BEFORE

THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION OF

SOUTH CAROLINA

DOCKET NO. 2023-287-C – ORDER NO. 2023-893

DECEMBER 12, 2023

IN RE:

Application of Ripple Fiber, Inc. (f/k/a Open Fiber USA, Inc.) for a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity for Authority to Provide Competing Local Exchange (Including Exchange Access) Telecommunications Services in the State of South Carolina and for Flexible Regulation	)	ORDER GRANTING CERTIFICATE AND APPROVING FLEXIBLE REGULATION

This matter comes before the Public Service Commission of South Carolina (the Commission) by way of the Application of Ripple Fiber, Inc. (f/k/a Open Fiber USA, Inc.) (Ripple Fiber, the Company or Applicant) requesting a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (CPCN) to provide facilities-based and resold local exchange (including exchange access) telecommunications services throughout the State of South Carolina. The Company's Application was filed pursuant to S.C. Code Ann. section 58-9-280(B) (2015), and the rules and regulations of the Commission. By its Application, Ripple Fiber also requests flexible regulation of its local exchange telecommunications services pursuant to Order No. 98-165 in Docket No. 1997-467-C.

The Application was filed on August 21, 2023, pursuant to S.C. Code Ann. section 58-9-280(B) (2015) and the rules and regulations of the Commission. When the

Application was filed, the corporate name of the Applicant was "Open Fiber USA, Inc." The Commission's Clerk's Office instructed the Company to publish a one-time Notice of Filing in newspapers of general circulation in the areas of the state affected by the Application. The purpose of the Notice of Filing was to inform interested parties of the Company's Application and of the manner and time in which to file the appropriate pleadings for participation in the proceeding. The Company complied with this instruction and provided the Commission with proof of publication of the Notice of Filing in two newspapers of general circulation in the areas of the state affected by this Application. A Petition to Intervene was filed by the South Carolina Telephone Coalition (SCTC) on August 28, 2023, which was granted by Standing Hearing Officer Directive Order No. 2023-102-H. Subsequent to the intervention, the Company and SCTC reached a Stipulation, attached, and incorporated by reference as Order Exhibit No. 1.

On September 29, 2023, counsel for the Applicant filed a letter informing the Commission that the Applicant had changed its entity name from "Open Fiber USA, Inc." to "Ripple Fiber, Inc." The Applicant changed its corporate name via Articles of Amendment to its Articles of Incorporation filed with the South Carolina Secretary of State on August 31, 2023, and also provided to the Commission on September 29, 2023.

The Office of Regulatory Staff is automatically a statutory party of record pursuant to S.C. Code Ann section 58-4-10(B) (Supp. 2022). On October 16, 2023, counsel for the South Carolina Office of Regulatory Staff (ORS) filed a letter with the Commission stating that it had reviewed the Application and did not oppose the Commission granting the Application. In addition, ORS advised that it did not intend to attend the hearing.

A hearing on the Application was held on November 14, 2023, at 10 a.m. in the offices of the Commission in Columbia, South Carolina, before a Commission-designated Hearing Examiner. The Company was represented by John J. (Jack) Pringle, Jr., Esquire. Neither SCTC nor ORS appeared at the hearing.

Lance van der Spuy, Chief Financial Officer of Ripple Fiber appeared and via video conference testified in support of the Application. The record reveals that the Company is a corporation incorporated under the laws of the State of South Carolina. Application, p.2, ¶ II(A). According to Mr. van der Spuy, the Company seeks authority to provide facilities-based and resold local exchange (including exchange access) services. Lance van der Spuy, Prefiled Direct Testimony, p.2:3-5; Application, p.2, ¶ II(B). Mr. van der Spuy explained the Company's request for authority, and the record further reveals the Company's services, operations, and marketing procedures.

