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March 15, 2016

Ms. Clover Sellden
Broadband, Video and Market Branch
Communications Division
California Public Utilities Commission
505 Van Ness Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94102-3298

RE: Comments on Draft White Paper “High Impact Areas for Broadband Availability”

Ayukii (Hello) Ms. Sellden,

The Karuk Tribe submits these comments in response to the CPUC staff white paper “High Impact Areas for Broadband Availability”. The CASF program is a powerful tool for bringing Internet access to the many remote corners of California, and the Karuk Tribe applauds the commission on the many CASF projects that are already deploying broadband to over 300,000 unserved and underserved households.

Senate Bill 1040, the most recent statute to regulate and fund CASF, states:

“The commission shall develop, implement, and administer the California Advanced Services Fund to encourage deployment of high-quality advanced communications services to all Californians that will promote economic growth, job creation, and the substantial social benefits of advanced information and communications technologies.”

Having recently benefited from a broadband deployment, the Karuk Tribe also recognizes that broadband improves public safety, education, and health care. During a recent telephone outage in the Karuk Ancestral Territory, Facebook became the primary means for local residents to communicate and coordinate community assistance. The more remote and rural a community, the more important broadband deployments are for the health, well-being, and safety of the community.

The most important term in the above quote from SB 1040 is “all Californians”. There are many communities within the state that will never receive broadband deployment without the help of a program like CASF. These communities are simply too remote, or located within terrain that is too challenging, to provide a return on a for-profit investment. To reach the goal of deploying high-quality advanced communications services to all Californians, CASF’s best “bang for the

buck” is to prioritize areas that are the least likely to receive for-profit investment. To that end, the Karuk Tribe recommends that CASF applications with low household density should be prioritized.

During California settlement, Native Americans who lived in preferred and desirable locations were killed, enslaved, or forcibly relocated onto Reservations and Rancherias, lands which were almost universally defined by their challenging terrain. Other tribes, such as the Karuk, retreated into the most remote parts of their ancestral territory in order to survive¹. By removing areas of challenging terrain from the areas of interest designated in the white paper, virtually all unserved and underserved tribal lands are removed from CASF consideration. The Karuk Tribe recommends that applications containing challenging terrain should be considered as high impact projects, since for-profit investment is unlikely to build in such locations.

In 2015 the FCC published a Broadband Progress Report² which stated that 63% of tribal land in the United States lacked access to broadband. Tribal lands designated as rural were unserved or underserved at 85%. There are 106 federally recognized tribes in California, with 64 in Northern California. The Karuk Tribe recommends that any project that partners with a Native American tribe to serve their tribal lands be considered a high impact project. Designating projects that serve tribal lands as high impact will encourage the public-private partnerships that have already proved successful in several CASF projects.

Although CASF funds are running low, as shown in Appendix A of the white paper, Assembly Bill 1665 proposes to provide additional funding to CASF. This white paper may shape dozens of future CASF projects to reach hundreds of thousands of California households. Broadband access is essential for rural communities, and CASF provides the tools for local providers to establish broadband for their communities. Please consider these recommendations and shape CASF to make broadband a reality for all Californians.

Sincerely,



Robert Super, Vice-Chairman,
Karuk Tribe

¹ Lowry, Chag, and Rebecca Haff. *Northwest Indigenous Gold Rush History*. Indian Teacher and Educational Personnel Program, Humboldt State University, 1999.

² “2015 Broadband Progress Report.” *Federal Communications Commission*. 4 Feb. 2015, <https://www.fcc.gov/reports-research/reports/broadband-progress-reports/2015-broadband-progress-report>. Accessed 13 Mar. 2017.