II process. The focus of the FCC's universal service reform is to drive economic growth in rural America by expanding broadband and voice connectivity to consumers, thus expanding the online marketplace and creating jobs and business opportunities across the country.

In August 2018, TCREC learned that it was one of the winning bidders in the CAF II process and received an award of 7,015 census block locations. As a result, TCREC is eligible to receive \$3.2 million annually in CAF Phase II funding for 10 years in order to develop and implement a Fiber to the Premises (FTTP) network for voice and broadband services. In addition to the \$32 million in CAF Phase II money, TCREC has a \$17.15 million commitment from the Pennsylvania Office of Broadband Initiative because the project will promote broadband in rural Pennsylvania. TCREC also plans to borrow funds and arrange for a letter of credit to pursue construction. TCREC's total estimated construction cost for building out the FTTP network is \$77 million.

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McNees is a full-service law firm based in central Pennsylvania with more than 130 attorneys representing corporations, associations, institutions and individuals. The firm serves clients worldwide from offices in Harrisburg, Lancaster, State College and Scranton, PA; Columbus, OH; Frederick, MD; and Washington, D.C. McNees is also a member of the ALFA International Global Legal Network.

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