Ripple Fiber intends to provide private dedicated lines to providers of wireless telecommunications and other carriers on an individualized case basis. Applicant will provide high-capacity fiber connections from the edge of the wireless carrier's network to an existing geographic core fiber infrastructure, and aggregate backhaul traffic across multiple networks providing a seamless end-to-end solution to wireless carrier customers. Application, pp.2-3, ¶ II(B). The proposed services will include fiber optic capacity on a wholesale basis to such telecommunications carriers – such as interexchange carriers (IXCs), incumbent local exchange carriers (ILECs), competitive local exchange carriers (CLECs), wireless service providers, international carriers, internet service providers (ISPs) and other large users. Lance van der Spuy, Prefiled Direct Testimony, p.3:11-13;

Application, p.3, ¶ II(B). Applicant will also provide "transport capacity to enable its customers to meet the growing demand for reliable, high-bandwidth voice and data transmission capacity." Lance van der Spuy, Prefiled Direct Testimony, p.3:13-15; Application, p.3, ¶ II(B).

According to Mr. van der Spuy, "Applicant will primarily serve residential customers with fiber to the home." Lance van der Spuy, Prefiled Direct Testimony, p.3:19. Applicant does not have plans to provide retail switched voice services, including dial-tone, to end-user customers in South Carolina. In the event that Applicant decides to expand its services to include voice services as dictated by marketplace conditions, Applicant will seek such authority at that time. Similarly, in the event Applicant intends to offer retail residential local exchange services in the future, Applicant will meet the bond requirements of S.C. Code Ann. Regs. 103-607 (or seek an appropriate waiver of same) at that time. Application, p.3, ¶ (II)(B); Lance van der Spuy, Prefiled Direct Testimony, p.3:23-4:1-3.

With regard to management and technical capabilities, the Company's Application and Mr. van der Spuy's testimony both evidence that the Company's management has extensive experience in telecommunications, information technology, regulatory matters, and accounting and finance. Application, p.4-5, ¶ (III)B; Lance van der Spuy, Prefiled Direct Testimony, p.4:14-23. In addition, there was testimony that the Applicant has sufficient financial resources to provide the services proposed. Lance van der Spuy, Prefiled Direct Testimony, p.5:1-4. Mr. van der Spuy also testified that the Company "will comply with all applicable Commission rules, regulations, and standards and will provide

safe, reliable, and high quality telecommunications services within South Carolina." Lance van der Spuy, Prefiled Direct Testimony, p.4:9-11. Mr. van der Spuy offered that the "public interest of the citizens of South Carolina will be served by granting the Application. First, Ripple Fiber will increase competition in the provision of telecommunication services in South Carolina. In addition to driving prices closer to costs, thereby ensuring just and reasonable rates, competition also promotes efficiency in the delivery of services and in the development of new services. These benefits work to maximize the public interest by providing continuing incentives for carriers to reduce costs while, simultaneously, promoting the availability of potentially desirable services." Lance van der Spuy, Prefiled Direct Testimony, p.5:9-16.

The Company requested a waiver of Commission Regulation 103-610, since the Company's books are maintained in Matthews, North Carolina. Application, p.5, ¶ (IV)(1.). Further, the Company requests an exemption from record keeping policies that require maintenance of financial records in conformance with the Uniform System of Accounts (USOA). The Company maintains its books in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP). S.C. Code Ann. Regs. 103-611. Application, p.5, ¶ (IV)(2.). Additionally, the Company seeks a waiver of Commission Regulation 103-631, so that it will not be required to publish local exchange directories. To the extent that the Company provides retail local exchange service in the future, the Company will contract with at least one incumbent local exchange carrier (or its directory publishing affiliate) for the inclusion of the Company's customer databases in an appropriate directory. Application, p.5, ¶ (IV)(3.). Further, the Company does not intend to provide

retail residential local exchange services in South Carolina at this time, and therefore the bond requirement set out in Commission Regulation 103-607 does not apply to the Company. Application, p.5, ¶ 9 (C); Tr. 10.6:10-11. Finally, Applicant's local exchange calling areas will initially mirror the service areas of the incumbent local exchange carriers. Therefore, Ripple Fiber requests a waiver of the map-filing requirement pursuant to S.C. Code Ann. Regs. 103-612.2.3 and 103-631. Application p.6, ¶ 9 (D).

