

Recent demands from local broadcast affiliates could put residents' access to local programming at risk.

Local affiliates in many areas across the state are currently in negotiations to determine retransmissions consent fees for the next three years. These fees are paid by local cable companies, such as Great Plains Communications, to the affiliate for the right to provide programming to its cable customers.

This year, many affiliates are asking for far higher rates than in the past with some local affiliates requesting rate increases of nearly 300 percent.

Many local affiliates are owned by large conglomerates who determine retransmission consent fees, taking the decision-making process out of the hands of the local affiliate.

Affiliates receive free government-issued spectrum to transmit their signal, even as they ask for higher retransmission consent rates. Great Plains Communications has invested heavily in providing the necessary infrastructure to bring cable programming to its service areas.

This includes laying and maintaining cable lines as well as creating partnerships with other companies to deliver the strongest signal possible.

"We are working with the local affiliates to find a balance between providing compensation for their programming and keeping costs down for our customers," said LeaAnn Quist, director of cable at Great Plains Communications.

These retransmission agreements tend to impact small to mid-size cable companies harder than national carriers who can leverage the loss of large advertising markets in negotiations. Local affiliates set rates for advertising based on the number of customers reached by their signal.

As negotiations progress, Great Plains Communications will continue to provide up-to-date information to customers. Residents are encouraged to visit www.gpcom.com/retransmission for information.

Great Plains Communications is the largest independent telecommunications company in Nebraska and provides services solely to rural areas. It offers residential services such as digital phone including local and long-distance calling, as well as high-definition cable television.

Broadband Internet is available in all Great Plains Communications' communities through DSL and cable modem facilities or its partnership with WildBlue Satellite Internet Services.

The company also provides business services ranging from traditional voice and data products to the installation and support of large business networks. With 100 years of experience, the company currently serves 90 communities with 200 employees throughout Nebraska.