USDA Rural Development
Telecommunications Program
Supai, Havasupai Reservation, Arizona

Tribal Need:

The Havasupai Reservation (Supai Village) is located at the bottom of the Grand Canyon. The only way to reach this remote tribe is an eight mile hike, a mule ride down to the bottom of the southwest corner of the Grand Canyon or by helicopter, so there was no broadband service available to the Tribe. There was very little chance that the private sector would invest telecommunications infrastructure in such a remote, geographically challenging area. However, there was a need for broadband to enable the Tribe to better communicate outside the bottom of the Grand Canyon, as well as enhance the Tribal tourist business.

How Rural Development Helped:

Through a 2004 USDA Rural Development Community Connect grant for $1,247,705, the Havasupai Reservation was able to utilize the four Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) towers located on the Havasupai and Hualapai Reservations. The system has been implemented with backup satellite internet which provides basic internet connectivity to the Tribal System.

The Results:

In addition to hooking up Havasupai Tribal and non-tribal community critical facilities, Elementary school, and businesses, there is now a community center with 10 public computers used after school by the reservation's elementary school students. Today the internet allows Tribal members to attend distance learning college courses from their homes. Most Tribal residents, who have telephone service, can't afford long distance calls and cellular service isn't available in Supai Village, so the deployment of internet in the community has allowed Tribal members to stay in contact with children and other family members off the reservation. Most importantly, the internet improves the communication ability of Supai Village during natural disaster when the phone service goes out. During the last flood, for the first time, the Tribe was able to communicate with emergency responders and ask for assistance using the internet.

BIP Funding to Benefit Havasupai Tribe:

As a result of the Tribe's Community Connect grant it will now benefit from the USDA Broadband Initiatives Program (BIP) award received by Niles Radio. This award will be used to install a new tower on the border of Havasupai/Grand Canyon National Park. This will allow Havasupai to move their system towards Flagstaff instead of Peach Springs and lower their internet connectivity costs. In the future it will allow the Tribe to extend broadband services to Supai Camp inside the Grand Canyon National Park, which will further strengthen the Tribe's communication system because Supai Camp is occupied by Havasupai Tribal members working at the GNCP and also homes to Tribal members requiring long-term off- reservation medical services.