The Company asserts that the granting of Ripple Fiber's Application is consistent with S.C. Code Ann. section 58-9-280(B) (2015). Ripple Fiber represents to the Commission that:

A. Applicant possesses the technical, financial, and managerial resources sufficient to provide the services requested;

B. The provision of local service by Applicant will not adversely impact the availability of affordable local exchange service;

C. Applicant's local services will meet the service standards required by the Commission;

D. Applicant, to the extent it is required to do so by the Commission, will participate in the support of universally available telephone service at affordable rates; and,

E. The provision of local service by Applicant will not adversely impact the public interest.

Application, p.4, ¶ 8.

After full consideration of the applicable law, the Company's Application, and the

evidence represented at the hearing, the Commission makes the following findings of fact and conclusion of law in granting a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity authorizing Ripple Fiber to provide facilities-based and resold local exchange, including exchange access, telecommunications services within the State of South Carolina and approving flexible and alternative regulation:

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. The Company is a corporation incorporated under the laws of the State of South Carolina.

2. The Company changed its corporate name from "Open Fiber USA, Inc." to "Ripple Fiber, Inc." via Articles of Amendment to its Articles of Incorporation filed with the South Carolina Secretary of State on August 31, 2023, and notified the Commission on September 29, 2023.

3. The Company seeks authority to provide local exchange (including exchange access) telecommunications services in South Carolina.

4. The Company has the managerial, technical, and financial resources to provide the services as described in its Application. S.C. Code Ann. section 58-9-280(B)(1).

5. The Company's "provision of service will not adversely impact the availability of affordable local exchange service." S.C. Code Ann. section 58-9-280(B)(3).

6. The Company will support universally available telephone service at affordable rates. S.C. Code Ann. section 58-9-280(B)(4).

7. The services to be provided by the Company will meet the service standards of the Commission. S.C. Code Ann. section 58-9-280(B)(2).

8. The provision of local exchange service by the Company "does not otherwise adversely impact the public interest." S.C. Code Ann. section 58-9-280(B)(5).

9. Following execution of a Stipulation with intervenor SCTC, SCTC does not oppose the granting of a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity to Ripple Fiber.

10. The Stipulation between the SCTC and the Applicant is in the public interest.

11. The Company requests a waiver of S.C. Code Ann. Regs. 103-610. The Commission finds the Company's requested waiver reasonable and understands the potential difficulty presented to the Company should the waiver not be granted. Further, we find that a waiver of S.C. Code Ann. Regs. 103-610 to be in the public interest. We also believe that exemption from the policies that would require the Company to keep its records under the USOA as required by S.C. Code Ann. Regs. 103-611 is reasonable. Finally, since the Company does not intend to provide retail residential local exchange services, we find that it is appropriate and reasonable to waive S.C. Code Ann. Regs. 103-607. Should the Company offer residential local exchange services in South Carolina in the future, we find that it should comply with the bond requirement of S.C. Code Ann. Regs. 103-607. The requested waiver of Commission Regulations 103-611 and 103-631 are reasonable and thus, the Company will not be required to publish local exchange directories.

12. The issuance of a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity to Ripple Fiber to operate as a facilities-based and resold local exchange, including exchange access, telecommunications service provider in South Carolina would be in the best interest of the citizens of South Carolina by increasing the level of competition in South Carolina, by providing an alternative source for telecommunications services, and by maximizing customer savings, lowering unit costs, and improving customer service.

13. ORS reviewed the Application, concluding that Ripple Fiber possesses the resources needed to provide the services requested and that the Company's request for a CPCN is consistent with the public interest.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

Based upon the discussion above, and the record of the instant proceeding, the Commission makes the following Conclusions of Law:

1. The Commission concludes that the Company changed its corporate name from "Open Fiber USA, Inc." to "Ripple Fiber, Inc." via Articles of Amendment to its Articles of Incorporation filed with the South Carolina Secretary of State on August 31, 2023, and notified the Commission of the name change.

2. The Commission concludes that the Company possesses the managerial, technical, and financial resources to provide the telecommunications services as described in its Application.

3. The Commission concludes that the Company will participate in the support of universally available telephone service at affordable rates to the extent that the Company may be required to do so by the Commission.

4. The Commission concludes that the Company will provide services which will meet the service standards of the Commission.

