

# Oconee taps \$400,000 from broadband grant.

Federal website tracks activity on \$9.6M award

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WALHALLA — Oconee County has spent just more than \$400,000 from its \$9.6 million federal broadband grant despite having had little success getting the project on track.

According to information submitted by Oconee officials to the U.S. Department of Commerce, the county had spent \$402,279 on the project as of the first quarter ending March 31.

According to "Track the Money" on the Recovery.Gov website, Oconee has submitted an environmental assessment study and applied for 30 more miles of encroachment permits.

The report adds that Oconee has been negotiating direct Internet access with multiple vendors.

Some of the information in the report is dated, such as Oconee having awarded a fiber installation contract.

Oconee County Council last week voted 4-1 to re-bid the work because the company that was awarded the \$8.2 million contract could not secure credit to put up a performance bond to guarantee its work on the full amount of the project.

County Administrator Scott Moulder said he



would re-bid the work in phases.

As of Thursday, Oconee had yet to advertise for bids on its Procurement website.

Moulder said he thinks the county still has time to re-bid the project in three phases and get it completed within a three-year window stipulated by the federal grant.

Federal funding on the project would end after August 2013.

Moulder thinks the county will do three separate bids for each phase of the project to install fiber in the ground throughout the more than 260-mile network.

The total cost of the broadband project is \$14.3 million. If and when it's completed, the system would establish a middle mile network for final-mile providers to expand high-speed service in rural and other underserved areas.