

## Qwest meets with county

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The Minnesota President of Qwest was in Two Harbors Wednesday to talk with county officials about the fiber optic line break Jan. 26. John Stanoch met with Lake County Sheriff Carey Johnson and board members.

Stanoch, who asked that the meeting exclude members of the media, told County Commissioner Paul Bergman that the purpose of the visit was to "open up a better line of communication and listen to your concerns."

Bergman said the meeting went well. "It was a good meeting with a lot of frank discussion," he said. He had expressed his appreciation in Stanoch coming up and that Qwest didn't get "corporate amnesia" when it came to the area and the problems the line outage highlighted.

Stanoch said Qwest still hasn't discovered how its line was severed under the streets of Duluth. Claims that it was caused by a steam pipe failure have been refuted by Duluth officials. Qwest is only saying that some kind of heat is likely to blame.

"The sheriff said, 'that's your problem,'" Bergman said. He and other county officials wanted to know how a line would be re-routed if a break happened again, keeping 911 service up.

"Qwest calls it re-routing diversity," Bergman said with a laugh at the corporate speak. He said Stanoch explained that when the lines were put down in the late 1980s, redundant lines ran along with the main lines with the thought that most accidents sever only one line. On Jan. 26, everything in one spot was severed.

"Technically, they had redundancy," Bergman said of Stanoch's explanation of practices in 1987.

"The undertone was that's the way it was done back then."

Qwest is willing to talk with the county about sharing in creating a looped telecommunications system, basically a line that runs from Two Harbors, to Ely, and over to Cook County and back down the shores. "If something gets lost one way, you get it from the other side," Bergman said.

The 12-hour outage caused by the line failure left Lake and Cook counties along the North Shore without landline or cell phone coverage or internet. Concerns about the outage have been fueled by the fact that 911-emergency service was also down.

B.J. Kohlstedt, the Lake County Emergency Management Coordinator, has provided the county board a review of the outage and lessons learned. She said there was a lack of understanding about how the county is wired, saying that had she known of places where phone and internet were working – using satellite – the county could have spread word to media outlets about the outage and response. "There was confusion about exactly which services were out and where," she wrote.

She also said a "looped" fiber optic line needs to be available as a backup.

She said the county plan to use phone trees to contact radio operators and other emergency responders spread across the county would have to be changed in the case of all phone service being down.

Kohlstedt made four recommendations to the board:

- Develop an alternative "callout procedure" for the emergency radio operators.
- Create a list of places to go for satellite internet.

- Encourage emergency managers to be licensed amateur radio operators and work more closely with the area group of operators.

- Install a satellite dish at the county courthouse as a backup.

Stanoch said Qwest technicians would come to Two Harbors again to talk about technical issues but only after it has finished investigating how its line was severed.