5. The Commission concludes that approval of the Company's Application to provide resold and facilities-based local exchange, including exchange access, telecommunications services within South Carolina will serve the public interest by providing for efficient use of existing telecommunications resources.

6. The Commission concludes that the provision of telecommunications service by the Company will not adversely impact the public interest.

7. The Commission concludes that the issuance of the authority to provide local exchange telecommunications services as requested by the Company and as set forth in its Application and Mr. van der Spuy's testimony is in the best interests of the citizens of the State of South Carolina.

8. The Commission concludes that a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity should be granted to the Company to provide facilities-based and resold local exchange and exchange access telecommunications services.

9. The Commission concludes the Company's local exchange telecommunications services shall be regulated in accordance with the principles and procedures established for flexible regulation first granted to NewSouth Communications by Order No. 98-165 in Docket No. 97-467-C. Specifically, the Commission adopts for the Company's competitive intrastate local exchange services a rate structure incorporating maximum rate levels with the flexibility for adjustment below the maximum rate levels approved by the Commission. Further, the Company's local exchange service tariff filings

are presumed valid upon filing. An investigation of the tariff filing may be instituted within thirty (30) days of the tariff filing, in which case the tariff filing would be suspended pending further Order of the Commission. If an investigation is instituted on a particular tariff filing, notice of the investigation will be provided to the person or entity making the tariff filing and to the Commission. The notice is timely if dated within thirty days of the filing date. Further, any such tariff filings will be subject to the same monitoring process as similarly situated local exchange carriers.

10. The Company will participate in the support of universally available telephone service at affordable rates to the extent that the Company may be required to do so by the Commission.

11. The Company will provide services which will meet the service standards of the Commission.

12. Approval of Ripple Fiber Inc.'s Application to provide resold and facilities-based local exchange, including exchange access, telecommunications services within South Carolina will serve the public interest by enhancing competition in the State of South Carolina, by offering additional service offerings to South Carolina's consumers, and by providing for efficient use of existing telecommunications resources.

13. The provision of telecommunications service by the Company will not adversely impact the public interest.

14. The issuance of the authority to provide competing local exchange (including exchange access) telecommunications services in South Carolina and for flexible regulation as requested by the Company and as set forth in its Application and Mr.

van der Spuy's testimony is in the best interests of the citizens of the State of South Carolina.

15. A Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity should be granted to Ripple Fiber Inc. to provide facilities-based and resold local exchange and exchange access telecommunications services within South Carolina.

16. Ripple Fiber Inc.'s request for waiver of S.C. Code Ann. Regs. 103-610 should be granted as strict compliance with the regulation would cause undue hardship on the Company. An exemption from the policies requiring use of USOA in S.C. Code Ann. Regs. 103-611, and the waiver of S.C. Code Ann. Regs. 103-631 are also granted and the Company should maintain its books in accordance with GAAP.

17. The Stipulation between the Company and SCTC should be approved. The Stipulation is attached as Order Exhibit No. 1.

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED, THAT:

1. The Company will now be known as Ripple Fiber, Inc.

2. A Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity should be granted to Ripple Fiber Inc. to provide facilities-based and resold local exchange (including exchange access) telecommunications services within the State of South Carolina.

3. The regulatory treatment adopted for the Company's services shall conform to the principles and procedures established for flexible regulation first granted to NewSouth Communications by Order No. 98-165 in Docket No. 97-467-C as described in Conclusions of Law above.

4. If it has not already done so by the date of issuance of this Order, the Company shall file its tariffs using the Commission's e-filing system for tariffs within thirty (30) days of the issuance of this Order. The tariffs should be electronically filed in a text searchable PDF format using the commission's DMS system (http://dms.psc.sc.gov). An additional copy should be sent via email to etariff@psc.sc.gov to be included in the Commission's E-Tariff System (http://etariff.psc.sc.gov). Future revisions to the tariffs should be made using the E-Tariff System. A revised tariff shall be consistent with the findings of this Order and shall be consistent with the Commission's Rules and Regulations.

5. The Company shall resell the services of only those local exchange carriers (LECs) authorized to do business in South Carolina by this Commission.

