<u>WASHBURN COUNTY receives Broadband Forward! Community certification</u>

Washburn County has been certified as a Broadband Forward community by the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin which distinguishes the county as supportive of increased broadband access by taking steps to reduce obstacles for private and public investment.

Governor Scott Walker signed The Broadband Forward! Community certification bill into law as 2015 Act 287.

"Expanding broadband is critical to the citizens of Washburn County and we need to take all the steps we can to reduce the hurdles for deployment of additional infrastructure," said County Board Chair Tom Mackie. "Our Broadband Forward! Certification sends the signal that Washburn County is serious about working with broadband providers to extend service."

'The State Broadband Office at the Public Service Commission stands ready to serve as a resource to communities and providers looking to maximize broadband infrastructure investments in Wisconsin-with the goal of bringing broadband service to every corner of our state," Walker said.

To assist in the expansion of broadband in Wisconsin, Governor Walker created the Broadband Expansion Grant Program in the 2011-2013 biennial budget. In 2015, Governor Walker and the Legislature tripled the amount of funding for broadband expansion grants to $1.5 million annually; with a total of $6 million allocated from the Universal Service Fund cash reserves, to fund grants over a 4-year period. "Our current budget allocates a historic $35.5 million in additional spending for broadband expansion efforts via the expansion grant program and TEACH grants," said Walker.

"In addition to these significant and flexible public-private grants, a six-year, $570 million federal program is providing funding to expand rural broadband access in Wisconsin," said Walker. "Any improvement in the speed and efficiency of these investments, such as that provided by the Broadband Forward! Community Program, will make a significant difference in Wisconsin."