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Photo Provided

Collaboration Clears Path for Rural Fiber Expansion in Marshall County, Illinois

VARNA, Ill., Nov. 14, 2025—Marshall County officials, the Illinois Office of Broadband, and [Surf Internet](#)[®], gathered on November 6 at Lake Wildwood near Varna, Ill., to celebrate ongoing fiber-optic construction funded through a combination of state and private investment. The event underscored how cooperation between county officials and Surf advanced the Connect Illinois grant project in this largely rural area.

Delays had mounted early on as Surf navigated county permitting requirements, common across Illinois, that require utilities to obtain individual easements or consent forms from every property owner along the construction route. The rule, designed to protect landowners' rights, can make broadband expansion challenging: when even one property can't be accessed, it can prevent service for surrounding homes and businesses.

Through a collaborative problem-solving process, county leaders and Surf Internet worked together to find a practical solution that kept construction on schedule to meet the grant's end-of-year deadline. Without a resolution, the funding and the residents set to benefit from it would have been at risk. The county ultimately approved a framework that allowed Surf to install fiber safely within a narrow corridor along county roads, thereby eliminating the need for individual easements.

The agreement cleared a key barrier and set construction in motion to connect 273 homes and businesses near and within the Lake Wildwood community before the end of the year.

"This wasn't an easy process, but it shows what's possible when people stay at the table and work through challenges together," said Travis McGlasson, Marshall County Board Chair. "We're proud of the teamwork that kept this build on track and grateful to everyone who helped make reliable, high-speed internet a reality for our residents."

Across Illinois, permitting challenges like those faced in Marshall County have delayed or complicated broadband projects. The approach developed here could help guide other counties preparing for upcoming broadband investments through the Connect Illinois program and the federal Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) initiative, which together will direct hundreds of millions of dollars toward expanding rural internet access over the next few years.

"The progress in Marshall County reflects the kind of collaboration that's needed statewide," said Scott Franko, Director of Business Development at Surf Internet. "When local governments and providers work together to clear roadblocks, broadband can be built faster, reach farther, and serve more people."

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The Lake Wildwood build, supported by \$650,158 in Connect Illinois grant funds and more than \$850,000 in private investment from Surf, includes nearly 18 miles of new fiber. An adjacent build in Magnolia, completed earlier this fall, added another 3 miles and connected 136 homes and businesses.

Most new connections in this area are expected to be service-ready by the end of November 2025. Residents can check address availability and follow construction progress by visiting surfinternet.com/construction/illinois/.

About Surf Internet

Surf Internet is an innovative fiber-optic internet company that serves as the essential gateway to connectivity across the Great Lakes region of Illinois, Indiana, and Michigan. The company is building a bridge to the wide-open future by delivering high-speed, reliable internet to homes and businesses in underserved, rural communities. Surf's 300-plus-person team is local, giving them an edge when it comes to customer care and advocacy for the region. Headquartered in Elkhart, Ind., Surf also maintains local Illinois offices in Coal City, Rock Falls, and Naperville, with additional regional offices in La Porte, Ind., and Byron Center, Howell, and Fowlerville, Mich. Learn more at <https://surfinternet.com>.

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PHOTO CAPTION: Members of the Lake Wildwood Association, representatives from the Illinois Office of Broadband, Marshall County leaders, and the Surf Internet team gathered on November 6 at Lake Wildwood, outside of Varna, Ill., to celebrate new fiber construction made possible through the Connect Illinois program and private investment from Surf Internet.