6. The Company shall file annual financial information in the form of annual reports and gross receipts reports as required by the Commission. The annual report and the gross receipt report will necessitate the filing of intrastate information. The Company shall keep financial records on an intrastate basis for South Carolina to comply with the annual report and gross receipts filings. The proper form for filing annual financial information can be found at the Commission's website at www.psc.sc.gov/Forms or at the ORS's website at www.ors.sc.gov. The title of this form is "Telecommunications Company Annual Report." This form shall be utilized by the Company to file annual financial information with the Commission and ORS and shall be filed no later than **April 1st**.

7. Commission gross receipts forms are due to be filed with the ORS no later than **August 31st** of each year. The proper form for filing gross receipts information can be

found at the ORS website at www.ors.sc.gov, and the appropriate form is entitled "Gross Receipts Form."

8. Each telecommunications company certified in South Carolina is required to file annually with the ORS the Universal Service Fund (USF) worksheet, which may be found on the ORS's website at www.ors.sc.gov. This worksheet provides ORS information required to determine each telecommunications company's liability to the State USF fund. The USF worksheet is due to be filed annually no later than **August 1st** with the Commission and ORS.

9. The Company shall, in compliance with Commission regulations, designate and maintain an authorized utility representative who is prepared to discuss, on a regulatory level, customer relations (complaint) matters, engineering operations, tests and repairs. In addition, the Company shall provide to the Commission and ORS in writing the name of the authorized representative to be contacted in connection with general management duties as well as emergencies which occur during non-office hours. The Company shall file the names, addresses and telephone numbers of these representatives with the Commission within thirty (30) days of receipt of this Order. The "Authorized Utility Representative Information" form can be found at the ORS's website at www.ors.sc.gov; this form shall be utilized for the provision of this information to the Commission and ORS. Further, the Company shall promptly notify the Commission and ORS in writing if the representatives are replaced.

10. The Company is directed to comply with all Rules and Regulations of the Commission unless a regulation is specifically waived by the Commission.

11. The Company requested a waiver of S.C. Code Ann. Regs. 103-610, which requires the Company to maintain its financial books and records within the State of South Carolina. The Company is granted permission to maintain its financial books and records at its principal headquarters provided that Ripple Fiber makes its books and records available for examination upon request by the ORS. Further, the Commission acknowledges that the Company shall maintain its financial records in conformance with GAAP.

12. The Company is granted a waiver of Commission Regulation 103-611 so that it will not be required to maintain its financial records in conformance with the Uniform System of Accounts. The Company shall maintain its books in accordance with GAAP.

13. The Company is granted a waiver of Commission Regulation 103-631 so that it will not be required to publish local exchange directories.

14. Should the Company offer or provide any service that would implicate Title 23, Chapter 47 of the South Carolina Code Annotated, the Company is required to comply with that Title and Chapter, which governs the establishment and implementation of a "Public Safety Communications Center," which is more commonly known as a "911" system or "911 service." Services available through a 911 system include law enforcement, fire, and emergency medical services. In recognition of the necessity of quality 911 services being provided to the citizens of South Carolina, in the event the Company offers or provides the appropriate services, the Commission hereby instructs the Company to contact the appropriate authorities regarding 911 service in the counties and cities where the

Company will be operating, should the Company become interconnected to the public switched telephone network. Contact with the appropriate 911 service authorities is to be made before voice or dial tone service in South Carolina. By this Order and prior to providing voice or dial tone services within South Carolina, the Company shall contact the 911 coordinator in each county, as well as the 911 Coordinator in each city where the city has its own 911 system and shall provide information regarding the Company's operations as required by the 911 system.

15. The Stipulation between the SCTC and the Company is hereby approved and incorporated as part of this Order, which is attached as Order Exhibit No. 1

16. This Order shall remain in full force and effect until further Order of the Commission.

BY ORDER OF THE COMMISSION:

PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION SOUTH CAROLINA

Florence P. Belser, Chair
Public Service Commission of
South Carolina

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BEFORE

THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION OF
SOUTH CAROLINA

Docket No. 2023-287-C

Re:	Application of Open Fiber USA, Inc. for a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity to Provide Competing Local Exchange (including Exchange Access) Telecommunications Services in the State of South Carolina, and for Flexible Regulation	**STIPULATION**

The South Carolina Telephone Coalition ("SCTC") (see attachment "A" for list of companies) and Open Fiber USA, Inc. ("Open Fiber USA" or "Applicant") hereby enter into the following stipulations. As a consequence of these stipulations and conditions, SCTC does not oppose Open Fiber USA's Application. SCTC and Applicant stipulate and agree as follows:

1. SCTC does not oppose the granting of a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity to Applicant, provided the South Carolina Public Service Commission ("Commission") makes the necessary findings to justify granting of such a certificate, and provided the conditions contained within this stipulation are met.

2. Applicant stipulates and agrees that any Certificate which may be granted will authorize Applicant to provide service only to customers located in non-rural local exchange company ("LEC") service areas of South Carolina, except as provided herein.

3. Applicant stipulates that it is not asking the Commission to make a finding at this time regarding whether competition is in the public interest for rural areas.

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4. Applicant stipulates and agrees that it will not provide any local service, by its own facilities or otherwise, to any customer located in a rural incumbent LEC's service area, unless and until Applicant provides such rural incumbent LEC and the Commission with written notice of its intent to do so at least thirty (30) days prior to the date of the intended service. During such notice period, the rural incumbent LEC will have the opportunity to petition the Commission to exercise all rights afforded it under Federal and State law. Also, Applicant acknowledges that the Commission may suspend the intended date for service in rural LEC territory for ninety (90) days while the Commission conducts any proceeding incident to the Petition or upon the Commission's own Motion, provided that the Commission can further suspend the implementation date upon showing of good cause.

5. Applicant stipulates and agrees that, if Applicant gives notice that it intends to serve a customer located in a rural incumbent LEC's service area, and either (a) the Commission receives a Petition from the rural incumbent LEC to exercise its rights under Federal or State law within such 30-day period, or (b) the Commission institutes a proceeding of its own, then Applicant will not provide service to any customer located within the service area in question without prior and further Commission approval.

6. Applicant acknowledges that any right which it may have or acquire to serve a rural telephone company service area in South Carolina is subject to the conditions contained herein, and to any future policies, procedures, and guidelines relevant to such proposed service which the Commission may implement, so long as such policies, procedures, and guidelines do not conflict with Federal or State law.

7. The parties stipulate and agree that all rights under Federal and State law are reserved to the rural incumbent LECs and Applicant, and this Stipulation in no way suspends or

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adversely affects such rights, including any exemptions, suspensions, or modifications to which they may be entitled.

8. Applicant agrees to abide by all State and Federal laws and to participate, to the extent it may be required to do so by the Commission, in the support of universally available telephone service at affordable rates.

9. Applicant hereby amends its application and its pre-filed testimony in this docket to the extent necessary to conform with this Stipulation.

10. Notwithstanding any provision contained herein, the terms, conditions and limitations of the Stipulation apply only in those instances where a rural telephone company's federal rural exemption under 47 U.S.C. § 251(f)(1) is implicated.

AGREED AND STIPULATED to this 9th day of October, 2023.

Open Fiber USA, Inc.

South Carolina Telephone Coalition

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ATTACHMENT A

South Carolina Telephone Coalition Member Companies for Purposes of Local Service Stipulation

Chesnee Telephone Company

Chester Telephone Company, d/b/a TruVista

Comporium, Inc. (f/k/a Rock Hill Telephone Company)

Farmers Telephone Cooperative, Inc.

Ft. Mill Telephone Company, d/b/a Comporium

Home Telephone ILEC, LLC d/b/a Home Telecom

Lancaster Telephone Company, d/b/a Comporium

Lockhart Telephone Company, d/b/a TruVista

McClellanville Telephone Company (TDS)

Norway Telephone Company (TDS)

Palmetto Rural Telephone Cooperative, Inc.

Piedmont Rural Telephone Cooperative, Inc.

PBT Telecom, d/b/a Comporium

Ridgeway Telephone Company, d/b/a TruVista

St. Stephen Telephone Company (TDS)

West Carolina Rural Telephone Cooperative, Inc.

Williston Telephone Company (TDS)